

The philosophical line between believers in extraterrestrial life and the scientists who debunk their so-called evidence is as fine, and as cutting, as a razor's edge. Only the assumption that our life-sustaining planet is not a phenomenon unique to the entire universe lies between the two, but it is a fine distinction which cuts deep and separates the many.

Most reputable scientists agree there is a natural explanation for nearly every alleged sighting of an unidentified flying object. They name rocket and aircraft exhaust, searchlights, aircraft flying in formation, and meteoric activity among the verifiable causes for strange, dancing lights.

The believers in UFOs, and they are many, counter this argument by saying that science cannot explain away everything strange that happens in the night sky. In addition, they say academicians and researchers offer no explanation at all for the increasing numbers of people going public with ter-



ALIEN BEINGS—During a recent conference sponsored by the Long Island UFO Network, a UFO investigator indicates the similarity of four descriptions of extraterrestrial life by four different people who claim to have met them. Photo by Julia C. Mead. (FULL A18F)

rifying tales of abduction by alien beings.

Roger Knacke, a professor of astronomy in the State University at Stony Brook earth and space sciences department, says although there are sometimes unusual occurrences in the sky over Long Island which he is unable to immediately identify as a known natural event, he and his colleagues generally assert the acceptance of flying saucers as fact is not the answer to their unanswered questions.

No Scientific Evidence

"I don't believe there is any evidence that unidentified flying objects are an indication of intelligent extraterrestrial life of any kind. It just seems there is no plausible evidence for that which has been forthcoming," Knacke asserts. "There has been no communication with any such life form that is repeatable and verifiable.

"There are atmospheric phenomena that we do not understand," he adds. "Lightning is not fully understood. I think it would be worth pursuing that study, and it would be interesting to know where and when meteors will fall. Ice in the atmosphere can reflect strange light, and although that is

fairly understood, most people are surprised when they see the visual effects."

Knacke stresses the distinction between those who are seriously and scientifically exploring the possibility of extraterrestrial life and those who accept it as the sole cause of UFOs.

Radio telescopes manned by astronomers, he says, are listening for messages from other planets in other solar systems and a significant amount of telescope observing time has been dedicated to the pursuit of unusual atmospheric activity.

Extensive Discussion

University conferences feature extensive discussion between scientists about how many life forms there may be in other solar systems, what shape those beings may take, and in what numbers they exist.

The one piece of evidence that urges these scientists on is that life does exist on earth. "The questions we are trying to answer were these: Is there anything unique about life on earth? Has it only happened once or does it happen a few times on a few planets?" Knacke queries. "It's fair to say we don't know of anything that makes life unique on earth. However, he cautions, it is important to remember that just because no one can say with certainty that life is unique to our planet, the theory that life therefore exists elsewhere in the universe does not necessarily follow.

This question was one of the motivations for NASA's 1977 Viking 1 mission to study the surface of Mars. The Viking data suggests there is no life on Mars. "It could be argued that all the evidence is not in," Knacke says, "but by and large it seems unlikely there is life on Mars or any other planet except ours in this solar system."

More UFO Reports

However, it becomes exceedingly clear when one listens to members of the Long Island UFO Network that more and more area residents are reporting sightings of unusual and, for them, inexplicable activity in the night skies.

There were 170 reported sightings investigated by LIUFON researchers during 1988, claims Chairman John Ford, with an additional 30 sightings called in to its hotline telephone number during the first three months of 1989.

"There is not a town or an area on Long Island that we did not get news of a sighting from credible people," Ford announced during a recent LIUFON conference in Middle Island. Those reports, he says, came from air traffic controllers, professional people such as lawyers and doctors, from the young and the old, and from police officers, seemingly the most jaded and skeptical segment of any community.

Ford tells one hair-raising tale—which he labels a government cover-up—of an October 18 sighting made during daylight hours at the intersection of Hallock and Colombia streets in Port Jefferson. According to his sources, whom he declined to identify, a vehicle driven by a postal worker was buzzed by a UFO at about 4:30 p.m. The postal worker became frightened by the large object and called police.

Buzzes Cops

Five police officers from the Sixth Precinct responded, Ford continues, and were so terrorized by the round, domed aircraft continuing to buzz the area that they reportedly drew their guns.

Since then, he adds, three of those five police officers have been transferred out of the Sixth Precinct. Three civilian witnesses have allegedly told Ford and LIUFON investi-

gators they were advised by federal agents—from an unnamed agency—not to discuss the experience with anyone. Ford mentions vague threats of retaliation via the Internal Revenue Service.

"I've heard that stupid story, too," said one member of the Sixth Precinct when Suffolk Life attempted to confirm the story.

According to Inspector Russell Brown, Sixth Precinct commanding officer, there is no record of a UFO sighting, or any similar occurrence, in police tour reports for October 18. "That story is just terrible, just terrible," Brown laughs. "No one on my staff, not the lieutenant on duty that day, remembers anything about a UFO sighting."

No Formal Policy

In response to Ford's charge that Suffolk Police have been given a formal policy on how to handle UFO reports, Brown says he "has never run across such a policy.

"I might call a duty officer at home in the middle of the night for a procedure if something came up, and if nothing else, we would check with the FAA (Federal Aviation Administration), but I can say there was absolutely no UFO sighting involving police officers on that day," Brown asserts.

In addition, he notes, there have been no personnel transferred out of the Sixth Precinct recently except as a result of promotion.

Unlike those allegedly involved in the Port Jefferson incident, Cheryl Estler of Bayport is not afraid to tell her story to the press. Estler says she is not crazy. She and her two daughters, then aged 10 and 12, have seen a flying saucer.

On September 5, Labor Day, Estler recalls driving home on Middle Road, heading east, from an Oakdale shoe store at about 8:30 p.m. Along with the family mutt, the woman and her daughters were accompanied by two of the girls' young friends.

Headlights in Sky

"I remember I was tired and the oncoming headlights were bothering my eyes. Then I looked up and saw the headlights coming from the sky, off to my lefthand side, to the north," she recollects. "I remember thinking 'oh great, now they're coming at me from the sky.'"

Two white lights, brighter, but about the same size as headlights, followed steadily alongside Estler's car. "My first instinct was to think it was a plane getting ready to land at MacArthur, but it was just above the trees and it kept right with me along the north side of the road from Sayville to Snedecor Avenue."

"The time seemed to go so slow, like it took us forever to go down the road," she adds. "Every time I looked, that thing was right there."

There is a difference of opinion as to what the craft actually looked like, with Estler saying it was rectangular in shape and her daughters recalling a dome. The 10-year-

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