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## Book Reviews

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### Easy Reading About Hard Mysteries

*Mystic Places.* By the Editors of Time-Life Books. *Mysteries of the Unknown* Series. Time-Life Books, Alexandria, Va. 1987. 160 pp. \$14.95.

Charles J. Cazeau

**M**YSTIC PLACES is the first book in Time-Life Books' widely advertised new *Mysteries of the Unknown* series (see *SI News and Comment*, Summer 1987). It contains five chapters: "Atlantis," "The Great Pyramid," "Megaliths," "Pictures on the Earth," and "An Interior World." Between the chapters are five pictorial essays touching upon related subjects. The numerous and elegant illustrations alone make the book worthy of purchase.

A scientific treatise it is not. There is little if any critical analysis. Nor was this the intent. The authors are saying, "Look, this book is to entertain you with some interesting stories and pretty pictures. We don't half-believe this stuff ourselves but there's an outside chance there may be something

to it all." This attitude is buttressed by qualifiers like "so-called," "purported," and "they claim." Even mainstream scientists are allowed their say, albeit briefly.

Chapter 1, on Atlantis, provides a rich background with due credit to Plato, the originator of the legend. It was easy, the authors say, to believe in the former existence of the lost continent in a largely unexplored world, where such speculations took firm root and often persisted into more recent times. The life and ideas of Ignatius Donnelly, a leading Atlantis exponent of the last century, are detailed, but the shortcomings of his work are noted. The views of Madame Blavatsky and Edgar



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Cayce are also paraded across the stage. Just when the reader is convinced Atlantis existed, the authors throw in all the geologic evidence demonstrating that there never was such a continent. The last segment of the chapter entertains the possibility that the real Atlantis was after all Crete. But that is still above water. The Time-Life authors conclude, possibly with tongue in cheek, that perhaps "a mystic Atlantis still rests in the deep, waiting to give up its age-old secrets."

Chapter 2 deals briefly with the methods of construction of the Great Pyramid at Giza and its purported purpose. This is followed by an interesting chronicle of efforts to discover hidden meanings in the dimensions of the Great Pyramid, especially those of nineteenth-century investigators John Taylor and Piazzi Smyth, who maintained that measurements of the pyramid showed the Egyptians far in advance of the times in mathematics, geometry, and astronomy. To a point, they believed that only divine inspiration could be the source of this knowledge. This account is balanced by the depiction of the work of Egyptologist Flinders Petrie, who found no scientific foundation for such measurements and their assumptions. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the pyramid-power fad—the idea that the shape of the pyramid provides a mechanism to preserve organic material, sharpen razor blades, and induce feelings of well-being for those camped inside a pyramid tent.

The focus of "The Meaning of the Megaliths" (Chapter 3) is Stonehenge. Again, a chronological approach is used, beginning with folklore and speculations of the Middle Ages about how and why Stonehenge was built, including the tale of the stones' flight from Ireland to Britain with the help of Merlin's wizardry. King James I commissioned architect Inigo Jones in 1620 to get to the bottom of the mystery. Jones concluded that the Romans built Stonehenge and that the Druids, who were not architects, had nothing to do with it. Along come William Stukeley and John Aubrey, names closely associated with Stonehenge investigations, who claim the Druids did indeed build it. Then we have Gerald Hawkins, who presents evidence that Stonehenge really functioned as a computerized astronomical observatory. This leads to a discussion of the ley lines and other archaeoastronomical evidence of Alexander Thom. It is a readable and interesting chapter, flawed only by hearsay and anecdotal tales of UFO visitations and psychic vibrations at Stonehenge, without rebuttal.

