

# EXPERIENCES & OBSERVATIONS

Towards a new concept of ufology

*Jerome Clark*

For many months it seemed that Mr. Clark, a regular correspondent and contributor to FSR, had dropped out of the ufological scene. Then came this unusual article, dated September 5, 1969, in which he claims to have had remarkable experiences. In a note, Mr. Clark writes: "It's . . . a personal accounting of my UFO thoughts over the last sixteen months or so . . . I believe I have something to say and, besides, there's new information in the article."

IN the early morning hours of May 5, 1968, I saw a UFO and its occupant. Or at least I saw *something*.

There were four of us, all in our early twenties. We were Paul Jensen, Jerry Fuqua, Phil Bjerke and myself. Of the group, only I had maintained an active interest in flying saucers, and that, incidentally, was the reason I was asked to join them in their plans for a vigil on the road to Kindred, North Dakota. Before then I had known them only slightly but recognised them to be sensitive, curious young men of definitely above-average intelligence.

As they explained it to me one morning on the campus of Moorhead State College in Moorhead, Minnesota—of which three of us were students—the story went something like this:

On a gravel country road leading to Kindred, North Dakota, on the other side of Fargo, there would appear a mysterious "ghost light". Invariably it hovered just above the road and it seemed determined never to let anyone get too close to it. At whatever rate of speed (at whatever risk, for the road was in a state of disrepair, to put it tactfully) one might drive to catch it, it simply would not be caught. It would usually vanish, only to reappear *behind* the car.

The whole affair sounded fairly typical, I thought. Ghost lights are certainly nothing that any experienced Fortean is unfamiliar with. But then I had never seen one myself and I was, of course, interested.

There were other details, these, however, considerably more vague, and I tended to dismiss them if not exactly reject them outright. For example, some persons who had visited the "Lady" (the name the road had been given, the reason for which I have forgotten) claimed to have heard strange sounds in a certain grove of trees surrounding an abandoned farmhouse, and others talked of shadowy, odd-shaped figures dimly glimpsed in the moonlight. Understandably, I think, I did not take these allegations overly seriously.

At about 11.30 p.m. on Saturday, May 4, the four of us sat in Paul's car on the Lady, smoking and joking among ourselves. Although I had hopes, I was not expecting very much. I had not the slightest inkling of what would happen before the night was over.

At 12.05 a.m. the light appeared far down the road. That was all it was, too: a light and nothing more. Bright and reddish-orange, it looked like a bigger light

when watched through binoculars. It did not reflect light on the road above which it appeared to hover. It flickered on and off every ten or fifteen seconds and then went off permanently as we raced toward it (an uncomfortable procedure—we all got sore heads out of it in more ways than one).

At 1.30 a.m. the light shone to the south of us. Paul bore down on the gas pedal and we roared down the road, only to have it vanish on us again.

We stopped the car and sat for a few minutes, hearing what seemed to be a high-pitched, screaming whine—and there are no power-lines on the road (though, perhaps significantly, there is a huge power station several miles back). At 1.45 a.m. Phil remarked that the light should reappear in fifteen minutes (earlier he had told me that it ordinarily came at half-hour intervals). A minute or two later there it was, this time to the north of us.

Paul noticed it first. He said: "Isn't there something dark at the bottom right hand of the light?"

Thinking about the tricks imagination plays, I looked, gulped, and gasped. I was seeing the silhouette of what must have been a huge figure *gliding toward us and growing larger as it did so*. (See accompanying sketch.)

Literally unable to believe my eyes, I turned away, then looked again. It was still there. All I could think was, *what if it overtook us?* In those few seconds I must have mentally reviewed every horror story in UFO literature. Finally, catching my breath, I blurted: "Let's get out of here!"

We sped away, swerved down a side road and halted. Now viewing the light from the side, we were startled to see that *the figure was still at the right-hand side of the object and still gliding toward us*. We drove several more miles before stopping again.

As we again approached the area at about 2.15 a.m., we saw the light moving through a grove of trees at an abandoned farmhouse (the same place from which, according to rumour, strange sounds like that of large animals walking through underbrush have been heard). We waited for a while. When the light did not show, we left.

I did not go out to the Lady again. It was not because of lack of interest; to the contrary, it was because too much else was happening. And I had begun to get scared.



Within hours after our return to Moorhead all hell started to break loose, and it continued unabated all summer. By September, on the verge of mental collapse, I dropped out of the UFO field.

