

*The original Man in Black was the devil himself, so presumably Men in Black are at least his first cousins. But what has this to do with a body of stories from the secular confines of ufology? Nothing? Something—but not what you think? Jerome Clark takes a look at one of saucerdom's oddest legends.*

## **Men in Black** **by Jerome Clark**

They don't necessarily have to be dressed in black to be called the Men in Black (MIB), though most often they are. They don't even have to be sinister, though most often they are, and they usually drive big black cars and they habitually call on selected UFO witnesses and UFO researchers to tell them to shut the hell up.

They are not, in other words, loved. In fact, they're so distinctly unpopular that many ufologists go to some lengths to deny their existence. They say that the stories in which they star are fictions concocted by the supermarket scandal sheets and the pulp flying-saucer magazines and that they're "real" only to those so far gone into dingbat paranoia that they probably should be locked up for their own—and ufology's—good.

UFO buffs have spent the past thirty years trying to make UFOs "respectable." The more serious of them—excluding those doughnut heads eager to book passage on the next flying saucer to Venus—have emphasized those aspects of the phenomenon least difficult to swallow: unidentified lights seen from a safe distance by "reliable witnesses," i.e., persons with impeccable middle-class credentials, or even an occasional landing if, say, the alleged observer is a cop or a college professor.

You can't blame them. Who wants any part of a

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phenomenon whose manifestations include the following unlikely episode which a popular singer—a man whose name you would recognize—swears happened to him a few days after he'd had a "respectable" UFO sighting?

The singer, who insists on anonymity, claims he was walking out of his Las Vegas hotel when a clean-cut young man approached him. The young man said he was part of a crew filming a documentary on UFOs and he wondered if the singer would be willing to talk about his sighting in front of the camera. The stranger was sufficiently persuasive that the singer, who if he had been a UFO buff would have known better, boarded his black Cadillac, and the two drove on out of town and into the desert, where the movie supposedly was being made.

On the way the stranger offered the singer a drink from a bottle. The singer took a swallow and suddenly began to feel "strange." As his head reeled and he struggled to remain conscious, he realized he had been drugged.

Suddenly, out in the middle of the desert, the car stopped. The singer was dragged outside, where he saw a bizarre sight: sixty automobiles were lined up next to each other with their headlights on. A host of "strange people" stood about, their attention directed toward a large, fat man who was arguing vehemently with someone. The singer was less than pleased when he discovered he was the subject of the controversy. They were trying to decide what to do with him.

"Does he know too much?" the fat man asked.

"No," someone else answered. "All he knows is what they told him."

With that the singer was led back to the Cadillac and driven to his Las Vegas hotel. Stunned, still trying to comprehend just what had happened to him, he watched the Cadillac disappear in traffic. He never saw it again, and to this day he hasn't the remotest idea what the weird episode meant.

Maybe he should talk with Albert K. Bender, who says he knows what the whole damn thing—the UFOs, the MIB, and all the rest of the spooky paranormal stuff—is about. He even wrote a book about it, which you can believe if you dare. It's all there in black and white, every-

thing and then some that you'd like to know about the perils of having MIB as houseguests.

You ought first to know, however, that Bender was always, well, different from your average factory clerk (which is what he did for a living). Decent and likable enough, certainly, but on the odd side, maybe even a trifle—or more—adolescent. Maybe even a prime candidate for certain other things besides MIB visitations.

He lived on the top floor of a three-story house in Bridgeport, Connecticut, with his stepfather, and he'd converted his section into a "chamber of horrors." He painted pictures of Frankenstein, Dracula, and the Wolfman all over the walls of his room and placed shrunken heads and artificial bats, spiders, snakes, and rats on the tables and shelves. They wrote about it in the local paper. When he was not attending horror movies or reading science-fiction stories, he was perusing treatises on the occult and black magic. He was also directing one of the very first UFO fan clubs to come into existence, the International Flying Saucer Bureau.

In 1953 ufology, which in more recent years has attracted a fair number of scientists, academics, and conscientious field investigators, was a decidedly fringe pursuit that appealed mostly to the more excitable science-fiction fans. They saw flying saucers as possible real-life counterparts to the imaginary spaceships they were thrilling to in *Amazing Stories* and *Astounding Science Fiction*. "Research" consisted of collecting newspaper clippings about sightings, and the "theories" that filled the IFSB publication, *Space Review*, were as naïve as the cheap pulp fantasies that inspired them. It is very difficult, in short, to believe that Al Bender solved the UFO mystery.

