The Bermuda Triangle: A Librarian's Pursuit of Excellence

by Lawrence D. Kusche

I told myself I would not cough this morning. That is the first thing I did. I think I have been living on cough medicine the last week.

I would like to thank you for the hospitality here in North Carolina. Unfortunately, I was not able to make it to all the parties. There just was not enough time to hit every one. I would like to invite you all to the Arizona State Library Association meeting next year in Tucson. I expect to see you all there.

Now I have always felt that a speaker should tell you how long he will ramble on so those listening will know how much more they have to endure. But I have no idea how long this talk will take. I have never been in North Carolina before. I assume everyone is familiar by now with most of the gory details of the Bermuda Triangle story so I will just take a few minutes to cover the highlights.

The story is that many ships, planes and crews have mysteriously disappeared in that small wedge of the sea and that Lloyds of London, the Coast Guard, the Navy and even *THE NATIONAL ENQUIRER* are completely baffled by it all. The most obvious cause of the losses — weather, mechanical problems and human error — have been eliminated as possibilities by those who have done extensive investigations previously. The Navy has suggested that it is merely a coincidence, but others claim that the lack of survivors, distress calls and wreckage in the Triangle make the disappearances something out of the ordinary. Many theories have been proposed to solve the mystery which continues to defy what might be called logical or normal explanation. Proposals include such possibilities as time warps, reverse gravity fields, UFO's and electronic and magnetic anomalies that silence radios, block radar and affect compasses.

Some researchers have found there are other such areas in the world. There is a Devil's Sea near Japan which also has an unusually high rate of losses. In 1955 the Japanese government sent a scientific re-

search ship to attempt to find the danger. That ship disappeared. The area was immediately declared a danger zone: a move that many investigators feel the United States should do for the Bermuda Triangle. However, cynics have said that the government would never make such a move. Think of the devastating effect it would have on the tourist trade.

Another group of researchers reported a network of twelve such areas evenly distributed around the globe. Recently an even more complicated pattern, the planetary grid system, was suggested by two Russian scientists who feel our planet may be a lattice or matrix of cosmic energy of a structure we do not yet understand and that it may once have been a giant crystal with angular dimensions — sort of a diamond in the sky. The crystal now lies buried beneath the eroded surface. Not surprisingly, the corners of the suspected crystal are thought to possibly be aligned with the twelve suspected vortices. Why the Bermuda Triangle is the most active of the crystal's points is not yet known.

Many other theories have been presented but none are seriously considered. Richard Woiner, author of *THE DEVIL'S TRIANGLE*, suggested that magnetic aberrations were at fault. And for a time even the Coast Guard fell for that one. Their handout on the Triangle agreed that Mr. Woiner's idea was the most logical possibility. But they recently dropped it, saying that forces of that kind are pure imagination.

John Wallace Spencer claims UFO's are responsible. He has collected hundreds of articles from *THE NEW YORK TIMES* and *THE NATIONAL ENQUIRER* to back his position. Charles Berlitz really has no opinion as to what the cause might be but claims to serve merely as a skeptical reporter doing his very, very best to collect the scientific evidence.

Many other ideas have been tossed out: lasers from outer space, lasers from Atlantis, lasers from Oz, a pathway to the fourth dimension, or a tear in the magnetic curtain of time. I did not know the curtain was magnetic, but apparently it is.

I received a phone call a while back from someone who said that the lopsided molten core of the earth is responsible. When it rotates underneath the Triangle where the crust is very thin, it causes a gravity differential on the surface and a corresponding electromagnetic activity which incapacitates electrical instruments and pulls ships and planes down. The following is a direct quote which he repeated three times even though I had heard it perfectly the first time and had not asked for a replay. "This is a logical theory and absolutely correct. UFO's are b-u-l-p-u-c-k-y." Very logical.

Another suggestion is that the government is performing experiments with high-powered electromagnetic devices in the Triangle and is purposely causing the disappearances. After all, the Army was caught giving LSD to soldiers and the CIA was found with poisons, were they not? They have opened everybody's mail. So why would our government not test their new devices by seeing if they could make a few vessels disappear? A little vanished hardware for the sake of science is a reasonable price.