## II

The August 1960 issue of Ray Palmer's *Flying Saucers* published this letter from William F. Riefer of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma:

"Dear Ray:

Two years ago with the aid of Hayden C. Hewes and James W. Maney, we formed the organization known as Interplanetary Intelligence of Unidentified Flying Objects better known as 'I.I.O.U.F.O.' with headquarters here in Oklahoma City. Both Hayden and James have had letters in your publication *Flying Saucers*. But until now I have had little to say that might be of interest to the readers of your magazine, however at this time I feel it necessary to get a few things off my chest pertaining to some of the events that have been occurring since organizing this group to investigate UFO sightings. We have tried to obtain members in various states throughout the country and abroad to make reports to us of UFO activities in their areas. So far we have been successful.

"But this is not the reason for this letter. I am writing you this letter for a little information and your opinion and the opinion of your readers of the events that are taking place now and for the past 15 months. I have no proof that any of these things are connected with my interest in the UFO field or the organization. I have heard many rumours about things of this nature happening to people in UFO research. But up to the last year I felt that most of the stories were the figments of an overactive imagination. But due to the more adverse activities of person or persons unknown I would very much like to know if things of this nature are happening to others in the UFO research field.

"First of all over a year ago my residence received a tremendous amount [sic] of unusual telephone calls, as many as 25 to 30 calls in a 24 hr. period. After tolerating this for about 3 or 4 months and making many complaints to the telephone company about these calls we decided to have our

number changed and unlisted which worked successfully and the calls ceased for a period of about 2 weeks. Then once more the calls started coming, not as many as before, maybe 2 or 3 a week.

"... Then the weird things really started happening, first of all Mr. Maney received a letter that was signed by an individual who has a grudge against the entire human race with heathen overtones due to the charges made against all Christianity that we have on earth. We checked through various sources and to all information that we can gather the individual writing these letters died Apr. 15, 1955. Now we know that this is impossible because people in that condition just don't write letters. Three other members of our organization have sent letters to this individual and they are returned promptly with a notation unknown at this address. However when Mr. Maney or myself send this person a letter to the same address we get a reply. And again supposedly written by this same deceased individual.

"Next the number of hang-up telephone calls has increased as much as before and with determination not to put up with this any further I immediately contacted the telephone company and ordered our number to be changed, also to remain unlisted, with strict orders that calls placed to the old number not be relayed to the new number. At the time of this change of numbers 4 people knew the new number; myself, my wife and my oldest son Joseph and the man that made the change at the telephone company. In fact when my son got the call from the telephone company with the information about the new number he had one wrong numeral. It took me better than an hour to obtain the right number from the man who had made the change. Within 2½ hours the hang-up and weird calls started coming again. Where these people obtained this new number I do not know.

"I am fully aware of the fantastic claims I am making here sound impossible [sic], but my family and I as well as Jim Maney know these things have been happening.

"I have been contacted by various individuals who make fantastic claims as to their identity and origin. These I consider as either crackpots or pranksters, until recently. But due to various other things that have happened that I will not go into at this time that has [sic] left me with a reasonable doubt as to the fact that maybe some of these people's claims might be true. But I would like to know if these sort of things and events are happening to other men and women in the UFO research field. I would greatly appreciate if you have any information pertaining to events of this nature...<sup>1, 2</sup>

When I read Riefer's account, I was impressed for two reasons. First, it appeared years before the pioneering research of ufologists like John Keel who managed to show that such phenomena do in fact occur. Secondly, I, along with my three fellow witnesses and a certain individual to whom I was then very close, were caught in a situation fully as frightening and baffling as Riefer's.

For personal reasons (not particularly, I hasten to add, fear of retribution from men-in-black types) I do not care at this point to relate in much detail the incredible events that occurred over the four-month period following the "ghost light" sighting, but I will say that they involved peculiar telephone calls, poltergeists, the appearances of strange dark-complexioned visitors, "ghost-like" figures coming out of and disappearing into nowhere, after leaving threatening messages, odd odours, sounds and lights, UFO sightings and psychic phenomena of various kinds.

After a time I began to wonder if I weren't the victim of an elaborate hoax of some kind. In many ways conservative by nature, I could hardly credit my senses and would often attempt, never successfully, to convince



myself that it was all in the imagination of myself and my friends. My solution, finally, was to divorce myself from ufology for one year.

### III

We are entering a weird, wonderful, terrifying age. The world we have always known is changing rapidly, almost inexplicably, heading toward either final chaos or the birth of a new order. Humanity has discovered a new consciousness of itself in the Universe—and if you don't believe it, check your local bookstore's supply of works on UFOs, psychic phenomena, witchcraft, astrology, the occult and other "borderline" fields, and watch how fast it is sold out. Magic, it is said, is being reborn.

