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Flying Saucers Are Real!

The US Navy, Unidentified Flying Objects, and the National Security State

Robert P. Horstemeier

In 1947, a fire-control-equipment salesman, Kenneth Arnold, flying his private plane, claimed to sight nine mysterious objects flying in the area of Mt. Rainier. He told his story to aircrews when he landed and newspapers picked it up, quickly beginning to call the things "flying saucers." In the two weeks following Arnold's report hundreds of accounts appeared in the media or were conveyed to the government as people in all walks of life found objects in the sky that could be seen as flying saucers. After investigating these reports in 1948 (as Project SIGN), the brand-new US Air Force closed the investigation and initiated Project GRUDGE, which was principally a public relations effort to debunk the reports. If this effort had succeeded, flying saucers might have been construed after the manner of sea serpents, i.e. as a continuing folklore based on occasional reports of anomalous things that remained controversial, but were of little consequence. However, at a critical juncture, when the flying saucer excitement seemed to have petered out in 1949, members of the US Navy sought to influence public opinion in ways that would undermine GRUDGE propagandas, flying in the face of Air Force intelligence requirements. For some, present at the creation of the national security apparatus, factional disputes and turf wars would have an extraterrestrial dimension.

The idea of aliens from other worlds, capable of space travel and visiting the Earth, is one of the most common in science fiction literature. The ways in which this idea became a social reality for ever-increasing numbers of earthlings impacted the national security establishment of the United States in a variety of consequential ways. The best known is the Air Force attempt to debunk the subject, which is generally misunderstood because it is taken out of context. Happy themselves to appropriate SF imagery when it suited their purposes,

the Air Force did not want the public to believe in flying saucers, which, if real, represented a threat to American national security that US technology, meaning the Air Force itself, could not counter. However, Air Force efforts to dampen and undermine what Americans chose to believe failed and finally contributed to an evolving flying saucer mythos.

In this paper I will demonstrate how differences between the strategic visions of the Air Force and the Navy provided the context and atmosphere of rivalry that encouraged Naval flying saucer advocates¹ to publicly oppose Air Force UFO policies. Each service sought to dominate US Cold War defense policies and each greedily worked to maximize its share of the military appropriations budget. The Naval advocates of flying saucers lent credibility to a hard-to-credit subject, made the claims of saucer reporters plausible to large segments of the population, and created problems for three intelligence agencies, namely, the Air Force Office of Intelligence, the FBI, and the CIA, each responding to popular hopes and fears prompted by anticipation of imminent contact with technologically superior worlds.

The Naval figures who publicized their view that flying saucers represented either visits to Earth by extraterrestrial spacecraft or sophisticated new Naval technologies brought science fiction into everyday life for the US public. However, to the degree that they succeeded in representing the saucers as spacecraft they undermined public faith in the ability of the Air Force to identify potential threats to the United States, provided a fig leaf of respectability to those who claimed to have contacted the aliens, and ignored the fears of Air Force intelligence and the CIA, who worried about the ability of the Soviet Union to use flying saucer rumors for offensive psychological warfare programs against the United States. In effect, the government struggled internally to determine which science fiction motifs should be accepted by the US public as real and which were unacceptable.

I will delineate how the Naval animus, against the air atomic policy of the Strategic Air Command, which would “evolve” into the policy of Mutual Assured Destruction, would produce, in a curiously consequential sidebar, seemingly serious grounds for belief in flying saucers. Before this development, flying saucer beliefs were largely limited to consumers of occult philosophy. Afterwards, intelligent

1. I use the neutral term “advocate” since I do not know with certainty whether all the Naval supporters of the extraterrestrial origin of flying saucers were, in fact, believers. Some certainly were, but I cannot rule out the possibility that cynical shenanigans were also in play.

readers who accepted the authority of Naval experts could plausibly believe that flying saucers were from outer space. Motifs drawn from pulp SF proved to be far more believable to large numbers of Americans than did New Age metaphysics and were included increasingly in military propagandas.

For the purposes of cultural study, I hold that "flying saucer" is a category that is arbitrarily comprised of an indefinite number of things, including conventional things misperceived, natural things unknown to science (meteorites were once UFOs), poorly understood inter-subjective phenomena, and fictions. Perhaps someone has really seen or made contact with an actual extraterrestrial spaceship. I do not know. Still, many, many people around the world believe this to be so. I consider the emotional compulsion to interpret flying saucers as extraterrestrial artifacts to be a by-product of the religion of astronomer Harlow Shapley, who popularized the idea that probability showed with vanishingly small uncertainty the likelihood of the existence of extraterrestrial intelligence in this vast universe: *We Are Not Alone*. My consideration as such does not, however, demonstrate that this is (or is not) the case.

The flying saucer literature is almost entirely comprised of work representing three advocacy groups. Two types of believers in the extraterrestrial origin of flying saucers vie against those who believe that the discs represent delusions, hallucinations and lies. The believers fall into secular and religious categories. Secular believers live in a science fictional world in which empirical methods of observation, comparison and the testing of hypotheses have driven them to the scientific conclusion that flying saucers are most likely extraterrestrial spacecraft. They espouse what they call the Extraterrestrial Hypothesis (ETH). Instead, however, of thereby legitimating "ufology" as an accepted scientific discipline, they cling to an un-testable, hence unprovable (and un-disprovable) hypothesis. In so doing, they remain in a science fictional, rather than scientific, domain. The religious flying saucer believers build on the conclusions of the secular investigators, making claims of alien contact and extraterrestrial confirmation of terrestrial occult metaphysics. They do not claim to be testing a hypothesis.

The third advocacy group denies that flying saucers represent alien craft. Classical philosophy reserved the term "skeptic" for those who found knowledge to be inherently problematic. The term came to refer to those who were open to argument and not entirely sure of the certainty of their knowledge. In the case of "UFO skeptics," however, the term comes to represent a member of an advocacy

group that opposes UFO believers. Skeptics argue on a case-by-case basis, attempting to disprove the un-disprovable Extraterrestrial Hypothesis. Skeptics typically recognize that they cannot disprove an un-testable hypothesis, yet cannot resist the temptation of trying to figure out what mundane occurrence accounts for each particular case. In this sense, for the purposes of this paper I refer to believers in the ETH and in contact claims as “believers” and believers in the delusional/hallucinogenic and fictive hypotheses as “skeptics.” I think it behooves the student of flying saucers to suspend judgment regarding the believer/skeptic binary and view both sets of believers in the context of the history of ideas. This context includes the history of the 19th-century literature on the multiplicity of worlds, religious precedents for the belief in inhabited planets (such as Emanuel Swedenborg), the debate about life on Mars associated with Percival Lowell, and the development of science fiction.

