

WHAT REALLY BROUGHT DOWN THE TOWERS?

- ☐ Planes flown by terrorists?
- ☐ A remote-controlled aircraft?
- ☐ Preplanted explosive devices?

As major questions surrounding the official version of the truth emerge, "What really happened on 9/11?" is becoming the "Who shot JFK?" of a new generation. How crazy are the new conspiracy theories? Depends how far down the rabbit hole you're willing to go.

Few of these guys simply talk. More accurately what they do is spew. Like a printer cranking out multiple copies of a statistical prospectus, they seem hellbent on spitting out every fact, figure, and thread of conjecture in their heads before the paper tray runs dry. About Dick Cheney's connection to the strangely prescient right-wing Project for the New American Century think tank. About Mohamed Atta's U.S. intelligence connections and love of pork chops and strippers. About implausible demolition patterns observed at the World Trade Center on that fateful morning. "There are so many problems with the official story of 9/11, it's hard to know where

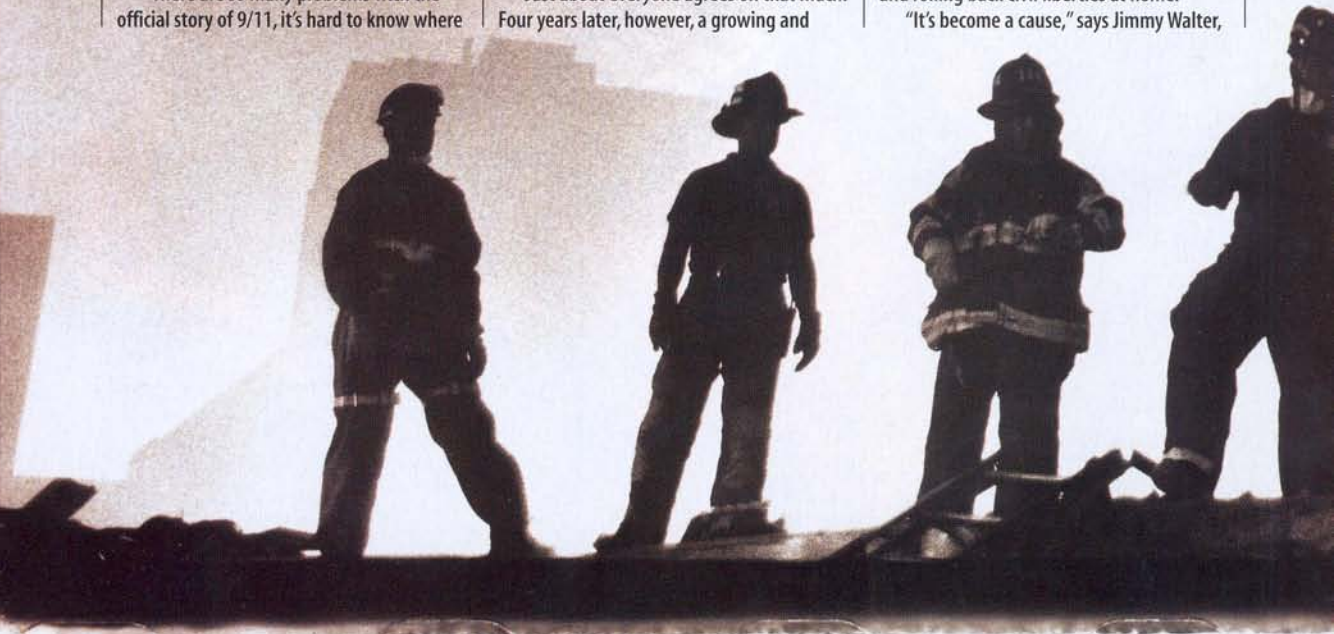
to start," says Sander Hicks, a 34-year-old independent publisher from Brooklyn whose "middle-of-the-road Christian values" father marched with Martin Luther King Jr. in the 1960s. "A person of intellectual honesty cannot embrace that story."

