

# M A G O N I A



INTERPRETING CONTEMPORARY VISION AND BELIEF

MARCH 1999 / £1.25



## SATANISM AND CLASS CONFLICT

**David Sivier**

reports from  
the barricades

Now hear this: **Peter Rogerson** can't believe his ears.

Strange and Wonderful:  
**Mark McCann** and  
**Gareth Medway**  
delve into the archives.

**John Rimmer** gives the  
demon headmaster a  
caning.

**Announcing the Second  
Roger Sandell Memorial  
Essay Competition**



**MAGONIA 66**  
**(incorporating MUF0B 115)**

**MARCH 1999**

**EDITOR**  
**JOHN RIMMER**

**ASSOCIATE EDITOR**  
John Harney

**WEB EDITOR**  
Mark Pilkington  
m.pilkington@virgin.net

**REVIEWS EDITOR**  
Peter Rogerson

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All correspondence, subscriptions and exchange magazines should be sent to the editor;  
John Rimmer  
John Dee Cottage  
5 James Terrace  
Mortlake Churchyard  
London, SW14 8HB  
United Kingdom

e-mail:  
magonia@magonia.demon.co.uk  
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# VIRTUAL BANA- LITY REVISITED

## Virtual Banality Revisited

Strange magazine has been described as the American answer to *Fortean Times*, but in fact it's more than that. It regularly features long, investigative and scholarly pieces that would be more at home in *Fortean Studies*. The latest issue received, number 20, includes a long, fascinating piece by Mark Opsasnick on the real story behind William Blatty's *Exorcist* novel and the film based on it. This is an excellent piece of investigative reporting.

However I think that perhaps the most important item in the magazine is a brief letter from a subscriber. In articles in *Magonia* we have sought to identify the basic phenomenon which underlies the visionary experience of abductions. A few years ago we introduced you to 'Val of Beckenham' who had a remarkable false awakening experience that was interesting because of its very banality (see *Magonia* no 51). Here, it seemed was the basic 'virtual experience', a phrase Peter Rogerson coined.

Nearly all the accounts of 'virtual experience' that we are able to examine describe very extraordinary events such as UFO abductions, ghosts and religious visions, which is why we have these accounts in the first place. This means that the details of the 'story' are investigated rather than the actual experience. If someone experiences a UFO abduction which didn't happen in reality, we examine the abduction: the nature of the entities involved, the description of the craft, the sequence of events in the 'medical examination' and so forth. If someone experiences walking down the street when they know that they didn't, they dismiss the experience as trivial, and investigators ignore it - in fact they probably never learn about it.

Which makes it all the more fascinating when we come across experiences such as that described by *Strange* magazine reader Johnny Mendoza. He describes an experience which happened five years ago. At the time he collected both rare paper money and Disney memorabilia. Working nights he went to bed at 8 am, usually waking at 4 pm. On the day in question he remembers being woken by his fiancé, who told

him that he had just received a free sample of newly issued Disney money. He was naturally pleased at getting something that combined both his collecting interests, and he was eager to examine the set of various denomination specimens. He then put them aside and went back to sleep.

When he woke in the late afternoon there was no money, and when his fiancée returned from work she was adamant that he had not received any packet of money in the morning's post.

Mendoza makes the same important points that 'Val' stressed to us. The experience was totally real: "I remember being totally awake when I looked at the money. The event did not have a dreamlike quality... I read over and over of people waking up to see little people walking around their bedroom... I have also read of theories that these people are simply dreaming in a state between sleep and wakefulness. I am afraid that my experience has made me a believer in this theory, or at least a believer that this happens more often than people will accept."

And he echoes 'Val' in saying, "What if I had woken up and seen a little grey alien looking down at me? What if I saw a vision of an Angel and my father coming to visit me?" 'Val' pointed out that if she had seen her grandmother, who had died a short time earlier, she would have accepted the experience as a 'real' ghostly visitation and it would be unlikely that anyone could have convinced her 'it was just a dream'.

We are fortunate in having these two accounts of similar experiences by people who have been able to establish the 'virtual' nature of the experience by its very ordinariness and the unremarkable nature of the 'physical evidence' alleged in each case - for 'Val' a concrete driveway, for Johnny Mendoza a set of souvenir banknotes - which carries no emotional baggage, and is part of no belief system.

We would like to hear of other similar mundane virtual experiences, where the emotional content of the vision does not overwhelm the nature of the experience. JR

# War amongst the angels

**David Sivier**  
sees the Satanism Scare as  
a function of class conflict

**One of the aspects of the Satanism scare that is least commented on is the part class antagonism and stereotypes seem to play in the construction of the archetypal Satanist. Although the victims of the modern Satanism scare, like their predecessors in the European witch craze, may come from any social class and part of society, the stereotypical Satanist according to rumour legends and the professionals and clergy engaged in hunting them belong to two extremes of the social spectrum.**

THEY ARE YOUNG PEOPLE from working class families, drawn into the occult either through such Satanic influences as Hard and Gothic rock music, or else they are wealthy businessmen. It was in *Magonia* 51, that Roger Sandell ('Still Seeking Satan') noted that the therapists seeking out the Satanic abusers had declared that most cases of ritual abuse came from families on council estates, especially those in which children are "shouted at rather than talked to". At the opposite social pole are wealthy businessmen, using their power and influence to corrupt society and preserve their immunity from prosecution for their crimes.

The quintessential example of this latter Satanic group is the American company, Proctor and Gamble, whose logo of the Man in the Moon surrounded by 13 stars was popularly considered to indicate the company's Luciferian inclinations. If looked at carefully, the number of the Beast in Revelations, 666, could allegedly be found in the curls of the old man's hair, while the 13 stars obviously represented the number of members in a black coven. Proctor and Gamble naturally vigorously deny any such allegations. Their logo evolved over a number of years and with differing numbers of stars since the company's founding over a hundred years ago. The 13 stars actually

represent, according to their public relations staff, the 13 founding colonies of the USA. Nevertheless, they have been forced to redesign it to remove any possible Satanic symbolism, which largely meant straightening out the Old Man's hair so that the offending numeral can no longer be seen. Despite this, the rumour is remarkably persistent amongst Christians of all denominations and geographical areas, and the company has resorted to a policy of vigorous prosecution in order to restore its tarnished image.

Beyond this are rumours of organised Satanic groups such as "Scorpio", long the target of parliamentarians such as the late Geoffrey Dickens, who allegedly abduct and kill young children as part of Satanic orgies. I have even heard stories from those with connection to *Class War* that Anarchist subversives have saved several children from death by decapitation at the hands of such groups. These gangs, allegedly, killed their victims in such a way as to make demons speak through the children's violated bodies. I have to say that beyond this rumour I have neither seen nor heard anything to corroborate the story. It seems significant, however, that this myth of Satanic covens of businessmen is believed passionately both by Conservatives such as Dickens, and anarchist radicals.

The immediate justification for such suspicion and rumours among Christian groups is rooted strongly in the Bible. A certain antipathy towards the state and the wealthy and powerful has always formed a strong component of Christianity. Christ may have admired the faith of the centurion whose servant he cured, (1) and declared "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, give to God what is God's", (2) and St Paul urged good Christians to obey the authorities, (3) yet the central message of the Gospels was aimed strongly at the poor and oppressed. Parables such as the story of the rich man and Lazarus (4) and Christ's meeting with the rich young ruler (5) exalt the humble against the wealthy, a position made clear in the Beatitudes, "Blessed are you who are poor" (6) and "But woe to you who are rich". (7) This identification of Christianity with the poor was explicit in the names and attitudes of a number of Christian sects, such as the Ebionites, who took their name from the Hebrew word meaning "poor", and the Waldensians, who, when they emerged in the 12th century, were called the Poor Men of Lyons after their town of origin.

Such attitudes have played a large part in popular rebellions against unjust rulers from the time of the Circumcellions' re-

# It is problematic as to the extent the European witch movements represented popular peasant traditions and how far they were creations of the witch-finders' own fantasies

volt against Rome in fourth-century Africa onwards. It's also played a very large part in socialist movements since the Digger communities of the Interregnum. Against this is the identification in the Bible of Satan as the lord of this world. Thus, those who are most closely connected with worldly affairs, such as business, risk guilt by association with its master.

This populist attitude is not limited to Christianity, however. A common African proverb, often seen displayed on lorries, is "no king as God". (8) Some Islamic sects, such as the Druze, believe that they are condemned to poverty and suffering until the wrath of God overturns the present order and makes their former oppressors their slaves, an attitude that permeates much of the millenarism in modern radical Islamic movements. More recently, some members of new religious movements such as the Wiccans have constructed a mythology of the "burning times" by which they represent an indigenous folk religion oppressed by the wealthy Christian elite. The best example of this attitude is in Leland's *Aradia, the gospel of the witches*. In this *Aradia*, Diana's daughter by Lucifer, is sent by her mother to bring her rites and gospel to the escaped slaves of the rich, who are explicitly identified with the Christian nobility and clergy. This seems to borrow much from popular Albigensiansim, especially as in its later heretical forms such as Luciferianism in which the Devil was explicitly worshipped in the hope that those participating in the rites would also take part in his kingdom when he was restored to power. Sects are primarily protest movements, and these early heresies with their stress on poverty and abstinence

represented a popular protest by the poor peasantry and burgers against the worldliness of the medieval church.

This aside, modern witches take great pains to dissociate themselves from Satanists, viewing themselves as survivals of a pre-Christian native religion distinct from Christianity, rather than a competing Christian heresy. Modern pagans, according to the Occult Census collected by Christopher Bray and his staff at the occult shop, Sorcerer's Apprentice, are predominantly young, between twenty and thirty-nine years old, whose political alignments tended to be towards the Green and Liberal Democrat parties. Most were comfortably off. Only 10% were unemployed. (9) They are thus very far from the historical stereotype of the witch as a poor, lonely old woman.

It is, however, problematic as to the extent the European witch movements represented popular peasant religious traditions and how far they were creations of the witch founders' own fantasies. Practically the only cases where the evidence is unambiguous are the case of La Voisin, who celebrated black masses for one of Louis IV's mistresses in 1680, and the aristocratic occultism of the *fin de siècle* Decadence. Decadence, and the related Symbolist movement, were largely snobbish aristocratic cults, which, following the theories of Paul Bourget, saw literary genius as a type of madness. This madness was the result of the gradual enervation of the aristocracy through in-breeding as the civilisation they founded moved towards its inevitable decline. This pessimistic view of society, taken from Montesquieu's essay on the fall of

Rome, *Considerations sur les Causes de la Grandeur des Romains et de leur Decadence*, encouraged those convinced of their civilisation's decline to adopt a cynical, hedonistic lifestyle in which every fevered and forbidden pleasure was to be indulged. Decadent literature, beginning with *Les Fleurs du Mal*, exalted the joys of drugs, sexual perversion, luxury and artifice. Many of its members also experimented with Satanism. Baudelaire wrote his *Litany to Satan*, Felicien Rops produced his etchings *Les Sataniques*, and the great theorist of Decadence, Joris-Karel Huymans, explored its aristocratic underworld in *La Bas* (the Lower Depths).

Huymans himself had been a follower of the Abbe Boulain, a perverted priest widely believed to be a Satanist. This Satanic strain in literature even reached pre-Revolutionary Russia, where some of its greatest exponents included the poets Zinaida Hippus and Fyodor Sologub. There it probably performed the same service that the novels of De Sade and other works of dire pornography had done in France on the eve of their Revolution in promoting the image of the bloated, corrupt aristocrat.

