

# OMNI

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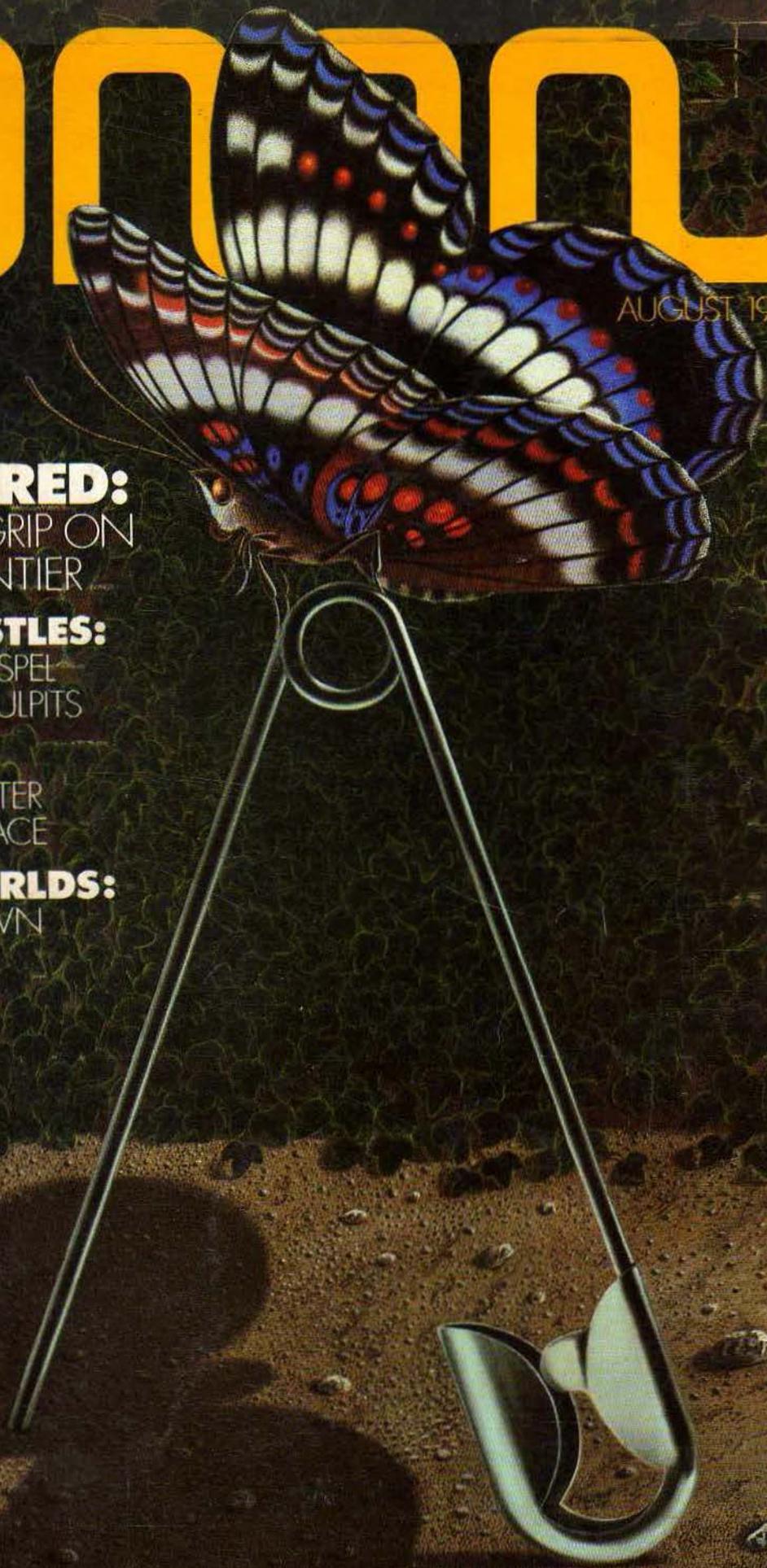
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# REPEATERS

## UFO UPDATE

By James Oberg

**S**trange manifestations have always appeared in the skies, but the modern concept of "flying saucers" was born in 1947, when Idaho businessman Kenneth Arnold saw nine shining discs fly past his small plane over Mount Rainier, Washington.

Nobody knows what it was Arnold saw. After three decades it will probably never be possible to reconstruct what actually happened on that day.

Arnold, however, has furnished some recent testimony that may reveal the true value of his report. Since that first sighting, he claims to have seen UFOs six more times, including one incident in which he filmed two UFOs flying under his light-plane. But all his UFOs looked the same, Arnold says: They flew in bounces, "like speedboats on rough water," and they flew both level and on edge. They also pulsed like fireflies in their centers.

Such descriptions are unique among the thousands of recorded UFO sightings. As psychologists recognize, if the same rare manifestation continues almost exclusively for one particular witness, that

perception may be traced to some internal characteristic, not to any external or physically "real" stimulus.

Dr. J. Allen Hynek has issued a warning about such UFO reports. Researcher David Schroth quoted Hynek as denouncing people who report UFOs, adding that they have "had similar experiences on many occasions in the past." These witnesses are called repeaters, and Hynek does not find them very reliable: "The idea that one person, often with little understanding of statistics or probability, can have dozens of UFO sightings while a great many other people—indeed, the majority—have never in their lives seen anything resembling a UFO can instantly be shown to be utterly nonsensical."

The same objection could be made regarding Kenneth Arnold. His claim to having seen half a dozen UFOs over the last 30 years marks him, in Hynek's own terminology, as "utterly unreliable." Yet since Arnold's sighting set off the current flying-saucer craze, he has achieved near-mythic status in the body of accepted

"UFO lore." Indeed, attempts by skeptics such as the late astronomer Dr. Donald Menzel to propose prosaic explanations for Arnold's sighting—which readily lent themselves to frequent repetition, as Arnold himself now confirms—met with ferocious denunciations from the UFO camp. There evidently is a canonized set of accepted UFO miracles—some of which originate with "repeaters"—that cannot be questioned without provoking a violent backlash from UFO enthusiasts.

With a collective sigh of relief, the United Nations has unanimously abandoned its notorious encounter with the UFO question. The only reason why UFOs were discussed at the U.N. at all was that Prime Minister Sir Eric Gairy of Grenada had insisted upon bringing various UFO specialists to the U.N. under the umbrella of his tiny Caribbean island nation's delegation. When Gairy was deposed in a surprise coup d'état last year, the topic of UFOs vanished from the world body's agenda almost as quickly as officials of Gairy's government fled into hiding.

UFO buffs had been hyping the U.N. affair with breathless descriptions of international scientific panels, of a "new respectability" for their crackpot-tainted specialty, and of high-level interest in UFOs from top U.N. officials. Alas, it was all a hallucination: Gairy's unplanned retirement punctured this UFO balloon and exposed the illusion. The United Nations, as it turns out, never had the slightest interest in UFOs but had only been trying to be polite to one of its members.

Grenada, meanwhile, is devoting itself to the task of rebuilding its mismanaged (some people say "looted") economy and of living down the country's reputation as UFO capital of the world. The new government has shown a disturbing pro-Soviet tilt, exemplified by the presence of Cuban advisers, the abolition of press freedoms, and voting with the Soviet bloc in the United Nations.

Suggestions are presumably now being evaluated for productive ways to dispose of several million postage stamps featuring Gairy lecturing to the U.N. about UFOs. **DA**



*UFO hovers over Odense, Denmark, near a strategic waterway that borders a Soviet military base.*