

Tekst 6

# Common sense abducted

## Aliens: Why They Are Here

by Bryan Appleyard

IN NOVEMBER 1974 the giant Arecibo radio telescope in Puerto Rico broadcast a special message to M13, a distant cluster of 300,000 stars, some of which might be orbited by life-bearing planets. The message contained line drawings of a human being, together with details of the molecular structure of DNA and other such useful information, and it ended with the cosmically fatuous word “Hi!”

As Bryan Appleyard points out, although this message has now been travelling at the speed of light for more than 30 years, it is still roughly 25,070 light years from its destination. “It will arrive in the vicinity of M13 in the year 27,074, so we could expect a response in 52,174, assuming they return the call at once.”

The combination of 19 in this story deserves a moment’s notice. A group of astronomers had decided, on the basis of their scientific knowledge, that there was a reasonable chance that intelligent life existed somewhere else in the universe. Their science also told them that they would have to wait more than 50,000 years for a radioed response – just as it told them that a physical spacecraft sent from M13 would take much longer, since no solid

object can be accelerated to the speed of light. 20 they went ahead and made the broadcast, complete with its geeky greeting.

The most reasonable position to take on the question of extra-terrestrial life is that while it is quite possible that such life exists somewhere, it is very unlikely that humans will ever encounter it. This is an issue which should therefore rest at the outermost fringes of our imaginations. Yet modern cultural history tells a very different story:

aliens now populate so many novels, films and television programmes that no imagination can 21 them.

The title and subtitle of Bryan Appleyard’s new book, *Aliens: Why They Are Here*, might best be described as a bit of a tease. Appleyard, a respected journalist and commentator, is not claiming that aliens have landed; his “here” means here in our mental world and popular culture. But the fact that many people do believe that aliens are literally here (or close enough, at any rate, to snatch humans from time to time) is, of course, part of our culture too. This is what

distinguishes 22 from Tolkien’s orcs and elves, which many people may have imagined but few claim actually to have met.

23. George Adamski for instance, author of the classic text



*Flying Saucers Have Landed*, met Orthon, a long-haired young man from Venus, in the Californian desert in 1952. Adamski could tell he was an alien because he wore reddish-brown shoes and “his trousers were not like mine”. Orthon spoke to him telepathically, and arranged for him to be taken on a tour of the solar system which included a visit to Venus, where, as it turned out, the late Mrs Adamski had been reincarnated.

According to Appleyard, there are three possible ways of talking about experiences of aliens. First comes the “nuts and bolts” position, which treats them as literal descriptions of physical reality. Then there is the “third realm” approach, which says that aliens may be real, but not in a physical sense – like angels, they exist as some other kind of being, 24. And the third approach is “psychosocial”: this assumes that aliens are illusory, but tries to account for the human origins of the illusion.

The best parts of this book take the psychosocial approach, offering a variety of explanations. Appleyard summarises recent research on the neurological origins of these illusory experiences; he also shows how 25 we should treat the so-called “recovered memories” of abduction produced under hypnosis. And his account of the cultural origins of modern ufology and alien-mania is rich and rewarding, fortified by a detailed knowledge of science fiction and marred only by a tendency towards hectic prose.

Yet Appleyard cannot leave it at that. He wants to suggest that we should look at the claims of the abductees with more respect; he argues that the differences between 26

should be “blurred”, on the grounds that whatever happens is, in the end, just happening in someone’s head. This is a surprisingly mushy conclusion, coming from such a clearheaded thinker and writer.

Unfortunately, the blurring has also got into the facts. In order to build up respect for those who believe in real encounters with aliens, Appleyard has copied historical claims from their books and websites, presenting them to his readers as if they were genuine.

Thus we are told about “27 sighting of a UFO in 1493 by the German scholar Hartmann Schaeden”; this is a garbled reference to Hartmann Schedel’s description of a meteorite which landed at Ensisheim in Alsace and which can still be seen in the Ensisheim Town Hall.

Most seriously, Appleyard reproduces, in a list of mysterious disappearances, a story about an entire regiment of the British Army being carried away by a hovering cloud at Gallipoli in 1915. The story (originally about a battalion, the 1/5 Norfolks) was investigated and 28 years ago: the soldiers were killed by Turkish forces, and their remains now lie in the Azmak cemetery. The suggestion that they had been carried off into the sky was made for the first time by three confused veterans in 1965; it was then included in a famous faked document, the so-called First Annual Report of “Majestic 12” (an alleged top-secret US Government committee on contacts with aliens), which purported to date from the early 1950s.

That Bryan Appleyard should treat this document as genuine is, alas, like the 13th stroke of the clock: it 29 everything that has gone before.

Noel Malcolm in *The Sunday Telegraph*

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*Kies bij iedere open plek in de tekst het juiste antwoord uit de gegeven mogelijkheden.*

1p 19

- A art and science
- B facts and figures
- C nerdiness and fanaticism
- D past and present
- E seriousness and absurdity

1p 20

- A Eventually
- B Instead,
- C Moreover,
- D So
- E Yet

1p 21

- A begin to comprehend
- B lay claim to have created
- C remain untouched by

1p 22

- A earthlings
- B extra-terrestrials
- C rational minds
- D serious science fiction

1p 23

- A But some meetings with aliens have all the trappings of realism
- B Not all writers, however, have been so successful as Tolkien
- C Some of the witnesses here do not inspire much trust

1p 24

- A beyond the dimensions we know
- B in a pseudo-intellectual sense
- C in the next world
- D in the world of myths

1p 25

- A conscientiously
- B sceptically
- C sympathetically

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1p **26**

- A old and new research
- B our minds and emotions
- C the three approaches
- D the various memories

1p **27**

- A a controversial
- B an imaginary
- C a significant

1p **28**

- A authenticated
- B discredited
- C dramatised
- D hushed up

1p **29**

- A exceeds
- B lends credibility to
- C mirrors
- D puts in doubt