
Book Reviews

Project Identification: The First Scientific Field Study of UFO Phenomena. By Harley D. Rutledge. Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1981. 265 pp. \$10.95.

Reviewed by Robert Sheaffer

Project Identification is the story of a UFO investigative group of the same name, founded and headed by Harley D. Rutledge, chairman of the Physics Department at Southeastern Missouri State University at Cape Girardeau. However, Project Identification differs from most UFO organizations in being principally a UFO *observation* group, only secondarily investigating the reported sightings of others. Contrary to what one might have expected, the group has reportedly seen a substantial number of UFOs. During 1973, the best year thus far, one UFO was seen for every three hours of observation. At first, UFOs were seen only on field trips in the vicinity of the town of Piedmont, which was experiencing a local "flap." Then, as Rutledge's powers of observation were sharpened, he began to see UFOs closer to home, ultimately seeing many of them from his own front yard, and even out the window of his office at the Magill Hall of Science. His son reported seeing more than 60 UFOs from the yard, but Rutledge, ever the scientist, decided against including them in the Project Identification figures on the grounds that the boy was not yet sixteen years old, and hence not eligible for membership.

Most of the UFOs described are of the type generally known as "nocturnal lights," usually held by UFO proponents to be the least interesting and least convincing type of UFO report. The errors of perception that can creep into an account of a featureless light seen against a dark sky are well enough known that the major UFO groups seldom assign much importance to reports of this type. But Rutledge and the other members of Project Identification (who are required to have college training or equivalent experience in one of the physical sciences) have prepared a compendium of observations that are bizarre if taken at face value: the Random Flashbulb effect, pseudostars, hovering lights, and even a classic daylight

Robert Sheaffer is the author of The UFO Verdict (1981) and a member of CSICOP's UFO Subcommittee.

flying-saucer. (Rutledge is miffed that J. Allen Hynek, when visiting Piedmont, said, "You have to disregard any light on the horizon." Some of the project's best UFOs are in that category.)

Rutledge is utterly convinced that the group "interacted with the phenomenon under study," and claims that it had "an intelligence equal to or greater than that of man." UFOs reportedly avoided the observing stations, heading directly toward them but suddenly turning away. When the position of the observing station was changed, the UFOs reportedly altered their customary flight-paths accordingly. Rutledge began to suspect that "some sightings were staged for me when I was alone." In two cases, he suspected that "telepathy" may have been involved, although he allows as an alternative explanation that "the UFOs were able to drift silently near our positions at night and listen to our conversations."

One's suspicions are immediately raised that the extraordinary characteristics attributed to these UFOs are not factually correct, and in a closer examination of Rutledge's claims the errors of fact begin to become apparent. One of the first UFOs sighted was dismissed by a skeptic, who also saw it, as an automobile far off on the horizon. Rutledge attempts to refute this by calculating that, if it had been a pair of headlights, the telescope through which they observed it would have resolved the image into two distinct headlamps at a distance of up to forty miles. But he utterly ignores the effect of atmospheric turbulence and scattering, which distorts distant images and destroys a telescope's power of resolution. This is not the kind of argument one expects to hear from a physicist. For another UFO, it is claimed that more fine detail of the object's supposed motion was captured by a 50 mm lens than by an 800 mm lens in the same place at the same time. This violates every law of optics and should have been an immediate tip-off to any scientist that the supposed fine movements of the object were due entirely to camera motion. This is as absurd as supposing that an observer a mile away from an object can see more detail than someone a half-block distant. Surely Rutledge did not earn his Ph.D by fuzzy thinking like this.

In his closing remarks on the subject, the author tells us his suspicion that "UFOs actually dart about in daylight at speeds at which they cannot be seen." He also says he is "certain" that "Missouri National Guard helicopters were in search of UFOs." Rutledge is one of the few UFO proponents to give any credence to the wild stories that UFOs are the secret weapons developed by the Nazis during World War II, assertions that "seemed to be substantiated by an article appearing in *Saga* magazine." (*Nothing* is substantiated by articles in *Saga*.) He relates how the Nazis reportedly flew off in their saucers to secret bases in Antarctica and observes that "scientific expeditions to Antarctica have reported UFO sightings there."

