

The Fringe Culture of Free Energy Claimants

Eric Krieg

A wonderful new age in society would blossom forth if we had a clean fuelless infinite source of energy. Many people believe such technology exists today. Claims of free energy are not merely an urban legend; they are part of a fascinating fringe culture of claimants and believers. Their history actually goes back hundreds of years and is much more than a colorful cast of kooks, cons and morons. Their realm also includes books, journals, conspiracy theory, heroes, bogus science, snake oil demonstrations, incredible patience and creative excuses. Eric Krieg's initial skeptical involvement in their world was probably like a kid poking a wounded animal with a stick, but he has gone on to document this underreported comical side of American culture.

Eric Krieg has an electrical engineering degree from Lafayette College and has worked in the greater Philadelphia area as an engineer for the past 25 years. He is presently helping to develop fiber optic transmitters and amplifiers for the telecommunications industry. He was one of the dozen people who helped found

PhACT - the Philadelphia Association for Critical Thinking - a decade ago. His interests in paranormal claims include free energy, alternative physics, dowsing and conspiracy theory. He is married with three children and enjoys running, mountain biking and rock climbing.

2 - 4 pm
Saturday, Dec 8, 2007

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The Washington Post—If You Don't Get It (the 1947 edition, that is), You Don't Get It
by Scott Snell

The *Post*'s October 21 "Sunday Source" section prominently featured a long and uncritical article by Joe Heim that amounted to free advertising for a UFO conference near Annapolis, and withheld information from readers that would otherwise help them understand a UFO case that was portrayed as mysterious.

A sidebar by Heim and Karl Evanzz listed "five of the more interesting" UFO sightings in the DC area over the past 60 years. One of the sightings was unfamiliar to me and piqued my interest. "July 4, 1947: An Arlington woman ... report[s] that she saw a flying saucer at 4:40 a.m. The craft, she tells the paper, had a clearly defined outline and a fiery appearance." An image of part of the original article, printed below the sidebar with a "torn" effect, shows that the witness was Mrs. Ruth Cole, but the rest of the article is missing.

Fortunately, I quickly satiated most of my curiosity at the ProQuest Archiver site for the *Washington Post* (1877-present) by downloading the original July 5, 1947 article (p. B10) for \$3.95. The part omitted by Heim and Evanzz states that "...she woke up, saw [the flying saucer] only a few moments and then 'went back to sleep.' [emphasis added, quotes in original]" She asserted that it was "about the size of the sun and did not seem to be moving. It appeared in the southwest sky, with the outline clearly defined and had a fiery appearance."

Clearly, at some level, Mrs. Cole did not think much of the sighting, which did not even fully rouse her from sleep before dawn. But I will act as devil's semi-

advocate for the case's proponents, who may interpret her sleepiness as symptomatic of a UFO abduction.

What was in Arlington's sky at 4:40 a.m. EDT on July 4, 1947? The skyandtelescope.com site was a good place to find out. Their interactive sky chart shows that a full moon was positioned about fifteen degrees above the (you guessed it) southwest horizon.

As all Washingtonians who have survived steamy area summers know, the moon takes on a ruddy (or fiery, if you will) appearance then, especially when low in the sky. The moon's size in the sky is nearly that of the sun, and it is relatively motionless, perfectly fitting Mrs. Cole's description. Moreover, she did not describe seeing the saucer *and* the moon, but rather just the saucer, which suggests that they were one and the same.

Continuing my advocacy, maybe the saucer was in front of the moon, or clouds were in front of the moon. The next step (which I leave for the interested reader) is to check Arlington weather records for that date to establish the sky conditions. But does anyone want to bet against a moonlit night, based on what we know so far?

Meanwhile, didn't Heim and Evanzz owe it to their readers to mention the fact that the witness went right back to sleep, and that the object was the size of the sun? Surely they had the original article in hand, but they chose to reproduce it without those important facts.

(The Heim/Evanzz sidebar is obtainable at washington-post.com by entering "eyes on the sky" [including the quotation marks] in the search box at the top of the home page.)

Admittedly, "Sunday Source" is not the front section of the paper. Bob Woodward's byline will never appear on any article there. Nevertheless, is it too much to ask for Journalism 101 standards throughout the entire *Post*? 