Massive Uncritical Publicity for Supposed 'Independent UFO Investigation' Demonstrates Media Gullibility Once Again

On Monday, June 19, 1998, all of the major media outlets were suddenly filled with accounts proclaiming that an *independent panel of scientists had taken a* fresh look at the UFO question, and had concluded that the matter needed to be taken seriously after all. The *Washington Post* wrote glowingly of "the first independent scientific review of the controversial topic in almost 30 years" that supposedly found "cases that included intriguing and inexplicable details, such as burns to witnesses, radar detections of mysterious objects, strange lights appearing repeatedly in the skies over certain locales, aberrations in the workings of automobiles, and irradiation and other damage found in vegetation." ABC News reported, "A panel of scientists is conducting the first independent UFO investigation in nearly 30 years." The Associated Press reported that "an international panel of scientists" was convened to conduct "the first independent review of UFO phenomena since 1966."

While finding that eyewitness testimony about UFOs was of little scientific value and "there was no convincing evidence pointing to . . . the involvement of extraterrestrial intelligence" (a major point widely underplayed by news reports), the panel had concluded that "the physical evidence in some UFO sightings merits further serious scientific review."

However, what virtually every major news organization completely overlooked is that this was far from an "independent" review of UFOs. The Society for Scientific Exploration, sponsor of the panel, is not a "mainstream" scientific organization. Instead, it is a group inclined toward belief in paranormal phenomena, albeit one with many scientists among its membership. This could have been easily determined by any reporter who would have taken the trouble to peruse their Web site (www.jse.com), or to interview them meaningfully. For the past eleven years, the *Journal of Scientific Exploration* been publishing articles suggesting that at *least some paranormal claims are true,* and have been verified scientifically. On the SSE Web site are found papers purporting to demonstrate that dowsing has been verified, that young chicks have psychokinetic powers, and that reincarnation is not only verified, but that past lives are often indicated by the presence of birthmarks. The Web site proclaims the journal's intention to publish supposedly scientific papers on "UFO and related phenomena, clairvoyance, precognition, telepathy, psychokinesis, out-of-body and near-death experiences, cryptozoology, evidence suggestive of reincarnation, alternative medical practices, astrological claims, ball lightning, crop circles, apparent chemical or biological transmutation (alchemy), etc." Despite the impressive jargon and in some cases the impressive academic degrees of the authors, these papers have been absolutely unconvincing to mainstream scientific journals and organizations, and, far from pointing the way to further research, they have been quite deliberately ignored.

The SSE UFO Panel invited only pro-UFOlogists to present supposed "evidence"; the skeptical viewpoint was evidently felt not to be worth considering. The panel was funded by Laurance Rockefeller, whose previous financial support for pro-UFO organizations is well-known. The scientific sessions of the panel were moderated by David E. Pritchard, professor of physics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Harold E. Puthoff, director of the Institute for Advanced Studies in Austin. Puthoff is well-known in parapsychological circles for his experiments with Uri Geller at SRI International during the 1970s, which are now viewed even by most parapsycholgists as hopelessly flawed. He is currently researching "Zero-Point Energy," i.e. supposed techniques for extracting useful amounts of free energy from the vacuum of space. (*see "Zero-Point Energy and Harold* Puthoff," SKEPTICAL INQUIRER, May/June 1998, and the subsequent exchange between Puthoff and Martin Gardner in this issue, page 60.) *The Journal of Scientific Exploration* has published Puthoff's writings on that subject. Pritchard was one of the organizers of the 1992 Abduction Study Conference at MIT, along with Budd Hopkins, Dr. John Mack of Harvard, and David Jacobs of Temple University. This conference, which was overwhelmingly slanted toward the pro-UFO and pro-abduction position, was intended to provide scientific credibility for the Hopkins-Jacobs-Mack abduction hypothesis, which centers around a supposed alien plan to breed part-human, part-alien hybrids. The conference not only failed to sway the scientific community, but has become something of an embarrassment to UFO believers as it made public for the first time some of the more outlandish claims and practices of the UFO abductionists.

