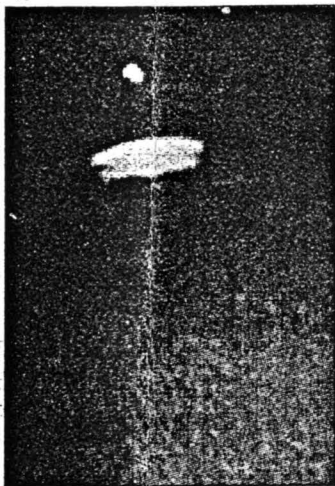


# THE SUNDAY STAR

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## They're ba-a-ck! UFO sightings soar

BY PATRICIA ORWEN  
FEATURE WRITER



**UFO MYSTERY:** They're the stuff of science fiction — but are they real?

In the small Northwest Territories town of Fort Resolution, residents have been mesmerized nightly since Jan. 4 by a mysterious display of pulsating multicolored lights dancing in the twilight sky.

In England last week, British aviation experts announced they could not explain a close encounter between a passenger jet and a wedge-shaped UFO, emblazoned with small white lights.

In South Korea in December, television footage inadvertently shot by a cameraman clearly showed a large metallic disk flying at supersonic speed.

Sightings of unidentified flying objects — real or imagined

— are nothing new.

But skeptics were dealt a blow a few weeks ago, when astronomers at San Francisco State University announced the discovery of two large, potentially life-sustaining globes a mere 35 light years away.

Could the stuff of science fiction be real?

The answers are elusive.

"What you believe may depend on what kind of science you practise," says Michael Persinger, director of the Behavioral Neuroscience Laboratory at Sudbury's Laurentian University.

About 350 UFO sightings were reported across Canada last year. That's more than double the number seven years ago, according to University of Mani-

toba researcher Chris Rutkowski.

Most sightings — 90 per cent at least — turn out to be identifiable planes, stars, meteors or weather balloons. The remainder, like the wedge-shaped UFO that buzzed the British Airways Boeing 737 on Jan. 6, 1995, remain unsolved mysteries.

"We've never had a case like this where we've looked at all the possibilities and still we just don't know," says Anne Noonan, a press officer with the London-based Civil Aviation Authority.

Noonan says people on the ground spotted the flying object, but for some inexplicable reason, it didn't appear on radar

☛ Please see **Could**, A13

# Could the stuff of sci-fi be real?

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screens. The jet's pilot and co-pilot said the craft passed so close to them that they ducked. It moved silently and without creating wind turbulence.

"We don't know if there's an extraterrestrial possibility here," says Noonan. "We just know it's nothing we can explain."

Both Persinger and British researcher Paul Devereux maintain, however, that there are other possibilities to consider in such cases. Most strange lights answering to the typical UFO description are actually caused by normal processes within our own planet Earth, they say.

UFO sightings typically occur in areas with both strange weather and geophysical activity, such as tremors and earthquakes. Being in an area where such geological phenomena is occurring can cause a temporary malfunction in the brain, which may trigger a wide range of fantasies.

And then there's the fear of the approaching millennium — millennial hysteria, as some refer to it.

"People now generally feel a lack of security," Persinger says. "They see that their jobs and marriages — once believed to be so stable — may not last."

The greater one's emotional stress or instability, he says, the more one is likely to have a "visitation experience" — a sense of being in the presence of someone or something from another world.

## 'There is something interesting going on here'

"TV's aliens are likely to figure in the visitations because the media have made the aliens our gods," Persinger says.

But don't tell any of this to those who say they have had "real contact."

Dr. Laurie Vassos, a medical doctor in Saskatoon, says he has been transported out of his home to the interior of a strange craft by aliens. And he is treating patients who say they, too, have been abducted.

"In my case, these aren't just vivid dreams," says Vassos. "My senses tell me that my experiences are real."

"I've seen the triangular ships in the sky and I've been with them," says Joyce Halfin, who hosts a bi-weekly Interstellar-UFO show on Rogers Cable television in Newmarket.

Though the town of St. Paul, Alta., actually has a flying saucer landing pad, Halfin says the aliens she knows will dock soon in underground caverns be-

neath Bradford.

The aliens believe that "we've messed up the planet... we've lost touch with nature," says Halfin.

According to her off-planetary sources, things may get worse on Earth in the near future. We may see more floods, earthquakes and volcanic activity. Aliens, she says, will land here in large numbers in order to assist us in the planetary chaos. Some of us may even depart the planet with them in their spaceships.

