

OMNIBUS

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MISSING TIME:
A NEW LOOK AT
ALIEN ABDUCTIONS



TOYS OF TOMORROW
NASA IN THE
21ST CENTURY
THE HARVARD/LEIDEN
COLLECTION OF
MEDICAL ODDITIES



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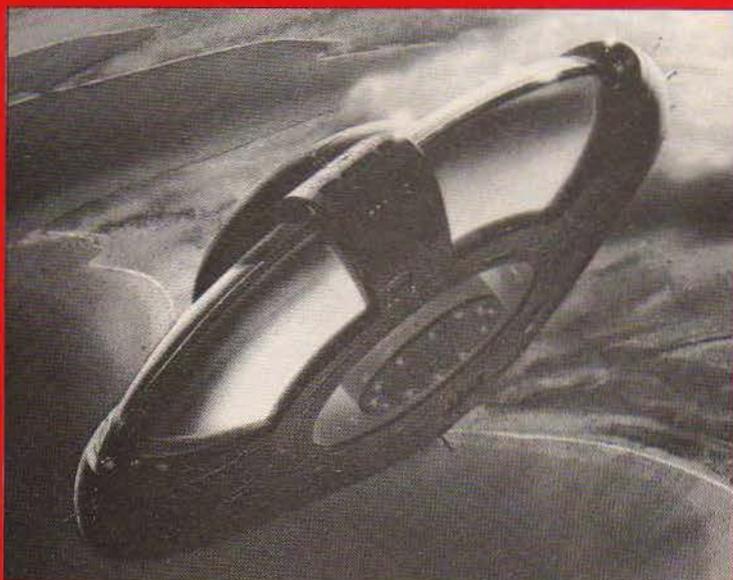
•Flying saucer
sightings are brought on by close
encounters between
earthquake energy and the brain. •

ANTI MATTER

First he told us that UFO reports were actually earthquake lights—electromagnetic effects caused by stress and strain within the earth's crust. Now numerous studies later, Michael Persinger, a neuroscientist at Canada's Laurentian University, has discovered that UFO reports often precede earthquake activity by as much as six months. In fact, analyzing Swedish data collected from 1963 through 1967, Persinger and investigator Dan Mattsson found a specific time-lag relationship between clusters of earthquake activity and UFOs.

Persinger has been hammering away at the UFO phenomenon since 1969 and in the process has developed what he calls the tectonic-strain theory. In brief, it states that the plates of the earth's crust are constantly shifting, grinding against one another, and building up stresses and strains. This results in minor seismic activity and eventually in the release of energy in the form of luminous balls of light. Within six months, earthquakes follow. Since 1974 Persinger has been studying the relationship between UFO reports and earthquakes in the United States, Canada, and, more recently, Europe. But only lately has he talked of predicting earthquakes. His theory has ruffled some UFOlogical feathers because it says UFO reports—the lights-in-the-sky type—are really earthquake lights, while the more structured space vehicle sightings are perceptual distortions brought on by close encounters between earthquake energy and the brain.

One of the ruffled is Chris Rutkowski, who does research at the University of Manitoba and has an astronomy back-



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ground. "It's a quantum leap," says Rutkowski, "to translate underground strain into energy that can travel hundreds of kilometers underground and then leap into the air as a UFO." Rutkowski also thinks Persinger is off base when he uses UFO databases, which consist of 95 percent misidentifications, for his analyses. "Persinger's analyses can be attributed to the old garbage-in, garbage-out computer syndrome," he says.

A similar complaint comes from Bruce Maccabee, a UFOlogist and a physicist for the U.S. Navy. "If you take big enough areas

and big enough time chunks, you can find all sorts of things."

Such criticisms don't faze Persinger. "When you find these correlations in as many places as we have," he says, "it becomes less and less likely that it's spurious." Nor is he bothered by the misidentifications in UFO databases. "It's patterns, not absolute numbers, that you look at," he argues. "You subtract the random noise."

Because of this criticism, which Persinger says shows a lack of statistical understanding, he has almost given up speaking at UFO conferences. "People make a lot of critical comments," he says, "but no one has ever supported these comments with data analysis."

The ultimate judges might be geophysicists, who have specialized knowledge and no particular ax to grind. James Byerlee of the U.S. Geological Survey thinks Persinger should submit his work to *Geophysical Research Letters* and let the professionals critically review it.—PAUL McCARTHY