They're coming to take us away: Can space aliens really have abducted the former Secretary-General of the United Nations? It sounds absurd, but thousands of Americans seem convinced by a rumour which has become a cause celebre even outside the mad world of modern 'Ufology'

By Jim Schnabel

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THE VOICE of the spokesman for His Excellency Javier Perez de Cuellar, the former United Nations Secretary-General, conveyed surprise and strained dignity. ‘I feel very comfortable in telling you now, on his behalf, that he wouldn’t have anything . . . absolutely nothing . . . to say about this. I have worked close enough with the former Secretary-General to know how he would react to . . . something like this.’

Something like this. The final words emerged as a dismissive burst of mirth. But in truth, the story about Perez de Cuellar was becoming more difficult to dismiss. Since it had begun to circulate in the summer of 1992, the story had appeared in numerous UFO journals, and parts of it - although without direct reference to Perez de Cuellar - had been published in the Wall Street Journal and Paris Match. Discussions of the case, with prominent mention of the former Secretary-General, were due out shortly in the New York Times and in the popular science magazine Omni. Journalists and UFO enthusiasts had been trying to reach the former Secretary-General by phone and by fax, by letter, through intermediaries. The most persistent inquiries had come from a Manhattan artist and UFO researcher named Budd Hopkins, of whom Perez de Cuellar had never heard, but others had come through friends and acquaintances. One journalist had even managed, briefly, to confront Perez de Cuellar at an airport.

Hans-Adam Liechtenstein, eponymous prince of that Alpine principality, had written him a letter with a cryptic reference to the case tucked incongruously amidst diplomatic niceties. Even on the cocktail party circuit, apparently, Perez de Cuellar wasn’t safe. It is said that one evening at a reception in New York, Perez de Cuellar’s hostess, the daughter of a distinguished Peruvian family, candidly informed him of the rumour that for so long had been humming and buzzing on the UFO enthusiasts’ grapevine: that Perez de Cuellar, in the small hours of the morning of 30 November 1989, had been plucked from his limousine, taken into a spaceship, and subjected to intimate examination by aliens . . .

If it means nothing else, the story at least illustrates the state of UFO research - or ‘ufology’ - in America today. It begins at 3.16am on that November night in a high-rise apartment on Manhattan’s Lower East Side. There, it is said, a 44-year-old housewife named Linda, finishing her bed-time prayers beside her sleeping husband, opened her eyes to see a grey-skinned biped standing over her bed. The creature was approximately 4ft tall, with large black eyes, a slit mouth and a bulbous head whose capacity suggested the presence of an extra-terrestrially large brain.

Linda attempted unsuccessfully to awaken her husband, then threw a pillow at the alien, but she quickly felt her limbs become numb with a sudden paralysis, and within moments she had lost consciousness. Later, however, with the aid of regression hypnosis she was apparently able to reconstruct some of the experience: the alien, with several grey accomplices, had floated her out of a window of her apartment and upwards through a blue beam into a waiting saucer-shaped spaceship. Inside the ship, the aliens had seemed to perform various actions of a medical nature upon her, such as palpating her spine. Later, she had been floated back from the ship into her apartment and, with a slight thump, into her bed. Her husband and children mysteriously had remained asleep throughout her ordeal.

The following morning, Linda telephoned the ufologist Budd Hopkins to tell him what had happened. Linda had first contacted Hopkins the previous April, after reading one of his books about UFO abductions and concluding that she had been abducted several times during her childhood and early adulthood; Hopkins, following his usual procedure, had hypnotised her, regressing her memory until she could recall the incidents in detail. This time Hopkins hypnotised her again, and she tried to recall what had happened to her within the spaceship. Her memories - at least in the context of the epidemic of UFO-abduction claims that was sweeping America - seemed relatively conventional, and Hopkins quietly filed the case report away with
the hundreds of similar reports he had received from other UFO abductees over the years.

IN FEBRUARY 1991, however, a year and a half after Hopkins first looked into it, something happened that caused him to open Linda's case again.

