

# MAGONIA



79



**Chris Aubeck** sets out in search of the elusive Rudolf Fentz, and **Mike McHugh** on three centuries of American paranoia



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# EDITORIAL NOTES

## Ufologists: how nutty are we?

In Magonia 78 I reviewed veteran American ufologist Jim Moseley's autobiographical *Shockingly Close to the Truth*. Although I found it an amusing read, and very informative about individuals from the formative years of American ufology, I predicted that it would not be received so happily by serious American ufologists - or as Moseley calls them, 'Serious Ufologists', with a great emphasis on the capital letters.

And so it has proven. I think any of us would be proud to be denounced over eight pages of the prestigious *International UFO Reporter*, august organ of the J Allen Hynek Center for UFO Studies. It would be even more of an honour if the denouncing was done by that scion of the UFO establishment, Jerome Clark. But this is what has happened to Moseley in IUR's Spring 2002 issue.

Making his criticism plain in the review's title, 'The Trivialist', Clark charges Moseley with being "every debunker's favourite UFO personality" and "rendering ufology trivial to outsiders' eyes and making even its most intellectually restrained participants look like dolts who can't tell a hoax from a hole in their socks". He is also agitated that the book has been published by Prometheus - "CSICOP's house publisher in all but name".

Clark takes particular issue with Moseley's assertion that ufologists are a particularly strange and amusing group of people. He points out, quite rightly, that many other groups of people can be "credulous, paranoid, easily fooled, or just plain weird", and these characteristics are not unique to ufologists. Well, as a librarian working with the general public, I am certainly not going to argue with that. But it does raise the interesting question of just how could we prove that ufologists are no more or less weird than the public at large.

It surely must be possible to conduct a scientific experiment to prove the hypothesis that they are. In a way this has been done, with hoaxes such as the Warminster Experiment, described recently in these pages. This certainly proved that *some* ufologists "can't tell a hoax from a hole in their socks", but of course the problem there was that there

was no control group to compare with - such as a representative collection of public library users, or members of a university English department (I mention the latter as it is Jerry Clark's own suggestion that such people exist in an atmosphere where "reality untainted academic discourse reigns supreme").

Even if we are unable to devise sufficiently rigorous experiments to determine the degrees of eccentricity, nuttiness and general weirdness amongst ufologists and other groups, can we really go along with Clark's assertion that "over the years what has most struck me about ufologists is not their remarkableness or their credulity, but their ordinariness". Surely this is pushing it a bit far? My subjective view is that although the general run of people - especially public library users - probably extend to a greater extremes of weirdness and ordinariness, the *average* level of weirdness amongst ufologists is higher than that of the population at large.

What is *really* exercising Jerry Clark in this review, and is a concern of other Serious Ufologists, is the supposed ridicule factor. This is the fear that, aided by books such as Moseley's, conventional science will throw a mantle of hilarity across the subject of UFOs, preventing any really scientific research taking place. It is an axiom of Clark's that, at some stage in the future, ufology will be welcomed into the bosom of the scientific mainstream, and tomorrow's scientists will clap their hands to their foreheads, asking how could their forebears have been so stupid as to reject the ufological evidence of the 20th century.

Where Clark misses the point is by not realising that books such as Moseley's will be totally ignored by scientists, who will see it for what it is, a light-hearted ramble by an amusing old codger, adding to the gaiety of nations, but not to scientific debate. The books they *will* take notice of will be those by Serious Ufologists that Clark approves of, such as Hopkins, Mack, Jacobs and Friedman, but he cannot see that it is these authors' books, not than Moseley's memoirs, which will prevent ufology ever becoming the scientific study that Clark so desperately desires.



# DESPERATELY SEEKING RUDOLPH

CHRIS AUBECK

This article describes my attempts to trace an incident of 'time travel' or 'teleportation' that allegedly took place in New York many years ago. The paper trail that led me to the original source is a classic example of how labyrinthine such searches can be. Oddly enough, the paper trail begins not in New York but in Spain.

## An untimely death

I first became aware of the case of Rudolph Fentz when I read an article in the Spanish magazine *Más Allá*. "Regreso al futuro en el corazón de Manhattan" (Back to the Future in the Heart of Manhattan) was a six-page report written by researcher Carlos Canales, co-author of two well-researched books dealing with supernatural themes in folklore and legend.

[1] The article told one of the most amazing

stories of 'teleportation' I had ever read. The gist of it was as follows:

It was about 11:30pm on an unspecified day in June, 1950. The night was warm and the streets of New York were still full of people as they made their way home after an evening at the cinema, at the theatre or dining in one of Manhattan's fine restaurants. One young man, however, stood out from the rest. He was dressed elegantly enough, but in a style

that looked old-fashioned, even archaic. Walking quickly, the strange figure seemed preoccupied by everything he saw around him, as if he were lost and looking frantically for something he could recognise. He was also quite oblivious to the passing traffic, as became immediately apparent when he dashed across a busy intersection near Times Square and was hit almost instantly by an automobile. The impact was such that the man was killed outright. A crowd of horrified pedestrians gathered on the curb to see his limp body, his peculiarly tailored clothes no doubt spattered with blood, until the police arrived to take him away.

Nothing about the dead man's appearance looked normal. He had been wearing a long black coat and an impeccable waistcoat that not even the old-timers would be seen wearing – and this gentleman had probably been in his late twenties. The cloth from which his clothes was made was uncommonly thick, especially for that time of year. More disconcerting than this were the shoes on his feet: narrow, pointed at the toes and with a metal buckle, the people at the morgue had never seen anything like them. But the oddest thing was what they found in his pockets. The deceased was carrying an amount of money – antique bills – and several business cards bearing the name "Rudolf Fenz." There was also a letter, addressed to someone of the same name with a New York address ... but post-marked in 1876! Naturally, they presumed the dead man was him-

self Rudolf Fenz.

A team of specialists were employed to find out who Fenz was. First they checked for his name in the records, but to no avail, there was nobody of that name living in the address on the cards and on the letter. The telephone directories listed no Rudolf Fenz and he was not a registered driver. Even more bizarrely, the name did not appear in any medical or dentist records. The fact that 'Rudolf Fenz' was a German name led them to contact the immigration services but still they found no trace of him. The Federal Republic of Germany could not offer any clues, and nor could the Swedes or the Austrians.

A few weeks after the accident, the name of 'Rudolf Fenz, Jr.' was found in a phone book dating to 1939. Hoping this person would turn out to be a relative of the deceased Mr. Fenz, the police investigators went to the address that appeared in the directory, but there they were told that Rudolf Fenz, Jr., had died some years before. In any case, this Fenz would have been more than 70 years old at the time of the accident and the body they found was that of a young man.

Progress was made finally by Hubert V. Rihn of New York's Missing Persons Bureau. He managed to track down Fenz, Jr.'s widow. She was able to tell him that her deceased husband's father had disappeared in 1876 when he went out for a smoke (Mrs. Fenz had not shared her husband's fondness for tobacco). He had gone out for a walk and simply never came back. Nothing was ever heard of him again. After this, Rihn checked his department's files for the year 1876, and there he found a document relating to the disappearance of Fenz and a photograph of the same. Rihn could not believe his eyes. The young man in the photo was identical to the one that had died near Times Square!

### Contradictions

The article by Canales was not a literary invention or, regrettably, an original investigation, but rather the synthesis of a variety of sources, including several internet articles in Spanish. Two Spanish books mentioned the case prior to Canales' article, and these also provided him with further details for his report: *Enigmas Sin Re-*

*solver* (1999), [2] written by journalist Iker Jiménez, and *Los Enigmas Pendientes*, by the late Joaquín Gómez Burón. [3] The latter was the earliest source, but it was published twice: first in 1979 and then in 1991.

Over a period of twelve months I managed to collect nine or ten summaries of the Fenz case from the internet but I soon discovered that information about the story was scarce outside the World Wide Web. None of the popular books dealing with time travel or teleportation that I would usually consult made any reference to Fenz at all, and enquiries to some of the major UFO and Fortean journals revealed that the case was practically unknown outside Spain. [4]

This was a strong indication that the whole incident was likely to be a piece of fiction, for a paranormal incident in which the evidence included a police report, a corpse (and presumably a burial), authentic documents and a photograph, would very quickly become famous and hotly debated, at least in esoteric circles. In fact, it would be irrefutable proof of the scientific reality of time travel. There would be whole books devoted to the case, perhaps even a museum. But no, as I found out early on, the Rudolf Fenz case had seemingly come out of nowhere to be published in Spain in 1979. Even the one article written in English, "In the Wink of an Eye: Mysterious Disappearances" (1996) by Scott Corrales, had based its summary of the Fenz case on Burón's book. And, like Carlos Canales after him, Joaquín Gómez Burón provided no source for his information (the short "bibliography" being just a list of titles by popular authors such as Bergier and Kolosimo, without dates or names of publishers).

For some time it looked doubtful that an earlier source would emerge until I had traced all of Gómez Burón's sources. Meanwhile I was able to compare and contrast the different versions available to me. Reading through the texts that I found on the internet I began to see that, although a great deal of agreement existed, the inconsistencies between one account and another gave the impression that each writer had contributed something new.

In one version, Fenz is

seen running along the Fifth Avenue to his doom; in another, he materializes in the middle of the street in front of the car. In some versions the time was 11:30pm, in others 11:15pm, and in another 11:10pm. In his pockets Fenz either carried coins or dollar bills, or both. Sometimes the FBI is called in, sometimes it was a matter for the Missing Persons Division alone. There are versions in which Hubert Rihn is the only investigator, and others in which teams of criminal experts use the latest technology to look into the case. In some renditions of the story Rihn visits the address given on the envelope and finds it is a store, in others it is a house. One article holds that when Fenz vanished in 1876 his family spent a great deal of money searching for him. In a few accounts Rihn solves the case when he sees an antique photograph of the young man, though most versions say that all he finds is a written description of the clothes Rudolf Fenz had been wearing the night he disappeared.

More agreement exists on the issue of the witnesses to the accident. Iker Jiménez writes that "scores of eyewitness reports" were gathered by the police, though unfortunately he does not quote from any. [5] Burón does not claim there were so many witnesses but he does note that one of them said they had seen the dead pedestrian "attending... the last performance of the day" at one of the theatres a short time before. Canales nods in agreement and adds that, with this one exception, all the witnesses were unanimous in their statements. "Fenz seemed confused, as if he had suddenly appeared in a strange, remote place," he writes. [6]

The article written by Canales is particularly interesting because he contributes an item of news unknown to everyone else: "The recent discovery of a letter addressed to the late Fenz from a trader in Pittsburgh, in the state of Pennsylvania (USA), has strengthened the theory [involving time travel] about what happened on New York's Fifth Avenue in the last days of spring, 1950, and it is possible that it will one day enable us to understand our still mysterious world." [7]

Unfortunately, that letter has never been published. In fact, as Canales admitted to me later, it was only ever mentioned during

1 "Regreso al futuro en el corazón de Manhattan," *Más Allá*, no. 138, August 2000 pp.76-81.

2 *Enigmas Sin Resolver*, Iker Jiménez Editorial EDAF, Madrid 1999 pp.284-285.

3 *Los Enigmas Pendientes*, Ediciones Uve, S.A., Madrid 1979 pp.75-77; Espacio y Tiempo, S.A., Madrid 1991 pp.67-69.

4 I was surprised to find out that neither Harold T. Wilkins' *Strange Mysteries of Time and Space* nor John Keel's *Our Haunted Planet* made any mention of the incident.

5 Jiménez (1999) p.284.

6 Burón (1979) p.75.

7 Canales p.80.

8 Located at <http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~blkyn/Marriage/R/R.13.html>

9 A one-man machine used to produce a "line of type," linotypes were used for generations after their introduction in the mid-1880s.

10 *El Libro del Misterio*, Jacques Bergier and Georges H. Gallet, Plaza & Janes, S.A., Barcelona 1977.

