

by Martin S. Kottmeyer

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Graying Mantis

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In April 1996, Lewels met a lady he calls Rebecca Grant who developed a relationship with a mantis being she nicknamed MU. His more formal designation was Master of the Universe. It tells her that in about twenty years we will suffer the full extent of the ecological damage humanity did to the ozone layer and the oceans. "The human race is essentially, if not actually, extinct."<sup>1</sup> It is an old message, but the messenger at least is new, indeed strangely so. Where earlier couriers were blonde-haired utopians or bulgy-brained grays, the twist of having a prophet appear as a big space bug is distinctly surreal.

To say this was chosen to make the message more credible or authoritative sounds doubtful if you are not familiar with the arcana of ufology. Frankly, people new to ufology would be well within the bounds of conventional propriety to think Lewels and Rebecca are certifiable. Man-sized praying mantises are strictly impossible by any reasonable standards of biology. The limbs would collapse. The innards could not get oxygen. Organs would compress and burst. Should humans care about the eco-philosophy of something as nasty as an insect, let alone one famed for its cannibalistic love feasts? This is a test of tolerance only the hardiest, or tenderest, of liberals would embrace.

Embracing the idea that God is a praying mantis is so far out there it sucks for humor. If God is a praying mantis, what is IT praying to? If a man prays to a mantis, do you realize it is a prayer to prey-er? Hey, do realize this finally explains Huxley's saying that God had an inordinate fondness for beetles!

With that out of my system, we can get down to a more serious question. How did ufology reach this surrealistic milestone in its ascent to newer, improved madresses? There is some history here I feel is worth delving into. Rebecca's MU is not the first praying mantis alien on the ufological scene. They have become numerous enough in recent years to appear in several taxonomies as a distinct type, race, or species.<sup>2</sup> There are at least 26 cases of people seeing or encountering praying mantis aliens that I can cite.

What immediately stands out in considering this race is how very new it is to ufology. UFO case catalogues compiled by the Lorenzens, Bowen, Vallee, and Bloecher in the 1960s and 1970s show not one instance of a praying mantis alien among the hundreds of entities they collected.<sup>3</sup> Bullard's exhaustive study of all abduction cases up through 1985 similarly does not tally a single instance of a praying mantis alien being reported among those 270 studied.<sup>4</sup> There are pre-1990s grasshopper-headed aliens that have been reclassified as mantis aliens by certain ufologists. This might be inspired by the sensibility that led Aleister Crowley to versify that praying mantises are just blaspheming grasshoppers.

It comes across as sloppy, however, and invites misunderstandings.

Among the earliest documented claims of alien mantis contact to gain prominence is Linda Porter's account made to Richard Haines in 1988. Linda Howe gives details of that claim in the second volume of *Glimpses of Other Realities*. Strangely, the drawing looks more like a monster in the movie *Poltergeist* (1982).<sup>5</sup> Howe has also reported on Jeanne Robinson's 1990 correspondence to ufologists relaying telepathic communications about the aliens. She reported the "Praying Mantis type" alien is ancient and a rare branch of the Grays. It is the "Great Mother" of many species. It supervises exploration and research. It is an impure species whose heritage is being passed on in compatible bipeds.<sup>6</sup> "You're not my mother! You're not my mother!"

The book that Robinson's case is discussed in also includes the case of David Huggins. The chronology of his claims is muddled. Huggins has drawings of a mantis encounter that he said took place when he was eight years old – and, by inference, in the 1950s. There is, however, no indication of the date when he first claimed such a contact that can be documented. Given what we said about the absence of any such encounters in the earlier literature, it sounds like a backdated anachronism and historians are obliged to sternly beware the claim. Some of his paintings of greys are dated 1987, but the paintings of the mantis aliens are undated. Whether they precede or follow Porter and Robinson on the timeline is unknown, but it should be noted that Carlo McCormick reports, "Huggins only began recovering his blocked memories of alien contact in 1988."<sup>7</sup> Some of his more naughty portraits of the aliens have been appearing in *Saucer Smear*. The July 10, 1998, issue includes a minor masterpiece about a mantis alien overseeing an exosemination procedure.

Howe also gives a transcript of an Aug. 6, 1990, hypnosis session of Cindy Tindle describing an abduction by a bug wearing a wig that makes her think, "It's my mom, but it's not my mom." Linda Howe indexes the case as being a mantis case. These are all sufficiently contemporary to each other to wonder about influences, but the more important point is that 1990 gives the impression here of being the start of mantis-mania.

Subsequent to 1990 the mantis beings form a steady strand of UFO abduction mythology. A giant mantis appears in Strieber's fiction work *Majestic* (1992, chapter 26). David in Karla Turner's *Into the Fringe* (1992, p. 205) sees a mantis and Karla suddenly has memories of looking at a giant grasshopper and insisting, "You're not my mother! You're not my mother!" She said it haunted her nightmares for several years when she very young. Remember Tindle.

