

# GLOBAL DISCLOSURES

## UFO UPDATE

By Harry Lebelson

It's a long shape . . . coming for me right now . . . hovering on top of me." With these words came the report of an extraordinary event that occurred on Saturday night, October 21, 1978. A light Cessna aircraft piloted by twenty-year-old Frederick Valentich of Avondale Heights, Australia, vanished from the sky.

Valentich, on a flight to Melbourne in clear weather and unlimited visibility, had a confrontation with an unidentified flying object at 7:06 PM. For the next six minutes, a game of hide-and-seek took place between the two craft.

The UFO, described by Valentich in his final radio relay to Melbourne as metallic in appearance, cigar-shaped, and having four bright lights, was orbiting above his plane. Following the pilot's last, desperate message, a long metallic noise was heard on the radio, then silence. Valentich has not been heard from since. His disappearance remains a complete mystery.

Varying theories exist in regard to the

Valentich disappearance. The Department of Transport in Melbourne claims the pilot was disoriented and may have been flying upside down, and seeing his own reflection in the water thought it to be a UFO. This notion was discounted by Arthur Schutt of Melbourne's Schutt Aviation Company: "The pilot would have known if the aircraft had begun to turn upside down, because the carpet would have come off the floor and anything else lying around loose would have bounced around."

Less than one hour after the disappearance of Valentich's plane, Mr. and Mrs. Wayne Bellew of Canberra, Australia, holidaying on the coast, observed a UFO performing "impossible maneuvers" unlike those of any conventional aircraft. This sighting, along with later sightings of similar-type craft by two freight planes over New Zealand, and an additional sighting on December 31 by an Australian television news crew—which

filmed dramatic footage of a circular object moving through the night sky—made headlines throughout the world.

The incidents in Australia and New Zealand are not atypical of classic UFO encounters. *Something* appeared to a diverse group of witnesses, each of whom reported sightings that coincided with radar reports from local airports. The most arresting eyewitness account of the sighting on December 21 in New Zealand came from Captain Powell and Copilot Perry as they flew in their freight plane near the UFO. Powell spotted a massive white light with a red tinge flying to his port at a distance of approximately 40 kilometers. "I imagined it was stationary but, checking later, found it to be still even with the window."

Meanwhile, on the ground, Wellington, New Zealand, radar tracked the object for 20 kilometers as it kept pace with the plane. The plane's radar indicated that the object was 64 kilometers out to sea. Both pilots watched as the UFO moved 25 kilometers toward the plane in five seconds. At this point, it veered to the southwest and disappeared off the radar screen with no further trace whatsoever.

An additional sighting was reported that same night by other aircraft. As a result, TV producer Leonard Lee of Channel O Melbourne instructed Quentin Fogarty, a reporter on holiday in New Zealand, to duplicate the flight of Captain Powell's Argosy freight plane. Lee thought they would be able to make contact and film the unidentified flying object, which—ultimately—they did.

On a recent Washington, D.C., talk show hosted by physicist Bruce Maccabee and UFO author Philip Klass, producer Lee stated: "He [Quentin Fogarty] was the reporter I asked to reconstruct the sighting. He was on holiday in New Zealand. We said, 'Would you please knock off holiday for a couple of days and go do the story, because we were short of news over the Christmas and New Year's period.'" Philip Klass said, "You say you were short of news over the Christmas period?" "Absolutely," replied Lee.

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Mysterious fireballs moving westward in summer sky were filmed by a Swiss airport-security officer.

# UFO

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Both Fogarty and an accompanying photographer retraced the route the Argosy plane took on December 21 and, astonishingly, located and photographed an unidentified flying object for five minutes. Their actual visual contact with the object lasted forty minutes.

The UFO photographed was a large circular object with bands of changing color across its surface, much like those of Venus. However, the possibility of its being Venus was ruled out because at that time, the planet presented a crescent shape.

In trying to go beyond the news accounts, I contacted Quentin Fogarty. The reporter stated that he would not reveal any aspects of the story unless he was paid the sum of \$500. *Omni* magazine refused his request for that amount. Fogarty was told, however, that the story would be given legitimacy by its inclusion in the magazine. "I don't care about legitimacy or illegitimacy," said Fogarty. "I want to wash my hands of the whole thing." With this channel of information now closed and the original footage locked up by Wide World Photos in an exclusive package deal for \$10,000, this case, like so many others, has become difficult to investigate.

A telegram sent to the New Zealand consulate from the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research in Wellington regarding recent UFO film footage by TV 1 of New Zealand, reads as follows: "The Department has made an examination of the footage shot by TV 1. They have discounted the possibility that the objects sighted were in fact UFOs." When contacted, the New Zealand mission to the United Nations had no comment other than those statements already given to the media. Likewise, the Australian, Italian, and Portuguese missions to the United Nations had no comment on recent sightings in their respective countries.

