

# OMNIBUS

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## 14 GREAT MINDS PREDICT THE FUTURE



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## ANTI MATTER

For a few hours this past summer, the "Great East Coast UFO" was the most widely witnessed UFO in history. Hundreds of thousands of people watched the apparition from areas as distant as Georgia, Michigan, and Quebec.

But within hours, the UFO was "killed," slain by a precise and prosaic explanation. Now the sighting has become merely the most widely witnessed UFO, or identified flying object, in history. And that's no mean feat.

It all started at about ten PM Eastern Daylight Time on Tuesday, August 12, 1986, when millions of people were outside looking

for Perseid meteors. Many of these skygazers had their telescopes and cameras at the ready when a brilliant, cloudlike UFO appeared in the eastern sky.

Descriptions of the object and its motion varied, but a general picture soon emerged. In Houston, Don Stockbauer described an "orangish nebulosity surrounded by an irregularly shaped white cloud." Brenda Newton of Rochester, New York, said, "It had a tail. By the time we got out of the truck, it had begun to spiral. It lasted for a few minutes, then dimmed and floated west." And Chuck Barnes, head naturalist at the Troy Farm and Nature Center near Detroit, said, "It was glowing like a spiral pinwheel standing on end. It appeared to be five or six times larger than a full moon."

A number of observers quickly figured it out: Tom Bolton of the David Dunlap Observatory, north of Toronto, attributed the sighting to a satellite. "The satellite was actually seen in the telescope here," he said, "and we also had a report from an amateur astronomer who saw the satellite



## UFO UPDATE

in North America. But it has been common elsewhere. Wherever it occurs, the explanation is the same. American rockets occasionally spray eerie spiraling clouds over Australia, and Soviet rockets regularly paint the twilight skies of South America with terrifying "OVNIs" (Spanish for UFOs).

The great, short-lived UFO of August 12 was an illuminating experience in more ways than one. Even the UFO groups got into the act. And the descriptions they gathered were drastically different from those put forth by astronomy buffs. Instead of an object moving across the sky, they described one that shot straight up until it exploded or moved into a cloud. Their data put a bizarre spin on already unusual perceptions, exaggerating the strangeness of the phenomenon and reducing the plausibility of other UFO eyewitness accounts gathered by these same groups.

If the recent brouhaha proved one thing, it's that if we look hard enough, we'll usually find a logical explanation for even the most spectacular UFO.—JAMES OBERG

and saw the release of material from it."

It didn't take long to identify the mysterious satellite. It turned out that a group of radio hams had received signals from the object—to them it was not unidentified. They had been patiently awaiting the launching of a Japanese amateur-radio satellite aboard a space booster. And that's just what the UFO turned out to be: a cloud of propellant dumped from the Japanese rocket's second stage, which was orbiting a bit ahead of the satellite.

Until last August the cloud-UFO phenomenon was unheard-of