

1.896 - 97

# LOREN COLEMAN

# MYSTERIOUS WORLD

MANY STRANGE THINGS fall from the skies. Followers of Charles Fort, that great American collector of the unexplained, know that everything from frogs to pennies, and ice to flesh have been recorded.

But some of the weirdest items are said to be brought to us by aliens. Are these incidents hoaxes or real? Whatever they are, some funny articles have been recorded down through the years.

### Messages from the Airships

On March 26, 1880, near the small town of Galisteo Junction (now Lamy), New Mexico, a mysterious large balloon passed overhead. Many ufologists see this case as a precursor to the "Great Airship Flap" (a "flap" is an Air Force term for a series of incidents happening together in a time-space cluster) of 1896-1897, when sightings of giant, usually cigar-shaped, craft were reported throughout the United States. In New Mexico, witnesses said they heard loud voices coming from the object as it flew overhead. But most bizarre of all, the listeners noted that several items were tossed overboard. One that was quickly retrieved was a "magnificent flower, with a slip of exceedingly fine silk-like paper, on which were characters resembling those on Japanese tea chests," wrote the *Santa Fe Weekly New Mexican* three days after the incident.

The next morning, a cup of "very peculiar workmanship" was found. Both the flower and cup were displayed at the local railroad depot for all to see until an archaeologist arrived on the scene and purchased the items.

The story ends with an even weirder twist. Despite the fact there were no airships at the time, the archaeologist was visited the next day by a mysterious "wealthy young Chinese man" who said the writing on the silk slip was a message of love from his fiancée, who was a passenger on the airship from China dur-

ing its maiden voyage to America. The man said such travel would soon be commonplace. He departed with the artifact.

Of course, in many ways, this account from New Mexico in 1880 fits into the whole lore of the Oriental-looking "Men In Black" (MIBs). The MIBs, in the modern versions, show up after a UFO sighting, harass the witnesses, and take the "evidence" of the flying saucers' appearance. As we now know, such stories have been around for a long time.

### More Strange Letters from the Sky

The "Great Airship Flap" of a little over a hundred years ago lasted from November 1896 through April 1897. Jerome Clark, the famed ufologist, and I wrote a series of articles on the airship scare for FATE during the 1970s. We now understand that many of these early stories were journalistic inventions based on a background of very real sightings and close encounters with unknown cigar-shaped and luminous objects seen in the skies of the 1890s.

The 1897 flap touched many areas of the country, including Wisconsin, where scared citizens of several counties sighted strange glowing objects in the sky. In one incident, something was left behind from the aerial encounter. An Appleton farmer said he had found a typed letter attached to an iron rod that supposedly dropped from one of the mysterious airborne ships. Strangely, the letter was written in English and boasted that "the problem of aerial navigation has been solved," according to reports of the time. Unfortunately, the missive was unsigned.

Strange letters left behind after sightings of anomalous lights continue to trouble investigators to this day. Take, for example, those that turned up during the famous flap of 1972. The Harrison family that reported the "Missouri Monster" (Momo) on several occasions in early July 1972, felt star-crossed when they also saw a strange fireball land on their property on July 26, and then they viewed a glowing, revolving UFO on July 30. That same week, little Rossie, a member of the family, found two strange messages written in blue ink on white paper and brought them home. The Harrisons thought Momo, or the "intelligence" controlling it, had penned the cryptic notes. To researchers such as Jerome Clark and myself, the messages sounded more like the ravings of a deranged, rejected lover. Nevertheless, the fact that they showed up in the midst of an otherwise bizarre sequence of reports of a hairy creature, reptilian footprints, UFOs, disembodied voices in the woods, golden crosses on the moon during an eclipse, and other strange goings-on fit within the "normal" pattern of such flaps.

### On the Matter of Space Pancakes

Not everything that is said to "come from the Heavens," however, falls from the sky. Sometimes it is handed to a person. Such was the case when 37 years ago, on April 18, 1961, three



## If the Sphinx has all the answers to life...

Isn't it about time he shared the wealth?

Don't you hate it when people make like they know everything and you don't — like it's only for some inner circle of initiates?

Maybe they're just hiding the fact they don't know the answers to life's real questions.

Who are you? Where do you come from? Where are you going?

