

ESSAY

Among the Anomalies

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So, Mr. Clark, have you yourself ever had an encounter with something weird that you couldn't explain?

One pleasant summer evening in 2000, I pulled up in front of our house. I had been working late at the office I then rented for my writing projects. It was an average day, an ordinary 11 p.m. in our tranquil life in a small Minnesota town far from anywhere except the South Dakota border eight miles to the west.

Then I noticed something on the landing at the top of the front steps. My first impression was that it must be our dog. As my second impression settled in a moment later, I realized that was unlikely. Misha's domain is our big fenced-in backyard, and we never let her go unsupervised out front. Even if she had somehow slipped out, she would not have lain by the door. Instead, she would have wandered off immediately, and Helene and I—as we knew from frustrating experience—would have had to spend the next hour or two trying to find her as she followed her nose down highway and byway.

At that point I wasn't entirely sure it was a dog at all. It was an animate object, and it was, so I dimly discerned, a quadruped too big to be a domestic cat. Darkness concealed it so that I could see nothing but an outline, a shadowy form that somehow managed to evade any streak of streetlight or moonlight that could have fallen on it and rendered it identifiable. I began to stride quickly in its direction, on the reasonable supposition that if I got close enough, I would see what it was.

A mere 15 footsteps separated the curb from the house, and I was moving at a brisk pace. But the thing was faster. I couldn't have propelled myself more than three or four steps forward before it was coming off the porch, passing at an angle to my left (west)—actually, generally in my direction (in other words, south-westward), since I had walked around the parked car from the left. From the streetlight on the corner, a bright yard light across the street, and the moonlight, the view immediately ahead should have afforded sufficient illumination for me to identify the animal. Yet, curiously, it always remained in shadow.

And then it was no longer there. It didn't run into a bush or onto a sidewalk or behind a building. In fact, as far as I could tell, it was not especially close to our neighbor's house when it was . . . well . . . gone. All the while, as this played out, I was listening for a sound associated with the thing. I heard nothing: no breathing, no cries, meows, yowls, or barks, no scurrying sounds as it passed over cement or grass.

I followed in the direction the thing had passed, but saw and heard nothing out of the ordinary. After a few moments I shrugged and went inside. When I mentioned the curious experience to Helene, I asked if Misha had acted up. Misha is sensitive to—in other words, she barks at—passing or intruding animals (mostly dogs, sometimes rabbits) she tracks from her perch by the front window. It turned out that Misha had betrayed no apparent awareness of the incursion of another creature on her territory.

The incident was a bit odd, and I had no doubt that I had seen, or imperfectly glimpsed, some sort of unexpected animal (and I don't mean "unexpected" in the cryptozoological sense). Having lived half of my life in rural small-town Minnesota, I know the wild-mammal population fairly well. I have seen deer in the countryside on many occasions, foxes on a few, a coyote once. On occasion deer wander into town. This was no deer. Foxes and coyotes, with every reason to fear the gun-toting blood-sport devotees who comprise a significant portion of rural America's male citizenry, stay well hidden, viewing a trip into town—one surmises—as tantamount to a suicide mission. (In any event, under no imaginable circumstances would one repose on front steps.) Only birds, rabbits, and squirrels share the town with us human residents.

Still, I took two or three wildlife reference works off the shelves and studied them as time permitted over the next few days. Nothing leaped out at me. I scratched my head and life went on.

For a week or two, anyway. Then at 10:30 one night I arrived home from the office. There it was: same spot, same shadowy shape. The same sequence of events ensued. It was almost as if I had entered a rerun of a movie scene, or as if I had stepped into a dream. At that point I was getting a sense that all this just *felt* peculiar.

I returned to the wildlife texts. I did some web searches, expanding my inquiry to unusual breeds of dogs and cats. I cautiously asked neighbors if they had seen any strange—as in not ordinarily around—animals lately. At this stage the phrase "anomalous phenomenon" had not, to the best of my recollection, crossed my mind, mystified as I was by an experience unlike any other. No animal I considered plausibly matched what I had seen. On the other hand, "seen" may have been stretching the point. The mystery nagged at me. I had no doubt of a conventional answer to it, but this answer eluded and frustrated me.

