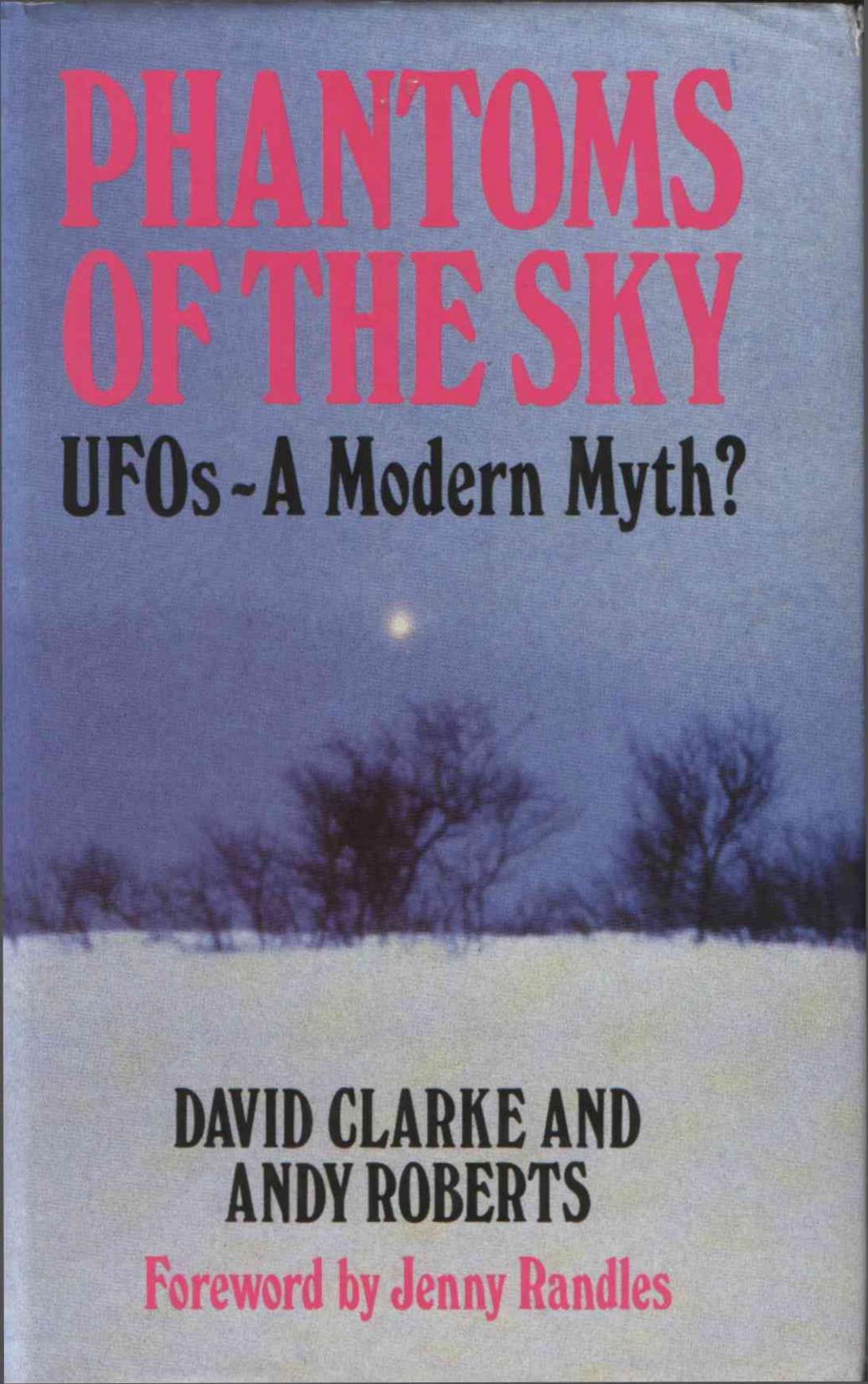


# PHANTOMS OF THE SKY

**UFOs - A Modern Myth?**



**DAVID CLARKE AND  
ANDY ROBERTS**

**Foreword by Jenny Randles**

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# Phantoms of the Sky

*UFOs – A Modern Myth?*

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David Clarke and Andy Roberts



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*Yorkshire Evening Post*: 1. Philip Mantle: 2, 6, 16. Mike Wootten, BUFORA: 3. Clive Potter/*Leicester Mercury*: 4. British Library: 5. Peter Beard: 7. Ground Saucer Watch: 8. Philip Mantle/Merlyn Rees: 9. American Freedom of Information Act (FOIA): 10. Tony Dodd: 11. Project Hessdalen: 12–15. Peter Jordan/*Ranchland Farm News*: 17.



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# Foreword by Jenny Randles

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Once upon a time I was a student at university. I had 'discovered' UFOs a few years before and weaned myself on Jacques Vallee, Allen Hynek and John Keel. In the sixties such luminaries were writing trailblazing material about the subject. I subscribed to what was then a very 'hip' journal called *Flying Saucer Review*, and using money I saved up from a newspaper delivery round I joined BUFORA, the British UFO Research Association. I even purchased a 'UFO-detector', which the manufacturers guaranteed would give off an electronic beep every time a UFO drifted by and triggered its magnetic field.

That was twenty years ago, and the world now looks a very different place. However, many things never seem to change, and the UFO phenomenon is one of them. What does alter is our apparent willingness to be honest about ufology (as the study of UFOs is officially termed).

If you intend to read this book in front of you, I may as well offer my 'health warning'. You had better be prepared to look beyond all these hopes, dreams and romantic illusions which prop up the scaffolding of the UFO movement. You are possibly about to receive a nasty shock, because you will be forced to confront all those things neither media nor UFO fanatics dare tell you. You may also have to wave goodbye to many of the other things which they do tell you – incessantly.

As we enter the nineties, we are in danger of tiptoeing into a new Dark Age in which myth and superstition replace cold, hard fact. In ufology it is always tempting to believe what you want to believe and forget those awkward little problems that merely get in the way. We prefer to speculate endlessly about 'spaceships' and 'pickled green men' locked up in US Air Force freezers. After all, that is what creates the excitement, elevating ufology beyond the mundane and the routine. Sadly, it is also symptomatic of what makes the field a hopeless mess of fairy tales and fallacies.

So what did happen to me all those years ago?

Well, my 'UFO-detector' never uttered the most feeble beep and, needless to say, no spaceship wafted by *en route* to Alpha Centauri. At college my physics tutors peered down from the lofty height of their upturned noses and said, 'But surely you don't take *that* stuff seriously?' When I asked them what they had read to formulate such a 'scientific' conclusion, it certainly wasn't computer scientist Vallee or astrophysicist Dr J. Allen Hynek. Rather it was popular mythologist Erich von Däniken or the ramblings of one of the 'ten-a-penny' UFO-spotters clubs offered (to a chorus of editors' sweaty hands rubbing together) by the grateful tabloid press. When I pointed this out, I detected an uncomfortable shuffling of feet followed by a rapid desire to move on to safe topics, such as the 'ghost world' of quantum mechanics. That was science. I was lost in pseudo-mystical claptrap.

I continued to read a steadily declining *Flying Saucer Review* (now disguised in 'secret code' as plain *FSR*, since its anachronistic title has become an embarrassment). My membership of BUFORA was also destined to be a long-term commitment. From both of these sources I quickly learnt one major truth about the UFO game: forget what you read in the papers. The entire UFO business is vastly different from that and is by no stretch of the imagination a simple, easy-to-answer delusion such as armchair experts by the truckload will eloquently inform you.

If you have consumed the *Sunday Sport* and *Daily Star* and think you know the basic facts about ufology, think again. In this book you will find the discomfoting reality that lurks behind the headlines describing sex-mad aliens and huge government cover-ups. 'Huge government cock-ups' often come much nearer the mark. Although the term 'mad' could legitimately be applied to quite a few people in the UFO field, it usually isn't the witnesses and certainly not any (very elusive) 'aliens' who are mad.

Ponder that allegation of a 'cover-up' for just a moment. Most governments on this planet cannot keep the lid on minor day-to-day misdemeanours, with new leaks and media tip-offs constantly occurring. How could 'the Ultimate Secret' (that aliens have landed and we have the dead 'starmen' to prove it) ever be preserved for five minutes?

Unfortunately, because these 'silly season' tales dominate public attention, the likelihood is that many rational people will already have concluded that ufology is a fools' paradise. UFO books turn up on bookshelves next to *The Tea-Bag Fortune-Teller* and *Astrology For Your Cat*. Few sober-minded folk venture in those shark-infested backwaters of their local high-street store.

However, assuming you have ventured to pick up this book by some means or other, what awaits you, should you progress beyond this introduction? Certainly a few shocks and disappointments, but some pleasant surprises too. It treads a sane and honest path between the fact and the fantasy, laying bare the confusions and the contradictions which populate this phenomenon.

Of course, if you are a 'UFO-believer', you will interpret what David Clarke and Andy Roberts have to tell you as scepticism or debunkmanship. They have taken a hatchet to many of your favourite ideologies and pruned so ruthlessly that at times very little seems to be left.

On the other hand, if you tend to be a bit dubious about UFOs, you may regard *Phantoms of the Sky* as an unusually objective, yet nonetheless deluded study. After all, the authors do not pretend that the entire subject can be wished away through the utterance of those five magic words, 'It's all in the mind.'

There is a UFO reality underpinning the distortions and fabrications, a reality that tends to be ignored for some interesting reasons.

UFO buffs reject it because it fails to support what they desperately long to believe. They yearn for the intergalactic cavalry riding in on their shiny white spaceships to bail planet Earth out of the ecological mess we have engineered for it. Inconvenient facts (which tend to form the bulk of ufology) are hidden well out of sight and out of mind.

Scientists ignore UFO reality for quite different reasons. Largely because it *does* support precisely what they *don't* want to believe. It is much simpler to presume that ufology is a crock than to admit that there are some awkward phenomena at large within our atmosphere which rather bend the rules of nature as we currently accept them.

Finally, the media in the main have a vested interest in preserving the UFO subject as silly but sensational. It offers

great fodder for light-hearted filler items when 'real' news is thin. Besides which, the truth about UFOs is often distressingly simple. To be blunt, 'WOMAN SEES SPACESHIP' is news, whereas 'WOMAN THINKS SHE SEES SPACESHIP BUT WAS PROBABLY MISTAKEN' is not.

All these forces combine to keep the sobering reality of the UFO world a kind of cosmic secret. Once you join the inner enclave of the 'order of the ufologist', you learn the awesome truth – that there is no awesome truth, just some moderately interesting scientific problems. Yet such a revelation is completely counter-productive. Were it to be known by everyone, your very existence as a ufologist might be threatened. After all, many people aspire to such a title because it lifts them out of routine lives and allows them to feel a twinge of self-importance. They can talk in the pub in the knowledge that they know more about something terribly important than most of their friends and colleagues seem to do. As a result, the truth about ufology is like the name of a certain Scottish play that simply never gets mentioned because of the fearful repercussions it is said to bring.

The authors relate one story of a media appearance I made at a local radio station in the Midlands. Some UFO sightings had occurred and been explained – as *not* being UFO sightings – to the total satisfaction of most responsible British UFO researchers, including myself. Over the air I told of this evaluation and saw the presenter's face turn pale. His chin dropped, lines etched across his brow and in a pained voice he spoke to his listeners: 'But I cannot accept that.'

Why? Did he know some secret that I was not privy to? After all, I was explaining how sensible investigators had behaved as any good scientist does, chasing clues and analysing facts in a manner that would have done Scotland Yard justice. The outcome was virtually irrefutable proof that demonstrated that the UFO was no such thing. Had this been the work of any other expert on a less contentious matter, their judgement would have been accepted without question. But UFOs have emotive overtones, and that changes everything.

Unfortunately, my experience tells me, the verdict of ufologist will be accepted by media and witness alike only if it reinforces what they want to hear. Had the evaluation of these investigators

been that the Midlands UFO was a 'spaceship', it would have been gratefully endorsed and proudly trumpeted. Because they were honest and spoke only of what the facts dictate, they were perceived as miserable spoilsports.

I did ask the radio presenter why he disputed my assessment of this case. His answer was: 'Because I had some of the witnesses on my programme, and I believe they were telling the truth.' Absolutely – so do I. Indeed, the overwhelming majority of UFO-percipients 'tell the truth'. The problem is that this is a *subjective* truth, and that often differs markedly from what we might call the *objective* truth uncovered through independent enquiry and evaluation.

I write these words on a North Wales beach. To the west the sunset looks spectacular. A ruddy sphere dips down towards the water and melts into a river of orange. Now I wonder what my eyes have just observed. Taken literally, it was a small ball of fire (I estimate its size at a few feet in diameter, its distance a few miles). This went 'underwater' and 'dissolved'.

Of course, you know as well as I do that this is not what happened at all. The 'ball' was gigantic (many times greater than the Earth itself). Its distance was many *millions* of miles from me, and it did not go into the ocean. That was an optical illusion.

Yet we know this truth only through a millennium of scientific research and questioning. There was a time – and that was just a blink away in the history of this planet – when mankind had solutions entirely different from, and far more superstitious than, the everyday 'miracle' I just witnessed.

The trouble with UFOs is that they reflect phenomena on the fringes of science. They fill areas in which no consensus view has yet developed. Witnesses describe what they saw but are wholly unfamiliar with the event that has unfolded, as indeed are all of us. Lacking these countless years of research and tradition which bring context to an experience, a UFO phenomenon remains an illusion. So far as these 'miracles' are concerned, we are still in the process of mythologizing, placing mystic interpretations on what took place. Of course, our 'sun gods' are riding alien spaceships, but nothing else is new.

The task of a good ufologist is to take nothing at face value and recognize the lessons we have learnt from more than forty years' research. The most important lesson seems to be that what

witnesses *believe* they saw owes as much to preconception and social conditioning as it does to the stimulus that produced the UFO.

However, having said that, it would be quite rash (and these authors are far from rash) to say that *all* UFOs are reducible to acts of misperception. Other phenomena stalk the hinterlands of UFO science. There is probably more than one such mystery, and that is lesson number two in the UFO rule book: there is no such thing as a 'UFO phenomenon', only a loose assortment of 'UFO phenomena' (possibly with very different explanations). These are strung together by the common cause of social belief and bound tight by the illusion of an 'alien spaceship'.

It is perfectly possible to be an excellent and honest observer of a 'real' UFO which is *not* – under any circumstances – a spaceship. It happens most of the time. In fact, it probably happens *all* the time!

I came to terms with such home truths many years ago. Yet that did not make the subject an insipid waste of time. To me it became all the more fascinating, because it was none of the things we presume it to be. In fact, it is a baffling series of intellectual puzzles, from the resolving of a UFO sighting into something down to earth to the new phenomena on the edges of atmospheric physics or geology which emerge from the data just like *Phantoms of the Sky*. Because so many people are 'playing' at ufology and so few grapple fair and square with the unexpected truths that come to light, I believe it is all the more important that someone speaks for rationality and good old-fashioned common sense.

David Clarke and Andy Roberts amply fill that criterion. They have been involved in the field from within. Unlike most critics of the subject, who eschew pet theories without ever bothering to go out there and talk to a witness or investigate a case, they have done both many times over. Unlike most ufologists, who merely accept everything they are told (so long as it fits in with their personal theories), they haven't – ever.

The result is a most entertaining and informative book which will either enthrall or infuriate. You may well brand the authors as heroes or villains, but in my opinion there is only one thing that they nearly always are – and that is: right.

Jenny Randles  
Cheshire  
July 1989

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# Introduction

## UFOs – Space Age Folklore

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### B-LIMEY! – IT'S UFO LEMONS

UFO hunters searching the skies for Unidentified Flying Oranges should keep their eyes peeled – for flying LEMONS!

Alien expert Dennis Harriman says the extraterrestrial Jaffas can change colour to yellow.

Dennis, head of the National UFO Investigation Society, has been inundated with dozens of sightings in the Midlands.

He said yesterday, 'We don't want people just looking for orange objects. There's evidence that they change colour. We've reports of yellow objects which look more like lemons.'

The society claims police are withholding reports of the sightings.<sup>1</sup>

The above news item is typical of how the subject of Unidentified Flying Objects (UFOs), and of those people interested in them, is perceived today by most people, and of how the subject is portrayed in the popular press. Bizarre as it may seem, that account is a genuine newspaper story which appeared in *The Sun* on 14 April 1988, during a wave of UFO sightings in the north of England. Whether or not it is true, however, is debatable. In many ways the objective truth of this or any other UFO report does not really matter. It is given here as a starting-point for an exploration of one of the most fascinating and durable myths of our time, that of UFOs – the inexplicable things seen in our skies, and the strange phenomena which surround them.

Whether you see UFOs as representing visitors from outer space or as merely the products of unstable minds, they are firmly established as big news in the 1980s. Not a week passes without at least one of the popular newspapers running a story on UFOs, from the 'IS YOUR NEIGHBOUR A SPACE ALIEN?' type to the occasionally more serious item about airline pilots tracking unexplained targets on their radar. It makes good, entertaining copy and gives the papers the chance to poke fun at anyone who reports something out of the ordinary.

There can now be no doubt about it: UFOs – or, more importantly, the *idea* of UFOs – are now deeply embedded in twentieth-century society. Everyone ‘knows’ what a UFO is supposed to look like. We say ‘the idea of UFOs’ because that is precisely what people have. Only an idea. What the actual truth about UFOs is is a different matter, which we may never resolve. Thousands of books have been written on the subject of UFOs, and there is a massive subculture of groups and magazines dedicated to circulating UFO reports and theories. There are almost as many ideas as to the origin of UFOs as there are books about them, the most well known of which include beings from outer space, visitors from our future (or past), creatures from another dimension, angels or demons. The list is endless and owes more to the sheer extent of human imagination than it does to actual descriptions of what is seen or experienced.

With this situation then, it is not surprising to find that few people have any conception of what is really involved in the study of UFOs. In reality we cannot study UFOs themselves, only the reports of them and the ideas of what they may be. This situation is further exacerbated by the media, who, as we have seen, frequently feature sensational UFO stories which in their turn feed the idea of UFOs. In and around all this confusion thousands of people every year are still reporting UFO-related experiences which they claim to have happened to them personally. We are now in a position in which we cannot deny these experiences, however implausible they may seem or however they may vary from our world-view. The situation must be faced and described as it is, not as we would like it to be.

There is an enormous amount of data and literature pertaining to UFO sightings and experiences, and yet we are no nearer to finding out what physical reality, if any, lies behind the phenomenon. Despite this wealth of data, ideas and direct experience, the UFO enigma has become bogged down in an endless – and, we think, futile – argument between those who think UFOs represent ‘flying saucers’ carrying ‘little green men’ and those who think the whole subject is fantasy. As exciting or boring as these ideas respectively sound, there is no evidence to suggest that either one is right, and in actual fact the spectrum of UFO experience is infinitely wider, deeper and stranger than either. Whether we like it or not, we find ourselves dealing with

an area of human experience which has resisted all explanation and shows no sign of fading away; rather, it appears to be increasing and diversifying alongside our attempts to come to terms with it. Neither the search for hard evidence nor the refutation of observable facts has yet proved adequate, and a multiplicity of experiences which appear independently to repeat themselves with no barriers regarding time, space and culture can no longer be ignored by any but the most naïve or the most ignorant.

But first, before we explore further, what exactly is a UFO? Most people are familiar with the term, but few understand what it means or what other phenomena have become attached to it.

The term UFO is now used to describe almost anything in a vast array of phenomena ranging from small shapeless lights bobbing around in the sky to gigantic saucer-shaped craft which allegedly land and leave marks on the ground. 'UFO' simply stands for 'Unidentified Flying Object'. It can mean something as simple as a paper bag blown by the wind or an unusual aircraft, anything which at first is not recognized and is then redefined in UFO terms as an unidentified craft, or a similar interpretation. Surprisingly, perhaps, ninety-five per cent of all UFO cases turn out to be something easily explicable, leaving a five per cent residue which defies explanation.

This is a simplistic overview of the situation. Amongst that hypothetical hundred per cent of sightings we have thousands of cases in which people have seen an aeroplane but for some reason have become totally convinced that it was a 'flying saucer' complete with portholes and landing-gear. The same goes for other stimuli, such as bright stars and planetary bodies. All these objects have been seen by witnesses (often by 'trained observers' such as military and airline personnel) who have interpreted them in an exotic manner.

The term UFO has developed to encompass such disparate instances as those in which people are transported onto strange craft, meet humanoid and not-so-humanoid entities in the countryside (as well as in their bedrooms!), mysterious and sinister Men in Black who harass UFO witnesses in their own homes, and a host of other 'paranormal' phenomena far removed from the simple term 'Unidentified Flying Object'. Yet this plethora of subjects is now part and parcel of the UFO experience and must all be included in any truly comprehensive study of the phenomenon.

Where did it all start? When did the idea of UFOs and the related phenomena originate? For most people with any knowledge of the subject, and indeed for most authors of books dealing with the UFO enigma, the phenomena 'appeared' soon after World War II. It can in many people's minds be traced to one specific event – American Kenneth Arnold's historic UFO-sighting on 24 June 1947. Mundane as the Arnold sighting appears when contrasted with events in the later history of ufology, no book dealing with the subject is complete without reference to this event, as it marked the genesis of the UFO Age, though certainly not, as we will see, of the subject itself.

Briefly, the sighting that started the ball rolling all those years ago went like this. Kenneth Arnold, a 32-year-old businessman and private pilot, was flying his Callair plane above the Cascade mountain range of Washington state. This was no joy-ride, as Arnold was out searching for the wreckage of a Marine C-46 transport plane for which a \$5,000 reward had been offered to the finder. After being airborne for about an hour, he noticed two brilliant flashes of light which illuminated the surfaces of his airplane. Scanning the skies to the north, the direction from which the flashes came, he saw nine brightly illuminated objects weaving north to south in and out of the distant peaks, about Mount Baker. By using the known distances between peaks, Arnold was able to estimate their speed: an incredible 1,200 mph, almost three times as fast as any known aircraft of that era. Arnold described the objects as having wings but no tails, one being crescent-shaped with a dome between the wings.<sup>2</sup>

Arnold was disturbed by what he saw. An experienced pilot, he was familiar with most, if not all, flying objects at all altitudes. He could not explain what he saw, and in his words, 'I would have given almost anything that day to have had a movie camera with a telephoto lens.' He watched the objects for about two minutes before resuming his search for the C-46, and then finally landed at Yakima, where he told of what he had seen.

By the time Arnold had arrived at Pendleton, Oregon, the next stop on his route, word of his sighting had spread before him, and he was greeted by news reporters. When asked by the journalists to describe what he had seen, he described the objects as flying 'like a saucer would if you skimmed it across water'. An imaginative sub-editor translated this phrase into 'flying saucers', a frame of reference was immediately created

and a modern myth was born. That most UFO witnesses don't actually see the 'classic' flying-saucer shape which the Arnold sighting engendered (note that Arnold himself did not describe a 'flying saucer' but was interpreted as doing so) is not generally known and may or may not be relevant. It is a myth which has grown rapidly and changed markedly with each decade since the 1940s to include more and more bizarre phenomena.

We are now a long way from the simple, unidentified, glittering shapes that Arnold saw in 1947. During the early years UFOs, or 'flying saucers' as they were referred to until 1957 (the year in which the term 'UFO' was coined by USAF Captain Edward Ruppelt) were seen only at a distance, often in fleets or formations. As the 1950s progressed, the stories connected with UFOs began to get stranger. Rumours spread that some of these craft had actually crashed and that they and their occupants were being held in military custody. From this basis grew the legend of the 'government cover-up' (which we will explore in depth in Chapter 6), in which it is alleged that the American and British governments (at least) know all about the 'truth' behind UFOs and are withholding it from the people.

Stranger still, these craft were now being seen to land, and an endless variety of humanoid and monster-like creatures were observed in conjunction with them. This situation peaked in the 1950s and 1960s with the contactee phenomena. Contactees claimed to have been befriended by aliens and often to have been taken for rides on board their craft. These aliens were almost always tall, blond, beautiful human types, both men and women, who announced that they were here to help mankind, and the contactees often returned with messages of impending global catastrophes, inevitably linked with the threat of atomic annihilation. Many small pseudo-mystical groups sprang up around the contactees, who often became guru figures for a time.

By the 1970s, the UFO situation had changed dramatically. Mysterious aerial phenomena were still being seen, but by now UFO investigators were receiving reports that UFO occupants were abducting helpless earthlings against their will onto the craft and conducting genetic experiments on them. The days of the benevolent spacemen were over. These aliens were a far cry from the tall, beautiful and peace-loving Venusians and seemed to represent a more sinister face of the phenomenon. Small and

insect-like, apparently with no emotion, these aliens claimed to be in complete control of us, able to do as they pleased.

As we move towards the end of the twentieth century, this situation is deepening. More and more people claim to have been 'abducted', and a minor cottage industry has sprung up to deal with these claims in the USA, offering counselling for abductees, and hypnotic regression to retrieve memories of 'forgotten' abductions. Any 'missing time' experience is seized upon by both investigator and witness as evidence that an 'abduction' by 'aliens' must have taken place. At the same time the rumours of crashed UFOs are on the increase again after a twenty-five year hiatus, and there are even (supposedly) genuine US government documents which acknowledge the fact. The current UFO situation, particularly in the USA, is riddled with paranoia and intrigue, with a small but growing number of respected individuals – senators, politicians and scientific and psychological professionals – being forthright and open in their beliefs. These beliefs, stated simply, are that real, physical aliens are now amongst us, that governments know all about it and indeed are working with these aliens and that there is a gigantic conspiracy of silence. These are extraordinary statements which, if we are to accept them as anything like the truth, require extraordinary evidence, and we will examine them in depth in Chapter 6.

And yet, strange as all this may seem, it is merely the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the UFO enigma itself. All the above have arisen within the space of forty years; millions of people have been involved one way or the other, and yet there is not one scrap of proof for the objective existence of aliens visiting Earth, nor for any of the other outlandish theories which have become identified with the enigma. Why then does this situation exist? What has created an environment of belief in which rumours of pickled aliens in secret rooms in Air Force bases can flourish, even to the extent that certain individuals are claiming that live aliens have been kept in safe houses in the town of Los Alamos, New Mexico, for over ten years? When examined closely, the subject becomes a maze of rumour and counter-rumour lacking in final evidential hard proof.

As can be seen from even a brief history of the modern UFO phenomenon, the dominant explanation is that of the ETH – the Extraterrestrial Hypothesis. However, the 'evidence' – such as it

is – for the ETH or for any of the current theories of UFO origin is riddled with contradictions and paradox. This inconsistency of evidence does not affect the ultimate medium through which we learn about UFOs – people. Every year, more and more people are reporting UFOs and UFO-related experiences. It is now almost as easy to speak to someone who has been abducted and experimented upon by aliens as it is to speak to someone who claims to have communicated with a dead relative via a spiritualist. Maybe the wrong questions are being asked. In view of this absence of hard proof, perhaps the question we should be asking is not ‘What are people seeing and experiencing?’ but ‘Why do they believe they are seeing what they say they are seeing?’

We have represented the history of the UFO phenomenon here as a modern phenomenon, in isolation. This is how it is generally seen, but that is wrong and out of context. Mankind has been in existence on this planet for millennia, and for as long as man has been chronicling events, he has been recording strange things seen in the sky. Similarly with the other aspects of ufology, such as ‘abductions’, Men in Black, contactees and crashed saucers. None of these is a new phenomenon. Each age and culture claims to experience these things, interprets and finds meaning in them in its own way. The examples are numerous, and we will describe and compare as many of them as possible in the course of this book. For instance, Joan of Arc heard voices in her head and attributed them to God; she was burned at the stake. In the 1980s people hear voices and attribute them to the space people; some of the ‘channellers’ are now millionaires. We now see saucer-shaped craft in our skies. In the Middle Ages it was common to see flying swords and shields; in the late nineteenth century people saw ‘phantom airships’ and ‘phantom aeroplanes’ – long before there were more than a handful of either.

When the history of UFOs is considered, it becomes increasingly obvious that, despite all the current talk of ‘crashed UFOs’ and ‘nuts and bolts’ craft, we are not studying any external physical objects at all, but the reports of these anomalies and the ideas which surround them. In short, we are studying the perception and belief systems of the individuals and societies in which these events take place. It’s a mammoth task which has unfortunately been shunned by the scientific

establishment, who regard the whole subject area as 'lunatic fringe' and don't wish to become involved with it. There are exceptions, as we shall see, but generally this is the case.

So how is the subject researched and investigated? Science may have shunned UFOs, but since 1947 there has been a growing number of people who have dedicated their lives to the exploration of the UFO enigma. It is these people, of whom we are part, who comprise the UFO subculture which is devoted to investigations, research and interpretation of UFO and UFO-related phenomena. They are just as much, if not more, a part of the phenomenon as the witnesses and are no less important; yet in most studies of the UFO subject they are ignored altogether or treated as objective, impartial observers and recorders of the anomalies they study.

Even with this body of enthusiastic, hard-working (and unpaid) people working worldwide for forty years, we are still no nearer an answer. True, there are now thousands of well-documented case files on individual UFO sightings, but very little of any use has been learned. People are still reporting bizarre experiences which defy logical explanation. Of course, many UFOs which the witness has perceived to have been a 'flying saucer' or whatever have been positively identified as an aeroplane or bright star. This tells us nothing about *why* the witness thought what he or she did, and invariably the witnesses themselves will not accept a prosaic explanation. Equally, the 'high-strangeness' cases of abduction and contact have defied explanation as the case reports continue to pile up. The 95:5 per cent explained: unexplained ratio mentioned earlier is meaningless when we are dealing with what people believe about UFOs.

Even in the instances in which 'novel' natural phenomena have been found to be responsible for UFO reports, as in ball lightning, earthquake lights and other similar phenomena on the verge of scientific acceptance, we are still left with a body of belief and experiences which does not represent the stimulus even when it can be isolated thus. Recently the mystery of the 'cornfield circles' which appear in their dozens every year in the south of England has been identified as being caused by mini-whirlwinds. This may or may not be the case, but it has not dissuaded the press and large numbers of people from insisting that they are caused by 'flying saucers'. As we shall see

elsewhere, an explanation, no matter how valid, does not affect entrenched belief systems.

The involvement of the UFO investigators is both highly relevant and questionable. Far from being the dispassionate and objective observers they imagine themselves to be, they are part of the phenomenon itself. Their beliefs and prejudices become entangled with those of the witnesses and the subsequent compilation of reports, hypotheses and speculation which follow accordingly. That this is the case is indisputable, and when dealing with belief and reported unknown events, care and discretion are required. As quantum theory has taught us in the study of particle physics, the investigator all too often becomes part of the investigation. This analogy and the 'investigator effect' seem particularly relevant in matters of belief and perception.

This situation is carried further by the authors who popularize the UFO subject, who are often writing about experiences after they have been filtered through the recollections and interpretations of the witnesses, through one or more investigators and finally through them, the authors, into the literature. Sadly many UFO writers are guilty of devising or holding one particular theory and of then selectively fitting together the 'facts' to suit it. In this way we may be as guilty as the rest, so we recommend '*Caveat lector*' here – 'Let the reader beware.' A certain amount of discretion, and most importantly a sense of humour, is necessary when reading the UFO literature, and we are no less subject to belief and cultural conditioning than are the witnesses to the reported phenomena themselves. There is, however, no real substitute for actually talking to the prime witnesses themselves, and we have done this in as many cases as possible, drawing directly from our own files and those of our immediate colleagues.

Our approach to the UFO mystery is based upon the examination of human beliefs and the ideas which people hold about the nature of the phenomenon. People want certainties, and this way of looking at such a broad-based phenomenon does not provide them – if anything, it propagates doubt, for, as one interpretation after another is examined in depth, it collapses under the weight of its own importance and lack of evidence. We hope to examine rigorously the way in which belief in the various key components of the UFO mystery has risen and

fallen. Doubt is at the centre of our approach, and we are advocating scepticism in its purest form, in which we will accept no certain knowledge or final reduction of the UFO phenomenon, only how it manifests itself within the societies in which we examine it.

By this way of looking at the mystery, which may itself be considered to be another explanation (although we prefer to think of it more as a philosophy, a view rather than a dogma), we hope to open a Pandora's box of human experience which has been with us for millennia and is still tugging at our dreams, hopes and fears. We will illustrate the UFO phenomenon in all its bizarre forms and compare it with other aspects of anomalous human experience, hopefully breaking down the barriers which have kept ufology trapped within the intellectual straitjacket which the Extraterrestrial Hypothesis has imposed upon it.

Since 1947 the ETH has been dominant in ufological thinking, and so it will run like a thread through this book, being compared and juxtaposed with previous manifestations and interpretations of UFO-related phenomena. We hope to demonstrate that the UFO phenomenon is reflective of the culture and time in which it manifests, and we will try to track down many of the most popular explanations for UFOs to their origins, and to predict where the subject will go next. Above all we will demonstrate that, from whatever angle the UFO mystery has been interpreted, there remains a central and unfathomable mystery. We will suggest that at the heart of the UFO phenomenon there is nothing tangible to grasp – only people, their experiences, explanations, dreams and beliefs.

Before we start our explanation of belief in the UFO phenomenon, perhaps how we see the subject of ufology can be best expressed in this way. Go into a bookshop in any town and ask for a book on the subject of what people believe. The bookseller may ask if you mean religious belief. No, you say, a book about what people believe about strange things that have happened to them. The bookseller will direct you to a shelf filled with books dealing with ghosts, legends, fairies and rumours. If he is an especially perceptive bookseller, you will find books on UFOs there also. All these subject areas are experiences which people claim to have had and which others have faithfully recorded in the light of their culture and understanding.

These books contain a body of lore and experience. That

shelf will be labelled FOLKLORE, and with the study of ufology we think we are dealing with just this type of category. We predict that in the twenty-first century UFOs and related experiences will be regarded as folklore in the same way as we look upon ghosts and fairies today. Rather than using the term 'folklore' to denote a quasi-fictional body of narratives, we believe that behind the transmission of folklore of any kind there lies human experiences based upon a variety of external stimuli. Although the connection between stimuli and experience is usually taken at face value by witnesses and ufologists alike, it is not always that simple. This way of looking at the subject will not endear us to those who want these 'Phantoms of the Sky' to be from a distant galaxy, nor amongst those who see them just as dogmatically as 'Phantoms of the Mind' – purely mental phenomena. Our ultimate aim is not to categorize these phenomena and the people who experience them but to challenge accepted ideas and to provoke thought about the world in which we live, how we perceive it and how we act upon what we believe we perceive.

We are now living in the late twentieth century, in the Space Age, and a good way of interpreting the body of experiences categorized as 'UFO' is to look upon them as Space Age folklore. This point of view in no way lessens the individual UFO experience, but it does make it easier for the whole body of lore attributed to the subject to be examined in a way independent of ultimate proof or refutation.

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## Spearhead from Space?

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I looked up at the sky and the thought flashed through my mind – ‘I wonder if there is anything up there’, and to my amazement I saw it – just like that!

Eyewitness UFO report<sup>1</sup>

In the early days of the ‘Flying Saucer Age’, the United States Air Force used the slang term ‘flap’ (meaning a period of excitement and confusion) to describe a short but intense outbreak of UFO activity accompanied by media attention. Later the term ‘wave’ was coined to describe longer periods of time during which sightings are reported on a national or international basis. Since that time ufologists have expended much time and energy in attempts to study such localized outbreaks of sightings, which have been statistically correlated with such obscure influences as sunspots and near approaches of the moon and other planets. American researcher John Keel, after studying vast numbers of reports from a wave of sightings in 1966–7, postulated the existence of what he called the ‘Wednesday phenomenon’ which appeared to demonstrate that Wednesday evening topped the bill for UFO entertainment.

Unfortunately, such statistical juggling has done little to further our understanding of what lies behind periods of UFO mania, as it implicitly assumes that a visiting ‘alien’ technology must be the origin of the reports in the first instance. We would argue that periods of ‘intense UFO activity’ should be studied from a viewpoint which takes into account human perception as well as the social and psychological context in which the events take place. This approach to the study of the UFOs is rare amongst those who profess to be experts on the subject, due to the fact that most ufologists are very poorly read on topics other than those which reflect their personal belief system (which

often amounts to religious faith in the existence of visiting aliens). As there is no physical evidence which conclusively proves the existence of 'nuts-and-bolts' UFOs, we can only study the testimony of the people who claim to see UFOs, and the means by which society interprets and contextualizes these experiences.

Belief in the reality of exotic flying objects amongst UFO groups has meant that a template exists into which any number of disparate phenomena can now be fitted. However much UFO investigators attempt to behave in a neutral manner, their very presence helps to lend credence to the myth that a 'flying saucer' (a word synonymous with 'spaceship') has been observed. This situation is exacerbated by the media, who distort UFO sighting reports out of all recognition. This has helped to enforce a stereotype of the 'flying saucer' manned by 'little green men' so beloved of Fleet Street.

Beginning in August 1987, we had the opportunity of studying a 'wave' of UFO sightings as they engulfed the British Isles. We carefully monitored the influence of newspaper stories and watched the growth of a general atmosphere of public and media interest which continued unabated until the spring of 1988. The large number of UFO sightings reported early in 1988 (with several hundred observations in Yorkshire alone) may be regarded by some as a 'UFO wave', but this must be viewed alongside media publicity which coincided with a period of clear skies and prominent bright planets (Venus and Jupiter) during January and February 1988. Additionally, for several weeks prior to this wave of sightings newspapers throughout the world had prominently featured a story describing how a 'UFO' had attempted to hijack a family travelling across the Australian outback; the London *Daily Star* had followed this with a series of lurid articles dealing with UFO abductions, replete with illustrations straight from the pages of science fiction, accompanied by loaded phrases such as 'aliens', 'spaceships' and so on.

Adding to the concatenation of distorting influences was the presence of a whole host of low-flying aircraft and RAF/NATO exercises which could be argued created the 'wave of sightings' without the influence of any real exotic flying objects. Newspaper cuttings show that throughout August scores of people throughout the British Isles believed that they had seen UFOs. For example, on 2 August 1987 the new *Skyship 600*

dirigible airship belonging to Airship Industries in Bedford embarked on a night-flying exercise over Northamptonshire. This produced an outbreak of UFO reports in Northampton and Kettering which described a weird 'cigar-shaped object with flashing lights flying at very low altitude'. However, as a spokesman for Airship Industries told the press soon afterwards, '[The *Skyship*] has been widely reported as being a UFO ... [but] reports of the craft flying at treetop level are wrong, as the craft never dropped below 2,000 feet.'<sup>2</sup>

A fine example of a UFO folklore in the making can be found in the events of the evening of Wednesday 9 December 1987, when over 300 witnesses in the Midlands counties of Nottinghamshire and Humberside saw a spectacular formation of coloured lights 'as big as a football field'.<sup>3</sup> This UFO appeared to move slowly through the sky in an easterly direction, accompanied by a deep humming sound. Police in Hull were inundated with phonecalls describing the UFO, which one observer described as a 250-foot-long triangular object, covered in hundreds of red and white lights and making a roaring noise. Newspaper headlines screamed 'MYSTERY SKY SIGHT REMAINS A MYSTERY' (*Hull Daily Mail*) and 'RIDDLE OF HUGE UFO' (*Daily Mirror*). Despite the massive media hype which featured unfounded statements about 'spaceships' and official 'cover-ups', our investigation team solved the mystery just over a week after the sightings took place. RAF Binbrook in Lincolnshire told investigators Philip Mantle and Gary Anthony that they '... were satisfied that the reports concerned two USAF KC 135 tanker aircraft each with up to seven F-111 aircraft in trail; these aircraft were from Mildenhall (Suffolk) and were operating with Midland Radar'.<sup>3</sup>

This explanation was confirmed one month later by the Ministry of Defence in London. However, shortly afterwards, when Jenny Randles was interviewed by Radio Nottingham, the presenter refused to accept the refuelling exercise as the explanation for the sightings in Nottinghamshire! Similarly, many of the witnesses in Humberside would not believe that they had seen refuelling aircraft; they were convinced they had seen a huge UFO. One lady told investigators that 'It couldn't have been aircraft because I saw one join onto the other'<sup>3</sup> Some UFO magazines are still featuring sightings of these aircraft as genuine UFOs, as the will to believe is stronger than the actual truth of what occurred. It should now become obvious how the

UFO folklore is created, fuelled and transmitted in popular culture.

By the middle of August 1987, the London newspapers had begun to feature a tongue-in-cheek story connecting the 'Harmonic Convergence' (a planetary alignment due to take place on 17 August) with a Hopi Indian prophecy that the world would end on that date. Dr Jose Arguelles predicted that 'a wave of UFO sightings and a great, unprecedented outpouring of extra-terrestrial intelligence' would accompany our imminent demise.<sup>4</sup> The world did not end with the Harmonic Convergence, or you would not be reading this, but the 'wave of UFO sightings' certainly did occur on cue. In Derby, late on the evening of Sunday 16 August 1987, over thirty witnesses reported having seen a brilliantly lit UFO pass overhead. One group of witnesses, who were night fishing on the River Derwent at the time, watched a row of peculiar lights manœuvring at low level in the direction of Chaddesden estate; one of them took several photographs, none of which showed the UFO on development. In the estate itself, there were reports of people rushing into the street screaming as the UFO – said to be 'as big as a car'<sup>2</sup> – hovered above them. This object first appeared oval in shape but, according to two independent groups of witnesses, seemed to change before it disappeared. Mrs Sandra Bryan described how, after watching the oval object it appeared to change into an arrow-shape, 'as if an arrow came out of it.'<sup>2</sup> After manœuvring at low level, the object disappeared north-east, towards Spondon.

