

TRANSCRIPT of MEN IN BLACK, pt. 1, the origin of the theory

SARAH: [00:00:00] Hello there. This is Sarah from Weird horizon. I cover topics of the creepy, paranormal and weird variety, so if you're interested in both *what* we believe and how we got here, join me as we deep dive into the topic and theorize where we might next come up for air.

Hello, my friends, this is Sarah from Weird Horizon. You're joining me today on slightly different sound. I'm trying to perfect the laziest podcasts I can, my ideal future would be doing this, but just reclined on my sofa with a microphone just next to me. And I just talk about the topic and that will be the absolute ideal scenario.

So I'm trying to be a bit more comfortable because I keep absolutely contorting myself into the strangest shapes trying to record this. And you can always just hear it in my voice. I'm just like gasping for breath because I'm like folded into myself like a pretzel. [00:01:00] So I'm trying sound a bit more relaxed today. Hopefully it'll sound a bit more relaxed because I'm keen to talk about this topic.

I've been going down an absolute rabbit hole with this topic. It is so interesting to me. I can't give this topic full justice. This is going to miss out some stuff, because it's just massive, but I hope you enjoy this little primer on the topic of 'men in black'. It goes some very interesting places and I hope you enjoy.

For almost as long as there have been reports of UFOs, there have been reports of shadowy visitations by men in black suits come to be known as 'men in black'. Few people watching the Men In Black movies would think that this concept is based [00:02:00] on any particular person or that the nameless figures prominent in the X-Files, ready to expunge all evidence of visitation as soon as they occur, might be more than just a narrative device used to keep our detectives on the constant chase.

But there are dozens of accounts of UFO researchers being approached by the shadowy figures. And various photos and videos, apparently showing these mysterious individuals weaving themselves into major events in the UFO timeline, coming to discourage those who may have gotten a little bit too close to the truth.

What kind of truth this may be varies wildly depending on who you talk to. There are a myriad of ways to approach the UFO mythos and how it interacts with these control systems many do not believe even exist. It is thought that they may work alongside the U S government as [00:03:00] a sort of layer insulating regular government from the ufologists and the

UFO researchers who may in their investigations stumble across something that they shouldn't have.

So what do these 'men in black' look like? Well, they're often quoted as men dressed in black suits, hence the name. Descriptions vary, but in all they carry an unsettling aura, their facial features are claimed to be eerily nondescript, their manner of speaking, sometimes robotic, sometimes oddly lyrical. An accent that betrays no distinct area of origin.

Some claims that they have no distinguishing features at all, even going so far as to say they had no facial hair or that any hair they had appear to have been recently shaved, perhaps in an attempt to render the individual as indistinguishable from the mass. Claiming to be members of a quasi governmental [00:04:00] agency above and beyond the systems we know of and acknowledged to this day, they are said to harass and threaten those researchers who stray too close to the information that they are tasked with protecting. Their aim, to ensure that these people keep quiet about what they know.

Many who claimed to come into contact with them were scared out of the field entirely. The 'men in black' conspiracy was born out of the advent of the modern UFO narrative at the very early point of convergence between the government support of people's research into UFOs, before their quick attempts to discredit those who researched the field, even going so far as to suppress any members of the military who may come out with stories in support of ufologists.

Out of this paranoia inducing turn came it supposed enforcers. The history of the [00:05:00] 'men in black' and the systems of government suppression in general, when it comes to counter-cultural groups, has as varied and complicated a history as UFOs themselves.

The root of the question is this... If the aim of 'men in black', sanctioned somewhere along the line by government, military or intelligence operations was to keep UFO researchers from revealing secrets better kept hidden for whatever reason, why did they go to such bizarre lengths to do so? And why did they participate in and perpetuate or at the very least failed to deny the myth of the 'men in black', when these organizations have far more effective ways of keeping people quiet, if need be?

And more puzzlingly, if their efforts had not galvanized portions of the UFO community against the shadowy threats, would the UFO community have fizzled out on its [00:06:00] own? Would this threat to national security have neutralized itself, had the government just done nothing.

Again, the question of whether this is even linked to the government is questionable at best. There is no solid ground when you're talking about this topic.

I've already covered a lot of the most famous UFO encounters in my previous series on UFO religions. And though I don't think it's necessary for you to listen to that series, to enjoy this, I think these two can work together as kind of two sides of the same coin. Some of the first ever ufologists were said to be plagued by these visitations, and the questions that their sudden silencing brought up helped to set off UFO research in various different directions as exist today. If they had found the truth, but could not share it, eyes were immediately [00:07:00] turned to their research, attempting to put together an incomplete and shifting puzzle. An awareness of some of these individuals theories when it comes to UFOs can help to understand just how varied the field was and continues to be. Some of the people we'll be hearing about today are very prominent early figures in UFO research, and some have become prominent names due to their entangling with the US government.

