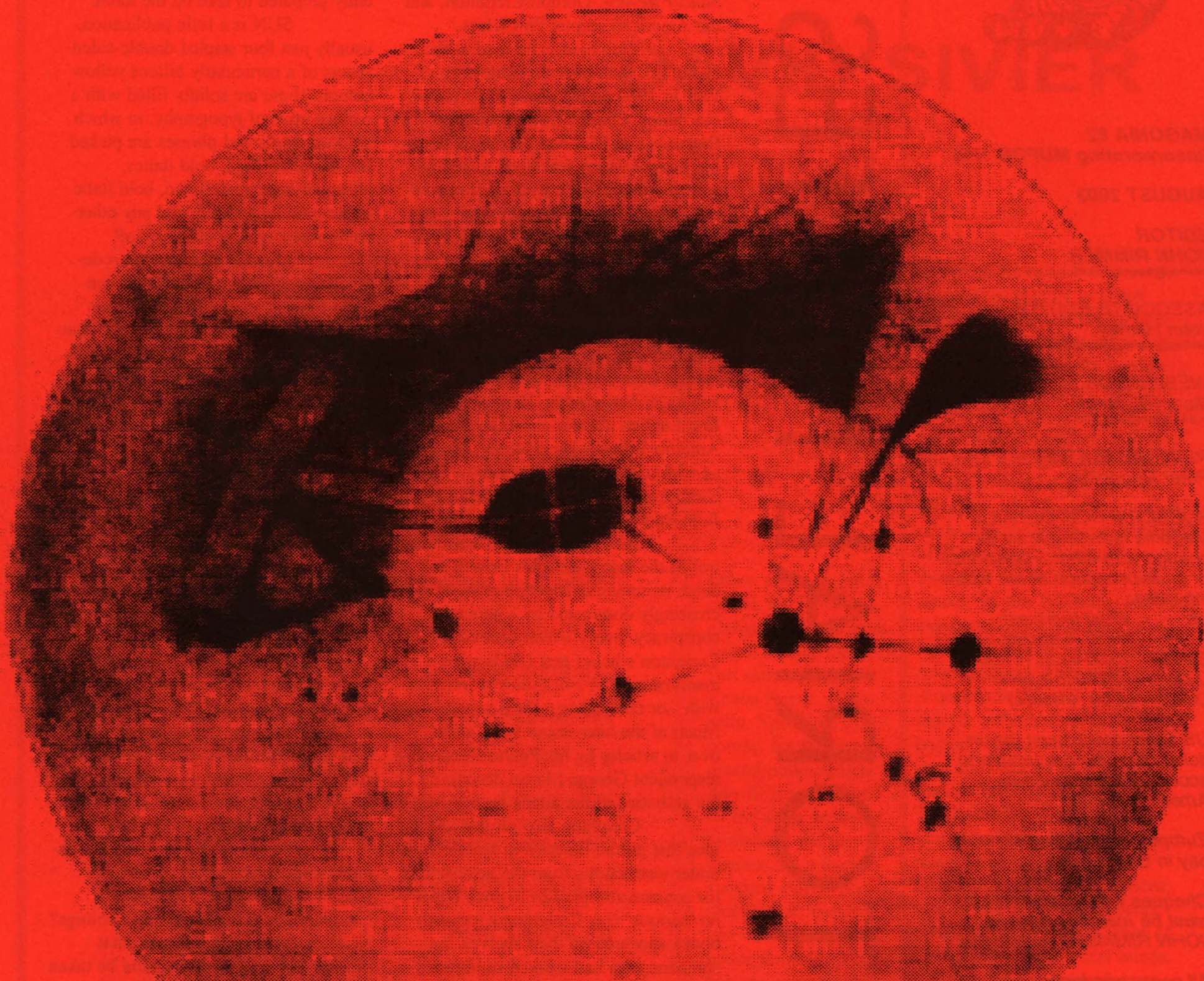


# MAGONIA

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## THE END OF TWO ERAS

Two very different figures have departed from the UFO scene over the past few weeks, the editor of *Flying Saucer Review*, Gordon Creighton, and the American sceptic Phil Klass.

Creighton, who died at the age of 95, took over the editorship of FSR in 1984 on the death of its previous editor, Charles Bowen. During Bowen's era, FSR had become a sensible journal which was open to serious contributions from a wide spectrum of rational opinion - even allowing some of the dreaded American 'skeptics' to have their say. It is fair to say that it was ufology's international flagship magazine.

At this time Creighton's contribution was significant in translating reports from foreign, mostly Spanish language, newspapers. He produced the first English translation of the famous Antonio Villas-Boas case, and presented us with a never-ending parade of bizarre contact and proto-abduction reports from South America.

But once he had overall control of the magazine after Bowen's death its nature changed, becoming increasingly dominated by a paranoid conspiracy theory which centred on Creighton's belief that UFOs were a manifestation of evil djinns working with - or controlling - the Soviet Union. Much of the later issues were given over to articles by his Puerto Rican correspondent George Martin describing the activities of the aliens on that island.

Creighton also promoted the idea that public libraries in Britain were under instructions from the government (or someone/thing else) to ensure that no 'serious' (i.e. Creighton approved) books appeared on their shelves. As someone who had worked in libraries for many years, I was able to inform him that I had never heard such instructions. I received no reply, but MUFOB's exchange copies of FSR soon dried up. Writing about this in *Magonia*, I commented: "From now on [FSR] will be of interest largely to paranoid cultists, conspiracy mongers and students of fringe literature" which is just what happened.

Phil Klass's contributions to ufology were very different, but in some quarters considered just as unhelpful. I write in the past-tense, although Klass is

still alive, but bad health has forced him to give up publishing *Skeptic's UFO Newsletter* (SUN), with no-one apparently prepared to take up the torch.

SUN is a little publication, usually just four stapled double-sided sheets of a particularly bilious yellow colour. These are solidly filled with a curious style of typography, in which random words and phrases are picked out in italics, bold, bold italics, all-upper-case, underlined, bold italic upper-case underlined, and any other combination you could think of!

Most of this text was a detailed, sometimes over-detailed, but quite forensic demolition of current high-profile American UFO cases. But it was very much American cases, developments elsewhere were seldom covered, although it is fair to say that Klass was writing mostly about people and events he knew directly.

As Klass's day-job was as a journalist for *Aviation Week* magazine, which is supposed to have close links to the US defence establishment, it was inevitable that many of those he offended accused him of being a government agent charged with disrupting the UFO 'community'.

His rather politically-incorrect sense of humour led, at one time, to a prominent American UFO writer declaring that Klass had threatened to shoot him and dump his body in Chesapeake Bay. The long ensuing correspondence, in SUN, *Saucer Smear* and elsewhere revealed a less exciting story.

So we might ask, who has actually done most harm to ufology? Klass with his sharp scepticism, or Creighton, with his paranoid ramblings? Neither of them demonstrated that ufology is a subject that should be taken seriously by scientists, but Klass did at least take it seriously enough to consider it worthy of attack. Perhaps the title of one of his books, *UFO Abductions, Dangerous Game*, expresses his views best: the UFO phenomenon matters, not because we're going to be invaded by communist djinns, but because of the things people are doing to each other as a result of what they believe about UFOs. Maybe despite all Creighton's fire and brimstone armwaving, it's Phil Klass who's really warning us about the dangers of the UFOs!

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# SCHISMATRIX

## Reflections on the Cult of Information in Film and Beyond

DAVID SIVIER

Undoubtedly the biggest cinematic event of the past few months or so has been the *Matrix Reloaded*. Forming the middle act in a trilogy between the earlier *Matrix* and the *Matrix Revolution*, due to be released this autumn, the film has already generated more than its fair share of media hype and academic speculation, including one paper by Mercer Schuchardt, which claimed that it is a new religious parable for the information age. In its wake, philosophers have claimed that the world could, indeed, be a computer simulation run by an alien civilisation, a view taken up by no less than the astronomer and science writer John Barrow in the pages of *New Scientist*. [1]

Other, more sanguine critics, have complained about its great length and the messianism surrounding Keanu Reeve's character, Neo. It is, of course, not the monumental philosophical *tour de force* claimed by the more excitable journalists and academics, but a fairly standard Hollywood blockbuster, though one which astutely mixes the balletic martial arts choreography of Hong Kong action

movies with cyberpunk. None of it is actually terribly original, as some critics reviewing the academic literature already generated by the movie have pointed out. 2 Neither are the complaints of some of its detractors. The messianic theme may be at the forefront of its plot and action, but it's hardly greater than that of *Dune*, and considerably less than many cult SF and Fantasy books now filling the shelves of Waterstones. Where the film is of interest is as an ex-

ample of the cult of information and Virtual Reality as it has emerged in the last few decades.

The first thing to note is that the notion that the world is a giant Virtual construct has been around for a very long time. Apart from Plato's metaphor of chained prisoners seeing only the shadows of reality on a cave wall in the *Republic*, it's a logical extension of the old philosophical problem of distinguishing dream from reality, when the only guide is one's senses. By the 1980s this had been expressed in the academic philosophical literature as the 'Brain in a Jar' problem. This states that it is quite possible that we are all, indeed, nothing more than disembodied brains, convinced of our own corporeality by being fed sensory information artificially. The Polish SF writer Stanislas Lem used this notion in his short story, *Doctor Diagoras*. 3 Diagoras, a Greek cyberneticist, has, as one of his experiments, constructed just such a series of disembodied mechanical minds. These minds are being fed pre-programmed recorded experiences, so living out Virtual lives. Supernatural phenomena, such as *deja vu*, ghosts and precognition, are the result of glitches in the programme, similar to those John Barrow suggests should be looked for in our consensual reality, where the recording has jumped forward a few moments. Lem was very much aware of the essentially religious nature of such a philosophical construct, and in another short story, *Non Serviam*, 4 describes a series of computer ex-



'We don't have religious films today. We only have science fiction.'  
- Andrei Tarkovsky, Russian film director

periments in which Virtual worlds are created, whose digital, 'personetic' inhabitants debate the possible purposeful creation of their reality by an outside force, the resulting theogonic arguments being recorded by the presiding scientists.



Lem himself was a fan of Philip K. Dick, whose novels also explore the problems of distinguishing between artificial and genuine reality, often overlaid with overt, if not blatant, religious speculation, as in *Valis* and the *Divine Invasion*.<sup>5</sup> While Dick is undoubtedly the best known, he was by no means the only SF author exploring contemporary science's potential for myth and Virtual realities. Jonathan Fast's 1978 book, *Mortal Gods*, was set in a future where the human colonists of Sifra-Messa had created, through genetic engineering, the Mortal Gods of the title, transhuman titans, living in hyperspace who physically personify the motifs and values of their worshippers' society.<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere in the Galaxy, Earth has been devastated by radiation from an erupting Black Hole in a cosmic war. As a result, the survivors had been forced underground, retreating into amniotic jars, to lead Virtual lives through robot bodies on the surface controlled through telepresence. While it isn't quite the world of the *Matrix* – the humans are, in this instance, in control of

the robots – in its depiction of a devastated world in which humans survive in bottles linked to intelligent machines as a kind of Virtual Reality, it isn't far off by any means.

Although this artificial reality was benign, if horrific, far

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more malign visions of the potential of VR to enslave and dominate appeared later in the 80s. In the 'Galactic Centre' novels of Gregory Benford – *Great Sky River*, *Furious Gulf*, *Tides of Light* and *Sailing Bright Eternity* – the remnants of future humanity, reduced to a hunter-gatherer existence by an aggressive machine civilisation, are pursued as vermin across the Galaxy by the Mantis.<sup>7</sup> Charged with eradicating the human pests, this robot electronically steals their minds, sucking them into its own personal Virtual Reality while at the same time fashioning grotesque sculptures from their bodies as art. Much the same attitude to their human victims is followed by the machine villains in Paul McAuley's *Red Dust*.<sup>8</sup> Here, the great cybernetic intelligences ruling Earth and Mars, the Consensus and the Emperor, have rebelled against humanity, and are attempting to eradicate it from a universe in which intelligence has no place. On Earth, the Consensus has exterminated the human race as a way of preserving the terrestrial biosphere, though the Artificial Intelligences at the heart of the

system have preserved humanity's minds in cyberspace as worshippers, setting themselves up as Virtual gods. Mars' own ruling machine, the Emperor, has been corrupted by the Earth's Consensus into following the same goal, encouraging its citizens to surrender their lives to become 'half-lifers', wired zombies dreaming their way into Heaven, the part of Martian Information Space reserved as an eternal environment for the dead. If SF is creating new mythologies for the scientific dispensation, then these machines – the Mantis, the Consensus, the Emperor – are truly its devils, cybernetic Lucifers stealing human souls to drag them down into Virtual hells.