Both believer and skeptic are interpreting *reports of claims*: neither are investigating UFOs, but only UFO reports. Sometimes the skeptic makes the better formal case; sometimes a believer punches real holes in a skeptical case. A student is on solid ground when studying the cases *as argued*, while withholding judgment. However predisposed we might be to accept or reject the “reality” of flying saucers, allowing such biases to guide historical research can divert us from a great deal of useful historical material. A steadfastly neutral approach often allows the buried political facts of the case to emerge, as the reader will see.²

What holds among the believer and skeptical advocacy groups holds also for the great body of the American people. Almost everyone in the US stands somewhere on the believer/skeptic spectrum, usually decidedly toward one end or the other. My impression is that statements that are not defined by the believer/skeptic binary are usually misunderstood and taken to represent one view or the other. Therefore, I am taking pains to clarify my position, which does not depend on the

2. My interpretation of the believer/skeptic binary pertains to the period of the 1950s when beliefs were relatively simple. During the 1960s a small group of professional scientists brought to the believer community an open-minded curiosity about the possible scientific implications of UFOs; its key figure, J. Allen Hynek, eventually founded the Center for UFO Studies. On the skeptical side, during the 1970s and 1980s, a “psychosocial” school of explanation grew in Europe around John Rimmer and the magazine *Magonia*. While these investigators were more sophisticated than their predecessors, the basic lines of argument defining the binary continued as before.

believer/skeptic binary, and does not require either belief or skepticism in order to be accepted or rejected.³

The secular UFO literature, especially the early literature (1950–1965), is mostly comprised of strings of UFO stories, held together by memoirs of the authors' investigations and a glue of social, often military-political, information, all decontextualized and arranged to make or break the case for the reality of flying saucers. While several consequential social milieus constitute sites of flying saucer interest, I became especially interested in their situation in the social history of the early Cold War, c. 1946–1955, and focused on those cases that might be interestingly restored to their power-political contexts. My reading soon led to basic questions, one of which was "could flying saucers have been construed as they were because such a construction aided the state-run campaign of fear that accompanied the invention of the Soviet enemy in the US popular imagination." The US State and Defense Departments created a climate of fear to sell their spine-tingling vision of a Soviet threat to Truman (who insisted on budget-balancing), Congress and the American people (at a time when the Soviet Union was prostrate and could threaten no one). Senator Arthur Vandenberg saw the need to "scare hell" out of the American people to be able to get isolationist Republican pols to give up their reluctance to support US adventuring abroad. Flying saucer stories *per se* do not appear to be part of this overarching pattern of what Strategic Air Command chief Gen. Curtis LeMay called flesh-creeping, although such uses *were* made of flying saucer stories, as we shall see in the case of tales of secret Navy saucers.

Believers of the ETH almost universally assert that flying saucers were drawn to the earth by the US development of atomic weapons. Atmospheric nuclear testing alarmed the alien legions of Earth's neighbors in the solar system. Skeptics also believed that the A-bomb, impacting the American imagination in innumerable ways, as well as the developing Cold War, made it easy for a jittery US public to imagine they were sighting interplanetary spacecraft. Both seek to explain the timing of the coming of the saucers. However, inasmuch as the first flying saucer sightings were preponderantly interpreted

3. In the interests of full disclosure I confess that I am a UFO percipient. In 1973 I participated in a multiple-witness close encounter (defined as a UFO experience of an object close enough to reveal detail). At the time I was reading a lot of descriptive phenomenology. Possibly in the light of this, I was not predisposed to accept any of the socially available interpretive models as being of particular help in identifying what I had seen. Nonetheless, my perplexity enabled me to distance myself from proper skepticism as well as from the flying saucer myths.

by their reporters to represent futuristic US or Soviet technologies, *not* alien spacecraft (then a small, but growing, idea), I would venture to suggest that the major factor in the genesis of government interest in flying saucer reports in 1947, the year of the birth of both the national security state and its component air force, was the *new need* to identify *all* things seen in the sky.

It was governmental concern that gave flying saucers the charisma required to inspire people to begin watching the skies expectantly. Average citizens newly excited by the prospect of a sky that held wonders saw all sorts of things they could not identify. Similarly, a major flying saucer flap occurred following the lofting of Sputnik, the first Earth satellite, in 1957, as thousands of Americans peered skyward at the threatening Russian technology.⁴ Before World War II, the US still possessed an island mentality and did not worry about intercontinental bombers, much less guided missiles. After the war, the US was potentially vulnerable to new weapons systems that might as well have *been* science fiction to most Americans. Before the war, anomalous and improbable reports of aerial prodigies could be allowed to remain as folklore. During and after the war, they became something else. They became potential threats on three levels: they might physically attack the US or they might be used to panic or to subvert populations.

There have always been unidentified flying objects (UFO) which have been "identified" in the social context of their reporters. Therefore, an ambivalence informs contemporary ideas of "unidentified" flying objects, which are always rhetorically "identified" one way or another, but which also defy identifications, slip away from them, and remain controversial and open to debate. When human products began to be lofted in the form of balloons and then airships, images of UFO identities began to be mechanized (Bullard 1988: 8–12). In Europe this process occasionally had political implications, as when a British airship scare raised fears of a German invasion in 1909 (Watson 1987: 27). This process of technicization culminated first in a rash of "ghost rocket" reports centered in Sweden in 1946 and, finally, in 1947, in "flying saucers." The acronym UFO became conflated with the term "flying saucer" in popular usage during the 1950s. It is tempting to consider flying saucers to be a kind of UFO, but this can only be done with the proviso that both terms be

4. The Pacific Northwest, where the flying saucer excitement of 1947 began, is close to Russia, a geographical detail not unappreciated by early commentators on the subject, both inside government and in the media.

understood as nominal and complex. I use the term “flying saucer” to refer to a particular social construction put upon the objects of reports of unknown things seen in the sky, without consideration of what those things might be or whether they are at all.

I shall discuss flying saucers in terms of *identification*, *subversion*, and *panic*. The relationship between the ideas of identification and panic associated with flying saucers tends to be taken for granted. The relation to subversion is not so well known. This taken-for-granted aspect, however, needs some clarification. UFOs began to be interpreted as potential enemy technology with the militarization of balloons during the 19th century and the emergence of airship fantasies in science fiction and, soon thereafter, in fact. At this point it increasingly behooved governments to identify UFOs – they could no longer remain mere folklore items. During the 20th century, bureaucrats came to think that psychological warriors could use the failure to identify UFOs as a precondition for panicking enemy populations. In this way, now taken for granted, the image cluster of saucers/panic/identity was constructed, heavy with implications of potential subversive political uses.

I shall treat these matters separately. First, I will discuss the Air Force–Navy struggle over the identity of flying saucers, which is also a struggle for the appropriation of science fictional imagery to serve the differing agendas of the armed services. Then I will detail the efforts of the FBI to respond to accusations of subversion among contactees, as the evolving flying saucer mythos reeled out of control when the leading contactee, George Adamski, began to report Communist proclivities among the aliens. Finally, I will outline the history of extraterrestrial expectations in general, the possibility of extraterrestrial fears (or fears of secret weapons) causing panics, and the response of the CIA to anxieties about the possible use of flying saucers in offensive psychological warfare operations. I will include in my closing remarks examples of other military forays into science fictional realms, particularly those of the Navy, and a few comments on “good” and “bad” appropriations of SF material in the military.

Background

The flying saucer excitement began in June 1947. Invaders from space became an air defense problem for a brand-spanking-new United States Air Force that loved to use SF images to spruce up its Buck Rogers-ish persona. The inability of the Air Force to identify the reported anomalous aerial wonders became one of many criticisms

leveled at the Air Force by its opponents within the Navy in the wake of acrimonious hearings before the House Armed Services Committee during the fall of 1949, dubbed by the newspapers the Revolt of the Admirals. Several Naval advocates of the provocative idea that flying saucers were real had roles in a Naval struggle against the air atomic policy of the Strategic Air Command. Were Naval officers more inclined to believe in the extraterrestrial origin of the discs because of the delicious implications it unfolded for their inter-service rivals?

Motifs found in pulp science fiction became the subject of factual claims until, by 1950, polls showed that a majority of people in the United States believed that their lives included the futuristic wonder of flying saucers. Science fiction became easy to believe. The "identification" of unidentified flying objects by various Naval advocates brought spaceships from another world into this one, making subversion by SF a real threat in non-Naval (i.e. Army, Air Force, FBI, and CIA) eyes. Perhaps SF was easier to believe than Marx – aliens offering socialist panaceas might be more persuasive than the clumsy agitprop of Socialist Worker cells. Furthermore, a population conditioned to accept extraterrestrial contact as real was bound to be nervous and might be panicked for political purposes. Thus, political and military Cold Warriors fought to appropriate flying saucers for a variety of agendas.

