

FANTASTIC UNIVERSE SCIENCE FICTION

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FEATURING

PROJECT BARRIER

A Startling Novelet

By DANIEL F. GALOUYE

SHAPES IN THE SKY

by CIVILIAN SAUCER INTELLIGENCE



shapes in the sky

by CIVILIAN SAUCER
INTELLIGENCE

What about the smells from the sky reported by some UFO witnesses—but not by others? What causes this?

"I HAVE been impressed with the frequent occurrence of sulphurousness with things that come from the sky," wrote Charles Fort in *The Book of the Damned* (1919). But, in contrast to Fort, we have been impressed with how *seldom* there are odors—"sulphurous" or otherwise—associated with unidentified aerial objects. As we have pointed out (F.U. Nov. 1957), cases reporting sounds from UFOs are by no means numerous; but there are ten cases involving sounds for every case involving odor.

Of course, one would expect to be able to smell a UFO only when it was at close range, which does not happen too often; but even among the reports of close approaches, mention of odor is the exception rather than the rule. We will describe some of the exceptions.

Fort himself quotes very few instances of "sulphurous" shapes in the sky, but one that he does cite is remarkable in several respects. On June 18, 1845, the captain of the brig *Victoria* saw three luminous bodies issue from the sea about half a mile away from his vessel.

The Research Section of Civilian Saucer Intelligence now discusses olfactory phenomena, "smells from the sky," in their seventh column on UFO sightings and reports, written specially for this magazine. CSI publishes a newsletter and has an extensive file of material on this subject.

These bodies remained visible for ten minutes, and spread "a stench of sulphur." The *Victoria* was then about twelve miles south of the port of Adalia (present-day Antalya), in the Gulf of Adalia, on the southern coast of Asia Minor; she was *not* 900 miles east or west of Adalia, as incorrectly stated in Fort—the longitude given on p. 274 should be 30° , not 13° .

The spectacle was also reported by the Rev. F. Hawlett, F.R.A.S., in Adalia, who described it as a single body which broke up, and gave its duration as twenty minutes to half an hour. An observer at "Mt. Lebanon" (300 miles to the southeast, if this means Lebanon on the Syrian coast) not only saw two of these "bodies," but described them as five times the apparent size of the full moon, and as adorned with strange "sail-like or streamer-like" appendages, "looking like large flags blown out by a gentle breeze," which seemed to connect the two objects. These appendages were not themselves luminous: "they seemed to shine by light from the main bodies." They were visible for an hour; however, the observer mentions no odor. These accounts, published sixteen years after the occurrence (*Repts. B.A.A.A.*, 1861, p. 30) and in garbled form, furnish all that we know of this unique event.

Since sulphur is odorless, a "stench of sulphur" cannot be taken literally. Many foul-smelling compounds contain sulphur, but the traditional "brimstone" smell is that of burning sulphur, which produces the gas sulphur dioxide.

Sulphur dioxide characteristically "catches one by the throat" and causes immediate wheezing, choking, and a feeling of suffocation; it was the killing component in the deadly smogs of the Meuse Valley of Belgium in 1930, of Donora, Pennsylvania, in 1948 and of London in 1953. As we shall see there is reason to think that it was present in the effluvia of at least three flying saucers seen, heard, and smelled at close range within the past five years.

Between 1845 and 1952, we know of only one report of an odoriferous UFO. Whether this was "sulphurous" cannot be determined from the description. According to Frank Quintana of Denver, Colorado, on January 29, 1950 he was climbing a foothill of South Table Mountain, in Colorado, when his attention was attracted by a whirring noise. He turned and saw a "silvery-green" object, about sixty feet in diameter, hovering only fifty feet above the ground. It was shaped like a ball flattened on top and bottom, encircled by what appeared to be a re-

volving band about three feet wide. From its base flashed a greenish light. Quintana fell to the ground, from which position he watched the strange object for several minutes as it landed slowly in a small ravine near him, then suddenly shot up again and out of sight at tremendous speed, with a "rush of air." After it had gone, Quintana said, he detected "a pungent odor which remained in the area after the object had ascended." (Arnold & Palmer, *The Coming of the Saucers*, 1952, p. 145.)

