

### Shoestring Space Science

By now, everyone has heard that the NASA budget has been cut dramatically, setting the development of astronomy and space-oriented research (among other fields) back on its heels. This comes at the same time that creation versus evolution is being debated in the courts. Also, a US Federal court recently ruled against CAUS for trying to get the CIA to release "secret" UFO papers.

What is happening to science? On the one hand, we can boast about being in the "computer age", while in the same breath comment that science budgets are plummeting at a rate dependent on inflation and other financial constraints. It is too-frequently pointed out that we can send a spacecraft to Saturn, but are unable to cope with unemployment and the starving, millions of people around the world. (This takes everything totally out of perspective, but I use it here to make a point.) Science is under fire.

Does ufology stand any chance of surviving? A recent article in Astronomy magazine by David Swift, titled, "A Tale of Two CETIs" (Astronomy 9 (10) 24) delineated the problems faced by both exobiologists and ufologists, and the parallel evolution of both groups. CETI researchers are approaching the idea of ET life by arguing that it exists, and postulate how communication can be effected across space. Ufologists eliminate the problem of distance by arguing that ET life is here, but not responsive to our communicative efforts. It is typical that the ufologists are unfunded, but when CETI research is almost eliminated through the heckling of Senator Proxmire, the the situation is grave indeed. Meanwhile, the Space Shuttle is given more money for development; not as a scientific tool, but as a defence instrument.

The curious hard swing towards distrust and rejection of science is not totally unexpected. The use of "complicated" terminology to describe simple events has long frustrated many laymen trying to understand scientific papers and reports. Reassuringly, many scientists have candidly admitted in the past that at least 75% of the scientific papers published each year are of little or no consequence, and contribute nothing to advancing knowledge. These fall into the "publish" category of the "publish or perish" aspect of academia. It may come as no surprise at all that the papers in scientific journals may be just as meaningless to scientists as they are to laymen.

But in all fairness, it has to be realized that science cannot provide answers to some problems of today. Inflation, unemployment and resource management can be described with equations, but cannot be solved with them. (Of course, read Asimov's Foundation Trilogy for a critique of this viewpoint) Science is not just a hobby for bored people to dabble in; it is a way of thinking by which mankind can attempt to understand its very existence. A rejection of science is a shrug of the shoulders, indicating we do not want to understand the universe, or ourselves.

The creation/evolution debate is illogical by itself. "Believing" in evolution does not exclude an act of creation, and vice versa. Why can the two not be considered mutually compatible? Of what relevance is the debate, other than being another rejection of science?

Senator Proxmire's comments that there are no immediately-observable benefits from CETI programs is in some ways a valid one, but fails to take into account the "human" side of science. We need astronomy to keep our egos in check; we are as insignificant in the universe as are rotifers in the Pacific. CETI (or SETI) is a reaching-out exercise, necessary for the thinking man (and woman). Equations cannot explain the need - only the exercise.

When the latest Saturn photos were coming in from Voyager, Proxmire defended himself in a debate on the space cutbacks, during a TV report. He said that there is no need to finance space research, since "Saturn and the other planets will be around a very long time. There's no rush." Carl Sagan, who was not invited into the debate, followed Proxmire's comments near the end of the report. He said, "It's very true that the planets will be around a very long time. But how long will we be around?"

Good one, Carl.

#### List of Zines Received Since Last Issue

Zozma #19, 20, 21 1981  
Probe Report 2 #1,2 1981  
Cambridge UFO Research Group 2 #7 Sept. 1981  
Love Makes the World Go Awry #5 June 1981  
New Canadian Fandom 1 #2/3 June/Sept. 1981  
— AFU Nyhetsblad #21 Jan/July 1981  
Short Treks 2 #5 Aug. 1981  
Mapit Skywatch #39 May/June 1981  
Notizario UFO 2 #9, 10, 11, 12 1979; 3 #1, 2 1980  
The Unexplained 1 #1, 2 1981  
CUFOS Associate Newsletter 2 #9, 10, 11 1981  
CUFOS Bulletin Spring 1981  
Speculator #7 Oct. 1981  
Neology 6 #3/4 Oct. 1981  
Winnicentrics 20 #9, 10, 11 1981  
UFO International 1 #1 May, 1981  
John Musgrave Mailing #327-338 1981

#### Why Are We Doing This, Anyway?

I want to make it perfectly clear that I was not the one to say it. Although, introspectively, the idea crop up, I cannot be held responsible. After all, most ufologists have considered the problem many times and formed various conclusions one way or the other. It is not something to feel guilty about, either, since an examination of values and achievements is needed from time to time.

