

MAGONIA Supplement



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DID THE KATRINA DEBACLE INCREASE UFO REPORTING? A Test of the Collective Shame Theory of Flaps

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A CATASTROPHIC HURRICANE hit and decimated New Orleans and the Gulf coast on August 28, 2005. In the days and weeks subsequent to the disaster a humanitarian crisis arose that the government failed to adequately handle. The duty to rescue victims was fumbled, starting too slowly and showing disorganisation. People were dying from the lack of medical attention. Many people lacked drinking water and food. There was looting. Thousands were believed dead.

The perception that the government had badly bungled was widespread. The words of shame and insult turned up on all the Sunday political talk shows - Face the Nation, Meet the Press, Chris Matthews - on 4 September. Political protests also arose, recycling signs saying "Shame" that were originally being used for protesting against the Iraq war. One photo shown here, is taken from the 8 September Democracy Cell Project website. This was also seen on national news coverage of the 8th. Local news, polling randomly in the street, caught people expressing the thought that the spectacle made them ashamed to be Americans.

The government's failure at rescuing residents from flooded New Orleans led to FEMA director Michael Brown resigning on 12 September. On the 15th President Bush gave a nationally televised speech that outlined plans for the reconstruction of New Orleans. Over the next few days, another hurricane named Rita was being tracked and led to the evacuation of the Texas coast. Before it hit, highways were jammed with cars and there were concerns this might turn into another debacle. Rita made landfall at 3



a.m. on 24 September. By the next day it became clear that Rita claimed no lives due to lack of emergency response. Government officials pointed to this as evidence that lessons had been learned from the Katrina tragedy. One can of course dispute how valid the reasoning is. New Orleans after all was a bowl of land below sea level quite unlike the Texas coast. But, emotionally, Rita did dispel the pall of Katrina both in the sense of distracting attention and as a symbol of government getting it right this time or at least better than the last time.

Chronologically, the shame of the Katrina debacle was reasonably well-defined. While some tragedies like the Iraq conflict drag on interminably, the emotional punch was sharply delivered and was over fairly quickly. There was also little ambiguity about the presence of shame. There was no way to rationalise it or gloss over it via political chutzpah. Masses of people were dead and, unlike the fall of the World Trade Center, there was no external enemy to blame it on. There would be no flag-waving patriotism connected to this crisis.

Although I confess discomfort 'using' this tragedy as a datum for ufological

research, I was keenly curious about whether this event would create a UFO flap in the United States. On one level, I felt this was an almost ideal stimulus with which to test the hypothesis that flaps are a manifestation of collective shame. (Story 2001) There were, however, a series of doubts nagging at me. NUFORC collects hundreds of reports every month, but when you chart them the results do not look like charts made from Blue Book data. There are ten-fold variations in monthly figures during the Blue Book period. NUFORC is lucky to get two-or three-fold variations over its base trendline. E-mailing a believer's computer database does not provoke the same set of anxieties and emotions as deciding whether to report a UFO experience to law-enforcement, military authorities, or media.

Present-day UFO beliefs also have different mixes of emotional concerns than during the Blue Book era. Nobody thinks of UFOs as Soviet spycraft any more. Fewer people think of UFOs as sources of danger. When was the last time you heard of a UFO chasing somebody's car as happened so often back in the Sixties? Are flaps of similar magnitude even possible if UFOs are not regarded as threats in the same degree as was possible in the middle of the last century?

One other thing worried me. Some flaps seem to involve beliefs attached to specific cases that gain prominence. Would the 1952 flap have been a fifth as big without the Washington National radar cases insisting that UFOs were intruding on the nation's seat of government? Would the 1957 flap have been anything more than a flurry of cases without the Levelland car-stopper case to

set fire to anxieties started by Sputnik? While there was plenty of paranoia about the cause of the levee breaks in New Orleans - see Remnick's *New Yorker* article - nothing arose suggesting UFOs were a possible cause. No particular UFO report came to general attention to crystallise anxieties around.

With such doubts and a healthy respect for how often predictions connected to UFO phenomena fail, I kept my wondering and expectations mostly to myself. But I absolutely would need to check on the possibility.

Enough time has passed that my question can now be explored with confidence over enough data having been collected to draw conclusions. On 7 December 2005 the National UFO Reporting Center's event database was accessed and material gathered over the span of July to November. As the test involves national shame over Katrina, I filtered away reports from foreign countries. No effect would be expected there and they would distort percentages. NUFORC's database includes some events that involve multiple reports of a single event. On 30 September and 1

October there are respectively 37 and 30 reports involving objects seen over Tinley Park, IL and vicinities. In the chart they are treated as two reporting events. On 22 September there were 21 reports involving a Vanderburg missile launch. There are also fireball cases and a Utah school case involving multiple reports that NUFORC states involve probable hoaxers. They were also reduced to single increments.

