

MAGONIA

85



WHEN THE ALIENS DROP US A LINE

Mark Newbrook wonders if alien languages are just double-dutch.

Are Magonia and the New Cromwellians attacking Fortean Times - P L Frankson investigates



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EDITOR
JOHN RIMMER
jrimmer@magonia.demon.co.uk

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
John Hamey
hamey@hameyj.freereserve.co.uk

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR
Mark Pilkington
m.pilkington@virgin.net

REVIEWS EDITOR
Peter Rogerson

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All correspondence, subscriptions and exchange magazines should be sent to the editor

John Rimmer
John Dee Cottage
5 James Terrace
Mortlake Churchyard
London, SW14 8HB
United Kingdom

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EDITORIAL NOTES

I've just been reading one of the most depressing UFO documents I've seen in a long time. No, it's not a badly bungled investigation, or a report of the manipulative exploitation of an abductee. It's something headed 'BUFORA Limited Company Report and Financial Statement.

Page 2 gives a 'statement of directors responsibilities', which include 'select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently' and 'prepare the Financial Statement on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to assume that the company will continue in business'. It furthermore informs us that the directors are responsible for ensuring that the Financial Statements comply with the Companies Act 1985, and safeguarding the assets of the company and taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities. What a weight of responsibilities to be loaded on the shoulders of the voluntary, unpaid directors, but at least we are assured that 'advantage has been taken in the preparation of the Directors' report of the Special Exemptions applicable to small companies conferred by part II of Schedule 8 to the Companies Act 1985'. So that's alright then.

After this there are pages and pages of accountants' jargon about 'tangible fixed assets', 'turnover less prime cost events', 'balance of general funds including fixed assets' etc., etc., etc.

The odd thing is that despite this public parade of what is probably called accountancy best practice, I can find no indication whatsoever of what BUFORA is actually doing with all these fixed assets, tangible or otherwise.

At least they are doing something: creating a computerized archive of all BUFORA's case reports since 1963, which is admirable. The project is planned to take two years, and if completed will be a valuable resource.

But perhaps a more realistic view of the general level of BUFORA's

activities is give by some of the amendments proposed to the group's Articles of Association at the previous AGM. One called for the quorum for BUFORA Council meeting to be reduced to three, another called for the required minimum number of Council members to be reduced to four. Hardly evidence of a thriving organization, especially as another proposal called for the reduction of the quorum for members at an AGM. to be reduced to seven! More revealing still was the voting on these proposals. They were all passed, but only eight BUFORA members actually voted in person at the meeting, as against 34 and 36 proxy votes wielded by the Chairman.

But even reducing the quora to minuscule levels seemed not to be enough to ensure that members would actually turn up, as John Spencer then proposed the holding of 'virtual' meetings. Claiming that when the Articles were drawn up in 1975 the technology was not available for such meetings. He defined 'virtual' as meaning 'any communication, be it electronic or otherwise, that is not in person'. Well, such means of communication as the postal service, telephones, telegrams and carrier pigeons were certainly around in 1975, but for some reason those who drew up the Articles did not consider them a reasonable way of conducting a committee meeting.

Perhaps if the BUFORA hierarchy spent less time pretending they were running a multinational corporation, and a little bit more time actually providing something for their members, the might find that more than seven people would turn up for the Annual General Meeting, and they would be able to at least get three people along to a Council meeting without relying on 'virtuality'.

Of course that might be the answer. With BUFORA's current development they will probably end up with just virtual members! Perhaps they're the 'intangible' assets?

The Aliens Speak - and Write

Mark Newbrook

Many UFO reports involve linguistic or quasi-linguistic phenomena: scripts loosely resembling hieroglyphics or Indian devanagari associated with crashed UFOs, long stretches of 'speech' channelled from alien entities or produced by self-described contactees, alleged telepathic messages with specific content, etc, etc. In the ufological literature, however, we seldom find any qualified linguistic analysis of the various claims and experiences.

The main reason for this would appear to be the very limited overlap between the groups of people who (a) are interested in the field and (b) have the relevant expertise. The few comments that are to be found come from writers who are amateurs in linguistics; indeed, some of them display no awareness

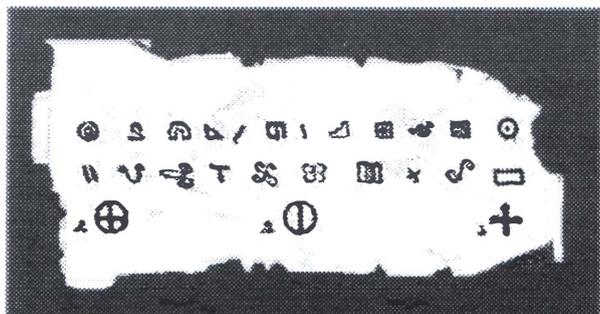
of the subject. While these people are often well intentioned, their remarks are neither extensive enough nor expert enough to assist in the complex task of analysis and assessment (see below). In many cases they are so scanty and/or so confused that they are of almost no value.

In fact, many of these writers are also clearly committed to an interpretation of UFO abductions and contact as genuinely involving extraterrestrial aliens. Their discussions are not only lacking in linguistic expertise; they are also predisposed in favour of this hypothesis.

An important issue at the

'coal face', which 'conspires' with the low level of expertise on the part of most writers in this area, involves the fact that the reporters themselves - even if wholly sincere, and whether or not they themselves claim the ability to understand or use the systems involved - seldom anticipate possible scientific interest in this area. And, even if they do, they too typically do not have the expertise to produce even first-order analyses (eg, phonetic training enabling them to produce International Phonetic Alphabet transcriptions). This latter is, of course, neither surprising nor disreputable, and researchers can ask only that people who have reported such events do the best they can. But the task of further linguistic analysis is naturally beyond non-linguistically-trained reporters and commentators - although of course linguists will seek to work with reporters in moving towards their own analyses.

Since 1999, Gary Anthony's Alien Semiotics Project has sought to apply scientific methods in dealing in this context with the broader issue of symbols and communication, including ideographic and artistic as well as linguistic material. More recently, Anthony and I have directed attention specifically at UFO-associated artefacts which are said to be and/or appear to be linguistic in character. This includes both spoken and written linguistic material and the scripts used to write the latter, and could also include modes analogous to human sign language or other, altogether alien



What are the structures and features of all these languages, especially any that at least might conceivably be genuine? How do they compare with each other and with known human languages and scripts, in respect of 'linguistic typology'

modes (eg, symbolism involving lights, which in fact is often reported). In 2002 we published an article in MUFON Journal, seeking to work with those who claim knowledge of or proficiency in such systems, with a view (i) to determining whether or not each body of material is or might be genuine and (ii) to making progress with the (associated) tasks of description, analysis and theory. (Some of the points here are taken from this article.) We have also been searching the literature and we have assessed whatever material we have found.

So far, Anthony and I have had only a few really interesting responses to our article. Some of the people who are active in this area are 'deep fringe' and their (typically unsupported) ideas cannot be taken seriously. Other 'experiencers' and their proponents may not be enthusiastic about collaborating with a project which may subject their hitherto unchallenged linguistic ideas and claims to rigorous scrutiny and perhaps undermine them (see also below). At present, the main part of the project which involves actual interaction with claimants focuses upon Mary Rodwell's 'contactee'/'abductee' support group in Perth (Western Australia) - to which we shall return.

ISSUES AND PATTERNS

Perhaps the most common single form of communication between aliens and humans, as reported, is telepathy or 'mind transference', achieved either with or without technological means. If it really is true that aliens are communicating with humans by telepathy this could lead to a veritable revolution in the relevant disciplines. But of course telepathy would be very 'convenient' here in the context of a hoax, because nothing is known of how genuine telepathy would operate and because - on most accounts of telepathy - positing this means would free the (non-linguist) claimant from the need to invent convincing linguistic forms and structures (though, as we shall see, there are other ways of avoiding critical analysis). And we know of no case (whether involving aliens or not) in which telepathy has actually been shown to occur. In any event, even in these cases telepathy is not always said to be used among the aliens themselves.

Other accounts of alien communication with human contactees/abductees feature a range of part-telepathic and non-telepathic modes, involving, as noted, spoken and written communication and other modes. These can be regarded as at least quasi-linguistic. (If any cases at all are genuine, it is of course possible that some attempts at communication in still other modes are not recognised as such or are not noticed at all because of, eg, inter-species differences in methods of perception.)

We must ask: among this quasi-linguistic material, are there any genuine alien languages and scripts? Are non-genuine cases always merely matters of misperception or misanalysis, or are there any deliberately hoaxed/invented alien languages? What are the structures and features of all these languages, especially any that at least might conceivably be genuine? How do they compare with each other and with known human languages and scripts, in respect of 'linguistic typology' (the relative frequencies of structural patterns) and indeed of universal or near-universal features of human systems (which obviously might in principle be infringed by non-human systems)? How coherent and extensive are they, especially in respect of structural features such as phonology and grammar? How plausible are they, given (a) general considerations of likelihood involving different genetic origins and home environments and (b) what is reported specifically of their users in non-linguistic terms?

Further: are any human contactees/abductees really able, as is often claimed, to speak and/or write these languages as well as understanding them? How have they been taught these languages (whether or not they can use them actively themselves)? Why have they been taught these languages?

In some cases, the aliens are reported as having been able to learn and use the languages known by the witnesses, or other human languages ancient or modern. If aliens are in general able to use human languages, this would seem to obviate the need to teach difficult, novel systems to humans. And of course there are many cases where aliens reportedly use modes analogous to speech and/or writing but the material is unintel-

ligible and no assistance is given; in some cases this material is similar in general terms to human language and in others it appears anomalous, featuring, eg, musical tones without phonation. However this may be, alleged use of and usage in human languages on the part of aliens is itself an important aspect of this overall issue.

Furthermore, what are the meanings of the alien messages provided in all these languages and language-like systems? Are these in turn coherent or plausible?

In fact, much linguistic material of allegedly alien origin appears highly suspect or worse. I will discuss alleged alien languages themselves later; but some obviously suspect cases arise where aliens are reported as using known human languages. It is probably easier to create a hoax involving an existing human language (if one knows it well) than to invent an alien language which might convince a linguist - although some hoaxers would not realise this and might even imagine that an invented 'language' could not be coherently critiqued or challenged. One possible example of anomalies arising from an inadequate grasp of the relevant languages involves the very strange 'messages' involving words taken from human languages which well-known abductee Betty Andreasson (now Luca) reportedly received from alien entities. Paul Potter, for one, upholds the veracity of this material (for his material, see <http://www.ufophysics.com/sunsnova.htm>). However, those messages which are not in English are simply strings of words familiar or otherwise, drawn or seen as drawn (often with some distortion) from Latin, Greek and other languages. Where a word exists in inflected forms in the source language, the citation (dictionary) form is virtually always the one which appears here. There is no grammar. In fact the sequences do not really exemplify language in use; they are lists of words. Potter translates the 'messages', adding grammar as it suits him. They are mostly warnings of impending doom, often through the Sun surprisingly becoming a nova. His own attitude to learning can be seen in his web-site remark that any challenges to his ideas 'will be ignored with great aplomb'! But

there is perhaps a plausible source for these texts that involves no aliens: a person who does not actually know Greek or Latin but has dictionaries and a conversion table for the Greek alphabet like that at the start of *Greek For Beginners*. One wonders why aliens would communicate like this, anyway. If they knew Latin and wanted to prove it, they could surely write in Latin.

There are in fact other cases involving UFOs where a string of the citation forms of words taken from a foreign language is presented as if it were a meaningful sentence. One such case arose in the Garden Grove abduction case of 1975, which was in fact acknowledged later as a hoax. The sequence (allegedly channelled) was *nous laos hikano* (early Greek: 'mind', 'people' as in *we the people*, '[I] come'). A gloss 'I come in the mind of man' was offered; but all three forms are citation forms, and the grammar has merely been added by the translator. 'I come in the mind of the people' would be *eis ton tou laou noun hikano* (or similar, depending on the dialect).

In even more extreme cases, there are outright errors in linguistic material purporting to be in known human languages. One example involves a spelling error in a Greek word found in material associated with the 1995 Alien Autopsy case.

Such cases look most unpromising (even where no hoax has been admitted). However, it should be noted that in contrast reports of 'genuinely' alien communication systems (not in known languages) might not necessarily be fraudulent even where the material does not really represent genuine alien communications (and where the reporters are not simply deluded). For instance, some symbols may relate to human psychological archetypes shared very generally across the species (if these exist), but may be misinterpreted, for various reasons, as associated with aliens or UFOs.

