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Interpreting Contemporary Vision and Belief



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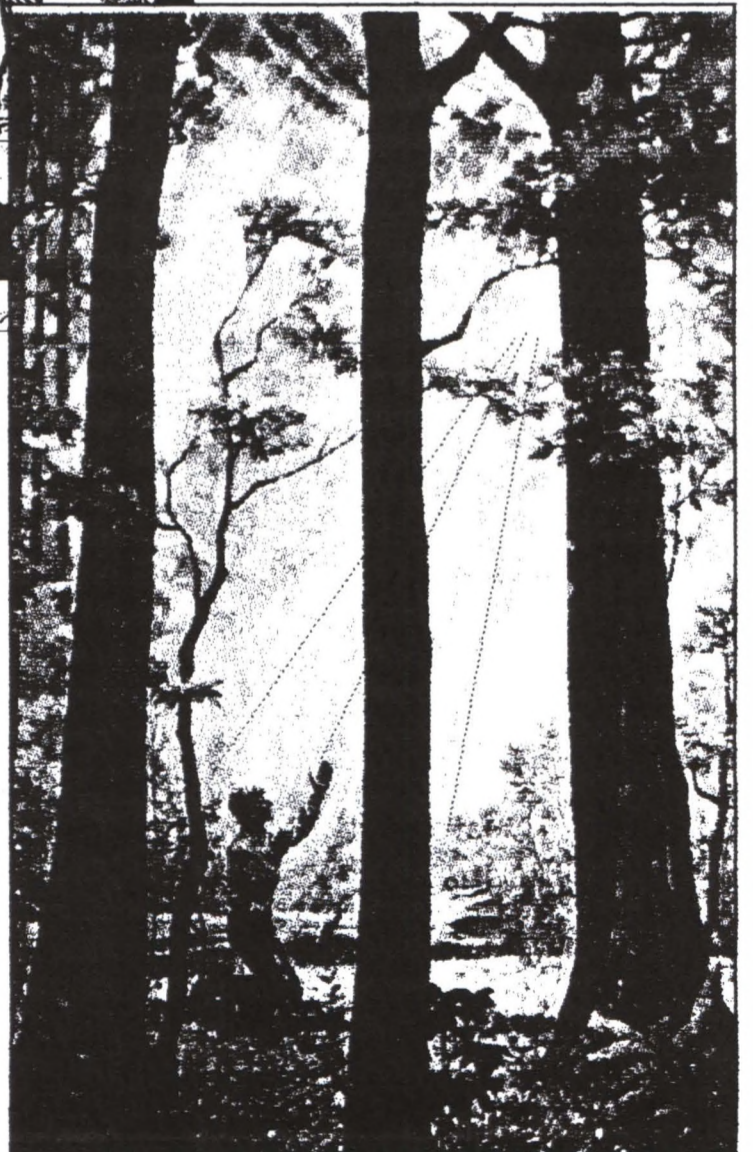


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Interpreting Contemporary
Vision and Belief

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**northern
echoes**

PETER ROGERSON

I had not intended to write a Northern Echoes column as well as my memory of Roger Sandell, but a situation has arisen about which Roger would have cared passionately, and it would be a betrayal of his memory not to comment on it in the strongest terms.

Readers may be aware of an organisation calling itself the 'Witness Support Group', orchestrated by Ken Phillips, late of BUFORA. Despite its name, the majority of its members do not consist of your average UFO witness, but rather of three broad categories: people with psychiatric problems of varying degrees of severity, living in community uncared for; a small group of people who believe they can offer healing to the former; and people who see the first group as a ready-made audience for their religious and political beliefs.

If these beliefs were the usual bland New Age platitudes then perhaps not much harm would be done; but in the case of one regular contributor to the Group's magazine Rapport they include racist doggerel appealing for votes for the neo-Nazi British National Party, and calling for the streets to run with blood.

Phillips likes to proclaim that his 'support group' is a haven of refuge for people who have been traumatised by what they interpret as close-encounter experiences. What a warm refuge he offers then, for encounter witnesses who happen to be Black, Asian or Jewish, to have thrust in their face propaganda in favour of those who are plotting them serious harm. This is no theoretical threat, as the thousands of victims of attacks by BNP members and similar racists can attest.

Considering the audience to which this incendiary obscenity is addressed includes several highly disturbed individuals whose sad delusions and paranoid fantasies appear to have nothing to do with extraterrestrials any everything to do with their neighbours and local communities, publishing this is as irresponsible as playing with matches in an ammunition dump.

Not every member of the WSG has been enamoured of this material, and a couple have complained. In response to one critic Phillips says "as editor I have the

unenviable job of printing all opinions whether they be religious, political, social or whatever. Of course in the interests of fairness this... include[s] the left wing socialist views of yourself [actually a bland religious homily, PR] as well as right wing ideas of nationalists, as well as all views in between." What appalling intellectual dishonesty and moral nihilism those weasel words represent. Passing over Phillips' use of the Nazi's own euphemism 'nationalist', we ask where would he draw the line - rape fantasies, paedophile pornography?

If Thomas Hamilton had been a member of WSG and had sent an article signalling his intention to kill a class of school-children in revenge for his grievances, would that have been published as "a matter of opinion"? Surely not. It seems however that while we can recognise threats made on an individual basis for what they are, and crimes against individuals and small groups as at Dunblane and Cromwell Street make our blood run cold, threats to the lives and well-being of tens of thousands of our fellow-citizens, targeted because of the colour of their skin or their religion, can be treated as 'politics' and "a matter of opinion", as though of no greater import than a debate on the ownership of the railways or the precise level of income tax.

Surely one does not have to have dogmatic religious or political beliefs to realise that to be open minded about the choice between good, symbolised by Itzak Rabin's cry of "enough of blood and suffering" and the evil represented by those who call for blood to run in the streets, means that our minds are so open as to become empty receptacles into which any kind of poison can be poured.

The hubris of ufologists playing at psychiatric social worker, as a break from skywatching, can only lead to tragedy. One severely disturbed member of the WSG has already committed suicide, allegedly after a dispute with another member. Paranoia bouncing off paranoia, pushing the already vulnerable and disturbed toward the chasm can only lead to worse, and maybe, for once, it would be well to be advised before the event and not be weeping over the consequences. As for Phillips himself, I have no doubt he started out with good intentions of offering a helping hand to the suffering, but in reality he is being sucked into their vortex of pain, fear, rage and paranoia, and is in grave danger of drowning. For the sake of his own health and security, he would be advised to abandon his activities forthwith, and make a new, healthy life for himself and his family before it is too late. And, if necessary to leave the mess he has left behind for the appropriate medical and legal authorities to clear up. P.R.

For almost ten years a horrible story has haunted the world's media: in Latin America children are robbed of their kidneys and corneas for the benefit of wealthy Americans.

On closer examination these horror stories turn out to be based on rumours and legends.

Organ-napping: the contemporary version of an age-old and universally known legend.

Organ snatchers



PETER BURGER

The first images of the documentary show a man with a wispy beard rocking his head back and forth as if he is in a trance. The camera zooms in on his face, showing us that his eyes lack irises and pupils. The next shot is an indoor scene. A younger relative asks in Spanish: "What did they remove?" The blind man answers: "My corneas". The boy pulls the eyelids of the right eye apart. Superimposed on the cloudy white tissue the title floats into view: *Organ Snatchers*.

The name of the blind man is Pedro Reggi. He is 26 years old and lives in a small village 60 miles from Buenos Aires. His corneas, the voice-over says, were stolen during a period he spent in the Montes de Oca mental institution.

Organ Snatchers ('Voleurs d'yeux') is directed by French journalist Marie-Monique Robin, one of the most influential disseminators of the shocking message that in Latin America the organs of the poor are stolen for the benefit of the rich. The recipients may be wealthy Americans, but stolen corneas are also procured by transplant surgeons in France. Robin's message does not fall on deaf ears. Her documentary has been aired in a number of countries and shown three times at United Nations meetings. A re-run on French television in January 1995 drew more than three million viewers.

Robin also sold her story to foreign magazines. In *Life* (October 1993) she describes Reggi as having "the emaciated face of Jesus Christ". In a Dutch weekly *•1* Reggi features as "the angel-faced boy" who "once had a pair of beautiful brown eyes, where now only two gaping holes remain".

This last statement is an exaggeration: Reggi's eyes may look horrible, but anyone can see that they are not gaping holes. What's more his corneas are still ■1 *Panorama* (no. 50, 1993)

there too, as someone with expert knowledge of eye surgery might tell you. I watched *Organ Snatchers* with Dutch ophthalmologist Mrs H. Völker-Dieben, board member of the Dutch Cornea Foundation. "The corneas are clouded", she told me. "This looks like scar tissue caused by old infections, as far as I can judge from the video images. To be completely sure, I would have to examine the eyes myself, using the right kind of lamp".

So Reggi's corneas have not been stolen? No, the alleged theft would indeed have left his eye-sockets empty. Normally, to remove the cornea from a deceased donor a transplant surgeon will extract the eyeball in its entirety, replace it with a plastic ball of the same size and eventually glue the eyelids together.

The Dutch ophthalmologist's observation tallies with medical records that became public after Reggi's appearance in a previous British-Canadian documentary about organ traffic, *The Body Parts Business*: Reggi was born with bilateral glaucoma. He lost his eyesight due to eye diseases. ●2

Jeison's Eyes

The story of Pedro Reggi is not the only controversial episode in *Organ Snatchers*. On closer inspection the documentary's emotional climax, the story of 10-year-old Jeison Cruz Vargas, the photogenic little blind boy with the flute, turns out to be equally doubtful.

In the documentary Robin meets Jeison in the Institute for the Blind in Bogotá, Colombia. His mother Luz recalls taking Jeison to a hospital in the slums when he needed treatment for diarrhoea; when she saw him again the next day, his eyes had been removed. Her son's medical file had been destroyed, she says. "It is a hospital for the poor, that's why things like this are happening here. It's the worst hospital in the world."

Ever since Robin went public with Jeison's story, this version of events has been vehemently contested by both the hospital involved - Salazar de Villeta - and the Colombian government. According to a statement (February 4, 1994) by the Colombian ombudsman for Health and Social Security, Jeison never underwent an eye operation. Barely four months old, he was hospitalised, suffering from severe malnourishment, dehydration and a number of serious ailments, including infection of the eyeball with *Pseudomonas* and infection of the cornea. Probably because his parents were very poor, they stopped the treatment and took the infant to a herb doctor. The infection destroyed his eyesight.

The row over Jeison's eyes reached a climax after Robin's documentary was awarded the Prix Albert Londres in May 1995, the most prestigious distinction for French journalists. Conscious of the fact that statements by Colombian doctors and officials do not carry much weight in France, the Colombian embassy had Jeison (now a 12-year-old) flown to Paris in August 1995 in order to have his eyes examined by two renowned French specialists in ophthalmology and infectious diseases. A pediatrician assessed the boy's medical records. ●3

In their report the French doctors note that the eyeballs, although atrophied, are still there, as are parts of the cornea. The infection that irreparably damaged his eyesight is quite common for malnourished infants in the Third World. Again, Jeison's eyes have not been stolen.

Moreover, the doctors argue, it is impossible to remove the corneas from a live donor without causing a severe haemorrhage, and no surgeon in his right mind

would use Jeison's infected corneas for transplantation as they would kill the recipient. It might be added that with its 28,000 violent deaths per year, Colombia has no shortage of donors anyway. According to Colombian law, everyone is a potential donor unless the family objects. ●4

Embarrassed by the outcome of the medical examination, the Albert Londres jury suspended Robin's award and promised to take a second, more thorough look at her documentary. ●5 Robin, meanwhile, does not budge. To maintain that Jeison's eyes have been stolen she has resorted to increasingly unlikely conspiracy theories and ad hominem arguments. The files could be forged - after all why did it take the Colombian hospital two years to produce them? "What is worth more" she asked, when confronted with the report, "a mother's oral testimony, or the word of a group of experts who intervene twelve years after the fact and in whose interest it is to make people doubt the existence of organ traffic (for reasons of professional solidarity, a proven taste for secrecy, international friendships established during the course of their careers)?" ●6

Nor does she think the medical establishment is the only culprit. When I spoke to her in February 1995, Robin claimed that Jeison's mother and other witnesses and authorities have all withdrawn their accusations under pressure from the United States Information Agency. ●7

In fact the USIA, a government institution that fights anti-American propaganda, does wage a campaign against Robin. Since 1988 it has published a number of reports systematically repudiating allegations of organ theft. This started out as a reaction to cold-war KGB propaganda, in which the United States were held responsible for the murder of South American children. The KGB has vanished but the atrocity stories are still with us and so is the USIA's anti-rumour campaign. Robin blames the responsible USIA staff officer Todd Leventhal for much of her setbacks, and has even suggested that he was implicated in the theft of her car. She later received death threats by phone and on the Internet. As she repeatedly said to me: "It's like a thriller."

Hansel and Gretel

Marie-Monique Robin was not the first to call attention to the organ mafia. Stories about organ-napping first appeared in the world press in 1987. ●8 On January 2 of that year a Honduran paper reported that disabled children were sold in the USA as a source of 'spare parts'. Thirteen child victims had been discovered in four *casas de engordes* ('fattening houses' - shades of Hansel and Gretel). The source of these reports was Leonardo Villeda Bermudez, secretary general of the Honduran committee for social welfare. On January 3, however, this official retracted his allegations, explaining that he had merely repeated the unconfirmed assumptions of social workers.

Later cases in Guatemala and Peru followed the same pattern: alarming but unsubstantiated reports which were withdrawn as soon as they were published. As bad news is more newsworthy than good news however, the initial disclosures were often reported by the press, whereas the subsequent denials were ignored.

This is a professional vice of journalists, which may be even stronger in those who have an ideological axe to grind. Unsurprisingly, in the late eighties the horror-stories about organ theft were eagerly picked up

■1 *Panorama* (no. 50, 1993)

■2 Report by Dr Patricia Rey, Buenos Aires, 6 Dec. 1993

■3 Renard, G., M. Gentilini, A. Fischer, *Rapport d'examen de l'enfant Wenis Jeison Cruz Vargas*. Paris, 10 August 1995. For reactions of Robin and other parties involved see: Gillot, Nathalie, 'Polémique sur l'enfant aveugle.' *France-Soir*, 12 August 1995; Nau, Jean-Yves, 'Un reportage sur les greffes de cornées en Colombie suscite un polémique.' *Le Monde*, 17 Aug. 1996; Proenza, Anne, 'Un document violemment critiqué à Bogota.' *Le Monde* 17 Aug. 1995; Bantman, Béatrice, 'Jeison, aveugle mais pas victime.' *Libération*, 18 Sept. 1995; Fritsch, Laurence, 'C'était une maladie.' *France-Soir*, 19 Sept. 1995; Nau, Jean-Yves, 'Un rapport médical contredit un reportage sur un trafic d'organes en Colombie.' *Le Monde*, 19 Sept. 1995.

■4 Proenza, *op. cit.*

■5 Mackenzie, Eduardo, 'Suspendido premio a Marie Monique Robin.' *El Espectador*, 26 Sept. 1995

■6 Bantman, *op. cit.*

■7 This is contradicted by her one-time collaborator, Colombian human rights activist Hector Torres, who agreed to keep an eye on Jeison's mother. According to him she has not been threatened. (Proenza, *op. cit.*)



In general, organ theft is implausible because clandestine transplantations require numbers of highly skilled medical personnel and sophisticated equipment that is not to be found in the countries where organ thieves are said to operate

and published by the Soviet media, which in the same period gave weight to the rumour that the HIV virus had been artificially created in an American biological warfare laboratory. ●9

The European Parliament too has twice spoken out against organ theft. In 1993 it passed a resolution condemning organ traffic. The resolution was based on a report by socialist Europarliamentarian Leon Schwartzberg. In this report the former French minister of public health describes the medical, ethical and social consequences of the lack of donor organs and stresses the existence of a homicidal organ mafia.

