



□ UFO 'Dogfight': A Ballooning Tale

UFO Fires on Louisville, Ky. Police Chopper" was the headline on the *Weekly World News's* May 4 cover story, complete with fanciful illustration. But if the tabloid account seemed overly sensational in describing the "harrowing two-minute dogfight"—before vanishing into the night—it was only following the lead of the respected *Louisville Courier-Journal*. The *Courier* had used similar wording in relating the February 26 incident (which had not been immediately made public), headlining its front-page story of March 4: "UFO Puts on Show: Jefferson [County] Police Officers Describe Close Encounter."

Unfortunately, the *Weekly World News* did not cite the *Courier's* follow-up report that explained the phenomenon. Yet the tabloid's tale contained numerous clues that might have tipped off an astute reader. The first sighting was of what looked like "a fire" off to the patrol craft's left; the "pear-shaped" UFO was seen in the police spotlight "drifting back and forth like a balloon on a string"; after circling the helicopter several times, the object darted away before zooming back to shoot the

"fireballs" (which fortunately "fizzled out before they hit"); and then—as the helicopter pilot pushed his speed to over 100 mph—the UFO "shot past the chopper, instantly climbing hundreds of feet," only to momentarily descend again before flying into the distance and disappearing. That the "flowing" object was only "about the size of a basketball" and that it had "hovered" before initially approaching the helicopter were



Scott Heacock (*left*) puts the finishing touches on a model hot-air balloon like the one he had launched in Louisville, Kentucky, on February 26. Looking on is psychologist Robert A. Baker. (Photo by Joe Nickell.)

additional clues from the original *Courier* account that the tabloid omitted.

The *Courier's* follow-up story of March 6 was headed "A Trial Balloon?" It pictured Scott Heacock and his wife, Conchys, demonstrating how they had launched a hot-air balloon Scott had made from a plastic dry-cleaning bag, strips of balsa wood, and a dozen birthday candles—a device familiar to anyone who has read Philip J. Klass's *UFOs Explained* (Vintage Books, 1976, pp. 28-34, plates 2a and 2b). No sooner had the balloon cleared the trees, said Heacock, than the county police helicopter encountered it and began circling, shining its spotlight on the glowing toy.

The encounter was a comedy of errors and misperceptions. Likened to a cat chasing its tail, the helicopter was actually pushing the lightweight device around with its prop wash. In fact, as indicated by the officers' own account, the UFO zoomed away in response to the helicopter's sudden propulsion—behavior consistent with a lightweight object. As to the "fireballs," they may have been melting, flaming globs of plastic, or candles that became dislodged and fell, or some other effect. (Heacock says he used the novelty "relighting" type of birthday candles as a safeguard against the wind snuffing them out. Such candles may sputter, then abruptly reflare.)

Although one of the officers insisted the object he saw that night traveled at speeds too fast for a balloon, he seems not to have considered the effects of the helicopter's prop-wash propulsion. Contacted by psychologist and skeptical investigator Robert A. Baker, the other officer declined to comment further, except to state his feeling that the whole affair had been "blown out of proportion" by the media. Be that as it may, a television reporter asked Scott

Heacock how certain he was that his balloon was the reported UFO. Since he had witnessed the encounter and kept the balloon in sight until it was caught in the police spotlight, he replied: "I'd bet my life on it." To another reporter, his Mexican wife explained: "I'm the only alien around here."

—Joe Nickell

Joe Nickell, CSICOP Fellow and investigative writer, teaches at the University of Kentucky.

CSICOP Wins Lawsuit In Maryland

On June 4, 1993, a federal jury in Baltimore, Maryland, found the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP) not liable for statements made by magician James "The Amazing" Randi regarding the personal life of the plaintiff in the case, Eldon Byrd. The verdict was handed down in the court of U.S. District Judge Marvin Garbis.

In 1989, Byrd sued Randi and CSICOP for more than \$30 million, alleging libel, slander, and invasion of privacy for statements made by Randi in a 1988 interview with the now-defunct *Twilight Zone* magazine and at a 1988 speech for the New York Area Skeptics.