The flying saucer controversy coincided with a heightening of inter-service tensions between the Navy and the Army Air Force, which grew along with saucer beliefs until 1949. During the fall of 1949, disagreements between the defense arms erupted during two hearings before the House Armed Services Committee (HASC), one investigating the procurement of the B-36 long-range bomber and the next airing basic strategic disagreements. The hearings were explosive; the press called them, with their attendant propagandas, the Revolt of the Admirals. Key figures in the revolt were soon involved in another consequential disagreement with the Air Force. They claimed that flying saucers had been identified, and not as the Air Force wished. They were spaceships from another world. Flying saucers were real.

The Revolt had its roots in World War II. Beginning in 1944, the Army Air Force conducted propagandas suggesting that air power should be centralized under a single air commander in a single department that combined Army, Navy and Air Force. In 1946 air power advocate William Bradford Huie published *The Case Against the Admirals*, attacking the Navy's opposition to unification of the armed services with its provision for a separate air force. Covert use of Huie allowed the Air Force to avoid the appearance of attacking a sister

service. The Navy failure to counter the propaganda efforts of the Air Force had to be remedied after the war, as strategic visions continued to diverge (Barlow: 1994: 48f, 198, 200). "By the end of 1948 the Navy and the Air Force had each staked a significant portion of its plans for increased near-term offensive capabilities on a single and expensive and technically complex weapons system" (Barlow 1994: 157). They were the flush-deck 6A carrier - the "Supercarrier" - and the B-36 bomber. Since weapons systems and doctrines implied one another, as disagreements hardened each service began public rhetorical attacks against the other's weapons. This series of attacks and counter-attacks would culminate in the revelation in 1950 that the Navy possessed the ultimate air platform: the flying saucer.

The Revolt of the Admirals was fomented in 1949 when the new budget-balancing defense secretary, Louis Johnson, a Truman crony and military outsider, who soon found himself denying news accounts of Naval saucers, cancelled the Navy's flush-deck (6A) carrier program. The Revolt was signaled by the resignation under protest of Navy Secretary John Sullivan. The pre-eminence of the Strategic Air Command was assured (Barlow 1994: 191). In response, Cedric Worth, Special Assistant to Under Secretary of the Navy Dan Kimball, and Thomas D. Davies of the Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Air, anonymously drafted and gave to Congress and the media a document purporting to reveal corruption in the B-36 program, the key instrument of the strategic bombardment policy. The "Anonymous Document," inspired by information from Glen L. Martin of Martin Aircraft, detailed the procurement irregularities of Floyd Odlum, who manufactured the B-36, and AF secretary Stuart Symington, and charged them with enriching themselves at the expense of the country (Barlow 1994: 207-209). The unofficial use of press leaks in order to advance the agendas of factions within the Navy would be repeated when Naval personnel sought to undermine Air Force flying saucer propagandas.

After the Revolt, the outlines of the future inter-service rivalry between air and sea were drawn. Disagreements over roles and missions, as well as strategic and tactical concepts, were formed then that continue today. Unpredictably, fantastically, the Revolt set the stage for Americans' belief in and fear of flying saucers. When members and advocates of the Navy chose to publicly disagree with the Air Force's skeptical assessment of the flying saucer situation, Air Force plans to lull an anxious public began to go seriously awry. Air Force debunking efforts were increasingly viewed by the public as a cover-up, part and parcel of the saucer myth.

Before Naval figures began to assert the reality of the spaceships, flying saucers were the province of science fiction and with science fictional dreams running amok in the corridors of power it is appropriate that the earliest defining figure in the emerging enterprise of flying saucer publishing should be an SF editor. *Amazing Stories* was the first SF magazine; its editor in 1947 was Ray Palmer, whose role as an “inventor” of flying saucers is commonly recognized: he was the first to marry spaceships to the New Age in the public eye. He had prior experience when, beginning in 1944, he gave a venue to Richard Shaver, who was plagued by the telepathic cross-talk of a subterranean race of science devils, who used nightmarish ray technologies to torment and madden surface dwellers. Shaver’s appearance in the pages of *Amazing* obscured the distinction between SF and science fact, as readers claimed to know the location of entrances to the subterranean world as well as reporting experiences in the cavernous domain and encounters with its inhabitants. Palmer was ready for flying saucers.

Kenneth Arnold’s report of June 24, 1947 started the original two-week wave of flying saucer sightings and attracted Palmer’s attention. Palmer was quickly interested in the new phenomenon and hired Arnold as his investigator, leading him to cross paths with some of his Air Force counterparts. Palmer’s next venture, *Fate Magazine*, became the earliest newsstand source for flying saucer information. The pulp-style illustrations on its covers provided a way for Americans to imagine the aerial spectacle. In this sense Palmer “invented” flying saucers (Keel 1983: 52–57).

His invention might not have attracted more interest than the Shaver mystery without continued reports of the phenomena, combined with the legitimating influence of propagandas conducted by Naval advocates. Flying saucers appeared to be in decline in 1949; by 1950 it was possible to think of them as things of the past. That was how the Air Force wanted it, and perhaps would have had it, had not men like Robert McLaughlin and Donald E. Keyhoe presented a more plausible case for the spaceship hypothesis than Palmer and his ilk could ever muster. Their credibility rested on their positions in the Navy as well as on the superiority of their science fiction.

Identification

The context wherein Naval men defied Air Force attempts to minimize flying saucer reports and, moreover, spread stories purporting to show that the reports represented either alien spacecraft or secret

Naval developments, was framed by the hard feelings left over from the Armed Services Committee hearings. Now Navy advocates would make SF claims of their own, countering future Strategic Air Commander Curtis LeMay's 1946 rhetoric of "harnessing light rays for destructive purposes and the creation of man-made 'planets' to be shot into the heavens by atomic power and anchored by gravity somewhere in the ionosphere to serve as 'space bases' for 'interplanetary' ships" (Shalett 1946a: 28). At the same time, the Army Air Force announced it was "taking steps to protect its high-flying spaceships or 'aiockets' (still on the drawing board) from bumping into meteors" (Shallett 1946b: 11). LeMay was ready for space-age action, without pacifistic namby-pamby. When he headed the Air Force research and development in 1946, he preferred manlier SF appropriations, exciting reporters with predictions of an Air Force that would feature "Buck Rogers" scenarios: "The goal is to get something that will enable us to sit in a cave, sipping mint juleps, and fire at the enemy."

In 1948 the Air Force established its first investigation of flying saucers, suitably code-named SIGN. A faction within the small project came to the conclusion that saucers were probably spaceships from other worlds, largely basing their theory on the strength of a spectacular "ghost rocket" reported by Eastern Airlines pilots. SIGN prepared an Estimate of the Situation favoring the alien technology hypothesis, which was summarily rejected by AF chief of staff Hoyt Vandenberg. In early 1949, SIGN became GRUDGE and investigating UFOs was no longer its priority. A policy of debunking and de-emphasizing saucer reports had been decided upon by the Air Force, and the GRUDGE staff cast about for a suitable public relations vehicle to announce their identification of the flying saucers as conventional occupants of the sky. They decided upon Sidney Shalett of the *Saturday Evening Post* to "play down the UFOs."

Later Air Force UFO chief Capt. E.J. Ruppelt did not believe that Harry Haberer, the AF's PR man, told Shalett exactly what to say in order to "play down the UFOs": "I think that he just wrote the UFO story as it was ... told to him by Project GRUDGE" (Ruppelt 1956: 61). Ruppelt thought the two-part article – out April 30 and May 7, 1949 – backfired; he claimed (inaccurately) that UFO reports picked up, and that skeptical readers saw through the feeble debunking effort. The gist of the Shalett piece was that flying saucers had been identified and posed no threat. Shalett cited only one admitted stumper: the same "ghost rocket" that had puzzled the SIGN staff earlier.

