

Summer in the Cities

It's been an interesting year, ufology-wise. The Guardian UFO crash/landing/contact has been debunked, Larry King and Montel Williams both went to Area 51, the Mogul balloon story is up in the air and everyone and her dog (literally) has been abducted by aliens.

It's almost enough to make one give up ufology.

And some people have, of course. Completely coincidentally (obviously), Bob Oechsler announced his retirement from ufology during the same week that MUFON Ontario published a report giving details of the Guardian UFO crash/retrieval/whatever hoax, and mentioned Oechsler's name several times.

I received issue #49 of the Cambridge UFO Research Newsletter, in which Bonnie Wheeler announces her "sabbatical." As many know, Bonnie has been publishing the CURG Newsletter since 1976, and it remained one of the most prominent ufozines in North America since then. Furthermore, her group has been active since then, and this certainly makes it one of the oldest groups in continuous existence. I had the good fortune of addressing her group once, many years ago, and I recall her as being kind, generous and hospitable. Good luck, Bonnie; we'll miss you!

Resurfacing and disappearing again was Tommy Roy Blann, a longtime researcher from Texas who was active in the 1970's only to withdraw from the UFO scene in the early 1980's. I heard from him this year when he co-authored a book with Nelson Pacheco, elaborating their theory that UFO contacts might be related to a satanic-type force. Nelson posted excerpts from the book on the I-way, and we corresponded for a short time. Apparently, as a result of some negative reaction to the book, Blann has gone in comunicado once again. (If you read this, drop me a line, Tommy! I won't bite, I promise!)

David Gotlib, whom I regard as a true expert on the abduction phenomenon, has expressed some concern about the publishing of his excellent Bulletin of Anomalous Experience. Because it takes up a lot of time and energy, he may be halting its production soon. Too bad. It's one of the few ufozines I actually endorse.

Grant Cameron, noted crash/retrieval expert and founder of the North American Institute for Crop Circle Research, has found that his hobby/passion was taking up more time than he bargained for. He has all but dropped out of the ufology scene altogether, but still keeps in touch.

The same can be said for Gord Kijek, one of the major domos of the Alberta UFO Study Group. He has found that family and work take precedence over what was becoming a time-consuming "spare time" profession.

And Jenny Randles has expressed her frustration at the politics and organizational problems within ufology, and has thought about withdrawing. Jenny's had a rough few years in ufology, being on the receiving end of many criticisms and legal issues. She has my support in whatever course she chooses.

As for me ... well, you'll notice that the SGJ's are getting fewer and farther between ...

Summer in the Cities

It was one of those summers. With all my good intentions to take it easy, I didn't.

It started in June, when Tom Theofanous invited me to Toronto for a speaking engagement as part of a lecture series MUFON Ontario had organized.

I arrived in Toronto around midnight one weekday, and was met by Tom and his wife, Lise. They quickly made me feel comfortable despite our mutual fatigue, and we stayed up talking for quite a while. Tom is a very easy-going person, and he seemed open to many avenues of discussion, if you could pry him away from the World Cup.

Tom had some work out of town the next day, and I tagged along with him when he drove into the hinterlands of southern Ontario. On the way, we talked about some of his investigations and research. Later, I met some of his associates, including Errol Bruce-Knapp who is delightfully eccentric and has a great penthouse apartment downtown. Errol is a video toaster wizard, and is MUFON Ontario's I-way connection. Having been in the media for many years, Errol has connections far and wide which make for some fine conversation.

My talk was scheduled at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, just down the street from the Judith Merrill Collection of Speculative Fiction. Maybe I got that name wrong - it's usually called the Spaced-Out Library. Run by my friend Lorna Toolis, a former member of the Winnipeg Science Fiction Society (back when that really meant something), the library has a huge collection of science fiction books *and* a significant collection of UFO-related material, including many classics and rare items that I'd heard of but never seen. (Thanks for the personal tour, Lorna!)

Having a few hours to kill before the lecture, I strolled down the street, looking for some place to eat. I spied a used bookstore and walked up to a table outside of it, covered with bargains. As I approached, a man at the table turned around and literally bumped into me. Lo and behold! John Robert Colombo!

John invited me to dinner with him and David Gotlib who were planning on going to hear me speak, anyway. Great Vietnamese food was found at a nearby restaurant; I'm not a big fan of it, but the stuff I had, mixed with the great conversation, made it truly worthwhile.

Previous speakers at the series included Stanton Friedman, Gotlib and Colombo. Stanton packed 'em in, as usual, but other speakers were less popular. About 50 people showed up for my talk in the 300+ capacity hall. But those who attended seemed appreciate what I had to say. I reviewed historical Canadian UFO cases and discussed the Canadian connection to much of ufology today.

