

FICTION

THE MICKEY MOUSE OLYMPICS

*Each athlete was developed
to be perfect for each event—which was
awful for the Olympics!*

BY TOM SULLIVAN

A world apart two specially chartered airliners took to the sky within an hour of each other. First there was the Aeroflot Soviet colossus lifting off the runway of the secret development base near Minsk. Forty minutes later a Pan Am curl-winged behemoth left the maximum-security training complex at Provo, Utah. Each flight maintained a fighter escort in international air space. Each followed a path guaranteed free of man-made weather by its crisis-detection satellite overhead.

To the personnel on board it was unbreached boredom. Occasionally someone made a boast. "We will bury them eh Nikita?" "Hey Shit, when we start shootin', those suckers gonna bleed red!"

The landings were accomplished on isolated runways of Havana's José Martí Airport. The triple-wire fences were two hundred meters away. In each case a telephoto lens foreshortened the distance. "Podolyak!" screamed the Russian when he saw the films of the American disembarkment hours later. "Fraud!" echoed the American at his own private screening of the Russians' arrival.

The next afternoon they stood side by side in the gamed Olympic stadium, mouthing the oath of brotherhood and fair play. A Babel. One hundred sixteen countries. Sixty-eight languages. When it was done and the crowd's roar had chilled the platform, Duncan Sherman poured a syrupy smile onto his Russian counterpart.

"Mr. Smerdyakov," he said with benign formality. "I believe we can dispense with a translator."

Georgi Smerdyakov allowed his own smile to fill out. "Yes, I speak a little English, Mr. Shuer-mann."

Politely but boldly they took each other's measure. The Russian saw a scruffy, tweed-bearded man white and gray perhaps an ex-athlete, atrophied now with an indoor skin—a below-ground skin. The American observed a face like an omelette, pan-

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shaped slightly askew the USSR executive chairman had never laced a sport shoe, he felt sure already and he doubted that the cherubic Smerdyakov could even reach his socks without pulling a hamstring.

"I trust you had a pleasant flight," said Sherman.

"Very pleasant. And you had a smooth landing, I hope."

"Didn't you see it?"

Smerdyakov was caught off guard momentarily, but then Sherman's teeth flashed and they shared a freacherous laugh.

"I hope the fog didn't spoil your pictures," the Russian said. "We had to use a computer to sharpen ours."

"Ah, Smerdyakov, could a little fog keep us from seeing those weight lifters of yours—the ones that had to get off the plane sideways?"

The suitcases were bulky! Smerdyakov waved his hand fussily. "We were concerned about that four-meter basketball player of yours, yes? He didn't bump his head, did he? Or was it a female high jumper? My trainer insists it was wearing lipstick!"

"You must have seen Stilt carrying his girl friend on his shoulders. Our tallest is barely nine feet. About three times the height of one of your dwarfs."

"Drawers?" Smerdyakov feigned a language gap.

"Munchkins. You know mice, midgits, little folk?"

Our gymnastics team is young, Smerdyakov shrugged helplessly. "But let me congratulate you on that odd bone structure so many of your athletes have. For us to equal it, we would have to violate every rule laid down at the second Olympic Convention on Genetic Manipulation."

Like all the Russian staff, Smerdyakov had a doctorate in genetic engineering. Sherman resented that. He couldn't afford to get into details. So he straightened dutifully as the Olympic torch passed by. Round the track it went, an unruly presence in an otherwise respectful pavane. Up the steps it went, to the top of the stadium. There it too straightened. Flags fluttered. The Olympic chain ascended hydraulically—a Walt Disney touch. Who else could afford to build the facilities? After the Games the second and fourth rings in the chain would become mouse ears. The flame now leaped to its dish and pillared upward. Another roar avalanched onto the platform where Smerdyakov and Sherman stood. Champagne was poured among the reps.

"To my friend Shuer-mann," Smerdyakov addressed. And delivered a toast in Russian that sent his vestigial transiator into hysterics.

Sherman nodded gratefully. "To Smerdyakov," he said, lifting his glass. "ay May lightning-lay ike-stray is-hay ass ay!"