Skeptics have been saying for years that private UFO groups are useless, while we nodded our heads in sympathy for the poor, misguided people who believed them. And why not? They were obviously ignorant of the great strides ufologists have made towards categorizing and evaluating reported sightings.

But, when it's in black and white, from an avid ufologist, then you have to sit back and consider the reasons. In his latest book, "Casebook of a UFO Investigator", Raymond Fowler makes the echoing statement: "CIVILIAN UFO RESEARCH IS AT A DEAD END".

And that gave me pause to wonder.

Is he right?

Okay, then, what have we accomplished? In over 30 years, we still don't know what UFO's really are. (Or do we?) At least 90% of reported UFO's are

misidentifications. Are the rest identifiable? A rephrasing of the other statement is needed. In over 30 years, we still don't know what the remaining percentage of unidentifieds really constitutes. Klass, Oberg and Sheaffer have pointed out that a great many "good" cases have been poorly investigated. Oberg won the Cutty Sark UFO Contest in New Scientist, by saying that UFO research has gone nowhere in 30 years, almost exactly what Fowler said. Hynek had to qualify many of his astronaut UFO sightings in The Edge of Reality after Oberg showed them to be erroneous and improperly investigated. But going the other way, Klass has criticized most cases, being best known in some circles for his debunking of the Father Gill case. He accused Gill of not wearing his glasses and observing an out-of-focus Venus. Gill, of course, was in fact wearing his glasses, and could see Venus elsewhere. Klass also got his facts wrong in his analysis of the Socorro case. That led Hynek to his famous comment, "Klass dismissed!"

Debunkers like Klass have encouraged an alarming number of scientists to develop negative views of "Pseudoscience" subjects such as UFO's. Even the tagging of UFO research as "pseudoscience" indicates a strong bias against serious scientific considerations. Although Carl Sagan has a point when he sees a paradox arising from UFO researchers basing their theories on extraterrestrial visitation while at the same time claiming to hold an "open mind", Sagan is himself guilty of the same paradox when he calls UFO research a "pseudoscience".

A big drawback to UFO research is the existence of debunkers, who cull tremendous peer pressure from scientists unprepared to stick their necks out. Nevertheless, debunkers serve a very useful purpose in questioning commonly-accepted beliefs of UFO buffs, and pointing out flaws in case investigations and testimonies. Their beliefs may be just as invalid, but they are serving as stimuli for UFO researchers to produce better-quality work, able to stand up under scrutiny.

But what spurs on a UFO researcher to do his or her work? Nearly all ufologists do UFO research as a hobby, spending large sums of money on books, magazines, investigations and conferences. "Hobby" might in fact be a weak term; "obsession" could be deemed more appropriate in many cases. We're certainly not in this for the money (well, maybe some of us are).

Have our efforts been **worth it?**

Undoubtedly so. William Corliss, the latter-day Charles Fort, has been praised for his sourcebook series on unusual phenomena. Among his data files are reports of UFO's, strange meteors, ball lightning and ghost lights. One might ask why Corliss has done such an absurd thing as research and collect such accounts. Perhaps because it is interesting? In a purely romantic sense, it is fascinating to discover Nature's whims and fancies, and delight in the unusual. Therein lies our own answer for the ufologist's absurd passion. It is genuinely interesting to hear of eyewitness accounts of UFO's. I recall that only a few days ago, at this writing, when a university physics student told me of a perplexing UFO which had travelled quickly across the sky, stubbornly refusing to be classified as a conventional object despite excellent weather conditions.

Objectively, there is nothing wrong with investigating or researching UFO reports in the name of science. Unfortunately, it doesn't even matter, then, if UFO's are real.

But, then, is civilian UFO research at a dead end? Considering that most UFO groups are capable of little else than file reports, yes. The direction taken by most civilian groups is generally unproductive in terms of yield. But in terms of information gathering and proliferation, the role of civilian groups implies ufology itself. UFO's continue to be reported, and someone has to take note. Okay, so the debunkers think we're crazy; we think they're crazy. We may both be banging our heads against a wall, but we realize our walls are padded.

## Book Review

The UFO Verdict - Examining the Evidence  
by Robert Sheaffer  
Prometheus Books, 1981

This book is a recent contribution from "the other side of the fence" of ufology. Written by one of the most outspoken opponents of UFO research, it is a classic example of the debunkers' style of dealing with the UFO phenomenon. It is, without any doubt, an excellent book, and should be read by both "believers" and "non-believers". By its own admission, the book is designed to assist readers in a critical analysis of UFO accounts. What more could a ufologist ask?