11 *Le Livre du Mystere*, Jacques Bergier and Georges H. Gallet, Éditions Albin Michel, Paris 1975.



an internet 'forum' in Mexico – not the most suitable of sources for a datum of such importance. But was it a mere flight of fantasy? The answer to this question will become apparent below.

One of the most interesting areas of disagreement concerns the spelling of the names of the 'time traveller' and of the police officer who led the investigation. Was it Rudolf or Rudolph? Fenz or Fentz, or possibly Fens? Hubert Rihn – or Rihm, or Rhin? Each of these names has been used at some time. This would be less significant if we were not looking for authentic information about supposedly real people. However, the writers who present the case as fact never mention this inconsistency.

#### A search for names

My first port of call was the United States Social Security database, available on line at various locations. I first checked the database for the name "Rudolf Fenz." It produced an immediate result: *RUDOLF FENZ. Residence: 60645 Chicago, Cook, IL. Born: 5 March 1909. Died: April 1976*

Unfortunately, the dates did not fit. The Fenz of our story had been 29 in 1876, and died in 1950, so we would logically expect to find a birth date of c.1847. A search in a different direction revealed that there is also a Rudolf Fenz, an engineer, alive and well and living in Germany today. Then I checked various databases for the name "Rudolph Fenz," but there were no results at all. I tried again using "Rudolf Fentz" and "Rudolph Fentz" but there was nothing to be found. The surnames had existed but not attached to those Christian names. In a file on "Marriage Registers, Extracts from Manhattan (1869-1880)" [8] I did come across a Franz Rudolph who lived in Manhattan and who married one Fridricka Winner in 1869, but I decided this was unlikely to be connected with the case.

I next sought references to Hubert Rihn, the man supposedly in charge of the police investigation in New York. There was no reference to anyone of that name. I tried Herbert Rihn (just in case), and then combinations of these names with Rihm, Rhin and Rhim. Nothing. Going through all the names attached to Rihn and Rihm one by one I did find a possible candidate by the name of

Herman Rihm: "HERMAN RIHM. Last residence: Ridgeview Ave., Cincinnati OH. Birth: 14 December 1912 in Mannheim, Germany. Death: 23 June 1993 in Cincinnati, Hamilton Co. OH."

The dates seemed okay, but that was about all. There was a little extra information in the file, which dispelled any doubt I had at that moment: "Medical Information: Cause of Death: Carbon monoxide poisoning. Married: 16 May 1939 [to] Emma Kopp b: 3 November 1916. Note: Herman and Emma met while working at a German newspaper in Cincinnati. Herman was a linotype operator, Emma was an editorial assistant. The newspaper, Die Frie Press [or rather, Die Freie Presse] (The Free Press) disbanded at the outset of World War Two."

This Rihm was not a policeman but a linotype operator.[9] I made a mental note to check up on the number of German newspapers published in the United States, but not in connection with the Fenz case. In fact I was wondering whether any of the members of the Project 1947 group, who systematically scanned the early press for UFO reports, had examined the German newspapers printed in the USA.

This failure to trace either Fentz or Rihn through the official records is an important indication that neither man ever existed, at least in the timeframe established in the narrative. It goes without saying that there was no "Rudolf Fenz Junior" listed anywhere, either, for any period between 1850 and 2002 (alternative spellings included).

In April 2002 I received confirmation from both the New York Public Library (Humanities and Social Sciences Library, Room 121, Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street, New York NY 10018-2788) and the New York State Library (Albany, NY 12230) that neither Hubert Rihn/Rihm nor Rudolph/Rudolf Fentz/Fenz were listed in any New York telephone directory between 1939 and 1941. In May the same year I received a communication from Walter Burnes of the New York Police Division telling me that after searching their database they had been "unable to find any information on a Captain Hubert V. Rihm having served with the NYPD and/or the Missing Persons Bureau."

#### Early sources

After six months of research and enquiries I finally came upon a book predating Gómez Burón's wherein Rudolf Fenz is mentioned. It turns out that Jacques Bergier and Georges H. Gallet discuss the case at some length in their *Le Livre du Mystère*, a typical collection of enigmas and supernatural experiences published in Paris in 1975. To his credit, Gómez Burón did include this book in his general bibliography but there had been no reference to it in the main text and I had not been able to track it down. Partly this was because this book by Bergier is not very well known, but also because it is extraordinarily difficult to obtain particular out-of-print titles in Spain. In any



## This Rihm was not a policeman but a linotype operator

case, I eventually did manage to obtain it, first in Spanish (1977)[10] and later in French (1975)[11].

The version given by Bergier and Gallet concentrates mostly on the investigations carried out by "Captain Hubert V. Rihm" of the Missing Persons Division. Now retired, they write, Rihm no longer has access to the police report he once filed but can remember enough details to describe most of the ins and outs of the case. In most respects this version corresponds with those we have already seen, though not entirely. The time of the accident is given as "approximately" 11:15pm. "Rudolph Fentz" is first

seen in the doorway of a theatre in the middle of a large crowd, although paradoxically "nobody saw him go down the street." He is next seen in the middle of the road, where he is hit by a taxi. A policeman spotted him from the street corner but could not reach him on time. The dead man's fingerprints were taken but did not match with any known to specialists either in New York or in Washington.

More details about Rihm's investigation are provided. After finding Rudolph Fentz Jr. listed in the 1939 telephone directory Captain Rihm goes to the address given and there finds out that Fentz had been around 60 years old in 1939 and worked at a local bank. He had retired in 1940 and moved away. At the bank Rihm was informed that the man had died in 1945 but that his widow was still living in Florida.

A letter from Fentz Jr.'s widow told Rihm that her father-in-law had disappeared when he went out one night for a smoke, and that the family had spent a great deal of money trying to locate him, in vain.

This version was now the earliest I had seen. The Spanish translator of *Le Livre du Mystere*, Marisa Olivera, had rendered the name of the missing man "Rudolf" to make it more familiar for Spanish readers (a common but regrettable practice), while Hubert Rihm's name was not altered. This meant that the name "Rihn" had originated as a mistake in Burón's book, as did the name "Fentz," leading other writers to make the same mistake in later years. The only North American reference to the case, we recall, is in Scott Corrales' *In the Wink of an Eye*, that also has "Rudolf Fentz."

The next question was, of course, What was Bergier's and Gallet's source?

Fortunately, this was not a difficult question. Their book had been pieced together mainly from articles published in an Italian magazine, *Il Giornale dei Misteri*, and the Fentz article had been published there.

#### The paper chase

Bergier and Garret drew their information from a magazine called *Il Giornale dei Misteri*, an Italian magazine devoted to these kinds of matters. A quick enquiry to the research group to which I belong

and have mentioned above. Project 1947, produced a response from researcher Bruno Mancusi telling me the precise edition of the magazine: number 36, March 1974, p.24. I now have a copy of that article in my possession, thanks to Edoardo Russo at CISU.

But that is not all. The article in the Italian journal contains a brief but important bibliographical reference: *Fakta*, no. 1, 1973.

At the time I had no idea what this referred to. Was there an Italian magazine with that name? A French journal? Ole Jonny Brønne of UFO-Norge came to my rescue. *Fakta?* ("Facts?") was a Norwegian magazine! Brønne informed me that on pages 11-12 of *Fakta?* number 1, 1973, there was an article entitled "Uforklarelige forflytninger og forsvinninger," which translated means "Unexplained teleportations and disappearances." I have a copy of this article in my possession, now, too.

Page 12 is devoted to the "Rudolph Fentz" story – note the spelling of "Fentz." "Rihm" is the spelling of the policeman's name ("Kaptein Hubert V. Rihm"). These are the original versions of their names, as we shall see. Another curious addition was the information that the letter Fentz carried in his pocket was "poststempelt juni 1876 i Philadelphia" – that is, it was postmarked "Philadelphia 1876." Was this the origin of the supposed "letter addressed to the late Fentz from a trader in Pittsburgh, in the state of Pennsylvania" that Canales had read about in the internet forum? It is worth considering, as there is no way such a letter could have been "discovered recently." Unless it had been addressed to Mr Rudolf Fentz (1909-1976) of Chicago, Illinois!

On page 11 the article deals with a mysterious disappearance in Nanking (1939) and the story of the "mass teleportation" of a whole regiment in Gallipoli in 1915, a well-known but untrue tale. More interesting than this, however, was the bibliographical reference "*Arcanum*, January 1973."

Was *Arcanum* another Norwegian magazine? No, it turns out that *Fakta?* had taken the article from a Swedish magazine of that name. So far I had been able to trace the story of Rudolph Fentz

from Spain to France, from France to Italy, then to Norway. Now it seemed the story may have originated in Sweden...

Anders Liljegren came to the rescue. Mr Liljegren is a UFO researcher but also the archivist for AFU-Sweden (Archives For UFO Research), one of the largest UFO libraries in Europe. In an e-mail he told me that issue 88 of *Brevcirkeln Arcanum*, January 1973, contained an article entitled "Into unknown country," which, of course, discussed the same 'teleportation' cases as the *Fakta?* article. The author of the 4-page article was Lennart Lind, an occultist and ufologist. Lind interpreted the three stories in an esoteric way, with theories about "the 4th dimension" and "time holes" from Ralph M. Holland, Marian Harthill and 'Myron.' No references to sources were provided in the article, but there were quotes from the journal of the Borderland Sciences Research Foundation (BSRF), and Liljegren felt that the information had probably come from there.

The BSRF is based in California. The paper chase had apparently taken me back to an English language source, where one automatically supposes a story set in New York and involving the New York police should be.

#### Borderlands

In 1945, occultist theorist N. Meade Layne (1883-1961) founded the Borderland Sciences Research Associates (later "Foundation") and a quarterly publication called *Round Robin*, a booklet dedicated to the examination of supernatural phenomena. Layne is acknowledged to be one of the first theorists on ufological matters, making public statements about the phenomenon in 1946 in the wake of a sighting in San Diego on October 9th that year. Before the world's press began publishing reports on 'flying saucers' in the summer of 1947, Meade and his colleague, medium Mark Probert (d. 1969), had already proclaimed the objects were "ether ships" from the "fourth dimension." Technically speaking, therefore, the BSRF is the oldest flying saucer group in existence, though according to a letter written by a much later director, James Borges, the group de-emphasised UFOs in their work in the 1970s in order to focus on scientific experimentation.[12]



Meade Layne, the founder of Borderland Sciences Research Associates, whose *Round Robin* bulletin played a key role in propagating the Rudolph Fentz story



The term "round robin" had been used for years in a slightly different context. It originally referred to a creative game in which one person starts a story and other people take turns adding to it, with no fixed plot. Although this was not what Meade Layne had in mind for his journal, it is, ironically, the simplest possible description of the process by which many tales, like Fentz's, are developed. In 1959 the name of the publication was changed to The Journal of Borderland Research. The organization, which is still active today, describes the publication as "an information resource for scholars and researchers on the frontiers of science and awareness."

As there was no reference to a particular issue of *Round Robin* or the *Borderland Journal* it seemed it was going to be a long job to find one article amongst almost thirty years of publication history. There was no guarantee that the Fentz story had come from there, either. I was, therefore, delighted when Anders Liljegren wrote and told me that he had located the issue in question. Fortunately it was not such an arduous task, as it had been published in the May-June 1972 edition of *The Journal of Borderland Research* (Volume 28), on pages 15 to 19. Was this the earliest version of the Fentz story? Anders sent me a copy of the article a few days later.

