

UFO UPDATE

By James Oberg

The question of hoaxes presents an interesting aspect of the UFO phenomenon. It can test the adequacy of UFO investigations and measure the powerful "will to believe" of many UFO investigators and authors. Only when, and if, these lessons are fully appreciated will serious UFO investigators be able to escape the suspicion that they are often victimized, willingly or unwillingly, by hoaxes.

English physicist David I. Simpson engineered some very revealing "UFO controlled experiment" hoaxes several years ago. According to his report published in the Spring 1980 issue of the *Skeptical Inquirer*, the tests "compared known details of fabricated 'UFO' stimuli with the issued statements of investigators." In addition, Simpson wanted to test the abilities of UFO researchers by leaving clues that could suggest a practical solution. The hoaxes "were designed to present substantial inconsistencies that would allow any moderately critical investigator to cast strong suspicion on their authenticity."

One particular experiment was performed on the evening of March 28, 1970, while a group of British UFO enthusiasts near Warminster, in Wiltshire, were watching for UFOs that reportedly frequent the region. Simpson installed a purple spotlight on a neighboring hill. As it suddenly flashed on and off, a phony "magnetic detector" sounded an alarm at the observation site. An accomplice with a camera containing preexposed film (which already showed UFO images) made several exposures of the horizon and then handed the camera—the film still inside—to a prominent UFO researcher.

Simpson prepared the hoax film so that the photographed direction and appearance of the "UFO" were grossly at odds with what observers actually beheld. He also saw to it that the first two pre-exposed frames (taken almost a year earlier) showed background scenes significantly different from the two subsequent real exposures (which of course did not show any UFO). This should have been evident even to the least experienced investigator.

But no one seemed to notice (and no one even interviewed the photographer). After two months of study by top UFO experts in Europe, the photographs were declared by *Flying Saucer Review* editor Charles Bowen to be "genuine beyond all reasonable doubt."

One consultant reported that "there is nothing about these photographs that suggests to me they have been faked in any way whatsoever."

Ufologist Dr. Pierre Guerin, director of research at the Astrophysical Institute of the French National Center for Scientific Research, reported that "there is no question that the object photographed was the result of faking."

An artist's impression of the UFO appeared on the cover of the July–August 1970 issue of *Flying Saucer Review*; it showed the "object" with an angular diameter ten times too large (the experts had computed that the flying saucer was 60 feet long and 30 feet in diameter).

Eyewitness accounts described how the UFO—purple, fringed with white, having a crimson light in the middle—hovered for a moment and then moved toward Warminster before stopping again. All estimates of direction and duration were significantly erroneous, and the errors accumulated as time passed. (Later the object was described as giving off ultraviolet light and being surrounded by a "ruby-red halo.")

Simpson's critique of the "investigation," which he allowed to continue for two and a half years before revealing the hoax, was devastating: "My experiences in the UFO field have shown that the investigative incompetence demonstrated by this particular experiment, far from being exceptional, is typical. . . . Occasionally individuals with relevant technical backgrounds become involved; it is disturbing to witness the abandonment of their mental disciplines and common sense. . . . If ever there is subtle evidence suggesting extraterrestrial visitation, it is unlikely that it will be discovered by a typical ufologist."

Some UFO hoaxes start out as impulsive pranks rather than as carefully

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Fact or fantasy? This UFO photo from Pennsylvania is a type commonly associated with hoaxes.

nearest thing in the whole world."

Mission control: "Where can I sign up?"

And then Christopher C. Kraft, who had been a part of the Mercury, Gemini, and Apollo programs and who was now one of the "wise gray heads" of NASA and director of the Johnson Space Center, in Houston, summed it all up with one sardonic line: "We just became infinitely smarter."

The pilgrims in the desert were celebrants now. The Coors truck was passing out free beer. The *Omni* area had turned into a champagne party. The years of frustration and delay, the budget cuts and engineering problems, the criticisms and threats to cancel the shuttle program altogether—they were forgotten now. We had all just become infinitely smarter. We had a spaceship sitting out there on the desert, a visitor from outer space: *Columbia* and her sister craft being built by Rockwell are meant to work in orbital space. Her time here on the surface of our planet is only the time between missions—waiting time.

By now Young, who has flown more space missions of greater variety than any other human being, impatient almost to the point of testiness, had finally climbed down out of *Columbia* and was circling the craft, inspecting it like a rookie pilot who has to see and touch the machine that carried him aloft.

