

# MAGONIA

80



## **TANGLING WITH THE TRICKSTER**

DAVID PERKINS asks if the archetype still lives.  
And fifty years later, BUZZ BRANDT checks if there still life in

## **THE FLATWOODS MONSTER**



**MAGONIA 80**  
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# EDITORIAL NOTES

Joe McGonagle, host of the excellent website Ufology UK, recently posted a notice on the UFO UpDates mailing list, calling for the establishment of a "UK National UFO Authority" to be, in his words, "on the line of something similar to a national trade standards body for ufology, establishing, monitoring, and accrediting groups and individuals who meet or exceed those standards." Presumably after all this monitoring and accrediting, groups and individuals will be awarded an 'Investors in Ufology' logo which they can add to their stationery.

Although McGonagle's idea is well-meaning, it is hardly new, and I don't think you need to have been reading *Magonia* for very long to have some idea as to what our reaction to such a scheme might be. Quite apart from the fact that any attempt (and there have been many previous ones) to encourage ufologists to act in an organised way is rather like trying to push a piece of string, or - as John Harney puts it - cat-herding, we feel that any such organisation, if it got even a few centimetres off the ground, would be quite useless and probably counterproductive.

The apparently defunct BUFORA has made numerous attempts to set up such an organisation, and the debris of its attempts at 'monitoring and accrediting' groups and individuals, lies around in back issues of BUFORA Bulletin for all to contemplate. Even its (fairly) successful training programme to educate would-be ufologists into the basics of investigation and identification seems to have foundered. We have also seen any number of investigator-oriented groups - UFOIN, IUN, NUN, etc. - which were supposed to revitalise ufology, both in Britain and elsewhere. Indeed, I seem to remember a series of excitable Internet postings proclaiming "British Ufology has been Reborn" a year or so back. Whatever happened to that initiative, a stillbirth presumably, or a sort of Raclian cloning?

The other demand which is made by those who want ufology to shape up, is that publications and reports should be 'peer-reviewed', like proper scientific papers. There are two publications which are promoted as being 'peer-reviewed', *Journal of UFO*

*Studies* and the *European Journal of UFO and Abduction Studies*. Now both of these periodicals publish some excellent papers, but one has to ask in what way they can be truly described as 'peer-reviewed'. In a conventional scientific context peer-review implies that submissions are scrutinised by a panel or people with recognised qualifications in the topic under review.

Medical journals are reviewed by people with real qualifications from recognised medical colleges and institutions; similarly with scholarly journals in civil engineering, gynaecology, astrophysics, musicology and any number of subjects. But who are the reviewers for ufology? Where are the recognised authorities? There just aren't any. Now there's no problem having people with scientific knowledge look over a UFO paper to check that there are no obvious technical howlers, but I don't think that this is what proponents of 'peer-review' mean.

I suspect that what they actually mean is that they want a group of people with roughly the same views on ufology that they have to approve the articles that they approve of, and give them some sort of imprimatur. And I think that applies as much to those with a sceptical viewpoint on the topic as to those of a more believing nature. The truth is that there is not a 'science' of ufology, and there never will be, for ufology is not a coherent subject in its own right. It is just the collectivity of what people who call themselves ufologists are interested in.

Understandably, in its search for an identity, ufology seems to pick up the *zeitgeist*. A few years ago it was trying to be very managerial, with mission statements, flow charts, profit centres, and the like. Now it seems to be buying into the Blairite world of targets and standards and accreditations. As I said about the previous manifestation, some of us get quite enough of this sort of stuff at work, and we do not want it invading our leisure hours. Ufology is, above all, an individual process, driven by personal passion and determination. Any attempt to control and monitor it will be, as it has always been in the past, the kiss of death to imagination and progress.

# THE FLATWOODS MONSTER

## A CRITICAL RE-EXAMINATION

**BUZZ BRANDT**

*Sometimes we see a cloud that's dragonish:*

*A vapour, sometime, like a bear, or lion,*

*A tower's citadel, a pendent rock,*

*A forked mountain, or blue promontory*

*With trees upon 't, that nod unto the world*

*And mock our eyes with air.*

*Shakespeare Antony and Cleopatra IV, xiv, 3*

Dubbed one of the "most bizarre UFO encounters of all time" (Clark, 1992), the strange tale of the Flatwoods "monster" was destined to become a classic of early flying saucer mythology. Popularised by such seminal Fortean anthropologists as Frank Edwards, the story surely reflects the

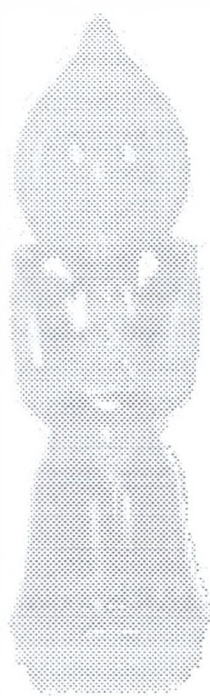
flourishing awareness in the public imagination of "alien spacecraft" in the years immediately following Kenneth Arnold's famous sighting of nine "flying objects" over Mt. Rainier. A synopsis of the published accounts of the incident is as follows:

It was just getting dark on the evening of September 12, 1952, when a group of boys playing football near the village of Flatwoods, West Virginia looked up to see what appeared to be a bright red disc-shaped object travelling overhead, shooting out sparks in its wake. Thinking it might be a flying saucer, they watched as it seemed to hover for

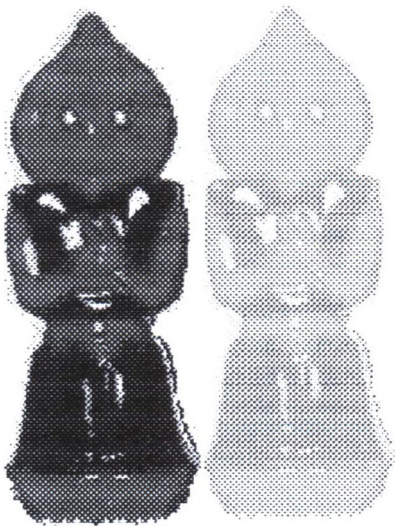
a moment in mid-air, then drop abruptly behind the crest of a hill. A moment later, a bright orange light blazed up from behind the hilltop, followed by a pulsing red glow. Two of the boys, Eddie May (13) and his 12-year-old brother Fred, rushed home to notify their mother Kathleen, a local beautician. Although she was initially sceptical of the notion of an alien spacecraft, as soon as she stepped out onto the porch where she could get a glimpse of the eerie illumination, she immediately sent the boys hustling to alert neighbour Eugene Lemon (17), a member of the National Guard. A search party was hastily assembled, which included Neil Nunley (14), Ronnie Shaver (10), and Tommy Hyer, also 10. Accompanied by Lemon's dog, and armed only with a flashlight, the seven started up the hill.

As the dog trotted ahead, the investigators became aware of a foul-smelling mist which was irritating to the eyes and throat. Suddenly the dog began to bark and bolted past them, heading for home. Undaunted, the party continued to climb, and as they rounded the last bend of the trail, the odour became overpowering. And there, resting on the ground 50 feet in front of them, they saw a "big ball of fire", as "big as a house", pulsating orange and red like a mass of hot coals.

Before anyone could recover from the shock of this otherworldly sight, Mrs May noticed two small lights in the branch of a tree to her left, shining in the dark like the eyes of some nocturnal



**Almost fifty years have passed since this strange occurrence. Did an alien monster really touch down on an isolated hilltop in West Virginia?**



animal. Eugene Lemon swung the flashlight in this direction, and Mrs May screamed. Standing there under the branch was a huge, man-like creature 10-15 feet tall, with a round, blood-red face set in a head shaped like the 'ace of spades', a green-coloured body, and eyes which shot out beams of light. When the creature began to glide toward them, Lemon fainted and dropped the flashlight. In a panic, some of the boys hauled him to his feet and they all fled to the May house, where they called the sheriff in nearby Sutton. He was unavailable, however, because he had been called to investigate the report of a flaming plane which had crashed into a hillside. While some of the witnesses were being treated with first aid, A. Lee Stewart, Jr., co-editor of *The Braxton Democrat*, arrived and after some entreaty finally persuaded a reluctant Lemon to lead an armed posse back up to the hilltop. On their return they could find no trace of machine or monster, but the strange odour still persisted.

The next morning, Stewart revisited the site, where he discovered a huge area of flattened grass where the object had lain, as well as two "skid marks" in the tall grass about 10 feet apart and a strange oily substance on the ground (Edwards, 1956; Clark, 1992).

Almost 50 years have passed since this strange occurrence. Did an alien monster in an extraterrestrial spacecraft really touch down on an isolated hilltop in West Virginia? Could this have been a hoax? Or perhaps simply the outpouring of overwrought imaginations? After such a lapse of time is it still possible to ascertain what really happened in the tiny village of Flatwoods?

The answer is an unqualified affirmative. Ironically enough, it is the very reports of the principal investigators of the case - biased though they are - which provide the essential clues to disentangling the truth from half a century of mythological speculation.

#### **Sanderson investigates**

By the morning of September 15, the national wire services had released reports of a 12-foot tall green monster with bulging red eyes and "clawy" hands terrorising the inhabitants of Flatwoods, WV. Intrigued by the story, the North

American Newspaper Alliance dispatched naturalist/writer/anomaly hunter Ivan Sanderson to investigate, who arrived at the village on the morning of September 19, exactly one week after the alleged encounter.

Accompanied by his assistant, Eddie Schoenenberger, Sanderson proceeded to carefully cross-examine the witnesses singly and in pairs. In *Uninvited Visitors* he reports a composite summation of their story:

Several of the boys were playing football on a field located approximately one mile from the hilltop. At about 7:15 p.m. a roundish object, "large as a small outhouse" and glowing bright red, came soaring overhead at a slow speed around the corner of a hill, after which it paused in mid-air before dropping abruptly behind the crest. Almost immediately, a bright orange light flared up from behind the ridge, only to diminish to a reddish glow. As the boys began to run in the direction of the illumination, the light seemed to pulsate regularly with these same colours.

It took the boys about 10 minutes to reach the May house, at which time Kathleen May stepped out onto the porch to ask them where they were going. Ronald Shaver explained, "A flying saucer has landed on the hill and we're going to look at it".

Mrs May and her two sons decided to go along after stopping to invite Eugene Lemon, who owned a flashlight. Tommy Hyer was the last to join the party.

As they climbed the twisting path to the hilltop, all could make out something lying on the slope about 50 yards from the ridge crest, still pulsing from orange to red.

Lemon had brought his dog along, which now darted ahead. Suddenly it began to bark, then turned tail and shot homeward. It was at this time that the party became aware of an "unnatural mist" which obscured the ground, accompanied by an overpowering odour, an "atrocious, sickly, 'warm' smell like that of hot, greased metal", which caused their eyes to water and their nasal passages to constrict.

Then, rounding the last bend of the trail, they found themselves within 50 feet of the object. All agreed that it was approximately the size of the May

outhouse (over 20 feet across), shaped like the "ace of spades" with the point narrowing skyward, and black. Ronald Shaver made the observation that it was "obviously black, really, but as it was hot, it was getting red like a hot poker". No one, however, felt any heat. At Sanderson's prompting, the boys compared the illumination to that of a neon sign.

Although all attention was fixed on the spacecraft, Mrs May suddenly noticed a pair of animal-like eyes in an oak tree to the left of where she was standing. She called out to Neal (*sic*) Nunley, who was carrying the flashlight, to shine it in that direction. The beam revealed an enormous manlike figure whose topmost features were level with a branch of the tree, and whose torso seemed to end 6 feet below at a "waist". No arms or any other appendages were visible, but it had a distinct head which was shaped like the "ace of spades". Set within this head was a large circular window through which they could see "darkness" and two "things like eyes, which stayed fixed and shone straight out". These eyes emitted pale blue beams of light about the size of a flashlight bulb in dimension. All agreed that the beams were focused above their heads and to the south, and only changed trajectory when the monster began to glide first toward them, and then in the direction of the object.

As soon as Lemon sighted the creature, he "passed out". Some of the boys dragged him to his feet, and all fled to the May house, where he was revived. An armed posse hastily assembled, which returned to the hilltop within 25 minutes and found neither the object nor its occupant.