That, however, is just what he claims he did. And because he did, he earned himself a place, for better or worse, in UFO history as the guy who gave the MIB their big start.

When it happened, the IFSB was a highly successful, rapidly growing organization which had already established branches in several foreign countries, and Bender basked in his newfound celebrity as an international flying-saucer personality. For a time—until one day in

September 1953, to be specific—Al Bender was a very happy man. Then it all fell apart.

It happened, Bender subsequently would assert, after he had written a fellow UFO buff about a theory he had devised to explain the origin and purpose of flying saucers. (The theory apparently suggested in part that UFOs were entering the earth's atmosphere over Antarctica.) Soon after, when three men dressed in black suits appeared unannounced at his home, one of them was carrying Bender's letter. (Later Bender would hint obliquely that his correspondent, whose identity he has never revealed, was one of the three men.) Shortly thereafter Bender, pale and trembling from the revelations the MIB had passed on to him, closed up shop and bowed out of ufology.

Eventually several of Bender's close associates were able to piece together part of the story. They got him to say this much: the three men had told him something he would rather not have known—the true, tummy-turning, brain-boggling solution to the UFO enigma.

One of those who talked with him shortly after the alleged visit was Dominick Lucchesi, a fellow saucer fan and gyroscope technician for the Bendix Corporation. Lucchesi recalls, "Bender didn't seem to be talking about government agents. He was talking about some type of authority but it didn't really appear to be government people. Whoever they were, they showed enough authority to really impress him. I don't think the government alone could have scared him that much. And he was *really* scared."

So scared, in fact, that he flatly refused to discuss the matter further. That, of course, only served to drive saucerphiles batty with exasperation.

The most exasperated one of all was Gray Barker, who spent so much time trying to unravel the deeper meaning of the Bender Mystery that he ended up writing an entire book on it, a fascinating and scary work entitled, appropriately enough, *They Knew Too Much about Flying Saucers*.

Six years later Bender produced his own book, *Flying Saucers and the Three Men*, which purported to be the true story of his encounter but which even the ordinarily

guileless recognized as a work of clumsy and absurd fiction. Even Barker, who published it, admitted he found it too much to take.

Bender's much-anticipated "secret" came to this, much to the disappointment of those who had expected something fantastic yet wanted it still to be somehow credible: the three MIB were paranormal intruders who whisked him away in a spaceship to the South Pole, where he met the occupants of the flying saucers, grotesque monsters who were collecting minerals from the oceans to take back to their native planet, called "Kazik." When they departed in 1960, freeing him of the hold they had over him (Bender reported that whenever he'd even *think* of revealing the secret he'd be cut down with a severe migraine), Bender hastened to write his book.

Barker, a Clarksburg, West Virginia, theater owner and longtime publisher of UFO books and magazines, frankly concedes that the Bender manuscript "disappointed" him. "Maybe," he says, taking the most charitable interpretation, "it was something that came to him in a trance or in a dream, something like that. Maybe if I'd been in his room while he was in 'Antarctica' I would have seen him lying in his bed in a trance."

Perhaps. But Bender makes at least one major blunder in his book—one that is hard to square with the view that he was somehow "honestly mistaken." He writes that "Kazik" is pronounced "Kayik"; yet nowhere does he mention seeing the word in print. The clear implication, of course, is that "Kazik" was fixed in Bender's mind as a written rather than spoken word.

Dominick Lucchesi says, "I've known three Benders in my life. The first one—the one I knew when he was directing the IFSB—was a real super person, interesting, jovial. He was honest and straight almost to the point of being a square. If you'd met him, you'd have liked him immediately."

"The second Al Bender was the one we met after the three men came. A frightened, sick man. He was the kind of guy who was never too imaginative but somehow he got blasted by somebody. I've never seen anyone so shaken."

"The third Al Bender was the author of *Flying Sau-*

cers and the Three Men. He was entirely different from the other two. He just didn't come across as real. He never really gave you a straight answer to a question; it was as if he didn't want to talk about any of this stuff. He gave a couple of lectures after the book came out and that was that. He dropped out of sight and moved to California.

"The book is a fantasy. There's not much doubt about that. I think he wrote it to do Gray a favor and to get all of us off his back. We pressed him so hard and we just wouldn't let go. We probably forced him into a corner and he figured he had to come up with *something*. Maybe, being a basically honest guy, he felt a little guilty and that's why he was so unenthusiastic about promoting the book."

