

High Weirdness in Ufology

Is it all getting stranger and sillier, or is it just me?

No sooner does an interesting story or case appear in ufology than it begins to look really bad and dubious. Ufologists split into camps defending one side or another and soon no one knows exactly what to think. Debunkers are loving it.

Case in point: Santilli's Roswell film. When the story first broke, people got excited because it could have been THE break that has been eagerly anticipated since saucerdom began. Imagine! A film of the autopsy of the Roswell aliens! But then ...

I called Stan Friedman early into this whole mess, just after he had returned from England. He was not impressed. "The story has lots of holes in it," he told me. What's more, at that time, he hadn't been allowed to view any of it. It began to smell of a scam.

Then there were great tales of how it was actually a Brazilian SF flick that had been shelved long ago, and how Jacques Vallee had confirmed this fact. He denied this, but the rumour carried on anyway.

Supposedly, the rumours went, Kodak had confirmed the film stock was dated 1947, BUFORA endorsed the film, and expert ufologists had seen it and judged it authentic.

Suffice to say that these rumours appear to be unsupported. I've even given up trying to sort out the details of curled phone cords, the number of fingers on the aliens and how many reels there were. Readers of the Internet will likely have found more conflicting facts by the time this issue of SGJ gets published, anyway.

I suppose that one big giveaway of the film's quality is that one of the people invited to a private screening was Colin Andrews. Not being a UFO researcher or an expert in crash/retrievals, he seemed an illogical choice for a "select group" of expert researchers to impress.

I don't know. Although it is **possible** that a top secret film of aliens has been laying around an archive gathering dust all these years, it seems **improbable** that it could be real. My biggest question would be why crash/retrieval experts had never had a hint of its existence before this, and why it took a rock music promoter to uncover it. The other concern I have is that if it isn't the Brazilian movie, then it would have taken some time and money to prepare and plan the hoax. Not being a fan of the conspiracy theorists and disinformation hawks, I would wonder who would bother doing it.

There are three possibilities, as I see it. The film is either a scam, a disinformation ploy, or it's real. Pick your favourite. I suppose we'll all know soon enough.

More About Persinger's Magic Helmet

I had some good responses to my comments about Susan Blackmore's endorsement of Michael Persinger's explanation for abductions. Basically, she implied that Persinger's "Magic Helmet" temporal lobe stimulator could induce abduction-like symptoms.

I noted my concerns on the net and received a response from James Lippard, who said he had passed my comments on to Blackmore. I had also sent her an e-mail, explaining my concerns in more detail.

Not surprisingly, I received no response. As far as I know, CSICOP's headmistress is still promoting Persinger's work as a viable explanation. However, several people have offered their own comments about Blackmore's endorsement, in various other forums. Among them:

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From alt.paranet.abduct Thu Dec 1 09:13:13 1994
From: Tim.Shell@p0.f150.n30163.z1.FIDONET.ORG (Tim Shell)
Subject: Pop Psych vs. UFOs - Battle of the B.S.!

Just butting in with an opinion. One of the degrees I have is in Sociology with an emphasis in social psychology, so I'm no stranger to mind-numbing jargon and smoke blowing.

I'd just like to say that trying to explain UFO abductions as a consequence of some type of psychological process is like using astrology to explain Bigfoot sightings.

The neuropsychological "work" being conducted by Michael Persinger as described in the recently posted Susan Blackmore article on "temporal lobe lability" is typical of the vague, empty, yet authoritative-sounding gibberish that for years has separated people from their money and their grasp of reality.

Psychology in general is possibly one the biggest conglomerations of nonsense ever perpetrated upon the general population. It's a prime (almost New Age-like) example of "creating one's own reality" by way of inventing impressive-sounding phrases for imagined psychological patterns or "structures" then associating them with each other in such a way that any reasonable (as in able to reason), skeptical layman is labeled as ignorant or manifesting some kind of anti-social "syndrome" or "disorder."

Let's start with one little thing. Temporal lobe lability. Yikes! Buzzphrase alert! Let me grab a dictionary. "Labile" is a more Latin-ized, authoritative and way of saying "unstable" (and the article sure drags in that negative connotation, too), but labile also means "flexible," and "adaptable," which in any other context would not only be a good thing, it would be a vital thing. Then Persinger relates this word to a part of the brain - the temporal lobe - that has a general association with perception and memory (but certainly not a direct or exclusive association, since the brain is essentially holographic, with no single part responsible for any single function). So temporal lobe lability is basically a flexibility in a person's ability to process perception and memory. And anxious, judgemental people, including artists (kooks, in other words) have a *tendency* to display more of this than others. Just what is Mr. Persinger trying to say here? Or more importantly, what is he NOT trying to say?

THEN he *speculates* that this lability is *somehow* greatly influenced by magnetism, THEN he *suggests* that UFO abduction reports *might* originate via this dubious process. Huh!?