If we assume, however, that some of these systems may actually be genuinely alien in origin, we must obviously be prepared to deal with structures and phenomena emanating from minds and physical communication systems which are very different indeed from our own. Even if the systems involved are similar to

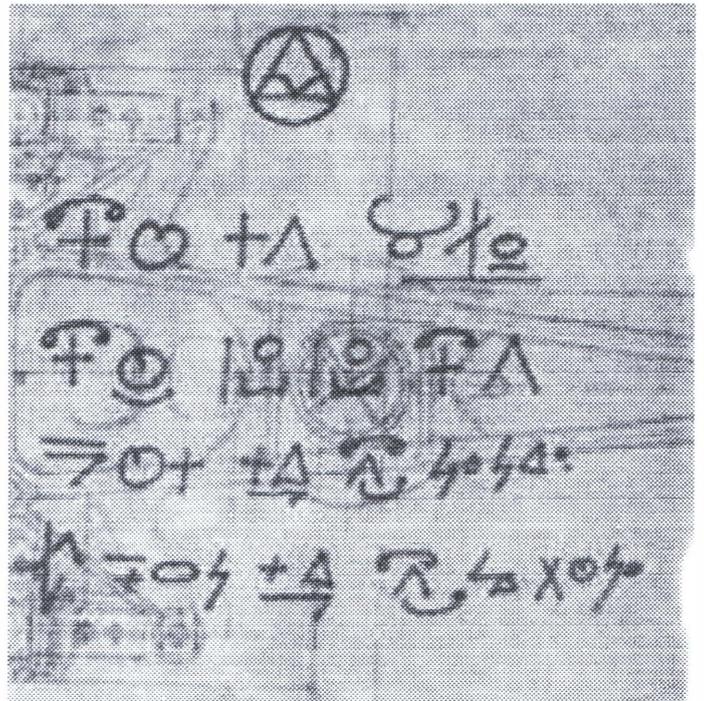
human languages in very general terms, they, and perhaps even more the semantic concepts which they express, are liable to be much more unfamiliar than the equivalents in any human language, however different from one's own first language the latter might be. In this context, it should be noted that the amount of variety even among human languages (and the intellectual aspects of the associated cultures) surprises some people. There are in fact over 6,000 human languages, which can be grouped into about 200 families; each of these families is not known to be related to any other. On the surface at least, this huge collection of languages varies a great deal; some of them are very different indeed from languages like English (notably in respect of grammar). It can be argued that some of these differences relate to major differences of mind-set/world view. But the scale of this variety would presumably be vastly greater where alien languages were concerned. We should expect to find utterly unfamiliar structures and types of usage, as well as utterly unfamiliar sounds (for some of which phonetic symbols might not currently exist).

One important upshot of this is that alien languages reported as being rather closely similar to human languages (even if only in structural terms rather than sharing any specific words, etc) are unlikely to be genuine.

Such degrees of difference will surely hinder the analysis of any genuine alien language in the early stages, especially if we have little specific information about the users of these systems (eg, if the system is available only as performed by human contactees). But we might expect to make some progress jointly on both fronts as we learned more. And we could take comfort from the fact that some so-described contactees have apparently managed to learn some such systems - whatever their real origin - despite knowing no linguistics (although of course they might conceivably have learned the systems by currently inexplicable means, as is often reported). We return to these issues later.

Although little work on the issue of very major linguistic differences between unrelated species developing on different

planets (etc) has been done in ufological circles, it has been a major focus of attention in SETI circles. But even here the discussion has seldom been adequately informed on the linguistic front specifically. For instance, it is often assumed that core notions in science and especially logic and mathematics - believed to be very generally shared - will permit rapid movement towards overall decipherment/ mutual understanding. However, given the diversity of structures and concepts even among human languages and cultures at comparable technological levels, this may be over-optimistic, at least in some respects. (Scholars differ on the degree to which logical systems - or at least workable logical systems - can actually differ, but the grammatical and semantic systems of unrelated languages can certainly differ very dramatically.)



One recent body of rather sophisticated work of this kind in the SETI domain is by John Elliott at Leeds University (see eg <http://www.nidsci.org/essaycomp/jelliott.html>). Elliott has worked extensively in computational linguistics, and (although computational linguists often know too little general linguistics) this would suggest he should have some competence. He is indeed familiar with relevant principles such as 'Zipf's Law' (though linguists are cautious about extrapo-

Many people who say that they can understand such material report that this understanding is 'holistic'; they understand whole messages rather than individual words or phrases. This makes linguists' task much more difficult

lating too far from such principles). But his references to linguistics texts are at a rather basic level only, and his program appears over-optimistic and inadequately informed by the vast literature on grammatical typology. He proceeds as if this tradition of scholarship hardly exists and seems to believe that phonological information alone can reveal grammatical patterns, which no linguist known to me would accept or even think plausible.

He also makes various naive and/or wrong statements. Eg: he does not (it seems) distinguish adequately between languages and systems of communication more generally; in this context, in his discussion of bird communication he totally misinterprets the key structural notion of duality (I am assuming that he is not erring further by including here confusion between birds' ability to mimic and real language-learning, or uncritically following Irene Pepperberg's claims); he assumes a strong interpretation of dolphin activity in this area; and he repeatedly confuses scripts and phoneme systems, or rather naively thinks in terms of the former (especially where he refers to Latin). There are certainly serious problems with this work as it stands, for all the apparently impressive material from his own area of specialisation (which others would have to assess).

Elliott is by no means alone. Other material has been produced by Anthony Judge and Allen Tough; their sites are linked and are at <http://laetusinpraesens.org/docs/alien.php> and <http://members.aol.com/welcometi/5.html> (etc) respectively. The material is very interesting but as usual there is too little focus on the linguistic issues and too little linguistic expertise is found in the relevant teams of scholars. But Judge does have a link to Justin Rye's survey of sf languages (<http://www.xibalba.demon.co.uk/jbr/lingo.html>). Rye in turn has links to non-fictional and allegedly non-fictional proposals near the fringe of the SETI world. He is linguistically well informed, although at times covertly contentious. There have also been many fictional treatments of this theme; one famous one is in 'Omnilingual' by H Beam Piper. But once again error is frequent in this body of writing-

THE MUFON JOURNAL PROJECT

For our own project, Anthony and I requested samples as long as possible. Frequently samples of alleged alien speech or writing are not long enough to make substantial linguistic or other analyses. Shorter samples are useful only if translations - preferably 'literal' ones - are available, and of course even longer ones are more useful with translations than without. As noted later, many people who say that they can understand such material report that this understanding is 'holistic'; they understand whole messages rather than individual words or phrases. This makes linguists' task much more difficult, but if they can work with the people who report the usage they may still be able to analyse the language systems involved. Specifically, we asked for instances of the following:

- 1. Alien scripts and texts written in these scripts, with a description of how they are written, eg, left to right or right to left, top to bottom or bottom to top, starting where on the page, etc. We also need to know if each symbol is a logogram (representing something like a whole word, as in Chinese script) or represents a phoneme or the like (as in an alphabet) or a syllable, or whatever. If words are generally made up of two or more symbols (as in an alphabet), we seek to know where the various words in each text begin and end (if this is known).
- 2. Translations into English (or other human languages) of texts written in such scripts.
- 3. Spoken alien language, ideally recorded on tape but, if this is not possible, in the form of transcriptions either into 'imitated spelling' (where sounds are represented by the reporter as best they can, using the spelling of English or of their own strongest language; it would help here if we knew which language each reporter had in mind and/or which English or other accent they had) or (better) into standard phonetic script, if a reporter knows it.
- 4. Translations into English (or other human languages) of spoken material.
- 5. Other apparently semiotic material.
- 6. Information on the circumstances in which the material came to be known, including any proc-

ess of later recovery using hypnosis or the like.

•• 7. Other supporting comment, etc.

RODWELL'S MATERIAL

As noted, one major manifestation of apparently linguistic material allegedly associated with aliens and UFOs involves Mary Rodwell's Perth-based group. Some of this material is presented in Rodwell's video productions and in her book *Awakening: How Extraterrestrial Contact Can Transform Your Life*. This book is aimed principally not at researchers but at those who believe or suspect that they themselves have had experiences of contact (including abduction) involving UFO-associated entities. The author promotes the view that these experiences represent actual physical happenings and offers supportive acceptance of the stories told by those who report them (or can be led to report them). She develops a complex 'theory' of extraterrestrial intervention in human affairs and its consequences for the individuals who are directly affected and for the species. I will examine Rodwell's book as an extended example of the ufological literature in this area.

Rodwell has extensive experience of UFO reporters. But her expertise in the intellectual disciplines involved is not so obvious, and the upshots of her approach are quite damaging in respect of any critical assessment of her claims. The book inevitably has a popular and in places an emotional tone which militates against skepticism or even neutral scientific analysis and discourages the consideration of alternative hypotheses. Indeed, Rodwell's view of the issue involves one-sided acceptance of this particular (highly dramatic) type of interpretation of the reports. This is presented as much the most plausible interpretation and is seen as 'honouring' the reporters by regarding them as reliable and of undoubtedly sound mind - and indeed as often having advanced psychological abilities and attributes. In places Rodwell recommends procedures which would more or less exclude alternative views, eg, she states that any 'professional' consulted after an experience should be 'someone who is educated in Contact reality' (which surely restricts selection to believers). Unfortunately, this is typical of the

literature in this area; the only gain here is that Rodwell does at least treat the linguistic issues at some length (though not competently).

In many cases, too, the facts are arguably distorted here; they are certainly presented with a massive slant. Rodwell and her collaborators accept more or less without debate many alleged psychic and similar phenomena which are heavily disputed for want of persuasive evidence and in some cases are rejected by almost all the relevant scholars. The bibliography is in a similar vein, presenting pro-UFO literature as 'scientific' and listing many fringe works on various themes, without any counter-balancing references to skeptical or mainstream-scientific literature in these areas. Furthermore, Rodwell often provides little or no solid evidence for her own claims - which is at times a matter of urgency because of the dramatic nature of these claims. And she admits so many types of event or subjective experience as indicators of possible alien contact that almost anyone might be able to persuade themselves that they have experienced such contact - but have forgotten it, as is often supposed to happen. There is of course evidence that surprisingly high proportions of people report or can be induced to report UFO abduction experiences or to manifest some of the associated behaviour, without there being any corroborating evidence of any actual events. Rodwell does not discuss this kind of evidence adequately. Neither does she take adequate note of the vast literature on the reliability of memories 'recovered' under hypnosis and the like. It is quite clear from this literature that at least some 'recovered' memories are factually erroneous. In addition, the book is also (again almost inevitably) short on 'academic discipline'.

Rodwell deals with abduction/contact on a broad front; but the linguistic issues are potentially important in this area and some comments are in order.

Some claims are repeated from other sources which are so dramatic that strong evidence is required if they are to be accepted. One excellent example of this involves Leir's claims regarding the advanced linguistic abilities of some human infants identified as 'Star Children'. Some of these claims would, if

true, revolutionise the study of child language acquisition; the most dramatic of all is the claim that some babies are able to read. But I know of no properly conducted experiments which would demonstrate or even suggest that such things occur, nor of any child language acquisition experts who take these claims at all seriously.

Forms presented as spoken and written alien language used by adults are discussed in the (largely self-reported) case studies, notably that of Taylor, who also appears prominently on Rodwell's video. Taylor includes this material in an account of her life-long pattern of experiences. Much of the discussion is again subjective in tone, involving Taylor's 'feelings' about the meanings of her experiences and her artistic and (quasi-)linguistic responses to them. The material is generated by means of automatic writing, however this may be interpreted, and Taylor links this process with an intuitively and experientially derived 'theory' of the nature of the aliens whom she regards as responsible.

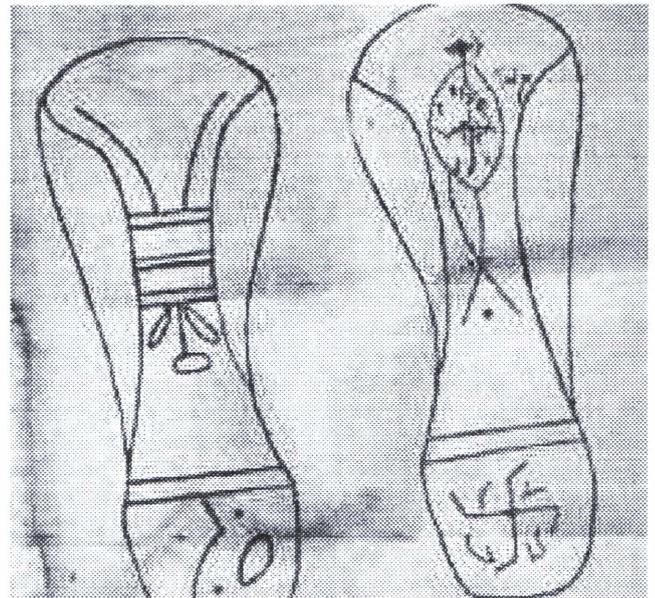
The written material produced by Taylor and another contactee and provided here in plates (more is seen on the video) is described as 'hieroglyphic', although it is not clear what Taylor thinks this term means generally or what it is supposed to mean in this context (see also below). It has the appearance of text written 'grass-stroke' style in a range of large alphabets, syllabaries or (parts of) logographies (there is too little material in each sample to be more confident, especially in the absence - see below - of useful translations).

