



The Best and Worst... **UFO** **Conspiracy** **Theories**

Scientists and philosophers gathered for a convention to discuss the question: Is there intelligent life on other planets? A rabbi who heard about the convention commented: “Are they so sure that there is intelligent life on this planet?”

According to estimates, one in four American adults believes that Earth has been visited by beings from other planets—despite the fact that evidence for the existence of extraterrestrial spacecraft (UFOs, or Unidentified Flying Objects) and alien beings on Earth has always proven fleeting.

Some of the theories about UFOs are downright ridiculous, if not hilarious. Others seem to be more grounded in real events. Here are some of the best and worst UFO conspiracy theories, including everything from absolute hoaxes to dangerous cults involving neo-Nazis.

Kenneth Arnold was a 32-year-old successful businessman when he took to the air in his private plane on June 24, 1947, searching for the remains of a lost C-46 transport aircraft. A \$5,000 reward had been offered to the finder.

Arnold never found the missing craft, but what he did see put his name in newspapers all over the world. Cruising at about 9,200 feet, he suddenly noticed a bright flash. To the north of Mount Rainier, in Washington State, there were nine peculiar objects streaking south at over 1,200 miles per hour. As these objects darted in and out of the smaller peaks they were outlined against the snow, and Arnold could make out that the lead object



looked like a dark crescent. The other eight were flat and disk-shaped. They traveled in a V-formation and were “skipping through the sky” in such a way that they resembled “a saucer skipping across water.” After two and a half minutes, the objects disappeared, heading south.

When he landed and told his story, the journalists were skeptical. However, because of his stature as a pilot, businessman and deputy sheriff their skepticism changed to wonder and the newsmen reported the incident as serious news. It did not take long for the story of Arnold’s sighting to take the world by storm. When a local newspaper misquoted Arnold’s description of skipping disks, the term “flying saucer” was born.

The age of UFOs had begun.

In the decades since flying saucers became part of the English lexicon there have been countless UFO sightings. The subject has attracted its share of kooks and charlatans, and many claims proved to be outright hoaxes, but others were reported by apparently sane and sober eyewitnesses. Indeed, less than two months after news of Kenneth Arnold’s mysterious flying objects hit the papers, the Roswell Incident took place (see main article). Its enduring legacy may not necessarily prove its truth, but it is a testament to the fact that those involved not only believed it but that they were believable to others.

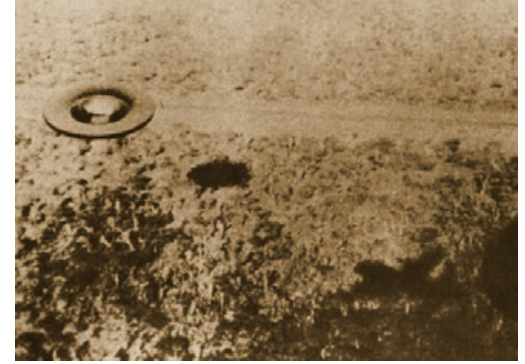
The idea of UFOs has proliferated in modern society to the point that, whether one believes in them or not, nouns like “flying

saucers,” “extraterrestrials,” “aliens,” etc., have become part of our everyday vocabulary—and not only in the English language. It is firmly implanted in contemporary culture across the globe. Public reaction may include a good dose of skepticism and even jeering derision, but many people are ready to believe that Earth has been visited by beings from a faraway planet.

Not only have UFO sightings been reported around the entire world, but they have even been officially investigated by government institutions in Canada, Sweden, Denmark, Greece, Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States. The earliest apparent UFO sighting goes back to ancient Chinese texts describing a “moon boat” that hovered above China every 12 years. A wave of sightings occurred near Rome in 218 BCE and again in Germany in 1561. During World War II, Allied pilots coined the term “foo fighters” for the bizarre orbs of light that some insisted flew alongside their planes during combat.

The US government’s search for extraterrestrials began in 1948, a year after Kenneth Arnold claimed he saw “skipping disks” in the sky. Then, from 1952 to 1969, the US Air Force authorized Project Blue Book, a series of systematic studies of UFOs. More than 12,000 reports were compiled and either classified as “identified”—explained by astronomical, atmospheric or artificial phenomena—or “unidentified.” Almost 95% of these UFO sightings turned out to be IFOs (Identified Flying Objects). Over 300 different things were misperceived as UFOs—including weather balloons, stars and planets, advertising planes, secret aircraft, telegraph poles and even shaggy dogs as well as other ordinary objects. The 5-6% of unsolved cases, scientists suggested, would become IFOs given enough study and sufficient evidence.

Others were not so quick to agree. They claimed that the unresolved cases represent authentic sightings of spacecraft from other worlds. In the 1970s, when Vietnam and Watergate sparked a revival of anti-government conspiracy theories, the



A Venezuelan airline pilot photographed this UFO but later confessed that it was nothing more than a button.



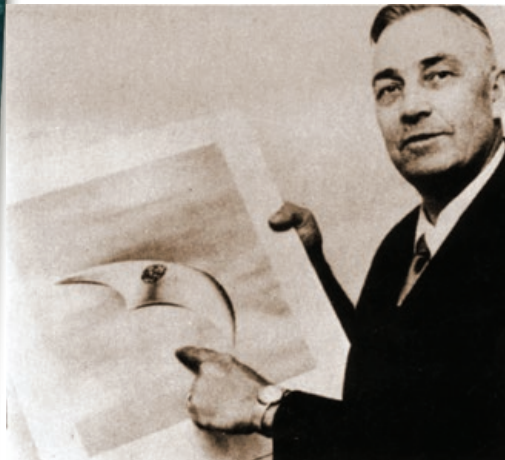
What became known as the McMinnville UFO turned out to be “a model hanging from a thread.”



In March 1966, a British teenager photographed these dubious-looking UFOs—apparently superimposed cardboard cutouts—and persuaded many that they were spaceships from another world.



UFO photographed in California in 2013 and featured on an Ohio news station’s evening report. In reality, the image was created by a smartphone app that makes hoaxing a convincing UFO picture very simple.



Kenneth Arnold holding a sketch of one of the UFOs sighted by him.



The subject of UFOs has attracted its share of kooks. This man stands in front of his “UFO” house, inviting aliens to join him for dinner.

