

MAGON I⁵⁷A



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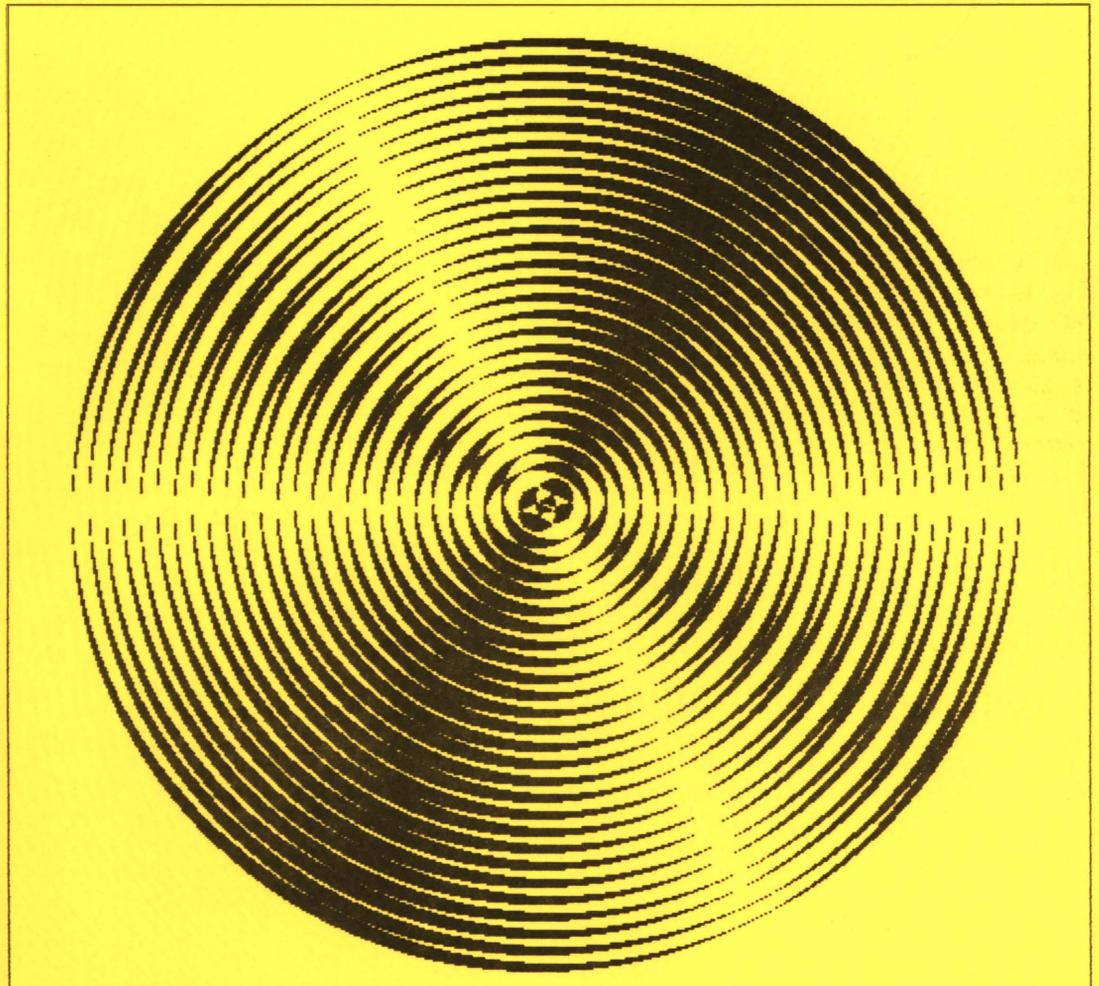
Gods or Astronauts?

Gareth Medway reviews the background to an extraordinarily persistent belief.



Ship Ahoy!

Martin Kottmeyer answers the critics of his nautical explanation for the classic New Guinea case

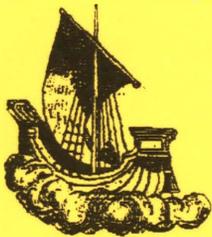


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PLUS

The sensational return of Desmond O'Connor spilling more beans about the great and good of Forteanism!



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The Remarkable World of Desmond O'Connor

I had hoped to provide you with a copy of Eric Dingwall's masterly study of the UFO phenomenon, complete with his file on Roswell compiled in late 1953, which would have conclusively proved the extraterrestrial origins of the phenomenon and put the scatterbrained psycho-social rambblings of Rogerson and his ilk to flight.

Alas, whilst my dear nurse, masseuse and personal assistant Tracy has many admirable qualities, an ability to catalogue my extensive notebooks and correspondence is not one of them, and the dossier remains elusive. However, you may be interested in the enclosed photograph of Aleister Crowley, Charles Fort, Hugo Rune and Harry Price engaging in the magical rites to evoke mermaids at Pegwell Bay. It is a sad commentary on the gross scepticism and lack of magical knowledge in this country that Inspector Dumbell of the Hastings Constabulary expressed his disbelief of this explanation, simply because the female spirits raised by the ceremony ran away across the beach when he and a dozen of Hastings' finest burst in on the sacred rites, rather than swimming off to sea. In vain did Crowley explain that these were *astral* mermaids, and as such could depart in any manner they wished. Dumbell's further allegation that the skyclad spirits were actually notorious members of the Brighton *demi-monde*, viz: Francine the Strict French Mistress and a number of her pupils, was beneath contempt.

A similar attitude of uncomprehending cynicism was exhibited by Fabian of the Yard in the episode of Crowley and Wallis Simpson, in which

he censoriously suggests that the future Duchess of Windsor took lessons in Tantric Magick from Crowley for reasons other than a search for metaphysical enlightenment.

I understand that several readers have expressed an interest in my memories of Charles Fort. As little more than an adolescent at the time I was very much in the outer circle of his companions. I knew only by hearsay of his prodigious drinking contests with Rupert Gould, his tempestuous affair with Virginia Woolf and more equivocal relationship with Lytton Strachey, and his longstanding feud with H. G. Wells, culminating in the notorious street brawl which led to both parties being bound over by the Islington magistrates, and several thousands pounds worth of damage to the Agricultural Hall. I believe that Fort's relationship with Wells was strained when he arrived at that worthy's doorstep with a letter of introduction from Theodore Dreiser saying that Fort was the greatest genius of the century and would provide the plots for Wells' next hundred stories. As Wells knew that *he* was the greatest genius of this or any other century, it did not endear him to Fort.

Fort was never able to establish a rapport with the dilettante petty bourgeoisie who monopolised psychic research in England at that time. Mrs Sidgwick and the other old ladies of the SPR thought of Fort as a 'terribly vulgar American' and would not have been amused to see him holding court in a tough Kilburn pub with a barmaid on each knee, downing pints of Borley Bitter and singing the Irish rebel songs

he had learned from his wife's disowned relative, 'Big Jim' Phelan, the notorious Sheffield cat skinner.

There were many speculations on the causes of Fort's abrupt move to England, his changes of address and his episodes of reclusiveness. The likelihood is that he had unwisely stood surety for his brother Clarence who had subsequently decamped leaving many debts, including some with business associates of the infamous Don Enrico Flaccionio, alleged to be one of the most feared mafiosi in Sicily. He was sometime patron and lover of Eusapio Palladino, and also a close friend of Crowley, whom he invited to Sicily to terrorise the local peasants. It is rumoured that Flaccionio personally inducted Crowley into the Mafia in a ceremony above a teashop in Leamington Spa. For years after Crowley would hide in a cupboard and squeak like a gerbil at the very mention of the Italian's name. It is for this reason that he started to learn the secrets of invisibility.

P.S. I was just about to post this when the lovely Tracey handed me Dingwall's dossier, which I enclose.

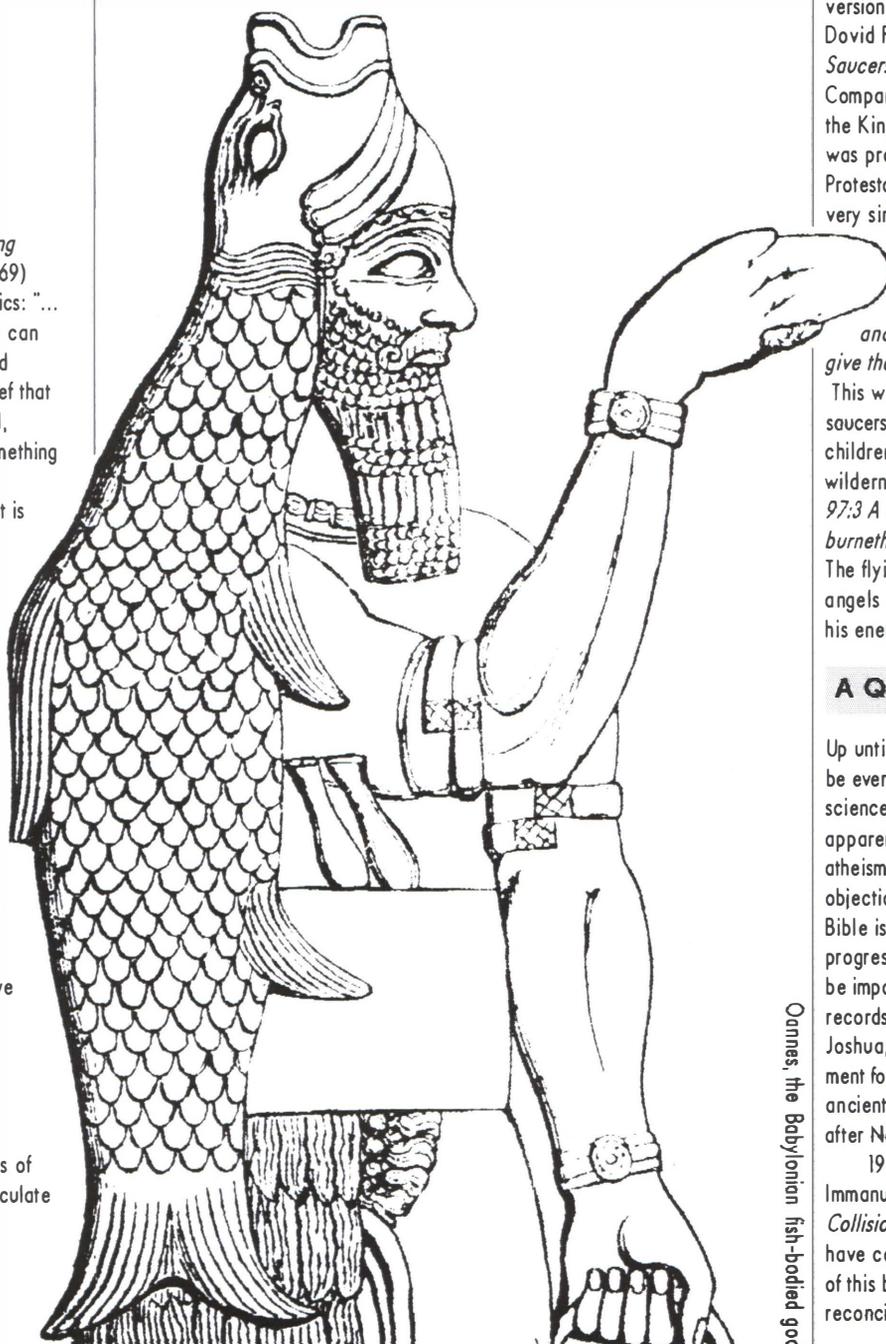
Editor's Note: In fact the dossier enclosed was not Dingwall's Roswell report, but O'Connor's scrapbook of the peccadillos of a number of leading members of the SPR and other prominent parapsychologists, ufologists and forteans. This is now in safe hands, and will be forwarded to a suitable archive after the last of the people mentioned in it has passed to 'The Other Side', which, if the activities described therein are typical of their lifestyles, cannot be long delayed.

WHO TAUGHT GOD TO DRIVE?

Gareth Medway looks at the writers who developed the Ancient Astronaut concept, and why that belief system proved so popular

R.L.Dione's *God Drives a Flying Saucer* (Corgi, 1973; 1st ed. 1969) sneers at traditional metaphysics: "...no system of logic yet devised can resolve the inconsistencies and paradoxes inherent in the belief that man is inhabited by a mystical, supernatural and immortal something called a soul."

Turning to the Bible, what is to be made of the miracles recorded there? Dione can find no reason to doubt the Bible's accuracy: "...if it were not for the references to miracles, the Bible would stand unchallenged as a monumental achievement in historical reporting." The possibility of supernatural powers he finds absurd, therefore the only explanation is that flying saucer technology was at work. After that, everything becomes simple: Adam and Eve were created by genetic engineers working under the direction of God, who is the "leader of the master technologists"; angels were spacemen; Ezekiel's vision was of flying saucers; as to the Immaculate Conception, it is "reasonably certain" that Gabriel was a "biological specialist" who artificially inseminated Mary



Ornnas, the Babylonian fish-bodied god

with a hypodermic needle; and "it may well be that the sperm used was God's making Jesus the Son of God just as the Bible teaches."

Yet in the end Dione's super-technological God is hardly different from the supernatural one of the Catholics. We don't have souls, but technology can make our minds, which are electromagnetic in nature, immortal: "God will choose which of us will survive as angels in heaven ... by analysing the references of our guardian angels and by studying the monitoring tapes which are at this moment recording our lives."

Dione's original background was evidently in the Roman church, since he gave a whole chapter to Fatima, and quoted the Bible in a revised version of the Douay translation. Dovid F. McConnell, in his *Flying Saucers of the Lord* (Economy Printing Company, Miami, Florida, 1969) used the King James translation (and so was presumably brought up a Protestant), but his interpretations were very similar to Dione's: "*Exodus 13:21*

And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light; to go by day and night.