The Navy saucer advocates, however, would not let the Air Force propaganda penetrate American hearts and minds unopposed. Two lines of thought emerged from Naval sources during 1949–1950 that gave credence to the idea that formerly unidentified flying objects had been identified. First, they were identified as spacecraft from other worlds and then, briefly, as secret weapons systems of the Navy, joining the ranks of such science fictional weapons as the hydrogen bomb.

The first effective Naval flying saucer propagandist was Cmdr. Robert McLaughlin, the chief of the Naval contingent for guided missile testing at White Sands Proving Ground. In April 1949, scientists tracking a balloon at the range tracked a flying saucer on a theodolite,⁵ determining that it was a 105-foot disc flying at an altitude of 56 miles. On June 6, 1949, McLaughlin conducted an upper atmospheric missile test. Two small discs paced the missile. One dropped back, crossed the exhaust trail and then rejoined the other. Both then easily outstripped the missile and vanished. Although McLaughlin did not witness this sighting by his ground crew, he reported that he had seen a flying saucer during a missile flight in late May (McLaughlin 1950). On July 6, McLaughlin was able to button-hole the public information officer for the Air Force, Al Scholin, who had come to White Sands seeking material for news releases. The security-conscious Army PIO Capt. Edward Detchemendy was shocked to find McLaughlin sharing his flying saucer reports with the Pentagon publicist. He tried to hush the Navy missileman, who insisted the story was unclassified. Detchemendy disagreed, but McLaughlin refused to be silenced. Inter-service rivalry sizzled (Gross 1988b: 31-5).

On August 24, futuristic-looking White Sands Proving Ground hosted the media, who were to witness a Viking rocket launch. Just being in such a place seemed science fictional in 1949. Big rockets, vertical and erect, rising from launch pads against the exotic white sand, visually suggested being on a SF movie set or on another planet. During the media spectacle an indeterminate number of Navy men told media people about saucer sightings. Marvin Miles (*LA Times*) and broadcaster Clete Roberts (radio station KFWB, Hollywood) went public. Detchemendy, feeling McLaughlin and the Navy men were “fully cognizant” that they were violating Army security requirements, demanded an investigation of the leaks. Nonetheless, McLaughlin took his story to *True* magazine, where it appeared in the March 1950 issue as “How Scientists Tracked Flying Saucers.”

5. A range-finding instrument.

Thus, the Navy itself lent the appearance of support to McLaughlin, since his article had to be officially cleared for publication. Its appearance in *True* continued that magazine's commitment to the outer space origins of saucers: the December issue had contained Marine major Donald E. Keyhoe's "Flying Saucers Are Real," the defining text on flying saucers. Ken Purdy, editor of *True*, offered Keyhoe, who had public relations experience, the job of joining his in-house investigation of the saucer story early in May 1949, a month before the McLaughlin sighting. That week, the first installment of Shalett's AF-assisted piece appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post*. Purdy needed a man like Keyhoe, with Pentagon connections, to compete with Shalett. Keyhoe represented himself as open-minded, but driven by his investigation to conclude that the saucers were interplanetary craft. He spent the rest of his life advocating the ET hypothesis and lobbying the government to end its cover-up of the alien invasion (Keyhoe 1950b: 18–20).

Keyhoe wholeheartedly believed in UFO realities and thought the Air Force included a "silence group" (Keyhoe 1953: 53, 134), that is, a faction that believed financial panic, social displacement and cultural collapse would follow any (say) Navy revelation that the observations represented contact with a technologically superior alien species. He was a best-selling, Book-of-the-Month Club cultural phenomenon and inspired skeptical government UFO investigators to hypothesize a "Keyhoe Effect," blaming UFO reporting waves on his publications.

When flying saucers attained their status as both national security and occult items, two advocacy groups emerged, each identifying the discs as extraterrestrial spacecraft. The circles around Ray Palmer developed into the contactee movement, wherein New Age philosophers claimed to have personally received cosmic wisdom physically or psychically from the aliens who piloted the saucers. With writers like McLaughlin and Keyhoe, flying saucers were presented in the light of science and of their military implications. The publication of "Flying Saucers Are Real" in *True* marked the beginning of the distinction between "serious" (secular) and "silly" (religious) UFO advocacy, and Keyhoe may be seen as the figure most responsible for the distinction, as he laid down a canon that excluded New Age beliefs. Keyhoe and his Navy cohorts were the main reason smart young people in the 1950s could believe in flying saucers on a secular basis.

Keyhoe was also a propagandist in the formal sense. He ghost-wrote for Admiral Arthur Radford, one of the leaders of the Naval insurrection and soon to be the Chief of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Informally, he acted as a conduit for Navy opinion on flying saucers. He promoted the pro-extraterrestrial views of Delmer Fahrney, the Navy's candidate for "Father of the guided missile," director of the Navy's missile testing station at Point Mugu, California. A perusal of the Navy-supplied material in Keyhoe's five books reveals the extent of the Navy disagreement with the Air Force line.

Although examples of Naval saucer publicity continued throughout the 1950s, a last example will suffice to demonstrate the ongoing efforts of high-ranking Naval personnel to transform science fictional phantasms into scientific facts through the felicitous magic of words. In 1952, before the flying saucer invasion of Washington, Secretary of the Navy Dan Kimball told Keyhoe that he had been involved in a fantastic event: While being flown from Guam to Hawaii he had been informed by his excited pilot that their plane had been circled twice - buzzed - by a flying saucer. Kimball's pilot radioed the Secretary's staff plane, trailing 55 miles behind, and was further shaken by the news that they had experienced an identical maneuver. Joint Chiefs Chief of Staff Arthur Radford flew in the second aircraft. In mid-March of 1952, Kimball told an audience his amazing story at the Pensacola Naval Test Station and received publicity (Keyhoe 1973; Schofield 1952).

Kimball reported his saucer through regular channels to the AF, and discovered that AF policy would not allow witnesses access to the results of their analyses. A review of Navy and Marine cases led him to realize that he was not the only witness for whom this was true. He ordered Calvin Bolster, head of the Office of Naval Research and a friend of Keyhoe's, to reinvestigate Naval/USMC cases and retain duplicates of the reports given to the Air Force in the future. Keyhoe claimed that both the AF and the CIA feared the possibility that the Navy would reveal their secret knowledge of the alien presence on Earth. He asserted that AF complaints ended the Office of Naval Research project. Did this end Kimball's interest? While these events developed, Navy petty officer Delbert Newhouse, on July 2, filmed what appeared to be a group of flying saucers cavorting above the mountains near Tremonton, Utah. Analysts at the Naval Photo-Interpretation Center believed they had the scientific evidence to demonstrate that the flying saucers were real, anomalous, physical and measurable. The Air Force suspected they were birds. Howsoever, the Tremonton film became a mainstay of serious flying saucer believers. But before Kimball could meddle with the Air Force UFO policy, the November election of Dwight D. Eisenhower sent the Navy secretary packing, his plans to encroach upon the turf of Air

Force flying saucer investigations unknown and unfulfilled (Keyhoe 1973: 80–82). Despite Kimball's departure, his public relations officer, Walter Karig, would continue the publicity battle for flying saucer realities.

