

ABDUCTION WATCH 22 May 2000

SURPRISE SURPRISE!

The response to my announcement that I was ending *Abduction Watch* was touching, and encouraging, and I feel obliged to carry on publishing it. It's good to know that people are listening, and in view of the general lack of firm but constructive criticism out there in the field (Peter Rogerson resoundingly excepted) I'm more convinced that I'm actually doing something useful. Thanks for your responses. Similarly, you wanted it on paper and not on disk. Here we are on paper.

Since the last issue I've become embroiled in a rather acrimonious debate - much of my own making - of which most of you will be aware. I won't go over it in detail, but essentially I asked Jenny Randles, leader of the UFOIN pack, to provide sufficient detail of the 87 UK alien abductions to which she referred in her recent book 'The Complete Book of Aliens and Abductions' for them to be reviewed and reinvestigated with input, where appropriate, from medical and psychological professionals. Particularly, I wanted to know who had investigated these cases originally, what methods for enhancing recall might have been used, and who might have used them. This request turned out to be quite unacceptable. It would breach witness confidentiality, upset people, intrude on them, take too much time, and apparently break all of the Ten Commandments as well. Like an artefact never quite found by Hancock and Phillips, these abduction cases have, it seems, to remain sacrosanct, locked away, unidentified and unchallenged. They are the UK Abduction Canon, and without them you couldn't write one or more books about UK abductions.

We're moving house next week, which will cause the usual havoc, and I want to devote all my available time for the next two or three months to my 'Nazi UFO' piece for *Fortean Studies*. Then, I'll return to *Abduction Watch*, and get back into the flow of the abduction debate. I may even end up on e-mail. We'll see. Anyway, somewhat disappointed by the air of complacency, and annoyed by the limp policy of appeasement and compromise that seems to be inevitable in published authors in our field ("that isn't the title/contents/cover etc etc I wanted, but the publisher said . . .") I'll summarise my ideas arising from this rather bleak discussion, with particular reference to some of the comments Jenny has made. I'll also refer to the proposal that UFOIN should effectively excuse itself from responsibility for the abduction material, past, present and future, by issuing a 'report' and holding a public conference at which statements about the problems of abduction research would be made and, seemingly, medical professionals would be invited to deal with abductees.

Oddly enough, I suspect that the way I've gone about the 'Nazi UFO' issue pretty much sums up the difference in approach between Jenny and I. In her long, autobiographical piece in the May/June 2000 issue of the Birdsalls' *UFO Magazine*, she says "It is always tempting to say that we intend to 'solve' mysteries. I don't think like that. Indeed I feel that's an unrealistic explanation." In all of my writing since the late '70s - before that I had even less idea what I was talking about than I do now - I've attempted to do exactly the opposite. I've seen the only rational approach as being to gather the available facts about reports of particular areas of extraordinary and anomalous human experience, set them out thoroughly enough for others to rely on, test them, see what's left standing, and draw conclusions accordingly. I make a judgment on the basis of the evidence, and not to do so would seem to

be to fail to do my job as a writer and researcher. We have a responsibility to be honest with our readers, and not to mislead them by avoiding making reasoned judgments. Silence can often be as harmful as complicity.

My investigations adopt methods from both historical and judicial processes, which is fair enough considering my background. Although - of course - the investigations are never really complete, and the facts are never sufficient to draw absolute conclusions, it's an approach that has served well enough in looking at the Egryn Lights, BVM visions, the Angels of Mons, and End Times prophecy. I've approached the 'Nazi UFO' question in much the same way, but there's a key difference in the material. All the other subjects I've investigated in detail have in large measure been based on perception, on supposedly visual, or auditory, or inspired interpretative (in the case of alleged End Times documentary sources) experience. This is the first time I've tried to handle what ought, essentially, to be a 'nuts and bolts' question - did the Germans design and/or develop and/or fly and/or use operationally high-performance flying discs during the Second World War. To do so, I've started by simply looking for factual proof that any of those events occurred. If it emerges that there is no such proof, then it's reasonable to assess any claim that they did in that context.

"Abduct - To lead or take away illegally; to kidnap" (Shorter OED)

'Alien abduction' is also a 'nuts and bolts' question. Are human beings physically, corporeally, taken from the face of the earth by non-human biological - or even non-biological - entities? If they are taken, are the human beings physically placed by those entities in physically, objectively real craft? If they are placed there, do they remain there for a period of real, measurable time? And are the human beings then returned, physically, corporeally, to the face of the earth at the end of that period of time?