This was a case of a flying saucer or saucers of the Lord leading the children of Israel through the wilderness of the Red Sea. ... *Psalms 97:3* *A fire goeth before him, and burneth up his enemies round about.* The flying saucers of the Lord with the angels go before the Lord and burn up his enemies."

A Question of Faith

Up until about 1950 religion seemed to be everywhere in decline, whilst science and materialism increased, apparently in the direction of universal atheism. One of the standard objections to religion was that the Bible is full of miracles, which the progress of science had indicated to be impossible. The Book of Joshua records that God, at the request of Joshua, stopped the sun in its movement for the space of a whole day. In ancient times this did not seem odd; after Newton, it was difficult to believe.

1950 saw the publication of Immanuel Velikovsky's *Worlds in Collision*. Though its author may not have consciously realised it, the intent of this book seems to have been a reconciliation of science and religion.

Velikovsky being Jewish, for him religion meant the Old Testament. He suggested that many of the Biblical wonders could be explained in wholly scientific terms as being catastrophes brought about by the wanderings of the planets Venus and Mars. He considered that Venus only came into existence a few thousand years ago, when it was blown out of Jupiter. About 1500 BC it came close to Earth, causing various dramatic gravitational effects such as the parting of the Red Sea, and the halting of the motion of the sun mentioned above. Eventually it reached its present orbit, which was then occupied by Mars. Venus settled in Mars' orbit, and Mars was driven away from the sun, passing Earth during the middle of the period covered by the Biblical Book of Kings, causing various further apparent miracles.

Dr Velikovsky was a friend of both Sigmund Freud and Albert Einstein, and evidently expected that his name would one day stand alongside theirs. He was disappointed: though *Worlds in Collision* was first issued by the respected academic publishers Macmillan of New York, not only did scientific writers denounce it, but universities threatened to boycott Macmillan's entire book list so long as Velikovsky's work remained on it. So they transferred the rights to Doubleday, who did not have a textbook business, and despite all the criticism it sold well for decades. Though there were perfectly legitimate objections to Velikovsky's theories on astronomical grounds, this excessive reaction leads one to suspect that his opponents were unconsciously aware of the book's hidden religious agenda, and that was what they objected to.

In a sense, Velikovsky was firmly within the Rabbinical tradition, which is that anything and everything can be found in the Torah (Law of God). In the 12th century, when Aristotelian philosophy became popular amongst the Jews, Rabbis claimed to find it all in their scriptures. Aristotle taught that there are three parts to the soul: the animal soul, the rational soul, and the divine soul. Now, the Biblical Hebrew word for "soul" is *nephesh*, but once or twice *ruach* and *neshamah*, both of which mean "wind" or "breath" and are used in the sense "breath of life". (Genesis 2:7: "And the Lord God formed Adam of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the

neshamah of life; and Adam became a living *nephesh*.) So it was explained that *nephesh* was the animal soul, *ruach* the rational soul, and *neshamah* the divine soul. Having by such means discovered the whole of Aristotle's system within their sacred books, they declared that Aristotle must have travelled to Jerusalem and learnt from the Jews.

The idea of Ancient Astronauts was toyed with as far back as 1919 by Charles Fort in *The Book of the Damned*. It also became a regular theme in science fiction. Notably, in November 1947, *Fantastic Stories* had a short story "Son of the Sun", in the form of a message from an extra-terrestrial, who tells the human race that the craft now being seen in the skies (this was a few months after the start of the first flying saucer wave) have visited the Earth long ago: their occupants were formerly confused with gods. They left behind "certain landmarks" in Egypt and elsewhere. The author of this piece, "Alexander Blade", was none other than Brinsley Le Poer Trench, subsequent author of a series of books on the theme, from *The Sky People* (Neville Spearman, 1960) onwards.

The first substantial treatment was by Desmond Leslie in *Flying Saucers Have Landed*, which appeared three years after *Worlds in Collision*. After some account of modern UFOs, Leslie suddenly jumped back thousands of years to Atlantis. In those days people flew around in machines called vimanas, of which it was written: "... their outside surface was apparently seamless and perfectly smooth, and they shone in the dark as if coated with luminous paint." (*FSHL*, p. 81, quoting W. Scott Elliott, *The Story of Atlantis*)

These were not the earliest flying saucers: in fact, human life was first brought to Earth from Venus by the Lords of the Flame, on whom Leslie quoted from the Stanzas of Dzyan: "The Lords of the Flame arose and prepared themselves ... the Great Lord of the Fourth Sphere (the Earth) awaited their oncoming. The lower (Earth) was prepared. The upper (Venus) was resigned ..." Their arrival was described thus: "Then with the mighty roar of swift descent from incalculable heights, surrounded by blazing masses of fire which filled the sky with shooting tongues of flame, the vessel of the Lords of the Flame

The idea of Ancient Astronauts was toyed with as far back as 1919 by Charles Fort in *The Book of the Damned*. It also became a regular theme in science fiction.



flashed through the aerial spaces. It halted over the White Island which lay in the Gobi Sea. Green it was, and radiant with the first blossoms as Earth offered her fairest and best to welcome her King." (*FSHL*, p. 166, quoting Besant and Leadbeater, *Man: How, Whence and Whither*) Leslie commented: "In this fragment we have the first account of the landing of a great space ship or flying saucer ... Incredible as it seems, there can be no other meaning to this passage." He dated this landing to the year 18,617, 841 BC...

In view of the sensational conclusions, one might ask, just how reliable are the sources? This question did not seem to occur to Leslie. His main authorities are given as the Stanzas of Dzyan, along with the writings of Annie Besant, Charles Leadbeater, W. Scott Elliott and Alice Bailey. The Stanzas of Dzyan were first published in Madame Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine*, introduced with the description: "An archaic Manuscript - a collection of palm leaves made impermeable to water, fire and air, by some specific and unknown process - is before the writer's eye." Unfortunately, this book does not seem to have lain before the eye of anyone else, and Madame Blavatsky herself probably only saw it with clairvoyant vision. It can therefore be reasonably objected that it is a matter of faith, rather than historical record, to accept its account of the Lords of the Flame. Furthermore, the information given by Besant, Leadbeater, Scott Elliott and Bailey was also obtained by psychic investigation. (The date 18,617,841 was "according to the Brahmin Tables".)

"As soon as we abandon our own reason, and are content to rely upon authority, there is no end to our troubles. Whose authority? The Old Testament? The New Testament? The Koran? In practice, people choose the book considered sacred by the community in which they are born, and out of that book they choose the parts they like, ignoring the others ... No Catholic, for instance, takes seriously the text which says that a Bishop should be the husband of one wife." (Bertrand Russell, *Unpopular Essays*, 1950, p. 108)

Now, Leslie's main authorities were Theosophical writers, and though the Theosophical Society might deny it, Theosophy is in effect a religion, with the writings of Blavatsky, Besant and

Co. as its scriptures. Desmond Leslie was evidently a Theosophist, and he was merely updating his Victorian religion to encompass the new phenomenon of flying saucers.

To be fair, he was also able to cite some unquestionably ancient books, notably the *Mahabharata*, which mentions flying ships and lethal armaments such as the "Brahma Weapon" described in terms comparable to a nuclear bomb. Yet the *Mahabharata* is itself a sacred book to the Hindus. Some years ago I met an Indian Guru who was on his way to California. He said his original home was a cave in the Himalayas, which was equipped with its own the *Mahabharata*, as it was a religious duty to watch it.

For most westerners, of course, religion means Christianity and scripture the Bible. The 1956 appearance of Morris K. Jessup's *UFO and the Bible* (Citadel Press, New York) was overdue: he began by saying: "Scarcely a week goes by without some alert reader sending me suggestions that I should expound on the Biblical references to UFO and related phenomena of a so-called miraculous type."

Jessup started from the position: "I believe that it is time for Church and Science to bury their respective tomahawks and let the pipe of intellectual peace glow as both parties mellow around the camp fire of tolerant and objective inquiry." As an example of the reconciliation of these two sides, take Kings 2:11: "And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder, and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven." Jessup quoted a "skilled and thoughtful student of the Bible" a Mr H. Lawrence Crowell, as saying that "the Aramaic words *ruach ceârâh* should be translated 'power blast' instead of 'whirlwind'." He could thus offer a new version: As they walked and talked there suddenly appeared a bright UFO, emitting electric sparks and blasts, and it parted them; Elijah was snatched up into the sky with a blast of power."

Having once hit on this principle of interpretation, other miracles are easily explained. Considering such passages as: "... and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha" (2

Kings 6:17); "And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly: yea, he did fly upon the wings of the wind" (Psalm 18: 10), Jessup commented: "No longer can we afford to laugh off these references as merely 'quaint' and allegoric, for they begin to sound more and more like accurate descriptions of the UFO." And so on.

Beyond Belief

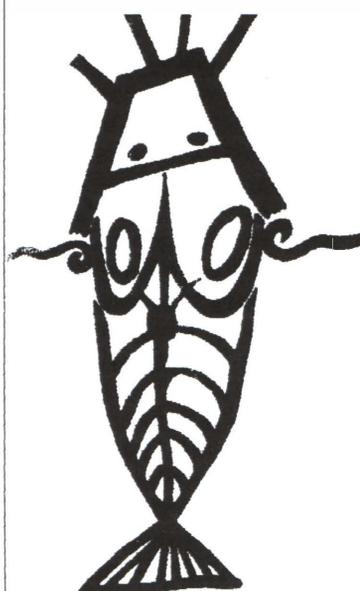
Pertinent here is the furore created by *Honest to God* (SCM Press, 1963), written by the Bishop of Woolwich, John A.T. Robinson, which proposed a mild revolution in theology. He began by asking if it made sense to speak of God "up there" in a Copernican universe. Though his argument was not set out clearly, he went on to propose displacing "supranaturalism" with "naturalistic" religion. This meant getting rid of miracles and such-like, which in the scientific age had become regarded as a bar to faith, though he was unsure with what they should be replaced.

The original print-run of *Honest to God* was for 6,000 copies, but before the end of the year more than 350,000 had been sold, showing that the questions it raised already bothered many people. Inevitably there was controversy and calls for the Bishop's resignation, but it is significant that the critics did not agree among themselves. One man wrote to him: "I have, and many thousands have, an image of God in the heavens. The parsons have always spoken of a God up there, but now the parsons are contradicting everything they have said ... These new beliefs will smash Christians in believing there is a God and it could be the Church in general will break up. The words of the creed will mean nothing. It is suddenly like telling a youngster who believes whole-heartedly in Father Xmas, 'there isn't a Father Xmas, it's your Dad.' The whole world would collapse beneath them." (This quotation, and other comments from *The Honest to God Debate*, SCM, 1963) C.S. Lewis, by contrast, thought that the Bishop was making a noise about nothing: "We have long abandoned belief in a God who sits on a throne in a localised heaven."

Voices of praise were far more common: a vicar's wife told the Bishop he had "made the Church seem alive again, when for years it has seemed

Strange Gods

The starting point of Robert Temple's *The Sirius Mystery* was the Dogon, a Sudanese tribe whom French anthropologists learnt to have traditions about being visited by beings from Sirius.



Temple reproduced their findings, then tried to prove that the same information was known to the ancient Egyptian priests as a secret tradition, and later to various Greek philosophers who were initiated into their mysteries. Of course these traditions were never written down, and Temple had to guess at them from scattered clues. His main authorities were Wallis Budge's *The Gods of the Egyptians*, the Mesopotamian epics, the Hermetic books, Robert Graves' *The Greek Myths*, Plutarch *On Isis and Osiris*, and the neo-Platonists. These are all either sacred writings of the Pagans, or modern summaries of such. At a guess, one would take Robert Temple to be a Pagan himself, particularly since he ignores the Bible altogether, and his only reference to Christianity is this: "The perversions of Christianity have always seemed to me to incorporate a perversion of the notion of 'sin' and the means by which 'sin' can be exploited as a means of temporal blackmail over other human beings."

Drawing of an amphibious creature which, according to Temple, gave the Dogon information about the solar system.

so unbearably dead!" Letters expressing agreement came from priests, theologians, doctors, headmasters and businessmen. "A well-known politician" wrote: "Reading it, and hearing you speak it, has done more to make the basic validity of the Christian message seem relevant to me than all the sermons and services I have ever heard or attended."

Until the debate on the ordination of women, this affair was the biggest religious controversy the Church of England had seen this century. It suggests that, generally speaking, the British felt unable to believe in a comforting God the Father "up there", just as they could not believe in Father Christmas. Yet they did not simply turn to atheism (as most materialists expected they would) but felt the need for some new kind of religion or belief, something to replace the old supernatural God.

Bishop Robinson remarked that he had never experienced "being born again" (*Honest to God*, p. 27). Since then, the most notable development within the Church has been the rise of "born-again" Christianity. A former "born-again" tells me that it is perfectly fair to say that born-again Christians are taught not to think. Instead they are meant to rely on the authority of the Bible, and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. For this growing section of the Church, there can be no conflict between science and religion, since they do not think about the question.

