

UFOlogy. By James M. McCampbell.
Celestial Arts Press, Milbrac, Cal. (231 Adrian Road, ZIP 94030), 1976.
202 pp. \$4.95 paper.
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Reviewed by James E. Oberg

UFOlogy has the form of words used to describe fields of science, such as biology, or psychology. This book is supposed to be a description of the new science of **UFO** studies and has the appearance of a scientific catalog of UFO effects. It is billed as “a scientific examination of the physical nature of the UFO phenomenon—a major breakthrough in the scientific understanding of unidentified flying objects.”

The prestigious Center for UFO Studies in Evanston has endorsed the book as “a basic primer for the beginner and a textbook for the informed.” Even space-scientist Dr. Thornton Page, considered a skeptic by most UFOlogists, reports for the American Association for the Advancement of Sciences that “the book is recommended for general audience readers and may be suitable for auxiliary reading in high school and college science courses. It contains a good history of UFO reports.”

UFOlogers closer to the edge of reality, notably the pulp-monthly columnists, have been even more lavish in their praise. At last, the **UFO** community seems to be saying, UFOlogy has become a respectable science.

Not yet it hasn't. The introduction reveals the fly in the ointment, the sty (or is it a beam?) in the eye, the serpent in the garden of the self-styled “science” of UFOlogy. The author admits that all of the data he uses is untrustworthy! In other words, he is going to build a castle of UFOlogy on the shifting sands of rumor, gossip, myth, and fantasy. Skeptics have charged this all along, and McCampbell admits it!

These are the author's words: “The reader is requested to suspend his doubts and follow the argument that is developed in this book. ... Nowhere does the author attempt to prove the validity of sighting information, or even evaluate it. The raw data are merely accepted without bias for the purpose of exploration. It is not necessary to believe the data in order to study it.... We will allow ourselves to say merely that such and such ***happened***, where it is actually known only that it was ***reported***’. Can this be the basis for a science?

The body of the book fulfills the promise of this attitude toward rules of evidence. The author seems to deliberately block any reader who wants to check out any of the cases to see if they actually did happen or not. McCampbell rarely gives the names of witnesses and usually identifies cases only by a footnote to a “case number” in somebody else's UFO book.

McCampbell believes in the “nuts and bolts” theory of UFOs (the so-called extraterrestrial hypothesis, which says they are the space vehicles of aliens visiting this planet), and he selects and organizes his data, allegedly, the “raw data,” to support this hypothesis. Common reports of psychic manifestations associated with UFOs are simply ignored. Accounts of UFOs fading out slowly are not presented because, it seems, they would not fit the hypothesis. The most ironic circumstance surrounding this approach is that McCampbell has selected his “raw data” primarily from a book by Jacques Vallee, the well-known IJFO researcher who has vigorously rejected the “nuts and bolts” hypothesis as “naive,” and whose book

supports the psychic-manifestation hypothesis. What McCampbell has done, then, is to selectively excerpt data from one specialist's book, a book written to prove just the opposite point of view of his own, in order to support his own hypothesis. This is not science, it's chutzpah.

McCampbell presents George Adamski's religious fantasies as fact (p. 122). He reports the "UFO crashes" as fables, which even the noted radio storyteller Frank Edwards could not swallow (p. 143). He tells of the "heat wave" in an aircraft chasing a radar UFO near Walesville, New York, but does not mention (it would be appalling if he just plain did not know) that the UFO turned out to be a private plane without a filed flight plan and that the heat was caused by an aircraft engine fire, a fire which showed up on the cockpit warning lights and which prompted the pilot to bail out (p. 68).

The author asserts that a UFO caused the 1965 power blackout in the Northeast (p. 66), that "dogs dislike UFOs" (p. 86; I've always wondered about that), and that astronaut McDivitt saw "a glowing egg-shaped object" with a tail during his space flight (p.38). (Here McCampbell's research consisted solely of believing everything Frank Edwards ever felt like writing on the subject, without checking any of it. It turned out that most of what Edwards reported was pure fantasy, but this wasn't demonstrated until real scientists investigated, which seems to explain why McCampbell and the other UFOlogists were taken in.)