I met several other MUFON Ontario members whose names I completely forget at this point, but we had a good time at our various meetings, dinners (what was that pizza restaurant off Yonge street that had those weird kinds like mussels and broccoli?) and informal conversations.

The reason behind the lecture series was Tom's disappointment with various travelling ufologists who breeze into towns with a UFO

roadshow, packing houses and peddling paraphernalia but lacking content or accuracy. The idea was to get people with significant reputations in the field to discuss their research. (And, yes, I was flattered!)

One of the lectures later in the summer featured Tom himself describing the infamous Guardian hoax. I'm sorry I couldn't stick around to hear it, but Tom gave me a personal tour of the evidence against the Carp affair, and believe me (or don't believe me, for that matter), it's enough to curl your hair.

First of all, Tom forked out some big bucks himself to have the Guardian video analyzed (including the sounds in the background). He showed me the original video, asked for my interpretation, then showed me the enhanced footage. For those of you paying attention, I have been intrigued by the video for some time, and had thought about what it might represent. Given that the Guardian had earlier sent me some of the maps, hokey documents and various other stuff, I had already figured out the video must have been a fake, but wasn't sure how it was done. I had thought about the helicopter idea, but rejected it, and the same with the balloon theory, though I had inquired of Ottawa hot-air balloonists about their night-flying habits. I posted a note to the newsgroups early in 1994 that I thought the "landed UFO" was possibly a fire truck, with lights illuminating its undercarriage. My post drew a lot of flames (pun intended), but I was surprised when I found out how close I had guessed.

I thought it had been a fire truck because of its general shape and because of the fires nearby. Tom's enhancement clearly showed the outline of a pickup truck, including the windshield, with flares strategically placed nearby. There's no question that's what it was, despite the objections of naysayers and supporters of the Guardian camp.

Further evidence came from the further efforts of Tom and his associates. The "key witness" of the event turns out to be a close friend of a main perpetrator of the hoax, who happens to own a large field where D&D wargames have been held. Wrecks of trucks are near the field, too, as well as hand-lettered signs about secret covert operations and military exercises and impending death to trespassers.

There's also the testimony of the MUFON investigators who searched for the landing site with Bob Oechsler, only to find nothing, then later be informed by him that he found it himself, in the dark. And, according to the MUFON report, Oechsler seemed to admit knowing it was all a hoax, but was going along with it anyway.

I give a lot of credit to Tom and his group, who went to great lengths to investigate and put this case to rest. Others, such as Christian Page, also contributed a great deal to the investigation, and kudos goes to them as well.

But why has CSICOP not given any public credit to MUFON for debunking this popular case?

My next trip was to Chicago, in July. I tried to arrange a meeting with CUFOS executives, but our schedules conflicted, and I missed everybody. I spent a week at Notre Dame, roasting in the heat and enjoying the campus. (Go Irish!)

On the way home, my flight was nearly empty, and the passengers wandered freely up and down the aisles. Being a bored (boring?) ufologist, I went to talk with the crew. Sure enough, they had both

seen bolides recently, and knew other officers who had seen UFOs. But make an official report? Never!

A few weeks later, I went to the Festival of the Written Arts in Sechelt, British Columbia. As a Canadian writer, I was invited to speak about my writing and do a reading or two. I quickly found out I was in good company; in fact, I was in way over my head. The Festival was more of a literary conference, and my writings on ufology barely qualified.

My nice commercial airliner landed in Vancouver and I was directed to another small airport along the ocean. There, I waited for a small six-seater seaplane to take me north to the resort. I spent the time pacing the small waiting room and making phone calls to people like MUFON Canadian Director Michael Strainic, who was too busy to see me that weekend, unfortunately.

My travelling companions soon arrived: a tall, red-haired woman and her husband, and an older gentleman with a quiet disposition. The woman was Joy Fielding, author of many mystery thrillers, and the older man was Scott Young, a former sports writer and broadcaster. Joy went absolutely pale as our puddle-jumper hopped over the ocean and banked steeply over tree-covered islands.

The four of us were met at dockside when we landed, and were driven to the lodge, nestled on the side of a hill amidst gorgeous gardens. The rooms in the lodge were spartan, without TV, phones or even radios, and I quickly felt I-way withdrawal. (A week without e-mail? Aaaaarrggghh!)

But the food, the atmosphere and the people were great! In fact, it was the ideal vacation. I spent many hours in my room resting or writing. (Fortunately, I had the foresight to bring along my laptop! Talk about 'roughing it'!)

