

Reporting on UFOs

How the mainstream press avoids UFO stories



by Tim R. Swartz

On November 26, 2002, North American Aerospace Defense Command began receiving reports of a contrail of unknown origin in the air over the Turks and Caicos Islands in the Caribbean. Fighter jets were scrambled from several bases to intercept the unknown that was heading northwest toward the U.S., but reportedly, nothing was spotted. Commercial airline pilots later reported the contrail over Florida and later over Indiana.

This fascinating report received scant attention in the U.S. press, which is unusual

considering the zeal for “national security” that has been rampant since 9/11. The thought is disturbing that an unknown aircraft could fly with impunity over the United States and receive only a few paragraphs in local papers. What could possibly explain this odd lack of curiosity by the national media?

Actually, the failure of the press to respond to this story is no surprise considering that the mainstream press has developed the attitude that UFO reports are strictly for the tabloids. This position has become so pervasive that when some edi-

tors and journalists have attempted serious, well researched UFO investigations, they have found themselves isolated by their peers.

The popular misconception is that UFOs are seen only by the uneducated, the mentally ill, or hoaxers seeking personal gain. Because of this, many think that any reporter interested in handling such a story must also be so inclined. Heaven help a journalist who has had a personal UFO experience and attempts to report on it. He may face severe questions concerning his credibility.

There had been some hope within the UFO community that the subject of UFOs would be given fair treatment when ABC ran the special *Peter Jennings Reporting: UFOs—Seeing Is Believing* on February 24, 2005. However, the program had little to do with objectively reporting on the UFO phenomenon and instead dealt more with debunking the extraterrestrial hypothesis, treating the subject as if this was the only explanation for UFOs. For those who have been active over the years in UFO research, the ABC show was just more of the same when it comes to the media’s mindset toward the phenomena.

According to the current attitude with the news media, there has never been anything mysterious about UFO sightings; they can all be easily explained away with glib, uninformed blanket statements. However, this has not always been the case. In the late 1940s the mainstream press regularly covered UFO reports. At that time UFOs were a relatively unknown phenomenon and

had not been tainted by the “lunatic fringe” that would surface in the 1950s and ’60s. By then, most media outlets had become discouraged by the lack of progress in explaining UFOs and little, if any, verifiable evidence.

By the time the 1970s had rolled around, UFO stories were permanently consigned to the back pages next to the horoscope column. Except for local, small-town papers, the news media rarely reports UFO sightings. When they do, the subject is presented as a “feature story,” not to be taken seriously. In large metropolitan newspapers, the occasional UFO report that does get printed is usually restricted to the paper’s entertainment section.

A Few Brave Souls

Some journalists have taken on the challenge of serious UFO investigations. Unfortunately, many have suffered setbacks in their careers as a result of their research. Others have been ignored or permanently ostracized. One such journalist, who was not afraid of the stigma of reporting on UFOs, was White House correspondent Sarah McClendon, who covered the White House beat for over 50 years. As an independent freelance reporter, McClendon provided a strong and assertive role model for journalists by asking controversial and provocative questions.

In 1998, McClendon reported in her newspaper column, newsletter, and radio commentary about the call from ufologists and enthusiasts for government disclosure on UFOs and the establishment of a global



Sarah McClendon and Bill Clinton.

scientific conference on the subject. McClendon said, "The lid on UFOs is gradually coming off. There is a national drive to get one million signatures on a petition calling for an open Congressional hearing for government employee witnesses."

A March 30, 1998, press release from McClendon stated that, "Unidentified Flying Objects, a term given for many years to unexplained sightings of craft in the skies over every state in the Union, are actual visitors from other worlds, believe a community of scientists and technicians employed by government.

"The real danger to the U.S. and perhaps this whole planet is the government has placed such a heavy blanket of se-

crecy upon this issue. So much secrecy, those in government who have knowledge showing UFOs are identifiable feel the subject cannot be discussed by those in the know without serious repercussions. Others are afraid their friends and co-workers will think they are crazy if they even so much as insinuate that UFOs are identifiable as manned craft from outside the earth. This particularly applies to newspaper editors and publishers, reporters and analysts. Thus the U.S. is denying itself the chance to learn more about UFOs or to encourage research despite the fact the United States stands to gain from such discussions."

