

MAGONIA

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1968-83
The editors of Magonia,
* older and wiser,
contemplate fifteen years
of publication

MAGONIA

MAGONIA 12

(Incorporating MUFOB 61)

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EDITORIAL

Our fifteenth anniversary of publication seemed to rather creep up on us unawares, and it was only a casual remark in a phone call from Peter Rogerson which called the matter to my notice. Even so, some sort of comment seems called for.

I rather feel that UFO magazines, like cats, should have their birthdays multiplied by some factor to give their age in human terms. Probably then, MAGONIA as a magazine is about as old as the venerable trio on our cover. (Perhaps I should break off here for the benefit of our overseas readers, and explain that our cover picture depicts - from left to right - the woolly-hatted Compo Simonite, 'Foggy' Dewhurst, and retired lino-salesman Norman Clegg, chief protagonists of the wonderful BBC TV series 'Last of the Summer Wine')

In fact, and if I am not factual I am sure one of our readers will soon correct me, MAGONIA is now one of the three oldest UFO journals in continuous publication in Britain. If so, this is a very alarming situation. It means that we are in danger of becoming part of the UFO Establishment - a vague and threatening entity we have long campaigned against. The frightening thought occurs that MAGONIA may be becoming respectable.

This is a view which seems to be

underlined by some of the correspondence which we get from readers and enquirers. Some people imagine that this flimsy tract is published by a giant corporation with plush offices on New Malden's fashionable Alric Avenue. We get references to 'your archives', 'your subscription department' or even 'your staff'. This last causes much, I think quite unwarranted, merriment amongst other members of the Editorial Panel at our meetings in our luxurious offices in the saloon bar of the the Red Cow!

So, is the Establishment closing in? Are we just another cog in the self-perpetuating UFO bureaucracy? Are we in the line for an MBE?

Maybe, maybe not. But we can take heart from the three gents on our cover. So long as there's some mischief they can get into between drawing their pensions from the Post Office, they'll be there. No Establishment will claim them; nothing will make them (especially Compo) even remotely respectable!

So maybe there is hope, even for a fifteen year old UFO magazine. And if you should think we are getting a bit past it, and we are getting rather pompous, just drop us a line.

Just say 'Foggy Dewhurst'!

CONFESSIONS OF A FORTEAN SCEPTIC

Jerome Clark

The nadir of my career as a Fortean was reached in 1973 when I was researching and writing an article which subsequently appeared in *Fate*. The article was later incorporated into the text of *The Unidentified*, a book co-authored by Loren Coleman, who is otherwise blameless in the horror story to follow.

Years before then, back when I was 11 or 12 years old, I was rummaging through the library of the small Minnesota town where I grew up. I came upon a book entitled *The Coming of the Fairies* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. It dealt with a series of photographs taken by two young English girls who claimed that they regularly encountered fairies in a wooded area near their Cottingley, Yorkshire, home. In due course they produced pictures of these beings. The pictures, which appear in Doyle's book, struck me as hilariously unconvincing. The 'fairies' resembled nothing so much as cardboard cutouts.

Many years later I read Jacques Vallee's *Passport to Magonia* and was taken with his attempt to link traditional fairy lore to modern flying saucer lore. I began reading in the considerable scholarly literature on fairy beliefs. In one of these books, Katharine Briggs' *The Fairies in Tradition and Literature*, I came upon a brief account of the Cottingley episode, about which Dr Briggs, one of Britain's leading folklorists, wrote: 'As one looks at these photographs, every feeling revolts against believing them to be genuine'. Yet, noting some of the unexplained aspects of the affair, she went on guardedly to suggest that the pictures might be psychic photographs.

She was troubled by a few odd items of evidence, such as the testimony of three photographic experts who said they didn't know how the pictures could have been faked.

Intrigued, I reread Doyle's book and two others on the subject. I was impressed not so much by the testimony of the photographic experts as by the demonstrated inability of would-be debunkers to come up with plausible, non-extraordinary explanations. Typical of the blunders was Houdini's bold assertion that the models for the fairy figures came from a certain advertising poster. This allegation was widely published and uncritically accepted. But eventually, when investigators located copies of the poster in question, they found that the 'fairies' depicted on it looked not at all like those in the Cottingley pictures.

I was also interested to read that as late as the early 1970s, over 50 years after the events in question, the two photographers, both now elderly women, seemed to stand by their earlier testimony.

So, following Briggs' lead, I cast all caution to the wind. I was at least wise enough to concede that the Cottingley fairies didn't 'look' real but dismissed that as a subjective consideration. To me the absence of convincing negative evidence, coupled with the presence of positive evidence (however thin), added up to the conclusion that these might be authentic 'thoughtographs' much like those Ted Serios is said to produce.

To this day I can't believe how stupid and how credulous I was.

As we know now beyond any reasonable doubt, the Cottingley pictures are clumsy

and absurd fakes. In his 1978 book Ghosts in Photographs Fred Gettings reveals that the models from the figures came from a popular children's book of the period. Photo-analysis by William Spaulding's Ground Saucer Watch has shown that, yes indeed, the figures are of cardboard, just as my 11-year-old eye had told me many years ago.

Robert Sheaffer, in his effort to debunk the story, contributed to the grand tradition of misleading nonsense by claiming, on the basis of the thinnest possible circumstantial evidence, that Theosophical writer Edward Gardner was the mastermind behind the hoax - an assertion that quickly fell victim to Occam's Razor, but not before proving once again that the Cottingley affair could as easily make fools of disbelievers as of believers.

In their recent books, non-admirers of mine like Sheaffer and Martin Gardner have resurrected my foolish remarks on these non-fairy/non-thoughtograph pictures in an effort to discredit me. Sheaffer even claims that he, as the man who commissioned Spaulding to analyse the pictures in 1977, 'forced' me to relinquish my support. He doesn't mention that, to the contrary, I accepted this first truly solid negative evidence with almost unseemly haste, in part because I like to think I am intellectually honest and in part because on some level - specifically the level of my psyche at which the embers of common sense still glowed, however faintly - I had long suspected that in taking the pictures seriously I was making a very, very dumb mistake.

Another mistake was in assuming the existence of 'thoughtographs', the evidence for which is shaky at best. In other words, I had attempted to explain a dubious claim with another dubious claim. Realizing belatedly that I was lost deep in a jungle of Fortean unreality, I decided that it was high time to cut and slash my way through the undergrowth and return to safety, sanity and scepticism. At the end of my harrowing adventure my hair was whiter but my head was clearer.

The moral of the story is this:

- (1) There is something to be said for common sense.
- (2) Just because the debunkers are wrong, it doesn't necessarily follow that therefore the proponents are right.
- (3) The time had come for this proponent to do some serious rethinking of his position.



There is a wonderful piece of verse by Spiritualist poet Ella Wheeler Wilcox. Its title is 'credulity' and it goes:

If fallacies come knocking at my door
I'd rather feed and shelter full a score
Than hide behind the black portcullis
Doubt
And run the risk of barring one Truth
out.

And if pretension for a time deceive
And prove me one too ready to believe
Far less my shame, than if by stubborn
act
I brand as lie, some great colossal
Fact.

That sounds to me like a prescription for the kind of 'open-mindedness' that permits the brains to fall out of one's head. But it is an apt description of a mentality we encounter all too frequently on this side of the paranormal controversy. It's the Will to Believe coupled with the Refusal to Disbelieve. It is the mindset that is sceptical only of claims of fraud or error.

To achieve it, one starts with the love of mystery. There's nothing wrong with that in and of itself. The problem is that some of us, even after all this time, even after we have no excuse for not knowing better, seem more interested in pursuing mysteries than in securing answers. To some, mystification is the beginning and end of paranormal inquiry. Mysteries are to be preserved and defended at all costs. And that may be why, after all this time, all we have to show for our efforts are a seemingly unending number of unanswered questions and a certain grotesque satisfaction in declaring, as one of the literature's enduring cliches goes, that such-and-such a mystery remains unsolved - proclaimed, incidentally, as an expression of triumph, not as an admission of defeat.

I suggest we take a fundamentally different view. If we are to make any progress in our inquiry, we would be better off celebrating the solutions of mysteries rather than the perpetuation of mysteries.