It was shortly before eleven o'clock that night that Mr and Mrs Boon, leaving Derby on the A608 at Breadsall Hilltop, came face to face with this Phantom of the Sky: '... all at once I saw this thing in the sky which I thought was a plane,' Mrs Boon told us. 'I said, "That plane's getting very low", and I then said, "Oh my God, it isn't a plane." My husband then looked at it (he was driving), and we then thought that it must be a UFO. It was massive and the lights were brilliant, and it hovered ... all I saw at first were these very brilliant lights either side of it and a red glow underneath. Then as it hovered and moved I saw more lights, looking like big cabins all lit up like a double-decker bus in the sky. At one point it looked like it had a metal thing on top, but the lights were so bright that there was no definite outline ...'<sup>2</sup>

This weird object hung there in 'the beautiful clear sky', as if

frozen in time and space, appearing to watch their movements as the car passed within an apparent hundred feet of the object. 'It was lit up all the way round, and there's no plane lit up like that. If it was a plane, it would have crashed anyway, because it was too low to come into anywhere – it was going towards a built-up area and it was so low it would have hit the cathedral.'<sup>2</sup>

A large unidentified flying object wanders across the night sky of a major city. The civil aviation authority and police (as we later discovered) were unaware of its presence or its movements and were apparently unconcerned about the possible hazard posed by its wanderings at such low altitude over a densely populated suburb. What of the Ministry of Defence in London? Shouldn't they be interested?

'You mention that you are concerned that alien or unidentified craft seem to be able to pass undetected through the UK Air Defence Region,' Clive Neville of AS2 (Air Ministry, Whitehall) reassured us in a letter of March 1988. 'I must point out that the UK Air Defence Region is extremely well protected and it is highly unlikely that an intruder of conventional origin would be able to travel to the UK without being spotted. I would suggest instead that many "alien" craft could in fact be either UK military aircraft, civil aircraft, meteorological balloons and a host of uncontentious objects ...'<sup>2</sup>

A further clue towards the explanation for these sightings came in a report that noted the presence of 'unusual atmospheric conditions' during the weekend of 15–16 August. Nottingham Weather Centre told us of the existence of 'a marked temperature discontinuity in the middle atmosphere, this being a rapid rise of temperature over a short vertical distance'. Such temperature inversions '... result in the anomalous propagation of energy such as light waves ... and [this] outlines our objective view into what caused the sightings'.<sup>2</sup> Did the temperature inversion produce a mirage of some distant light source or aircraft, which gave the witnesses the impression they had seen a large object at low altitude? Even if this were the case, it does not effect the witnesses' experience. They 'saw' neither mirage nor aeroplane – they believe they saw a UFO and continue to believe that today.

Lights observed at night can be very deceptive in terms of estimated distance from the observer, particularly on nights when there is good visibility. Under unusual weather conditions, aircraft at a distance away may appear to be very close and of huge

size, the strangeness being enhanced if no noise is heard. Combined with a 'will to believe in UFOs' on the part of many observers, the ideal conditions for misperception are apparent behind many 'UFO flaps'.

A prime example of a misperception of a celestial object took place after midnight on Saturday 2 January 1988, when, according to the *London Evening Standard*, 'A total of eight startled police officers watched a grey-green, pink and electric blue object as it span, banked and hovered' above Kensington in London.<sup>4</sup> A 16-year-old girl had mounted a telescope on the doorstep of the family home after spotting a light in the sky, and soon called in the local police as additional witnesses. A Scotland Yard spokesman said later: 'Police officers saw an unidentified flying object after a call from a member of the public. We are unable to say what it was.'<sup>5</sup> This story made headlines in most of the national newspapers, even appearing on the BBC six o'clock television news as a bona fide UFO report, and became the genesis of a period of renewed media interest in the UFO phenomenon which continued until the end of February.

However, despite the media hype, rapid investigation of the Kensington 'UFO' sighting by Mike Wootten, an investigator with the British UFO Research Association (BUFORA), soon established that what had been observed was nothing more unusual than the planet Jupiter! The telescope used had been out of its box only once before and was found to have significant lens distortions. A check with BUFORA's computerized astronomy programme left no doubt that the bright planet Jupiter was in exactly the same position in the sky in which the 'UFO' appeared; the final blow came when the 'UFO' appeared again in the same place the next clear night that came along! The media, however, were interested only in a humorous New Year story; hence the headlines read, 'ELLO ELLO, THAT'S A UFO.'

As the public is largely ignorant of astronomy and perceptual psychology, this, combined with an awareness that others have recently reported UFOs, leads many people to make a false interpretation of a stimulus which would normally be ignored. Why else would otherwise sensible observers interpret a bright white light which remains stationary in the sky for several hours as anything other than a bright star or planet? This conclusion appears logical to us, but sociologists such as Dr Phillis Fox would point out that, 'The process by which people arrive at

beliefs about the nature of UFOs is similar to the process of rumour transmission.<sup>6</sup>

The rumour was accentuated on Monday 8 February 1988, when the national press reported another sighting, this time from Sheffield in South Yorkshire. 'MAY THE FORCE BE WITH YOU,' headlined the *Daily Mirror*, in a story describing a sighting at Ecclesfield village, in which two police officers spotted 'A V-shaped machine hovering just yards away, [with] a row of flashing red lights along its side which lit up the entire area'. Another report told of how, 'A few hundred yards away outside the police-station [a police constable] saw the spaceship hover for about 30 seconds before flying off towards Grenoside ... officers in the control room laughed in disbelief until they too heard the whirring noises that accompanied the ship.'<sup>7</sup> Typically, the premature release of this story to the media resulted in a flood of telephone calls to Ecclesfield police station – TV news, Fleet Street, UFO societies and so on. Wisely, the force refused to comment further, but almost immediately local UFO-enthusiasts were quoted in the press to the effect that, 'We are checking aircraft and satellite movements today but from what we can gather there's no way this could have been anything else but a spaceship.'<sup>7</sup>

However, a different interpretation was given by another observer, Norman Athey, who with two others saw the 'UFO' from a hill commanding a good view over Ecclesfield towards Rotherham in the east. He described to us how he '... first saw it a long way off over the direction of Kimberworth Hill-top, and from there it came directly towards us flying very low until it was directly overhead. It passed overhead, which was when I was able to see it was an aeroplane – its hazard flashing lights giving a peculiar effect as they reflected off the fuselage and the wings.' He adds that, 'Because this, at first strange-looking flying machine proved to be an aeroplane ... it was only on seeing the newspaper articles, and particularly the direction of the flight-path described there, that we decided it was the same object we had seen. Its flightpath should have put it over the police station and probably over Wharncliffe.'<sup>8</sup>

Our investigations during the UFO wave of 1987–8 left us in little doubt that a large percentage of the reports related to misidentifications of aircraft, both military and civilian. In January 1989 a Ministry of Defence spokesman stated that,

'Our low flying is done in rural areas, especially in Scotland and Wales but obviously we need flight corridors to get to those places ... we do carry out training sorties over towns but we do not allow our pilots to fly below 200 feet ... it is impossible for them to avoid towns although we do not fly over major cities.'<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, as the military are often reluctant to release information relating to night-flying exercises (indeed, it often serves their purposes far better to say nothing), they are unwittingly feeding the growing UFO folklore. Reports such as the Ecclesfield sighting are eagerly swallowed by the media and by the UFO believers as clear evidence of UFOs regularly intruding into British airspace.

The sightings of 2 February 1988 were the first of a large number of UFO reports which were later to emanate from the north of England, and South Yorkshire in particular. On the evening of Wednesday 20 April 1988 scores of people in Barnsley and surrounding towns observed a strange oblong object carrying white, red and green lights, as well as two brilliant 'searchlights'. This UFO was first sighted in the area of Hoyland and Wombwell in an area of electricity pylons, reservoirs and woodland. One of the most interesting accounts was that of Linda Sage, who saw the strange flying object whilst returning home to the village of Broomhill along an isolated country road at 9.45 pm. She told us that her daughter first drew her attention to the UFO as it approached them from the direction of Barnsley.

'As we got nearer to it, we could see it much plainer. It was not a plane, as there was no noise coming from it at all. It had red, green and white lights flashing and as it got right to us it hovered round us and came lower down. It then turned all its lights out and then put two big white spotlights on my daughter and myself. My daughter became frightened, and I said to her just keep walking as we have to get home. When we started to walk again these big white lights went out, and the small red, green and white lights came on again. It then went towards Wombwell, and we ran towards home very frightened.'

Mrs Sage described the classic time disorientation (known in UFO jargon as 'the Oz factor') when she mentioned that, 'Everything seemed to go quiet when it came over. There wasn't a car passed or anything while it was coming low down and looking at us ...'

Shortly after this observation a group of men leaving work at a glass factory in Monk Bretton, a short distance away, apparently saw the same object hovering slightly with its coloured lights and familiar bright searchlight. Harry Reynolds, one of the workmen, told us: 'I remember saying "If he's going to Manchester he'll never make it, he's too low" ... then for some reason I can't explain we stopped walking and stared in astonishment, because whatever we saw it certainly was not moving. It didn't make a sound, but then it started to move. It moved in a straight line with a series of thrusting movements, almost like a dragon-fly, and disappeared in a fast, darting movement – still no sound!'<sup>8</sup>

Could aircraft again be responsible for these sightings? It seems likely that anything which flies around so blatantly displaying red, green and white lights must be a conventional aircraft of some description. The light configurations described are similar to the standard ICAO (International Civil Aircraft Organization) lights used for night flying, which include rotating red beacons and flashing high-intensity strobes which can give a very strong flash or beam effect when seen under certain circumstances. However, our investigations failed to trace any such aircraft, and we were informed by the AS2 in Whitehall that, 'We are not aware of any flying operations in the area ... although [we] cannot discount the possibility that there may have been the odd individual training sortie here and there.'<sup>8</sup> However, what aircraft, civilian or military, is capable of hovering motionless for extended periods of time and then move off, darting around the sky like a dragon-fly without making any audible engine noise? What aircraft is capable of swooping low and projecting bright spotlights onto startled observers on the ground?

In May 1988 another 'flap' of sighting reports took place in the Midlands, where the *Staffordshire Newsletter* featured the stories of local people who had seen strange lighted triangular objects in the night sky. These reports generated so much interest that the MP for Stafford, Bill Cash, put out a request for witnesses to send details of their sightings directly to him, so that he could '... put the strange sightings into the Ministry of Defence for an official investigation'.<sup>8</sup> The Staffordshire witnesses emphasized that these objects were 'completely silent' and performed manoeuvres impossible for conventional aircraft.

For example, a group of five friends in the Fernwood area of Stafford gave a description similar in some respects to the reports from 20 April in the Barnsley area of South Yorkshire.

'We were standing in the garden at 10 pm [on the night of 16 May 1988],' said Eileen Ballard, 'when two spotlights came through the sky towards us so that we couldn't see anything else ... they banked over and went into side by side formation, one above the other, and flew slowly across the sky without any noise at all ... they flew very close together and were triangular in shape, too high for microlite aircraft and too low for normal aircraft. There were a lot of lights underneath, red and green around the edge, and within that lots of others.'<sup>8</sup>

Once again these 'UFOs' turned out to be conventional aircraft – in this case the culprits were 'two VC-10s of 101 squadron from RAF Brize Norton' who were taking part in an 'in-flight refuelling exercise' over the West Midlands at 10 pm on 16 May. One witness who was able to confirm this explanation was John Teasdale, an aircraft-enthusiast, who saw the 'UFO' himself whilst driving home with his wife from Stafford to Burton-on-Trent that night: 'We were completely baffled until the lights (quite complex but in two clusters) were immediately overhead ... [then] I suddenly realized I was watching two VC-10s, one immediately behind the other; the lights of the second aircraft illuminated the four tail-mounted jets of the first and the sound of jet engines could be heard for a brief moment.' Although an experienced observer of aircraft Mr Teasdale had never before seen such an unusual display of lights in the night sky, and adds that, 'It is not difficult to understand why other people had written to the newspapers, and I can appreciate the mystery that ensued.'<sup>8</sup>

This underlines the fact that it is very difficult for people with little or no experience of observing aircraft at night to judge height and distance of lights in the sky. In the Staffordshire and South Yorkshire examples above, aircraft flying very high and slowly were misinterpreted by witnesses as low-level, silent objects which even appeared to hover. In the case of such misperception, how can any UFO report be taken at face value?

In other cases our detective work has led us to suspect that some kind of low-flying, short-ranged reconnaissance aircraft (known to experts as an RPV – a 'Remotely Piloted Vehicle') could be responsible for some of these sightings. Remote-

controlled drones such as these are now used widely by the military in great secrecy; indeed, a United States Army report of 1983 predicted that in the near future, 'Remote-controlled flying saucers and robot-guided vehicles will be used on battlefields.'<sup>8</sup> RPVs are also designed by businesses such as Dragon Models, based in Wrexham, North Wales, who produce 25-foot-long model aircraft fitted with cameras which are used by local councils, the police and the Ministry of Defence.

One UFO report which reached us during the current wave of activity appears to confirm suspicions that RPVs may lie behind a number of UFO reports. At 8.30 pm on 20 April 1988, over one hour before the outbreak of UFO sightings in the Barnsley area, two witnesses walking in an area of farmland at Staincross, to the north-east of the town, observed a large 'triangular-shaped' flying object with coloured lights which appeared to be operated by a man in a car who used an aerial or control box to guide it in flight. At the same time, a fleet of four or five cars appeared on the lane and 'looked as if they were chasing this object'; the cars appeared to have spotlights attached which the occupants were using 'to search the fields'. These cars disappeared at high speed in the distance, apparently in pursuit of the 'flying triangle', the man with the 'aerial' having departed at the same time. It appears more than likely that the 'UFO' observed at Staincross – and perhaps later in the evening over the outskirts of Barnsley – was a remotely controlled flying object. Who were the operators, what was the purpose of the exercise, and why did it apparently take place in secrecy?

The description of the flying object as triangular may perhaps provide another interesting clue, as for over a decade a strange diamond or triangular object has plagued Britain. Waves of sightings of triangular-shaped UFOs are a relatively new development in both the United States and Britain, which may indicate that real deltoid aircraft are being observed – be they military or 'alien' in origin.<sup>9</sup>

There have been many reports in the East Midlands of what is often called the 'Silent Vulcan', owing to its shape, enormous bulk, metallic-looking construction and amazing silent flight. A large percentage of the UFO sightings reported during the UFO wave of 1987–8 describe large triangular-shaped flying objects carrying rows of coloured lights. The lack of sound is probably the most distinctive feature of these sightings; when

sound is detected, it is usually only when the witness is within close proximity to the flying object. The noise is then usually described as a soft humming or buzzing, 'like a swarm of bees' or like an electric motor.

A classic sighting describing this kind of UFO took place on 22 September 1987, near Abbots Bromley in Staffordshire. One of the witnesses, 22-year-old Dominic Goodwin, gave the following vivid account to investigator Clive Potter:

My family and I were driving back from Walsall illuminations and had just passed through Baggots Wood at Abbots Bromley when my father shouted 'What on earth is that? When I looked up I saw the underneath of what seemed to be a triangular-shaped craft. The craft was moving very slowly, almost stationary. I wound down my window and there was no noise at all. The craft slowly banked over to one side and I caught a glimpse of the top of the craft, it was slightly raised on one side. The underneath of the craft had lights which were pulsating in sequence and down the middle of the undercarriage was a red cross-shape, very dimly lit; on each point of the craft were like large strobe lights. The craft moved away slowly towards Abbots Bromley; it then stopped over the woods and all I could see was a long thin red stripe in the sky directly over the woods. I would like to state that never in my life have I ever seen such colours as I did on the craft; it was truly an unforgettable experience.<sup>8</sup>

Newspapers and aeronautical magazines have been speculating for some years about the existence of the previously 'top secret' Stealth aircraft. Rumours about the Lockheed F-19 have spread because, although the super-secret craft is supposed to have been under development since at least 1966 (and operational since 1977), no photographs of it were released until 1988. From what is known about Stealth, its function is primarily long-range incursions into enemy territory, flying low and fast beneath radar, and changing shape so that the wings merge into the fuselage, forming an elongated delta-shape. It is clear that ground observers who see an aircraft of this kind flying at night would perceive it as triangular-shaped. The engines are positioned deep inside the airframe to reduce noise and heat emission, explaining the curious lack of noise noted in some instances. The description of the object from Abbots Bromley above appears to be a classic description of the Stealth fighter –

particularly the side elevation described and sketched by the witness.

On 10 November 1988 the United States Air Force for the first time confirmed the existence of the F-19 Stealth fighter, officially designated the F-117A. According to Pentagon sources, pictures of the previously top-secret aircraft were being released because the USAF '... wants to operate the type from a wider range of bases and also during the day; previous flights have been made almost exclusively at night.'<sup>10</sup> The Pentagon revealed that the Stealth fighter first flew in June 1981 and has been operational since October 1983 with fifty-two of the aircraft now in existence. We believe it is possible that some of this large number have visited, or are based in, Britain, which plays an important part in NATO and the front-line defence of Europe. There have been persistent rumours that the Stealth fighter has been operating out of three main air-bases in England – Alconbury, Wetherford and RAF Binbrook in Lincolnshire.

*Pilot* magazine reported in April 1986 that the F-19 had been developed from an earlier Lockheed design known as XST (Experimental Stealth Technology) and that it was capable of flying up to speeds of 1,500 mph. The shape of the aircraft has been deliberately chosen to make it almost invisible to enemy radar, aided by a 'chameleon' skin coating – known as RAM (Radar Absorbing Material), a material manufactured in the UK which, under computer control, enables its surface colour to adapt to the surrounding terrain. The F-19 is known to have been responsible for a Californian UFO report in 1975, when a radar unit attached to Edwards Air Force Base tracked a target travelling at 460 miles per hour which vanished in one sweep from the radar screen. The Stealth had, in fact, switched to its 'invisible mode' shortly after it appeared on screen. William Spaulding notes that, 'Officially [the report] was logged as "unidentified" – one part of the USAF seeing no need for another to know what it was doing. The foundations of the UFO myth were made a little stronger – and the secret aircraft remained secret.'<sup>11</sup>

Twelve days after the release of the first picture of the Stealth fighter, on Tuesday 22 November 1988, the Northrop B-2 Advanced Technology Bomber was rolled out onto the tarmac at USAF's Plant 42 at Palmdale, California. Newspaper reports

have described how the B-2 has flown 'thousands of miles in test-flights', including several above Palmdale which were followed by a flood of reports from people 'convinced they had seen a UFO'.<sup>8</sup>

Dr Jacques Vallee has noted that, '... there are now various types of silent aircraft that can go through manoeuvres that are very similar to UFO behaviour. If equipped with appropriate lights, as the Vietnam-type helicopters are, they would closely duplicate what UFO witnesses have reported ...'.<sup>12</sup> How many other classic UFO sightings may in fact be describing secret military technology – Stealth aircraft, Remotely Piloted Vehicles and unusual aerofoil configurations? The advantage provided by the widespread will to believe in UFOs on the part of the public may therefore provide the perfect cover required for the clandestine testing of military hardware in unrestricted areas.

Any detailed, unprejudiced investigation of UFO waves as they occur on the ground clearly demonstrates that a wide range of distorting influences is at work, continually affecting witness perception. While there is no evidence that any observation describes a spearhead from space, there is clearly much of interest to be discovered when we ask why modern society habitually associates all UFO sightings – whatever their explanation – with visiting aliens. In the period before 1947, people also saw aerial phenomena regularly, but their interpretations of these phenomena were moulded by different cultural influences. It is to the period before the invention of the term 'flying saucer' that we must therefore now turn.

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## Wings over the World

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... I heard a whirring noise overhead, and when I looked up I saw that the fields round were lit up by a bright light. I was startled and wondered whatever it could be. Then I saw that the light came from a long, dark object which was travelling swiftly overhead. It was low down – only a little way above the trees – so I could see it plainly. It seemed to be 80 or 100 feet long, and I could distinguish two men on a kind of hanging platform below. The searchlight lit up the road, the farm buildings, the trees and everything it touched, so that it was like day. I could even read some printing on some bills on the wall.

Witness Fred Harrison  
quoted in the *Daily Express* (London), 14 May 1909<sup>1</sup>

Although the terms ‘flying saucer’ and ‘UFO’ originated in the period immediately following the end of the Second World War, waves of observations of strange aerial phenomena can be traced back to the beginnings of recorded history. However, it was not until the 1890s, when Americans reportedly saw ‘phantom airships’ in the sky, that the role of the news media in the development of UFO belief systems took on its present importance. Despite the fantastic stories which appeared in American newspapers in 1896–7, aviation history has no record of any airship or heavier-than-air flying machine in existence at that time in North America.

Between November 1896, when the first sighting of an ‘airship’ was reported from Sacramento, California, and the summer of 1897, newspapers in almost every Midwest state carried daily stories chronicling the odyssey of the strange flying object. The wave of airship hysteria appears to have spread from newspaper to newspaper via telegraph-operators, giving the impression when the accounts are read today that the mythical craft was moving slowly eastwards across the United States.<sup>2</sup>

At the height of the wave appeared a host of peculiar stories and rumours, similar in many respects to the most bizarre UFO reports today; these were, however, a mixture of hoaxes, misidentifications of bright stars and planets, and newspaper inventions. Many people came forward with fantastic stories of seeing the landed airship, speaking to its occupants and even taking rides in it; for instance, a Pennsylvania man claimed that the airship's pilots had taken him on a flight to Mount Washington, but he didn't remember anything 'because he had been drinking'.

Were the 1896–7 airship sightings a UFO wave? The answer appears to be that the airship craze has similarities to current UFO beliefs in the means by which the rumour was transmitted. According to folklorist Eddie Bullard, belief in such phenomena requires '... a general [acceptance] that flying machines were possible or that secret weapons may be tested or that UFOs exist – all waves have grown out of a milieu of popular belief.'<sup>2</sup> Others have compared the details in the airship stories with the popular Victorian fantasy novels of Jules Verne and H G Wells, which were read widely in that period and which contained depictions of airships of an advanced type designed by 'secret inventors' and mad scientists.

In the 1960s, when the airship 'waves' were rediscovered by American ufologists, retired railroad telegraph-operators came forward to say that the 1897 sightings had been part of a hoax invented by bored telegraph men in Iowa, who had spread fantastic accounts of the airship's movements from one state to the other by means of the telegraph system. Other reports were the result of newspaper hoaxes.

The most successful hoax of this kind came from Yates Center, Kansas, where rancher Alex Hamilton signed an affidavit to the effect that on the night of 19 April 1897 he, with two others, saw a cigar-shaped airship with an 'immense searchlight' hovering above a 'cowlot' on his property. This fantastic object contained what Hamilton described as 'six of the strangest beings I ever saw'<sup>3</sup>, who lassoed a calf which was carried away by the craft and was subsequently found butchered on a neighbouring ranch. Hamilton had impressive credentials (once being a member of the House of Representatives for his state) and persuaded ten of his friends, all town officials of Leroy and Yates Center, to sign an affidavit attesting to his honesty.

In the 1970s, when ufologist Jerome Clark traced some of Hamilton's surviving relatives and associates, he was surprised to discover that it was common knowledge in the local area that the airship story had been concocted by Hamilton and the editor of the local newspaper, 'following a Saturday afternoon pow-wow'. They ran the local Liar's Club, and Clark was told that, 'They would get together once in a while to see which one could tell the biggest story they'd concocted since the last meeting. The club soon broke up after the "airship and cow" story. I guess that one topped them all.'<sup>3</sup>

The Leroy calfnapping airship yarn has passed into modern UFO folklore, with the truth of the original tale now in effect irrelevant, as the story has been so frequently published as a factual account that many thousands of people worldwide continue to believe it to be true. This demonstrates how hoaxes are as much a part of belief in the UFO phenomenon as the 'real' cases. Historical UFO classics such as the Alexander Hamilton story have been taken at face value by ufologists who have regarded them as evidence that the Earth was visited by aliens prior to the Second World War who cunningly adapted themselves in order to stay one jump ahead of contemporary human technology – hence 'phantom' balloons and airships were sighted in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, mystery aeroplanes in the 1920s and thirties.

The naïvety of the above hypothesis is exposed when the eyewitness accounts are examined in detail, for it becomes obvious that the terms 'airship', 'aeroplane' and more recently 'flying saucer' function as frames of reference which are used to interpret an ambiguous light or object in the sky. For instance, before the outbreak of the First World War, many British people began to report bright stars and balloons as the headlight of one of Count Zeppelin's airships on a reconnaissance mission. The early years of the twentieth century saw an escalation of tension between the two great European powers Britain and Germany, and by the year 1909 the deployment of battleships combined with British anxiety over the capabilities of the Zeppelin airship fleet to become the primary manifestation of psychological tension. This situation led towards one of the bloodiest conflicts in human history and provided a background against which psychological fears could manifest in the form of strange stories of phantom German airships and rumours about thousands of

German spies living in Britain disguised as waiters. Beliefs such as these are mirrored today by the beliefs of UFO buffs who accept as fact the presence of aliens living secretly among us.

Despite the unlikelihood of German airships being capable of making night-flights across the English Channel (only three experimental Zeppelins were operational in 1909), by the winter of 1908–9 reports began to emanate from the eastern coastline of England describing the nocturnal appearances of torpedo-shaped flying objects complete with 'searchlights' and engine noises. The 'scare' began with a sighting made by a police constable who reported seeing an airship flying over the town of Peterborough near Cambridge in the early hours of the morning of 23 March 1909. PC Kettle heard 'the steady buzz of a high-powered engine' and on looking into the sky saw '... a powerful light, which I should judge to have been some 1200 feet above the ground. I also saw a dark body, oblong and narrow in shape, outlined against the stars ... it was travelling at a tremendous pace, and as I watched, the rattle of the engines gradually grew fainter ...'<sup>4</sup>

PC Kettle's sighting was typical of many reported by residents of the eastern counties which began to appear in the columns of London newspapers during the spring of 1909. In all, several hundred people reported sightings of a dark, cigar-shaped object carrying a searchlight and sometimes accompanied by the sound of machinery. One person even claimed he had discovered part of the 'airship' which had apparently fallen onto a beach near his home at Clacton-upon-Sea, Essex. Egerton Free, a London businessman, told the *Evening News* how he had observed 'a long, dark torpedo-shaped flying object'<sup>5</sup> on the evening of 7 May, and had discovered the following morning a strange oval-shaped metal and rubber object with the German words 'Muller Fabrik Bremen' painted upon the sides. The discovery of this 'airship fender' confirmed to many the existence of a real German airship spying upon Britain. On 19 May the War Office impounded the object for examination, and it was soon found to be a buoy used by British warships for target practice.

By this time, however, a stranger incident had been reported by Mr Free, who stated that, 'About 2 o'clock on May 16 two foreigners appeared near my house and examined my private steps to the seashore and the vicinity where my wife found the

steel and indiarubber object with the German name. The men went to the back of the house where for some time I kept the article. The men hovered about my house persistently for five hours, and when the servant girl set out for church she heard them conversing in a foreign tongue. Finally, they came up to her, one on each side, and one of the men spoke to her in a strange language.<sup>5</sup>

The above story can be compared to modern UFO folklore, in respect of the discovery of 'physical evidence' following a sighting, stories of evidence concealed by the authorities and the later involvement of the sinister 'Men in Black' (MIB). There is little doubt that the 'foreigners' in the 1909 story were meant to be Germans, as at that time Britain was in the grips of a 'spy scare'. At the same time as the airship sightings, there were widespread fears of a German 'fifth column' working to undermine British security; for instance, on 18 May 1909, the Secretary of State for War was asked in Parliament whether '... he knew anything about the 66,000 trained German soldiers in England, or about the 50,300 strands of Mauser rifles and 7,500,000 Mauser cartridges stored in a cellar within a quarter of a mile of Charing Cross'.<sup>6</sup> Another newspaper correspondent described how he had clearly heard the 'sounds of what I judged to be subterranean excavations while passing over the shallows to the northwest of the Netherlands coast' – implying that the Germans were drilling an invasion tunnel below the North Sea!<sup>6</sup>

The most sensational story of the 1909 scare was that given to the *London Star* by two gentlemen named C. Verney-Graham and W. Bond, who told, 'with every evidence of conviction', how they were returning from Teddington to Richmond in south-west London on the evening of 13 May 1909 and had just crossed onto Ham Common at 11.10 pm when, according to Mr Graham,

... we were near the middle of the common when I suddenly heard a soft buzzing noise behind me. Then suddenly I saw it creeping along the surface of the grass ... it looked like a collection of big cigar-boxes with the ends out. There were two men on the aeroplane. The first man, who was near the forepart, seemed to be in a sort of steelwire cage and had a row of handles in front of him, like the handles of a beer-engine, only thinner. The moment they saw us the first man, who was clean-shaven and looked like a Yankee turned the searchlight right round on us, and there he was

doing this over and over again, blinding us with the glare, evidently so that we should not see too much of the shape of the airship. The second man, who stood in the middle of the airship, looked like a German, and was smoking a calabash pipe. They were on the ground quite close to us, and I went up to them. The German gentleman had a cap and a beard and a map in front of him. It was fastened on a board and there were red discs on it, as though they had been stuck in the map with pins.<sup>7</sup>

The above account is written in a style very similar to the many American newspaper stories during the 1897 airship scare, and it is easy to appreciate how ufologists have taken such yarns at face value as historical 'close encounters'. An examination of the context in which the Ham Common account appeared – the columns of a highly sceptical London newspaper – and the numerous clues hidden within the text expose it as a journalistic hoax perpetrated to throw scorn upon the promoters of the airship 'scare'.

Although the 1909 'scare' came at a period before many people in Britain took seriously any threat of invasion from the air, four years later the situation had changed, with Germany's aerial fleet now being perceived as a real threat from the highest Government circles down to the man in the street. The origins of the subsequent 1913 airship scare – a wave of hysteria inspired mainly by the brilliance of the planet Venus in February of that year – provide early evidence of the manipulation of belief in ambiguous aerial phenomena for political and social ends.

In the autumn of 1912 war clouds were seen to be gathering over Europe. Germany had supremacy in the air, with the development of airships for bombing-raids causing much concern in official circles. A new dimension of warfare was emerging in which Britain was woefully lacking, as the Zeppelin fleet meant that war could now be brought to the civilian population hundreds of miles from the front line. It was in this climate of suspicion that the incident which triggered the 1913 airship scare took place.

On the morning of 14 October 1912 it was widely reported in the British press that the new Zeppelin L1 had landed in Friedrichshafen in Germany after completing a successful thirty-hour endurance flight. That very evening an unidentified flying object was seen and heard above the strategic naval

dockyard at Sheerness in Kent. This object was said not to be from the nearby Eastchurch headquarters of the naval wing of the Royal Flying Corps.<sup>6</sup> Rumours spread rapidly that a German airship was responsible for this incident, causing considerable public and parliamentary alarm, which could have led to the premature outbreak of world war.

One month after the alleged German overflight, on 18 November 1912, the MP for Brentford, Mr Joynston-Hicks, asked the Secretary of State for War in the House of Commons '... whether he can give any information as to a Zeppelin dirigible passing over Sheerness on the night of 14th October'.<sup>8</sup> In a reply of 21 November, Winston Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, wrote: 'I caused enquiries to be made and have ascertained that an unknown aircraft was heard over Sheerness about 7 pm on the evening of 14th October. Flares were lighted at Eastchurch, but the aircraft did not make a landing. There is nothing in the evidence to indicate the nationality of the aircraft.'<sup>8</sup> When questioned further as to whether he [knew] 'where our own airships were on that night', Churchill replied, 'I know it was not one of our airships.'<sup>8</sup>

The consternation and alarm which followed these revelations led Count Zeppelin himself to send a telegram to the editor of the *Daily Mail* to the effect that, 'None of my airships approached the English coast on the night of October 14th'.<sup>8</sup>

Granville Oldroyd, who has spent many years investigating the Sheerness airship mystery, has noted the odd fact that official enquiries into the incident did not commence until several weeks afterwards, when the Admiralty instructed the captain of Eastchurch Torpedo School to make 'private enquiries' into the sightings. If a German airship was actually believed to be involved, this would have amounted to an act of war – so why was such a low-key investigation requested? Lieutenant Murray Sueter's report reached Churchill on 15 November 1912 and was subsequently deliberately leaked to the MP, Joynston-Hicks, who brought the mystery to the attention of the press and public. Oldroyd believes that the evidence leads to the conclusion that the Sheerness incident was fabricated by the authorities in order to warn the British public and alert them to the certainty of air raids in the war with Germany that was foreseen to break out shortly.

The facts are that the station log for Eastchurch naval air

station for a two-year period from March 1912 has been removed from Air Ministry files at the Public Record Office in London. It is therefore possible that it was the British aeronaut Claude Graham-White who was responsible for the flight over Sheerness. Graham-White ran the flying school at Hendon in London, where a night-flying exhibition involving illuminated aircraft took place in September 1912. The same aviator was a friend of the Prime Minister, Mr Asquith, and on 25 February 1913 – at the height of the subsequent airship scare – it was reported that he had been summoned to 10 Downing Street, and after an interview with the Prime Minister had left for the north of England. ‘Great secrecy shrouded his objective,’ speculated the newspapers, but it was concluded ‘... that [his trip] was to visit York and Selby, where the foreign airship has been sighted.’<sup>9</sup>

In the light of the above, Churchill’s statement that the UFO reported from Sheerness was ‘not one of our [Admiralty] airships’ makes sense. If the authorities were capable of fabricating aerial phenomena as long ago as 1912 for the purpose of manipulating public opinion, it makes sense that it still goes on today behind the scenes of the alleged government ‘cover-up’ of the UFO phenomenon (see Chapter 6). The Sheerness incident acted as a spark which allowed thousands of people in strategically vulnerable regions of the British coastline to ‘see’ strange lights and airships in the night sky. Media rumours and scare stories spread rapidly in the tense period leading to the outbreak of the First World War. A similar process appears to be in operation today in the generation of UFO waves. However, the process now seems to have gone a step further, in that we are producing our own subjective imagery – the close encounters – with all the trappings of the Space Age.

On 17 January 1913, after the furore over the Sheerness incident had ended, the chief constable of Glamorganshire claimed he, along with other observers, had seen an airship flying over Cardiff at dusk. It is possible that his sighting was a deliberate attempt to keep the scare afloat – after all, who would doubt the word of a chief constable? Some of the other airship ‘sightings’ may well also have been planted by the authorities in order to work up the scare, and with Venus a brilliant planet in the clear evening skies, and with others releasing balloons, kites

and at least one model airship hovering around, the British people were primed for mass delusion. By the latter part of February 1913, streetcorners in Leeds, Sheffield, Doncaster, Manchester and other towns and cities throughout Britain were crowded with people staring skywards in anticipation. On the evening of 25 February crowds of people in Hull city centre watched a light in the sky which previously coastguards had reported to the Admiralty in London as a foreign airship. However, a reporter from the *Daily Mail* said, 'I watched what appeared to be a bright light high up in the heavens west of Hull for about an hour, and noticed that it did not move. There was no sound of the whirring of machinery. I believe that it was a star.'<sup>9</sup>

It is quite clear that the airship scares originated in the belief that German Zeppelins were capable of secret visits to Britain with the purpose of spying in preparation for wartime. The airship scares, like the more recent UFO waves, appear to have been triggered by a sighting reported by a 'respectable witness', or by the expectation that an aircraft was to be seen in the sky after statements were made by 'secret inventors' or persons in authority. The initial sightings were encouraged by the newspapers (the primary medium for rumour-dissemination at the time) and by word-of-mouth and were encouraged by the presence of ambiguous aerial objects such as lighted balloons and bright planets at a time when the public was alerted to enemy air raids.

When war with Germany was finally declared, on 4 August 1914, the general public firmly believed that the arrival of the Zeppelins was only a matter of time. A frame of reference was firmly established, and the initial excitement which accompanied the outbreak of war enabled those expecting the arrival of the enemy to interpret lights and unexplained objects in the sky as German aircraft. Beginning in the first weeks of August 1914, whispers and rumours began to circulate that a Zeppelin was hiding in the Lake District mountains – coming out at night to spy on the war preparations. The belief was that it had a base somewhere on the fells near Grasmere, and many strange stories were circulated about odd motor-cars and spies who were alleged to have guided the craft in its flight.

All these stories were of the same order as the rumours about Russian Cossacks who at the same time were said to have been

seen in Scotland on their way to the Western Front, a story which was based upon 'physical evidence' of such magnitude as a chocolate-machine on a station platform which was found to be jammed by a Russian rouble! Granville Oldroyd, who has studied the various rumours which circulated upon the outbreak of the First World War, observes that, 'Eyewitness testimony cannot be trusted to be reliable. There was a rumour in late August 1914 of a Russian army being sent from Archangel to the Scottish ports, thence from England by rail to the south coast and from there shipped to Belgium. Although it was merely a rumour I have discovered enough eye-witness reports to "prove" that the event took place and could even speculate that there was a government cover-up of the facts which exists to this present day.'<sup>10</sup> These stories can be compared with the modern rumours spread by people who claim to have seen the dead bodies of aliens kept in Government custody in secret Air Force hangars, and demonstrate that we cannot rely upon the statements of people who claim to observe incidents where they are rumour-inspired.

In 1914 the phantom aircraft reports initially caused so much concern amongst the authorities that an official order was made that, '... an aeroplane be sent to fly over Derbyshire, Lancashire and Cumberland with a view to locating the supposed base of the alleged airship.'<sup>11</sup> The man picked for the job was Lieutenant Hucks of the Military Wing of the Royal Flying Corps. On 16 August 1914 he set off in a rickety Bleriot II monoplane on a flight over the Pennines in an attempt to ascertain if there was anything of substance in the rumours, reaching Penrith and the Cumbrian mountains three days later. He found no secret base or German spies, but on his departure on 24 August the chief constable of Penrith telegraphed to the War Office reporting that, 'An aircraft was seen last night east of Carlisle flashing red and white lights ... at 11.45 another aircraft was seen travelling fast, came apparently near the first one from the south.'<sup>11</sup> Admiralty Intelligence wrote: '[We] cannot account for this. It seems unlikely that hostile aircraft would use lights.' He wrote privately to the chief constable, '... asking who actually saw these aircraft and what reliance can be placed upon their reports?'<sup>11</sup>

Late in August and September 1914 the Zeppelin and spy-scares spread to other areas of the British Isles – to

Scotland, Liverpool and Ireland, and the War Office once again suggested that '... someone be sent north to investigate these repeated reports'.<sup>12</sup> A memo from Lieutenant Colonel Kell of MO5 (renamed MI5 in 1916) in the files of the Royal Flying Corps, dated 11 September 1914, states: 'I have received a letter from Colonel Everett of the Scottish Command, Edinburgh, to the effect that there is a strong suspicion that a hostile aircraft has a base somewhere in the wilds of the north or west of Scotland. Lights from an aircraft have been repeatedly reported at night in the neighbourhood of the Firth of Forth.'<sup>12</sup>

These rumours of secret bases in remote areas are reflected today in the stories currently in vogue suggesting that the UFO aliens operate from similar concealed locations, usually underground.

The huge number of reported sightings of lights and aircraft in the first six months of the First World War led the British authorities to conclude that, 'There is no evidence on which to base a suspicion that this class of enemy activity ever existed' and that, 'Of the total number reported the percentage of cases satisfactorily cleared up is 89 per cent'.<sup>12</sup> This is very similar to the percentage as a whole of UFO reports explained by investigators today. In the First World War any strange light spotted in the night sky was interpreted as German spies at work, whereas in more recent times people perceive these phantoms as 'flying saucers' – in all these cases the reports come in waves.

None of the above rules out the possibility that unexplained phenomena may provide the original stimulus onto which human perception and expectation were later influences. In 1915, for instance, Naval Intelligence agents in Devon were baffled by reports of unexplained 'floating lights' – interpreted by observers as signalling-apparatus employed by German spies on bleak Dartmoor. At 9.30 pm on 4 September 1915 Lieutenant-Colonel W.P. Drury, sent to track the 'spies' to their lair, saw '... a bright white light considerably larger than a planet, steadily ascend from a meadow to an approximate height of 50 or 60 feet' whilst he was observing Dartmoor from a spot near Dartington Point. 'Its course was clearly visible against the dark background of wood and hill,' said Drury in his official report to the War Office. 'We were within a mile of the light and saw its ascension and transit distinctly.'<sup>13</sup>

Strange lights were also observed by members of the Royal Flying Corps defending London from Zeppelin raids on the night of 31 January 1916, just as many pilots observed similar unexplained aerial phenomena during the Second World War. On the night in question, orders were sent to the fighter aerodromes to the effect that Zeppelins were approaching London. At 7.40 pm Lieutenant R S Maxwell arose from Hainault Farm Aerodrome, near Romford in Essex. At 8.25 his engine was '... missing irregularly and it was only by keeping the speed of the machine down to 50 mph that I was able to stay at 10,000 feet. It was at this time that I distinctly saw an artificial light to the north of me, and at about the same height. I followed this light northeast for nearly 20 minutes, but it seemed to go slightly higher and just as quickly as myself ... and I eventually lost it completely in the clouds.'<sup>14</sup>

At 8.45 pm another aeroplane, piloted by Flight Sub-Lieutenant J.E. Morgan, may have observed the same UFO after arising from an aerodrome at Rochford, some twenty-two miles east of Hainault Farm. Morgan reported that at 5,000 feet he had seen, about a hundred feet away from his aircraft, 'a row of what appeared to be lighted windows which looked something like a railway carriage with the blinds drawn'. In the belief that he had chanced upon a Zeppelin, Morgan fired at the object with his Webley Scott pistol, whereupon 'the lights alongside arose rapidly' and disappeared!<sup>14</sup>

As on that particular night none of the raiding airships came as far south as Essex, what was it that these two pilots independently reported in the sky in the same area at the same time?

In the recent past UFOs have been reported as both phantom airships and mystery aircraft; but even in the flying saucer era mystery lights in the sky have been interpreted in other frames of reference. An examination of why people in particular circumstances and locations interpret lights in the sky as one type of aerial craft and not another can help us better to understand the current UFO folklore in the Space Age.

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## On the Trail of the Phantom Flier

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The UFO frame of reference is a relatively weak one, still, in popular consciousness, and is easily replaced by other and more immediate threats. The fear of illegal immigrants is clearly a more powerful 'folk devil' than any little green man from Mars, and as such his machinations can be seen behind a variety of phenomena often regarded as Ufological. For example some time last year [1972] a motorist reported that he had seen, at night, a helicopter land, a car drive up, and several illegal immigrants get out and enter the car. He claimed he could clearly see the driver of the car was a Pakistani. Unfortunately, he could not possibly have seen such a scene in the amount of detail he gave, at that time of night. Indeed, the whole story possessed just that air of 'mystery' that many UFO stories have.