All that took place three months ago. *Columbia* is now back at Cape Canaveral, being readied for her second trip into space. *Challenger*, under construction in California, will be ready for flight next year.

In Washington the new team heading NASA now has a powerful argument to convince our political leaders that a new era in space transportation has truly begun. Never again can the debate be over whether the space shuttle will fly or not. Now the question is, How much do we want to accomplish with the shuttle? How soon will we use her capabilities to help build a permanent American presence in near-Earth orbit?

For the first time since its inception, Space Week will have an entirely new and different American achievement to celebrate. We are in space again. And this time we are there to stay. No longer the glamorous, one-shot missions that grabbed headlines and then faded into oblivion. Spaceflight is on its way to becoming as routine as commercial air travel.

Even the longest journey is started with a single step. *Columbia* has taken that first step for all of us.

Crippen said it best, the day after the landing, when he told a press conference in Houston that, despite all the problems and setbacks that had beleaguered the shuttle program, "It was worth it."

None of the pilgrims who ventured into the desert that morning to see the dawn of the Shuttle Era would disagree. ☐

planned scientific experiments. In March 1968 several college students at the University of Maryland were listening to a call-in radio-show interview with a man who claimed to have been taken by flying-saucer people to their home planet, Lanulos, "in the distant constellation Ganymede." One of the students, Tom Montealeone, an avid science-fiction buff, called to ask a question. Then Montealeone suddenly thought, *Just for the heck of it, why not claim I've been to Lanulos, too? It'll blow his mind!*

And so he did, and it did. The dumbfounded "contactee," Woodrow Derenberger, quickly regained his composure and corroborated Montealeone's description of the planet Lanulos, agreeing with details that contradicted things Derenberger had just disclosed on the show. Fifteen minutes later Montealeone hung up and enjoyed a good laugh with his roommates—until the phone rang. The radio station had traced his call and now wanted further information.

For the next two years Montealeone went along with the ruse, cleverly providing UFO investigators with information gleaned from Derenberger's accounts and from the general UFO literature. Whenever he "corroborated" information given earlier, his credibility rose further (he had told investigators that he was unfamiliar with UFO literature, and they believed him). UFO publicist Harold Salkin was impressed that Montealeone's story was "so tightly synchronized" with Derenberger's; UFO writer and editor Timothy Green Beckley taped an interview and wrote several magazine articles that presented the account as factual; noted UFO author and theorist John Keel called the story "one of the most puzzling contact stories in my files. . . . I'm forced to accept that it's true" (even though, as Montealeone noted, Keel's published accounts of the story were vastly distorted).

"I underwent long interviews," Montealeone recounted in *Omni* (May 1979). "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 discredited." Montealeone even submitted to a hypnosis session, sponsored by Salkin, during which he faked the trance and "passed" the test like a champion.

Strangely enough, when the full admission of the hoax was published in *Fate* magazine late last year (*Omni* had scooped *Fate* by a year and a half), Montealeone was the one blamed for all the confusion. His actions, wrote author Karl Pflock, "served to muddy still further the already muddy waters of ufology. The last thing we need, if we are to unravel the UFO mystery, is false leads that absorb any part of the far-too-limited resources of serious researchers"—which Pflock considered

Salkin, Beckley, and Keel, among others, to be. This ironic complaint appeared to absolve the gullible investigators of any responsibility for their careless and credulous acceptance of Montealeone's deliberately absurd fabrications. *Fate* magazine seemed to be saying that it was not their fault that they were hoaxed.

Some other reactions to Montealeone's confession are quite amusing. Salkin, who is described by long-time ufological observer James Moseley as "a warm, likable, but somewhat gullible sort," still refuses to believe Montealeone's confession. Keel is particularly upset and has issued a statement calling the *Fate* piece "an attempt to discredit my entire body of work and my professional reputation as a journalist for over 35 years." Keel is preparing a lawsuit, according to some accounts.

As for Beckley, he has to worry about fresher wounds in his credibility as a competent UFO investigator. In a recent issue of his monthly tabloid *UFO Review*, Beckley apparently became the victim of yet another UFO hoax.

