

# Stories of UFOs gain credibility

## Reports of abductees with no prior contact oddly consistent

By Pythia Peay

Religion News Service

Like a miniature toy top, planet Earth spins in the midst of a vast universe. Against this cosmic backdrop, many find it easier to believe in UFOs than angels or miracles.

Yet actual stories of UFO encounters challenge conventional perceptions of reality. As put forth in recent books, conferences and magazine articles, such accounts range from sightings of glowing discs to underground chambers concealing starships to hairless beings who perform medical experiments on humans.

So what is the person in the street to make of such tales? Are they for real? Or are they the result of hoaxes or the products of fevered imaginations?

Rather than dismiss the UFO phenomenon, journalist C.B.B. Bryan conducted his own study. In "Close Encounters of the Fourth Kind" (Knopf, 1995), Bryan reports on a scientific conference held at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1992. The conference was co-chaired by Pulitzer Prize-winning Harvard psychiatrist John E. Mack and MIT physicist David Pritchard.

As one of our century's greatest mysteries, UFOs are worthy of such academic scrutiny, Bryan maintains. Quoting Mack, he says, "If what these abductees are saying isn't happening to them, then what is?"

What abductees are saying is remarkably consistent. People with no

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prior contact report being taken aboard ships by gray beings with tear-shaped black eyes. While aboard they are subjected to painful medical experiments. Many return with strange scars. Abductees, says Bryan, also report their stories with similar emotion — feelings of trauma and an unwillingness to believe that what happened actually occurred.

Many in the scientific and academic community remain unconvinced. Mack himself is under investigation by the Harvard Medical School for the way he's conducted his research. He's been accused of encouraging people in their delusions and exposing his subjects to psychological harm.

Sacramento psychologist Richard Boylan, author of several books on UFOs, has examined more than 160 people who claim to have been abducted by aliens. In all cases he concluded they were mentally sound people who reported events as they saw them. The large number of credible witnesses providing testimony, Boylan says, is the same type of evidence that "could send 10,000 people to the electric chair."

### Symbols of social instability

More intriguing than whether human-alien contact exists is the debate over where UFOs come from. Some believe UFOs are the result of mass psychological projections — symbols of social instability as the new millennium approaches.

Then there is the standard notion, writes Bryan, that they are physically real craft piloted by creatures from other galaxies. Skeptics say this would require extraterrestrials to overcome the physical laws of the universe — an impossible task.

Some theorists, however, say aliens may be as close to us as the air we breathe. French scientist Jacques Vallee, says Bryan, suggests UFOs are not objects but "windows" into alternate dimensions. Their occupants are visitors from parallel universes.

As an example, Bryan cites the case of a craft that was observed by witnesses to glide over a bridge in New York City, then suddenly dive into the East River. This implies, says Bryan, that perhaps the East River was "a portal" to the craft's destination.

### Cross-breeding program

Why aliens might choose to visit Earth is another matter for speculation. Some say aliens are using humans in a cross-breeding program. Others say aliens are warning humanity about an impending ecological disaster. Still others say aliens are trying to help humans cultivate a more spiritual consciousness.

Yet others have shifted the UFO debate to new ground. A recent conference in Washington, D.C., considered what might transpire should humans and aliens meet. Will humans know the right questions to ask? Who will they choose to represent them?

What language will they use to communicate?

Such a dialogue is critical, says conference organizer Scott Jones, a former naval intelligence officer, in the event of unambiguous evidence that extraterrestrials are using Earth as a meeting ground.

Another group has gone a step further. In the current issue of "Yoga Journal," journalist Keith Thompson interviews Steven Greer, a medical doctor and head of the Center for the Study of Extraterrestrial Intelligence.

Dubbed "close encounters of the fifth kind," Greer's organization spearheads groups around the country in an effort to initiate contact with aliens. Mobilizing at UFO "hot-spots," individuals fill the sky with sounds and lights. In some instances, Thompson writes, UFOs have been sighted, purportedly responding with

flashing lights.

Despite the varied attempts to explain extraterrestrial visitations, many researchers agree on one point: something strange, but very real, is happening.

But like the frog who perceives the world in black and white, says Bryan, human perception may be too limited to perceive the actual mystery of what lies behind the purported appearance of UFOs.