

THE FABULOUS FIFTIES -
The early days of UFO in the Spanish-Speaking World
By
Scott Corrales
(c) 2006

In July 1947, a number of peasants approached the newspaper of the Spanish town of Albacete with an unusual story: in the first days of that month, they had witnessed the transit of a dark object resembling a derby hat over the village of Balazote. The disquieting object was clearly not an airplane, as residents had seen their fill of aviation during the days of the Spanish Civil War a decade earlier. The headline of the Albacete newspaper did not hesitate to ask "*Did atomic explosions draw the attention of beings from another world?*" - a question that would be debated by ufologists for a number of decades yet.

Reports suggested that other communities of the region had also been treated to the sight of the unusual object, and on the evening of July 15 that year, the village of Azpeitia was buzzed by a shiny disk that left a wake in the clear skies over the Basque Country. Eyewitnesses said that as the object appeared to come in for a landing, it suddenly rose into the air once more into the skies, but not before emitting several powerful flashes that allegedly lit the surrounding mountain valleys with sun-like intensity.

UFO researcher Iker Jimenez mentions a case 1947 involving a student named Jose Villalobos from the southern Spanish city of Seville, who was headed toward an olive grove in the locality of Montequinto at six o'clock in the evening to sit among the trees and do his homework, aside from seeking relief from the broiling summer heat. Looking up from his books, Villalobos was astonished to see a strange round object surrounded by a metallic ring on the other side of the road from where he sat. The bizarre object was hovering above the olive trees, making a persistent buzzing sound. Eventually the object rose into the air making a "corkscrew-like" counterclockwise motion. Villalobos was apparently unmoved by what he saw and returned to his studies; it was only many years later that he realized he had joined the ranks of UFO witnesses.

In the early 1990's much attention was given to the experiences of Próspera Muñoz, a resident of the southern Spanish province of Murcia considered by many to have been her country's first bona fide abductee. Manuel Carballal, in his book *Secuestrados por los Ovnis* (Espacio y Tiempo, 1991) mentions that the Muñoz incident occurred in the summer of 1947 when Próspera and her sister Ana whiled away the hot summer days in her family's country home in Jumilla. One day, Próspera saw something through a window that she took at first to be a car; the object glided silently toward the house, and from its recesses emerged two large-headed beings dressed in white coveralls. The beings politely asked for a glass of water and inquired as to the workings of the calendar, with which they were utterly unfamiliar. The strange visitors departed without incident, but returned several nights later with others of their number; Próspera felt the urge to go outdoors and then boarded the unfamiliar vehicle, where she was subjected to tests and the implantation of a "transmitter" inside her skull.

After returning home, she would have no recollection of the event for another thirty years.

As the Forties gave way to the Fifties, sightings of strange objects over Spain and France would increase rather than diminish, and worse yet, reports of strange “occupants” would begin to fill newspapers and the first few books and pamphlets circulated on the subject. It was a time of intense social change in a country held in the vise-like grip of an authoritarian government: as Ignacio Cabria notes in his landmark *Entre Ovnis, Creyentes y Contactados* (Spain: Cuadernos de Ufologia, 1993): “As information [regarding UFOs] reached us, like some kind of cosmic Marshall Plan, flying saucers began coming to us from the USA along with chewing gum and Walt Disney cartoons...” Despite strict government control of the media, publications like *Solidaridad Nacional* boldly stated on February, 2 1950 that “Flying Saucers are manned by beings from another planet” while the *Fechas* newspaper asked: “Is Mars attacking us? The mystery of the flying saucers.” Such headlines were considered sensationalistic, but accurately reflected the interest and concern brought about by the disconcerting lights in the sky. On March 29, 1950, the phenomenon visited Castilian city of Burgos when the air traffic controllers of the city’s airport heard a loud, intensifying whistling sound similar to that of an airplane coming in for a landing, although nothing could be seen. Only a few minutes after 12:00 pm, the traffic controllers would be startled by the appearance of a triangular object approaching the control tower at breakneck speed, flying over it before executing a sharp eastward turn. The startled - and perhaps somewhat shaken - controllers were able to calculate that the triangular intruder was flying at nearly seventeen hundred kilometers an hour, far in excess of the speeds achieved by the fastest jet fighters of the time.

This case would be among the most spectacular and best-documented of the “Spanish Wave of 1950”, as described by Antonio Ribera, who would go on to earn the distinction of being Spain’s foremost UFO researcher. Inspired by the pioneering work of French researcher Aimé Michel, Ribera attempted to track UFO activity along the “orthothenic” lines posited by Michel’s work. His early observations in March 1950 suggested that the bulk of the sightings were taking place along a straight-line between Santa Cruz de Tenerife in the Canary Islands, where an unknown object had been seen hovering over the sea on March 29, Seville and Villafria, the location of the airport in Burgos. “It is interesting to note,” said Ribera in one of his books, *El Gran Enigma de los Platillos Voladores*, “ that in almost all of these [sightings] the time displacement occurs in the order given. That is to say, from south to north, which appears to indicate that a large mothership could be located at some point over the Atlantic, in the vicinity of the western coast of Africa.” This statement speaks volumes about the thought process, quite generalized at the time, possibly on both sides of the ocean, that the “flying saucers” were scout ships flying out of interplanetary aircraft carriers or motherships. By the time the next major burst of UFO activity occurred in Spain in 1954, Ribera’s “orthothenic” map of Spain would be nearly complete.

Mexico’s Mid-Century UFOs

Is it possible that a Mexican miner, far from home and completely ignorant of the phenomena he was witness to, could have beaten Kenneth Arnold to the title of first witness of the modern UFO explosion?