On September 11, 2001, the World Trade Center collapsed in an implosion of concrete, flying steel, and human bodies. In Washington, D.C., the Pentagon suffered a giant, blackened gash in a recently renovated section. Meanwhile, United Airlines Flight 93 plummeted into a rural Pennsylvania field, killing everyone on board.

Just about everyone agrees on that much. Four years later, however, a growing and

increasingly prominent group of Americans believes that a government conspiracy is the only explanation of "the new Pearl Harbor" that makes any sense. Armed with a spate of books, compelling videos, and a recent high-profile ad campaign, the loose community that some call the 9/11 Truth Movement has moved from the shadowy basements of the Internet out into the open. Across the board, the movement operates on the conviction that the U.S. government is keeping the whole truth under wraps. And that it either planned or allowed 9/11 to happen as a pretext for invading Afghanistan and Iraq and rolling back civil liberties at home.

"It's become a cause," says Jimmy Walter,





the millionaire who runs reopen911.org. Walter is blowing stacks of cash on cable TV spots and full-page ads in *The New York Times*, plus funding the free distribution of DVDs (more than 365,000 so far, he says), to demand new investigations into the attacks. "It's hard to say it feels good, but it actually does feel good to stand up and be a patriot."

While Walter may be the Truth Movement's most prominent promoter (see sidebar), it's not a one-man crusade: Just check out the six million hits on a Google search for "9/11 conspiracy." Or a 2004 CNN.com poll in which 89 percent of respondents said they believe there's a U.S. government cover-up surrounding 9/11.

The surest sign of the conspiracy movement's growing momentum: opposition. Two major magazines, *Popular Mechanics* and *Scientific American*, recently devoted features

They were there, but did they all see the same thing?



Some observers see the devil in even the smallest details.



to debunking various 9/11 conspiracy theories. In September 2005, a book by two British journalists, titled *9/11 Revealed*, prompted the U.S. State Department to post a detailed critique of the authors' "absurd, sinister interpretations" on the agency Web site.

"That's the first time the government has ever taken notice of any alternative ideas," says David Ray Griffin, professor emeritus of philosophy at California's Claremont School of Theology, who dropped his respected and prolific scholarly work to write 9/11 conspiracy books (*The New Pearl Harbor*, *The 9/11 Commission Report: Omissions and Distortions*). "We all thought that was a pretty big step."

In fact, the government had refuted earlier 9/11 rumors. But the movement has an answer for everything. One might ask, for instance, wasn't it the threat of WMDs, not 9/11, that sold the American public on the need for war in Iraq?

"September 11 was very important to Iraq because it squelched domestic dissent," explains Hicks. "They waged the invasion of Iraq on the heels of the Afghanistan invasion, which conveyed the sense that we were unbeatable. You've got to remember the context." In other words, it all fits together—if you listen carefully to the way they tell it.

THEORY #1

There were no suicidal Islamic hijackers.

The case: In the days after 9/11, Americans came to know and hate the 19 terrorists, commanded by a nefarious Egyptian named Mohamed Atta, who used box cutters and a perverted version of Islam to hijack airplanes, level the towers, smash up the Pentagon, and bring the United States to a virtual standstill. But what if they actually had nothing to do with it? Some

of the most sensational 9/11 conspiracy theories insist that Atta and company were framed.

"The jets were controlled by advanced robotics and remote-control technology, not hijackers," insists Carol A. Valentine on her Web site public-action.com, which peddles a wide range of conspiracy theories. Hang on, it gets wilder.

Elaborate umbrella theories involve the use of multiple decoy planes, remote-controlled commuter jets packed with explosives, and manipulated passenger lists. The most incendiary idea: that all four "hijacked" planes were secretly directed to a U.S. Air Force base, where all their passengers were loaded onto United Flight 93, the plane that went down in Pennsylvania. Some variations of other theories tie in here, including claims that the story of hero passengers thwarting the terrorists on Flight 93 was, amazingly, fabricated, cell phone calls and all.

