

Strange Places: UFOs and Cemeteries

Graverobbers From Outer Space?

by
Scott
Corrales

In 1979, an unusual film graced screens across America. Billed as a horror/sci-fi flick, *Phantasm* presented the story of a small town whose less-than-human funeral director (a character known only as the Tall Man) modifies human corpses into "slave labor"—dwarfish creatures resembling the Jawas from *Star Wars*—on a distant planet. When the film's youthful protagonists discover the ultimate fate of their dead relatives' mortal remains, they undertake a quest to vanquish the Tall Man and his works. So compelling was this piece of fiction that it spawned an enthusiastic fan base and three sequels.

While the merits of this cinematic event are best left to film reviewers, *Phantasm* drew attention to a curious aspect of the UFO phenomenon—its unusual affinity with human burial grounds, ancient and modern.

But before proceeding along this line of inquiry, it is necessary to differentiate between UFOs and the balls of light seen at many graveyards in this country and in others. Known as "cemetery lights" or

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"graveyard lights," they have been described as having sizes ranging from candle flames to large azure fireballs. These lights, which either dart around or remain perfectly motionless, have been attributed to the presence of phosphorated hydrogen, which has luminous properties. Researchers such as Spain's Salvador Freixedo have remarked about the sentient quality exhibited by these objects and dubbed them REPQEN—Residual Psychic Quasi-Intelligent Energy.

A History of Sightings

In the early decades of the UFO phenomenon, investigators wrote about the phenomenon's preference for dark, deserted places—quarries, garbage dumps, cemeteries—and suggested that these choices were ideal low-visibility places for alien spaceship crews to land undetected by humans. As the paranormal aspects of the phenomenon began to be acknowledged in the 1970s, researchers admitted that such places had also been favored by shadowy creatures from terrestrial traditions.

One of the most the most remarkable cases involving the presence of unidentified flying objects over an ancient North American burial ground was recorded by investigator John Magor in his article "Strange Sightings in Yukon Sky" (*Canadian UFO Report*, Vol. 1. No. 1). The incident took place in the environs of Canyon Creek on the Alaska Highway in December 1966 and involved the family of one Bob McKinnon.

According to McKinnon, he first became aware that something was amiss when a powerful beam of light poured through the windows of the rest area he operated on the highway. Even more surprising was the fact that the light beam had its origin in an ancient Indian burial ground half a mile away.

McKinnon thought at first that the light issued from construction work being done at the site, but soon realized that this could not be the case, since the beam "was hanging absolutely motionless in the air, maybe 100 feet up, and looked to be about two feet in diameter. It was bluish-orange in color, something like the reflections off a

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diamond.”

The rest-area operator called his relatives to witness the event and went outside the structure to get a better view. The light initiated a slow descent over the burial ground. The source of light almost touched the ground and lit the four-foot-tall wooden huts into which the bodies of the dead were deposited. “We definitely had a feeling it was interested in the place,” noted the main witness.

Then as suddenly as it appeared, the light vanished. McKinnon contacted the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and was told that the object must have been a meteor—a suggestion that the witnesses could not agree with.

Magor’s report concludes with the rest-area operator saying that, despite his lack of interest in flying saucers, “there definitely was something strange happening out there over the cemetery that night.”

On the night of July 21, 1977, three members of the Bradford, Pennsylvania, police department were treated to the sight of two luminous objects flying low across the city sky toward Oak Hill Cemetery. That same evening, a triangular UFO sporting white and red lights was seen over Limestone, New York. Adding to the baffling phenomena was the problem of “unidentified radio signals,” mostly in a language similar to Spanish, pouring in over area air waves and disrupting police-band communications. While local experts dismissed the radio “skips,” as they were known, no official explanation was ever put forth for the anomalous radio activity.

Even rock and roll musicians have experiences to share. Rob Zombie recalled having had a UFO sighting in 1973 while attending a third-grade Halloween party. The future rock celebrity was leaving the event when he saw a UFO hovering over the cemetery adjacent to his grade school. “That was pretty freaky,” he admitted to journalist Gerri Miller.

Even South of the Border...

