

*The question is, Can UFOs and other so-called alien phenomena be explained by the present scientific paradigm? One astronomer answers with a resounding no*

## INTERVIEW

J. ALLEN HYNEK

**F**or millennia the Zuni Indians have made their way up the burnt and chiseled slopes of Superstition Mountain. This yearly pilgrimage, marked by days of fasting under a blistering sun, culminates at the top. There, the Zuni hold ecstatic communion with the thunder gods, their emissaries from the stars.

About 40 miles east of Superstition, outside of Phoenix, lies another geographical wonder: a mammoth slab of rock sculpted by nature to resemble a monk kneeling in prayer. Facing the monk, in the foothills of Quartz Mountain, are the stark, red boulders and cacti that have been attracting the wealthy to this desert for years. If you follow a meandering road up, up, up into the heart of Quartz Mountain, you come to Paradise Canyon. And there, in sun-drenched chambers full of arches and antiques, you can find J. Allen Hynek, the nation's foremost authority on UFOs.

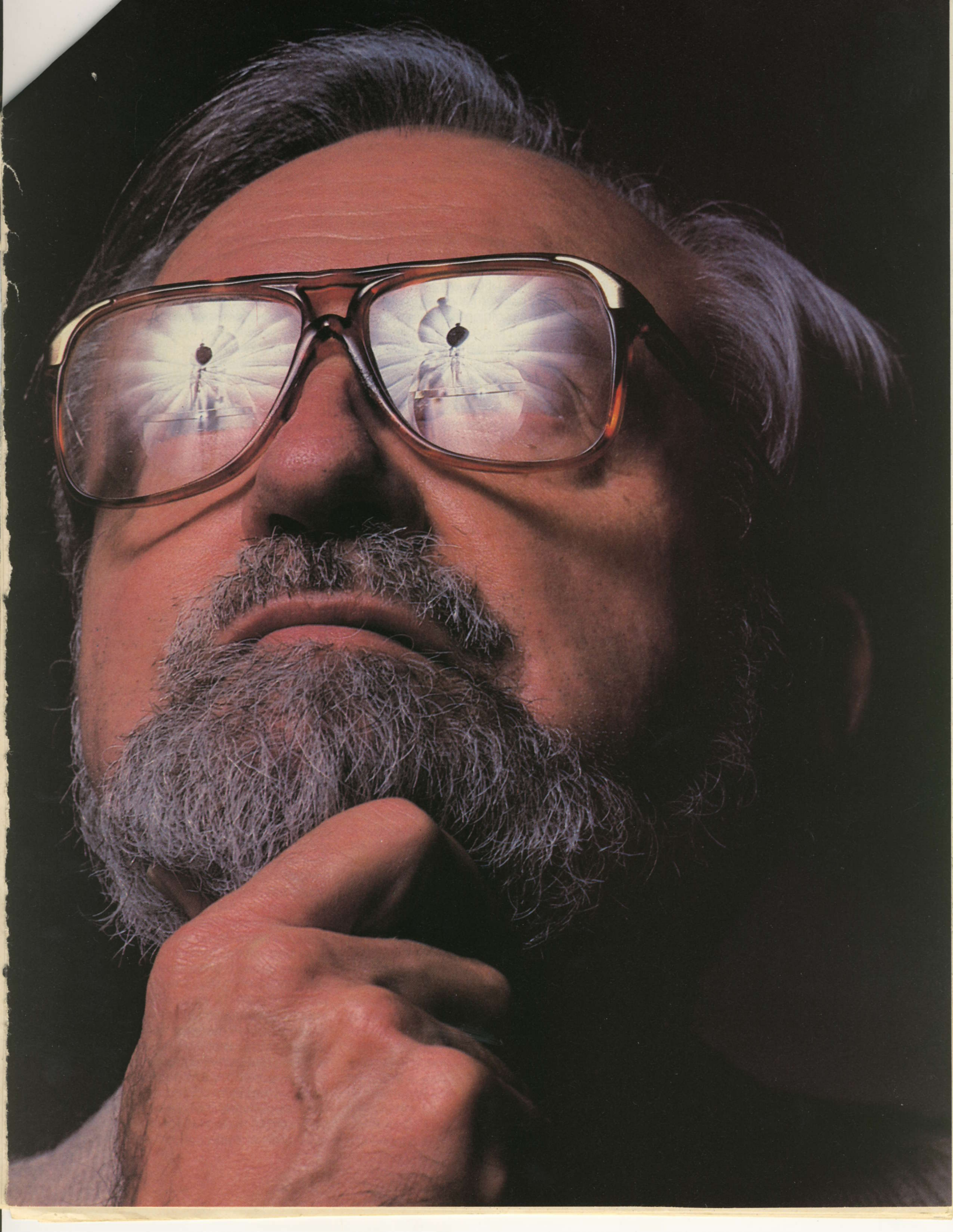
Hynek does not own this spectacular hacienda in the sun. He is merely a guest, ensconced in temporary comfort by the good graces of an anonymous benefactor who, like the Zuni, hopes to

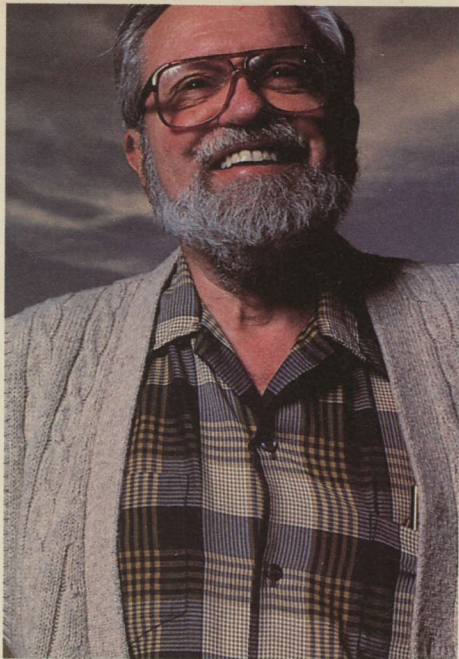
pry some salvation from the sky. Hynek is like the Zuni, too. He has journeyed a lifetime to reach this sumptuous house where, he's told, his benefactor will establish a UFO research center without rival in the world. And if anyone deserves to head such a center, it is the seventy-four-year-old Hynek himself.

Hynek was not always sympathetic to the idea of flying saucers. Through the Forties and Fifties, he worked as a research scientist at Ohio State and Harvard University, producing rigorous papers on supernovas and electronic satellite tracking. He served as associate director of the Smithsonian Institution's Astrophysical Observatory, establishing a dozen major observatories around the world. And from 1960 to 1974 he was chairman of the astronomy department at Northwestern University. As a sideline this hard-headed skeptic worked with the Air Force, debunking UFO reports for the infamous investigative effort known as Project Blue Book.

