

gas, abnormally fast moving clouds or (snort) the planet Venus. For decades, military and commercial pilots, who literally live or die by their ability to identify flying objects, swear on their jobs and pensions they've seen things flying objects they couldn't identify. A few observations by carefully trained observers would be cause for speculation; files filled with them should, one would hope, move matters past reasonable doubt.

For those with eyes to see, there are hundreds of photographs of UFOs posted on book pages and websites; enough that several different "models" have been identified. There are scores, if not hundreds, of volumes on the subject, many of them the result of actual research and clear thought, reporting and analyzing the thousands of stories from the thousands of people who swear up and down they've seen a UFO; not to mention the growing legion of otherwise normal humans who swear up and down aliens have had, in one way or another, their way with them. There are the crop circles made by something that intricately braids dry wheat stalks, the 1957 formation fly over of Washington, D.C., the drive-by grid blackouts, the hundreds of lazer-incised cattle still popping up on the Great Plains. (No vehicle tracks, no footprints, some carcasses clearly dropped from a significant altitude.) Whatever we're dealing with, it's safe to say it's more than the fevered imaginings of large-bellied conventioners wearing aluminum foil briefs and Dr. Spock propellor beanies.

In terms of believing without seeing, alien visitation is hardly a heavy lift. If we accept, and impressive evidence suggests we should, that there are regions of the universe which began unfolding thousands of millions of years before our sun was so much as a twinkle in the eye of a congealing gas nebula, then it follows that, just as surely as quantum probabilities made little green apples, there must be planetary systems out there just bubbling over with levels of intelligence which, by comparison, would rank us somewhere between amoeba and gerbils. The handmaiden of intelligence is curiosity. It is, in fact, its driving force. Once a life form starts thinking, it starts wondering. Once you start asking questions, the need to see what's over the next hill is a monkey on your back. Humans risk life and limb, not once in a while but habitually, to see or do something they haven't seen or done before. What else accounts for the existence of hang gliders and roller coasters? When Captain Kirk's spiritual ancestors first sailed out of sight of land, they had no real choice. Having thought long and hard about the horizon, only death would have stopped them from seeing what was beyond it. The most endearing aspect of intelligence is that, given enough of it, the will to live is easily trumped by the lust for experience.

It's reasonable to assume that given, say, a hundred million year head start, a few intelligent life forms would have been curious enough to sail out of sight of their star system. If, for no other reason, than because they can. Hillary climbed Mt. Everest "because it was there." Would a Zeta Reticular need more reason? Would time and fate eventually bring them here? Why not? We raft down the Colorado, book rooms in quaint third world villages, videotape primitive mating rituals and, lest we forget, have a space program of our own that's seriously wondering about terraforming Mars. On a darker note, when humans discover new worlds, they tend to beat up the natives, take their stuff and leave a mess. That's what makes us gerbils.

And so, in the minds of the thoughtful, two questions immediately arise: who are these life forms and what do they want? I haven't the foggiest notion. Given the little I know of the world, I make only one assumption: few, if any, aliens we encounter are likely to be families vacationing in saucer shaped Winnebagos. Or mindless nitwits in fast as light SUVs. They will be, in all likelihood, agents of either government or big business. Judging from what we read in the papers, this not a win-win situation for the common earthling.

Which isn't to say the situation is without good news. If the Alpha Centaurans wanted to cook and eat us, they'd probably have started by now. Any invasion (or, from their point of view, migration to the new world) will, after awkward beginnings, probably boil down to business and politics as usual. How much more ruthless than Congress, the Supreme Court, big oil and the pharmaceutical drug cartel can vicious insects be? If the alien agenda involves interbreeding, who's to say it won't be meaningful and fun? The way things are going, intimate encounters with an operationally intelligent life form might be just what humanity, and evolution, needs.