#### A Voice from the Gallery

The report consisted of two parts of unequal length. Pages 15 and 16 dealt with Fentz while the rest discussed the esoteric significance of such mysteries, introducing three cases that had not been mentioned in the articles published in Norway and Sweden. We will look at these later. The most significant detail, however, was the way the story of Fentz was presented. The heading of the article was: *THE VOICE FROM THE GALLERY: By the late Ralph M. Holland. From "Colliers"*

This seemed to indicate that the article had been taken directly from the popular American magazine *Collier's*, but as no date or issue number was mentioned I was unable to trace it. But I decided that this was probably not necessary, as another source was mentioned: *A Voice in the Gallery*, number 4, 1953.

The *Borderland* writer – Vincent H. Gaddis – states that "From Holland's 'A Voice in the Gallery,' No.4, 1953 until March 1969 we had to wait for the occult explanation of the Fentz disappearance and reappearance," so I suspected that the *Collier's* article would have been identical to the *Borderland Journal* version. The inclusion of an exact bibliographical reference, plus the fact that Ralph M. Holland is presented as its author, implied that the text about Fentz was copied verbatim from the original. Unfortunately, editions of *A Voice from the Gallery* (the correct name of the booklet, according to a reliable source I will cite below) are very rare and I have yet to see any of them. There was no doubt in my mind that this was the earliest published source, and the 'paper trail' lead me to the inevitable conclusion that all later renditions of the story stemmed from this one. The following is a transcription of the article precisely as presented in *The Journal of Borderland Research*:

"One night in June 1950 an oddly dressed man was seen in Times Square in New York City -- which eventually led to the most baffling mystery in the history of the New York Police Department.

"Captain Hubert V. Rihm was in the Missing Persons Bureau at the time, and took an active part in the investigation. He is now retired and, since he does not have the records of the case in his possession, could not quote exact dates and addresses in all instances. He did, however, remember the main details. It was somewhere near the middle of the month, about 11:15 p.m., right at the height of the after theatre traffic rush.

"The man appeared to be about 30 years of age. His most noticeable feature, aside from his clothing, was a luxuriant set of mutton-chop whiskers, which went out of style many years ago. He wore a high silk hat, a cutaway coat with cloth covered buttons at the back, and a high cut vest with lapels. The trousers were black and white checked material, rather tight, without cuffs and pressed without a crease. He wore high button shoes.

"No one saw him walk out into the street. Witnesses first noticed him standing in the middle of the intersection "gawking at the signs as if he'd never seen an

electric sign before". Then he seemed to become aware of the traffic and began to make frantic movements to dodge it. The police officer at the corner saw him, and started out to lead him to safety. Before he could reach him, the man made a sudden dash for the curb. A taxicab hit him, and he was dead when they picked him up.

"The attendants at the morgue took the whiskers and the clothing in their stride. One meets some odd characters during 20 or 30 years on the force, some of them much odder than he. When they began to search his pockets [sic], their brows began to wrinkle. 'One brass slug, good for one 5¢ beer'. The name of the saloon was unfamiliar even to the old timers.



"One night in June 1950 an oddly dressed man was seen in Times Square - which led to the most baffling mystery in the history of the New York Police Department"

'One bill from a livery stable on Lexington Ave.: 'to the feeding and stabling of one horse, and the washing of one carriage; \$3.00', The name of the stable did not appear in the directory. 'About \$70 in currency, all old style notes, and including two gold certificates.' 'Cards bearing the name 'Rudolph Fentz' and an address on Fifth Ave., with a letter to the same name and address, post-marked in Philadelphia June 1876' None of the items showed any signs of age.

"The Fifth Ave. address was a store. So far as the present occupants knew, it had always been a store. None of them had ever heard of 'Rudolph Fentz'.

12 *Saucer Smear*, Volume 48, no. 3, April 1st 2001.

13 Holland's book *The Flying Saucers* was published in 1954 by the Borderland group. An 11-page document, it was reprinted by Gray Barker in 1963 along with related items. Anders Liljegren located the booklet in the AFU archive and kindly sent me a copy of the relevant pages. The obituary was prepared by Holland's sister under the title "In Memoriam."

14 Quoted in "Hatred on the Homefront: Cincinnati, Ant-German Hysteria, and the Media," in *Alterity: Transylvania's Academic Journal* 1999-2000, at [www.transy.edu/homepages/alterity/hatred.html](http://www.transy.edu/homepages/alterity/hatred.html).

15 *Ibid.*

16 Prometheus, Internet Bulletin for Art, Politics and Science, no.82, Spring 2002.



The name did not appear in the directory. A finger print check, both in New York and Washington brought no results. No one ever called, or made enquiries at the morgue. Capt. Rihm continued to investigate the case. He checked back thru old phone books, looking for the name 'Fentz'. Finally, in the 1939 directory, he found a 'Rudolph Fentz Jr.' with an uptown apartment address. They remembered Fentz at the apartment: a man in his 60s, who worked at a nearby bank. He had retired in 1940 and moved away. They had not heard from him since.

"At the bank, Rihm learned that Fentz had died about 5 years before, but that his widow was still alive in Florida. In reply to Rihm's letter, she said that her husband's father had mysteriously disappeared sometime during the spring of 1876. It seems that Mrs. Fentz, Sr. didn't like to have him smoke in the house. She thought it smelled up the curtains. So it had been his custom to go out for a walk every evening about 10 and enjoy a final cigar before retiring. One night he went out as usual and never returned. The family spent quite a bit of money trying to find him but he was never seen or heard of again.

"Capt. Rihm found Rudolph Fentz listed in the "Missing Persons" file for 1876. The address given was the same as that appearing on the cards and letter, so the place was evidently a private residence at that time. He was 29 years of age, and wore mutton chop whiskers. The description of the clothing which he was wearing when last seen agreed exactly with that worn by the mysterious traffic victim. The case was still listed as "unsolved".

"Captain Rihm never wrote the results of his private investigations into the official records. He didn't dare! They'd have had him in the "nut factory" for a mental checkup in nothing flat! After all, a man can't just walk out into thin air in 1876 and then suddenly turn up, unchanged in any way, 74 years later! No one would believe a tale like that. He didn't believe it himself, "but -- give me some other explanation which will make sense".

Thus reads the original version of the mystery according to Holland. A glance at the later renderings of

the story show that the Bergier/Gallet version was the most complete summary of the case after Holland's. The reason for this is that the Norwegian and Swedish articles upon which the Italian article was based had been translated practically word for word from the BSRF Journal. Had this not been the case, we can be sure the details would have been distorted much further by the time they were translated into Spanish.

Borderland Sciences proceeded to rationalize the Fentz incident from an esoteric perspective. According to the article, members of the Borderland Foundation gathered in March 1969 to contact 'Myron of the Ashtar Command,' hoping to discover the mechanism that produces teleportations and strange disappearances. This was achieved through a medium or 'channeller' called Marian Harthill.

This is not the place to discuss the complex world of the Ashtar Command. Suffice it to say that a contactee named George Wellington Van Tassel (b. 1910) claimed to have received 'psychic messages' from an intergalactic fleet with this name, and wrote about it in a book called *I Rode a Flying Saucer* (1952). Van Tassel founded a group of followers, the "Ministry of Universal Wisdom," and it all started there. It still exists today.

According to "Myron," Rudolph Fentz's leap through time was an example of what occurs when a person slips into the Fourth Dimension through a hole in the fabric of reality. Such holes – which are apparently random alignments between gaps in our dimension and in the Fourth – are especially common "in thinly populated areas or over your vast ocean stretches," in the words of the Ashtar alien. "Myron" speaks of "ships sailing right through one hole and out another, while the crews are never found," an inference to the Bermuda Triangle, a popular enigma at the time. Indeed, 1969 was also the year when John Spencer's *Limbo of the Lost* was published, the first book entirely devoted to the Triangle.

The article spoke of another case, in which a steamship called "Avalon" disappeared during a voyage from Long Beach to Santa Catalina Island, off the coast of California. According to Vincent H. Gaddis, who provided his

own account of the story, the steamer was seen again some 20 years later by the commander of a submarine, though a subsequent search failed to find it.

Gaddis had been an early member of the Fortean Society, a group founded in 1931 to examine the kinds of phenomena that Charles Fort (1874-1932) had collected for decades. It is a curious fact that Gaddis had published a round-up of contemporary UFO reports in the June 1947 issue of *Amazing Stories* – an article that was still on some newsstands when Kenneth Arnold made his famous sighting on the 24th of the same month. Later, Gaddis wrote articles for the Borderland Journal and similar publications. One of these, in *Argosy* magazine in February 1964, coined a new term that was to become very popular: 'the Bermuda Triangle.' Although he had not been the first to write about the disappearance of ships and planes in the region of the Bermudas and Miami, or even the first to call it a 'triangle' (both doubtful honours belong to one George X. Sand, whose short article in *Fate* entitled "Sea Mystery at our Back Door" discussed the enigma in October 1952), it was his expression that stuck in readers' minds.

The other 'teleportations' mentioned in the article were the alleged (but untrue) 1880 "David Lang" mystery, and the (dubious) 1593 "Manila to Mexico" incident. This is not the place to deal with these cases, of course.

#### Ralph M. Holland

I decided that Ralph M. Holland was the author of the Rudolph Fentz story. But if this was so, who exactly was he? This question has two answers. It turns out that first we have to meet Ralph, and then his alter ego Rolf.

Ralph Merridette Holland was born in Youngstown, Ohio, on August 29th 1899. He lived there until 1914 when his family moved to Akron, Ohio. After attending two public schools he left at the age of 16 to start work. He continued to take classes, and finally received a degree in engineering, yet his first jobs were with local newspapers. His first job was with a German language newspaper in Akron, and later with the Akron Beacon Journal. There is no indication that he wrote articles for either of the two

but rather that he worked "in the plant," as his sister Dora G. Holland noted in his obituary. [13]

This set me thinking. If Holland had worked in a German language newspaper, could he possibly have met Herman Rihm, the linotype operator who had lived and worked in Ohio? While it is true that Rihm had worked on a German newspaper in Cincinnati, not in Akron, was it possible that the two men had actually met? Holland had only been thirteen years older than Herman Rihm, so it is possible that their paths had crossed. Considering the rarity of names resembling "Hubert Rihm" in the first half of the twentieth century in North America, it continued to be an interesting, if indemonstrable, idea.

After his brief stint with the Akron *Beacon Journal* (a newspaper founded in 1897 and which still exists today), Holland turned to engineering as his main profession. He first worked at the B. F. Goodrich Rubber Company, then at similar firms, until he finally went to Scotland to help set up a rubber plant there. After this he returned to Ohio, later winding up in Detroit, where he worked as an engineer for the Detroit Edison Company. He spent the rest of his life working as an engineer, designing machinery. When he died of a heart attack on January 26th 1962 he was living in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio.

Returning to the German connection, it has struck many as odd that the two named characters in the Rudolph Fentz story had surnames of Germanic origin. Rihm and Fentz are common throughout Germany, Austria and Holland, as are Rudolph and Hubert. Did Ralph Holland have much contact with German immigrants in Ohio?

The answer is that he could well have.

According to Dr. Don Heinrich Tolzman, the author of *German-Americans in the World Wars* (London, K. G. Saur 1995), the Census of 1910 had determined that nearly a third of the population of Cincinnati alone were of German stock (121,719 out of 363,591). [14] The German language was introduced into Cincinnati public schools at the beginning of the twentieth century. The Mayor of Cincinnati, himself a German-American, praised "German culture," which had

"contributed so much to the present greatness of Cincinnati that so long as the Queen City exists the name of the noble characters of its German citizens will stand forever." [15]

In fact, there were dozens of German newspapers in the United States before World War II, and several in Ohio. 525 daily and weekly German newspapers were published in the U.S. in 1860, though by 2001 this had dropped to a mere 8. [16] In this context we should not be surprised that Ralph Holland chose German names for his characters, especially after his formal education in Ohio and his contact with German newspapers on leaving school.

If I was correct in my hypothesis, the question still remained about why Ralph Holland would have written a story about someone who had fallen through time in mysterious circumstances. I felt the explanation was not too complicated and that the key to the whole mystery lay therein.

