Book Reviews

Extinguishing the Fires of Unreason

UFO-Abductions: A Dangerous Game. By Philip J. Klass. Prometheus Books, Buffalo, N.Y. 1988. 200 pp. Cloth, $18.95.

Robert A. Baker

PHILIP KLASS's latest contribution to responsible scientific journalism could not have come at a better time. When the definitive history of the pseudosciences is written, 1987 will appear as a banner year in the UFO chronology. It was not only the year of Gary Kinder's *Light Years,* Whitley Strieber's *Communion,* and Budd Hopkins's *Intruders,* but it was also a time when the general public began to sit up and take notice and wonder whether "maybe there is something to this abduction nonsense after all." Scott Rogo's edited volume *Alien Abductions: True Cases of UFO Kidnappings,* which appeared in 1980, met with only cursory interest among the chroniclers of pseudoscience and was almost totally ignored by the media. But in 1987 both Hopkins and Strieber, in particular, were clutched to the media's bosom and warmly embraced. The two books appeared on national best-seller lists and the authors were guests on radio and television talk-shows week after week. Their tomes were reviewed in just about every magazine, newspaper, and journal in the nation, and Hopkins and Strieber were the subjects of in-depth interviews in a number of popular scientific and pseudoscientific journals. As might be expected, there is talk that *Communion,* with Strieber playing the lead role, will be made into a movie.

Toward the end of 1987 things were definitely getting out of hand. In fact, a cover article in the December 1987 *Omni* magazine suggested that literally hundreds of people have been kidnapped but are not consciously aware of it! *Omni* even included a questionnaire to help you determine whether *you* were a

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victim. Although as I write the results of *Omni*'s poll are not yet in, with this sort of open invitation and incitement you can rest assured that hundreds more abductees will turn up clamoring for the spotlight. It is well documented that one UFO sighting succeeds in triggering a dozen more.

Fortunately, early this year Klass's new book appeared. It not only successfully extinguishes most of the flames of "abduction" unreason but also meticulously combs through the ashes of the reports to expose example after example of fraud, delusion, and self-deception. Beginning with the famous (or infamous) case of Betty and Barney Hill's 1961 encounter with a flying saucer, Klass shows in step-by-step fashion how this elaborate fantasy game came about and how, with the help of John Fuller's book *Interrupted Journey*, it became a *cause célèbre*. Even more help was forthcoming from the NBC prime-time movie "The UFO Incident," shown in October 1975. As one would expect, following this telecast other reports of UFO abductions quickly accumulated.

One of the most notorious was the Arizona case of Travis Walton, who was reputedly kidnapped for five days. As Klass reports, the most astounding thing about this incident was the fact that it was ever taken seriously. It should have been seen for the hoax it was from the outset. Travis's brother, Duane, was even quoted as saying about Travis: "He's not even missing. He knows where he's at, and I know where he's at." Although Travis passed one polygraph test, when Klass interviewed an unbiased polygrapher who had tested Travis earlier he found that Travis had flunked the first test miserably.

Again, as a result of the sensationalistic publicity, an Air Force sergeant named Charles Moody came forward to claim that a few months earlier he too had been kidnapped by UFOnauts who spoke perfect English but did so without moving their lips. Weeks later three Kentucky women claimed they were sucked into a giant UFO by laserlike beams. Next a young man named David Stephens was snatched up by little webb-fingered men wearing flowing black robes. Then, from a small town in California, Steve Harris and Helen White discovered that they also had been kidnapped by—in White's terms—"a blond-headed fellow with wavy hair wearing a long kind of thing that looked like a raincoat." Notably, all of these reports of abductions emerged following the use of regressive hypnosis to recover an alleged period of "missing time."