Charles Fort himself was less a lover of mysteries than an eccentric with a perverse taste for the kind of pompous humbug associated with authority figures who feel they must account for unaccountable phenomena about which they not only know little but apparently prefer to know little. The resulting 'explanations' are predictably preposterous and it is not hard to conclude that the explainers suffer from a case of anomaly phobia sufficiently advanced to severely impair their reasoning faculties.

Anomaly phobia, of course, continues to claim its victims. We all remember how the Air Force dealt with UFOs - identifying them, for example, as astronomical bodies not even visible at the time of the reported

sighting. We have all seen the inept criticisms of psi, lake-monster reports and other anomalous claims. We have listened incredulously to self-appointed protectors of the public welfare who assert, apparently with straight faces, that acceptance of unexplained phenomena is not only wrong but dangerous, perhaps even conducive to the collapse of civilization. Some of us have exposed the errors and baseless claims of the debunkers and recently we have seen scandalous revelations about the way these would-be defenders of science and reason deal with evidence that runs contrary to their beliefs.

Reading Fort and tracing all that has happened since his time, a number of paranormal proponents seem to have concluded that because some mundane explanations are bogus, most or all are bogus. In ufology, for instance, the standard line has it that 90 to 95 per cent of raw reports are potentially explainable; still, to some in the field, just about any specific raw report of an object in the sky is of a UFO. Some enthusiasts still believe that Jimmy Carter saw a UFO, not the planet Venus, and that many of our astronauts encountered UFOs in space.

More Fortean than we might care to admit still consider the Bermuda Triangle a genuine mystery, despite Larry Kusche's masterful expose in the Bermuda Triangle Mystery Solved. In fact, the Triangle, along with its similarly fictitious counterparts, the 'vile vortices' of the world, still occupies a prominent place in the fertile imaginations of a few theorists. The alleged powers of Uri Geller and other metal-bending wonder-workers are blithely assumed to be real and incorporated into extraordinary explanation schemes, even though the only thing about metal bending that has ever been established with undeniable certainty is that fraud figures largely in the phenomenon. And our ranks are infested with guileless souls who still look to the novels of Carlos Castaneda as support for their metaphysical views. All things are possible in a separate reality, we are told, but we are not warned that all things are possible as well in Cloud Cuckooland.

Those who wish to return to earth might consider some ways of getting back. Here are a few:

(1) Don't assume that the experts are always fools. Scientists and other scholars are not infallible, it need hardly be said. They are human beings and they have human failings, prejudices and blindnesses. But at the same time we must always remember that as specialists who have devoted their professional careers to their special areas of interest they are likely to know far more than you do about these subjects. If you take

issue with them, chances are they are right and you are wrong. It is even possible that you are a crank.

On the other hand, if a scientist pronounces on something outside his area of expertise, then he is an amateur and he has no greater claim on the truth than any other untrained commentator. When an eminent astronomer presumes to tell us what to think about UFOs, it is often immediately apparent to anyone who knows the literature that the man is talking through his hat. When, however, that same astronomer talks astronomy, better listen. And if you don't agree with him, proceed very cautiously.

(2) Don't believe every story you hear. Some months ago my wife was babysitting for a married couple of our acquaintance. The man was an officer in the Army reserve, holding a high security clearance which rendered him privy to various military and intelligence secrets. He worked as a research scientist at a major university.

He regularly confided some of these secrets to his wife, who then confided them to my wife, who then told them to me. Beyond recalling that all these presumed secrets were sensational in nature, I have forgotten most of them. Of those I remember, one - related in the midst of the Iranian hostage crisis - was that our government knew that the Iranian militants had executed several of their American captives. My informant also said that on a particular date the United States would invade Iran. You get the idea.

I never believed any of this, needless to say, but I couldn't resist the temptation to ask him - tongue firmly embedded in cheek - if, as a man well-versed in hidden truths, he knew if there were any substance to those stories about crashed saucers and pickled aliens purported to be in the Pentagon's possession. He immediately assumed a stern, official-looking expression and declared that that was something he couldn't talk about. Not long afterwards, however, he added that the truth, if he were to confide it, would shock me. On two or three subsequent occasions he brought up the subject and let it be known that if I pressed him at all, he would tell me the whole story. For obvious reasons I never bothered.

I mention this as a cautionary tale. Remember, the man has impeccable credentials. He is a military officer; he does have a high security clearance; and he is a research scientist at a major university. And he is also, it is clear, a spinner of yarns. Next time you read a story about a crashed saucer told by a man with similarly impressive credentials, remember him.

In fact, there is a whole branch of modern folklore waiting to be seized upon

and catalogued by scholars of popular culture. These are what I call 'Soldier's Tales, or, the Horrendous Secrets I Learned in the Service'. We ufologists hear them all the time. A few even purport to be firsthand accounts describing involvement in retrievals of crashed spaceships, the taking of spectacular UFO films, the witnessing of a fatal encounter between an aeroplane and a UFO, and so on. Such stories - or at least those with enough specific detail to permit follow-up investigation - seldom check out.

I can only speculate on the motives of the yarn-spinners, but it's not unreasonable to theorize that for many people the most important period in their lives was the time they spent in the military, when in fact some may well have been privy to secret information. All human institutions, including intelligence agencies, have rumour mills through which stories may circulate. The environment in which such fantasies are related may give them a false authority. Those individuals who pass into civilian life may repeat the rumours in good faith. Other persons, not acting in good faith, may simply place themselves inside the rumours to impress girl friends, wives and acquaintances.

(3) Don't get emotionally involved.

I have always been amazed at the tenacity with which some people hold to favourite beliefs and the rationalizations to which they will resort when these beliefs are threatened.

I remember reading an exchange in a Fortean journal between a critic of the Bermuda Triangle and a prominent promoter of same. The critic outlined some quite specific reasons for disbelieving anything particularly mysterious is going on in that fabled region. The proponent responded by remarking that the critic didn't know what he was talking about because once, when the two were on a television show together, he had asked the proponent if the New Yorker were a newspaper!

Apparently this argument made sense to the proponent, but I can't imagine its making sense to anyone else. It is an extreme example of how emotional commitment to a position or to a specific claim can close us to rational argument and open us to irrational defensiveness. It can lead us - and this, by the way, is as true of debunkers as of believers - to feel that the truth is greater than the sum of its facts.

It is easy to say that facts are all that matter. It is not always easy, however, to act on that knowledge. This is especially true at a time when paranormal and other anomalous claims are under attack by professional debunkers who gleefully jump on any mistake proponents make (while of course refusing to acknowledge their own)

and do their best to paint these proponents as fools who can't tell the difference between valid and invalid data. The effect is to force a proponent, if he isn't sensitive enough to know better, to assume a burden of infallibility.

Not long ago an ongoing controversy was settled when a certain item of information came to light. This new information proved that the claim in question was fallacious because it had been based on erroneous assumptions.

The controversy had gone on for several years, with debunkers on one side of the issue and a prominent proponent on the other. The proponent - let's call him X - and his allies skilfully refuted the debunkers' arguments, most of which were demonstrably false or irrelevant. But finally an independent researcher, Y, who had no particular stake in the controversy, discovered disconfirming data which showed that, while the debunkers' arguments were mistaken, their conclusion - that the claim was unfounded - was correct. The critics, predictably passing over their own errors, equally predictably chortled about their 'victory' and had fun at X's expense.

X's response was to cast aspersions on Y's motives and to mount an emotional defence of the claim using post-hoc rationalizations and shaky arguments. When I talked with him about the controversy, X talked less about facts than about face - his own in particular and all anomalists' in general - and about the use to which the debunkers were going to put Y's information. He made it appear that the fate of all anomaly investigation rested on the preservation of the claim. To him it seemed the finding of facts had become distinctly secondary to the scoring of points, just as it always had to those debunking opponents whom he so long had criticized so eloquently.

Let's not be afraid to admit it when we're wrong. And let's not make the mistake of getting emotionally involved with - or staking our professional reputations on - a particular idea or a particular case. That doesn't mean that we aren't entitled to our opinions about the merits of various claims or that we should refrain from expressing these opinions and citing our reasons for holding them. It just means that we ought to understand clearly that what we believe and what is need not necessarily bear a blood relationship.

