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An Observation of the Famous Marfa Lights

By James Long

On Sunday of Memorial Day weekend, 1990, Jeff and I (both college graduates with engineering degrees) went to the city of Marfa, Texas to see the well known Marfa Lights. Several reputable news broadcasts, including the "Texas Eight Reporter" (a state-wide TV show) are supposed to have mentioned the Lights, but I can't vouch for this.

The Marfa Lights have been reported since the 1880s. Apparently, the majority of the sightings have been along Highway 90, a two lane road leading east from the city. The lights are unique among unexplained phenomena, in that they appear regularly and can be seen almost any night. According to the descriptions of numerous observers, the lights vary in color, are spherical, are characterized by rapid and erratic movements, and range from the size of a baseball to a basketball. The light is constant, rather than pulsating. Many people claim to have seen the lights up close, and others even claim to have been chased by them.

Numerous scientific hypotheses have been proposed to explain the Marfa Lights, but none fit the data well enough to have gained general acceptance. Most explanations, however, are nonscientific, and range from extraterrestrial visitors to Apache spirits.

When we arrived in Marfa, the friendly clerk of a rather shabby motor lodge in the city supplied us with directions to the "viewing area". This turned out to be a parking lot on the south side of the road, roughly ten miles east of the city. The Texas Highway Department has installed some fifty feet of parking area and a large permanent highway marker, indicating the viewing site and denoting it as a historic landmark.

The country-side there is an extremely flat plain, estimated at the time to be about 20 miles across (see diagram, p. 2). Rather abruptly, a ring of mountains (probably about two to three hundred feet high) rise around the edge of the plain. The only vegetation on the plain is scrub brush and small cacti, no more than a couple of feet tall. Although visibility across the plain was unblocked and excellent, there was the major disadvantage of completely losing any sense of distance. Therefore, most distances given here are estimates.

Jeff and I arrived at the viewing site about one hour before sunset. At that time, there were no cars present, except for mine. We had brought along some dinner, and we cooked it, while waiting for darkness. Well before sunset, at least fifteen cars pulled up and parked. A few people brought chairs, and nearly everyone had binoculars. One middle-aged lady parked immediately beside my car, and shortly afterwards joined us in conversation.

The lady said that she had been at the viewing site the night before, as well, and gave us a few pointers on what to watch for. She pointed out where a red antenna

tower light would be seen (not visible at all in the daylight), and said that the Lights appeared near the tower, and could be seen dimly moving clockwise along the mountain. She also said that some were visible far to the north-west.

About a half hour after sunset, the tower light became visible in the darkness. A few people began questioning aloud if "that's one of the Lights," but were quickly assured that it was not.

However, within just a few minutes (ten at the most), a bright white (not red like the tower) point of light appeared at the base of the mountains near the tower, and could obviously be seen to move clockwise along the mountains. After about ten seconds, (and already about one third of the way along the mountains) the light disappeared. In less than a minute, another light appeared and repeated the motions of the first.

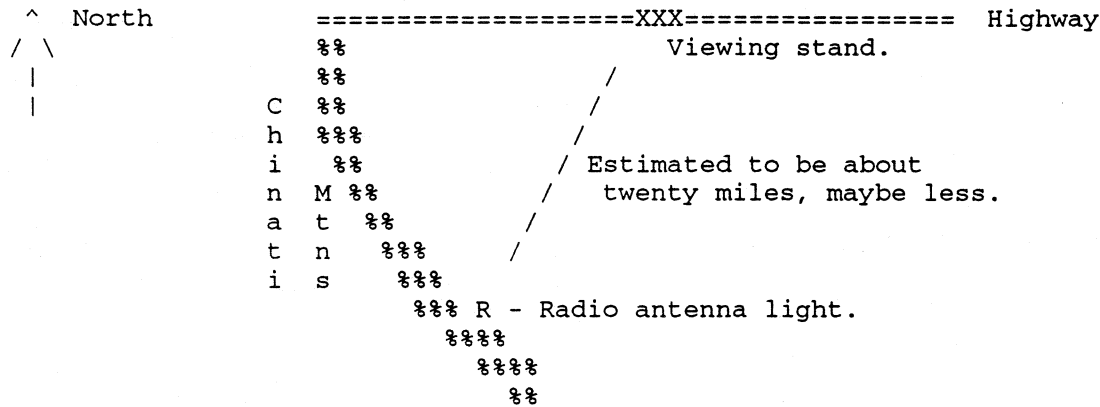
This turned out to be just the beginning. From then until midnight there was a nearly constant stream of Lights. There were two major patterns visible to the eye. The first pattern was to appear near the southern edge of the mountains (near the tower), and move about halfway to the road and vanish. The second pattern was to appear about two-thirds of the way to the road (or closer), and to stay motionless. With both patterns, however, there was still a wide range of variation. The moving Lights traveled at different speeds (although movement was always easily visible to the eye), whereas the stationary Lights tended to blink on and off at regular intervals, before disappearing.

