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Brenda Denzler : *The Lure of the Edge: Scientific Passions, Religious Beliefs, and the Pursuit of UFOs*
The Lure of the Edge: Scientific Passions, Religious Beliefs, and the Pursuit of UFOs by
Brenda Denzler

Review by: rev. by Michael J. Crowe

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of technology Thomas Hughes. Indeed, Chiles's explanatory concept of "system fracture" (p. 7 ff.) would seem to be a robust analytical concept on the order of Hughes's "seamless web" and "reverse salient." Chiles's recommendations for change appear to be based on an underlying understanding of technology as culture.

Inviting Disaster is a light read for historians, but a generally thoughtful and even entertaining one. The argument is sometimes repetitious, and the author's technique of shifting scenes from a contemporary to a more remote disaster is somewhat distracting—it reminds one of the plot technique used in the *Love Boat* television series. But then, historians were not Chiles's intended audience. The book was intended for a general audience, particularly those who may be actors in a technoscience network and who may benefit from Chiles's "lessons from the edge of technology."

J. SCOTT HAUGER

Gary L. Harris. *The Origins and Technology of the Advanced Extravehicular Space Suit.* (AAS History Series, 24.) 558 pp., illus., figs., tables, notes, index. San Diego, Calif.: Univelt, Inc., 2001. \$85 (cloth); \$60 (paper).

The History Committee of the American Astronautical Society brings us this rich, carefully researched, and well-referenced book. Gary L. Harris spent ten years tracking the evolution of the extravehicular space suit. The result is an eight-chapter book that is amenable to selective reading, although one could read it from beginning to end for an evolutionary view. *The Origins and Technology of the Advanced Extravehicular Space Suit* is an outstanding technical compendium for one's reference library. While the author describes it as "introductory in nature," many will find it several notches toward the moderately advanced side. The bibliography offers twenty-two pages of references.

The sequential reader is taken through a section on EVA (extravehicular activity) suit nomenclature, followed by a discussion of pressure-suit mechanics. Suit physiology in relation to the space environment is summarized. The EVA suit developments through the Apollo program are compared to Russian developments, including those in connection with the Mir Space Station. The advanced EVA suit requirements and technological concepts for lunar and Mars investigations are presented.

The book is richly illustrated, including more than thirty-five line drawings by the author. Many persons will find this book to be a signifi-

cant review of the EVA suit and a contribution to documenting the progress in enabling humans to work in the vacuum of space (earth orbit and lunar locations) and the thin atmosphere of Mars (with a surface atmospheric pressure less than 1 percent that of the earth).

Wiley Post, the 1934 progenitor of the first practical pressure suit and pioneer high-altitude flyer using it, would, I am sure, be very pleased to see the spectacular evolution of his early equipment to what is described in this highly readable and authoritative book.

STANLEY R. MOHLER

Brenda Denzler. *The Lure of the Edge: Scientific Passions, Religious Beliefs, and the Pursuit of UFOs.* 335 pp., notes, bibl., index. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001. \$35 (cloth).

Brenda Denzler, who based *The Lure of the Edge* on her doctoral dissertation in religious studies at Duke University, reminds her readers that according to a 1996 Gallup poll, 48 percent of U.S. citizens believe in the reality of UFOs and 12 percent claim to "have seen a UFO" (pp. 2, 161). Despite these striking figures and the immense number of publications that the UFO movement has produced, relatively few scholars have studied the movement itself. Denzler states that the goal of her book is for the "reader to come away with a sense of the conflicting and paradoxical dimensions—and, I feel, the importance—of UFOs and the UFO movement in American society" (p. vi). Her particular focus is "the tension between science and religion as explanatory frameworks within the UFO community" (p. xv).

Put differently, her goal is to use sociological and historical techniques as well as methods employed in scholarly studies of religion in order to show that the widespread belief that the UFO movement can be conceptualized as primarily cultish in character is seriously inadequate. In pursuit of this goal, she documents in detail that the dominant orientation of many early investigators of UFO claims was scientific. Gradually, however, two developments complicated this tendency. The first was that some of the leaders in these investigations—for example, the prominent astronomer J. Allen Hynek—began to believe that the conceptual tools of science might be inadequate to uncover the compelling evidence of UFOs that he so energetically sought. Second, during the past twenty years or so, the type of evidence that presented itself shifted very significantly. In particular, hundreds if not thousands of people began to come forward claiming that they had been abducted by UFOs. Moreover,

their claims were judged credible by some respected intellectuals—for example, the Pulitzer Prize-winning Harvard psychiatrist John Mack. One investigator described this situation as nothing less than an “invisible epidemic” (p. 55), while others suggested that in the United States alone the number of UFO abductions might be as high as 3.7 million (p. 56). The upshot of these two trends was that ufology tended to split into two camps, one seeking evidence in terms of traditional scientific categories and methods, the other stressing that more capacious categories should be sought in such areas as religion, spirituality, metaphysics, and mysticism.

Denzler's book provides a well-informed and thoroughly documented history and sociology of the UFO movement in the United States. This is formulated into five main chapters: “A Short History of the UFO Myth,” “A Short History of Alien Encounters,” “Ufology: On the Cutting Edge or the Fringe of Science?” “Ufology and the Imaginal,” and “Ufology, God-Talk, and Theology.” These are supplemented by a largely empirical appendix, “A Picture of the UFO Community,” which reports on an extensive survey Denzler conducted among persons active in the movement. Her book is especially effective in sorting out the ways in which the movement has interacted with religion. She provides a sensitive and nuanced analysis of its links with theosophy, spiritualism, traditional religions, and much else. Denzler designed her volume as a work of scholarship, as is indicated by the fact that nearly half of it consists of extensive endnotes, a detailed bibliography, and a useful index. And she navigates her way through the minefield that is her subject with a commendable objectivity and a dexterity rarely found in such studies. Although it is clear that her sympathies tend toward the ufologists, she carefully presents arguments made by the “debunkers.” Historians of science interested in the history of the UFO movement or in historical interactions of science and religion should find this a useful and engaging contribution to the literature.

MICHAEL J. CROWE

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