



Original Image Author: Σ64 (GFDL)

the FOG



“That hateful, pallid mist curled forward as if veritably driven by some remoter advancing bulk”

H.P. Lovecraft

By *The Emperor*

We’ve all seen those classic horror movies: The mist rolls in off the moor and something terrible emerges from the billowing wall of the fog. Seen explicitly in both versions of *The Fog* and in the recent cinematic adaptation of Stephen King’s *The Mist*.

Not only does this look good and provide a great ‘reveal’ for the *monstre de jour* (and covers up shaky special effects) but it does seem to be a factor in a large number of reports of anomalous phenomena. The odder thing is that the descriptions are strikingly similar even when they concern what one might assume are distinct and separate groups of entities.

As I mentioned in my previous investigation² into the ‘high strangeness’ aspects of Bigfoot encounters (in *Darklore Volume 1*), we could do with a cross-disciplinary look at some of the Layer II (anti-physical) and IV (physiological) evidence. Greg Taylor has previously looked at the strange sounds often reported in paranormal events,³ and it strikes me that the odd fogs, curious clouds and mysterious mists are another ideal element to look at.

Jenny Randles in one of her early classic books, *UFO Reality*, stumbles across this link so many times that she said “once again we see a connection between close encounters and curious clouds – what does it all mean?”⁴ What I’ll be doing here is looking at a range of reports and seeing if we can get a bit closer to answering her question.

BLACK DOG SMOG AND SHAMANS IN THE MIST

The most obvious horror motif we’ll touch on is the Black Dog: as big as a cow, stinking of brimstone and sporting eyes like the glowing coals of Hell itself. It is the kind of monstrosity that would send the Hound of the Baskervilles whimpering back to its kennel. The important thing for us is that it is also linked to peculiar mists.

A good example comes from Nick Redfern’s blog, where he recounts a story told to him by a colleague which takes place in Cannock Chase, a location well known for its wide diversity of odd occurrences:⁶

[H]is attention was drawn to a small, dense – and “hovering” – area of fog situated at a distance of about 250 to 300 feet. Curious as to what would cause such a phenomenon, he headed towards it, with some trepidation, he admitted. As he got within about 20 feet of the fog, he felt his hair become “static and electrified,” and an intense smell of burning metal filled the air: brimstone, no less.

But the bizarre activity had barely begun: suddenly, out of the fog loomed a large, and certainly monstrous, black dog...

...The man slowly backed away, and the black dog did likewise, retreating into the impenetrable depths of the fog. As the man reached a point perhaps 150 feet from the fog, he was both startled and shocked to see a small ball of light “zoom in” over the fog and duly cast down a vivid blue column of light in its direction. In an instant, the fog and the ball of light were gone, the black dog was nowhere to be seen, and normality was restored.

This is noteworthy, not just for the dog and the fog, but also for the ball of light and the unusual electrical sensations – keep an eye out for more of the same in other accounts.

Redfern also wrote an article for *Fate* magazine on black dogs and he describes a report emerging from the same area in response to a newspaper’s feature on “The Ghost Dog of Brereton”:⁷

It had no definite shape, seeming to be a ribbon of mist about 18 inches to 2 feet in depth and perhaps nine or ten feet long with a definite beginning and end. It was a clear, warm night with no mist anywhere else. We were both rather stunned and my husband’s first words were: ‘My goodness! Did you see that?’ I remember remarking I thought it was a ghost.

So we not only get a nice two-for-one deal here (ghosts and black dogs) but this last account is also similar to another sighting of a strange cloud which was seen in the area, but we’ll discuss that in the conclusion, and there are a lot more odd clouds to inspect before then.

We can only briefly touch on clouds seen in shamanic practices (and skip entirely cloud gods) but I did want to mention one report before we move on. Anthropologist Douglass Price-Williams has written

“Shamanism and UFO Abductions”, an article looking at the parallels between the two and he includes this snippet of information:⁸

There is another report from Prem Das on a visit to a Huichol shaman in Mexico who saw what he called ‘luminous clouds’. They were identified by Don Jose, the Huichol shaman: “The luminous clouds...these are the *urucate* (spirit beings).”

The phrase “luminous clouds” crops up time and again in different forms throughout this investigation.

