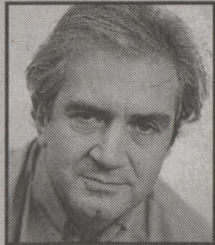


# The aliens at the end of my garden



Bryan Appleyard

Since June 24, 1947, when a businessman called Kenneth Arnold saw a squadron of alien spaceships in the Cascade Mountains in Washington state — generally regarded as the first authentic UFO sighting of the post-war era — aliens have poured from the abyss that lies between ourselves and the world.

We know them well. They are the grey aliens with slanting, black eyes and vestigial nostrils whose corpses are kept at Area 51, a secret military base in the Nevada desert. They are the tall "Nordics" who gently oversee complex surgical procedures on human abductees. They are ET, the Borg, the Klingons and the Vulcans, the Pleadians and the Nine.

"You've really taken on a monster here. Careers are really derailed by an interest in this subject," Professor John Mack of Harvard University said when I told him I was writing a book about these real, dreamed, hallucinated or imagined creatures and the humans who have met or found themselves involved with them.

Mack spoke from experience. His own interest in alien abductions led to an inquiry by the Harvard authorities. He survived, though with many scars.

Mention aliens and you will at once be thought either mad or stupid, deluded or naive. Extraterrestrial visitation is the faith of rural hicks in the American Deep South or of lonely English teenage nerds who can't get girlfriends.

People who think there may well be intelligent life elsewhere in the universe are not mad. People who have made contact with aliens, been abducted or who have seen flying saucers probably are. But I'm not mad and I have seen an alien spaceship in broad daylight in Norfolk. It was on the ground and I saw it as a glowing oval behind some trees. It was about 300 yards away.

The catch is that I was in a deep



ET and the aliens in *Independence Day* are Hollywood fantasy but many people believe they have seen the real thing. Can they all be wrong?

dered. He came into this field, as most do, because he saw a flying saucer. "It was a daytime sighting over Cape Cod. Up until that moment I had absolutely no interest in or knowledge of the subject, nothing. It came out of nowhere; I sure wasn't looking for it."

There were three of them in the car, on their way to an artistic party in Provincetown. Mark Rothko, among others, would be there.

"We were on high ground and we saw to our left, not terribly high up, a small object, lens-shaped and a dull aluminum or pewter colour, not highly reflective. It was just sitting there. There were clouds blowing by, coming in from the ocean. We couldn't really tell if it was moving. I said maybe it's a flat balloon. It didn't seem huge."

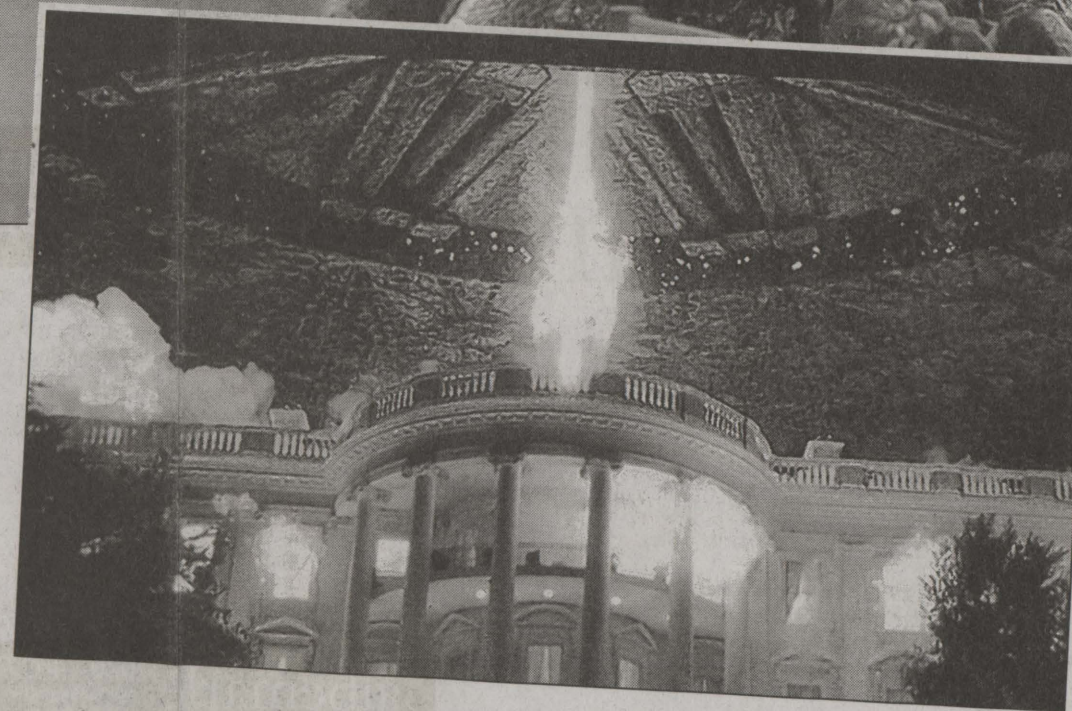
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to make them tired. The beeping sounded again and they returned to full wakefulness, finding themselves some miles further south. Two-and-a-half hours had elapsed. They reported the incident to Pease Air Force Base in Portsmouth, and it later emerged that an unidentified object had been registered on the radar at the same time.

