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TV, books keep myth of UFOs flying

The pervasive myth of the UFO, or flying saucer, refuses to die.

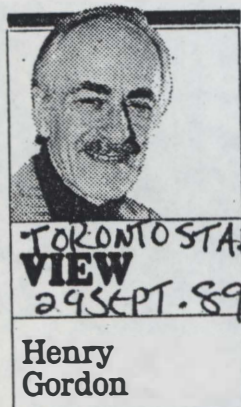
And the institutions responsible for maintaining the life-supporting structure for this myth are the publishing industry and the electronic media.

Over the short period of a week recently, four network television programs featured ufologists publicizing UFO sightings, abductions of humans by extraterrestrial aliens, and government coverups of sensational (and anecdotal) UFO cases.

There was one basic ingredient missing from every one of these programs: balance.

Not one of them took the trouble to include an informed skeptic who could supply a prosaic explanation for the many wild claims that were being bandied about.

The knowledgeable people are available and so are the explanations. But for some strange reason the producers of these programs seem to think that it's more titillating to leave the viewer dangling in the air, suspended by a big question mark.



CNN's Larry King Live featured Whitley Strieber, the American author of several books on the subject, as did Sonya Live In L.A., also on CNN. Strieber, well known as a writer of horror stories, came up with a great commercial idea. He wrote

Communion, dubiously subtitled *A True Story*, describing visitations by little people, who carried him away and did various experiments on his body.

Larry King, an astute and experienced journalist, didn't ask him the basic question: Why didn't he report this violation of his basic rights to the authorities?

Surely the FBI would have taken an interest in this kidnapping — it falls under their jurisdiction. Of course, there is a heavy fine for reporting a crime of this sort if it did not occur. Writing a

book might make more sense.

Communion, incidentally, became a bestseller and has now been made into a motion picture.

Strieber has followed this up with two more books, the latest being *Majestic*.

This deals with "Majestic-12," the supposed code name for a purported secret group of scientists allegedly appointed by U.S. president Harry Truman to study the reports of a crashed craft and its other-worldly occupants near Roswell, N.M., in 1947.

Larry King, seemingly uninformed of the facts, neglected to question Strieber on another basic issue: the fact that the documentation involved with this so-called top-secret coverup has been thoroughly investigated by crack UFO investigator Philip Klass — and shown to be counterfeit.

Recording fantasies

"Majestic-12" is a dead issue. But in the world of ufology, dead issues live, become bestselling books, and sometimes are immortalized on film.

NBC's new program, *Unsolved Mysteries*, narrated by Robert Stack, also featured the Roswell incident, presenting it as a documentary.

The re-enactments of scenes showing army personnel carting away bodies of little green men were realistic enough to convince casual viewers they were watching the real thing. Nowhere in the one-hour program was there a hint that the whole thing was a concocted story, based on rumor, imagination and self-delusion.

The new *Dini Petty* program on CTV featured Budd Hopkins, a New York artist and author of the bestseller, *Intruders*. Hopkins, a strong UFO believer, specializes in gathering people who claim to have been UFO abductees, hypnotizing them and recording their fantasies. That's what his book is about. Only he does not recognize their stories as fantasies (which authorities in the field of hypnosis do).

During the entire hour of this CTV show, the only skeptical voice was that of hypnotherapist Dr. David Gottlieb. He was on camera for approximately two minutes, after which he was ignored for the balance of the program.

Most viewers will take these books and television programs with a very large grain of salt. But, as Philip Klass points out in his book, *Abductions. A Dangerous Game*, there are many who do suffer ill effects from exposure to these wild scenarios.

They are at least entitled to enough information to allow them to view the other side of the coin.

□ Henry Gordon is a member of the UFO subcommittee of the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal.