

Agents of the dark

Rarely – if ever – do the threats of the mysterious men in black come to anything. So what is the purpose behind their visits? HILARY EVANS considers this disconcerting phenomenon

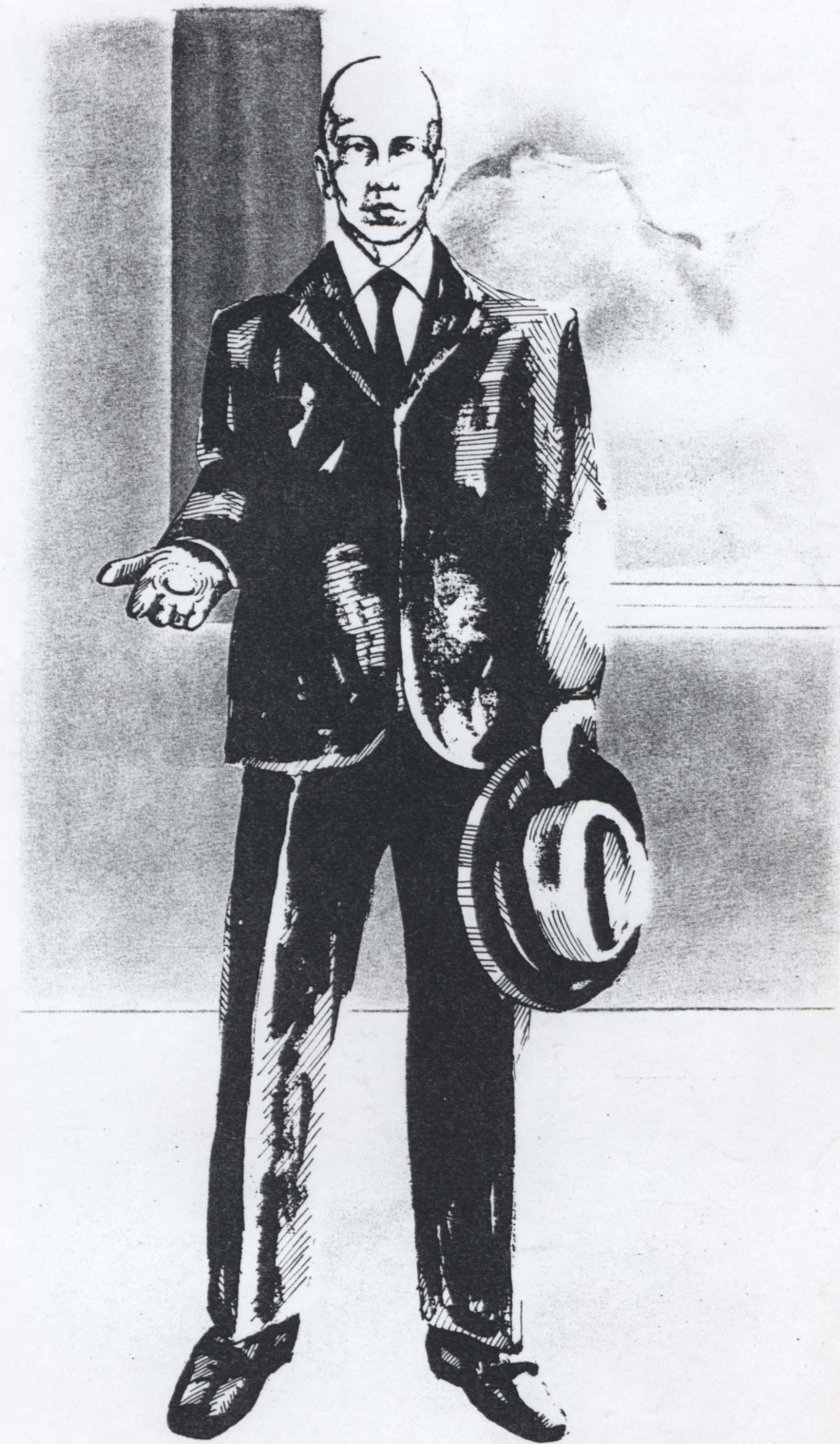
IN SEPTEMBER 1976 Dr Herbert Hopkins, a 58-year-old doctor and hypnotist, was acting as consultant on an alleged UFO teleportation case in Maine, USA. One evening, when his wife and children had gone out leaving him alone, the telephone rang and a man identifying himself as vice-president of the New Jersey UFO Research Organisation asked if he might visit Dr Hopkins to discuss the case. Dr Hopkins agreed – at the time it seemed the natural thing to do. He went to the back door to switch on the light so that his visitor could find his way from the parking lot, and saw the man already climbing the porch steps. 'I saw no car, and even if he did have a car, he could not have possibly gotten to my house that quickly from *any* phone,' he later commented in astonishment.

