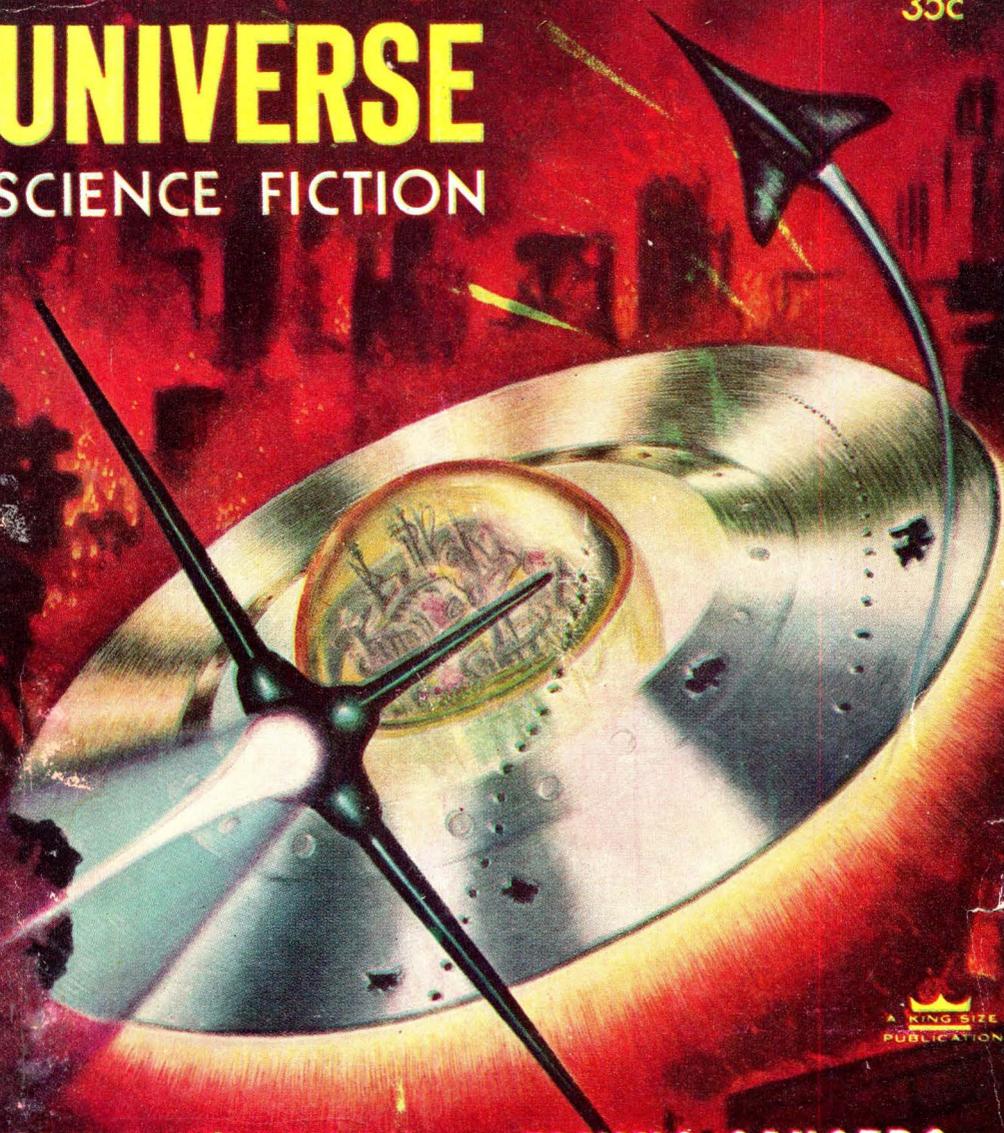


FANTASTIC UNIVERSE

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IVAN SANDERSON on FLYING SAUCERS

ARTICLES AND STORIES BY GRAY BARKER • HARLAN ELLISON • RICHARD WILSON

VOLCANERO A Novelet by ROBERT E. GILBERT

**the
truth
is
fantastic**

by...GRAY BARKER

Who were the three strange men in dark suits who scared the saucer investigator so much? Were they aliens?

"YOU know, sometimes I think flying saucers must be the greatest hoax ever perpetrated on mankind—or that mankind has perpetrated upon itself." Dom was smiling wickedly.

