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Prologue

On a beautiful, clear day in late April 1980, I found myself climbing a steep hill across the bay from the city of Rio de Janeiro to locate the spot where Brazil's most dramatic UFO event had occurred. It was a case in which two men had been found dead in circumstances the police had never been able to explain. It was widely believed that they had died while awaiting a signal from the sky, possibly communication from a UFO.

If such an event could be validated, we might get closer to a proof of the reality of UFOs. At the same time, however, many of our ideas about the phenomenon would have to be drastically revised. Gone would be the gentle visitors, the scientific explorers, the mischievous aliens that fill the pages of UFO books. Gone, too, the shining presences and the angelic visions of the "New Age." At a minimum we would have to enlarge the scope of our hypotheses. A more complex and dangerous picture would emerge.

Unfortunately, everything I knew about the case had come to me secondhand through the UFO rumor mill or through the media, a notoriously unreliable source in Latin America.' The only way to learn more about the precise circumstances of the event was to fly to Rio and climb that hill.

With me were my wife, Janine, and a small party of investigators: Saulo Soares de Souza, a detective from Rio police headquarters who specializes in long-term follow-up of unsolved cases; Mario Dias, a journalist; Alberto Dirma, a press photographer; a local French teacher who was kind enough to serve as my interpreter; and the first adult who had seen the bodies that August day in 1966, when a group of boys came running to his house. He had accompanied them to the police station at the foot of the hill, where they described their grisly find to the officer in charge, Oscar Nunes.

The hill is located in the Rio suburb of Niteroi and is called Morro do Vintem, literally the hill of the penny coin. It is overgrown with short trees and bushes with long, blade-like leaves. As we stepped from rock to rock along the path that snakes its way up the hill, the landscape changed from the houses, the bungalows, the cars of Niteroi's streets, to a busy tangle of shacks crowded with curious children who run everywhere in Brazil. Higher still were vacant, rusty spots on the mountain and grassy areas where lovers or smugglers meet, where kids chase birds, where strange deals are made.

The police, we were told, are wary of the area. It is noteworthy that on the night the bodies were discovered, Officer Nunes had decided to postpone the search until sunrise.

If the view at half-point is confused and disconcerting, the scene at the top is altogether different. It sweeps across miles of earth and ocean, encompassing one of the most glorious landscapes on earth: Niteroi, Rio, the Sugarloaf, the whole bay. Often shrouded in low clouds or rain, or marred by the heavy industrial smog that hangs more and more frequently over the metropolis, the Morro do Vintem was absolutely clear when we made the climb that day. Framed by tall bushes that provided welcome shade, the site was more worthy of a travel poster than of a murder scene.

Finally we stopped at a place where the earth was almost bare, showing only grainy dirt among short grass, with a wall of wide-leaf bushes hiding us from direct sunlight. Detective Soares spoke and the interpreter translated: "This is where they were found."

"I don't understand how they could expect to see the sky from here," I said, "or why anybody would suggest they were waiting for some signal."

The question started a flurry of exchanges in Portuguese between Detective Soares and the short, brown-skinned man who, fourteen years before, had led the police to the bodies.

"He says the bushes were a lot shorter then," the interpreter told me. "You could see the sky."

"Ask him how it happened."

The first boy to find the corpses, who was eighteen at the time, had been looking for his kite. He found the bodies dressed in neat suits and new raincoats, lying on their backs.

Nothing had been done that evening in 1966; the local police felt it was prudent to postpone any efforts until the next day. At daybreak, however, the official party of officers and fire fighters climbed the steep trail, reached the spot, and discovered that the boy had not lied to them. One of the strangest investigations in the records of the Brazilian police had just begun. It would go through three distinct phases.

The first phase was straightforward, routine detective work.

The investigators found no blood, no signs of any violence at the site. The two corpses were lying peacefully side by side. Next to them were crude metal masks as well as slips of paper covered with notes. One of these notes contained elementary electrical formulas. Also found was a crushed piece of aluminized blue and white paper, some cellophane soaked in a chemical substance, and a handkerchief with the initials AMS.

The skin of the corpses had a pinkish color and showed possible burns, but decomposition had progressed to the point where such a finding was not significant. Indeed, the coroner, Astor de Melo, soon concluded that death was by natural causes (cardiac arrest) and closed the file. His examination of the bowels had revealed no poison. The men had died sometime between Tuesday, August 16, and Saturday, August 20.