An intriguing affidavit, dated July 18, 1957 and featured in the appendix section of Trevor James Constable's They Live in The Sky (New Age Press, 1958), sworn by Pierre Perry, president of Arizona's Copper Mountain Mining Corporation, tells the story of how Mr. Perry was on his way to inspect a certain mineral deposit to the north of Prescott, PA on a broiling hot summer day in 1943. Journeying along with Perry were an anonymous prospector and Isidro Montoya, a Mexican miner. The story that follows should by all accounts be a classic in the annals of ufology:

While fording the Agua Fria River on horseback around 5 p.m., Montoya, who was in the lead, shouted: "*¡El diablo, el diablo!*" (The Devil)

"Overhead," states Perry in his affidavit. "a most terrific drama was unfolding that lasted only a few minutes. A military plane was in sight, so where the two large unidentified flying objects that looked like balloons without baskets. They were luminous and bright as the sun. The UFO's stood still as if waiting for the plane to approach, the pounced towards it. At the same time, they projected a violent luminous ray that could be compared with the large beam of a lighthouse."

What followed was no less spectacular. The cohered energy beam hit its target and brought it down. The three onlookers saw the pilots eject from the plane, but another beam from the unknown craft caused the parachutes to catch fire and the men plummeted to their deaths. "The two bodies were later found," adds Perry.

While unnerved and muttering orisons, Isidro Montoya was by no means a stranger to such visions. After crossing himself, he reportedly told Perry: "*El diablo, señor...I have seen the same thing many times, señor...*"

The affidavit goes on to indicate that a third spherical intruder joined the two existing UFOs and the trio vanished south toward Mexico at breathtaking speed. The men on horseback turned back to notify the authorities, but military vehicles had already been dispatched. Perry's party guided the recovery team to where they had seen the stricken aircraft crash. "Parts were scattered all over the mountainside."

It is interesting to note, among the cases of these early days of Mexican ufology, the collision of an experimental V-2 rocket on the outskirts of Ciudad Juarez on May 29, 1947. The liberated German projectile was launched from the White Sands Missile Facility and four seconds into the launch, due to a defective gyroscope, headed southward over El Paso and fell in the Ciudad Juarez cemetery. Ironically, this would prove to be but the first of many rocket launches gone astray into Mexican territory.

By 1949, stories about a "flying saucer" collision in Mexico had become widespread. A man named Ray Dimmick told Californian newspapermen that "a shining disk" had collided against a mountain on the outskirts of Mexico City and that he himself had seen the wreckage of a "space craft" some sixty feet across. To add spice to his account, Dimmick alleged that the hapless saucer's dwarfish pilot's remains had been collected and preserved for future study. This Mexican crash would go on to become part of the vast corpus of such events collected by other UFO researchers such as Kevin Randle.

The 1950's dawned upon a world terrified by the seemingly ubiquitous presence of Communism, the very real possibility of atomic annihilation, and the persistent reports of strange vehicles seen in the skies over the northern hemisphere. On March 3, 1950, a Mexican aviation official engaged in a routine tour of inspection of the airports in the northern regions of the country when he saw a curious yellowish disk suspended at an estimated altitude of 15,000 over the city of Chihuahua's airport. A press report indicated that two airplanes--whether military or civilian--tried to intercept the object but were unable to reach it.

By mid-March, the saucers were over Mexico City itself. On the 14th, many hundreds of witnesses reported seeing four flying saucers over Mexico's international airport, creating a sensation across the city. Activity reached its peak on March 21, when the *El Nacional* newspaper reported that an unidentified object was seen so clearly over Mexico City that movie camera operators were allegedly able to capture it on film. Sensational claims continued to emerge, such as the supposed collision of a saucer in the Sierra de Morones of Zacatecas--an impact that caused the earth to shake.

People from all walks of life were beginning to report strange objects during this period. A professional wrestler known by his stage name, Aguila Blanca ("White Eagle"), was in his hometown of Querétaro one evening in 1956 when he decided to go to the movies. As he walked across a public park toward his destination, he became aware of a strange light hanging motionless in mid-air, which almost immediately descended upon the city to remain suspended at 200 meters over the ground. According to the wrestler, he was able to make out a series of lights resembling portholes around the structure, which he estimated to be some 50 meters in diameter and made of metal. The object remained motionless for approximately 10 minutes before heading away.

In 1957, when most ufologists were still debating the wisdom of publishing reports indicating that UFOs could in fact land and leave ground traces, Mexican newspaper *El Universal Gráfico* published a comprehensive account on the alleged landing of a discoidal object in the community farms of San Juan de Aragón, an event witnessed by farmer Gilberto Espinoza. Although the incident had taken place in November of the preceding year, the newspaper ran its story in January 1958. An early UFO pursuit occurred on December 12, 1957, when a "speeding saucer" intercepted a Douglas DC-3 belonging to Aerolíneas Mexicanas over San Luis Potosí. Passengers aboard the aircraft were apparently petrified with fright as the pilot, Capt. Gilberto Alba, coolly put the DC-3 through a series of evasive maneuvers.

Argentina's Early Saucer Cases

If countries could hold an award ceremony for the one of their number that has endured some of the strangest and most terrifying UFO cases, Argentina would certainly emerge the winner or at least the runner-up. The world's fifth largest country, with a landscape that includes the sub-Arctic conditions of Patagonia and the rainforests of the Gran Chaco, the Andean range and a coastal plain that offers some of the best cattle grazing fields on the planet, has plagued - rather than visited - by UFOs since the earliest days of the phenomenon's modern stage and well into the colonial and pre-European past. The sightings of strange objects in the late 1940's and early 1950's were followed almost immediately by incidents involving occupants at a time when most researchers in the U.S. were understandably leery about going as far as suggesting that the strange lights in the sky could be manned. Nor were these visitors the type whose craft landed in France in the 50s, shaking hands and embracing stunned farmers (the Antoine Mazaud case of 1954) -South America's UFO occupants would prove to be unreasonable and terrifying.