Taylor is reported as being able to write in more than one 'unusual' script (presumably in otherwise unknown languages; but few non-linguists make this distinction clearly). She can also reportedly speak in several 'strange' languages and can ascribe meaning to some of this material and to her experience-inspired artwork (but see below). She gives further details, claiming that she and other experiencers regularly acquire such languages and in due course the ability to translate them into human languages without conscious learning. Unfortunately, evidence that these claims hold up and that these languages are genuine is not presented here, which is again a

huge omission given the very dramatic nature of the claims.

The corroboration reported by Taylor from other members of her groups is too vaguely and informally reported to be taken seriously. For instance, the comments about 'ancient symbols' found in temples and pyramids and about similarities between Taylor's material and 'hieroglyphic text' are far too vague to be of use, and it is not at all clear that the people who were commenting had any intellectual authority in this area.

The samples of Taylor's spoken material on Rodwell's video appear to resemble glossolalia ('speaking in tongues'), in which case the material is probably merely phonetic rather than



linguistic and thus is not meaningful (though such phenomena are still very interesting in themselves). It is striking in this context that some of the sequences are reminiscent of Japanese, a language to which Taylor has been exposed. (I actually identified this as a possibility before learning that Taylor had lived in Japan.) It is characteristic of glossolalia and the like that the vast majority of the sounds produced are drawn from languages known or familiar to the speaker. A further reason for supposing that this present case involves glossolalia or a similar phenomenon rather than a genuine alien language involves the fact that all the sounds used are familiar from human languages and indeed not even confined to obscure languages unlikely to be known to speakers or their acquaintances. As noted earlier, genuine non-

human (and non-terrestrial) languages would be expected to manifest different phonetic ranges.

If useful translations (preferably morpheme-by-morpheme) were provided for any of this material (spoken or written), it is possible that this kind of negative judgment might be proved mistaken. In this case, the material might be deemed genuinely linguistic and the issue would then be whether the language was indeed from an alien source as claimed/believed or was of human invention. However (as will be seen) this sort of evidence appears unlikely to be produced.

In a most damaging passage, Rodwell quotes Taylor as making a claim which has very dramatic upshots. She states that in these alien languages 'there is no preconceived idea or concept about what a particular sound actually means because this type of language is not structured in the way the English language is'. This is badly confused: one has to assume that she means here to contrast the alleged alien languages with all human languages rather than with English specifically, because the gist of this claim is that these languages cannot be analysed as human languages can; and by sound here she clearly means 'word', not 'phoneme'. But, given all this, the idea is clear; and Taylor then indicates (in her own words) that this means (as indeed it surely would mean) that the meaning of each utterance could not be related to that of earlier utterances and would have to be (somehow) arrived at intuitively (?) and presumably 'holistically' on each occasion.

The most damaging aspect of this passage is that it is implied (and indeed this is further hinted at by Rodwell herself) that analysis of these alien languages ù no matter how sophisticated and free of advance assumptions based on the nature of human languages ù is most unlikely to succeed. Such analysis would be more or less impossible, because these supposed languages would lack anything that a linguist could identify as a stable or well-defined structure within which morphemes with a constant meaning could be identified and larger morphological and syntactic structures with more complex meanings could then be analysed as composed of

these morphemes in significant specific orders and relationships (linear or other). (This is the normal practice in analysing previously unanalysed human languages or ù suitably modified - other communication systems.)

However, all this appears unlikely in the extreme. Any system which is recognisable as a language in the first place must thereby (by definition) have a complex and largely stable and well-defined structure of this kind (in general terms). That is the kind of thing that a language is. Languages (and indeed most other kinds of communication system) depend upon the repetition of meaningful units. No 'holistic' interpretations unrelated to earlier texts are possible (although sometimes naïve non-linguists using their first languages may perhaps have the subjective impression that this is happening). It is difficult to see how even a genuinely alien language could differ in such a fundamental respect and still be usable for its native speakers or for anyone else. Members of another species which really had the psychological abilities which this implies (assuming that these are possible in principle!) would presumably not need or use language, and it is not clear how they could succeed (or why they would expect to succeed) in using systems of this kind to communicate with humans, given our own psychological and linguistic capabilities and habits.

As noted earlier, it is true that even human languages vary a great deal in structural terms, and a genuinely alien language might well be very much more differently structured, perhaps in some relatively fundamental respects in respect of which human languages do not differ. Analysis of such radically novel systems might be very difficult and error-prone (especially without access to native users). But this would not necessarily be an impossible task in principle. The point that humans who are naïve non-linguists can allegedly learn and use such languages would itself suggest that the differences would not be as great as might be logically possible or even probable ù or as great as Taylor and Rodwell suggest in denying that the languages are morphologically structured. In this context one should note that (as stated) the

phonetics, which can be observed directly and thus described readily without any comprehension, are not dramatically unusual.

However, it is also true that any 'system' which was presented as a language but which in fact really did have no largely stable and well-defined structure could not be analysed (or at least could not be analysed using any techniques currently known). In such a case, no quasi-linguistic claims made about this 'language' (eg, about the meanings of sequences in it) could be empirically tested, and all such claims would be immune from scientific scrutiny (unless and until wholly new principles of analysis could be developed; but this would appear unlikely to occur). The most that could be achieved would be that one could examine whether different human learners of the same 'language' interpreted an identical given passage used in the same circumstances in (more or less) the same way, in test conditions, as listeners or as speakers. Even here, however, only a positive finding would be decisive; a negative finding could be countered with the claim that even in a case such as this the meanings might vary. The claims would thus remain immune to empirical disconfirmation.

One cannot be blamed for suspecting that claims of this kind might have been developed with the aim of preventing scientific analysis of this material and thus blocking any possible demonstration that the nature of the material was (or might very well be) not as described (non-linguistic, concocted, etc). This would certainly be the actual effect of adopting such a position; nothing useful could be said about such material, other than about the phonetics. (This would, then, place the same kind of constraint upon analysis as is placed by claims about telepathic communication; see above.)

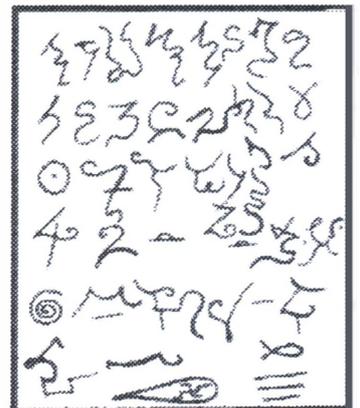
However: once again, the onus is, in fact, upon those making these dramatic claims to justify them or at least to cooperate in rendering them testable. If the systems identified as alien languages are such that the associated claims can be tested, they should be so presented. If the claims are really untestable, their advocates must realise that these systems will be of limited interest

to linguists and other scientists, and that these scholars are likely to adopt (legitimately) the default interpretation that the alien languages are not genuine. In order to determine the real situation, one must obtain a reasonably sized corpus of data in each such language and be allowed to work with those who claim ability in it, so as to determine its actual structure.

Rodwell does refer to the critical work of Antony and his associates, one of whom is of course myself, on the linguistic aspects of her case. But she seems inclined to fluctuate between what may be an over-optimistic expectation that work of this kind will 'validate' her claims, and a defensive stance grounded in the evasive-sounding claims mentioned above.

CONCLUSION

As we have repeatedly observed, these shortcomings are widely shared by writers in this area. Their presentations are one-sided, and most crucially, they lack linguistic expertise. Advocates of the reality of alien languages and of communications from aliens in human languages will need to provide much better evidence ù including evidence arising from such analysis as Anthony and I might conduct, if we are given access to reporters ù before the balance of probability renders their case sufficiently interesting to warrant further focused attention. Nevertheless, Anthony and I stand ready to engage with any suitable material. In the meantime, we continue to scour the archives for other material which is at least amenable to linguistic analysis.



NEW CROMWELLIANS?

From Intellectual Sex, Good Lord Protect Us!

P L Frankson

Out there in cyberspace, dearly beloved, there is an entity that intermittently calls itself Colin Bennett, and publishes a webzine called Panzerben's Combat Diaries. In considering these entities, it is useful to know that Bennett entertains a tantalizing belief that there is no such thing as reality.



P.L. Frankson lives on the southern slopes of the French Massif Central where, between visits to the Fortean Times Un-Convention, he tends a trove of 19th-century bicycles. He has written five novels, a treatise on Stéphane Mallarmé, and a history of VTOL aircraft.

For example, in various versions of his essay 'Scepticism as mystique', he declares that "the real is a piece of clapboard philosophical fakery", while facts are "the ultimate conspiracy", "stage constructs" that "are not found in nature.

They are manufactured screens, a fraudulent

convenience to enable us to reason in yet more fraudulent terms".

Elsewhere he has called facts "structured pieces of manufactured cultural deception whose sole object is to get agendas into the prime time of consciousness", and "advertising construct[s] created by cultural gaming systems". And so on. It is not altogether a surprise, if apparently obligatory to mention, that Jerome Clark has eulogized Bennett as "the most original, entertaining figure to appear on the [ufological] scene in a long time, a real breath of fresh air, not to mention good humor." It's not necessary to endorse this mangled progeny of such non-philosophers as Robert Markley

(see, for instance, 'The irrelevance of reality: Science, ideology and the post-modern universe', Genre 25, 1992) to find oneself wondering precisely which species of unreality it is that Bennett inhabits. It may be necessary to adopt one or more Fortean 'temporary acceptances' in evaluating whether Bennett himself actually exists in any meaningful sense.

To begin with, to enter Panzerben's Combat Diaries is to be ushered into a realm of quite unusual self-absorption, perhaps of clinical significance. The Bennett-mind is a zoo of multiple personalities, masquerading as Brent Ables, Yvonne Cook, Ron Mensch, Dr Betty 'Shackster' Baxter, and Patricia Farson - among others. One is reluctantly reminded of those blokes who christen their willies 'George', or those who go forth privily in the raiment of their wives, to introduce themselves to crepuscular acquaintances as 'Lily' or 'Thomasina'. One might equally form the impression that the Bennett-entity is but one dark (if balding) cranny of some sprawling, self-reproducing, interdimensional egoid. Or perhaps these names belong to actual individuals, while The Bennett is but a protuberance of their collective imagination, a Philip Experiment of the 21st century gone stupendously out of control. Who can say?

It is even possible that The Bennett itself is, actually, dead. At any rate this syntax is appropriate only on the tongue of a corpse: "The vast demoniacal

PLOTTERS REMAIN CALM CONSPIRACY DENIED HARD WORK DEEMED UNATTRACTIVE

Members of the coterie named in Bennett's *Combat Diaries* appeared unperturbed at allegations they had secretly corrupted the editorial policies of *Fortean Times*, when doorstepped by *Magonia's* fearless investigative reporters.

Leading 'conspirator' Paul Devereux responded tranquilly: "Colin Bennett or 'Gordon Bennett'? He has a somewhat confusing if vaguely humorous way with words. I didn't recognize myself in his rogues' gallery unless I am that 'Great Ley-Hunting Shagbat of Chilworth', in which case he got the location wrong."

Paul Sieveking sounded weary: "Life's too short to spend time on Bennett, a dull buffoon who lives in a little world of his own."

Professional Yorkshireman Andy Roberts commented: "All most amusing. Colin must now be losing weight rapidly on his diet of sour grapes. Perhaps the fact that he talks nonsense has a lot to do with the fortean 'establishment' finding him such a laughing stock. His most amusing trait is not naming me.... Bless him."

Dr David Clarke echoed his bulkier twin in sin: "Amusing... Bennett must be getting desperate ... no one is listening to him any more."

John Rimmer, the gaunt, flame-now-going-a-bit-smoky-haired editor of *Magonia*, said affably: "Such a delight to see the latest from dear Colin. I must pop over to Brentford soon, always a good pint at the Magpie and Crown."