When the sheriff arrived approximately 2 hours later, he scoffed at the story and refused to climb the hill. Three hours later 2 reporters turned up (one of whom was probably A. Lee Stewart), who searched the area, discovered nothing, but did report a "powerful, metallic stench".

The following day the entire site was explored again. A 15-foot circular shape of flattened grass was found where the object had rested, but otherwise no trace of physical evidence was visible, except some odd "grease" clinging to the vegetation. Stewart claimed to have discovered two "skid

marks' in the grass, but Sanderson could not personally confirm this anomaly, and the boys were unaware of it as well.

The local searchers pointed out the strange smell which still permeated the grass. Sanderson identified it as an odour peculiar to the colloquially-named "tar grass" which grew abundantly in the region. The "grease" was nothing more than the common exudate of the same plant.

#### **Barker arrives**

Alerted by a September 15 United Press story about a 'Frankenstein monster' which had frightened the citizens of Flatwoods, Gray Barker, a theatrical film booking agent and aspiring writer in Clarksburg (West Virginia), telegraphed *Fate* magazine in the hope of securing a freelance reporting assignment. Assured of a contract, like Sanderson he reached the village exactly one week after the alleged sighting, and immediately began to seek out witnesses to interview. His first candidate was A. M. Jordan (Neil Nunley's grandfather), who testified that he had been sitting on his porch when a brilliant elongated object flashed overhead in the direction of the hill opposite his house. The top of the object was coloured a light red, while its underside glowed a bright shade of the same colour. Red balls of fire shot out from the rear. Thinking it was a jet plane, he watched the strange light as it seemed to halt sharply in mid-air and fall toward the hilltop.

Barker's next witness was Neil Nunley himself, who disagreed with Jordan, describing the object not as elongated, but resembling a "silver dollar going through the sky". It did, however, discharge a trail of fire behind it. Approaching at a low altitude, the fiery disc appeared to hover over the hilltop, then drop "like a door falling down flatwise". After it disappeared over the ridge, he could still see the light pulsing from dim to bright.

Once the search party had been recruited, the seven proceeded up the hill, with Nunley and Lemon in the lead. Near the crest they became aware of a "strange mist" which smelled faintly "like some kind of gas". Climbing to the top of the summit, they first saw a "huge globular mass" about 50 feet to their right.

Nunley described it as a "big ball of fire", which dimmed and brightened at regular intervals. He could not determine how large it was, but some of the others estimated it to be "as big as a house". Notwithstanding, some of the witnesses did not see it at all, and no one could remember whether it was a complete sphere or a hemisphere.

Nunley heard nothing, but others recalled a "low thumping or beating sound, like someone hitting a canvas", as well as a noise "halfway between a hiss and the noise made by a jet plane".

At the top of the hill the stench had grown more powerful, resembling burning metal or burning sulphur (although later questioning revealed that in reality it was unlike anything any of them had ever encountered before), and irritating to the throat and nasal passages.

Lemon, who was carrying the flashlight, thought he spied animal eyes in the tree and pointed the torch in that direction. Approximately 15 feet away stood a huge, manlike shape, no more than 15 feet tall (the height of the branch it stood under), with a round, blood-red face which showed no evidence of a nose or mouth. Eyes, or eye-like apertures were projecting greenish-orange beams of light which pierced through the haze. These rays were focused over the heads of the party.

Surrounding the face was a dark, hood-like shape, which tapered upward to a point. The body of the creature extended down only to its "waist", and appeared dark and colourless to Nunley, but green to others. Mrs May thought she saw some kind of internal illumination in the figure when the flashlight beam brushed against it. She also described clothing-like folds and "terrible claws". No one could remember whether the thing was floating in the air or resting on the ground.

When the entity moved toward them, Nunley maintained that it approached with an even motion, while at the same time circling away towards the globe. Others, however, insisted that it bobbed or jumped.

The dog had already shot away, and Lemon dropped the flashlight. The seven raced to the May house, where the owner of a funeral home in Sutton allegedly

administered first aid (when questioned by Barker, he denied any involvement, insisting that he had attended church on that night). At this time, A. Lee Stewart reached the house, where he found most of the participants too terrified to provide coherent testimony. Finally he persuaded Lemon to return with him to the hilltop, where they saw and heard nothing. However, when Stewart did put his nose to the ground, he sniffed a pungent, irritating odour.

The following morning Stewart detected the "skid marks" in the grass about 10 feet apart. Aside from the displacement of a few stones, the ground underneath the marks was undisturbed, as if someone had "skied" over the vegetation. Where the globe had rested, a "huge area" of grass was flattened.

The sheriff, who been absent in the fruitless investigation of the "crash" of a Piper Cub, made his appearance in Flatwoods one to one-and-a-half hours after the event and climbed the hill. He found no trace of anything unusual. Barker also located two additional witnesses, Junior Edward and Joey Martin, who had ven-



**Gray Barker, a theatrical film booking agent and aspiring writer from Clarksburg, West Virginia, reached the village exactly one week after the alleged sighting and began seeking out witnesses**

Sanderson alludes to his investigations of mysterious three-toed tracks which he concludes could only be the footprints of a fifteen-foot tall penguin!

tured to the site one-half hour after the landing. They also saw, heard, and smelled nothing. Max Lockhart, a local businessman, drove his pickup to the scene about an hour after the report, and was likewise unsuccessful in his search. Then, on the strength of a rumour, Barker travelled 50 miles to question a man named Bailey Frame, who was said to have observed a "rocket ship" take off from the hilltop. But when cross-examined, Frame denied any knowledge of such an event.

#### Secondary reports

Sanderson includes in his narrative three additional newspaper accounts of the incident. The first was generated by the national wire service, which broadcast the story of a 12-foot, man-shaped monster, green in colour, with "bulging red eyes and 'claw' hands". According to this story, when the sheriff and others searched the hilltop the following morning, they encountered a "dreadful, sickening, hot, stuffy odour". The second report, from *The Braxton Democrat*, downplayed the aerial object, concentrating instead on the mist and odour, as well as the creature, which was depicted as 10-12 feet tall, with an "oversized head of a fiery orange colour". Its eyes protruded and emitted beams of light. The body was dark green in colour and extended claw-like hands. The third story, from the rival paper in Sutton, *The Braxton Central*, "differed considerably" (details unspecified), and was published almost a week after the sighting. It offered Kathleen May's description of the monster as 10 feet tall and 4 feet wide, with a bright red face and eyes "resembling flashlights" about a foot apart. Bright green clothing hung in folds from the waist down, and the head looked like the "ace of spades".

#### A comparison of the reports

Even a cursory glance at the various reports reveals glaring inconsistencies and incompatible contradictions. In Sanderson's version, the object was black (but incongruously glowing red hot), and shaped like the ace of spades; but to Barker it was a spherical, globular mass (and some didn't see it at all!). In one testimony the beams shooting from the creature's eyes were pale blue, in another they were greenish-orange; most reports described claws on

the thing's arms, but Sanderson insists there were no appendages of any kind visible; the monster was wearing some kind of helmet with a circular window or simply had a round face (which was initially depicted as orange, and subsequently as blood-red); the sheriff either climbed to the hilltop upon his return or he did not. The list goes on and on. No one could even agree on who was holding the flashlight!

It is crucial to remember that Sanderson and Barker conducted their investigations and cross-examinations of the same witnesses on the same day! It is very clear that the tale had evolved and mutated during the week between the actual event and the arrival of these two writers.

#### Professional bias

Although Sanderson graduated with honours from Cambridge University with degrees in zoology, botany, and geology, and circumnavigated the globe as a member of various scientific expeditions, he can hardly be considered an unbiased seeker of the truth. Rather, his writings betray him as a credulist of the highest order. Fascinated by such Fortean phenomena as "abominable snowmen", strange falls from the sky, and UFOs, in 1965 he founded the Society for the Investigation of the Unexplained, editing its quarterly magazine *Pursuit* and penning a number of books concerning "unexplained" phenomena (Clark, 1992). One of these, *Uninvited Visitors*, is a virtual manifesto of uncritical belief in UFOs as extra-terrestrial vehicles. Indeed, Sanderson cites as "proof" of UFOs his personal experiences of lights in the sky which were obviously nothing but garden variety meteor/fireballs.

Sanderson betrays his prejudice for the fantastic in his other writings as well. In *Investigating the Unexplained* (1972), he tells of an encounter in West Africa with a "giant bat" which zoomed at him on a 12-foot wingspan while baring 2-inch-long fangs. The same volume alludes to his investigation of mysterious 3-toed tracks (later unmasked as a hoax), which he concluded could only be the footprints of a 15-foot tall penguin!

To be fair, Sanderson does include in his report the synopses of the competing newspaper

accounts, and volunteers conventional explanations for the strange odour and "grease". But it is more than apparent that he is intent on promoting the crash of an alien spacecraft and its monstrous occupant.

Similarly, UFO mythologist Gray Barker cannot be considered to be anything but an extremely partisan reporter, since it has been revealed that he was an inveterate hoaxer and fabricator of tall tales presented as true accounts (Sherwood, 1998). Together with Jim Moseley, the then editor of *Saucer News*, he concocted the famous Straith Letter hoax. After having obtained official stationery from several government agencies, the two conspirators wrote to UFO "contactee" George Adamski in December of 1957, granting him federal endorsement for his claims from the FBI and the Air Force (Clark, 1992). In fact, even veteran paranormalist John Keel has admitted that Barker was not to be trusted after 1959 (Keith, 1997).

Notwithstanding, in this his solo assignment, Barker appears to be conducting himself in a professional manner. Not only does he concentrate on rounding up stray witnesses, but he also includes material severely damaging to the confirmation of his personal theories (although he seems oddly unaware of this disparity).

#### Things in the sky

On the evening of September 12, 1952, at approximately 7:00 p.m., a slow-moving reddish fireball was tracked over Baltimore, MD, travelling northeast to southwest, and ultimately passing over West Virginia. P.M. Reese of the Maryland Academy of Sciences estimated its altitude as 60-70 miles (Sanderson, 1967). Surely this was the unknown object observed over Flatwoods. But how could a group of eyewitnesses mistake such a high-flying celestial body for the visitation of a ship from another world?

Astronomy provides the easy answer. When a meteoroid (a particle in space, such as a piece of an asteroid) plunges into the Earth's atmosphere, air friction heats it to incandescence, thus transforming the tiny chunk of rock into a streak of light - a meteor. Some of these particles are the size of a grain of sand, while others can weigh thousands of

pounds, and will not completely vaporise in their descent, but survive as meteorites when they collide with the planetary surface. In general, the larger the object, the brighter the meteor. Particles weighing more than one-quarter ounce produce fireballs - meteors which can be as bright as the sun.

Brilliant fireballs can exhibit a range of colours, from yellow to green to red, which often appear to flare up and then dim. As the object blazes through the atmosphere and its topmost layer is ablated by friction, this material vaporises, only to condense as it cools, forming a dust or smoke trail behind the fireball. Red sparks or "fire" are often reported as shooting out in the wake of these objects (just as they were at Flatwoods). As a fireball nears the end of its trajectory, it will flush a bright red and then explode. At this point its velocity is reduced almost to zero, its incandescence is snuffed out, and it falls to earth as a dark body (Hutchinson and Graham, 1993; Norton, 1994).

Eyewitness testimony of the altitude of fireballs is quite commonly underestimated, even among trained professionals such as airline pilots. Many observers believe that they are watching the flaming crash of an airplane a short distance from their standpoint (thus the sheriff was absent in search of such an accident based on a phoned-in report), when in fact the meteor is many miles above the surface of the planet. A case from 1969 illustrates this phenomenon clearly. A man and woman driving about 80 miles north of Reno, NV attested to the sighting of a brilliant red ball of fire, shooting sparks, and soaring so close over their heads that they feared it was about to collide with their car. They calculated that the object fell to earth behind a hill about a mile away. However, other observers in Reno stated that the same meteor touched down in the hills south of town; and in Las Vegas, 400 miles to the southwest, witnesses swore that it landed near Hoover Dam. Similar descriptions followed the fireball all the way to the Mexican border (Norton, 1994).

