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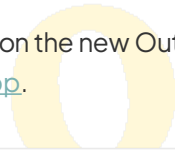


Illustration by Nathaniel Walker and Luke Laeser

If cosmonauts, astronauts, and pilots can see them, can we? **The desert wind is howling. The zephyr is dry as the sand beneath my pedals.** I'm riding my bike west across the Arizona outback starting a solo journey. The invisible hand pushing against me is my first real task. The wind makes my skin prickle, it wraps around me like a bear hug. Mile after lonely mile, I get a chance to think a lot. I ponder my forty years in the mountains and xeric terrains, and the strange occurrences there that modified my life. My chain hums as it revolves around the sprockets, but the wind hums, too. Ever thought about how nature hums? I was about twenty years old and two thousand feet up the east face of Mt. Whitney in California's Sierra Nevada, nearly three miles into the atmosphere. I felt the earth hum, like the sound a Wurlitzer Organ makes when you hit a bass note on low volume with the reverb on. I'm not talking about a sonic boom from a Navy jet out of China Lake or Area 51 breaking the sound barrier, though I have watched such aerial maneuvers in this Range of Light. More attune to a musical pitch fork vibrating, sending out through the plutonic bedrock a non stop signal. This was my first encounter with strange events in the mountains. Ever witness a meteor slam into a peak? Not a Tunguska event wiping out the tundra forest, but startling. A galactic stone the size of a grape traveling twenty thousand miles an hour, hitting a solid igneous wall is thrilling. The Perseid Meteor Showers in August where dozens of shooting stars per minute light up the night stratosphere with thousand mile tracers, viewed from a meadow at twelve thousand feet is pretty amazing. As we were laying in our sleeping bags, we created a rating system for the light show: Wow!, Wow Sit!!, Wow Sit Point!!! Terrence and I were on one of California's many granite domes at 6,000 feet, circa 1975, the sky was perfect blue. No clouds. We were a pitch up, lounging on a ledge enjoying the view and saw in the azure atmosphere an anaconda size white rope create itself. This phenomenon was very much alive. A UFO? We were too young to know, in meteorology terms this could of been a rogue down draft hose of the normally invisible jet stream. My buddy Bob lives near the base of Mt. Shasta. He tells me the town of Weed is home to Lemurians, half breed people who also inhabit the core of this volcano. I've been to Weed many times but can't say I met a Lemurian. Some say they have a waxy skin and prone to a far off gaze or to look right through you. This condition is somehow related to the lost civilization of Atlantis but you'll have to look that up. I have to take this yarn with a grain of sand as my compadre has meditated his way deep below the desert surface into the den of ants, and inside an oak tree where the sap runs down to the roots and high up to the leaves. Above tree line on an alpine bivouac near Tuolumne Meadows, Mt Conness, not high on anything other than the moment, sitting at my stone observatory after dark enjoying the heavens, I saw a constellation of stars materialize, bluish and bright, blinking in concert and moving across a large portion of the sky dome. The formation vectored in, out, yawed left and right. Then, not five minutes after it's arrival, poof!, like when Darth Vader first saw the Millennium Falcon piloted by Hans and Chewbacca travel to light speed and into hyperspace. "Traveling through hyperspace ain't like dusting crops, boy." (Han says to Luke) And then there were the shadow people in Lovers Leap Campground. Though I have had a couple of out-of-body trips, I am not prone to exaggeration or hallucination. I do have a vivid imagination: as a kid I used to have dreams of flying saucers doing battle over Los Angeles. What are shadow people? Wikipedia does a good tutorial, better than I can do, but in my experience they are dark spirits in human form staying out of the fire light but being in, well, the shadows. I focused on one coal colored and translucent specter moving over stone. Alien on the rocks. For years I told few friends about these occurrences for fear of being seen as somebody who had a Martian electronic implant put up my nose by these little green men. Yet the truth remains, and Dave Killokoski would attest to this if

he hadn't already left this planet for his next life journey. Kilo and I once spied a glowing orb out near Death Valley and tried to identify it, driving bad dirt trails and walking all over the sagebrush for hours with no luck. The light stayed out there and illusive. Hum. In the last decade as I have 'fessed up to other kin of the hills these stories, they have told me their tales of ET's, poltergeists, unexplainable 2AM beacons or lasers, weird beeps under the talus, visions of the gods, Tibetan or Sherpa lama tales (Yeti), rendezvous with angels, visits with Yahweh and burning shrubs, and freakish meetings with snake-like apparitions. My college botany prof, Dr. Langham (also an ornithologist), would tell us students on weekend plant collecting expeditions about his dad. Doc knew his padre was like Jodie Foster's in the movie Contact. My mentor was an odd bird, but I loved him, wouldn't miss a field trip; I TA'd for Doc. His progenitor must of been out of this world. Riding my two wheeled aluminum mule across the high desert in Arizona, this is my world right now. I am traveling from Flagstaff to San Luis Obispo, bucking this fierce headwind. I know a half moon will rise at dusk. I'd love one night to see an LTP Lunar Transient Phenomenon. Defined, a LTP is a flash of fluorescence orange, red, blue, green emanating from a crater. Hypotheses vary from an asteroid impact, lava venting, lunar gas fart that has been somehow ignited (ever lit your flatulence with a flaming match? You know what I mean), asteroid an extraterrestrial space craft taking off, or a nuclear explosion from a clandestine NASA other agency H Bomb experiment. My dad saw an atomic explosion back in the late 1950's when they were above ground on the Nevada desolate landscape. He had no warning flying a Piper Cub at ten thousand feet. Back then the FAA didn't do such a good job advising aviators. Preston Sweetland said the detonation was like a billion flash bulbs going off before his eyes. The blinding light, shockwave, and mushroom cloud disturbed him 'til he died. This encounter above the rocky terrain changed his life. We climbers spend a gawdly amount of time out there, up there, looking, hearing, feeling, getting baked by the solar oven and frozen by the cold. What we sense we off' do not understand, but we know what it does to us, it modifies our lives. *Gary Snyder says don't be the mountaineer, be the mountain. I say don't be the cosmonaut, be the cosmos, willing to step into the unknown.*

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