The second chapter points out the first observation of ufology: You do not investigate UFO's, you investigate UFO witnesses. Sheaffer details his rather thorough investigation of the infamous Jimmy Carter UFO to show it was really Venus. His investigation relied mostly on, of all things, luck, which is a common situation as most ufologists realize. Unfortunately, Carter's sighting is not a CEL, as described by Sheaffer.

Next, Sheaffer describes the "UFO movement" and its infighting, finding an admitted oversupply of references. But in his amazingly brief mention of the Condon Report, he points out that although 39% of the reports therein were unidentified, they have subsequently been explained by Klass, Menzel et al.. That is not the issue, however, and such a quick passing is not proper for such a significant detail. At any rate, if Menzel's "explanations" for the 39% are an example of how these cases were explained, then this is a serious flaw in the reasoning.

Sheaffer's next chapter on evidence also contains some misleading points. His brief mention of "landing rings" is accurate enough for the Delphos type, but not the Langenburg type of trace. He also includes a mention of the classic tale of a crashed saucer and "little green men in pickle jars".

Sheaffer redeems himself considerably in the next section on CE3K's. His discussion of the Hill abduction, including a mention of the Atterberg map, is well-written and -presented. His discussion of the "dream or reality" problem, supported by Lawson's hypnosis experiments, rounds out the chapter quite well.

However, the next chapter on photographic evidence clearly betrays the author's general attitude towards the subject. His style becomes increasingly sarcastic, and often reaches far too far to make a slightly witty comment. For example, when he discusses the McMinnville photo, and observes that the "antenna" is off-center, leaning to the left, he says, "One would expect that an advanced, space-faring civilization could at least manage to stick an antenna on straight!" Cute, but typical of the comments. Sheaffer also praises Bruce Maccabee for his efforts to analyze UFO photos, but disagrees with some of his findings. Pessimistically, Sheaffer concludes that since there are no good UFO photos available, "the only reasonable explanation...is that there are no genuine UFO's to be photographed." He has a point. I have seen only a scant few photos that haven't been suspicious. I have seen my share of fakes and lens flares and various other IFO's, so I have reason to doubt UFO photo authenticity. But it does not mean that there are no UFO's; merely that no one has photographed a real UFO.

Another interesting argument put forth by Sheaffer is his reasoning that UFO's do not exist at all. Fairies, for instance, were also investigated by "professionals" and reputable people like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who were convinced that fairies existed. But they do not exist, so the skeptics are proven correct. The Martian canals were also thought to exist at one time, and worldwide observers seemed to report similar patterns to the lines overall.

Now, in analogy, there are worldwide similarities to UFO reports as well, but UFO's do not exist, so the similarities are imaginary. The human mind will create similarities where none exist. Therefore, since UFO's are another case of improbable phenomena being reported worldwide with similar characteristics, they, too, do not exist. In this way, Sheaffer reasons, the fact that UFO's are reported worldwide does not support the reality of the phenomenon. But as with most such arguments, this appears to be another example of treating apples and oranges together, and not an argument strictly disproving UFO's.

Actually, Sheaffer has an excellent theory as to why 100% of reported UFO's cannot be explained. No communications channel is 100% efficient, "and given the ample number of stimuli in the sky available for misperception, it is inevitable that reports of UFO's will be generated." The unexplained UFO reports are the "noise" in the system. Therefore, there is no need to explain these reports. Is this the skeptics' cop-out, or is this a sensible way to deal with unexplained sightings?

Sheaffer's chapter on Exeter is a good review, with a fine sifting of the facts. His chapter on SETI is very curious, however. He finds it odd that ufologists like Stanton Friedman are against SETI proponents, calling them advocates of "job security". Sheaffer is very pro-SETI, but points out the recent trend that ET life does not exist at all.

Calling UFO's a "jealous phenomenon", meaning "shy" or "elusive", is quite appropriate, and Sheaffer has a lot of fun with the concept. He complains that there are never two independent photos of the same UFO. Perhaps UFO's are too rare for this to occur? He relates how in 1974, a fireball passed over the US, and was seen by many witnesses while in flight, and many photos were taken. Why is this not ever the case for UFO's? Well, for one thing, the fireball was many miles above the ground, and could be seen over a wide area. Also, it lasted "101 seconds", an extraordinarily long time for such a phenomenon, but obviously much longer than many UFO sightings.

