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THE GULLIBILITY FACTOR

LAST WORD

By Thomas F. Monteleone

Anyone can be a UFO contactee. Anyone can have a close encounter with the aliens—if he has a fertile imagination.

I speak from experience, having been involved in a UFO-contactee hoax that began in 1967 and still haunts me today. It happened while I was attending college, after I called in to a Washington, D.C., radio talk show to speak with their guest. He was a man named Woodrow Derenberger, who claimed to have been contacted many many times by aliens from the planet "Lanulos" in the "lan-off" galaxy of Ganymode.

When I called in to speak to the show's host, I said, "I just want everyone in the listening audience to know that I can prove that Mr. Derenberger is telling the truth."

The talk-show host asked me how I could do such a thing, and my reply was calm but touched with righteous indignation: "Because I have been to Lanulos, too." I told the astonished host and the totally befuddled Woodrow Derenberger. The station's switchboard became jammed with calls, and the show was momentarily thrown into a state of minor chaos. While on the air, I contradicted Mr. Derenberger's story on purpose, claiming to have seen totally different things on my visit to Lanulos. But on each occasion, he would give ground, make up a hasty explanation, and in the end corroborate my own fabrications. He even claimed to know personally the "UFOman" who contacted me!

In the months that followed what I had considered a harmless prank, I came to regret ever getting involved with what must be termed a vast UFO cult. After speaking on the talk show, I was contacted by many men who identified themselves as UFO investigators wanting to meet me. I subsequently underwent long interviews with them, in which I not only repeated my false experiences but also added further embellishments and absurdities—just to see how far I could carry the hoax before being discovered.

To my honor, I soon realized that I could have told these "investigators" that the aliens had taken the Washington Monu-

ment home to Lanulos as a souvenir, having replaced it with a fake back in 1956 and they would have believed me!

And so I was introduced to the odd, schillingly pathetic world of the UFO cultists. These people called me long distance from all over the country. They usually phoned very late at night and spoke in nervous whispers, claiming to be fearful of the FBI and the CIA, who were always trying to bug their phones. One of them, who would identify himself only as Mr. X, tapped on his phone mouthpiece with a pencil at 30-second intervals during our conversation (to confuse and disrupt their bugging devices, he told me).

Many of the investigators were either presidents, founding fathers, or guiding lights of small, obscure UFO clubs and organizations—many with bizarre names such as the Arizona Saucer Spotters, Extraterrestrial Society (ASSS) or the Wisconsin Extraterrestrial Intelligence Research and Deflection Organization (WIDEOD). When they came to my apartment to interview me, they always traveled alone, lived out of beat up suitcases in third-rate motels, and seemed to have an affinity for Radio Shack portable tape recorders.

One man, proclaiming himself to be the Mystic Barber from Brooklyn, called me to say that he had heard about my contactee experience and knew that I was telling the truth because he had eavesdropped on the aliens talking about me on their ship-to-ship radios. It seems as though this man had constructed a headset out of aluminum foil and coat hangers, which enabled him to pick up "extraterrestrial vibrations."

Another man flew in from New Mexico to ostensibly interview me for "his film" and spent three hours telling me how sad he was because he had never been fortunate enough to have seen the Masters of the Universe and their great saucers. At one point, he produced a drawing of what looked like a hybrid of several Mandarins and Sanskrit characters and asked me if the Lanulesian saucer had this symbol emblazoned anywhere on its hull. When I replied in the affirmative, he became

ecstatic, telling me that the symbol was one of his organization's most closely guarded secrets, and now he was convinced of my sincerity because I had "described it perfectly!" Several minutes passed, and he then confided to me that I was not the first contactee who had described that symbol. I told him I was not at all surprised.

Another investigator sat in my living room, listening to my story and at one point he off-handedly told me that he was in constant "organic communication" with the UFO "Overlords," as he reverently referred to them. Explaining, he said that when the Overlords were near, his arms would break out in gooseflesh. This phenomenon, he claimed, had been occurring ever since he saw saucer ships over the skies of not-ions Newark, beaming down "tranquility rays" into the ghettoes. All went well until, midway through the interview, the man jumped up, taving maniacally. He ran up to me, roughly yanked up his shirt sleeves, and showed me his goosefleshed arms. "They're here!" he cried repeatedly. "They're here! They know of this meeting, and they approve!" He ran to my window, threw back the drapes, and cried out to a blank, blue sky: "Come down! Come down and show yourself!"

What my personal contact with the UFO cultists demonstrates most poignantly, I think, is the deep, psychological need that many of these people have—a need to believe in something greater than themselves. It is the need that makes them so oddly gullible, so willing to accept anything you wish to tell them.

It has been 12 years since I played what I thought would be only a harmless prank. Since then, I have been questioned by countless UFO cultists. My "case" has been discussed in many books and magazine articles, even though I expressly wished to receive no publicity. I shudder to think what would have happened had I sought public attention.

In closing, I would like to reemphasize that anyone can be a UFO contactee. There's only one hitch: The people who contact you will not be from the stars. **DO**