

Saucers in the Sixties - UFOs in Latin America and Spain

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A revolution in Cuba in 1959 kicked the door open on the turbulent cultural period in human history known collectively as “the Sixties” - best remembered in the U.S. for miniskirts, rock and roll and Vietnam, but elsewhere in around the planet for the student uprisings in Paris, the leftist revolutionary movements in Latin America and other parts of the Third World. Satellites with names like *Telstar* and *Early Bird* handled our television and telephone communications, cosmonauts and astronauts took their first awkward steps beyond the atmosphere, and the decade would end with humanity getting a good look at its fragile homeworld from the vantage point of lunar orbit.

The presence of the unidentified flying object phenomenon loomed large in the midst of all these paradigm shifts as sightings - and the rising phenomenon of encounters with putative alien occupants - achieved notoriety in dozens of countries. The phenomenon slowly began shedding its “flying saucer” moniker to emerge into society with the slightly more respectable appellation of “UFO”, with considerable numbers of magazines, journals and books devoted to its dissemination and study.

In Latin America, cultural predisposition toward the phenomenon was more than likely fueled by the “space race” and newspaper headlines of one superpower besting the other with increasingly dazzling landmarks in space - the first manned flight, the first space walk, the first successful docking, the first landing of unmanned probes on the Moon, successful flybys of Mars and Venus. If humankind, beset with problems as it was, could dream of touching the surfaces of other worlds, what was so unreasonable about sentient beings from inhabited worlds coming to ours? Science fiction, reaching millions of readers through comic books and newspaper strips (Mexico’s newspapers, for example, reprinted Alex Raymond’s *Flash Gordon* strips as *Roldán El Temerario*), books and television shows, acted as a lubricant that allowed minds closed by religious or political doctrine to open ajar. Separated by oceans or national borders, the generation that went home from school to watch *Perdidos en el Espacio* (Lost in Space) and *Viaje a las Estrellas* (Star Trek) was amenable not only to the possibility of alien visitors, but of ultra-or trans-dimensional entities and time-travelers as well. As early as 1961, Mexico City boasted a rock and roll group called “Los OVNIS”, undisputable proof that awareness of the otherworldly had penetrated the very marrow of pop culture; even more surprisingly, according to Gordon Creighton, a band of cat-burglars masquerading as “Martians”, complete with space suits, took advantage of a flurry of UFO activity in Perú wave to engage in armed robbery in 1965.

In Spain, the change of decade brought with it a renewal of the imagination. Science fiction, a subject that had never truly earned a foothold except as translations of existing American and British works, blossomed with the works of Tomás Salvador - 1960’s *La Nave* (the Vessel) dealing with a generation ship on a centuries-spanning mission - and Domingo Santos, author of 1962’s *Gabriel, la historia de un robot* (Gabriel, a Robot’s Tale), the story of a mechanical who saves the world from an uprising among lunar

colonists. This rekindling of speculative literature would lead to the creation of *Nueva Dimensión* magazine in 1968, which would go on to win awards in the following decade and be one of the longest-lasting publications of its type in the Spanish-speaking world. Mention should also be made at this point that some UFO and paranormal researchers, like Antonio Ribera and Juan Atienza, had also made inroads into the worlds of science fiction, both as authors and translators.

Interestingly enough, the success of one particular TV show - "The Invaders", starring Roy Thinness, played a major role in shaping popular opinion about the UFO phenomenon during this period of time in both Latin America and Spain. The exploits of the show's protagonist, David Vincent, an architect who carries the knowledge that Earth is being invaded by aliens, made for interesting programming in a country like Spain, which only had two television stations at the time. Remembering these more innocent times, researcher Angel Rodriguez recalls: "People lived very simply at the time. They were more domestic and enjoyed anything they had intensely. Furthermore, the detail about the show's aliens having stiff pinky fingers [as detail that enabled the show's protagonist to distinguish between real humans and their alien counterfeits] was quite startling, as we considered it a highly affected gesture, like people who drank coffee with their pinkies outstretched..."

So as the world watched Gagarin and Glenn take off into space, its eyes were also riveted by the enigmatic objects that filled some with a sense of elation and others with a sense of dread: on October 6, 1961, a UFO flyby over the Venezuelan town of Santa Rita by Lake Maracaibo bathed the entire community in an eerie luminescence, causing a considerable panic. Terrified fishermen jumped into the waters, hoping to swim to shore and away from the hovering craft. One of them, Bartolomé Romero, drowned in the mad rush to flee from the unknown.

The "OVNIS" Return to Mexico

While the 1950s had brought a considerable amount of activity by unidentified flying objects, as well as the more sensational contactee lore during the period, it wasn't until the Sixties that the UFO phenomenon would fully add itself to Mexico's consciousness, along political activism among the young, the massacre of innocents at Tlatelolco in 1968 and the troubled '68 Olympics -- events which mirrored similar developments in France and in the United States.

One of the most impressive photographs of a UFO during this period was the 1965 snapshot taken by Juan David Mateos. According to the photographer's testimony, he was driving along the road from Villa Ahumada to Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, when he saw a dark, oval shaped craft approaching at an altitude of less than twenty meters and a distance of only sixty meters. Mateos stopped the car and clicked away at the unknown object, earning himself a place in saucer history.

On July 10 1965, six residents of the city of Chilpancingo, capital of the state of Guerrero, were left spellbound by the maneuvers of two large, glowing objects in the darkened skies over their community--a two-hour performance which would be replayed later that month over Mexico City, where another pair of brilliant objects remained suspended at treetop level before shooting off into the sky.

Two students at Mexico City's *Instituto Nacional Politécnico* would become the protagonists of a still-debated "close encounter of the 3rd kind" which would be among the first of its kind in the country. The brothers Yayo and Payo Rodríguez achieved national prominence when on the morning of August 19, 1965, at eight o'clock in the morning, they claimed having witnessed the landing of a sizeable glowing disk on an open field near the Politécnico's campus. The otherworldly vehicle allegedly charred vegetation as it settled to the ground on its tripod landing gear. As if the landing of this spaceship, drawn straight from *My Favorite Martian*, wasn't enough, the Brothers Rodríguez also claimed that a pair of diminutive beings wearing respirators of some kind emerged from the craft and walked up to the terrified students, depositing at their feet a metallic object. The dwarfish "away team" (in Star Trek parlance) returned silently to their conveyance, which took to the air in a matter of seconds.

The Rodríguezes delivered the putative extraterrestrial fragment to the campus laboratory, where it was apparently subjected to analysis by investigators. According to an article in Mexico's *El Gráfico* newspaper (defunct) a few days later, a number of journalists and photographers from different media organizations visited the site, where burn marks were plainly visible and where traces of a curious liquid, characterized as "fuel" (leaded? unleaded?) were found. Despite the good physical evidence, Yayo and Payo were not considered credible witnesses. Even Dr. Santiago García, in his landmark book *OVNIS Sobre México*, would headline his chapter on the Rodríguez case as "¿de cual fumarían?" ("what kind did they smoke?").

The age of the great UFO-induced blackouts was about to begin during these troubled years. As a foretaste, perhaps, of what would happen later on across the northeastern U.S., the city of Cuernavaca, some fifty miles south of Mexico City, would suffer three separate power failures on the night of September 23, 1965. The *Ultima Hora* newspaper indicated that the blackout had been caused by a large luminous flying saucer which crossed the heavens over the city--an inverted soup-bowl device which was seen not only by thousands of citizens but by city mayor Emilio Riva Palacios, who was attending the opening of a film festival with members of his cabinet. The lights went out during the showing, and upon going outside, the city fathers were treated to the sight of the massive object's glow, which reportedly filled all of Cuernavaca valley.