"While in Detroit, Michigan," wrote Dora Holland, "he studied journalism and became a free lance reporter, and still kept his press card and credentials after returning home, sending out many stories to wire services and magazines, sometimes under a pen name." Holland's main interest was paranormal phenomena, especially anything bordering on science fiction. "He was a member of the Borderland Sciences Research Associates for a number of years, as well as many other groups of a similar nature."

UFOs became one of his favourite mysteries. "He was interested in our own life beyond our earthly one," it says in his obituary, "as well as life on other planets, flying saucers, etc., ever searching for the truth."

Holland was such an enthusiast for science fiction that he became a member of the National Fantasy Fan Federation (N3F), finally becoming its president, a post he held until his death. In 1935 he published several issues of his fanzine, *The Science-Fiction Review*, and in 1958 he was the co-editor of the first issue of *Fantasy Aspects*, another science fiction fanzine. He published a small book called *Ghu's Lexicon* in the 1950s ("Ghu" being a fantasy character invented in the 1930s). Also, of course, he published *A Voice From the Gallery*, de-

scribed by his sister as a series of booklets full of "many unusual or out of the way stories or events."

Dora Holland tells in her obituary that her brother was "constantly... in search for the truth, sorting fact from fake, before he would pass the information on." However, it is clear that she was either quite credulous in this respect or not telling the whole truth, for she knew that Ralph Holland had also published some very fishy 'factual' material under the pseudonym of Rolf Telano.

### "Rolf Telano," the extraterrestrials and the Underworld

The first indication that Ralph M. Holland was not all he seemed came to me in the form of a letter

*I decided that Ralph  
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This question has  
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dated 1964, a copy of which was forwarded to me by Anders Liljegen.

It happened that Miss Edith Nicolaisen, owner of the Parthenon publishing company in Helsingborg, Sweden, specialising in contactee literature, read *A Spacewoman Speaks*, a UFO book written by one "Rolf Telano," and decided she wanted to publish it in Swedish. She wrote a letter to Telano on March 1st 1962 care of Harriet P. Foster in Del Mar, California, whose address had been provided by its English language publisher, "Understanding Publishing Co." A reply from Dora Holland was received at the beginning of June. In the letter Dora said that

17 I highly recommend *Subterranean Worlds* by Walter Kafton-Minkel (Loompanics Unlimited, WA 1989) as the best guide to the 'hollow earth' literature published in this period.

18 Timothy Good, *Alien Base* Arrow Books Limited, London 1999 p.99.

19 Jenny Randles, *Time Storms*, Piatkus, London 2001.

20 Whitley Strieber, *The Secret School*, Simon and Schuster, New York 1997.

21 Brad Steiger and Joan Writenour, *New UFO Breakthrough*, Tandem 1967, quoted in "Fairyland's Hunters, Part One," by Peter Rogerson, *Magonia* 46, June 1993.

it was okay to publish the book as long as her deceased brother's desire for anonymity was respected by the publisher. Nicolaisen agreed, and before the year was through *Vänner i universum* ("Friends in the Universe") was printed and sold in Sweden. The book became a success, at least in the world of UFO literature.

*A Spacewoman Speaks* was a 93-page text that Holland/Telano claimed to have received in 1954 from an extraterrestrial called Borealis. It had first been published in 1960 by the Understanding Publishing Co., owned by another notorious contactee, Daniel Fry. According to Holland, Borealis was a member of an ancient race of extraterrestrials who first came across the Earth thousands of years ago. These beings had an average life span of a thousand years and were reincarnated constantly. When they saw the planet was inhabitable they started to breed people by carefully selecting parents and developing them biologically in subterranean laboratories called Edens. This improved species was called the Adam and it is from this race that human beings have descended.

*A Spacewoman Speaks* goes into much greater detail about subterranean beings and monsters, alien gods, Lemuria and Atlantis. A number of Adam-beings that chose to remain below the ground and not rise to the surface rebelled against their nature, indulging in continuous orgies and other vices. These are the devils feared by men today. The creators saved as many of them as they could and sealed the rest of them inside their grottos, where groups of them still live today.

Of course, considering the period in which Holland was writing we should not be surprised by these 'revelations.' A variety of colourful mystics and channellers had been publishing psychic messages about subterranean worlds and Atlantean demigods for decades. [17] In the late nineteenth century Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891) had written about vast caverns under the ground and the origin of the human race at points situated near the North Pole and on the lost continents of Lemuria and Atlantis. The "Lords of the Flame," she said, were divine masters living on Venus. Annie Besant, her successor as the head of the Theosophical Society, be-

lieved the next race would rise from the most spiritual residents of Southern California, a new Lemuria, and in the distant future yet another version of humanity would appear on Mercury.

Between 1884 and 1886 Frederick S. Oliver wrote *A Dweller on Two Planets*, a text that he claimed had been channelled through him by Phylos, a thrice-reincarnated native of Atlantis. Oliver explained that there was a subterranean world beneath California's famous Mount Shasta. In his last mortal incarnation as a gold miner called Walter Pierson, Phylos is flown to Venus in his astral body to receive the secrets of the universe. Oliver's book inspired the founder of The Rosicrucians to write *Lemuria: the Lost Continent of the Pacific* in 1931, which was not only more of the same but actually included references to strange flying lights and boats that were identical to modern UFOs.

In 1934 mining engineer called Guy Warren Ballard published *Unveiled Mysteries*, a book which described his encounters with the Comte de Saint-Germain. The notorious Count took him to a series of magnificent chambers 2000 feet beneath Wyoming, where he sees great mounds of gold that had been saved from Atlantis before it sank. When a sequel, *The Magic Presence*, was published, Ballard went on to write about a fantastic radio that he had seen below Colorado which the Masters could use to communicate with other cities and other planets.

However, the greatest influence on Holland was probably Richard Sharpe Shaver (c.1908-1975), a science fiction writer whose strange tales were published in the popular magazine *Amazing Stories* in the 1940s. They were, of course, presented as fact, and they stirred up strong reactions from the very beginning. Although many of the stories were authored by the editor of the magazine himself, Ray Palmer, only the name of Richard Shaver was attached to them. When the first full-length story, "I Remember Lemuria!" was published in March 1945 the issue sold out immediately and interest in the lost continents was reawakened.

Shaver's version of the history of the Earth differed very little from that of his predecessors. Thousands of years ago, he said,

the world was colonized by a race of extraterrestrial beings. They set up their first base on Atlantis, and are thus remembered as Atlans (or "Titans"). They enjoyed lifespans of thousands of years but never grew old, and possessed a superior technology which allowed them to travel at the speed of light and breed new forms of life. Some of the creatures they made were monsters but one group became the ancestors of Mankind. After some time Atlan scientists discovered that the sun was changing and had begun to poison the Earth's atmosphere with a deadly radiation. Terrestrial conditions got so bad that the whole Atlan race was driven below the ground, but even there they felt the effects of the radiation. Finally they decided there was only one way to survive: to search for a new home near a less hostile sun.

When the Atlans boarded their spaceships and flew away they left many of their genetically modified creatures behind. Some of these adapted to the terrestrial atmosphere and evolved into human beings. Others remained underground, degenerating into a race of evil dwarves called the "Dero." In his writings, Shaver blamed the Dero for nearly everything bad that ever happened on Earth. They had provoked most of the world's conflicts and disasters. Their antics had led to the crucifixion of Christ and the assassination of Kennedy, to name but two of their successes.

Ralph Holland, an editor of science fiction fanzines and a man who later became the president of N3F, would not only have been familiar with the best-selling *Amazing Stories* magazine but would probably have read the writings of Shaver's imitators, too. Maurice Doreal came up with very similar stories from 1946 on (publishing booklets with titles such as *The Inner Earth* and *Mysteries of Mt. Shasta*), as did W.C. Hefferlin (a reincarnated Ancient whose tales about extraterrestrials, the underworld and the origin of humanity were published in 1947 and 1948 in fragments by the Borderland Sciences group, of which Holland was a member).

*A Spacewoman Speaks* was not Holland's first book on UFOs. In 1952 the Borderland Sciences group published another, less philosophical work by him, *The Flying Saucers*. This was a



description of the different kinds of UFOs known to exist. On this occasion, too, Holland/Telano claimed that the information had been channelled to him telepathically by Borealis. On both occasions Holland chose to remain anonymous.

Daniel Fry also published Holland/Telano's *A Spacewoman Speaks* as a supplement of his own book, *The White Sands Incident*. Here, Fry uses the "channelled" messages from Borealis to support his own claim he had met the space-people himself. Fry claimed that his first close encounter took place on July 4th 1950 (later changed to 1949 when it was shown that he had not been there on that date) at the White Sands Proving Grounds in New Mexico, where he worked as a rocket test technician. They invited him aboard their craft and took him on a round trip to New York to demonstrate their powers. According to Fry, the entire 4000-mile round trip took just thirty minutes, which meant that they had travelled at an amazing 8000 miles an hour. Fry was impressed. After this promising start, however, the rest of the tale differed little from all the other contactee claims: the extraterrestrials explained that their ancestors had lived on Lemuria tens of thousands of years before, and humanity owes its existence to them.

Daniel Fry called himself "Dr Daniel Fry," which is how his name appears on his books. He claimed that he had been awarded a "Ph.D. from Saint Andrews College of London, England," but it was shown that the title had been acquired from a correspondence school and had no academic value whatsoever. In fact, no such college is formally recognized in London, and Fry's "dignity degree" of "Doctor of Philosophy (Cosmism)" is patently absurd. [18]

When Dora Holland wrote to Miss Nicolaisen on June 1st 1964 she expressed a strong desire to keep her brother's true identity secret. Ralph Holland had not wanted anyone to know that he was so deeply interested in science fiction, for this would have ruined his claims about aliens from space and subterranean monsters. His sister understood this perfectly, although whether she believed his fantasies were true or not is im-

possible to say. She certainly defended his honesty as a writer in her letter, just as one would expect in an obituary:

"I am sorry that I am so late in [replying], but press of other matters has kept me from it. Then too, I was trying to think of just how to answer, for I knew my brother's desire for anonymity, and felt if he had wanted such a sketch of publicity, he surely would have presented it himself at the time *A SPACEWOMAN SPEAKS* was published here in the States.

"I note that you state you will keep his name as 'Rolf Telano', for which I am very glad... He had been interested in Science Fiction for a number of years, and was president of the National Fantasy Fan Federation at the time of the death - this is the connection he did not deem advisable to use in connection with his book or other similar interests lest his work in that connection be discredited as a result - and he was a most dedicated man and sincere in his beliefs. I hope nothing will be used to discredit him or his work in this connection, and have only mentioned it because you did include it in your letter..."

We are left with a very confusing image of Ralph Holland indeed. "Contactee," science fiction enthusiast, journalist, engineer - a man of many talents.

#### An unexpected twist

In July 2002 I contacted the *Akron Beacon Journal*, the newspaper where Holland had worked when he was young, in case they could provide me with a photo or some additional information about the "father" of the legend. I received a reply a few days later, telling me that their archives did not go back so far, so they could not help me. However, the letter did say that a journalist named Paula Schleis could be interested in writing an article about Holland based on the information I had accumulated so far.

Thus, the same newspaper in which Holland had worked published an article about my investigations. "Clock runs out on long-told story of time traveler" was published by the *Akron Beacon Journal* on August 12th 2002. To be honest, I felt satisfied with my efforts and now I only hoped that a reader of the article, perhaps a resident of Akron, could provide me with some interesting infor-

mation about the origins of the legend I'd been researching for so many months...

I didn't have to wait very long.

On August 13th I received a letter from Reverend George Murphy, a minister in Akron, who confessed to be a great science-fiction fan. He told me that he was sure he had heard the Fentz story before, including all the names and details about the police investigation. Yet he had never heard of Ralph Holland, nor Rolf Telano, and he had never read *A Voice from the Gallery*, either. It set him thinking, and soon he remembered who had told exactly the same story... in 1951!