I was silent.

I hadn't been saying much on the way to Newark. I usually grew morose when the time came to leave Dom's place in Jersey City. Soon I would get on a Capital Viscount and after a change in Pittsburgh be skimming over the mountain tops hoping the pilot could set us down at Clarksburg, W. Va., on the small landing strip which my home town citizens term, perhaps rather grandiosely, *Benedum Airport*.

It had been, as usual, a fascinating weekend at Dom's house. I had gone to New York on Monday, a week before, done some radio and tv interviews, and a couple of lectures.

I always looked forward to these hours with Don. My schedule completed, I had taken the opportunity to drop

West Virginia businessman Gray Barker, who publishes The Saucerian Review, is the author of THEY KNEW TOO MUCH ABOUT FLYING SAUCERS (1956, University Books). Mr. Barker, in addition to describing a number of theories about the origin of the UFO, told how one by one the leading figures among flying saucer researchers, who had challenged the official denial that saucers come from outer space, had been silenced. Nothing had "happened" to them—they'd just been silenced. Mr. Barker's present article again describes these strange happenings.

over to his place in Jersey City on Friday.

You never know quite how to take Dominick C. Lucchesi.

By day Dominick C. Lucchesi is a highly paid gyroscope technician who works for the Bendix people. But by night, when he has company, he is the arbiter of a magical world in which he tells how he has projected his astral body, and has on tap a thousand theories on what flying saucers can or cannot be. The night before, for example, some friends had dropped in and we had descended into his brother's "laboratory" in the basement, where Dom turned out the lights, stood at one end of the huge room, and announced he wanted to "demonstrate the human aura."

Now the human aura, as I understand it, is supposed to be some kind of exhalation surrounding the body, the color of which reflects the personality or physical condition of that body. Certain occultists or "adepts" say they can see the human aura surrounding a person in broad daylight. That I don't know. At least I have never seen one. If I did, I think I would go out and buy an extra fifth.

Anyway, Dom had stood there in the darkness and asked if we could see his aura, while he went into some kind of deep breathing ex-

ercises (all put on I suspect), presumably to make his aura stronger and more visible. Everyone looked. Under the spell of Dom's hypnotic patter, running all the while, some said they could see little flashes of fire where he was standing. Me, I saw nothing.

But now I knew that everything Dom would say would be in dead seriousness. He hated to see me go. We had been at this thing together ever since the inception of the International Flying Saucer Bureau, when Dom had believed the saucers were built by the Air Force and stated he could build one in six months, given the money and facilities. But after what happened in Bridgeport, Conn., I think he had changed his mind long ago.

We swung into the parking area and Dom guided the immense Buick into a stall. His brother, Armand, or "Om," as he was nicknamed, who fooled around with old cars, had rebuilt this one for him. It must have been a '47 or '48 model—one of the big jobs made for a chauffeur to drive. I remembered it was the same car in which he had met me at that same airport three years before, in the fall of 1953, just after the excitement had really started. After I received Dom's tape I had put in a call to him, and early the next morning grabbed one of the four daily

flights out of Clarksburg. I remember now that at that time I thought that if I could get together with Dom and we could go to Bridgeport together—we might decide whether we were being told a science fiction tale, or *the thing*.

After going to Bridgeport Dom and I figured it was the real thing all right, though underneath it all, I suppose, we had always wondered. Why a grown man could be frightened almost out of reason by three men who were dressed rather oddly.

I checked my baggage, confirmed my reservation and we walked into the coffee shop. I decided to have breakfast over again, ordered an egg and some bacon. Dom decided on tomato juice. Never before had I seen a man put sugar in tomato juice.

We were silent again for a while.

"It's like this, Dom. It's happened, we've investigated every possible angle, and now the book is out with all of it in it. Maybe I'm going to look like a fool, maybe people are going to laugh at me—oh that's all right, they've laughed at me ever since I got this crazy idea to chase saucers—but now they'll be doing it all over the country!"

"In a few years no one will be laughing at us, Gray."

"Look, we've had a fine

time and a lot of fun. But now I'm leaving. Honestly, Dom, tell me how you feel about the man."

"He had something, Gray. I only wish I had got to him before it happened."

