

## How Blink-182's Tom DeLonge Became a U.F.O. Researcher

Two years after Mr. DeLonge left the band, he found a new life trying to make sense of outer space.



By [Derrick Bryson Taylor](#)

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For decades, the discussion of whether or not [U.F.O.s exist](#) has been debated in American pop culture and within science communities.

That all reached a fever pitch last week when the United States Navy confirmed that three widely shared [videos captured by naval aviators](#) in 2004 and 2015 were indeed real and showed what it called “[unidentified aerial phenomena](#).” The “unidentified” part of that statement sparked excitement among [U.F.O.](#) enthusiasts.

The three videos show mysterious objects in the sky and contain audio of pilots trying to make sense of what they were seeing. They had gained notoriety since being published in 2017 and 2018 by The New York Times and a company called [To the Stars Academy of Arts & Sciences](#). Founded in 2017, it is run by a team of 12, including several former government employees, who try to advance society’s understanding of scientific phenomena through the lenses of entertainment, science and aerospace.

As news of the Navy’s statement spread, many people took note of the academy, and more specifically one of its founders: Tom DeLonge, who was from 1993 until 2015 a guitarist and singer for the band Blink-182. *How, many wondered, did the guy from Blink-182 become involved in U.F.O. research?*

It might be hard for those not steeped in U.F.O.-ology to see the significance in all this. Susan Gough, the [Pentagon](#) spokeswoman who made the statement last week said that the Navy had “confirmed that the three videos that are in wide circulation are indeed recordings made by naval aviators, recorded during their training evolutions.”

She also said that the Navy “has always considered the phenomena observed in those videos as unidentified.” Not only that, but the sightings had been “part of a larger issue of an increased number of training range incursions by unidentified aerial phenomena in recent years,” she said.

And that brings us to Blink-182.

We talked with Mr. DeLonge, who is on tour with another band, Angels & Airwaves, and Luis Elizondo, the director of global security and special programs for the academy, about the company and what the Navy’s response to the three videos actually means.

The following is an edited and condensed version of the conversation.

**I just wanted to say to Tom and Luis, thank you again for giving me a little bit of your time. I know you guys have busy, busy days.**

Mr. DeLonge: Sure! Absolutely man.

**How did you get into U.F.O.s and space research?**

Mr. DeLonge: Well, ever since I was in junior high I was really kind of a troubled, rebellious kid. I got into a lot of trouble. My parents were working all day and I was a skateboarder and

I was heavily into punk rock music, which is rebellious by nature. I would just do things, honestly, to try to get security guards and police officers to chase us to get some adrenaline. I remember being so bored during the summer and kind of going, “Wow, there’s got to be more to all this.”

I started becoming very fascinated in the idea of what else is there besides working a 9-to-5 job and coming from a broken family. For some reason I just thought science fiction was just fascinating. My brother and I were so into the whole “Star Wars” thing, obviously, in the early ’80s. It just kind of led to me thinking a little bit broader.

**There have been a lot of headlines about the Navy confirming and saying objects seen in three declassified military clips, one from 2004 and two from 2015, are “unidentified aerial phenomena.” Why is the Navy’s response so important to the larger conversation on U.F.O.s?**

Mr. DeLonge: Everyone still looks up to the United States government as having the resources, the intellect and the duty to deal with subjects like this. We’ve been waiting around as scholars and researchers on the subject for many decades and hoping to God that one day the government would come out and acknowledge what this is. This whole thing could be answered by the government. We’re just waiting for them to come and help us with some of this research. This situation that just happened is literally something I and many other people have been waiting for for not years, but decades. This is what we’ve been hoping it would do so it can really just ignite more smart people and intellectuals to get into this race and help us figure out more about it.

**Luis, you have a background in the Department of Defense. What does this response signal to you?** *(He was a career intelligence officer with the Army, the Department of Defense, National Counterintelligence Executive and the Office of Director of National Intelligence.)*

Mr. Elizondo: I think it signals an opening of the aperture. A willingness to be more transparent. Particularly when you’re talking about a topic that has classically been seen and looked at with a sense of disdain and some degree stigma. I think this signals a new paradigm. I think it signals a willingness by some of the government to recognize data for what it is and begin to have the conversation that needs to be had.



