

Strange Sightings

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Probing odd observations in the night sky

On November 7, 2006, United Airlines employees and passengers reported seeing a large, disk-shaped object hovering over gate C17 at O'Hare International Airport, according to the Case 18 report from the National Aviation Reporting Center on Anomalous Phenomena. Despite numerous eyewitness accounts, there is no photographic evidence of the occurrence and no definitive explanation. Was it an alien vehicle, a secret government aircraft or just a case of over-active imaginations?

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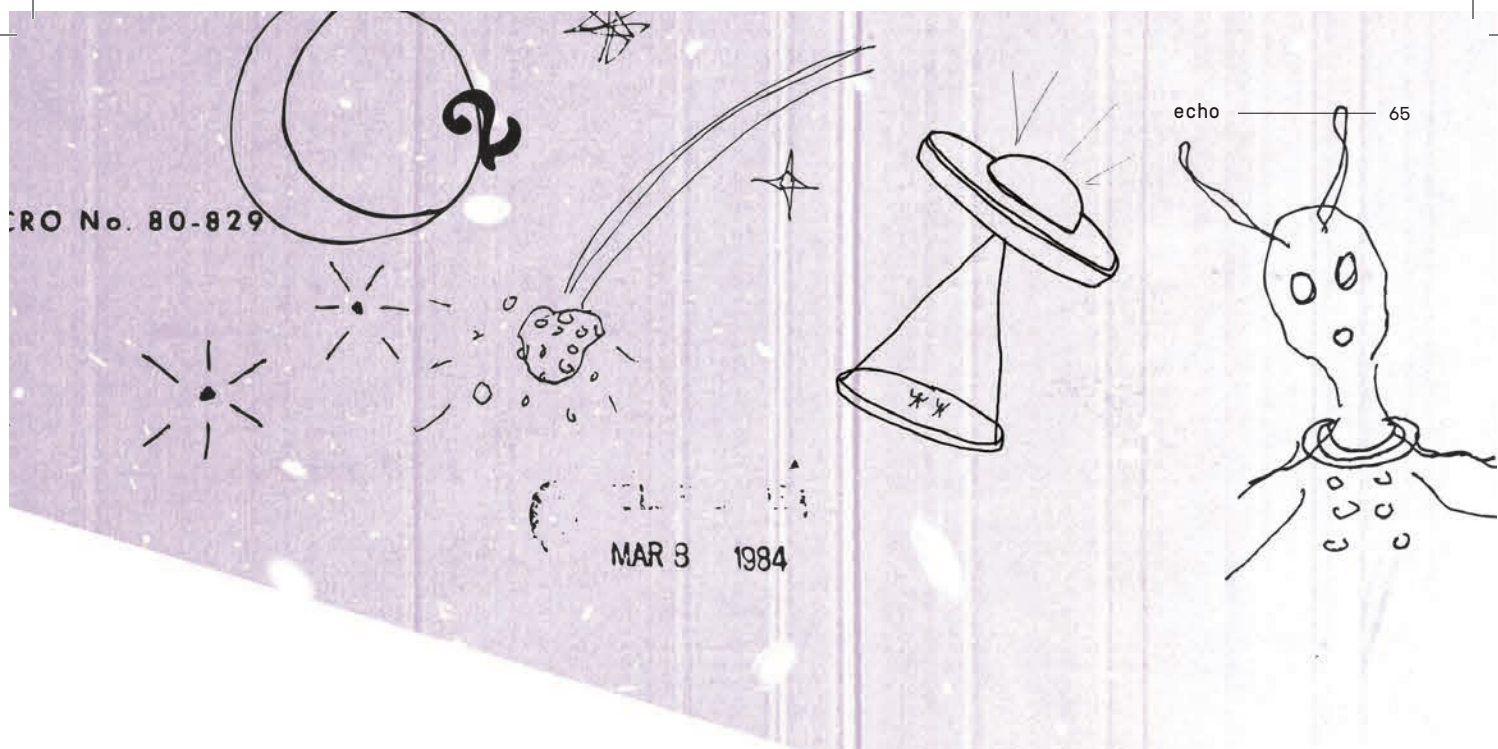
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“There are many unexplained observations in the sky—many natural atmospheric phenomena people may not have seen before,” says Philipp R. Heck, Ph.D., associate curator of Meteoritics and Polar Studies at the Field Museum of Natural History. “It’s normal human nature to say, ‘Okay, this must be alien,’ because it’s unfamiliar,” he says. “Like science fiction, they associate it with alien life.”

Heck oversees the largest meteorite collection housed in a private research institution, and studies the origin of meteorites, the early solar system and what happened before the solar system started. He is also researching pre-solar grains—minerals that are older than anything else found in our universe. “They are basically stardust,” he says.

The likelihood of finding these presolar grains is absurdly small. “Space is very, very empty,” Heck says. These space crumbs are confoundingly important to understanding the nature of the universe. “They contributed to the matter which the sun and the Earth are made of.”

