

Short Story 125*: Sightings at Twin Mounds

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Marc Aramini — 27 Apr 2015, 20:09

#SIGHTINGS AT TWIN MOUNDS

Inverting the usual order of things, "Sightings at Twin Mounds" was first collected in Wolfe's 1988 collection *Storeys from the Old Hotel* — though it was reprinted in the 1996 themed anthology *UFOs: The Greatest Stories*.

#Summary:

The story does not follow a traditional narrative, instead representing a collation of supposedly objective sources to narrate the events in question: "This puzzling case presents several unique features; because it is of more than ordinary interest, I shall quote several of the documents in full."

The first article, which attracted the narrator's attention, is a news snippet entitled "UFOs Spotted Over Park" and mentions the brilliant blue and white lights over Indian River State Park in Duke County (certainly set near Rochester, New York or possibly New England, conceivably near the Canadian border, though probably entirely fictional) which residents often see after midnight, with several hundred people witnessing the lights. When police were dispatched to investigate the lights, they found an incoherent man there.

Then, the narrator includes the description of the (most certainly fictional) Indian River area which includes many mounds, including Eagle Mound, Twin Mounds, and Snake Mounds. "An Algonquin legend has it that the site commemorates a raid on an Algonquin village by Iroquois, in which all the Algonquins perished with the exception of the chiefs daughter, who fled into the forest pursued by the Iroquois warparty. Encountering the wendigo, she begged it to defend her." The two were killed, and their remains interred under Twin Mounds. The entry ends with, "This legend may arise from the similarity of the hemispherical mounds to a woman's breasts."

The narrator then includes an encyclopedia entry describing a wendigo, an ogre in the mythology of some northeastern tribes - "Hunters lost in the forest without food are thought to turn cannibal and, through the effects of eating human flesh, become wendigo, fearsome enemies of human beings possessing great strength and appearing and vanishing at will."

The narrator requests copies of the *Colbyville Courier*, noting "several carried half-jocular stories concerning moving lights and 'giant spaceships' hovering over Indian River State Park", but quoting only appropriate parts.

One article details the man found unconscious, Stanley J. Robakowski, who was admitted to the hospital and was not truly considered to be responsible for the lights: "Several witnesses stated emphatically that they had observed moving lights above the trees after police departed with Mr. Robakowski in custody."

The narrator looks up Robakowski's information and is certain that he is a "contactee" of aliens or UFOs. By the time he arrives in Colbyville, Robakowski has been discharged from the hospital. The narrator manages to arrange a meeting with Robakowski over the phone, but cannot find his way to the apartment in the rain, calling to arrange another meeting for the next night when he returns to his hotel.

"With a day to kill in Colbyville", the narrator visits the park and talks to people who had seen the lights. "They were described as very bright, usually white or blue-white, but occasionally yellow. ?One informant stated they proceeded from what she termed a 'wingless airplane' ? that is to say, a torpedo-shaped flying object." He drives to find Robakowski's apartment, which is actually the upper story of an old house, and sees the shadow of an embracing couple on the curtains. He decides to wait and telephones from a nearby cafe. When he returns, he notices that the door was ajar. After ringing, he enters and finds blood all over the kitchen, bedroom and hall, then calls the police at once, though he states no arrest was ever made.

The doctor who treated Robakowski publishes his account of his stay at the hospital in *The Journal of the American Psychiatric Society*, using the pseudonym Stan Roland to identify Robakowski (though both names in the various objective sources are described as belonging to a man employed at a paper mill). Roland is described as exhibiting neither hostility nor aggression and as having no history of psychopathic or psychoneurotic disturbance. Having come to the park with friends to see if they would witness the lights, he saw a dim blue light moving in the area of the Twin Mounds, but others did not believe him. Roland climbed the fence of the park and claimed that the trails he had known since boyhood had vanished, being almost free of underbrush. He saw moving blue and white lights but could not approach them.

At this point, Roland invariably became agitated, and the order of subjective events is unclear. "She ran into me in the dark." "I thought I heard somebody screaming off to my right — there was a lot of yelling, and all of a sudden this girl was holding onto me." "I was just walking along, trying to go fast, you know" And all of a sudden my arms were around her.

There is no objective evidence for the existence of this mysterious young woman, who Roland said could not speak English and seemed terrified.

They run, assaulted by invisible beings. Roland claimed he could see the young woman but could not see their attackers, "who were thus tactile and auditory hallucinations only." He says that they became separated, but still feels as if "they and she were still searching for him." The young woman called something that sounded like "Where'd he go?"

?He said that neither she nor those who had attacked them could see him now; nor could he see them.

The narrator concludes by saying that UFO contactees have often felt that they were shadowed or threatened, "most frequently by *men in black (MIBs).* Physical harm at their hands are rare, ?and murder almost unheard-of; and yet murder would appear to have taken place in the mysterious case of Stanley J. Robakowski."

More sightings have been sparse and difficult to verify, but two years ago an archeological excavation of Twin Mounds was begun, but "All activity was suspended indefinitely when it was discovered that the site had been contaminated by ?modern materials."

