

MAGONIA ETH Bulletin

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EDITORIAL

This is the last issue of this publication under its present title. Next month it will be renamed *Magonia Monthly Supplement*. It was started, as we stated in our first issue, 'to examine the evidence that ETH supporters apparently find so compelling'. However, it seems that ETH proponents are not at all keen to have their evidence submitted to critical examination. As Jacques Vallée remarked in his book, *Revelations*, ' . . . you are not supposed to point out contradictions in the stories. Questions must always be directed at the higher topics, such as the philosophy of the aliens, or their purpose in the universe - not the practical details of their existence. In other words, *it is not done* to ask any question that has a plain, verifiable answer.'

This avoidance of the issues regarding alleged alien visitations, and the extreme reluctance of ETH proponents to identify cases which seem to them to point to the ETH as a reasonable explanation, have made it difficult and frustrating to try to fill even a modest monthly newsletter with interesting and relevant information on this theme. Thus, future issues will be devoted to covering all of the topics normally dealt with in *Magonia*. The editor welcomes letters and short articles on these subjects. Readers interested in the ETH are assured that we will keep a close watch on it and will continue to publish anything we think might be of interest to them.

ALLGASH, AZANDE, ABDUCTIONS AND ALL Thoughts on the ETH as blanket explanation

Hilary Evans

If it is true that we are by nature an inquiring species, seeking an explanation for everything, it is no less true that the kind of explanation we prefer is the kind that explains as much as possible by as little as possible.

We started by inventing gods, who could be held responsible for pretty well everything from thunder to crop failure. Evans-Pritchard in the 1930s found that life with the Azande was impossible until he adopted their working hypothesis that everything is the result of magic. But little by little, we have learnt that some things can be blamed on natural causes, some on our own misperceptions, until, for many of us who live in the second half of the 20th century, field-theories and blanket explanations have become things we tend to cast a cold eye on.

But the lure is always there - to blame the Government, the Atom Bomb, the Jews, the Papacy: 'Them' in this form or that, whichever is convenient.

So, when Kenneth Arnold saw some strange things in the sky, and when several other people said 'Me too!', and when no terrestrial explanation was forthcoming for what they said they saw, the suggestion was made that maybe they were extraterrestrial? And lo! it turned out to be the suggestion everyone had been waiting for. A great big hold-all of a hypothesis into whose limitless folds could be shovelled every shape and size of enigmatic phenomenon that could conceivably be related to visiting alien spacecraft.

If UFOs have fascinated us for 50 years and more, it is because it is such fun trying to fit all those disparate elements into a single category. The aliens fly saucers and triangles, mother-ships and scout-ships. They maintain underground bases in the Antarctic and collaborate with the US

government in New Mexico. They mutilate cattle and channel J.Z. Knight. They fly black helicopters and carve circles in crop-fields. They take George Adamski for a ride and get Elizabeth Klarer in the family way. They do unspeakable things to Brazilians and Whitley Strieber. They seek out innocent children and implant monitors under their skins, they rape their mothers and steal their fathers' sperm. They dress up as Men in Black, they paralyse Maurice Masse with their ray-guns, they grant Betty Andreasson a religious experience. All this - and goodness, there's much more! - is somehow trimmed and tailored until it can be fitted into the ETH.

And all the time the paradox remains: the ETH is nothing but an idea, an artifact, constructed to meet a contingency and clung to for convenience. There is not a scrap of evidence that it has any substance whatever outside the minds of those who conceived it, nourish it and cherish it.

The only thing going for the ETH is that it offers a refuge of a sort, luring us out of the cold into a kind of security, where those huddling within feel justified in jeering at those outside. 'Well, if you know of a better 'ole, go to it!' Or in ufological terms, whenever a crucial case comes up - Gulf Breeze, the Strieber abduction, the Manhattan Transfer or whatever - we are challenged to refute the evidence, if any, and to offer contrary evidence, if we can: or, failing that (and so far, it has always been a case of 'failing that'), to offer an explanation that has a higher probability rating than the ETH.

Previous issues of *Magonia ETH Bulletin* have rightly cited the Walton case as a classic exemplar of the UFO enigma. A sincere-seeming primary witness, with a bunch of seemingly no less sincere secondary witnesses, tell a story which ultimately has nothing to stand on apart from what the narrators narrate. If they were telling us about a strange animal they saw in the woods, we would believe them: but the 'high strangeness' of their story makes us hesitate.

Of course it isn't as simple as that. There are a wealth of circumstantial hints which might tip us towards belief or rejection - the fact that Walton always wanted to see a UFO, the fact that after all these years he is sticking to his story, the astonishing unworriedness of his family during his disappearance, such signs point us this way or that, and we either follow them or don't according as we find them persuasive. But ultimately, it's a question of trust/distrust.