The Lights themselves appeared about equal in brightness to the tower light (or perhaps somewhat brighter). They never appeared to be anything other than mere points of light. They appeared quite similar to distant car headlights, but were always single to the naked eye. Car headlights eventually were ruled out as a cause, since reports have occurred for over a century. In addition, the map provided to us showed no indication of a road on the near side of the mountain.

The lady beside us provided a great deal of entertainment. She possessed a rather large set of binoculars and kept up a running commentary of the "antics" of the Lights. Comments such as, "That one there is now rounding the bush!", and "It's coming straight at us!" kept us amused for a great deal of the night. With our binoculars, we still could not distinguish any details at that distance.

Jeff and I had been attending the Texas astronomy party, so I had my eight-inch diameter Celestron telescope with me. For over an hour, I was too fascinated by the Lights to even remember the telescope, but eventually I brought it out of the car and set it up. With this telescope, the Lights were resolvable into obvious fuzzy round balls, apparently several feet in diameter.

The telescope verified several observations, and provided several more discoveries. The most significant observation was that the lights truly were all the way to the mountains. The view through the telescope allowed



each viewer to verify that the lights were passing behind rocks and cliffs on the mountain side. Indeed, much, but by no means most, of the blinking observed was due to a Light passing behind a rock and being eclipsed by it. The light shed from the Marfa Light was more than enough to illuminate the rock wall behind the light. Rocks to the front were obvious from their silhouettes.

A fascinating discovery from the telescope was that several of the balls were doublets. Often, a single light would appear, and about fifteen to thirty seconds later, a second, identical light appeared right beside the first. Indistinguishable with the naked eye, these balls were obvious pairs through the telescope. These balls would then begin varying in brightness, one going dim while the other brightened, and then the first brightening while the second dimmed. After eight to ten cycles, the balls would usually split up, and separate into two naked eye pairs. This easily ruled out car headlights.

One item I found rather disturbing was that whenever another car arrived (people kept arriving for several hours into the night), the watchers already present acted like tour guides for the occult. The newcomers were quickly treated to a lecture by people that had received the same lecture themselves no more than twenty minutes earlier. To my small dismay, Jeff and I fell quite naturally into the "pro" mode. Having been at the viewing site since before dark, we made a point of describing all we had seen that night. We never, thankfully, went so far as the lady next to us, who eagerly attributed conscious thought to the movements.

About midnight, the lights tapered off and came to a halt. In all, there had been lights nearly constantly visible for about four hours. Rarely was there *not* a light visible, and a good deal of the time, three, four or sometimes five lights were seen at once.

On the ride back to the campsite, we tried to check the distance to the mountains. However, after driving about eight miles, our road turned off to the north. We estimated that we had come less than half way to the mountains.

In short, watching the Lights was fascinating. All of the suggested natural causes were quickly ruled out from their appearances. However, I eventually decided that I really didn't care what caused them. They were pretty to watch, and provided me with my most interesting vacation in years.

James Long is a member of the Georgia Skeptics.

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The Marfa Lights

By Hal Finney

I spent the summer of 1976 living with my parents in Midland, Texas. I heard about the Marfa lights from co-workers, and decided to drive down to see them. I only went once and just was there for a few hours, so this isn't a comprehensive observation by any means.

My observations were not at all in accord with those of James Long of the Georgia Skeptics. Now, I may not have been at exactly the same viewing location. I was on the state highway east of Marfa, as was Long. And the view was the same, looking south across a basically flat plain to a range of low mountains many miles away. But I may have been at a different spot on the highway. I just picked a turnoff area on my own, without having received specific directions about any particular place. At that time the lights were mostly a local phenomenon and hadn't received as much publicity as they have now.

The lights I observed differed in two ways from what Long saw. First, they were stationary; and second, they were exactly on the horizon. Each light was white, like a headlight seen from many miles away. But they didn't move. A light would appear, be visible for a minute or two, and then fade away over several seconds. A few minutes later another light would appear at a different spot. Sometimes there might be two or three lights visible at once.

