

# Elvis Spotted in Estonia!

Glasnost goes bonkers as extraterrestrials, video healers and Abominable Snowmen distract comrades from everyday woes

The extraterrestrial not only phoned, it arrived at the appointed meeting place on time. Hardly believing his luck, the Soviet reporter flipped out his notebook and, in the finest tradition of glasnost, shot out a question: "And what were your feelings on your arrival, comrade spaceman?"

"I couldn't believe my three eyes," said the alien, a 9-ft.-tall assemblage of humps, arms and legs, outfitted in silver overalls and bronze boots. "This planet is so much like my own. When I landed in my pink space ball, the sunset lighted up tall non-

to the arts, ran the story, claiming it was following "the golden rule of journalism: the reader must know everything."

Freed by Mikhail Gorbachev to report on the corrupt and famous, Soviet journalists are busy pushing glasnost toward its tabloid outer limits—tracking down space visitors and exploring psychic mysteries. Science takes a whirl with fantasy. Fiction runs away with the facts. Humanoids abduct humans.

Earlier in the year, the newspaper *Socialist*



ILLUSTRATION FOR TIME BY PATRICE MCDONNELL

natural structures that resembled the state housing collectives back home. I've gone through your papers and read all about the two-headed Abominable Snowmen and the psychic cures for arthritis—Oh, the secret balsam-water diet that lets you lose 40 lbs. in two days and prevents tooth decay? Leonid wants me to bring the details back for him."

No. This story has not quite appeared in the Soviet media. But a report carried by the news agency TASS last week told of a similarly dressed, three-eyed space creature landing in late September in the town of Voronezh, 300 miles southeast of Moscow. There it zapped a 16-year-old boy with a gun that made him disappear temporarily. Pelted with questions from skeptics, TASS stood by its story. Said an agency official huffily: "It is not April Fools' today." *Sovietskaya Kultura*, a Communist Party paper dedicated

to the arts, reported an "encounter" between a milkmaid in the region of Perm and a cosmic creature that looked like a man but was "taller than average with shorter legs." Last week the Soviet newspaper *Komsomolskaya Pravda* declared that not only had an Abominable Snowman been caught stealing apples in the Saratov region but researchers had "registered the influence of energies" at a site in Perm, leading a geologist to conclude that they had discovered a landing field for flying saucers. The same story transcribed a telepathic discourse between Pavel Mukhortov, a journalist from Riga, and an all too knowing extraterrestrial.

"Where are you from?" asked Mukhortov.

"The Red Star of the Constellation of Libra is our home."

"Could you shift me to your planet?"

"That will mean no return for you and danger for us."

"What danger?"

"Thought bacteria."

To the chagrin of Soviet scientists, the thought bacteria are everywhere. Following the evening news on TV, hypnotist Anatoli Kashpirovsky holds séances to heal broken limbs, scars and blindness. Kashpirovsky claims to have helped hundreds of people through surgery without anesthesia and to have mesmerized others into losing up to 60 lbs. The Ukrainian has thousands of fans, apparently even among the bureaucracy. Last week, under official auspices, Kashpirovsky held a briefing at the Foreign Ministry Press Center. "People sometimes see me and idolize me," he said, adding that he could treat AIDS. "Give me 500 or 600 patients in a hall. I am sure that several months later some will be cured."

Another superstar is Alan Chumak, psychic-in-residence of *120 Minutes*, the Soviet equivalent of the *Today* show. Chumak can transmit his curative powers to heal the sick not only through live TV but even on videotape. Viewers can place glasses of water or jars of cold cream next to their sets to absorb his telepathic healing charges. Chumak has promised to solve the country's chronic food problems by energizing seeds, compelling them to produce larger crops. When Chumak was yanked off the air by skeptical superiors, a popular outcry brought him back. A Siberian fan in Bratsk wrote to a newspaper, "Here we can't buy medicine and we have no hope left for the Soviet health system. Don't criticize those who are trying to relieve our sufferings."

For many Soviets, however, the fascination with the magical and the extrasensory is a distasteful reminder of the final years of the Russian empire—with its demagogic holy men and a royal family under the sway of Rasputin. "It's deplorable that the state-run media would contribute to this hysteria," said Dr. Yakov Rudakov, a leading psychotherapist with the Institute for Physical-Technical Problems. Even the obsession with UFOs may be a projection of Soviet anxieties, a pseudoscientific distraction from the increasing economic and political burdens of daily life. Enraged that TASS publishes such reports, one Muscovite said, "It's a reflection of a country falling apart."

A disillusioned party member views state sponsorship of psychic and UFO studies as a new sort of official opiate. Says he: "They've been feeding us rubbish about the dream of Communism for years, and we now see they were lying. At least this gives us something new to dream about." So the next time aliens approach and ask for directions, point them toward Moscow. The Soviets need them more than ever.

—By Howard G. Chua-Eoan

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