

Irving is taken up with background material and appendices. A valuable feature of the Ertel/Irving volume is a lengthy summary of the entire controversy at the beginning of the book. The contrast between the accuracy of Irving's summary of the facts and the summary in the preface by Paul Kurtz in the beginning of Benski could hardly be more extreme. In fact, it would be worth buying the Ertel/Irving book just to get this summary. Equally valuable and revealing is a chronology of the French study, which one will find in Ertel/Irving but not in Benski. Ertel/Irving also contain a chronology of the recent study and its background. Those interested in the background to the Benski book will find this instructive.

These books display very different attitudes toward the Mars Effect data, a difference I think worth remarking upon. Benski wants the Mars Effect to go away. Their argument is that enough time has been spent on the Mars Effect without real payoff. Now it is time to forget the whole thing, except as a footnote. In fact, they compare the Mars Effect to N-rays and polywater. If one accepts their data and remarks at face value, it is hard to reach any other conclusion. If one were to read only this book, it would be hard to take the Mars Effect seriously. Only those familiar with the players would choke over the statement that the study was done "without *a priori* beliefs." Are we really expected to believe this?

The attitude of the Ertel/Irving book is very different. The authors think that there is a tenacious Mars Effect, that research should focus on where this effect manifests itself, and adopt a program to highlight and illuminate the workings of this (and similar) effects. In other words, rather than trying to close debate, their research invites continued inquiry. It is noteworthy that Ertel had previously done considerable work on the Gauquelin data, showing their weaknesses as well as their strengths. I like this attitude. I do not know whether there is a Mars Effect, but if there is one, its workings are more likely to be illuminated by the hard and unremitting labors of Suitbert Ertel than by the sort of committee work evident in Benski and his associates. There are too many unanswered questions here to turn away from this subject, and truth will not be served by pretending that the issues have been resolved when in fact they remain.

Ron Westrum
Professor of Sociology and Interdisciplinary Technology
Eastern Michigan University
Ypsilanti, MI 48197

Glyphbreaker by Steven Roger Fischer. New York: Copernicus/Springer, 1997. 240 pp., ill. About \$25. ISBN 0-387-98241-8.

Investigating anomalies offers great challenges. One seeks to study what the consensus of scholarship or science asserts to be spurious or impossible. Any progress is dismissed if it contradicts established views. Very rarely can one

make a living as a teacher or researcher while engaged primarily in pursuit of anomalies.

On all these grounds, anomalist researchers will be able to empathize with Steven Roger Fischer. He became fascinated by the challenge of two undeciphered scripts in unknown languages: the apparently hieroglyphic script of the Minoan Phaistos Disk and, on the other side of the world, the Rongorongo Script of Easter Island. The conventional wisdom says that decipherment is possible only of an unknown script recording a known language, or of an unknown language in a known script — that one can but shrug at an unknown script when the underlying language is not known. Nevertheless Fischer succeeded in both instances. His story is intellectually exciting, and written sufficiently well that lay people like myself can follow it with interest and pleasure.

In some respects, decipherment of the Phaistos Disk was a replay of Michael Ventris's decipherment of the Minoan Linear B syllabic script: Ventris too was an independent scholar, and his work too was strongly resisted until the very end because it broke a dogma — that the language in which Linear B was written could not be Greek. John Chadwick was one of the first established scholars to support Ventris, and described Ventris's exciting and ingenious work in a marvelous book, *The Decipherment of Linear B*. It is then ironic — though anomalists will find it eminently believable — that Chadwick in his turn resisted Fischer's developing insight that the Phaistos Disk too recorded Greek — albeit a very early, pre-Homeric Greek. Another cited example of established authorities holding back progress is that of Arthur Evans, whose misconceptions dominated Minoan-Mycenaean scholarship for half a century (p. 26). “For 40 years Evans hoarded his private Linear A and Linear B tablets, refusing others permission to reproduce or even study them” (p. 29).

It is a great pity that this book has some major flaws. (My advance proof had no index, though one is referred to in the Table of Contents.) In the body of the text, the reproduction of the glyphs on the Disk is barely readable, as though made with a dot-matrix printer of insufficient resolution. On pp. 197 and 199, the Figure legends should surely state X^1YX_n , not X^1YZ_n . The text is an unfortunate melange of the intellectual story of the decipherment with a personal account of the doings of Fischer and his wife, much of the latter written rather like the “To our Friends” form letters that one gets from acquaintances once a year, embarrassingly personal and telling really more than one needs or wants to know. In a number of places, there is a bit too much of a self-praising slant; “a distinguished Swiss academic publishing house” agreed to publish one of Fischer's books, but a peek at the Bibliography reference reveals the publishing house to be Peter Lang, to whom academics often have to pay handsome subsidies to get their work published. The book also suffers from a lack of good copy-editing, for example to remove or moderate some purple, school-childish, prose: “The once-glorious capital of the Czars was then locked in the chaotic throes of the dying Soviet empire” (p. 179); as well as a number of extreme statements and superlatives: The Minoans (p. 10) are Europe's “great-

est” mystery and the historian’s “greatest” challenge? What about the Etruscans? Or the Basques? For that matter, how much more we would like to know about the Celts, whose name we take in vain without really knowing all that much about them. Then again, I wish it were true, but it just isn’t, that “There’s no secret so hidden that it cannot be found, no voice so mute that it cannot be heard.” New Zealand is “our planet’s last refuge” at page 8, but when the Fischers return to it they find (p. 205) “rejection of its British heritage, and virulent North American and Asian commercialization.” Yet surely page 8 was written, or at least could have been revised, after that return?

The personal stuff predominates early in the book, and readers can rest assured that it is worth persisting to get to the intellectual story. One has to respect Fischer’s drive and dedication, and admire the support his wife gave, for decades of living on the edge of poverty in order to accomplish an advance — a major advance — in humankind’s knowledge. The account of the decipherments is riveting. I learned a lot from this book and wager that others can too. I hope in years to come to read even more about Fischer’s work and life — but written, I hope, with the help of more professionally accomplished storytellers or editors.

Henry H. Bauer

Professor of Chemistry & Science Studies

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Blacksburg, VA 24061-0227

The Threat, The Secret Agenda: What The Aliens Really Want... And How They Plan To Get It by David M. Jacobs. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1998, 287 pp., \$23.00, (c). ISBN 0-684-81484-6.

As with the study of any subjective phenomenon, whether it is a form of poetry, history, art, or science, there comes a time when fragments of the ideas that drive it are captured. Captured for at least a moment, and displayed before us to be examined until they can slip away, change, or find their way to completion. Prof. David Jacobs appears to have done that in *The Threat*. He seems to be allowing us a view into the private agenda of one non-human species’ pervasive interactions with a subset of our own species.

He starts with a substantial overview of the history of “ufology,” which is based upon his own involvement with the field over the years and many references to the work of others. This book has both very detailed “Notes” and “Index” sections which help ground the reader, even one who may be unfamiliar with this phenomenon and field of study. This approach continues through his discovery of abductees and his first impressions of their hazy-sounding claims of interactions with other beings. And it takes a number of years before he becomes convinced enough to think that their claims could be real. This attitude-swaying evidence includes physical marks, emotional impact on the