Under hypnosis, the Hills told identical stories about what had happened in those hours of missing time: their car had stalled, they were at once surrounded by humanoid in black uniforms and taken on board the craft. A circular device was attached to Barney's groin, and semen was extracted. Betty was given a tour of the craft and shown a star map. They were told they would remember nothing and returned to their car. The UFO then flew away.

Budd Hopkins mulled this over for 11 years. Then he fell into conversation with the man who ran the liquor store near his apartment. "He said, 'A man can be driving home from work and this comes



and seen a strange figure in the room, 15% had seen a frightening figure, 14% had had an out-of-body experience, 13% had missing time, 11% had seen a ghost, 10% had flown through the air, 8% had inexplicable scars, 7% had seen a UFO and 5% had dreamt of UFOs. A further sifting of the figures indicated that 2% of Americans, some 5m people, "have experienced events consistent with those that

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There could be an explanation in which no amnesia effect occurs, however. In this case, what we see under hypnosis is a glimpse into a "third realm", neither of the world nor of the human mind. The alien

analytical. In the event, neither analysis nor perversity proved a defence against Oakley's powers.

I provided him with a description of a special place, the riverside garden of my house in Norfolk, in which I felt comfortable. He then put me under remarkably rapidly and, as far as I could tell, remarkably deeply. Hypnosis has the power to put you in two minds which normally do not co-exist.

know me well enough to take me further and he didn't wish to add an overtone of anxiety to a place where I felt relaxed.

This didn't matter. What did matter was the certainty with which I saw that glowing UFO. It was, quite simply, there. Obviously, I knew of Oakley's past creation of abduction narratives under hypnosis and, equally obviously, UFOs were on my mind. I was predisposed to see this. But there is a big difference between thinking such things and seeing them.

There is, however, a nuance here. I knew I was in Bloomsbury and was merely evoking Norfolk in my mind. But is evoking the right word? Perhaps I was remembering an occasion on which I had seen a UFO in Norfolk but my conscious mind had suppressed the memory or it had been suppressed for me. Or I was imagining Norfolk with a UFO attached. I could do such a thing in a conscious state, but it would involve an effort that constantly reminded me it was not real. Under hypnosis, there was no doubt in my mind that I was really seeing this.

Of course, the simplest explanation is probably true. I had never actually seen a UFO, I had simply imagined one under three distinct influences: my knowledge of Oakley's experiments, my own preoccupations and the effects of a deep hypnotic trance. But the point is: I didn't feel as though I was imagining anything. Listening to myself on the tape I made of the session, I can hear my voice sounds tentative, investigatory, not as though I am idly inventing.