There is no reason to doubt Rutledge's sincerity as he rattles off accounts of one mystifying sighting after another. However, UFOlogists are finally being forced to come to grips with the extraordinary propensity of witnesses to report what they have seen incorrectly (see especially Hendry, *The UFO Handbook*). To the critical reader, it is painfully, even embarrassingly, apparent that the story of *Project Identification* is, from start to end, a massive exercise in self-delusion. ●

The Second Book of the Strange. By Laurence D. Gadd and the Editors of The World Almanac. World Almanac Publications, New York, 1981. 341 pp., paperback, \$7.95. Prometheus Books, Buffalo, N.Y., 1981, cloth, \$16.95.

Reviewed by George Fergus

This book is not a new edition of *The World Almanac Book of the Strange* (reviewed in *SI*, Spring-Summer 1978, pp. 102-05) but rather a completely new volume, consisting primarily of material that was not covered in the original book.

There are new sections on spontaneous human combustion, moon madness, psychic archaeology, acupuncture, cloning, limb regeneration, cryonic preservation of the dead, and similar items of popular interest that were unaccountably missing from the earlier book. On the whole, the evaluations are balanced and based on accurate information. Since they are necessarily brief, it is also important that references are given for further reading, and I am pleased to say that there are more references to debunking articles (many of them from the *SKEPTICAL INQUIRER*) than were present in the first book.

This second volume also presents some excellent updates on subjects covered in the earlier book. For example, it points out that the alleged 130-year-olds living the simple life in remote mountain villages are simply lying about their ages and that "out-of-body experiences" can readily be explained as hallucinations occurring during periods of hypnagogic sleep. Its coverage of the perennial controversies over UFOs and parapsychology seems very well done, although it does fail to warn that the random-event generators used in modern tests for precognition and the ultrasensitive devices used to test for psychokinesis may be subject to a nonrandom bias due to small imperfections in the equipment and should therefore be checked by the insertion of frequent test trials among the actual experiments.

As is to be expected, however, some of the discussions are disappointingly one-sided. The sections on negative air ions and hot-blooded dinosaurs, for example, make specific citations only to works by proponents, even though skeptical treatments are readily available. There are also no corrections to the earlier volume's rather one-sided discussions of Kirlian photography, psychosensitive plants, Bimini blocks, dowsing, Carlos Castaneda, and other subjects.

Also, apparently, "scientific creationism" has progressed to the point that a book about strange phenomena has to include a section on evolution. Whatever the reason, this section includes the book's greatest number of lapses into nonsense, apparently the result of cobbling the information together solely from newspaper and magazine clippings. Here we find that "only one present-day primate, the Howler monkey, stands out as a possible candidate for the missing link." This appears to be a garbled reference to the Howler monkey of South America, whose genetic link to a direct human/ape ancestor is so tenuous that any similarities would most likely be due to convergent evolution.

This section also informs us that living organisms' ability to evade the Second Law of Thermodynamics by use of external energy sources not only is strange but is

George Fergus is an engineer at the Corporate R & D Laboratories of Motorola, Inc., Schaumburg, Illinois.

“one of the basic conundrums of science.” Actually, the explanation is well-known—life decreases its own entropy by increasing the entropy of its food and the rest of its environment. Ilya Prigogine’s Nobel-prize-winning contribution, described here incorrectly as the discovery of a “loophole” in the Second Law, is his extension of the theory of thermodynamics beyond simple “closed” systems so that chemists now have the tools to start analyzing living biological systems.

It is further stated that we will be able to re-create extinct species as soon as “geneticists succeed in extracting viable genetic material from fossil or frozen remains.” Whoever wrote this obviously hadn’t read the section on clones a few pages earlier, which points out that no one has even succeeded in producing a copy of any *living* adult vertebrate.

Perhaps oddest of all, it never does get around to even *mentioning* creationism.

Some of the topics have not been brought completely up to date with current knowledge. The section on ball lightning does not mention James Barry’s duplication of this phenomenon in the laboratory, nor does the section on regular lightning explain why an electric charge builds up in the first place. The discussion of olfactory communication does not make the necessary distinction between ordinary smell and the operation of the vomeronasal system. The description of the legendary Amazons fails to make any reference to the historical and archaeological evidence for women warriors among the ancient Sarmatians. The update on the Shroud of Turin totally ignores Walter McCrone’s identification of an artificial red pigment in particles lifted from the shroud, as well as Joe Nickell’s creation of strikingly similar images by a rubbing technique that could easily have been employed by a medieval artist.