Peter Rogerson, in *MUFOB* (1973)<sup>1</sup>

On New Year's Day 1934 the *New York Times* printed the following wire story from Stockholm, Sweden, dated 31 December 1933: 'Swedish Army aviators have been ordered to chase a mysterious airplane which has been sighted for many weeks over Lapland. It is believed to land among the mountains, making flights at night. The pilot was recently heard flying toward Norway in a heavy snowstorm. It is thought he is a smuggler ...'<sup>2</sup>

This 'mysterious airplane', known as 'The Ghost-flier', was reported by hundreds of witnesses in Norway, Sweden and Finland between the years 1933 and 1938. The large grey aircraft carried no visible insignia and operated at very low level, often during snowstorms, blizzards and heavy fog, circling low above villages and hedge-hopping skilfully above hazardous mountain ranges. The phantom flier carried brilliant search-lights and visited rugged mountainous regions in the dead of night.

The reports caused a press sensation, and just as in the case

of Britain before the outbreak of the First World War, German or Russian spies were suspected of involvement. Similarly, the Scandinavian authorities took the reports very seriously and dispatched military aeroplanes and a number of ships to search the Arctic fjords and remote islands for the bases they assumed must have been used by the strange flying objects. The weather conditions were so atrocious that two of the army planes involved in the search crashed, and a naval cruiser ran aground. Needless to say, the Ghost-flier mystery was never solved, and as with Dartmoor's 'floating lights' of 1915, the alleged spies were never discovered.

In the early 1930s, night-flying was still a daring exercise for aeronauts, with navigation aids crude and unreliable; more to the point, history demonstrates that neither Germany nor the Soviet Union would have risked the political ramifications of such a reckless and pointless exercise above sovereign territory. John Keel makes the point that, 'The mystery airplane wave was impossible. No known nation or organisation had the facilities, resources, and more importantly, the motivation for carrying out an aerial survey of northern Scandinavia.'<sup>3</sup> The wave may have been 'impossible', but something must have caused the sightings.

The years immediately prior to the First World War showed that it was possible for anomalous aerial phenomena to trigger panics which reflected the anxieties and concerns of society at that time. Prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, the Soviets or Germans were perceived as the aggressors, and so it seems likely that any unusual object or light in the sky would be interpreted in terms of this frame of reference.

The reasons why a UFO 'scare' – whatever its nature – should erupt in a particular place at a particular time are difficult to isolate, but of crucial importance is the attitude of the media, which can be instrumental in causing a specific event to trigger off a series of sightings which leads to the generation of rumour and 'eyewitness' reports. The media does a great deal to promote 'socially constructed realities' – for instance, the famous *War of the Worlds* radio broadcast of 1938 (see p.219), which caused mass panic in New Jersey – and can condition people to interpret strange aerial phenomena within a specific frame of reference.

All the above factors can be found at work in the wave of

sightings of an unidentified 'helicopter' which took place in the North of England during the winter of 1973–4, a series of events which provides a microcosm of the complex interaction between aerial phenomena, perception and the media in the creation of UFO folklore. These particular sightings are also important because they took place at a time of widespread belief in visitors from outer space and yet were not interpreted within this particular frame of reference. In 1973 the IRA were mounting a bombing campaign on mainland Britain, and the fact that some of the first observations of this non-existent helicopter took place in the vicinity of quarries and explosive magazines quickly put the fear of terrorist involvement into the minds of Special Branch, who became involved in the hunt for the phantom flier early in 1974.

The first sighting appears to have occurred on 18 September 1973, at Harpur Hill, on the moors to the south-east of Buxton in the High Peak of Derbyshire. At one o'clock in the morning a resident of Harpur Hill, who lived opposite the large Hillhead limestone quarry, observed what she perceived to be a helicopter apparently rising directly out of the quarry, and reported the matter to security guard Simon Crowe, who was employed by Peak Security to guard the complex of quarries and Mines Research laboratories. Peak Security had previously received warnings from the police to be extra vigilant due to knowledge that terrorists were active in Britain and that among their targets might be places where high explosives were stored.

Simon Crowe was described in newspaper reports at the time as having spotted the phantom helicopter five times whilst on duty in the Buxton area late at night. In 1988 we asked Mr Crowe what he remembered about the mystery, and he told us:

I think the whole incident lasted over a period of about two months culminating in a week of several sightings, but as you can imagine people were seeing every light in the sky as a helicopter. The two best sightings I had were both in Hillhead Quarry, one about ten o'clock and the other about midnight. At no time did I positively identify it as an helicopter – apart from its ability to hover and the sound from the rotor-blades. On the first sighting it hovered at about fifty feet from the ground with spotlights shining downwards into the main quarry floor. When I approached in the landrover with my headlights on, it rose slowly and flew away towards Mines Research. On the second occasion it rose out of the quarry and I

was not aware of it until I saw the lights. It quickly disappeared in the same direction as before ...<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, if the object *was* a helicopter, the police were unable to identify it, and the reason for its midnight visit to this quarry remains unknown.

Whatever it was, sightings of the 'phantom helicopter' did not make newspaper headlines again until January 1974. Once again the matter came to the attention of the media due to official appeals for information on behalf of the police, as this time the police themselves had spotted and even chased the unknown helicopter!

After midnight on the morning of Monday 14 January 1974, police in the Macclesfield area of Cheshire received a report of an unidentified helicopter and were said to have 'kept the machine under observation for some time'<sup>5</sup> as it manoeuvred over the moors towards the High Peak. Derbyshire police were alerted, and at 1 am the crew of a patrol car spotted the helicopter flying above the 'shivering mountain' of Mam Tor in the vale of Edale. The patrol car gave chase, but the helicopter appeared to veer off towards Sheffield, and the police soon lost it. Later the craft was said to have landed at the Cheshire village of Goostrey, near the Jodrell Bank radio-telescope. A police spokesman commented: 'We know it is a helicopter, our officers have got close enough to see it, but we do not know why it is making these trips at night. Our officers spotted the helicopter and then lost it. They managed to spot it again and it gave the impression that it had landed, but it took off again before the officers could get to it.'<sup>5</sup>

Although details of the sightings were vague, they were regarded as serious enough for Special Branch to be called in to investigate the mystery on 15 January 1974. Detectives began to check up on 'ex-military fliers with helicopter experience', and top-ranking police officers from four forces held an urgent conference to organize the hunt for the phantom flier. One of the witnesses who reported seeing the helicopter told us how one evening in January 1974 two plain-clothes policemen from Liverpool CID turned up at his home and advised him not to speak any further to the press or in public about what he had observed – adding that he 'hadn't seen anything'. The detail that the officers were from Liverpool appears to indicate, as was

suggested by newspaper stories, that the authorities took the sightings seriously as the handiwork of the IRA, who had been known to use helicopters in the past and who would probably be using Liverpool as an entrepôt in any planned bombing campaign.

Checks were made on the 340 registered helicopters throughout Britain, and pilots were asked to account for their movements on the days in question – without success. Also air-traffic control headquarters in Preston were informed of the helicopter's flights. Their radar had failed to pick up anything, due to the low-flying, contour-hugging altitude of the targets.

By the middle of January 1974 the police of up to seven separate forces were actively involved in the investigation of the helicopter mystery. They believed that the helicopter was a 'medium-sized' craft, i.e. a five-seater with a range of about 250 miles. However, no definite description of the helicopter was given in any of the published accounts, and the amount of evidence for its existence was slight and based mainly on eyewitness testimony. Like the Scandinavian Ghost-flier of the 1930s, the 'phantom helicopter' flew after midnight at very low altitude, it used a searchlight to guide its way through the darkness, and it carried no civil aviation markings.

After 15 January the media attention given to the police appeal for sighting reports backfired, and hundreds of reports flooded into police stations throughout the North of England. As with modern UFO waves, it only took publicity to transform any strange light in the sky into something much stranger. Between 16 and 17 January north Staffordshire and south Cheshire police alone received over twenty helicopter sighting reports, all of which they investigated without success.

As a consequence of the lack of information, many strange and wonderful rumours began to appear in local newspapers to account for who was operating the 'helicopter'. It was suggested by the newspapers that the helicopter was being used for drug- or gun-running, for smuggling immigrants into the country or by terrorists planning a gaol-break or bombing campaign. One journalist speculated that, '... it might be a "home-made helicopter" which the owner, unable to obtain an air-worthiness certificate, is flying – and dangerously so – at night, or, it is suggested, it might be a modern – and wealthy – lover who finds it the most convenient way to reach his mistress or girlfriend'.<sup>6</sup>

However implausible the flights seemed to be, the 'helicopter' was flying blind at night, weaving expertly in and out of powerlines and hovering as it flashed a stabbing searchlight across the sky. On one occasion the helicopter was even reported to have hovered above the roof of a house in Macclesfield, Cheshire, at 1.30 am, making 'a terrific noise'. The sheer improbability of the pilot's actions was commented upon by Alex Parker, an ex-Army pilot who, with the permission of the authorities, took *Daily Mirror* reporter Edward McCauley on a daytime flight over the High Peak of Derbyshire. The two investigators flew at 500-foot altitude in a Jet Ranger helicopter in daylight, compared with the phantom, which flew at fifty feet above the ground in the dark! Parker commented that, 'To try and get through these hills at such low-level makes this guy a madman – or a great pilot. But whichever he is, I still feel he has been lucky to get away without an accident.'<sup>6</sup>

It became increasingly apparent that there never was a real helicopter behind the wave of sightings – this was merely an interpretation placed upon the reports by the police. All the sightings are lacking in descriptive detail which would easily have identified any real 'helicopter', and they have all the characteristics of a typical 'UFO flap'. The *Daily Mail* quoted Professor John Cohen of the Department of Psychology, Manchester University, who doubted the reality of the helicopter: 'The first reports of the helicopter may have started a rash of them,' he said. 'It is contagious – plant an idea and you get a kind of visual epidemic.'<sup>7</sup>

Just as the evidence for the Scandinavian Ghost-flier's being of Soviet or German origin was non-existent, the same is true of the evidence that the 'phantom helicopter' was a machine under the control of Irish terrorists. The similarities and motifs shared by the waves of sightings of phantom aircraft during the First World War, the Ghost-fliers and the phantom helicopter are intriguing and should be closely compared. In all these scares there is the noise of aircraft heard and lights seen at night, and apparently solid aerial machines seen in daylight. There is the mystery of where the flier obtains his fuel, and where his landing-strip is located. The spread of the initial rumour, encouraged by an official investigation, enabled the stories to spread to other regions and to the eventual involvement of hoaxers and publicity-seekers who accentuate the mystery.

We believe it is possible that some objectively real light phenomena were seen and reported by observers in the context of an unidentified helicopter. This is highlighted by a sighting made by police officers in Derbyshire on the night of 17 January 1974, which was interpreted by the press at the time as another sighting of the 'phantom helicopter'. We obtained a detailed account of this observation from one of the witnesses, Walter Buswell, in 1989.

On the night in question he was on patrol with a colleague near the town of Ashbourne when at 11.45 pm they observed a number of strange lights in the sky and after pulling into a layby heard a strange noise resembling a child's spinning-top mixed with a rapid-firing piston engine. They duly reported this to their headquarters over the radio, were told there was no air traffic in the area nor anything unusual on radar and were ordered to 'observe and report' further.

'Then suddenly,' he remembers, 'a chap on a motor-scooter passed us, stopped and came up to me and said, "I hope you don't think I'm going crazy but I've just come up this hill and a big light came in front of me as if it was going to swallow me up." We reported through that we had got this chap with us and we were told to carry on and observe.'<sup>7</sup>

After parking the car on a piece of level ground, all three witnesses watched a display of coloured lights in the sky, followed by the appearance of a 'terrific beam of light' which '... seemed to come and hold above the earth. It was too bright for a searchlight beam and seemed to go either from the earth to something or from something to the earth. We couldn't have been a great way from it, because you could see the earth lit up around the beam – much brighter than a magnesium flare. Then it went out and there was a drumming sound, and then a red light shot away in an arc to the west like a tracer bullet.'<sup>7</sup> PC Buswell noted that the beam '... gave me the impression that it was "power", or a source of energy like when you light a rocket.'<sup>7</sup>

At 4 am on 24 January 1974, the crew of another police car at Leek on the Staffordshire Moors reported seeing the phantom helicopter but, 'Because of the darkness they were unable to tell whether it had any identification markings.'<sup>7</sup> This was the last reported sighting of the mystery flier from the North of England.

However, by this time press attention had been captured by another strange aerial mystery. At 8.30 pm on 23 January, a brilliant fireball impacted upon the Cadar Bronwen mountain range in North Wales. The resulting 'explosion' was accompanied by an earth tremor as well as scores of sightings of brilliant flying objects throughout the west of Britain. Were the 'helicopter' sightings connected with the events in Wales? The sighting at Darley Moor, Derbyshire, described a beam of light moving 'from the earth to something or from something to the earth', as well as a deep drumming or droning noise. As it is clear that no real helicopter was involved, this concept acted as a 'frame of reference' into which perceived light phenomena could be interpreted. Light phenomena such as these, connected with earth tremors, are described further in Chapter 7.

The 'phantom helicopter' frame of reference, or rumour, became ingrained in popular folklore in the Pennine hills following the events of the winter of 1973–4. When, during the following year, further sightings of strange aerial objects and lights began to be made once again, these were interpreted against a background of rumours concerning IRA terrorists and illegal immigrants – two powerful 'folk devils'. In the early hours of three successive mornings, 15–17 January, 1975, strange flashing white and red lights were observed by police, gliding across the barren moors between Oldham and Hebden Bridge. On 17 January at 3.10 am policemen from Oldham again saw flashing white lights which they chased at one point on foot across the moors, but the 'helicopter' had vanished before they closed in.

The common factor which links most of these reports is the concentration upon remote moorland and mountainous country. Few of the sightings describe an actual helicopter – only manoeuvring lights (UFOs) which gave the witnesses the *impression* that they were observing a helicopter. The powerful influence of rumour upon perception is illustrated by this account from the *Oldham Weekly Chronicle* of 4 October 1975:

There have been a number of mystery helicopter sightings in Saddleworth over the last two years, and several UFO reports came last winter. Speculation about the sightings on quiet stretches of moorland has been considerable, with suggestions that they have

been connected with illegal immigrant smuggling or the IRA. On one occasion, two men in strange white suits were seen coming from the moors, and the possibility of climbers or hikers was eliminated, but no explanations of the matter obtained ... within the last year one woman has reported seeing a group of immigrants standing on the moorland with suitcases, and she and a companion had personally seen other immigrants standing on the moors with a coloured golf umbrella.<sup>8</sup>

Both these 'sightings' were reported to the police in all seriousness and demonstrate once again how eyewitness testimony, when it is based upon rumour, cannot be trusted to be reliable.

Rumour, it seems, attributed even more sinister motives to the elusive helicopter pilot. In June 1976, during the trial in Leeds of the notorious murderer Donald Neilson, better known as 'the Black Panther', the defence appealed to the public for information about 'a mystery helicopter'. Mr Barrington-Black, the solicitor defending Neilson, said that he was anxious to trace witnesses who might have seen or heard a helicopter flying in the Kidsgrove area of Staffordshire on the night of 16-17 January 1975, two days after heiress Lesley Whittle was kidnapped. 'We have made exhaustive attempts to identify the helicopter,' he said. 'It had been reported in the area and some sightings were made by the Civil Aviation Authority, but so far we have been unable to identify it.' He refused, however, to disclose why the defence required this information.<sup>9</sup>

These weird and fantastic rumours which became attached to the legend of the ghost helicopter are identical to the many strange stories and rumours which accompany belief in UFOs today. By the 1970s there was clearly a psychological link forged between unexplained aerial phenomena and the appearance of strange helicopters. Jenny Randles asks: 'What is it that can move very low and fast across hilly terrain, seeming to hug the ground contours, and yet outpace anyone who chases it in a car? Clearly not an aircraft ... there are only two real possibilities. One is a UFO, whatever a UFO might be, and the other is a helicopter.'<sup>10</sup> American folklorist Dennis Stillings has suggested that there is 'a deep-rooted psychological connection between helicopters and UFOs' and that a '... very interesting mythology has been built up around the helicopter in popular culture'.<sup>11</sup>

When in 1974 and 1975 a wave of unexplained cattle

mutilations spread across the Midwest of the USA, rumours of strange, unmarked helicopters began to circulate in the same areas, coincidentally at the same time as the helicopter sightings across the Atlantic in northern England. There had been a similar rumour that cattle had disappeared mysteriously in the Derbyshire Peak District during the wave of helicopter sightings, when a Manchester Airport employee suggested that the craft might have been used by sophisticated cattle-rustlers, who guided the craft with flares from the ground!

Between 1975 and 1977 it was alleged that over 700 animal (primarily cattle) mutilations took place in over fifteen of the western United States, including Kansas, Iowa, Nebraska, Colorado and South Dakota, often clustering in areas such as Elbert county, Colorado, on the very doorstep of some of the most sophisticated and secret military installations in the world. The 'mutes', as they became known, took place under the same circumstances as the UFO and helicopter sightings – at night, under cover of darkness. Cause of death remained mysterious, blood often being drained from the animals, and specific organs removed in a surgical manner. After intensive investigations by local law-enforcement bodies, no immediate explanations could be found – initiating a wave of rumour and speculation.<sup>12</sup>

By the end of 1975, reports of strange flying objects resembling helicopters began frequently to be made by ranchers in areas where the cattle mutilations had occurred – helicopters sometimes without lights, at other times associated with blinding searchlights, sometimes vanishing and appearing in unlikely places (i.e. areas of high-tension powerlines). The use of tranquillizers and helicopters by the unknown mutilators soon appeared to be the logical connection to those caught up in the mystery.

The 'phantom' helicopters were sometimes caught on film: on 24 July 1975, John Hines, editor of the *Ranchland News* observed a dark green unidentified helicopter apparently pursuing a group of teenagers driving near Simla, Elbert County, Colorado. He quickly took a photo which clearly shows a very real chopper. The craft reappeared at 11 pm, when 'It hovered over a barn and had a brilliant light shining underneath.' Elbert County was one of the areas worst hit by the wave of cattle mutilations throughout the 1970s, at the same time as sightings of unidentified helicopters were common. Over 180

separate mutilations reportedly took place in Colorado alone during 1975, and in August of that year one of the helicopters was even chased by a light airplane piloted by the sheriff of Logan County, but without success.

The presence of such helicopters – most of which were probably involved in legitimate military and civilian flights – signified to the ranchers the involvement of the military in the cattle mutilations. Speculation that helicopters were in some way connected led to ranchers' firing upon helicopters using Fort Carson airbase in Colorado at low altitude. Rumours rapidly spread that the US government was conducting secret tests on livestock, using reproductive organs removed from victims as 'bio-indicators' for monitoring the effects of fall-out and other radioactive substances on living organisms. Others directed their paranoia towards other 'folk-devils' – a massive, covert operation by a 'military-industrial complex' or nefarious occult groups who were using the mutilated animals in 'clandestine rituals' or for some kind of psychological warfare.

It was inevitable that the UFO investigators, when they arrived on the scene, would add another layer of belief to the growing mystery. Hence, in place of the US military, the UFO buffs blamed the 'aliens' for the cattle mutilations. Animal mutilations and disappearances are an integral part of the UFO mythology in the USA and have a long pedigree in the literature of the subject, which can be traced back to the story of the phantom airship which kidnapped a calf at Leroy, Kansas, in 1897 (now known to have been a newspaper hoax).

The animal mutilation 'mystery' in North America follows the same patterns found in other areas of UFO folklore. During the scare a professor of sociology at the University of South Dakota suggested to the press that belief in cattle-mutilators was the 'result of collective delusion', echoing the conclusions of psychologists in reference to the UFO, airship and helicopter sightings.

In *Social and Cultural Factors influencing belief about UFOs*<sup>13</sup> Dr Phillis Fox, Professor of Sociology at the University of Chicago, describes the factors which contribute to the production of UFO waves and how the human reaction then leads to the creation of belief systems or frames of reference. She writes: 'The process by which people conclude a UFO is an alien spaceship [or, in the present context, a gun-running or

cattle-mutilating helicopter] can be described as a type of collective behaviour similar to the transmission of rumour.<sup>13</sup> A rumour is defined as 'a recurrent form of communication through which people caught together in an ambiguous situation attempt to construct a meaningful interpretation of it by pooling their intellectual resources'.<sup>13</sup>

The above can readily be used to contextualize belief in UFOs, phantom helicopters and animal-mutilators. What is required first is the perception of an unusual stimulus (which must be ambiguous and important), be it a novel natural phenomenon or a bright planet, and an effective apparatus to spread the reports (a role played in our society by newspapers and TV). The attitude of people of status in the community (i.e. the police and/or government) is all-important to the way in which the population as a whole will respond to this information, as is the lack of any convincing official explanation.

Dr Fox adds: 'In the absence of official explanations, people tend to improvise their own, attempting through their conversations with each other to place an unusual event in its proper context. We know that human beings do not observe events the way a camera does. To a considerable extent, people see what they expect to see; and what they expect to see is not simply a result of their personalities but also of their social and cultural milieu.'<sup>13</sup>

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## The Flaws of Perception

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Never seen anything like it in all of our lives.

Police officer's statement;  
object later confirmed by police to be a star<sup>1</sup>

The late Dr J. Allen Hynek, regarded by most UFO researchers as the father of modern ufology, frequently pointed out that we are not actually studying UFOs themselves, only reports of sightings of UFOs. This fact is of great relevance and often overlooked by people who assume that there is a *de facto* case for the existence of UFOs as an unknown physical phenomenon if not as alien spaceships. It immediately puts any UFO investigator in a very difficult position. How can we study something which leaves no unambiguous physical evidence and which cannot be measured in any way other than retrospectively by its effects upon people? Photographic and radar-recorded cases are rare and frequently not all they seem to be and, rumours of possession by the military of crashed UFOs notwithstanding, there are no physical UFOs for us to study. All we have are the witness accounts of their UFO experiences.

Whatever the witness reports, from the simplest unexplained light in the sky to the more exotic abduction claims, all UFO cases depend upon witness testimony. We have no UFOs with which to reproduce a UFO experience, nor can we study one whilst it is taking place, and this is one of the reasons why the hard sciences have stayed well away from the subject. Scientific criteria require phenomena which can be repeated under laboratory conditions by a number of experimenters, and clearly this is not the case with UFO experiences. Despite the tales of alien abductions and saucer-shaped craft that can travel at faster-than-light speeds, in the cold light of day we are left with the human being who witnessed the event, and little more.

The previous chapters have displayed that interpretations of both historical and contemporary UFO reports are largely perception-centred and belief-driven. We now take a deeper look at the UFO experience from the point of view of human perception – the process which makes a UFO experience what it is in our society today. Science may not be able to study a UFO experience, but the witness can, and the initial recording is done by a complex piece of instrumentation – the human brain, often taken for granted when it comes to the interpretation of even the most ordinary experiences.

The UFO data which the brain receives arrive in two ways: actively, to individuals in the form of the direct UFO stimulus, whatever its nature, which becomes the basis of the UFO experience, and passively, through the news media, UFO books, advertising and what society believes UFOs to be – remembering, of course, that what people think UFOs are changes constantly. That these two categories inform and affect each other, we hope to be able to illustrate with examples of specific cases. UFO researchers appreciate the above problems and attempt to separate the wheat from the chaff, to sort the witnesses' received and interpreted data from what they actually experienced. But ufologists are human too, and they are as much a victim to the vagaries of perception as the witnesses.

Everyone 'knows what a UFO is' – or, more correctly, they have an idea of what they think a UFO is, based on the above cultural factors. This aspect of the UFO experience is often hotly contested by some ufologists, who are fond of claiming that a witness may have had no previous knowledge of UFOs and is therefore a 'good' witness who is less likely to imagine a flying saucer. This claim is refuted simply by the fact that, if you ask children to draw a flying saucer, they will all produce the same basic saucer-shaped archetype. Everyone has an immediate mental picture and series of ideas which come to mind when asked about UFOs or flying saucers. This is an idea fed by images presented to us by popular culture, not one we have formed from direct experience. This UFO information store is constantly fed with data received from the outside world and carried around unconsciously until it is invoked by an outside stimulus. In our analogy, this data is the cultural idea of UFOs as saucer-shaped craft carrying aliens from other planets as portrayed in the media through advertising and in films and books.

The expression 'seeing is believing', used often in conjunction with UFO sightings, is false. Witnesses to UFO events are often certain about exactly what it was they saw, using such phrases as, 'It was definitely real' and 'That was no man-made object.' To them the experience *was* real, and so they assume that what they perceived was what they actually saw. This is not always the case, as we have already demonstrated that many UFO reports are misidentifications of aircraft, stars and other everyday objects. Responsible UFO groups maintain that between ninety and ninety-five per cent of all reported UFO sightings have mundane explanations connected with misperception: direct misperception (when an experience is misinterpreted as something it is not) and hoaxing (which we will define as the intentional construction of a particular perception to create or foster a belief in an individual or a group).

As this book is partly an attempt to place the folklore of UFOs within some kind of historical context, it is necessary to go back to the sighting which ushered in the modern UFO era. The sighting by Kenneth Arnold (recounted in the Introduction) in 1947 is a classic example of misinterpretation, if not actual misperception. The sighting that gave us the name 'flying saucer' which has since become attached to UFOs, whatever their shape, was actually not of a 'flying saucer' at all. 'Flying saucer' may have originated with Arnold's sighting, but he did not say he *saw* flying saucers, only that what he saw '... flew like a saucer would if you skipped it across the water'. Arnold also used the comparison of their flying like geese, which was ignored by the newsmen. 'Flying Geese' doesn't have the same ring to it as 'Flying Saucers'!<sup>2</sup>

The importance of this event and the dichotomy between experience, description and image cannot be overstressed as a catalyst, and are significant in the light of the fact that people frequently report seeing the 'classic' flying saucer shape. Is this because they see an ambiguous light in the sky, presume it is a UFO and interpret it in terms of a saucer-shape because of their knowledge and exposure to the image of the traditional 'flying saucer'? Or are there really saucer-shaped aerial phenomena, perhaps natural in origin? Or, as many people suggest, are aliens visiting Earth, and did they first arrive in 1947, in flying saucers? These questions can be condensed into one: do people really see what they think they see?

A Gallup poll taken in 1978, the year of the release of the film

*Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, resulted in the statistic that around 13 million Americans claimed to have seen a UFO. This translates as nine per cent of the population having seen something so inexplicable in the sky that they were confident that it was a UFO. Gallup produced another poll in Britain in 1987 which indicated that fifty per cent of people under the age of thirty, and fifty-seven per cent of people aged thirty to thirty-nine, thought that UFOs were real and not imaginary. These are interesting statistics, but we must remember that these are not polls of what people *know* to be factual but polls of what people *believe* to be factual. Critics of the Extraterrestrial Hypothesis (ETH) would use these figures to support the view that aliens exist because so many people believe in and have seen UFOs, whereas a social psychologist would use them to support the view that, no matter what our level of technological advancement, people will continue to believe in irrational things. Even assuming that aliens are visiting Earth, it is unlikely that they are responsible for so many sightings, and so we must look at other sources for the origination of the majority of, if not all, these UFO reports.

Stars, planets and aeroplanes are the three types of most misidentified aerial objects out of the ninety to ninety-five per cent of explicable UFO reports, and UFO books are littered with accounts which can easily be dismissed as mundane phenomena. But should they be dismissed? The fact that the human brain is capable of translating an everyday object into an archetypal UFO experience is an amazing event, and we make no apologies for giving further examples of the creative skills of the human mind.

Even the most prominent object in the night sky – the moon – has been reported as a UFO. One American study discovered that the moon was the stimulus behind two UFO encounters where physical evidence was allegedly left at the site.<sup>1</sup>

The moon, misinterpreted as a UFO, has followed cars, landed and behaved just as ‘explained’ UFOs are said to have.

One such case, at first baffling, was investigated by David Clarke in South Yorkshire. At 4 am on 16 March 1981 two night-nurses at Doncaster Royal Infirmary noticed an unusual light low on the horizon in the south. As they watched the light, it became clear that they were looking at a ‘domed saucer’. Studying it closely, they could see that it was a definite ‘craft’, even having portholes around the side. The drawing they made for the investigator was a ‘classic’ flying saucer. The top of the

object remained stationary whilst the lower half turned clockwise, displaying a row of white lights. After thirty minutes the UFO vanished in the early morning haze. Intensive investigation discovered that at the same date and time the moon was in exactly the same part of the sky, at the same angle of elevation as that at which the UFO was sighted.<sup>4</sup> The witnesses did not see the moon, so it is logical to conclude that they had observed the moon through the refractive layers of the Earth's atmosphere and overlaid this with their ideas about what a UFO should look like – a domed disc with portholes – an image gleaned from the UFO mythology which surrounds us all.

Witnesses to all objects misperceived as a UFO have interpreted them in a way which bears no relation to their appearance. Stars appear to perform impossible manoeuvres due to 'autokinesis' – the mechanism by which the eye, when staring at a fixed point, moves slightly and creates the illusion of external movement. Planets can appear to be huge objects, flashing lights and spinning, the result of light refraction in the atmosphere. In Chapter 1 the sighting of a 'UFO' by a teenager and a group of police officers in London in January 1988 was widely reported by the national press as an 'unexplained' case, when in fact these witnesses had seen the planet Jupiter, which appeared to change colour and pulsate due to the influence of autokinesis. These optical phenomena occur frequently, as UFO literature demonstrates, and we should no longer shy away from the fact that this is what influences most UFO reports and is the genesis for much of the UFO folklore.

Clearly the influence of pre-conceived ideas about what people think UFOs are, and the problems connected with perception, can lead to the interpretation of any ambiguous object or light in the sky as a 'flying saucer'. These problems are not confined to visual distortion and interpretation of UFOs. The witnesses' ability accurately to describe other perceptual factors, such as the passage of time, has been called into account by a number of studies carried out by psychologists and latterly by ufologists.

One such study, undertaken in 1982 by Ken Phillips and Dr Alexander Keul, demonstrated that individuals have a large variation in the ability to estimate correctly the duration of an event. The study exposed groups of people to a photographic slide of a typical UFO and asked them to estimate the duration

and to sketch the object. Two-thirds of the viewers wrongly estimated, by a large margin, the duration of the 'sightings'.<sup>4</sup>

Phillips and Keul's study makes sobering reading. Not only was time duration wrongly estimated but visual reproduction of the stimulus varied widely from viewer to viewer. Half the viewers drew almost the exact shape of the object; half drew it in a distorted fashion; one sixth of the sample reproducing completely different shapes. This type of perceptual confusion ran through all the categories of the experiment: one third to one half of the witnesses displaying accuracy, the remainder recalling and interpreting the object in another way. One significant fact revealed by these experiments was that in half the drawings produced by one group completely new details had been included – details which were not on the image displayed but which had come entirely from the viewer's mind. Moreover, these added details were identified as being found in the popular image of what a UFO should look like.

The results of this experiment indicated to Keul and Phillips that, when people are asked to reproduce 'uncommon shapes' they have been presented with, they make large errors in all aspects of recall and reproduction and that elements of UFO folklore, not present in the stimuli, are frequently reproduced. The setting for these experiments also has a bearing on the results, and it should be remembered that the experiments were carried out under controlled conditions. The 'witnesses' were aware of the experiment and in relaxed surroundings when confronted with the 'unknown'. They were also presented with a clear image and yet could not reproduce it correctly afterwards. No doubt the perceptual inconsistencies displayed in these experiments would be greatly enhanced in real life, when a witness is presented with ambiguous aerial phenomena when they are least expected.

American ufologist and astronomer Allan Hendry spent fifteen months investigating UFO reports on a full-time basis for the Center for UFO Studies in Chicago. In the excellent work which resulted from this exercise, *The UFO Handbook*, Hendry gives page after page of examples in which witnesses radically misperceived mundane objects and redescribed them as UFOs, spaceships or aliens. If one set of witnesses sees and misperceives an aeroplane as a flying saucer, what does this say about the stimulus behind drawings made by witnesses to

as-yet-unexplained UFOs? A short-list of expressions used by witnesses cited in the Hendry book is given below, with the solution to the case in parenthesis:

‘It made a whirring noise like on TV shows ...’ (Star, seen for one hour.)

‘Followed our car and hovered over our house. Didn’t follow any other car, only ours ...’ (Venus, watched every night for a week.)

‘Made my hair stand on end ...’ (Moon.)

‘Never seen anything like it in all of our lives ...’ (Stars, confirmed the next night by witnesses, who were police officers.)<sup>1</sup>

These radical misperceptions, transformations of ordinary events into UFO experiences, take place in their thousands. Not to mentally unbalanced people, cultists or UFO-believers but to all types of people, from policemen to a former president of the USA, Jimmy Carter, whose UFO report turned out on investigation to be a misidentification of the planet Venus. The phrases used by such witnesses are identical to those used by witnesses to events classified as ‘unknown’ and must indicate that it is the reaction to the event, based on received knowledge and opinions about UFOs, which influences the creation of the ‘UFO experience’ – which can be dramatic and life-changing in some cases.

Until the late 1940s the ‘flying saucer’ shape was rarely, if ever, seen and, as we have shown, was itself a misnomer created by the press. ‘Mystery airship’, ‘ghost-flier’ and ‘foo-fighter’ were the terms and shapes by which UFOs were reported pre-1947.

The media’s portrayal of UFOs is important and has been mentioned in previous chapters. This is unavoidable, as it is largely via the media that the public are kept informed about ‘sightings’. There is growing evidence (see Chapter 1) that a great many ‘flaps’ of UFO sightings can be related to UFO stories originating in newspapers which have been since explained as misidentifications.

The media are quick to pick up on a UFO story and are generally unconcerned whether or not the case is genuine, misperception or hoax. Invariably, the resulting story will be slanted towards the ‘alien visitors’ interpretation, regardless of whether the case may be subsequently identified as an aeroplane, planet or other mundane stimulus. The readers are

never informed, and the story enters UFO folklore with whatever image the newspaper decides to give it. For example, in November 1986 a small article appeared in the West Yorkshire press describing how a number of police officers had observed, from the moors above Holmfirth, an 'elongated silver object with a small number of darkened "portholes" running along the side' stationary in the sky at low altitude. Local UFO enthusiasts described the sighting as a 'quite spectacular observation' but were unable to obtain further details from the local police as they were informed that, 'The proper procedures have been followed regarding such incidents, the MOD have been contacted and a report submitted.'

Such refusals of co-operation on the part of the authorities have led to the generation of rumours that an official cover-up of UFO reports is underway. However, one year later the Ministry of Defence released the full report on the Holmfirth police sighting to our colleague Philip Mantle.<sup>5</sup> It contained a number of sighting reports by police officers in the Huddersfield area who saw a 'bright light' in the sky near the Emley Moor TV mast at around 3.30 am on 3 November 1986. One officer described the object as 'approximately 150–200 feet in length, cylindrical in shape with one white light, at either end' at an altitude of 'approximately 6,000 feet [and] 2–3 miles away from my position'; another described how the lights hovered and 'moved off in an easterly direction'. However, the reports made by other officers in different locations make it quite clear that the 'UFO' was nothing more than a bright planet! One of them wrote that, whilst on night duty, 'We heard two other patrol vehicles talking to Force Control ... referring to a bright object in the sky which appeared to be stationary and near to Emley transmitting mast ... looking towards the direction of Emley [we] saw what appeared to be no more than a bright star or planet which was above a solitary cloud in an otherwise clear sky.' The officer then described the classic 'colour changes' caused by autokinesis: '... when staring at the object it appeared to be changing colour from red to green and back again, which I assumed was caused by the spectrum effect of the atmosphere.'

Some cases of misperception fool not only the witnesses to the event but also UFO groups and professionals, leading them to believe that some genuine unexplained phenomenon was behind the sighting in question. These cases, when they come to

light – which is infrequently, due to the factors already noted, are invaluable for study, as they demonstrate the effect of what belief in UFOs has on all levels of society, from witness to media.

Photographs of alleged UFOs are few and far between, and most so-called UFO photographs can be dismissed after analysis as obvious hoaxes or camera- and film-faults. But great store is placed in the ‘unexplained’ UFO photographs, in particular by the media. The less critical UFO investigators are also quick to seize a UFO photograph in order to back up their particular theories – ‘The camera can’t lie’ being their argument. Belief is strong that, if something is captured on film, it is therefore ‘real’, taking it away from the realms of possible misperception or fantasy – into the area of science and therefore, to some people, proof. The reality is usually somewhat different, and a more apt quote when dealing with UFO photos is ‘Every picture tells a story.’ That the perception of unexplained photographic cases frequently leads to confusion and controversy can be seen from the events which resulted from the Cracoe Fell saga.<sup>6</sup>

Cracoe village lies just to the north of Skipton in the Yorkshire Dales national park, a small place with only a few hundred inhabitants, boasting a few farms and houses, a pub and a police house. The police house and its occupants were the focus for the initial events of the Cracoe sighting, when, on the morning of 16 March 1981, off-duty Police Constable Derek Ingham was called by his wife to the kitchen window of his Cracoe home. He looked out on what would normally be a clear view across the valley, which rises up to the moorland and crags beyond – a view he had seen hundreds of times before. But today was different. A mile or so across the valley, against the side of Cracoe Fell, at about 1,100 feet, there appeared to be something hovering against the side of the rock face. Looking closer, Ingham could see three very bright lights in a straight line. The lights were so bright, even from over a mile away, that, although he could distinguish a shape behind them, he described the lights as ‘... like looking into a car spotlights, and it gave a glare.’ Considerably perplexed and unable to explain the sight, Ingham telephoned a fellow officer, who arrived shortly afterwards and verified the strange object.

When viewed through binoculars, the lights seemed to be on a solid object, and a ‘fin’ could be described behind the glare,

but because of the brightness they were unable to make out exactly what sort of an object it was. Six photographs were taken of the object, which, after it had been under observation for one hour, dimmed in intensity, reappeared and then vanished. A senior police officer was informed, and he later went up on the fell, but nothing could be found to account for the phenomenon. There was no snow on the rocks, and it would have been impossible for anyone to have placed powerful lights on the sheer, seventy-foot surface of the rock face.

Superficially, this was a 'classic' UFO sighting. A solid object with a fin, giving out a blinding glow at a distance of over a mile, seen by two witnesses who just happened to be policemen. Great credence is given to UFO sightings made by policemen, as they are supposed to be trained, objective observers who are often accountable in law for what they see. Not only was this UFO seen by two policemen: it was also captured on film several times. Enough evidence should have been available either to solve the case immediately or to conclude that it was a genuine unknown craft. It had all the makings of a 'classic' case.

The photographs were duly processed, and when enlarged the image on film seemed to show at least three spheres of light hovering against the rock face. A small regional UFO investigation group, the Yorkshire UFO Society (YUFOS), was called to investigate the sightings, and the group spent many years and hundreds of pounds investigating the case, which became even more complex and compelling when other witnesses to the event were found. One couple, after viewing a slide of the 'UFO', claimed to have observed the same object high in the air above Cracoe Fell later on the day of the police officers' sighting.

Great significance was placed by YUFOS on the Cracoe events, because the area around Cracoe and the southern Yorkshire Dales in general had been the focus for numerous UFO sightings around the late 1970s and early 1980s. Many of these UFOs were alleged to be similar to that depicted on the Cracoe photographs, displaying 'three balls of light' on their underside. This configuration had been associated with UFOs in many other countries and had its genesis in the hoaxed photographs taken by the famous UFO 'contactee' George Adamski in the early 1950s. Also several YUFOS members were of the opinion that there was some kind of underground UFO base in the Yorkshire Dales, and they were determined to

discover the cause of the sightings, often spending nights out on the remote moors in freezing temperatures. A genuine UFO captured on film would fit in perfectly with YUFOS' ideology.

When serious ufologists acquire a potentially genuine UFO photograph, they are careful to follow the correct scientific methodology, and so, to be totally sure about the photographs, YUFOS sent them for analysis at several independent locations. Ground Saucer Watch (GSW) based in Arizona, USA, specialized in the computer enhancement of alleged UFO photographs and has had considerable success in the past in the identification of hoaxes. Unfortunately, GSW were provided with inaccurate data about the times and distances involved and could not identify what was responsible for the image on the photographs. Another sceptical UFO photo-analyst, Klaus Webner of West Germany could not identify the cause of the image either, and so the photographs remained a mystery.

After two years of hard work on the case, YUFOS were convinced that they had a genuine UFO photograph on their hands, and they released the photographs to the media. They were featured on TV and in several national newspapers, accompanied by lurid headlines which read 'VISITORS FROM SPACE' and 'THE ALIENS HAVE LANDED'. YUFOS, who openly admit to their belief in alien visitations, made them the centrepiece of their lectures and produced long and expensive reports for sale dealing with the case.

The photographs were too good to be true. The five to ten per cent of unexplained UFO sightings are essentially of a transitory nature, and UFO sightings of a long duration are almost always something of a mundane nature, such as stars or planets. But the Cracoe UFO seemed to be different. It was a multi-witness, police-validated daylight photographic case and had evaded all explanation. The 'UFO' was below the horizon, and so stars, planets and aircraft had been ruled out. A mystery was growing around the Cracoe photographs.

Ufology may not be a science but it often works like one. One group of researchers puts forward its evidence for a theory or hypothesis, and other groups try to refute or validate it. The Cracoe cases was no different in this respect, and other UFO groups were not so certain about the UFO status of the case. In September 1983 a Cracoe farmer came forward and claimed that the 'UFO' was in fact nothing more than a light reflection

observed on the fell many times in the past, information which resulted in a reappraisal of the case by another UFO investigation group. YUFOS refuted and suppressed the farmer's testimony, branding him an 'unreliable witness'. The West Yorkshire UFO Research Group (WYUFORG) took the case up, and a dispute arose between WYUFORG and YUFOS over witness-credibility, investigation methodology and veracity of evidence. This war of words carried on for over a year, each side making claim and counter-claim over the available evidence, with no progress made by anyone.

