

Over the past few years there has been a greater interest in pre-1947 UFO sightings. Unfortunately useful articles and publications on this subject quickly go out of print, and emanate from such a wide variety of sources that they easily elude our grasp. In an attempt to rectify this situation, and to speed-up my neglected correspondence with fellow researchers, I've decided to circulate this bulletin on an irregular basis. Basically my intention is to publicize and review relevant factual and fictional material on pre-1947 UFO sightings. Though there will be a bias towards the mystery 'airship' sightings made approximately at the turn of the century, mainly because this is the main area of my attention at present.

In future I'd particularly like to compile listings of 'airship' articles contained in FSR, Magonia and other journals. If you have a complete run of any UFO journal and would like to compile similar listings, or if you wish to supply any contributions to this bulletin, I'd be very pleased to hear from you.

To launch this issue the short story 'Horror of the Heights' by Arthur Conan Doyle serves to remind us that fictional and factual material have a bearing on our studies. The story first appeared in The Strand Magazine, November 1913, and revolves around a tattered and bloodstained manuscript which was found near the wreckage of a crashed monoplane. The owner and pilot of the aircraft, Mr Joyce-Armstrong, had literally disappeared from the face of our planet.

The manuscript, known as the Joyce-Armstrong Fragment, reveals how its author began to suspect that 'There are jungles of the upper air, and there are worse things than tigers which inhabit them. I believe in time they will map these jungles accurately out.' His fears were raised by the discovery of crashed aircraft minus their pilots, and in one instance a Lieutenant Myrtle, R.N., who had attempted a height record, was found in his wrecked machine, minus his head. Joyce-Armstrong believed that aerial jungles existed high above such districts as Pau-Biarritz, France, Wiltshire, England and Homburg-Wiesbaden, Germany.

In order to confirm his suspicions, Joyce-Armstrong, armed with a shot-gun, flew upwards into the 'jungle' which resides above the landscape of Wiltshire. At a height of 41,300 feet, he saw something like 'a jelly-fish such as sails in our summer seas, bell-shaped and of enormous size- far larger, I should judge, than the dome of St. Paul's. It was of a light pink colour veined with a delicate green, but the whole huge fabric so tenuous that it was but a fairy outline against the dark blue sky. It pulsed with a delicate and regular rhythm. From it there depended two long, drooping, green tentacles, which swayed slowly backwards and forwards. This gorgeous vision passed gently with noiseless dignity over my head, as light and fragile as a soap-bubble, and drifted upon its stately way.' Following this came a fleet of hundreds more of these 'argosies of the sky' which were slightly smaller than the first.

The real 'horror of the heights' were 'the serpents of the outer air. These were long, thin, fantastic coils of vapour-like material, which turned and twisted with great speed, flying round and round at such a pace that the eyes could hardly follow them.' They were 20 or 30 feet long, and had 'two vast, shadowy, circular plates upon either side, which may have been eyes, and a perfectly solid white projection between them which was as curved and cruel as the beak of a vulture.'

One of these 'serpents' paced the aircraft, and shot long tentacles at the machine, fortunately Joyce-Armstrong warded the monster off with his shot-gun and was able to return to his home base. But a few days later he went into the upper atmosphere again in order to obtain a sample of these creatures and prove to humanity the perils that float above us. This time his mission failed, and all we have left is the fragment of his manuscript and the wreckage of his aircraft.

This story is even more interesting when we consider that at the time some people seriously thought that such monsters had been observed by aviators, perhaps Conan Doyle had read of such legends and based his story on them? One day I'll write a more detailed article on this theme.. Please address all communications to: Nigel Watson, Westfield Cottage, Crowle Bank Road, Althorpe, South Humberside, DNI7 3HZ.