The very idea that cynical traffickers literally sell the flesh of third world children evokes strong feelings of dismay and compassion. This does not make a detached, clinical look at the facts any easier. Schwartzberg even disqualified sceptics by classing them with Holocaust deniers: "To deny such traffic is comparable to denying the existence of the gas chambers in the last war."

Nobody denies that in some countries (for instance Brazil, India and Egypt) poor people offer their organs for sale. In this respect organ traffic is a reality. Transplantation experts however are not prepared to assume the existence of a large scale mafia-controlled organ trade. Individual cases, like Pedro Reggi's and Jeison's do not stand up to scrutiny. In general, organ theft is implausible because clandestine transplantations require numbers of highly skilled medical personnel and sophisticated equipment that are not to be found in the countries where the organ thieves are said to operate. As Eurotransplant's medical director Guido G. Persijn told me:

Of course it is possible to kidnap people, anaesthetise them and steal one of their kidneys, but to do that you also need a recipient. The recipient needs to have a matching blood group and tissue group. You need an HLA-typing... And how can you be sure that this Mr. X you've snatched off the street makes a suitable kidney donor in the first place? Isn't he suffering from a renal disease, nephritis, HIV? You would need an immense organisation. It's just not worth it.

Even the strongest evidence for organ theft, such as the reports of kidney-napping in India that emerged in February 1995 ●10, is ambiguous at best. Poor inhabitants of a Bangalore village applied for jobs in the city and were robbed of their kidneys under the guise of a routine medical check-up. A specialist, a GP and two middlemen have been arrested. The German magazine *Der Stern* broke the news with an article headlined 'Organ theft in India proven for the first time'.

Actually, *Der Stern's* pictures of Indian men and women sporting huge scars merely prove that India has a markedly higher proportion of inhabitants with only one kidney than richer countries. By March 1995 more than eighty alleged victims had registered with the Bangalore police. Yet according to the town's police commissioner only a small fraction of those have really been robbed; the others supposedly sold one of their kidneys and are hoping to receive a higher remuneration by lodging a complaint. ●11

But why wait for conclusive evidence to be found? When I called him in February 1995, Stan Meuwesse, Director of the Dutch branch of the Defence for Children International (an organisation that fights child labour, child slavery, child prostitution and other forms of child abuse) asserted that organ theft is a reality. "The accepted facts and figures about child abuse are so overwhelming, that this has to be true too",

■8 The most comprehensive overviews of the rumour's history have been written by Campion-Vincent: 'The Baby-parts story: a new Latin American legend' *Western Folklore* 49, (Jan. 1990), pp.9-25 and Leventhal, Todd: *The child organ trafficking rumour: a modern 'urban legend'*. USIA, Dec. 1994

■9 *Soviet Active Measures in the Era of Glasnost*, USIA, Washington, July 1988, pp.12-13. For a less patriotic perspective on the Aids rumours, see Turner, Patricia A., *I Heard it through the Grapevine; rumour in African-American culture*, Berkely [etc.] 1993, pp. 151-164

■10 Penberthy, Jefferson, 'An abominable trade', *Time* 20 Feb. 1995; Ulli Rauss & Jay Ullal, 'Nieren-Klau in Indien', *Stern*, 23 Feb. 1995.

■11 Leventhal, Todd, 'The illegal transportation and sale of human organs: reality or myth?' Paper read at the annual meeting of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, Ghent, 25 Apr. 1995.

■12 Frankel, Mark, John Barry & David Schrieberg, 'Too good to be true.' *Newsweek*, June 26 1995.

■13 Main sources for the Guatemala organ theft scare: 'Foreigners attacked in Guatemala.' *New York Times*, 5 Apr. 1994; Carol Morello, 'A nation in the grip of panic'. *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 10 Apr. 1994; Mark Frankel & Edward Orlebar, 'Child stealers go home' *Newsweek*, 18 Apr. 1994; Laura Lopez 'Dangerous Rumors', *Time*, 18 Apr. 1994; Gleck, Elizabeth, 'Rumor and Rage', *People*, 25 Apr. 1994; 'Body parts panic in Guatemala' *FOAFtale News* 33/34 (June 1994), pp.17-18; Shonder, John A., 'Organ theft rumors in Guatemala, some personal observations', *FOAFtale News* 35 (Oct. 1994), pp. 1-4.

■14 Campion-Vincent, *op. cit.*

■15 Scheper-Hughes, Nancy, *Death Without Weeping: the violence of everyday life in Brazil*, Berkeley [etc.] 1992, chapter 6: 'Everyday violence. Bodies, death and silence.' pp. 216-267. Pages 233-239 deal with rumours of organ traffic.

■16 *Op. cit.* p. 233

■17 *Op. cit.* p. 238-239

■18 Oliver-Smith, Anthony, 'The Pishtaco, Institutionalised fear in highland Peru', *Journal of American Folklore* 82 (1969), pp. 363-368; Caro, Frank de. 'The body parts panic and the Peruvian pistaco tradition.' *FOAFtale News* 36 (Jan. 1995), pp. 1-2.

■19 Burger, Peter, *De Wraak van der Kangoeroe. Sagen uit het Moderne Leven*. Amsterdam 1992, pp. 23-26

■20 Whenever the tellers specify the child's gender, it's always a boy. Why?

he argued, repeating an argument voiced by other representatives of Non-Governmental Organisations in the human rights field. Who would believe, Meuwesse asked, that 6-year-old Pakistani boys are forced to work as camel-jockeys in the Arab Emirates? Still, this is an undisputed fact.

Meuwesse emphasised that he had never seen a "consistent, reliable, clear" report about stolen corneas and kidneys. All there was to go on are the stories that are being repeated over and over again: stories Meuwesse said, that convince everyone in the children's rights community.

Legendary Criminals

In *Organ Snatchers* one of those recurring stories is told by Mexican parliamentarian Hector Ramirez, a member of the parliamentary commission charged with the investigation of illegal organ traffic. Ramirez recounts the case of a little boy who was kidnapped on the market in the Extapalapa quarter and turned up two months later on the same spot, a scar on his back marking the place where one of his kidneys had been extracted.

Ramirez: "His mother had him examined by a doctor. This confirmed her suspicions. When the little boy returned to her family, he brought \$2,000 with him. I contacted his mother, but she wouldn't tell anything at all. She was very scared. With the money she could take care of him.

For lack of names, pictures or documents, it is impossible to check this story. The official report by Ramirez does not mention it. Robin's team could not locate a single victim or witness in Mexico. The story sounds improbable: why didn't these supposedly ruthless criminals simply kill the eye-witness instead of delivering him to the scene of the crime with \$2,000 - for pocket money? Random acts of kindness like this one have never been reported from other branches of crime.

If this story is convincing at all, the appeal lies not in its realism but in the moral point it makes. The story graphically expresses a message that speaks to the hearts of both poor Mexicans and human rights activists worldwide: Americans think that they can use the inhabitants of Latin America any way they like in return for a little pocket-money.

Everything points to Ramirez's story being a contemporary legend: a tale that surfaces time and again in different forms, but always appears to have happened recently just round the corner from where the storyteller lives. Unreal stories like this one can have real consequences though. In Colombia, Argentina, France, Switzerland, The Netherlands and other parts of the world, organ donations have dropped off as a result of these rumours, claim transplant organisations.

And "it has had a devastating effect" on international adoptions, says Susan Cox, president of Holt Adoption Services in Oregon, one of the agencies that annually help place about 8,000 children with US parents. In Turkey, officials outlawed foreign adoptions after the organ-thieves myth took hold. ■12 As sociologists are wont to observe: Whenever people experience a situation as real it will become real in its consequences. The truth of this dictum is brought out even more dramatically by the Guatemala organ theft scare of 1994.

Lynch Justice for Child Snatchers

Guatemala, March 8, 1994. ■13 American tourist Melissa Larson (37) is sipping a glass of pineapple juice in the

market of the village Santa Lucia Cotzumalguapa. Suddenly she finds herself surrounded by angry villagers and accused of being a child snatcher. To protect her from the mob, Larson is arrested and smuggled out of the village by the authorities. When the inhabitants find out that she has gone, they turn on her protectors, burning down the police station and setting fire to ten cars. It takes five hundred riot police, army reinforcements and armoured cars to restore the peace. Larson, after 19 days in prison, has a lucky escape.

Less fortunate is 51-year-old June Weinstock, who came to San Cristóbal to watch the Easter celebrations. On March 29 villagers spot her photographing children in the market and caressing a little boy. A woman who has lost sight of her 8-year-old son in the bustle eyes Weinstock with suspicion. "Maybe the *gringa* keeps the boy in her suitcase," the ice-cream vendor jokes.

Weinstock becomes the centre of an increasing crowd: there is an American child stealer in town! She too needs police protection, as one thousand inhabitants lay siege to the police station. Five hours later she is dragged outside and brutally beaten. Weinstock lapses into a coma and has to be hospitalised. She suffered eight stabwounds, a fracture of the base of the skull and two broken arms. By then the lost boy has been back with his mother for some time.

These incidents would never have happened without the rumours that preceded them. Long-haired foreigners were said to prey on children. A street urchin had been robbed of his corneas; his pocket was stuffed with US dollar bills. Eight babies were found with their hearts cut out. One had a hundred dollar bill stuck in the gaping wound with a note saying "Thanks for your co-operation".

Graffiti warned Americans that they were not welcome: "Gringo child stealers go home". Hysteria was fuelled in *La Prensa Libre* (March 13, 1994), Guatemala's largest circulation daily, depicting the organ trade in the form of an advertising pamphlet. Ten usable organs are displayed like meat in a supermarket, with the prices they would fetch in the United States. The price-tag on the heart reads \$100,000; a kidney is worth \$65,000 and a cornea would fetch a mere \$2,500 on the black market.

A Children's Exodus

So, where *do* these stories come from? How did Jeison's and Pedro Reggi's families come to believe that their child's blindness was caused by thieves? Apparently these stories have not been inspired by actual crimes. So, could they be leftist propaganda spread by deceitful journalists, as the US Information Agency has repeatedly suggested? In its most recent report on *The Child Organ Trafficking Rumour* (December 1994), the USIA does not come down as hard on 'Soviet front groups' as it used to; it provides much useful information but still does not *explain* the phenomenon.

Both parties - humanitarian believers and US Government sceptics, but most of all the believers - underestimate the power of the people themselves to develop and circulate unofficial explanations as a reaction to actual circumstances and tensions. In other words they underestimate their ability to create rumours. These stories originated in Latin American cities, not in a communist era Russian ministry.

The most detailed study of these rumours has

been made by folklorist Véronique Campion-Vincent of Paris. Campion-Vincent, who has been monitoring the organ theft rumour for years, maintains that it is much more than cynical propaganda. Rather, the rumour is the unreal synthesis of two real consequences of the poverty that afflicts Latin America: adoption and organ traffic. ●14

Children from Latin American countries are much in demand on the adoption market. At the times of the attacks on American tourists in Guatemala, on average twenty children per week were adopted from that country, half of them by Americans. Not all requests from American and European couples for the adoption of a Latin American child are met by legal means. Documents are forged, mothers sell their babies and even kidnappings occur. Clandestine foster homes do exist and are frequently discovered by the authorities. The people themselves regard this children's exodus with mixed feelings: what will the future of the children be like? Do they not rather belong in our country?

As we have seen, the selling of bodyparts belongs to the reality of third world countries too. Rumours about organ theft, says Campion-Vincent, posit an imaginary connection between the two phenomena: according to the rumour, the adoptions serve the organ trade as well.

A third fact of life in Latin America that feeds the rumour is the high level of everyday violence, vividly described by anthropologist Nancy Scheper-Hughes in a chilling chapter of her book *Death Without Weeping*. ●15 Scheper-Hughes shared the life of the poor in a community in North-East Brazil, a region where 'disappearing' is a frightful and by no means imaginary way of departing this world. The anonymous bodies of the victims may turn up on the side of the road, their genitals cut off and their eyes plucked out. Violence is such a routine feature of the world these people live in, that they cannot even take ownership of their own body for granted. And so, starting in the mid-1980's, the anxiety of the poor produced rumours of organ traffic.

It was said that the teaching hospitals of Recife and the large medical centres throughout Brazil were engaged in an active traffic in body parts, a traffic with international dimensions. Shantytown residents reported multiple sightings of large blue or yellow vans driven by foreign agents (usually North American or Japanese), who were said to patrol neighbourhoods looking for small stray children whom the drivers mistakenly believed no-one in the overpopulated slums and shantytowns would ever miss. ●16

According to Scheper-Hughes, inhabitants of the first and third world hold incompatible views of organ donation:

While Western Europeans and North Americans persist in thinking of organ transplants as 'gifts' donated freely by loving and altruistic people, to the people of the Alto, whose bodies are so routinely preyed on by the wealthy and powerful (in economic and symbolic exchanges that have international dimensions), the organ transplant implied less a gift than a commodity [...] The Brazilian rumours express poor people's perceptions, grounded in an economic and biotechnomedical reality, that their bodies and the bodies of their children may be worth more dead than alive to the rich and powerful. ●17

These feelings of powerlessness in the face of ruthless exploitation predate the introduction of transplant surgery. In fact, stories of white killers stalking poor South Americans for their bodyparts fit a native tradition which already existed long before adoption and trans-

plantation became important issues. One of the white ogres that abound in these traditional legends is the 'pishtaco' of the Andean Indians, a night prowler who collects human fat. ●18 He sells his booty to factories (as a lubricant) or to pharmaceutical companies (as a basis for medication). Indian fat was also said to be used to start up jet engines. The monsters have kept up with the times and are presently hunting for corneas and kidneys.

The EuroKidney Gang

The fear of cutthroat physicians that thrives under the corrugated iron roofs of South America exists as well in American and western European luxury apartments. Although emotions do not run as high as in the third world, the Dutch, for instance, have their own rumours about stolen bodyparts. In 1990 a contemporary legend circulated in The Netherlands that is the mirror image of the Latin American versions. A widely known and believed story told how a businessman or tourist visits Brazil (or Tunisia or Turkey), is anaesthetised by kidnapers and on recovery finds that one of his kidneys is missing. ●19

Since 1992 a new version is doing the rounds, this time starring a child rather than an adult victim. On a daytrip to Disneyland Paris parents lose sight of one of their children. After a while the little boy ●20 is found on a bench, pale and dazed, with a big scar marking the spot where his kidney has been extracted.

Such stories surfaced within two weeks of the Paris theme-park opening its gates in 1992. They do not only scare Dutch parents: German, Swiss, Austrian and Swedish parents too fear for their toddlers' safety in EuroDisney. In spite of this, not one single victim - or his parents - has ever come forward. Disney denies that the incident ever took place (but they would, wouldn't they?). The story is a textbook example of a contemporary legend. ●21

Typically legend-like too, is the way the story adapts itself to its surroundings. The EuroDisney kidnap scare does reflect a certain amount of xenophobia, but it is not the expression of a people that feels exploited. So, like their Mexican counterparts, the Parisian kidney thieves kindly return their victims to the scene of the crime, but in contrast to their Latin American colleagues, they never give them thousands of dollars for pocket money.

