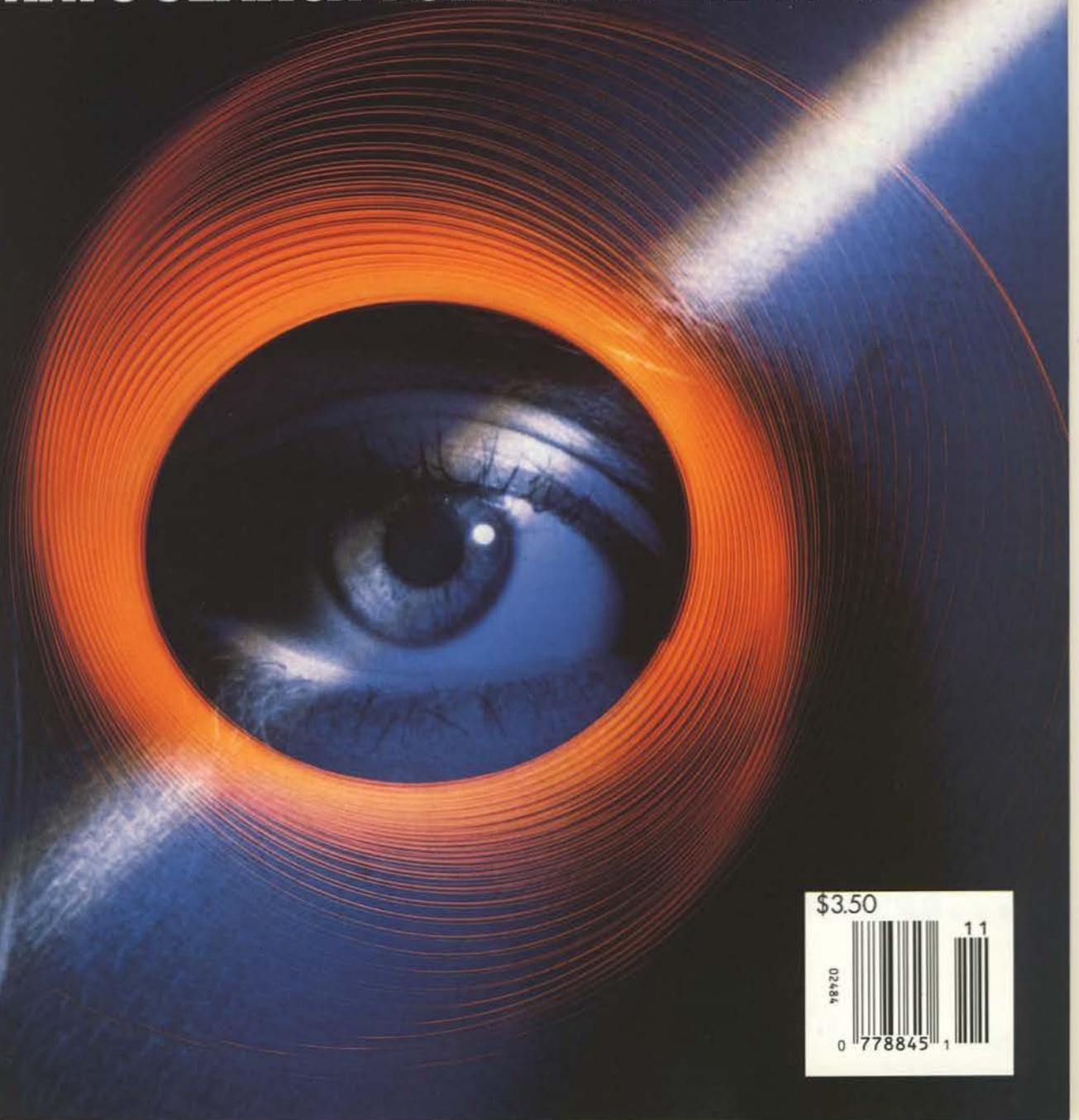


OMNI

NOVEMBER 1994

PROJECT OPEN BOOK **OMNI'S SEARCH FOR THE REAL UFOS**



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B Y P A M E L A W E I N T R A U B