Fireballs have often been mistaken for UFOs by witnesses uneducated in basic astronomy. Sanderson, in fact, cites as crucial evidence for the extraterrestrial hypothesis the boys' testimony

that the object was slow moving and appeared to soar around the corner of a hill ("Meteors don't go round corners," he states). But some do travel relatively slowly. The rate of movement can be illusory as well, depending on the distance and the direction of motion relative to the observer. Movement parallel to a witness's line of sight will appear much slower than the same motion at a right angle. Fireballs have also been reported to change course or direction, a perception often due to the shifting pattern of the smoke or dust trails behind them. (Menzel and Boyd, 1963).

There can be no doubt that the strange aerial object seen by the boys at Flatwoods was indeed the reported fireball (the conclusion of the majority of the citizens of Flatwoods [Nickell, 2000]). As untrained observers they grossly underestimated its altitude and were fooled into thinking that it was flying low over the hilltop.

A. M. Jordan specified an elongated object, while the boys thought it resembled a silver dollar (i.e., disc-shaped). Again, this is not an uncommon perception. Menzel and Boyd (1963) record an oval or cigar-shaped fireball which at the same time displayed a noticeable disc. The boys also stated that the object seemed to halt in mid-air before "landing". Menzel and Boyd (1963) list a slow-moving meteor which appeared to stop short before spiraling away. The illusion that the object fell behind the hilltop is likewise consistent with reports of "plane crashes" which fool observers into thinking that the fireball has landed nearby. It is important to recall that the boys' viewpoint was over a mile from the hill, a distance conducive to optical illusion. The pulsating illumination could have been due to the normal flaring and dimming of the fireball's colour shift, and the continued glow could have been simply its luminous trail reflecting the rays of the sun setting on the western horizon. Moreover, in a typewritten report of 1952, Sanderson admitted that three plane beacons were in sight on the hilltop (Nickell, 2000).

Sanderson ascribes the unpleasant odour to the "tar grass" native to the region, and while this may have been the source of the smell, magnified by a willing

imagination, it is still interesting to note that fireballs can be accompanied by noxious gases, most commonly with a strong sulphurous odour. On April 22, 1922, a huge ball of fire with an incandescent trail flashed over southern New Jersey, gushing clouds of foul-smelling gas. Observers were compelled to cover their faces with moistened handkerchiefs for 15 minutes until the powerful, irritating stench dissipated (Lewis, 1996).

Some members of the seven heard a thumping sound, like "someone hitting on canvas", and another noise halfway between a hiss and the roar of a jet. Once again, this is perfectly consistent with meteor reports. Witnesses describe hissing (like radio static), as well as rumbling, crackling, or whistling sounds. Frequent also is a thumping or "whomping" noise, similar to the sound of a flat tire on a moving car (Menzel and Boyd, 1963; Norton, 1994). Since a fireball travels much faster than sound, any noise generated can take as much as several minutes to reach the ears of the observer. Although this time frame would rule out the more than 10 minutes required to run to the May house and climb the hill, the exact placement of the sounds in the reconstruction of events could easily have been confused in the general excitement (Neil Nunley reported no sound at all).



**Although Ivan Sanderson graduated with honours from Cambridge University with degrees in zoology, botany and geology, his writings betray him as a credulist of the highest order.**

**When West Virginia was settled by the Scots-Irish and Welsh in the latter part of the eighteenth century, these immigrants carried with them a cultural legacy rich in superstition**

### **What really happened at Flatwoods?**

Although the possibility of a hoax cannot be dismissed entirely, logic demands that the events of September 12 were nothing but mirages conjured up by overactive imaginations. 1952 was a "flap" year in UFO history as the frequency of "flying saucer" sightings escalated, no doubt inspired by the popularity of *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, released the previous year. *Time* and *Life* circulated articles about visitors from space; the Air Force launched Project Blue Book; Kenneth Arnold and Ray Palmer published *The Coming of the Saucers*; and Frank Scully's *Behind the Flying Saucers* had achieved best-seller status. By mid-summer, the Air Force was swamped with sightings from all over the country (Peebles, 1994).

In other words, flying saucers were - so to speak - in the air, and the cultural climate was ripe for the leap of imagination at Flatwoods. It is precisely this very human capacity for self-delusion and misperception which has contributed so much to the history of UFO mythology. For example, in July of 1909, due to rumours of advanced German technology and fears of invasion, New Zealanders were terrorised by a wave of Zeppelin sightings. On the 24th of the month, 23 schoolchildren and one adult detailed a report of a low-flying dirigible-type craft, describing it as a black winged ship with a propeller-like wheel at the stern. Another child added that he had seen the wheel reversing, causing the craft to change course. An alarmed posse of volunteers searched in vain for any sign of the Zeppelin. The media were notified, resulting in an inundation of similar sightings from around the country, as well as rumours that one of the airships had crashed and several German corpses recovered.

Of course, no Zeppelins or look-alike aircraft had been flying over New Zealand during this period. The sightings were the result of mass delusion, hoaxes, and the misperception of natural celestial objects. Subsequent investigation proved that the students had been previously exposed to a fictional Zeppelin story in a magazine (Clark, 1992), and years later when some of the participants were interviewed, they admitted the illusory nature of their experi-

ences, and blamed the sightings on overactive imaginations (Bartholomew and Howard, 1998).

In a similar manner the West Virginia fireball was transformed into a "flying saucer". But what of the glowing, pulsating object actually resting on the hillside? Once again, a chimerical mind-set must be invoked. Ample proofs are the contradictory statements given to the investigators, and the admission (to Barker) that not everyone had seen the object, even though it was only 50 feet away and as big as a house! Just one month before, in August of 1952, a well-publicized case with remarkable parallels had occurred in West Palm Beach, FL. A local scoutmaster named D.S. Desvergers was driving three boys home from their weekly evening meeting when he noticed odd lights glowing through the pine trees along a country road. At first the scouts could not make out the lights, but then caught sight of them. The scoutmaster decided to investigate, leaving the boys in the car.

After scrambling about 50 yards into the woods, Desvergers encountered a "sharp" or "pungent" odour which grew in intensity as he pushed forward. The heat suddenly became oppressive and he found it hard to breathe. It was then that he realised that the sky was blocked out in front of his eyes, and he realised that a huge, domed, circular-shaped craft was hovering about 30 feet above his head. As he stared in amazement, the ship sprayed out a cloud of red mist which engulfed him, and he fell to the ground, unconscious.

On the road, the scouts had been tracking their leader's progress by the bobbing of his flashlight through the trees. He had been gone only about 5 minutes when they were horrified to see a huge red ball of fire envelop him. The boys, in a state of shock, bolted to a nearby farmhouse to contact the authorities.

When the sheriff arrived, the four of them raced into the woods to find the scoutmaster still unconscious. His arms, face, and cap had been scorched, and when revived, he seemed genuinely terrified. The Air Force was called in to investigate.

Desvergers' story, however, soon began to disintegrate. His personal history was less than

exemplary. He had been drummed out of the Marine Corps after a few months for car theft and AWOL charges, and had been incarcerated in a federal reformatory. One local resident remarked that if Desvergers claimed that the sun was shining, he would look up to see for himself before he believed him. The scoutmaster had already hired a press agent, apparently planning to cash in on his "experience".

Tests performed at the FBI laboratory demonstrated that the burns could easily have been manufactured with a cigarette or match. Upon interrogation, the scouts' testimony began to fall apart as well. Experiments at the site proved that not even by standing on the roof of the car could anyone have witnessed Desverger's reported position in the woods.

The entire incident was a hoax, coupled with consenting imagination on the part of the boys (Menzel and Boyd, 1963; Ruppelt, 1956).

Misperception of ordinary sources of illumination is the cause of many alleged UFO sightings. Menzel and Taves (1977) give an account of an army sergeant who in the early morning hours was surprised to see a brilliant object blaze overhead, appearing to land behind the base mess hall. When the man ran around the corner of this building, he could make out a bright light pulsating in a wooded area. Thinking it was a downed saucer, he summoned Air Force investigators, who were quickly able to determine that he had witnessed a fireball (which had been tracked by astronomers), then later the "pulsating" floodlight on a distant dairy farm which had only recently been replaced.

A similar incident occurred in 1980 on an American Air Force base in Suffolk, England. Early in the morning of December 27, two security guards claimed to have observed an alien spaceship crash into Rendlesham Forest (which bordered the base) in an explosion of light. Three patrolmen were dispatched to investigate, and reported a glowing triangular-shaped object, metallic in appearance, and approximately two metres in height. Whatever it was lit up the forest with white light. As the airmen approached, the object seemed to manoeuvre away from them, as if under intel-

ligent control.

Research proved that the flight of a dazzling meteor had been recorded over southern England at the time of the "crash". The "eerie" pulsating light turned out to be the beam of the lighthouse at Orford Ness on the Suffolk coast, five miles away, augmented by overactive imaginations. A BBC camera crew returned to the woods to photograph what the patrolmen actually saw that morning. Because the forest is situated on a plane higher than the coastline, the beam appeared to be shining only a few feet above ground level, fooling the airmen into thinking that the illumination was deliberately changing position. This same optical illusion also caused the light to appear to be much closer than its actual location (Frazier, Karr, Nickell, eds., 1997).

It must be assumed that the seven at Flatwoods experienced the same misperception of normal phenomena. The light from a house or a neon sign, or even a distant fire could easily have produced the imagined effect (according to Sanderson, there were three airplane beacons on the hilltop). But what of the "monster" itself? Common sense dictates that the creature was pure fantasy, a genuine case of mass hysteria, since it is obvious that the object in the sky was a fireball and never landed on the hilltop in the first place. Barker records that most of the residents of the village were sceptical of the story, and one characterised the participants as "highly excitable". As the seven climbed the hill, their minds were already predisposed to find a flying saucer, and when someone in the party spotted luminous eyes in the branch of the oak tree, the stage was set for the final scene in this famous science fiction horror story. Even rabid UFO crusader Donald Keyhoe (1953) ascribed the glowing eyes to those of an owl perched on the limb, while the underbrush and vegetation were transfigured into the shape of the creature (this accounts for the green coloration and the torso disappearing at the "waist"). The excited witnesses "imagined the rest". A quick glance at a photograph of a horned owl or barn owl will reveal that this bird can provide all the necessary details: a circular, heart-shaped face and ear tufts which could inspire the im-

pression of a "hood" or the "ace of spades" shape; luminous eyes; claws; and rippled feathers which look remarkably like the folds of clothing.

The overpowering odour might have been the aftermath of gases spewed out by the fireball, or the strong smell of the "tar grass", and the "grease" on the ground can easily be ascribed to its exudate. As for the "skid marks", these were not in evidence at the time of Sanderson's search, and thus suffer from lack of credibility. Allegedly, they were 10-12 feet apart, while the creature was estimated to be 4 feet wide, a physical contradiction. If the marks did exist at all, they were probably left by Max Lockhart's pickup truck. Since many searchers visited the hilltop during the night, they were no doubt responsible for the "huge area" of flattened grass as well (a conclusion conceded by Barker, who likewise found no evidence of "skid marks" or "grease"). The "strange mist" was simply what the sheriff noticed upon his arrival: a fog which was "settling over the hillside" (Keyhoe, 1953).

#### Conclusion

It is tempting to want to examine the underlying psychological motivations behind the events at Flatwoods. When West Virginia was settled by the Scots-Irish and Welsh in the latter part of the 18th century, these immigrants carried with them a cultural legacy rich in superstition. Even to this day the region is rife with tales of ghosts, hauntings, witches, magic spells and hexes (Gaines, 1975). British folklore speaks of the devil as clad in a black gown, with burning eyes and claws, accompanied by sulphurous or other vile odours (Keith, 1997; Ritchie, 1994). Another legendary character, Springheel Jack was said to have haunted London in the late 1830s. Citizens were startled by a huge cloaked figure with glowing eyes, pointed ears, a metallic-looking helmet, and fingers which felt like iron claws (Clark, 1992). Memories of these tales, combined with a superstitious mind-set and the growing public awareness of 'flying saucers' in the early 1950s created the belief system necessary for the 'sighting'.

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# TANGLING WITH THE TRICKSTER

## MYTH MAGIC AND THE UFO

### DAVID PERKINS

Ufologists! Have you been feeling "marginalised" lately? Ever wonder why ufology "can't get no respect"? In his new book, *The Trickster and the Paranormal* (2001), George P. Hansen tackles these questions and many, many more.

