

Unearthly row brewing

THE missing gaps in my life last week are still blurred. Rudely pushed aboard an alien craft, I found myself in a brightly lit cabin, observed disdainfully by a uniformed being. He touched the wall, whereupon hidden doors sprang back to admit dozens of jabbering creatures, all intent on performing medical experiments on my body. I must stop travelling on the London Underground during the tourist season.

The degree to which alien abduction experiences have taken hold as reality among American UFO researchers is opening a rift with their European counterparts, who favour psychological and socio-

logical research before jumping to conclusions. The row is likely to surface at this week's international conference on UFOs in Lyons.

"American scientists are adamant that the UFO phenomenon is resolved," says Jenny Randles of the British UFO Research Association. "They believe these experiences are of extra-terrestrial origin because the witnesses say so."

The reality, she says, is that under hypnosis witnesses relive a genuine trauma, which is made to fit a national preconception. "The hypnosis is often not conducted under proper supervision. I have sat through it with witnesses.

Most end up less happy than before."

Randles suspects that UFO sightings, many comprising atmospherical phenomena related to geophysics, are distinct from abduction experiences.

European researchers, she admits, are preoccupied with cultural stereotypes. It seems that America's aliens are short, grey-skinned and have domed heads. The French encounter mythological, gnome-like entities. The British are given implants by tall, blonde, Nordic types. Perhaps George Burns, Charles Aznavour and Brigitte Nielsen should be made to account for their movements.