LET THE PROJECT BEGIN

OMNI KICKS OFF PROJECT OPEN BOOK, A WORLDWIDE QUEST FOR CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE DOCUMENTED KIND

IT WAS A CLEAR, COLD NIGHT IN BROOKLYN, NEW YORK, WHEN HAM-RADIO OPERATOR ALEX CAVALLARI PICKED UP BIZARRE, JUMPING WAVE FORMS ON HIS SCOPE. AN HOUR LATER AND SOME TEN MILES WEST IN NEWARK, NEW JERSEY, THE SAME DISTURBANCE PUZZLED FORMER NAVY MAN AND HAM-RADIO OPERATOR JOHN GONZALEZ. GONZALEZ'S NEIGHBORS WERE DISRUPTED AS WELL: TV RECEPTION WAS INTERRUPTED, HOMES SHOOK AS IF IN AN EARTHQUAKE, AND SEVERAL WITNESSES REPORTED A FLASH OF LIGHT. GONZALEZ NOW CLAIMS HE COULD MAKE OUT A DISC-SHAPED CRAFT INSIDE



the light, and contends the craft brushed his ham-radio antenna and knocked down tree branches in his backyard. A strange, ashlike sphere the size of a golf ball was later found in his yard. Rich in evidence, this intriguing incident has already been investigated by police and fire departments and by researchers in a lab. The needed culmination for all this data: a synthesis, in which an explanation might emerge.

Multiple witnesses and physical effects also define dramatic sightings over southwestern Michigan, where hundreds of people have reported red and white lights moving in circles through the sky. Here, the documentation includes police reports confirming the strange phenomena as well as data from the National Weather Service at the Muskegon County Airport, where meteorologists have tracked the lights on radar. While experts concede that radar alone can be misleading, it does add weight to reports and suggests that something might be afoot.

And in Alabama, an accounting teacher and mother of two says her abduction by aliens was harrowing. Her story, precise in its detail, echoes the claims of hundreds of other alleged abductees who have come out of the closet of late. But given all the recent research on false memory syndrome, can anyone accept her account, rendered through deep hypnosis, as literally true? Well, it might be easier to evaluate if some of the evidence described by abductee Leah Haley turns out to be real. From odd scratches and scoops on her skin to weird malfunctions in her security system to alleged harassment by military men in fatigues, Haley claims to have a plethora of evidence that sets her story apart from other, more anecdotal tales.

These incidents all have one thing in common: They offer evidence that can be analyzed, fertile ground for *Omni's* newest venture, Project Open Book. In our effort to examine the UFO phenomenon, our basic question is clear: In the midst of all the sightings, all the claims and counterclaims, all the abduction scenarios, conspiracy theories, and hype, is there any incontrovertible evidence, solid as nuts and bolts and plain as day, of visitation from on high?

We feel we are in a good position to pose this question because we have no axe to grind. As an editorial staff, we are not yet convinced the invasion has begun. Yet we don't have the knee-jerk instinct to debunk material just because it's weird. Yes, we agree the uni-

verse is vast enough and evolution flexible enough to forge intelligent species throughout the cosmos, especially on earthlike planets around sunlike stars. Yet we feel the feat of interstellar travel would be tricky, even for geniuses of the cosmic kind. In the end, there's just one thing we sense for sure: The UFO data suggests a mystery—unabiding, unresolved and sometimes downright spooky—in which strange phenomena continue to go unexplained.

In our search for evidence, explaining is mostly what we aim to do. As investigators have found in the past, the large majority of UFO sightings are rooted in the mundane. Whether sightings have proved to be practical jokes and hoaxes, meteors, cloud formations, ball lightning, Soviet satellites, or "black" aircraft under development in the United States, some 90 percent of all UFO reports investigated are eventually explained. Just sift through our past columns on the subject, and you will see that finding real-world explana-

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tions for the UFO phenomenon has been our impetus throughout.

