

Not dreaming and not mad

UFOLOGIST OFTEN LAMENT the fact that so few UFO sightings are made by people with 'trained minds' - by which they mean scientists and engineers. But this is not really surprising, since the 'trained mind' of a witness is likely to reveal prejudices that discourage him from reporting an extraordinary experience and encourage him to

explain it away. On the other hand, unsophisticated observers, unacquainted with the UFO controversy, are often impressive witnesses, telling their story without embroidering it. The sightings of classic 'flying saucers' described here may have more value by virtue of coming from people of little formal education or technical training.

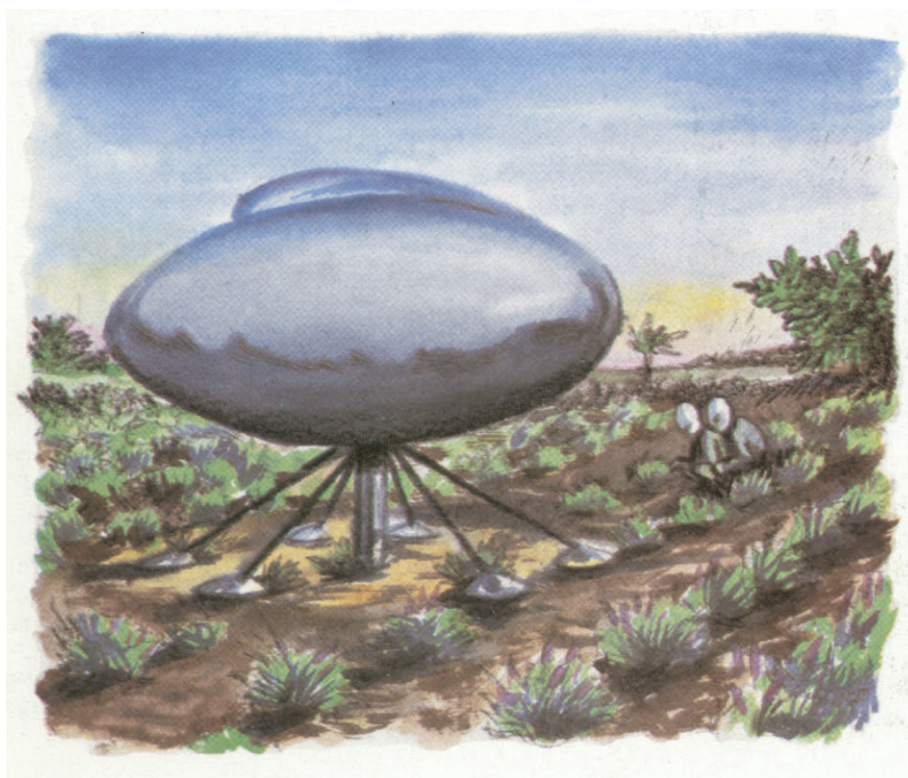
'Dwarf-like creatures with pumpkin-shaped heads'

Close encounter of the third kind: Valensole, France, 1 July 1965

Just after 5 a.m. on 1 July 1965, Maurice Masse, a 41-year-old lavender grower, set to work in his fields situated on the Valensole plateau in the Basses Alpes of south-eastern France. At about 5.45 a.m. he stopped to have a cigarette, parking his tractor by a hillock at the end of a small vineyard that lay along the northern side of the field.

Suddenly he heard a shrill whistling noise and glanced round the hillock, fully expecting to see a helicopter; instead, he saw a dull-coloured object the size of a Renault Dauphine car, shaped like a rugby football, with a cupola on top. It was standing on six metallic legs, and there was also a central support, which appeared to be stuck into the ground. Close to the 'machine' Masse saw two boys, about eight years old, bending over a lavender plant.

Masse crossed the vineyard and approached the boys, believing them to be the 'vandals' who had picked young shoots from a number of his lavender plants on several occasions during the preceding month. Then, to his surprise, he saw that he was not



approaching boys at all, but two dwarf-like creatures with large bald heads. He was about 15 feet (5 metres) from the beings when one of them turned and pointed a pencil-like instrument at him. Immediately he was stopped in his tracks, unable to move any part of his body. (In the first reports of the case it was stated that the witness was 'paralysed', but UFO investigator Aime Michel suggested the term *immobilised*, perhaps by some form of hypnotic suggestion.)