He has done a thorough and timely job of coalescing a number of issues swirling around ufology for several years. In this far-ranging 564-page tome, Hansen takes a penetrating look at the state of current UFO, psi and paranormal research. His observations and descriptions of the various schisms within the research community will no doubt raise the hackles on some and bring nods of approval from others.

Seven years in the writing, *The Trickster and the Paranormal* is an impressive work of scholarship and a tribute to Hansen's perseverance. Trickster mythology, laced with unbridled sexuality, outrageous scatology and permeated with the supernatural, has

been largely ignored by the academic community. Even many hard-core anthropologists have found the material too embarrassing, irrational and generally weird to ponder seriously. Sensing an untapped goldmine of resources relating to the paranormal (and, potentially, ufology), Hansen dug in and did his homework. Speaking of UFO studies, Hansen says: "It takes several years of relatively intense reading and research to appreciate the field's complexity." As John Kennedy said long ago: "We are not going to the Moon because it is easy. We are going because it is hard."

George Hansen is game for the challenge. He is one of a handful of people in America who

can actually say that his day job for a significant period of time was parapsychology/psi research. He was employed for three years at the Rhine Research Center in Durham, North Carolina and five years at the Psychophysical Laboratories in Princeton, New Jersey. The portions of the book dealing with psi research are both fascinating and authoritative.

The book was begun with the idea of addressing what Hansen saw as some fundamental problems in parapsychology. A magician in his spare time, Hansen was intrigued with the issues of deception, hoaxes and fraud. These elements, which have so frequently plagued parapsychology and ufology, seemed to Hansen to be central, not peripheral, to understanding these phenomena. By and large, the research community has viewed the deception problem as a minor vexation to be shunted aside in its inexorable march toward scientific respectability. While studying the historical precedents of the deception issue, Hansen was soon drawn to that high-spirited mythological master of deception - the trickster.

In his "Acknowledgements" section, Hansen credits Dennis Stillings and their discussions of the trickster and Jungian psychology as the single most important factor that led him to write the book. Under the direction of Stillings and Gail Duke, the Archaeus Project and its flagship publication, *Artifex*, were a lightning rod for UFO, psi and paranormal researchers for roughly a decade (early 1980s until the



early 1990s). In addition to George Hansen, the *Archaeus* editorial board included such notables as Berthold Schwarz, Jack Houck, Walter Uphoff and Rhea White. The Jungian-tinted *Archaeus* publications attracted contributions from a host of "third wing" researchers eager to explore alternatives to the "nuts and bolts" school of ufology. These included Hilary Evans, Michael Grosso, Alvin Lawson, Michael Persinger, Carl Raschke, Peter Rojcewicz, John Keel and Martin Kottmeyer. Incidentally, Hansen considers Kottmeyer "arguably the premier UFO theorist in the US". Jacques Vallée, Kenneth Ring, Keith Thompson and Michael Talbot are also generally acknowledged to be members of this third wing or "psychosocial" school of thought.

In *The Trickster and the Paranormal*, George Hansen argues that science and reason can only go so far toward helping us understand UFOs and the paranormal. According to Hansen, the "correct understanding" of these realms has "massive implications for how we understand the world". Here's his thesis in a nutshell.

The supernatural, the paranormal, psi/psychic phenomena and UFOs are all associated with processes of destructuring. For the purposes of his argument, ghosts, Bigfoot, etc. are considered as categories of the paranormal. Animal mutilations and crop circles fall under the UFO rubric. The qualities of destructuring include: change, transition, disorder, marginality, the ephemeral and the blurring of boundaries.

Standing in opposition to these qualities are structure, order, routine, rigidity and clear demarcation. Drawing from the work of sociologist Max Weber, Hansen maintains that "for several thousand years, there has been a slow, progressive implementation of rational thought and organisation of society". Weber called this "the iron cage of modernity", and dubbed the process "rationalisation". In our modern civilisation, academe, economic and political bureaucracies, the scientific establishment and organised religion have been the primary forces for rationalisation. This process necessarily requires the elimination of "magic" from the social structure in what Weber called "the disenchantment of the world".

Enter the trickster! The

ultimate destructuring agent, the trickster is a character found in mythology world-wide. Documented far back into humanity's archaic past, the predominantly male trickster has been called "a powerful life spirit" by mythology scholar Karl Kerényi. In his classic book *The Trickster: A Study in American Mythology* (1956), anthropologist Paul Radin says:

"Trickster is at one and the same time creator and destroyer, giver and negator, he who dupes others and is always duped himself. He wills nothing consciously. At all times he is constrained to behave as he does from impulses over which he has no control. He knows neither good nor evil yet he is responsible for both. He possesses no values, moral or social, is at the mercy of his passions and appetites, yet through his actions all values come into being."

In Radin's book, psychologist Carl Jung calls the trickster: "God, man and animal all at once. He is both subhuman and superhuman, a bestial and divine being . . . both superior and inferior to man". Jung even gives a nod to parapsychology, noting the similarity of trickster antics to the malicious tricks and fatuitous "communications" of poltergeists.

In Jungian terms, the trickster is a "root" archetype, a universal image shared by all humanity. In *Synchronicity: Science, Myth and the Trickster* (1996) by Allan Combs and Mark Holland, the authors refer to the themes carried by archetypes as "neither wholly internal nor wholly external but are woven into the deepest fabric of the cosmos . . . myths as expressions of archetypes might be expected to portray certain aspects of the objective world as well as depicting psychological realities." Combs and Holland also refer to root archetypes as amorphous "concentrations of psychic energy" which can assume an endless variety of forms.

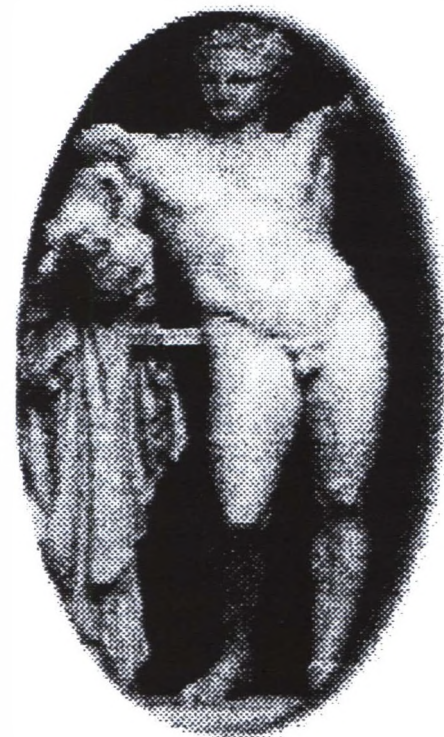
In Greek mythology, Hermes is the best known and most comprehensive trickster figure. The supreme boundary-crosser, Hermes served as the messenger between the lofty gods of Olympus and the mundane world of terrestrials below. In Native American lore, the trickster is often associated with animals, particularly the coyote and raven. In a delicious bit of irony, these are also the creatures most frequently

cited by sceptics as the real culprits responsible for animal mutilations. In all these myths, the trickster is a vigorous force for deconstruction, frequently turning established hierarchies upside down. Their style is one of paradox, irrationality, ambiguity, contradiction, deception, stealth and (Hansen's favourite attribute) de-structuring.

Trickster figures have much in common with UFOs and their "occupants". Tricksters are the definitive shape-shifters. They teleport effortlessly between the earth and the heavens, Their evasions and chicanery are legendary. They have no regard for linear time and have the ability to "dissolve" or alter time (missing time). Trickster communications alternate between profound wisdom and total nonsense. Tricksters abduct people and animals at will. These encounters frequently involve sexual contact and interbreeding. Tricksters taunt humanity's political, scientific and military hierarchies. They even mock our methods of investigation. Trickster lore is replete with macabre shenanigans like stealing and killing cattle and other livestock, eviscerating animals and coring their rectums. They have also been known to lay down circular patterns or nests in crops and vegetation. Dennis Stillings has noted that the "mystery helicopters" sometimes associated with UFOs and animal mutilations have more in common with the shape-shifting trickster than with human-made technology.

For Hansen, the trickster is the pre-eminent embodiment of all the paranormal, preternatural and anti-structural forces that the rationalisation process is attempting to stamp out. Hansen offers words of warning: "When the supernatural and irrational are banished from consciousness, they are not destroyed, rather they become exceedingly dangerous." He also has words of caution for UFO and paranormal researchers who might be frivolously tempted to tangle with the trickster and his domain, warning of personal destabilisation, a loss of critical judgement, wrecked careers, ruined marriages and general "trickster-induced irrationality". Ouch!

Respectable or not, proponents of the extraterrestrial hypothesis (ETH) will no doubt argue that UFOs are not paranormal or supernatural. Abduction re-



**In Greek mythology, Hermes is the best known and most comprehensive trickster figure. The supreme boundary-crosser, Hermes served as the messenger between the lofty gods of Olympus and the mundane world of terrestrials below.**

searcher David Jacobs, for one, adamantly refutes the assertion that abductions are paranormal. Others might contend that extraterrestrials may have such a complete understanding of humans that they can manipulate or "hide behind" our psychology and my-

classes of phenomena seem to blend, are missing vital clues and thus doing a grave disservice to ufology.

So, are ufologists forever banished to the bottom of the pecking order? Probably. Despite a fervid interest in UFO and para-

ongoing rationalisation process prevails.

In his chapter on "Government Disinformation", Hansen makes the interesting observation that the only substantial funding for paranormal and psi-related research from the ruling hierarchy has come from government intelligence agencies. Since their job is institutionalised deception, it is logical that they would gravitate to these tricksterish realms. Hansen suggests that these agencies have promoted "mythological beliefs" which are not always healthy for the larger society. Aside from the government's well-documented remote viewing research, Hansen claims there was more going on. He quotes from a 1997 article by Gerald Haines, a historian at the National Reconnaissance Office, which suggests that intelligence agencies had a strong interest in the link between UFOs and parapsychology: "During the late 1970s and 1980s . . . some in the Agency and in the Intelligence Community shifted their interest to studying parapsychology and psychic phenomena associated with UFO sightings." Hansen questions why so many prominent UFO/paranormal researchers have links to intelligence services and goes on to paint some less than flattering portraits of these individuals.

Many ufologists will remember Hansen for his controversial role in the Budd Hopkins/Linda Napolitano "Brooklyn Bridge UFO Abductions" case. Along with his colleagues Richard Butler and Joseph Stefula, Hansen did his own investigation and concluded that it was an outright hoax. The case had been considered "fragile" by several other researchers. As a result of Hansen's critical appraisal, Jerry Clark, of the Hynek Center for UFO Studies, and other ufologists started referring to Hansen as "Torquemada" (the Grand Inquisitor of the Spanish Inquisition). Hansen absorbed the barbs with tricksteresque glee. "I expect to antagonise people", he still says.

Lest one picture Hansen as some sort of arch-sceptic, his chapter "CSICOP and the Debunkers" is one of the most blistering critiques of that austere sceptical organisation ever written. He calls CSICOP "aggressive agents for the rationalisation and disenchantment of the world". The poor marginalised UFO researcher

Is the Trickster still alive and vital in the modern world? George Hansen proclaims: "The Trickster is a living thing!"



thology while they conduct their "programmes".

Hansen maintains that the extraterrestrial hypothesis in actuality is a misnomer and that the hypothesis is really more of a "foundational premise". It is essentially an assumption from which ideas are derived accordingly. He says: "US ufologists . . . have conceptualised the phenomena as ET 'flesh and blood' humanoids travelling in 'nuts and bolts' flying saucers, thereby rationalising them, keeping them in the normal world and apart from the supernatural." Hansen also argues that researchers who avoid or attempt to downplay "high strangeness" cases, where many

normal themes as evidenced by a string of blockbuster movies like *Ghostbusters*, *Ghost*, *E.T. - The Extraterrestrial*, *Close Encounters* and *Independence Day*, funding for serious research remains minimal. Sceptics twaddle that popular TV shows like *The X-Files* are fanning the flames of irrationality and leading humanity into "the new Dark Ages". Hansen makes the point that portraying paranormal topics in a format of fiction and fantasy makes them by definition "unreal" and therefore non-threatening. Along with the horror genre, these off-beat subjects have great entertainment value, but when the lights go back on, it's back to reality. Once again the

is no match for the gallery of scoffing Nobel laureates at CSICOP. Hansen points out that the "scientific investigation" portion of CSICOP's name is basically a lie. Rarely has anyone at CSICOP ever published the results of any scientific investigation of claims of the paranormal. To do so, they feel, would only give credence to the "nonsense". Instead, CSICOP relies on "research by proclamation" (as ufologist Stan Friedman calls it) combined with *ad hominem* attacks and good old-fashioned ridicule.