In seeking to explain, moreover, Open Book will continue to embrace *Omni's* longstanding policy of informed skepticism. Show-me-from-Missouri types, we will abide by the skeptic's tenet: Extraordinary claims require extraordinary levels of proof. In our philosophical universe, if we do not work hard to find an explanation—an ordinary explanation—for each and every case we look into, then our work has not been done. When we send our researchers out to sift through evidence for signs of E.T., you can bet your bottom dollar the terrible burden of proof will stay with us. And Open Book's final query will always be the same: Is there any evidence that proves, to our satisfaction and beyond the shadow of a doubt, that the alien interpretation of UFOs is for real?

UFO researchers have attempted to address this issue from the start. One of the first to try to bring the scrutiny of science to bear on UFO sightings was

the late Dr. J. Allen Hynek, who, during the 1940s and 1950s, worked as an astronomer at the Smithsonian, Northwestern University, Ohio State University, and Harvard, producing rigorous papers on electronic satellite tracking and supernovas. At first a hard-headed skeptic, Hynek also worked for the Air Force, looking into UFO reports for the notorious Project Blue Book. Although Blue Book has, in recent years, been discredited as a PR organ of an Air Force intent on debunking any and all UFO reports, Hynek himself went through a conversion at its helm. As he followed "the program," squelching one UFO flap after the next, he began to doubt his own words. "Somewhere along the line," he told *Omni*, "I realized that I wasn't being scientifically honest. The sightings needed further investigation, but we were disregarding them, throwing the data away."

That realization put Hynek on a path he would follow for the rest of his life. He began making copies of all the documents to come out of Blue Book and gathered data that would allow him to study UFOs as they had never been studied before. He classified the various types of reports and even traveled around the country investigating the more interesting ones. Hynek agreed that many of the sightings could be explained. But, he held, there was "nothing in the accepted scientific paradigm to explain them all."

His obsession resulted, in 1973, in the founding of the Center for UFO Studies in Evanston, Illinois. Out of this small operation, run mostly through the donations of friends, he produced respected papers and monographs in a field replete with misguided enthusiasts, psychopaths, and frauds.

In the end, the so-called science of J. Allen Hynek went soft. Critics, and even friends, began to say he'd become shockingly gullible. He spent some of his last days in the luxurious Arizona home of a wealthy, but "anonymous" benefactor who subscribed to a psychic interpretation of UFOs and promised Hynek he would create for him the most lavish UFO center in the world. When Hynek died of brain cancer in April 1986, it was easy for sympathizers to say he'd gone insane.

Today, Hynek's legacy—his original notion that UFOs could be studied with as much scientific rigor as a volcano or a lake—lives on in a handful of serious researchers and open-minded skeptics

who continue to sift through evidence, seeking to make sense of the data, to explain. It is in this spirit, and in hopes of doing what Blue Book couldn't, that Project Open Book turns its first page.

Because proof, if it exists, might be out there anywhere, we have asked our readers to help. Already, our call for evidence has been heard. Thousands of readers have written, sending us their thoughts, perceptions and suspicions, their photographs, video- and audio-tapes, their samples of earthly (or un-earthly?) leaves, rocks, and offerings from backyards and mountaintops throughout the country and the world.

A reader from Canada describes a mysterious object he says smashed into the waters of Shag Harbour, Nova Scotia, three decades ago. "What the Shag Harbour UFO crash lacks in high drama, it gains in solid documentation," this eloquent letter states. "There were many witnesses, and virtually no one of sufficient age in Nova Scotia's Shelburne or Yarmouth counties has forgotten the event. I am still uncovering new evidence, and have even interviewed witnesses from the Royal Canadian Air Force, Coast Guard, and Police."

