

Flying Saucers Are For People

*True believers include a variety of cultists,
some who think Christ will return in a UFO*

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"Since there are no externally verifiable facts about the UFO—from Venus? from Mars? benefactors of mankind? a danger to civilization?—none of the many interpretations saucerians give can be refuted." (Photo of a "sighting" at Albuquerque in June, 1963, from *UFO International*.)

The flood of recent flying saucer reports is still under investigation, so we don't yet know whether or not earth is being visited by creatures from outer space. But the recent UFO phenomenon recalls a period only a few years ago when hundreds of such reports were made annually and thousands of people become convinced that something from out there was paying a visit down here.

Yet the flying saucer might just as well be a flying Rorschach test, considering the social impact made by all the headlines and strange stories about observers from other worlds. A few officials of the Federal Aviation Agency, the air force, and the Department of Defense continue to check out reports of Unidentified Flying Objects (UFO), such as those two months ago, but for all the furore of the immediate postwar years there are few private organizations of any size that support the notion, or the hope, that earth is being visited by men from outer space.

Although there are only a few flying saucer associations founded by flying saucer believers (or flying saucerians), their development and change over a short period of time is a dramatic illustration of what happens to certain kinds of occult organizations. Most groups dispensing occult wisdom have a delimited body of knowledge which changes little over time: astrology, spiritualism, faith healing; some method of restricting membership to true believers; and some control over, and evaluation of, the conformity of its members. But since there are no externally verifiable facts about the UFO—from Venus? from Mars? benefactors of mankind? a danger to civilization?—none of the many interpretations saucerians give can be refuted. Therefore, flying saucer clubs do not operate with the same restrictions as the customary cult. Indeed, over the years they have turned into "open door" cults, embracing many kinds of people with no direct interest in saucers at all.

Popular excitement about UFO had three main periods: a period of sensitization from 1947 to 1951; a period of hysteria in 1952; and a period of secondary hysteria following Sputnik in the last months of 1957. Many people who saw flying saucers were in all other ways quite normal. As a result many of them to this day are unwilling to completely reject the idea that there is "something up there."

When Kenneth Arnold saw some lights from his airplane near Mount Ranier in June, 1947, he gave them the happy name of "flying saucers." This concrete name defined a previously undefined class of phenomena, and people began fitting their experiences to it. From 1947 through 1951 reports of flying saucers came in at a rate of 100 to 200 a year. During this period of sensitization the public at large

came to be aware of the word flying saucer, and to be unsure of its reality or meaning. On May 20, 1950, 94 percent of respondents to an American Institute of Public Opinion poll, claimed to have heard of flying saucers. The largest portion of these people said they didn't know what they were, and those who thought they knew guessed wildly.

From April to July of 1952 *Life* magazine and the United States Air Force managed to trigger a flying saucer hysteria. On April 7 *Life* printed an article which argued that the flying saucers came from another planet. Then the air force began to report seeing flying saucers. Through a series of incredible public relations blunders which ranged from giving official sanction to wild reports, to advancing patently absurd "explanations," the air force managed to fan the hysteria. By the end of 1952, 1,501 sightings had been reported for the year.

The hysteria fell away rapidly, though not to the low level of the sensitizing period, and was briefly revived when people began looking at the sky after Sputnik went up in October, 1957. This ended the phase of popular excitement. There are still people who report seeing flying saucers, but their numbers are quite small, though there are occasional flare-ups such as the March reports.

LITTLE GREEN MEN

A new phase, overlapping the first, then began—the phase of occult colonization. It consisted, in brief, of people who reported not that they had seen something in the sky, but that they had personal contact with beings from another planet who were piloting the flying saucers. This is clearly quite a different phenomenon. Defining the situation in occult terms began in 1950 with the publication of two books—including the first mention of little green men—Frank Skully's *Behind the Flying Saucers* and Gerald Heard's *Is Another World Watching?*

A publication explosion hit the flying saucer field in 1953 and 1954—ten books claiming contact with the flying saucers were published. These books found a ready audience of interested people who, after the hysteria of 1952 had passed were still wondering what flying saucers were. Many people read the books; few believed them. But some people were convinced. Who were they? I think that they were people who were already believers in the occult and psychic.

People who believed the flying saucer books began, in 1955 and 1956, to band together in flying saucer clubs and to hold flying saucer conventions. A chain of saucer clubs, Understanding Incorporated, was started in 1956. With the existence of this public, a number of magazines devoted to flying saucers began publication. This was a period of great growth for flying saucer organizations. The existence of flying saucer clubs meant that there was a ready market for lectures given by those who had been contacted by flying saucers. It became common for them to go from club to club telling of their "experiences" with the "space broth-

ers." This pattern persists, though in greatly modified form, to this day.