The social elevation of the Satanist from impoverished crone to wealthy aristocrat parallels the same treatment of the vampire. Before Polidori's novel *The Vampire* of 1816, the vampire was conceived generally as the corpse of a peasant called back from death to prey on his former neighbours. After Polidori, the vampire became, at least in literature, an aristocrat. This social elevation was no doubt intended to appeal to the aristocratic milieu which read and wrote such

fiction. Polidori, remember, wrote the novel as his entry in the competition between himself, Byron and Mary Shelley which produced *Frankenstein*. Byron himself was a member of the aristocracy, and Polidori's vampire may well have taken on the aristocratic origin of this "great, bad man". It has also been suggested that the vampire may also be a symbolic treatment of contemporary social conditions. As an aristocrat, he literally and metaphorically sucks the blood of his victims. Gothic literature was a favourite of the French Decadents, so its image of the supernaturally depraved aristocrat may well have influenced their own inclinations towards such pleasures. Regardless of their precise literary origins, these images are remarkably persistent. They inform such characters as the debauched Jarvis of Newman and Baddiel comedy fame, while those from a privileged background are still suspected of having indulged homosexual impulses, at least at public school. This latter is the result of descriptions of public school bullying and homosexuality in books as diverse as *Tom Brown's Schooldays* and *Brideshead Revisited*, spiced up with scandals reported in newspapers such as the *News of the World*. From sexually debauched aristocrat it is only a short step to the image of a Satanically depraved aristo, especially as this century has seen a gradual decline in traditional religious observance and a resurgence of heterodox beliefs including occultism.

Although many Christians were active in the early socialist movements, socialism, at least in the early 19th century, contained a powerful secularist, anti-Christian component. Robert Owen was a



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spiritualist, and many of his political disciples also adopted his religious beliefs. Thomas Spence, another Utopian theorist, had moved from Christianity to deism, while the Communists, even before Marx, had a militantly atheist *weltanschauung*. British Socialism never achieved the status of continental Social Democracy, which between the 1890s and the 1930s formed an "alternative society" (10) in Germany and Austria, but did tend "to become a complete way of life, which largely superseded the churches in their social role". (11) The political inclinations of the urban working class can, however, be overstated. Socialism was always a minority creed in the 19th century, and the long reign of Mrs Thatcher, among others, has shown that a large number, even the majority, of the working class voted Conservative.

There is a distinct social break between town and country which has informed many right-wing movements this century. The Nazis' earliest electoral victory was in the rural area of Schleswig-Holstein where they represented the grievances of the farming community hit by the agricultural crisis of the 1920s. To them, the Nazis presented the image of upright German peasants bringing healthy village values to socialist Babylons such as Berlin. In Italy Fascism had earlier gained massive support in primarily agricultural areas such as Ferrara for similar reasons. Although it would be wrong to equate Evangelicalism and Christian Fundamentalism with Fascism, they do have certain traits in common. In the Satanism scare, both represent beleaguered social groups seeking simple, emotional solutions to complex problems, and

fear and hostility towards organised labour has become a marked feature of American Evangelicalism and forms a strong component of their political beliefs.

Any discussion of the Satanism scare has to include the American dimension. Evangelicals are far more likely to view Satan as a concrete, tangible being, in contrast to more mainstream Christians who may regard Auld Cloutie as an impersonal force or a metaphor for evil acts and impulses at the personal level. Much Evangelical literature and ideology is American in origin, exported through tapes and the comics produced by the notorious Chick Publications, amongst others. Here, the class nature of

much of the Evangelicals' world view is quite clear. There's a marked hostility to big business, especially the global financial capital as personified by the Rothschilds, while working-class movements such as trade unions, socialism, communism and anarchism are also denounced as part of Satan's dominion. Although these attitudes are more commonly associated with the Protestant white supremacist component in the militia movement, politically Evangelicalism is markedly conservative. The heartland of American Evangelicalism is, of course, in the Deep South, and it was primarily a creed of poor whites. Before the 1970s, 43.7% of Evangelicals lived in

towns with fewer than 2,500 inhabitants, (12) and in 1978, 25.3% of them earned less than \$4,000 a year. (13) This agrarian background strongly influences their political conceptions. Most still seem to see the world in essentially 17th-century terms. The ideal communities are those like their own, small towns run by paternalistic industrialists or self-reliant farmers which feel threatened by big business on the one hand and organised labour on the other. Many of the sects originally settled in America to escape persecution in Europe, and the poverty of their members would ensure that they absorbed the Biblical hostility to the wealthy and powerful without necessarily turning towards secular ideologies such as socialism. This base in America's agrarian heartland may also contribute a deep-seated suspicion of urban politics which may, in its turn, account for the conception of Satanism as especially prevalent amongst the urban poor.

Despite the occult trappings of the Satanism scare, it is poverty, especially urban poverty, that forms the motor for the panic. Roger Sandell's article mentioned above noted the similarity between the modern witch hunters' attitudes to the urban poor and that of the Victorian missionaries to their slums. The continuity of such ideas reflects both concerns with urban decay and the similarity of housing policies in Britain and America, as opposed to continental Europe. The post-war response to the housing crisis in Britain and America has been to build estates of reasonably well provided suburbs while leaving the inner cities to decay. Continental countries, however, conceived the suburbs in terms of solely providing housing, concentrating

amenities and industry in the centre of towns. Thus, discussions of urban poverty in Britain almost invariably centre around inner-city decline, in contrast to the Continent, where it is the *banlieu* which are the deprived areas.

This similarity, however superficial, between Britain and America could partially explain why the Satanism scare, although certainly not unknown on the Continent, has translated most easily into the British context. In these terms, the Satanic panic represents a confrontation between traditional, agrarian values and those of the modern, secular, urban environment.

The Satanism scare gained prominence in the early 1980s after the publication of the book *Michelle Remembers* and a gestation period in the 1970s when, as all good Magonians will recall, Satanists and other occult groups were held responsible for the cattle mutilations plaguing the Midwest. It is not coincidental that these panics began when the West was entering a period of economic crisis which result in political and economic retrenchment. Most of those holding traditional moral views in America come from the same background as the Evangelicals and Fundamentalists, the membership of both groups overlapping to a large extent.

They are generally people from the small towns and blue-collar areas of the big cities, frequently poorly educated, and "at greatest risk of losing their jobs due to economic dislocation". (14) These people feel powerless against a political order dominated by the wealthy and powerful. These feelings of alienation have been growing steadily since the 1960s. In 1986, 60 per cent of Americans

expressed feelings of powerlessness in contrast to only 29 per cent in 1966. (15) Periods of economic stagnation produce a powerful need among people to find a scapegoat for their problems.

Racism is a typical example of this need. It has, for example, been noted that the areas of America which have a higher incidence of racist behaviour are those where there is a great disparity of income amongst the white population. In the parts of the country where there is less difference in income, racist incidents are far less frequent. (16)

And the gap between rich and poor in America and Europe is increasing. Faced with economic and military challenges from outside, the West is once again turning in on itself seeking scapegoats for its decline. The political and economic elites against whom so much animosity is focused are especially suitable for this role as their ethical values are frequently at variance with those of the majority of the working class, especially over issues such as abortion, sexual permissiveness and homosexuality. The *Financial Times* noted some time ago that large sections of the American population had still not caught up with the sixties. In Britain newspapers like the *Daily Mail* regularly attack the "liberal establishment" for promoting, among other things, homosexuality and the decline of family values.

The result is that there is a general, widespread belief in the moral decline of society. According to Gallup polls, the percentage of Americans expressing dissatisfaction with current standards of behaviour in 1987 was 71 per cent, a massive jump from the 58 per cent who held the same views in 1963. (17) Economic hardship can produce marital strife and family breakdown, but the Evangelicals' belief in the innate virtue of the free market and that morals are purely a matter of private responsibility divorced from social or economic influences prevents them from taking a pragmatic approach to these problems based on state intervention. A scapegoat in the form of a

Satanic other becomes a necessity as they are unable to countenance any failing in free-market economics as a system.

By and large, the Evangelicals still preach a prosperity gospel which would have been familiar to the Victorian missionaries, in which economic wellbeing follows as a result of God's favour to His followers. If this does not occur, then it can only be that the worshipper is either being punished for his sins, an explanation some Evangelicals found for the Great Depression, or that there are Satanic enemies working against them. In the cultural sphere, this increased distrust of big business is particularly clear.

The square-jawed heroes firm in body and values played by Cary Grant and James Stewart were honest businessmen. Now those days are gone, and businessmen are now frequently the villains, such as the corrupt executives of OCP in *RoboCop*, and the Company in *Alien*. In *Dracula* (1972) they're explicitly Satanic. This memorable little flick from the Hammer stable had Dracula himself as the leader of a multinational corporation leading a Satanic cabal of businessmen dedicated to the extermination of humanity. If ever there was an explicit metaphor for contemporary attitudes, it was that. The rumours surrounding many big companies appeared after that little epic, however.

The rumours by and large began as a response to concrete concerns about the influence of various new religious movements which first emerged in the sixties. The rumour about Proctor and Gamble first emerged in the mid-eighties, with the difference that the cult running the company was supposed to be the Unification Church

("Moonies"), which had a more obvious logic considering the company's logo is a Man in the Moon. This then evolved into the far more powerful and persistent version which dogs the company today. Other rumours about companies include the belief that Marlboro cigarettes are involved in the Ku-Klux Klan, and that McDonalds' supports the IRA. The IRA does indeed turn up in the deductions on their payslips, but it's a pension scheme called Individual Retirement Account rather than any Irish terrorist group.

These rumours are expressions of distrust of big business, but the link to secular organisations has allowed them to escape accusations of Satanism, while, of course, being part of the climate which makes such accusations plausible.

It was the 1980s which saw a number of financial scandals tarnish the reputation of American big business. These included the Savings and Loans scandals under the Reagan administration, and the deregulation of the banking system which led to many farmers in the mid-West facing bankruptcy. These events are paralleled in Britain by the numerous "fat cat" managers attacked in the press, who have awarded themselves colossal pay rises after closing down factories and sacking many of their work force.

The Satanism scare's historical precedents in medieval anti-Semitism and 19th-century panics about Freemasonry are particularly significant. The Jews in medieval Europe formed an urban, mercantile class amongst primarily agricultural societies. Hatred of the Jews was present throughout the Middle Ages, but became particularly vehement during periods of

# Other rumours include the belief that Marlboro cigarettes are involved in the Ku Klux Klan and that McDonalds supports the IRA

economic and social crisis, such as the Black Death when they were accused of poisoning the wells. As the magnates' consumption exceeded their income from taxation, many became indebted to Jewish moneylenders. In the 16th and 17th centuries the *schuetzjuden*, or protected Jews, were a feature of many German noble courts. The image of the Jews as a demonic force corrupting Christendom through its control of financial capital became a strong one.

This prejudice swiftly became passed to the Freemasons after the French Revolution. The first publications to point a finger at them were the Abbe Barruel's *Memoirs of the History of Jacobinism and Proofs of a Conspiracy*, published at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th respectively. Freemasonry was an obvious suspect as the secrecy of its meetings meant that it became the conduit for dangerously subversive ideas, such as democracy and freedom of conscience. The alleged subversive nature of Freemasonry was given a verisimilitude with the attempts by Adam Weishaupt's Illuminati to infiltrate them in the late 18th century. Although this conspiracy was stamped out, suspicions of its survival continue, largely as a result of it being used as a term of abuse by some of the American Founding Fathers for their political opponents.