Sherman was at the track and field

stadium before the events officially started the next morning, watching the athletes arrive dictating notes to his Man Friday. As the homogenized delegations cast off their sweat suits for warm-up, he hit upon a scheme for identifying those without numbers. "Autograph?" he would ask, tapping pad and pencil in the face of a select athlete. "Auto-graph please?" The flattered participant would then sign, while Man Friday snapped a picture. This was necessary because no head-to-head international competition had taken place in fifteen months. That was because of the mandatory chromosome tests. And the chromosome tests were required because of genetic cheating. No one wanted a ruling in an Olympic year.

Sherman saw his first sideshow when the Russian women came out on the field. He could tell they were women because the CCCP was on the left jacket breast as distinguished from the men's right-sided monogram. When the jackets were off

•The American team lay basking like lizards at the side of a mat on which a freestyle paperweight match ensued between a thyroidal cretin from the Ukraine and a Yankee hump•

there was no distinction. But what really jarred off Sherman—what really filled the mold cast of suspicion and shaped to nonhuman form—were the jumpers.

"My Gawd-d..." he drawled.

"A flea circus," Man Friday acknowledged tersely.

With piano-wire legs proportioned as uniformly as sausage links, the Russian bevy looked like the insect equivalent of mermaids. In unison they began loosening up. Their jack-in-the-box knee bends, frenetic locomotive drill, and gazellelike bounding erased any doubts.

"Protest, protest, protest," Sherman whispered, rapidly snapping his fingers.

Man Friday grabbed a fistful of forms from his attaché case. But salt 'n' pepper whiskers were already flowing amid the low orbital ballet. "Autograph—get the camera ready, Felix—autograph, please." Man Friday wrestled with attaché, protest forms and camera.

Suddenly a basso profundo erupted and one of the females advanced on Sherman, rubbing the air in front of her with bunched fingers as if wiping a splat from a windshield.

"It's the coach, sir," said Felix.

Sherman held ground.

"She says if you come near her girls again, she'll have Ludmilla kick you in the in the."

"Got it, Felix," Sherman grinned falsely in retreat, saluting with his pencil. A few of the girls giggled. Deeply.

"See that? See that? Touchy. No way, Felix. There's no way they can survive a protest." Sherman drew himself erect, slowed his voice. "Fill it out. A blanket challenge. We'll get the names later."

"What'll I charge, sir?"

"Charge anything. Say you saw them rubbing their hind legs together and chirping. Say their calves are longer than their thighs. We want a chromosome match-up with their parents, damn it! And if necessary their great-great-grandparents—right back to the jackrabbits!"

"Yes, sir," said Felix.

The Russian translation of this scene concurrently took place in Gymnasium 1 of the Multi-Sports Hall, to which Smerdyakov had gone in response to a panic call from the Soviet wrestling coach.

The American team lay basking like lizards at the side of a mat on which a freestyle paperweight match ensued between a thyroidal cretin from the Ukraine and a Yankee pyramidal hump. The pyramidal hump sported its apex between its shoulder blades.

"I could hang my hat on that!" the Russian coach pointed.

Smerdyakov's eyes bugged, his chin retracting into the folds of his neck.

"We've won all our contests but the American ones," the coach shrieked. "They are impossible to pin. Hunchbacks. All of them. We can't even win on points. Pankin bruised his chest executing a hug!"

"Protest the losses. When does Korolenko wrestle the American?"

"Next."

The Ukrainian cretin had the American by the legs and was wheeling him around the circle on his hump. Smerdyakov dropped to all fours and beaf the mat. The American promptly scissored his opponent down for the count.

"Korolenko!" called the Russian coach.

Up stood Korolenko, stripping off his sweats. His coach massaged him with a pair of gloves, and the dry rasp was audible throughout the gym.

"He's got scales!" came an incredulous whisper from the capitalist side.

The Quasimodo of the moment balked at the edge of the circle, no longer sure of his quarry. "Is eczema contagious?" he was heard to quail. The American trainer assured him that the scruffy corn husk from Siberia had merely peeled in the Cuban sun. But at first touch the American wrung his hand, and when the Russian clutched him with piggish grunts, he screamed as if impaled.

"That ain't skin!" he appealed with a tormented look to the side. "This guys an alligator!"

CONTINUED ON PAGE 122

MICKY MOUSE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 52

The referee spoke mostly Japanese but understood screams. He motioned Korolenko close for examination.

He's been fibreglassed. The American clamored, indicating the rows of abrasions on his torso. "I ain't wrestling no pineapple."

