



On Assignment

Read More About It ... Please!

by Peter Robbins

With the reorganization of *UFO Magazine*, my mandate as a columnist has been expanded. Many of you are likely familiar with my former column "Webwatch," which was dedicated to UFOs and related topics on the Internet, and in the years I had the honor to peruse this area of interest, the column published information and reviews on literally hundreds of websites. I will certainly continue to bring interesting sites to your attention in the future, as space allows, but intend to cover a wider range of ufological interests from now on. These will include conferences, books, and UFOs in the media, and more. And while the views expressed in "On Assignment" may coincide with those of my editors, they are my own and I am the person who should be held accountable for them. So, off we go ...

This past November a dedicated group of authors, investigators and researchers were joined by an audience of about 250 at the Sunset Station Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas, Nevada, for a unique UFO conference. To the best of my knowledge, The UFO

Crash Retrieval Conference was the first time an American UFO-related event focused in on this most compelling area of study. It was organized by Robert and Ryan Wood, the father-and-son research team whose investigative skills have been focused on authenticating the highly controversial MJ-12 documents.

I flew out to Nevada from New York City along with my friend and colleague Budd Hopkins. Budd, best



Image copyright 2003, Dr. Robert M. Wood & William Louis McDonald Sr.

Purported U.S.A.F. alien autopsies of "EBE-1" and "EBE-2" with forensic-style composites of the living xenomorphs, as commissioned by Dr. Robert M. Wood, Majestic Documents Research Team; as rendered by forensic reconstruction illustrator William Louis McDonald Sr.

known for his best-selling books and pioneering research into the alien abduction phenomenon, spoke about an alleged 1963 UFO crash retrieval north of Albuquerque, New Mexico, information on which had come to him through an abductee he'd worked with. It was a most unique presentation, to be sure.

He and I arrived on Thursday evening and were soon enjoying the company of some of the other speakers, as well as some of the attendees who had arrived early. Friday brought a press conference, then a reception.

It is no mean feat to organize a conference of any sort, and the Woods', aided by their families, did an admirable job for a first effort. While most of the speakers directly addressed the subject of UFO crashes and retrievals, some of the presenters, myself included, delivered papers on matters that related directly or indirectly to the theme of the conference.

Ryan Wood's talk concerned a 1941 UFO crash/retrieval in Cape Girardeau, Missouri that very few of



Photo courtesy Ryan Wood

Ryan Wood speaking on crash retrieval at the first such conference devoted to the topic.

us had heard of previously. Kenn Thomas of *Steam Shovel Press*, one of the nation's leading conspiracy specialists, spoke on the 1947 Maury Island UFO case, which like Ryan's talk, dealt with an alleged crash that predated Roswell. Researcher Art Campbell's lecture was on the 1947 crash retrieval on the Plains of Saint Augustin, New Mexico. Stan Gordon addressed the so-called Kecksburg, Pennsylvania UFO crash, something many of us now know more about thanks to the SCI FI Channel's recent Kecksburg documentary. Robert Wood's compelling subject was the authentication of the SOM-101 Manual, a purportedly authentic government publication devoted to the procedures which the military should observe in dealing with a UFO crash. And what UFO crash/recovery conference would be complete without Stanton T. Friedman, the man who can properly be regarded as the father of Roswell studies? Stan's talk addressed the lies and exaggerations that skeptics and debunkers maintain about Roswell, but which are themselves patently untrue—way to go, Mr. Friedman!

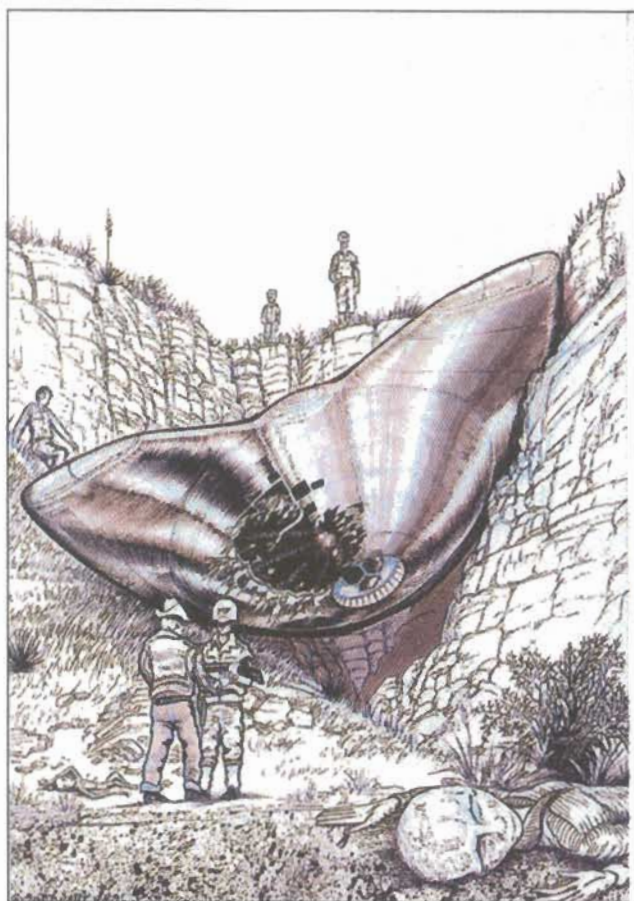
I was particularly pleased to have three of my British colleagues there to present as well. Nick Redfern spoke on UFO crashes in Great Britain, while Matthew Williams' engaging presentation was on Rudloe Manner, a sprawling, documented underground "city" sometimes known as the "British Area 51." And memorable, as always, was Jonathan Downes' talk. Downes, Britain's leading cryptozoologist (a person who studies strange, unusual, or unidentified animals), presented his first-hand findings on UFO crashes in Puerto Rico and the chupacabra.