Daniel Fry claimed he had been awarded a PhD from St Andrew's College London, a correspondence school with no academic value

#### Jack Finney

In 1951 a writer named Jack Finney published a curious short story in the September 15th edition of the American magazine *Colliers*. The tale was about a certain Rudolph Fentz who was transported from the Nineteenth Century to the Twentieth, and a detective called Hubert Rihm who investigated the case.

Yes, that's right, it was the same story. It did not originate with Holland but with someone else entirely!

George Murphy sent me a copy of what was evidently the original version of the Fentz legend. Jack Finney's 12-page tale, entitled *I'm Scared*, was a compi-

lation of several fictional anecdotes about people who have experienced spontaneous time travel. I discovered that Finney had designated the Rudolph Fentz enigma as the last of these, numbered "case III." For the first time I read that Captain Hubert V. Rihm was a fat, red-faced 66 year old police officer, and that.... At the end of the story the narrator offers his own theory about what probably happens in such cases: that sometimes, due to the pressures of living in the modern world, one's wishes to flee from one's own time and space are granted. And who was Jack Finney?

Finney was a prolific writer of science fiction stories, especially stories of time travel. He was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on October 2nd 1911, but he spent his

## "I felt that the chase was worth it after all"

infancy in Chicago. He published his first short story in 1946 and many of his later works were made into films, including *The Body Snatchers*, which was published in *Colliers* in December 1954. He died in 1995, at the age of 84, of pneumonia and emphysema.

A second article about the Fentz legend, updated with the new information, was published on August 19th 2002 in the *Akron Beacon Journal*.

### Una opinión personal

Having spent a long time searching for the original sources of the Fentz story I have come to the conclusion that Ralph Holland's article in *A Voice from the Gallery*, while not being where the tale first appeared, was the source of the legend in Europe. When it was confirmed that Jack Finney was the creator of Rudolph Fentz I felt that the goose chase had been worth it after all. Whether deliberately or accidentally, Holland had set off a chain reaction that had kept the mystery alive for almost exactly fifty years – from *I'm Scared* (1951) and *A Voice from*

*the Gallery* (1953) to Carlos Canales' article (2000) and my own (2002).

It is curious that Holland's interest in Finney's tale came one year after his first "channelled" book about flying saucers and a year before his alleged encounter with Borealis that led up to his second book. Evidently he found himself in a moment of reflection and creativity in the ufological field at that time. In my opinion, if there existed a motive behind his use of the Fentz anecdote, it was to bolster theories about the "Fourth Dimension" – an important theory for associates of the Borderland Sciences group, of which he was a member. Only theories about unknown dimensions could explain how the flying saucers could come from places such as Venus, which the progress of science was gradually rejecting as a planet that could harbour life.

### Postscript: A Note on Modern "Chrononauts"

Many books discussing the theme of accidental "time travel" have been published since 1953. One of the most recent books devoted to the subject is *Time Storms*, by Jenny Randles. Randles' theory is that these leaps through time are a common, natural phenomenon, and her book contains a large number of eyewitness testimonies to show it. [19]

However, I have found a modern incident that resembles the Fentz case to a surprising extent, but in reverse. This can be found in Whitley Strieber's 1997 book *The Secret School*. According to him, in 1983 he was transported to late 19th century Manhattan while standing at the corner of La Guardia Place and Houston Street. He found himself in a familiar road but in an unfamiliar period, with low brick buildings where there are high-rise towers today.

The experience lasted between five and ten minutes. Strieber judged the year to which he was transported as being between the 1870s and 1880s. Later, when he scanned old issues of the *New York Journal* for references to himself (perhaps as a "ghost" that had appeared and disappeared before people's eyes), he found a report of a woman who had materialized suddenly in the street in 1945 and vanished again in seconds. Unfortunately, Strieber doesn't give a reference to the ar-

ticle in question. [20]

There is another case of someone turning up unexpectedly in Manhattan. In March 1957 John Robinson reported an abduction story during the Long John Nebel radio show. Allegedly, one of Robinson's neighbours, Steve Brodie, had told him about an experience he had had in 1938 while prospecting for gold out west with a companion. One day they were confronted by two strange hooded figures who did not look entirely human. They paralysed Brodie with a hand-held rod-like device and then turned on his companion, whose attempt to flee was brought short by something like a heat ray. Then one of the beings placed "small earphones" behind Brodie's ears, causing him to lose consciousness.

When he came to he found himself in a dark place alongside other prisoners like himself. They told him he was in the cave of the Dero, a subterranean race. Just as he began to regain his senses, however, one of the beings adjusted the earphones and Brodie passed out again. This happened from time to time until he was finally released, whereupon he found himself wandering the streets of Manhattan in a state of confusion. Two years had passed. Brodie came out with his story one day when he saw a copy of one of Ray Palmer's magazines in Robinson's apartment. "He speaks of the Dero!" he exclaimed, pointing excitedly to an article about the mysterious creatures. To prove his tale he then showed his neighbour the small scars behind his ears where he had worn the earphones and said that he had not been able to eat meat since his abduction.

Some time later, when Robinson had moved away but was paying a visit to his old neighbourhood, he learnt that Brodie had disappeared again. A neighbour told him that he had been spotted in Arizona, wandering about in a trance-like state. Had the Dero returned for him? [21] In this story we return to the subterranean world of the Dero, a man's transportation to limbo for a long period and their strange reappearance in Manhattan. It is clear that certain themes have been recycled once again. This particular story is particularly interesting because it introduces the concept of electronic implants, a staple in abduction lore in later years.



# CONSPIRACY THEORY IN AMERICAN HISTORY

Mike McHugh



I was reading through the Feature Review on witchcraft books on the Magonia Website, where I was pleased to find a review of one of Robert Thurston's books. Thurston was one of my professors in graduate school and I was an assistant in one of his classes on Modern Russian History, which is his speciality. He always theorised that the Stalinist purges and show trials of the 1930s were very similar to the witchcraft persecution of the 16th and 17th Centuries, in the sense that the masses really DID believe that agents of evil were at work in both cases: literal agents of the Devil in the witchcraft trials versus agents of Germany, Japan and other imperialist powers in the case of Stalin's Russia. In other words, the ruling elite did not simply orchestrate these situations, and even shared in the delusions themselves, in a mutually reinforcing cycle of paranoia.

I should point out that some of the older Cold Warriors in the Department grumbled that Thurston was a "Stalinist", trying to absolve the "Genius Leader of All Mankind" of his crimes charge which Thurston angrily rejected. The History Department itself had a history, as all of them do, in this case going back to the Vietnam War. At that time, my major professor along with most of the younger faculty, were opposed to the war and were even involved in the occu-

pation of the ROTC building in 1970. The Chair of the Department fired some of them and wrote a letter to the New York Times saying he should have fired even more.

Well, to make a long story short, by the 1980s, the younger faculty had taken over the Department and hired professors like Thurston, who shared their

progressive views. The older, more conservative faculty were always grumbling about this, and even condemned the younger, leftist professor who ran the Department as the "Gang of Four." (Thurston was not part of the Gang, although a well-known British ex-pat professor was.) I mention all of this by way of background, not to imply that politics could ever be involved in matters of purely "objective" scholarship and social science. We all know that that could never happen!

Be that as it may, Thurston's theory led me to speculate about the Salem witchcraft trials and other examples of conspiracy thinking in American history, which is my speciality. Now the first graduate class I ever took in colonial American history, was with an ancient, curmudgeonly professor who was completely sick of the Salem trials and always warned students that he did not wish to read any more papers about that subject. He was more interested in the new social history, in counting things based on old church and probate records. He was of the school of thought that regarded the outbreak at Salem as the result of a conflict between the older, more traditional part of the community based on agriculture and the newer, more liberal one based on commercial capitalism.

Indeed, this town/country conflict runs through all of American history from the 17th Century to the 20th, and is sometimes simplified as "western" or rural populism versus "eastern" or urban liberalism, with populism

giving rise to all sorts of radical, anti-modern movements of the Right as well as anti-urban, anti-capitalist movements of the left. One can find it in Jefferson's writings, just for starters, in his idealisation of the small farmer and artisan and hostility to banking, cities and the industrial revolution.

Not coincidentally, a healthy portion of American conspiracy thinking originates in populist, agrarian movements, with their focus on the east coast and European "Money Power" that is out to destroy the American Republic. There are many variations of this "Paranoid Style" in American politics, as the historian Richard Hofstadter described it, and some very noxious movements like the Ku Klux Klan and McCarthyism are part of it.



In McCarthy's case, though, the Soviet agents were members of the Eastern Establishment, the Ivy League elite, working with the Soviet Union to destroy the United States from within. In the case of the 20th Century Ku Klux Klan, the "enemy" was also Communism, but also modernism in general: the city, the university intellectual, the Darwinist biologist, as well as the Jews (especially "Jewish bankers"), Catholic immigrants, foreign "influences" in general. There is not much in American conspiracy theories today that cannot be traced to earlier movements, going back to the 18th and 19th Centuries.

I have thought a great deal about the origins of this Paranoid Style, which I would trace back to the very Calvinists ("Puritans") responsible for the Salem outbreak. One should remember that North America was a Calvinist society, and that evangelical Protestants were the majority here well into the 19th Century. Their hostility to the Roman Catholic Church ran deep, and they did not grant Catholics citizenship anywhere in colonial North America, except in Quaker Pennsylvania. (And the Calvinists despised the Quakers for their tolerance as much as their pacifism.) American history is full of anti-Catholic movements, such as the "Know Nothing" parties of the mid-19th Century and the Ku Klux Klan of the 20th, which sometimes went so far as to burn Catholic Churches and convents.

They also consistently tried to block immigration by Catholic immigrants, and were quick to adopt "scientific" racism and eugenics as soon as such tools became available to them in the late-19th Century. The earlier anti-foreign, anti-Catholic and anti-Semitic urges could now be buttressed by "science" in order to restrict immigration and citizenship to "Nordics." The National Origins Act of 1924 attempted to do exactly that, and remained the law of the land until 1965. The Puritans of the North and South could unite around a racist program on this basis, and even had "scientific" IQ tests to prove that the groups they hated were genetically inferior.

In my opinion, the very dualistic religion of Calvinism was one the main intellectual influence in North America, responsible for this well-known tendency to divide the world into saved/damned, good/evil, light/darkness, the Elect and the Sinners. For the early Puritans, of course, the Catholic Church was the Devil, the Antichrist, the Great Satan of the 17th and 18th Centuries. Even the free thinking Unitarian Jefferson shared this hatred, if not the Calvinism that inspired it. As the British know very well, the Puritans also hated High Church Anglicanism and the Toryism of the Stuart monarchs, which they (rightly) suspected was only a thin veil disguising their Catholicism.

They had fled England for express purpose of setting up a

Protestant Utopia in the colonies, a Holy Experiment that would be free of Catholics, bishops and nobles, although many of them returned to support Cromwell during the Civil War, and gave refuge to those who went into exile again after the restoration of the monarchy in 1660. The government in London was never in any doubt about where the sympathies of most colonists lay, and the more pragmatic kings and ministers sought to placate the dangerous Puritans who controlled most of the colonial legislatures and led opposition "factions" against the royal governors.

King James II was not pragmatic, though, and the American Puritans always distrusted him for his Catholicism and pro-French sympathies. In North America, the French in Quebec also had the sympathy of the Indians, whom the colonists had also despised as Devil worshipers and robbed of their land. The North Americans fought in four full scale wars against the French and Indians from 1690 to 1760 and many smaller skirmishes, and feared that any "Tory" government in Britain would be too sympathetic to their enemies. In their minds, Catholic, Tory and Indian were all Satanic, and their mission was to war against "hell and Rome."