A week or two later a ringing phone shook us out of our 3 a.m. slumbers. A relative who suffers from a crippling illness had fallen out of bed and needed urgent assistance. We rushed over and lifted her back on the mattress and under the covers, then returned home. On our arrival we happened to notice a light

flickering in the upstairs-front bedroom of a house which borders ours on the east. We knew that the neighbor, an elderly woman, was out of town and would not be back for another week or two. The longer we studied it, the more uneasy we became. Was it a burglar? The earliest stage of an electrical fire? We decided to call the police.

The officer who responded was as mystified as we were. He alerted the owner's son-in-law, who showed up with a key. The two entered the house to discover a malfunctioning night light which could easily have sparked a fire. Through the accidental circumstance of our being awake and outside at an unlikely hour, we had probably saved our neighbor's house.

As the policeman and the son-in-law departed, Helene and I turned to go home. By now the time was around 3:45 a.m. As soon as my eyes fell on our front porch, I gasped. A moment later I managed to shout, "There it is!" I could see—or thought I could see—it watching us. I broke into a run, knowing by now how fast it moved and how fleeting my chance to identify it would be. Helene was right behind me. The thing was down the steps, crossing the western edge of our lawn at the usual southwestern angle, keeping to the shadows, and then, metaphorically or literally, fading into the ether.

Though much to my regret I have not encountered it again, it is still with me. It keeps coming back to me, both the experience itself and its odd sequel. In many ways the sequel troubles and confounds me more than the incidents that initiated it.

It eventually came to me, of course, that my experiences—and, in the last instance, Helene's¹ experience as well (her perceptions were identical to my own)—were pretty strange and not, perhaps, easily explainable. Even, yes, anomalous. This was a conclusion I resisted, mostly unconsciously because it seldom rose to a place in awareness where I would be forced to notice its presence. For some time, in fact, I did not allow myself to entertain the possibility, and any contrary thought amounted to hardly a ripple in the stream of consciousness.

It was this unconscious resistance, I think, that caused me to do something regrettable: I did not write down the experiences directly after they happened. I had long sworn to record fresh impressions should I ever have an anomalous encounter—thus, I thought, moving both to record it as quickly and precisely as possible and to obviate the predictable debunkers' droning about memory's vagaries. Because I resisted thinking of the experiences as anything extraordinary, I judged them, or pretended to judge them, not worth the time it would consume to take pen in hand and preserve every detail in immediate recall. The episode was simply peculiar, I kept telling myself; it wasn't as if it were *weird* or anything. I would solve the mystery by identifying the animal, and then I would forget about it.

I never identified the animal or found an explanation that satisfied me, not for lack of trying. (I write as one who has identified numerous "UFOs" that have crossed my line of vision over the decades.) It took months for me to

acknowledge the anomalous, even dreamlike, quality of the encounters. By then, I suspected my own memories—conveniently, I reflected ruefully. My resistance to the notion of a personal anomalous experience had given me an out: all else having failed (at least as far as I could determine), now I could transform discordant, heterodox details into mere mind tricks. I knew better—for one thing, Helene finally had seen the thing, too—but in idle moments I sought comfort in the thought. I could accept other people's strange experiences, but to have one of my own . . . well, it seemed like a confession of failure. *I* couldn't be stumped.

Without realizing it, I had internalized society's compulsion to rationalize away troubling anomalies. Even after spending most of my life studying accounts and interacting with witnesses, having no conscious problem with the abstraction that the world hosts peculiar things that frustrate orthodox accounting, somehow I couldn't credit the notion any could ever intersect with my life. Worse, the experience itself was ambiguous, nebulous, downright pointless, perhaps inherently unresolvable. The only certainty was that it had happened. Beyond that, what? I had both seen and not seen something. It moved, always, in shadows. There—at least in metaphor—it remains.

It started when I read Edward J. Ruppelt's *The Report on Unidentified Flying Objects*. It was the summer of 1957, and I was between the fifth and sixth grades. I ordered the book not because I was interested in UFOs (of which I was only marginally aware) but because the Science Fiction Book Club had an introductory offer of four books for a buck. Ruppelt's was my fourth choice. My enthusiasm for science fiction (SF) barely survived my teens—I am living proof that, as the saying goes, the golden age of science fiction was when you were 13—but UFOs stuck. Ruppelt's book simply knocked me out.

