

FORUM

In which the readers, editors, and correspondents discuss topics arising out of Omni and theories and speculation of general interest are brought forth. The views published are not necessarily those of the editors. Letters for publication should be mailed to Omni Forum, Omni Magazine, 909 Third Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10022.

UFO over Iran

James Oberg's article for UFO Update in *Omni's* August issue is rhetorical prose at its worst. Oberg has used innuendo and guilt by association; he has introduced facts that were not part of the original story and then shown them to be false. He introduced the presence of Jupiter and all, but he said that it is the cause of the event, while choosing to ignore radar lock-ons by the F-4 chasing the object. I could go on, but it would serve no purpose. Those of us who have studied the Iranian case know that Oberg's presentation of the facts is distorted by his perspective. The fact of the matter is that neither Oberg nor the *National Enquirer's* blue-ribbon panel was in Iran that night. The events occurred three years ago and are becoming dim memories in the minds of the people who experienced them. All we have left are second- and thirdhand stories. This is the fate of all UFO events to date.

I was on the *Enquirer's* panel that judged this case as "the most scientifically valuable UFO case reported in 1976." I would like to think that we did somewhat more than "merely agree that it sounded like a good story," as Oberg stated.

Oberg takes the *Enquirer's* blue-ribbon panel to task for endorsing the Iranian case without a thorough investigation. The panel is not a scientific investigative body. It is a group of scientists who meet once or twice a year to discuss stories selected by the *Enquirer's* minipanel of representatives from the major civilian organizations: NICAP, APRO, and MUFON. We have not seen a reported case strong enough to be considered proof that UFOs are vehicles, but we have seen many cases that provide us with tentative scientific clues, which may help someone in the future unravel

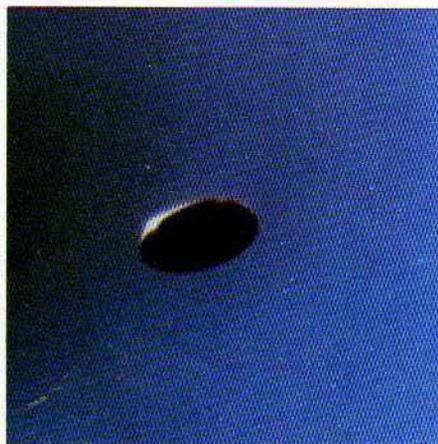
this mystery.

What would be scientific proof? The only acceptable proof is a "close encounter of the third kind," as depicted in the movie of that name, or the nearly complete wreckage of a flying saucer in the Smithsonian Museum for all to look at. I do not think that we will see either during our lifetime. I think that we must take the clues that we have, although many of them may be false, and try to explain them by mathematical theories and then by laboratory experiments.

John L. Warren, Ph.D.
Los Alamos, N. Mex.

James Oberg replies: *If Dr. Warren thinks he can take "second- and thirdhand stories" and conclude from them that the Iranian UFO was a doorway into space through which material from another universe can enter our dimension, then he is welcome to keep contributing to the National Enquirer. I cannot see that he has anything of value to contribute to science. Nothing personal, but I think those ideas are some of the most ridiculous UFO fantasies I've run into this year—and the competition is pretty stiff. Sorry, but the quality of the evidence cannot support such speculation.*

In regard to the UFO Update ["UFO over Iran"], James Oberg seems to have a problem with his information concerning



the F-4 Phantom's fire-control system.

I believe I would qualify as an expert on that matter. I've spent several years as a radar technician in the U.S. Air Force on the F-4, the same model that [was] sold to Iran. As a matter of fact, Iranians trained with us at Lowry Air Force Base, in Denver.

The "frozen weapons control panel" is very ordinary. Since both heat-seeking and radar missiles are initially aimed by the radar set, they have an intricate relationship with that radar. Radar enables the missile to be fired. Unless the radar is receiving a target that is within the missile's range, the missile will not be fired. The button, when pushed, would have no effect. It would then seem as if the panel was "frozen." Jupiter, needless to say, is out of range of the missiles.

As for Oberg's experts from Tactical Air Command, unless they were radar technicians, they wouldn't be of much help. They are correct, however, in stating that the missile is fired from an electrical circuit separate from the fire-control panel. Even though this is true, the missile button is not a light switch that, when pushed, completes an electrical loop to fire the missile. It is, instead, a complex system that integrates in the logical circuitry of a computer (the fire-control computer) many signals from all parts of the plane. Altitude, airspeed, relative speed to target, heading of target, missile range, etc., are involved in the decision of the computer to fire the missile. In effect, the pilot "asks" the computer to fire the missile; the computer then decides and has the final say.

Alas, another terrestrial explanation!

David Hofer
Denver, Colo.

