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CONAN THE VICTORIOUS

A startling New Novel

By L. SPRAGUE DECAMP and BJORN NYBERG

EXCITING REPORT by CIVILIAN SAUCER INTELLIGENCE

shapes in the sky

by *CIVILIAN SAUCER
INTELLIGENCE*

Angel Hair, Gossamer
Showers and Flying Jellyfish
—and what these have to do
with UFO sightings today.

ONE WEEKEND early this spring we were over in western New Jersey nosing out an unusual UFO observation. Ivan Sanderson had heard from Chester Ehric, of Belvidere, of an incident of a few years back that was said to involve that rare and mysterious stuff we call "angel hair." With the helpful assistance of Mr. Ehric, we ended up in a hilltop home outside Easton, Pennsylvania, listening to pretty Mrs. Anna Eliason describe what she had seen on the morning of November 10, 1949. (This date gives the case the distinction—until someone comes up with an earlier one—of being the first typical "angel hair" report on record.)

The Eliasons were living then in a little house in Depue's Ferry, Pennsylvania, overlooking the Delaware River and directly opposite Foul Rift, New Jersey. It was a brilliant autumn day, with a cloudless blue sky, and not a breath of wind. One of two electricians' men installing the antenna for the Eliasons' new TV set came

The Research Section of Civilian Saucer Intelligence continues to discuss angel hair and related phenomena in their fourth bi-monthly column on UFO sightings and reports, written specially for this magazine. CSI publishes a newsletter, has an extensive file of material on the subject.

into the kitchen to tell Mrs. Eliason that there were some things in the sky that "must be what they call flying saucers." She went out and saw them too. High up in the southwestern sky, over the ridge that runs along the river, an indefinite number of bright, round objects were passing. "I could only compare them to electric light bulbs," she told us. They appeared to be not much smaller than the full moon in angular measurement. She could not be certain whether their brightness was due to luminosity, or was merely the reflection of the sun, which dazzled the eye and interfered somewhat with observation.

Apparently they were not disc-shaped, but spherical, as they did not flutter, and presented the same circular shape at all times. They were visible only briefly as they moved rapidly and horizontally along; whether all were moving in the same direction, or there was a coming or going, the witness cannot now recall, but at any rate she did not observe the acrobatic behavior noted on such occasions. The display was gradually receding from her toward the southwest, and had evidently passed overhead a few minutes earlier. While they watched, something like cobwebs began to fall from the sky. Descending vertically in long strands and skeins,

it festooned bushes and leafless trees with gleaming sheets of gossamer. In a surprisingly short time, according to Mrs. Eliason, "very heavy drapes of cobwebs" were spread over everything in sight. A dead tree near the house was "just covered with it." Though somewhat astonished by all this, Mrs. Eliason returned to the house to look after her children and prepare lunch. The "angel hair" was still falling when she went in, and she never did learn how long the shower lasted.

Unlike real spiderweb, these silky fibres melted away like snow in sunshine. About 1 p.m., Mrs. Eliason's sister Helen drove up to visit her; enough was still in evidence at that time to cause her to remark on "those cobwebs all over the place." But by 5:30, when William Eliason (a plumbing contractor and former Air Force captain) returned home, there was no trace of them left. He was struck by his wife's story, and thought she might at least have touched some of the strange stuff. However, she had not done so, and whether it would have become gelatinous and evaporated when handled, or (as at Marysville, Ohio five years later) imparted a temporary green stain to the fingers, must remain unknown.

It is apparent that a very
of this

unknown substance must have fallen from the spherical objects as they passed slowly from Warren County, New Jersey west-southwestward toward Nazareth, Pennsylvania. Nevertheless, the only other observations we have heard of are by Mr. Eliason's father in Bridgeville, N.J. (six miles northeast of Depue's Ferry), who noticed the sky objects but not the "angel hair", and by Mrs. Eliason's cousin Irene Thomas, in Hazen (four miles east-northeast of Depue's Ferry), whose "cleaning lady" remarked to her daughter, "Janet, I really ought to get up and clean off your television antenna—it's just covered with cobwebs!" And this is the sum total of our information on what took place in sight of many thousands of people, just sixty miles west of New York City, less than eight years ago.