Whether by mere coincidence or not, in the last two weeks of August and in early September, 1952, no less than five instances of UFO odors were reported, two of them famous and sensational "landing reports."

The first of these was the "Florida Scoutmaster case." It has been the subject of much controversy, and its status is still unsettled. In its favor are the remarkable similarities between this story and others, better-attested, which occurred afterwards; the testimony of three Boy Scouts who watched from a distance; and certain traces found on the scene. On the other hand, investigation by the Air Force's Project Blue Book uncovered certain derogatory information concerning the Scoutmaster's background, which led them to take a very dim view of his

credibility; and it is known that his story after repeated tellings included some very astonishing details which were absent from it at first. To be sure, there is no evidence that UFOs take care to show themselves only to people with untainted backgrounds; but these circumstances are hardly reassuring. However, we give the story here, as pieced together from local news items and from Ruppelt's account in his book *The Report on Unidentified Flying Objects* (Doubleday, 1956).

On the night of August 19, 1952, D. S. (Sonny) DesVergers, a Scoutmaster in West Palm Beach, Florida, was driving three Boy Scouts home along a lonely road skirting the Everglades, when he noticed a group of lights "strung in a level row, like the windows of an airliner," plunge into the woods. The boys did not see this; but a short distance farther on, all four saw them, apparently at treetop level. Curious as to what this could be, DesVergers turned the car around and went back. Taking a flashlight and machete with him, he started off into the pine woods to investigate, advising the boys that if he didn't return in ten minutes, they were to go to a farmhouse up the road and phone the sheriff. The boys watched him disappear into the darkness, occasionally

catching sight of the beam of his flashlight among the trees.

As DesVergers told the story to Ruppelt, the first unusual thing he noticed as he made his way through a heavy palmetto thicket was a faint but "sharp" or "pungent" odor. Emerging from the thicket into a clearing, he suddenly felt an "oppressively moist heat" around him, and found it "hard to breathe." Almost at once he had "the horrible feeling that someone was watching me." Then he was conscious of a hissing sound, "like a tire going down." He took another step forward, stopped, and "looked up at the stars to get my bearings." He saw only darkness overhead. Turning his flashlight upward, he saw that almost the whole sky was hidden by a large circular object no more than ten feet above his head. Dirty grey in color, and looking more like "linoleum" than metal, it had a grain to it "which ran north and south." Panic-stricken, he stumbled backwards to get out from under this thing. Simultaneously, the object began moving away from him, its far edge tilting upward so that its top portion came into view. It was hemispherical, with the bottom slightly convex; spaced around the thick, three-foot rim were vaned sections "like ventilators," each containing

a nozzle; on top was a kind of turret.

An opening now appeared in this turret, with a slight sound "like a well-oiled safe door opening." From it emerged a small ball of red fire which drifted slowly toward him, expanding into a cloud of red mist. "It had a sickening, nauseating stench—worse than rotten eggs—more like burning flesh." Flinging up his hands over his face, he lost consciousness as the mist enveloped him.

Back on the road, the scouts saw something go off in the woods that "showered sparks all over the area like a Roman candle." They ran to the farmhouse and blurted out what had happened. Deputy Sheriff Mott Partin and an assistant were called to investigate. When the boys took them back to the spot where DesVergers had left them, they encountered him just emerging from the woods, so excited that he was incoherent. He had dropped his flashlight, but still carried the machete. "He was a sorry sight," Partin said. "He was talking a blue streak, but he didn't make any sense." The backs of his hands and arms, and his hair, were singed; his cap was scorched, and a couple of small holes were burnt in it.