Take the famous RB-47 radar case, which by space alone (more than three pages) rates as one of McCampbell's "best cases." It would have been impossible for a real scientist to ignore all of the data both pro and con about this case, but the author does indeed ignore all explanatory research while adding to the mysteries by actually embellishing the event with dramatizations. In fact electronics engineer Philip I. Klass, of *Aviation Week*, published a solution to this case in 1974, a solution which the flight crew accepted as almost certainly authentic. UFOlogists who prefer enigmas to explanations have deliberately ignored the work of Klass, treating it as if it had been recorded on the blank portions of the White House tapes.

McCampbell does attempt to sound scientific, but a careful reader may detect more silliness than science in his writing: "It appears that beeping sounds near UFOs... are used to induce hypnotic trances. The mechanism for transmittal of the beeps seems to be encoded signals on a high-frequency carrier in the microwave range as suggested by the correlation between the Hills' experience and laboratory experiments with human subjects" (p. 54). This sounds good until the reader notices the odd fact that whenever scientific laboratory experiments are conjured up to support UFO evidence, the ubiquitous footnotes vanish like a fading UFO! One hopes that McCampbell is not secretly footnoting Frank Edwards again, but one cannot be sure.

But we do have *one* footnote of a scientific assertion: "A physical basis for the effect... is the increase of resistivity of tungsten in the presence of microwave energy" (p. 58). Following a paragraph full of "mights" and "coulds," this sentence sounds authoritative, until the reader actually looks up the footnote citation: "This obscure point came to the author's attention a few years ago and, unfortunately, all efforts to locate the source have been unavailing" (p. 172). Perhaps Frank Edwards told him. The admission is refreshingly honest, especially in a book whose Introduction warns the reader not to believe any of the facts to be presented inside but only to concentrate on the pretty pattern they make; but by now the reader is not willing to equate candor with reliability. The admission that he cannot prove his only scientific assertion (and that nobody

he asked had ever heard of it!) does not stop McCampbell from using this “fact” to explain the reported UFO effects on radios and automobile ignition systems.

Missing as well is any footnote to laboratory experiments which might provide the slightest basis for blandly asserting that “an artificial state of fear that is induced by radiation is the suspected cause of this reaction the radiation that at greater intensity apparently causes a biochemical psychosis, also paralyzes dogs, cats, cows, probably birds, and possibly insects” (p. 89). Well, this is a measurable laboratory effect, and I, for one, would be fascinated to see some reference to it so I could read the original reports. But again there is no footnote to real science.

And so it goes. The evidence is admittedly completely unreliable (and the author is correct on this point, as careful scientific investigation has repeatedly shown). The analysis fits nicely into an outline only because McCampbell uses just that evidence that will fit nicely into his outline. References to scientific laboratory data consist of undocumented statements and unprovable assertions (and the author has had a copy of this review for three months without responding to the challenge to send me the references).

This is not science, and UFOlogy is not a distant cousin of geology, biology, and psychology. It is a kissing cousin, instead, to astrology, or so its standards and practices seem to indicate.

If this were only a lousy book by a mediocre writer, published by an obscure California book company, there would be no problem in ignoring it or forgetting it and moving on to any new attempts to convert the study of UFOs into a real science (a transformation I would enthusiastically welcome). But the reception of McCampbell’s book by the UFO community indicates that most self-styled “UFOlogists” think highly of the book and consider it to be one of the best scientific analyses of UFOs ever written. The new *UFO Reporter* calls *UFOlogy* “a comprehensive examination quite beyond the scope and depth of most UFO books.” Even the *samizdat* UFO literature in the USSR is now quoting McCampbell.

For the sake of the still unborn science of UFOlogy (unless, of course, it turns out to have been only a hysterical pregnancy), I hope that this is not the best that can be done. McCampbell has tried and failed to create a science of UFOs, and insofar as the UFO movement does not recognize his failure, it will be frustrated in its attempts to become a science and to deserve the word *UFOlogy*. This book, at least, does not deserve its pretentious title.