I met some interesting deinizens of the literary world. W.P. Kinsella ("Field of Dreams") is a hilarious storyteller, and looks just as hilarious in shorts and his trademark hat. Mel Hurtig, founder of the National Party, gave a great politics-oriented talk to a packed house of 500 one night. (He told a great story about assertiveness that brought the house down! Ask me about it sometime!) Bill Richardson, the Poet Laureate of Canada, is a lot funnier than I could ever have imagined a poet laureate to be. (I even bought his book, and when would I have ever willingly bought a book of poetry?) Marg Meikle the answer lady, was a wealth of information (you can hear her on CBC radio). And Di Brandt, a feminist writer, was fascinating to talk with and a fine dining companion. Her poetry managed to get her ostracized from the Mennonite church, but her perspective of her trip to Jerusalem is bold and poignant.

About 150 people paid good money to have lunch and listen to me talk. I read excerpts from UNNATURAL HISTORY and part of an introductory chapter from my next book, as well as a poem I wrote not that long ago (well, all the other literary types were reading poetry, and I didn't want to be left out).

In short, I had a great time. I strongly urge anyone who will be on the upper BC mainland in summer to check out the writer's festival. Good scenery, good food, and lots of brain stimulation.

The 1994 World Science Fiction Convention

I still don't understand why, but Winnipeg won the bid for the 1994 WorldCon. It was in Los Angeles last year, and will be in Scotland in 1995. I suppose that to most people, Winnipeg is an exotic locale in some ways. It's certainly off the beaten track.

I got involved in the organizing committee in 1993. I've been almost a "regular" guest speaker at Winnipeg science fiction conventions for several years, and I was asked to talk about UFOs for the 'Murricans. I also helped organize other interesting local speakers like Martin Clutton-Brock (who teaches astronomy while dressed and in personae as Galileo), Art Stinner (whose classic paper "The Physics of Star Trek" was published in NEW SCIENTIST), Joe Donatelli (a postmodern professor who studies communication in the 90's) and Carl Matheson (a connoisseur of horror flicks).

Sure enough, in early September 1994 about 4000 SF fans descended on Winnipeg, much to the consternation of the mayor of Winnipeg who may not have realized what a big deal this was. There were about 300 presentations, ranging from serious discussions on the Jupiter comet crash by JPL scientists to silly discussions on how to make a stuffed pet dragon for your masquerade costume.

There were trekkies (not trekkers) everywhere you looked, and many Klingons in full battle armor. Lots of ladies-in-waiting and druids and medieval warriors .. but disappointingly few aliens. Well, at the masquerade, one of the winners was a couple who dressed in exact replicas of Sigourney Weaver in her exoskeleton battling the alien queen, but that was a notable exception.

The huckster (sorry, dealers') room was perhaps the most interesting. Imagine a department store filled with SF memorabilia. You could buy videos and books and posters of everything related to Star Trek, Star Wars and most other popular SF TV shows. And there were crystals and swords and costumes and latex Klingon headpieces (including some in newborn-size, for family outings). The most interesting to me included a dealer from Russia who didn't get paperwork filed in time and had to set up outside the dealers area. He had Soviet space mission artefacts, including pins from the Sputnik launches, Yuri Gagarin watches and replicas of KGB ID badges (which I of course bought). Another great table featured scripts from TV shows and movies. All the Trek episodes, of course, but also an extra's working script from Schindler's List and other major films. At another booth I bought an "official" X-Files Spooky Mulder ID badge. (Okay, so I finally admit it's a pretty good show! BUT IT'S STILL FICTION!)

So the big question is: What does SF have to do with UFOs?

I answered part of that in the previous paragraph. UFOs and SF are inextricably linked through the media. UFO literature has its origins in the pulp SF mags of the late '40s, with Harold Sherman's THE GREEN MAN and Richard Shaver's I REMEMBER LEMURIA. It's all there, starting with OTHER WORLDS magazine which became FLYING SAUCERS FROM OTHER WORLDS and finally just FLYING SAUCERS. (If you've never seen a copy of FS, too bad.)

Those were the days when contactees ruled the bookshelves, writing about their encounters with aliens in their bedrooms, receiving telepathic communications from the Space Brothers and taking rides to other blissful planets. Unlike today.

(At this point, the astute reader will detect witty sarcasm.)

Like it or not, ufology is closely tied to science fiction. Want another example? How about the debate that Budd Hopkins' Linda Cortile case is taken liberally from a science fiction novel titled NIGHTEYES, by Garfield Reeves-Stevens (a Canadian, BTW).