Published in 1956, *Report* was part history, part memoir, and for a long while the only credible source of information on the Air Force's early UFO projects. Ruppelt, who headed Project Grudge (renamed Blue Book in March 1952) between 1951 and 1953, took an even-handed approach that was neither dismissive nor credulous. Though the book devoted as much space to solved cases as to unsolved ones, many readers came away from it impressed that extraterrestrial visitation may plausibly explain the most puzzling sightings.² I later learned that a number of colleagues in my adult life in ufology got hooked exactly as I had, with the same offer from the Science Fiction Book Club.

Early in November 1957, a destined-to-be-historic UFO wave washed over the United States, and for a few days UFOs crowded the then-novel and threatening Sputniks off the front pages. Thoroughly enchanted, I sought out anything about UFOs I could find. That led me to books by Donald Keyhoe, M. K. Jessup, and George Adamski, which I ordered from an occult bookstore in Fontana, California.

A retired Marine Corps major, Keyhoe, who was the leading advocate of the extraterrestrial hypothesis in the early UFO era, wrote in a sort of pulpish, gosh-wow style which has not aged well. He alternated dramatic sighting accounts

with charges, which even then struck me as overheated, of a massive Air Force cover-up. Jessup, an early theorist of what would be termed ancient astronauts during Erich von Däniken's reign in the 1970s, supposed that tens of thousands of years ago pygmies—yes, *pygmies*—developed spacecraft and levitation technology which led them to establish bases on the moon and a space station between there and earth; that is why, Jessup explained, witnesses to UFO entities tend to describe them as diminutive. George Adamski insisted that he consorted with friendly Venusians, Martians, and Saturnians, and he got some people, among them some who ought to have known better, to believe him. Only Keyhoe's books spoke to me, but not so appealingly as Ruppelt's.

Besides these, I consumed magazine articles and newspaper stories, mostly skeptical, often openly derisive. Being a kid, I missed the implicit warning that further inquiry and open interest would not be socially advantageous.

Then, as I pursued my science-fiction enthusiasm, I came upon the monthly *Fantastic Universe* in the magazine rack of our local drugstore. I soon found out that the editor, Hans Stefan Santessen, was a UFO buff—which made him even then a rarity in the already UFO-phobic SF world. The magazine featured a series titled "Shapes in the Sky" with the enigmatic by-line Civilian Saucer Intelligence (CSI). (Only years later did I find out that this was an actual New York-based organization; the series was written by CSI's mainstays Alexander Mebane, Isabel Davis, and Ted Bloecher.) "Shapes" was a smart, thoughtful survey of what reasonably could be deduced about the UFO question a decade into the controversy. Two of the articles dealt with the phenomenon before 1947, and it was there that I learned of anomalist and satirist Charles Fort (1874–1932).

I hastened to secure a copy of the omnibus *Books of Charles Fort* (1941).³ I was in seventh grade and now held a lit stick of dynamite in my hand. I couldn't put it down, and the resulting explosion shattered my young life.

I felt as if, before Fort, I had never seen the true world. Fort's books seemed larger than the physical and emotional world that surrounded me. When my young, impressionable mind entered them, as it fell under the spell of Fort's odd, jokey prose and genial sneer at just about everything consensus opinion held complacently to be true, I began to define existence by its frog falls, strange creatures, and shapes in the sky, the quotidian phenomena that otherwise defined my days reduced to no more than aggravating background distractions. I have read many books in my lifetime, but none has ever affected me as Fort's did. Even now, on the occasional dip into *Books*, the delicious disorientation returns, nearly as vivid as it was when I first felt it in that distant lost world of my youth.

Vacationing with my parents and brother in the Black Hills of South Dakota in the fall of 1961, I purchased my first copy of *Fate*, the digest-sized magazine created in 1948 by Ray Palmer and Curtis Fuller. The only American magazine of any circulation to cater to the "true-mysteries" audience, *Fate* was concerned mostly with paranormal—which is to say psychic—occurrences, but it also covered UFOs and Fortean phenomena. The latter would always be more interesting to me than ghosts and ESP, and there was enough of that to get

me to subscribe. Through an ad in a subsequent issue, I learned of Ray Palmer's *Flying Saucers*.⁴

Each issue of *Flying Saucers* carried "Saucer Club News," in which tiny UFO groups boasted of their activities⁵ and hawked subscriptions to their mimeographed bulletins. Many of these were run by teenagers. Well, more precisely, teenage boys; teenage girls, scarcer than Martians' teeth, had the good sense to keep their distance from so transparently a dorky-male obsession. I joined these groups as well as larger, serious—and grown-up—outfits such as Keyhoe's National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena and Jim and Coral Lorenzen's Aerial Phenomena Research Organization. In 1961, by the time I published my first "article" (I think it was "The Mystery of the Exploding UFOs") in a teenage bulletin, I was exchanging letters with other youthful ufologists in the United States and elsewhere.

