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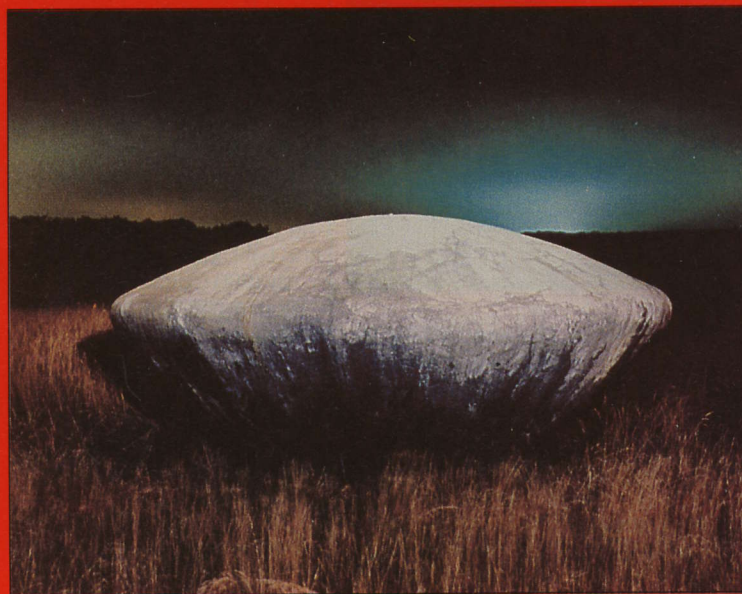
ANTI MATTER

In the fall of 1977 photographer Douglas Curran bought a secondhand yellow Renault. He christened it Giselle, pulled out the rear seat, and fitted a small desk in the space behind the driver's seat. Then he set out from British Columbia, following secondary highways through the towns and cities of Canada and the United States. His goal: to document the twentieth-century fascination with flying saucers and godlike aliens from space.

This mythical quest, Curran now says, emerged from his ideas about photography itself. “The more I thought about it,” he explains, “the more I realized that photography was anachronistic, that the very act of photographing something thrust it into the past. The popular point of view is that artists are ahead of their time. But I began to realize that artists are actually behind the times. They are the garbagemen of society, cultural Luddites hoarding the past while the rest of humanity moves forward in subtle, but powerful, ways.”

Hoping to render images of man's latest yearnings and fears, Curran began to seek a symbol for the new age. Then one night, as if in answer to his prayers, he was jolted out of a dream. The dream itself seemed to fade in a mist. But, he says, the words *In Advance of the Landing: Folk Concepts of Outer Space* remained.

“I didn't pay much attention at the time,” Curran now says of the phrase that would become the title of his first book (Abbeville, 1986). “But about two years later I was rounding the curve of a highway in Quebec when I saw my first folk rocket. Thrust out over the trees, held in simulated flight, it



UFO QUEST

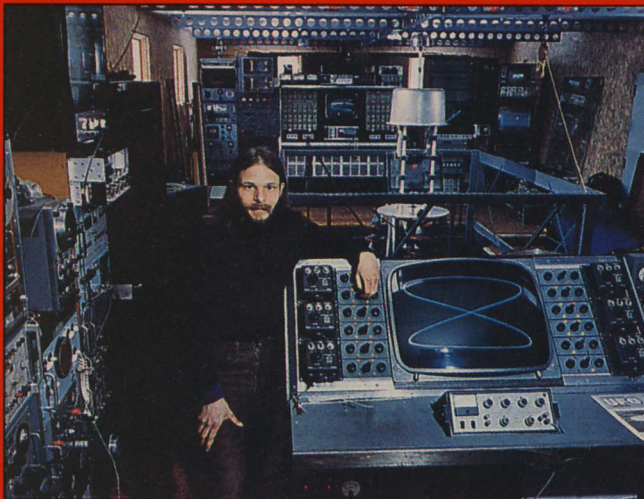
seemed to strain against its metal pylons, a totem attempting to leap away from the gravity of Earth.”

Curran was so awestruck by the apparition that he literally fell off his bicycle. This peeling metal sculpture, he knew, embodied the nocturnal murmurings of his dream. Built by two local carpenters outside a general store, it was the roar of the collective unconscious. “I saw it as a symbol of transcendence,” Curran now says, “an archetypal image of our time.”

This discovery redirected Curran's artistic ambitions. Living out of Giselle, he

began to hunt for rockets and saucers built by those plying salvation from the stars. These alien altars, it turned out, were everywhere. In Port Costa, California, he found an “Alien Rocket” (page 113, left) built by inventor Clayton Bailey, who also maintains a fleet of 1947 and 1948 Studebaker “rocket cars.” Behind the grounds of Governor State College in Park Forest, Illinois, he discovered a concrete flying saucer (above) created by the New York sculptor Jene Highstein. And he photographed another concrete saucer (page 112, left) in the San Bernardino hills.