A UFO was inadvertently “caught in the act” of showing its interest for human burials on April 28, 1976, when Angel González photographed funeral services being held

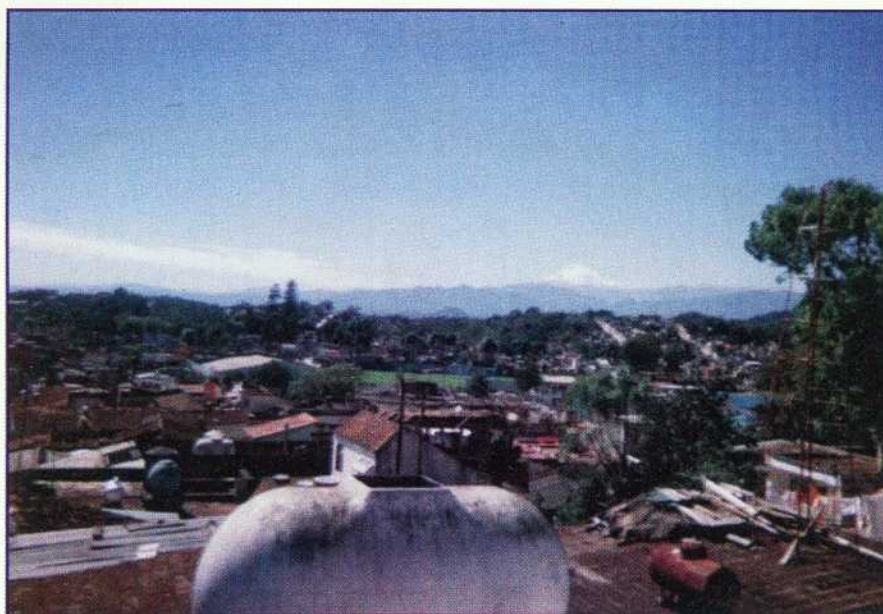


Angel González UFO photo as it appeared in *La Semana de Caguas*, May 20, 1976

for the Rev. Antonio Roque of the Barrio Navarro Baptist Church in Gurabo, Puerto Rico. At no point were the photographer or those attending the service ever aware of the unidentified flying object—the dark, oval-shaped object appeared when the color film was developed. Gonzalez’s snapshot shows the object suspended at a certain distance over the crowd. The photo appeared in the May 20 edition of the Caguas *La Semana* newspaper and went on to become

one of the memorable images of Puerto Rico’s mid-70s UFO wave.

On the other side of the Caribbean, residents of the Las Margaritas and Santa Rosa developments in the city of Jalapa, Mexico, allegedly witnessed a collision between two UFOs in mid-flight, directly above the Bosques del Recuerdo cemetery in the early hours of October 27, 1995. Both objects had been flying at high speeds and low above the ground.



Jalapa, Veracruz, with the Pico de Orizaba in the background

It was approximately 4:00 A.M. when the dispatcher of the Canal 35 Hermandad taxi company, Ms. P. Ch. C., reported from her vantage point at the summit of Lomas Margaritas that a huge light which had been flying over the area had subdivided itself into three smaller lights, two of which had collided in midair. This report prompted a large number of cab drivers to rush to the scene of the events. Mrs. Y. F. G., a resident of the aforementioned development, stated that similar events had occurred days earlier and that she herself had seen the objects disappearing in the vicinity of Cofre de Perote, a nearby mountain.

Dr. Rafael A. Lara of the Mexican research organization CEFP, a resident of the state of Veracruz, managed to interview the witnesses for his *Terra Incognita* journal. Ms. P. Ch. C. added that after the objects disappeared, three women were seen in the middle of the cemetery, although the cab drivers who reported to the scene could not find anyone.

Contradictions did not wait long to emerge, as the selfsame Ms. P. Ch. C. declared that what she had seen had not necessarily been "alien spaceships" and that an overeager radio journalist, Antonio Trujillo, had reported the "alien spaceships" over Bosques del Recuerdo Cemetery. The media frenzy led to the young woman

being besieged at her workplace by reporters interested in learning "if she had undergone any emotional or physical trauma as a result of witnessing the UFOs."

Mexico was not alone on the list. UFOs also staged appearances at cemeteries in Brazil during the April 1996 flap that caused excitement all over the South American giant's northeastern region. On April 5, 1996, a woman named María José and her son were driving along the road linking the cities of Joao Pessoa and Natal in the state of Paraíba when they became aware of a UFO hovering in the vicinity of a local cemetery. The unknown object sped directly toward them, passing over the car's roof at low altitude. Mrs. José was so unnerved by the experience that she was hospitalized in the city of Campinha Grande.