FAIRY FOGS AND MARY’S MIST

Fortean author Janet Bord’s *Fairies* looks at the wide-range of odd reports of meetings with the fairyfolk and the connections with UFOs and other areas of the paranormal, and includes mentions of fog. Some are classic fairy encounters – like the 1977 report from Hull about a policeman who saw a bank of fog, and three dancing figures in odd clothing who vanished as he approached⁹ - but many seem to cross the line into ufology or cryptozoology.

So we hear of attacks by black hairy dwarves in Argentina (South America having a much wilder and diverse selection of beasties) during 1985, culminating in a weird incident the following year when small, horned, black-haired dwarves with no feet attacked a group of children. A thrown stone passed through them and then they “shrank and disappeared in a cloud of black, sickening smoke.”¹⁰

Bord also describes a sighting by seven kids on Studham Common, Bedfordshire, on 28th January 1967, in which “a flash of lightning and a thunderclap were followed by the sighting of the entity.” This was a strange blue creature with a black box fixed to his belt and he kept appearing and disappearing in puffs of smoke and then disappeared in a mist, which might have come from his belt.¹¹

Edward L. Gardiner’s description of a fairy from his 1945 book *Fairies* is also worth quoting:¹²

They have no clear-cut shape and their working bodies can be descried only as clouds of colour, rather hazy, somewhat luminous, with a bright spark-like nucleus...



This could, of course, be a mere flight of fancy but has strong parallels with descriptions of the other unusual “entities” which we will touch on as we proceed.

Odd fogs are of the most intriguing aspects of visions of a figure usually interpreted as the Blessed Virgin Mary (BVM, to her friends). So much so that Jacques Vallée notes:¹³

We are not concerned here with an interpretation of mythology but with an attempt to deal with reports of observations that seem to form extraordinary patterns. One such pattern is that of the cloud and the cave, a common thread between Fatima, Lourdes and other apparitions.

At Fatima an odd cloud was seen to form on a number of occasions around the “tree of apparitions” and this, or a glowing sphere of light, were the main ways the figure was said to materialise.¹⁴ At Lourdes the first BVM appearance was preceded by a golden cloud, which seemed to coincide with Bernadette suffering some kind of paralysis.¹⁵

Vallée describes the apparition at Guadalupe in similar ways:¹⁶

The apparition took place on December 9, 1531, in Mexico, It began with the sweet sound of “singing birds” followed by a voice which came from the top of the hill. The source of the voice was hidden by “a frosty mist, a brightening cloud”.

Of course, these aren't the only clouds in religious circumstances. We all know Moses entered a cloud to commune with God and returned with the Ten Commandments¹⁷ and the Apocrypha describe a mysterious cloud appearing at the birth of Jesus¹⁸ and at Mary's death.¹⁹

Vallée draws out the parallels with UFOs in his work, and it is to that field that we now turn to look at the curious case of cloudships.

CLOUDSHIPS AHOY

Before the Phantom Airship flap at the end of the 19th century²⁰ the skies had been filled with strange cloudships – not just the cloudships of Magonia described by Agobard, Archbishop of Lyons,²¹ but what appear to be flying vessels in the shape of clouds and/or ones that can, somehow, adopt that form.

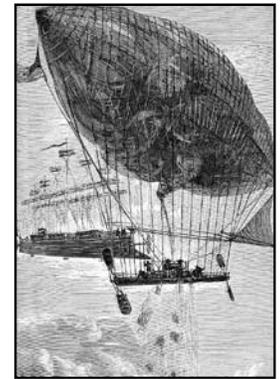
Take, for example, a report from 1874 where two clouds were seen to be approaching each other from opposite directions and when they met the ground shook and light blazed out, leading to an excitable account stating “This behavior is strange and not according to the known laws of physics... Were the clouds actually ships fighting against each other?”²² Of course, people could have mistaken a natural phenomenon for something spectacular, but you would imagine people would have been familiar with the general working of clouds by then.

