

F O R U M

TEMPEST IN A TEAPOT DEPT.—
Few articles have drawn such fire as Victoria Lacas' criticism of the UFO conference held by the fledgling International Association for New Science (See Forum, UFO, Vol. 7, No. 4). It saddens me that a single opinion piece about a UFO gathering has elicited more comments from our readers than the many revealing stories we have run about far more important matters—vital UFO cases, disinformationists and charlatans, government malfeasance and the relationship between ufology and geopolitics among them. Be that as it may, we're honor bound to present "the other side." The central issue in this ongoing controversy—elitism in ufology—should be kept to the forefront; it's another dangerous trend which needs to be confronted and rooted out. This Forum section concludes with some comments from Lacas. We thank our interested readers for their input. —V.C.

Charges Of 'Elitism' Totally Unwarranted

By Paul Von Ward

Victoria Lacas' article, "IANS Symposium Spoiled by Outrageous Elitism," however well intended, unfortunately miscast both the purposes of the symposium and its results. The May 22 to 24 research symposium/think tank organized by the International Association for New Science (co-founded by Maurice Albertson and Brian O'Leary) had as its purposes the exact opposite of what Lacas implied. It was designed to bring together people with opposing views in an attempt to cut across the "my turf" mentality that does characterize the UFO field. The organizers also were motivated by the desire to expose UFO researchers and projects to a wide range of funding sources to benefit the entire discipline (if we may call ufology a discipline).

With very limited resources, they had to restrict the number of think tank participants and only individuals who had already developed a significant public record were invited. Of course not "everyone" could be there, but a fairly representative group was assembled, as Lacas pointed out.

The off-the-record nature of the meeting and range of participants resulted in a successful advance in the development of greater professionalism and cooperation in the field. The short time period available—two

days—did not make it possible to develop entirely new and integrated research proposals. Lacas' lament that they reflected only long-held individual interests has merit. More needs to be done.

Unfortunately, she submitted her article before learning the outcome of discussions within IANS on ways to encourage greater professionalism and scientific rigor in the UFO field. While the idea of an Academy was on the agenda, it was never conceived as an elitist, credential-bound body, nor was a no-application policy considered. Neither was the process at the retreat rigged in any way. People could, and did, volunteer to be on committees to consider the Academy idea. There was an open discussion where people expressed all the concerns implicit (and explicit) in Lacas' comments. The end result was the idea of a Research Institute under the IANS umbrella that would encourage and recognize more bona fide scientific research and professional self-discipline in the field.

This is compatible with IANS philosophy, which fosters research and public education in areas outside the mainstream of establishment science. The central idea regarding membership in the Institute is that individuals will *select themselves*, measuring their own work against the ethical and professional standards of the Institute. Members will be required to place their research in the public record for scrutiny by any of their interested peers.

Rather than being a failure, this innovative approach undertaken by IANS has the potential to upgrade the quality of work within the discipline and facilitate its acceptance by a broader range of public institutions. While empathizing with Lacas' keenly-held desire to introduce more intellectual honesty and true validation of UFO reporting by more publicly-reviewed science, I regret that her article was a premature exclamation. This rejoinder is intended to welcome her collaboration in the task which is in our mutual professional interest: the upgrading of UFO research to a truly scientific endeavor.



Paul Von Ward

Paul Von Ward heads up The Delphi International Group, a globally-minded management group in Washington, D.C. He facilitated part of the IANS retreat.