

After Soviet aliens, can sightings of Khrushchev be far behind?

BY WARREN CLEMENTS

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SHORTLY BEFORE his death in December, 1987, Soviet comedian Arkady Raikin lamented that Mikhail Gorbachev's *glasnost* had made it hard for satirists to maintain their comic edge. "We can say anything we want, but nobody is very interested. The newspapers are already saying it."

That was certainly true this week. Tired of the sober image it had acquired from years of echoing the party line, the official news agency Tass kicked up its heels and danced a merry romp through the territory of the Notional Perspirer and the Wacky World Nuisance, two U.S. tabloids of irreparable repute.

It was all talk of red spaceships and four-metre-high aliens with small heads, modified only slightly

THANK GOODNESS IT'S SATURDAY

when one interviewee protested that he had been misquoted.

According to Tass's report on Monday, scientists were called by frightened residents in the central Russian city of Voronezh after they had seen a large, shining ball hover above a park. It is unclear what the scientists said to clear their way through this quavering mass of humanity — something like, "Let me through, I'm a scientist," or, "Back, you superstitious fools!" But what they saw apparently made them true believers, since they concluded (to quote Reuter's paraphrase of Tass) "that giant creatures with tiny heads which recently emerged from an unidentified flying object and went for a

midnight stroll [in Voronezh] were aliens."

The report said the scientists discovered traces of minerals not found on this planet, a category that in my experience includes gold, silver and diamonds. Genrikh Silanov, head of the Voronezh Geophysical Laboratory, was quoted as telling Tass that he had identified the landing site "by biolocation," an extra-sensory method of tracking down invisible objects, but that further tests were required to conclude that the rocks discovered were truly alien.

The Soviet cultural paper *Sovetskaya Kultura* supplied further details, courtesy of Voronezh correspondent E. Efremov. Boys playing soccer in Voronezh saw a pink glow in the sky, which deepened into a red ball. People who looked through an open hatch in the ball saw a three-eyed alien dressed in silvery overalls and bronze-colored boots. (Is there fashion sense

in space?) One alien pointed a 50-centimetre tube at a 16-year-old youth and made him disappear, although the youth reappeared after the red ball had taken off, which has to count for something in this cold and unfeeling world.

Alas, Mr. Silanov got on the telephone to say that Tass had embellished its report of his words. "Don't believe all you hear from Tass," he said, as sage a bit of advice as I've heard in my short, gullible life.

Since the follow-up report was brief, it remains unclear what exactly Mr. Silanov objected to in Tass's initial article. Were the rocks he examined readily identifiable? Did he find the aliens' landing site by some means other than biolocation — perhaps by following the shouts of frightened citizens who had gathered in the park to

play soccer and look at flying red spheres?

This week's excitement was not without precedent. As recently as August, the Socialist Industry, a daily paper of the Communist Party's Central Committee, quoted dairy worker Lyubov Medvedev as reporting a creature with "only a small knob instead of a head. . . . I was frightened to death. Then it became fluorescent and disappeared." Does *perestroika* really translate as paranormal?

Interesting, at any rate, that there was a sphere in Central Russia this week that started off pink and glowed increasingly red. Elsewhere in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, it's been just the opposite.

By DAN PIRARO

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