But somewhere along the line, Hynek's outlook changed. Though he'd long tried to squelch one UFO flap after the next, he came to

PHOTOGRAPH BY NORMAN SEEFE





“We don’t have UFOs, only UFO reports. The patterns and contents of these reports constitute the UFO phenomenon. The phenomenon says nothing about little green men. Belief or disbelief in UFOs is irrelevant.”

feel that *some* sightings, especially those made by such qualified witnesses as pilots and meteorologists, defied explanation. “I slowly realized,” he says, “that I wasn’t being scientifically honest. The sightings needed further investigation, but we were disregarding them, throwing data away.”

That realization put Hynek on a path he would follow for the rest of his life. He began making copies of all the documents to come out of Blue Book and gathered data that would allow him to study UFOs as they had never been studied before. He classified the various types of reports and even traveled around the country investigating the more interesting ones. While less rebellious colleagues insisted UFOs were meteors, ball lightning, or cloud formations, Hynek began to say there was nothing in the accepted scientific paradigm to explain them all.

His obsession resulted, in 1972, in the founding of the Center for UFO Studies, in Evanston, Illinois. A small operation run on the donations of friends, the center produced the most respectable papers and monographs in a field replete with misguided enthusiasts, psychopaths, and frauds. In the process, Hynek defined the UFO and profiled UFO witness. He also developed a series of scenarios to explain UFOs and to challenge the laws of physics as we know them today.

It’s no surprise that Hynek’s activities have thrust him into the limelight. He contributed the title to Steven Spielberg’s film *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, made a cameo appearance in the movie, and is the subject of a question in the Silver Screen edition of *Trivial Pursuit*. A major beer manufacturer has even written a commercial for Hynek, but he doesn’t know if he likes the script. “Too beery,” he says, “and too gullible, too suggestive of a belief in E.T.”

It is this pop appeal, perhaps, that annoys Hynek’s critics most. Noted UFO skeptic Philip J. Klass, author of *UFOs: The Public Deceived*, feels that all the publicity is helping Hynek to mislead the public. Hynek, he says, profits from radio, television, and lecture tours. Furthermore, Klass suggests in his book, Hynek is typical of the failed and aging scientist who has resorted to UFOs in a last, desperate attempt to capture a little glory. Aerospace expert and UFO skeptic James E. Oberg has other problems with Hynek. “We can account for all the types of UFO sightings *without* resorting to extraordinary explanations,” Oberg says. “Moreover, it’s foolish to assume that one must be crazy, drunk, or uninformed to suffer misperception. A totally sane and sober pilot or meteorologist can be fooled by his senses as easily, in some cases even more easily, than the average person. To see UFOs one need not be crazy, just human.”

But Hynek stands firm. He says he may be on the verge of solving one of mankind’s major mysteries. And, he adds, a desire for glory has nothing to do with his claims. “I could become a UFO guru if I wanted to,” he says. “I could have thousands of disciples and ride around in limousines. And like

most cult leaders, I could be rich. Those are things I would never consider.”

What Hynek does consider these days is dividing his time between the established center in Evanston and the new research facility in Phoenix. He flies between the two cities on his senior citizen’s pass, gearing up the Phoenix office for a potent research effort while the Evanston center continues to publish journals and reports.

*Omni* senior editor Pamela Weintraub interviewed Hynek at his headquarters on Quartz Mountain, opposite the massive rock figure of the praying monk. Weintraub was particularly impressed by a floor-length bathroom window, through which she saw a small stone fountain set against a towering wall of rock. When asked about this stunning piece of design, Hynek, anxious to dissociate himself from the aura of wealth, responded, “We’re going to rent an office in downtown Phoenix. We want a setting that’s more egalitarian, more appropriate to a lab.”

**Omni:** Many people consider you the world’s foremost ufologist, yet you started out a staunch skeptic. Can you describe those early days?

**Hynek:** On May 5, 1910, at five days of age, I was taken on the roof to see Halley’s Comet. Years later, after getting my Ph.D. in astronomy from the University of Chicago, I weathered the Depression at the university’s observatory in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. I lived like a king on my fellowship of sixty-eight dollars and fifty cents a month, and I slept and cooked my meals under the dome of the observatory. It was like living in a monastery. I was so utterly steeped in astronomy that the rest of the world didn’t exist. I didn’t even know that Hitler burned books. It was a great isolation.

Then the war came along, and I got married. I was on my honeymoon and passing through Washington, DC, when I offered my services to what was then the equivalent of the National Science Foundation. They learned I was a radio ham; so they had me help develop an explosive device called the radio proximity “fuze,” which was used against Kamikaze planes and V-1 buzz bombs and that ultimately detonated the A-bomb over Hiroshima. It’s the only thing in life I’ve come to regret.

After that I went to Ohio State, where I served as director of the school’s McMillin Observatory. One memorable day in 1948, three Air Force officers from nearby Wright Field came by in full regalia. We chatted about the weather for a while, and finally one of them asked, “What do you think about flying saucers?” “It’s a helluva lot of nonsense,” I said, “a fad, postwar nerves, a craze.” I apparently said the right thing because the Air Force asked if I’d like to be a consultant to Project Sign, an attempt to deal with the great many reports pouring in. I said sure, why not? It was a chance to eat fresh lobster, flown in from Boston, at the officers club, and it certainly didn’t require that I compromise my work as an astronomer.

So once or twice a month I’d visit Wright

Field, and they'd give me a stack of UFO reports. I'd go through them and say, "Well, this is obviously a meteor," or "This is not a meteor, but I'll bet you it's a balloon." I was a thorough skeptic, and I'm afraid I helped to engender the idea that it must be nonsense, therefore it is nonsense. I always did my best for the Air Force, pulling the chestnuts out of the fire with my explanations.

**Omni:** I bet the Air Force appreciated that.

**Hynek:** Sure. They found the whole idea of flying saucers repugnant. They tried to ignore the reports at first, but they were, after all, responsible for protecting us from anything that flies, so they had to respond in a public-relations sense. They spent much of their time answering letters from kids and little old ladies in tennis shoes.

**Omni:** Wasn't there anything more compelling afoot?

**Hynek:** Oh, yes, but that *disturbed* them. What bothered the Air Force most were the reports coming from their own military pilots, men they had trained to be good observers. In fact, reports from military personnel caused General Nathan Twining to write a paper recommending that the government take the sightings seriously. But his proposal was killed by General Hoyt S. Vandenberg, a show-me type from Missouri who prohibited the paper's release.

My own report in June 1949 concluded that eighty percent of the sightings had astronomical or other obvious explanations, and twenty percent could not be explained. But I said that if we investigated further, we could probably explain those, too.