The UFO "experts" who were invited to present supposed evidence to the SSE UFO panel were: Richard Haines, psychologist and longtime pro-UFO researcher; Illobrand von Ludwiger, director of the Central European branch of MUFON; Mark Rodeghier, director of the Center for UFO Studies, Chicago; John Schuessler, Deputy Director of MUFON; Erling Strand, one of the directors of UFO Norway; Michael Swords, Scientific Director of CUFOS; Jacques Vallee, the author of many UFO books, who has repeatedly suggested that UFO reports signify something momentous precisely because they do not make sense; and Jean-Jacques Velasco, the Director of SEPRA, the French Space Agency (CNES) UFO Study. Not one of these investigators is a skeptic in any

sense of the word; all of them have long-standing positions of UFO advocacy.

Amazingly, the cases that the panel found so impressive are old ones that have long been touted by UFO promoters and have failed to convince skeptics inside or outside the scientific community. One of their principal cases was an alleged UFO "landing trace" case in Trans-en-Provence, France. The soil appeared to have been compacted, and traces were found of iron, zinc, and phosphates. However, the connection of the alleged 'landing trace' to any aerial event rests upon the testimony of just one individual. If he is either hoaxing or deluded, then the incident proves nothing about UFOs no matter how many tests might be performed upon soil samples.

The Cash-Landrum case of 1980 was presented as evidence of physiological effects upon witnesses. Exposure to a flaming UFO is said to have produced blisters, digestive disorders, burns, hair loss, and other dramatic effects. However, the accuracy of these claims is impossible to assess, as only selected por-

COMMENTARY

It Is Time for TV Networks to Admit Their Role in Misleading Public About UFOs

Now that Cable News Network has admitted that producers of its *NewsStand* television program on June 7 knowingly omitted important contrary evidence to falsely accuse the U.S. military of having dropped nerve gas on a Laotian village during the Vietnam War, it is time for the television networks to admit they have withheld evidence from the public to make a much more serious allegation against the U.S. government.

Public opinion polls indicate that more than half the public believes the U.S. government is involved in a "UFO coverup." This is testimony to television's pervasive influence on public opinion and its knowingly biased treatment of the Roswell "crashed-saucer" incident.

CNN viewers saw and heard former Army Lt. Robert Van Buskirk allege not only that nerve-gas had been dropped from helicopters on a Laotian village but that his platoon had killed two Caucasians he believed to be American defectors. Withheld from CNN viewers was the fact that when Van Buskirk published a book in 1983 about his wartime experience in Southeast Asia, he made no mention of either incident. Van Buskirk's explanation is that while writing his book he was suffering from "repressed memory syndrome," which vanished when he was being interviewed for the CNN program.

Even if CNN's nerve-gas charges were true, at worst they would reflect adversely on only a few American military officials and perhaps on a single U.S. President—if he had in fact approved such action. The Roswell Incident crashed-saucer cover-up, if true, would represent a policy of ten presidents and their administrations to withhold the truth about UFOs from the American public and the world.

As described in my article "That's Entertainment: TV's UFO Coverup" (SKEPTICAL INQUIRER, November/December 1996), during the mid-1990s I was interviewed for numerous TV shows dealing with the Roswell Incident. On every occation, I gave the producer photocopies of once "Secret" and "Top Secret" USAF and CIA documents which showed that if a flying saucer had crashed in New Mexico, top intelligence officials were never informed of that fact—even five years later. I told the TV producers: "These documents have never before been shown on TV; you can be the first to inform the public." Yet invariably these documents were never shown or discussed.

For example, when CBS News visited Roswell to film a segment for its show *48 Hours,* I was interviewed. While the camera was filming, I whipped out and held in front of the camera a copy of a "Top Secret" USAF/Navy document dated December 10, 1948—prepared more than a year after the alleged crashed-saucer recovery. I read its conclusion, that it was then suspected that unexplained UFOs might be Soviet spy vehicles.

