



UFOs Sink Mir into the Ocean while the Alien Choir Sings On

Finally someone has figured out the *real* reason that the Russians have ditched space station Mir into the ocean: to help keep the lid on the Great UFO Cover-up. UFOlogist Andy Lloyd explains that "NASA and the U.S. Government want to steer clear of space tourism in a very, very big way" (www.ufos-alien.co.uk/cosmicmir.html). Therefore, the U.S. government pressured the Russians into sinking Mir because "Space tourists are far more likely to honestly describe what they're seeing and experiencing in orbit. In other words, their presence in orbit would bring unauthorized and uncontrolled civilians into direct contact with what many of us believe is happening up there. They will tell the world about the anomalous activity that routinely seems to 'buzz' our space platforms in orbit. Perhaps they will return with photos and camcorder images. Such access to the events fleeting glimpsed on secret NASA transmissions would become a major tourist attraction, and blow the lid off the whole UFO phenomenon." Aha, now we understand!

As if this were not exciting enough, a photographer has captured on film an entire "alien choir," looking for all the

world as if they were singing Christmas carols. According to Alien Abduction Experience and Research, "This photograph shows a group of six aliens standing on a garage roof in Alabama. The aliens are facing in one direction towards a hovering ball of light, from which another alien appears to be



The Russian Space Station Mir, before it burned up returning to Earth.

descending (see www.abduct.com/photos/pn007.htm). This September 29, 2000, photograph was taken after the witness saw a movement and heard a sound like 'humming electric lines.' Having seen and heard UFOs before, the witness knew to take a picture," which is very fortunate—had the photographer not had such keen UFO knowledge, he might have concluded that alien choirs were an everyday occurrence. The "choir" looks like a blurry photo of someone's lighted outdoor display of Christmas carolers. Unfortunately for science, "the name

and address of [the] photographer are being withheld."

Joseph Trainor's *UFO Roundup* relays a Reptoid sighting from a Mexican UFO group. Two policemen were reportedly on patrol near the thermoelectric plant in Rosarito, Baja California, at 3:17 one morning when

"they saw what appeared to be a reptilian creature walking on the beach with a black suit on and with glaring red eyes." That would bring the creature quite close to the U.S. border, and it will be interesting to see if the glowing creatures being sighted throughout the Baja can pass through U.S. Customs. Unfortunately, the incident is reported to have taken place on February 29, 2001, which causes us to have some doubts about it.

Trainor also tells us of some strange goings-on at Concordia College in rural Moorehead, Minnesota: "Hoyum Hall, one of the girls' dorms at Concordia, appears to be home to a colony of Reptoids." Supposedly it has been nicknamed "Reptoid Hall" because of the many creatures allegedly reported there, dating back to the 1980s, although the name "Hokum Hall" might seem more appropriate. Unlike the Mexican ETs, these creatures apparently do not glow, but they have reptilian skin, only three fingers, and like to play pranks on women in varying states of undress.

Robert Sheaffer's World Wide Web page for UFOs and other skeptical subjects is at www.debunker.com.

Back on Mars, the most recent "anomaly" to be reported in the Mars Online Gazette is a supposed "Manta-Wing Aircraft" that seems to have gotten itself snared in a Martian sand dune. See www.electricwarrior.com/mol/MarsOnlineGazett.htm for more information. But on Earth, Malin Space Science Systems, which operates the cameras on the Mars Global Surveyor spacecraft, has released a new set of high-resolution images of the Cydonia region, which represent all images taken thus far (see www.msss.com/mars_images/moc/01_31_01_release/cydonia/index.html). The "Face on Mars" doesn't look anything like a face in the latest images, but that won't stop anyone from trotting out the same tired old claims.

In San Leandro, California (near Oakland), the Wizard Brewery has come up with an out-of-this-world brew—Crop Sector Ale, "the highly unusual beer made from crop circle barley." It is harvested from the fields of Alton Barnes, East Field, England, where allegedly extraterrestrial crop circles are said to turn up all the time. According to the advertising flyer, the brewer found that this malted barley possessed some remarkable properties, so he sent it off for analysis to the Malting Science Division at the University of California–Davis. Supposedly they found it was high in selenium, which when mixed with the chromium in brewer's yeast created a mix that was too strong to ferment correctly. The proportions of the mix have now been adjusted correctly to account for extraterrestrial influences, and the result is said to be that "with all the energy from the beginning of the grain through the brewing process, we know this new style ale is sure to please even the most skeptical amongst us!" I'll drink to that.