I was still at the university, teaching classes and observing the sky through a sixty-nine-inch telescope, and UFOs didn't seem to get too much publicity for a while. Then, in July 1952, civilians on the ground and airline pilots flying into Washington Airport reported lights cavorting over the White House. This sighting created quite a stir, stealing a lot of newspaper space from the Democratic convention. And it put the spotlight back on the Air Force, which, under pressure, started Project Blue Book. That's when they called their great debunker—me—out of mothballs. But when I came back, I realized that Project Blue Book was little more than a public-relations campaign. They'd had the word handed down from the Pentagon: "Don't get the public excited; emphasize the things that are solvable, and put the kibosh on cases you can't explain."

**Omni:** Why did they want it done that way?

**Hynek:** Perhaps they honestly feared public panic. Also, the Air Force is responsible for everything in the air, and it would be very bad PR, if they were to say, "Yes, UFOs are real, but we're helpless." Time and again I observed the official poop sheets, always quoting only the number of cases solved. They would develop all sorts of crazy explanations. Sometimes the Pentagon would give one explanation and Wright Field another, in obvious contradiction. Sometimes they would say it was Venus, when, at the time of observation, Venus was below the horizon. During my entire stay at Blue Book I never

once had a really serious scientific dialogue on the subject of UFOs.

**Omni:** Who ran Blue Book?

**Hynek:** Always Air Force employees, and until the very end, never anyone above a captain or a major. The first director of Blue Book was the late Captain Ed Ruppelt, whose prime purpose was to tell the brass what UFOs were—not to perpetuate a mystery. He was soon followed by Captain Charles Hardin, a misplaced broker who spent most of his time reading stock-market reports in the office. Hardin was amusing because he hated flying—whenever he went out to investigate a case, he took a train. After Hardin came Captain George T. Gregory, who reminded me of an apple polisher who gives whatever answer his superiors seem to want. People think that Blue Book was a large office with computers and filing cabinets and jets at the end of the runway ready to take off and investigate a case. Hardly!

**Omni:** Why did a responsible scientist and hard-bitten skeptic like yourself choose to

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• Perhaps UFOs are instruments introducing us to a new notion of life and reality. UFOs may be illusions created by consciousness that exists apart from protoplasm. •

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stay on at this small-time circus?

**Hynek:** I don't know whether you know the story of the astronomers Johannes Kepler and Tycho Brahe. Brahe was a marvelous observer. He got all sorts of data, but he hadn't the slightest idea how to use them. Kepler had such poor eyesight he couldn't make an observation in the back alley, but he was also a mathematician. He took Brahe's data and gave us Kepler's laws, which are the basis of Newtonian mechanics. I was essentially playing Kepler to the Air Force's Tycho Brahe. The Air Force was getting the data, and I wanted the data. So whether it's good science or not, I played along. I used their photocopy machine to make copious copies of everything. I was building at home a near duplicate of the Air Force's Blue Book file because I'd begun to sense that there might be something more important than anyone would admit.

**Omni:** What led you to that conclusion after more than a decade of skepticism?

**Hynek:** The caliber of the witnesses. When you get reports from professors at MIT, engineers on balloon projects, military and commercial pilots, and air-traffic controllers, you might one day sit down and say to your-

self, "Just how long am I going to keep calling all these people crazy?" I realized that if one took the reports seriously, definite patterns emerged. I recall one case that occurred in 1957, when I was teaching at Harvard. Over a period of four hours, officers at the police station in Levelland, Texas, got numerous calls from terrified drivers who, unknown to one another, said that a UFO appeared out of nowhere, causing headlights to go off and engines to die. The UFO stayed for three or four minutes and then rose, whereupon the cars allegedly became operable again. This pattern of stalled autos has been documented in a monograph called *UFO Reports Involving Vehicle Interference*, a study of four hundred forty-one such cases written by Mark Rodeghier, of the Center for UFO Studies, in Evanston.

Another extraordinary report came out of Socorro, New Mexico, in 1964. As patrolman Lonnie Zamora was chasing a speeder out of town in broad daylight, he reportedly saw *this thing* descending over the plains. He went out over the sagebrush and finally glimpsed what looked like an upside-down car and some creatures. Then, he reported, he saw the craft rise slowly with a sort of whistling noise but no exhaust. It moved horizontally with increasing speed and disappeared down what was called Six Mile Canyon. When he went back to investigate, Zamora found some charred greasewood bushes and, more important, three pod marks, indicating the spot where the thing had landed and scooped up some dirt.

I myself looked into the case quite extensively. I tried unsuccessfully to char the bushes with matches, and I couldn't make anything resembling the podlike impressions that were there, even with a shovel. I also interviewed Lonnie's old schoolteacher, the railroad baggage man, and others—they all gave Zamora a clean bill of health. He was a very solid, unimaginative cop.

**Omni:** How did the Air Force react?

**Hynek:** It was the one case they latched onto because of the physical evidence—the pod marks, the burned branches. They thought it was some sort of secret device. Colonel Hector Quintinella, the last director of Blue Book and the person in charge at the time, believed it was a U.S. government advancement on the lunar module, and he did hand-springs to get evidence for that. But the higher-ups told him they knew of nothing. That really bothered him. To this day he thinks it was a government craft. I told Quintinella that I couldn't possibly explain it. It certainly wasn't astronomical; it certainly wasn't a misperception. Something physical had been there. But I still wasn't convinced of UFOs as a *phenomenon*.

**Omni:** Then you considered the possibility of a hoax?

**Hynek:** That was claimed by UFO debunker Philip J. Klass, who said the story had been concocted by the chamber of commerce to whip up tourist interest. He intimated that there had been improved roads put in and so forth. Well, I went back to Socorro twelve years after the incident, in 1976, and looked

up Lonnie Zamora. He'd been hounded off the police force. Whenever he stopped kids for speeding, they'd say, "Why don't you go look for little green men?" I located him at his filling station, and he agreed to show me where it happened. The rented car wouldn't make the grade—improved roads, hell!—so he took us to the area in his pickup truck. We walked back and forth and finally found the spot. It's so dry there the pod marks were still there, overgrown with bushes. There were no signs saying IT HAPPENED HERE, no concession stands, no T-shirts. No, I don't believe it was a hoax, but neither did I consider that UFOs might be truly unexplainable until 1966, after my involvement in the infamous swamp-gas case.

**Omni:** What happened there?

**Hynek:** A farmer named Frank Manor and his son had described a craft landing in their Dexter, Michigan, farmyard. They insisted that they'd shot at it and that the bullet had ricocheted off it with a ping. Well, I arrived to find a circus situation, with reporters from all over yelling, "What do you think it is?" Some girls at nearby Hillsdale College also had a sighting the previous night, so in the presence of the housemother, I went into the girls' dorm and had them draw pictures for me. Standing at the window from which they'd made the sighting, I realized that they faced a marshy arbor region, a potent source of glowing swamp gas.