It is disappointing that the discussion of continental drift does not make it clear that key elements of Wegener’s original theory (such as the motive force and the rate of drift) were shown to be incorrect—that the theory wasn’t rejected solely because of the hidebound conservatism of the scientific establishment.

Although there is a new section on legendary creatures, there is still a surprising lack of coverage of the various scientific explanations for unusual legends, particularly the supernatural phenomena described in the Bible. But perhaps this would require a whole book by itself.

I don’t know if the editors are still looking for suggestions like these, since the present volume does not repeat the request for queries and criticisms that was printed in the earlier book. This may signal a change in policy, the editors being tired of the type of mail they’ve been getting. I would like to have seen at least a preface describing the sorts of comments sent in by readers of the first volume, but the present book is totally devoid of introductory material. It does have an index, however, which was annoyingly absent in the earlier book.

In sum, this book has pretty much the same virtues and faults as the first one, and thus includes enough diverse information to be worth buying despite its flaws.

●

Some Recent Books

Listing here does not preclude more detailed review in a future issue.

- Abell, George O., and Barry Singer, eds., *Science and the Paranormal: Probing the Existence of the Supernatural*. Scribner's, New York, 1981, 414 pp., \$17.95. A clear, even-handed, authoritative examination of fringe-science and the paranormal from a scientific point of view. Twenty essay articles by 19 scientists and writers: Gardner on parapsychology and quantum mechanics, Singer on Kirlian photography, Hyman and Randi on scientists and psychics, Asimov and Siegel on life after death, Abell on astrology and moon madness, Sagan on Velikovsky, Krupp on pseudomysteries of the past, Klass on UFOs, Kusche on the Bermuda Triangle, Nolen on psychic healing, Cohen on monsters, Galston and Slayman on plant perception, and Khalil and Kurucz on bio-rhythms. Two concluding chapters by astronomer Frank Drake and physicist Philip Morrison deal with the positive side of science's *real* mysteries. An excellent, readable scientific perspective on popular mysteries and misconceptions.
- Alcock, James E. *Parapsychology: Science or Magic?* Pergamon Press, Elmsford, N.Y., 1981, 224 pp., \$17.95. A critical perspective on parapsychology by a psychologist knowledgeable about the pitfalls and biases of belief. Approaches the subject with two questioning themes: What are the central—and very fundamental—problems with parapsychology, its methods, data, and theory (or lack of it) that prevent it from achieving acceptance within the scientific community; and if psi phenomena do not exist, what psychological factors account for the persistence of belief in them? An important look at essential issues.
- Cohen, Daniel. *The Great Airship Mystery*. Dodd, Mead & Co., New York, 1981, 212 pp., \$9.95. An examination of the "mysterious airship" sightings of 1896 and 1897. An entertaining look at a nineteenth century "UFO" flap. In his final chapter the author concludes that, suggestions of "real" UFOs and parapsychical explanations to the contrary, the great airship mystery probably grew out of mistaken identification of natural phenomena combined with intentional hoaxes. He draws parallels with UFO reports of today.
- Forrest, Bob. *Velikovsky's Sources: Part 1* and *Velikovsky's Sources: Part 2*. \$12.00 for the two. (U.S. residents may order from and make checks payable to Robert J. Schadewald, Rte. 1, Box 129, Rogers, MN 55374.) An interesting and long-needed examination of Velikovsky's use of historical sources. Among the author's purposes is "to show that much of the 'evidence' for the scenario of *Worlds in Collision* is the product of a . . . process of selection and rejection and to demonstrate that a different picture emerges when Velikovsky's evidence is read not in the forms in which it is presented in *Worlds in Collision* but in its original contexts."
- Moore, Brooke Noel. *The Philosophical Possibilities Beyond Death*. Charles C. Thomas, Springfield, Ill., 1981, 222 pp., \$22.95. A philosopher's critical examination of the purported evidence of after-death survival. Although his conclusions are essentially negative, his approach is mild and nonhostile to believers' sensibilities.

—Kendrick Frazier

Books In Progress

Evolution and Creationism

A number of books by scientists and writers dealing with scientific, political, or social aspects of the evolution/creationism controversy are in press or in progress. Stan Weinberg, national coordinator of the network of state Corresponding Committees on Evolution (see News & Comment, this issue), provided information about them.—E.D.