"I still believe a great deal in Bender," Barker says, "even if the second story is hard to swallow. I believed Bender and believed him so well that I find it difficult to shake off that belief. I'm talking about the first story, not the one he wrote about in his book. It could still be true. I think it is. And I still have no idea what really happened to him. Only Bender knows that."

If he does—and I doubt it, for reasons we shall get to shortly—Bender isn't talking. Now a Los Angeles resident and the director of an organization which seeks to perpetuate the music of film composer Max Steiner, he won't discuss his MIB experiences. In a brief letter to me in which he declined to be interviewed, Bender made this cryptic statement: "I would like to add before I close that in 1977 something spectacular will take place involving space." \*

Maybe so. On the other hand there is no assurance that Bender was not romancing—either deliberately or unconsciously. There are many elements in the story that suggest that even before his purported space trip he was obsessed not only with flying saucers but with horror movies, demonology, and black magic.

By his own admission Bender had long entertained certain dark suspicions about some of his correspondents, chief among them Dominick Lucchesi, whom his other

\* In this, as in his 1953 statement that the truth about UFOs will be known in four or five years, Bender proved a poor prophet.

friends have never accused of being anything other than a bright, engaging Jerseyite. But Bender writes, "I sensed then, and have believed ever since, that his devoted interest in UFO research involved motives in addition to a desire to solve the saucer mystery."

Elsewhere he makes these curious remarks:

"After I closed the IFSB, [August] Roberts, Gray Barker . . . and [Lucchesi] visited me to find out why. . . . During [the] 'grillings,' I believe it was Lucchesi who got me out of many difficult corners as I tried to satisfy my questioners without revealing information I feared I might accidentally release. I felt that Lucchesi often led the questioning to diversionary areas when Barker and Roberts came too close to the truth.

"During one of the two interviews . . . I made a bad slip. Lucchesi . . . tensed visibly as I made it, and again he diverted the conversation to another area."

(Lucchesi, who left the UFO scene some years ago, told me he believes flying saucers are the creation of a secret colony of superscientists operating out of some isolated region of the earth. He thinks that is what Bender concluded and the reason the MIB shut him up.)

I believe we can reasonably speculate that Bender's "mysterious" correspondent was none other than Lucchesi, an innocent man on whom Bender projected a paranoid fantasy. Later Bender wrote the consciously fictional *Three Men* to get himself out from under UFO-buff pressure. In the meantime he continued to conceal the "real" secrets he believed the MIB had told him, assuming presumably that no one would be the wiser.

I like that explanation. It's neat, compact, and logical, the way all explanations should be. It soothes the soul and comforts us with the knowledge that we need no longer worry and can go on about our business. It prevents us from awakening in the middle of the night scared of the dark. Only—

Only there are these other stories told by people who don't sleep with Dracula paintings on their bedroom walls and who don't spend all their waking hours thinking about UFOs. In fact some of them could never have *heard* of UFOs, at least by that name (though they've been around

a long time, they were never given any name at all until a much-publicized sighting over Mount Rainier, Washington, in 1947 inspired the term "flying saucers").

It is highly unlikely that Bender ever read this item, published in the March 30, 1905, issue of the *Barmouth Advertiser*, a Welsh newspaper—unlikely because the story was not discovered until the late 1960s, when a British ufologist came upon it while researching a 1905 UFO scare in rural Wales:

"In the neighborhood dwells an exceptionally intelligent young woman of the peasant stock, whose bedroom has been visited three nights in succession by a man dressed in black. This figure has delivered a message to the girl which she is too frightened to relate."

Then there are these curious events, which are said to have occurred four years later, in May 1909, after a man named Egerton S. Free observed a cigar-shaped object hovering over the beach at Clacton-on-Sea, Essex, England. The morning after the sighting his wife discovered a bag made of steel and rubber in the immediate vicinity of the UFO's appearance.

About a week later, on May 16, two "foreigners" showed up and scoured the area. "Then the men went to the back of the house, where the stables are situated and where for some time I kept the article," Free told the *East Anglican Daily Times*. "The men hovered about the house persistently for five hours, that is until seven o'clock in the evening. When the servant girl set out to church, she heard them conversing in a foreign tongue. Finally they came up to her, one on each side, and one of the men spoke to her in a strange language. The girl . . . was so frightened that she ran back to my house, and would not again leave for church."