UFOs and anomalies were not then, and are not now, my sole or even primary intellectual interest,⁶ but without my even being fully aware of it, I was creating a public persona, "Jerome Clark," distinct from the "Jerry Clark" familiar to family and friends. "Jerome Clark" was somebody who (to mounting regret in my adult life) was best known for his association with UFOs. I had always been certain that I wanted to be a writer, but it had never occurred to me that I would be a "UFO writer." I just sort of fell into it, in large part because I had soaked up enough knowledge of the subject that it was easy to write about and, frankly, I enjoyed it. The subject was, alas, fun.

I entered college in the fall of 1964, and within two years I was immersed in the fabled Sixties experience, few of whose excesses I was inclined to resist. (In August 1968, as a protester at the Democratic National Convention, I succeeded in getting clubbed by an incensed, profanity-spewing Chicago cop. I ran too fast to get arrested, though.) When not otherwise engaged, I wrote regularly for England's *Flying Saucer Review* (aka *FSR*), then under the editorship of Charles Bowen, the world's leading UFO periodical.

In my spare time I dug into newspaper archives in search of primary materials on the 1897 airship wave. The experience taught me that the UFO literature's ET-slanted rendition of that episode distorted what the period press (admittedly, dubiously reliable) was reporting.⁷ Perhaps, I thought, things were more complicated than one might infer from reading Keyhoe. Maybe UFOs are anomalous and yet culture-bound; thus, whatever UFOs appear to be, they are being seen and interpreted through contemporary expectations about potential space visitors, as opposed to other eras' expectations about fairies, gods, or other otherworldly entities. That became the theme of a series of *FSR* articles. Other *FSR* contributors, such as John A. Keel and Jacques Vallee, picked up on my ideas or—just as likely—arrived at comparable ones independently. Ufology's extraterrestrial hypothesis passed out of fashion in some quarters. *FSR* championed the "new ufology" hailed by Clark, Keel, Vallee, and others, spawning a vast and generally incoherent literature which at times managed the curious feat of being at once occultish and debunking.

Bowen introduced me—via mail, anyway—to Keel, with whom I entered into an intense correspondence. In those days Keel was prowling the Ohio River Valley as a *de facto* folklorist collecting tales of assorted creepy critters, men in black, and UFO entities who apparently borrowed their names from aliens in comic books. They all were grist for the books he would write. *The Mothman Prophecies* (1975), the most famous of them, was turned, in 2002, into the terrific (if under-appreciated) Mark Pellington film of the same name.⁸

At one point, in late December 1967, I met Keel for the first time. It was at his Manhattan apartment, where he and a young couple had just purchased gas masks and were trying them out in anticipation of an imminent attack on the city by malevolent “ultraterrestrials.” It is embarrassing to confess to the naivete of the 1967 me, but the hell was scared out of the young and gullible Jerome Clark in those days. In due course (a longer course than it ought to have been), I would see Keel as an unreliable reporter, a demonologist, and a crank. Even so, I still enjoyed him as an outsized character—less a Fort figure than a latter-day Tiffany Thayer, sputtering and tilting at windmills. Keel did not react graciously to this sort of indulgence, and our paths parted, unamicably on his side.⁹

In 1970 a girlfriend took a job at the Chicago office of a federal agency, and we moved to Chicago. I had been doing some writing for *Fate*, headquartered in the tree-lined, well-heeled North Shore suburb of Highland Park, and I applied for work with the magazine. I was hired as associate editor. I was thrilled to meet Curtis Fuller, who published *Fate*, and Mary Margaret Fuller, his wife and the senior editor. I worked there for less than a year, however, before homesickness and a romantic break-up led me to return to Moorhead, Minnesota, for five years. In 1976, newly married, I would come back to Chicago and my old *Fate* job.