This means that if Oakley had been determined to convince me that what I was seeing was a recollection and not an invention, then he could have done so, assuming I did not resist too fiercely. He would merely have confirmed what I felt to be true, that this was a flying saucer.

Evidently, therefore, if a large number of people who are convinced alien abductions are real are hypnotising even larger numbers of others who suspect they might be, then it is likely there will be many alien abduction narratives flying around, as, indeed, there are. Of course, this is not proof they are not true, but it does provide a persuasive context for a simple psychosocial explanation. Hypnotism is a technique that triggers a mass storytelling project in which all the stories are linked.

On the basis of my experience, I cannot argue with this. But I do believe it does not say enough. All

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People who think there may well be intelligent life elsewhere in the universe are not mad. People who have made contact with aliens, been abducted or who have seen flying saucers probably are. But I’m not mad and I have seen an alien spaceship in broad daylight in Norfolk. It was on the ground and I saw it as a glowing oval behind some trees. It was about 300 yards away.

The catch is that I was in a deep hypnotic trance in London at the time. David Oakley of University College London, who had hypnotised me, would say that what I saw was a product of the hypnosis. Others would say it was a buried memory and that I have been abducted by aliens who had tried to ensure that I would never remember what happened. The hypnosis retrieved that memory. Who is right?

In the 1950s Budd Hopkins became important in the abstract expressionist movement in New York. But, latterly, he has become better known for his other work. For Hopkins, 73, is a gatekeeper in the vast, strange otherworld of alien abduction: the temporary removal of thousands of people, if not millions, by extraterrestrials.

There is nothing weird or crazy about him. He looks like an adman’s dream of an East Coast grandfather. He has not been abducted himself, but he is the leading believer in abductions and he insists that very few of the abductees he has met are remotely disor-



dered. He came into this field, as most do, because he saw a flying saucer. “It was a daytime sighting over Cape Cod. Up until that moment I had absolutely no interest in or knowledge of the subject, nothing. It came out of nowhere; I sure wasn’t looking for it.”

There were three of them in the car, on their way to an artistic party in Provincetown. Mark Rothko, among others, would be there.

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tureless. And then it flew off at “about the speed of an airplane”.

At the time, neither aliens nor their activities were widely discussed in respectable ufological circles. The general view was that the UFOs were most likely to be secret military craft or natural phenomena. Then in 1966 *Look* magazine published the story of Betty and Barney Hill, a respectable couple who were driving south on Highway 3, to their home in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, when they noticed something that looked like a star, but which seemed to be following them.

They heard a beeping noise from the boot of their car which seemed

to make them tired. The beeping sounded again and they returned to full wakefulness, finding themselves some miles further south. Two-and-a-half hours had elapsed. They reported the incident to Pease Air Force Base in Portsmouth, and it later emerged that an unidentified object had been registered on the radar at the same time.

Under hypnosis, the Hills told identical stories about what had happened in those hours of missing time: their car had stalled, they were at once surrounded by humanoids in black uniforms and taken on board the craft. A circular device was attached to Barney’s groin, and semen was extracted. Betty was given a tour of the craft and shown a star map. They were told they would remember nothing and returned to their car. The UFO then flew away.

Budd Hopkins mulled this over for 11 years. Then he fell into conversation with the man who ran the liquor store near his apartment. “He said, ‘A man can be driving home from work and a thing comes out of the sky and little people come out.’” It had happened nearby in New Jersey. Hopkins investigated, found other witnesses to what appeared to be a clear case of an alien landing and published the story. People started contacting him. Soon he found himself gathering together hundreds of accounts.

In 1991 Robert Bigelow, a Las Vegas businessman, suggested to Hopkins and David Jacobs, another abduction investigator, that a poll should be conducted to find out how many abductees there were in America. The problem was that, if the aliens had made people forget abduction experiences, like the Hills, then whether a person was an abductee could not necessarily be established by a direct question. So the pollsters sought to discover peripheral incidents or experiences that suggested an abduction had taken place.

