

BOOK REVIEWS

Alien Discussions: Proceedings of the Abduction Study Conference Held at MIT, Cambridge by Andrea Pritchard, David E. Pritchard, John E. Mack, Pam Kasey, and Claudia Yapp, editors. North Cambridge Press: Cambridge, MA (1994), 684pp., \$69.95 (illus.), ISBN 0-9644917-0-2.

This is a formidable book (almost 700 pages) about a controversial, difficult, and confusing subject. That line should indicate why it will not be well read by our academic colleagues. However, for anyone with the slightest serious interest in the topic, it should be. Persons wishing to immerse themselves in the many dimensions, layers, and schools of thought about alleged UFO abductions cannot find a more eclectic and stimulating pool.

The book presents an essentially verbatim account of the talks, panels, and discussions of the Abductions Study Conference of June 13-17, 1992. The editing of these, especially the accurate transcriptions of audio tapes and attributions of comments, was a heroic task. The editors, particularly the indefatigable Andrea Pritchard, are to be saluted for producing a volume which (barring videotaping) comes as close as possible to placing the reader right there in the MIT lecture hall alongside the participants.

There are nearly 150 separate presentations transcribed in the volume. World famous UFO researchers like Budd Hopkins, David Jacobs, and John Mack hold forth beside relative novices and the abductees themselves. Representatives of some non-U.S. research also contributed (ex. Brazil, Canada, United Kingdom, Australia). Even the skeptics were represented and spoke. Actually, it would be more accurate to have used the term "debunkers" (or absolutist *a priori* skeptics), since the conference had many true skeptics in attendance: the UFOlogists themselves, who disagree (amicably) with one another, and expressed those disagreements here.

This conference was deliberately eclectic. The field of study is new and in much internal debate. The program was meant to be an occasion to bring everything from well-conceived-academic quality research to partially baked-intuitions onto the stage, and roll the mix together to see what we could see. The contributions to the book are, therefore, of a wildly diverse quality. If the reader is an intolerant academic purist, much of this will not appeal. If the reader is a flexible explorer, it should be stimulating caveat emptor. There seems to be much gold in here somewhere, but which the gold and which the hematite?

The conference, in line with the above, marked a UFOlogical watershed of sorts, as it is the formal moment symbolizing the cracking apart of the almost monolithic paradigm of UFO abductions which issued from the seminal work of Budd Hopkins in the early 1980s and had come to dominate public UFOlogical thinking. Hopkins' work, strongly supported by the research of David Jacobs, pictured the Abductions Phenomenon as not only truly extraterrestrial in

origin, but essentially uncaring and negative toward its abductee victims. Although some counter-views existed, they carried very little impact in the mainstream UFO literature and symposia of the later eighties and nineties. The European researchers had rebelled and created a non extraterrestrial *psy*-chosocial hypothesis, and the communities were engaging in a trans Atlantic debate wherein the Hopkins Jacobs school of thought was largely thought of as the sum of American Abductions Ideology.

The conference at MIT split the public unity of American researchers into (at least) two major schools of opinion, which deeply disagree to this day. Both continue to believe that the phenomenon is extraterrestrially-based. Hopkins, Jacobs, and others were present to elaborate what some have come to refer to as the Dark Marauders view of abductions. But conference co-organizer, and world-known Harvard psychologist, John Mack, presented an entirely different spin: these experiences are extraterrestrially caused but are positively transformational for the human spirit. Despite the severe disagreements that followed, this gave researchers like Joseph Nyman a foundation stone authority figure around whom to rally. The so-called pessimist and optimist schools took shape before the attendees' eyes. A third major position, of course, exists within the U.S. research community, the "probably extraterrestrial but I don't know the details" viewpoint. They were also there in the persons of Mark Rodeghier, Stuart Appelle, David Gotlib, et al. Kenneth Ring also presented his interesting view comparing abductions and near-death experiences, and David Hufford did likewise regarding the centuries old Old Hag phenomenon.

The Proceedings are split, like the conference itself, into a stack of logically organized sections, as follows: Introduction; The Abduction Experience; Evidence; The Psychology of Abductees; Hypotheses; Ethics, Therapy, and Investigation; and What Should We Consider Next? Sections 2, 3, 6, and 7 feature some talks and panels by the abductees themselves, and are among the few places that a reader can get a relatively undistilled feeling for what these folks are all about. At the end of the volume, the Pritchards have tacked on a 50 page investigator survey analysis by Thomas Bullard. This analysis is done with Bullard's usual awe-inspiring thoroughness, and with the insightfulness also displayed in his seven symposia contributions.

Being an empathetic but semi-stick-in-the-mud academic, this reviewer was most impressed with Section Four: The Psychology of Abductees. Because the major skeptical barrier to taking this phenomenon as anything other than the Carnival of the Human Mind is the assertion that the abductees are all liars and confabulators (at best) or psychiatric (at worst), this issue of psychology, must be firmly addressed before the subject can even get off the ground. This is a point which abduction researchers often agree to, and then naively assume that no further attention need be paid to it if one study or one authority pronounces abductees "OK." Fortunately, the symposium did not short shrift this issue, and, led by the extremely important work of Rodeghier, Good-

paster, and Blatterbauer, gave an intellectually honest and well balanced assessment of what is known. And, the verdict is generally positive for the persons reporting abductions. This continuing emphasis is all the more important due to the relative weakness of Section Three: Evidence. Despite all manner of anecdotal claims which (some at least) should in theory be testable, basically none of the physical attributes of the reports are documented (even today). The *almighty power* and control of the ETs can be alluded to explain this lack (and it is a *sufficient* hypothesis), but that is not very helpful in the long run for acceptance. If one is dependent upon testimony, one better continually demonstrate dependability.

Whereas that last analysis might not be welcome to those who have already concluded upon reality, reliability, and reasons, I do not apologize. The subject matter is astonishing, and perhaps astonishingly important, but to this reviewer is not in a state of fixed certainty. In fact, this is the charm and the value of this book. In these pages are all the puzzlements, complexities, and arguments of an exciting *something*, bursting to be revealed. This book has no conclusion. That's why it is a good book. Let a free wind blow through the attic of your consciousness and read it.

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Confronting the Experts by Brian Martin (ed.). Albany (N.Y.): State University of New York Press. 1996. 204 pp. \$44.50 (c), \$14.95 (p).

Normally one might suspect that a collection of articles ranging from art history to atomic energy, from terrorism to sewage disposal, would be leftovers hastily flung together to meet a commitment. Such is not the case here.

Dr. Brian Martin, who lectures at the Department of Science and Technology Studies at the University of Wollongong in Australia, has for many years done research in the field of intellectual suppression. For this volume he deliberately chose dissenting experts, in a variety of fields, to tell their stories, the aim being to see the commonality of criticism and the reactions from establishments subject to critical examination. In his introduction, Martin explains how establishment experts always have more power than critics, even when the gadflies are right. The power comes from the inherent prestige of high office, from control of what gets published, and from the backing of powerful and wealthy organizations. It is hard for lone individuals to make an impact (it is too easy to label them as cranks) unless these individuals have an expertise to match the establishment defenders. And even then it almost always is necessary for critics to get the support of a pressure group and some co-operation from the media.

This engaging collection begins with Sharon Beder's account of forcing the