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UFO UpDates Mailing List

Re: 'The Threat'...

From: William White <bwhite@frognet.net>
Date: Sat, 24 Jan 1998 01:37:53 -0500 (EST)
Fwd Date: Sat, 24 Jan 1998 18:31:30 -0500
Subject: Re: 'The Threat'...

> To: UFO UpDates - Toronto <updates@globalserve.net>
> From: Mark Cashman <mcashman@ix.netcom.com>
> Subject: re: UFO UpDate: Re: 'The Threat'...
> Date: Fri, 23 Jan 1998 01:10:19 -0800

> Well, science fiction has only really existed for a relatively
> short time, at least as a literature of technical extrapolation.
> So I can't see how UFO descriptions, which have remained
> relatively unchanged (given the difficulty in interpreting or
> assessing the credibility of older sources) could follow SF
> fashion.

Well, I'll hold of my assessment of that until I look further into the subject. All that I can say is what I have read has lead me to regard the descriptions as more fluid, but that may as well be a reflection insufficient reading.

> Basically, I think that has to be an important
> part of our "baseline": we have reports from the present day and
> the last fifty years which have been relatively well
> investigated, and the credibility of whose witnesses is generally
> known.

But is it though? So much of what I have heard (and again, I'll admit much of it being more recent may very well be a poor sample) has involved little physical evidence and has relied mostly on the credibility of the eyewitness. And especially in cases where hypnotic regression has been used, I have some difficulty accepting witness credibility.

> So the patterns we derive from that data are probably
> representative of the "real" phenomenon (whatever that may be).
> Thus, when I go back and look at old data, I give much greater
> credibility to cases that support current patterns than to those
> which break them.

I can understand your motivation for doing this, but at the same time I worry that doing so may be dangerous. I'd prefer to have some sort of objective criterion to select or reject data. Without it, you risk massaging the data to support an existing conclusion.

But again, I do appreciate your response and will take some time to read more, and at that point, if I still have problems with your analysis, I will have more to go on that worries.

> c) SF readership has never been a major proportion of the

> reading public. Offhand claims that SF influences the reports of
> UFOs must deal with the absence of UFOs during period of high SF
> awareness (such as Welles' 38 War of the Worlds or the period
> immediately after Close Encounters, and with the (until fairly
> recently) limited demographics of SF and fantasy.

I wasn't suggesting that the popularity of SF was in any way related to the frequency of UFO sightings, only that the form of UFOs may be related to the SF representations of alien craft at the time. But I don't think I could claim that the latter caused the former without pushing it. And I would argue that ideas and other elements from limited genres do spread into society as a whole, often without anyone thinking about the source. Culture is by no means a gradual, liner phenomenon, and the existence of numerous fads, trends, and fashions which arose from unexpected places are I think sufficient evidence.

> Also, most "alien spacecraft" in the 30s and 40s were giant metal
> riveted cigars with large round glass portholes. These are
> conspicuously absent from the UFO reports of the time period.

Now that I will grant you and I apologize for not being more careful in characterizing SF spacecraft. I guess it's been a long time since I looked through my pulp SF collection.

> In other words, any theory that claims a relationship between
> fiction and reports doesn't stand up well to the actual cases.

OK, it seems you're right. I still suspect some cross-contamination in either one direction or the other (possibly influencing some of the more dubious sightings) but no, it isn't nearly enough to hope to explain the phenomenon.

> I'd suggest a copy of Paul Hill's Unconventional Flying Objects.

Thank you.

> If there were some evidence for the existence of these so far
> imaginary constructs existing in a state of nature, I might,
> slightly grant some possibility to the idea that they could cause
> some minor EM effects.

It's admittedly difficult, but the models do explain ball lightning quite effectively (although your later point about clear skies is nonetheless valid). And some considerably more microscopic effects. In any case I have some papers arriving by interlibrary loan and I'm going to take them to a physicist friend of mine for evaluation. If anyone cares, I'll tell you what he says about it.

> Unfortunately, like most UFO reports, most EM reports occur
> during clear weather, many are during the day and include the
> close observation of structured objects with a metallic
> appearance.

And that's a very good point.

> The idea that plasmas can leave calcined ground traces with
> weights in the tens of tons, however, is completely unsupportable
> (pun intended).

I'm assuming your previous reference contains documentation of this, if so I'm looking forward to reading it.

> And the extensive literature of radiation damage
> cases indicates that we are not talking about minor levels of
> energy generation - again a major problem for any of these
> "self-motivated plasma" theories.

Yeah, unless modern science has completely missed something about particle physics, and matter is spontaneously converting to energy (which I don't think it is). Well, obviously we don't know everything about physics because we haven't managed to break the light speed barrier or make a reactionless drive yet.

> This is a Vallee-type concept which I really can't see support
> for in the cases that I have examined. Only a very small
> percentage of cases appear unusual enough to require
> extraordinary explanations of this sort, and many of those are of
> dubious credibility. Others have been successfully explained by
> various theorists with ideas that don't require quite so much

> revision of current scientific concepts as "parallel worlds",
> "ultra-terrestrials", paranormal "control systems", etc.

Actually parallel worlds aren't as hoaky as you think (c.f., Everett and Wheeler) but that's a matter of semantics. Like I said, I look forward to evaluating the evidence myself. Ultimately, though, since we can't really do any experiments, it all comes down to which theory describes it "best". And "best" is of course a matter of one's personal belief systems; the metrics we each use to evaluate the elegance and "ordinariness" of a theory are entirely subjective.

Case in point, I've met people who believe that the entire phenomenon is essentially being produced, in physical form, by mass human belief (the "Tulpa" theory). To them, this was a much more elegant explanation. Until we can figure out how to test a theory on the UFO phenomenon, it's going to come down to "who sounds less like a crackpot". And while there are some people I'd definitely consider crackpots, I'm sure others would say the same of me. Or you, for that matter.

> I refer you to my essay at
...

Thank you very much.

> But that argues for great caution and maximal evidence before
> theorizing, especially before making theories that really break
> with the knowns of physics.

Well, I think most, if not all, of these theories put a strain on physics, if for no other reason than UFOs appear to have some form of reactionless propulsion (if this has been addressed before please tell me in email and I'll look it up). But I rely heavily upon Clarke's Law in issues of technology, because I don't think our own level of science is anywhere close to perfection.

> The reason
> for that is that there are credible cases on the border
> of abduction, consciously remembered, and in some cases
> with physical evidence of one sort or another.

OK, so I think one of the problems I'm running into here is that I haven't been looking towards the right sources. Although in my defense, trying to find a good book has been like finding the proverbial needle in the haystack.

> Read the catalogs and read the literature. My website hosts
> four large catalogs, and the Project 1947 website

And again, thank you very much for the pointer. I appreciate it very much.

> We recently hashed that around extensively here. I won't go into
> it again, but you may want to check out the UFO Updates archive.

Will do. Thanks.

> It's not a question of getting more intelligent but of having more
> knowledge. And we certainly have a lot more knowledge now than
> we did then.

But viewed from the perspective of how much knowledge it is possible to have (and I'm talking about major changes in understanding, not obscure stuff like "how many protons are in my cup of coffee"), I looking upon earlier peoples as more ignorant is like an ant looking down upon a flea. Many, many times have scientists (who should have known better) claimed to be close to the end of important discoveries in their fields.

> Anyway, I hope this helps in your search for knowledge.

Yes, it does. Once again, thanks for taking the time to address my concerns in an intelligent way.

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