(4) Don't hesitate to criticize.

Throughout this article I have referred to our critics the debunkers. They call themselves 'sceptics', which they aren't, and I think we ought to stop calling them that, too. Marcello Truzzi defines the difference between the sceptic and the debubker as the

difference between one who doubts and one who denies. In the paranormal field there is, Fort knows, plenty of room to doubt.

Unfortunately we hear too much from the deniers and too little from the doubters. We are not likely to get rational arguments from those who choose to define the controversy in apocalyptic terms. Anyone who believes, as some debunkers say they do, that civilization will collapse if too many people believe that Bigfoot exists is not likely to concern himself with such small matters as reasonable arguments. That is too bad for the rest of us because it means we have to look elsewhere for the kind of good critical review that anomaly studies urgently require.*

The true sceptics, at least those willing to put in the time to familiarize themselves with the literature, the issues and the personalities, are all too few in number. Most can be found in the pages of Truzzi's superb journal Zetetic Scholar** which I recommend to all serious anomaly-ists.

But it appears that the major part of the policing of the field will have to be done by us. To our credit we have produced a surprising body of critical studies of various claims. But much, much more is needed.

The more we learn, the more we see the necessity for great care in assessing the data. Some stories hold up under the most searching scrutiny. Others, including some we hadn't expected (such as the 1897 UFO 'calfnapping' and the Barbados 'restless coffins'), collapse and blow away. We can be certain that more of the old favourites will meet a like fate.

I urge each of you to pick a particular case - one that everyone 'knows' to be true but that has not been documented in our time - and follow it as far as it goes. If you are able to substantiate it, great; then we have a solid piece of evidence. If you disprove it, that's great, too. Who needs a bogus mystery when we already have far more real ones than we can possibly deal with?

Let's not be afraid to criticize friends and colleagues - or even ourselves -

*This is not to say, I wish to emphasize, that the debunkers are always wrong or that they have made no contribution whatever to serious research. Some of their work does withstand critical scrutiny. So, however, does some of the work of extreme believers. My point is that debunkers' and believers' claims must be approached with caution, with judgement reserved until all sides have been heard from.

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when they or we stray from the paths of common sense and caution. Along the way some egos will get bruised, but if those you criticize - tactfully, I hope - are as concerned with fact-finding as you are, they'll get over it. We all make mistakes. The only unforgivable mistake is the knowing perpetuation of error.

(5) Don't assume that all mysteries, even the genuine ones, have extraordinary solutions. Once, reflecting on his involvement with the mystery of the Loch Ness Monster, Roy Mackal remarked to me that he could never understand the resistance of so many scientists to the idea of Nessie. After all, he said, Nessie is a '...rather mundane sort of idea. We already have other larger freshwater animals such as the sturgeon... Sometimes I think it would be almost worth the game if the phenomenon at Loch Ness were all that earthshaking. But it's not. It violates no basic law of zoology to suggest that there are large animals in the loch'.

Many of us have come to assume that we are dealing with phenomena that border on the miraculous, phenomena that if understood properly would shake the scientific establishment to its very foundations. That may be so in a limited number of cases, but in the great majority of cases I think it's wiser to conclude that the various mysteries

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UFOs and poltergeists caused railway guard Stephen Dukes (26) to be ousted from his post as General Secretary of the break-away Federation of Professional Railway Staff. Dukes, founder and secretary of a supernatural research society, was accused by members of the Unions steering committee of neglecting his duties and "wasting his energies chasing poltergeists and alien beings, when he should be chasing up new members". Dukes refuses to accept the union committee's decision, and claims that he was democratically elected at the union's meeting in February. Speaking at his Birmingham home, surrounded by models of ET, and books on psychic research, he explained that his interest stemmed from childhood, when his parents home was plagued by a poltergeist. He admits: "I have to confess, I find it more exciting than union work". Union members, who say Dukes takes too long to reply to letters, accuse him of being a 'phantom secretary'!

LETTERS

THE "EARTHLIGHTS" DEBATE FOR THE DEFENCE

Dear 'Magonia',

Two things struck me about *Magonia* 11: the review of my *Earth Lights* (EL), naturally enough, I suppose, and the comments in the editorial bemoaning the state of British ufology. I hope I may be allowed to respond to John Harney's review of EL and use that to make a few comments on the editorial's viewpoint.

It is obvious that I'm biased in favour of my book, but even allowing for that it seems incredible that Mr Harney could produce such a negative, jaded and dismissive review of it.

In his first paragraph he talks of gaps: the gap is the UFO enigma itself. All books on the subject have been speculative. What is important is whether or not that speculation is constructive, leading to new avenues of research and to fresh perspectives on the problem, whether such speculation can be tested, and whether such speculation can generate creative debate, for it is that which stops ufology (or any field of enquiry) from becoming stagnant. EL fulfils all those criteria, providing a stick to stir the stagnant pond of ufology when it is most needed.

But does Mr Harney appreciate that? Not a bit of it. He clearly was determined to remain bored. And it is the bored and dismissive Mr Harneys of ufology that I suggest are one of the elements contributing to its jaded state.

EL does the following things:

(a) Provides the most comprehensive roundup and discussion of the main UFO theories. The analysis of what Jung actually said is the best in print. The damaging ETH is placed in perspective. I would have thought Mr Harney could have forced a bit of appreciation out of himself for this effort at least.

(b) The nature of UFO study is placed into two halves: the core phenomenon which is actually witnessed in the skies, and the mental 'shadow' UFO enigma (the visionary, psychological and sociological aspects) which is, at point of origin, a separate thing entirely. Randles and Warrington started that vital split (which is necessary if ufology is to progress any further - both areas of investigation are of interest but I suggest they are not the same thing: it's at least worth arguing about and recording in a review). EL clarified it.

(c) It is suggested, not without considerable evidence, that the core UFO phenomenon is somehow tectonically produced. The history of that idea was explored - French 60s research, some (poor) Spanish 60s research, Devereux/York in the early-mid 70s, Persinger in the late 70s and the recent Brady/persinger material. Mr Harney accuses me of being 'highly' speculative. This is not so and is a misrepresentation of the work in the book. The theory is unfolded in several chapters, but primarily in chapter 7, almost line for line in step with case histories and eyewitness observation. It is clear that the theory best accommodates the facts. If Mr Harney is simply going to yawn away any eyewitness material linked with a dynamic paradigm which can be tested, then from whence does he expect any answer to the UFO enigma to emerge? Figure 23 in EL shows the most detailed and accurate UFO/tectonic correlation currently attempted anywhere in ufological research. The correlation is observably significant. How come a reviewer of EL was unable to pass comment on that when he found room to spend his longest paragraph discussing the relatively unimportant value of one photograph? It's appalling reviewing

if not sloppy ufology. And why no comment on the curious 'coincidence' that Warminster and Cradle Hill sit on the only two surface faults in the whole region - a region that is tectonically stable? Anyone reading Mr Harney's review could be forgiven for thinking that EL was a hotchpotch of pseudo-scientific waffling without any evidence, let alone damned good evidence, being presented. I consider these omissions to be due to Mr Harney either merely scanning the book or stooping to deliberate vandalism of a theory he does not approve of.

(d) The fourth contribution to current ufology made by EL, is that it presents two entirely fresh ideas: (i) that the energy pockets produced tectonically are in such a sensitive state that they may be responsive to human consciousness (which would explain much), and (ii) associated with (i), that UFO 'entities' may be formed out of the 'UFO material' itself, rather than being occupants of a spacecraft. Now these two ideas are speculative, far more so than the almost certain tectonic origin of the core phenomenon, but as they would explain so much of the UFO enigma, as well as, unexpectedly, providing a dynamic new area of psychic research, they should be considered. In the first place, I've seen it happen, so I know it CAN take place, and I put myself 'on the line' with regard to that experience with a certain honesty and courage that Mr Harney might have commented on; in the second place it may be a testable theory as I will explain shortly (any paradigm which handles the known data most effectively must be given serious consideration by any serious investigator in any field, after all, quantum theory postulates unknown mechanics - at present at any rate - and merely encodes certain effects); and in the third place EL presents eyewitness accounts of this 'geophysic process' occurring. Models are important, even if they only exist to be superseded. Without a paradigm, Mr Harney, you are without a dime in the slums of ufology.