A reader from Staunton, Virginia, described "a bright red" disc in the night sky above his home. "In the middle

were four round black circles," he reports. "When the object floated over the apartments, it seemed to stop and turn one of its sides up. Then it did something really wonderful—it blinked a good-bye. Its speed seemed to go from 200 miles an hour to God-knows-what, and it was gone."

And from the owner of a bed and breakfast inn and dairy farm in northern Vermont, we heard this: "Sunday, January 6, 1994 I had two guests from Washington, DC. We had been watching a video and when it went off, everyone was heading up to bed. My husband was already upstairs, but my son and I and one of our guests (an astrophysicist, now lawyer) decided to check the outside temperature. We went over to my large front window to look out at the thermometer (it was -28 degrees Fahrenheit) and we saw two bright lights in the sky across the street. I thought 'helicopter.' But there wasn't any noise and the two lights were spaced very wide apart. It moved so slowly. We just looked at each other, saying 'What is it?' Regardless of the cold, we ran out onto my front porch. It was a very gray sky that night, with the threat of snow. The object—two large rectangle shapes connected by a central square or triangle—was slowly

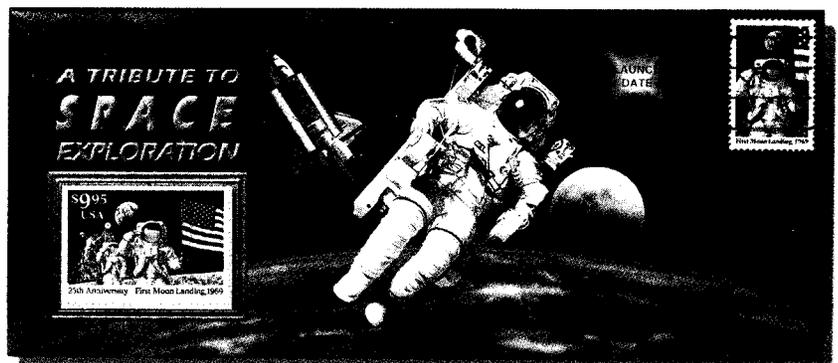
moving directly toward us, without a sound, and flew almost directly over our heads. Only then did I hear a faint rumble, like a deeper version of the sound you hear when you place a large seashell up to your ear." This witness reports that the local newspaper, the *County Courier*, eventually carried the story, turning up witnesses she hadn't known about at all. "In all, eight people reported the sighting," she recalls.

Finally, we received three separate missives on the saucerlike designs registered at the U.S. Patent Office. "There are patents in the patent office describing certain flying aircraft not of conventional design," one reader tells us. His claim: The patents link many people who have worked on special or secret projects. Another reader goes even further. "I have spent several years researching current hardware available to build these craft," he states. A third informant sent us, via overnight delivery, more than one hundred photocopied sheets of the patents themselves.

But conventional mail, via "pony express," is not the only conduit to Open Book. As our online devotees have discovered, they can reach us through America Online as well. (To get to the Open Book bulletin board, type Key-
CONTINUED ON PAGE 88

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PROJECT OPEN BOOK

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 51

word: *OMNI*. Then click *Antimatter*. Click *Message Board*. Click *List Topics*. And go to *REAL PROJECT OPEN BOOK*.) Posting on our board, a few readers have mentioned the so-called triangle craft, recently witnessed over California and elsewhere in the United States. "During the winter of 1992-1993, I was at Beale AFB, Marysville, California, and was in my backyard with my telescopes," explained one of our online regulars. "I am an amateur astronomer with over thirty years' experience, and was also a trained photo intelligence specialist in all types of systems. The date was around the third of March at about 10:30 p.m. Pacific Standard Time. I had just walked out of my warm-up shed and was walking back to my telescopes about ten feet away when I noticed something floating above me, going from southeast to northwest. The craft was a triangle shape with two rows of lights going around the middle on the two sides and was a light gray on the bottom, possibly from the reflected lights of the housing area I lived in. There was no sound of any type and no sign of engines. The craft looked to

be as thick as a C-5A transport, which I have seen and flown in many times. The corners and sides were curved and were only broken by the two rows of lights. As I stood there with my mouth open, the craft traveled out of sight toward the PAVE PAWS radar site, about two miles away. For a long time, I thought what I saw was the new Mach +6 reconnaissance plane that has flown near Beale for many years, but on reflection, the craft was too thick (30 to 50 feet) to travel at such speeds. Having worked with the SR71, I can say I have never seen a craft like this, and others here in the Sacramento Valley have also seen the same type of craft in January and February of this year. . . . Any ideas?"