The 'men in black' mythos seems to have sprung up at the point that the US military went from tacitly accepting UFO sightings and encouraging details around them (kind of around the sort of Kenneth Arnold era of UFO sightings), to their blanket approach of dismissal, even to the point that anyone encouraging these theories could face prison time and fines, if they were government.

There was a very conscious decision made to distance the American government from this idea of the UFO, [00:08:00] despite, or maybe because of the fact that a lot of the UFO sightings occurred on or around military bases. For this reason, though, today our discussion will primarily focus on the US UFO scene. Even though of course the UFO is not uniquely American, nor is the idea of any kind of shadow agency.

Whether they were the agents of the government or whether they were a concurrent myth spun up to discourage others from researching UFOs while the movement was in its infancy, we will be researching both of those theories.

There is also of course, the maddening question of whether the 'men in black' themselves represent some kind of extra-terrestrial being. A distinction is made therefore in UFO literature, between 'men in black' and Men In Black, each word with capital letters. So if you see these two written, there is a distinction between these two.

So the former are believed to be [00:09:00] human agents who cover up governmental secrets, which is mostly what we're going to be focusing on today. And they're said to appear relatively normal. To the latter, with

capital letters are often abbreviated as MIB, and described by the late ufologist, John H Keel author of the book slash film, *The Mothman Prophecies* as 'demonic supernaturals who behave in distinctly non-human ways'. Depending on what approach you come at this mythology from, there are multiple ways you can view the 'men in black', similar to the rift we find between UFO contactees, channelers and ufologists.

Depending on which viewpoint you approached this, you can come to very different conclusions about the purpose and the origin of the 'men in black'. So first things first, what does a visitation from the 'men in black' look like? So a quote from a journal article called [00:10:00] 'The Men in Black, experience and analogues with the traditional devil hypothesis', *'One of the oldest legend proposals of the age of flying saucers, concerns the mysterious men in black.'*

The story begins with factory clerk, Albert K. Bender. Described by everyone who knew him as eccentric and interested in the paranormal and UFO, but nevertheless, he was seemingly a very down to earth, individual, no pun intended.

'The mystery of the flying saucers', he stated in his editorial for the first issue of *Space Review*, a UFO publication, 'will eventually be solved by calm, clear thinking individuals'. Bender did not think of himself or his colleagues as saucer addicts, or space nuts. And this approach appealed to many people, *Space Review's* readership grew hugely because of this.

So Bender was [00:11:00] the President of IFSB, which is the International Flying Saucer Bureau. But despite being President of a saucer publication, he did not in fact have any UFO encounters of his own. But he did have probably the most famous 'men in black' encounter - one which spurred investigations and a book on the subject by his colleague at the bureau, Gray Barker, called *They Knew Too Much About Flying Saucers*. Which is our primary source today and looks at how Ufologists of the time reacted to, as he termed 'men in black' and traces these commonalities between his colleagues at different UFO publications being approached and seemingly silenced by this new threat in 'men in black'.

But Albert Bender believed that the theoretical first contact with UFOs or with aliens would come not from a flying saucer, but by [00:12:00] concentrated mental effort. So he organized the readers of his publication *Space Review* to chant in their mind at a specific time on March the 15th, a day he coined c-day or contact day the following mantra.

"Calling occupants of interplanetary craft that have been observing our planet, Earth. We are of IFSB. We want to make contact with you. We are your friends."

But although Bender viewed first contact as peaceful and something to be strived towards, something turned him away from the subject entirely just at the point that he felt he had had a breakthrough. But it seems that the breakthrough itself wasn't the thing to turn him away, but the run-in with the 'men in black' that followed swiftly afterwards. Here's a rundown of the events in Barkers [00:13:00] words, as recounted by a reluctant and very shaken Albert Bender.

"Three men in black suits with threatening expressions on their faces.

Three men who walk in on you and make certain demands. Three men who know that you know what the saucers really are. They don't want you to tell anyone else what you know.

The answer had hit you like a flash. This is it! I KNOW I have the ANSWER!

The next day the theory didn't sound as convincing to you as it did before. Nevertheless, you wrote this down and sent it to someone. When the three men came into your house, one of them had that very same piece of paper in his hand.

