

# Off Centre



with Andy Rutherford

# Do they want to find us?

IN space, so the tagline to the movie *Alien* goes, no-one can hear you scream.

Now, according to a top astronomer, fainter broadcasting signals and digital switchover mean Earth will become pretty much undetectable to aliens.

Frank Drake, who has been searching for radio signals from alien civilisations for close to half a century, told a meeting of SETI (Search for Extra-terrestrial Intelligence) earlier this week that more efficient ways of broadcasting, using fainter signals, and satellites using fewer watts and with aerials pointing toward Earth instead of into space, are just two factors contributing to this potential communication breakdown.

Of course, Mr Drake's theory contains two mighty assumptions.

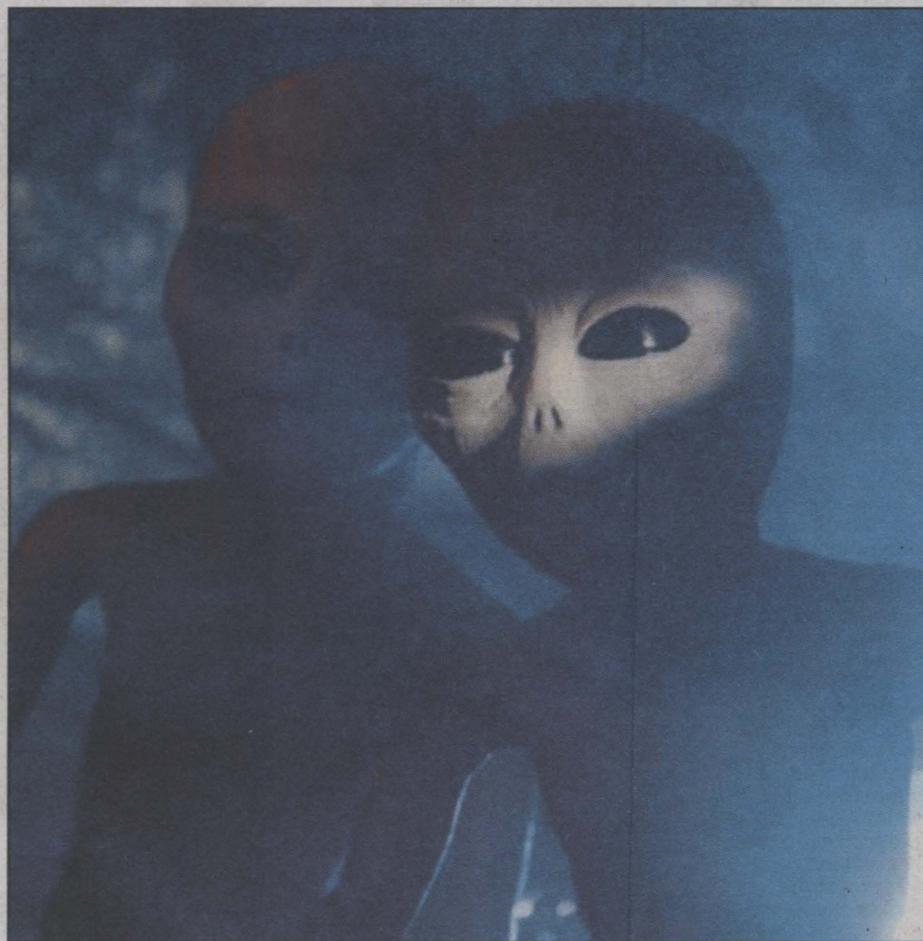
One, that aliens exist. Despite the countless stories of sightings, landings, abductions, aliens-taught-my-pet-llama-to-play-the-piano stories, and such like, no definitive evidence has ever been produced.

Two, that if they exist, they are frantically seeking to discover other lifeforms.

Hmm.

We at Off Centre do not believe in the existence of aliens. But even if we were to be proved wrong, we suspect they have better things to do than scour deep space for evidence that they are not alone.

A third assumption made by astronomers is that a basic technique for aliens trying to find other civilisations involves seeking sig-



**CAN THEY HEAR US?** Or are prospects of close encounters getting further away?

nals from TV, radio and radar broadcasts.

Hmm, again.

Let's continue to assume then, that aliens do exist. Is it any wonder they have not bothered to send us back some signals of their own, if we are pumping out TV signals?

Would any alien lifeform with any degree of intelli-

gence think it worth their while to communicate with a 'civilisation' that churns out the likes of *Big Brother*, *X Factor*, *East Enders*, and so on and on?

The only point to such an exercise on our part must be to ward off aggressive aliens. Limited exposure to any of the above programmes and

more, would be enough to send any sensible extra-terrestrial running for a black hole.

"Very soon we will become undetectable," a forlorn Mr Drake told the SETI gathering in London.

In short, from space, no-one will be able to hear us scream. Frankly, that might not be a bad thing.



**ANYONE THERE?** Frank Drake searching for signals

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