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Prologue

I have never seen a UFO, I have never noticed anything in the sky that didn't seem to belong there, nor can I claim to have been invited -- or hauled against my will -- inside a landed saucer.

During my formative years I read no books promising to present the "startling, never-before-revealed facts" about UFOs. I wasn't even acquainted with the world of science fiction prior to taking a university course called "the literature of the fantastic." (Although I have probably seen every episode of the 1960s television program "Green Acres," I can't recall watching more than two or three episodes of "Star Trek" from beginning to end.) And over the years nothing about the respective claims of UFO disciples and UFO debunkers has convinced me of the need to reach definitive conclusions about the ultimate nature and origins of this puzzling phenomenon.

Instead, I have watched with fascination as a persistent body of remarkable stories (or in UFO jargon, "sighting reports") has given rise to provocative mythic horizons and imaginal realms. In the pages that follow, I explore the ways in which these symbolic worlds are real, vital, and filled with significance whether or not any particular UFO was the planet Venus or a Venusian starship.

In *Creation Myth*, Scottish religion scholar R.J. Stewart defines a myth as "a story embodying and declaring a pattern of relationship between humanity, other forms of life, and the environment." Joseph Campbell, in turn, writes that "the first and most essential service of a mythology is this one of opening mind and heart to the utter wonder of all being." Both definitions are relevant to this study, as are questions concerning parallels between modern UFO events and accounts in world mythology of human interactions with extraordinary beings.

To the extent that the figures of myth are characteristically depicted as quarreling, cheating, vulnerable, seeking revenge, tearing apart and being torn apart, we find evidence of "mythic patterns" among competing UFO researchers as they contend to fashion for the UFO phenomenon a consistent mythos, or plot; and as their very efforts to do so forms a mythos of its own: an epic drama of individuals seeking to make meaning of epic events and experiences in which (to borrow an apt phrase from the psychologist James Hillman) "the supposed surety of fact and illusion of fiction exchange their clothes."

Time after time, this exchange reaches the same impasse: testimony from The People on one side, dismissive responses from The Authorities on the other. In the fertile void of this deadlock, extraordinary possibilities -- about the nature of mind and matter, spirit and soul, heaven and earth, the destiny of the cosmos, their plans for us -- enter the debate, transforming the traditional celestial UFO into a metaphysical one.

"We have here a golden opportunity of seeing how a legend is formed,' wrote the great philosopher-psychologist Carl Jung about flying saucers. I heartily agree. For over forty years, the curiously compelling acronym "UFO" -- as an idea at work in the world soul -- has shaped human belief and imagination in complicated ways. A robust contemporary prodigy has emerged in our midst, enticing us with the vivid ambivalence of its images, systematically resisting

definitive explanation, fostering rancorous debate, comprising a provocative enigma of global proportions.

This is a chronicle of the wanderings of that prodigy.