The same month that officials at Spain's Burgos airport were buzzed by an unknown triangular object, and while Mexico's own air authorities witnessed the disk-shaped craft over Chihuahua, an Argentinean cattleman named Wilfredo Arevalo, not one given to musing about life elsewhere in the universe, was about to step into the pages

of the history of the unknown. On Saturday, March 18, 1950, Arevalo had driven out to survey his ranch, Estancia La Blanqueada in Lago Argentino, some thirty kilometers distant from El Calafate, Province of Santa Cruz, with a farmhand to inspect the herd. It was then he noticed an object "shaped like the planet Saturn" issuing a reddish light some 20 meters away from the one of the livestock pens. Even more perplexing was the fact that another similar object hovered at a higher altitude as if keeping watch over its sister ship. The farmhand squealed and promptly hid under the dashboard, leaving Arévalo to stare stunned at the bizarre object that had appeared out of nowhere. Stranger than the object itself, however, was the semi-transparent dome that revealed the presence of four occupants - human looking and wearing grey outfits. At one point, one of the beings noticed Arévalo's vehicle and the reddish orb rose into the air, vanishing at speed. Both Arévalo and his farmhand - now recovered from the shock - got out of the pickup truck to inspect the area over which the strange device had hovered. The grass was charred and the temperature at the site was warmer than the surrounding area. (Note: there is quite a bit of controversy regarding this case, as the witnesses - Arévalo and his farmhand - were unable to be located by successive generations of researchers).

Argentina's UFO chronicles in the mid-20th century began, as we can see, not just with what have come to be called the CE-1 cases but full-blown CE-III cases - a fact that attracted U.S. researchers Jim and Coral Lorenzen, who were the first to devote ample space to Latin American cases in their writings, even in the world was not ready for the high-strangeness quotient that some of these cases involved. In 1953, for instance, Eberto Villafañe was in the vicinity of Ichigualasto, Cerro del Valle (not far from the Huacañita mica mine) hunting guanacos when he decided to camp out. In the middle of the night he was overwhelmed by a blast of heat and woke up to see "a lovely woman" wearing green coverall. Singed by the heat, the hunter decided not to stick around.

Puerto Rico in the 1950s

Puerto Rico - an eternal UFO hotspot that has blazed into searing, white-hot prominence several times in the 20th century - began its contemporary sequence of UFO cases on June 20, 1947, four days prior to Kenneth Arnold's history-making encounter over Mount Rainier. Mrs. Maria Ayuso witnessed the passing of a "bright object at high speed over the skies of San Juan" at 5:30 p.m. from Puerta de Tierra in San Juan. Nor was Mrs. Ayuso alone in this - her husband, Dr. Rómulo Ayuso, was driving the family car when his wife suddenly asked him to pull over and look at the strange flying disk in the heavens. "The intense light it gave off," said Maria Ayuso, was similar to what can be reflected by an aluminum pan held against the sun's rays." The newspaper article of this early sighting appeared in the July 10, 1947 issue of San Juan's *El Mundo* newspaper.

El Mundo's issue for the previous day, coincidentally, had also carried the story of four witnesses - Americo Paoli, Miguel Orozco, Francisco Rodriguez and Julio Salazar - who reported seeing four luminous discs heading south in the night sky as they stood outside a pharmacy in San Juan at 2:35 am. Paoli, the manager of a taxi stand, noted that the objects "appeared to be flying at high speed and in pairs, separated by a short distance," adding that "they were plate-shaped when tilted in such a way" that

he could see their circumference, although they weren't perfectly round. An attorney and his wife also reported seeing the same intriguing objects, adding that they had a "shiny, straw-like color."

As the sightings continued sporadically into the early 1950s, even newspaper writers themselves were having sightings. Miguel Angel Santin, senior writer for El Mundo, and an unnamed co-worker, were returning to their homes in the Puerto Nuevo sector of the city around ten thirty at night when they saw a luminous object traveling from east to west. "We thought that it couldn't be a shooting star due to its trajectory, as these tend to fall very quickly. Furthermore, it gave off a greenish cast. The object was at an altitude of some 15 degrees and at an azimuth of some 5 degrees."

By 1952, UFO activity over the Caribbean island was in full swing, with cases being reported from parts of the island's geography that would become well known in subsequent decades for the volume of reports issuing from them, particularly the waters of the Mona Passage between Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. On May 13, 1952 at seven o'clock in the evening, Miguel Angel Garcia, a prominent politician, was seated with his family at their residence in the city of Mayaguez, commanding a view of the city and its bay from a considerable elevation. García, his wife, daughter and son-in-law interrupted their conversation to look at two orange disks—one larger than the other-- flying high over the Mona Passage. The politician promptly went inside for his field glasses and returned to study the unusual objects. The larger of the disks had "the apparent size of the sun, according to Garcia, and was static while the smaller one maneuvered around, switching positions with each other. García's daughter Fredita managed to photograph the strange aerial ballet between the orange disks but nothing appeared on the film due to shortcomings in the Verichrome film employed. Other residents of Mayaguez also saw the disks, but believed them to be military devices from the Ramey Strategic Air Command base on the island's northwestern tip.

On August 3rd of that year, guests and staff at San Juan's Caribe Hilton hotel reportedly saw a pair of saucer-shaped objects flying at a considerable height over the ocean. The staff members - Dominic Tutela and Ramón Rodríguez - said that they had looked out over one the ballroom terraces facing the sea at 7:45 that evening and saw the two discs, flying in a north-northeast direction high above the water. The Hilton experience is not without humor, as one of the guests who shared the sighting with the hotel workers believed the objects to be "giant butterflies with extremely bright bodies," and had to be reassured that there were no giant butterflies to be found on the island.

Martians in Spain

By the mid-1950s, interest in *platillos voladores* (sometimes shortened to *plativolos*) was widespread in many, if not most, Spanish-speaking countries. Hollywood's contributions to the notion of visitors from another world - and the inevitable bug-eyed monsters - had already graced screens of movie theaters in Madrid, Buenos Aires and Mexico City. It was not uncommon to see the cartoon image of the flying saucer associated with progress and the technological future: business establishments with such names as "*los OVNIS*" or even "*los marcianos*" (the Martians) sprouted in many

neighborhoods, where ballpoint pens (*plumas atómicas* - “atomic pens”) were replacing the fountain pen in growing numbers.