The ETs are also studying our genetic material and creating a new species — part human, part alien, says a Bowmanville woman who asks to remain anonymous.

## 'In my case, these aren't just vivid dreams'

She says she and her 27-year-old daughter have been abducted by aliens countless times in recent years and they now run a monthly support group for about a dozen other UFO abductees.

Their space abduction stories are similar in detail to those of nearly 100 other UFO abductees interviewed by Pulitzer Prize-winning Harvard psychiatrist John Mack.

In his 1994 book *Abduction: Human Encounters With Aliens*, Mack writes of people being transported through walls on beams of light and then being lifted into spaceships. His subjects told him of monitoring devices implanted in their sinuses and eyeballs.

They also said that the hairless big-eyed aliens — known in UFO parlance as grays — performed continual sexual experiments on them with the objective of creating a human-alien hybrid race.

Mack remains convinced these stories were not dreams. Nor were they anything he could explain psychiatrically.

After hundreds of hours of work with people who say they were abducted, he concludes that "we are dealing here with a profound mystery that has potentially vast implications for our contemporary world..."

"It seems impossible to avoid the observation that the alien abduction phenomenon is occurring in the context of a planetary ecological crisis... and that information about this situation is often powerfully conveyed by the alien beings to the experiencers."

Mack's book quickly became a bestseller and he soon found himself the most credible spokesperson for the thousands who say they have been kidnapped by aliens.

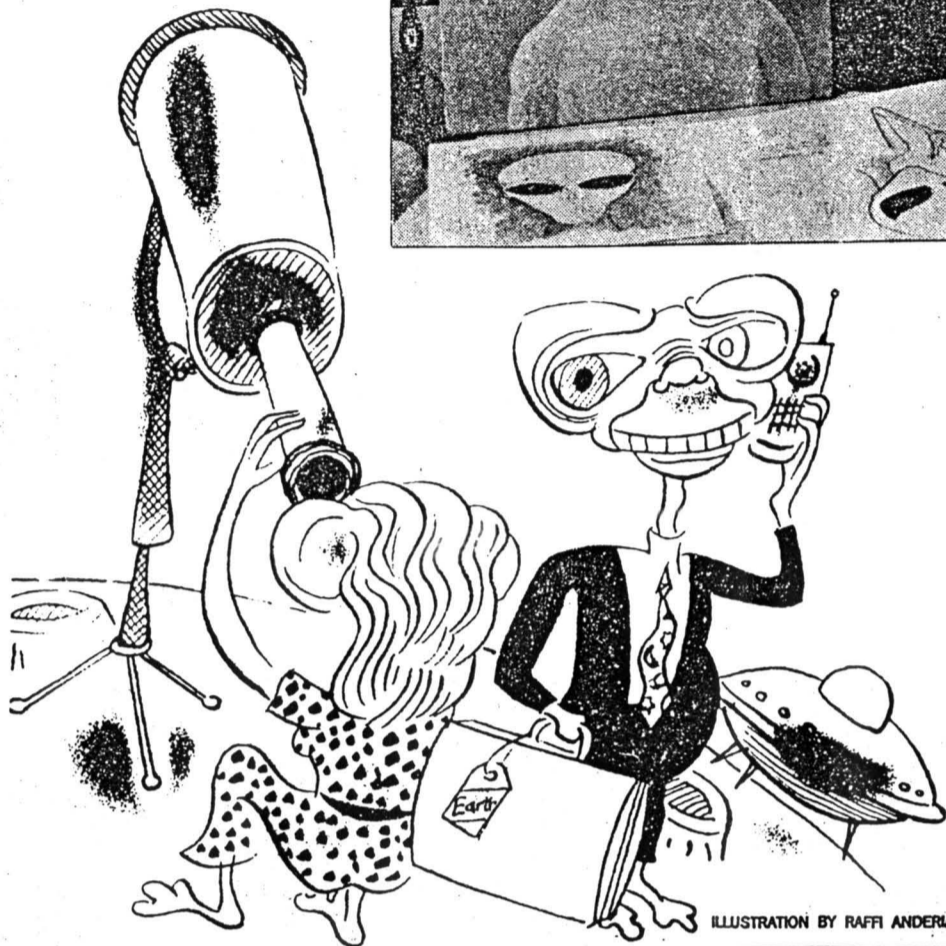


ILLUSTRATION BY RAFFI ANDERIAN / TORONTO STAR



**BIG-EYED:** John Velez with sketches of alien abductors will appear on PBS special Feb. 2.

**IN TOUCH:** Joyce Halfin the Interstellar-UFO cable TV show in Newmarket, says aliens she knows will soon dock caverns in Bradford.

