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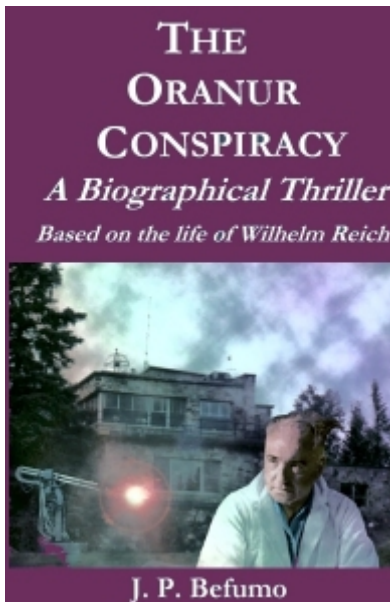
**Address:** P.O. Box 26, Union Dale, PA 18470-0026

**Fax:** (570) 300-1706

**Email:** [info@PleasantMountPress.com](mailto:info@PleasantMountPress.com)

[www.PleasantMountPress.com](http://www.PleasantMountPress.com)

## The Oranur Conspiracy



By J.P. Befumo

## ***Excerpt:***

### **Preface**

This story is based on the life of Wilhelm Reich (1897-1957), a Viennese psychiatrist and pioneer psychoanalyst. Early in his career, Reich attracted the attention of many prominent scientists, and was hailed as “a new Pasteur in the field of psychotherapy.” Reich attributed all psychological, and many physical dysfunctions to sexual repression. He argued that physical, mental, and emotional health could not be segregated from social issues. An early proponent of abortion rights, safe sex, and universal tolerance, Reich established free clinics in Vienna and Berlin. He provided counseling and health care to the poor, and distributed literature and free contraceptives.

These controversial activities resulted in his being disavowed by Sigmund Freud, who had previously considered Reich a protégé. He was also expelled from the Viennese Psychiatric Association, and even expunged by the Communist Party.

Reich came to New York City in 1939, and taught at the New School for Social Research in Greenwich Village. He theorized a physical analog to Freud’s concept of libido, underlying a new form of energy. Reich called this universal force orgone. He believed that orgone was the source of organization that overcomes entropy, and results in the formation of life.

Reich established a laboratory complex called Orgonon near the town of Rangeley, Maine. His ongoing investigation into the nature and properties of orgone led to the development of the Orgone Energy Accumulator, which he believed could collect and intensify this universal orgone flux.

Reich claimed that treatments using this device could assuage (but not necessarily cure) many ailments, including cancer. These assertions aroused the suspicion of mainstream medical science. Despite official condemnation, numerous physicians reported startling success when using Reich’s techniques to treat advanced cancer.

The medical and scientific communities, however, were not the only ones provoked by Reich’s findings. By 1947, he had also come to the attention of the FDA, which launched a massive investigation of his endeavors. In 1954 the FDA filed a complaint accusing Reich of fraudulent activities.

Reich’s naïve idealism perpetuated his difficulties. He responded to the FDA complaint by arguing that scientific research was beyond

the jurisdiction of any court. The court viewed this response as a crank letter. When Reich, believing that he had acted properly, failed to appear at the hearing, Judge John D. Clifford Jr. entered a default judgment against him, and issued the injunction as requested.

The proceedings continued for years. Although the fraud charge was never tried, Reich was convicted of contempt, and sentenced to two years in prison. First, however, he was forced to burn several hundred volumes of his work. (The injunction stated that he, not the federal agents, would do the actual burnings; an effort to exonerate the action on a technicality.)

Wilhelm Reich was found dead in his cell at the Lewisburg Federal Penitentiary on November 3, 1957—just three days before his scheduled parole hearing. The cause of death was listed as “myocardial insufficiency with sudden heart failure.” He was sixty years old.

In his last years, Reich claimed to have run a motor using only orgone energy—a demonstration witnessed by several prominent scientists. In his article “The Day Reich Died,” Harvey Matusow, a fellow prisoner serving time for perjury in the McCarthy witch-hunts, claimed that Reich had spent most of his time working on a book entitled *Creation*. In this book, Reich claimed, he developed the mathematical formulation of “countergravity”. The book was never found.

Newspaper reports confirm Reich’s ability to control weather using an apparatus he called the cloudbuster. On July 6, 1953, attempting to help local farmers after a prolonged drought, Reich’s efforts were reported to have resulted in 1.74 inches of rain over a three-day period for which the National Weather Service had predicted no chance of rainfall whatever. In subsequent experiments outside Tucson, Arizona, many credible witnesses described his having created a patch of green in the midst of desert.\

By far, the most significant of his claimed discoveries resulted from the Oranur Experiment, which purported to demonstrate the ability of orgone energy to damp nuclear radiation. (“Oranur” was an acronym derived from orgone and nuclear reaction—Reich had a great penchant for acronyms, and would employ them when nobody but himself could possibly know what they meant.) Numerous witnesses allege that when one of these experiments backfired, everyone in the vicinity suffered from symptoms similar to radiation sickness, and the area was uninhabitable for some time thereafter.

Convinced that his discoveries were crucial to national security, Reich reported his findings to several government agencies, including

the Atomic Energy Commission, the Bureau of Health, Education, and Welfare, the Air Force, and the White House. He claimed to have met with president Eisenhower—an allegation denied by the government, although records do prove that the president was in the tiny town of Rangeley, Maine on the date when Reich claimed the meeting occurred, and no official reason for the visit was provided. Many witnesses confirm that during this period, military aircraft frequently circled Reich's facility at low altitudes.

That Reich met with Albert Einstein can be confirmed, and on January 13, 1941 the two worked together far into the night, analyzing the results of Reich's experiments. By all accounts, Einstein initially considered Reich's discovery significant enough to set up another meeting on February 1, and to borrow Reich's experimental apparatus. Then, abruptly, Einstein severed all communication with Reich. These and other occurrences convinced Reich that he was the victim of a government conspiracy to obstruct his discoveries and discredit him personally.

Whether Wilhelm Reich was one of the great geniuses of our age, or a confused neurotic, remains for history to decide. What can be concluded from available evidence is that he honestly believed in the worth of his work, and was not, as detractors claimed, a fraudulent crook.

The Oranur Conspiracy is a fictional tale based on the life of this colorful, misunderstood, and tortured soul. I have tried to remain faithful to the major events of Reich's life, while dramatizing the story in a manner consistent with what is known of his work and personality. The final trial scenes draw upon the actual court transcriptions in order to convey the depth and eloquence of Reich's insights and responses.