

Extract from Wernher von Braun's book *First Men to the Moon*,
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"Question: What is your opinion on 'U.F.O.'s'?"

"Answer: There is a rational and rather straight-forward explanation for the great majority of 'sightings of unidentified flying objects,' or 'flying saucers,' as they are more familiarly called. During the last ten years, official U.S. investigators have tabulated about six thousand 'sightings.' They could account for all but two per cent as belonging to any of the following categories:

- High-flying balloons of various kinds
- High-flying aircraft illuminated by the sun after the sun had set on the ground
- Nightly 'Fata Morgana' type reflections in the atmosphere of distant light sources on the ground
- Artificial satellites of U.S. or Soviet origin
- Meteorites and fireballs
- Birds
- The planets Venus or Jupiter
- Searchlights illuminating cloud layers
- Hoaxes perpetrated by pranksters

Even the most ardent believers in flying objects of extra-terrestrial origin will usually concede that most reported 'sightings' can be traced back to one of these sources. But it is that unaccounted two per cent that makes enthusiasts cling tenaciously to their conviction.

I cannot account for the mysterious two per cent, either. But a lifetime spent with testing of guided missiles has taught me to be extremely careful with eye-witness accounts on rocket firings running into some in-flight trouble. Of three experienced observers questioned after a typical mishap, one swore that he clearly saw a part coming off before the rocket faltered; a second hotly denied this but claimed that the missile oscillated violently before it veered off the course; while the third trained observer saw neither a part coming off, nor an oscillation, nor any veering off the course but insisted that the rocket was flying perfectly steadily until it was abruptly ripped apart by an internal explosion.

Such contradictions in the eyewitness accounts of old rocket men are by no means an exception; we are almost invariably confronted with this situation. Yet, we are dealing here with experienced observers who not only had seen many firings, but who had the great advantage of being mentally prepared for the imminent test.

For this reason, I am highly skeptical about the objective of any 'sighting' report of a fleeting, mysterious object in the sky submitted by an equally surprised and unexperienced observer. And those unaccounted two per cent of U.F.O.'s absolutely fail to raise my blood pressure. To me, ninety-eight per cent is a mighty good batting average. I wish we could account for ninety-eight per cent of what we observe in many other fields of human endeavor! Yet, ever since the Middle Ages it has not been customary for science to call on ghosts or witches - or little green men from Mars - whenever we are confronted with a phenomenon for which we do not yet have a satisfactory answer.

To those who, either through personal observation or through hearsay based on other people's accounts, still insist that objects of extra-terrestrial origin are roaming through our atmosphere, I can only say that I have never seen such an object and cannot believe in their existence until I do."