(e) EL presents evidence which could be interpreted as indicating that pre-historic megalith builders in Britain and probably north-west Europe built certain of their sites in regions prone to UFO incidence. A modern example was given from Australia. It was shown there is a geological common denominator in the British material. If this interpretation is correct, then we may have anthropological or archaeological avenues of exploration in ufology which might lead us to fresh insights into the phenomenon. In the course of discussing these possibilities in EL I made a 10-page reference to the Dragon Project (not really 'brief' though admittedly passing). One day, in a few years, there may be a book on

the Dragon Project, but now, in the middle of ongoing research (we've only been at it 5 years), would not be the time to publish fully about results we cannot fully interpret. Would Mr Harney not accuse us of being 'pseudo-scientific' if we did? Moreover, it may be that the Dragon Project will satisfy itself that there is no physical anomaly at stone circle sites within the limitations of its equipment - even though that seems far from the case at the moment.

So EL has made a useful contribution to ufology. Many people feel it was the most important book on ufology published in Britain in 1982 - and some have been kinder than that. I would only go as far as to say that it was worth more attention by Magonia in general (so intent on bemoaning the poor state of British ufology that it isn't able to sit up and take notice when something a bit positive does happen) and Mr Harney in particular.

In addition, I deeply resent Mr Harney's implication that EL was just another journalistic gee-whiz type of offering by some pseudo-scientific con man. It is a clearly constructed, paradigm-generating book written by someone who has been an active UFO researcher for 15 years and who had a passing interest in the subject for up to 10 years before that. I have witnessed the phenomenon at first hand, have interviewed other witnesses (of all types), have studied the key literature (and much of the lesser variety), I have taken part in sky-watches and the like. It is one aspect of my overall research which has kept me a part-time teacher and therefore my funds low: my life is literally dedicated to such work. I have been consciously working on EL for 8 to 10 years, and the first, skeleton draft was written in 1975. If I wanted just to dash off any old book on UFOs I assure Mr Harney that I wouldn't have invested such time and research in it. Also, the 'highly speculative' and 'pseudo' references are a slur on my collaborator, Paul McCartney, who is a trained geologist and chemist. Indeed, I brought him in, and shared my royalties with him, precisely so that the science would be as accurate as possible when dealing with the subject of UFOs. Mr Harney says I went 'beyond science' in some of the book. Mr Harney, UFOs currently are beyond science, didn't you know? That's what makes their study so worth while... they have the potential to move our understanding on a few more rungs.

In his fourth paragraph Mr Harney says, in reference to the population-corrected UFO distribution for England and Wales presented in EL, that it is 'first necessary to make a selection from all available reports' and that such a selection must be highly subjective. Then what is one ever

to do, Mr Harney? In any case, it simply isn't true. We presented a sample from 20 years' UFO reports. The only ones rejected were those marked on the report sheets by the investigators as being suspicious or likely misidentification. A working filter. I had no control over the years selected - two years were selected by a BUFORA officer and the others were selected by lifting brown cardboard boxes off shelves at random as rapidly as could be done in the two days we had available. The only conscious selection was that we avoided the years 1977 and 1978 as these had been already selected by Lawrence Dale of BUFORA. There was no subjective selection on my part, and the reports were being put to a use not suspected by anyone who had compiled the reports. It is therefore difficult to see how subjectivity came into it. We also included data from coherent reports of English or Welsh 'wave zones', ones that had a beginning and end, as it were, and in which all the known sightings had been recorded. Only two such reports came to our notice, and we had no control over where they would be. We omitted the Warminster material as it was somewhat 'ragged', and hadn't had a defined end to the activity - or rather the reported activity - and we were well aware of the artefactual nature of much of the Warminster material. Mr Harney carefully avoids saying anything about the Leicestershire material, in which ALL known reports were plotted on the landscape. At approximately 130 reported cases over approximately 800 square miles this remains the best event-to-area presentation of UFO incidence ever attempted. If Mr Harney is not satisfied, then EL acts as a prod to him to get up out of his armchair, off his supercilious backside, and to get down to a bit of work himself. Another example of EL's excellent effect.

In his fifth paragraph Mr Harney reveals, inadvertently, that he has just skipped through EL. He says that many of the reports given in detail in EL seem to be 'somewhat similar to...ball lightning or St Elmo's fire...' Bravo, Mr Harney. Clap clap. Well done. What do you think EL was about? But in EL I go to some lengths to explain why I think UFOs are not kugelblitz, but why I think they belong to the same family as it and other phenomena such as earthquake lights, mountain peak discharges and the like. I attempt to show that there is a geophysical matrix from which coherent light-phenomena can emerge, and I suggest that UFOs are one of these. I've never ever seen a reviewer miss the point of what he was reviewing with such determination.

EL was written as the result of thinking by someone who has deeply studied the

UFO enigma and one who was deeply affected by witnessing it. It was not written specifically to 'attract the attention of scientists' as Mr Harney puts it in his sixth paragraph. But there is much in EL which would make such a bridge-building more possible than hitherto. As for going 'beyond science'...well, so was putting a man on the Moon once...so were pocket calculators...so was quantum physics...etc. One of the problems of British ufology is its lack of vision and courage...exemplified by Mr Harney. The unknown is not discovered by clinging solely to the known. (But EL even attempts to show that new views of the known can be created.) And creativity is another sadly lacking quality of British ufology. The turgid state of British ufology merely reflects the turgid state of many British endeavours...industry, politics and so on.

In his eighth paragraph Mr Harney seems to demonstrate that the most important matter in the book for him is the status of the photograph on page 98 of EL, apparently showing ball lightning - it is his longest paragraph. Mr Harney thinks it is a fake. Actually, Bob Rickard also thought I was 'sticking my neck out' on this one. Firstly, I must exonerate my publishers in this respect - it is my caption. And I said what I did because of all the purported ball lightning photos we studied for the book, this one most convinced me. If it is a fake, it is definitely not created in the way that Mr Harney (or Bob Rickard) maintain. I am a practising photographer so I know obvious fakery and this is not one of those. Just look at the picture. It is suggested by Mr Harney that the photographer simply moved his camera when photographing a street light to create the tracer effect. That is not possible in this case. The trace of light occupies about three-quarters of the width of the picture. Yet the edges of houses etc., and the lights from a telephone kiosk show quite clearly that the camera could not have been moved so wildly: the offsetting of their edges is minute compared to the span of the trace - there simply is no correlation. The blurred edges of the houses etc. are quite in keeping with a hand-held camera on a slow shutter speed used (presumably) in a hurry to catch a fleeting event. Moreover, study of the trace reveals a spatial effect that could not have been created by simply slashing the camera: the side view of the trace shows elongated lines, yet it is clear that the light source, whatever it was, turned in space and comes towards the camera in one case and away from it in another - the perspective on the trace is clear to see.

This could only have been created if the light source was moving freely in the air or

if the photographer was on some mechanical device that could push and pull him rapidly towards and away from the light source. Further, if the street light is on, it is the only one on in the street. The light occurring at the top of the lamp-post illuminates the houses behind...there is no hint of other illumination in the street (the photographer maintained that there had been a power failure during the storm). And again, there is no doubt that a thunderstorm was taking place when the photograph was taken, as on the original print there are several lightning traces in the sky... one is visible on the reproduced phot in EL - just above the lamp-post! And there is nothing odd about ball lightning being attracted to a tall, vertical earthed object standing freely, surely? There are many cases of ball lightning earthing themselves against chimney pots and spikes on roofs. Finally, the picture in EL is shown the same way round as the original print. The photo could have been faked, but would have required double exposure. Had the photographer gone to that trouble, I would have thought that he'd have avoided 'earthing' his light ball on the lamp-post just to prevent the sort of careless and ill-informed criticism as that put forward by Mr Harney. In any case, the status of the photo does not affect the status of ball lightning.

It seems a pity to me that this relatively unimportant feature of the book was singled out as the most important in Mr Harney's review.