Since ideas are the currency Open Book trades in online, our postees have given us quite a few. For instance, our online participants have helped us fine-tune our notion of what is and what is not legitimate "proof." A few people pointed out, for instance, that radar, while an important tool, is not valid as the *only* evidence of a UFO. "Since radar is dependent upon electromagnetic waves," we were told, "it may be easily distorted by other electromagnetic waves that are man-made or natural in origin."

Our online board has also sponsored a lively discussion on the type of evidence required to prove that bona fide extraterrestrials have, in fact, been in touch with alleged abductees. The consensus can be summed up by this posting: Real evidence, it was suggested, would come when, following abduction, an alleged abductee could deliver "advance information of an astronomical or physical nature, not known to contemporary science but checkable or verifiable ex post facto."

To help us evaluate the evidence, we have chosen a small but balanced panel of experts (see sidebar). Because we need people experienced at UFO investigation, we have selected a number of researchers allied with the UFO camp; all UFO researchers on our panel have been noted not only for their field work, but also for the high quality of their *skeptical* work. To give some credence to the other side of the realm, moreover, we have solicited the help of some noted skeptics. Intent on policing the UFO field, these panel members will help us make sure we never let down our guard. To provide background and expertise, we have recruited experts in aerospace and military craft. To shed some light on the human mind, we have asked for help from

a few psychologists. And, because *Omni's* roots are, ultimately, journalistic, we've selected a number of investigative reporters who will wield their craft to go through data, coming up with what we hope is a semblance of truth.

Already, their investigations have begun. A. J. S. Rayl, an investigative journalist most recently writing and producing a CD-ROM on the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (or SETI), is speaking with Leah Haley, the accountant-abductee. Jerome Clark, editor of the *International UFO Reporter*, is researching the Holland, Michigan, sightings and their radar components. Investigative science reporter Patrick Huyghe is on the trail of abduction cases in which multiple witnesses (and/or multiple abductees) claim to have been involved. Other Open Book panelists have been assigned to investigate the saucerlike designs in the U.S. Patent Office, the Nova Scotia water crash, and the bed-and-breakfast sighting in Vermont.

Our panel has also been poking around in the past. Longtime *Omni* writer Paul McCarthy, for instance, was intrigued by reports that an Army Air Corps nurse helped autopsy aliens recovered from a UFO that crashed near Roswell, New Mexico, in July 1947—and then just disappeared. Top Roswell researchers, in fact, told McCarthy they had attempted to find her along with other Roswell nurses to no avail, suggesting, perhaps, that they'd been intentionally deleted from the record for good. McCarthy decided to track the nurses, and thus far, has had astonishing good luck. (Look for his Open Book report in an upcoming *Omni*.)

And James Oberg, our longtime resident skeptic, an aerospace engineer, and a world-class expert on the Soviet space program, has been looking back a decade to 1984. His current assignment: bringing new evidence to bear on a Soviet sighting already touted as having it all—visual, radar, and physical effects. Just added to the mix, Oberg tells us, is a series of sketches that now may shed light on the origin of the mysterious apparition as it changed shape, color, and size.

