

The Fourth Level Series: Book 3

FIRST CONTACT



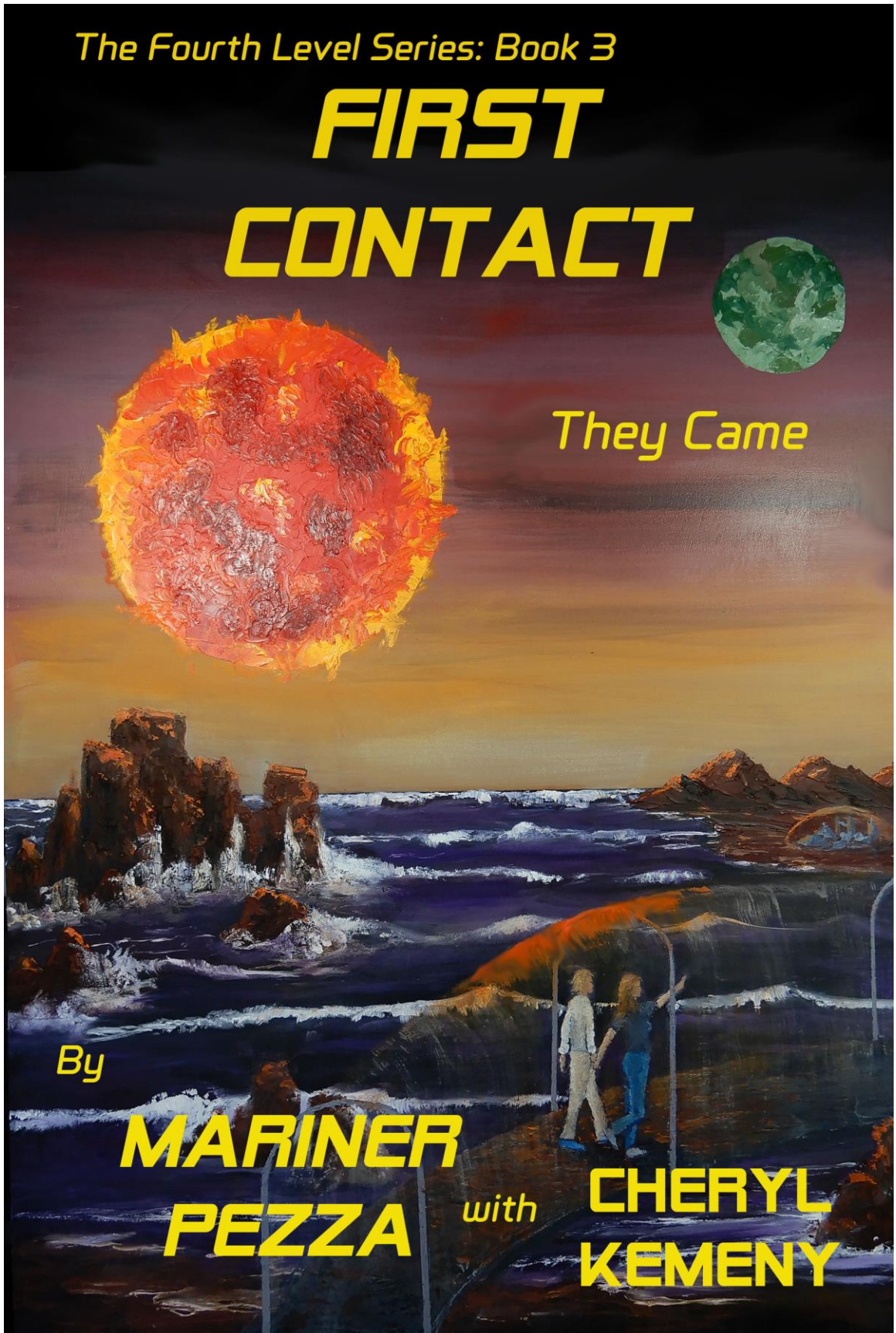
They Came

By

**MARINER
PEZZA**

with

**CHERYL
KEMENY**



Albert replied, "First Level Technology would be equivalent to your stone age. The second level is what you would call Newtonian Mechanics. This would include simple machines like your internal combustion engine. The beginnings of awareness occur at the Third Level. The civilization suspects the four forces and the three fundamentals, Space, Time, and Matter, are linked.