But at the time Dr Hopkins felt no particular surprise as he admitted his visitor. The man was dressed in a black suit, with black hat, tie and shoes, and a white shirt: 'I thought, he looks like an undertaker.' His clothes were immaculate: suit unwrinkled, trousers sharply creased. When he took off his hat he revealed himself as completely hairless, not only bald but without eyebrows or eyelashes. His skin was dead white, his lips bright red: in the course of their conversation he brushed his lips with his grey suede gloves, and the doctor was astonished to see that his lips were smeared and the gloves stained with lipstick!

Visitor from another dimension?

It was only afterwards, however, that Dr Hopkins reflected on the strangeness of his visitor's appearance and behaviour. At the time he sat discussing the case in a normal manner. When he had given his account, his visitor stated that his host had two coins in his pocket, which was indeed the case. He asked the doctor to put one of the coins in his hand: he did so. The stranger asked Dr Hopkins to watch the coin, not himself: as he watched, the coin seemed to go out of focus, and then gradually vanished. 'Neither you nor anyone else on this plane will ever see that coin again,' the visitor told him.

After talking a little while longer on UFO topics, Dr Hopkins noticed that the visitor's



An MIB visited Dr Herbert Hopkins and told him to discontinue his investigations into an alleged UFO teleportation case on which he was working at the time. Taking a coin from Dr Hopkins, the MIB made it disappear – remarking that 'Neither you nor anyone else on this plane will ever see that coin again'

speech was slowing down. The man rose unsteadily to his feet and said, very slowly, 'My energy is running low – must go now – goodbye.' He walked falteringly to the door, and descended the outside steps uncertainly, one at a time. Dr Hopkins saw a bright light shining in the driveway, bluish-white and distinctly brighter than a normal car lamp; at the time, however, he assumed it must be the stranger's car although he neither saw nor heard it.

Later, When Dr Hopkins's family had

returned, they examined the driveway and found marks that could not have been made by a car because they were in the centre of the driveway, where the wheels could not have been. By next day, although the driveway had not been used in the meantime, the marks had vanished.

Dr Hopkins was very much shaken by his visit, particularly when he reflected on the extraordinary character of the stranger's conduct. Not surprisingly, he was so scared that he willingly complied with his visitor's instruction to erase the tapes of the hypnotic sessions he was conducting with regard to his current case, and to have nothing further to do with the case.

Curious incidents continued to occur both in Dr Hopkins's household and in that of his eldest son. He presumed that there was some link with the extraordinary visit, but he never heard from his visitor again. As for the New Jersey UFO Research Organisation, no such institution exists.

Dr Hopkins's account is probably the most detailed we have of an MIB visit, and

confronts us with the problem at its most bizarre. First we must ask ourselves if a trained and respected doctor would invent so strange a tale, and if so, with what conceivable motive? Alternatively, could the entire episode have been a delusion, despite the tracks seen by other members of his family? Could the truth lie somewhere between reality and imagination: that is to say, could there have been a real visitor, albeit an impostor making a false identity claim, visiting the doctor for some unknown reason of his own, and somehow acting as a trigger for the doctor to invent a whole set of weird features that to a third party might have had some quite natural explanation?