When the CBS Roswell segment was aired, the entire interview with me, and the showing and discussion of this "Top Secret" document, ended up on the cutting room floor. The host for that television show was Dan Rather. Two hours earlier, Rather appeared on the CBS evening news program where controversial issues usually are treated in a balanced manner.

Viewers watching the Roswell segment of *48 Hours* would, understandably, expect that CBS News and Dan Rather were providing them with an equally balanced treatment of the Roswell Incident and (alleged) government coverup. *Viewers were being misled by CBS.*

In view of the CNN nerve-gas program fiasco, can we expect CBS and other TV networks to re-examine their coverage of the Roswell Incident and charges of government UFO coverup—and to set the record straight? Don't hold your breath!

—Philip J. Klass

Philip J. Klass, author of The Real Roswell Crashed Saucer Coverup *and* UFOs: The Public Deceived, *is chairman of CSICOP's UFO Subcommittee and a veteran Washington aerospace journalist.*

tions of the medical records of the individuals involved have ever been released. Furthermore, no other witnesses in this suburban area of Houston reported seeing anything at all, and no effects of the UFO's supposed heat and/or radiation were detected on any animals, plants, or inanimate matter. The witnesses' claim that the UFO was being pursued by exactly twenty-three large dual-rotor helicopters (which if true would certainly have attracted a great deal of attention and would have been verifiable afterward) raises serious issues concerning witness reliability and candor. As before, the link between a "physical effect" and any alleged UFO is quite tenuous. Jacques Vallee made presentations concerning a number of alleged "artifacts," none of which can be excluded as ordinary terrestrial objects. One of the cases Vallee presented was the supposed UFO crash in Aurora, Texas, in 1897, which has long been dismissed as a hoax even by many pro-UFOlogists.

The fallacy underlying all of the panel's "evidence" is that no matter how indisputably real any measurement may be, its relationship to any alleged aerial phenomenon is merely anecdotal. The late J. Allen Hynek was fond of citing in his lectures supposed animal reactions to UFOs as proof that the case for UFOs does not rely solely on fallible eyewitness testimony: animals, he assured us, do not suffer from mass hypnosis. He never seemed to understand the objection that our knowledge of the animals' supposed actions rests entirely upon uncorroborated testimony.

It has not been a good year for the giants of American journalism. CNN and *Time* were forced to retract, and even apologize for, an unfounded story that the U.S. military used nerve gas against defectors. *The New Republic* fired one of its reporters, and the *Boston Globe* saw one of its reporters resign under pressure, both for fabricating stories in whole or in part. The Associated Press reported the death of Bob Hope while the famed comedian sat at his home, calmly eating breakfast. Close on the heels of these embarrassments comes a gaffe in which nearly every major news outlet uncritically heralded as an "independent scientific review of the UFO phenomenon" an in-house study from a fringe organization whose conclusion, because of the group's very makeup, was never in doubt. While perhaps not as egregious as the other examples, it illustrates all too plainly the tendency of the contemporary American news media to leap before they look.

—Robert Sheaffer

Robert Sheaffer's latest book is UFO Sightings: The Evidence, *just published by Prometheus books.*

'Pi' April Fool's Joke Gets Out of Hand—and Goes Round the World



NMSR *Reports*
The Newsletter of the New Mexicans for Science and Reason

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APRIL MEETING

Keith Gilbert
"What Are Your Chances?"
7 PM, Wednesday, April 8th, 1998

Alabama Legislature Lays Siege to π

It began as a simple parody. But, thanks to the increasingly popular Internet, it grew to become a new urban legend.

Just before April 1, 1998, New Mexico physicist and skeptic Mark Boslough wrote an April Fool's parody on legislative and school board attacks on evolution in New Mexico. He took real statements from New Mexico legislators and school board members supporting creationism, and rephrased them in a fictional account detailing how Alabama legislators had passed a law calling for the value of pi (3.14159 ...) to be changed to the "Biblical" value of 3.0.

