

FSR BOOKSHELF — 14

New UFO books reviewed by . . .

Janet & Colin Bord

IN the mid-1970s the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal was formed, with the intention of attempting "to encourage the critical investigation of [the many kinds of paranormal and fringe-science claims] from a responsible, scientific point of view." In the ensuing years it has seemed to many non-members that the attitude shown by the Committee's spokesmen, in material published in their journal *Skeptical Inquirer* and elsewhere, is somewhat less than open-minded. Newcomers to the Committee's activities can judge for themselves by reading *Paranormal Borderlands of Science*, edited by Kendrick Frazier (large 474-page paperback published by Prometheus Books, 700 East Amherst Street, Buffalo, N.Y. 14215, U.S.A., price unknown), which is a collection of 47 articles from the *Skeptical Inquirer*.

The subject range is wide, and includes psi phenomena, Uri Geller, psychic photography, metal bending, Amityville horror, biorhythms, astrology, Bermuda Triangle, cattle mutilations, dowsing, Von Däniken, psychic archaeology, Velikovsky, Tunguska, and UFOs.

Among the articles there is some silliness (notably "Do Fairies Exist?" by Robert Sheaffer) and some valuable material (including the fascinating insight into "cold reading" — how psychics convince sitters that they know all about them).

The UFO material is not particularly earth-shattering. Philip J. Klass writes on "NASA, the White House, and UFOs" and on "UFOs, the CIA, and the New York Times;" James Oberg examines and explains the UFO sightings allegedly made by astronauts, and the 1979 Persian Gulf "UFO" (satellite rocket booster falling to earth), David I. Simpson describes the 1970 Warminster UFO hoax, and Anthony Standen discusses "The Semantics of UFOs." However there is also a valuable 9-page review by Ernest H. Taves of *The Andreasson Affair* in which he points out the flaws in the investigation into Betty Andreasson's "abduction" and explains it in non-UFO terms.

Despite its uneven quality, this collection of articles is well worth reading. Although the sceptics are not always right, they can often blow a breath of fresh air on to subjects too long the province only of "believers." To make up our minds on any subject we must consider *all* points of view.

In FSR Vol. 26, No. 3 we reviewed the book *UFO . . . Contact from the Pleiades* which describes the contact claims of the Swiss Eduard Meier. Since then no evidence has been forthcoming to support his

claims and Meier has apparently made further claims and Meier has apparently made further claims which remove him from the realm of hoaxers and give him the aura of prankster and conman. In America **Kal K. Korff** was so incensed by Meier's effrontery, and the gullibility or chicanery of his American supporters and publishers, that he has attempted to gather the evidence together and expose their fraud. Much of this evidence, unfavourable to Meier, has been published before in various journals, but what is new is Korff's conversations with some of Meier's American supporters who originally accepted his wild stories and cleverly faked pictures and are now seen wriggling about trying to unhook themselves. Regrettably Korff's book is not well organised and will make muddled reading for anyone who is not already familiar with the story.

Ground Saucer Watch, the American group who say that their computer analysis of UFO photographs can show if they are genuine or not, have 40 of their computer photographs reproduced in the book. Unfortunately for the reader, the reproductions are too small (2½" × 3½") and of such poor quality that little can be learned from studying them, and as is usual with GSW analyses, their explanations of the methods used and how they arrived at their conclusions are inadequate and muddled and so their conclusions have to be taken on trust by the reader. Neither author Korff nor principal Meier advocate Wendelle Stevens appears to know what sort of camera Meier claimed to have used, for on page 38 Stevens is reported as saying that the mirror on the camera was jammed closed and Meier was therefore unable to view through it. Korff enlarges upon this statement by remarking that Meier used an Olympus single lens reflex, but all the evidence in the captions of the original *Pleiades* book shows that Meier's camera was one of the compact range-finder cameras made by Olympus, having no removable lens and therefore needing no reflex mirror. This sort of muddle over easily established technical detail is all too typical of so much UFO research and provides assistance to the hoaxers by muddying the trail. The book, a large size (8" × 11") staple-bound 124-page paperback, is a self-publishing exercise which would have benefited from some professional editorial help. The writing is often clumsy, and typographical errors abound.