Knowledge of the equation that connects the four to the three: $3!=4$ is the basis of Fourth Level Technology. Of the eight billion people on Earth, you alone, Jack Neufield, have learned this precept. We must determine why that is."



*Cheryl Kemeny,
Noted playwright,
President and founder
of Crystal Theatre*



*Mariner Pezza,
structural engineer,
artist and playwright*

THE FOURTH LEVEL

BOOK 3:

FIRST CONTACT

By Mariner Pezza

Creative Consultant – Cheryl Kemeny

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Chapter 1: The Oval Office:

“What I saw last night; well, for the first time, I had to seriously question . . . my senses. It looked like the goddamn sky was falling! What the hell is going on, and . . . what are we going to tell the people?” For the briefest of moments, Madame President wondered why she chose to run again. This, after a long, hard-fought, second term election, which she won despite being forced to endure the antics of a buffoonish Vice President. Everything was under control: foreign policy, domestic policy, hell, even monetary policy. And she didn’t need this.

“And John,” she referred by the first name to the V.P. seated on a sofa, halfway across the room, “is all this crazy stuff related to your boy Winston’s rather sudden launch?”

“It could be, Ma’am. A whole lot of crazy stuff’s been going on for quite some time now. But our girl Alysha’s on the scene. We’re all waiting for her to report in.”

“Report in? What the hell? She should be in continuous contact. Did someone order radio silence?”

“That’s another big unknown, Ma’am.” The Veep accompanied his reply with a cheesy grin.

“You can’t grin your way out of this one, John. I need answers, and I need them now! At least something to tell the people.”

“The truth, ma’am? I wonder if they; or even we . . . can handle the truth,” reflected General John Tayler, of the Air Force Flight Command. He was seated next to his friend, the Vice President.

“What the hell ‘is’ the goddamn truth? First, tell me that! Then we’ll decide how to message it.” Madame POTUS was beginning to show her age; dark ellipses under each eye, frown lines etched prominent and repeated lower down, adjacent to the mouth. Her blond hair was morphing to gray in a premeditated, stylistic transition. At a certain point, ‘blond’ becomes incongruous. But it was in

the eyes where she revealed a complexity: a collection of visages, from the warmth of laughter to the icy cold of power. Yet, always, the glimmer of insanity stealthily hid not too far beneath the surface.

“Perhaps our Science Advisor can provide the appropriate interpretation,” suggested the President’s Chief of Staff – William Cahill. A tallish man, well-dressed in a stylish, gray suit, though his best feature was his tan – natural, not applied. No doubt, something he worked at. His silvery gray hair matched his suit, which unsuccessfully covered the bald spot on top. The steely color went well with the bronzed tan of his pate. Tan and silver. A good choice versus the bald look. It reflected his freedom from fashion.

The National Science Advisor, a Professor Weingloss, late of E.I.A.G.R. – the Erhart Institute for Advanced Gravitic Research, sat a little straighter, “Well, if you’re referring to the latest atmospherics; it is a well-known fact that the autumnal equinox intensifies the lunar radiance, such that . . .

The President impatiently interrupted, “Are you referring to the Harvest Moon, Edgar?”

The VP mumbling through his teeth, “It’s Alysha; she’s up there riding on her broom . . . with sparklers.” The wit was worthy of a brief flash of his whites.

The Commander in Chief shot him a look, and his teeth vanished.

Weingloss was on the spot; his fleshy face hollowed, and his nose glowed a rosier shade of red, but he continued, “Yes, but the effects of light amplification on a meteor shower could create a spectacle of the type seen over . . .”

“You think the Russkies did it? Are they up to something again?” interrupted the Vice President.