Even more compelling is the case involving a direct link to one of South American ufology's strangest cases: the 1949 death of Joao Prestes due to an alleged "UFO bolt" which roasted him to death. Researcher Pablo Villarubia managed to find fresh leads and witnesses to this case in recent years, delving into the misperceptions between what was reported and what actually happened. One of the most interesting side stories involved the unfortunate Joao's brother Emiliano, who had seen "two fireballs rising and striking each other" and repeating the same action in the

vicinity of the Aracariguama Cemetery a year after his brother's death. Emiliano Prestes was reportedly encircled by the fireballs and could feel the intense heat arising from the unknown objects. He dropped to his knees in fervent prayer until the lights departed, perhaps sparing him a fate similar to his brothers. According to Hermes da Fonseca, whom Villarubia interviewed, the fireballs have remained active to the present. In 1995, Giomar Gouveia, a champion jockey and owner of some stables at Ibatí, saw a light hovering over his animals, giving off orange beams of light.

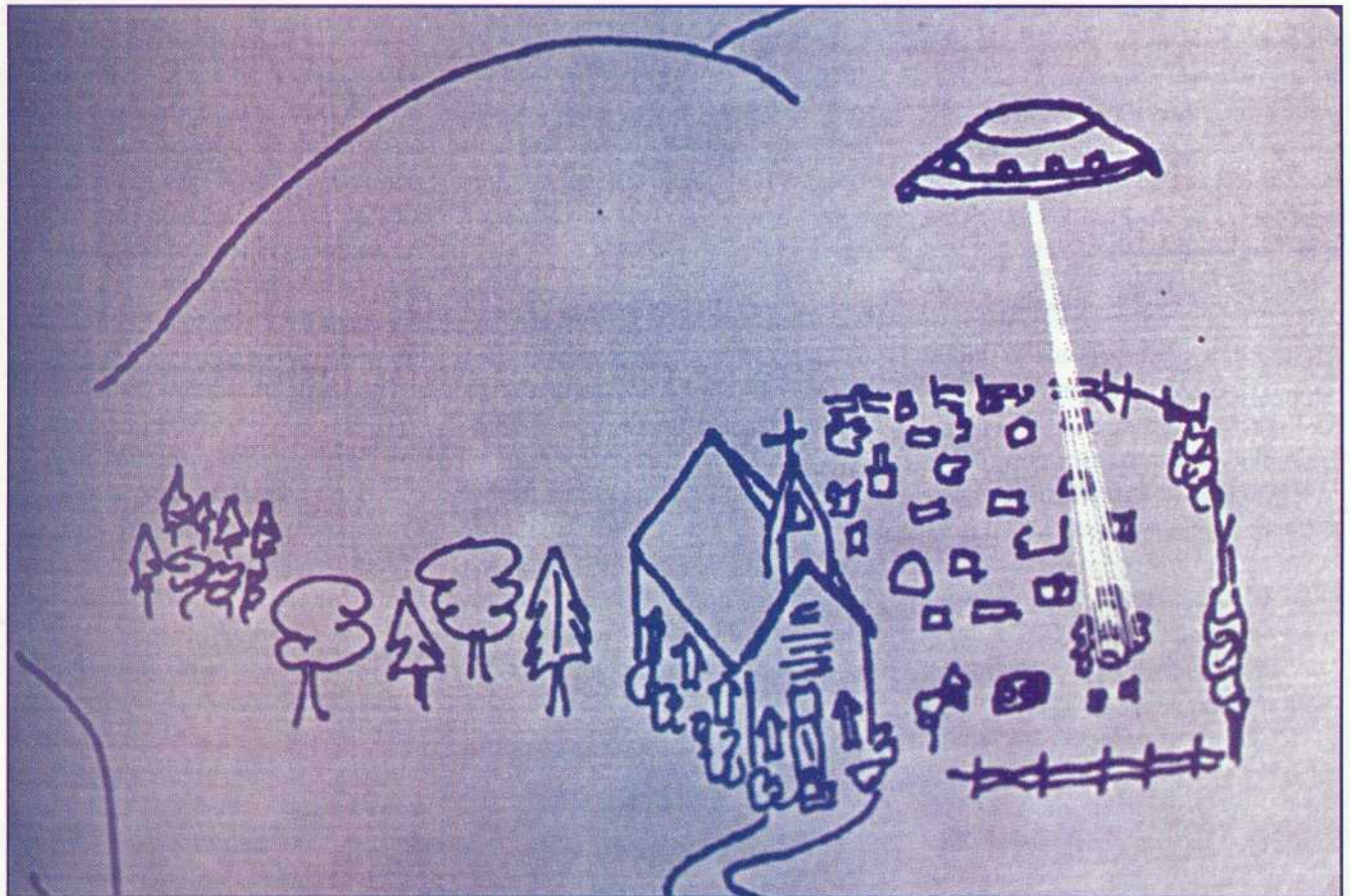
Aracariguama Cemetery had its own eerie stories to tell. Nelson Oliveira, the local grave digger, informed the UFO researcher that around 1989, he had seen something strange in the cemetery—an unusual circular flying object that resembled "an upside-down hat" made of aluminum. The object hovered for a while before heading in the direction of the city of Sao Paulo.

