

Okay, so this issue is a bit late in appearing. But, while I find myself doing a great deal of writing, most of it is online and in emails. The electronic revolution is taking its toll by making news old before it gets distributed. I only have to go onto IRC to hear the latest about the Mars probe, without waiting for a post to appear in Updates or Roundup.

It's a challenge to come up with information that hasn't let been bounced around the ether for awhile. Yet, there are some things that either haven't been said or have been said but ignored by the masses. There are UFO cases and Fortean events that need telling and disseminating and there have been personal comments made to me but which deserve wider circulation.

This particular issue was in preparation since about February of 1997, but for one reason or another is just finding its way through the net now. So, let us recap some of the "breaking news" of the past several months ...

Hale Mary, out in space ...

It may seem repetitious to begin another issue of the Swamp Gas Journal with a discussion of some of the silly or absurd claims circulating in ufology, but this time, ufology deserves it.

Certainly one of the most bizarre stories advocated in ufology was that of the Hale-Bopp "companion" - known affectionately as the Hale-Mary. First of all, astronomers had known about Comet Hale-Bopp for a few years, and had been predicting it would put on a good show.

We were treated last year to Comet Hyakutake, which seems to have got some people "hooked" on astronomy. Hyakutake was a nice naked-eye object which I observed through my bedroom window and later from a field near my home where it showed a good tail. David Levy boasted he could see a 70-degree tail, but that was in Arizona!

Anyway, possibly because amateur astronomical equipment is getting relatively cheap, many people have been able to buy some impressive scopes and systems. In fact, even a low-end computer-controlled, commercially-available scope is much better than some of the equipment I used in undergraduate astronomy. Back then, Schmidt cameras were all the rage; snipping unexposed film in a dark hood and slipping it inside the focal plane clips was awkward, but gave us some nice photos of distant galaxies. These days, if you even \*bother\* to do your own observing instead of just using a software program or downloading images from the Internet, you can use a computer-run CCD camera to electronically capture astro GIFs of your choice. And, in antithesis to dedicated amateur astronomy, with astro software hooked up to your telescope, you don't even need to be familiar with the night sky or even basic astronomical principles. Just highlight your selected deep-sky target from the pull-down menu, and a few minutes later, it's on your computer screen.

Last fall, when Hale-Bopp began getting hyped up in the media,

a guy named Chuck Shramek used his computerized scope system to take a look at it. He says that when he did, he saw a "saturn-shaped object" near the comet. According to his software program, the object was not a star or other astronomical body.

For some reason, Shramek thought the object was mysterious enough that he agreed to appear on the infamous Art Bell radio show and tell the world about his discovery. While he insisted that he never claimed it was a spaceship, it was hyped up and lauded as some sort of alien device accompanying the comet in its flight. In fact, some "experts" who were "scientific remote viewers" claimed that the object was several times the size of the Earth and was transmitting signals to the Earth which had been detected by radio astronomers.

Ed Dames, one such expert scientific remote viewer, said that the object contained a large quantity of a pathogen which will reach Earth and destroy all terrestrial vegetation in 1997.

Since I'm active on the Internet, I received many queries from people wanting my opinion on the Hale-Mary photos, quizzing me on IRC. So, I downloaded Shramek's photo and immediately laughed. It was so obviously a diffraction spike or CCD artefact, I simply could not believe that anyone would be taking this seriously.

I was surprised, then, to find myself flamed by Shramek supporters who insisted that HM was real and that there was no explanation for the photo. I'm not going to get into the details here, but suffice to say that many people still support the contention, while astronomers are aghast at the claim. For one sincere request, I took the time to compare Shramek's photo with that by an astronomer about the same time and showed how the differential movement of stars and the comet made it obvious that the HM object was a background star.

Despite this, some staunch supporters insisted that because the stars did not exactly line up when the two photos were superimposed, it was proof that the HM object was "real" and that astronomers were trying to suppress the "truth."