To Nesta Webster, a novelist who contributed much to British and American Fascist ideology, the relationships between Judaism, Freemasonry and the French and Russian Revolutions were obvious. Partly drawing on information given to her by the Duc d'Orleans (despite him being dead for over a hundred years) she de-

clared that the Freemasons were the true successors to the Jewish threat as at their core were the mystic secrets of the Jewish cabbalah and the Jewish programme to destroy the Christian, aristocratic order and replace it with bourgeois, atheistic democracy. Although it's easy to dismiss such fears as nonsense, they are remarkably persistent. The past decade has seen a resurgence of fears surrounding Freemasonry, beginning with the murder of Roberto Calvi and the publication of books such as *Inside the Brotherhood*. There have even been claims that Masons are secretly Satanists, the god they worship being allegedly YahBulOn, a mixture of the Hebrew Yahweh, the Egyptian god On, and the Semitic Baal, the origin of the Beelzebub of the Bible. Initiation into the upper levels of Freemasonry is supposed to involve the ritual inversion and breaking of a cross as in admission to a Satanist coven. Freemasonry is thus popularly perceived as a Satanic cult.

From that point on, it is only a short step to the gangs of Satanic businessmen conjured up by the Satan hunters. More justified concerns over undue influence of the Freemasons in the business community, judiciary and police force are still very much part of contemporary British politics and are the subject of parliamentary enquiry before which several prominent Freemasons have appeared. Finally, in the extreme theorising of the American Right, both financial capital and labour movements are linked in a Satanic conspiracy. Noting the Rothschilds were important backers of the United Nations, and that many big industrialists, such as Armand Hammer, have shown some sympathy for left-wing causes, it's now

argued, following Hitler, that the Rothschilds are using labour movements to create the one world state, under Satan's direction, of course. Other permutations of this tale involve the Vatican, but the story is, lamentably, much the same.

Regardless of this, it appears that the main forces driving the Satanism scare are economic pressures as they affect an impoverished, rural *mittelstand* which, in the absence of an appropriate secular ideology, uses the Bible to articulate its intense discontent. This explains its hostility to both organised labour movements and suspicion of extreme wealth, the images of which are appropriated ultimately from both the French Decadence and propaganda material from the French Revolution. This scare has become plausible owing to recent government scandals, such as Watergate, economic decline due to globalisation of capital and the clandestine activities of fringe religious organisations. Other groups have been able to seize on aspects of it as American and Western culture breaks down into a collection of competing social and ideological communities motivated by the "culture of complaint". Secular feminists, for example, may reject the religious aspect of the Satanism scare, but be convinced by the tales of paedophilia and rape through the concern with male violence against women and children.

These economic and social pressures, extend far outside the milieu of American Evangelism. The rock and occult groups, by no means synonymous, have also felt them. Much of the panic revolves around youths corrupted by "Devil" rock, by which is meant Black Metal and Gothic Rock, which is permeated with demonic and vampiric imagery. This is a curious parallel to their own movements, a sort of Jungian "shadow" of American Evangelism. It's been noted that as a symbol of hostility to authority, "it is during the periods of greatest social flux that the vampire - especially the woman vampire - seems to thrive". (18) The problem is to channel this discontent into more constructive ideologies.

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This article was submitted to *Magonia* as an entry for the first Roger Sandell Memorial Essay Competition.

For details of the second competition, see page 14.

# Strange and Wonderful Newes

Gareth J Medway and  
Mark McCann

This article is taken, with permission of the authors and editors, from *Talking Stick Magickal Journal*. See the review on page 19 for further details.

THE TERM 'FLYING SAUCER' was coined in 1947, but the year was by no means the first in which reports were heard of airborne kitchen utensils.

On Wednesday 11 April 1651, a Mrs Holt was sitting in the doorway of Highway House, between Madely and Whitmore in Cheshire, with a little girl in her arms, when she "perceived the Sun to shine exceeding red, and casting her eyes upwards, she beheld a dark body over the sun, about the bigness of a half moon, and in short space, the said body divided into several parts, seeming numberless to her view, about the bigness of small Pewter dishes, which came swiftly towards her..."

However, they did not land and drag her off for a medical examination: rather, what happened next was never more in accord with what people in that disturbed decade would have expected:

"...immediately the Court about the house seemed filled with armed Hands and Gauntlets, with swords; glittering and fighting (in their imagination) with another as great an Army, and it seemed to their view to be in the ayr above them."

Mrs Holt panicked at this point, and ran into the house, leaving the little girl to the mercy of the glittering thingummies. She found her maid, prayed with her a little to

recover her composure, and then the maid, who seems to have been made of sterner stuff than her mistress, opened the door, stepped forth and took in the child "which had no harm":

"...her Maid at first saw nothing, but after she had uttered these words, 'Mistris it may be the Lord will not suffer me to behold what you do', she immediately saw the same!"

After this the house became as dark as night, and Mrs Holt thought her end had come.

"After which her Maid and she looked forth, beheld infinite [an infinity] of Horse legs and feet trampling, and great Canons and Ordnance on the other side of the House rear'd up together with the muzzels upward, and Houlsters hanging on them; this continued some space and vanished."

After a while the two women plucked up their courage and eventually opened the door to the courtyard, but, alas, their travails were not yet over:

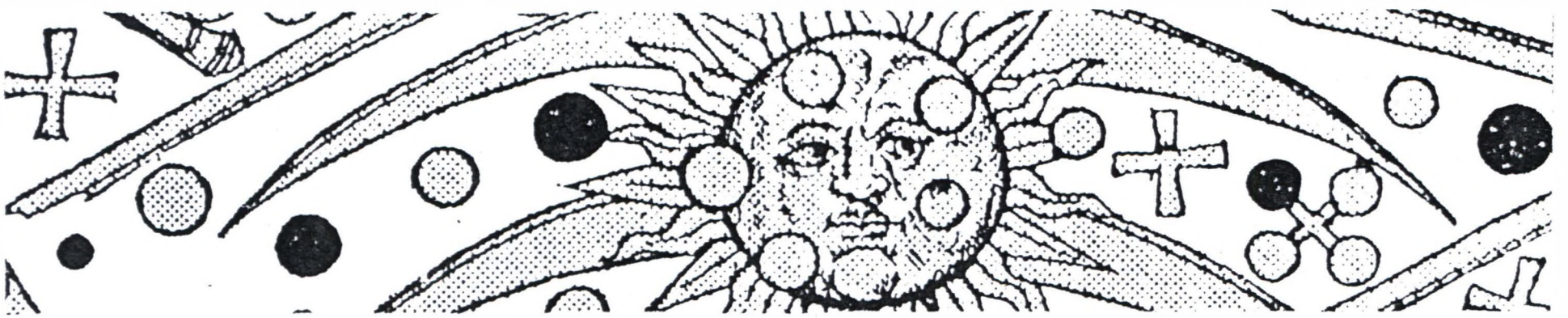
"Then she opened the door and went forth, and saw an beheld the likeness of one man onely, standing with the Court near to the mote, and immediately there arose a little Cloud or Vapour (as it were) forth of the miste whence issued a Bird about the bigness of a capon, with wings such as a Angel is usually protraicted with, and a second and third followed and flew

near to her and her Maid, having faces almost like owls, and something [somewhat] resembling a man, and after they had hovered about a while, they vanished in the vapour of Cloud; these birds were blewish red, or sanguine colour, but the Men, Horse, Swords, and canons, all like fire."

Eventually Mrs Holt recounted these unsettling happenings to the vicar, who told them to one William Radmore, who communicated them to his brother in a letter, whence they were published as a pamphlet. Since it records various incidental details: "though I have not heard from you a long time... hath made me fear... you have taken somewhat unkindly to me... I desire to hear fro you... because of our aged mother, who takes it very heavily, one feels it is a genuine letter, not something got up by the pamphleteer.

Five years earlier, on 31 May 1646, in Gravehage, Holland, a round plate was seen "about the bigness of a Table-board, like gray paper...". It is not clear whether this is the estimate of the actual or apparent size of the object. Once again, it was only the prelude to much more startling sights.

We must, of course, bear in mind that 'flying saucer events' (leaving aside for the moment any consideration of what they 'really' are) would be perceived very differently in the Seventeenth Century



from how they are today. For one thing the observer's estimation of the actual size of a object seen in the sky depends upon his estimation of its distance, and vice versa. These in turn will determine the estimation of speed.

Most modern observers of UFOs assume, unconsciously for the most part, that the object they are looking at is about the size of an aeroplane, a flying machine they are familiar with. A Seventeenth Century observer, on the other hand, would not have seen a flying object larger than a bird, and might well guess that something that looked like a pewter dish was small and quite near to hand.

Following the plate, the first vision reported was of a lion fighting with a dragon and overcoming it. The second vision showed the lion and dragon "still in fight", together with "a multitude of Souldiers". The third was of "a King with 3 Crownes upon his head, sitting upon a Kingly throne", then the lion and dragon fought once more. The fourth: "a multitude of mens heads, the which also vanished then the Lyon and Dragon remaine as before standing in sight." Then: "There appeared also a man sitting upon a horse who kills himselfe and falls backward." The sixth vision showed "a mighty fleet of ships", whilst "the Lyon and the Dragon destroy one another, and fall backward, and then vanished." There remained nothing but a "great Cloud which before was not, and so drave forward away with the winde."

A third example, similar to the others, came from Herefordshire. A man named Banister was walking near his home town of Lemster (Leominster), on the 15 April 1679, an hour before sunset,

when he "to his great Amazement beheld the Earth to open not many Paces before him; at which he had for a Considerable time Admired: behold at last to his farther Amazement, he saw a Round thing proceed from that Gaping Part of the Earth, of a blew Colour, but in Form much reselbling a Gloab, which watching with great intendness, he might discern it to move upwards, and Ascend into the Aire, till at length it got out of his sight, and hid it self among the sheltering Clouds".

Once again this was followed by a series of other sights. the earth opened again, "and out of its Dreadful Mouth Proceeded a Hand, an Arm, and part of a Shoulder, about the bigness of those Parts of a Man. They appeare'd in a Threatening Posture, the Hand being half Grasp'd, and of a black mournful Colour, and Ascending up into the Sky". This same vision repeated itself, until Banister had seen the same objects rise out of the earth and ascend to the sky seven times over. They were followed by "a Thing in resemblance of a Sadle; of very deep Blood-colour", six times over.

It was further reported that the next day three other men, whose names were Humphrey Lawrence, Samuel Showrd, and one Mr. Cornel, went out to the same field, and "beheld the Earth open several times, and the like things Ascending out of it, as Banister had seen before."

One thing is certain, that people in those troubled times looked ofr signs from the heavens, and the heavens obligingly provided them. the same month as the Gravehage visions, another pamphlet reported "Signes from Heaven OR SEVERALL APPARITIONS

seene and heard in the Ayre, in the Counties of Cambridge and Norfolke, of the 21 day of May last past in the afternoone, 1646." These included three men seen struggling in the air above Newmarket; a "Pillar or Cloud ascending from the earth like a spire-Steeple, being opposed by a Speare or Lance downward"; and a "Navie or Fleet of Ships under Sayle". Also, a sound like "a whole Regiment of Drums beating a call" was heard within three miles of Kings Lynne; and at Sopham in Cambridgeshire, "a ball of wilde-fire fell upon the earth, which burnt up and spoyled about an Aker of Graine, and when it had rolled and runne up and own to the terror of many people and some Townesmen that see it, it dissolved and left a most sulphurous stinck behind it."