When all the dust settles, we are still left with the basic question: Is the trickster still alive and vital in the modern world, or has the once mighty archetype been relegated to some sad remnant of his former glory as a run-down clown in a seedy circus at the edge of town? Both George Hansen and Dennis Stillings proclaim: "The trickster is a living thing!" Carl Jung pondered why the trickster continued to make his influence felt "on the highest level of civilisation". He concluded that it was "like an old river-bed in which the water still flows". Jung felt that the archetypes which he had spent a lifetime delineating were all still simmering at the deepest levels of the collective unconscious.

In his charming book *Trickster Makes This World* (1998), Lewis Hyde asserts that, "outside traditional societies there are no modern tricksters because trickster only comes to life in the complex terrain of polytheism". Christianity has been moderately successful in grafting the trickster's attributes on to the Devil.

If we assume, as Hansen maintains, that the trickster is still alive and kicking, we are left with some profound questions. Does the synergistic interaction of this "powerful life spirit" and the human collective unconscious somehow have the ability to alter/create physical reality? Is the trickster an independent objective entity *apart* from the collective unconscious? Jung speculated that flying saucers were "materialised psychisms" or what are today called "macro-PK events". Jung's "psychoids" were the contents of the unconscious mind that spilled out into the material world as physical or semi-physical manifestations.

Theorist Tom Bearden

has put forth the idea that UFOs, cattle mutilations, Bigfoot, fairies, Mothman, etc. arise from "exterio-ised psychokinetic manifestations of the collective unconscious". Bearden called these manifestations "tulpoids". Tulpas are reputedly the entities which can be *consciously* created by Tibetan spiritual masters. Obviously there is a big leap from unconsciously created materialisations to consciously generated entities. Borrowing from Jung, Bearden speculates that the materialised tulpoids have a "metapsychological" or prophetic function. Just as an individual's dreams reveal his or her unresolved conflicts, tulpoids are thrust up from the unconscious depths to illuminate the unresolved conflicts of humanity. Depending on how skilful we are at interpreting and integrating these prophetic eruptions, this could be construed as a helpful therapeutic process.

Hansen refers to psi and paranormal phenomena as "ideoplastic", meaning that "they respond to and are shaped by the ideas, beliefs and anxieties of the observers". He leaves the door open by saying that the phenomena also "display a measure of independent intelligence". As for UFOs and abductions, Hansen admits that some UFO phenomena have "a physical event-level reality" and that "something exterior is going on" with the abductions.

So what are these wild, psychoidal, ideoplastic, tulpoidal tricksters trying to tell us? Carl Jung mused that the trickster "psychologem" might have some purpose or function in the "biological sphere": "like many other myths, it was supposed to have a therapeutic effect". The trickster stories indicate that, although he was a cultural deconstruction agent of major proportions, his actions always brought some benefit to humankind, including new skills and technologies. The quintessential trickster Hermes invented the first musical instrument using a tortoise shell and cow intestines. Native American trickster figures introduced fire, fish traps and fish hooks. Other tricksters invented language. The trickster's "social inversions" only temporarily subvert established hierarchies. During these reversals of normal patterns, novelty and new forms of thought arise. The social order is reinvigorated, revitalised, enli-

vened and made more flexible.

The trickster's appearance in traditional societies meant that, at least for the moment, people were freed from the onerous obligations of rigid social restrictions. On the day of tribute to the local trickster, the tribal chief might be obligated to wrap himself in deer guts and publicly re-enact his most embarrassing dreams while eating dog excrement. Everyone gets a few beneficial belly-laughs and the chief gets a useful dose of humility. Actually, this might not be a bad idea for our society. All of this would seem to have survival value from a Darwinian, biological point of view.

Researchers Jacques Vallée and Terence McKenna have both toyed with the self-regulation or "cultural thermostat" theory of UFOs. In *The Archaic Revival* (1991), McKenna says: "Vallée proposed that the flying saucer is an object from the collective unconscious . . . that appears in order to break the control of any set of ideas that are gaining dominance in their explanatory power at the expense of ethics." McKenna takes this to mean the current dominance of "scientism" which has "betrayed human destiny". According to McKenna, a "confounding" like the UFO seems to appear "whenever history builds to a certain kind of boil". Sounds suspiciously like the trickster again. Ufologists will recall that Vallée explored the mythological antecedents of the UFO experience in his controversial book *Passport to Magonia* (1969).

Hansen barely touches on the possible biological aspects of the trickster. He only goes so far as to say that the tricky qualities of deception and pretending might confer some degree of evolutionary usefulness on humans. In conversation, I mentioned to Hansen that I would like to see a good sociobiologist or evolutionary psychologist take the trickster material and run with it. Trickster lore could provide a dynamic "tension of opposites" model of how societies and individuals maintain a robust homeostasis, with the trickster mechanism kicking in as needed to ensure novelty and vitality. Hansen beseeched me to resist this ignoble urge toward "reductionism". Pursuing such a line of inquiry, he admonished, would only be contributing to the process of driving magic from the



world and further disenchanting it.

Far be it from me . . . But maybe Hansen's right. As philosopher Karl Popper noted, "Darwinism is a metaphysical research programme." We might end up in the same place, merely using a different set of metaphors. If, however, the trickster *is* a personified (but veiled) biological mechanism whose therapeutic function is to confer survival value on the human species (or even Gaia itself), then logically "it" would not want to be exposed. Revealing nature's secret wonderworks might negate and disable them. On the other hand, as we gain a more sophisticated understanding and appreciation of nature's subtle processes, we might enter a new phase in our biological and cultural evolution when we don't need to be childishly tricked any more. This may seem implausible in the light of current events, but it remains a possibility. It is hard to see how a deeper knowledge of human nature and the intricacies of our home planet extracts any "magic" from the world. If anything, it makes the whole grand illusion even *more* enchanting and awe inspiring. The more you know, the more you don't know, as they say.

Hansen counsels that ufologists and paranormal researchers must have an extremely high tolerance for ambivalence, ambiguity and paradox to avoid disillusionment and personal destabilisation. For starters, some basic assumptions about our ideas of cause and effect should be re-considered. In his eloquent book *Daimonic Reality: Understanding Otherworld Encounters* (1994), British writer Patrick Harpur points out that Carl Jung, ever the Western scientist, was never fully able to abandon the idea of causality. Speaking of synchronicity, Jung said that although an archetype might not exactly "cause" a coincidence, it at least "organises" it. Harpur maintains that Jung still divided the world into inner and outer and "had not yet reached the imaginative, unified view of the world in which physical events simply have an inner meaning". The peculiar parade of otherworldly trickster "daimons" described by Harpur attacks the rational Newtonian/Cartesian world with a vengeance. Examining both crop circles and animal mutilations, he observes that they seem "tailor-made to discredit the very

notion of causation itself".

Apparently we could never fully escape the trickster, even if we wanted to. He is embedded or nested in the most minute and basic level of physical reality - the Alice in Wonderland world of quantum physics. Physicist Werner Heisenberg, who formulated the famous uncertainty principle, stated: "We *cannot* know, as a matter of principle, the present in all its details." Harpur observes that electrons, for example, are paradoxically both particles and waves at the same time: "They are both there and not there . . . like UFOs they cannot be measured exactly." Maybe the African tribalists knew that paradox was built into the foundations of existence when they named their trickster, Eshu, the god of uncertainty. The particle physicists at CERN refer to the capricious little subatomic particles that dart in and out of reality as "manifestations". They wonder rather plaintively: "Perhaps we are creating that which we seek to find."

Author and veteran Fortean researcher, John Keel, recorded the tale of tricksterism run completely amok in his landmark book *The Mothman Prophecies* (1975). Driven to the brink of insanity by the eerie "crew of mischief-makers" he encountered during his investigations of the bizarre goings-on around Point Pleasant, West Virginia, Keel concludes: "Once we begin looking beyond the mere manifestations we will finally glimpse the real truth. Belief has always been the enemy of truth; yet, ironically, if our minds are supple enough, belief can sometimes open the door." Lately, Keel is playfully fond of saying: "In 100 years this won't matter. It barely matters now." This may or may not be true. Meanwhile, for the serious (or even quasi-serious) researcher, George Hansen has written one of the most relevant and thought provoking books in recent memory.

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The Trickster and the Paranormal is available through Amazon.com and Barnes&Noble or (cheapest) directly from the publisher: Xlibris at [www.Xlibris.com](http://www.Xlibris.com) (1-888-795-4274)

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# 25 YEARS AGO

The Autumn 1977 issue of MUFOB (new series 8) was a special "Autumn Book Number", reviewing such titles as Charles Berlitz's *Without a Trace*, effectively demolished by Roger Sandell, and Menzel and Taves' *The UFO Enigma*, reviewed by Peter Rogerson. Rogerson's highly critical review might give pause for thought to some American ufologists who have been claiming that sceptics never criticise the work of other sceptics. Listen to Rogerson: "The whole book is written in a most unpleasant tone, a combination of spluttering indignation, emotionally loaded phrases and arrogance. At times the authors give the impression of regarding themselves as Messiahs saving the benighted plebs from superstition and ignorance . . . They even share the UFO buff paranoia about the media, only there they see a great conspiracy by true believers."

Pelicans united? I think not!

The lead article in this issue was the final, definitely last ever contribution to MUFOB from our former science editor, the now legendary Alan W Sharp. Entitled "More Ghosts in the Machine", he looked at the phenomenon of UFO-related car stoppages. Finding that most of those in the literature seemed to take place in autumn and the end of winter, he concluding that this seemed to be more an effect of climate and car usage than and mysterious external influences.

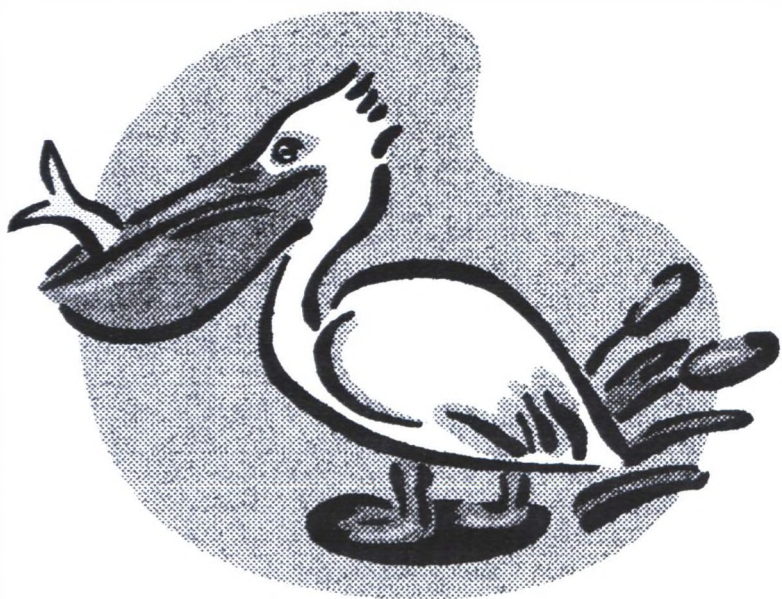
In contrast, Nigel Watson contributed a short note on the folkloric association of vehicle interference, pointing out that horse-drawn carts and bicycles also seemed prone to mysterious stoppages

Another piece by historian John Fletcher looked at some of the celestial phenomena reported from Somerset in the era of the English Civil War.

The winter 1977/8 issue (MUFOB 9), led with my article "Facts, Frauds and Fairytales" in which I presented the idea of regarding UFO events as part of a spectrum of experience, ranging from total fraud at one extreme to genuine perception at the other and the inability of investigators, and in most cases experiencers, to determine exactly where along this spectrum any individual event might lie. The whole thing was hung around a review of J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Silmarillion*, but this may have been just a cunning plan to get hold of a free review copy from the publisher!