After they got through with you, you wish you had never heard of the word saucer. You turned pale and got awfully sick. You couldn't get anything to stay in your stomach for three long days."

[00:14:00] Bender closed out his publication almost entirely, maintaining a short run of non UFO based issues for the subscribers who wanted it. He closed out with this statement.

'The mystery of the flying saucers is no longer a mystery. The source is already known, but any information about this as being withheld by order from a higher source.

We would like to print the full story in Space Review, but because of the nature of the information, we are very sorry that we have been advised in the negative. We advise those engaged in saucer work to please be very cautious.'

It's the same kind of statement we will hear from other ufologists who come into contact with 'men in black'. It goes on to say that there will be certain confirming facts released to the public soon. That without confirmation of these facts, no more information can be shared.

[00:15:00] A common refrain. When Bender was interviewed by even his closest friends, for the interest of safety, he could not answer those

questions... Questions that had been setting the UFO community ablaze, the origin, the purpose, the needs of these craft or its potential inhabitants. He knew the answer and he couldn't tell any of them.

Bender confessed to his friends and colleagues that the men had more or less edited the copy for the future issues of *Space Review*. So the evidence of their manipulation could play out in its pages. This confirming information, needless to say, never appeared. Bender would slowly but surely remove himself from anything to do with flying saucers. The 'men in black' had gotten their wish.

But why would such a devoted ufologist suddenly turn their back on the subject? As Barker says, 'there's something about flying [00:16:00] saucers and the prospect of space travel that almost takes over a person's life.' And for both of them, it practically had.

Space Review and IFSB took up basically all of the free time of a team of enthusiastic volunteers. They weren't really making any money off of this. They were doing it out of pure love of the subject. So what had happened that could so thoroughly take the wind out of the sails of the Bureau's President, after all?

'Men in black' are said to often appear in suits, unusually wrinkle-free moving with a strange motion and quality, as if their legs and torso were not quite attached to their body or not attached in the usual way. Favoring big black sedans and dark glasses, often visibly shaved so as strip them of any human individuality. Racially ambiguous with a distinct, implacable tone of speech [00:17:00] in turn, sing song and monotone (we've covered these details before) form a sort of collage of things that don't quite fit together or at least fit together to form this disquieting impression of a person.

Bender relates that these men 'showed credentials', but Barker raises quite correctly that government men do not dress so conspicuously, especially if they're on a secret mission or an important mission. All three men were dressed similarly, in black. Put simply, government spies probably go out of their way to *not* dress like government spies, to not develop a recognizable uniform that can be disseminated amongst their targets. Maybe then there was a purpose behind steering this narrative towards a governmental hypothesis...

But if the visitors were not governmental in nature, what could they [00:18:00] possibly say to a private citizen (and one interested in counter-cultural topics such as UFOs) that could silence them entirely? 'The way Albert talks', says Barker again, 'I would believe that some rights of American citizens are being infringed upon.' And if this is the case, why would they not just go to the police? Or why would they not be

more vocal about this crime done against them? Many of the people I will discuss, including Bender, had means of getting messages out. They had publications of their own, often. But they left behind a vacuum, which is quickly filled in by evermore elaborate theories and fracturing the UFO community more so than it was already.

And perhaps this was the point. This is something we will circle back around to.

But physically these visits left in their wake nausea, vomiting, migraines, loss of appetite and [00:19:00] sleep paralysis-like symptoms. Many of these symptoms might sound familiar to you from abduction narratives. We can draw parallel as well between the lost time and inaccessible memory of the abducted with the kind of willed amnesia from 'men in black' victims. Many are said to be burdened with the answer to a question that they wish they had never asked. This missing time in abduction accounts came to be in the seventies, the sort of homogenizing and legitimizing factor in sorting the true encounters from the false one. And this is from an article on the 'UFO contact movement from the 1950s to present'.

'If you ever arrived home from a road trip inconceivably late or blacked out for any reason, UFO abduction was thought to be a distinct possibility.' The seemingly very [00:20:00] similar turn in attitudes from truth seekers, to the point that they are persuading their friends to abandon their search entirely, seems to be one of the legitimizing factors in true 'men in black' encounters, in that they wished they had never started this in the first place. They have an answer that they wished they had never sought. From Barker again, on his friend 'it appears he had lost all the interests and enthusiasm that used to seem to set him on fire, so to speak. Now that he evidently knows.' This complete 180 when it comes to mood, again, echoes a topic with abduction narratives.