We didn't have to mention the man's name. We both automatically knew whom we were talking about.

The one man we knew of who must know something very definite and very positive about the saucers.

What they were, where they came from, and possibly why they were here.

Bender.

Coral E. Lorenzen, head of one large saucer organization, said Bender had made up the story, that it was an excuse to get out of a field of research which had become too puzzling, too much work.

We had both known Bender too well to believe that, however.

I suppose the Flatwoods, W. Va., "monster" had been responsible, in a roundabout way, for my knowing Bender well, as it had been responsible for a lot of other things. Whatever it had been, it had sailed through the night sky over a small town near Clarksburg, almost like a shooting star. Only it wasn't.

A group of youngsters just leaving a playground

saw it halt, hover, then fall to the ground on a nearby hilltop, where it pulsed dim to bright, alternately lighting up the entire hill.

With more curiosity than bravery, they climbed the hill to see what it was. It was almost like looking into Hell. Down over the other side of the hill they saw a huge glowing sphere, and then from their left something came at them!

Something like a man, they said, but about 15 feet tall, something unknown and incredible, a creature that had eyes, but eyes from which light rays projected.

Very little else is known about the Flatwoods "monster." The witnesses didn't stay long enough to find out just what it was. They fled down the hill in panic; it was necessary to treat some of them for shock.

Before that happened I had been an average sort of guy, a fellow who closed his office at five and went home and read a book. But after looking into the Flatwoods incident I decided there must be something to this talk about flying saucers after all.

I investigated the incident because I was curious, and because I thought it was a hoax. I didn't find out what the Flatwoods monster was, but I did find out what it wasn't. First, it wasn't any hoax. The kids were telling

the truth. Second, it wasn't anything that normally walked the face of the earth.

I saw Bender's ad in a magazine. He had formed a club or organization, called the International Flying Saucer Bureau, which would investigate and collect information on the flying saucer mystery. I sent a copy of my "monster" report to him. Four days later I received an air mail letter. Bender, too, thought there was something to it, even though the newspapers had laughed at the children's story.

I was amazed at the prospectus he sent me. I knew the Air Force was trying desperately to figure the saucer enigma at Wright Field, but I didn't know that civilians were doing anything about it. Bender was receiving membership applications from all over the U.S.; he also had branches and members in other countries.

He was forming a department within the Bureau, he said, which would assure expert attention to selected reports. He had lined up an aeronautical expert, an astronomer, and a photographic technician, to serve in the department of investigation, as he called it. He was looking for someone to head the thing. Shortly thereafter I was asked to head the depart-

ment.

I believe that given a little time we would have come up with something; I believe we would have found out what the saucers were, for we were set up to do it. If, through what must have been some fantastic accident, Bender himself had not run onto something so terrifying and dangerous it changed a warm, personal friend into a shaken, changed individual overnight.

It was certain that Dom was closer to the "Bender Mystery," as we had begun to term it, than any other man, even myself. Within closer reach of Bridgeport than I, Dom was able to make frequent visits to Bender's home while the IFSB was still operative. As aeronautical consultant in the department of investigation he found it important to get together personally with Bender about once a month. At that early date Dom felt flying saucers behaved no differently than machines then possible to build on earth, though he didn't discredit Bender's contention that they could come from space.

We should have seen it all coming, for some odd things already had been happening, though we could never put a definite finger on their being connected directly with saucers. I remember receiving Dom's urgent tape recording and letting it lay around the

office a couple of days before playing it. That was during my busy season. I operate an agency which books pictures for theatres, mainly the outdoor type open only during the summer months. Consequently I am tied up with practically no time to think about anything besides motion pictures for about six months out of the year. But when I finally hooked up the recorder and listened to the tape, I telephoned my secretary and told her the show was all hers for a few days.

DOM was finishing his oddly seasoned tomato juice as I hauled out the dog-eared copy from my portfolio.

"You probably didn't know I had my secretary copy your report," I remarked. I sat there, reading again those first disturbing paragraphs.

After some personal amenities Dom had got to the point:

"Actually, Gray, some very interesting things have happened, and the only way I can describe these to you is by using tape.