But for the rest of the "Body of Christ" the problem has remained, and the conventional, non-born-again churches have continued to decline. And, so, the Space Gods have been able to manifest to help fill the vacuum left by the departure of God the Father from his throne in heaven

Return of the Gods

A few years later appeared the most successful of the Ancient Astronaut books, Erich von Däniken's *Chariots of the Gods?*, 1969 (1st ed. as *Erinnerungen an die Zukunft*, Econ-Verlag, 1968. The original title meant: "Memories of the Future"). The first thing that would strike anyone familiar with the literature is this book's lack of originality. Despite his continual references to "my theories" (etc.), almost everything in his book had already been noticed by Desmond Leslie, Robert Charroux, Pauwels and Bergier, W. Raymond Drake and others. Indeed, von Däniken's quotations from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* are simply lifted from *Flying Saucers Have Landed* (he translated the 19th century English renditions into German, whence Michael Heron turned them back into English, so that the versions in *Chariots of the Gods?* have been translated thrice). Likewise, when von Däniken wrote: "Seen from the air, the clear-cut impression that the 37-mile-long plain of Nazca made on me was that of an airfield!" (*Chariots*, p. 32), he was most likely influenced in this impression by Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier's *The Morning of the Magicians* (Mayflower, 1971, p. 117; 1st ed. Paris, Editions Gallimard, 1960): "Photographs taken of the plain of Nazca remind one irresistibly of the ground-lighting of an airfield." It would be tedious to analyse the whole book in this way, but nearly all of it had been said before.

So why did this book greatly outsell its predecessors? Part of the reason is no doubt that von Däniken wrote in a fluent and popular style (more than one can say of the average UFO author), he appeared (if only superficially) to be scientific, and he had actually bothered to visit many of the sites he wrote about.

Unlike Desmond Leslie and many of the others, his treatment was simple and unmythical. Readers of Brinsley Le Poer Trench's *The Sky People*, for instance, might have been able to take in the Garden of Eden (a Galactic cross-breed experiment carried out on Mars), Atlantis, Osiris and Isis, Abraham, Red Indian folklore, Sodom (destroyed by nuclear weapons), tektites, Jericho, the 1908 Siberian explosion, and the star of Bethlehem, but maybe it all got too confusing



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when he added Madame Blavatsky, Kundalini, Gnosticism, etheric nature, mediumship, the significance of the cross, telepathic powers, and the "journey back to godhood".

Perhaps the main cause was simply that he published at the right time and place to influence those who, like the disaffected readers of *Honest to God*, wanted a non-supernatural God "up there". For instance, Darwin had made Christians uncomfortable about Genesis, and Bishop Robinson hardly bothered to defend it: "A hundred years ago the Church was forced to clarify whether it accepted the Adam story as history or as myth. Until then there had been many theologians (St Paul probably among them) who, if pressed, would not have thought the truth of the story depended upon Adam being an actual historical individual. But the point is that they were not pressed. There was no compelling need to distinguish between the categories of history and myth. But with the Darwinian controversy on evolution it became a vital necessity. It was imperative for Christian apologetic to be clear that Genesis was *not* a rival account of primitive anthropology. If the distinction had not been made it would have been virtually impossible to continue commending the Biblical faith to modern scientific man."

The Bishop himself settled for myth, regarding Adam and Eve as metaphors for Everyman and Everywoman, who are always subject to temptation (the Serpent). "Go back as far as you will, human nature has always been like that. That's why *in the myth* they are put at the beginning." (John A.T. Robinson, *But that I can't believe!*, Fontana, 1967)

How much happier are those who can take a myth to be absolute truth! The born-again, as always, adhere to the Bible on this question. Many of them suppose that the world was created in 4000 BC, hence that radioactive dating is all wrong, dinosaurs and Neanderthal man never existed, and Darwin is condemned to hell. Some even suggest that God created fossils, as they were found, with intent to deceive ("God shall send them strong delusion that they should believe a lie", 2 Thes. 2:11) in order to test Christians' faith in the scriptures.

Return to the Stars offered, again, a reconciliation of scripture and

science: it took the Garden of Eden as an accurate record, not of the doings of a supernatural LORD God, but of genetic manipulation by which unknown cosmonauts created *homo sapiens* from ape-men. Even outlandish verses could thereby be believed in: *And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; and the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.* Van Däniken: "Eve must have been produced in a retort. Now a number of cave drawings showing objects like retorts in the vicinity of primitive man have been preserved. Could foreign intelligences with a highly developed science and knowing about the immune biological reactions of bones have used Adam's marrow as a cell culture and brought the sperm to development in it?"

It says so in the Bible

Miracles aside, the accuracy of the Bible has been a matter of dispute since the 18th century: until then, it had apparently never occurred to anyone to doubt it. Thomas Paine, author of *The Age of Reason*, objected to the Bible on the grounds that it often depicts God as a mad tyrant. He backed this up with critical arguments against the Bible's supposed textual perfection: The Book of Kings ("little more than a history of assassinations, treachery, and wars") actually contradicts itself: as to the Kings of Judah and Israel who were both called Joram, "one chapter (2 Kings 1: 8) says that Joram of Judah began to reign in the *second year* of Joram of Israel; and the other chapter (8:16) says, that Joram of Israel began to reign in the *fifth year* of Joram of Judah". Such mistakes are enough to disprove the old contention that it is all the word of God, dictated by the Holy Spirit to scribes incapable even of ordinary clerical ((Neville Spearman, 1968; Sphere, 1973), though happy with *The Secret Doctrine*, Sanskrit romances, *Oahspe* (produced through automatic typewriting by a New York dentist), the Egyptian and Tibetan Books of the Dead, and the revelations of Aetherius through Dr George King, was dubious about the historical value of the Bible: "Egyptologists, Assyriologists, archaeologists of

renown, men of science, who should know the facts, find no evidence whatever of the Exodus ... no Egyptian text refers to the miraculous deliverance mentioned in the Bible ... the Book of Exodus is not a factual, critical record of events, history as we write it today ... With all due respect to the learned Moses, this hotch-potch of religious narrative in such turgid style does his great mind ill-justice; it is doubtful whether its literary merit would attract any publisher today." (Mayflower ed., pp 157-8)

This attitude is understandable: anyone attempting a revolution in thought will tend to challenge the accepted standards they were brought up with, and if that included "The Bible is true", the independent thinker grows up to question that. Ancient Eastern literature and modern inspirational works were not mentioned in childhood, so there is not the same motive to doubt them.

Howsoever, the texts he relied on were mostly religious works of one kind or another. The same is true of Robert Charroux, the cover of the original French edition of whose *Le Livre des Secrets Trahis* (Robert Laffont, 1965) promises it is "From documents older than the Bible". These are primarily *The Book of Enoch* and the *Popol Vuh*. *Enoch* treats of the "fallen angels", who descended to earth, married human females, and taught various arts and sciences: this indicates "a colonisation of our world by cosmonauts (p. 127); conventional scholarship, though, assigns the book to the intertestamental period. The *Popol Vuh* relates that a woman named Orejona descended to earth from Venus, and gave birth to the human race by mating with a tapir. Charroux apparently accepted this because it was in a book he supposed "older than the Bible".

Gospel Truth

On the subject of the Virgin Birth, Bishop Robinson summarised the modern sceptics' position thus: "But you can't really believe that lot, can you? Stars hopping over cribs, angelic choirs lighting up the skies, God coming to earth as a man - like a visitor from outer space? You couldn't really believe it today." (*But that I can't believe!*, p. 27)

The Bishop's response was vague, suggesting that the star and the angels



From the Pulpit

Barry H. Downing, a Presbyterian pastor in Endwell, New York, was one clergyman (probably speaking for many) who came out in favour of such interpretations with *The Bible and Flying Saucers* (Sphere,

1973; 1st US ed., 1968). Downing was able to salvage a more traditional God from the work of Space Angels by means of the following construction: "Suppose that in five hundred years humans on earth should advance technologically in the space age to the point where we are able to travel to another world in a spaceship and discover intelligent beings who were scientifically primitive. Suppose that Christian missionaries were to travel in space to this planet to try to convert these primitive people to Christianity. How would these people talk about our missionaries? The Bible seems to suggest that angels are very much like missionaries from another world."

and the Virgin mother were "poetry", a way of saying "God is in all this". Yet he unwittingly suggested the new solution of "a visitor from outer space", that would be so enthusiastically adopted by some. "The only celestial object to appear suddenly close enough to the Earth to be visible within only a small radius, which moves guiding followers, then stands still, is an intelligently controlled Spaceship." (W. Raymond Drake, *Gods and Spacemen throughout History*, Sphere, 1977, p. 184) "The arrival of the infant Christ on earth from a spaceship is less fantastic, more credible, logical and acceptable, than the ethereal dogma taught by the Christian Church." (Robin Collins, *Did Spacemen Colonise the Earth?*, Mayflower, 1975, p. 163) By 1976 W. Raymond Drake could declare: "Today the only persons prepared to accept those New Testament wonders as literally true appear to be our believers in Flying Saucers." (*Gods and Spacemen in Ancient Israel*, Sphere, p. 11)

The question of the resurrection is a tricky one even for UFO writers, but it did not daunt Paul Thomas (*Flying Saucers through the Ages*, Neville

Spearman, 1965; French ed., 1962. Thomas was actually Paul Misraki, a well-known French popular musician) who was a Catholic (like Dione he gave a chapter to Fatima), as was his English translator Gavin Gibbons. However, his interpretation of Jesus' return from the dead would not have commended itself to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. He suggested that Jesus Christ was a "biological mutation" produced by alien genetic experimentation. In fact, the Astronaut Angels' interest in the Children of Israel, from the time of Abraham, was as a gene pool from which to breed the first specimen of the next phase of evolution: humans who could die and then naturally come back to life, as was demonstrated after the crucifixion.

(If this was true, one would expect that Jesus would have been encouraged to have as many offspring as possible: but, as Thomas/Misraki admits, he left the world childless (*The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* to the contrary); so it seems that for some reason the aliens decided on a delay before making the benefits of immortality generally available.)

The life to come

The other key feature of a religion is its teaching on the future, in which, nearly always, present wrongs are to be set right in some way. Either there is a life after death in which rewards and punishments will be given out, or future lives assigned on the basis of past behaviour, or else there is to be a Second Coming, in which the Divine Kingdom will be brought to Earth, and (after the wicked have been thrown into the fiery pit which burns forever) universal peace and happiness will reign for eternity. One of the best-known prophecies to this latter effect is Mark 13:26-27: "And then shall they see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven." Morris K. Jessup produced his own version:

Shall we paraphrase it a bit? (such as combining verses 26 and 27)

"The great shining and powerful mother-ship will appear among the clouds and the Master will dispatch his assistants in smaller craft, and will gather from all parts of the earth those who have survived the brunt of the cataclysm and have reached temporary places of safety, and particularly those whom the Shepherd Race deem suitable for the propagation and resurgence of humanity in a new racial generation, and these will be taken to live for a while in the celestial regions where are the homes of the UFO in space.

There isn't much more to say, is there?

Some people would conclude from all this that there is no reason to believe in Gods or Astronauts. Actually all it proves is that people have a very strong need for some kind of religion, and if one is taken away from them they will hasten to locate another. Even the most severe secularists would admit that the creed of the Astronaut Gods is harmless, as religions go: believers are not expected to obey every command of a priesthood, or burn heretics at the stake. Science might one day be able to provide a testable explanation for the religious impulse: until then, the frontier between science and religion must remain uncertain and disputed territory.

After proposing a solution to the classic Father Gill case, in *Magonia 54*, Martin Kottmeyer was met with a barrage of objections in the next issue.

Now he replies to his critics:



Illustration from *The UFO Handbook*, by Allan Hendry

Looks like I have some objections to deal with. Let's start with Bullard's four points.

●1 Bullard asserts that the UFO of June 27 was an all-terrain vehicle, crossing not just sea but land as well, the latter being inconsistent with a ship. In the talk some four months after the encounter the object "wandered over the sky a bit", passed behind a hill, came back, then "shot right across the bay".

In the original report these quoted behaviours are not associated with the events of the 27th, but the 26th. The wandering behaviour was reported in association with all the UFOs, and sounds consistent with autokinesis. In saying the object shot across the bay the original report adds, "It diminished to a pinpoint and vanished" which suggests the motion was not across the field of vision but along the line of sight. This vanishing would have involved speeds of thousands of miles per hour, but "there was no sound", i.e. no sonic boom. This probably proves the interpretation was wrong. The description seems

suggestive of the light just meeting the horizon as the boat was dropping below the curvature of the Earth. The closest thing I can find to something passing behind a hill in the original report refers to events in the 8:35 entry: "Another one over Wadobuna village". (Seers, p.47) Cruttwell describes it as an object that "swooped up and away over the mountains". (p.52) As the word 'another' indicates, this is not the same object that had the figures walking around on top of it.

The artist's depiction of the object over land in Hendry's *Handbook* was approved by Gill, but this may only indicate that he was satisfied the UFO was drawn correctly. The drawings in the original report are not framed by reference points in the locale of the observations, nor are there any verbal references to the object with the figures ever being seen over land.

●2 Seas rarely are mirror-smooth, but I am not asking for miracles. Consider the miracle implicit in the assumption that Americans actually had silent flying platforms on

manoeuvres in Papua in 1959. Consider the miracle of an alien vessel crewed by humans gratuitously levitating over the water for hours with no visible propulsion, no disturbance in the water beneath it attracting attention, and no deafening noise.

I suspect the postulated light-to-calm wind conditions necessary for the illusion may be reflected in a curious little detail that caught my attention in re-reading the report. Gill indicated there was a glow about the craft with figures. "The glow did not touch them, but there appeared a little space between their outline and the light". (Seers, p.50) This is less mysterious than it first reads. What I believe is happening here is that exhaust was forming a cloud of smoke to the side of the boat and the light from the centre of the deck was casting shadows forward onto the cloud. Wind conditions would have to be minimal or the exhaust would have dispersed quickly. For a sharp thin space to be present the cloud had to be close and not enveloping the crew itself, making it unlikely the cloud was

meteorological in origin.

●3 I confess I know too little about squid to argue about whether or not they avoid shallow waters. Any squidologists out there in our readership?