Jenny Randles also reports on some strange clouds but puts it down to tornadoes, although it sounds odder than that. In August 1973 a black cloud caused mischief across Cheshire and into Staffordshire. “The cloud was oval, and at least one witness reported a ‘white star’ which kept bobbing in and out of the top of it.” It moved against the wind lifting up coal and dropping hay. Three years later it returned in Lancashire up to the same tricks but this time “a humming ‘diesel engine’ type noise was heard in association”.²³

An Australian document said to date from 1873 (although the provenance hasn't been completely nailed down) gives a very early account of what these days may be thought of as alien abduction. The purported author also goes on to describe a later incident involving strange clouds, very similar to Randles', with “screw-like appendages” descending from strange stationary clouds which went through other contortions, before they all joined together and set off at some speed.²⁴

Randles also includes a strange sighting from Cumbria in 1975 when a large “strange ‘aircraft’” crashed into a man's trees. It then flew backwards and “spewed out masses of grey smoke” and then “dissolved itself into the mist”.²⁵ This is not the only flying vehicle that has been seen disappearing in such a fashion.

Another is reported from the famous centre of weirdness, the San Luis Valley, as chronicled by Christopher O'Brien. In 1994 a hunter appeared at a ranch claiming to have been gassed and held captive by aliens while they went about their mysterious business. When they were done they took off in their ship which then “morphed into the shape of a bear, then morphed into ‘a three-headed wolf,’ then turned into a cloud.” O'Brien asks – possibly unkindly, or potentially accurately – “could it have been Amanita mushroom season or a flashback from the sixties,”²⁶ but, in the end, it is no stranger than other happenings he relates in his book, or that are presented here, although I do admit the story has a certain psychedelic edge to it.



In the 1954 UFO flap in France a strange man was seen in front of a hovering object, but he disappeared and the object vanished, “erased in a kind of blue fog, as by miracle.” Another ‘Martian’ was seen entering a craft which let out a loud whistling noise and belched out a “thick fog”.²⁷

There are even clouds doing things that almost defy description. In the 'Fife Incident' we are presented with a series of strange events leading to this odd encounter:²⁸

Not long after this, all the witnesses once more beheld small 'beings' in the woods. However, this time, events took a more alarming turn, for as the witnesses were observing these 'beings' in the woods, Mary noticed a blue 'mist' starting to come from the woods and into their direction.... Contained within this blue 'mist' were several small grey 'beings' who were not walking, but being 'propelled' towards them in the mist. That was it! They had seen enough. This was too much!

We also find claims of telepathic contact with strange clouds:²⁹

As it turned out, the contactee was activated at that time to drive me to another nearby location where I DID see a very unusual aerial manifestation, a fog which whizzed over the car in the form of a low aircraft, and then hung over a small pond changing shapes, becoming finally a large oblong. This pond was on military property.

However, the fogs don't stop at merely freaking out the locals, they also seem to be abducting people.

WHISKED AWAY ON A CLOUD

The idea of someone being kidnapped by a cloud (cloudnapped?) may seem odd but is a recurring theme. It is the basis of a classic urban legend about the disappearance of the "Vanished Norfolks" (the 1/5 Norfolk Battalion) at Gallipoli in 1915, which itself has overtones of the Angel of Mons, some versions involving odd

clouds. However, none of this withstood a thorough investigation and the sad truth seems to be that, rather than advancing into a strange cloud and never being seen again, the majority of them died on the battlefield.³⁰

There is also the Frank Fontaine case. In 1979 he was reported to have disappeared into a luminous fog, only to appear again a week later with no memory of where he had been. This turned out to be some kind of hoax, possibly perpetrated by the intelligence services.³¹ Equally, we have the Vidal case from May 1968 where a couple claimed they were driving down a road in Argentina when the car was enveloped by a thick fog. They came to 48 hours later, in Mexico! However, it has only recently been revealed that this was a clever hoax designed to promote an awful film.³²

We seem beset on all sides by hoaxes and urban legends but are there any good accounts? It would appear that there are, so we'll take a look at these next, like this case from Finland:³³

Another UFO abduction occurred on this day in 1980 in Pudasjarvi, Finland. Ms. Ivanoff, age 25, was driving her car across a bridge when her car entered a fog and her car headlights were deflected upwards. She saw a silver domed disc with portholes overhead. She next lost consciousness and experienced a two-hour period of time loss.

While going through the literature at hand it became clear that there were a core of cases that shared remarkable similarities – and the account above is just the start. Some of them did go on to produce elaborate stories of alien abduction but only through hypnotically recovered memories. Given the vast problems with that line of investigation,³⁴ I won't be going into any detail on those angles.