James II had also imposed a military government on the colonies, under the dictatorship of Sir Edmund Andros. Although carried out in the name of administrative efficiency, the Calvinists feared that James and Andros were plotting to impose absolute rule permanently, destroying both the colonial legislatures and the Protestant religion, and perhaps even delivering the colonies to the French and Indians. Andros had also suspended the colonial charter of Massachusetts, under which the colony had existed in virtual autonomy from the Mother Country for decades. Not surprisingly, the Puritans quickly overthrew Andros after they received word of the Glorious Revolution of 1688. They sent representatives to London with an appeal that their old charter be restored, but this did not happen. Instead, Massachusetts was required to accept a royal governor.

This was the larger context for the Salem witchcraft hysteria that began in 1692. Few popular writers mention any of it,

## Belief in evil forces out to destroy America developed over time from a purely religious world view to a belief in secular, earthy threats, and finally to high tech, ET ones.

preferring to concentrate on the more sensational aspects of the Afflicted Girls and their fits and hysterics. It was a terrible time for the colonies, given that war with the French and Indians had begun in 1690 and they were still uncertain about what charter the new king would impose on them and whether their Bible Commonwealth would survive. In their minds, of course, God was had been severely testing their faith, upbraiding them for their sins and shortcomings, and allowing agents of the Enemy to attack them from without and subvert them from within until they repented of their sins. This is a common enough pattern in American history.

The facts of the case are well known, how the Afflicted Girls and their clerical supporters moved from town to town, naming hundreds of witches and agents of the Devil. The trials were a farce, with no chance of acquittal for the accused, and in the end nineteen people and several dogs (imps) were hanged. Hundreds of others were imprisoned, tortured or coerced into confessing, and only the arrival of the new governor, Sir William Phips, prevented a much larger bloodbath. Phips himself was a Puritan, a former merchant and ship's captain from Boston, but simply did not believe the accused were guilty.

It is often pointed out that these trials were the last government sanctioned persecution of "witches" in North America, and this is true as far as I know. As Robert Thurston said, the belief in witchcraft and literal agents of the Devil died out by the early 18th Century - at least among members of the elite. From that point on, most conspiracy theories involved more secular notions about political and ideological enemies.

Of course, this is true only of the elite. There is plenty of evidence that the common people of rural, small town America still believed in witches, demons, goblins, ghosts and ghouls well into the 19th Century, and that evangelical Protestants in the hinterland still regarded the Catholic Church as Satanic. Many of them still do today. Secular liberals of

post-Enlightenment elite regarded Toryism and Catholicism as ultra-conservative, intolerant and undemocratic, while the masses still maintained their older "folk" beliefs in a literal Devil. I know of cases as late as the 1770s, in enlightened Philadelphia, where mobs stoned accused witches to death and I'm sure that is not unique. One could already see the great split between elite "scientific" opinion and popular, "religious" opinion, even in the 18th Century. It is still not clear which will prevail in America.

Historians like Bernard Bailyn have described many of the popular conspiracy theories during the American Revolution, and how even the liberal elite shared them to one degree or another. For the Calvinist masses, still "superstitious", it was easy enough to portray George III and his ministers as satanic, as evil incarnate, much as they had viewed James II and Andros in the 17th Century. But even liberals like Washington, Jefferson and Franklin believed that George and Parliament were conspiring to suppress American liberties and impose absolute rule on the colonies.

In the absence of "scientific" polls, there is no way to know how many people shared this conspiratorial view of the British government, but professors I studied with thought that two-thirds to three-quarters of the colonists did, and that perhaps only 10-15% remained loyal to the king. It shows just how powerful such an ideology can be, given that contemporary historians no longer regard George III as evil so much as hapless, bumbling and ineffectual. In this case, if one believes Bailyn, the notion of sinister Tory forces conspiring against America made a truly popular revolution possible.

One could say the same thing about the Civil War of 1861-65, in which more Americans died than all the other wars combined. In the decade leading up to that war, many Northerners had become convinced that the Southern "Slave Power" was attempting to take over the U.S. government completely, open all

the Western territories to slavery, and even force the Northern states to allow it in areas where it had long since been abolished. In the popular mind, the aristocratic southern slave owner had become a potential tyrant and dictator, in the same league with James and George.

The genius of Lincoln and the other Republican leaders was not in convincing a very racist population to sympathise with black slaves--a sympathy most of them had conspicuously lacked throughout American history--but in getting them to believe that the South now wanted to suppress the liberties of white people, perhaps even reduce them to slavery. By the time of the Civil War, of course, it was no longer fashionable to literally demonise one's political and ideological opponents, but it was not difficult to turn them into secular devils. And so it remains today, except for people like Christian and Moslem fundamentalists, who can still get aroused by belief in a real Devil at work.

By way of disclaimer, none of this should be read as a defence of Stuart Toryism or slavery; liberals in 2002 don't defend such things. Rather, I only wanted to point out how often conspiracy thinking has been mainstream thinking in America, particularly during times of great political and economic tension or social upheaval like the 17th Century religious wars, the American Revolution and Civil War, not to mention Cold War "McCarthyism." It was not just a fringe or marginal cult that affected only the pathological few, but a phenomenon shared in some degree by the elite--or at least manipulated by it. I have not even mentioned all the conspiracy theories that emerged out of the Vietnam Watergate period, both among the New Left and Counter culture and the Right-wing Backlash against them. Suffice it to say that those are still affecting American politics and society today.

I am sorry that I have not mentioned UFOs, although it should be clear enough that I regard them as just a smaller subset

of this larger phenomenon I have been discussing. It is not surprising that belief in such objects as devices operated by ETs from Planet X emerged during and right after World War II. That was the first time that the majority of people could take the idea of space travel seriously, given the spectacular development of jets, missiles and nuclear power during those years, and the paranoid, hysterical atmosphere of the Second World War and early Cold War years.

As a historian, I know that before the mid-20th Century, one hears very little about possible ETs and alien visits in American popular culture. I just don't believe the idea was very widespread at all. This is not to say that people jumped from believing to angels, witches and demons into believing in invaders from outer space. That is a terrible distortion and simplification of a very complex historical process.

During the 18th and 19th Centuries, I do not know of many (any?) people who seriously believed in alien visits, but there were many who believed in secular demons and earthly threats and conspiracies. Basically, I think there was an evolutionary process at work here, and that belief in evil forces out to destroy America developed over time from a purely religious world view to a belief in secular, earthy threats, and finally to high tech, ET ones.

I do believe that the American mind is still profoundly Calvinist, despite the 1960s "liberation movements"; maybe even because of them, since the populist backlash against them gave new life to fundamentalism and evangelical Puritanism. And yes, I think the Calvinist mind is a dualistic mind, one prone to see dark, sinister, menacing forces in the world--it is often a paranoid mind. Such a mind may be receptive to any kind of conspiracy theory, depending on the political, social and historical circumstances. ETs and X Files types of stories are simply more grist



# READER'S LETTERS

Dear John

Though the film of *The Mothman Prophecies* is quite enjoyable, fans of the original may be disappointed that it deals only with the Mothman and his prophecies, omitting most of the UFO, cattle mutilations and Men in Black reports. This will please those who feared it would be 'bad for ufology', but it means we are not given the Hollywood treatment of one of the most fascinating parts of the book, the episode of the extraterrestrial librarian.

Following a sighting of a UFO which involved 'missing time', a young woman named 'Jane' of Babylon, Long Island, received a telephone call from a 'metallic voice' which told her to go to a local library (presumably Babylon Public Library, which according to the *World Guide to Libraries* is at 24 S. Carll Avenue - just in case you wanted to know) and look at page 42 of a certain book on Indian history. She went the next morning and found that the place was deserted except for the librarian, a woman in a 1940s-style outfit who, evidently expecting Jane, immediately produced the book and handed it to her. On looking at page 42 the print mysteriously turned into a personal message from 'them', which she later passed on to John Keel.

Later, Jane started to see the librarian all over the place. It eventually proved that she was named Lia (short for Librarian?) and came from another planet. Keel continued:

"I am an amateur herpetologist and once kept three-fanged cobras in my New York apartment ... until my concerned neighbors squealed to the Board of Health. Some of the descriptions of the entities impressed me as resembling some kind of reptile rather than human mammals. I didn't mention this reptile notion to anyone. But on July 24, Lia visited Jane and refused to talk about anything but eggs. She took some eggs from Jane's refrigerator and sucked out the contents like a reptile!"

How many other librarians are, in reality, alien reptiles? I don't ask this in hostility - on the contrary, I wish there were

more librarians who could produce the book you want without you having to ask.

Yours, Gareth J Medway  
London, SW7

Dear Editor

I have just read the article on your website archives entitled *The Mystic and the Spy: two early British UFO writers*, by Phillip Taylor. He claims that the books by Bernard Newman (Don Betteridge) and Gerald Heard are two of the earliest books about UFOs

In a used book store, I came across a book titled *The Flying Saucer*, the same title as the book by Newman, but a different story and a different author, also British. The author is listed as 'John Sylvester', and the publisher is Ward, Lock and Company, London, Melbourne and Cape Town. Unfortunately there is no date on the book. However, I checked other books by this author written for children or juveniles, all of which were written during the 1920s and 1930s. I also found out that the name is a pseudonym for Hector Hawton, who is now well known as a British philosopher.

There were other titles listed at the front of the book, all of the 'Sovereign Series' and most of these were written in the mid 1940s. The author mentions an American newspaper article in the beginning of his book, and from its contents I would guess that the book may have been written between 1948 and 1950. Specifically it mentions on page 14 that "up to the present date the United States government has collected two hundred and fifty three accounts of so-called flying saucers". The use of the term 'flying saucer' as well as the count of 253 flying saucers indicates that the article must have appeared after 1947 but well before September 25 1952 when Adamski reports (*Flying Saucers Have Landed*) that "over 1,800 sightings have been examined", let alone reported.

After 1947 there were a flood of reports, so the 253 must have been about 1948 or 1949. I acknowledge the possibility that the author might have written the story somewhat afterwards, but likely not too much as old news would not sit well with his young

readers. I did an extensive search and found many other books by the same author, but not another mention of this particular one. I will continue my investigation.

However, this book which I have never seen to date mentioned with regard to early UFO books, may possibly, depending on further research and verification, rank as one of the earliest books on UFOs. If you are familiar with this book, I would appreciate any information you may have come across with regard to it.

John Koopmans

Dear Editor

Your contributor M. J. Graeber was convinced that rather than having seen an exotic flying machine of unknown origin, Mrs Bailey had misidentified a light plane despite the relative lack of engine noise for such low height. Certainly I would agree that for an emotionally overwrought witness such an event could be of great symbolic importance and make a lasting impression.

A few days later I read an interview in UFO magazine (yes, I was brought up in the 50s) with Wing Commander Hubbard who was told by the MOD that he and his colleagues didn't see an exotic flying machine of unknown origin, just an optical illusion or misidentified aircraft in the distance.

Everyone seems to have a sensible explanation for what these poor deluded witnesses saw and I was about to give up on the ETH when I heard that the Boeing aircraft company were seriously investing in anti-gravity research. Maybe I could sell them my first edition of *Space, Gravity and the Flying Saucer* with a beautiful Adamski scout-craft on the cover. But wait a minute - wasn't that discovered to be a chicken-feeder or part of a refrigerator? Anyway, I know someone had a sensible explanation for it.

If only I could be a true believer in 50s-style ufology, or even 70s-style Magonia ufology, but I can't quite sign up for either, so I'll go on subscribing to both and hope for enlightenment soon.

Yours, Michael Buhler

London E1



# BOOK REVIEWS

•Walter Stephens, *Demon Lovers: witchcraft, sex and the crisis of faith*. University Press, 2002. £25.00.

•Hilary Evans. *Seeing Ghosts: experiences of the paranormal*. John Murray. 2002. £19.99.

