

# Ancient Astronauts Modern Mysteries

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## UFOs—30 YEARS OF INVESTIGATION

June 1977 will mark the 30th anniversary of Kenneth Arnold's famous sighting of flying discs over Mt. Rainier in the state of Washington. Although there were innumerable sightings earlier that year, June 24, 1947, has become the accepted date for the beginning of modern ufology. Private pilot Arnold is also credited with introducing the term "flying saucer." Several years later, Capt. Edward Ruppelt of the U.S.A.F.'s Project Blue Book coined "Unidentified Flying Object" (UFO).

For the past 29 years, thousands of people have spent part of their lives, and a lot of their money, acting as amateur investigators of the phenomenon. An entire generation has grown up surrounded by comic books, movies, and television dramas concerned with the questions raised by the flying saucer mystery. Today's young people accept the presence of strange objects in our skies as easily as they accept jet airplanes and manned flights to the Moon. Flying saucers have become as real as ball-point pens to millions of people all over this planet. Nearly every nation on Earth has one or more civilian organization devoted to the study of "the problem." Several noted scientists and top government officials, particularly in Europe, have publicly expressed their concern over the UFO situation.

But what have we actually learned from the phenomenon in these 29 years? What real effect have these mysterious intruders had upon our society and our sciences?

Advanced researchers like Jerome Clark, Loren Coleman, and Dr. Stephen Thomas have compared the flying saucer mystery with the fairy faith of another age, noting many impressive parallels. They point out that although thousands of humans once saw the little people and millions believed steadfastly in their existence, the fairy myth had little real impact upon our civilization and made no tangible contribution to our progress. UFOs, on the other hand, have had a resounding, though subtle, effect on the last generation and

their mere presence has caused us to contemplate cosmic questions that were once the exclusive property of science-fiction writers. It is even probable that if UFOs did not exist we would not have broken our backs—and our wallets—sending men to the Moon and sophisticated probes to Jupiter and beyond. If nothing else, the arrival of the flying saucers over Mt. Rainier made us aware of our pitiful smallness in a vast universe.

After 29 years of study and observation we still don't know where UFOs come from, why they are here, and who is behind the phenomenon. But we have learned a great deal about ourselves in the process of trying to study them. This sudden self-knowledge may be their greatest gift to us.

### WHO PROFITS?

The major offshoot of the flying saucer mystery has been the interest created in extraterrestrial life. In 1950, no reputable astronomer or scientist was even willing to speculate on the existence of life on other planets. Most sneered at the whole idea as a "fantasy." Ten years later, however, nearly all of the leading astronomers and cosmologists were writing reams of articles and lecturing enthusiastically about the possibility of life on other worlds. Today exobiology, the study of alien life, is a respected science.

What brought about this dramatic change? Did the scientific community suddenly accept flying saucers as proof of extraterrestrial life? Hardly. The answer is both ancient and disappointing.

#### *Money.*

It suddenly became very profitable to study extraterrestrial life. The government, NASA, and the leading foundations began handing out generous grants to scientific institutions and individual scientists to search for proof of life somewhere "out there." There was gold in them thar spaceships hovering in our night skies!

NASA was created for 3 reasons. First, the Russians were ahead of us in space technology and we wanted to catch up, primarily for military reasons. The "space race" of the early 1960s was outwardly a matter of prestige—a public relations performance. We finally beat the Soviet Union to the Moon, but only because they gave up the effort after losing several cosmonauts in accidents. Secondly, President Kennedy had the notion that space exploration could become a substitute for war. By channeling vast sums of money into the space program he thought he could switch our economy from making the machines of war to making the machines of space. (This nation had been, and still is, largely dependent on a military economy since the early days of WW II.) Thirdly, NASA was assigned the task of searching for extraterrestrial life. This, too, was largely a public relations gambit designed to appeal to the public's imagination and justify the enormous expenditures.

The space program gobbled up 4 billion tax dollars per year during its peak years, but most of this money was fed back into the economy through the burgeoning aerospace industry. Hundreds of thousands of workers and engineers and technicians were employed by the program. And thousands of scientists and astronomers, accustomed to struggling along on the pittance they received from their universities and colleges, suddenly found themselves eligible for sizable grants, commissions, and profitable part-time consultancies. The gravy train had arrived at last and no one was really bothered by the fact that its engine was a flying saucer.