It has been said that to solve the mystery once and for all, it may be necessary to have the United Nations send in remote controlled vessels with equipment to detect unusual phenomena. Spending time there proves nothing. No matter how long a person, a boat, or even a fleet of ships stayed; no matter how scientifically equipped they might be; the answer would not be learned because they still would not know what caused the previous vessels to disappear. Those who suggest solving the mystery by spending time in the Triangle do not understand the problem and have not done their homework. Such a project would be interesting and would certainly rate a few headlines in the *NATIONAL*

TABLOID BLABBERSHEET. It would be wasted effort, however, since I have already solved the mystery.

The solution was not discovered by a vast scientific or psychic expedition but, rather, by the expert utilization of library resources and library skills. You may have noticed that my book is dedicated to the Interlibrary Loan Department of Arizona State University and their unseen partners in other libraries. They were sure glad when my project was over. But I have got another one going now. Lloyds of London, the Coast Guard, Isaac Asimov, Carl Sagan, Walter Sullivan, Samuel Elliott Morrison and many others agree that this *is* the solution — not *a* solution — but *the* solution. We have seen Black Power, Chicano Power and Feminist Power. What do you think of Library Power?

After several years of extensive research I have decided that all the previously suggested answers are completely wrong. None can explain the disappearances or why the Bermuda Triangle is such a prominent topic today. It is ironic that the purpose of my research was not to solve the mystery but merely to find as much reliable, objective information on each incident as possible. The solution was an unexpected bonus I did not seek.

One of the important things I discovered is that many people, as well as writers, fail to differentiate between a mysterious occurrence and an incident about which not much information has been found or has been sought. They are not the same thing. My research showed that once proper investigation had been done there were logical explanations for almost all the incidents. Those few that remain unsolved are those for which no information can be found. It is unlikely that those who claim these incidents are mysterious could support this with good solid information to prove that the incidents actually happened the way they described. I found that disappearances occur in all parts of the world, *even* over land, but only those that happen in the Triangle receive much publicity. The routes of some of the vessels were through the Triangle, but it is not known that they vanished there. The mystery makers assume that they did. Many incidents were not considered mysterious when they occurred but only became so years later when they were misreported by writers seeking additional mysteries in the area.

Because of these discoveries and others I have not spelled out here, my conclusion is that the Bermuda Triangle is what I call a manufactured mystery. Others a little less delicate call it one of the greatest world-wide hoaxes ever to be perpetrated. It is one of a succession of many subjects that have received widespread publicity in the past few decades.

The techniques used to put across these so-called mysteries of this kind are similar. They are often prefaced with statements like "Truth is stranger than fiction," "factual accounts of the inexplicable," and "documented facts that force mankind to stretch its mind." Beware when you see those phrases. Usually when they say "Truth is stranger than fiction," what they are giving you is fictionalized truth.

The mystery writers can, of course, explain why their views are not accepted by orthodox scientists. "You see," they tell you, "the traditional scientist wears blinders. He has been shuffled along a conveyor belt of an education based on preconceived notions that fit together all too neatly. The facts that do not quite fit the puzzle are just tossed aside. The scientist is trained to ignore them. When anyone, especially from outside the fraternity, asks embarrassing questions he is met with ridicule and scorn or just ignored. This attitude on the part of established science detracts from those who seek truth in our modern times." That is the familiar war cry of the pseudo-scientist.

Some years back Marshall B. Gardner felt his views had not received a fair hear-

ing because of this conservative nature of scientists. He was certain that ultimately the public would accept his views and force the scientists to do likewise. His attitude is a similar one and is echoed today by many who would have us believe that the Establishment has its head buried in the sand. It is a popular stand, especially since some of the time in our bureaucratic age it is true. There are many examples of this, and the pseudo-scientists frequently use them. The great inventor Thomas Edison said that the telephone was worthless, and he later felt the same about the airplane. In 1945 Admiral William Leahy said: "The atom bomb will never go off, and I speak as an expert on explosives." The examples of mistakes by the Establishment are legion. They persecuted Galileo, they laughed at the Wright brothers, and they said the Six Million Dollar Man would never make it. That is the record of the Establishment — shabby, very shabby.

But back to Marshall B. Gardner who felt that way. What was the cause he espoused when he blasted scientists for their resistance to new, progressive ideas? Gardner had proved that the earth is hollow. The outer shell is eight hundred miles thick and inside is a sun six hundred miles in diameter. There are fourteen hundred mile wide openings at both poles. The aurora borealis is proof of that. For further proof Mars is also known to be hollow. What traditional, stodgy old scientists refer to as ice caps are really the Mars polar openings allowing occasional rays from its inner sun to escape.