I recall the first time I sat in on a meeting of the Winnipeg Science Fiction Society. Members grumbled about my inclusion. "He's not really into science fiction," protested one. "He reads and writes about UFOs, and that's just, just ..." "Science fiction?" I offered. That was in 1975; I'm still a charter member.

SF allows serious scientists to speculate about the possibility that aliens just *might* be out there, somewhere. And maybe, just maybe, they've figured a way around the known laws of physics and are travelling the spaceways (to quote Sun Ra; if you don't know who he was, give up now). Or maybe they're in some sort of "dimensional" or "spiritual" realm. (Or maybe the debunkers are right and humanity *is* just very, very messed up.) (Maybe both.)

At any rate, WorldCon was surprisingly interesting. I, like most, ignored the trek and dragon nonsense and attended sessions on writing, criticism, the Shoemaker/Levy Jupiter thing, Soviet space missions, interstellar propulsion systems and, of course, the Internet.

And *that's* why ufologists should pay more attention to SF.

Alien Abduction Syndrome

I've stopped counting how many people have come to me asking for help or guidance in understanding their abduction experiences. Not only that, I've come to identify the "usual" story: "I had this dream, well at least I *thought* it was a dream, that these little creatures were in my room and I could understand them even though they weren't really talking and it hurt when they touched me and then I seemed to be floating somewhere not in my room and they told me some things I couldn't understand and then I was suddenly back in my room. But I think they are still around."

I've read John Mack's epic case study ABDUCTIONS and I tend to see the points of many of his critics. Far from the aliens preparing his clients for some future use and teaching them about ecology and spirituality, I think some of those in his group have problems in dealing with our reality.

Not that that's such a bad thing, mind you.

Now, I'm not a psychologist by training, nor a psychiatrist, so I'm sure my diagnosis is going to draw some flames. But I think that what we have here is something I might call *alien abduction syndrome*. For some reason, certain people appear to *think* they have been contacted by aliens. This could be because of various contributing factors: dissatisfaction with life; stress; domestic problems; family problems; peer pressure; rape trauma; chemical imbalances; or child abuse. Perhaps any one of these or any combination of them. I believe that thorough studies might help to understand AAS. (It's even possible that aliens are actually doing some abductions, but that's another matter.)

Let me backtrack, however. First of all, I don't think that *all* people who report such experiences have AAS. Secondly, in most cases, AAS is not a problem. (This is another example of the 90% rule in action.)

The *real* problem, though, is how to deal with such cases. Most ufologists are woefully inadequate as abduction therapists/counsellors. Investigating a NL and counselling an abductee are two very, very different things. You just don't "file" an abductee case away as you would a DD. Furthermore, ufologists are not trained as psychologists (generally), though John Musgrave published a paper in the late 1970's on the role of the UFO researcher as a counsellor and healer. It was ignored at the time.

However, there's another side to this issue, and more questions. Who *is* appropriate and/or adequate as a counsellor/investigator of abductee cases? What relationship should there be between a clinical psychologist and a UFO researcher?

These questions began concerning me as a result of some calls I received during the past few months. I regularly get calls from people about UFO experiences, fireballs, sasquatch, ghosts and UFO abductions. The abductees are often of the "usual" variety, and their stories seem not to vary very much. Roy Bauer and I have been meeting with them on an ad hoc basis, sometimes referring them to others.

It's very difficult to deal with, sometimes; because of an altruistic streak, I feel compelled to help people plaintively asking for assistance in understanding their experiences. But whom to send them to for further assistance? I can only handle so many "clients."

In some cases, abductees have gone with me to clinical psychologists, hypnotherapists and other kinds of counsellors (most have gone on their own). Not surprisingly, the quality of the "professionals" varies considerably.

One memorable session was at the office of a "qualified hypnotherapist" who did regressions as part of therapy. I was allowed to sit in with an abductee who wanted to unlock the memory of a certain night during which she and her sister were *both* abducted simultaneously. The therapist put on a tape of waves crashing amidst some flute music, set a large crystal on the table and informed the abductee that she shouldn't worry because he was going to do some Huna chanting and send spiritual energy to her if she got afraid.

I worried. She worried, too. Then, she said, halfway through her regression, "You know, that taped music is annoying." Needless to say, the session was a failure.

Two Cases

The woman who called me in August was requesting help in dealing with her abduction experiences. She had repeatedly dreamed about aliens in her bedroom and a paralyzing beam of light emanating from the ceiling. (You know, the usual.) What was more unusual in this case was that she had been keeping accurate records on her computer and drawing realistic pictures of her encounters. She even kept a diary beside her bed for when she woke up from her "dream abductions." The revelations passed on to her included information that she was in training for the Rapture, during which time only abductees would be saved.

