

THE SCU REVIEW

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Table of Contents

Fireside Chat: Robert Petersen

Robert Powell p.2

Opinion Pieces

Julia Mossbridge
The UAP Science Ecosystem p.5

M. Cifone
Transcendental Skepticism p.10

History

Robert Powell
UFOs in 1952 p.16

Sci-Fi Highlight

Esteban Corio
A Sip of the Past p.20

What's Going on in SCU

- The SCU Board is inaugurating a semiannual membership-wide Zoom meeting. The first event will be hosted in November. Details will be sent out via e-mail to all members.
- SCU now has a document that outlines our [public relations strategy](#) as well as a document that lays out a [diversity initiative](#) for the organization.
- SCU board members continue to work behind the scenes to promote the scientific study of the UAP subject. For example, Robert Powell recently presented on SCU at an invitation-only meeting hosted by GEIPAN, in Toulouse, France. GEIPAN is the French UAP investigative body that is part of the French space program, CNES.
- SCU's project teams investigate various UAP subjects. If you are interested in participating on a team, please contact [Peter Real](#) for additional information.
- *The SCU Review* editorial committee welcomes short (2,000 word) research or analysis articles, editorial commentaries on current UAP topics, and essays on the subject of UAP. Please e-mail submissions to [Robert Powell](#) for consideration for publication in *The SCU Review*.

SCU FIRESIDE CHAT

Meet SCU Contributing Member, Robert Petersen

By Robert Powell

Where were you born and what were you like as a kid?

I was born about midnight between July 6 and 7, 1947, in Chicago, IL. When I was 4 ½, we moved to a new suburb on the west side of Chicago in a small town named Schiller Park. I'd have to say I was a bit shy, but as I grew up in post-war Schiller Park my block was filled with children my exact age. We went through grade school together and had a lot in common.

Was there anything unusual about your childhood?

On the morning of my birth, my father bought a copy of the *Chicago Tribune* with a headline "Planes Hunt 'Flying Disks.'" I have the paper framed in my office.



In what subject are your degrees and why did you choose that field?

I went to school at Illinois State University (BS Sociology 1969, MS Sociology 1970). When I completed my masters, I eagerly accepted an NIH Fellowship in the Research Methodology and Statistics program at University of Wisconsin-Madison. In my second week of attendance, I realized "I was home." I was awarded my Ph.D. in 1977; my dissertation was a mathematical model of pre-trial delay in a federal court using records from the Prosecutor's Management Information System (PROMIS) in Washington, D.C. In my final two years, I worked part-time for the Police Foundation processing data and running statistics for an evaluation unit. I've exercised my skills in Abt Associates, Textron Defense Systems, Addison-Wesley Publishing, Lotus/IBM, and Fidelity Employer services, where I managed and integrated incoming datasets for company conversions.

Tell us a little about the field in which you work and why you chose it or fell into it?

I got interested in personal computers before the original IBM 5150 was released in August of 1981. I had a Timex-Sinclair 1000, Atari 800, which I used with BASIC and as a terminal simulator into a PRIME minicomputer. I was at the keyboard when Textron Defense pushed the power button on its first 5150 and at the table when the first hard drive was installed. I had financed my undergrad education by working various odd jobs until the IBM 026 card punch and model 82 counter sorter arrived. We used it to create cross tabs, wrote down the numbers and typed them into reports. Project Blue Book Special Report 14 used similar equipment; reading it brought back many memories.

Tell us a little about your academic field and why it ties into UAP.

While sociology has some overlap for UAP study, it is really my interest in data analysis and statistics that drew me to this organization, not only because I had a pile of books on the topic, but also that's where the data are and I love to follow the data.

What is your passion when you're not at work or thinking about UAP?

I used to bike race, but since retiring I spend a lot of time coaching middle school trapshooting teams and, prior to COVID, I traveled around a four-state area competing in Amateur Trapshooting Association tournaments. I have been surprised to find young rural shooting range members are often quite open to the topic of UAP. One range manager shared a close encounter with me. Although I had known him for years, I had no idea.

Have you met any famous people in real life?

My children and I once got sprayed with victory champagne when Greg Lemond won the Tour de Trump in Boston.

If you could choose any historical figure with which to have dinner conversation, who would it be?

Stan Friedman, without a doubt. Today, it would be Avi Loeb and for the same reason. Both want to "follow the data."

What is your role within SCU?

No simple answer. I'm a contributor who helped a little with the NLP paper that Robert Powell presented at the SCU 2021 conference. I'm doing some statistical consulting with the Intentions Project and have run some promising GPS cluster analyses with USO data taken from Carl Feindt's research on *UFOs and Water* (<http://www.waterufo.net/menu.htm>) and looking into Data Archival Systems for future SCU use. In fact, if any of your readers have experience with Harvard Dataverse or Zenodo, I would welcome a chance to talk to them. I've taught statistics at Boston University, and I like to apply those skills where they are useful. Perhaps a brief focused workshop would make sense at some point.

How can we progress the science of UAPs, and what is SCU's role in this?

I think there is only one way. We need to publish scientific papers in recognized peer-reviewed journals. In-house publishing is great, and we certainly should continue that avenue, but if we don't get our name out there in the science community, I worry that another group will get there first.

What are the main challenges we face in progressing UAP research?

Well, this may not be popular, but I think we must start projects with a clear proposal and analysis plan, follow those plans, complete the research, and publish it. Peter Reali's proposal guidelines (https://drive.google.com/file/d/1EfeZiOKnJ6aDbEdzWZLhZN_unXmNhBAz/view) and project templates are available in the SCU library. There is a lot of *nose to the grindstone* in writing proposals and analysis plans but it can't all be elegant graphs and sophisticated programming without agreed-upon analysis goals. We need a bit more formality with project leadership, plans, and flexible realistic schedules. Because that's what science does. *Did I mention analysis plans?*

What are your thoughts about UAPs?

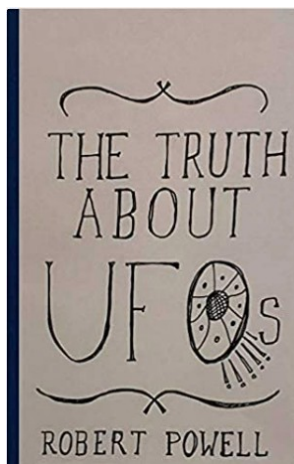
Ten years ago, I thought (but didn't say very openly) that they were spaceships from outside the earth, the product of alien technology. They were "objects" not "phenomena." I've had to open my mind way up and consider alternative hypotheses such as Michael Masters' time travelers, multi-dimensionality and even some "woo" that I would have giggled at before. I'm delighted to see how reduced the stigma is (although not gone certainly), and how the topic has become mainstream without the "giggle factor."