What a load of mumbo-jumbo claptrap, nonsense, and rampant card castle building -- with shades of phrenology and den-

igration of art (a recurrent theme among social "scientists")
thrown in for good measure. And all with only the vaguest
hint at proof. Typical psychology. And a lot of people
swallow this stuff hook, line and sinker.

And I'll only touch upon a couple of other bits of nonsense
mentioned in or suggested by the article:

- * Temporal lobe stimulation by magnetic fluctuations from earthquakes is a complete fantasy even surpassing UFO abduction reports. To my knowledge there has never been a magnetic effect recorded more than perhaps a microsecond prior to any earthquake, and certainly not at the intensity Persinger is apparently applying. Think about it. Most people's brains ain't made of metal. A magnetic field hypothetically strong enough to influence it would probably bend every spoon in the county.
- * Even accepting for a moment the fantasy that magnetism affects the brain, I'd like to hear how Persinger believes that he's only applying a magnetic field to the temporal lobe. A strong magnetic field anywhere near the head is going to permeate the entire head and much of the body, not just the temporal lobe.
- * Yeah, who needs an expensive EEG when handy questionnaires do the job just as well? Hey, I've designed questionnaires, and all I can say is... HA!
- * So from what Persinger is suggesting, I guess all those kooks wearing tinfoil hats are really onto something. After all, we all know how good they work keeping the Alien Mind Control Rays <tm> away.

Huh-boy. No wonder physical scientists laugh (as if they were beyond criticism, but that's another long, tedious article).
When are people going to climb out of the 19th Century and realize that the Emperor Psychology has no clothes?

+++++ END QUOTE +++++

Well, okay. Tim hadn't heard about the EM precursor studies that are really hot these days. But his point is well-taken. Just because it *sounds* good and scientific doesn't mean that it's true.

Of course, there's always cold fusion and polywater

The Canadian Government UFO Archives

There for the asking: UFO sightings.

One of the FAQs about UFOs is the availability of government UFO investigations and research. In Canada, such information is obtainable from the National Archives. Twenty years ago, I first tried to gain access to the docs, and found it ridiculously simple. I got my local library to inter-library-loan microfilm reels of UFO reports from the National Archives. I sat in a cold, dark room with an almost antique microfilm printer, plugging quarter after quarter into the machine. I was very broke, but very rich in UFO reports.

Recently, Jim Easton posted a note in various locations, noting the procedure that enables UFO buffs to get such docs themselves. I repost it again, thanks to his efforts:

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From alt.paranet.ufo Mon Nov 28 09:13:32 1994

From: James Easton <TEXJE@VAXB.HERIOT-WATT.AC.UK>
Subject: Canadian Government Archives

NOTE: The Micro-film listed below, can be borrowed (and in some cases purchased) from the National Archives of Canada. Those wishing to borrow micro-film, both in Canada and the U.S., can usually do so through "Inter-Library Loan", available through most major libraries with microfilm facilities. The address for the National Archives of Canada is: Historical Resources Branch, 395 Wellington St., Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0N3.

UFO SOURCES - GOVERNMENT ARCHIVES DIVISION

Intelligence Sightings of Unknown Objects, 1947-1964
(RG 24, vol. 17984, file S-940-5, pts. 1-2; on reel T-3291)
AVAILABLE FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES. CAN BE PURCHASED OR BORROWED.

Intelligence Sightings of Unknown Objects, 1950-1964
(RG 24, vol. 17988, file C-940-105, pts. 1-2; on reel T-3291)
AVAILABLE FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES. CAN BE PURCHASED OR BORROWED.

Intelligence Sightings of Unknown Objects Outside Canada, 1950-1952
(RG 24, vol. 17988, file S-940-105-3; on reel T-3291)
AVAILABLE FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES. CAN BE PURCHASED OR BORROWED.

Air Services - Sightings of Unidentified Aerial Objects - Project Second Story, 1952-1953
(RG 97, vol. 115, file 5010-4)
AVAILABLE FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES AT NATIONAL ARCHIVES ONLY.

Space Research and Satellites, UFO's, 1953-1966
(RG 97, vol. 104, file 5010-1, pts. 1-3)
AVAILABLE FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES AT NATIONAL ARCHIVES ONLY.

Space Research and Technology, 1959-1964
(RG 97, vol. 104, file 5010-1, pts. 1-2)
AVAILABLE FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES AT NATIONAL ARCHIVES ONLY.

Counter Intelligence - Flying Saucers, 1952-1957
(RG 24, acc. 83-84/165, box 59, file 9150-4)
AVAILABLE FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES AT NATIONAL ARCHIVES ONLY.

Target Detection - Search - Flying Saucers - General, 1950-1967
(RG 24, acc. 83-84/167, box 7523, file DRBS 3800-10-1, pt.1)
AVAILABLE IN PART FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES AT NATIONAL ARCHIVES ONLY. THIS FILE HAS BEEN REVIEWED IN ACCORDANCE WITH ATIP (Access to Information and Privacy Acts) PROVISIONS. SOME DOCUMENTS HAVE BEEN REMOVED FROM THE FILE; DELETIONS ARE

INDICATED ON FILE.