According to Hopkins, he received a letter from two men called Richard and Dan who claimed to have witnessed Linda's abduction. Richard and Dan identified themselves as police officers. In the early hours of a morning in late November, they said, while seated in a patrol car on the Lower East Side, within sight of Linda's apartment, they had seen 'a strange oval hovering over the top of an apartment building two or three blocks up from where we

were sitting'. The men stated further that they had seen a woman, accompanied by several smaller beings, floating out of a window of the apartment building and into the underside of the strange oval.

Hopkins decided to take a fresh look at Linda's story. Over the months that followed, he corresponded regularly with Richard and Dan, although he never actually met them. He also spent a lot of time talking to Linda.

In April 1991, Linda told Hopkins that Richard and Dan had abducted her from downtown Manhattan. She said that they had been in two limousines, each with United Nations licence plates - a detail which seemed to confirm Hopkins's growing suspicion that, whoever the two men were, they were not policemen in the conventional sense. She said that they had interrogated her about various things and had suggested that she herself might be an alien. A few weeks later, Linda claimed that Richard and Dan had attempted to abduct her again, but that she had narrowly escaped after running across a street and being hit and bruised by a car.

In October 1991, Linda turned up on Hopkins's doorstep soaking wet and covered with sand and seaweed, claiming that Richard and Dan had kidnapped her again and had taken her to what she believed was a CIA safe house on Long Island. There, she said, Dan, in a frenzy of unrequited love for her, had nearly drowned her in the surf, calling her his 'Lady of the Sands' and asking her to wear a night-dress like the one she had been abducted in.

Richard and Dan, meanwhile, had also been in touch with Hopkins, although they never allowed him to meet them in person. In the course of a series of communications in letters, tape-recordings and messages through Linda, they admitted that they were not really police officers. Instead, they alleged, they were US federal agents, who on the night in question had been charged with protecting Javier Perez de Cuellar, then the UN Secretary-General. Most sensational of all, they claimed that, on that same fateful night, they too had briefly been abducted by aliens - along with Perez de Cuellar.

By late 1992, Linda, in regression sessions with Hopkins, was claiming further alien abduction experiences involving herself, her sons, and a pyjama-clad Perez de Cuellar. Another of Hopkins's abductees, a close friend of Linda, reported an abduction episode in which she, Linda, one of Linda's sons, and Perez de Cuellar were all taken into a spaceship together by the aliens.

Hopkins, meanwhile, had decided that he could discern method in the aliens' apparent madness. To him it seemed possible that the Linda case, unlike the typical abduction case, which involved no independent witnesses, had occurred in part for Perez de Cuellar's benefit, so that such an important world leader might help mankind to take more seriously the idea that there were extraterrestrials out there.

'This was a revelation for the Third Man,' Hopkins explained to me. ('Third Man' is Hopkins's pseudonym for the former Secretary-General, created in order to spare him publicity and thus to facilitate a confession from him about the case.) 'It's almost like they were saying, 'Look at us'.'

BUDD HOPKINS used to be best-known as an artist. Born in 1931, in the steel and coal town of Wheeling,
West Virginia, he learned to draw after a childhood bout with polio, and at university in the early 1950s decided to join the new wave of Abstract Expressionism. After graduation he moved to Manhattan, found a flat and a job, entered the art scene, and within a decade had made a name for himself not only as an innovative artist whose works sold well and hung in major museums, but as a man who took his work and himself seriously, who was fundamentally sane and decent. In 1966, the New York Times's critic Brian O'Doherty wrote of Hopkins that 'he is not the sort of fellow you are going to read about in the glossy columns where kookiness and personal charades are the usual price of admission.'

By then, however, Hopkins had already had his first encounter with a UFO. It had happened one afternoon in the summer of 1964, when he and his wife Joan and a friend had seen a silvery disc-like object hovering and zooming over Provincetown on Cape Cod. The object seemed to behave as no man-made object should have behaved, and Hopkins's curiosity led him to telephone nearby Otis Air Force Base to report the sighting. The officer he spoke to was cordial but relatively uncommunicative. Hopkins soon began to suspect that the government, with all its resources, knew more about UFOs than it was telling.

'Budd has always been very curious about things - stories behind stories,' remembers Joan, now his ex-wife. 'We were very fascinated by the Kennedy assassination . . . There was the sense of a plot . . . And I think with the UFO we quickly realised, maybe with that phone call to the air force base, that we weren't being told the whole story.'

