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# Introduction

## The Phenomenon

I was eight years old when I saw my first flying saucer. It was the summer of 1960. I was crouched in the backseat of a spanking new turquoise Nash Rambler with my best friend Mark Temple, and his younger sister Kim, anxiously staring over the heads of their parents, Val and Wally, at the ominous darkness in front of us.

The night sky seemed to crackle, as if an electrical storm were approaching. A magic cone of flickering white light appeared from a nearby brick building. Suddenly the whole world lit up when a spaceship as wide as a football field whooshed across the black vastness of outer space. Slowly, like the words on the stone tablets brought down from the mountain, the movie credits rolled, announcing the phenomenal adventures of Invaders from Mars. Fear turned to fascination, anxiety to awe. I was hooked forever.

As best as I can recall, I gained my first heart swelling glimpse of worlds far beyond our own that night at my hometown's neon-ribboned Wayne Drive-In. In another time and place I might have heard stories about the mythic Celtic fairylands of Tir na Nog, King Arthur's Avalon, or the magic journeys of wayward travelers in old Russia. But this was the America of the 1960s and the ancient desires for adventure had both accelerated and shifted from the "otherworld" to the stars.

My exploration of those far-flung worlds took off in earnest. Soon I became a science-fiction fanatic, reading all the books on the subject in the school library. Like millions of others, I disappeared into *The Twilight Zone*, ventured into *The Outer Limits*, and reveled at being Lost in Space. After watching John Glenn orbit the earth on my family's black-and-white Philco, I was even inspired to cajole Mark and another neighborhood buddy, Steve Shrope, and my brother, Paul, into building our own spaceships out of cardboard refrigerator boxes. With visions of *This Island Earth* and *The Angry Red Planet* flaring in our mind's eye, we spoke to each other via taut string-and-tin can telephone lines, fired death rays from paper towel cannons, and for an entire sweltering summer explored the solar system using maps copied from moldering encyclopedias without ever leaving our cool Michigan basement. My Uncle Cy, a parachutist during World War II and an avid pilot, was "proud as punch," as he put it, and brought over two fellow pilots from the local hangar to see our "invention." Upon reflection, and after a couple of shots of scotch, he offered to put me and my brother through flight school so we could do more than fantasize.

But not long after our summer of make believe space travel, the local newspapers began trumpeting what appeared to be a real flying saucer invasion. On March 14, 1966, farmers and police officers around nearby Ann Arbor reported strange lights hovering over the swampland and highways in the predawn skies. Three nights later, eighty-seven Hillsdale College coeds and their dean watched an astonishing midair acrobatic show as a football-shaped object swayed, wobbled, and glowed in flight for four hours in the distant marshlands. The sightings continued over the next few weeks, the public grew frenzied, and the Detroit Free Press ran sensational stories about the goings-on out in Washtenaw County. Finally, to the great relief of embarrassed local officials, an investigator from the now-infamous

Project Blue Book team explained that the UFOs were nothing more than "swamp gas" igniting in the marshlands, although this conclusion would later haunt everyone involved.

Looking back, it seems flying saucers were landing everywhere but on the White House lawn, which is exactly where the archskeptics demanded to see them. Rockets, disks, and spaceships adorned magazine covers, emblazoned lunch boxes, and crowned cafe signs. They bolted across television screens, inspired hit songs, and gave comedians and cartoonists plenty of cosmic material for lampooning a world becoming more lunatic by the hour.

Though reports of heavenly lights date back to the mythical "celestial chariots" of the ancient Hindu epics written circa 500 B.C., what developed through the 1950s and 1960s was an exhilarating belief that the dazzling aerial phenomena might be associated with intelligent life from elsewhere in the universe.

From the legendary sighting of nine strange "skipping objects" over snowcapped Mount Rainier by pilot Kenneth Arnold in that mythic summer of 1947, through the recent spate of reports of aliens visiting unsuspecting souls in the middle of the night, virtually millions of people around the world have experienced something like vindication at the heart of ufona, a feeling of being eased or relieved by the indication that a few unsolved mysteries and enigmas remain beyond the scope of calibrators and computers, holding out the possibility of a new vigor and hope.

French ufologist Jacques Vallee gives us a hint of why this might be in his 1979 book *Messengers of Deception*, in which he writes, "Scientific reluctance to consider valid claims of paranormal phenomena is slowly driving many people to accept any claim of superior or mystical contact."

The avid reaction to flying saucer stories and i photographs, the fever pitch over rumors of suppressed information about to be released, the undeniable camaraderie exhibited at UFO conventions all provide moving testimony to Vallee's theory that more people than we may realize believe in, and are experiencing, the eJtraOrdinary dimensions of life, experiences that not only science but religion and general opinion are traditionally reluctant to consider authentic.