“I think it signals a willingness by some of the government to recognize data for what it is and begin to have the conversation that needs to be had,” Luis Elizondo said. Credit...Roger Kisby for The New York Times

**What did your Blink-182 bandmates and people in the music industry think of your company, To the Stars Academy?**

Mr. DeLonge: It's really funny, I think I was kind of groomed for this job because the first time that I left Blink-182, which is a long time ago, all my fans were so angry and the public at large was like, "Why would you do that? You're crazy." *[The band broke up in 2005, and reformed in 2009. Mr. DeLonge left again in 2015.]*

I had a list of this whole kind of reinvention of who I was, and starting my band Angels & Airwaves really gave me a way into that. I had to rebuild up from the ground, who I thought I was, who I wanted to be, where I wanted to go. By the time this happened my band didn't understand it, I couldn't tell who I was talking to. Because at the time, a lot of these guys were still in positions that are sensitive and transitioning out of government or whatever. I wasn't in a place to be able to really say everything, it just wasn't the right kind of etiquette, if you will. The guys from Blink didn't know this. But it's O.K. But I knew I was getting into waters that were so important that I had never really even touched before. Going through what I went through earlier with the band, I already had thick skin. So I didn't really care, is the short of it.

**You are a musician, known for outlandish stage behavior including sometimes being naked. How did you get people to take you seriously?**

Mr. DeLonge: That's a really good question. It was funny because, fortunately most of the people I was meeting with in the early days weren't really aware of the crazy rock and roll behaviors and antics that I've had in my early, mid-20s. I always tell people being a celebrity got me in a few doors, but that's all it did. My intellect, whatever level it may or may not be [laughs], is what got those meetings to bear fruit. I think from my perspective, the most important thing that I was focused on was being eloquent. Being humble to the subject, because the subject is not a joke. I had to really be respectful about what I was saying, how I was saying it. I think because all those things, I earned trust and I earned more meetings. It was a process, it did not happen over night, it took me a couple years.

**In July, the academy announced the ADAM (Acquisition & Data Analysis of Materials) Research Project, an academic research program focused on exotic material samples from U.F.O.s. How will the academy conduct research on the materials and what exactly is it looking for?**

Mr. Elizondo: We're going to do research employing the scientific method, first and foremost. What we have been doing is trying to find the most qualified individuals at the most respectable institutions to conduct scientific analysis. That scientific analysis includes physical analysis, it includes molecular and chemical analysis and ultimately it includes nuclear analysis.

Image



“For some reason I just thought science fiction was just fascinating,” Mr. DeLonge said. “My brother and I were so into the whole ‘Star Wars’ thing, obviously, in the early ’80s. It just kind of led to me thinking a little bit broader.”Credit...Daniel Brenner for The New York Times

**Has the academy gotten its hands on any materials to review?**

Mr. Elizondo: Certainly.

**Are you able to share more about that?**

Mr. Elizondo: Not at this point. We have to let the process take its course. And what we don't want to do is be presumptive either way. The last thing we want to do is jump to any conclusions, prematurely. Ultimately, the data is going to decide what something is or what something isn't.

**The materials come from a variety of sources?**

Mr. Elizondo: Correct.

**That could be from people finding them all the way to government?**

Mr. Elizondo: Sure. Fill in the blanks. T.T.S.A. does not limit itself as to where it obtains material or information. In that process we have to be very discerning. As I've said before, there's a difference between something that's truly exotic and something that fell from the alternator of a 1984 Cadillac.

**When I was a kid, I saw what I believed to be a U.F.O. I'll never forget that moment with my mom. No one has ever truly believed me. Have either of you ever seen a U.F.O.?**

Mr. DeLonge: I saw some really anomalous stuff one night out in the desert, zipping across the stars, horizon to horizon, zig zagging. That really blew my mind because no satellites move that way. But, I can't tell you what it was. I think like most people, the stuff that I've seen is a lot of stuff on the internet where I bet some of it really is true, but you really don't know which pieces.