

"I think I've spotted a phenomenon!"

The above phrase was quoted in a national UFO magazine as being uttered by a UFO investigator in the United States, having just observed a low-flying nocturnal light in a field. It ranks as one of the most forgettable quotes I have ever read or heard of, and at the same time, it sticks in my head like glue whenever I'm in the company of a UFO buff. Perhaps I'd better define this term - "buff", since many of you reading this consider me to be such a person. My definition of buff is someone who sits up all night in a field, waiting for a flying saucer to land near him or her. The same swallows everything he or she reads in print on the subject, and accepts each eloquent account of a UFO sighting at face value, with no questions or analyses. That is a buff.

I am a UFO skeptic in some ways. Most of the reports that reach me are misidentifications of one sort or another, and it is only rarely that I deem a sighting as "unknown". But when I do, it is only after I have examined all the data, and found no conventional explanation for the observed phenomenon. During the years I have investigated UFO reports and tracked down innumerable rumors of this and that, I have become convinced of one thing: something is being seen; something unique and possibly beyond our present-day knowledge of science. To suggest that all the sincere people who have related their sightings to me are the victims of hallucinations, is crazy! Something is being observed, but whether it falls under the category of physics or not, it is definitely worth serious consideration by the scientific community.

Unfortunately, perhaps, I am not a scientist. I am, however, scientific in my attitude, towards the subject. While this does absolutely nothing, for my credentials, I know that I am a cut or two above those accredited scientists who dismiss the UFO phenomenon entirely, using such over-popular words as "hogwash" and "psycock". Take Carl Sagan (please!). He is an open-minded scientist who speculates on everything from interstellar travel to evolution, yet dismisses UFO's in the same lump of collective dross as the Bermuda Triangle and the Hollow Earth. Hey to go, Carl!

To change the subject a bit, I thought I'd describe the nature and purpose of this zine. If I can. This, the Swamp Gas Journal, is my first attempt to air my views in print. It is officially a one-shot, since I have neither the time nor the money to publish a running magazine. I hope that I can make it interesting for my associates in both the fields of science and science fiction, and also for just anyone else who is peripherally interested in the subject. As I say, this is my first attempt at this, so spelling mistakes (such as the one two lines back) are inevitable. I haven't fully decided on the slant of this zine, though I know I want to include a wide variety of thoughts and ideas, covering most facets of ufology.

I am the co-director of the Manitoba Centre for UFO studies at the Manitoba Planetarium, and also the research co-ordinator. It seems, however, that the media tend to make a few errors here and there on my capacity and that of other members of the Centre. They have deemed us "Dr.'s", and one of us the "head" of the group. But such is life, as the media sometimes assure more than they ought, with the result being incorrect information.

Some researchers would ignore the latter half of the incident, while some would reject the whole thing. Others would believe it entirely, without trying to figure out where it fits in the cosmic plan. Scientists drew their own various conclusions. I can remember a Science Teachers' Conference I attended in October of 1977, which featured a talk by Dr. J. Allen Hynek, followed by a talk given by Dr. MacKenara of the National Research Center in Ottawa, where all (supposedly) Canadian UFO reports go to end up getting dusty in old file cabinets. I had to give him credit, speaking after Hynek like that (talk about hard acts to follow). He went ahead and explained how Langenburg and other such landing trace cases were caused by fairy ring mushrooms. This came at a particularly good time for me, as I had just returned from Roseburn, Manitoba, where I had investigated some really good rings, just 45 miles east of Langenburg. It really amazed me how MacKenara could stand up there, show photos of fairy rings bearing no resemblance whatsoever to the Langenburg rings, and convince a good half of the audience of his sound logic. Remember, this was a Teachers' Conference.

Come to think of it, I was at Lower Fort Garry the other day, and was shown some necklaces made from fairy ring mushrooms, strung together. I asked if there was a fairy ring nearby, and was directed to a patch of ground just outside. Lo and behold, there it was, a fairy ring, in all its green splendour, and totally unlike a UFO ring. Isn't nature grand?

An alternative title for this mine was to be "Agrigor", which means "thought form". A trend in UFOlogy today is the idea of a cosmic consciousness that our minds somehow tap into from time to time, resulting in a UFO or UFO-related phenomena appearing to the individual in a thought form (agrigor) or entity, depending on the individual's state of mind. This could explain why there are so many different shapes and kinds of UFO's reported, but doesn't explain landing trace cases unless we include other things such as telekinetic, actual extraterrestrials or outright hoaxes. But notice that it is very easy to get even further off the beaten track of empirical science, and into what the rationalists call pseudo-science. I personally feel that the UFO problem is a collection of bits of each of the theories, turning it into a truly intertwined series of strings of "character" data. (type: series). Else, some pattern and/or simple solution would have emerged long ago. Perhaps some UFO's are, indeed, extraterrestrial visitors; perhaps a special few are manifestations of thought forms. At any rate, it would all be much easier if they were from Mars.

Maybe they are.

I typed that as a lead-in to this paragraph (notice the continuity). The connection between UFO's and science fiction, at least in my mind, is strong and prominent. Skeptics, of course, have thought this all along, but in a different sense than I mean. I refer to the UFO literature, both the factual and the fictitious. The former reads like SF, the latter is SF. UFO skeptics see no difference between the two. But on the other hand, many science fiction authors refuse to include UFO's with standard SF themes, and also disregard their true science content, placing them in limbo.