Continuing on his trip, Curran also found an America dotted with flying-saucer homes. The house shown on the bottom of page 110, for instance, is located in Pensacola, Florida. But according to Curran, a whole series of identical homes were manufactured and shipped throughout Canada and the United States. “In almost every instance these houses are raised above the ground and can be reached only by long ascending roadways or ramps,” Curran says.



"You approach the house in supplication, as you would approach the altar of a god."

Passing through the rural community of St. Paul, Alberta, Curran even found a UFO landing pad, built in 1967 to commemorate the Canadian centennial. In fact, in 1982, the International Year of the Child, St. Paul used the pad to welcome Mother Teresa (page 111, bottom).

"The tiny nun," Curran recalls, "was driven down Main Street in a cavalcade of jeeps. A high-school band played as two sergeants at arms in white plumed hats greeted her on top of the pad. When Mother Teresa spoke, she said simply, 'If there is sickness in space, we would go there too.'"

But as Curran continued his journey, he realized that saucers and landing pads were just the beginning. While some people used UFO imagery to symbolize the future, others were convinced the aliens were *real*.

"On the road," Curran

explains, "I started talking to people. One man, a newspaper editor in northern California, told me, 'There's no one around here building flying saucers, but there's this guy down in Orland who goes looking for them. Maybe you should talk to him.'"

That's what Curran did. "I found Orlando Toroni [page 111, right] in Orland, California," he says, "and when I dropped by he pulled out the family Bible, with references he believed referred to flying

saucers underscored in yellow marker."

Toroni, Curran learned, was an unemployed bulldozer operator who traveled up the slopes of nearby Red Mountain to commune with alien gods. And in December 1977 he took Curran along. First, Curran relates, Toroni strapped an aircraft traffic light to his car battery. Then he scanned the sky with binoculars. When he spotted a satellite—the shield, he claimed, for hiding UFOs—he signaled upward with the light, using Morse code.

In 1980 Curran found Toroni again, this time living in Eureka, California, with a group of born-again Christians. What about UFOs? "They are part of Satan's work, part of his deceptions," Toroni now said. "They are not of Christ."

Though Toroni has disavowed UFOs, he was the one to tell Curran about the mercurial Ray Stanford and his Project Starlight International (PSI), billed as the only full-time group for "hard-data" monitoring of UFOs.

Stanford's career in ufology

started in December 1954, when at the age of sixteen, he says he received his first "very distinct telepathic message from the space people." A few years later he and brother Rex hitchhiked to California to meet the most famous of all UFO contactees—George Adamski. They became disciples, and perhaps in response to Adamski's scientific claims, Ray grew interested in an instrumented approach to UFOs. As early as 1964, in fact, PSI members constructed a ring of lights out in the Arizona desert



to signal UFOs. (A modern version of the ring, formed around PSI headquarters in Austin, Texas, is shown on page 112, bottom right.)

By 1975 serious money for PSI began to flow. And according to Stanford, one of the most important results was a new device dubbed the UFO/VECTOR. Part telescope, part video camera, and part ruby laser, the machine supposedly sent pulsed messages to UFOs. The operator, who used a



joystick to aim the VECTOR at starships, was provided with goggles in case the aliens responded with a dangerous blast of light.

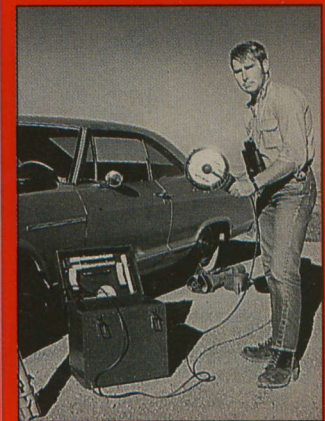
Despite the wonders of the UFO/VECTOR, Curran says, Stanford never published his work, never publicly demonstrated his technology, and never documented the existence of a UFO. Today, with his staff and funding gone and his projects in ruin, Stanford says he's "going to become an artist. I'll pursue



the UFO thing as I can."

If Stanford's effort has stopped, though, Curran has found another project going full-speed ahead. The master of ceremonies: young John Shepherd (page 110, top), who has turned his grandparents' Bellaire, Michigan, house into the most elaborate UFO-detecting station in town.

Shepherd's interest in UFOs took hold at the age of thirteen. He was fixing a radio when he glanced up to see unexplained lights overhead. Not long after, his family split up, and he came



to live with his grandparents in Bellaire. Dissatisfied with high school, he dropped out to soup up sound equipment for local bands. And it didn't take him long to point his equipment toward the stars.

Today, each morning at ten, Shepherd begins by broadcasting music and radio signals from a 20-foot transmitter. He also uses instruments called gravimeters to monitor any violent changes in the earth's magnetic field. "The assump-

tion," Curran explains, "is that those changes have been caused by UFOs." Radio gear wired to the gravimeters then pinpoints the disturbance, sending off a message of peace.

Shepherd, who finances his project by selling stock futures, views his life as portentous from the time he saw a UFO while fixing a radio to Curran's arrival at his door. "There's definitely a purpose, a plan of some kind," Shepherd says. "People are being prepared."