Uforia is the tumbling blood-rush excitement over the phenomenal sightings experienced around the world this century. It is an echo of deep desire and a fervent hope that "they might l be giants," as Cervantes explained Don Quixote's reason for tilting at windmills. In this sense, the strange stories from Mount Rainier, Washington, and Roswell, New Mexico, from Brazil, France, Belgium, and Spain, have cast a spell and helped establish a standard for the coming decades. The UFO phenomenon - a nearly fifty year pattern of persistent reports of as yet unidentified flying objects seen around the world, with discernible patterns or commonalities that don't conform to presently known technologies and cannot be evaluated by the current scientific paradigm - is, as ufologist J. Allen Hynek said, a matter of fact and not belief."

In fact, people in UFO circles are frequently suspicious of the authoritarian scientific worldview that pretends to explain away so many of the mysteries that imbue life with meaning. Whether or not the UFO phenomenon is revealing that extraterrestrial intelligence is in contact with us here on Earth remains one of the most tantalizing issues of our time. The hundreds of thousands of reports of unexplainable aerial phenomena and otherworldly visitors that have been officially filed since the end of World War II may not have convinced everyone of the existence of physicsdefying space travel, much less Close Encounters of the Fourth Kind, but they have accomplished something profound.

For millions of people, the UFO phenomenon, whether experienced firsthand or vicariously through movies, books, or magazines, has reenchanting modern life. Enchantment not in the sense of being hypnotized, but of being deeply moved, revitalized, through a renewed awe and wonder about the riddles of our world.

"Something is being seen," Swiss psychologist Carl Gustav Jung wrote in his 1958 book *Flying Saucers*, "but it isn't known what."

Something, indeed, is in the air. The question from the beginning has been, "What? Are they real? I low is it our hearts and minds have been stretched by this tremendous dream from above? Why us, why now?"

## **A Manual for the Millennium**

Perhaps the reader grew up with the specter of flying saucers and alien visitors, or more recently heard tell of the abduction enigma on a television talk show, or read about the parallel universe theory for the origins of UFOs, or laughed uproariously at a Far Side cartoon of Stone Age flying saucers built out of giant boulders, or were puzzled by a documentary video "exposing" the UFO "problem" with the "plasma hypothesis," or were intrigued by a recent rash of reports of strange lights in the skies over New Jersey.

If so, maybe you wondered, naturally, what in the devil is going on? What exactly is a UFO? Where do they come from? Why are they here? Am I crazy for believing in them? Who do I turn to if I've had a disturbing experience? Is there a thread that runs from the ancient sightings of shamans and mystics all the way to modern "contacts"? Why have angels, aliens, and UFOs so seized our imagination? Where can I find kindred spirits to share my experiences and theories? Where are the best sites for skywatching? Are there discussion groups, conventions, or online forums? Are there any reliable answers or at least intriguing theories to this enormous riddle?

Since the first wave of saucer sightings hit in the late 1940s, there have been millions more, along with a supporting cast of hundreds of movies, scores of songs, and thousands of books written on the UFO phenomenon. If not the "Event of the Millennium," as trumpeted by researcher Stanton T. Friedman and many others, the prospect that our planet has been monitored, visited, and infiltrated by extraterrestrials has at least triggered one of the biggest publishing phenomena of our time and been a prime supplier of kaleidoscopic images for the Dream Factory of Hollywood.

So while much has been written about the theories of UFOs, aliens, abductions, and other examples of "high strangeness," as Hynek called the most baffling cases, this book offers a simple introduction to many of the mysteries and riddles that comprise the complex phenomenon. Each section includes case studies, reports, and illustrations in an effort to simplify what has become an extremely crowded and confusing field of documentation and debate. There are also sidebars and charts, recommended reading, convention and conference lists, and on-line forums as part of the general survey of this skybreaking phenomenon.

Since there is still no one conclusive answer to any of its vexing aspects, it is hoped that by offering an overview of the UFO field, this book will allow readers to make up their own minds about these riddling questions, especially since the approaching millennium fever is certain to trigger more waves of sightings, and more passionate interest in the exploration of outer space.

## Groom Lake, Nevada

They call it The Ranch, The Box, Watertown Strip, The Pig Farm, and Dreamland. But in honor of old government maps and the sheer mystifying ring of it, most people know it as "Area 51" of the Nevada Test Site.

