

Rare Thrill for Tass: Joshing Over U.F.O. Report

By ELEANOR BLAU

The report by the Soviet press agency Tass that lanky, three-eyed creatures took a stroll through a Soviet park last month has caused such reverberations in the United States that they have bounced back to Tass itself.

The agency reported Tuesday that major American television networks and newspapers, which it said typically avoid stories about unidentified flying objects, "played up the space adventure, frequently poking fun and suggesting that the beings from outer space might be a result of overzealous glasnost."

The Tass report, written by an American working for the agency, did not sound resentful. It quoted Edwin Diamond, a New York Magazine media critic, who criticized what he called the story's shallowness, saying, "What did the Academy of Science think?" and "Where are the pictures?"

And it quoted Yervant Turzian of the Cornell University Astronomy Department, who said fellow academics regarded the story as a joke.

Drawing of Creature Is Broadcast

"Given the physical parameters of the universe, the possibility of life on other planets is high," he told Tass. "But the vast majority of these reports can be explained by such logical phenomena as unconventional aircraft in the sky or artificial satellites."

On the other hand, Tass found that "A Current Affair," the syndicated news and entertainment show, was taking the report seriously enough to plan on sending a film crew to Voronezh. That is where Tass originally reported that three children had said they saw aliens emerge from a ball, wearing silvery overalls.

Last night, Soviet television viewers saw a picture of one of the creatures on the main nightly news program "Vremya," in the form of a scribbled drawing by one of the children. It showed a smiling stick figure inside a glowing two-legged sphere.

Vremya sounded more skeptical than the original Tass report, but it offered without comment an interview with Vasya Surin, one of the purported witnesses.

'He Didn't Have a Head'

"We were scared," said Vasya, who appeared to be about 11. "It hovered over this tree. Then the door opened and a tall person of about three meters looked out. He didn't have a head, or shoulders either. He just had a kind of hump. There he had three eyes, two on each side and one in the middle."

Vasya said the alien had two holes instead of a nose, and could not turn its head, so it had to swivel its middle eye.

But "Vremya" cast some doubt on the reports of the sighting, noting, for instance, that

there were no adult witnesses, even though a large apartment house overlooked the site.

Since the first U.F.O. sightings in the 1940's, spaceships have been described as sausages, cigars, balls, bananas, crescents, round straw hats, eggs, mushrooms, disks and, especially saucers. But, in the 1980's "Saucers are out; boomerangs are in," said Jim Speiser, a computer expert in Scottsdale, Ariz. He founded a national U.F.O. computer network in 1986 because he thought there should be an exchange of information instead of disputes among people who reacted variously to U.F.O. stories, "from skeptics to wild-eyed gee-whiz believers."

In a telephone interview, Mr. Speiser said of the reported Soviet sighting: "I think Tass is exploring its new freedom and is not used to self-censorship. I don't disbelieve, but we have much better stories in this country."

Also surprised — but only because he thinks the media ignores U.F.O. reports — is Tim Beckley of Inner Light Publications. He edits U.F.O. Universe, a glossy magazine that prints 100,000 copies six times a year and distributes them internationally.

Mr. Beckley said that he is a journalist, not a scientist, and that he is almost as puzzled about U.F.O.'s now as he was when he saw his first in 1957, as a 10-year-old in New Brunswick, N.J. "It's kind of a cosmic game those entities seem to be playing with us," he said.

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NEW YORK TIMES TH 10-12-89 p. 8