

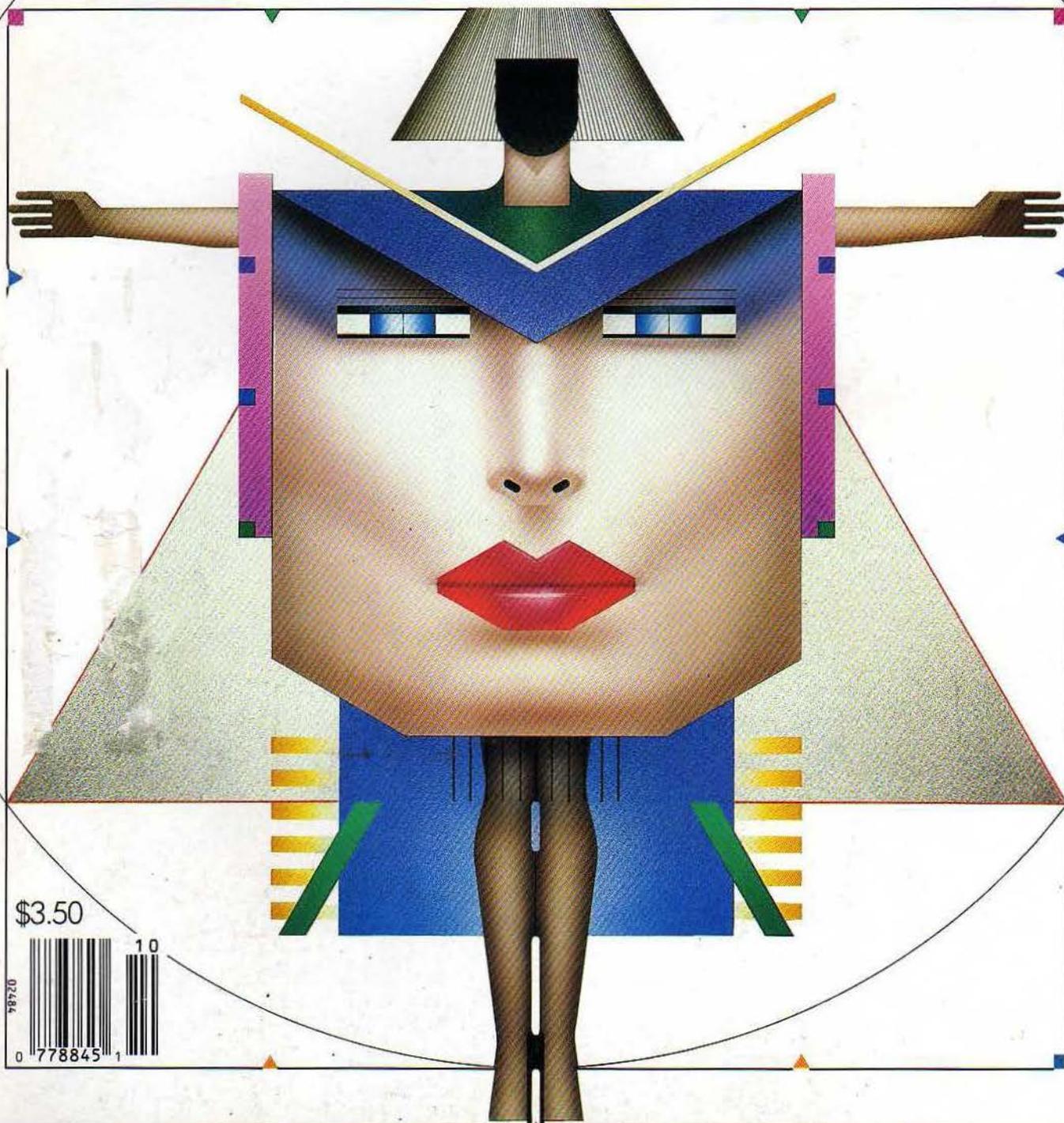
SPECIAL ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

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TRENDS AND PREDICTIONS FOR THE YEAR 2000 AND BEYOND



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• Are mysterious waves of UFO sightings triggered by general public hysteria or by bona fide UFOs? •

ANTI MATTER

What do 1896, 1947, 1952, and 1973 have in common? All were years when the world witnessed mysterious UFO "waves."

When UFOlogists refer to waves, they mean repeated UFO reports in a specific region or regions over a precise period of time. For example, throughout 1933 and 1934 many mysterious ghost fliers were seen over the Scandinavian countries. In 1973 thousands of sightings were reported across the breadth of the eastern seaboard of the United States. And most recently, hundreds of people around the globe have reported close encounters in which they say they've been abducted by tiny, slit-mouthed aliens with bulging eyes.

But now Indiana folklorist Thomas E. Bullard has given new meaning to the term *UFO wave*. Studying every significant UFO wave from 1896 to the present, Bullard has divided them into several groups. For instance, he notes, some UFO waves focus on a small geographic area, while others are worldwide. Some waves last for weeks and some for months or years.

As far as UFOlogists are concerned, however, Bullard's data are especially important because they suggest that many waves emerge not from social hysteria, as skeptics contend, but from bona fide UFOs. Indeed, to prove this point, Bullard has analyzed two radically different wave patterns. In the first, "explosive wave" pattern, Bullard says, a spectacular sighting receives a lot of publicity. The sighting is quickly followed by many others for weeks or months, until the wave slowly dies. In the second, "gradual wave" pattern,



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large numbers of UFO reports accumulate without garnering much publicity at all. "While explosive waves may be related to social factors or even hoaxes," Bullard concedes, gradual UFO waves are not. Even when these waves are finally publicized, he adds, "there's no discernible increase in UFO reports."

To make his point, Bullard recalls the great UFO wave of 1952. Even when publicity was generated because of reports of UFOs near Washington's National Airport, he says, sightings continued to emerge steadily, without increasing.

Some sociologists find Bullard's theories simplistic, to say the least. Sociologist Marcello Truzzi of Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti, for instance, says that "several social factors may contribute to why people think they see UFOs and report them, and for why the media publicizes them. The social factors that contribute to UFO waves are probably extremely complex and interactive. So to summarily dismiss social factors in any type of UFO wave is naive."

Truzzi does believe, however, that Bullard's work is important. "It shows that *simple* social factors cannot explain these waves," he says, "though when you're dealing with mass behavior, little is ever simple."

Bullard himself concedes that Truzzi may be correct. "But at least I've shown," he says, "that publicity does not always trigger UFO reports with the knee-jerk suddenness that skeptics suggest." In fact, he adds, "I believe people are sighting something to get excited about when they report UFOs. I'm just not sure exactly what."—D. SCOTT ROGO