The Duke of Mendoza claimed to be on horseback when he answered his cellphone, and for once was obliged to be (relatively) brief.

"Bennett? I think he's probably a reincarnation of Gordon Creighton. Take over *Fortean Times*? Joking. Too much like bloody hard work."

Mark Pilkington did not respond to requests for a comment. Is his silence significant?

architecture of the 'factual' conspiracy scared me a little, a fear and suspicion that was to remain with me all my life." Are his laboured pseudonyms, then, still more hungry ghosts? Or are they psychic mediums who go in for automatic writing - their one cross-correspondence being this new, and rather angry, allotrope of Ashtar? If so, the wisdom received is as trite and (where comprehensible) fallacious, as anything ever channelled by anyone anywhere, and that includes California.

Who are we to say what is real or not about what we may now reasonably refer to as The Bennett Community of Alters? Perhaps the best one can say is that this conglomerate is surely a phenomenon unknown to science. The entity, while 'denying' the 'existence' of 'reality', itself seems as confused about its own existence as it is about the rest of actuality.

One will have to take some other opportunity to deal in depth with the dizzy-chick-hippiness, vintage circa 1967, of this other (but related and typical) kind of abdication of responsibility: "Panzerben's *Combat Diaries* are not here to educate, inform or convert you. Their sole object is to offer the greatest intellectual sex you have ever experienced ... Treasure your fantasies, your illusions, your self-deceptions, hopeless desires, ridiculous thoughts, precious silliness, your dreams, and all your nonsense, because without them you are under control." While noting in passing that whatever wrote that is definitely not under control, we can for now address only how The Bennett Community has lately produced a thoroughly stupid wheeze, in nasty language to boot, which demonstrably is not true. The Bennett cannot hide behind his rejection of 'reality' and 'facts' in this. Not even when dressed in the verbal drag - or with his head up the skirts - of his persona 'Dr Patricia "Arson" Farson'.

Sorry, Lunch Is Off

The Bennett Community likes to call its webzine 'The Alternative *Fortean Times*'. This is already chutzpah of a fairly advanced order. Actually, this monthly production contains not a solitary *Fortean* 'datum', but rather a lot of feeble fillers masquerading as satire, and a vast and tedious deal of rant and cant. And more means worse. We learned in *Combat Diaries* 11 that 'Dr Farson' would soon reveal "in detail the full extent of the secret take-over of the *Fortean Times* by Magonian sceptics, and requests that the magazine be retitled *The British Sceptical Enquirer* [sic] because now, in her opinion, it has as much to do with Charles Fort as the inside of her ****." (We surmise the censored word is 'head'.)

When this gem duly appeared, under the title '*Fortean Times* and the New Cromwellians', it contained a plethora of rude remarks about the entirely innocuous and affable Paul Sieveking (for no other discernible reason than that he is innocuous and affable) and characterized Charles Fort as seething with "hatred, savagery and intellectual fury" ad qualities that few, if any,

other readers have remarked in his works. In the Farsonian Universe, *Fortean Times* has fallen on hard times indeed:

"With breathtaking hypocrisy, this supposedly '*Fortean*' magazine now denies all things metaphysical, mystical, magical, transcendental, and spiritual. Never do we hear of Fort the anarchist, Fort the first post-modern, or Fort the metaphysician, and especially Fort the mystic. But above all of Fort the great foe of science we hear nothing."

Nor, we may add, do we hear much in FT of Fort the gifted countertenor, the champion campdrafter, or the inventor of the 'Driad I' Steam-Treadle Automatic Onion Peeler. And this omission, we soon learn, is neither because Fort wasn't (as it happens) much of any of these things, nor even because many of FT's readers might possibly find such items too abstract for their taste. It is, as alone of all her sex the Farson-Alter is privileged to reveal, because there is a tentacular conspiracy between the editors of FT and a tightly-knit group of stony-faced men who publish or write for none other than our own dear *Magonia*. This fifth-columnry has

allegedly been at work for a decade or more. And:

"The organizer of the steady but perceptible change is the staid, bland, ultraconservative Paul Sieveking. ... Let no one be deceived. The gang of Fort has always been a tight-knit Masonic clique, and skeptical conspirators extraordinary. The net of influence spreads out to John Rimmer, Paul Devereux [sic], Peter Brooksmith [sic], James Easton, the creator of the idea that Anold [sic] saw pelicans, not flying saucers in 1947. The comically pompous Paul Devereux [sic again] is perhaps the most influential. ... Of the most powerful influence, he rigidly controls both Sieveking and Rickard in these matters."

Further evidence of intrigue, according to 'Dr Farson', is that *Magonia's* webmaster, the once spectacularly pretty Mark Pilkington, writes for *Fortean Times*, and that Andy Roberts and David Clarke - 'Prod and Tonto' in The Bennett Community's side-splitting satirical style, and occasional contributors to *Magonia* - have a regular column too in FT.

All this must come as a surprise to those concerned. This writer is too young to remember when Paul Devereux last wrote for *Magonia*, for instance. But one may imagine how these failed roués should love to have met at Granita, to refine their nauseant schemes! - exchanging nods and winks with Tony and Gordon all the while, of course. Or at Rules. Or better yet at that old haunt of the Duke of Mendoza, the Connaught Hotel - all courtesy of the platinum card of Devereux's twitching puppet Sieveking. But is it plausible?

Unfortunately not. Most of these characters live too far from railway termini to be able to reach Islington or Mayfair with any ease, and anyway few of them would wish to pay the fares. There are non-restaurant hypotheses (NRH), of course, which may embrace whispered conversations be-



Panzerben's *Combat Diaries* may be viewed from URL: <http://www.combatdiaries.co.uk>. 'Skepticism as mystique' by Colin Bennett has appeared in various forms: in *Fortean Studies No 7* (John Brown Publishing Ltd 2001) under the title 'Fast Transients: Skepticism as mystique'; as a handout at the Fortean Times UnConvention 2002; as an appendix in Colin Bennett's *Politics of the Imagination*, Critical Vision 2002; and as an Internet spam-ad.

Left: Bennett, and alleged alter Farson

tween public telephone boxes - although rumour has it that no Sas-senach can understand what James Easton is saying without the aid of lipreading. Then one may consider encrypted e-mail, and epistles in mirror-writing inscribed in lemon juice on heatproof paper.

There is just one snag in the non-restaurant hypothesis. This is perhaps as near as anyone will ever get to 'proving' the negative to The Bennett Community's loopy tale. If the profile of one of the 'conspirators' revealed in the public prints some years ago is any guide, he can be guaranteed to refuse to join any cabal that cannot afford the lure of numerous lavish dégustations at establishments flaunting a minimum of two Michelin stars. Along with pretty girls at the bar, and first-class fares on expenses to get him there (preferably early). Every man has his price. And this, it seems, is his.

If one of its persistent whinges is any indication, The Bennett Community's own price appears to be more modest, if in keeping with its coast-to-coast ego. That is to have all its letters published in FT all the time. But the entity that once advertised itself as 'a writer for *Fortean Times*', as if it had been nestled in the bosom of the salaried staff, has lately been thwarted in this respect, and consequently has become a bit of a diddums. In a fine paddy at not getting its sweeties, it calls Nurse naughty names. Paul Devereux for instance becomes 'the Great Ley-Hunting Shagbat of Chilworth', while John Rimmer is still more inscrutably dubbed 'the Brentford Polonius von Magonia'. Then, ever more crimson with frustration, the hysterical infant accuses Nurse of child abuse and wild satanic practices. Bennett, it seems, just can't bear not to be one of the boys.

Not Even Statistics.

On a deeper (?) level, The Bennett Community's intellectual refusal - inability? - to consider there may be facts and non-facts in the world

outside its head leads it to believe everything it invents. And so it finds itself imagining not just that skepticism leads inexorably to Auschwitz - as crazed a notion (see 'Skepticism as mystique') as any Jean Baudrillard ever hatched out - but that its ravings have effected a change in FT's editorial policies:

"The *Fortean Times* is now blasting out worn-out scrapings of tired old weirdness at a rate calculated to frighten the horses in the street. Our sources tell us that the force making Granny break into an unseemly run came from corporate orders after seeing The Alternative Fortean Times."

This is veritable, and verifiable, claptrap. Such a frame of reference as the truth, however, is implicitly renounced and denounced as irrelevant in the Farsonian Universe. The real object of the exercise is self-gratification. And that, as Victorian moralists knew, induces blindness. And so, while the Bennett Community still doesn't like what it thinks it dimly sees in FT, its fabrications permit it to suck its thumb while nursing comforting delusions of power.

Dream on. What we really see in *Combat Diaries* is a paranoid narcissism, expressing fictions that acquire 'reality', if only for the writer, by endless repetition. This is the technique of Goebbels, turned in upon itself. No wonder its hero is George Adamski.

Does any of this matter? Probably not very much to the individuals about whom The Bennett Community chooses to fantasize [see sidebar], although FT editor David Sutton could be forgiven for being more than a mite peeved. The Bennett, eschewing reality as it does, can always pretend that its fake history is just another "advertising construct created by cultural gaming-systems" - in this case its own. Nonetheless, these are lies, and no factitious philosophy will offer much wiggle-room out of that. If Panzerben really believed

that "the only reality that is truly objective is moral" (Bennett, UFO UpDates, 10 March 2003), it would issue a grovelling apology in its next *Combat Diary*.

It matters as much - and is certainly more exasperating - that The Bennett Community's brain is so hidebound by its own projections that it's failed to notice how much writing in *Magonia*, and in Paul Devereux's many books, is precisely concerned with entering and illuminating the kind of magical thinking - a product of wonder, imagination, and inhabitan-ty of liminal experience - that Panzerben claims to espouse. What's more, these writers got there a very long time before he did. This is but one of the ways his ego 'privileges' histrionics over actuality. Consider this - and note the date - as an early example of what The Bennett thinks it is doing, from MUFOB NS9 (Winter 1977-8), by John Rimmer:

"If the reaction of most students of our subject towards hoaxes is simply to unmask then discard them, it is inevitable that their reaction to out-and-out fiction is even simpler. They just do not regard it as any part at all of the material they are studying. Yet, if our model of the percipient and hoaxer externalising, with varying degrees of conscious control, a confusing welter of internal feelings and imagery is valid, then the artist and writer, producing overtly 'imaginative' fiction from the same internal stimuli, is manifestly part of the same phenomenon, and worth of similar study. [...]

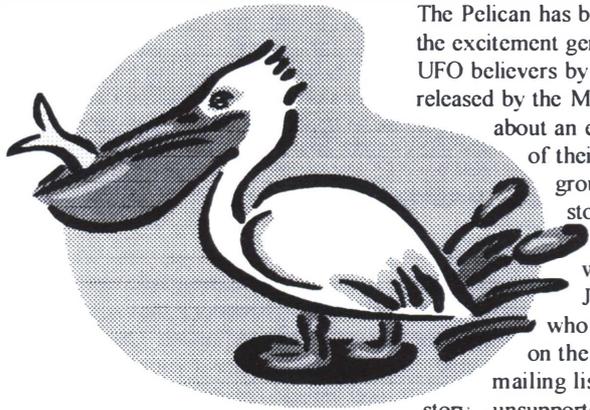
"When we examine Tolkien's world it is temptingly easy to see the parallels with *Magonia*. ... And does it matter too much whether this universally felt myth is expressed in a great work of imaginative fiction; or as a message from an apparently real spaceman; or as a lucrative hoax in some paperback potboiler[?] It is certainly the same ore that is being mined, and it is capable of being refined and fashioned into a Fabergé Egg or an old tin can!"

Unlike postmodernist 'discourse', Rimmer's thesis is stated in limpid English. One is entitled to wonder if Panzerben's loud embrace of postmodernism is less an intellectual commitment than yet another device for grabbing attention - while the mandatory impenetrability of the genre's prose has the advantage of keeping the Bennettian oeuvre safely beyond the reach of detailed and sometimes even rational criticism.

There is a final irony. The Bennett Community howls and stamps its tiny feet at 'the real', and "the great Satan science". At the same time it appears not to notice that without some authentic consensual reality in which actual events actually occur, and actual things actually exist, and in which these events and things are palpable to the senses and amenable to objective analysis and manipulation, The Bennett Alters would not only have nothing to write about, but no language in which to write. And they certainly wouldn't be able to stick their frothings on the Web.