The resulting chart is here:

Just by visual inspection, we can see there was increased reporting in the period between Katrina and Rita. Perhaps significantly, it does not increase in anticipation of Katrina's landfall or even on the day of the hurricane itself; things you might expect if anxiety, stress, fear or threat were primary determinants of increased UFO reporting. Things start firing up on 1 September as the chaos involving the Superdome and Convention Center becomes obvious with government officials blatantly lying. 2 September sees Bush praising FEMA director Michael Brown, "Brownie you're doing a heck of a job." It tracks with the recognition of massive incompetence.

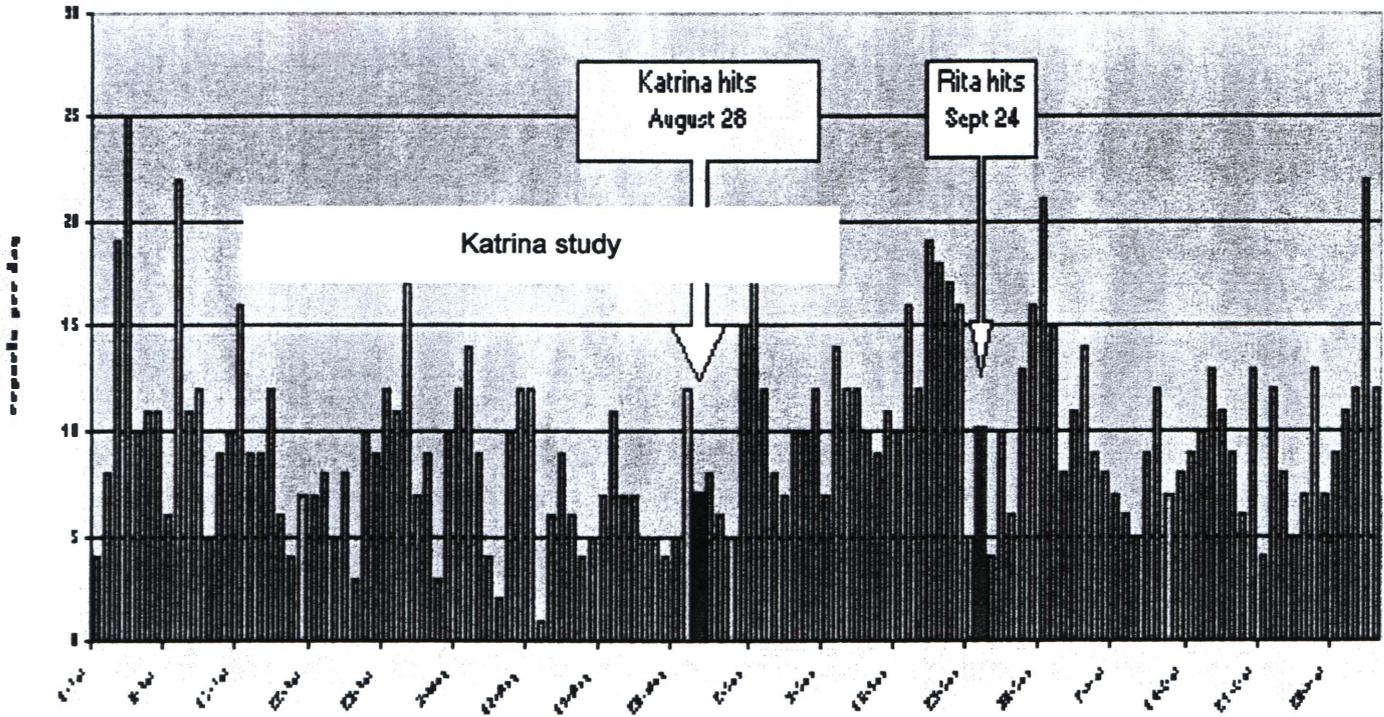
Next, let's put on the table some numbers - a total for each month and the average per day.

July	316	10.2
August	227	8.4
September	362	12.1
October	314	10.1

By the standards of some ufological studies, a month with 362 reports would certainly count as a flap. For example UFO Sweden's study "Peak Months in Worldwide Waves" includes a month with a figure as small as 65 as a wave. It lists 38 months as peaks of waves that have monthly numbers smaller than 362, so we have plenty of precedent from that angle. In the statistics of Blue Book, 362 is a bigger monthly total than any of the important flaps of the Sixties, including the swamp gas flap of March-April 1966.

It would also fit Bullard's definition of a wave as "any notable and temporary increase in sighting reports above the usual rate." Let's use some different numbers here. Between Katrina's and Rita's landfalls there were 318 reports. Divide this by 28 days and you get an average of 11.4 reports per day.