In short, **The Meier Incident — The Most Infamous Hoax in Ufology!** is a blunt instrument wielded without much skill, when what ufology really needs is a scalpel used with precision. Nevertheless all UFO

cognoscenti who have so far collected Meier material will undoubtedly want to add this volume to their files. (Published by William L. Moore, P.O. Box 1845, Prescott, AZ 86302; also available from Arcturus Book Service, 263 N. Ballston Avenue, Scotia, N.Y. 12302, U.S.A., price \$6.50.)

Having 'examined the evidence' for UFOs, **Robert Sheaffer** has come to a decisive conclusion: 'UFOs, as a phenomenon distinct from all others, simply do not exist.' (p.211) Sheaffer is an arch-sceptic in the UFO field and as a result many UFO proponents will not wish to read this book. But they would be wrong to reject it without giving it a fair hearing. "Sceptical" does not necessarily mean "stupid," and an open-minded study of the book will show that Sheaffer has many valid points to make, although he does inevitably go too far in his dismissal of all the evidence for UFOs. **The UFO Verdict: Examining the Evidence** (Prometheus Books, N.Y., hardcover, 242 pages, illustrated with photographs, notes and index, \$15.95, available from Arcturus Book Service, address as above) covers a wide range of topics including physical trace cases, abductions, photographs, witchcraft and fairies, MIB, the New Zealand films. It is well written and entertaining, and Robert Sheaffer clearly gets a lot of fun out of UFOs. But it is a pity that a man of such obvious intelligence has not seen through his own refusal to take the subject seriously, and has not devoted his energy to exploring the very real mysteries that remain after the heaps of UFO garbage are cleared away.

In complete contrast is **Hilary Evans'** attitude towards UFOs and indeed all unexplained phenomena. In only six pages in his book **Intrusions: Society and the Paranormal** (Routledge & Kegan Paul, large-format paperback, £5.95, 206 pages, illustrated with photographs and engravings, bibliography and index) he makes a number of important points, including: that many "witnesses" are sincere but subconsciously hoaxing; that the media attitude is worthy of sociological study; that fear is covered up by ridicule; that UFOs are a social phenomenon meriting scientific attention. Sheaffer concluded that UFOs do not exist; Evans comments that "It is no business of this study to take sides as to whether there is any substance to UFO reports" (p.190). If only all ardent UFO students, be they for or against, could adopt this latter attitude, ufology would be in a far healthier state than it is. Sadly many ufologists are not even aware of their bias!

Hilary Evans' unfortunately brief reference to UFOs in *Intrusions* hints of a book that maybe he will one day write — a study of 'how contemporary society deals with a paranormal problem' (p.184). His present book is largely a study of attitudes to the paranormal in the past, which may be of interest to students of the

paranormal in all its aspects, but is unlikely to have the same impact on the general reader as would a book dealing with the unexplained phenomena of, say, the last fifty years.

Australian UFO researcher **Keith Basterfield** has written an interesting account of his own involvement in ufology: **Close Encounters of an Australian Kind**, subtitled "UFOs: The Image Hypothesis" (published by A. H. & A. W. Reed Pty Ltd, 2 Aquatic Drive, Frenchs Forest, Sydney, NSW 2086, Australia, price A\$5.95, 112-page paperback). The two titles indicate the two main themes of the book: a description of Australian close-encounter cases (including a section of 30 pages of abbreviated reports), some of them investigated by the author; and an examination of a hypothesis which he feels can account for many, if not most, so-called UFO events (excluding of course those with natural explanations). This is the ability of some people to produce spontaneous imagery within the mind, which is so vivid that they confuse it with reality.

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FOR COLLECTORS! Are you interested in obtaining copy of only Yugoslavian UFO/Forcean publication? It is published in the Slovenian language. For details write to: Miloš Krmelj, Milčinskega 6, 61000 Ljubljana, Slovenija, Yugoslavia.

It seems likely that such a mechanism as this may account for some UFO events, especially those occurring at night when the witnesses are in their bedrooms and in a state between sleep and wakefulness, and also to people driving alone at night. But it is stretching the theory too far to try and apply it to the majority of UFO events, daylight cases and multiple witness cases especially. The author over-enthusiastically tries to persuade us that even such phenomena as visions, witches and fairies are a result of imagery, but if the phenomenon is so widespread as he would have us believe, then one must begin to doubt one's eyes: is anything you think you are seeing really there? Unfortunately the UFO phenomenon cannot be explained so easily, though Keith Basterfield has given us a valuable insight into the origins of certain types of reports.