Chapter 4, "Pictures on the Earth," is mostly about the Nazca Plains. The fact is brought out that there are a multitude of large pictorial representations elsewhere on the earth. Those familiar with the Nazca lines and animal portraits best seen from the sky will also be familiar with the work of Maria Reiche, which is highlighted in this chapter. So are the "theories" of the discredited Erich von Däniken. However, the opinions of scientists of von Däniken's ideas are reasonably presented. There is a fine summation on the construction of the hot-air balloon by the International Explorer's Society to see if the Nazcas could have made such a balloon and viewed the drawings from the air or supervised their rendering. The reader is left to sort out the motives for such drawings, and alternative possibilities are presented.

The apex of the fantastic is reached in the final chapter, "An Interior World." The thesis is examined that the earth is hollow. Small wonder, perhaps, because in recent years some Soviet "scientists" proposed that the moon is hollow. The chapter explores the myths that woolly mammoths may still wander inside the earth; that a race of degenerate people lurk below; that the northern lights are beams shining out from within; that Adolf Hitler sent out expeditions to find openings in the earth so he could see the movements of the British Fleet on the other side. Even the respected Edmond Halley of Halley's comet proposed a hollow-earth theory. Fortunately, the

writer of the chapter doesn't really believe there is a hollow earth. Unfortunately, the gullible will read it and think that there might be.

In sum, an interesting book to read and a fine exercise in separating fiction from nonfiction. The skeptic will feel it gives too much credence to sensationalist beliefs. Perhaps. Yet this volume certainly distances itself from pure *National Enquirer* drivel. ●

## Lost in the Flying-Saucer Subculture

*In Advance of the Landing: Folk Concepts of Outer Space.* By Douglas Curran. Abbeville Press, New York. 1985. 132 pp. Oversized paperback, \$16.95.

Michael R. Dennett

**O**NLY A handful of the hundreds of books about flying saucers merit serious consideration. *In Advance of the Landing: Folk Concepts of Outer Space*, by Douglas Curran, is one of those few good books. Indeed it is an exciting photonarrative that covers facets not normally explored. In the Foreword, Tom Wolfe writes of the author: "[He] is not only a photographer but also a reporter, and an extremely gifted one." I agree.

*In Advance of the Landing* is the product of eight years of exploration by Curran into the North American subculture of the flying saucer. The book is richly composed of more than 60 photographs and complementary text. Its message and significance are in no way depreciated by the photojournalism format.

The author's odyssey across the United States and Canada brought him into contact with the exotic and often quixotic world of the flying-saucer worshiper. Curran met Charles Gaiffe at Giant Rock, California, in 1977. Gaiffe, then 78, had driven from his home in Ohio to seek help from UFO-contactee George Van Tassel. Gaiffe was hoping to gain information about a UFO propulsion system for "Bluebird," an incomplete flying saucer he was working on. "Bluebird," pictured in the book, was a project of the ASDP (Advanced Scientific Development Project). Van Tassel, although in close contact with the space brothers, was unable to help Gaiffe. Gaiffe continues to work on a motor that will make "Bluebird" fly.

South of San Bernardino, Curran met Carl Gendreau, another subject of his photographs. Carl, who lives in his 1962 Meteor and a tent, believes that an airliner will make contact with a giant UFO in the near future.

For those who want to see a flying saucer now, there is Henry DiCienzo's Flying Saucer Drive-in, built in 1972 and located in Niagara Falls, Ontario. Curran reports that the drive-in was recently enlarged and "now boasts 96 lights."

A key element in the success of this book is the author's ability to identify and empathize with so many of his subjects. Curran spends a night atop Red Mountain,

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Orlando Toroni spends his nights on a hillside tracking spaceships hiding behind satellites. Near Orlando, California. (Reprinted from *In Advance of the Landing*, with permission.)

California, with Orlando Toroni. Toroni, an unemployed bulldozer operator, uses a pair of aircraft traffic lights to signal alien spaceships, which he claims hide behind Earth satellites.

At a meeting of the Aetherius Society in Hollywood and at a New Age convention near Mt. Rainier, Washington, Curran met more UFO contactees and people who believe in them.