By the horizon, I mean the visual line between the mountains and the sky. That is where all of the lights appeared. There was no way to judge the distance to the lights but it was natural to assume that they came from at or beyond the mountains. They did not appear at the base of the mountains and certainly didn't appear on the plain between the mountains and the road, as the lights Long saw did.

My feeling at the time was that this was an effect of atmospheric refraction, perhaps caused by a layer of warmer or cooler air near the ground. I felt that this was a kind of mirage, in which we were seeing a distant source of light that was being refracted and focused as it passed grazingly over the mountains.

Because of the fact that the lights lasted a minute or two, and because they are reported to have appeared for

over a hundred years, my feeling was that I was seeing focused starlight. I had also been told that the lights would not appear if it was overcast. Due to the earth's rotation, stars would be continually rising, and at different times it seemed possible that different stars would be in position to be made visible by an atmospheric effect. Perhaps the topography of the mountains was such that some kind of lensing could occur. Rising stars would then move through the focus points of the many different possible lensing positions along the mountains.

Whether this explanation is correct or not, I am puzzled by the differences between what James Long saw and what I saw. Last year, the TV show "Unsolved Mysteries" did a report on the Marfa lights, and I felt that their observations matched my own quite well. Their lights did not appear to move, and they appeared on the horizon line of the mountains. Maybe what Long saw is a completely different phenomenon.

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Letters

The following letter is printed in its entirety in fulfillment of an offer I made to John Bryant to print his complete response to my review of his book. Since much of it is not entirely to the point, in the future I will edit such replies both to conserve space and to remove redundancies and irrelevancies. —Editor.

Editor:

Re your review of my book *Bryant's Law and Other BroadSides* in the September/October *Arizona Skeptic*, let me just say that in charitably sending a free copy of my book to someone who represented himself as an impoverished philosophy grad student, if I had only known that I was going to end up getting reamed in that same individual's newsletter, then I just possibly might not have sent it.

As to my qualifications, which you seek to belittle in your review, if someone has published articles in the scholarly journals of several other countries besides his own, is listed in *Who's Who in the World*, and has received the praise of two Nobel prizewinners for articles in the book under review (facts which you either carefully obscure or fail to mention), then the claim of being an internationally-recognized philosopher is not altogether without basis. Nor, of course, do you bother to mention that my work has received praise from several CSICOP fellows (Edwin Krupp, William Jarvis, Robert Sheaffer, Paul Kurtz, James Oberg, and others). But then this is typical of your attempt to blacken my work by saying everything negative you can think of, with barely a semblance of balance. In fact, your review is a microcosm of the very thing I was criticizing in my article on the *Skeptical Inquirer*, namely, the bias, selective reporting, and overweening arrogance of the True Believers of the Scientific Faith. The reason you are so negative about my article is the very reason that Robert Anton Wilson was so positive (he's been

advertising it free in his newsletter for the last two years): You want to defend scientific orthodoxy to the last comma and period, and he (and I) want to debunk it where debunking is due. (Note: This is not to say I necessarily endorse all of Wilson's views of scholarship—I don't.) My point is, I am *more* skeptical than you, for I am skeptical of orthodox as well as "fringe" science.

Let me now deal with several other of your criticisms. First, you say that my claim that *The Skeptical Inquirer* is guilty of gross and shameful ignorance by dismissing astrologically-based stock market advisory services is vitiated because I fail "to give sufficient data to support this claim." Good God, man! I gave the address of the tracking services which had verified the track records of two astrologically-based advisories. What more do you want—a note from the Pope?

To respond to a second point of criticism, I mention in my *Bryant's Law* article on SI the fact that CSICOP fellow Paul Edwards edited the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* in which appears an article highly supportive of psi. Now as you point out, it may very well be that some major experiments cited in that article have been debunked, but that is simply not relevant. The point is that there is a lot of support for psi among informed people. That's it! That's the point! And the fact that you missed the point merely illustrates my point about the psychology of you so-called skeptics—you *don't* want to see the point—you're not responding correctly to the relevant information that other people are putting out.