Spanish-speaking readers will be interested to know of a new book published in Spain — *Los Ovnis*

y la Ciencia (UFOs and Science) by Vicente-Juan Bal-
lester Olmos and Miguel Guasp. Dr Richard F. Haines writes in his Foreword that the authors have approached "the subject of scientific ufology systematically, carefully, critically." Perhaps some English-language publisher will be inspired to publish a translation before too long, so that we can all benefit from the authors' experience. The Spanish edition, a 382-page softcover with photographs, illustrations and tables, is available from Plaza & Janés, S.A., Export Department, Virgen de Guadalupe 21-33, Esplugas de Llobregat, Barcelona, Spain, price \$9 (U.S. dollars) or equivalent.

Two books reviewed earlier in their hardcover editions and now available in paperback are: *Arthur C. Clarke's Mysterious World* (Fontana, £4.50) and *Direct Encounters* by Judith M. and Alan L. Gansberg (Coronet, £1.25).

MAIL BAG

Correspondence is invited from our readers, but they are asked to keep their letters short. Unless letters give the sender's full name and address (not necessarily for publication) they cannot be considered. The Editor would like to remind correspondents that it is not always possible to acknowledge every letter personally, so he takes this opportunity of thanking all who write to him.

Queries on the report of the 1954 BOAC sighting

Dear Editor, — The editorial leader in Volume 27, Number 3 of FSR contained some interesting notes pertaining to the classic BOAC case of June 29, 1954, off the coast of Labrador. But these notes also present somewhat of a problem because they present certain inconsistencies with previous data on this case that have come to my attention. In particular I refer to an article entitled "BOAC's Flying Jellyfish," written by John Carnell, that appeared in an issue of *Fate* magazine some months after the sighting occurred. Included in the article was an extract from the Voyage Report of Captain James Howard. This Voyage Report and your editorial leader conflict on a number of points. It is the purpose of this letter to point out these seeming contradictions, and hopefully a clarifying response from you will be in order.

One contradiction concerns the cloud cover. According to Captain Howard's Voyage Report we learn the following: "The visibility at this altitude was unlimited, with no cloud other than low overcast." Yet according to your editorial leader the BOAC aircraft was flying "...just below a

layer of broken cloud..." Also, that the large UFO "...appeared to be shape-changing while threading its way through the broken cloud..." Was there broken cloud just above the Stratocruiser or wasn't there?

The contradiction that poses a major problem concerns the question of whether or not there was *radar confirmation* of the UFO formation? Obviously, this issue is central to this incident. Again, according to Captain Howard's Voyage Report we learn the following, "I spoke to Fighter Control and he said he picked us up at 01.13 G.M.T. (when we had the object in sight), but had nothing else on his screen but us." Yet according to your editorial leader the intercepting USAF Fighter "...reported radar contact at 16 miles, with two images showing up — presumably those of the aeroplane and the large object." Also, "...and these had been intercepted on radar by Control — as implied by the pilot being ordered to 'hold.'" This is a major disparity that has arisen, and one that demands a satisfactory resolution.

Incidentally, there is *no* mention in the Voyage Report of the long "hold" delay of the Stratocruiser cited in your editorial leader. Another unresolved question!

The BOAC case is far too important

to allow these questions to remain. Your clarification of these matters would be greatly appreciated. Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,
Herbert L. Taylor,
3400 Fifth Street,
Oceanside, New York 11572
U.S.A.

January 3, 1982

[Please see Captain Howard's article elsewhere in this issue, and the editorial leader on page 1 — EDITOR]

A travesty of a Programme

Dear Sir, — I would like to voice an opinion on Thames Television's *White Light* programme which I saw on 13 November '81. I am a police officer, and although I was on duty, I managed to arrange my refreshment period to cover the programme.

And I assume many other people expected to see a debate on at least some well-known UFO reports.

I was disgusted by the way Gordon Creighton was treated by the so-called chairman, and the "gang" of teenagers who giggled most of the time. The big mistake was to treat these morons as responsible adults.

I thought Mr Creighton very polite