The Blood Carriage

Moral panics caused by tales about strangers who kidnap and kill children have been around at least since the Blood Libel legend accused Jews of mixing their Passover matzo dough with the blood of Christian children. Among those numerous historical rumour panics there is one that is the spitting image of today's organ theft scare. ●22

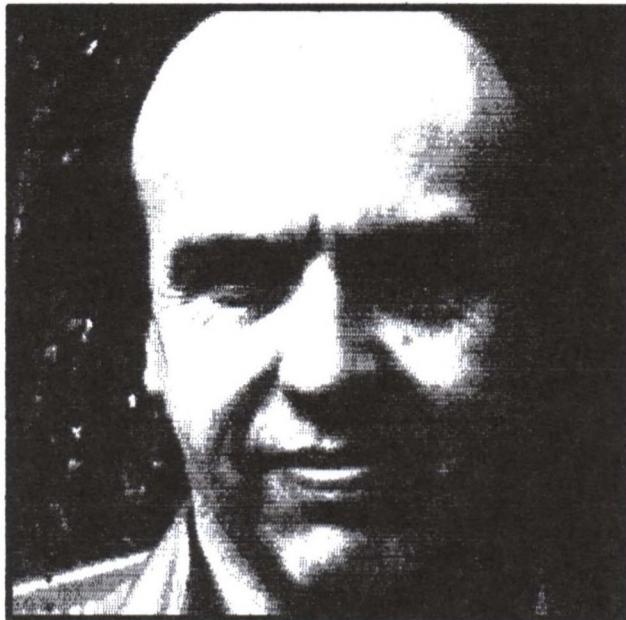
Paris, May 1750. The city is in uproar, because under the eyes of the populace police are arresting children on the streets, taking them away in shuttered carriages, destination unknown. The people resist; riots ensue. Police officer Labbé is caught redhanded as he grabs an 11-year old boy. The boy is liberated by the mob and Labbé has to run for his life. He enters a house and tries to hide under a bed, but his pursuers drag him out into the street. Guards come running, prise him from the hands of his captors and take him to

■21 Numerous collectors of contemporary legends in all parts of the world have recorded versions of the kidney heist legend. See, for example, Brednich, Rolf Wilhelm, *Sagenhafte Geschichten von Heute*. München 1994, pp 215-217, 310-311; Brunvand, Jan Harold, *The Baby Train and other Lusty Urban Legends*. New York 1989, pp. 149-154; Czubala, Dionizjusz, 'The "Black Volga": child abduction urban legends in Poland and Russia', *FOAFtale News* 21 (March 1991), pp 1-2; Goldstuck, Arthur, *The Leopard in the Luggage. Urban legends from Southern Africa*, Johannesburg, 1993, pp. 99-101; Klintberg, Bengt af, *Den Stulna Njuren, Sägner och Rykten i var Tid*. Norstedts, 1994, pp. 15-22, 66-68; Seal, Graham. *Great Australian Urban Myths*, Sydney 1995, pp. 133-135; Toselli, Paolo, *La famosa invasione delle vipere volanti e altre leggende metropolitane dell'Italia d'oggi*. Milan 1994, pp. 149-164

■22 Farge, Arlette & Jacques Revel. *Logiques de la Foule. L'affair des Enlèvements d'enfants Paris 1750*, Paris 1988. (English translation *The Vanishing Children of Paris*, Cambridge, MA, 1991)

CONTINUED ON PAGE 23

Remembering Roger



MICHAEL GOSS

Roger Sandell once told me that New York is the world's leading city for Shouting Men. Now, this isn't exactly the kind of datum you get from regular sources of information like the United States Tourist Board. It's not even mentioned in less orthodox sources that pride themselves in cataloguing the idiosyncratic and the manic; you won't find anything about Shouting Men in the literature of Forteana, nor, I fancy, in the literature of anything else. But Roger knew about them - described them as wonderful, semi supernatural seeming characters, disturbed and disturbing, frightful but comic. Perpetually, unappeasably furious, their sole purpose in life comes down to stalking our streets while shouting wildly and loudly at or about anything and nothing. And, as I said, Roger believed that numerically and percentage-wise, New York owned a larger population of Shouting Men than any city in the Western hemisphere.

Roger (whom I never once saw angry, let alone wildly-shouting angry) spoke enthusiastically of these metropolitan clown-terrorists as an inadequately recognised phenomenon. He wasn't especially interested in what they were shouting about or why; instead, with a connoisseur's sense for the moment when the terrible and anomalous becomes the ridiculous, he enjoyed the idea of individuals propelled through the urban landscape by some awesome impulse to express themselves in bellowing uncontrollably and unfathomly. And loudly of course.

James Thurber advised us not to look backward in anger nor forward in fear, but around us with awareness. Roger Sandell was aware in the true Thurberite manner. Dealing frequently as he did with the paranoid images of conspiracy theorists - Civilization imperilled by Night's black agents, by the new Satanists, covert governmental

desperados and terminate-and-cover-up merchants - he refused to be angry or fearful. He laughed at these dark visions. Like the American humorist, he was conscious that if the world is governed at all, it is by something possessed of a surreal, ironic, yet humanly-accessible sense of humour. He knew that humour and common-sense together will make Night's black agents go away.

What we discuss in *Magonia*, be it called ufology, Forteana, folklore or anything else, is undoubtedly serious business. Most of us who write on these things present them (and ourselves) as serious business. We are apt to be wary of humour lest it betrays us into the power of professional debunkers and other agents of dismissiveness (who, by the way, are apprehensive of utilizing humour for the same reason). It's easy to suppress the humourousness of what we are writing about for fear of making it seem trivial and risible - thereby sacrificing our claim to be serious, responsible students of a serious subject.

Roger had little patience with any of that. I can't think of too many ufologists/Forteans/folklorists who have taken their subject more seriously than he and yet, when occasion demanded, have taken it *less* seriously. Roger used humour - his inbuilt sense of the ridiculous - to show how often the cryptoconspiratorial ravers were missing the point of the very joke they themselves were telling. He demonstrated that humour, intelligence and the sense of being in a world none the less normal for being at times strange and crazy, are the keys to what we write about.

Re-read his 'Still Seeking Satan' essay in *Magonia* 51, in which he returns again to the subject of ritual abuse allegations - on which he wrote better and more perceptively than anyone. It is a serious piece of work on a serious subject. It has the confident grasp of contemporary writings

and historical analogues, the balance and hints of amused exasperation that typify the Sandell style. But you'll also be impressed by its recourse to popular, unoccult and transient culture materials, as when the author conjoins La Fontaine and La Vey with Rab C. Nesbitt and Harry Enfield; you will notice too, how adroitly it exposes credulity and monomania by quoting the guilty party's own words.

I have an enduring memory of Roger entertaining the *Magonia* 20th Anniversary Conference some years ago by the same sort of effect, arousing curative laughter by reading aloud in his sonorous, deliberate voice from Walter Bowart's cryptoconspiratorial classic *Operation Mind Control*. You saw the ludicrousness of what was being claimed at once; it hardly needed the speaker's wry comments to underline just how ludicrous those claims were. To pull off something like that, you need more than an omnivorous reading habit (which Roger certainly possessed). You need a well-developed eye for the comedic and a grasp on realities without which nobody can hope to comprehend things that pose as being beyond reality.

More especially you need an affection for what you are exposing as fallible and risible. For it was very evident that, regardless of the damage he was doing to Bowart *et al's* credibility, Roger *loved* books like *Operation Mind Control*. For him, they belonged to an exciting world of modern myths; they expressed a hirsute and valuable emotion through their excesses, just as the Shouting Men expressed theirs through incoherent cries. He also loved bumptious, encyclopaedic pedantry in books like A. S. E. Ackermann's *Popular Fallacies Exposed and Corrected*, wherein the writer expends 900+ pages on what he believes are heinous errors (and which most of us would see as quite trivial ones) as if the sanity and moral fabric of modern life depended on it. Roger could respect the erudite effort that went into books of this sort.

He could admire the incurable fact-collector as well, even when that sage displayed no understanding of why (s)he was collecting facts. Unsurprisingly, Roger was a lover of random pieces of knowledge, though not for their contribution to mental hygiene. He treasured the way they could set the imagination racing. I think most who knew him can recall times when he would lean forward, eyes gleaming, to share with us some wild datum that excited him. Nearly always it excited us as well. But then Roger was a simply marvellous anecdotalist. Knowledge, they say, is Power; to him it was more like Fun. There are comedians who can respond with a joke to match whatever subject the audience

throws at them. Roger Sandell was much the same when it came to UFO/Forcean/folkloric matters. And while I never experienced any of the pub quiz evenings over which he presided, I bet his questions were several cuts above the usual "who recorded the original version of 'Twist and Shout'?" variety.

Sombre thought, but unavoidable: many of us who have been associated with magazines like *Magonia* and *Forcean Times* over the past twenty-or-so years are at an age when obituary notices no longer seem irrelevant or sentimental. It's sad that Roger should be getting *his* notice so early; sad to think that we've lost one of the best, most energetic writers in the Magonian field so early and along with that a perennially-entertaining friend. I hope wherever he's gone has a good library and a good pub that stocks unusual ales just up the road from it. And listen, whoever's in charge over there: if you need someone to start up a regular quiz-night, look no further than the fellow who has just joined you.

PETER ROGERSON

Life proceeds by serendipity. In the autumn of 1971 I decided to get in touch with Carl Grove, then a leading light on the sensible wing of BUFORA and the author of a catalogue of 1909 airship cases. Having mentioned my interest in the 1905 Welsh Revival, he suggested I contacted a correspondent of his, Roger Sandell. This I was eager to do, as I had been greatly impressed by his articles in FSR on Springheel Jack, and thus began the correspondence which began our 24 year friendship.

From the start, what I found impressive about Roger was his vast range of knowledge, and what became clearer over the years, his prodigious memory. His letters covered a wide range of historical UFO cases, the nature of the UFO experience, the parallels from history, folklore, literature and film, and by no means least his abiding interest in the fringes of politics and all the wilder shores of belief. Many of these letters were of article-length and form a fascinating record of the early seventies.

In one of these letters, Roger described how he had become involved in the subject: "I have generally been interested in the mysterious since as a child I was a follower of a TV programme called *Explain This* in which dramatised versions of famous mysteries were presented and possible solutions were discussed... My interest in UFOs was aroused by the writings of Michel and Keyhoe when I was at school, but I became disillusioned with the low standard of much UFO literature and my

interest remained dormant until I discovered Vallée's two books during the 1967 flap. I started to read FSR, and the articles on 1897 encouraged me to embark on historical research."

Roger had written in his first letter: "we seem to be thinking along the same lines", and I rapidly arranged for copies of MUFOB to be sent to him, and I began to persuade him to write for the *Bulletin*. His first piece was a review of Lethbridge's *Legend of the Sons of Man* in late spring, 1972. This marked the beginning of Roger's study of the 'ancient astronaut' hypothesis on which he wrote his first full-length MUFOB article in 1973 which set the tone for his future contributions: concentrating on one topic at a time, meticulously researched. For this particular piece, feeling that he didn't have enough background information, he embarked on an adult-education course on archaeology and ancient history.

I met Roger for the first time in August 1972 and he initiated me to the tour of paranormal and related bookshops in London which was to set the pattern for future meetings. On 31 May 1973 the first great meeting between Roger and John Rimmer took place, the highlight of which was a visit to the Lamb and Flag in Covent Garden, where the patrons were photographed by a man who was rumoured to be a member of the Special Branch. It was natural that when John Rimmer, and later John Harney, moved to London they would start meeting regularly, and the new MUFOB and its successor *Magonia* was born.

Times change, and the telephone replaced the letter. Roger's calls were as informative as his letters, often commenting on the contents of the daily and Sunday papers. Our phone conversations dropped off in the mid-eighties, then became more regular again - updates on the Satanism panic, commentaries on the paranoia of the times, or on our shared interest in the Kennedy assassination (about which he was vastly more knowledgeable than me), or alternative histories, or fringe politics.

Roger's life was infused with a central moral purpose, that of a world in which all people would have bread and peace, justice and freedom, and all essential human dignity. Unlike some of his generation Roger did not abandon the ideals of his youth even if they had become deeply unfashionable. But there was no way in which his restless and enquiring mind could have been constrained by any party line or dogma. It was typical of his moral integrity that he resigned a secure teaching post on a matter of principle and returned

to supply teaching.

With his major work on the Satanism scare, Roger was emerging more and more as a key figure, being quoted in academic journals, reprinted in *The Skeptic*, developing a wide range of contacts, and taking the debate to a wider forum.

The editorial team of *Magonia* had always seemed like a permanent fixture, surely they would all go on into cantankerous old age, haunting conferences, like Eric Dingwall. Sadly, this is not to be. Of course, there could never be a good time for our friend to be taken from us, but I can't help thinking this was the worst: as the world seems to be heading to ever greater millennial lunacy, Roger's reason, knowledge and common-sense are needed all the more. I really cannot imagine the run-up to the millennium without Roger commenting on it.

In one of his early MUFOB editorials John Harney said "we are sensible". Roger was a beacon of sense in a mad world, and we are poorer with his passing. One of his interests was Sherlock Holmes, and we must look to the words of Holmes in *The Empty House*: "work is the best antidote to sorrow." Roger's work goes on, *Magonia* lives, *la lotta continua!*



We have been thinking of some suitable way to commemorate Roger Sandell's life, and record the contributions he made to so many aspects of the topics we comment on in *Magonia* magazine:

One possibility is to produce an anthology of some of his most significant articles from the twenty years he was a regular contributor to *Magonia*, including his analysis of the Satanism controversy and his work on the social history of ley-hunting. We would welcome suggestions from our readers of which pieces they think would be suitable for such a memorial publication.

Another possibility we have considered is the inauguration of an essay competition, perhaps with a cash prize, for articles which continue Roger's contribution to the understanding of the social and historical background to ufology, forteana and the fringes of human belief. We hope to bring you more news of these proposals in future issues of *Magonia*, and would welcome your comments.

Communion cups and crashed saucers Part Two

The Godlings Descend

In Judaism, Christianity and Islam, God may represent the overwhelming power of lovingkindness, but he is also the primordial creative force, the primum mobile, and the controller of all things. And so - as the canonical texts make plain - God is also the source and ultimate embodiment of all evil. In the second part of this series, PETER BROOKESMITH shows how the ambiguities of the omniscient Master of the Universe are reflected in UFO lore

1 C.G. Jung, *Flying Saucers*, [RKP 1959] Ark Paperbacks 1987, pp.148-9

2 *Ibidem*, p.170. For some inexplicable reason this passage put me in mind of 'believer' versus 'sceptic' debates, polemics and monographs in ufology.

3 This picture, which is in the Fortean Picture Library, can be seen in colour on the dust jacket and in monochrome on page 131 of my *UFO; the Complete Sightings Catalogue*, Barnes and Noble (New York) and Blandford (London), 1995

4 Anthony Dodd, 'In the Heat of the Night', *UFO Magazine* (UK) May-June 1996, pp. 44-47. One assumes that the investigators did in fact take the basic step of making enquiries among the neighbours. That is what the police would have done, had the abductors been human.

In UFO-related reports there is a cluster of symbols and images that directly parallel religious symbolism and imagery. In this article I want to demonstrate and explore those parallels, and so indicate the similarities between the underlying structures of belief in UFOs as extra-terrestrial hardware and in the Semitic religions.

Argosies of the Divine

Jung pointed out the mandala-like nature of the flying disk, and its associations of healing and wholeness, coming down from the Heavens, the realm of the gods, to bring salvation:

A political, social, philosophical and religious conflict of unprecedented proportions has split the consciousness of the age. ...Between the opposites there arises spontaneously a symbol of unity and wholeness, no matter whether it reaches consciousness or not. Should something extraordinary occur in the outside world, ...the unconscious content can fasten itself upon it, investing the projection carrier with numinous and mythical powers. ● 1

I'd also add that the daylight disk is a hard, shiny, inaccessible thing; a thing from Elsewhere; a symbol of Otherness. And UFOs perform 'impossible' aerial maneuvers - such as flying, for a start, against all known laws of aerodynamics, as well as performing maneuvers that defy momentum, inertia and gravity. They can even change shape. While being essentially remote, they are at the same time capable of miraculous activity: they are in the world, and even interfere with it, but are not subject to the laws of the Universe. These are divine traits, and Jung could accommodate their disparities in his symbol of wholeness, for he believed that

although the 'rotundum' is a totality symbol, it usually encounters a consciousness that is not prepared for it... indeed is bound to misunderstand it and therefore cannot tolerate it, because it perceives the totality only in projected form, outside itself, and cannot integrate it as a subjective phenomenon. ● 2

One can remain agnostic about Jung's particular slant on 'subjective phenomena' without being insensible to his perception of the analogous attributes of a salvific God and the flying disks: unapproachability, inexplicable powers, and an intimidating presence.

And, despite their sometimes gigantic size, UFOs have the knack of appearing only to chosen witnesses.

