

20,000 Enigmas Under the Sea

USO (H)

*The Caribbean is Grand Central Station for
bizarre occurrences and disappearances —
and for Unidentified Submarine Objects.*

by Scott Corrales

The southern coast of Puerto Rico is filled with postcard-perfect scenes: the calm green waters of the Caribbean Sea, the quaint fishing villages, the gorgeous sunsets, and the mighty mangroves plunging myriad roots into the surf. At Las Cucharas, a seaside community near the city of Ponce, one landmark stands out because of the impressive mangrove beside it. It is the location of Las Cucharas Restaurant and Hotel, where owner Amador Piazza has witnessed abundant UFO activity in the area.

In fact, on the day I arrive, Mr. Piazza is earnestly recounting an event from the previous evening. "It was José, the night watchman, who saw it," he starts. "He was out in the back of the restaurant, looking at the sea, when he became aware of a large structure, all lit up, moving across the horizon. It was uncommonly bright, and José thought it must be a cruise ship, until he realized it was moving much too fast — like a speedboat."

The restaurateur pauses. "We never see large ships around here, since the waters are so shallow. Whatever he saw, it wasn't a cruise ship."

From the comfortable back patio, patrons often report see-

ing green lights emerging from the sea, hurtling skyward. A narrow boardwalk leads straight out from the dining area to the sea, and Piazza says that customers enjoy sitting in the narrow pulpit at the end to witness all manner of strange nocturnal events. Some of these occasionally attract the media. On the evening of November 11, 1991, residents of El Tuque and Las Cucharas notified authorities that a UFO "was entering and leaving the sea" less than half a mile from the shore. The unknown vehicle engaged in its maneuvers from 11:30 P.M. until well after midnight.)

And in December 1996, there were unconfirmed reports that a police helicopter, flying over the waters off of Ponce, had spotted a vast submarine "vehicle" clearly discernible from above. The circular watercraft was a staggering mile in width — an estimate that matches other reports from the Caribbean, notably the tales from Cabo Rojo fishermen during the southwestern Puerto Rico UFO flap of the early '90s.

USOs in the Caribbean

USOs — Unidentified Submarine Objects — held a position of respect in the dynamic first two decades of ufology. Reports from around the world would dramatically illustrate how the strange objects in our skies could also plunge into our seas, perhaps headed for clandestine underwater bases. Investigators have often wondered whether there is a connection between the mysteries of the Bermuda Triangle, for example, and the presence of alien bases or planetary "access corridors." The subject of USOs has lost its popularity in recent decades, as Roswell and abduction studies have dominated ufology. But that doesn't mean that mysterious craft have ceased to travel beneath the seas for their unimaginable purposes. Far from it.

The best evidence of the existence of USOs has been provided not by paranormal investigators, but by the world's navies. Norway was driven to delirium by mystery submarines in their



The shores of Puerto Rico frequently serve as vantage points for viewing UFOs, USOs, and other unexplained phenomena. Top: The Atlantic's waves break against the territory's northern coast.

Bottom: San Juan's Morro Castle keeps a lonely vigil on the ocean.



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fjords and in the North and Baltic seas. The perplexing subs traveled far faster and deeper than the noisy Soviet subs that frequently roamed those waters. And in the 1960s and 1970s, Argentina fought in vain against USOs off the coast of Patagonia. But abundant evidence and accounts seem to suggest that if there's a Grand Central Station for USOs, it may be found in the Caribbean.

In his watershed book *Invisible Residents*, Ivan T. Sanderson wrote of a particularly memorable event in 1963 off the coast of Puerto Rico. The U.S. Navy was conducting a training exercise aimed at practicing submarine detection techniques. According to Sanderson, the war games included major surface ships, aircraft carriers, submarines, and anti-submarine warfare planes. At one point, one of the submarines broke off from the exercise, apparently to pursue an unidentified contact that was moving at the unheard of speed of 150 knots (170 miles per hour). ←

* Officers first suspected this was merely a curve ball thrown into the exercise. But it proved to be an astonishing reality when every single ship began tracking the improbable object. The fleet engaged in a four-day round of cat and mouse with the intruder, which plunged to a depth of 28,000 feet — far beyond the reach of the navy vessels. (At the time, the top speed for a submarine was 45 knots, with a maximum diving range of some 6,000 feet.) Details of this incident are sketchy at best, but it remains one of the most compelling accounts of USOs in the Antilles.

USO encounters in the Caribbean haven't been confined to the military. The crew of the *Dorthemaersk*, a Swedish cargo ship on the trade route from Europe to Venezuela, witnessed a glowing conical craft plunge into the sea in 1959. In 1967, independent witnesses in the same area claimed that the sea began boiling furiously, followed by the rapid skyward ascent of three UFOs in formation. And in 1973, "neighbors" of the Caribbean port of La Guaira, Venezuela, emerged from the ocean, executing daring maneuvers over the city and leaving behind thousands of

flabbergasted witnesses. Many of them, interviewed by the regional media, claimed to have seen everything from orange lights to large blue capsules emerging from the sea at night, flying along the shore within sight of the urban sprawl of Caracas.

