

ning to write about his experiences with them. The symbolism of the illness suggested that he had been the victim (very nearly a casualty) of a psychic attack. Apparently these kinds of situations did not end with the mystery disease. Shortly after publication of the U.S. edition of his book in the spring of 2001, Joe Fisher committed suicide. Friends noted that he had been having problems in his personal relationships and with his finances, and continuing trouble from the discarnate entities who had once so warmly embraced him. It's a pity Fisher never met Louise Ireland-Frey. Maybe it wouldn't have helped, in the end. But surely it couldn't have hurt.

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Addendum: Interestingly enough, the board's first response was "ABC," which it elaborated into a name when pressed for specifics. Years later I briefly dated a young man who was one of five children. The oldest's name began with "A", the second oldest's with "B", and so on through "E." The family's last name was "Fischer." In other words, they were A, B, C, D, and E Fischer. In another curious twist, the first name of the man I did eventually marry began with "G."

Swamp Gas Times: My Two Decades on the UFO Beat, by Patrick Huyghe. New York: Paraview Press. 2001. 394 pp. \$17.95, paper. ISBN 1-931044-27-9.

Swamp Gas Times: My Two Decades on the UFO Beat is a collection of articles on the UFO subject published by science journalist Patrick Huyghe over the last two decades. Huyghe is first to be credited with a ground-breaking *New York Times Magazine* feature in 1979 prompted by the release of the first batch of CIA documents on unidentified flying objects under the Freedom of Information Act. This success opened many doors for his future reporting. Most of his later stories are short and ran in *OMNI* magazine between 1984 and 1997. More recent ones have appeared in *Science Digest* or on the internet site Space.com, and Huyghe now edits a print and web journal, *The Anomalist*.

Huyghe's time on the "UFO beat" certainly made an important contribution, since most media refused to touch the subject. As a freelance journalist who has recently covered the UFO subject for mainstream newspapers such as the *Boston Globe*, I empathize wholeheartedly with Huyghe's statement that he was not open with his colleagues about his work for fear of damaging his career. Unfortunately, I too have felt compelled to guard my professional standing in this way. I commend him for sticking with his reporting despite the risk.

I found Huyghe's writing on a broad range of topics relating to UFOs to be uneven. Some pieces are in-depth, well-researched and informative. Others, especially many of the *OMNI* stories, are infused with a simplistic, popular tone. Perhaps Huyghe was constricted by the requirements of his editors, and he was certainly limited by length (many stories on complicated topics aver-

age two pages). Some pieces also suffer due to the fact that they are dated, and much has been learned since. This gives them an elementary feel and they can be tedious to read for someone well versed in the subject.

A dismissive attitude is injected into his pieces from time to time. “The video evidence for UFOs has been a waste of time,” he declares in his 1997 piece “UFO Home Videos: Seduced by Venus and Other ETs.” Of greatest concern to me were the stories tinged with a hint of ridicule—sometimes subtly through tone and other times overtly. In “The Strieber Show” he treats the work of Whitley Strieber with sarcasm. However, Huyghe does apologize for not disputing the opinion of his editor, who thought that Strieber was a cult leader. In a very interesting analysis of the famous Linda Cortille abduction case, he says Budd Hopkins is consumed with “bizarre tales of UFOs and the nasty creatures who inhabit them, plucking innocents from their homes in the middle of the night.” Huyghe describes his session with a woman claiming to channel an ET named Hwieg in a piece titled “Aliens ‘R’ Us.” “Huyghe meets Hweig,” he chuckles, amused by the similarity between his birth name and the alien’s who “made up his from random letters.”

Huyghe gives great credence to the comments of veteran debunker Philip Klass (who he states is a good friend) in his quest for balance and objectivity, often giving Klass the last word in a story. Perhaps Huyghe enjoyed writing with what he calls a sense of humor, a quality he admires in Klass. But when he pokes fun of a frightened Australian family who believed they encountered a UFO while in their car, I could not understand the point. Even if the family members were mistaken, what purpose does it serve to make light of the incident? I react in response to my own uphill battle to bring credibility to this complex subject through serious reporting. The prevailing attitude in the media is one of ridicule. Stories such as this only add to that problem.

Yet numerous pieces in the book are thoughtful and substantive. These are well worth reading and to be respected for their balanced approach. I particularly appreciated the in-depth *Anomalist* piece “The Best UFO Case Ever?” about the 1964 Socorro, New Mexico sighting—the only Project Blue Book case designated as “unidentified” that involved observation of a landed craft and occupants, as well as physical evidence. The sighting terrified its witness, a highly credible police officer named Lonnie Zamora. Huyghe pulls together a detailed picture of the case based on the documentation, witness accounts and interviews, and the work of many investigators. He provides a detailed description of Blue Book director Major Hector Quintanilla’s unsuccessful attempts to explain the object over a period of years, and the work of J. Allen Hynek and Ray Sanford of the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena (NICAP). The highlight of the piece is a powerful interview with Zamora himself, conducted 35 years after the incident. This is investigative journalism at its best.

Other interesting stories include coverage of Laurance Rockefeller’s attempt to persuade President Clinton to become active on the UFO issue, the activities of disinformation agent Richard Doty, scientists who have seen

UFOs, the Phoenix Lights lawsuit against the Department of Defense, and an analysis of what the government isn't saying about UFOs.

Huyghe touches on the current debate of media and government cover-up as presented by Terry Hansen in *The Missing Times: News Media Complicity in the UFO Cover-up*. (See review by John L. Peterson in *JSE*, Volume 15, Number 3.) He takes issue with Hansen's thesis that the government has directly influenced the media in its effort to maintain secrecy about UFOs, due to national security concerns. Huyghe states that if there is any deliberate "media conspiracy" it would have been obvious to him. This strikes me as naïve. There is no way any journalist would have direct knowledge of such an undercurrent. The lack of coverage of the subject and the persistent ridicule is open to many interpretations. One cannot overlook the debunking campaign put into place by the CIA's Robertson panel and the CIA infiltration of media during the cold war, which is well documented by Hansen.

Huyghe concludes that government secrecy is not about its knowledge of UFOs, but about its attempt to downplay its own lack of knowledge. To explain this position he says that if it were known that these visitors were from outer space, the Air Force would not refer people with sightings to civilian UFO groups. This logic simply doesn't hold up. Well over 90% of sightings reported by civilians are explainable. Why would the Air Force want to bother dealing with these reports, even if they did have evidence of an ET reality? The record shows that civilian groups have been infiltrated and surveilled by intelligence for decades. The authorities would easily be aware of any cases of significance, and in fact could make use of these groups as a filtering device.

But by and large, Huyghe draws a series of sensible conclusions in his very fine Afterword, providing an open-minded assessment which should inspire any journalist to recognize that the subject is worthy of investigation. "I refuse to throw out these remaining unidentifieds," he concludes, despite the "flimsy assumptions" of skeptics claiming that all UFOs could be explained if more information were available. He laments the lack of true investigation in today's media and the stigma that still overlays this subject. Huyghe ends by stating that he still has no answer to the UFO mystery, and he's not afraid to say that even sightings of occupants by honest observers remain an open question.

Although I think it could have been shortened by inclusion of only the most serious articles, *Swamp Gas Times* provides an important historical record of media coverage on this subject and therefore has much to teach us. I hope that Huyghe's material will inspire more journalists to engage in a fruitful debate on points such as those I have raised above. None of us have the answers, so we must keep asking the questions.

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