Abduction, if they are to follow the agreed upon sort of pattern, leave their victims not being able to consciously recall the events that took place. But there is something curious that happens to some abduction victims when they have recalled this [00:21:00] information, their attitude towards the events change over time, sometimes, from a site of trauma to actually a positive interaction, a relationship that some even come to say they miss. And you could argue, this is evidence in some people's minds of a kind of weaponized mood manipulation. Exactly when and where this concept of mood manipulation became entangled with the UFO story we may never know, for reasons I hope that are becoming clearer and less clear at the same time.

The 'men in black' conspiracy theory has become so interwoven with UFO popular culture, you would be forgiven for thinking that it was an

invention of Hollywood, and that therefore these sightings pop up around the release of similar media in film or television. We will compare more [00:22:00] against the Bender case in the coming weeks, but for now, now that we have this blueprint. But in brief, some of the most documented cases and Bender case I was talking about today, most of these visitations occur in the fifties. They're not coming out at the same time Men in Black movies are coming out or X-Files is coming out. They are coming out at a time where most of the most lengthy communications between the individuals involved, were done in person or through letters, although the tale does continue into the internet age and take some even more bizarre turns as we will find out.

With UFOs in general, though, there is a point at which the urologists parted ways from the saucerians, and now with 'men and black', we see the optimists branch away from the counter-cultural conspiracy theorists and with all the negative connotations that it's really starting to have. Fear of [00:23:00] persecution, acting outside of the mechanisms meant to dole out justice. The idea that the more they try to push you around the more you're on the right path. This is a counter-cultural thread that has only strengthened over time and as a fairly modern, and well-documented emerging mythos, the UFO story kind of gives us an opportunity to see this play out amongst its members.

But that does not mean that it does not share a commonality with other folklore, particularly paranormal folklore traditions. The appearance of 'men in black' has been likened to descriptions of the devil. It has been variously offered as proof of a manifested collective fear. A kind of tulpa, created from, and at the point of this terrible, fantastic breakthrough that it's at the root of all of these cases, a [00:24:00] 'materialized tuloidal form, stabilized by collective fear of Big Brother.'

Again, this comes from the article on 'analogues with the Devil'. Another curious detail which may indicate more of a shared lineage with the paranormal phenomena than would appear on the surface, is how common a smell of sulfur would accompany both the 'men in black' sightings and the sort of contemporary UFO sightings. Sulfur, again, being tied to the Devil.

Furthermore, the men's ability to seemingly say so much, but not say anything at the same time, tied the researchers up to the point that they are incapacitated, brings to mind the Devil as the mythological trickster. This is all to say that the trappings seem new, but the core concept seems old.

Indeed, iff contactees such as [00:25:00] Adamski framed their extra-terrestrial visitors in a quasi-Christian sense, (even implying that Jesus was a benevolent alien/human hybrid), then 'men in black',

especially extra terrestrial Men in Black, MIBs, may represent the other side of that sort of religious alien hybrid coin.

The real fear and the real tension though in the UFO narrative, I would argue, is around the idea that the aliens may already be among us. In how we would navigate a world where human achievement may pale in comparison with its neighbors. And the fact that the modern sort of UFO scene has kind of gone in this direction, shows that it is one of the scarier aspects of UFO theory. And therefore is the one that catches a lot of attention. So it's one of these theories that is promoted, I [00:26:00] think, to stay relevant, to stay on the cutting edge.

But could this be the 'fantastic' truth that Bender was terrified of. Barker supposed that there might be a future where the mind of the average citizen, imbued with the delusion that he was alone in the universe, had snapped. Snapped at the idea that not only was he not alone, but the aliens were in fact among us and had a part in our history.

I will leave that there, because that is a little theory that we will dive into on its own. But I will summarize briefly with a point raised about the abduction phenomenon, which I think is just as true for the shadowy 'men in black' sort of, mythos. 'The abduction phenomena is not this monolithic belief, but a plurality of beliefs related to a more or less stable experience claim.'

This is from an article by [00:27:00] Thomas Bullard on UFO abduction reports, 'experience interpretation, personal need, and rival theories, complicate the abduction phenomena with intricate layers of nuances of belief.' So we will continue this discussion next week with some more famous 'men in black' cases and compare them with this sort of most famous experience. And we'll start to dig in a little bit more into the sort of rival theories, interpretations, and personal needs that complicate how you approach the 'men in black' mythos alongside the UFO mythos.

Thank you for joining me this week as we dip our toes into the topic of 'men in black' so to give us a good foundation to build on next week. [00:28:00] If you would like to interact with me between uploads, you can find me on Twitter as Weird Horizon, and you can find me on Instagram as WeirdHorizonPodcast.

Bye.