I had at one time read a story about how UFO's actually do come from Mars, despite the fact that modern science says they don't, so far. It was based on the old underground caves idea, and had the Martians scurrying for cover whenever an American or Russian Mars Lander came down. Anything is possible, especially, I suppose, in science fiction.

The media, of course, are responsible for much of the false ideas people have about UFO's. Whenever a newscaster reports yet another UFO sighting, it is very hard not to notice the sarcasm in his voice, or visualize the smile upon his face. The media have generously given us such honorable phrases as "little green men" and "flying saucer", both of these coming from the tangle of words pouring from a reporter's typewriter. And speaking of reporters, I remember one time when I was on Peter Warren's phone-in radio show on CJOB, when he, in his famous tactful manner, opened the phone lines with the words: "Okay, let's hear from the crazies!". Long live objectivity.

Mind you, it's easy to see why such an attitude has developed. It is indeed hard for the average person to accept the totally bizarre UFO reports one usually hears on the radio or sees on TV. UFO researchers are confronted with a phenomenon that refuses to behave in a rational and sensible manner. I don't mean the nocturnal lights, but the really baffling, unusual cases, like the Hill or Walton abductions, or the Michael's incident. This is when something truly out of the ordinary forces closed-minded skeptics to say "ohhh" and walk away, in spite of the fact a phenomenon was actually observed and recorded for data.

Many a time, I'll come across a good close encounter with an element of incredulity suggestive of a Kessler's essence. For example, a case I investigated near Elkton, Kentucky, involved two hunters who were driving their truck through a swampy area in the fall of 1976. They suddenly hit a mudhole, and got out of their vehicle to see if they had to push. They were startled to see two, silver, "hamburger-shaped" objects rise up out of a dense thicket less than 50 yards away from them. The objects had lights around rims, and a red "RCMP light" on their undersurfaces. The two both said that they felt like they were "paralysed" or "frozen" while the objects hovered for a few seconds, then flew slowly away, humming softly. So far, this is an average Close Encounter of the First Kind, with a low "strangeness" factor. But: the two decided they would return home, get their hip waders, and then explore the area where the two objects had been. Doing so, they could not find anything remotely resembling a "saucer nest". However, they did find, at the estimated location where one of the objects was thought to have been, "a monkey's hand in a clear plastic bag", "sealed like a record (heat-sealed)". But the two were not certain the hand was that of a monkey, since the skin color was only "slightly darker than a 'normal' hand", with "not a lot of brown hair." The hand "looked frozen", was half the size of a human hand, and somehow also seemed fresh, despite the fact that there was no blood in the bag. The two thought its appearance was "like a young child's", in some ways; both were dumbfounded by their unusual find. Curious, the two took the bag with the hand, and placed it in their truck, and headed home, expecting to show it to their friends. However, as soon as they drove away, they "had a lot of trouble and bad luck", such as the truck stalling and lurching repeatedly, as it hit nuts and rocks in the road. Now quite frightened, one of the two remembered the curses in the story of the "Monkey's Paw", and, thinking that was what was affecting them, heaved the bag out the window. As might be expected, the "bad luck" ceased immediately. The two returned home with their story, and decided to go back and search for the bag in the morning. Of course, they never found it.

What are we to do with such a case? We have only eyewitness testimony, and no hard, physical ('scientific') evidence.

Since I'm talking about UFO's and science fiction, a mention of Close Encounters of the Third Kind is in order. When I was interviewed about the movie by the Free Press, I told them it was a good movie, with a lot of things, like the shays and behavior of the UFO's, taken directly from some actual cases. In fact, Ron Heary's Close Encounter at the railroad crossing is very close to a case which took place in the American Midwest. The paper said I was "kram" on the movie. I stressed the fact that it was science fiction, though I don't recall them quoting me on that. CSXK was pretty good, I must say, though it did have some problems. A mountain of mashed potatoes?

But that's one of the basic connections between UFO's and SF; the bizarre qualities in many sighting accounts compare well with ideas that would conceivably be bases for SF stories (in fact, there are many such stories in existence). Bug-eyed monsters in fiction are one thing, but compare them to the Hopkinsville Goblins in UFO lore, and you have a headache. On Project UFO, NBC's hit TV series about Project Blue Book, the Goblins were explained as escaped chimpanzees. From the network programming department, no doubt.

I caught Dr. Hynak on TV the other night, on a Good Morning, America special at 9:45 PM. He and Dr. Robert Jastrow discussed extraterrestrialism for a while, but Hynak several times brought up the idea of thought projections of extremely evolutionized aliens. A person who was watching this with me was shocked, and asked: "You mean they're not spaceships, those UFO's?"

UFO's are big in the public eye right now (I'm almost sure it's just a trend). Every bookstore has at least two UFO titles in its new arrivals section, and a score elsewhere in the store. Oh, some places have them in the Occult section, some in Fiction, and some in Science. But they're there; all the big names: Adamski, Hynak, Keel, Steiner, etc. My own collection grows considerably each week. I expect to be totally broke by 1980.

So, here was my first attempt at a UFO fanzine. I probably typed too light or too dark; I nudged the paper; I typed over my mistakes and otherwise screwed up what I hoped would be an easy task. I would like to thank Garth Danielson for his help with this, and for its printing.

For the record, this was completed in September of 1978, on the second try, and printed by Rowatt Enterprises of Winnipeg, through the courtesy of the Winnipeg Science Fiction Society (D/S).

I have a feeling I'll never live this down.

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