Katrina study



Reports per day 1 July - 1 November 2005

Immediately before Katrina from 1-27 August, the average was 7.4 reports per day. This is a 54% increase. This is literally a temporary increase and above the usual rate. 'Notable' is a more subjective matter, but if anyone wants to argue 54% isn't 'enough' then we can fall back to saying this is a 'modest surge.' Vocabulary isn't really that critical; the fact of an increase is ultimately the thing of interest.

It is conceded in advance that most of the monthly figures in the NUFORC database since 1998 would be called flaps if one used an absolute measure instead of a relative measure. It also conceded that the 54% increase hardly resembles the ten-fold spiking of numbers seen during the 1952 and 1957 flaps. As already stated, there have *never* been swings of that magnitude in NUFORC's monthly figures between 1994 and 2005.

The content of some sightings can be discussed to add a polish to the argument. One report showing some awareness of the ongoing social backdrop is this one from Conroe, Texas on 22 September:

"I was evacuating from the hurricane Rita down the conterflow of I-45 highway. I had been driving several hours and decided to jump the curb and park in a parking lot to try to rest. As I looked out the car window, I saw a large black triangular aircraft flying very slowly from South to North off the counter flow highway flowing I-45 pathway. My first thought was the government was taking pictures of the blocked traffic on I-45. I noticed a fluoresce tube light that was also shaped like a triangle on the bottom side of the craft. Then I realized triangular shaped American craft fly very swiftly while this one glided very slowly and silently along."

When the media covered this traffic jam, there were concerns expressed about how the government was not able to evacuate populations smoothly. What might this mean if a terrorist attack by chemical, radiological, or biological means forced evacuations elsewhere. This particular report could be interpreted as paranoia expressed as a 'delusion of observation.' Possibly it indicates the government is in surveillance mode, watching the population, in implicit shame at its handling of Katrina. They are worried they are in trouble yet again. Black triangles are familiar to most people as a form of Stealth aircraft, in

some degree an icon of government secretiveness. (NUFORC, 22 September 2005)

There are other curiosities suggesting some social reflexiveness. One is a case where a bright light is seen hovering over a refinery in Lemont, Illinois. It is felt by the percipient to be getting a good look at something there. (NUFORC, 1 September) Given the reduction of refinery capacity caused by Katrina, one wonders if this indicated fear of terrorist opportunism. One guy in Henniker, New Hampshire saw a bright light with a halo of light around it that seemed like it was being blown by a light wind. He didn't know if it was an alien ship, but admitted, "I also thought maybe it was a weather monitoring device, but didn't understand why it was covered in lights" (NUFORC, 12 September). One woman in Meadville, Mississippi reports seeing a "star that just decided to just take off and do a strange dance." t was a herky-jerky wiggling followed by a funny loop thing. She concedes the craziness of the sight but, "with all the Hurricane Katrina upset I certainly wouldn't be writing this if it weren't true." (NUFORC, 6 September) One guy in Miami taking digital pictures of clouds in advance of Rita finds an object in two of them that he sends to NUFORC. (19 September, Miami) Another Floridian indicates he usually sees fireballs during hurricanes and passed along the fact that such a fireball had made the news. (16 September, Edgewater, FL)

Most of the hundreds of cases of September, though, lack any overt sign of the Katrina context. It should not be necessary to say it, but the bulk of the cases seem transparently soluble in terms of standard misinterpretations - airplane lights, meteors, balloons, and the like. I especially liked one (24 September; Stratford, CT) that is a veritable textbook (Printy 1998) case of Sirius scintillating a few degrees above the horizon. It is pretty much obligatory that we are dealing with earthly social behaviour, rather than extraterrestrial tourism.

So, is this a good confirmation of the shame/paranoia theory? If one was hoping for a major league 'classic' Blue Book era flap, clearly this isn't all that impressive. Yet, making allowances for the absence of a catalysing UFO event and the various caveats described, it looks acceptable. There is a flurry of increased activity

starting at what seems to be just the right time. I will content myself with the observation that it is at least not a failure of the sort that crisis theory had in its test against the 9-11 tragedy. (Kottmeyer 2003)

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EDITORIAL

When Joe McGonagle, Gary Anthony, Andy Roberts and David Clarke recently announced the forthcoming release of a Ministry of Defence UFO study, the usual suspects on UFO UpDates immediately had their usual fits of hysteria and showed their usual amazing ability to produce detailed criticisms of a document which they had not yet had the opportunity to read. When it was suggested that they should wait for the document to become available before denouncing it as worthless, unscientific and, yes, "disinformation" they became even more hysterical.

"SERIOUS UFOLOGISTS" AND THE ETH

John Harney

SERIOUS UFOLOGISTS are those who take themselves seriously. They get very angry when they discover that certain other ufologists regard them as buffoons. To be a Serious Ufologist you must take the ETH seriously, but be careful not to say that you believe in it. You must say that you think that it is a perfectly rational idea to be considered as a strong possibility in certain UFO cases.