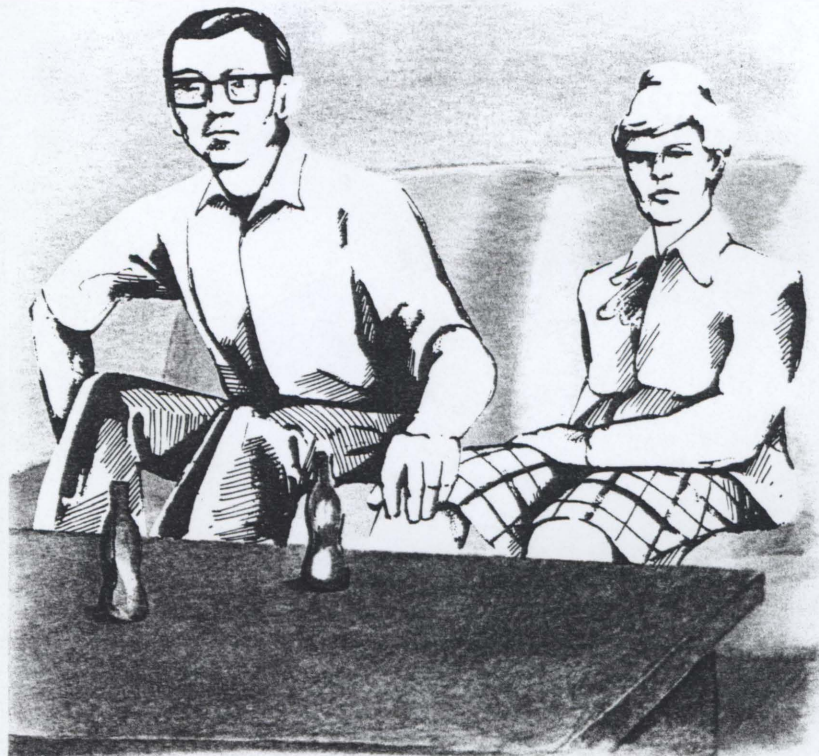
Frightening aftermath

What seems the *least* likely explanation is that the whole incident took place in the doctor's imagination. When his wife and children came home, they found him severely shaken, with the house lights blazing, seated at a table on which lay a gun. They confirmed the marks on the driveway, and a

The odd couple

On 24 September 1976 – only a few days after Dr Hopkins's terrifying visit from an MIB – his daughter-in-law Maureen received a telephone call from a man who claimed to know her husband John, and asked if he and a companion could come and visit them.

John met the man at a local fast-food



restaurant, and brought him home with his companion, a woman. Both appeared to be in their mid-thirties; they wore curiously old-fashioned clothes. The woman looked particularly odd: her breasts were set very low, and when she stood up, it seemed that there was something wrong with the way that her legs joined onto her hips. Both strangers walked with very short steps, leaning forward as though frightened of falling.

They accepted Coca-Colas, but did not so much as taste them. The strangers sat awkwardly together on a sofa while the man asked a number of detailed personal questions: Did John and Maureen watch television much? What did they read? And what did they talk about? All the while, the man was pawing and fondling his female companion, asking John if this was all right and whether he was doing it correctly.

John left the room for a moment, and the man tried to persuade Maureen to sit next to him on the couch. He also asked her 'how she was made' – and whether she had any nude photographs of herself.

Shortly afterwards, the woman stood up and announced that she wanted to leave. The man also stood, but made no move to go. He was between the woman and the door, and it seemed that the only way she could get to the door was by walking in a straight line, directly through him. Finally the woman turned to John and asked, 'Please move him; I can't move him myself.' Then, suddenly, the man left, followed by the woman, both walking in straight lines. They did not even say goodbye.



Towards the end of Dr Hopkins's MIB visit, he noticed that the man's speech and movements seemed to be slowing down. The MIB got up unsteadily and left, walking very shakily; Dr Hopkins watched him walk down the front steps of his house and into the driveway, and saw a bright, bluish-white light – far too intense for car headlights – but failed to see, or hear, anything else as the stranger departed

series of disturbances on the telephone that seemed to commence immediately after the visit. So it would seem that some real event occurred, although its nature remains mystifyingly uncertain.

The concrete nature of the phenomenon was accepted by the United States Air Force, who were concerned that persons passing themselves off as USAF personnel should be visiting UFO witnesses. In February 1967 Colonel George P. Freeman, Pentagon spokesman for the USAF's Project Blue Book, told UFO investigator John Keel in the course of an interview:

'Mysterious men dressed in Air Force uniforms or bearing impressive credentials from government agencies have been "silencing" UFO witnesses. We have checked a number of these cases, and these men are not connected with the Air Force in any way. We haven't been able to find out anything about these men. By posing as Air Force officers and government agents they are committing a federal offence. We would sure like to catch one. Unfortunately the trail is always too cold by the time we hear about these cases. But we're still trying.'