In contrast, the ominous Central Intelligence Agency and the shadowy National Security Agency were trying to make ends meet on a paltry 11 billion tax dollars per year during that same period. Millions were spent on assassins hired to rub out Fidel Castro and

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other foreign leaders. Hardly a notable contribution to our economy or our world prestige.

## HIGH COSTS AND LOW COMEDY

In 1966, I trudged around Washington, D.C., trying to find someone who knew exactly how much was being spent for the non-hardware research in exobiology. Many astronomers were being paid large sums to calculate the number of probable planets in our galaxies. Biologists, zoologists, and anthropologists were experimenting with plants and animals to find out how they would fare in an alien environment. Statisticians and mathematicians by the hundreds were hard at work on the problem with their computers and Ouija boards. But no official in Washington seemed to know what the exobiology budget really was. The best estimate I could come up with was that we were spending about \$150 million annually on these matters.

That same year, the U.S. Air Force reluctantly handed \$300,000 to Colorado University to begin a UFO study. The figure was later upped to \$500,000.

Paradoxically, the effusive search for extraterrestrial life was worth at least \$150 million, but the search for a flying saucer that could conceivably prove conclusively the existence of such life was only worthy of a miserable half-million!

The rest, as they say, is history. The Colorado Project was a monumental disaster and the grandiose search for extraterrestrial life slowly fizzled out. We were left with great piles of reports, all negative, and mind-boggling probability tables that proved only that if extraterrestrial life existed somewhere in our galaxy the odds against our locating them—or their locating us—were staggering. Radio telescopes, built at enormous expense, did discover clouds of known chemicals in outer space, chemicals that the exobiologists optimistically call “the building blocks of life.” But since it is safe to assume that everything in our galaxy is composed of essentially the same kind of matter this find was not particularly revealing.

In the early 1970s, NASA's budget was cut back sharply and the great search for alien life quietly folded. The scientists who had been living in luxury apartments in Houston and Cape Kennedy glumly packed their bags and moved back to their old apartments in little college towns. Engineers and technicians who had expected aerospace to be their life's work found themselves standing in unemployment lines.

In the 1950s, the pioneer ufologists were convinced that flying saucers came from Venus and Mars. The space program proved otherwise. Venus is too hot and gaseous to support life as we know it, and Mars is apparently as dead as our Moon. The famed contactees of yesteryear were all proved wrong. George Adamski, who died broke in 1965, had claimed he had seen trees and rivers on the Moon when a flying saucer had transported him there. Our astronauts found only dust and rocks. Others who had allegedly visited Mars described great cities and friendly people. Our space probes found only dried river beds and huge craters.

The scientific frenzy of the early '60s now seems like a sad job. We mobilized our best brains in the '40s and built an atom bomb in a mere 5 years. We mobilized science again in 1960 and reached the Moon in less than a decade. But we are still alone. In fact, we are more alone now than then. In 1960 we hoped that our solar system was shared by some other intelligent life. In 1976 we *know* that we are an island—a cosmic oasis—in a great sea of black emptiness. It cost us dearly to find this out. And we may never be the same.

## PROGRESS OR RETROGRESSION?

The world of 1947 seems very distant and naive now. In those early days the pioneer ufologists cried out for an organized exploration of space. When that exploration became a reality in the 1960s, the ufologists somehow hardly noticed. The flying saucer syndrome had generated complex and foolish causes, and for many people those causes became more important than

the study of UFOs themselves. A very small handful of indefatigable researchers widely scattered throughout the world have made the only real contributions to our understanding of the UFO phenomenon. The rest have spent 29 years engaging in polemics and feuds, and indulging in evangelism trying to convince a still dubious world that wonderful “Brothers” from outer space are coming here to save us from ourselves. A few manage to earn a living by lecturing on the subject to anyone willing to pay to listen. But most will die as broke as Adamski. Overall, we don't know much more about the phenomenon today than Kenneth Arnold knew when he first gaped at those shining discs wobbling around the mountain-top.

We know only what they *aren't*, and where they *can't* be from. We know that the expenditure of money alone will not provide any answers. We could buy our way to the Moon but we have proved we can't buy proof of extraterrestrial life.

That proof must lie in some other direction, beyond the tables of probability, beyond the turtles in oxygen-less tanks, somewhere out there in the night where people are still staring at strange lights bobbing in the darkness. Those same lights led us forth into Mankind's greatest collective adventure. But now that that adventure has ended will those lights and objects also fade into myth? Or will they be there in 2007 A.D., and will we know more about them then than we know now? ★