Of course, this essentially religious fear – of the soul's enslavement and torture for all eternity by a malignant, nonhuman intelligence – would not exist if the writers could not present a plausible scenario for the cybernetic survival of the human personality after death. Following Marvin Minsky and the Extropian Downloaders, Benford presents just such a possibility in his books. Here, humans preserve the accumulated wisdom of generations of the deceased in the form of Aspects and Faces, digital recordings of their minds saved at the point of death. Each human carries a number of these cybernetic familiars to advise him, summoning them up from the depths of their circuitry as and when they are required. McAuley adopts the same concept and terminology in *Red Dust*, though here the posthumous personalities are preserved and transmitted by nanotechnological viruses, their new incarnations revered as gods. Planned reincarnation through cloning is also foreseen. On Earth, natural reproduction has been abolished altogether, replaced instead by the recreation of past generations by clones, which then have the memories and personalities of their predecessors artificially implanted in a strange parody of the Buddhist cycle of reincarnation. A similar process, though this time benign, appears in John Barnes' *A Million Open Doors*, in which the dead live through clones electronically given the personalities of their deceased parent.<sup>9</sup>

McAuley, the founder of Rhibofunk/ Gene Punk, was a bi-



Paul McAuley, the founder of Rhibofunk/Gene Punk, was a biologist before becoming a professional science fiction writer and in his novels he is trying to do for the biological sciences what William Gibson and Bruce Sterling had done for computers

ologist before becoming a professional SF writer, and has admitted on Radio 3 that in his novels he was deliberately trying to do for the biological sciences what William Gibson, Bruce Sterling and the Mirror Shades crowd had done for computers. Thus, in *Fairyland* and *Red Dust*, he depicted the squalid underside of decaying future worlds where, instead of hacking machine code people cut and paste their own genomes in grimy back street salons, and nanotech viruses stalk the wetware processors of human brains like those of computers.

In all of this there is a very strong streak of messianism, apotheosis and apocalypticism little different, except in its technological underpinnings, from the

more conventionally supernatural treatment of such themes elsewhere in Fantasy and Horror literature, and which frequently includes motifs and images from Christianity, as well as other religions. Both Gibson's *Neuromancer* and McAuley's *Red Dust* end in an apotheosis. <sup>10</sup> In the first, the hero's shadowy AI employer, Wintermute, unites with its Brazilian counterpart, Neuro-mancer, to form a single intelligence which expands into Cyberspace, only, it is hinted in later books, to fragment into separate autonomous intelligences which take on the personae of Voodoo gods. At the end of *Red Dust*, it is the hero, Wei Lee, who himself achieves this elevation to divinity, as, despite the murder of his physical body, he defeats the Emperor in Cyberspace to become the new, benevolent Virtual ruler of Martian Information Space, effecting democratic reforms in its structure before planning his reincarnation in the body of a boy seeded with his memories by nanotech viruses. If the messianism in the Matrix and its subsequent outing was considered excessive by some, then it's fairly certain they probably wouldn't enjoy *Red Dust*: Wei Lee himself is revealed at the end to be a genetic construct, planned from before his birth to receive the viruses which would destroy the corrupted Emperor and the tyrannous human elite who serve it. Lee himself is guided in his quest by the Virtual recreation of Elvis Presley, one aspect of a monad of personalities downloaded and adopted by a gestalt community of self-replicating probes in the Jovian atmosphere. This benign machine intelligence instead has incorporated aspects of the lives of Orpheus and Jesus into its persona, and in the end appears to Lee in cyberspace as Elvis driven in a pink Cadillac by Christ himself. While it's a slightly blasphemous handling of the person of Christ, it is a good illustration of the way the new scientific religious sensibility at the end of the 20th century was swift to adopt older, traditional religious beliefs and imagery. As such, it is only a stone's throw from notions of Christ as an ascended Master living on Venus with Aetherius, or hearing the voice of God Himself in a UFO piloted by Quazgaa.

Elsewhere in the Fantasy canon authors satisfy themselves

with their heroes undergoing a Christlike passion before destroying their enemies and passing on, like Brian Lumley's Harry Keogh in the last *Necroscope* book.

*Deadspawn*. <sup>11</sup> Now afflicted by vampirism himself, Keogh is crucified by his vampire enemy Shaitan – who obviously has more than a passing resemblance to the Judaeo-Christian Satan and Muslim Shaytan – before destroying him in an explosion. Keogh's then disembodied spirit is praised by one of the lower guardian intelligences of the Cosmos, and rewarded with reincarnation throughout the worlds of the multiverse in all of which he will retain the memory of his previous existence. As with McAuley and, to a lesser extent, Gibson, there is an urge in these books to redeem the dead. Keogh is a hero throughout the sequence of novels as he uses his powers as a necroscope to converse amicably with the dead, offering them companionship and encouraging them to create a posthumous community by talking to each other, instead of spending eternity in lonely isolation, or torturing them for their secrets as the Vampires and their human counterparts do. At the end of *Red Dust*, Lee tears down the barrier around Heaven, the part of Information Space reserved for the dead, so that its denizens can communicate with the outside world, while granting those cybernetic ghosts forced to serve the Emperor their freedom. Similarly, at the end of *Neuromancer* Case grants the artificial, posthumous personality of the Texas Flat Line its freedom and transcendence in Cyberspace. It is significant that, despite his own brain death and brief existence as a Virtual ghost in the machine environment of *Neuromancer*, the computers running the simulated reality are unable to intrude into Case's own mind, even when he is trapped in their reality, a literary attempt to preserve some portion of human freedom and transcendence even in the face of god-like omnipotent machines.

Of course, all this would be of purely literary interest were not for the fact that such a faith in the transcendent power of Information, a desire to pass beyond the 'pearly gates of Cyberspace' in Margaret Wertheimer's succinct phrase, were not held by an increasing number of people. Para-

1. Barrow, J., 'Glitch!', *New Scientist* 17th June 2003, pp. 44-45.
2. Grossman, W., 'SF Overloaded', review of Yeffeth, G., with an introduction by Gerrold, D., *Taking the Red Pill: Science, Philosophy and religion in The Matrix*, in *New Scientist*, 21st June 2003, p. 55.
3. Lem, S., 'Doctor Diagoras', in *Tales of Pirx the Pilot*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Orlando.
4. Lems S., 'Non Serviam', in *A Perfect Vacuum*, Harvest/Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Orland 1978, pp. 167-196.
5. Dick, P.K., *Valis*, Bantam; *The Divine Invasion*, Timescape, both 1981.
6. Fast, J., *Mortal Gods*, New American Library, New York 1978.
7. Benford, G., *Great Sky River*, Victor Gollancz, 1987; *Tides of Light*, 1989; *Furious Gulf*, 1994; *Sailing Bright Eternity*, 1995.
8. McAuley, P., *Red Dust*, Vista, London 1993.
9. Barnes, J., *A Million Open Doors*, Orion, London 1992.
10. Gibson, W., *Neuromancer*, Grafton, 1986.
11. Lumley, B., *Necroscope V: Deads spawn*, Grafton, London 1991.

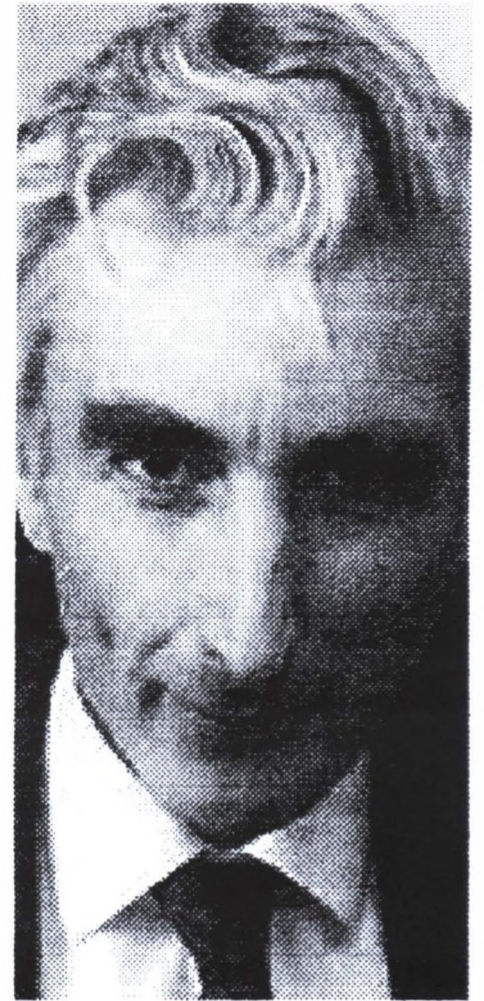
I found myself wishing for the simple, humanistic belief that valued human life as it is, not just for what it may one day become.

doxically, given Richard Dawkins' own vehement hostility to religion, his theory of memes forms a vital part of this new faith, a faith that raised its head several times during the Cheltenham Festival of Science in May this year. Discussing his latest book, *Our Final Century*, the Astronomer Royal Dr Martin Rees cautioned the audience against thinking that humanity was some kind of culmination. Our Sun was only halfway through its life, and there was no telling into what it may evolve. Like many, perhaps most professional scientists, he was unimpressed with predictions 'from flaky Californian futurologists' that nanotech 'grey goo' was going to eat the planet, though there was a real, though remote possibility that humanity would be overthrown by intelligent machines. It was on this point that the Faithful of the Wired Age arose to challenge him during the question and answer session. One young man wondered if humanity's obsolescence by its machines would be a bad thing, given that these new, artificial intelligences may care more for the environment. I found that problematic, considering that such machines would probably have even less in common with the organic world than humanity, which is doing so much to destroy it at the moment. One young woman with blazing red highlights in her hair wondered why we should be so concerned about taking all this wetware – the human body and its attendant organic requirements – into space, as it was information, such as that on her computer, which was now more important. Rees' answer was that humanity still had a long, evolutionary future ahead of it. In the metaphor for the present situation he used, if you were transported back to the end of the Devonian period to see the first fish walk out of the sea onto land, you may well have considered it an ugly brute and bludgeoned it to death. If you had done so, however, the whole of land-based life would not have evolved. It's a good point, but I found myself wishing for the simple, humanistic belief that valued human life as it is, not just for what it may one day become. Bertrand Russell was asked once by the BBC while on a CND march why he was protesting against nuclear weapons. 'Because,' said the Great Brain, 'they threaten to de-

stroy the entire human race. And some of us think that would be a very great pity.' Not perhaps the most intellectually sophisticated of answers, and recent biographies of the great man have shown that he wasn't the paragon of moral rectitude you may have expected, but the answer did have the simple virtue of a straightforward concern for humanity, even in its present state. I suddenly felt nostalgic for the fifties, where, for all the era's numerous faults, at least such uncomplicated attitudes could be aired in the face of global extinction. The intellectual environment has grown more sophisticated, more cynical, since then, to the point where a return of a little intellectual directness would not go amiss.

Back at the Cheltenham Festival, another member of the audience asked Jim Al-Kalili during his talk on his book *Quantum Physics: A Guide for the Perplexed* – whose subtitle was surely lifted from Maimonides classic of Jewish philosophy – about the conservation of information without a base in matter. Al-Kalili poured cold water on this, too. He mentioned Edward Fredkin's belief that information lay at the heart of reality, though at the moment it seemed that information always needed to be encoded in something concrete, like matter. Following questions from a sceptical neuroscientist, who wanted to know if he really believed that quantum processes in the human brain gave rise to consciousness, Al-Kalili confessed that he thought this theory, from Hameroff and Roger Penrose, was also rather too farfetched. These two, an American neurosurgeon and a respected British mathematics professor, have suggested that tubulin molecules in the brain build up quantum information by adopting, in true quantum physical fashion, two separate states at once until a critical point is reached when the structure collapses and information is spread throughout the system as a whole, creating consciousness. Al-Kalili doubted that this was actually the case, and stated that he believed the theory had only been accepted because of who Penrose was, rather than being otherwise discarded.

Fredkin's influence on the new Virtual faith of transcen-



Discussing his latest book, *Our Final Century*, the Astronomer Royal Dr Martin Rees cautioned the audience against thinking that humanity was some kind of culmination.

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dent information is strong, and has been remarked upon by Erik Davis, amongst others, but Dawkins' memes also play an important, though muted role. 12 *Meme* was the term Dawkins gave to a self-replicating unit of information in his book *The Selfish Gene*. It was originally intended to be a metaphor for the expression and replication of genetic information. His example was a limerick – a meme, which contained the coded information for its own replication, like biochemical genes. The consequent structures in the human brain which arose to record this information could be seen as its phenotype, in the way the bodies of living creatures are

the expressions of their genes. Although intended merely as a metaphor, Dawkins then went on to use it to explain the evolution and propagation of cultural traits in human societies in his subsequent book *The Extended Phenotype*, which generated a lot of attention and controversy. There is something to it – recently, information processing techniques taken from DNA analysis have been used to show the similarity between changing tastes in babies' names and genetic drift, 13 and the evolution of the P and Q Celtic tongues from a single parent language. 14 There are, however, also real drawbacks. The definition of a meme as a 'self-replicating unit of culture' is actually very vague, and can be used to cover almost every component of human society, from the insignificant – limericks, or shoe styles, say, - to the immensely powerful, such as religion and political ideologies. This is in sharp contrast to the clear definition of a gene as a tangible, biochemical phenomenon, a section of DNA coding for particular proteins.

Moreover, the initial idea of a meme has crosspollinated with cybernetic information theory, so that the vehemently antireligious Professor Dawkins can denounce religions as viruses of the mind. This last comment actually isn't as original as it appears. The comparison between superstition and disease, specifically cholera, was made as long ago as the mid-19th century by the great popular educator James Augustus St John in his book *The Education of the People*. 15 Although the analogy has become rather more contemporary with the implication religious belief is specifically like computer viruses, it does seem to be part of the curious Victorianism, that seems to inform many of Dawkins' pronouncements. The philosopher Keith Ansell Pearson in his book *Viroid Life* denounced the expectation of many Futurists that organic life would be replaced by mechanical beings as a kind of corrupt Hegelianism. 16 It's an analysis, which could very easily be extended to cover memes. Instead of history being the process of the gradual enactment on the plastic plane of transcendental ideals, history and the evolution of human society becomes merely the result of the operation of competing memes acting on human con-

sciousness. Indeed, to researchers such as Dr Sue Blackmore, the human mind is nothing more than a vehicle for these memes, just as the bodies of living organisms are no more than the vehicle for their genes. The selfish gene has become the selfish meme.