A question remains: were the impostors referred to by Colonel Freeman and Dr Hopkins's strange visitor similar in kind? UFO sightings, like sensational crimes, attract a number of mentally unstable persons, who are quite capable of posing as authorised officials in order to gain access to the witnesses; it is likely that some supposed MIBs are simply pseudo-investigators of this sort.

One curious recurrent feature of MIB reports is the ineptitude of the visitors. Time and again they are described as incompetent: if they *are* impersonating human beings, they don't do it very well; they arouse their

victim's suspicions by improbable behaviour, by the way they look or talk, by their ignorance as much as by their knowledge. Of course it could be that the only ones who are spotted as impostors are those who are not good at their job: and so there may be many more MIB cases that we never learn about simply because the visitors successfully convince their victims that there is nothing suspicious about the visit, or that they will do best to keep quiet about it.

A feature of a great many MIB visits is the instruction to the witness not to say anything about the visit, and to cease all activity concerning the case: clearly, we know of these cases only because such instructions have been disobeyed. Curiously, however, no terrible retribution follows, although violence is frequently threatened if the witness does not comply with instructions. Canadian UFO witness Carmen Cuneo, in 1976, was told by a mysterious visitor to stop repeating his story and going further into his case, or he would be visited by three men in black. 'I said, "What's that supposed to mean?" "Well," he said, "I could make it hot for you . . . It might cost you certain injury."' A year earlier, Mexican witness Carlos de Los Santos was stopped on his way to a television interview by not one but two large black limousines, and one of the occupants – dressed in a black suit and 'Scandinavian' in appearance – told him, 'Look, boy, if you value your life and your family's too, don't talk any more about this sighting of yours.'

However, there is no reliable instance of such threats ever having been carried out, though a good many witnesses have defied their warnings. Indeed, sinister though the MIBs may be, they are notable for the lack of violence associated with them: the worst that can be said of them is that they harass the witnesses with their untimely visits and telephone calls, or simply disturb them with their very presence.

Threats of violence

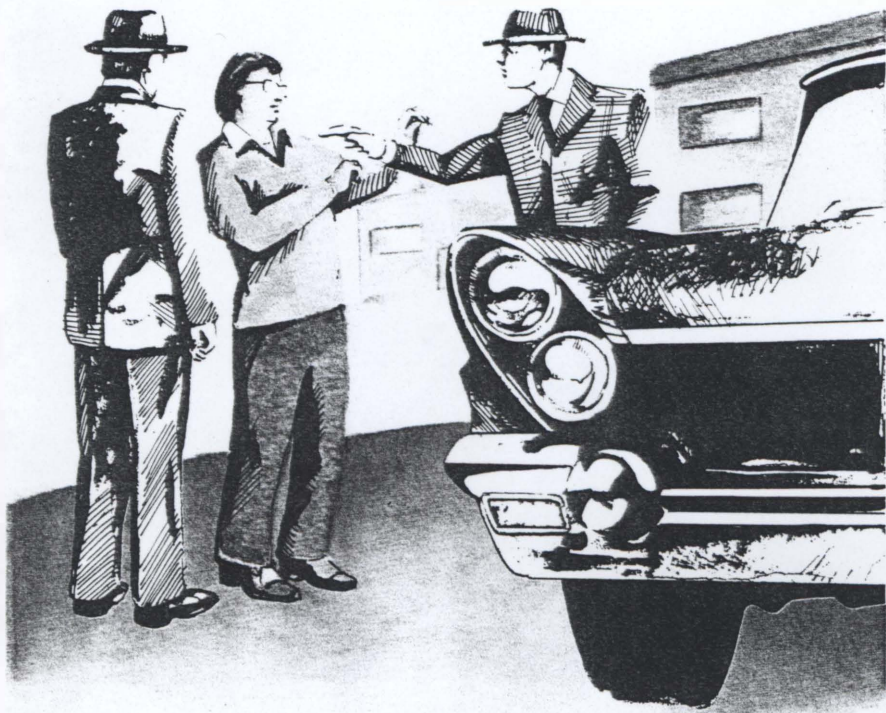
While for the victim it is just as well that the threats of violence are not followed through, this is for the investigator one more disconcerting aspect of the phenomenon. For violence, if it resulted in physical action, would at least help to establish the reality of the phenomenon. For it remains a fact that most of the evidence is purely hearsay in character, and not often of the highest quality: cases as well-attested as those of Mr Richardson and Dr Hopkins are unfortunately in the minority. There is a dismaying lack of precision about too many of the reports. Popular American writer Brad Steiger alleges that 'hundreds of ufologists, contactees and chance percipients of UFOs claimed to have been visited by ominous strangers – usually three, usually dressed in black'; but he cites only a few anecdotal instances. Similarly, John Keel, an expert on unexplained phenomena, claims 'on a number of occasions I