For the sake of comparison, here are two briefly-reported incidents that occurred five and seven years later:

Late afternoon of October 28, 1954: Three objects like "luminous silver coins" passed rapidly and silently over Rome in V formation; apparent size comparable to the moon; seen by U.S. Ambassador to Italy Clare Booth Luce, who said: "I saw something, but I don't know what it was." A few minutes after their passage, "cab drivers declared they saw fine cotton or wool particles falling

from the sky and hanging on telephone wires." (AP in N.Y. *Journal-American*, Oct. 29, 1954.)

Sept. 30, 1956, Cherry Valley, Illinois: Mr. and Mrs. L. L. Leonard noticed numerous round, white objects nearly overhead and traveling very fast; through 7X binoculars, they appeared half the size of a pea at arm's length. "The objects suddenly ejected long white streamers, which floated in the air, hanging absolutely perpendicular. These silver streamers must have been of an enormous length. In one part of the southwestern sky there was a concentration of them which looked like stationary silver rain, a most eerie sight. While we were watching these round white things explode, one of them came just below our tree tops, but I couldn't see where it landed. On one of our evergreens there was something that looked like spider webs, but had the consistency of spun glass; and next morning a long piece of "something" was plastered on the fender of my car." (CRIFO *Orbit*, III-9, Dec. 1956.)

It seems incredible that a phenomenon of such well-marked character, reported nearly a score of times since 1949, should never have been observed prior to that time. But everyone who has looked into the data on unidentified flying objects knows how

difficult it is to find unambiguous examples of the typical silvery-disk "flying saucer" earlier than the outbreak of June, 1947. The same is true of "angel hair." It may be that the phenomenon has really come into existence only within the last eight or ten years.

However, we *do* find on record numerous examples of falls of cobwebby substance from the sky which in some ways so strikingly resemble present-day "angel-hair" falls that it seems not unreasonable to hazard the identification—even though sky objects are unmentioned. Here are several instances—mostly taken from Fort, but we quote in all cases from the original reference:

September 21, 1741, Selborne, England: Gilbert White, a renowned amateur naturalist, arose to find the countryside "matted all over with a thick coat of cobweb." About 9 a.m., "a second shower of cobwebs began to fall, and continued until the close of day." The material fell in "flakes or rags", "descending into sight on every side in a constant succession, and twinkling in the sun." It hung on trees and hedges "so thick, that a diligent person might have gathered baskets full." Though White was satisfied that it must have been "the production of small spiders" (significantly enough, he makes no mention of having *observed* any such

spiders), he remarks that "why their webs should all at once become so gross and material as to be considerably more weighty than air, and to descend with precipitation, is past my skill." (*Natural History of Selborne*, 1769.)

September 16, 1823, Bewdley, England: Great quantities of webby substance, some in "branched filaments" up to 50 feet in length, some in "woolly films, or flocculi", fell from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. "The whole atmosphere seemed to be a tissue of cobwebs." Some of the material fell slowly, some more rapidly. (John Murray in *Mem. Wernerian Nat. Hist. Soc.*, 5, 388.) Although Murray's article is specifically concerned with gossamer spiders, he says nothing of having found any spiders in association with this "gossamer", whose fall he himself observed.

October 1, 1826, vicinity of Liverpool, England: Fields covered for many miles with light, filmy substance, "mistaken by many persons for cotton", which fell thickly from the sky. Trees and lamp-posts festooned with the filaments, some many yards long. The "gossamer" was found to contain tiny flies, but no spiders. (*London Times*, Oct. 9, 1826.)