In daily life, Panzerben's dearth of hinges should lead to an interesting relationship with practical reality - such as the need to eat, drink, sleep, feed the cat, light candles when it gets dark, and so on - since, allegedly, none of these 'things' is 'really' 'real'. When they embarrassingly insist on occurring, they have to be incanted away (perhaps with the deployment of some Derridan meta-garlic to purify the spelling) as "those historically arriveste impostors called facts". So what does it think it's doing when, as one suspects it does, it grills chops, washes shirts, and blows its nose - just like everyone else?

If its deranged 'philosophy' had any substance, The Bennett Community would be condemned to be as mute as a frog. If it would only follow its own advice, it would stop riveting on as if it lived in the same world from the rest of us.



THE PELICAN WRITES...

El pelicano es fuerte en sus apreciaciones pero muy razonable

The Pelican has been amused by the excitement generated among UFO believers by a report recently released by the Mexican air force about an encounter by one of their planes with a group of UFOs. The story, with accompanying video, was released to Jaime Maussan, who has been vilified on the UFO UpDates mailing list because of his story - unsupported by evidence and relying on apparently false testimony - about a UFO allegedly crashing into a plane near Mexico City airport and damaging its landing gear. There was also, in 1997, the favourable publicity he gave to the amazing video of a saucer moving at a low altitude across Mexico City, which was eventually subjected to painstaking expert examination and demonstrated to be a fake. Then there was Maussan's wholehearted support for the story of "Dr Reed", who claimed to have killed an alien and kept it in his freezer until it came back to life and . . . Anyway, you get the idea? There is the suspicion among some ufologists that many of the UFO stories touted by Maussan perhaps might not be entirely true.

The incident occurred on 5 March 2004 involving a Mexican air force plane on a routine flight to attempt to detect aircraft involved in drug smuggling. The objects (or phenomena) were detected by radar and FLIR (infra-red detection equipment) but were not sighted visually. The Mexican secretary of defence, General Gerardo Clemente Vega Garcia, said that the incident was unexplained, so naturally he was asked why he had handed the details and the video to Jaime Maussan instead of giving them to scientists for evaluation.

He replied that they were given to Maussan because he is a person "who has been interested all of his life" in the study of these phenomena and were not given to scientists from institutions of higher learning "perhaps because we do not know them or know who they might be". He also denied that the release had been timed to distract attention from a scandal known as the Ahumada case, involving advisors of the mayor of Mexico City accepting large bribes and being videoed

gambling with their ill-gotten wealth in Las Vegas. The scandal also involves a row with Cuba, whose diplomats are said to have interfered in this affair.

Some ufologists were outraged at what they thought were allegations of a hoax by the Mexican government, but they got the facts confused as usual. The allegations were not about the genuineness of the UFO video and testimony but about the *timing* of its release.

Further confusion was added when various scientists who were consulted about the report offered different and conflicting explanations, usually without taking the trouble to look at the data. These were reported by the news media with hardly any critical comments, which must have been very confusing to interested readers. These explanations - most of them not from ufologists - included US stealth aircraft, meteors, re-entering satellites, hoax hot-air balloons, ball lightning, flames from oil wells, etc. One or two of them seemed worthy of further investigation but most were just silly. A good example of silly explanations was provided by a group of Mexican university teachers who said that the phenomena were just lightning flashes. They avoided commenting on the fact that the phenomena were not sighted visually and did not behave like any known type of atmospheric electrical phenomena. They also refused to study the weather report for the Campeche area (where the phenomena occurred) for the day and time in question.

The Mexican meteorological service issued a report saying that the conditions at Campeche at the time of the incident would not have produced any electrical phenomena.

Meanwhile, some of the UFO UpDates Listers were getting a bit overwrought, especially Greg Boone, who pondered the reasons for people trying to debunk this and other cases. Commenting on some remarks by Stanton Friedman he expressed agreement with one of his crazier notions:

"What do they have to fear? I recall at one of your lectures you mentioned something regarding a collapse of nationalism if the truth were known. This sounds a logical reason to me for their actions."

In a later posting he gets even more excited and writes:

"I take it the 'How to Debunk Any UFO Report' handbook hasn't been updated recently. It might be due to the over abundance of 'X Ray Specs' and 'Build Your Own Sub' advertisements. Doesn't that booklet have fold-in back cover as well?"

The Pelican just can't resist making you cringe, so he is going to quote some of Boone's joke debunking explanations:

"They're not UFOs they're Keebler Cookie Elves [whatever they might be] with itty bitty graham cracker [?] crust covered jets."

"Bugs. No one mentioned bugs! Ha! We've got them! We can say they're a rare collection of Mexican Lightning Bugs that fly in swarms in the upper atmosphere and on occasion have mistaken aircraft for possible mates. lcky but sufficient."

"Car lights. Yes, automobiles on the ground's headlights reflected from the clouds. Heck, the sighting was during the day so let's say that it was a funeral procession. That's why they had their headlights on."

"Ghosts. It's gotta be ghosts when all else fails. That'll jam up the talk show lines with people who've seen ghosts so that no credible scientist can get a word in edgewise."

"Last but not least, when all else fails, when push comes to shove the old 'Luminescent re-fraction ionizational enturbulating coalescent pulse emission frazzil-statis' trick always works. The term is so stupid that it will take weeks before they figure it out."

Yes, you might say, but The Pelican has so far avoided giving his views on the case. Ah, but The Pelican and the other members of the Magonia Mob don't have to say anything, as there are ufologists with the amazing ability to read what they haven't written. On UFO UpDates, Alfred Lehmborg wrote in reply to a posting by Magonia editor John Rimmer:

"Lately, with regard to the latest Mexico flap, you and yours are quick to trot out planet sightings, swamp gas, ground-fires and radar echoes . . ."

No such comments by The Pelican or other members of the Magonia team have appeared on UFO UpDates or anywhere else.



READERS' LETTERS

Dear John

I was particularly interested in Peter Brookesmith's article in *Magonia* 83 on the use and frequent abuse of history in the arguments of the nuts and bolts school. While I can't comment on the debate, not having seen Jerry Clark's arguments for myself, Peter's historiographical points are well made. In fact I distinctly recall many of them being made in the very first history lecture I attended as an undergraduate. The difference between proper history and folklore is a case in point. Although the example at university was Anastasia rather than Davy Crockett as the folkloric survivor of a massacre, the point made was that the difference between these episodes and genuine history was the same: history is about large scale change in institutions, communities, nations and the globe. The survival of Anastasia, Davy Crockett or the character of Wyatt Earp, for that matter, while regularly recurring as the favourite subjects for writers and producers of popular histories actually don't count as history proper for the above reason. As Peter points out, Davy Crockett's survival or otherwise after the battle of the Alamo had no impact on subsequent events.

the other point made in undergraduate history classes, at least in Britain, is that history is concerned largely with argument and interpretation based on the known facts. The facts of history very rarely change, only historians opinion of the nature of events alter. the Norman Invasion of England in 1066 is a case in point. Although no historian doubts that William the Conqueror defeated Harold at the Battle of Hastings, to be crowned king in Westminster Abbey, the fact that there were a series of rebellions by the Conqueror's new subjects lasting into the 1070s has led some historians to conclude that the Normans never conquered England until several years later. As with Napoleon's defeat at the Battle of

Borodino or the Nazi seizure of power, the historical authenticity of the event is not in dispute. The argument is over their precise interpretation. In the case of the Norman Conquest, the question is how secure Norman power was in England in the immediate period after the Battle of Hastings and when it could be reasonably said that they had subjugated the country to the extent that they had effectively conquered it.

In the case of the Roswell UFO crash the physical remains have vanished long ago and the surviving pictorial material does not support contemporary descriptions of 'a crashed disc' or what may reasonably be considered the remains of an extraterrestrial craft. this is, of course, excluding such notorious fakes as the alien autopsy video. As for witness testimony, it's a pity that the researchers had not followed the methods and protocols of professional historians. A major part of history is the evaluation of sources - detecting biases, inconsistencies and mistakes, and falsifications in texts, and so learning how to build up a reliable picture of a historical event through a close interrogation of the evidence.

When it comes to evaluating the kind of evidence cited by the Roswell investigators, amongst other researchers, a leaf could be taken from the oral historians' book. Since the emergence of this particular branch of historical enquiry in the 1970s, scholars within the discipline have paid a great deal of attention to the question of historical accuracy and the reliability or otherwise of oral testimony. This is obviously immensely relevant to the Roswell debate as most of the evidence comes from the oral testimony of witnesses decades after the events. In this instance the Roswell incident and its investigations certainly seems to bear out the view of the Italian oral historian Luisa Passerini that the memorates recovered by oral history differ from other forms of historical evidence

in that they are an expression of culture, and so researchers using this form of historical investigation need to take into account the question of memory, ideology and subconscious desires. Alessandro Portelli has taken this argument one step further, arguing that oral history doesn't tell you what people did, but that people wanted to do what they think they did.

The central lesson from all this is that people use their memories to make sense of their lives, and in particular to make themselves comfortable with the events of the past. This doesn't necessarily mean that oral history is any more unreliable than more traditional types of history, in which the evidence can be incomplete. Documents can be fragmentary, forged, or suffer from lapse of memory in their compilers, or too great a reliance on hearsay. It does mean, however, that historians have to treat it with caution as representing what people may genuinely believe occurred, rather than what actually did. As a result, those academics specializing in the discipline have evolved specific and sophisticated techniques for eliciting and evaluating oral history.

Amongst the works recommended to postgraduate students introducing the philosophical and technical approaches to this form of historiography are Portelli's article 'What Makes Oral history Different?' in the *History Workshop Journal* for 1981, Passerini's article 'Work Ideology and Consensus under Italian Fascism' in the above *journal* for 1979, Paul Thompson and Raphael Samuel's *The Myths We Live By*, of 1990, and Rob Perks and Alastair Thomson's *The Oral History Reader*, 1998. The above should contain much material useful to anyone trying to make sense of decades-old tales of crashed aliens and nefarious government cover-ups.

Sincerely,
David Sivier, Bristol

Leading the Summer 1979 (new series 14) issue of MUF0B, was a two-part review of Jacques Vallee's recently published book, *Messengers of Deception*, with both Peter Rogerson and Roger Sandell offering their views. Peter looked particularly at the cultist groups Vallee described and his analysis of them. It is worth quoting a section of Peter's review at some length here, as it has a more recent relevance, with the entanglement of ufology and politics through a number of individuals over the last three of four years, and the growth of interest in the Raclians after their claims of human cloning.

After reviewing Vallee's experiences with a range of 'fringe' groups, Peter continued:

"Vallee's impression of these groups is roughly the same as that reached by the editors of MUF0B. It was this reviewer who first drew Vallee's attention to the connections between the veteran American fascist William Dudley Pelley and George Hunt Williamson, and the latter's relationship with the Stanford brothers, to say nothing of George Adamski. The roots of American fascism themselves lay in occultist movements such as Guy Ballard's I AM, and the antisemitic strains of the populist remnant led by people such as Tom Watson, who perhaps coined the phrase 'the international Jewish Bankers'. This is a facet of American history which merits far more details study.

"We can also match the authoritarian message of the French contactee Claude Vorilhon [Raël]: 'You must eliminate elections and votes that are completely



ill-adapted to the current evolution of man', with that of British contactee Derek Sampson, who claimed to be a reincarnation of Jesus and Hitler, and filled his journal with polemical pieces about the 'International Zionist Conspiracy'. He formed a crypto-fascist political party, and informed our former editor [John Hamey] that Britain 'needed to be run with a rod of iron'.

"It may be that Vallee is in danger of falling into the same trap as I did, and assume that such belief systems are an incidental aberration to ufology, manipulated by 'small groups of politically motivated men and women'. It seems possible that authoritarian belief systems are endemic to the whole UFO field. Recent, as yet unpublished, sociological research suggests that extreme right-wing, and UFO groups, draw upon the same socio-economic backgrounds for their members, who share similar ideologies."

In his review, Roger Sandell also commented on an issue which is very relevant today:

"Although ufologists frequently berate astronomers and

other scientists for their lack of interest in the phenomenon, it is the lack of interest by sociologists that is more surprising. There are only a few social studies of contactee groups, and as far as I know none at all of any major UFO waves ..."

Roger also considered the political dimensions of UFO cults which Vallee discussed, concluding that: "while some are explicitly racist or anti-democratic, the remainder are equally anti-human in their values, since they believe that humanity is incapable of solving its own problems, and that a utopia will be achieved by following the dictates of the extraterrestrials. He considers that in a time of uncertainty and growing suspicion of science, these groups could become mass-movements of irrationality."