He has since appeared on numerous television programs, including *Unsolved Mysteries* and the Canadian Discovery Channel's recent series of UFO programs *Alien Week*.

But in some academic circles, his work is considered controversial, even unscientific.

"There is something interesting going on here," astronomer Carl Sagan acknowledges in the PBS documentary *Kidnapped by UFOs?*, airing Feb. 27.

"But whether it is going on in inner space or in outer space, that is the question."

Harvard medical school dean Daniel Tosteson launched an inquiry into Mack's conduct, concluding it last year with a warning that Mack not let his enthusiasm for UFO research steer him from the path of professionalism.

Mack has come under fire because he uses hypnosis to aid his patients in recalling their ab-

duction experiences, says Saskatchewan's Vassos.

"The problem with hypnosis," says Vassos, "is that you don't always know if what people are remembering is really true."

Vassos has seen about 20 patients who believe they have had experiences with extraterrestrials. He says, however, he does not use hypnosis in helping them.

Rather, he first looks for other possible explanations for what they say has happened to them. He may look for medical causes or refer them to psychologists or psychiatrists for evaluation.

"My theory is that, in some of these cases, ETs are interacting with these beings. The difficulty is in trying to objectively or scientifically prove this. However, if people begin to feel more comfortable about coming forward and discussing this without the fear of being labeled, we may get closer to the truth."

## Ottawa bows out but mystery lingers on

Reports of strange flying objects in Canadian skies are soaring.

But the government agency that has collected information on such strange sightings for the past 30 years says it's now officially out of the UFO business.

"Budget cuts," explains Folke Creutzberg, a geophysicist with the National Research Council in Ottawa.

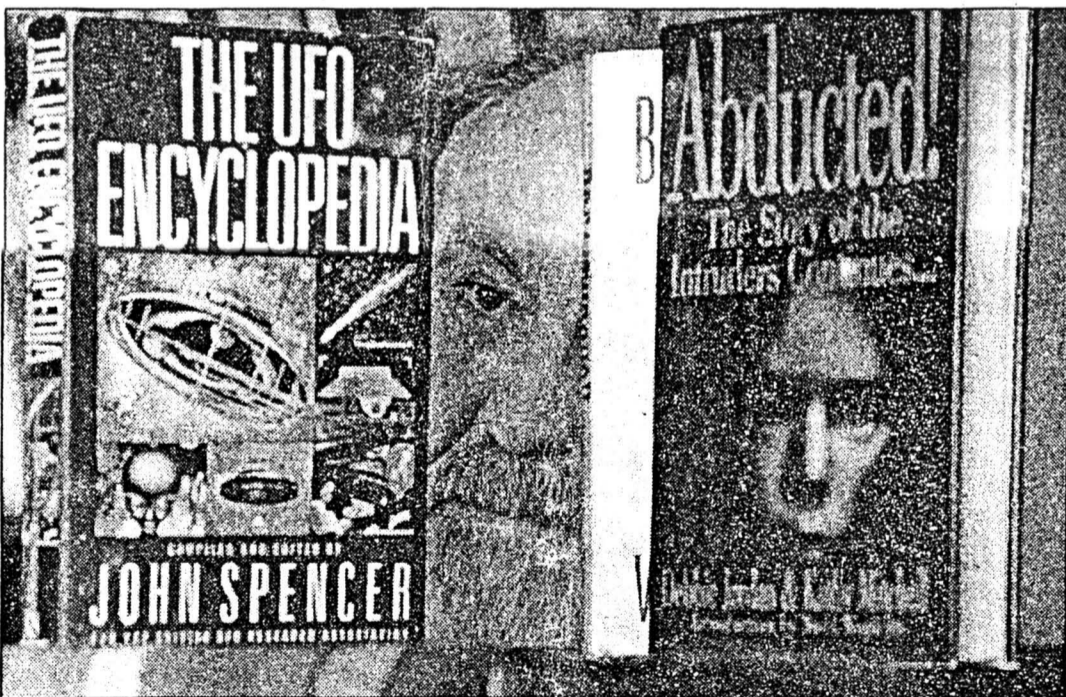
His job has been phased out and he says the NRC wasn't doing anything with the UFO reports, anyway.

The NRC took over responsibility for UFOs in the late '60s after a Canadian Forces headquarters study determined the sightings didn't pose a threat to national security. It was suggested back then that these flying objects might be of some scientific interest.

