

**UFOs and Abductions: Challenging the Borders of Knowledge** edited by David M. Jacobs. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2000. 382 pp.

A serious book about UFOs, published by a university press, may strike many academics as puzzling and incongruous. But should it? One consistent theme throughout this collection of scholarly essays is that the UFO phenomenon, no matter what it may be, raises serious issues that deserve scientific and scholarly attention. The ten contributors include eight academics from a variety of disciplines and two other authors who have researched UFOs carefully and published extensively about them. The content of these essays demonstrates that there is a substantial body of documented information about UFOs and much thoughtful analysis and interpretation. Why should so many scholars and scientists dismiss this whole area of inquiry, usually without taking the time to examine it?

Jacobs has a brief introduction pointing out the need for serious attention to this area of inquiry and the failure of qualified researchers to meet that need. Then, in Chapter 1, Appelle summarizes the relation of academia to ufology—its history and present status. He covers briefly a wide range of research by academics in the “Invisible College” that does take this subject seriously, as well as major historical events, such as the 1969 Condon Report, the 1969 AAAS Symposium on UFOs, the 1992 Abduction Research Conference at MIT, and the 1997 Physical Science Review Panel.

Westrum focuses on six important figures in the history of UFO research—Menzel, Sagan, McDonald, Hynek, Vallee, and Condon. He examines the influence of each one and some of the ways in which they exerted that influence—e.g., posing key questions, gathering empirical data, serving as an exemplar or model, and creating organizations or intellectual enterprises. Some (Menzel and Condon) opposed research and influenced others to ignore UFOs. Others—especially McDonald, Hynek, and Vallee—exerted influence for serious research.

Donderi’s excellent, provocative chapter analyzes three frameworks for examining and interpreting the UFO evidence—science, law, and military intelligence. He argues, on the basis of Kuhn’s philosophy of science, that the scientific framework is systematically unsuited to the task of interpreting UFO evidence. In his analysis, legal procedures for assessing evidence would probably win the case for ufology on the criterion of preponderance of evidence. The modes of operation of military intelligence are, in his opinion, the ones most likely to make sense of the UFO evidence—and may already have done so but kept it secret. His thoughtful analysis is well worth reading, and, whether one agrees with his conclusions or not, his analysis is guaranteed to provoke thought and argument.

Swords focuses on the entanglement of ufology with the cold war and the military. He presents a densely detailed factual history of military and other intelligence activity concerning UFOs. Although there were clearly great divi-

sions and conflicts within these services about how to handle UFO evidence, by and large they did not treat that evidence in a scientific context but in a context of national security. The net effect of this has been to follow the recommendation of the Robertson panel to debunk and ridicule the UFO evidence, rather than try to understand it. To my eyes at least, this chapter contains much interesting new detail about the tangled history of the military and intelligence agencies handling UFO evidence.

Clark's chapter is another historical treatment, this one focusing on the rise and decline of the extraterrestrial hypothesis over the 19th and 20th centuries. This history covers many aspects of UFO history, including 19th-century airship reports, the 1947 Kenneth Arnold sighting, the important influence of Donald Keyhoe, the occultist contactees (such as Adamski and Van Tassel), and Peter Sturrock's Physical Science Review Panel in the Fall of 1997.

Bullard's chapter focuses on the relation of UFOs to religion and to myth. It is a long, wide-ranging, discursive treatment, informed by vast scholarly knowledge of mythology, and densely packed with provocative ideas and interpretations. Though I found many little gems in this chapter, I had difficulty finding an underlying flow of an argument that puts it all together. Perhaps someone closer to this area of knowledge would see the forest where I see some beautiful trees.

The chapter by Jacobs is an account of the UFO abduction controversy in the U.S. written by one of its most active participants. After summarizing abduction reports of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, he describes the developing arguments among abduction researchers and their differences as seen by an active participant. Part of this is "first-person history," and it is a valuable source for understanding UFO abduction research, including the conflicts and disagreements within the area.

The next chapter, by Hopkins, fits well with the preceding, as he is another pioneer and very active participant in abduction research. While Jacobs focused on the history of this research, Hopkins focuses on the role of hypnosis and the nature of evidence in abduction research. He summarizes assessments of the effects of hypnosis on recall and argues strongly that the abduction phenomenon is not an artifact of hypnosis. He discusses the corroborative evidence that is used to support information from hypnosis—eyewitnesses, photos, physical traces, etc. He also points out that many cases have developed without hypnosis, and an important part of the information in nearly all cases comes without hypnosis.

Mack, a psychiatrist who has worked with many self-reported abductees, describes his approach to this task and his interpretation of the meaning of the abduction phenomenon. He argues that there is powerful resistance to the acceptance of the reality of these abductions because they challenge our culture's fundamental assumptions about reality. He summarizes the basic features that are regularly reported in UFO abductions, and he concludes that no psychosocial explanation fits the observations. In effect, to make sense of this

phenomenon we need to change some of our fundamental conceptions of reality, and that, needless to say, results in powerful resistance to accepting that the abductions really occur.

Persinger's chapter is entitled, "The UFO Experience: A Normal Correlate of Human Brain Function." He is conducting research in the laboratory in an effort to generate in human subjects the same subjective experience as is reported by UFO abductees, and he claims success in producing some elements of that experience. Apparently the argument is that producing the experience in this way will support a hypothesis that the abduction experience is strictly a psychological/neurological one, produced in some way by forces in the environment such as electromagnetic fields. Although this is a difficult chapter for anyone not trained in neurological science, it is very provocative in its implications. Certainly it leaves completely unanswered important questions about what kind of field outside the laboratory impinges on the brains of so many people, what produces that field, and how it manages to generate so many matching details in the recollections of widely disparate people. Though I applaud the idea of this line of research, it seems to me at this point to raise more questions than it answers.

Jacobs concludes the book with a brief chapter on research directions. There is a wide-open question about what kinds of research might be most productive. Is this a cultural phenomenon, or psychosocial, or neurological, or something totally outside our current body of knowledge, as John Mack suggests? Or perhaps some complex amalgam of these things. Clearly there are psychological, sociological, and historical aspects of this phenomenon that are worthy of study. The whole area of false memory is surely very relevant. And there are important issues for other fields including philosophy, jurisprudence, optical physics, folklore, etc.

Looking now at Jacobs' book as a whole, I find a generally thoughtful, scholarly collection that makes a case that the phenomenon of UFOs is, in the words of McDonald, "an area of extraordinary scientific interest." The volume has the strengths and the weaknesses of most essay collections: a diversity of perspectives, a variety of provocative issues raised, but little coherence. The unifying theme is that UFOs constitute an important anomaly that deserves far more serious research attention. Perhaps it is asking too much, in an inchoate and anomalous field such as this, to expect any more coherence than that. Academics—indeed all open-minded intellectuals—should read this book and contemplate it carefully. There is much misinformation presently circulating among those who refuse to look at the evidence themselves, and the history of science is full of cases of refusal to face and deal with anomalies—and of major advances in knowledge when the anomaly is finally acknowledged and confronted.

ROBERT L. HALL

*Emeritus Professor of Sociology  
University of Illinois at Chicago*