The idea of memes as autonomous, conscious informational creatures has penetrated SF, adding new dimensions to the scientific Gnosticism of the 21st century. McAuley mentioned on BBC radio's own short series investigating the transhuman condition, *Grave New Worlds*, some years ago that he was influenced by the concept of memes when inventing the nanotech viruses used by corporations and politicians in *Fairyland* to alter behaviour and voting allegiance. Going further, in Benford's last Galactic Centre novel to date, *Sailing Bright Eternity*, memes have become vast, godlike disembodied entities using gravity waves and other forms of energy as their substrate, evolved from the thoughts of the Clays, mineral intelligences based on crystalline lattices which arose to use the vast energies produced by the massive stars at the beginning of the cosmos. 17 These memes are benevolent, seeking to end the war between organic life and the robotic Mechs so that both may evolve towards the electron-positron plasma, which will survive the cosmos' final Heat Death. This drive for transcendence can be seen as a kind of positivist Godbuilding, in which humanity itself advances towards an apotheosis through collective action. In this scheme, such memes become archons, or demons, lesser gods or spirits acting as intermediaries and agents for the higher being into which humanity will one day evolve. It is but a short step from this scientifically informed literary speculation to the far less scientifically respectable theorizing of many Forteanes. Indeed, it bears more than a passing resemblance to John Keel's suggestion that UFOs, fairies and other apparitions are the products of a deranged computer at the end of time, though with the difference that these more recently postulated computational entities lack even the semblance of a physical body.

The problem with such a view of ideas as abstract autonomous beings is that it ultimately

leads back to the cry of the Idealist in Goethe's Faust: 'Ideas can be a tyranny/ To give one mental twinges/ If all my thoughts are really me/ My mind is off its hinges.' 18 People naturally rebel against notions of such determinism, as well as the view, articulated by Blackmore in her book *The Meme Machine* and elsewhere, that consciousness does not exist. It appears to contradict lived, empirical experience, as well as reducing humans to automatons controlled by their ideas and subconscious mechanisms, where the sense of self is only an illusion. It also seems, curiously, to bear the stamp of Dawkins' own moral hostility to the very phenomena he investigates. He has asserted that in his personal views he most anti-Darwinian, and railed against the 'tyranny of the selfish gene'. Culture is a way out of that biologicistic reduction of organisms to genetic determinism. In positing memes as the controlling evolutionary unit of culture, however, he has replaced genetic with cultural determinism, and so rails against them, or at least their religious expressions, as retrograde, oppressive forces. It's almost as if there is something in his psychology, which, unable to accept the notion of humans as possessors of free will, compels him to erect prisons about the human condition to denounce and strive against.

Elsewhere at the Science Festival, other aspects of contemporary fringe belief raised their head. In their talk on the possibility of life on Mars, the astronomers Heather Coupar and Nigel Henbest recounted with dismay the argument Ed Malin had over the photographing of the infamous 'Face on Mars'. Malin was one of the software engineers contracted by NASA to process the images from the Pathfinder probe. He refused to train the probe's cameras on the Face because he saw it as a publicity stunt, not true science. Faced with people demonstrating outside the gates of JPL against what they saw as a NASA cover-up to hide the existence of intelligent life on the Red Planet after the probe's imaging equipment went down after briefly capturing the Face, the NASA hierarchy insisted that Malin train the cameras back on the feature. After taking his objections all the way to Dan Goldin himself, who personally

12. Davis, E., *Techgnosis*, Serpent's Tail, London 1988, pp. 125-5, 160, 281, briefly discuss Fredkin's views of the universe as a 'cellular automata' – a Virtual simulation.

13. 'From Ashley to Zoe, its name drift at Work', *New Scientist*, 21st June 2003, p. 26.

14. 'Just once for Celtic', *New Scientist*, 5th July 2003, p. 20.

15. Davies, O., *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture 1736-1951*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 1999, p. 53.

16. Pearson, K.A., *Viroid Life: Perspectives on Nietzsche and the Transhuman Condition*, Routledge, London 1997, p. 33.

17. Benford, G., *Sailing Bright Eternity*, Vista, London 1995.

18. Goethe, trans. Wayne, P., *Faust Part 1*, Penguin, London 1949, p. 185.

insisted on it, Malin eventually complied. The episode did, however, seem to have left him bitter. While Malin's purist concern for scientific research over hype is perfectly understandable, even praiseworthy, in this instance the NASA top brass were actually quite correct in their actions. Faced with mass demonstrations at their gates and the growth of yet another irrational conspiracy myth, they were undoubtedly right in trying to forestall any further criticism by training the camera back on the Face. The result has been that the Face stood revealed as an ordinary mesa without any particularly strong resemblance to the human physiognomy, though Coupar jokingly suggested that this was due to the Martians coming out in the meantime to chip away at it to mislead us. As for the photograph apparently showing a sandwhale crawling at the bottom of a transparent plastic tube miles long, which so excited Arthur C. Clarke amongst others, Malin suggested that the image be rotated 90°, at which it becomes an ordinary slumped dune at the bottom of a gully system. Faced with unfamiliar perspectives, the mind can play tricks even on the best of us, so that it is easy for even sceptics to see creatures which aren't there.

A classic example of this, which Coupar and Henbest mentioned earlier in their lecture, was Percival Lowell's notorious canals. These haven't been recorded since they were effectively disproven by Antoniadi c. 1916, and numerous astronomers and historians have wondered what he, and others like him, was looking at. Coupar recalled a conversation she had at Flagstaff with Clyde Tombaugh, the discoverer of Pluto. Tombaugh told her that he had seen canals on Mars plenty of times using Lowell's telescope. In fact, the telescope was rather too powerful, so that Mars became too bright to look at through it when it was closest to Earth. Lowell had solved this problem by stopping it down – effectively reducing the instrument's magnifying power – by placing a plywood board half over its aperture. Tombaugh himself had seen the canals, but always when he too had placed a board across it. This suggests that the canals were an illusion created by this technique, though it must also be added that Lowell and

other astronomers like him were keen to see the specific features noted by Schiaparelli on his maps. Schiaparelli himself had failing eyesight, not recognised at the time, and so it's quite likely that many of the astronomers who saw his canals had persuaded themselves to see features which were tragically optical illusions produced by the fading eyesight of a once brilliant observer.

Lastly, Coupar and Henbest discussed the possibility of human colonisation, both by terraforming and its alternative, the genetic modification of humans to survive on Mars in its present condition. Such a variety of humanity – *Homo Sapiens Martialis* – would need a tough, leathery skin to survive the radiation flux, and to get their oxygen by other means than from the atmosphere, possibly using altered livers to extract oxygen from fluids. This new breed of humanity was illustrated by a slide showing what could well have been three Greys emerging from the fog. The talk's host jocularly declared that he already knew a good many people with leathery skins and dodgy livers, speculating that perhaps they were Martians. Despite the tentativeness of this speculation, you do wonder how long it will be before this image of *Homo Sapiens Martialis* turns up in the fringe literature as fact, perhaps as time travelling colonists from the Red Planet's future, in the way that the speculative reconstruction by Dr Dale Russell of the intelligent dinosaur which would have evolved if the Chicxulub asteroid impact had not occurred got roped into the UFO myth as the true identity of the alien Greys in David Buxton's 1995 *Aliens: The Final Answer*.

Finally, Dr Kevin Fong's talk on Medicine for Mars on the Saturday contained a detail, which should caution anyone against taking anomalous experiences reported by astronauts at face value. Discussing the immense physical and psychological challenges facing voyagers into the Deep Black, Fong, the director of Britain's Institute of Space Medicine, and who himself had served on shuttle rescue and retrieval crews, stated that astronauts were vulnerable to auditory and visual hallucinations. As were submarine crews, where it is the second most common cause of manoeuvres being abandoned

after ordinary accidents. On one mission, two Russian cosmonauts were caught staring out of a port-hole, as one had heard a dog barking and a baby crying. On another mission, two crewmembers had woken up to find a third about to take a spacewalk with his oxygen hose unattached. When questioned, the cosmonaut could give no reason for his potentially fatal actions, apart from the fact that he felt like taking a spacewalk. Given the isolation, incredibly cramped condition aboard spacecraft, and the intense physical disorientation, which occurs in microgravity, it is not surprising that the crews may occasionally suffer such episodes. It does, however, suggest that any UFOs, which may be reported by such crews from time to time could similarly be the result of such episodes, or optical illusions created by the problems of adapting to weightlessness. The immensity of space is deceptive, as well as mysterious.

From all this it may also be concluded that the cult of information, however, deeply felt, is as much a literary construct as a scientific postulate. This is not necessarily a criticism: myth is essentially a creation of the imaginal realm wherein poets of all eras have found their inspiration. Much of the embryonic science of early ages also found expression in poetry, from Empedocles to Lucretius' long *De Re Natura*, whose atheism and scepticism made its translation one of the more scandalous literary products of the 17th century. Even now there is a considerable corpus of poetry inspired by science. The mythographic tendencies of much science fiction are merely the latest expression of the perennial human drive to construct myths and cosmogonies from scientific speculation. Those scientists writing such are only following a long line of philosopher-adepts pointing to transcendent worlds available to the human intellect from the renaissance magi to Pythagoras and beyond. It does, however, warn us that other scientific minds, more fixed on the reality of what actually occurs, rather than dreaming of other, more glorious worlds, are much more sceptical of its reality. It's a pity that some of this scepticism towards the wilder claims of certain futurists and technological visionaries were not rather more widespread.



**Faced with unfamiliar perspectives, the mind can play tricks even on the best of us, so that it is easy for even sceptics to see creatures which aren't there. A classic example of this was Percival Lowell's notorious Martian canals.**

# COOK'S TOUR

## A Trip Down the Mean Streets of Ufology

By Curtis Peebles

It was a hot day in the late summer of 2002. I was in a bookstore in Palmdale and saw a copy of Nick Cook's *The Hunt for Zero Point*. [1] As I read Cook's story of secret anti-gravity technology, Nazi flying saucers, Black airplanes, shadowy sources, and sinister cover-ups, all told in a breathless first-person account, I realized that UFOlogy had returned to its roots. Not simply the technological nuts and bolts of the 1950s, but back to the books of Donald Keyhoe and their atmosphere of "saucer-noir." As the name suggests, the nature and tone mirrored hard-boiled detective novels of the 1930s.

Raymond Chandler put it simply: "The story is this man's adventure in search of a hidden truth." In search of that truth, the hero must travel "down these mean streets," on a journey which leads to official lies and obstacles at every turn. [2]

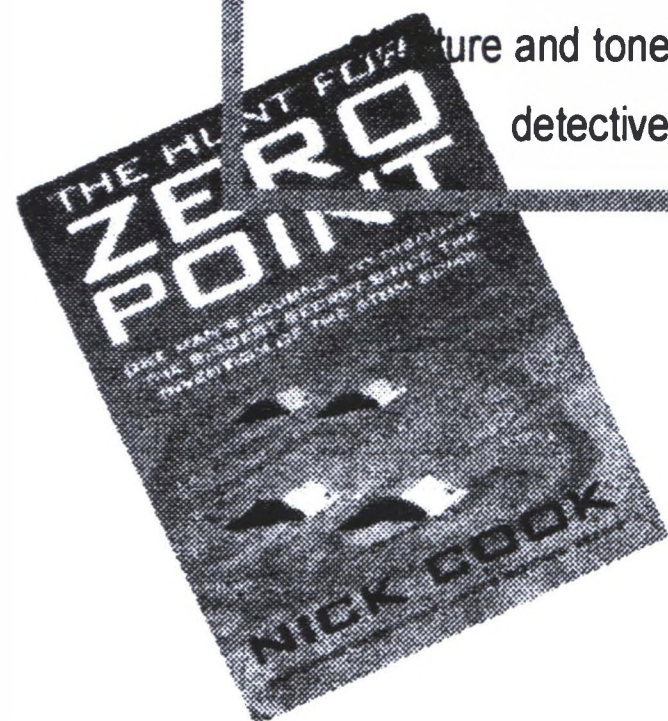
Cook's journey begins at the F-117A crash site near Bakersfield, California. His guide was Sheriff's Deputy "Amelia Lopez," who had witnessed the crash when a law student on a

camping trip with friends near the Kern River. She had just gotten into her sleeping bag early on the morning of July 11, 1986 when the sonic boom from the F-117A hit their campsite, sending a shower of embers from the fire. The horizon was then lit up as the aircraft slammed into Saturday Peak some ten miles away. The group headed for the crash site, but had gone only five miles be-

fore being confronted on a trail by an Air Force "red team," flown in by helicopter to secure the site. "Lopez" was thrown to the ground, had a boot on her back, and a gun held to her head. When they were finally released, the group went back to the camp site, where "Lopez" talked to a reporter. A decade later, Cook tracks "Lopez" down from the newspaper report, and she reluctantly agrees to show him the crash site. [3]

Cook and "Lopez" arrived near the crash site in the early evening, then headed up a slope. They crossed an old, broken-down barbed wire fence, and entered the brush. They reached the crash site just as the Sun was setting. It was about 2,000 feet below the summit of the mountain. Here, Cook wrote, "the ground was even and covered with a crusty layer of dirt. The plants and trees were younger than the vegetation we'd passed on the way up. But that was the only real clue that something had happened here." "Lopez" then comments that "I read they sieved the dirt for a thousand yards out from the impact point....A few weeks after they left it was like nothing ever happened here."