Examples are legion; here are a few. On 9 May 1984 a vast object was photographed over Sao Paulo, Brazil - which, one can see from the photo, is clearly a lively town. ● 3 But no one besides the photographer (and his magically sensitive camera) seems to have been aware of it. In the UK it was recently reported that at about 10:40pm on 15 July 1995, while barbecuing their dinner *al fresco*, four adults were abducted by aliens. The entities arrived in a UFO 'almost 30 feet in diameter' that shone 'a powerful shaft of light' into the garden. A photograph of the premises shows it to be surrounded by numerous dwellings of equally dismal architecture. The narrator of these events offers no evidence that any of the quartet's hugger-mugger neighbors were disturbed by this huge craft or its brilliant beam of light, although he sternly adjures us not to deny the reality of the event. ● 4 The highly populated backdrops in several of Willy Meier's pictures show that the Pleiadean spacecraft that appeared to him managed the same stunt of exclusive visibility; so did the gaily-lit UFO ridden by Ed Walters' molesters at Gulf Breeze.

Of course I hear the chuckles and snorts. But *it doesn't matter* whether this 'evidence', or any other, is hokum or not. Such cases suck their credibility, artesian fashion, from a bedrock of 'authentic' reports, in which UFOs remain invisible to all but those they wish to impress (or, more simply, those who want to see them). And, merely by existing, fraudulent cases of exclusively visible UFOs (or any kind of UFO - there's always someone ready to believe them) contribute to the accretion of received wisdom about the whole phenomenon; which has covertly evolved into a system of beliefs. The same exclusivity occurs, and is perfectly acceptable among onlookers who are believers, in visions of the Virgin Mary. Readers of *Magonia* will not need an exhaustive list of references. ● 5

The attributes of aliens and their craft, and the themes of ufological legends and parables do not always amount to a consistent whole. For instance: UFOs are 'proven' to be exotic hardware by radar/visual data; on the other hand, aliens have given America 'stealth' technology, while some say UFOs' propulsion systems are

knocked out of kilter by radar signals. All the contradictions within the catalogue can be resolved by UFO proponents, often by invoking additional extraneous premises, such as the ufonauts' presumed motives. Both the inconsistencies and the explanations are signs of a belief system at work rather than a body of empirically derived and falsifiable knowledge. ● 6

Superior Beings

If unidentified flying objects themselves suggest the numinous and miraculous, their occupants are even more remarkable. They are always alleged to be not just different from, but vastly superior to human beings, and in all respects - Willy Meier's Pleiadean friends claimed



Joseph Smith experiences the light of revelation in a forest in upper New York state in the early 1820s. Like many abductees caught in lightbeams from UFOs, Smith was 'born again' to a whole new way of life.

their civilization was 3000 years ahead of ours. Even sober writers on the scientific search for extra-terrestrial intelligence assume that anyone visiting us from the great Elsewhere will be phenomenally 'advanced'. ● 7 These assertions are not usually illuminated with details, but they seem to derive from a fairly quaint 19th-century notion of 'progress': moral, cultural and technological improvements are assumed to proceed at the same rate, if not actually hand-in-hand. This is not the rhetoric of the anti-technological, spiritually questing New Ager.

It is irrelevant to point this out, or to argue that primitive and degenerate humanity already has the wherewithal to voyage among the stars, if it wished to

do so. Nor is it pertinent to employ the obvious liberal rhetoric, as one might by suggesting revealing parallels: was, say, Cortès morally superior to Montezuma, or Rhodes to the Matabele? The argument, the questions and the analogy are all in the wrong language, being specific and concrete and open to informed debate. The vaporous imprecision of the committed Ethers' and ancient-astronautists' assertion is deliberate (if not necessarily conscious), because emotionally that is more suggestive. In fact by talk of 'superior' and 'unimaginably advanced' aliens we're implicitly being invited to be in awe of ufonauts even before we set eyes on one.

The Light of the Otherworld

When we do encounter aliens, these days, they don't stop much any more to chat about organic farming, as they did with Gary Wilcox, or hand out the cup-cakes, as they did to Joe Simonton. They come and grab us, don't they. And the abduction scenario, I am not the first to say, is rife with religious imagery and symbolically sacred routines. It is worth looking at components of this syndrome in some detail because it is through abduction narratives that the UFO phenomenon most richly reveals itself.

In both CE-IIIs and CE-IVs, the first thing the aliens commonly do is zap their victims with a beam of light. A light of *revelation* knocked Saul of Tarsus down, amazed the shepherds at Bethlehem, when 'glory shone around', and revealed the paraclete at the baptism of the Nazarene. The Christian texts call on a pre-existing tradition: a suitably poignant manifestation from the Tanach is the 'fire infolding itself' with 'a brightness... about it' that preceded Ezekiel's first vision. Later, in a variation on this motif, tradition held that Mohamed's mother was convinced her son was born to greatness for, as she said, 'Satan has no access to him.... While I was pregnant with him, I saw a light issuing from me'. ● 8 Mohamed's first biographer remarks that when the Prophet began to receive revelations from Allah, his visions would come upon him 'like the break of day'. ● 9 (As the Koran says, 'Would that you knew what the nightly visitant is! It is the star of piercing brightness.') ● 10 Still later, Joseph Smith recalled how, when he first called on God for wisdom, initially a 'thick darkness gathered around' him - 'the power of some actual being from the unseen world' that threatened to destroy him. Then

just at this moment of great alarm, I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me. ...When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. ● 11

Bertrand Méheust has pointed out how these visionary, revelatory light beams are not limited to the modern civilized world (or, I interject, to the long-vanished civilizations of its current prophets); and he notes:

The fact that [primitive and modern 'abduction' experiences] share so many elements, and have in common their underlying structure must be more than coincidence; at the very least, it points towards a permanence of certain elements in the universal language of the imagination, emerging in certain states of consciousness.... ● 12

One might say that the magical light of revelation drives back the darkness of the mundane world, which by implication is the Gnostic world of flesh and devil, the darkness that threatened Joseph Smith with 'destruction' and 'ruin'. In UFO experiences, the light is often

5 They will have to make do with one, and very good it is too: Hilary Evans, *Gods, Spirits, Cosmic Guardians*, Aquarian Press, 1987. See especially the Preface and Part 2.5

6 Cf. note 29 to Part One of this series in *Magonia* 54.

7 See, for example, Edward Ashpole, *The Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence*, Blandford, 1990, *passim*, and p. 157: '... what chance have we of guessing the attitudes of intelligent non-humans who will be thousands of years ahead of us at the very least. We cannot expect to find ETIs of a lower status.'

8 Ibn Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammad*, tr. M. Edwardes, Folio Society, 1964, p. 20.

9 *Ibidem*, p. 35.

10 Sura 86. Translation from *The Koran*, tr. N.J. Dawood, Penguin, 1959, p. 38

11 Joseph Smith, quoted in the pamphlet *The Prophet Joseph Smith's Testimony*, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, 1978, p. 3

12 Bertrand Méheust, 'UFO Abductions as Religious Folklore' in Hilary Evans and John Spencer (eds), *UFOs 1947 - 87*, Fortean Tomes, 1987. See also Méheust, *Soucoupes Volants et Folklore*, Mercure de France 1985, pp. 58-60, where he refers to 'piliers de lumière solide, sphères incandescentes ravisseuses de prophètes, pinceaux de lumière dardés sur le mystique choisi' found 'dans l'imaginaire apocalyptique



13 Hilary Evans, *Visions, Apparitions, Alien Visitors*, Aquarian Press 1984. See Parts 1.8 and 1.9.

14 Unpublished paper given at the Independent UFO Network conference held at Hallam University, Sheffield, UK, in August 1993; transcribed from tape recording. See also Devereux, *Symbolic Landscapes*, Gothic Image 1992, Chapters 3 and 4. There are obvious lexi-links here, too, for those of Fortean disposition. Aliens come from *Other worlds*.; the word 'alien' literally means 'belonging to another'. (And in common parlance people do or don't 'believe in' UFOs.

15 Richard L. Thompson, *Alien Identities*, Govardhan Hill 1993, p. 131

16 John 14:2

17 Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God; Creative Mythology*, Penguin 1976, pp. 124-6

18 This curious characteristic is mentioned in William S. English's summary of the Project Grudge / Blue Book Report #13 that he claims to have seen in 1976 (or '77). English's outline has circulated amongst ufologists and has been posted on the Internet but as far as I know has not been published in its entirety anywhere. William Cooper's account of Report #13 (he too claims to have seen it) can be found in Linda M. Howe, *An Alien Harvest*, LMH Productions 1989, pp. 196-213; see page 208 in particular.



reported as blue which, it feels patronizing to point out, is the 'color of Heaven'.

Both mystics *and* abductees agree that the light has a paralytic effect and/or generates a sense of floating. Mohamed was rooted to the spot when he was informed he was the Apostle of God by the Archangel Gabriel, who filled the sky in every direction. There is a condition of disembodiment of some kind as abductees are wafted (sometimes through solid walls or closed windows) up to a waiting UFO; just as, Hilary Evans points out, mystics are taken on a visionary journey by angels or demons. ●13 There is no evidence that this is a physical event, but there are clear parallels with out-of-the-body experiences and with the shaman's ascent to the Otherworld to discourse with the spirits. As, rather less tentatively than Bertrand Méheust, Paul Devereux has noted:

The reality of UFO abductions is - I suggest, along with numerous other researchers - to do with altered states of consciousness. These states were known of in earlier cultures, but today... we have no cultural context for experiences of the Otherworlds - which... can appear totally real, with all senses involved. Rather than spirits and ancestors [encountered during altered states of consciousness in shamanic societies], our modern altered states of consciousness are peopled by aliens and machines. While shamanic initiates experience death and rebirth, we experience invasive examinations at the hands of impersonal beings. The machine is within the modern soul. And the ET robot or alien could be the very image of our estrangement. ●14

Without quibbling with the essential drift of this, I am leading to the argument that death and rebirth, martyrdom and resurrection are *fundamentally* implicated in the abduction experience. I imagine Devereux would not disagree that the soulless clinical and mechanical images are the most appropriate metaphors in which to dramatize these themes in 'modern times'. For now the key point is that we are dealing with 'a permanence of certain elements in the universal language of the imagination'.

Magical Spaces

Once the abductee is aboard the UFO, the light becomes diffuse: symbolizing the immanence and ubiquity of the powers of this Otherworld. Furthermore, nothing can be hidden here - the light is everywhere; in any of the featureless chambers abductees report, the décor is as far removed from that of a cluttered Victorian drawing-room as one can get. That this place is Other is emphasized by curious features such as 'seamless doors' - that is, doors that merge invisibly into the wall once closed. Richard L. Thompson comments ●15 that 'many of the uniform features that show up repeatedly in abduction accounts do not seem to be psychologically significant. For example, what would be the psychological significance of seamless doors in UFOs, or slitlike mouths in short humanoids?' But at the level of dramatic symbolism, the image shouts. Indeed several interesting things follow from it.

Only the aliens can open these doors, reminding us that they are absolutely in control of the situation - or, to put it another way, that the abductee is trapped, and entirely at their mercy. They also suggest that this can be a one-way trip: there is no way back from (or to back out of) this experience - a point abductees have made many times, for in many instances it changes their lives. There is also the element of Wonderland - which, few seem to have noticed, Alice spends much of her time wondering how to escape. And there may be

echoes of dreamscape journeys in which the surroundings through which one has passed turn out to be entirely different from those that appear when one tries to make the return journey. The doors vanish - are lost to memory - as if reprising the way the means and moment of entering the craft become obscure ('doorway amnesia'). The doors become invisible too because the gateways to the Otherworld are always everywhere and nowhere at the same time, like the ubiquitous light.

'In my father's house are many mansions.' ●16 Whatever their external dimensions, the abductees' shining craft frequently turn out to be more spacious inside than they appear to be from without. Obviously this is a magical realm, but it is one designed to astonish, bemuse, and perhaps belittle, since it is a manufactured environment, not a natural one, that confronts the abductee.



Before the 'greys' became fashionable, aliens might appear in a wide variety of shapes, sizes, and degrees of pulchritude. Here is a curious creature badly in need of a decent haircut and a good tailor - characteristics it shares with some ufologists

Not like us

The aliens themselves are *very* alien. Despite the febrile insinuations of the Hopkins-Jacobs-Mack axis, across the whole range of CE-IIIs and CE-IVs aliens come in all shapes and sizes, all of them essentially non-human, if largely of humanoid or primatial configuration. Some are horrid troll-like things; some are robotic, some monstrous; some are quite angelic - the so-called Nordics. David Jacobs has suggested that the 'Nordics' are alien-human hybrids, but this doesn't alter their

equivalence to angels - both are midway between gods and men, and prettier than most of the latter.

Nonetheless the little gray fellows have been reported more often of late by abductees, mainly from North America but from elsewhere too. One can, I think, safely grant both the extreme unlikelihood that these are actual organic creatures, and the strong probability that they are visionary beings. Their peculiar behavior and singular appearance must, then, derive from some set of elements that, in combination, speaks to the condition of those who encounter them, and perhaps to our general condition as well. It doesn't matter whether the sources and inspirations of the 'alien' synthesis are cultural, pharmacological, neurological, imaginative, or anything else. We can take it that the gray alien type (and its activities) seem to be marginalizing the others because that is how people *want* aliens to be - this is what best embodies their idea of alien-ness. And I wonder if the little gray fellows have become so fashionable mainly because they are Incarnations, with a capital I, of *all* the godlike powers and properties attributed to the Otherworldlings. Physically, the gray aliens have:

- *Huge heads* - These plainly symbolize super-human brains and intellects. (Speaking of cultural sources: I have yet to see the infamous Mekon mentioned in this connection. Dan Dare's dread adversary in the old Eagle comic not only had a vastly oversized cranium, but floated on his own private miniature saucer and was green all over).

- *Bizarre eyes* - With which they gaze into abductees' souls, read their minds, control their actions, and bind them psychologically and emotionally. For their captives, the aliens hold 'the final way of escape, the most intimate of all places', as Tillich said of God. Gods always see too much. Pagan gods consisting almost entirely of eyes have been found as far apart as Iraq, Spain, and Syria. ●17

- *Attenuated bodies* - This suggests the aliens have no physical warmth or emotional sympathy; no 'earthy' distractions of digestion and dirt; the implications are of frigid intellect and passionless asceticism. The Houyhnhnm-like gutlessness is the corollary of the huge heads: the creatures seem to ask to be taken as unfeeling, super-rational intellectuals - they are certainly not large, warm, comforting Earth Mothers! Reports that autopsies on aliens reveal a chlorophyll-based metabolism that depend on photosynthesis ●18 reinforce the image of emotional incapacity. The entities have as much visceral feeling as an aspidistra.

- *No naughty bits* - They go straight round like my teddy bear, or like an angel, or like Satan in William Blake's illustrations of Job; in which Satan was not the Devil of the New Testament, but a companion (i.e. angel) of God. Once more the aliens' passionless nature is emphasized. There is also, in the context of the American Religion, a powerful suggestion of purity in this. Sex is 'the chief obstacle to spirituality in Gnostic thought, and the source of all evil in medieval Christian thought' ●19 - and in what passes for thought among fundamentalist Christians today, too. Lacking genitalia, the aliens can know no original sin, a dubious privilege otherwise accorded only to God, his angels, and the Nazarene. Uproar always greets any suggestion that Jesus of Nazareth had a sex life, and Protestant cultures are notorious not just for disapproving of sex, but for sexual repressiveness. ●20

And what do the aliens do?

Meaning in their Madness

- *Aliens physically invade their victims* - Aliens poke, probe, bugger, impregnate, dismember, even de-brain their captives. This last was notably reported by Sandy Larson, who on 26 August 1975 had her brain taken out and a fresh (if not noticeably improved) one inserted in its stead.