Almost 6,000 people were questioned and the results were startling: 18% had woken paralysed



and seen a strange figure in the room, 15% had seen a frightening figure, 14% had had an out-of-body experience, 13% had missing time, 11% had seen a ghost, 10% had flown through the air, 8% had inexplicable scars, 7% had seen a UFO and 5% had dreamt of UFOs. A further sifting of the figures indicated that 2% of Americans, some 5m people, “have experienced events consistent with those that abductees experienced before they knew they were abductees”.

The figure was bizarre, wild, improbable and the image it evoked surreal in the extreme. If 5m people had been abducted, many repeatedly, there must be hundreds of thousands of people who periodically vanish and return without comment. And yet this whole, vast industrial project seemed to have left no trace of physical evidence.

On the other hand, a large number of otherwise mentally undisturbed people were having extremely strange experiences that seemed to have much in common. The information about these experiences was quite amazingly consistent. It was scarcely adequate to dismiss this vast human airlift as a mass hallucination.

Many, perhaps most, alien abduction accounts are retrieved under hypnosis. Hypnotic regression — taking people back to past events

— can, it seems, break down the barrier of imposed amnesia. It has been suggested that memories are present in every part of the brain. All the aliens can do is block them. Hypnotism can unblock them.

There could be an explanation in which no amnesia effect occurs, however. In this case, what we see under hypnosis is a glimpse into a “third realm”, neither of the world nor of the human mind. The aliens are inhabitants neither of our minds nor of matter, but of something else that we are unable to grasp or apprehend except under hypnosis.

Or the accounts narrated under hypnosis must be artefacts of the hypnosis itself. If this is true, then the effects of hypnosis are quite staggeringly powerful. Thousands of people have been so convinced by what they have “remembered” under hypnosis that it has persuaded them that their previous recollections in normal states of consciousness have been utterly false.

Hypnosis is not something that can be understood in abstraction. So I asked David Oakley to hypnotise me at his office in Bloomsbury. Oakley has hypnotised people who have never claimed to be abducted by aliens. Yet, under hypnosis, they have produced compelling and detailed abduction accounts. I had never previously been hypnotised and had always assumed I would be a poor subject, possibly because I would be too

analytical. In the event, neither analysis nor perversity proved a defence against Oakley’s powers.

I provided him with a description of a special place, the riverside garden of my house in Norfolk, in which I felt comfortable. He then put me under remarkably rapidly and, as far as I could tell, remarkably deeply. Hypnosis has the power to put you in two minds which, normally, do not so easily coexist. Or perhaps it simply intensifies the imagined at the expense of the real. I knew I was imagining Norfolk, but I was doing so with heightened capacities of evocation and memory. The real, Bloomsbury, had simply become a blurred background.

Oakley said: “Now take the calm feeling to your special place, sitting on that bench in the sunshine.” I returned to Norfolk. Then he simply asked if I noticed anything odd about it. At once I did. About 200 yards beyond the river rises a small hill topped with a dense thicket of trees. In the midst of these trees I now saw a glow. At first I tried to interpret this as a memory of a fire I had once seen up there. But that was at night and some way to the left. In any case, this glow was not fire-shaped, it was distinctly oval — flying saucer shaped, in fact.

I had made up my mind that it was, indeed, a UFO, but, just as I did so, Oakley quickly brought me out of the trance. He felt he didn’t

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On the basis of my experience, I cannot argue with this. But I do believe it does not say enough. All it tells us is that we are prone to see such things in a hypnotic state. It does not tell us why, and it does not answer the deeper questions about the nature of human experience that are implied by the phenomenon of such visions.

These questions become even more profound when we remember that many people see these things in full consciousness and without any suppression of the memories they inspire. These are questions about the way we apprehend the world, not about the truth or otherwise of alien experiences.

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*Is anyone out there?*  
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