If the probability of finding a presolar grain is absurd, the prospect of finding extraterrestrial beings is inconceivable. Think about it: an asteroid needs to first and foremost contain the dust, survive in space for millions of years, land on Earth and finally be found. To date, the only presolar grains studied were extracted from a single meteorite: the Murchison meteorite, a primitive rock that fell near Murchison, Australia in 1969.

The Murchison meteorite fell during the same year as the Allende meteorite, the largest carbonaceous chondrite—a classification of primitive meteorites—on Earth. Allende fell near the village of Pueblito de Allende in the Mexican state of Chihuahua, nearly 9,000 miles away from Australia. Heck says it’s nothing more than a coincidence that the two most important meteorites fell just 232 days apart. “But you start do think, does it mean anything?” he asks.

Heck cannot exclude the possibility of aliens visiting Earth. This doubt confirms his role not as a stubborn skeptic, but as a scientist. “It’s just extremely unlikely that they would come,” he says. “I think life must be somewhere in the universe, but if this life is technologically advanced and makes it to our planet? It’s just unlikely.”

Such explanations don’t discourage those who believe in UFOs. The National UFO Reporting Center has more than 104,000 UFO sightings in its database, dating back to 1762. John Greenwald’s popular paranormal website, The Black Vault, claims more than 10,000 visitors a day.

Since the age of 15, Greenwald has been dedicated to exposing government secrets, one Freedom of Information Act request at a time. “I thought if I contact the government, they’ll tell me the truth,” he says. “I quickly realized this was the [dumbest] thing I could ever assume.”

Greenwald says it’s easier to get nuclear and biological weapon secrets declassified than UFO information. He claims he once waited for 14 years for a document to be processed. “I told myself early on, if there really is a game being played or a cover-up, then they want you to give up,” he says.

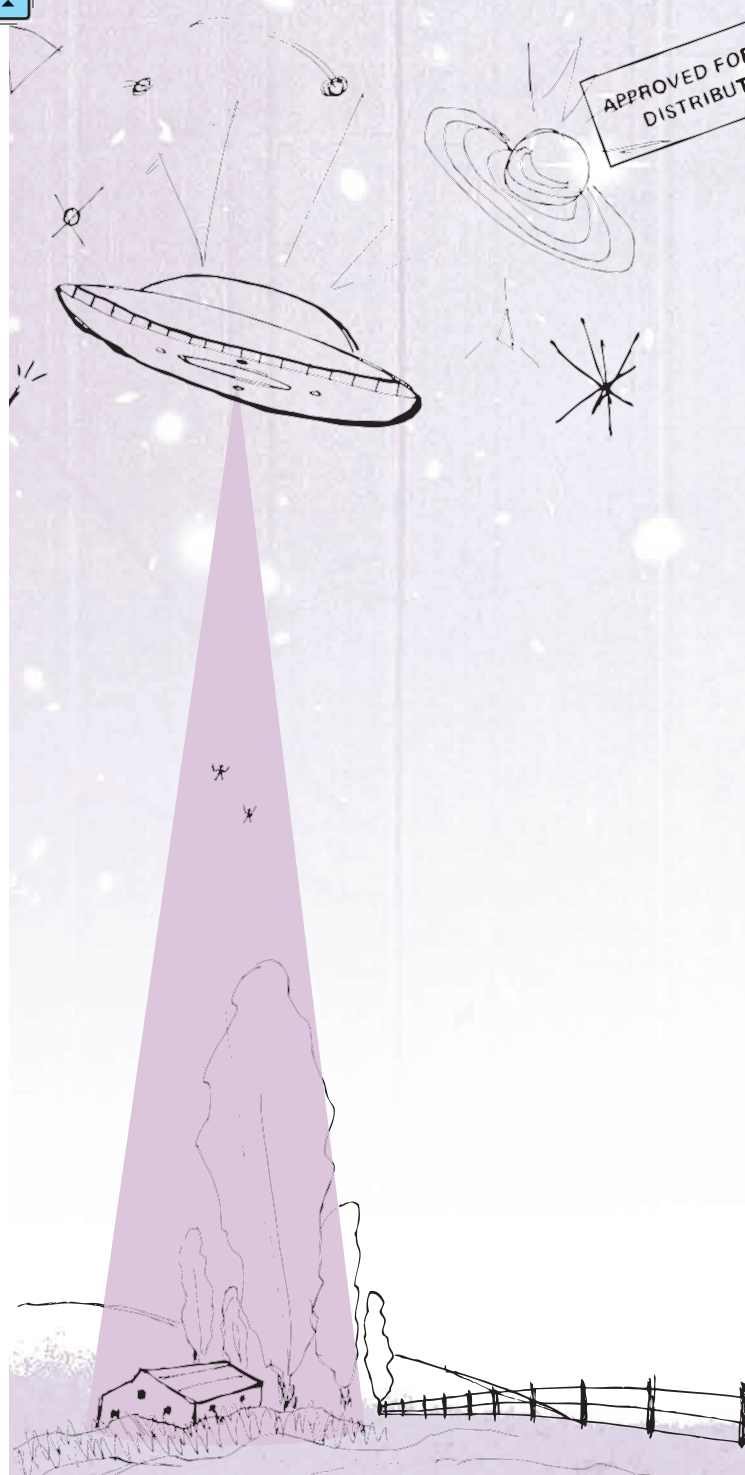
“Any top-secret military aircraft may be a UFO to you or me, but it’s not to the government,” he says. “When the military considers it unidentified, what does that tell you? It can’t be their own technology.”