In an article entitled "Erotic Encounters of the Very Close Kind," Beckley opened with the startling words, "It is not uncommon for the occupants of UFOs, to have sexual contact with humans." He tried to lay the foundation for this far-out story in an editorial on the facing page: "Some readers undoubtedly will believe that we are getting a wee bit carried away when we turn to sex in order to sell a UFO newspaper. . . . We really aren't trying to capture a larger audience by printing a sensationalistic headline on our cover. If we wanted to take this approach, we'd . . . simply fabricate the stories we print. But we don't cater to the gullible. . . . All the items we mention in our story are fully documented. We need not substitute fiction for truth—for truth is far greater than fiction in the field of UFOlogy."

The principal source of Beckley's "saucer sex" story was a newspaper account dated February 12, 1978, which carried the headline KIDNAPPED TO VENUS. Reporter Jerry Burger told of a thirty-one-year-old librarian found by police as she rambled around in a park, wearing no clothes. She claimed she had been "abducted by Venusians" and taken to the "back of the moon," where she was "implanted with outer-space semen" before being returned to Earth. Beckley reported the case as true and added that "such reports are taking place on a global scale. . . . There can be little doubt from the documented evidence that some tremendous event is slated to happen that will guide us to a higher understanding of ourselves and the cosmos. . . . The UFO-nauts are trying to teach us a lesson—that love is universal and encompasses every living creature, regardless of their planet or dimension of origin." And for those readers who wanted more information, Beckley added that the "saucer sex" story is just one chapter in his new book, *Strange Encounters—Bizarre & Eerie Contacts with Flying Saucers*, avail-

able from the author for \$6.95 plus postage and handling.

Unfortunately, Beckley's story is even more absurd than it first appears. Houston spaceflight expert Robert Nichols sent *Omni* the actual source of the "outer-space semen" story, in the form of the newspaper clipping Beckley quoted. The article did not come from a newspaper at all, but from a 1978 satirical publication, the *Sunday Newspaper Parody*, written by the *National Lampoon*. Beckley (or someone on his staff) evidently made some editorial changes by adding realistic touches to the article and changing the original spelling of the saucer-rape victim from the highly suspicious "Penelope Cuntz" to the acceptably ethnic "Penelope Kuntz." Beckley also altered the name of the newspaper from the utopian Dacron, Ohio, *Republican-Democrat* to the *Toronto Sunday Sun*. The entire account, then, is a fictional spoof, but the extent of Beckley's role in promoting and altering it (or merely passing it along credulously) is still undetermined.

Photographs are even more subject to hoaxing. In fact, while only a very small percentage of raw UFO reports are hoaxes, it is generally acknowledged even by UFO believers that the overwhelming majority of published UFO photographs are hoaxes—either forgeries, models, or misrepresented ordinary phenomena.

A classic UFO photographic hoax involved the "Fogel flying saucer" pictures,

taken in December 1957 and first published in 1959. As chronicled by skeptical ufologist David A. Schroth, the photographs were embraced by magazines in Great Britain and the United States; UFO experts argued that some features on the bottom of the flying saucer were identical to features seen in other photographs, testifying to the authenticity of Fogel's photographs. American UFO publicist Ray Palmer declared, "We are forced to admit this is not a fake." In 1966 one of the photographs was presented as authentic in *Life*.

That may have been the last straw for Fogel, who finally revealed that the UFOs were faked—made with a small model hung on a wire. When asked why he did what he did, Fogel replied that he wanted to show "that certain people make utter fools of themselves. Far too many people make a racket of the UFO business, writing phony books, supported by faked pictures."

As if in fulfillment of Fogel's point, UFO writers continued to use the hoax pictures. Palmer (who is credited by UFO historian Daniel Cohen with having "invented" the concept of "flying saucers") wrote that it was "impossible" for the photos to be fakes and that Fogel's confession must be a hoax. And in 1979 McGraw-Hill published David C. Knight's *UFOs: A Pictorial History*, with page 86 proudly presenting one of Fogel's pictures as still authentic.

Another famous UFO hoax provides eloquent warning against well-meaning

UFO stories that originate at a great distance in space or time. They are thus immune from any real investigation. If they are hoaxes, it is next to impossible to prove.

As part of a "UFO flap" in 1897, the story of Alexander Hamilton, of Yates Center, Kansas, stands out. The farmer reported that a cigar-shaped airship flown by jabbering humanoids hovered over his farm and caught hold of a calf with a rope. Hamilton's account was published in the local newspaper, along with a statement vouching for his honesty, signed by five leading citizens of the town. The story rapidly spread around the world, and for decades UFO writers considered it one of the best-documented "close encounters of the third kind" ever.