Once Serious Ufologists have investigated a UFO report and pronounced it unexplained, and a case where a "structured craft" of unknown origin ("we didn't say it was interplanetary") has been seen by "independent witnesses", then it becomes a "true UFO" and anyone who casts doubt on it is a "pelicanist" or a "skeptibunker", or both.

There is said to be plenty of evidence which indicates that UFOs are interstellar craft, but if you ask for the details of a convincing case you will be told to "do your own homework".

In order to make any progress in countering this nonsense it is necessary to demonstrate that ufology is not potentially a new branch of the physical sciences, but just another pseudoscience. It can of course be studied academically as modern folklore, as well being subjected to investigations and research by psychologists and sociologists. A number of such studies of ufologists and UFO percipients have been published and most of them have either been generally ignored or greeted with howls of rage by the Serious Ufologists.

My aim is quite simple in writing this and similar articles: it is to show that when all the misperceptions, delusions, lies and hoaxes have been stripped away there remains only a small number of puzzling observations, most of these being of unusual optical or electrical phenomena in the atmosphere. There will be no announcements by the US or any other government of alien spacecraft visiting Earth because no governments are in possession of such evidence. If enough people come to accept these truths then ufology will fade away, and any reports of

unusual phenomena will be calmly and impartially investigated by the appropriate experts. The world will then be a saner, if slightly duller, place.

There will be no place for Serious Ufologists. There will still be crazy UFO conferences and local UFO flaps generated by people apparently unable to recognise stars, planets, or the lights of passing aircraft, but they will be of serious interest only to a few sociologists and folklorists.

Any attempt to draw attention to these elementary truths and to suggest that the employment of a little common sense and elementary logic might be useful in the investigation and interpretation of UFO reports is invariably greeted with hysterical outbursts by the more unhinged enthusiasts, quickly followed by words of comfort and reassurance by the Serious Ufologists.

When I announced on my Magonia blog (1) that I was planning to write this article, excitable ufologist Stuart Miller (2) copied the item to the UFO UpDates mailing list where it produced exactly the knee-jerk reactions I had expected.

Don Ledger, for example quoted my remark that those reports described as "true UFOs" always failed to stand up to critical examination and wrote:

"This last sentence is a big lie, and what's more, Harney knows it [note he said he was "attempting" to write an article] because he can't make his accusations stick himself - other than in his craw. He uses this approach over and over in hopes [like the Nazis of yore] that if you tell a big enough lie often enough, people will begin to believe it. In his closed off little, self aggrandized, "Magonia" world perhaps that is true, but he and the other magonian sheep are bleating into the wind when it comes to the world at large. The best he can hope for is that he intimidates enough witnesses into keeping to themselves their extraordinary experiences because they don't want to be branded as crazies and lunatics. These are/is the same methods used by the SS, Stalin, organized crime and many governments to keep people from testifying to the truth. Harney doesn't like the truth. I've never actually seen him disprove anything, but just make repeated

claims that there is no proof."

Of course, when people make extraordinary claims it is up to them to prove them. Logically, I don't need to disprove anything. However, here Ledger is obviously employing what is known as "Saucer Logic". (3)

He then gives an example of a UFO observed from an aircraft:

"Commercial Air Transport Airmiss Reports (January-April 1995)
Manchester Airmiss With Wedge Shaped UFO"

Airmiss report No. 2/95
Date/Time: 061848 Jan; Night
Position: N5318 W0200 (8NM SE Manchester Apt)
Airspace: TMA Class: A
Reporting Aircraft Reporting Aircraft
Type: B737 Untraced
Operator: CAT
Alt/FL: 4000ft =83 (Descending) (QNH 1027 mb)
Weather: VMC CLAC
Visibility: 10Km+

This case is well known to British ufologists. The pilot and co-pilot had reported it as an airmiss because they thought it was something passing fairly close to their aircraft. They were quite correct to report it, as it is sensible to regard anything in the air which is not easily identified as a possible hazard to air navigation. However, the CAA could find no evidence of any object passing close to the aircraft and did not reach any conclusions as to what it might have been. They did not consider the possibility that the object might have been a meteor and then reject it, as Ledger asserted. In fact, he seems not to have read the CAA report although it is readily available on the Internet. Jenny Randles (and others) had concluded that it was probably a meteor. It was thus much further away than the pilots thought, and it should be noted that it was in view for only about two seconds. In an exchange of e-mails with science writer Ian Ridpath, Ledger rejected the meteor explanation, even though his remarks showed that he knows very little

about meteors. For instance, he seems to believe that they are never seen to have level, or nearly level, trajectories.

Of course this still leaves us without a UFO case which will stand up to critical examination. So much for the "big lie". Serious Ufologists are of course reluctant to provide lists of "best cases", and when they do these are usually ones where vital details are somehow not available to ordinary mortals ("Do your own homework") or they are said to be multiple-witness cases where the testimony of the numerous witnesses is mysteriously absent (Trindade).