A friend of mine returned from California to tell me of a new church starting in San Francisco. People he knew were joining it and encouraging him to do likewise. "Services" consisted of everyone's joining together and chanting in a language none of them recognised or understood, but the end result was that whatever one wished for—a girl for the night, money, social position—one got.

"I read their literature," my friend said, "but it didn't make sense. I read it through carefully several times, trying to understand what was going on, but it was all literal double-talk. *It wasn't meant to be understood.*"

Around the world new religions, new philosophies, new ideologies arise and gain adherents. Malcolm X, in prison studying Black Muslim literature and preparing to assume his future role as one of the most influential figures in the black struggle, has a vision identical to that of a UFO contactee:

As I lay on my bed, I suddenly, with a start, became aware of a man sitting beside me in my chair. He had on a dark suit, I remember. I could see him as plainly as I see anyone I look at. He wasn't black and he wasn't white. He was light-brown-skinned, an Asiatic cast of countenance, and he had oily black hair.

I looked right into his face.

I didn't get frightened. I knew I wasn't dreaming. I couldn't move, I didn't speak, and he didn't. I couldn't place him racially—other than that I knew he was a non-European. I had no idea whatsoever who he was. He just sat there. Then, suddenly as he had come, he was gone.

... I would later come to believe that my pre-vision was of Master W. D. Fard, the Messiah, the one whom Elijah Muhammed said had appointed him—Elijah Muhammed—as His Last Messenger to the black people of North America.<sup>3</sup>

"Fard", who one time told Elijah Muhammed that his (Fard's) true name was "Mahdi", appeared in the streets of Harlem in the early days of the depression,

selling silks and identifying himself as "a brother from the East." In 1934 he disappeared as mysteriously as he had arrived.

Life styles change along with fashions. The growing hippie subculture produces males whose hair flows down to their shoulders, a feature previously associated only with a certain type of UFO being. And powerful drugs like LSD, whose workings science is at a loss to understand, change those who take them in mysterious ways they can scarcely perceive. Men everywhere, searching for new gods, find them and the pace of change accelerates.

In the past year I have been able to place my experiences into the kind of perspective that I am convinced ufology must accept if it is going to get anywhere.

What happened to me, I think, was nothing special, nothing even especially fantastic, no more special, no more fantastic than any other UFO-related phenomenon (as commonly understood). The occurrences in and of themselves were no more revealing than any sighting, than anything "straight" ufology has come up with.

No, I believe that the UFO researcher must now look outward and around him, to the world that he lives in every mundane day of his life, to its workings, to its history, to its traditions, to its art, to its changes. He should watch for the new, re-examine the old, and study his newspaper as closely as he watches the skies.

The UFO riddle cannot be separated from the riddle of human existence. It is not as if the UFOs were intruders (as I thought they were when I became dramatically aware of their reality) into our sphere. They are no more (and no less) than one manifestation of a Reality that has many manifestations.

It is this Reality to which the New Ufology must turn its attention. Those who hold to the Saucer Cult, who have taken to UFO buffery to escape the problems of this world, will find the idea distasteful and offensive, but let them, for they have nothing to offer us or anyone.

The rest of us, our attention long on the distant stars, must now draw our attention slowly earthward, where the answers are and always have been.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I wrote to Mr. Riefer last year, but my letter was returned stamped "moved with no forwarding address".

<sup>2</sup> Riefer's mention of strange dealings in the postal service brings to mind a statement made by a member of a Tacoma, Washington, Fortean group that tried to investigate the Maury Island case: "I have had the experience of writing to Hal Dahl—in my original efforts to help find [Fred] Crisman—and having the answer come back from Crisman post marked in England or in some part of the U.S. Any letter sent to Hal Dahl is usually answered by Crisman—if he bothers to answer at all.

<sup>3</sup> *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (Grove Press, 1964, 1965), pp. 186-7, 189.

## PUBLIC LIBRARIES AND BOOKS ON UFOs

Few and far between are the library shelves with serious books on UFOs, so it would be a good idea if readers got down to their local public library and asked the librarian to obtain books like the following:

#### The Humanoids

**Anatomy of a Phenomenon**  
**Challenge to Science**  
**Uninvited Visitors**  
**The Flying Saucer Story**  
**Unidentified Flying Objects**

Ed. Charles Bowen  
(published by Neville Spearman Ltd.)  
Jacques Vallée (Spearman)  
J. & J. Vallée (Spearman)  
Ivan T. Sanderson (Spearman)  
B. le Poer Trench (Spearman)  
Robert Chapman (Arthur Barker Ltd.)