When your family hears that you are interested in UAPs, what are their reactions?

Varied to be sure. My son-in-law is very open-minded and asks about my work on our monthly Zooms. My granddaughter's mind is completely closed. I sent her a copy of Robert Powell's book, *The Truth About UFOs*, which I highly recommend to help open the young mind about both the UAP topic and how to think about science. I think she's less sure now.

Do you have any hobbies?

I turn quality ink pens on my lathe, load my own ammunition, coach middle school trap teams; I'm a certified Mental Game Coach. My wife Cheryl and I work our dogs in agility and obedience and when we lived on the East Coast, we worked Newfoundland Dogs (Newfies) in carting and water rescue. They were so quick to learn that they fooled me into thinking I was a great dog trainer. I've worked with other breeds since and learned that while I was pretty good at dog training, it was I who was a great student.



What might someone be surprised to know about you?

At one point in my life, I commuted to work on a mountain bike and rode in amateur races. I completed a 100-mile marathon in about eight hours and once came in third (by 20 seconds) in a four-hour mountain bike race. I am a certified Mental Game Coach Professional (MGCP) with special interest in the high performance "Zone."

What aspect of the phenomenon do you think deserves greater research focus?

SCU has done some very interesting work on measuring data quality of UAP reports. I would like to see a lot more systematic sophisticated statistical effort in this direction. I'm also thinking of inter-rater reliability, for example.

OPINION PIECES

Excerpted from
“What’s UAPS? The UAP Science ecosystem — United States”
by Julia Mossbridge, PhD

Let’s say you’re a talented engineer, a credentialed scientist, or a skilled pilot and you’ve just seen a disk in the sky, with little portholes for windows and some kind of intelligent-looking creature apparently operating equipment inside. What do you do?

First, you check to see if you’re both sober and sane. Second, you probably get upset with yourself that you didn’t think to take a video. Third, if you make it past the stigma and self-criticism that surrounds and invades you, then you — and those who believe you — want to understand what the heck is going on.

Over the past 50+ years, these motivations are exactly those that created and maintained a global network of scrappy-but-productive ecosystems of UAP Science (UAPS) organizations, which lately have been especially vibrant in the U.S. (I’ll call these the UAPS-US ecosystem). Despite very little funding and powerful waves of pushback from all sources, the UAPS-US ecosystem is experiencing a resurgence. That’s because government and public opinion about unidentified and unexplainable objects in the skies and seas — currently called unidentified aerial phenomena (UAP) or unidentified aerospace-undersea phenomena (UAUP) and previously called UFOs — has shifted radically in the last five years. Several UAP videos were released to the New York Times in 2017, and in 2021 the military intelligence community was told to more openly and fully investigate UAP phenomena ([here’s the U.S. military’s own statement](#) and a [review article](#)).

This is a fantastic development for the UAPS-US ecosystem, and hopefully for the entire world, but everyone wants to know — who will do the studying? [NASA launched a new UAP research program](#) led by astrophysicist David Spergel of the Simons Foundation and orchestrated by Daniel Evans of NASA’s Science Mission Directorate, but any studies either performed or funded by NASA would do well to draw on the existing knowledge in the UAPS-US ecosystem to both avoid replication and inform strategy.

Drawing from the embedded wisdom in the UAPS-US ecosystem sounds both easy and obvious, but of course instead it’s difficult and subtle. Each UAPS-US organization has a unique character, sense of purpose, and view of their future. Many already work together, but there are overlapping relationships and tensions that are completely understandable given their up-until-now necessarily underdog approaches. The larger UAPS ecosystem includes international UAP science organizations as well as organizations working on understanding UAP from the perspective of non-traditional science backgrounds, and neither type of organization is included in this article. Hopefully, with the opening up of

scientific discussions around UAP, all organizations who include themselves in the broader UAPS ecosystem can learn from each other.

Now that they can be seen in the light of day for what they have already accomplished and what they plan to offer, each UAPS-US organization must find its piece in the emerging puzzle. What might each organization offer in collaboration with government, private industry, investors/donors, and the international communities that wish to support and encourage their work? How do they see themselves evolving in this newfound openness?

Map of the UAPS-US ecosystem

In my recorded conversations with leaders of ten UAPS-US organizations, a few consistent themes emerged:

1. UAPS-US organizations earnestly want to fully describe and understand the nature of UAP, using the tools of science.
2. Each UAPS-US organization uses their expertise and experience to address the problem in a different way, and each method can support important discoveries.
3. Several UAPS-US organizations receive reliable reports from around the world, confirming the fact that UAP are global in nature.
4. Most UAPS-US organizations want to work with each other, academia, government, private industry, and individual citizens to solve the mystery of UAP.
5. More expertise and experience than I had previously imagined exists within the UAPS-US ecosystem; my interviews barely scratched the surface.

With support from the Scientific Coalition for UAP Studies (SCU), I've provided a map of the ecosystem for interested academics, government agencies, investors, donors, and others who are hoping for an organized introduction to UAP science in the United States. After the table, I'm happy to share my more subjective observations — and maybe have a little fun.

founded	organization	type	contact
1969	MUFON	nonprofit	Rob Swiatek
1973	CUFOS/UFODATA	nonprofit	Mark Rodeghier
1974	NUFORC	nonprofit	Peter Davenport
1999	NARCAP	nonprofit	Ted Roe
2014	UFODAP	profit	Ronald Olch
2017	SCU	nonprofit	Robert Powell
2019	UAPx	nonprofit	Kevin Knuth
2021	The Galileo Project	nonprofit	Avi Loeb
2021	Enigma Labs	profit	Alejandro Rojas
2021	AIAA UAP Col	nonprofit	Ryan Graves

Table 1. Organizations surveyed in the UAPS-US ecosystem.

Interview gleanings

Here are my notes providing what I think are the key takeaways from ten interview participants (note that SETI Institute is included among these although it is not strictly speaking in the UAPS-US ecosystem). These notes are my own summaries of individual conversations. Almost all interview participants pointed out that they were voicing their own opinions and they did not necessarily speak for the entire organization. Watch the interviews themselves for emotional tone, precise wording, and most of all — engrossing stories. View an [online version of this article to watch interviews](#) and read summaries.

Commentary: What's missing from the UAPS-US ecosystem?

The UAPS-US ecosystem has a lot going for it, especially with several high-profile organizations coming on the scene in the last year and the new NASA program. But like any community that has evolved over more than five decades, there are a few aspects that could be improved or that have gone missing. From my point of view as a scientific observer with a keen interest in the field but not much prior work in the UAPS-US ecosystem, I've compiled a hopefully inoffensive (but thorough) list of potential areas for improvement.