Although Marshall Gardner failed to attract more than a few followers, others who have taken on the Establishment have fared much better. I have not yet had the time to dig deeply into many of them, but there are other topics that have been declared by others to be pseudo or false scientific topics in the past few decades: Velikovsky's cataclysmic theory, Bridey Murphy, UFO's, psychics, exorcism, ancient astronauts, pyramid power and the librarian's favorite, or at least one of their most frequent problems, the Bermuda Triangle.

The Triangle, like many of the popular topics, is a product of the pseudo-scientists who claim to expand the mind of the common man and woman by forcing them to think new thoughts or, as the current phrase goes, to "stretch their minds." But are these supposed mystery probers successful in their intellectual efforts? Do they really force people to think, or are they in fact guilty of that which they accuse the Establishment — inhibiting thought? Are they really mind-stretchers or are they mind-shrinkers?

Having been a Triangle watcher and a Triangle writer-watcher for several years, it is my conclusion that those who have created the mystery of the Bermuda Triangle are unmitigated failures when it comes to encouraging people to think. They do not encourage the reader to ask original questions, but merely to repeat the phrases they have just read, or, to use a technical educator's term — "to regurgitate." The readers repeat exactly what they have been fed and nothing ever reaches the brain. When this happens in school, the teacher has failed. When it happens in books, the writer has failed. The ultimate purpose of teaching or writing is not merely to overwhelm the student or reader with one's own biases, but to encourage them to think objectively for themselves, not to be a parrot, but to question and probe, to be critical and skeptical; not only to question the information presented, but to wonder what might *not* have been presented, and to think to ask whether there might be more alternatives to consider; to do some good research of their own (as difficult and time-consuming as it may be) and to recognize the difference between a primary and a secondary source of information; to become aware that everything that appears in print is not necessarily true or accurate and that the purpose of much of the popular press is not to impart information, but to print whatever they feel will sell the most.

Many people have been accepting as fact everything they have been handed about the Bermuda Triangle and under the proper stimuli they are able to repeat it, but they have never thought to dig beneath the surface. The mystery writers have presented mountains of so-called facts, most of which are inaccurate, and then have drawn conclusions from these facts. Then they have drawn further conclusions based on the erroneous assumption that their first conclusions are accurate.

I have blown up a balloon and now I declare that this is a brick. It is factual and it is documented. Orthodox scientists do not accept it, but we know how they operate, do we not? This is a fact, but don't take my word for it, check the record. It is available anywhere and only takes a minute. The pseudo-scientist blows up a balloon, tells everyone it is a brick and proceeds to build a skyscraper. Many such skyscrapers have been built in the past few decades and it is a rare person who takes the trouble to examine them piece by piece. The pathetic part to me is that it does not appear to occur to many people that such a check should be made. I challenge anyone to take any of the Bermuda Triangle books and pin down the sources of their information. I know where most of it is from because in the course of my own research I discovered many of the sources that they used. Not only do I know where much of the information came from and how reliable it is not, but I also know what has been distorted or left out. I have examined the Bermuda Triangle story very thoroughly and have concluded that it is not built of bricks but of balloons piled high and deep. Some of the writers knew they were only shoveling balloon upon balloon, but others, possibly, did not even know. Now that the fruit of their labor is in print they are obligated to defend them.

Deep down, the main purpose of my excursion into the Bermuda Triangle is far more important than the loss of some ships and planes, as important as that may be. My real concern is how people think or fail to think. The thinking reader should always ask if the writer is biased. The writer will protest, of course, that he is not, but the reader should pay no mind. The hoaxer will usually point out other hoaxers to make himself appear legitimate. The thinker should question the writer's sources of information. Are they spelled out point by point or are they vague? Are they listed at all? Are they only listed in a bibliography at the back which can easily be packed with authoritative looking sources that were not even used? Could the reader track down the sources of information if he wanted? Are the sources themselves reliable and accurate? Many times the pseudo-mystery writer merely rewords the articles of previous writers who were equally unreliable. If a writer says the weather was calm, does that mean the weather *was* calm? If he says the Coast Guard was baffled, does that mean they *were* baffled? Or might the writer himself be the one who is confused? When a writer said previous experts were unable to solve the mystery, who is he referring to? Could it be to other pseudo-mystery writers? Why are these so-called experts rarely named? Despite the oft-stated "don't believe everything you read," many people do believe just about anything they see in print. I have actually heard people say that inaccurate or misleading information could not be permitted because "they" would not allow it.