Eventually the mystifying case was solved, almost by accident. A WYUFORG member happened to be passing through Cracoe village on an unrelated matter in November 1986 and noticed something bright on the side of the fell. Closer examination through binoculars revealed that it was 'three balls of bright light' – and, what was more, they were in exactly the same place as the photographs from 1981 depicted. The Cracoe UFO was back! Repeated visits, photographs and site surveys determined that the 'Cracoe UFO' was in fact a very complicated reflection caused by moisture and crystals in the quartz-bearing rock reflecting sunlight on days when the sun was low on the horizon. The sunlight effect, especially when the conditions were optimal, was staggering. It did indeed look as though three balls of light were hanging on the side of the fell, but at the location itself nothing could be seen. The case was solved.

As with breakthroughs in any subject area, the opposing camp resisted the new explanation initially: firstly by simple refusal to accept that WYUFORG's photographs showed the same image as those taken by the police in 1981, and secondly because YUFOS had stated categorically on several occasions that the 'UFO' was not due to a light reflection of any kind. The YUFOS president, Graham Birdsall, had said publicly that, 'No natural phenomenon could have caused this to hover there for just under an hour ... to construct something like this requires a pretty good intelligence.' Admitting that it was a reflection would have meant loss of face and credibility as serious investigators. When their position became untenable, YUFOS then devised curious theories to account for an identical light reflection and a UFO appearing in the same place over a period of time. Several years and hundreds of pounds had been spent

by both sides on the misperception of a natural phenomenon, and ironically it was later discovered that YUFOS had actually photographed the light reflection themselves but had not realized it because it did not resemble the close-up enlargements of the 1981 photographs!

Even when resolved, the Cracoe case raised questions about individual and group perception. How could the original witnesses have failed to see the light reflection before? It is visible to some degree on many days of the year (as the Cracoe farmer had said in 1983), and the witnesses had lived in the police house for at least two years prior to the sighting. The witnesses must have looked at the fell several times each day. Why was the farmer who knew it was a light reflection ignored by YUFOS as an 'unreliable witness'? And, most importantly, what are we to make of the witnesses who came forward to state that they saw the very same thing in the air on the same day? This event could simply not have happened unless part of the rock-face was able to uproot itself and take to the air!

The Cracoe case *was* a 'classic case' after all! *It was a classic case of misperception of an event, of witness testimony and of evidence.*

We have spent so long describing the Cracoe case because it provides a microcosm of hundreds of UFO cases, and of the methodology and interpretation which lie behind them before they reach the public in magazines and books about UFOs. How much of this distortion is by accident, and how much by unrealized or admitted motivations on the part of UFO groups to have an 'unexplained case' on their hands, is impossible to say. The Cracoe case also typifies the way in which UFO study groups with differing outlooks, ethics and approaches to the UFO phenomenon will process, interpret and distribute information according to their own beliefs. How we as researchers in the front line of ufology deal with evidence and witness testimony has a massive influence on how the image of the UFO enigma is shaped in the eyes of both the public and the media, who then reflect it back to the research groups. Discovering the stimuli behind a UFO sighting becomes an increasingly difficult task, and even when a case is resolved, the folklore which surrounds it is often added to the subject, leading to 'identified' cases being recycled over and over again in books, newspapers and ultimately people's imaginations.

Cases of complex misidentification such as Cracoe and

'trigger' cases such as the Kenneth Arnold sightings, which initiate specific motifs or waves of sightings in their wake, are common in UFO mythology. Misperception, poor investigation and a refusal to accept facts play a major part in the development of UFO folklore, but there is another category which has had just as big an influence – the hoax. Hoaxes are worth looking at.

Just as misperceived objects share the same characteristics as those classified as 'unknown', most hoaxes follow similar patterns, being treated like genuine UFO sightings themselves. The field of UFO research is riddled with hoaxes, both confirmed and suspected, and several books could be filled with accounts of them and their effects on the way in which the subject has been interpreted.

Hoaxes have plagued ufology since its inception in 1947, but those concerning aerial objects go even further back. During the 1896–7 US airship wave, hoaxes were perpetrated involving airships which had allegedly crash-landed (see Chapter 6).

Some hoaxes are simple in content, others far more complicated, involving sophisticated photographic hoaxing to back them up. One such case involves the Swiss farmer Billy Meier, recently the subject of a best selling book entitled *Light Years*, by Gary Kinder.<sup>7</sup> Meier had led a picturesque early life prior to his famous UFO experiences, travelling the world in a variety of occupations before settling in Switzerland. Even during his time in India, he claimed to have met spacemen and to have photographed their craft, but it was not until the 1970s that the Meier controversy became well known.

Meier claimed that he was frequently visited by a group of aliens from the Pleiadian star system. These interplanetary visitors gave him the usual 'contactee' messages relating to faster-than-light travel, photon drives and planetary evolution. As with many UFO contactees, the material passed to Meier verged on the pseudo-spiritual, and he rapidly came to the attention of UFO investigators in the USA. Retired USAF officer Wendelle Stevens believed everything Meier told him and helped to document and later publish Meier's claims. Between 1975 and 1979 Meier alleged he was in close contact with the Pleiadians, amassing hundreds of photographs, alien metal samples and tape recordings of their voices in the process. These photographs were not just hazy blobs in the sky either: they were crisp, clear shots showing highly structured 'flying

saucer' type craft. Photographs tend to dominate hoax cases because they quickly capture the imagination and interest; speculation, however, that Meier had hoaxed the photographs was fuelled when identical models were found in a barn on his farm. Further photographic analysis by GSW in America revealed the photographs to be riddled with ambiguities and contradictions (for instance, some of them had been taken with the camera pointed towards the sun to obscure detail), and the conclusion was arrived at that most of them were double exposures of model UFOs.<sup>8</sup> This negative evidence was, however, conveniently ignored by Kinder's book, which promotes the case as genuine!

We don't know why Meier chose to spend so many years creating a hoax based on beamships from the Pleiades, as most hoaxers never reveal their motivations. It may be hard to prove or disprove a story by a witness, but recent advances in photographic analysis techniques have changed the situation slightly, enabling researchers to say with some certainty that a photograph is hoaxed, even if the photographer denies it. One case falling into this category is the series of photos taken in Barnsley, South Yorkshire, during the UFO flap of August 1987 (See Chapter 1) by fisherman Peter Beard.<sup>9</sup>

After returning from a sea-fishing trip to Wales, Peter Beard was awakened at 5 am on 5 August by a strange buzzing noise. Thinking the noise was a fly on the window, he got out of bed and opened the curtains. What Peter alleges he saw was no fly but a strange, vaguely saucer-shaped craft flying above a row of houses opposite. The object was moving slowly – 'lazily', in Peter's account – and luckily he had time to grab his self-winding camera and take four photographs of it. His girlfriend also saw the object whilst it was being photographed. Peter claimed he would have taken more photographs of the object but his camera jammed at the crucial moment, and when he looked again, the UFO was gone. Peter thought no more of the photographs until he mentioned them in his local public house. The landlord showed them to a newspaper reporter, and the photos and story were subsequently printed in the *Barnsley Chronicle*.

The Independent UFO Network (IUN) heard of the case and immediately began investigations. Peter was interviewed several times and, even though his account of the events differed from

that of his girlfriend and changed in the course of the interviews, the case was a strong one. Several professional photographers examined the photos, and although they had some doubts about the image on the film, they could not arrive at a mundane explanation for them. The photos, retouched and complete with sensationalized story, were featured on the front page of the tabloid *Daily Star* newspaper, and Peter Beard appeared on two national TV shows, discussing the case.

Analysis of photographs previously had to be done by physical measurement of the image and the opinion of the analyst, leaving room for mistakes and individual perception dependent on the usual biases. Digital analysis and the enhancement of photographs have minimized these factors, and now a photo can be reduced to its basic data, or pixel form, on computer. Using this technique, it is possible to ascertain with a degree of accuracy factors such as the distance of the image from the camera, whether or not the image is three-dimensional, if the image is supported by a string and so forth. So it was to professionals in this field, Ground Saucer Watch in the USA, that the IUN turned for help with the Barnsley photographs.

GSW were sent three of the Barnsley photographs for examination and by digital analysis were swiftly able to determine that the photographs were hoaxed, saying: 'There is a lack of symmetry in each photo relative to the "objects" shape. This lack of symmetry is always associated with two causes. A) a cut out of cardboard or paper in a saucer shape, or B) a hastily assembled "model" saucer. This lack of geometric consistency does not support any theory that the object is truly structured.'

This was proof enough, but GSW had even more conclusive data to add: 'Analysis of the pixel (picture cell) data reveals that the camera was focused on features of the roof/building (background) and that the window/curtain combination and that of the UI (unidentified image) [foreground] are totally out of focus. This is logical, as the window feature is much closer to the camera lens. However, the point being made here, reveals that photographic pixel data from the window edge and the edges of the UI are proportionately distorted.'

In simple terms, this means that whatever is on the photographs is pasted onto the window itself. One further piece of evidence to support this theory was offered by GSW (They had discovered it by a technique known as high-band filtering):

that there was a 'strange linear boundary' surrounding the image on film which would be consistent with the edges of something stuck to the window. Too many aspects of the computer analysis had indicated that the photographs were not what the witness had claimed they were.

When Peter Beard was asked to comment about GSW's conclusions, he said that they were 'rubbish' and that the UFO was not pasted on the window; but strangely he intimated that he knew what the image really was – impossible if the object *was* a UFO. Despite our doubts and conclusions about the case, Peter gave us permission to use one of his photographs in this book, so you can judge for yourselves.

Many UFO investigators would dismiss hoaxes as being of little overall significance to the study of UFOs. This idea is dangerously naïve, bearing in mind the as-yet-undiscovered hoaxes, and the implications which they have for the subject when they *are* 'discovered'. That many of the hoaxes which have so far been revealed were on their way to becoming 'classic' cases, were very well publicized and had been at the root of many ufological beliefs, cannot be underestimated. They were being repeated as truth year after year in books and magazines, influencing the ideas of those who came into contact with them. Nor are UFO hoaxes solely photographic cases. Every one of the UFO types or motifs, from eyewitness accounts of lights in the sky through to landing traces and abductions, has its hoax analogue.

The motivations behind hoaxes are much more complicated than they first appear. Most people assume that they are perpetrated for the money or the notoriety. This is far from the truth. Hoaxers often make little financial gain from their efforts and fame is rarely bestowed upon them for more than a day or two. The real reasons must run far deeper. It is more likely that the reason why people perpetrate hoaxes is the quiet satisfaction they must get from the knowledge that they have fooled a great many people and have created and fostered a strong belief in an event which did not actually occur. They have in the process manipulated people and their beliefs, creating a false reality for others who will build and add to that reality; both parties, the hoaxer and the hoaxed, contributing to the growing UFO folklore.

This chapter is not intended to be a reductionist view of

human perception – quite the opposite, in fact. The aim has been to point out, with reference to specific case studies, how our perceptions are irrevocably tangled up with our beliefs, either as individuals, groups or societies and through our communication systems. The debunker would stop there, satisfied with that explanation, summing up with the phrase ‘It’s all in the mind.’ Maybe it is, but if so, *this is the real mystery!* Why exactly do people interpret unusual or ambiguous aerial phenomena as ‘UFOs’? What more mystery do we need? The mind or the brain may be the creator of the UFO experience. By this we mean the UFO experience as separate from the stimulus, which may be any one of a number of mundane phenomena or even as-yet-undiscovered phenomena – including the possibility of visitors from space.

Misperception and hoax, plus all the shades in between, form a major part of the UFO enigma and are shaping forces in the creation of UFO folklore and belief systems – in particular that we are being visited by beings from other worlds. An overview clearly illustrates that the line between what we know to be fact and fiction is thin and constantly under redefinition. The lesson learned from a study of human perception and hoaxes and their effect on the UFO subject is a harsh one and indicates that our idea of what UFOs are must be constantly questioned and revised. When these lessons are set against the changing face of ufology in its historical context it becomes all the more apparent that the percipient, his beliefs and socialization are more important than what he claims to have seen.

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## Mind out of Time

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... no one would have believed in the last years of the nineteenth century that this world was being watched keenly and closely by intelligences greater than man's and yet as mortal as his own; that as men busied themselves about their various concerns, they were scrutinised and studied ... with infinite complacence people went to and fro over the earth about their little affairs, serene in the assurance of their dominion over this small spinning fragment of solar driftwood ... yet across an immense ethereal gulf, minds that are to our minds as ours are to the beasts of the jungle, intellects vast, cool, and unsympathetic, regarded this earth with envious eyes and slowly and surely drew their plans against us ...<sup>1</sup>

These are the opening lines from *War of the Worlds*, H.G. Wells' epic 1897 science fiction novel. But for the date, the concerns expressed there are exactly the same as those currently being voiced with growing conviction by many UFO researchers and UFO witnesses worldwide, who are claiming that a similar situation is occurring today. According to them, for the past forty years at least the Earth and its occupants have been under just such scrutiny by real aliens – aliens who are taking humans away against their will and performing medical experiments on them of a most sinister kind, showing scant regard for human dignity and freedom.

Probably the most well-known UFO-related phrase is 'close encounter', which became part of popular usage following the Steven Spielberg film *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. The term 'close encounter of the third kind' is UFO researchers' jargon denoting a close-range sighting of a UFO and one or more occupants. Once big news, CE3s are now rapidly being overshadowed by a new kind of UFO report – abductions.

Whilst being a very small part in percentage terms of the whole UFO phenomenon, abductions – or 'close encounters of

the fourth kind' – represent perhaps its most disturbing and unsettling aspect. Mankind's previous accounts of alien contact fade into insignificance in the face of the events now being reported. Over 200 people have now come forward and claimed they have been abducted by aliens from space, and the number is rising yearly. These claims are being made not by the mentally ill but by people who are serious, sane and in many cases very, very frightened about what appears to be happening to them.

Some UFO researchers share the witnesses' unease about what may be taking place, and a growing number of ufologists are now concentrating solely on the abduction phenomenon, convinced that it holds the key to the UFO mystery. Even those UFO researchers who are sceptical about the underlying causes behind abduction accounts are concerned about the spiralling number of claims, and the intensity of feeling which goes with them. Until recently the public were largely unaware of the abduction phenomenon, but within the last ten years this situation has changed radically. Writers such as Whitley Strieber have made the abduction scenario well known to everyone, with descriptions of his particular experiences in books such as *Communion* and *Transformation*, and there are now very few people who are not aware of the inverted, pear-shaped head with the dominant black slanting eyes which are the trademark of the small grey aliens.

Nor is it only members of the public who are taking these reports seriously. Scientist and UFO historian David Jacobs says of the abduction phenomenon: 'Abduction research has given us more information about the UFO phenomenon itself ... than all the accumulated information of the last forty years', qualifying this statement by adding that we are witnessing a 'breakthrough of unimaginable and incalculable importance'.<sup>2</sup> These are powerful and emotive statements.

If abductions do represent a 'breakthrough' in our understanding of one part of the UFO enigma and, more to the point, if they indicate alien intervention in human affairs, just what evidence is available and what does it suggest? What incontrovertible evidence is there to support the idea that aliens are not only visiting Earth but are abducting and abusing humans? The trail of events which has brought people like Jacobs to such conclusions is a long and complicated one. It is also a narrow trail from which few UFO researchers have

strayed to consider the possible alternatives to their chosen belief system. By opening up the possibilities and comparing abduction reports with other types of phenomena, we hope to give a clearer overview of the abduction situation.

Man's latest flirtation with the idea of contact with extraterrestrial beings has come about in a number of ways. The first flying saucer sightings of the late 1940s gave way in the 1950s to reports of encounters with spacemen by the group of people known as contactees. In the early 1950s the unfeeling abductions and medical experiments by small grey aliens which are common today were totally unknown, and any contact with space people was always with the benign variety of humanoid aliens made famous by contactees such as George Adamski and Truman Bethurum.

Whatever the veracity of their claims and experiences, the significant difference between the contactee experience and that of the abductee is that it was always voluntarily. Although the contactees' aliens were keen to take humans onto their craft, there was no question of force. Physical contact generally was minimal, often by 'telepathic' means. Contactees tended towards the religious end of the belief spectrum and often founded small pseudo-religious orders or cults, some of which, such as the Aetherius society, still flourish today.

Until the recent publicity connected with abduction popularizers Whitley Strieber and Budd Hopkins, the Betty and Barney Hill abduction was the best-known UFO abduction case of them all. A best-selling book by John Fuller, *The Interrupted Journey*, was written about it, and it was also turned into a film. Depending on your point of view, the Hill abduction was either the first time an American had come forward and reported a UFO abduction or the fantasy UFO case from which all the rest followed.

The night of 19 September 1961 saw Betty and Barney Hill driving down Highway 3 on their way home from Canada to the New Hampshire town of Portsmouth. As they drove through the White Mountains, Betty became aware of an unusual bright light in the sky, which later appeared closer as a 'pancake-shaped' UFO hovering in the air, with 'figures' inside. Barney Hill watched the UFO through binoculars at one point and, terrified by what he had seen, ran back to the car and then

drove off in a frightened state, intending to get away from the object as quickly as possible. Shortly after driving off, they experienced a 'time-lapse' period preceded by a series of 'beeps' and sensations of drowsiness and tingling. Later they found they had driven for thirty-five miles during which they could not account for what had happened.<sup>3</sup>

Hypnosis as a method of recovering 'forgotten' events recurs time and time again in the history of UFO abductions and is a highly contentious issue. Basically the hypnotist regresses witnesses to the time of the event in an attempt to get them to relive the missing period of time. Hypnotist Dr Benjamin Simon saw the Hills on several occasions and regressed them separately to the night of 19 September. What came out under hypnosis was a 'classic' abduction of humans by aliens. The period of missing time, now determined to be two hours, seemingly masked the Hills' being forcibly taken from their car and onto the UFO, where they were both subjected to a series of medical tests. Betty Hill's 'test' involved having a long needle inserted into her navel which caused her extreme stress when relived under hypnotic regression; Barney's was an inspection of his genitals and the possible extraction of a sperm sample.

Suddenly the nature of alien contact had changed. The Hill case represented a scenario completely different from that of the friendly aliens who chatted about world peace to the contactees, and was a turning-point in UFO research. Although the Hill case has been repeatedly called into question by ufologists, it was the first case of its kind to have the basic elements of the coming wave of abduction reports: forcible abduction by aliens (Oriental-type aliens), and the suggestion of interspecies breeding and genetic manipulation.

Being the first case of its kind in North America and also the first in which hypnosis was used to uncover the hidden period of time, the Hill case has suffered much criticism. Few people, including even the most vocal critics, are denying that the Hills saw a UFO, but they have questioned exactly what it was they did see which may have precipitated the experience. Some critics have said that the word 'UFO' could have been a misperception of the planet Jupiter, and therefore they could not have been physically 'abducted' by aliens. These theories throw doubt on the objective reality of the event and are backed up by the comments of Dr Simon, the hypnotist in the Hill case, who

also believed that the Hills had undergone an 'imaginary experience' triggered by confusion over the initial 'UFO' sighting.

These doubts have been countered by those in the midst of abduction research with claims which are even more unprovable than those of the original abductee experience. Since the Hill case, and with the advent of abduction research by Budd Hopkins, it has been claimed that many abductees were first taken in childhood, long before the Hills' experience, but have only just recalled it via regression hypnosis. This may be the case, but as these details are recalled only hypnotically, they do not shake the Hill case from its position as the first contemporaneously reported North American abduction.

Since the 1970s there has been a steady rise in the number of abductions reported, and more and more UFO researchers have dedicated themselves to this one aspect of the UFO phenomenon.

Budd Hopkins, already mentioned, is now the major force in abduction research in the USA. He first became interested in UFOs as the result of his own sighting of a strange aerial object in 1964, and by 1977 he was concentrating his efforts on the burgeoning abduction reports which led to a book, *Missing Time*,<sup>4</sup> published in 1981, in which he laid down three basic tenets of the abduction scenario. Firstly, that a period of time is missing from the experience, behind which lies the core abduction; secondly, that most abductees have been repeatedly 'taken', with their experiences commencing in childhood, and thirdly, that a good many abductees have some form of physical marking in the form of a scar received during their experiences with the 'aliens'.

In his follow-up book, *Intruders*,<sup>5</sup> Hopkins goes further into the abduction mystery as it has revealed itself to him, and as a result of extensive investigations into the experiences of a woman known as 'Kathie Davis' he is now sure of exactly what lies behind the abduction enigma. To say that Hopkins' claims about the true nature of the abduction experience are incredible is an understatement, and it is this incredulity which has led to abduction reports being ignored by scientific disciplines and relegated to the realms of fantasy. Instead of being ignored, Hopkins' claims need to be examined and analysed. If people are reporting these experiences in any number, they deserve

more than dismissal, and his claims have the right to be heard and considered.

Rather than the one-off event which most abductions at first seem to be, Hopkins argues that the abductee is somehow 'chosen' when young and subsequently undergoes a series of abductions throughout his or her life. Many of Hopkins' abductees have scars on their bodies, and under hypnosis many can recall the actual moment when the event causing the scar took place. According to Hopkins, the scars are the result of cell-sampling experiments when the abductee is first taken as a child. Those humans who fit the aliens' criteria as a result of this early selection are monitored, and later in life, when they are sexually mature, further abductions are carried out, resulting in the taking of sperm and ova samples. Hopkins is certain that this evidence, retrieved from witnesses both under hypnosis and in normal consciousness, gives the key to what the end product of the alien interest is – the creation of a hybrid race between aliens and earthmen.

Although some of the abductees' recollections manifest through dreams as well as in normal consciousness and via hypnosis, Hopkins is certain that these events are not dreams but take place in the objective world throughout the abductees' lives. Nor, he says, are they confabulations or hallucinations, as he keeps many of the details secret so as to be able to cross-check accounts, believing that, if an abductee comes forward with an item of information previously unavailable in the public domain, it suggests that that person's experience was objectively real.

Besides the genetic manipulation which seems to be occurring, resulting in alien babies raised in mother-ship nurseries, something even more sinister is cropping up in many abduction reports. Under hypnosis abductees are reporting having needles pushed up their noses and into the brain. This seems to be either to place something in the brain or to retrieve something, and some abductees claim to have seen a small ball-bearing-type object which is implanted in or removed from the brain by this needle. Novelist Whitley Strieber and several other abductees claim to have had this implant physically located in their brains, in the temporal lobe area, which has allegedly been detected by a medical technique known as Magnetic Resonance Imaging.<sup>6</sup> No one has yet had one of these alleged

implants removed from their brains, but the connection between the implant, the experience and the temporal lobe will be raised again later.

The speculated-upon but unproven experiences of reproductive tampering and alien/human hybridization have also been accompanied by physical changes in some abductees' physiology. These are frequently cited as supporting the reality of the less tangible abduction accounts. Pregnancies have been 'mysteriously' ended, leading Hopkins to suggest that foetuses caused by artificial insemination during the abduction experience are later removed.

Contentious though Hopkins' work and methods are, his conclusions are a clear challenge to how we think our everyday world functions. According to Hopkins, what is taking place is on the same level as the fictional nightmare described by H.G. Wells. Humans are, in effect, someone's property to do with as they wish. They can be taken at any time by the aliens, and it seems that we are impotent in the face of their activities. The abductees are left frightened and confused by their experiences and in many cases exhibit signs of shock and trauma – in other words, they appear to have undergone a real event. Gone are the days when mankind was on the brink of being part of the galactic federation, as the contactees led us to believe. If Hopkins' research is valid, the human race seems to be nothing more than some kind of cosmic ant farm, to be visited and plundered at will by an alien species who can distort our consciousness, tamper with our genetics and tag us like creatures in a safari park.

Hopkins, Jacobs and Strieber are at the vanguard of a growing movement which is claiming that these abductions are real, objective events, and events which are affecting our planet and its inhabitants in a fundamental and irreversible way. Ignoring and dismissing their allegations would be folly, but in view of the continuing lack of physical evidence we should accept the abduction phenomenon as objectively real only if it is unique – if none of its components can be found either separately or together in any other area of human experience. Only then can we accept that genuine alien intervention is taking place. When abductions are put under the microscope, though, and compared with other types of transcendental experience, the situation begins to alter in perspective.

Researchers Robert Bartholomew and Keith Basterfield have

stated that they believe there to be an 'abduction state of consciousness', meaning that some human beings are capable of slipping out of the normal state of consciousness and into an altered state of consciousness (ASC) in which an abduction event may appear to take place.<sup>7</sup>

For this idea of an abduction state of consciousness to be viable, there have to be other reasons for the alleged physical residue of the abduction experience. How does a state of mind take into account the pregnancy anomalies or the scars consistently reported by abductees? A whole book could easily be written on the human body and its interaction with the brain and its external environment, and it appears that the mind/body can in fact replicate all the physical symptoms of an abduction if it so chooses.

The key motif which identifies abduction experiences is that of missing time, treasured by ufologists as central to an abduction event. But time-distortions are certainly not unique to UFO and abduction experiences and are common throughout all areas of transcendental and 'paranormal' experiences. In her book *The Mask of Time*,<sup>8</sup> Joan Foreman cites cases of missing time and time-slips relating to ghost encounters, precognition and past-life memories. It seems that a distortion in the perceived flow of time, rather than being the guise behind which a real event lies, is indicative of an altered state of consciousness in which we can have a variety of experiences. Abductions may well be among those experiences.

The mysterious scars found on abductees are also open to interpretation as to how they got there. The discovery of physical marks on the body of someone who has undergone a non-ordinary experience is well known and timeless. Stigmata – marks appearing on those people who have had intense religious experiences – can take the form of shapes of letters, lumps, cuts which bleed, and scars. Equally, problems with pregnancies and reproductive systems have been noted by various authors. Pseudopregnancies and other gynaecological anomalies which can confuse doctors have been observed throughout medical history, and Helen Flanders Dunbar, in her book *Emotions and Bodily Change*,<sup>9</sup> gives examples of these and many others. Are all these instances further examples of alien intervention as yet unrealized by the medical profession or are they evidence of the power of the human mind over its basic bodily functions?

Just as Budd Hopkins regards scars as the physical evidence for abductions' having taken place objectively, witch-finders in the Middle Ages regarded any such marks as evidence of fraternization with the Devil – fraternization frequently attested to by the 'witches' themselves. The parallels between witchcraft and demonology accounts from the Middle Ages and those of UFO abductees are numerous. Witch-finders, for example, went out into the countryside armed with a list of likely symptoms (including marks on the body!) which might identify a witch. Once found, the witch was 'assisted' by torture in the telling of her experience. Today the UFO abductionists operate a reverse procedure, in that, rather than going out to look for potential 'abductees', the subjects are discovered when they write to an address at the end of a book they have just read about the 'abduction' experience. Before long they are 'assisted' by hypnosis (itself a form of torture, considering the emotional anguish hypnotized subjects often display) into the telling of their 'abduction' story. There was no real medieval witch-cult, even though there were many people willing to admit to having taken part in the most bizarre of practices. In the same way as the witch-cult was an invention of the witch-finders, the 'abduction' craze is the product of the UFO investigators themselves.

If the physical side of abductions is conceivably caused by the mind, what evidence is there to suggest that the actual encounter with aliens is not of a similar nature? Our normal state of consciousness, far from being the fixed state we would like it to be, is just one of many states possible. A look through any good book on parapsychology and transpersonal experiences will throw up numerous other states of mind in which different things appear 'real', and by 'real' in this context we mean objective, external to the body. Near Death Experiences (NDEs), when the person seems to be dying and meets heavenly beings or relatives; Out of the Body Experiences (OOBEs), in which the person appears to leave the physical body and be able to travel freely; false awakenings, in which the person actually lives part of his or her life before waking up and realizing it had been a vivid lucid dream: these are just a few of the ASCs which have been identified and named and which appear real to the percipients, the people who perceive that the experience is happening to them.<sup>10</sup>

Not only are analogues of various parts of the abduction experience found in other areas of contemporary transcendental experience but, curiously and perhaps significantly, folklore from both previous centuries and earlier this century contains accounts of experiences which sound remarkably similar to the current abduction stories. If current alien abductions were a new and unique event, we should not be able to find similar reports from earlier times, but research shows that, far from abductions being a recent event, human beings have always had the experience of being 'taken' by aliens. This experience, whether objectively or subjectively real, is universal throughout time and across culture, throwing serious doubt on the objective, external reality of contemporary alien abduction claims, giving what has become a narrow outlook deeper perspective and enabling us to see the claims of contemporary UFO abductees set against a historical backdrop. In the Western world, historical abduction accounts can be found in the two areas of fairylore and the Celtic otherworld. The literature of both is of much use in analysing this century's wave of UFO abduction accounts and assessing if they represent objective or subjective phenomena.

The link between alien contact in the twentieth century and the events recorded in fairy lore is not new to the study of UFOs<sup>11</sup> but, despite the similarities, is frequently ignored or its relevance played down. Accepting that events similar to contemporary alien abductions took place in the past, with only marginally different content, would completely upturn any ideas about the recent intervention of aliens from space, and a connection between the two, and explanation for why they are so similar, would have to be found by alien abduction proponents.

In our own research into UFO folklore and abductions, we have found a convincing case for a direct connection between abduction states and folklore stories. These historical accounts, often viewed just as whimsical folk tales, seem to describe physical location and experience almost identical to the abductions of today – events set apart from human time and normal consciousness which it was possible to enter either by choice, at the right time and location, or by direct encounter with its denizens. This 'otherworld' is consistent throughout time and human culture, being described by different names at different times and locations – very much like the alien contact

aspect of contemporary UFO phenomena. All motifs found in current abduction accounts can also be found within stories of excursions to the Celtic otherworld and encounters with fairies and 'little people'. Before we can conclude that today's abductees are recalling a real event, we have to reconcile the similarities between the historical accounts of travel to the fairy otherworld and the modern UFO abduction lore.

The following passage, from a book on Welsh folklore written by the Revd Elias Owen in 1887, contains an account of an event remarkably similar to many descriptions of abductions reported by aliens during the past twenty years.<sup>12</sup>

Entitled 'A three hour Fairy Dance seeming as a few minutes', the story describes how David Williams, a servant, was returning home to his employers at Penryn Isaf in North Wales one dark night. Williams was walking behind the lady of the house, and she, assuming he was following, went straight home. Williams did not appear until three hours later. Stranger still, when he was questioned as to the cause of his delay, he was convinced that he had arrived only three minutes after his mistress. When he was told that over three hours had elapsed, he would not believe it at first, but after some consideration he conceded the time loss and recalled what had taken place. According to the Revd Owen,

He observed, he said, a brilliant meteor passing through the air, which was followed by a ring or hoop of fire, and within this hoop stood a man and a woman of small size. When the hoop reached the earth these two beings jumped out of it and proceeded to make a circle in the ground. As soon as this was done a large number of men and women instantly appeared and with the sweetest music that the ear had ever heard commenced dancing round and round the circle. The sight was so entrancing that the man stayed, as he thought, a few minutes to witness the scene. The ground all around was lit up by a kind of subdued light and he observed every movement of these beings. By and by the meteor which had first attracted his attention appeared again and when it reached the spot where the dancing was, the lady and gentleman who arrived in it disappeared in the same manner in which they had reached the place. Immediately after their departure the fairies vanished from sight, and the man found himself alone and in darkness, and when he proceeded homewards. In this way he accounted for his delay on the way.

A period of missing time combined with a strange light which

resolves itself into a flying object? A subdued light which illuminates the area? Humanoids acting in an incomprehensible way? If this experience occurred today, it would be interpreted as a UFO abduction with all the major components present.

These 'aliens', described in folklore as fairy folk, did not come from space but from within the earth itself and were described in Wales as the *Tylwyth Teg* ('The fair family'). The world in which they lived was, according to the folklorist Evans Wentz, '... quite unlike ours, and mortals taken to it by them were changed in nature ... If they thus took you away, it would be according to our time for twelve months, though to you the time would seem no more than a night.'<sup>13</sup> Missing time was firmly established throughout reports of experiences related in folklore and was then, as it is now, an integral part of interaction with the dwellers of this otherworld.

Contemporary abductees do not always see a UFO as part of their experience. Several of Hopkins' abductees did not actually encounter a UFO in the air but chanced upon it on the ground in much the same way as people came across the fairy entrances to the otherworld. Hopkins offers the case of an abductee called 'Angie' who under regressive hypnosis describes walking in the woods and encountering a small grey-skinned creature 'about as tall as her shoulder'. Later she comes upon 'some kind of ship' in the woods. When Hopkins enquires whether or not the 'ship' is in the sky, Angie is sure it is on the ground, in the cornfield. Angie enters the 'ship', which has its own internal glow, and a classic abduction takes place.<sup>14</sup>

But what makes Angie's encounter different from those reported in Celtic folklore? Even when she is regressed, there is no actual UFO encounter: she merely relates a memory (and we cannot be sure that this is the memory of an objective encounter) of meeting a small person in the woods, followed by an encounter with a 'ship' – note that she uses the word 'ship', not 'craft' or 'UFO' – which is on the ground and self-illuminated. Just how objective was her encounter, and why should a 'ship' on the ground be connected with a UFO from elsewhere? The connection between Angie's experience and a UFO abduction seems to be as much a part of the Space Age culture we live in, and the intervention and interpretation of a UFO investigator and his terminology, as it seems a true account of an alien abduction. Two hundred years ago Angie

would have reported being 'taken by the fairies' not by the grey aliens.

Fairy mounds on legs looking suspiciously like flying saucers, and hollow hills lit by unseen lights: these were entrances to the 'otherworld' – a place where time was distorted and wondrous creatures dwelt. But in folklore accounts of abductions, unlike today's rigid dogmatism of UFO experience, other ways of entering these locations, or states of consciousness, were also available. In Celtic and fairy lore the otherworld could also be reached through caves, the waters of a lake, and mists. This may be because folklorists were just collecting accounts and were not interested, as so many of today's abduction investigators are, in establishing a rigid criterion – entering into abduction states via means other than a UFO today is conveniently ignored by the ETH advocates, who want a convenient, physical basis for the stories of their abductees.

Missing time masking an abduction experience and strange structures in which fairies dwelt are consonant with the major features of the current UFO abduction mythos. Even the end result posited by Hopkins, the creation of a hybrid race, occurs time and time again in fairy lore, which is replete with accounts of fairy folk meddling in human reproduction. In *The Vanishing People: A Study of Traditional Fairy Beliefs*, Kathleen Briggs lists numerous cases of fairies mating with humans and stealing human children, and of fairy midwives helping to deliver human children which are then removed. Briggs says: 'The fairies seem to have been shy breeders in spite of their interest in fertility, and they were always anxious to revive their powers with a human strain.'<sup>15</sup> This is exactly what the grey aliens are alleged to be doing. Is it really possible that the two sets of reported experiences are different?

The striking similarities between fairy lore and contemporary abduction experiences are hotly denied by many abduction researchers, who see today's events as new and completely unconnected with any in the past. Their reasons are many, but patterns in the sequence of events and appearance of unpublic motifs in the abductees' accounts are used to support the reality and originality of the experience. This line of argument fails to be convincing, as identical patterns in other human transcendental experiences can also be found. OOBES, and in particular NDEs, have a set sequence of events, some or all of which take

place in every experience, just as occurs in abduction accounts. The reporting of components of the abduction experience which are generally unknown or are intentionally held back to cross-check the veracity of reports is open to interpretation. Some researchers have argued for this being accountable by a mechanism such as the collective unconscious from which we can all draw information or cultural archetypes.

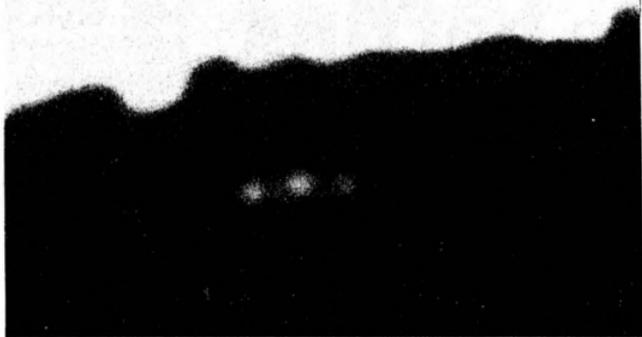
One factor against the physical origin of UFO abductions is that no one has ever been seen in the process of being 'abducted'. There are no witnesses other than the abductees themselves, and they are more correctly percipients, not witnesses, as they underwent, not observed, the experience.

This lack of one particular type of hard evidence to support the ETH origin is fundamental. If abductions are real events, they must be capable of being observed by others independent of the event. Many abductions take place on roads, where even at night people ought to see something taking place. The abduction of the Todmorden policeman Alan Godfrey in 1980 took place early in the morning on a busy road in a built-up suburban area used by people going to work and travelling between Yorkshire and Lancashire. Yet no one saw anything taking place. To account for this lack of third-party witnesses, forms of 'special pleading' are often used by ET proponents, and one investigator seriously confided in us that the UFO occupants had in this case affected the entire area, so that no one saw what was taking place!

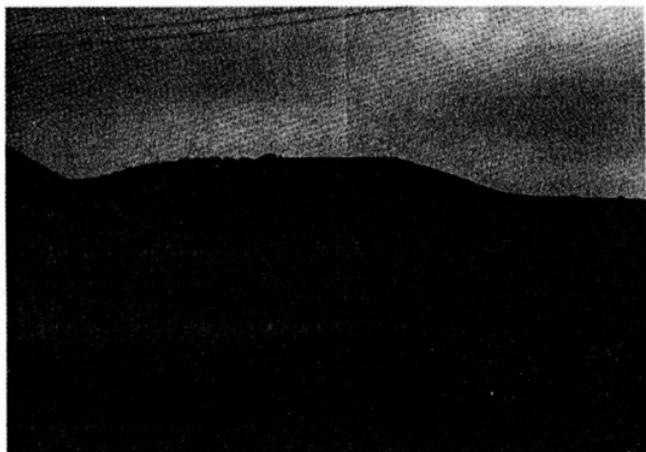
Taking into account the continuing lack of physical proof, all accounts of abductions, whether by aliens or fairies, come back to the perceiver of the event, the percipient. We cannot track down the physical location of either the UFO craft or the fairy mound. Do the witnesses have to be in the right place at the right time for the experience – or in the right state of mind? The analogues between components of OOBESs, NDEs and other transcendental experiences point the way – the Celtic otherworld, the interior of the fairy mound and the interior of the UFO are not properties of the external, physical world. They appear to be created by and reside within the human brain, and the percipient enters this altered state of consciousness in some manner.

If the abduction experience is a purely human, mental event, perhaps numerous people have been observed whilst they were

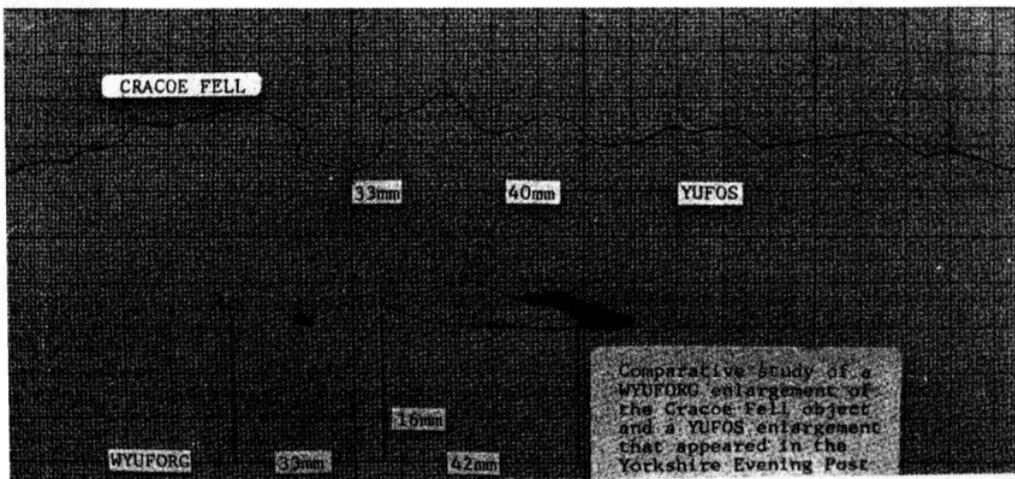
The 'Cracoe UFO', a cutting from the *Yorkshire Evening Post*, 22 August 1983. The accompanying article quoted the Yorkshire UFO Society as saying, 'This is the most dramatic photo we have ever had. It is the best photographic evidence in this country ever of a UFO.'



This photograph, taken from Cracoe village, clearly shows that the 'Cracoe UFO' is in fact a light reflection on the fell face.



The BUFORA comparative analysis of the Cracoe photograph (top) and the WYUFORG photograph (centre) showed conclusively that the light reflections were the same phenomena (see chapter 5).



# 'UFO' rings baffle boffins

## Pilots make first report on imprints

BRITAIN'S great flying saucer debate flared in Leicestershire today after the discovery of mysterious rings in a county field.

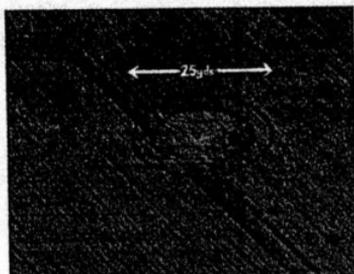
A circular area of flattened wheat, with an estimated 25-yard diameter, has appeared near Oadby.

It is surrounded by a single ring apparently scored into the vegetation — with a triangular formation of three smaller circles nearby.

**No tracks seen**

And it has already begun to baffle experts, who say there is no obvious botanical or geological explanation for it.

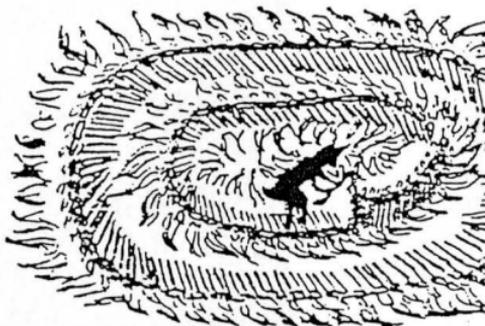
The rings were first spotted by fly-



**FLATTENED:** The circular area in a wheat-field which has an estimated 25-yard diameter.

*Leicester Mercury*, 5 July 1988. An example of the UFO-connected media coverage of the cropfield circles mystery. Natural phenomena, spaceships or hoax?

Woodcut from 1678 attributing obvious crop-circle phenomena to the work of the devil. The press today connect such mysteries with UFOs and aliens.