It was in the spring of 1979, however, that, in Klass's words, "the most incredible UFO-abduction story of all time" emerged in a book titled *The Andreasson Affair: The Documented Investigation of a Woman's Abduction Aboard a UFO.* Written by Raymond Fowler, the book tells how Andreasson, a Massachusetts mother of seven, was kidnapped only a few months after the Betty and Barney Hill case broke but waited seven years before going public herself. Klass shows, in a careful analysis of the regressive-hypnosis material and the other facts surrounding the case, that several parts of Andreasson's story were indisputably "pure fantasy." He concludes: "If any part of Andreasson's story is inventive fantasy, the entire incident must be suspect. . . . For me, the Andreasson case demonstrates that even a basically honest, religious person, who admits to having read UFO books and who has a vivid imagination, can easily invent a tale that credulous UFOlogists find impossible to dismiss simply as fantasy despite its bizarre details." Anyone familiar with the characteristics of fantasy-prone individuals will have little difficulty recognizing that Andreasson is a perfect example of the genre.

Klass also discusses the fascinating case of Charles Hickson and Calvin Parker of Pascagoula, Mississippi. These two are of particular significance to abduction be-

lievers because, like Walton's and some of Andreasson's memories, details of the kidnappings were recalled without the use of hypnosis. Again, careful analysis of their claims and their confused accounts indicates that both suggestion and confabulation are at work. Along with the powerful effects of the social-demand characteristics of the situation, little wonder that their story is a corker! Suggestion is such a powerful force that the usual hypnotic routine is not even necessary. The entire school of Eriksonian psychotherapy uses hypnotic suggestion via parables, metaphors, and stories with open-eyed clients. When persons like Hickson and Parker are interrogated by prestigious UFOlogists who also strongly believe in UFO abductions, it is hardly surprising that, if there was any doubt about what happened to them before the interrogation, that doubt will be removed by the time the questioning is over.

Indeed, with just a little help certain people can be made to believe just about anything. Klass reports, in detail, the experimental work of Alvin Lawson, John De Herrera, and William McCall, who early in 1977 took ordinary (UFO-free) people, hypnotized them, and told them to imagine they had been kidnapped by a UFO. They were then asked to describe the experience. The experimenters could find few differences between the stories told by their test subjects and the experiences described by Betty Hill and other claimants. Coupled with Martin Orne's warnings about the ease with which pseudo-memories are created, Klass makes very clear just how such erroneous abduction beliefs come about.

The most important and impressive chapters in the book, however, are those dealing with Budd Hopkins and the cases he discussed in his 1981 book *Missing Time* and in his more recent *Intruders: The Incredible Visitations at Copley Woods.* In analyzing some of the cases Hopkins regards as irrefutable, Klass has little difficulty in finding their Achilles heel. In the case of Steve Kilburn (a pseudonym) and Kathie Davis, Klass shows that Kilburn's kidnapping was wholly in Hopkins's mind, since even under hypnosis Kilburn did not recall being kidnapped. In the Kathie Davis case, even though physical evidence is claimed, Klass's detective work shows that the physical manifestations were due to natural rather than unnatural causes.

Klass's most valuable contributions to our knowledge of human frailty and credulity are found in his chapter "Many Dreams, Many Abductions." Described here are a number of individuals undergoing vivid hypnopompic or hypnogogic dreams—or acting out highly realistic fantasies—who, after encountering true UFO believers, are easily brainwashed into believing they were indeed kidnapped and violated. In a startling quotation from Hopkins's book, a hypnotized subject tells of his abduction and rape and then asks Hopkins: "It was a dream, wasn't it Budd? It had to be a dream. . . . This can't be real, can it?" Hopkins says that he reassured the subject that it was only a dream, but amazingly he then adds, "As I spoke there were tears in my eyes *because we both knew the truth*" (Klass's emphasis). Then come these chilling words from Hopkins, *"Every single abductee I've ever worked with is sure that it may happen again."* After this revelation Klass states the theme and purpose of his book:

> How tragic for those who have sought counsel from a person with no training in psychotherapy who admits that he has shifted his emphasis to "therapeutic considerations—helping the abductee deal with fear and uncertainty." In my opinion that fear and uncertainty is the completely unnecessary product of Hopkins's own UFO fantasies, which he unwittingly implants in his subjects' minds. When subjects are under hypnosis

> and thus in an extremely suggestible state of mind, pseudo-memories unwittingly implanted can last a lifetime.