This has not happened in quite the way Vallee thought, but the mass-movements are thriving today, in fundamentalist religious movements, and also in the anti-scientific and anti-humanistic tendencies which are becoming increasingly influential in the environmental movement. Many

present-day UFO magazines, web sites and discussion groups seem to be dominated by an overtly anti-scientific world view, which sees the human race as a nuisance to be controlled or even eliminated by the superior space-people.

In another significant article in this issue the veteran American ufologist Allen H Greenfield gave a valediction to his life as a ufologist. He began by considering the wide diversity of opinion that had characterized ufology from its early years:

"At the beginning of my involvement in 1960 the ETH seemed to be the near universal belief amongst ufologists, but by the later years of that decade the influence of John Keel was making itself felt though it seemed more so with British ufologists than their American counterparts), opening the door to speculation about psychological aspects, alternative realities and suchlike. The only thing that seemed beyond the pale of open discussion was the possibility that UFOs were a misapprehension of natural phenomena - in essence a rumour, without basis in objective reality ... People who looked into the phenomenon and openly held the view that UFOs were not real were classified as 'sceptics', rather than as ufologists who held a negative view".

The only change nowadays is that such people are denounced as 'Pelicanists', 'skep-tibunkers' and other meaningless epithets, rather than people who have examined the evidence and come to conclusions at variance to those of the name-callers.

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BOOK REVIEWS

All reviews by Peter Rogerson except where stated

Jerome Clark, *Strange Skies: Pilot Encounters with UFOs*, Citadel Press, New York, 2003, \$16.95

"At least some UFOs are surely the product of technological intelligence", writes Jerome Clark in the Introduction to this book. By "technological intelligence" he obviously does not mean earthly intelligence, but no one is going to trick him into saying directly and unambiguously that the UFOs come from outer space, making him look like another Donald Keyhoe.

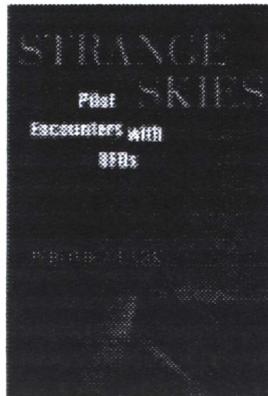
The general quality of UFO reports from pilots can be gauged from Clark's remark that "... two of the most important sightings - both by pilots (Arnold and Chiles-Whitted) in the early UFO era - may have been telling us: that this world is no longer ours alone." These two sightings are indeed important, but for historical reasons, for their influence on the course of amateur enthusiasm for UFO reports and professional investigations of them. If these two sightings are indeed among the best, then Clark really does not have much worth writing about - except from a sociological and historical point of view, of course.

A number of explanations have been suggested for the Kenneth Arnold UFO report, most of them rather implausible. However, proponents of this case being a "real" UFO often ignore or discount the possibility that Arnold's description of the event might perhaps be less than perfectly accurate, or fail to emphasize that Arnold was the only witness and that he claimed to have had other UFO sightings. Ufologists have often been left looking foolish as a result of their uncritical acceptance of testimony uncorroborated by independent witnesses.

A few years ago, Scottish ufologist James Easton suggested that Arnold's UFOs were American white pelicans, a theory which has a certain plausibility if one can accept the idea that Arnold's estimates of speeds and distances might have been very inaccurate. This theory led Jerome Clark to coin the term "pelicanist", which soon came to be parroted by

America's more hysterical and paranoid ufologists whenever anyone suggested a possible mundane explanation for a UFO report.

Clarence Chiles and his copilot, John Whitted, saw a "torpedo-shaped" bright object from their plane, flying near Montgomery, Alabama on 24 July 1948. The object was in view for about 5-10 seconds, but the believers have never accepted the official explanation that it was a bolide. As for its importance, Brad Sparks (whose work is greatly admired by Clark) has written on the UFO UpDates mailing list:



"All in all, this just seems rather marginal. Why argue over this case? Don't we have thousands of unexplained cases of longer duration and better circumstances? It is a matter of history more than anything else because it triggered the parallel development of AMC's

Aug. 5, 1948, TOP SECRET Estimate of the Situation and Air Force Intelligence's TOP SECRET AIR 203 study."

One of the more preposterous yarns in this book is about an allegedly multi-witness sighting in Puerto Rico of jet aircraft attempting to intercept an enormous triangular UFO. The UFO captured two of the jets and they were never seen again. The report also contains other fantastic details.

No aircraft were reported missing and there was no other evidence to indicate that the alleged incident had actually occurred. Clark admits that: "The seemingly impressive witness testimony notwithstanding, the story makes no sense on its face." However, he also asserts that the principal investigator of this case, Jorge Martin "is not a man known to conjure up tall tales". Perhaps not, perhaps he just exaggerates them a bit? It makes them more interesting. One wonders if Clark has read any of Martin's other UFO stories. Perhaps a reinvestigation by persons entirely independent of Jorge Martin and friends might possibly clarify the matter?

The book is an interesting summary of UFO reports in-

volving aircraft, but is mainly of historical rather than scientific interest. Clark's attempts to add a touch of mystery to the stories should perhaps not be taken too seriously.

John Harney

Lynne D. Kitei, *The Phoenix Lights*, Hampton Roads Publishing Company, Charlottesville, Virginia, 2004, \$16.95

Dr Kitei was ready for the Phoenix Lights when they appeared on the evening of 13 March 1997 because she had first seen them, she claimed, on the evening of 6 February 1995. Her husband saw them first and together they not only watched them from their bedroom window, but managed to photograph them. "Less than a hundred yards away from our property, three objects hung in mid-air, about 50 to 75 feet above the ground."

One might expect that a doctor would adopt a scientific approach to investigating UFO reports, but there is nothing scientific about this book. Dr Kitei contacts various ufologists and asks their opinions of her sightings, photos and videos, and she seems to adopt a policy of believing everything they tell her, so long as it is what she wants to hear.

Some of these people have their views on UFOs in general, and the Phoenix Lights in particular, quoted at great length. The more "New Age" and extravagant their views are the better, it seems. Dr Bruce Maccabee was consulted but he hardly rates a mention, presumably because he attributed some (not all) of the sightings to flares and doesn't care for quasi-religious interpretations of the phenomena.

She is very impressed by Jim Dilettoso and his computer analyses of UFO photographs. Perhaps she would have been slightly less impressed if she had taken the trouble to do a bit of basic research on him and some of the other colourful characters she describes. She is surely capable of logging on to the internet and using a search engine. A good example of the sort of information which is typical of many "respected" ufologists is this paragraph from an article entitled "High-Tech's Missing Link" (Michael Kiefer, Phoenix (Arizona) *New Times*, 21-27 April 1993):

"Jim Dilettoso's bio is a tangled circuit board of fact and fiction, disputed achievements, inventions and connections that can't be documented, others he won't talk about. He claims he has a Ph.D. in biomedical engineering from McGill University in Montreal, but the registrar's office there never heard of him. He claims an undergraduate degree from the University of Hartford, but its records show he took a single math course there."

If Dr

Kitce had taken the trouble to dig up some facts on Dilettoso she would also have learned that he argued that the Billy Meier photos and films were of real UFOs, and that the famous Mexico City UFO video of 1997 - eventually shown to be definitely faked - was also genuine. Another character who touted the Mexico City video as genuine, "the acclaimed Mexican journalist and respected UFO maven" (her description and, no, she's not being ironic) Jaime Maussan, tells her just what she wants to hear. They are trying to communicate with us; if governments accept their presence they will present themselves, etc.

A clue to why the author prefers a quasi-religious rather than a scientific approach to UFO reports can be found in chapter 12:

"I am proud of my heritage and its spiritual and moral foundations. Throughout my childhood, I was blessed with a strong, loving family, based on these values. But the fact is that organized religion didn't enter our lives."

This obviously left a gap which had to be filled somehow, but her pursuit of New Age ideals has led her to treat scientific data, theories and methods in a manner which makes me glad she's not my doctor.

John Harney

Michael Barkun. *Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America*. University of California Press, 2003. £16.95.

In this book Michael Barkun, author of books such as *Religion and the Radical Right* and *Disaster and the Millennium* looks at

the territory which our friend Roger Sandell used to examine. This is the world of 'fusion paranoia', (though Barkun never uses those words), in particular the fusion of traditional radical right conspiracy theories with modern beliefs of alien intervention. Barkun enters deep into *Magonia* territory as he follows the careers of the likes of William Cooper, Jim Keith and David Icke who have straddled the boundaries of the secular and supernatural conspiracism, and how ufology and new world order myths permeate.

One of the most disturbing aspects of this fusion paranoia is the incorporation of traditional anti-Semitic myths such as the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* into the New Age milieu, through the writings of such as William Cooper and David Icke. Though both writers sought to conceal their naked antisemitism with fig leaves (arguing for Jews, read Illuminati etc) the message clearly gets through. In other cases such as the Hartoon 'channelings' of E.J and Doris Ecker and George Green the antisemitism is even more blatant. Barkun notes the early appearance of this material in the writings of George Hunt Williamson, a disciple of pre-war fascist leader William Dudley Pelley and his occultist sidekick Guy Ballard. Barkun might have pointed out that Williamson, along with

contactees such as Adamski, linked his anti-Semitic views with 'leftist', anti-big business and notionally pacifist views, echoing earlier generations of American populism. These views led the FBI to suspect that the contactees were spreading Soviet propaganda, and we should note the antisemitism and mixture of radical right and left ideas which permeated Stalin's

National Bolshevik regime.

Barkun also notes the connections between alien abduction, Satanic abuse, and 'Project Monarch' literature, with their themes of sexual violence and exploitation by sinister forces, with earlier generations of anti-Catholic 'secrets of the convent' type of literature. He briefly comments on the appropriation of antisemitic imagery by the alien abduction literature. While his particular suggestion that the 'bad' aliens incorporate antisemitic stereotypes, (opposed to the 'good' blue eyes blondes) is too simplistic by far, there are subtler connections. For example David Jacobs' 'hybrids' are perceived as hypersexual predators who threaten 'our' women, and who contaminate the gene line, playing on America fears of miscegenation and echoing both anti Jewish and anti black stereotypes. Jacobs in *The Threat* also evokes New World Order style fears of the dictatorship to be established when the Grays take over. Both Jacobs and Hopkins present the grays as soulless demonic beings living in a 'socialistic' hive style society (more classic radical right fears).

Beyond the New World Order and ufological fusion, and the fusion of left and right conspiracy theories, there are also fusions of material from both secular and religious backgrounds, and in the latter, fusions of traditional Christian and New Age motives. Thus the Anti-Christ and dispensationalist theology might be merged with the prophecies of Nostradamus and material derived from theosophy and its offshoots. Furthermore conspiracy material is presented alongside a wide range of New Age issues such as environmentalism, health foods, alternative medicine, auras, spiritualism and the like.

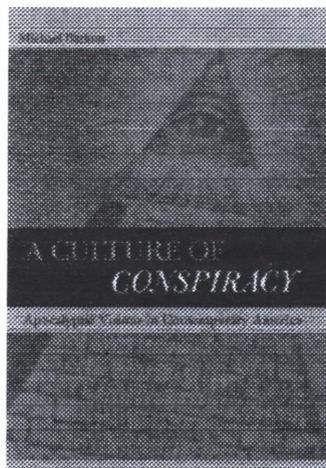
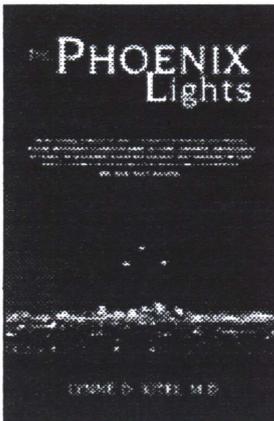
This material is not confined to the fringes, Barkun notes its impact in mass TV and film shows such as the *X-Files*, with its paranoid vision of the overarching super-conspiracy in which no-one can be trusted. This is by no means confined to the United

States, and a wide range of fusion ideas circulate in Britain. One of the most disturbing aspects is the embedding of Holocaust denial in a wider nexus of conspiracy theories, such as the belief that the lunar landing was a hoax. As more right wing conspiracy theories permeate (through for example the surprisingly popular works of David Icke) through the cultic milieu and into the wider culture, it becomes less of a surprise that a recent opinion poll found that 15% of respondents said that they believed that the number of deaths in the Holocaust had been greatly exaggerated.