The other main article in this issue was a translation of an article on a little-known phantom airship wave, in Denmark in 1908, which was believed at the time to be an intruder from across the German border, or from across the North Sea, but contemporary records seem to rule this out. However, as in all such waves, reports are difficult to interpret at this distance in time.

INTCAT ploughed on through both issues, moving into 1957, but the only case listed which has retained any interest was the April 1957 report of a spinning-top shaped object at Vins sur Carany in France, which had the effect of making a metal signpost vibrate noisily. This case was recently listed as being one of the best pieces of evidence for a physical UFO phenomenon, and may be something *Magonia* will return to in the future.



# THE PELICAN WRITES...

El pelicano es fuerte en sus apreciaciones pero muy razonable

It is clear to The Pelican that many UFO sightings remain unexplained simply because the reports have not been subjected to the necessary quality control. This is partly the result of sheer ignorance but, more disturbingly, it is also the result of a desire to make UFO reports seem mysterious and inexplicable, even if it also makes them somewhat incoherent.

It is important to remember, when conducting a scientific investigation or collecting raw data, that not all observations and testimony should be given equal weight. Some of the data need to be corrected or rejected. Investigators must satisfy themselves that instrumental readings come from observers who are using reliable and accurate instruments and who know how to operate them correctly.

For example, in meteorology, surface weather reports and upper-air data stream into collecting centres, from where the information is transferred to computers which plot weather charts and produce forecasts. Before the computer can get to work on the data the reports must be scrutinised - mainly by quality control computer programs these days - to correct errors and to reject reports which are obviously or probably inaccurate or unreliable. For example, a few years ago the meteorological service of a certain nation persisted in using unreliable radiosonde equipment, so their upper-air data were routinely rejected. This rigorous quality control is essential in order to achieve the best possible weather forecasts and to produce archives of accurate climatological data.

The unscientific attitudes and general sloppiness in the handling of raw data in ufology would never be tolerated by real scientists doing real science, such as meteorologists or astronomers. Many UFO case histories seem impressive at first, until we take

the trouble to read them critically. They then begin to look rather silly and pathetic - a lot of fuss about nothing in particular.

Let us take as an example the incident usually referred to as the Las Vegas case. This occurred on 18 April 1962 and apparently began with sightings of an object over Oneida, New York. There were investigations by Project Blue Book, but the only other study of the case was carried out by Kevin Randle, who wrote: "Before the event was over, people in several states would report it, it would be tracked on radar, it would cause power outages in Nephi and Eureka, Utah, and it would then disappear in a bright red explosion that illuminated the skies around Las Vegas, Nevada." (1)

The object over New York was described as being at a high altitude, making no sound and disappearing in seconds. It thus must have been travelling extremely fast. The descriptions indicate that it was a meteor. It is said, however, that fighters were scrambled to intercept it. If it was a meteor it would of course been impossible to intercept it, as it would have disappeared before the aircraft could get off the ground. Apparently the aircraft were sent to identify unknown radar targets, but these were moving much more slowly than the object sighted visually. Randle sets out his account in a very confusing manner, but he summarises the incident briefly as follows:

"We have a report of an object that was seen to begin its journey over Oneida, New York, and complete it near Las Vegas, Nevada, when it apparently exploded. It was seen by thousands during the journey. In Utah it landed and took off near Eureka. It was close enough to the ground that the witnesses got a good look at it. It affected the lights in a number of small towns; tales of photoelectric cells do not explain the power blackouts in Nephi, as demonstrated by the lights of the doctor's offices and pickup trucks. It continued its journey until it reached Reno, Nevada, after it apparently had made a long, looping turn so that it was now headed to the southeast rather than the northwest. It flew on toward Las Vegas, where it was tracked on radar until it vanished from the scopes to the northeast near the small town of Mesquite." (2)

Dr J. Allen Hynek investigated the sightings for Project Blue Book and concluded that the object was a meteor. Randle argues that it couldn't have been a meteor because it changed direction, landed and took off

again, and at least one pilot reported that the object passed his aircraft apparently at a lower altitude, although he said it was in sight for only "a second or two". (3) As for the change of direction Randle remarks: "In Utah all the witnesses had described an object that had been flying generally to the west. Now suddenly over western Nevada, the object is observed flying in the opposite direction." (4)

Note that he doesn't mention anyone having seen the object actually changing direction, and he doesn't mention the obvious possibility that there were two different objects. Two brilliant meteors moving in opposite directions within a short time may seem unlikely, but it is certainly possible. Yes, you might object, but what about the landing in Utah? The answer is that there was only one witness to this alleged event, who preferred to remain anonymous.

So we have an object seen in New York, and an object seen passing over Utah, but why should we assume it must have been the same object? Then we have an object moving in the opposite direction, which is assumed, with no justification, to have been the same object. There were also the unidentified radar targets which caused fighters to be scrambled, but the US Air Force said that it was probably an aircraft or balloon and was not actually seen, so could not have the object, or objects, which caused all the excitement. Randle collected some rather odd descriptions of the object flying very low, making strange noises, changing speed, and causing power blackouts, but it is important to note that his investigations were carried out in the late 1980s, many years after the events. Some of the witnesses admitted that they could remember very little about it.

It is impossible to evaluate such a UFO narrative, as there are essential details missing, such as cloud cover in the relevant parts of the USA, and documentation from electricity companies confirming that power supply problems occurred at the relevant times. It is only fair to point out that Randle admits the inadequacy of some of the witness testimony and he leaves the reader to speculate as to what the object or objects might have been.

#### References

1. Randle, Kevin. *Scientific Ufology*, Avon Books, New York, 1999, 167
2. Ibid., 175
3. Ibid., 172
4. Ibid., 170



# READER'S LETTERS

Dear John:

Belated thanks for your very nice review of Jim Moseley's and my *Shockingly Close to the Truth!* (Magonia 78) and your commentary on Jerome Clark's *IUR* 'review' of same in (Magonia 79). My Esteemed co-author and I greatly appreciate your good words.

Of course, I wouldn't be writing if I didn't have a nit or three to pick, would I? In this instance there are two. First is your mistaken identification of Clark's dyspeptic verbosity as representative of the general reaction to our book in the ranks of Serious Ufology. It seems clear Clark speaks only for himself, most but definitely not all of his fellow CUFOSians, and perhaps a few hangers on.

In fact, our book has been very well received across the ufological spectrum, from Serious through Not So Serious to Sceptical. To my knowledge, Clark's is the *only* negative review yet, while we've gotten many good and even rave notices from both inside and outside The Field. These include those by *MUFON UFO Journal* editor Dwight Connelly in his May 2002 issue and Barry Greenwood in the current (fall 2002) *Journal of Scientific Exploration*.

Oh, there's been a bit of huffing and puffing from a certain former physicist, and I imagine a number of other Leading Lights are fuming in silence, wiser in the ways of book promotion than Clark. However, the many ufologists and saucer fiends possessed of a sense of humour and secure egos have found *Shockingly...!* in your words, 'an amusing read, and very informative', and they haven't been shy about saying so, both privately and publicly.

As for nit number two, I beg to differ with you as to which ufological books mainstream science will take note of, if - *if* - and when it decides once again to take a serious and thoughtful look at the ufological evidence. I suspect

that such works as Hynck's *The UFO Experience* and *The Hynck UFO Report* and the Vallees' *Challenge to Science* and *Anatomy of a Phenomenon* - oh, yes, and the remarkable data behind Condon's executive summary - will rise to the top of the list. As 'Professor' George Adamski was wont to say, time will tell.

Cheers, Karl T. Pflock  
Placitas, New Mexico, USA

Dear Editor

John Koopman's report about the John Sylvester (Hector Hawton) book *The Flying Saucer* indicates that the date of the writing is probably suggested by a line speaking of a count of 253 flying saucers at the present date. He suggest around 1948 or 1949. A couple of items I have here might help narrow the date somewhat.

Project Sign offers a chart that ends with January 1949 and is based on 233 incidents according to the chart's legend (Brad Steiger, *Project Blue Book*, Ballantine 1976, pp. 190-1) Sydney Shal-it did a work on the Air Force position concerning saucers in the 30 April 1949 *Saturday Evening Post*. The pitch under the title and by-line reads: 'Air Intelligence probed 250 reports and here, for the first time, are its findings.' Keyhoe's 'The Flying Saucers are Real' article for *True* - easily the most famous article of the period - states "approximately 300 reports have been made to project saucer". This appears in January 1950 and so was being widely discussed already as early as 26 December 1949.

Hawton had to be writing before the appearance of the Keyhoe article. I haven't seen any use of the 253 figure in Loren Gross's UFO history, nor in news clippings conveniently available. If the figure is a typo for 233 then a date *circa* January 1949 is indicated; otherwise a *circa* may 1949 date seems likelier.

Martin Kottmeyer  
Carlyle, Illinois

Dear John:

In response to Mr. Michael Buhler's comments on UFO researchers offering 'sensible explanations' for UFO sightings, I can only reply that my thoughts on the Bailey case pertain to that case and others like it. But, I do not believe that all sightings and UFO encounters are misidentifications that have a psychological foundation. Moreover, Mrs. Bailey and her daughters did hear 'a humming sound' like a motor of some sort as that UFO object passed over their automobile. Perhaps the combined sound of wind and rain during the incident muffled the light plane's engine noise. Perhaps, too, the plane was fitted with a rather quiet running engine (?).

Anyway, I will be sending you (via snail-mail) a report on a flap of UFO activity that took place in the early 70's. It isn't exactly an 'Adamski scout-ship endorsement' - but, it also doesn't entirely close the door on Mr. Buhler's wishful ETH aspirations. [This report can be found on the Magonia website at [www.magonia.demon.co.uk/arc/00ms41.htm](http://www.magonia.demon.co.uk/arc/00ms41.htm)]

Turning to the Mothman; I also found Mr. Gareth J. Medway's letter on John Keel's book, and the episode on the 'egg-sucking extraterrestrial librarian' to be most interesting reading indeed. Could it be that the American malady known as 'mothmania' has spread to the UK and beyond? Or, should we take the story with a grain of salt, realising that UFO insiders like James W. Moseley feel that Mr. Keel is not an investigative journalist - but, rather, 'a science fiction writer' As Mr. Moseley says, 'inquiring minds need to know'. So, perhaps The Pelican could shed a little bit of light on this matter. Ya know, that wise ol' bird certainly set the record straight on faulty UFO logic in *Magonia 79!*

Regards, Matt Graeber  
Plymouth Meeting, Pennsylvania.



# BOOK REVIEWS

BY PETER ROGERSON

**Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke. *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism and the Politics of Identity*. New York University Press, 2002.**

In this third volume of his study of the connections between Nazism and the occult traditions, Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke analyses the esoteric connections of a wide range of neo-Nazi movements. Two themes emerge. One is the growth of radical Nazi pagan movements, attracted to be a variety of sources including esoteric Hinduism and Nordic Neo-Paganism; along with the growth of Identity Churches based on antisemitic outgrowths of British Israelism. The other is the literature which in effect supernaturalises the Nazi Party.

One major version of this latter is what G-C describes as 'The Nazi Mysteries', in which Hitler is seen as literally demonically possessed. G-C argues this idea first arose in 1930's France, though similar ideas were being expressed in England. For example Harry Price compared Nazism to a poltergeist outbreak, and noted that he shared his birth place with the Schneider brothers, two noted inter-war mediums. The idea was popularised by Pauwels and Bergier's *Dawn of Magic* aka *Morning of the Magicians*, one of the most influential books in the early New Age field, and a pioneer of the ancient astronaut school of writing. Literature such as this portrayed Nazism and the Holocaust as an eruption of the 'wholly other' into the rational waters of European culture, offering both a horrified fascination and an alibi. Whole areas of potentially genocidal strands of Social Darwinism were airbrushed out of European and American history in the post-war period.

Another form of this supernaturalising of the Nazis has been to suggest that they possessed super-technologies of one form or another, and G-C traces this development in his study of the Nazi UFO myth, though this chapter would have benefited from

a prior study of Kevin McClure's study on our website.

