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# UFOs—a storm in a saucer?

REPORTS of a huge flying saucer over Alaska not long ago underline a space age paradox within the scientific community.

Many scientists are sceptical about supposed sightings of unidentified flying objects but many of these same scholars believe the galaxy is teeming with intelligent life and support extraterrestrial intelligence projects.

Scientists with the U.S. National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) have embarked on an official mission to vastly expand the scope of the search.

The Alaska incident was reported last November by Japan Air Lines pilot Kenji Terauchi, who said his plane was trailed for an hour by a walnut-shaped craft twice as big as an aircraft carrier, with a broad brim at its centre and bright running lights.

He said the UFO stayed with him as he descended 4,000 feet and circled, and that his plane's weather radar picked it up.

The Federal Aviation Administration initially reported that it, too, had detected a craft on radar, but later said a malfunction may have created a duplicate radar image of the cargo plane itself.

The Alaska incident was widely dismissed by space experts as just another inconclusive episode.

Thousands of people including former President Jimmy Carter have reported seeing UFOs.

Given the millions of stars in the Milky Way, the probability is that many of them have planets with environments suitable to life.

## Research

The theory behind SETI is that if advanced alien civilisations exist, they may be trying to communicate with other worlds by beaming radio signals into space.

U.S. scientists pioneered SETI, starting in 1960 with physicist Frank Drake's 'Ozma' project, named for a 'Wizard of Oz' character and using a radiotelescope in West Virginia.

Now the Soviet Union, France, West Germany, the Netherlands, Japan, and Canada are funding Seti radiotelescope projects.



A UFO captured on camera?

No alien signals have yet been detected, scientists say.

But NASA, with an annual SETI budget of some £1½ million is developing the technology for a vast expansion in the number of frequencies that could be scanned for messages — a jump from thousands of frequencies to many millions.

This will accomplish more than all the past 25 years of research.

NASA plans to scan the entire sky and conduct closer probes of 800 stars which are similar to the sun, beginning in the 1990s.

Earthlings have sent out relatively few messages to possible aliens, although scientists says advanced

civilisations could tell Earth was inhabited from military radar and television rays leaking into space.

Some scientists say receipt of an alien message would be the most important event in human history and could result in mankind learning vast amounts from a more advanced culture.

But University of Virginia physicist Robert Rood sounded a note of warning in his book, *Are We Alone?*

"The civilisation that blurs out its existence on interstellar beacons at the first opportunity may be like some early hominoid descending from the trees and calling, 'here, kitty' to a sabretoothed tiger," Mr Rood wrote.