The author was not always successful in winning the trust of followers of alien prophets. At O. T. Nodrog's Time Ark Base near Weslaco, Texas, not all believed that Curran was sincere. He did learn from members that UFOs were five-dimensional craft and that training was available at the base on a 13,000-mph four-dimensional junior spacecraft. When Curran telephoned the base later, he was told: "We don't give interviews. . . . You have all the facts you need. . . . You've gone back to the Empire."

In March 1965, and again in 1968, John F. Reeves made contact with aliens. Known as the "spaceman of Brooksville," Florida, he subsequently built a 23-foot obelisk as a testimonial to the encounters. In 1980, he lost his home and the monument to tax collectors and now lives in a trailer. When Curran visited him Reeves was 86. Writes the author: "His newspaper clippings are kept in an old suitcase that he hauls out for anyone who wants to see. A dog-eared book contains the autographs of people who came to see his UFO monument, among them Jimmy Page of Led Zeppelin, Pat Boone, Tuesday Weld." John Reeves's biggest regret, reports Curran, is that he "will not be buried in the tomb he had prepared for himself at the foot of the obelisk, which bore this legend: 'In this tomb lies the body of John F. Reeves, one of the greatest men of our time, the greatest of them all. Outer space traveller to other planets of our universe.'"

Curran's book brings the world of the UFO devotee to life. It is a subculture that has been either ignored or called the "lunatic fringe." Initially the stories seem

humorous, even ludicrous. But as one reads further and reflects on the content, one realizes that the real story is one of individuals lost in our society. The photographs and narrative tell a tale of desperate people looking for answers. If you have an interest in UFOs, *In Advance of the Landing* would be a good investment. •

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## Some Recent Books

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

Druckman, Daniel, and John A. Swets, eds. *Enhancing Human Performance: Issues, Theories, and Techniques*. Committee on Techniques for Enhancement of Human Performance, Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education, National Research Council, National Academy Press, 2101 Constitution Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20037, 1988. 299 pp., \$32.50, cloth, \$22.50, paper. Report of NRC committee evaluating techniques claimed to enhance human performance, including psychological techniques (learning, improving motor skills, altering mental states, stress management, and social processes) and parapsychological techniques (paranormal phenomena). We hope to have a summary in our next issue.

Evans, Hilary. *Gods \* Spirits \* Cosmic Guardians: A Comparative Study of the Encounter Experience*. Aquarian Press, Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, U.K., 1987. 287 pp., £7.99, paper. An examination of alleged encounters with divinities, spirits, folklore entities, extraterrestrials, and so on, including the physiological, mental, and psychological processes that contribute to these reported experiences. A sequel to Evans's *Visions \* Apparitions \* Alien Visitors*.

Harrold, Francis B., and Raymond A. Eve, eds. *Cult Archaeology and Creationism: Understanding Pseudoscientific Beliefs About the Past*. University of Iowa Press, Iowa City, IA 52242, 1987. 163 pp., \$20.00. Along with astronomy and psychology, archaeology has been the continuing object of fringe theories and bizarre claims by laymen and popular writers. This much-needed volume, an outgrowth of a symposium at the Society for American Archaeology, addresses virtually all these claims. The emphasis is not in showing how and why the fringe beliefs are wrong but in understanding the origins and levels of these beliefs and coping with them. Several of the chapters provide more information on studies of student beliefs about the past described in the editors' article in the Fall 1986 *SI*.

Narasimhaiah, N. *Science, Nonscience, and the Paranormal*. Bangalore Science Forum, The National College Buildings, Bangalore 560 004, India, 1987. 334 pp., paper. A collection of articles from the SKEPTICAL INQUIRER and writings of Indian scientists and thinkers. See Editor's column, pp. 228-229, this issue.

Reveen, Peter. *The Superconscious World*. Eden Press, 31A Westminster Ave., Montreal, Quebec H4X 1Y8, 1987. 133 pp. Reveen, who adapted a brief article from this book for our Winter 1987-88 issue, here addresses in greater length the state of hypnosis, with special references to sorting out what is fact and what is