The growing academic interest in 'stigmatized knowledge' itself indicates that this material cannot simply be dismissed as the ravings of cranks; it only gets produced because there is someone out there to buy it. In a world in which the boundaries of fiction and reality are blurring, where there are ever increasing numbers of semi-educated young people with no grand vision to fill their lives, where there is a distinct lack of grand visions all round (OK, although ideas such as building the British Empire, bringing on the Socialist Utopia, colonizing the Moon or ending world poverty seem hopelessly naive or just plain wrong with historical hindsight, one can't help feel that they offered some sorts of emotional satisfaction that a lifetime of nothing more than slogging away in a series of short contract jobs for Feed Us with your Credit Card Unlimited doesn't), that those who are not inclined to simply drug and booze themselves into oblivion will look for anything, absolutely anything that offers as escape route. Barkun's book reminds us that Islamic fundamentalism is just one of many rough beasts sloughing our way.

Shirley Andrews, *Lemuria and Atlantis: Studying the past to survive the future*. Llewellyn, St. Paul (MN), 2004. \$12.95

Franz Hartmann, *With the Adepts; an adventure among the Rosicrucians*, Forward by R. A. Gilbert. Ibis Press, Berwick (ME) 2003 (First edition 1887) There are some subjects of such perennial interest that they are always good for at least a few books a year, for instance biographies of Lord Byron or new theories about who killed President Kennedy. But

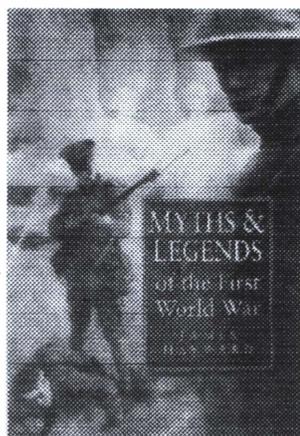


whereas Byron's life story is essentially fixed, and even the wildest conspiracy theorists at least agree on the date and place of Kennedy's assassination, there are no constants in the story of Atlantis. Andrews is actually a conventionalist, in that she locates Atlantis in the Atlantic Ocean, rather than, say, the Indian Ocean, The South Pole, or the Watford Gap services off the M1; and she accepts Edgar Cayce's date for the first destruction of the continent as 50,722 BC. Nevertheless, she describes Atlantean culture in much more feminist terms than was normal a few decades ago:

"Women priestesses usually di-

"Your intuition told you right. It does not indeed very often happen that an individual attains adeptship while inhabiting a female organism, because such an organism is not as well adapted as a male one to develop energy and strength, and it is therefore frequently the case that those women who have far advanced on the road to adeptship must reincarnate in a male orgasm, before they can achieve the final result. Nevertheless exceptions are found." This seems sexist now but it was quite advanced for its time, when the vast majority of secret societies, real or imaginary, were entirely made up of men.

Faced with these sorts of story, along with tales of the missing Norfolks, supernatural warnings, and occult forces behind the Nazis, Hayward sometimes seems to be irritated that 'educated people' could believe these things



rected the temples' activities. This was partly due to the strong influence of Lunar fertility Goddesses at that time, and also because during its various civilizations, Atlantis, Atlantis was a matriarchal society".

In her bibliography, alongside old favourites such as Braghine's *Shadow of Atlantis* are more recent titles like Brodie's *Healing Tones of Crystal Bowls*, 1996. Otherwise her information comes mainly from women who remembered lives as Atlantean priestesses and healers - evidently they were so advanced that there was no need for road-sweepers and lavatory cleaners.

Hartmann's novel is about a man who is permitted to visit a secret monastery of the Brothers of the Golden and Rosy cross in the Alps. The superbeings that he meets are mostly men, but he is surprised to discover two women amongst them, one of whom proves to be Joan of Arc, her body having been miraculously reconstituted following her burning at the stake. She tells him:

Basically both authors describe a Utopia, whether hidden in mountains of the mists of the past. They are much the same, though, in that people have philosophical beliefs and possess useful occult powers. The fact is, however, that an ideal society is easier to describe than to create.

Gareth J Medway

James Hayward. *Myths and Legends of the First World War*. Sutton, 2002. £18.99.

James Hayward. *Myths and Legends of the Second World War*. Sutton, 2003. £17.99.

War is the progenitor of legend, rumour and fantastical stories, some arising spontaneously, others the products of the propaganda factories of the various combatants. In these books James Hayward looks at all sorts of legends surrounding the two Twentieth Century World Wars. Some of the legends are essentially folk interpretations of history, and in these readers should assume that Hayward's often critical views are just one of many, for example his

chapters on the 'myth' of the ineptitude of the British generals in WWI, or of the 'myth' of Dunkirk in the Second, contain views which might be challenged by other historians. Other chapters point to universals in the human imagination, for example during WWI a rumour grew that a nurse who had looked after a wounded German officer had been told by him 'to avoid the Tube in April'. Virtually identical rumours circulated after 9/11, and today we see replays of the spy manias which led to attacks on German waiters in WWI and rumours of parachutists dressed as nuns in WWII.

Some rumours have dark consequences, for example reaction against the 'German atrocity' stories of WWI blinded many in the Allied nations to the reality of the Holocaust. The additional irony is that original atrocity stories were exaggerations rather than pure inventions, as the Prussian army had engaged in mass reprisals against the Belgians who had the temerity not to lie down

and be raped by their conquerors, as the aristocrats had always expected peasants to behave, but had actually fought back, thus becoming 'terrorists' or 'illegal combatants', and subject to the sort of severe reprisals by which well brought up gentlemen demonstrate their superiority to peasants and savages.

For *Magonia* readers it is the more supernatural rumours which are likely to have the greatest interest, and Hayward devotes a chapter in the first volume to rumours of Angels of Mons and other supernatural visions, and in the second volume part of a chapter is devoted to foo fighters. In the former case Hayward comes to the conclusion that the rumours did indeed start with Machen's *Bowmen*, but the latter leaves him rather baffled. Faced with these sorts of story, along with tales of the missing Norfolks, supernatural warnings, and supernatural forces behind the Nazis, Hayward sometimes seems to be irritated that 'educated people' could believe these things. Once again 9/11 and its

subsequent wars have produced very similar rumours, beliefs, and appeals to the supernatural.

Despite the sombre subject matter, there are flashes of dark humour at times, the WWI trial of Noel Pemberton Billing, arguably the most bizarre trial in modern British legal history, in which at one point a witness accused the judge himself as being part of the vast gay conspiracy undermining Britain, would make an excellent drama. Of course Billing would be a boon to the current degenerate tabloid press, and if alive today would no doubt end up as a celebrity castaway eating things just slightly more unwholesome than himself.

Robert E Batholomew and Benjamin Radford. *Hoaxes, Myths and Manias: why we need critical thinking*. Prometheus, 2003.

In many ways this is an interesting collection of articles on the psychosocial aspects of a wide range of anomalous experiences, covering the whole range of the sort of subject matters covered by *Magonia* - 'contemporary visions and beliefs'. Though much of this material has appeared in earlier books by Bartholomew, for those who have not read the earlier volumes this makes a useful compilation. *Magonia* readers will find the chapter by David Clarke on the phantom helicopter of 1973 particularly interesting (needless to say the then *Merseyside UFO Bulletin* took a keen interest in this, and published one of the first round ups). This was a social panic generated in a period of exceptional social strain within Britain, with a background of class war, Irish terrorism, fears of illegal immigration, rumours of impending military coups and so on, in which the sort of ambiguous lights in the sky which were conventionally attributed to "flying saucers" now became associated with more terrestrial fears and paranoias.

In the chapters on the birth of the flying saucer, the 1909 airship scare in the United States and the 1896-7 airship stories, we see the various ways in which these ambiguous stimuli are interpreted in terms of current beliefs. For example in 1947, the 'flying saucer' wave was generated by fears of Soviet secret weapons, and the ETH didn't figure until several years later.

Other social panics include the phantom gasser of Mattoon and Indian stories of the monkey men.

The boundaries between social panic and ritual form the basis of Bartholomew and associates' studies of latah, dancing manias, fears of disappearing genitals and jumping responses, which have been medicalised into 'culture specific syndromes'. Bartholomew uses these to challenge the medicalisation of a whole range of behaviours in the western world.

He sees the various social rumours discussed in the book as falling into several categories: 'immediate community threat' (e.g. the Swedish ghost rocket scare), flight panics (e.g. the great Martian panic of 1938), 'symbolic threats' (e.g. the Satanic abuse scares), and wish fulfilling 'signs of transcendence' (e.g. visions of the Virgin Mary or ET's).

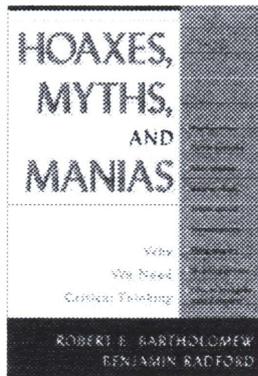
If this is in many ways an interesting book, it is not without its problems. The presence of 'review questions' indicates that this is a textbook, and as with many such books, the 'correct' answers to the questions are the ones which fit the author's own beliefs and values. There is also an annoyingly patronizing tone about its call for logical thinking to replace emotion. If Bartholomew and Radford had argued more the

need to critically evaluate evidence this wouldn't have grated so much. As it is there is a hint of the CSICOP idea that if only the proles could think more like well-educated college professors then all would be well. The problem with this is that just as many horrors have been perpetrated by 'rationality' as by blind emotion.

The witchcraft persecutions were supported by the finest minds of the time, arguing quite rationally within the confines of their cultural beliefs and values. The German doctors who estab-

lished the euthanasia programme did so for perfectly logical and rational reasons, and were only too willing to discard 'irrational emotional responses' such as pity for the weak. Imagine that you have captured a terrorist whom you know has planted a 50 megaton under some city, but not

which. Nothing you do to him will break him, but the psychologists tell you that if you torture his five year old child in front of him, then there's a good chance he will break down and tell you where the bomb is and thus save many millions of lives. Reason and logic tell you that you have to torture the child to save millions of lives, yet is there not some set of values beyond all reason and logic which say that it is never right to torture a child?



Barabara Forrest and Paul R. Gross. *Creationism's Trojan Horse: the Wedge of Intelligent Design*. Oxford University Press, 2004. £25.00.

This book traces in meticulous detail the activities of the right wing Christian groups promoting 'Intelligent Design' a sort of thinking person's creationism, into the American public education scene. Proponents of 'Intelligent Design' including Philip Johnson, William Dembski, Michael Behe, Michael Denton and Jonathan Wells, claim that there is scientific evidence that implies 'irreducible complexity' which thus disproves evolution. Needless to say very few real scientists accept this, and the authors of this book give some space to explaining some of the more obvious errors in their reasoning.

In general however, they are less concerned with a detailed refutation of the designers' arguments than in chronicling their plans and activities, many of which appear to be based on a web document known as the *The Wedge* outlining their plans to infiltrate and take control of the American education system. It is of course very difficult for a British outsider to work out how real this conspiracy is, or to what extent Forrest and Gross are engaging in the traditional American hobby of conspiracy mongering. Certainly there are places where if you substitute 'liberal' for 'Intelligent Designer' and 'communist' for 'creationist' the voice of Joe

McCarthy seems to echo through.

Of course if the ID's really are powerful and stand some chance of success then that would indeed be worrying. As one reads their agenda's, it becomes clear just how different the word 'conservative' is in America to Britain. These are not people who want to restore the America of Dwight Eisenhower or even Calvin Coolidge. They represent a cynical alliance of traditionalist Catholics, Protestant evangelicals and members of the 'Reverend' Moon's Unification Church, united in their opposition to the Enlightenment and Naturalism. Needless to say the ideological gurus of Margaret Thatcher: Adam Smith, David Ricardo, John Locke, Thomas Hobbes and Edmund Burke were all in their own way products of the enlightenment. So were the founders of the United States: Alexander Hamilton as much as Thomas Jefferson. Anti-Enlightenment conservatism can only mean a return to the values of either Catholic absolute monarchy or something like Calvin's Geneva, or at best something like modern Iran, at worst an American Taliban.

Of course if the religious right were to win, what could they do but having enslaved, forcibly converted or exterminated everyone else, turn on each other and burn each other at the stake for heresy. No ideology could possibly be more "anti American" than this, yet some of these characters have George Bush's ear.

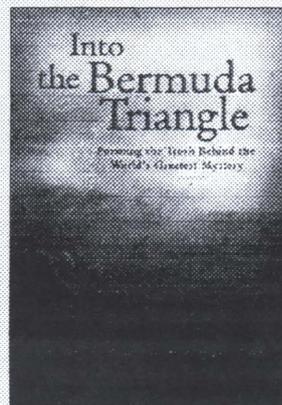
Gian J Quasar. *Into the Bermuda Triangle: pursuing the truth behind the world's greatest mystery*. International Marine / McGraw Hill, 2004. £16.99.

