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Scientist repudiates visitors from space

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Edwin Charles Krupp, archaeoastronomer, has bad news for hopeful fans of E.T., the extraterrestrial being of cinematic fame.

"There is no evidence whatsoever to support claims that intelligent extraterrestrials ever visited earth," Krupp said during a recent visit to Portland.

That's the way this Carl Sagan of the West responds to tales of ancient astronauts mingling with primitive earthlings centuries ago and leaving them with sophisticated astronomical knowledge.

Krupp, the 39-year-old director of the Griffith Observatory in Los Angeles, was in Portland to lecture at the Oregon Museum of Science & Industry on ancient Chinese astronomy. In an interview, he said he has no patience with people who "read things in books and don't ask questions."

He says those who blindly accept the "wild speculations" of Erich von Daniken, author of "Chariots of the Gods?" and others are doing a disservice to their ancestors.

"I really get frustrated, but I recognize the appeal and romance for people that exists in some of the absurd writings that abound in our age," he said.

"We still see the bond we have with the sky reflected in UFO's and stories about ancient star travelers. It's recognition that there is something awesome about the universe."

According to Krupp, "there is no present evidence for or against the presence of life beyond the earth."

"It's a question that intrigues us because it is at the heart of our perception of what we are. If you ask my personal view of life out there, I will tell you I don't know, but I believe life is plentiful in the universe.

"It's a fair question, but it is at the edge of our knowledge. It is important to know the limits of your belief system and what is prov-

able. Beyond that, you can think what you wish."

Krupp has no respect for the idea that the lid of a sarcophagus "fancifully discussed" by von Daniken after its discovery in Palenque, Mexico, portrayed an astronaut blasting off in a rocket-ship. He favors an explanation that the "astronaut" is a Mayan ruler shown falling, in death, to the legendary Mayan underworld.

Krupp describes as "astronomical nonsense" a von Daniken proposal that the lines and figures marking the Nazca plain in Peru were set there by astronauts for an interstellar airport. In one of his books, "In Search of Ancient Astronomies," Krupp offers an earthly explanation for the markings, and he ridicules the idea that space visitors able to travel from light years away would need landing strips or navigational markers.

Krupp says the ancient peoples of Earth were intelligent enough, and did not need help from extraterrestrials, to build what they did and to make the observations "we have records about."

"We tend to look at our past with a distorted view," he said. "But when we look at the track or progression of history, it follows that if our ancestors were not intelligent and motivated, we would not be where we are."

As an archeoastronomer, Krupp links modern astronomy with studies of ancient peoples' observations of the heavens. His work has taken him to Indian ruins in the United States and Mexico, sites in China and the pyramids in Egypt, and his plans include a trip to Peru to study ancient Inca monuments and reconstruct that culture's view of the skies.

"A unique aspect of Andean astronomy is that they made not only star-to-star astronomy like everyone else, but dark-to-dark constellations," Krupp said. "Perhaps others also have dark constellations; the Australian aborigines do.

"In the southern hemisphere, the Milky Way is much richer and you see more of it, including its dark areas. So people there made constellations of those as well as the stars," he said.

He noted the advantage of the human brain's

buildings or their purposes, he said the author has helped rekindle interest in the stars and their place in human history.

Krupp, a native of Chicago and a comic book fan, teaches a class on archaeoastronomy at the University of California at Los Angeles, where he has a reputation for flamboyant irreverence coupled with serious astronomy.

He began work at the Griffith Park Observatory as a curator in 1972. He is a crusader, hoping to raise enough money for a major overhaul of the observatory.

"It will be 50 years old next year and it has never had a major overhaul," he said.

tronomical mythology. He said the constellation of the Pleiades, given different names by different peoples, heralds the beginning of winter to some and the start of the rainy season to others. The stories told about the constellation, wherever they originate, relate to the seasons.

"By looking at the skies, our ancestors created reliable ways to tell about time and the seasons," Krupp said. "Their mythology helped them explain what they saw. They built monuments linked to the sky, monuments with astronomical significance."

While Krupp is tough on von Daniken's brand of solutions to ancient alignments of

ability to make connections and filter information as elements in the recognition of the concept of time.

"The brain has to organize information. It also filters information and discards a lot of what we don't have to have as individuals," he said. "There is order in time and space. Brains used the skies to fashion tools that allow two people to meet at a time and place."

The tools to which he referred included calendars, clocks and directions — such as north, east, west and south — that have come from ancient times.

Krupp noted several universal themes in as-