Diversity. There is good age diversity at least among the leaders I interviewed, but like many STEM fields, the UAPS-US ecosystem could benefit from diversity of gender, race, and socioeconomic background. The UAP science diversity problem is made worse as a result of stigma that reduces researchers' willingness to speak openly with each other. I asked David Mitchell, a Black colleague in consciousness research at the California Institute of Integral Studies and a long-time observer of the field, whether he knew of any UAPS-US organizations currently led by Black or Indigenous people — he did not know of any either. Neither of us could name any current UAPS-US organizations led by women. Previously, Jim and Coral Lorenzen founded and led APRO (1952–1988), one of the earliest UFO investigative groups, and Major Robert Friend, a Black officer, headed up Project Blue Book (1958–1963). Representation of people from all backgrounds at the leadership level would support the scientific advancement of the UAPS-US ecosystem, as diverse ecosystems solve problems faster than more homogeneous ecosystems.

→ What might help? Federal research funding can reduce stigma so underrepresented researchers of all identities, orientations, and backgrounds feel comfortable leading UAPS-US organizations and also less concerned about reputational, financial, and bodily harm risks. Each UAPS-US organization might consider drafting a diversity statement and actively assessing diversity initiatives within the organization. [NOTE: SCU's diversity statement can be found on its [website](#).]

Social sciences. Maybe because of the lack of mainstream scientific belief in UAP, there is not currently enough scientific focus on large-stakes issues like determining UAP intention, communication/contact strategies, and socio-cultural aspects of UAP.

→ What might help? At SCU and The Galileo Project, there are fledgling committees focused on these issues, but more social scientists and more discussion are needed — which again requires better funding and processes for addressing these issues. Planning ahead for potential contact may be appropriate for an international focus group.

Global education about reporting. Starlink launches, thousands of satellites, ubiquitous but nondescript “lights in the sky,” and lack of scientific thinking result in 70–85% of purported UAP being identifiable natural or human-made phenomena.

→ What might help? A massive global education campaign related to UAP reporting and how to connect with others who are well educated about atmospheric phenomena, satellites, and UAP would help reduce reporting stigma and break down data silos.

International communication processes. There’s a tricky problem here in that, based on reputable reports and historical data, UAP are a global phenomenon — but we don’t want to communicate details of reports that reflect tests of secret military or intelligence programs.

→ What might help? Creation of a national UAPS post-analysis reporting structure for compelling cases that includes U.S. military and intelligence officers as active and supportive members could go a long way toward producing constructive international science communication about UAP.

Sense of authority. Perhaps due to so many years being ridiculed in public and consulted in private, the UAPS-US ecosystem does not have a sense of its own authority and can seem a bit insecure. This can result in under-preparation for being in the public eye, which can have an unanticipated negative effect.

→ What might help? Acknowledgement from NASA and other government agencies that the UAPS-US ecosystem has historically done a remarkable job with very few resources, but is now ready for media training (potentially as a NASEM project) to meet the next set of challenges as we move toward better public education about UAP.

Appendix: Inevitable superhero musings

About halfway through the interviews, which were conducted via video conference from Sept. 2 to Sept. 8, 2022, I started mentally assigning superhero names to each of the organizations (Appendix Table). It sounds flip and silly, but hear me out — I found it was the best way to imagine how the UAPS-US ecosystem could work because I could characterize each organization as a powerful (yet flawed) superhero. Also, it’s not nothing that The Avengers and Guardians of the Galaxy are stories about protecting humanity, Earth, and our galaxy from alien threats. Aliens or no aliens, it’s difficult for anyone to understand if something is a threat in the first place if you don’t understand the science of that something, and that’s what this superhero ecosystem is all about. So, these are my superhero musings, and I’m sticking to them. Thanks for indulging me.

organization	superhero	explanation
MUFON	Captain America	Brings data into the 21 st century for team use
CUFOS/UFODATA	Dr. Banner/Hulk	Passion for discovery and collaboration with scientific mainstream
NUFORC	Peter Quill/Star-Lord	Detects hoaxers and those with mental illness with wise gentleness
SETI Institute	Rocket Raccoon	Precision and knowledge are primary – dislikes being misunderstood
NARCAP	Agent Coulson	Willing to sacrifice itself to serve other organizations for the higher good
UFODAP	Prof. Erik Selvig	Provides customized scientific and engineering support for the team
SCU	Nick Fury	Leads by reducing tensions and sparking collaborations across organizations
UAPx	Clint Barton/ Hawkeye	Focuses on long-term vision and technology to support it
The Galileo Project	Tony Stark/Iron Man	Uses financial resources and high-level connections to explore new territory
Enigma Labs	Groot	Speaks the cosmic language of interstellar enigmas while being open to change
AIAA UAP Col	Thor	Knows service is primary; negotiates a truce between potentially opposing forces

Appendix Table. Author's UAPS-US organization-superhero matchings (including SETI Institute), with explanations.

For the full article, visit: <https://tinyurl.com/WhatsUAPS>

The SCU Review welcomes submissions of up to 2000 words, including but not limited to the following categories: UAP research briefs, letters to the editor, current events, historical perspectives, original essays, cases that represent significant sightings, and scifi stories. Please submit your document in MSWord or equivalent, double-spaced, 12pt Times New Roman font, with page numbers, and include a title, your name, date and contact info in the document itself. Provide full citations, in footnotes at the bottom of the page, for any sources you reference. Each figure needs a caption that provides sufficient information for it to stand alone. Please email ExploringSCU@gmail.com if you have any questions or would like to submit an article.

SCU Review Editors: T.W. Fendley, Bill Granger, S.A. Little, R. Powell

Transcendental Skepticism

M. Cifone, PhD



Figure 1: Apollo 16 floodlight boom. Photo credit NASA.

Among the many, endlessly distracting videos pumped by nameless algorithms into my Facebook feed was one that alleges to be of an airline pilot's encounter with what, upon first glance, appears to be a mysterious, seemingly cubical UFO soaring by the airliner at a somewhat lower altitude.¹ The first voice that speaks to us here is—and perhaps should always be—the voice of the skeptic. But, if we are to be true to our commitment to absolute honesty and open inquiry, we must also be uncommitted to skepticism *as a fundamental position*. Skepticism is a means to an end. What end? Truth? Here is where we are stopped in our tracks. We can surely say that 'truth' is something we, who adopt a skeptical standpoint, are interested in when it comes to the UFO question: we would like to know whether this or that particular UFO claim, or bit of evidence, *is true*. That's fine as far as it goes; but how far does it go? When there is a dispute over the 'truth' of this or that claim, what is usually at stake are the standards one adopts (or has implicitly adopted) to establish *that* something is true, and whether those standards are plausible ones for the phenomenon in question. But more fundamentally, however, we must face a deeper question: whether we're actually seeking the truth, or just seeking to secure the truth *of our skepticism*.

Truth, when it comes down to it, is nothing but a negotiation, an endless experimentation, a trial in which our practices and beliefs get tested against the spontaneity of things themselves, things clothed for a moment in our notions of them. Removing ourselves, then, from any self-serving notions of truth leaves us in a place of radical openness, the place of "the question" in which the poet Rilke enjoined us to live. Such a standpoint of honest questioning suggests that it is skepticism, too, from which we must withdraw—to have the fortitude to even, at times, be skeptical of our sometime skepticism. My aim is to examine the limits of skepticism, and to ask at just what point does skepticism end, and what comes *after* skepticism... For the video I mention above, do we have a sense of how credible the footage is? My first impression is that of course it isn't—that it's either a clickbait hoax, or worse: a

1 The video can be seen here: <https://youtube.com/shorts/jtZGKY07iyI?feature=share>.

video clipped out of context and made to *appear* to be just what the producer, looking for mere views, wants us to think it is, which is a compelling video of a mysteriously-shaped UFO caught on camera by an airline pilot. After submitting the video to a more serious-minded group of UFO researchers and enthusiasts, their initial and very preliminary assessment was rather sober-minded and fair: if it *is* at all an actual object in space (perhaps a balloon of some kind?), then its rapid motion is likely largely apparent: a parallaxic effect, not a consequence of a mysterious propulsion system. But this is likely *too* generous: the video seems to be something very easily faked.² Still, taking such a skeptical position against the view that this is a “true” UFO (an object, that is, which definitely *cannot* be explained by means of conventional or common-sensical premises) is surely a sound one to take, especially when all that we have here is but one random and unanalyzed video. We know little to nothing of its provenance. We know little to nothing of the context within which it was produced. We don’t even really know (without further investigation) *who* produced this video (so far as credibility of the source or witness is a factor to consider: it is surely possible that some good evidence comes from bad sources). In other words, this particular video has little to no evidential value as far as the UFO phenomenon itself is concerned. It is an occasion, rather, to allow skepticism to rightfully make its appearance in the name of truth. But what this video does demonstrate is a curious failing of the very skepticism that, in this case, saves us from too much worry, in fact, due diligence requires a rigorous follow-up on both the provenance and content of this video, implying that something approaching a *final* judgment *must await this more complete analysis*. Let’s talk strategy for a moment. How are we to demonstrate that this video ought to be dismissed as a fake, forgery, hoax, or falsification? There are a number of analytical techniques open to the investigator, but I’d rather like to look at the skeptic’s strategy itself—its basic logic. There would seem to be at least three options open to the skeptic.

In the first place, one can look at the relevant content of the video (in this case, the allegedly anomalous flying object) and try to determine whether that content was *inserted* into the video—whether the relevant bits of the video are *out of context*, foreign intruders into an otherwise ordinary video. Certain visual anomalies or irregularities in the image might indicate such an interpretation. Here we would be accepting the general veracity of everything about the video *except* its anomalous content: something that wasn’t native to the video was put in after the fact, making it a fake video because of that illicit intrusion. In the second place, the skeptical investigator might try to determine whether some or all of the *native* content itself was *altered* in some illicit way, yielding precisely what the author of the video wants you to believe about it: that there was a genuine UFO caught on camera for you to marvel at. Here, nothing foreign to the content of the video was inserted; rather, it was the native content itself that was changed. Failing this, the skeptic’s last recourse would be to accept the footage as is, but simply dispute the UFO *interpretation* of the relevant content (content which is in itself truthful).

All attempts at the refutation of UFO claims based on video or photographic evidence are versions of one of these strategies. And of course, there is nothing wrong with any of this in principle—surely there will be cases where it is straightforwardly true that the video was either altered or contains falsified content within an otherwise authentic video or photo; is an outright fabrication (using the right software for manipulation or creative purposes); or records something perhaps easily mistaken for a UFO but which is, upon closer analysis, fully identifiable. But equally surely there will be videos (or photographs) of an allegedly anomalous sort that *cannot* be so straightforwardly refuted as being hoaxed, faked, falsified or misinterpreted. Indeed, there may be videos whose content does not lend itself to *any* conventional explanation.

2 A useful website in this regard is Issac Koi’s (<https://www.isaackoi.com/ufo-videos.html>) which documents numerous instances of faked or falsified videos.

Or are there?

This is the crucial point: to what extent is the skeptic amenable to the existence of *genuinely* anomalous content ... indeed, to genuine anomalies period? Is there *ever* a point at which skepticism is overcome and we then move beyond doubt to the more disorienting position of having to actually encounter the anomalous *as anomalous*—but still without the conviction of a true (or even just merely adequate) understanding of it? What comes *after* skepticism—and what allows us to get there?



Figure 2: “Gimbal” unclassified video taken by Navy pilots. Photo credit U.S. DoD

Let us focus for a moment on a video that, by most accounts, *is* authentically anomalous. It contains what both pilots and even the US military openly acknowledge is footage of an unidentified aerial phenomenon that can’t be conventionally accounted for: the so-called “Gimbal” video.³ At first glance, it is not particularly anomalous, as the object appears to just hover and, according to one of the pilots, “rotate”. But when you consider that this was something seen by pilots as they flew their jets at cruising speed, at altitude, and with headwinds of over a hundred knots, it quickly becomes puzzling as to how this object is able to both keep pace with the jets and rotate seemingly effortlessly against the strong winds. The puzzlement increases when you also take into account the entire context of the encounter, when you discover that, as Lt. Graves will famously recount many times, the object filmed was part of an ongoing engagement with multiple unidentifieds, of differing forms. What exactly are we looking at, then? It would appear that no object with this kind of geometry can maintain the altitude, forward velocity and rotational oscillations in which it is observed to engage—no human-fashioned technology, in any case. What is the object’s source of lift? Of propulsion and rotational movement? A balloon would have to move with the prevailing winds and could not therefore maintain a stable rotational axis and rotate without some means of propulsion—let alone keep pace with the pilots filming it. In other words, *assuming that the video is genuine*, we have here a truly unidentified aerospace phenomenon (UAP). Thus, the skeptic must question: *is* the video of an objectively “real” object flying out in the space near where the pilots were flying? Or, if it *is* genuine, was it not possible that the pilots themselves have mistaken some other phenomenon for something unidentified? That is, perhaps both our interpretation of the content of the video and the pilot’s own interpretation of what they thought they were filming are wrong. Let’s work through each of the skeptic’s moves.