Fuel for the fire: Some say the four 9/11 planes' light passenger loads—the most crowded had 81 aboard, while Flight 93 had just 37—suggest someone deliberately capped ticketing for the four flights. As for the hijackers themselves, conspiracy theorists cite numerous media reports of alleged 9/11 jihadists

(or at least Arab dudes with the same names) turning up alive *after* the attacks. And the U.S. military just happened to be running a number of war games that morning, including some that, according to conspiracy proponents, could have deliberately confused response to the attacks.

Believe it or not? To believe this (and many 9/11 conspiracy theories), you have to believe that the government is evil enough to cook up a head-spinningly complicated plot against its own people in its largest city. Once you make that leap, remote-controlled decoy planes don't seem that far-fetched.



Skeptics call Atta a playboy, not a terrorist.

ASK ANYTHING

Q Do some people have a psychological need to believe in conspiracy theories?

A Calamitous events often spawn conspiracy theories. You can find people who think the Pope had Abraham Lincoln whacked, meaning even new theories belong to an old tradition. But why buy into the idea that the U.S. government had a hand in the 9/11 attacks?

According to Patrick Leman, a psychologist at Britain's Royal Holloway University of London who studies conspiracy theory, Americans' growing distrust for media, politicians, and corporations plays a role. "If you feel out of

the loop on all these things, you're more likely to believe these institutions are conspiring against you," he says. "As society becomes more fragmented, belief in conspiracy theories will become more widespread." And it's not just here. "Iran is awash with them," he says, "both for and against the current regime." On the other hand, those guys might actually have something to be paranoid about.



What JFK's death is to one generation, 9/11 is to another.

THEORY #2

Explosives—not planes—really brought down the World Trade Center towers.

The case: On March 26, 2000, more than 4,450 pounds of gelatin-based nitroglycerine, linked by 21.6 miles of orange detonation cord that burned at 24,000 feet per second, was ignited in Seattle. Barely 17 seconds later, the monstrous Kingdome—400-plus tons of structural steel and 52,800 cubic yards of concrete—crumpled neatly to the ground in a controlled demolition. Almost as if by magic, the damage was limited to the dome's own footprint.

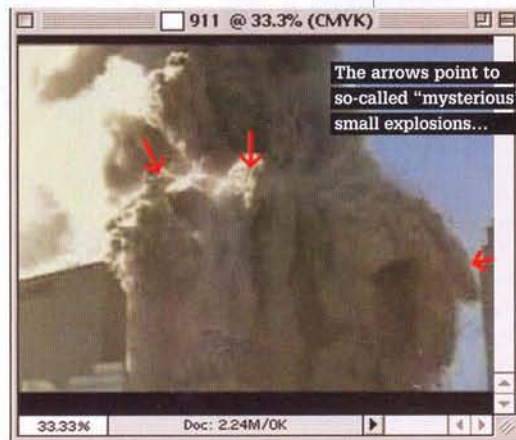
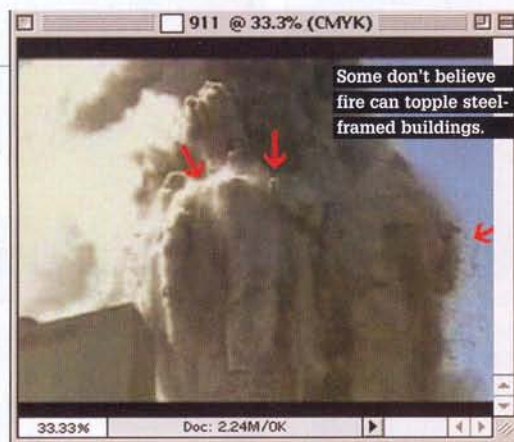
Is it odd that the collapse of the Twin Towers looked eerily similar to just that kind of pre-arranged job? Conspiracy theorists think so. Rejecting the official story—that 1,800-degree infernos sparked by burning fuel fatally weakened the Towers' steel support beams—they say planted explosives destroyed the buildings.

"It's undeniable," says Jim Hoffman of 911research.com. "There's never been a fire-induced collapse of a steel-framed building before." William Rodriguez, a 20-year WTC maintenance worker, insists he heard and felt a massive explosion in the basement floors—"I thought a generator blew up"—just before the first plane struck. He is suing George Bush and others for "knowingly failing to warn of 9/11."