Although the jury did find that some of the statements made by Randi regarding Byrd were defamatory, it refused to award Byrd any damages whatsoever.

CSICOP was named in the lawsuit because the plaintiff contended that Randi was acting as an agent of CSICOP and was authorized, or apparently authorized, to speak on

CSICOP's behalf.

During the two-week trial, both Randi and CSICOP testified that Randi was not authorized to speak for CSICOP and that Randi had not requested permission to do so. It is a long-standing policy of the CSICOP Executive Council that members of the Council are not authorized to speak for CSICOP on any topic unless permission has been granted by a majority of the other members of the Council.

Accordingly, CSICOP contended at the trial that Randi was neither authorized nor apparently authorized by CSICOP to make the statements at issue in the suit. The jury agreed.

—Barry Karr
CSICOP Executive Director

What on Earth? From Old Minerals To New Mystical Gems

A mail-order establishment in Marshfield, Vermont, called Heaven & Earth, publishes a catalog not only selling "metaphysical" jewelry but also trading on some highly creative mineralogical nomenclature. Heaven & Earth invents new names for old minerals and claims that they are new discoveries. Each one is presented in the catalog with lavish "channeled information" concerning its properties. This information is usually attributed to an outside consultant channeler.

The proprietors in-

clude a small disclaimer to the effect that they don't advocate the use of stones as a substitute for conventional medical or psychological care. That said, they go on to provide 16 large, closely printed pages of medical and/or psychological advocacy for their stones, all of which are notably expensive.

The mineral spurrite, well known since 1908, has been rediscovered and renamed "strombolite" by this establishment, which informs us that strombolite's whitish veins are "lightning strikes" that direct energy toward fortification of one's weaknesses and create instantly noticeable healing. Strombolite also enhances memory and the integration of knowledge. Combined with another mineral, newly named "merlinite," it will "bring access to the Cosmic Book of Knowledge," which is also parenthetically and most mysteriously described as "The Void."

Void indeed. It turns out that merlinite is nothing but drusy crystalline (misspelled "druzy crystalline") quartz, blackened by inclusions of the manganese oxide known as psilomelane. The latter is given a highly original spelling, "solalamine." Merlinite is said to bring on an instant alpha state, etheric body "alignment" (*sic*)—



with what, we are not told—time traveling, and grounding light into one's negative energies. Heavy work for a piece of blackened quartz.

The newsletter/catalog that first announced the wonders of merlinite gave no indication of its composition. This writer asked Heaven & Earth for the real name of the mineral and was told that merlinite is the true species name of a brand-new discovery and that the original discovery date and chemical formula are closely guarded secrets. The informant (or uninformed) was adamantly opposed to making any such details available to the public.

Of course there is no such secrecy attending any discovery of a genuinely new mineral. The very process of establishing its species status depends on extensive testing and publication of test results in accredited journals.

A similar inquiry about another Heaven & Earth find named *azetzulite* met with similar evasion. Heaven & Earth claimed that their *azetzulite* came from a beryllium mine and might be a beryllium silicate like phenakite (which they always spell "phenacite"), but that it is not phenakite. Its formula is not known because "the miners" haven't finished testing it yet. (Miners don't do tests for new mineral species.) The Heaven & Earth catalog describes *azetzulite* as a mineral specially selected by a space-traveling "group soul," the Azez, "to re-engineer the etheric pattern of its energies so that it can become a conductor or conduit for the energy of the Nameless Light." The material shown in the catalog's color illustration of *azetzulite* jewelry looks very much like chips of plain glass, which would indicate a distinct lack of discrimination on the part of the Azez. But whatever it is, Heaven & Earth refuses to say. Evidently *azetzulite* is another secret to be revealed only to channelers and never,

never to mineralogists.

