
Book Reviews

The Encyclopedia of UFOs. Edited by Ronald D. Story. Doubleday, Garden City, N.Y., 1980. 440 pp. \$12.95, paperback.

Reviewed by Daniel Cohen

As a general rule it is a bad idea for a book to be reviewed by one of its contributors, but my own contributions to *The Encyclopedia of UFOs* are so minor that in this case I think the rule can be ignored. In fact, my participation in the project gave me the advantage of some insight into how this book was put together.

Back in October of 1977, I was asked by Ron Story to suggest some articles for the planned *Encyclopedia of UFOs* and to prepare a brief autobiography and a statement of my position on UFOs. I wrote one article, a bio, and a position statement. Last year, after a long and, I assume, tortuous process *The Encyclopedia of UFOs* finally appeared. Obviously a large number of people connected with UFOs responded to Story's request as I did. A notable holdout was Phil Klass, who declined to have anything to do with the project.

The result of all of this is a curious sort of book — actually it is two books. The first is a collection of articles on various UFOlogical topics; the second is a collection of biographies and position statements from all sorts of people who have had something or other to do with UFOs. The statements range from the short and petulant (my own) to the long and thoughtful (Thornton Page's and Robert Sheaffer's) to the absolutely nutsy (Frank Stranges's). If an individual did not provide a position statement, the editors put one together from his or her previous writings and speeches.

Since UFO pictures are hard to come by, the majority of pictures in *The Encyclopedia of UFOs* are portraits of the various "leaders in the field." On flipping through the book my first impression was, "My God, we are a scruffy-looking lot."

Oddly, there is no photograph, biography, or position statement from editor Story himself, though his book *The Space Gods Revealed* is generally considered one of the best on the von Däniken nonsense, and a Story article on von Däniken

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appeared in the Fall/Winter 1977 issue of the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER (then the *Zetetic*). Since Story not only edited the *Encyclopedia* but also wrote many of the articles in it, a little background would have been useful. There is a biography and a position statement from J. Richard Greenwell, who is listed as consulting editor, and, though I did not count, it appears that Story and Greenwell wrote more of the articles for the *Encyclopedia* than did any of the other contributors.

I cannot imagine that the biographical part of this book will be of much interest or value to the general reader, or to anyone who did not actually participate in the project. Of course I enjoyed attaching faces to names that I had known only through correspondence or third parties and seeing how much older some of my friends and enemies had grown. I also had some fun finding out what this or that obscure individual thought about UFOs back in 1977 or 1978. But how many people not already deeply involved in UFOs will care? How many should? This part of *The Encyclopedia of UFOs* struck me as a space-filler.

The second part of the *Encyclopedia* (which I would estimate makes up two-thirds of the book) is the articles themselves. As in all encyclopedias where the articles are provided by a mixture of different authors and “experts,” these are a mixed bag, a good deal more mixed than in a standard encyclopedia. The authors represent all shades of UFO belief and nonbelief, and they approach their subjects from widely different points of view and with varying degrees of competence and writing skill.

Often in a work of this type a strong editorial hand is applied, but editor Story seems to have declined to do this. As a writer I’m entirely sensible of the advantages of editorial nonintervention, but *laissez faire* has its disadvantages too. An encyclopedia should have some point of view. Since so much of what is said about UFOs depends on the point of view of the writer (not to mention the writer’s honesty and competence), the average reader, even one fairly knowledgeable on the subject, is going to have a great deal of trouble evaluating the worth of any particular article. Since each contribution is signed, the reader can check back with the author’s position statement, but that doesn’t always help very much.

For example, the article on the Travis Walton “abduction” case is written by APRO’s Coral Lorenzen. In her own position statement, Ms. Lorenzen makes her strong belief in the extraterrestrial-visitation hypothesis absolutely clear. Fair enough. In her Walton article she states, “Tests indicate that he [Walton] has related his experiences truthfully.” Not according to Phil Klass. Klass has charged that APRO, along with the sleazy *National Enquirer*, suppressed the results of a lie-detector test that Walton had flunked. Ms. Lorenzen doesn’t have to agree with Klass’s charges. She can refute them if she wishes. But not to mention them at all and pretend that Walton’s assertions have been unchallenged — that’s just not acceptable. The editor should have caught that one. Further, I seriously question assigning an article on such a subject to someone who has been as deeply involved in it as Ms. Lorenzen has.