3 It can be accessed here: <https://youtu.be/QKHg-vnTFsM>.

Is the video itself genuine? Perhaps it is not. Perhaps it was faked—but in this case, it would have to have been faked by the military, who’ve now openly admitted it is a video of something they can’t explain. We would then wonder why ... and here all manner of theories (many of which being conspiracy-oriented) are ready-at-hand in order to flesh out this more sinister possibility. But what those strategies that focus *only* on the content of the video lack is a full accounting of the alleged encounter, which would have to reckon with the experiences of those who were supposed to have filmed the object. A video or photograph is generally (but not always) taken by someone who is also actively *seeing* the object directly, without the mediation of the camera or video equipment; surely this also counts as evidence of the truthfulness of the footage captured. So, as part of an authentically skeptical investigation of video or photographic UFO evidence one must *also* interview the witnesses taking the footage. In this particular case⁴ if we want to argue that the footage was faked, then we also have to impugn the pilots’ own eyewitness accounts.⁵ We’d have to either argue that there was a conspiracy involving the military witnesses and military officials to concoct and release a faked video. But to what end? What would be the motivation, especially if the US is itself actively admitting it can’t explain what was filmed? We are then down the rabbit hole of interrogating the complexities of US military and government informational secrecy. Such a line of inquiry is *possible*; but is this the most likely explanation for what’s going on here? Without further, more concrete and specific evidence to suggest a kind of government-military fabrication *in this particular case*, this sort of explanation has to remain speculative.⁶ It would not be enough to reason *purely inductively*, by, for example, noting prior government-military fabrications of this sort (need we mention the Doty affair?). It has to be shown that *this particular case* is most likely part of a more general pattern in play. In other words: since it is *always possible* to reason that anything coming from government/military channels that looks out of the ordinary is a signal of purposeful dissimulation, such an explanation would bear the burden of having to first show why this kind of a scenario, *in this particular case*, is likely.

So where does this leave us? It leaves us with footage that we seem to have to accept as genuine, and with eyewitness testimony that we also have to assume is trustworthy. Thus, the only recourse the skeptic would have in this case is to challenge the *interpretation* of what the eyewitnesses saw, and which was also captured on video for *us* to see. In order to do this, one has to come up with at least some plausible, but conventional, interpretation. The hard question in this case is: Can we do it? Remember, the skeptic cannot *just* challenge the videographic content itself, because in this case we’re assuming there was an object visible both to the infrared camera the pilots used in filming, *and* to their unaided eyes. In this way we finally arrive at the main task of the skeptic: to produce an adequate explanation in conventional terms of what was actually seen *and* recorded on video. And of

4 It was documented in several news media outlets; see for example this Washington Post article: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2021/05/17/ufo-sightings-navy-ryan-graves/>.

5 Some of which are recounted here: <https://youtu.be/zNsxtNUeFB4>.

6 Precisely this question—whether the recent government and military public admissions (ongoing since the now-famous NY Times article of 2017), including the widely-viewed tranche of military videos, could be considered as part of the latest edition of a disinformation campaign—was considered in some detail in a recent scholarly article (see Anton and Vugrin (2022): “‘UFOs Exist And Everyone Needs to Adjust To That Fact.’ (Dis)information Campaigns on the UFO Phenomenon” in *Anomalistics* 22, pp. 18-35). The authors Anton and Vugrin begin with the now well-documented disinformation campaigns that the U.S. government and military actually did engage in, prompted, it would seem, by the infamous “Robertson Panel” of 1953 (*ibid.*, 22), but conclude that “it does not look like the publications on the UFO topic since 2017 are due to a targeted intelligence campaign or even a disinformation campaign. Of course,” they continue, quite correctly, “one cannot rule out this possibility. However, from our point of view, it is much more likely that the U.S. military has repeatedly made and continues to make observations in the sky that it cannot explain” (*ibid.*, 33). In other words: if what we have here is truly anomalous, the government is just as clueless as the rest of us.

course, out there on the Twitter- and blogosphere, we find just that, self-described debunkers, thinking they have the explanation—not just for the video we consider here, but for just about *all* of the leaked or declassified Navy videos released to date (quite an ambitious wish list for any debunker).⁷ The particular form that explanation takes is rather common in the world of debunkerism. It assumes, naturally, that these videos contain genuine content—that they capture real objects really witnessed by the pilots or military officers who filmed them. (To doubt this would be *to stretch the credibility of the skeptic*, as we have already suggested.) But it then goes on to argue that we are witnessing either artifacts of the filming equipment (in which case we are owed an explanation as to why that the pilots claim to have actually seen something *with their unaided eyes*); ordinary planes strangely illuminated (another artifact of the filming equipment?) or blurred from distance; or a balloon.⁸

The method of demonstrating the likelihood of many of these explanations is rather common among debunkers: showing that ordinary objects, when given the right conditions and filmed with the equipment originally used, can be made to *resemble* the seemingly anomalous content of the videos in question. (We might call this an argument from simulation or resemblance; we can give it a fancy Latin name as logicians like to do: *argumentum ex simulatione*.) But again, in this particular case, content analysis of the video *itself* simply cannot suffice on its own, since we also have *witness testimony* corroborating it. Tellingly, nobody really knows what the pilots saw, so we *cannot* offer an explanation of what they say they saw. But this is arbitrary: if one cannot find a consistent explanation that can explain at once both the pilot's own testimony as to what they saw with their unaided eyes, plus explain how it was that the object also appeared—in the precise way it actually appeared—on infrared camera (and every other instrument on which it appeared), then we have no serious alternative explanation. We should also hasten to point out that if the explanation proposed for the image captured by the infrared camera has to be *supplemented* by an independent explanatory mechanism for what the pilots actually saw with their own eyes, then we have clearly violated a simple principle of parsimony: an explanation is surely worse off when it needs multiple independent mechanisms to explain something that can be explained with just one (a single object visible both to the naked eye and to infrared cameras, and possibly also to radar). Furthermore, if one needs to add separate explanations for each of the relevant aspects of the case that need to be explained, then we are also headed into a worse direction with our account of the incident: for now, the resulting debunker's explanation starts to look more and more *ad hoc*. As the philosopher of science will at this point inform us, one can *always* save their favorite theory from being overturned so long as you help yourself to the right *ad hoc* supplements to your theory that help it to work out just like you need it to (an exercise well known to the history of science⁹). So, for example, any skeptic or debunker might feel free to argue *anything they like* about what the pilots saw (or about anything that's inconvenient to one's skeptical thesis) because the well-known principle of underdetermination *always guarantees that this is logically possible*.

7 Consult <https://www.leonarddavid.com/debunking-navy-ufo-videos/> for an overview.

8 One can read a synopsis of many of West's explanations here: <https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/news/military/story/2021-05-29/navy-ufo-videos-skeptics>.