What was most amazing to me was that people were getting worked up over such nitpicks but ignoring the basic principles of astronomy. While these arguments were ensuing, Comet Hale-Bopp was perfectly visible in the night sky to anyone with a telescope. No astronomer ever saw what Shramek saw.

[Aside: However, at least a few Shramek supporters claimed they had seen the object, too, at the exact same time, with binoculars, and knew it was not a star! There were also some claims that a Japanese observatory had taken a photo of the comet last summer and that a "mysterious object" appeared on one image. Japanese astronomers pointed out that it was a CCD artefact, but that didn't stop supporters from claiming this was more proof of HM and of the astronomical community's cover-up of the truth.]

{Aside II: As for claims that the HM was sending radio signals and that "prominent astronomers" had verified the claims, no such astronomer has ever come forward with this information. In fact, Colin Andrews (how the hell he got involved is beyond me) admitted that faxes about the HM radio signals from a prominent observatory had been hoaxed!}

The reality is that if there really had been a companion object flying with the comet, it would have been visible to everyone on Earth. And, needless to say, it would be impossible to arrange a "cover-up" of a

kind that would involve the amateur and professional astronomical communities.

So, as we know, Hale-Bopp really did put on a great display. I watched it many times over the winter and early spring, pointing it out to neighbours who were curious and who had heard something about it on the news. In some ways, it could be said that it was a harbinger of doom as some fanatics claimed, especially since this spring saw the worst flooding in my area in 500 years, wiping out several towns including Grand Forks and almost Winnipeg. (I heard an amazing statistic the other day - that only 27 homes in all of the city of East Grand Forks were unscathed.)

[For the record: yes, I was one of those evacuated, along with my book collection and UFO files. Thanks to all who helped me!]

### Israeli Martians

Then there was the story that a small, slimy, gooey Martian had been captured in Israel. The details varied, but one version had it that a green creature had been found on a kibbutz and a police officer hit it with a shovel, killing it. When it was retrieved and placed in a pail for transport to "experts", it degraded into a pile of green goo. Later, it was claimed that tests at a university had shown the pail's contents was cow manure.

Along with this story was the one which had another UFO "expert" who predicted the landing of a craft early in 1997. Even though spacey music blared to entice the aliens, no UFO appeared to the gathered crowd. Perhaps incidentally, Uri Geller was in Israel at that time, celebrating his 50th birthday.

### Alien Boogers

I don't want to belabour the alien autopsy film any more than it already has been, but no further proof has emerged about it. One exception is an interview with the cameraman that was conducted by a Japanese TV crew. However, this interview is greatly disputed (as usual) and we are still faced with an absence of closure to the affair.

Then there's the implants which have been surgically removed from abductees' bodies. Some "experts" are convinced that these are some kind of "tracking" or "tagging" devices, used by the aliens to monitor their victims' whereabouts. However, when one considers some details of the implants, there are some problems with this concept. First of all, the implants vary in size, shape and composition. While we certainly cannot try to outthink an advanced technology, the lack of consistency is puzzling. Another odd revelation is that each implant has been removed from a different part of abductees' bodies. Some are in shoulders, others in hands, and one intensely-reported case had the implant removed from a woman's big toe. (For some reason, the possibility that a metal ort could have become lodged in a person's toe through any means other than an alien abduction doesn't seem to be supported by UFO buffs, even though we all have stepped on things in the dark.)

Some readers may know that Roy Bauer and I examined an "implant" removed from a Canadian abductee. The object was about one millimetre in diameter, very irregular and was attracted to a magnet.

It looked like a metal shaving fragment such as that you might get while using a drill press. The abductee admitted he had used such equipment and many others that might have generated such pieces of metal. In short, we were not impressed.

### Emory Bored

In September 1996, psychology professor Scott Lilienfield published an article in Emory Report about political science professor Courtney Brown. Lilienfield noted that Brown has embarrassed Emory University by claiming he has used his remote viewing abilities to travel to Mars, mind meld with aliens and learn that Adam and Eve were genetic engineers.

"One hardly knows where to begin," Lilienfield says in his attempt to rationally discuss Brown's claims.

