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Introduction

This book is a chronicle of the flying saucer myth - the system of beliefs that have developed around the idea that alien spacecraft are being seen in Earth's skies. These beliefs did not suddenly spring into existence fully formed. Rather, a set of conflicting ideas originated, the myth was defined, then the beliefs evolved over nearly half a century. Moreover, the flying saucer myth is not a single, monolithic set of doctrines. As soon as the flying saucer myth was defined, schisms began to develop among "believers" - those people who accepted the idea that flying saucers were extraordinary objects. Not all believers held the same beliefs, and these schisms soon led to open warfare. This interaction between believers has been a major influence on the myth's history.

The flying saucer myth not only concerns disk-shaped spaceships and the aliens who supposedly pilot them. Because it also involves how the believers view the role and nature of government, and how the government relates to the people the U.S. government has had to deal with the flying saucer myth. Presidents have denied their existence, they were a twenty-two-year headache for the Air Force, and were investigated by Congress and the CIA. This interaction both fed the flying saucer myth and brought about the very things the government sought to avoid.

A similar interaction has taken place between the flying saucer myth and the larger society. The flying saucer myth is a mirror to the events of postwar America - the paranoia of the 1950s, the social turmoil of the 1960s, the "me generation" of the 1970s and the nihilism of the 1980s, and the early 1990s. As the flying saucer myth entered popular culture, images and ideas were created which, in turn, shaped the flying saucer myth itself.

The flying saucer myth, unlike myths of historical eras, is an ongoing, living, and changing mythology. When the author began this project in 1988, the beliefs which now dominate the flying saucer myth were only just emerging. Since then, they have come to supersede the traditional version, dating from the 1950s and 1960s. Looking ahead, a few predictions are offered for the future of the flying saucer myth.

Because this is a book about beliefs, it is only fair that the author's beliefs are made clear. I am a skeptic. I believe flying saucer reports are misinterpretations of conventional objects, phenomena, and experiences. I do not believe the evidence indicates the Earth is under massive surveillance by disk-shaped alien spaceships. I base this conclusion on several decades of interest in UFOs, along with the source material that went into this book. This includes the Air Force's Project Blue Book files, Air Force, FBI and CIA documents, UFO books, magazines, reports, white papers, lectures, newsletters, and discussions with believers and skeptics alike. This forms a body of source material best described as official, unofficial, and antiofficial. These conclusions are those of the author; readers are encouraged to make up their own minds.

The chapter epigraphs are from the works of A. Conan Doyle, whose fictional detective, Sherlock Holmes, showed the importance of collecting and analyzing small, seemingly unconnected clues. Part of the appeal of the flying saucer myth is that it allows both believers and skeptics to be Sherlock Holmes.

Many people, skeptics and believers alike, provided information for this book. Not all, however, wished their names to be connected with the subject. I want to express my thanks to Thornton L. Page, "High Government Official," James E. Oberg, John Moseley, Martin Kottmeyer, Dennis Stillings, J. 1'. Cahn, Robert Sheaffer, Martin Gardner, Philip J. Klass, "C," "D," "G," "M," "Q," "S," and "Dr. X," Eric Herr, Chuck Jines, and the members of the Orion UFO group, "Sigmund," "Dr. Clayton Forrester," the National Archives, the San Diego Aerospace Museum, California Interlibrary Loan, San Diego State University Library, the National Air and Space Museum, Lee Saegesser and the NASA History Office, and Smokey.

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