During that first Chicago stay, I visited—at Keel’s urging—an active Fortean then living in his native Decatur, Illinois. Loren Coleman and I, who had much in common beyond shared anomalistic fascinations (we are the same age), immediately hit it off and have remained close friends. (Actually, we’re more like brothers, which means that the occasional heated, albeit passing, spat is part of the bargain.) Loren’s principal interest was and is cryptozoology, but each of us is generalist enough to see anomalies-related questions in broadly similar ways. I know that I have learned a great deal from him, and I hope that he has learned at least a thing or two from me.

We—Loren, his then-wife, and I—saw the new year of 1971 steal in over the cold, dark Midwestern prairie. Before I boarded the bus that would take me back to Chicago, we vowed to write a book together. We ended up writing two,¹⁰ firsts for both of us, though neither was all that good. Each boasted the occasional lucid moment but more frequently bore the marks of callow youth, loose thinking, excessive enthusiasm, and sometimes rank, slack-jawed credulity. Loren and I came to understand how much easier it is to write than it is to think. We were adept at the former before we worked our way to the latter, and unfortunately left a lasting record to document the fact. Separately,

we went on to write much better books. In 1999 we collaborated again on a mature book for Simon and Schuster, *Cryptozoology A to Z*.

In the fall of 1975, while I was living back in northwestern Minnesota, a mutual acquaintance who knew the witnesses alerted me to a dramatic UFO sighting in eastern North Dakota the previous August 26. My informant told me that the incident contained some odd aspects, including a period of time weirdly missing from the three observers' conscious recollection. Soon thereafter, I contacted the three, consisting of a mother, daughter, and daughter's (by then ex-) boyfriend. Subsequently, psychologist/ufologist R. Leo Sprinkle, of the University of Wyoming, flew in to place the mother and daughter under hypnosis so that they could "recall"—a verb we tossed around casually those days—the missing elements.¹¹

While all of this was happening, I was taken aback to receive a phone call from J. Allen Hynek, the astronomer who had advised Project Blue Book for many years before becoming an outspoken UFO advocate. Prof. Hynek was someone whose name I had known since sixth grade, when he contributed astronomy articles to the schoolkids' newspaper *My Weekly Reader* and figured prominently in Ruppelt's book. Hynek had always seemed larger than life to me, and I had no idea that he had ever heard of me. It turned out that he wanted to fly up from Chicago to interview the witnesses. That was how I met Allen Hynek, who proved to be friendly, good-humored, and not at all the stern, distant, coldly scientific figure of my imagination. As I learned when I got to know him better, it was hard not to like Allen Hynek, though some people managed to conjure up their own peculiar, typically self-serving rationalizations for doing so.

The abduction case ended up getting play in newspapers across the country. This was all before the 1980s, when books by Budd Hopkins, David M. Jacobs, and Whitley Strieber¹² brought abduction stories and images into mainstream popular culture. I would be struck—still am struck, actually—at how much of the material the principal witness imparted anticipated subsequent, but then unsuspected, aspects reported in Hopkins's and Jacobs's books. Of course, abduction reports, though uncommon, were hardly unheard of in 1975. The Betty and Barney Hill episode had been known since the mid-1960s. Specifically, it was the October 20 airing of the NBC movie *The UFO Incident*, based on the Hills's experience, that led the witnesses to share their own encounter with friends, leading in time to me. Still, whatever else it may have been, the North Dakota story was not a copy of the Hills's and had its own intriguing, suggestive features.¹³

I engaged in other abduction investigations in the following years. I recall two of these as puzzling in the profoundly anomalous sense, the sorts of cases that make the abduction phenomenon resistant overall to reductionist approaches (though that has discouraged nobody from attempting them). Others fizzled into psychological quirks and wishful thinking. That didn't necessarily make them any less strange.

In late 1986, for instance, I heard from someone who claimed to have physical evidence of his abduction experience. Like some other abductees, he reported that his abductors had stuck a small implant up his nose (presumably en route to his brain). Then a few nights after one of his alien encounters, his car plowed into a bridge, and he was hurled into the windshield. At the hospital the doctor X-rayed his skull to check for injuries. Soon afterwards, the man caught a serious cold. As he was blowing his nose, he felt something pass through it. It was a strange, spherical object just like the one the aliens had pushed inside his head.