The trouble is that any attempt to censure Brown for his claims and actions might constitute infringement of his academic freedom. Further, any attempt by the academic "establishment" might be construed as an attempt to oppress those who really know "the Truth."

Of course, having tenure, Brown is untouchable.

We can sympathize with the Emory administration who were bored and tired of Brown's absurdities. But what could they do? Lilienfield came up with the only possible solution: bury Brown's claims by a deluge of rhetoric denouncing him. Offering contradictory opinion doesn't infringe on his academic freedom. Lilienfield had even offered Brown the opportunity to be tested in his psychological laboratory, but Brown, naturally, refused.

### Apollo Moon Photo Hoax

When the Fortean Times contacted me about writing a rebuttal to one of their articles, I had trouble believing it was even necessary.

David Percy's article on the faking of the Apollo Moon landings is a fine example of exactly how weird Forteana can get. What is perhaps most interesting is the way in which his thesis has been embraced by so many people who agree with his contention that NASA fabricated the whole thing.

Bob Shell, the photographic expert who was invited to "verify" the alien autopsy film, posted to the Internet a request for "astute photographic experts" to take a hard look at Percy's evidence. "Are we looking at a 27-year-old hoax?" he asks. "Sure looks like it."

"I can think of no other explanation for the oddities," he adds. Shell clarified his position by explaining that he did not doubt astronauts really went to the Moon, but that "maybe their photos weren't good enough and NASA accordingly whipped up a batch in a studio somewhere."

I was most amazed at the support from people who we must assume are not technologically naive and who are living in a scientific age. Why, I wondered, did so many people believe that NASA fake the Apollo landings?

Percy's interpretations of shadows and reflections were completely at odds with what is known about photographic effects, and as expected, he took quite a beating on the Internet. Yet, some people gave him some support, calling his questioning approach an attempt to discern the "truth."

Varginha, Chupas, whatever ...

Not to be outdone by the strangeness in North America are the stories emanating from the south. Almost everyone will have heard about the Varginha aliens by now. The gist is that a saucer crashed near this Brazilian locale and aliens were retrieved and taken immediately to a hospital. Several people came forward and insisted they had seen the creatures, which were described as hairy little fellas in need of some medical attention. There were plenty of rumours about military helicopters, official-looking visitors to the hospital and so forth.

The possibility of a contemporary Roswell was greatly appealing. However, since then, investigation of the case has been met with denials, obtuse officials and wild claims that challenge the imagination.

On the Internet, one UFO buff said that a Brazilian UFO "expert" had told him that the beings from Varginha "are in a university in Campinas near Sao Paulo and that US people were on the scene from the beginning." Further, "the beings captured (4 beings, 3 alive and one was dead, shot by a military person) are more animals ... possibly servants to the Alphas or what we call the Greys."

Other comments were that a saucer "with a hole in it and smoke coming from it" was seen crashing to Earth, but "the area of the crash is totally clean ... [because] these beings ejected before the crash." Also, it was speculated that "some UFO beings were protecting some area full of minerals."

Although South American ufologists have tried to find more information about the Varginha creatures, it appears as though they have reached a dead end of some kind.

### Disinformation or Datinformation?

Regardless of the story, it is fair to say that some very strange claims have been made during the past year. Further, it can be said that the claims themselves have been largely disputable and completely against all logic and reason.

As amusing as these claims and stories are, the most important aspect is that people are \*believing\* them. And, with the incredible rumour-expansion capabilities of the Internet, the stories get bounced around the world with such speed that UFO buffs everywhere hear about them and spread them at unprecedented speed. Almost without exception, I first heard about these bizarre stories within the Internet Relay Chat (IRC), where the details of the Varginha aliens' skin and the exact dimensions of the Hale-Mary were lively being discussed by breathless believers.

The worst part of this is that it takes a hundredfold effort to undo the damage done by such rumours within the UFO community. And even then, true adherents will not tolerate any naysayers.