Today, these researchers will help Open Book move forward, joining other serious groups across the spectrum, from the Mutual UFO Network (MUFON) to the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP), who have been investigating the phenomenon for years. Thanks to our readers, our efforts will be fueled by reports coming in at a steady pace from around the world. With our own perspective, our own techniques, and

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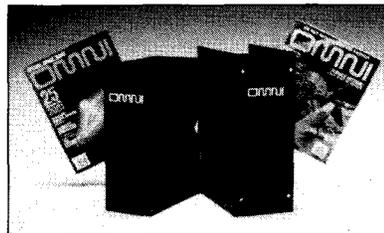
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our own special panel, we throw our hat into the ring. We have no way of knowing what we will find—or if we will find anything at all. We only know this: Any story we agree to look into must provide plentiful evidence to analyze, dissect, and explore. From our camp, without such elements as multiple witnesses, physical traces, medical documentation, or electromagnetic effects, you have nothing at all.

In marking our place on the UFO map, we evoke the trajectory of our near-namesake—the frustrated Project Blue Book—and its leader, J. Allen Hynek himself. In the end, Hynek could not use science to unlock the mystery of the UFO, as he had planned. Near the end of his life, ensconced in a grand hacienda in the heart of Arizona's Quartz Mountain, he glimpsed a geographic wonder: a mammoth slab of rock sculpted by nature to resemble a monk kneeling in prayer. In this gorgeous spot called Paradise Canyon, Hynek discovered fervor in his calling. Moved more by religion than reason, more by mysticism than science, Hynek the investigator was finally swept away. For him the dream had come to this: "I've often said that someday, I would enjoy being snowbound on the rocky coast of Maine," he told *Omní*. "I imagine myself in front of the fireplace, keeping my friends entertained for many nights, with one interesting UFO tale after the next. I'd enjoy being given the chance, as long as the food held out."

But now, at the cusp of the twenty-first century, the busboy has come and cleared the food away. In a sense, it's sad: Who can deny an attraction to the stories? After all, from a literary perspective, UFO yarns can now unequivocally take their place among the greatest ghost stories and science-fiction stories of our time. No doubt about it, from the tragicomic plight of the closet abductee and her frail, half-human "hybrid" heirs to the ominous stalwart bureaucrat who keeps crashed saucers and alien bodies under lock and key, magnificent UFO stories, rich in social commentary and psychological truth, abound. The heroes of these tales, be they missing nurses or pale hybrid children lost forever to the world of love, have become mythological symbols for our time. We will continue to listen to their cries. But now it is also time to move on. Kicking and screaming, we must let loose our grip on these riveting, best-loved allegories and embrace the evidence, leaving literary conceits behind.

On this cautious note, and in hopes of finding some answers, our investigation begins. ☐

ISOBEL AVENS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 75

curity gate. I was disappointed by him. He turned out to be a tall thin man, middle-aged, grey-haired, dressed in a light wool suit. He looked less like a doctor than a poet. He had that kind of fragile elegance some people maintain on the edge of panic, the energy of tensions unresolved, glassy, never very far from the surface. He would always seem worried. He looked along the street toward Shepherd's Bush, then down at his watch.

I opened the nearside passenger window.

"David Alexander?" I called.

I called: "Waiting for someone?"

He bent down puzzledly and looked into the BMW.

"Need a lift?" I offered.

"Do I know you?" he asked.

I thought: Say the wrong thing, you fucker. You're that close.

I said: "Not exactly."

"Then—"

"Forget it."

He stood back from the car suddenly, and I drove off.

Christmas. Central London. Traffic locked solid every late afternoon. Light in the shop windows in the rain. Light in the puddles. Light splashing up round your feet. I couldn't keep still. Once I'd walked away from Isobel, I couldn't stop walking. Everywhere I went, *She's Always a Woman* was on the radio. Harrods, Habitat, Hamleys: Billy Joel drove me out onto the wet pavement with another armful of children's toys. I even wrapped some of them—a wooden penguin with rubber feet, two packs of cards, a miniature jigsaw puzzle in the shape of her name. Every time I saw something I liked, it went home with me.

"I bought you a present," I imagined myself saying, "this fucking little spider that really jumps—"

"Look!"