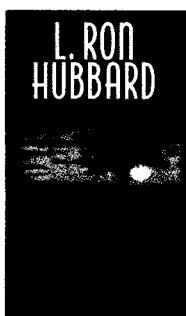
Did you ever wonder if the answers were sitting right under your nose?

So here's something different. No mumbo jumbo. No initiation. No human sacrifices. Just the facts.

And they pack more punch than anything you ever studied on the subject of the mind, spirit and life.

Real answers work. They lead somewhere. You can use them. That's SCIENTOLOGY.

If you value your future, if you're a friend to you, if you want to help others, read *Scientology: The Fundamentals of Thought* by author and philosopher, L. Ron Hubbard.



\$6.99

# SCIENTOLOGY®

applied religious philosophy

## Know yourself. Know life.

Pick up a copy wherever books are sold or call

**1-800-334-LIFE**

or write to Bridge Publications,

4751 Fountain Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90029

© 1998 BPI. All Rights Reserved. SCIENTOLOGY is a trademark and service mark owned by Religious Technology Center and is used with its permission. Item #4228

were pancakes. However, in an attempt to be balanced, it is interesting that Bill Jacobs would use the phrase "pizelle," as Simonton said the aliens were "Italian-looking." Hmm.

Well, that's not the end of the story. The Pancakes from Space were such a big source of entertaining exchange on the Fortean email list, that mention of them flipped over onto *The Anomalist* Website, and then they turned up for two hours of talk on Hieronimus & Company's Twentieth Century Radio Show, a nationwide program out of Baltimore. You say it's just a silly story from the beginning of the UFO era, but it's a story so odd and yet magical that it has captured people's attention again. And no one thinks Joe Simonton had any reason to create a hoax. He was just minding his own business when he had a strange visitation. Nothing more, nothing less.

### Concluding Thoughts

When objects from above descend to Earth they are seen to hold clues to some of the mysteries of our life here below. But do they tell us more? Or are

we only wishing? Letters from mysterious airship inventors may have had more to do with turn-of-the-century newspaper folks and liars' clubs than any harbingers from beyond. Pancakes from space are more problematic because the witness is not fictional and has been investigated. But the framework that such incidents get wrapped up in sometimes has as much to do with the experiences of the witnesses and the storytellers as it does with the supposed visitation of any alien crafts.

Perhaps if those space pancakes had been given to a resident of Italy, part of this column would have to have been entitled "The Mystery of the Space Pizelles." Instead, the "givers" of the gift "look Italian" and we are befuddled because of the closeness of the phenomena — known but unknown. Maybe there is something to be learned from these reports, but perchance we are only beginning to learn more about the messengers. ■

*Loren Coleman is a Fortean investigator and a professor of social work in New England.*

### A Calf Dropped from the Sky

by Loren Coleman

~~1896-97~~

In February 1977, Jerome Clark wrote a wonderful little article for FATE called "The Great Airship Hoax," about the Alexander Hamilton case. The story first appeared in 1965 in UFO literature by Jacques Vallee. It told of an incident that happened long before, in the midst of the "Great Airship Flap."

Rancher Alexander Hamilton of Le Roy, Kansas, swore that on the evening of April 19, 1897, he, his son, and his hired farmhand had seen the strange-looking occupants of an airship abduct one of his calves. Cattle-rustling was not unknown in the 1890s in the Midwest, but doing so from a huge, mysterious airship was enough to startle anyone. Hamilton reported that the next day he found the grisly butchered remains of the calf in a neighbor's pasture, looking for all the world as if it had been thrown overboard from the airship. The story caused a major sensation through the years. It was linked to the wave of cattle mutilations that swept the country in the mid-1970s, and was used as evidence of how violent the "aliens" could be in their abductions.

But in his 1977 FATE article, Clark told of the testimony he had collected from an elderly woman who as a child had been a friend of Hamilton's daughter, Nell. The woman said that Hamilton once had returned from a trip to town and was laughing about the story he had made up and which would appear shortly in the local newspaper, the *Yates Center (Kansas) Farmers Advocate*. As Clark discovered, the woman's affidavit testifying to the reality of the "calf-rustling" incident all turned out to be the members of the local liars' club.

In an update to the story's debunking, researcher Thomas E. Bullard rediscovered in 1982 that a rival Missouri newspaper, the *Atchison County Mail*, had asked Hamilton about the incident. On May 7, 1897, they published that Hamilton candidly acknowledged, "I lied about it." ■