In case after case, I found logical explanations for the losses that everyone else said were completely inexplicable. It was not that solutions could not be found, but that no one ever took the trouble to do thorough research. They did not, in fact, want to find solutions. Poor investigative abilities are being passed off as problems that defy the best efforts of scientists. Sloppy research is often behind what is called "an inexplicable mystery." Mysteries are very easy to create. From an unlimited number of random events, the mystery maker judiciously selects those

few that appear to prove his point, while ignoring all the others. He feels that a grain of truth is the same as the truth. He claims to be an inquisitive, no-nonsense skeptic, but is so only when he encounters ideas that conflict with his mystery. He feels that the public does not have the intelligence to want accurate information, but only wants light entertainment, while at the same time claiming to seek reality and enlightenment. I have found that a mystery writer need only hint or pose a theoretical question that something, no matter how unlikely, has occurred, giving no names, dates, places or documentation, and the burden of proof automatically falls to anyone who disagrees to prove that it is untrue. Someone once actually suggested that a parrot had been captured from a ship and was being held by the extra-terrestrials to teach them earthling language. I challenge you to prove that that is not true. If you like you can use Einstein's Theory of Relativity.

There are many tricks a writer can use to put his or her mystery across. One of the favorites is a technique I call the "obviously." Five planes were flying along together, lost, when pilot A called pilot B and said: "I think my compasses have failed." Pilot B said: "We must have gotten lost after that last turn." "Obviously," the writer says, "the compasses in all five planes had gone haywire." *Obviously, this "proves" there are indeed mysterious forces in the Triangle.*

There is also the distorted denial or how to misquote the authorities who disagree with you to make it appear as if they are on shaky ground. "The Coast Guard denies there are mysterious forces at work in the deadly Triangle." Does the Coast Guard refer to the area as the "deadly" Triangle, or are those the writer's words? "The Navy says there is nothing mysterious about the many losses." Whose word is "many?"

I have named many other techniques but will not define them now. Techniques like: "converting the hard-nosed skeptic;" the "federal case," otherwise known as the "molehill-mountain trick;" "great expectations" (this is where if the ship or the plane does not operate perfectly, it is a great mystery); the "methodical metaphor;" "sensational simile;" the "two-step;" and "undue familiarity." Richard Woiner, if you are familiar with his books, is a great user of the technique of "undue familiarity." You would think he had been there the way he talks.

One of the most frequently used and funniest techniques is the "non-sequitur" where two or more true statements are made, but the conclusion they imply is not warranted. I used one earlier when I said I did not know how long this talk would take; I had never been in North Carolina before. Both true, but it leads nowhere. And I do not know how long I am going to talk.

Of all the misleading statements about the Triangle, the funniest line comes from John Keel who has written many books on so-called "inexplicable subjects." He said: "The Navy took the loss of Flight Nineteen very seriously; two months later President Truman created the CIA."

Maybe I am taking this all too seriously and should just go along with the game. There is certainly much more money to be made on the other side of this mystery. But there is also a deep satisfaction in knowing how the little boy must have felt when he blurted out: "But Mom, what new clothes? The emporer is naked." Besides, it is not a game if most people do not realize that it is a game.

It is possibly my background in the field of education that influenced me to the point where I could not go out and play the Bermuda Triangle game the same as all the other little boys. I have been a reference librarian at the university level for more than six years and before that at a high school two years and was a math

teacher another year. Before that I had been a flight instructor for several years. So for the last fifteen years or so I have been teaching either flying, math or, as a librarian, everything. And as teachers, no matter what our areas, we have several levels we must reach. The obvious is that we must teach our subject whether it be how to solve a quadratic equation, make a cross-wind landing at night or use the *READERS' GUIDE*. But far more important is that we must somehow get our students to think for themselves, to consider all the possibilities and to be aware that not all the answers are simplistic. We have to encourage them to poke and probe and realize that a solution may not come easy and may not be tidy. On the other hand, an answer should not be rejected just because it is simple.

It is good that high-interest topics like the Triangle come along now and then and can be used to capture the kids and get them to read. But sometimes in the process of teaching the mechanics of reading, I wonder if we do not overlook an important purpose of reading — to transmit knowledge.