The last chapter discusses the rise of conspiracy theories and the role of William Cooper and David Icke in transmitting antisemitic conspiracy theories into the new age, and their attempts to rehabilitate the notorious *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. (One result of this was the appearance of The Protocols in the New Age Section of Waterstones in Manchester a few years ago). G-C notes the radical rightist take over of *Nexus* magazine, and its promotion of American militia propaganda (and adverts for Holocaust denial literature). The conspiracy-riddled UFO and Fortean fields are open to much of



this, *Magonia* readers will remember the infamous 'Conspiracy Conference' addressed by among others American Nazi Eustace Mullins, and the Bulgarian Nazi-UFO conspiracy theorist Vladimir Terziski.

Much of the esoteric Hinduism of the likes of Miguel Serrano and

Savitri Devi also have resonances with the New Age. The connections however may go much deeper than G-C seems to realise. One major lacuna in this book is the lack of a treatment of the esoteric Nazism of William Dudley Pelley and his connections with Guy Ballard, who in turn was the intellectual godfather of much of the America 'New Age' tradition. Ballard (and in some cases directly Pelley) was a major influence on the flying saucer contactee movement, and one can see how the Aryan mythology emerges in the idea of the 'Nordics'. We can also see echoes of 'Volkish' ideology in parts of the earth mysteries movement.

There are more mainstream connections, for example the mythologist Joseph Campbell, who shared Serrano and Devi's admiration for Hinduism, Hitler and antisemitism; or the historian of religions Mircea Eliade who had been a member of the ultra-fascist Romanian Iron Guard. In

the post-war years these two were much more circumspect in public print than, say, Serrano (though some sources claim that Campbell served on the editorial board of the racist magazine *Mankind Quarterly*) but their influence was much greater. Perhaps one can argue that occult movements with their notions of spiritual élites and secret traditions are invariably anti-democratic and in a broad sense 'fascist'.

Do such organisations pose a great threat. G-C (perhaps because of his own right-wing sympathies) argues that reaction against multiculturalism might give them political space. Equally however it might create insuperable dilemmas. For example the natural ideological bedfellows for the European and American radical right are militant Islamic movements which share their hatred for feminists, gays, liberalism, secularism and above all the Jews. There have been a number of links between the two, but this ideological common ground clashes with the anti-Islamic prejudices of their grass roots members. The neo-Paganism of many of these groups sets them against the Christian right and so on. The main gainers from anti-immigrant feeling in Europe seem to be more mainstream right populism and 'post liberal' parties. (US readers might be confused here, but Continental 'liberal' parties are actually on the right of the political spectrum, for example the Danish Liberal or Left Party is quite a bit to the right of the Danish Conservative or Right Party, there are separate sets of 'Liberal Democratic' or 'Radical' parties in the centre ground)

**Keith Chandler. *Psi: what it is and how it works, a central model for parapsychology*. Author's Choice, 2001. \$24.95.**

Having read this book I am little further forward in actually understanding how the author imagines psi, if it exists, actually works. Like many of its ilk this book indulges masses of scientific jargon from a variety of disciplines, but which doesn't actually transmit any meaning. The following is an example of the sort of thing one finds throughout this book:

"I need to note that, although [a diagram in the book] has a similar appearance to EEG recordings, it is not intended to

represent electrical brain waves but modulations of an individual's non-energetic carrier wave in the cognitive field ... Projective memory is the low energy/high probability model that forms the default background for our daily life pursuits. Field configurations below its threshold are buffered or constrained to the level of normal projective memory because they entail identity threatening memories...

Behind all this jargon is Chandler's central rejection of scientific naturalism in favour of world view in which individual minds are 'refractions of Cosmic Mind', which may or may not be God. This is identified with the zero-point energy field. Needless to say he rejects Darwin in favour of teleological evolution, aimed at producing minds like ours. The extinction of hominids such as the Neanderthals is evidence of this, so I assume the genocide of the Neanderthals is meant to part of God's plan. Whether the genocide of the native Americans or the Australian aboriginals was part of the same plane we are not told.

When it comes to parapsychology it becomes clear that Chandler's estimates as to the possibility of various paranormal phenomena depend less on the empirical evidence, than whether the phenomena would fit his hypotheses. Thus telepathy is in, pure clairvoyance is out. The explanation for psychokinesis ap-

pears to be that Cosmic Mind alters the local laws of probability and physics while simultaneously putting unusual expectations in the brain/minds of the participants. Don't ask what the explanation for precognition is because it involves lots of jargon with words like 'holopresent'.

This book therefore illustrates the central problem that parapsychological writings have, it is not so much the odd facts, (or purported facts) as the mountains of metaphysical speculation

heaped around them. 'Theories' like Chandler's are simply ad hoc speculations which appear to be based, if anything, on some kind of personal revelation, rather than evidence. Furthermore they are not at all radical new ideas, they represent essentially a reactionary rejection

of the modern scientific world view. Thus all that is new in Chandler's presentation is a thin robe of jargon. The naked ideas underneath are ones which were prevalent in the early years of the last century, and can be found in the writings of Whitehead, Bergson and de Chardin.

**Paul Kurtz (editor). *Skeptical Odysseys: personal accounts by the world's leading paranormal inquirers*. Prometheus Books, 2001.**

A sort of *festschrift* for CSICOP'S 25th birthday, in which leading

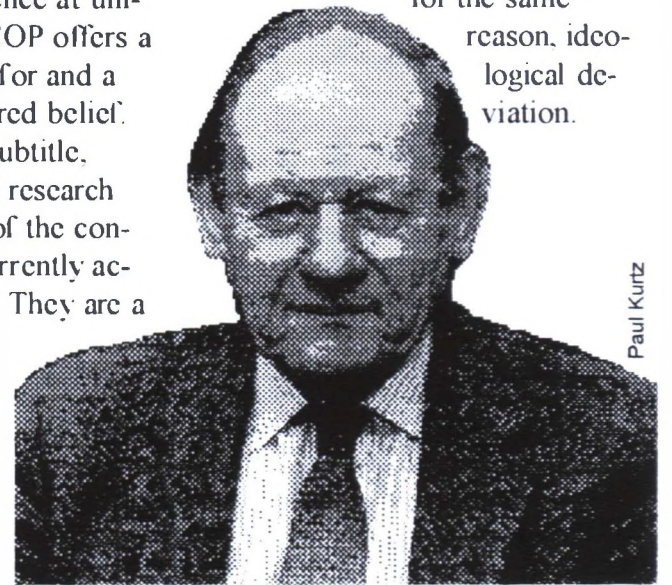
members give their memories of their involvement with the 'skeptics' movement. Like all such compilations the content is variable, with some amusing asides. My favourite is the account of Stanton Friedman's encounter with a notorious Canadian TV host, the sort who makes Jeremy Paxman look like the model of polite reticence. After Friedman finished one of his standard spiels, the politician-eater looked him in the eye, and said, "That's biggest load of shite I have heard in my life". On this occasion Stan did not threaten to sue for libel.

I have to say that such anecdotes are not the main tone of the book, much of which is rather earnest, mixed in with the self congratulations which is standard for 'authorised' institutional histories. There are other interesting undertones. Some of the entries have the feeling of the conversion narrative: they encounter CSICOP, see the light and put their old life of credulity behind them. In some cases this is connected with meeting or seeing a lecture by one of the heroic founder generation (James Randi, Paul Kurtz, Phil Klass, etc). A number of the contributors seem to have been people who lost their childhood religious faith when reading science at university. For them CSICOP offers a new faith to be fought for and a new community of shared belief.

Despite the subtitle, CSICOP is not really a research organisation, and few of the contributors seem to be currently active research scientists. They are a mixture of the retired, people in business or academic administration, media folks and journalists, with perhaps the largest component being amateur

or semi-professional magicians. CSICOP is essentially an advocacy organisation, or what sociologists call a moral crusade. This does not imply that the cause is necessarily an unworthy one, and several of the contributors point to obvious causes for concern, such as companies forcing their managers to attend New Age motivational courses, or the teaching of pseudo sciences like 'magnetic therapeutic touch' in nursing schools as part of compulsory courses, or the activities of those who batten onto the grief and distress of others for money and power.

But in many ways CSICOP can look like a mirror image of the paranormalists they criticise. They both over estimate the cultural significance of paranormal claims, both believe that if only their view of world were to be adopted then society might in some sense be redeemed. Both lay claim to open mindedness, yet when it comes to the crunch both prefer to be part of a comfortable club of the like-minded than opt for conflicts of ideas and outlooks. CUFOS chucked out Robert Sheaffer, MUFON chucked out Dennis Stacy, while CSICOP chucked out Marcello Truzzi and Dennis Rawlins. All essentially for the same reason, ideological deviation.



Paul Kurtz

**Cheryl and Lynn Hersha with Dale Griffis and Ted Schwarz. *Secret Weapons: how two sisters were brainwashed to kill for their country*. Vision Paperbacks, 2002. \$9.99.**

In addition to those familiar to *Magonia* readers, who claim that between the interstices of their normal domestic lives they were regularly abducted into alien spaceships or were brood mares for vast, untraceable cults, there is another category who claim that hidden from their normal memories, they were participants, willing or otherwise, in fantastic CIA conspiracies. This is what Dale Griffis, the actual author of this book claims has happened to the Hersha sisters: they were being secretly trained as members of what looks like the US version of the SAS since they

were 4 and 6 years old. The training is, of course, extremely brutal and not part of any regular special services regime, involving all sorts of sexual abuse and such like.

There are obvious elements of modern folklore in the stories, the mysterious Project Monarch for example (though stripped of the claim that its victims were meant to be sex slaves for Ronald Reagan and George Bush Snr), the notorious 'Dr Green' and others. These are stock figures in the recovered memory community of which Griffis is a member. Other people the girls claim to have been victimised by are some well known to have been involved in the MKULTRA drug use scam in the 1950s. Others just happen to be opponents of the re-

covered memory crowd. All are very conveniently dead and unable to sue for libel.

The stories seem to be products of B movie scripts than anything that is likely to go on in the real intelligence world - there are no recovered memories of endless days in stuffy offices listening to dozens of overseas radio broadcasts or clipping from newspapers. Needless to say, nothing like evidence is presented to back up the claims. Assuming that the whole thing has not been made up by Griffis, the most likely explanation is that these are fantasies of power and violence developed by two women who were probably sexually and physically abused by their alcoholic, schizophrenic father.

**Ronald D Story (editor) *The Mammoth Encyclopedia of Extraterrestrial Encounters*. Robinson, £9.99.**

This volume is intended as the second edition of the *Encyclopedia of UFOs* edited by Story and published more than 20 years ago. When I reviewed that edition, I gave a qualified approval, though there were a number of gaps, and a decided American bias, it was by far the best round up on the subject then available. Indeed it is still one of the first sources I tend to get for accounts of some individual cases.

Of course since then we have had Jerry Clark's magisterial efforts, so a second edition of Story has quite a task. Well, I'm sorry the result is in many ways disappointing. It is even more eccentrically Americentric, and the essays on Spanish, Italian ufology etc., are gone and the biographies are even more narrowed down. There are a few British entries (Jenny Randles, Tim Matthews (sanitised!), Nick Pope, Tim Good and Hilary Evans, and for some weird reason Raymond Drake - a camp version of Eric von Daniken. No Charles Bowen, Gordon Creighton, Waveney Girvan, or Andy Roberts or David Clarke or Paul Deveraux or even John Rimmer! The whole of continental Europe is represented by Aimé Michel and Michael Hesseman (?). There are no entries for Dennis

Stacey, Patrick Huyghe, Chris Rutowski or Michael Persinger.

The trouble with this book is that it is not an encyclopedia, it is a miscellaneous collection of essays, some such as those by Martin Kottmeyer and Joe Nickell are really good, but not original to this book, others are reproduced from the first edition, others are just dreadful. Then there are the fillers, of which the indifferent book synopses by Randall Fitzgerald taken from another book are just about acceptable, but the New Age ramblings of contactee-new ager Scott Mandelker are not, and guess what - they were lifted from another book as well!

Of course there have been worse, such as the John Spencer effort, and at £8.99, this is still a bargain, and worth it for the Martin Kottmeyer essays alone - for those who have not read them elsewhere. It clearly gives an impression of the wide range of voices now in the subject, but the definitive encyclopedia, trying to give as objective picture and voice to all the currents in the subject is still to be produced.