Intelligence officers at a nearby air field were notified immediately, and Cap-

tain Ruppelt, in Dayton, Ohio, was advised of the incident. The next day he arrived at the scene to make a personal investigation. To him, the story sounded authentic,—that is, until DesVergers told the press that “the Air Force and I know what this thing was, but I’m not allowed to tell because it would create a panic,” and hired a press agent. Investigators at Dayton, who had examined the cap, reported that they did not think it had been on anyone’s head when it was scorched. Finally, a check on the Scoutmaster’s background indicated that he had a poor record for reliability—indeed, he was said to have been “given to spinning wild yarns.” Soured by these developments, as he well might be, Ruppelt unhesitatingly wrote the case off as a hoax (*True*, May, 1954) in spite of the Scouts’ corroborating testimony. But by the time his book appeared, Ruppelt was no longer so sure. It had proved impossible to account in any normal way for the fact that the roots of grass in the clearing appeared to have been charred. The only explanation he could think of was that a powerful alternating magnetic field just above the ground could, conceivably, have heated it by induced eddy currents—“induction heating.”

Although Ruppelt says

that “we wrote it off as a hoax”, the official Blue Book evaluation was that the case, while suspect, could not be classified as a proven hoax, and must remain an “Unknown.” Ten weeks after the event, a remarkable, because apparently spontaneous, press release was issued by the Air Force:

“Washington, Nov. 6. (INS).— The Air Force announced today that two of last summer’s ‘flying saucer’ reports have been thoroughly investigated and that they remain unexplained. One of the ‘saucers,’ said to have burned a Scout leader’s hand when he walked under it, was reported Aug. 19, at West Palm Beach, Florida. The other, which a radio engineer said took off perpendicularly at a distance of 100 yards, was reported August 25 at Pittsburg, Kansas. The Air Force said: “In neither case was sufficient evidence available upon which to base a conclusion. The incidents remain unexplained.”

(The Pittsburg, Kansas, incident referred to here was the Squyres case, which we recounted in our November article.)

Three weeks after the sensational but equivocal DesVergers case, and a thousand miles to the north, there occurred a flying-saucer incident which is not only one of the most sensational ever reported, but also one of the

best authenticated. It was looked into immediately by two highly competent UFO researchers, Gray Barker and Ivan Sanderson, both of whom were convinced from their independent investigations that the story should be accepted as genuine. The account we give here is abbreviated from Sanderson's unpublished report, together with some details from Barker's (FATE, Jan. 1953; *They Knew Too Much About Flying Saucers*, University Books, 1956.)

Just after sunset, three boys playing football in the village of Flatwoods, in central West Virginia, saw a red-luminous object pass overhead and apparently land on a nearby ridge. They thought they had seen a fireball strike the ground, and started toward the ridge to search for meteorites. As they did so, they noticed with amazement that a pulsating orange light was still visible on the hilltop, and they concluded (correctly, as it proved) that what had come down was not a meteor but a flying saucer. On the way to the spot they collected four other boys, the oldest being Eugene Lemon, 17; the mother of two of the boys, local beautician Mrs. Kathleen May; and a dog.

The party mounted the ridge path until they were within about fifty feet of the strange thing, which was now seen to be a very large

pear-shaped object about thirty feet high, sitting in the tall weeds to the right of the path, and pulsating from dull red to bright orange. All agreed that this light was not that of incandescence, but was a luminosity like that of a neon tube, which radiated no heat. The object's "real" color, they thought, was black. Some say that they heard a loud hissing sound, accompanied by a dull thumping as of an engine or a heartbeat. The ground ahead was overspread with a low mist. The dog, which had run ahead, turned tail and ran yelping back down the trail. Advancing a few feet farther, all smelled a choking odor unlike anything in their experience; some compared it to "hot, greased metal," some to "burning sulphur"—it was a "hot" odor, sickening, and irritating to the nose and throat. "It seemed to grip you in the throat and suffocate you." They experienced, too, just as DesVergers had reported, a sense of oppressive heat and humidity.