Magonia readers of a certain age will recall the alleged mystery of the Bermuda Triangle which was all the Fortean rage in the mid-1970's. Then in 1975 Arizona librarian Larry Kusche effectively disposed of the mystery in his sceptical *The Bermuda Triangle Mystery Solved*. Well it appears nothing is so dead that it cannot rise again, and after a couple of vague twitches, Gian Quasar tries a major resurrection job in this book.

As he attacks Larry Kusche for relying on newspaper reports than original official documents the reader might imagine that Quasar will examine a number of alleged disappearances in great detail, quoting at length from official and other contemporaneous accounts and trying to find out exactly what happened. Needless to say this is not

what we get here, instead we get the usual Charles Berlitz style scatter-gun approach, with events listed in a couple of lines, with endless use of words such as 'mysterious', 'incredible' and the lack. Even if official records are mentioned and listed in the bibliography, there is little reason to believe that the author's version of events is what one finds on actual examination of the said records, after all who will have the time and energy to do this?

Instead of detailed discussions of actual cases what we get through much of this book is yards of pseudoscientific speculation in which time warps, creationism, Edgar Cayce, Atlantis, John Hutchison's mysterious



machine and so on are all promiscuously mixed together. Your reviewer notes with a cynical smile, that Quasar's pseudoscience is featured in 'documentaries' featured on alleged 'educational' TV channels featured on Rupert Murdoch's satellite TV empire, and that this book is produced by a 'reputable' publisher noted for its science textbooks. This sort of thing can't be all that unwelcome to the corporate power elite then. After all, it adds more lucre to their coffers, and also draws attention away

from the real causes of high plane and ship losses, not just in the Bermuda Triangle: down to earth things like cost cutting, over-worked crews, air traffic control and coast guards, poorly trained and poverty paid non-unionised ships' crew and general putting profit before safety.

Ronald Hutton. *Witches, Druids and King Arthur*. Hambledon and London, 2003. £25.00.

This latest book by Ronald Hutton is essentially a collection of essays which tie up some of the loose ends of his earlier works on English paganism and the birth of the modern witchcraft religion. The topics covered include the various perceptions of King Arthur held by academic historians in the twentieth century, the growth of the mythology surrounding Glastonbury, the modern Druid movement and its various factions, how 'ancient myths and traditions' have often been manufactured in comparatively modern times, the survivals and rebirths of forms of classical paganism, and the ethics of sociological and anthropological investigation.

While, personally I found the chapters on classical paganism and its possible survival in the Middle East into the early medieval period, and its rediscovery in the Renaissance, slightly dull, much of the rest should be of interest to *Magonia* readers, particularly those interested in earth mysteries and the like.

It is perhaps the final chapter, essentially on the ethics of anthropological and sociological research which has the widest implications. Much of this is stimulated by the sense of betrayal felt by sections of the Pagan community over their treatment by

mean that for example only Nazis could study the British National Party? Attacks on 'western humanist universals' also make me uneasy, because the alternative seems to be a humanity fractured into thousands of mutually uncomprehending ghettos where people are trapped by accident of birth, and no common human ethical language by which to denounce oppression and genocide.

Hutton no doubt is pushed into the this position by his human sympathy with an often persecuted community. He notes the profound ignorance and fear which these groups often evoke among otherwise rational people. Here again we see the universal human fear of the other. Some of this persecution is genuine, imagine what the outcry would be if your Internet search engine came up with a firewall which said "access denied Muslim/ Christian/ Jewish content", yet firewalls do come with "access denied occult/ cult content" (i.e. something which gets up the nose of the American religious right).

That being said, I suspect that Hutton, dealing with today's eco-friendly feminist Wiccans, underestimates the confrontational and transgressional nature of some of the founders, whose use of ritual nudity in 1950's Britain, and festooning their homes with brooms, cauldrons and other

imagine what the outcry would be

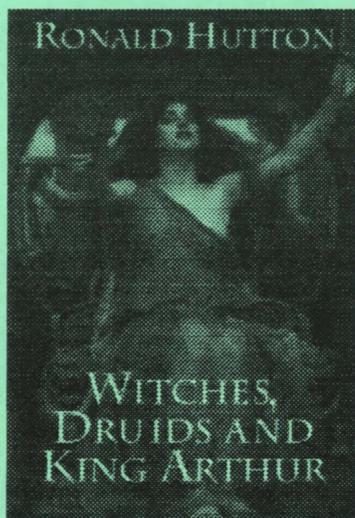
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the American writer Tiny Luhrmann, who seems to have used them and then moved on. In reaction to this, Hutton comes too close to arguing that only insiders and believers can provide a true insight into that movement, and that the anthropologist or sociologist must totally and permanently immerse themselves in this culture. This can sound seductive, until you ask yourself does this

imagery of the folk witch, was like the sporting of swastikas and Nazi regalia by some teenagers; an act of sticking two fingers up at mainstream society (no doubt in years to come disaffected young people from many different backgrounds will start adopting some of the accoutrements of radical Islam as an act of rebellion against mainstream society.) Of course



such actions always run the risk of provoking extreme reactions from those offended.

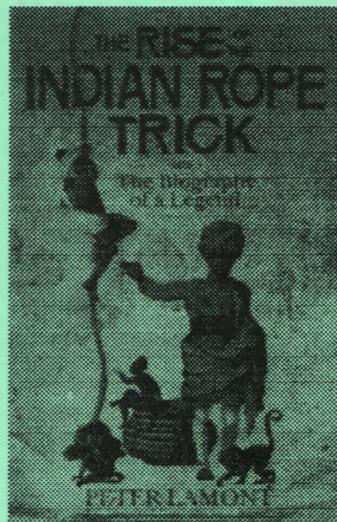
Peter Lamont. *The Rise of the Indian Rope Trick: the biography of a legend*. Little Brown, 2004. £14.99.

Everyone has a general idea of what the Indian Rope Trick is supposed to involve: in some public place a conjurer lays a rope on the ground, by of its own accord it rises into the air, up it goes a boy assistant, followed by the conjurer. There is an altercation, and bits of the boy fall to the

earth. The conjurer comes down after, kicks at the bits and up jumps the boy uninjured. Needless to say there have been various attempts at 'rational' explanations at this seeming miracle; these dividing into two camps. One alleges that the whole thing is the result of 'mass hypnosis' (and that concept has then been used to 'explain' all sorts of other wonders, from the levitations of D. D. Home, to the Fatima sun miracle, to spectacular UFO cases). The other claims that a real conjuring trick is involved, and various ingenious explanations of just how this work have been proffered.

Historian and conjurer Peter Lamont surveys the evidence and comes up with another explanation. At least in the sense that it is usually understood, the IRT is a complete fiction. It was invented by journalist and later US Secret Service chief John E. Wilkie in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* of 18 August 1890. In this story the twine is tossed into the air, the boy goes up it and they both disappear. Two amazed Americans saw this feat and photographed it, but the photograph just showed the fakir sitting by

himself on the ground. The story was a complete work of fiction, and perhaps the name of one of the witness, Fred S. Ellmore (Sell-more, geddit?) should have alerted perceptive readers to this fact. In December the *Tribune*



published a retraction, but as is the nature of these things it received very much less publicity than the original.

The story spread and soon, as Lamont shows us, a whole raft of 'eyewitness testimony' showed up. Some of this, Lamont suggests, may have been based on a real trick, in which a boy bal-

ances on a bamboo or similar pole for a short while, and he notes that the accounts got the more spectacular the more distant they were in time from the alleged event, allowing for confusion of memory. *Magonia* readers will, I am sure, be aware of this effect in many other circumstances. Other testimony turns out to be completely fraudulent, and perhaps this accounts for rather more than Lamont suggests. The Rogerson rule 'assertion is not evidence' clearly applies here very strongly.

Magonia readers will note some familiar names, notably John Keel (who described an ingenious but essentially impractical solution to the IRT, and Harold T. Wilkins, the latter shown in a distinctly unfavourable light, as shifty as a politician) They will also note the death of the yet another Fortean favourite; maybe we need another Rogerson's law 'All fortean favourites are frauds'.

If the IRT doesn't exist as a real event, it might still have a symbolic reality, in the shamanic imagination, in which the shaman climbs the world tree, suffers dismemberment and is reborn. Tales similar to the IRT had existed in Chinese folklore, and Lamont suggests that it was transported to India where it became part of the orientalist vision of the Mystic East, or of an India 'sunk in superstition', which the Raj was charged with modernizing and making into rational Victorian society.



Square Prancing

A few years back we were following the story of the mysterious vanishing cats, which allegedly were being spirited away from their owners, bundled into sacks by sinister gangs and smuggled out to - well anywhere, really. We had stories of cat-fur traders in Belgium, Ukraine and 'Eastern Europe' generally. Of course, nothing was ever proven, no evidence was produced and the whole matter faded away, with just the occasional scare story in a local paper.

Many people, of course, have a strong emotional bond to their cats, so the stories were very distressing to many cat-owners. I'm not sure that the latest variant of it will send quite the same *frisson* down peoples' spines.

According to an item in the *Camden New Journal* (13 May 2004) sent to us by Gareth Medway, a new terror is stalking elegant Russell Square, in London's Bloomsbury district.

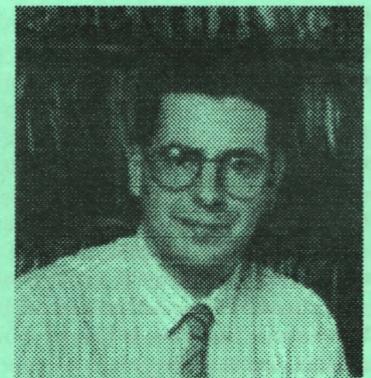
"Regulars at Russell Square believe they have solved the mystery of their plummeting squirrel population, which fell from 15 to just three in the space of a week", the paper informs us (It's not made clear who conducts the squirrel census in Russell Square). A security guard spotted two men acting suspiciously with a bag of peanuts (it says here): "they were working together and herded up twelve of our fifteen squirrels".

"Bryan Coghlan, who eats his lunch in the park, said he

Finally, a plug for our colleague Mark Pilkington's publishing venture, *Strange Attractor*. Billed as 'celebrating unpopular culture' this journal is in fact a 250 page paperback, elegantly designed and stuffed to the gills with marvellous, weird and fascinating essays on subjects as varied as the Blackpool waxworks of medical horrors, H. P. Lovecraft, the British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology, and Elliot O'Donnell's strange cults of London. It's a limited edition and may be sold out by now, but take your chance and write to *Strange Attractor Journal*, PO Box 961, Devizes, Wiltshire, SN10 2TS. And be sure to visit the *Strange Attractor* website (www.strangeattractor.co.uk) to find out more about its events and publications.



Pope



Dolan

Have any of your readers noticed the remarkable resemblance between American ufologist Richard Dolan and British ufologist Nick Pope? Both are known for their writings and for their lectures supporting the ETH at those crazy UFO conferences. Do you think they could be related? *Seán Ó hAthairne*

saw the pair grab a squirrel, bundle it in a bag and make their escape. 'One grabbed a squirrel he had been feeding and threw it in a bag, I couldn't believe my eyes.'"

Magonia Towers was troubled for a while with an intrusive squirrel which proved impossible to catch, let alone put in a bag. The idea of two men 'herding' fifteen of the little blighters beggars belief! And the alleged destination of the squirrels seems even more unlikely. The august *Camden New Journal* tells us: "Squirrel meat is turning up on the tables of London's trendiest restaurants and poorer households", and when a plucky Russell Square squirrel fan approached the evil duo, one told him that squirrel meat was "tasty and nutritious."

A baffled Camden spokesman commented, "we've never heard of this happening before". Indeed! The *New Journal* helpfully prints a hot-line number (020 7974 1693, if you're interested) so that readers can report any squirrel rustling they stumble across in the borough's leafy squares.

We'll keep you informed of any developments, and in the meantime would like to hear of any other similar tales from your own local papers. It's not only squirrels who go hunting for nuts!

As far as we can see, no-one was suggesting that the squirrels were being used in obscene Satanic rites, but give it time.



Magonia readers' meetings

Magonia readers living in or passing through the London area are welcome to come along to our monthly meetings at the Railway pub, Putney, on the first Sunday of each month - from about 7.15 pm to closing time. Join in the conversation, debate discussion and sheer scurrilous gossip!

The Railway is just opposite Putney station, 10 - 15 minutes from Waterloo, and 10 minutes walk from East Putney District line station.

HOLD THE BACK PAGE