Much of modern ufology revolves around such suspicions of government cover-ups. In part these suspicions serve to excuse the apparent lack of hard evidence that UFOs are extraterrestrial spacecraft. But it is also true that the US government has taken, at least occasionally, a serious interest in the phenomenon.

UFOs first received sustained government attention with the advent of frequent high-altitude military flying in the Second World War. Often dismissed as experimental enemy aircraft, UFOs plagued both Allied and Axis pilots and radar operators.

Shortly after the war, a wave of sightings of disc-shaped aerial objects made headlines across America. It may be difficult for the reader to imagine now, when UFOs have retreated into a low-culture haze of tabloid stories and Spielberg-esque fantasy, but during the first couple of post-war decades UFOs were treated with businesslike seriousness. In July 1947, for example, an air force base in New Mexico issued a press release announcing matter-of-factly that it had recovered a crashed 'flying disc.' The Air Force soon retracted the claim, stating that the object had been only a weather balloon, but it did not retract its overall belief in the possibility of flying discs: in September of that year General Nathan Twining, an Air Force official tasked with evaluating the reports of strange aerial objects, sent a memorandum to Air Force Intelligence in Washington noting that 'the phenomenon reported is something real and not visionary or fictitious'. In the summer of 1952, after a wave of visual and radar sightings of UFOs above Washington DC briefly overshadowed the Democrats’ national convention there, Air Force pilots around the country were instructed to shoot down any flying saucers that refused to land. Shortly thereafter, the National Security Council asked the CIA to look into the phenomenon.

The scientific panel convened by the CIA seemed embarrassed by its task, and quickly dismissed UFOs as either non-existent or unworthy of further scientific investigation. A panel set up by the Air Force in the late Sixties spent more time examining the issue, but arrived at essentially the same conclusion. Facilitating such conclusions were some of the wild stories of close encounters with aliens that had begun to surround the UFO phenomenon. These 'contactee' cases first drew widespread publicity in the early Fifties, the contactees typically claiming that the aliens were benevolent and consciousness-expanding, intending to bring peace on earth. Part 5

Within a few years, however, close-encounter stories had begun to take on a more sinister aspect. The first big case in America concerned a New Hampshire couple, Barney and Betty Hill, who suffered from anxiety and a sense of amnesia after a strange incident one night on a deserted highway in the autumn of 1961. The Hills visited a psychiatrist, and under regression hypnosis recalled having been swooped upon by a flying
saucer, whose alien occupants paralysed them and briefly took them aboard, carrying out medical type procedures which seemed to focus on their reproductive organs. The Hills' story became the 1966 bestseller, *Interrupted Journey*, and was made into a television movie in 1975.

Budd Hopkins had retained a casual interest in the subject of UFOs throughout this period, but in the autumn of 1975, his involvement began to deepen, after the proprietor of a nearby liquor store related to him a story of how he had seen a flying saucer land in a park in New Jersey one night some months before. Hopkins, who knew the man and didn't consider him a tale-teller, investigated the story and found several independent witnesses who substantially corroborated the man's account. 'That was so stunning to Budd that he really decided to follow up on these things,' remembers Joan. Hopkins wrote about the case for the Village Voice and Cosmopolitan, and soon people were telephoning him with tales of other UFO experiences. Many of these tales hinted at encounters with UFO occupants, although the individual's full memory of the encounter would often seem to be masked by a sense of amnesia, or 'missing time'. Working informally with several mental health professionals who had experience in regression hypnosis, Hopkins began to collect detailed accounts in which apparently normal people claimed to have been visited by aliens, taken into spaceships, and then subjected to various medical procedures which included the taking of skin samples, sperm or egg samples, and the insertion of metallic 'implants' in various places throughout the body. Hopkins believed that some of these claims were supported by the presence of otherwise 'unexplained' scars or marks on abductees' bodies. In 1981, Hopkins's book about such cases, entitled *Missing Time*, was published by Putnam's. After this, his caseload of abductions grew rapidly, and his UFO research began to eclipse his art. In 1987, Hopkins's second book, *Intruders*, detailed the apparent alien practice of inseminating female abductees with alien sperm and then re-abducting the abductees later to harvest their hybrid alien/human babies.