The identity of the victims was soon established. They were electronics technicians Miguel Jose Viana, 34, married and the father of several young children, and Manuel Pereira da Cruz, 32, also married. Both lived in the town of Campos where they were well known, respected citizens. Both specialized in putting up local TV transmitters and repeaters. Miguel had 157,000 cruzeiros in a plastic bag inside his clothing. Manuel had only 4,000 cruzeiros.

The police were able to reconstruct the movements of the men between the morning of Wednesday, August 17, and the time when they took their position on the hilltop. They had departed Campos at 9:00 A.M. by bus to Niteroi, leaving word that they intended to go to Sao Paulo to buy a car and electronic equipment. They were, said to have 3 million cruzeiros (about \$1,000) with them.

Their bus reached Niteroi at 2:00 P.M. It was raining. They purchased identical raincoats for 9,400 cruzeiros. At a bar on Marques de Parana Street they bought a bottle of mineral water and kept the receipt. At about 3:15 P.M. they set off on foot up the path to the Morro do Vintem, where they were observed about 5:00 P.M. It was the last time they were seen alive.

Unhappy with the stated cause of death, the man in charge of security for the state of Rio, Col. Eduardo de Cento Pfeil, held a review meeting with police delegate Jose Venancio Bettencourt and an electronics technician. The next day he contacted Toledo Pizza director of the Coroners Institute. Dr. Alberto Farah was asked to conduct a second autopsy. The viscera were removed and analyzed. The pathologist also looked for possible injection sites in the bodies, but the second autopsy revealed nothing new.

On the basis of these facts the police examined a number of hypotheses. Could robbery have been a motive for the crime? A large sum of money seemed to have disappeared between the time Miguel and Manuel left Campos with nearly 3 million cruzeiros and the time they were found dead. But this hypothesis did not explain the manner of death

and the absence of a struggle.

Were the men spies? The Morro do Vintem is a strategic spot from which the entire area can be surveyed. More prosaically, it would also be an ideal location for a TV repeater, the type of electronic installation in which the two men specialized. The absence of any violence, again, seemed to exclude espionage and foul play.

Were the men smugglers? Currency regulations make foreign electronic equipment difficult to obtain in Brazil. But it was hard to reconcile these scenarios with the manner of death. If they had been found with knives in their stomachs, in an isolated spot in an area of Niteroi that was known to harbor all kinds of borderline activities, the case would have attracted little notice. Why would a murderer leave so many mysterious clues: the notes, the mask, the handkerchief?

"Did you pursue other hypotheses?" I asked Detective Soares.

"We thought it might be a case of a homosexual suicide pact," he said. "The spot is known to be a rendezvous point for gays from the neighborhood. But there was no evidence of this, either in the victims' lives or in the manner they died. Every line of investigation ran into the same brick wall: no sign of violence, no poison in the digestive system, no clues to the manner of death."

When these details became known in Brazil, the police were deluged with calls from the public in the Niteroi area and the case entered its second phase.

One of the first callers was a society matron, Gracinda Barbosa Coutinho de Souza. She told Officer Bettencourt that as she was driving along Alameda Sao Boaventura in Fonseca with three of her children on Wednesday evening, her daughter Denise, then seven, told her to look up in the sky over the Morro do Vintem. She saw an oval object, orange in color, with a line of fire around its edges, "sending out rays in all directions," while it hovered over the hill. She had time to stop the car and to observe it carefully as it rose and fell vertically for three or four minutes, giving off a well-defined "blue ray." When she got home she told her husband, a member of the Rio Stock Exchange, about the sighting. He drove back to the site but saw nothing unusual.

This observation was soon confirmed by a large number of witnesses who called police independently to report they had seen an orange-colored, egg-shaped object giving off blue rays over the Morro do Vintem, adding that they had not reported it at the time for fear of the ridicule that attaches to UFO cases. All reports placed the object in the vicinity of the victims near the estimated time of death. Thus, the investigators were forced to direct their attention to some of the details of the scene that had seemed irrelevant at first.

There was, for example, the matter of the lead masks. Were they intended to shield the eyes of the victims from some form of radiation? The police found similar masks in a workshop in Miguel Jose Viana's home, along with remnants of the lead that had been used. Also found was a book on "scientific spiritualism" with underlined passages regarding spirits, intense luminosity, and masks. Miguel's sister was interrogated. She disclosed that he had spoken to her of a "secret mission."

Also interrogated was Manuel Pereira da Cruz's widow. Her testimony indicated that the two victims were members of a "spiritualist" group, an occult society with unknown objectives. It was rumored that the group attempted to communicate with other planets. A civilian pilot named Elcio Correa da Silva was also a member of the group.