These casually-inflicted horrors underscore the aliens' indifference and Otherness, but also their ability to *remake* humanity: as gods can. At the same time, like rape in the real world, they are a display of *power* that humiliates and degrades the abductee. On one hand the imagery directly echoes shamanic accounts of symbolic death and rebirth: what else can one make of Ms Larson's traded-in brain? On the other hand, the emotional content relates directly to the traditions of self-abasement, flagellation and self-degradation in some Semitic religions - most notably Christianity, which has made a cult of martyrdom. An apparent paradox is that, once they have submitted to the noxious embraces of the aliens, the victims proceed to do their owners' bidding. But this too parallels the psychopathology of the victim in Christianity, and the doctrine of absolute predestination in Islam.

À propos the medical and sexual components of abductions: I am extremely glad for the personal safety of the ancient-astronaut brigade that none of them seems to have studied Islam, and that when their effusions were fashionable the abduction syndrome was not. There is a startling story in the earliest biography of the Prophet, written in the 8th century CE by Ibn Ishaq (AH 85-151, 707-773 CE). As a child, Mohamed had a wetnurse; as she told it, one day

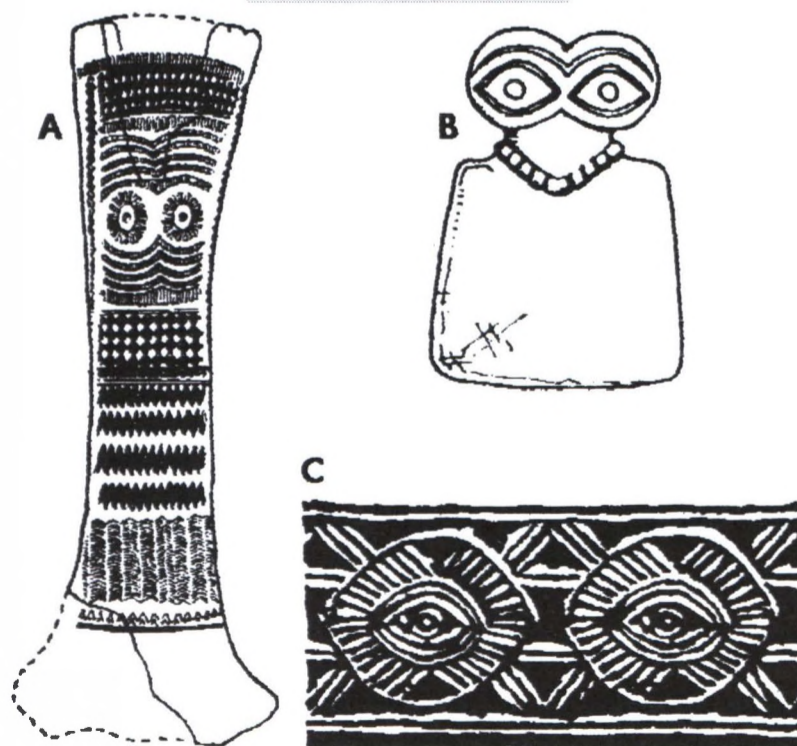
his milk-brother came running to me and his father, saying, 'Two men dressed in white garments have taken hold of my brother [Mohamed], and have thrown him on the ground. They ripped open his belly, and are stirring it up!' We hastened out and found [the boy] standing apparently unharmed but with his countenance quite altered. ●21

It's surely significant that later biographers put this incident in Mohamed's adult life, immediately before his ascension to heaven; in any case the parallels with the

19 Hyam Maccoby, *Judas Iscariot and the Myth of Jewish Evil*, Free Press, page 106.

20 This is as good a place as any to explain why I have persisted with the traditional attribution of the male gender to God. There are two reasons. One: because the Semitic God is *conceived* as fatherly (although only Christians labour the point, as they would), not motherly or neuter. Two: because I cannot believe that anything with feminine qualities - anything other than a being saturated in a massive overdose of cosmic testosterone - would be as barbarous as the Semitic God is reported to be (in all derived religions).

21 This is a conflation of the translations in Ibn Ishaq, *op. cit.* pp. 19-20, and in Alfred Guillaume, *Islam* Penguin 1956, pp. 24-5.



Eye-gods from the ancient world, all dating from around 2500 BC: a, carved in bone, from Spain; b, in clay from Syria; c, on a Sumerian seal

23 The Darkside scenario is as long and labyrinthine as it is pathological; there is an excellent summary in Jerome Clark, *UFOs in the 1980s; the UFO Encyclopedia Vol. 1*, Apogee 1990 under the entry 'Extra-terrestrial Biological Entities', pp. 85 - 100

24 Maccoby, *op. cit.* p. 110. Cf. p. 94: 'By washing their hands like Pilate, and mourning and bewailing the death of Jesus every Easter [Christians] hope to avoid complicity in his death. The more they cover Judas and the Jews with obloquy and hatred, the more they can distance themselves from responsibility.'

25 If God did not intend us to eat animals, why did he make them so tasty?

26 Exodus 33:23

27 II Corinthians 12:3-3. A later translation makes the point still more forcefully: '...and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat.' The Greek literally says 'sayings not to be told that must not be prattled about by people'

abduction syndrome are glaringly apparent here.

● *Aliens choose their victims* - The abduction syndrome is very democratic and yet also élitist. Just as anyone may be washed in the blood of the Lamb or be received into the bosom of Allah, *anyone* can be abducted. But once in the fold you are someone special. The aliens reinforce this 'chosenness' by using implants to track abductees wherever they go (the themes of *property* and of *no hiding place* again), but most especially by passing on messages or 'wisdom' for the rest (the 'gentiles') of humanity. In other words:

● *Aliens grant revelation* - The messages either concern human destiny which the aliens at least partly control, through genetic manipulation, for example (peace on Earth and mercy mild - God and Darwin reconciled!), or divulge particulars of the aliens themselves. These revelations fall into four general categories:

- 1- apocalyptic warnings (nuclear or, since approximately 31 December 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet empire, ecological disaster); ●22
- 2- moral injunctions;
- 3- messianic appointments (the abductee as the aliens' messenger to humanity); and
- 4- the identity and purpose of the aliens.

All these messages, in one form or another, echo the fundamentals of all religions anywhere. More or less explicitly, they all suggest the *means to human redemption*, and they *explain the purpose of life*.

The Cult of Despair

This is the classic pattern of the gentler, positive warnings relayed by George Adamski, Willy Meier and others, who had them direct from aliens. Although it seems unlikely at first glance, the pattern holds true for the

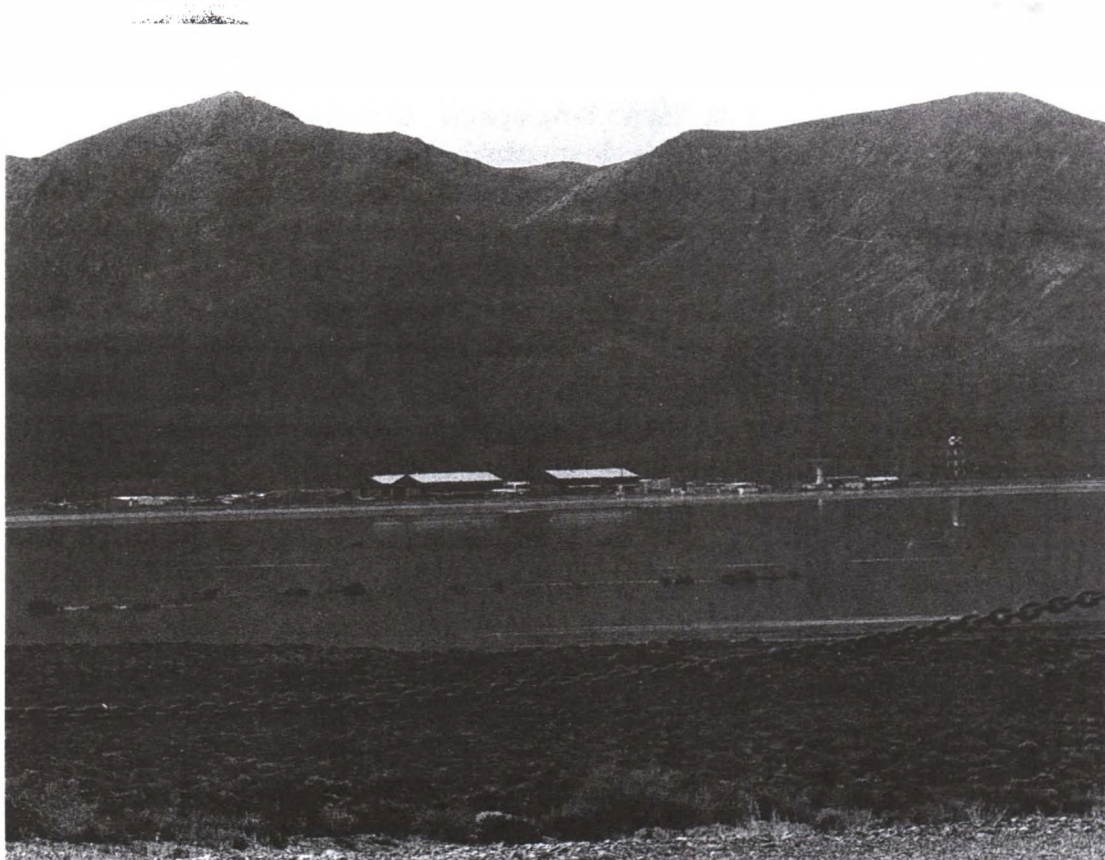
'Darkside' communications ●23 from such as Linda Howe and William Cooper, who justify their apocalyptic paranoia by reference to real, false or imagined government documentation and whispers from insiders. And the claims of Paul Bennewitz, who instigated the whole Darkside saga, support the point. Bennewitz is really a Darkside contactee; he had (he said) much of his information from aliens - albeit different aliens from the ones reported by Adamski *et al.*, - who transmitted it directly into his computer.

The most developed of the Darkside scenarios known to me comes from something called Cosmic Awareness, which confides in a channeling group based, aptly enough, in Olympus, WA. In 1990 the Cosmic Awareness purported to confirm all the usual grisly claims: secret alien-government treaties, hideous Nazi-style alien medical experiments on human subjects in subterranean bases, the involvement of the CIA and the 'international bankers' (guess who), the 'creation' of Jesus of Nazareth by the aliens, and the rest. But it added that the end of civilization/moral decay-as-we-know-it is due between 1996 and 2011 CE; and instrumental in this apocalypse will be the arrival of 40 million reptilian humanoids from the constellation Draco [*sic*].

All this seems a long way from the meaning of life and a means of redemption, but Cooper has solved the latter problem, with entirely consistent internal logic, by joining the militia movement and preparing for war against the US government, which is merely a tool of the internationalist (or, if you prefer, cosmopolitan) New World Order. The militia movement has imported many of paranoid ufology's themes and imagery into its mythology, from anti-semitism to wicked black helicopters. Thus the theme of martyrdom emerges again in political guise, out of a mythology that identifies Christianity with alien manipulation (Jesus as son of the omnipotent gods) and is entirely predicated on the notion that human existence is directed by aliens. One has the depressing suspicion that these obsessions are not as 'fringe' as they seem. Abductionist and jacuzzi player Dr Richard Boylan has lately linked (in Internet postings) the alien invasion with the four horsemen of the Apocalypse, thus tying the Christian millenium, Armageddon and the aliens neatly together.

The 'meaning of life' is thus reduced to that familiar condition of the devotee of the Semitic (and most especially, Christian) God - subjugation to incomprehensible and uncompromising savages, who like wanton schoolboys kill us for their sport. The Darkside conjures up the most extreme servitude: for the alien race is etiolated and moribund, and feeds on human flesh and blood to survive. But this is not so far from the actual behaviour of the Semitic God. As noted in the first part of this series, he kills what most he loves, and one of the subtexts of the Christian Eucharist (= 'Thanksgiving') is cannibalism. And the internal logic of the sado-masochistic Christian myth leads, as Maccoby has shown, to the fiction of Judas Iscariot and the institution of anti-semitism:

Only if Christ truly suffered was there salvation for Christians. Every pang of pain, every contortion of agony, witnessed on the stage [in the Passion Plays] and enacted in the theatre of the believer's soul, contributed towards release from the hell-fire which terrified the medieval Christian. The good Christian must feel sorrow for the agonies of Christ and never allow into consciousness his thankful and happy awareness that only those agonies stood between him and damnation. The best defence



The secret base at Groom Lake, Nevada. All religions have their shrines, and ufology is no exception. The Groom Lake base attracts many pilgrims, who like to watch the strange orange UFO, aptly known as 'Old Faithful' that rises regularly above the desert there. Non-believers know this is actually the Boeing 737-based transport used to fly workers into Groom Lake. Pilgrims prefer to believe that they are seeing the result of alien-human collaboration in aerospace technology.

against such awareness was to hate and blame the Jews. The more he hated them, the more innocent he was of desiring the crucifixion of Christ. ●24

Saucer Full of Secrets

The fourth of those alien revelations also bears interesting comparison with a religious theme. The aliens' own accounts of their origins have shifted over the decades from the near and impossible to the distant and no less unlikely - Mars, Venus, Saturn to begin with, then the Pleiades and Zeta Reticuli and the like. Intermingled with these have been still more exotic, fabulous places such as Clarion, Zircon, Martarus, the galaxy of Guentatori-Elfi, and so on. But all said they were extra-terrestrial, and that they lived in utopian societies (i.e. Paradise) free from money, meat eating ●25, politicians, war, etc. Lately they have become distinctly furtive about the locations of their home worlds. Abductees who ask get shifty answers: "That is not for you to know", "It doesn't matter", and so on.

"Thou canst not see my face," God told Moses in the tabernacle at Mount Horeb. (Although he did offer to show him his back parts, which has always intrigued me.) ●26 Borges in his writings makes repeated reference to the 99 names of God, and the 100th which is unknowable and unspeakable; among Jews, the Tetragrammaton (YHWH) is never pronounced, but signalled by the utterance 'Adonai' when reading the Tanach aloud. Apart from this magic of naming, but related to it, Semitic religion and alien encounters share another version of the secret that cannot be told. Saul of Tarsus, after his conversion, reported of himself that:

(whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell; God knoweth;) How that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for man to utter. ●27

Herb Schirmer, a seminal experient who was more contactee than abductee, also said that he had been given information he was not permitted to repeat; some abductees are vouchsafed great truths that they must forget, but that will be restored to memory at a later time. Another form of this motif is the 'book of wisdom' (of a blue hue, in Betty Andreasson's cases) presented to abductees that is retained by the aliens at the last minute or mysteriously misplaced later.

To the percipients, the close encounter phenomenon can be revelatory in another, more radical and manifest fashion. For many (I don't know what proportion) the experience changes their priorities, and they change their way of life. This is true of those who undergo revelation in a more overtly religious context, too, of course; the examples from the Bible alone are legion.

The abduction experience can thus, on one level, be seen a mythologised way of saying - of crying out - I am alone, I am *misused*, I am *manipulated* to the roots of my being. I am *not in control* of my life, not even of my most basic biological functions (my genes can't even be selfish!), I am the *victim* of overwhelmingly powerful forces, my *identity is at risk*. To paraphrase Charles Fort - *I am property*.

Those who are transformed by the experience and adopt what they feel is a healthier and more fulfilling way of life seem to contradict this characterization. The apparent opposition here between symbolic statement and practical response is less of a paradox than it seems. It can even be seen as a species of the dualism that runs through the 'American Religion'. These are the issues I will explore in the next part of this series. ●●●

THE ETH DEMANDS A MIRACLE

The aliens' craft are miraculous, and they themselves, like God and his prophets and emissaries, perform miracles. I'm not referring to those rather sad cases of handing out vinegar as a cure for cancer, although there are instances of chronic illness reportedly being cured through an abduction or a close encounter. I mean, for example, their adeptness with telepathy. This is so convenient, as it saves intergalactic travellers from having to learn so many languages, and no doubt explains their 'psychologically insignificant' slit-like mouths, which are not adapted for speech. But most especially I am thinking of the tricky means whereby they manage to get here at all.

