

UFO mania rife: Did Ike know?

By WILLIAM J. BROAD

NEW YORK TIMES

NEW YORK — The aliens are here again, at least in terms of popular culture, if not fact.

Three books about alien visits are selling briskly. Clubs, newsletters, movies and lectures about unidentified flying objects are generating revenues at a pace exceeded only in the 1950s, during the first wave of UFO sightings.

Enthusiasts assert that for 40 years the federal government has harbored evidence of an encounter with extraterrestrial creatures, including their lifeless bodies and damaged spacecraft. That startling report, dismissed by skeptics and government officials as a hoax, is contained in what purport to be top-secret government papers from the Eisenhower era.

In interviews, psychologists, historians, philosophers and writers of science fiction said belief in alien encounters was rooted in such things as the need for secular messiahs and the search for explanations for terrestrial troubles.

"We used to have gods. Now we want to feel we're not alone, watched over by protective forces far beyond us," said Ben Bova, former editor of *Omni* magazine and a writer of science fiction.

The UFO flurry is led by new books: "Communion" by Whitley Strieber (Morrow), "Intruders" by Budd Hopkins (Random House), and "Light Years" by Gary Kinder (Atlantic Monthly Press). "Communion" has

The hottest topic among UFO enthusiasts is the federal government's experience with aliens, especially the 'Roswell Incident.'

been on the New York Times best-seller list for 16 weeks.

All three tell of personal encounters with aliens. In this they differ from the last great period of UFO enthusiasm, in the 1950s, said David M. Jacobs, author of "The U.F.O. Controversy in America" and a historian at Temple University in Philadelphia. In the 1950s UFO sightings were in vogue.

The hottest topic among UFO enthusiasts is the federal government's experience with aliens, especially the "Roswell Incident." Timothy Good, a British UFO researcher, and a group of UFO investigators in the United States say they have proof that the government hid its knowledge that a flying saucer crashed in 1947 near Roswell, N.M., killing its crew of extraterrestrials. The charges are contained in Good's book "Above Top Secret: The Worldwide U.F.O. Cover-Up," to be published in Britain in July.

The government says the 1947 incident was nothing more than the sighting of a weather balloon. But the UFO researchers say a document dated Nov. 18, 1952, proves that explanation is false. The document, supposedly a top-secret briefing paper for President-elect Dwight D. Eisenhower, discusses a secret team of a dozen experts known as Majestic-12, or MJ-12, established by President Truman Sept. 24, 1947, to investigate the remains of the spacecraft and its crew.

"It appears to be genuine," said William L. Moore, who wrote a book about the incident and who investigated the document for more than two

years after a colleague received it anonymously in the mail.

"Nonsense," replied Philip J. Klass, a leading UFO debunker and chairman of the UFO subcommittee of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, a group of scientists that publishes the *Skeptical Inquirer*. Klass said he had seen the document and considered it a hoax.

The document purportedly recounts a briefing to Eisenhower by Rear Adm. Roscoe H. Hillenkoetter, first director of the CIA, and begins with a chronology of a crash near Roswell.

"On 07 July, 1947," it says, "a secret operation was begun to assure recovery of the wreckage of this object for scientific study. During the course of this operation, aerial reconnaissance discovered that four small humanlike beings had apparently ejected from the craft at some point before it exploded. These had fallen to Earth about two miles east of the wreckage site. All four were dead and badly decomposed due to action by predators and exposure to the elements during the approximately one week time period which had elapsed before their discovery.

"A special scientific team took charge of removing these bodies for study. The wreckage of the craft was also removed to several different locations. Civilian and military witnesses in the area were debriefed, and news reporters were given the effective cover story that the object had been a misguided weather research balloon."

By November 1947, the briefing

continued, a federal team of scientists had concluded "that although these creatures are humanlike in appearance, the biological and evolutionary processes responsible for their development has been quite different from those observed or postulated in homo sapiens."

Stanton T. Friedman, a nuclear physicist in Frederickton, New Brunswick, who is investigating the document with Moore and who lectures widely on UFOs, acknowledged that interest it generated would raise lecture fees but said their goal was to get at the truth.

Nations are "caught up in tribal warfare," he said, adding that the reason for the 40-year cover-up is that "no government wants people to have their allegiance to the planet rather than themselves."

Reflecting on the flurry of interest, Jerome Clark, vice president of the J. Allen Hynek Center for UFO Studies in Chicago and editor of *International U.F.O. Reporter*, said: "What's interesting is that all this is happening in the absence of a sighting wave. There hasn't really been anything sighted since the 1970s."

Frederik Pohl, a science fiction writer, said belief in UFOs is flourishing because the nation's leaders seem to be floundering. "We're told by our leadership to be resolute against terrorism, yet they make deals. We're told Star Wars is the future, but no one other than Ronald Reagan believes it. People have lost trust in reality, and they're looking for something else."

Michael Wertheimer, a psychologist at the University of Colorado who has participated in studies that debunked UFO reports, agreed that feelings of helplessness tended to reinforce the urge to believe in the extraterrestrial. "The less people feel in control of their own fate, the more they look to occult or extranatural phenomena," he said.

THE PLAIN DEALER, SUNDAY, JUNE 21, 1987

CLEVELAND, OH

JUNE 21, 1987