Why Alabama? Because it was a believable locale, given that state's anti-science actions (such as requiring an "Evolution is just a theory" disclaimer to be pasted in all biology textbooks). And Alabama, like New Mexico, is a state with many smarter-than average people, yet dumber-than-average politicians. Current Alabama Governor Fob James did nothing to help change that image when he recently (June 1998) put on a monkey act while making fun of evolution. And his predecessor, Governor Guy Hunt, wasn't a big help either—one of the commenters on the parody wrote that Hunt "puts the Goober in gubernatorial."

Why change the value of pi? Because legal attempts to set the value of mathematical constants are as ludicrous as the current legal attacks on biology. And it was hoped that engineers, the "victims" of the pi legislation, would see the analogy to attacks on biology, which are frequently led by creationists specializing in engineering.

The parody was chock full of joke hints—for example, the author was named as April Holiday, and the Internet version credited the story to "the Associmated Press." The governor of Alabama was named as Guy Hunt, not the current governor (Fob James). The article was tagged with an Internet address that ended with "/april/fool.htm." And it contained several puns, such as a dig at "traditional values" (as in the "traditional value of pi, 3.0"). But the main part of the article was a realistic-sounding account of how Huntsville rocket scientists and Alabama professors were furious over the changing of pi, and included statements from legislators and board members supporting the action.

At Boslough's request, New Mexico physicist and SKEPTICAL INQUIRER consulting editor David E. Thomas posted the parody on "talk.origins," the Internet's USENET group devoted to discussions of creation and evolution. The parody was also sent to a list of New

Mexico scientists and citizens interested in evolution, and was printed in the April issue of the New Mexicans for Science and Reason newsletter *NMSR Reports.* Thomas posted the story on the Internet on April 1, and followed later that day with a full confession and explanation. Several creationists commented on the piece, but reaction died down after a few days.

Or so it seemed. Unbeknown to the author and poster, several readers of the original parody forwarded it to their friends, and to other newsgroups. And, in a stunning example of adaptive radiation, the prank story was forwarded again and again. As the story was forwarded, all hints of the parody were deleted, and replaced with official-sounding titles and names. For example, "April Holiday" was on one occasion replaced with "SLA/Physics Lab." Soon, it was was being discussed by people from Germany, Norway, China, Australia, and all over the globe. It was all the rage in USENET groups such as alabama.politics, sci.math, alt.folklore,urban, and soc.culture.Jewish. While some Internet users realized it was not a real story, many others were taken in completely.

The story even worked its way to Huntsville, Alabama, where it became a hot topic on talk radio there. The Associated Press (the real one) picked it up, and explained it was a hoax. But interest in the story persisted on the Internet. As of mid-June, it looks as though the fuss is dying down, but that could be just a lull in the storm.

In 1897, the Indiana legislature considered re-defining pi. But if you hear about a similar story in 1998, in Alabama, please be assured—this one was a joke. A joke that got out of hand, and—in an international game of "Gossip"—has apparently grown to become a new urban legend.

—David E. Thomas

David E. Thomas is a New Mexico physicist and SKEPTICAL INQUIRER *consulting editor.*



Indian skeptic B. Premanand

India Honors Premanand for Exposing 'Miracles,' Promoting Science

The noted Indian conjurer and skeptical investigator Premanand has received the government of India's highest award for science popularization.

B. Premanand was honored by the National Council for Science and Technology Communication, Department of Science and Technology, Government of India, with its national award for the Best Effort in Science Popularization during the period 1992–1996.

Premanand, chairman of the Indian Skeptics and editor of its publication, *Indian Skeptic,* has devoted years to exposing as psychic trickery the supposed miracles of India's self-proclaimed "godmen." Through tours and appearances he has become known to skeptics and scientific audiences worldwide.

