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America's Best Astrophysicists Are Taking UFOs Seriously. Maybe You Should Too

BY JEFFREY KLUGER  JUNE 10, 2022 4:00 PM EDT

NASA has spent more than 60 years flying UFOs. Every spacecraft that ever visited the moon, landed on Mars, buzzed by Jupiter, orbited Saturn, or reconnoitered Pluto would be a decidedly unidentified flying object to any alien intelligence that might encounter it. There may be no such intelligence beyond Earth in our solar system. But in interstellar space? That's another question. That's why the Voyager 1 and Voyager 2 probes, which left the solar system in 2012 and 2018 respectively, carry golden records on their sides etched with coded sounds and pictures from Earth—a message in a bottle to any civilization that might one day encounter the ships and want to learn more about the curious species that launched them.

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UFOs—or UAPs (unidentified aerial phenomena), as they're more decorously called today—have frequently been in the news lately. [As I reported](#), just last month, the House Intelligence Committee's Counterterrorism, Counterintelligence, and Counterproliferation subcommittee conducted public hearings on more than 140 sightings by military pilots over the past 20 years of UAPs flying in all manner of inexplicable ways: bobbing, weaving, hovering, diving, changing direction with head-snapping speed that would produce potentially deadly g-forces to any living being—or at least any living *human being—inside*

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The Congressional hearing followed [the release last year](#) of a similar Department of Defense study of UAPs, and both Congress and the Pentagon came to the same conclusion, which was basically: *beats me*. The objects could be natural phenomena misinterpreted by the pilots and their equipment; they could be new technology developed by Russia, China, or another high technology power; and yes, they could, in theory at least, be extraterrestrial in origin.

“UAPs are unexplained, it’s true,” Congressman and committee chairman Andre Carson (D., Ind.) said in his opening statement during the House hearings. “But they are real.”

Now, there’s a third government agency getting involved in the effort to explain UAPs: NASA itself. [As the space agency announced this week](#), it’s launching its own investigation, beginning in the fall, to get to the bottom of the UAP mystery. The effort will be led by astrophysicist David Spergel, former chair of the astrophysics department at Princeton University. Budgeted at a bargain rate of just \$100,000, the study will run for nine months, analyze all available video data and first-hand accounts amassed so far, and consult both military and civilian experts for their analysis of the evidence. The space agency is open to any and all interpretations of the data—though it is setting a high bar for at least one.

“There is no evidence,” NASA said in its release, “[that] UAPs are extraterrestrial in origin.”

But absence of evidence, of course, is not evidence of absence, and NASA officials acknowledge that anything is possible and that they will follow the findings, wherever they might point.

“NASA believes that the tools of scientific discovery are powerful and apply here also,” associate administrator Thomas Zurbuchen said in a statement. “We have the tools and team who can help us improve our understanding of the unknown. That’s the very definition of what science is. That’s what we do.”

That is indeed what NASA does—and it’s high time it brought those skills to the UAP mystery. After six decades of building and flying machines it can very much explain, the space agency will at last turn its eye to ones the world can’t.

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