But in spite of Mr Harney's jaundiced attitude, EL has already generated interesting events. As a direct result of the book's publication, the GAIA PROGRAMME has now been formed and will involve ufologists (those that bother to get up out of their armchairs), earth mysteries researchers (including trained geologists and archaeologists) and psychic researchers. A most exciting grouping of minds. Gaia is going to attempt to set up three experiments:

(a) To make a region-by-region analysis of the correlation (or otherwise) of the very best UFO reports and the local, detailed geology, to see if the tectonic connection continues to hold up.

(b) To carry out certain experiments to attempt to determine the incidence of unexplained aerial phenomena (Jenny Randles' excellent and sane term) in the vicinity of certain prehistoric sites, and

(c) To attempt to set up an experiment to see if earth lights produced by rock-crushing experiments can have their behaviour in any way affected by human observers.

This last will be an enormously difficult operation, and the very best PK subjects will have to be involved. But even at this

writing (January 1983) plans are well afoot.

So, Mr Harney and MAGONIA, that's the state of British ufology...only you were all too busy carping to notice. The tone of the Editorial seems to be placing the blame elsewhere: I think the ufological malaise is much closer to home, MAGONIA. So what if the number of UFOs reported has dropped off? It may be due to disenchantment with UFOs by the general public (though attendance at certain films doesn't seem to bear that out), it may be a sense of wasting one's time on the part of researchers who have been told that the UFO is not an actual phenomenon but some sort of psychological or sociological phenomenon. In which case the buck stops at MAGONIA's door more rightfully than anywhere else. But it could be that there is really a phenomenon that occurs in cycles of which we are currently ignorant.

Ufology has been bedevilled by two things: (i) the dominance of the ETH which for too long rendered any other interpretation of the phenomenon to the shadows; (ii) the reaction against this when mental and sociological factors came to the fore. This reached a pitch a few years ago when almost all leading UFO researchers were intimating if not stating that there was no real UFO event, only a mental/sociological one. The corrective swing went too far.

It seems to me that we really do have to make the distinction that I mentioned earlier: there is a geophysical UFO event - one with extraordinary and far-reaching characteristics - and there is this 'shadow phenomenon', which is the effect of the phenomenon on people, and the generation of apparently similar archetypal material in visionary and psychopathic ways - plus the hoaxes and misperceptions (and missed perceptions). To treat them all as a job lot, as the same thing, must lead to research errors. One aspect or the other will be denied by any given researcher. In reality, I feel there are two strands of ufological research - the socio/religio/psychological epiphenomena, and the actual, time-space atmospheric event. They are not the same phenomena. Unless this distinction is made, I fear progress in the subject will not be possible.

And the sort of patronizing, dismissive attitudes shown by Mr Harney will help neither field of ufological endeavour.

Ultimately, it may be that ufologists as a whole have painted themselves into various corners which prevents any sane across-the-board understanding of what it is they are studying, their cornered perspectives being unable to encompass the view required. I am beginning to suspect that ufologists may not be the people to study ufology, if you see what I mean. Thank God - or evolution or whatever - for earth mysteries research, then.

Researchers in that area stand head and shoulders above their ufological and psychic researcher counterparts at the present time in commitment, perception and healthy debate. I think it's a question of having your feet on the ground, rolling up your sleeves and getting down to a bit of work.

Finally, with regard to Earth Lights, I want to make it clear that I am quite aware all the various theories stated within it, or some of them, may be wrong. If they are so proved, well, fine. I'm not after patenting the UFO discovery, merely establishing further understanding of the whole enigma. That I have written a book that can be tested is surely a step in the right direction. All I can say is that in the light of what is presently known about UFOs, and in the light of my own experience and research, the earth lights theory holds up the best to the evidence. Not perfectly - but the best. To date, Earth Lights is not merely 'a book' - it is the result of sane and sober enquiry. And let's be a bit more generous, eh, Mr Harney? When was the last time that a single book produced two entirely new concepts in ufology, developed a sleeping theory so fully and generated a multi-disciplinary research programme? Hmmm?

Yours

Paul Devereux
Llanfyllin

Dear John,

As fascinating as it was to read Dr Alvin Lawson's 'birth-trauma' hypothesis of the origin of much of the imagery familiar in UFO abduction and contactee experience, I was looking forward to its refutation. Ian Cresswell raised some good objections, ending with the most pointed: namely, how could a foetus know what itself looked like. Very few who have described entities with foetal features have been twins (in which case they just might have observed their sibling)...and to postulate that foetuses might astral-project for a self-view would be special pleading in extremis.

I wish I was better read in the specialist literature of body-image research, one of the obscurer branches of psychology, but I believe that foetus images are not that common. There are self-descriptions, gained from hypnosis or from interviewing one of multiple personalities, which range from idealized character types to the geometric forms of letters or Platonic solids. And what about the most famous body-image of all, the one hard-wired into our brains as the surface distribution of nerve-endings? You've all seen it, I'm sure - the little homunculus whose distorted proportions are related to the amount of brain-area processing data from those areas. The body is tiny, with large hands and feet on spindly

limbs; but the head is large with huge eyes, nose, lips and tongue. Compare that with the thin-lipped, no-nosed abductors favoured by Lawson.

But why go back to make weak connections with conjectured body-images at all? I for one would like to see a sound study of the effects on society of the images arising out of early science fiction, in which our friend from beyond frequently threatened mankind in the form of a foetus-like alien. Remember the Mekon and his UFO-like anti-grav seat? Remember the ending of 2001: Space Odyssey? And I certainly remember discussions in '50s or '60s SF mags on the future form of the human race. The confident prediction was that automation (etc.) would render us all big-brained with small bodies and vestigial limbs.

I think Lawson has come up with an exciting connection, but his conclusions are premature. It must be borne in mind that these descriptions of foetal aliens and birth-like associated imagery have been obtained by extraordinary means (hypnosis, drugs, ecstasy, deliria, etc.). As many psychologists know (as Lawson himself has discovered) the human mind has amazing powers of confabulation; just consider the way in which dozens of images from a day in our lives can be woven into an apparently meaningful dream or nightmare that very night. We'll never get much understanding of the abductee enigma if we underestimate the power and creativity of our unconscious mind.

Joseph Chilton Pierce's book The Magical Child has much to say about alleged birth trauma, and I recommend a reading of it. The vast majority of births have very little of a serious life-endangering nature go wrong with them, so the birth trauma in question, as used by Grof, Lawson et al., are the ones we all share...the stages of birth which are part of the normal process of birth. From what Pierce says, (and I'm no doctor) the evolutionary process has prepared babies for the experience, so that a normal birth should have very few psychological consequences if any. This is believed by the Continuum Concept people also; that a baby is biologically programmed for the admittedly dangerous transition from one matrix of life to the next, and is therefore prepared (hard-wired, in computer slang) to react within quite a fair margin of circumstances. Birth is a high-anxiety process, naturally, but the anxiety has no focused object or visual imagery. Besides, the baby is not a 'victim' of birth. Hormonally speaking, it is the baby who triggers the onset of labour, during which the baby is flooded with adrenalin and oxygen and is as high as a kite (more imagery?).

Whatever validity there is in the BT concept - and I do think there is some - it

shares the same set of problems as the anecdotes of encounters, visions, astral projection, reincarnation, and 'life after death'. We would do better to seek out their common properties, and work back from there. Even so, there is no guarantee that we will recognize the archetypal experience, or even articulate it. And should we succeed, the world being what it is, it will always remain in contention. I, for one, will keep on looking though, and it is work like that of Lawson which is giving me much food for thought currently.

Incidentally, you will recall, with amusement, that Carl Sagan - a gladiator of science who regularly gives the thumbs-down to UFOs - includes a chapter on the BT work of Grof in Broca's Brain ('The Amniotic Universe'), in which he acknowledges the universality of BT-type imagery, present even in modern cosmology, though he tends to regard it as largely symbolic rather than literal.

Sagan has a quote from Francis Bacon: 'It is as natural to a man to die as to be born; and to the little infant, perhaps, the one is as painful as the other'. To which we might add, 'or as painless as the other'. As adults, looking back on birth, we see pain, blood, danger and the disruption of an idyllic existence. If the Continuum people are right, a baby has few regrets and fewer memories of its previous existence, the transition being natural, programmed and the right thing to do at the time. In other words, the general belief that babies suffer a massive BT is itself in contention (apart from those instances which depart from the naturally intended birth process and sequence).