Another alleged discovery has received the Heaven & Earth name of Gel Litium Silica or Gel Lithium Silicate, depending on which page of the catalog one reads, though it is declared that this name was invented by those ubiquitous and mysterious miners. When pressed a bit, Heaven & Earth confessed that Gel Lit(h)ium Silica(te) is lepidolite—a violet-colored mica well known since the late 1700s—combined with quartz. It is said to balance "physical systems" and to act as a diuretic for women suffering from excessive water retention.

Another stone, imaginatively renamed Aphrodite, is called a welcome surprise "only now entering the awareness of metaphysical stone-users." The real name of this stone is mentioned just once. It is cobaltian calcite, in the form of microscopic pink crystals clustered on a rock matrix. The catalog claims that Aphrodite will "strongly aid the tissues of the body" and improve circulation, besides bringing about success in love.

Though Heaven & Earth's proprietors continually suggest an extensive empirical knowledge of minerals on their part, they do consistently misspell common mineral names and mineralogical terms, such as cabochon, heliodor, nickel, rhodochrosite, iridescent, translucent, crystallize, cobaltian, and many other words. Despite the upscale nature of their expensive products, they create a general impression of ignorance fostering and feeding on ignorance. It may be unfair to single them out, since the country is full of similar establishments selling minerals and jewelry on similar pretenses; but Heaven & Earth is a little different in its habit of creating "new" minerals from old ones by the simple expedient of renaming them. Thus the commonplace is made to seem rare, the tired old pseudo-

effects are made to seem new, and the customers are made to think they have bought something unusual.

Such misleading advertisers flourish in our modern atmosphere of lenient omnirecledity and scientific illiteracy. No laws exist to control them. Only an ingrained habit of skepticism, combined with willingness to do a bit of research, can identify

their claims as questionable. Here is another confirmation of the necessity for skepticism, which may be one of the most needed if least appreciated of all modes of thought.

—Barbara G. Walker

Barbara G. Walker is the author of The Book of Sacred Stones: Fact and Fallacy in the Crystal World.

I *The Nebraska Experiment: A Paranormal Claims Phone Service*

“**N**ebraskans who think they have seen ghosts, unidentified flying objects or other weird things now have a telephone help line they can call for assistance and information,” began an Associated Press story released nationwide during the 1991 Easter weekend.

More than 75 calls were generated from around the nation within the subsequent five days, including some 15 inquiries from the media. CNN Headline News carried the story on Easter Sunday, and the following day an East Coast radio station called to ask, “Is this an April Fool’s joke?”

Such was the reaction to the AP release, which was based on a reporter’s article about what is now called the Nebraska Paranormal Referrals Service and an editor’s “piggy-back” insert on a then-forthcoming Fortean conference, both published on page 5 of the March 30, 1991, issue of the *Lincoln Journal-Star*.

While the original article with its insert and the subsequent AP release contained much that is accurate, their

interpretation of the intent and the concept of the telephone service created some misconceptions that need correction.

The telephone service is now housed at the Department of Psychology on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) campus. It is available for use by citizens of Nebraska who wish to report what they believe may be a paranormal experience—which may or may not be able to be explained by existing scientific laws—or who want to discuss any paranormal claim with a behavioral or physical scientist. The 24-hour number is 402-472-9493, and all inquiries are kept confidential.

In 1987, I established the telephone service through a \$10,000 endowment with the University of Nebraska Foundation as a public service in education and consumer health.

There are three sub-purposes: (1) to provide scientists with a way to collect information associated with the subjects reported, (2) to offer the inquirer more access to reliable, factual information for judging the validity of these reports or claims, and (3) to offer an atmosphere to the inquirer that promotes a scientific attitude, respect, and confidentiality.

All inquirers are reminded that reputable scientists and other professionals have not been able to demonstrate claims of the paranormal under

experimental control to the satisfaction of the scientific community in general; nor are they able to formulate quantitative theories that will explain phenomena people have described. Inquirers are also informed that humankind's innate curiosity about the unknown will very likely continue and that someone may someday discover a way to measure phenomena not now recognized or understood by modern science.