The next day was the Air Force press conference on the Manor sighting. Standing be-

fore tiers of microphones and TV cameras, I said that although I could not prove it, the Hillsdale incident indicated that we could ascribe that sighting, at least, to swamp gas. I hadn't even mentioned the Manor episode, when reporters rushed off to the phones like madmen. "The answer is swamp gas!" And I couldn't say, "Hey, fellas, come on back, that's not the whole story." Hell's bells! If the King of Arabia had reported a UFO the next day in the Sahara Desert, it would have been called swamp gas.

At that point I had to ask myself when I would become scientifically honest and say that I just didn't know what the sightings were and that they deserved further investigation. The swamp-gas incident caused such a furor that Gerald Ford, who was a congressman at the time, called a hearing on the subject, at which I recommended that the government set up a UFO commission at several universities. That was the beginning of the controversial Condon Committee, headed by the late Professor Edward V. Condon, at the University of Colorado.

**Omni:** How did the Air Force react?

**Hynek:** Oh, the Air Force was thrilled. It wanted to end Project Blue Book so badly, it could taste it, and the feeling was that if Condon came out and said UFOs were nonsense, they'd have the chance.

**Omni:** Many people claim that the Condon investigation was nothing but a whitewash, that Condon reached his conclusion before he began his study. What's your feeling?

**Hynek:** There's no doubt about it. I had dinner with Condon at his home in Boulder two weeks before his committee actually went into action. And he was quite clearly negative. But if he was negative, you should have seen Mrs. Condon. She was vitriolic. And it was a pity, really, that Condon, who was such a darn good scientist, should be remembered not for his excellent radar research, but for the flying-saucer situation.

Anyway, he was clearly prejudiced. He asked me to come in and brief him, and I was astounded to see that his chief, Bob Low, the guy actually doing the work, was at the blackboard putting down chapter headings and conclusions. You don't generate chapter headings and conclusions until a project is actually well under way. You've heard of the famous "trick would be" memo, haven't you? In writing a letter to the trustees of the University of Colorado, asking them to accept the Air Force contract, Low said, in effect, "The trick would be to give the *impression* that we are doing a scientific job."

**Omni:** Did the Condon Commission intend to review all of Blue Book?

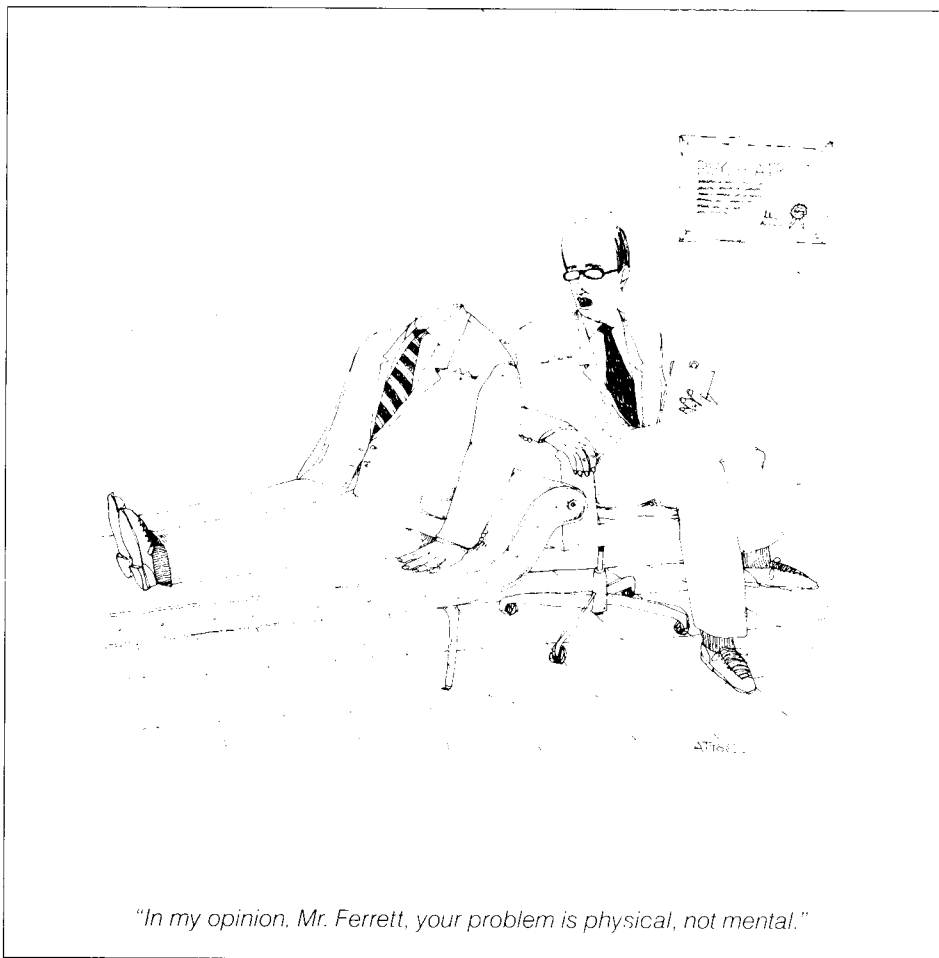
**Hynek:** Oh God, no! Blue Book turned over all its files, but most were never even unpacked. Condon finally decided to examine seventy-five cases. But the choices were poor. If I had been asked to advise, I would have said, "There's no point examining this one. It's obviously a meteor." Or, "This behaves like a balloon. Why don't you investigate the cases we found truly puzzling?" Well, Condon didn't always do that, but even out of the seventy-five, there were about twenty-five that they just could not explain. This is mentioned in the bowels of the report, but not in the much-publicized summary, where he dismisses UFOs as nonsense.

**Omni:** If a third of the sightings were puzzling, why dismiss the whole phenomenon?

**Hynek:** It almost seemed to me as if Dr. Condon had not read his own report. It was, after all, really written by underlings. The report itself presented real mysteries. To illustrate my point, after the report came out I received a visit from a French space scientist working with NASA. "By the way, what got you interested in UFOs?" I asked him. "Well, I read the Condon report," he said. Noting my surprise, he added, "You know, if you really read that report from cover to cover, you realize there's a problem." Nonetheless, when the Condon Report came out in 1969, it was the kiss of death. The great Condon and his committee had spoken, the boys in his club—the National Academy of Sciences—had concurred, and Blue Book was closed.

**Omni:** The issue certainly wasn't closed for you, though. What happened then?

**Hynek:** Nothing much until 1973, when I decided to investigate a marvelous sighting at a medical mission in Boanai, a remote part of Papua, New Guinea. The report, made in the late Sixties by some natives and a white Anglican priest named Father Gill, had been dismissed by Blue Book. I decided to see for myself. To get there I had to take a mission plane from Port Moresby, part of Papua,



*"In my opinion, Mr. Ferrett, your problem is physical, not mental."*

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to a place called Raba-raba, which means *far, far away*. From there I had to take another plane, and then a little outboard motorboat, and finally the natives just picked me up bodily and carried me ashore.

