

# UFOs perplex and fascinate still



By MARTIN BRIGHT

**T**HE BRITISH UFO Research Association announced last week that a United States Government film had come into its possession which shows evidence of the existence of alien life forms. According to the association — which will show the film at a conference in Sheffield in August — the footage shows US military scientists examining the corpse of an extraterrestrial whose spacecraft crashed near the New Mexico town of Roswell in 1947.

For Philip Mantle, director of the association, the time has come for the scientific community to take UFO watchers' claims seriously.

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"We used to attract scorn and ridicule from academics," he says. "They just thought we were strange people with binoculars who stood on hillsides looking for flying saucers. Now, with the film from Roswell, I'd like to think that scientists could keep an open mind."

People have been seeing strange lights in the sky for centuries. Erich von Daniken, the author of *Chariots of the Gods*, has suggested that alien astronauts visited earth thousands of years ago. He refers to Ezekiel, a Hebrew prophet in the Old Testament, who saw four living creatures and a wheeled vehicle emerging from "a great cloud, and a fire unfolding itself". Von Daniken also believed that ancient peoples such as the Mayans, had received visits from aliens. In one Mayan carving, he identified what he believed to be an astronaut in the cabin of his spaceship.

And there have been theories about the extraterrestrial origins of ancient structures, such as the Pyramids and Stonehenge — their design and execution have seemed way ahead of their time to some.

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At one time flying saucers were taken very seriously, even on a governmental level. A memo from Winston Churchill to his Air Se-

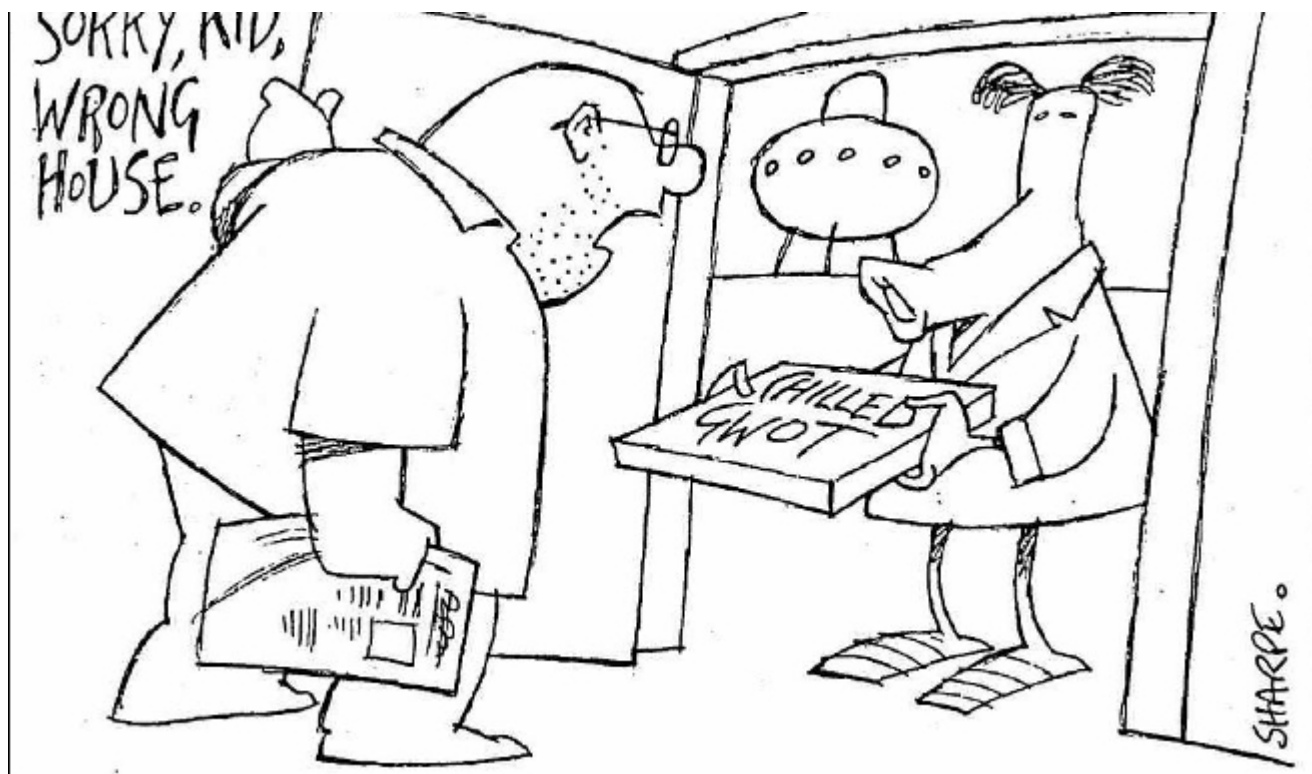
Winston Churchill to his Air Secretary in 1952 reads, "What does all this stuff about flying saucers amount to? What can it mean? What is the truth? Let me have a report at your convenience." However, a team sent to the US to investigate concluded that all UFOs could be explained without resorting to tales of extraterrestrials.

In the US, the threat from flying saucers also was taken seriously. In 1948, the US Air Force set up Project Blue Book to register sightings. By 1969, when the project was ended, it had recorded more than 12,000 incidents.

After a series of sightings around the National Airport at Washington, DC, in 1952, the Central Intelligence Agency set up a panel of scientists to investigate. They reported that 90 per cent of sightings were due to astronomical and meteorological phenomena, or to aircraft, balloons or other terrestrial causes.

But this still leaves a small proportion of sightings unexplained. Some respected scientists, including the meteorologist James E. McDonald and the astronomer J. Allen Hynek, claimed that a small proportion of the reports did point to the existence of aliens.

SORRY KID. /



The newly publicised Roswell incident, which has been attributed to rocket-testing and a crashed weather balloon as well as aliens, occurred when interest in "flying saucers" was growing in the US. (The term UFO — unidentified flying object) was introduced by the US Air Force in 1953.)

Science-fiction authors Isaac Asimov and Ray Bradbury wrote tales about life on other planets; and several movies were made — such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, which told of an evil race of aliens who attempted to take over the earth by possessing human bodies.

Photographs of flying saucers appeared from all over the world. Many were later shown to be fakes, often produced by UFO en-

images, often produced by UFO enthusiasts photographing miniature models in close-up or doctoring negatives. There were also claims

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that aliens were already living on earth and some people even claimed to be aliens themselves. One such "alien", Valiant Thor, who said he had come to earth with 70 fellow Venusians, appeared in Virginia, US, in 1959 and demanded to meet "the leader of the Free World".

By the start of the 1980s, thousands of cases of abduction by aliens had been reported, 90 per cent of which were in the US. Usually they involved someone travelling late at night, seeing a bright light in the sky and ending up in a different place a few hours later. Over time, sometimes under hypnosis, the "contactee" remembers the lost hours, which involved being taken into an alien spacecraft and having some kind of medical examination.

It has yet to be proved that in-

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telligent life-forms are paying regular visits to earth, and no evidence has yet been found of life on other planets in our solar system. But scientists involved in the Pioneer 10 and 11 space programs in the early 1970s were taking no chances. The probes were designed

chances. The probes were designed to send back scientific data from Jupiter and then fly off into deep space; but they also carried a plaque containing symbols designed to communicate our existence to fellow inhabitants of the universe. These included a representation of the hydrogen atom, a plan of our solar system and drawings of a naked man and woman.

"We'd all like to believe there were other forms of intelligent life out there," Philip Mantle says. "That's what the search for UFOs is all about."

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