In Italy, doughnut-shaped objects, with a hole in the middle and giving off green, red, and white lights, have been reported and photographed at dozens of locations between Palermo and Milan. Even in Rome OVNI (the Italian designation for UFOs) have been seen by both police and citizens. Newspaper offices throughout Italy have been inundated with calls. There is the mysterious case of two fishermen, who, along with their boat, disappeared on a clear night while fishing in the Adriatic near Pescara during the high point of the sightings.

In view of the need for a more comprehensive evaluation of UFO material, it is gratifying to note that the French government has taken a positive step. In 1977, a national organization called Groupement d'Etude de Phénomènes Aériens (GEPAN) was created with the backing of the French government. The group was put under the direction of Dr. Claude Poher. Poher, head

of the sounding-rockets division of the National Center for Space Studies, had for years been compiling statistical data on European sightings. Analysis of Poher's statistical evidence occupied the group's activities for the first year. This research led to the expansion of GEPAN's operation to include the investigation of actual cases.

The evidence was so overwhelming in 11 such cases that GEPAN investigators admitted the existence of a "flying machine whose mode of substance is beyond our knowledge." Most of the sightings occurred when the distance between the witnesses and the objects was less than 250 meters. Each case was investigated by a four-person team including a psychologist. Two of the incidents included "sightings of humanoids." The conclusions reached in these and other UFO incidents appeared in a five-volume report approved by GEPAN's scientific board, which includes members of the National Meteorology Administration, the Lyons Astronomical Observatory, and



UFO contrail snapped near Mt. Sedona, Ariz.

the Geodynamic Research Center.

In the United States, a flurry of UFO activity has spawned at least five sightings in recent months. Two occurred near Jersey City, New Jersey. One sighting was witnessed in Brick Township, New Jersey, and two additional sightings were reported in Poplar Branch, North Carolina, and in Tennessee. Many more go unreported because of the press's tendency to ridicule such accounts.

When asked to comment about the recent sightings, Major Ralph Williams, of the US Air Force, said, "The Air Force is no longer involved in the investigation of UFOs, and for any additional information one should go to either the National Archives or Project Blue Book."

In the Jersey City account of January 4, 1979, an unidentified police officer observed a UFO for 20 minutes. The reason he gave for not wanting his name published was, "You know how those headlines read, 'Cop sees little green men.'" He said further, "We're trying to downplay these sightings as they come in."

Another sighting, perhaps related to the one in Jersey City, took place over Bar-

negat Bay in Brick Township, again on January 4. Police lieutenant Joseph De Angelo said he saw "a white circle of light with blue lights at either end which hovered over the bay for nearly forty minutes before it took off and disappeared." In Tennessee, police officers were witness to similar unidentified objects in the night sky.

Such events continue to baffle scientific experts. What remains is to produce the physical proof necessary to validate these phenomena. I, for one, feel the evidence will be forthcoming.

In the words of Allen Hynek, "There is an inadequate amount of information available based solely on newspaper accounts to make a balanced statement in regard to these sightings. Hopefully, this will change in the future. Until more news is available, we will just have to wait and see."

After reading Allen Hynek's foreword and Allan Hendry's new book *The UFO Handbook—A Guide to Investigating, Evaluating and Reporting UFO Sightings* (Doubleday & Company, 1979) based on an analysis of 1,300 cases, one comes away with the feeling that something is amiss.

Both Allen Hynek (director of the Center for UFO Studies) and Allan Hendry are of the opinion that a corrosive emotional atmosphere exists among the various UFO investigative organizations, which, in the words of Mr. Hendry, "is profoundly influencing the objectivity of not only kooks and crackpots but all those concerned regarding the subject of UFOs." If indeed, emotionalism is involved in the UFO movement, a perfect manifestation of it lies in the text of Mr. Hendry's book.

He goes out of his way to detract from the fact that during the past 32 years serious attempts have been made among both laymen and scientists to evaluate UFOs in the most comprehensive ways possible. With the statement of Allen Hynek that Mr. Hendry is providing the serious UFO investigator with a valuable tool in the form of this manual, one shudders to think of the potential for progress in this area if one were left with only the information contained in the pages of this book.