“We’ve thoroughly investigated that possibility, John,” replied General Taylor, “We detected no launches, and their satellites were nowhere near the location in question.”

“All right, I think we can rule out the ‘Russians,’ and most likely the Harvest Moon as well.” The Madame in Chief took charge, looked at her Science Advisor again, telepathically imploring him for something more plausible.

“A solar storm could have triggered the unusual auroras. We are currently experiencing a period of heightened sunspot activity.”

“Sunspots! Sunspots caused the sky to light up like the Fourth of July? But the Sun was on the other side of the Earth!” The boss woman was getting frustrated.

“Yes, yes,” replied the Professor, “but the magnetosphere entirely surrounds the Earth. It is possible that a meteor shower, as it passed through the solar storm, set off an unusual display of aurora borealis, and thus caused so much, uh, concern.”

“Concern? How about panic, like people running wild in the streets! And what about everything else? The time-shifting, the levitation, and let’s not forget, the multitudes who had some kind of a God experience?” She couldn’t help speechifying. It was her stock ‘n trade.

Jeff Unger, the Vice President’s Chief of Staff, entered carrying a tray of small glasses and a variety of decorative bottles. He was soon followed by a White House page pushing a cart, laden with an assortment of pastries, coffee, hot water, and the necessary accouterments.

Jeff served the V.P. a short, stocky glass half full of an amber liquid, “I took the liberty, Sir, of improvising,” he smiled slyly.

The big man’s eyes lit like a couple of supernovae. He autonomically reached for his cigarettes, then caught himself. But his beaming smile spoke volumes, “I like a man who takes the initiative, Jeff, though,” holding up the glass to the light, “this is pretty much the polar opposite of what the doctor ordered – milk of magnesia with a dash of bioflavonoids.”

The conversation stopped with the entry of the White House page. No doubt the daughter of somebody. Nepotism – it’s what makes the world turn.

She was a cute college coed who wore a light, floral print dress, partially covered with a thin, white sweater. The chill of fall was in the air. Her blond hair was garnished with a pink bow, her complexion – fair, and her eyes were blue. She was as innocent as a sacrificial lamb: her workplace – a wolf’s den. Without asking, she proceeded to pour the coffee. The service was comprised of bone china, both the decanter and the cups; very elegant, a soft, semi-translucent white.

The President left her desk, walked around, and joined the party.

“Why, thank you, Mary.” She added a packet of sweetener, “Did you happen to hear our conversation, Dear?”

“Only the part about ‘polar opposites,’ Ma’am.”

“Well, now you know that Old Grand-Dad is the polar opposite of Milk of Magnesia. A valuable piece of information.” The big guy made it his business to tease the pages, especially if they were young, pretty, and innocent.

“And what are you majoring in, Mary?” asked the President.

“Physics and Political Science, Ma’am.”

“Whoa! Talk about polar-opposites!” interjected the Veep, “One deals in truth, the other in . . . uh, fiction?” The witticism was definitely worthy of a lingering head bobble, accompanied by a flash of light.

“Too bad we can’t change that, and at a minimum, interject a little truth into the political world,” added the President.

“Well, Mary,” queried Chief of Staff Cahill, “What field do you prefer – science or politics?”

The VP added, “It seems our young page here is at a crossroads. One, which we all encounter, at some point on our journey through life; the road of light, or the road of . . .”

“Maybe someday the dark road can pass into the light,” mused the President philosophically, “The polar-opposites can be reversed.”

“What do you prefer, Mary, politics or physics?” asked Mr. Cahill

“I think I’ll be pursuing the sciences, Sir,” replied the page.

Well, if my memory serves me correct, science is all about opposites,” opined the POTUS.

“Yes, like matter and antimatter,” offered Jeff Unger, the VP’s Chief of Staff. He beamed at the breadth of his technical scholarship.

“And every action has an equal and opposite reaction,” added Mr. Cahill. People were vying to impress with their knowledge of high school science.

The Vice President joined in, “And that’s the nature of politics, too. How to get people to do the opposite of what’s good for them . . . when they go to the polls.” The quip sparked a round of chortles.