The social world of the occult "seeker" is a very unusual one. The seeker moves in a world populated by astral spirits, cosmic truths, astrologers, mystery schools, lost continents, magic healing, human "auras," "second comings," telepathy, and vibrations. A typical occult seeker will probably have been a Rosicrucian, a member of Mankind United, a Theosophist, and also a member of four or five smaller specific cults. The pattern of membership is one of continuous movement from one idea to another. Seekers stay with a cult until they are satisfied that they can learn no more from it, or that it has nothing to offer, and then they move on.

THE SPACE SEEKERS

Seekers know one another from various meetings over the years, and there is an occult social world which contains all of the various occult philosophies, and all the people who restlessly move from one to another of them. Any new philosophy can gain a large first-time audience simply by letting it be known among the seekers that it exists. There are very few occult philosophies, however, which are so well organized as to keep the interest of the seeker over many years. If the seeker doesn't feel that he is learning anything, or that something is being hidden from him, he will move on.

The flying saucer movement started as just another distinct occult philosophy but it gradually changed and is now an "open door" cult, with room for diverse beliefs. How did this come about?

The most important single fact about the flying saucer clubs I have had contact with is that they were organized by people who were already functioning within the occult social world. One particular club which I have followed for several years, and whose records I have been able to examine, is typical. Its organizer was a late-middle-aged lady whose formal education had ended with the fourth grade. She used the title "Reverend" which she was given by a man who claims the title himself, but who had been taken to task by the State of California for dispensing titles for a fee. She had been a member of Mankind United before the war and had been president of the Theosophist Club. She was familiar with all of the other major occult philosophies. When she decided that the new field of flying saucers was of more than passing interest, after reading some of the volumes of the publication explosion, she decided to start a club. Apparently this was entirely on her own as no other organizations of any size existed then.

She rented a small hall for the first meeting, and immediately ran into difficulty. The owner objected to having "Flying Saucer" on his bulletin board. The name was changed to "Space-Craft Club." She then mailed out postcards "to her friends." Her friends, of course, were people she knew from her contacts in the world of occult seekers.

To the first meeting in February 1956 35 people came. The first three meetings consisted of quite straight-forward flying saucer information. The fourth meeting was on "Space People in the Bible," which is not an unusual topic as, according to one version, Jesus Christ was (and is) a saucer pilot.

The flying saucer clubs were organized around a fairly simple idea. In brief, it is that intelligent beings from other planets, disturbed by mankind's development of atomic energy, have appeared above earth in flying saucers with the intent of saving man from himself. In its original



formulation, the flying saucer is a material object which operates on magnetic energy and is free of the laws of acceleration and inertia. It also "vibrates," in some way so that it can disappear into the fourth, fifth, or sixth dimension.

The pilots bring a new message to the men of earth which is roughly "do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Even space people seem to have a norm of reciprocity.

Given all of its ramifications and variations this is not a very complex revelation, and the occult seekers who joined the club were probably soon able to look elsewhere for new revelations. The response of the club was to tie flying saucers up with occultism of various types. Thus flying saucers were supposed to be the way of travel between Atlantis and Venus and between Mu and Venus. Also flying saucers are supposed to travel between various astral levels—thus the ascended spirits of one's departed relatives can talk to earth over a radio-like communications system from a flying saucer.

FLYING RORSCHACH BLOTS

When varied occult beliefs like this one become diffused throughout a social world it becomes very difficult to determine what is distinctively a property of flying saucers. The flying saucer thus becomes a Rorschach blot. Anyone with an occult line to sell can hook it up to flying saucers in

some way and have it accepted in the flying saucer club.

For several years this took place with speakers moving around the Understanding Incorporated lecture circuit with progressively further-out connections with flying saucers. Then, around 1960, a strange thing began to happen. The audience in the flying saucer clubs began to lose interest in flying saucer sightings. A common remark was "we all know about that." Which implies that they were no longer interested in hearing about it. In the terms used by club members, "we have advanced" from those elementary insights to more complex insights. These more complex insights were the various occult philosophies with which everyone was already familiar. The occult lines were presented from the flying saucer platform in a non-exclusive fashion with no particular emphasis on one line or another. For many seekers the seeking was over. They could stay in one place and have the various lines of the occult world paraded before them without having to move from one group to another.

The personal characteristics of the audience are of particular significance because they relate to the survival of the flying saucer organization. (My data have been gathered by observation over a period of three years of attendance at conventions, including one year of continuous attendance at meetings with sporadic attendance of meetings during three other years.)

- The members are old. The average age is probably around 65 and there are very few people under 50. Most of the members, perhaps 90 percent of the regulars, are women. The ordinary meeting, then, will have an audience which is at least 80 percent composed of women over 50 years old.