A major part of the text is devoted to what Hendry calls "The allegations [or] the reports themselves." Taking seriously the information contained within this book would represent a misinterpretation of the facts. Mr. Hendry contends that "because I tackled these cases [1,300 cases of UFO reports, which were largely telephone interrogations throughout a two-year period, 1976-78] without a strong prior interest in ufology itself, I like to think that my efforts were less biased than those of others who entered the field." (If interest in the subject is *not* Hendry's motive for writing this work, what then is his motive?) His writing, however, exemplifies that very bias by conferring it on those currently involved in the UFO inquiry. He brings into question the tools, techniques, and procedures used by investigators and scientists alike in evaluat-

ing over 13 million sightings (as recently revealed in a 1978 Gallup poll).

I do not question Hendry's labeling himself a UFO agnostic who finds "it is not personally important to me what UFOs turn out to be." Nor do I question the absence of higher academic credentials, which in some eyes could demean his observations. I question only the assumptions on which his facts are based and the conclusions resulting from them in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary. In conclusion, Mr. Hendry states: "Unless we develop drastically new ideas and methodologies for the study of the baffling UFO cases and the human context in which they occur, we will watch the next thirty years of UFO report-gathering simply mirror the frustration of the last thirty years."

He further points out that civilian UFO groups lack the credentials necessary to deal with the complex subject of unidentified flying objects. Because the groups offer only human testimony, Hendry feels that nothing of any compelling scientific value will be gained. There are, however, a handful of civilian UFO organizations in the United States, along with many foreign groups comprised of both laymen and representatives of the scientific community, who disagree with Mr. Hendry's evaluation of the situation.

One such man is Jacques Vallee of France, noted mathematician and astronomer. He believes that the only way to properly conduct research on the phenomenon is to centralize all existing files, both official and private, on a global scale. Once that's done, the next step is to initiate the long and difficult work of classification, indexing, and information gathering under the aegis of an international scientific commission. Such action is already being taken by the United Nations. It's a step important in itself, because for the first time an international governing body has chosen to acknowledge the need for information gathering and investigation. Aimé Michel, a colleague of Jacques Vallee, was responsible for the first organized application of the scientific method to the analysis of unidentified flying objects. The work of both these men, along with the constant flow of sightings throughout the world by qualified observers—pilots, radar experts, aviation ground crews, and scientists—make obsolete many of the claims made by Allan Hendry in his book.

To be sure, not much can be said for *The UFO Handbook* in spite of its good intentions, except that perhaps in the near future, those nonexistent extraterrestrials will visit us, holding in their hands, with great indignation, a copy of this book. With that in mind, I think the cause of investigating UFOs would be better served by keeping our eyes peeled to the sky rather than to the pages of *The UFO Handbook*. ∞

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# NEXT OMNI



LAW



FICTION



AGRIBUSINESS



NEUTRINO

**NEUTRINO MADNESS**—Billions of neutrinos zing through your body every second. Yet, omnipresent as they are, we're just beginning to understand the full potential of these subatomic particles. Someday, "neutrino radios" may allow us to send messages straight through the center of the earth or may be used as a more efficient way of sending messages through outer space. Next month, reporter Hal Hellman takes you on an eerie journey to the bottom of a South Dakota gold mine where scientists are attempting to trap and study this fast-as-light, superpenetrating phenomenon. The hottest story in physics today awaits you in the June *Omni*.

**IN THE MATTER OF SPACE LAW**—Can we really keep nuclear weapons out of orbit? Can you sue for damages if a falling satellite demolishes your back porch? If you live in a space colony and visit Earth, can you shoot your wife's lover and claim the strange environment drove you temporarily insane? A few pioneering attorneys are already grappling with these and other equations even more complex. In our next issue, George S. Robinson, the first attorney to win a Ph.D. in space law, offers an intriguing progress report. Read how the long arm of the law stretches beyond Earth.

**AGRIBUSINESS 2001**—If farmers keep cultivating the same furrow they've been in since World War II, by the year 2001 they will own nearly twice as much land as they do today—perhaps 1,000 acres each in the Corn Belt. Tractors will have diesel engines of around 500-horsepower. An array of on-board computer functions and electronic monitors, which would do justice to the starship *Enterprise*, will control everything from the rate of plow spin to actual seed depth. The only reason for a farmer to be aboard a tractor will be that he still prefers driving to sitting at his desk. What will all this do to the prospect of food shortfalls and world poverty? The limits of growth may be in for some bending, as our readers will find out in the June *Omni*.

**SCIENCE FICTION**—Roger Zelazny, among the most honored of science-fiction writers, tells of "Halfjack," a cyborg whose human emotions face the crucial test of love. George R. R. Martin's "The Way of Cross and Dragon" examines the future of religion in an interstellar civilization. Robert Haisty appears for the first time in *Omni* with "The Madagascar Event," and Tom Sullivan shows how genetic engineering can drive sports officials to complete distraction in "The Mickey Mouse Olympics."