A third point of your criticism was that I praised Whitley Strieber's book *Communion* as a clear effort to investigate alien encounters in a scientific and rational way: Your response was that MUFON dismisses Strieber, ergo Strieber must be wrong and that I must be unsophisticated. (You offer essentially the same criticism of my endorsement of the TV feature "UFO Coverup?") As to Strieber, I was making a judgment on what I would call the tone of the book—it was written in such a way as to make me believe that Strieber was trying to find out, in the best way that he could, just what the hell was going on—unlike you, who seems to assume he already knows what is going on without bothering to investigate. Perhaps there are defects in Strieber's book—I don't know MUFON's criticisms—but I do know that there is a lot of backbiting in the world of ufology, so the conflict may be more political than substantial. But in any event, I doubt that any of the MUFON criticism would change my view, precisely because the view was about the tone rather than any technical ufological matters. As to "UFO Coverup?", my response would be largely the same. Incidentally, I do not claim expertise in ufology; I am writing from the standpoint of a philosopher who is criticizing the methodology of so-called skeptics such as yourself; and nothing you have said in the way of your criticisms has done the least to refute my very negative view: To the contrary, it has reinforced it. As for UFOs specifically, my position is basically that I find the positive evidence

to be strong, and the criticism to be weak, tho in some specific cases (e.g., MJ-12) the criticism has been successful. My major criticism of the critics is that, with all the genuine "unexplained" cases which have now accumulated, backed by the testimony of credible "solid citizen" witnesses, it seems clear to me that the critics are simply sticking their heads in the sand, rather than acknowledging—not that there are extraterrestrials or some such—but rather that something very unusual is going on, of which the ET hypothesis is a good explanation, tho certainly not the only one. The deficiency of the critics has been particularly pointed up by the recent Belgian sightings, which include not only hundreds of testimonials, but radar imaging, fighter scramblings, and front-page acknowledgment by major newspapers such as the *Wall Street Journal*, which is not exactly a tabloid. And while the critics constantly seek to dismiss UFO claims as the produce of a "psychological need to believe" in space brothers or whatever (undoubtedly true in some cases, but unlikely in such a volume of "solid citizens"), they will never in a million years recognize their own equal and opposite "need to disbelieve." There are none so blind as those who will not see.

Speaking of belief and disbelief, there are some interesting historical parallels to the skeptics' attitudes. For example, historian Carroll Quigley, in his monumental *Tragedy and Hope*, describes how Stalin, having been warned several times by very credible sources that Hitler was about to attack him—he was even given the exact date and time—nevertheless was totally unprepared for Hitler's attack. Similarly, as has been made plain by revisionist historians and recent testimonials by involved persons, Franklin Roosevelt knew of the impending Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, and yet did nothing to prepare. In Quigley's opinion, both cases represented a refusal to believe, even in the face of clear and convincing evidence. In a few years I believe we will be analyzing the "skeptical" phenomenon in the same way, tho in a sense Thomas Kuhn already analyzed it this way many years ago. (Ref: Wm Broad, *Betrayers of the Truth*.)

I note your statement that my reference to Michel Gauquelin's *Birthtimes* as containing a criticism of *SI* was probably an account of the Mars effect, which you term "a genuine case of skeptical failure." I'm not sure what you mean by this, but I can assure you that any person serious about the role of *SI* should read Gauquelin's book, for it will give an excellent account not merely of "skeptical failure," but of the intellectual dishonesty of many *SI* folks, and particularly its *primum mobile*, Paul Kurtz. It is certainly gratifying to see the article on the Mars effect in the most recent *SI*, but it has come, I think, not primarily because of interest in scientific truth, but only because the *SI* hierarchy had its back against the wall.

One criticism which I found particularly galling was your statement that I write in a "grating, pedantic tone." While I have had many criticisms, no one has ever had anything but praise for my writing style, even tho the subjects I tackle are often pedantic in substance. In fact,

if there is any pedantry in my work, it is usually a joke; and thus if you construed anything as pedantry, then that just means that you didn't get the joke. But then what can one expect from a wet-behind-the-ears graduate student? In fact, your gratuitous smear suggests to me that you have a lot to learn from your good buddy and CSICOPer Robert Sheaffer, author of *Resentment Against Achievement*; for your review of my book sounds like a case study of what he was talking about. Bob certainly found things to criticize about my books, but he also had some pretty favorable things to say, too. But then trying to be fair would interfere with your so-called skeptical agenda, wouldn't it?

