

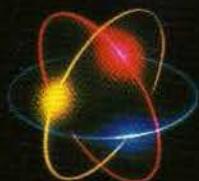
COMICS

JULY 1991

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UFO UPDATE:

Belgium's military has begun to work hand in hand with private groups to track UFOs

Life in the tiny kingdom of Belgium is anything but harmonious. In fact, ferocious rivalry between the Flemish up north and the Walloons down south has dominated Belgian politics for centuries. But according to UFO activists, a mysterious triangular craft may do much to change this. Belgians from the north and the south, it seems, have put aside their differences to form what some call the most coordinated UFO investigation to date.

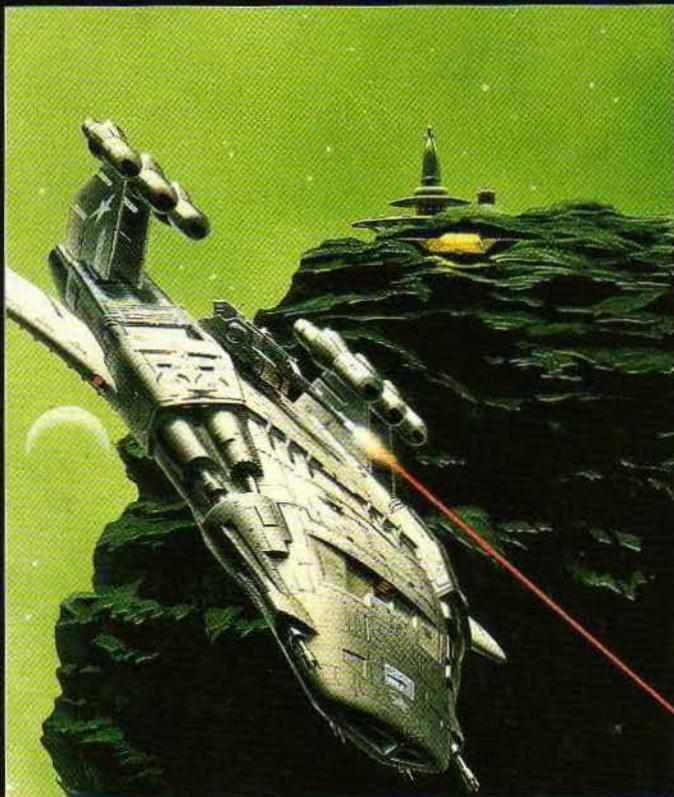
It all began on November 29, 1989, when hundreds of people from two Belgian towns—Eupen and Wavre—reported sighting a dark gray deltoid shape, one white light per tip, gliding across the night sky. The mysterious object, with a wingspan of 50 to 100 meters, was apparently silent, says Michael Bougard,

president of Belgium's Society for the Study of Space Phenomena (SOBEPS), a nonprofit citizens' organization. "And no one reported seeing it land."

By March, adds Bougard, "everyone from farmers to teenagers to high-ranking military officers and professors claimed to have seen the UFO." In addition, on March 30, controllers at a radar station in Glons detected a foreign object on their screens. They quickly contacted colleagues at a station in Ghent. The second station confirmed the presence of a slow-moving blip.

"At this point it had become a scientific problem deserving serious investigation," says Professor Leon Brenig, a physicist at the Free University of Brussels. "It couldn't be steel coming back into the atmosphere because the edges were smooth, not bent. It couldn't be a NATO aircraft because its capacity for flight seemed to outreach current technology. I decided it was worth my time."

Apparently the military agreed. Belgium's air force contrib-



uted two F-16's, an expert crew, and instruments to a hunt later that spring. Scientists and citizens participating in the effort formed four watch groups, each responsible for calling sightings in to headquarters, an airport southeast of Liège. The airport tower, in turn, alerted pilots, who flew planes equipped with infrared cameras in pursuit of the triangle. The pilots failed to get photographs because of the deltoid's reported great speed. Nonetheless, the effort goes on: Engineers and physicists at the Free University are analyzing radar images of the object. Belgium's air force training school, the Ecole Royale Militaire, is analyzing UFO photos with computers. And botanists are examining burn patterns in fields where the triangle was reportedly seen.

"This investigation is unprecedented—it's gone further than any I know of," says Walter Andrus, international director of Mutual UFO Network, Inc. (MUFON). "We are impressed that Belgium's military cooperated. That is a major step." Indeed, adds Lucean Clerebaut, SOBEPS's secretary-general, while the French have a government office dedicated to UFO study, "this is the first time that a national authority has worked with a private society in researching UFOs."

Whether or not the Belgians eventually unravel the mystery, the unusual official effort may affect the perception and pursuit of UFOlogy worldwide.

According to MUFON's Andrus, for instance, in the United States, "every military and intelligence agency we can identify has been involved in investigating UFOs since 1947, but they will not share their information. If nothing else, we hope the efforts of the Belgians will embarrass the U.S. government into admitting some of what they know," he says.

—BETH LIVERMORE