Cook continued that "there was no physical evidence - no fragments amidst the thin soil and the rocks - to suggest anything out of the ordinary had occurred....But they left something behind, something you couldn't see or touch - and it was that trace, that echo of past deeds, that brought me here....it told me there was a secret out there and that it



was so big no one person held all of the pieces. I knew, too, that whatever it was, the secret had a dark heart, because I could smell the fear that held it in place." As they went back down the hill, Cook concluded, "Through half-closed eyes, I could almost reach out and touch it." [4]

As I read Cook's hard-boiled soliloquy on that hot summer day, I realized it had a few loose ends, such as the missing flag pole.

In July of 1986, the 4450th Tactical Group operated three squadrons of F-117s at an airfield at the Tonopah Test Range (TTR) in northern Nevada. The group's cover was as an avionics and evaluation unit for the A-7 aircraft. During the day, the F-117s were locked away in hangars, which were not opened until one hour after sunset. Two waves of training missions were flown each weeknight, the "early-go" and the "late-go." The F-117s had to complete their late-go missions, land back at TTR, and be in their hangars with the doors closed one hour before sunrise. The pace of operations at TTR, combined with the nighttime schedule, took a toll on the F-117 pilots, and this was the root cause of the Bakersfield crash. [5]

Maj. Ross E. Mulhare was scheduled for a late-go mission on the morning of Friday, July 11, 1986. As he prepared for the flight, Mulhare told a colleague that he was tired and "just couldn't shake it." His call sign for the flight was Ariel 31. Two other F-117s were also flying the same planned route, at intervals behind his aircraft.

Mulhare took off from TTR at 1:13 a.m. PDT, in F-117A serial number 81-0792. The night was clear, with no Moon. He flew northwest to the town of Tonopah, Nevada, then turned southwest and climbed to an altitude of 20,000 feet. He was in radio contact during the flight with air traffic controllers at the Los Angeles and Oakland Centers. Mulhare's transmissions and the aircraft's transponder signals indicated that he was flying an A-7. Mulhare then crossed the Sierra Nevada mountains, and turned south along the edge of the San Joaquin Valley. Mulhare received a controller's permission to descend to 19,000 feet. Nearing Bakersfield, Mulhare turned southeast, re-

quested a descent to 17,000 feet, and then canceled his instrument flight plan at 1:44 a.m. The F-117 then slipped into a steep dive, at an angle of 20 to 60 degrees, apparently due to Mulhare's fatigue and disorientation. With its twin jet engines at full power, the F-117 accelerated towards the ground. [6]

Below, Andy Hoyt, his sister Lisa, and her sixteen-year-old son Joey had parked at a rest stop when they saw the descending vehicle. Hoyt said later that, "It seemed like it was something other than an airplane. Believe it or not, I thought it was a UFO." He was unable to get a good look at it, telling a reporter, "All I saw were three red lights and a dark image behind them like an upside-down triangle," which disappeared behind a hill opposite them. Suddenly, a pair of explosions "lit up the sky like it was daylight out." The F-117 hit the ground at 1:45 a.m., killing Mulhare instantly. [7]

The first on the scene were a Kern County Sheriff Department search team. The crash sparked a fire in the Sequoia National Forest, which burned 150 acres before being contained by mid-morning. The Air Force condoned off the crash site, and the firefighters were not allowed within the area. They were also required to sign forms agreeing not to discuss what they had seen. The surrounding area was declared a National Defense Area. This prevented access by unauthorized personnel on the ground, and closed the airspace above it. Although Mulhare was identified as the pilot, no details about the aircraft were released. This fueled press speculation that an "F-19 stealth fighter" had crashed. [8]

The crash site itself was nearly inaccessible, even though it was located only 15 nautical miles from Bakersfield. The F-117 had impacted on a steep and rugged wall of the Kern River Canyon. The slopes were covered with thin grass, with only a few clumps of light brush, and a few scattered maple, oak, and pine trees. Cattle trails meander through the area. Although the impact point was directly opposite the Live Oak Picnic Area, the slope is such that the crash site could not be seen from the rest stop. State Highway 178 runs along the floor of the canyon, but the crash site was on the op-

posite slope, and direct access was cut off by the Kern River.

Rather than trying to cross the river, then climb up the steep slope, the Air Force recovery crew approached from the rim of the canyon. A small bulldozer cut a winding trail down a ridge to a point above the impact point, where a helicopter pad was leveled out. Search crews and investigators were brought in by UH-1 helicopters flying from Meadows Field at Bakersfield. The sight which greeted them was stunning. The F-117's impact had dug a pit in the ground, and debris was thrown out in a fan-shaped pattern that covered well over a hundred yards, across a steep slope, over a ridge, and down the other side. [9]

What the recovery crew did over the next month later became a subject of controversy. A retired Lockheed official, now deceased, stated that the recovery crew went out a thousand yards beyond the last piece of debris, dug up the soil, and then sifted through every cubic foot for any debris. Once all traces had been removed, debris from a F-101 that had crashed at Groom Lake in the 1960s was scattered around the area. His comments were later repeated in books and articles. [10]

The recovery operation was completed on Wednesday, August 6, 1986, when the ground personnel were withdrawn from the area. The following afternoon, Thursday, August 7, the access restrictions on the crash site were lifted. A press conference was held about a mile from the site. All that remained, an Air Force spokesman told a group of reporters, was a scorched patch of ground. The next morning, the crash site had its first civilian visitors. [11]

On Friday, August 8, KERO-TV Channel 23 reporter Karl Schweitzer, cameraman Carlos Espinoza, helicopter pilot David Richards, and an earth scientist flew to the site, landing at the dirt pad. Schweitzer said later that they had not expected to find any debris, believing that the Air Force had removed every trace. Instead, they discovered countless small fragments within 100 to 150 feet of the landing pad. He and Espinoza filled three plastic food storage bags with pieces in 20 minutes.

Schweitzer described the fragments as pieces of plastic and

1. Nick Cook "The Hunt For Zero Point One Man's Journey to Discover the Biggest Secret Since the Invention of the Atom Bomb" (London: Arrow, 2001).

2. Raymond Chandler, "The Simple Art of Murder" (New York: Vantage Books, 1988), p.18.

3. Cook "The Hunt For Zero Point," p.x, xi. Cook notes that he deliberately blurred Lopez's identity.

4. Ibid, p xi-xiii.

5. James Goodall, "F-117 Stealth in Action," (Carrollton, Tex: Squadron/Signal Publications, 1991) p. 3038.

6. William B. Scott, "F-117A Crash Reports Cite Pilot Fatigue, Disorientation," *Aviation Week & Space Technology* (May 15, 1989), p.22, and Bill Sweetman and Jim Goodall, "Lockheed F-117A" (Osceola, Wisconsin: Motorbooks, 1990) p. 81, 82.

7. "Man saw stealth' jet crash," undated newspaper clipping from the F-117A 81-0792 accident report. It is not clear from the story if Andy Hoyt and the others were at the Live Oak Picnic Area or the Upper Richbar Picnic Area. The latter is about a mile up stream, and around a bend in the Kern River from the crash site.

8. "Pentagon seals off plane crash site," *San Diego Union* (July 12, 1986) A-1, "Crew works to salvage secret plane," *San Diego Union* (July 13, 1986) A-2, and "USAF Aircraft Destroyed in Crash Believed to Be Stealth Fighter," *Aviation Week & Space Technology* (July 21, 1986) p.22, 23.

circuit boards, various metal fragments, some non-metallic mesh, and "a piece of shiny metal shaped like a nozzle." Most of the debris was about an inch in size, while the largest was two-and-a-half inches by one inch. Richards said that the debris he saw looked like stainless steel nuts and tubing, metal fragments, and composite material. The scientist found none of the debris was radioactive. KERO showed the recovered debris on their Friday newscasts.

The news crew found something else, as well. Overlooking the impact point, atop a rocky mound in the middle of the gully, a twenty-foot tall pole with a U.S. flag had been set up by the recovery personnel as a memorial to Major Mulhare.

The Air Force contacted KERO on Saturday, August 9, the day after the broadcast. Helicopter pilot Richards was also contacted on the same day, by an individual who identified himself as being with the Air Force. Apparently suspicious of the approach, Richards then called the FBI, and turned over the debris that he had collected to its personnel. He explained that, "I didn't want to inadvertently turn it over to any foreign agents." The following Monday, August 11, an Air Force public affairs officer from Edwards AFB, Lt. Col. Jerry Guess, came to the station to collect the three bags of debris. He said that the debris would be examined, but there were no plans to return to the crash site for an additional search. [12]

The crash site soon received two additional visitors, Bill Marvel, a former Air Force Captain, and Dave Lewis. If Cook's description of the site was a trip down Raymond Chandler's mean streets, Marvel and Lewis' visit was more akin to the adventures of Indiana Jones. Their quest began only two days after the crash. They flew over the site, above the 8,000 foot restricted altitude, and marked the location. They could see trucks and bulldozers on the rim of the canyon, but not the actual crash site. Then, in early September, soon after the restrictions were lifted, they made a low-level pass to map out the route they would use for the climb.

They made the first attempt to reach the site in early October, but they were unable cross the fast-flowing Kern River. They

were told by the Forest Service that a search was still underway for five people who had drowned while rafting. (Since 1968, over a hundred people have died in such accidents on the Kern River.) Eventually finding a possible crossing point, they decided to try again the next weekend.

The pair returned on October 18. The spot on the Kern River was not too wide nor had too swift a current, and they crossed in a rubber raft. Once safely across, they began the hike up the steep slope, through v-shaped gullies. When they reached the general area of the crash, they heard the drone of an approaching military helicopter, and they hid under burned bushes. The helicopter had its wheels down, as if about to land. Marvel and Lewis thought they might have tripped a sensor. The helicopter hovered for several minutes, then raised its gear and flew off.

Marvel and Lewis spent some two hours combing the area for debris. They were able to find the impact point, reconstruct the direction the aircraft had been headed, and the size of the debris field. The fragments were tiny bits of aluminum and titanium. Then, Marvel caught the toe of his boot on a large buried object. This proved to be an engine component, seven inches in diameter and weighing six pounds. Marvel said later, "We never expected to find anything that big. Maybe it was totally covered over with dirt when the Air Force was in there scouring every inch, and then maybe the rain washed away enough dirt for me to see it."

Marvel and Lewis then climbed farther up the slope, to the flag pole. They still thought the crash site would be monitored, and suspected the guard who called in the helicopter might be there. When the pair reached, the flag pole, they found the site was deserted. They were the only people at the site. [13]

Marvel told the Los Angeles Times about the adventure. As with KERO, the Air Force contacted Marvel, asking that he return the debris. Marvel never expected to be able to keep it, and offered to fly it up to Edwards AFB or deliver it to the Air Force station in El Segundo, where he had worked as a spacecraft engineer in the early 1970s. The Air Force did not want anyone else to

touch it, however, and Colonel Guess made a special trip from Edwards to Marvel's home. During the visit, he said that the recovery crew had killed some fifty rattlesnakes and numerous scorpions during the operation. Colonel Guess added that there would be no further contact from the Air Force. [14]

As I continued reading *The Hunt for Zero Point* I kept thinking about the prologue. Cook's description of the crash site and the loose ends kept nagging at me. Marvel's photos and account, the newspaper articles, aerial photos, and the declassified accident report painted a very different picture of the F-117 crash site than Cook's rather bland description. Nothing was said about crossing the raging Kern River, or having to struggle up a steep and rugged slope fit only for mountain goats. Cook wrote that he and "Lopez" crossed an old, broken-down barbed wire fence, yet there is no such fence at the crash site. When they reached the site, no mention was made of the flag pole. Cook specifically said that there were no fragments, which was counter to what the KERO crew as well as Marvel and Lewis reported.

I smiled as I put the book back on the shelf and headed out the door. The summer heat baked the parking lot. In the distance, the brown hills loomed above the city. There were a couple of things I had to track down to be sure that my suspicions were correct. Once I had the information, there was only one conclusion possible: Cook and "Lopez" went to the wrong place.

9. Aerial photos, topographic maps of the area, and the debris field map in the F-117A 81-0972 accident report.

10. Goodall, "F-117 Stealth in Action," p. 16. Had such an excavation been made, it would have covered an area of nearly a square mile, and the site would have resembled a strip mine. No such evidence is visible in Marvel and Lewis' photos, or later aerial shots. The claim that F-101 debris was left at the site is also false. The fragments of composite materials recovered by the KERO crew are consistent with what is now known about the F-117's design.

11. "Probe Ends at Site of Mystery Jet Crash," undated newspaper clipping.

12. David Holley, "TV Crew Finds Debris at AF Jet Crash Site," Los Angeles Times (August 12, 1986), and "TV station hands over wreckage from mystery crash to Air Force," Los Angeles Daily News (August 12, 1986).

13. A first-hand description of Marvel and Lewis' climb, as well as photos of the river crossing, slope, the crash site, flag pole, and the recovered debris are at [www.f-117a.com/](http://www.f-117a.com/)

14. Bob Williams, "Captain Marvel Finds What Does Not Exist Part of Stealth Mystery," Los Angeles Times (November 27, 1986).

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# THE RAEFIELD AFFAIR

## Matt Graeber

In Magonia 78 (June 2002) Matt Graeber discussed a 'down-to-earth' variety of UFO experience that he called 'a dynamic display'.