We arranged to meet him at a restaurant in the small downstate Illinois city where he lived. One bitter winter day ufologist Don Schmitt and I drove out of Chicago and headed down the highway. Both of us had been around long enough to be jaded about these things, but it was hard not to feel a sense of delicious anticipation, even paranoia—what if Sinister Forces didn't want The Truth to be known? We laughed at our fears, but we couldn't shake our uneasiness.

In the mid-afternoon we pulled into the restaurant parking lot and entered the building. A man, apparently in his mid- to late thirties, sitting alone in a booth was the sole customer and, we presently determined, the one we came to see. We joined him and put in our food orders, then engaged in distracted small talk for two or three minutes as we waited to see what he had. At last he pulled out a handkerchief and unwrapped it, and Don and I gaped at the prize in astonishment.

It was a ball bearing.

To this day I don't think the guy was a conscious hoaxer. I can only guess at his motives. Just to make sure *we* weren't crazy, though, Don and I—who by now were struggling to keep our faces straight—asked if the man would be so kind as to supply the x-rays he had talked about. Certainly, he said. We actually took what our own eyes told us was a mundane industrial object to a laboratory, which confirmed that it was indeed a ball bearing. The x-rays arrived a few days later, and they evinced—hardly needful to say at this point—nothing out of the ordinary.

As the abduction controversy has rolled on over the decades, I have grown ever less certain about what it means. Initially, in common with other ufologists of the time, I took such accounts at face value. At least in part this was because skeptics ignored the parts of the experiences that were the most difficult to explain and thus the most interesting. Moreover, I admired—and continue to admire—the courage and commitment of researchers such as Hopkins and Jacobs, who often have stood at the receiving end of venomous assaults from critics who make more noise than sense and whose true target, one suspects, is heresy.

Yet in time, while the most puzzling abduction stories never looked to me less than genuinely mysterious, I would doubt that they are what they seem. Today I tend to think of them—conceding, of course, that I could be wrong—more as anomalies of consciousness than as events in the world. That doesn't mean, I wish to stress as emphatically as I can, that I think current knowledge is sufficient to lay them to rest; I am sure current knowledge will not, in fact, get us

there. As even so sympathetic an observer as the behavioral scientist and folklorist David J. Hufford remarks, "Much abduction theory, at present, is way out in front of its data, and its data collection and analysis are suffering as a result." Hufford suspects, and I agree, that the phenomena, variously experienced and interpreted, are not UFO-motif specific and have "great historical depth."¹⁴

Living and working in the Chicago area from August 1976 until April 1989, I got to know a number of highly interesting people, many of whom are still important in my life.

Five days a week I was in the company of Curt and Mary Fuller, who were unfailingly kind to me. When my dad died suddenly in April 1980, Curt, as decent a man as ever came down any pike anywhere, stepped in as a kind of second father. Mary Fuller was my direct boss, the senior of the three *Fate* editors, who taught me writing and editing skills. Mary was delightfully—and occasionally exasperatingly, even infuriatingly—quirky, with an unanticipatable way of reading situations (always either startlingly insightful or staggeringly obtuse), coupled with an unforgettable wit and a benignly aristocratic sensibility. Though she had no particular interest in the magazine's subject matter (her life outside the office revolved around family and cooking), she knew how to put a readable magazine together.

Curt, who loved science and should have been a scientist but ended up instead a successful businessman, owned a publishing company which catered to the recreational-vehicle industry. That company made *Fate*, whose profits were slim on their fattest days, an enduring, if sometimes shaky, enterprise. Curt and Mary kept *Fate* alive, they always said, because it was "fun" (anomalistics' honey trap, as many of us have learned to our chagrin). It was also fun being around these two exemplary human beings, whom I love to this day. Both passed on in the early 1990s to whatever awaits on the other side—a frequent concern of the magazine.

The magazine, then and now,¹⁵ was hardly a scientific journal, obviously, but besides the many anecdotes of the paranormal, it carried solidly researched articles, even no small number of debunking pieces. I was and am emotionally removed from the psychic stuff, my own approach being more on the "crypto" than the "para" end of the spectrum.¹⁶ I respect parapsychology as a valid enterprise asking legitimate questions, but it does not excite me much. What I know about it I learned in my days at *Fate* and from my friendship with the late parapsychologist D. Scott Rogo, whose knowledge of the discipline and its history had more depth than a single human brain should be expected to accommodate.

