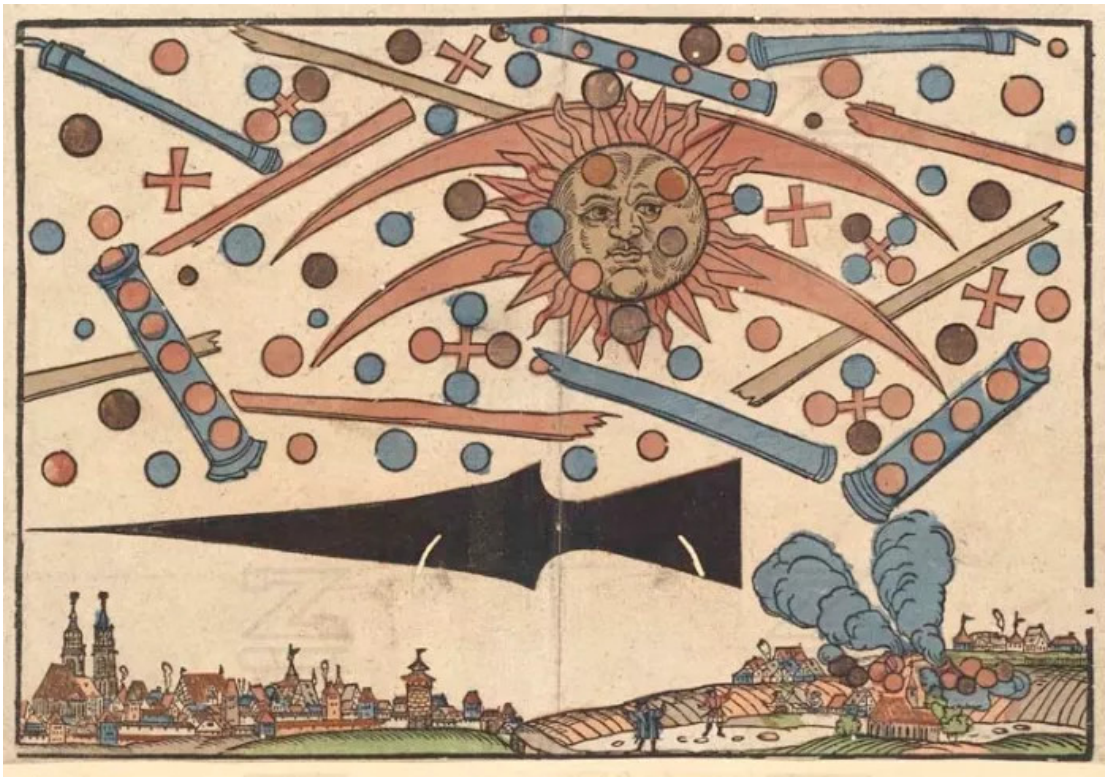
The Great Battle in the Skies of Nuremberg



At the hour when the first rays of sunlight pink the red-tiled rooftops of Nuremberg, on this Tuesday, April 14, 1561, the early-rising residents opening their shops and market stalls have no reason to expect that the sky is about to offer them the strangest spectacle of their lives. Yet no sooner does the day break than a shudder of dread ripples from street to street, from window to window.

What the chronicles of the era describe with startling precision — and undisguised terror — resembles less a natural phenomenon than a display of power from somewhere else entirely. Dozens, perhaps hundreds of citizens witness it with their own eyes. It is no dream, no mystical vision: it is a collective event, rooted in the material reality of the Bavarian sky.

What the eyes beheld

Witnesses unanimously report the appearance of two gigantic black cylinders moving through the heights above. From these colossal structures pour swarms of smaller objects: blue-black spheres, blood-red crosses, brilliantly white discs. The sky above Nuremberg that morning is no longer an empty blue expanse — it is a teeming stage of unknown entities in motion.

Then begins what the contemporaries can only describe in terms of combat. The shapes collide, clash, swirl in a violent and incomprehensible ballet. The event lasts nearly an hour. It ends no less dramatically: several of the objects appear to hurtle straight toward the solar disc and vanish into it. Others fall at the edge of the city.

Archival Document — Nuremberg Gazette, April 14, 1561

> "[...] approximately 3 in length, from time to time four in a square, much remained isolated, and between these balls one saw a number of crosses with the color of blood. Then one saw two large pipes, in which small and large pipes were 3 balls, also four or more. All these elements started to fight one against the other."

The printer's testimony

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The phenomenon does not go unrecorded. Hans Glaser, a printer by trade, publishes on April 14, 1561 — the very same day — a woodcut illustration accompanied by a written account of the events. This document, preserved in the archives of the Zentralbibliothek in Zurich, stands to this day as one of the earliest illustrated descriptions of an unexplained aerial phenomenon in Western history.

One text, three centuries of enigma

What are we to make of this 1561 gazette? For generations, Hans Glaser's text was catalogued among the curiosities of early printing — a testament to medieval credulity, some said; a religious allegory, others argued. Historians specializing in the history of ideas see it first as a reflection of an era in which the sky was perceived as the realm of God, angels, and portents.

But from the twentieth century onward, a new eye turns to this document. UFO researchers — scholars specializing in unidentified aerial phenomena — regard it as one of the oldest and best-documented accounts of an encounter with unidentified flying objects. Carl Jung himself, in his 1958 essay on "flying saucers," cites this case as exemplary of the way collective beliefs shape the perception of extraordinary events.

Hypotheses before the mystery

Rational explanations proposed by contemporary scientists are not lacking. Some meteorologists invoke a *parhelion* effect — those "false suns" produced by the refraction of light through ice crystals suspended in the atmosphere. Others favor ball lightning, a low-latitude aurora borealis, or an exceptionally dense meteor shower.

These explanations nonetheless stumble on the duration of the event — a full hour — and on the consistency of descriptions across witnesses. The variety of shapes reported (cylinders, spheres, crosses, discs), their apparent movement, and their combat described in almost tactical terms are difficult to reconcile with a single atmospheric phenomenon. The Nuremberg affair remains, five centuries later, filed without a definitive answer.

Nuremberg is not alone

What makes the Nuremberg affair all the more troubling is that it stands not alone. In the summer of 1566, the Swiss city of Basel witnesses a similar phenomenon: numerous onlookers see black spheres fill the sky and clash before the rising sun. A woodcut by Samuel Apiarius immortalizes this episode in turn. Two cities, two engravings, two converging testimonies — five years apart.

Unexplained celestial phenomena are likewise reported in seventeenth-century Japanese annals, in Irish ecclesiastical chronicles of the Middle Ages, and in several texts from Antiquity. Humanity did not wait for the space age to scan the heavens with bewilderment.

A sky that still speaks

Today, as the American, British, and French governments progressively declassify their files on unidentified aerial phenomena — now discreetly rebranded UAP for *Unidentified Aerial Phenomena* — the Nuremberg affair finds unexpected new relevance. It is a reminder that the question is not new.

On that morning of April 14, 1561, the people of Nuremberg had no radars, no smartphones, no satellites. They had only their eyes, their memories, and their quills. And what they saw — cylinders, spheres, crosses, discs, combat and fall — continues to defy our understanding of the world. Perhaps that is the essential point: that some questions, across the centuries, remain open.

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