Other reporters have put their reputations on the line by trying to report on

UFOs, only to find their efforts unexpectedly thwarted.

In a recent article entitled "More Proof of Media UFO Coverup," reporter Greg Boone recounted his UFO experience while employed at the *Poughkeepsie Journal* newspaper in New York state. On August 25 1985, Boone, along with ten other newsmen, received word from a photographer that a huge, boomerang-shaped UFO was slowly flying over the area.

The photographer stated that the craft was headed south and it might be visible from the third-floor office windows. The ten journalists rushed to the windows and watched in amazement as a dark shape with amber and red lights and about 100 feet above the ground slowly approached their building.

"This thing got huge and believe it or not flew right over top of us by about 40 feet," Boone recalled. "It had to be 200 feet wide and was jet black."

Boone and his colleagues were certain that they had the story of the century.

"We had access to AP, Gannett, etc., and *USA Today*, which we mainly put out. Nope. Word came down from on high that not one word was to be mentioned. Solid object, hovered, maneuvered, seen by tens of thousands, pictures taken, and no mention anywhere.

"The next day, some 'menacing' chaps showed up in our editorial office. I got in trouble for staring back just as menacingly. That night at the local watering hole where I would sit and do sketches after work

another big menacing fellow waltzes in with a stack of papers and pictures eight inches high. Slams them on the bar and bellows a threat: 'So! Somebody in here wanted to talk about UFOs?'

"He made a big mistake. My high school and college chums were at the bar that night and were just as big and menacing. He was ceremoniously ushered out of the bar by about 3,000 pounds of very angry citizens."

Press Blackouts

Even though it has been denied, there is no doubt that the military and other government agencies have been responsible at times for press blackouts concerning UFO sightings. Government orders to silence the press about UFOs are not, however, contained strictly within the United States. In 1996, a top-level BBC executive let slip that there is a D-Notice (black-out) on media reporting of black triangle UFOs. The executive, who has kept his identity hidden, is the former producer of a popular BBC science program. He told one investigator that the black triangle UFO has been "heavily D-Noticed" by the British government. Consequently the BBC will not be reporting on the strange UFO, no matter how many witness reports they receive.

According to the former producer, the government has quietly informed the BBC that the craft is part of a new secret military project and is protected under the secrecy laws.

ous pieces that ridicule everyone involved, no matter how impressive their credentials.

Taking Responsibility

Tom Burch, in his article "Opinions Disguised as News," writes, "The UFO phenomenon is newsworthy and deserves professional news coverage. There are many more angles to the UFO subject than the news media seems to recognize. This in itself is weighty evidence to suggest that the news media is fundamentally ignorant of the facts relating to the UFO issue. For example, the media fails to sense that there is more substance to the UFO controversy than just the question of whether or not extraterrestrials are visiting our Earth. While the answer to this question has a most profound significance to us all if the answer is 'yes,' it is not the only question being asked by UFO investigators."

Burch goes on to write that the very persistence of the UFO controversy is newsworthy in itself.

"The UFO debate merits news coverage because both sides of the UFO dispute are articulated by highly credentialed spokespersons from science, industry, and academia. Each side in the dispute has something to say. Each side has inherent strengths and weaknesses in its argument. Both the proponents and opponents in the UFO controversy deserve equal time in a public forum, and the American people deserve access to it. The public does have a right to know."

To be fair, the study of UFO reports is fraught with problems for the media. In order to present a story fairly and accurately, a journalist must have concrete, verifiable evidence. As any responsible UFO researcher will tell you, solid evidence for the physical reality of UFOs has been hard to come by. Despite the thousands, maybe millions, of UFO sightings over the decades, the evidence that has been uncovered so far has been mostly anecdotal. Even when solid evidence has been brought forward, such as the mysterious metal parts said to be from a crashed flying saucer and sent to radio talk show host Art Bell, there are still many unanswered questions that would prevent most journalists from taking on such a controversial story.

Perhaps the time will come when a courageous newspaper editor or national television news director will decide to take the time and effort to conduct a real, objective investigative report on UFOs. Until then, the press will continue to avoid their responsibility by bombarding the public with soft, silly stories about little green men from outer space and the interesting people who always seem to encounter them. ☺

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UFO over Capitol building.