Having now criticized you, let me acknowledge a valid criticism of your own. You noted that I said in my bio in *Bryant's Law* that I had written the seminal work in relative modal logic, and yet you can find no references to my work, thus implying my statement is false. You are right—it is false (tho not intentionally so) because the implication is that others have used my work as a take-off point for their own, and while that *might* be true, I do not know it to be true. So why did I make this false statement? Probably because of the natural human tendency to exaggerate the truth when it is favorable. (And since I am human, I am therefore not immune to human frailties.) It is not, however, a "gross" exaggeration—"pioneering" or "revolutionary" might have been closer to the truth, particularly since my piece was a major article published in a major journal ("The Logic of Relative Modality and the Paradoxes of Deontic Logic," *Notre Dame Journal of Formal Logic*, Jan. 1980), and is in fact a major—and I think revolutionary—contribution (in terms of content, at least) to both logical and ethical theory. (I might add that it was part of a doctoral thesis, an earlier form of which was not accepted by my committee: By your statement that I have "only" a B.A. in math, you falsely imply that I did not do graduate work in philosophy, a fact you should have remembered from having read my bio in *Bryant's Law*, the very place where you got the information about my "seminal work.") I would also like to add that, in my just-published book *Systems Theory*, I develop a theory of relative existence (see chapter 7: "Gödel's Theorem, the Paradoxes and the Theory of Relative Existence") which is in some sense complementary to the theory of relative modal logic developed in my aforementioned paper. What with all this relativity swirling around me, I am now waiting for someone to dub me the Einstein of logic, ethics and ontology. (Oops, there goes that damned ego again. But since we now know it was really Einstein's wife...)

On the matter of the seminality of my work, I think it might help your readers to understand that articles in professional philosophy journals are totally different from articles in professional science journals: As a recent article in *Science* noted, most articles in the sciences (around 80%, I believe) *do* get cited within two years or so of their publication, while most philosophy articles (about 90%) *do not* get cited. So if you are a philosopher, even publication of a major article in a

major journal does not mean that your work will come to anyone's attention.

Now to return to my misstatement, the psychology of my mistake is both interesting and revealing to me: In some sense I knew that it was false, and yet I couldn't quite see that it was. Why does the mind behave this way? I don't know. But I do appreciate your pointing it out to me, even if your review—in my opinion—was otherwise extremely unfair and misleading. As a searcher for truth, it would be completely contradictory to my principles to ask others to confess unpleasant truths if I myself am unwilling to.

Incidentally, my book *Systems Theory and Scientific Philosophy: An Application of the Cybernetics of W. Ross Ashby to the Problems of Personal and Social Philosophy, the Philosophy of Mind, and the Problems of Artificial Intelligence* is just out from the University Press of America, in case any of your readers want to get a better view of my philosophical and critical capacities which you so energetically attempted to smear in your article. Copies are obtainable either from me or UPA at \$14.75 + \$2 shipping; however, I'll be happy to autograph any copies purchased thru me free of charge, as well as to offer a money-back guarantee (I don't think UPA does). A free catalog of my books is available on request (Box 66683, St. Petersburg Beach, FL 33736-6683). And, as a way of disputing your criticisms, I'll also be happy to send anyone a free copy of my article on *SI* upon receipt of a SASE.

John Bryant
St. Petersburg Beach, Florida

Jim Lippard replies:

I stand behind my review of John Bryant's book, Bryant's Law and Other Broadides (AS, September/October 1991, pp. 5-7). My review was directed primarily at the chapter of that book entitled "A Skeptical View of The Skeptical Inquirer," as my review makes clear. I must confess that I had not read all of the book when I wrote my review, and so was unaware that Mr. Bryant had pursued graduate studies in philosophy. (In any case, I never stated nor intended to imply that he hadn't—I simply remarked that his only degree was a B.A. in mathematics.) Contrary to Bryant, I did not learn of his logic article from his bio in his book, but from his promotional book catalog.

Bryant makes much of praise he has received about his work from Nobel prizewinners Milton Friedman and Kenneth Arrow, from CSICOP Fellows, and from other eminent persons. He touts this praise in his promotional literature and in his books themselves. There are three important questions to be raised about this praise: (1) Just what did these people read? That is, what exactly is it that they are praising? In the case of Milton Friedman, he comments favorably only on the article "Bryant's Law," which is a fairly humorous piece about a sociological "law" Bryant claims to have discovered, that "Thoughts expand to fill all available consciousness." Bryant probably did not send Friedman other chapters from the book in question, such as the chapter on adult-child sex or the chapter on "digital