Outside *Fate* I befriended Allan Hendry, then chief investigator for the Center for UFO Studies (CUFOS), and got to know Allen Hynek fairly well. In the mid-1980s Hynek asked me to join the CUFOS board and to edit *International UFO Reporter (IUR)*. I had never wanted to be part of any formal UFO organization, but CUFOS was different, operating on a level of scholarly and scientific

sophistication infrequently in evidence elsewhere. My CUFOS and *IUR* affiliations continue, as does my firm respect for my colleagues in the organization. Since Allen's death in 1986, Mark Rodeghier has served ably as CUFOS's scientific director. Environmental scientist Michael D. Swords, succeeded by psychologist Stuart Appelle, resurrected and significantly improved ufology's only refereed scientific periodical, CUFOS's *Journal of UFO Studies*. Besides Rodeghier, Swords, and Appelle, the CUFOS board claims such luminaries as the folklorist Thomas E. Bullard and the anomalistics-bibliographer George M. Eberhart.

In 1979 my friend J. Gordon Melton, now an esteemed religious-studies scholar at the University of California at Santa Barbara, and I spent time with Marcello Truzzi, sociologist of science at Eastern Michigan University, at his home in Ann Arbor.¹⁷ This was my first encounter with him. Marcello became a dear friend and scholarly mentor to me, a regular caller whose ideas provoked and sometimes irritated me, but never failed to make me think deeper and harder. Our last phone conversation took place a week to the hour of his death on February 2, 2003. He was fighting cancer—it had been with him for seven years—but was sufficiently hopeful about his prospects to talk about writing his intellectual autobiography. Unfortunately, Marcello was a great talker. Writing, which is much harder, did not often interrupt the talk. He wrote some sociology textbooks, a book on psychics and police with crime writer Arthur Lyons,¹⁸ and the periodic essay on science, anomalies, and the paranormal, but mostly he will live on, if not in the sparse printed record, then in the fond memories of those of us who knew and adored him.

Marcello helped me comprehend and value the honorable role true skepticism plays, or ought to play, in controversies on the fringes of science. He sought to reclaim skepticism—doubt—from debunking—denial—from the “skeptical” movement represented by the militant likes of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, which he had co-founded with philosopher Paul Kurtz but from which he soon departed. While he did not (in the irritating phrase) “believe in” UFOs, cryptids, or psi, he was convinced that ufology, cryptozoology, and parapsychology are genuine protosciences which are not manifestly—even if, history tells us, most likely—destined to be disappointed in their most extraordinary expectations. Most of all, as he reflected one last time in our final conversation, knowledge is uncertain. We cannot be certain of what we know, and we can be even less certain of what we do not know.

What may be my life's last great anomalies project was *The UFO Encyclopedia*, which occupied me from 1989 through most of the next decade. It was published in two editions, the first in three volumes published between 1990 and 1996, the second in two volumes (A–K and L–Z) released in 1998.

As I saw it, the project both summed up and justified my life as anomalist and ufologist. I knew enough now, and knew how to think about it, to take up a controversy that had, if nothing else, generated vast amounts of paper and many millions of words, a large proportion of them directly contradicting each

other. I sought out as many primary documents as I could gain access to. Much of this material consisted of private correspondence from leading figures in ufology's history, affording me a backstage view of personal lives and conflicts as well as a sense of how these individuals approached UFO study and what they thought offstage. Nobody I had admired disillusioned me; to the contrary, the likes of Donald Keyhoe, Coral Lorenzen, James McDonald, Allen Hynek, Isabel Davis, and the rest only grew more real, more nuanced and textured and complicated, but, if anything, even—for all the flaws to which humans are heir—more admirable. Their persistence against huge odds, not to mention their flinty intellectual integrity, is to me the stuff of heroism. History will be kinder to them, I predict, than to their critics.

This concentrated focus on all aspects of the UFO controversy—from the hard evidence of physical traces and radar/visuals to the hoaxes, crackpot theories, and saucer religions—eventually fell into a narrative, at least in my mind, that gave a very long book (the second edition is in the high hundreds of thousands of words¹⁹) a structure of sorts.

