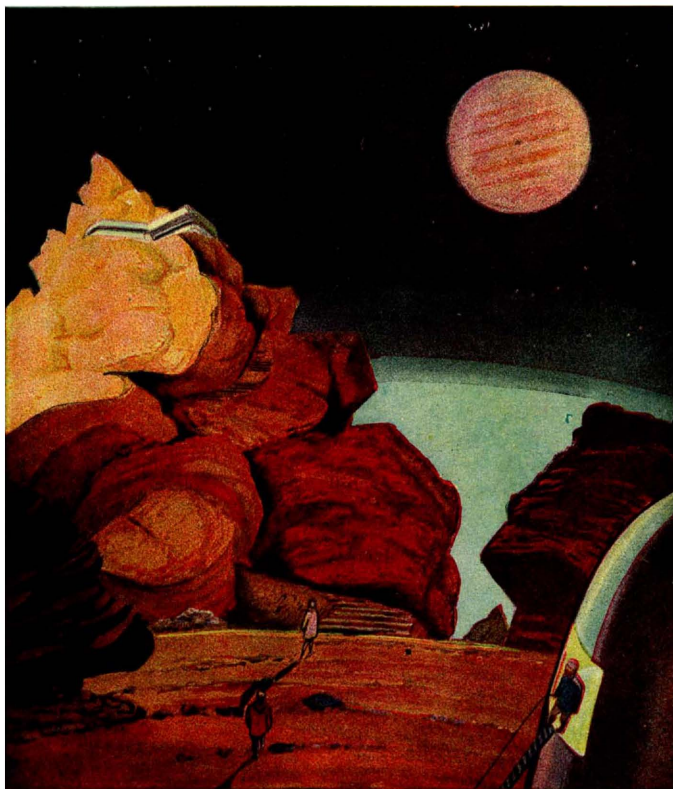


Galaxy

SCIENCE FICTION

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TIME QUARRY—A Suspense Novel By Clifford D. Simak
CONTEST—STARTLING PRIZES—Introduced By WILLIE LEY



INTRODUCING A GREAT SCIENCE FICTION CONTEST

FLYING SAUCERS

Friend, Foe or Fantasy?

By WILLY LEY

THE editors of *GALAXY Science Fiction* have asked me to open the Flying Saucer Season by sniffing out the scent of the quarry, to be followed by as many bloodhound readers as may wish to join in the hunt.

Fine. I approve of the hunt. Neither a cynical nor a credulous attitude is justified in considering the Flying Saucer mystery. For one thing, about four hundred eyewitness reports have been collected. If we say that the average number of witnesses per case was three, about 1,200 persons claim to have seen these objects. One has to assume, therefore, where there is so much smoke, there must be fire somewhere.

Possibly several fires, for the per-

sons who claim to have seen "un-identified objects" (to use a neutral term) do not agree as to size and shape. There is no question that most of the witnesses told the truth as they thought they saw it, and what they saw, or thought they saw, clearly falls into three groups:

Group One:—

Lights in the sky, generally round and without anything visible attached to them, sometimes "flying in formation," reminiscent of those strange "fiery balls" which Allied pilots saw near the wingtips of their airplanes during the last few weeks of World War II in Europe. They were called "Foo Fighters" and believed to be a secret German weapon—but they never did anything.

Group Two:—

Round or oval objects that looked metallic, flying at high speed, generally at a very high altitude, estimates of size ranging from 30 to 300 feet in diameter.

Group Three:—

Rocket-shaped craft without wings, larger in size than known military and research craft, doubly strange because they were seen in areas far away from rocket testing grounds, where experiments of such type might be conducted.

The fact that the observers do not agree makes it unlikely that one over-all explanation will fit every case. By a convenient coincidence, the explanations advanced so far also fall into three categories . . . or four, if you want to include the idea that they might be Russian missiles, which I discount from the outset. Even before China turned communist, the Soviet Union had roughly three times the land area of the United States. It has room enough to test new weapons without using our hemisphere. And if it did have such swift and powerful missiles, the cold war would have grown hot some time ago.

THE three other explanations are:

(1) that the witnesses saw phenomena which are known, but not known to them; (2) that the Saucers are a secret American development; (3) that they are spaceships from another planet.

The first explanation probably ac-

counts for a large percentage of the reports, those originating from people not professionally connected with aeronautics, meteorology and related sciences. They may have seen radar targets, Navy "skyhook" balloons which are of huge size, rare cloud formations, and even, on occasion, actual meteorites, without being able to identify them. Personally, I believe that the few reports of "luminous disks flying in formation," especially, are due to such a mistake. Meteorological instruments normally are carried by one balloon, but in special cases, clusters of five, six or more balloons are used. I consider it possible that such a balloon cluster, at maximum altitude (which means that the balloons are expanded to bursting point and therefore almost transparent) could produce an *optical effect* on a lower cloud layer which would look like luminous disks in formation.

The second explanation has two advantages. It is the easiest and also the most pleasant to believe in. The assumption that the disks are a U. S. military development which should not have been seen in the first place seems to explain why the attitude of official quarters ranges from semi-silence to outright debunking. It does, however, have a major disadvantage—it is very hard to imagine why a military missile should be given this peculiar shape.

The third explanation, championed by Donald Keyhoe in magazine and book analyses, is also quite

appealing, particularly to the science fiction faithful. If the disks were spaceships from another planet, one can easily think of a number of reasons why they have avoided any contact with us. The atmospheric pressure of Earth, for example, might be too high—or too low—for them. Perhaps there is too much moisture in our air. They might need more ultra-violet light than they would get here below the ozone layer, which is at about 100,000 foot altitude.

The third explanation would also clarify a number of very old reports of "airships" dating back even before the invention of the balloon. But that explanation also suffers from a drawback. While we probably cannot yet build an atomic-powered rocket, we do have some idea of what such an atomic rocket motor could do. And then it turns out that a 30-foot disk, even with a super-excellent atomic reaction engine, could barely make the moon, and a 300-foot disk might just get to either Mars or Venus.

VENUS, of course, has an atmosphere through which no astronomer has yet looked, but we have reasons to believe that the climate below that impenetrable atmosphere is not congenial to living beings with a body chemistry like ours, not to say intelligent beings.

Mars has a thin and completely transparent atmosphere, but if it had inhabitants which could build

atomic-powered space craft, we *should* see some other activity, too. And it is at least doubtful whether anybody ever did, since the phenomena observed on Mars can be explained more believably as natural occurrences than otherwise.

Therefore—the disks would probably have to be interstellar faster-than-light ships, in which case I would expect them to be about half a mile long, and, to date, none has been reported that size.

Where does this leave us? Back approximately where we started. However, several factors in my argument must be pointed out for scientific objectivity: (1) I have never seen a Flying Saucer myself, nor do I know anybody who has; (2) there may be more than one type of missile involved, which would explain the conflicting reports; (3) I have only *known* propulsive and design principles and life forms to base my reasoning on; (4) my personal belief that many reports are based on mistaken identity does not explain the rest.

The simple truth is that I don't know what to think. But, as I said at the beginning, the editors of *GALAXY Science Fiction* have declared open season on Flying Saucers. Somebody, somewhere, may be hoarding an explanation that explains all. Possibly the ingenious and extremely desirable prizes will lure out that explanation.

What is *your* theory?

—WILLY LEY