“I think Mary has shown some good sense by choosing the field of science,” added the President, trying to move things along.

“Unless we can convince her to do the opposite?” teased the Big Dude.

“Well, Mary, as a physicist, can you add something to our . . . list of opposites?” asked Jeff Unger, still enthused by the subject.

“In my geology class, we learned that the Earth’s magnetic poles shift, every once in a great while. They reverse and become . . . opposites.”

“Well, Professor, what do you have to say about that?” asked the Lady in Charge.

The Professor was caught sneaking a dollop of Old Grand-Dad into his coffee. He spilled a little on his white lab coat, looked up, and said, “That is possible, but highly unlikely. The Earth’s core is composed of molten iron, which rotates perpendicular to the planet’s axis, causing an electric current. And as we all know, electric currents create magnetic fields that radiate outwards. In order for the fields to reverse . . .” he droned on while applying a linen napkin to his white coat.

“What did you call that again, Mary?” asked the President.

“My Professor called it magnetic pole reversal.”

There was an extended period of silence. Even the Science Advisor ceased his oration and stared. The germ of an idea infected all. And the Halleluiah Choir began to sing, silently, of course.

“Thank you, Mary,” stated the President. The page dutifully exited. “That could be the answer we’re looking for.”

“But, what if it’s not true?” asked the Big Guy.

“It’s a long, dark road we travel on,” answered the Madame in Chief.

Chapter 2: Sara Steinway – Sara

Notes from the journal of Sara Steinway: The Press Conference

“We know that a ‘4,3’ type vehicle was very recently launched from Lockheed Martin’s Palmdale facility, aka, ‘the Skunk Works.’ It’s rumored they encountered something out there, in space, and that this confrontation triggered all the peculiar phenomena we’ve been experiencing. Is this true?”

**Note:* This was my one and only chance. Against million to one odds, the President’s press people chose me, Sara Steinway, freelance reporter, to present a question, via the internet, of course. They’d never give someone like me real press credentials nor allow me anywhere near the White House. And it was all planned, scripted even. I got a call about an hour before the press conference.

“I’m glad you asked that question,” the President looked down at her notes, “er, Miss Steinway . . . who do you represent again?”

“*UFO News*, though I freelance . . . Ma’am.” I was unsure about how to address the most powerful person in the world. Madame? Madame President? Your Majesty?

“Well, Miss Steinway, I can answer your question with three words – ‘magnetic pole reversal.’ We just had a small one, just a wobble. Every hundred thousand years or so, the magnetic poles reverse. And, at this time in our geologic history, the Earth was due. We can expect more of these minor ‘geomagnetic excursions,’ as they’re called, to happen every now and then. Electronics may go a little haywire, toilets may flush backward. My experts tell me there’s no cause for alarm. Mother Earth hiccupped. It’s just something that happens.”

“A follow up please,” I quickly asked. “What about the strange light show we all saw in the sky last night?”

“Perhaps my Science Advisor, Professor Edgar Weingloss, could better answer your question; Professor . . .” The President stepped aside, and a very

sciencey-looking man took the podium. He had barely restrained grayish hair, which struggled mightily to escape his very recent coiffeur adjustment. No doubt implemented by the President's make-up people. He wore thick, rimless glasses that magnified his eyes excessively and partially obscured his fleshy face. But not his most outstanding feature, his rather reddish nose. The redness being, to a certain extent, repeated on his cheeks as well. I wondered for an instant about the cause of "rosacea," a disease peculiar to older men. And, of all things, he wore a white lab coat. Obviously, preplanned. The President really wanted to put on a show.

"Thank you, Madame President," he cleared his throat. "Magnetic pole reversals happen all the time . . . geologic 'time' that is." He looked around to see if anyone appreciated his wit. He was disappointed. "The last full reversal occurred 41,000 years ago; the Laschomp Event. However, what we all just experienced was a small foretaste of what we can expect, oh, in a thousand years or so. The light show you speak of was the aurora borealis extending quite far southward . . . the solar wind impacting on the Earth's magnetic field. Normally the magneto-spherical plasma is confined to the Northern regions. But excited protons can sometimes reach Southern climes. Entirely normal with these types of events."