Donald Keyhoe approached his Annapolis classmate Admiral Calvin Bolster, Director of the Office of Naval Research, concerning the Tremonton, Utah, UFO film. He was surprised when the normally tight-lipped admiral told him that Karig, now Special Information Deputy to the Secretary of the Navy, had top-level clearance to publicize the Newhouse report. Karig's article appeared in *American Weekly Magazine* and noted that the Utah film was still under study, contradicting the AF claim that the filmed objects had been conclusively identified as birds. Karig asserted that UFOs were solid, that they accelerated beyond human capacities, and that they seemed to be intelligently controlled (Keyhoe 1955: 66, 79f).

However, not all Navy-based saucer propaganda supported the ET hypothesis. During March and April of 1950, ABC radio broadcaster Henry J. Taylor (*Your Land and Mine*) and *US News and World Report* publisher and newspaper columnist David Lawrence – a Naval advocate and exponent of the air admirals – made big news when they announced that flying saucers were science fiction made fact through the genius of the US Navy. Continuing the post-atomic trend to resort to apocalyptic imagery, Taylor named the story "The Good News." The Soviets might have their atomic bomb, temporarily depriving the United States of global hegemony, but now the US Navy had restored the post-war status quo ante by providing what the Soviets still lacked: an all-purpose platform for the projection of atomic destruction. The Navy might fill some gaps in the US air defense structure as well with their fantasy super-weapon.

The idea that flying saucers were the secret weapons of the US or of a foreign power began with the original reports of 1947. One candidate had always been the XF5U1, an allegedly super-modified form of the Navy's not-very-airworthy Flying Flapjack, publicized since 1946. When news accounts sought to explain the saucers by reference to the awkward aircraft, the Navy routinely discredited the claim, issuing a handout that told a story of unsuccessful flight tests. When *US News's* David Lawrence began his strange course of claiming that the mystery discs were Naval weapons systems, he resurrected this old story, heightened its attractiveness with SF twists, and gave it veracity. Before 1950 was over, flying saucer belief polled unprecedented numbers. Others that spring told stories of US or Soviet saucers, but none had the impact of Lawrence's. The *US News* cover headlined

the tale: "Flying Saucers - The Real Story."⁶ Lawrence began his account with the story of the unstable elliptical craft developed by Charles Zimmerman in 1942. Positing the solution to "problems of stability by use of very advanced design," Lawrence patched together his image of the flying saucer: 105-foot discs, 10 feet thick, built in three layers, the central layer slightly larger, with a ring of jet nozzles surrounding it, made of a dull white metal and having no "protruding surfaces." The nozzle arrangement accounted for the impossible maneuverability of the saucers: vertical take-off, right-angle turns, hovering, and fantastic accelerations with sudden starts and stops.

How did Lawrence know flying saucers were Naval developments? First, the Air Force claimed to have closed down Project "Saucer," the public name for GRUDGE: "This indicates clearly that top Air Force officials know where the saucers originate and are not concerned about them . . . These officials . . . denied emphatically that a secret Air Force project is responsible." Also, the craft was designed to carry out Naval strategy and tactics, i.e. air cover, "even in antisubmarine warfare," and vertical take-offs from any combat ship, not limited to carriers ("Flying Saucers - Real Story" 1950: 15). In his news column for April 7, Lawrence linked the House Armed Services Committee hearings to his exposé of Navy saucers. The hearings showed that an "iron wall" existed between Air Force and Navy research and development, so it was to be expected that the new service would be ignorant, originally, of the SF items that had somehow materialized in order to technologically humiliate them. Lawrence opens by referring to the McLaughlin report, wherein flying saucers plague a missile test, recently published in *True*. McLaughlin told *Time* that the *US News* piece was full of "wild statements" (Lawrence 1950).

A chorus of denial arose following the Lawrence "disclosure." Truman's office, Louis Johnson's Defense Department, the service secretaries and chiefs of staff hurried to deny the reality of the saucers. Believers saw this as evidence of corroborative denial.

The "good news" was announced during the Congressional defense appropriations season, while a propaganda effort was

6. Although Lawrence's name did not appear as the byline for the unattributed *US News* story, he was generally regarded as its source in contemporary news accounts. He published the news weekly and wrote versions of the claim in two of his newspaper columns. *Time* regarded his citation of the *US News* story in his column, without noting his role as publisher, as disingenuous. I shall follow Lawrence's contemporaries and refer to the *US News* account as well as the two columns as authored by Lawrence.

underway that was the centerpiece of Pentagon public relations designs to maximize their budget share. "New Weapons" – some of which did not exist – were presented to the public in futuristic SF terms as if they were already in production. The hydrogen bomb was one of these non-existent weapons. At the time of the New Weapons campaign, government feasibility studies labeled the fusion weapon a fantasy, as unreal and unrealizable in 1950 as were Navy saucers.

Subversion

On July 9, 1947, two weeks after the flying saucer excitement began, Brig. Gen. George Schulgren, who was Chief of the Air Intelligence Requirements Division of Army Air Corps Intelligence, contacted the FBI. He worried about Communist sympathizers or Soviet agents precipitating "hysteria and fear of a Russian secret weapon." Most observers of the developing situation assumed that the discs, if not delusions, were either US or Soviet devices. J. Edgar Hoover agreed to participate in Air Force saucer investigations, with the stipulation that nothing, especially physical evidence, was to be kept from him. The service conjectured that a foreign power might drag a formation of gliding discs behind an airplane. FBI investigations lasted until September, at which point Hoover learned that, far from being the valued player in the effort to determine what flying saucers represented, he was instead receiving nonsensical hoaxes to investigate "to relieve the numbered Air Forces of . . . instances which turned out to be ash can covers, toilet seats and whatnot." Hoover bridled and pulled the FBI out of Air Force UFO investigations (Gross 1988a: 63f).

Nevertheless, the FBI and the UFO communities continued to cross paths, most notably when someone in a civilian saucer club or a member of a lecturer's audience suspected Communist infiltration or propaganda. The lecturer who received the most such attention was George Adamski, the leading "contactee" of the period, and one of the few who espoused left-wing politics. The contactee movement was comprised of those individuals and organizations who believed in contact with alien pilots and in their superior wisdom. The notion of interplanetary contact pre-dated the contactee movement. Venusians appeared as Ascended Masters of the Great White Brotherhood in H.P. Blavatsky's Theosophical Society.⁷ Trance mediums contacted

7. H.P. Blavatsky, founder of modern theosophy and of the Theosophical Society, claimed to have received her eclectic, mystical philosophy through the guidance of

extraterrestrials. The popular pseudo-theosophy of the Great I AM Activity, a New Age road show of the 1930s, also featured Venusian masters of occult science. Yet there was no SF in any of this. Venusians did not require spaceships to travel to Earth. Theosophical “rays” were occult emanations. Adamski’s Venusians, however, combined the hermetic philosophy of New Age California with the SF mentality of aliens in our midst. Adamski was an unsuccessful SF writer who originally tried to frame his ideas in a novel, *Pioneers of Space: A Trip to the Moon, Mars, and Venus* (1949). But whereas typical New Age metaphysics of the late 1940s appealed to the extreme right – with Masters preaching hierarchical systems and a top-down model of spiritual authority – Adamski’s utopia was egalitarian and his Masters preached a simple gospel with Marxist overtones. He began to proselytize for the aliens in 1952. Early in his career as their contact agent, the FBI opened a bureau file on him.