It has been pointed out to me that among Serious Ufologists it is quite all right to say that certain significant reports are hoaxes or misinterpretations so long as you believe - or affect to believe - at least *some* of them. You must accept that some reports are not generated by anything known to present-day science; you have to believe that there is something inherently mysterious about them. You must not look *too* closely at individual cases, but you must consider the *cumulative* effect of thousands of individual reports, many of them apparently having various interesting features in common. Although each individual report may be explicable as a hoax or misinterpretation, there must be some *signal in the noise* and it is the task of the Serious Ufologist to find it, or at least to keep repeating that it must be there somewhere.

This notion of UFO evidence cumulatively pointing to the ETH as a reasonable explanation for unexplained reports is very important to the Serious Ufologist, as the whole idea of the True UFO as a worthy object of scientific investigation utterly depends on it becoming accepted by those who have the expertise and the resources to conduct serious investigations. It is only necessary to demonstrate that this notion is logically and scientifically invalid to destroy what has come to be known as Serious Ufology, leaving the folklorists, sociologists and psychologists to pick up the pieces.

One of the chief proponents of the cumulative evidence approach is Richard Hall, who has compiled long lists of UFO reports and has picked out some which he considers to be unexplained. In a thread on the UFO UpDates mailing list, in which he was arguing with Bob Young,

(4) he drew attention to an article he had written listing such cases. He wrote:

My position is and always has been that it is the cumulative evidence of many hundreds of cases of the type illustrated in this article . . . and associated physical evidence of various types, and recurring patterns closely similar or identical to the cases illustrated in this article, are what make the ETH the most likely interpretation. For purposes of the present debate, I am willing to base my argument on these 18 cases.

Of course, Young found plenty of fault with these reports and suggested various mundane explanations, as others had done. Young, of course, refused to accept the notion that some cases could not have mundane explanations and thus represented something inherently mysterious which strongly suggested the validity of the ETH. Many UFO reports are unexplained, but if we compare them we do not necessarily find that they have much in common. For instance, no satisfactory explanations have been suggested for Kenneth Arnold's famous 1947 sighting or for the apparent landing of a strange craft at Socorro. Every explanation offered has been found to have obvious weaknesses and implausibilities. However, this does not mean that the ETH should be considered, as there is no reason to believe that unexplained UFO reports have a common cause.

A common accusation made against those who are sceptical of the ETH is that they have a rule that any explanation for a UFO report will do, even if it has to be force-fitted by ignoring some of the facts of the case. This impression partly arises from the problem that in many cases some of the facts are in dispute. A good example is the Trindade case, which has been discussed at length on UFO UpDates, in which controversy has raged around a number of questions, for example:

- How many witnesses were there, and why are their testimonies unavailable?
- Were the photographs faked? Why are the negatives not available? (Some people even claimed to have copies direct from the negatives, not just from prints. How do they know if they don't know where the negatives are?)
- Why did the captain of the *Almirante*

Saldanha apparently not consider the incident sufficiently important to write up in the ship's log?

There are many more questions, including some which apparently never occurred to the original investigators in their eagerness to record a truly mysterious UFO event. The same failure to gather accurate information promptly and to ask all the right questions has marred many a classic UFO case. Usually this is due to lack of resources but sometimes to incompetence and credulity.

There are probably some reports which are examples of observations of unusual atmospheric optical or electrical phenomena, but these tend to become distorted by the obsession with the ETH or even more exotic speculations, instead of a desire to find the true facts of each case. This ensures that ufology will never be taken seriously by mainstream science.

Notes

1. mufob.blogspot.com
2. When I described Miller as "excitable" in a posting on my blog, he responded that he was not excitable, but hysterical.
3. I think an article on Saucer Logic would be a good idea. Comments and examples are invited.
4. www.virtuallystrange.net/ufu/updates. The title of this thread is "Serious Research". Enter this to search the site's extensive archives. Other relevant material can be obtained by searching for "ETH", "serious ufology", "serious ufologists", "pelicanists", etc.

MAGONIA READERS' MEETINGS

If you live in or are visiting the London area and are over 18 years old you are welcome to attend our informal meetings. These are held on the first Sunday of each month, starting at about 7.15 p.m., at the Railway, opposite Putney station (South West Trains) and about 10 minutes' walk from East Putney station (District Line).



Jerome Clark and Loren Coleman, *The Unidentified and Creatures of the Outer Edge*, the early works of Jerome Clark and Loren Coleman, Anomalist Books, 2006

These books were among the seminal classics of the so-called new ufology, long out of print; they are known to fetch some very nice prices on the secondhand book market. It was rumoured that Clark in particular was eager to buy up all remaining copies to expunge all evidence of their so-called 'youthful folly'. Now here they are presenting the books again under one cover.