David Tansley, a UFO theorist who has suggested that MIBs are some kind of demonic psychic entity



actually saw the phantom Cadillacs as advertised, complete with sinister-looking Oriental-like passengers in black suits', but for a trained reporter he shows a curious reluctance to pursue these sightings or to give us chapter and verse in such an important matter. Such loose assertions are valueless as evidence: all they do is contribute to the myth.

And so we come back once again to the MIB myth, and the possibility that there is nothing more to the phenomenon than the myth itself. Can we not write off the whole business as delusion, the creation of imaginative folk whose personal obsessions take on this particular shape because it reflects one or other of the prevalent cultural preoccupations of our time? At one extreme we find contactee Woodrow Derenberger insisting that the 'two men dressed entirely in black' who tried to silence him were emissaries of the Mafia: at the other, theorist David Tansley suggests that they are psychic entities, representatives of the dark forces, seeking to prevent the spread of true knowledge. More matter-of-factly Dominick



Lucchesi, one of Albert Bender's friends, held that they emanated from some unknown civilisation, possibly underground, in a remote area of Earth – the Amazon, the Gobi Desert or the Himalayas.

But there is one feature that is common to virtually all MIB reports, that any theory must account for, and that perhaps contains the key to the problem. This is the possession, by the MIBs, of information that they should not have been able to come by – information that was restricted, not released to the press, known perhaps to a few investigators and officials but not to the public, and

A Mexican UFO witness, Carlos de los Santos, was stopped by MIBs travelling in two large black limousines on his way to a television interview about his UFO sighting. The MIBs warned him to keep silent, and he cancelled the interview. Two weeks later, however, he changed his mind and made the broadcast – and not a word was heard from the MIBs, despite their threats

sometimes not even to them. The one person who *does* possess that knowledge is the person visited. In other words, the MIBs and their victim share knowledge that perhaps nobody else possesses. Add to this the fact that in almost every case the MIBs appear to the witness when he or she is alone – in Dr Hopkins's case, for example, the visitor took care to call when the wife and children were away from home, and established this fact by telephone beforehand. The implication has to be that some kind of paranormal link connects the MIBs and the persons they visit.

Truth – or paranoia?

To this must be added other features of the phenomenon that are not easily reconciled with everyday reality. These notorious black cars, for instance: where are they, when they are not visiting witnesses? Where are they garaged, serviced? Do they never get involved in breakdowns or accidents? Can it be that they materialise from some other plane of existence when they are needed?

These are only a few of the questions raised by the MIB phenomenon. What complicates the matter is that MIB cases lie along a continuous spectrum ranging from the easily believable to the totally incredible. At one extreme are visits during which nothing really bizarre occurs, the only anomalous feature being, perhaps, that the visitor makes a false identity claim, or has unaccountable access to private information. But at the other extreme are cases in which the only explanation would seem to be that the witness has succumbed to paranoia. In *The truth about the men in black*, UFO investigator Ramona Clark tells of an unnamed investigator who was confronted by three MIBs on 3 July 1969. 'On the window of the car in which they were riding was the symbol connected with them and their visitations. This symbol had a profound psychological impact upon this man. I have never encountered such absolute fear in a human being.'

That first meeting was followed by continual harassment. There were mysterious telephone calls; the man's house was searched. He began to hear voices and see strange shapes. 'Black Cadillacs roamed the street in front of his home, and followed him everywhere he went. Once he and his family were almost forced into an accident by an oncoming Cadillac. Nightmares concerning MIBs plagued his sleep. It became impossible for him to rest, his work suffered and he was scared of losing his job.'

Was it all in his mind? One is tempted to think so. But a friend confirmed that, while they talked, there was a strange-looking man walking back and forth in front of the house. The man was tall, seemed about 55 years old – and was dressed entirely in black.

What is the origin of the men in black – and what is their purpose? See page 578