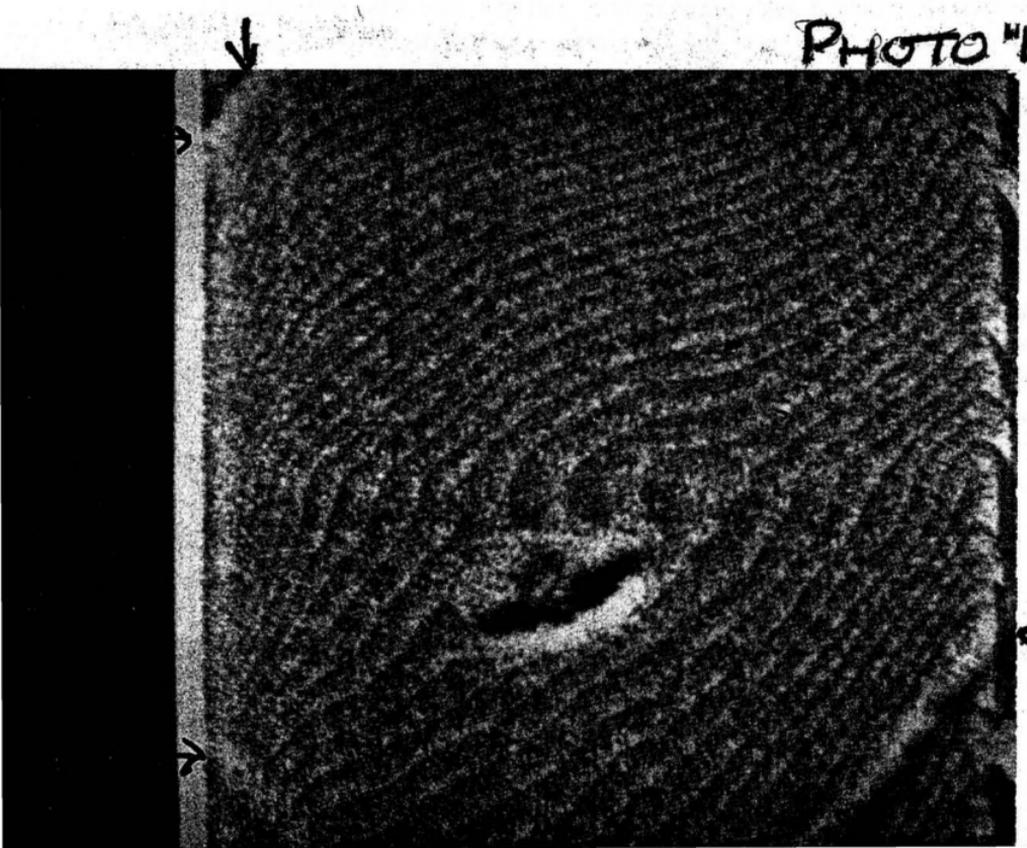
A typical 'mystery circle', Cley Hill, Warminster, summer 1984. These circles have been connected with UFOs by both the media and some UFO researchers. Others have suggested a meteorological origin (see chapter 8).





One of the series of four UFO photographs taken by fisherman Peter Beard from his home in Barnsley, South Yorkshire on the morning of 5 August 1987 (see chapter 5).

One of the computer enhancements of the Beard photographs carried out by Ground Saucer Watch of Phoenix, Arizona, showing evidence of a possible double negative – another UFO bites the dust?





MINISTRY OF DEFENCE WHITEHALL LONDON SW1A 2HB

TELEPHONE 01-218 9000  
DIRECT DIALLING 01-218 6169

D/S of S/210/83

5 November 1983

Thank you for your letter of 19th October enclosing the one attached from your constituent, Mr Philip Mantle.

I can assure you that there is not a grain of truth in the allegation that there has been a "cover up" about alleged UFO sightings.

As you will recall from your time as Minister for the Royal Air Force, reports of alleged sightings are examined by operations staff to see whether there is any interest from a defence point of view. No such interest was found in the case of the incident reported in the "News of the World" of 2nd October, or in any of the other sightings reported in the UK. In the "News of the World" incident there was in fact no question of any contact with "alien beings", nor was any unidentified object seen on radar.

My Department's interest remains solely in the implications for the air defence of the UK, as you may have seen in John Stanley's answer in the House on 24th October (copy attached) to a question about the "News of the World" report.

Michael Heseltine

The Rt Hon Merlyn Rees MP

Letter from Defence Minister Michael Heseltine received by Merlyn Rees MP in response to Philip Mantle's request for information about the Rendlesham Forest incident and governmental investigations of UFO phenomena.  
Is Heseltine's unequivocal reply truth or subterfuge?



~~SECRET~~  
~~Security Information~~

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
 WASHINGTON 25, D. C.  
 OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

1952  
 TABS 157

Declassified by 057075  
 date 20 APR 1977

MEMORANDUM TO: Director, Psychological Strategy Board  
 SUBJECT: Flying Saucers

1. I am today transmitting to the National Security Council a proposal (TAB A) in which it is concluded that the problems connected with unidentified flying objects appear to have implications for psychological warfare as well as for intelligence and operations.

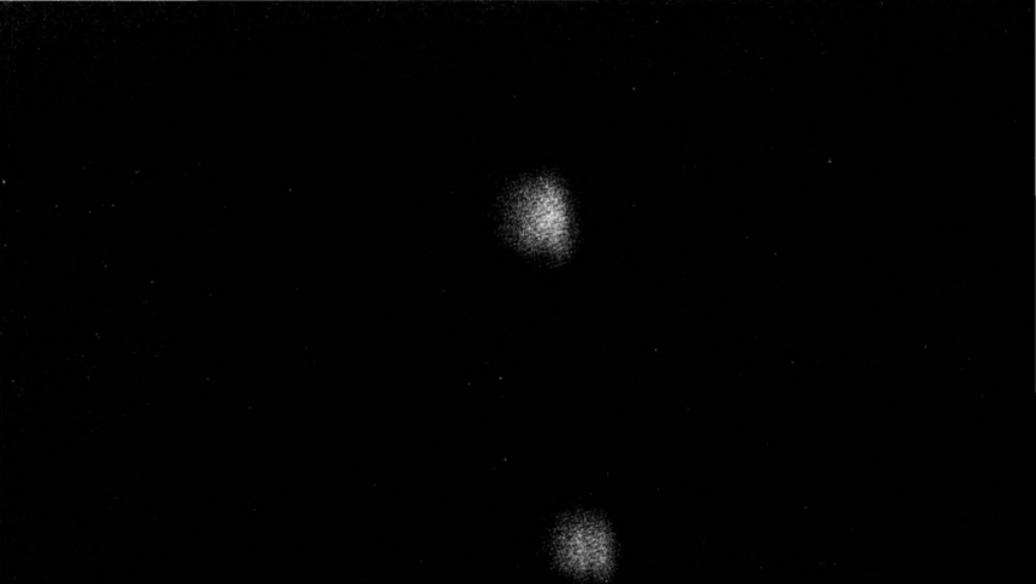
2. The background for this view is presented in some detail in TAB B.

3. I suggest that we discuss at an early board meeting the possible offensive or defensive utilization of these phenomena for psychological warfare purposes.

Enclosure

Walter B. Smith  
 Director

Early CIA document showing an interest in UFO phenomena for use in psychological warfare. Does this document indicate government knowledge of aliens; or does it show an awareness of belief in UFO phenomena as a screen for covert military activities? - a view held by proponents of the Federal Hypothesis

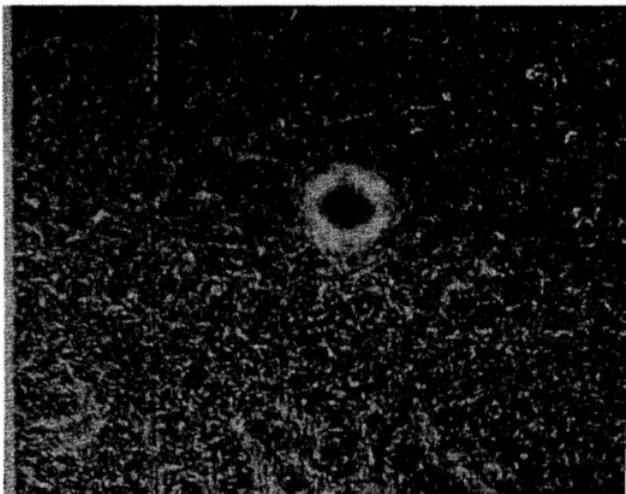
Two glowing, textured balls of light are positioned vertically in the upper half of the page. They have a grainy, almost crystalline appearance with a bright center and a darker, more diffuse outer edge.

Photograph of two balls of light taken by Police Sergeant Tony Dodd on Carleton Moor, near Skipton, North Yorkshire at 3.15 a.m. on 14 March 1983. This type of light phenomena is seen regularly in the Pennines region of northern England and worldwide. Although balls of light, they are frequently described as solid, structured craft under intelligent control.

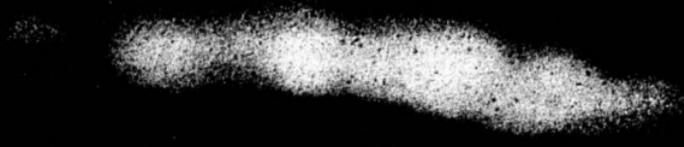
Photo taken in 1982 at Hessdalen, Norway. One of hundreds of such photographs taken depicting light phenomena which haunts the Hessdalen Valley near Trondheim, Norway. 'Why they show such exceedingly great interest in the unpopulated mountain valleys in central Norway is difficult to figure out', adds Arne Thomasson, a member of the Project Hessdalen team (see chapter 8).

A single, small, bright white dot of light is centered in the lower half of the page. It is surrounded by a very faint, diffuse glow, making it stand out against the dark background.

Photo taken in October 1982. One of a series of the Hessdalen phenomena, it was analysed by Ground Saucer Watch (*below*), who concluded that while there was no evidence of a structured object behind the light, 'there is no evidence of a hoax technique applied to these photographs'.



Dr J. Allen Hynek, father of modern ufology and creator of the term 'Close Encounters of the Third Kind', seen here on location at the remote mountain headquarters of Project Hessdalen with project member Leif Havik.



Photograph of unexplained light phenomena taken at Dalarna, Sweden in 1984. Note the apparent similarities between this picture and the Cracoe photographs. Had the Cracoe pictures remained unexplained, what spurious connection could have been put forward?

Photograph of a 'mystery helicopter' taken by journalist John Hines in Elbert county, Colorado, in 1975 during a wave of UFO sightings and unexplained cattle mutilations. Helicopters are a potent symbol within Ufolore and occur frequently in aspects of the mystery (see chapter 4).



being abducted; but instead of being led onto a UFO by grey aliens, they would have been observed just sitting quietly, staring into space. A clue to what the body may be doing while the abduction experience is taking place can be found in other mental experiences, such as OOBES, hallucinatory drug experiences, lucid dreams and NDEs, where the body is seen to be motionless but the mind is experiencing events which seem like everyday reality.

In recent years, experimenters with psychedelic drugs have experienced similar mystical and religious experiences, including meetings with luminous beings and 'pillars of light'. The weird alien worlds experienced by those undergoing LSD trips appear to have a reality of their own, existing in other dimensions or in universes co-existent with ours. Experimenters have encountered entities who have bizarre physical forms, operating on the basis of incomprehensible laws, and who have metabolic and physiological processes completely different from humans. According to Stanislav Grof in *Realms of the Human Unconscious*:<sup>16</sup> 'On several occasions, LSD subjects [have] reported contacts or encounters with flying saucers and other types of extraterrestrial spacecrafts. Sometimes they were seen as visitations from remote parts of our universe or as astral projections from other dimensions and parallel worlds. Such alien universes experienced in LSD sessions can be much smaller or infinitely bigger than ours and can be governed by unfamiliar laws.'

Events with connections similar to the abduction phenomenon, and in particular what happens to the physical body when the mind is experiencing an altered state of consciousness, have been taking place in the small Yugoslavian village of Medjugorje since 1981. The Medjugorje encounter is not a UFO event but a classic experience with the Blessed Virgin Mary (BVM), one of the many reported with her over the past 2,000 years. Millions of pilgrims have now visited Medjugorje to observe people meeting divine beings – what they actually see, however, is just children sitting on the ground. This does not alter the fact that it is believed that the experience is real to those involved.

The events at Medjugorje began in June 1981, when two girls saw a 'bright shining figure' in the sky, identifying it immediately as the Madonna. The children returned to the area the next day, and altogether six of them saw the vision. As they began to pray,

the vision changed from a blurred image, 'like a haze clearing', into a clear image of the Blessed Virgin Mary herself. On the next day crowds gathered, all present saw a brilliant aerial light, and the children once again experienced the BVM. A week after the first experience, the visions and aerial lights were still being seen.<sup>17</sup>

On the surface, this may seem to have only minimal connection with abductions accounts, but in many ways it is the same type of experience – human contact with a non-physical being. The witnesses at Medjugorje were having what to them was a 'real' experience, yet to observers they were in some form of trance. Even more significantly, the children, when observed undergoing the experience, acted not as individuals but as a group – staring fixedly at one spot and nodding and speaking as if in communication with a real being, which, to them and to the crowds of pilgrims sustained by belief in the Virgin Mary, it was. Proponents of extraterrestrial abductions have often cited cases in which more than one person is involved and reports a similar experience, to support the objective reality of the claim. The Medjugorje contact refutes the uniqueness of this claim and gives a human base for multi-witness cases.

The children at Medjugorje are unequivocal as to the personal 'reality' of their experiences. To them it was experienced as being objectively real, part of ordinary consensus reality. But both were obviously internal subjective experiences appearing to be objective – events experienced in an altered state of consciousness. The claims of the UFO abductees follow a similar pattern, being believed to be objective experiences. But when their experiences are put into perspective against observable events such as those at Medjugorje, this argument begins to crumble. It seems that both types of events are a 'separate reality' which others can sometimes share.

In an attempt to 'prove' the veracity of the abduction phenomenon several abductees have been tested by psychologists in the USA. Nine abductees in all were subjected to tests by Dr Elizabeth Slater, a psychologist who had no knowledge of who the people were or why she was testing them. Nor was Dr Slater interested in the UFO phenomenon. She assessed them for basic emotional and psychiatric problems using a battery of well-known personality tests, such as the Rorschach Blot Test and the Minnesota Multiphasic Test. Dr Slater's conclusions

were startling, at least for the debunkers. The subjects tested were 'normal', and there was 'little to unite them as a group from the standpoint of the overt manifestations of their personalities'.<sup>18</sup> In short, they were not mentally unbalanced.

As with the abductees, tests were conducted on the children at Medjugorje. It should be noted here that the tests run on abductees can be implemented only after the events, whereas at Medjugorje they were often conducted whilst the experience was taking place. In one test a Yugoslavian psychiatrist concluded that all the children who had experienced the Virgin Mary were 'absolutely normal adolescents with no psychopathological symptoms'. In another, a team of French doctors conducted a series of psychological and physiological tests on the children, deciding that they were collectively having the same experience, even their eye movements being identical. An auditory test performed on one of the subjects undergoing the BVM experience revealed that a ninety-decibel blast went only as far as the cortex and was not reacted to.<sup>17</sup> Although the experience was shared by all the children, it was internal; they had 'shut off' the external world and were drawing on their own internal and possibly transpersonal sources to create the experience which to them was so real.

So here we have a group of normal, well-adjusted individuals having a collective experience of a non-human being who to them is tangibly real, matching exactly the claims of the abductee researchers. But rather than ascribing the encounter at Medjugorje as being an objectively real encounter on the results of the tests, the conclusion reached at Medjugorje was that the experiences could not be explained by science. Lost for any form of current scientific framework in which to describe the events, the scientists' final report described the experience as being 'intense active prayer, partially disconnected from the exterior world, and state of contemplation and healthy communication with a definite person whom only they can see, hear and touch'.<sup>17</sup>

With the results of the tests on the BVM percipients, the events at Medjugorje become of further significance to a search for an explanation for abduction reports. The witnesses claim to have met non-earthly beings and to have communicated with them. They were not insane or suffering from any form of psychological disorder. Moreover, there was even luminescent

aerial phenomena associated with the visions, and one of the children's sisters went so far as to suggest that, 'Maybe they'd seen a flying saucer, like on TV,' when first hearing of their encounter. Yet we know that the BVM witnesses do not see and touch these beings in the external world, and nor do they move from one spot. Maybe if someone were lucky enough to witness someone who later reported an abduction, they might recall having seen someone sitting, staring into space.

In fact, this has happened. Not all abductions take place totally unwitnessed, and one case in the canon of UFO abduction lore is very reminiscent of the events in the Medjugorje case. An Australian woman, Maureen Puddy, had an experience in 1972 in which she was approached by a blue light and suffered a short time-lapse during which she seemed to be 'half abducted', feeling as if in a vacuum and hearing voices reassuring her about the medical test she was to undergo. At a later date she had another experience during which her car was approached by entities and she later found herself on a UFO, frightened because she could not get out. The relevance of this particular experience to both Medjugorje and to other UFO abductions is that, whilst undergoing her second experience, she was seated in the car with two experienced UFO investigators who saw and heard nothing, only her account of the experience which she was relating as if it were real.

We hope that by now we have made a case for abduction reports being related not to extraterrestrial intervention but to a type of altered state of consciousness. But if this is the case, problems will remain. If abduction accounts are the result of ASCs, what determines the content to differentiate them from, say, Out of the Body Experiences?

The answer to that is apparent by looking at the history of ASCs. Just as ideas as to what physical UFOs look like have changed over the centuries, ideas about ASCs, unless they are kept rigid and trapped in dogma by religion, also change. Whilst it has been suggested that there is a physiological or neurological basis for why OOBs and NDE percipients experience sensations of floating, detachment from the body and tunnels of light, a great many of these experiences are 'learned behaviour', either intentionally through religious belief and practice or as a result of cultural conditioning as to what to expect when in an ASC in particular circumstances. This must be the case, as, for

instance, no one now ever sees fairies, at least in the form described at the time. The effect can also be seen in religion, where ASCs, when they take place, often take the form of the traditional BVM. It would be unthinkable for a devout Catholic peasant in a small Italian town to have an 'American'-style abduction with grey aliens, a UFO and gynaecological meddling, but to have an ASC which results in a vision of the BVM is acceptable and has been incorporated into the prevailing belief system.

Even though the abduction phenomenon is spreading rapidly, there are few reports from Catholic countries, such as France, Spain and Italy, yet there are still many accounts of BVM experiences. Eddie Bullard's comprehensive abduction catalogue lists only ten alleged abductions from those countries, as against 132 from North America.<sup>19</sup> Is this because people having an ASC interpret it in the accepted mythological terms of their society? Or is it because the small grey aliens have yet to start visiting Europe in any great number? The reason why America and the UK lead in the number of abductions is due to a complexity of factors, not least the fact that both cultures are saturated with the myth of extraterrestrial visitation in many forms and are in states of religious flux – ideal situations for ASCs, freed from any form of historical and religious binding, to take on the content of the new mythology and the entry of man into the Space Age.

If the fairy mound, Celtic otherworld and abduction state are the same experience redefined to suit cultural and personal needs, how are they accessed? What makes them happen? Redefining and comparing abduction events with other types of ASCs do not account for how, if they are not initiated by real aliens, they take place. In the absence of a suitable mechanism for the initiation of the event, abduction reports are once again open to wild speculation. The only constant in all the experiences is the human mind, and so perhaps what are being experienced are internal events which take a different form and content consistent with the belief and folklore of the time. But, as with any ASC, there has to be some form of 'trigger' to effect the change from everyday consciousness.

It seems that, like the initiation of NDEs and OOBES, no one specific event triggers off an abduction experience. A look through any catalogue of abduction cases shows that many are

initiated by the sight of a light in the sky, perceived later as a UFO or just as simple bright lights. Remember that the BVM at Medjugorje was first seen as a hazy bright light until the intervention of the children's belief system, which initiated the religious part of the experience. But not all UFO abduction cases begin with the sighting of a light or of a UFO. Many abductee experiences take place whilst their subjects are in bed, possibly in a liminal state between full waking consciousness and sleep. Many other 'paranormal' experiences, OOBES, NDEs and apparitions amongst them, take place whilst the witness is in one of the liminal zones between sleep and wakefulness. Lonely roads are another area of UFO abductions, areas and times when sensory input is at a minimal and highly repetitive level. This creates an ASC which is now medically recognized as 'highway hypnosis' during which people cannot remember travelling certain distances – in other words, missing time ensues. Remember also that the lonely countryside and sea shore were equally likely in times past to give rise to a fairy or otherworld experience. Mystics have asserted for centuries that the alternative realities are far more easily accessible when ordinary consciousness is separated from the ties of the physical body. This takes place best when the body is subject to the low-level, repetitive stimulus found in car-driving, walking outdoors and semi-sleep states, all of which are found prior to abduction states.<sup>20</sup>

That a change in consciousness takes place in a number of UFO states, not just abductions, has long been realized by a small number of UFO investigators. Immediately prior to an experience, witnesses often report birds not singing, traffic noises gone and a strange quietness descending on the area, as though they were 'in a world of their own'. Jenny Randles has named this obvious ASC 'the Oz Factor' and considers it to be '... the mind's way of inducing an artificial form of sensory deprivation, so that we pay less attention to normal everyday things "out there" and "tune inward" instead.'<sup>21</sup> Tuning inward to what? The Oz factor is exactly the type of ASC that people reporting time-slips involving ghosts and past lives report, and it is a clear indication that a change in consciousness is taking place. What shape the content of the ASC becomes is then dependent on the individual and his culture, needs and expectations. This Oz-factor type of ASC was previously described as 'enchantment' or being 'under a spell'.

One abduction case investigated by the Independent UFO

Network (IUN) was triggered in a most unusual way. Called to a house in Clayton le Moors, Lancashire, the investigators were met by a woman (Mrs C) who was in an obvious state of mental distress. The terrified woman told how she had been taken from her bed in the night by aliens to a nearby field, where a UFO 'like a fairground' waited. Once on board, she was subjected to the usual medical examinations before being returned home. She also reported gynaecological problems which were later verified by a doctor. The woman was obviously deeply distressed by her experience, and the investigators were impressed by her sincerity. If it had not been for a stroke of luck, her case might have now been regarded as 'real'. The event was an internal experience though. On the night of the incident the woman had been watching an episode of *Dynasty* in which the character 'Fallon' was abducted by a UFO. The details of Mrs C's case were exactly the same as the TV abduction and, unless the aliens had chosen the very same night to impose an identical abduction, her case was purely subjective.

This particular case proves that the effects of the UFO mythology in popular culture can inform and create real experiences in people – so real, in fact, that, despite knowing about the TV influence, Mrs C would not accept that the experience was not objective. It also aptly demonstrates the problems with abduction research, as other investigators have since worked with Mrs C and are now convinced that she had been abducted before and that the *Dynasty* abduction recollection was just a screen memory to hide the 'real' abduction!<sup>22</sup> This case also proves the need for swift action to be taken with alleged abduction reports; if it had not been for the quick thinking of investigator Rodney Howarth, the date and time of Mrs C's 'abduction' would have been lost and the *Dynasty* link never realized.

The trigger mechanism for abductions can range from ASCs induced by sensory deprivation-type phenomena to misperceptions of ordinary objects. Other triggers may also be external in nature and related to newly discovered forms of natural planetary phenomena.

Some of the lights experienced prior to an abduction experience may be examples of new and novel phenomena, such as those now known as 'earthlights'. The effects of the Earth's own magnetic anomalies may also be responsible for triggering

off any form of altered state, including abductions. These ideas are discussed more fully in Chapter 7, in the context of other forms of UFO sightings, but the work of Michael Persinger and Paul Devereux needs some exposition here.

Michael Persinger, head of the neuroscience lab at Laurentian University of Sudbury, Ontario, is one scientist who is also of the opinion that the abduction experience is an altered state of consciousness. Persinger sees the abduction state as an ASC similar not only to NDEs and OOBES but also to experiences designated as mystical by people throughout history. Mystical experiences, suggests Persinger, take place when the self is threatened, leading to reactions in the circuits of the brain and in particular in the temporal lobes. It is the temporal lobes, remember, in which the abductees implants are allegedly located.

Persinger's interest in UFO phenomena also led him to be one of the first people to suggest that some UFO 'sightings' are the result of tectonic strain, an idea which has now resulted in the scientifically accepted idea of 'earthlights', packets of luminescent aerial energy created by the earth itself. Visual evidence of this has been found in and around earthquakes, but Persinger and others, such as John Derr from the US geological survey, have extended this theory to the geophysical production of balls of light seen at other times and locations. Paul Devereux, ufologist and earth mysteries researcher, has suggested that the interaction of the human mind with any type of earthlight could possibly trigger off some form of ASC and indeed that these experiences may have been actively sought out in the past.

According to Persinger, the claimed veracity of a UFO event would be incontrovertible to the percipient if it were the temporal lobes which were involved, as, 'The experience will be perceived as extremely real because those functions of the temporal lobe that are recruited are the same ones that assign meaning and significance to experience in the first place.'<sup>23</sup> We also know, as a result of experiments carried out by American surgeon Wilder Penfield earlier this century, that objectively real sensations can be triggered by stimulating various areas of the human brain. Penfield's work is a direct precursor of Persinger's and proves beyond doubt that, if the brain's electrical field is tampered with, the witness cannot clearly distinguish external

reality from induced, belief-created reality.

Like Penfield's work, Persinger's contention that transcendental experiences are created and affected by magnetic fields is that rarity in UFO research, a testable hypothesis, and Persinger did just that. Constructing a helmet containing electrical circuitry which would emit a controlled pattern of magnetic fields, Persinger tested this device on people who had never had a UFO encounter. Once the subjects were exposed to the magnetic fields, he gave them the simple suggestion that they could see a light in the sky, one of the most commonly reported triggers to an abduction experience. The combination of the stimulus and the magnetic field facilitated the subjects to have 'abduction' experiences, right down to the small grey-skinned aliens and medical examinations. The experiment was done in conjunction with a control group who were given the same suggestion but were not subject to the magnetic field. They showed far less temporal-lobe activity than did the group wearing the 'active' helmet. Persinger's experiments showed that abduction experiences can be triggered by magnetic fields and are a repeatable experience. Is it likely then that the abductees 'discovered' by Budd Hopkins have had any more of a real UFO abduction experience than those people who have used Persinger's helmet?

The evidence for an abduction as an objective event as against a subjective psychological experience is undermined by these facts, which are not usually mentioned in UFO books. Persinger's work is slowly becoming better known but is still ignored by most UFO researchers.

Although it is possible for abduction experiences to be artificially induced either by techniques such as Persinger's or by suggestion whilst under hypnosis, none of these experiments results in the witness's exhibiting the after-effects of allegedly genuine abductees. Some reports say abductees suffer from effects similar to post-traumatic stress syndrome, as do veterans of the Vietnam war, which are indicative of their having undergone and been traumatized by a 'real' event. Reasoning from Persinger's work with temporal-lobe-related experiences, one answer could be suggested. In any experience which, as Persinger says, is related to the areas which create 'meaning and significance', the after-effects would be likely to be appropriate, based on the content of the experience. Religious converts who

experience religious encounters, like mystics and hallucinogenic drug-users, exhibit real and quantifiable after-effects as a direct result of their experience. If something *seems* real, it affects us as if it *were* real.

That the abduction experience is not nearly as homogenous as some people would like has been highlighted recently by the books of Whitley Strieber. Through Strieber everyone in the western world has become aware of what an 'alien' looks like. Posters advertising his books *Communion* and *Transformation* have been everywhere. But Strieber's experience with the aliens, or 'visitors' as he terms them, is not the straightforward abduction scenario, and it may be here that the mythology of alien visitation takes yet another development. Strieber's books are rambling affairs, alleging alien intervention in most aspects of human existence. Unlike Hopkins, Strieber is never exactly clear in what he perceives the visitors to be or to be here for, and perhaps unwittingly he has created a gigantic Rorschach blot of an experience onto which others can project their own experiences and beliefs. Strieber's reported experiences, and the effects his books have had, open up another area of questions as to who is reporting a genuine experience and who is just fantasizing and passing on a modern folktale.

Budd Hopkins and Whitley Strieber do not see eye to eye over their interpretations of the abduction enigma. Hopkins' contention that they are extraterrestrial is not shared by Strieber, who in an interview with *BUFORA Bulletin* editor Mike Wootten, stated, 'I cannot believe that the source of my experiences is nothing more startling than visitors from another planet ... I suspect that the alien spacecraft imagery is a screen between the individual and the actual experience which may at this time be impossible or too awesome to comprehend.' Whilst never actually clear what 'his' aliens are, Strieber speculates that they '... might well seem to be part of our mythology ... perhaps the visitors are the old Gods'.<sup>24</sup>

These statements, coming from a man who has spent many years exploring other types of ASC and whose previous books have dealt with nuclear war and magic, suggest that his experiences have been caused by internal factors rather than by any form of alien intervention. Strieber's knowledge of ASCs and of human mythology refuses to allow him to pigeonhole his experiences as being 'just' aliens, but nor will the sheer

imaginative scope of the events related in his books allow him to admit the possibility that the human mind is at the root of the experience. We see this as the nature of a truly transpersonal experience: even though it takes place directly to individuals, it is too awesome and relevant not to have an external controlling force and is the root force behind all religious belief and mythology.

Whether or not his experiences are real, Strieber is ideally placed to spread the new mythology. For better or for worse, this is happening, and he is inundated with over 2,000 letters a week from people who claim to have had comparable experiences. Whitley Strieber seems to have touched deep into the heart of the need for a modern mythology. Gathering together the popular themes of planetary awareness the Gaia hypothesis (the theory that the Earth is a conscious organism) and the impending millennium, Strieber has enabled everyone to know about the alien presence and to decide how they choose to interpret it: '... perhaps the planet is not just the piece of rock the scientists would have us believe. It could not only be alive, but conscious, more even than the scientific version of the Gaia hypothesis ... suppose that not only is the Old Religion true, suppose its all true, what if every God and Goddess is beginning to tap their feet in concern that we might wake up?'<sup>24</sup>

With that statement Strieber has left the world of individual experience behind and clearly made the new mythology open to any interpretation at all.

Rather than just whimsical legends and tall tales, it may be that the folklorists were collecting stories of a human experience rooted in ASCs – just as we are today. But caution should be encouraged. It seems that, in the past, the prevailing mythology of fairy abductors was just as firmly established in folk tradition as the belief in the existence of little grey aliens is today to the followers of Whitley Strieber and Budd Hopkins. This popular acceptance of a myth creates a framework in which more and more people can report having had this experience themselves. Whether or not they are intentionally lying or whether people can have had the experience triggered just from reading about it or watching it on TV, as in the case of the Mrs C *Dynasty* abduction, it is hard to say. But as more and more films and books dealing with the subject become available, it will be increasingly hard to determine who has had a genuine

experience and who is relating a modern folktale which they believe in wholeheartedly.

In this chapter we have made what we feel to be a cogent case for UFO abductions' being the result of an altered state of consciousness – not of an abnormal state of mind but one which is just part of the many facets of consciousness available to humans, and one which can be filled with a variety of imagery, either intentionally or accidentally. We realize that this idea will not fit the belief systems of many people, but none of the components found in abductions is unique, and all can be found in other areas of human experience. Until one of the alien implants is retrieved, an abduction is witnessed or some other equally incontrovertible physical evidence of alien intervention is made available, the most sensible way of dealing with abduction reports is from the human perspective. The problems come when we have to accept that humans may be capable of more than just the everyday state of consciousness which we take for granted. Realizing we can affect our bodies and create our own realities is far more exciting and earth-shattering than believing we are victims of an insectoid alien species. Which of the two possibilities is the more likely we will leave for you and history to decide.

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## The Ultimate Secret

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The answer seems to be that UFOs, in the USA at least, are controlled not so much by intelligence, but by an intelligence agency.

Bill Spaulding, Ground Saucer Watch<sup>1</sup>

The fear of conspiracy is universal. All societies are beset at one time or another with the suspicion that their government, or a faction within it, is conspiring to hide from the people the truth about some subject of great significance. That this fear is not unfounded is frequently demonstrated by the disclosures made by ex-intelligence agents and more publicly by investigative journalism which has unearthed scandals such as Watergate and Irangate.

Since the dawn of the contemporary UFO era, the subject has been riddled with rumours and intimations of a gigantic worldwide government cover-up of UFO-related information. Belief in this cover-up is now such a fundamental part of the contemporary perception of the UFO phenomenon that it cannot be ignored by any commentators on the subject. So much has the cover-up gripped the UFO community that in recent years many ufologists have devoted large amounts of time and money investigating the alleged government investigations rather than concentrating on witnesses to UFO events. Every UFO-related government document and every claim made by ex-military personnel has been carefully scrutinized to see if it can throw light on what is really known about UFOs in the halls of power. There is no shortage of official UFO documentation, and at various points in the past forty years studies, both secret and public, have been instituted by governments, notably in the USA. The end result of these 'investigations of investigations' has been unproductive, causing further confusion and rumour within the UFO research community, leading to a situation in

which no one knows exactly what is going on.

It is not possible in one chapter to examine in depth the detailed claims of a cover-up, which have been covered at length elsewhere.<sup>2</sup> Instead, we will look briefly at the idea of UFO cover-ups historically and ask the question of the contemporary cover-up on any level – not ‘Is this true?’ but ‘Can this be true? Is it possible for a cover-up of these proportions to be sustained for so long, and to what end?’

If any one of the world governments has intimate knowledge of an alien UFO phenomenon and has chosen to conceal it, we have a government deception on a scale which makes Watergate and other scandals look tame in comparison. The analogies between a UFO cover-up and events such as Watergate have led to the cover-up’s being described as ‘the Cosmic Watergate’, but the name most generally used in the USA at the moment is ‘the Ultimate Secret’. What exactly the Ultimate Secret is depends upon which UFO book or magazine the interpretation is taken from, but it is essentially the belief that the government is fully aware of the UFO phenomenon, has been investigating the subject for over forty years and is hiding its findings under a veil of public denials.

In all versions of the Ultimate Secret, the authorities know exactly what the source of the UFO phenomenon is – namely, aliens from outer space who are technologically more advanced than ourselves. The further into the scenario we go, the more extreme the claims become. According to some researchers, the government also has physical evidence of UFO reality in the form of ‘crashed’ UFOs and alien corpses. Some accounts allege that live aliens have been kept for study in safe-houses in Los Alamos, and yet others claim that the United States has used alien technology in its latest aircraft and space technology. At the furthest extreme of the spectrum are rumours, gathering in momentum, of aliens making secret deals with the US government, the genetic manipulation of humans in secret underground bases in New Mexico, joint CIA/alien bases, and myriads of other claims which resemble a John Carpenter sci-fi film rather than anything which could possibly be true.

The ‘cover-up’ is claimed to have begun during the Second World War, when UFOs were seen frequently by aircrews. These UFOs were known as ‘foo-fighters’ and were described as balls of light which tailed aircraft and in some cases played

'tag' with them. Cases of structured craft-type UFOs from this period are few and far between, aliens and flying saucers non-existent. Foo-fighters were seen by aircrews of every nation and over every country, much in the same way as UFOs are reported today. The idea of aliens from space had not yet gained acceptance, and the foo-fighters were believed to be secret weapons designed by the enemy on both sides of the conflict. A myth has grown up in retrospect which suggests that each of the major powers had instigated a study of the foo-fighter mystery and subsequently covered up the results. As a result of this rumour, it has been suggested that the foo-fighters were the first example of alien visitors and, hence, when the cover-up really began.<sup>3</sup>

During extensive research into the foo-fighter mystery, Andy Roberts interviewed scores of ex-air crew who claimed to have witnessed the strange aerial phenomena. Only one flyer reported that more than a cursory interest had been shown towards his sighting by intelligence at the debriefing session. This particular incident took place towards the end of the war in France, when fears that the Germans were developing new weapons were at their greatest. The ME262 rocket fighters had just been introduced into the theatre of war, and the interest shown in foo-fighters at that time seems to have been within that context. Rumours of a British foo-fighter research team led by a 'Colonel Massey' have been investigated and come to nothing, and similarly an alleged German foo-fighter study group ('Project Uranus'), mentioned by Timothy Good in *Above Top Secret*, was a hoax perpetrated by a French ufologist, Henry Durrant.

The evidence for any investigation or cover-up of UFO or foo-fighter phenomena during the Second World War is non-existent. This view is supported by Air Marshal Sir Victor Goddard, himself a fervent believer in UFOs and alien visitors, who said in respect of the 'Massey project': 'This implies Treasury sanction: it suggests that in the middle of the war against Germany, when we had our hands full and it was far from certain we could survive, the Air Ministry was concerned that a UFO menace existed; it most certainly was not.'<sup>2</sup>

When the Scandinavians became puzzled by the 'Ghost Rocket' mystery in 1946, the authorities this time took notice immediately. Coming as it did immediately after World War II

and with the Soviet threat growing daily, it would have been dangerous to ignore reports of V2-like rockets in the sky. A special investigation committee was set up, and governmental departments of all disciplines became involved in an attempt to determine what the 'rockets' were. As with other aspects of the UFO mystery, there were crashes of ghost rockets and, alleged physical evidence, and rumours as to their origin were rife. None of the evidence amounted to anything, and although the US Navy secretary James Forrestal and former commander of the 8th Air Force James Doolittle became involved, the ghost rocket wave was never resolved. The mystery rocket wave was the first indication we have of world governments' taking any real interest in and officially documenting a UFO event. The fact that they came to no conclusions may be significant.<sup>4</sup>

The Ghost Rocket sightings were the last major series of UFO events before Kenneth Arnold's sighting and the dawning of the modern flying saucer era with its entrenched belief in cover-ups of all types.

Before we go on to discuss the post-Arnold cover-ups and the dichotomy between the European and American perception of what the 'cover-up' consists of, we will describe an event which took place on the day before Arnold's seminal 1947 sighting. 'The Maury Island Caper', as John Keel calls it, may play a fundamental part in our perception and understanding of government cover-ups. Dismissed variously by UFO researchers as a hoax or an example of an early cover-up, it exemplifies the confusion and misunderstanding which abound in the UFO field and how conspiracy and cover-up can be read into mundane events.<sup>5</sup>

On 23 June 1947 Harold Dahl was sailing with his son and another man in Tacoma Harbour, Washington State, USA. Whilst passing Maury Island, they noticed aircraft overhead, and without warning lumps of slag began to fall from above, some of which hit Dahl's boat. As the slag fell, Dahl photographed the aircraft and swiftly returned to Tacoma. The following morning, Dahl was visited by a man in a large black car. The man took Dahl for coffee and to his surprise explained that he knew all about the previous day's events and made it clear that it would not be wise to speak about the incident to anyone. The relevance of this story to UFOs became clear with the intervention of Dahl's partner, Fred Crisman, a former

fighter pilot who also worked for the State Department as an investigator. He processed the film Dahl had taken but found it damaged by exposure to radiation. Crisman then visited Maury Island himself and removed more of the mysterious slag, reported the incident to the local press and in the process turned the aircraft seen by Dahl into 'donut-shaped' ('doughnut-shaped') objects – fitting the template formed by the hundreds of UFO reports which had been received in the wake of the Arnold sighting. Arnold, then employed by the editor of a pulp magazine who had an interest in UFO folklore, was called in to investigate the case, which by then had turned into a UFO 'classic'.

However, the whole event was based on a misperception. In 1947 the Atomic Energy Commission was illegally dumping waste generated at its Hanford, Washington, plant in areas of deep water to avoid having seriously to address the problem of how nuclear waste should be dealt with. Dahl and his crew had been the unfortunate victims of a premature dump caused by engine failure. They were seen and photographed from the air, and the mysterious man who visited Dahl was an AEC agent determined to keep the incident quiet. When the case turned into a UFO sighting, this was used to confuse matters further and enabled the AEC to hide their dumping flight behind a curtain of UFO lore. John Keel speculates that Crisman – who, remember, was working for the State Department – may have been hired to 'plant' the UFO story intentionally. Whether this case served to 'launch the key components of the saucer mythology ... the fiendish conspiracy to hide "the truth" from the public', the Maury Island incident demonstrates that from the early years of the UFO era personnel within the US government were aware of the social implications of the UFO idea and were quite content to let the idea of UFOs serve their own purposes.

Before attempting to look at the cover-up in the USA, we will take a look at the official treatment of UFOs in post-war Britain. Obtaining any information about the Ministry of Defence treatment of UFO reports is extremely difficult, as Britain is not blessed with a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) as is the USA. Consequently, formulating any overview of official UFO policy can be frustrating. The Public Records Office (PRO) is virtually the only means British UFO researchers have of accessing official UFO material. Add to this the fact that, under

British law, files can be held back from public scrutiny for periods of up to one hundred years, for reasons of 'political expediency', and the situation becomes hopeless. However, a batch of Air Ministry files released by the PRO in 1988 reveal both an interest in and confusion about the UFO subject, and although there is some evidence of a cover-up, it is nothing in the order of any 'Ultimate Secret'.

Several UFO reports covering the period from December 1950 to January 1954 were passed around various departments, as it seemed that no one knew quite what to do with them.<sup>6</sup> In the case of a sighting of an unidentified light in the sky made by Group Captain Cartmel, his report was passed around three departments with DDOps attaching the comment, 'I suppose reports of this sort might, if kept, one day be useful for analysis – I can't think of any use for this one.' ASA(O) apparently agreed and returned the papers with the comment, 'Save papers for future reference.' What this interchange of indifference meant is open to interpretation, but it indicates to us that until that time no one had any real idea what to do with the UFO reports which were just starting to be received in any real quantity in Britain. Intelligence departments within the Air Ministry were apparently unconcerned by the reports, and the circulation of this file appeared to be the first occasion on which the subject had been given serious attention.