Several months ago one reviewer noted that my book was logical and that: "Kusche acknowledges where the evidence is not watertight, leaving satisfying elements of inconclusiveness." Think about that: "Satisfying elements of inconclusiveness." This reviewer is saying that inconclusiveness, incompleteness, ineptness is what is successful. There do seem to be some people who enjoy being fooled, but I find they are a very small minority.

Mystery writers have presented many complex and convoluted answers to the Bermuda Triangle, but they have overlooked the solution I have found: that there is not one huge, overall, complicated theory that explains it all but a number of down-to-earth causes (sort of a pun, I guess) that are not related. This discovery led me to invent an old proverb: "He who always gazes at the stars will not see what is right in front of his nose."

I met a person in Tucson about six months ago and as we were talking he said: "I have heard that the explanation is that time warps — it is definitely the answer — time warps are what are causing the loss of all these ships and planes." So we talked a little while, and I showed him many cases where I had found hurricanes and other small things like this that other writers had overlooked. He thought about that for a while and said: "You are really dumb. How could hurricanes explain away time warps?"

I have here a *Peanuts* cartoon from April 26th. Lucy comes up to Snoopy. She says: "I have been down at the library all morning. Been doing a little research. There is not one case in all of medical history where a dragon fly sewed up someone's lips so he couldn't eat and he starved to death — not one case." Last frame. Snoopy all alone thinking: "I wonder why they'd cover up something like that?"

The last I heard of Charles Berlitz (who declines, incidentally, to debate this topic with me) is that he strongly suspects that I am an agent of the airlines or the Government who is out to cover up the situation because, after all, it is going to hurt the tourist season out in Bermuda. Of course, what he overlooks are a few simple facts like Bermuda just had its best tourist sea-

son ever, largely because of the Bermuda Triangle publicity, but he is consistent.

In December, 1974 there was an article in *THE MIAMI HERALD* with the headline: "Forget the Bobbsey Twins. Young Readers Want Reality." It stated that students today *do* want reality; they do not want to waste their time on trivia like *The Bobbsey Twins* and the *Little House* books. They want to read about the real world, to stretch their minds. They want to read books like *The Devil's Triangle, Lord of the Flies, The Exorcist, Jaws* and *Chariots of the Gods.* Is that reality?

It has been said in the last few years that fiction is dying out and that the market for flights of fancy is all but gone in this pragmatic age. But fiction is just really as popular as it has always been. It is just that now they call it non-fiction. Actually the whole Bermuda Triangle mystery is really the fault of the Library of Congress. They classified the books in G 525: Adventures, shipwrecks, etc., instead of PS 3500, Twentieth Century American literature and fiction; or for those who speak Dewey, 910 instead of fiction.

The June 21, 1974 issue of *SCIENCE,* the journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, had an editorial about the pseudo-sciences. I will read the last paragraph. Substitute, if necessary, your own teaching level where they use the word "university."

> *The popularity of pseudo-scientific books at universities should be a source of concern to academic people. The new trend comes at a time when many universities have abandoned requirements that students be exposed to as little as one science course. It is not pleasant to contemplate a situation in which our future leaders are being steeped in fantasy and are exposed to a putdown of science without effective response. The university community has a special obligation which it has not been meeting very well. It should move toward providing antidotes to the new intellectual poisons. In meeting these challenges to rationality, we should all remember that although humanity is eager to accept mysticism, it is also capable of yearning for truth.*

An important objective of all librarians and other teachers should be to open the eyes of their students, to encourage them to see all sides of an issue — not just those that receive the most publicity because they are the most sensational.

I feel that the Bermuda Triangle has tremendous possibilities as a teaching device and properly approached *can* be used to stretch people's minds and imaginations. This will come about *not* by introducing vast, new, mysterious forces to our world, however, but rather by exposing some of the unrealities that can be foisted off on people who pride themselves as being hard-headed realists. The solution of the mystery of the Bermuda Triangle is an eye-opener that may lead not only to the solution of some of the other so-called great mysteries of our time, but it tells us a great deal about ourselves: how we think and fail to think. Have we advanced at all beyond the mentality of the day of the patent medicine sellers? I think so, but sometimes I wonder.

A major objective of educators should be to help students learn to separate fact from fiction on their own, as trite as that may sound. The mystery *and* the solution of the Bermuda Triangle provide a great opportunity for all classroom teachers and librarians to *teach,* if that is the proper word, critical thinking and discrimination. The pursuit of excellence requires us all to do our best to meet this challenge.