



Aliens On Earth.com

Resources for those who are stranded here



[UFOs](#) | [Paranormal](#) | [Area 51](#)
[People](#) | [Places](#) | [Random](#)
[Top 100](#) | [What's New](#)
[Catalog](#) | [New Books](#)

Search... for keyword(s)

in Page Titles

Our Bookstore
is [OPEN](#)

[Mothership](#) -> [UFO](#) -> [Updates](#) -> [1999](#) -> [Jun](#) -> Here

UFO UpDates Mailing List

Re: Beyond the Blunderdome

From: Mendoza <DarkSecretPB@compuserve.com>
Date: Sat, 12 Jun 1999 22:30:48 -0400
Fwd Date: Sun, 13 Jun 1999 13:55:32 -0400
Subject: Re: Beyond the Blunderdome

With the compliments of the Duke of Mendoza (for it is he):

On Sat, 12 Jun 1999 15:08:56 +0100, Jenny Randles wrote:

>All this stuff about Max Burns brings up a critical issue
>about UFO credibility and the way we present ourselves in
>public. Surely that ids the issue here. It is what BUFORA
>utterly failed to read. They did the same thing with the
>fawning over the Santilli autopsy fiasco. Although I dare
>say they might - not unreasonably - cast back the point
>against various Sheffield events that, for instance, the IUN
>invited the likes of Budd Hopkins - when he is (without
>medical qualification) regressing five year old children and
>promoting the image of nasty grays raping humans. Somehow
>there is not a lot of difference here. Both are apparently
>honest UFOlogists expressing a view that most of us consider
>not only fundamentally wrong but potentially destructive. We
>may hate these opinions but can we honourably suppress them
>all?

I believe I was among if not the first to express some outrage in public at Budd Hopkins's regression of small children, in a review in "Fortean Times" of an IUN Sheffield conference in approximately 1993. In his presentations (which I taped, but I write from memory) he actually admitted the children were as young as two and a half.

I don't think Hopkins is honest, although he may be sincere in his own peculiar way. Nor do I think Mad Max is honest. In neither case, however, do I think there is any question of deliberate misrepresentation or hucksterism. But it surely is self-deception, which I've called intellectual dishonesty (see UFO UpDates, passim), and for which I've been most vehemently reprimanded, most often by people who I'd naively expected would know better. That the strongest detractors are citizens of the United States is not, I think, entirely coincidental.

Pleasant as it is to talk about oneself, I am actually also pointing these couple of things out for an impartial & (I think) disinterested purpose. I imagine most people receiving this de facto discussion list also know I've sounded off at length at Max & the BUFORA clowns in attempts to get them to see the difference between free speech and promoting claptrap. Thus far Jenny and I have no argument.

But I would caution that this recommendation (a) goes too far as a matter of principle and (b) is unenforceable in practice:

>Let us all take the decision here and now that
>any public event we organise involve the invitation only of

>serious researchers who can put forward hard evidence with a
>demonstrably scientific basis and who do not endorse
>patently absurd, unscientific ideas without support. Nor
>that we should invite anyone who sets before the public a
>scenario that has damaging moral or ethical repercussions.

Taking the second point (b) first, does anyone really think that the Birdsall brothers - for example - will wash their hands of the likes of Stan Friedman, Linda Mouldy Cowe, Hopkins and his neophytes, Tony Dodd, Harry Harris, Nick Pope, Tim Good - all of whom strike me as unhinged in varying degrees - et al? The Birdsalls are in business as conference impresarios, not in the business of promoting objective analyses of ostensibly anomalous phenomena. Ergo they will promote the proponents of the more sensational claims, to put bums on seats. No more, come to that, will the likes of Alice Earle and Jame Watkins at John Brown suddenly begin to shrink from inviting the likes of Hopkins, Graham Hancock, Philip Mantle & c & c, to FT UnConventions.

But between the Birdsall approach and FT's lies an important difference, and one that we might take as a more practical approach to the problem of "seriousness" (as in those cant & much abused phrases "serious ufologists" and "serious researchers"). The FT UnCons never fail to lay on a fine array of skeptics and debunkers to balance the mental diet. Hopkins, for example, had to contend with the presence of Hilary Evans, and even (aaiiiee!) the dread Phil Klass at a recent UnCon, and made a right pratt of himself, earning several well-deserved hisses and boos, by refusing to appear on the same stage as Klass for a panel discussion.

So, rather than leave these matters to the vagaries of some kind of ad hoc democracy, as in--

>As these things require common sense and someone to make a
>value judgement we dont want to set ourselves up as the
>thought police. So I suggest we agree a second principle,
>if we make a value judgement and yet someone whom we invite
>still clearly offends the sensitivities of people out there
>- such responsible criticism should be heeded. If it is
>apparent there is concern over an invite then a free vote is
>offered over the net - a simple yes/no to whether that
>person should be considered suitable for invite and that the
>decision to run with that lecturer or to cancel the invite
>be abided by whatever the outcome of this vote.