As I said earlier, UFOs shouldn't actually be able to fly, but they do. Unless you're American, or know nothing about physics and biology at all, the extra-terrestrial hypothesis won't impress you. There's no good reason to assume life on other planets will have evolved along parallel lines to ours. But the aliens have, until recently (since they moved to Knotty Ash, I suppose), insisted that they are indeed from outer space. So how did they get here? You can write off conventional space travel, for literally dozens of reasons. Which leaves us with the fanciful notions of time travel or passing through hyperspace - 'other dimensions'.

In superstring theory, theoretical physicists have developed Riemann's metric tensor (a way of describing a point in space, in any number of dimensions) so that the previously irreconcilable qualities of gravity - that is Einstein's relativity theory - and quantum mechanics emerge naturally from the equations. This was long the Holy Grail of physics. The maths calls for 10 dimensions, nine in space and one of time, in certain circumstances and 26, 25 spatial and one of time, in others. 'Other dimensions' do, it seems, exist.

Difficulties arise over getting into them, however. They appear to have collapsed into loops somewhat smaller than 10^{-32} cm as the energy to sustain them dissipated in the immediate aftermath of the Big Bang. You have to generate 10 billion billion billion (10 followed by 27 zeroes) electron volts to open them up - and you'll rip four dimensional spacetime to bits in the process and, of course, generate a gigantic amount of heat. Even if you could do that, and could shield yourself from the effects and enter hyperspace, alarming things would happen to you. Only in four dimensional spacetime do knots stay tied, electrons stay in their orbits around atomic nuclei, stars shine, and does the home life of our own dear Queen run its habitually tranquil course. Things as we know them fall apart in hyperspace.*

Extra-terrestrial aliens, then, can get here from their Otherworld only by a miracle. The best source science can offer cannot deny it.

* Useful guides to the physics of all this are: John D. Barrow, *The World Within the World*, Oxford U.P. 1988; F. David Platt, *Superstrings*, Abacus 1988; P. Coveney and R. Highfield, *The Arrow of Time*, Flamingo 1991; Kitty Ferguson, *The Fire in the Equations*, Bantam Press 1994; and Michio Kaku, *Hyperspace*, Oxford UP, 1994. The unique cohesion of the material world of three dimensions plus time is discussed by Kaku on his pages 49-51 and 339-340. Even a primitive understanding of these tracts suggests Dr Richard Hoagland's recent utterances about hyperdimensionality are better taken as a form of satire than serious scientific comment. There is a telling discussion of the unlikelihood that extra-terrestrial life will be anthropomorphic in Robert Baker, 'Alien Dreamtime', *The Anomalist* #2, pages 94 - 137. The real reason the aliens of ufology look vaguely like us is that we require them to, the better to *personify* our condition and preoccupations. A slug-like ET, a space-faring headlouse, or a technologically advanced tapeworm would hardly reflect our concerns as human beings as parsimoniously. PB

After reading some of their recent publications

JOHN HARNEY

finds he is becoming

sceptical about the sceptics

■ 1. Joe Nickell, *Entities: angels, spirits demons and other alien beings*. Prometheus, 1995.

On being invited to review this book, one of the latest sceptical works, I decided to try to get a clearer idea of what scepticism is and what sceptics aim to do. What are sceptics supposed to be sceptical about? Do sceptics believe nothing at all about anything unless they have cast-iron proof? Where does scepticism stop?

One of their main preoccupations is with the debunking of allegedly paranormal events. The problem here is that they do not give any definition of what they mean by paranormal. If a group of sceptical experts investigated a haunted house, for example, and could find no plausible explanations for events which they witnessed and recorded, would they admit that they had a genuine case of paranormal phenomena? Or would they carry on working to solve the mystery? Or would they go mad and be led gently away by men in white coats?

According to my dictionary (*Chambers English Dictionary*, 7th ed. 1990) the word paranormal means "abnormal, esp. psychologically; not susceptible to normal explanations". However, it doesn't seem that sceptics are engaged in studying abnormal psychology.

In the sceptics' ideal world we would approach all questions in the manner of *Star Trek's* Mr Spock or Commander Data



They are concerned that we should not think there is anything in tales of the paranormal beyond psychological disturbances and conjuring tricks. Let us have a look at Nickell's book.

He is evidently proud of being recognised by his fellow sceptics (Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP)) as a field investigator, but most of this book is taken up with

rehashes of old stories, starting with the Fox sisters, whose tricks gave rise to nineteenth-century spiritism, and proceeding to more modern cases, most of which have been thoroughly investigated and explained to the satisfaction of most sane people.

The cases which he has investigated personally are often surprisingly trivial. For instance he travelled to an abandoned farmhouse in Kentucky to investigate reports of a mysterious banging door, said to be caused by the restless spirit of a child killed in an accident nearby in the last century. He found that this phenomenon was caused by gusts of wind. (What else?) There are several other accounts of travelling long distances to investigate similarly trivial reports.

A slightly more interesting case concerns the investigation of a report of blood mysteriously appearing on the walls and floors of a house in Atlanta. It was established that the blood was human, but did not come from the elderly couple living in the house. Further investigations instigated by Nickell indicated that up to half a pint of blood was used. He concludes his account by quoting a police investigator saying: "Some adults will act like children just to get attention". Yes, but what about the blood? Where did the old pair get it from? This intriguing question is not followed up. Nickell has concluded that nothing paranormal has happened and moves on to the next case, about a poltergeist manifestation in New England in 1979, for which he supplies the usual sceptical explanations. These explanations are highly credible, but what is the point of such exercises? If you think that such reports are bunkum and can readily be explained psychologically, then why not just sit back and wait for a really difficult contemporary case to get your sceptical teeth into? If the sceptics are right you'll wait a long time and save a lot of effort.

A section is devoted to apparitions of the Virgin Mary. These, we are told, can generally be attributed to neurotic teenagers craving public attention, egged on by credulous devotees of the Marian cult.

This was not the case with the apparition at Knock, Ireland (1879). It was "quite different from the others we have discussed". The vision consisted of an illuminated image on a church wall of figures including Mary and Joseph which were easily identified by the witnesses as they were portrayed in accordance with the conventions of Christian iconography. No in-depth investigation here, though. Nickell brushes it aside

with remarks about "pious imaginations" and "the testimony of credulous villagers".

Nickell tries to cover so much ground in this book that many potentially interesting cases get only brief mentions. The aim appears to be to rubbish as many reports as possible. As it is not clear what would constitute a genuine example of a supernatural entity the exercise seems rather pointless.

Scepticism is a useful tool to employ when faced with claims of instant cures for deadly diseases, or plausible sales pitches, but it can become a bit tedious when it is pursued as an end in itself, so that it is applied indiscriminately to everything that is not to the writer's taste. The result of this tendency is to give the impression that sceptics desire to alter human nature so as to eliminate not only mindless gullibility and crass superstition but also everything that seems to them to be frivolous or not strictly rational. In the sceptics' ideal world we would approach all questions in the manner of *Star Trek's* Mr Spock or Commander Data.

CSICOP's magazine *Skeptical Inquirer* shows this lack of focus in employing scepticism. It contains many excellent articles dealing with such matters as the misuse of health statistics and the inability of the claims made by psychic detectives to stand up to critical examination. On the other hand, *Skeptical Inquirer* ●2 cannot resist wasting space on more frivolous subjects. For example, the January/February 1996 issue has an article which gleefully lists predictions made by psychics which were supposed to come true - and of course didn't - before the end of 1995. Now if these were plausible predictions there might be some point in the exercise. These predictions, however, are either too vague to be worth noting, or so silly that they were obviously written as a joke:

- "A child will stun judges at a 7th-grade science fair when he presents a working time machine" made from parts of a microwave oven.
- "A meteor the size of a Buick will hit a used car dealership in Las Vegas. No one will be injured in the crash, but the crater will open up a vast underground reservoir of drinking water, solving the desert town's water shortage"
- Michael Jackson's "already weakened schnozz" will "permanently collapse" after an outraged mom punches him during a public appearance.

I thought at first this item had been intended as a joke rather than a solemn warning that the predictions of psychics were not to be relied upon, but the same issue also contains a rather po-faced item complaining about magazines which indulge in April Fool hoaxes.

Another problem with the application of scepticism is that some people don't know where to stop. This is illustrated by a letter to the editor (from David C. Richwerger) in response to an article entitled 'Consciousness as a Valid Subject for Scientific Investigation' by Huntly Ingalls, which appeared in the September/October 1995 issue. The writer "noticed that no attention was given to the many scientists who still believe that there is no such thing as consciousness". Richwerger goes on to say: "A perfectly sound, materialistic and parsimonious explanation for every human behaviour observed or experienced can be given without having to conjure up consciousness".

I don't know if you can make any sense of that. Difficulties arise, however, from the fact that until recently consciousness was generally regarded as a sub-

ject to be studied by philosophers rather than scientists. Some of them have tried ingenious methods of disposing of the problem by denying that it exists, but this tends to place them on the brink of solipsism. Attempting to deny the reality of consciousness inevitably leads to paradox and confusion. Richwerger does not explain how his presumably non-conscious scientists can be said to believe or disbelieve anything!

In the next issue of *Skeptical Inquirer*, Richwerger is gently chided by Ingalls who observes that "it is remarkable to hold that the existence of consciousness needs to be proven".

I mention this topic because I believe that we are going to hear a lot more about it in the future, as scientists increase their attempts to establish what are the necessary and sufficient conditions for consciousness.

Also in the January/February issue is an article about the portrayal of scientists and sceptics in popular entertainment. The author, William Evans, complains that: "Film and television entertainment programming increasingly portrays science and reason as tools that are unsuitable for understanding our world in a new age of credulity." He cites films and television programmes in which people attempting to deal with horrifying supernatural events are hampered and endangered by the intervention of a sceptical scientist. Only when he is got rid of or made to see the error of his ways can the problem be successfully resolved. The list of films he mentions in this connection even includes *Ghostbusters!*

Presumably the sceptical alternative to such films would be ones in which the sceptic arrives, carries out investigations and then gathers everyone together to give a detailed explanation of how they have been deceived either by natural phenomena or the activities of some unscrupulous trickster. You don't have to be a great dramatist or novelist to realise that this would be an anticlimax and that most people would quickly switch to another channel. Films like the ones Evans complains of are made to entertain, not to teach people to be sceptical.

Perhaps they would find their work easier if they confined their attentions to worthwhile targets

A constructive approach to the problem as he sees it is to encourage television companies to make documentaries which deal with matters of scientific controversy more objective. The problem is that it is difficult to attract large audiences for such programmes, at least in the USA, and this would not please the advertisers.

It is not clear what steps American sceptics would be willing to take to enable people to take science more seriously and to make it harder for them to be deceived by charlatans. Would they favour public service broadcasting financed by compulsory television licences, as in Britain? Would they be willing to pay extra taxes to improve educational standards?

Perhaps they would find their work easier if they confined their attentions to worthwhile targets, such as scientific fraud, quack medicine and extravagant claims of special powers made by people attempting to part the credulous from their money.

■ 2. *Skeptical Inquirer*, published by CSICOP, bimonthly. 1 year's subscription \$29.50 from Skeptical Inquirer, PO Box 703, Amherst, New York, 14226-9973.



Letters



Dear Magonia,
I've just read Kevin McClure's article 'Bogeymen' in issue 55. While wholeheartedly agreeing with the sentiment contained therein, there are one or two points I would like to take up with him. He states (p. 6, para. 3) that "In the context of the potential psychological damage.. the efforts of the sceptics and natural scientists are, at this stage, a waste of time, a nuisance, an irrelevance and an obstacle to dealing with the real issues." I disagree.

If we accept the abduction phenomenon as a form of urban myth, or even as a socially constructed form of inner psychological experience, then it is surely a better weapon against Mack, Jacobs *et al* to be able to present a viable alternative explanation to its victims than just knee-jerk denial. Jeffrey S. Victor in his book *Satanic Panic* notes that 'denials of the rumour stories are commonly either ignored or distorted by rumour-mongers so that they become seen as confirmation of the rumours... The best anti-rumour strategy is to promote a counter explanation'. (Appendix III, p.325) Of course, he's talking about Satanic abuse and conspiracy rumours, but the same holds true of much of ufology, especially the abduction phenomenon with its orgiastic abuse of children by supernatural 'others' *in loco parentis* and the paranoid attitude towards the authorities.

By presenting it logically as a psychological experience it may be possible to comfort someone already trapped in the phenomenon by reassuring them that these experiences are *not* objectively real. If this is accepted, then the sufferer's children may be less at risk. If the parent believes that this abduction episode didn't really happen and was internal, pertaining only to them, then logically they should be less likely to project their fears onto their children and so infect them with the syndrome - something similar to the approach offered to those unfortunates who suffer from anxiety attacks.

Although a terrible experience, part of the treatment offered to its victims is the advice that what they are suffering is only fear, which will pass. It is only an emotion state - albeit an extremely distressing one - but there is no objective reason for their fears and they can still lead rich, worthwhile lives.

I know this may be leaping a bit too far ahead, and should ideally be the province of more enlightened doctors and mental health experts, if and when they choose to interest themselves in the subject and not condemn it to the piecemeal academic research being done at present. In the meantime, surely a good step in the right direction must be formulating a convincing and rational explanation for these experiences. I admit that it might only be a matter of damage limitation, simply a matter of catching the individuals who feel they have been abducted before they seek 'therapy' from the Hopkinses of this world and get the full-blown mythology, but it's surely a start.

This is my only quibble with the article and the rest of the issue. It was as usual an interesting and thought-provoking read. My condolences also to you and his family on the death of Roger Sandell. I greatly enjoyed his comments and articles in your magazine. I hope you manage to maintain the quality he and you managed to give to *Magonia*.

Yours faithfully,
David Sivier, Bristol

Dear Mr. Rimmer
I found Kevin McClure's article concerning the abduction experience's potentially dangerous impact on children to be interesting and informative reading. But the piece seemed to be far too apologetically-toned to produce the desired effect upon the abductionists' behaviour. These are the same self-proclaimed experts who actually

embrace the notion that a super-intelligent race of extra terrestrials would go to the great trouble and expense of traversing the cosmos (on what could only be described as a covertly-executed scientific mission involving the kidnapping of millions of earthlings) just to carelessly blow their stealth-like cover by dropping off their prize specimens with their underwear on backwards or inside-out.

What's more, this is the same group of 'experts' who came up with a Roper Poll which was so ill-conceived and ludicrous that anyone with as few as two active brain-cells could see that it was utter nonsense. Yet they still proclaim that as many as 3½ to 5 million abductions have been *flawlessly* executed over the last fifteen years.

Of course, the interesting thing about all of this is that while all these abductions were allegedly occurring, the established UFO report and information centres such as MUFON and CUFOS were receiving few if any new sighting reports (in fact during the last two or three years the number of reports has dramatically fallen off). Naturally, this enormous numerical contradiction has caused a few ufologists to wonder who no-one (except the abductees) noticed the thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of giant UFOs flitting about as they zeroed in on their helpless victims.

Obviously, if the abductees are informing the experts (while fully conscious, and under hypnosis) that the creatures they are encountering are small in stature, spindly-built, grey in colour, have wrap-around eyes and that they appear to feel cool an "hard to the touch" (i.e. they must be cold-blooded, exoskeletal life-forms) - the experts immediately deduced that these aliens *must* be humanoid entities.

Then, because the abductees insisted that the greys have no hair, lack nipples, frontal genitalia, buttocks and a navel, the experts shouted 'Eureka!, this mammal is indeed a super-intelligent humanoid!' Of course the fact that the grey's head is

described as being about one-third of its total body size, which is entirely consistent with insect (or insectoid) physiology, enabled these experts to take the next leap of illogic and ask themselves, 'what in the world do these humanoids want of us?'

If Mr. McClure thinks he can reach these folks by appealing to their sensibilities on behalf of any children who may be psychologically or emotionally injured by the stories they bandy about, I'm afraid he is in for a rude awakening. For the abduction experts actually *do* believe what they are saying, and also that anyone who doesn't believe them is either ignorant, an ideologue, short-sighted, or a fanatic. Indeed, they do not seek debate about UFOs; they seek the like-minded companionship, approval and adulation of other believers.

