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Science Fiction

A history of strange encounters

Dennis Livingston

Allan Hendry, *The UFO Handbook: A Guide to Investigating, Evaluating and Reporting UFO Sightings* (Garden City, NY, Doubleday, 1979, 297 pages, \$8.95)

Brian Froud and Alan Lee, *Faeries* (New York, Harry N. Abrams, 1978, 208 pages, \$17.50; London, Souvenir Press, 1978, £7.50; London, Pan Books, 1979, £4.95)

It is through neither oblique cynicism nor sarcasm that I have paired books on flying saucers and fairies for this

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review. These two fascinating publications complement each other, as do their subjects, both reaching deeply and explicitly into humankind's mythological and psychological heritage.

Hendry's book does precisely what its subtitle indicates, but it is also much more. In a field rife with fanciful speculation on one side, and hostile rejection on the other, Hendry treads the minefield of no-nonsense pragmatism. His handbook is not a brief for or against UFOs (unidentified flying objects), but a framework in which the lay person (and what else is there in such a subject?) can apply some common-sense rules to the evaluation of UFO material.

On this level, the book has much to offer—a great deal of it devastating to

the community of UFO fans. That the book still receives an introduction by J. Allen Hynek is a tribute to that scientist's persistent attempts to put 'ufology' on a systematic track.

Saucer hot line

Hendry's method was not to look at a representative sample of past or present sightings, but to carry out telephone interviews with those reporting UFOs via a police toll-free hot line operated by Hynek's Centre for UFO Studies. Taking the stance of an agnostic, Hendry analysed the 1300 cases that reached him over a year for what they have to tell us, both about 'true' UFOs and the 90% of the sightings that were IFOs (identified flying objects).

One of Hendry's major points is that, instead of discarding the IFOs to concentrate on the more glamorous unknowns, ufologists should take the IFOs seriously for what they are—the best approximation to (and only available choice of) a control group for UFOs.

By categorising the mistakes commonly made in misidentifying IFOs (advertising planes predominate) as various kinds of lights, discs, and close encounters, Hendry provides an early-warning system for students, and participants, in the field. One striking conclusion is that *nothing* distinguishes those who misperceive IFOs from those who report UFOs: individuals otherwise credible, stable, and reliable may wildly misjudge such factors as the distance, speed, and movement of objects reported. Hendry also exposes the shaky uses of, and misattributions made by, such UFO tools as radar, hypnosis, and animal reactions.

What does this imply for UFOs? One obvious conclusion would be that UFOs are simply IFOs so badly misperceived that their true origins cannot be determined. Yet Hendry has other points to make—UFOs are a multifaceted phenomenon not easily sub-

jected to a single explanation (least of all the extraterrestrial-origin hypothesis, for which there is not a shred of evidence); a pervasive emotional atmosphere now surrounds sightings of strange things in the sky; and those who reject any possible, unknown, objective reality for UFOs make their own distortions of the more interesting cases and witnesses.

Hendry's own conclusion, following Jung and others, is that at the very least UFOs are a first-class sociological phenomenon reflecting the political tensions and technological predilections of our times. UFO reports are therefore meaningful phenomena—Hendry asks why, before the cold war of the 1940s, there was no UFO movement, ie why were twinkling stars, and the like not assumed to be alien craft? Today, "a powerful emotional desire exists universally to 'see' UFOs", and those who strain to disprove the physical reality of UFOs completely miss the mythic significance of the UFO phenomenon.

Yesterday's fliers

Hendry notes in passing the similarity of UFO sightings to encounters with fairies over the centuries. The analogy is fully born out by Froud and Lee in their most entertaining, and delightfully illustrated, 'natural history' of fairies (other books in the series feature gnomes and giants).

The authors have drawn on folk tales and sightings from various cultures to give an account of fairy society, habits, food, clothing, and relations with humans. According to this book, fairies, like UFOs, have been reported by the most credible witnesses, come in a wide variety of shapes, have both benign and evil consequences for people they meet (depending on the type of close encounter and nature of the species), and occasionally leave physical traces of their existence.

To carry the analogy through, one

can imagine some 13th century Centre for Faerie Studies producing precisely this type of study. With a mix of seriousness, awe, and bemusement, the authors report where fairies are most likely to be found, how to ward

off fairy spells, when it is especially dangerous to come across fairies, and the ecology of fairy-plant interactions. While I would prefer a world in which both fairies and UFOs 'really' exist, the mythic level is rich enough indeed.

CONFERENCES

Waiting for the FAST line

"Europe in transition: the challenges of the future", a workshop organised by l'Association Internationale Futuribles in cooperation with the Commission of the European Communities, Arc-et-Senans, France, 19-22 September 1979

The assistance of the Commission of the European Communities was obvious at the third, and the biggest to date, in a series of European workshops presented by the French futures studies association. Günter Schuster, head of Directorate-general 12 in the Commission, chaired the final session (the summing up was done by Aurelio Peccei, president of the Club of Rome). Ricardo Petrella, head of the Commission's FAST (forecasting and assessment of science and technology) team spoke in the afternoon session on the first day.

But it was Jacques Lesourne, head of the OECD INTERFUTURES project, who spoke first, and who gave one of the best presentations at the meeting. In this he was no doubt helped by having just completed three years of research, but he did not limit himself to the contents of the official INTERFUTURES report.

He spoke of his fears that the next nuclear war might be between Third

world countries in Asia, of the possible Balkanisation of Africa, and of the likely 'conquest' of Russia by Soviet Asia through its higher fertility rates. He also noted the decline of the USA as a world power, but did not think that Japan would be able to take up the mantle, partly because of her lack of military power.

For Petrella, head of the FAST team (but stressing here that he was speaking as an individual) such a decline represented a chance that should be seized, a chance for Europe to reassert its position as a world power. How this will translate into FAST's work remains to be seen. And it was a pity that FAST has not produced anything which could be compared with the INTERFUTURES report. The team has only recently been at full strength (six) and is still at the project-definition stage.

Sharp Schuster

The next day was taken up with the working groups. Because some had proved popular, and others less so, various working groups had to be eliminated. This still left ten groups to report on the third and final morning under the watchful chairmanship of Günter Schuster. "Why", he asked the reporter of the 'welfare state' group, "did you not mention the question of