The episode occurred in the midst of a wave of UFO sightings which most commentators believed were caused by German airships reconnoitering for a planned invasion of the islands. On May 20 the *South Wales Daily News* remarked, "A Colchester [man] states that, although the stories that have been circulated as to German military airships hovering over Colchester are dismissed as canards, serious attention is being paid in that garrison town to

continual reports that are received by the police and other authorities as to the presence of foreigners, whose sole business seems to be to take notes of cross roads and buildings in the neighborhood of Colchester. Several instances of this have lately been noted by the police."

Whatever the "airships" might have been, the Germans were not responsible for them, aviation historians attest. Neither were the "foreigners" German agents. So who the hell *were* they?

The Pentagon would also like to know. And so, too, would a lot of people, including a very frightened man who will be known here as Paul Miller.

You see, Paul Miller made the mistake of shooting a man from a flying saucer. It all happened—so we are told—one cold, rainy evening in November 1961 when Miller, a civilian employee of the Air Force, and three companions—a school superintendent, a college professor, and an Air Force sergeant—were driving home to Minot, North Dakota, from a hunting expedition when they saw a "luminous silo" descend in a field near them. Since none of them had ever given UFOs much thought, they thought an airliner had crashed—until the object abruptly disappeared. A local cop to whom they reported the occurrence didn't believe them until he drove out to the site and observed a peculiar light himself.

A few minutes later, Miller and company, who had resumed their journey home, were decidedly displeased to see the damned thing again. Two humanlike beings suddenly emerged from the object and Miller, panicking, shot and wounded one of the figures. The hunters fled the scene but on their way to Minot experienced a mysterious mental blackout which removed about three hours from their conscious memories. The trip to Minot, which should have taken an hour, inexplicably took four.

But they were too frightened to concern themselves with that particular aspect of the experience. What did concern them was the matter of keeping the incident in strictest confidence among themselves. They didn't want *anybody* to know what they had seen and done that evening.

What Miller, who had never heard of Al Bender, did

not know was that he was about to receive a visit from the Men in Black.

They arrived the next morning at the federal office where Miller was, and is, employed. There were three of them and they were well groomed, well dressed, and official-looking. They introduced themselves as government men but produced no credentials to that effect—a detail that was to astound Don Flickinger, a U.S. Treasury agent who in his private capacity as a UFO researcher investigated the case.

The men took Miller aside and asked if he was telling the truth about his encounter of the night before. Miller, suitably stunned, demanded to know where they had heard about it. "We have a report," they responded, not very helpfully.

As Miller recalled the interview, "They asked me a few questions about this object we had seen and most of their questions were just like they knew what we had seen." Curiously, they did not ask about the shooting incident, only about the first part of the episode.

"They seemed to know everything about me, where I worked, my name, everything else," Miller told Flickinger several years later. They were most interested in what he had been wearing that night and insisted on driving him to his home, where they closely examined the hunting clothes and the boots he'd had on.

After doing so, two of the men walked out the door and into the car. The third, the one who had done most of the talking, lingered for a moment. He thanked Miller for his cooperation, then added in an unpleasant tone, "You'd better not say anything about this to anybody." Miller assured him he would not and the visitor left, leaving Miller stranded. He had to call a cab in order to get back to work.

Soon after that, Miller contacted his hunting companions and demanded to know who the blabbermouth was. The three vehemently denied telling anyone anything.

Eventually the men confided the story to their families but otherwise maintained a frightened silence. Several years later Flickinger accidentally heard something about

it and with considerable difficulty was able to persuade three of the principals to discuss the incident (one had since moved to the east coast and could not be located). All insisted on total anonymity. They were scared—and they're still scared.

The Pentagon, on the other hand, was merely pissed off. UFOs had become a major public relations headache for the Air Force, which by the mid-1960s just about everybody and his crazy uncle suspected of suppressing the truth about flying saucers—to the extent even of silencing UFO witnesses and researchers.

It didn't help matters either that a bunch of weirdos were running around identifying themselves as Air Force officers or government agents and threatening people involved in one way or another with UFOs. For years the men of Project Blue Book, the Air Force body that dealt with UFO reports, had issued monotonous—and, contrary to all paranoid suspicions, perfectly sincere—white papers denying the existence of UFOs. The fact of the matter, though not widely known or believed, was that the service had been sick unto severe nausea of the flying-saucer mess since 1953 and long since had taken to conducting only the most perfunctory "investigations" of sightings. (In 1969, after a supposedly independent study by the University of Colorado—actually a government-sponsored whitewash—echoed its conclusions, the Air Force departed from ufology for good, to nobody's great regret.)