It is tragic that Hopkins and his sort do not understand *iatrogenic* disorders—disorders caused by doctors and their treatment techniques and procedures, which may, although unwittingly, cause problems more serious than those that brought the patient in.

In later chapters Klass deals with Whitley Strieber and his "communion" with little folk from a parallel dimension. Strieber, of course, is a fascinating individual with a fantasy-prone personality profile who also appears to have some of the symptoms of temporal-lobe epilepsy.

In the most amusing chapter in his book, Klass discusses the rivalry between Hopkins and Strieber in claiming the limelight. Then he tells of the time he approached Hopkins with an "absurd" (Hopkins's word) suggestion: "Why don't you report these alleged abductions to the FBI?"—a brilliant strategic move. Hopkins rejected this outright and later stated: "This is the bizarre Phil Klass thing. . . . Nobody is going to report this to the FBI. It's like trying to report it to the EPA. It's totally irrelevant. . . . I think Klass is a despicable human being because he's trying to discredit the witnesses." Not at all. Klass has offered to pay any "victim" $10,000 "providing the alleged abduction is reported to the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the FBI investigation confirms that the kidnapping really occurred." Klass's announcement also noted, however, that "anyone who knowingly reports a spurious kidnapping to the FBI is vulnerable to a $10,000 fine and five years in prison."

In the final chapters of the book Klass provides the most interesting and, at the same time, the most disturbing conclusions about the present state of UFOlogy, abduction believers, UFO investigators, psychology, and scientific communication. Painful as it is to have to admit, psychologists and psychiatrists have done an embarrassingly bad job in communicating their knowledge to the general public and even to the members of their own professions. The reasons for this are many and various; books could be written about the results of narrow specialization, the proliferation of journals and papers that no one has the time to read because he is too busy producing his own, and so on. But another major contributor to the problem is the public's tendency to overrate the knowledge of the so-called experts. Most modern scientists are highly specialized and may not be aware of every development in their highly diverse and complex field of practice. And certainly no field of science is more complex and variegated than psychology and psychiatry. Too many practitioners become so narrow and so specialized they often do not know what is, literally, going on next door. Moreover, they much too frequently pronounce and declaim outside their areas of expertise. Klass cites an example of this latter problem in discussing the work of David Jacobs, a professor of history at Temple University who uses hypnosis with alleged abductees. Jacobs, in a talk given at the 1986 Mutual UFO Network conference, weighed the prosaic explanations offered for "abductee" stories and promptly rejected them, concluding his talk with the observation:

> If the abductee stories are not true and the claimants are neither lying nor pathologically disturbed . . . psychiatry, psychology and psychoanalysis are revolutionized.

Only someone unaware of the entire area of anomalistic psychology—the prevalence of fantasy-prone personalities, the powerful demand characteristics of the hypnosis situation, the impossibility of separating confabulation from truth in regressive

hypnosis, the ease of implanting false and pseudo-memories, and the universality of hypnopompic and hypnogogic hallucinations—would make such an absurd statement.

For a denouement, Klass suggests that victims of the abduction fantasy—whose initial confusions and fantasies have been magnified into full-blown abductions—should all be considered as suffering from "Hopkins Syndrome." In Klass's words: "While Hopkins was not the first to discover 'covert UFO abductions,' in my opinion he has become the 'Typhoid Mary' of this tragic malaise. Perhaps, without realizing it, he also has become one of its victims." We heartily agree and commend Klass's efforts.

In a postscript, Klass urges all potential UFO abductees to remember that "even those UFOlogists who believe that some UFOs are extraterrestrial spaceships admit that more than 90 percent of all UFO reports turn out to have prosaic explanations." He also notes that after more than 21 years of investigating the most seemingly inexplicable UFO cases he has yet to encounter even one that could not be explained in natural terms.