UFO Sightings, 1965-1981 (RG 77, reels T-1741 to T-1744).

Similar records for the period 1982-1988 are also in our custody, but not on microfilm.

MICROFILM REELS ARE AVAILABLE FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES. CAN BE PURCHASED OR BORROWED. RECORDS NOT ON MICROFILM REQUIRE REVIEW IN ACCORDANCE WITH ATIP PROVISIONS BEFORE CONSULTATION CAN TAKE PLACE. THESE RECORDS COULD ONLY BE EXAMINED AT NATIONAL ARCHIVES.

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I think the original poster was Mike McLarty, but I could be wrong.

Letters and Comments

Last issue, I noted that UFO researcher Tommy Roy Blann had written a book with Nelson Pacheco and then disappeared from the UFO scene again. I had heard that the book was panned by some people and that Tommy had withdrawn partly due to this. Pacheco sent me a note informing me that Blann didn't disappear just because of the reviews, and that it was just a matter of getting back into a more "normal" lifestyle after having an exhausting career that included getting shot at while investigating UFOs/mutes.

As for abductions, I received a comment from some readers who expressed their own opinions about what was really happening. One person pointed me to a note posted to alt.alien.visitors, describing why abductions could *not* be so easily dismissed by skeptics:

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From alt.alien.visitors Fri Sep 9 15:02:16 1994

From: flreynolds@aol.com (FLReynolds)

Subject: Arguments against abduction as psychological phenom

Arguments against abduction phenomenon as simply a psychological phenomenon:

POINT 1: Repeatable and clinically testable phenomenon: under hypnosis a subject recalls a detailed description of events involving the subject and a second individual. When informed of this fact in the abstract, being careful not to reveal any more detail than this, either from the physician or the first subject, the second individual strenuously denies any involvement. However, when the second subject is taken under hypnosis, the second subject recalls the events and independently corroborates the detailed description of events as described by the first subject.

POINT 2: This phenomenon occurs in children under the age of 3.

POINT 3: This phenomenon only occurs in tight association with the UFO phenomenon.

No psychologist has ever addressed all of these points taken together as a whole, in an attempt to explain them away as a psychological phenomenon, since any such contention is clearly pseudo-scientific and unsupported by any work of clinical psychology. In general, the psychological community is exceedingly silent on this matter, for which they are being subject to considerable heat for being unable to explain away. Witness the attack on the discipline of psychology

as whole and it's well established use of hypnosis in trauma cases. If psychologists could come up with an even half-way justifiable way to dismiss Dr. Mack's work as a whole, it would have been immediately forthcoming, considering the intense pressure they are under to do so.

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I would observe, however, that these three points are not necessarily proven fact. There are only a handful of cases whereby one abductee has corroborated another's testimony, and these are viewed with suspicion by some researchers. As for abductions occurring in children as young as three years old, I can only note that in my own experiences with three-year-old children, I have found they can come up with some really imaginative things. When I sometimes ask a certain three-year-old what she had for lunch, I can easily convince her that she had a grilled-cheese sandwich, when she really had eaten spaghetti (and vice-versa). Sometimes, she even gives me a wrong answer without any prompting. So, no, sorry, I doubt whether or not the testimony of a young child in recalling an alien abduction is very accurate.

Finally, as for abductions occurring in close association with the UFO phenomenon, I'd say no, again. I have had a number of abductees come to me with their stories without any prior UFO sightings and without an associated UFO observation on the night of the abduction.

On the topic of abductions, I received a review copy of an excellent fortzine titled THE ANOMALIST, edited by Patrick Huyghes and Dennis Stacy (of MUFON fame). Now that BAE is defunct, the ANOMALIST has quickly earned a place as the most interesting and informative zines I have seen, and the one I will willingly read. Stacy and Huyghes have done an admirable job of gathering some of the best names in Fortean literature and produced a twice-yearly zine that covers everything from UFOs to bigfoot to remote viewing experiments and the infamous face on Mars. It's a quality production, it's well-written, and it's *good.* (I won't even mention the typos, Dennis!)

Anyway, one of the feature articles is by Robert Baker, the arch-nemesis of abductee experts who is convinced that virtually all abduction cases can be explained. He points out that the psychological literature has been chock full of descriptions of abduction-like experiences, all in the context of sleep disorders and hallucinations. He suggests that abductees counseled by abductee therapists recall alien encounters, whereas those who present with the symptoms of bedroom paralysis, visits from floating entities and missing time and are seen by psychotherapists familiar with sleep disorders are diagnosed with recognized elements of sleep disorders. He presents a convincing argument in a contrary vein to most abductee literature and is well worth reading to get the "other side" of the debate.