- Most of the members seem to be widowed or single. There are very few couples who attend, but there are a few people who attend who are married to non-believers who do not attend.

- The socio-economic status of the members seems to be in the upper-working class and lower-middle class with, perhaps, a greater dispersion downward than upward.

- The formal education level of most members is quite low. Consequently, although they spend all their time learning, and they consider themselves "students," they do not learn things in an ordered and disciplined way, but build up chunks of disconnected knowledge which they cannot bring to bear on a problem, and which they cannot systematize.

- The physical health of the audience appears to be bad, even worse than would be accounted for by the high average age. Many members are deaf, many have very poor vision, many walk with the aid of sticks and many more display obvious physical handicaps of other types.

- By any conventional definition the mental health level of the audience is quite low. Hallucinations are quite common, though people may be drawn to the environment by the fact that "seeing things" is accepted as a mark of spe-

cial sensitivity. Many symptoms of serious illness are displayed.

■ The men in the audience tend to be either young schizophrenics or aged with advanced senility. I have never seen a male saucerian who could make a successful presentation of normalcy.

■ The audience, as a group, has a norm of "anything goes" in several areas. No behavior and no ideas, except those in bad taste, are considered illegitimate. All human defects are treated with kindness, even to the extent of completely disrupting a meeting, so that a late-arriving person with hearing difficulties can be given a front row seat.

The flying saucer clubs have difficulties as organizations. Having few members who are explicitly interested in flying saucers is one thing. But having an audience that on one level is willing to learn about anything occult, but that would gradually drift away if only one line were emphasized; and on another level having an audience that will drift away if they don't feel that they are being benefited, is quite another. It poses problems for the person who must choose the speakers: they must always have something "new" to say and it must be helpful. The club has no line of its own to sell that is so important as to exclude any other even contradictory line. Enclosed in a recent newsletter was the following statement which illustrates the latitude given to other lines:

The "Bay City" Space-Craft Club, as such, may not always share the views of extra and varied statements placed in the envelope for distribution, but the Club is always ready to serve its patrons, in any plan that will build a "Better World" for the present and future generations.

In the past this open door policy has been wide enough to include socialism, Birchism, peace, retirement plans, anti-communism, new-age economics, and the saucerians' own Universal Party, all at more or less the same time. In addition to political lines where contradictory characteristics may be clear, occult and assorted lines have included: Lemurianism, astrology, Rosicrucianism, Yoga, Baha'i, Christian Yoga, Unity, Divine Precepts, UFOlogy, health food, ascended masters, the Master Aetherius, technical metaphysics, Negro history, color healing, free energy, Akashic records, celestial music, and hypnotism. The strain toward variety is clear.

GOOD LINES FOR BETTER WORLDS

But unrestrained variety is chaotic and would lead to a small average attendance as any single line may attract a fairly specific audience. A decision must be made whether or not to present a line, and the decision is made in large part on the basis of whether it will attract an audience. Some things, such as political lines, can be presented in a convention where people will sit still for them, but could not be presented in a meeting, where no one would come.

The founding of the Universal Party, the saucerians' very own political party drew exactly eleven people, six of whom had set it up, four members of the "audience," and me. Attendance like that doesn't pay the rent.

The characteristics of the audience affect what they want to hear. Time after time the "good" speakers are the healers. Anything which has to do with physical disease draws a good-sized audience, and if the speaker presents a line of magic healing with mental power the audience will be large and interested. The healers on the Understanding lecture trail are all con-men of some talent, and they use the flying saucer club platform to make their public pitch for private and expensive treatments or therapy. Thus given limited amounts of money in the hands of saucerians, healing speakers are a self limiting group.

When there is a flare-up of sightings as there was in March, any speaker, even a conventional saucerian, can draw a large audience. At a late March meeting I attended, so many people came, including many college student observers, that the hall was overfilled, and the extra room that was opened up was soon filled as well. The speaker gave a fairly conventional speech linking saucers to the hollow earth theory, planetary reincarnation, our collective descent from Lucifer's hoard, and a reincarnated "master" saucer pilot. Even though this was familiar to most of the regular audience, it might serve to recruit some of those who attended because of the Michigan sightings. So flying saucer clubs will never become exclusively devoted to healing speakers, but they will probably continue to drift toward an exclusive interest in the magic healing of the problems—social, economic, political, physical, and mental—of the aged.

The flying saucer clubs have maintained themselves in the face of the loss of interest in flying saucers by choosing a goal so general, building a better world, that it can legitimate anything. Then, drifting with the interests of the audience, the organizations manage to survive. They are not prospering, however. It takes more than drift to build.



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