By this time both teams had edged forward in bilingual outrage. The official, who refrained from touching the specimen, suddenly straightened and announced in Oriental English, "No o foe-in sub stints." He then chopped the air smartly with both hands, bidding the bout resume, and, when the American gingerly donned his jacket and savagely denounced his toe as a "Communist cactus," the beleaguered ref declared a forfeit.

Smerdyakov shrugged and sat down opposite the American coach at the scorers' table to fill out another protest.

And so it went the first week until the Olympic Committee, as a sign of helplessness, convened a private meeting of the two antagonists at the Havana Libre Hotel.

Sherman, more tweed than ever, his skin a deeper-below-ground skin than before, and inhabiting a blue blazer he had not climbed out of for thirty-six hours, appeared first. Smerdyakov dallied psychologically long at a nearby coffee shop but showed up equally worn, his fat and flexible face delivered of cherubic charm, a post-pregnancy landscape, rilled, jellied. The two of them faced each other across the polished table regarding each other's lapel pins.

"Gentlemen," began the wise old Olympic patriarch sitting peripherally to them, "we are all sorely tried."

Whatever else he said was inconsequential. Smerdyakov knew it. Sherman knew it. The two other Executive Committee members knew it. The grinning Cuban who seemed to have wandered in by mistake knew it. Each loathed the transcultural experience of an old man's speech. They had not come to be assuaged. They had come to cross swords, to bleed, and then—if enough blood of the right color was spilled—to bury.

"On behalf of the United States," Sherman flickered to life at the proper moment, "and for the sake of the integrity of the Games, I demand gene scans of the following Soviet entries: Ivan Spadunka, center—"

"Spadunka!"

"Center forward, Soviet basketball team," Sherman overrode Smerdyakov's dismay.

"We'll trade you a gene scan of Spadunka for a gene scan of the humanoid you call Silit!"

"and of pole vaulters Olga K. and Mikhail C.," Sherman continued undaunted, "discus thrower Pyotr I—"

"Inber or Izmaylov?"

"The one with the cast-iron forearms."

"All our field athletes have fine supinator and pronator development," declared Smerdyakov.

"Then I want scans of all of them."

"And what do you expect to find? Evidence of chemical synthesis?"

"You wouldn't be that clumsy."

Smerdyakov laughed smugly. A laugh deep inside the neck and shoulders. Internal peep show.

"We suspect they are *chimeras*," Sherman said slowly. "Reaggregated genes you've somehow controlled at the blastocyst stage—four parents, eight parents, whatever pick and choose."

"Ab surd!" A touch too much anger. Smerdyakov attempted to cover it with reckless scorn. "Eight parents! Of course. Eight models of mediocrity instead of two. Makes sense. Something from nothing, yes. Shuer-mann? If you find the genetic model for this kind of development in anyone's ancestors, I'll be glad to call Inber

He waved the paper loose from his jacket, . . . "Fencers whose arms are longer than their legs, water polo players with dewclaws who secrete oil like seals, and this goalie of theirs!"

and Izmaylov home myself. Why not? We can simply enter their parents!"

"No, we won't find the right genetic model," Sherman agreed. "But we should be able to prove that their gene scans don't meet any possible permutations of the gene scans of any human parents you produce."

Smerdyakov began thumping the table. "Proof, proof, proof. Shuer-mann! None of this guilt by omission of evidence. Would your capitalist justice admit such foolishness? Where is the sire for this genetic circus you accuse us of?"

"Popeye!" Sherman blurted sarcastically.

"Pup-eye?" Smerdyakov blinked. "Who is Pup-eye?"

"We aren't dealing with legalities," said Sherman. "We're dealing with Olympic admissibility."

"Who is Pup-eye?" Smerdyakov asked the patriarch.

"Pup-eye," that august being informed him.

"Pope-eye," the Cuban was heard to repeat with inner amusement.

Smerdyakov looked concerned. The

Popeye. Could it be the English equivalent of the actual sources they had used?

and unless convincing genealogies are forthcoming for all the entrants under question, they must be disqualified and stripped of their medals. Sherman was concluding.

