

# Saucer-Season Tales Explore Not-So-Alien Territory

By Curt Suplee

Washington Post Service

WASHINGTON — Heads up. They're here. Again.

After a 10-year lull in public interest about UFOs, 1987 appears to be the Year of the Saucer.

Three reputable publishers — Random House, Morrow and Atlantic Monthly Press — are releasing major nonfiction accounts of humans contacted, abducted or tortured by extraterrestrials.

Popular infatuation with the unidentified flying object sighted by a Japan Air Lines pilot in November has grown, putting the Federal Aviation Administration into the mail-order business.

To meet the demand, the agency is selling information packages at \$194.30 each that

contain tapes of the crew, statements by air controllers, the pilot's drawings and color photographs of radar images.

"Our membership has gone up 10 percent in the past two months," said Walt Andrus, international director of the 1,500-member Mutual UFO Network in Seguin, Texas. "And our mail has doubled. People are realizing that there is something to this after all."

"It has been building for quite a while," said Bruce Maccabee, a navy research physicist and chairman of the Washington-based Fund for UFO Research.

The new books, he said, will provoke "an outcry for more information" from a the public. "The negativists haven't realized what's going on yet."

In the 1950s, when saucers had fins like Edsels and space folks acted like intergalactic Jaycees, a self-proclaimed abductee

named Buck Nelson sold packets of fur at \$5 each. He said they came from a Venusian Saint Bernard weighing 385 pounds (175 kilograms).

Another self-styled contactee, Howard Menger, explained on television how easy it was to breathe on the moon and subsequently cut a record entitled "The Song From Saturn." It was, he said, "actual music that came from another planet."

But that was 30 years ago. The new books provide a more lugubrious forecast.

Whitley Strieber, the novelist who wrote "Warday," "The Hunger" and "The Wolfen," came out last month with "Communion," a gruesome "true story" of how he and his family were repeatedly tormented by creatures he calls The Visitors.

It includes such interludes as needles stuck into the brain, a thin probe shoved through

the nostril to the temporal lobe and other manifestations of what Mr. Strieber assumes is a form of interspecies research.

With his son haunted by night terrors and his marriage crumbling, Mr. Strieber turned to neurology, psychiatry and hypnosis. Still the horrors persisted, forcing him finally to regard The Visitors as somehow real, even to find a grudging empathy for their purposes.

He says he was not keen to write the book until he saw the "human suffering" after meeting several similarly afflicted persons through Budd Hopkins, a leading investigator of abduction claims and the author of another saucer-season volume.

Publishers were equally reluctant. Of the 13 houses to which he submitted the manuscript, five, he said, "turned it down with

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*Jamie Lehn*

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contempt and a number rejected it as a favor to me, with the recommendation that I never ever publish it" lest his reputation be ruined.

But four houses decided otherwise, and the bidding reached \$1 million for hard-cover, soft-cover and other rights.

Mr. Hopkins, author of "Intruders," is a successful New York artist with works in the Corcoran and Hirshhorn museums in Washington. He has spent the past 12 years studying 132 persons who claim to have been abducted by aliens, employing psychiatrists, psychologists and lie-detector experts to screen his subjects.

In "Intruders," he recounts the experiences, often revealed through hypnosis, of more than a dozen victims and their relatives. Despite wide divergence in region, age, sex and social class, the subjects share

an alarming similarity: Members of the same family "seem to have been systematically abducted, at varying times and locations" for anatomical examination.

There are accounts of sperm and ova ripped from their donors, tubes inserted and withdrawn while victims lie there like laboratory specimens, babies artificially birthed and stolen. The stories are so alike in pattern and detail, writes Mr. Hopkins, that they reveal "a central purpose behind" the abduction phenomenon, namely, "a genetically focused study of particular bloodlines." A hideous notion, "but I have the case material and I'm stuck with it," he said.

The book's credibility chiefly depends on the assumption that so many people could not be lying in such eerily identical ways when they have nothing to gain except public humiliation.

Without physical evidence, he conceded, "there's no smoking gun. But we're gonna find it one of these days."

In "Light Years," Gary Kinder re-examines the case of Eduard Meier, a Swiss laborer who in the late 1970s convinced thousands

that he was in constant contact with an amiable outfit from the Pleiades, a group of stars.

Mr. Meier amassed hundreds of photographs of the aliens' saucers, thousands of pages of notes on their science and moral lore and yards of film of UFO maneuvers.

For months, fans, reporters and film crews flocked to hear Mr. Meier sermonize. But no one actually saw his mentors. Then, in 1980, it all came apart. Several UFO researchers declared his photos bogus, his story a fraud.

Mr. Andrus and several other UFO researchers, without reading Mr. Kinder's book, were worried that a resurrection of the Meier case would open their pursuit to ridicule. They implored the publisher to dump it.

Carl Sagan, an astronomer who regards the search for intelligent life in the universe as "exceedingly important," puts astronomical odds against a landing on Earth. Even assuming that our galaxy contains a million advanced civilizations, each one would have to send 10,000 missions a year just to find us among the billions of possible venues.

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