What he said was pure gobbledygook. I quickly shouted, "So, it's just coincidence that a new vehicle, employing '4,3' technology launched at the same time?"

"Well, as the discoverer of this new branch of science – '4,3', I would know if there was a correlation . . ."

The President nudged him aside, returning to the mic, "Well, Miss Steinway, our Air Force and related contractors like Lockheed Martin are actively testing new designs every day. It's called . . . progress." Almost as an afterthought, she added, "And the aliens are not coming, Miss Steinway, there's no need for us to 'run for our lives.'" The statement precipitated a round of laughter. Then she turned to the room, and a mob of arms rose, accompanied by a chorus of "Madame President!"

The President pointed and said, “George.” She made it her business to know the celebrity reporters.

“Madame President, should we be worried about the effects this event will have on the markets?”

“No, George. With the policies, my administration is pursuing . . .”

My attention slipped away. I had just had my 15 minutes; granted, it was closer to two minutes and derisive, but still, fame is fame. And the good thing was, the President actually answered my questions. The bad thing was; I didn’t believe a word she said. But I had just been seen by millions, and that can’t be bad for my career. As a reporter and researcher, I want my work to be read, and being seen is a close second. As to being seen, I like to think that I’m not unsightly. At least, I’m normal. Normal height – 5’6”; normal physique – not heavy, not thin, light skin with dark hair, almost black. But some say my legs are slightly longish, good for running, which I hate to do. Though I jog once in a while to boost my energy levels – I have a lot to do. Oh, and one more thing; I don’t play the piano. With a name like “Steinway,” that was the ever-present question. Made me dread the first day of school and the teacher’s inevitable query:

“Oh, that’s a nice name, Sara. Do you play the piano?” This would prompt a round of snickers from my classmates. Maybe that’s why I never played – personal rebellion against outside expectations.

And just what were those “outside expectations”? As the youngest daughter of Jewish immigrants, the fourth generation, I was expected to engage in a respected profession, like a doctor or lawyer. Though being a professional writer at the ripe old age of 23 is acceptable, just not the UFO kind. But facts being what they are, I simply cannot ignore the most important story of our time – the knowledge that we are not alone in the Cosmos. The evidence is overwhelming, and the truth must be presented. This is my life’s mission. Further, I sense we’re on the brink of momentous events.

**Footnote:* I do play the violin, though not as well as I would like.

Magnetic pole reversal? Could that possibly be true? I did a quick search . . . and yes, we were due. They happen every so often, though the magnetic strength varies. The last full reversal occurred 800,000 years ago. The Earth's magnetic field completely flipped. If you were around back then and holding a compass, the needle would have swung north. Did it lead to planetary doom? Obviously not, since our ancestors were not wiped out. I mean, we're all still here, right?

What's more, a magnetic pole reversal would not cause gravity to vacillate, a peculiar phenomenon felt by many, including me. Nor would it cause Time to fluctuate, seemingly slow down, speed up, and even repeat. Throw in the unusual "god experiences" felt by many, plus the peculiar atmospherics and, I must conclude, that our Madame President engaged in misrepresentation. In other words, she told a whopper.

I listened to the entire press conference; it didn't last long. A practiced prevaricator knows how to keep it simple and to keep it short. And to never embellish. But "magnetic pole reversal"? Madame President gets an A for originality with that fabrication. The phony reporters asked more phony questions about the latest scandals. They were going to miss the greatest story ever. Good, that just leaves more for me.