But the force behind all these aerial phenomena appeared to be enamored of *la capital*, Mexico City, with its juxtaposition of massive colonial structures, modern skyscrapers and ancient ruins: it chose the 16th of September, the one hundred fifty-fifth anniversary of Mexico's independence from Spain, to manifest half a dozen luminous objects over the city's skies, casting downtown Mexico City into unbreakable gridlock as drivers left their vehicles to take a better look at the phenomenon. Newspapers reported that aviation authorities had received in excess of five thousand telephone calls from people asking if they had also seen *platillos voladores*. On September 25, a citizenry weary of craning their necks skyward endured another leisurely display of the unknown as a vast luminous body passed overhead, remaining motionless for a while before shooting out of sight at a terrific speed. Only days later, two smaller objects would buzz the gilded dome of Mexico's Palacio de Bellas Artes, a turn of the century structure that dominates La Alameda park. A few dozen people waiting at a bus stop witnessed the early evening sighting; they described the objects as "enormous luminous bodies with intermittent sparkling lights."

By this point in time, some of the world's major newspapers had picked up on Mexico's saucer situation. Paris's *Le Figaro* reprinted an editorial from Italy's *Corriere della Sera* on the subject: "Mexico City International Airport has officially recorded, of late, some three thousand cases of mysterious apparitions described in detail. At nightfall, people gather on the terraces and balconies of their homes to search the skies...a clamor of voices can occasionally be heard, saying: "There goes one! Can you see it?" Invariably, what follows is this: traffic is paralyzed on neighboring streets, since drivers also want to partake of the spectacle. The roadways grind to a halt, leading to monstrous traffic jams. After a while, witnesses to the event are willing to swear that the presence of *platillos voladores* causes engines to stall and plunges homes into darkness. Throughout Mexico, the number of blackouts has been inexplicably high..."

[At this point, the reader will allow me to insert a personal note. These mysterious blackouts continued well into the Seventies when I lived in Mexico City. My family's apartment overlooked busy Avenida Insurgentes--the artery that sections the city from north to south--and every room had a wall-to-wall, ceiling-to floor window offering an unlimited view of the avenue, the houses and buildings on the other side, and the mountains in the distance. It was not at all uncommon for the light to brown out and then black out completely, leaving people stuck in elevators and snarling traffic for hours at intersections. But the common denominator to all these blackouts, in my eight-year-old mind, was the bright yellow light that could be seen without fail crossing the sky in the horizon. Was it indeed a UFO? Who can say?]

Spanish ufologist Antonio Ribera, who kept careful tabs on the Mexican scenario, indicates in his book *América y los OVNIS* (Posada, 1977) that foreign sources as unlikely as Kenya's *Mombasa Times* were carrying stories about the situation: On October 2, 1965, a fourteen year old girl in the city of Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz, ran away screaming in fright when a flying disk some twenty feet in diameter dropped out the heavens to hover directly over while issuing a soft, whistling sound. The object was surrounded by multicolored lights that appeared to dangle from it. After this daytime apparition, the object was seen over the same city again at night.

At 21:00 hours on April 1966, Isidro Hernández, only six years old at the time and a resident of San Luis Potosí, was able to see a perfectly spherical object he described as "a full moon" or "a huge bubble with someone inside it." According to Luis Andrés Jaspersen, the boy thought it was a witch and didn't stick around to find out. He cried for his mother, who rushed to his side, only to become a witness to the same phenomenon. The cries of mother and child alerted the rest of the family, who also saw the phenomenon for an estimated two minutes.

A discovery of note having nothing to do with saucers occurred in 1966: Harry de la Peña, a geophysical engineer for Mexico's state-owned oil company, Petróleos Mexicanos (PEMEX) drove into a section of the northern Mexican desert fifteen kilometers from the town of Ceballos, Durango to check certain facilities in the area. When he tried to raise other members of his team on his car's two-way radio, there was no answer. Upon returning to camp, technicians ascertained that there was nothing at all wrong with the equipment; when it happened again, De la Peña dismissed it as sheer coincidence. But when it happened for a third time, he decided to solve the matter once and for all, discovering that the area contained pockets in which sending and receiving radio signals was impossible.

De la Peña dubbed these pockets "zones of silence" - a name that would subsequently be bestowed upon the entire area located at Vértice de Trino, the spot where the Mexican states of Durango, Coahuila and Chihuahua meet, some four hundred miles south of the U.S. border. That same year, Carlos Cabrera, a researcher for the Mexico's Comisión Nacional de Energía Nuclear, carried out a series of tests using 27-megahertz transceivers on the AM band and proved that radio waves are not easily broadcasted in the area. Electromagnetic energy fields of some sort seemingly absorb radio waves

With no further significant cases, 1966 gave Mexico a respite from its ufological experiences, but it was to be a brief one. 1967 would rekindle the frenzied activity of the preceding year.

On Saturday, February 11, 1967, a Guatemalan Aviateca airliner managed to avoid a near-collision with a UFO as the airliner prepared its final approach to Mexico City's saucer-plagued airport. The airliner's pilot, Col. Alfredo Castañeda, radioed the tower that a silvery round object, with what appeared to be "a reddish ball" on top of it, had suddenly crossed the airliner's path as it flew over Oaxaca. His co-pilot, the flight attendants and many of the passengers had also been witnesses to the unusual and possibly hazardous phenomenon. Mexico's airport limited itself to saying that the intruder "could not have been a weather balloon."

Stories began to circulate on March 30, 1967 regarding the collision of a spindle-shaped object against a hillside near Mezcala, state of Guerrero. A reporter for *Ultima Hora* indicated that at least a thousand residents of the village of Xochilapa had seen the object plummet earthward and heard the deafening explosion that inevitably followed. Many of the villagers agreed that the heavenly bullet had been roughly cigar-shaped and emitted a blinding light, "making it impossible to be mistaken for a meteorite." An infantry unit of the Mexican Army was allegedly dispatched to collect the object's remains, but nothing else was heard about the event.

Between 8:00 and 8:30 p.m. on May 7, 1967, the Mexican states of Tamaulipas, Tlaxcala, Hidalgo, Veracruz were visited by a veritable celestial armada of UFOs: at least twenty individual blue, yellow and red lights flew in formation over the heads of thousands of bewildered onlookers. The formation was spearheaded by a colossal red saucer and leisurely appeared to be following a northwesterly course. Newspapers in these four states carried the story but no photographs of the formation. A similar occurrence took place on August 6, 1967, when the citizens of Poza Rica, Veracruz, were treated to the sight of several "waves" of unidentified flying objects -- each wave having its own color -- as they flew overhead to become lost over the Gulf of Mexico.

While the Poza Ricans gawked at the spectacle, Captain Angel Fojo of Aeromexico Flight 145 was facing a similar prospect: at an altitude of twenty thousand feet over the state of Guanajuato, his DC-9 was running into a formation of three glowing disks an estimated 30 miles away from the airliner. Captain Fojo's best estimate was that the speeding objects crossed the horizon in a matter of thirty to forty seconds.

The late Jim and Coral Lorenzen of APRO documented a considerable number of cases occurring in Central and South America in '67, and while Mexico's UFO activity during

this particular year was by no means as significant as the "fleets" (to use the Lorenzen's own expression) that were engaged in a show of force over Argentina and Uruguay, APRO's files nonetheless contained a few cases of great interest regarding our southern neighbor.

As indicated in their book *UFOs Over the Americas* (Signet, 1968), APRO's founders were on their way to visit a number of South American locations and took advantage of a layover in Mexico City to meet with their correspondent, Jesús H. Garibay, who briefed them on the most important cases at the time. One of them involved two witnesses (a father and daughter) to the landing and takeoff of a UFO, with the added benefit of the photographs taken of the event.