A nascent body of people interested in knowing more about the phenomenon - ranging from scissors-toting scrapbookers to serious students of the metaphysical - was emerging in these countries. Some of them were devoted believers in spiritualist and theosophical doctrines who added belief in “visitors from another planet” as the next logical step in the evolution of the soul; others were academics and less spiritually inclined individuals who saw the possibility of “flying saucers” as being proof that humankind was finally advanced enough to be worthy of notice by infinitely more advanced spacefarers.

From the musings and lectures of the metaphysicians emerged the early contactees, those who went beyond listening to the long messages dictated by trance-mediums or automatic writers to claim firsthand experiences with the “space brothers”. There is a certain charm to the early contactee accounts coming out of Latin America, as they contain elements strongly reminiscent of Jules Verne’s novels - portrayals of individuals coming into contact with the advanced technology of an alien race as opposed to a reclusive genius, with the resulting minute descriptions of the technology employed. In Spain, the emerging contactees and scholars of the new phenomenon shared a common origin, at least in Madrid: La Ballena Alegre (the Merry Whale), the basement of the street-level Cafe Lyon. In the smoke-filled recesses of this underground world, playwrights and priests gathered together to listen to the compelling oratory of Fernando Sesma, journalist and true believer, author of a newspaper column on the subject of the otherworldly. Sesma’s esoteric get-togethers would - in the fullness of time - give birth to one of the most spectacular UFO myths ever recorded: the UMMO affair. But in 1955, all eyes were on an alleged “Martian stone” given to Alberto Sanmartin, a hospital orderly, by a humanoid entity that irradiated love and understanding. The orderly bemusedly accepted the stone - crawling with strange glyphs - and watched the humanoid descend into a ravine, board his spacecraft and take off into the night sky. While many called the experience into question, others saw the stone as the first bona-fide proof of an alien presence on Earth. Severino Machado, a priest, became Sanmartin’s strongest supporter, devoting hours of study to the mysterious signs on the stone.

Father Machado’s long hours of study resulted in a pronouncement: the stone was not from Mars but from Saturn! The glyphs (considered random rubbish by an epigrapher who had examined it earlier) contained the following message: *“Message from Saturn to Earth - we are on a round-trip voyage to establish links of friendship with all of Earth. There is a shorter path to reach you by employing the conjunction of a celestial body between Saturn and Earth...”* and so forth. The priest and the “Martian stone” would eventually find their way to Sesma’s lectures at The Merry Whale. Machado has the distinction, however, of being the author of one of the first books on “flying saucers” published in Spain: *Los Platillos Volantes Ante La Razón y la Ciencia* (Madrid, 1955). “I am writing for the astronomer, for the physicist and for the man of science,” says Machado in his book, “in order that they may compare and contrast what I am saying and so that they may ascertain the truth of my words.”

But these ruminations on alien visitors weren’t all that was going on in Spain at the time. In the early morning hours of December 6, 1954, a young construction worker

named Juan Martínez was cycling his way to work in the town of Rentería amid the bone-chilling winter rain. As his bicycle progressed along the road, he noticed a large object moving at high speed down the middle of the road and away toward him, giving off a dull yellowish light. Upon negotiating a curve on the road, he came face to face with a featureless rectangular craft with a single “spotlight” built into its structure. Terrified, Martinez fled the scene. A construction foreman inspecting the site would later find signs of flattened vegetation and very large footprints, as well as scattered debris. Months later, a truck driver and other local residents would report seeing a reddish object landing near the location, adjacent to a slate quarry, before taking off again in a vertical direction at high speed.

One of the most charming stories of this early period of Iberian sauceriana remains, without a doubt, the encounter between a group of fifteen boys engaged in a pick-up soccer match outside the city of Badajoz in August 1956. Their animated afternoon game was interrupted by a sudden and deafening buzzing sound that came from the sky; all of the players looked up to see a strange object flying directly toward the barren field they used as makeshift soccer pitch. The object -- described as an elongated craft with a transparent cockpit “similar to that of a military aircraft” -- descended to within a few feet of the ground. Half of the players ran off to seek the help of grownups while the other half remained riveted to the spot until their elders arrived. The earthlings allegedly perceived movement within the craft, “greenish silhouettes” that responded with strange gestures to the frantic, friendly waving of the older humans. What could have been a perfect opportunity for a meeting of worlds ended abruptly as the object took to the air, accelerating into the distance.

Mexico’s Earliest Contactees

In January 1954, across the ocean from Spain and far from the animated get-togethers in a Madrid speakeasy, a man named Armando Zurbarán was negotiating the dangerous hairpin curves of the road connecting Mexico City to Acapulco. Zurbarán’s only concern at the time was reaching the Pacific port city before sunrise, in order to meet a business associate. He had left Mexico City at 2 A.M., ready to cover the six-hour trip. At some point during the drive, he was overcome by sensation of lethargy that caused him to pull over. Not far ahead on the road, he was able to see a number of men clad in overalls with wide belts gathered around a strange, brilliantly lit object. Before he realized, and having no idea how it happened, he was walking toward the object, escorted by the longhaired men. A slight buzzing sound filled his ears as he entered the saucer. Zurbarán was going down in history as his country’s first contactee, and this was his first question to the ship’s captain: Why had he been chosen for this honor?

The stunned businessman was treated to a review of the smallest details of his life on a screen within the vehicle’s wall and a tour of the ship’s interior, guided by one of the fair, long-haired crewmen (reminiscent of Adamski’s Venusians) who answered each of the puzzled human’s questions in detail. The space travelers, he learned, employed an gravity repulsion system to cover the distance between their homeworld and Earth, scanning the space ahead of them with a radar-like device to dispel any objects that may lie in their path. Unlike other contactee stories of the time, Zurbarán’s visitors did not claim to originate from any planet in the Solar System, nor did they mention their planet of origin by name.