Upon dialing the 24-hour number, the caller reaches a recording machine with which to make an inquiry, describe a report, and leave a phone number or address. During daytime hours, Donald D. Jensen, a professor of psychology at UNL, provides a response, determines if a referral to a scientist affiliated with the University of Nebraska or other appropriate institution is warranted, and mails a pro/con bibliography of the paranormal to the inquirer. The inquirer is also informed about the existence of the Nebraska Paranormal Collection housed in Love Library on the UNL campus. Report forms are kept in a confidential file, but names of callers and their communities are not recorded.

Implementation of the telephone service originally occurred in March 1988 with the assignment of a mental-health educator in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha to handle calls and set up the project within the Research Section when her or his duties permit. The entire operation is under the direction of the Chair at the Department of Psychology, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 209 Burnett Hall, Lincoln, NE 68588-0308.

Several behavioral and physical scientists affiliated with the University of Nebraska system and other institutions volunteered to take re-

errals in their areas of expertise, such as astronomy, physics, physiology, and psychology, and in their areas of interest, such as ESP, ghosts, monsters, UFO reports, and witchcraft. The majority of these scientists were an integral part of Paranormal Claims Research, a private group of professors and lay people I co-organized in 1980 and dissolved in 1988. Additionally, anyone in the university system and elsewhere, including CSICOP, with any relevant expertise may be consulted. However, names of scientists who take referrals are not released.

In the fall of 1988, Paranormal Claims Research's revised *Selected Pro/Con Bibliography of the Paranormal*, including the phone service's telephone number and information about the Nebraska Paranormal Collection, was mailed to some 900 law-enforcement officials, private and public high school principals, college and public libraries, and other agency personnel in Nebraska. By December of that year, an official announcement on the service's stationery was mailed to the same 900 people.

As a private citizen, I also assisted in publicizing the existence of the service and the Nebraska Paranormal Collection in 1989 by having announcements placed in the Nebraska State Education Association newsletter of January 19, the State Patrol *Bulletin #9* on March 1, the *Nebraska Library Association Quarterly*, Summer issue, and the *Nebraska Psychologist*, November issue. There was no coverage in the public media.

Despite the limited publicity, there were 54 calls from April 1, 1988, to September 30, 1990, a period of two and half years. A breakdown of the 54 different inquiries reveals that 19 could not be returned (because of "giggles" or the lack of a phone number or address); 22 involved the



Donald D. Jensen (*left*), a professor in the UNL Department of Psychology, where the telephone service is now housed, with E. A. Kral, who originally established the service in Omaha in 1987.

paranormal in general; 11 ghost/poltergeist/demonic spirits; and 2 UFO reports. (Several individuals called more than once, amounting to 10 more calls, but all calls from one individual were tabulated as one inquiry.)

It is important to note there were 6 demonic-cult reports, which may be over-representative because of media attention and rumored "satanic cult" involvement with at least three cases in the Omaha area during the 1989-90 school year. Of the 35 legitimate inquiries, 9 were referred to scientists for future discussion.

Requests for information came from 7 law-enforcement, mental-health, and library personnel, 11 students working on term papers, 7 adult individuals at large, and 1 media person.

From October 1, 1990, to September 30, 1991, there were 138 calls. (An additional 14 calls were mis-directed.) A breakdown of the 138 different inquiries reveals that 17 could not be returned because of "giggles," obscenity, or the lack of phone number or address. Fifty-three involved

the paranormal in general, 40 were in the ghost/poltergeist/demonic spirits category, and 28 were UFO reports.

Since only 12 contacts occurred from October 1, 1990, to March 30, 1991, the overwhelming majority were related to the March 30 article in the *Lincoln Journal-Star* and the AP story on March 31. Inquiries were received from all areas of the nation, many from the East and West coasts. Callers were referred to national organizations and publications in their local libraries and local outlets of nationwide bookstores. A few were referred to ABC-TV, since the "20/20" feature on exorcism was shown at about the same time the AP released its story.