The first real hint we have of any organized and long-term response to the UFO phenomenon within the Air Ministry came with the 'daylight disc' report from RAF Topcliffe (North Yorkshire) on 19 September 1952, when a Meteor jet was followed by a 'silver disc' for twenty seconds. The UFO, which performed unusual aerial manoeuvres before vanishing 'faster than a shooting star', was also seen by several ground-based witnesses, and the sighting's being connected with an RAF base and a fighter plane understandably attracted some official comment. A report on the incident was distributed to at least six interested bodies within the Air Ministry, and one attached comment from Ops (AD)1 requested, 'Ask Personnel Assistant to open Folder "Unidentified Aircraft or Objects reported to the Air Ministry".' Note that here the term UFO is classed as synonymous with unidentified and misperceived aircraft, a position the MOD has retained – publicly, at least – ever since. The connection between most UFOs and misidentification is

clearly made, and in fact most of the other available MOD UFO files from the 1950s are a hotch-potch of vague lights which could be stars and misperceived objects. However, the opening of a 'file' suggests that this was the beginning of any serious consistent attempt to record UFO sightings, although no indication is given as to what was done with the data. But it was by no means the first time that the Air Ministry had taken an interest in UFOs.

In July 1952 Prime Minister Winston Churchill wrote a short memo to Lord Cherwell, Air Minister for State. The memo said simply, 'What does all this stuff about flying saucers amount to? What can it mean? What is the truth? Let me have a report at your convenience.' A significant request because if, as the American ufologists claim, a worldwide cover-up of the Ultimate Secret was already underway, it would seem that the courtesy of knowledge did not extend to Britain's own PM. Churchill obviously had no idea what, if anything, was going on.

Churchill received his answer on 9 August. The Air Ministry indicated that they were fully aware of the situation and had in fact conducted a special study of the subject in 1951 which had concluded that all reports of UFOs could be reduced to mundane and natural phenomena plus human perception.

The Air Ministry's claim that a special study was conducted in 1951 makes a mockery of the 1952 memos which seemed to deal with the subject for the first time. It seems to imply that a secret investigation of UFOs was already underway. Is this the indication of a cover-up that people had been searching for? If it is, it is more one of interdepartmental ignorance than of any useful information, as both sets of information come to the same conclusion.

The 1951 'special study' did exist and was undertaken by several groups and individuals within the various services. It was an unofficial study initiated as a result of the growing number of American UFO reports in the media. No previous information has been published in connection with this report but we have been in contact with one of the people involved with it and reveal what he said.

Squadron Leader R.G. Woodman, DSO, DFC flew with the secret '100' group who operated secretly over enemy territory. After the war he became Deputy Superintendent of Test Flying at the world-famous Boscombe Down airfield, where he was in

regular contact with the world's most advanced flying machines and their pilots. Following a 'request from the government' Woodman conducted the special study into the UFO phenomenon alluded to by the Air Ministry and concluded that there was nothing in it other than misperception and natural phenomena. In the course of his investigations, air crew from both the RAF and the Navy were requested to submit sighting reports to him, but nothing of any significance was reported – which presumably was why at that time the UK government had no organized policy or department to deal with the putative phenomenon. During his investigation Woodman also spoke at length with leading American test pilots who were 'astonished and amused that the British should take an interest in such a matter which they treated as rubbish'.<sup>7</sup>

Whether or not all this newly uncovered information is part of the cover-up, planted in the early 1950s to deceive researchers thirty years later, is open to conjecture. The Air Ministry were covering something up, because not all sightings investigated by them were proven natural phenomena or misperception. During 1955–6, out of sixty-four cases received by the MOD six were classified as unexplained, mainly radar contacts which were not substantiated by a visual sighting.

Documents from 1957 reveal one MOD case which stands out as being probably the 'best' MOD UFO sighting revealed to date and concerns an incident at West Freugh, Wigtownshire, Scotland, in which two radar installations separately picked up a total of five objects which could not be identified. They were targets larger than those of most aircraft and were moving at varying speeds and heights, often against the wind. The West Freugh incident gives us the only known statement made by the MOD that they had been involved in the tracking of a UFO: 'It is concluded that the incident was due to the presence of five reflecting objects of unidentified type and origin. It is considered unlikely that they were conventional aircraft, meteorological balloons or charged clouds.' – DDI (Tech) 30 April 1957.<sup>2</sup>

Although the Freugh object was admitted to be a UFO, the MOD were cautious enough to include the word 'unlikely' with reference to its being a mundane object and did not enter into speculation as to what a 'UFO' may have been.

However we interpret the confused statements and treatment

of UFOs by the UK government, the official pronouncements to the public have remained basically unchanged for forty years. Whenever a question about UFOs is posed to the MOD, the reply is essentially the same. In 1957 Labour MP for Bristol Stan Awbery enquired about recent UFO sightings and was simply told, 'Reports are continually being received and we investigate them wherever the details are sufficient. Most of the objects turn out to be balloons or meteors.'<sup>6</sup> Clearly, in view of the statements on the West Freugh incident, which he was not told about, this could be classed as a cover-up. But it seems to be covering up ignorance and a wish not to have people realize that the authorities are just as susceptible to rumour and lack of knowledge as everyone else. Obviously cases like the West Freugh incident were kept as quiet as possible. If the government didn't know what was in its skies, it certainly wouldn't want its electorate being aware of the fact. In the 1950s, as now, the military must be seen at least to be in control and ready to act should airspace be invaded.

Until recently little has been known about the MOD's treatment of UFO reports from the 1950s onwards. All UFO reports received by the police or MOD go to the air traffic control centre at West Drayton and also to the department which deals with UFOs within the MOD, Air Staff 2 (AS 2). Author Tim Good has claimed that there are a number of other secret UFO research, investigation and tracking installations located at various places in the British Isles, but as yet this information is no more than rumour.<sup>2</sup> Upon receipt of a UFO report, AS 2 insist that they investigate it only if its content seems to indicate anything which might affect 'defence interests', and a letter from AS 2 always contains a variation on the statement, 'The main concern of the MOD is to determine whether or not UFOs present a threat to the security and defence of the British Isles. Unless we judge that they do, and this is not normally the case, no attempt is made by the MOD to investigate or identify the object.' What exactly constitutes a 'threat' is never answered, and what happens to cases falling in this category is hazy, but on the surface that is as far as official UFO investigation in the UK goes.

This situation will confirm everyone's beliefs. Cover-up proponents will say this is a smoke-screen to avoid answering direct questions on specific UFO cases. Sceptics and debunkers

will claim that they are telling the truth as they know it and are hiding nothing. Both claims are partially true.

Two events which have taken place recently have shed light on the way in which the MOD deals with the UFO problem. The first of these events is the infamous Rendlesham Forest (Bentwaters) incident, and the second is the arrival on the British UFO research scene of Ralph Noyes, a former MOD official who worked for a time in the department which dealt with UFO reports.

More has been written about the Rendlesham Forest case than any other UFO event in UK UFO history. For full details, interested readers should refer to Jenny Randles' comprehensive treatment of the subject in the book *Skycrash*.<sup>8</sup>

If we are to believe the official report submitted to the MOD on 13 January 1981 by USAF Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Halt, something very strange took place in Rendlesham Forest – something which we have been lied to about by both the British and American authorities. Halt's report describes how two USAF security men came across '... a glowing, object in the forest. The object was described as being metallic in appearance and triangular in shape, approximately two meters high. It illuminated the entire forest with a white light. The object itself had a pulsing red light on top and a bank(s) of blue lights underneath. The object was hovering or on legs. As the patrolmen approached the object it manoeuvred through the trees and disappeared. At this time the animals on a nearby farm went into a frenzy. The object was briefly sighted approximately an hour later near the back gate.'

This is not a vague report from a member of the public but an official USAF UFO report made by the commander of one of the largest USAF bases in the UK. Traces were found on the ground the following morning where the object had been seen, and other strange phenomena were reported as part of the incident. A USAF serviceman later came forward and alleged that the object was in fact a crash-landed UFO and they had seen three 'small silver-suited occupants carrying out repairs while suspended in a shaft of light'. It was also alleged that the overall base commander, Gordon Williams, had communicated with the aliens and that films and photographs were taken of the incident after which the craft was repaired and flew off. If true, this is one UFO story neither government would like to see made common knowledge.

Instead of being 'hushed up', this story of alien contact was 'leaked' to two separate UFO investigators within a few weeks of the incident. The UFO research community got its teeth into the case, which over the years has become a maze of claim and counter-claim. Debunkers ridiculed the story, claiming that the lights were nothing more than those of a nearby lighthouse. Besides being nonsense, this in no way accounts for the servicemen's accounts, which were dismissed as being the result of wild drug parties in the woods.

The plot thickened with the appearance of the notorious 'Halt Tape', which was released in 1984 by an ex-base commander at RAF Woodbridge. This tape purports to be a live recording of the events witnessed by Lieutenant-Colonel Halt as he was in the woods on 29 December investigating the previous reports.

That the event ever took place was denied by the British government until, curiously, a couple of months before the Halt memorandum had been retrieved through the FOIA in America. It was only then that the MOD admitted, in a letter to Jenny Randles, that: '... USAF personnel did see unusual lights outside the boundary fence early in the morning of 27 December 1980. No explanation for the occurrence was ever forthcoming.' Everyone and every agency concurs that something did happen in the forest. What are we to make of such a scenario? Was it really an alien contact, or was it a convenient cover-story intentionally spread to mask something else? After all, who is going to take any allegation seriously if it revolves around a UFO story?

Halt was later promoted to the rank of colonel, a surprising turn of events for someone who had revealed the most closely guarded secret in the history of mankind. Halt's curious memo, his subsequent promotion and the manner in which the case came to the public's and ufologists' attention have been seen as great cause for concern amongst many UFO researchers as to the nature of the original events and the motivations behind the official releases.

Ralph Noyes, the former head of DS-8, the department of the British Ministry of Defence at Whitehall which deals with UFO reports, made enquiries via his former colleagues at the MOD and was told that, 'There was no evidence of anything having intruded into British airspace and "landing" near RAF Woodbridge.' DS8 had apparently looked into the case, satisfied

itself that there was no 'defence significance' and dropped the matter. He is of the opinion, however, that, 'There is no doubt at all that the MOD played a thoroughly dishonest game over the Rendlesham affair,' and his own view is

... essentially that Halt and several others came face to face with a striking manifestation of the 'UFO phenomenon' (whatever that may be) in the December of 1980. Other commentators may disagree; alternative theories abound. My only immediate point is that the MOD have resisted all attempts to obtain a sensible statement, even under sustained pressure to the Defence Secretary from Lord Hill-Norton. Why? Simply I think, because it embarrasses them. Either they must admit that a senior USAF officer at a highly sensitive base in the United Kingdom went out of his mind in December 1980 (with unthinkable potential consequences in Defence terms) or they must acknowledge publicly that weird things occur for which no explanation is at present possible.<sup>9</sup>

Ralph Noyes is now a valuable part of the UFO research community in the UK, and although still bound by the Official Secrets Act, he has given us much insight into the government attitude towards the UFO phenomenon. Ralph claims that the UK government do know more about the UFO subject than they care to admit to and, for instance, have gun-camera film of UFOs which he has seen. Needless to say, this has never been released, and the MOD deny knowledge of its existence. Although Noyes is often treated with suspicion (some UFO researchers suggesting that he is part of a double bluff to misinform and confuse), he has given us a picture of a government which knows that the UFO phenomenon exists in some form but which is ignorant of how to record or deal with it. This idea, based on first-hand experience, supports the documentary evidence.

We asked Ralph Noyes to clarify his position on various points relating to his official UFO involvement, and he was kind enough to answer our questions, one of which was the possibility of whether a cover-up could operate at a 'higher level' (as alleged by proponents of the 'Ultimate Secret') of which he would have been unaware in his capacity as a civil servant:

'I reached a fairly senior grade in the MOD and had access to whatever documents were necessary to my responsibilities,' writes Noyes, '... if somebody above me had wished to conceal

from me that the British or other governments were in touch with extraterrestrials, they could certainly have done so. But I'm pretty sure that I would have got *some* intimation of this ... but I never had the faintest whiff of such a thing. More important than my own testimony, however, is the fact that Admiral of the Fleet the Lord Hill-Norton, who was the Chief of the Defence Staff from 1971 to 1973, never had the smallest indication of ET contact.'

On the subject of whether he ever had any intimation or evidence of an 'alien' component to UFO reports he received during his time at DS8, Noyes writes:

In the several capacities which brought me into touch with UFO reports during my 28 years in the MOD I encountered several reports, particularly those from military establishments, which indicated 'high strangeness'. I, and military colleagues, had little doubt that something had taken place for which we had no explanation. Not once, however, was there the faintest suggestion that extraterrestrials might be in question. We suspected the Russians, we suspected faulty radar, we wondered whether RAF personnel might be succumbing to hallucinogens. We found no evidence of any such things. In the end (and fairly swiftly) we simply forgot about these uncomfortable 'intrusions'. We never had the smallest evidence that the Brothers from Space were responsible for our transient unease – and I do believe that we would have picked up anything of that kind, given our highly effective radar cover and the incessant watch kept on radio communications by GCHQ and the NSA ... My impression is that unexplained reports were passed on to scientific colleagues (especially the Meteorological Office) when the Air Staff had dismissed them as being of 'no defence significance'.<sup>9</sup>

Of course, whatever Ralph Noyes says will be treated with suspicion by some, who will regard his comments as part of the cover-up intentionally to deceive. Or, if he is accepted as telling the truth, he will be accused of not knowing about the higher levels of the cover-up to which he had no access. Ralph's views indicate to us that the MOD are just as confused now as they were in the 1950s about exactly what constitutes the UFO phenomenon and that they are in a disadvantageous position as, unlike many civilian investigative groups, they do not have access to the majority of witnesses.

If, as some ufologists believe, a cover-up of UFO

investigation exists at a high level, this begs the question of where exactly the MOD obtains the data on which it bases its conclusions. If it relies upon the sightings submitted by civilians via the police and other bodies, it is in the hopeless situation of trying to draw conclusions based upon third-hand testimony. It is unlikely that the MOD investigates the phenomena first hand, as there are no more than a handful of UFO witnesses who assert that they have been visited by 'men from the ministry', and most of these claims are subject to doubt. Claims of a British cover-up of anything other than a lack of knowledge await validation, and there even appears to be a spirit of *glasnost* running through AS 2 during the late 1980s, with official UFO reports being handed out on request to UFO investigators, and in some cases witnesses being referred from the MOD to civilian investigation groups. Are these actions evidence of a 'cover-up' or, more likely, lack of official interest?

Inferences as to exactly how deep the cover-up runs or to what extent the government will try to deceive the British public regarding either its ignorance or its knowledge of the UFO phenomenon may be drawn from the Rendlesham Forest saga. Whatever took place there in 1980, the government maintains that there never has been any cover-up over the subject of UFOs. Our colleague Philip Mantle elicited the official response from the Rt. Hon. Michael Heseltine, then the Defence Secretary for the Conservative government, in reply to a question posed on his behalf by his MP, Merlyn Rees, that, 'I can assure you that there is not a grain of truth in the allegation that there has been a "cover-up" about alleged UFO sightings.'<sup>10</sup> This is as clear a statement as any delineating the British government position on the UFO mystery; similar statements have been given by Labour MPs in response to questions from members of the public on the subject of UFOs.

Investigations into the cover-up in Britain are stagnant, with nothing of any real relevance coming to light in the past few years, but the situation in the United States is radically different, however, with the American perception and interpretation of the alleged 'cover-up' existing on a far deeper and stranger level of belief. From simple origins, the allegations of a cover-up in the USA have now reached a level at which the vaguest rumour is being used to connect the government with UFOs, resulting in a situation which has seriously reduced the study of UFOs on that

continent to the pursuance of 'Above Top Secret' documents and the hypnotic regression of abductees – and little else. As in Britain, the fact that the US government has held back and covered up UFO information is not in doubt. Constant document releases under the FOIA prove this. What they do not prove is what the American government really knows, and it is the inferences drawn from this situation by ufologists which are of interest here.

When members of the US government realized in the 1950s that the UFO 'craze' wasn't going to go away, they mounted a series of public 'projects' to deal with the subject, beginning with Project Sign. Initiated less than six months after the term 'flying saucer' had been coined, Project Sign concluded that twenty per cent of UFO sightings were unexplained, and it was soon closed down, to be followed by Project Grudge. Grudge quickly assessed the UFO situation and recommended that the subject area be 'debunked'. Whether this was because the project staff found nothing of interest or because they found they could cover the subject up by ridiculing it is open to interpretation. The CIA formed a scientific panel to look at the problem and also recommended debunking. Other projects and committees came and went, each passing an opinion dependent on who was involved in them and what information they had access to. As with all politically instigated studies, just how much of this opinion-forming and concluding was based upon belief and policy as opposed to genuine knowledge we shall never know.

UFO researchers have argued endlessly over what these projects really meant or revealed or concealed about the US government's attitude to the UFO phenomenon. Even some of the members of the 1969 Condon Report committee resigned because they thought UFO cases were not being assessed correctly. It would be pointless to go over these arguments in depth here. The prevailing school of thought amongst American ufologists is that a cover-up of alien knowledge exists, and the lynchpin of their claims is that crashed flying saucers are in the possession of the government.

Rumours of a cover-up of crashed UFOs have accompanied the development of the subject since the early days, but one highly significant event took place in 1947, which, if satisfactorily resolved, would lay to rest once and for all the

spectre of a cover-up of alien intervention. What took place at Roswell in the New Mexican desert on 2 July 1947 has become a *cause célèbre* among UFO researchers and believers in the 'Ultimate Secret' in the USA. The belief that a 'flying saucer' crashed at Roswell and was later retrieved by the Air Force is a strong and overpowering foundation of ufology in the USA. Allegedly the craft, made of soft but undamageable metal, was found by a local farmer who later alerted the Air Force. The story was at first broadcast freely on the radio but then was suddenly 'hushed up'. Once in the hands of the authorities, the wreckage of the UFO 'became' a weather balloon, the main witness was 'silenced' and the story went dead for thirty years, until it was circulated again through sensational books such as *The Roswell Incident* by Charles Berlitz and William Moore. No one, least of all the US Air Force, now doubts that something did come down at Roswell on that July day, but since the late 1970s arguments have raged as to exactly what it was.<sup>11</sup>

Although the 'Roswell Incident' is the best-known event of its type, it is alleged that there may have been as many as thirty UFO crashes in the USA alone over the past forty years, and the study of 'crash-retrievals', as they have become known, is at the root of American investigations into the UFO-related actions of the government in the late 1980s.

Much written-about, the crash-retrieval syndrome bears examination and criticism. Why do so many people believe that the government has a crashed UFO in its possession, and how is it possible for this situation to be kept secret? In the words of Allen Hynek, these are extraordinary claims which in return require extraordinary evidence. Unfortunately, all we have are the claims. The evidence comprises much the same type of evidence as the rest of the UFO subject – a body of hearsay and rumour, in effect Space Age folklore.

Like all other motifs found in ufology, stories about alien craft crashing on Earth are not new. Folklore gives several instances of fairy craft coming to Earth, and there are at least two well-attested medieval cases in which 'flying ships' had their anchors entangled in the spires of churches. A tradition exists in which these things are reported, and before we attribute any objective reality to the current crop of crashed UFO stories, we should perhaps consider if they also do not belong to folklore of a contemporary kind.

The phantom airship waves of the late nineteenth century (see Chapter 2) had their crashed UFO yarns too. In one case a group of cowboys came across a downed airship and were affected by the heat from its glowing machinery. In the famous Aurora, Texas, case of 1897, an airship allegedly crashed into a windmill, killing its pilot.<sup>12</sup> Examination of the pilot and wreckage revealed that he came from Mars and that his craft was constructed from a metal harder than was available in America at that time. Subsequent investigation of the cases demonstrated that both were newspaper hoaxes, but nonetheless they retain the essential motifs of modern UFO crashes.

In post-1947 stories the crashed saucer story has become, with the lack of serious proof, a modern legend and has extended itself to include live and dead aliens in military custody, the use of captured alien technology in US military and space programmes, and secret hangars in Air Force bases where the captured machinery is pored over by puzzled and excited scientists. Witnesses are still silenced, with 'national security' implications being used, and there are even rumours that whole families and farms where a crash has taken place have been 'relocated'. These are just the mild claims, though the evidence for any extraterrestrial root to these stories is slim. To date not one piece of wreckage from a crashed flying saucer has surfaced for examination. There are no unambiguous photographs of a crashed UFO or its occupants, and no pieces of alien cadaver have been made available for study.

The major problem with even one genuine crashed UFO case is that of logistics. The sheer number of people required to deal with one 'crash' would run into thousands. Initially there would have to be a well-maintained, highly trained and active squad of men with the most sophisticated transport and lifting-equipment whose job would be to retrieve, transport and guard the crashed saucers at short notice. Assuming they could be brought secretly to an Air Force base for study, yet more experts are required – with almost every scientific discipline becoming involved at some stage. With so many personnel involved at first hand, why have so few come forward with their stories, and why has no one smuggled out any incontrovertible evidence? Beside those directly involved, most of these people would have families, and such a secret would be hard to keep from them. It is true that death-bed confessions do exist in which people have

claimed that they were previously involved in a retrieval operation, but this does not constitute evidence – it is hearsay and rumour of a kind found in many other areas of folklore and belief.

Crash-retrieval proponents would have us believe that the cover-up has been sustained for over forty years and through many levels of official administration. This last claim takes us even further into a never-never-land of UFO folklore. Documents have recently been surfacing in a suspicious manner on the UFO scene in the USA claiming to be secret papers of a group called MJ-12. This group was allegedly set up in 1947 following the Roswell incident to liaise between politicians and those involved in crash-retrieval work. Comprising an ever-changing panel of high-ranking officials and scientists, including one noted debunker of UFO phenomena, MJ-12 is claimed to underpin the whole Ultimate Secret scenario.<sup>2</sup> As for the Roswell incident, conclusive proof of its existence and activities would settle the argument once and for all. Despite the lack of such evidence, ufologists in America have eagerly accepted the MJ-12 papers as genuine, as they confirm the belief systems they already hold about the existence of alien UFOs and the government cover-up.

The MJ-12 papers claim to be a 'briefing paper for President Truman' and detail the bare events of the alleged crash, giving details of the alien entities. Allusions are made in the document to absent 'attachments' which promise details of maps and photographs. This would be a monumental validation of the whole crashed saucer rumour if it were not for one fact. The MJ-12 papers were delivered anonymously, on 35mm film, to researchers known to be involved in just this type of research, and come at a time when UFO research in the USA is riddled with spurious government documents and alleged 'leaks' from intelligence agents who wish to tell all about their involvement in the Ultimate Secret. Furthermore, it has recently come to light that William Moore – the UFO researcher who has promoted and distributed the MJ-12 and other similar documents – has himself worked for intelligence agencies in the United States and has admitted 'doctoring' alleged government UFO documents in the past.<sup>13</sup> After being taken seriously initially and promoted as genuine in books such as Timothy Good's bestseller *Above Top Secret*, the MJ-12 papers with their

amateurish description of the Roswell crash have now become just another 'tall story'.

In short, the 'crashed saucer' rumour is in exactly the same position today as it was in the early 1950s. There are more yarns about aliens, better-developed scenarios involving a wide range of government agencies, but no evidence either of the reality of the situation or of a cover-up of knowledge of such a situation. Crashed saucer claims seem to belong mainly to previous decades, and the most recent rumours in the USA which are replacing them describe secret underground alien and joint alien/CIA bases where unspeakable things are taking place. Strangely, these locations are in the same areas of the USA, predominantly the south-western desert regions, where both the crashed saucer rumours originate and where there is also a high concentration of top-secret US government military installations.

Other theories have sprung up to account for American government interest in UFOs. The 'Federal Hypothesis' (FH), as it is known, alleges that the authorities know that extraterrestrials are not involved in the UFO mystery and that, even though there are unexplained cases, they represent nothing significant. Further, the FH claims that the idea of UFOs has been used to cover up the authorities' own activities, as has been suggested in the Rendlesham Forest 'Skycrash'. This may seem an idea as bizarre as the ETH, but when dealing with any story which seems to originate from an official source there is always the possibility that some manipulation is taking place.

The Federal Hypothesis is intriguing and may point to the interest shown by intelligence agencies in UFOs and ufologists having an origin and purpose far removed from the Ultimate Secret. Professor Fred Landis of San Francisco State University who contributes to *Covert Action Information Bulletin*, a journal devoted to intelligence agency operations, has views on the official treatment of UFOs: 'I don't think the CIA is interested in the UFO topic from the intelligence point of view; they're interested in the propaganda aspect ... they study what the psychological limits are on people's gullibility or credibility. They try to draw a psychological map of what a person is going to "buy" and what they aren't going to "buy". Where UFOs fit into this ... it may be one of the ways they pre-test propaganda.'<sup>14</sup>

This view would fit in with the information now reaching selected people in the UFO community and allegedly emanating from intelligence and government sources. Landis offers another reason why the intelligence agencies appear so interested in the UFO community and its ideas: 'Any group with an intense belief has a lot more power than a thousand times that number who are not that motivated. UFO people have a real intensity about their belief system. People in intelligence have to keep track of groups in the community who are really into this UFO stuff because they are a potential source of problems.'<sup>14</sup> Landis's view is backed up by the known fact that intelligence agencies have an interest in all social pressure groups from ecologists through fringe politics to occultists and regularly monitor, infiltrate and manipulate them all.

Whilst documents which seem to prove government knowledge of UFO reality are published in UFO books, documents which indicate the contrary are ignored by the believers. A memo dating from the early 1950s from the former CIA director Walter Bedell-Smith to the Director of the Psychological Strategy Board concludes that: 'The problems connected with unidentified flying objects appear to have implications for psychological warfare as well as for intelligence and operations.' In the same memo Smith suggests that '... we discuss at an early board meeting the possible offensive or defensive utilisation of these phenomena for psychological warfare purposes'. Does this document mean that the Americans were aware of the idea of UFOs and were intent on using it for their own purposes? The Federal Hypothesis would say yes. But what exactly would the Federal Hypothesis be covering up?

Andrew Tully's 1969 book *The Super Spies: A History of the CIA and the DIA* has a chapter intriguingly entitled 'Saucers with Ears', which opens with the following paragraph: 'When an official report reached the Pentagon one day in September 1965 that a resident of Exeter, New Hampshire, had encountered a brilliantly glowing "flying saucer", an officer in Army Intelligence turned to a colleague with a remark familiar to men who have known battlefield action. "I hope it's one of ours," said the officer.'<sup>15</sup> Tully asserts that the intelligence agencies have been using the flying saucer phenomenon as 'an intelligence device' to cover up the activities and tests of their

secret weapons and satellites. This was one of the solutions suggested to Jenny Randles for the origin of the incident at Rendlesham Forest – a covert retrieval of a Soviet satellite, and Tully's comments open up a new area of speculation into government secrecy and knowledge of at least some aspect of the UFO phenomenon.

This theme has been developed by other ufologists in the USA, such as William Spaulding. Spaulding ran the prestigious Ground Saucer Watch in Arizona for many years, analysing UFO photographs, and eventually concluded that the evidence for the so-called 'cover-up' did not indicate a cover-up of extraterrestrial craft or contact but revealed instead 'a trail of disinformation about saucers, a ruse to cover-up high-tech testing'.<sup>16</sup> Ron Schaffner and his colleagues at the Ohio UFO Investigators' Network (OUIN) have conducted extensive research into the early 'UFO crashes', particularly the one at Roswell, and have concluded that there is good evidence to suggest that these and many others were illegal rocket tests which went wrong.

The area around Roswell in the south-western USA is, as we have noted, famous for its high concentration of military testing areas, including the White Sands rocket-test range which was within firing-distance of Roswell. Schaffner and the OUIN have proved that illegal rocket testing with live monkeys was taking place in the south-western USA throughout the peak period of alleged crash-retrievals.<sup>17</sup> As with the Maury Island case described earlier, how convenient it would be to have illegal activities masked by the idea of UFOs, a belief system which everyone is aware of but which few take seriously enough to probe to find out what really lies behind the stories.

Extending the Federal Hypothesis to other sightings is easy on the face of the available evidence. The Rendlesham Forest incident can as easily be construed as a Federal Hypothesis scenario as it can an ETH cover-up, and the famous 1964 landing case from Socorro, New Mexico, which baffled Project Blue Book investigators at the time, is a more likely candidate for the early testing of a lunar excursion module than it is of a disabled alien spaceship. It may be more than a coincidence that the very areas now alleged to be where secret alien bases are located are the very same areas where the US military tests its new aircraft such as Remotely Piloted Vehicles (RPVs) and the super-secret Stealth bomber (see Chapter 1).

If the FH exists in any way, it serves a multitude of ends. Any aerial or ground-based operation can be leaked or suggested even mildly to have a UFO connection, and the rumour-mill of UFO mythology will do the rest of the job. In this respect the FH needs fewer people to operate and maintain it, unlike the ETH cover-up which must comprise organizations of unimaginable proportions. Although the FH is a far more likely scenario than the cover-up of the Ultimate Secret, there are arguments against it. Why has no one come forward to admit to being part of such an enterprise, for instance? This is mitigated to some degree in that the core of the FH, if it exists, is that of a passive cover-up. The ufologists do most of the work, in the sense of speculating about government activities, and essentially it is they and not the government who operate and run the FH cover-up. A perfect cover-up!

For there to be acceptable proof of a cover-up of something like the Ultimate Secret or the Federal Hypothesis, it really needs to be discovered by people from outside the UFO research community. Stories, hoaxes and ambiguous evidence will prove nothing. Outside commentators who know something of the workings of the government and military have also cast doubt on the idea of a cover-up of useful information. Investigative journalists have failed to take an interest in the subject and have been pilloried by ufologists for not doing so, but it is hard to accept that, if there was any hint of such a cover-up's really existing, the investigative journalists would not have discovered it by now.

Author and journalist Bill Burrows, formerly a writer for the influential *Washington Post*, who spent several years researching a book based upon the American government's 'Black Projects' concerning the development of ultra-secret satellites, weaponry and test craft (projects through which any UFO-retrieval organization would be allegedly funded), found no evidence of secret UFO projects or of a cover-up, and in a 1988 interview states: 'When I was with the *Washington Post* I satisfied myself that there was not enough evidence to make the subject of UFOs viable. I still believe that.'<sup>18</sup> Speaking of the possible satellite tracking of UFOs, Burrows goes on to question the possibility of the US government's undertaking such an exercise, painting a picture of a government under pressure to maintain ordinary operations without the complex and costly tracking of a phenomenon which it does not really know exists:

'For them to divert those resources to look for UFOs is virtually unthinkable. They are always crying bloody murder for more capability to monitor what's under those satellites.'

Like so many other aspects of UFO study, the idea of a cover-up is belief-driven. Once it is accepted that any kind of a cover-up exists, different groups will try to hang their belief system on it, and they will inevitably find proof of its existence if they try hard enough. It is possible to find proof of a cover-up of alien involvement, backed up by witnesses and documents galore. As we have demonstrated in reference to the Federal Hypothesis, it is equally possible to find proof for a completely different scenario – one which looks disturbingly more tenable. Conclusive evidence to support any of the other cover-up scenarios has yet to be found. Deciding beforehand that there is an Ultimate Secret being concealed which can be revealed only by accepting the evidence which fits one particular criterion leads to a circular argument which can only lead to further belief in the Extraterrestrial Hypothesis.

Forty years with no conclusions seem to indicate that, if a cover-up exists, it is a cover-up of ignorance rather than of knowledge. Ralph Noyes agrees with this conclusion, although he believes that the authorities are covering up their ignorance of a real but as yet incomprehensible phenomenon. Additionally, elements of manipulation certainly seem to exist within the government in relation to the idea of UFOs, indicating that they are aware on a basic level at least of the social effects the UFO myth is having; it is known that in the Soviet Union, for instance, information was fed to ufologists, implying that secret space and military launches were in fact UFOs. The benefits to the military of this kind of disinformation are obvious. Yet another possibility is that those in power are as subject as the rest of us to the complex intermeshing of events and experience which create civilian ufology.

Why UFO researchers are so obsessed with 'what the government knows' reveals more about the ufologists themselves than it does about UFOs. We want to know the truth about a baffling subject. Because the government has an interest also, it is perceived that, because they are in power, they must 'know the answer'. Consequently, all that has to be done is to get the government to release the 'Truth'. In the words of Bill Spaulding, commenting on the beliefs of the ETH cover-up

proponents: 'If the government would only release their data, we could *prove* the existence of extraterrestrial visitations.'<sup>16</sup> When data is not released, or when it is and it does not validate the rumours, a deeper cover-up is suspected and the argument becomes a circular one. Like the ETH, the cover-up is an untestable theory. It can never be disproved, only proved. The longer it goes 'unproved' and the more the folklore of crashed saucers, alien corpses and underground bases persists, the more people will suspect a cover-up.

We can believe what we want about the cover-up because there is no ultimate proof. If we subscribe to any form of conspiracy theory, it is easy to end up dismissing someone else's 'proof' simply because we don't agree with it, by alleging that it is part of the cover-up to deceive. In this way some ufologists have entered an infinite regression in which official sources can only be lying unless they back up the stories from non-official sources which the ufologists accept as reliable. It can become a hall of mirrors in which paranoia lurks around every corner.

We would suggest that, when all the layers of UFO folklore are stripped away, when we ignore stories of crashed saucers and alien bases spread by governments and ufologists alike, we are left with a clear picture of governments which are as confused as some ufologists are certain. They are aware of the reporting of the UFO phenomenon on most of its levels, from lights in the sky through to 'physical' radar contacts. Like the rational ufologists, they know that at least ninety per cent of all sighting reports are nothing out of the ordinary other than in the context in which they are reported (as spacecraft). They remain confused about the ten per cent residue and in that respect are also in a position similar to that of UFO investigators. How they interpret that ten per cent seems to be much the same way as ufologists, varying from ultra-scepticism to outright belief in the Extraterrestrial Hypothesis. Perhaps members of the British government were right in the 1950s when they said that the phenomenon was due entirely to misperception and natural phenomena and in the next two chapters we examine the connection between natural phenomena, belief systems and UFO folklore. Meanwhile, the arguments about government secrecy will go on indefinitely, and we are leaving the last word here to John Keel, who aptly sums up the situation thus:

... I'm developing a gnawing suspicion that the Air Force has been right all along – and has been telling us part of the truth all along. After all, they've always claimed that there was no evidence of extraterrestrial origin, and so on. If I jumped into print with this kind of conclusion, all the buffs would scream that I've been 'silenced' or 'bought off' or some such nonsense. But I've got to admit the Air Force's position makes more sense to me every day. Maybe the government has always realised that the 'truth' can't be proven, and that few people would believe it anyway. So they've done the only thing they could do: they've tried to play the whole thing down and dismiss it.<sup>19</sup>

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## Phantom Lights

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... a wand'ring fire  
 Compact of unctuous vapour, which the night  
 Condenses, and the cold environs round  
 Kindled through agitation to a flame,  
 Which oft, they say, some evil spirit attends,  
 Hovering and blazing with delusive light,  
 Misleads th'amaz'd night-wanderer from his way,  
 To bogs and mires, and oft through pond or pool,  
 There shallow'd up and lost, from succour far ...  
John Milton, *Paradise Lost*<sup>1</sup>

Contrary to popular belief, the majority of UFO witnesses do not observe solid 'flying saucers' but more commonly blobs and masses of light which pulsate and perform acrobatics in the sky or which, when seen at low altitude, appear to manoeuvre above the contours of the landscape. The vast majority of 'bona fide' UFO photos depict brilliant nocturnal light sources which share common characteristics with rare and little-understood natural phenomena such as earthquake and ball lightning. During the 'flying saucer' age, believers in alien spacecraft have congregated in 'window' areas such as Warminster in Wiltshire and the Yorkshire Dales, where large numbers of UFO sightings have allegedly taken place. However, the few 'authentic' photos of alleged UFOs obtained from such areas of high activity all depict balls and blobs of light and not solid 'flying saucers'.

Although natural phenomena are subject to the same distortions of human perception as are outlined in Chapter 4, there can be little doubt that a number of rare exotic lightforms are produced regularly by poorly understood natural forces. The most common – the 'ball of light' – has been described consistently throughout recorded history, and its appearance is

often highly localized and associated with exceptional atmospheric and electromagnetic factors. Whereas the cultural interpretation of UFOs changes almost with each new generation, the manoeuvring balls of light can be found in the records of every human society and are what many people actually see before their conditioning overlays a contemporary UFO stereotype.

It must be recognized that our planet itself is a reservoir of electromagnetic energy: energy in the form of light is released from beneath the Earth's crust to illuminate the sky with flashes, glows and independent balls of light. Will o'the wisp, 'spook-lights', ball lightning and certain UFOs are undoubtedly produced by natural forces whose precise nature is at the present time unknown to science. Electromagnetic phenomena manifest in nature in curious and improbable geometrical forms and patterns; also UFO-like luminous phenomena display behaviour which can often give the impression of intelligent control.

There is a wide spectrum of odd natural phenomena occurring within the Earth's atmosphere which are on the fringes of scientific credibility. For example, it has taken many years for the scientific establishment to accept the existence of the phenomenon known as 'ball lightning' (actually a catch-all term incorporating a wide range of energetic light phenomena), and even today there are physicists who will dismiss this rare phenomenon as 'collective hallucinations', 'after-images' and 'observer hysteria'. Although photographs have been obtained depicting ball lightning, and similar lightballs have been produced in laboratory experiments, the mechanics of its occurrence in nature and its inner composition remain largely a mystery.<sup>2</sup>

It is hardly surprising that – given the variety of forms and movements attributed to ball lightning and the fact that thunderstorms do not always accompany its appearance – some observers have reported this phenomenon as a UFO. As the lightning balls can often follow contours and electrical sources, moving erratically or in an apparently 'intelligent' fashion (approaching observers, for instance), human perception can easily interpret this as evidence of 'control'. Ball lightning often hovers, appears at ground level and disappears into thin air. Adding to the confusion, the phenomenon has appeared in a number of weird shapes – rods, dumb-bells, spiked balls,

sometimes with a writhing, snake-like inner structure. There are instances of black ball lightning and conversely transparent light balls.

The strange characteristics associated with ball lightning and other plasma phenomena have been connected by researcher Stuart Campbell with a famous 'UFO encounter' reported from Livingston in West Lothian, Scotland. At around 10 am on 9 November 1979 61-year-old forestry worker Robert Taylor was inspecting a plantation of young trees north of Livingston near the M8 motorway in the company of his dog. Rounding a corner on the forest track, he found himself confronted by a weird dome-shaped object (which appeared to be 'sitting' upon the ground), surrounded by a flange. This object was dark grey in colour, of a texture similar to that of emery-paper, and parts of it appeared to be transparent.

In 1988 Mr Taylor described to our colleague David Kelly his recollections of what he saw as he entered the clearing. 'Here was this huge dome-shaped thing sitting just about 12 yards away, and I just couldn't believe it ... the thing appeared to be changing colour; it seemed to go transparent – first one part, then this would move to another; after a few seconds I would think, there are these two objects that came from under it or from behind it.'<sup>3</sup> He described these as two grey spheres with spikes sticking out, similar to wartime mines – they made a 'plopping or sucking noise' as they approached him. 'They came at some speed right up to me on either side of me, I felt them latch onto my trousers and they began to tug me towards the object and at the same time I got this terrible heavy smell that choked me.'<sup>3</sup> At this point Mr Taylor lost consciousness, awakening shortly afterwards '... on the ground with my face in the mud ... I could hear a high-pitched sound but on raising my head and looking round there was absolutely nothing there except my dog which was in a state, running round and barking'.<sup>3</sup> Mr Taylor awoke in a state of shock – having lost his voice and barely able to stand, and after staggering back to his home he notified the police, and the area was cordoned off. A number of ground traces were found at the site, and there were peculiar tears in Mr Taylor's police-issue trousers – indicating the presence of *something*.

Predictably, the Livingston incident was publicized in the media as an encounter with an 'alien spaceship' – one headline

reading 'VISITORS FROM SPACE ATTACK FOREST WORKER'; similarly, an artist impression provided the dome-shaped object with 'legs', the implicit assumption being that a solid, metal flying object was involved when in fact the phenomenon was seen on the ground *only*.

Steuart Campbell, one of the investigators of the Livingston case, suggested in 1982 that the objects encountered by Mr Taylor were 'collectively an unusual and unidentified natural phenomenon somehow related to ball lightning'.<sup>4</sup> This conclusion is supported by the description of the transparency, the colour changes, the strange smell – similar to 'burning brake fluid' (later it was found that sulphur dioxide was the closest comparison odour). Mr Taylor's 'blackout' could be attributed to the influence of a strong electrical field which 'induced an isolated partial epileptic attack centred on the temporal lobe'.<sup>4</sup> Dr Michael Persinger, a physiological psychologist at Laurentian University in Canada, has extensively investigated the effects of such fields upon the temporal lobe area of the brain (an area sensitive to electrical stimulation), whose implications were outlined in Chapter 5.

Scores of other UFO sightings and encounters carefully logged by investigators in recent times have much to offer scientific scrutiny as possible examples of rare natural phenomena. A good example was investigated by our colleague Clive Potter in 1988. According to initial newspaper reports, shortly after midnight on 4 August 1988 a 'UFO' had been spotted over a road late at night by Reg Morgan and Gloria Hall, whilst returning to the town of Little Hayward in Staffordshire along the edges of Cannock Chase. As they turned right, onto a bridge, Mrs Hall was the first to see a 'luminous cloud' which appeared suddenly on the left-hand side of the road. The object was hazy underneath, with a more solid top and a pulsating, semi-saucer-shaped red light within. The object appeared to be circular, thirty feet in the air, with 'a gaseous cloud around it',<sup>5</sup> some of which appeared to touch the ground overhanging a hedge at the side of the road. After a few seconds the object 'disappeared and then reappeared a little distance away over the road'<sup>5</sup> and left them feeling a 'queer sensation'. Returning to the scene the following day, they noticed that a stretch of hedge had been damaged where the cloud had been seen at the side of the road.

With no funding and limited time and resources, and despite the lack of interest from the local universities, the investigation team did everything they could to gather evidence at the site. The team examined the hedge and noticed the presence of a damaged section which was characterized by uprooted, broken and severed branches, some areas of which were devoid of bark. Two branches were completely uprooted and shattered vertically from the root upwards. The damaged section was dead, and parts of it appeared to have been pushed into the field away from the road, although no evidence of burning or charring was found.