*defecation" as a solution to constipation. (2) What exactly is the content of their praise? Most of the quoted praise consists of short sentences like "Thanks for sending me the articles from your book, which I enjoyed reading" (Noam Chomsky) or "Your ideas are certainly provocative" (Kenneth Arrow) or "Many thanks for sending me a copy of your fascinating Bryant's Law piece which is certainly both amusing but, more important, substantively relevant and pointed" (Milton Friedman). These do not appear to be unqualified endorsements of the genius of Bryant's work. (3) Did these people consent to their statements being used for promotional purposes, or did they believe they were simply making private comments? Of the two people I have asked (Robert Sheaffer and William Jarvis), neither consented to have Bryant use their comments. Sheaffer was familiar with much of Bryant's work (and largely agrees with my criticisms of Bryant's Law), but Jarvis was aware only of Bryant's 1987 booklet, the modestly-titled *The Most Powerful Idea Ever Discovered*, about which Bryant quotes him as saying "I have gone through your book and agree with most of what you have said." (An aside: although I have not read this booklet, from what I have read I gather that in it Bryant argues for the rationality of at least some forms of altruistic behavior. In one of the pieces in Bryant's Law, he asserts that altruism has not had a firm philosophical basis until the publication of his booklet, but I think Robert Axelrod's 1984 book, *The Evolution of Cooperation*, and numerous other pre-1987 works give lie to this assertion. Robert Sheaffer has pointed out to Bryant that the central thesis in his booklet was previously presented by Nietzsche and Emerson.) Most of the praise for Bryant from eminent persons appears to consist of politely worded comments from people who did not intend to be making public recommendations of his work.*

*Bryant obviously thinks very highly of himself, but goes to absurd lengths to convince others to do so. On his letterhead, the left side lists his accomplishments down almost the entire length of the page. These "accomplishments" include his journal articles, his many self-published books and booklets, his biographical listings in various "Who's Who" books, his membership in Mensa, his B.A. in mathematics, and his "Golden Poet Award" from the World of Poetry (of which some two thousand are awarded every year; see Henry Alford, "Bad Poets Society," *Spy*, January 1990, pp. 102-103).*

Regarding my specific criticisms of his book, Bryant has little of substance to say. He defends his failure to provide data supporting his claim about the efficacy of astrology in predicting the stock market by pointing out that he gives an address from which such information may be obtained. If Bryant is going to make the claim, he should do the homework to properly support it, not me.

In regard to the status of the existence of psi, Bryant now claims that his point is merely that "there is a lot of support for psi among informed people," nothing more. But in his article, he is concerned to rebut the claim that "psi is false/unproven according to 'mainstream' or

'establishment' science." As I pointed out in my review, his only cited evidence against this claim is a philosophical (not scientific) work that is over two decades out of date and which is based in large part on work which has been discredited.

On the subject of UFOs, Bryant defends the "tone" of *Communion* and the TV show "UFO Coverup?", while my criticisms were mainly of their content. Apparently Bryant reads the *Skeptical Inquirer* and is familiar with Philip Klass's debunking of the MJ-12 documents, but, as I pointed out in my review, he appears to be largely ignorant of other critiques such as Klass's book on UFO abductions. (I also recommend that he read Robert Sheaffer's *The UFO Verdict*.) I must point out that I found the tone of "UFO Coverup?" to be sensational rather than sober. I do not disagree with Bryant's claim that there are "genuine 'unexplained' cases," but one would expect such a residue of unexplained cases even when there is no anomalistic phenomenon to be explained, due simply to the foibles of human perception and lack of other evidence. Bryant should read Elizabeth Loftus's book, *Eyewitness Testimony* (reviewed in *AS*, January/February 1989, pp. 6-7). Bryant's reference to the Belgian UFO sightings is not to the point. They are certainly worth looking into and should not be dismissed out of hand, but the point of my criticism of Bryant was that the specific evidence he chose to criticize the *Skeptical Inquirer* over was inadequate to the task.

Bryant accuses "many SI folks" of "intellectual dishonesty" regarding the Mars effect controversy. This accusation is grossly unfair. Many of the events of this controversy took place before CSICOP was even formed, very few "SI folks" were involved, and of those who were involved fewer did anything worthy of criticism. Those CSICOP members who were directly involved with the testing of the "Mars effect" acknowledged their mistakes in "The Abell-Kurtz-Zelen 'Mars Effect' Experiments: A Reappraisal" in the Spring 1983 *SI*. I should point out that while many CSICOP supporters feel that CSICOP did little or nothing wrong, I disagree—the articles by Patrick Curry and Richard Kammann published in the *Zetetic Scholar* (#'s 9, 10, and 11) document misuse/misrepresentation of statistics in both the Humanist Zelen test and the CSICOP-sponsored U.S. champions test. On the other hand, Dennis Rawlins' misadventures are inaccurately minimized, I think, in the *Zetetic Scholar*. I believe it is a mistake to rely solely on Michel Gauquelin, Dennis Rawlins, Paul Kurtz, or Philip Klass as one's source of information on the controversy. The *Zetetic Scholar* articles are probably essential for a complete understanding; reading all of the *SI* articles and letters (by Kurtz et al., Gauquelin, and Rawlins), Rawlins' Fate article ("sTARBABY"), and Klass' response ("Crybaby," available with SASE from me) gives a decent overview (though note that Klass fails to address many of Rawlins' specific complaints). Bryant, however, appears content with Gauquelin's account and Robert Anton Wilson's (hopelessly confused) account alone.