The craft, he learned, had taken off while he was unaware and was now in space. Zurbarán peered out a porthole, hoping for a glimpse of the world seen from above, but could only see a grayish mist until at a distance of 40,000 kilometers, the ship's captain pointed out the planet to him through another porthole. Excited by the vista, the human asked the Captain if he could perhaps be taken to visit their world, but his request was turned down. He was told that perhaps someday such an invitation would be tendered, at the right moment.

So far, we are faced with typical abductee fare, reading more like the diary of Jules Verne's Professor Arronax when taken aboard Captain Nemo's Nautilus. But Zurbarán's experience departs from others in this respect: he was able to sleep a normal sleep and eat with the UFO's crew. His description of taking a shower in space is particularly memorable: *"I shall never be able to forget it. That bathroom was a new and unimaginable experience for me. Standing upright, facing an angle of the wall filled with tiny holes, I was covered in warm air, and as it grew stronger, it became transformed into damp air, impregnating my skin like a warm, wet breeze. When I was completely drenched, I was offered a sort of liquid soap that I rubbed all over myself, from head to toe. Standing once more before the warm air sprinklers, I felt the soap begin to evaporate and my skin become completely clean. The air then ceased to be damp, turning dry and warm instead...becoming colder until agreeably cool."*

After their meal, the Captain proceeded to regale Zurbarán with his world's philosophy, religion and history: children and the elderly received special consideration, and there was equality between the occupations. The average life span was of some 250 years, and collaboration had replaced competition in the area of commerce...a utopia made possible by a being they termed "The Master" or "Beloved Number Nine", who was at the heart of their religion, and who had ruled them for a span of three thousand earth-years. The spaceship returned Zurbarán to his car by the roadside. Confused but excited by his experience, he continued the balance of his drive to Acapulco, learning upon his arrival that it had only taken him an hour and a half to complete a six-hour journey.

A year before Zurbarán's experience, another experience involving allegations of contact between an unsuspecting human and visitors from space had occurred far from Acapulco. In August 1953, a humble taxi driver named Salvador Villanueva, had been hired by an American couple to drive them from Mexico City to Laredo, Texas (an undertaking that probably deserves a story all to itself). Halfway along the journey, Villanueva's cab broke down, prompting his passengers to hike back to the nearest town in search of a mechanic or a tow truck. He would never see them again.

Alone on the arid roadside, Villanueva was startled by the unexpected arrival of a longhaired man wearing "a kind of aviator outfit" and bearing a helmet under his arm. The man asked him in a gentle voice if there was something wrong with the car. The cabbie was startled by the strange flashing belt worn by his interlocutor and was unable to reply. The stranger donned his helmet and went away. Villanueva put the tire jack back into the trunk and made ready to spend the night in the wilderness; his sleep was eventually interrupted by a tapping on the driver's side window - the helmeted stranger had brought a companion, dressed in the same "aviator" type gear. A conversation ensued in which the strangers told Villanueva they were from another world, one with a single ocean and not many, like our planet. They offered to show Villanueva their own "automobile"; the taxi driver accepted and soon found himself

staring at “a flattened sphere, like a ball with some of the air taken out” with round portholes. The entire craft - as Villanueva would tell researcher Ramiro Garza - resembled “a buoy buried in the ground” more than anything else.

Within the strange vessel, Villanueva reported seeing “enormous steering wheels” arrayed in three different rows. There was no visible machinery, only a sort of sofa. The “aviators” sat on either end of the sofa and the taxi driver occupied the middle, looking out at the world through the vessel’s transparent hull (opaque from the outside). The vessel took off and the strange men offered Villanueva “a view of his world and their own” before returning him to the roadside—five days later, as he would learn with consternation. The contactee reported feeling in high spirits and filled with optimism, although a series of painful, crippling headaches followed shortly after. Abandoning the damaged car to its fate, Villanueva hitched a ride back to Mexico City, where he underwent medical care for the uncontrollable migraines. In the fullness of time he would write *Yo Estuve en el Planeta Venus* about his experiences on the second planet from the Sun and the aftermath, stressing that Venus was insect-free and with a flora consisting predominantly of fruit trees, some of them similar to those on Earth; all Venusians had the same shoulder length hair and enviable physiques, but Villanueva was startled by the presence of smaller creatures standing no taller than eighty centimeters. These were not children, but smaller versions of adult Venusians “freshly minted” through “a laboratory process”.

The notion of Venus, Venusians and saucers from the second planet would play a major role in popular culture: in 1960, Mexican comedians Viruta and Capulina (Gaspar Henaine) would star in *Los Astronautas*, a comedy in which X7 and X8 - voluptuous Venusian females true to the space opera tradition - come to Earth in search of husbands and whisk the hapless protagonists off to their homeworld.

Midpoint of a Decade

This was also the period of the first serious books on the phenomenon and of the creation of the early research organizations. Some of these early texts were compilations of U.S. cases, ranging from the Kenneth Arnold sighting to the experiences of Daniel Fry in New Mexico, with lengthy disquisitions on the possibility of life in the universe. Ismael Diego Pérez, a Mexican author, self-published “¿Son los platillos voladores una realidad?” (Are flying saucers real?) in 1955; a year later Hector Espinoza would release Enigma Interplanetario: *Los Plativolos y Barcos del Espacio* (Interplanetary Engima - Flying Saucers and Vessels from Space), discussing the probable propulsion methods employed by putative spaceships. In Spain, Eduardo Buelta’s *Astronaves sobre la Tierra* (Spaceships Over the Earth) would appear in 1955 in Barcelona, while the irrepressible Fernando Sesma’s own *Los Platillos Volantes Vienen de Otros Mundos* (Flying Saucers Come From Other Worlds) would hit the newsstands in Madrid that same year. Ironically, it would be Sesma’s alien-flavored chat sessions that would give rise to BURU, Spain’s first UFO research organization, although some complained that the acronym, if it meant anything all, was a secret that Sesma kept to himself.