Notes on the setting:

My business is to discern – facts from fiction, information from disinformation, and more specifically – the identified from the unidentified as it pertains to flying objects. In plain English – my business is UFOs. And I was not alone. I was surrounded by a thousand like-minded citizens who had gathered to watch "the launch." Where? In the desert next to Lockheed Martin's Skunk Works in Palmdale, California. Everyone had encamped on the sand, among the desert trees and silvery-green scrub. Like an oasis in the wasteland, there were cars with adjacent tents, recreation vehicles, usually of the older models, a few converted school buses, plus one 1960 Airstream Tradewind camper with an awning set up outside. That was mine. I bought it from an elderly couple for

\$2,170. It was a good deal but needed work. With my family's help, I had a second home. Though normally, I still lived with my parents in Santa Clarita about half the time.

The atmosphere was festive. It was an interesting phenomenon, this assemblage of UFO spectators. One has to admit, it was an odd pastime – alien watching. Word travels fast by way of social media, and people gather at the likely sites; trading stories, recalling other encounters, and discussing the latest news; plus, selling memorabilia. And there was a certain measure of self-organization going on, a clustering among the larger masses – various clubs, news organizations, and the friends and relatives of the real Lockheed Martin employees. They were the cognoscente, those who actually knew what was happening. One unifying aspect was the cameras. Everyone had a camera ready, many were expensive set-ups on tripods, so many in fact, that it looked like an army of stick-figures out there, and they were all saluting the sky. One other common denominator was the music. Where there're people, there's music. It's a fact of life. Pickup trucks, tailgates, and make-shift stages were rigged together, supporting musicians of every stripe but mostly acoustic guitarists singing their songs. It was UFO Woodstock out there.

I had pulled my rig a short distance off the road. I drove a 1992 Jeep Wagoneer, dark blue with fake wood sides. Bought it from an old beau while we were still together. Today, he regrets the sale, tried to buy it back for considerably more; I declined. Hey, next time, don't cheat on me. I was seated at a table under a red and white striped awning. It was nice; it rolled up into a permanent fixture attached to the side of the Camper and made for a lovely outdoor terrace – anywhere. And it's where I had just talked to the President of the United States, in front of millions. And although I was very serious about my work, I was having more fun than one should legally be allowed. And guess what? It wasn't; legally allowed, that is. The Bureau of Land Management Rangers came, but more on that later.

Notes on the launch:

It was during the previous evening, shortly after sundown, when we all witnessed – the launch. Only, it wasn't exactly a launch per se; it defied all the anticipated expectations. There was no giant rocket blasting off with the explosive force of tons of chemical propellants. In fact, there was no exhaust at all, nor was it accompanied by a deep roar, the kind that could be heard for miles. There was none of that. Indeed, we would have missed it entirely had we not been tipped off.

The word was out. First, Weingloss published his paper online, to multiple sites, simultaneously. And it instantly flashed around the world. I must tip my hat to the Professor for that. The benefits of 4,3 would not be hoarded by the few and denied to the many. Interestingly, he also explained how to use it. How it was “utilized” at his institute, the Erhart Institute for Advanced Gravitic Research. Currently, it was being peer-reviewed, and the various results dominated the news every day, often with video proof. 4,3 was the real thing, unlike cold fusion, though that sort-or worked. And Lockheed Martin has thousands of employees, my father being one. Sure, confidentiality agreements were signed, but people talk, and the unknown inevitably becomes known, especially to cajoling daughters of the reporter variety.

But what could not be hidden behind sworn secrecy was the excitement painted on every employee's face; brighter eyes often focusing on places not readily apparent. Plus, the constant half-smile that exposed a certain kind of satisfaction, the kind that can only be found in people whose lives were being well-lived. And that was my father – Ferenc Steinway – his contemporaries called him Frank, but at work, he was Doctor Steinway. With a Ph.D. in Electromagnetics, he had earned the honorific.

The most blatant evidence of secrets unkept was all around me. The thousands of spectators who had gathered in the desert not too far from the “Plant.” Seemingly drawn to the event as if by some newly discovered force. We all came, myself included, to celebrate the dawning of a new era, a celestial age – “let the stars shine in.” And it was a real happening; good food, good music with more than a whiff of cannabis in the air. By the way, that was my grandfather's

claim to fame – he attended Woodstock. I think he was a hippy; he still wears turquoise Indian jewelry.

