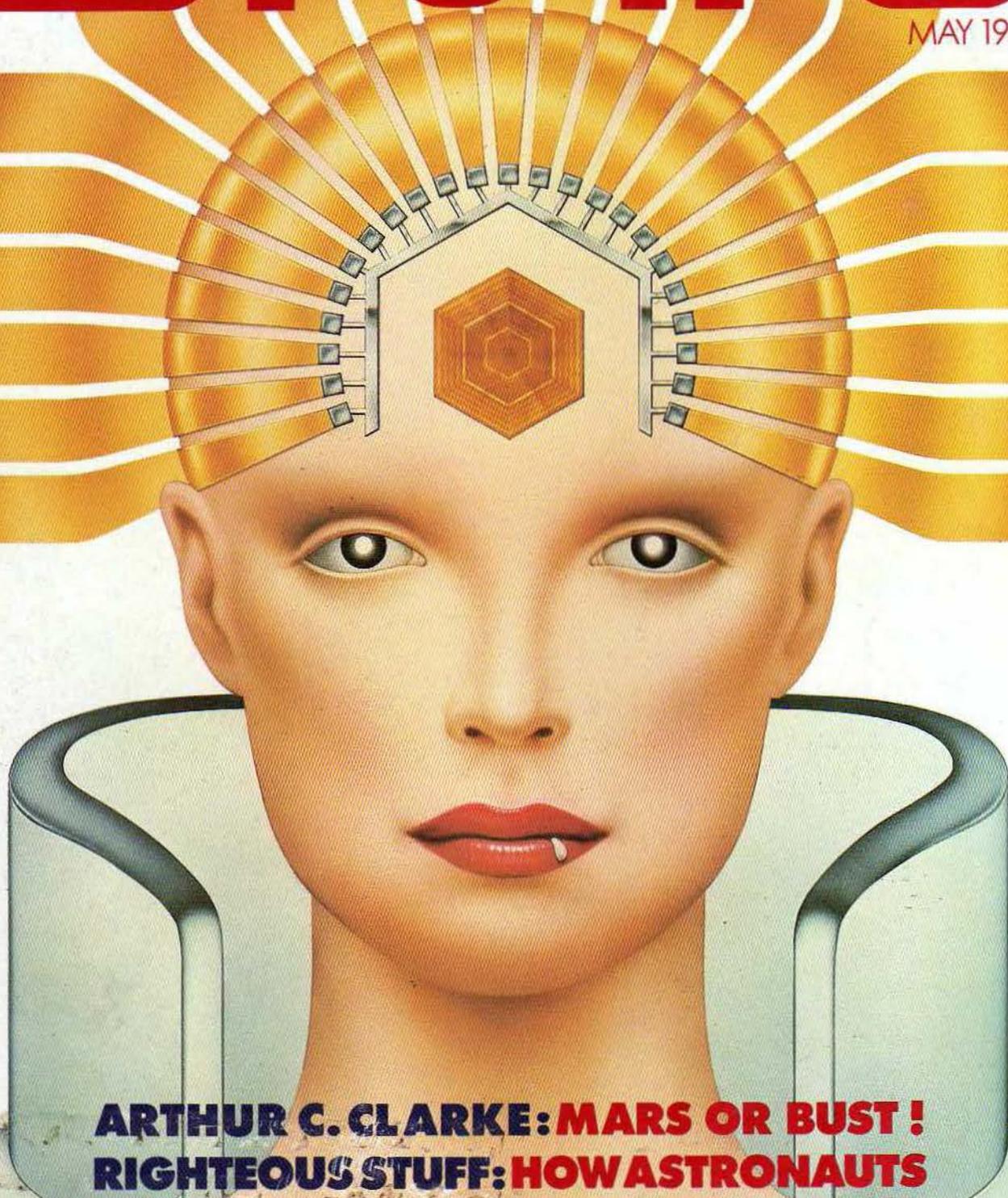


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“We can account
for decades of UFO sightings
without resorting
to supernatural explanations.”

