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**I**N THE United States and in Australia more and more people are reporting close encounters of the third kind. The greatest increase is in reports by people claiming that they were taken from their homes by alien beings and then taken home again to come around (for these experiences seem to involve a kind of sedation) in the beds from which they had been plucked, earlier, by their abductors.

How are we to explain what is going on?

Alas, for credulists, this column has a sceptic as its custodian and so this column looks to what might

so this column looks to what might be going on in the addled minds of the credulous rather than to any explanation of why real extraterrestrials might be showing an increased interest in our inconsequential little planet.

Laurence Goldstein, a professor of English at the University of Michigan, a student of these things and author of *The Flying Machine and Modern Literature*, thinks that the great psychologist C. G. Jung was right when he asserted that UFOs were not cosmic but psychic disturbances and that plethoras of reports of them coincided with periods of social and economic trouble.

Goldstein, wondering why we seem to need extraterrestrials at the moment, fancies that "One answer seems especially pertinent as we near the end of the millennium. UFOs appeal to our desire for an 'end time', a closure of history like those prophesied in our religious literature. For many people the end of the Cold War signals the beginning of some hopeful new cycle and UFOs are the annunciation of the apocalyptic beginning. Because aliens are smarter than Americans [and, *just*, Australians as well] they will be our saviours, the big fixers of our broken society . . . The neuroses of the 1950s are back. Keep watching the skies."

*Source. The New York Times.*

YESTERDAY'S

**Y**ESTERDAY'S gales coincided with my discovery in a journal of a fascinating article on "The Weathervanes of Scotland" and left me wondering (one likes to provide, in this column, oases of utter irrelevance in which the reader may seek temporary sanctuary from the fast lanes of life) about the weathervanes of Canberra. Are there any (the dismal science of meteorology may have kept their numbers down in the new world) and if so where are the buildings they adorn? I throw myself upon the mercy of my observant readers, ask them to report any weathervanes they know, and toss them the tidbit, gleaned from this timely article, that the most popular weathervane design of all, that fea-

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turing a cockerel, is thought to have been the invention of Bishop Rampert of Brescia (now in northern Italy) who had a bronze weathercock made and installed on his church in the year 820.

*Source. Weatherwise magazine.*

**Y**ESTERDAY'S column referred to the naming of the new Gungahlin suburb of Palmerston after a farmer, one Palmer, who tilled the thin, resentful soils of our region in the last century.

Canberra's suburbs and streets are always named after Australians or people who have featured in

of people who have featured in Australia's history or after Australian things but one is reminded, by some current agitation in Alice Springs, of how the need may arise to rename places named after people found, in the fullness of time, to have been rotters and scum.

Black people in Alice Springs want changes made to the names of streets in the city named after eminent palefaces now known to have been racists who murdered the objects of their racist views.

Some Canberrans may want to agitate for new names for their streets when they discover the truth about the rotters whose names they bear.

Good morning, for example, to the burghers of Sorell Street in Forrest. Your boulevard is named after Lieutenant-Governor William Sorell (1775-1848) a man with (we learn from Robert Hughes's *The Fatal Shore*) "a taste for fornication" who abandoned his wife and seven children for the wife of a brother officer and who, as the cruel aficionado of flogging put in charge of the convicts of Van Diemen's Land, invented the penal settlement at Port Macquarie and made it for 10 years, for convicts, what Hughes calls "the worst spot in the English-speaking world".

Watch this column to learn whether you, too, live in a thoroughfare shamed by the name of one now known to have been a fornicator and a monster.

