

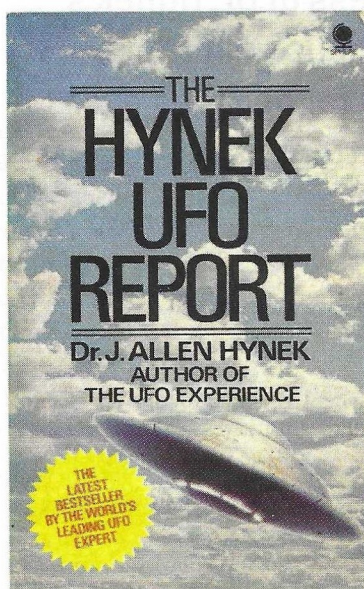
Vindication of My Notorious 'Insulting' Letter to UFOlogist J. Allen Hynek

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John Franch's article "The Secret Life of J. Allen Hynek" (SI, January/February 2013) has rekindled memories of my correspondences of yesteryear with several prominent UFOlogists, among them Jerome Clark and Hynek. Clark, author of such books as *The UFO Encyclopedia*, for many years edited the *International UFO Reporter*, which until its discontinuation in 2012 was the bimonthly magazine of the J. Allen Hynek Center for UFO Studies (CUFOS).

Some of my exchanges with Clark were quite testy. One round of letters in 1992 revolved around a defamatory accusation he made in *IUR* about people affiliated with CSI that ultimately led to my hiring an attorney (see gpposner.com/loathsome.html). But a comment Clark had made to me years earlier came to mind as I read Franch's piece.

Allan Hendry (not to be confused with Allen Hynek) was the main investigator at CUFOS in the 1970s. In one of Clark's 1985 letters to me, he said, "Hendry once told me, by the way, that in the course of his employment at CUFOS the single rudest letter that organization received was written by you." A couple weeks later, his next letter again made reference to "the more frequent assertion (made, for example, in especially insulting fashion in the last paragraph of your January 26, 1978, let-



ter to Allen Hynek) that proponents are irrational, money-grubbing publicity seekers."

I first wrote to Hynek (two pages) in 1976, while still a UFO believer. His two-page June 1 response (see gpposner.com/Hynek-1976.pdf) begins, "This is in reply to your kind letter of May 18th" and ends, "Thank you again for your letter. It is always a pleasure to correspond with someone who has his head screwed on straight. . . ." I next wrote to him (three pages) at the end of 1977, shortly after reading his latest book, *The Hynek UFO Report*. His two-page January 11, 1978, response (see gpposner.com/Hynek-1978.pdf) begins, "Thank you for your most excel-

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lent letter of December 27th. Because you have taken the time to write in considerable detail, I am putting your letter ahead of the stack to acknowledge it." And his stack nearly reached to the stars, as a result of his involvement as a consultant with the movie *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. (Hynek had coined the "close encounter" classifications.)

Thanks to my new awareness of Dr. Hynek's "secret life," any subconscious guilt that I may have been harboring for decades over my notorious "insulting" letter has now certainly been vanquished.

My metamorphosis from UFO believer to skeptic was chronicled in the chapter (posted at gpposner.com) that I contributed to *Skeptical Odysseys* (Prometheus Books, 2001). As I detail there, my next missive to Hynek was four pages in which, having just discovered and devoured Philip Klass's *UFOs Explained*, I rebutted Hynek's letter point by point. Klass (who died in 2005), senior avionics editor of *Aviation Week* magazine and one of the founders of CSI, soon thereafter wrote to me of this letter:

It was 7 p.m. before I left the office, exhausted from a hard day probing a very controversial international aviation issue, and by a cold and hacking cough that should have sent me to bed but for the press of *Aviation Week* business.

But your letter [to Hynek] has moved me almost to tears and so I must respond tonight and express

my thanks.

Soon after I entered the "Strange Land of UFOria," I realized that I had undertaken a largely thankless task. That for most people, who think the whole issue is nonsense, I was on a fool's errand, while for those who are interested and who generally are "believers," my efforts would evoke only harsh criticism.

But your letter of Jan. 23 [to

Hynek] is ample reward for all my efforts—truly. What you have dared to say to the "Galileo of UFOlogy" [as Hynek had been dubbed in a recent issue of *Newsweek*] has long needed to be said. . . . You are the first, to my knowledge, to brazenly comment that the Emperor is NAKED!

I didn't think to mention in my chapter the two-page addendum (see gpposner.com/Posner-1978.pdf) I sent Hynek three days later after seeing him on a national television program the night before. This "rudest" letter's "insulting" closing paragraph reads:

Thanks to TV Guide, I have been able to view many of your recent TV appearances, as you well know, and have found them to be quite distressing. Even if UFOs do represent a "quantum jump" phenomenon (and as I've said before, I hope they do), your illogical statements only serve to alienate (no pun intended)

persons such as myself. If you continue to pursue your present course, your personal finances may remain sound, and you may even eventually get your own TV show, but I assure you that your credibility among the "logical" segment of the population (no matter how few of us there may be left) will erode to zero, if it has not already done so.

Had I known then about Hynek's "secret life," I might have found myself much less vexed by the man. Incorporating information revealed in Hynek's close friend and colleague Jacques Vallee's 1996 book, Franch tells of how Hynek "had been an enthusiastic though closeted student of the occult [and], for example, believed that there were planes of existence beyond the physical, and he even endorsed alleged instances of 'psychic surgery' and 'psychic photography.'"

Moving on from the "irrational" to the "money-grubbing publicity seeker" (as Clark interpreted my letter), Franch quotes a Vallee journal entry: "Media men hire Allen as they would hire a guitar player. He rushes wherever he sees a spotlight, and if the spotlight moves, he moves with it." And in a 1978 letter to a friend, Hynek boasted that "each one of my [UFO] lectures brings me more than my monthly pay from Northwestern [University]." Franch also quotes Vallee as having noted back in 1968 that "[Hynek] is no longer taken seriously among astronomers."

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