9 Let's not forget that the Ptolemaic system of astronomy—the conventional account of heavenly bodies—was kept alive for almost *two millennia* by endlessly extending it with numerous epicycles to account for any anomalous (non-circular) planetary orbits. Why? To save the metaphysical desiderata of Aristotle's metaphysical philosophy, with its insistence that all *heavenly* bodies be accorded perfectly circular motions. Nearer to the Divine, nearer to perfection—and a circle is the most perfect geometrical form. Or so went the conventional (Aristotelian) logic of the day.

At this point—at the point where the skeptic’s account becomes clearly *ad hoc* in nature—we must become *deeply* skeptical of the debunkerism, wondering now if the skepticism is not in fact *a priori* ... that the skeptical conclusions are driving the debunking arguments.

At the end of the day, we who would be skeptics for a time must ask (and this is the Socratic question *par excellence*): Am I skeptical of something because it is of a sort that merits doubt, or am I doubtful of it *just because I’m skeptical*? After the conviction of many instances in which one’s skepticism is confirmed, one is tempted to generalize, and make the inductive leap: *this, too, must also be a hoax, falsification, or fake*. Here skepticism takes over and becomes primary—an end rather than a mere means. Thus, is it hard to tell what grounds one’s doubt: the conviction of skepticism alone, or the doubtfulness of the thing itself. One must see this skepticism turned recalcitrant as pathological, not philosophical.

The true test of the UFO skeptic comes not in the many cases that fall to the skeptic’s attack, but in the few that don’t—or rather, from *the mere acknowledgment that these few even exist*. Otherwise, we would seem to be dealing with dogmatic (and pathological) skepticism. Underlying it is a kind of faith: that this, too, shall be explained—that every inexplicable UFO encounter or sighting or evidence will *eventually* fall to *existing* science (or common-sense). It is born of the conviction that, to use J. Allen Hynek’s way of putting it, “it can’t be true, so it isn’t”—thus speciously inverting the most basic axiom of modal logic (that actuality implies possibility). But what the dogmatic skeptic cannot see is that, eventually, it is science itself that must change to accommodate the anomalous. If it didn’t, or couldn’t, it wouldn’t *be* science. It would be dogmatism.

HISTORY

UFOs in 1952

by Robert Powell

Over a thousand sighting reports were sent to the U.S. Air Force in 1952. It was also about the time that the Air Force stopped using the term flying saucers in favor of unidentified flying objects (UFOs). UFO reports came in from all over the United States as well as from U.S. military bases in Korea and Japan. Dozens of reports came in from the Washington, D.C. area that summer.¹ These D.C. reports caused the Air Force the most grief because widely visible sightings caused high interest from the media and the public. They wanted an explanation for this sudden rash of sightings. Fortunately, Project Blue Book had gone into operation in June of 1952.²

The public did not know everything that went on that summer. A very interesting incident was unearthed during a research trip that I made with Dr. Michael Swords to Texas A&M's Cushing Archival Library in 2008. The library possessed an audio file of an interview made by Dr. Roy Craig with Boeing engineer, Jay Nogle, in 1967. The engineer recalls the event that led to a military order to fire on UFOs in the summer of 1952. UFOs were detected on radar almost every night that summer, recalled Nogle. He described one of the more unusual nights when he was monitoring his M33 radar. The UFO showed up on his screen and was detected by two to three additional Army radar units. The signal was strong as the unknown object hovered at 18,000 feet. The UFO began to move on Nogle's screen after 30 minutes. It was traveling at over 1000 mph by the time it reached the edge of his radar screen. Nogle's own words best describe the military's reaction:³

We didn't think too much of it ourselves that night. But the next morning the Battalion commander, a light colonel, came into our radar area and wanted to know what happened and all the background. Apparently, this report went all the way to the Pentagon that night, and the order came back that if another one came in then we were to fire on it...After that first night, we had orders to fire on them, and we loaded our guns (90mm anti-aircraft rounds), which was an unusual thing to do in a populated area. We also scrambled fighters off McGuire AFB. About the time the F-94 fighters would take off, these objects would leave.

Nogle recalled the last time that the UFOs showed up on his radar. Twelve F-94 Star Fighter jets were scrambled from McGuire AFB. The lead F-94 fighter locked onto a UFO with his fire control radar and indicated over the radio that he was closing in for the kill. Before he could fire, the UFO moved rapidly out of range.

1 United States Air Force, *Project Blue Book and Project SIGN*, microfilm, review of all card files for June and July 1952, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C., Andrews AFB, MD.

2 Edward Ruppelt, *The Report on Unidentified Flying Objects*. (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1956), p.99.

3 Roy Craig audiotape interview of Jay Nogle, location of interview at Malmstrom AFB, Montana, Oct. 19, 1967, Roy Craig files at Cushing Archival Library, Texas A&M University.

The public and the media were not aware of how the military reacted to UFOs, but they were aware of the many reported UFO sightings in July. Captain Ruppelt of Project Blue Book went in front of the press on July 18 to answer questions. Here are some of his remarks:⁴

...ground radar had tracked some aerial objects at speeds ranging between 1500 and 2000 miles per hour.

...jet fighters equipped with the very latest radar have been sent aloft to ‘make contact’ with the phantom objects, but all efforts to catch up with them have failed.

...we are convinced that persons making these reports actually see something in the sky, but what they are is another question.

Dr. Lincoln LaPaz, a meteor expert of his time, was interviewed by the press the next day, on July 19. LaPaz listed the characteristics of UFOs, “They can reverse directions and cruise back and forth; they travel at high speeds in wide sweeping circles. They are spherical or disc-shaped and for the most part give off a steady yellow light; they travel at high altitudes and can be followed as long as 3½ minutes.”⁵ These comments fueled the interest of the media and the public. The UFO phenomenon itself would soon pour gas on the fire.

On July 26 at 10:30 p.m. radar operators at Washington National Airport detected an arc of UFOs spread around Washington from Herndon, Virginia, to Andrews AFB. They called Andrews AFB; their radar had detected the same unknowns. Two F-94 jet interceptors were airborne at 11:30 p.m. The UFOs disappeared from radar just as the two F-94s arrived in the area. The jets searched the area for a few minutes before returning to their base. Radar detected the UFOs’ return within minutes of the jets’ departure. The radar operators again called Defense Command, and once again two F-94s were dispatched. This time the UFOs hung around. The jets were vectored to one of the targets by radar. Just as they got close enough to see more than just a light, the target sped away.⁶

The next day, the newspaper headlines were all about UFOs:⁷

“FIERY OBJECTS OUTRUN JETS OVER CAPITAL”

“JETS ALERTED FOR SAUCER”

“INTERCEPTORS CHASE LIGHTS IN D.C. SKIES”

The Air Force did not want this type of publicity, especially on the doorstep of the White House.