On the sights over Cambridge and Norfolk the pamphleteer commented piously: "The Lord grant that all the people of this Kingdome may take heed to every warning Trumpet of his, that we may speedily awaken out of our sins, and truly torn to the Lord", etc.

In those unsettled time people looked to the skies, not for spaceships, but for visual signs sent from the Lord. Yet, in the first three cases, people first saw a flying dish or globe that meant nothing to them; and only secondly symbolic visions of the kind the expected.

However, such anticipated sights did not occur in the most remarkable flying saucer report of the 17th century, which was published by Richard Bovet in his *Pandaemonium* in 1684. Bovet heard the story from a Mr Edward Ansty of South Petherton in Somerset, who was by then very old, but his mind, Bovet said, still wholly

lucid. His sighting had occurred in his youth, about the year 1620.

Ansty had been at Woodbery-Hill Fair, and resolved to return home that night: "...coming to a place not far from Yeovil, noted by the name of *Cuthedge*, his Horse rushed very violently with him against one side of the Bank, snorting and trembling very much, so that he could by no means put him on his way, but he still pressed near to the Bushes: At length Mr. Ansty heard the Hedges crack with a dismal noise, and perceived coming towards him in the Road, which is there pretty wide, a *large Circle of a duskish light, about the bigness of a very large Wheel*, and in it he perfectly saw the proportion of a huge Bear, as if it had been by day-light; It passed near by him, and as it came over against the place where he was, the horrid Monster looked very gashfully [in a ghastly way] at him, shewing a pair of very large flaming Eyes. As soon as ever it was gone by, his Horse sprung into the Road and made homeward with so much haste, that he could not possibly rein him in, and had much ado to keep the Saddle." [Italics in original]

If Ansty had reported seeing men fighting in the air, or fairies dancing in a circle, one could have supposed he had hallucinated, imagined or invented something that suited his own worldview. But it is remarkable that he should have seen something so like a twentieth-century UFO report, even down to his horse stopping, paralleling modern cases where the car engine stalls just before the spacecraft appears.

Neither he nor Bovet appear to have had any idea what to make of it, except that it was proof of the existence of the supernatural.

# The case of the Warrington Hummadruz

Local history librarian **Peter Rogerson** unravels the background to one of the north-west's enduring mysteries

There have been some interesting reports recently of a mysterious hum in the Penketh and Great Sankey areas of Warrington. The story first came to public notice in a short piece by reporter Steve Ry-lance in the Penketh and Great Sankey pages of the *Warrington Guardian* for November 27th 1998, which reported that environmental health officers had failed to track down, after a year's investigation, the source of a mysterious humming noise which was affecting Mrs Anne Heesom of Maliston Road, Great Sankey and some of her neighbours. Described as a high pitched droning sound, it could only be heard by women, one of whom said that the noise was so loud that it drowned out her TV set. Mrs Heesom and some of the other witnesses were claiming that the sound came from a nearby North West Water Plant and other local industrial premises, but the council Environmental Protection Team were noncommittal. A similar, shorter story appeared in the next days Manchester Evening News.

There the matter seemed to rest until New Year's eve, when the story appeared in many of the national newspapers. The most detailed reports were in the *Daily Express* and the *Liverpool Daily Post*. These stories reported that up to a dozen women in the Great Sankey and Penketh areas had been affected, only women could here it,

and that their husbands and male noise pollution monitors were unable to here. Mrs Heesom was quoted, in more or less identical terms, saying "Its been going on for 18 months and its had such an effect on my life I'm going to move house. Its a high pitched pulsating humming noise and it turns me into a nervous wreck. Its very bad in the front bedroom, but my husband can't here it all". She claimed to be hearing three noises and that "The noise abatement officer drove me around the area to try and isolate the noise and we stopped outside a North West Water treatment works".

The local environmental health officer explained that only women had reported the noise or noises which ranged from intermittent droning and humming to high pitched whining, and which according to diaries kept by the women for the noise officers were worst in their bedrooms and on cold frosty nights. There was speculation that physiological and psychological differences between the way men and women react to noise may underlie the selectivity. It seems, though this is not clear, that the sounds had not been recorded or registered on instruments.

Fortean will recognise that these Warrington sounds are not unique, the hum has been heard on many previous occasions, and is by no means always con-

finied to women. I (PR) was in fact haunted by this hum in my childhood in the 1950's, a sound like an insect buzzing perpetually around the room. Explanations offered then ranged from the distant sounds of Trafford Park factories, to the sound of wind in the wires

In their book *Modern Mysteries of Britain*, Janet and Colin Bord refer to the hum (see chapter 20) describing it as a constant throbbing hum, heard loudest in the early hours, and refer to cases in Poole, Hereford and Worcester, Bognor Regis, Bristol, Worlingham and Aldershot. In the Worlingham case, as with the Warrington, only women seemed to be able to here the "low key pulsating sound that seems to go right through you". There are accounts in FT 29 and FT 19 pointing out the prevalence of this hum. William Corliss has some pieces on it (*Strange Phenomena* GI pp 236-7; *Earthquakes, Tides etc.* pp 178-9 and *Handbook of Unusual Natural Phenomena* p 383-6). A summary of reports and speculation appears in an article by John Billingsley in FT 115

One of the most extensive discussions of the hum, given the name hummadruz, appeared in the pages of the notes and queries column of the *Manchester City News* for 1878, where a correspondent reported hearing the sound of a low drone or humming noise on calm days, particularly in

the east of Manchester around Gorton, Rusholme and Longsight, mainly in the early morning and evening. This was 50 years before the 1870's, when these areas were still semi-rural. He first though they were the drone of Manchester factories but did not see how the actual sound could carry that far.

A lengthy discussion ensued, and the original correspondent came back with a quotation from Gilbert White's *Natural History of Selborne*:

'Humming in the air. There is a natural occurrence to be met with upon the highest part of our downs in hot summer days which always amuses me without giving me any satisfaction as to the cause of it; and that is the loud humming as of bees in the air, though not one insect is to be seen. The sound is distinctly to be heard the whole common through Any person would suppose that a large swarm of bees was in motion and playing above his head'.

As unexplained today as then, explanations range from as the above factory sounds, distant insects, the sound of frogs, wind in electricity wires, electromagnetic stimulation of the auditory cortex, the sound of the jet stream, secret projects, interference patterns of sound, all the way through the sound of the Dero's machinery in the inner earth.

From the Manchester City News,  
May 18th, 1878:

"THE HUMMADRUZ - here is a query for your readers. Is the term known? If so, what does it mean, and has it any application apart from the phenomena I now relate? These inquiries I put because I never saw in print any allusion either to the term of the remarkable sounds which have been so euphoniously named, and being familiar with them from my childhood it is clear that they were known to a past generation at least. The phenomena itself I have heard and listened to hundreds of times, and in common with my neighbours, with whom it was a sort of village wonder, vainly attempted to get at a solution of the mystery.

"The sounds in question were simply a low drone, or humming noise, which on calm days, particularly in clear weather, could be heard over the entire districts east and south of Manchester; the neighbourhoods of Gorton, Rusholme, and Longsight being places where I have noted them most frequently.

"Commonly speaking, the sounds were continuous, but at times the crescendos and diminuendos partook much of the character of the Aeolian harp, and were quite as musical. My solution of the mystery was that it proceeded from the whirl of machinery in Manchester, which, favoured by a still atmosphere, travelled through the air and was toned down by distance to the musical cadences this so often assumed; but on following this notion up, when in the vicinity of any busy factory I never could conceive such a volume of sound being thrown off as would travel a distance of over two to four miles; nor could I ever reconcile this theory with the fact that the hummadruz could be heard in early morn and also late in the evening's twilight (as I have often noted in the quietude of my angling expeditions), when we must suppose all mechanical operations would be at rest; but as those days, now half a century ago, were long prior to the Ten Hour Act, this supposition may not hold good. Whether the phe-

# One hundred and twenty one years ago, the controversy began in the pages of a long forgotten literary journal in the north of England

nomenon was ever heard on other sides of Manchester I have no recollection. *R.E. Bibby, Denton.*"

In response to this request for information the issue of the *Manchester City News* of June 1st 1878, found two correspondents who offered explanations for Mr Bibby's observations:

"The term 'hummadruz' is one which in a long series of years I have never heard used, nor did I ever see it in print till I read R. E. Bibby's query in the *City News*. But as to the remarkable sounds which the term is intended to represent, I have often heard them when passing along the footpath through the fields which lie between Blackley Church and Lichford Hall. Like Mr. Bibby I was much surprised when I first heard them; but after hearing them on several occasions, being desirous to ascertain the cause, I left the footpath and proceeded through the fields in the direction from which the sounds seemed to come.

"Presently I stood on the borders of a large pit, the surface of the water in which was covered by

a multitude of frogs, whose croaking produced the strange sounds that had previously puzzled me. *Samuel Hewitt*"

"Nearly two years ago, in the very height and heat of summer, I was on the tops of Penrhos, Llanrychwyn, which is above and on the east side of Llyn Geirionydd. Everything was beauty and repose in that wild mountain solitude. It was about for o'clock in the afternoon when my attention was attracted by a continuity of musical minor murmuring strains, resembling the minor notes produced by the rain-wind playing sadly through the window sashes, and sometimes like the musical tones of the telegraph wires played upon by a whistling north-easter or south-wester. Being busily engaged at the time I did not pay that attention I might otherwise have bestowed had I been performing a quiet ramble. Now and again I looked round about me, expecting to see myriads of insects on the wing; but no, the air to all appearances was empty, not a fly was to be seen.

"The crescendos and diminuendos of the plaintive murmur-

ings I noticed particularly, and was much impressed by them. In a while, after listening, my curiosity grew a little excited, and I wondered where on earth these musical cadences could proceed from. Wherever I moved the sounds were still heard; as they grew piano I was reminded of the large sea-shells which in my childhood I used to place to my ear, recalling the low, sad, distant moaning of the ocean waves.

"At length, having finished what I was engaged in, I packed up my traps and directed my steps homeward. Still this 'humadruz' or humabuzz never left me until I left the moorland top. Before doing so I stooped and examined the dry wiry grass of the mountain, and to my surprise I found an infinitude of life everywhere, in the shape of small winged insects, producing these wild, weird, minor Eolian-harp kind of strains. *Ar-lunydd Glan Conway, Trefriw, North Wales.*"

In a subsequent issue (June 29th 1879) Mr Bibby of Denton returns to the pages of the *City News* with the Gilbert White passage that Peter Rogerson quotes, along with other literary references. He is not impressed by the explanations offered by the two earlier contributors:

"For years I have had quite a colony of frogs almost under my windows, and am thoroughly familiar with their by no means unmusical croak; but under no stretch of the imagination could these humming sounds be attributed to them. the supposition of Arlunydd Glan Conway is more plausible, as many insects give off humming noises; but any such sounds would be easily traceable to a centre, even by a half-tutored ear, and the source at once detected. Moreover so close an observer and profound a naturalist as Gilbert White would not long remain in doubt.