Recently, in one serious IRC discussion (they \*do\* take place), we came to an interesting conclusion of sorts, based on the observable evidence. Given that there is such a proliferation of nonsensical beliefs and stories and claims within the ufological community itself, and given that the proponents of such stories and claims are often "big name" ufologists or those defined as "experts," it is \*as if\* there really is a "disinformation campaign" in the works which is effectively

undermining ufology.

Evidence for this included examples such as Whitley Streiber publishing details of channelled information about the Hale-Bopp companion spaceship, and accepting without question the faxes from a major astronomical observatory supporting such claims. Why anyone would want to pose as such an astronomer and fax information to Streiber is an absurd concept in itself.

### The CIA and a Canadian Centennial Project in Alberta

I'm about the farthest away from a conspiracy buff you can get, but a few things have recently given me pause to wonder.

In 1967, the town of St. Paul, Alberta, decided to do something special as a centennial project honouring Canada's 100th birthday. Someone had the brilliant idea to build a "UFO Landing Platform" as a goodwill gesture to our extraterrestrial neighbours. The site would be designated as a "safe" area for aliens to land and make formal, peaceful contact with Earth.

The site received some national attention when it was built, but over the years it fell into disrepair. No saucer ever landed on it, and it was starting to become a bit of an embarrassment to some local townspeople. But then came the recession.

Someone on town council realized that with the growing interest in UFOs, perhaps it was time to cash in on the popularity of the subject. The town obtained the travelling CUFOS exhibit from John Timmerman when he decided to retire from his EBE chautauqua and concurrently built a UFO "museum" at the base of the platform. In effect, it was creating a unique tourist attraction.

In addition to the exhibit, the town council installed a toll-free telephone line which allowed people to report their UFO sightings. The line was staffed by employees of the town with little or no experience or knowledge of UFOs. They took down witnesses' descriptions of UFOs, typed them up and posted a notice of the incident on public display in the museum. Visitors can browse recent cases while looking at the CUFOS display and also purchase t-shirts, keychains and baseball caps featuring images of aliens. In terms of marketing, it's a great gimmick. In terms of UFO research, the St. Paul museum is a source of firsthand UFO sighting reports, and staff have been most helpful in providing case data to researchers.

Except for one minor thing ...

### The Las Vegas Connection

The town of St. Paul does not have unlimited resources. It needed someone to underwrite the expense of the 800-number. They found their financier in Robert Bigelow, of Las Vegas, Nevada.

Bigelow is described as a "successful real estate developer in Las Vegas", who owns many properties including the Mount Charleston Hotel. Allegedly a multi-millionaire, Bigelow has a keen interest in unusual phenomena. It was said on the net that: "Bigelow wants to gain some fame by spending his money on ET research that will accomplish something."

In 1996, Bigelow bought a 480-acre ranch in the Uintah Basin in Nevada. His \$200,000 investment was to allow the creation of a field

laboratory to study UFO phenomena which have been plaguing the area for many years.

One media source noted: "Bigelow has erected an observation building and moved in a pair of scientists and a veterinarian. He has someone on the property 24 hours a day, recording anything out of the ordinary. Officially, the research is being conducted by the National Institute for Discovery Science, which Bigelow formed last October. Among the big names in the institute's stable of scientists is John B. Alexander, former director of non-lethal weapons testing at Los Alamos National Laboratories in New Mexico."

And, quoting Alexander: "Our approach is to do good, high-quality research using a standard scientific approach and do what we can to get hard data," Alexander said in a telephone interview from the institute's Las Vegas offices. "One of the missions of the institute is to make information widely available."

According to Jim Moseley, Alexander has been described as a former head of the Los Alamos Nonlethal Weapons research, which included conventional means of incapacitating opposing armies and pesky civilian crowds without necessarily killing them, but also included "psiwar" techniques such as remote viewing. Alexander recently "retired" and moved to Las Vegas but still admits to continuing his nonlethal weapons connection through future conferences and his still-existing "NATO appointment." [12/5/95 "Saucer Smear"].