●4 Bullard quotes Hendry as giving an elevation of 45 degrees during the waving episode. Hendry was not quoting Gill in that passage. It is a blatant mistake. He was confusing the angle made by the blue beam of light with the angular elevation. In the *JUR* report Gill's estimate was only 30 degrees. Bullard would inevitably reiterate that this is still much too high. I would agree if we could trust its accuracy. There is however no angular elevation in the field notes or Cruttwell's report. This detail emerges first in the *JUR* re-interview and this makes it a decades-old memory. Even outside the issues of reliability of such memories, angular elevations are generally very inaccurate. Ask people to point to the mid-point between the zenith and the horizon and they don't point at 45 degrees but down around 30 or 20 degrees and, rarely, even as low as 12 degrees. (Minnaert, pp.153-4)

One point of clarification: Bullard uses the word disorientation in describing the illusion I propose. In general usage this is thought to be synonymous with vertigo and I just want it understood that I don't assert the involvement of vertigo.

Aymerich's point about Gill saying the object was above Venus is a more substantial objection. If one regards the observation as infallible, then there is no ready explanation for it that I would risk offering. The observation is not in Gill's field notes and is not signed onto by the other witnesses. It thus comes down to one man's word. As such it is vulnerable to the standard doubts about memory (See Drake's remark about the rapid decay of accuracy of memory encountered in investigating meteor reports in Sagan & Taves, p.254). It may involve a transpositional error or an unintentionally leading question like what Elizabeth Loftus found in her investigations of memory. There are other possibilities. I concede in advance there are no independent grounds for affirming Gill made such an error. Acceptance of the possibility

hinges on how much one wants a solution or how much one wants the case to remain a mystery.

Acknowledging their address, I share Aymerich's interest in wanting to know what those three rods drawn by Guyorobo and Rorata are.

Buhler proclaims his faith that the most convincing explanation for the Gill case is that they saw what they saw. Did he notice that Gill said he saw "a strange new device of you Americans"? This isn't a problem for you?

If I am guilty of sins of omission, let me reply that my critics are not innocents either. None take up the challenge to offer a better explanation. None acknowledge, let alone answer, the objections raised by the alternatives. Bullard wants a water-tight explanation which satisfies an absolute standard of correct vs. incorrect. None of the solutions advanced to date, even the fuzzy one of it being a part of the UFO phenomenon, squares perfectly in every detail. My failure to offer one is less a reflection of my incompetence than the intractability of the case itself. Frankly, I was simply trying to get an answer that floated better than the competition.

Buhler's insinuation that I dodge uncomfortable details and ought to have discussed the other seventy plus cases in the Cruttwell report is to me a damn irksome thing to say. Can you show me any believer in the case who ever acknowledged any difficulties in their assumption this case involves an alien visitation or how different it is from all the other cases they hold dear? I am hardly alone in ignoring the rest of the report. Some I suspect fear the implications it was part of a general hysteria, an assumption which would be strengthened if they assessed the very much lower quality of those other cases. For the record, I ignored them because I had my hands full with just the Gill case.

M. Minnaert *The Nature of Light and Colour in the Open Air*, Dover, 1954.
Carl Sagan and Thornton Page *UFOs - A Scientific Debate*, Norton Library, 1954.

Stan Seers *UFOs: the Case for Scientific Myopia*, Vantage, 1983

25 YEARS AGO

A portrait of John Keel with a row of bullet-holes across it, and the cation 'Keel Under Fire' was the tasteful cover design promoting Alan Sharp's critical piece on Keel's recently published *Operation Trojan Horse*.

In this brief article Sharp took Keel to task for a number of basic scientific errors in *OTH*. He concludes "It seems that Mr Keel is not averse to deliberately attempting to mislead his readers when it suits his purpose... There is much more that one could write along similar lines concerning [*OTH*], but this would savour of using a bulldozer to demolish a house of cards." However, the engine was already revving up and the demolition team would be moving before a couple more issues of MUF0B had passed.

A letter from Peter Rogerson, part of an on-going argument with Norman Oliver, reminds us that even in 1971 the Right-wing hate merchants were infiltrating the UFO field: "I feel that responsible groups and individuals can help to overcome this infiltration by ceasing all communication and exchange with the offenders and making sure that their own platforms and publications cannot be used for the propagation of political, religious or racial propaganda." Advice which, as we have seen is as relevant, and as wilfully ignored, today as 25 years ago.

The issue concluded with a round up of the latest local UFO - "Most Merseyside reports easily explained" was the summation - well, being MUF0B we would say that wouldn't we?.

In the September/October issue I took up Peter's comments on political extremism in the world of ufology, suggesting that the irrationality which surrounds much ufology makes it a fertile breeding ground for political irrationality and extremism, and that clearing out all the bigots moy, in the long run, prove impossible. I see no reason to change this view, whilst still insisting that whenever such people and ideas *do* creep out into the daylight, they should be exposed and harried as much as possible.

In a short piece, John Harney chronicled his ultimate disillusionment with the Warminster phenomenon. He had visited the town in the autumn of 1971, found little activity and had noted a number of dispiriting signs: the installation of a litter-bin on Cradle Hill to cater for the tourist traffic, whimsical graffiti around the famous hill-top gates, and the ufologist-haunted Farmer Giles Guest House had become The Farmer's Hotel, and prices hiked accordingly.

In the absence of Arthur Shuttlewood a group of nocturnal visitors were trying to psyche each other up with UFO yarns - "it was like the Northern Lights but the other way round" - but as John recorded: "It was a good try, but it did not come off. It can never be the same again at Warminster". The Wiltshire town was on its last legs as a living phenomenon, and would soon become a place of UFO memories and unexploded hoaxes.

John Rimmer



MAGONIA Magonia Readers' Group meetings take place from 7.00 p.m. onwards, on the first Sunday of each month at the Railway pub, Putney, at the corner of the High Street and Upper Richmond Road. 30 seconds from Putney BR station, 10 minutes from East Putney tube.

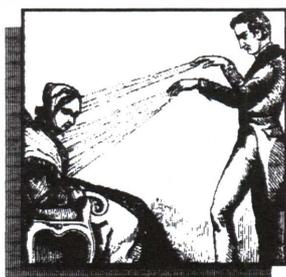
Just turn up and join in the conversation.

THE HYPNO-HEIST

MORE THAN JUST AN URBAN LEGEND?

MICHAEL GOSS

The customer was tall and dark - perhaps Italian, maybe Turkish: that was the impression which 32-year-old Mohammed Zamir formed of the man who stepped into his electrical shop at Ilford, Essex, one day in late 1977. He wanted to buy a cassette and asked Mr Zamir to take its cost out of a £20 note which, the shopkeeper observed with momentary interest, was a curious colour. Up until now it had been a perfectly ordinary sort of transaction. What happened when he examined the note more closely was quite out of the ordinary.



Frankly, it is somewhat difficult to comprehend precisely *what* happened to Mr Zamir. "Zzzz - that was that!" exclaimed Linda McKay, reporting the incident for the *Sunday Mirror* of 9 October 1977. But then, Mr Zamir's own account was hardly more explicit. "All of a sudden, I was in a daze," he told the journalist. "Either I was hypnotised, or there was something on that note." At the time, the exact cause of Mr Zamir's stupor mattered far less than the fact that he came out of it to find the till had been relieved of the £1,700 it contained only 15 minutes before and that, like the money, the stranger had gone.

A police spokesman was prepared to confirm that Ilford Constabulary was "taking the matter very seriously". This "method of distraction" was one they had never heard of before and their best working theory was that Mr Zamir had fallen foul of a con-man with a highly original technique for parting victims from their money. About the "hypnotism aspect" of the case he or she would not speak, however. No matter: the person who composed the *Sunday Mirror's* headline saw no need for such reticence. Mohammed Zamir's ambiguous adventure was presented to the British reading public under the block-capital title of, "THE HYPNOHEIST".

A couple of months later and only a few miles away, Leyton police were cautioning women who lived alone to beware of another itinerant criminal-occultist menace. This time the threat came from female gypsies - perhaps as many as eleven of them, though only two featured in the episode covered by the lively if flamboyant *News of the World* of 4 December 1977. The pair were said to target isolated mothers with young children whom they coerced into handing over goods, jewellery and money through a mixture of intimidation and "spells" that may or may not have included hypnosis. "The women ... are dark-haired with weather-beaten faces and wear tattered clothes and bangles", wrote John McNamee. "They chant and mumble curses. And once inside a house they say mysteriously, 'We are the Eleven Sisters'". For good measure, the younger of the pair was also cross-eyed.

Most of this came from the testimony of 31-year-old Mrs Romella Blake, who had encountered the two women when they helped carry shopping up to her 16th-floor flat off Leyton High Road. Once the door was open they slipped inside before she had time to object; the older had insisted on reading her palm and then they started to chant, threatening to cast a spell on the baby and asserting that they had to have its bed linen. All the while the younger of the duo paralysed Mrs Blake with a fixed, mesmeric (and presumably cross-eyed) stare. The victim claimed that she had been in a peculiar mental state and was brought back to normal consciousness four hours later by the phone ringing. The TV, cassette player and bed linen were gone; Mrs Blake

could only think she must have helped the two women to carry these bulky items away somewhere. She had a partial memory of remaining helpless as the "gypsies" removed the rings, bracelet and necklace she was wearing - also of their taking the children's money boxes and £50 from her purse. On top of all that, they had made her go to the bank and draw out a further £20, which they immediately took from her.

"I could sense what they were doing," she explained, "but I was powerless to stop them. It was horrifying. Their power over me was so strong I can still feel it." And what was the nature of that "power"? Mrs Blake was inclined to suppose that she must have been hypnotised.

Here was another matter that the police were forced to view with extreme seriousness - the more so, as the same gypsies were thought to have obtained £150 plus jewellery from another local woman and terrified her into maintaining silence about the affair for several days by promising she would die a horrible death if she reported it. There was no excuse for them not taking the Two (or Eleven) Sisters seriously: as genuine con-artists, that is, who established a firm mental control over their victims by means of intimidation in which the threat of the "gypsy curse" played no minor part.

A reasonable enough hypothesis, surely; it would not have been the first time that a door-to-door pedlar had played on the superstitious fears of a householder to extort money. Nor would Mr Zomir have been the first "mark" to be taken in by a variation on the conjuror's old card-switching routine, a sleight-of-hand that made him mistake a forged note - or even a worthless bit of paper - for a large-denomination bill. Stage performers do tricks like this all the time. Part of the fun comes from the way they let the audience see what the duped one cannot; we are allowed to witness the fraud being worked in front of the victim's bemused face. And a good performer will pull off the trick even when we have been warned that it is a trick and are watching for it to happen...

Neither sleight-of-hand nor intimidation are "hypnosis" in the usually accepted sense of the term. We could be satisfied with supposing that both Blake and Zamir had been the prey of accomplished yet orthodox con-artists.

That being so, need we spend time in looking for any "hypnotic aspect" of these cases?

Despite this - despite the occasional conservative tendency to place the word inside inverted commas as if to imply it was being used figuratively rather than literally - the media seemed determined to exploit the hypnotic angle to these stories. They were presented as amazing tales of hypno-heists and the con-artists as nothing less than skilful, super-powerful hypnotists.

All of which reflects a little-appreciated truth about how we regard hypnosis itself. No matter how often we are assured of its harmlessness, its therapeutic and other beneficial applications *and* of the intrinsic limitations that preclude it from becoming a criminal weapon, popular belief prefers to portray it as an awesome occult art enabling devious individuals to transform their fellow-citizens into mindless zombies. Many of us enjoy this histrionic presentation; sometimes we *want* to believe the worst of hypnosis.

So in popular narratives, oral and printed alike, hypnosis is shown as a sort of magic, a supernatural power that permits those gifted in its use to achieve the most spectacular effects. It becomes a slightly modernised version of the "fairy glamour" we find in nursery-stories and other early folk-tales. As long ago as 1905, Celtic culture scholar J.A.M. Macculloch made the rationalising connection between hypnosis and all those fairy-story characters plunged into enchanted slumbers or forced by spells to see, act and be just as the spell-caster wishes in his *The Childhood of Fiction*.

Or there is the elderly but still popular folk-tale known as "The Hand of Glory", which bears a good resemblance to our contemporary hypno-heist scenarios. This narrates how a stranger begs a night's lodgings at a lonely farmhouse and puts its inmates into an unbreakable sleep by burning a candle made from the pickled hand of a hanged felon while reciting: "Let those that be asleep be asleep and let those that are awake be awake". The formula doesn't credit the Hand of Glory with the power to *induce* sleep, but only with that of changing ordinary sleep into a magical variety so that those who are a-slumber when it is lit cannot wake until it ceases to burn. The story goes

on to tell how the burglary fails because one girl has only *feigned* to be asleep in order to keep a suspicious eye on the stranger; she breaks the spell by dousing the Hand of Glory's flame with milk and then wakens the household.

In popular lore, hypnosis can still be made to seem the perfect crime-tool. "How could you commit a theft with complete impunity and moreover with the consent of the victim?" asked *Parisien Libéré* of 10 November 1990, when reporting how a 61-year-old bank clerk of Mantes-la-Jolie claimed to have been placed into semi-consciousness by two "experts in the art of suggestion" who walked off with 15,000 francs. The paper's advice to readers was brief: all you needed was a familiarity with the "occult sciences".