All had been staring at the luminous object, but at this moment Mrs. May noticed two luminous "eyes" off to the left of the path. One of the boys shone his flashlight in that direction and they all saw something shaped rather like the head and trunk of a giant broad-shouldered man, floating in midair just below

the bough of an oak tree. (This bough was later found to be twelve feet from the ground.) The "face," if such it was, was red, and the only features the terrified witnesses made out were the two luminous "eyes," which projected pale-blue beams into the misty air. Around this "face" was a dark, pointed "monk's hood" appearance, "shaped like the ace of spades"; the "body" beneath it was a dark green. Mrs. May afterwards said she had seen small arms ending in long talons, but none of the boys noticed any such feature. The lower part of the figure was not seen.

At sight of this terrifying apparition, Lemon fell backward in a momentary faint. As they hauled him to his feet again, they saw that the entity was "drifting" closer to them. At this, all fled pell-mell in hysterical terror, half a mile back down the ridge to the May house. Several required first aid; according to Mrs. May, they vomited for hours afterwards. It was three days before Eugene Lemon had fully recovered from the effects.

A posse that went up the ridge less than an hour afterwards found nothing there. A. Lee Stewart, local editor, was the next to visit the site; he noticed nothing out of the ordinary until he put his head to the ground, but then, sure enough, he smelt an un-

recognizable, irritating odor, which "constricted the nasal and throat passages." Next morning it was found that the weeds were crushed, and the ground itself depressed, in a circular area fifteen feet wide. Two saucer investigators who arrived later that day reported finding six symmetrically-placed holes in the ground, and grass spotted as though by a dark liquid; but when Sanderson and Barker arrived some days later, they were unable to verify these details.

No one has been able to think of any plausible "natural" explanation for this weird and terrifying experience, and hoax, fortunately, can be ruled out. It seems entirely probable that here we have a genuine observation—albeit a very brief one—of a UFO occupant or "spaceman," apparently wearing a protective suit of some kind. The gas encountered, to judge by the description of its effects, may very well have contained sulphur dioxide. Sanderson has speculated that this construction, and perhaps also its unfortunate occupant, may have been rapidly dissolving in our "hostile" atmosphere, and that the noxious mist that surrounded it may have been produced by this process of destructive corrosion.

Thirty-three hours later, again in Florida—in fact, only 35 miles west of the

spot where DesVergers came stumbling out of the palmettoes—another aerial object descended and spread an irritating odor. This object, although observed so soon after the Flatwoods saucer, bore no resemblance to it—but it did resemble somewhat the object described by DesVergers.

At 4:30 a.m. on September 14, 1952, Fred J. Brown, an employee of the Everglades Experimental Station in Belle Glade, Florida, was preparing to milk the Station's cattle when he noticed a loud humming sound, "like that made by high-voltage electric wires." He went to the door of the barn to investigate and found that all the cattle had bolted to the far end of the pasture, about a quarter of a mile away.

Looking up, Brown was amazed to see a circular object approximately 35 feet in diameter, with a row of red and amber lights spaced alternately around the outside rim on the underside. It appears that these lights were not rotating. At first Brown thought it might be a blimp, but then he saw that the object had no motor or propeller. He was unable to discern any openings or "windows." The object, only 70 feet above the ground, "seemed to settle over the barn until it descended to a height of approximately 40 feet," then veered to the west

and disappeared from view.

Although unnerved, Brown went out after the cattle and had succeeded in getting them all back to the barn when the UFO returned, this time from the south and going in a northerly direction. He estimated its speed as approximately 30 miles an hour. The glow from the object was bright enough to light up the ground as it passed over, and it gave off a peculiar odor, which he described as "acrid, yet smelling somewhat like ammonia." The odor was so strong it made his eyes smart and burned his nostrils. (Since he mentions no choking sensation, this was probably *not* sulphur dioxide.) The object gained altitude and disappeared to the north over Lake Okeechobee, but not before the cattle had again stampeded to the far end of the pasture.

Brown attempted to rouse the occupants of two houses across the road, but the UFO had passed out of sight before he could awaken them.

It was 5:20 before he again had the nervous cattle herded for milking, and their milk production that morning was only two-thirds what it should have been. (Miami Daily News, Sept. 16, 1952.)

