

## World features

### If they've got bubble heads, they're aliens

By CHRISTOPHER HANSON,  
in WASHINGTON

**T**hey are a metre and a bit tall with huge eyes and large bubble-shaped heads. They come from across the galaxy and they may be planning to kidnap you.

Forty years after the the first wave of "flying saucer" sightings, the topic of visitors from outer space is heating up again in the US and saucer buffs say creatures like these are the advance-guard of an alien civilisation studying mankind.

Although their claims are branded absurd by many in the scientific community, three respected publishing houses have aired them in Budd Hopkins's *Intruders* (Random House), *Light Years* by Gary Kinder (Atlantic Monthly Press), and *Communion* by Whitley Strieber (Morrow).

"This isn't a kook book, it's serious and responsible," Elisabeth Scharlatt, Random House editor of *Intruders*, said.

It is also financially successful, as are the other two, publishers say. They are selling very well.

Supposedly official documents citing mysterious "unidentified flying objects," or UFOs, have also been circulated in support of the believers' case in recent months.

Sceptics say these documents are hoaxes, but UFO researchers insist they are evidence of a "cosmic Watergate" in which the US Government, seeking to

which the US Government, seeking to avoid panic, has concealed visits by space aliens.

Hopkins, the author of *Intruders*, told a recent international conference on UFOs that in researching his book he had interviewed more than 140 people who claimed to have been abducted by aliens and taken into space ships.

They said they had been subjected to medical experiments and returned to Earth after hours of being studied and prodded.

However, science writer Phillip Klass said that months ago he had offered \$US10,000 (about \$14,300) to any "victim" who reported his kidnapping to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, provided the FBI confirmed the claim. No one accepted.

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Scharlatt of Random House said the alleged abductees were not publicity-seekers. Most felt stigmatised by the experience and refused to let their names be used.

She said she was a UFO sceptic herself but was convinced by Hopkins's manuscript that "something is happening". Hopkins said that, before publishing, he compiled details from stories of supposed abductees, who had never met except for cases involving families.

Most said their captors had inserted a large needle with a metal ball on the end into their noses, not a detail dozens of people were likely to fabricate independently, he said.

Drawings of the aliens done after hypnosis were also quite similar, he said, displaying several sketches. Each depicted a bubble-shaped humanoid head with

ed a bubble-shaped humanoid head with large oval slanting eyes, a tiny nose, and thin, delicate lips, uncannily like "aliens" millions saw in the film *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*.

Another source of UFO controversy is a document, distributed at the conference, which refers to a strange aircraft

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crash near Roswell, New Mexico, 40 years ago.

The document, dated November 18, 1952, purports to be a briefing for President-elect Dwight Eisenhower by a secret government team probing UFO reports.

"On 7 July, 1947, a secret operation was begun to assure recovery of the wreckage for scientific study," it says.

"Aerial reconnaissance discovered that four small human-like beings had apparently ejected from the craft before it exploded . . . All four were dead and had badly decomposed . . . A special scientific team took charge of removing these bodies for study."

UFO researcher Jaime Shandera said he got the document from intelligence sources in 1984.

Science writer Klass said the paper was a hoax, riddled with inconsistencies. For example, he said, Eisenhower was Army Chief of Staff in 1947 and would surely have known about and recalled such a discovery.

The Army first reported a "flying disc" had crashed near Roswell, then said it was really a weather balloon.

Jesse Marcell, who investigated the crash as an Army intelligence major, told reporters in 1985, "It was definitely not a

reporters in 1985, "It was definitely not a weather balloon. It was an aircraft."

He said the craft was made of material as thin as tinfoil that was virtually weightless but could not be bent.

Klass said the supposed craft was in fact a radar-testing device that had been hoisted aloft by a balloon.

At the conference, researchers distributed other documents, released under America's Freedom of Information Act, referring to mysterious swift aircraft that supposedly intruded at US military bases in 1975, 1980 and 1981.

A 1981 Pentagon document referred to intrusions at a weapons research site at Kirtland Air Force Base, New Mexico.

"[A guard] observed a round disc-shaped object," it said. "... As he approached on foot armed with a shotgun, the object took off in a vertical direction at a high rate of speed. The guard was a former helicopter mechanic in the US Army and stated the object ... was not a helicopter."

— Reuter