

WHAT IS IT THAT IS FLYING IN OUR SKIES?

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Is it serious ?

RIGHT up until very recently it was considered positively indecent for any reputable scientist to talk seriously about UFOs. But now the situation has changed. The American astronomer Dr. J. Allen Hynek has been for almost twenty years the scientific consultant on UFOs to the American Air Force. And although throughout his long period of service to them he was almost always able to give an explanation for the UFOs (there were at least 3,000 of them) [3,000?—*Editor*], nevertheless some of them still remained unidentified. Here is one of the cases which he analyses:—

“On August 25, 1966, an Air Force officer in charge of a missile crew in North Dakota suddenly found that his radio transmission had stopped working. He was in a concrete capsule 60 feet below the ground. An observer on the surface reported that he could see a UFO high in the sky. A radar crew picked up the UFO at 100,000 ft. After that a second UFO appeared in the sky, its existence also being confirmed by radar.”

Another case occurred near that same base a few days earlier. A police officer—a reliable man—saw in broad daylight a mysterious shining object floating down the side of a hill and wobbling from side to side, about ten feet from the ground. It hovered for about a minute, then moved to a small field, and finally disappeared rapidly into the clouds.

Dr. Hynek puts the question: can Science brush aside observations that cannot be explained? And he urges that a strictly scientific study be made of everything to do with UFOs. It is in fact now impossible to make light of the reliable reports of competent witnesses, often scientists of standing. In recent years a large body of scientists—theoretical physicists, mathematicians, astronomers, psychologists—in various countries have begun gathering the facts and exchanging reports with each other, with a view to studying them objectively in the stillness of their laboratories.

Mystery is a favourable soil for the inevitable speculations by people who well understand how avid the average person is for something sensational. But let us point out once again that the uproar engendered by tricksters has nothing whatever in common with the scientific manner of approach requisite for the solution of the UFO mystery.

And so, first and foremost:

Reliable sightings

It has already been established that many reports are based on authentic facts. On January 16, 1958, near the Island of Trinidade, over 100 officers and seamen of a Brazilian warship saw a UFO appear over the sea

and the shore and observed its rapid flight. Any suspicion of fraud was nullified by the expert skill in the pictures that were taken from aboard the warship by a professional photographer.

Throughout the night of May 3, 1957, two automatic cameras of an American amateur astronomer were engaged in photographing the sky. Analysis of the photos showed that some shining object with the typical luminous features of UFOs had appeared in the field of vision of the instruments at 10.38 p.m. A second object (or the same one again) appeared at 10.41 p.m. The trail left by this unknown source does not tally with the trails of meteors, ball-lightning, or aircraft. The phenomenon remains unexplained.

In November 1957 many inhabitants of Toulouse observed a mysterious shining object in the form of a bright orange disc with something resembling a cupola on top. The disc was rotating and travelling rapidly across the sky. The astronomer I. L. Chapeux watched the object through a telescope. Here is the note that he wrote about it:—

“A shining yellow spot of the second magnitude, elliptical in shape, no twinkle whatsoever, its edges very clearly visible against the sky, and leaving a short trail behind it.”

Collating all the reports of it, they were able to establish that the object was travelling at the speed of 1 km. per second, thus vanishing from sight well-nigh instantaneously.

Another absolutely fantastic case was reported by the U.S. Air Force. It is listed as No. 700 of the so far “unidentifieds”, i.e. “unknowns”, in the American archives.

At about 10.30 p.m. on October 26, 1958, two Americans saw an unknown stationary object poised at a height of some 50 metres above a metal bridge near the Raven Dam Lake, north of Baltimore in Maryland. The object appeared to be large, flat, luminous, and elliptical in shape. The witnesses decided to drive their car nearer to it. But when they had got to about 30 metres from the bridge *the car suddenly stopped*, as though the whole of its electrical system had failed. Even the headlights and the dashboard lights went out, and the engine was dead. The driver tried to use the starter, but without result. It seemed that the batteries had given out completely. The passengers then alighted from the car and watched the object for 30 or 40 seconds. Then, following upon a vivid flash, there was a loud noise like a thunderclap, and the men felt a blast of hot wind. The object began to rise vertically, at tremendous speed, and was out of sight in a few seconds. The witnesses returned to their car and were able to drive it without any difficulty. . . .