Sheaffer has the usual, expected comments on mothman, MIB and other entities, and also takes note that the invitation-only 1976 CUFOS symposium endorsed such stories to the exclusion of skeptics. "Were ufology a true science," he says, it would endorse the views of the skeptics, as well.

A rather facetious account of the Spaur UFO chase is actually quite good, but Sheaffer seems to be convinced that the witnesses' testimonies were wrong, simply because they had to have been seeing Venus!

Then, Sheaffer recounts Klass' prediction of a flap following the CE3K movie. CUFOS claims that all the cases received were old, but Klass and Sheaffer believe otherwise. The rest of the book glosses over various things, such as the Kaikoura UFO, which is explained as radar angels, squid boats, Jupiter, etc.

As a final word, Sheaffer immodestly suggests that ufologists should be more objective and like Klass and Sheaffer in their approach to ufology. Of course, the easy jibe would be to point out that Klass and Sheaffer need to be more objective themselves.

All in all, the book is chock full of detailed case investigations and derisive comments aimed at ufologists (much of it deserved). However, Sheaffer's anti-UFO bias stands out much too strongly on many pages, and this makes the book weak in its "objectivity". Sheaffer is nevertheless a good writer, and has produced a book noteworthy for its skeptical view of ufology.

## Journal UFO

1981 saw the last issue of Journal UFO published by David Haisell. Dave did a remarkable job of putting out his zine; it was well-laid-out, impressive and contained excellent articles. He incorporated the ailing Canadian UFO Report and kept the quality high. However, the Journal was expensive to produce, and eventually, the financial burden was too much to bear. The cessation of Journal UFO leaves Canada with no comparable ufozine.

### More Books Recently Added to the UFOROM Library

Barton, W.G., ed. Canada's Psi-Century. Metaphysical Society of Canada, Ottawa, 1967?

Another example of Bartonian Metaphysical literature, giving accounts of psychic experiences as contributed by individuals across Canada. Included are several UFO-like experiences and entities.

Cathie, Bruce. Pulse of the Universe: Harmonic 288. Sphere Books, London, 1981. This is Cathie's detailed explanation of how he developed his world-wide grid of "field lines" for UFO's. His nonchalant attitude of dropping decimal points and zeros so the integers look the same will totally baffle and frustrate mathematicians.

Gelman, R.G. and Seligson, M. UFO Encounters. Scholastic Book Services, Toronto, 1978.

A rather average children's book on UFO's. Noncommittal and elementary.

Frazier, K., ed. Paranormal Borderlands of Science. Prometheus Books, Buffalo, 1981.

A collection of articles, all taken from the pages of the Skeptical Inquirer. Naturally, the articles are all strongly "anti-pseudoscience", and lambaste ESP, OOBIE's, astrology, Velikovsky, UFO's and other "border" sciences, usually showing no mercy and often no line of reasoning.

Pugh, R.J. and Holiday, F.W. The Dyfed Enigma. Coronet Books, London, 1979.

A discussion of UFO sightings in Wales. Pugh gives a true first: the veterinary aspects of UFO's, with regards to animal reactions.

Story, R.D. UFO's and the Limits of Science. William Morrow & Co., New York, 1981.

An interesting presentation of many noted cases. Drawing heavily on the writings of various individuals, Story blends their versions with his own analysis to provide a very readable overview, giving both debunkers' and proponents' comments.



W. Nilsson Jr. / 78

Current Articles of Interest

Molton, Peter. 1981. "The Discovery, Care and Feeding of Intelligent Aliens". Spaceflight 23, 176.

A good CETI article dealing with the prospects and problems of contact. The title relates to our communications and relations with ET life, and not what you think.

Newman, W.I. and Sagan, C. 1981. "Galactic Civilizations: Population Dynamics and Interstellar Diffusion". Icarus 46, 293.

Another SETI article with an explanation for why Earth has no been colonized by an extraterrestrial civilization yet. Essentially, the Galaxy is too large for "them" to have reached Earth in their sphere of colonization.

Silberg, P.A. 1981. "On the Formation of Ball Lightning". Il Nuovo Cimento 4C, 221.

It is postulated that ball lightning is formed by the collapse of the electric field field in the lightning-stroke discharge column.

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Blatant, everyday lies:

"I'm working on it."  
"I don't recall it offhand."  
"Have a nice day."  
"Thank you for reminding me."  
"I had nothing to do with it."  
"There's nothing wrong."  
"That certainly is interesting."  
"I agree with you entirely."

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