Graeber believes that such displays are "unique symbolic dramatisations" of the observer's personal life status at the time of their UFO encounter; and that the UFO event seems to reflect both the 'situational' and 'confrontational' character of the witness's problems. In this case study he takes another look at a dynamic display (or UFO 'self perception) that took place on a busy highway in broad daylight.

This report comes to us from a 29-year-old man whom we shall call Mr Raefield. On the misty morning of August 26, 1976, near Chester, Pennsylvania, he encountered four discoid UFOs which somehow managed to knock out his CB radio set and foul up his automobile's performance. Here, transcribed word-for-word, is his account:

"Time - 0637 (hours) - While driving to work,

north on I-95, I observed four disk-shaped objects, three ahead and to my left, and one ahead to my right. All the objects were about 100 yards above any existing or man-made structures. The objects seemed to be approximately 300 yards ahead of me.

"I had my CB in my car and was transmitting at the time of sighting, my transmission was as follows: 'Breaker 19 for a south-bound on 95. Oh my God! There's three bogies over houses around

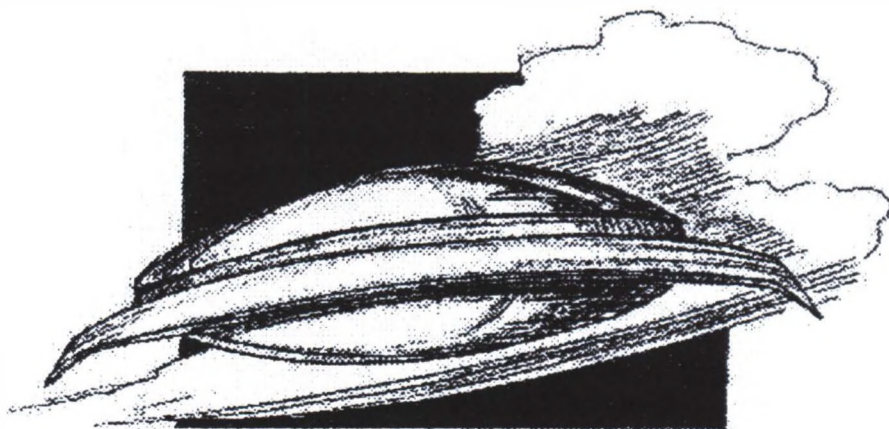
Highland Avenue!' Someone replies, 'Breaker 19, I see them bogies!'

"At that instant my radio went dead, not off, just dead! I am very certain that what I saw was real, not a reflection of gas [vapours] of any kind. I knew what I saw was not any type of aircraft that I have ever seen before. I've worked for an airline for nearly nine years. The objects were close enough that they did not look distorted. I estimate that they were about the size of a single-engine aircraft - like a Piper cub, about 19 feet long. No noise was apparent. A pale yellowish-white colour emanated from all the UFOs. Also, as they left, a very pale green colour was around the middle of the entire craft from the direction I was coming."

The duration of the complete sighting was estimated to be about 45 seconds.

### A Misidentification?

The investigative report's findings indicate that we have several very good reasons to suspect that birds (probably gulls or terns) were actually the objects that Raefield observed. However, we also know that this witness has some practical experience at observing aircraft on a daily basis and because of his reliable and intelligent character it is difficult to imagine how he could have been so far off-base and to have mistaken terns, or even the larger gulls in flight to be comparable in size to a Piper aircraft. Additionally, even with this fluke of optics explained, there still remains the question of how a



ARTIST'S RENDERING OF THE RAEFIELD UFO

sighting of birds could cause a CB-radio to malfunction, and radically affect the relatively new car's otherwise good performance.

As you probably know, the misidentification of birds is a very common source of UFO reports. In fact one of the most widely publicised cases involving such an event took place in Lubbock, Texas, on the night of 25 August 1951. At that time a group of observers, including several scientists, witnesses many faintly luminous objects silently traversing the sky at an estimated 50,000 feet. Regrettably someone even went so far as to help the story along by producing bogus photos of what was reported. Fortunately, the photos were of such poor quality that the matter was finally brought into proper perspective, after being blown out of proportion by an overzealous, and for the most part unsuspecting, press.

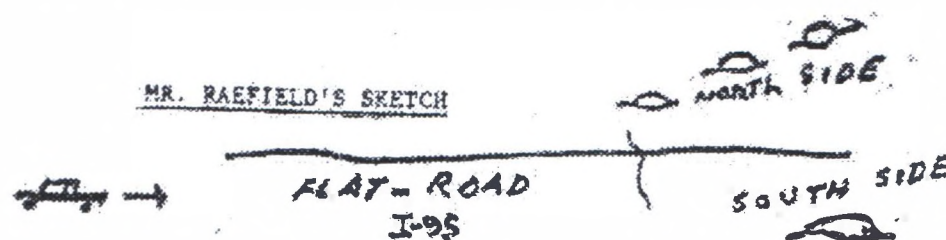
the sky phantoms that flew over Lubbock on that night were said to have been high-flying plover (wingspan approximately one foot) which were dimly illuminated on their feathery undersides by streetlights

In the files of UFORIC (the Philadelphia-based UFO Report and Information Center) there is an account of a spectacular daylight sighting of many luminous spheres, made with the aid of a rooftop telescope at the Franklin Institute, in Philadelphia. This sighting caused quite a stir amongst several in-house technicians and 62 tourists who signed their names to a witness list of the event. Interestingly, what they actually had observed were 'blurred images' of gulls (described as fleeting ping-pong balls in the reports) which were observed sweeping across the lens of the telescope which was pre-set to search the early morning skies for the planet Mercury

In addition to this type of misidentification, the noted UFO sceptic Donald Menzel described a distraught witness in New England who had mistakenly reported a flock of gulls for an enemy parachute invasion just three days after the Pearl Harbor attack.

So, one can easily account for the tremendously inaccurate estimates of the UFO's size in some reports simply because of the effects of various atmospheric

conditions existing at the time of the event, the separating powers of the human eye at the distance, and the effects of subjective emotional and/or anxiety-laden tensions and fears which may adversely affect one's judgement considerably. In our witness's case the assumed size of the UFOs to that of a Piper aircraft does, of course, automatically provoke the *piloted* though, and in addition to that other visual clues such as the UFOs' seemingly fixed sky positioning, came across as being an example of a rather well-disciplined flying formation to Mr Raefield. However, a closer examination of the event illustrates that all of the above may have been little more than a chain of mistaken assumptions which, cu-



*MR. RAEFIELD HAS MISTAKENLY IDENTIFIED THE NORTH AND SOUTH SIDES OF THE HIGHWAY IN HIS SKETCH.*

riously, tended to verify and reinforce each other. The problem is that we seldom bother to verify what we have seen with our own eyes, and of course one does not have the opportunity to replay a UFO experience for critical evaluation.

#### **Witness sincerity**

But, since our witness's sincerity in filing the report is beyond question and because it is the very 'stuff' of so many other UFO reports, we must consider the fact that the mere sight of these strange objects must have been a tremendous psychological shock for Mr Raefield. In fact, we might even go so far as to suspect that in such a state (observing and rapidly approaching four alien craft) he was probably experiencing the event emotionally and physiologically as well. Perhaps he was sweating, nervous, stammering and experiences a momentarily loss of control over his car (i.e. it is suspected that Mr Raefield's auto drifted onto the roadside shoulder during the UFO experience, simply because his attention was fixed on the UFOs and not the highway). Therefore the abrupt and

acutely rough 'feel' of the shoulder's texture which was transmitted through the steering column caused him to assume mistakenly that the engine was malfunctioning.

Additionally, he was aware of the fact that quite a number of well-publicised UFO accounts inform us that UFOs are alleged to have the capability to knock out and adversely affect an impressive array of terrestrial apparatus and instrumentation. But it could also be that he had in confusion turned off the switch of the CB set during the sudden event. Such 'all too human' happenings are not uncommon when an individual is under great emotional stress or when one perceives a di-

rect threat to one's safety.

If fact such things can even happen when the tasks required of an individual so affected are supposedly very simple, and indeed often 'second nature'. An example of this might be a lady who cannot fasten the clasp of her necklace no matter how hard she tries, simply because her dinner guests have arrived fifteen minutes early, and have completely upset her plans.

On such occasions the problem might reach such proportions that she might call for her husband's assistance, whilst claiming that the clasp must be broken. In so doing she has shifted the cause of her emotional state, its accompanying nervousness and her diminished dexterity, to an alleged fault in the necklace. It seems reasonable to suspect that our witness may have done the same thing - for he informed investigators that the car and CB radio performed very well just before and immediately after his UFO encounter.

With such considerations behind our efforts, we must now attempt to take a more penetrating look at Mr Raefield's psychologi-

Since our witness's sincerity in filing the report is beyond question, we must consider the fact that the mere sight of these strange objects was a tremendous psychological shock

cal make-up before, after, and especially during the event, for our probe of the sighting particulars and the search for physical evidence to establish the fact he alleged (observing an extraterrestrial visitation) certainly appears to have been so reduced that only a 'subjective' psychological occurrence of a marked character could account for the report's emergence.

In other words, our witness may have been primed (or 'set') to see four gulls in a certain

lacking feminine touches such as fancy curtains, etc) although it was quite orderly. Oh yes, one small room in particular caught our eye, for it was obviously over-furnished - by that I mean to say that he had a stereo, TV, end table, and an extra-wide reclining lounge crammed into it. This, he explained, was his favourite niche, the place where he and his girlfriend spent peaceful moments together.

As the interview continued, Mr Raefield informed us of his recent 'marital difficulties', and this new light, when shed upon case particulars which were already gathered, seemed to bring several things into focus, which led to the following commentary of the Raefield case

#### Tentative findings: possible psychological factors involved in the UFO report.

This report indicates that the observer is travelling to work, when suddenly, on the highway ahead of him he notices four flying saucers; three of them are situated on his left side, and the fourth disc on his right. The latter, although identical to the others in design appears to be rather smaller, or perhaps more distantly positioned. In this instance, the objects on the left side of the roadway may be interpreted as a *triadic subconscious assemblage* (or symbols) that were projected upon Mr Raefield's faulty observation of the gulls. So, on an unconscious level, these misidentified gulls may represent his family (an estranged wife and two children). While the fourth object, on the right, though appearing to be somewhat small or more remote, nevertheless has the potential of being of the same significance to him by virtue of its exact likeness to the other UFOs. I suspect this symbol is a *symbolic representation* of his new love and the *developing* relationship with her. If so, these dynamically-charged symbols indicate that the observer is heading towards the fourth UFO which has its own uniqueness, in that it is situated on his side of the road, which loosely translates as "on his side" in his difficulties.

It is interesting to note that the three objects on the left side of the highway are a potential threat to his progression in reaching his destination, which lies in the direction of the smaller object. For, at any moment, they could

intercept him simply by crossing over the central reservation of the highway, to 'cut him off at the pass', so to speak. Instead our observer pulls his car off the road (after experiencing some sort of engine and CB malfunction) to take a better look at these fantastic objects; and just as suddenly as they appeared, with an unusual 'jerky motion' they 'blink out' simultaneously. (both the jerky motion and the blink-out effect' are extraordinarily common descriptions of UFO behaviour), Raefield then looks about quickly for the fourth object, only to discover that that too, has vanished. He ponders his UFO experience, in light of the difficulties with his car, the other motorist's transmitted message, and the CB's sudden failure. It seems that much has happened in such a short time, and his mind is still reeling at the marvel of seeing alien craft.

If we take a closer look at the general appearance of these objects (as illustrated by the witness) we have little difficulty in understanding how an early morning observation made through mist might have distorted the appearance of soaring waterfowl which are frequently seen flying about the roadway, due to its close proximity to the Delaware River.

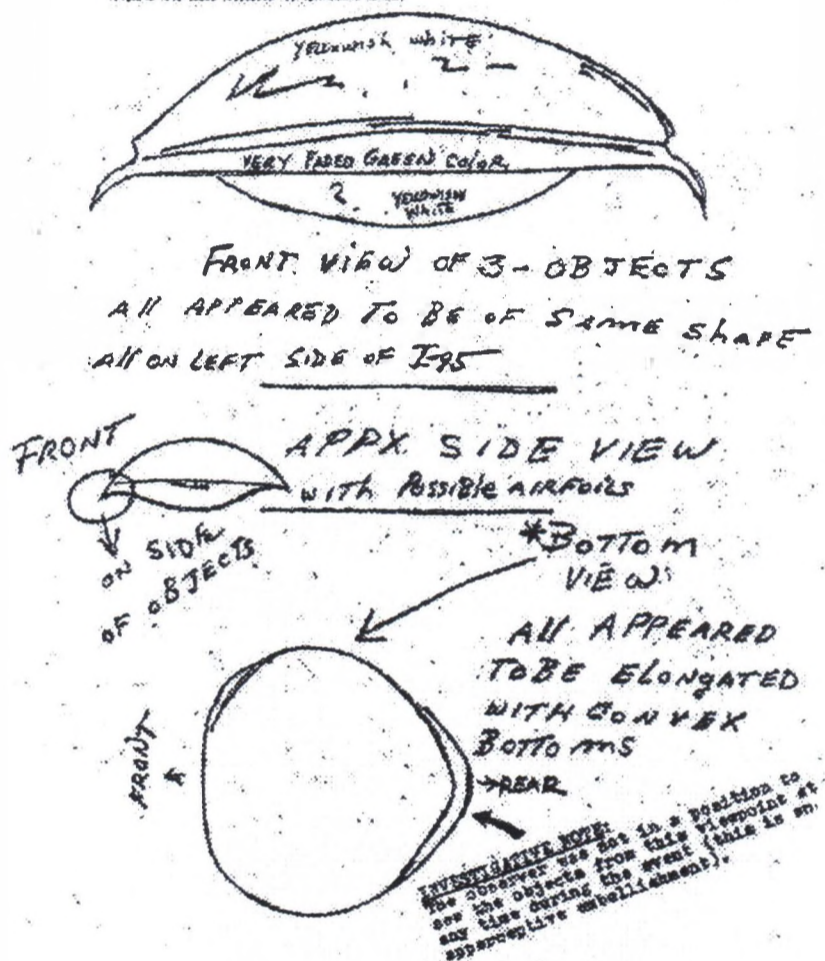
This seems to be more than a reasonable suspicion for, as you might suspect, the combination of the car's motion and the birds' gliding flight could easily produce the hovering appearance of the UFOs - in addition to this, the atmospheric conditions at the time of the sighting may also have contributed to the illusion by acting as a sort of prism through which the misty morning's light reflected off the birds' white feathers and created the interesting UFO coloration reported (soft greens, whites, and pale yellows). The downward slant of the UFOs' protrusions situated on the ends of the craft also points towards this avian speculation since gulls in flight often assume pronounced downward slanted wing attitudes when gliding along, hanging on the thermals.

