



DERMOT PURGAVIE LETTER FROM AMERICA

Astral bodies

BEING shanghaied by spacefarers is not the sort of transcendent experience many had hoped for out there. Beyond the movies, it seems, aliens are not exactly winsome.

In the standard description they are short and grey, have large heads and big bug eyes, communicate by telepathy and like to stick needles and tubes into any Earthling they can get their little grey hands on. You could say that so far intergalactic relations are strained.

We are not off here in the wacko world of overheated imaginations (of course it was a flying saucer — it had UFO painted on the side). These people have credentials. Stanton Friedman is a nuclear physicist, and for the last three days he and other scientists and scholars have been earnestly sifting the accumulating evidence about humans abducted by extraterrestrials at the International Symposium of the Mutual UFO Network in Washington.

The network now has more than 300 cases of abduction in its files, individual stories that, according to Friedman, are so consistent in their recall of time adrift with aliens that they have to be listened to seriously. Others seem to agree. The American Psychological Association is due to consider the matter of UFO abductees at a meeting in New York.

It was exactly 40 years ago, in June, 1947, that businessman Kenneth Arnold said he saw 'nine peculiar-looking objects' moving fast at about 9,500 feet while he was flying his two-seater over Washington State. It seemed to be, he said, 'a chain of saucer-like things.' The flying saucer had landed in popular mythology.

Since then cosmic crockery has been reported everywhere, more than 100,000 sightings around the world. Even Jimmy Carter saw some.

Documents liberated under the Freedom of Information Act show extensive investigations by military intelligence and there is a dark and persistent belief that the Government actually recovered some expired aliens and metals unknown to man from the New Mexico Desert but has covered it up ('a cosmic Watergate,' says Friedman).

After a distinct dive in UFO interest over the last ten years, public fascination is now reviving again. Saucers are back in season, stimulated by new revelations about cosmic kidnapping, a phenomenon that is apparently so widespread that there are only a few of us who haven't yet been hustled aboard a moving space ship between a couple of burly astrals.

There are three new books about alien Earth-crashers and one of them *Communion*, by Whitley Strieber, author of *Wolfen*, has been on the best sellers list for 18 weeks. It tells of the ordeal of he and his family in the hands of those he calls *The Visitors*.

In one of the other books — all from serious publishers — Budd Hopkins relates the stories of more than a dozen who under hypnosis have relived their experiences, after being temporarily snatched by space travellers. They commonly report that their captors subjected them to probing anatomical examinations and took tissue samples, usually from the leg, leaving abductees, it's said, with a distinguishing brand — 'the classic scar'.

Hopkins and other believers speculate that Earthlings are being borrowed for some genetic experiment (why don't they take Tina Turner?) and at this weekend's symposium he and Strieber said that publication of their books has uncovered an underground of 'thousands' who claim similar experiences but had kept quiet out of fear of public ridicule.

There is a natural human predisposition to believe that we are not alone in the universe, and this may account for many of the world's flying saucer sightings. But Mark Rodeghier, a university of Illinois sociologist and scientific director of the Centre for UFO Studies, says that rigorous screening of UFO reports still leaves 'about 500 sightings that can't be explained by any ordinary phenomenon.