In his final criticism of my review, Bryant finds it "galling" that I describe his writing as having a "grating, pedantic tone." Here again, I must stand behind my remarks. Bryant has an irritating habit of repeatedly telling the reader how intelligent he is. For example, in the "Publisher's Preface" to Bryant's *Law* (published by Bryant's own Socratic Press), it is stated that "Mr. Bryant is an essayist of the first rank, as well as a poet of greatest emotive power and technical skill; and in this book are collected some of his finest pieces intended for a general readership." One of his chapter titles asserts that he deserves a Nobel prize in economics, another on how to be successful claims that he has "been quite successful not only in a financial sense, but also in marriage, in achieving personal recognition, and in fulfilling [his] lifetime goals," and of his poetry (some of which is in the book) he states that it is "truly good, if not actually great" and "achieves its exalted status because ... each poem puts forth a significant thought ... is comprehensible ... and ... is technically perfect," despite containing lines such as "The People's Republic of China/Is somewhat like a humongous vagina." His book catalog describes his book of quotations (his own) as "The work of a Montaigne, an H.L. Mencken, a Philip Wylie, and a Lenny Bruce, all rolled into one—and smoked." He has compared himself with Shakespeare and Einstein. Contrary to Bryant, I am not the only person who has criticized this tendency in his writings; Robert Sheaffer has done likewise.

Milton Rothman, in the Winter 1992 *SI*, describes two 19th century skeptics. One of them, John Fiske, is quoted in Rothman's article as having written that "One of the most frequent traits of your crank is his megalomania, or self-magnification. ... he cannot see wherein he is inferior to Descartes or Newton. ... His mood is belligerent; since people will not take him at his own valuation, he is apt to regard society as engaged in a conspiracy to ignore and belittle him." This description appears to fit Bryant fairly well.

It is true that there is good to be found with the bad in Bryant's book (my comments may already have given some readers incentive to purchase the book, though perhaps for reasons other than awe at its intellectual and literary genius); I did not mean to imply otherwise. My criticism in my original review was directed at the critique of the *Skeptical Inquirer*, which fails utterly to provide anything substantial or even original. Of the book as a whole, I confess that it is entertaining and amusing, and in some places even intellectually stimulating. I do not, however, expect that Bryant will go down in history as one of the great minds of our time.

P.S. I am an impoverished graduate student. Bryant voluntarily sent me a copy of his book when I had requested only a copy of his article about the *Skeptical Inquirer*.

Editorial Note Regarding the "Mars Effect": Readers of the *Skeptical Inquirer* will have noted Suitbert Ertel's article, "Update on the 'Mars Effect,'" in the Winter 1992 issue. The publication of this article, which is supportive of Michel Gauquelin's pro-

"cosmobiology" position, is another piece of evidence (in addition to the above-mentioned article from the Spring 1983 SI on the "Mars effect") that CSICOP is interested in a fair assessment of astrology. The French skeptics group, CFEPP, has been at work on an attempted replication of the "Mars effect" and Suitbert Ertel and Arno Müller have done their own analysis of the CFEPP data. A report on this from Prof. Ertel may appear in a future issue of AS.

Book Review

The Mind Game by Norman Spinrad
1985, Bantam, 342 pp.

Reviewed by Jim Lippard

On a recent trip to Los Angeles, my girlfriend and I stopped by the Dianetics Testing Center on Hollywood Boulevard for a "free personality test" from the Church of Scientology. After spending about twenty minutes answering "yes," "no," and "don't know" to oddly worded questions about whether one enjoys inflicting pain on animals or frequently laughs at things no one else finds funny, we were both told that we had serious personality defects which Dianetics could correct. The brash, chain-smoking pregnant woman who did our post-test interviews was emphatic about that. We declined to spend any money, however, and left the Center to continue our walk down the star-studded sidewalks, where we observed a sign advertising the "L. Ron Hubbard Life Exhibition" on another Scientology building on the other side of the street. (Later on during our vacation, we noticed the Scientology Celebrity Center, which is presumably where such Church notables as John Travolta, Tom Cruise, and Kirstie Alley get their auditing done.)