According to Father Gill, a nurse named Annie Laurie Borewa came running into his study to say there was a furor outside. Gill, who's not really excitable, sauntered outside to see a hovering disc with a deck around it. Being a friendly guy, he waved at the disc, and to his utter surprise, some creatures waved back. Then he waved with two hands, and they waved back with both hands. The natives got so excited they ran around screaming and gesticulating, and then, because it was a religious sort of place, they went into evensong!

Well, I got Father Gill aside in 1973, and I said to him, "How is it that you stopped to pray?" "I've asked myself that question," Gill answered. "But you know, I just felt it was some strange device made by you Americans." I told Gill it didn't sound like any technology I'd ever heard of.

**Omni:** How did Blue Book explain this?

**Hynek:** The disc had a glow around it and a blue beam that went straight up. As it left, it passed through—and illuminated—some clouds. So Blue Book called it "cloud illumination." Well, how did the clouds get illuminated in the first place?

After investigating that—it was part of a whole series of sightings in the area—I stopped at a hotel in Samoa and happened to glimpse a telex in the lobby. I sidled over to it and read about a UFO sighting in Athens, Georgia. Well, I returned home to one of the biggest UFO waves in a decade. There were more than five hundred sightings throughout Alabama, Georgia, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and much of the Eastern United States. I still remember the day—I had gone over numerous reports, and I was just pacing the floor—when I said, "There's got to be a center. Too much is going down the drain, and no one is minding the store."

**Omni:** Was after the founding of your center that you really began to define UFOs as a phenomenon. What was the understanding that began to emerge from your work?

**Hynek:** I realized that we don't have UFOs, only UFO reports. I defined the UFO phenomenon, then, as the continual flow of strange sightings and reports from all over the world. The patterns and contents of these reports constitute the UFO phenomenon. The phenomenon says nothing whatsoever about origin, nothing about little green men. The question about whether you do or don't believe in UFOs is irrelevant. If you define the UFO as the UFO report and its consistent contents, then the phenomenon is there.

On the simplest level, I've divided that phenomenon into six categories. The most frequently reported sightings are those of strangely behaving lights in the night sky, so I called these, simply, nocturnal lights. Since

the majority of daytime UFO sightings have an oval shape and are often reported as metallic looking, these I called daylight discs. A separate category is also needed for UFOs that are picked up by radar. Then there are the close encounters. In close encounters of the first kind, witnesses come within a few hundred feet of the UFO, but neither the witnesses nor the environment is physically affected. In close encounters of the second kind, the UFO interacts with the environment, witnesses, or both. People or trees can be burned, holes or rings are made in the ground. And most incredible, in close encounters of the third kind, humanlike creatures—the so-called aliens—are said to make their presence known.

**Omni:** This third category gave Steven Spielberg the title for his film *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. How did you come up with that particular label, and how did you react when Spielberg used it in his film?

**Hynek:** I did not want to use any classification system that would imply an origin; so I

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● Suppose UFOs  
are trying to save us in the  
same way we try  
to save whales. Suppose  
when some  
damn idiot tries to press  
the red  
button, it doesn't work. ●

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simply copied the nomenclature that physicists used to describe collisions—collisions of the first and second kind. From that, I expanded to get close encounters of the first, second, and third kind. I still remember walking through Hollywood around ten-thirty at night and coming across a line two or three blocks long. I looked up at the marquee and saw *CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND*. Boy, what a thrill!

**Omni:** How has your work helped you understand UFOs?

**Hynek:** It has helped me to formulate a major question: Does the phenomenon represent new empirical evidence in the same sense that bacteria represented empirical evidence when Van Leeuwenhoek first looked through his microscope? The real question is whether or not the UFO phenomenon can be explained by the present scientific paradigm. I've come to believe that the answer is no. Take the car-stopping cases. The Condon committee tried to duplicate that effect by subjecting a car to an intense magnetic field. This changed the magnetic signature of the car but didn't stop the car. Now that is something that is not explained by present-day science. Here's an-

other example: UFOs are reported to hover noiselessly and then take off with tremendous speed, sometimes with flashing lights. A jet aircraft can take off with tremendous speed, and a helicopter can hover. But I know of no device that can do both and do both silently. In both instances the hardened critic would have an answer: It didn't really happen. If he's right, the UFO phenomenon is no longer a physical, but a psychological, problem. Then the psychologist must tell us how ten geographically independent people can report identical details.

**Omni:** Well, that is a possibility.

**Hynek:** Of course, the UFO phenomenon may teach us more about ourselves than it does about the outside universe. We don't know the answer, but there are several intriguing possibilities.

**Omni:** Including the possibility of visitors from outer space?

**Hynek:** That's certainly one possibility, but it's hard to accept. My biggest hope is that as the research progresses, I will be able to demonstrate that the E.T. hypothesis is untenable, that it just doesn't wash to a scientist. Look, if you let the thickness of an ordinary playing card represent the distance from the earth to the moon, how many cards, put back to back, would represent the distance to the nearest star other than the sun? The number is staggering. You'd have to have nineteen miles of cards. If you put down two cards per second and worked an eight-hour day, it would take you eight and a half years. There is simply nothing in our present or foreseeable technology that would allow travelers to cover such distances. And I have much too much respect for Einstein to think we can travel faster than light. There are other things that render the E.T. hypothesis unlikely as well. Our detection devices, which are sensitive enough to detect a soccer ball thousands of miles away, do not discern UFOs coming in or out. Yet there are so many reports that if UFOs were actual ships, it would be like not detecting an Apollo launch every half hour.

There's also the fact that these supposed aliens don't behave like we would behave upon visiting another world. They don't call for a summit meeting with heads of state. They don't set up trade, and they don't try to explain their presence. Moreover, they seem to be at home in our gravity and our atmosphere, which is highly unlikely.

**Omni:** Then you are advocating a psychological point of view.

**Hynek:** Hold on there, what do you mean by psychological? I always delight in pointing out that on whichever level you perceive the UFO phenomenon, you still have a problem. Whether UFOs are real or not, their motions are not random. They seem to be programmed and to exhibit what appears to be curiosity and purpose.

There's another feature about the UFO phenomenon that escapes most people. I like to call it the Cheshire Cat effect. In *Alice in Wonderland*, the Cheshire Cat manifested itself, communicated with Alice, and then disappeared. The UFO does very much the

same thing. The typical UFO is seen by several people; it seems solid and leaves marks, then goes away rapidly. But it's rarely reported from town to town. Now when a 747 leaves New York for San Francisco, the damn thing can be tracked any place along the line. Not so with UFOs. In essence, UFOs appear spontaneously within a limited area, remain visible for a short time, and then disappear without a trace. This peculiar behavior reminds us of the duality of light, which acts either as a wave or a particle, depending on the particular situation. Perhaps UFOs also have two aspects. They might even be an interface between our reality and a parallel reality, the door to another dimension.