"Indeed the fact that the humming described in my first notice was heard at all hours of the day as well as of the night will be held to refute altogether the theory that insects gave rise to it, particu-

larly as all creation has its periods of repose in some part of the twenty-four hours, whereas in favourable states of the weather I have had ample opportunities of concluding that the hummadruz never ceased [...]

"Again, the humming generally appeared to me to fill the heavens to an almost illimitable degree, and anyone looking for its source would certainly look upward, never on the ground. This "music of the spheres" may, with some degree of certainty, be attributed to electrical currents, which, under certain circumstances, are known to give audible sounds, and as the sound commonly appeared to me to flow from north to south it lends some degree of support to the theory."

A surprisingly modern-sounding theory which seems to foresee contemporary speculation about electromagnetic effects.

On July 6th the final contribution to the correspondence appeared in the *City News*:

"Mr. R. E. Bibby's Note acted magically on me. It transported me into the past and distant. Many years ago, on a hot still day in summer, I was walking with a peasant, accustomed to field sports, on a mountain table land, an ocean of purple heath extending as far as the eye could reach. We stopped for a few moments to load a gun, and my companion, for the first time in his life, became aware of the hummadruz. He was certain that a swarm of bees was somewhere near, and went in all directions seeking for it. But finding that, go where he would, the sound never became nearer or nor remote, he gave up the quest with wonder not unmixed with fear, as if he had witnessed something supernatural.

"I was quite familiar with the sound, but I find that I erred in two respects concerning it. I thought that its 'local habitation was the mountain, and that it had no name. I did not know until to-day that anyone had noticed it but myself. I had been accustomed to hear it for years, always on the mountain and in hot weather, and

supposed it to be the blended hum of innumerable solitary bees and other insects scattered over a wide space in a resonant atmosphere. Even now I am not certain that the invisibility of the insects - for I never saw any - invalidates this explanation, because there is a parallel phenomenon in which the agency is generally unseen and yet indubitable.

"One evening I perceived that the downs above Freshwater Cliffs [Isle of Wight? -JR] were covered with spiders' threads running, as the wind blew, from east to west. they were visible only as the rays of the setting sun glanced off them. the ground was dark and common-place when viewed in any direction but one, but when viewed in that one direction a long pathway of glistening silver webs led towards the sunset. Now here is the fact to which I draw attention. I could not see, though I searched long and carefully, a single spider. Hundreds of acres were netted over with webs, but not one of the little weavers could be seen. W. A. O'Connor"

This contribution reinforces Arlunydd Glan Conway's (could a Welsh-speaking reader confirm my suspicion that this is a pseudonym?) suggestion that the hummadruz is the collective noise of insects, but it would seem unlikely that this could be the case in modern, urban cases, such as Warrington. It also adds a suggestion as to the origin of present day UFO 'angel hair' cases.

The hummadruz phenomena appears in many parts of the world under different names. Some are described in the *Fortean Times* articles mentioned above. A related American phenomenon is the 'Taos Hum'. There is an Internet website devoted to the Hum, with news, information and discussion forums, as well as links to many related sites. Topics discussed range from secret weapon testing to medical aspects and tinnitus. It is well worth a visit at:

[www.eskimo.com/~billb/hum/hum.html](http://www.eskimo.com/~billb/hum/hum.html)

# 25 YEARS AGO

This will be the last '25 Years Ago' column which will appear in *Magonia* for about 18 months, as the three issues of MUFOB described here were the last of the 'old-series' magazines published on Merseyside. In November 1973 I married and moved to a new home and job in Surrey. John Harney remained on Merseyside, and produced two further issues of MUFOB single-handedly as Alan Sharp now had only a peripheral connection with the magazine. In 1975, quite by coincidence, John Harney moved to a new job just a few miles from where I was living and we were able to resume publication.

*Magonia* 6:1 was a strange publication, with each page printed on a different coloured paper (a graphic design technique thankfully not repeated in the world of ufology until Andy Roberts's *Armchair Ufologist* a year or so back. The main article was by Peter Rogerson, 'Future Shock as a factor in the development of quasi-religious UFO cults' (now on the *Magonia* website archive). Peter considered the UFO experience as a way in which people tried to come to terms with the disturbing social changes they saw around them. Rather than accepting that those changes as the result of many uncontrollable random influences, it was more psychologically acceptable for them to seek an overall, cosmic force which would provide a neat explanation for these events.

INTCAT ploughed on remorselessly through the 1950s and through twelve pages of this issue. And as a final reminder of our soon-to-be-abandoned local roots a solitary UFO report from Ellesmere Port, Merseyside was tucked away on the back page.

After four years of elegantly designed covers from my drawing board, issue 6:3 was a step back to the earliest days of MUFOB, with a hand-drawn stencil-duplicated cover contents page from John Harney, after my defection southwards. Again, most of the magazine was dominated by INTCAT, and a short article in which I urged innocent ufologists to throw away what remained of their lives and sanity and start earnest catalogues of local UFO reports.

the final issue of the old MUFOB came in April 1974. Ron Westrum and Peter Rogerson disagreed about proposals for the future direction of UFO research, although in the light of what has happened over the intervening 25 years neither of them seemed to have had much influence in keeping us all on the right track. An interesting article by John Harney summarised the recent north of England phantom helicopter flap. Explanations ranged from drug-runners to illegal immigrants, as well as a wealthy businessman paying illicit late-night visits to his mistress!

Well, that's all from '25 Years Ago' for now. See you again in 2001 after the Great Hiatus. *John Rimmer*

# Ah yes, I remember it... Well...?

Mr Esther Rantzen meets the Demon Headmaster. John Rimmer discovers an unusual case of false memory.



For well over twenty years Esther Rantzen has been a dominant figure in British television, at one time being spoken of as a possible candidate for the post of Director-General of the BBC, although her star has declined recently. In the 1970's her programme *That's Life* was the top-rated non-soap programme on BBC television. With its combination of consumer campaigning and a seemingly endless search for phallically-shaped root vegetables, it became a pioneer of "victim television" in this country. Amongst its many campaigns it took on the issues of bullying at school, and ME.

In recent years it has emerged that Esther Rantzen's daughter is an ME sufferer. And now, according to a newspaper story last year, Rantzen's husband, the television producer and broadcaster Desmond Wilcox was allegedly a victim of school bullying. In November newspapers carried a story that at the launch of a telephone helpline for stammerers Wilcox revealed that he too had been a stammerer when a boy at Cheltenham Grammar School.

"Stammering was the first disabling condition of my life", he is reported as saying (*Daily Telegraph*, Friday, November 13th., 1998). "I stammered so badly until the age of thirteen that I was almost locked into silence. It was war-time and very little sympathy was available. He then went on to make a remarkable allegation: "The only

teachers who were left behind were women who had not volunteered and men who were drunk and a Jesuit priest who was the headmaster.

"I can't remember his name but I have his face in my mind. I don't know why I'm protecting him or the others as it is more than they offered me... The school I was at thought stammering could be beaten out of people. I held the record for the number of times I was caned. the headmaster was the beater but it was not unusual in those days to be caned. As a stammerer you were thought of as a malingerer and a faker."

A deplorable story, and it is certainly true that many children have been put through an experience of total misery by parents and schoolteachers who have thought that stammering could be cured by such crude methods. The only problem with Wilcox's experiences though, is that they appear never to have happened. Three days (16th November) later this account of life at Cheltenham Grammar School was challenged in the correspondence column of the *Daily Telegraph* by another Old Boy, a Mr Peter James of Cheltenham:

"Sir - Desmond Wilcox's claim to have been beaten by the Jesuit headmaster of Cheltenham Grammar School in the 1940's for stammering must be a mental aberration. the Headmaster at the time, Geoffrey Heywood, was a gentle caring man who led a dedicated

staff and was certainly no Jesuit. For the sake of surviving teachers and their families, Mr Wilcox should think again."

The next day the *Telegraph* returned to the subject. In a piece by their entertainment reporter Jessica Callan (chosen presumably on the basis of Wilcox's occupation) more Old Boys and teachers challenged Wilcox's version of events. Bob Beale, the school's deputy Head from 1976 to 1986 told the *Telegraph* that many former pupils and teachers were upset by the allegations: "It has caused a lot of distress. He mentioned that there were drunken staff during his time but there was only one teacher, a botanist, who liked to drink. He was never drunk during the school day but he was quickly removed from his part-time post. I don't know what Mr Wilcox is thinking of."

Others recalled that the headmaster, Mr Heywood, was the very opposite of the enthusiastic beater Wilcox described, and was not a Jesuit. In the letters column of the 19th November more former pupils join in to defend Mr Heywood. After pointing out that the headmaster *before* Heywood, and well before Wilcox's time at the school, was a strict disciplinarian, Lord Christopher of Leckhampton recalls:

"As a disciplinarian Geoffrey Heywood was the other side of the coin. If he had a weakness it was perhaps that he was not quite

hard enough on us. His toughest punishment was a letter to one's parents suggesting that the school and his son were wasting each other's time."

Another correspondent denied that the headmaster at the time was a Jesuit, noting: "Geoffrey Heywood was a caring headmaster, an active member of the Church of England, who must have been proud of the excellent academic record of his school"

A retired physics teacher, Julia Edwards also dismissed the claims: The headmaster certainly was not a Jesuit. I can safely say no teachers were drunk when I was there. It was an excellent school". (The suggestion that the teacher was a Jesuit is interesting, as in largely Protestant Britain Jesuits have a sinister reputation as teachers, brainwashing the children in their charge into an unquestioning Catholicism: "Give me a child until he is seven...", etc. and many people would readily accept that a Jesuit would behave in such a way.)

However, despite this flood of contrary memories Wilcox was sticking to his side of the story. In his conversation with Jessica Callan he denied that his recollections were at fault: "I am afraid my experience was one I remember vividly as you might imagine. The headmaster wasn't Geoffrey Heywood. I can't remember his name and wasn't in a position to remember it at the time. My memory is my memory. He didn't wear Jesuit robes. He may have been trained by Jesuits, but he was fond of telling us he was a Jesuit, which is why I remember it clearly. I don't think many schoolboys can remember the name of their headmaster 50 years later." He then makes the very significant remark: "No one invents this kind of experience from their childhood."

Apart from the fact that I think many schoolboys (and girls) can remember the name of their headmaster 50 years later (a point that a number of other *Telegraph* readers made - in my case, L. W. Warren, Alsop High School, Liverpool, 1955 - 1959) it is certainly true, as any *Magonia* reader knows,

that people *do* "invent that kind of experience from their childhood"; in many cases experiences far more remarkable and traumatising than being caned by a drunken Jesuit. Wilcox, like many others, fails to distinguish between 'inventions' that are the deliberate work of the conscious mind, and unwitting 'inventions' that arise through complex and hidden psychological processes.

One of the factors behind such processes is that we are increasingly living in a victim culture, where being victimised is seen as in itself conveying some sort of moral authority. This is an attitude which Desmond Wilcox's wife Esther Rantzen has probably done more to promote in Britain than almost anyone else. The essence of victim culture is that any of the many misfortunes of life are the fault of someone else: parents, teachers, the government, authority figures of one kind or another. Being a victim also delegitimises any criticism or examination of the claims of victimhood. We see this in the protests of 'victims' of alien abduction and their investigator/promoters, that their claims are not amenable to critical examination, and that any attempt at sceptical analysis simply prolongs their 'abuse' at the hands of the aliens. This reached its obscene apotheosis in Budd Hopkins' declaration in *Intruders* that rejection of the claims

of alien abduction was comparable to Holocaust denial.