Books and More Zines

Well, not "new," necessarily, but recently acquired. The UFOROM library continues to grow at an alarming rate.

Added during the past several months were:

Tenn, William. OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS. paperback, 1963. There's been a lot of discussion about whether or not William Tenn the SF writer is really William Tenn a.k.a. Philip Klass, or vice versa. Especially

since the SF writer has interesting stories about encounters with aliens ...

Young, Scott. THE SHAMAN'S KNIFE. paperback, 1993 (autographed). So, I was sitting with Joy Fielding and her husband and Scott Young, enjoying a quiet dinner overlooking the ocean, when Joy asked Scott about how his son was. "Oh, Neil is coming in on his yacht tomorrow," he said. I said something eloquent like: "You mean, like, *the* Neil Young?" (I owe Neil Young's dad \$10 for my share of the wine.) Helluva good writer, BTW.

O'Brien, Barbara. OPERATORS AND THINGS. paperback, 1976. This should be required reading for would-be and alleged abductee therapists. Why? Because it's written by a woman who for many years was in control by *them*. These days, we'd say she was in direct contact with her alien abductors. Back then, she was diagnosed as schizophrenic.

Norman, Ruth. FACTS ABOUT UFOS. paperback, 1989. Someone at the 1994 WorldCon told me that Ruth died recently, or rather, she ascended into the ether. The facts in this book concern revelations of the Space Brothers, and are supplemented by many great colour photos of Ruth and her entourage, including the cosmic star generator. A good reason to stay away from El Cajon and San Diego.

Field, Paul. 50 THOUSAND BIRTHDAYS. paperback, 1964. An interesting collection of birthdays of famous people, mimicking Gauquelin in some ways, but from a slightly different perspective. What's more, the actual dates are included for you to check. Field also graphed and charted out some professions, just for fun. Fuel for CSICOP-bashers.

Mason, Peggy. TALES OF TWO WORLDS. paperback, 1972. This is a weird vanity-press publication from Sussex, England. It's one woman's thoughts on everything from reincarnation and UFOs to test-tube babies and war.

Dickhoff, Robert. HOMECOMING OF THE MARTIANS. paperback, 1958 (reprint). Back in the good old days of ufology, when contactees were identified as such and you knew that aliens were everywhere, books such as this were the only ones that you could get with any ease. Mostly reprints of newspaper clippings and finely-detailed drawings of aliens, this is another classic from the bygone era of ufology.

_____. THE URANTIA BOOK. hardcover, 1976. Hardcore Urantians have always asked me if I actually owned a copy. Now I do. I could never justify the \$80 price tag new, but I found a used copy for substantially less at Phoenix Metaphysical Books in Surrey, BC. (You'd think that after such a plug they'd give me a discount or something.) I personally find it odd that a sect of the Seventh-Day Adventists would have spawned such a huge channeled work from the Order of Melchizedek, but who am I to argue with the numinous?

As for the zines, well, there are far too many to cover in detail, but here goes:

ON SPEC #11,14 (a magazine of Canadian SF); PRAIRIE FIRE v.15,#2 (the issue devoted to Canadian SF, released at WorldCon); THE CROP WATCHER #22 (Paul Fuller's excellent circle/ufozine, exposing some great hoaxes); MUFON UFO JOURNAL #316 (what can I say?); MIMOSA #14 (the zine that won the best zine Hugo at WorldCon - it deserved it); BADLANDS #1 (the first issue of a Winnipeg zine devoted to British SF - it has an article by my friend, Susan Rocan); SPACERUNNERS REDUX (not really a zine, but kind of, anyway - an "in" joke that I think is very clever indeed, about an SF TV show which was produced here in Winnipeg); CONADIAN 1994 (the 1994 WorldCon souvenir book); GEO-MONITOR V.4, #9,10 (Vince Migliore's dedication to his earthquake studies is amazing, and should be paid more attention to than certain TST theorists I know); SAUCER SMEAR v.41, #7 (again, what can I say, besides, great! - I was devastated to realize that my subscription has run out ...); DEJA VU #21 (Robert Runte's ramblings on life, especially relevant as the fan GoH at WorldCon); IUR v.19, #4 (great zine, but of course, I'm biased - I'm a contributing editor; this issue features a previously-unpublished article by Edward Ruppelt, written in the 1950s, as he reflected on his visit to a contactee convention. If you don't know who Ruppelt was, you don't deserve to be reading the SGJ); BILL KNELL'S UFO NEWSLETTER #278 (when he was in Winnipeg, I spoke with him briefly but didn't attend his talks - he seems to know more about the Carp crash than Tom Theofanous and Bob Oechsler combined); JUST CAUSE #40 (contains a letter from Bob Todd to Richard Weaver pointing out inaccuracies in his report); UFO AKTUELLT #2 1993 (I haven't the foggiest idea what the quality of the stories are like, but it *looks* like a high-quality UFO mag!); the aforementioned ANOMALIST #2, Spring 1995 (P.O. Box 12434, San Antonio, TX 78212); another NUFON #169, Winter 1995 (11 Pike Court, Fleetwood, Lancashire FY7 8QF); ARCTURUS BOOKS, INC., Catalogue 1995-July (1443 Port St. Lucie Blvd., Port St. Lucie, FL 34952); John Paul Oswald's COMMENTARY #8 (P.O. Box 652, Hampton, NH 03843-0652), a great fundamentalist Christian rant about UFOs and crop circles; and GEO-MONITOR Volume 5, #6, June 1995 (65 Washington Street #400, Santa Clara, CA 95050).