Now I'm just suggesting this, not saying it's so. Any number of other theories are presently as valid.

**Omni:** What theory might explain the most puzzling part of the so-called phenomenon—claims that people have been abducted by actual creatures or aliens?

**Hynek:** It's obvious that abduction captures the public fancy: Spielberg didn't make a movie out of a nocturnal light or even a daylight disc. *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* was a grabber because it brought in another intelligence, *the others*. It struck chords of awe and wonder and fear: "My God, are they here to make charm bracelets out of us? Are they looking for a new source of protein? What is their mission in the world?"

I probably know more about the abduction phenomenon than most people, but this information simply raises more ques-

tions. Take the classic case of Betty and Barney Hill. Barney was a black post-office official, and Betty was a white social worker. Coming back from vacation in Canada in 1961, they reportedly saw what would be called a typical UFO. Then Barney was somehow impelled to take a side road. They came across what they thought was a road block when, they claim, some creatures started walking toward the car. One started to put his hand through the car window, and that is all Betty and Barney remember. Two hours later, they regained consciousness. They were thirty-five miles farther down the road without any idea how they got there, and this, obviously, began to bother them.

They began to have bad dreams and fi-

nally went to see Dr. Benjamin Simon, known for handling shell shock and amnesia cases. He used hypnotic regression to bring them back to the incident. He never interviewed them together and never allowed them to hear each other's tapes. After it was over, Simon found that they told the same story: Extraterrestrials impelled them to leave the car and walk to the craft, where they were separated and given examinations. Betty said they stuck a needle in her navel and then took skin and nail samples. Barney claimed they took a sample of his sperm.

Simon had me over to dinner with the Hills, and afterward put them under hypnosis. Then he allowed me to interrogate them for an hour and a half. They were sitting as close

felt he was dealing with a nincompoop. But under hypnosis, Betty drew the map. I myself put Betty's star map into a computer, and as it turns out, if you just sit there and diddle with the controls, you can match it up beautifully with part of the telescopic night sky. Carl Sagan argues that it is a coincidence. You can put down any number of dots, and if you turn them a certain way you'll get a replica of part of the sky. The map has evidence for and against it. But to me, it doesn't make much difference. The alien's home planet would require about one hundred sixty miles of cards. The problem remains: How did they get here? I don't think they did; certainly not by physical means.

**Omni:** Then you dismiss the Hills?

**Hynek:** Absolutely not. Having talked intimately not only with Betty and Barney but also with other abductees, there's one thing that stands out. They firmly believe it happened, and they maintain that it was real. But at what level of reality is it? Is it psychological reality, physical reality, or something else entirely? Right now, we don't have enough evidence, and any answer that I could give would be invalid.

**Omni:** Professor Michael Persinger, of Laurentian University, in Ontario, suggests that UFO sightings are visions induced by electromagnetic fields from the earth's crust.

**Hynek:** Persinger is a very enthusiastic scientist with tremendous energy and self-assurance. He could be right. But I won't be convinced until he can prove that an electromagnetic field *not* applied through elec-


trodes is capable of producing visions.

**Omni:** Alvin Lawson, a professor at California State University at Long Beach, suggests that UFO abductees are simply reliving the birth trauma. Medical instruments and the long tunnel to the womb, he says, have been converted into alien examiners and unearthly beams of light.

**Hynek:** I don't think babies coming through the birth canal would remember that sort of stuff. Lawson, who is an English teacher, after all, has somehow latched onto a theory. I just think it's nonsense.

**Omni:** Could UFO abductees be revealing some sort of Jungian archetype, psychological symbols that haunt us all?

**Hynek:** Why at this particular epoch, though?



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to me as you are now, and when Barney got to the scene where he was abducted, he yelled out in absolute, abject terror. It sent shivers down my spine. I'd say he'd have to get an Oscar for the performance if he were putting it on.

**Omni:** Wasn't there also a star map that Betty supposedly saw?

**Hynek:** According to Betty, she asked the leader where he was from. He pulled this three-dimensional map out of the wall. He told her that the dots were stars, and the lines, the trade and exploration routes his people normally followed. Then he said, "Do you know where you are?" Betty knew no astronomy whatsoever; she can probably tell the sun from the moon, but that's about all. He

Why wouldn't we have seen copious UFO reports in the nineteenth century?

**Omni:** Perhaps because modern technology leads to this particular expression of the archetype. There have always been fantasies. People saw elves, monsters, dragons. Perhaps the archetype varies from one age and society to the next.

**Hynek:** Jung died a very puzzled man about UFOs. He wanted very much to show that they were a projection of the collective unconscious, but he was sorely puzzled by the physical effects: How could an archetype or projection produce burns, radar tracings, or tangible marks on the ground? In a sense, that's my problem, too. The close encounter of the third kind just cannot be swept under the carpet. In science you do not discard data just because you don't like them.

**Omni:** Yet you reject the E.T. hypothesis. How do you account for what's going on?

**Hynek:** What I reject is the idea that flesh-and-blood aliens are visiting the earth. I do believe that from an astronomical standpoint, the probability of another intelligence in the universe is enormous. But our vision of that intelligence tends to be very provincial. In looking for life elsewhere, we naturally think in terms of our own life. But I think that's a mistake. I prefer to go with the view of George Wald, at Harvard, who says that consciousness may be separate from the vehicle that contains it.

I also agree with Arthur C. Clarke, who said that when we look for life elsewhere, we should look not only for life as we know it but also for life as we don't know it and can't imagine it. We are terribly circumscribed and pre-Copernican in our naiveté when it comes to our concept of intelligent life. We understand that there are other solar systems, but we are still egocentric when it comes to our concept of life. Maybe UFOs are instruments to make us aware of the truth, introducing a new notion of life and reality. UFOs may be illusions created by consciousness that exists apart from protoplasm.

**Omni:** But why? And why now?

**Hynek:** All I can do is spin some scenarios. Suppose that a million years ago, some outside intelligence had planted a sensor in the solar system. If it sent reports back home every thousand years, as far as Earth and the human race were concerned, most of those reports would have been really monotonous: "The human race is still procreating and starting wars; the human race is still procreating and starting wars." But perhaps the last time the report went back, a number of things had happened: electric lights, nuclear energy, going to the moon. In other words, the human race has suddenly become of interest to another intelligence.

Another scenario is that some intelligence outside us has suddenly realized that the human race is an endangered species. Perhaps they are trying to save us in the same way we are trying to save whales, seals, and so forth. This is conjecture and far from fact, but really a hope. Suppose that when some damn idiot on this Earth tries to press the red button, that button won't work.