A mantis appears in the 1992 Houston mass abduction. Brian Thompson, at the 1992 Abduction Study Conference, talks of a 3-foot-tall praying mantis seen by a crowd of people in Cincinnati. Len Stringfield purportedly had independent confirmation of this incident by two other people.<sup>8</sup> In February 1992, Ken Rose has drawn a mantis being called *The Controller* perched before a console with a myriad of switches. He "studies Everything – makes Everything happen – ALL that happens, he makes happen...the overseer is watching."<sup>9</sup>

They turn up among Richard Boylan's subjects in his 1994 book, most specifically the account of "Mike." Strieber recounts a letter about a teen pinned to the ground by a six-foot long mantis. His family chased it back into the woods and they still hear the sounds it makes occasionally. In a different letter a child tells how she was taken up to a life raft floating in the air and saw what seems to be her gran, "but I am afraid it was great big bug."<sup>10</sup> Remember Tindle, again. The sister of Kathie Davis from *Intruders* steps forward to recall a 1965 encounter with a praying mantis-headed being.<sup>11</sup>

It turns up in Kim Carlson's abductee artwork in 1995. Lewels cites the experiences of Rebecca Grant and Rita Peregrino. David Easler tells of meeting a praying mantis that helped him recover childhood memories. His DNA is sampled and he believes he has been genetically altered.<sup>12</sup> In the July/August 1997 *Ufo Magazine*, a headline warns "Mantis Creatures Join Alien Troops" and reports that abductee researchers John Carpenter and Barbara Lamb have such cases.

Elsewhere we learn a lady called Miss D dreams of praying mantis people who stuck a needle in her stomach, a distant echo of the Betty Hill case.<sup>13</sup> On the ZetaTalk Web site, a channel named Nancy, inspired by Zeta Reticulan material, indicates that praying mantis alien forms are actually mammalian hominoid (sic) rather than insectile in origin. They affirm their superior telepathic abilities and are involved in Earth's Transformation. Few in numbers, they are "all in the

Service-to-Other orientation." Another channel named Dorothy Roeder indicates the giant mantis race is called the Ataiens and that they once immobilized evil aliens in the past.

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Peter Brookesmith, in his new book *Alien Abductions*, adds to the roster the cases of John Velez, Clarke Hathaway, and "Kathie." A visit to The Practical Alientomologist Web site will give you a brief account of a galactic mantis encountered by a person on psychedelic mushrooms. It had cartoon details about it and was testing and probing the person, advising him not to struggle.

The emergence of the mantis alien race in the 1990s puzzled me for a time. Those earlier cases collected by Howe seemed idiosyncratic and unlikely to spawn imitations. Lewels raising them to the pantheon of gods seemed hard to understand. One puzzle piece I was missing was hiding in plain sight among the papers of E.B.E. lore. Somehow I overlooked the crucial announcement in a statement by John Lear dated Dec. 29, 1987.

Very early into it he announces to the world what he calls the "horrible truth." General James H. Doolittle inspected the flying saucer that crashed in Spitzbergen, Norway, in 1952 and made a discovery then-to-fore known to only a handful of men. "They were indeed ugly little creatures, shaped like praying mantises and who were more advanced than us by perhaps a billion years. Of the original group that were the first to discover the 'horrible truth,' several committed suicide, the most prominent of which was Defense Secretary James V. Forrestal, who jumped to his death from a 16th story hospital window. Forrestal's records are sealed to this day. President Truman quickly put a lid on the secret and turned the screws so tight that the general public still thinks that flying saucers are a joke."<sup>14</sup>

The talk of a truth so terrible it drives men to madness and suicide uniquely echoes the tradition of H.P. Lovecraft's fiction. Contact with the secret tome of darkness *The Necronomicon* was certain doom in his universe of horror. His monsters had an uncanny ability to unhinge the minds of those who encountered them. Lovecraft's monsters tended more to giant seafood combinations than to big bugs, however. Still, the famously cannibalistic mating practices of earthly praying mantises make them a finely chosen horror on basic principles.

When I indicated earlier that praying mantises are surreal, the choice of adjectives was precise. Surrealists had a passion for the praying mantis. William Pressley did an extensive study, "The Praying Mantis in Surrealist Art" *Art Bulletin*, 55, 600-15, showing many examples and discussing how the erotic violence and devouring sexuality they came to symbolize drew their fascination. Andre Masson captions one painting with the equation "Semiramis: Ishtar, Earth Mother, Mantis." Recall that Jeanne Robinson echoed part of that equation in her description of the mantis race.