This brings to mind my favorite UFO story. Seems that early one winter morning a man rushed into the sheriff's office to report that he had seen a large yellow object on the ground, with flashing red lights, rows of lighted windows, and small people inside. The object was a school bus! Although *UFO-Abductions: A Dangerous Game* may not be the final word in the battle of science versus pseudoscience, Klass nevertheless has succeeded in delivering a powerful and telling blow against those fictional aliens, their human accomplices, and the ever-present forces of illogic and unreason. •

The Exploitation of the Public Interest

The UFO Phenomenon. By the Editors of Time-Life Books. *Mysteries of the Unknown* Series. Time-Life Books, Alexandria, Va., 1987. 160 pp. $12.99

Michael R. Dennett

THE SLICK advertising brochure received by millions of Americans promoting Time-Life's new *Mysteries of the Unknown* series promises that it is unprecedented, irresistible, and astounding. *The UFO Phenomenon,* third in the series, is none of these. Instead it is a brazenly pro-UFO book put together by hack writers. The paranormal bias aside, the book reflects the poorest writing quality. The text is peppered with vague phrases like "some intelligence officers," "some researchers," "serious UFO investigators," "some local commentators," "a civilian investigator," and "some ufologists." The reader never learns who the intelligence officers might have been or who, in the opinion of Time-Life, the serious UFO investigators are.

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There is no indication that *any* primary research was done by the authors, nor does the book contribute any new or original ideas on the topic. No attempt is made to make an assessment of the overall phenomenon on the basis of either the quality or the quantity of UFO reports. The focus jumps from one case to the next and then often back again, much like a low-budget television "documentary."

A few UFO cases are reviewed skeptically but many are presented just as they first appeared in the *National Enquirer*. Among the many cases for which the authors provide no skeptical data are the Travis Walton abduction (see Wells 1981) and the Pascagoula, Mississippi, case (see Klass 1974, Chap. 27). Although there is ample evidence that both of these cases are hoaxes, Time-Life presents them as true mysteries.

Perhaps the most blatant example of omitting the prosaic explanation of a UFO event is in the recounting of the encounter of an Air Force RB-47 aircraft with a radar UFO in 1957. No mention is made of the brilliant investigation of this case by Philip J. Klass. Yet in writing about radar evidence Time-Life states: "A number of radar-tracked UFO episodes remain unexplained—at least to the satisfaction of those who tracked them." Because the RB-47 incident is one of the few radar cases mentioned, the reader is drawn to the conclusion that it must be unexplained, at least to "those who tracked them." The truth is quite different. The report of the investigation by Klass not only provided a solution but one that was able to satisfy both the aircraft's pilot and its radar operator. After reviewing the data presented by Klass, radar operator Frank McClure wrote: "I am certain that for some reason we had intercepted a ground signal that moved up-scope. . . . I do not believe any UFO was emitting these signals" (Klass 1974, p. 211).

Other important facets of the flying-saucer phenomenon covered by the authors include the ideas of Erich von Däniken and the design of a "viable" UFO based on the description of Ezekiel's wheel in the Bible. A page is devoted to "the Oz factor," the supposed feeling of "sensory isolation" experienced during close encounters with UFOs. Wilhelm Reich and orgone energy are mentioned. Even the tale of Antonio Villas Boas's abduction and seduction by a beautiful spacewoman is told. Subsequent medical examinations, report Time-Life, showed unusual wounds on Villas Boas, which "led some researchers to study the case seriously."

The UFO Phenomenon is, more than anything, a picture book. Of the 152 pictures, drawings, and photographs, only three were of passing interest to me. A couple of the more than 200 UFO photos taken by Eduard "Billy" Meier are featured in color. Almost 10 percent are artists' renditions of space aliens and abductions, seven are motion-picture stills from films like *E.T.*, and a baker's dozen, 9 percent, are stylized artwork of no value.

Time-Life has produced the standard fare used by other publishers to cash in on the public interest in flying saucers. Not surprisingly, the contributors to *The UFO Phenomenon* seem unaware of the impact on our society of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of pro-UFO books, many of them heavily promoted by major publishing houses, It is clear from reading Time-Life's book and many others like it that flying-saucer tales are too lucrative for the publishing industry to ignore and that writers with little talent will continue to exploit the public's gullibility.

References

Klass, Philip J. 1974. *UFOs Explained.* New York: Random House.

Wells, Jeff. 1981. Profitable nightmare of a very unreal kind. SKEPTICAL INQUIRER, 5(4): 47-52. •