On the other hand, the article on the 1897 Aurora, Texas, spaceship “crash,” which is adapted from the bulletin of Ms. Lorenzen’s APRO, clearly (and correctly in my view) labels the whole thing as a hoax. Why the skeptical attitude in the one case but not in the other, which is even more obviously faked? This, I suspect, has more to do with UFOlogical politics than with anything else. Aurora was being pushed by an organization that was a rival to APRO, and APRO did its best to sink its rival’s claims. Perhaps in APRO’s enthusiasm to get back at a rival they were

guilty of what they have so often accused others of — blind skepticism.

This sort of problem arises constantly throughout the *Encyclopedia*. I found excellent articles alternating with bad ones or those that were just plain silly. I had no way at all to judge many of the articles, because I didn't possess any independent information on the subject and I could not automatically trust what I read. This represents a great drawback in any book that has pretensions to becoming a standard reference.

The editor's preface says that in addition to being a compendium of UFO information the *Encyclopedia* is supposed to be a "fun" book. For the most part it is pretty heavy going, and I doubt if many are going to find it fun. Perhaps the publishers had something like *The People's Almanac* in mind. If so, they didn't get it. That observation leads me to say some nice things about the *Encyclopedia of UFOs*. It is not merely an exploitation of a semi-sensational subject. While it is certainly not "comprehensive and objective," as stated on the cover, it does represent a reasonably serious attempt to present a compendium of UFO information in a single volume. For all its flaws, *The Encyclopedia of UFOs* is the best and most complete work of its type that we have or that we are likely to get for a very long time.

The Encyclopedia of UFOs is overpriced, unattractively produced, intermittently accurate, and generally dull; yet no serious student of UFOs can afford to be without it. A backhanded compliment perhaps, but this is a backhanded business.

The Roswell Incident. By Charles Berlitz and William L. Moore. Grosset & Dunlap, New York, 1980. 168 pp. \$10.00

Reviewed by Robert Sheaffer

If *The Roswell Incident* can be taken seriously, it is the story of the century. A flying saucer reportedly crashed in the vicinity of Roswell, New Mexico, during the summer of 1947. The bodies of humanoid aliens were said to have been recovered. There may have been at least one survivor.

Charles Berlitz is already famous for his sensationalist writings about the Bermuda Triangle (see Kusche, *SI*, Fall/Winter 1977; Klass, *SI*, Fall/Winter 1977), and William L. Moore is widely respected in UFOdom. Stanton T. Friedman, who calls himself the "Flying Saucer Physicist," was a research consultant for the book, and his name is scattered throughout. (When I spoke to him at the recent Smithsonian UFO symposium, Friedman said that he was a research consultant to Moore, but not necessarily to Berlitz; he balked at endorsing Berlitz's so-called research but declined to give him an out-and-out repudiation.) Friedman has been trumpeting the book's "evidence" for crashed saucers to the press, saying that, while the other rumors of saucer crashes may be baseless, this one seems to be authentic. Leonard Stringfield, a member of the Board of Directors of MUFON, a

Robert Sheaffer is a systems analyst, a long-time investigator of UFO claims, and author of the just-published UFO Verdict (Prometheus).

major UFO group, says that the book "cuts through some of the old smoke and reveals some of the fire." If the book has a fault, says he, it is that the authors are excessively skeptical about saucer crashes occurring *after* 1947.

"The majority of space ventures have encountered UFOs," the authors state, and with this remark we can begin our calibration of the accuracy of their claims. (Let us even go so far as to assume that Berlitz has repented of the wild errors of his Bermuda Triangle writings and has decided to "go straight." We will consider only the reliability of the information contained in *this* book.) James Oberg has examined in depth the various claims of astronaut UFOs (see *SI*, Fall 1978) and has found them to be based entirely on exaggerations, inaccurate reporting, and outright hoaxes. "Additional confirmation" of the Apollo 11 astronaut UFO sighting was said to come from an unnamed source "apparently associated with Anglia TV in London." This is an obvious reference to a TV documentary-spoof, "Alternative 3," which claims that a secret space program exists to kidnap innocent persons, lobotomize them, then transport them to the back side of the moon to do manual labor. It was an April Fool's joke; see the *London Times*, June 21, 1977, and *Second Look*, November/December 1979. It is not clear if Berlitz and Moore themselves were taken in by the joke or whether they were attempting to take in their readers.