Most curious was the fact that this woman was educated enough to know that "this couldn't possibly be real, but it *seemed* real!" She had a degree in psychology and so knew something about the workings of the human mind; she was willing to accept that her dreamlike

experiences were imaginary, but she felt they seemed far too real for ordinary dreams.

It was the second caller who got me thinking about this issue and formulating my question. This woman told me a very similar story (the usual) and also wanted help in dealing with it. But there was a difference.

The woman explained that she had told her family physician about her experience. The doctor had referred her to a psychiatrist. The woman claimed that the psychiatrist had listened to her story and her recall of the dreams and promptly diagnosed her as schizophrenic. You see, by her own admission, she could not tell if her dreams were "real" or not. She was technically unable to distinguish fantasy from reality. As a consequence, she had spent several months in a psychiatric institution.

Finally, a third case presented another variety of abductee. A man described to me how (in a matter-of-fact manner) an entity or entities had contacted him and began helping him make decisions in his life through recommendations and cautions. He would sometimes wake up in the middle of the night to find an entity with him in his room, telepathically conversing with him and warning him of what he might expect the next day. This was all done benevolently, of course.

The Hamlet Defense in Ufology

Is a person who thinks he or she has had a nighttime abduction experience schizophrenic? If so, what about the person who is unsure of the reality of the experience? If you're consciously aware that something was possibly imaginary, are you schizoid? On the other hand, what can we say about people who are absolutely convinced that aliens are conversing with them regularly?

Abductees are, by some definitions, schizophrenic.

This is not to say that they all have some kind of psychological problems. What this does mean is that abductees have had experiences that were surreal, yet were somehow perceived as real to them. This inability to distinguish reality from apparent fantasy is one symptom of clinical schizophrenia.

However, ufologists are placed in a very precarious situation because of this. Abductees and contactees will certainly not stand for any suggestion that they are schizophrenic or delusional. To them, their experiences are "real." Some admit to having internal conflict because they "know" that alien abductions are impossible yet they have an overwhelming sense that they had an encounter of some sort.

Added to this are complications such as false memory syndrome, alleged ritual abuse, screen memories and outright lying. (For completeness, we can also include people who have mental problems, although Meerloo and others examined mental institutions and found virtually no patients displaying abductee/contactee symptoms.)

I asked David Gotlib for his opinion on the relationship between alien abduction syndrome and psychiatry:

"There ARE some schizophrenics who, in addition to their other problems, incorporate abduction experiences into their hallucinations. (I have met some). They are identifiable by other signs and symptoms besides the abduction account.

OTOH, it makes no sense to diagnose someone as schizophrenic simply on the basis of abduction experiences. In general, if someone presented with abduction experiences as the SOLE symptom, and they were able to deal with them through supportive counselling and psychotherapy (not necessarily including hypnosis) I would see little reason to medicate them and no reason at all to hospitalize them.

"Do psychiatrists have enough background in this phenomenon to deal with it effectively? Probably not, because most have no training or familiarity with treating paranormal experiences. Those few involved in transpersonal psychology are probably an exception to this. But what constitutes "effective" management is still open to debate, because the nature of the experience is still unknown. Also, we don't know whether there are multiple causes for a reported abduction experiences (sleep disorder, schizophrenia, dissociative disorder, TLE, and then the "real" abduction experiences, whatever that means).

"I am not convinced that most "abduction therapists" have enough background to deal with the problem effectively, either -- or that what they do is in the long run safe or effective. There are no outcome studies on this question.

"Generally, abduction experiencers fall between some pretty wide cracks in the health care system, and in society."

So, what are the implications for ufology? Can a ufologist *ethically* advise/counsel/treat an abductee without a referral to a professional psychologist or psychiatrist? Probably not. It would seem that it might be unwise to counsel abductees because of the possibility that they may have underlying psychological problems, and most ufologists are not trained to deal with this. Certainly some of the people who have come to me presenting with abductee/contactee experiences have had such problems, and I would suspect that it is more pervasive than is usually acknowledged.

The reason for this is that it is not "politically correct" to suggest abductees/contactees have *not* had alien experiences unless one is an ardent skeptic or debunker. For a ufologist to question whether or not an abductee has actually had an alien encounter is tantamount to heresy.

Think about it. If a person claims an abduction experience, a ufologist usually tries to fit the experience in with his or her perceived notion of alien visitation, not question the view of the experiencer.