NIDS is supposedly involved in psychic research, remote viewing and the afterlife. Its members want to "understand the physics of flying saucers" and even build one! Furthermore, NIDS at least partly funds the "implant retrieval" research of Derrel Sims and Dr. Leir and \*also\* has been named as contributing funds for Budd Hopkins' infamous Linda Napolitano/Cortile abduction case investigation which generated the book WITNESSED. In short, it's involved in a lot of odd things.

Bigelow is also associated with Linda Moulton Howe, the noted "expert" on cattle mutilations, crop circles and chupacabras. But here is the link to St. Paul, Alberta. Bigelow has agreed to fund the toll-free UFO hotline in Alberta as long as NIDS gets "first crack" at the "really good" tips they receive. In fact, Linda Howe has visited Alberta recently with Chad Deetken, another crop circle "expert", and the two are reportedly working on a "scientific study" of cattle mutilations in North America. Their book is supposedly due out soon.

Howe is a regular contributor to the Art Bell radio program. Her frequent case updates have included conversations with many UFO/paranormal "experts", and she has a toll-free line for witnesses to report sightings as well.

But Bell, as noted earlier, embraces many "off-the-wall" topics and often supports or hypes up preposterous claims such as the Hale-Bopp companion.

### The Common Thread or Threadbare?

If you really wanted to follow all the links, you'd find connections to pretty well everyone else in "popular" ufology. Also involved in the Hale-Bopp fiasco is Major Ed Dames, president of PSI TECH, Incorporated, is the former Operations and Training Officer of the military remote viewing unit. He was apparently with the National Security Agency and was the head of a team at the Stanford Research

Institute, funded by the US Army to develop "scientific remote viewing."

As stated on his web page:

"As a result of increasing turmoil and turnover in the ranks of top Army intelligence leadership during the late 1980's, "channelers" and psychic charlatans were recruited to co-mingle with the trained professionals in the unit. Worse yet, various politicians, desiring information about their political and personal futures, began to approach the project, turning it into a "three-ring circus." Rather than being forced to stand by and witness the disintegration of his unit's effectiveness and the loss of remote viewing technology, Major Dames retired from the U.S. Army, taking the original team's best and brightest with him to form [his own company]."

Despite these lofty goals and altruistic sentiments, it was Dames who went on the Art Bell show to announce he was in direct contact with the aliens guiding the Hale-Bopp companion spaceship that was going to destroy the Earth.

There are also threads to people such as Ingo Swann, another "remote viewer" with links to the military and CIA/NSA, and back to Dr. Courtney Brown himself.

### What's the Deal?

Brown, Howe, Dames, Bigelow, Shramek, Hopkins ...

They all are relatively well-educated individuals who know better than to accept or proliferate questionable claims or information. But to look at the litany of weirdness that has been promulgated through actions, we can look and wonder why and how they got involved.

Unless ...

Well, I can't (and won't) say it was my idea, but it does seem to make sense in its own way. I'll quote verbatim from what someone suggested on the net.

Here goes: "Since scientifically-trained individuals and others trained in military strategy are involved in the "big" UFO cases, and since they are the ones who are on the public lecture circuits providing information about this populist ufology, and since such people should see through such obvious false claims and skewed logic ..... they are the prime candidates for any so-called "disinformation program."

"Furthermore, such individuals are perfectly placed within ufology to exert influences over guillable UFO buffs."

You have to admit, it's a persuasive argument for those looking for the ultimate conspiracy. Basically, everyone's involved.

"We have seen the enemy, and they is us."

Of course, there are other interpretations. One possibility is that within ufology, there is a trend for adherents to be loners, eccentrics and social outcasts. If so, then such individuals' social status (described at length in the classic paper titled "Status Inconsistency Theory") might be responsible for their slightly-skewed view of reality. Their misdirected energies could feed each others' ideas and perceptions and create a unified (but aberrant) version of the UFO phenomenon.

In other words, it could be that such judgement errors are simply due to the fact that ufologists are \*human\*.

(With the exception of those who insist they are "Star Children" or "walk-ins.")



## Off on a Comet

Unfortunately, I do have to mention Heaven's Gate in some way. Ufology simply cannot sweep this incident under the rug and pretend it didn't happen.