At the end of this—"this" occupying a significant part of my waking life for six or seven years—I came to some conclusions which are not expressed in the encyclopedia. One is that if the proper scientific resources (including, prominently, funding) had been applied early on, we would know a great deal more than we know now. If extraterrestrial visitation is in fact taking place, science almost surely would have established that much, though no doubt many unanswered questions about specific aspects of it would remain. If, on the other hand, UFOs signify something uncontainable within the boundaries of current (or at present unimaginable) knowledge, scientists would at least have documented the presence of intriguing anomalies in the earth's air space and embarked upon a potentially rich research project. UFOs may be enigmatic by nature, but they surely would be less so if human beings had applied proper curiosity to them, as opposed to unreasonable credulity and irrational incredulity. The last have conspired to leave the question for a future generation of scientists to take up. They will shake their heads at how thoroughly their colleagues in the 20th and early 21st centuries managed to bungle things.

In my reading of the evidence, many, perhaps most, high-strangeness reports of encounters with ostensible extraterrestrial and other bizarre entities are vividly felt but subjective anomalies of imagination and consciousness, not currently understood but presumably—not, of course, certainly; nothing is certain in anomalistics—resolvable with open-minded research and expanded knowledge.²⁰ These "experience anomalies," as I have called them, take on the coloration of any given culture's expectations of what might be called, generally speaking, the supernatural. That is why there are ostensible "sightings" of fairies, angels, merbeings, monsters, and other hugely improbable entities.

By the time Omnigraphics published the second edition of the *Encyclopedia*, my longtime editor on the project and I had fallen in love—without ever meeting

in person. We met finally in 1997, after the project that had brought us together was concluded. We have been happily married since January 5, 2002.

I keep writing. I keep thinking. I keep hoping that one day the anomalies that have haunted me all these years will emerge from the shadows. I hope, too, that one night I will see my own anomaly again. Maybe this time I will get there before we both fade into darkness.

Notes

- ¹ My wife, whose full name is Helene Henderson, is an editor and writer of books on cultural matters. She has no interest in anomalies and the paranormal.
- ² Ironically, this was hardly Ruppelt's intention. As a new 1960 edition of the book, appending three additional chapters, made unambiguously clear, Ruppelt did not believe in UFOs and, ever the loyal Air Force man, judged all reports to be potentially explainable. Michael David Hall and Wendy Ann Connors's *Captain Edward J. Ruppelt: Summer of the Saucers—1952* (Rose Press International, 2000) sheds much light on Ruppelt's career and his book's genesis. Ruppelt died at 37 on September 19, 1960.
- ³ *Books* comprises Fort's four works on what decades later would be called anomalistics. They are *The Book of the Damned* (1919); *New Lands* (1923); *Lo!* (1931); and *Wild Talents* (1932).
- ⁴ A few years into their partnership, Palmer (1910–1977) sold his interest in *Fate* to Curtis and Mary Fuller and moved to small-town Wisconsin to produce his own competing magazines (whose circulation never rose above a fraction of *Fate*'s), but mostly to perpetuate the legend of Ray Palmer. The readership of *Flying Saucers* and *Mystic* (later renamed *Search*) consisted in large part of his hard-core fans/cultists. Palmer, whose fame or notoriety derived from his editorship of SF pulps and promotion of the lurid alternative-reality claims of Richard Shaver (the “Shaver mystery” in Palmer's framing of its namesake's delusions about demonic cavern-dwelling humanoids), had the hucksterish impulses of a carnival barker. To this day some have asserted—with a degree of hyperbole that would have pleased Palmer himself—that in the pages of his 1940s pulps Palmer “invented” flying saucers.
- ⁵ In truth, “activities” seldom amounted to more than filing, cutting clippings from newspapers, writing letters to other UFO buffs, and reading saucer literature.
- ⁶ Most of my non-anomalist friends—that is, most of my friends—are only marginally aware of my involvement in these subjects. They are more likely to think of me as a devotee of politics, history, literature, or folk-roots music. Either that, or as a tiresome beer snob.
- ⁷ My book *Unnatural Phenomena: A Guide to the Bizarre Wonders of North America* (ABC-CLIO, 2005) surveys 19th century and early 20th century press accounts of alleged anomalies of the kind Fort chronicled. Much of this

