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**AT CINEMAS
25 JANUARY**

WAITING FOR ET

A hopeful set of humans meet up in the veld to watch the skies in anticipation of an extraterrestrial call. *Oliver Roberts* goes along in hopes of a close encounter

MY first meeting with extraterrestrials is curtailed by foul weather. After enduring an abominable flight to Cape Town (the woman next to me is so incredibly corpulent she needs a special seat belt), I arrive only to be told by Cristo Louw — founder of SA's UFO Resource (Saufor) — that heavy clouds mean sightings and contact will be impossible.

I am hugely disappointed. On the phone only days earlier, I ask Louw whether it will be okay if I bring my camera along.

"Please do," he says. "We might just see something and it'll be great if someone's there to record it."

A few weeks later, the clouds have lifted off Cape Town and I am back, eager to receive and possibly be received by benevolent intergalactic beings.

Louw, 36, established Saufor in 1997 after being fascinated by the arcane since he was a boy. Before even entering school, he was reading encyclopaedias and dictionaries "for fun" to both fuel and satiate his probing mind.

The Saufor website is regularly updated with local sightings, recommended reading and upcoming events, such as the "Skywatch" I'm attending tonight at Samsara, a "Body Mind and Spirit Club" in Durbanville. Actually, the invite, probably to avoid confusion, specifies: "Durbanville, Cape Town, South Africa, Earth."

It is difficult to quantify just how widespread the interest in UFOs is in SA. Certainly, YouTube is awash with wobbly footage of apparent sightings all over the country, and SA's first official UFO conference took place in November last year and was well attended. Louw has been hosting his own annual conferences since 2004, with turnouts ranging from 75 people to 18.

Tonight, however, there is just one other person at Samsara: an attractive, middle-aged woman named Bridgette (blonde) who talks in rapid, staccato sentences, openly confesses to owning several porcelain mushrooms and claims to have faeries residing in her garden. In some ways this makes her more of a radical than Louw, who is jobless and homeless and regularly sleeps in the mountains. He is witty, easy-going and very sharp; he considers himself an adventurer on a quest to enlighten and free the great brainwashed masses from

their perceptions of truth.

"For me, it's about reality, consciousness, where you are coming from," Louw says. "I'm not here to tell you what to think or believe, that is your job. What I do is collect information, sift through the crap, and make it available. I don't spend my time trying to convince people; it's not a cult."

You, of course, want to know what a man of Louw's academics believes. Are there really extraterrestrials? Do

they visit earth in space ships? Do they walk among us? Are abduction stories real?

Louw's initial response is ambiguous. And lush with semicolons. Just now, when we stand on an open field and look for signs of life in the stars, he is more revealing. But, for now, it's: "I believe in a larger... it's difficult to choose a word. I think any way of trying to describe God is limiting. I

definitely believe there is some kind of organised energy design which is inexplicable, which is vast. It was there from the beginning, it will always be there, and we are part of it; there's no such thing as we are separate from anything. I base my beliefs on science, metaphysics, all religions; I'm inclusive of all instead of excluding anything. Everything is connected. But the secrecy that limits this information and why people don't know the stuff that I know is because you are being fed this idea that you need to go through this avenue or that avenue to get there, whereas we are already there. The method of controlling our mind has to do with telling you something different than what reality is."

We take a drive, us three. Two separate cars and Louw on an old red Honda motorcycle, helmeted, whizzing through the night, all the while, I imagine, working on his acute sensitivities of time and space like some philosophical biker from a Milan Kundera novel.

We park by the side of the road and walk into the middle of a cold, windswept patch of veld in Durbanville. Beyond us is a stretch of tall, crop-circlesque grass and beyond that, and somewhat conveniently, is an airport.

Louw immediately tests our perceptions of reality by pointing at one of the blinking, flying objects coming in to land.

"What's that?" he asks.

I am eager to receive and be received by benevolent intergalactic beings

I'm not here to tell you what to think or believe, that is your job, says Louw

"An aeroplane," Bridgette and I answer in unison. "Yes, but how do you know it's an aeroplane?"

It's not quite a tree-falling-in-the-woods revelation but it is, nevertheless, a diligent way of checking that what you see is really what you see.

By now it is very cold and I am only wearing a T-shirt. I accept Bridgette's offer of a spare blanket, and the freezing wind causes us to instinctively huddle together and unashamedly swap body heat while we gaze up at the star-strewn sky, desperate to spot other life.

"I once saw one, a glimpse of light," she bursts. "It gave me a feeling. It's hard to describe, but it was like a connection, something inside my heart."

Louw, who says he's seen "plenty" of UFOs, tells us there are three categories: explainable objects like aeroplanes; man-made, secret projects (a large percentage apparently); and those of "our friends" from distant places. They don't dart about in metallic discs though. They travel "interdimensionally" through wormholes. Louw calls it linear travel.

So why, if these things exist, has there never been some great event? Some mass revealing?

"The question is loaded because we are talking about it from an anthropomorphic point of view," Louw says.

"We are used to what we are used to and think the universe must comply. But that is not to say events like [a UFO sighting] did not happen."

I'm then informed that certain human discoveries — agriculture, astrology, martial arts — happened at opposite ends of the world at exactly the same time.



This, rumour has it, is evidence of intellectual meddling from other, more advanced, beings.

Louw says there are accounts from those time periods describing what the beings who "gave the information" looked like.

There is conjecture among these circles, too, that human beings are merely the result of genetic interference by

extraterrestrial professors.

Our skywatch ends with the three of us looking up at Alpha Centauri — a cluster of three stars (there is speculation that planets may orbit it) — and projecting munificent thoughts towards it.

"Focus on saying 'This is where we are, come say hi'," Louw whispers. "Focus on love energy and make it grow, and invite

anyone that resonates at that frequency. Trust that your connection is pure, and that is exactly what you will call to you, what you will experience."

Then we stand there so still and quiet, we three humans, strangers really, hoping to receive this purity.

For more information, go to <http://saufor.com/>

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