While I'm sad that some people had to die for this, it's not like we didn't have any warning. I followed the career of Bo and Peep from the 70s until they disappeared in the 80s, and even back then I was concerned about their control over adherents. When Balch and Taylor infiltrated the group and wrote about it in psychology journals, I figured that certainly \*someone\* in the scientific community would get concerned.

Even when Balch and Taylor noted that some followers disappeared and were never heard from again, it should have triggered a reaction from authorities. But, Applewhite and Nettles were just considered part of the lunatic fringe, and therefore not worth bothering about.

From a viewpoint within ufology, Bo and Peep represented an extreme faction, admittedly, but were not that far removed from contactees in their approach and story. The danger signs of contactee groups are usually ignored as well, and this should be a warning bell for sociologists to pay more attention. One contactee with whom I became acquainted told the story of a "landing site" left behind by an alien probe ship. She held religious ceremonies and pilgrimages at the site, declaring it a holy shrine. After several weeks of this, some local townspeople decided that enough was enough and tried to drive a bulldozer across the site in order to wipe it out. The "true believers" laid in front of it, of course, and the attempt was thwarted. However, the next day, the driver of the bulldozer met with a terrible accident and was found drowned in a nearby lake, with several bones broken. The contactee guardedly informed me: "See what happens when you interfere with the wishes of the aliens?"

Heaven's Gate was a tragedy in the sense that people took their own lives (although some were murdered, as we now know) because of false information. There was no spaceship, no companion and no terrible plague. But we must recognize that Millennial Fever is beginning to hit. Around the globe, believers are starting to really get worked up about a chronological milestone that doesn't even exist in half the world's cultures. Why? Because their spiritual leaders tell them so.

In an excellent series of articles in the Fortean Times, the scale and scope of the Heaven's Gate affair is eloquently displayed. In Canada, for example, I already knew about the Solar Temple mass suicides which had been occurring for the past several years. The most recent apparently took place about the same time as the more newsworthy ones in San Diego. Mass suicides in the name of spiritual belief in a quickened progress towards the afterlife have taken place throughout history.

It seems odd, though, that the suicides were to assist reincarnation on spaceships near comets, or in the case of the Solar Temple, on another planet. Whatever happened to Heaven as a destination? After all, wasn't the group called Heaven's Gate? Somehow, I'd prefer clouds and harps and Pearly Gates rather than an interstellar cargo ship or a hot planet orbiting Sirius A.

What's even \*more\* of concern is that the signs are there that Millennial Fever will only increase as we get closer to 2000 (or 2001 for

the nitpickers). And, in terms of cults, we only need to look at current ufology to find some candidates. There are a host of self-styled "experts" within the UFO community who hold many ardent UFO buffs in the palms of their hands, despite their making absurd and patently foolish and unprovable claims without any calls for verification.

Maybe Phil Klass was a few years too soon when he subtitled his book: "A Dangerous Game."

### Notes from the 1996 Canadian UFO Report

This year, I received extraordinary cooperation from many Canadian UFO researchers and investigators. For the most part, it seems that the most active investigations are by people and groups not associated with the "major" UFO organizations. Why this is so, I am not certain, but it is interesting that I generally received case data from people formerly with major UFO organizations, but not generally from provincial reps of the big UFO orgs themselves. At any rate, I thank everyone who contributed for their open sharing of information; it is through their efforts that some understanding of the nature of the UFO phenomenon is being realized.

For those who are interested, the entire report is available online at several Web sites, including Contact:

<http://www.autobahn.mb.ca/~mikem/canada.htm>

(I know there are others, but I can't find them right now!) The 1996 analysis is also described in detail in the latest issue of the International UFO Reporter, published by CUFOS:

<http://www.cufos.org/index.html>

I've had many positive comments about the annual work we do in Canada, and many people wish that such a report could be done in the USA. I think it's unfortunate that there isn't more work on what I would call "basic" ufology - the investigation, collection and analysis of UFO reports. I mean, this is what is at the \*core\* of the UFO phenomenon: the actual sightings - and if ufologists don't take the time to carefully look at the data, how can they make any judgement about peripheral effects and theories?