Late October, 1881, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and places as much as 100 miles distant: A widespread fall of

"spiderwebs" in strands from two to sixty feet long, strong in texture and very white. "Curiously, there is no mention, in any of the reports that we have seen, of the presence of spiders." (*Scientific American*, 45 (1881), 337.)

November 21, 1893, Montgomery, Alabama: Web-like substance in flakes and films up to 20 feet long "falling from trees and leaves to the ground." It was stated that the substance was not spiderweb, but resembled fine asbestos fibres; also that it "showed a phosphorescent effect." (*Monthly Weather Review*, 26 (1898), 566.)

On the night of February 20-21, 1955, a large quantity of "ragged sheets" and skeins of cobwebby grey fibres, some many feet in length, fell on an area half a mile square in Horseheads (near Elmira), New York. By the 22nd, it was "disintegrating and disappearing." Because of the season (snow lay on the ground), it was not possible here to speak of "spider gossamer", and some fantastic explanations were put forward, accompanied by incredibly contradictory "analyses." Prof. Charles B. Rutenber of Elmira College's chemistry department, supported by Professor-Emeritus Francis Richmond, said his tests proved the material consisted of "extremely short-fibered cotton, heavily dam-

aged in an explosion." He suggested that the stuff (which, contrary to newspaper headlines, was not radioactive) might have been carried in an atomic bomb-debris cloud from Nevada, finally "knitting itself together" and falling out over this single quarter square mile in southern Horseheads! But the next day, John Diffenderfer, in charge of chemists at the nearby Westinghouse electronic-tube factory, said *their* analyses showed that the substance must have formed from powdered milk, presumably blown into the air from a flue at a nearby milk-processing plant. Now, there is absolutely no chemical similarity between cotton (cellulose) and milk (a protein, like wool and spiderweb).

The Atomic Energy Commission endorsed the milk theory, and conjured up an "explosion and fire in a local dairy" to account for it. To complete the comedy, two chemical technicians at the Dairy Lea milk plant flatly contradicted Diffenderfer and the AEC, asserting that the web consisted of a mixture of cotton and wool fibres—together with a few fragments of fine copper wire! Under the circumstances, it seems permissible to suppose that this web, as in some other instances, was partially or wholly of protein nature, and was called "milk" (or "wool") rather than "gossamer" sim-

ply because gossamer spiders are not a thinkable explanation in February. (Elmira *Star-Gazette*, 2/22/55; N.Y. *Journal-American*, 2/22; N.Y. *World-Telegram*; 2/23, 3/8; FATE, Aug. 1955.)

What regularities can we notice in these cases? Only two can be called invariable: the falling of the substance in rags, flakes, and skeins, rather than as isolated gossamer threads; and the complete absence of the multitude of spiders required to produce such a prodigious quantity of web. There is also an obvious concentration about the month of October, a circumstance which would harmonize with the spider theory if it were confined to the Northern Hemisphere; but it seems to be true also of the Southern Hemisphere, where October is a spring month. However, the Puente and Horseheads cases show that falls may also occur in mid-winter.

The volatility of "angel hair", especially when touched by human hands, is one of its most astonishing features, but it seems to be variable. Even in unquestionably "UFOgenic" cases, like that of Whitsett, N.C., it can go unremarked, and the fibres can be stable enough to handle and analyze; in others, as at Oloron, the material is very fugitive. No odorless, volatile substance that could form silky filaments

like this is known to chemistry; and one whose volatility is not always the same would be an even greater scientific anomaly. It is difficult to avoid lugging the spiritualists' "ectoplasm", and conjecturing that what happens may be not so much evaporation as "dematerialization"—whatever that may mean.