Another scenario is one I call the parable of the elk. An elk is wandering through the Northwest Territory when suddenly he sees a strange craft and some very strange creatures. He experiences missing time and eventually wakes up knowing something has happened. The machine and the creatures are gone, but he goes back and tells his fellow elks, all members of B.P.O.E. 347, about his experience. They say, "What kind of moose milk have you been drinking?" Well, although he doesn't know it, the strange craft was actually a helicopter, and the strange creatures, people. They fired a tranquilizing bullet into him, and while he was unconscious, implanted a transponder. So the elk, after he wakes up, has no notion whatever that whenever a certain satellite passes overhead it activates the transponder, and back in Washington, DC, his blood, heart-beat, temperature, and location are all being carefully plotted. Now, it's very suggestive but certainly not provable that some of these abductees, especially when they seem to

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◉ Suppose a  
very advanced civilization  
has the ability  
to project a thought-form  
down here, which,  
like a holographic image,  
assumes  
three-dimensional reality. ◉

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show scars, have been selected as experimental guinea pigs.

**Omni:** Yet close encounters of the third kind might be anybody's fantasy.

**Hynek:** I can't disagree. That's why I'd like to focus most of my new research on close encounters of the second kind, where there are actual physical marks. Perhaps a foreign consciousness is creating not just illusions but the real ship and the real creatures as well. If they weren't physical creations, they couldn't leave traces. That's the importance of the close encounter of the second kind. Let us suppose that a very, very advanced civilization has, as a part of its everyday technology, the ability to project a thought form that, like a holographic image, temporarily assumes three-dimensional reality. This is just speculation of the wildest sort, but if the UFO phenomenon is doing anything, it's causing us to expand our imagination, to make us aware that this nice, cozy world we live in is only the world we see around us, not the sum total of our environment.

**Omni:** Are there any close encounters of the second kind that you feel would particularly help to reveal this broader reality?

**Hynek:** I'd like to get to the bottom of the

Cash/Landrum affair. The story there concerns Betty Cash, Vicki Landrum, and Vicki's grandson Colby. The three were coming back from a Bingo game when they saw a glowing triangle spewing flames above them in the sky. They stopped the car to watch the thing, and as it moved off, they reportedly saw about twenty-three helicopters escorting it out. After they got home there were all sorts of physiological effects: Their eyes swelled, their hair fell out, they developed blisters, they were nauseated and weak. The event completely altered their lives.

**Omni:** What do you think was at the root?

**Hynek:** My best guess is that they were exposed to some kind of microwave radiation. Space-shuttle engineer John Scheussler, who's investigating the case, is veering toward the idea that the three were exposed to a government device escorted by twenty-three helicopters. He's even helped Betty, Vicki, and Colby to institute a lawsuit against the government. But there's another side of all this: Where would twenty-three helicopters come from? First of all, it was Christmas week, and people at the bases said they would never conduct military exercises at a time like that.

**Omni:** Certainly you can't be suggesting the possibility of twenty-three extraterrestrial helicopters?

**Hynek:** No, that's preposterous. But perhaps Cash and the Landrums saw a holographic image of the helicopters. I could buy that more than I buy twenty-three solid, physical helicopters from some unknown base, when no baseman will admit seeing so many helicopters of that particular kind.

**Omni:** Yet I really think that we're obliged to consider the fact that some of these sightings are due to government craft. Recently, James E. Oberg traced many reports to secret Soviet satellite launchings.

**Hynek:** Today, of course, such technology may account for many reports. From 1947 through 1955, however, almost none of the maneuvers ascribed to UFOs could have been duplicated with human technology. And even today, our technology can duplicate only part of the phenomenon. We *still* don't have craft that can hover and then take off at fantastic speed.

**Omni:** As far as you know. But the government has been implicated in other ways as well. A group known as CAUS [Citizens Against UFO Secrecy] claims that the government has been orchestrating a massive cover-up of UFO information. They've recently invoked the Freedom of Information Act to obtain classified information. Have they found anything, and do you believe there's a government cover-up?

**Hynek:** What can be covered up? You can cover up ignorance, embarrassment, sinister political acts. I myself don't see real evidence for a diabolical, Machiavellian cover-up. I do perceive a strong reluctance to share information with the public. The government did classify many of the unexplained sightings, and CAUS, wielding the Freedom of Information Act, managed to discover a number of things. The most important ma-



erial concerned the Strategic Air Command (SAC) bases.

CAUS learned that in the fall of 1975, there had been a spate of sightings at the Loring Air Force Base, in Maine; the Wurtsmith Air Force Base, in Michigan; the Malmstrom Air Force Base, in Montana; and the Falconbridge Air Force Base, in Canada. In each case, according to classified government documents, the nuclear-weapons storage area was penetrated by UFOs. One helicopter pilot sent in to look at the Malmstrom UFO even claimed that it had manipulated the computer, changing guidance directions on intercontinental ballistic missiles.

CAUS also found evidence indicating the presence of still more documents. When CAUS attorney Peter Gersten went after those, he was told he couldn't have them because they would interfere with national security. Yet the Air Force today maintains that Blue Book was closed because UFOs did not affect national security. How can they have it both ways? Gersten took his case to the Supreme Court, which refused to hear the case. He finally managed to obtain some documents. This is one of them. [Hynek takes some pages from his folder.]

**Omni:** It's all crossed out!

**Hynek:** Government censors crossed out virtually everything. Now, is that a cover-up or what?

**Omni:** How do you react to Larry Bryant, who claims the government is hiding crashed saucers and alien corpses?

**Hynek:** Bryant is a superenthusiast, and he doesn't show good judgment. His evidence is a letter purported to be from an Air Force officer claiming that he'd heard of these aliens. That certainly wouldn't stand up in any court of law.

To be honest, I don't like to talk about crashed saucers because I am in a position to mobilize public belief. If I came out and held a press conference to say that a saucer has landed and the creatures were in deep freeze at Wright Field, quite a few people would believe me. But it wouldn't necessarily be true, and it certainly wouldn't be science. I'm the interpreter, the monitor, the elder statesman in this field, and I won't jeopardize my reputation for the sake of a story.

**Omni:** All this brings up a good point: Where do we draw the line? After all, the UFO phenomenon is made up not only of reports by pilots, scientists, and meteorologists. There are a wide variety of cults that worship aliens and make all kinds of outrageous claims about communication from beyond.

**Hynek:** First of all, such claims are simply not testable. One would have to throw away so much of what we know about the physical world to believe what these people say that the burden of proof is certainly on them. When asked for evidence, their typical response is, "The aliens won't let me discuss it with you; you can't see this, it's a private matter." Science has no truck with that.

But from another point of view, perhaps there's a reason. The cultists, after all, are part of the phenomenon. Sometimes I think that hoaxsters and psychopaths are being

manipulated to muddy the waters, to cast doubt on the sightings that are real so we won't be too jolted by the presence of an alien consciousness. One can view the UFO phenomenon as a conditioning process for the human race, a force nudging, budging, and pushing us to a deeper awareness of the universe. But perhaps such conditioning works better if it's subtle. I like to invoke the name of Jane Goodall, the primatologist known for her work with chimps. What would have happened if she had barged into the chimp community waving banners and gear? She would have scared the hell out of the chimps. So what did she do? She quietly pushed her footstool an inch or so closer each day. She got the chimps used to her. And maybe by using a few crazy cultists as a foil, the UFOs are getting us used to them.