The first two are from Jacques Vallée's *Confrontations*, who has followed up both of the initial reports with interviews and other investigations, devoting a chapter each to his findings.

The first comes from Happy Camp in northern California and took place on November 2nd, 1975. However, it was preceded by a number of sightings, over a couple of days, of glowing red lights, “glowing silvery eyes in the bushes and a sirenlike noise”³⁵ and two “eerie luminous figures (accompanied by the siren sound and odd feelings of pressure and humidity). A few days after this, five people (including a number who had witnessed some of the previous phenomena) were driving down a track and into some strange territory.”³⁶

In the canyon, however, they found an area of heavy fog that forced them to turn back, and they became very confused about subsequent events...

...Their next conscious memory is of driving down the mountain singing a chorus of an old church song.

What they initially recalled were scattered impressions of the presence of other entities who spoke to them and dim recollections of being taken into a room or flying craft. When one of those involved was interviewed by Vallée, he reports that she stressed that during the incident “everything seemed to happen in slow motion.”³⁷

Following this incident, more witnesses came forward reporting other sightings:³⁸

Other episodes of strange fog with a humanoid shape inside, high-pitched sounds so piercing that they hurt the witnesses, and various kinds of spherical or oblong objects flying over the town, sometimes with an Air Force jet in hot pursuit.

Other reports from around this time include giant birds, poltergeist-like activity and a small glowing sphere seen in a house, as well as a whole set of eerie events involving a white sphere, somehow connected to an unseen force that snapped a fir in half, dragged their truck

backwards and hurled the broken half of the tree sixty feet. Just to tick all the boxes, the area also has its own Bigfoot-like creature, Indian legends of strange beings with unusual powers and two witnesses also saw a Man In Black enter a diner and make a botched attempt at ordering and eating a meal.³⁹

The second incident occurred in Redding California on May 7th, 1980 and involved a Mrs Anderson, her two teenage daughters and another teenager whom the family were going to foster. From Vallée’s own description:⁴⁰

It was 9:05 p.m. They were driving south approaching the bridge over the Sacramento River, when they saw a luminous cloud “explode” and engulf the car. All sound stopped. Mrs. Anderson said they seemed to be “floating along.” When they emerged from the cloud, they looked back but could see no trace of it behind the car. They stopped to buy soft drinks and drove to their friend’s house. It is at that point they noticed it was 10:10 p.m., over half an hour later than it “should have been.”

Mrs Anderson went into more detail:⁴¹

The cloud appeared to settle on the road and move toward them. Mrs Anderson, who had worked at a nuclear research facility, described the cloud to me as an energized blast with a beam of light travelling at the top of it. It was glowing. She felt as if the flashing light “went through” her head with a painful sensation. It seemed to her that “time had stopped,” but the feeling was not negative.

After the encounter they describe being very thirsty and some of them reported sore and reddened eyes. The girls all found marks on themselves although “they did not look like puncture marks” and “could be explained as insect bites or ordinary scratches.”⁴²

The final case is the Aveley abduction from 1974, one of Britain's earliest such cases:⁴³

Then as they were driving through the bend in the road, no more than 30 yards ahead of them, there was a dense green "mist" or "fog" covering the road up to a height of about 8-9 feet. Just as the "fog" was seen the car radio began crackling and smoking. The man went ahead and pulled out the wires. Then the headlights went out.

Still traveling at 30 m.p.h., the car entered the green mist. The wife remembered the car violently jerking at this point. The couple had seen fog different times in their lives, but this green 'fog' seemed very different from anything that they had ever experienced previously. In addition, it seemed very light inside the "fog," they felt very cold (the windows were rolled up), and they recalled a tingling sensation and remarked on the curious dead silence.

Next things seemed a little hazy. The couple couldn't even remember for sure if the car was still moving. It seemed as though they were only in the mist for a second or two, then there was a jolt "like a car going over a hump back bridge," and the "fog" was gone. At this point the driver realized that they were about a half mile further up the road.

Everything seemed to have returned to normal but they had lost nearly three hours. Note the repeated occurrence of strange tingling sensations, time slowing down, the silence and almost seamless loss of part of their day.

The Happy Camp, and especially the Anderson and Aveley cases, certainly appear to be describing the same kind of phenomena. What is intriguing is that they have striking parallels with the BVM appearances we mentioned earlier.