The problem is whether *either* approach is appropriate.

Since I know that some abductees/contactees I have spoken with may be reading this document, I would like to clarify my position lest it be misinterpreted (if it hasn't already).

I do *not* believe that all abductees/contactees are schizophrenic or have some kind of mental problems. What I *do* believe is that abductee/contactee experiences can be compared to dissociative

or delusional experiences reported by some schizophrenics. I have met and spoken with many abductees/contactees and have found most to be rational, earnest and fully functioning in society. Many have approached me for help in coming to terms with their *apparently real* experiences given their surreal nature. My question to the psychologists and psychiatrists is, "Does this mean that abductees/contactees are schizophrenic, or does it mean that they are reacting 'normally' to unusual stimuli?"

One further anecdote: After some media had reported on some UFO reports recently, I did a short interview during which my phone number was given out on the air. I don't like doing this, but then, how else would anyone be able to contact me? I received several calls from people with interesting NL and ND sightings, including one from a prominent professor at a local university who requested anonymity (of course; one could hardly expect his peers to understand he saw a UFO, could we?). But one of the calls I received was from a man who started out by telling me that "they" had phoned him and ordered him to go to a certain location where he would be abducted. "They" had called him several times, apparently, each time insisting (in a woman's voice) that he should obey and allow himself to be abducted aboard their saucer. He had refused, but admitted that he had later observed many UFOs, some in the presence of other people, while in the city. He also said he had filmed a UFO while in Europe and his footage was to be in a new UFO movie featuring himself and his friend, "the world's greatest psychic." I was informed that "he can bend keys just like Uri Geller." Both men were apparently under close observation by aliens, and they had "much information to give to [me] about aliens."

Is this man an abductee or a contactee? Does it matter?

The Electronic Information Supercliche

Okay, so I'm an Internet addict. I seem to need to log on each day just to see what's new on the net. My week at Sechelt away from all electronic gadgets was almost painful, so there is hope because I can quit cold turkey if I have to.

The trouble is, Stanton Friedman was right.

Stan incurred the wrath of 'netters when he made a comment publicly to the effect that virtually everything (pun intended here) on the net was garbage. He was berated immediately by people insisting that a great deal of useful information was available on the net and that intelligent conversation existed in many forms and venues.

They were right, too.

But the problem is quantity, not necessarily quality, although that's an issue too. Yes, there is useful info and intelligent discourse out there. But just try to find it.

As of this writing, I am getting daily emails from people frustrated with the noise on the UFO newsgroups and who are giving up on them. The situation is that bad. Really. The most popular one, alt.alien.visitors (a name just begging for flames), is almost all noise and pointless dither. "I have a new theory of propulsion," "Isn't Billy Meier great?" "Has anybody heard of a book by some guy named Ruppelt?" and my favourite: "Crop circles are real!"

I made the mistake of replying to a poster about something that he had got completely wrong, and ended up getting flamed and branded a

skeptic! One poster was promoting Colin Andrews and his findings about radiation at crop circle sites - and how the aliens were testing neutron rays. Just trying to make a dent in explaining the facts about the radiation story resulted in a huge flame war about "disinformation about crop circles."

The good news, though, is that all the really good and accurate information is indeed on the net, but you have to look for it. Occasionally, I or John Stepkowski or some other well-meaning fool try to tell people where it is, but we're ignored. I suppose that the sign of a good ufologist or really intelligent UFO buff is his or her ability to find the files or sites themselves. It's a dying art.

Over at alt.paranet.ufo, Mike Corbin's newsgroup, things are much more rational than a.a.v, but the amount of noise has forced him to publicly raise the question of moderating the group. This has shocked many into a frenzy. Imagine, restricting posts to worthwhile and serious discussions!

Of course, sci.skeptic is hardly the answer, either. Ever sticklers for details, discussion there about the Bible and Nostradamus consists of seemingly endless debates over semantics and typing errors.

As for my own group (hey - I like that: my "own" group. NOT!), alt.ufo.reports, I had hoped that after I created it people would post only their UFO sightings. Instead, we get bad UFO gifs, questions about abductions and posts about channeled messages. Fortunately, few sites get the group, so the noise level is relatively low. I've been archiving any actual UFO sightings posted there, and I'm thinking about what I should do with them.

The mandate for alt.ufo.reports is as follows:

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From alt.ufo.reports Thu Nov 3 09:46:52 1994
From: rutkows@cc.umanitoba.ca (Chris Rutkowski)
Subject: MANDATE FOR alt.ufo.reports
Date: 2 Nov 1994 16:00:24 GMT
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To all posters, readers and lurkers:

Once again, I have to explain the purpose and reason for this newsgroup.