But the honor of being the first UFO book in Spain, according to Ignacio Cabria, fell upon Manuel Pedrajo, a native of the northern city of Santander, who was fascinated by the Scandinavian “ghost rocket” crisis of 1946 and became an avid collector of

news clippings regarding flying saucers. In 1954, he presented his book *Los Platillos Voladores y la Evidencia* (Flying Saucers and the Evidence) for publication but had it rejected. Undaunted, Pedrajo self-published and his thousand or so copies were sold almost immediately by those interested in reading his conclusions on the “Martian” origin of the flying saucers and the expeditions launched to our big blue marble from the Red Planet.

In Argentina, 1956 would witness the creation of the CODOVNI organization (Comisión Observadora de Objetos Voladores No Identificados) by aviation pioneer Ariel Ciro Rietti and Cristián Vogt. Only a year before, Captain Jorge Milberg would translate and write the prologue for *Flying Saucers From Outer Space*, published by Circulo Aeronautico. The distinction, however, of being the first UFO related book written in Argentina corresponds to an earlier author, James Dawson (pseudonym) who wrote *¿Vienen de Otro Mundo los Platos Voladores?* in 1953, followed by Origen, *Estructura and Destino de los Platos Voladores* by Jorge Duclout the same year. Cristián Vogt would pen his own work on flying saucers, *El Misterio de los Platos Voladores*, in 1956.

Interest in the UFO phenomenon at the time was on the rise, perhaps due to saucer activity during the 1954-56 period, mirroring the increase of cases in Europe and the northern part of South America. On December 28, 1954, a troupe of actors driving from the city of San Rafael to Mendoza along Route 143 noticed a bright light near Cerro Guaiqueria - bright enough to cause the driver to pull over in order for all the passengers to get a better look at the phenomenon. One of the women in the car, Maria Luisa G.H. de Amaya, a history professor and gifted concert pianist, claimed having seen two humanoid figures standing beside the bright source of light; the first figure appeared to be scooping something off of the ground to hand to the second one.

The unknown craft was described as having the shape of two deep, superimposed bowls joined at their edges, irradiating a bluish light that illuminated the entire object and generated a sort of fog around it. No doors or windows were visible, although all present agreed that its size, roughly similar to that of a bus, was one of the most impressive features. At no time were the onlookers blinded by the light or suffered any physical effects. Moments later, both figures vanished into the light, which rose into the air and faded in an out, as though appearing and disappearing, all the while issuing smoke from its base. The percipients placed the entire duration of their sighting at between thirty minutes to an hour. According to Mrs. Amaya, the emotional impact of seeing this unknown object and its occupants was second only to the birth of her first child.

In 1955, witnesses in the Buenos Aires suburb of Caseros reportedly saw a UFO containing white-garbed humanoid occupants, seemingly laughing and even backslapping. When one of the humanoids became aware of the onlookers, he touched one of the instrument panels visible in the object’s “cockpit”, prompting the UFO to disappear, yet again, at breakneck speed. At least four major reports involving flying saucers and occupants emerged from Entre Ríos, Salta and Córdoba.

Activity at the halfway point of the 1950s was not circumscribed to Spain, Mexico and Argentina - other countries like oil-rich Venezuela were stepping onto the scene with fascinating cases of their own. Perhaps the best known of these is the now-legendary case involving truck drivers Gustavo González and Juan Ponce on November 28, 1954

near the town of Petare. At two o'clock in the morning, as the two men were on their way to drop off a shipment, they found the road obstructed by a large, luminous sphere that hovered above the pavement. Curious, both men got out of the truck for a better look, only to be confronted by a very unpleasant sight: a three or four foot tall creature, covered in hair, with clawed eyes and glowing eyes. Unafraid of the animal or creature, Gonzalez grabbed it and hoisted it into the air to throw it, but the entity gave the startled driver a push that sent him flying over a dozen feet back. Ponce ran to the aid of his fellow driver, attacking the hairy creature with a knife. But far from stabbing deep into the monster's vitals, the knife appeared to strike something as hard as rock or metal. At that moment, two other creatures resembling the first emerged from the bushes; the non-humans jumped into their glowing sphere of light, but not before flashing a blinding light at the humans.

Coral Lorenzen's *"Flying Saucers: Evidence of the Startling Invasion from Outer Space"* offers an interesting additional note to this case. One of the physicians who attended Gustavo Gonzalez's wounds following the otherworldly scuffle reported that he had been a witness to the Petare incident while out on a night call. He had seen the object and the stopped truck, as well as the confrontation, but feared becoming the object of negative publicity and his statements to the Venezuelan authorities regarding this case included a request that his name not be associated with Gonzalez's and Ponce's struggle against the unknown assailants.

As the Decade Ends

UFOs had all but vanished from Puerto Rican skies during a four-year stretch since 1952. But that would come to an end on March 11, 1957 when Pan Am Airlines Flight 257 from New York to San Juan, Puerto Rico, had a brush with the unknown: at four thirty in the morning, while passengers slept or engaged in quiet conversation with each other, the pilot, Captain Matthew Van Winkle, was forced to make a violent evasive maneuver to avoid a collision with a strange bolide that was heading right toward the airliner. Passengers and flight attendants - except for those who had wisely never unfastened their seatbelts - flew out of their seats and crashed into the bulkheads. According to reports, the pilot had seen an object described as having "a shiny greenish core and an outer ring that reflected the inner glow." Frantically executing an evasive maneuver, Van Winkle climbed 1500 feet above the object in a matter of seconds. According to San Juan's *El Mundo* newspaper, Van Winkle's initial impression was that he was seeing the burning exhaust gases of a rocket airplane, followed by a glowing light. Pilots from other airlines two to three hundred miles away, flying the same route toward Puerto Rico, reportedly saw the same object. John Walsh, a pilot with TransCaribbean Airways, very much doubted that "he'd seen a meteorite."