In the United States the press has become “self-policing” when it comes to serious, investigative reports on the UFO phenomenon. Rarely will the larger media outlets in the major markets allow anything but the silliest UFO stories to reach the public. On the rare occasion that a legitimate UFO-related story does make the headlines, more often than not, the reporter will add personal opinions to the piece in an attempt to save face and invoke the “giggle factor.”

It's All Just One Big Joke

A good example of this was science writer Lee Dye's July 1, 1998, column on the ABC News website. Dye's column dealt

with the Laurance Rockefeller-funded 50-page report that called for reexamination of UFO evidence. The report, issued by an international panel of nine scientists, focused on physical phenomena such as photographs, radar readings, and biological effects of UFO incidents and was highly supported by astrophysicist Peter Sturrock of Stanford University.

Dye writes that, “No matter how carefully such a report is worded, it can't help but lend credibility to those who claim we've been visited by ETs. That isn't the point of the report, of course, but by calling for better scientific scrutiny of such claims, Sturrock and the other scientists have exposed themselves to the ‘giggle syndrome.’ The next time he attends a scientific symposium; he can expect a few snickers when he walks in the room.

“In interviews with reporters after the study was released, Sturrock said life probably abounds throughout the universe, but ‘most physicists believe it is quite impossible to travel from one star to another.’ Most physicists? What about him? All he's willing to say is let's take another look at the evidence. OK, but no giggling.”

Clearly, Dye has interjected his own personal opinions on the subject rather than reporting on the story objectively. This is the real underlying problem when it comes to impartial reporting on UFOs. Many journalists feel that the subject is just “too weird” to warrant real investigation. Instead, most take the low road of journalism and turn their stories into humor-

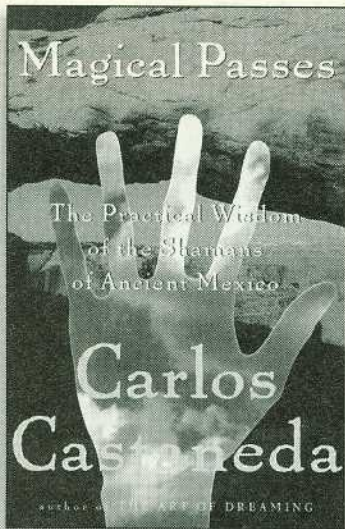
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the ancient movements, renamed by Castaneda by combining two words: "tension" and "integrity."

The book consists of photos depicting positions and movements, along with explanations for the forces the movements are supposed to empower: "mashing energy," "stirring up energy," "the heat series," and so forth. The approximately 30 chapters each deal with a different set of movements designed to stimulate energies in different physical regions.

One of the real problems with this book is the lack of originality of the exercises — they look and feel like a cross between Eastern Tai Chi and Western calisthenics, without Tai Chi's elegance or calisthenics' vigor. Readers are asked to believe that these are "magical passes," when in fact they are just slow-motion gymnastic routines that favor upper body movements and are almost completely devoid of footwork.

Another profound problem is that



the writing itself — while quite literate and intelligent — lacks veracity. For instance, Castaneda quotes the rural Mexican shaman as saying: "To be transformed into an inorganic being was evolution for them..." (p. 104)

It stretches credibility to expect a reader to believe that a shaman not schooled in a Western university setting would use a vocabulary that included

concepts like "evolution" and "inorganic." After many repetitions of this level of discourse, we are left with the sense that the whole thing is the product of the author's erudite imagination.

On the plus side, for an individual who has no daily habits of exercise, this book might provide a healthful alternative to couch-potatoism. It's not "magical," nor "practical wisdom," but a good exercise program couldn't hurt. — Anita Evangelista

Hollywood Vs. the Aliens: The Motion Picture Industry's Participation in UFO Disinformation

Bruce Rux
Frog, Ltd., Berkeley CA
softcover, 1997, 681 pgs., \$19.95

If, says film historian Bruce Rux, you carefully examine the sci-fi/horror/fantasy movies of the past half century, you will clearly understand that the film industry, covertly influenced (and perhaps funded) by the federal government, has fed us a carefully chosen blend of facts and fiction about UFOs.