LoCs and WAHFs: Medye Caryk, Gordon Phinn (thx for the pix & stuff!), Mary Henry, T. Horvath, Christian Page, Gary Elsby (a postcard from Gulf Breeze!), archskeptic Robert Young (you're wrong about the Carman film, but thanks for the Roswell missive!), Norman Roll, Carlos D. Ferguson, from Argentina (written completely in Spanish, so I have no idea what he asked), Debra Gilbert, William Jones, Chris Pettett, Paul Ferrughelli (great job on the UFO stats, Paul!), Alice Keens-Soper of Granite TV in England (did anyone see the crop circle show that had me in the credits?), Craig Roberts, Eugenia Lenterio of Out There Canada (I don't want to think about it), Trina Dykstra, A. Howell, K. Yusko, Gianpiero Spicci of CIU in Italy, and a host of others.

Why-I-Don't-Answer-My-Mail Dep't

"Dear sirs, My name is SK (name deleted) and I am president of German Ufology Research (GUFORES). We would like to see how works a Ufology Research in Canada. We will be happy if you send us some information about your work and your research.

Do you know something about Area 51? (USA; 50 miles of Las Vegas). Which date landed the last UFO in Canada? When was the last

contact with an alien?
Looking forward to hearing from you soon."

.... typical of about half the letters I receive. Where would I start?

I've Been Warned

"Listen: The truth about the sightings is what you know. The UFOs are not the secret that our governments think they are. We do not need their pathetic lies anymore. Also no more bitter hatred from them too. They have hurt too many people, from Siberia to Gulf Breeze. I am uncovering the truth, it may take some time. I know some people who will help me. I hope you will help me too. The aliens are breeding from us a super race that will lead us to peace. No more war/killing. No bitter hatred. The world needs people like us to bring forth the truth. When they have the truth, it will be time. But we must be careful. Our governments get more desperate. Clinton/Yeltsin/Major are working hard to hide the truth. Remember our friends who we lost in Siberia in Oct'94. We will remember them. My name is secret. To them I must be invisible. Watch your back.
- Cassandra"

This note had a Detroit postmark. What the heck happened in Siberia last October?

This reminds me of an email I received from someone after the OKC bombing. Sure enough, UFOs had been seen near the headquarters of the Michigan Militia, and it was all a government plot.

Rebecca Made a Crop Circle

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Newsgroups: alt.alien.visitors
Subject: CROP CIRCLES
Date: 27 May 1995 03:45:40 +0100

> Tony M. wrote:
> Does anyone know of any reliable research that has been done to find out
> what kind of mental pathology produces the DESIRE to fake crop circles?

Well, about five years ago some friends and I made one, on a State right-of-way near the heart of downtown Atlanta. We researched the hallmarks of a "genuine" circle and made sure ours met each and every one of the criteria, just to show that it could be done without invoking supernatural or extraterrestrial explanations. It got mentioned on Larry King Live show. But of course you wouldn't be the first to imply that members of Georgia Skeptics are "pathological" - GRIN! But what kind of non-pathological woman would be seen standing in a field holding a long leash with a grown man on the other end running in circles stomping plants. Other than "skeptical research" I guess the pathology is the same as any other practical joke.

> I think it is interesting that believers in such things as crop circles
> seem to hold onto such beliefs ever more tightly the more the evidence
> proves such theories to be nonsense. Again, what kind of mental
> pathology are we talking here?

I have a fascinating tape of Colin Andrews speaking at a Discovery Expo a few years back. He was a rather pitiful figure, speaking of how much he had given up to pursue his belief in the circles, and practically begging the audience to believe. He said things like, "If you could just SEE, them, then you would FEEL their reality. THEN you would BELIEVE." The man was a perfect case study of the points made in the book _When Prophecy Fails_ about when and why people cling to a discredited claim. Andrews's belief in the mystical nature of the circles seemed to have increased to an even more fanatical fervour as more and more evidence (such as the Bowers and Chorley confession) came to light. He was gathering around himself a small cadre of similar fanatics, who could feed off each other to keep the discredited belief alive, just as described in Festinger's book.