How well have these books stood up to thirty years, and are they as bad as the authors sometimes made out? The answer is generally reasonably well, and not really. Of course there are some toe-curling passages in *The Unidentified* in particular: the half-support for the reality of the Cottingley Fairies for example, or the claim that an abductee teleported himself from one end of Brazil to another using his telekinetic powers. These passages point to one difference between now and the early 1970s. Then parapsychology was a much more respectable discipline than it is now. The Parapsychological Association had been invited to join the American Association for the Advancement of Science in 1969 with the backing of the then iconic anthropologist Margaret Mead. Respected scientific figures were involved with the subject, and some surprising figures were taken in by what today look like the crude magic tricks of Uri Geller.

There is, of course, the rather mechanical and very literalistic version of Jungianism. Already Jung was becoming a marginal figure, but his demolition at the hands of Richard Noll and others was still years away.

However, as a collection of American folklore these joint volumes still hold their own, their argument that many different kinds of anomalies are different

cultural glosses on the same essential experiences still holds good, and they show how the same themes crop up in fairy lore, religious miracles, and modern-day paranormal and UFO stories. Their strictures against the literalist interpretations of both nuts-and-bolts ufologists and paws-and-pelts cryptozoologists still hold good. The combined volume still shows how complex these subjects can be.

They also provide for today's audience a fascinating picture of what ufology looked like in its essential pre-Roswell and pre-alien abduction days. True, a couple of alien abduction stories are mentioned, but they bear little resemblance to the narratives produced by Hopkins and Jacobs. Of course the 1970s Clark and Coleman would have had no problem in assimilating these new narratives to their vision; think what a Jungian could have made of Betty Andreasson for example. *The Unidentified* also contained one of the first mentions of George Ritchie's seminal near death experience. NDEs were a field which could come just as *The Unidentified* was being published, but were to contain many of the same themes. Similarly we can see in *Creatures of the Outer Edge* just how unlikely it is that many of these cryptozoological experiences are occasioned by encounters with actual paws-and-pelts animals. Time again demonstrates how true that was; for example we have even more accounts of urban bigfeet, even of them shambling down English motorways. Then there was the reappearance of angels.

Curiously, however, as time went on, both authors began to support the very traditional views they had once excoriated. Perhaps as their faith in the paranormal began to recede, they were forced to a starker choice - either consider the possibility that these anomalies were in some way the products of the human imagination, artefacts of the processes by

which human beings perceive, remember and narrate the world, or that they were much more tangible anomalies. So Clark began to assert that the 'truth' lay in 'multiwitness physical trace reports', while Coleman went on to argue for the paws-and-pelts reality of a whole range of curious animals. The physical evidence never came along, however, no genuine alien hardware, no cryptozoological remains. Endorsing a variety of claims every bit as dubious as the Cottingley Fairies, such as Roswell, the Linda Napolitano/Cortile abduction and the Gimlin/Patterson film proved to be diversions which got nowhere.

Two themes fuelled this, both having their roots in traditional Christianity. One was the doctrine of eyewitness inerrancy. For Clark in particular the world became divided sharply into the realm of unproblematic, accurate recalls of actual historical events and works of complete fiction. Any suggestion that a particular UFO or Fortean story was anything other than a 100 per cent accurate recall of an actual historic event became anathema; to suggest otherwise was to personally insult the witness. On the other hand, those stories which failed to meet the canon, such as tales told by contactees, became 'nothing but' made up, and therefore valueless stories. Only unproblematic historical facts had value.

Beyond this, however, was another motivation from the Christian tradition. Clark recalls that in his boyhood "I heard first- and second-hand accounts of angelic visitations...as a deeply religious and impressionable little boy awaiting the imminent Second Coming, I took the stories literally and saw them as proof of God's intimate concern with the affairs of us mortals." These collections of what theologians call 'evidences', were important parts of the Christian tradition; tales of ghosts, witches, sudden deaths and miraculous survivals, of strange sights, sounds and portents, were

LITERARY CRITICISM

Review by

Peter Rogerson

collected as proof of God's 'miraculous providences'. Fortean stories function very much in that way, as evidences of a transmudane realm breaking into the world of daylight, reason and common sense. The Christian sociologist Peter Berger called these intimations of a transmudane world 'rumours of angels'. 'Anomalies' become just such 'rumours of angels', even though the 'angels' might masquerade as things as mundane as smelly hairy bipeds, curious machines and falls of periwinkles.

To deny the historical accuracy and inerrancy of such rumours of angels is therefore to deny the existence of the sacred transmudane realm. As a number of UFO UpDates exchanges indicate, for Clark neither wild nature nor the human imagination are worthy objects of awe. Again this comes from the puritan tradition which asserts equally the worthless and fallen nature of both the natural world (the almost literally God-forsaken howling wilderness) and the perverse human imagination. The rumours of angels must come from outside, from a realm of the non-human.