Located near a vast lake bed 140 miles north of Las Vegas, it's a "remote test facility," as the U.S. Air Force officially refers to it. The Base That Doesn't Exist is comprised of hangars, barracks, colossal parabolic antennae, radar, test planes, what is reputedly the world's longest paved runway, and the world's hottest test pilots. In such a vacuum of information, curiosity, if not paranoia, runs rampant. In 1954 it was a secret air base, convenient to the Atomic Energy Commission's nuclear bomb testing area at White Sands. This is where the U-2, SR-71, and F-117A spy planes were tested in absolute secrecy. Since then intrepid travelers have made the rugged trip to the desert to witness the thunderous air shows provided by F-15s, F-16s, B52s, the Russian Sukhoi Su-22 and MiG-23, and, rumors have it, the test flights of reputed spy planes like the Aurora, regarded by *Aviation Week-Space Technology* magazine as a "quantum leap in aviation." Of the announced 1994 defense budget of \$84.1 billion, \$14.3 billion - the equivalent of the entire NASA annual budget - was procured for secret or "black" programs like these.

But that's not why Area 51 is fast becoming the most popular skywatching site in America.

On any given day in the town of Rachel at Pat and Joe Travis's legendary Little A'Le'Inn, a cafe festooned with wild and wacky UFO memorabilia, you will find UFO buffs, film crews, conspiracy mongers, skeptical journalists, aviation lovers, military gadflies who call themselves the Dreamland Interceptors, and even a few pop-eyed folks who call themselves aliens. These pilgrims flock here from around the world to hold vigil and view the lights.

## The Rummors of Hidden Saucers

In 1989 an enigmatic man named Bob Lazar a self-proclaimed physicist, announced on television that he had been working at a hushhush base at S4, a Nellis Range base far more secret than Area 51. According to Lazar, flying saucers are being hidden in nine underground hangars at S4, and the government is replicating them using a process called "back engineering." His scientific analysis of the actual mechanics of spacecraft dazzles some, while drawing sighs and shrugs from others.

As the deductive investigator Glenn Campbell says, likening the Area 51 puzzle to a Sherlock Holmes story, "The setting is real, just like Baker Street, and there is an intellectual challenge in following the clues."

Consciously or not, Lazar's descriptions of having seen and worked on a "sport model" saucer sounded like something out of a James Bond movie, especially the jargon about "anti-gravity" engines and wobbly-legged aliens acting as advisers in the shadows of underground hangars and a back engineering program that would allow the government to learn from our distant engineer cousins.

Lazar's story immediately captured the attention of the "nuts-and-bolts" enthusiasts eager to finally have evidence of a downed saucer at a secret military facility. Every legend needs a landmark, so a simple rancher's mailbox forlornly stuck in the ground at mile marker LN 29.5 on Nevada State Highway 375 has become the "X" that marks this tale's treasure. The black mailbox serves notice as the closest spot the average UFO enthusiast can come to viewing the distant complex of military buildings and the nearby nightly light show of silhouetted diamond- and boomerang-shaped aircraft. In short, it's become one of the pilgrimage sites for avid UFO buffs from around the world who hope to see flying saucers that they believe are here to spy on or keep watch over one of the most secret military bases on earth.

After years of skywatching over Area 51, local military watchdog Glenn Campbell concludes, "I've never seen anything I couldn't explain, just a lot of military activity that could look like saucers if you're in that frame of mind." Apparendy many folks are. Campbell goes on to say that the area now attracts "tours, conferences, believers, skeptics, and charlatans, not to mention a steady stream of urban pilgrims in search of enlightenment." Some arrive at night and drive or hike on the remote back roads, unaware of or ignoring the signs that warn: "Use of Deadly Force Authorized." They risk arrest and expensive fines, if not physical harm. What can be seen at the black mailbox? On a typical skywatching night it is common to see the landing lights of airliners en route to Vegas. Several times a night, unmarked Black Hawk helicopters buzz the hills and back roads looking for trespassers. Other ominous craft hover motionlessly in the sky, secret military planes painted in dark camouflage with their running lights turned off.

Alone under the incandescent stars with only the sound of the wind blowing across the cactuspunctuated desert, the lights of the distant base make the blood race. Every movement in the heavens and on earth seem full of meaning and glory. This is a land of destructive schemes be yond most imaginations, but also a land where dreams learn to fly.

The "[Area 51 Viewers Guide](#)" has maps, milepost logs, and lots of practical information for visitors in search of mysterious aircraft. The Groom Lake Desert Rat newsletter is dedicated to keeping tabs on any activity in the area. Both can be ordered from creator Glenn Campbell, HCR, P.O. Box 38, Rachel, NV 89001 (Internet e-mail address: [psychospy@aol.com](mailto:psychospy@aol.com)).

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