As indeed the unknown woman with brilliant, dark eyes who visited Dominique Desigaux in March 1964 must have had. Mlle (26) Desigaux was reading behind the counter of her souvenir store in Nice Old Town when a woman of oriental or Egyptian disposition appeared unexpectedly and offered to read her palm. Feeling slightly anxious, the shopkeeper parted with five francs. Next the woman placed her hands on Desigaux's shoulders close to her neck and began to talk in a very soft voice that had a bizarre "melting" effect. There followed what the *Parisien* (28 March 1964) called "a veritable hypnotic seance". The "Egyptian" performed some ritual which involved cutting up Desigaux's handkerchief and later wrote out a prayer to St Rita, the patron saint of Nice; more to the point, she ordered Desigaux to open the cash-register and give her the 150 francs it held. Mlle Desigaux said she obeyed all these instructions in a dream or "like a sleep-walker". Afterwards, she added, her head ached as if she had a hangover.

By this time the mysterious visitor was long gone. Realising that she had been the victim of "no common theft", Mlle Desigaux ran into the street, but (unsurprisingly) could not see her persecutor, though apparently she found witnesses who confirmed they had seen the woman in the shop. And so the police were notified ... and a minor panic among Nice shopkeepers began.

This, as journalists hastened to point out, was *not an isolated case*. There had been another like it in Rome some months since when

In popular narratives, oral and printed alike, hypnosis is shown as a sort of magic, a supernatural power that permits those gifted in its use to achieve the most spectacular effects. It becomes a slightly modernised version of the "fairy glamour" we find in nursery-stories and other early folk-tales.

Violetta Spinella, a "bohemian" and alleged author of many hypnotic thefts, had been arrested. And another a little while ago in Toulon, where a young woman hypnotised a bank cashier into giving her an "important sum". Nor was Desigaux's the *last* case of its kind. On 10 April 1964 *France-Soir* reported that a jeweller in Issoire (Puy-de-Dôme) believed he had been victimised by an elegant, seemingly oriental couple whose difficulties in speaking French did not prevent them from being "experts in hypnotic theft", nor in robbing him of 2,800 francs.

Meantime back at Nice, investigators working on the Desigaux case thought they had a promising lead when a butcher identified a "gitane" with "eyes of fire" as the mystery woman from the newspaper account. Unfortunately, she turned out to be a "perfectly inoffensive" housewife. All too plainly, people were over-reacting to what they had read of the Desigaux incident and some portions of the media had begun to manifest scepticism about hypno-heists. One reported slyly that Mlle Desigaux might find her ordeal (and her cash loss) were not without recompense: an American movie producer was supposed to have seen her photo in the papers and to have been so impressed by it, not to say by her story, that he wanted her to visit the USA.

Had Mlle Desigaux been hypnotically robbed at all? Where had the hypnotic Egyptian gone to? Now the police were inclined to dismiss her story as mere "autosuggestion" and the mini-panic among Nice shopkeepers as "collective hallucination". But the newspapers were reluctant to let the topic drop and the reports kept coming in. On 30 May that same year (1964) a teenaged Le Mans bride alleged that she had been made to give 300 francs - her housekeeping money - to a gypsy hypnotist and as late as May 1970 two more travelling folk were required to attend a Versailles court to answer a charge of hypno-robbery that had been brought against them.

Hypno-criminals - the baleful gypsy, the mystic oriental, the sharp-dressed con-artist - are villains with no respect for international borders. As my opening paragraphs intimated, Britain hasn't been immune from them. Among the most interesting cases in my files - also one of the earliest, dating as it does from January 1890 -

is that of Lewis Albert, a former graduate of Oxford University whose fondness for alcohol had brought him into shabby circumstances. Here he eked out a living by turning his considerable mesmeric powers on small shopkeepers and other unchaperoned sources of ready money.

The secrets of Albert's technique were never fully revealed; my source is satisfied with calling them 'hypnotic' or 'mesmeric', as if that explained all that needed to be explained. Evidently and in common with more recent European hypno-heist accounts - like the Zamir case, also - he began by presenting the victim with something that simulated a large-denomination coin or note for which change would be due. In fact, it was always a ridiculously small or worthless one; in his last experiment, which led to his appearance before a Wolverhampton court in 1889, Albert had persuaded a 19-year-old clerk at a theatre box office that a dirty scrap of newspaper was a £5 note. The youth was astounded when police officers, who had been trailing Albert for some time, pointed out the error and he could only complain that an odd numbness had overcome him when the accused approached his window. Albert was caught, then, but there was some doubt as to what law he would be charged with having broken. He was "undoubtedly worthy of severe punishment", in one journalist's opinion, yet "his crime is so entirely novel that he probably cannot be punished at all unless the old statutes against witchcraft be revived, in which case he might be comfortably roasted before a slow fire."

Lewis Albert sounds like a man wasted on Wolverhampton; he would have fared better in Italy, a country that seems alarmingly prone to hypno-heists - or at least, to *reports* of them. I have a brief reference from 1953 concerning two gypsies arrested for hypnotising bank cashiers in an unnamed town or towns into giving them undisclosed but substantial sums and another from 1988 of a shopkeeper (not to mention 20 customers) incapacitated by a couple of "Indians" who stared into victims' eyes and gestured - after the style of the old-time mesmerists, no doubt - as a prelude to raiding the till. But the most concentrated study of this Italian phenomenon comes from the contemporary legend journal *Tutte Storie* (1:3) where Alessandro Cortellazi surveyed

Rumour legends are topical, fast-spreading and sensational exposés of hidden truths. Though their story-lines are rudimentary, they succeed in warning us that things are not what they appear, nor what we have been led to believe.

of "ipno-rapine" reports ranging across six months of 1991 and geographically from Trento and Milan (March) to Sarre (May) back to Trento and district (Calceranica and Mori, August) to Aosta (September). (For the sake of completeness, I may as well throw in here a June 1994 note from a British newspaper that "A robber who hypnotises his victims has been GIVEN more than £200,000 in 20 raids on shops and banks across Italy.")

Signor Cortellazi found these narratives to be fairly consistent. One or a pair of "oriental" or Asiatic-looking characters would enter a shop, bank, restaurant or megastore and proffer a large amount of money for which change was needed. The customer would stare fixedly at the cashier and might make a series of baffling, trivial or irrelevant comments; when the transaction reached a point where the till was opened, the cashier would suddenly experience a sense of massive confusion followed by memory lapse, from which he or she emerged later to see that money was missing - usually a very significant amount of it.

"Tutte storie" can be translated as "all stories" or "nothing other than stories", which is a fair reflection of how Italian folklorists regard these hypno-heist reports. They may appear genuine accounts of real-life events - that is how the newspapers make them sound. In truth, they are "no more than just stories" - *not true*: as some would prefer to say, they are urban, contemporary legends or *rumour legends*.

Rumour legends are topical, fast-spreading and sensational exposés of hidden truths. Though their story-lines are rudimentary, they succeed in warning us that things are not what they appear, nor what we have been led to believe. They deal with corruption, conspiracy and cover-ups; they speak of subversive threats to our well-being - to the very concept of Truth itself - which have been connived at or even created by the authorities who govern our lives. Original, daring and slickly devised crimes operating on a large scale, crimes which the police seem utterly helpless to prevent, crimes master-minded by gigantic underworld syndicates: these are perennially popular themes in rumour legends. The Hypno-Heist sits nicely within this category.

Taken together (as the 1964 French and 1991 Italian cases might be) hypno-heists can be made into attractive rumour legend sequences. *These are not random, unconnected incidents!* A fearsome criminal organisation is touring the streets of our cities almost undetectably - and unpredictably. Its operatives, talented hypnotists, are as audacious as they are mobile and highly practised. And versatile: they may pick upon an isolated female shopkeeper, but they can walk into a bank and perform the same mental chicanery on an experienced cashier just as well. And walk out again - and vanish. The "gang/conspiracy" element magnifies the extent of this menace. Imagine such power in the hands of the Tong or the Mafia! Maybe these hypno-robbers are making the Tong and Mafia look like crude amateurs!

Or forget the "secret criminal network" idea. Suppose these hypnotic thieves *are* independent operators: don't they seem to have something in common nonetheless? Surely they belong to a dangerous cultural or ethnic unit which is *in* our society, but not *of* it, an *alien* culture knowledgeable in terrible occult arts of which we know virtually nothing. The key in both scenarios is Hypnosis, shown once again as that irresistible force with which The Shadow of comic-book fame befogs men's minds - and women's minds as well, come to that.

This is to regard the Hypno-heist as a product of contemporary folklore. But ... can we be sure these reports *are* rumour legends, or any kind of legend at all? To categorise them in that manner would be much the same as saying they are not true - that the events they describe didn't really happen. Personally, I feel it safer to allow that *part* of what *some* rumour legends claim *might* be true and that *something* akin to what they describe *may* have taken place. In other words, these could be stories based upon a somewhat ambiguous set of circumstances to which an imaginative, speculative and *legendary* slant has been given.

"These people are real", comments Alessandro Cortellozi of the north Italian "ipnorapinatores", "and they've visited dozens of megastores and cashiers all over Italy. The only thing that becomes legend is the robbers' technique. In fact, really hypnosis doesn't work like that."

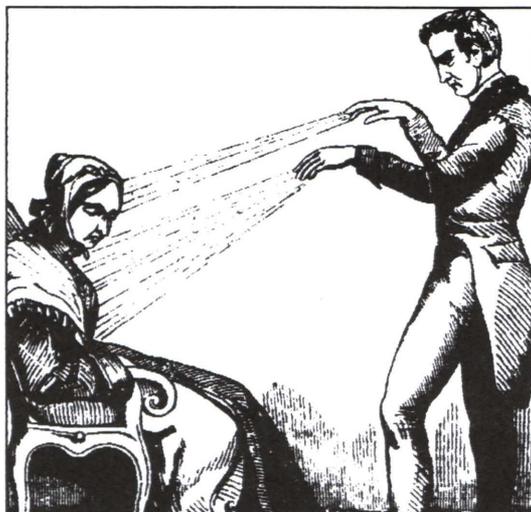
No, hypnosis certainly *doesn't*

work like that; at least, what most of us associate and identify with the word, 'hypnosis' doesn't work like that. In the popular conception, induction of the hypnotic state is a fairly prolonged process best attempted with the subject's full knowledge and co-operation. It involves fixation of that subject's attention on a defined focus (a small point above eye-level, for example - as in the "swinging shiny object" dear to movie-makers) with verbal suggestions of progressive relaxation which lead to eye closure and sleep-like trance. Admitting that the victims' memories of what occurred may have been inhibited - by post-hypnotic suggestions of amnesia, perhaps? - there is little in these hypno-heist stories that approaches our conventional view of hypnosis or indeed our view of what is "conventional" hypnosis.

On the other hand, we know very well that people get confused from time to time and that afterwards they tend to blame that confusion on all kinds of external influences. To claim you were drunk, "not thinking properly" or "under a spell" is a means of shrugging off responsibility for actions from which you wish (belatedly!) to dissociate yourself. A person who has experienced a drastic lapse of concentration, especially one leading to some traumatic error of judgement, may find solace in the rationalising excuse: "I don't know what came over me. I must have been hypnotised!"

This or some comparable blame-transferring, self-excusing mechanism may explain what happened in the cases of Dominique Desigaux and Romella Blake; it may apply to other cases of hypno-theft besides. But realistically, we cannot rule out the possibility that they were subjected to some form of hypnosis so far removed from the conventional image of swinging bright objects and "You are feeling sleepy" suggestions that it seems to be "not hypnosis" at all.

Many people don't realise that hypnosis can be induced without suggestions of relaxation and sleepiness or that (conversely) it can be achieved by stimulating the subject's mental processes into frenzied activity. His or her mind might be exposed to a barrage of swiftly issued, confusing instructions which create a condition of disorientation, culminating in a point where it will readily respond to a direction which is



In the popular conception, induction of the hypnotic state is a fairly prolonged process best attempted with the subject's full co-operation.

not ambiguous ("Go to sleep"). Is it coincidental that some hypno-heist narratives talk of the mysterious customer making oddly confusing remarks just prior to the moment when the victim suffered an unaccountable bewilderment that precluded a "sleep-walking" or amnesiac episode?

Then there is the controversial phenomenon variously known as "waking", "wide-awake", "hyperactive" or "hyperalert" trance. It could more simply be called hypnosis without sleep or hypnosis with the subject's eyes still open. It may be produced in subjects (including those who have not been hypnotised before) who are engaged in some concentrative task like reading, typing or riding exercise bicycles. (Or, theoretically, working out how much change to give a customer?) In the opinion of American doyen Raymond Wesley Wells, waking hypnosis must not be construed as a light or superficial form of trance; all the major hypnotic or post-hypnotic phenomena can be elicited in it, amnesia included. The controversial aspect here is that some researchers do not regard "waking trance" as synonymous with the more conventionally induced hypnotic variety. Add to this the still more provocative belief of Theodore X. Barber that these "hypnotic phenomena" can be produced in *non-hypnotised* persons and that consequently "hypnosis" itself can be

no more than a term of convenience - and you may find yourself precipitated into a mental confusion rivaling that attributed to hypno-heist victims.

"A brilliant hypnotist criminal could thus hypnotise shopkeepers just after they opened their cash registers or tills, scoop up the money, and leave them with no memory of the incident", declares Robert Temple, writing on waking trance in his *Open to Suggestion* (1989). Some 50 pages after this eerie though slightly imperfect echo of what we find in hypno-heist reports, the author relates the story of Maria, a Portuguese cleaner from London's Notting Hill district, whom personal investigation led him to believe had been the victim of two fellow-countrymen: one of them owning flowing hair, penetrating eyes and a good knowledge of how to provoke the "hyperalert trance" state in a suitable subject.