In the wake of *Intruders* - and of another abduction-survivor's book, Whitley Strieber's best-selling *Communion*, which was published around the same time - there was a sharp rise in the number of people telling stories of abduction by aliens. The abductees approaching Hopkins included such professionals as attorneys, policemen, teachers, airline pilots, and even psychologists and psychiatrists. ('They should know whether it's a real thing,' says Hopkins of the therapists who have come to him for help in coping with their abduction experiences.)

In the late Eighties Hopkins began to set up a formal network of ufologists and mental health professionals who could handle the apparent epidemic, administering hypnotherapy to abductees and otherwise building up a record of cases. Hopkins's abduction research colleagues came to include academics such as David Jacobs, a history professor at Temple University in Philadelphia, and John Mack, a psychiatry professor at Harvard and winner of a Pulitzer Prize in 1975 for his psychoanalytic biography of Lawrence of Arabia.

Despite minor differences over the nature of the aliens' abduction programme, Hopkins, Jacobs and Mack agreed that the phenomenon was widespread. This view was supported by a survey which they helped to design and which was carried out by the respected Roper polling organisation in late 1991. This survey asked about 6,000 respondents whether they had experienced any of the symptoms which Hopkins and his colleagues believed were indicative of alien abductions. These symptoms included a sense of missing time, out-of-body experiences, mysterious scars and bruises, and recollections of awakening at night with the sense of a strange presence in one's bedroom. The poll results, if applied to the population as a whole, suggested such symptoms were experienced regularly by several million Americans.

'ARE YOU interested in art?' Budd Hopkins asked me as he led me into his studio for an interview on an autumn day last year. I wasn't really interested in art, at least not in the sense he intended, but his question was a poignant reminder that this man at the centre of one of the 20th century's most bizarre social phenomena, itself arguably a form of art - himself arguably its chief patron - had not yet cast off his other persona, that of the proud abstract expressionist painter, the friend of Kline and Rothko and Motherwell, ensconced in intellectual New York.

Along one wall of his studio hung samples from his Guardians series: brightly painted wooden sculptures
with suggestions of heads and striated tails, inspired by ancient bas-relief figures but vaguely resembling tropical birds. From another wall stared a triptych in which lines and planes of colour exploded from a segmented central eye. I sat on the leather couch where abductees normally lay for regression hypnosis, and Hopkins told me about the Linda case.

'An absolutely terrific case,' he exclaimed. 'A sensational case . . . I have an audio tape and 90 pages of letters . . . There are two videotapes involved. There are physical samples that are being tested at two different universities.' Hopkins was keeping most of this evidence to himself, for his planned book about the case, but he said that one of the physical samples was an apparent alien 'implant' taken from Linda's nose. The audio and video tapes were of interviews with various witnesses.

The witnesses to the UFO abduction of 30 November 1989, according to Hopkins, included not only Richard, Dan and Perez de Cuellar, but a woman whose car had mysteriously stopped on Brooklyn Bridge, and another abductee who had seen a UFO over the East River that night. In addition, Linda's husband and son had videotaped interviews (one of which I watched) describing their encounters with Richard, Dan and a man fitting the description of Perez de Cuellar.

Hopkins told me that he had written to Perez de Cuellar via several channels, in an attempt to confirm Richard and Dan's story, but that he had merely received a letter signed 'The Third Man' in which the latter explained to Hopkins that he would always deny his alien abduction experiences if asked.

Some time after he received that letter, Hopkins's friend and fellow UFO enthusiast, the Prince of Liechtenstein, had written to Perez de Cuellar (who had recently been a house guest at his palace) employing a more subtle strategy. Liechtenstein's letter began with some comments about a recent Perez de Cuellar speech on the subject of nationalism, and closed with the brief, bland comment that at a party recently he had met Perez de Cuellar's friends Richard, Dan and Linda - the latter having been dressed as 'the Lady of the Sands'. In his response, Perez de Cuellar acknowledged the Prince's comments about nationalism and other prosaic matters, ignoring the references to Richard, Dan and the Lady of the Sands. To Hopkins, this suggested that Perez de Cuellar, as expected, remained unwilling to comment on his abduction experiences. As for the possibility that Perez de Cuellar had never been abducted, that Richard and Dan didn't exist, that Linda's tales and those of the other 'witnesses' represented nothing more than a moderately complicated hoax - well, Hopkins had considered it and rejected it. 'There isn't any doubt about the Linda case,' Hopkins told me. 'A hoax never has a thousand and one moving parts.'