The newspapers reported in 1947 that a saucer allegedly *had* crashed in Roswell. They then ran follow-up stories saying that the supposed saucer was just the remains of a high-altitude weather balloon. The authors say that this was just a government cover story to hide the truth about a *real* saucer crash. Barney Barnett of Socorro, New Mexico, claimed to have seen a crashed saucer with dead humanoid bodies. Unfortunately, Barnett is dead now, and his wife is, too. But their friends tell a mighty fine second-hand tale. William W. Brazel reportedly discovered the pieces of the crashed saucer on his land. He's dead, too, but his son and daughter-in-law "recall the incident well." It is not clear why the authors of *The Roswell Incident* think that the testimonies of these two departed witnesses corroborate each other, since they place the alleged crash sites more than 100 miles apart. The difficulty is resolved, however, by the speculation that either *two* discs crashed at the same time 100 miles apart or that one disc exploded in midair, scattering debris on the Brazel ranch before it crashed near Socorro, 100 miles to the west. A character witness cited to bolster Barnett's testimony. Holm Bursum, Jr., is a bank executive and former mayor of the town of Socorro. The authors fail to note that, by an astonishing coincidence, the famous Socorro UFO landing of 1964, witnessed by Lonnie Zamora, allegedly occurred on property owned by Bursum. It is remarkable that this man should be involved in both a UFO landing *and* a UFO crash, nearly twenty years apart.

Other sources of information concerning the whereabouts of the saucer after the alleged crash are Desmond Leslie and George Hunt Williamson. Both of these men were close associates of the late George Adamski, who claimed that his friends from the planet Venus took him to the moon in their flying saucer, where he saw forests and cities. The authors note that Leslie had "compromised his reliability" through this association but suggest that his story "may well have been true" nonetheless.

Two other major sources of information on the alleged crash are Riley Crabb and the late Meade Layne, present and former directors of the Borderland Sciences Research Foundation. The authors appear to take the accounts given by these two

men at face value and expect the reader to do likewise. No information whatsoever is provided to enable the reader to judge the reliability of their accounts. Permit me to fill in the gap. The Borderland Sciences Research Foundation has long been associated with the most far out fringe of contactee UFOlogy; their teachings on the ethereal nature of extraterrestrial travel are so bizarre that they make even Adamski appear tame. Meade Layne was the author of works with titles such as *Mystery of the Ethereans* and *The Coming of the Guardians*. J. Gordon Melton, working on a historical study of UFO contactees, says that Riley Crabb "was saying as early as 1957 that all the [UFO] space flights are etheric." Much of the "research" performed at Borderland involves mediums, a fact apparently not noted by the authors or their research consultant, or those UFOlogists who embrace the book's conclusions.

The testimony of Nicholas Von Poppen, a supposed baron, who allegedly photographed the crashed disc at the request of military intelligence, comes to us via Gray Barker, operator of the Saucerian Press. (Von Poppen has also, alas, passed on, and can no longer answer questions.) The reader is not told that Gray Barker had also presented the "Alternative 3" hoax as if it were fact and was the first to write a book on "Mothman," a strange creature akin to Batman of comic book fame. From my own personal acquaintance with Barker, it is obvious that he has one of the most subtle senses of humor in all of UFOlogy. He admits to "spicing up" supposedly factual accounts with pure fiction when the mood strikes him. I am astonished that anyone with any degree of UFOlogical sophistication believes that Barker takes his own writings seriously.

One anonymous but supposedly credible source, referred to as "J.K.," is quoted as saying that "since 1948 secret information concerning UFO activity involving the U.S. military has been contained in a computer center at Wright-Patterson." That statement alone refutes J.K.'s claims about seeing nine dead aliens in the deep-freeze. Given the utterly primitive state of computer technology in 1948, it was almost impossible to store any significant amount of information. The minuscule memory capacities of those ancient vacuum-tube machines made it more likely that data would be carved into stone tablets than kept in the computer. By projecting today's technology back to 1948, J.K. demonstrated his ability to describe things that plainly do not exist.

The authors selectively quote various documents that were obtained from the CIA, the FBI, and other federal agencies via the Freedom of Information Act. Only the items that seem to suggest a UFO cover-up are mentioned, while other documents, suggesting virtually no serious interest in UFOs, are ignored (see Klass, *SI*, Spring 1980). One of the CIA UFO documents not mentioned — the report of the famous Robertson panel — seems to destroy any credibility the Roswell incident may have had. Why would the CIA convene a secret panel in 1953 to discuss what UFOs might be ("no evidence" was the conclusion) if U.S. Intelligence agents had actually confiscated a crashed saucer in 1947?

"On the dark side of the moon [all sides of the moon receive equal amounts of sunlight] the Soviet Luna 9 reported geometric arrangements of huge stones, which, according to Professor Ivanov, a Soviet space scientist, *could* be flight markers for a lunar runway." The final chapter, "The Russian Connection," consists of material like this. It is not at all clear what this unsubstantiated and often inaccurate material has to do with the Roswell "crash." It is likewise unclear what purpose a lunar runway would have on the airless moon.