Hamilton and the five leading citizens actually had organized a local Liars Club, and Hamilton's "calfnapping airship" whopper, a tall tale through and through, topped all other fabrications. The newspaper story was all a joke, as it turned out, but neither the editor nor the town citizens realized how seriously the outside world had taken the account. It was not until early 1977 that the full story appeared, in *Fate* magazine. Associate editor Jerry Clark, a diligent and highly principled pro-UFO investigator, revealed what he called "the biggest hoax ever known in UFO history" when he published hitherto-unknown documentation that established beyond a shadow of a doubt that the Kansas farmer's story was phony.

But the same old "uforic" patterns continued. New writers based their books and articles on older UFO books and articles, not relying on original sources or their own independent verification. Among the subsequent UFO literature that continued to use the Hamilton story as if it were authentic were Knight's *UFOs: A Pictorial History* and Ripley's *Believe It or Not: Stars, Space and UFOs* (thirty-third in a series).

The January 1980 issue of *UFO Journal* (issued by MUFON, the Mutual UFO Network, a well-organized private research group with a good reputation) provided some very interesting insights into the minds of a UFO hoaxer and of the UFO investigator who worked on the case. The witness was a twenty-six-year-old security guard who claimed to have encountered aliens in the San Joaquin Valley on February 27, 1977. A year and a half later, after trying to dig up supporting evidence, he contacted MUFON.

The investigator (who, along with the witness, was kept anonymous in the article) reported: "I was impressed with this young man's sincerity, his apparent honesty, and his concern that he was unable to locate any other witnesses. I am by nature a cautious and suspicious person . . . having run into enough hoaxes and fraudulent cases in my 22 years of investigation to give me adequate insight and recognition for such incidents. . . . I was quite satisfied as to his honesty." The UFO incident filled nearly four pages in the magazine.



But at the end of the article the entire tone changed: "The important message for all of us," wrote editor Richard Hall, "is that this case is a hoax—a confessed hoax." The investigators didn't find this out for sure until the article had been typeset, but they decided to publish it anyway as a lesson in human vulnerability to hoaxes. "The story content fit so well with other cases, and the reporter seemed so 'sincere' and in a responsible position, that we were nearly taken in." Even without the confession, MUFON investigators had become suspicious of glaring discrepancies in the story as told to different investigators, but even those considerations might not have been enough to prove the case a hoax if the witness himself had not confessed when confronted with the inconsistencies and contradictions in his story.

In a letter to MUFON, the hoaxer (code-named "Carl" to preserve his anonymity) explained his motives: "All my life I had been a nobody, unimportant. . . . I wanted to be important. . . . I am not psychologically deranged but just wanted some attention." But he had not apparently acted as if he sought attention. He certainly had not sought publicity. Indeed, the investigator had originally reported that "fearing ridicule and harassment from friends and coworkers, Carl kept this story to himself until he simply had to tell someone who would help ease his frustration and anxiety." Evidently the "adequate insight" into hoaxes that the MUFON investigator claimed to possess involved something other than factual evidence.

MUFON's decision to publish the San Joaquin hoax story with the confession was a courageous one, since it did make its investigator sound rather foolish. But the UFO group demonstrated commendable maturity in choosing to try to have all its investigators learn from the experience, lest it be repeated on a wide scale. It still may not help.

The other famous hoaxes were not universally swallowed, either. Monteleone's space trip to Lanulos was never believed by most of the "nuts and bolts" UFO buffs who have for so long despised the crackpot contactees and the bad publicity they have brought to the subject. James Moseley, editor of *Flying Saucer News*, wrote that Monteleone clearly was not a "classic contactee" and evidently never believed his own story. A perceptive conclusion! However, the Fogl photographs and Simpson's experiment in England would probably not have survived the sophisticated photoanalytical techniques now used by some UFO groups, notably William Spaulding's high-technology Ground Saucer Watch, in Phoenix, and the GEPAN laboratories, in Paris.

The extent to which serious UFO groups seem determined to detect and reject hoaxes was demonstrated last year when, virtually without exception, all major groups and leading investigators publicly denounced Genesis-III Productions' photo

book *UFOs: Contact from the Pleiades*. While the strikingly handsome collection of flying-saucer photographs was being billed by its publishers as the greatest UFO breakthrough in human history, a number of pro-UFO researchers circulated reports that claimed that the whole business was a money-making fraud. For once UFO skeptics agreed with their traditionally antagonistic pro-UFO counterparts, though a Genesis-III spokesman continues to deny that his company is involved in any hoax.