But for a long time, rumors of the Flying Saucer Conspiracy (as its chief proponent, retired Marine Corps Major Donald Keyhoe, called it in the title of a best-selling book) flew through the stratosphere almost as swiftly and as frequently as the UFOs themselves, in part because many people had a hard time believing the government was really as stupid as it appeared to be. Another reason was that "officers" or "agents" were calling on UFO witnesses, often before they'd even had a chance to tell their neighbors about what they had seen, and cautioning them to keep their lips zipped. If the observer had taken some pictures, the agents might demand that he turn them or at least the negatives over. Sometimes the

appeal would be to the observer's patriotism. Sometimes it would be a simple bluntly stated threat. Whatever it was, it usually worked.

Early in February 1967 Colonel George P. Freeman, Pentagon spokesman for Project Blue Book, told a reporter, "We have checked a number of these cases and these men are not connected with the Air Force in any way." Freeman complained about a number of incidents, among them a Wanaque, New Jersey, case in which an individual clad in an Air Force uniform had ordered a group of UFO witnesses not to tell anyone what they had seen. Another mystery man, identifying himself as an FBI agent, had seized a UFO photograph from a Grand Blanc, Michigan, restaurant owner.

"We haven't been able to find out anything about these men," Freeman said. "By posing as Air Force officers and government agents, they are committing a federal offense. We would sure like to catch one."

A few days later, on February 15, Air Force Lieutenant General Hewitt T. Wheless, Assistant Vice Chief of Staff, sent out a letter to all commands ordering them to forward any reports they had of men posing as military officers and threatening UFO witnesses.

The weirdest "officer" of all called upon Mrs. Ralph Butler of Owatonna, Minnesota, one day in May 1967. Mrs. Butler had seen a UFO some months before and her visitor wanted to talk with her about it. Identifying himself as "Major Richard French," he said he was an Air Force officer, but in Mrs. Butler's opinion, he certainly didn't look like one. His hair was too long, for one thing. For another thing, he was just too damned *new*. Everything about him was slick—his car, his suit, his tie all looked as if he'd just bought them. And he looked funny, "about five feet nine inches tall," she recalled, "with a kind of olive complexion and pointed face."

But that was nothing compared to what really bothered Mrs. Butler—which was that this character, after accepting a bowl of Jell-O the lady had offered him, actually tried to drink the stuff.

It turned out that there was a Major Richard French in the Air Force in Minnesota, but he bore no resemblance

to the spooky personage who had called on Mrs. Butler. Suddenly there were MIB all over the place and they weren't all posing as Air Force officers or G-men.

One, a six-and-a-half-foot-tall, three-hundred-pound, pasty-faced character who called on a suburban New Jersey family after they had seen a UFO at close range, identified himself as a representative of the "Missing Heirs Bureau." They thought his manner was sort of odd—for example he spoke in an emotionless singsong voice "like a recording" and he had a wire coming up out of his sock and disappearing under his trousers—but they took him at his word. Later it occurred to them to wonder why he was wearing such a thin coat for such a blustery winter day, why he had been able to walk through the snow without getting his feet wet, and why he drove off with a peculiar companion in a big black Cadillac with its headlights off.

The next morning a woman called to say that the family they were looking for had been located in California. But who were "they?"

"They don't exist," John Keel says.

Because Keel, a sometime television writer and a full-time UFO writer, has done more to publicize the MIB phenomenon than anyone anywhere, this bald assertion—which Keel is fond of making—often precipitates a sharp intake of the listener's breath and an abrupt dropping of the jaw, especially after Keel has just finished telling you about his own run-ins with the boys in black.

What he means, it develops, is that the MIB "sort of" don't exist. He could just as easily say that they also sort of *do* exist, but that's not Keel's style.

Depending upon whom you ask, John Keel is either ufology's greatest pioneer or its premier crazy—or maybe, as some say, he's both. In any case there is a considerable portion of the ufology community who will never forgive him his trespasses against them.

No one had ever heard of him until 1966 when, armed with a contract to do the "definitive" book on UFOs, he headed down the Ohio River Valley to investigate a series of sightings of flying saucers and assorted



creepy-crawlies, including a mammoth bug-eyed "bird" locals had dubbed, after a character on the Batman television program, "Mothman." Keel spent thirteen months off and on in the valley, finally emerging to tell some of the wildest stories anyone had ever heard. Some of them were about quasi-Oriental types who dressed in black suits, drove black Cadillacs, and threatened Keel's informants.

