

FOLLOW-UP ON THE MORRO DO VINTEM MYSTERY

Gordon Creighton

IT will be recalled that, in two articles published in 1967¹ and 1968² respectively, Charles Bowen discussed the curious affair of Miguel José Viana and Manuel Pereira da Cruz, the two young Brazilian TV and radio technicians who died in decidedly mysterious circumstances on a hill at Niterói, near Rio de Janeiro, on, or some time soon after, Wednesday, August 17, 1966. Beside each body, when they were found three days later in a thicket on the hill, was a leaden half-mask without eye-holes (see sketch). Also found on the bodies were notes, some giving simple electronic formulae, and others containing cryptic instructions, in an unidentified handwriting, such as:

"Sunday, one capsule after lunch; Wednesday, one capsule at bed-time",
and:

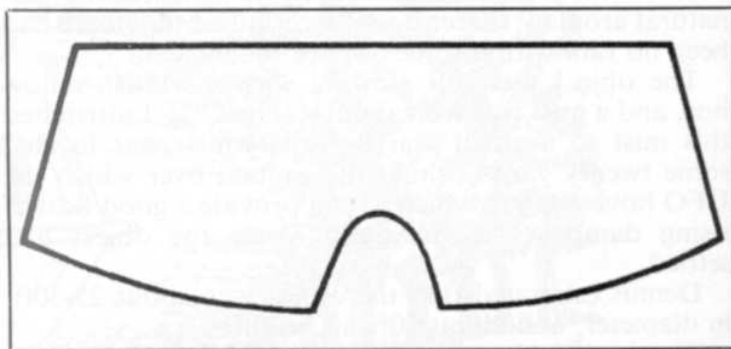
"Be at the place arranged at 16.30. Take capsules at 18.30. After feeling the effects, protect half the face with lead masks. Await the agreed signal."

The case naturally gave rise to a welter of fantastic speculation in Brazil and all sorts of theories were advanced, one of the most popular being that the two victims had made some kind of rendezvous with UFO entities and had been killed by them. This particular theory was moreover reinforced considerably when it became known that a prominent Rio de Janeiro lady, Senhora Gracinda Barbosa Coutinho da Sousa, had told the police that she and three of her children had been travelling by car near the Morro do Vintém on the evening of August 17, when they saw an oval-shaped object of an orangy colour, with a band of fire around its edges, hanging stationary above that hill and emitting vivid beams of light. They had stopped and watched it for some three or four minutes, during which period it made no lateral movement, but rose and fell in the air several times. And there was also much rumour about other—*secret*—details which this lady had allegedly divulged to the police. Other witnesses also came forward and said they had seen the UFO.

Other press comment made much of the fact that, a little over two months previously (June 13), Miguel and Manuel had engaged in some mysterious "experiments" on the nearby beach at Atafona, in the course of which an intensely luminous object came down over the shore. An explosion and a blinding flash occurred a few moments later, and local fishermen in due course testified that they had seen a "flying saucer" fall into the sea at the time.

Other sensational revelations and allegations suggested that the unfortunate pair had been active members of a group of "scientific spiritualists" who dabbled equally in voodoo and spiritism, explosives, and "communication with Mars".

By mid-September of 1966 the case had slipped into oblivion. Charles Bowen concluded his first article with



Shape of the lead masks

these words: "For the time being the clamps are on, but in Brazil things often have a habit of leaking out after a while. Maybe one of these days we will learn a lot more about this absorbing case."

After the bodies (already partly putrified) had been found on the hillside on August 20, 1966, the Brazilian newspapers stated that no signs of violence had been found on them and that autopsies had been performed which revealed no signs of poison in the internal organs. Likewise no known cause for cardiac failure had been found.

After a year had elapsed the Brazilian press reverted to the affair and reported (August 19-26, 1967) that the bodies had been exhumed for certain organs to be examined again for poison. The papers also reported the arrest of an associate of the two dead men. This was a civilian air line pilot named Elcio Gomes—the "third man" involved in the mystery "experiment" on the beach at Atafona. Gomes was now taken into custody, the papers said, for having made contradictory statements to the police. Under interrogation it seems that he had allegedly made all manner of revelations—one of these being that the two dead men had operated a clandestine radio station.

All this was related briefly in Charles Bowen's second article, which concluded with this question: "Was the case allowed to re-appear briefly, so that the police could project the idea of a 'murderer'? After all, down-to-earth human mayhem is so much more reassuring than wild hints about spiritist dabblings with dark forces, or any suggestion that the men in the lead masks were done away with by a UFO, or even by a great big glob of plasma."