But Lawson has pointed out the similarities in imagery used by those who recall BT and those by abductees. Grof shows the commonality of the imagery in drug, near-death and ecstatic-vision experiences. Sagan links BT to religious and cosmological symbols. If the set of images we label BT has its origins in human birth trauma, we can test this with a study of those born by Caesarean section. If they use BT, in hypnosis, or other forms of imaginative vision, then we have some ground for seeking our archetypal images elsewhere.

I was sorry to see John Harney completely miss the point in his review of Paul Devereux's Earth Lights. The purpose of the book, surely, was to set forth the evidence for the hypothesis that certain types of UFOs may have their origin in geomagnetic fields created by seismic stress. He does this admirably, to the limits of current research. The book should not be condemned simply because Devereux speculates that these same geomagnetic fields may influence the human neuro-system, creating the more familiar images of entities of ufological and religious

experience. In fairness, Paul presents a pretty good case based both on scientific research and direct experience. It would have been more constructive had Harney devoted less space to 'St Elmo's fire' and more to elucidating the 'many controversial matters' he acknowledges are in the book.

The hypothesis is here to stay and, like it or not, must be tested and discussed.

John Harney also refers to an alleged ball-lightning photo, the same one reproduced (in colour) in my Photographs of the Unknown, page 41. I reproduced it in the orientation advised by Frank Lane, from whom Maxwell Cade, Devereux and I all obtained the picture. When questioned, Lane told me he could not guarantee it was a photo of ball lightning, and not a trick of shutter-delay/sodium vapour light pulse (as Harney thinks). A lightning stroke is visible in the distant background. A new book, Ball Lightning and Bead Lightning by James Barry (Plenum, New York, 1982) prints a sadly deteriorated black-and-white of it, but interestingly cites a research study which identifies it as an artifact of the camera and a street lamp.

Yours sincerely

Bob Rickard
London E6

John Harney will be replying to the points raised in these letters in the next issue of MAGONIA



HE'S JUST DISCOVERED THAT THE BACK ISSUE OF MAGONIA HE WANTED IS OUT OF PRINT!

MUFOB 12 and MAGONIA 10 (the one with the important 'BT' article) are now out of print, and can only be supplied as photocopies at 75p. each. Other copies are in very short supply. Make sure you fill in the gaps in your collection as soon as possible. Issues of MUFOB from n.s. 8, are 45p. each; MAGONIA back numbers are 50p. Prices include surface post.



A CAUSE FOR CONCERN

John Rimmer

A major event occurred in British ufology when last month the editorship of Flying Saucer Review changed for only the fourth time in its 28-year history. One feels a particular sadness in recording that this is due to the continuing illness of Charles Bowen. All UFO researchers in the UK and many throughout the world owe a great deal to the hard work of this man. Indeed, this very magazine probably owes its continued existence to the fact that he wisely guided me to the flourishing MUF0B rather than the soon-to-decline MUF0RG when I wrote to him in distant 1968 for a local UFO contact on Merseyside. I am sure that all the readers of MAGONIA will join with me in wishing him a speedy and complete recovery.

A change in the editorship of any magazine, especially one as well-established and influential as FSR can provoke something of a crisis. Indeed, there has been for some time an undercurrent of concern in the UFO community about the future of FSR. At first this was largely confined to the question of the line of succession. FSR, like MAGONIA, has never pretended to be a democratic organization. The stamp of the Editor and his closest associates is paramount in the style and content of the magazine. This is as it should be. In a field as open to theory, speculation and idle daydreaming as ufology, it is important that readers should be able to see clearly just who is doing the theorizing, speculating or daydreaming. Naturally therefore, a change in editorship would be likely to herald a change in the character of the magazine. This change now seems to be upon us, as far as FSR is concerned, with the appearance, from the Vol. 28, No. 2 issue of the rubric: 'Editor, Gordon Creighton, MA, FRGS, FRAS'. This at least seems to be settled.

However, another cause for concern has been voiced in at least one quarter. In his abstracts of journals in Common Ground 5, Kevin McClure commented: 'I am not sure what to make of FSR these days... It is

becoming more international in outlook... Yet it seems to be sacrificing a good deal of objectivity as a price for this'. He goes on to criticize two British reports as very weak indeed, and concludes: 'The present trend at FSR needs checking; can it really be seen as the best UFO journal in Britain?' In CG 6 he returns to the subject: 'Much agonising about the 1954 BOAC sighting, as if it really matters now... Maybe better things are on the way; they certainly need to be... It's worth supporting, but do press for a new outlook, while subscribing'.

So far Kevin seems to have been the only person to have gone into print with his worries about the future direction of FSR, but there have been mutterings in smoke-filled rooms from the 'Don't quote me but...' element. I am sure this caution was due to a genuine realization of the difficulties the Review's Editor was undergoing. But with the appointment of a new Editor, and the appearance of the second issue under his direction, a closer look at those trends which are disturbing some ufologists is justified.

The latest issue to hand (Vol. 28, No. 3) seems to be the culmination of a process which has been happening for some time. It displays an almost total preoccupation with a vague conspiratorial approach to ufology. Even the most straightforward statements are couched in oblique, cloak-and-dagger terms, with such phrases as 'the name of the organisation where I was employed and the nature of my duties there are not matters that need to be chronicled here...' Quite so, but then why mention them at all? Or such sinisterly significant phrases as 'in the summer of 1958...while taking my vacation in a country not far from Britain...' Would it really be blowing a state secret if we were told that it was France, or Belgium, or wherever? Hardly, but it would sound far less portentous!

Most of the articles in this latest issue seem to be promoting a conspiracy theory of ufology. One asks 'Are UFO Reports Subject in Britain to the D-Notice System and the Official Secrets Act?' This tries to suggest that the Government is taking great pains to suppress the dissemination and collation of UFO reports. A nameless informant is quoted at length, only to come to the conclusion that he cannot actually remember whether or not a D-Notice was ever issued over a UFO report! In fact it would be most remarkable if some UFO reports were not subject to the Official Secrets Act, such is the scope of this Act, especially reports made by military personnel or near military installations. Being covered by

the Official Secrets Act does not mean that a topic is particularly important, as FSR (and many other ufologists) seems to think (in fact the present writer had to sign the Official Secrets Act when he worked in a menial capacity in a firm which printed Government forms).

The major article in this issue is the second part of Part One of the Second Status Report (I hope you've got that) of Leonard Stringfield's 'UFO Crash-Retrieval Syndrome'. This has been commented on critically at length elsewhere, so I shall remark only that it is yet another collection of un-attributed stories of crashed UFOs and US Government cover-ups, and serves to continue the theme of conspiracy-mongering.

An article headed 'An Early British Naval Sighting' spins out a story from the mid-fifties UFO journal Uranus, taken from an undated German newspaper Speyerer Tagblat. The original report seems to be now unobtainable, but the Editor of FSR thinks that it sounds genuine! The report appears to have been made by a non-existent British naval officer, and there is no reason to think that it is anything more than a hoax. A number of dubious stories appeared in the German press in the early fifties, including the Spitzbergen hoax and the Wiesbaden 'alien'. It is not clear why this story has been resurrected at this time, except as an opportunity to retail rumours about Lord Mountbatten, mysterious photographs on the desks of 'very senior' naval officers and oh-so-discreet mentions of those in 'the very highest levels amongst our national leaders who had expressed such an interest and who consequently also received every issue of FSR right from the commencement'. What a splendid guessing game we have here! Churchill? Attlee? Macmillan? ...or higher still? ...we boggle!

But there is one specific allegation of conspiracy which I would like to look at in some depth. In a long series of notes to a case-report with the sensational but unwarranted title 'Burnt by a UFO's Laser Beam', Gordon Creighton speculates on the Government's attitudes to ufology and ufologists. He begins:

'The signs are indeed that, as a recent TV programme (presumably the 'horizon' programme - JR) has clearly shown, an immense drive is at present being mounted in the USA, Britain, Europe, and USSR to stifle all civilian UFO research, to keep reports as much as possible out of the media, and to encourage civilian UFO research and enquiry groups to wither away.'