Suspecting that a natural phenomenon was involved, the investigators consulted meteorologist Dr Terence Meaden of the Tornado and Storm Research Organisation (TORRO), who suggested that a 'descending air vortex' might have been responsible for the light phenomenon and the attendant damage to the hedge. Although the 'luminous cloud' was moving in opposition to the wind direction, it was thought possible that upper-air turbulence, perhaps encouraged by the presence of high ground nearby, might have provided the conditions required for the creation of an air vortex. It is known that the rates of spin within such vortices (which amount to mini-tornadoes) can produce build-ups of static electricity which have been known to cause burns to humans and vegetation upon contact. It is also conceivable that the rates of spin may be more than sufficient to cause a charge separation to occur, so that such a vortex could literally 'glow in the dark'.

Such descending vortices have been associated by Dr Meaden and UFO researcher Paul Fuller, of BUFORA, with the mystery of the 'cornfield circles' which have appeared regularly in fields of arable crops across southern England every summer since the early 1980s. Since 1980 Dr Meaden has visited, measured and photographed over 200 examples of such circle formations (which can often be up to thirty yards in diameter). These investigations have produced evidence which clearly supports the hypothesis that a previously unrecognized meteorological phenomenon – a 'stationary, descending atmospheric vortex' – is responsible for the circles 'mystery'.<sup>6</sup>

The circles phenomenon first attracted the attention of the media in 1980, when formations were discovered near the Westbury White Horse in Wiltshire; and since that time circle

formations of many different kinds have appeared in fields throughout southern England every summer, accompanied by sensational newspaper headlines connecting UFOs with their appearance. This is a prime example of UFO folklore in the making, showing how the media and UFO buffs regularly invoke one unexplained phenomenon to 'explain' another unexplained phenomenon. The UFO connection was encouraged by the appearance of the circles in the vicinity of Warminster – the garrison town whose surrounding hills became a virtual shrine for UFO-spotters during the 1960s. It is the UFO folklore attached to Warminster which has allowed the growth of the belief that the circles are ground traces left by flying saucers.

Despite the solution (supported by the majority of farmers and landowners on whose land the circles appear) that the circles are the product of a weather anomaly and that others are undoubtedly the work of hoaxers, the 'lunatic fringe' of ufology who often pose as scientific investigators soon latched onto the circles 'mystery', invoking 'invisible earth energies', 'ley lines' and 'giant flying saucers' as the producers of the circles. Even the tragic death of an RAF pilot (who was accidentally ejected from his jet whilst flying above Wiltshire, where the circles appear) was linked in as part of the mystery! Theories such as these provide better stories for tabloid newspapers than the less-exciting theory that the circles are produced by mini-whirlwinds. The circles have now become an article of almost religious faith among certain UFO buffs, who use them as a screen onto which they project wild fantasies and paranoia.

Despite the media hype attempting to connect the circles with UFOs, not one convincing report of a UFO 'creating' the circles or appearing in the vicinity of the affected fields has been authenticated. This fact is conveniently ignored by those promoting the mystery, as is the large amount of analogous material recorded in the scientific literature describing natural vortices which are capable of a variety of 'impossible' feats – for example, their ability to develop in 'swarms' leaving large, semi-circular 'suction marks' in soft ground produced by the pressure gradient within their funnels. There are some eyewitness accounts describing wind vortices producing circle formations, the rarity of such testimony owing to the fact that such mini-whirlwinds are invisible until they pick up dust and other debris.

The idea that the 'Mystery Circles' are the product of UFO 'landings' can be put into historical perspective by a seventeenth-century reference describing an identical phenomena interpreted at that time in a different manner. In a pamphlet entitled 'The Mowing-Devil: Or, Strange News out of Hartford-Shire' published in 1678, a curious story is told of a farmer who invokes the Devil to mow his crops. That night, according to the account, 'the Crop of Oat shew'd as if it had been all of a Flame', and the following morning upon inspection of his crop the farmer found that '... as if the Devil had a mind to shew his dexterity in the art of husbandry, and scorn'd to mow them after the usual manner, he cut them in round circles, and plac't every straw with that exactness that it would have taken up above an age for any man to perform what he did in that one night'<sup>7</sup>.

The woodcut which accompanies this account clearly depicts a 'Devil' complete with tail and horns, creating a crop circle identical to those photographed over the past decade in the south of England. In view of this discovery, it is apparent that the modern idea of the circles being the product of the landing gear of 'solid' flying saucers is as much a contemporary artefact of belief as was the seventeenth-century preoccupation with the Devil as the creator of such weird phenomena. Significantly, a light phenomena is linked to the activities of the 'Mow-Devil' in the 1678 account corroborating the 'vortex' theory of circle formation propounded by Dr Terence Meaden.

It is probable that reports in the UFO literature describing glowing and pulsating lights (accompanied by humming and screeching sounds) which appear and disappear suddenly, and which may create transient damage, should now be re-examined, with consideration given to the vortex theory as well as the 'geophysical hypothesis' – another theory explaining UFOs as the product of natural phenomena. Although scientists have in general treated UFO reports with no interest and at times with scorn, the late 1970s saw the rise of the 'Tectonic Strain Hypothesis' to explain the origin of some UFOs – a 'testable' theory based upon scientific research.<sup>8</sup> In 1977 Canadian scientists Michael Persinger and Gyslaine Lafrenière published a study which correlated a number of UFO and related phenomena in North America with geology and 'seismic events' (earth tremors). Although Persinger has been criticized

for the inadequacy of his data base (which undoubtedly included a significant number of IFOs (Identified Flying Objects) – stars, aircraft etc.), the geophysical theory has since gone from strength to strength. The hypothesis was popularized by Paul Devereux<sup>9</sup> in his book *Earthlights* (1982) and the sequel *Earthlights Revelation* (1989), in which localized outbreaks of light phenomena throughout the world were correlated with geological and seismic factors.

The geophysical theories for the production of natural luminous phenomena (interpreted since 1947 as UFOs/spaceships) suggests that lights observed under certain conditions and specific terrains are masses of yet unidentified electromagnetic energy, possibly created through frictional energy discharges in zones of geological faulting and mineralization. Lights which have similarities to landscape-scale UFO phenomena have been produced under laboratory conditions in Britain and America, and Persinger has suggested that stress and strains generated in the Earth's crust during an earth tremor or rock-slippage can produce sufficient electrical potential to cause a 'discharge' in the air which might possibly be perceived as an aerial lightform – a UFO.

In 1910 the researcher I. Galli produced a classification of light phenomena associated with earth tremors which included reports of 'fireball shapes, fire-column shapes, beams of fire or searchlight-like occurrences, and luminous funnel (triangle) shapes'.<sup>4</sup> These descriptions are typical of the shapes commonly associated with UFO phenomena. The UFO literature is replete with stories describing luminous masses of energy, often spheroid in shape, performing quick alterations in directions and movement, 'impossible' acrobatics and right-angle turns. The common tendency for UFOs to move along roads and related linear features (such as electricity powerlines) has often led to the assumption of 'intelligent action' on the part of the occupants when it seems more likely that the energy forms are simply reacting to changes in the environment – for instance, interacting with geology and topography, which gives the impression of intelligent control. The movements of the lights demonstrates that they appear to be responding to changes in the Earth's magnetic field, temperature variations and air density.

The importance of the 'earthlights' theory is that it suggests

that geophysical processes similar to those associated with large-scale tremors are produced at lower magnitudes within localized areas producing luminous phenomena for short periods of time. In Chapter 3 the sequence of observations of the 'phantom helicopter' in the north of England clearly preceded the earth tremor centred upon the Bala fault-line in North Wales on 23 January 1974. At 8.30 pm 'a gigantic explosion' rocked over sixty square miles of North Wales. Nine minutes later an earth tremor was recorded 250 miles away on the seismographs at the Institute of Geology at Edinburgh University. Originally the story was that a meteorite had crashed upon the Cadar Bronwen mountain range, and the following day mountain rescue teams, police and volunteers searched the rugged mountains but, finding nothing, called off the search after a number of hours. It soon emerged that at the time of the 'impact' villagers at Llandrillo, at the foot of the Berwyn mountain range, had been startled when glasses and windows rattled, and a number of people saw 'red disc-shaped objects' and bright white lights encircling the mountains. Annie Williams of Llandrillo said, 'I saw this big, bright light hanging in the sky. It had a long, fiery tail which seemed to be sparking off small stars. It seemed to be motionless for several minutes, going dim and then very brilliant.'<sup>10</sup>

Dr Ron Maddison, a lecturer in astronomy at Keele University, Staffordshire, who investigated the events in 1974, notes that,

The episode began when reports were made of a large explosion that was heard by many local residents and which was thought to be an aircraft crash. It soon emerged that no aircraft was missing but there were numerous reports of a bright flash seen in the sky at the same time, which suggested that it could have been a meteorite fall. We interviewed many who had seen or heard the event and, guided by the best directional fixes we could obtain, we explored the uninhabited area of the possible fall. The only changes we could see were recent disturbances of surface soil in some areas, but we were hampered to some extent by light snowfall. We persuaded the RAF to do a photographic survey as an exercise but nothing was found. During this time we had been in touch with the Eskdalemuir seismic station and they had been able to fix the event as centred a few hundred feet beneath the surface of the Bala fault. There was no doubt about the visual sightings that were reported as coinciding with the 'explosion'.<sup>10</sup>

On the same night as the tremor and 'meteor', scores of witnesses had reported sightings of brilliant flying objects identical to UFOs in the skies of Wales, Merseyside and County Durham. Coastguards and police at Holyhead reported observing lights in the sky and a flaming object like a tadpole one hour after the earth tremor. Just before 10 pm Mr and Mrs Houghton of Betws-y-Coed in North Wales saw 'what [first] looked like sheet lightning behind a cloud, and then a luminous sphere, without a tail'<sup>10</sup> speeding across the sky. There were other sightings of 'fireballs' and 'meteors' from areas as far apart as East Anglia, the Bristol Channel and the Isle of Man on the same evening, astronomers recording three fireballs that night, the last only one minute after the rock movement along the Bala fault. There can be little doubt in the face of this evidence that geophysical forces can produce *some* UFOs.

Geophysicists have linked 'earthquake lights' to hilltops and mountains in areas of strong acidic rock, especially in the vicinity of geological faults and quartz-diorite outcrops. Dr Persinger has written that the 'effect' is most likely to occur in winter after the passage of cold fronts, with the resulting luminous displays associated with strong electromagnetic fields.<sup>8</sup> After an earthquake in Guerrero State, Mexico, in 1973, a strong signal was heard on all stations on the FM radio in the observer's car for a duration of five minutes. Such electrical interference is commonly associated with UFO encounters; in one sighting in the Pennine hills in 1980 a police car's radio transmitter began to receive police broadcasts from South Wales (over 200 miles away) instead of the usual signals from a thirty-mile radius, whilst a large oval-shaped blob of light hovered above electricity pylons on the moortops.<sup>11</sup> This strongly suggests that 'earthlights' are linked with electromagnetic anomalies and poorly understood macrocosmic influences such as sunspots and unusual conditions in the ionosphere.

Logically, geophysically produced lights would be focused around electric-charge collectors such as electricity powerlines and point-sources (such as towers, aerials and TV masts). Dr Persinger believes that UFO displays will occur in areas subject to maximum concentration of electrical field potential generated by tectonic stress. Point-sources could then act as 'discharge points', as well as the mountains, powerlines and less conductive materials such as railway lines and pipelines – all commonly

associated with UFO sightings. There is sufficient evidence to conclude that some UFOs are 'earthlights' of which at present science has little understanding. The connection between such UFOs and the landscape in which they manifest has long been a neglected area of study – it is also the greatest clue we have towards finding the answer which fits the extraordinarily consistent nature of the testimony describing balls and blobs of light which have haunted our planet for millennia.

Hessdalen, a thinly populated valley south-west of Trondheim in central Norway, has become world famous during the 1980s as *the* place for seeing Unidentified Flying Objects. Between the autumn of 1981 and the winter of 1984 there was a stream of reports describing UFO/light phenomena from this isolated mountainous region, so much so that ufologists from Norway and Sweden combined efforts to form a team investigation which became known as 'Project Hessdalen'. The project members spent a total of three to four winters monitoring the valley from a caravan base under very difficult climatic conditions. Whilst the Norwegian authorities showed little interest in the light phenomena, the project team received much assistance from the Norwegian Defence Research Establishment and from the Universities of Oslo and Bergen, who loaned the team expensive monitoring equipment, including magnetometers, spectrum-analysers, infra-red viewers, seismographs and even a portable radar.

Project Hessdalen has become one of the rare occasions when a team of researchers has been in the field with the correct instrumentation actually to witness and record an outbreak of UFO phenomena. Dozens of lights, all shapes, sizes and colours, were observed and photographed by the team. The lights moved rapidly, hovered, appeared below hillsides and sometime resembled inverted Christmas trees which slowly rose and fell, changed brightness and faded to near transparency at times. The phenomena were on several occasions tracked by the project's radar – but sometimes were not visually observed at the same time. Spectrum gratings suggested that the objects were solid, and yet paradoxically they were also tracked on radar apparently moving at 8,500 metres (27,887 feet) per second without producing a sonic boom!<sup>12</sup> On another occasion a 0.5 milliWatt laser was used to direct a beam of red light at one of the UFOs, which when hit changed its rate of pulsation.

The Hessdalen UFOs were very ghostlike in nature, oddly displaying qualities of objects both with and without mass – suggesting they were some kind of unknown energy form on the very fringes of physical existence. Phenomena such as these have been largely ignored by the more sensational UFO writers, who prefer to present evidence which supports their belief in the existence of ‘spaceships’. What kind of spaceship, however, is capable of ‘playing tag’ with observers, at times appearing to be gaseous and at others solid, sometimes showing up on radar and at other times not, appearing and disappearing out of thin air and performing manoeuvres impossible for a structured flying machine?

Light phenomena similar to those haunting the Norwegian valley are common at many similar locations throughout the world. It was a general awareness of the regular appearance of such mystery lights over the Pennine Hills region of northern England that in 1986 led the authors to set up ‘Project Pennine’. Our extensive fieldwork and archival research for what soon turned into a long-range multi-disciplinary landscape study produced clear evidence that the majority of the UFO sightings in the Pennines occurred in moorland areas, there being very few reliable reports of ‘structured craft’. The majority of observations appear to describe multi-coloured balls and beams of light, phenomena which are rooted in local folklore and are often inseparable from ancient belief in ghosts, spirits and fairies.

In a valley in the High Peak of Derbyshire, strange luminous aerial phenomena have been appearing regularly for hundreds of years. The local farming community will not speak to strangers and outsiders about these happenings, as they regard them as something ‘private’ and best left alone. Mountain rescue teams in certain regions of the foothills have sometimes been called into action to investigate reports of unknown ‘lights’ and ‘flares’ observed over barren hillsides and moor, under the impression that climbers or ramblers are lost or in distress. But more often than not the lights remain unexplained and unaccountable as real distress flares, aircraft lights or other conventional luminosities.

The mystery of the ‘Longdendale Lights’ in the High Peak of Derbyshire is one fascinating example of an area of the Pennine landscape which has a long history of recurring light

phenomena. The most persistent stories in recent years, however, have concerned the appearance of unidentified lights on a remote area to the south of the Woodhead Reservoirs on the western flanks of inhospitable Bleaklow. The spectral lights of Longdendale are of several different kinds, including a single, powerful beam, like that of a searchlight, which has been seen in the area of Clough Edge and Bramah Edge, above the Torside Reservoir. Also reported is a string of wandering, elusive and eventually fading lights that appear on the craggy gritstone heights of Shining Clough, further along the valley to the east. Is it possible that Shining Clough was so named long ago because of the appearance of these mystery lights? Bleaklow – reaching its boggy summit at nearly 2,000 feet above sea-level to the north of the trans-Pennine Snake Pass road – is one of the largest areas of land in England which is uncrossed by road, and it is a difficult, rugged and inhospitable area with no artificial light sources.

Late one night in February 1982, twenty-five members of Glossop Mountain Rescue Team, together with several National Park Rangers, spent three hours searching the desolate moors on the north-western edges of Bleaklow after a sighting of a 'green flare' was reported to the local police. Triangulation of sightings revealed that the light had been hovering in the vicinity of Torside Castle, a place where many other sightings have taken place. David Frith, a member of Glossop Mountain Rescue Team, described in 1980 how, 'There have been frequent calls about them to the rescue team ... the last sighting was in October last year, when they looked like a string of walkers carrying torches. They drifted about and then faded away. Other times it's been like a searchlight coming out of the hillside.'<sup>13</sup>

Longdendale resident Barbara Drabble had a strange experience with the strange light phenomenon one night in July 1970 when driving alongside the reservoirs towards Crowden: 'I was returning from Manchester through Tintwistle towards Crowden; on the left hand side of the road is bleak moorland and on the right the reservoirs, the railway line and then the stark, forbidding north side of Bleaklow. This is indeed a very impressive sight very late at night with the moon shining and the cold, black outline of the mountain towering over the reservoir. It was a very warm summer's evening, and I was stone cold

sober, having been visiting my parents ... On leaving Tintwistle and reaching the top of the hill ... I could suddenly see the whole of the valley in front of me lit with a brilliant blue light. This was not a definite blue but had the clarity of bluey-white of a flash of lightning.' This brilliant light '... lit up all the bottom half of Bleaklow, all the railway, the reservoirs and about a two mile stretch of the road. The air appeared to vibrate.'<sup>14</sup>

Mrs Drabble described the light phenomenon as '... not like daylight but brighter, clearer and harsher. Immediately as I drove into it I felt extremely cold and came out in goosepimples. I felt frightened as it was so unnatural. It was certainly bright enough to drive without lights; I closed the car window but had the sensation of slight tingling as one receives with a minor electric shock and could feel the hair at the back of my neck standing on end ... on arriving home [the car] had an icy sheen and felt cold.' The light '... had the same piercing brightness as lightning but this light lasted for some three or four minutes. It then disappeared as suddenly as it had come. The following day I asked around the valley and drew a blank from everyone ... [the local farmers] wouldn't admit seeing it, and did not even want to discuss the matter, but their attitude made me feel that they did see something.'<sup>14</sup>

However, a year later, in July 1971, the light was seen again by several people at the newly constructed youth hostel at Crowden. Mrs Joyce Buckley, who then ran the hostel, said: 'At first I thought it might be car headlights, but it reappeared on the top of Bleaklow and no car can get up there. It lasted three minutes 25 seconds, and was very powerful.'<sup>14</sup> This light lit up half of Bleaklow, all the railway, the reservoir and about a two-mile stretch of road. Mrs Drabble remembers '... someone saying that although they had all the lights on in the hostel they were dazzled by a light coming from outside into the hostel much brighter than their lights. They sent mountain rescue teams to investigate. What they thought they would find I don't know. I remember that at that time the rescue teams had big searchlights about the size of a dustbin lid and someone said that high up on the moor these looked like torches from the hostel whereas the previous light, which had brought all the hostellers out to look, had filled the whole valley.'<sup>14</sup>

The search party was led by Ken Drabble, the chief warden for the Peak Park. He said: 'When we got to the top there was

nothing – no trace of people, lights or even a fire.’<sup>14</sup>

After this sighting Mrs Drabble again approached the local farmers, and this time – although very reluctant to speak – several admitted having seen the light on previous occasions, ‘... but they wouldn’t discuss it. Their attitude was that it was something best left alone. I am sure that someone said that they had known it to freeze young lambs when it came very early in the year ... also someone said that it had been coming for generations but never so close together as two years, usually about thirty or even fifty years in between. They were still reluctant to discuss it.’<sup>14</sup>

Apparently the phantom light of Bleaklow Moor is a permanent feature of the landscape of Longdendale – and possibly has been for thousands of years. Between the years 1971 and 1982, Glossop Mountain Rescue Team was called out on at least six occasions to search the moors for people believed to be in distress after sightings of mystery lights were reported to them. The Longdendale Light phenomenon demonstrates the existence in the Pennine valleys of northern England of a perception of light phenomena not as evidence of visitations from outer space but as an accepted part of planet Earth’s natural processes.

Another area of the Pennines which consistently generates UFO phenomena is that of the Craven hills of North Yorkshire, centred on the north, mid and south Craven geological faultlines, which encircle the market town of Skipton. Low-level manoeuvring lights are a commonplace occurrence in this area, particularly over the Carleton and Elslack Moors, near a large transmitter aerial; and to the north of Skipton, the moors and undulating hills surrounding the Dales villages of Grassington, Burnsall and Appletreewick are all regular hotbeds of UFO activity. Local CB-radio enthusiasts, when asked by investigators about local UFO sightings, replied, ‘Oh, you mean the flying oranges?’, implying once again that light phenomena in this area are regarded as if they were no more than a cow run wild after calving-time.

Local UFO investigator Tony Dodd, a police officer for over twenty years in Wharfedale, has observed numerous examples of anomalous light phenomena, sometimes at close range in the presence of other observers, over the moors around Skipton. He believes that real, structured flying objects are present behind

these lights, and has obtained impressive photographic evidence to support his statements. However, these photographs do not depict 'physical structured objects' but the familiar blobs of unexplained light, such as the photograph taken on Carleton Moor (near Skipton) in March 1983 which depicts a classic example of two plasma-like blobs of energy, very similar to photos from other parts of the world, such as Hessdalen and Marfa Flats in Texas.

Another series of impressive photos taken by Mr Dodd near Bolton Abbey, North Yorkshire, on the evening of 7 November 1983, have been described by Ground Saucer Watch, after computer analysis, as 'Britain's first confirmed UFO photographs'.<sup>15</sup> However, although this flying object appeared to the observers 'like a giant child's spinning-top' covered in pulsating red lights, the computer analysis stated that, 'There is no evidence of a top-shaped object, only a round object at best', most of the image being a 'tenuous, cloud-like structure'.<sup>15</sup> This clearly demonstrates how human perception of what are basically balls of electromagnetic energy can give the impression that solid flying objects have been observed.

Tony Dodd informs us: 'I have personally witnessed these balls of light many dozens of times ... and have seen them at close range and at distance and have photographed them. At the present time I have come to no logical conclusion as to the composition or origin of the phenomenon but I feel certain that we are dealing with an intelligence which is totally outside the scope of our understanding or science. They appear to be intelligently manoeuvred, sometimes following cars, sometimes just standing still and on one occasion adopting a threatening attitude towards myself in a police vehicle.'<sup>16</sup>

Phantom lights were once described by the term 'will o'the wisp' or 'Jack o'Lantern' throughout the British Isles. Prior to the end of the nineteenth century lights such as these were a terror to countryfolk and travellers, who believed them to be spirits or fairies intent on leading them to their deaths in bogs and fens. This tradition is reflected in the ancient Latin term *ignis fatuus* – 'foolish fire', a phenomenon generally dismissed by scientists upon the assumption that these lights are the products of ignited gases produced by rotting organic matter present in bogs and fens. However, the majority of these reports come from well-drained mountainous country and uplands. Furthermore,

numerous witnesses have described brilliant lights dancing above hedgerows, rising high into the air and performing complicated acrobatics – advancing, combining and retiring. They often seem to display signs of intelligence, appearing to recede if followed or to follow if the observer moves away. This appears to contradict the long-standing belief that such lights are caused by the ignition of marsh gas or methane.<sup>17</sup>

In 1980 Dr A.A. Mills of the Department of Planetary Science at Leicester University published a study examining the possible connection between marsh gas and will-o’the-wisp-type lights. Dr Mills concluded that, to explain these lights in reference to marsh gas, one has to ‘... explain how to achieve natural ignition of intermittent, disconnected bubbles of gas rising through the marshes’.<sup>18</sup> The suggestion that phosphine could provide this natural ignition is a non-starter, as phosphorus is never found in a pure state in nature, and vapour-phase chromatography has failed to detect even parts-per-million traces of phosphine present in marsh gases analysed in the laboratory.<sup>18</sup>

The sweeping dismissal of anomalous lights as ‘marsh gas’ therefore has no scientific evidence in its support and is merely another example of an attempt to dismiss a poorly understood natural phenomenon by merely giving it a name. Will o’the wisp is as much of a mystery in our present technological age as he was to earlier generations – we now interpret these lights as UFOs. This explains why the old belief in sprites and fairies who haunted the sky and certain spots in the earth appears to be in decline, as technology has moulded perception of them to fit our Space Age expectations. We now regard strange lights in the night sky as extraterrestrial visitors rather than the evil spirits and elementals once as familiar to our ancestors as television is to us.

Naturalists and outdoorsmen have been puzzled and fascinated by the dancing lights known as will o’the wisp since the days of Shakespeare. In *Scots Magazine* (1968), J. Alan Rennie wrote of his experiences with a strange light he called ‘the Dawn Wanderer’ which he observed several times floating above the moors near his Highland farm on the Cromdale Hills. One particular morning, as Mr Rennie was walking along his farm road at 7 am, he spotted a strange light moving at the foot of Lethendry Brae:

I did not pay much attention to this at first. Only when it rounded the bend and was steadily climbing the last fifty yards of the brae did I realise this particular light was unsupported by either bicycle or man. The realisation brought me to a halt. All I could do was stand and stare. Now that it was drawing nearer the light was no longer as bright and sharply defined as it had been at a distance. It was, in fact, more like an incandescent vapour cloud. There was something indescribably eerie in standing there on a lonely hill road while this manifestation of the unknown moved steadily towards me ... The light drew closer, looking for all the world like a comic artist's drawing of a ghost. It even had a short, tenuous, slightly-curling transparent tail. Vaguely I wondered if my presence would have any effect upon its unswerving progress; but no, it was completely unfaltering as it passed me and continued along the road I had just come. Floating no more than three feet from the ground, it seemed borne on the breadth of an imperceptible wind. At the instant when it was directly level with me I could see clean through it ...<sup>19</sup>

The light disappeared further along the road.

Almost everywhere in the 'Celtic fringe' the lights were and are regarded as disastrous omens of death – these traditions led to the origin of the term 'corpse candle' – *canwyll corph* in Welsh. These ghostly flames are described in one account from nineteenth-century Denmark as a light 'seen during the night slowly gliding from the house to the gate of the churchyard and along the churchroad, which very often is not the common road, but that by which funeral processions pass'.<sup>17</sup>

Beliefs such as these are not extinct: They are still taken as commonplace in many parts of the world. In rural Ireland, UFO reports are rare or non-existent, as lights in the night sky are interpreted differently there. As an example, the mysterious phenomena known as 'the Lights of Crusheen' have been observed by residents in that part of south-west Ireland for hundreds of years. The 'Island Lights', as they are known locally, are 'uncanny flames in the sky' which are said to hover over the tiny island of Inchicronan and come ashore at times of death and disaster. Inchicronan Island is remote and uninhabited, except for the ruins of Inchicronan Abbey and Crusheen cemetery. There are two lights, like enormous 'candle flames', which appear above the island in the lake and bob along at about six feet from the ground as though being carried by invisible torchbearers. It is believed locally that at times of

disaster they move along a rocky causeway connecting the island, then follow the road into Cusheen, floating slowly up to roof-level, and remain there, still, for several minutes over the doomed household, before drifting back the same way, to disappear over the island.

Mr Eddie Lenihan, an author and local historian of south-west Ireland, tells us that he has 'interviews on tape with people who claim to have seen the "Island Lights" as recently as the mid-1980s', and 'I know at least two versions of the story of how they came to be; also why they came and for whom ... [one] informant told me that for years he'd seen a light travelling in the same direction, crossing the countryside at night and disappearing into bogland, always at the same spot. He also had an interesting comment to make about different kinds of lights, and maintains that he can tell the difference between one that is "bad" and one that is "good"; the good one is yellowish in colour, whereas the bad is white ...'<sup>20</sup> These lights have apparently also been photographed, and observed by 'hundreds of reliable witnesses' in the Crusheen area.<sup>20</sup>

The existence of so many independent witnesses over such a length of time in a localized district suggests that the light phenomena involved must be connected to some common topographical and geological factors rather than accountable by some vague socio-psychological aberration of the people involved. Lights such as these are commonly associated with lakes and lochs, areas of mineral enrichment (hence the connection with quarries), towers and sharp shapes, rocky outcrops and the grounds of ancient churches and burial grounds – the same locations favoured by UFOs. They sometimes appear at certain times of the year, at certain times of the night, during certain kinds of weather conditions etc. Their appearance over long periods has led to their integration into local folklore and the development of complex traditions to account for their existence.

One interesting location haunted by a light phenomenon was the Burton Dassett hills in Warwickshire. In the 1920s the increasingly frequent appearances of a 'ghostlight' here reached the ears of the local press and then came to the attention of outsiders. In February 1923 hordes of ghost-hunters, curiosity-seekers and journalists descended upon the hills to catch a glimpse of the light. Many sceptics were converted.

George White, a resident of Fenny Compton, a nearby village, in the presence of two others saw ‘... a strong and dazzling light like a motor-car headlight ... a perfectly lovely sight, it flitted about and passed through bushes and over fences at great speed; then with a final flash it disappeared.’<sup>21</sup>

The ‘ghostlight’ roamed the hills and hovered around the ancient church of All Saints (from where it was observed by Mr White) and the beacon tower nearby. It was from this tower in 1923 that a visiting journalist saw the light ‘... fully a mile away, but its radiance was such that the sky was faintly illuminated for several miles ... the light itself was steady and vivid, but the wide beams that were thrown upwards flickered like a failing lamp ...’<sup>21</sup> His description of what he saw would be interpreted today as a ‘UFO sighting’. Another journalist, investigating the mystery on behalf of the *Birmingham Gazette* saw a ‘... well-defined and spherical light [which] moved across our field of vision with [a] peculiar switchback motion from left to right disappearing as quick as it had come ... like a dull yellow eye, it was glowering at us apparently from beneath a nearby tree.’<sup>21</sup>

It was noted at the time that, ‘On enquiry it is found that [the light] has been seen in the Fenny Compton district before at long-distant times. An old resident recalls beholding these same strange wandering lights when a mere child ... older residents in the Burton district accept the appearance of the “ghostlight” as quite a commonplace occurrence, and it is claimed that lights similar to the one which is now carrying the distinguished title of “Ghost Light” have been seen over the Burton Hills for over ninety years ...’<sup>21</sup>

Once again this light appears to have been associated with geological faulting and seismic stress. The Burton hills are extensively faulted and mineralized. A journalist from Coventry who saw the ‘ghostlight’ reported: ‘The light, penetrating the fog, commenced its eerie course from the direction of Northend village, and flashing brightly now and then, and occasionally disappearing entirely, hovered up the valley until it reached the ironstone quarries. Here it became extinguished.’<sup>21</sup>

On 24 January 1924, when the ‘ghostlight’ made its most spectacular appearance, a fierce earth tremor was shaking the nearby counties of Herefordshire and Worcestershire. Mrs Neal, the wife of a shepherd who often saw the light hovering in

the old churchyard, '... was confronted with the apparition when she opened the door of their cottage on the hillside [on the night before the earth tremor] ... the light, of a yellowish-blue hue, flashed past and dived into the valley'.<sup>21</sup>

Throughout the world these strange wandering lights have haunted certain favoured parts of the landscape, appearing century after century, as was made plain in the Pennine study. Folklore scholar R.C. McLagen noted how, 'There are places in the Scottish Highlands which have got their names from the belief that mysterious lights have appeared in their neighbourhood. Thus, Creag an T-Soluis, a rock above Cairn, near Port Charlotte [Isle of Mull], has its name from a belief that supernatural lights used to be seen about it. For the same reason another rock down at the shore below Cairn Cottage is called Carraig na Soluis.'<sup>22</sup>

This tradition is similar to that connecting phantom lights with areas of prehistoric sanctity, as well as ancient churches and burial grounds. In some parts of the world, shrines have been constructed at places where ghostly lights and visions have been encountered – that this practice still occurs is evident from events in Ireland in 1985, where a shrine was erected overnight at Cairns, Co. Sligo, upon the site of an encounter with an apparition interpreted as 'the Blessed Virgin Mary'.

This idea was mooted as far back as 1919, when a Mr Sington, writing in *The English Mechanic*<sup>23</sup> suggested that, 'Suppose, owing to some local conditions at present unknown, such lights have occurred from time to time near the site, they would have attracted the attention of the inhabitants, who, awestruck, would have attached great significance to them, and might then have selected the site as a place of worship or sacrifice.'<sup>23</sup>

In support of his theory, Mr Sington tells how,

Some years ago, during Easter, returning to Keswick from an ascent of Helvellyn with a hotel acquaintance we saw [strange] lights, no doubt will o' the wisps. It was so dark that we had to probe for the road walls with our sticks. When we were at a point near which the track branches off to the Druidical circle [the Castlerigg Stone Circle], we all at once saw a rapidly moving light as bright as the acetylene lamp of a bicycle, and we instinctively stepped to the road boundary wall to make way for it, but nothing came. As a matter of fact, the light travelled at right angles to the road, say 20

feet above our level, possibly 200 yards or so away. It was a white light, and having crossed the road it suddenly disappeared ... we then saw a number of lights possibly a third of a mile or so away, directly in the direction of the [stone] circle, but, of course, much fainter, no doubt due to distance, moving backwards and forwards horizontally; we stood watching them for a long time ... Whilst we were watching a remarkable incident happened – one of the lights, and only one, came straight to the spot where we were standing; at first very faint, as it approached the light increased in intensity. When it came quite near I was in doubt whether I should stoop below the boundary wall as the light would pass directly over our heads. But when it came close to the wall it slowed down, stopped, quivered, and slowly went out, as if the matter producing the light had slowly become exhausted. It was globular, white, with a nucleus possibly six feet or so in diameter, and just high enough above the ground to pass over our heads.<sup>23</sup>

The belief that such lights originate from under the ground is common in traditional stories and folklore throughout the world. Irish folklore tells of the inhabitants of the spirit world as inhabitants the *sidh*-mounds, the great barrows of the dead; this is reflected in Scandinavian and German folklore in the belief in the *haug-folk* ('dwellers in the mounds') and the *under-jordiske* ('those under the ground'). A writer in *Folklore* (1894) tells that natives in Darjeeling, northern India, have another name for these lights – *chota-admis*, meaning 'little men', '... whom they believe to live underground ... only coming out at night to fly around with lanterns ... they are constantly about on dark nights, sometimes as many as twenty or thirty together [but] the natives always give them a wide berth'.<sup>17</sup>

Folk traditions such as these have been gathered by anthropologists living among tribal societies in every corner of the globe. They are as fundamental to primitive belief systems as the longing for visits from outer space is to our society. Societies living close to the rhythms of nature have intuitively known for aeons that the strange lights and apparitions they see moving through the night sky have their origins in the earth itself, even though they may be ignorant about the mechanics of geophysics and electromagnetism. It is therefore a testament to our present technological ignorance that we have to search for extraterrestrials in our attempts to understand our Phantoms of the Sky, when the answer we are seeking lies within man himself and the world he inhabits.

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## Blinded by the Light

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We no longer believe that gods appear and speak to us in our dreams, but nevertheless we continue to dream. Officially we no longer believe in gods but actually we continue to dream of superior forces, and eventually some of us see them. The 'producer' continues to produce; but his creations are no longer channelled by cults, rituals and universally accepted beliefs. This is quite a new situation. We are the first civilisation to construct a social life without any reference to the sacred. And, if my hypothesis is correct, we are observing for the first time the emergence of a sacred experience utterly disconnected from its usual cultural channels.

Bertrand Meheust, in *UFOs: 1947-1987*<sup>1</sup>

A 1949 United States Air Force report dealing with UFO phenomena notes, in a list of hypotheses, that, 'The possible existence of some sort of strange, extraterrestrial animals has also been considered', adding that, 'Many of these objects acted more like animals than anything else.'<sup>2</sup> Many other commentators have considered what has become known as the 'Sky Animal' theory, when the evidence led them logically to the conclusion that UFOs do not behave like solid flying machines but more like living beings possessed of a kind of rudimentary intelligence. In the 1950s Trevor James Constable even produced numerous infra-red photographs which he claimed depicted such creatures in the sky above the Mojave Desert in California. Although his 'breakthrough' has never been replicated by anyone else, the theory still has a number of adherents.

Kenneth Arnold, whose observation in 1947 sparked off the 'flying saucer age' never believed that the objects he saw were spacecraft. In 1967 he said: 'The impression I have held after observing these strange objects was that they were something alive rather than machines – a living organism of some type that

apparently has the ability to change its density, similar to fish that are found in our oceans.’<sup>3</sup> John Keel, one of the most influential writers in the history of ufology, reached similar conclusions when in the same year he wrote that ‘the real phenomenon’ consisted not of solid machines but of ‘... soft objects ... sightings of transparent or translucent objects seemingly capable of altering their size and shape dramatically ... most of these objects are temporary manipulations of matter and energy’.<sup>4</sup>

Keel’s extensive fieldwork led him, like ourselves, to abandon the ‘extraterrestrial’ hypothesis after he discovered ‘an astonishing overlap between psychic phenomena and UFOs’ which led him to the conclusion that a large percentage of the UFO evidence ‘... is subjective and many alleged UFO events are actually the products of a complex hallucinatory process, particularly in the contactee and CE3 events’.<sup>5</sup> Conclusions such as these have not pleased the more naïve of UFO writers, who take it as self-evident that every UFO report is an observation of an alien spaceship. This belief system leads to the implicit bias of all the data to fit the investigator’s personal prejudices. Indeed, one UFO group in Yorkshire regards any UFO reports with ‘psychic’ overtones as unreliable and deliberately ignores them, whilst at the same time elevating hearsay and rumours obtained from ‘military personnel’ or police officers as first-class evidence for the existence of extraterrestrial UFOs.

Many UFO encounters, ‘abductions’ and contacts are preceded and followed by other ‘paranormal’ phenomena: Out of the Body Experiences, prophecy and poltergeist phenomena in the home of the percipient. The phenomena appear to be attracted to – or more likely created by – certain ‘sensitive’ people, often those gifted with ‘second sight’ or with abilities usually associated with trance mediums. In prehistoric times these people would have probably been the tribal shamans – those regarded by the community as the intermediaries between the tribe and the supernatural forces of nature surrounding the village. Their modern counterparts may be the contactees, abductees and ‘channellers’ who throughout their lives see and interact with what they believe are UFO intelligences and spirits (names given to such entities are interchangeable and dependent upon the belief systems of the percipient). The classic

childhood experiences of repeater witnesses to UFOs are of seeing and playing with 'balls of light' and aliens, as previous generations played with the 'fairies' or denizens of the spirit world.

Many UFO sightings describe huge and brilliantly lighted flying 'machines' which hover above densely populated urban areas and yet are observed by only one individual or a small group of individuals. For instance, Jenny Randles describes a case from Oldham in Lancashire in which a security guard saw a strange object hovering above Cairo Mill one evening in October 1972: 'I estimated it to be about 100 feet in diameter because it seemed to completely fill the sky,' he said. 'It was brightly lit with this fluorescent type of lighting because it was not casting any shadows and no beams of light came from it at all.'<sup>6</sup> Despite the apparent large size and the presence of a loud humming noise, only the guard himself appears to have observed this UFO – a colleague who was only yards away at the time saw and heard nothing!<sup>6</sup>

It is apparent that UFOs behave more like ghosts than structured craft – they are, in effect, Phantoms of the Sky. Jacques Vallee has noted how, in many UFO experiences, 'The so-called spacecraft did not appear by moving away, even at high speed. It simply vanished on the spot, or it slowly faded away like the Cheshire cat ... sometimes also producing the sound of an explosion. In other cases, UFOs have been reported to enter the ground.'<sup>7</sup>

Many close-range UFO encounters and 'apparitions' described in ghostlore are essentially the same phenomena; both involve luminous blobs of plasma-like energy which are seemingly attracted to certain types of terrain, appear at certain times of the year and are always interpreted in ways familiar to the witnesses' belief system. There is a marked tendency on the part of observers to perceive an unusual shape-shifting mass of light in a human or anthropomorphic mould.

The *Newcastle Evening Chronicle* announced in January 1968 that two groups of people had independently reported a strange phenomenon which could be interpreted equally as a ghost or a UFO. Peter Harper and his girlfriend were walking at night along a footpath on lonely farmland at Blyth, Northumberland, when they saw '... a solid white mass, which split into three shapes. They looked like figures, but no faces could be seen,

and they seemed to be 6½ feet tall.<sup>8</sup> As they approached, the objects ‘... again merged into one shape and then resembled one figure, which turned off down a path and disappeared’. Later that same night another local resident, James Main, was walking across a field in the same area when he saw ‘... a huge solid white object which started to shimmer and then split into lots of funny long-shaped forms [which] seemed to melt into nothingness’.<sup>8</sup>

The supernatural world of European folk-tradition was populated by similar creatures – goblins, elves and spirits who inhabited burial mounds, stone circles, haunted woods and lonely places. Many of the bizarre humanoids described as ‘UFO occupants’ – for example, the weird beings who besieged a lonely farmhouse at Kelly-Hopkinsville, Kentucky, in 1955 – resemble the images of goblins and elementals well known in traditional folklore and tales of the fairy otherworld. A professor of Welsh language at Bangor University told folklore collector W.Y. Evans-Wentz early this century that, ‘In most of the tales I heard repeated when I was a boy, I am quite certain the implication was that the Tylwyth Teg [fairies] were a kind of spirit race having human characteristics, who could at will suddenly appear and disappear. They were generally supposed to live underground and as aerial beings they could fly and move about in the air at will.’<sup>9</sup> Strange humanoid figures such as these have been reported in connection with UFOs and aerial lights throughout the world.

Catholic faith is sustained in many societies by belief in the continuing manifestations of the Blessed Virgin Mary (BVM). This considerable sub-culture – very similar to the belief in extraterrestrial UFOs in the ‘advanced’ world – is supported by a huge body of eyewitness testimony and evidence of much the same order as that advanced for the reality of UFOs. To the population of Catholic Europe, belief in the miraculous appearance of the BVM is just as strongly held as an article of faith as the beliefs held by millions elsewhere as regards the possibility of extraterrestrial UFOs.

In a case at Lourdes, France, which began in 1858, Bernadette Soubirous initially believed her visions there to be of either a demon or a ghost – her first experience was of only a pale white light, after which she entered a trance state. To the Catholic theologians the trance state is interpreted as ‘religious

ecstasy'; the experience is, in fact, identical to that well known to trance mediums, those undergoing Out of the Body Experiences, and those who have experienced a close encounter with UFO phenomena (in UFO folklore it is known as 'missing time' or 'the Oz factor').