As the reader can see, a curious thing has happened here, for the dynamics of an actual physical event (the UFO/bird sighting) have precisely mirrored the psychodynamics of an unconscious psychical complex affecting the observer (i.e., his immediate

Mr. Raefield's sketch

Page 4

MR. RAEFIELD'S SKETCH:



#### The Raefield Interview

When my wife Grace, and I interviewed him, we found that he was a very interesting and intelligent person - he was sincere and did not come across as the type of person who would intentionally exaggerate his experience. He worked two jobs, liked to read novels and some science fiction, but most of all he enjoyed technical publications on photography, which is his hobby. He was fond of art, and we noticed two poster-sized prints hanging on his apartment walls. One was a more-or-less religiously-toned rendition of hands (similar to Albrecht Durer's *Praying Hands*); while the other was an interesting abstract work in pale yellows, soft greys and greens.

His manner of dress was casual and his apartment was definitely batcheloresque (i.e.



marital problems). So, in a strange way, the witness was actually observing and experiencing a real world happening and his inner world's tensions and fears on display. This unusual mix of perception and projection is then a kind of 'subjective dramatisation'.

In this case, it seems reasonable to suspect that the impact of perceiving such a vivid 'dynamic display' as we've come to call such UFO experiences, would transform the birds into what fits Mr Raefield's, and the world's view of the *great expectation* of our times (i.e.; contact with a highly advanced extraterrestrial civilisation) especially since so few positive visual clues as to the birds true identity were available to his conscious powers of perception in the first place.

If so, then the fact that a second (albeit unidentified) motorist who also saw the bogies in the sky does not in the least bit threaten or destroy our psychological estimate of the situation. For, surely, that individual would have had similar difficulties in recognising what he was looking at through the early morning haze. Unfortunately that motorist did not file a report with the UFORIC, local police authorities of the International Airport, which is located several miles from the sighting area.

#### Summary on the Raefield UFO encounter

It seems to be apparent that our observer's personal problems may have been directly projected on a faulty UFO observation - but we cannot, in good conscience dismiss the fact that this synchronous interplay of both internal and external elements was caused by an actual physical event, as well as being a coincidence, for we know that the witness was 'psychically set' to be looking for an answer to his problems, as well as fearing to run headlong into them, even though he may have been com-

pletely unconscious of the fact at the time of his encounter.

Thus, we have discussed how the symbolic contents which were buried in the human psyche can be catapulted into the field of consciousness during a UFO encounter, through the mechanism of a visually-triggered process of self-perception and emotional responsiveness.

But beyond our seemingly in-depth analysis of this UFO encounter, we must also ponder the fact that the investigators of this case cannot categorically prove that Mr Raefield's experience was triggered by a faulty observation of gulls on the wing. In fact he has never accepted this prosaic explanation, and insists that he accurately reported on the size, configuration and coloration of the four strange craft he observed above the highway.

In light of this impasse, and because of similar statements voiced by others who had similar UFO experiences, I had to consider the possibilities that either the observers were simply reluctant to accept the idea that they had made an honest mistake about what they had seen with their own eyes; or, that I had completely failed to present them with a convincing explanation to what may have actually happened to them.

The problem is that the unsuspecting UFO observers seldom have the opportunity to closely scrutinise the sudden, shocking, and fleeting objects that come upon them. And because the highly emotional experience is theirs (not the researchers), one should not underestimate it's subjective uniqueness and psychological value to them. For, if a Dynamic Display-type UFO experience is a visually-triggered 'self-regulating' function of the human psyche, one should not attempt to extinguish its potentially beneficial affect upon the

experiencers by reducing it to a mere optical fluke of some sort.

Could it be that some UFOs *are* from outer space, while still others hail from the depths of

man's innerspace; that is, his unconscious mind? Perhaps UFO reports like Mr. Raefield's offer us a brief glimpse at both the physical and psychical components of the UFO experience and, in so doing, brings us a bit closer to understanding this enigmatic phenomenon? It seems reasonable to suspect that this may be the case, and that by including investigative inquiries along these lines to those currently employed by researchers, we may both enhance our skills and expand our knowledge on the UFOs as well as those who observe them.

## 25 YEARS AGO

Two articles in the Summer 1978 issue of MUFOB raised an issue which is still a subject of debate among ufologists: the question of how much a UFO experience becomes 'public property' when it is reported on and investigated by researchers.

An article by Nigel Watson, 'Anatomy of a Percipient', subsequently reprinted and extended in his book *Portraits of Alien Encounters* (Valis Books, 1990) he takes a close and sometimes critical look at the reported experiences of Paul Bennett, who at the time was well-known in ufological circles in the north of England, feeling that there may have been some element of 'fantasy proneness' (although the phrase had not been invented then) in his reports. Elsewhere in *Portraits* he wrote about 'Norman Harrison', a UFO percipient whose story exhibited many indications of schizophrenia, and Gaynor Sunderland who, following her UFO-related experiences became involved in the world of 'psychic questing'.

All three of these people found a great deal to argue about in Nigel's analyses, and in the case of the latter two, challenged his right to publicly comment on their personal experiences.

Elsewhere in this issue of MUFOB, the Canadian researcher Harry Tokarz asked

whether UFO witnesses were indeed 'public property, concluding that it is inevitable that they will be: "To the close-encounter UFO witness who is prepared to come forward with his experience for us to study, we offer our thanks ... and our condolences."

As it now appears to be obligatory to include a reference to Jerome Clark in every issue of *Magonia*, we can do no more than quote Roger Sandell's review of his and Loren Coleman's book *Creatures of the Outer Edge* which appeared in the reviews column of this issue: "[They] suggest that the mystery animal is an apparition, which in the collective unconscious reminds us of the non-rational side of the human psyche and of the natural world, the preservation of which is becoming a subject of increasing general concern."

We have commented before on Clark's prescience in foreseeing the degree to which this suppressed irrationality has burst out destructively into the world over the past decade or so, but he never seems to thank us for it! Just as Jerome has repudiated the 1970s-style 'New Ufology' and moved to a nuts-and-bolts position, it seems that Loren Coleman now thinks that Bigfoot and its cousins are real 'pelt and paw' creatures. We think they were both right the first time around!



# READERS' LETTERS

Dear John,  
Thank you for the latest issue of *Magonia* and its sceptical dissection of contemporary weirdness. I was particularly interested to read Kevin McClure's analysis of the myths surrounding Victor Schauberger. It's almost obscene that this man, who comes across as really having been nothing more than a harmless crank, should be so grotesquely misrepresented as a Nazi superscientist. Especially as if he really had spent some time in a mental hospital he would have run the risk of imprisonment in a concentration camp or been eugenically murdered as part of the Nazi policy of purging the *Volk* of the physically and mentally defective.

Regarding the bizarre theories about frequencies and harmonics which seem such an integral part of Schauberger's ideas of implosion, at least as expounded in *UFO Secrets of the Third Reich*, these do seem to have a basis in respectable science teaching. The physicist and Anglican Priest J.C. Polkinghorne uses the metaphor of a plucked string to illustrate the quantum nature of light in his book *The Quantum World*, (Penguin, 1984). Just as there can be only a discrete number of overtones accompanying the note produced by a plucked string, so the characteristic bands in the spectra of different elements are caused by light vibrating in discrete proportions in the electromagnetic field (p. 9).

The impression given by the above video is that Schauberger interpreted the metaphor absolutely literally, using it as the basis for his bizarre theories. As for the video *UFO Secrets of the Third Reich* itself, there does seem to be a very unpleasant Neo-Nazi subtext. Although it's not blatant, the sentence that 'in reality, everyone in the Third Reich could do as he pleased' coming after the statement that it wasn't really a totalitarian state at all, does seem deliberately intended to misrepresent Nazi Germany as a nice, fundamentally liberal state governed by respect for individual liberty. The precise wording seems to suggest that this statement is disguised as a comment on the difference between the Nazi state, in which private industry was preserved, and the nationalised economy of the Soviet Union. The difference even here, however, was

one of quality, not kind. Private industry was indeed preserved and protected, but share issue was rigidly controlled by law and the entire economy was, like those of the Communist nations, rigidly subjected to state planning. Any suggestion that there was any significant degree of civil, political or commercial liberty in Nazi Germany is a flagrant lie, and you can only speculate on what the individuals who wrote the script believed they would gain from such mendacity.

Jumping from the Nazis to recent fraudulent claims by the Raelians, *inter alia*, to have produced the first human clone, it has occurred to me that if the proposed sample return missions to Mars and the asteroids do return with extant microbial life, then it probably won't be long before we can expect the next pseudo-medical scam to be alien gene therapy. After the discovery of Oetzi, the Italian 'Ice Man', four women in Germany presented themselves at various clinics hoping to bear his child by artificial insemination, just in case his semen had been preserved as well.

At the moment one component in much of the evolving saucer mythology has been the notion that we all originally had 12 strands to our DNA, but were stripped of ten of these by the evil Dinoids and Reptoids after we lost the war with them and were exiled to Earth. Once we have regained these 10 extra DNA strands, we will be endowed with etheric powers, using them to pick up the energies propagating through the cosmos, as the strands of our DNA are really aerials for this purpose.

All this scientific nonsense comes from the American channeller, Virginia Essene and her wretched book, *You Are Becoming a Galactic Human*, which also makes the claim that electric lights work by matter-antimatter annihilation, news that will surprise anyone who has read even the most basic physics text book. Essene's just one of many, and I have a feeling that similar claims about humanity regaining extra DNA strands have also been made by the Raelians and the Montauk crowd. I suspect that if extant microbial life is found, and its genetic material extracted and sequenced, then sooner or later one of the doctors or scientists working for one of the nuttier UFO

cults will claim to have developed a gene therapy to impart this blessed cosmic mana into human recipients and so raise them to the next transhuman level of cosmic awareness, or introduce it into their ova so that they may bear the new, alien Messiah. Of course, I may well be wrong about all this, but I'll keep an eye out for such claims, just in case  
Yours, D.J. Sivier  
Whitchurch, Bristol

Dear John  
I have belatedly come across the Pelican column in *Magonia*, thanks to a recent posting of yours on UFO Updates. Who, I wonder, can write such a fluent, thoughtful and well-informed column?

Looking through back issues, I came across mention of the 1967 Flying Cross incident from Devon. You may not have seen, or will have forgotten, this posting which I submitted in August 2001 to one of the sceptical lists which James Easton ran at that time. I recalled that Howard Miles of the British Astronomical Association had looked into this case but never published any results, so I thought I would seek his recollections to put on the record. He is currently retired and living in Cornwall, but at the time he taught at a technical college in Coventry. He ran the BAA's artificial satellite section and UFO cases sometimes came his way. In this case it wasn't difficult to recognize that the 'flying cross' was a classic Venus sighting. In response to my request, Howard emailed me with the following information on his involvement with the case:

"I did not carry out any astronomical observations on this event as it was purely in field of the nutters. I became involved because the TV station at Plymouth phoned me up when I was living in Coventry and asked me to appear on a programme that particular evening. I was late in arriving at Plymouth and the producer met me at the Station. On the way to the studio he outlined what was involved and said that I would interview a UFO supporter who was described as a bit weird and then two policemen who had witnessed the event from their patrol car.

"The UFO chap was a prize nutter and knew no astronomy. He was completely confused about the positions of the planets and I came out with a sentence

which is frequently quoted to me 'For God's sake talk a bit of ruddy sense'. The camera crew roared their heads off and after the programme the producer congratulated me in the way I handled him. The two pcs were completely different and accepted completely my explanation of the apparent motions of Venus as being due to travelling along a bending road.

"I explained all the usual optical illusions that arise when a very bright object is seen in the sky and the idea that it must be near if it is very bright. They seemed quite satisfied. That was my sole contribution to the episode. I did not wish to become involved with the UFO organisations as I had enough to do with the satellite work. These organisations were a pain throughout my years as satellite director. In the end I used to say that UFOs were outside the terms of reference of the BAA and hence could not comment. It usually shut them up."

The case attracted a fair bit of publicity at the time because of the two policemen involved but I had thought it was now largely forgotten. Even those familiar with the case may not have known of Howard Miles's involvement and his story may add an interesting sidelight.