OK, let's hold it right there and consider this. Where are these signs? In the Horizon programme? Clearly? The Horizon treatment has been criticized as one-sided -

and there may be some justification in that charge. But this must be put against the numerous other programmes or sections of programmes which have put forward another point of view. Shortly after Horizon appeared, another TV show featured a number of notable British ufologists who put their case for a serious treatment of ufology in their own, very eloquent, words. No, I don't think we can see clear evidence for an 'immense drive' in one hostile TV documentary. So where is the evidence? I admit there are fewer media reports of UFO events these days, but then I rather think that there are fewer UFO events to be reported. Most of the UFO press seems to agree. And how are the civilian UFO groups being encouraged to wither away? I admit, we are not getting massive grants from the Arts Council or the GLC, but then we never did. I see no evidence of an 'immense drive' here, either.

But let Gordon Creighton continue, to perhaps the most remarkable statement yet:

'Simultaneously, the currents of public thinking are being manipulated. It is well worth while, for example, to take a look and see what is happening to the books about UFOs on the shelves of your local public library, and I hope that a great many readers will be good enough to do this and let me have written reports on what they have found. I have already watched this situation for a considerable time past, with significant conclusions.' Of course, we are not told the conclusions.

Now this remarkable paragraph can only mean that some agency, governmental, quasi-governmental, or perhaps paranormal, is engaged on a campaign to remove UFO books from public libraries in an attempt to smother interest in the subject amongst the general public. Now, I have a particular insight into the ways books appear (and disappear) on public library shelves. I am the Librarian in charge of a large library somewhere not a million miles from London (I can be evasive too!) and I am responsible for choosing which books should be added to that library's shelves, and which should be removed. Many people seem to think that there is some sort of vague bureaucracy which makes these decisions, according to mysterious prescriptions of its own. In fact the job of book selection in most public libraries is done by the Librarian in the branch or department concerned, or someone responsible for a group of branches in one area. This is almost universal. If you do not like the selection policy of your local library, there is nearly always someone near at hand you can speak to about it (only don't tell them I sent you) without having to send written reports to FSR.

Nevertheless I did what Mr Creighton asked. Two days before writing this, I checked the shelves of my library. There were 18 UFO books (not counting some general books which included chapters on UFOs) representing 17 titles. The one duplicate was Bourett's *Crack in the Universe*, which happens to have an introduction by Gordon Creighton. This of course is not counting any books which may have been out on loan. Now I have no doubt that this would not be repeated in some other libraries. I am interested in the subject; perhaps as a result of this I am rather more inclined to select books of this type for my library. In other libraries the librarian will not share my interest, and reject UFO books as a waste of his/her precious funds. You may find, though, that other libraries seem to be particularly heavily stocked with books on steam engines, needlework or stamp-collecting, reflecting the librarian's own interests. This is probably not ideal book-selection practice as we were taught at college, but after all most librarians are human! But whatever, there is no conspiracy here! It goes without saying that in twenty years of working in libraries I have never been approached by sinister agents, MIB, or high-ranking military officers suggesting that it would be in my own interests if I stopped selecting UFO books!

This whole matter is a massive red herring, and it can be instantly thrown back. If Gordon Creighton has reached significant conclusions, let him say what they are, and give us the evidence for them.

rather than hide behind a smokescreen of obfuscation and baseless rumour-mongering.

Actually, I have reached significant conclusions about the apparent dearth of UFO books in Mr Creighton's local library. Mr Creighton lives in Hertfordshire. This county, like many other parts of the country, has suffered serious cuts in its funding of local services. Libraries throughout the country have had their book-funds drastically reduced. In this sort of economic climate all sections of a library's book stock will suffer, and it is inevitable that librarians will be obliged to concentrate their resources on standard works, classics, textbooks, and the like, rather than on what many people will see (rightly or wrongly) as peripheral, non-essential material. If Mr Creighton finds no UFO books in his local library, the blame rests with his County Council rather than some sinister 'silence group'.

Flying Saucer Review has come to regard itself as the world's leading UFO magazine, and this claim has been accepted by many people, including MAGONIA. But the present directions it is taking are surely a cause for concern. As Kevin McClure remarks, it is 'sacrificing a good deal of objectivity'. Its pages are becoming riddled with bizarre claims and allegations; serious conclusions are relaxed by baseless innuendo. Instead of clear statements of fact, we get vague hints of suppressed knowledge. Conspiracy is replacing clear thinking. FSR's pre-eminence looks more and more doubtful.

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Notes & Quotes

It is not often that one is obliged to begin a report of a UFO conference with a comment on the food! The soggy sandwiches and tepid tea of far too many British buffets seemed (and were) a long, long way from the three four-course meals of 'Operation UFO/OVNI' last month in Boulogne. In the land of Napoleon they realize that a gathering of ufologists, like an army, marches on its stomach, and a hasty ten-minute break for a cup of tea and a Kit-Kat is just not good enough!

However, the food would have been rather less significant had the ufological content of the weekend not been of equal quality. A new generation of French ufologists, largely unknown in this country, are bringing an incisive new approach to the subject. Researchers like Jacques Scorneaux, Bertrand Meheust and Michel Monnerie have cleared away the extraterrestrial undergrowth of ufology, and are looking at the phenomenon as it is. Rightly, they perceive the identified flying object as an integral part of the phenomenon and, noticing no difference in kind between these events and the UFOs, they have turned their attention to the mechanisms which create the reports. They see the phenomenon as belonging squarely in the realms of psychology and sociology. It's not that they're opposed to the extraterrestrial idea (as Jacques Scorneaux stated very firmly in a bar in Boulogne's Market Square at 2 o'clock on the Sunday morning!) it's just that they do not find it necessary.

It was significant too that two of the contributors devoted their talks to exposes of hoaxes and shoddy reporting - without the accusations of 'cynicism' that often accompany such revelations in this country. The hoax and the hype are a part of the phenomenon, they realize, and must be dealt with honestly and directly.

The overall impression I took away from this event is that ufology in France has grown up, whereas in Britain (and probably in the USA) it has never progressed beyond a troubled adolescence. I think all the British contributors went away greatly impressed by the quality of the debate (and the food). Yet such, it seems,

is the insularity of the Anglo-Saxon nations that little of these people's work has been made available in English. In a small attempt to remedy this, MAGONIA will try to place the work of this new team of French researchers before our readers. To this end, Thierry Pinvidic, the Paris-based investigator, has generously agreed to accept the role of 'French Editor' for MAGONIA, and will channel material from researchers in France, Belgium and Switzerland, so that we may put them in front of a predominantly British and American readership. At the same time he will be helping to promote MAGONIA to a European readership.

The Boulogne event was organized, from the British end, by ASSAP, and is promised to be the first in a series of similar international events. Let us hope that when it is time to hold the event in England we will be able to match the quality of both the participants and the food!

- JR

In the last issue of MAGONIA, we mentioned briefly the setting up of the ASSAP library at Purley, in South London.

Since then there has been considerable progress. There have been several major donations, including a large proportion of the MAGONIA archives. The collection already consists of well over 1,000 books, as well as a large number of runs of periodicals and other documents. Other donations are expected soon.

Material placed in the Library can be either in the form of a donation, or in the form of an indefinite loan. In the latter case the material would remain the property of the person or organisation giving the material, and it would be possible to reclaim it at a later date, although it is hoped that in the majority of such cases the loan would be permanent.

It is hoped that a particular value of this Library will lie in its collection of periodicals. These, in the fields of ufology and the paranormal, are notoriously ephemeral, and any centrally accessible collection of even a proportion of the available material will be of considerable importance. The material in the MAGONIA archives forms a basis for the ufological side of this collection; but it is a basis only, and there are many gaps.

We would like to ask all our exchange Editors, and other readers who have been, or are now, associated with the publication of a small magazine (even - especially - if it only lasted one or two issues) to let us know if they have any archive copies still to hand which they could offer to the Library. We shall also be writing individ-

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will eventually yield to solutions that are not only un-extraordinary but also uninteresting.

The late F W Holiday once wrote a book in which he contended that Nessie is a strange phenomenal manifestation from another realm of being. In reality, as Mackal and other zoologically trained investigators have shown, Nessie looks and acts precisely as any large animal would under the circumstances.