Maria's experiences were dreadfully similar to those of several hypno-heist victims already mentioned in this article. Inveigled into a complicated financial transaction centred upon an envelope said to contain £3,000 - and which in fact contained a wad of newspaper sandwiched between two genuine £50 notes - she began to feel she was losing contact with her surroundings, especially when the man with the intense gaze spoke to her. A kind of amnesia intervened,

though she remembered having gone home to collect all her savings and jewellery which she gave the pair ... who promptly disappeared while she was waiting in a Post Office queue. Subsequent enquiries revealed the same men had extracted sums of £1,500, £6,000 and £8,000 from at least three other people and according to Robert Temple they "apparently had committed similar crimes in Italy and Spain in the past". It is a relief to know that in committing their last British hypno-heist they were arrested, sentenced to a term in prison and eventually deported. A relief for *British* peace of mind, that is. Back home in Portugal, they may have gone straight back into their old business.

Remember Mohammed Zamir's speculation about what may have happened to him when he examined the strangely coloured £20 that his customer gave him? "Either I was hypnotised", he said, "or there was something on that note". Some inhalable drug, presumably: a powerful narcotic or maybe a substance that exerted a "hypnotic" effect. Drugs and hypnosis frequently appear side by side in popular narratives; to some extent, they are interchangeable and the former may even be used to induce the latter. Robert Temple was inclined to think that a drug may have promoted a preliminary wide-awake trance in Marie and she herself appears to have thought along the same lines.

Obscure, dire and incredibly potent drugs figure prominently in contemporary fictions. The villain of these thrilling tales is not merely a master-hypnotist; he has at his disposal a pharmacopoeia of weird mind-sapping chemicals and zombie-potions into which he routinely dips whenever he wants to abduct or brainwash a victim. So much for popular fantasy. But just as narrators insist we can't ignore what they claim of hypnotic malpractice purely because we don't know all there is to know about hypnosis - just as their stories receive some support from journalistic reports of new scientific findings in this field - so too we are not allowed to discredit these drug-horror stories. Don't the papers tell us of new and horrendously potent drug menaces practically every day? Is a drug that throws people into a somnambulant state the instant they breathe it *really* beyond the realms of belief?

Not if it comes from Colombia. The media have promoted the view that "Colombia", "dangerous drugs" and "criminal syndicates" are words that belong together. We are encouraged to think even the wildest tales of crime and chemical perversion are believable if they emanate from the country that has become known as the drug dispensary of the World. So we do not challenge something like the Associated Press report of 27 August 1994, which stated that thousands of Colombians have been robbed or raped by means of the hyoscine-based sedative *burundanga*; that 500 cases of 'burundanga intoxication' are treated in Bogota *each month*; that gangs track prospective victims for weeks before making contact, when the target is slowed down by a dose of chloroform and then offered a restorative drink by a kindly, well-dressed stranger who just happens to come along. Needless to say, this drink contains burundanga, a property of which is to enhance suggestibility so that (in the words of a US State Department warning issued in 1994) victims are 'disorientated and powerless to resist the criminal's orders'. He or she may be made into a 'mule' (drug-carrier) or, like the woman mentioned in Alfredo Ardila and Carlos Moreno's paper for *Cognition* (vol. 5, 1991) may spend hours in a helplessly compliant state during which the criminals escort him/her to make savings withdrawals with which they exit - taking whatever cash and jewellery the victim can provide them with as well. Any dissimilarity between *this* story and what newspapers tell us of hypno-heists seems too slight to dwell upon.

For some of us, however, hypnotic drugs may be an unnecessary luxury - scarce worth the trouble of carrying, let alone worth the risk of administering. There have always been individuals adept at compelling others to follow their instructions. In some, this is a natural inborn talent; many more (advertising and salespersons, for example) have had to learn how to cultivate it. Their persuasive techniques frequently employ a measure of suggestion. Again, we can rely upon it that con-artists have practical expertise in the same area, effectually mesmerising the "mark" into seeing and acting as he or she is required to see and act. None of this is "hypnosis" in the strictest sense, but mental manipulation which induces a diminished awareness that there are alternatives

to the suggested behaviour. Additionally, a sizeable proportion of the population - ten per cent, according to some reckonings - are highly suggestible types who are easily placed in a deep hypnotic state. One final and curious fact to consider here: a large number of these highly suggestible folk are capable of being eased into that deep hypnotic state by the mere notion that they are being hypnotised ...

The preconceptions we have about hypnosis - what it is, how it is induced, what happens when you are hypnotised - can be hypnotic devices in their own right. A suggestible person who equates hypnosis with watching a swinging shiny locket or with staring into a pair of commanding, inescapable dark eyes is likely to respond quickly to forms of induction that use those foci. The actual participation of the hypnotist in the process is almost irrelevant, since the subject is hypnotising him- or herself by virtue of the fact that the method employed corresponds with his/her beliefs about hypnosis. Hypno-heist reports often provide clues that the victims, consciously or subconsciously, matched what was happening to them against a set of ideas which added up to the "fact" of hypnosis. The shiny, black eyes of the French gypsy-characters conformed with a popular "hypnotist" image; the victims' testimony to feeling a loss of power to argue or resist and the sensation of sleep-walking or being in a dream both conform with familiar ideas of what it is like to be in a hypnotic state.

And we could go further. We could guess that the victims had been hypnotised by a stereotype. The strange customer belonged (or seemed to belong) to a cultural group persistently suspected of an ability to cast hypnotic spells on their prey. The majority of reports describe them in such racially stereotypical terms as "gypsies", "bohemians", "Egyptian" or "oriental": all reputedly experts in unhallowed occultist crafts. Such thinking may be reprehensible and primitive, no doubt, but recognising it as such may not always provide a defence against it. Essayist and novelist Tom Wolfe has said that no matter how sophisticated and prejudice-free the American male likes to think himself, he harbours a secret and unreasoning fear of his black counterpart. This has nothing to do with the fear of physical assault; it is

the fear that black men possess the power of voodoo. Unpleasant as it must be to recognise the same tendency in ourselves, there are races who inspire vague apprehension about curses and the evil eye - races we dread offending and shrink at meeting alone, one on one. Gypsies, for example. And orientals in general...

Undoubtedly some individuals of these racial groups are quite aware of how we feel about them. They recognise the stereotype, see advantages in living up to it. An itinerant vendor of trinkets may find it convenient to become a "Romany" on occasion. Mingling sentimental religiosity with something more ominous, she may put on a performance of magical rites, as Desigaux and Blake's visitors appear to have done and if all else fails she may invoke the dreaded threat of the Gypsy Curse to unsettle the victim still further. Call this intimidation or manipulation; neither rules out the possibility that she is also accomplished at recognising a highly suggestible subject and at inducing in that person something which deserves to be called a trance - whether 'waking' or 'hypnotic' is beside the point.

Look again at the stories of Desigaux and Blake. Alone, confronted by people who seemed to them members of the magical race, a gypsy race known for its spells and curses, they felt uneasy. They felt vulnerable to the visitor's magic and as the transaction progressed, they experienced a sensation of that magic working upon them. Their level of suggestibility rose, helped along by the 'gypsies' stereotypical performance: the chanting, the palmistry, the prayers. Confusion, dizziness or disorientation and a loss of volition occurred, amounting to an altered state of consciousness that was "hypnotic" in a metaphorical sense if not in a literal one. Critical faculties only returned after the mystic stranger had gone, when, finding that goods and money had gone, too, the victim underwent more confusion. Hardly able to believe she had allowed all this to happen, she could only assume she had been hypnotised. As, in a certain sense, she *had* been.

Folklorists generally prefer to avoid arguments about whether urban legends "really happen" or don't. For one thing, the subtextual meanings of a story - here, the racial/cultural stereotyping on which I just remarked - are more important than long and frequently futile efforts to probe truth

or falsity. If forced to state my opinion of the bulk of the material on hypno-heists, I must agree that they present no solid evidence for being *more* than rumour legends. But I keep thinking back to that comment of Alessandro Cortellazzi's on the 1991 Italian reports: the 'ipnorapinatori' were real, but their hypnotic powers seem legendary - or at any rate, they cannot be comfortably identified with anything we normally think of as hypnosis.

It won't be denied that certain aspects of these hypno-heist narratives bring them into close proximity with stories which have proven themselves highly dubious and with others whose factuality has been decisively dismissed. Serious doubts have been lodged concerning first-person testimonies that rely solely on the witness's memory of what happened, especially when the episode in question carries traumatic or pseudo-traumatic associations; UFO abductions and Satanic Ritual Abuse allegations are blatant examples. From another angle, the hypno-heist script appears to mimic the plot of "body-part theft" rumour legends like the Stolen Kidney, which no contemporary folklorist considers to be *anything more* than a rumour legend. We have a choice here. We can say that hypno-heist stories are not true - that they *are* rumour legends - and that the media have been trying to hypnotise us into believing them; or, that some elements of these narratives may be true and that our current ideas on what constitutes hypnosis need strenuous revision.

A *third* path recognises that, like many contemporary legends, the Hypno-Heist intrigues us because it has a certain imaginative feasibility. It is a story of modern magic and cleverly executed crime - crime carried off with style and flair: the *perfect* crime, as the French journalist implied. Nor is it totally unbelievable. To use the favourite phrase of *X-Files* creative genius Chris Carter, it lies within the realms of "extreme possibility".

This is not to say that hypno-heist stories are 100% (or even just 50%) accurate records of what happened to the victims. But acknowledging how they persuade us to think that they *might* be genuine, if only within the limits of extreme possibility, we understand *why* they are believed - and repeated. ●●●

I would like to thank Véronique Champion-Vincent for supplying photocopies of many newspaper accounts mentioned in this article.



LETTERS

“The best recommendation for Magonia is found in the Letters Page which shows, very clearly, that minds have been stimulated”

*Fred Hadley,
Surbiton, Surrey*

Dear Mr Rimmer,

John Harney's article 'Sceptical about the sceptics' has persuaded me to give in to the urge I have been fighting for months and to write and give my views on *Magonia*. I had hoped that this would say everything for me but it fell far short of my expectations thus obliging me to make up for the shortfall.

I would liken *Magonia's* approach to investigating the mysteries of our planet to that of an English court of law where the object is not to uncover the truth but for each side to put forward its version of events and have it accepted as the correct one. Martin Kottmeyer's article on Father Gill is a perfect case in point. Instead

of investigating with the object of getting at the truth, he approaches with a mind already confirmed in its disbelief with the sole object of proving the case to be false. After describing the sighting and trying to find a tiny crack in its armour, he states: 'The case is probably even worse than you might guess'. 'Worse' not 'better' as one would normally suppose. I must needs quote his concluding lines to get the full flavour of this approach:

Well do you have a better solution?...That this is a disappointingly unrevolutionary solution, I fully concede...My hope that the Cargo belief would provide a key to the case was thoroughly dashed in the end... Still it was history's best close encounter. Excelsior, I suppose.'

He cannot hide his disappointment at not producing a solution which would blow this apart. He is not interested in whether or not it is true but only in disproving it. Philip Klass's hoax solution is even worse, even more desperate. We could all batten on to this one, ascribe everything untoward as a hoax, shut up shop and lead normal lives.

Another quote which supports my view is from Peter Rogerson's review of *The UFO Phenomenon...* by Edward Ashpole, which states: 'He rightly rejects the possibility that ETs would be humanoid in form and so dismisses all occupant and abduction reports'. I am absolutely stunned by this breath-taking statement by both author and critic who, one must assume, have roamed freely in the vastness of space, meeting all and sundry. (Meanwhile, back at the ranch, alien abductions carry on unabated, heedless of such profundity.) It is most convenient to come to such a conclusion as one no longer has to tussle with the outlandishness of the alien abduction scenario.

One last quote from Kevin

McClure's 'Bogeymen' when after five pages of descriptions and assessment of alien child abductions, he concludes: 'It is time to start dealing with the truth, whatever the consequences may be'. Another one who knows it all!

My assessment of the *Magonia* team is that you are either professional debunkers who may or may not believe what you write or you are all desperate to live in a reasonable, logical world but encountering tales of Fortean, you are obliged to do your utmost to prove them false. You set about this task by pointing out the illogicality of the doings of the aliens. Martin Kottmeyer asks eleven consecutive questions about their behaviour and that of their craft as described by Gill. One of your correspondents, Matthew J. Graeber asks why a super-intelligent race of ETs should traverse the cosmos in order to kidnap millions of earthlings only to return them with their underwear askew. You figure that in finding these and similar antics to be completely nonsensical, they therefore cannot have happened, therefore the perpetrators cannot exist either.

My own view is that the whole alien floor-show through the ages from religious visions, fairy-folk, space-brothers, cosmic day-trippers and now abductors who carry out medical examinations, is a smoke-screen for their real purpose. Yes, you now see me in my true colours, I'm one of those 'hidden agenda' types. My hypothesis is that the aliens either created us by tinkering with the DNA of the higher apes or they commandeered us for their use. They will not come down out of their 'space-ships' and take us over at some future date when their plans reach fruition, neither are they creating a hybrid race. This is all part of the oke-screen because *we are already taken over. What they want to do to us, they are already doing to us.* We are not in the laboratory or the slaughter-house, but in the milking shed.

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I have come to this conclusion mainly by reading about the Fatima incident and Uri Geller's autobiography but firstly, I came to realise that the aliens have instigated most of the world's religions and have deliberately formulated them so that humanity would be constantly at war, thus releasing oodles of energy. To keep generations of believers still believing, they stage religious apparitions of which it is the Marian type that comes to the attention of the West. The common denominator of these appearances is that which is stressed in the Fatima case, that the Virgin insists on constant prayer. In Uri Geller's book, his mentor, Andrija Puharich, is urged to pray for 24 hours by 'extra-terrestrials'.