"The principal witness," wrote Coral Lorenzen, "is a mechanical engineer, and the other is his daughter. On May 6, 1967, the two were driving between Durango and Mazatlán. At 11:00 a.m., they spotted a disc-shaped object on the ground off the highway. They stopped the car and took three photos as the object was taking off. The first shows the object at the level of the treetops, partially hidden by a tree. Two parts of its landing gear are clearly shown. The second shows the object apparently in flight against the clear sky: no landing gear is visible in this exposure. The third photo showed nothing. APRO is still on the track of this set of photos, and not knowing if the principals want publicity or not, we have decided not to release any names at this time."

The remainder of the year and the beginning of the following one would simply be a repetition of sightings until December 30, 1968, when a mountain rescue team on the slopes of the Popocatepetl volcano witnessed the maneuvers of a strange object conducting maneuvers over the summit of the nearby Iztaccíhuatl volcano. The artifact moved deliberately toward the mountain's eastern glaciers before flying toward Puebla, vanishing from sight. The object would come into view once more during its return trip to the mountains at 8:00 p.m.

Carlos A. Guzmán of Mexico's CIFEEAAC, happened to be one of the researchers in this early case. His group's findings indicated that the mountain rescue team's sighting was corroborated by a number of reports from the city of Puebla at the time: the newsroom of the city's *El Sol de Puebla* was swamped with phone calls from all over the city, reporting the maneuvers of "a strange white object, as bright as the planet Venus, flying noiselessly over the city." One witness, Francisco Martínez, claimed to have seen not only the object itself, but the various lights which composed it; Reynaldo Ponce, a student at Puebla's distinguished school of architecture, observed the UFO through a theodolite and was able to make a sketch based on his sighting. The entire report was compiled by APRO correspondent Jesús Hernandez Garibay and forwarded to that organization's Arizona-based headquarters.

A year later, on September 18, 1968, Antonio Nieto-- a cab driver plowing the main avenue of the city of Coatepec' -- thought that an otherwise slow night was coming to an end when he pulled over to pick up a fare, or so he thought: his would-be passenger turned out to be a black-clad figure with glowing hands and enormous cat-like eyes that glowed eerily in the taxi's lights as it stood on the curb. The terrified cab driver stepped on the gas and put as much distance as he could between himself and the frightful apparition.

As chance would have it, he ran into a fellow cabdriver who had also been hailed by the nightmarish apparition. Leaving one cab behind, both men set off in the other vehicle and went in search of a local journalist, who accompanied them to the spot where the improbable creature had last been seen. Their effort was rewarded by a third encounter with the entity, which now held in its glowing hands a crystal wand that emanated a radiance that hurt the eyes. A staff writer for Mexico City's *Excelsior* noted that in spite of the ufonauts' vaunted ability to cross space, they encountered the same difficulty as Earthlings when it came to hailing a cab.

High Strangeness could also be found in the blue waters of the Gulf of Mexico. On February 17, 1969, an unknown animal washed up on Veracruzian shores at a location known locally as "El Palmar de Susana" between the fishing communities of Tecolutla and Hautla. The authorities were dumbfounded by their find: the creature's head weighed approximately a ton, measuring 6 feet across and 4 feet from top to bottom. A 9-foot long "beak" that projected from the skull startled scientists who at first thought they were dealing with a decomposing whale carcass. The creature's hide was described as "wooly" and resistant to all manner of knives, machetes, axes and saws. Biologists Sergio García, Martín Contreras and Daniel Yutch were entrusted with studying the cryptid without reaching any conclusive results. According to Dr. Rafael Lara Palmeros, the University of California purchased the mystery remains, and their final whereabouts are equally enigmatic.

Spain: Urgent Emergency

The giant cylinders of the late 1950's had given way to an increasing number of cases involving occupant sightings - encounters between the average citizen, totally unprepared for an event of such a nature - and grotesque characters that did not resemble in the least the eldritch beings of contactee lore. For the remainder of the decade, Spain would be a source for some of the most interesting accounts of human / non-human encounters that can be found in the annals of ufology.

One of Spain's first serious research organizations, the *Centro de Estudios Interplanetarios* (CEI) under the guidance of Antonio Ribera, Eduardo Buelta and Marius Lleguet, had actually emerged in 1958, but would achieve prominence in the Sixties. Ribera and Buelta believed, at this period of time, that the planet Mars was the point of origin of the UFO phenomenon, while Lleguet advocated an extra-solar origin for the unknown objects. 1961 also marks the appearance of *Objetos Desconocidos en el Cielo*, a book by Ribera that became the first "ufological bestseller" in the country.

In the summer of 1960, Miguel Timermans, a schoolteacher from Prado del Rey (Cadiz) in southern Spain, decided to go on a weekend run on his Lambretta motorcycle to the city of Jerez. It was a clear, beautiful morning and visibility was unlimited. As he drove uphill at some point between Prado del Rey and the town of Arcos, a colossal figure appeared out of nowhere along the roadside. Timermans described it as well over two meters (6.5 ft.) and encased in a "swollen" red one-piece suit. Shocked, the teacher brought his motorcycle to a halt right in the middle of the highway as an overpowering sense of fear washed over him: the giant entity was slowly walking toward him along the edge of the highway. Recalling the event, Timermans remarked that the creature's

pressure suit or outfit was composed of "concentric rings" which also reminded him of the Michelin Man. The improbable figure lurched forward robotically, measuring its steps.

With the high-strangeness quotient overflowing at this point, Timermans was doubly startled to see another creature walking behind the giant! The second entity was barely over a meter tall and had what appeared to be a glossy black "boot" covering one of the legs of its red outfit. It, too, walked awkwardly as it brought up the rear.

The enigmatic figures crossed Timerman's path diagonally and vanished from sight after an encounter that lasted no more than 30 seconds. Kick-starting the Lambretta, the teacher headed for the place where the creatures had last been seen and was unable to find a trace of their presence. The astonishing case would later be reported in *Stendek* magazine in the 1970s.

The mysteries in Spain were not circumscribed to the lonely highways and byways, as we can see from the following case:

Captain Charles Wendorf's orders were straightforward enough: fly his B-52 Stratofortress to the Saddle Rock Mid-Air Refueling Area to meet a KC-135 tanker. The clear skies over the Mediterranean coast of Spain made Saddle Rock a particularly suitable refueling site. The giant aircraft, an element of the 68th Bomber Squadron out of North Carolina, was in the middle of a long patrol of the Atlantic Ocean, coming as close to the USSR as they dared. But Cold War tension would be the very last factor to affect the B-52's fate.

At 10:22 a.m. on January 17, 1966, at an altitude of thirty thousand feet, Captain Wendorf's nuclear-warhead laden Stratofortress sighted the KC-35 some 15 miles ahead in the refueling zone. The B-52 carefully jockeyed into position behind the tanker to connect with its refueling mast--a complex but efficient operation that did not involve any loss in speed on the bomber's part and in which remarkably small amounts of fuel were lost.

But something went wrong. An unseen force bumped against the bomber's underside, pushing it upward and causing the KC-135's starboard wing to graze the B-52's cockpit. The bomber's crew felt another terrible jolt as their plane rammed into the tanker's fuselage

To observers on the ground witnessing the refueling maneuver, the tanker exploded into a ball of orange flame while both military aircraft disintegrated high above the earth. The long-range bomber's crew managed to jump clear of the explosion and was later rescued by Spanish fishermen after having miraculously survived their high-altitude jump. But four hydrogen bombs now lay at the bottom of the shallow coastal waters, and the efforts to retrieve them before lethal gamma radiation spread throughout the sea made headlines worldwide.