This was nothing most ufologists, who had been anticipating the imminent acceptance of a well-mannered UFO phenomenon into the middle class, wanted to hear. That was Bender Mystery stuff, and that had long ago been relegated to the fringies, who had decided that the MIB were (a) demons and/or (b) Jews.

The Jews were prime suspects because some of the early saucer fringe personalities were graduates of earlier political fringe groups which one could characterize, without resorting to significant hyperbole, as fascist in inclination. After Hitler's Final Solution had rendered the open advocacy of anti-Semitism a difficult proposition, American fascists resurrected a code phrase: "International Banker." Those conversant in the literature of political booby-hatchery knew full well what an International Banker's ethnic composition was likely to be, but it just sounded better to call the secret rulers of the world by that name than by that other one.

In the years after World War II, as America's home-grown fascists reluctantly realized that the goosestep was not particularly likely to supplant more conventional methods of walking to the grocery store, some of them gazed sickly at diminishing audiences and diminishing revenues, then at length looked up—and saw flying saucers.

With people in them, people with blond hair and blue eyes. With a strangely familiar social and political philosophy. Who were fighting the Silence Group, *née* the International Bankers, *née* the—well, never mind. But these bastards were in league with the head MIB himself and were making the world miserable for decent white folks and were dispatching these thugs in dark suits to thwart the good work of the Ary-er, the Space Brothers and...

You get the picture. Somehow the idea, which attracted enough of a kook following to keep the people who proposed it in beer and sausages through the 1950s, never really caught on in the good gray mainstream of American ufology. The mainstreamers, if they thought about the MIB at all, saw them as agents of a lesser conspiracy, this one directed by the Air Force and Project Blue Book. This particular conspiracy was no more real than the one the International Bankers were supposed to be orchestrating, but at least belief in it was relatively harmless. Maybe it was even beneficial in a way; latter-day revelations that the American government routinely lied to and spied on the American people surprised ufologists less than it did most of their fellow citizens.

But John Keel was not a fascist, a cultist, or a diploma-mill messiah. So therefore, the Ufology Establishment reasoned, he must be an outrageous liar who was just inventing all this wild stuff about MIB and worse. His "witnesses" must be fictitious people. All ufologists had to do was to go down there to Ohio and West Virginia and prove it.

They returned ashen-faced and muttering. Yes, they said, the people Keel had cited were real. No, they weren't nuts. Yes, they were scared as hell about some awfully weird events that they insisted had happened to them. No, they weren't all a bunch of superstitious hillbillies. *Something* damn strange was going on.

Pretty soon you didn't have to go down the Ohio River Valley to encounter the really weird stories. They were all around you, always had been, apparently, because some of the stories you heard turned out to be a few years old; it was just that, as Keel had said (albeit in a manner invariably calculated to irritate the hell out of you), you weren't asking the right questions. Or reading the right books—for example, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, in which the late black leader recalled his own encounter (in a prison cell) with a classic MIB:

"He had on a dark suit, I remember. I could see him as plainly as I see anyone. . . . He wasn't black and he wasn't white. He was light-brown-skinned, an Asiatic cast of countenance, and he had oily black hair.

"I looked right into his face. I didn't get frightened. I knew I wasn't dreaming. I couldn't move, I didn't speak, and he didn't. I couldn't place him racially—other than I knew he was a non-European. I had no idea whatsoever who he was. He just sat there. Then, as suddenly as he had come, he was gone."

A Milwaukee truck driver told me about his own confrontation, in September 1975, with an MIB who appeared to retrieve a power-cell-like device the man, who confided the story to me on condition that I not reveal his name, allegedly was given by a UFO occupant. The MIB looked, according to the driver, "like a white person with certain Chinese features and lightly tanned skin. I couldn't really figure out what his race was."

(Among their other dubious achievements you can credit the MIB with perpetuating the energy crisis. The truck driver claims the spaceman allowed as how the device the MIB stole back into the twilight zone with had enough energy in it to run a city the size of Chicago for twenty-four hours.)