"As far as my being investigated by anyone is concerned, no one that I know of has interrogated Augie Roberts (Roberts was the photographic consultant for IFSB and lived near Dom in Jersey City) or myself—unless it might have been someone with whom we are well acquainted, and whom we might not have realized was

an investigator of one type or another."

The tape related how he and Augie had planned to visit Bender that day, and how the car had developed trouble, Augie telephoned Bender to let him know they couldn't make it. Dom saw a puzzled look come over Augie's face, and began listening to his end of the conversation. Suddenly Augie put his hand over the receiver and looked at Dom.

"Bender's acting real funny," he whispered, and continued listening.

"What is it, Al, are you holding something back?"

Augie motioned for Dom to come over and share the receiver. Dom heard Al say something about *Space Review*, the publication issued by the IFSB.

Dom's recording continued:

"Al told Augie that *Space Review* WOULD come out on October 15th, but whether it would come out after that was something else."

"*It seems something strange has occurred in IFSB.*"

"Well, Augie was quite persistent, and kept pushing Al for more information. Finally Al stated bluntly, *I know the secret of the disks.*"

"Now the way I gather it, Al had run across something important during his study of the saucer mystery. This information was evidently

the solution. In his position as head of the IFSB he was in what one might picture as the focal point for all the saucer information being run down by the hundreds of IFSB members. He had run across the secret unexpectedly while going through all this material."

"When Bender learned what he felt was the answer, he evidently wrote it all down and submitted it to someone, maybe to a magazine, maybe to an expert for an opinion—just whom he wouldn't say."

"THREE MEN CAME TO HIS HOUSE WITH THAT VERY SAME PIECE OF PAPER IN THEIR HANDS. THEY TOLD BENDER HE HAD CRACKED THE RIDDLE, THAT HE HAD FOUND OUT THE ANSWER TO THE FLYING SAUCER MYSTERY."

"Then they filled him in with details."

"When they got through with him Bender said he turned white as a sheet and got sick. He couldn't get anything to stay on his stomach for three long days."

"The oddest thing about the three men, was their rather strange dress: they all had on dark suits and black hats."

That was not the end of the story. The three men had confiscated back issues of *Space*

Review, and told Bender to shut up about saucers. Shortly thereafter Bender would close down the IFSB tighter than the heads on Cugat's drums and refund all unearned membership dues.

"There is something that smells to me in this whole business, Gray." Dom continued. "Just because Bender is out of action doesn't mean we are knocked out. We must try to find out what Al found out... We don't have the key, that's our only trouble. But if Al found it, we can find it. We have a clue in the fact they confiscated the back issues of *Space Review*. There must be something in those issues!

"I believe we must look for something fantastic, for that is just how Al put it about what he had learned. The way Augie quoted Al, he said, 'I went into the *fantastic* and came up with the answer.'

"The question now is this: what should we do about it? Do you wish to try and get at the bottom of it, or are you, by chance, now in the same position as Al?"

AS WE sat there in the coffee shop I went over in my mind just what we HAD done about it, how I had collected reams of material on the case, how we had gone to Bridgeport to interview Bender, how we had evolved dozens of theories as to what

Bender had found out...

And now we had come up with a complete blank.

Bender wasn't talking. He was afraid to. He didn't even want to hear the word "saucer" mentioned, as if he were afraid of the mere sound of it.

I had asked Bender why the saucers didn't interest him any more.

"Was it because you found out they were too ordinary to be interesting (I was hinting they might have turned out to be government devices), or that what you discovered about them is painful for you to think about?"

"The latter."

DOM AND I walked out onto the observation deck.

"I often ask myself if it all really did happen," I began.

"I think that way myself," Dom replied, "but then I say to myself, 'yes, it did for sure. I know it did because I was a part of it.' Do you believe we will ever know all the facts behind Al's 'shush-up'?"

"I hope so," I replied. "But I've almost given up. You remember that Al told me right after it happened that when he felt he could reveal the entire matter, I would be the first to know. I wanted that to happen before I wrote the book exposing the whole thing."

"Maybe the book will crack it open."

"That's the reason I wrote it. I felt like this, Dom: Probably a lot of people have run across the answer and have been silenced. Maybe they were even more afraid than Bender, and didn't blurt out a single word of it. Maybe there wasn't anyone pushing them, like you, Angie and me. I figured that once the book got around a lot of people with similar experiences would read it and decide to talk."