In the case of the visions of the BVM at Banneux, Belgium, in 1933, the children involved spoke initially only of seeing a weird light. When they were questioned repeatedly by the Church authorities, they said they saw a young woman dressed in white – but originally the description had been of a white light which took a human form and disappeared like a light being switched off. At Banneux the luminous figure appeared by 'gliding in from the sky', first seeming very small but then growing in size (typical UFO behaviour) and surrounded by a '... great oval light [which] enveloped her body ... her feet did not touch the ground but rested on a greyish cloud some fifteen inches above the earth'.<sup>10</sup>

Virtually all these visions are based on initial encounters with light phenomena which were interpreted through the experience, expectation and psychological state of the witnesses. To children brought up in a society dominated by the Roman Catholic Church, the only appropriate cultural template into which supernatural visions can be interpreted is that which the prevailing ideology has placed in the minds of the populace. Before the advent of Christianity, experiences with radiant visions such as these would have been interpreted as manifestations perhaps of a mother goddess. The recurrence in modern times of the BVM vision may be due to a subconscious race memory of encounters with the ideal female entity. Kevin McClure has speculated that, 'What emerges from the [BVM] visions may be a contact of some form with an externalised form established by belief and hope over the years and perceived by those who were prepared for it, who were in the right frame of mind ...'<sup>10</sup> The 'right frame of mind' is undoubtedly the same altered state of consciousness common to trance mediums, tribal shamans, UFO contactees and those with pronounced 'psychic' abilities.

Light phenomena similar to those associated with the BVM visions at Medjugorje (Chapter 5) accompanied the Welsh religious revival of 1904–5 and were connected at the time with an outbreak of religious hysteria which accompanied the mission

of a 36-year-old evangelist, Mary Jones. The 'Revival Lights', as they became known, were typical UFOs and appeared to be connected with the spread of religious hysteria through England and Wales, apparently following Mrs Jones's car as it twisted around a mountainous road in North Wales, hovering above the revival meetings in the tiny chapel at Egryn, near Barmouth, and playing games with the hordes of pressmen who descended upon the area from London.

A reporter from the *Daily Express* described similar light phenomena he observed in the vicinity of the chapel at Egryn in February 1905:

... a farmer suddenly stopped, excitedly seized my arm, and shouted triumphantly 'Yonder are the lights!', he pointed with outstretched arm and pointed finger to the spot, amongst the shadows the dark outline of the chapel appeared to rest upon the hills. Beyond I saw some half-dozen lights. They gleamed, scintillated, jumped, and then vanished, to appear at brief intervals. 'Now you will believe', said my guide who seemed to take it for granted that I should at once accept the phenomenon as miraculous. A still more remarkable light appeared after the farmer and I had parted company. Faint at first, it rapidly gained dazzling intensity, when from a globe-like centre it flung out nine long, distinct radiations. It lingered for a full sixty seconds and exploded. A similar display occurred on the roadway some three hundred yards behind, while once a curious gleam shot across my path and circled behind me.<sup>11</sup>

The local residents interpreted the lights as manifestations of 'the Holy Spirit', and Mrs Jones claimed to receive guidance from these UFOs in much the same way as modern UFO contactees. Hence: 'She had seen, almost from the first, each evening, a light between her and the hills. It had revealed to her what to expect at the [revival] meetings.'<sup>12</sup>

A similar religious revival took place in Ireland in 1859, similarly accompanied by the appearance of strange light phenomena. A writer in the *Spiritual Magazine* of 1877 describes how, 'During the open air meetings, when some 600 to 1,000 people were present, a kind of cloud of fire approached in the air, hovered and dipped over the people, rose and floated on some distance, again hovered on that which was afterwards found to be another revival meeting, and so it continued. The light was very bright and was seen by all, producing awe.'<sup>13</sup>

Were lights such as these attracted to the intense religious emotions, just as they also seem to be attracted and focused, in different circumstances, to bodies of water, powerlines and areas prone to seismic stress? Charles Fort, speculating on the nature of the phenomena connected with the Welsh revival, wrote in 1931 that: 'The excitement was combustion, or psycho-electricity ... and perhaps when flowing from human batteries, there was a force that was of use to the luminous things that hung around. Maybe they fed upon it, and grew, and glowed, brilliant with nourishing ecstasies. If a man can go drunk on God, he may usefully pass along his exhilarations to other manifestations of godness.'<sup>14</sup>

The possibility that belief in itself – like prayer – can create objective phenomena is a theory known and accepted by philosophers for centuries. The Tibetans, for example, believe that shamans are able to manipulate invisible energies into visible 'thought projections' known as *tulpas*. Mary Jones believed that it was her religious faith which created the 'Revival Lights'; the lights were therefore the means of her fame and helped her to achieve the ambition to be 'the accepted medium for spreading the Revival'.<sup>12</sup> The lights which accompanied Mrs Jones and the Welsh revival can now be seen in context, not as 'UFOs' in the modern sense but as external manifestations of spiritual light.

In tribal societies encounters with luminous beings, spirits and strange lights are all common elements in the spiritual journeys of the shaman. Illumination is achieved through meditation in solitude, followed by the experience of blinding light – the supreme phenomenon of deconditioning and one of the oldest mystical experiences of mankind. Tribal societies believe that inner light is not perceived by the physical body but by the soul in an altered state of consciousness ('dreamtime'), a condition identical to that experienced by UFO 'abductees' and those undergoing Out of the Body Experiences. Illumination does not necessarily manifest subjectively within the shaman – the light can often be perceived by others. The anthropologist Rasmussen describes how a 'bright flame' hovered above the Eskimo shaman Kritdlarssuark as he led his people on a train of dog sleighs; another mystery light is said to have followed the mission of Owain Glyndwr, the legendary leader of the Welsh rebellion in the fifteenth century.

Mrs Jones's experiences with 'her' lights can be compared with those of tribal shamans throughout the world. The Korean Oh Un-sook dreamt of thunder and lightning and three times encountered a pillar of light from which three men appeared to her from heaven. Rasmussen describes how the Iglulik Eskimos believe that 'enlightenment' is invoked by '... a mysterious light which the shaman suddenly feels in his body, inside his head, within the brain, an inexplicable searchlight, a luminous fire, which enables him to see in the dark ... he can now, even with closed eyes, see through darkness and perceive things and coming events which are hidden from others.' The appearance of such a light '... is as if the house in which he is suddenly rises; he sees far ahead of him, through mountains, exactly as if the earth was one great plain ... he can also discover souls which are kept concealed in strange lands or have been taken to the Land of the Dead'.<sup>15</sup>

Such 'Out of the Body Experiences', now experienced by the UFO abductees, in a manner suitable to the Space Age, are recorded in the traditions of people throughout the world. In Celtic mythology the supernatural residents of the otherworld were known to the Irish as the *Tuatha de Danann* or the *Sidhe-folk* (dwellers in the fairy hills) who are described in the early ninth-century *Book of Armagh* as a subterranean race of '*dei terreni*' – earth gods. There are many magical tales of voyages to supernatural worlds.<sup>16</sup> In the Connacht tale of Nera, the entrance to the otherworld was via a hole in a rock found by the hero who was following a raiding party of warriors into the *sidh*. The mysterious underground caverns with their unearthly lighting described by the shamans are identical with the alleged interiors of UFOs in the present day.

Anthropologist Holger Kalweit<sup>17</sup> describes a legend of the Californian Chumash Indian tribe which tells of a shaman, Aixwalic, who upon contracting a fatal illness went to die at a place far away from his people: 'He was walking one night by the side of the ocean when a light appeared from a nearby cliff. This light flew around for a while, disappeared again, and shortly after reappeared, dancing above the cliffs.'<sup>17</sup> Aixwalic decides to catch the light, which guides him through a narrow tunnel: 'After they had passed through the tunnel and entered a house, the light disappeared and Aixwalic found himself in the company of various animals. All these animals defecated upon

Aixwalic, and when he was covered all over ... the old deer asked him what he wanted. Aixwalic replied that he was sick and wanted to be healed. Thereupon the animals held a great celebration, at the end of which they bathed Aixwalic, who soon felt better.<sup>17</sup> The initiate then returned home, having reached the Earth's surface through a spring and, 'When he reappeared at the village, all the people were overjoyed ... he told them everything that had happened and was amazed when they said that he had been gone only three days.'<sup>17</sup> (Budd Hopkins, in the twentieth century, would describe this experience as 'missing time'.) Aixwalic is astonished at having been away for three whole years as the Altered State of Consciousness is subject to a different time-scale, which transcends all human spatial and temporal definition.

Aixwalic's experience contains a great number of motifs found in UFO abduction experiences – the initial appearance of a strange light, the spirit creatures (ufonauts in a modern context) or guides who escort the percipient and show him the way. After passing through the tunnel (or entrance to the UFO) which connects our world with the otherworld, he arrives at the 'house of the animals' – a symbol of creation and the highest symbol of Self, where he is symbolically washed and in many modern instances shown scenes of ecological disaster, as well as being given warnings and messages about the future of mankind.

The symbolic imagery involved in traditional stories such as that of Aixwalic is found today in the encounters described by Whitley Strieber, Betty Andreasson and many other UFO abductees and contactees, few of whom believe that the creatures they have met are 'aliens' (this concept is usually imposed by the UFO investigators). Evans-Wentz believed that, 'In the ancient Celtic legends of mortals who make that strange voyage to the Western Otherworld and returned to this world again [there is] an echo of initiatory rites ... undoubtedly a poetical rendering of an actual psychic experience of a great initiate.'<sup>14</sup>

Eddie Bullard has written that folklore and UFO lore share the same sort of evidence, with 'the verbal testimony of narrators describing extraordinary occurrences'.<sup>18</sup> Ufologists must accept that as recorders of stories they are in effect folklorists, and this is how their writings may be regarded by future generations.

The fast-growing UFO mythology is undoubtedly the most extensive and influential paranormal belief system at work in modern culture, comparable to the complex belief system of the fairy otherworld in the Celtic countries of western Europe, and equally based upon cultural assumptions about the nature of reality.

Ufologists, like those who study folklore, compare texts for patterns and similarities – for instance, in regards to the abduction experience – but all too often conclude that, because these similarities exist, they must provide evidence for the objective reality of such phenomena. Folklorists, such as Eddie Bullard, would point out that, ‘Every UFO report claims to describe a real event, but truth and fiction, reality and belief are indistinguishable in [such] narratives.’<sup>18</sup>

As in the Middle Ages the fairy realm was a supernatural reflection of human society, our present imaginary visitors from outer space are a reflection of mankind’s hidden fears and dreams as we enter the twenty-first century. Fairies, goblins and demons have now been replaced by a modern folklore consisting of flying saucers and space people. In the words of Michael Persinger, ‘... even if there are no aliens, no gods, no old hags, our human need to escape the mundane dictates that we conjure them – be it from the temporal lobes or the astral plane.’<sup>19</sup>

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## Conclusion

# Living in the Heart of a Dream

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We are the intelligence which controls the phenomena.

John Keel<sup>1</sup>

... the real manipulators are you and me. The people ourselves, using the symbols of our dreams and those provided by the 'psychic technology' of the mass media.

Peter Rogerson, UFO researcher<sup>2</sup>

Conclusions about the UFO phenomena are difficult to arrive at. There are no ultimate truths with which to categorize the phenomena, only human belief against which to measure it. In this book we have gathered together and compared many of mankind's beliefs about UFOs. This has resulted in a book of Space Age folklore – a collection of stories based upon experiences and belief which appear to be rooted firmly in human perception and our environment.

Although we have supposedly written a book about what UFOs are, we have really been writing about what people believe about UFOs, and paradoxically, whenever we have tried to describe what UFOs are, we cease talking about what people believe in. There are many types of folklore dealing with phenomena existing on the edge of our known and accepted reality: the Loch Ness Monster and other lake creatures, mystery cats stalking the boundaries of our towns,<sup>3</sup> and large, hairy man-animals in the mountains of the world – all of these stories are identical in many respects to the content of UFO folklore. Indeed, many of these anomalies have at one time or another been directly connected with the UFO enigma, giving us more clues towards the ultimate source of the belief systems which conjure them. Just like the UFOs, these mysteries

continue year after year, sighting after sighting, with little progress ever made in the search for a solution. Although similar in 'reality status' to UFOs, they remain essentially disparate phenomena lacking public interest or significance in their actions to elevate them to the position attained by the UFO phenomenon.

Instead of remaining localized folklore, as have lake monsters and the yeti, there is something inherent within the UFO phenomenon to take it beyond just folklore. The sum of the parts of UFO folklore has created an enigma far greater and more significant. As a result of popular belief in extraterrestrials and UFOs in the Space Age over the past fifty years, we now have a 'folk creation which encapsulates the feeling of the times'<sup>4</sup> – a myth. This is the myth of extraterrestrial visitation which captures better than most belief systems the hopes and dreams of mankind in the Space Age. The gods and goddesses of nature have left us, mankind has broken free of the Earth's atmosphere, and now homo sapiens needs different dreams and a new mythology. We are now more than ever faced with the fundamental question of human existence: are we alone in the universe? Now more than ever, folklore and myth are in the making to answer that question.

Psychologist Carl Jung first referred to belief in the alien origin of UFOs as a myth in his book *Flying Saucers – A Modern Myth of Things Seen in the Sky*, and his final words on the subject were: 'The usual story about the UFOs is that they are some kind of spacecraft coming from other planets, or even from the fourth dimension. They are the symptoms of a universally present psychic disposition.'<sup>5</sup> Since then people have been trying desperately to prove why UFOs aren't a myth, why they are real, solid and portentous to the human race. The evidence for this 'reality' is still lacking, and it is our belief that it will continue to be absent. So we are left with a body of folklore which has arisen as man has reached for the stars and which has resulted in the myth of ET visitation.

The myth of ET visitation now wears different clothes and is presented to us by people who hold a belief in it as the 'Extraterrestrial Hypothesis', a name implying that it is a testable proposition. Unfortunately it is neither testable nor refutable, and while astronomers are content to await evidence and to theorize about the possibility of ET life, believers in the myth

will always find another excuse to account for why the alien presence on Earth cannot be proved – yet.

All our investigations into UFO-related phenomena have led us back to human perception and belief, and whether or not you believe in UFOs as myth, folklore or hard reality, we hope we have presented the UFO mystery from a different perspective, demonstrating that there is nothing in the pantheon of UFO phenomena which is not a reworking or modern interpretation of older ideas, experiences and beliefs. This approach is problematic, and some may think that, because we find no evidence for ETs visiting Earth, we are debunkers; others that, because we have an open mind about the possibilities of consciousness, human potential and planetary phenomena, we are credulous 'New Age' people.

Neither of these interpretations is correct. Rather than being a belief-based dogma, our point of view is a positional statement based upon what two UFO investigators living in the North of England have found to be true about a very perplexing subject; we have constantly been trying to tread the fine line between belief, scepticism and experience. It would have been far easier for us to have written a book based upon just one aspect of what people believe about UFOs. Data 'proving' that UFOs are alien spaceships, come from inside the hollow Earth, were created by Nazis now living in Antarctica or are secret government military craft can all be found, and in fact whole books have been written ascribing just such fantastic origins to the UFO phenomenon. But none of these theories has led to any answers. They cannot predict the phenomenon and are all based upon folklore – what people have said they have seen or heard. No one simple theory can account for all the data, and the case for none of them would stand up in a court of law. Hence we have not attempted to manipulate the data in order to 'prove' one theory or another but have stressed that no one theory accounts for all the UFO mystery.

We have criticized the ETH throughout this book precisely because it is the most commonly held belief about the UFO phenomenon, held and promoted by witnesses, investigators and the media alike. The ET belief system is a product of this day and age. Aliens may well exist, but we have no way of knowing for certain. Were they to exist in reality, we would suggest that the humanoid type of alien with legs, head, arms

etc. is a naïve projection – an anthropomorphization – of what we would like an alien to be: a little like us but not quite the same. In truth we have no real conception of what an alien species may be like. Something truly alien may not exist in any way remotely comprehensible to us. The dictionary definition of alien is ‘different in nature’. Just how different in nature any real aliens might be, we cannot know. Just as an example from our own planet, consider the difference between humans and dolphins – both of which are ‘intelligent’ and adapted perfectly to fit their environment, yet are physically and mentally totally different in nature. When we extend this to consider possible aliens from light years away who may have been in existence for millennia more than ourselves, is it reasonable to suggest that they are humanoid at all? To travel here, they must be far superior to us – technologically, at least, in which case any efforts to reveal them on our own terms will fail.

The ETH as an avenue of research for UFO origin is a cul-de-sac. Research into the alien origin of UFOs should continue, however, but precedence should be given to other ideas. None of the ETH-based explanations attributed to UFO and alien contact phenomena in the past has amounted to anything, and if we wish to develop our understanding of these phenomena further, a fresh approach is required.

One of the most frequent complaints of those interested in UFOs, especially from the ‘alien visitation’ point of view, is that science is not taking the phenomenon seriously enough, implying that, if it did, some answer would be swiftly arrived at. But what exactly could science study? It can’t study the UFOs themselves because we don’t have any. If science can be persuaded to look at the UFO enigma, it can look only at the component parts that make it up. Physicists can look at physical evidence if there is any, psychologists can look at the psychological effects that experiences have on people, sociologists can study how people and society reacts to reports of UFO experiences, and so on.

But by doing this scientists are not studying what most of us think of when we think of ‘UFOs’, and they are certainly not studying the UFO experience. When scientists attempt to study the UFO phenomenon, like a good magic trick it vanishes before their eyes, being reduced a jumble of human and external factors to which significance is attached, meaning imposed and a

myth projected. Science cannot adequately study these factors. The moment of experience is always past, and even when some types of experience – such as those from Medjugorje (Chapter 5) – can be studied whilst they are occurring, the same conclusions are always reached. What do we have? Just a few people sitting on the ground staring at nothing in particular. Yet the belief in the reality of what is seen continues even when, with events such as those at Medjugorje, we know that nothing external is being observed. So again we are back at what people believe, and the mystery is undiminished.

In fact, the UFO mystery is solved frequently – every day – but not by scientists. It is solved by the ufologists themselves. When an object has been previously perceived as a genuine structured craft-type UFO, such as that shown in the Cracoe Fell photographs referred to in Chapter 4, or when contact with alien beings is discovered to be a result of, say, misperception of a known object combined with belief, then just for a moment the mystery is solved and a pointer is given as to where we ought to be looking to resolve other cases. The mystery is solved but, as with all good mysteries, the best way to conceal them is to reveal them, so the solving of the UFO enigma is immediately forgotten. The media are not interested in printing stories about a UFO's being 'just a misperception', UFO books dealing with these subjects don't sell very well, and for the UFO researchers there is always another unexplained case, another mystery which may reveal the 'truth' behind the phenomenon. But the real mystery is to be found in the 'solved' cases and what made them appear to be something they were not. That people can create in their own minds a 'UFO experience' is the ultimate mystery.

Similarly, when a novel type of natural phenomenon is isolated as a stimulus for UFO reports, it immediately becomes uninteresting to most people and ceases to be part of the popularly conceived UFO phenomenon. Persinger and Devereux's work on 'Earthlight' phenomena (Chapters 6 and 7) has proved in a laboratory setting that rocks under stress do produce light phenomena. This is fact, not fantasy: science now accepts earthquake lights and mountain peak discharge, and we know that natural phenomena create lights in the Earth's atmosphere. But these theories – logical and backed up by masses of corroborating data – have received little recognition in the field of UFO research, and none at all in the media. Yet the

implications – that the Earth can produce lights which can be perceived as UFOs and which can possibly affect human consciousness – are enormous and far-reaching. They demonstrate just how little we know (or, it seems, want to know) about the environment in which we live and take for granted. We know these things are possible, yet they are ignored and still lag behind the myth of the ETH. The mystery of the ‘cornfield circles’ has been ‘reduced’ to their being caused by a weather anomaly, but neither the media nor many ufologists wish to know. The fact that a natural phenomenon exists which can create precise geometrical patterns and vanish within seconds is far more ‘mysterious’ than the absurd possibility that alien spaceships which we don’t really know exist may be responsible for ground traces whose origin we can’t really be sure about.

Just as we don’t seem to want to look at the external world in any depth, neither do we wish to look deeply at ourselves. The evidence that Altered States of Consciousness (ASCs) can create experiences just as ‘real’ and meaningful as everyday reality, and that the mind and environment can instigate radical changes in our physiology and vice versa, is overwhelming. Overwhelming and yet ignored, despite replicable and well-documented instances of mind/body-related phenomena being connected closely to accounts of ‘alien’ contact. The extension of this, the deeper levels on which society generates its mythology and belief systems, people are rarely willing to consider.

On a harder level, the same factors are at work in the allegations of government ‘cover-ups’. No matter what any government says about UFOs, it will not be enough. The only possible resolution of belief in a cover-up will be the production of a live alien and a craft, confirming the suspicions held all along. Even if the military allowed a search of every one of its installations, and if no evidence of alien technology was found, it would be suspected that somewhere beyond reach was still the ‘Ultimate Secret’ and that the authorities’ compliance was part of a complicated double-bluff to deceive. There can be no refutation of beliefs of this nature, only confirmation which we are told will come soon if only we try harder to reach it.

All this belief generates more belief, newspaper articles and books are written, UFO magazines circulated and theories advanced, each feeding the other, and so the UFO folklore

continues, with no conclusions being reached and mystery being continually created and solved on a daily basis. Thousands of people are still reporting UFOs of all shapes and sizes, others are still meeting and communicating with aliens in a variety of different ways. Year after year, century after century, the procession of weirdness goes on and on, and we march right along with it, scared to step to the side of the road and examine what we think we are seeing, how we are seeing it or if anyone else previously saw anything similar.

From the early days of simple sightings of flying saucers, we have gone through crashed saucers, landings, landings with occupants, contactees, 'monster' UFO-related phenomena and psychic-related UFO phenomena to the current abduction craze. Each has had its period of notoriety before being edged aside by the next, taking its place as part of the accepted folklore within the subject. They are disparate phenomena all gathered together under the banner of 'UFOs', with the UFO mythologists and dogmatists attempting to find or make the connections which may bind them to the ETH or to say why they are not connected to the ETH and therefore cannot be 'genuine' UFO phenomena.

The situation is changing again in the early 1990s. Belief in ETs has reached such a level of intensity and has reached such a great number of people, especially in America, that rumours are rising and falling almost monthly going full circle through all the previous types of reports and beyond. A new wave of interest has swept across America and will be arriving in Britain shortly. New books, films and magazines are being published, all re-invented the UFO subject and re-interpreting it in a new way, each more peculiar and spectacular than the last.

Extraterrestrials have been moving closer over the years, from the vague shapes of ambiguous origin in the skies of the late 1940s to the abduction reports of the 1980s. The aliens are now here, and UFO folklore has developed to include rumours of underground alien bases, joint CIA/alien bases, war between humans deep in underground caverns, and the physical intimacy of alien implants. As though our escape from Earth's atmosphere has let them in, the aliens have come down from the stars; they are amongst us, they are inside us, and we have to deal with them on those terms. If only the government would wake up, perhaps something could be done!

This new mutation of the UFO folklore may have come about because the UFO mythos now has few central figures and policy-makers who determine the direction in which belief and investigation should move. The great gurus, such as Dr J. Allen Hynek, who brought respectability to the subject without losing the mystery, are dead. So are many of the other bastions of ufology who were with it from the early days. The remaining long-term researchers and speculators, such as Jacques Vallee and John Keel, are largely ignored by today's UFO-believers, and there is no connection with the subject's past history or focus for the future. In an ideological struggle new leaders are trying to gain a foothold in the subject, each with their own brand of beliefs and interpretations, all bearing different versions of the ET mythology. Where they lead, others will follow. Budd Hopkins and Whitley Strieber are both fighting for their ideas to be heard and accepted, and with this rush of new interest stranger stories are being reported and committed to print. UFO folklore is alive once more and moving rapidly towards an unknown destination.

In the beginning it was simple – UFOs existed, and it was only a matter of time before the truth was exposed or the alien landed openly for all to see. Now the subject has changed so radically that it bears little resemblance to the stories of silver discs whizzing across Washington state in 1947. The subject is open to anyone who wishes to inject into it a new belief system, and whatever is served up, there will follow experiments, believers and participants.

'It's near,' the current believers declare. 'It's getting closer. Just a few more years and the truth will be out.' This message, backed up by the relevant folklore, transmitted through UFO books, magazines and films and by UFO researchers, is desperate, urgent, almost a tangible reality. It's happening now, they say. According to the cover slogan on one of Budd Hopkins' books, 'It could happen to you.'<sup>6</sup> But it was happening in the 1950s too – that same urgency, that same belief that UFO research was almost there, on the brink of a breakthrough, those same hopes and rumours. When it comes to belief, we learn nothing from history. Predictions were and are continually being made as to what will happen in the future, and so, rather than dwell on ones which have been made and have failed to materialize, we would like to give our own predictions

concerning the future of the UFO folklore over the next twenty-five years, based upon what we know now and what has happened in the past:

1. Aerial UFO-type phenomena will continue to be reported but craft will be larger and more complex in shape and illumination.

2. No government will ever officially acknowledge they have either crashed UFOs or possession of aliens alive or dead, nor will attempts by ufologists to ascertain involvement of government with aliens come to anything. Consequently, the rumours of 'cover-up' will develop and spread until it is seriously suggested that aliens are running the US political administration (the ultimate 'Devil Theory').

3. Further allegedly genuine government document (such as MJ-12) dealing with aliens will emerge but will fail to be validated.

4. The current abduction craze will continue and metamorphose into something far stranger, as we are already seeing with the writings of Whitley Strieber and the rumours of alien implants, aliens crossbreeding with humans, etc.

5. A kind of ET-based religion will emerge, with its own Space Age 'churches' dedicated to dealing with people who have been abducted by aliens, in a way analogous to the 'casting-out of devils' of past centuries.

6. Ufology (or whatever it will then be called) will still remain an unresolved mystery twenty-five years from now.

If Ufology wishes to continue and to achieve anything, it should learn from the lessons of the past fifty years and progress accordingly. There are several avenues open to it. On one level the stories of what people believe can be collected and stored for future commentators to analyse. We need more information about the witnesses or percipients of a UFO experience. We need to look at perceptual psychology, behavioural science, cultural anthropology and other disciplines which may tell us something about how we create and transmit folklore, myths and belief systems. We need to look at ASCs and instances in which ASCs and natural phenomena have combined to produce a UFO experience, and to learn from these instances, not to ignore what we find and set off in search of the uncatchable.

Let us turn our eyes from the stars and ufology for a moment. Throughout this book we have been saying that a close

examination of how man, society and the environment interact demonstrates that people are capable of creating experiences and belief in almost anything. This includes UFOs, along with other areas of anomalous phenomena. Saying that anything is possible for humans is rather a sweeping statement, but it is borne out time and time again when UFO experiences are found to be something they were not at first interpreted as. These are not our beliefs and speculations but are drawn from definite instances where we know that individual or groups have created their own realities and acted upon them. How many more examples do we need before we realize the importance and implications of these possibilities when extended to other UFO sightings and to other areas of human anomalous experience?

One event which took place in 1938 was a direct demonstration of the effect that science fiction and a belief in the ETH can have on people and of the lengths they will go to to participate in the 'reality of an idea'. When H.G. Wells' *War of the Worlds* story was transformed into a radio show which was broadcast across America in October 1938, no one could have foreseen the effects it would have. *War of the Worlds* was broadcast 'live' – as though it were really happening, complete with crowd panic noises and realistic news flashes which punctuated the developing story of a country under attack from Martian invaders. Although it was introduced as a play, no further mention was made of the fact that the events were fiction, and panic ensued, with many people in New Jersey and New York fleeing their homes. Suicide attempts were reported and even prayer meetings were held in an attempt to engage God in the forthcoming interplanetary struggle.<sup>7</sup>

A great many Americans believed in and acted upon the threat of ET invasion with no proof offered to them whatsoever, and the 1938 Martian scare proves conclusively that the American public at least were primed with the ETH, probably by the pulp sci-fi magazines of the time, and ready for something to trigger off a great social panic. To the people who heard the broadcast, the event was real, not fantasy. If this can happen on such a small scale over a short period of time, what effects can the idea of the ETH which have spread at an alarming rate over the past forty years be subliminally wreaking on our modern 'sophisticated' society?

If we need further proof of the complex intermeshing of people and their minds to create bizarre realities, another event, which took place in 1938 across the Atlantic in northern England, provides a perfect example. Between the months of November 1938 and January 1939 the small West Yorkshire town of Halifax was paralysed with the fear of an alien in its midst. This 'alien' was not from a UFO, however, but was a mystery assailant who travelled around in a selection of black cars and vans, stopping only to slash people with a razor in the lonely streets both day and night. He attacked and slashed over fifteen people in the space of a few weeks. His victims and other witnesses saw and described him closely, right down to his distinctive staring eyes and the shiny buckles on his shoes. His vehicles too were clearly seen, and evidence of his presence was everywhere. His victims gave grim accounts of their close encounters with 'the Slasher', and the physical evidence of wounds caused by razors on their bodies was proof that they had been attacked. The authorities believed in and acknowledged as fact the Slasher's existence but were unable to catch him, and fear swept the area unchecked. Although the Slasher was frequently seen, no one was able to apprehend him, and on the odd occasion when it was thought he had been caught it turned out to be an innocent bystander.<sup>8</sup>

However, the Halifax Slasher did not exist. He was a figment of a town's collective imagination, brought out to the point at which he 'existed' in reality. He was a phantom attacker travelling in a phantom car. Even his 'victims' had been fooled. They had slashed themselves – physically mutilated themselves with razors, causing serious wounds which in many cases needed stitches. Why they did so was never satisfactorily explained either by the 'victims', who admitted it, or by the authorities who had invested so much belief initially in the reality of the phantom attacker. The idea and belief in this 'alien' existed, and the proof of his existence appeared to back up the belief by creating a loop of experience and belief which resulted in a 'reality'.

It has been said that the UFO phenomenon, particularly those aspects of it which involve physical contact with craft and aliens and the resulting physiological effects, could not possibly be a human creation; but when we know that the entire population of a town can believe in the reality of a man to the

extent that they 'see' him and the vehicles he travels in, we must question that assumption. When people will go so far as to claim encounters with such a non-existent person, intentionally wounding themselves in order to be part of the collective experience, we have no choice but to consider how much of our reality is socially and individually constructed, how we interpret it and how we subsequently act upon our beliefs. We must question how individual belief can turn into a collective dream which can affect normal reality in the form of direct experience. We appear to live not in any objective reality but in our dreams of reality.

Instances such as the Halifax Slasher rarely come to light, but when they do, we are given an opportunity to examine in isolation the 'socially constructed realities' which people and societies are capable of creating. Some of the more perceptive UFO researchers have realized that this type of phenomenon may be responsible for the UFO mythology – that humans can create, experience and manipulate the symbols transmitted within the subject. A tale from the annals of science fiction gives us not only a parallel with the spread and influence of a fictitious story but also a direct connection between what people believe and report as reality in 'the Age of the UFO'.

Ray Palmer is little known outside the specialized books on ufology, and most histories of the subject choose to ignore his influence altogether. This is a shame because, although he is rarely credited as having any effect upon the development of the UFO folklore, Palmer, according to John Keel, was 'The Man Who Invented Flying Saucers'.<sup>9</sup> Palmer spent the 1930s writing sci-fi stories for the pulp magazines, eventually becoming editor of *Amazing Stories* in 1939. An uneventful career perhaps, but for the fact that one yarn he published had similarities with the later UFO mystery and should be borne in mind when considering any claims of objective reality behind the ETH.

In the early 1940s Palmer printed a letter from a reader by the name of Richard Shaver. Letters to *Amazing Stories* were common enough, but Shaver's letter was different – it contained ideas which for some reason touched something deep in the psyche of the American people. In his letter Shaver described his experiences with a mysterious race of robots he called the 'Deros', who lived beneath the surface of the Earth and who were terrorizing him with 'rays' and 'voices'. The Deros were

the descendants of the Atlanteans and Lemurians, who in turn were descended from a race of ETs.

This was a completely fictional idea, a ready-made folklore which, whilst interesting, should not have caused the stir that it did. As a result of Shaver's letter the circulation of *Amazing Stories* soared to 250,000 copies! People believed in the Shaver mystery. In fact, people more than 'believed' in the Deros: they had met them too! Letters began to arrive from people claiming 'real' experiences with them. Palmer capitalized on this, bought up all Shaver's existing stories and began to re-write them for the magazine. The response was tremendous, and letters continued to pour in, with accounts of encounters with Deros, of discovering their underground bases and of seeing strange craft in the skies. According to Keel, 'It seemed that many thousands of people were aware of some distinctly non-terrestrial group in our midst.' The legacy of years of sci-fi pulps was widespread, and active belief in the idea of ETs manifested in the form of Shaverism!

Although the stories were re-written by Ray Palmer to suit what he thought the pulp-buying public wanted, people had come to believe in the Deros idea so strongly that it took on a life of its own, resulting in people's reporting actual experiences with them. Could it be possible that this is what has happened with UFO folklore as a result of the long-held belief in the ETH? Has belief in the ETH become so much part of our culture that people have the experiences they expect to have, made possible by the authorized myth of the ETH? Whenever people say that UFOs must exist because so many people have seen them or believe in them, the Shaver mystery should be invoked to show the socially constructed reality which such ideas can create. The product of the imaginative mind which resulted in Shaverism is lasting and noteworthy testimony to the effect that one man and a publicity outlet can have on the consciousness of thousands of people.

Palmer's influence on the ETH and the burgeoning UFO folklore was not limited to Shaverism. Besides introducing the Shaver mystery to the world, he also incorporated many other elements of the UFO mythology in *Amazing Stories*. Missing time periods and 'Men in Black' were common, but Palmer's awareness of just how influential the ETH was is clearly stated in the July 1946 issue of his magazine (one year before the UFO

Age began) when he wrote: 'If you don't think spaceships visit the earth regularly then the files of Charles Fort and your editor's own files are something you should see. And if you think responsible parties in world governments are ignorant of the fact of spaceships visiting earth, you just don't think the way we do.' One year before flying saucers and the beginning of the modern UFO Age, Ray Palmer had summed up the next forty years of ufology.

John Keel, who has followed the development of the subject from the 1940s, thinks that the UFO situation in America which is now at fever pitch is 'Shaverism at its silliest'<sup>10</sup> and that the Shaver mystery cannot be too highly stressed as an example of how fiction can affect fact, of how the mind can create any reality it wishes to, and of how deeply the wish for the ETH to be true is embedded in the human consciousness. Fear of the 'dark side' of the human brain is always projected outwards, whether onto the Devil, as it was in the witch persecutions of the Middle Ages, or as today onto 'aliens'.

We could ask Budd Hopkins if he believes that the wave of 'alien abduction' reports he has 'discovered' is evidence of a genuine objective phenomenon, and he would reply 'Yes'; but if we could travel back in time and ask Matthew Hopkins or any of the other famous witch-finders of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries if the witches they were 'discovering' constituted similar evidence for the physical reality of the Devil and his demons, they would be equally as certain. Certainty comes easily to those caught up in any belief system.

The conception of the witch cult developed by the inquisitors of the Middle Ages never existed in reality but was used as evidence which led to the execution of thousands of innocent people, many of whom willingly confessed to crimes they could not have committed. The prosecution of witches ended when the courts refused to accept the witness testimony – extracted by 'leading questions' and torture – as reliable. In Spain, the Inquisition refused to prosecute cases of alleged witchcraft after 1526, on the grounds that the so-called 'witches' were self-deluded. The inquisitor Alonso Salazar de Frias concluded that, 'There were neither witches nor bewitched until they were talked and written about.' In 1689 an English judge, John Seldon, wrote: 'Casting out devils is mere juggling ... they never cast out any but what they first cast in.'<sup>11</sup>

The proponent of the UFO abduction craze in the present day should study the witch craze, as we can learn much about the current UFO mythology from the study of similar historical belief systems.

Times change, our experience of strange phenomena changes, but people don't really change at all. We are little different from our ancestors who sat in caves huddled around fires wondering fearfully what was out there in the darkness, formulating myths to account for events which they did not understand. Now, in the twentieth century, we can leave the Earth's orbit and travel to the moon, and we know the structure of the DNA which creates us. Science is slowly explaining the world, but thereby we have come to realize that we know less about it than when we started our quest. The physical universe we live in is awesome; nature in all its forms, including human nature, is vast and frightening, and we constantly build barriers against it or give it a framework to keep it from worrying us, just as tourists in the Alps in previous centuries were advised to view the scenery via a postcard-shaped device to impose order and boundaries upon it. If science has told us anything at all, it is that there is no order or boundary and that discovery is infinite, constantly leading to further revelations. To a large extent these investigations of the external universe have been conducted at the expense of knowledge of our internal world, and as a result our primeval fears have not been considered, merely masked under a veneer of civilization. Humans may have evolved to the point at which we think we understand and have some insight into our condition. But do we? Mentally we are still cavemen grasping for explanations and securities where there are none, and where those we have slip away from us every century as our beliefs evolve.

Using the caveman analogy further, the modern fear of alien intervention in our lives is age-old tribal racism at its most fundamental. The fears expressed in the abduction folklore are the most basic human fears of being taken away in the dead of night from one's tribe and its ordered society; of having the perceived and measured flow of time distorted; of having species, race, body and close relations tampered with by impersonal forces or gods. It is the basic fear of not being in control of either ourselves or our destiny – fear which led us in the past to create gods to be worshipped and feared. Now we

have studies of alien intervention, with such titles as *Intruders* and *Communion*, representing the different ways in which we see these new gods of the Space Age.

The UFO phenomenon in its many and varied forms will continue. Cases will remain unresolved, and neither debunkers nor believers will be totally satisfied with 'explanations' offered. If we want to progress at all, we will have to work on what we know is possible, what has happened and what is happening now, not what we wish was happening. In the future both witnesses and investigators are going to have to turn their attention away from the stars, back to this planet, and ask themselves some very human questions, because it appears that we are dealing with experiences whose nature calls into question what it really means to be a human being living on Planet Earth.

We will have to question the very nature of belief and the reasons why we believe in anything at all. Belief in religion, mythology and other ideas has frequently changed man's direction on this planet. Ideas can change things, and they do not necessarily have to relate to any external 'reality'. Belief has created experiences and changed societies in the past, and thousands have lived and died as a result. The dream-like nature of belief on this level affects us all continually, as we may, in fact, be dealing here with the future of mankind as a species. If we believe that the Soviets are a threat, we can easily annihilate ourselves. If we believe we are not damaging ourselves by our pollution, we are in serious danger. If we believe in ET visitation, that we are helpless in the face of the alien threat or should look to the stars for our salvation, what happens then? This particular belief is rapidly growing today. How many people need to believe in it before a significant effect is seen – and, more importantly, what will that effect be?

It is popular for writers speculating on these lines to say something like 'Mankind stands at the crossroads of his destiny', and as we approach the third millennium we are hearing this type of statement with increasing frequency. We are warned of a multitude of threats: impending global disaster, rising crime, AIDS, drugs and now an ET invasion of our minds, bodies and planet. These fears and worries are echoed in religions, the New Age movement and the ET myth. We are warned about them by their proselytizers and offered ways out of the respective alternative futures. Help and salvation are just around the

corner, waiting for us at this particular portentous time in our history, if only ...

Religion and the New Age movement have it that, if we only turn to God or the forces of light, all will be well; to the UFO-believers, it seems plain that, if we can only force the truth out of the government, it may not be too late to do something about the alien threat. If only we would surrender to one dogma, to one belief system, all would be different. All these beliefs, gathering momentum at this time in history, have been compared to millennialism – the irrational beliefs and activities which spring up when we approach the end of a thousand-year period. However, millennialism is itself man-created, an artefact of how we choose to organize time, just another belief system. These warnings are never far away at any time in history. We constantly warn ourselves about our own future and possibilities, but do we take any notice?

Man does not stand at the crossroads of anything. He stands where he has always stood, apparently alone in a huge universe he is desperately trying to understand but which is becoming continually stranger. The human race is always in a precipitous position, both from its own actions on the external world and from its beliefs about what the purpose of life is. Strange experiences, stranger beliefs and warnings of impending doom or salvation have been with us since the dawn of time but, despite thousands of years of philosophical thought and scientific method, we are only just beginning to make any sense of the universe which surrounds us and have only just realized that there is an equally large universe within us.

There are still many places on the maps, both terrestrial and mental, which in past ages would have been marked 'Here Be Dragons' – places, events and experiences about which we know nothing. There will always be these places, and the human quest for knowledge and its resultant beliefs and discoveries is what drives us on. We still have our dragons, but now they manifest themselves as strange lights in the sky, flying saucers and space aliens. These beliefs can be ultimately dangerous, taking responsibility out of human hands. Belief is a tool and not an absolute, and until we realize this we will always be the victims of our dreams. Perhaps one of the 'aliens' was trying to tell us something when he delivered the message 'Wake up down there!'<sup>12</sup>

There will always be dragons of one sort or another, but instead of being frightened of them, we need to change our attitudes to all aspects of the unknown – to realize that such phenomena have always been with us and always will be, and we wouldn't really want it any other way. Until we can arrive at a greater understanding of ourselves, our history and the physical environment which surrounds us, the UFOs will continue to remain Phantoms of the Sky.

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# Abbreviations

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ASC	Altered State of Consciousness
CE1	UFO sighting at close range with no tangible evidence
CE2	UFO sighting involving some alleged physical evidence
CE3	UFO sighting at close range involving entities associated with the UFO
CE4	UFO experience during which a human is taken on board a UFO by UFO occupants
ET	Extraterrestrial
ETH	Extraterrestrial Hypothesis
FH	Federal Hypothesis
MIB	Men in Black
NDE	Near Death Experience
OOBE	Out of the Body Experience
BUFORA	British UFO Research Association
<i>FSR</i>	<i>Flying Saucer Review</i>
GSW	Ground Saucer Watch
IUN	Independent UFO Network
TORRO	Tornado and Storm Research Organization
AS 2	Air Staff 2
DS 8	Defence Secretariat 8
FOIA	Freedom of Information Act (USA)
MOD	Ministry of Defence
PRO	Public Record Office
RPV	Remotely Piloted Vehicle

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