Here is Premanand's citation: "For his relentless efforts towards promotion of scientific attitudes among common people, all over the country, through lecture-cum-demonstrations and scientific explanation of hundreds of the so-called miracles employed by self-styled godmen; and through books written and television shows conducted by him on the same subject in the country as well as outside."

It was signed by Y. K. Alagh, Chairman, NCSTC, and Union Minister for Science and Technology.

Into the Nagual at Last: New Age Author Carlos Casteneda Dies

The New Age form of shamanism was ushered into popular awareness largely through the teachings of don Juan Matus, the mysterious Yaqui Indian sorcerer made popular during the past three decades through ten books by Carlos Castaneda. Don Juan, the stories tell us, disappeared directly with his living body a decade or so ago into the Nagual or spiritual state. Castaneda, however, apparently died more prosaically in Westwood, California, and without publicity on April 27. His death wasn't announced until June. He had liver cancer and he was believed to be sixty-six or seventy-two, take your pick. His cremated remains were taken to Mexico without fanfare.

Castaneda rarely gave interviews (one of his last was "Portrait of a Sorcerer" in *New Age Journal* April 1994). He would not permit photographs. He was alleged to have a small cult of followers who tried, together with him, the sorcery techniques he wrote about. From what we know about him and his storybook persona, Castaneda seemed to lead a reclusive, emotionally loveless life.

Several years ago I spent twelve hours in discussions with a young, bilingual man who claimed to be part of Castaneda's "inner circle." He described the "Tensegrity" movements years before they were published in *Yoga Journal* ("Carlos Castaneda's Magical Passes," February 1998). Two women from this circle, Taisha Abelar and Florinda Donner, have published in the same occult adventure genre as the don Juan books.

Serious anthropologists (see Richard De Mille, *Castaneda's Journey,* 1978; The *Don Juan Papers,* 1980; Jay Courtney

Fikes, *Carlos Castaneda, Academic Opportunism, and the Psychedelic Sixties,* 1993) have convincingly dismissed Castaneda's don Juan stories as clever fiction. Castaneda, however, never veered from his claim that don Juan actually lived, and he claimed that his books were nothing less than interpretations taken from field notes and real experiences.

The occult experiences and powers are what so intrigue the readers who want to become "warriors" or sorcerers like don Juan. Throughout the books Castaneda offers elusive techniques to better align with occult power. For instance, the apprentice can learn to create and move an "assemblage point," a way of re-energizing the self so one can literally disappear and appear at will. In *Star Trek,* Scotty, the starship engineer, "beamed" you up; in Castaneda stories, you learn to do it all by yourself as you "fly with intent" to different "dreaming" realities. The don Juan stories have amounted to head trips for most readers who dared not to ingest the dangerous drugs like Jimson weed mentioned in the early books, and who could not find a suitable shaman like don Juan—he was nowhere to be found. So, it surprised many seekers when Castaneda described Tensegrity in illustrated detail as certain martial art-like movements in *Yoga Journal.*

Using these movements the frustrated seeker now has the potential to enter the powerful altered states of perception Castaneda talks about. With the Tensegrity techniques, the Castaneda cult finally has something to compete with other magic power groups that offer yogic flying techniques, meditation mantras, heavy breathing (pranayama), screaming, chanting, or trance dancing as the means to become supermen. I have found nothing to prove that any of these techniques can facilitate true occult powers, but there is a variety of evidence that they do alter perception, sometimes radically and even harmfully (Margaret T. Singer, *Cults in our Midst,* 1995). If Castaneda ever possessed these powers, we will never know as we can no longer test him. If there is a sorcerer's heaven, I have a hunch that Carlos Castaneda is now with don Juan dreaming up new tales of power.

—Joe Szimhart

Joe Szimhart has researched fringe cults and the New Age movement for more than two decades, and he has helped many people to recover from harmful experiences in that milieu.