Such are some of the sightings.

Theories and hypotheses

We can now proceed to a general discussion of the question. The serious investigator should be mindful of the fact that in Science there is no place for blind credence or for blind denial.

Over the course of the past five years, the American author of the present article has taken part in the assembly and the systematic study of some 6,000 UFO sightings.

The phenomenon can be divided into four categories:—

- (1) An object is seen very close to the ground.
- (2) A large object engenders small ones.
- (3) The object is immobile, it hovers above the ground or manoeuvres over a definite point on the Earth's surface.
- (4) The object moves off, leaving no trace.

On the basis of the classification given above, we can make a statistical examination which will assuredly help us in the development of hypotheses as to the nature of the phenomenon.

The total number of sightings for the period 1947-1962 is, we would say, *cyclic*, i.e. there are periods of high peaks (many sightings) and periods of fall in sightings.

As far as the sightings are concerned, it is sometimes possible, as we have already mentioned, to get photographs of UFOs (and even cinéfilm!). Quite frequently photographs are secured with perfectly ordinary and indifferent cameras. UFOs are often tracked on radar, and in many cases their presence is registered by Earth-satellite tracking-stations in all parts of the world.

At this point mention may be made of the strange unidentified Earth-satellites, at least one of which is moving in the *opposite direction* to all those launched by the USSR and the USA.

It is extremely difficult to interpret objective sightings of this kind as ordinary natural phenomena.

Even the American astronomer Menzel, who has explained away all UFO phenomena as atmospheric effects and mirages, is obliged to admit that *there are cases which even he is unable to explain by his method.*

So what, then, are these UFOs? Are they ball-lightning plasmas? But not more than 2% of all the reliable sightings can be explained by ball-lightning. A new phenomenon of Nature, perhaps? If so, it must be studied.

Are they perhaps one of the notorious "secret weapons"? In that case, surely it is scarcely necessary to try it out for 20 years already, and over pretty well all the countries in the world?

Finally, there is still another hypothesis: the UFOs

are related to visits being paid to the Earth by spacecraft or sondes or automatic devices from other planets. However extravagant this suggestion may appear to be, it is deserving of thought.

We would like to quote a book, published in New York by an American scientist and a Russian scientist, *Intelligent Life In The Universe*, by Carl Sagan and Josif Shklovskiy. The authors of this book accept not only the existence of extraterrestrial civilisations, but also the possibility of frequent (10,000 times!) visits to the Earth by beings from Outer Space throughout the Earth's history, including visits during the time that human civilisation has existed here (which is an extremely short time in comparison with the whole history of the Earth).

We can agree with the authors of this book. And if doubts as regards any material traces of such cosmic visitors are always permissible (the doubts pertain to the method of investigation!) one cannot overlook the numerous traditions and written memorials in human culture where, in one form or another, there is reference to sons of Heaven, or sons of the Sun, flying dragons, fiery chariots, and other symbols or representations of possible visitors from Space. Such references can be found in the legends of Japan, China, India, ancient Babylon, ancient Greece, Egypt, Israel, and the ancient Amerindian peoples.

Consequently the idea of visits to the Earth by Space visitors in our own days too is entirely permissible. The mystery of the Tunguskaya meteorite is still not fully solved. The latest data to hand indicate that, before the explosion, the thing performed manoeuvres reminiscent of the operations of a pilot trying to beat out a fire. Who knows whether, if the catastrophe had not occurred, the question of space visitors would perhaps now no longer be merely hypothetical? For example, the President of the Byelorussian Academy of Sciences, V. F. Kuprevich, puts it quite definitely:—

"Who knows—it may be that they (the beings from another planet) are even now visiting the Earth, but not contacting us? Why? I, for example, suspect that the present level of intellectual development of Man may have been surpassed to such a degree that we present-day men, seen from that new level, might appear no higher than our predecessors the Cave-Men."

It seems to the authors of the present article that now, in the absence of any clear physical theories, the time has come to give serious consideration to the Space hypothesis about the UFOs, by accepting that the objects observed are Space sondes from other worlds. It is possible that they are piloted by intelligent beings or by "thinking" cybernetic machines.

Be that as it may, the answer to the proposed scientific investigation, whether it may involve Outer Space or new phenomena of Nature, will be no simple one. But only bold thinking gives birth to revolutionary discoveries in Science.

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