

There's No One Out There

The Sightings

But what about all the people who have seen UFOs and the people who have reported being abducted by the aliens on board?

"I don't have a good answer to explain all the sightings or kidnappings," von Hoerner said. "But I do know that only a few hundred years ago, many people, the well-educated included, reported seeing the devil. Even Martin

Luther said he saw the Dark Prince and had thrown an ink bottle at him.

"People tend to see things which, 100 or 200 years later, are believed to be nonsense. Right now, it's flying saucers. My own opinion is that life on Earth and the rise of humankind are unique."

According to research done by Alvin Lawson, a professor of English at California State University, Long Beach, earthlings who claim to have been aboard a UFO are recalling their own births or have experienced some common mental phenomena. Lawson teaches a class on the rhetoric of UFO literature and operates a 24-hour UFO hotline (the UFO Report Center of Orange County, Calif.).

In one study, Prof. Lawson rounded up 20 volunteers with no particular interest in UFOs and asked them under hypnosis (through a clinical hypnotist) to imagine they had been taken aboard a UFO and to draw sketches of their other-world abductors. The imaginary drawings closely resembled the descriptions of UFO creatures people have actually reported.

Similar Reports

Moreover, Lawson says the reports of UFO encounters are similar to a wide range of mental and psychological phenomena like drug-induced hallucinations, religious conversions and death-bed experiences of the afterlife.

James Oberg, a space scientist associated with NASA's shuttle project, has reported how UFO buffs have resorted to hoaxes, fraud and advertising tricks in a bid to win respectability for their beliefs.

"The point to all these stories is that, if there ever is anything significant to be found out about UFOs, it won't come from UFOlogists," said Oberg. "Their methods are not scientific, and almost all published UFO photographs are hoaxes — either forged models or misrepresented ordinary phenomena."

Nor is it logical, Oberg said, to base the existence of something like UFOs on the grounds of a hypothetical neg-

ative. Just because some UFO reports cannot be explained doesn't make them legitimate.

"Unexplained cases are simply unexplained cases. The most outrageous sightings have ordinary explanations when one really looks into it," said Oberg.

Philip J. Klass, a writer with Aviation Week and Space Technology, began investigating UFO phenomena in 1966.

"I have not found a single case which would make me think Earth is being visited by spacecraft from other worlds," he said.

Of all the many photographs taken since the first UFO sightings were reported in 1947, Klass said, not a single picture is clear and almost all smell of hoax.

Despite rumors to the contrary, Klass said all the Project Bluebook papers, the U.S. Air Force's investigations into UFO phenomena, were declassified and made public. He also obtained, through the Freedom of Information Act, 900 pages of material the CIA collected on UFOs.

The CIA finally lost interest and quit filing reports. Project Bluebook wrapped up in 1969 with the conclusion that most UFO sightings could be explained in terms of natural phenomena.

"Of the 200 people who have claimed to have been aboard a spacecraft, not one has brought back a single souvenir

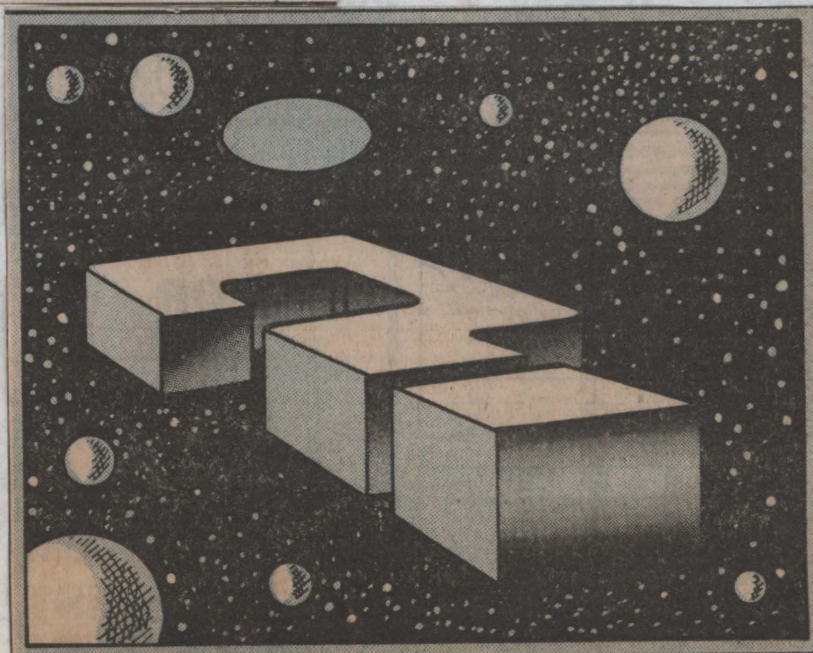
or artifact," Klass said.

And so what does all this mean?

Michael Hart thinks it's probably a waste of time and money to continue significant searches for alien beings.

He also predicts our descendants will go on to explore and colonize the habitable planets of our galaxy.

It may well be human beings who become the first true aliens from outer space.