Elcio disclosed to the investigators that he had, indeed, conducted a number of experiments with the two victims, one in Manuel's garden in Campos, and another time on the beach at Atafona. In that experiment Elcio and another man named Valdir had witnessed a huge blast. This had taken place on June 13, 1966, two months before the tragedy in Niteroi. There was an explosion, a luminous object in the sky, a blinding flash. Local fishermen stated they had seen a flying saucer fall into the sea. The explosion was so powerful that it was heard in Campos. But speculation was dampened when the families of the victims testified that the devices used at Atafona and in Campos were only homemade bombs, they said, manufactured with pipes and wires.

The police started digging deeper into the victims' backgrounds they had attended courses in Sao Paulo organized by Philips Electronics and other firms; they had purchased sophisticated equipment, yet they were not thought to be

qualified to conduct scientific experiments. There were allegations that the victims maintained an illegal radio station in Glicerio, in the Macae district. And again witnesses spoke of their interest in the paranormal. A few days before his death, Manuel is supposed to have said that he was going to attend a "final test," after which he would say whether or not he was a "believer."

Manuel's widow stated that she had witnessed a quarrel between Elcio and her husband. Under the pressure to demonstrate progress in the case, the police found it convenient to arrest Elcio on August 27. However, it was soon established that he had not left Campos on the day of the tragedy, and he had to be released.

Another curious element in the case was one of the notes found next to the corpses. It read:

Meet at the designated spot at 4:30 P.M. At 6:30 P.M. ingest the capsules. After the effect is produced, protect half of the face with lead masks. Wait for the prearranged signal.

Were the two men expecting to be contacted by a UFO? Or were they, more prosaically, taking part in a spiritualist experiment that went wrong.

Further complication came. A civilian guard named Raulino de Mattos reported that he thought he had seen the victims get out of a Jeep at the foot of the hill with two other persons who were not clearly observed. But the case bogged down again.

On August 23, the police ordered the exhumation of the bodies and a new battery of tests. This step was so unusual that it was reported in newspapers around the world, but the new analysis yielded nothing of significance.

Two years elapsed before the case was again mentioned: the Brazilian press announced that the police were now looking for a blond man who appeared to be a foreigner. He had been seen by a witness sitting behind the wheel of a jeep while talking to Miguel and Manuel near the Morro do Vintem. It was also disclosed that radiochemical experts at the Atomic Energy Institute in Sao Paulo had conducted a neutron activation analysis of the hair of the victims. The four elements measured - arsenic, mercury, barium, and thallium - were found at normal levels.

With that, the officer in charge of homicide cases, Romen Jose Vieira, closed the investigation and forwarded the dossier to the Ministry of Justice. The second phase of the lead mask case (the "in depth analysis" phase) had just ended. It had failed to explain the facts, just as the first phase of plain detective work had.

The third phase, predictably, was characterized by wild speculation, silliness, and extreme measures born out of everyone's frustration with the unexplained deaths of Miguel and Manuel.

A group of Brazilian spiritualists claimed to be in contact with Jupiterian beings through psychic channeling. According to these messages, the deaths of the victims were an accident that resulted when "they started running forward [toward the saucer that was supposed to pick them up] before they were instructed to do so." The channel also disclosed that the Jupiterians were females, one foot taller than the average humans, with vertical mouths and four fingers on their hands. Nobody took the revelations seriously, since there was no evidence that the men had died while running.

More interesting was the confession of a man named Hamilton! Bezani, who was in jail for contraband and car theft. He gave police a complicated account of his participation in the murders of Miguel and Manuel, claiming that he had been hired to kill them. He and three other underworld figures stole the money carried by their victims, took them to the hilltop, and forced them at gunpoint to swallow poison. The police stated that they were close to making other arrests in the case. But these arrests were never made, and the public was left with the dubious testimony of a prisoner who was serving a long jail sentence.

Neither Bezani's confession nor the channeled revelations from Jupiter had explained the specific details of the murder. A lengthy discussion we had at the home of Professor Silvio Lago, a medical doctor who had been called by the court as an expert witness on parapsychology, threw some light on the spiritualist aspects. According to Professor Lago, the victims may have been engaged in a series of seances during which a paranormal entity was supposed to manifest itself. After the experiment in Campos, and again after the explosion on Atafona Beach, Manuel had found powder at the site.

He may have suspected that others, possibly including Elcio had designed a hoax to convince him of the reality of the "entity." Yet, remarked Detective Saulo Soares, they were willing to make a third attempt at contact with the entity in question: there must have been a higher-level person who remained in the background and whose instructions they trusted—possibly the person who gave them the orders written on the note.

