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Soviet papers disagree over UFO sighting

MOSCOW (AP) ³⁴⁶⁴ — Are they flying saucers or just space rubbish? Two Soviet newspapers which rarely contradict each other are in somewhat of a disagreement about Unidentified Flying Objects — UFOs — and other extraordinary sightings.

Three months ago, the trade union daily Trud (Labor) reported that an Aeroflot plane bound from the Georgian capital of Tbilisi to Tallinn Estonia had a close encounter with a UFO that appeared as a bright beam of light.

The light appeared as the plane flew over the Byelorussian capital of Minsk and "escorted" the craft to its destination, according to Trud.

Earlier in January, Trud reported on other inexplicable bright lights sighted over the Baltic Republic of Latvia.

Muscovites were startled — not only by the reported UFO, but by the fact that a Soviet newspaper which normally purveys news strictly conforming to socialist realism had reported the fantastic as fact.

To set the record straight, the Soviet military daily Krasnaya Zvezda (Red Star) today dutifully debunked science fiction myths.

Flying saucers and UFOs sighted through the ages are not the spaceships of extraterrestrial beings, it said, but more likely apparitions caused by inversion and refracted light and radio waves.

In the modern space age, the number of artificial objects — discarded booster rockets, canisters, instruments and hatches — orbiting around the Earth has increased the likelihood of freak appearances in the night sky, the newspaper said.

The mystery surrounding January's reported UFO sighting near Minsk could thus be explained as refracted light beams striking floating space garbage, or as bits of a discarded rocket showering down through the atmosphere to Earth, it suggested.

Similarly, the newspaper said, the "Petrozavodsk miracle" of 1977 was caused by nothing more than a booster rocket falling away from a Soviet satellite, Cosmos 955.

Today's report marked the first known occasion that Soviet news media had explained UFO sightings as being caused by Soviet activity in space.