Eight days later came the last of these closely-grouped incidents; and, as we should have learned to expect by now, the UFO's seen on this

occasion were different in appearance and behavior from any of the preceding. Whether the odor, too, differed cannot be determined from the information available (Washington Star, News, and Times-Herald of Sept. 22). In this case, it was the odor that first drew attention to the objects. Shortly after midnight on September 22, Mrs. F. L. Hazelwood, living near Centreville, Virginia (20 miles from Washington, D.C.), "smelled something awful" in her back yard. Her husband also smelt it, and wondered if something were burning nearby. They stepped out, and found the yard brightly illuminated—"just like the early morning sun," according to their daughter Marie—by light from three or four brilliant, round objects in the sky overhead. They called the police. Soon most of the 100 residents of Centreville were calling the police, many in panic. Three policemen and a police sergeant responded, and all confirmed the presence, in the cloudy sky, of several brilliant white balls of fire which "went in and out of the clouds" and "played tag." One policeman spoke also of blue and red balls of fire; to the suggestion of searchlight reflections he replied, "No siree! They were solid objects!" "Weird indeed" was the comment of another witness. One of the objects amused itself for some

time by descending toward the police station, where it would "get real bright, make a circle, fade out, and climb back up again... It just kept that up." The brightness was compared to "a big auto headlight—it lighted up the sky." The brilliant objects continued their aerial ballet until 4 a.m., when they finally disappeared in the direction of Washington, D. C. Radar operators at Washington National Airport and Andrews Air Force Base said the objects did not show up on their screens. Mrs. Hazelwood, according to her daughter, was made ill by the odor.

During this same August-September period, on the other side of our planet, Miss Gertrude James of Melbourne, Australia, saw "a noiseless green ball flying too fast to be a plane, and not fast enough to be a meteor," on the night of August 30. According to the next day's Reuters dispatch, she said "it smelled like a rotten egg." No further details are given, but this description identifies the smell as hydrogen sulphide. A curiously similar instance of odor from a green fireball is mentioned on page 125 of Jimmy Guieu's book, *Les Soucoupes Volantes Viennent d'un Autre Monde* (Editions Fleuve Noir, Paris, 1954). On October 13, 1953, at 7:30 p.m., a "flying cigar" was seen by

hundreds of witnesses in many places in Duex-Sevres (western France). Its luminosity lit up the ground like bright moonlight. It was not a fireball in the ordinary sense, for its course, according to Guieu, was capricious: its yellowish, sparkling trail traced circles in the sky. Over Thouars, where it appeared as a greenish fireball with a train, it exploded noiselessly; and after the explosion, according to witnesses, "*the air was impregnated with a strong odor of ether.*" Probably no one could confuse hydrogen sulphide with ether; so these two green fireballs must have smelled different. But there is one other case in which hydrogen sulphide was reported: a unique occurrence, which furnished an authentic specimen of fragments from a fireball-type UFO.

Shortly after 9 p.m. on August 20, 1953 (not quite a year after the Melbourne stinkball), a resident of New Haven, Connecticut, saw a "streak of light" go by her window. Almost immediately, she heard a loud "explosion" that shook the house, and caused her house lights to dim momentarily. She and others hurried outside to investigate, and saw smoke curling from a ragged foot-square hole in a signboard 200 feet away, made of 20-gauge steel. Only one man, a motorist driving past, had seen what had smashed through it. He

had seen "a red ball of fire about 6 inches in diameter, trailing a tail," emerge from the signboard. Passing about 30 feet in front of his car, it had torn through the top of a large tree, just missing telephone wires and disappeared at very high speed on a rising trajectory.

There were no marks of heat on the sign, but whatever crashed through had left metallic deposits on the jagged steel edges of the hole. These were collected by saucer investigator August Roberts, and were found on analysis to consist of pure copper. It had also left behind it a *strong stench of rotten eggs.* (Source: Albert Bender's now-defunct *Space Review*, Oct. 1953.)