Rebecca Long
President, Georgia Skeptics
arlong@netcom.com

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One of the other hot topics in circledom is the H-Glaze report and the debate over the "iron filings" found in a British crop circle. I know that John Stepkowski has posted some notes between Robert Irving and Dr. W.C. Levengood (what do his initials stand for, anyway?) and that there is some concern over who is giving samples to whom. My view is that since the filings were found only at one (two? not including the rumoured one in Canada) site, they are irrelevant to the whole debate. Paul Vigay is corresponding with me regarding physical evidence within crop circles. We have (I am pleased to note) agreed to disagree without getting into any name-calling and flaming that dominates the field. Basically, he has noted electromagnetic anomalies and subjective vibes while in crop formations, while I note that I and others haven't. His experiences have led him to think there are some real anomalies and genuine circles, while ours don't.

What IRCs Me

Not that long ago, MUFON Journal ran an article about ufology on the Internet (including stuff about BBS's). The author explained how wonderful the Net was and how much information about UFOs was available.

Now, I've been on the Internet for five years or so, and I've seen what kind of information is available. It's not pretty. I started out originally on FIDO through a local BBS, and contributed to the UFO sections of the chat groups. Even back then, the limitations of the medium were obvious.

The chat groups were literally filled with drivel, with a few really interesting posts cleverly hidden among the debates about the quality of the groups' moderators, redundant questions from newbies such as "Are there really UFOs?" and nitpicking over completely pointless trivia.

Many BBS's boast dozens of Megs of files related to UFOs, but when you actually look at them you realize they are old Bill Cooper diatribes, the Krill Papers, capture files of pointless arguments in

chat areas and assorted other tediousness. There's very little in the way of actual cases, analyses, detailed case files and scientific papers. Oh, there are some digitized photos of the Santilli film stuff and line drawings that are schematics of Lazar's sportster models, but the vast majority of stuff is pretty lean, indeed.

Then, there are the Web pages. Hardly a day goes by in Usenet without someone announcing: "Really neat UFO Page! Check it Out!" Usually, these turn out to be teenagers' "Gee whiz!" efforts with links to a few standard sites like Yahoo and rutgers buried within other drivel.

(I hardly sound cynical at all, do I?)

Now, there are some good UFO-related Web pages, but I'm hardly about to list any of them here. Chances are, by the time this zine has traveled through the ether and reached you, the sites would be dead and gone. I **can** tell you that the Internet UFO Research Group, IUFOG, did have (at the time of this writing) a very good page with many subpages and links to hordes of other UFO sites including ORTK, Art Bell and others. Try a WebCrawler search to find it and others.

The point I'm trying to make is that the amount and diversity of information and resources related to UFOs is mind-boggling. In addition to the SGJ, there are other zines (such as the Desert Rat), photo archives (like that at rutgers), online personalities (like Mark Rodeghier, Paul Fuller, James Oberg, Chad Deetken and Mike Strainic), realtime discussion groups (such as #ufo, #ascension and #abduction in IRC) with notable UFO personalities with nicks like ss2, Anomaly, Tai-Pan, Rubylcd and Foxx (and many others too numerous to mention here), all ready to share their wisdom, experience, and files galore.

I created a newsgroup called alt.ufo.reports, designed specifically for people to report their UFO sightings. The other Usenet UFO groups tend to fill up with arguments over the reality of the Santilli film and whether or not James Oberg is a NSA stooge. I reasoned that since Usenet was worldwide in scope, it seemed logical that a new group specifically for people to report their UFO sightings was a great idea. Researchers could get the data they needed, and posters could even be anonymous, if necessary.

Of course, logic does not exist on the Internet. Most posters to alt.ufo.reports, despite numerous posts from myself belabouring the purpose of the group (and others rushing to my side) merrily post stuff that would fit other groups better. Not to mention the trolling and spamming that goes on.

On IRC, it's even worse. Aside from the bot and op wars, the group is frequented by people who sign on, type something exotic like "You guys are all crazy!" and log off. Thank you, AOL. Then, there are those who post something slightly more intellectual such as, "Hey, wanna see my Unidentified Flying Dick?!!!" - and then sign off. (Although, some stay on the channel and ask to be made channel operators, as if they had passed some secret test by being ignorant.)

The **good** news (and there is some, BTW) is that if you are patient and hang around long enough, you **can** meet other serious researchers from around the world and exchange information. Often, when the #ufo channel gets tied up, a private channel is created and you can be allowed in by strict invitation only. Real, online UFO "conferences" in the best sense of the word have been held, with some fairly big names discussing case details and important research with each other.

One of the people whom I have met on the IRC channel is A. Wyndham (and no, I won't tell you the IRC nickname). Wyndham is a "newbie" who has become interested in ufology and has undergone a trial by fire in order to find out the current state of ufology on and off the Net. Really, where does one start, and which information is the most valid. These and other things were what frustrated Wyndham during those first steps into the UFO Interland. Here, in a rare, commissioned article specifically for the SGJ, is what Wyndham found ...