These four questions - concerning the objective, physical reality of 'taking', 'entering', 'remaining' and 'returning' - are just as key to the alien abduction question as are the questions regarding high-performance flying discs to the investigation of 'Nazi UFOs'. If the answers to these four questions is, on the evidence, 'No, these events did not/do not occur physically and objectively', then it is reasonable to assess any claim of alien abduction in that context. And for me that means making an initial, wide-ranging, but surely not too difficult judgment.

Throughout the discussion with Jenny and UFOIN, the main obstacle placed in the way of case review and reinvestigation has been witness confidentiality. Then, when I said that the reinvestigation of key elements - particularly the 'investigator effect' - could go ahead without identifying witnesses, various practical and time difficulties were raised instead, which left me wondering to what extent the proverbial 87 cases themselves had any specific reality. I suspect that given a genuine willingness to review a substantial proportion of those cases, that review could be conducted. Unfortunately, I think that willingness does not exist.

I'm not persuaded by Jenny's belief that "there is a root abduction experience that certain kinds of people have", nor do I think that her hope that we will "find a way to tap this root phenomenon and study it properly outside the influence of any one mind set, belief system or interfering investigation method" is realistic. The images of greys and abduction are very pervasive: some people allow them (no doubt because the publishers wanted it that way) to decorate the covers of their books. I doubt that we will find these 'pure' abduction

experiences in contemporary Western culture: I think that the cryptomnesia argument could always be effectively made.

There probably are places to find more primitive, more pure experiences. Not, I suggest, in shamanic ritual and recollection: the assumption that 'primitive' societies have less culture, less communication, and thus less cultural influence is as patronising as it is racist. The close-knit, tradition-centred nature of many such societies seems likely to enhance the influence of their culture rather than reduce it. The use of hallucinogens and other stimulants have, not unnaturally, together with clearly defined cultural expectations, combined to produce tales of flying, shapeshifting, mingling with animals and birds, and going on long and vivid journeys. It is abundantly clear that the provenance of these experiences is akin to that of the youth out of his mind on cough mixture who sat next to me at the Weeley Festival in 1971(?) and decided that setting fire to his leg with lighter fuel would be a worthwhile spiritual experience. The thing about altered states of consciousness, be they induced by drugs, hypnosis, hunger, isolation, chanting, dance, fear or Grof Breathwork (hyperventilation for the chattering classes) is that they, er, alter your state of consciousness. In terms of understanding reality, it's a bit like finding your way to the North Pole with a magnet sellotaped to your compass.

As I touched on in 'Sacred Sites', I suspect that the root experience, the common experience, indeed the *only* experience that most human beings have that takes them outside of the purely mundane is a sense of relating to something other than, or more than, human. This is most commonly both evidenced and satisfied by an adherence to mainstream religion which, in the West, functions mainly in terms of worship and forgiveness, within the framework of a moral and social code. The relationship - worship going up the line to God, and forgiveness of sins, albeit conditional, coming back - is one of being involved with, and relating to, something more than human. As I've noted before, the proof of the existence of God adopted by the Stoics was that of the 'common notion' - so many people believed in God that He/She must therefore exist. The same would, I guess, apply now: worldwide, the great majority of people not only accept the concept of God/A Higher Power, but also claim a relationship of some nature with that power. In the Eastern cultures it tends, perhaps, to be one of worshipping, living right and then being judged, rather than of worship and forgiveness, but there are broad similarities, and similar potential post-life rewards.

As in relationships between humans, there are different degrees of depth and passion in the relationship. Some long - look at any study of pre-conversion experience - for the relationship to commence, apparently breaking down some sort of internal barrier to belief by way of preparation. Others - St Catherine de Laboure in Paris in 1830 is a fine example - long for and anticipate the personal encounter, by way of vision or message. Others - the children at Garabandal and Medjugorje for instance - enter into long-term, sometimes daily dialogues with a - to them only - audible and visible representative of the Divine. The function and variety of forms of prayer can tell us a lot about the nature of the relationship with the divinity in question.