Of the 138 legitimate inquiries, 14 were referred to scientists for further discussion. Requests for information came from 6 students working on term papers, 8 from people "curious" about the service but with no specific phenomenon to report, and 24 from media members.

From October 1, 1991, to December 31, 1992, there were 23 inquiries, of which 13 involved

requests for sources of information, 6 were from outside of Nebraska as a result of the 1991 AP story, and 4 were misdirected or nuisance calls.

People were willing to discuss their UFO reports, even though the "events" may have occurred 10 to 30 years ago, and they indicated a willingness to contact national UFO groups. Those who reported ghost/poltergeist/demonic spirits were more secretive and often voiced fears and confusion about their situations. It was difficult to provide assistance to some callers from other parts of the nation because of a lack of knowledge of their local resources.

There was a high degree of "novelization" in the reports, i.e., they were closely related to television, motion picture, and book plots. Most of the UFO reports were similar to previous ones, including a report of "reptoids" (intelligent reptiles from other planets) that closely resembled the TV movie "V." Some who reported poltergeists and demonic spirits were looking for a "ghostbuster" service.

A separate but important adjunct to the telephone service is the Nebraska Paranormal Collection, which I established in 1980 for the benefit of laymen and scholars alike. Initially, I donated \$5,000 and materials with an appraised value of \$1,700 to house the collection at the University of Nebraska-Omaha Folklore Archive, where it was organized by folklorist and foreign language professor Richard S. Thill, who also placed my UFO field notes in a confidential file.

With a need for more accessibility, and my desire to create an endowment for long-range maintenance of the collection, I donated another \$5,000 through the University of Nebraska Foundation in 1985, and the collection and the confidential file were moved to the McGoogan Library of Medicine

on the UNMC campus. In November 1992, the collection and confidential file were moved to Love Library on the UNL campus.

The telephone service was integrated in existing facilities and programs with a minimum of university time and expense. It is not a new program or an effort to legitimize paranormal beliefs or claims, as the AP release, the headline writers, and the perception of some citizens seemed to suggest.

Its intent is clearly to help callers pursue the truth rather than to reinforce or perpetuate paranormal beliefs. And while researchers who examine the data collected over a period of years may not discover anything new to science, the citizens of Nebraska will at least be able to have confidence in calling a reliable, scientific, professional source of information to assist in their efforts to assess the validity of claims asserted and disseminated, to relieve anxiety, or to satisfy their curiosity. Moreover, people who call can have confidence that their information will be treated with respect and confidentiality.

There is also built-in protection from misuse. The endowment contract stipulates that if the project does not meet a need or does not work as intended, then the funding will be transferred to the Nebraska State Historical Society for its uses.

For those who may object to the setting in which the service has been housed, I will offer an argument for the involvement of scientists found in philosopher Durant Drake's *Invitation to Philosophy* (1933; reprinted by Greenwood Press, 1968): "The insistence upon the untrustworthiness of science is usually, if not always, subtle propaganda in favor of some theology or metaphysics which would take us farther away from the world of obdurate reality rather than give us

■ Notes and Comments

The discovery of a new species of mammal in the forests of western Vietnam is not only an exciting scientific find but a sobering lesson for all who might have thought such a thing impossible. The new genus and species of living bovid is reported by Vietnamese and Hong Kong zoologists in the June 3 *Nature* (V. V. Dung et al., 363:443-445). It has been more than 50 years since any comparable find of a large mammal species was made. The last was the kouprey *bos*, also from Indochina, in 1937. The bovid family includes cattle, sheep, goats, and antelope, but this Vu Quang bovid, given the genus name *Pseudoryx*, differs significantly from all of them in appearance, morphology, cranial and dental features, and DNA. An adult weighs about 160 pounds and has long, smooth, almost straight slender horns and other diagnostic features. The scientists have examined more than 20 specimens, all local hunters' trophies, and they now plan a three-month field study to observe the living animal.