Jim Horan/World-Herald

Aliens a question mark . . . but scientific skepticism mounts.

Many UFO Investigators Say There's Nobody Out There

By Charles Downey

Los Angeles Times Syndicate

They are shaped like cigars or saucers or Frisbees. They flash and glow and zoom away in an instant. Or they hover quietly in darkness.

They whisk fishermen from the banks of remote streams. Or they trap automobiles in a beam of bright light and transport the occupants skyward.

There, the "catch" is examined, drugged to induce amnesia and returned safely to fishing banks or stalled autos.

They are, of course, UFOs — those widely reported Unidentified Flying Objects, crafts from other worlds that inspire myths and movies and midnight moon-watching.

But there is a problem. "E.T." and "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" aside, flying saucers from space have never been to Earth. At least, that's what many scientists are now saying publicly with increased vigor.

And what's more, many of these scientists are saying that no extraterrestrial intelligence has set foot or claw or flipper on Earth because there is nothing out there. Man, they say, is alone in his universe.

A group of astronomers, physicists, chemists, biologists and other scientists have been gathering to discuss the question.

After one such conference, their cautious conclusion as to why the world scientific community possesses not one shred of evidence about aliens from outer space was that "intelligent life is not widespread in space."

Individually, they are more outspoken, especially when battling proponents of "UFOlogy" who say that with all the billions of stars out there, surely there are life-sustaining conditions like those on Earth.

Could be. But astronomer Michael Hart thinks the chances are mighty slim.

Hart, a former professor of physics at Trinity University in Texas, performed an elaborate computer study on how a planet's atmosphere evolves.

"I found that a planet must be situated in quite a narrow zone about its

sun to avoid either being too hot or too cold to support life," he said.

"If the Earth were 5 percent closer to the sun, life here would have never evolved. If the Earth had been 1 percent farther away, the planet would have had runaway glaciation."

Stars that are less bright than our sun have a habitable band so narrow it doesn't exist. Brighter stars have much wider habitable zones, but those stars emit large amounts of ultraviolet radiation that inhibit life.

Moreover, big, bright stars don't last long enough to go through the several billion years of evolution scientists generally consider necessary for the development of intelligent life.

Hart said his computer studies show that among the many variables in the universe (billions upon billions of years, millions upon millions of miles, and vastly different atmospheric conditions), the chance to become life-sustaining is extremely low.

"Odds against forming life on one particular planet where all conditions are suitable can be very much higher than 100 billion to one," he said. "That would mean that only one galaxy in a trillion has a single habitable planet."

"As for life in our galaxy, we on Earth are it," Hart said.

That galaxy, the Milky Way, is where our solar system revolves. The Milky Way is 100,000 light years long by 20,000 light years wide. (One light year is the distance a beam of light traveling at 186,000 miles per second will cover in one year — about 6 trillion miles.)

But couldn't life exist in the galaxy in some other form?

"There could be life on other planets based on different structures than life on Earth," said Frank Tipler, associate professor of mathematical physics at Tulane University. "Instead of being based on oxygen and hydrocarbons like Earth's life, there could be life forms based on, say, silicon and argon gas."

'Fact A'

"But most scientists ... think that hydrogen and carbon, because of their chemical and physical properties, are much better and more common building blocks."

Even more significant than the rarity of life in our cosmic neighborhood is what Professor Hart calls "Fact A."

"If there were many civilizations on other planets in our galaxy, we would have some evidence of it by now," Hart said. "Fact A simply means there are no beings from outer space on Earth."

"The Earth and our sun are relatively young, and my calculations show extraterrestrial civilizations would have developed long ago and settled on Earth and other places at least 100 million years ago. If our solar system had been even briefly visited, we would see tracks on the moon where there's no erosion or weathering to eliminate them."

Professor Tipler says a civilization only 50 to 100 years more advanced than ours could probably build robots that could make copies of themselves from raw materials found on other planets or in an asteroid belt.

"Using such a system, an intelligent species could explore our entire galaxy in 300 million years," Tipler said. "But

we've seen no such machine — I think because no intelligent species within reach exists to have sent one."

Eric M. Jones, an astronomer at Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico, figures it would have taken only 30 million years to colonize all the habitable places in the Milky Way. That's only a fraction of the 4 billion years in the life of the Earth.

"So one must conclude that alien beings would have been here long ago if they existed," Jones said. "Furthermore, there's not a shred of evidence that Earth has ever been visited by alien beings."

Sebastian von Hoerner of the National Radio Astronomy Observatory in Green Bank, W.Va., also reasons that all habitable planets, Earth included, should have been visited or colonized long ago.

"Despite everything you've read and heard about space travelers, if they did exist, they would openly land and ask for government officials and there would be no question whatsoever about their existence," von Hoerner said.

Proponents of UFOlogy counter that space people don't contact us openly because they don't want to change the course of our civilization and technology.

"If that were true, then we would not know anything at all about them and there never would be a question," von Hoerner said. "If these travelers come light years through space, they are far ahead of us in every respect. And if they wanted to remain in hiding, then they would be in hiding."