Ufology Today: A Beginner's Viewpoint
by A. Wyndham

Ufology is like emotional quicksand...
the more you get into it, the deeper
you sink. (John Keel)

Back in 1979, I saw something in the sky that may or may not have been a UFO. It appeared to fit what I later learned was a classic description of a certain type of UFO. When I realized it was not an airplane, not a Good Year blimp and unlike anything I had ever seen in the sky before, my first thought was, "I have to tell someone!" Though I live in an urban area and the thing appeared in broad daylight and moved slowly enough for me to get a really good look at it, I could find no one in the vicinity who had seen it. I checked the news that night to see if it had been reported, scanned the paper the next day, and talked to neighbors. Nothing! I was surprised and disappointed--how could I have been the only one to have seen this?!

Now, 16 years later, while navigating cyberspace, I discovered others who have had similar experiences. My interest in getting to the bottom of this has been reawakened. Was it a UFO that I saw? I decided to try and find out all I could about this phenomenon--but where to begin? I asked a ufology friend to suggest some books I might read on it. "Well, what exactly are you interested in?," he asked. "Flying saucers? Abductions? Crop circles? Conspiracies? Cattle mutilations? Extraterrestrial visitors? MIBs?" I quickly realized ufology comprises many fields, with subfields, and sub-subfields that have nothing to do with UFOs.

I found lots of information out there but not all of it seemed trustworthy. There were so many conflicting interpretations of just what UFOs really are, it made my head spin. I think some people want to believe so badly, they alter their perceptions to fit their theories. Others, with a vested interest in seeing that the status quo is maintained, go to great lengths to suppress evidence and discredit witnesses, in some cases destroying their lives. Conspiracies have been linked to certain aspects of the phenomenon but that doesn't mean there is a conspiracy behind everything connected with UFOs. And, because someone saw or experienced something perceived to be connected with outer space that ultimately changed his/her life, this does not mean there was anything actually there.

Aha! Here's where I started getting into the mire. The more I learned, the more confused I became. Do I have a theory as to what's behind the UFO phenomenon? There are plenty more I've never even considered. Could it really be plasma, as Phil Klass suggests? Are UFOs secret government aircraft? (If they're so secret, why are they popping

up everywhere?) Could alien beings be coming to visit? Or are UFOs a psychic projection of everybody's collective unconscious?

My reaction at seeing that unidentified, odd-looking, stationary object in the sky back in 1979, was to ask if it might not be a UFO. This interpretation was subjective, no doubt drawing from the stored images in my subconscious, but even now, I may be remembering the event differently.

I began reading articles, talking to people who investigate UFOs, collecting references, exchanging files and buying UFO mags. Despite my initial enthusiasm, disillusion soon set in. Hoaxes continue to be perpetrated and believed. I tend to accept things at face value when, perhaps, I should be more discriminating. There is nothing more disheartening than to discover you've been boonswoggled by sloppy research and unfounded conjecture sensationally presented as the "truth."

Being a newcomer, I rely on UFO researchers and field investigators to tell me what's going on in ufology, while I try to dig out some information on my own. With all this legwork going on, maybe some of my burning questions can now be answered.

Or can they? The ufologists themselves can't seem to agree! Hoaxes abound, as do infighting, name calling, and ego parading. Do some ufologists rationalize their findings to fit their cherished hypotheses? How can I tell? Are ufologists today "a lacklustre bunch of 'experts'...publicity seekers, fortune hunters ... [and] wishful thinkers," as Keith Thompson notes in his book *ANGELS AND ALIENS* (NY: Fawcett, 1991, p.201), quoting Tom Hackney writing in *Saucer Smear*.

Like everyone else, ufologists tend to associate with people who share their views. Whose "evidence" I ultimately accept will reflect my own inclinations on the subject. And if I'm still undecided, I'll go with the view that makes the most sense to me. When my friend gave me the UFO reading list, he purposely included both pro and con viewpoints but did not tell me which was which, leaving it to me to form my own conclusions. Can I remain as openminded when I begin to confront the barrage of conflicting testimony after I've become familiar with the "big names" in ufology? The pro-UFOers suggest intriguing possibilities; the debunkers ask questions a believer might never consider. It's difficult not to get caught up focusing more on the presenter rather than examining his or her actual work. Arrogance does not invalidate reliable, objective research, any more than angry repudiation denotes inaccuracy. The challenge is to separate fantasy from fallacy.

Sometimes I think we forget that we're all on the same journey. We all want to know--experts and newbies alike--what it all *means*. As interest in UFOs increases, as more information becomes available, and as more dedicated people enter the field, my own endeavors begin to improve. I am learning to spot anomalies, to try harder to get at the facts, and to not accept something because I want it to be true.

The most exciting aspect of studying UFOs for me is the opening up of a whole world of ideas I had never entertained before. Is there another dimension to reality? This is both enticing and frightening, because accepting certain theories about where UFOs come from and indeed, what they *are*, may shatter my foundations: I will no longer be on secure ground.