New Poll Points to Increase in Paranormal Belief

Are paranormal beliefs on the rise? Turn on the television, listen to the radio or browse the best seller shelves and you'll notice an apparent explosion in the quantity and popularity of mass media paranormal presentations. Televised episodes of the immensely popular *X-Files* draw 17–25 million viewers. On radio, Art Bell's fantasy-laden *Coast to Coast AM,* with an average of 8.75 million listeners tuning in per week, is ranked fourth among American radio talk shows. Paranormal popularity even extends to book sales. Dubbed a "publishing miracle" and fueled by appearances on *Oprah Winfrey* and *Larry King Live,* psychic medium James Van Praagh's *Talking to Heaven* has been on the New York Times nonfiction best seller list for months.

Now a recent Yankelovich Partners poll lends further support to the notion that belief in the paranormal is on the rise. Published in an April 20 *USA Today* Snapshot titled "Belief in the Beyond," a 1997 poll compared current belief in paranormal phenomena with belief levels measured in 1976.

Maria Miller, Director of Client Services for Yankelovich Partners, deems the poll an indication of a "significant increase in paranormal belief." According to Miller, other studies by Yankelovich have indicated that Americans are now trying to "find something in their lives beyond the material." She points out that one source for growth in paranormal and spiritual belief might be the evolving attitudes of aging Baby Boomers. As the generation grows older, they increasingly seek to get in touch with themselves. Miller cites other Yankelovich polls that show increased consumer spending in areas that bring internal reward. When asked about the recent increase in media presentations of the paranormal, Miller believes the reason simple: "The public wants it, they're looking for it."

The Yankelovich results are difficult to verify since other polls conducted by the Gallup Organization and Roper

continued on page 12

Which if any of the following do you believe at least to some degree?

Belief	1997	1976
Spiritualism	52%	12%
Faith Healing	45%	10%
Astrology	37%	17%
UFOs	30%	24%
Reincarnation	25%	9%
Fortune Telling	14%	4%

(1976 N=8,709; 1997 N=1,000 Margin of error = +/- 3–5%)

Reports indicate relatively little change in belief for the topics asked by Yankelovich. Differences may be explained by the use of different wording in questions and different descriptions for paranormal topics. Both the Gallup and Roper Reports polls also vary across questions as to whether there are comparable results dating back to the 1970s. Tom W. Clark of the Chicago-based National Opinion Research Center adds that the manner in which questions are asked can affect results. "What prior questions were asked? What is the context effect? Often, prior questions can suppress or buoy an answer." Clark also notes that it is important to examine the representativeness of the poll sample. "If those polled are made up of more than one socioeconomic class or ethnicity it can bias the answers."

In a 1992 paper titled "Phantom Changes on Paranormal Beliefs," Clark criticized a 1990 Gallup poll that showed apparent substantial growth in belief of certain paranormal phenomena as a "methodological artifact." He cited differences in response options and question wording between the 1990 poll and the comparison Gallup poll from 1978. "As a result," Clark wrote, "despite Gallup's claims, there is no evidence that belief in the paranormal has increased over the last decade."

The measurement of society-wide paranormal beliefs, their change over time and their relation to the media merit ongoing study. The best available polls and research comparing current levels of belief to the 1970s are inconclusive. Meanwhile, there is continued debate over whether paranormal beliefs are media-driven. A recent study conducted by Purdue University Professor Glenn Sparks reveals a direct correlation between credulous media portrayals and increase in viewer belief (see *SI*, July/August).

—Matt Nisbet

Matt Nisbet is Director of Public Relations for CSICOP.

Folk Beliefs May Increase Cancer Deaths

A study published in the June 10, 1998, *Journal of the American Medical Association* (JAMA) suggests that the prevalence of folk beliefs among Black women may help explain that group's higher breast cancer mortality rate. Although the incidence of breast cancer is lower among Black women than White women, their mortality rate is consistently higher than Whites. While as a whole, Blacks have less access to medical care, the study reports that socioeconomic variables alone cannot account for the disparity.