Lost at Sea

No study of unidentified submarine objects would be complete without a discussion of the links between USOs and human disappearances on the high seas. There are many mysterious cases with paranormal and even ufological overtones that are much more spellbinding than any Bermuda Triangle yarn.

Possibly the greatest (and most overlooked) maritime disappearance of all time involved the Spanish passenger liner *Valbanera* in 1919. The 600 lives lost on this passenger vessel did not vanish in the middle of some mysterious triangle, circle, or parallelogram in the middle of the ocean. They vanished as the ship apparently entered the busy port of Havana, Cuba.

The six-thousand-ton *Valbanera's* crossing of the Atlantic had been uneventful, and the 1,300 people aboard — mostly Canary Islanders looking for opportunity in the canefields and plantations of the Antilles — awaited landfall in Santiago de Cuba with a mixture of trepidation and excitement. The ship made port as scheduled on September 5, 1919, where it discharged 700 passengers. After refueling, the steamship sailed out of Santiago and doubled Cape Maisi in the Windward Passage...never to be seen again.

On the evening of September 9, the portmaster's office in the port of Havana heard the booming sound of a ship's horn. Officials could make out its lights and assumed that it was the *Valbanera*, since no other ships were expected that evening. But no ship ever entered the spacious harbor.

Cuban gunboats were mobilized to find the missing liner. A U.S. Navy frigate out of Key West joined in. The vessels swept the Old Bahama Channel without much success, until the frigate



came across the remains of the hapless *Valbanera* on September 19, in Floridian waters. Divers reported finding lifeboats still in their divots, and no major structural damage was evident. No bodies were found in the closed staterooms or the common areas of the ship. Six hundred people had been claimed by the maw of the unknown.

Boards of inquiry in three countries sought in vain for answers to the questions that burned in people's minds: Why was no distress signal sent? What had been the ship's fate during the 10 days of its disappearance, when those very same waters were being scoured by warships?

Carmen Machado, a writer for Spain's *Año Cero* magazine, uncovered a fascinating lead while investigating the trail of the missing passengers. Machado came across the relatives of a man named Domingo Almenar, who died in 1957 and maintained for more than 30 years that he was the sole survivor of the ship. An alleged stowaway, Almenar was known to the passengers who disembarked in Santiago de Cuba, and who confirmed that he had gone on to Havana. Three days after the disappearance, Almenar got in touch with his family and informed them that he was the only survivor. But for the remainder of his life, the one-time stowaway would insist that the fate of the

passenger ship was known only to God and himself.

The story of Freddy Miller is a great disappearance case with more explicit ufological undertones. On May 5, 1959, a boat sailed out of Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, headed for the beach some 20 miles away. Despite the excellent spring weather and calm azure seas, the 19-foot boat carrying 45-year-old television producer and director Freddy Miller and his passengers (two women and two children) disappeared without a trace. A search of Dominican and adjacent waters was made, but the five people were never seen again.

Years later, on September 22, 1973, Virgilio Gómez, a sales manager at one of the Dominican Republic's better-known insurance companies, was on his way to visit an experimental farm 15 miles west of Santo Domingo, to advise the farm of the proper policies to carry.

At around 9:00 A.M., Gómez was driving along the road when he saw a person waving him down by the roadside. "I thought it would be best to avoid him," Gómez later stated in an interview. "But when I got closer I noticed the character was dressed completely in green and that there were two other individuals standing 15 or 20 feet away from the first one. Thinking it might be a military checkpoint or some accident, I decided to slow down with caution."

According to Gómez, the man in the green outfit informed him that he was Freddy Miller, adding that he had supposedly drowned along with some other people, but that he had in fact been rescued by a modern device, "a module known to people as a UFO."

Gómez played along and asked the man 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."

In subsequent interviews, Gómez remarked that his alien interlocutor had a grayish-yellow skin tone that he had 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 his 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 chromelike sheen to it and largely resembled an American football. It was windowless, betraying no external seams or rivets.

The putative Freddy Miller informed Gómez that he and his companions were conducting research on the Milwaukee Deep — the undersea trench whose depth reaches some 20,000 feet and forms part of the Puerto Rico Trench. The alleged extraterrestrials were greatly concerned about the likelihood of destructive seismic activity at this location, which would have a catastrophic effect on the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

After being reassured that the aliens "would try to avoid the cataclysm" slated for October 28 or 29, Gómez was told to leave the area as soon as possible, since the space vehicle was about to lift off. Reluctantly obeying the strange charac-