We read books that would have us believe fossilized footprints prove that Homo sapiens walked the earth millions of years ago. Yet a recent scientific investigation shows that the prints are neither of great age nor of human origin. They are almost certainly camel tracks and they may be only 8000 years old. 'Skyquakes', sometimes attributed to UFOs, are now being studied by Thomas Gold and Steven Soter of Cornell University. They have learned that such phenomena have a geophysical explanation. The fabled moving rocks of Racetrack Playa, California, are caused by the interaction of wind and rain.

And so on and on. We would do well to recall that before meteorites were understood they were considered so bizarre as to be utterly unbelievable. There was a time not so long ago when meteorites were Fortean phenomena.

It is high time that we get serious. And if we are going to be serious, then we are going to have to be cautious and careful. And if we are cautious and careful, we're going to look a lot more like sceptics than believers. Which is fine, and in the true Fortean spirit. Charles Fort was sceptical of establishment humbuggery and so are those of us who follow in his footsteps. That hasn't changed and I hope it never will. But now it's time that we train a sceptical eye on our own humbuggery as well.

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ually to a number of people asking if they can fill gaps in the existing stock.

I suppose it goes without saying that the catch in all this is that the Library is unable to pay for any of this! We are reliant entirely on your generosity in these hard times.

As material comes into the Library it will need to be organised and catalogued in a way that will make it of the greatest use to researchers. To do this a Librarian will be needed. ASSAP seeks application from volunteers who would be willing to undertake this job. Although it would be a

pleasant bonus if such a person had some experience of library or archive work, the real qualification is a knowledge of, and an enthusiasm for, the range of subjects the Library will cover. Obviously it would also be an advantage if the Librarian lived within convenient striking distance of Purley.

If you have any material (however much or however little) you would like to give to the Library, or if you would like to apply for the (unpaid!) post of Librarian, please write to MAGONIA with the details. Any large parcels could be sent directly to the Library at this address:

ASSAP Library
Purley Public Library
Banstead Road
Purley
Surrey
CR2 3YH

Finally, I must point out that the Library is still in a formative stage. The material that has been received is not yet catalogued or arranged in order on the shelves. It will be some time yet before it is operational, so please do not turn up at Purley Library asking to be shown the ASSAP collection. Even when the Library is fully operational, members of the public will not be able to browse around the shelves; although the stock will be catalogued and most of the material will be freely available for consultation on request.

We will be keeping you informed on future developments in this most important project.

We realised that our Christmas Quiz was tough; we hadn't realised that it was so tough that by the closing date we would have received no answers at all. We accept that it is unlikely that any one person would come up with a completely correct set of answers, but we hope that some of our readers would have a good stab at it.

So for the benefit of those whose innate modesty prevented them sending in incomplete answers, we are extending the deadline to April 30th, and spelling out our prizes. For a subscriber the first prize will be two years subscription to MAGONIA (pretty good, eh?), for an exchange editor the prize will be a half-page free ad. in MAGONIA (wow!). Of course the real prize is the sheer glory of it (oh, and we'll throw in a copy of John Rimmer's 'Abductions' books when (if?) it's published next year)(betcha can't wait!).

BOOKS



MICHELL, John and RICKARD, Robert. Living Wonders. Thames and Hudson, 1982. £8.95

Michell and Rickard take us on a tour of the bizarre end of the animal kingdom which introduces Charles Fort to the Guinness Book of Records. Not the biggest, smallest, heaviest or fastest, but the strangest, the most out of place and the most disturbing! In four sections the book reviews those creatures which couldn't be or shouldn't be; those which are but shouldn't be where they are; those that should be where they are, but shouldn't be doing what they're doing; and finally those which probably could be doing what they are, but nobody's quite certain about it.

In the first category come such classics as sea-monsters, ape-men and the dinosaurs allegedly splashing about in the Congo. This first section also includes a valuable brief history of crypto-zoology, and some of the people who have been hunting mystery animals often almost as weird as themselves! Part Two looks at the strange appearances of animals in showers, swarms and shoals. The authors hint at teleportation as a mechanism for these sudden appearances, but like true Forteanes they have a deep-seated (and shrewd) objection in principle to explanations of any kind. Part Three looks at smart horses, faithful dogs and homing cats. Part Four is in one way the most interesting part of the book. It looks at those things that once were taken for granted. Man-eating trees and birds that kidnapped children were once quite unremarkable; everyone knew that swallows hibernated in the bottoms of ponds, and that monkeys bridged rivers by hanging on to each others' tails. Now...we're not so

sure. Forteanes, ufologists and others often assume that today's mysteries will be understood in the future, and will be revealed to have natural explanations. But the lesson we learn here from Michell and Rickard is that it is just as likely that today's natural explanations will in the future flutter away, like swallows from a lake-bottom, leaving us with new mysteries.

As we expect from this duo the illustrations are a treasure house, make of them what you will. Essential for everyone who doesn't believe everything they read in books - including this one!

- JR

BRUNVAND, Jan Harold. The Vanishing Hitch-hiker: American Urban Legends and their Meanings. London and New York, W.W. Norton, 1981. \$14.95

An amusing and erudite survey of the world of the 'whale-tumour' story, with phantom hitch-hikers, nude surprise parties, deep-fried rats, alligators in the sewers and babies roasted by drug-crazed baby-sitters. Despite the title, such stories are not, of course, confined to America, and they probably occur world-wide. The existence of an underground distribution of whale-tumour stories by means of Xerox copies, though, is probably specifically American.

Brunvald sees many of these stories as moralistic; those who defy society's established conventions may encounter grotesque nemesis.

- PR

BLACKMORE, Susan J. Beyond the Body: An Investigation of Out-of-the-Body Experiences. London, Heinemann for the Society for Psychical Research, 1982. £8.50

This is an extremely valuable study of ostensible out-of-the-body experiences, and covers all aspects of the subject. The author's approach is sympathetic but critical; she makes it clear that it is certain that people have out-of-the-body experiences, but points out that the dispute is about the interpretation of such experiences.

Susan Blackmore effectively disposes of many of the naive 'etheric nuts and bolts' theories which seem to gain credence across the Atlantic by pointing out that they simply do not make sense. She believes that the evidence for ESP and PK during these experiences is very limited, and concludes by somewhat tentatively proposing a psychological theory: 'I would suggest that the OBE is best seen as an altered state of consciousness (ASC) and is best understood in relation to other ASCs.

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Everything perceived in an OBE is a product of memory and imagination, and during the OBE one's own imagination is more vividly experienced than it is in evryday life.' (p. 243)

She relates such an experience to others in which there is direct awareness of the imagination. The similarity between the OBE and the false awakening is very clear, and the kind of vivid imagery occurring in OBEs may be a clue to the bases of many vivid UFO experiences, apparitions, etc. I believe that this book is absolutely essential reading for anyone interested in these subjects.

- PR

PEDLER, Kit. Mind over Matter: A Scientist's View of the Paranormal. London, Methuen, 1981. £7.95

This is a typical oversimplified coffee-table book, written by an uncritical author trying to connect ESP with the 'new physics'. Pedler tends to argue from authority, quoting various physicists, often, one suspects, out of context. Needless to say, the old chestnuts - quotes from Jeans and Eddington, and how wicked scientists refused to believe in meteorites. Not recommended.

- PR

LIFTON, David S. Best Evidence: Disguise and Deception in the Assassination of John F. Kennedy. New York, Macmillan/London, Collier Macmillan, 1980. £9.95

This book is an example of a tower of conspiratorial hypotheses built on one self-evidently false premise. The false premise is that the doctors who tried to save Kennedy's life at Parkland Hospital, Dallas, and those who performed the autopsy at the Bethesda Hospital in Washington were sufficiently calm and collected to make accurate detailed observations, and hence when discepancies arise between various accounts these must be evidence of tampering with the body. This is absurd. Those of us who can remember the terrible shock and grief of this event, can understand that these examinations and observations were conducted by people in the extremities of grief, shock anxiety and fear, numbed by what had happened. Not surprisingly, their recollections are confused, and these vague impressions have become solidified over the years. The real value of this book is to demonstrate that eyewitness testimony of events at times of great stress is extremely unreliable.

- PR

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