I doubt they care what Mr. McClure, Mr. Klass, or *Magonia's* many readers think. They are not seeking an exchange of ideas, a lesson in semantics or entomology. They are on a mission for a new age space god and that's far more exciting, romantic and personally gratifying than butting heads with sceptics and non-believers.

Sincerely,
Matthew J. Graeber, Norristown, PA.

Dear John

The amazing and amusing letter from Mr Fred O. Gardner in MUFON of 1971 must go down in ufology as unique.

Whilst there are numerous researchers over the years who have paraded their military status to further their beliefs (usually in ETH), never before or since have I come across someone who used his or her children's qualifications or the size of their employer to further such beliefs. It is astonishing, and is likely to be a unique case. It makes you wonder what Mr Gardner would say to the opinions of someone who worked for the little corner shop or who was self-employed. And what about someone who had the misfortune to be unemployed...?! Presumably nobody thought to ask him this at the time (or did they?)

Concerning the various delusions and maladies in the book *Eccentric and Bizarre Behaviours* reviewed in issue 55, Phil Klass has suggested the 'Hopkins Syndrome' as a suitable name for the malaise affecting abduction victims. More recently we could add to this the 'Jacobs Syndrome' and now the 'Mack Syndrome'. Better still, why not denote the whole abduction disease as 'HJM Disease'?

Does anyone know of anybody afflicted with what may now be termed the 'Gardner Syndrome'? And can someone please suggest a suitable name for the delusion afflicting those who believe that certain governments have kept crashed flying sau-

cer wreckage under wraps for fifty years?

Yours Sincerely

Christopher Allen, Alsager, Staffs.

John Rimmer writes: The spirit of Fred O. Gardner is still flourishing. The April 1996 issue of *MUFON UFO Journal* carries a letter from Texas MUFON stalwart Keith Hutson attacking a recent TV programme which was critical of the HJM trinity. He bolsters his denunciation with the declaration: "As an engineer with forty years' experience, three significant patents, and the successful development of two successful companies which manufacture composite materials..." Ah, yes, but what about his grandchildren's exam results?

Dear Sirs,

I was hardly surprised, but nonetheless rather distressed to read yet another example of Randles-bashing in your magazine; this time Kevin McClure is responsible. In general I share many of Kevin's worries about abduction research, and I have been outspoken against the use of children in case investigations.

Although Kevin promises he will quote widely from the work of the four researchers he names, he actually quotes me only once, and does not tell his readers that I am quoting from a case published by Keith Basterfield, a researcher *Magonia* has rightly applauded in the past.

He introduces it with the claim that I present it as factual reality. This is a gross distortion and I cannot understand why he makes this bogus claim if he had in fact read the chapter from which he quotes. In the paragraph after he stops his very selective quote I stress the importance of Basterfield's finding that the percipient is 'visually creative with an active imaginat-

Dear John,

Kevin McClure's article is a timely one. It's a bit late, though, to ask 'should any of this material ever reach a mass audience?' because it already has. My two children pounce on *Fortean Times* when it arrives, which, given the steadily downward slide of *FT* gives me pause. Should I get it in duplicate and go over one version with an inky roller, like they used to do with the racing pages in public library newspapers? Or can I allow them to grow up thinking sex is weird - a view, after all, held by most of the human race one way or another. Meanwhile they accept 'My Baby was an Alien' stories with the same unphased indifference that they give the rest of the adult world, so I suppose if you look after your kids and supply them with baked-beans, band-aids, Beansos, etc. at timely intervals they grow up able to take fears of the supernatural in their stride.

ion', and I admit that such finding 'favour a psychological explanation', and go on to discuss problems with the physical evidence that was offered in this case. I even discuss the possibility that 'alien abuse' in this case may have been a cover for 'human abuse'. I do not see how this can be seen as anything other than a responsible, balanced presentation of the case, favouring a non-physical explanation.

I have often questioned the physical reality of abductions; I discussed the failing of the 'scar' evidence as long ago as 1988, and have always emphasised the view that abductions are not physical realities, but occur as visionary experiences during an altered state of consciousness. In *Star Children*, the only source Kevin McClure quotes, I have a 22-page chapter, 'All in the Mind', which reviews false-memory syndrome, fantasy proneness and other data that support that opinion.

Kevin McClure issues a challenge to the four writers in his article: to prove that alien abductions really occur. I would like to issue a challenge to him: prove that I claim they do!

What is rather galling is that, I suspect, we agree quite closely on these issues, in the sense that I think abductions are phenomena of consciousness. Where we may disagree is that I am open-minded as to whether the source of these visionary experiences is within ourselves on a psychological level, or has an external, possibly alien, source. But this is very different from professing their physical reality and claiming that spaceships have landed, which no evidence allows us to do.

Jenny Randles
Fleetwood, Lancashire.

Belief, as I think some of your critics of abductionists have shown, is a complex of mental functions, not an either-or state. There's many a millenarian who buys unit trusts due to mature in 2010.

I read your comments on Philip Heselton and EM with interest. The picture changes rapidly even as we speak, the 'instrumented readings and recordings' of the Dragon project are giving way before attempts to catch up with the fundamental philosophical problems of how landscape is defined by thinking and experiencing it. Paul Devereux is, alas the Gorbachev of Earth Mysteries; in his attempts to update a bankrupt paradigm he has seen it split into any number of divergent truths.

Yours sincerely
Jeremy Harte, Ewell, Surrey

book reviews

Duncan Steel. *Rogue Asteroids and Doomsday Comets.* John Wiley & Sons, 1995. \$24.95.

Since the spectacular impact of comet Shoemaker-Levy 9 on Jupiter in 1994 much interest has been generated in the possibility of comets or asteroids colliding with the Earth. Duncan Steel is an astronomer engaged in the work of discovering such bodies which cross the Earth's orbit and assessing the risks of collision.

Until quite recently the possibility of asteroid and comet impacts on the Earth causing widespread death and destruction was not taken seriously by most scientists. Comets were thought to be too insubstantial to do much harm and it was believed that the asteroids were all safely confined to stable orbits between Mars and Jupiter. Although all mythologies contained stories of catastrophes and most peoples shared a traditional fear of comets, the prevailing view among scientists during the past few centuries has been a uniformitarian one, the belief that changes on the face of the Earth happened gradually over very long periods. This view was strengthened by Darwin's theory of evolution.

It was not until the 1930s that the first discoveries were made of asteroids which crossed the earth's orbit, but this information made little impression on the entrenched beliefs of astronomers and geologists. A good example of this attitude is the case of the Barringer Crater in Arizona. As early as the 1890s it was suspected by some geologists that it could be an impact crater, but it was not until the 1950s that this explanation won general acceptance, as so many scientists clung to the idea that it must be volcanic. This was in spite of the fact that the rocks in the area are sandstone and limestone, with no igneous rocks such as granite or

basalt which would indicate past volcanic activity.

Once impact craters began to be recognised, many more were discovered and investigated. The discovery in 1990 of the remains of a crater at least 180 kilometres in diameter in Mexico (the Chicxulub Crater) tended to confirm the theory which had already been advocated by some earth scientists that the extinction of the dinosaurs and many other creatures 65 million years ago, indicated by a discontinuity in rock strata known as the Cretaceous/Tertiary boundary, was caused by an asteroid impact. This was because the Chicxulub Crater was also estimated to have been formed 65 million years ago.

It is calculated that the effect of this impact was to raise the surface temperature of the Earth to over 1000 degrees C. Later the air temperature over the continents would have fallen by up to 40 degrees C below normal for a year or so, as the immense amount of dust in the atmosphere would prevent the sun's heat from reaching the surface. It is difficult to see how any land-dwelling animals could have survived such conditions, but many evidently did. Steel is careful to point out, though,

that it is very difficult to make accurate estimates of the precise effects of such impacts.

There is a somewhat speculative chapter on Stonehenge and the Pyramids which the author presents as a basis for discussion and argument. The oldest parts of Stonehenge were constructed about 5000 years ago at the same time that similar structures were independently devised and constructed in other parts of the world. He attributes this to the effects of meteor showers associated with Comet Encke. He thinks that these showers may have been more intense and have contained much larger meteors in those times, and he calculates that these spectacular and alarming events would have occurred every 19 years. The alignments of Stonehenge and similar structures indicate that they could have been used to predict such events by making the appropriate astronomical observations and calculations.

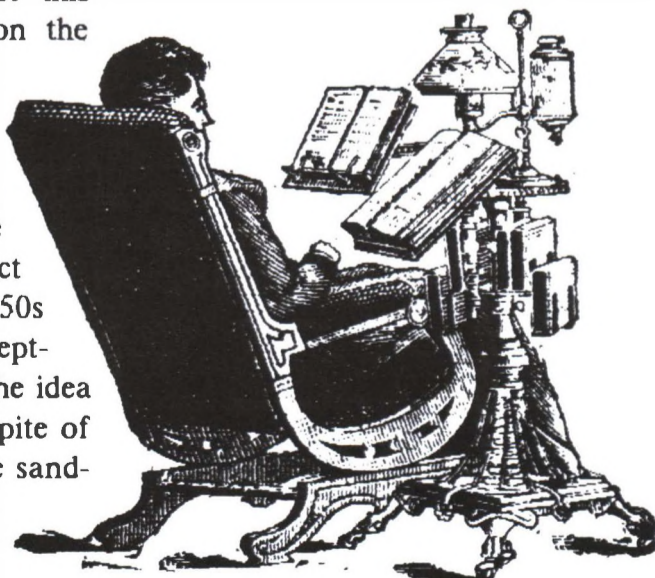
I recommend this work to all those interested in astronomy and earth sciences, and to connoisseurs of actual and potential natural disasters.

John Harney

Colin A. Ross, *Satanic Ritual Abuse: principles of treatment.* University of Toronto Press, 1995. £11.50.

While Colin Ross has achieved a certain notoriety for alleged claims that the False Memory Foundation was a front for CIA ritual abuse brainwashers, this book presents a surface of sweet reasonableness, and at least a rhetorical willingness to concede that up to 90% of SRA memories are false.

Despite this, there are clear indications of residual paranoia and unreconstructed belief systems bubbling beneath the surface. Thus we get an odd statement about the Assassins still being active in India in 1866 (presumably this is an error for the Thugees), the Illuminati being found



in Afghanistan, and the idea that the influence of the Illuminati on the French Revolution 'could have been significant' - an idea which derives from the French republican writer Augustin de Barruel, and the American Federalist propagandist John Robison, writing at the end of the 18th century.

The sources of Ross's 'information' are, needless to say, popular sensationalist books such as Darouls's *History of Secret Societies* or Howard's *The Occult Conspiracy*. There are also wild claims about the Inquisition and the usual Nazi-occult nonsense taken from Dusty Sklar's anti-cult book *The Nazis and the Occult* and Trevor Ravenscroft's *The Spear of Destiny*. In their turn these ideas derive from Pauwel and Bergier's *Dawn of Magic*, which must be evaluated in the light of Pauwel's own racist and parafascist world view.

Nor does Ross help his case by using sources such as Jules Michelet's *Satanism and Witchcraft* (and dating it at 1939 and 1975, and not hinting at its original publication date of 1862) which promoted the idea that witchcraft really existed as a

peasants' protest movement against feudal authority and the Church - not an idea which is taken seriously by historians.

Despite his disclaimers, Ross still tries to argue for the real existence of Satanic sacrificial cults, by means of false analogies: as systematic human sacrifice has been practiced throughout history, there must be human sacrifice cults in North America. A ridiculous argument; the genocides by the Nazis and others are *not* examples of ritual human sacrifice, such as displayed by the Aztecs, but of racial violence and the projection of unacceptable aspects of one's own personality onto others, who are thus dehumanised and destroyed. Indeed, low-intensity ethnic cleansing does go on in North America and Europe in the form of racist violence or vigilante actions against various outgroups of 'deviates', 'undesirables', etc. Groups which engage in systematic violence against the 'in-group' and their own children would be very unusual indeed.

Ross also makes the mistake of assuming that guilty verdicts in law courts invar-

ably mean that people were guilty. This cannot be taken for granted in times of social or moral panic. For example Debbie Nathan and Michael Snedeker's *Satan's Silence* and Mark Pendergrast's *Victims of Memory* (reviewed by Roger Sandell in *Magonia* 53) cast grave doubts on many trial verdicts, such as the conviction of Frank Fuster, whose conviction Ross believes establishes the reality of many of the non-cannibalistic claims.

I have concentrated on a small aspect of the book, one which is open to fairly straightforward verification. Much of the rest strikes me as typical psychobabble. I suppose I should note Ross's invocation of multiple personalities and alters, some of which claim to be demons. This would be expected if the origins of modern multiple personality belief systems can be traced back to Christian psychologists with at least a half-belief in demonic possession. He also seems to be maintaining that 'recovered memories' are valid, or in any case not the therapists fault.

Peter Rogerson

Abduction Review Round-up

PETER ROGERSON

Debbie Jordan and Kathy Mitchell. *Abducted: the story of the Intruders continues*. Carrol & Graf/Richard Gallen, 1994. \$15.95.

The heroine of *Intruders* (better known as Debbie Twomey, a.k.a. Kathy Davies) and her sister give their own story, including the chunks that Budd Hopkins left out.

Here we can see that they have gone through (or at least claimed to have gone through) the whole range of paranormal experiences; ghosts and poltergeists plague them and they become channelers. Debbie has episodes when ideas rush through her head as if from outside; she claims to have ESP powers, and a Geller-like ability to bend metal. No doubt much of this has emerged as Debbie has moved away from the Hopkins orbit, and towards more post-secularist ufologists like John Campbell, Forrest Crawford and Vicki Lyons.

By her own account Debbie's adolescence was extremely troubled, with a huge range of illnesses which even she suspects may have been largely psychosomatic, and behavioural problems which at one point led her parents to refer her to a psychiatrist. These are the symptoms which we have come to expect from both alleged abduction and alleged ritual abuse 'recovered memory' victims, along with the mood-swings from being painfully shy to 'wild-

child'. In adult life this transforms into periods of 'sensing the interconnectedness of everything', periods of compulsive writing, hypersensitiveness and deep depression. Some of her problems may have been caused by childhood bullying, but as they also seem to be shared with her sister we might suspect some genetically based medical condition.

Given that Debbie's husband died after just six months of marriage, and she had just had a hysterectomy she was clearly going to need all the support she could get. Budd Hopkins' reaction was to tell her that she was one of the last female abductees to still have all her female parts, and that this happening was probably just a matter of time, seems rather insensitive, and belies the impression of sympathetic old Uncle Budd.

Katharina Wilson, *The Alien Jigsaw*. 1994, £16.95

Katharina Wilson, *The Alien Jigsaw Workbook*. 1994, £9.95.

Both books published by the author.

Katharina Wilson, like Debbie Jordan, suffers from classic 'abduction personality' symptoms: extreme fear of the dark, near-paranoid anxiety states and mood swings. In her case there are clear non-ufological reasons why she might be suffering from

post-traumatic stress: the deaths of her best friend and a kitten K.W. had given her, in a fire, and a string of abusive relationships. In one such with a born-again Christian, she was told that a light on a wall was Jesus preventing Satan taking her away. Her husband was a weapon-obsessed military man who told her he was obsessed with thoughts of killing her, then when she was pregnant, told her to choose between abortion or divorce.

Not surprisingly she has nightmares connected with abortion, which - especially after filling in a questionnaire and meeting dear old Uncle Budd - she is now convinced are abductions. She started keeping a dream journal, and found, as keepers of such journals do, that she remembers more and more of her dreams, which are becoming ever more vivid. These are like lucid dreams, but without the insight that one is dreaming. Debbie Jordan called the 'virtual reality dreams' - a useful phrase. Wilson interprets them as abductions and the bizarre scenarios as dramas staged by the Greys. They reflect her fears, dreams of kittens (like the one burned in the fire), about babies (like the one she was forced to have aborted), about sinister military types (like her shit of an ex-husband), and about her own passionate rage. The dreams in which she is taken into military bases where she witnesses collaboration with aliens reflect the latest trends in ufological folklore.

Karla Turner, *Taken: inside the alien-human abduction agenda*. Kell Words, 1994. £12.95.

