

bluntly, more UFO flaps should be subjected to the many-pronged analyses that Dewey and Ries offer. I say that not because I so notoriously doubt that anything in ufology has anything to do with extraterrestrials (although I admit an interest). Without taking account of all the factors, and perhaps more, that Dewey and Ries examine, it is approaching impossible to extract from such very noisy data any genuinely mysterious or truly anomalous elements.

Accordingly, and apart from their discussion of the cultural context, Dewey and Ries run Warminster through the filters of Shuttlewood's position and influence and his increasingly religious interpretation of the phenomenon; the role of hoaxers; problems of hallucination, misperception, and self-deception; the dynamics of skywatching in groups; and the extent to which enthusiasm for UFOs intrinsically answers a religious dilemma. Finally, they place Warminster in the context of ufology as currently practiced. What emerges from all this is that the Warminster phenomenon was and is essentially a story—a "narrative", in modern parlance—nested within a network of truths, half-truths, imaginings, and assumptions both conscious and unconscious. As they remark wryly, without the story, all you have is some lights in the sky. The story of the Warminster phenomenon as Dewey and Ries tell it is at once singular and weird—not least in its initial manifestation as a still-unattributed series of alarming noises—and archetypal. This book should be read with care, patience, and reflection, but most of all it should be read.

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Grass Roots UFOs: Case Reports from the Timmerman Files by Michael D. Swords. Lima, OH: Fund for UFO Research, 2005. 251 pp. \$22.00 postpaid (paper). ISBN 0-78-80216-56.

At one time books about UFOs were collections of facts and figures on sighting details, altitudes, azimuths, and all of the nuts and bolts visual specifics. These were relayed with the intent of convincing the reader that the reports were evidence of at least a new area for scientific inquiry, or at most proof of aliens from another planet, visiting the earth in flying saucers. Now UFO books are largely about highly sensational stories about crashed saucers, alien contacts, conspiracy theories, or alien philosophies, full of wild claims and speculations.

This new book by Dr. Michael Swords, a newly retired educator from Western Michigan University, harkens back to the days of UFOs far removed from the confusing complexity that presently dominates UFO research. This complexity seems to be the result of the ever-increasing one-upsmanship of radical claims that has tired the reading public and virtually knocked the subject from bookshelves and newsstands, according to semi-interested readers with whom this reviewer has spoken.

The volume is a collection of UFO sightings gathered over twenty years by John Timmerman. Timmerman was a board member of the Center for UFO Studies in the Chicago area. In an effort to promote scientific interest in UFOs, he helped to build and man a travelling exhibit. Beginning in 1980, many thousands of people viewed the exhibit across North America and brought with them stories of personal UFO experiences or new details of known UFO incidents. Timmerman was always ready with a notepad and tape recorder to document interviews. Eventually over twenty binders and numerous cassette tapes were gathered with tales from distant UFO sightings to close encounters.

Having been friends with Timmerman for many years, Swords urged him to get the information published, inasmuch as few people had convenient access to the hundreds of previously unseen incidents. With the help of transcribers, the tapes were put onto paper and organized by dates and sighting types (round, square, cigar-shaped, etc.). Some of these details had to be urged from reluctant witnesses. Assembling and organizing all this raw material is not a frivolous task, having taken Swords about a year to construct.

Now if a book can be called both maddening and delightful at the same time, then this one qualifies. It is maddening because of the circumstances under which the information was collected. Crowds of people would gather at the exhibit in its various venues. Information would be related in a noisy, confused environment. Sometimes, when deemed worthwhile, a witness would be brought to a quieter location to record a statement and to answer questions. The result of this is immediately obvious with even a brief skimming through the book. There aren't very many accurate times and dates for these incidents, many being described as "sometime in 1973" or "summer in the early 1970s." Most sightings are related in one or two paragraphs. Locations are often vague as well. Practically no witnesses are identified, nor will some ever be identified though such data do exist in the raw notes and tapes.

For these reasons, not much science could be done with the information, despite the fact that the author calls the subject "the science of Ufology" in his dedication. Swords openly acknowledges this problem. But at the same time he stresses that due to the spontaneous nature of the data collection, the accounts have a natural and honest element to them. It is not as if a person is spinning a lurid tale for the media. They are, for Swords, believable stories. And if they are believable, then a very strange phenomenon is in our midst.

Where the "delightful" comes in is that this is an eminently readable book. Because the reports are brief and to the point, and illustrated by Swords with useful drawings that reasonably interpret the experiences, I felt like I was back in the 1960s when I was young and first interested in space and the possibility of extraterrestrial life. UFOs were in the national news. The Air Force and Congress were investigating them. It was a curious and mind-broadening topic for its potential of revealing a new natural phenomenon, if not proof of alien visitations. Whether one thinks the potential has been fulfilled or not, it is hard not to find the following story from the book compelling:

Clinton, Ontario—early June 1958, 9:15 P.M.

Five members of the Royal Canadian Air Force were driving outside of town, when they saw a glowing orange light over a ridge near a farmer's field. It was oval in shape and very large; its apparent size being that of a football held at arm's length. Its distance from the road was between 300 and 400 meters, and its altitude about 500 meters. No sound was emitted, and the object seemed to be simply an oval of orange pulsing light. The air force guys decided to drive off the road and into the field after it. But it rose straight up and slowly drifted away at a leisurely pace. They never reported it.

Is it a spaceship, or an electrical phenomenon not well understood? Or did it happen at all? It may never be clear from this presentation but my own experience from listening to UFO witnesses is that the detail reported is believable, if not always the interpretation of what that detail is. And that is pretty much as far as it goes with UFO reports.

Information like what is reported in this book can be valuable in context with other information. If it can be established once and for all that ball lightning exists, and behaves in a manner as described in the Clinton, Ontario report, then historical context for ball lightning reports has been created. This can also apply to documenting reports of transient lunar phenomenon (TLP). An amateur astronomer sees a strange flash for a short time on the moon's surface through a telescope. It subsequently disappears, leaving no trace. The scientific approach to this and similar reports would be to dismiss them as imaginary, that is, if it weren't for the fact that some TLPs finally have been established as genuine, being due to lunar meteorite impacts. One 1953 TLP that was photographed by an astronomer has been linked to a fresh appearing crater within the last year.

Consider, too, the case of upward lightning strokes, sometimes called "rocket" lightning. This was deemed fairly anomalous when described by William Corliss in his 1982 book *Lightning, Auroras, Nocturnal Lights and Related Luminous Phenomena*, saying, "It is difficult to visualize how a volume of clear sky could act as a highly charged terminal." We are now familiar with "sprites," "jets," and "elves," thunderstorm phenomena high above the clouds up to the fringes of space which have been photographed and otherwise documented in scientific literature over the last fifteen years.

Does one discard anomalous reports as useless to science or does one record them for future consideration? If you agree with the latter, you provide the reason why the Swords book should have been written and should be read. It might be put into the category of "protosignificant." A portion of the reports in *Grass Roots UFOs* may be useful to science now or they may be useful one day. Many may never be useful. But I wouldn't want to be the one to toss any one of them out prematurely.

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