

UFO Sightings Echo Our Childhood Longing

By Avi Loeb on June 10, 2021

In his science fiction book [Childhood's End](#), Arthur C. Clarke tells a story of a peaceful alien invasion of Earth at the expense of human identity and culture. This month Congress received a report from the Pentagon and various intelligence agencies containing evidence for [Unidentified Flying Objects](#) (UFOs) by military personnel. The report [concludes](#) that some of the UFOs are likely real objects whose [nature](#) cannot be assessed with any confidence. Most likely, the reported objects have mundane explanations, but we need better evidence to be sure. A UFO could potentially be a robot – namely autonomous equipment which follows the blueprint crafted by an intelligent species beyond Earth.

Our current technology evolves exponentially on a few-year timescale. The devices we use today would have looked magical a century ago. Global [Wi-Fi](#) connectivity and the [Internet](#) revolutionized human behavior in recent decades, and so will [Artificial Intelligence](#), [Robotics](#) and [Genetic Engineering](#) in future decades. Since most stars [formed](#) billions of years before the Sun, it is conceivable that technological civilizations which emerged around them had more time to develop their science and technology than we did, and created equipment that represents our future and would appear magical to us now. This hardware could be so advanced that it would look to us as an [approximation to God](#). When such equipment visits us, the encounter would echo our childhood experience of not fully understanding the actions of a higher power looking over our shoulders.

The possibility that the Pentagon UFOs are human-made can potentially be excluded by identifying behavior that cannot be reproduced by our most advanced equipment. We know our technological limits because any advance that goes well beyond them would have introduced major commercial or military benefits and would have been represented in the consumer market or in the battlefield.

Nevertheless, most people may choose to ignore the Pentagon report and maintain an attitude of “business as usual”. My daughter told me explicitly that she will not miss her routine soccer match on the day that the Pentagon report will be made public, irrespective of its content. At a recent forum about my popular-level book [Extraterrestrial](#) and new textbook [Life in the Cosmos](#), I was asked: “how long could humans ignore extraterrestrial intelligent life?” and I replied: “humans may choose to remain ignorant forever. They can refuse to recognize a reality that does not flatter their ego, like the simple idea that we are not the [smartest](#) species that ever existed in the Milky Way galaxy. But reality does not care whether we ignore it. The existence of neighbors does not go away if we close the curtains on our windows and disregard them”.

The Pentagon has access to much more data than is released to the public. Its report states that the reality of some UFOs is beyond doubt but their nature requires further study. It is

therefore an opportune time for the scientific community to take a closer look at UFOs by collecting and analyzing new data with the finest instruments and computers in a controlled set-up. The new data can be obtained by measurement devices with capabilities far exceeding the equipment that provided past UFO data.

A fresh scientific study that [reproduces](#) UFO sightings and resolves their nature would demonstrate the power of science in answering a question that is of great interest to the public, namely: "*is the origin of UFO natural, human-made or extraterrestrial?*" Finding a conclusive answer on the basis of open data will enhance the public's confidence in evidence-based knowledge. Currently, the UFO mystery surrounding the inconclusive interpretation of the Pentagon report fuels unsubstantiated speculations. A decisive scientific experiment holds the promise of clearing up the fog.

The required instrumentation will likely involve state-of-the-art cameras on wide-field telescopes that scan the sky. The data stream would be processed by an advanced computer system that will store only the essential variable features. The focus on near-field aerial phenomena that move fast across the sky is different from astronomical surveys of distant sources, such as the upcoming Legacy Survey of Space and Time (LSST) on the [Vera C. Rubin Observatory](#).

Irrespective of whether the origin of the Pentagon UFOs is terrestrial or extraterrestrial, we will learn something new and exciting from studying them scientifically. A single UFO of extraterrestrial origin will bring us back to our childhood mentality and reverberate in our mind as evidence for a higher power looking over our shoulders.

Underlining this childhood yearning are physical objects whose properties can be measured by scientific instruments. What starts as a psychological need can be tested through analysis of empirical data. [Natural selection](#) may favor technological species which are [guided](#) by the principles of science to enhance their longevity. Our first encounter with alien technologies might involve [self-replicating machines](#), as envisioned by the polymath [John von Neumann](#). Obviously, it is not just the hardware that intrigues us. It is the meaning behind its existence - the intent of those who manufactured it. Here's hoping that when the time comes we will figure out that their intent is wise and well-meaning, just like that of our parents.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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