Witnesses to the explosion claimed having seen three objects in the sky at the time of the explosion, although only the downed bomber and the disintegrated tanker should have been in the area. Suspicions arose among the Spanish military elements assisting with the rescue efforts that the USAF's frantic search for the missing warheads was, in

fact, a thinly veiled excuse for finding the elusive third "airplane" -- the UFO that had caused the destruction of its aircraft and then disappeared without a trace.

The USAF had good reasons, perhaps, to worry about a force inimical to its interests somewhere over the Mediterranean: Eight days before the Palomares debacle, a colossal fireball of unknown origin had flown over the Italian cities of Capri and Naples, causing a general blackout. Four years later, in October 1969, two jet fighters would disappear without a trace during NATO exercises held off Crete. The previous year, the French air force had lost two Mystère IV fighter-bombers on routine patrol over Corsica. The result of the military inquest was that both planes were lost due to "undetermined causes"

Months after the world (or at least the Mediterranean countries) breathed a sigh of relief following the recovery of the Palomares bomb, a farmer in southern Spain would come across a particularly terrifying humanoid entity reminiscent of the West Virginia "Mothman" - but this time wearing a helmet.

Around seven o'clock in the morning on May 16, 1966, Manuel Hernandez was returning from his early duties at his small property on the outskirts of the Andalusian city of Córdoba when his eyes caught a glint of metallic brilliance - an unusual disk-shaped object on the ground, less than two hundred feet from the shoulder of the road. The object made no sound whatsoever and the farmer was completely mystified; curiosity got the better of him and he cautiously approached the three-meter wide object. In retrospect, it is almost certain that Hernandez now wishes he hadn't.

The farmer reportedly saw three short, greenish-gray figures, winged and wearing transparent helmets, suddenly appear out of nowhere and flutter around the landed disk. Hernández was unable to make out any features on the small "flying devils" as he termed them and prudently decided to retreat from the scene as far as his legs could take him. He shared the story of his encounter with relatives and was unable to bring himself to even walk past the stretch of road where his bizarre experience had occurred.

Argentina's Amazing Decade

If a banner or pennant similar to the kind employed to warn people of storm warnings could be designed for UFO flaps, the citizens of Argentina during the Sixties would have clearly welcomed it. The decade opened with a formidable UFO flap that is still studied today, forty odd years after it occurred, and includes some of the most memorable cases to emerge from this country.

The first major UFO wave of the decade began in the month of May 1962, as reports of "lights in the sky" gave way to reports of landings and occupant encounters throughout the length of the country, from Cordoba in the north to Neuquén in the far south. On June 13, 1962, so many unidentified objects had been reported over Bahia Blanca on the shores of the Atlantic Ocean that all of the eyewitnesses were rounded up by the authorities for questioning by the police. Within a few nights, also along the ocean's edge, dozens of residents of Mar del Plata - Argentina's premiere resort city - reported the maneuvers of an impressive cigar-shaped *nave nodriza* or mothership as it flew in from the darkness of the South Atlantic at 21:00 hours on June 15. This large object was described as having an apparent size greater than that of the Moon.

At 7:20 p.m. on May 22, 1962 a squadron of fighters in the vicinity of Bahía Blanca's Comandante Espora Naval Base, reported the presence of UFOs along its flight path. The interception lasted 35 minutes. Direct eyewitnesses to this incident were Lt. Rodolfo César Galdós and his student, Roberto Wilkinson. This was the first official acknowledgement of the phenomenon and would lead to the Argentinean Navy's inception of its first Permanent Commission for the Study of the UFO Phenomenon (*COPEFO*, in Spanish), headed by a team composed of naval officers and journalists. Not to be outdone, the Argentinean Air Force promptly created its own saucer study group.

In the early afternoon of July 19, 1962, well over a hundred workers at the DKW auto plant in Santa Fe followed the progress of another cigar-shaped "mothership" as it made its way toward the northeast at an estimated altitude of a thousand meters, letting off blinding flashes of light as it traveled.

The UFOs were growing bolder: A month later, a strange object had landed with impunity in an airfield in the province of Corrientes. A report circulated in Buenos Aires' *La Razón* newspaper stated that Luis Harvey, the airfield manager, had been alerted to the landing of an unauthorized flight. Fearing a landing by insurgents or leftist guerrillas, Harvey went out to the runway to confront the problem. But no rickety aircraft filled with bearded *milicianos* awaited him - a luminous object described as "spherical and spinning on its axis" was now suspended above the tarmac, giving off flashes of blinding green and blue lights. Suddenly, while the airfield manager and his assistants looked on, the object rose vertically into the air and zipped off into the distance.

Platillos voladores were a daily occurrence and a household word during the 1962 Argentinean wave, with 4 cases in the provinces of Córdoba, San Luis, and La Pampa taking place on the same day, May 13. The month of June of that year recorded major incidents in the towns of Crespo, Pedro Luro and Bajada Grande, while August brought sightings to Pirán, Catrilo, Chamba Punta, scattered all over the nation's geography. The fall of 1962 was no less busy, with incidents in Mar del Plata, Monte Leon, Choele Choel and Tucumán in the far north of the country. It may have seemed to many that an invasion from outer space was underway.

Among the most compelling Argentinean cases from the mid-1960s we find the Mar del Plata Case of August 20, 1965, experienced by Eduardo Jacobi and Teresa Acuña, ages 23 and 18 respectively at the time of the event. The event was first mentioned in the *La Razón* newspaper on August 21, subsequently picked up by author and researcher Roberto Banchs and re-opened by Miguel Angel Gomez Pombo, who managed to interview Eduardo Jacobi in the year 2002.

According to Yacobi - who disputes the date given for the case, claiming a September 1966 date for it - he was having supper when his brother told him that word on the street was that the port harbored a "flying saucer base". The witness scoffed at the notion. He and his wife left the house to catch a midnight bus to downtown Mar del Plata. Walking a distance of "five or six rural blocks" to the bus stop, Yacobi says that the few lights on the road suddenly went out, which didn't trouble him at all. At that point he heard a sound coming high above the eucalyptus trees: the source was an object that would eventually descend over an empty field

measuring some 15 hectares by his estimate. Exchanging glances with his wife, both realized that they were seeing the same thing, but a difference of opinion occurred - Teresa wanted to stay behind, Eduardo wanted a closer look. She won out, asking him: "If you get taken by a flying saucer, who's going to believe me?"

He described the luminous object as being "50 times more potent than a mercury light, but did not cause a burning sensation". Its colors ranged from yellow to red, with intermittent flashes.

The couple reportedly saw silhouettes within the light, adding that throughout the length of their experience, no other car or person came by the roadside where the event was taking place. No sounds were audible either. The object took off without further incident. (One of the journalistic sources reporting the case turned the silhouettes into "alien occupants standing outside the craft making repairs before boarding it and taking off").

"The lights came back on," Yacobi continued, "and fellows from the *La Capital de Balcarce* newspaper stopped by. They asked me where we were headed and remarked about the blackout, but I said nothing about the sighting. Ten minutes later, the bus came. I told the driver "you're so late!" and he replied that they were on the road and couldn't get the bus started, adding: "I saw a light, too" and they were some 2 kilometers away more or less. The microbus always ran on time and the lights never used to go out back then. The following day I spoke with reporters from La Capital. They told me that they tried to take photos of what they had seen but their cameras wouldn't work. Another day we went back and found a triangular mark on the field. The reporters were there too. The object was hovering above the ground, it never landed."