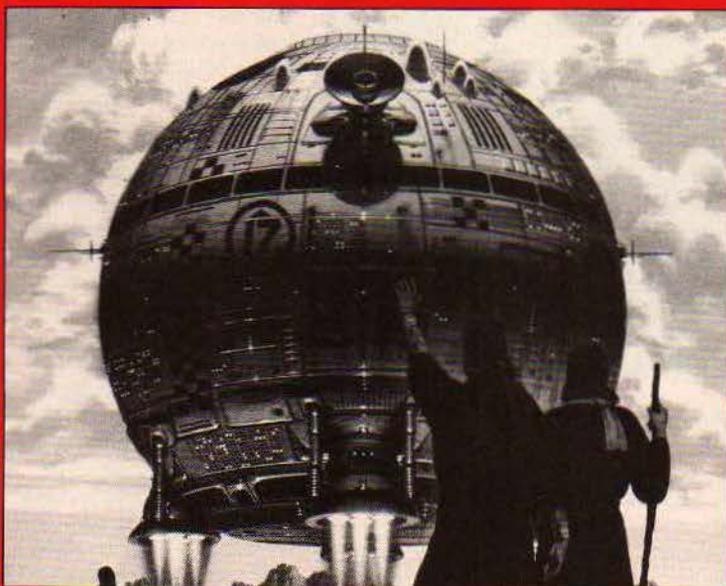
ANTI MATTER

In last month's UFO Update, J. Allen Hynek called intergalactic travel physically impossible, arguing that UFOs could *not* be craft carrying emissaries from space. Instead, Hynek, director of the Center for UFO Studies, in Evanston, Illinois, suggested that unidentified flying objects may represent an alternate reality, or even “doors” connecting our universe to some parallel dimension.

I would like to counter that theory with the “null hypothesis,” which holds that we can account for decades of UFO sightings without resorting to extraordinary explanations. Under this hypothesis, put forth by skeptical UFO theoretician Robert Sheaffer, there would still be innumerable UFO reports, including some seemingly unexplainable cases. There would still be hypnotically extracted stories of abductions by flying-saucer crewbeings. There would be close encounters of the first, second, and third kind.

There just wouldn't be any UFOs.

Proof of this hypothesis lies in a simple thought experiment. Ufologists now claim that of all UFO reports, 90 percent can be explained, while 10 percent are “true” UFOs. But imagine that all true UFOs go away for a period of time, leaving the UFO reports caused by readily explainable misperceptions, pranks, and hoaxes. Since it is unreasonable to expect amateur UFO investigators to solve all such prosaic cases, we would be left with a residue of false UFO cases, indistinguishable from what pro-UFO investigators present as true UFOs. The obvious impli-



cation is that the real world doesn't have real UFOs after all.

Ufologists such as Hynek refute this experiment by pointing to the credentials of witnesses. But witnesses need not be drunk, uneducated, myopic, hysterical, or psychotic to succumb to limitations in human perception and memory. In fact, studies suggest that the better educated an individual is, the more likely he or she is to fill in the blanks unconsciously.

An excellent example is a set of cases endorsed by Hynek himself. Astronomers in the Caucasasia and Volga

regions of the USSR reported sighting UFOs throughout 1967. The men were actually seeing tests of space-to-Earth orbital thermonuclear warheads, but their reports were interpreted by leading American ufologists as proof that even highly educated people see UFOs.

Until pro-UFO researchers grapple with the reality of human perception and self-deception, alternate universes and interdimensional communication are destined to remain hypotheses in search of data.

Maybe alien starfaring civilizations who have mastered the secrets of intergalactic travel are observing our planet. Such beings would, in Arthur C. Clarke's words, be capable of feats “indistinguishable from magic” and could thus conceal themselves from us. Having done so, they may even now be searching for the identity of the UFO pilots, since they know it isn't they!—**JAMES OBERG**

James Oberg is a UFO skeptic and an aerospace engineer.