OBSERVERS of the UFO abduction phenomenon often point out its similarities to other folkloric encounters specific to particular cultures, from fairy abductions to visits from demons and angels. 'The extraterrestrial abduction is the modern secular version of the religious dream, very much like Jacob's Ladder,' says psychologist Michael Persinger, of Canada's Laurentian University.

Persinger, who is one of the few academics to have published papers on the abduction syndrome in peer-reviewed scientific journals, argues that UFO abduction scenarios are typically experienced in an altered state of consciousness, often during restless sleep, a hypnotic trance, or some other half-awake state. The 'alien' or other entity experienced, Persinger believes, is really an intrusion into the normal sense of self, which is dominated by the left hemisphere of the brain, by processes normally unconscious within the right hemisphere of the brain. Such intrusive entities would be shaped, at least in part, by the cultural material to which the hallucinating person had been exposed.

'These are quite normal phenomena,' Persinger emphasises. 'They are part of dealing with the complexities and anxieties of the everyday world.' But he argues that some people are inherently more likely to report such phenomena if their brain's temporal lobes, which often seem to mediate the experience of right-brain intrusions, are prone to seizures or other sudden bursts of activity, or if their left brains are naturally less dominant. 'They're usually the more creative individuals,' says Persinger. 'They're the ones who are more sensitive to changes in their environment - and they're usually individuals who are more cognitively female, which means they're more intuitive . . . and involve or utilise creative processes to solve personal problems.'
Persinger believes that in rare cases, UFO abduction experiences may be triggered by actual close-encounters with UFOs - which he believes can be natural electromagnetic phenomena, generated by geological and atmospheric processes and related to ball lightning. According to Persinger, the magnetic fields associated with a UFO, at close range, may trigger temporal lobe seizures and right-brain intrusions, bringing about an altered state of consciousness in which a UFO encounter or other culturally defined hallucination is experienced, or creating amnesia upon which the spurious experience or 'memory' of a UFO encounter is later imposed, perhaps during hypnotic regression therapy.

In any case, the idea that the main cause of UFO abduction stories should be sought in the minds of abductees is also supported by the apparent connection between the UFO abduction syndrome and a class of psychiatric disorders known as the dissociative disorders, whose best-known variant is Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD). 'There are several checklists for symptoms of suspected UFO abductions,' says George Ganaway, a psychiatrist and dissociative disorder specialist of Emory University in Atlanta. 'Those symptoms are remarkably similar to the symptoms we clinicians use to diagnose dissociative disorders - things such as periods of missing time, unexplained marks or wounds on the body, the experience of a presence around you, the feeling that you're not alone, the feeling that you're being influenced to behave in certain ways . . .'

An innate tendency to fantasy may explain some of the elaborate tales told by UFO abductees, but there is evidence that social factors are also at work. Most abductees are female, and belong to support groups which revolve around a charismatic male UFO abduction researcher or therapist. (Budd Hopkins hypnotises about a dozen female abductees on a regular basis.) Similar conditions prevailed during the epidemics of demon-possession among convent-confined nuns and other young women in 17th-century Europe and America; possessees then tended to flock around male exorcists or witch-hunters, and the inevitable competition for attention encouraged wild tales of abuse and outrage. The anthropologist I M Lewis, who has studied and described the female-dominated cults which spring up around many spirit-possession syndromes in the Third World, notes that competitive stories of trauma are found there, too. 'There would be a lot of competition between devotees for attention.'

SINCE Budd Hopkins began to publicise the case at UFO research conferences, some of his other abductees seem to have grown annoyed at Hopkins's preoccupation with the case, referring to Linda derisively as the 'Queen Bee abductee'. One abductee diverted some of Hopkins's attention with claims that she had been abducted, gang-raped, and in one case apparently subjected to occult-like ritual abuse, by aliens, government officials, and half-alien/half-humans. But Hopkins remains convinced that Linda's abduction - and her subsequent harassment by men who appear to be government agents - is far from imaginary.