So did the ancients trust their gods, and the Azande their witch-doctors.

The happening at Allagash (1)

Another crucial case is the 1976 Allagash abductions, investigated by the redoubtable Raymond Fowler whose lifelong dedication and manifest sincerity would alone be enough to make us take the case seriously. Four primary witnesses, and many secondary ones, testify to an event which, if it happened as described, seems to offer (in Fowler's words) 'evidence that would demonstrate, beyond a reasonable shadow of doubt, that worldwide reports of humans being abducted by alien entities were really happening'.

As with the Walton case, the events take place in an isolated location where there is no one else around to confirm or deny the story. Four young men go for a boating trip in the wilds, and experience a collective abduction. Their stories jibe. The events open up a series of links to the past, lead on to further incidents, tie in to yet more incidents involving relatives and friends, forming a web of disparate but interlinking happenings.

Indeed, it's with Allagash like it is with Walton: IF what the witnesses say happened DID happen, then there's no two ways about it, ETs are real, flying saucers are real, abductions are real, all is real as real can be.

So did it happen? There are four primary witnesses, not to mention the various friends and relatives who get drawn into the story: their accounts all more or less agree. If one of them isn't telling the truth, then none of them is.

Could they be mistaken? It's hard to see how. Their stories are detailed, factual and mutually validating. Hallucination? Misinterpretation? *Folie à quatre*? Whatever is true for one must be true for all.

So if their story isn't true, it has been in some manner fabricated. And if so, the four of them must know it, or at the very least suspect it. So, if we reject their story, do we have any choice but to label them as liars?

Well, we could suppose that [1] something happened which they didn't understand, which [2] led them to formulate an imaginary scenario to help them understand, which [3] subsequent events encouraged them to perceive as fact. Far-fetched? Yes, but stranger things have been reported in the annals of psychology.

But could they tell so elaborate a story without having any doubts whatever? Is there never, at the back of their minds, some little niggling hesitation as to the factualness of it all? Alan Godfrey,

that most bemused and confused of abductees, at least has had the good sense to express a degree of uncertainty as to the reality of his adventure: but the Allagash abductees show no discernable wobble in their story-telling.

Virtual reality?

Some thoughtful students of the UFO phenomenon, reluctant either to accept such stories or to label their narrators as liars, dodge both horns of the dilemma by invoking such abstract concepts as virtual reality, imaginal reality and the like - a middle ground where things which are impossible by normal consensus become possible because they take place on some other level of reality. The believer is placated, the sceptic disarmed.

Intriguing as these ideas are, though, they are only ideas and nothing more. They have no more substance than the ETH itself. There is nothing to support these metaphysical constructs; they float in mid-air with only one thing going for them, that they offer a neat way out of the truth-or-lies cul-de-sac. And, appealing as ever, another catch-all 'explanation' like possessing demons or Azande sorcerers.

But whether or not such scenarios contain any truth, they won't do for us as we confront the Allagash Four. They, like Walton and his mates, are living human beings like you and me, and unless we are prepared to let go of everything that experience has taught us about the universe we live in, we have to believe that if something happened to them, it happened on a touchy-feely physical level. Walton's earthly body was taken *somewhere* by some method which enables a human body to be borne safely through the air, and when it got there it was able to continue functioning, breathing, taking in the 2.5 litres of water it requires for daily sustenance, and so on. To invoke a kind of reality in which the processes of nature are suspended is to invoke magic and miracle. If we are willing to accept imaginal reality for Walton or Allagash, we may with equal justification accept it for diabolical possession and Azande magic.

But unless we are prepared to settle for magic, we must continue to seek understanding at the level of human experience. We need to understand why the Allagash aliens choose to manifest, on occasion, as 'a white-glowing, robed, bearded figure', on others as a 'horrible looking monster'? We need to know why abduction brings with it so many other anomalous happenings, ranging from balls-of-light to out-of-body experiences? Why do odd lumps appear on bodies, then vanish into nowhere? What are we to infer when witness Chuck Rak says: 'In instigating and organising that trip, I knew that the bizarre haunted those twins. If I could get them up there, I knew I could be part of something unusual'? That doesn't sound like a bunch of all-American youngsters heading for a healthy weekend in God's great outdoors!

Everything anomalous that ever happened to the Allagash Four, or to their kith and kin, is lumped together in Fowler's account, all seen as part and parcel of alien abduction. Likewise, in Debbie Jordan's true confessions, (2) the unwinding of a toilet paper roll is ascribed to extraterrestrial intervention. In Ann Andrews's account (3) of her son Jason's abductions every inexplicable event (walking-shoes under bedclothes, a smell as of burnt sugar) is attributed to the aliens. We're back with the Azande ascribing every unexplained event to magic.