If you can get someone who believes he's run afoul of the MIB to talk about it—and more often than not it would be only slightly more difficult to persuade such people to allow you to extract their toenails with a pair of tongs—he's likely to describe one or more of these racially ambiguous crypto-Asians, or else oddballs of decidedly anemic appearance who talk funny (usually in broken English or in a "mechanical monotone" or in an annoying singsong rhythm), or else men (reports of WIB are very rare, women's lib having made little progress in these circles) of normal appearance who speak pure American (or Spanish or Portuguese or French or Norwegian or whatever—the U.S.A. has no monopoly on these reports). And if that isn't enough for you, there are a few scattered and obscure reports of midget MIB and others of MIB who exhibit a marked reluctance to show their faces, choosing instead to conceal them between the turned-down brims of big black hats and the turned-up collars of big black coats; some MIB are even said to cover their entire faces, mummylike, with tape.

One of the ultimate MIB stories brings the Loch Ness

Monster into the equation. The supposed witness was Welsh naturalist F.W. Holiday, author of two books on the Ness phenomenon.

Holiday claims that one day in June 1973 he had just stepped out of a house on the banks of Loch Ness when he spotted a strange figure standing by a gate leading down to the loch.

"It was a man dressed entirely in black," he recalled. "Unlike other walkers who sometimes pause at this corner to admire the view he had his back on the loch and was staring at me fixedly. Indeed, he seemed to be waiting for me to return. We were about thirty yards apart and for a few seconds I stared back wondering who on earth this was. At that moment I remember clearly receiving a strong sensation of malevolence, something cold and passionless and possibly threatening although the figure had not moved.

"I moved forward warily, never taking my eyes from the shape. He was some six feet tall and appeared to be dressed in black leather or plastic. He wore a helmet and gloves and was masked even to the nose, mouth, and chin. The eye region was covered in goggles but on closer approach I failed to detect any eyes behind the lenses. The figure remained motionless as I came up except possibly for a slight stirring of the feet. It didn't speak and I could hear no breathing. The whole unexpected episode was most sinister and quite unbelievable. Uncertain what to do and still groping for some commonplace explanation, I walked slowly past him at a range of about a yard and then stopped, looking down on Loch Ness.

"I stayed thus for perhaps ten seconds and when I turned it was with the intention of obtaining contact with the being to prove it was in fact a person. This was done almost subconsciously. I had the vague plan of pretending to slip on the grass so that I might lurch against the figure. In any case I intended to speak and elicit a verbal response. But this was not possible. While I was in the process of turning my head a slight whispering or whistling sound made me swing around to find the man had gone. He had been only three yards away and could only have gone along the road. When I stepped forward to look there was

nothing to be seen in either direction. Half a mile of road was visible to the right and about a hundred yards to the left. No normal person could possibly have scaled the roadside fences in the time available."

Holiday was so perplexed by the incident that he mentioned it to no one. He even tried unsuccessfully to persuade himself that he had seen a motorcyclist.

A year later, however, something happened that put it all in a kind of sinister perspective—at least for Holiday. He was back at Ness on a research trip when he was struck down with a coronary attack. He wrote, "It may have been no more than coincidence that I was, in fact, carried on a stretcher, en route to the hospital, over the exact spot where the black figure had stood."

So who cares? John Keel is thinking. He may be the man who brought the MIB out of the closet, but that doesn't mean that by now the subject doesn't bore the bejabbers out of him. Somebody is bending his ear about her own MIB experience and his eyes glaze over until they fix on the nearby bar toward which we were making our way until we were interrupted.

Finally, over exotic Mexican drinks (we were in Acapulco at a UFO conference) he tells me that ufologists—a species of humanity of which he is not especially fond nor to which he is often kind—shouldn't bother with the MIB now that at last they have taken the painful step of conceding their presence—because the MIB don't exist.

"You mean they *sort of* don't exist," I correct him wearily.

Keel thinks that MIB—and UFOs, bug-eyed monsters, and a lot of other peculiar things human beings perversely continue to insist they have seen—are "transmogrifications" (a good occult word); that is, parapsychical manifestations which emerge temporarily from the "super-spectrum," a vast invisible energy field which Keel theorizes surrounds the earth and which regularly drops paranormal phenomena into our midst. Without realizing it, we are creating these things ourselves. We see flying-saucer spaceships because our Space Age culture has conditioned us to the idea of extraterrestrial visitation. The

MIB are "simply" modern-day projections of an ancient archetype which the late Dr. Carl Jung termed the "shadow"—the hidden, destructive side of the unconscious mind—which less sophisticated peoples have identified as demonic guardians of forbidden knowledge. In Eastern mysticism they're called, fittingly enough, the Brothers of the Shadow.