My lecture was on the strange death of America's first Secretary of Defense, James Forrestal. It is my contention that Mr. Forrestal was a key player in the early days of post-war UFO activity and awareness and that the stress of same contributed to his suffering a well-publicized nervous breakdown upon his retirement. While he was reported to have committed suicide in May 1949, the facts suggest that he was murdered, and that his death was seen as necessary to prevent him leaking classified information, at least in the minds of the powerful men who were involved.

My compliments go out to Robert and Ryan Wood and to their families who contributed greatly to the organizing and running of the conference. Hopefully we will see another such gathering at some point in the future.

Opinion: On the Need to Read

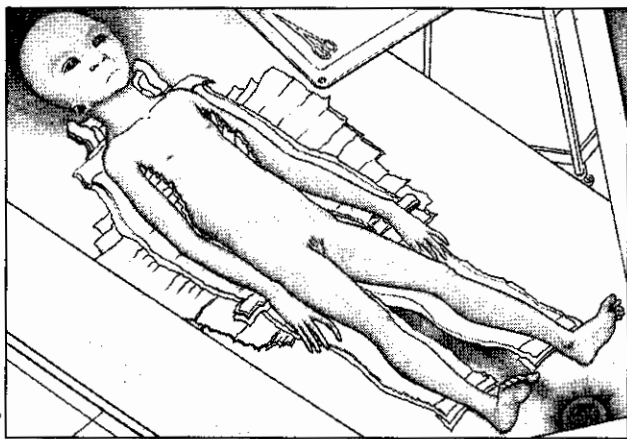
The advent of the Internet, not to mention the accessibility of home-computer technology, has made it easier than many of us had ever imag-



These images were drawn by William McDonald exactly as described in the Special Operations Manual dated April 1954.

ined to access information, and to communicate with friends, colleagues and interested strangers worldwide about UFOs and related subjects, and that's terrific. But technology is a double-edged sword, and paralleling the growth and popularity of the World Wide Web (indeed, who online can even consider life without access to the Internet now?), a chilling trend seems to grow more prevalent each year. More and more of us are reading fewer books, and by extension, books and library buildings seem less important to many of us, especially when compared to their sexier digital counterparts, namely DVDs, computer games, CDs, CD-ROMs, *et al.* For me, this is cause for real concern.

I was fortunate enough to grow up in a family where a love of books and reading was instilled into my sisters and me from the time we were young. As a result, I have taken great pride in building my library, which of course includes many UFO books and numerous unrelated subjects as well. As much as I love film and will continue to add titles to my modest but growing DVD collection, I cannot imagine life without books. Perhaps that has something to do with my being a writer, but it goes beyond



that. Adding a new title to my shelves gives me the opportunity—in action, if not in words—to actively thank an author for his or her hard work—either via the modest royalty they may appreciate from my purchase or when possible, by buying a book directly from the writer, a great plus about many UFO conferences or lectures. But it is also a way to support those dedicated specialty book dealers whose passion and curiosity drive them to keep the latest and often the more obscure or arcane titles in stock. And I know of no individuals in the business more dedicated than Robert and Monica Girard, the driving forces behind Arcturus Books, Inc.

I first became aware of Arcturus Books twenty-odd years ago. Back then it was just Bob working from his home base in upstate New York, but the titles he offered in his monthly catalog amazed me. They included the newest and the oldest, the best known and the most obscure books on the subject, not to mention volumes on cryptozoology, ancient mysteries, and related esoterica. Arcturus relocated to Georgia sometime after that, then to its present home in Florida. To this day I have never seen any catalog or bookstore, large or small, that has a more complete selection of such books. But this invaluable service may soon become a memory. Why? Specialty book dealers are a genuinely endangered species, and as noted previously, fewer and fewer of us are regular readers.

More to the point, books seem to have become devalued in our culture, a trend that is not helped by a growing population with a decreased attention span. And while I've met people who are proud of the number of DVDs they own or video games they've mastered, far too few of us take the same kind of pride in our libraries. Truly, the Internet is amazing, video games are fun, and DVDs are a light year beyond videotapes, but friends, a good (dare I say

great?) personal library can be a source of unequalled pride, not to mention knowledge. So, the next time you are preparing to fork over some of your hard-earned money for a movie or videogame, consider buying a book or books instead. In any case, get into the reading habit. Patronize your local bookstores (the smaller independents are my personal favorites), and by all means contact Arcturus Books and ask them to add you to their monthly e-mail list. You won't regret it, and doing so may enrich your life more than you imagine.

My remarks here are entirely unsolicited, but they are self-serving: if we do not support dedicated, specialized booksellers like the Girard's, Arcturus Books and its counterparts will soon be a memory, and such a loss will diminish the quality of my life, and yours too, even if you aren't aware of it. You know the drill—bad things happen when good people do nothing.

See you in the next "On Assignment." UFO

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