The best example of this phenomenon may be cult leader George Adamski, one of the greatest hoaxsters of all time. Though no longer alive, he still has many thousands of followers around the world. He ran a hamburger stand at the base of Mount Palomar, had a little six-inch telescope, and called himself Professor Adamski. He was no more a professor than I'm the man in the moon.

The moon was his thing. He had gone to the moon, and he had seen the other side, lush vegetation, UFOs, and all. I asked him some technical questions about the focal length of his telescope. Could I see his camera? What sort of emulsion did he use? But all he wanted to do was show me photos.

His arguments were completely illogical. His understanding of astronomy and physics was nil; there is simply no physical way in which one side of the moon could have vegetation and atmosphere and the other side not. Yet this man had an audience with Queen Wilhelmina, of the Netherlands, and large groups of people accept his ideas.

**Omni:** Perhaps people were swayed by his intensity and his conviction that he was right.

**Hynek:** He styled himself a teacher and philosopher, preaching love and kindness. And perhaps it's that aspect that attracts this lunatic fringe. Mankind has always looked to the sky for help in one way or another. If the crops failed, we had to placate the gods. Today people are looking for a more scientific father image, but they still look to the sky. And the coming of the UFO phenomenon was a ready-made vehicle for anyone seeking relief from the energy crisis, overpopulation, the chance of a nuclear holocaust, pollution, you name it. Wouldn't it be nice if some other intelligence came down and helped us out of this mess. In a way, these UFO cults are fulfilling a deep-seated need that lets members live more comfortably.

**Omni:** Your critics would use *your* theory of a disembodied alien consciousness to accuse you of the same thing.

**Hynek:** First let me say that I probably could have used my influence to become a UFO guru with a vast following of disciples. And like most cult leaders, I could be rich. Those are things I would never consider. Nonethe-





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less, what you say is true. I'm walking a tight-rope the whole damn way. One wonders why study the subject at all. I've gone through ups and downs, times when I felt that it was just pointless. Then all of a sudden a case comes along that reawakens my interest, and I say, "My God, how do you explain this one?" Right now, I'm terribly excited by a spate of sightings in Westchester County, New York, where dozens of highly credible witnesses—including computer experts, teachers, engineers, and a meteorologist—have seen a large, hovering boomerang-shaped pattern of lights. This case differs from other, similar cases because it has an abundant number of *independent*, as opposed to multiple, witnesses. When you have three or four people in a car, a psychologist can always argue that they were affected by one another. But when strangers separated by two or three city blocks report the same thing in some detail, that's something else.

**Omni:** A recent article in *Discover* magazine said that the Westchester boomerang was created by small planes flying in formation.

**Hynek:** Some of the sightings, undoubtedly, revolved around the fliers. But most did not. Single-engine planes cannot hover soundlessly or travel below stall speed. Again, it seems as though the UFO phenomenon wants to muddy the waters, to disprove itself. It has been pretty conclusively shown that the flyers took off and mimicked the actual UFO within four hours of a legitimate sighting. Why? One of the most profound statements in *Close Encounters* was made by [the late] François Truffaut: "It's a *phenomenon psychologique*." People were impelled to come to the mountain. Time and again, people were impelled to go to the window or outside. Perhaps the Westchester flyers were also impelled, impelled to obfuscate the situation by doing things so that no one would believe it.

**Omni:** Your personal goal, I take it, is not obfuscation but clarity. What do you plan to do in pursuit of that?

**Hynek:** My project now is the new UFO Research Facility, in Phoenix, funded largely through private sources. We hope to carry out an extensive UFO research effort. My main benefactor is a major philanthropist who wishes to remain anonymous.

**Omni:** How do you hope to make the new center different from most UFO research efforts around today?

**Hynek:** I do not mean it unkindly, but the UFO movement today is filled basically with amateurs. Most of the investigators are not professionals, and they are technically ill equipped and lack funds. Many are also beset by preconceived notions of what UFOs ought or ought not to be. My new research facility, on the other hand, will be a thoroughly professional operation. Subject to sufficient funding, I would divide my investigation into two areas: passive and active. The passive work would include two computer studies. One, named UFOCAT, for UFO catalog, already contains some eighty thousand UFO cases. Another, UNICAT (for unique catalog), concerns the study of cor-

relations between UFO features most frequently reported from all over the world. These correlated features—like hovering, blinding output of light, anomalous acceleration, or complete silence—seem to violate our present scientific paradigm.

The active work would include a vast network of psychologists, physicists, polygraph experts, even magicians, who would live and breathe carefully selected cases, even if it took years. The end result would be technical reports on such cases, truly scientific documents. As the years pass, we would accumulate a set of technical reports acceptable to the National Academy of Sciences. I hope to demonstrate to my scientific colleagues that the subject is worthy of their serious attention and that ridicule is not part of the scientific method.

**Omni:** How does your investigation of UFOs compare with the beleaguered effort of SETI [search for extraterrestrial intelligence] researchers, who are using radiotelescopes to comb the heavens for messages?

**Hynek:** Some wag has said that the ultimate aim of the SETI program is to have the not yet born talking to the long since dead, and vice versa. In essence, SETI scientists are currently listening for radio messages from distant civilizations many light-years away. If the scientists did find a message, it would be philosophically important. But I don't think it's good policy to spend millions of dollars on the SETI program and not spend even one cent to consider the possibility that the UFO phenomenon might have some bearing on the issue. It would be a tragic joke if all this money were spent searching for evidence of extraterrestrial intelligence in far places when that evidence might be under our very noses.

**Omni:** How does your quest tie in with your concept of religion and God?

**Hynek:** My personal feeling is that the universe is not an accident. I feel like the spider in the corner of the 747. It hasn't the slightest idea what the mission of the 747 is or who built it. All that is an order of magnitude above its comprehension. The universe is an order of magnitude above mine. Sir Arthur Eddington had a nice way of putting it. He said that the human mind is like a fishnet, and the kind of fish you catch depends on the mesh of the net. There will always be fish that slip through. Eddington also said that given the weight of an elephant sliding down a grassy bank and the slope and friction of that grassy bank, a physicist can calculate the exact speed with which the elephant would hit the bottom. But no physicist can tell you why it's funny. No physicist can tell you, either, about the meaning or purpose of the universe. I have a lot of fun spinning out such analogies because, like UFO stories themselves, they help me to think. I've often said that some day I would enjoy being snowbound on the rocky coast of Maine. I imagine myself in front of the fireplace, keeping my friends entertained for many nights, not with ghost stories but with one interesting UFO tale after the next. I'd enjoy being given the chance, as long as the food held out. ☺