Unfortunately, knowledgeable sources are now warning that this year's tourist season for crop circle watchers may be hampered, if not eliminated, by the farmers' very legitimate concerns over foot-and-mouth disease. With this highly communicable livestock virus, capable of being carried on the shoes or clothing of unsuspecting persons, many farmers are understandably unwilling to have hordes of strangers tramping through their fields, even if they do pay a couple pounds

apiece for the privilege of gawking at circles trampled out by hoaxers the night before. If this year the British economy suffers the loss of income not only from raising cattle, but from crop circle tourism as well, it will be a serious blow indeed.

In Scotland, the town of Bonnybridge is a local UFO hotspot, claiming more UFO sightings than anywhere else in the world (a claim that many other localities would no doubt contest). Local councilman Billy Buchanan knows a good thing when he sees it, and the BBC has reported on his plans to set up Bonnybridge as a sister city to Roswell, New Mexico (see http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/english/uk/scotland/newsid_1022000/1022712.stm). "We in Bonnybridge have an affinity with Roswell, and the common denominator is UFOs," he said. "The cultural, tourist, social and economic advantages would be tremendous for the area." He also said that an Anglo-American company was planning to visit the area to present plans for a £20 million UFO-related theme park. Apparently dear old Nessie hasn't been bringing in enough tourists of late, and Mr. Buchanan has great hopes that UFOs may reverse Scotland's tourist decline: "There has been a lot of discussion lately about the tourism situation in Scotland and how it is diminishing with the established tourist sights that we have. We have got to move forward and regenerate and I think this could be the way forward for a theme scenario in the central belt of Scotland."

Meanwhile, UFOlogist Karl Pflock has an article in the January 2001 *Fortean Times* noting how certain descriptive elements in Travis Walton's "classic" UFO abduction story from 1975 (made famous by the movie *Fire in the Sky*) appear to have been borrowed heavily from Robert Heinlein's equally "classic" science fiction novelette *Universe*, first published in 1941 and widely reprinted since then. In *The Travis Walton Experience*, the celebrated abductee tells of breaking free from his captors after his examination and exploring the saucer. Walton claims to have found "a round room" that appeared to be the ship's control room, in which he sat down at a high-backed chair with controls built into its arms. Then he saw the

ship's walls seem to fade away, and found himself apparently sitting out in the middle of space. In Heinlein's description, a "spherical room" contained chairs with "high supporting sides, or arms" having controls built into them. When the protagonist sat in them, "the mirrored stars looked down on him . . . he hung alone in the center of the stellar universe." Pflock lists quite a number of parallels between the two accounts, which seems to quite definitely show that Walton "borrowed" at least part of his spaceship narrative from Heinlein. The primary difference in these two accounts would seem to be that Heinlein freely admitted that his story was fiction. Pflock corresponded with Walton on a number of issues, and found him more than willing to answer questions about other aspects of his supposed "abduction," but Walton refused all comment on the Heinlein similarities.

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UFOlogists have long cited Officer Lonnie Zamora's report of a landed vehicle and occupants in Socorro, New Mexico, on April 24, 1964, as among the very strongest pieces of UFO evidence. The local police officer was chasing a speeder when he reports that he heard a loud roar, then saw a flame in the sky, which was difficult to see because he was looking toward the Sun. Catching a glimpse of the landed object in the gaps between some small hills, Zamora claims to have seen two beings in garb resembling white coveralls who presumably scampered back into their vehicle, which he observed taking off. The object reportedly left behind some irregularly-spaced indentations in the ground, and scorched shrubbery. Skeptics have long suggested that the incident was a hoax, intended to bring tourists into town, a suggestion bolstered by the way that the New Mexican towns of Roswell and Aztec are today successfully milking dubious UFO tales. Now UFO skeptic Larry Robinson, Systems/Applications Programmer at Indiana University, has suggested the intriguing possibility that what Zamora saw, and reported

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This is not a movie review, so I'll only say that this is a warm, touching, and gently humorous film that is far, far better than the sort of stuff that most often finds its way to our neighborhood movie screens.