Perhaps the most haunting theme of *The Unidentified* (which also had echoes in *Creatures of the Outer Edge*) is the idea of the return of the repressed. In the early 1970s the idea of the triumph of the secular held its highest sway. The future was in the secular city, replete with tower blocks, monorails and day trips to the Moon. Clark and Coleman argue that this secular city has expunged the idea of the sacred, but that which was repressed will return with a vengeance. Please note that this was written years before the Iranian revolution, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, the American religious right, the killing fields of Kampuchea, Bosnia and Rwanda. In this vision 'the collective unconscious' becomes a metaphor for untameable wild nature itself. By the end of *Creatures of the Outer Edge* this has become a vision of ecological collapse and the revenge of Gaia. Any tour of bookshelves today will show that such themes are predominant; killer asteroids, vengeful super-volcanoes and global warming.

What of the folklore which fills these books? What these stories almost certainly are not are unvarnished 100 per cent accurate accounts of actual historical events, nor carefully crafted fictions. They inhabit grey zones between reality and the

imagination, between dreaming and waking, between truth and fiction, which are probably never ever really separate. They are myths which hint at the irreducible 'others' of a world which is never going to be summed up in a neat little formula which can be printed on a tee-shirt. They hint that our perceptions of the world can be subversive, that things are not always what they seem. They are stories which tell us far more about ourselves than any inhabitant of Zeta Reticulae, uncatalogued denizen of the forest, or shape-shifting boggart.

NOTES AND NEWS

from

Nigel Watson

Pseudologica Fantastica

Within ufology the respectability of witnesses is often put forward to support their claims. UFO writers rhetorically ask 'why would someone respected in the community with a good job and family and no other record of lying tell an extraordinary story about being abducted?'

The certainty that we can rely on such faith is undermined by the discovery that many people have claimed to be veterans of the Vietnam war. For example, when Patrick Couwenberg applied for the post of judge in the Los Angeles County superior court, he claimed he had worked for the CIA in Laos during the late 1960s. He had otherwise excellent academic qualifications and a distinguished legal career but his claims of being a CIA operative were easily exposed as a lie. He had only ever served in the US Naval Reserve and at the time he was supposed to have been in Vietnam he was a social worker in Orange County, California. In his defence his lawyers said he suffered from "pseudologica fantastica".

At Mount Holyoke college in Massachusetts, Professor Joseph Ellis, was similarly exposed when he claimed that he had been a platoon commander in Vietnam. In reality at the time he was teaching history at West Point. He was suspended from his post for a year and he

had to make an apology to all Vietnam veterans.

Nearly every week researchers and disgruntled veterans were unearthing public figures who claim an heroic Vietnam war record. The amount of bogus claims has been so extensive that Chuck and Mary Schantag created a special section of their POW network website to expose such frauds. Their P.O.W. Network website features lists of phonies and wanabees that can be viewed at: <http://www.pownetwork.org/>

Mary observes that: "The Vietnam war is not the no-no it used to be. I think a lot of people feel that they missed the chance to face their demons, to sleep in the jungles in Vietnam, to face that psychological test. This country is so deeply in need of heroes that no one is willing to check out their backgrounds, they want to believe it is true. When you have someone who says he rescued people in darkest Cambodia, people are so desperate for it to be true that they don't check. It's a morality problem. It tears us apart." (The Guardian [London], 21 August 2001).

Larry Bailey, who ran a website, AuthenticSEAL supplied tips on how to spot these frauds, and he thought as many as 100,000 Americans had invented bogus military histories for themselves. This website can be viewed at <http://cyberseals.org/authentiseal/> though as their home page explains they have had to remove their Wall of Shame feature because they could not keep pace with the number of false claims.

In Britain this phenomenon is not totally unknown, and the most popular stories concern serving in the Falklands war, the first Gulf War or working as a bomb disposal expert in Northern Ireland.

Regarding 'Pseudologica Fantastica' that was used to somehow explain Patrick Couwenberg's claims, Dr Sam Vaknin notes it, 'is the compulsive need to lie consistently and about everything, however inconsequential - even if it yields no benefits to the liar. I am not that bad. But when I want to impress - I lie.' (<http://samvak.tripod.com/journal23.html>)

I can think of some contactees and abductees who could easily fit this description. Generally I think that, like with most of the claims of bogus military service, thousands of people use the odd lie to brighten their CV or make themselves more interesting to friends or

colleagues. I know that from reading biographies of film stars that many of them create bogus life histories that fit with their star image. It is usually after their death that their well-preserved image is probed and their 'real' past exposed. Sometimes the repetition of a lie will make the claimant actually believe their own lies over time and often it can escalate beyond their personal control.

In the context of ufology it is relatively easy for someone even with a hint of Pseudologica Fantastica to run rings round our subject.

Further reading:

STOLEN VALOR -- How the Vietnam Generation was Robbed of its Heroes and its History by B.G. Burkett and Glenna Whitley.