A video on reopen911.org uses red arrows to track supposed "mysterious explosions" within one tower as it collapses. Conspiracists agree that two airplanes hit the WTC, but point to the towers' rapid fall and the fact that the massive buildings "pancaked" straight down into their own foundations as evidence of other forces at work. Lots of attention goes to World Trade Center 7, a 47-story building that was not struck by a plane, but also collapsed upon itself hours after the attacks.

Fuel for the fire: The implosions were highly unusual, as the magazine *Fire Engineering* pointed out in 2002. Brigham Young University physics professor Steven Jones, who recently released a scientific paper questioning the cause of the Twin Towers' collapse, notes that even FEMA concluded the official reasons for WTC7's collapse had "a low probability of occurrence."

Believe it or not? In *Popular Mechanics'* anti-conspiracy feature, engineers say steel doesn't need to melt to lose its structural integrity. And for this theory to work, you have to believe that someone could booby-trap some of the world's busiest buildings without anyone noticing.



MISSION STATEMENT

OPEN SECRET

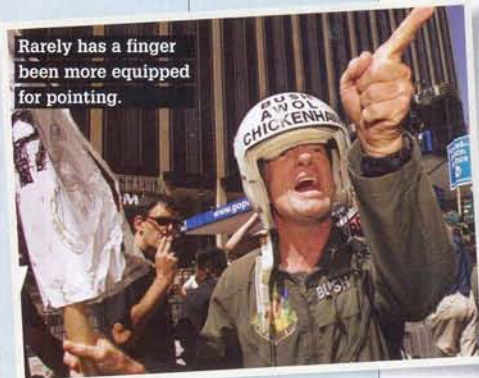
You've seen the TV ads, Now meet the man behind reopen911.org.

Last fall a man in a suit and tie stood outside *The New York Times'* Manhattan headquarters, holding a sign calling the paper's management "cowards and traitors."

That man was Jimmy Walter, the 58-year-old son of a Florida homebuilding tycoon, who runs reopen911.org. His one-man protest at the *Times* was just the latest step in a 9/11 conspiracy crusade that includes

than \$1 million for TV ads and full-page spots in the *Times*. His efforts landed him airtime with TV news big-leaguers like Anderson Cooper and Geraldo—to little avail. "They give you three minutes and ask you one question," he says. "Then they just flush you. They try to make me sound like a nut or some rich guy who doesn't have anything better to do." Despite the criti-

Rarely has a finger been more equipped for pointing.



cable TV ads, lavish newspaper spreads, and speaking tours in the U.S. and Europe. Why would a millionaire burn his inheritance on ideas most people think are sheer lunacy? Walter says Colin Powell's WMD U.N. testimony led him to reexamine 9/11—and that he became convinced the official story of the attacks is bogus.

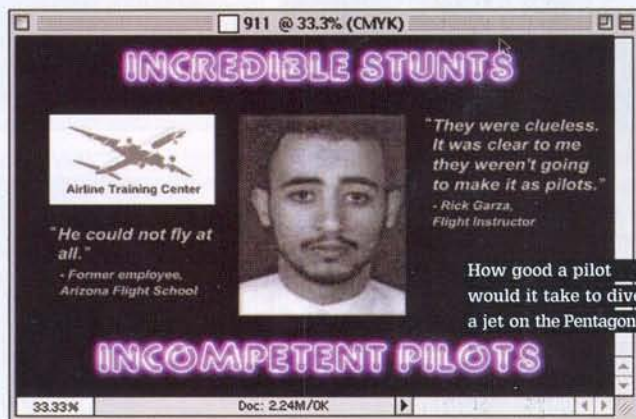
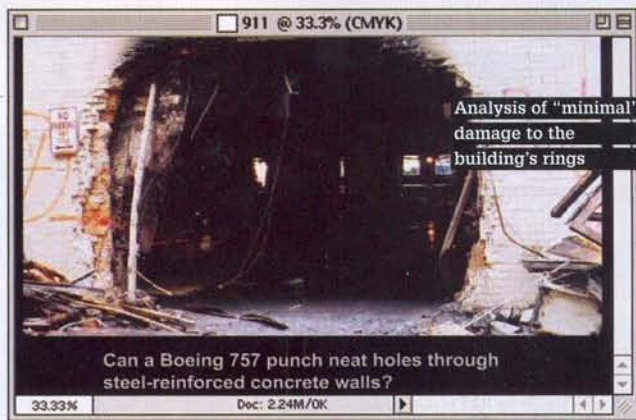
"My whole view changed," he says. "I knew there were so many unanswered questions."