Another long silence seems to have followed. One of the frustrating and disappointing facts about the job of producing FSR is that we are so totally dependent on the reports which have to reach us *from the source*, and that means from all the far corners of the earth. If, as so often happens, we print no follow-up on a case, however exciting or interesting it may have been, commonsense would surely indicate that this must be because we have not got any further reports. It is

curious that so many readers, who are perfectly well aware that FSR is a publication produced on an almost totally voluntary and unpaid basis, in their spare time, by a tiny group of dedicated people, get so impatient and write to enquire why we have said no more about this or that case. A little reflection would surely show that operation on such a scale would call for vast funds and resources and a global research organisation such as FSR certainly does not possess. (And indeed such as only powerful corporations or governments could possess.)

More news filters through

In this particular case of the Morro do Vintém I am happy however to be able to report that the ghosts of the unfortunate Miguel and Manuel still continued to walk after 1967, refusing to lie down as it was no doubt hoped they would. And a few further press items about them have come our way.

Thus, on June 28, 1968, under the headline AFTER THE ATOMIC TEST, the newspaper *O Globo* (Rio de Janeiro) was writing as follows:

“A blond man now emerges in the mystery of the leaden masks, just at the moment when science had given up, as unattainable, the last hope of securing a technical clarification of how precisely the radio workers Miguel José Viana and Manuel Pereira da Cruz met their deaths.

“The unknown wanted man, whose appearance is that of a foreigner, was seen, by a witness, sitting at the wheel of a jeep and conversing with Miguel and Manuel on the road up to the Morro do Vintém, on the day before the bodies were found.

“Yesterday the atomic scientists in São Paulo gave their verdict—a *negative* one—on the tests they have been conducting on the hair from the corpses. And with that the Rio Police Delegate in charge of homicide cases, Sr. Romen José Vieira, has closed the enquiry and forwarded the dossier to the Ministry of Justice.

“The text of the report issued by the Atomic Energy Institute in São Paulo is as follows:

‘As an exceptional measure, the Radiochemical Division has conducted an analysis, by neutronic activation, on some hair sent to them by the Medico-Legal Institute of the State of Rio de Janeiro. Four elements were sought in the hair, namely arsenic, mercury, barium, and thalium. The results are as follows: arsenic, 0.0000041%; mercury, 0.0001%; barium, 0.0001%; thalium, 0.0001%. This result proves scientifically that the deaths of Miguel and Manuel were not due to ingestion of these poisons.’”

Official explanation

Eight more months passed, and then, in the first quarter of 1969, a few more press-clippings on the case reached FSR from Brazil. The following paragraphs are a translation which I have made from one of the fullest of these reports (*Correio do Povo*, Pôrto Alegre, February 23, 1969), but I should add that for convenience I have also incorporated into it a number of minor features and clarifications, which come from several other press-reports of about the same date but for which

we have no precise indication of day or of the name of the newspaper.

LEADEN MASKS MYSTERY SOLVED AFTER THREE YEARS

“Rio. February 22. The mystery of the two electronic technicians found dead three years ago on the Morro do Vintém with lead masks beside them (masks which subsequently came to be considered as having originated on another planet) has now been cleared up, with the confession of the underworld figure, Hamilton Bezani.

“Hamilton Bezani, notorious criminal, smuggler and car-thief, already serving a sentence of over 50 years in São Paulo, had told a woman relative of his who lives in Rio that he had been connected with the murders, and when Delegate João Antônio da Silva of the Rio de Janeiro Police went to the São Paulo prison to interrogate him, he freely admitted it—as the woman relative had told the Police he would do, if skilfully questioned.

“Hamilton Bezani’s story is that, wanted by the São Paulo authorities, he was hiding in Rio de Janeiro, where he was approached by three other criminals known by the nicknames of ‘Espanhol,’³ ‘Wilson



Map of Brazil

Alemão,’⁴ and ‘Acácio,’ who asked him to ‘do a job’ in Niterói, which would yield good dividends for the four of them.

“So off they went to Niterói, where they first engaged a taxi and then, at a certain spot, they changed to a private car which took them to a spiritualist centre. There they met the proprietor of the place, a woman called Helena.

“Inside the spiritualist centre, Hamilton Bezani was next introduced to Miguel and Manuel, who were already there. ‘Espanhol,’ ‘Wilson Alemão,’ and ‘Acácio’ indicated to him by gesture that these two people were to be the targets.’

“During the séance which followed, the criminals learned that Miguel and Manuel were in Niterói en route from their homes at Campos to São Paulo, where they planned to buy electronic equipment and a new

car, and that they had plenty of cash on them. Pointing to a briefcase carried by one of the targets, 'Wilson Alemão' sagely remarked to his companions: 'See. *The Spirit of Fortune has descended. But it will shortly incarnate in other bodies!*'

"Hamilton Bezani told the Police that at the close of the séance he was instructed to take the wheel of the car standing outside, and drive the party, 'Espanhol', 'Wilson Alemão', 'Acácio', Helena, and Miguel and Manuel, to the foot of the Morro do Vintém. There the others forced the two men to get out and go with them into the thickets on the hillside while Hamilton Bezani stayed with the car (a stolen one).