--I'd commend all and sundry to invite whom they like, barking as they may be, to their conferences, but to ensure that a rational and balanced voice is on the same programme to present the qualifying point of view. Even the Birdsalls could rise to that, though they seem to do so rarely. (What they have yet to learn is that skeptics and curmudgeons like Hilary Evans, Andy Roberts, Ian Ridpath and I visibly pack any hall as thoroughly as the most devout of True Believers, *and* we get bigger laughs besides. The Birdsalls' real mistake - which you could divine from the arrogant tone of their dreadful magazine - is to underestimate the intelligence and the tolerance of their market.)

Presenting a balanced list of speakers at least would satisfy this point from Jenny--

>Otherwise we face the question of setting ourselves up to
>make moral choices about who should be empowered to speak
>and who should not. I dont see how we can fairly do that.

And nor do I, for what that's worth. I don't see how "we", whichever actual "we" is at issue, can do it with a straight face, either. But that isn't quite the point I want to make - which is in (a) above, that (in effect) censoring the lunatic fringe - some of whom, like David Jacobs, are regarded as mainstream geniuses, of course, such is the oddity of the field - is wrong in principle. The principle *isn't* free speech, because any nutter can get an audience one way or another (Mark Pilkington charges very reasonable rates to set up a website), but simply dissemination of information. It's in the interests of the sane to know what the loopy are promoting. And the sane, I have to harp a bit, are every bit as much in the audiences as they are on the stand. It's also surely in the interests of the sane to have the opportunity to haul the loopy across the

coals, either in public Q&A sessions or in the bar or over breakfast, God forbid, or dinner.

The presentation of conferences could be rethought a trifle too. Ever since the FT UnCons began Lynn Picknett and I have been muttering, to absolutely no avail, at the organizers - I use the term loosely - to set up dialogues instead of those wondrously unproductive "panel discussions" they lay on. Lynn thought it would be good theatre and informative to boot for her to discuss the Turin Shroud, one-to-one, with Ian Wilson (you bet it would be!). I suggested Colin Andrews talking to/with/at Rob Irving. We can all, I'm sure, think of similar oppositions - Jerry Clark versus Tony Dodd on animal mutilations would be a nice one. John Rimmer versus the editor of Hall's Rules for Printers and Compositors would make an especially ripe affair. So that's a wheeze some of you in the conference biz may like to ponder a bit.

>Let us agree a declaration like I have
>just set out (that obviously needs fine tuning) and those of
>us who accept it - on behalf of ourselves and groups we
>represent -then issue it as a proclamation to the UFO world
>ASAP encouraging other UFO groups to sign up to the
>initiative. The plan would be to demonstrate globally that
>we are voluntarily setting standards as regards to the
>people we invite to give our public lectures - even if it
>means not inviting some whose dramatic claims and media
>stardom would attract audiences and put money into our
>coffers. We are putting the principle of only promoting
>good, serious, defensible research and theorising first and
>any personal gain second. This will send a small message
>that we do care about self policing UFOlogy and making
>efforts to do the right thing by educating the public -
>surely one of our primary aims.

By all means make a declaration, though I also enquire if you've ever heard of the Haslemere Declaration and the Port Huron Statement and know what they said, and if you haven't & don't I shouldn't be at all surprised, because such things tend to acquire a mantle of obscurity with some alacrity. Certainly make plain your standards (with which, so far, I'm not quibbling). But do bear in mind the practicalities, which includes dragging in the punters and even making a profit, and the principle of information. Better to set things up so that you can expose, in all senses of the word, the woofiness of a Max Burns or a David Jacobs than to appear prim and puritanical and actually be censorious. It's surely not that hard to make it clear you think such characters are bonkers - well, that you disagree with their general drift and the basis of their thinking, let's say - even while letting them say their piece. Censorship, however it's dressed up, is an admission of fear and insecurity. And the Brits ought to be last people to indulge in censorship. Better debate the opposition openly. Better, in other words, a public hanging than a furtive assassination.

best wishes
Peter B

PS: On Sat, 12 Jun 1999 20:22:28 +0100 Tim Matthews wrote:

>It is simply not the case that UFO researchers are going
>to fund each other - so what do we do?

A hostage to fortune, this remark, if ever I saw one. Maybe UFO researchers can't pay one another's wages, but one thing Tim Matthews could at least do is extract his tardy digit and pay my expenses for getting to and from his LUFOS conference a mere 18 months ago. Since LUFOS is plainly not a not-for-profit organization, you'd think that the tax advantages of paying debts would be sufficient incentive to keep the books straight. Let other would-be speakers at Matthews's conferences be warned by my tiresome experience.

[[Next Message](#) | [Previous Message](#) | [This Day's Messages](#)]
[[This Month's Index](#) | [UFO UpDates Main Index](#) | [MUFON Ontario](#)]

UFO UpDates - Toronto - updates@globalserve.net

Operated by Errol Bruce-Knapp - ++ 416-696-0304

A Hand-Operated E-Mail Subscription Service for the Study of UFO Related Phenomena.

To subscribe please send your first and last name to updates@globalserve.net

Message submissions should be sent to the same address.

[[UFO Topics](#) | [People](#) | [Ufomind What's New](#) | [Ufomind Top Level](#)]

To find this message again in the future...

Link it to the appropriate [Ufologist](#) or [UFO Topic](#) page.

Archived as a public service by [Area 51 Research Center](#) which is not responsible for content.

Software by Glenn Campbell. Technical contact: webmaster@ufomind.com

Financial support for this web server is provided by the [Research Center Catalog](#).