



Dispatch photo by Tom Dodge

UFO researcher Don Jernigan

UFO report has stirred things up

By Jonathan Riskind
Dispatch Staff Reporter

A 9-foot-tall, three-eyed alien making a 16-year-old Soviet boy disappear and then reappear?

A scientist from Buffalo, N.Y., says it's just another example of a *glasnost*-induced "paranormal pandemonium" reigning in a Soviet press suddenly handed greater freedom.

A Columbus UFO researcher, however, says there's a good chance the Soviet story is true, making it one of the thousands of times aliens have visited Earth.

One thing is certain: The reports by the Soviet news agency Tass that an alien landed recently in the city of Voronezh add fuel to the long-running debate over whether aliens from outer space are fact or fantasy.

The account of the three-eyed alien's confrontation with a terrified teen-ager was "confirmed" by a newspaper in the area, Tass reported yesterday.

"Nobody's been listening" to UFO researchers' claims, but that will change now, Don Jernigan, a Columbus UFO researcher and president and

founder of the Phenomenon Investigation Committee, said yesterday.

"I think this Soviet report will give credibility to this phenomenon," Jernigan said. "People will have to give this a lot more serious attention because Tass is the Soviet Union's official news agency, and they don't have a reputation for playing jokes. So I would assume this incident has a pretty good basis."

The reverse is true, said Paul Kurtz, chairman of the Buffalo-based Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal.

"What's happening in the Soviet Union since *glasnost* lifted press censorship is a *National Enquirer*-type mentality setting in there," said Kurtz, who visited the Soviet Union in July.

Kurtz said in a telephone interview that he is trying to start a "skeptical scientists" group in the Soviet Union to investigate claims of things such as UFO sightings.

"Under communism, critical faculties atrophied; there have been many claims coming out of the Soviet Union," Kurtz said.

"People say Tass wouldn't do this, but do you accept Tass' views on politics?"

Kurtz said one recent Tass story reported, in all seriousness, that a Soviet man had developed the ability to sit in a bathtub, create 10-foot-tall soap bubbles and sit inside the bubbles for up to 10 minutes.

"I don't think there is any evidence for extraterrestrial visitation," Kurtz said. "I call it transcendental temptation. People approach this subject with religious fervor, but instead of angels floating overhead you've got extraterrestrials."

The U.S. Air Force has investigated more than 12,000 UFO sightings, finding explanations for 94 percent of those sightings, according to an Air Force UFO "fact sheet." The Air Force said it didn't have enough data to explain the other sightings.

Maura Webber, a reporter in Tass' New York City bureau, said yesterday that "Tass stands by what it writes." Webber said Tass' Moscow bureau will send more information "when it is available."

After all, inquiring minds want to know.

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