But the council decided it would study only those UFOs that turned out to be meteors. It simply stored reports on any mysterious sightings, sending them to the National Archives in Ottawa at the end of each year.

"It's too bad the NRC lost interest, especially now that so many people are coming forward saying they've seen things," says Chris Rutkowski of the University of Manitoba.

He has been collecting the information from the NRC since '88 and adding it to reports made to UFO researchers across Canada. Each year, he compiles a complete Canadian sightings report.



RICK EGLINTON / TORONTO STAR

**TRACING LEADS:** Errol Bruce-Knapp is an investigator with a Toronto-based research group that gets about 50 calls a week about UFOs.

"The interest in all this is so high. I'm constantly getting E-mail from people or calls and requests that sightings be investigated... it's too bad there isn't more official interest."

The mayor of the tiny Northwest Territories town of Fort Resolution agrees.

He called the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the military and York University astronomy professor Paul Delaney after people began seeing strange lights.

According to Delaney, the Fort Resolution sightings aren't UFOs. They're the planet Venus and the star Sirius.

But townsfolk aren't satisfied. "That still doesn't explain the other lights that at least five people have been seeing near the highway," says a baffled mayor Euan Hunter.

"It's a real mystery... It's

got everybody out looking... When I first saw these lights it blew my socks off."

Hunter isn't sure where to go next with his story. The federal defence department was interested when the sightings began. Col. Pierre Leblanc travelled to the town of 500 people, though cloudy skies prevented him from seeing anything.

Leblanc filed a report with his superiors in Ottawa, but that's as far as it is expected to go.

"Why isn't there more official interest in all this?" wonders Errol Bruce-Knapp of MUFON Ontario. MUFON, the Mutual UFO Network, is a Toronto-based UFO research group, affiliated with MUFON, an international organization with 5,500 members worldwide.

MUFON takes about 50 calls a week from people who either want to report UFOs or talk

about other aspects of the alien-UFO phenomenon.

"There is so much semi-concrete evidence... So many people who talk about their experiences... So many people talking about sightings... These are not anomalies that are easily explained as geomagnetic disturbances," he says.

Could there be a cover-up? Bruce-Knapp is among many in the UFO field who believe it's likely.

"It's a cosmic Watergate," charges Stanton Friedman, a nuclear physicist and UFO lecturer based in Fredericton.

Creutzberg says he hears this conspiracy theory all the time and knows of no evidence to support it.

Not only is nobody hiding anything, but nobody is even interested in UFOs, he says.

— Orwen



KEITH BEATY / TORONTO STAR

## Tomorrows revealed — for dollar bills today

BY LESLIE SCRIVENER STAFF REPORTER

Amber Simas wasn't making any promises.

But the tea leaves in the plastic cup were full of them.

Wonderful promises: a three-diamond ring, Indiana Jones style adventures, a trip to Australia and, most wonderful of all, an Oscar.

Well, like an Oscar, and a "New York style presentation" to go with it.

Simas, tea cup reader and clairvoyant, is one of 135 exhibitors at this year's Psychic, Mystics and Seers Fair at Exhibition Place. She's insightful enough to tell the buyer of psychic services to beware.

"The information given during each session is meant for entertainment purposes only," her brochure cautions.

Rats. While Simas' fees were only \$25, dozens of palm and tarot card readers, crystal ball gazers, channelers and interpreters of past lives seemed not to see that the current economy has a lot of people struggling.

Readings were in the \$40 to \$60 range, up to the \$90, and business seemed slow.

"It was expensive," complained Helen Baskett, 72.

"But I like to come to find out what's going to happen later on. No matter what your age is, you like to know."

Psychic Laura was charging \$10 for one question.

But Narayana, smooth, dignified, with a wall of newspaper clippings proclaiming his skills, was offering a free answer to one question.

"He has an over-inflated ego," he advised a young woman. "You deserve better."

Olha Hnatyshyn, fourth-generation card reader and psychic, was among those promising 90 per cent accuracy.

"I don't even advertise. I increase my clientele by word of mouth. People are stunned. They say, 'How do you know?' Listen, I'm psychic, I should know."

Four women from the Healing Temples worked energetically over a woman wrapped in a comforter, waving gemstones and waving their arms in mysterious motions.

The stones draw out negative emotions, explained Tasha Mir, whose "earthly name" is Carol Colangelo and who remembers coming to Atlantis with her parents 25,000 years ago in a spacecraft from the planet Thu.