UFO skeptics, however, go even further in their allegations that there have been hoaxes, and they find themselves in bitter disagreement with pro-UFO forces. Some of the highly publicized classic UFO encounters (such as the 1973 Pascagoula fishermen's account and the 1975 Snowflake, Arizona, woodcutters' account) and some of the classic UFO photographs (such as the 1950 McMinnville photos and the 1957 Trinitade Island photos) are considered by skeptics to be hoaxes. Half of the "best UFO cases" of the 1970s—as judged by a blue-ribbon panel of UFO experts sponsored by the *National Enquirer*—are considered hoaxes, according to independent research by skeptics. Here the battle lines are clearly drawn.

Suggesting that a UFO case is a hoax poses delicate problems. First of all, the UFO witness (whether a hoaxer or not) may have grounds for a libel lawsuit. Although many threats along these lines have been made, so far no suits have been filed. Second, without a confession it is extremely difficult to prove an accusation of "hoax," however spurious the story may sound. Last, UFO skeptics (in particular, the world's undisputed leading skeptic, aviation journalist Philip J. Klass) open themselves up to countercharges of "character assassination" and "vicious ad hominem attacks" when they point out, usually quite correctly, that the reliability of many famous UFO witnesses is highly questionable because of their past and subsequent histories of exaggeration, fantasy, and outright deception (pro-UFO groups generally downplay, or even cover up, such behavior on the part of people whose credibility they wish to emphasize).

Despite the problems caused by UFO hoaxes (mainly, that they can be far more difficult to solve or even recognize than are "ordinary" honest UFO reports), these patterns in deception can be made useful. Successful hoaxes can help calibrate the reliability of UFO research, as in the case of Monteleone's and Simpson's hoaxes; hoaxes can also instruct serious investigators in caution and humility, as with the San Joaquin hoax reported in *JFO Journal*. The claim of the superskeptics, that unsolved UFO cases can all easily be dismissed as unrecognized hoaxes, is unsubstantiated; the claim of UFO eager believers, that the hoax problem is under control, is equally unsubstantiated, if not refuted. And since no one wants to look foolish, the disagreement continues. ☐

MUSIC

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ological applications of music. We probably know more than anyone else about the psychological and physiological effects.

"What we claim to offer is a really functional music in worker areas. We arrange and record all our own music, and we give it a stimulus factor. Then we play in fifteen-minute segments, on and off, programmed sequentially so that the last composition in the fifteen-minute segment has the maximum amount of stimulus value. Although it's not entertainment, we still use music from the Top Hundred, and we even compose some of our own."

Muzak is made in the studios of the company's world headquarters at 100 Park Avenue, in New York City, by musicians like Dick Hyman, Warren Covington, Lionel Hampton, Tony Mottola, Al Caiola, and maybe even Bucky Pizzarelli. After the compositions are properly mixed, they're put in the library, where they become part of the daily schedule of programming.

All the programming is done by computer. There is a computer printout for each day. A program is never repeated. The programmers produce 24 hours' worth of music every day.

The printout for this day's program, tomorrow's program, and so on, goes out to Westbury, Long Island, where there's an automated studio. Until very recently the program was duplicated onto tapes that went on a 15-city circuit about every three days. First the tapes were played at 100 Park Avenue and then, by lease line, went to the antenna atop the Empire State Building. There the tapes were transmitted on the subchannel of an FM station before being sent to Philadelphia and then to the next city on the circuit. Ultimately they returned to Westbury, where the process began all over again.

Now Muzak is going satellite. Instead of producing tapes, copying them, and sending them city to city, Muzak is beamed directly from the satellite to the subscriber.

The price of a subscription depends upon the number of speakers a restaurant, office, or elevator has. The greater the number of speakers, the greater the distribution on the subscriber's premises. A simple little restaurant with two or three speakers may pay \$40 a month. And then there are installations that pay \$10,000 a month per franchise.

"We have four programs to choose from: 'Office,' 'Travel,' 'Public Area,' and 'Industrial,' which has lots of brass. Most of the heavy industry that we play is at night, because the workers on the third shift require the greatest amount of stimulation. That's why they get a lot of brass."

A warehouse in Stuttgart requested a "Light Industrial Program," although it's not clear to Bing Muscio whether it was to increase the workers' productivity or to relax the customers. ☐