Thanks to this cinematic disinformation program, says Rux, who reviews scores of films as well as major TV shows and series in his book, most Americans have been cunningly manipulated into believing that there is nothing of substance in 50-plus years of UFO reports and abduction claims. We watch, we shiver, we laugh — but when most of us leave the theater, we don't really believe in alien visitors.

According to Rux, this cinematic UFO disinformation program was a direct, albeit covert, outgrowth of the recommendations by the Robertson panel. This panel, comprised of a half-dozen CIA-selected scientists, reviewed a number of carefully selected UFO sighting reports, decided we weren't threatened by alien visitors, and recommended an "educational program" to strip the public of the beliefs they had built up about UFOs.

The CIA, working with the National Security Agency and other covert gov-

ernmental groups, then co-opted a number of major Hollywood figures — producers, writers, directors, and actors, many of whom were ex-World War II intelligence team members — to produce a variety of sci-fi flicks that mixed fact and fiction about various aspects of UFO and abduction reports in such a manner that movie audiences could not sustain a rational belief in the existence of visiting extraterrestrials. Rux cites film after film where UFO misinformation contributes to laughter at the expense of logic. If you watch much late night TV, you've likely seen some of them.

Unfortunately, for all his suppositions, inferences, and chains of reasoning, I don't find Rux ultimately convincing. Where UFOs are concerned, I think the film industry has been behind, not out in front, of public fads, interests, and concerns. Hollywood doesn't move unless it thinks a market exists, and once it is convinced, everyone gets into the act. Movie moguls are mostly imitators, not innovators.

I think this book is tediously long. Spread out the reading. Maybe a chapter a night. You may find it more plausible than I do; but no matter how you react to Rux's ideas, your late night TV watching may never be the same! — George W. Earley

Worth Noting

Many FATE authors write books as well as articles. Here are five recent ones that relate to our traditional September theme, UFOs.

Africa's best-known UFO investigator and occasional FATE contributor Cynthia Hind is the author of UFOs Over Africa (Horus House Press, PO Box 55185, Madison WI 53705, 1996, softcover, 254 pgs., \$15.95), one of the few available books on this subject. Hind, MUFON's African coordinator, gives details of several of her investigations, one of which turned out to be an initially convincing hoax, and others, including the incident at Ariel school reported in FATE in April 1997, which have no known earthly explanation.

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TAPES, VIDEOS, ETC.

BOOK REVIEWS

Your Dreams and Your Stars

David F. Melbourne and

Helen Adams

Blandford Press

London, England

Softcover, 1998, 192 pgs., \$12.95

Dream analyst David Melbourne and astrologer Helen Adams unite their talents in this fascinating book that provides a new way to tap the tremendous potential of the subconscious.

The authors believe dreams and their interpretation have a direct link to astrology. They maintain that dream symbols mean something different for each dreamer depending on a variety of factors, such as the subject's nationality, gender, and occupation. As a result, standard dream dictionary definitions cannot be trusted to interpret the true meaning of dreams.

The key to understanding dreams, Melbourne and Adams contend, comes from analyzing them in relation to the dreamer's astrological natal chart. A natal chart is the map that shows the position of the planets at the time of a person's birth and how these planetary positions influence human behavior.

Using the dreamer's natal chart as the background for the interpretation places the dream in a broader context. It helps identify what area of life the dream relates to and helps the dreamer discover the dream's inner dynamics.

The authors say other astrological events such as transits or progressions may also influence the timing of the dream, revealing different stages in the dreamer's development. Transits are the ongoing movement of the planets in relation to the natal chart, and astrological progression is the slow but steady evolution of our natal energies as we move through life.

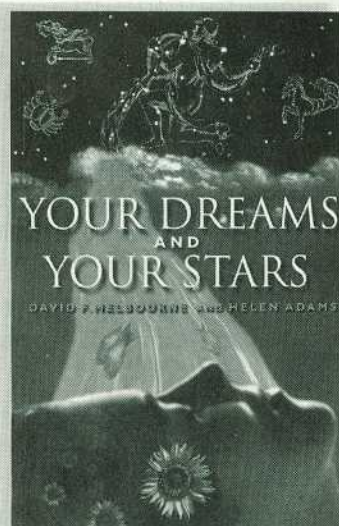
Whether or not dreamers have any knowledge of astrology, they often experience images that match those of a progressed Moon or a particular transit phase.