Another religion which was founded by Nichirin Daishonin who lived in Japan from 1222 to 1282, is based on Buddhism. I quote from his writing: 'finally we came to a place that I knew must be the site of my execution. Indeed, the soldiers stopped and began to mill around in excitement. Shijo Kingo, in tears, said: "These are your last moments". I replied: "How thoughtless you are! You should be delighted at this great fortune. Don't you remember your promise?" I had no sooner said this when a brilliant orb as bright as the moon burst forth from the direction of Enoshima, shooting across the sky from southeast to northwest. It was shortly before dawn and still too dark to see anyone's face but the radiant object clearly illuminated everyone like bright moonlight. The executioner fell on his face, his eyes blinded. The soldiers were terrified and panic-stricken. Some ran off into the distance, some jumped from their horses and knelt on the ground and others crouched down in their saddles. I called out: "Here, why do you shrink from this miserable prisoner? Come nearer! Come closer!" But no one would approach.'

Nichirin Daishonin's teachings stress that devotees must chant for hours per day and like prayer to the Virgin, they receive benefits which, of course, keep the devotees interested and the energy flowing. With religious services and hymn-singing now broadcast, this energy is increased a thousand fold which brings to mind the Aetherius Society with its charging of mountains and special receptacles with energy. Don't ask me how the aliens utilise this energy, I obviously

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don't know but personally, I have been averse to praying and hymn-singing for many a year, long before I saw any connection with ufology.

Although, as I say, I think that abductions are part of the ongoing smoke-screen for a hidden agenda, I still do not disbelieve in their physical reality. Most of the particulars of the stories cannot be proved but there are two points I find unanswerable which I now put to *Magonia* to explain away. Firstly, reverting to the abductees who tell of awakening to find that their night-clothes are on back-to-front etc., or even that they are wearing a stranger's night attire, some are in the wrong bed, the wrong room or wrong house! This is convincing by its very mundaneness and as we should not dismiss aliens because their actions are nonsensical, so we should not similarly write them off just because we do not expect such grandiose beings to be incompetent. Sceptics say that abductions are all in the mind but the illusion must be extended to awakening the next morning and carried on for months as one keeps coming across strange underwear in the wash.

My second point concerns abductions from vehicles, usually involving two or more people who are awake and, consequently, cannot be said to be in the near-paralysis state which occurs just before falling asleep, much upheld by sceptics as being the root of the abduction illusion. My main query, however, concerns missing time which is often corroborated by friends or relatives after the abductees reach their destination. If they have been suffering under a delusion, can more than one person be affected with the same delusion which can be verified by comparing notes afterwards? What have they been doing all that missing

time, lying in their vehicles deluding? And, most mysterious of all, why would ordinary folk, out together on an ordinary trip, suddenly find their minds producing fantasies which have also arisen in the minds of many thousands of other ordinary people? Answers on a postcard please!

I find your attitude regarding the reports of people who have lost cats and suspect that they have been stolen for their fur or vivisection, to be flippant, almost callous and certainly not a subject for light mockery. The disappearance of a pet causes much heartache made worse by the suspicion that it could have been stolen. Your correspondent, Gareth J. Medway, finds it hard to believe that vivisectionists would use pets for, surely, they would breed their own or buy them from legitimate suppliers thus making cat torture acceptable as long as it is the right sort of cat. Anyone who experiments on conscious animals for a living does not balk at using pets as has been proved by Animal Rights activists who have broken into laboratories and discovered them there.

In footnote 25 to his article 'The godlings descend' Peter Brookesmith asks: 'If God did not intend us to eat animals, why did he make them so tasty?' I wonder why he made human flesh so tasty, seeing that its consumption is taboo unless he was concerned that a few lucky animals should enjoy themselves too. Anyone can acquire a taste whether for cigarettes, drugs, alcohol or flesh but it does not mean that it is natural or advisable to consume them. Babies are taught to accept whatever perversions their parents thrust upon them and even grow to enjoy them. Unless one of their more enlightened comrades shows them a better, healthier

life-style and one which benefits the whole planet, they are likely to go to their death-beds still entrenched in such medieval practices.

John Harney's sceptical piece was the first article I had read in four editions of *Magonia* which was the least bit critical. I am enclosing my subscription renewal form and cheque for £5, surprising perhaps, in view of the foregoing but someone has to keep an eye on you.

Yours sincerely,
Margaret Buckingham, Bournemouth

Dear Mr Rimmer,

I wholeheartedly agree with Kevin McClure's article *Bogeymen* in *Magonia* 55. In my view the only difference between the current lurid stories of alien abduction and the recent Ritual Child Abuse hysteria is the identity of the supposed perpetrators. In neither case is there evidence of the claims having any foundations in reality; rather they are just variations of the millenia-old myth of the 'hidden enemy bent on destroying society' which has always managed to recruit believers.

It is somewhat puzzling that none of the social workers *et al* who throw themselves into wrecking people's lives in Ritual Abuse cases have ever bothered to do anything about protecting the children who are allegedly having the same things done to them by aliens. In similar vein is a case reported in Timothy Good's *Beyond Top Secret*, where Denise Bishop claimed to have been attacked by a UFO outside her home. When the police were called and told that someone or something had physically assaulted her, and that she had a burn mark to prove it, their reaction was simply that they didn't deal with UFO cases.

These examples suggest an attitude on the part of the authorities that kidnapping, abusing and injuring people is perfectly acceptable, as long as the attackers carry lots of bright lights around and dress up in little grey men costumes.

Kind regards,

Mark Smith, Copenhagen

We understand that a county Social Services Department in the south of England, prompted by Kevin McClure, is investigating a well publicised case of a boy who has allegedly been subjected to physical injury which was reported in the context of a UFO abduction. J.R.



BOOK REVIEWS

Jerome Clark (Ed.) *High Strangeness: UFOs from 1960 through 1979 (UFO Encyclopedia, Volume 3)* Omnigraphics, Detroit, 1996. \$95.00

With this title, Jerome Clark concludes his titanic overview of the UFO phenomenon. As well as 600 pages of reference entries, nearly all penned by Clarke, there is a 100 page cumulative bibliography to all three volumes, and a 70 page cumulative index to the entire work. By any standards this is a remarkable achievement, and probably represents the greatest single compilation of UFO information ever written by one person, certainly of any written to reasonable standards of scientific and historical rigour.

The era covered by this volume represents the period during which the nature of the UFO phenomenon, and the attitudes of those engaged in its study and promotion, changed radically. In 1960, although the naiveties of the first contactees had been discredited, little else had happened which would challenge the supremacy of the ETH amongst ufologists. It was either spacecraft, or a rather limited sceptical viewpoint, of which Donald Menzel was a proponent, which looked solely at physical phenomena such as 'sun dogs' and temperature inversions. By 1979 these certainties had crumbled with Keel and Vallée leading the demolition crew, the New Ufologists were in charge of the asylum, and, even in America, the psychosociologists were on an upward track.

Outside the narrow world of ufology the two decades embraced massive social changes too. America had moved from pre-assassination certainties to post-Watergate paranoia. And one of the people who'd been swept along in this tide of social

This is a remarkable achievement and probably represents the greatest single compilation of UFO information ever written by one person.

change was one Jerome Clark. Hard to remember now, looking at the short-back-and-sides, business-suited figure above the editorial page in *International UFO Reporter*, that a younger, longer-haired Jerome was writing for *Flying Saucer Review* articles which seemed at the cutting edge of New Ufology. One such was 'Experiences and Observations' in *FSR* 15, 6, 1969. It contained observations which seemed to sum up the ethos of the times in their exciting iconoclasm, intended to shock the old-time ufologists and sceptical physical scientists: "It is not as if the UFOs were intruders into our sphere. They are no more (and no less) than one manifestation of a Reality that has many manifestations. It is this reality to which New Ufology must turn its attention. Those who hold to the Saucer Cult, who have taken to UFO buffery to escape the problems of this world, will find this idea distasteful and offensive, but let them, for they have nothing to offer us or anyone. The rest of us, our attention long on the distant stars, must now draw our attention slowly earthward, where the answers are and always have been."

Fine words, and splendidly enlarged upon in *The Unidentified*, co-written with Loren Coleman, the pivotal, but now largely forgotten, New Ufology book. How I treasure my copy inscribed by the author: "To John Rimmer, for writing that stunning and

perceptive piece 'The UFO as an anti-scientific symbol'. With much admiration, Jerome Clark".

Well, time moves on, hairstyles grow shorter, skirts lengthen and trouser flares narrow. And now Jerome Clark is a leading proponent of 'back to basics' ufology. Away with psychosocial waffling, bring back the radar-visual cases.

Perhaps this is reflected in some of the entries in this encyclopedia. There are certainly one or two obscure cases which seem to have been included to emphasise the physical nature of the phenomenon, the Wakefield NH, 'hole in the ice' case for instance, or the rather better known Coyne case, where Clark concludes his summary of the events with the words "It is hard to imagine any kind of conventional explanation for this incident". The Harris (Salt Lake City, 1961) sighting seems to have been included to provide an unsensational daylight-disc report: "By any reasonable standard the Salt Lake City sighting remains a puzzle". Even some of the more exotic cases are firmed up with the suggestion that there is a basic UFO phenomenon underneath the New Age tosh. He concludes his summary of the Andreassan case with the suggestion that "we may reasonably speculate [that there was] a core UFO experience (or perceived UFO experience) at the bottom of a mountain of

confabulation". Maybe, but isn't it more likely that it's *just* confabulation? And of course, no indication of what a 'core UFO phenomenon' might actually be, especially as the best candidate for one, earthlights, gets fairly comprehensively dismissed in Volume 1 of the *Encyclopedia*.

Like the other volumes in the series, this book suffers from an absurd over-emphasis on the phenomenon in America. There is a good 30-page overview of ufology in Australia and New Zealand by Bill Chalker, although it is not clear why it should be included in this particular volume. But a book on ufology in the 60's and 70's which does not include any discussion of Warminster? In fact apart from Scoriton (an easily dismissed hoax, however fascinating it may be as a study of the motives of ufologists) there is nothing from Britain, and the lively French scene is confined to an entry on Valensole. This limited viewpoint is perhaps the ultimate demonstration of the problems inherent in creating an encyclopedia which is almost entirely the work of one man.

Despite its horrendous price (there may be a special offer along soon, as there was for the last volume) this is a book which many ufologists will want to have. Apart from its omissions and, to my mind, significant bias in selecting cases for coverage, this is a work which demands admiration. Where I have been able to check on cases, or referred to material I have previous knowledge of, I have come across no inaccuracies. The entries are detailed and comprehensive, and each carries an impressive bibliography, allowing the reader to access the original source material. It will remain, for some considerable time to come, the definitive reference work on ufology. Perhaps Jerome Clark should now consider staring work on volume four: *Ufology; the International Perspective?*

John Rimmer

Charles Fort, *New Lands*, revised by X.

John Brown Publishing, 1996. £9.99

Let's start off by congratulating the *Fortean Times* crew on producing the definitive revised and corrected edition of this classic, but be honest, have you ever read Charles Fort? I mean *really* read him; starting at page one and going right through to the end? Of course not, he's unreadable. Try this: "Vaunt and inflation and parade of the symbols of the infinitesimal calculus; the pomp of vectors, and the hush that surrounds quaternions: but when an axis of co-ordinates loses its quaternions, in the service of a questionable selection, disciplined symbols become a rabble". What on earth is he talking about? If it were not 73 years old I would be able to claim a fiver off *Private Eye's* 'Pseuds Corner' from every page of this book.

If you carefully filter and pan this flood of verbiage, like a patient old prospector, you do eventually come across the nuggets of 'Fortean phenomena'. After a while you learn to skip the flannel and concentrate on the information, aided in this edition by the excellent new index by Steve Moore, but it does become wearisome. And even more wearisome is Fort's heavy-handed sarcasm about the alleged shortcoming and short-sightedness of science. Like a boring taxi-driver he drones away, 'astronomers, don't talk to me about astronomers, guv, waddatheyknow: "phantom dogmas, with their tails clutching at vacancies, are coiled around our data", "the seismologists... have been hypnotised into oblivion of a secret that has been proclaimed by avalanches of fire from the heavens..."', "Another position of mine that will be found well-taken is that, no matter what my own interpretations or

acceptances may be, they will compare favourably, so far as rationality is concerned, with orthodox explanations." Really? Would you want to be stuck next to this man on the bus?

If Fort was just a rather verbose collector of odd snippets from the local papers, or was a methodical recorder and analyst like William Corliss, then we would all be either amused or educated. But he liked to think of himself as a philosopher (or avant-garde poet, for who else could write lines like "Exploding monasteries that shoot out clouds of monks into cyclonic formations with stormy nuns similarly dispossessed - or collapsing monasteries - sometimes slowly crumbling confines of the cloistered..." oh, I'm sorry, I just can't go on, it reminds me irresistibly of the old Tony Hancock episode where he got involved in a beatnik poetry circle).

Even worse, people then started

taking him seriously as a philosopher - scientists, whaddatheyknow? - and a sort of crippling 'Fortean Correctness' has grown up which insists that *anything* strange is unexplained, *every* explanation is specious, and science can *never* have the answer to anything. Indeed, they seem to suggest, we should not even *attempt* to explain any strange occurrence, as this is somehow contrary to the Fortean ideal. This attitude soon becomes just as trite and boring as any other orthodoxy.

But the Forteans say, 'no, old Charlie, what a joker, eh? Mustn't take him so seriously'. To which old curmudgeons like me say, why not? He took himself very seriously indeed, as anyone who actually *reads* this extremely opaque and, despite its laboured and verbose attempts at jocularity, remarkably humourless book will find.