More abductions stories, combining Mack's post-secularism with the raw sexuality of Jacobs's accounts, and the rising military-UFO collaboration scenarios of Militia Ufology. The experiences which give rise to these visions range from dreams to false awakenings, hypnagogic imagery, memory 'flashbacks' and what look like epileptiform seizures.

Elsie Oakensen, *One Step Beyond; a personal UFO abduction experience*. Regency Press, 1995. £7.50.

British ufology's favourite abductee tells her own story, in which she become indistinguishable from the mediums, psychics and contactees who used to hang around the fringes of provincial UFO groups a couple of decades ago. This book must be read between the lines to see how naive witnesses can be drawn into the ufologists' belief systems. This witness, forced by ill-health into retirement, her children grown up, was clearly looking for a new meaning and direction in her life. Ufology offered her not only that, but plenty of attention and a certain kind of fame.

From her account we have even more evidence of the cultic nature of the 'witness support group', which now appear to be developing millennialist potential. One of those connected with this organisation is a person who believes that anagrams of the quatrains of Nostradamus prove that he is the Second Coming of Christ, or at least an alien. I couldn't help thinking of this when watching the recent *Witness* programme on Waco, a couple of days after reading this book. One saw how apparently sober and normal people got caught up in the

Ian Wilson, *In Search of Ghosts*. Headline, 1995. £17.99.

Anyone buying this book expecting the critical analysis that Wilson brought to reincarnation claims in *Mind Out of Time* is in for a shock. The Catholic Church is hostile to claims of reincarnation, but there is an element, especially amongst the middle-class-chic, Montague Summers school of convert, believes in ghosts as disembodied spirits, suffering in Purgatory. So, therefore, does Wilson. The result is a work which at times affects the facade of scholarship but is closer to Summers' work on vampirism than anything produced by the SPR.

paranoid craziness of David Koresh. Being intelligent, sensible and normal, as Elsie Oakensen so clearly is, does not provide some sort of inoculation against being taken over by some very strange beliefs and believers.

Walter N. Webb, *Encounter at Buff Ledge: a UFO case study*. J Allen Hynek Center for UFO Studies, 1994. \$19.95.

At last, a far more traditional abduction story. Two witnesses see strange objects out of doors. One reports communicating with the occupants, and under hypnosis recalls an abduction. Later his companion recalls the same. In the initial account however, the female witness recalled only odd lights moving across the sky. In contrast the male witness reports a complex scenario, involving three small objects whizzing around, forming a triangle with edge lights pulsating in time to 'a wavering vibrating sound composed of various tones and pitches'.

If that sounds familiar, it is because it is from the beginning of the climactic sequence in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. However, the witness swears blind that he never saw the film - not on TV, not excerpts, not trailers! Whose leg is being pulled here?

Though Webb does what few abductionists do, and tried to investigate the events, the passage of time rendered that difficult, and we are still faced with the use of hypnosis and the evocation of increasingly discredited 'recovered memories'. The superficially impressive correlations between the allegedly independent accounts can probably be attributed to cultural conditioning, subtle cuing, and pressure to conform. After all, can anyone in the USA now *not* know how a typical abduction progresses? *Peter Rogerson*

We are given examples where Catholic ritual has led to hauntings ending - or rather people ceasing to have odd experiences which they interpreted as hauntings. No doubt in those circumstances the rituals did work, but it should be borne in mind that one prominent psychic researcher found it was equally effective if he told witnesses that he needed to be left alone for some time to commune with the spirits. He would then sit in the supposed haunted site for half-an-hour smoking his pipe and reading the sports pages of the *Daily Telegraph*. Such rituals appease the living, not the dead. *P.R.*

Jane Goldman, *The X-Files Book of the Unexplained*. Simon and Schuster, 1995. £15.99.

With a title like this you might expect a load of sensationalist tosh, but as an introduction this is not at all bad. It is careful to include a variety of viewpoints, and interviews with writers like Bob Rickard, Bob Morris, John Spenser and Tim Good. There is also a plug for Nick Pope, as Britain's answer to Mulder (Pope's book is also being published by Simon and Schuster). It gives a good idea of the complexity of the issues involved. *P.R.*

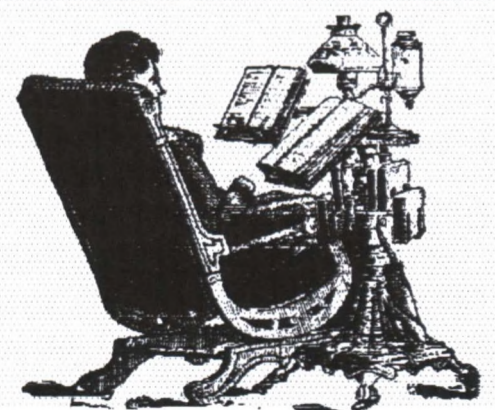
Paul David Pursglove (ed.), *Zen and the Art of Close Encounter: crazy wisdom and UFOs*. New Beings Project, 1995. No price given.

Published in California, of course, it is a collection of New Age, post-secularist writings about ufology. Some of the more comprehensible pieces would be of interest to followers of Dennis Stillings or Patrick Harpur. Other articles would, I suspect, require the ingestion of not altogether legal substances to become fully attuned to them. There are some totally barmy pieces on crop-circles, and how to communicate with the ETs, who are producing them. *P.R.*

Edward Ashpole, *The UFO phenomenon; a scientific look at the evidence for extraterrestrial contacts*. Headline, 1995. £18.99

Extremely old-fashioned, very conservative pro-ETH book, basically taking the pre-1964 NICAP line; promoting Tim Good and *Quest* as experts, and taking seriously Roy Dutton's mathematical jiggery-pokery.

There is however also a much more reasonable discussion of the nature of extraterrestrial life than in many such works. He rightly rejects the possibility that ETs would be humanoid in form and so dismisses all occupant and abduction reports. *P.R.*



James Randi, *The Supernatural A-Z: the truth and the lies.* Headline, 1995. £19.99.

John & Anne Spencer, *The Encyclopedia of the World's greatest Unsolved Mysteries.* Headline, 1995. £19.99

Jenny Randles and Peter Hough, *Encyclopedia of the Unexplained.* Michael O'Mara, 1995. £15.99.

David Ritchie, *UFO: the definitive guide to unidentified flying objects and related phenomena.* Facts on File, 1994. \$21.95.

Everyone seems to think they can write an encyclopedia, but in fact it is extremely difficult, and they nearly always fail. Of this lot, the Spencers, and the Randles - Hough partnership cover a wide range of Fortean and paranormal topics; the former in an A-Z format, the latter by larger, topic-based sections. Both sets of writers can be interesting when dealing with topics of which they have personal experience, but skimpy and not very well researched when they step out into wider fields. They are also both rather too uncritical, and do not give sufficient attention to the sceptical case. Both sets of writers would be advised to stick to topics and events with which they have had a personal involvement, or else spend the next year or two on a mass reading sabbatical! And John Spencer could use the time to take on board that fact that the Alexander Hamilton calf-napping was a *hoax*, as definitively proven by Jerome Clark as long ago as 1977. There really is no excuse for dragging this old legend out yet again.

Randi's work is more a sort of Devil's Dictionary of the occult, but its real lesson is that when it comes to producing lazy, sub-standard hack work the sceptics can be up there with the worst of them. The standard of scholarship is revealed by the entry for the *Necronomicon*: "said to have first been published in about AD 730 - in Arabic - by Abdul Alhazred, an English translation is attributed to John Dee...". Sorry, Randi, like John Spencer, you've been had. The *Necronomicon* and the 'Mad Arab' Abdul Alhazred were the inventions of the famous writer of horror stories, Howard Phillips Lovecraft, in the 1920's, to add background colour and authenticity to his tales. In the words of Molesworth: 'Every fule no that'.

The work by Ritchie is strangest of all. He is an aerospace journalist, with no background in ufology, and I am tempted to think that he is the publishers' in-house writer. The bibliography is poor. On the other hand he does seem to be making an effort, and one could almost begin to take this work semi-seriously, until a check on the index reveals constant references to one Father Seraphim Rose. Who he? you might ask. He is an Orthodox priest who wrote a pamphlet in 1977 claiming that UFOs are a

demonic phenomenon, and in Ritchie's introduction there is an all-so-subtle hint that the UFO phenomenon is a demonic conspiracy to undermine Christianity and promote Hinduism, Buddhism, and - you've guessed it - the 'New World Order'. Rave reviews then from Gordon Creighton, embarrassed silence from everyone else. P.R.

ORGAN SNATCHERS

Continued from Page 7

a police commissioner's residence. The people lay siege to his refuge and demand those inside to surrender the kidnapper. In the end, they kick in the door. There is an exchange of gunfire. the furious crowd wrestles Labbé away from his guards and puts him to death with sticks and stones.

In a way the Parisians are not mistaken: policemen do randomly arrest boys and put them in jail without granting them a proper trial. This is part of an operation to clear the streets of vagabonds. As the police receive a reward for every arrested child, they are not particular about the ones they arrest; even those whose age, behaviour or social status does not fit the description run the risk of being apprehended.

Ambiguous situations like these are ideal breeding grounds for rumour, and indeed, in no time rumours do emerge. The children are cut open, it is said, and bled to death in a tub because an ailing prince - or a princess or even the King himself - has to bathe in children's blood. This story did not originate in Paris in 1750. It was already told about the Emperor Constantine, who refused to be cured in this un-Christian way and saw his health restored by God as a reward for his righteousness.

In Paris, the then king, Louis XV was one of the targets of the rumour. For his atrocities he was compared with Herod, the murderer of the innocent children. According to the French historians Arlette Farge and Jacques Revel, the fact that the people pointed to King Louis as the perpetrator reveals their hatred of a ruler who had turned from a benefactor into a Herod.

The rumour was known in 18th

century Antwerp too.●23 Parents used to warn their children against staying out late by telling them about the 'Blood Carriage', a beautiful horse-drawn carriage. Inside is a rich lady who offers sweets to children playing in the street and asks them to accompany her to her castle and play with her daughter. If this approach does not succeed, she'll just drag them inside. In her castle, their big toes are chopped off and they bleed to death in a tub for a king who suffers from a severe illness and can be cured only by the blood of children under seven.

Parisian children forced to donate their blood for an ailing member of the royal family find an exact counterpart in Third World children who are robbed of their organs for the benefit of rich Westerners - in fact, the rumour had not really changed in two and a half centuries. One version of the rumour, that stirred trouble in 1768 Lyon, even involved transplantations. ●24 To provide a mutilated prince with a fresh arm, a new child was kidnapped each day. Day after day surgeons tried to graft a new arm, but each time the operation failed. ●●●

Earlier versions of this article appeared in the Dutch magazines *Wetenschap, Cultuur & Samenleving* (April 1995) and *Skepter* (September 1995), and in my collection of contemporary legends and rumours, *Der Gebraden Baby* (Amsterdam 1995). Véronique Campion-Vincent, Todd Leventhal and Eduardo Mackenzie were very generous in sharing their opinions and research materials.

●23 Roodenburg, Herman. 'The autobiography of Isabella de Moerloose: sex, childrearing and popular belief in seventeenth century Holland.' *Journal of Social history* 18 (1984/5) pp. 522-524; 'More on body parts abductions', *FOAFtale News* 32 (Feb. 1994), p.10

●24 Campion-Vincent, *op. cit.*



Peter Burger

hold the **backpage**

25 Years Ago

At the beginning of 1971 MUFOB was developing as of the defining elements of the 'New Ufology' movement. We were beginning to align ourselves quite strongly with John Keel and the American writers like Jerome Clark (in an earlier incarnation) who were beginning the assault on the ETH. Not surprisingly, we were called to account. My 'Death and Life of British Ufology' article seemed to have aroused interest in high places, and in February 1971 I was summoned to explain my heresy to a meeting of BUFORA, in their old Kensington Library meeting hall.

Awestruck, I travelled to London to meet the ufological glitterati. My account appeared in the Spring 1971 issue. Highlight of the evening for me was, after spending the best part of an hour slagging off the whole idea of UFO groups, I was told by a pained, and rather anxious chairman: "You know John, it takes an awful lot of work *by a group* to put out a magazine like this", as he flourished a copy of *BUFORA Bulletin* at me. I always regret that my natural Liverpudlian reticence prevented me telling him he was talking a load of tripe. All UFO magazines (and other small enthusiast journals) are produced by at the most four or five people, and are best if they reflect the opinions of just a few people.

My message was not well received, and the meeting concluded with a lukewarm vote of thanks and the words of one of BUFORA's barmier old buffers ringing in my ears: "You have a marvellous turn of phrase, have you ever thought of becoming a theatre critic. The masks of comedy and tragedy fit ufology very well, so in a way perhaps I have."

June 1971 carried a batch of letters defending us against the fulminations of Fred O. Gardner. Gary Lesley commenting perceptively, "Sure the *Bulletin* is a bit nasty, but aren't we all?" Other articles in this issue included John Harney taking a hard look at the Ubatuba magnesium story, and a significant piece by Peter Rogerson,

'The Sun Maiden' which continued our exploitation of links between folklore and ufology.

As I look through these old issues to compile this column, more and more I am being reminded just how much of what is now being discussed in ufology was written about, analysed and pretty well cleared up in these pioneering issues of MUFOB.

The same issue contained a long letter from John Keel taking his critics, including MUFOB's Alan Sharp to task. This was more for the Keel / Sharp debate, which started getting serious in the next issue.

More Cat Flaps

The cat-skinners are back in the news, in a cutting from the Epsom and Ewell *Extra*: 'Cat owners live in fear of pelt yard'. The Neil family cat Chloe (presumably not Chloe Sencountersofthethirdkind, the late arrival at the ufologists' ball) went missing. Described as 'independently minded' (which cat isn't?) you may not think it unusual that she strayed and, perhaps, came to a sad end. However a man was seen in the neighbourhood 'calling out trying to entice cats into the streets'. Moreover 'several people have seen a van'. In shocked tones the *Extra* reports that this is happening 'in one of the most up-market areas of the borough'. Up popped the famous National Petwatch organisation, who seem to be behind this panic. According to them, they have lobbied the Department of Trade about factories in 'Eindhoven, Germany' (actually The Netherlands) which allegedly make hats, waistcoats and fancy goods from cat-fur.

Apparently, after the cats have been 'caught to order according to the types and colour in demand' (a feature we first noticed in the Bracknell scare) then they are taken to 'skinning yards in the West Midlands' (this is a new development in the story, previously the cats were supposed to have been skinned on an *ad hoc* basis where they were caught. Do any

Magonia readers in the Midlands know anything about this unwholesome local industry?) and then exported to, presumably, Germany.

So, it's the wicked Krauts who are behind it all! All we've got to do is persuade them that our cats are as mad as our cows and we've got the problem sorted! (Clipping credit: Jeremy Harte)

Dress Nonsense

A remarkable document has come our way from an organisation calling itself MAPIT. It appears to be no relation to the MAPIT who produced the long dead *MAPIT Skywatch*, the nearest thing Britain has produced to the scurrilous *Saucer Smear*. This new MAPIT seems to be a far more authoritarian organisation. Much of the introductory leaflet is devoted to ways you can be thrown out of the group. The organiser seems obsessed with a dress code. All members must 'attend meeting regularly and be of a tidy appearance' and 'dress sensibly during investigation procedures' (so that the chicken costume out of the window). Failure to comply with the leader's concept of 'sensible' (and the rest of this document suggests that might be different from yours or mine) could result in dismissal. But you do get fair warning: 'The policies of revoking a membership are as follows: 1 Oral Warning, 2 Written Warning, 3 (wait for it!) Written and Oral Warning, 4 Dismissal'.

Of course, all members must 'wear their identification badges when ever it is appropriate'. That Citizens' Charter has a lot to answer for.

Meet Magonia

Magonia Reader Group meetings continue on the first Sunday of each month at the Railway pub opposite Putney station, at the corner of the High Street. Interesting discussion, bizarre gossip, and a free drink on your first visit. What more could you ask for? All welcome.