Anti-intellectual Peers

This letter is sent in response to the article in *Omni's* September issue entitled "Saraswati in the Bronx."

Several years ago I attended a small public high school in Florida, which was similar in design to Bronx Science, though perhaps not quite so rigorous or demanding. Reading the article reminded me of my own experience in a special

UFO UPDATE

By Robert Anton Wilson

Most people see the UFO debate as a battle between True Believers and Skeptics. The true believers, according to this model, are dogmatically—even religiously—committed to the idea that UFOs are interstellar spaceships; the skeptics hold that UFOs are nothing but hoaxes, hallucinations, and misperceptions of ordinary aerial phenomena.

It might be better to picture the debate as involving two rival bands of true believers, the spaceship fans on one side and, on the other, those who will not renounce the doctrines they learned in high school and college.

The true skeptics are those who are not dogmatically committed to any theory, who are willing to consider both these positions and less-publicized theories as well.

Two new books, written from entirely different perspectives, seem to represent true skepticism. The first is *Space-Time Transients and Unusual Events* (Nelson-Hall, Chicago, Illinois), by two psychologists, Michael A. Persinger and

Gyslaine F. Lafrenière. The second is *Messengers of Deception* (And/Or Press, Berkeley, California), by Dr. Jacques Vallee, astronomer, cyberneticist, and longtime gadfly of ufology.

Persinger and Lafrenière have examined not only 1,242 reports of UFOs but also 4,818 other anomalies. Something of the feel of this remarkable compilation can be gained by looking at just 6 of the 6,060 reports: In Casterton, England, in 1885, a 12-pound quartz stone fell during a lightning storm; in Huntington, West Virginia, in March 1962, a telephone operator picked up part of a phone call that was made the previous Christmas; in Bedford, Indiana, in 1957, a UFO witness' head was covered with burns; in Rapid City, South Dakota, in 1911, the temperature dropped 47 degrees in 15 minutes; in Budapest, Hungary, in 1921, unexplained fires and jumping furniture beset a house; in Madison, Wisconsin, in 1954, a driverless car was pursued by police.

Such occurrences are unusual but not that uncommon: They are often reported by families and appear in statistical

clusters. Using an IBM 360-40 computer, Persinger and Lafrenière have found several provocative clusterings. These oddities tend to take place in the same localities many times, recurring after decades or even centuries. Areas of high tornado activity and those along fault lines are also unusually susceptible to strange phenomena. And where there have been reports of UFOs, there have usually been reports of other oddities: Bigfoot has prowled; houses have been "haunted" by poltergeists; electrical equipment has misbehaved; or people have had visions, nightmares, or amnesia or have suffered burns or been paralyzed.

A partial explanation, the authors suggest, lies in the recent finding that Earth's geophysical behavior suffers local fluctuations at times of high solar-flare activity. These fluctuations, they propose, create electromagnetic anomalies and energy shifts leading up to earthquakes or tornadoes. Hence the clustering of these events in earthquake and tornado areas and their tendency to peak before earthquakes. The same fluctuations, they argue, can promote the formation of ball lightning and plasma in the sky and can interfere with normal brain functioning in animals and humans, causing both the panic so often reported in animals in these areas and the amnesia, blackouts, and/or hallucinations in humans.

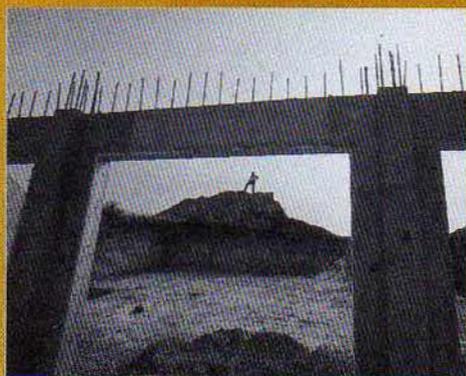
This hypothesis fits nicely with most—alas, not all—of the data presented. It also explains why some of the craziest and most implausible "contact" stories have come from places where independent witnesses have also reported strange occurrences. In such cases, those on the outskirts of the energy flux report baffling electromagnetic oddities, lights in the sky, and other events. Those closer to the flux experience odd physiological sensations—terrible odors, paralysis, and such—along with such strange phenomena as objects jumping and dancing. Those at the epicenter report all of the above and, with equal honesty, their own hallucinations. The "experts" then sweep into the area and announce that the hard evidence was hoax and all the rest, hallucination. Small

CONTINUED ON PAGE 138



Lenticular clouds, such as this one seen over Powys, Wales, have inspired many UFO reports.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 40