John Rimmer

Simon Hoggart and Mike Hutchinson. *Bizarre Beliefs*, Richard Cohen Books, 1996. £12.99

Mike Hutchinson is the British representative for Prometheus Books, the CSICOP-linked American publisher; Simon Hoggart is best known as political journalist and parliamentary sketch-writer for *The Guardian*. Their collaboration seems to have resulted in best of both traditions. CSICOP's hard-nosed scepticism is tempered by Hoggart's wry understanding of human gullibility; anyone who listens to parliamentary debates day after day can't be immune to the subversive attractions of sincerely believed nonsense passionately expounded.

Unlike some hard-core sceptical (perhaps better to write 'skeptical') works, the authors seem aware of *why* people believe in a variety of pseudo-sciences (all the usual suspects are collared here: clairvoyance, UFOs, corn-circles, mediumship, graphology, etc.), and are aware that most practitioners of these belief systems are not out-and-out frauds looking for a quick buck. They accept, for instance, that although astrology is nonsense on stilts, astrologers largely *do* believe it, even though most of what they tell their clients are 'Barnum statements' - generalised comments on human nature that fit almost any circumstances. Nor do the authors seem to believe, like some critics, that the appearance of astrology columns in newspapers heralds the downfall of western civilization.

When they tackle a particular topic their approach is fair, both sides of the controversy are outlined, and their reasons for coming down on the sceptics' side are made clear.

There is probably little that the hardened Magonian will find particularly new, or even particularly controversial, in this book. It is presented in an attractive soft-back format, with lots of illustrations, many in colour, and may attract some of the customers for the currently burgeoning 'X-File' genre. If so, they could do a lot worse. They will be fairly painlessly exposed to an alternative viewpoint from that proclaimed in other, similar looking, volumes, and may be rather relieved to find that sceptics are not always the rabid bigots that some eager-believers wish to portray them.

John Rimmer

Ivan Banks. *The Enigma of Borley Rectory*, Foulsham, 1996. £9.99

The author has clearly put a great deal of research into this detailed study of the Borley events, but it is written from a largely uncritical spiritualist viewpoint. He somewhat tastelessly makes serious allegations about members of the Bull family who are not around to answer back, purely on the 'evidence' of spirit writings. As a Spiritualist, isn't Banks worried that the Rev. Henry Bull might not take possession of one of those burly 30-stone mediums, and proceed vigorously to horsewhip him? The introduction by Tom Perrott is a masterpiece, subtly distancing himself from the views in the book, whilst remaining perfectly polite!

Peter Rogerson

Travis Walton. *Fire in the Sky: the Walton Experience*, Marlowe and Co., 1996. £19.99

Basically Walton's book of the film. An update of his 1977 *Walton Experience*, along with the story of the making of the film, and an extended attack on Phil Klass. Walton emerges as a characteristic States-side abductee, but in his favour the narrative remains largely unchanged from previous versions: there are no sudden 'recalls'

of 'blocked' data to render his story more ufologically fashionable. The extended debate about lie-detector readings will strike British readers as something of a red herring, given our assumption that all polygraph claims are questionable. As with many of these stories it is impossible to know what the truth is, but the probability is that it is a good deal more complicated than the version here, or the simple hoax explanation proposed by Klass.

Peter Rogerson

Karl Shuker. *In Search of Prehistoric Survivors*, Blandford, 1995. £18.99

Subtitled 'Do giant 'extinct' creatures still exist?', this encyclopaedic survey makes it clear that the author's answer is a categorical "yes". However, sceptics might think that the world of the cryptozoologist seems to be set in a sort of time-warp, a lost imperial world of remote wildernesses, simple natives and intrepid white hunters. This is far from the real world of continuous human encroachment on the wild places, and the world-wide spread of McDisney culture. An amusing example of this archaic attitude is Shuker's claim that "native gold dealers in Ghana are hardly likely" to know what a dinosaur looks like, unless they had actually seen one in the local swamp. Couldn't possibly have been in a school-book, an Airfix model kit, or an old B-picture on

on satellite TV, could it? Roger Sandell recalled once seeing Mackal or one of the other dinosaur-hunters on TV interviewing inhabitants of a remote Zairean village who were presumably innocent of such examples of Western cultural conditioning. The impression of primaeval remoteness was somewhat spoiled by a lad in the background wearing a Michael Jackson T-shirt! *Peter Rogerson*

David Blackburn. *The Marpingen Visions: rationalism, religion and the rise of modern Germany*. Fontana Press, 1995. £9.99

An extremely impressive and detailed study of a Marian vision in mid-nineteenth century Germany, setting the visionaries in their historical and cultural context. Blackburn makes many important points, such as the visionaries being recruited from the ranks of the poor, distressed, victims of abuse or unsettled households, etc, who are likely to see the Virgin Mary as a surrogate mother. The Marpingen visionaries gave equivocal confessions (shades of the Fox sisters), and their narratives grew with new - and to the Church authorities, unwelcome - beliefs being added, and the Virgin being integrated into their games. The similarity with other child and teenage visionaries and paranormal experiences are obvious. There were even 'waves' of BVM reports, as various imitators appeared on the scene, both in Marpingen and in other areas, mixing the approved cultural traditions with their own imaginations.

These events took place at the height of the Bismarkian Reich's *kulturkampf* against the Catholic Church, a struggle supported by many liberals as part of the war against peasant backwardness and superstition. Polemicists such as Rudolph Virchow used arguments very similar to those used today by groups like CSICOP. This assault forced many otherwise sceptical Catholics to "support their team".

Marian Visions are now beginning to follow witchcraft into the nimbus of academic respectability - how long before today's visions and beliefs follow? Only when the subjects covered by this magazine are made the subject of studies of this quality will we begin to make some progress. Highly recommended. *Peter Rogerson*

James R. Lewis. *From the Ashes: making sense of Waco*. Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham, MD., 1994. \$18.95

A collection of impassioned pieces from a wide range of experts on new religious movements, virtually all condemning the actions of the Department of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms team at Waco [what an archetypal set of American preoccupations to be summed up in the title of a government department, for a nation where people can legally own armour-piercing anti-tank weapons, yet are forbidden to smoke in public parks!]. This is important and controversial material, with much that is significant for the consideration of millenarianism. Unfortunately some contributors give the impression that they are rather too willing to take would-be prophets and gurus on their own evaluation, and not face the probability that in many cases religious and political ideologies are essentially facades for control.

That said, there can be little justification for the publicity-seeking AFT raid and the subsequent events. The fact that several leading academics are quite willing to suggest that the bombing of the Waco compound was a deliberate, pre-planned act, whether true or false, says as much as we need to know about the depths of anti-government hostility in America. *Peter Rogerson*

Carl Sagan. *The Demon Haunted World; science as a candle in the dark*. Headline, 1996. £18.99

Essentially two books in one: both a polemic against pseudo-science, and a jeremiad on the state of science education (or the lack of it) in the USA. There is some good material here, and a lot of common-sense. But one has to understand that this is written by one of the front-line troops on the liberal-rationalist side in the increasingly bitter American *kulturkampf*. The book's subtitle contains its own symbolism: the idea of science as a gospel of hope and enlightenment in a world of wild, pagan darkness, as a potential for the secular millennium. *P.R.*

PETER ROGERSON'S

REVIEW ROUND-UP

Michael Barkun (Ed.) *Millennialism and Violence*. Frank Cass, 1994. £13.50.

This is part of a series on political violence, aimed at political science students. It includes a preface and seven academic essays, on topics ranging from early modern millennialism, through Maori resistance movements, to eco-warriors and anti-abortion groups. Not an easy read, but an important topic, and one that is going to be of increasing relevance in the next few years.

Francis B. Harrold and Raymond Eve (Eds.) *Cult Archaeology and Creationism*. University of Iowa Press, 1995. £12.95.

A collection of eleven academic essays, which are less interesting than the title might lead us to hope, as a fair proportion of them are devoted to the beliefs of US college students, and how to combat creationism in the classroom. A chapter on Afrocentric History draws our attention to a pseudoscience which we have yet to encounter in this country.

Humphrey, Nicholas. *Soul Searching: human nature and supernatural belief*. Chatto and Windus, 1995. £18.99

Good old fashioned religion-bashing and polemical scepticism, much of it coherent, but it fails to address any of the experiences and studies which have convinced intelligent people that there is 'something in' psi, etc. As the book was financed by the SPR through the Perrott-Warwick Scholarship it has gone down in certain quarters like a Vatican-funded study coming down in favour of abortion!

David Pritchard et al. (Eds.) *Alien Discussions: Proceedings of the MIT Conference*. North Cambridge (MA) Press, 1994. £61.00 [sic]

This is a huge book (700 pages, small folio), also hugely expensive, hugely impressive credentials, hugely flawed, and hugely uncritical. But it is also hugely important, because this is what the people who are pushing the abduction scenario believe, and much of it is hugely implausible, with just one token sceptic (and a member of CSICOP, so he can be safely dismissed). Not one contributor makes the obvious equation: "abductees report being taken through solid walls and windows; this is categorically impossible, therefore the abduction is some sort of subjective experience. QED." Making such an equation would however fall foul of Farlean Correctness, which says that you never say impossible. If this book ever comes out in paperback, or you see it remaindered, get it. Otherwise get along to your local branch library, pay your reservation fee and wait in the queue for the British Library copy.

Derek Sheffield. *UFOs, a Deadly Concealment*. Blandford, 1996. £9.99.

The Belgian wave of 1989/90 contains some truly puzzling events, and is well worth a detailed investigation. Unfortunately this book is not it; instead it is a tiresome collection of Henry Root-style letters to various government departments, written by an individual with the hide of a rhinoceros. No brush-off couched in terms of professional courtesy can get through to such people. Told to go and jump in the lake, he would write back: "When you said jump in a lake, precisely which lake did you mean? I live halfway between Ullswater and Windermere; the temperature of Ullswater is...", and so on for pages and pages.

Cherie Sutherland. *Children of the Light; the near-death experiences of children*. Souvenir Press, 1996. £9.99.

A collection of NDE memorates by children or, mainly, adults 'remembering' childhood experiences. While uncritically presented, the publishing of extended interviews allows many points to emerge. We see clear examples of false memory ('remembering' a NDE at birth, for example), parental manipulation, incorporation of childish fantasy (e.g. the child in an NDE who joined a combat line to fight 666 demons), NDE during episodes of childhood abuse, the incorporation of stereotyped New Age and therapy-speak into narratives, and the projection of the NDE child as pious child, comparable to Marian visionaries. In all, a very useful folklore source.

HOLD THE BACK PAGE



Renewal Reminders

Those of you who have ever been late in sending off your *Magonia* subscription renewal form (you know who you are!) will probably remember that after a while you get a rather pained little letter, demanding "have you forgotten anything?", and we do get quite a few people sending in renewals after receiving this reminder.

However, with rising postage costs we are finding that this is not a very economic way of warning you of your impending relegation from the Premier League of *Magonia* subscribers to the Beazer Homes League of those who have to read other magazines. So we're trying something different. If your subscription is going to expire with the *next* issue of *Magonia* we will put a note in the current issue, and we would be very, very, very pleased indeed if you renewed at that time (your renewal subscription will still start after your current one expires, of course). Then in the last issue of your sub, we will put in another renewal notice, and this will really have to be the last reminder we can send you. If you fail to respond to that you will be, regretfully, removed from our little list.

A long time ago we made an offer that if you introduce a new subscriber to *Magonia* we will extend your subscription by one issue for each new subscriber who signs up. The offer still stands; you could try arm-twisting your friends, or giving out subscriptions as birthday, Christmas, anniversary or Bar Mitzvah presents.

Gray Flannels?

Naturally *Magonia* is constantly being asked what are its views on the 'Fossilized Bugs from Mars' controversy. A correspondent in the *Daily Telegraph* recently reminded us of the true Magonian position, quoting the wise words of Peter Tinniswood's immortal Yorkshireman, Uncle Mort:

"By God we're an arrogant lot thinking we are the only form of life in the whole universe. Why, with millions and millions of stars there must be thousands of planets with living creatures. Probably hundreds where they play cricket - with a different lbw rule, of course".



Cabaret Night

Another reason, as if you needed one, to come along to *Magonia* Readers' Group meetings (see page 9) is the opportunity you might have of catching a sight of prominent ufologists storming out of the pub, after some of their more *outré* ideas had been questioned by sceptical Magonians. Perhaps you will see them nearly knocking people off their chairs and

shouting "you're f*****g stupid" to your humble Editor, as they barge their way to the door. Who was it who put on such a stirring performance at the August meeting? We're too discreet to say, of course. But the incident was quite electrifying, even though we do have something of an allergy towards such public displays of emotion.

Internal Affairs

Our comments on the New MAPIT and their interesting membership policies seemed to raise a few hackles in their northern stronghold. On return from holiday, your *Magonia* editor found his answerphone full of aggrieved messages from MAPIT functionaries, demanding to know where we obtained their 'confidential internal documents', and making a vague threat of

legal action. Naturally, like any responsible journalist, we refused to reveal our sources. MAPIT's 'Protocol Officer', just back presumably from making the arrangements for the State visit of President Mandela, was concerned that our comments might have been construed as belittling the sterling work done by her organisation. Far from it, and we are happy to pass on her assurance that "MAPIT is very highly thought of in Manchester". Your Editor and Associate Editor, who hail from Merseyside, are sure that it is.

Incidentally, if MAPIT are keen to ensure that their 'confidential internal documents' remain confidential and internal they should take the trouble not to mail them out to anybody who just writes in asking for details of the group... like, er, Peter Rogerson!



'MAPIT'S STRICT DRESS CODE ALWAYS CAUSED THEM PROBLEMS ON NATIONAL GORILLA-SUIT DAY.'