The unidentified flying - or hovering - object in the Mar del Plata Case was circular in shape and described as "immense", with a sixty meter circumference. The witnesses were standing some hundred meters away from it. Yacobi, an avowed atheist and unbeliever in anything as outlandish as flying saucers, developed a passion for the subject after his brush with the unknown, although he never had another sighting or encounter. A curious item of information emerged during Miguel Angel G. Pombo's interview - the witness stated that he "received a letter from NASA some three or four days later, but threw it out." Apparently it was a form and a request for a drawing of the object he had seen.

That same month - August 1965 - the Argentinean Navy's COPEFO study group conceived the notion of following the pesky UFOs by means of a combined effort involving radar and chase planes out of the joint Air Force/Navy Base at Punta Indio. During the one particular incident, radar screens picked up an unexplained echo. A Navy interceptor was scrambled after the radar contact, but the UFO repeatedly managed to elude its pursuer. According to the pilot, the intruder had an "ellipsoid" configuration and an estimated diameter of some twelve meters. At one point, this unexplained object came within two hundred meters of the interceptor. However, in spite of its successes, the Navy's UFO panel ran aground in 1967, possibly due to a statement made by one of its directors supporting the existence of unidentified flying objects. A spokesman, making it clear that the director's opinions did not reflect the Navy's official stance on the matter, issued a hasty retraction. Another contrast between the Air and Navy services became evident

when the commander in chief of the Argentine Air Force, Brig. Gen. Adolfo Alvarez embraced the existence of "flying saucers" in July 1968, cryptically adding, "Otherwise, I wouldn't be an aviator."

No account of the Argentinean UFO situation of the Sixties would be complete without a mention of the "Trancas Incident" of 1963. It has been included in most every book and encyclopedia published since that time, but the most thorough account appears in *Los Asombrosos Fenomenos de Trancas* by Dr. Oscar A. Galíndez, APRO's Argentinean correspondent and one of this country's leading researchers at the time.

At seven o'clock in the evening on October 21, 1963, a generator belonging to the Moreno family - owners of the Santa Teresa ranch, the only dwelling for several miles around, one mile distant from the village of Trancas, Province of Tucuman - ceased to function properly. Loss of the only power source to run the entire property forced the occupants of the farmhouse to resort to flashlights and candles to go about their activities. The evening's usual activities curtailed by the outage, the Morenos went to bed at eight o'clock.

Around 21:30 hours, while Mrs. Yolié Moreno was in the same room with her sister Yolanda and her young child, Dora Guzmán, a teenaged domestic worker, knocked insistently on the door saying she was frightened, without specifying the cause. Mrs. Moreno dismissed these concerns, but young Dora returned only minutes later, this time saying that she could see "lights at the end of the backyard" whose origin she could not explain. Every time she set foot outdoors, she explained, the surroundings would light up abruptly for a matter of seconds, as though flashes of lightning were occurring on a clear, cold night.

Humoring Dora, Yolié and Yolanda went outside and saw nothing; minutes later they were asked to come outside to look at the strange lights for a second time, and were unable to detect anything unusual. When asked for a third time, the domestic begged them not to leave again, as the lights were flashing with certain regularity. It was at this point that they became aware of two "sources of light" joined by a "glowing tube" measuring an estimated one hundred meters. A number of silhouetted figures - forty, by some counts - were moving hurriedly about. The lights and their mysterious connection were a scant 150 meters away from the Moreno farmhouse on the Belgrano Railroad tracks.

Suspecting that either a train derailment or a terrorist act was in progress, the sisters went back to their room to get dressed while Dora went for a .38 Colt revolver. Yolié tiptoed past the bedroom of her elderly parents - Antonio and Teresa - to avoid waking them up, but deliberately woke her sister Argentina Moreno, 28, to ask her to look after her son while she went for a closer look. The sisters discussed the ruthlessness of left-wing guerrillas who would doubtless open fire on them if their presence was detected.

Interestingly enough, it would be Argentina - characterized as calm and introspective, who would leave her room for a better look of the lights described to her by Yolié. Unexpectedly, the others heard her scream, adding that "there were strange devices near the house" -- cries that shook her parents out of their slumber. With no time to waste, the two older sisters, with a gun-toting Dora taking point, headed for the

tracks. Upon reaching the property's gate, they were surprised to see a faint greenish light. When Yolié shined her flashlight on it (believing it was a pick-up truck belonging to one of the farmhands), six portholes on a disc-shaped object lit up: the bizarre structure was hovering over the ground, barely eight meters from where they stood. The witnesses would later describe the object as measuring "between eight and ten meters in diameter" and having a surface similar to aluminum, with projections resembling rivets. There were no identifying marks on its surface and the portholes burned with a powerful white light that kept them from looking inside. An unlit dome surmounted the disk's body, which wobbled slightly without spinning on its axis. A sulfurous odor was also present in the air.

While the three women looked in amazement at the outlandish and somewhat frightening device, it suddenly let off a gout of flame that toppled the women to the ground, sending them rolling a distance. Stunned and in a panic, Yolié, Yolanda and Dora ran for the safety of the house; the first two had seen and felt the intense heat of the fiery outburst, but it was Dora who took the brunt of the flame, suffering second and third degree burns to her face, legs and arms.

As this occurred, three more powerful sources of light appeared along the Belgrano tracks, bringing the total of unknown objects to six. A sulfurous fog began to envelop the nearest saucer, whose structural characteristics faded away until only an orange cloud was visible. From one of the windows of the Moreno farmhouse, the terrified occupants could see a "tube of light" measuring an estimated three meters in diameter, issue from the craft and project itself against the house, as though scanning every detail of its architecture. Between the larger object on the railroad tracks and its peripheral craft, enough light was being generated for the Moreno family to clearly see what was going on.

Beams of light from the craft projected upon a tractor shed, moving increasingly close to the farmhouse. The solidity of the beams is a remarkable feature of the account, as they were described as "perfectly cylindrical and casting no shadows whatsoever, or emitting any vapor or sound." Yolié inserted her hand into one of the solid beams of light in the belief that they were jets of water of some sort, held together by unknown means. She suffered no ill effects from doing so.

At this point, the elderly Mr. Moreno made ready to go out and face the situation himself. He had been the mayor of Trancas for a number of years and believed that this display of lights had to do with political adversaries who were hoping to settle a score once and for all by eliminating him and his family. His daughters, however, kept him from engaging in any heroics: the solid beams of light were now concentrating upon the farm and its outbuildings at a rate of two beams per unidentified object. Two such beams from one of the objects headed for a henhouse and fell short of actually reaching it.

The worst aspects of the "siege" experienced by the Moreno family was beginning: the temperature inside the house was quickly approaching 40°C when it had previously barely reached 16°C, and despite the lateness of the hour and the total lack of electricity, the farmhouse's interior was lit as bright as day by the beams, which seemed able to pierce through the stone walls. Also at this point, the elder Mrs. Moreno reportedly saw a "silhouette" racing past the windows of one of the rooms,

but what later unsure if this was a product of her imagination. While her husband and children dealt with the phenomenon, she had been engaged in prayer.

Her devotions perhaps proved helpful. The object nearest to the house redirected its beams of light before retracting them slowly; the intruder carefully glided its way toward the train tracks, where it joined the five other objects. In unison, all six unidentified vehicles flew east at low altitude toward the Sierra de Medina, leaving the horizon bathed in a strange orange light for well over half an hour.

The entire ordeal had lasted forty-five life-changing minutes for the Moreno family, whose place in the annals of the unknown had been assured forever.

Researchers who looked into the case made some interesting discoveries: a number of white spherules had been found throughout the backyard and the train tracks, seemingly left behind by the unwelcome visitors. A chemical analysis performed by Walter Tell at the University of Tucuman proved revealed their composition to be largely of calcium carbonate with traces of potassium carbonate. The family's guard dogs did not bark before, during or after the incident, and the chickens in the henhouse had also kept their peace throughout the ordeal. Francisco Tropiano, owner of the property nearest the Moreno farmhouse, did not see the objects or their enigmatic beams but had indeed witnessed the preternatural orange glow issuing from behind the Sierra de Medina.