Although it seems likely that some of the reports we've looked at describe events with a range of different causes, there does appear to be a clear core of accounts which could be describing the same thing. To draw proceedings to a close I want to look at what that might be.

CONCLUSION

So can we now answer Jenny Randles' question "a connection between close encounters and curious clouds – what does it all mean"?

The simple answer is we don't know. However, like my previous article, I can throw in some possibilities. As more evidence is gathered we can test these further.

The first possibility is that this is purely a natural event, even if it has some "unnatural" effects. Of course, sometimes clouds are just clouds, and some can look remarkably saucer-like and can probably explain some of the early cloud ships reports and some more recent cases.⁴⁴ However, the core of cases I highlighted suggest that some of these cases have the same explanation, and if it is a natural one then it isn't a simple case of mistaking identifications of clouds.

There is one report that could cast more light on this and it comes from one of the few British 'Hotspots of High Strangeness': Cannock Chase.⁴⁵ Jenny Randles commented on the encounter:⁴⁶

As they approached a bridge not far from Little Hayward Mrs Hall saw a glow ahead of them. Shortly afterwards, as Mr Morgan turned the car to the right, he looked in front and saw it also...

...Gloria Hall describes it as "a big cloud on the floor – all red – and it lit up." She later added that it was fluorescent and slowly pulsed (or rather the central glow was being 'eclipsed' by vapour). It seemed denser in the middle, with vaporous mist on the edges. They could not determine if there was any solid shape behind. Reg Morgan

confirmed: “It was like a gas cloud...like a semi-saucer shape – a red glow – like if you look through a fluorescent tube...”

There were no smells detected or apparent after effects. But during the sighting a clear indication of the Oz factor mentioned. Gloria spontaneously remarked: “It was dead quiet...very, very quiet.” Roger later confirmed: “It was unbelievably quiet,” and Gloria emphasized: “There was silence about everywhere.”

...Furthermore, Gloria was clearly the more affected of the two. She saw it first...something Reg seemed slightly puzzled by, saying at one point: “I don’t know why it was blanked out to me.” Possibly important in that regard, Gloria noted: “I felt weird” and tried to describe a vague unease or alteration in her state of consciousness.

As Randles says, “the investigation of this case was first class”, with damaged plants tested, soil samples taken and local weather analysed by experts.

David Reynolds, a local meteorologist, visited the site with investigators for a more detailed analysis. He found some evidence of tree damage which suggested a rotating vortex could have passed by. The general opinion of the weathermen involved seemed to be that the mechanical damage noted afterwards (if it was directly linked with the glowing cloud) was created by a vortex associated with the blob. The glow itself was probably ionization...

...We may notice another point from Persinger’s work. The red colour, just as theory predicts, probably occurred because of the saturation of water vapour in the atmosphere at the site. If it had been completely dry, or further from the river, the colour would have probably been blue or white.

This has a lot of features we’ve seen before: a glowing cloud, the ‘Oz Factor’ and seemingly a difference in what the witnesses perceived. Randles also suggests this might be a natural phenomenon and highlights the proximity of three faults. As she mentions also, this connects with Canadian researcher Michael Persinger and his ‘Tectonic Strain Theory’ which posits that stress in the local rocks may generate energy, resulting in lights and other effects⁴⁷. However, one of the problems with Persinger’s theories is that the mechanism for releasing large amounts of energy from geological processes has been lacking.

However, Friedemann T. Freund, a NASA and SETI scientist, has recently proposed one of the most convincing mechanisms to explain earthquake lights, and tested that against the reports from the Saguenay earthquake, which produced a range of different sightings: “The phenomena were variously described as globular luminous masses, bands or rays or as intense atmospheric illuminations lasting from several seconds to several minutes.” He and his colleagues suggest “Our conclusions seem to be consistent with not only the observed luminous phenomena but also with the reported emission of radio-frequency electromagnetic radiation and other effects.”⁴⁸ Such charged plasmas would not only explain luminous phenomena but also the tingling sensations, thirst and red eyes. They could even explain the odd feelings of disassociation (part of the ‘Oz Effect’) and the impression there are other beings there. However, these energy discharges appear to be fairly much confined to the area of an earthquake and a short space of time surrounding them. There is, though, an intriguing hint that there might still be something to this. A recent article in the *New Scientist* looked at a theory that holes in clouds could indicate earthquakes months ahead of a quake, and although this was greeted with moderate scepticism, the article also mentions Freund’s work.⁴⁹