Now, it seems that *spherical objects* of a similar "ectoplasmic" substance sometimes occur in the sky. One instance is the Philadelphia "purple sphere" of 1950 (FU, May issue), whose flimsy consistency and rapid dissolution on being touched irresistibly suggest that it was composed of "angel hair". A second is the Swedish 1808 observation of "gelatinous hat crowns" (*ibid*), whose rapid "drying up" was noted by the witnesses. (When "angel hair" disappears, according to witnesses, it first becomes gelatinous. This is probably not attributable simply to moisture picked up from the air, because *touching* the material causes almost immediate gelatinization.) A third example occurred shortly before the writing of this article:

On March 20, 1957, in Charlotte, N.C., Mr. and Mrs. W. B. Brown were outdoors at 8:45 p.m. when five white objects "like bubbles—about the size of a basketball" came floating over the rooftops. They were non-luminous, and visible by re-

flection of the street lights. Four 'sailed off', but the fifth fell out of the group and dropped to the street. It sounded like a thin sheet of ice slapping against the ground", said Brown. Where the object had splattered on the asphalt, they found a five-yard area wet with a semi-liquid substance that "felt slippery to the touch, like an alkaline solution" and was "cooling or numbing" to the touch. "It smelled sort of like burnt matches." (*Charlotte Observer*, March 22.)

The similarity to the Swedish case is obvious, even to the "soapy" feeling.

It is tempting to put all these incidents together, into some such speculative picture as this:

In the earth's stratosphere, there live large flocks of spherical entities or creatures, about six feet in diameter when fully grown, and of a very light, gelatinous composition, with a brightly silvery-white surface or skin. What keeps them aloft—whether a hydrogen bladder, or an actual antigravitic faculty—isn't known. These aerial "jellybirds", in contrast to marine jellyfish, are capable of great speed—though how they manage this is completely unknown. Astronomers occasionally catch sight of their migratory "hosts" crossing the sun. (We have no space here to cite the numerous recorded

descriptions of this phenomenon, which remind one of that given by the Swedish ground observers of 1808.

One astronomer, Bonilla, has photographed one of the objects, showing filmy appendages.) Only rarely do they descend low enough to be seen from the ground. When (by mischance or illness) one falls to the ground and is killed, there is found a lump of soapy jelly, which soon disappears. Their migration and mating season, all over the world, is the months of September to November. At this period, they descend to lower altitudes (like marine fish returning to fresh water to spawn) and dance in groups, later in pairs; and they put forth webby tentacles like those photographed by Bonilla, which temporarily link their clusters together. These appendages are shed after mating, and descent to the ground as a fall of "angel hair." (It may be too that, as with many insects, the males die after mating.) Those that perish in mid-air, we may presume, usually burst open (cf. 1950 Paradise, California case) and lose their moisture, leaving a cobwebby "skeleton" of angel hair, which evaporates before it reaches the ground (unless the death occurred at low altitude). The Philadelphia sphere may be regarded as the desiccated corpse of such a creature, which for

some reason had failed to burst, and had been "mummified" in its natural spherical form. Falls of angel hair outside of the autumn months are a sign of disasters among the denizens of the stratosphere.

Such an hypothesis may be as far from the truth as the perversity of human wit can make it; it is unquestionably in conflict with present scientific view of what is possible. But it would account for a great many observations in a persuasively "natural" way. The behaviour of many UFOs, including those that have emitted angel hair, compellingly suggests that of living beings, rather than piloted machines. Such qualified students of the problem as Ivan Sanderson (FU, Feb. 1957), Walter Karig (*Ameri-*

can Weekly, Nov. 22, 1953), and Kenneth Arnold himself, whose 1947 observation ushered in the "modern" UFO age, have all independently been struck by this, and have argued for a "space animal" theory.

Reader, if you are ever so fortunate as to encounter any "angel hair" or gelatinous matter fallen from the sky, consider the possibility that it may represent the mortal remains of a "flying saucer." And after considering this melancholy thought, try to get as much of it as possible into hermetically sealed containers. If you will send a sample to this magazine, though we can't guarantee any results, we can at any rate do no worse a job of analysis on it than the Horseheads chemists did.

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