"Genealogies?" Smerdyakov sopranoed. The American neurotic wants us to have pedigrees! Incredible. First he invents an army of mutations, insulting the flower of Soviet youth, then he finds an ancestor for them—this, this mysterious Poop eye, who probably exists only in imperialist folklore, and now, now he takes it upon himself to strip us of our medals! Curiously he makes no mention of Soviet protests. But I too have a list." He waved the paper loose from his jacket pocket. Fencers whose arms are longer than their legs, water polo players with dewclaws who secrete oil like seals, and this goalie of theirs they call Pon-toon! No need to go on. No need to tell you about the phone call to Spadunka at 3 AM announcing that his pregnant wife, Vera, had been arrested naked on a statue of Lenin in Novgorod. No need to mention the anonymous gifts our athletes receive—radios that don't turn off, an art farm with a secret exit! No, I merely ask that the Americans on *my* list be suspended from further competition until their gene scans are also approved. We look for Poop-eyes too!"

Sherman snapped his fingers. "The medal count, Felix."

"Gold: twenty-eight/twenty-eight. Silver: sixteen/eleven. Bronze: twenty-three/twenty-two. us. That's without any protests upheld, of course."

"And without the fifteen hundred free, which is in the bag," Sherman stirred a lime rickey and eyed the swimming pool on TV. He had given up troubleshooting on the front line and turned his hotel suite into a nerve center with five phones and a television after finding out his blood was nectar to Cuban mosquitoes. "How does it figure if all the protests are upheld, Felix?"

Man Friday sighed like a steamed lobster. "Just about a dead heat in gold and silver. They might edge us in bronze."

"Nobody looks at bronze. The way I see it, when all the dust settles today, this fifteen hundred will be the difference. That's the way I see it. You see it that way, Felix?"

"I don't know, sir. The Russians haven't seen Thompson swim yet. They might protest. I . . ."

A long pause brought Sherman's glance "What?"

"Isn't that Smerdyakov, sir?"

"Where?"

"There. Back of the starting blocks."

Sherman leaned close enough to count the electronic dots on the TV, several of which, it seemed to him, did approximate the silly-putty face of Giorgi Smerdyakov.

"That no-good-nik. That crummy Commie!" Sherman felt a transcendental tingle flowing down the back of his neck. Eupho-

ria before death Thompson was the last sure thing the United States had If they couldn't pull this out before tomorrow, it meant losing An eternity of losing for him He saw himself as the final contestant acknowledging defeat at cocktail parties vaguely introduced, shunned whispered about—"That's Sherman, he blew it in Havana"

Sherman arrived bloodless at the natatorium but managed to stroll casually through the press of dewed flesh and crisp white linen on the deck The pool was a caldron of warm-up, the officials were trying to organize back-up timers behind the automatic touch-pads Smerdyakov regarded his approach with cynicism

"Giorgi-ii!" Sherman affected "I just had to see you to tell you I'm glad we got that awful protest meeting behind us It was a chance to get rid of our frustrations eh? And now it's the next-to-last day of competition and all is forgiven—the committee has forgotten us the athletes have done their thing the spirit of the Games has come through eh Giorgi?"

Smerdyakov sucked his lips into a thoughtful moue.

"Oh, come now" Sherman laughed adolescently, "we've done *our* jobs We should just sit back and let things happen"

Smerdyakov continued to inhale his lips until one of the freestylers flip-turned and laid a wave at their feet

"Hey!" Sherman said as they backed away "Guess what I just came from the diving annex where I withdrew our protest against your diver, Baba Babalus—the one that looks like a flying squirrel!"

"The one that took fifth?" Giorgi smiled

"Fifth? Oh, did he? Fifth, he took Well, he might move up if there are any other protests Anyway, we thought it was time to—uh, in fact, in fact, we've been thinking of withdrawing all our protests Of course, that could only be part of a *mutual* gesture"

Someone kicked into the wall Aquatic thunder A waiting teammate launched off the block Slap! The sound seemed to fit the sting on Smerdyakov's face "Eaf spinach," he said

Sherman's eyelids fluttered "No need to get vulgar Giorgi—"

"Eat spinach *Poop-eye* You see we have our sources The Soviet-American Cultural Society in Armenia traced down your imperialist mythologist We are not stupid And we can keep medal counts as well as you, I suppose you think we will just overlook this—this amphibian Thompson of yours The one who doesn't warm up The one with the special shoes—he appears to have very few bones below the ankles, Shuer-mann"

"Thompson? Thompson The one with osteogenesis of the feet?"