According to Masse's description, the creatures were less than 4 feet (1.2 metres) tall, and were wearing close-fitting grey-green overalls. They had huge pumpkin-shaped heads, but no hair - only smooth white skin. Their cheeks were wide and fleshy, narrowing to very pointed chins; the eyes were large and slanting. The witness did not mention their noses, but he did describe the mouths, which were like thin slits and opened to form lipless holes. It is rare in close encounters for humanoids to be reported as having their heads uncovered outside the craft, as in this case.

The creatures appeared to communicate

Maurice Masse, owner of vast lavender fields in south-eastern France, stands on the area where a UFO stood while he watched, unable to move. Only weeds grew in this patch of land after the incident

with each other, but not with their mouths, for inarticulate sounds seemed to come from their mid-body regions. The hapless lavender grower thought they were mocking him, although he admitted that their glances were not hostile; indeed, he never had the impression he was face to face with monsters. Masse has never disclosed what took place during the rest of the time he was immobilised, 15 feet (5 metres) from the beings.

After a few minutes the creatures returned to their machine, moving in a remarkable manner: 'falling and rising in space like bubbles in a bottle without apparent support . . . sliding along bands of light . . .' to enter the object through a sliding door. The witness said he could see them looking at him from inside the craft. Suddenly there was a thump from the central support, which retracted, the six legs began to whirl, and the machine floated away at an angle of 45°, making a shrill whistling sound. At 65 feet (20 metres) it just disappeared, although traces of its passage in the direction of Manosque were found on lavender plants for more than 100 yards (90 metres). (These plants withered, then recovered and grew taller and finer than those nearby.)

The farmer grew alarmed as the invisible bonds that held him failed to relax their grip, but after 15 minutes he slowly regained the use of his limbs. He could see marks left by some of the legs of the craft, and almost liquid mud around the hole where the central support had entered the ground. (There had been no rain in the area for several weeks.)

Masse ran down to Valensole, on the outskirts of which is the Cafe des sports. The proprietor, a friend, was just opening for the day, and Masse, shaken and as white as a

sheet, told him part of his story. The cafe owner pressed Masse for further details of what had happened, but the farmer refused to say any more because he feared the rest of his story would not be believed. His friend advised him to report the incident to the gendarmes, but Masse would not. So the cafe proprietor rushed to the field, saw the marks and returned to tell Masse's story.

That evening Masse took his 18-year-old daughter to see the landing site; they saw that only four of the craft's legs had left marks on the ground, and that the mud around the central hole had set like concrete.

The world's reaction

Soon after Masse's experience was made public he was questioned by the chief of the local gendarmerie. Crowds of sightseers visited the field, and Valensole was flooded with representatives of the press, radio and television. On 4 July, overwhelmed with interviews and questions, Masse collapsed, seized with an insuperable desire to sleep. Aime Michel reported that he would have slept 24 hours a day had his wife not awakened him to make him eat.

The initial private investigation was conducted by a local magistrate, who handed his report to *Flying Saucer Review* in October 1965. He said that Masse had 'prevented his daughter approaching too close to the hole for he feared she might suffer some harmful effect from it; indeed, he was worried about possible genetic effects it might have on himself. In the end he filled the hole, which was shaped like an inverted funnel.

Aime Michel interviewed the witness twice at Valensole in 1965, and found him anxious and distressed, still worried about possible effects on his health. During his second visit, Michel showed Masse a photograph of a model based on Lonnie Zamora's description of the UFO he had seen at Socorro, New Mexico in the spring of 1964. Masse was staggered that someone should have photographed *his* machine; but when told that it had been seen in the USA by a policeman he sighed with relief: 'You see then that I wasn't dreaming, and that I'm not mad.'

Two years later UFO investigators visited Maurice Masse again and he took them to see the landing site. It was 10 feet (3 metres) in diameter, and distinguishable because lavender plants around the perimeter were withered, and only weeds grew in the inner area—despite the fact that it had been ploughed and replanted.

Although Masse had recovered from his experience, he was anxious to avoid any more publicity. In an endeavour to hide the location of the landing site he trimmed the mass of weeds to the shape of lavender plants. Eventually, he tore up the vineyard, ploughed the lavender field and sowed it all with wheat.