University of Massachusetts anthropologist **Laurie Godfrey** (familiar to SKEPTICAL INQUIRER readers for her article on anti-evolution propaganda in our Fall 1979 issue and author of a recent *Natural History* article on the subject) is editor of *Scientists Confront Creationism* (W. W. Norton, 1982). Contributions by leading scientists are aimed at specific creationist arguments. Godfrey is also working on a book for Allyn & Bacon on current controversies in evolution, not addressing creationism per se but including one chapter on the subject.

Princeton anthropologist **Ashley Montagu** is editing a work by 18 authors (Oxford University Press, Summer 1982) giving broad coverage of specific arguments and issues for the general reader. **Michael Bentley** (Roanoke Valley Science Museum) and **Robert Bordeaux** (Biology Dept., Hollins College, Va.) have completed a work for school-boards, teachers, and mainline Christians. It deals with educational issues, the history of creationism, synopses of major court cases, synopses of both positions, plus their educational recommendations (pro-evolution). By the time this appears the book should have been released from Cambridge Publications, Charlottesville.

Philosopher **Michael Ruse** is author of *Darwinism Defended: A Guide to the Evolution Controversies*, due from Addison-Wesley in early 1982.

Niles Eldredge (American Museum of Natural History) has a work going into production with Pocket Books of Washington Square Press. An expansion of his *New Republic* article on the subject, it will deal with what is and what is not science, contemporary controversies *within* evolution, and creationist activities. **William Mayer** (Biological Sciences Curriculum Study) is editing a book by scientists analyzing specific creationist arguments and intended for school boards, legislators, teachers, and parents.

Norman Newell (American Museum of Natural History) has completed a book aimed at the religious community. It will deal with what science is and with the scientific method, the difficulties of interfacing Bible and science, and interpretational matters. Publication expected in Spring 1982. **Robert Schaedewald** (author of the article on the similarities among creationists, flat earthers, and geocentrists in our Winter 1981-82 issue) hopes for publication in 1982 of his book on creationism, its leaders, creationist propaganda methods, and why creationism is a pseudoscience. It also will deal with such specifics as flood geology, the age of earth, the debating and legal tactics of creationists, and comparisons with earlier Bible-science movements.

A new book by zoologist **Doug Futuyma** (SUNY, Stony Brook) for laymen, teachers, and nonscientist educators is targeted for publication by Pantheon in Fall 1982. It addresses what we understand about evolution and why, plus creationist

arguments. Zoologist **Warren Dolphin** (Iowa State University) is coordinator of a 13-chapter work dealing with various aspects of scientific creationism that will summarize the Iowa experience and probably treat the national legislative scene. **Allen Stairs** (History and Philosophy of Science, University of Maryland) is in the early stages of editing a book treating the broader philosophical issues, such as falsifiability, use of "theory," "fact," and "hypothesis," backgrounds of religious controversy, Bible scholars' current approach to Genesis, theological concerns raised by humanism and evolution, and legal matters of creation versus evolution.

The vacuum of books on evolution specifically intended to help the public deal with the tactics and misstatements of creationists is about to be filled.

—K.F.

Articles of Note

- Asimov, Isaac. "The 'Threat' of Creationism." *New York Times Magazine*, June 14, 1981, pp. 90-101. Excellent and comprehensive. Outlines the seven major arguments of the creationists and corrects the misconceptions proffered by each. "To those trained in science, creationism seems like a bad dream, a sudden reliving of a nightmare, a renewed march of an army of the night risen to challenge free thought and enlightenment."
- Bernstein, Ellen. "Lourdes." In *Encyclopaedia Britannica 1982 Yearbook of Medicine and Health*, pp. 129-47. A critical examination of the healing "miracles" that attract ailing pilgrims to the cathedral in northwestern France.
- Cherfas, Jeremy. "Paranormal-Watchers Fall Out Over the Mars Effect," *New Scientist*, Oct. 19, 1981, p. 294. Balanced report on the Rawlins/Gauquelin/CSICOP Mars-effect controversy discussed in our Winter 1981-82 issue.
- "The Creationists," special section in *Science* 81, December 1981, with articles on creationism as a social movement, "The Genesis of Equal Time" by John Skow, and creationism as science, "A Farewell to Newton, Einstein, Darwin . . ." by Allen Hammond and Lynn Margulis, plus sidebars on the impact on education and what the creationists say. Fairly direct and hard-hitting.
- Crowe, Michael J. "New Light on the Moon Hoax." *Sky and Telescope*, November 1981, pp. 428-29. Following on David S. Evans's two articles on the Great Moon Hoax of 1835, in that magazine's September and October issues, Crowe presents evidence that the series of *New York Sun* articles about life forms observed on the moon was not a hoax at all but a satire.
- Dahlin, Robert. "A Tough Time For Textbooks." *Publishers Weekly*, Aug. 7, 1981, pp. 28-32. Report on the battles educational publishers are having to fight against conservative pressure groups, including the creationists' attempts to limit references to evolution.
- Eagar, Harry. "How Psychic Is Greta Alexander? Not Very, Her Track Record Shows." *Des Moines (Iowa) Register*, Sept. 30, 1981. To check a police claim that Illinois "psychic" Alexander had "demonstrated some success" in crime-solving and body-finding in Iowa, Eagar, a *Register* copy editor, used his newspaper's files to examine what her predictions were and how they stood up.

