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Are UFOs good old moonshine?

THERE you are driving down the road at night, minding your own business, when suddenly you catch sight of something in the sky.

It's not like any aircraft you've ever seen; it's flashing colourful lights and moving erratically at enormous speed. As it passes overhead your radio goes dead. Then it disappears.

Scoff not . . . this kind of thing seems to happen to several hundred apparently sane and respectable Britons every year.

by JULIE COCKCROFT

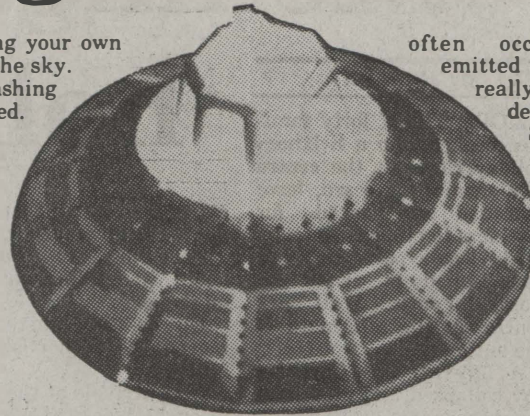
Many of them shake their heads in disbelief and swear never to drink again; others are so frightened that they dare not tell a soul; and a small percentage enjoy a brief moment of glory in the spotlight of the local press.

Such a story invariably prompts similar, often embellished revelations and 'experts' dust off the old theories about little green men from Mars. But is the invasion of Planet Earth really imminent? Or is there a simple explanation?

There have been mysterious sightings in the sky for as long as written records have been kept for example, The Bible appears to contain several references in the chapters of Ezekiel.

Modern sightings appear to date from 1947 when an American businessman reported seeing nine silvery objects flying very swiftly near Washington.

His description prompted the tag 'flying saucers' and similar sightings have been made by supposedly serious, well-trained professional people like police, servicemen and even ex-President Reagan at frequent intervals ever since.



JUST JOKING: This "flying saucer," spotted over Surrey turned out to be a hot air balloon — it was used as part of an April Fool's prank.

Take the incident in London last year when no less than eight policemen swore they had seen a 'saucer' through the telescope of a teenager. It later turned out to have been the planet Jupiter, and in fact nine out of ten sightings can be explained away fairly easily.

Saucer shapes are frequently formed naturally in the atmosphere by pollution, pulverised dust and water particles, and lights can be caused by many things.

Ball lightning is a favourite among the natural phenomena and it is now known that moving lights

often occur in the months before an earthquake, emitted by rocks under pressure. Otherwise a 'spaceship' could really be an aircraft, weather balloon, meteorite or burned-out debris from satellites and other space junk falling to Earth.

Scares have even been started in America by what turned out to be loads of illegal marijuana, blasted over the Mexican border by a rocket launcher to beat the border patrolmen.

And it is possible that some supposed UFOs are really top secret military or scientific experiments that have been seen accidentally but cannot be officially explained away.

NASA has even claimed that the Russians use apparent UFO sightings to cover up tests of strategic weapons which violate international treaties.

Sadly, there is not a scrap of real evidence to indicate that we are being watched or visited by super-intelligent beings from another planet.

Phenomenon

Stories that various governments have actually made contact or possess the bodies of aliens who died on Earth, have to be taken with the proverbial pinch of salt. Credibility is decidedly challenged by those people who say they have been kidnapped and examined by strange creatures.

Yet a survey in America as long ago as 1966 indicated that five million Americans claimed to have seen a UFO or to have met aliens. Six out of ten say they believe in the phenomenon as do 20 per cent of Britons.

In Britain as many as 400 sightings are reported each year although UFO societies believe that ten times as many more go unreported because people are afraid of being ridiculed.