Being a victim also allows you to identify with others who perhaps have more justifiable claims on that status. Wilcox's apparently quite genuine childhood stammering did not prevent him from becoming a successful television presenter, a role in which it is rather difficult to appear as a victim. Now we must assume that Mr Wilcox has not just made up his memory of traumatic schooldays - we would soon be hearing from Messrs Sue, Grabbitt and Runne if we assumed otherwise - as apart from anything else it would be foolish to invent a scenario which could be so easily checked. So obviously he does genuinely believe that these beatings happened, just as many people believe they are victims of violent Satanic abuse or UFO abductions.

This was not a memory induced by hypnotic regression or prolonged interviewing by an obsessed therapist, but it appears to be as false as those that are. In the context in which Desmond Wilcox 'recalled' these events it clearly helped him to empathise with those suffering from stammering who would make use of the helpline he was inaugurating. It could be that an identification with a successful public figure who had undergone a traumatic experience as a result of stammering and had 'survived' and

'recovered' would encourage other sufferers to come forward who would not otherwise have done so. It could seem that if these memories were unconsciously fabricated the motivation behind that process might have been to identify with and help stammerers; a few uneasy memories, misplaced recollections and overwrought might-have-beens were woven together to produce a moral fable with Wilcox as the hero overcoming misfortune and an example to other victims.

However, the *Daily Telegraph's* conclusion, in an Editorial on 18th November was not so accommodating. Drawing a comparison between Wilcox and disgraced MP Ron Davies of Clapham Common infamy, it concluded:

"Ron Davies denounced his violent father before the Commons, and justified his own misconduct with the all-purpose excuse 'we are what we are'. So to Mr Wilcox: 'My memory is my memory'. That might be a suitable motto for Mr Wilcox, but the desire to be seen as a victim of child abuse does not make the claim true... Mr Wilcox is not the first to demonise a headmaster. What is new is the therapeutic maligning of the dead in the name of self-righteous, self-validating memory. Perhaps we need a new term for cases like Mr Wilcox's: recovered psychobabble syndrome."

### Preliminary announcement of the Second Roger Sandell Essay Competition

Following the success of the first competition, entries are to be invited for the second essay competition in memory of Roger Sandell. We have decided to set a broad theme for this competition, which reflects one of Roger's interests: "The Media and Vision and Belief". This can be interpreted in the widest sense, and could include analysis of media coverage of a specific phenomena or belief; how the media shapes contemporary beliefs, how the media contributes to public understanding (or misunderstanding) of anomalous events and beliefs, or any other aspect of media interaction with the topics covered in this magazine.

There will again be a prize of £100 for the winning entry, which will be published in *Magonia*. Other entries may be published by agreement with the authors.

The rules of the competition are as listed in *Magonia* 61, and will be published again in full in the next issue of *Magonia* and displayed on the *Magonia* website. The closing date is provisionally set for September 30th.

# Fort was an ancestor of today's post-modern philosophers, being one of the first to argue that works of science were just cultural texts

**Kendrick Frazier (ed.) *Encounters with the Paranormal: science, knowledge and belief*. Prometheus, 1998**

**Alan Sokal and Jean Bricmont. *Intellectual Impostures: post modern philosophers' abuse of science*. Profile Books, 1998. \$9.99.**

Kendrick Frazier presents a wide selection of articles which have appeared in *Sceptical Inquirer* in the 1990's. These include some important studies of false memory, aware sleep paralysis, the remote viewing experiments etc. It is interesting to see that CSICOP is now extending its field of attack beyond the usual paranormal and Fortean suspects, into subjects such as the polygraph, honesty detecting questionnaires, subliminal messages, and the whole repressed memory debate. One of the problems with anthologies such as this, is that many of the pieces, while timely and important when first published, are by the time they are anthologised, rather old hat, and this is the case, for example, with some of the articles on the satanic abuse scare of the early 90's. However in what I found the single most enlightening, not to say, alarming article in the whole collection, Evan Harrington's account of a meeting of an anti-satanic abuse conference in Dallas, shows how that part of the therapeutic community which most assiduously promotes the satanic abuse survivors stories has become a bedfellow of the promoters of barely disguised anti-Semitic conspiracy theories and similar ma-

terial, producing the classic fusion paranoias of the age.

However strange and bizarre the ideas attacked by CSICOP can become, one can usually make out at least what the author's might be trying say. The material attacked by Sokal and Bricmont - the work of some of the alleged avant-garde of French philosophy - consists of pompous scientific and mathematical sounding terminology, either misused, or simply spread like a linguistic pate, looking impressive but meaning absolutely zilch. The following extract, quoted at random gives a flavour, its from psychoanalyst Felix Guattari:

"And here again we need to rediscover a manner of being of Being-before, after, here and everywhere else-without being, however identical to itself; a procesual, polyphonic Being singularisable by infinitely complexifiable textures, according to the infinite speeds which animate its virtual composition." I couldn't have put it better myself!

Sokal hit the news a couple of years ago when he sent a spoof essay entitled *Transgressing the Boundaries: toward a transformative hermeneutics of quantum gravity* to the journal *Social Text*, which consisted largely of quite accurate quotes of meaningless verbiage from the post modernist set, interspersed with a mass of technical sounding but empty phrases and misapplied science. The journal bought the whole thing and was understandably miffed when exposed. It was quite obvious that the editors didn't understand a word,

but it looked good, and especially as it heaped praised on them and their circles, must have been, well, 'really profound man'.

Sokal and Bricmont also launch several salvos at the relativisation of science, the assumption that scientific facts and theories are nothing more than one set of texts among many, and that all such texts are as valid as each other. Such relativisers are invited to test their theories from Sokal's upper floor office window. Is there a reality in which you don't end up a squashed mess if you jump out? They warn that the use of such relativising argument by the elements of the academic left is ultimately self defeating for their own cause, after all if reality is relative and there is no absolute historical or scientific truth, then what is to stop relativisers arguing that the holocaust and slavery for example did not occur in their truth?

In fact this is just what has happened in parts of the Fortean circuit, and the reason for that is that in many ways Fort was an ancestor of today's post-modern philosophers, being for example one of the first to argue that works of science such as Newton's *Principia* or Darwin's *Origins of Species* were just cultural texts in the same way that say *Great Expectations* was. Fort's philosophy included the denial of transhistoric or transcultural truths, and his theory of the dominants in many ways anticipated Kuhn's concept of the paradigm. Fort of course did not have access to the vast array of technical sounding words and phrases to use as mystification, but there are

passages in his works which suggest that were he alive today he would have made use of them.

This does not, however, mean that social and cultural factors do not play a part in the development of scientific theories, in many cases they do, particularly in areas where emotions are high and the actual empirical evidence weak, or difficult to decipher. And though the facts of nature may be given, those of the text books, which is often the only window on science that many people have, are too often constructs. For example between the wars, Piltdown Man held a centre place in the texts on evolution, and in the 1970's *Ramapithecus* was hailed as the earliest human ancestor and made the subject of various speculative drawings. Up to the 1950's Neanderthal people were portrayed as shambling ape men barely able to walk upright. In the counter cultural and post colonial 60's and 70's they became fully human, dressed in well tailored furs and laying their dead to rest in graves sprinkled with healing flowers, in the harsher 80's and early 90's they were again expelled from the human family, denied the ability to speak properly and their alleged cultural achievements explained away. The raw bones are real objects, not cultural constructs, but the meaning of the bones, for which there is no definitive empirical evidence, are cultural constructs.

Both books reviewed here point out that it is an authoritarian education system, which confronts students with facts drawn from textbooks, but does not educate them on how to evaluate evidence and arguments, and to discover how these facts were discovered and to evaluate the evidence for them. That is perhaps the role of real scepticism

All book reviews are by Peter Rogerson, except where stated. Reviews which we are not able to include in *Magonia* for reasons of space are posted on our web-site. See page 2 for details.

**Linda Moulton Howe. *Glimpses of other Realities: Volume II, High Strangeness. Paper Chase Press, 1998. £28.99***

At least this huge, large format paperback is not graced, as have the author's previous works, with large, full colour photographs of mutilated cattle in gory detail. Howe has now moved on, so while we get her usual quota of the amazing tales told by anonymous military sources (i.e. bullshitters), she now adds to this a dollop of post-secularist contactee-abductee (the distinction between the two is now quite non-existent) stories. These abductees-contactees seem increasingly to be forging a new religion out of doses of environmentalism, pre-Christian religion, New Ageism, bits of Judeo-Christianity and its various 'heretical' offshoots and a smidgen of existentialism, all mixed in with the antigovernment political paranoia. In this religion human beings are the property of the gods, who are farming us, and promoting environmentalism to stop us fouling up the farmyard. Images of the supernaturals always reflect the structure of human society, and as the agrarian imagery of traditional religion becomes ever more remote, an imagery which sees human beings as commodities in the gods' capitalist consumer society may start gaining ground.

**Wolfgang Behringer. *The Shaman of Oberstdorf: Chonrad Stoeckhlin and the phantoms of the night. University Press of Virginia. 1998 \$14.50***

One evening, about week before Shrove Tuesday in 1578, two herdsmen of the village of Oberstdorf in the Bavarian Alps, Chonrad Stoeckhlin and Jacob Walch, were drinking in the inn when their conversation turned to matters of life after death. They entered a compact that the first of them that died would return from the the dead to inform the other of the nature of the post-mortem realm. Within days, on Ash Wed-nesday itself, Jacob died, and eight days after that his spectre returned to warn Chonrad of the fires of purgatory, and the need to reform his drunken life in order to escape them.

So far this sounds like a traditional Christian ghost story, versions of which abounded from the 16th to the 19th centuries, if not before. However this experience was just the start for Chonrad, he was to encounter Jacob on other occasions, and about a year later he met the apparition of "a person dressed in white with a red cross on his (or her) forehead". This announced itself as his personal angel and called on him to follow it; whereupon Chonrad went into a swoon and his soul journeyed with the angel to a place of joy and sorrow, where he saw many people, but could not identify any of them.

These encounters with the angel and the trances were to occur regularly on the ember fast days, and in these trances they would travel with the *nachtschar*, a

term which the translator renders as 'Phantoms of the Night', but which has connotations of 'legion' or 'horde' but need not necessarily be military or imply a vast crowd (perhaps 'Comrades of the Night' or even 'Night Gang' might convey the idea). These were groups of men and women who travelled vast distances to the realms of the dead.

These stories are part of the tradition of the secret night journey, and Behringer takes us on a tour of these legends and who was met on various parts of the journey. There were the *nachtvolk*, who are sombre and dark and walk at a leisured pace, and to meet is a sign of one's own death. There were the souls on the 'good journey' to their appointed place in the afterlife, and there were the *woutos*, the Wild Hunt, whose cries were the screams of the storm winds in the mountains; and there was the witches flight on the Sabbath. Within German folklore these encounters with the various denizens of the night were often accompanied by unearthly music, which induced a nameless longing, and the good company of these travelling souls could invoke images of joy and plenty.

Readers will see that these beliefs have much in common with the fairy beliefs of Britain and Ireland, as documented by nineteenth century folklorists: the idea of the trooping company, the cloud of souls which can seize the living and transport them along, the fairy music and the enchantment. The secret night journey also recalls the journey women might make with Diana or Hecate or whatever named lady of the night.