The most recent example of a "smell from the sky" is once more in the "sulphurous" group, like Adalia and Flatwoods, but it set a remarkable precedent: for the first time an employee has drawn disability compensation as a result of an encounter with an unidentified flying object. On November 26, 1956, a New Jersey State Workmen's Compensation referee awarded medical compensation to a night watchman who testified that an encounter with a UFO had made him ill and affected his senses of smell, taste, and touch. The referee, Leonard B. Willits, ducked the issue of what if anything, had been

seen by the watchman 66-year-old Harry J. Sturdevant, saying merely that "he *thought* he saw something, and it was his duty to investigate"; however, Sturdevant not only "thought" he saw something but "thought" it caused him injuries, and the reality of these injuries was apparently not disputed. Sturdevant's story, as told to Trentonian reporter Emil Slaboda, appeared in *Fate*, June, 1957.

At 3:45 a.m. on October 2, 1956, Mr. Sturdevant, on duty for the Herbert Elkins construction firm of Trenton, N.J., was standing by the Delaware River, just opposite Rotary Island. "Suddenly it appeared, first as a red light in the sky above the Reading Railroad bridge about a mile up the river. In a matter of seconds it shot down past me, only about 15 feet above the water, and 50 yards away. Then it shot upwards about 500 feet and disappeared. It was 60 to 100 feet long and about 15 feet in diameter, shaped like a cigar. It had no wings and no fins—I heard no propulsion from it except a hissing sound like escaping steam." (Compare this with what was reported by DesVergers and the Flatwoods witnesses.) "It gave me the greatest shock of my life. *There was a smell like sulphur or brimstone.* It was something I had never smelled before. I don't know what it

was except it was very nauseating and it made me very sick. I lost my sense of taste and smell; my throat would not swallow properly." Sturdevant told Slaboda that he had collapsed in pain after the object had disappeared, but had managed to crawl to his parked car. "I stayed there for half an hour before I was competent to drive." Finally he was able to drive to a phone from which he called the police. Six weeks later, his sense of taste and touch were still impaired and he had been able to work only a few days.

Slaboda was able to uncover two confirmatory observations—one from a 5-year-old boy living nearby who saw "a big lighted ball with a tail," the other from *Trentonian* route manager Peter Borza, who was near Cadwalader Park, two blocks from the river, shortly before 4 a.m. when he caught sight of a luminous object "about the size of the moon" high in the sky. His description differed only slightly from Sturdevant's, the main discrepancy being that Sturdevant described it as glowing red, whereas it appeared white when Borza saw it.

It cannot be positively affirmed that the nauseating and poisonous gas given off by this UFO was sulphur dioxide (which would be expected to cause respiratory trouble), but we note that the

witness does compare it to "brimstone."

By now the reader may be wondering whether saucer odors are invariably repulsive and toxic; don't UFOs ever smell *pleasant*? Well, hardly ever. We know of just two instances. At 3:45 p.m. on October 5, 1954—at the height of the spectacular European "landing wave" of that autumn—a luminous UFO was seen a few miles from Beaumont (north of Paris). This object approached the witnesses, at the same time losing its luminosity, until it was within 150 yards of them. They declared that they then felt a strange sensation and were "as if nailed to the ground." At the same moment, they smelled, "a strong odor of nitrobenzene" (which smells like almonds). After a short time, the object moved away, and the smell and the feeling of paralysis ceased. (Paris *Le Figaro* and Charleville *L'Ardennais*, Oct. 7,

1954.) This tale may possibly be exaggerated, or even fictitious, but aside from the nitrobenzene, it resembles scores of other, apparently authentic, incidents reported at that time. And in March 1955 a witness to an alleged saucer landing near Cincinnati, Ohio declared that as he drove away to fetch the sheriff, he noticed a *strong smell of "almonds and alfalfa."*

Why this small group of UFO witnesses have reported marked odors, while numerous others—just as close to an "object" as the first group, or even closer—make no mention of any smell, is one of the countless puzzles of the UFO problem. It is a known fact that the sense of smell weakens when the individual is excited or apprehensive, and perhaps this partly accounts for the contradiction. However, it may also be true that most UFOs actually do not diffuse any very strong odor into the surrounding air.

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