Since 2003, Walter has shelled out more

cism—and threats that he claims force him to spend most of his time in Europe—this eccentric millionaire shows no signs of backing down.

"They call me a conspiracy theorist," he says. "But I call them coincidence nuts. It's just a coincidence that there were four major war games taking place that morning? Just a coincidence that those planes were almost empty when the other planes that day were 90 percent full? Come on."

—Zach Dundas



THEORY #3

American Airlines Flight 77 never crashed into the Pentagon.

The case: Officially, terrorists piloted American Airlines Flight 77 into America's military headquarters. But if you watch "Pentagon Strike," a hair-raising video widely circulated on the Internet, you see a much different version of events.

Set to a throbbing backbeat of ominous techno, the video fires a barrage of questions and statements aimed at contradicting the accepted story. IN REALITY, A BOEING 757 WAS NEVER FOUND, it says, going on to claim that the debris at the Pentagon shows no evidence that such a massive plane hit the building. AIRPLANE CRASHES LEAVE WRECKAGE, screams one screen shot. Eyewitness quotes scroll over pictures of the burning building, suggesting a small

The video says the debris field shows little evidence that a massive airliner struck the Pentagon.

commuter plane... or a missile... or a military jet... or explosives. Why, the video asks, did the Feds hustle to clear debris away and seize surveillance film? (The video can be seen at pentagonstrike.co.uk.)

Fuel for the fire: Hani Hanjour, the alleged hijacker pilot, reportedly sucked so bad in lessons that he couldn't safely fly a single-engine Cessna, much less pilot a 155-foot-long Boeing 757 into a 7,000-foot dive, turning 270 degrees into a ground-level target at 530 mph.

Believe it or not? Many eyewitnesses did report a full-size plane, and many in the Truth Movement refute this as the type of wild fantasy that discredits their more reasonable claims.

THE REAL WORLD: EARTH

DAVID VS. GOLIATH

Among other things, über-conspiracy theorist David Icke blames 9/11 on our shape-shifting, reptilian overlords.

You've written books about your theory that we're headed toward a one-world fascist government. How does 9/11 fit in? Problem. Reaction. Solution. It's the most devastating mass mind manipulation technique there is, and 9/11 was the most classic example. You had the problem (9/11), you had the public reaction—

understandably outrage, fear, horror—and then you had the solution... the Patriot Act, which has fundamentally taken away basic freedoms. **So who's responsible for 9/11?** 9/11 was not orchestrated by Bin Laden, but orchestrated within the U.S. by forces controlling the government, whether Democrat or Republican.



"Give me an hour of TV and I'd demolish the 'official' version of 9/11."

That's a bit vague. Interestingly, it goes back to the land that is once again a massive focal point: Iraq. Iraq was the land of ancient Babylon. There were bloodlines that controlled Babylon. They expanded into Rome. That is when we had the Roman Empire. They expanded into London. That is when we had the British Empire.

Who, again? A secret society network that does not like to call itself a name. When they do, it is the Illuminati, the illuminating ones. **Which leads to your theory that shape-shifting reptiles from another dimension are ultimately in control of our world leaders. This can't help your credibility.** In the early '90s, I

went through enormous ridicule. But the more people have read the books, the more they have understood. If you try to investigate what is really going on in this world and you have a preconceived idea or a religious belief, then do not even bother. Am I worried about what people might say about me? I don't give a damn. —Clint I. Smith

THEORY #4

OK, maybe Al Qaeda did it. But the government let it happen.