When I discussed our day's events with the friend I was visiting, he was reminded of a book he had recently read. He took it from his bookshelf for me, and I read it over the next couple of days.

The book was Norman Spinrad's *The Mind Game*. It is the story of Jack Weller, director of a grade-B Saturday morning television show called *Monkey Business* (starring a chimpanzee) and his wife Annie, an aspiring actress. At the invitation of a friend they attend a social gathering at the Celebrity Center of a movement called Transformationalism. Jack hopes to schmooze and meet people he can use as stepping stones to an improved career, but Annie becomes more interested in Transformationalism and its founder, former science fiction writer John B. Steinhardt. At first Jack tolerates his wife's interest in Transformationalism and pays for her courses. But as she begins devoting more and more of her time to it, he becomes annoyed and pressures her to end her involvement with the group. Instead, the group issues Annie a "life directive" to either leave the movement or her husband, and she chooses the latter.

Jack discovers that if he wants to see his wife again, he must successfully complete the Transformationalism education process and achieve "fully eptified consciousness." Or, from his perspective, he must convince the Transformationalists that he has been completely converted to their way of thinking without

actually becoming brainwashed in the process. To this end, he enlists the aid of a deprogrammer (or is he a reprogrammer?) named Garry Bailor.

Jack undergoes "block auditing," a process of diagnosis which creates a "psychomap" of the psychological blocks which prevent him from being Transformed; "meditative deconditioning," a process which eliminates these blocks; and a "life analysis" by Gomez, a secretive and wily "Monitor," a member of an elite class of Transformationalist overseers. Gomez knows that Jack is trying to fake the impression of conversion, but engages in tactics designed to make sure that in the process, Jack is genuinely changed. (The twists and turns of the psychological drama are somewhat reminiscent of *The Prisoner* TV series—Jack learns to manipulate lower level Transformationalists, who fear that he is a Monitor.) In the end, Jack's character does seem to be transformed, but not exactly in the way that Transformationalism intended.

Spinrad's Transformationalism is clearly patterned after Scientology. Early in the book, Jack explicitly draws the comparison:

He had heard of Transformationalism, dimly. It was one of those consciousness-raising cults, like Arica, EST, or Scientology, of which he had a low and jaundiced opinion. (p. 5)

Even descriptions of Transformationalism buildings are similar to Scientology's Hollywood centers:

The Los Angeles Transformation Center was a small converted hotel in Hollywood, just south of Sunset Boulevard and just west of Cahuenga, not too far from several studios. A fading tan stucco building eight stories high with a dirty red-tiled roof; a brand of cheap hotel common to the area. (p. 38)

Spinrad's book offers a convincing description of social and psychological pressures that can lead people to conform to an unusual belief system. In the end, much is left unresolved, including whether there is anything really beneficial to Transformationalism or not. (For the most part, it seems clear that Spinrad's opinion of Scientology/Transformationalism is that expressed by Jack on p. 5. But there is also no question that Jack benefits from his exposure to the cult.) The book is an enjoyable and suspenseful journey into the world of Transformationalism, and could possibly also work as a vaccine against getting caught up in a group like Scientology.

Upcoming Meetings

The Phoenix Skeptics will meet at the Jerry's Restaurant on Rural/Scottsdale Road between McKellips and the river bottom, with lunch at 12:30 on the first Saturday of each month except where it conflicts with a holiday.

Articles of Note

George P. Hansen, "CSICOP and the Skeptics: An Overview," *The Journal of the American Society for*

Psychical Research 86(January 1992):19-63. A rather critical article about the nature and influence of CSICOP and local skeptical groups, featuring a quotation from Phoenix Skeptics Fellow Hans Sebald. Skeptics should make themselves aware of these criticisms.

Philip J. Hilts, "The Science Mob," *The New Republic* 206(May 18, 1992):24-31. A report on fraud in science, centering on the David Baltimore case, in which Nobel prizewinner Baltimore refused to investigate allegations of faked laboratory

notebooks of Dr. Thereza Imanishi-Kari, one of his researchers.

John H. McMasters, "The Flight of the Bumblebee and Related Myths of Entomological Engineering," *American Scientist* 77(1989):164-169. The last word on the myth that scientists have shown that bumblebees can't fly.

Ron McRae, "Beyond Gonzo," *Spy* (June 1992):50-56. A former researcher for Jack Anderson and the author of the book *Mind Wars* admits making up stories about Pentagon psychics, Libyan hit squads, and a Jimmy Carter-ordered invasion of Iran.

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