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UFO UpDates Mailing List

Re: IFOs

From: John Rimmer <jrimmer@magonia.demon.co.uk>
Date: Mon, 2 Aug 1999 23:27:55 +0100
Fwd Date: Tue, 03 Aug 1999 14:08:56 -0400
Subject: Re: IFOs

>To: UFO UpDates - Toronto <updates@globalserve.net>
>From: Jerome Clark <jkclark@frontiernet.net>
>Subject: Re: IFOs
>Date: Sat, 31 Jul 99 10:27:32 PDT

>>Date: Thu, 29 Jul 1999 22:43:35 +0100
>>To: UFO UpDates - Toronto <updates@globalserve.net>
>>From: John Rimmer <jrimmer@magonia.demon.co.uk>
>>Subject: Re: IFOs

>>So basically, to reject a workable scientific model of the
>>universe on the basis of a series of contentious and
>>questionable narratives, is iconoclastic and by inference a good
>>thing; continuing to doubt the literal validity of these reports
>>because there is no convincing evidence behind them, is being
>>safe and unheretical and fearful of the ridicule of the
>>establishment.

>It's precisely this sort of self-righteous posturing

You're the expert, Jerry...

>that helps
>make us American ufologists so deeply skeptical of the theories
>of English majors and librarians about UFOs. Yet one more reason
>I am proud not to be a pelicanist, or psychosociologist, or
>whatever the proper name for your continuing exercise in
>ridicule-avoidance.

What's all this about "ridicule avoidance"? Do you seriously think that I and other sceptical ufologists (not just in Britain, by the way) have adopted our views just to placate some mysterious group of people who apparently have nothing better to do that go around jeering at a random collection of UFOs? It's flattering to imagine that the scientific establishment thinks I'm worth a good belly-laugh, and if so I'm delighted to be able to add to the gaity of nations. No, sorry to tell you this Jerry, because it is such a delightful idea, but I, and the other "pelicanists" I know (by the way be careful about using that word next time you're in the UK) actually came to our current viewpoints by actually studying the evidence and not bothering too much about what our elders and betters might think. > >There is, of course, "convincing evidence" for the existence of >anomalous UFOs, though no one would know that from reading >Magonia.

Then you don't read it very well. We have never denied that there are anomalous UFOs. We just don't automatically jump to

the conclusion that they are physical spacecraft.

>Maybe you think that grand rhetorical gestures will
>drive the heresies (and the heretics) from the temple. There
>must be some rational explanation for strange allegations like
>yours. You should, however, save them for the rubes. The
>people on this list are better informed than that.

Sorry, but I just can't understand what on earth you're
rabbitting on about here - my loss, I'm sure.

>The rest of you are referred to the UFO literature. For some
>convincingly documented cases which have stubbornly withstood
>the assaults of pelicanists, see The UFO Encyclopedia, 2nd Ed.,
>on the Coyne CE2 (254-57), Portland County Sightings (719-27),
>RB-47 case (761-90), or the Socorro CE2/CE3 (856-67). To cite
>just a very small number.

Ah, ha! So finally you've listed your "best cases"! After about
a year of asking.

>Amusingly, no less than the eminent
>historian of astronomy Steven Dick recently stated (at a private
>gathering of UFO historians held

- in a telephone booth? -

>in Chicago late this past May)
>that "evidence" in science is always a matter of dispute and
>negotiation; he went on to say that ufologists' evidence is
>entirely reasonable in that context (the history of scientific
>disputation), and he said what we're doing is well worth doing.

Very amusing. Bet you didn't pin him down and ask him if he
thought UFOs were extraterrestrial spacecraft, though, did you?
This strikes me as the sort of nice non-committal statement that
a polite guest at a private gathering would say. I wonder just
how much negotiation is possible about, say, the second law of
thermodynamics? I fact, on re- reading it the statement seems to
reflect a sort of post-modernist cultural relativism normally
associated with French philosophers and, erm, English majors.

>Asked why he believed in one controversial phenomenon, which
>skeptics have charged is based solely on misidentifications
>and hoaxes, a scientist of world-class reputation has stated the
>following:

>"Though ... I have never seen the phenomenon personally, I feel
>that there is no question that [this phenomenon] exists. I have
>talked to six eyewitnesses of the phenomena and think there is
>no reasonable doubt as to the authenticity of their
>observations.

"No doubt"? How remarkable.

>Furthermore, the reports are all remarkably
>similar and have common features with the hundreds of
>observations that appear in the literature."

Yes, just like the hundreds of ghost stories, encounters with
Satan, messages from spirits, memories of past lives, etc.,
etc., etc. This is just the old "I can get it for you wholesale"
school of research, where we are meant to be impressed by the
sheer number reports.

>What a dope. Obviously, this true believer has never read The
>UFO Handbook or Magonia,

I'm puzzled. Are you comparing The UFO Handbook to Magonia, as
two "pelicanist" publications, and suggesting that the Handbook
dismisses UFO reports with "grand rhetorical gestures?"

>Long live the iconoclasm of American ufology, and long may it
>thrive. Too bad British ufology -- or at least that end of it
>that's wandering aimlessly through the library stacks -- has
>lost its way.

Jerry, go to your local library (I suppose they do have one in
Canby), get a card, talk to the librarians. They are quiet,
gentle people who will treat you kindly, and help you to get
over this crippling fear you have of my respected profession. We

only really get threatening if you keep your books overdue!

>David Hufford's more scholarly *The Terror*
>That Comes in the Night, for example, does not deal specifically
>with UFO reports (though they are mentioned), but it amounts to
>a powerful refutation of some of Handbook's more disputable
>assertions -- i.e., the ones particularly beloved of
>pelicanists.

I agree with you about Hufford. He makes the important point that the "Old Hag" stories collected by folklorists and others in Newfoundland were being treated as collections of stories, and no-one was seriously entertaining the possibility that these stories represented actual events being reported by the people who had experienced them. Totally valid and very relevant to the UFO phenomenon. It is also a point I made in my article "The UFO is alive and well and living in Fairyland":

"When attempting explanations for fairy(s), monster(s) and other traditional entities, folklore students have thought in terms of historical traditions, literary analogues and tribal ritual. They have all but ignored the possibility that people did, and often still do, actually *see* these things." Pretty much Hufford's point, I think, but made in 1970, twelve years before publication of *The Terror that Comes in the Night*.

>>The point is that a lot has changed in ufology on both sides of
>>the Atlantic since those heady days in the seventies. And the
>>way American ufology has gone has been away from those landmark
>>publications, whereas in Euroland many of us have tended to
>>stick closer to the ideas of these great American pioneers.

>Like, you mean, Keyhoe, Hall, McDonald, Davis, Bloecher, Hynek,
>Webb, and all those other psychosocial theorists?

The great American pioneers I was thinking of were Hendry... and you. But as they say, the prophet is without honour in his own land.

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