Some of those sceptical of Linda's claims suggest that her case, like the abduction phenomenon in general, has become a distraction from the more subtle but perhaps more interesting aspects of the UFO phenomenon. 'It becomes a joke for the news media,' says Joe Stefula, a New Jersey ufologist who has been one of the most vociferous sceptics over the Linda case. 'The media don't want to hear things about (UFO-related) government documents and lights in the sky. They jump on this abduction stuff.'

Hopkins, meanwhile, has responded to his critics by publishing articles in various UFO journals, as well as appearing frequently at UFO conferences in America, Europe and Australia to promote the Linda case. Increasingly, he has brought Linda with him to buttress his arguments. Responding to a questioner at a recent conference in Connecticut, she said: 'Maybe I am crazy. But if I am crazy, then there are millions of others all around the world that have the same sickness.'

David Jacobs and John Mack have both rallied to the support of Linda. 'Linda has been victimised twice,' wrote Jacobs in a recent issue of the journal International UFO Reporter, 'much like a rape case in which the victim is put on the stand at the trial . . . and the rapist's attorney tries to show how she was responsible for bringing it on herself.'
'The idea,' wrote Mack in the same journal, 'that this sincere and honest woman could be involved in an elaborate hoax is so absurd as to force attention upon the motivation of those making such a bizarre claim. Linda . . . is clinically, characterologically, humanly - use whatever language you like - incapable of such a deception . . .'

Perez de Cuellar, meanwhile, continued to face queries about his own alleged abduction. Last summer, Jay Sapir, a long-time UFO enthusiast who is also the Midwest bureau chief of the United Press International radio network, interviewed the former Secretary-General during a brief stopover at Chicago's O'Hare Airport. Hopkins, notified by Sapir that the interview was going to take place, was also present. Sapir says that he and Hopkins were struck by Perez de Cuellar's apparent evasiveness. 'I asked him every which way about this whole issue - of UFOs, spaceships, whether or not a world body like the UN should be involved in monitoring them. I phrased the question in six different ways and he would not touch it. He kept talking about Saddam Hussein and the UN Charter and peace in the Middle East, to the point where I had to say, literally, 'Mr de Cuellar, stop one moment, do you understand what I mean by Unidentified Flying Objects? UFOs? Spaceships?'

Sapir says that he eventually handed Perez de Cuellar an issue of International UFO Reporter, in which the former Secretary General's alleged UFO encounter in Manhattan had been described. 'I showed him his name in it,' says Sapir. 'At that point he flatly denied it. His words were, 'I certainly don't remember anything like this. There's a restaurant we go to in Brooklyn sometimes. I don't know, maybe my guards saw some strange light a few years ago . . .' He shook his head, with a mixture of amusement and amazement.'

'I'm not convinced that the Third Man is not de Cuellar,' says Sapir, looking back on the episode, although he is also prepared to believe that the Third Man might be some other political figure instead. 'I am convinced that de Cuellar is at least consciously convinced it's not him. But I mean, if you believe these things, there's all kinds of mind control, and they switch you off . . .'

Perez de Cuellar's denial did, however, somewhat dash Sapir's hopes of a big story. 'I don't know what I'm going to do with this subject. It always seems to slip through my fingers every time I think I have something solid.'Hopkins will not comment on Sapir's interview with Perez de Cuellar, but according to Sapir, he came away from it 'more convinced than ever' that Linda's abduction by aliens had occurred and that Perez de Cuellar had been an involuntary participant. Indeed, it seems that, for the artist-turned-ufologist and his colleagues, the central question is no longer whether Linda is a hoaxter, or whether the abduction syndrome is merely a space-age form of mass hysteria. The central question is: what can we do to cope with this invasion of apparently unfeeling, clinically minded aliens?

'What we must do as human beings,' Hopkins told his recent Connecticut audience, 'is to fall back on to our own inner resources, our own art, our own vision, our own sense of what mystery really is to us. And I think, profoundly, that the aliens envy us for this. I think one of the reasons they're here is that we have humour, we have sex, we care for our children, we make art . . . I think they're fascinated by us.'

Jim Schnabel's book about UFO research, 'Dark White', is published by Hamish Hamilton on 14 February

(Photographs omitted)