Quite select of the disease, wouldn't you say? And another thing, we are told he doesn't breathe during the race Is that so, Shuer-mann? For fifteen hundred meters he doesn't breathe? Even amphibians

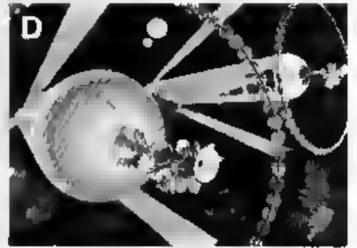
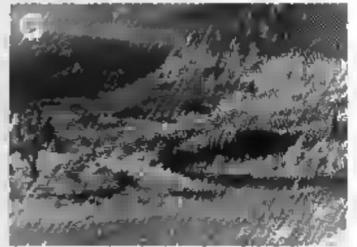
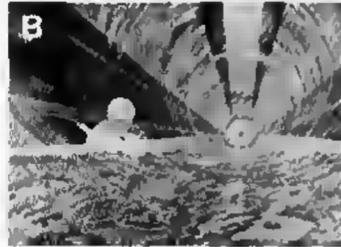
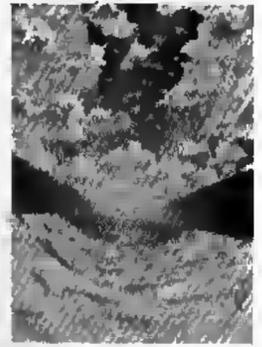
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breathe, though often through a blowhole in the top of the head

"He breathes very rapidly, Giorgi I swear it. And his mouth is unusually elastic He can catch air with the slightest turn"

"How remarkable. We will be filming the race to see"

They sat on deck chairs twenty feet apart behind the timers When the pool was cleared and the officials readied, the championship heat was marshaled to the blocks Thompson aided by teammates on either side, and wearing footgear resembling calf-length ski boots doddered to lane 4 The long, limp appendages that emerged from the boots could have been windsocks or as Smerdyakov said with a lustrous grin, albino galoshes Hardly less intriguing to the Russian was Thompson's topknot Except for a circular thicket at the crown of his head the swimmer was smoothly bald

"Amphibians!" Smerdyakov called sprightly tapping the top of his head

Soviet cameras rolled

The Last Day

Thompson's world-record performance was under protest The Olympic Committee procrastinated Someone had sent Smerdyakov seven Popeye comics and a package of frozen spinach The mosquitoes around Sherman fed

Sherman was watching a replay of the final equestrian event grand prix jumping

Uncle Sam had another gold—temporarily Fool's gold "It's down to the boxing, Felix," he said "Look at that nag She doesn't jump she hops Should've been destroyed Would you let a protest like that go by? It's down to the boxing, Felix"

One of the phones rang Felix answered, "Smerdyakov" he said

Sherman took the phone and clamped it on his head like a hot compress "Hello, Popeye," he said wearily

"How dare you call that animal a horse!" screamed Smerdyakov

"It's got four legs and a tail doesn't it? That qualifies it in the Soviet stable"

"Shuer-mann. We want that creature x-rayed!"

"Sorry The race was over two hours ago She's dead"

"Dead?" Smerdyakov's frayed voice cracked

"Broke a leg on the way back to the stable Had to shoot her"

"Remarkable! An autopsy will do"

"Already buried"

"We will exhume the beast"

"Cremated We buried the urn"

"Really, Shuer-mann—"

"You can autopsy yours, though"

"Ours?"

"The thing that took the silver—a rump, a tail, sort of a head? The one we are protesting He's dead, right?"

"Of course"

Thought so. We figured one of your cos-

sacks spurred him to death

"Very funny. He died of natural causes. We put him on a plane that crashed in your Bermuda Triangle."

"It's been nice talking to you."

"Nice talking to you, Shuer-mann. How are your mosquito bites?"

"Fine. How are your Popeye comics?"

"Excellent. This Bluto—ha, ha. Well, goodbye."

"Goodbye, Popeye."

Sherman handed the phone to Man Friday. "It's down to the boxing, Felix," he said.