Another idea is that ionisation may be involved: Friedemann Freund at the NASA Ames Research Center in Moffett Field,

California, recently demonstrated that when rocks are squeezed, positively charged ions form in the air above. *The trouble is that ions usually help to form clouds, not dissipate them.* [my italics]

Which, of course, is what actually interests us. So the idea of an ionised/charged cloud is still a possibility but, if this is a natural occurrence, then not only is it still unknown, but the mechanism for its formation is unclear.

A lot of the physical effects can be explained by exposure to high levels of electromagnetic radiation (prickling/tingling sensations, thirst, red eyes and possible burns) and Michael Persinger has shown how altered states can be produced by the same source. However, there are other extreme effects, like the missing time, that still require explanation.

Paul Devereux has researched 'Earthlights'⁵⁰ for decades (and Charles Fort pointed out such links in *New Lands*⁵¹), and has suggested that there may even be links with poltergeist reports⁵², so this may explain the whirlwind of weird happenings that surround some of these events, like those at Happy Camp. Equally Devereux has said "it is known that people can perform quite complex tasks such as driving a vehicle for quite long periods while in an unconscious, entranced state"⁵³ so it seems possible the afflicted don't just drive straight off the road.

While I still favour this explanation, such a theory would require more work on both the formation of the cloud and especially its effects. We'd need to know if a cloud can turn people's memories off like flicking a switch, and what happens during that missing time: are they just driving around on auto-pilot?

It would be remiss of me not to supply some more possibilities that stray into more unnatural territory. Perhaps what we are seeing might be a 'weapon'. Something which could switch people off, like flicking a switch, would be of interest to the military (an 'uber-taser?'). What has been reported could be tests of such a device 'in the wild'. After all

groups like 'The Aviary' seem to contain an odd mix of military types with an interest in both UFOs and non-lethal weapons technology. Of course, it may even be cruder than that. As we saw, the Franck Fontaine case was a hoax, but Jacques Vallée's investigations lead to him believe it was one carried out by the intelligence services, and he suggests:⁵⁴

The fog could have been a theatrical device created artificially to mask a small commando from casual observers, long enough to carry Franck away. The fog could also have contained a chemical that served to induce the heavy sleep that overtook the car.

A more speculative alternative is that we are witnessing some form of alien technology. It could be something as simple as a form of camouflage, but it could be more exotic. One of the stranger suggestions for the use of nanotechnology is a "utility fog" – a cloud of nano-machines – and it could be possible that something similar to this could blur the lines between a spacesuit and a spaceship. This might explain the sightings of figures or vehicles in the fog and objects appearing from, or disappearing into, a cloud. Or perhaps what we are seeing is a gateway to another world. The sharp gradient between the two different humidities would create a mist in the general vicinity.

The idea that aliens are visiting us at all, and the descriptions from early alien encounters, seem more rooted in early science-fiction and the era of the Space Race. What witnesses could be seeing is something closer to a probe made of pure energy, which a sufficiently advanced culture could use to get around the relativistic limitations of sending ships across the galaxy.⁵⁵

Once we are speculating about visitors so far ahead of us that we'd look like over-ambitious amoebae to them, then the Subanthropic Principle⁵⁶ applies. We may not even have the necessary cognitive tools to be able to parse and describe such an encounter. Hence the strange morphing often described, as people try to grasp at a concept as slippery as a bar of soap in the shower.

No explanation seems completely convincing. Even the theory that this is all down to a natural phenomenon is describing something right at the borders of accepted sciences (if not beyond). All we can really say is that there is something out there literally blowing peoples' minds, although the identity of that something remains a mystery.

The Emperor was baptised in the diocese of Jerusalem and the morning after friends "proved" he was the Antichrist, he was nearly killed by two nuns. These facts may not be connected, but what if they are? He has written for *Fortean Times* and a number of British small press magazines and comics. He also blogs at the Cabinet of wonders (www.wunderkabinett.co.uk) and elsewhere. In addition his "Black Hitler" won the Nazisploitation Nanofiction contest.