The syringes-in-Pepsi-cans flap this past June took less than one week to go from scary-sounding cases of multiple unexplained tampering to proved copycat hoaxes, complete with surveillance-camera videotape of one of the perpetrators and multiple arrests. The flap illustrates once again, if a reminder is needed, that there is virtually no limit to the human temptation toward deception. Good

for everyone to remember the next time we hear of personal testimonies to crashed flying saucers, abductions aboard UFOs, covens committing ritualistic satanic murders, or any of the myriad alleged psychic-type wonders.

The notorious MJ-12 papers are officially *not official*. Released nearly six years ago by UFO promoters William L. Moore, Stanton T. Friedman, and Jaime Shandera, they were purported to be official U.S. government documents about recovery of crashed flying saucers in New Mexico. They were immediately suspected of being a hoax, and evidence now clearly shows that to be so (see the three articles about this in *SI*, Winter 1987-88, Spring 1988, and Winter 1990, for example). Now the Office of the Secretary of the Air Force has officially designated and stamped on them: NOT AN OFFICIAL USAF DOCUMENT, NOT CLASSIFIED, SUSPECTED FORGERY OR BOGUS DOCUMENT. The process took so long because only the agency that classifies a document has the authority to declassify it. Finally, Philip J. Klass reports in his July 1993 *Skeptics UFO Newsletter*, Col. Richard L. Weaver, Deputy for Security and Investigative Programs in the Office of the Secretary of the Air Force, "decided to bite the bullet and buy an appropriate rubber stamp." Klass nominates Col. Weaver to receive "the USAF's Medal for Outstanding Bravery and Valor Under Deadly Fire."

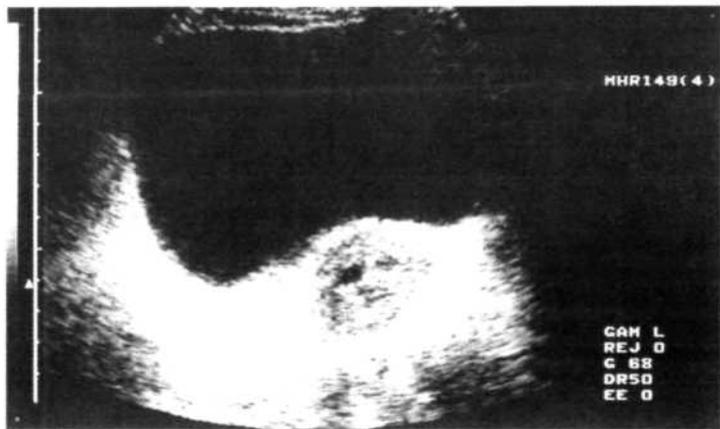
—Kendrick Frazier

a clearer view. Amid the welter of such day-dreams, it is safe to cling to scientific fact. The conclusions of science are the surest knowledge we have; and *so far as science goes*, we can trust it more confidently than any other brand of truth" (emphasis in original).

All of us, from time to time, need help in separating knowledge from belief. From my perspective, scientifically verifiable knowledge does improve the quality of our lives. That's what I have concluded will be the effect of treating paranormal claims

Faces Can Be Found Just About Anywhere

The accompanying ultrasound image, submitted by Michael H. Maiman, M.D., a radiologist in Fremont, California, illustrates once



again how readily images that look like human faces can be found just about anywhere.

"I am enclosing a photo taken from a recent ultrasound examination of a woman's pelvis," Maiman says in his note. "The examination shows a startling image that strongly resem-

as education and consumer-health issues. That's what the phone service at the UNL Department of Psychology attempts to offer the citizens of Nebraska.

—E. A. Kral

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bles a face. The dark region in the upper part of the photo is the bladder, and the 'face' is the cervix of the uterus, in the lower central part of the photo.

"The facial features are made by small cysts (Nabothian cysts) in the cervix. As much as we scanned the area, we could not make the face

disappear. . . . It just stayed there, staring at us. Being an amateur astronomer and recalling the famous face on Mars, I suspect that this 'face on the cervix' is no random distribution of cysts. Can you or CSICOP offer an explanation of this apparently paranormal phenomenon?" □