Walter Stephens asks an interesting question: why did early modern demonologists get obsessed with the idea of demons having sex with witches? Why were they determined to prove that witches really did physically travel to sabbats, when previous generations had been content to view these claims as delusions of the devil?

Stephen's answer and his perception of witchcraft, are of particular interest to us. It is that such phenomena were regarded as important because they were seen as providing empirical evidence for the external, corporeal existence of devils. They were proof that devils and therefore the whole supernatural realm was "really real" and not as one commentator put it "... that demons do not exist, except in the imagination of the common people, so that a man imputes to himself by the exercise of his own imagination, and that on account of a vehement imagination, some figures can appear to the senses exactly as a man has thought of them".

In other worlds what Stephens called the "witchcraft theorists" (a term concocted in imitation of conspiracy theorists) saw in stories of the sexual congress of demons, was as evidence against a psychosocial hypothesis, as against the idea that demons, and by extension God and religion, were "all in the mind".

The reason for this search, Stephens holds, was not that the witchcraft theorists were total, unquestioning believers in a wholly credulous society, no it was that they and the society in which they lived was already entertaining doubts, questions were arising in their mind, which could not be publicly asked. Witchcraft stories were presented to try and assuage doubts. It was not so much that the witchcraft theorists believed the stories they recounted, it was that they could not *not believe them*. For that would imperil the whole theological world view. Witchcraft theorists tried to believe in such things, not because it was easy to so believe, but because it was difficult.

Horrifying though the witchcraft stories were, they were also reassuring, by providing empirical

evidence. Forbidden by their religion to try to encounter demons themselves, they could meet them second hand as it were. Someone else, groups in society who were disposable, could do the meeting and collect the evidence for them.

The exact nature of the witches and the demons tricks caused deep philosophical problems. How could angels and demons gain bodies for example, how could they have sex with humans, could witches really turn into cats? If you didn't want to believe in the physical reality of all this there was a get out, the devil could quite literally get into your head and mess about with your senses from inside as it were. But this was a dangerous line to take, for it could always lead to the heretical belief that angels and demons, and ghosts and boggarts were nothing but the product of the unaided human imagination.

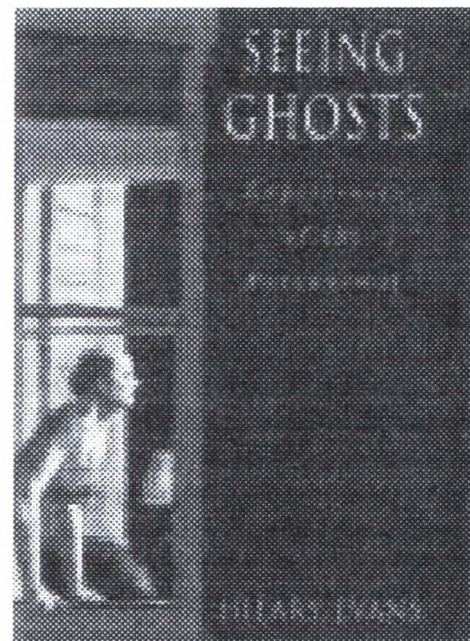
These arguments are still with us. Stephens draws our attention to the alien abduction theorists and their search for empirical evidence. Modern paranormal theorists of one sort or another look around for evidence that the suprahuman forces, whether spirits of the dead, extraterrestrials or the latent psychic forces, are not 'all in the mind'. There are nuts-and-bolts spaceships, paws-and-pelt mystery animals, and so on. We can understand something in this light, of the ease with which psychical researchers were prepared to dwell on the deeply 'earthly nature of ectoplasm and its emanations from 'unclean' orifices. Its as though its very polluted nature ensured its 'really real' physical reality. Anomalists search out witnesses and like kindlier, more PC, inquisitors interrogate them to encounter the 'other' at second hand.

Hilary Evans book would in many ways have seemed familiar to the witchcraft theorists, for it is essentially a metaphysical treatise on the nature of ghosts and spirits, asking questions such as whether ghosts are just the products of "an imagination so vehement that it can make figures appear to the senses"; or do spirits of the dead confuse the senses and provoke hallucinations; or can they acquire 'airy bodies' as the demons were thought to do, and appear to the senses?

To a great degree Evans tries to push the third agenda. He is looking for evidence of a separable soul or 'extended self'. Reading his

account, we can sense Evans goes this way, not because he finds believing in the quasi-physical nature of ghosts easy, rather he finds it difficult, and will be quite aware that he is writing in a far more hostile climate than any 15th or 16th century witch theorist. Rather it is because he cannot not believe.

What Stephens calls the "terror of the imagination and of nature", the idea that the natural forces and the human imagination can account for the supernatural, and that we are on our own in a wild and empty place, still holds us in thrall.



This gives us a clue as to another puzzle, why the limits of belief are often pushed back. Ufologists back abduction and crashed saucer stories that a generation or so ago would have been laughed at. Psychical researchers go for evidence that the founders of the SPR would have recoiled from, as an example Hilary Evans builds his case in part from letters to *Fate* magazine, and uses well known free-floating tales among his evidences. The answer must be that as the "terror of nature and the imagination" creeps ever closer, paranormalists seek more and more frantically for any countervailing evidence they can find. The witchcraft theorists went through the same processes.

The escalation of what can be believed goes on. In a way this may lead to its downfall, the more extreme the claims, the more the proponents become isolated, indeed they themselves tip the scales toward scepticism. The price of belief eventually outweighs the price of scepticism. Better see the world stripped back to nature and the imagination than reduced to total chaos and absurdity.

**Colin Bennett.** *Looking for Orthon: the story of George Adamski, the first flying saucer contactee, and how he changed the world.* Paraview Press, 2001. £12.50.

George Adamski, the subject of Colin Bennett's sometimes very amusing and perceptive, and other times obtusely wrong study, was a classical trickster figure, a sexually ambiguous, media-savvy, part prophet and part con-artist. He became the most successful of those trying to update traditional occultism in space-age guise, offering a reassuring image of the mysterious UFOs and the technological future they symbolised. They were nothing scary at all, just the electromagnetic space ships of those nice space brothers, who were just like us, or at least like the duller kind of nonconformist preacher.

Like most prophets, Adamski was largely unheeded in his own country, where his support was largely confined to the existing theosophical/occultist subculture. Not so in Britain, where spiritualism had a much higher social profile. Here Bennett's image of the 1950s come seriously awry, for he sees them as a time of dull, materialistic conformity, contrasting with today. However it should be remembered that 1950s Britain was a far less secular society than that of today, and

also one where spiritualism and psychical research had considerable social and intellectual cache. Favourable articles on spiritualism by British authors appeared in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and *Chambers' Encyclopaedia*. Many social leaders' views had been formed during the Great War of 1914-18, when mass bereavement gave a huge boost to the subject. This meant there was a prominent ready audience for occultist notions. Pioneer ufology in Britain was in many ways an exclusively spiritualist and occultist venture, lacking the rocket science technology interest found in the United States.

The writings of the likes of Desmond Leslie, Gavin Gibbons and Arthur Constance appealed to those who felt threatened by the new technological society, in the which the "man in the white coat" educated at a provincial grammar school threatened the

social position of the classics educated public school upper classes. Of course, the vast majority of readers of *Flying Saucers Have Landed* are more likely to have been attracted by the startling cover and the tale of Adamski's adventures rather than by Leslie's

occult meanderings. In a much less scientifically aware society than the US, the book became a best seller.

However despite Bennett's claims, the UFO writers were to have little long term impact. If Desmond Leslie is remembered at all outside the world of the older members of the UFO subculture, it is for punching Bernard Levin for writing a

nasty review of a play his actress wife appeared in (or as a former resident of the Irish stately home where Paul McCartney celebrated his second marriage). Other figures such as Brinsley Trench sold their books on the title and cover alone, how many readers ever got through the impenetrable occult waffle inside is anybody's guess. Even the great Hugh "Stuffy"

Dowding had become an object of national ridicule when he was reported as politely asking the mice to leave his house.

Adamski's main problem was that he couldn't adapt, and as the space age dawned his tales looked sillier and sillier. At one time he tried to retire, claiming that the Flying Saucers had now departed, then got nasty and started to blame his problems on the International Bankers (i.e. Jews), allied to negative elements on Orion. In the end he became just another seller of psychic secrets.

One of the most hilarious episodes in his career was the Madeline Rodeffer film, a work of such transcendental awfulness in the special effects department as to make Ed Wood look like a cinematographic genius in comparison. I can still remember after more than 30 years the howls of derision this film produced when shown at a local, not very sceptical, UFO group meeting.

Bennett's (real or assumed) hostility to sceptics traps him into all sorts of verbal contortions. By refusing to face the obvious fact that Adamski constructed the images in his photographs, Bennett denies him his true claim to fame, that of the artist who created the iconic image of the flying saucer.



**James Houran and Rense Lange (editors).** *Hauntings and Poltergeists: multidisciplinary perspectives* McFarland and Co., 2001 (Box 611, Jefferson, North Carolina 28640, order lines 1-800-253-2187) \$85.00

This collection of papers makes a brave attempt to examine hauntings and poltergeists from physical, psychological, sociological and cultural viewpoints. These range from those of the moderate believer through to the hard-core sceptic, but contributors generally manage to stay polite with each other.

In the first section, sociocultural perspectives, in what are essentially précis of their books, Ronald Finucane examines the changing meaning of ghost stories through the centuries, Hilary Evans examines ghost stories as part of the wider spectrum of entity experiences. Emily Edwards examines the use of ghost

stories in popular film. David Hufford examines some ghost narratives from the perspective of his experience centred approach, and seeks to argue that the supernatural beliefs arise rationally from certain experiences. At one level no one would challenge that, and it is by no means a new or revolutionary idea, for example Victorian anthropologists argued that beliefs in a separable spirit arose from the experience of dreams. Hufford, however appears to be going further in arguing that as disembodied spirits must be assumed to be beyond empirical inquiry and therefore the belief cannot be challenged by contemporary rationalism. Here Hufford misunderstands what the folk belief in ghosts was and is, it was not a belief in disembodied spirits, but in differently embodied spirits, able to interact with the physical world, to the extent of making footsteps, producing transiently material figures etc. As Finucane shows these quasi

material visitants were original regarded as coming from the after-life realm for a specific purpose. (Even the elite belief in disembodied spirits must assume that such spirits are able to interact with the physical world even if it is only to interact with the perceptual centres of the witness's brains, and are therefore by definition physical).

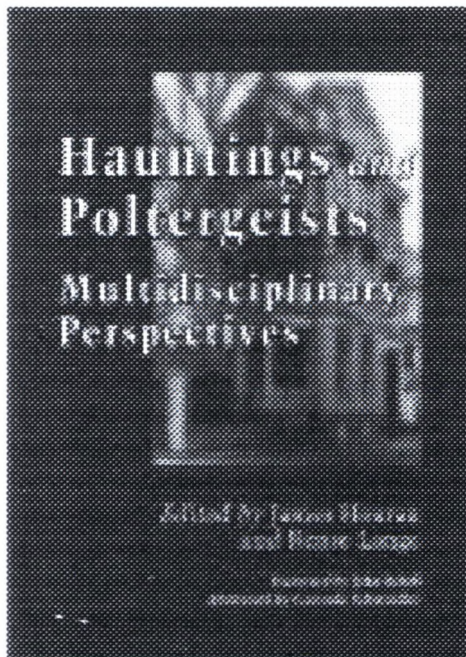
Hufford returns to his study of the hag experience, now under the influence of political correctness renamed the Mara experience. While we can appreciate the reasons for this the renaming isolates the experience from its general folk explanation, which was not ghosts but witches. Today, ghosts and poltergeists, along with aliens in UFOs constitute the authorised supernatural, as opposed to say the actions of witches or of boggarts and djinns etc. In other words culture plays a strong role in the interpretation of such experiences.

