

Sky Watches and Balls of Light – Distant Encounters in the Night

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My how time flies; it's now the 17th anniversary of my first real exposure to the Minnesota UFO scene, when I attended the 1994 Science and Politics of UFO Research conference in Saint Paul. For me, it was the beginning of a long, adventurous journey full of events – and I'm convinced that that journey has only begun. Some time later, once I had finished grad school and had the time to do so, I joined MUFON and became a field investigator. Two years after that, I became a certified hypnotherapist. The rest is history... ☺

Like many other UFO investigators, as our understanding of the phenomenon evolves, I have occasionally stepped back and examined events in my own life. I have drawn many different and changing conclusions over fifteen years, often contradictory and ambiguous. Yet one thing I have noted is that, to the best of my knowledge and despite my wishes to do so, I have never seen a UFO up close and personally, never had a consciously remembered close encounter. (Note: I have often heard people repeat the old saying, be careful what you wish for).

Numerous times over these years, I have attended sky watches, CSETI contact circles, etc. All of these have been with the hope of seeing something for myself – yet so far, nothing – at least nothing unambiguous. There have been quite a few distant encounters, sightings of interesting lights in the sky, daylight specks that acted in an unexpected way, etc.- but so far nothing that I could clearly say was visiting us from another world.

Recently, several of us travelled to a location in west central Minnesota to visit the home of an experiencer who has described repeated on-going contact with the phenomenon. This particular person has described balls of light at treetop level, large up-close triangle sightings, abduction experiences, etc. Thus, I wondered if this this time, I would observe something meaningful, sizeable, and clearly unexplained.

I need to thank the person – whom I will not name, as I do not have his permission at this time – for his gracious hospitality. He fed us and provided shelter for the night and while there, we took a number of interesting photographs of light traces, balls of light and flashes in the sky.

Several of the more intrepid skywatchers stayed up all night. However, I eventually packed it in, chilled in the October night air. Of course, during the time I was asleep, those remaining awake observed several interesting things in the sky. One sighting was of a ball of light moving rapidly across the sky, apparently too fast and in a trajectory not consistent with a satellite, the wrong lighting for an airplane, and too slow for a meteor.

(Note: I later learned that another camera apparently caught an interesting image of a ball of light, not sure whether it was the same one. As of this writing, I have not yet seen this image).

While I was awake, both before I packed it in and later, after I waking up, we observed several intriguing flashes in the sky. One was a multiple flash in the constellation of Orion, nearly due south of us at the time. Another was a similar series of flashes in the constellation of Cassiopeia, nearly due north of us. Both flashes occurred several times, in nearly (but not exactly) the same location in the sky. This suggested that they were not geostationary, as the flashes were not in the exact same place. In addition, the location in the northern sky would not be possible for a satellite in geosynchronous orbit. So scratch that explanation.

Earlier in the evening, we had observed an Iridium flare, the reflection of the sun from the solar panels on one of the many Iridium satellites passing overhead. This was sudden, bright at first, fading to nothing over several seconds. Yet, our mystery flashes were different, only momentary, repeating a few seconds to minutes later a few degrees from their earlier location. Were these unknowns? At least at the time, they were – technically meeting the criteria of being UFOs – something unidentified in (or from) the sky.

After I had returned home (and slept for quite a few hours), I did some internet research into the flashes we had seen. I found an on-line discussion involving high inclination, high eccentricity satellite orbits with references to such flashes. The explanation was that they were reflections from satellites in what is called a [Molniya orbit](#), with a perigee (lowest point) of under 200 kilometers and an apogee (highest point) of around 40,000 kilometers. Somewhere near its apogee, it would most likely emit the flashes we saw, appearing nearly but not exactly stationary.

Case closed? Not so fast...

One of the sky watchers had taken a fair number of pictures at periodic intervals during the night. On at least one occasion, his camera caught one of the flashes. In one picture, it was clearly bright and visible. In the next picture, a second or so later, the light was no longer there. Was it a satellite flash? According to him, the light in the photograph appeared too bright. Since I am not an expert on digital photography, I cannot say one way or the other. It may be explained, or maybe not, but once again, it was an ambiguous light in the sky, a momentary flicker of the unknown.

As in past sky watches, this time we observed a number of interesting lights, perhaps explainable, perhaps not. At the very least, for me it was another moment in which I could take in the beauty of the sky far from city lights. It was a brief moment of darkness, mysterious lights and ambiguity – another chapter in an on-going story of distant encounters in the night.