This type of analysis provides new insights into the dreamer's life and helps people become more conscious of their purpose.

The interpretations do more than just decode the message concealed in a dream. They also suggest ways in which the dreamer may act on that message to harmonize discordant factors in his or her life.

This book is for anyone with a basic understanding of astrology and an interest in exploring this revolutionary form of dream analysis. The authors recommend recording dreams on a nightly basis. A five-page questionnaire for specific dream interpretation is also included in the book.

Combining astrology and dream interpretation provides an immediate way to access the inner worlds in order to release the guidance of the higher self. Working with our dreams and the energies inherent in our stars give us the courage to move into new areas and effect constructive change in our lives. — Luann Wolfe



Project Mindshift: The Re-Education of the American Public Concerning Extraterrestrial Life 1947-Present

Michael Mannion

M. Evans and Co., New York

Hardcover, 1998, 304 pgs., \$19.95

Some scientists, despite years of derision, have decided that UFO sightings might be worth looking into after all. This recent announcement could have startling implications for the entire UFO field. If those scientists are sincere, then the hypothesis proposed in *Project Mindshift* — that the U.S. government has waged a subtle propaganda campaign for more than 50 years to prepare the masses for the fact that extraterrestrials are here and we will eventually have to deal with them — may be a reality.

Author Michael Mannion begins by outlining the case for the reality of UFOs and government secrecy. In a sense, you cannot really blame any country for burying the subject over the last half century, he argues. First there was the battle against Nazi Germany and Japan, then the Korean War and a Cold War that threatened to erupt into nuclear conflict at any time. Only in the last seven or eight years have potential earthly threats eased sufficiently to warrant a serious and public look into the possibility of extraterrestrial or interdimensional life visiting us.

Every new invention, political development, or medical discovery has required a change in public attitudes, or *mindshift*,

Mannion writes. But all pale in comparison with the idea of intelligent extraterrestrials visiting Earth. Since a gradual accommodation is easier to take than a sudden shock, some researchers feel the government would be morally obligated to prepare us by instigating a re-education campaign.

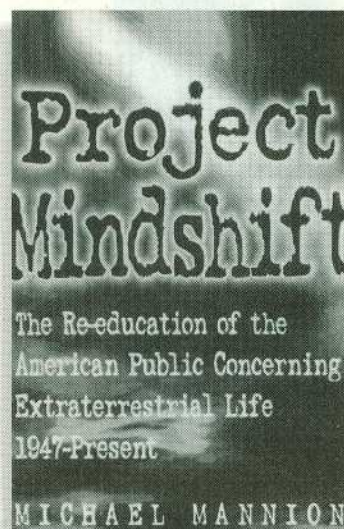
Mass media such as television and film would be ideal for such a program, provided the influence was subtle, according to Mannion. The problem with more direct information is that UFO researchers are now so distrustful of government disinformation that genuine material could be ignored or considered fraudulent.

Another potential source of government information are the odd "leaks" such as the infamous MJ-12 papers. It's possible the government allows these leaks. We need to ask if mavericks like Capt. Edward Ruppelt (*The Report on Unidentified Flying Objects*) and Major Donald Keyhoe (*Aliens from Space*) simply disagree with the American military's policy of covering up UFO reports, or were they early teachers in a re-education program?

Several years ago, for example, *Star Trek: The Next Generation* filmed an abduction episode that had various Enterprise crew members pulled from their stations at night by mysterious entities. Were the writers of this episode, whether knowingly or not, doing the government's re-education work?

Mannion also looks at other mass media including music, advertising, and the Internet, which is full of Websites that detail recent sightings. Of course there are hoaxes and misinformation out there, he notes, but it is becoming increasingly difficult to bury dramatic events.

I would have liked to see more about advertising and aliens, but on the whole, Mannion does a workmanlike job of laying out various scenarios, including a shift in scientific attitudes. A stimulating and thought-provoking book. — *W. Ritchie Benedict*



Even if there is no specific government campaign to impart hidden knowledge, such data could still emerge through the creative subconscious of film and television writers in a process akin to channeling, Mannion proposes.