This group was created with the intention of allowing people to post their personal UFO experiences/sightings, without any bias or subjective interpretations. This does not mean that posts here are necessarily about observations of alien spacecraft. Most UFOs turn out to be misidentifications - honest mistakes. Some could be aircraft (secret or otherwise), others are bolides, others are balloons or anything else you might want to include in a category of IFO.

The reality is that *a small percentage* of UFO reports do not have a simple explanation. This does not mean they are spaceships, but only that they cannot be explained easily. Basically, we need the data before we can interpret them according to various theories.

The only way this can be achieved is through the collection of UFO reports in an objective, organized manner. It seemed that allowing

witnesses to post on the I-way was a logical possibility.

The advantage of this is that it does not matter whether the posters or readers are skeptics or believers. The idea is that data about UFO sightings are needed to formulate a greater understanding about the phenomenon, whether it be psychological or physical. A non-partisan group seems to be a desirable location for such information.

It still is, but discussion threads about John Lear, MJ12 and the Mars Face outnumber UFO reports here.

PLEASE TAKE THESE DISCUSSIONS TO alt.alien.visitors or alt.paranet.ufo or alt.alien.research or sci.skeptic

PLEASE DO POST YOUR UFO SIGHTINGS HERE!

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The latest Canadian Internet Handbook 1995 again has a list of UFO sites with good info that I was asked to contribute. The best site I've found so far is: <ftp.rutgers.edu/pub/ufo> There's even a subdirectory called /rutkowski that contains many of my SGJs, and various other articles.

Dean Kanipe for some reason has honoured me by including my work in his Web page at: <http://www.duke.edu/~dpk/road.html> The site is "The Road Less Travelled," and he's included a lot of weirdness there, such as a Skeptic's page, pointers to bizarre zines and an SF pointer, too.

I occasionally log on as a guest at the freenet in Ottawa, which has a UFO SIG. It's frustrating because as a guest, you can't reply directly to some of the posters there, who ask simple questions and get abysmal answers from local buffs. I got flamed really bad when Mike McLarty posted a message for me in which I tried to politely point out that some of the "experts" posting information on the SIQ or whom were cited in discussions were actually less informed than they were lauded.

This greatly upset some SIG members, who basically told me to mind my own business and not to try and tell them who they should be talking to and which books they should be reading.

As the (now old) joke goes, "On the Internet, no one knows you're a dog."

Anyone now has access to an unlimited amount of information, and a way of disseminating that information to more people than ever before. Anyone can also call him- or herself an "expert," without any real need to justify that position. This can be implied or explicitly stated. "The real reason for X is Y, because that's what I've found through my research." Never mind that you have no idea of how to develop a research methodology, your ideas are now broadcast through the electronic world, and you have now become an instant expert in the eyes of many readers.

The parallel in the "real" world is the UFO conference, where experts (with a varying amount of real expertise) inform audiences of their findings. You can listen to them and hang on their every word, or think about whether or not what they are saying is true.

Or, indeed, ignore commentary in the Swamp Gas Journal and

instead read UFO Universe.

A lovely couple: Susan Blackmore and Michael Persinger

It all started in England, then Australia, then Canada, then ... (you see how this Internet stuff works, yet?).

A number of years ago, so the story goes, Susan Blackmore was a psychic researcher. However, things didn't go so well in her investigations, and she became frustrated with her lack of solid evidence for the phenomena. Eventually, she gave up on it altogether and joined the ranks of the skeptics, even becoming a CSICOP executive.

This was a feather in the cap for debunkers. A former psychic investigator throwing in the towel and becoming an archskeptic? A powerful argument against the reality of psychic phenomena, if there ever was one.

But then Michael Persinger crossed her path.

As anyone who has read SGJ knows, I'm not a fan of the tectonic strain theory of UFOs. If you're really interested in why this is so, take a look in the rutgers ftp directory in my file area. I simply have found no reason to accept the published findings about the seismic/UFO link. I even did a study of my own, in which I compared the huge number of UFO sightings in the UFOROM MANUFOCAT database with Manitoba's lack of seismic activity. Persinger responded by finding high correlations between the UFOs in Manitoba and weak tremors up to 700 km away from the UFO sighting locations and several months distant in time. There's no arguing with statistics, I guess. Never mind that most of the MANUFOCAT sightings were actually airplanes and stars misinterpreted as UFOs, the correlations were there.

Give me a break.