Other witnesses, however, had seen much more. José Acosta, the foreman of the Santa Teresa ranch, asked the Morenos why a fire had been set in the fields, adding that he had witnessed a number of objects heading west, but the presence of trees and other obstacles had kept him from seeing the activities on the Belgrano tracks or the siege at the farmhouse. Renée Vera, a physician from the village of Trancas, experienced an auto breakdown on the road to the community, forcing her to walk the remaining distance to the settlement. At around 23:00 hours she reportedly saw a "fleet of 40 or 50 luminous bodies" at low altitude that covered the area with a smell of sulfur, so intense that she nearly passed out on the roadside.

When interviewed, Yolié Moreno expressed an opinion that may have been considered startling in the light of the experience that she and her family had been through: at no time did she feel in the presence of a technology that was anything other than human, mainly due to the presence of rivets on the disk-shaped craft nearest to her home.

Guillermo Gimenez, who wrote a follow-up on the Trancas incident in 2005 to commemorate the anniversary of the event, reports that Captain Omar Pagani, one of the first officials to report to the scene, noted in his findings that "a glow similar to that produced by a distant city was left at the place in the mountain range where the objects vanished, lasting approximately an hour and a half. I was able to hold in my hands a branch touched by one of these objects, but it was impossible to obtain any results." Giménez, director of Argentina's Planeta UFO, adds: "I was able to visit this location [Trancas] in the months of July/August 1989 and tour it, thinking back to those events, the experiences that were had, the eyewitness accounts and the important evidence found. Unfortunately the main witnesses of this event were already deceased. All that was left there were the memories of a spectacular UFO case that was still remembered at the time."

Respected Argentinean author Roberto Banchs mentions the July 4, 1968 blackout that darkened the entire sector of Tigre (province of Buenos Aires). During this incident, a number of witnesses reported seeing a UFO. A woman named Isabel Gómez stated that the object "seemed to emit light. It was the only lighted object at the time." A few months later, the city of Chascomús was plunged into darkness. Mrs. Blanca Davis witnessed a UFO measuring some 7 or 8 meters in diameter hanging motionless in the air, directly above the town square. "When we looked toward the west," she reported, "we saw two [more] discs and another one which gave the impression of being ready to land. Suddenly the UFOs headed toward the lagoon area, from which twenty more objects appeared, flying from north to south at fantastic speeds." Banchs reports that electricity was restored the moment the objects disappeared.

The impressive and unbelievable amount of UFO activity taking place over Argentina during this period of time generated a considerable quantity of photographic evidence that appeared first in the national press and subsequently in saucer-related publications on the international level. Some of these images are immediately recognizable by even the casual student of ufology (a good example would be the August 5, 1965 photo taken over Buenos Aires at 0:300 hours), but a careful study of these images performed by Vicente Juan Ballester Olmos as part of his FOTOCAT project shows that many of them were a succession of lens flare misidentifications or simply photos of astronomical interest. One may theorize at this point that the urge on the part of the newspapers to have some kind of visual material to accompany a factual story was so strong that resorting to such chicanery was seen as fair game. In the Internet age, we see this "for purposes of illustration only" situation repeating itself on many websites.

UMMO: Harmless Prank or the Hoax of the Century?

The personalities that had made Madrid's *La Ballena Alegre*, such a weird and wonderful place in the 1950s, continued their activities into the new decade under the guidance of Fernando Sesma, perhaps best described as chief instigator and merrymaker. At some point in 1962, Sesma received a phone call from someone or something claiming to be "Saliano" from the distant sphere of Auko. The residents of this planet must have been quite addicted to their own penmanship, as "Saliano" bombarded Sesma with correspondence filled with scrawls and portents. These missives would be read out at the Merry Whale to the delight of believers and non-believers alike. This carefree reading of what was largely contactee claptrap gradually gave way to more serious fare, received not from Auko but from UMMO, a world endowed with the power of space flight but, alas, not the lowercase typeface.

The spacefarers from UMMO - located some 14 light-years away from Earth -- described themselves as tall and blonde and would have fit in perfectly with Adamski's Venusians or the Nordics that became part and parcel of the ufological taxonomy. Often endowed with names like DEI 98, ASOO 3, and IAUDU 3, they represented a civilization that had overcome planetary disharmony and mastered the secret of trekking throughout neighboring solar systems in their wonderful OAWOLEA UEWA OEM, which dull Earthlings could only describe by their shape as "flying saucers."

These advanced space travelers were in possession of a science completely undreamed of by human thinkers: their numerical system operated on a base of 12 rather than 10, as does ours; they had discovered that the link between body and soul was a chain of 84 atoms of krypton lodged in the hypothalamus; their physicists had rejected our concept of Euclidean geometry and discovered that the universe was composed of an unsuspected number of dimensions and that matter, energy, and mass were in fact the result of three independent axes known collectively as IBOZOO UU. It was precisely this control of IBOZOO UU which enabled them to leave their homeworld and reach our solar system in some seven or eight months of travel time. Ummite cosmologists spoke of a "multiverse", the WAAM-WAAM, and were fascinated by magnetohydrodynamics, which they employed to power the small remote spheres (UULEWA) employed by their agents on Earth.

Their society, or UMMOALEWE, was probably the most attractive asset these avowed aliens could offer a Spain that was stultified by the repressive Franco dictatorship: full equality between the sexes, religious free thought, and an apparent lack of hierarchical structure, in spite of having leaders, which could be very young, and were shown great deference. The Ummites also had the kind of gadgetry that would have made James Bond's Q green with envy: ballpoint pens that emitted buzzing sounds for remote communications, metallic spheres which hung suspended in mid-air as if by antigravity, and glowing discs the size of a quarter which could light an entire room.

All the information concerning their society, organization, and beliefs was gleaned from endless, erudite "reports" aimed at familiarizing humans with their culture, as well as acquainting humans with their perspective on our affairs, such as war, inequality, etc. These reports were allegedly transmitted by means of dictation to a human typist (who was strictly ordered never to attempt contact with the addressees), and then sent to scientists, philosophers, and broad-minded individuals who in the Ummites' criteria, would be able to understand them and put them to good use.

Unlike other contactee fare, the Ummites offered neither religious messages nor the hope of imminent salvation from cataclysms that never quite materialized. Belief in the solvency of these communications was bolstered by a series of curious coincidences in which some of the UMMO letters predicting sightings and landings of their spacecraft in the Madrid area apparently coincided with UFO sightings that appeared in the local press: the landings at San José de Valderas and Santa Monica on June 1st, 1967 could only have been produced by the Ummite vehicle collecting its passengers and heading into space. Oddly enough, the Ummites had taken the precaution of notifying three journalists they had befriended in Madrid about this upcoming event. Between thirty and forty people, members of Fernando Sesma's *Club de Amigos del Espacio* (Space Friends Club) attested to having seen an ad in the newspaper which provided the coordinates and arrival time for the interstellar craft.

The lenticular craft, with the famous UMMO emblem on its underside, crossed the skies over Madrid's San José de Valderas sector before making a brief landing at Santa Monica. A number of witnesses claimed to have seen the Ummite vessel rise from behind a line of trees, hover, and fly up vertically at a tremendous rate of speed. There was also physical evidence to bolster the Ummite's claim: a trio of rectangular imprints arrayed in a triangular formation, and burnt soil in the triangle's center. Yet far more fascinating than these ground effects were the nickel tubes containing long

strips of material embossed with the UMMO emblem --)+(--. Upon analysis, however, the metal tube and the strips proved to be highly unusual but hardly alien: the former was indeed an unusually pure form of nickel, and the latter was a material known as TEDLAR, manufactured by DuPont and used for space-related applications.