Air Force Intelligence received a call from the President’s aide, Brigadier General Landry. President Truman wanted to know what was going on. Captain Ruppelt told him that the radar target could have been caused by weather but that there was no proof for that theory.⁸ This reply was insufficient.

4 Captain Edward Ruppelt extensively quoted in “15% of Saucer Reports Are Labeled Mystery,” United Press news story, dateline: Dayton, Ohio, July 18, 1952.

5 Associated Press news story, dateline: Albuquerque, New Mexico, July 19, 1952.

6 Edward Ruppelt, *The Report on Unidentified Flying Objects*. (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1956), pp.116-117.

7 Ibid.

8 Edward Ruppelt, *The Report on Unidentified Flying Objects*. (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1956), p.118.

Major General John Samford, the Director of Air Force Intelligence, gathered his team and held a Washington D.C. press conference at 4 p.m. on July 29. He assured the public and the press that the Air Force was working responsibly to resolve the issues and that everything was under control. He discussed various possibilities that might explain the sightings, and he made a statement that gave a certain credence to some of the sighting reports, “However, there have remained a percentage of this total, in the order of twenty per cent of the reports, that have come from credible observers of relatively incredible things.”⁹ General Samford’s press conference calmed the furor, but the Air Force would need more than a press conference to keep the UFO phenomenon from causing them more grief in the future.

Enter the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The CIA had two major concerns with the UFO phenomenon:¹⁰ (1) Could UFOs be used by our enemies as a psychological warfare tool to panic the public? Widespread panic could clog the phone lines and roads prior to an enemy attack; and (2) How would our military distinguish between real enemy craft and UFOs? The CIA proposed a scientific committee to address the question of UFOs. They appointed their former chief science consultant, physicist Dr. Howard P. Robertson of Cal Tech, to chair a panel to investigate UFOs – to be known as The Robertson Panel. Early on Robertson recruited astrophysicist Dr. Thornton Page early on. Atomic physicist Dr. Samuel Goudsmit and radiation physicist Dr. Luis Alvarez were brought in two weeks prior to their first working meeting on January 14, 1953. Atmospheric physicist Lloyd Berkner was also added but he never attended a working meeting. None of these physicists had any background knowledge regarding UFOs. Also present at the meetings were a six-man CIA project team and three Air Force representatives, which included the Air Force consultant Dr. J. Allen Hynek. The Air Force had 300 UFO cases they could not explain, but the CIA’s interagency panel only looked at a handful. The Robertson Panel concluded their meeting after two and a half days. Robertson was tasked to write the final report after dinnertime on the last day.¹¹

The CIA and the Air Force obtained the results that they wanted. The Robertson Panel concluded UFOs were not a threat to our national security, and “that the continued emphasis on the reporting of these phenomena does, in these perilous times, result in a threat to the orderly functioning of the protective organs of the body politic.” Lastly, the Robertson Panel recommended a broad educational program across all concerned agencies and a debunking program for the public. The Robertson Panel’s actual words were Orwellian:

The ‘debunking’ aim would result in reduction in public interest in “flying saucers” which today evokes a strong psychological reaction. This education could be accomplished by mass media such as television, motion pictures, and popular articles. Basis of such education would be actual case histories which had been puzzling at first but later explained.

9 Michael D. Swords and Robert Powell et al., *UFOs and Government: A Historical Inquiry*. (San Antonio: Anomalist Books, 2012), p.160.

10 Chadwell, H. Marshall, memorandum to Director of Central Intelligence, subject: “Flying Saucers,” September 17, 1952. Freedom of Information Request.

11 Michael D. Swords and Robert Powell et al., *UFOs and Government: A Historical Inquiry*. (San Antonio: Anomalist Books, 2012), pp.175-197.

Lastly, the panel recommended that citizen UFO groups should be kept under surveillance by the government.¹²

Historians have wielded many complaints against the Robertson Panel – it was a shill game sponsored by the CIA and Air Force; it lacked scientific rigor; it contained sarcastic remarks and ridiculed UFOs; only a small percentage of cases were examined; and its conclusions were determined ahead of time. One of the panel’s key members, Dr. Thornton Page, stated many years later: “H.P. Robertson told us in the first private session that our job was to reduce public concern and show that UFO reports could be explained by conventional reasoning.”¹³ Perhaps it was Dr. Hynek’s observations of the way the panel operated that caused him to write three months later in the *Journal of the Optical Society of America*.¹⁴

Ridicule is not part of the scientific method, and people should not be taught that it is. The steady flow of reports, often made in concert by reliable observers, raises questions of scientific obligation and responsibility. Is there... any residue that is worthy of scientific attention? Or, if there isn't, does not an obligation exist to say so to the public—not in words of open ridicule but seriously, to keep faith with the trust the public places in science and scientists?

The Air Force followed the path laid out by the Robertson Panel. The next four years after the panel’s meeting remained calm, with no major media stories about UFOs. The Blue Book crew was able to slosh through the 400-600 reports they received each year without interference. This soon changed. In 1957, nearly 1,100 UFO sighting reports came into Blue Book that year. But that’s another story for another day.

12 Robertson Panel, *Report of Scientific Advisory Panel on Unidentified Flying Objects*, Convened by Office of Scientific Intelligence, CIA, January 14-18, 1953.

13 Thornton Page to James L. Klotz, 3 October 1992; and Page’s notes on his talk to the Society for Scientific Exploration, May 30, 1987.

14 Jerome Clark, *The UFO Book: Encyclopedia of the Extraterrestrial*. (Michigan: Visible Ink Press, 1998), p.305.

SCI-FI HIGHLIGHT

A sip of the past

Esteban Corio



Sergio Castro, Illustrator

The ship unfolded its six landing appendages and descended to the ground on planet Earth, kicking up whirlwinds of dust in the light of a fading sun. Within seconds, the purr of the ion fusion engines ceased, a door slid open, and stairs unfolded.

After a few moments, two human beings, dressed in space suits but without helmets, descended the steps until they reached the ground. Theirs were the first fresh human footprints on the planet in more than two centuries. About ten feet above the ground, a reconnaissance drone emerged from the ship and followed their cautious journey away from the landing site.

"Are you sure it's around here, around this area?" Remi asked after a couple of minutes. They stood amid piles of debris, which spread as far as they could see.

"Definitely. This must be 116 Boulevard Haussmann, in what was once Paris before the Pleiadean invasion of Earth," Roman replied. "I didn't come all the way here from our Tycho moon base to find nothing."

"Well, we are going to get something, I promise you that. And it will not be pleasant at all. General Nikko will not be very happy to learn we left the scheduled course of our Earth mission to come on this kind of 'excursion,'" Remi replied sourly. At that moment, the drone raised an alarm. Autonomously, it descended into a clump of debris. Using a powerful mechanical arm, it removed a large chunk of masonry, revealing a ladder that descended into a terrifying gloom.