Quite suddenly I was exhausted. Christmas Day I spent with the things I'd bought. Boxing Day, and the day after that, I lay in a chair staring at the television. Between shows I picked up the phone and put it down again, picked it up and put it down. I was going to call Isobel, then I wasn't. I was going to call her, but I closed the connection carefully every time the phone began to ring at her end. Then I decided to go back to Stepney for my clothes.

Imagine this—

Two a.m. The house was quiet.

Or this—

I stood on the pavement. When I looked in through the uncurtained ground-floor window I could see the little display of lights on the front of Isobel's CD player.

Or this—

For a moment my key didn't seem to fit the door.

Imagine this—

Late at night you enter a house in which you've been as happy as anywhere in your life: probably happier. You go into the front room, where streetlight falls unevenly across the rugs, the furniture, the mantelpiece and mirrors. On the sofa are strewn a dozen colourful, expensive shirts, blue and red and gold like macaws and money. Two or three of them have been slipped out of their cellophane, carefully refolded and partly wrapped in Christmas paper. "Dear China—" say the tags. "Dearest China." There are signs of a struggle but not necessarily with someone else. A curious stale smell fills the room, and a chair has been knocked over. It's really too dark to see.

Switch on the lights. Glasses and bottles. Food trodden into the best kilim. Half-empty plates, two days old.

"Isobel? Isobel!"

The bathroom was damp with condensation, the bath itself full of cold water smelling strongly of rose oil. Wet towels were underfoot, there and in the draughty bedroom, where the light was already on and Isobel's pink velvet curtains, half-drawn, let a faint yellow triangle of light into the garden below. The lower sash was open. When I pulled it down, a cat looked up from the empty flowerbed: ran off. I shivered. Isobel had pulled all her favourite underclothes out onto the floor and trodden mascara into them. She had written in lipstick on the dressing table mirror, in perfect mirror writing: "Leave me alone."

I found her in one of the big blanket boxes.

When I opened the lid a strange smell—beeswax, dried roses, vomit, whiskey—filled the room. In there with her she had an empty bottle of Jameson's: an old safety razor of mine and two or three blades. She had slit her wrists. But first she had tried to shave all the downy, half-grown feathers from her upper arms and breasts. When I reached into the box they whirled up round us both, soft blue and grey, the palest rose-pink. Miami! In some confused attempt to placate me, she had tried to get out of the dream the way you get out of a coat.

She was still alive.

"China," she said. Sleepily, she held

T E A M O P E N B O O K

MEMBERS OF OUR PANEL, LISTED BELOW, WILL HELP US TURN A PAGE IN UFO RESEARCH. IF YOU

SEND US A REPORT FOR STUDY, IT WILL MOST LIKELY BE FORWARDED TO ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

Patrick Huyghe has been a science writer for 15 years. His work has appeared in *Omni*, *The Sciences*, *Health*, and *Audubon*, among others. He has produced documentaries for WGBH-Boston and WNET-New York and consulted on science exhibits for the Liberty Science Center in New Jersey. He has reported on UFOs for *Newsweek*, the *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, and *Omni*. Particularly notable was his investigative exposé on the infamous "High Rise Abductee," considered by some UFO researchers to be the case of the century.

Sherry Baker is an Atlanta-based freelance journalist and television consultant specializing in medicine, science, and the arts. She has also applied her significant investigative skills to the arena of UFOs. She has written on the subject for *Omni* for almost 15 years.

Jerome Clark is vice president of the J. Allen Hynek Center for UFO Studies (CUFOS) and edits CUFOS' bimonthly magazine *International UFO Reporter*. Author of a multi-volume history of UFOs, he is currently based in Canby, Minnesota.

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Joe Nickell, Ph.D., a former magician and private investigator for a world-famous detective agency, now teaches technical writing at the University of Kentucky. He is the author of several books, including *Mysterious Realms*, a casebook of paranormal, forensic, and historical mysteries; *Pen, Ink and Evidence*, a manual on historic document study; and (with psychologist Robert Baker) *Missing Pieces*, a manual for investigating paranormal claims.

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