

The Myth and Mystery of UFOs by Thomas E. Bullard. Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2010. 417 pp. ISBN 9780700617296.

UFO books run the gambit from slapped-together pulp jobs with little thought to accuracy to Ph.D. dissertations that rely on scholarship without a thought to style. Thomas (Eddie) Bullard's book, *The Myth and Mysteries of UFOs*, is one that walks the fine line between over-the-top scholarship and bottom-of-the-barrel trash. His is a book that belongs on everyone's shelf because of the scholarship and the readability.

It was, for me, confusing at first. I wasn't sure where he was going with his scholarship. He wrote about sightings that most of us inside the UFO community knew about, but he often answered the questions about their reality. Or maybe I should say about their extraterrestrial nature. Clearly something had happened, but Bullard seemed to provide us with answers for those strange cases.

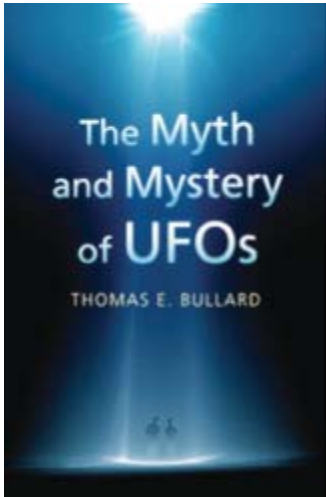
The massive sightings of March 3, 1968, in which a number of witnesses described a cigar-shaped UFO with windows on the side, for example, was explained as the re-entry and breakup of the Zond IV spacecraft launched by the Soviet Union. This has become an accepted explanation throughout the UFO community and one not without merit.

The case is interesting because, as Bullard notes, while some thought of alien craft, there were those who recognized the sighting for what it actually was. Bullard suggests that the reason there weren't more reports of this with the proper answer is because those who properly identified it felt no compulsion to report it. Those who thought of it in terms of an alien craft did.

But the real importance of the sighting was how it applied to other, similar reports. In 1948 two airline pilots saw something that they described as cigar-shaped with square windows. This was, of course, the same thing said about the Zond IV reentry. A cigar-shaped craft with square windows. Of course there was no returning space debris in 1948, but there were bolides, very bright meteors, that could give the same impression and often do.

Bullard looks at the UFO phenomenon through the eyes of a folklorist who is studying the legends and myths of the human race. He notes that humans, from the very first, were reporting the strange apparitions in the sky that we now call UFOs or flying saucers. He looks at the history of those myths.

But he is not telling us that all UFO sightings can be explained with such a study, only that science might learn something about human nature, about how we view the world as opposed to how our ancestors viewed the world,



and that there is something real happening. Some of the sightings aren't based only on our perceptions, but on something concrete and tangible flying, or floating, through the sky.

He acknowledges many of the answers for what people have seen, but also makes it clear that these answers do not cover everything that is seen. It is impossible to write off a UFO sighting that was witnessed by dozens, especially when the object, or objects, are detected by radar or have been photographed or leave traces on the ground.

In other words, Bullard sees something of value in the study of UFOs. There is science that can be applied, and science

has been negligent in what it has done with UFO reports. Rather than be intrigued by them, science simply ignored them.

This is a book that has been needed since 1969 when the Air Force-sponsored study at the University of Colorado, popularly known as the Condon Report, rejected the idea of UFOs. The Condon Committee found that not only did UFOs not pose a threat to national security, one of the Air Force's requirements for the inquiry, but, more outrageously, nothing of scientific importance could be learned by studying them. Skeptics have cited this investigation as if it is the final word on UFOs since it was released.

Bullard's book, however, is the important and long-needed counterpoint. He's not arguing that UFOs are extraterrestrial, though it appears in some places he has reached this conclusion. No, he's arguing that some UFOs demand scientific study. They might not lead to alien spacecraft but they will certainly add to our knowledge of the world around us. While national security might not be an issue, scientific understanding of our world is.

While alien abduction might not be extraterrestrial creatures taking humans into their craft for examination, neither is it explained by sleep paralysis. While sleep paralysis may, in fact, explain some abduction tales, it does not explain them all.

Bullard's argument here, then, is that UFOs deserve academic study. Hufford's study (1989) of the Old Hag, as outlined in *The Terror That Comes in the Night*, which is about bedroom visitation, led us to a more complete understanding of the phenomenon related to sleep paralysis. The study of the UFOs might lead us to a better understanding of our psychological makeup.

With that said, Bullard is also suggesting that there are UFO sightings that are sufficiently strange, sufficiently documented, with sufficient eyewitness testimony, to demand study. This might lead us right into the extraterrestrial.

Bullard is suggesting that we stop dismissing UFOs by saying the witnesses were drunk, uneducated, unsophisticated, or simply of below-average intelligence, and apply our science to them. He looked at the UFO phenomenon with the eyes of a trained folklorist and found much that required study. He is saying that other sciences, both physical and social, might benefit from a similar academic analysis.

Ridicule is not a way to learn something new. Ridicule is a way to dismiss something without having to know anything about it. Bullard tells us that now is the time to stop ignoring UFOs and actually try studying them with the same sort of academic precision that is devoted to other types of anomalies. Now is the time to begin the real science and not the pseudo-science that has gone before.

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Reference

- Hufford, D. J. (1989). *The Terror That Comes in the Night: An Experience-Centered Study of Supernatural Assault Traditions* (Publications of the American Folklore Society). Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.