Most of us accept that inexplicable things happen every day. To classify such incidents as side-effects of the abduction experience indicates a state of mind in which reality-testing has been set aside: a persecution complex, a touch of paranoia. In which case we have the right to wonder if that state of mind wasn't responsible for the core experience also?

The late Renée Haynes, of the SPR, invented the phrase 'boggle threshold' to define the point at which we exhaust our supply of willingness-to-believe and scepticism takes over. Consider Larry Warren. Seems a nice enough fellow, he comes over well letting it all hang out in his account of his involvement with Rendlesham. (4) But when he tells us he experiences 'nonhuman visitations' on an almost nightly basis, and that on the first night of his re-visit to Bentwaters he and his co-author observed 25 UFOs, he raises a boggle threshold so high that only the most agile of True Believers could think of accepting anything he says at face value.

But if we balk at Warren at Bentwaters, or at Linda Napolitano floating out of her Manhattan apartment, that is tantamount to saying, Whatever happened to these witnesses, it wasn't what they thought happened. And if that is so for these cases, then is it not equally so for Walton and Allagash, Debbie Jordan and all?

If you read the life of Jean-Marie-Baptiste Vianney, the curé d'Ars, you will learn how this unfortunate priest was plagued by the Evil One who sent little demons to pull the bedclothes off his bed at night. The Catholic Church made Vianney a saint, but most of us will boggle at his story,

marvelling that Satan, with all the power at his command would use such childish means to harass the poor fellow, and we will think less highly of the Church for accepting his story. We boggle when we hear of spirits of the dead who revisit Earth and can find nothing better to do than float luminous trumpets through the air and bang tambourines in suburban séance-rooms, and we think less highly of Spiritualists in consequence.

If we find ourselves boggling at Allagash, Strieber, Gulf Breeze, Napolitano and Walton, it's because they, too, offend our sense of the plausible. Extraterrestrial intervention, per se, is logical enough: but these alleged instances of it savour more of magic than matter-of-fact. If we boggle at the ETH, it is because we boggle at the evidence that its champions offer in its support.

References

1. Fowler, Raymond E. *The Allagash Abductions*, Wild Flower Press, 1993
2. Jordan, Debbie. *Abducted!*, Carroll and Graf, 1994
3. Andrews, Ann and Ritchie, Jean. *Abducted*, Headline, 1998
4. Warren, Larry and Robbins, Peter. *Left at East Gate*, Marlowe, 1997

LETTER

Your remark that the 'secret saucers' concept should be treated with the contempt it deserves is very timely, seeing that a number of American, plus a few British, ufologists still adhere to this daft idea. However, I blame chiefly Stanton Friedman, not Kevin Randle, for promoting the Roswell myth since it was he who first stumbled upon Jesse Marcel in 1978. Randle only entered the fray a decade later.

What amazes me is the number of highly qualified (with advanced degrees) US researchers, particularly in the ranks of CUFOs and MUFON, who still defend Roswell at all costs, even though they must realise that once you admit to Roswell being an ET crash you have to accept the unpalatable consequences, namely that the US government has kept the wreckage and bodies under wraps for half a century. There is no halfway stage. You cannot separate the crash from the cover-up. Yet Randle et al. do not seem the least bothered by this; the cover-up idea is so embedded in the minds of Americans that they assume debris and bodies can be kept secret (for 50 years!) as easily as can documents. If these proponents could even produce some genuine crash documents they would at least have made a start, but that too is beyond them.

Yes of course Randle has painted himself into a corner. So have all the Roswell proponents, who are bitterly disappointed that their much heralded evidence did not lead to congressional hearings and an official pronouncement. And the much touted secret documents never existed.

You are right. To maintain a semblance of credibility these people have to say all other crashes, especially those outside the US, are hoaxes. But Roswell is different. After all, 500 'witnesses' cannot be wrong, can they?

Christopher Allan, Stoke-on-Trent

THE WALTON CASE - YET AGAIN

I make no apologies for returning yet again to the Walton case. Of course, there is no problem for those who believe that everything happened just as Walton described it, but most of those who are sceptical about it concentrate entirely on possible motives, the interpretation of polygraph tests, and the apparent reactions of Walton's relatives to his disappearance. Hardly anyone seems to be interested in trying to find out what did or did not happen in the forest on 5 November 1975. If it was a hoax, were all the men involved? Or were they somehow deceived by Walton and Rogers? Or is there some other explanation? One of our readers is already pursuing this challenge on a confidential basis and invites your information, ideas, suggestions, etc. Please send them to me, and I will pass them on.

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