Anyway, back to Susan Blackmore. She travelled to Persinger's lab in Sudbury, where he impressed her with his research facilities, especially his "magic hat," which directs electromagnetic radiation inside a subject's brain. The sensations reported by subjects have been compared with those of UFO abductees. Persinger and Blackmore agreed on this point, apparently.

Blackmore wrote about her trip to see Persinger for an article in NEW SCIENTIST. It caused some controversy, and I was asked for my comments. Here's some relevant discussion, started by Bill Chalker in Australia:

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From alt.paranet.abduct Thu Nov 24 09:19:21 1994
Newsgroups: alt.paranet.abduct
Subject: Re: NEW SCIENTIST ON ABDUCTIONS
Date: 23 Nov 1994 15:39:34 GMT

In <12371.2ED1C1D4@paranet.FIDONET.ORG> Bill.Chalker@f8.n1040.z9.FIDONET.ORG (Bill Chalker) writes:
>New Scientist, 19 November, 1994, carries an article by Dr. Susan Blackmore, on
>alien abductions. It largely focuses on the work of Dr. Michael Persinger,
>particularly his helmet device which sets up magnetic fields across a
>subject's head. The article argues that people with high levels of electrical
>activity in their temporal lobes are more prone to such experiences, and that
>such experiences can be explained by excessive bursts of electrical activity in
>the brain. Persinger's helmet device is intended to try and simulate the

>stimulation of the temporal lobe and thereby create such episodes. Dr.
>Blackmore reports that the method has yet to induce a full sensation of alien
>abduction.

[discussion of Persinger's "magic hat" deleted]

>Dr. Persinger's research is to be applauded, since he is trying to create a
>repeatable experiment - the classic mainstay of the scientific method.

Yes, true, I can't take anything away from him for actually conducting
some studies in order to ascertain what's going on.

But you raise an interesting point: "repeatable". Although his studies
are repeatable (which is needed in order to embrace them fully), I have
yet to hear of anyone attempting to do this. The problem is that it's
expensive, time-consuming, and you'd need to know a great deal more
about his methodology. Perhaps a philanthropist would be interested in
donating a "magic hat" to a skeptical researcher for use in independent
studies. Until then, Persinger's research is interesting, but not
conclusive..

You'll note also that even Blackmore (a CSICOP exec) noted that the
"magic hat" failed to produce anything *close* to an alien abduction.
This is a point that should be emphasized, since I've already read
elsewhere that some debunkers are suggesting that the "magic hat"
explains abduction experiences. It most certainly does not!

>Dr. Persinger's interest in UFOs and more lately abductions, has been a many
>for ongoing debate amongst researchers. He has been a proponent of the
>"tectonic strain" theory.
>Perhaps Chris Rutkowski can post some reports on the status of Dr. Persinger's
>"magic hat" experiments.
>Chris, this is a longwinded way of requesting some clarifications on theses
>fascinating issues. Greetings from down under.

Okay, I'll bite. To be quite honest, I have not been following his
"magic hat" experiments lately. There are several reasons. First of
all, his "faulty" TST methodology (pun intended) indicates to me that a
certain portion of his research can be questioned. Why should we listen
to him now? Secondly, his quantum leaps of interpretation seem to
suggest he thinks temporal lobe induction explains abduction
experiences fully. If he had spent any time reviewing the literature,
he would immediately see that the diversity and detail of the
experiences do not point to his theory as an ultimate explanation.
Third, as noted above, we need some independent verification of his
results. When I last looked through his published work relating to EM
induction helmets, he was already talking about enhanced ESP ability
and awareness. My question is, why did Blackmore get snowed by him if
she's such a skeptic?

On the other hand (to show you all that I'm more skeptical and
objective than most debunkers), I can't begrudge him his efforts. It is
possible that EM radiation plays an important role in altering our
view of our immediate environment and *may* help to understand certain

dissociative disorders. But there's an obvious problem: if EM radiation affects the temporal lobe that much to create abduction experiences in the minds of abductees, what about manmade EM radiation in the environment? How about abduction experiences brought on by *cellular phones*! computer terminals! electric blankets! etc. Surely these are more intense sources of EM radiation and would cause *more* effects! Hmm. I think there's a *real* experiment there ...

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Basically, my objection to the reported correlation between abduction accounts and the temporal lobe effects is that the former are very detailed, descriptive narratives of coherent experiences, whereas the latter are vague sensations. Now, it's possible that with a skewed belief system, dissociation and fantasy-prone personalities, EM effects *might* induce an abduction fantasy. But that's a long way from an explanation for abductions. A good try, but not quite.

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