The values of the story lie not in histrionics and special effects, but rather in affirming the fallibility and hard-won accomplishments of down-to-earth folks who just happen to make their living by calculating the trajectories and coordinates of objects hundreds of thousands of miles and millions of light-years away. Far too often, these same working stiff's are shown as madmen in white coats. All of us who are concerned about the popular depiction of scientists as people to be distrusted and feared know this only too well. When a film comes along that breaks the stereotype, it's reason to celebrate. In recent memory only *October Sky* (another true story about how a young boy's dreams of becoming an astronaut led him from the coal mines to the space program), and *Contact* (discussed previously in SI 21[6] November/December 1997) which has a fictional scientist heroine, deal with the intense problems of the nature of research, politics, and public perception.

We have every reason to be concerned about the portrayal of scientists and the

scientific method or process in popular entertainment. Given the failure of American public education in the areas of science and mathematics, film and television are the main exposure that the average child or adult has to the mysteries of science. On one hand, PBS, The Discovery Channel, and the like generally do a good job of presenting real research, real science, and real facts in a digestible manner. On the other hand, short of reading journals, many of those television programs are the closest that we will all come to the workaday world of scientists.

While I genuinely enjoy science fiction like *Star Trek*, and *The X-Files*, not only are they not educational in any meaningful sense, but aside from inspiring a genuine "sense of wonder" about the unknown in the universe, they can actually trivialize the labors of real scientists. Without entering into the endless debate about whether or not *X-Files* really purports to be the "truth" (I think that it only purports to be storytelling), it's fair to say that the "real" science shown in *X-Files* is only a parody of laboratory research and professional investigation. There is the rub: it appears that only these sorts of highly dramatized and fictionalized stories attract and hold audiences. A film like *The Dish*, which not only tells a gripping story but also treats its subjects with respect and admi-

ration, is a rare bird indeed!

Here is a tight little film that recounts what it's really like on a daily basis to sit at the controls of a huge radio telescope pushing little buttons and waiting endlessly for motors and gears to move the thing into position so that the poor, exhausted scientists can sit around for endless more hours listening to radio noise that doesn't seem to make much sense until it's tweaked out into something useful. More than that, it shows that the scientists themselves are as fallible as the next guy: one of the key players forgets to prime a fuel line and nearly screws up an entire NASA project! These scientists get cranky and forgetful, but they're also shy, sensitive and, in the end, brilliantly persistent and innovative, saving the day for NASA when nature itself supplies an unexpected obstacle. If I were a scientist, I wouldn't at all mind being immortalized in this fashion.

It was a no-brainer for a film like *Men in Black* to become a top grossing film, but if the movie studios can see that a small, intelligent, and respectful film like *The Dish* can turn a profit for them, perhaps they'll consider producing more films with "human" scientists to take their legitimate places alongside the endless stream of mad Dr. Frankensteins that are the traditional staple of big-buck box office. □

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more-or-less accurately, was a brief landing of a propane-powered hot air balloon, commonplace today but new and quite rare in 1964 (see <http://php.indiana.edu/~lrobins/howisoco.htm>).

Zamora compared the landed object's shape to an ellipse with a long horizontal axis, suggesting a balloon that was starting to collapse. In the excitement, Zamora ducked behind his cruiser, and lost his glasses. The object's shape when airborne looked like a teardrop. In fact, it has been established that the government was car-

rying out then-classified experiments using exactly such balloons in New Mexico in 1963 and 1964 (apparently the CIA was interested in using balloons for, among other things, quietly getting agents into, and out of, exotic locations). However, nobody has yet been able to tie a classified balloon experiment to the sighting's location and time. Zamora's statement that the object rose slowly, barely clearing the ground, and in taking off generated heat but "not nearly as much" as a rocket exhaust, sounds very much like a balloon ascending. Also, Zamora's observation that the flame seemed to strangely have little if any effect

upon the ground might be explained if the flame were directed *upward* into the balloon (which is how hot air balloons are constructed), rather than thrusting downward toward the ground. The object took several seconds to rise to a height of about twenty feet, then suddenly the "propulsion system" was turned off, and the object flew off in total silence. Watching the object depart, Zamora radioed to the police station, "it looks like a balloon." While Robinson's explanation is still being analyzed and debated in skeptical UFO circles (see www.ufoworld.co.uk/v07.txt), it makes a lot more sense than Little Green Men. □