However, the Ummite landing in Santa Monica was declared a fraud early on, and it is as such in Vicente Juan Ballester-Olmos' *Enciclopedia de los encuentros cercanos con OVNIS* (Encyclopedia of UFO Close Encounters). Suspicion began to fall upon "professor" Fernando Sesma and his merry band of followers. According to distinguished investigator Antonio Ribera: "[Sesma] has a reputation for being fantasy-prone, given to unfounded speculation with little grounding on reality, such as what has been presented in certain magazines and books." Ribera and fellow investigator Rafael Farriols managed to have Sesma hand over all the "originals" given to him by the Ummites, who no longer interested him because they weren't as spiritual as Saliano from Auko.

The "UMMO Affaire", as it would become known for posterity, reached far beyond Spain as serious researchers in other European countries became recipients of the intriguing correspondence. Aimé Michel and René Fouéré received UMMO microfilms and photographs of a spacecraft identical to the one supposedly seen over San José de Valderas, thus bringing UMMO's existence to the notice of French investigators. The Ummites themselves had revealed that their first landing on Earth had taken place near the village of La Javie in Southern France, where they proceeded to remove samples of hair and bodily secretions from the sleeping occupants of a home close to their landing site. Among the Ummites' "booty" were items as diverse as newspapers, light bulbs, and knickknacks.

Eminent UFO researcher Jacques Vallée visited La Javie, and in searching through the local police files, discovered that the occupants of the house in question had reported the theft of an electric meter, which happened to be among the articles supposedly pilfered by the itinerant spacefarers. Vallée pursued the phenomenon to Argentina, where a medical establishment dispensing miraculous cures had become UMMO's most tangible manifestation to date. An earlier Vallée book, *Messengers of Deception*, intimated the possibility of an espionage link with UMMO as part of the Cold War. In 1970, a British company known as UMO Plant Hire Ltd. was exposed as a front for KGB activities. One year later, over a hundred Soviet officials were expelled from the UK under suspicion of espionage, and UMO closed down.

In an interview with journalist Linda Strand, Vallée observed that there existed the strong possibility that UMMO was in fact some sort of covert exercise by one of the world's intelligence agencies, possibly aimed at the creation of a cult which would later be put to other uses. He was not alone in his observation: it had already been suggested by certain Spanish investigators that life on UMMO -- an antiseptic society obsessed with personal cleanliness, heavily dependent on gadgetry for every detail of their existence, flitting about in air cars straight out of *The Jetsons* -- reflected the ideal futuristic society from an American cultural perspective, thus hinting at the possible motive force behind the entire affair.

The UMMO phenomenon can lay claim to being the longest-running hoax in ufology. It drove wedges between believers and non-believers -- between those who had received,

yet again, the Good News purveyed by the space brothers and those who took a more skeptical approach. Apparently, the scientific jargon that characterized the UMMO reports led many to consider it the real thing. Curiously enough, the very first "sighting" of one of Ummite saucers -- at Aluche in 1966 -- was witnessed by José Luis Jordán Peña, a habitué of the Merry Whale and an engineer by profession, who has since been accused of perpetrating the entire hoax.

The Decade in Print

Material related to the subject of UFOs was becoming readily available during this period of time - exponentially greater than a decade earlier. Magazines sold at the newsstand and available to the unspecialized reader included translations of U.S. and British news items, largely translations from Frank Edwards's books at the time - *Stranger than Strange*, *Flying Saucers Here and Now* (also available as a full translation, *Platillos Voladores Aquí y Ahora*) - or articles from *Flying Saucer Review*. Entries on the occult lore were usually translations from France's *Planète*, and Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier were accorded the stature of high priests of the new esoteric revolution. In Spain, the decade's contributions to literature began marked the appearance of two markedly different UFO books: Antonio Ribera's *Objetos Desconocidos en el Cielo* (Barcelona: Argus, 1961) and Fernando Sesma's *Yo, Confidente de los Hombres del Espacio* (Madrid: Jirafa, 1965), plus translations of the early works of Aimé Michel. Later in the decade, such titles as Marius Lleget's *Mito y Realidad de los Platillos Voladores* (Barcelona: Telstar, 1967) and Sesma's *UMMO, Un Planeta Habitado* (Madrid: 1967) would grace bookstores, but the market featured a predominance of translated works from French and English (some of these translated by Antonio Ribera, whose translation credits also included the Spanish version of *Arthur C. Clarke's 2001: A Space Odyssey*). Ribera would retain his undisputed heavyweight title as the decade came to a close with three books of considerable importance: *UMMO: Un Caso Perfecto*, *Los Platillos Voladores en Iberoamérica y España*, and *Platillos Volantes Ante la Cámara* - all of them published in 1969.

South America, undergoing the period known as the "boom" in the field of literature, was also contributing a wealth of literature to the ufology. Argentinean readers interested in learning more about the phenomenon could read Oscar Uriondo's *Objetos aereos no identificados; un enigma actual* (Buenos Aires: 1965), Oscar Galíndez's *Informe Sobre los Objetos Voladores No Identificados* (Cordoba: 1968), Pedro Romaniuk's *Naves Extraterrestres, sus Incursiones a la Tierra* (Buenos Aires: 1969) or Luis Anglada Font's *La Realidad Ovni a Través de los Siglos* (Buenos Aires: 1969). Brazil, a hotbed of sightings throughout the 1960s, produced a considerable amount of UFO literature in Portuguese, such as Paulo Coelho Netto's *A Realidade Dos Discos Voadores* (Rio de Janeiro: 1966) and Flavio Pereira's *O Livro Vermelho Dos Discos Voadores* (Sao Paulo: 1966).

Venezuela's own contribution to ufology during this period was *Platillos Voladores Sobre Venezuela* by Horacio G. Ganteaume (1961). As in Spain, many translations of the works of U.S. authors - Donald Keyhoe, Morris K. Jessup and Frank Edwards - were circulated at the time.

If it had been possible to look at the postal services of the world through some sort of x-ray and sorting device, the spectator would have been amazed at the number of UFO

bulletins and round robins circulated to subscribers. Mentioning all of them is a task akin to counting the stars in the sky, and it is only thanks to the heroic efforts of Ignacio Cabria in *Entre Ufologos, Creyentes y Contactados* that we have a thorough list of bulletins and magazines available in Spain at the time. Some of them lasted no more than two issues (as occurs with podcasts almost forty years later!) while others managed to publish weekly for an entire year. Newsstand publications like *Algo* (1968-75), *OVNI* (1969) and *Ciclope* (1969-1970) were often produced on quality paper, lavishly illustrated and contained interesting features and interviews, some of them with personalities not usually associated with ufology, such as Colombian novelist Gabriel García Márquez discussing his views on the possibility of extraterrestrial life. That they lasted so long indicates the presence of a dedicated readership willing to support them during a period of considerable activity.

"In Spain, the Sixties represented Ufology's baby steps in our country," says Angel Rodríguez, a veteran UFO researcher and director of Spain's GEIFO organization. "It was a Spain in which you either became a political activist against the Regime or wasted your time by immersing yourself in stories that would make you forget the dullness of those times. The man on the street did not know much about ufology, a word that became fashionable in the '70s. Martians and flying saucers were spoken about jokingly and sporadically, but the subject wasn't really in vogue. Saucer buffs weren't well regarded and there was no widespread UFO movement. It was all behind closed doors.