He thought it was fitting that the final distillation of the brotherhood of nations in friendly competition should be two guys in the ring trying to beat each other's brains out. Even with headgear the heavyweights could deliver micky fins. And the American boy had dynamite hands. So far as they could tell, the Soviet was a ballroom dancer. He glided, bowed, swept, dipped, and occasionally peppered his opponents with pretty but ineffectual volleys. His boxing was elegant, but no one had seen him take a punch in the qualifying matches. He had the brittle features of a ballerina. Well scrubbed. Cleanly sculpted eyes. A porcelain jaw. Sherman got on the phone to the team manager at the arena. "The head, Bronson," he said. "Make sure he goes to the head. He can't outbox the man. He's got to put his lights out." Bronson let Sherman know how much he appreciated the

interference, and the two men barked goodbye.

But he needn't have bothered to call. The kid chugged out of his corner at the bell like a wind-up toy. For the first round he pummeled, lambasted, and blasted. The Russian flitted and flicked. It couldn't last. Round 2 saw the American lash, beat, strike, cuff, and buffet. Solid hits. Crushing hits. The brittle nose became a Chuckle. But, except for that, the Soviet boxer seemed completely undaunted. He danced the same blithe dance, scored the same powdery tattoos, even stared the same serene stare. "He's been hypnotized," the Americans complained. A short but profound conversation with the Russian convinced the ref otherwise. Monotonously the American's assault continued. He smote. He thwacked. He thumped, thrashed, drubbed, pelted, and trounced. Finally he FLOGGED and SCOURGED his sashaying enemy, gloves whipping like windmills, then minnow tails, then dropping to his sides. In came the feminine taps. Down went the American, physically and emotionally exhausted, crying and clutching the great Isadora's knees.

"I don't believe it," Sherman murmured.

"I'll deliver the protest in person," Felix said, reaching for the attache case.

The phone calls came late in the day. One to Smerdyakov, one to Sherman, in-

forming them that *all* protests had been upheld.

"All?" said Sherman. "But that's inconceivable!"

"What kind of Poop-eye Olympics is this?" choked Smerdyakov.

Stunned, they slumped in their separate chairs in separate suites.

"How could they uphold every protest?" Sherman said to himself. "I thought they might turn them all *down*, but uphold them? How could they uphold every protest? How could they?"

Felix dragged in twenty minutes later with a tom computer printout of the complete international protest results and medal redistribution. "Every major country with a genetic-development program he tried to begin, and then let the paper fall into Sherman's lap.

Sherman felt his hair going white as he read. He was looking into his grave. "Twenty eighth?" he whispered hoarsely. "We finished twenty-eighth?"

"Tied with the Soviet Union," said Felix.

"Sri Lanka? Sri Lanka won?"

"Just ahead of Liechtenstein."

The phone rang.

"Shuer-mann" came soothingly over the line. "My dear Shuer-mann. We are ruined." Smerdyakov vented a few tight sobs. "Forgive me, Duncan. May I call you Duncan? I know your pain is great, too. What are we to do?"

Sherman choked, swallowed. "The first thing I'm going to do," he announced unsteadily, "is to open the windows of this room and let all the mosquitoes in. Then I'm going to take off my clothes and lie down on the bed."

"Ah, Duncan, no."

"and if I'm still alive in the morning, I'm going to shave off my beard, buy a ticket for a public flight, and go back to my farm in Virginia."

"I wish it were so easy for me, Duncan. They will take away my car, my apartment, my free tickets to the Bolshoi. Do you think do you think the American embassy in Havana might—uh, might?"

"They would be very glad to see you, Giorgi. Very glad. Just don't mention my name, and they will be very glad to see you."

"Yes, yes, I understand. And do you think you might need a farmhand—that is, I'm very good at developing hybrids—"

"No question about it, Giorgi. No question, well, one question."

"Anything, comra—er Duncan."

"How the hell did your boy take so much punishment in that fight today? He was like a thumb puppet in there. I thought he was getting his brains knocked out."

Giorgi sighed. "A thumb puppet. Not bad. A thumb puppet has no brains, yes? Not in his head, yes? Kuchka has no brains in his head, either."

"Giorgi, you didn't. But where?"

"You didn't see him sit down, did you?"

"Ah, Giorgi, Giorgi," Sherman chuckled. "See you in Virginia." **DD**



Our next guest is a gentleman who claims to have actually been taken aboard a U.F.O.