Part of the problem may lie with widespread folk beliefs and superstition. Folk belief was found to be a significant predictor of breast cancer mortality. Black women agreed with such statements as, "Air causes a cancer to grow faster" and "Someone can give you cancer by putting a spell on you" in higher numbers than White women. The Blacks studied were three times more likely than Whites to delay seeking treatment until their cancer was advanced, and the researchers concluded that cultural and folk beliefs were strongly associated with the disparity. Fatalistic views (such as "When I get sick, I am to blame"), religious beliefs ("If I pray, God will cure my cancer"), and the belief that herbs and chiropractic can heal cancer also contributed to the effect.

Five hundred forty Black women in rural North Carolina with newly diagnosed breast cancers were interviewed about their attitudes toward breast cancer, among other topics. The study was headed by Dr. Donald Lannin, a cancer surgeon at the East Carolina University School of Medicine in Greenville, North Carolina. Although these cultural beliefs were strongly associated with low income, they were even more strongly associated with race, indicating that some higher-income Blacks shared the beliefs.

The study also has implications for earlier cancer treatment. It may be possible to modify certain folk beliefs to encourage earlier diagnosis. Advances in breast cancer screening may not lead to a decrease in Blacks' mortality rate if incompatible folk beliefs are not addressed.

—Benjamin Radford

The Aztec UFO Symposium: How This Saucer Story Started As a Con Game

When the Aztec, New Mexico public librarian, Leanne Hathcock, read about Aztec's own crashed saucer story from the late 1940s, she decided to organize a symposium to mark the (alleged) fiftieth anniversary of the event, which supposedly first took place in May of 1948. When I learned about this, I dug into the Aztec story, and what I found was amazing. Phil Klass supplied me with a copy of pro-Roswell writer William Moore's devastating 1985 MUFON Symposium analysis of the Aztec tall tale. I found more revealing information in Curtis Peebles's 1994 book *Watch the Skies*, and in the Air Force's 1997 Roswell report, *Case Closed*.

I called the librarian, and got myself accepted as a symposium speaker. In Aztec, I explained the source of the legend of crashed saucers and bodies. It turns out that two grifters, Silas M. Newton and Leo A. GeBauer, met in 1949 while fleecing the same Denver millionaire. GeBauer liked to sell his cons with devices like the "doodlebug," a secret magnetic device that could supposedly locate oil or gold. Newton was suspected of pumping oil into wells by night, so that he could impress potential investors by pumping it out the next day. Newton and GeBauer were driving through the Mojave desert in August of 1949 when they heard a report of a crashed "alien saucer." Then and there,

they hatched the mother of all cons.

Aztec was chosen as the site of the fictional crash, most likely because GeBauer had just been there scouting oil opportunities for Newton. GeBauer posed as a mysterious and powerful government Ph.D. scientist named "Dr. Gee." In reality, he maintained shop equipment at a plant in Arizona. Newton himself told many investors of the recent crash of an alien ship, the analysis by top-secret government labs, and the discovery of magnetic devices that could find oil and gold. Then came the pitch.

Newton told the investors that he could get them access to this incredible "alien" technology . . . for a price. Of course, the alien gadgets were really just GeBauer's magnetic doodlebugs. Newton even talked Hollywood reporter Frank X. Scully into writing a book about the "Aztec crash." Scully trusted Newton completely, and—without a shred of evidence—proceeded to write a book that, in fact, only served to give two sleazy con men some undeserved credibility. But *San Francisco Chronicle* reporter J. P. Cahn caught on to the sting. While talking to Newton, Cahn boldly managed to switch a small piece of the "alien ship" with another piece of metal, and promptly had the "alien" material tested. It turned out to be earthly—the grade of aluminum used for pots and pans.

After Cahn's story was printed in *True* magazine in 1952, several swindle victims wrote to tell their stories of Newton and GeBauer. Most of these victims couldn't press charges because of statutes of limitations—most, but not all. The aforementioned Denver millionaire, Herman Flader, had a solid case. The FBI arrested Newton and GeBauer, and the con men were quickly convicted. One of the high points of the November 1953 trial took place when the hustlers' $18,500 "tuner" was shown to be identical to a local surplus unit costing $3.50. Cahn wrote another *True* exposé on the Aztec UFO swindlers in 1956.