Time after time she was wrong. A fine example of the type of follow-up article all publications that publish reports of psychics' predictions should do.

- Evans, Christopher. "Pentagon Putting Its Mind to Psychic Arms Race." *Minneapolis Star*, Oct. 6, 1981, pp. 1B and 2B. Detailed, skeptical examination of the military's no-joke (but funny nevertheless) top-secret program to attempt to develop "psychotronic" (ESP) weapons. Based in part on interview with Ron McRae, Jack Anderson's associate, who first exposed the program and is researching a book on it.
- Gould, Stephen Jay. "Agassiz in the Galapagos." *Natural History*. December 1981, pp. 7-14. Amazed to learn that naturalist Louis Agassiz, the last great scientist-creationist, voyaged to the Galapagos in 1872, Gould resolves to discover what effect this virtually unmentioned trip to the land of Darwin and evolution had on Agassiz. He concludes that it made precious little impact, because Agassiz's mind was so committed to creationism that it was not receptive to the subtle signals about evolution. "Scientific discovery is not a one-way transfer of information from unambiguous nature to minds that are always open."
- Hunt, Morton. "A Fraud That Shook the World of Science." *New York Times Magazine*, Nov. 1, 1981. An examination of the case of plagiarism and falsified data involving endocrinologist Vijay R. Soman at the Yale School of Medicine.
- Lewin, Roger. "A Response to Creationism Evolves." *Science*, 214:635-38, Nov. 6, 1981. Report on the start of coordinated scientific reaction against creationists' anti-evolution tactics. (See News and Comment, this issue.) This was the first of a splendid series of detailed reports by Lewin on the creationism issue and the Arkansas trial. See *Science* issues of Dec. 4, Dec. 11, Jan. 1, Jan. 8, Jan. 22, and Jan. 29.
- Lewis, Ralph W. "Why Scientific Creationism Fails to Meet the Criteria of Science." *Creation/Evolution*, Summer 1981, pp. 7-11. Michigan State University biologist concludes that "scientific creationism does not exist, and those who say [it does] are being misled by their ignorance of science and their ignorance of the criteria by which scientists decide what constitutes science."
- "Magician or Scientist?" *Discover*, December 1981, p. 12. "Skeptical Eye" report on the controversy over the strange "morphogenetic fields" hypothesis of English plant physiologist Rupert Sheldrake. See also the running discussion in many issues of *Nature* throughout the fall of 1981.
- Roberts, David. "Heroes and Hoaxers." *Outside*, October 1981, pp. 62-70. Re-counting of the considerable evidence that Richard E. Byrd's "first flight over the North Pole" in 1926 in fact never made it to the Pole. From the author's forthcoming book *Great Exploration Hoaxes*.
- Steinhart, Peter. "Fundamentals." *Audubon*, September 1981, pp. 5-14. Essay on the creation-evolution dispute and the ethical and environmental consequences of ignoring evolutionary principles.
- Zuidema, Henry P. "Genetics and Genesis: The New Biology Textbooks that Include Creationism." *Creation/Evolution*, Summer 1981, pp. 18-22. Examination of biology texts shows how evolution as a topic is slipping away and creationism slipping in as several major textbook publishers accede to creationist pressure in the billion-dollar school market. Followed by a discussion by biology educator Stanley Weinberg of some of the issues raised.

—Kendrick Frazier