The paper by James

McClennon may provide a clue as to the origin of the Mara experience. McClennon argues that paranormal experiences cluster round specific charismatic, encounter prone, shamanic individuals, and that their experiences, and more importantly their ability to convince other people that they have shared them laid the foundations of religious experience. This would certainly seem to be the case in many modern examples from a whole range of anomalous experiences. Might not one go further and argue that this development of the shamanic complex is intrinsic to the development of behaviourally modern humans. This is certainly an idea worth pursuing. Coming back to the Mara experience, imagine what this experience of "sniffing snuffling footsteps" and ominous presences meant to our Palaeolithic ancestors, not I think ghosts, but predators. The Mara is the Universal Predator. (A further clue lies in

the connect between sleep paralysis and narcolepsy which also involves cataplexy and or REM sleep in conditions of hyper arousal. is this a vestigial play dead response in the presence of danger. If so then the experience of aware sleep paralysis may trigger some ancient predator present warning system which produces predator present imagery)

The second set of papers on physical and physiological perspectives shows the increasing influence of Michael Persinger, who co-authors two papers here, in this field. I definitely get the impression that Persinger's ideas are reaching gospel status, though it is not at all clear to what extent if at all they have been independently verified. Sceptics who quote Persinger may wish to pause, when they see him invoking natural holograms, conscious plasmas (they wouldn't be boggarts by another name would they) and time warps to account for some experiences. I must say that science fiction writers should go for the conscious plasmas which might have the level of consciousness of a squirrel, and imagine them stabilised and used as the basis for the new generation of super computers. Imagine the political ramifications, you know the demos by the Boggart Liberation Front, and the alliance of Christian and Muslim



fundamentalists who say that it is trafficking with demons. A good film there folks.

There are sceptical pieces by Joe Nickell and Peter Brugger. Nickell summarises the various normal events that can trigger ghost and polt reports, however Brugger's piece which deals in part with the "facilitated communication" controversy is perhaps more pertinent to a discussion of ouija boards and table turning than hauntings. Similarly Dean Radin's experiments with the psychomantrum, a kind of up market crystal ball do seem to be dealing with the same sort of experience at all.

While the previous sections were all highly accessible,

the last on psychological perspectives includes some really heavy going stuff, though parts of Fatima Machados semiotic study of poltergeist cases give clues as to the psychology behind such stories, it is worth trying with pieces by Tony Lawrence and Kumar and Pekala, because despite the technical language and mounds of statistics they are saying something important. The concluding paper by the editors examines the relationship between ghost and poltergeist cases and "mass psychogenic illness" and the role of selective attention and misperception of ambiguous stimuli. Such a view should perhaps be connected with a more general concept of all perception being more akin to a work of art than a video recording.

The paper by Houran and Lange links in with that of McClennon in suggesting that the ability to weave stimuli into meaningful patterns and construct patterns between events plays a role in the development of behavioural modernity. This is connected with the development of modern language and culture about 60,000 BC, a process during which the human imagination filled the world transforming the neutral nameless backdrop, into a named, mapped place. It is here that our ancestors development a "thou" relationship with the landscape of

the imagination.

This is an important collection of papers on a topic too often relegated to the heritage industry, it is a pity therefore that the exorbitant price will deter almost all private buyers and will mean that only a tiny number of libraries will consider purchasing it.

The one deficit in this study is the lack of a study of the social and cultural meanings of ghost stories and what it means to be haunted. As I mentioned in a *Magonia* article, ghosts (spirits of the dead) and cryptids (living fossils, prehistoric survivals) hint at the "presence of the past" in our world while UFOs (advanced technologies) hint at the "presence of the future".

The "presence of the past" lives on in our genes and cultures, haunting us and oppressing us. The terrors of our age tell us that it is folly to believe that there are no ghosts and that we are not haunted. They also suggest that it is equally folly to believe that the ghosts exist as lumps of ectoplasm "out there", which could be exorcised by a mixture of holy water and parapsychologists hi-tech equipment. If only things were that simple. And when our ancestors claimed that the Mara was due to witchcraft, they knew that the Universal Predator, the Great Terror in the darkness was

**Michelle Stacey. *The Fasting Girl: a true Victorian medical mystery.* Jeremy P Tarcher/ Putnam, 2002. \$23.95**

In June 1865 a 19 year old Brooklyn girl, Mollie Fancher was crossing the street, laden with parcels and her mind on her forthcoming marriage, when she was knocked down by a horse drawn street car. She took to her bed and her injuries developed into a mysterious affliction which caused convulsions and paralysis. She claimed to go blind, but could still read and sew, allegedly seeing through her skin. Soon she claimed that she could exist without eating anything and that she could separate from her bedridden body and roam the town. For years she seemed to be in a trace like state, from which she emerged without memory of the previous 8 years.

Mollie became a media sensation, and soon believers and sceptics were arguing over her claims in the most vitriolic terms. She became a focal point in the cultural wars of the post-Darwinian period, as the new sciences of neurology and psychology battled with religious and mystical world views. Molly's wild talents were used as ammunition against "materialism", while 19th century ancestors of

James Randi proclaimed her a fraud.

Michelle Stacey sees Molly as a link in the line that leads from the holy anorexia of medieval saints such as Catherine of Sienna, through early-modern fasting girls to today's *anorexia nervosa*, though in Mollie's case it is clear she was far from starving herself to death.

Mollie's strange symptoms lie in the nexus of hysteria and neurasthenia, the psychogenic diseases par excellence of the Victorian age. Grand hysteria has now largely vanished, though it can still be seen in the strange performances in 'electro-allergy' clinics, but neurasthenia lives on as ME, and chronic fatigue syndrome, protean diseases with vast lists of symptoms.

Mollie lies at the centre of three modern concerns: anorexia, fatigue and multiple personality disorder, which may or may not exist, depending which "authority" you listen to. To these considered by Stacey we should also add Munchausen's Syndrome. Like many Munchauseners Mollie starts with a real illness, and we can hypothesise that the solicitous attention she received became something she was loath to give up. All of these syndromes are perhaps not separate things but symbols

and strategies of something deeper, desperate attempts to gain control of the world by those who feel themselves powerless. The claims of clairvoyance and the like come in here surely. Her pseudo anorexia and clairvoyant claims are messages of transcendence, an escape from the body, often seen as a burden, especially for women in the days before effective medicines and contraceptives. Today in the age of the perfect body it is not surprising that psychogenic illnesses seem to be taking on the form of very more extreme and radical body dysmorphias, to be "cured" by therapies and surgery, and soon by genetic engineering.

There is another story of alienation in this book, Michelle Stacey, a bright thoroughly modern New Yorker cannot grasp the world of her ancestors, the past to her is a *very* foreign country and she finds herself baffled by how intelligent rational people could believe that Molly lived on air. But out beyond the bourgeois areas of the big cities, that pre modern world lives on; and not all that far away from Molly's home will be the apartment block from where it was claimed that Linda Napolitano was abducted through a closed window into a spaceship. What would the Victorians have made of her story?



# THE PELICAN WRITES...

El pelicano es fuerte en sus apreciaciones, pero muy razonable.

The Pelican thinks it is time to solve the problem of UFOs and ufology once and for all by explaining how the various controversies within it are caused mainly by faulty logic rather than by the difficulties in establishing the true facts of each case.

For example, there was a case in which there were three witnesses, two of them together in a car. One of these witnesses described a domed craft, with two entities visible inside the dome. This object disappeared behind trees as if it was landing, and was followed by other, similar craft appearing in the distance. She was very frightened by this sighting, according to the local police chief.

Many ufologists would accept such a report at face value, because there was more than one witness, and the witnesses appeared to be honest. However, this particular case soon unravelled when it was investigated by Kevin Randle. (1) When he interviewed the other main witness, he said that he saw no shape behind the lights and he thought that the pictures of domed craft and alien shapes drawn by the other witness were "ridiculous". Thus there was obviously a conflict of testimony between the two main witnesses. Randle dealt with this problem by going back to the original statements and descriptions and found that, on the night of the incident, both witnesses had merely described lights seen in the distance. Then one of the witnesses kept changing her story. Two days later she was talking about a domed disc, and a few days after that she was describing the alien shapes she claimed to have seen inside the dome.

Randle drove out to the area where the sighting had occurred and saw lights similar to those initially described by the witnesses. They were aircraft coming in to land at the local airport.

The point about this is that if it had not been competently investigated, it would have been recorded as a multi-witness sighting of a structured craft, with alien occupants. Randle does not accuse the woman who kept changing her story of lying; it was a case of confabulation. If the woman did not have available to her the idea of aliens flying around in domed saucers then she would not have

had any basis for adding spurious details to her original sighting, and would probably have correctly interpreted the lights in the sky as aircraft.

This is where the psychosocial hypothesis is relevant to UFO reports. If someone sees something in the sky which seems to them to be unusual, or has some strange experience, then there exists a whole range of ufological myths which can be used to interpret such sightings and experiences. The details of UFO stories tend to vary depending on differences of language and culture. This is especially true of stories of alleged UFO entities. For example, many ufologists associate the *chupacabras* with UFO activity, but only a few of them seem to realise that almost all of the people bothered by these unpleasant creatures happen to speak Spanish. The occupants of UFOs are more likely to be Nordics in Britain and Greys in North America. And so on.

Faulty logic is also applied in arguments as to whether UFO occupants have any objective existence. A noted exponent of twisted logic about them is Budd Hopkins. Hopkins insists that UFO abductions are physically real events, yet when Philip Klass asked him if he had informed the FBI about the abductions, he dismissed the question as "the most absurd thing I've ever heard in my life". (2)

Hopkins apparently believes that one can prove the physical reality of UFO abductions by argument rather than evidence. In an article in which he attempts this he uses sexual abuse of children as an analogy. He argues that those who recall their own abduction experiences will accept their reality, whereas those who have not had such experiences will reject the idea that abductions are even possible. (3) So what answer does Hopkins propose? Attempts to provide physical proof? No. He argues that Sigmund Freud was wrong to retract his belief that his patients' problems were to a great extent the result of being sexually abused as children. He mentions a number of mental health professionals who have come to the conclusion that "childhood sexual molestation, seduction and abuse are rampant in the real world..." He makes no mention of how con-

troversial this opinion is, or that it has led to innocent as well as guilty persons being accused and convicted of child abuse.

He attempts to link alleged child abuse with alleged UFO abductions like this: "Mason in particular claims that Freud's theory that his patients were merely fantasising such childhood traumas in effect blames the victim and often deepens a sufferer's problems. (In a parallel way, if UFO abductions are actually taking place as event-level occurrences, labelling them as fantasies is immensely destructive to those who suffer their after-effects.)"

So, you see, you must not deny the physical reality of abduction stories, because you might upset the abductees.

And what further powerful argument do we have from Hopkins, to convince, if possible, even The Pelican that abductions must be real? He gives us some examples of abduction reports containing details which had not appeared in the UFO literature when the incidents took place. As they read on, though, attentive armchair ufologists indulging in literary criticism will become aware of his little trick. For instance, one witness reported an incident which occurred in April 1961, involving "missing time". However, he didn't tell Hopkins about it until 20 years later! Is it possible, the cynical old Pelican asks, that his story could have changed somewhat over the years? Does Hopkins consider this possibility? Of course not.

The Pelican hopes in future columns to continue to show how logic and the exposure of the tricks of the believers can clear away the atmosphere of spurious mystery and lead us to a sane and balanced approach to the evaluation of UFO reports.

## Notes

1. Randle, Kevin, "UFOs on memory lane", *International UFO Reporter*, Spring 2001, Volume 26, Number 1
2. Klass, Philip J., *UFO-Abductions: A Dangerous Game*, Prometheus Books, Buffalo, New York, 1988, chapter 16
3. Hopkins, Budd, "Abductions as physical events", *UFO Brigantia*, No. 50, November 1991