"Maybe they'll still be afraid."

"Maybe they will be, but who knows?"

"I wonder how we would react if we were visited," Dom murmured. "Somehow I believe we'd run out and scream the whole thing out to the world. I get mad whenever I think of it. Extremely mad!"

"You can't tell, Dom. The most interesting factor of these visits is that when such a person is so intimidated whoever tells the person to shut up does so in such a way or imparts such terrifying information that the victim is scared almost out of his wits. Maybe it would be the same with you—OR me!"

"When you really think it out," Dom mused, "all kind of possibilities come up. Suppose you were Bender and the three men came to visit you. Suppose you asked them for credentials and they

showed them to you. Only instead of showing you a card one of them just dematerialized, then popped back into view at another end of the room. I guess if a thing like that happened to me—maybe..."

"Anyway, we should communicate it to each other. I hope we can do that—if it happens."

Saucer researchers were being shut up.

There had been E. R. Jarrold, of The Australian Flying Saucer Bureau, in Australia; John Stuart, of Flying Saucer Researchers in New Zealand; and a lot more we knew about but couldn't exactly put our fingers on. These people were too frightened to tell us anything.

"One thing they inevitably ask me at lectures," I said, "Is, 'if so many researchers have been shut up, why haven't you been silenced too?'"

"That would be easy to answer," Dom believed. "You and I probably know a lot about the saucer mystery, but in the cases of these 'shush-ups' one or two common factors have been involved. The victims either know some important key to the mystery or have in their possessions pieces of metal or residue evidently from space ships."

"I guess that's it," I agreed. "We don't have the key."

Dom thought for a moment.

"I think we can find it if we look long enough. You know, I think our main fault is that we know TOO MUCH in general about saucers. We're always bringing the dozens of theories of saucer origin to mind and trying to fit them to Bender and the others. Maybe if we knew less we could attack the problem from a better vantage point.

"Maybe we are concentrating on the wrong angle.

The truth, Bender has said, is *fantastic*.

"What would be *fantastic* to you Dom—really now? Or to Bender, who had probably thought of everything in the course of his research and was really dulled to fantasy?"

"Maybe some simple thing, something we haven't thought of, that would scare us into a tizzy if we found out it was for real."

We could probably guess the rest if we only knew who the three men were. Bender had hinted they were from the government, but he must have been deliberately trying to throw us off the track. Government investigators do not dress so conspicuously. And if they threaten people they investigate, that's certainly a new one on me. Most agents of the different investigative and intelligence services don't volunteer information, they just ask questions. They hesitate to venture an opinion on anything; they

don't like to say it's raining outside unless it is cleared by proper authority.

But if *not* government men, what fantastic sponsorship was responsible for their activities?

It seemed Dom and I deliberately shied away from getting too deeply into the three-men proposition. Though I know he often thought the same as I about it.

OF ALL the theories we had run through our minds as to what Bender could have found out, the one about Antarctica seemed to stick out the most obviously.

Shortly before the three men came, Bender suggested a strange project to his colleagues of The Australian Flying Saucer Bureau and The Civilian Saucer Intelligence of New Zealand, the two other large civilian agencies probing saucers in 1953.

It was to be termed "Project X."

Evidently concerned about the rash of saucers reports that had broken out in the "down under" countries, Bender suggested they go through all their sightings reports, ferret out those which gave directions of arrival and departure. These reports they would chart on a map. Lines would be drawn for each direction reported, and if the lines tended to show a point of convergence or intersec-

tion, such a spot on the map might indicate a place of saucer origin, a point of rendezvous, maybe even a saucer base!

Unfortunately Bender closed down before the project got underway in Australia and New Zealand.

"I THINK we're on the right track," Dom started, but was interrupted by the loud-speaker calling out my flight. We rose.

"Don't look like that; I'm heavily insured," I joked.

"One never knows," he said. "I don't want to appear morbid, but now and then I suppose I experience that fear that every saucer researcher feels. Maybe it's a fear of the unknown. The fear he's looking into something he has no business being in."

I could figure what Dom was thinking. The entire Bender files were in my brief case. If someone or something wanted to get rid of all the evidence—a lot of planes had been crashing mysteriously. Perhaps that was why...

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