Tomb Raiders From Beyond

Compelling evidence for UFO interest in the discarded mortal coils of human beings comes from West Virginia journalist Bob Teets, who mentioned the following cases in his book *West Virginia UFOs* (1994).

Elk Garden, a community of 300 souls in Mineral County, has attracted the disturbing attention of unidentified objects since at least the early 1960s, when local residents began to see them in the vicinity of Nethken Hill, whose cemetery contains a number of the small town's most prominent citizens as well as a Methodist church. The Kalbaugh family, living on a farm located a small distance away from the cemetery, claims to have seen "lights" throughout the late 1960s and early '70s, and were clearly aware that they were neither airplanes nor helicopters. Eyewitnesses are in agreement that the lights were invariably white in color and accompanied by a high-pitched sound.

But the most memorable and eerie of the apparitions over Nethken Hill occurred on October 8, 1967, when the Rev. Harley DeLeurere and two male members of his



From Bob Teet's West Virginia UFOs

Drawing by Susan Williams of the Nethken Hill UFO

congregation, intrigued by the stories of sightings, went up to a promontory from where they could have a panoramic view of Nethken Hill and its cemetery. Their sky watch was rewarded later that evening when one of them saw an object described as "a big turtle with lights on it" appear over the hill and move deliberately toward the church.

The witnesses were stunned by what happened next: The turtle-shaped luminous object descended to approximately six feet off the ground as it shone its lights toward the graveyard. One of the men (identified by author Teets only as "Leonard Jr."), recalls that the object's lights projected into a day-old grave at the cemetery. The Reverend DeLeurere allegedly mentioned that it would be a good idea to exhume the body in the new grave to check for signs of disturbance. "It seems like every time there was a new grave, within the next couple of nights, people would see lights up there."

Seeing the events through the prism of early '90s abduction research, the author

suggests the interesting possibility that the UFOs were engaged in the business of retrieving alien implants from the bodies interred on Nethken Hill.

Unhealthy Interest?

Why are UFOs (whatever their origin) interested in our final resting places? What could they stand to gain from such pursuits? Trying to ascribe reason to an utterly unreasonable phenomenon leads us to consider that "alien scientists" can glean important biological information from the deceased, or as suggested in the West Virginia scenario, we are witnessing a cleanup operation aimed at removing implants left in the bodies of long-time abductees.

There is still a less wholesome possibility to consider, and it is as mind-bending as it is sordid: Could UFOs be piloted by "recycled" humans? If it is true that the technology of any advanced alien civilization would be indistinguishable from magic, as Arthur C. Clarke noted in *Report on Planet Three and Other Speculations*, a

space-faring civilization might choose to leave the dangers of space travel to beings created specifically for the purpose rather than jeopardizing its own citizens.

In November 1974, Luis and Maribel R., a married couple from the city of Huesca, Spain, stopped their car on a deserted highway in the middle of the night to hold a strange conversation with a pointy-faced, all-too-human ufonaut, who asked them a surprising question: would they be so kind as to lend him a monkey wrench? A semi-spherical UFO with alternating red, yellow, and white lights hovered in the background, and the car's driver wondered what good would a wrench do aboard such a vehicle. The ufonaut introduced himself as having been the former "Dr. Flor, from Barcelona."

Perhaps even more alarming is a case investigated by Spanish researcher Manuel Carballal: according to the testimony of a number of witnesses, a young man who identified himself as Frederick Valentich, the Australian pilot who disappeared mys-

teriously in 1978, was alive and well in 1990 at Plaza del Charco, a seaport square on island of Tenerife in the Canary Islands. Displaying an Australian passport to prove his claim, Valentich told those with whom he spoke on several occasions that he now belonged to a group of humans who had been "recruited" by extraterrestrials. It is also worth noting that the supposed Valentich showed no signs of aging, and resembled the photos circulated around the time of his disappearance.