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**Gun** (firearm) likely from a woman's name: from the practice to name siege engines and cannons after women. Two famous examples are Mons Meg, the 15th century mortar that can be seen at Edinburgh castle, and Big Bertha of WWI fame. In weapons, the word arose from Gunnhildr, and the name transferred to the general sense.

**Cut the Mustard** OED2 has it deriving from the slang sense of mustard, meaning the best, flavorful. O. Henry used it in 1904-- 'Cabbages and Kings'. The phrase comes evolved in the same period: cut refers to harvesting the plant-- if you can't cut the mustard, you can't supply what is best.

**Broad** (woman) Broad originally meant a ticket (admission, transport, meal, etc.); then was applied to prostitutes (a pimp's meal ticket), then to women of loose morals, and eventually to women in general. It dates to 1911. Why a ticket was called a broad is uncertain, but likely had something to do with traveling abroad. Playing cards were also called broads. Go figure.

**Red Herring** (deliberate misdirection) Derived from hunting. Poachers would interpose themselves between the prey and the hunting party and drag a red herring across the trail to mislead the dogs. This would give them the opportunity to bag the prey themselves. A red herring was used by dog trainers, the pungent fish would create a trail when training their hounds-- they'd follow as if the one they had been trained with.

**Drag Race** Drag is late 18th century for a wagon or buggy, because the horse would drag it. By the 1850s this was transferred to the street, as in the phrase 'main drag'. In the 1950s was adopted by hot rodders-- a drag race is one conducted on city streets, originally.

**Pussyfoot** (soft step of a cat) To proceed with caution, subtly; used pejoratively, is American in origin and dates to at least 1893. In England, pussyfoot has a different meaning: someone who advocates prohibition. A pussyfooter is a teetotaler, derived from William E. "Pussyfoot" Johnson, an American prohibitionist who traveled to London in 1916 to spread the good word. Johnson claimed his nickname came from his "cat-like policies in pursuing lawbreakers in Indian territory."

**The Whole Shebang** (entirety) A shebang or chebang, is a hut or dwelling, dating back to the early 1860s. Mark Twain, in an 1869 letter to his publisher, was the first to use the phrase 'the whole chebang' in its modern sense of the entirety.

**Booze** (alcohol) Arose around the fourteenth century; in America since the early eighteenth century. The Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang records Benjamin Franklin using the term boozy from 1722, and Webster's 1828 dictionary has entries for booze and bouse meaning "to drink hard; to guzzle," and for boosy meaning "a little intoxicated; merry with liquor." Derivative of the Middle Dutch verb busen, meaning to drink heavily, and first appeared in English as a verb spelled bouse.

**Cyber-** The combination form cyber- used in such terms as cybernetics and cyberspace, was coined in 1948 by Norbert Wiener (1894-1964) an American mathematician; from the Greek κυβερnetes, or steersman, which is also the root of the word govern. Wiener may have based his word on an 1830's French, cybernétique, which meant the art of governing.

**Jukebox** Creoles are languages arising spontaneously, when people without a common tongue have to work and live together. The first stage is pidgin, a simplified amalgam of elements from colliding languages. Creole is a pidgin that's advanced to a mother tongue. There are many in the Americas and Caribbean: in the Sea Islands off the Carolinas, 'Gullah' is spoken-- several West African languages used by slaves in the eighteenth century. In Gullah, there's jook or joog, meaning disorderly or wicked, coming from a West African language: Bambara dzugu, meaning wicked, or from Wolof dzug, to live wickedly. In Gullah/Black English, jook house - a disorderly house, brothel/gaming parlour/dance hall, or a shack off the road selling moonshine-- a tavern or roadhouse providing music. It shortened to jook and appeared in the 1930s, but is almost certainly much older. The jukebox was invented in the late 1930s to provide music in jooks that didn't have their own bands. Time magazine, 1939: "Glenn Miller attributes his crescendo to the 'juke-box' which retails recorded music, a nickel a shot in bars, restaurants and small roadside dance joints".

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