**Cheryl and Lyn Sten F Oldenwald. *Patterns in the Void: why nothing is important*. Westview Press, 2002. £18.99.**

On one level this is an account of and history of our understanding of the vacuum, the raw potentiality out of which all things emerge,

tracing the development of the notion that space and time, matter and energy are in some way patterns in this vacuum, forged by gravitation.

On another level however, it is account of the author's own confrontation with darkness

and nothingness, from his childhood fears of the dark, to his mature contemplation of the deaths of his loved ones, his mortality and that of the universe itself, condemned current theories suggest to an eternal cold, dark senescence. Here Oldenwald brings us close

to the central emotional power of belief in the paranormal as he meditates on the yearning he feels for the magical folk world of his Swedish parents, and his adolescent belief in all things Fortean, ufological and paranormal that he left behind at college to pursue science. Indeed Oldenwald may well be what might be called an encounter prone personality, as he recounts a story of apparent synchronicity (a mysterious ringing of the doorbell and a sudden conviction that someone in Sweden had died, he goes to the door and no-one is there, and a friend of his

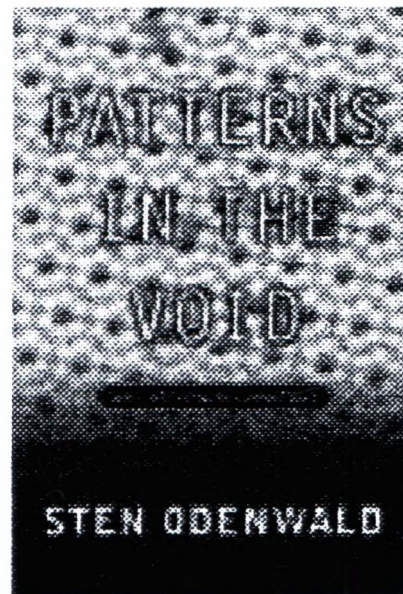
father's has died at that time), hearing the magical music of the mountains, a UFO experience, even a false awakening in which three Grays surround his bed.

Someone not an astronomy professor might have made much of this (you bet Bud Hopkins would),

but Oldenwald seems these as examples of how the brain can make patterns out of the information coming in.

We can sense from Oldenwald's dilemma, that the loss lamented is not that of awe and wonder, but of a warm and human world, one which cared for us, and which nothing and no one is finally lost.

Yet perhaps that nostalgia, like all nostalgias is for a world made rosy in retrospect. In the days of the old animism, the world was often seen as extremely threatening. C D Broad once reminded his psychical research audience that if they and he were right the world might not only be far stranger than we can imagine but far nastier. Visions of paradise can inspire the terrible as much as the noble, and fear of hell fire was always far worse than any fear of extinction. Perhaps the nostalgia for the magical is really a nostalgia for Disneyland rather than



**Jack Cohen and Ian Stewart. *Evolving the alien: the science of extraterrestrial life*. Ebury Press, 2002. £17.99.**

Cohen, a biologist and Stewart, a mathematician, are science fiction fans who have made a hobby of doing the science for a number of leading SF writers. In this book they combine science and science fiction to challenge the view, expressed in Ward and Brownlee's *Rare Earth*, that complex life will be a very scarce phenomena. They argue that Ward and Brownlee's arguments are too parochial and have been in part falsified by the discovery of life in extreme environments here on earth.

They think the same goes for much standard astrobiology, which presumes that life must be like life on earth, or rather what we imagine life on earth to be like in oversimplified accounts. They

propose a much more radical approach of xenoscience and xenobiology. This 'life' may be much more alien than anything we can imagine (nuclear life on neutron stars, or plasma life in the Sun's photosphere).

One thing we can be certain of is that no real aliens will be bipedal humanoids or anything else related to terrestrial organisms. They suggest some features which have evolved many times over on earth might be more universal (flight of some kind for example) This doesn't mean this will be the only kind of life out there, merely that it might reoccur in quite a number of different places.

What most writers call intelligence Cohen and Stewart call extelligence, a shorthand for cultural intelligence mediated by complex 'language' capable of transmitting highly abstract 'ideas'

and information, and of preserving this outside the bodies of particular individuals. They seem to be willing to entertain the idea that this extelligence may be widespread and perhaps a universal development, but have to concede that of all the millions (or perhaps billions) of species that have evolved on earth, only one, ours has produced this extelligence. It has to be faced that only one terrestrial culture went through an industrial revolution and developed heavy industry of the sort needed to build radio telescopes and spaceships.

Even without this argument Cohen and Stewart reject ufologists images of the ETH. If ETs are present in our environment it will not be as biological entities, but as some form of 'technology' so subtle that we could never detect. The aliens of

ufology, like those of *Star Trek*, etc. are essentially cultural icons, secularised forms of the creatures of folklore and myth.

As to whether Cohen and Stewart, or Ward and Brownlee are right, who knows at this juncture. If we encounter the truly alien in the oceans of Europa then put your bets on Cohen and Stewart, if all we find is nothing or just terrestrial type organisms courtesy of some passing meteorite, then go for Ward and Brownlee. But forget the Greys and their breeding programme (of course if we are wrong and the Greys actually exist then we know that they aren't ETs at all, but some other terrestrial creature we have somehow overlooked perhaps descended from some as yet undiscovered branch of the hominid bush)

**Malcolm McGrath. *Demons of the modern world*. Prometheus Books, 2002.**

The story of the Great Satanism Panic of the 1980s and early 1990s continues to fascinate, and in this book political science graduate Malcolm McGrath seeks to relate that episode with earlier epidemics of witchcraft beliefs. His arguments in some ways resemble those of Walter Stephens, in that he argues that while the basic magical beliefs which underlay witchcraft accusations lie in the pre-modern world in which the mechanical physical world and the symbolic world of human culture were still entwined. The actual witch hunt epidemics emerged at a period in which they were beginning their separation. Western perception of the world was beginning to shift from the traditional and natural view of one dominated by personalities (gods, demons, God, the Devil, saints etc) to the modern view of the law-centred world.

As these changes progressed, the entrance into the realm of the 'demonic' became pushed back from the world of adults to the world of children, whose fantasy lives and magical thinking were seen as doorways to the realm of the demonic. Thus there was an increasing reliance on child witnesses in witchcraft cases.

The eruption of this magical world back into western culture, came through a similar process. Modern western elite education emphasizes the radical separation between the cultural and physical realms, with the physical realm being governed by impersonal natural laws, and the cultural realm the product of autonomous, self acting human beings. However, the old enchanted world view is hard-wired into us, so that the modern world view is one which does not come naturally. It certainly does not come to children, and thus we all, having been children, have memories and experiences of this other realm. Our culture can therefore see childhood and children as doorways into the demonic.

One could add other reasons why children might be seen as doorways into the other realm. Children are perceived as unformed, incomplete people, visitors from the outer realm, and as such, the subject of conflicted attitudes. They are seen sometimes as

visitors from realms of the divine, innocent and coming with trails of glory, or as subhuman visitants from the realm of wild nature. Today popular media present children either as helpless innocents or dangerous monsters, as fits the prejudices of the occasion.

The next major modernist development which influenced the growth of the myth was that the doctrine of the self-acting individual as the source of law, morality and value led to various liberation movements. Part of their ideology was that the world view of the oppressed was equally valid

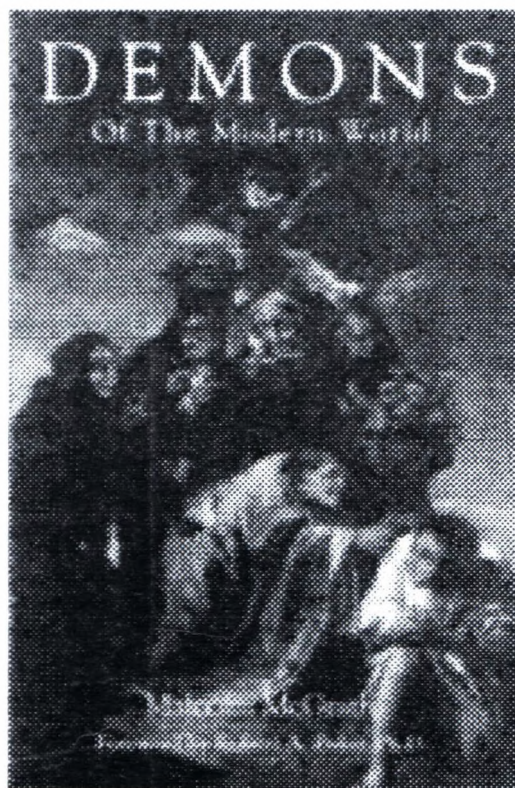
to that of the ruling elites, indeed it was more so. However the problem with this is that groups of the 'oppressed' such as workers and women may have no clear idea what their liberation entails or that they are oppressed at all. As a result groups of intellectuals can emerge as secular 'spiritual elites' who have the means to

discern the correct state of the human condition: in particular the state of the oppressed to have access to the truth which shall set you free'. If workers didn't see themselves as 'oppressed' Marxist intellectuals could discern that they were suffering from enchantment, secularized of course into 'false consciousness'. Similarly the intellectuals of the recovered memory movement discerned that those who thought they were living happy lives were actually living in a state of enchantment under the spell of the secret abuser, and it was the job of the therapist to break the spell.

McGrath argues that as therapists proclaimed that the oppressed child's world view was the true and valid one, they elevated the child's world of fantasy into the 'real reality', and thus collapsed the world of rational argument and scientific-legal evidence gathering. However the 'childish' content of such fantasies was very much secondary to the imported imagery of adult pornography de-

rived from witchcraft trials, lurid accounts of the activities of self publicists like Crowley and the fiction of writers like Dennis Wheatley. By constructing the image of the demonic, the 'therapists' were able to envision themselves as heroic fighters in the jihad against the anti society of Satan, while projecting their own dark pornographic fantasies onto their victims, both adult and child.

Of course behind all of this lies the ur-fantasy, that all the pain, suffering and heartache in the whole wide world, is caused by *Them*, the terrible others, who



are the absolute and total reverse of the good and kind *Us*. This mysterious 'them' is both totally alien and totally close, it can be seen not just in the faces of the foreigner, but in the face of the neighbour.

In the concluding part of the book McGrath examines the alien abduction fantasy, in

particular as presented by John Mack and Richard Boylan. He seems puzzled by why Mack has come to believe alien abduction stories, even though he can see they run counter to the modern scientific world view in a way that lay abductionists cannot. One answer might lie in the idea of the intellectual elite who speak on behalf of the oppressed whose world view if truly known and expressed would be real truth. The oppressed group that Mack sees himself speaking for are non-Western societies, whose world views often do not emphasize the radical separation between the physical and cultural realm. If 'the oppressed' believe in spirits and magic, then spirits and magic there must be. (Of course real people in non-Western societies often want to buy into the goodies of Western society, however the Western intellectuals who have correctly discerned the human condition, must tell them that this is because they are under enchantment by Western advertising, and they should live

the authentic lives of their great grandparents. Naturally this does not apply to western intellectuals who on no account should have to live the lives of *their* great-grandparents!).

Much of the mythologies of our time point to the central dilemma of modernity. Increasing education and accumulating knowledge means that the traditional world views seem less and less plausible, yet the modern disenchanted world fails to satisfy.

Both worlds can appear as demonic and threatening, the fantasy of the Satanist is that of a world in which the sacred and ritual can only appear as an alien malignancy, hot and full of savage lusts and wrath, while the alien abductors, cold and remote give a fantasy image of scientific modernity that is equally alien. They are the fantasies of a society in which every priest is seen as a child abuser, every scientist a vivisector, and every politician a member of a secret cabal bent on world domination. A world in which no one can ever be believed, where there is danger everywhere. The Internet brings in kiddie porn (and note that this is presented as something so terrible and forbidden, that the merest sight of it will expel you from the human community. The idea of a secret so dreadful that one glance will destroy the soul is a very old one). The white van down the road contains an abductor, and the lorry parked on the corner contains a 'weapon of mass destruction'. The latest moral panic is about people taking photographs of children's Nativity plays, secularized as fears about paedophiles, but echoing back to ideas of the magical powers of images - and note that this centres around a Nativity play, a symbol of Christian spirituality being put to a perverse use. Remember those tales of witches and the host?

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