And what was it that lifted off? The kind of thing I see every day in the periodicals I write for: *UFO Review*, *UFO Digest*, and pretty much every publication, documentary, and TV show that deals with UFOs. It was a genuine flying saucer. It looked to be about 100' across, fairly flat like a round silver plate, only with a transparent dome on top. And it was majestic in its grace and elegance. Quietly, without a sound, it rose, slowly at first, then it gradually accelerated. My little camcorder has a huge zoom, 120x – a wonder of modern technology, and it was on. I trained it on the dome and saw several people. Some were in what looked to be swivel chairs, not strapped and buckled into fancy blast-off seats. Others were standing and even walking around. Very atypical.

Suddenly, a couple of very sophisticated fighter jets raced overhead. The sound was louder than a thunderclap, so loud it could actually be felt. My windows rattled, my door jimmied open, and I swear, I felt it in my teeth. The Saucer had protection. I saw two more bristling airframes in the distance. The nation's most advanced space vehicle would not be venturing forth alone, at least not for some measure of the trek upward. The little red light in my viewfinder reminded me of what I was seeing – likely one of the most significant events in human history: the construction and initial launch of Earth's first "4,3" type conveyance.

It was early evening, and the sun had set. Dusk was transitioning to darkness. As I gazed upward, the stars seemed more brilliant than usual, and the void of space looked darker. A speckled band of stars, like a shiny ribbon, swept across the sky. A not-so-little reminder of where we were – at home in our own special Galaxy – the Milky Way. Though, only one among billions. Were we destined to explore it? Or were we coming a little late to the party? When the vehicle finally blinked out of sight, cheers and applause erupted, sporadic at first, then growing into a full-fledged standing ovation. In my opinion, the performance deserved the standing-o.

Rumors abounded as to why the vessel was built; for what purpose – an “alien rendezvous”? Among my colleagues, this was the most prevalent theory and the one I personally subscribed to. Other questions were: why the rush? No sooner was the new theory, 4,3, released; then presto, something was built and launched. Surely it went up untested. My father was mum on the subject, but silence is, in itself, an answer. And in this case – it was a very loud affirmative. It was a good time to be a UFO reporter. Career-wise, I had chosen well. But another question dominated my thought processes: Why did they have to meet the aliens? What was so important? It was about then that the seed of obsession germinated, and it was to grow large. I intended to discover all; and . . . to reveal all as well. The people have a right to know.

Notes on the light show:

A short time after the launch, the light show began. It was as though someone was celebrating the successful launch. Only, the display seemed to occur very high up, maybe a thousand miles or so. At first, there were only a couple of beams, constant yellow beams, then blue ones that seemed to intersect. After that, the real display began – like the Fourth of July. All different kinds of bursts; spreading chrysanthemums, shooting comets, erupting roman candles, the whole works. And there were sheets of light also, like auroras, in different colors. Some pale, just a slight blurriness in the air. Others, colorful blasts of iridescence. It was interesting. My fellow spectators “oo’d” and “aah’d,” then we all clapped some more. The event had turned out to be a major happening, and for certain, it met with everyone’s expectations, including mine. In due course, the pyro-technics concluded, and I returned to my table under the canopy.

The raid:

After the launch and the fireworks, everyone, including me, thought that that was it; the show was over. We were wrong. An army of brown uniforms

with sidearms arrived. And they weren't crashing the party. They were there to terminate it. Who knew the Bureau of Land Management had its own army? To be fair, a plethora of Park Rangers were also in attendance. They fanned out through the crowds showing pieces of paper and citing laws, particularly HR 6 – something: improper use of Federal Lands. One man with extra regalia climbed onto a stage and proceeded to shout through a hand-held loudspeaker, "This is an improper use of public lands. You must vacate immediately." The statement sparked numerous debates among the more lawyerly concerning what is "public," who is the "public," and what is the "proper use" of public lands. Is watching the launch of a new type of space vehicle proper use? All valid arguments, in my opinion. To their credit, the Rangers, as they were collectively called, were trying to be nice, at least – humane. They dispersed among the throngs arguing these points.