The case: Just as some believe the U.S. allowed the Japanese to bomb Pearl Harbor in 1941 to drag the American public into a war the government wanted, many say at least a few in Washington knew what was coming on 9/11. Some suspect that someone, somewhere decided that a war against Middle Eastern terrorists (and anyone else—cough, Saddam, cough—who got in the way) wouldn't be all bad.

More than any outright conspiracy theory, the sense that the Feds botched a chance to stop 9/11 generates mainstream interest. Two members of Congress, Democrat Cynthia McKinney and Republican Curt Weldon, aggressively question the government's handling of advance intelligence. Recently, Weldon convinced 246 members of the House, from both parties, to sign a letter demanding a full investigation into Able Danger, a classified military intelligence effort to identify and track Al Qaeda agents that began in 1999. According to a Weldon spokesman, the Defense Department won't allow key testimony on the project.

"The Pentagon has substantiated that Able Danger existed," Weldon staffer John Tomaszewski says. "We were getting somewhere, and it abruptly halted. Why? There were three meetings where FBI guys showed up expecting to meet Defense intelligence, and the DIA guys just wouldn't show up. Why was that exchange stopped?"

Fuel for the fire: Besides Able Danger, skeptics point to major miscues. On August 6, 2001, President Bush was given a now-infamous intel brief titled "Bin Laden Determined to Strike in U.S.," which cited potential hijacking plans. So how off guard, they ask, could the government really have been?

Believe it or not? Obviously someone—somebody—does that mean 9/11 was deliberately allowed to happen? No. But the fact that, for example, guys like Dick Cheney's indicted ex-chief of staff, Scooter Libby, teamed up to write a 2000 report for the Project for the New American Century think tank speculating that a "new Pearl Harbor" would be needed to "rebuild America's defenses" gives theorists plenty to go on.



U.S. Rep. Curt Weldon (R) has pushed for a wider investigation.

The glare from 9/11 still prevents many from seeing the truth.



THEORY #5

Someone else did it, but there's too much we don't know.

The case: One of the most common threads of conspiracy holds that some other hostile force either helped Al Qaeda with the attacks, failed to warn the U.S., or did the job itself. Suspicions about Pakistani intelligence, the Saudis, Hussein, and others are out there, but suggestions that Israel had a hand in the attacks—or at least knew about them—are most commonplace.

Between May and September 2001, for example, the Feds deported more than 100 young Israelis who earlier in the year had shown up at Drug Enforcement Agency offices, military bases, and agents' homes, snooping around under the pretext that they were art students looking to make sales. (The shady kids carried portfolios of shoddy, mass-produced art.) The strange visits occurred around the country, including areas where 9/11 hijackers are thought to have lived. According to a Salon.com

report, several of these possible spooks lived just down the block from Mohamed Atta. Did they know something was up?

"The most smoking-gun thing we have is the way Israeli intelligence were tracking Atta and were ejected from the U.S. on August 21 for getting too close," says Hicks. "It shows the levels of protection Atta had."

Fuel for the fire: Then there's Saudi Arabia, home to most of the hijackers. The U.S. allowed prominent Saudis to scurry home at a time when no commercial planes were flying, a move that still looks either strange or sinister, depending on your point of view. Meanwhile, Griffin notes allegations that Pakistan—up to its neck in the funding of Afghan jihadists—may have been in contact with Atta.

Believe it or not? Many of these theories stretch the patience of the most credulous. But dismissing an entire tree for one rotten apple may be rash. For those who simply can't wrap their minds around such an epic deception, many are eager to frame things in a more pragmatic perspective.

"Losing a couple of buildings in New York is nothing compared to the global capital at stake," Hicks says. "It's like Jack Nicholson and John Huston in *Chinatown*. As Jake Gittes, Nicholson asks Huston, the magnate who's monopolizing L.A.'s water supply, why he's doing it. 'You've got all the cars, women, and houses, so why are you doing it? Is it greed or power?' And Huston has this great pause before he says, 'The future, Mr. Gittes—it's the future.'" **M**