For Chonrad they set him on the road as healer and witch finder, drew him to the attention of the ecclesiastical authorities. Like the inquisition confronting the Italian 'good walkers', who travelled in virtual journeys to fight with the dark witches to protect the village crops, the authorities did not understand and did not want to hear these stories. Like David Jacobs they knew what the truth was, and with the appropriate amount of torture Chonrad confessed to being a witch and ended up burning at the stake, along with a number of village women.

Behringer sees Chonrad as a shaman, not that he imagines that any actual shamanic cult, or even a coherent set of ideas had survived, but rather echoes of echoes in popular folklore. We can still hear these echoes in the modern stories of abductions and near-death experiences, part of a tradition which continued from rural tradition, till its incorporation into spiritualism and popular occultism in the 19th and 20th centuries. Today Chonrad would have been a contactee and abductee and the pains he sometimes felt on his journeys would have been interpreted as the pains of medical experimentation.

A direct line of descent is by no means improbable, many of these folk beliefs would still have been around in the mid 19th century, as the great waves of European immigrants reached America. Certainly one can imagine them surviving in the largely rural German, Scandinavian and Scots communities there, even after they began to fail at home.

**Edward J. Larson. *Summer of the Gods: the Scopes trial and America's continuing debate over science and religion*. Harvard UP, 1998. £ 9.50**

A study of the famous 1925 trial of John Scopes for violating Tennessee's statute against the teaching of evolution in schools, which pitted two heroes of the American left, Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryan against each other. Larson shows how anti-evolutionism developed in America in the early years of the twentieth century, not only as a reaction against modernity in church and state, but in opposition to the use of Darwinian ideas to argue in favour of unrestricted capitalism and eugenics. The trial exposed one of the central dilemmas of democracy, whether democracy if the people are not liberal and tolerant? Bryan could argue with seemingly obvious logic, that as the people paid for the public school system, they should determine what was taught within the schools. If not the people, then who was to decide? To which liberals would argue, do parents have the right to restrict the intellectual horizons of their children? Though for many years the Scopes trial, not least in the film *Inherit the Wind*, was regarded as a relic of a superstitious past, de-

feated by the forces of modernity and reason, by the 1980's anti evolution and creationism were back on the agenda.

In many ways the Scopes trial, particularly the folk rendering in *Inherit the Wind*, which portrayed the Scopes character as a martyr to small town religious bigotry, has become part of the ideological heritage of groups like CSICOP, in which science is seen as being constantly under siege by the forces of pre-modern darkness. In reality the trial started out as a set-up by the opponents of the statute to bring a test case which would go up to the supreme court, and earn some money for Dayton in the process.

**Cynthia Hind. *UFOs over Africa*. Horus House Press, 1997 £12.99**

A collection of UFO reports from Zimbabwe and South Africa, ranging from lights in the sky to BOLS to abductions. As with much of this literature one is confronted with stories which if they occurred exactly as reported would be very difficult to explain, but which provide precious little evidence for the ETH, which the author seems to favour. Given Hind's apparent willingness to give people like liar Lazar the benefit of the doubt, I am not sure that we can rely too much on her

assessment of character or critical abilities. As Kevin McClure pointed out in his review of *The Communion Letters*, what we have is the reinterpretation of a wide range of experiences in terms of the UFO mythology. In a number of cases the witnesses themselves originally interpreted the experiences in terms of their own culture. This does not necessarily mean that they did not have access to UFO imagery of one kind or another. These countries are not isolated backwaters, they are very much part of the emerging global civilisation, mediated through the transnational media. One of the cases discussed in this book consists of a school yard encounter in Zimbabwe, in 1994. A mixed race group of children tell of an object and being seen by the school. Their drawings contain several standard grey images. It has taken about 6 years for the image of the Streiber grey to reach Africa from the USA.

The idea that there parts of the world inhabited by 'simple people' who are completely isolated from the modern world is one that has been anachronistic for years (One recent TV travel show featured Benedict Allen meeting an isolated group of Mongolian herders, complete with their satellite TV) The fact that a Zimbabwean estate worker or a Brazilian maid might tell people with power over them that 'Oh no, have never heard of men landing on the moon, we are simple folks here' is not altogether convincing. Its just a little too close to what Herr Professor wants to hear.

**Jenny Randles. *Truly Weird: real life cases of the paranormal*. Collins and Brown, 1998. £9.99.**

A soft back semi-coffee-table book with black and white illustrations, exploring sixteen topics in the paranormal and Fortean field, presenting sample cases and giving a range of opinions from the sceptical to the supernatural, with some points in between. Those on topics which Jenny has undertaken a deal of personal research are the better ones, and she expresses a fair degree of scepticism about the Bermuda Triangle, crop circles, the

Roswell crash and alien abductions, but still seems more favourably disposed to paranormal claims such as poltergeists, precognition and life after death. The problem may well be that the choice she offers, scepticism versus folk explanations may not be the correct one, particularly as paranormal explanations often when closely examined turn out not to actually tell us anything. Many of these topics are caught in the same vicious circle, I suspect; no-one really knows if there is a genuine mystery because no-one has ever undertaken real open ended, open minded research, most investigations are done by true believers who rely on untested folk beliefs, anyone else is put off by the aura of credulity and the paranormal which surrounds the topics.

**Kevin D. Randle. *Project Moon Dust: Beyond Roswell - exposing the government's continuing covert UFO investigations and cover ups*. Avon Books, 1998. \$8.99.**

The reader who hopes that this book will reveal the startling secrets of the amazing top secret Project Moon Dust will be disappointed, there are none. Instead what we get is yet another reprise of the some of the better known UFO cases of the last fifty years. Randle is something of a puzzle, he clearly possess a fair degree of critical faculty, especially when discussing other peoples researches, is aware of the problem of radical misperception, yet still seems wedded to a belief in the ETH, and grand conspiracies. Faced with the absence of any paper trail indicating that a flying saucer crashed at Roswell, he interprets this as showing just how tight the conspiracy of silence was, because he *knows*, on the basis of 30 - 50 year old alleged memories, that it must be true. Randle now has the minutes of a meeting in which the Chief of the Intelligence Section of the Air Material Command says in effect that he would give his eye teeth for a crashed flying saucer, clearly indicating that one did not exist. This does indeed disturb Randle, but in

The Scopes trial has become part of the ideological heritage of groups like CSICOP in which science is constantly under siege by the forces of pre-modern darkness.

the end he has the old memories of a changing band of elderly blabbermouths to go on. This must be the first conspiracy in which all sorts of nobodies are in the know, but a Chief Intelligence Officer is kept in the dark.

*Magonia* has pointed out time and again that conspiracies only make sense when you are in charge of events and can predict what will happen next. What use would be a conspiracy of silence if you had found a genuine alien device, when for all you knew the aliens might land in Washington next week and demand their wreckage back? A conspiracy kept for fifty years, through administration after administration. Never once a President, with his back against the wall, like the zipper king, determined to make his mark on history come what may, and dish the dirt on predecessors, breaks rank to reveal the truth. No foreign government, however hostile to the United States, however barking its leaders produces their evidence. The reason is obvious, there is no smoking gun.

Indeed, as I have pointed out previously, the very fact that the news conference was scheduled at Roswell is proof positive that at the time Marcel and his colleagues did *not* believe they had found anything really exotic, which *might* have been an ultra-secret US weapon, or even worse a Soviet spy device.

What writers like Randle and many other ufologists are unwilling to realise is that in all probability attitudes among US military personnel closely mirrored those in the wider community, ranging from the most credulous true believers (America's answer to Nick Pope perhaps) all the way to the most die-hard debunkers, with all points in between, and that a uniform does not give anyone special authority or credibility in these matters (Knowing that some of our most senior military officers, take Air Marshall Dowding for example, were to put in bluntly, barmy, gives us Brits some detachment in these matters).

I suspect that the majority USAF position was that it was very probable that nothing would come

of UFO research, there was never any really persuasive physical evidence, nothing to get a handle on, a bit of a waste of time. But you still had to watch your ass just in case you were wrong. If you had a department dealing with recovering crashed satellites, why not give them the added paper responsibility of dealing with anything else which was alleged to have come down from the skies, especially if it kept some true believing congressman or top brass happy. And in the extremely unlikely event there were flying saucers, you could say you had the situation covered.

**Hilary Evans. *From Other Worlds: the truth about aliens, abductions, UFOs and the paranormal.* Carlton, 1998. £14.99.**

A beautifully illustrated coffee table book, full of evocative images, most from the Mary Evans Picture Library, with the balanced, sensible text we have come to expect from Hilary Evans. Hilary traces the idea of visitors from all sorts of elsewhere through history, blending imagery from traditional religions, science fiction and the modern folklore. He doesn't just cover UFO entities, but also ghosts and religious visions. His thesis, that these experiences are psychodramas projected by the unconscious mind will be familiar to readers of his earlier books; *Visions, Apparitions and Alien Visitors* and *Gods, Spirits and Cosmic Guardians*; but these are now becoming very scarce, and there are new generations to whom this will be less familiar. He writes from the perspective of a social historian, and this approach clearly will not be to the liking of those who argue for the literal existence of visitors of various kinds, by selecting superficially plausible scientific sounding excerpts from the canon, and censoring out the awkward bits. Not that Hilary is a sceptic in the CSICOP tradition; he is quite willing to be open minded about far more possibilities than say myself for example, including the possibility of telepathic communications from the dead, or the existence of at least quasi intelligent Balls of Light

**Kenneth Ring and Evelyn Elsaesser Valarino. *Lessons from the Light; what we can learn from the near death experience.* Insight Books, 1998. \$29.95.**

While this book has many of the appurtenances of an academic work, notes, references, a resource list and index, in reality it is much closer in tone to an evangelical polemic, extolling the wonders of the NDE, or at least the sanitised Ken Ring version, which does not include the neutral or even downright unpleasant variants reported by other investigators. In the language of the tent evangelist Ring enthuses that just reading about NDE's can transform your life, to say nothing of curing your sore throat. This book may well represent very much the end stage of the desecularisation process for NDE studies.

I'm afraid that my impression is that if this book has any healing properties, it is because laughter is good for the soul, and parts are, unintentionally, quite funny; other sections are however rather irritating, or they are if you, like me, find a bunch of narcissists singing their own praises rather off-putting. Again and again NDE survivors tell us how wonderful and empathic and helpful they are. This amazing empathy does not always include members of their own family, and we get the usual pattern of family relationship breakdown, which, of course, are always "the other persons fault", particularly if the partners and family are dull, materialistic types who fail to appreciate what a wonderful, special person the NDE 'survivor' is. Of course it would be surprising if a close encounter with one's own mortality did not often lead to reevaluation of priorities. Some of the reactions rather belie the NDE's claims that they have received intimations of immortality; if you know you have an eternity of bliss awaiting you, a mere 40 years with the same old boring prat is a mere trifle. Realising that life is short, and you might

as well live it to the full may lead to a different reaction.

Ring presents the stories in large part with a classical gee-whiz attitude, and though occasionally the cooler reality that a bunch of anecdotes doesn't actually prove anything breaks through, the gushing enthusiasm soon takes over. Confronted by the fact that a story about a NDE'er seeing a shoe on a hospital window ledge is reported as having occurred in two separate hospitals on opposite sides of the United States, he does not take the hint that this story may be a free floating piece of folklore, perhaps in the traditions of many hospitals (a suspicion rather confirmed by Sue Blackmore's inability to verify the original version of the story) - no it's much easier to believe that people just make a habit of leaving shoes on hospital ledges, no doubt to attract passing astral travellers.