"Half an hour later, the three men and the woman returned to the car, looking nervous. Holding the briefcase, containing NCr \$6,000.00,⁵ 'Wilson Alemão' told Bezani: 'We have killed them both. We forced them, at revolver point, to take the poison.'

"The party then drove off to Guanabara, fixing a rendezvous together for next day, which Hamilton Bezani, fearing a trick of some kind, did not keep.

"The Police say they are on the track of the group and will have no difficulty in apprehending them as they are notorious criminals."

(One of the press reports said that the police already had the Voodoo woman, Helena.—G.C.)

And there, for the moment, I fear we must leave the matter, as no further news about the case has reached me.⁶ It may well be that all have been apprehended, have confessed, and the dossier is closed once and for all time. If so, I have not heard about it from any of the correspondents in Brazil.

Views of correspondents

Great pressure of work and lack of time have prevented earlier examination and translation of all of the South American UFO material of recent years. When, early this year, I had run through this lot of 1969 clippings, I at once wrote off to Brazil to ask several of the correspondents for *their* views. Did they, I asked, knowledgeable people about Brazil and about the Brazilian UFO scene, really feel satisfied that this was the truth at last about the Morro do Vintém?

Their replies are negative. One of them made a particularly interesting comment, which I quote:

"As for the Lead Masks case, we are all pretty certain that the explanation put out by the authorities in February 1969 was *faked*. It was at that precise time that the big drive against all UFO investigators in Brazil began in earnest. The authorities were doing everything they could to 'debunk the flying saucers.'

"It would therefore have been very unwise indeed for any of us to have looked any further into the Morro do Vintém case just then. Ufologists in Brazil were even being linked with the activities of the terrorists, and consequently we were all most careful not to attract attention to ourselves!

"As you say, the official 'explanation' does smell to high heaven. FSR might of course publish the whole story again, with full details, adding the official 'explanation' as a footnote, and ending with the words: CASE CLOSED. This might give your readers a chuckle or two."

So there it remains. Brazil, like every other country for that matter, certainly does have its "seamy side", and, just as has happened elsewhere, it is very easy for criminal elements to make use of psychic séances and spiritualistic activities as a cloak for something else. (In addition to this, we must not overlook the evidence, already strong, from many other quarters, that the parapsychical or ultraterrestrial entities which could be behind the so-called "UFO Phenomenon" are not over-addicted to the practices of morality and virtue themselves, *but are indeed using terrestrial criminal elements to do their work for them.*)

Dino Kraspedon

It is most unfortunate that genuine parapsychical research and enquiry and genuine psychic work, so much of which is devoted to *healing*, should suffer a backlash from all this. But, if we bear in mind the business about Aladino Felix ("*Dino Kraspedon*")⁷ who, so we understand, turned out to be a terrorist who was going to "bring in the Venusians to help him," then it is not one whit surprising if, in the past two or three years, we should have seen the Brazilian authorities stamp very heavily on all psychic and spiritualistic activities—including spiritual healing—as well as on everything relating to UFO research.

At first glance, I suppose the story allegedly told by Hamilton Bezani might seem reasonable and likely enough. *But is it?* The two victims had left their homes in Campos by bus for Niterói at 9.00 a.m. on Wednesday, August 17, saying that they were going to São Paulo to buy a car and electronic equipment. Their bus reached Niterói at about 2.00 p.m. the same day, and at 5.00 p.m., after they had bought raincoats as it was raining and had bought mineral water in a bar, they were allegedly seen, by a boy, sitting at a point high up on the Morro do Vintém. The same boy detected their putrefying bodies on August 20 when he was bird-nesting on the hillside.

What I personally find sticking in my craw is the idea—which we are apparently expected to buy—that the criminals already had their plans worked out to the extent of having prepared the lead masks and the notes—which we are to presume were already in their pockets when they met their victims at the séance centre. It is true that there remain serious discrepancies in all the reports that I have seen. For example, in 1966 the press said the two men had left their homes in Campos on *August 17*. But I note that in 1969, some of the press reports were saying they had set out on *August 15*. In the latter case, they would obviously have been in Niterói, and perhaps hanging around and visiting the Morro, and perhaps even the spiritistic centre too, for several days—long enough, admittedly, for the murderers to learn all about them and prepare the lead masks and so on.

At any rate, regardless of my own feelings, it is to be noted that our trusted observers in Brazil say that they too view the "explanation" with much reserve.