Other contactees received little attention from the Bureau. Orfeo Angelucci, like Adamski, attempted to write science fiction, working in 1948 on a screenplay about a trip to the moon. The aliens who contacted Angelucci were anti-Communist. Angelucci was the privileged contactee of his fellow anti-Communist C.G. Jung, who paid close attention to him in his study, *Flying Saucers: A Myth of the Modern Age*.⁸ Angelucci briefly had a job with Lockheed in the heart of the military-industrial complex. His aliens professed a Manichaeian metaphysics that demanded a radical choice between Good and Evil. They had great faith in Angelucci, their human contact: “We know where you stand, Orfeo” (Angelucci 1955: 26). Angelucci asked his contact about the “creeping menace of Communism,” to which query he received the following reply:

Communism, Earth’s present fundamental enemy, masks beneath its banner the spearhead of the united force of evil. Along with good, all men have evil in their hearts to a degree. But some are much more evil than others. Communism is a necessary evil and now exists upon Earth as do venomous creatures, famines, blights, cataclysms – all are negative forces of good in man and cause them to act. Thus they are combated, understood and ultimately their unreality becomes apparent. For evil is always eventually self-destroyed. (45f)

spiritual masters who had ascended to the astral plane (which she popularized). Unencumbered by material bodies, they constituted the Great White Brotherhood.

8. Jung interpreted UFOs as a symbol of wholeness, integration and the unknown self. His coyness regarding the physical reality of the phenomenon enabled believers in the ET hypothesis to claim him as a supporter, despite the main thrust of his arguments, which did little to distinguish genuine reports from dream experiences, inasmuch as his focus was on the archetypal significance of flying saucers.

Hoover would have liked these extraterrestrials. He could have written their propaganda.

Angelucci's Venus is ruled by an elite: on their colossal spacecraft, a thousand "peers" rule half a million "regulars"; 20 billion inhabitants have shipped all animal life off-world. (Adamski's Venus had instituted planned parenthood programs, eliminating crowding.) A *führerprinzip* exists and one enlightened individual might, through teaching and breeding, lead all the rest into utopia. Regulars, or "retarded ones," are kept in "concentration areas" where they "prefer" to live among their own kind. Darwin is held in contempt, as he is by the contemporary Christian right (Angelucci 1959: 75, 109, 160, 162).

Most contactees, however, shied away from politics. For instance, one Truman Betherum, in his childlike account of the planet Clarion, in Earth orbit but on the far side of the sun, tells of a society with no troubles, no taxes, unity and peace. Still, he claimed to have been threatened by "two or three fellows who had sons in Korea" and were convinced his contacts were really with "enemy agents" (Bethurum 1954: 59, 74, 99). Another contactee, Daniel Fry, in *The White Sands Incident*, represents an apolitical, technocratic utopia. Like Angelucci, he worked for the military-industrial complex, namely Aerojet, Dan Kimball's company prior to his Naval appointments. Fry's purported contact occurred at White Sands Proving Ground, where he was employed at the time as an engineer.

Capitalists had reason to tremble, for Adamski's aliens were indeed fearsome: "On Venus there is true equality in all respects, including allocation of commodities" (Adamski 1955: 67). Adamski's Venusians condemn divisive ideas of race and nation. Adamski's aliens believed in the classic Marxist maxim of from each according to ability, to each according to need. As the Venusian Master told Adamski: "Every man and every form is respected alike for the services they render. None are judged as to shortcomings . . . All services are equally acknowledged" (205). This was pretty strong medicine in 1955, as McCarthyism and the Ku Klux Klan flourished. Furthermore, Adamski represented himself as having lived in semi-communal circumstances during World War II. Adamski's Venusians are reminiscent of Klaatu, the Christ-like hero of *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, who may have served as one of his models. Taking the earth name "Mr. Carpenter," Klaatu goes among the common people offering salvation, and is ultimately killed and raised from the dead. Adamski offered socialist salvation to a capitalist world riven by racism and nationalism, which Klaatu contemptuously dismissed as "squabbles."

The film was especially critical of LeMay's air atomic strategy and, implicitly, the SAC.

Later, probably in 1952, the FBI opened Bufile No. 100-395273 on Adamski, headed SECURITY MATTER. The file begins with a May 28, 1952 document in which an FBI informant relates a conversation at the Palomar Gardens cafe of the Adamski collective. Two years before his interplanetary contact, Adamski alleged that the Federal Communications Commission had established contact with other planets and discovered their form of government, which they kept secret: "If you ask me they probably have a Communist form of government and our American government wouldn't release that kind of thing, naturally. That is a thing of the future - more advanced." Adamski predicted a Russian Millennium: world domination would herald 1,000 years of peace. He claimed to know that a recent "earthquake" in Russia was really a hydrogen bomb test. San Diego would be attacked within a year. He condemned the enslavement of workers by capitalism. Nonetheless, he expressed ambivalence about openly espousing his politics: "It is a good idea to be quiet now. Right now if you talk in favor of Communism you will be spotted as a Communist and if you talk against Communism you will be spotted by the Communist, so it's best to just shut up." Alas, Adamski was too late. He had been "spotted as a Communist" (Special Agent in Charge, San Diego 1952).⁹

By 1959 Adamski's Communist aliens were again raising suspicions. A couple in Texas who helped Adamski with his large correspondence and who believed his stories had become alarmed by the possibility that Adamski was "subtly spreading Russian propaganda." Adamski's space people were "under a system in which churches, schools, individual governments, money, and private property were abolished in favor of a central governing council, and nationalism and patriotism were done away with." They were alarmed by an October 12, 1959 letter from Adamski which implied that the space brothers were assisting the peaceful Russians in their space program. They read this letter to members of their ham radio network and received many angry responses. This aroused the couple to re-examine Adamski's books for signs of pink, whereupon they decided

9. Another local informant added to FBI suspicions by offering his opinion that Adamski was "a very brilliant individual who gives the community the impression that he is mentally unbalanced because of his 'Space Ships'." A member of the Adamski group told the visitors a friend had returned from Russia with tales of free opera tickets and an easy life. Had contact with Russia been transformed into contact with other planets?

that the space people might *be* the Russians, and contacted the FBI. The Communist onus that grew around Adamski affected his followers as well (Special Agent in Charge, San Antonio 1959).

The Detroit Flying Saucer Club promoted contactees, especially Adamski, by arranging their lectures. However, the FBI never formally investigated the DFSC (or any other contactee-related groups); instead, they kept files under the heading ESPIONAGE-X that contained information gleaned from volunteer anti-Communists. A long memo, for instance, outlines the suspicions of subversion that followed Adamski and his space brothers. Adamski seemed to be following the line of the Soviet Peace Offensive. Sensing less than absolute Americanism, one FBI informant complained that many members of the club maintained an overly conditional air of "We are Americans, but . . ." Another informant thought "such an organization could use the flying saucer scare as political propaganda." He further felt the club "would make a good cover for subversive activities" (Special Agent in Charge, Detroit 1954).

Panic

On the night of Halloween, 1938, Orson Welles broadcast a radio adaptation of H.G. Wells's SF novel *The War of the Worlds*, thus conveying the idea of an alien invasion of the Earth. When flying saucer reports a decade later demanded a place in our psyche, they evoked *The War of the Worlds* and the possibilities inherent in the manufacture of mass hysteria.

Furthermore, a UFO panic had occurred five years before the advent of flying saucers. A failure to identify radar returns led a jittery anti-aircraft battery to turn Los Angeles into a mock battlefield in an event that has never been fully understood, but would be remembered when flying saucers became a fixture of the national security state. During the night of February 25, 1942, Army radars at Los Angeles detected aerial targets approaching the city, two days after a Japanese submarine had fired upon the Barnsdall Oil Company's gasoline storage tanks 8 miles north of Santa Barbara. A blackout was declared and LA was littered with shrapnel as anti-aircraft batteries responded to the threat. Air raid wardens tried to deal with panicky citizens. The *L.A. Times* reported at least five deaths had been caused by the blackout. Post-panic analysis was made difficult because while Navy Secretary Frank Knox suggested that the Army had fired on nothing at all, Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson claimed that 15 unidentified planes had caused the alarm. Congressional and media

inquiries into the “raid” were stymied by the characterization by this disagreement (Lore and Deneault 1968: 74–87).