This was driven home when I gathered the entire UFOROM gang together for a meeting at which all the "unknowns" from 1996 were examined in detail. After an hour or two of slogging through copies of the case data, the effort was summed-up by one member who said: "If this is what we talk about as the \*best\* sighting information, no wonder we don't have any answers yet."

I quote from the 1996 report:

"In order to gain a greater understanding of cases classified as Unknown, UFOROM members and associates held a special meeting to study and discuss these reports. Available information about each of the 42 cases originally listed as Unknown was discussed in detail and the cases re-assessed. Original classifications of Strangeness and Reliability were also re-examined for each case. Through this process, the identification of only 13 higher-reliability and higher-strangeness cases was made. This re-evaluation therefore left only 5% of the total number of 1996 cases as "good" unknowns.

"It was the consensus of the group that this process was most revealing in that a better appreciation of the difficulties in using UFO data was

gained. Many reports were good as "stories" but seemed to have possible or probable explanations. Some witnesses' descriptions were deemed less than accurate and a significant fraction of cases appeared to need more investigation.

"In short, the exercise showed that the analysis of UFO reports is a very tricky procedure, relying heavily upon mere text of subjective estimates and interpretations of witnesses' less-than-accurate observations. Members of the group recommended that accounts of UFO sightings should not be taken at face value and that caution be used in interpreting what was "really" seen."

What I find most interesting with regards to UFO statistics is that there still appears to be a profound lack of understanding of UFO sightings, even among "expert" ufologists. When I pointed out in Updates that most UFO sightings are explained as stars, planes and other stuff, I was met with disdain from some prominent researchers who insisted that just because a UFO was seen near an airport with coloured flashing lights and a regular direction of flight does \*not\* indicate it likely was an airplane. Similarly, to some people, a starlike UFO which is almost stationary but sinks slowly to the western horizon over an observation period of several hours is \*not\* necessarily a star or planet.

I have no quibble about the semantics, but if I was faced with 90% of all UFO reports having descriptions similar to these two examples, I'd kind of get the idea that most UFOs were not that mysterious.

Well, then, what did we find? I quote from the report again:

"UFOs were reported at a rate of about 21 per month across all of Canada in 1996. Throughout the past eight years, the rate has been approximately 19 per month.

"UFO witnesses range from farmhands to airline pilots and from teachers to police officers. Witnesses represent all age groups and racial origin. What is being observed? In most cases, only ordinary objects. However, this begs a question. If people are reporting things that can be explained, then the objects they observed were "really" there. Were the objects we can't identify "really" there as well? If so, what were they?"

And, as for the numbers:

"The number of UFO reports made in Canada has increased slightly during the past eight years. There now are approximately 190 cases of unidentified flying objects reported each year, up slightly from previous years' calculations."

"About 13% of all UFO reports are unexplained. This percentage of unknowns falls to about 5% when only higher-quality cases are considered."

What does this tell us? Well, the UFO phenomenon hasn't gone away, much to the chagrin of those who thought it was just a "fad." After 50 years, the UFO phenomenon hasn't progressed all that much, I suppose, and James Oberg may be vindicated to some extent. (He won a Cutty Sark writing competition many years ago by arguing that ufology has gone nowhere since its inception.) Contactees are back from the 1950s, except

now they are abductees. Scully's Dr. "Gee" has been reincarnated as any number of sideshow ufologists who claim expertise in alien technology and possess much more mysterious "debris" (although any attempts to get more information from their chemists about these scientific details are thwarted at every turn). Fuzzy black and white photos of saucers have now become fuzzy videos of spotlighted pickup trucks billed as alien landings and latex EBEs are autopsied while mysterious cameramen refuse comment.

It's all rather silly, really, and the circus at Roswell for the 50th anniversary pretty well summed it all up. From the "Crash and Burn Parade" to wedding dresses modelled by grey mannequins to UFO-themed techno-rave non-events to MIB kewpie dolls ....