##Commentary:

###I. An Incidental Displacement

"Sighting at Twin Mounds" is presented as a series of reports and supposedly objective source stories. According to Wolfe's introduction to **Storeys from the Old Hotel**, **this framing technique came about in the following fashion:*

"'Sightings at Twin Mounds' was written last year as a sort of experiment ... From time to time, no reading gives me more pleasure than supposedly factual accounts of UFOs, black dogs, vanishing hitchhikers, and similar apparitions, although all such accounts are ultimately unsatisfactory. (I recommend **Sasquatch: the Apes Among Us**, by John Green, should you ever come across a copy.) It seems to me that a good, and indeed entirely satisfactory story could be written in that style. It is a framed story, if you like, in which the frame is the whole story; and if you like it, that makes two of us."

The concept of John Green's book involves a series of objective reports and interviews to get a complete picture of the phenomenon, with the evidence presented logically. This is clearly the inspiration for the structure of the short story, which uses small snippets to paint a larger picture (from which the narrator and collator seems unable to draw a final conclusion which should be fairly obvious.)

While some readers assert that Wolfe's narrators lie assiduously, I have always believed that for the most part we are given the truth, unless it contradicts some other bit of information or forms an identifiable, if subtle, pattern. For example, when Marsch says that he could not write because of the cat bite in **The Fifth Head of Cerberus's** final novella, he might be actually telling the truth, but in a way that we could not have anticipated on our first reading before we understand that the Shadow child infection thrives in the saliva of the mouth. When the narrator of many portions of **The Book of the Short Sun** denies being Silk, he does so as a psychological defense mechanism that is readily ascertainable: Silk would not admit that his student Horn has died to bring him back, and as long as he can hold on to Horn's memories, it is a way to keep his student alive. Subsequently, I am reluctant to identify information as a red herring or a useless lead without an extremely compelling narrative hint that this is actually the case. The story features flashing lights, time travel, the corruption of an Indian word, and the factual, objective structure inspired by Green's book, in addition to descriptions of the alien cylinders by supposedly objective witnesses.

The interpretation which uses the most of these features is the standard reading: Stan Robakowski is caught by the blue and yellow lights that are formed when unidentified flying objects travel at extreme speeds above Twin Mounds, and, caught in the wake of their super fast displacement through space, is accidentally displaced in time temporarily (when the underbrush disappears), where he forms a deep union with the young Indian girl. He seems to be stuck in a kind of phase shift joining the two times together. Stan and the young girl are attacked by the Indians which they cannot see, which "Stan Roland" describes as "tactile and auditory hallucinations." The union they form leads to a joint occupation of past and present, as he feels he is still being hunted. When the pull finally creates another conjunction, our narrator sees Stan and the Iroquois girl embracing on the window before they are pulled inexorably back into the past and are buried together under Twin Mounds, to become the legend (and the modern contaminants).

If we assume that the lights represent the movement of alien ships, the redshift/blueshift spectrum and doppler effect allows us to guess that these ships actually emit green light: they would appear blue as they are approaching at extreme speeds, and appear yellow as they are leaving (green is situated between these two in wavelength). Thus, it is their passage which explains the displacement of space and time and winds up resulting in Stan's remains buried in

the past as the “wendigo” (which he hears as “Where'd he go?” when the girl says it) and introducing modern material under the hill, such as his clothes or any artifacts of contemporary consumer technology he carried upon him at the time.

This reading firmly places the story as a science fiction story in which UFOs incidentally create a vortex in time, possibly unintentionally via the wake of their passage, but at least one other interpretation favors an extremely unreliable narrator bent on cannibalism.

###II. Framing the UFOs

Though I do not necessarily endorse the following reading, available on the WolfeWiki, Robert Pirkola's recreation of events involves the concept of a murderous narrator who is attracted to Stanley Robakowski as a “contactee” and potential victim for his cannibalistic tendencies, and there are at least two metatextual statements that are offhandedly ominous. The first is the narrator's statement that he had “a day to kill in Colbyville”, which is the kind of double entendre Wolfe enjoys at times. The second is less ominous but conceivably more remorseful: “No doubt I should not have done what I did,” though of course by the surface reading he is simply stating he should not have entered someone's house - rather than saying that he should not have eaten them for dinner (or breakfast).

Under Pirkola's timeline, the narrator comes across the newspaper clipping from the United Press Wire Service while Stan Robakowski is still at St. Joseph's hospital, and, his interest piqued, orders recent copies of the *Colbyville Courier*. After he travels to Colbyville, he arranges a meeting, and rather than being unable to find the apartment, prevents the duplex door from locking (open in anticipation of his arrival) and then phones Robakowski to say that he could not find it. Pirkola's recreation involves the narrator returning that night or in the early morning of the next day, killing Robakowski, and dragging him from the bedroom down the hallway into the kitchen (where he eats him) to account for the trail of blood found there. He also takes Stanley's personal effects to later bury at Twin Mounds. The yellow lights the narrator notes as being reported are, in this case, the headlights of his car going to the park. Pirkola makes the following claims:

The narrator only felt safe enough to report the event more than two years later, after he had kept tabs on whether anyone had been arrested for the murder. In a final bid to mislead would-be investigators, he plants the idea that MIBs may have been involved. ...The narrator's interest was first attracted by the fact that there was an incoherent man found near a site of possible supernatural happenings. This opens the door to occult explanations for such a man's disappearance and the opportunity to feed without notice. Not only are there apparently extraterrestrial/supernatural goings-on near an occult site, but there is an interesting legend attached to the area that the cannibal narrator can later appropriate and use to distract future investigators. The narrator only feels sure that Robakowski was a “contactee”, which is to say a potential meal, after gathering information about the occult nature of the event and confirming that Robakowski had been psychiatrically hospitalized at St. Joseph's for at least 5 days.