I suppose that could explain why the MIB could figure in a psychotic episode, as they did in Bender's case, and also in "real" occurrences in which the MIB appear to have a sort of "objective" existence. In either instance, the source is the same: the archetypes of the collective unconscious; only sometimes they're just hallucinations concocted by a single disturbed individual and exist only in his "reality"; at other times, for reasons we're a long way from understanding, they may enter our collective "reality" and even assume a certain physical substance.

Impossible? Not necessarily.

Mme. Alexandra David-Neel was a remarkable Frenchwoman who received her education at the Sorbonne and in later years explored vast tracts of Tibet which no other white traveler had crossed before her. She was awarded a gold medal by the Geographical Society of Paris and was also a Knight of the Legion of Honor. In one of her books, *With Mystics and Magicians in Tibet*, Mme. David-Neel writes of the *tulpa*, described as a "visible and sometimes tangible thought-form independent of its creator."

While living with the Tibetan yogis, Mme. David-Neel, who had on occasion seen these entities come into existence, decided to create one, which she conceived of as a short, fat, good-natured lama. After some months of studied concentration the *tulpa* appeared, and Mme. David-Neel took it with her when she and her retinue resumed their travels across the country.

"Now and then," she wrote, "it was not necessary for me to think of him to make him appear. The phantom performed various actions of the kind that are natural to travelers and that I had not commanded."

Finally the situation got out of hand.

"A change gradually took place in my lama. The

countenance I had given him altered; his chubby cheeks thinned and his expression became vaguely cunning and malevolent. He became more importunate. In short, he was escaping me. One day a shepherd who was bringing me butter *saw* the phantasm, which he took for a lama of flesh and bone."

Mme. David-Neel realized she was going to have to destroy her creation before it could do harm.

"I succeeded," she said, "but only after working at it for six months. My lama was hard to kill. That I should have succeeded in obtaining a voluntary hallucination is not surprising. What is interesting in such cases of 'materialization' is that other persons see the form created by thought."

Of course I am not suggesting that anyone is *consciously* willing MIB *tulpas* into "existence." The implication of Mme. David-Neel's story and others like it is that on some level—call it the superspectrum, the psi field, the collective unconscious—mind and matter interact and fashion shadowy phenomena which briefly enter our world and for the duration of their appearance are at once "actual" and "imaginary," "real" and "unreal"—sort of existing and sort of not existing.

Parapsychologists have already established to their satisfaction that the poltergeist—that variety of apparition which has the nasty habit of tearing up people's houses—is not a "ghost" at all but a psychokinetic phenomenon whose source is the unconscious mind. In other words, parapsychologists claim to have determined that a physical effect can have a mental cause; mind can create matter.

In a classic work on psychical research, *The Imprisoned Splendour*, Dr. Raynor C. Johnson postulates "a psychic aether or 'substance' which partakes of some of the qualities of matter (such as localization in space and retention of form), and which is yet capable of sustaining thought images and emotions: something, in sort, which is a bridge between matter and mind."

In a 1923 essay entitled "An Experience in the Occult," the great German novelist Thomas Mann recounted the story of a séance he attended with medium Willi Schneider, then a nineteen-year-old dental assistant.

While Mann held the twisting, entranced youth, handkerchiefs and bells sailed about the room, a music box played, and the keys of a typewriter were struck by the fingers of Schneider's "spirit guide." Mann, an open-minded skeptic with no particular interest in the occult, wrote, "Any mechanical deception or sleight-of-hand tricks were humanly impossible."

He concluded that the phenomena were caused by the medium's mind, which somehow translated its dreams into objective realities. "It was Hegel," Mann remarked, "who said that the idea, the spirit, is the ultimate source of all phenomena; and perhaps supranormal physiology is more apt than normal to demonstrate his statement."

But you don't have to believe that—or any of the foregoing—if you don't want to. You might prefer to believe that the MIB tales—there are hundreds, maybe even thousands of them, of which the above have been only a small, more or less representative sampling—are generated by a massive secret network of jokesters whose sole function is to amuse, irritate, and frighten UFO buffs. Or you can mutter that there are a whole lot of nuts out there and wonder if the whole goddam human race isn't heading inexorably toward a massive nervous breakdown. Or, if it makes you feel any better—though I fear it doesn't happen to be true—you can persuade yourself that *I* invented the MIB just to test your credulity.

That's up to you. Have it any way you want. But in the meantime watch out for black Cadillacs.