



# Abductions or Hoaxes? The Man Who Attracts Aliens

I was queried by ABC News about an alien video that subsequently aired on the ABC show *Primetime: The Outsiders* (August 18, 2009). The documentary focused on the personal experiences of a few people who believe they have been abducted by aliens, as well as on certain physical evidence, offered by one alleged abductee, that purports to prove alien visitation.

The reported experiences were consistent with other abductees' reports. Many of the abductees have simply had common "waking dreams," which occur in the borderland between wakefulness and sleep. Others have been hypnotized by alien-abduction gurus like the late Dr. John Mack and therefore have merely gone on a trip to Fantasyland that can conjure up false memories. Some of the more elaborate experiences happened to subjects (like Whitley Strieber, author of *Communion*) who, though sane and normal, nevertheless exhibit many of the traits of fantasy-prone personalities: being easily hypnotized, having vivid memories, experiencing intense dreams, and having out-of-body experiences, among others (Nickell 2007, 251–258; Baker 1987–88). A few alleged abductees may be psychotic, while others seem so craving of attention that they have turned to hoaxing.

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The physical evidence was offered by Stan Romanek, forty-six, who claims to have had contact with extraterrestrials since 2000. Indeed, if he is to be believed, he serves as a virtual magnet for extraterrestrial attention and has been getting quite a bit of terrestrial notice too—not all of it favorable. Living on disability income, he spends much time actively promoting the notion that aliens are fascinated by him. His obsession began when he caught on video a UFO that was witnessed by others at a park on the outskirts of Denver. Romanek also offers a video of an alien peering in his window and an X-ray showing an alien "implant" in his leg.

On *Primetime: The Outsiders* he was supposedly hypnotized by Leo Sprinkle, a psychologist who studies abductees and contactees. (Formerly of the University of Wisconsin, Sprinkle was asked to leave his position when colleagues found his work unprofessional and unscientific [Chang and Dubreuil 2009].) Under hypnosis, Romanek, who claims to have only a fifth-grade proficiency in math, wrote out a high-order mathematical sequence known as Drake's equation (an astrophysics formula approximating the number of planets in the Milky Way galaxy that could have intelligent life) (Chang and Dubreuil 2009).

To a professional mathematician, the equation feat seemed no more than memorization by an amateur. When ABC News asked Romanek for an inde-



Figures 1–3. Frame sequence from questioned UFO video. Frames 1 and 2 show flashing consistent with a commercially available strobe light carried by a small balloon. In Frame 3, sampled four seconds later, the object has decreased appreciably in size. (Frame analysis by Tom Flynn)

pendent medical assessment of his alleged implant, he claimed it had suddenly disappeared (Chang and Dubreuil 2009).<sup>1</sup> As for the videotaped alien, which Romanek named “Boo,” a reporter appropriately described it as resembling “one of the glow-in-the-dark heads I got when I was in Roswell, New Mexico” (Meadow 2009). It certainly embodies the stereotypical likeness—the big-eyed, big-headed little humanoid that has evolved in popular culture and is seen in toy stores (Nickell 2001, 160–163). Romanek’s alien provoked many parodies on the Internet.

Romanek’s wife seems extraordinarily credulous, though she insists she is not. It is difficult to keep a straight face when you hear her say: “. . . when all your [TV] remotes in your house disappear for three days and you have searched everywhere, and then you wake up the next morning and they’re all lined up on the counter, that’s something I can’t explain when I’ve searched for them.” Less naive people would surely look not to aliens but to nearby terrestrial beings for suspects.

To assess Romanek’s UFO video, I turned to my colleague Tom Flynn, a video expert, who treated me to a frame-by-frame analysis. He noted that the object was below clouds and appeared to pick up “illumination from ground sources such as street lights,” suggesting it was rather low-flying and small, which

was further suggested by its apparent rate of motion relative to the camera. As Flynn explained:

A very large object would have to move at a very high rate of speed to display the apparent motion seen in this clip. A smaller object, which would be correspondingly closer to the camera, could display the same apparent rate of motion if it were simply drifting on a modest breeze, particularly if it had been quite close to the camera at the beginning of the shot.

Flynn concluded:

Given the modest amount of visual evidence, many other explanations are possible. But in my opinion the imagery of this just over 11-second clip is *consistent* with a translucent, slightly underinflated balloon between 2’ and 6’ in diameter that carries or contains two light sources: one circular whitish constant light source, and one flashing red strobe with a period of 8–10 flashes per second, released from a position to the left of camera prior to the shot and allowed to drift overhead on a wind blowing from the videographer’s left.

He characterized the red flashing light as “similar to emergency strobes found on some toys, camping lanterns, and the like” (Flynn 2009; see figures 1–3).

In short, the evidence provided by Stan Romanek that purports to prove he has been repeatedly visited or contacted

by extraterrestrials is all of a doubtful, even suspicious, nature. I cannot distinguish it from hoaxing. Romanek, who is reportedly working on a feature film, asks of the entities, “Are they from a different planet? I can’t tell you. I know they’re not human, whatever they are” (qtd. in Chang and Dubreuil 2009). The evidence would appear to indicate that they, and their craft, hail from the familiar planet Latex. □

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## Note

1. For more on alien implants, see Nickell 2001, 204–205.

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