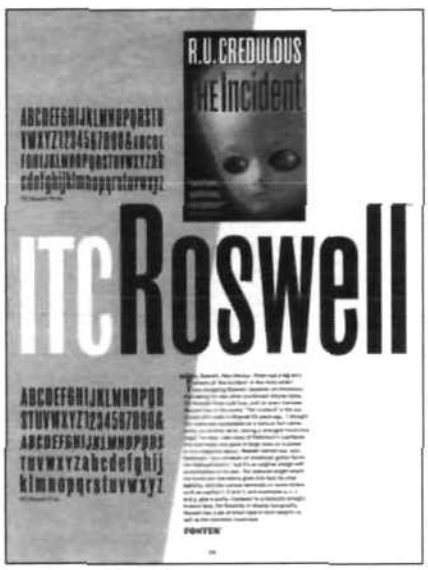
Even though the Aztec story is more pitiful than the Roswell legend, which at least involves *some* physical evidence, elements of Aztec still remain in popular UFO culture. On May 31 and June 1, 1998, on the nationally syndicated radio programs "Art Bell's Dreamland" and "Art Bell Coast-to-Coast," UFO researcher Linda Moulton Howe described a top-level government document that supposedly proves that the U.S. has known about the existence of real alien "saucers" for decades. She described the document—a secret FBI memo from March 22, 1950, written to J. Edgar Hoover himself. Memo author Guy Hottel, a special agent for the FBI, described an investigator's report of a flying saucer recovery in New Mexico, with mention of three saucers, three-foot tall bodies, metallic cloth, and bandaged alien bodies. The crash was supposedly due to interference from high-powered radar.

But *all* of these elements (saucers, 3-foot-tall aliens, cloth and tape, radar site) have been firmly linked to the yarns spun by our two swindlers! William Moore even traced how the story got from Silas Newton to J. Edgar Hoover: Newton told George Koehler (employed at radio station KMYR in Denver), who told Morley Davies, who told Ford dealers Jack Murphy and L. J. van Horn, who told auto dealer Rudy Fick, who told the editor of the Kansas City Newspaper *Wyandotte Echo*. By that time, Koehler had become "Coulter."

The *Wyandotte Echo* printed the account on January 6, 1950. This article was picked up by other news sources, where it caught the interest of the Air Force Office of Special Investigations (OSI). An OSI agent passed the story on to Guy Hottel of the FBI, and Hottel wrote the now-famous memo to Hoover, describing the eighth-hand story of the alien crash.

And what do residents of the Aztec area recall about the supposed incident? Hundreds have been interviewed over the years, but—not surprisingly—*no one* seems to recall the event. Aztec has a long way to go before it can catch up to Roswell. Considering the dubious benefits to be derived from crass marketing of aliens, maybe they should quit while they're ahead! At least they got a taste of their possible future with one of my fellow symposium speakers, Dan Salters. Salters rambled on for hours about Earth running out of oxygen in thirty-two years, the aliens are here to wake us up, and said it doesn't matter if the Aztec or Roswell crashes are "real"—they *become* real when we believe in them.

—David E. Thomas



The Roswell Type

Now there's a Roswell type.

No, not type of person. A Roswell typeface. Inspired by the hoopla of the Roswell crashed-saucer tale, type designer Jim Parkson has devised a new typeface and christened it "ITC Roswell." The graphic above is a page about it from a new typography catalogue.

"Yes, Roswell, New Mexico," Parkinson writes. "There was a big anniversary of 'the incident' in the news while I was designing Roswell," he said, discussing how his new ultra-condensed display types, ITC Roswell Three and Four, work. "I thought the name was acceptable as a serious font name, while, on another level, having a strangely humorous edge." □