In 1940, Princeton social psychologist Hadley Cantril published *The Invasion from Mars*, an influential study of the 1938 panic. A few years later, as US–Soviet tensions hardened into the Cold War, Cold Warriors looked to Cantril’s study to support their fears of a Soviet victory in a putative war of nerves. Newspapers regularly featured *War of the Worlds*-based paranoia, often connected to the mysterious flying saucers. Former AF colonel Paul C. Potter told the Congressional Atomic Committee (in March 1950) that the Russian war colleges were giving careful attention to the Cantril text as a guide to the American tendency toward mass hysteria. Potter proposed a program of “panic-proofing” US populations (“Reds Seen” 1951). Cantril’s study addressed social psychological responses to mass media and limited its analysis to these factors. Cantril did not address the strong grounds that an informed citizen had in 1938 for believing that Martians *could* invade the Earth. The *War of the Worlds* broadcast was plausible in part because of a well-publicized controversy within the scientific community that made it possible for news consumers to imagine an imminent attack from Mars. This debate provided much of the detail that would give SF stories about Mars their verisimilitude.

The focus of the debate was the opinion of Percival Lowell, whose romantic views of the ancient civilization of Mars were themselves science fiction in the guise of astronomy. Lowell, a Boston Brahmin, writer and brother of the poet Amy Lowell, was obsessed by the “canals” of Mars originally reported by the Italian astronomer Schiaparelli. He used his fortune to establish an observatory at Flagstaff, Arizona, in order to substantiate his belief that Mars was a dying planet inhabited by intelligent beings who desperately held off inevitable doom by constructing a system of irrigation canals that transported water from the polar regions. His ideas were widely publicized from the 1890s, and continued to be highly influential, as well as controversial, into the mid-20th century. Lowell’s advocacy of the idea of a nearby extraterrestrial civilization, more highly evolved than that of Earth, led newspapers to survey Mars stories at times when the two planets were most proximate. These popular science compendia of Martian lore included the latest pros and cons regarding the Martian canals and reviewed the newest scientific schemes to communicate with Mars. Frequent Mars excitements formed a long prelude to Welles’s faux invasion and fostered extraterrestrial expectations made real by the interfaces of science, popular science writing, and science fiction. Also, the panic following the broadcast gave

extraterrestrial expectations political uses and forced governments to see in flying saucers a potentially threatening development. And if the dimensions of the 1938 excitement were overblown in the popular imagination, so much the better for the fearmongers of a latter day.

Mars continued to be a cause for worry during the post-war period. When, on January 16, 1950, Japanese astronomer Tsuneko Saeki reported the sudden appearance of a "vast gray cloud" on Mars that grew to 900 miles in diameter in 30 minutes, newspapers recalled the opening minutes of the Welles broadcast. The British Interplanetary Society quipped in its journal: "No further phenomena have been reported, but the interest shown in the story (like flying saucers) would appear to confirm the wide popularity now claimed for the type of literature known as 'science-fiction'" ("Notes" 1950: 142). During this period *The War of the Worlds* remained potent: a radio station in Quito was burned to the ground following a rebroadcast. Omaha, Nebraska was given a case of the jitters when collegiate drama students from the University of Omaha broadcast their version of the story. As late as 1957, 60 anxious callers were worried by a CKOV radio performance in Kelowna, British Columbia.

Extraterrestrial fears and susceptibility to panic added the SF dimension to the larger campaign of "flesh-creeping" instituted by the State Department authors of National Security Document 68, the review of US defensive stance in light of the loss of the atomic monopoly with the successful Soviet nuclear test of 1949. Newspapers and magazines were full of maps of US cities with superimposed concentric circles indicating the areas of devastation that would result from a Soviet atomic attack. Propaganda exercises included mock Red attacks on metropolitan centers, in celebrations of paranoia. One might suspect a certain disingenuousness on the part of those who feared flying saucer-induced panics but simultaneously sought by all means to increase public fears of a Soviet colossus.

The Day the Earth Stood Still (1951) features a flying saucer invasion of Washington, DC, during which peaceful ET cops stamp out nuclear proliferation. In 1952, Washington was "really" invaded by flying saucers. When Twentieth Century Fox released the Robert Wise-produced film, they provided one of the defining images of the "classic" flying saucers. The screenplay was heavily informed by references to media coverage of the saucers. Investigative journalist Drew Pearson played himself in a series of newscasts that evoked the media-driven format of Welles's 1938 presentation. Pearson's broadcasts in the film, detailing the 4,000 mph course of a flying saucer as

it approached the Mall in Washington, DC, repeatedly pleaded for calm, while the film accented panicky behavior. Followers of Pearson's newspaper column would recognize that the reporter was echoing his continuing interest in saucer theories. His concern proved to be well-founded when, one year later, panic reigned among the air traffic controllers at Washington's National Airport as unknown radar returns were interpreted as a flying saucer invasion.

On two Saturday nights in a row – July 19 and 26, 1952 – “panicky confusion” characterized the reactions of radar operators at National Airport to seemingly hard returns representing unknown objects over Washington. At 11:40 pm on the night of the 19th, unidentified blips appeared on the control tower scopes. Two of the targets assumed positions above the White House and near the Capitol dome. Jet interceptors were dispatched around midnight but took three hours to arrive, at which point the blips inexplicably vanished from the radars, returning after the jets departed. The events were repeated exactly one week later (Gross 1986: 69–84; 1988c: 1–39). Critical accounts and editorials took the Air Force aback (1988c: 33). Implied were serious problems regarding its role in the air defense of the United States. Where were the jet interceptors as flying saucers flew (or so it was perceived) unopposed above the seat of government? What was government doing about it? Long before 9/11, flying saucers had tested US air defenses and found them easily overcome. Media alarm over the DC event was reflected at the CIA and was amplified by Drew Pearson.

Damage control was in order: Maj. Gen. John Samford, chief of Air Force Intelligence, presented the largest and longest press conference since the end of World War II, during which he ascribed the entire complex of events to weather returns caused by temperature inversions. Donald Keyhoe, present at the press conference, blithely assumed that the debunking was necessary in order to address AF fears of panic (Gross 1988c: 46–54).

An unattributed briefing report on August 14, 1952 revealed that the CIA Office of Scientific Intelligence (OSI) felt that it would be timely to make an evaluation of the Air Force study of flying saucers. The agency role was to remain hidden: “It must be mentioned that outside knowledge of Agency interest in Flying Saucers carries the risk of making the problem even more serious in the public mind than it already is, which we and Air Force agree must be avoided” (CIA 1952: 2). A special study group was created to consider the implications of UFOs for the national security. This group proposed a Scientific Advisory Panel on Unidentified Flying Objects, to be led by

H.P. Robertson of the Weapon Systems Evaluation Group. H. Marshall Chadwell, the assistant director of the CIA's Office of Scientific Intelligence, steered the process that led to the formation of the panel. Chadwell recognized the peril of a science fictional idea that was increasingly compelling to Americans. An August 19 briefing report noted that there was no evidence to support the three main theories: Russian secret weapons, US secret weapons or alien spaceships:

However, it is important that there are many who believe in them and will continue to do so in spite of any official pronouncement which may be made. This whole affair has demonstrated that there is a fair proportion of our population which is mentally conditioned to acceptance of the incredible. Thus we arrive at two danger points which, in a situation of international tension, seem to have National Security implications. (CIA 1952: 3)

A search of the Soviet press had revealed zero comment, "even satirical," on flying saucers:

This could result only from an official policy decision and of course raises the question of *why* and of whether or not these sightings could be used from a psychological warfare point of view either offensively or defensively. Air Force is aware of this and had investigated a number of the civilian groups that have sprung up to follow the subject. One - the Civilian Saucer Committee of California¹⁰ has substantial funds, strongly influences the editorial policy of a number of newspapers and has leaders whose connections may be questionable. Air Force is watching this organization because of its power to touch off mass hysteria and panic. Perhaps we, from an intelligence point of view, should watch for any indication of Russian efforts to capitalize upon this present American credulity. (3f)

Chadwell put the psychological warfare question succinctly: "The question, therefore, arises as to whether or not these sightings: (a) Could be controlled, (b) Could be predicted, and (c) Could be used from a psychological warfare point of view either offensively or defensively" (Chadwell 1952: 3). The recommendations of the Robertson Panel generally supported Chadwell's threat analysis regarding the implications of flying saucers to national security, although they did not recommend any specific scientific effort to analyze and identify "the phenomena involved." "Misidentification of actual enemy artifacts by defense personnel" was dangerous. So were the "overloading of emergency reporting channels with 'false' information" and "mass

10. This is a reference to the Civilian Saucer Intelligence of Los Angeles, a secular private investigation.

hysteria." In order to defuse the perceived threats a public education program was necessary (Chadwell 1952).

Dedicated ufologists often speculated on a secret government education program designed to prepare the US public for the panic-inducing instability of seeing flying saucers as extraterrestrial spacecraft. Keyhoe advocated the view that an official policy of debunking was desired by a "silence group" of government officials who wished to hide the truth from the public, while psychologically preparing them for the devastating news via a series of planned leaks (Keyhoe 1953: 53, 99, 134). At the same time, the CIA was recommending a two-tiered propaganda effort to train Americans to identify objects in the sky, modeled on the World War II aircraft recognition program, and to debunk UFO cases, by revealing how easily things seen in the sky might be misperceived. Both parties - the believers and the debunkers - were obsessed with education programs, but imagined them very differently. The Panel recommended that mass psychologists, in particular Hadley Cantril, as well as advertising experts, would be useful consultants in the creation of a psychological operation against the US public to calm their flying saucer anxieties. Variety show hosts Arthur Godfrey and Dave Garroway were suggested as media outlets, as tactics already used by GRUDGE in 1949 were resurrected under the new imprimatur of science (Durant 1953: 19-21). A February 6, 1953 memo to FBI bureau chiefs was written in language that seemed designed to appeal to J. Edgar Hoover. Continued emphasis on UFO reporting "constitutes a threat to the orderly functioning of the protective organs of the nation" and could create a "morbid national psychology in which skillful hostile propaganda could induce hysterical behavior and harmful distrust of duly constituted authority" (Warfield 1953).

A great deal of time and energy had been expended in failed programs to suppress a science fiction idea that was harmless. Paranoid intelligence agencies inadvertently fueled public paranoia by trying to suppress it. Accompanying the arms race, which was the military-industrial centerpiece of the Cold War, was a hazy, tenuous but ubiquitous doppelganger, a phantom double revealed in half-light, that stood behind and above the array of clearly visible - and usable - weapons systems. Images of better missiles and futuristic tanks merged with other images borrowed from SF and weapons systems folklores that preceded the Cold War: death rays, cold bombs, engine-stopping rays, anti-gravity devices, mystery submarines and flying saucers. Rumors became factoids which served as bases for innumerable articles which, sometimes explicitly, suggested a race in the development of phantom arms between the US and Russia - ghost-like weaponry never to be taken

into hand or shown to the public. The new-to-Americans secrecy of the national security state boosted the credibility of the idea that impossibly sophisticated weapons might be tested by the great adversaries. The repeated publicity of such weapons by the Cold War adversaries, itself contradicting the premise of secrecy, made the phantom arms race vividly real to its aficionados. What, finally, it was all about remains difficult to understand, as the shapes continue to shift, obscuring weapons systems realities even today.

During the Cold War, disinformation campaigns were conducted in the US and Russia in which other SF scenarios hastened to, in the words of Robert Anton Wilson, “imminentize the eschaton.”¹¹ The origins of these campaigns are for the most part obscure and, in some cases, such as the Air Force–Navy flying saucer rivalries, represent the agendas of individuals and factions within government rather than official covert policy. In practice, the student of these stories is faced with a difficult meld of government-sourced claims, combined with the chicanery of private citizens, loosely wrapped in a text written in the hope of commercial success. Scientific research in these fields is conflated with unscientific claims and factoidal assertions that serve government agendas, perhaps to fool enemies, who might waste resources developing fruitless lines of research. Perhaps larger romances are at work.

Navy involvement with the “sciencefictionalization” of US life did not end here. The Hydrographic Office of the Navy was involved in the publicity surrounding a study of the Piri Reis map, used by Columbus, a gnomonic projection showing the continents surrounding the South Atlantic. Keyhoe’s Naval sources informed him that gnomonic projections could only have been made through a global aerial survey, and suggested that the map was evidence of ancient astronauts, or at least of an ancient flight technology (Keyhoe 1960: 208–217). The Office of Naval Research interest in early claims regarding the “Philadelphia Experiment” – a pulp-fiction-like account of an invisibility experiment gone horribly awry – brought a lasting weird tale to light, if unofficial disinformation casts light on anything besides the peculiarities of government processes (Moore and Berlitz 1979). The Navy also participated in a case of trance mediumship, ending with a Navy man learning how to use automatic writing to communicate with aliens in the twilight zone where spiritualism and outer space meet.

11. In his *Illuminatus* trilogy, Wilson uses this term to refer to the attempts of his conspirators to bring the end of the world near.

Other science fictional ideas that were current during the first decades of the Cold War required no education programs to manage popular perception. When stories suggested that a major effort was underway in US government and industry to reach a breakthrough in anti-gravity research, once again an old chestnut of the SF pulps with a respectable provenance was made to seem within the imminent grasp of science and might be the next all-encompassing technological revolution. Research into the nature of gravity was exaggerated in regard to its feasibility, scope and allocation of resources. It was quickly conflated with ufology, since *everyone knew* flying saucers constituted a kind of feasibility study for gravity research. Keyhoe counted upwards of 65 projects aimed at the conquest of gravity. The fly in the ointment was that no one knew the first thing about anti-gravity. Still, no official efforts to debunk Pentagon anti-gravity were necessary and its publicity added to the sense that the technological fantasies of science fiction would all soon be a part of US life (Keyhoe 1966: 35f).

Throughout the first half of the 20th century, the Earth was invaded by extraterrestrial expectations which condensed, in 1947, into the flying saucer interpretation of unknown things seen in the sky. An idea common in SF literature became real, eventually for millions of people, in its collision course with the national security establishment and the New Age.

When saucers first appeared on the scene they were perceived by the military services of the US as a potential threat, most likely a Soviet threat. When the physical threat did not materialize, government scientists and others in government began to suspect a psychological threat, which was aggravated by several science-fictionally-minded members and advocates of the Navy. Unworried by the idea that panic might result from their propagandas, they undermined the panic prevention efforts of the Air Force and the CIA. They established a foundation upon which the utopian SF of the contactee movement could build, and provided a small modicum of respectability to their otherwise utterly improbable claims of alien contact. Since then a rich and complex edifice of UFO beliefs has grown from the ground provided by Naval sources of legitimation. The idea that the Earth has a special place in the universe, sufficiently important to warrant unceasing attention from a variety of alien races whose motive can only be a subject of speculation, is believed by millions of people worldwide. Believers have developed a science fictional world in which to live, a world they cannot imagine otherwise.

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