As we reviewed these details at the scene of the tragedy, I noted that no vegetation was growing at the place where the bodies had been found. I asked whether the location was known with precision. The witness showed me the stake that enabled him to ascertain the exact spot.

We returned to Saulo's concern that the two men had an "intellectual mentor" who manipulated the situation, a hypothesis supported by the wording of the notes.

"The expression *ingest the capsules* does not belong to the vocabulary of the victims, " the detective concluded. "Similarly, *after the effect* is too sophisticated for them. The note reads like a prescription dictated by someone else."

"What do you make of the robbery hypothesis?" I asked.

The detective shrugged. "How do we know they had money with them in the first place? They never really intended to buy a car and electronics parts."

"You think that story was a cover?" I asked him.

"I spoke to a cousin of Miguel, who had tried to discourage him from taking the trip because it could not amount to any profitable business. Miguel answered: 'Buying a car isn't the real purpose of this trip. When I get back, I'll tell you whether or not I believe in spiritualism.'²

"What was the book that was found in Campos?"

"It was a general text on spiritualism, a book by Bezerra de Menezes. "

Janine inquired about the workshop used by the victims in Campos.

"It was a small room," the police officer replied, "about four by three meters, where Miguel fixed TV sets. We found shelves with specialized materials, but nothing suspicious."

"What about the lead masks?" she asked.

"They had been hammered out of a lead sheet; they were obviously homemade, very crude."

I went back to Bezani's so-called confession. The detective laughed: "He was a thief who specialized in gems and typewriters. His nickname was Papinho de Anjo, which means fast-talker. He had already managed to escape from two jails. He was rearrested and sent to the Hippodrome in Sao Paulo, reputed to be very secure. He concocted this whole story in the hope that he would be transferred back to Niteroi jail. Everybody knows it is easy to escape from Niteroi! But he made a mistake when he confessed to the murders: he put the bodies on the wrong mountain! So he was kept at the Hippodrome, and do you know what happened? He eventually managed to escape from there!"

Getting my bearings from the wide landscape around us, I drew a map of the scene. As I was orienting the sketch, I noticed some power lines and a tall transmission tower.

"That's the facility for police communications," I was told. "It wasn't there in 1966."

"Let's go over what was found at the site once more, the exact circumstances."

The man who had first seen the corpses answered in a quiet voice. His story differed somewhat from the details printed in the newspapers: "Some boys found the bodies while looking for their kite. They came down to my house and told me about it. I sent them to the police."

"Were the bodies resting on the ground itself?", I asked.

"They were on a bed of leaves."

"What about the smell?"

"No, they were not smelling," he insisted. "And the bodies had not been attacked by predators."

I pointed to the sky, where a number of large, menacing black birds were circling us. "What about those?"

"They did not attack the corpses."

"What about the newspaper report that the boys had been attracted by the smell?"

"There was no smell when I got there."

We started on the long trek down to Pinto Street, where we had left our cars. It was a return journey Manuel and Miguel had never made. Yet, Saulo told us he thought the men had intended to come down again. Otherwise, why would they have kept the deposit receipt for the bottle of mineral water? He found it very strange that no vegetation was growing at the spot, fourteen years after the event. And he had no explanation for the hovering saucer.

Today my files of UFO data bulge to a barely manageable volume that occupies fourteen well-packed file cabinet drawers. They are organized by country, and the file on Brazil contains a series of original documents that were given to me shortly before his death from cancer, by a highly skilled investigator, a medical doctor named Dr. Olavo Fontes.

When Dr. Fontes visited us in Chicago in 1967 he took this bundle of case reports from his suitcase. "I want you to have these," he said. Was he already aware that he would soon die? Among the documents he presented to me were his personal reports on the lead mask case and another sighting of UFOs in the Niterdi region.

The event had taken place on March 16, 1966, at 9-15 P M., two months before the tragedy. A luminous object, elliptical in shape was seen at an altitude of 100 feet. The witness, a fifty-four-year-old manager with an electronics firm trained as an industrial technician, drew a sketch of a series of what he called "effervescent" spheres. He observed them along with his wife, his daughter, and his future son-in-law, an official with the Bank of Brazil. The object flew over the Morro da Boa Viagem, in Niterdi.

Clearly the observation of a large oval object by Mrs. de Souza was not an isolated incident in that region. Neither was the correlation between the sighting of the object and the unexplained physical and physiological effects including those with tragic consequences for the witnesses. Yet the UFO literature is largely silent on such cases because they challenge both the skeptics and the believers in UFO reality.

The time has come to set aside the old theories, to search for fresh evidence.

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