If Hamilton Bezani and his trio of friends with the fabulous Damon Runyonesque names⁸ really do exist, and if Bezani really was, as we are told, in 1969 serving a gaol sentence of 50 years in São Paulo, then the

thought occurs to my suspicious mind that such a man as Hamilton Bezani would be a Heaven-sent gift to any government desirous of making troublesome ghosts lie down and stay down. What hardened old lag, doing a 50-year stretch, would be averse to earning a little remission (indeed, why not full liberty?) by making any nice little "confession" so long as it pleased the authorities? After all, the reports do not represent Hamilton as being one of the actual murderers, but only an accomplice.

From my own experience of matters relating to the way in which the police sometimes operate in Brazil (and I had some very interesting experiences which, alas, cannot be related here) I have more than a sneaking feeling that this fine old lag, Senhor Hamilton Bezani—if he exists at all outside the columns of the newspapers and the police statements—is at full liberty, out and about: perhaps enjoying himself on the beach at Copacabana with his other *spiv* pals, while Officialdom heaves sighs of relief and fervently hopes that it will never be necessary any more to think about the Mystery of the Dead Men with the Leaden Masks on the Morro do Vintém.

As for the enigmatic "blond man", it will be observed that he seems to have got lost somewhere along the way, together with the pilot Elcio Gomes. Or, being a blond, was he, in fact, "Wilson Alemão"! (One must admit of course that *Wilson* does not sound a convincingly Teutonic name.)

In conclusion, let us say of this whole affair, as an Italian might: "Se non è vero, è molto ben trovato."⁹

Notes

¹ Charles Bowen: *The Mystery of the Morro do Vintém*: FSR Vol. XIII, No. 2 (March/April 1967).

² Charles Bowen: *No Easy Solution to the Morro Mystery*: FSR Vol. XIV, No. 4 (July/August 1968).

³ "Spaniard".

⁴ "Wilson the German".

⁵ 6,000 New Brazilian Cruzeiros (or Cr. \$3,000,000 as given in the first press reports, i.e. 3 million *Old* Cruzeiros). The Brazilian Cruzeiro being greatly inflated, the value of what the two men had with them was in fact not more than about £485 in English currency.

⁶ For all these reports now quoted we express our profound thanks, as always, to Dr. W. Buhler, Mr. Nigel Rimes and Senhor Jäder U. Pereira.

⁷ On Aladino Felix ("Dino Kraspedon") (see FSR Vol. XV, No. 1 (January/February 1969), p. 32 (World Round-up), which quotes a letter from Nigel Rimes to the following effect:

"At the beginning of August 1968, Aladino Felix, alias Sabado Dinotos, alias Dino Kraspedon, appeared on television in São Paulo and stated publicly that his book *Meu Contacto Com Os Discos Voadores* (*My Contact with Flying Saucers*) was nothing more than sheer invention.

"At the end of August he was arrested, together with a number of other people, charged with being the leader of a terrorist group in Brazil. It now seems pretty certain that he was deeply involved in terrorist activities, but was by no means the leader of the group. The press has been full of his testimony, and indeed on September 10 the São Paulo paper *Última Hora* devoted the whole of three pages to it, with headlines five inches high. He has been 'singing like the proverbial canary', but what he has said is so fantastic and so contradictory that there can be no doubt that the poor chap is extremely unbalanced. He has even gone so far as to say that his arrest will have serious consequences for humanity, as the Venusians will soon attack Earth in order to free him and his friends."

In connexion with this highly interesting and significant report from Mr. Rimes I feel however that it would also be wise to bear in mind the suggestion made by John Keel in his *Operation Trojan Horse* (Souvenir Press edition, pp. 280-281) that "Dino Kraspedon" was not simply a hoaxer who had invented a UFO story, *but a man who had most probably had some kind of genuine experience with ultraterrestrial UFO entities, who had taken control of him, caused him to develop psychic powers so that he could even appear on the Brazilian television and predict the forthcoming assassinations of Senator Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, and who finally led him into courses of action that were calculated to spell total disaster for him.*

In other words, "The Others" were the hoaxers—not their tool "Dino Kraspedon".

Such considerations as these must likewise never be absent from our minds when we contemplate such cases as the Mystery of the Morro do Vintém.

⁸ Among the charming Brazilian people, one encounters many delightful, colourful, even pompous or high-faluting names and nicknames like these, and I made a collection of them. I knew a State Governor whose name was *Sylvester Perciles*, and the huge and immensely genial Negro taxi-driver whose cab was usually parked in front of my Consulate was called *Napoleão* (Napoleon).

And may I add here, for the edification of readers (and perhaps also for posterity) that I shall never forget that splendid evening which I spent in a bar in Miami in 1942 drinking *Cuba Libres* with the gentleman who was the *original* on whom Damon Runyon had modelled his immortal character *Harry the Horse*. *Harry the Horse* was wearing the uniform of the U.S. Army, and was in training at one of the great military camps in the Deep South before going to a theatre of war overseas. I have often wondered whether he came through it all.

⁹ Or, as we might put it colloquially: "If it isn't true, well at least it *sounds* good!"

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