A couple of youngish men strolled over to my veranda. They looked more like the kind you'd find on a barstool, not the badge-wearing, enforcer type. One wore green "camos," not exactly appropriate for the desert, the other – plain khakis. Additionally, each sported a thick black belt, trimmed out with numerous satchels, and of course – the ultimate symbol of authority – the gun, holstered, thankfully. Their heads were covered, a khakis baseball cap on the khakis-guy and a floppy-brimmed matching green camo hat on the camo-guy. Attached to their upper arms were emblems: a pretty picture of mountains, a receding river, with a pine tree in the foreground. Underneath it read, "Bureau of Land Management." Their eyes were cautious and curious, but they were smiling. I sensed a little "boy meets girl" awkwardness there. Just normal chemistry, I suppose.

"You know you're illegally parked on public land." The question was stated by the camo-guy clumsily.

I could have employed the "I'm a member of the public argument, even pulled out my bogus press card, which granted me access to public areas. But I didn't get the chance.

The khakis-guy sidled over to my camera rig and commented, “Nice camera. That’s the new model, isn’t it? I have the older version – the AR-300. Great little camera.” It was funny – he wanted to talk photography.

It was then that the real crazy stuff started happening. There was a sudden blurriness. At first, I thought there was something wrong with my eyes, then the scene, somehow – repeated itself. The two ranger-guys walked over again and reiterated the previous conversation; about my illegal parking and my “nice” camera equipment. After the scene replayed, we just stared in total confusion. The odd part was, we all knew that we had just relived the same scene twice. Somehow time itself had slipped backward a couple of beats. I looked around, and the whole campground was frozen and in a total state of disorientation.

“Did you just . . .” As the camo-guy said this, he levitated. He simply started to rise off the ground. Slowly; first one inch, then two but steadily. His partner followed suit. I was more firmly planted to the ground, being seated at the table, but I felt light and had to hold on. In short order, my two rangers had impacted with the canvas canopy and were holding on to the frame. A look of profound wonderment was etched on their faces. Then they fell. The sand was soft, and consequently, so was their landing. What was bizarre, though, was the camo-guy. Upon recovering, he dropped to his knees. Then he blessed himself and began to pray. It was very strange.

I looked out. The whole encampment was in disarray. People were picking themselves up, gathering fallen gear – cameras, tables, umbrellas, and such. One young man picked up his guitar, ascended a stage, and started to sing:

“Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound,

That saved a wretch like me.

I once was lost, but now I’m found

T’was blind but now I see . . .”

A few of his neighbors joined in, and then a few more. I have to admit to feeling a similar compulsion. I joined in, though I did not know the words. So did my two new friends. Before long, all the musicians were playing, and the entire campground was belting out in heartfelt harmony. It was a sight to behold, a little like the “Hallelujah Chorus,” singing from the mountaintop. And it continued for several minutes. It was a communal religious experience. An omnipresent oneness accompanied by a sensation of universal love. And our would-be oppressors were no longer inclined to oppress.

I offered my two ranger friends a seat. We had much to discuss, but not my illegal parking. We introduced ourselves; their names were Jesus Fernandez, in the camos, and Julius LeClair and they were nice guys, as I initially suspected. Jesus aspired to be a documentarian; I tried to steer him towards UFOlogy. He said he might come back with his gear. Julius, aka – Jules, said he was writing a novel. I told him he had a great name for a novelist, and for sure, he now had reams of new material to work with. This led to a general discussion of the recent events. The conversation ranged from the scientific, my interpretation, to the supernatural – Jules’ view, to the religious, which Jesus expressed quite assertively. I brought out three wine glasses, a couple of candles, and a bottle of Mateus, and we had a good ole time, but with reverence. After all, we had just shared a religious experience.

In due course, the commanding officers terminated the operation, and the Rangers withdrew, including my new amigos. We exchanged cards, promising to keep in touch. Then I withdrew as well into the camper. I had an article to write, more than one.