Meteorites? Top-secret military aircraft? Alien visitors? *Echo* interviewed three people who encountered the unknown firsthand. Skeptics beware.

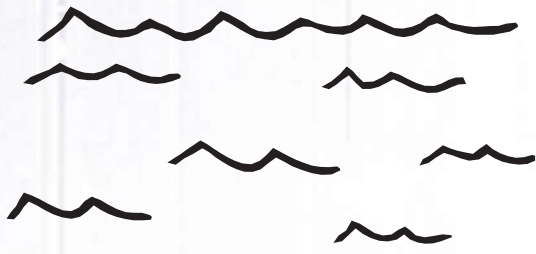
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Randy Nieto, 37

I've always been a computer nerd; I've been on the internet since before AOL. Websites started popping up devoted to UFOs, and I would read all of the cases and look at all of the photos. The unknown fascinates me. That has always been my drive behind it: to use science to explain it. There's a scientific explanation for everything. I never say that anything is alien because nobody knows.

People see time as being linear—there's the past, the present, the future—but time doesn't function that way. Really, time is all happening at once. It's one instant. You look at the technology that we're witnessing, and that could be something from way far in the future. I think that might be what UFOs are.

People are very paranoid about the government. But if you know anything about the government, they really don't have their shit together. To think that there's this huge conspiracy... They're just not that good. But there are definitely black programs developing a lot of technology, which accounts for a lot of the things that people see, including some of the stuff that I might have seen.

This past summer, I was driving on LaSalle Street, where LaSalle goes into Lake Shore Drive. Above Lake Michigan were eight lights in the shape of a diamond, quickly moving parallel to the lake. Unfortunately, they kind of flew behind some apartments. I thought I should follow it. But I was going north and it's a whole thing to get off and go downtown and do I really want to do that? Nah, I'll just go home. I regret doing that. I feel like I should have followed it.

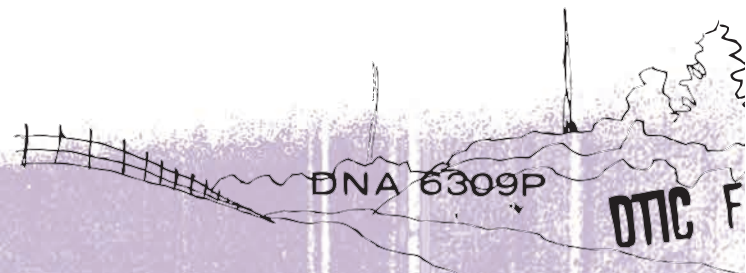
Roger Brown, 36

When I was 30, I was suffering from extreme depression. It was the summer of 2010, and my marriage was hanging together by a thread, and I was in a really negative state. At the time I knew nothing about paranormal activity; I was always kind of a skeptic. But one evening before I was asleep in bed, I knew that there was something out there.

All of a sudden, this negative energy vibration entered the room. It paralyzed me. I couldn't breathe; I couldn't speak. I couldn't move a muscle because I was scared to death. This shadowy being was at the end of my bed and he distorted the room with his presence. No facial expressions. He was about six-foot-two, wearing a fedora and a black cloak. He just stood there and looked at me. It felt like six or seven seconds before he vanished. I was in such a state of shock.

After that happened, my life completely turned around. It didn't cure me, but that shadowy figure really explained to me in just a few seconds that if I continued down this negative path, I would end up taking my life. It woke me up.

The oddity is that a few months before this happened, a friend knocked on our door late at night, scaring the living hell out of my wife and I. She was white as a ghost and said she needed to sleep here. She didn't tell us why until two months later, after I told her about my experience with the Hat Man. She had experienced the same being.



Katie Scheuber, 21

My beliefs stem from my mom—she's a huge believer. She's got books and documentaries on UFO sightings, crop circles, aliens, space. We will watch documentaries together and have conversations about it afterward. We'll also have conversations with my grandpa. He used to be a research microbiologist and he says that life exists on another planet somewhere, but he says he believes they haven't been trying to contact us.

I believe life exists beyond Earth. I'm not sure how or where or who, but I know there's gotta be something out there. I've seen spirits and I've felt their presence, too. And I've never doubted the things I've seen before.

Last month, I was in my bedroom trying to go to sleep—it was around 3:15 a.m. I sleep with my blinds open because there's no one who lives in back of me and I like looking at the sky. There's nothing but a giant hill, some evergreens and a Harley Davidson store. I had just gotten up to go to the bathroom and was about to go lay back down in bed when I looked at the window and saw a neon green flash in the sky—it was just a quick, bright flash. I've already considered if it was a glare or something like that, but it couldn't have been. I figured it was a UFO. I didn't think too much of what I saw, simply because I've seen far weirder things. ●