M.C. Escher did a wood engraving of a mantis, about the same size as current mantis aliens, hugging the chest of a bishop. Enough is known of Escher's life to state that this 1935 drawing titled "Dream (Mantis Religioso)" was a humorously intended experiment in drawing techniques combining elements from earlier works he had done. It is known the mantis is taken from a drawing he did five years earlier while visiting Pentadattilo, Italy. A normal-sized mantis had jumped onto Escher's folder and stayed there immobile for such a long time he used it as a model.<sup>15</sup> Despite the title, it was not based on any dreams or alien experiences so far as the record of his life can show. There is nothing to suggest anything out of the ordinary was happening in his life.

Of less impressive pedigree are various depictions of mantis aliens in pop culture. The 1951 bubblegum card series *Jets\*Rockets\*Spacemen* had a card illustrating Bold Explorers killing Mantis Men on the Moon while checking on a United Nations observatory.<sup>16</sup> The 1952 *Weird Science* comic #13 has praying mantis aliens spearheading an invasion of Earth.<sup>17</sup> On the Saturday morning kid show *Space Ghost* (1966) one alien villain was a mantis named Zorak. A 1978 comic *Star Weevils* shows a saucernaut riding a mantis horseback-style. As recently as 1995, the *Chigs of Space: Above and Beyond* were imagined to be like praying mantises or walking sticks.

Of even more trivial relevance are the movies *The Deadly Mantis* (1957) and *Son of Godzilla* (1968), and *The Applegates* (1991). They are not alien, but the depictions of giant mantises (a.k.a. "GiMantises" in the *Godzillian* film) do prove the impulse to seek this particular type of big bug as an object of horror, more evident in intent than achievement.

The praying mantis is very much a new detail with no provenance.

A more formal appraisal of Lear's "horrible truth" is necessarily deeply damning. To begin with, it amounts to bald assertion with not even a semblance of supporting evidence. The revelation has been injected into a long-standing piece of saucer legendry, the Spitzbergen saucer crash. The praying mantis is very much a new detail with no provenance. Ideally, historians favor earlier accounts to later ones and this detail has no roots connecting it to the earliest material. The Spitzbergen tale has been dissected by ufologist Ole J. Braenne and shown to contain impossible details such as travel times by planes of the era well outside their capability. It seems to be a fraud through and through.<sup>18</sup> The fact that Lear made a raft of other claims that have not panned out in subsequent investigations is also reason enough to reject the "horrible truth" as a horror fiction.<sup>19</sup>

Back in late 1980s however, Lear seemed to be someone important and a source to ponder for many in the UFO field. A few did not buy his story, but that hardly mattered. They did nothing to stop his "horrible truth" from capturing a wide enough audience to pick up his new myth, live it, and build upon it. We can confidently guess it was Lear's assertion of a billion-year ancestry that made Rebecca's MU-bug a god in her eyes and lent her ecological concerns the highest authority. It was an equally short step from Lear's Lovecraftian Elder Gods to Lewel's recycled ruminations of a God too horrible to face.

There is one other piece of this puzzle that needs to put into place however. There was one other UFO personality preceding John Lear who brought mantis beings into ufology – Whitley Strieber. On March 14, 1986, he was regressed to explore memories behind a 1967 incident at his grandmother's house. The regression turns up the image of "a big bug." At first blush, "A praying mantis is what it looks like. Only it's so big. How can it be so big?" He vacillates back and forth on whether it really does or does not look like a mantis. Besides the size, there are black eyes that seem inconsistent with a normal mantis. Regardless, it serves the purpose normally accorded big bugs. It scares people. Specifically, it stands in the middle of the living room and freaks the bejesus out of his son. He tells the story in *Communion* (1987).<sup>20</sup>

It seems appropriate that a horror writer as honored as Strieber should introduce such a creature into the stew of horror gimmickry already present in the alien abduction mythos. It is worth noting he had the sophistication to at least bracket his experience in disbelief. He recognizes that mantises can't really be as big as he was seeing with his own eyes, even if he omits the details of the problem. The experience occupies only a couple of pages and does not tie in with his other experiences beyond there being occasional big bug traits among the other aliens. Though it does not form a big part of *Communion*, the book was widely read and likely inspired Lear's revelation and formed the precedent for later abductees to incorporate such bugs into their stories. I trust I don't have to review here the doubts not only skeptics, but ufologists, have expressed about the material reality of Strieber's visions.

The genealogy of the mantis alien so clearly points to the effects of cultural factors I don't feel it is even necessary to recycle my warnings about space insects and big bugs being a uniquely modern Western creation.<sup>21</sup> This is one species of alien that should make atheists of us all. Let us prey.

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