Others have a much colder, more formal relationship, living under the control of regulation and the fundamentalist interpretation of scripture. This element seems to prevail in the urge towards monasticism, where worship and forgiveness still function, but dominate the life of the individual. Outside in the real world, hellfire preaching, exorcism, the control of behaviour and the giving of warnings of doom based on the strict interpretation of holy books

are another outlet for the relationship: one based on the conviction that belief and understanding give authority to the individual. There is a place for every kind of person in the range of religions available in both the east and west, and a range of religious experiences and responses to those experiences that is just as broad. All are based on the perception of a relationship with something other than, or more than, human. That is one of the basic elements of all cultures and societies.

So what of Jenny's assertion that "there is a root abduction experience that certain kinds of people have". Prior to 1980 there are incredibly few accounts that include, in one sequence, forcible abduction, medical investigation, and interbreeding. Let alone assertions of foetus-removal and off-planet maternal visits. There are very few accounts that include any of these elements in a form that even vaguely resembles that set out repeatedly in books, from 1980 onwards, by Hopkins, Jacobs, Streiber, Mack, Randles and so on. And by Tony Dodd and the Quest team in magazines and at conferences: it would be a mistake to take account only of what has appeared in books.

There are, certainly, accounts of visits to Heaven and, more frequently, to Hell. In the West, these continue to arise in the world of BVM visions: Our Lady has a way of illustrating her requests for prayer and penitence with a graphic mixture of carrot and, more commonly, stick. But these are journeys, not abductions, and the participants are observers, and not victims. If you want to find a parallel in ufology, I suggest it lies in the generally charming, usually inane accounts of visits to other planets which long predated 1947, but which persisted through the post-1947, pre-abduction period. The cultural tradition may well be continuing in the Remote Viewing fantasy: Ingo Swann's accounts of naked men on the Moon being a silly - but widely accepted - case in point.

I am, of course, no folklorist. I rather think that the idea of children being taken by fairies or (more frequently?) of human children being exchanged for grumpy, awkward fairy children, derives from a harmless speculation that no child so badly behaved could be human, or the progeny of the exhausted and frustrated parents. Awkward infants have always been with us, and I'm not aware of persuasive evidence that a belief in changelings was widely and deeply held, let alone that there was a widespread belief in real, physical fairies. Presumably these would have been great big fairies, producing human-size progeny with human characteristics, and places where they lived and bred and hid stolen children unobserved by almost everybody, except when they were mysteriously spotted shrunken to minute size, dancing on the heads of dandelions or whatever. It is just as unwise to mistake folktale for reality as it is to presume that because an author records that there have been 87 alien abductions in the UK, there have been 87 alien abductions in the UK. Both refer to records, not to actual events

So, leaving aside the argument that "there is a root abduction experience", let's look at the idea that it is one "that certain kinds of people have". This is certainly worth considering. Jenny has suggested that it is particularly available to the 'creatively visual' (visually creative?), and that may be true. I wonder if, in fact, it is that those who are 'visually creative' actually give an especially graphic representation in response to whatever the stimulation is: I somehow doubt that the experience is limited to the visually creative. The 'certain kinds of people' idea is widely applied, and we can certainly observe multiple-experiencers, who claim participation in new and more exotic experiences as they arise: that's nothing new - I observed it personally in Spiritualism in the late 60s, and, if you want a

classic example, look at the role and influence of Theosophists in the millennial flying saucer group investigated in Festinger et al's *When Prophecy Fails*. Whatever the answer is, the question warrants much more analysis and investigation than it has hitherto received. It may also bring us to the heart of the abduction issue, which I suggest we can approach from two directions.

We have become accustomed to referring to a 'core experience', a 'root experience', or a 'trigger experience'. We have become careless here, because in adopting this terminology we have failed, first, to define where we consider that experience itself originates. No question is more important in exploring abduction, and probably many other claims of anomalous experience, too. The situation is muddled by the usual suspects of sleep paralysis, temporal lobe epilepsy and so on, but I think we still have to address the basic question - does the 'core experience' involve any sentient intelligence other than, and separate to, that of the human being who reports the experience to other human beings?

