

Men are from Mars ... and so is Richard Hoagland

by Vicki Ecker

At a time

after my divorce but before the full flowering of *UFO Magazine*, Richard Hoagland was my boyfriend, my companion, my live-in helpmate—at least in my imagination that was so. Like many women with an unflagging flair for romantic fantasy, I put this man in a role he was both unwilling and unsuited to play.

The year was 1987.

We came from different worlds. In my eyes, Richard's world was far more exciting and prestigious than mine, even though, with my female business partner Sherie Stark, I was actually the first woman anywhere to start a magazine on UFOs. Yet Richard was right there in the real world with this stuff, this out-of-this-world, spacey stuff—and he worked on the Apollo missions, didn't he? He was a consultant for CBS, right? His résumé far outranked mine, and to this UFO editor, he was a star.

I still don't know to this day exactly why I let an initial mild attraction take erratic flight in my pretty little head, unless it was some deep-seated need to find an attractive guy with whom I could share my then-overwhelming obsession with extraterrestrials and UFOs. Someone, please, besides the usual crackpots. The first time he referred to ufology as "the ghetto," I should have gotten the hint; Hoagland's lofty ambitions couldn't be sidetracked with something so flaky as flying saucers.



It's true I don't remember

much from those days, but the memory of Richard's mental vibrancy has stayed with me like Jupiter's Great Red Spot—a delightful anomaly on an otherwise cold and forbidding entity. Yet his own intellectual fetishes that first hooked me kept jumping around: thought exercises on top of crazy

imaginings garnished with wit; like the canals of Mars, he always seemed to be changing and reconfiguring himself and his planetary theories. In a sense, Richard was the man from Mars, and if I was from Venus, then indeed between us it was the war of the worlds.

War is too strong a word. There were no real clashes between us, just no real ground for lasting connection. I don't remember exactly how we met. I think it was probably when I called him up to interview him about Mars, since he was a big name on the circuit and his celebrity was skyrocketing in tandem with the notorious Face on Mars—which, many will agree, Richard Hoagland single-handedly turned into both a mass *raison d'être* among alternative thinkers and a lasting thorn in NASA's side. But it wasn't a single-handed accomplishment. More on that later.

I've always been a sucker for a pretty face. But never *just* a pretty face. Something substantial has to come with it, and in Richard's case, that substance, if you will, spiraled straight from his lively and articulate presentation into what I mistakenly thought was my heart. I lusted after his knowledge. Later, I lusted after him.

Our relationship—surprise!—centered around Mars. Any minute now, see, Martian life was going to be discovered, spring-boarding from the real facts about the mysterious Face. That particular Face, or whatever it is, Richard has mentally, physically, metaphysically, geometrically, geographically—and in his mind, genuinely—dissected from top to bottom. All from 150–200 million miles away, depending on the Martian solar calendar. In the less-than-vaunted sport of extreme science, Richard used his unerring and nearly Rasputin-like powers to corral support and endorsement from the academic mainstream. Me, with my BA in journalism and a new magazine, had something to offer him, for a while, anyway. But it was enough to generate heat, if not light, on our mutual interest in extraterrestrial life.

From fragmentary memories I can pull up a few emotionally charged flashes from our short-lived affair. A visit to Berkeley where his publisher hosted a small party in honor of *The Monuments of Mars*. Stopping by the condominium of a young couple, new parents reportedly predisposed to donating a significant amount of money to Richard's dream. Another trip north where we chatted with fellow author and Mars Face supporter Randolpho Rafael Pozos.

Pozos, among others, furnished supportive data and commentary that Richard has melded into his thematic enterprise. The author of *The Face on Mars—Evidence of An Ancient Civilization?*, Pozos is a learned sociologist whom I only remember briefly meeting. He and Dick went off somewhere on important business, and I was left to contemplate our relationship.

In fact, the relationship, on my end, was always dominated by such contemplation. Most of the time I wasn't

with him. When we were together, the meetings were brief, invigorating, psychically intense, maybe even sweetly romantic. But that's when I could persuade him to talk about something other than the clumps of persuasively shaped rocks on Cydonia and how he was on the verge of making the most globally important discovery in history.

For a while in the late '80s, I lived with my mother while recovering from a car accident and some personal financial horrors. It was during this period that Dick stayed with us for a few days and the romance (in my head) took off. He didn't drive, but I did. He didn't have money, but I had some. There was the sunny morning he bought Mom and me some fresh doughnuts. I was get her as im-

pressed with him I was, but it never worked. But both of us were always impressed by his constant consumption of black coffee and sweets and the way he could spin a tale

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about the impact of his notions on the world.

What of those notions? Thomas E. Carey says it best: "The connections are so inchoate, so interwoven, so pregnant with possibility — how even to begin to talk about this?" Carey's comment refers to moon anomalies, but when it comes to the elaborate ways in

which human transformation meets a hoary planet, he could easily be talking about Hoagland's Mars.

Somewhere in my scattered library I have my own personal copy of Dick's literary zenith, *The Monuments of Mars: A City on the Edge of Forever*. Dick never signed it. I did hang on to one tiny note where he declared his love. Dick *did*, in fact, love me. He's one of those people whose heart is ready to give, if not of his time and constancy, at least his knowledge and enthusiasm. My topic (UFOs) and his (ancient civilization on Mars) converged in a maelstrom of intellectual and emotional fervor that reached a lava-hot pitch. On my part.

His family was in North Carolina, and it so happened my stepmother lived there, too. A woman I rarely thought about, much less visited, suddenly became the one person in the world I had to spend a week with. That's because she made room for Dick, too. It was like a quasi-honeymoon with chaperone, but I didn't care. It was a chance for Dick to show me how the Billy Meier Pleiadian scenario so elegantly dovetailed with the Face on Mars.

We drank coffee and tea on my stepmother's front porch overlooking a lake while Dick verbally branched his theories and I took notes. The result was an article I wrote in Vol. 2, No. 3 of *UFO Magazine* ("Pleiadian Ancestors From Mars?"). George Earley reviewed Dick's book in the same issue, the first in a string of Mars-themed issues we've produced over the years, and arguably the least scientific. But my mission at the time was to find common ground between Dick and me ... If not here on earth, then on Mars!

I even baked him my first and only lemon meringue pie.

Hindsight is 20/20 vision. Nearer-to-now sight is reserved for close friends and associates; people outside of you can frequently see your relationship far more clearly than you, and such was the case with my partner Sherie. She persuaded her husband Rick, an audiophile, to compile a special music tape specifically in honor of my passion for Hoagland.

I guess I lost the tape; I do remember one cut on it, though: U-2's "With or Without You." I like to think the

bridge of that song embodied the selfless love I tried to grant Dick: "And you give yourself away ... and you give yourself away." But, hey, not exactly.

Perhaps I gave a lot, but got this in return: An arguably intimate, *albeit* brief, relationship with the man of the moment in my field, and an inside look at the brain and media skills of someone whose powers of persuasion are seemingly magical-like in their ability to turn a piece of rock into an iconic symbol for the ages.

But for all that, Dick didn't parlay his elaborate theories into the stratosphere alone. Along the way he solicited and received the help of numerous other Mars thinkers. Along with Pozos, the names or presences that came up during my involvement included John Brandenburg, Eric Burgess, Mark Carlotto, Vince DiPietro, Richard Grossinger (publisher), Stan McDaniel, Greg Molenaar, Brian O'Leary, Erol Torun, Tom Rautenberg, Tom Flandern ... and I know I've

Van left many out. I'm not the only female, for instance, who's stood loyally by Richard and readily offered him support—in a variety of ways. Among all, too, I'm fairly certain I'm not the only one who eventually felt slightly exploited by this man.

But to me, it's mostly trivial water under the bridge. Putting aside all the natural human emotions that come with having loved and lost (and that's easy to do, nearly 20 years hence!), there's a certain brilliance and sweetness Dick anchors at the fringe port that I won't discount. Anyway, I try to put the messy detritus of human frailty in the background and focus on the core: In this case, the core is Mars, which Richard Hoagland has indisputably brought life to, in one way or another.

I haven't spoken to Dick in years. As to our multi-angled relationship, he's probably forgotten it. But if it were to be geometrically charted in the vast and troubled universe of failed romance, I know it where it would be affixed—precisely at 19.5! **UFO**

Vicki Ecker is editor-in-chief of *UFO Magazine* and a great fan of Mars exploration.