"Aha, I was right!" exclaimed Roman. He ventured down without hesitation, followed by Remi.

The staircase ended on a granite cobblestone floor. At that point, Roman's flashlight brought good news: From the ceiling, a poster hung precariously from two rusty wires that could fail at any moment. It was covered in mold and dust, but it was still legible: "Caves Augé." Roman then directed the light into the darkness beyond the poster, and they both saw long shelves with their precious contents apparently intact.

"It's just as I told you, Lieutenant! This 'excursion' will allow us to return to the Moon base with some good loot," said Roman happily. From the hermetic pocket of his suit, he withdrew a brochure with a map of the famous wine cellar and a list of its most valuable products. Roman identified what he wanted, checked the brochure for the approximate location, and stepped into the darkness.

A few minutes of searching were enough: Cardenal Mendoza Non-Plus Ultra. The bottle had a thick layer of gray powder on the outside, but the nectar inside looked irresistible.

Roman uncapped it, wiped the edge of the spout with the sleeve of his space suit, and without further ceremony took a swig of the legendary sherry brandy... no less than 263 years old at the time.

"Ah, what a delight! Do you want a drink, Remi?"

Remi nodded, but frowned at the first contact of her lips with the drink. "Wow, how bitter!" She coughed a little.

"Ha ha. Well, better for me, I have the whole bottle left." Roman took another drink. "There are several other bottles that I want to find to bring back with us."

They continued through the dark corridors, where thousands of bottles were silent and ancient witnesses of times of pleasures and toasts before a ruthless extraterrestrial race put the perpetuity of the human species in extreme danger.

After a while, somewhat restless and looking at her partner, Remi asked: "Roman, how many drinks have you drunk? Your cheeks are ... well ... somewhat red."

"Ha ha, not enough yet. Hell, I feel like never before!"

"Don't abuse that drink! Let's dispatch this soon – I want to go back to the ship. This environment is making me... a little nervous," Remi said.

"This is a real man's drink... hic ..." With effort, Roman consulted the brochure and turned to the drone. "You, useless drone, locate and ... hic ... put the following ... hic ... bottles in your receptacle. All you can find and fit in your damn drawer!"

"Commander Renner, sir, I'm ready for your list," replied the drone's metallic voice.

"Ehh... Hennessy, Pierre... hic... Ferrand, Rémy Martin, Martell hic! Courvoisier, Hic... Hine, Torres, Camus, Tariquet... hic, and Metaxa" Roman finished the list as best he could. The Cardenal Mendoza bottle already had less than half the content, and he did not seem to miss any opportunities to take another swig. He stumbled a little.

Remi approached him immediately. "Commander, what's wrong with you?"

"Hic! You know sweetie, you look wonderful. Let's dance here and now. Hey, stupid drone ... hic ... ahem ... play a love song!"

"Lady in Red" played.

"Sir, what are you doing?" Remi removed Roman's hands from her waist and buttocks.

He brought his face close to Remi's.

"Roman, stop it!" She pulled her face away from his mouth and the hideous ethyl vapors emanating from it.

Roman lost his balance and ended up sitting on the floor. He started laughing and singing wildly.

"Drone, run a diagnostic on Commander Renner!" Remi exclaimed.

The drone came immediately and hovered above Roman.

"Lieutenant Drexler, Commander Renner is in a total drunkenness state."

"Drunkenness? What is that exactly?" asked Remi.

"It is a general state of confusion and absence of the natural inhibitory barriers of an individual, induced by alcohol in the blood. It can cause, as in the case of the Commander, a state of illogical euphoria, and in other individuals a depressive state."

As if the situation weren't already complicated enough, at that moment an authoritative voice came through Roman's radio transceiver. General Nikko! This is not going to end well, Remi thought.

"Commander Renner, please report your location and situation!"

"Ah, but it's my friend Nikko! Hic! How are you, comrade? You should be here, old man. Good drink and good music... Hic!, Who said that the Earth was shit?"

"But ... How dare you talk to me like that, Renner!?"

"Hey! Don't get hot, man. The hotter you get, the more you stress. Hic! And the more you stress, the less you live ... hic ... Live and let liv..." said Roman.

Remi broke into the chat.

"General Nikko, this is Lieutenant Remi Drexler, sir! Commander Renner wanted to investigate the taste of some apparently innocuous liquid substances found in a tank and made the mistake of not having them checked beforehand by the drone." Remi shouted, trying to cover the music and Roman's rants.

"But how irresponsible! He has endangered his life and his mission," Nikko said. disapprovingly. "Lieutenant, can you take charge of the situation or do you need reinforcements?"

"I'll take care of the situation, sir. We will return immediately to the base."

"Understood. And, Drexler, don't hesitate to call if the going gets tough."

"Yes sir! Drexler out."

Remi was silent. She looked at Roman, who still held the bottle of Cardenal Mendoza. Empty. At least he was lying still, licking his lips like a satisfied cat. The drone continued to collect the bottles on the list and play the final chords of Chris de Burg's beautiful ballad.

“Drone! Suspend the Commander's orders under directive 3X487 and come here immediately. Transport the Commander very carefully back to the ship. I'll follow,” said Remi.

“Affirmative, Lieutenant.”

If it weren't for the tragic surroundings - beautiful Paris in ruins - the scene would have been hilarious: A drone carrying a drunkard in a space suit, still holding an empty bottle in his hand, followed by his partner carrying a case of old wine and sporting a frown as they walked the streets of the once romantic city.

After returning to the ship, Remi activated the ion engines and left Earth's atmosphere. Even the purr of the engines couldn't cover Roman's snoring in the aft cabin.

The trip to the Tycho base on the Moon would take about four hours. Remi was a seasoned pilot and calculated the fastest trajectory. The journey was uneventful until Roman staggered into the cockpit. He had a cold compress on his head.

"Hello friend," he said weakly. "My head seems about to explode. What happened? Did I hit something? I can't remember anything."

Remi looked at him with murderous eyes. But after a moment, she took pity on him. Everyone is entitled to a moment of weakness, she thought

“You had an interesting meeting with Mendoza. I suggest you review the audio files on your transceiver and think of a good story to tell General Nikko.”

Roman paled and sat on the floor.

“I screwed up big, right?” he said in a tremulous voice.

"Let's just say your dialogue with the General will probably be incorporated into the academy books as an example of how to get immediately kicked out of the space army. But the good news is, thanks to your ‘stupid drone,’ if you lose your job, you can open an exclusive bar in the base's commercial sector.” Remi grinned as Roman's eyes refocused, undoubtedly imagining his own little Caves Augé on a quiet street in Tycho.