

Men in Black
from the Minneapolis Star Tribune

They sat quietly, leaning toward the lectern in a dark-paneled room near Lake Calhoun as a professor from New York told of his encounter with one of the mysterious Men in Black. In the audience were people like biophysicist Otto Schmitt, a retired professor of electrical engineering at the University of Minnesota, retired aircraft developer and physicist Cecil Behringer, physician Steven Zuckerman and polymer scientist Arthur Coury, Medtronic's director of venture technology.

Peter Rojcewicz told them there have been hundreds - perhaps thousands - of such encounters over the centuries. "The Men in Black are part of the extraordinary encounter continuum - fairies, monsters, ETS, energy forms, flying saucers, flaming crosses," said Rojcewicz, a 37-year-old professor of humanities and folklore at New York's Juilliard School. The modern era of Men in Black - visitations by mysterious, black-clad men who seem evil and threatening - goes back to at least the early 1950s when a man named Albert K. Bender allegedly saw a UFO in Bridgeport, Conn., and was later frightened by a visitation from three Men in Black.

Rojcewicz told the audience that his own MIB (Men in Black) experience occurred in 1980. "I have never gone public with this before," he said. Most of the modern era MIB encounters have followed sightings of UFOs or strange lights. Rojcewicz's encounter involved no sightings. He was just sitting in the University of Pennsylvania library, reading a UFO book suggested by another professor who thought that Rojcewicz, as a folklorist, would be interested in such phenomena. "Then in the corner of my vision I noticed a black pants leg and a black shoe, scuffed," Rojcewicz said. The folding chairs in the auditorium of the Bakken Library of Electricity in Medicine, 3537 Zenith Av. S., stopped creaking as Rojcewicz's audience listened intently. Standing in front of him, Rojcewicz said, was a very gaunt, very pale man. He was about 6-1, weighed about 140 pounds and wore a black suit, black shoes, black string tie and a bright white shirt. "His suit was loose and it looked as though he had slept in it for three days," Rojcewicz said.

Rojcewicz didn't know what to make of the figure. At the time he wasn't aware of the Men in Black phenomena which, he subsequently learned, dates back to at least Biblical times. "He sat down, like he had dropped from the ceiling - all in one movement" - and folded his hands on top of a stack of books in front of him, Rojcewicz said. The Man in Black asked Rojcewicz what he was doing. Rojcewicz said he was reading about flying saucers. "Have you seen a flying saucer?" the Man in Black asked. Rojcewicz said he hadn't. "Do you believe in the reality of flying saucers?" Rojcewicz said he didn't know much about them and wasn't sure he was very interested in the phenomena. The man screamed: "Flying saucers are the most important fact of the century and you are not interested?" "I tried to calm him," Rojcewicz said. The man got up, once again all in a single awkward movement, put his hand on Rojcewicz's shoulder and said: "Go well on your purpose" and left.

Rojcewicz looked out at his audience. "In 10 seconds I was overwhelmed by fear. . . . I had a sense that this man was out of the ordinary and that idea frightened me. . . . I got up and walked around the stacks toward where the reference librarians usually are. The librarians weren't there. There were no guards there - there was nobody else in the library. . . . I was terrified."

He went back to the table where he had been reading "to get myself together. It took me about an hour. Then I got up and everything was back to normal, the people were all there." He didn't talk about his experience in public because he was concerned about how people might

react to his story, he said.

Was he dreaming? He doesn't think so. He said he suspects he was in an "altered state." Rojcewicz said he thinks his experience - and that of others who have been exposed to the Men in Black - are somewhere "in the crack" between real life and fantasy.

He has been studying anomalous phenomena such as the Men in Black ever since his 1980 experience. He has interviewed many people who have reported UFOs, flying saucers and Men in Black experiences. He said the Men in Black most frequently appear in threes, but sometimes in twos, ones and fours. Some of the MIBs carry brief cases and represent themselves as being Air Force UFO investigators, he said. The MIBs warn UFO spotters to tell no one of their experiences with aliens from outer space.

When the MIBs leave, people are fearful, dizzy and, sometimes, nauseous, he said. Frequently their lives are changed by the experience. Some become more successful in their jobs and marriages and report a joie de vivre. Others lose their jobs and marriages. One of his friends quit a good academic position and went into hiding, he said. Some become addicted to drugs, and many feel they have been victimized, he said.

He said the reaction varies with a person's culture, religion or openness to imaginative ideas. To illustrate the various reactions he cited a case of a psychiatrist and her husband, a professor of education, who saw a UFO in Maine and subsequently had a MIB encounter. "She has been all right since then, but he has not." The professor was left lethargic and troubled by the encounter.

Rojcewicz, who teaches at the C. J. Jung Foundation for Analytical Psychology as well as at Juilliard, said he suspects the psychiatrist was able to handle the experience better because she is more open to spiritual matters while her husband by training and experience is rooted in the acceptance of only what seems reasonable.

In another case, Rojcewicz interviewed a woman named Deborah from Burlington, Va., who said she had been visited by a slender, 6-foot, 9-inch Man in Black who was wearing a bowler hat. She said her knees went weak when the man was close to her. She said of her experience: "There was something wrong - evil about this." When Rojcewicz telephoned Deborah to recheck his notes, there was a beeping on the line and they couldn't hear each other. He redialed and the line was all right.

Rojcewicz said there are references to Men in Black going back to Abraham in Biblical times, and there have been many similar stories in folklore over the years. Often the Men in Black have been considered to be the devil or his representatives. Some of the Roman Catholic church's saints had Men in Black experiences. The church itself recognizes the possibility by endorsing exorcism, Rojcewicz said.

What is a good defense against the Men in Black? "Laughter," Rojcewicz said. "If they ask you why you're laughing, tell them, 'Rojcewicz told me to do it.'" He added: "When you confront evil, don't feed them your fear. Say you are not worried - ha-ha."

When his talk was over, several of those attending were asked if they took the Men in Black stories seriously. "Maybe there is something there," said Dennis Skillings, director of the Archaeus Project, which sponsored the meeting. But he said he doubts that there is any way of confirming that MIB encounters "really, truly happened."

Zuckerman, a specialist in internal medicine, said he thought Rojcewicz was serious. "I have a friend who knows a fellow who is investigating reports that men from space are coming to Earth and taking biopsies of

people's calf muscles," Zuckerman said. "He says the biopsy sites heal right away." Why would people from outer space take biopsies of people's calf muscles? "An interesting question," Zuckerman said with a smile.

The Archaeus Project, which is subsidized by Medtronic founder Earl Bakken, regularly brings in researchers in the field of the paranormal and so-called alternative science for special lectures.