I can only shudder to think what next crisis might befall ufology ...

### AIN'T Misbehavin'

I'd like to thank all those who replied concerning the publication of AINT, the theory I and Vladimir Simosko proposed. AINT (Alien INcompetency Theory) attempted to explain the bizarre nature of UFO sightings and the associated weirdness in ufology by asserting that aliens themselves were incompetent, with various complications.

Although AINT was phenomenally well-received, I did receive several snail- and e-mail letters lambasting me for daring to suggest aliens were incompetent. It was implied that it was our inadequacy as scientists that prevented us from understanding the true nature of the alien agenda. What was most surprising, perhaps, was that these writers were obviously serious in their attacks.

Fortunately, most replies were as the following:

"Chris,

An utterly beautiful scientific theory. Its ability to predict alleged UFO phenomena is outstanding, and I for one cannot wait for further research into various other aspects of the UFO field. Several come to mind:

1) The obvious alien fascination with abductee genitalia and the recent mysterious disappearance of a shipment of Raquel Darrien faux-vaginas.

2) Cattle mutilations. Is the littering of the prairies with rotting bovine corpses indicative of the sadistic nature of "grey" aliens "out for a good time," or the incompetence of alien butchers?

3) The statistically significant relationship between network advertising revenues and the increasing appearance of \*both\* UFO sightings and television programs. One can easily imagine this is a scheme by the aliens to raise capital to repair their ever-crashing ships so they can go home. I mention this because it appears contradictory to your thesis of alien incompetence. Evidence points to people very willing to spend big money of UFO paraphrenalia."

Whereas another reader wrote:

"Sorry, I think the opposite is far more likely: What they are up to is intended to confuse and mystify us deliberately. They are introducing themselves slowly into our consciousness, turning up the volume a little every year. They make it just strange enough that the debunkers can

fairly easily heap ridicule if they wish, yet just real enough that the phenomena can't be ignored.

"Besides, why *\*should\** what they do make sense to us? Isn't it more reasonable to assume that they are to us as we are to our pets or to our own small children? It is only our arrogance and limited perspective that would allow us to assume that their actions should make sense to us.

"Perhaps they just don't care that much, and sometimes make mistakes. Or maybe they are deliberately acting in a confusing way to get us to think."

And from another:

"Incompetence, which as you point out seems to be a hallmark of alien *\*intelligence\** as much as our own, may just be another example of entropy. After all, it's an old universe, and things have had plenty of time to come unglued. Why would we expect higher intelligence to be uniquely organized when stars blow up, species regularly go extinct, and comets and other debris trash perfectly good planets? Terminal clumsiness may be the fifth force ...

"I teach a course in critical thinking at UColo Boulder. The other day one of my students told me she'd heard that the "government" had an alien in captivity in Colorado Springs. Given that abductees tell us that aliens can materialize anywhere they want, float folks through walls or out of 10-story apartments, freeze mechanical devices, and alter our memories (incompetently, of course), it seems a little odd that they couldn't spring their guy out of a tin-pot jail on a backwoods primitive planet like ours. Perhaps he likes the food, or maybe he's fallen in love with a federal agent."

Excellent point!

Finally, I must include one last observation:

"There is an alternative to the aliens being government workers of some sort. Although having had some contact with the Trust Territory Government of the Mariannas, I can see the comparison you are drawing. Every winter, the State of Florida is overrun by seasoned citizens. These are people who are legally blind, mentally incompetent and otherwise infirm. Yet, they are allowed to drive cars and create mayhem on the highways of Florida. This is with the blessings of the Florida government. I believe it has something to do with money.

"Perhaps the subject aliens are retired and come here for the weather? Another excellent point you bring up is the biological experimentation. Why are they doing the same experiments today that they were doing forty years ago?

"Perhaps the answer is, they are not biological experiments. They are some sort of religious ritual. We will keep doing this until we get it correct, and then the Great Kahuna will come and bless us. That sort of thing."

I thank all my respondents for their comments, rational and otherwise.

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(Come to think of it, no one here has noticed me yet.)