

## Book reviews

Timothy Green Beckley. *The UFO Silencers*. New Brunswick, NJ, Inner Light, 1990. Pb 160 pp. ISBN 0-938294-87-3.

Scholars with an interest in discovering more about the nature of the puzzling “Men In Black” (MIB) phenomenon will find this book disappointing. The author is the president of his own publishing company and *The UFO Silencers* is a pot-pourri of largely unsourced information. This is not, however, to say that the book is not without use, for it can be seen as a conduit of information in its own right, functioning in a manner not dissimilar in many ways to a legend-telling session.

The book starts with an introduction by noted UFO scholar John Keel, who briefly places MIB in a historical context. Following the likes of Rojcewicz (1987; 1989), he sees analogues to the current MIB legend in fairy beliefs, witchcraft beliefs and others. This is slightly expanded upon by the author, who states, for example, that “American folklore holds many frightening tales of the Devil, or demons, who roams the countryside on a dark horse—as opposed to today’s MIB who arrive in dark autos” (8). This quote is symptomatic of all that is bad about the book: an interesting idea is alluded to but not sourced, nor is it further developed. Without such detail scholars cannot trust the information nor even trace a route to the source of the data.

Where the book is most useful is in its rendering of various accounts of MIB activity, albeit usually told second-hand. These accounts vary from a Chinese peasant being frightened by a faintly glowing “black man” to a Korean war veteran shot in the forehead, to a hairless invader who made a coin vanish from the hand of a noted psychologist and UFO investigator, Budd Hopkins. The diversity of the narratives, sixteen in total with many other summaries, gives a feel for the protean nature of the phenomenon and its many mysterious inconsistencies. The breathless writing style, and occasional credulity of statement, give a feel for the author and his beliefs.

This book may also prove useful as an example for those interested in understanding the relationships between the various

communicative media in transmitting legends. It is profusely, if badly, illustrated with depictions of different MIB. It also contains reproductions of US Air Force documents noting concerns about individuals impersonating officials: seemingly a favourite trick of North American MIB. This series of non-textual elements, when allied to the lack of a list of contents, bibliography or index, and the cheapness of the production, all give the book an air of immediacy; an air more of whispered gossip than scholarship. Where Rojcewicz deals with memorates of MIB activity (1989), Beckley writes of information that came second or third hand. He writes of respected figures in the UFO community to legitimize his accounts and includes descriptions from around the world. He includes theories that might explain MIB, and even rituals to protect individuals from harm at the hands of MIB. In many ways then, the structure of the book and its choice of content can be seen as functioning to legitimise the subject through features more commonly seen in verbal interaction.

In general, however, readers with an interest in finding out more about MIB should also read Peter Rojcewicz's work. Those already *au fait* with the phenomenon will find little new here of interest. If readers are interested in the transmission of legends via pseudo-scholarly publications and are familiar with MIB phenomena then this book may prove a little useful. Otherwise, it has little to offer.

## References

- Peter Rojcewicz. 1987. The "Men In Black" Experience and Tradition: Analogues with the Traditional Devil Hypothesis. *Journal of American Folklore* 100:148-160.
- . 1989. The Folklore of the "Men in Black": A Challenge to the Prevailing Paradigm. *Revision* 11.4:5-16.

BRUCE MASON  
DEPARTMENT OF FOLKLORE  
MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY OF NEWFOUNDLAND