In Spain, one of the most significant cases of the last third of the decade took place in Girona, near the Ter River, in October 1958. José Angelú was driving home from work around seven o'clock in the evening when an unusual sight in the heavens caused him to stop. A powerful source of white light was approaching a copse of pine trees near the road, closing in at high speed. After reaching the dense trees, the flashing light vanished and Angelú believed for a moment that he had witnessed a plane crash. Getting out of his car, the witness ventured into the woods to find the downed aircraft, but never expected to see the sight that hovered in air before him: suspended some twenty feet off the ground was an aluminum-colored oval object with

a small transparent dome, issuing a buzzing sound “similar to nozzles issuing a powerful rush of air.”

But the good samaritan’s bewilderment would increase exponentially upon realizing that the buzzing object was the least remarkable item - staring at him intently only a short distance away were two large-headed humanoid creatures, dressed in dark suits made of an unfamiliar, leather-like fabric. The encounter lasted an estimated fifteen minutes before the strange creatures entered the object and took off into the night.

The files of the late, great researcher Antonio Ribera included a case from the summer of 1958. Three witnesses - Juan Corrons, Francisco de Rojas and Maria Rosa Amadó - were chatting on the rooftop of the Rojas home in downtown Barcelona late in the afternoon. Suddenly, they became aware of a silvery cylindrical object flying slowly in a north-south direction. Reports of such “motherships” would become a staple in Catalan UFO reports, most notably the Vallés sightings in eastern Barcelona province. “Nearly all of them,” wrote Ribera, “involved large motherships, silver cylinders glowing intensely under the rays of the sun at dawn and at sunset.” On October 24, 1959, one such mothership flew over the eastern Vallés, seen by hundreds of witnesses who described it as a silver cylinder, tilted at a 45-degree angle. Newspapers and radio stations were flooded with mail from witnesses reporting what they had seen and requesting explanations; debunkers had a hard time brushing the sighting off as “weather balloon” activity. On December 16, another “mothership” was reported at daybreak toward the east. Two days later, twin saucers were reported over the same area. These observations would continue well into the first few months of 1960.

Argentina’s UFO activity would continue unabated during the final third of the 1950s. In August 1957, less than twenty kilometers from the town of Quilino, Province of Cordoba, a serviceman with the Argentinean Air Force heard a very loud and acute buzzing sound. He got out of his tent to take a look and was startled to see a disk-shaped object coming in for a landing, causing a whirlwind that shook surrounding trees and grass. Frightened, the airman reached for his sidearm but was unable to draw it. “It appeared to be welded to its holster,” he would later say. A voice issued from the unknown craft, assuaging his fear and informing him that “interplanetary visitors already had a base in the region of Salta” and would soon make their presence known all over the world. Their avowed mission, it seems, was to discourage humans from misusing atomic energy.

Although we have concentrated on the early days of the UFO phenomenon in four countries - Argentina, Mexico, Puerto Rico and Spain - it is almost impossible to end any examination of matters ufological in the 1950s without including the Antonio Villas Boas (AVB) case from Portuguese-speaking Brazil. Many researchers and writers have agreed that were it necessary to sum up ufology in a single case, the one involving the strange experience of this young Brazilian farmer would indisputably be the one to select.

Veteran Brazilian ufologist Fernando Cleto reminisces about the surreal days of this most unusual case: “...being a friend of Joao Martins, I already knew enough about the event in his own words. One one occasion, I read letters written by Villas Boas and even managed to see a small model of the “flying saucer” and of one of its occupants--

small rustic statuettes whittled out of wood by Villas Boas himself. I also recall that Joao Martins was completely opposed to making this case known to the public, for which reason it was disclosed much later[...]after Dna. Irene Granchi disclosed the case overseas, I published my own opinion in this regard in a Belgian or British magazine--I can't remember which. I made an observation which greatly favored the Villas Boas case."

As if the incredible AVB required any further bolstering, Fernando Cleto managed to show that there had indeed been sightings of the same elongated oval vehicle elsewhere in Brazil prior to the date of the events in the AVB case.

"I remember," says Cleto, "that a few days prior to October 15, 1957, there was a case in the interior of the State of Goiás. A car was forced off the roadway by a force issuing from a "flying saucer". The driver described something that bore a strong connection to what Villas Boas had seen. He compared the UFO to a helicopter, at first, with the power to exert traction...and to have seen occupants similar to those seen by Villas Boas. There is no doubt that on November 6, 1957, Colonel Ivo Gastaldoni, who was on the way to the hospital to see his newly born daughter, was summoned by his command to see a UFO hovering directly over the Cumbica Air Base. The colonel remarked that the object was high up in the air and well out of the reach of the base's fighters. His overall impression was that it resembled some sort of egg-shaped craft with a helicopter blade spinning over the ovoid fuselage.

"The event with the driver before October 15, 1957, when added to the November 6 case," writes Cleto. "coincided with the description given by Villas Boas for his own object and impressed me greatly. It was as if a certain model of UFO carrying a very special crew complement had been operating a given region of Brazil for a given period of time while on a special mission." Ufologist Cleto notes in his memorandum regarding the AVB case that Joao Martins' reluctance to disclose the particulars of the astonishing event was to keep mentally unbalanced individuals from conjuring up similar scenarios. But what exactly happened to Antonio Villas Boas?

The deposition taken by investigator Dr. Olavo T. Fontes and subsequently delivered to Brazil's Ministry of the Navy remains the cornerstone of research into the case. It was taken in Fontes' office on February 22, 1958 and witnessed by journalist Martins himself.

Villas Boas began by stating that he was 23 years old at the time and was a farmer by profession. He lived on a *fazenda* on the outskirts of Sao Francisco de Sales, Minas Gerais, not far from Sao Paul and came from a large family composed of two brothers and three sisters who all lived in the immediate area. The young farmer explained that it was their custom to work two shifts during the planting season: one at night, which he was responsible for, and another by day that was handled by farmhands.

On October 5, 1957, Villas Boas went to bed at 11:00 p.m. following a party at the farmhouse. He shared the room with his younger brother Joao, and they were both witnesses to a strange nocturnal light that lit up the entire room and had its source in one of the animal pens on the farm.