I still do not know what UFOs are. The manifestation of an alien intelligence? An elaborate trick played on us by some mischievous cosmic consciousness? The product of our own collective assumptions? Will I ever find out? I've noticed that ufology has now become part of my life,

like feeding the dog or going off to work in the morning. I have only been at this for about four months, but others have spent 20 years sorting it out, and in the end are neither total believer nor total skeptic.

Where do I stand, as a newcomer? I think, despite the lack of hard evidence, that the phenomenon we are experiencing as UFOs means something. I hate it that disgruntled critics continue to attack witnesses, and that hoaxers succeed in taunting believers and providing more bait for the debunkers. Everybody's asking questions, it seems, but nobody agrees on the focus.

Maybe the answer is that there **are** no answers, that it's the journey that matters. I keep searching because it has meaning--even though I suspect it will lead to more hopeless quagmires. My son (whom I see has been reading my UFO mags) likened the search for the truth behind UFOs as "going into a room with a thousand doors--and not knowing which one to open." "Don't you mean a hundred", I asked (leave it to a kid to exaggerate...). "No!" he said, "because a hundred doors you can **do**, given enough time. But a thousand--is just so ridiculous, your brain would explode." Well, my brain hasn't exploded yet, but sometimes I feel as if it will!

So why do I keep looking? Because these persistent, frustrating, thankless endeavors can sometimes produce the most astonishing insights. And if it results in understanding, even a tiny part of this confusing phenomenon, it's worth the effort. So, if you're a newcomer to ufology--go for it! Learn all you can. Be informed. But be warned too: the more you get into it, the murkier it becomes. The journey is eminently worthwhile though...it tells us as much, if not more, about ourselves as it does about what's out there in our skies.

More New Books and Videos

I have been honoured, I think. The Swamp Gas Journal has received correspondence that suggests it is **both** a skeptics' and a believers' zine.

On a recent trip to the post office, I was pleasantly surprised to find some packages waiting for me. One was from Prometheus Books (which has ABSOLUTELY NOTHING to do with CSICOP): a review copy of **FLYING SAUCERS ARE EVERYWHERE** by Tom McHugh (1995). Billed as a "zany, satirical look at the UFO phenomenon," the book is filled with lampoons of popular UFO-related cases and events. Hugh tells the story of Betty and Barney Bumpkin, for example, and how they were abducted by cricket-faced aliens who wanted to do telemarketing and sell crystal trinkets. They were, of course, aided in their recall of the story by a Nazi researcher who used hypnosis to make Barney bark like a dog and Betty sing "What do you do with a drunken sailor?" Along the way, we hear how astronaut Sally "Gus" Ride discovered that astronauts' UFO sightings were ascribable to frozen urine, trace the Bermuda Triangle and the Puerto Rico Pizza Slice, and learn that Nostradamus correctly predicted that McDonald's would sell a low-fat hamburger.

Okay, so I found myself chuckling at some of McHugh's characterizations. Longtime UFO buffs will like the in-jokes, skeptics will howl at the silliness - and others will burn as many copies as they can find. The cartoons by John Kloss are in the same vein as the book, and show no mercy toward UFOolishness.

In the same mail as the skeptical book, I received a review copy of a new, distinctly pro-UFO video titled **UFO - THE UNTOLD**

STORIES. Produced by ITV and sold through Acorn Media Publishing (7910 Woodmont Avenue, Suite 350, Bethesda, MD 20814-3015, \$19.95), the 50-minute video was a pleasant surprise. UFO buffs will enjoy the great collection of UFO video and film footage that includes many classics that are rarely seen today. My favourite segment is vintage footage of Dr. J. Allen Hynek discussing the Tremonton film and his frustration with the Robertson Panel. There are numerous clips of Gulf Breeze activity for GB fans, and an interview with Ed Walters. There's also a section on Russian UFO videos and military investigations, plus a version of the "jellyfish" UFO that ignores James Oberg completely. One of the video's consultants was Bob Oechsler, and this shows through when the clip of the Guardian Carp UFO is shown, without mention of MUFON Ontario's exposee of the hoax.

Roswell fans will enjoy the interviews with good old Jesse and a few others, and there's even something for crop circle enthusiasts. However, despite it's pro-UFO approach, I was pleased to see some UFOs actually *explained* and some decent discussion by Schiff and archivists concerning the GAO investigation. Plus, there's some good comments about the realities of the classification of documents. Easily the most balanced and rational of commercial UFO videos available today that I have viewed, I would recommend UFO - THE UNTOLD STORIES for addition to anyone's UFO video collection. It can stand alone as a good basic introduction to the pro-UFO side of the debate.

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One last thing: as this issue goes into publication, Manitoba, Canada is in the midst of a UFO flap. There were 15 reports made to UFOROM between late June and the end of July, 1995, including one video of a daylight disc. These and others will be discussed in the next SGJ.

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