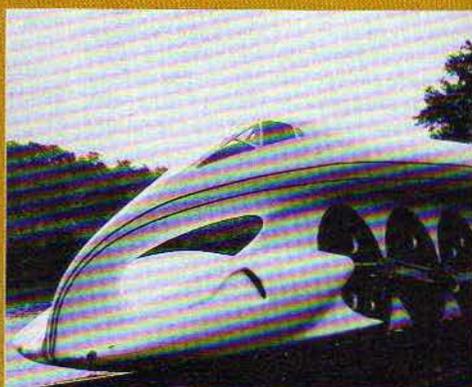
UNDERGROUND



MAN AND MONKEY



ALLIE



COLANI

UNDERGROUND ARCHITECTURE— Trees grow in the Lierlys' front yard. Flowers bloom, breezes blow. But it never rains. The Lierlys' house cost less than other Oklahoma homes its size, and it uses perhaps a third as much energy. And grass grows on the roof. Like a surprising number of American families, Price and Sylvia Lierly live underground. There are at least 3,000 subterranean homes in the United States today, probably many more, and office buildings and even shopping centers are following them into the earth. For a look at why the caveman's ancient home may be the best housing for the coming decades, see the January *Omni*.

LOOKING BACK AT C-21— Algirdies Eunan Olgierd Huth— Allie, as most of us know her—embodied the best in biotechnology in the primitive year 2000. Gene mapping, artificial fertilization, and a host mother combined to guarantee that she would be the healthiest, most capable child her genetic parents could produce. Allie, as her parents had planned, was the first person born in the twenty-first century. In this record of her first 100 years, she traces the revolutions in medicine, education, government, and personal freedom that electronics, bio-, and psychotechnology have brought about since her birth. The tale, told to science writer G. Harry Stine before Allie left for the stars in the first faster-than-light ship, appears in next month's *Omni*.

COLANI— "There are no straight lines in nature," says engineer Luigi Colani. So he's thrown away his straightedge to design aircraft, autos, and furniture that curve into the future. Colani grew up in Berlin and trained there at the Academy of Art. Today, after three decades of sculpting home and industrial products that range from toothbrushes to oil tankers, he just may be Europe's best-known designer. In a stunning pictorial, January's *Omni* will show you the look of tomorrow.

BETWEEN MAN AND MONKEY— Get ready for the most important words uttered in the twentieth century. They're "Baby in my drink," and they were said by Washoe, a fourteen-year-old chimpanzee that speaks American Sign Language, also used by the deaf. Washoe is the property—or perhaps the colleague—of Dr. Roger Fouts, a University of Oklahoma psychologist pioneering in the field of interspecies communication. Washoe, a gorilla named Koko, and many other talkative simians are telling us man is not alone anymore. The next issue of *Omni* holds all their gossip.

wonder the experts think the public is crazy and the public thinks the experts are liars.

Dr. Vallee's *Messengers of Deception* takes a broader and more ominous perspective. Vallee proposes that UFOs, whatever they are, have been created by a terrestrial intelligence agency. UFOs, he says, are not a secret weapon, as some have hypothesized. They are a secret control system to manipulate the beliefs and the behavior of the public. The argument for this is subtle and ingenious. It is also damnably difficult to summarize. Vallee does demonstrate with examples from recent history that intelligence agencies have created some truly staggering deceptions. (This part of the book is great fun for fans of espionage stories, whether or not they are interested in UFOs.)

He then points out some consequences of the UFO mystique, which has grown up in the past three decades. According to this mystique, certain elect individuals have been selected by our space brothers to carry their wisdom to us backward Earth folk. The messages carried by these elect ones, Vallee points out with fine Gallic irony, are redolent of the most reactionary ideologies. Authoritarianism, mysticism, a follow-the-guru syndrome, contempt for science and reason, in-group superiority, and messianic fervor are found among UFO cultists.

Here Vallee becomes chillingly specific. Naming names, he shows links among intelligence agencies, occult groups, UFO cults, and allegedly impartial UFO study groups. The whole UFO phenomenon, he says, might well have been designed as a new quasi-religious faith that can be used to manipulate populations, just as churches and cults have been used by reactionary forces in the past.

It is refreshing that Persinger, Lafrenière, and Vallee admit that some of their theories do not explain the enigmas they have confronted. Combining these theories, one can envision both that a cyclical natural phenomenon creates areas of strange occurrences and that a cynical intelligence agency has capitalized on it to instill a new mythology.

Still, some of the reports do not fit even that theory. The extraterrestrials that so many want to believe in might yet be found among the still-unexplained tales. But so might the time travelers conjectured by Saul Paul Sirag, the "sky critters" of Trevor Constable, the "ultraterrestrials" of John Keel, and other natural phenomena we do not yet understand. It will take several more investigators as imaginative, independent, and free of dogma as Persinger, Lafrenière, and Vallee to find out. ☐

Robert Anton Wilson reviews books for Omni. His new novel is Schrodinger's Cat: The Universe Next Door (Pocket Books).