It was ten days later--on October 15--that Antonio Villas Boas would have his historic experience. While driving his tractor, he noticed a shining star that increased in brightness as if descending to earth. "In a matter of seconds," he told his interviewers. "it turned into a very shiny oval object headed straight for me. He tried to escape from it by speeding up the tractor, but the object had already landed some 10 to 15 meters ahead of the tractor. "It got closer and I was able to see, for the very first time, that it was a strange device with a slightly rounded shape, encircled by small lights and with a large, enormous red light in front, from which came all the light I could see when it was higher...the machine's shape was now clearly visible. It resembled a large, elongated egg with three spurs in front." AVB added the curious detail that "something appeared to be spinning at high speed on top of the vehicle and gave off a reddish fluorescent light."

Seized by terror, Antonio jumped off the tractor in hopes of eluding his pursuers on foot, but the furrowed terrain made a speedy getaway impossible. The next thing he knew, someone had seized him by the arm. It was a figure much shorter than he, wearing a "strange outfit" and a helmet. The farmer pushed the figure away and managed to knock it to the ground, but three more similarly-dressed figures turned up, seizing him by his arms and legs, and bore him off to the waiting craft. Villas Boas indicated that he did not go off meekly to face whatever fate was in store for him: he kicked, screamed and hurled insults at the helmeted intruders. Given the narrowness of the vehicle's access stairway, the farmer managed to break away from his captors, but their uncanny strength and superior numbers overpowered him once more.

The humanoids dragged him into the craft, where he was stripped naked and subjected to several indignities. His captors drew a blood sample from his chin using a chalice-like device, and after slathering him with a strange liquid that covered his entire body, he was taken to a room--unfurnished but for a couch--where he was left alone for some twenty minutes, by his count. At this point, a mixture of fear, nausea and coldness, coupled to the stench of a strange gas that was pumped into the room, led him to vomit in one of the corners.

"After a long time," Villas Boas said, "a noise at the door startled me. I turned in that direction and was shocked to see that it was now open and a woman was entering the room, walking toward me. She was approaching slowly, perhaps amused at the astonishment that must have been visible on my face. My jaw had dropped and with good reason. This woman was completely naked, as was I, and barefoot. She was also pretty; although different from the women I'd known. Her hair was an almost whitish shade of blonde, as if bleached with peroxide, straight and not very abundant, neck-length and with the ends curled inward. Her eyes were blue and large, narrower than round and slanted outward--like the pencil-painted eyes of those girls who fancy themselves Arabian princesses and make their eyes look slanted; that's what they were like. Only it was a completely natural effect, since there was no paint at all involved."

The strange liquid which had been spread over his body, apparently some sort of aphrodisiac, began to work as Antonio felt less tense as the small woman began to caress him, ultimately seducing him. "It sounds incredible," he confessed to Fontes and Martins during the interview, "given the situation I was in. I believe that the liquid they rubbed on me was the cause of it. All I know is that I felt an uncontrollable sexual excitement, which had never happened to me before. I forgot about everything

and held the woman, returning her caresses with my own. We ended up on the couch, where we had relations for the first time. It was a normal act and she responded like any woman. Then came a period of more caressing followed by more sexual relations. In the end, she was tired and breathing quickly. I was still excited, but she now refused and tried to get away. When I noticed that, I cooled down too. That was what they wanted from me, a good stallion to improve their stock."

The door opened once more and two of the "crewmen" appeared, summoning the woman away. Before leaving, she turned to the farmer and pointed at her belly, then pointing him, and finally at the heavens. Curiously, Villas Boas took this to mean "she would return to take me from where it was she came."

After having served as breeding stock, Antonio was unceremoniously led off the vehicle, which took off immediately. Returning to his tractor, Villas Boas learned that the time was now five thirty in the morning. Estimating that it had been around 1:15 a.m. when he was abducted, his entire experience had lasted some four hours and fifteen minutes. "My mother told me shouldn't become involved with those people again. I didn't have the courage to tell my father, since I had already told him about the light that appeared over the pens, and he didn't believe me, telling me that I was seeing things..." Villas Boas concluded.

After his traumatic experience, Villas-Boas withdrew from public life to pursue his studies, earning a law degree and becoming a practicing attorney in the city of Formosa, Goiás, while running a small business on the side. He died in late 1992 in the city of Uberaba, in Brazil's Triângulo Mineiro.

In June 1993, the late Dr. Walter K. Buhler, president of the Sociedade Brasileira de Estudos Sobre Discos Voadores (SBDEDV), disclosed the fact that between 1962-63, his organization had received an anonymous letter from the U.S., inviting Villas-Boas to visit this country in order to examine a recovered flying saucer in the possession of the American military. This letter was sent to Formosa, state of Goiás by Dr. Buhler. Allegedly, Villas Boas's son advised him that his father had indeed visited to the United States to inspect the object but had kept silent the rest of his life concerning the visit.

Conclusion

"There is no truth to the rumor that flying saucers are from Spain, or are piloted by Spaniards." This statement, made in 1948 by no less than Gen. Charles Spaatz, the U.S. Army Air Force Chief of Staff, could have easily been echoed by one of his military counterparts across the ocean in an effort to reassure the public that the ubiquitous flying objects being reported everywhere at the time (and commanding a fair share of Hollywood budgets) were not from the U.S. or piloted by Americans.

The fact of the matter is that many sky watchers - civilian and military alike - were wondering exactly what was the provenance of the strange objects filling their skies. In a world emerging from a global conflict and entering the uncertainty of the Cold War, rumors ran rife. Were the objects Nazi holdout weapons being used by what former U.S Defense Secretary Rumsfeld would've termed "dead-enders"? Or more

unsettling still, the results obtained by technicians from the former Third Reich now at the beck and call of the Soviet regime? To some, perhaps, the possibility of hostile or meddlesome visitors from another star system was more palatable than the first two.

The fact that the rest of the planet underwent the same intense UFO activity in the mid-20th century is often lost among the cascades of information regarding the Roswell Crash and its ancillary incidents. Nevertheless, Spanish and South American files present the reader with a no less impressive array of cases from that very same period in time.