Another case involving a possible "recycled" human occurred in the Dominican Republic on September 22, 1973, as insurance salesman Virgilio Gómez drove to a business appointment. Heading toward his destination, he became aware of someone waving him down. As he slowed down, Gómez became aware that the person was clad in a green uniform and that there were two others standing a few dozen feet away. The insurance salesman could not have been prepared for what happened next: the man in the green uniform told him that his name was Freddy Miller, a man who had "supposedly" drowned 13 years earlier with other people in a boating accident, but that he had in fact been rescued by a modern device, "a module known to people as a UFO."

Suspecting that someone was playing a prank on him, Gómez asked the stranger which planet he came from. He was stunned when the man soberly answered that he thought he came from Venus, and that he had been rescued "on account of his knowledge of radio technology," adding that there had been no room for the other hapless boaters and that they would not have survived the "adaptation process."

Gómez remarked that "Freddy Miller" had a disgusting grayish-yellow skin tone that he found repulsive, spoke in a thick, deliberate voice, and was virtually hairless. The entity's body was covered by a form-fitting green coverall without zippers or pockets. A large wristwatch "similar to the ones worn by scuba divers" adorned the wrist of its left hand.

The insurance agent was shown a half-concealed vehicle in the woods by the roadside—a fact that caused him to realize that

the situation was no joke. The oval-shaped craft had a chrome-like sheen to it and largely resembled "an American football" (unlike the traditional soccer ball used throughout Latin America) and was windowless, betraying no external seams or rivets.

Did "recycled" humans resembling burn victims make an appearance in a 1967 UFO case in Western Pennsylvania? In a case researched by the defunct Pittsburgh UFO Research Institute, a man known only as "Mr. Rible" took his daughter to an airstrip near Butler, Pennsylvania, to possibly catch a glimpse of the strange nocturnal phenomena which had plagued the vicinity for some time. Father and daughter soon found themselves staring at the evolutions of two luminous objects that suddenly headed straight for their Volk-

"There was something wrong about her movements. It was as if... she were dead."

swagen, yet rather than crashing into the hapless car, the lights morphed into a half-circle of five humanoid figures "dressed in sloppy green-gray trousers" with their heads covered by flat-topped caps. The exposed skin of their arms and faces was coarse and gave the appearance of being severely burned. After Mr. Rible coaxed his rear-engined car into starting, he found it necessary to drive around the semicircle of unpleasant figures.

Could the Men-in-Black who played such a prominent role in the early days of the UFO phenomenon correspond to this category of unliving beings, for want of a better term? Descriptions of these entities in their ill-fitting clothes, superannated vehicles, and odd physical characteristics have filled the casebooks of researchers in North America, South America, and Europe.

A compelling example can be found in John Keel's *The Mothman Prophecies* (Signet, 1975) as the author turns his attention from the goings-on in West Virginia to the no less strange occurrences on Mount Misery, Long Island, New York. In the late spring of 1967, a young contactee began to have repeated encounters with a personage she at first took to be the local librarian, clad in old-fashioned, 1940s-style clothing (the author notes that this was before any "retro" styles were in fashion). A series of subsequent encounters occurred in which the strange personage—always wearing the same garb—tried to address the contactee. "There was something wrong about her movements. It was as if... she were dead."

Much has been made of the Men-in-Black's choice of clothing—white shirts, black ties, and black suits. Perhaps these intriguing characters have been reanimated from the grave still clad in their burial clothes? A ludicrous proposition, but the MIB who caused a coin to vanish before the startled eyes of Maine physician Herbert Hopkins in 1976 was described as wearing heavy white makeup and lipstick. An effort to hide the disfigurements of a cadaver? The intervening 20-odd years have not shed any further light on this case.

Rational Fears?

Humanity has developed a series of ritualized behaviors to deal with its dead, a subject that is usually avoided and is considered taboo by primitive societies living in fear that the unappeased dead may return to haunt the living. In his book on Roman history, M. P. Charlesworth mentions the Roman peasant's terror that "vampires would carry off the dead." Aside from the obscurantism of a pre-technological age, could there have been a somewhat rational basis for the ancients' fears? The activity of these strange lights, and the hair-raising testimony of the parties who have witnessed the events described in this article, would seem to confirm this. ☐

Scott Corrales is a frequent contributor to FATE. He is the editor of Inexplicata: The Journal of Hispanic Ufology.