FAKE WARRIORS by Henry Mark Holzer and Erika Holzer.

The Seventh Sword: The Search to find the Seven Swords of Meonia

By Andrew Collins. Arrow, 1992.

Today with the controversy raging around Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* and its imminent release as a major motion picture in 2006, it's worth noting that such mixtures of fact and fiction are far from new. Former ufologist Andrew Collins has been a long-time exponent of the psychic adventure quest, and his book *The Seventh Sword* is probably the most accessible to a general audience.

At its best this is an exciting psychic adventure story revolving around Andrew Collins and his helpers Graham Phillips, Alan Beard, Terry Shotton and a family in North Wales. They use dreams, séances, intuitions and automatic writing mixed with large dollops of luck, to find the first Meonia Sword at the Knights Pool, Worcestershire in 1979. This quickly leads to the discovery of the Meonia Stone (or Green Stone) not far away. They believe the stone is like a psychic microchip that contains a vast library of knowledge.

Andrew and Graham smoke their Benson and Marlboro cigarettes, frown over Ordnance Survey maps, drive yellow Ford Cortinas and Austin Maxis, and indulge in fry-ups. This 'designer' materialism makes a stark contrast with

the psychic visions that lead Andrew to five more Meonia Swords over the next twelve years.

At its worst *The Seventh Sword* is no more than a hall of mirrors, that turns Andrew Collins into the Indiana Jones of the British provinces. The swords are discovered to be Victorian copies, but Andrew explains that the originals were probably replaced by 'some quasi-Masonic occult fraternity'. The stone is associated with the Pharaoh Akhenaten, the Knights Templar, the legend of the Philosopher's Stone, Mary Queen of Scots, Freemasons you name it!

They are so set on their quest that they resort to vandalism, trespassing and even stealing. There is also the shadowy threat of a rival occult group blocking their quest. After Part One, with Graham Phillips disappearing from the story, and new visionaries appearing, the adventure peters out, and the book degenerates into a mess of historical reinterpretation.

At the end the Seventh Sword remains undiscovered, and readers are invited to search for it themselves. What puzzles me is what good are all these (reproduction) swords and the Meonia Stone? They are invaluable if you like rushing round the countryside in the dead of night on the pretext of psychic whims, re-writing history, or even believing you can influence current events through these discoveries. The evidence is as flimsy as a lap dancer's G-string. For materialists and cynics, just buy a metal detector and some proper history or archaeological books, and you'll probably find more treasure than all the psychic quests put together.

Mr Venus, Titter Ye Not

Many years ago at a Magonia meeting in London - in reality an extended pub crawl - it was decided that the comic Frankie Howerd would be great for playing the part of a certain ufologist. Howerd was always startled by real life and seemed to stand-outside the norm, so his brand of comedy based on his inabilities and lopsided anti-authoritarian observations of life was very appropriate.

It is only recently that I've read that in real life Howerd used to attend fortnightly LSD sessions administered by the Marlborough Day Hospital. For two

months in the early 1960s he would be given LSD and other drugs during these 5-hour sessions, so that he could penetrate self-conscious realisation of his unconscious mind. Following these sessions he would write notes about them and discuss with the psychiatrist Thomas M. Ling, the meanings of the fantasy, symbolic and real memories that came to light. They had a mildly beneficial effect on him though he still grieved for his recently deceased mother.

More intriguingly, back in 1958 he was involved in a stage musical titled *Mr Venus*. It featured an alien from Venus who tries preaching love and peace to Earthlings who reject him. In the end he resorts to using a London publican to spread his cosmic message. The role of the publican was originally slated for Norman Wisdom, but when he turned it down Frankie Howerd accepted the role.

The production featured music composed by Russ Conway, lyrics by Norman Newell and choreography by Paddy Stone. These were the plus points; on the negative side was the incongruous stage presence of a Venusian 'winched down from the gantry, wearing nothing but a sparkling cape, a shiny leather nappy and a pair of high-heeled, platform-soled shoes....(who spouted)...platitudes about why there was nothing really funny about love, peace and inter-planetary understanding.' (*Frankie Howerd. Stand-Up Comic*, by Graham McCann, Fourth Estate, 2004, p. 156.) Even the combined script writing talents of Ray Galton, Alan Simpson, Eric Sykes and Johnny Speight could not save this project. It ran for 16 days in the West End.

Mr Venus seems to have been inspired by the works of Adamski and the film *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. Its Venusian whom Howerd himself described as 'like a great big fairy queen lost on the way to the Christmas tree' seems to have been a preview of the glam rockers of the 1970s.

It's a shame Howerd never got to play the part of the ufologist in our discussion, the show could have been titled *Up Ufology* and featured a Venusian being winched down...perhaps on sober reflection the world was not ready for it. Or as Howerd would have said it, 'Nay, nay and thrice nay.'