Ring makes several references to his previous book *Heading Towards Omega*, but tactfully omits the predictions in that book of universal catastrophes occurring in 1988.

If all that the NDE cult, for despite Ring's disavowal that is clearly what is developing, were doing was providing solace for the terminally ill and the bereaved then one could say it is probably doing a fair deal of good and precious little harm. But there are much more worrying sub texts: the plugging of the old Christian Science / New Thought line that illness is either illusory or the sufferer's own fault, the millennialism which is quite prepared to envisage the deaths of billions on the road to the New Age, and the plugging of the old Panglossian lie that all is for the best in this the best of all possible worlds. Ring ends up telling us that the NDE's (or a favoured few of them) are messengers from God, and that "We can ask no more of these people, make no further inquiries or insist on additional proofs", ie the traditional religionist response of 'shut up and don't ask awkward questions'.

**Whitley Strieber, Confirmation. Simon & Schuster 1998, £15.99.**

Call me gullible, but there was once a time when it seemed that Whitley Strieber was genuinely trying to make sense of some very peculiar events in his life. His first three books made for interesting reading as Whitley dealt with all the thorny spiritual, psychological and political tangles that the biz could throw his way. In an what appeared to be an exemplary case of getting too close to your subject, by 1997 the horror-novelist-turned-victim-of-high-strangeness had become a time-travelling seer bearing messages of doom encoded within the Face (and Pyramids) on Mars. What a difference a decade makes.

On more than one occasion in *Confirmation*, Strieber bemoans his dire financial situation, and this book certainly feels like a hastily compiled wallet-filler. The first half provides a gloss over a few recent-ish developments in UFO culture: the Mexican camcorder wave, the mission STS-48 space shuttle footage, Tim Edwards' admittedly interesting videos from Colorado, and the "rods". These are small fleeting, elongated images that appear to haunt only one particular model of Sony digital video camera; some consider them to be a new skybom lifeform, others a digital artefact of insects, seeds and other airborne objects flying past the camera's lense. As yet no other camera model has produced the same results. Hmm. Strieber remains curiously ambivalent about most of the material he's describing. Perhaps he's getting wary

after all these years in the business, or maybe he's just bored - all the material he covers has been dealt with in greater depth elsewhere.

The middle section deals with his and others' encounters with the visitors. Strieber has always vacillated between the extraterrestrial and the mystical in coming to terms with his experiences and he offers us no new insights here. He does, however, cover a few psychological bases such as stress-related disorders, false memory syndrome and other vagaries of perception. For this we should probably be grateful, but he soon chucks it all away with the final section, in which he tackles the wonderful world of implants.

Thanks to the work of Kevin McClure and others, the findings of Roger Leir, Derrel Sims et al, have been shown to be, at best, an irrelevant sidetrack to the larger abduction puzzle, at worst a cynical pack of lies. Strieber appears to be equally unimpressed, even when considering his own suspected implant, but he refuses to give up hope. By way of a climax he refers us to a sliver of silicon found in a man's leg, which he claims is truly not of this earth. It would certainly be interesting to hear whether its constituent elements - 99.3% silicon, 0.02% potassium, 0.27% calcium, 0.03% iron (the other 0.38% are traces "too small to be identified without destructive testing of the object") - are as remarkable as Strieber maintains. We're then treated to a quick overview of the CIA's implant experiments in projects such as MK-Ultra (see *Magonia* 58), and the usual ques-

tions about government mind control. This is still an interesting and inadequately explored area of investigation, but Strieber offers us nothing new.

Finally in an appendix we're treated to an interview with Monsignor Corrado Balducci of the Vatican by "cultural anthropologist" and purveyor of Billy Meier videos, Michael Hessemann. Sample dialogue: "Q: ...How would the Church react if contact with extraterrestrials were made? A: If such a contact were to occur, it would confirm the truth that extraterrestrials exist." Balducci is well-known in Italy for his outspoken comments about demons and aliens. His appearance in this book is supposed to add credibility, as if a position within the Catholic Clergy precludes you from being a dangerous nutter.

Ultimately, Strieber seems to be less sure of what's going on than ever before. There's an almost overbearing feeling of desperation to the book, that gradually descends into paranoia. "What if my mind was somehow being influenced from the outside?" he asks towards the end of the book. "When I read the books months after writing them, I could see a disturbing difference between what I had written and what I intended." Thank you, Whitley, that's all we needed to know. We're ready for Excommunication now.

By the time it's all over you feel like you've just endured a marathon of paranormal cable TV programming. And guess who's just produced an epic two-hour TV show based on the book's "findings" for NBC? Ever get the feeling you've been had? *Mark Pilkington*

**Amanda Prouten and Caroline Robertson. Talking Stick Magickal Journal. Issue 1, volume 2. Talking Stick Publications, 1998. £7.50.**

*Talking Stick* magazine has transformed into a substantial large-format paperback book, which it is planned to issue twice a year - an increasing popular format, similar to *The Anomalist* or *Fortean Studies*. But why should a magazine which describes itself as 'a modern anthology of paganism and the occult' be of interest to the hard-nosed sceptical types who comprise the majority of readers of *Magonia* (don't they?).

Talking Stick organise regular meetings at a number of

venues in London, usually consisting of a presentation on a particular occult or paranormal topic, followed by an extensive question and discussion period. I gave a talk on abductions some years ago, and found the questions and discussion afterwards to be of a higher standard than at almost any UFO lecture I have attended. More than anything I was impressed by the depth of knowledge of the individuals involved.

A similar depth is to be found in this collection of essays. The topics covered range from reviews of magical belief in Mesopotamia, Greece, and New Zealand, to descriptions of walks around places of magical interest in London, Lancashire and, of course,

Mortlake. Two historical studies reassess the origins of the twentieth-century witchcraft and occult revival. Melissa Montgomery examines Margaret Murray's controversial role in recovering a history for modern witchcraft, and Steve Wilson's account of 'The First Pagan Revival' reveals the part played in the rediscovery of a magical sensibility by the Kibbo Kiff and early ecological and environmental movements.

Gareth Medway and Mark McCann's review of accounts of UFO-type sightings to be found in 17th century pamphlets is reprinted in this issue of *Magonia*, so readers will get some idea of the level of research into original sources which appears throughout

this collection.

In most of the essays here, the writers are aware of the wider cultural and social ramifications of the topics they are writing about, and show a familiarity with topics outside their immediate area of research. It is the lack of this broader cultural awareness which limits much of the writing and research which we see coming from the 'UFO community', which seems to be without any sense of its own history, and is constantly reinventing itself in its former image.

Even if you have little interest, or even sympathy, for the topics discussed, it is difficult not to be impressed by the levels of scholarship displayed in this fascinating book. *John Rimmer*



# HOLD THE BACK PAGE

## It's deja-vu all over again!

Every three or four years we at *Magonia* comment on the Great BUFORA Crisis. It's become something of a tradition. What crisis? Well, isn't there always some crisis or other at BUFORA? - often two or three at the same time.

Let's look at the current crop. There's the hypnotic regression crisis, as Malcolm Campbell, Scotland's arch-regressor heads south and takes over organising BUFORA's lecture programme. This apparently automatically gives him a seat on the BUFORA council without anything so tedious as actually having to stand for election. Some people thought it was a bit odd having an investigator who had repeatedly side-stepped BUFORA's ban on hypnotic regression on the Association's governing body.. but, hey, this is BUFORA and such little details as having a consistent policy are easily disposed off.

Then of course there's the financial crisis. People are asking questions about where BUFORA's money is going, and getting brush-off answers from the men in suits. So no change there, then.

And then there's there magazine crisis. After more than a year when Britain's allegedly premier UFO organisation was incapable of bringing out a magazine, Robert Moore took over and produced a few issues of a rather decent, if scaled-down, BUFORA Bulletin. However the total lack of co-operation (and money) from BUFORA-Bunker meant that he soon left to spend more time with his cataloguing project (don't do it Robert, it's a waste of time and effort. No one's really interested in such dull but worthy projects, however much they say what a splendid job you're doing.) So it's anyone's guess when the next magazine comes out.

Many years ago, after giving a talk to BUFORA about the failings of UFO groups generally, the meeting chairman, almost

tearfully, told me: "You know John, it takes an awful lot of hard work *by a group* (the words were emphasised with a catch in the throat) to put out a magazine like this", waving a copy of the current BUFORA rag. The truth is it *doesn't* take all that much hard work to put out a magazine, if there is a plentiful supply of material - as there should be from a membership organisation the size of BUFORA - and the editor is allowed to get on with the job free of whinging interference from bean-counters.

But really, the important thing is that *it makes no damn difference at all!* BUFORA is more like a political party than a scientific research group. It consists of a rabble of conflicting interests and personalities who all hate each other: there's New BUFORA and Old BUFORA; Scottish BUFORA, Northern BUFORA and London BUFORA; Scientific BUFORA and People's BUFORA. All with different agendas, all squabbling away.

Dontcha just love it? As the now-legendary Alan Sharp would say: *Vive la Sport!*

## Animal Panics

The cat mutilation stories we have covered in *Magonia* for several years seemed to have taken an extremely ugly turn last year when reports started appearing in the national press about cats, and other domestic pets, being found decapitated in their owners gardens.

From the first reports it was clear that in fact this was something quite separate from the "cat skinning" rumours we have reported. The rumours were just that - no dead, skinned cats ever turned up, no smuggled cat-skins were ever intercepted. Indeed it was difficult to find any pet owner who had actually lost their *own* cat.

The real killings began in north London and spread around the south-east of England, with isolated incidents elsewhere.

At the time of writing there have been over 100 such incidents. Speculation as to the culprits has included the usual suspects such as teenage "Satanists". *Magonia's* own Mark Pilkington, who moonlights for *Fortean Times* has a fuller report in the current issue.

Awareness of attack on animals has led to some other odd reports. The *Daily Telegraph* (which seems to be turning into a daily rival to *FT* from some of its recent stories) reports that 1,500 toads were found dead in Cumbria and Southern Scotland in 1997. All had their legs *expertly removed!* It was clear who was to blame here - "Experts at London Zoo suspected that humans were responsible - possibly with connections in the restaurant trade". Ah, yes, those fealthy foreigners again. Sated with French frogs they are now after our native British toads!

But in the interests of *l'entente cordiale* all was not lost. An investigation by Stephen Hewett, a naturalist with Carlisle city council, which involved studying otter droppings and toad bodies (some people get all the cushy jobs) revealed that the culprits were herons and otters, who presumably were as expert at removing toads legs as any garlic-chewing foreign chef armed with a Sabatier kitchen knife!

## Supplementary Benefit

John Harney's *Magonia ETH Bulletin* has been doing fine work sowing controversy and discord around ufodom, as it tries to get some facts from the murky morass of ETH ufology. Now he plans to extend his range of operations. The *Bulletin* now becomes the *Magonia Monthly Supplement*, and covers the whole range of topics dealt with in the main magazine.

The *Supplement* is primarily issued on the Internet, at *Magonia's* own website ([www.magonia.demon.co.uk](http://www.magonia.demon.co.uk)) and is also posted onto the UFO UpDates mailing list: [www.ufomind.com/ufo/updates/](http://www.ufomind.com/ufo/updates/)