

## Believing that aliens have visited our solar system is not just for kooks

The prolific Harvard University astrophysicist [Avi Loeb] has produced pioneering and provocative research on black holes, gamma-ray bursts, the early universe and other standard topics of his field. But for more than a decade he has also courted a more contentious subject—namely, space aliens, including how to find them.

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[In 2017,] astronomers around the world [scrambled to study an enigmatic interstellar visitor](#)—the first ever seen—that briefly came within range of their telescopes.

The object's discoverers dubbed it '[Oumuamua](#)—a Hawaiian term that roughly translates to “scout.” The unavoidably cursory examinations of this celestial passerby showed it had [several properties that defied easy natural explanation](#). 'Oumuamua's apparent shape—which was like a 100-meter-long cigar or pancake—did not closely resemble any known asteroid or comet.

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To Loeb, the most plausible explanation was as obvious as it was sensational: taken together with its possibly pancakelike shape and high reflectivity, 'Oumuamua's anomalous acceleration made perfect sense if the object was in fact a light sail—perhaps a derelict from some long-expired galactic culture.

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Loeb has now taken his case to the public with the book [Extraterrestrial: The First Sign of Intelligent Life beyond Earth](#), which is just as much about the author's life story as it is about 'Oumuamua's fundamental mysteries.

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