Indeed, Curran found that preparing for the alien

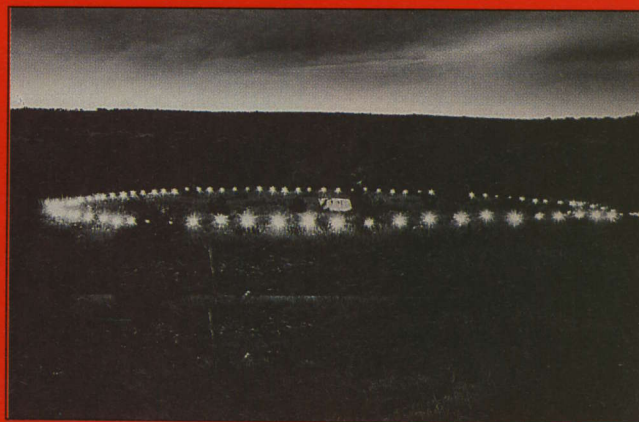


landing has become a favorite pastime for saucer buffs worldwide. Each year, for instance, members of the New Age Foundation meet at Mt. Rainier, Washington, where they join hands to create a "cosmic brain battery" (page 113, bottom right). The energy, they say, will summon the UFOs. Constant Bilodeau (page 113, top), head of the Center of Cosmic Consciousness in St. Jovite, Quebec, has converted a wood-frame church to a

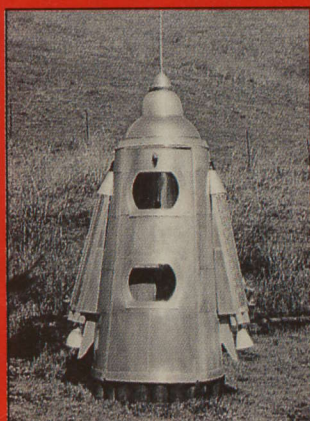


temple in anticipation of extraterrestrial gods. And Nodrog (page 111, top), Earth contact for the Outer Dimensional Forces (ODF) in Weslaco, Texas, is preparing for the arrival of starships. These will set off a sort of Armageddon, he contends—and only those trained by ODF will survive.

The most spirited group of saucer buffs preparing for the aliens, though, could be the Unarius Foundation, located in El Cajon, California.



"The Unarius Foundation," Curran explains, "presents members with a complete and ordered cosmography. Earth, they believe, is 'the garbage dump of the universe,' the place where unfulfilled souls end up until they achieve enough of a karmic bank balance to bail themselves out. The Unarius contend that Earth operates at a low level of consciousness, and raising that consciousness is the group's goal. Such a move, they believe, would send a cosmic 'yes' to the Intergalactic Confederation. Thirty-two



spaceships—one from each planet of the Intergalactic Confederation—would then 'land on Planet Earth [the Unarius landing site, near Jamul, California, is shown on page 112, top] to teach mankind a higher way of life.'

"The power for such an ambitious endeavor," Curran adds, "comes from an eighty-four-year-old widow named Ruth Norman, known to Unarius as Archangel Uriel. The incarnation of a supreme being who has



visited Earth many times before," Uriel has supposedly lived as Confucius, Socrates, Henry VIII, and even Benjamin Franklin. She is also said to have lived among higher-consciousness peoples on the planets Vidis, Janus, and Vulna.

The first time Curran met Norman, he awaited her, with Unarius members lining the street. Suddenly an electric-blue Cadillac with a glowing saucer on its roof wheeled into view. "Out stepped Uriel," Curran says, "with rhinestone flecks on her eyelids, hair the color of orange sherbert, and a flowing purple chiffon gown."

Norman's hold over her flock, Curran adds, is complete. "After one meeting, I watched strong men break into tears as they realized what they had done to Uriel in past lives and how kind she was to let them appear in her presence now." (Unarius Brian and Mike Warfield, page 110, right, dress in the costumes they

wore in previous lives on a distant planet.)

Have groups like Unarius convinced Curran that extraterrestrials are on the way? "You can't do this work without coming face to face with that question," he says, "which is not to say that I came face to face with extraterrestrials. I'm open to the possibility, but I'm not encouraged by the likelihood."

How has Curran managed to maintain both skepticism and respect for his subjects?

"One of the things people ask me," Curran responds, "is how do I listen to this stuff and not die laughing. But in fact, the people in this movement are so sincere, so committed to their ideas, that receiving information from them is exciting. When you talk to them, you can't help being impressed by their skills. Most people would consider Ruth Norman, for instance, beyond the pale in terms of flakiness. But she's a wonderful psychologist. She has an awesome ability to command people and influence their behavior. John Shepherd and Orlando Toroni had to master striking technical skills. I was so busy listening, so immersed, that I had no time to laugh or even to pass judgment. It was as if I were an empty vessel getting filled."

—PAMELA WEINTRAUB

Photographs from In Advance of the Landing: Folk Concepts of Outer Space, by Douglas Curran, published in 1985 by Abbeville Press. Reprinted with permission of the publisher. All photographs © Douglas Curran 1985.