The widespread acceptance of "crashed saucer" tales such as *The Roswell Incident* provides the best example of what I term the "credulity explosion" now taking place within the UFO movement. Tales that were too wild to be believed when they first surfaced decades ago are now being rehabilitated as credulity stretches far enough to accommodate them. The best summation of *The Roswell Incident* comes from its own pages: "Unfortunately we are forced to rely on rumor again as our best source of evidence." ●

Articles of Note

- Birx, H. James. "The Creation/Evolution Controversy." *Free Inquiry*, Winter 1980-81 (premiere issue). Excellent review by chairman of Canisius College's Sociology and Anthropology Department.
- Brandt, Anthony. "Face Reading: The Persistence of Physiognomy." *Psychology Today*, December 1980. Reports on the return of an old pseudoscience — with some new wrinkles.
- Cowen, Robert C. "UFOs: Fact and Frivolity." *Technology Review*, November/December 1980, pp. 6-7. Echoes call of Smithsonian UFO symposium participants for more hard-nosed, no-nonsense investigation and less attention to spurious sightings and sensational talk about "encounters" and "alternative realities."
- Emery, C. Eugene, Jr. "The Danville Dowsers Harbor No Doubts." *Providence (R.I.) Sunday Journal Magazine*, November 2, 1980. Science writer's examination of the psychology and folklore of dowsing, based on his reporting at the American Society of Dowsers' annual convention in Vermont and queries to dowsing critics. Author was easily able to fool dowsers (e.g., by falsely bending rods down at one point, he induced others to come over and "confirm" his find). Concludes that divining fills a basic human need and will be around for a long time.
- Gregory, Anita. "Why Do Scientists Engage in Fraud?" *Parapsychology Review*, November-December 1980. "To experience surprise that scientists should sometimes cheat," cautions this psychologist, "is to forget that scientists are human beings who have aims and purposes and goals other than the dispassionate pursuit of truth." She warns that these other motivations "may become dangerous pitfalls to those working at the edges of science."
- Kelly, Ivan. "The Scientific Case Against Astrology." *Mercury* (Astronomical Society of the Pacific), November-December 1980, pp. 135-142. Good review of the scientific evidence accumulated regarding traditional astrology. A subsequent article, in the January-February 1981 *Mercury*, examines the claims of "cosmobiology."
- Leo, John. "Memory: The Unreliable Witness." *Time*, January 5, 1981, p. 89. Report on the research of psychologist Elizabeth Loftus showing that remembering is often a creative blend of fiction and fact. See also her article "The Malleability of Human Memory" (*American Scientist* 67: 312-320, May-June

1979) and her new book, *Memory*.

Marshall, Eliot. "Police Science and Psychics." *Science* 219:994-995, November 28, 1980. Inquiry into the way police and press were hoodwinked into giving a reputed psychic free publicity in the Atlanta child-murders case. "City officials are reticent about [Dorothy] Allison's visit, perhaps because they are awakening to a cold feeling that they were gulled."

Schatzman, Morton. "Evocations of Unreality." *New Scientist*, September 25, 1980, pp. 935-937. More insights into the neural physiology of hallucinations. An apparition — a vision of something clearly not there — can nevertheless stimulate electrical activity in the brain the same way real vision does.

Weber, Christopher Gregory. "Common Creationist Attacks on Geology." *Creation/Evolution*, Fall 1980, pp. 10-25. Addresses creationists' distortions of the earth sciences. (This fine new journal — 953 8th Ave., Suite 209, San Diego, CA 92101 — is performing a much-needed public service in straightforwardly answering creationist contentions.)

—Kendrick Frazier

Some Recent Books

Fuller, Uriah. *Further Confessions of a Psychic*. Available from Karl Fulves, Box 433, Teaneck, N.J.) 1980, 70 pp., \$6.00, paper. More insights into the psychic rackets by a man who knows all the tricks. "Fuller" shows how dozens of them are done.

Neher, Andrew. *The Psychology of Transcendence*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall/Spectrum, 1980, 361 pp., \$7.95, paper. An excellent work demystifying mystical and transcendental experiences. Psychologist Neher shows that "mystical" and "psychic" experiences often have normal physiological explanations that avert the need to resort to "paranormal" hypotheses. Forewords by Robert Morris and Ray Hyman.

Sprague, Roderick, and Krantz, Grover S., eds. *The Scientists Looks at Sasquatch (II)*. Moscow, Idaho: University Press of Idaho, 1979, \$6.95, 195 pp., paper. Essays and articles of variable approach and quality.

—K.F.