My own belief - my own temporary conclusion, if you like - is that there is no evidence sufficiently strong to persuade me that any reported experience of this kind must necessarily have entailed the input or involvement of any sentient intelligence other than, and separate to, that of the human being who reported the experience. No information has ever been provided which is so unique, so remarkable, that it could not have come from an earthly source. No reported experience of a journey, or a kidnapping, or a meeting with an external intelligence has ever been beyond the range of human imagination and, wherever the contact has included prophecy or prediction or allegedly secret information that could be tested and proved it has, to my knowledge, turned out to be wrong. On the other hand, the suggestions I've made above about a need, longing, or predisposition to communicate with, and relate to, something that is not only 'other', but is also superior and will relieve some of the burden of living in an often difficult world, seem to fit in well with a model of internal experience. If you overlay any unusual and exotic experience in the sleep paralysis-temporal lobe epilepsy area on to a possibly instinctive need to relate to an 'other', it wouldn't be at all surprising if the physiological experience was interpreted by the experient as involving contact with an external intelligence. If the person was particularly spiritual by nature, the experience might entail more spiritual characteristics. If 'visually creative', the visual imagery might dominate, and the spiritual content be less.

We can, I suggest, make the situation even simpler where alien abduction is concerned. Never mind about UFOIN's report and public meeting. Nothing could look sillier than a bunch of people who probably know more about the alien abduction material than anyone else in the UK telling a few people who know substantially less that they don't know anything but that they know that investigation is dangerous and that, by an entirely natural inference, 'abductees' need the assistance of medical professionals. If you wanted to make a mystery, and a scare-story, out of material that justifies neither interpretation, there could hardly be a more effective way to do it.

No, first-stage investigation of reports of alien abduction - past or present - requires precisely the abilities that researchers who have dealt with Berwyn and Sheffield have displayed: a talent, and a desire, for establishing the evidence regarding an allegedly real and physical event. Put aside, for the time being, the minutiae of 'core' or 'trigger' experiences, pseudo-medical examination, intimations of doom and disaster, and the rest of the paraphernalia of the alleged abduction experience. Instead, find out whether there is any

reason to believe - and I suggest that a negative assumption is the safe one to start from - that the physical event which allegedly frames that paraphernalia ever took place. If the 'taking', 'entering', 'remaining' and 'returning' criteria are not satisfied, then it is inherently unlikely that an 'alien abduction' has actually occurred in the physical world. Maybe we aren't qualified for - even suitable for - assessing people's psychological well-being. Maybe a knowledge of psychiatry, psychology, even religious belief, is necessary to deal with the internal, mental state of these people: we can think hard about that problem in due course. But we certainly have people well-suited to assessing whether somebody was hauled out through their door, window, wall or whatever, into a spaceship, and were later returned, after a period of absence, to their home. The literature of abduction investigation is almost devoid of house-to-house enquiries, physical inspections, discussions with partners and families, and all the other obvious means of establishing whether a person has been kidnapped, taken away, held against their will, and then returned home. Before UFOIN even considers excluding abduction research, I suggest that it could be the ideal organisation to undertake this line of research, in relation to every case, past or present, that it can identify. This combination of historical research into the nature of the 'core experience', and 'nuts and bolts' research into the physical parameters of reported abduction experience seems, to me, to offer a viable way forward for greatly increasing our understanding.

I think that we could do all this, and that we could have done it long since. I suspect we would already have done it if, in our heart of hearts, we believed that abduction by aliens actually takes place. But apart from the odd collector of alien alphabets, I think that we probably don't believe that at all. It is, therefore, much more commercially viable, and intellectually pleasing in a train-spotting, hobbyist kind of way to keep on speculating, and to keep on publishing the same old speculations in a variety of guises. We feel safe with the abduction material because we know that, whatever those who know less might believe, we are at no risk of actually being abducted. But, oddly, we fail to share our comfortable, personal certainty with others.

While I can understand individual preferences not to offend friends and collaborators, let alone risk an action for defamation, I suggest that there is a great gulf between accepting that somebody holds genuine beliefs, and allowing them to impose those beliefs upon others. It is likely that the Heaven's Gate and Solar Temple victims all believed in what they were doing, as did Pol Pot, Stalin, and Hitler, but it would, surely, have been preferable if somebody had stopped them doing it at a very early stage. It is quite possible both to acknowledge somebody's integrity, and to challenge the effects of their beliefs and actions. I suggest, strongly, that taking on the assessment of the physical reality of alleged alien abduction cases, with all the anomalies and contradictions and absurdities that any such analysis will inevitably raise, is the ideal task for UFOIN, and the most constructive approach there is to modifying public perceptions of human/alien interaction. It might not be as grandiose as throwing the problem out to a world that knows little or nothing about it, but it might well be a lot more helpful to those we have allowed to become abductees in spite of, not because of, the simple, objective, physical facts.

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