About the time I posted this message, the term 'pelicanist' was entering the UFOlogical lexicon to the delight of both sides of the great debate. I thought a formal definition was called for to prevent possible misuse or misunderstanding and came up with the following, which seems to parallel the definition adopted by the Pelican himself:

**pelicanist** (n): the author of, or subscriber to, an unusual but rational explanation for a UFO sighting which is mocked by believers yet remains unrefuted by logic or contradictory evidence.

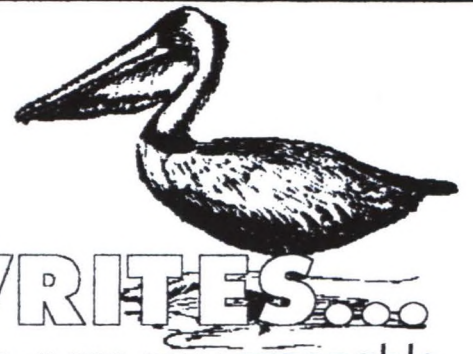
**pelicanism** (n): the art or science of devising unusual but rational explanations for UFO cases, to the mockery of believers who are unable to refute the explanations by logic or contradictory evidence.

Of course, the key word here is 'rational', the very subjectivity of which will allow everyone to choose for themselves whether they are a pelicanist or not.

Yours, Ian Ridpath.

## THE PELICAN WRITES

El pelícano es fuerte en sus apreciaciones, pero muy razonable



The Pelican does not like being described as a sceptic. This is because so many people who call themselves sceptics simply cannot confine their criticisms to matters which they understand, usually the hard sciences, such as physics, astronomy or biology. They persist in blathering on about matters of which they evidently know very little with the result that, instead of recruiting people to the cause of logic and honest scientific research, they merely succeed in arousing hostility, and for no good reason.

Many examples of this can be found in *The Skeptic*. In the latest issue is a serious and objective article about *ganzfeld* experiments, which attempt to establish whether or not people can send information to one another without using any known means of communication. (1) In other articles, however, the arguments are somewhat less clear and straightforward. For example, Steve Stewart-Williams attempts to show that life must have begun as a result of natural processes, urging us to reject "the traditional Judeo-Christian view that God created the earth and all life around 6,000 years ago". (2) That people who believe that the earth is only 6,000 years old would be subscribers to *The Skeptic* strikes The Pelican as being very unlikely. The author's real purpose appears to be just one of the sceptics' routine religion-bashing exercises. He writes of creationists when he obviously means to include all those who believe, or are willing to consider, that the universe was created by God rather than being the result of the Big Bang (you are not allowed to ask what caused it).

So far as the origin of life is concerned, Stewart-Williams points out that because it is as yet unexplained, some people assume it must be the result of divine intervention. This approach to gaps in human knowledge is known as semi-deism, the belief that God created the universe which is capable of

running on its own, although He occasionally intervenes to make adjustments or to introduce new features. However, mainstream Christianity generally agrees that our lack of knowledge of the first steps in the origin of life is due to our ignorance rather than divine tinkering. In other words, modern theology is too sophisticated to require inexplicable gaps in nature to allow for marvellous events.

The only real difference between sceptics and religious believers concerning the origin of life is that sceptics believe its origin was purely fortuitous, whereas believers consider it to be a part of the Divine Plan. There is no serious disagreement about the facts which have so far been established, and most of the arguments about evolution concern some of the details of the theory rather than the theory itself. Thus the question of whether the origin of life was divinely ordained or not is a matter of faith or a matter of opinion, or speculation, rather than a scientific question.

In Wendy Grossman's column (3) we get treated to a little sermon about credulity concerning the paranormal which, curiously, begins with a tale which strains not only The Pelican's credulity but also his ability to attain a temporary suspension of disbelief. We are asked to believe that her friend Matt had "gone to the kind of weekend gathering where lots of rich, famous, or interesting people . . . get together to entertain each other." We are told that "at meals everyone took turns hosting a table, and you picked the table you thought would be most interesting." Wouldn't some tables get rather crowded, The Pelican wonders? Or do they fight for their places?

And, even more implausibly, we are informed: "Matt immediately discovered that no matter whose table he picked and no matter how apparently erudite and sane the person sitting next to him might be . . . he would im-

mediately find himself listening to him or her swap names and experiences of homeopaths, pet psychics, and astrologers, or questionable theories about crystals, 'toxins', and 'forces'."

Grossman tells us: "Belief in the paranormal has nothing to do with intelligence." So, what are these gatherings of the great and the good where everyone babbles new-agey drivel? The Pelican thinks we should be told.

Another of The Skeptic's columnists, Steve Donnelly, engages in another religion-bashing exercise, though less sophisticated than the one by Stewart-Williams, his approach to the subject being more like that of a sniggering adolescent. It seems that Donnelly's eldest daughter witnessed scenes in Sydney, Australia, where crowds gathered to look at a fence post which, to some people, when squinted at with eyes slightly unfocused, resembled traditional images of the Virgin Mary. Donnelly's treatment of a complex subject with a long history is typical of sceptics - flippant, mean-spirited and superficial.

Perhaps The Skeptic's sceptics could pause in their desperate endeavours to convince one another that there is no such thing as the paranormal or supernatural beings, and no meaning or purposes in life apart from those which they devise for themselves. Let them ease up a bit and maybe they'll feel better and be able to stop taking the tablets.

Meanwhile, The Pelican would like to leave with them this thought: "It is not how things are in the world that is mystical, but that it exists." (4)

### References

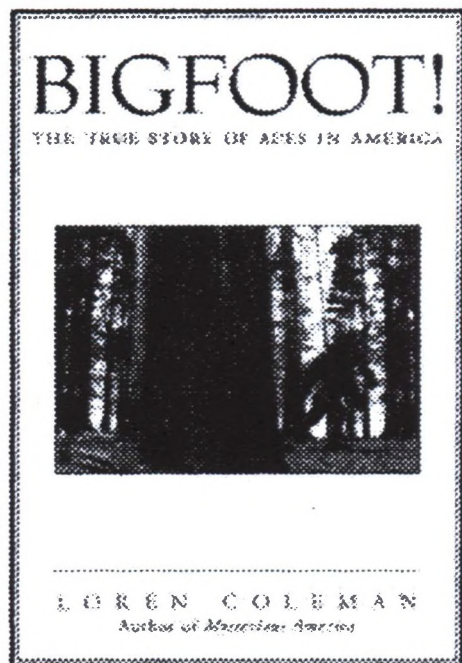
1. David Marks, 'What are we to make of exceptional experience?' Part 2: *Ganzfeld* studies', *The Skeptic*, Vol. 14, No. 2, Summer 2003
2. Steve Stewart-Williams, 'Life from non-life: Must we accept a supernatural explanation?', *Ibid.*
3. Wendy M Grossman, 'Skeptic at large . . .', *Ibid.*
4. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 6.44



# BOOK REVIEWS

All reviews by Peter Rogerson except where stated

Loren Coleman *Bigfoot: the true story of apes in America*. Paraview Pocket Books, 2003. £9.99.



In this round up of Bigfoot encounters and lore, Loren Coleman pursues a relentlessly euhemistic course. Bigfoot is a real, live animal, and various folklore about wild giants is inspired by such creatures. Thus the wendigo, the great cannibal spirit of the wild, is not a symbol of ultimate wilderness and a myth which is concerned with the possibility that human beings can fall out of the world of human society and culture, and be transformed into something far wilder than any natural animal; no, its just another account of our old friend Bigfoot.

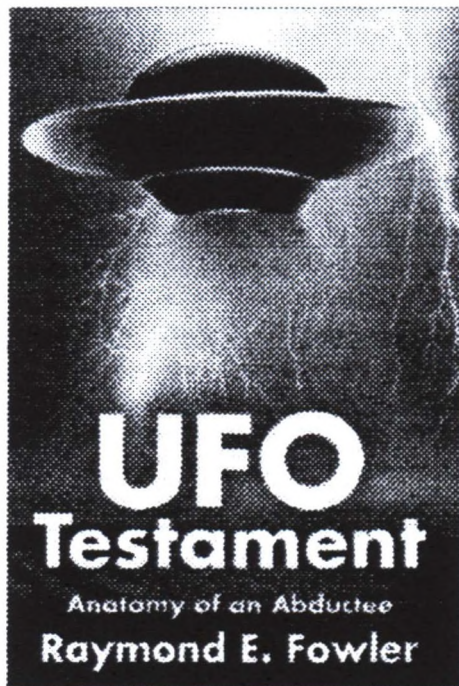
Though Coleman concedes that the stories which launched the modern Bigfoot saga are likely hoaxes, and other well known ones are at least iffy, this does not dent his faith, which extends even to the Patterson film and the notorious Minnesota ice-man, which surely never haunted even the wildest bar in Canby. The latter has been the subject of all sorts of anti-Neanderthal racism, not least by Ivan Sanderson and Bernard Heuvelmans.

Coleman has now joined his former writing partner Jerry Clark in denouncing their own book *Creatures of the Outer Edge* for its presentation of stories which suggested that Bigfoot may be more a creature of the human imagination than any future menagerie. It's not clear however that the "witnesses" in those cases were any less "sincere" than those for the authorized stories.

Coleman is quite open about the immense emotional pull that the Bigfoot has had on him

through much of his life. This suggests that whatever else it may be, it is a symbol of something very powerful in the human imagination, perhaps an icon of the wilderness, and a vision of a "natural" humanity outside the boundaries of bourgeois civilization.

Raymond E. Fowler. *UFO Testament: anatomy of an abductee*. Writer's Showcase, 2002. £25.99. Ray Fowler says that this paranormal autobiography is his last book before he gets out of ufology for good, under family pressure (i.e. its even bets as to which comes first, his wife divorces him, his son has him committed, or his daughter has him exorcised!). This situation has come about because not content with placing UFO investigations above his children's visits to the zoo, Ray has become convinced he is an abductee, and every little odd thing that happens to him is marshalled as evidence for this. Every hypnogogic hallucination, every time he gets a nosebleed or a scar from scratching himself in his sleep, or feels tense and unable to sleep, is further "evidence". Needless to say under hypnotic regression Ray recalls some classic abduction experiences.



That is not to say that some of the experiences he recounts are not genuinely odd and puzzling, though one has to wonder to what extent they are real memories, or memory-like fantasies. Memory is not something fixed and static and it can be reconstituted to suit various needs. Given his background of odd experiences, obsessional behaviour and intense religiosity, it would certainly seem possible that

Fowler has some form of temporal lobe lability, and that this might run in the family. Perceptive readers will also note the theme of status inconsistency, Fowler records he had a high IQ, but failed in his high school and left without many qualifications. Were there also tensions between his working class background, and that of a his wife, a middle class English-women? There is also the theme of the many years of conflict between his former fundamentalist Christianity and his own father's occultist beliefs, as recorded in one of his earlier books. Ray is now taking on his father's role, and his own children are reacting in the same negative fashion. The result is a portrait of someone who seems on the edge of a complete breakdown, the similarities with those who fell under the spell of the childhood sexual abuse/multiple personality disorder industry are striking.

In the middle of the book are accounts of some of the UFO cases investigated by Fowler in the 1960s and 1970s, which remind us why ufology, before it became obsessed with crashed flying saucers and alien abductions, interested a number of scientists. There are certainly cases here which if they occurred exactly as reported would be very puzzling indeed. But then perhaps we ought to remember Besterman's dictum "no serious student of the paranormal has the right to accept the unsupported testimony of anyone whatsoever" in these matters.

There are more reviews of current books, as well as an extensive file of older reviews on the Magonia website. Go to

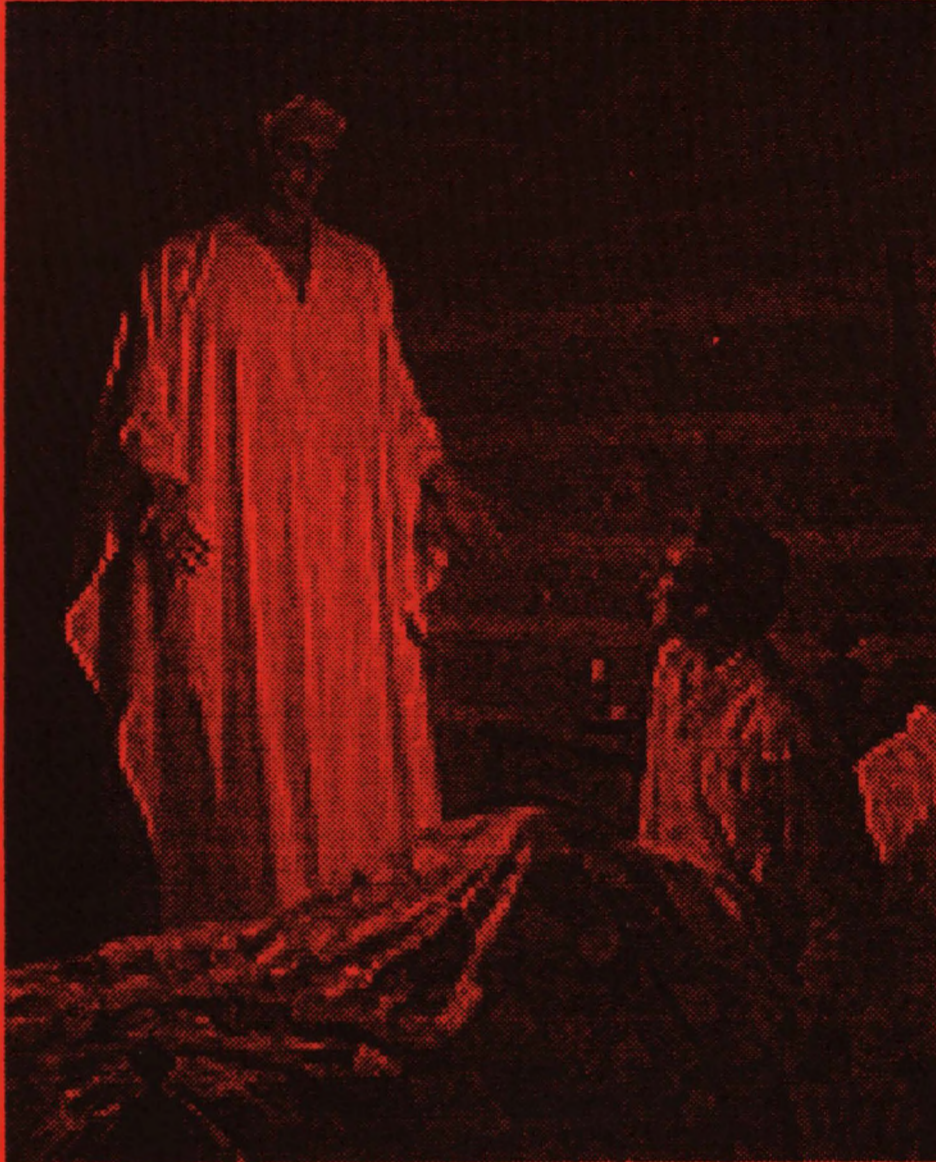
[www.magonia.demon.co.uk](http://www.magonia.demon.co.uk)  
enter, then click on 'Magonia Review of Books'; for the full listings. The website also includes an extensive archive of articles, the complete file of *Magonia Supplement*, and The Pelican's astringent views!

**Richard Abanes** *One Nation Under Gods: a history of the Mormon church. Four Walls Eight Windows, 2002. \$32.00.*

Probably the only things that most people know about the Mormons is that they are interested in genealogy, that their dark-suited young missionaries, who resemble the popular image of the MIB' knock on your door just when you are getting the dinner ready, and that once they practised polygamy. This book fills in some of the gaps, and the picture painted of their founder, Joseph Smith, is one which will be familiar to *Magonia* readers, the status inconsistent visionary. Smith was the descendent of a once semi-bourgeois family which had fallen on hard times and was, as the Victorians would say, on its way down into the abyss. Smith had a reputation as a local cunning man and treasure finder, a bit of a lad and something of a con artist. He started to tell a story of encountering the bloody ghost of a pirate who revealed the whereabouts of treasure, and of finding a stone which he could use to decipher some mysterious plates. Over succeeding years this bloody Spanish pirate became first a spirit then an angel, then the prophet Moroni who dictated to him a new gospel.

There are certain similarities with Bernadette Soubirous, the Lourdes visionary: both came from despised marginal families, who had fallen into the proletariat from more secure 'respectable' backgrounds, the visions started as ghost stories, and then underwent a process of sacralisation, though in Bernadette's case this was a much more rapid development.

The gospel which Smith and successors proclaim is an unusual one, which seems to an attempt to construct an American national sacred epic. There are accounts of Biblical emigrations to the Americas, indeed America was home of the original garden of Eden, only the flood sent humanity to the Middle East. The New Jerusalem was to be built in the United States. The American Indians are degenerate descendants of the lost tribes of Israel, the Mormons are the new Israelites etc. Here we can clearly see the development of a specifically American national religion, the sacralisation of the new landscape by reference to the well known places of the Bible. America is no



**The Angel Moroni visits Joseph Smith**

longer the god deserted howling wilderness of the first Pilgrims.

Smith and his successors applied New World notions of boundless opportunity to their ideology also, proclaiming "as God once was we are, as God is we will be." Smith assured his followers that you could rise from log cabin not just to president but to God. The biblical God was an "exalted man" (for a time this role was given to Adam, but was later allocated to what we would today call an extraterrestrial), a physical being and not a spirit. The notion of a physical god was one shared with Muggletonianism, but whether this was a case of direct borrowing, or both drawing on a wider pool of working class materialism is unclear. This God had at least one wife and human beings were their spirit children. The attractions of this American ideology of self-advancement to working class people of the period is obvious; after all this was a time when the ruling class religions were very heavy on the notion of divinely appointed estates, with the rich man in his castle and the poor man at his gate. Derived from folk Lamarkianism and early evolutionary theories, this notion

of "eternal progression" was to feature in a number of "progressive" and working class religions, such as Universalism or Spiritualism.

Smith added an even stranger notion: to be a successful god you had to have lots of kids, both in this world and the next, to worship you and keep your status rising in the celestial realms. Though it was not explicitly stated, the idea seems to have been the more kids you have the better the planet you become God of. It's the difference between choice Reticular real estate and some slag heap off Proyecon 5. Clearly we are in the realm of ancestor worship here, and it's here that the polygamy comes in (more wives equals more kids) and the obsession with genealogy (make your ancestors Mormons so they can have lots of spirit kids and be the God of something worth being the God of).

Even if you couldn't make it the kid stakes, Smith offered consolations, just being a white male gave you some brownie points, and being a Mormon gave you a heck of a lot more, you were in the top class of the top race, with all the cursed

inferior races to lord it over.

This obsession with family seems to reflect Smith's need for the perfect celestial family, to replace his own not altogether satisfactory one, and lots of worshipers to boost his fragile ego. It was this need to boost the ego, which set Smith and his immediate successors on the road from being purely religious prophets to the status of dictators of their own freelance totalitarian states. It was these political ambitions, which set them on the road to conflict with the rest of America: conflicts in which both sides resorted to terrorism and ideological cleansing. For much of the nineteenth century polygamy, something quintessential unBritish and unAmerican, and terribly "native" was the cause around which many of these ideological battles were waged.

With polygamy officially ended, and a grudging recognition that black people are human beings, today the Mormon church presents an ultra respectable face, and buddies up to the most reactionary elements of the US ruling class. Its origins are now something of an embarrassment, religions after all should be founded by fully paid up Rotarians, and it now seems to be marketing itself as just another subsidiary of the First Church of Jesus Christ, Company Executive.

Abanes won't have this, and takes clear delight in rubbing the Mormons' noses in what he sees as their scandalous past. He is however not a disinterested historian, but an evangelical Christian polemicist and much of his ire is aroused by the various ideological deviations from 'correct' Christianity, i.e. Abanes own, and in this just about any horror story and atrocity propaganda is aired. More secular observers might still find this book of value as the portrait of how people in a world on the brink of modernity tried to create a new mythology, one forged out of Christianity, popular occultism, classical paganism, ancestor worship and nationalism. It had progressive features, a vision of human beings transcending the bounds of their class and situation and aspiring to Olympian heights, but its obsession with nation, race, ancestry and patriarchy, and imagery of the superman foreshadowed the great terrors of the twentieth century.

**Peter Hough.** *Supernatural Lancashire.* Robert Hale, 2003.

£17.99

**Roddy Martine.** *Supernatural Scotland.* Robert Hale, 2003.

£16.99

**Betty Puttick (editor).** *Supernatural England.* Countryside Books, 2002. £9.95

These three books illustrate various approaches to supernatural lore, and the debatable land between experience, folklore and what the American folklorist Richard Dorson called fakelore. Martine and Puttick's books tend to concentrate on traditional ghost stories, a style of the supernatural that would have been familiar to the collectors of ghost stories in Victorian times. Hough's on the other hand has a clear bias towards the modern folklore of UFOs, MIB and alien abductions. The perceptive reader will notice clear class differences between the two books in the Hale series. Martine, a member of the Scots establishment collects stories mainly from fellow members of the upper middle class and the clan aristocracy; Hough's contemporary memorates come more from working class and petite bourgeois sources. The tone of the stories reflect their origins, the traditional ghost stories from a tradition regarding strata, those from the Lancashire working class reflecting a harsher landscape and life history. One reeks of the country house and castle, the other of council estates.

These class differences

main also explain differences in narrative style, Martine's stories tend to the underplayed, they are closer to the SPR ideal, which perhaps signals the class biases of the SPR's own memorate sources, while those of Hough have a tendency towards the dramatic.

Do modern stories of violent polts in council houses and alien abductions from rows of semis form a modern equivalent of the "raw head and bloody bones" ghost story expunged from the canon by the SPR and other bourgeois investigators?

We

can also see in the works of Hough and Puttick how today's fakelore, the works of intentional fiction by known authors, such as the stories of the Cambridge Everlasting Club, or Lucy Lightfoot contained in Puttick's book become tomorrow's folklore. This process is well under way in the two cases just mentioned which have been reproduced in numerous books of "true ghost stories", as have, for example, the spoof ghost stories told by Charles Sampson in his *Ghosts of the Broads* (1931). We can see another round starting in Hough's book, where the

fakelore tales of Warrington charity worker Wally Barnes, including the story of Spring Heel Jack appearing in Warrington in the 1920's, are reproduced as though they were real paranormal events.

(The Warrington Spring Heel Jack story is an obviously modern invention having no basis in tradition, derived from the infamous 1904 William Henry Street, Liverpool story, which in turn was made up a *News of the World* journalist, based very loosely on a local poltergeist case). No doubt in the future other writers will take up the account from

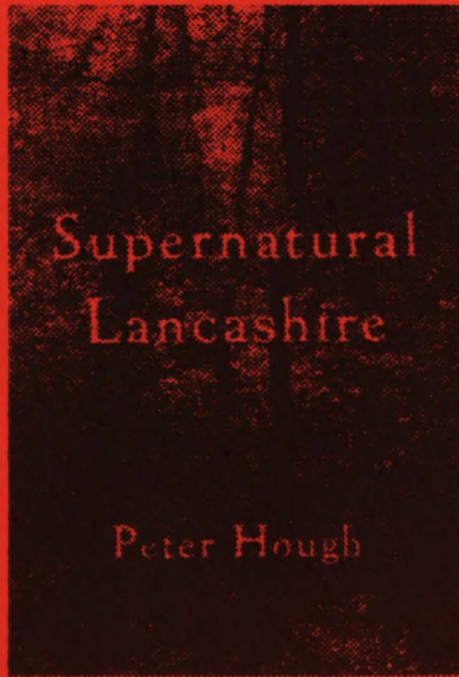
Hough and so the story will enter the tradition.

We can also see how fakelore enters the canon when an identifiable authors' mystification of a not especially mysterious event becomes part of the folkloric canon. So both Hough and Puttick retell the story of Zigmund Adamski, the miner who went missing and turned up dead on a coal tip. In reality there is nothing more mysterious about his disappearance than many of the cases in the "missing persons" column of the *Big Issue*. And what does this ex-miner do to turn a living with-

out questions being asked? He forages coal from a tip, something regarded as illegal by the authorities but condoned by mining communities as a worker's right during hard times. This was one of the many causes of miner-police conflict during the great miners' strike of the 1980's, and was the subject of quite a bit of discussion at the time. We can see therefore that the "paranormal" writers can become themselves generators of today's fakelore, and hence tomorrow's folklore.

The purist in us tends to deplore this sort of thing, and to complain of the adulteration of tradition, even to cry fraud, but perhaps we should see these examples as an insight into how all folklore is generated. Suppose that all the "ancient" customs, traditions, and supernatural lore which fills books of folklore and "true" ghost stories, were made up by groups of friends around an alehouse or pub table, or by some antiquarian clergyman seeking to restore "merry England"; thence copied from place to place, stories in chapbooks and penny dreadfuls being retold with local settings.

Modern memorates, even if to some degree based on "real" experiences, may be deeply influenced by this tradition, the "experience" being "improved" and reconstituted to fit "traditional" forms. As new traditions, mediated by new forms of media, develop, so new types of "experience" will be reported to conform with



**V. Gowri Rammohan (editor).** *New Frontiers of Human Science: a festschrift for K.*

**Ramakrishna Rao.** McFarland and Company, 2002. £22.95.

The contributors to this collection of essays in honour of the Indian parapsychologist K R Rao range from highly respected academics to some very curious characters indeed, and their contributions range from highly technical discussions of quantum mechanics to what I suspect can be described not too unkindly, as arrant nonsense. The underlying argument of the more respectable and comprehensible contributors is that psi phenomena not only exist but provide empiric evidence for the deep interconnectedness of all things. Psi phenomena are also seen by some contributors

as evidence against mind-brain identity, though I detect more disagreement here.

I have to say many of the arguments presented by these contributors strike me as implausible, for example Beloff's claim that human beings could have evolved just as they have, and engage in the exactly the same behaviours as they do now (such as writing and reading books) without being conscious, strikes me as totally absurd. (In the real world people deprived of consciousness by loss of higher brain functions for example, are capable only of very basic reflex behaviours). Beloff argues thus to try to separate consciousness from nature, and to make it something more mysterious and special than it already is. Equally, Hoyt

Edge's argument that ideas of mind-body dualism are the product of modernity and Descartes is very iffy, to say the least. Don't such beliefs go back to Plato at least?

One thing which strikes me is how inappropriate is the title of this book. These are strange new frontiers indeed, for most of the rational contributions to this book could easily have been written with scarcely a word changed 30 years ago; and many of the general arguments date from much earlier periods. The real frontiers of human science, the studies and insights of neuroscience, whether based on individual case studies or developments from new technologies, wash over these writers.

