

The Fourth Kind

The Fourth Kind movie review.

November 13, 2009

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Check out The Fourth Kind movie trailer at the end of this blog.

The Fourth Kind kicks off my first official Friday movie review blog. It's about something near and dear to my heart: alien abduction.

Before I get started, I wanted to mention that I hate movie reviews and coming attractions that give away too much of the movie. I'll try to avoid doing that with mine, but of course some plot details will have to be mentioned. I promise I will try hard to not ruin surprises and plot twists.

Do you believe in UFOs? I try to keep an open mind about them. There are millions of reports – can they all be explained away as weather balloons, swamp gas and nutty people who crave attention? An argument against the existence of UFOs is that any intelligent life would exist so far away from Earth that it would take forever for them to reach us. To that I say, who the heck knows what kind of technology they may have?

I happen to have a very good friend who has seen a UFO. She is a sane, smart, college-educated professional with a Master's degree and a family, and I've never gotten the impression that there's anything amiss in regard to her mental stability, except maybe that she has maintained a close friendship with me for many years. She was living in upstate New York at the time of her sighting. To those of you who are familiar with UFO lore, she didn't live too far from the area in which Whitley Strieber experienced his abduction experiences as written in his really scary book, *Communion* (which spawned a pretty awful movie starring Christopher Walken; if you're interested in this stuff, read the book and skip the movie).

My friend was driving home one night when she noticed a ring of spinning lights in the sky. I think she said they were blue. As she was looking at them she realized they appeared to be attached to the bottom of something really huge -- a gigantic, spherical object that was a darker-than-night shadow against the night sky. Then, as she watched, it just sort of disappeared. One minute this huge object was there in the sky, the next minute...gone. She found out the next morning that she was not the only one who saw it. There was a newspaper story, and it stated that the object was observed by multiple witnesses, including some cops.

I mean, gee whiz, even Jimmy Carter saw a UFO, when he was the Governor of Georgia. He remains the only U.S. president who ever filed an official UFO sighting report.

The Fourth Kind gets its title from the scale applied to UFO encounters. Like many people, I first learned of this scale via Steven Spielberg's masterpiece, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (I remember riding home in the back seat of my parents' car after seeing *Close Encounters*, and looking up at the night sky with newfound wonder). The rating scale was developed by J. Allen Hynek, a prominent astronomer and UFO researcher. Hynek's ratings only went up to level three. A UFO sighting was an encounter of the first kind; a sighting accompanied by some kind of physical evidence, such as scorch marks in a field, was the second kind; the third kind was contact.

I was familiar with the first three, but apparently, at least according to someone who posted an entry on Wikipedia, there are now seven "kinds." The fourth is abduction by a UFO or its occupants, the fifth is willful and perhaps ongoing contact (as opposed to forced abduction), the sixth is a UFO encounter that causes injury or death, and the seventh is alien/human hybridization. Yikes to that last one. Let's just say that numbers four through seven may be open to debate, and I'm not sure they're universally accepted by those who accept these sorts of things.

The Fourth Kind is about a psychologist named Abigail Tyler who discovers that some of her patients in Nome, Alaska, have been experiencing the same type of unsettling nighttime experiences, in which owls play a role. Owls are common images in stories of alien abductions. The abductees appear to think of owls because the face of an owl resembles the face of an alien -- assuming you believe in that kind of thing, of course.

Under hypnosis, Dr. Tyler's antsy patients reveal that they have been abducted by aliens. Judging by their reactions upon remembering, it must have been quite an unpleasant experience. Yet they never say exactly what happened. One patient

only moans something like, "It's more horrible than you could imagine." Yeah? Well, tell us what the heck happened! They never do.

As if this weren't weird enough for Dr. Tyler to deal with, she gets some face time with the aliens, too. And all this is the icing on the cake while she's trying to come to grips with the murder of her husband, shown in flashback at the beginning of the movie. I tell ya, if I were her, I'd retire, get a Prozac prescription, pack up the kids and hightail it out of Nome.

The twist with *The Fourth Kind* is that the movie portrays itself as a true story. Dramatizations starring actors are spliced together with documentary footage of the real people who were supposedly involved. In the movie, Dr. Tyler is portrayed by Milla Jovovich (my favorite element from *The Fifth Element*), but the real Dr. Tyler appears as well, via interview footage with Olatunde Osunsanmi, the film's director.

I was intrigued, especially at the outset, when I thought that the story being told in *The Fourth Kind* might be true. There are creepy moments when the nature of what's really troubling these people becomes apparent, and the "authentic" video footage, often showing Dr. Tyler's patients' sessions, provides some chills. Soon things get more hectic, with levitating people channeling the aliens while speaking ancient Sumerian. It proves surprisingly simple for Dr. Tyler to find a guy who speaks Sumerian, and he pops up in Nome almost immediately with little convincing, to help out. At that point, all he really does is stand around and look bewildered.

Once the levitations and Sumerian entered the picture, the air of believability faded away and I realized I had been duped. None of this was real, dagnabbit. I later poked around the Internet and discovered that the general opinion is that Abigail Tyler is a fictional character created for a viral marketing campaign for the movie. Or is she? The movie keeps up the front right through the end credits.

The alien stuff was pretty weird, but for me, the all-time scariest alien abduction scene took place during a 1993 movie called *Fire in the Sky*. Those aliens were severely lacking in bedside manner. If you haven't seen this movie, see it and see if you don't agree with me.

If you like alien abduction movies, I also recommend a 1975 TV movie called *The UFO Incident*. It's about the 1961 case of Barney and Betty Hill, played in the movie by Estelle Parsons and James Earl Jones. Jones has since given voice to a couple of aliens, most notably Darth Vader and one of the tentacled aliens in the very first Simpsons "Treehouse of Horror" episode.

The Hills are suffering from nightmarish visions, and under hypnosis it comes out that they were taken aboard a UFO and subjected to medical experiments. I can't say any of these movies makes me ever want to undergo hypnosis! What I find especially interesting about the Hill case is a star map that Betty Hill drew while under hypnosis. She said an alien showed it to her. In 1968, a teacher discovered that the stars Betty had drawn matched the Zeti Reticuli star system, and that three of the stars, forming a triangle, matched stars that were not mapped out by anyone on Earth until 1969. Yet Betty drew her map in 1961. That's kinda eerie. Of course many scholarly skeptics try to poke holes in everything that has to do with the Hill case, the party poopers.

The Fourth Kind had a few genuinely scary moments, and I thought the "based on a true story" angle, with concurrent "documentary" footage shown along with dramatizations, was unique. I did feel a little ripped off once it became apparent that it was all a fake. Hmm...at least I think it's a fake.

Final Verdict: Okay, but not great.

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