"Those were the times," continues Rodríguez, responding to questions posed to him for this monograph, "in which those who concerned themselves with the subject belonged to university circles, although these were more concerned with political activities. Men in Black and such were relegated to a minor role when compared to the agents of the Dirección General de Seguridad, who represented a very real threat. Many supposedly UFO-related gatherings really concealed a more revolutionary agenda. It was the heroic age of our pioneers, namely Antonio Ribera, Manuel Osuna, Ignacio Darnaude, Julio Marvizón, Manuel Filpo, V.J. Ballester Olmos, Pepe Ruesga...the list is very long. As Manuel Osuna told me on one occasion, ufology is like a thermometer that rises and falls, referring to the fickle interest of the population."

Puerto Rico in the Sixties

According to Sebastián Robiou's *Manifiesto OVNI* (San Juan: Ed. Punto y Coma, 1979) the first reported landing of a UFO occurred in 1963 in western Puerto Rico when an anonymous agricultural engineer from the city of Aguada saw an intense bright light near the surface at eight o'clock in the evening on an unspecified date. The engineer thought that a car had driven off the road and landed upside down, with its headlights pointing upward. Upon getting closer, he realized that it wasn't a car, but instead "a small object on the ground, about the size of a small vehicle." Coming within one hundred feet of the strange object, he noticed that it was surmounted by a gyrating red light and a grilled lower section, through which the white light he had originally seen, poured through. After a while, the object lifted itself into the air, remaining motionless dozens of feet off the ground, and then took off horizontally in a

northwesterly course, toward the Mona Passage. This would mark the beginning of saucer activity in the new decade, although it would not be a particularly fruitful period for sightings.

March 14, 1964 would bring with it the high-altitude transit of a strange object over several Puerto Rican communities at around five thirty p.m. The object was described in an article for the *El Mundo* newspaper as being rocket-shaped and at an estimated altitude of twenty thousand feet, although neither Roosevelt Roads Navy Base or the Ramey AFB at Punta Borinquen had any explanation for it, and it was ultimately dismissed as "space junk".

A nineteen year old resident of San Juan's El Condado neighborhood, returning from an early morning mass on December 23, 1966, supposedly took a photo of a "dark blue, opaque object that remained motionless at an elevation of two thousand feet." Lester Rosas, who took the snapshot --which would subsequently appear in various UFO publications - would go on to allege that he had maintained telepathic contact with the vehicle's occupants and had even met some of the same "Venusians" who had interacted with George Adamski a decade earlier.

Less contactee-flavored reports would emerge later in the last third of the decade. On January 19, 1967, residents of Mayaguez, Aguada and Hormigueros in the island's western half reported sightings of "luminous bodies crossing the sky and vanishing as though falling into the ocean". One witness told *El Imparcial* newspaper that "one of those strange devices almost touched the surface of the sea west of Mayaguez and lit up the Industrial School," adding that on some occasions, three such objects had merged to form a single one. With regard to the same case, *El Mundo* reported that at 5:00 a.m. that morning, dozens of citizens reported the passing of a strange luminous object flying slowly and in silence. Juan Ruste, one of the witnesses interviewed, said that the vehicle "looked like a square object with some yellow, low-intensity lights." After Ruste and his family observed the apparition for some three minutes, the object fired an intense, white beam and accelerated into the distance.

A similar sighting occurred in February 1967, when students on the rooftop of one of the male dorms at the Interamerican University in San Germán reported seeing an unusual object that made a quick upward turn before losing itself in the firmament. According to Ruben Roig, one of the witnesses, the object had issued a deep, engine-like sound that caused the students to gaze skyward. They all agreed that the object had some sort of "glass capsule" on top of it.

1967 would also bring the first of many incidents - some of them tragic - involving small private planes and unidentified flying objects.

Before noon on April 6, 1967, two Cessna 150 training flights were approximately one mile north of the Tortuguero Lagoon on the northern coast of the island at an altitude of three thousand feet. It was a sunny, clear day with excellent visibility. One of the Cessnas flew directly above and ahead of the other; each of them carried an instructor and a student, maintaining sporadic contact between both planes. At one point, the flight instructor aboard one of the Cessnas radioed his counterpart, saying, "a strange object was tailing him." The pilot of the second plane, the one flying under the first, made a 180 degree turn to take a look, just as the UFO flew past before the pilot had

completed his turn maneuver. The intruder was flying some fifteen hundred feet under both planes and at high speed, making a northward 90-degree turn without slowing down. The event had played out at such speed that the pilot of the second trainer - the one that had turned around to see the unknown object - never got a chance to see it. The description came from the pilot of the first aircraft and his student.

The Tortuguero UFO would later be described as being “flat metallic gray or dull white in color and measuring an estimated sixty feet long, three times the size of the Cessna 150.” It lacked any visible features and was noiseless. The one unexplained event in this incident was that the chronometer aboard the Cessna that had made a turn to get a better look suffered “irreparable damage” for no apparent reason.

On August 18, 1968, fifteen witnesses reported seeing a disk-shaped UFO with partitions or “windows” that emitted a bright, fluorescent light. The sighting took place at 02:00 hours at Playa Borinquen, outside Ramey AFB, and the witnesses happened to be not locals, but members of the base’s security personnel. The object was about fifteen hundred feet over the sea, lighting the entire area. At one point during the observation, the object expelled a small luminous orb that remained beside the disk-shaped craft and wobbled before taking off at astonishing speed. Moments later, the windowed disk would do the same, leaving the onlookers bewildered. The entire sighting lasted between twelve and fifteen minutes.

The year came to an end with the sighting of a humanoid entity on the ground standing next to its hat-shaped vehicle: on December 31, 1968, an uncle and nephew were making their way toward San Juan from the town of Isabella to meet the rest of their relatives at a New Years’ Eve celebration. At 19:30 hours, driving near Vega Baja, their car’s headlights fell on white object they first believed was a damaged car. While the nephew, who was at the wheel, tried to identify the unusual object, he noticed that something was standing beside the object - a humanoid creature standing some five feet tall and whose mouth resembled that of “an elderly toothless person”. Frightened, the driver stepped on the accelerator and sped away, just as his uncle was beginning to notice the object on the ground. Looking back as they sped away, the uncle reported that the white object lit up with a greenish-blue light that shifted to a reddish hue as it began to rise into the air.

End of a Decade

Some historians say the Vietnam War brought the “iconoclastic Sixties” to an end; others point to a tragic rock concert in Altamont, California. The fact of the matter is that the decade that brought us Woodstock and Laugh-In actually started in the chronological mid-Sixties and ran well into the ‘70s. In Latin America, revolutions - some successful, some less so - were the norm, along with student unrest and the first stirrings of a break with the region’s all-compassing catholic culture; ironically, the first signs of this rupture would come about in the shape of *Mi Iglesia Duerme*, a book written by a Jesuit priest who would go on to become one of the most controversial authors and lecturers in Hispanic ufology: Salvador Freixedo.

UFOs were seen - by those interested in the subject, and those of a more metaphysical bent - as proof that “change was in the air.” Believers in extraterrestrials, as stated earlier in this monograph, were convinced that humanity’s tentative steps into space

were being welcomed by more advanced space-going civilizations (and a merry prankster made sure that the UMMO correspondence said as much). Disbelievers probably felt that the interest and presence of these bothersome lights in the sky, and their even less-appetizing occupants seen on the ground, meant that the consumption of psychedelics was not limited to the longhaired young.

Many organizations and study groups developed during the rush of interest in “flying saucers” in the 1950s had not lasted into the Sixties, but those that succeeded in doing so managed to form serious organizations, turn their mimeographed newsletters into magazines, and their magazines into full-length books. The decade that loomed ahead - even amid reports of skyjackings, communist insurrections, student revolts and urban riots - burned bright with promise.

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