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Rumors of Aliens Trail Comet

From: magnus@io.com (Bruce Lanier Wright)
Date: Wed, 25 Dec 1996 23:07:47 -0600
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Rumors of Aliens Trail Comet
Albuquerque Journal, 12/3/96

Charges that a spacecraft is headed for Earth behind the Comet Hale-Bopp have taken on a life of their own

By John Fleck
Journal Staff Writer

An alien spacecraft is headed toward Earth, tailing Comet Hale-Bopp. NASA and the U.S. government know about it and are suppressing the telescope images that would prove it. Those charges, lurking on the Internet and talk radio since the comet was discovered in 1995, have exploded in recent weeks. The talk has been fueled by nationally syndicated late-night talk show host Art Bell and discussion groups on the Internet, where anyone who wants can weigh in. Despite debunking by scientists, the conspiracy theories have gained a momentum of their own, with the scientists who offer explanations immediately lumped in with the conspirators.

The debate has grown so intense that, two weeks ago, one Internet critic called Alan Hale, the New Mexico astronomer who discovered the comet, "an Earth traitor" after Hale helped debunk one of the latest "mystery spaceship" sightings. "This whole thing is nutty," said Hale, who said he is alternately amused and aghast at the uproar surrounding the comet that bears his name.

The most popular tale is that the spacecraft is either out to destroy us or save us.

The government knows about it, according to the conspiracy theorists, and is keeping it from the public. Their evidence is a hodgepodge of speculation, information allegedly gathered telepathically from the aliens and astronomical data that, scientists say, have been misinterpreted out of ignorance.

Neither Bell nor any of the other chief conspiracy theorists responded to Journal requests for comment.

Hale-Bopp would seem an unlikely subject for an international cover-up, scientists say, simply because anyone who wants can take a look. Now 270 million miles from Earth and growing brighter, the potential comet of the century is hanging out there for anyone with a cheap telescope or even a pair of binoculars to see.

Hale, who lives in the mountains outside Cloudcroft in southern New Mexico, has been observing the comet every night it's visible, and hasn't seen anything amiss. "Don't take my word for it," he says. "Go out and look at

it." Since Hale and amateur star-gazer Thomas Bopp discovered the comet in July 1995, the conspiracy theorists have latched onto the comet with a vengeance.

The evidence for the alien presence is hung from bits of truth. As astronomers gather more data on the comet's orbit, they have revised their calculations of its orbit. That has led to calls from conspiracy theorists that Hale-Bopp has "changed course," something no comet could do.

Conspiracy theorists have also made much of a perceived paucity of publicly available images from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's Hubble Space Telescope. Hubble comet pictures taken in September and October, published recently in the magazine Science News, do not seem to have reduced the vehemence of those arguments. For the record, NASA scientist Jay Bergstralh, who is heading up a portion of the space agency's comet research efforts, said he has heard of no such conspiracy.

The discovery of "mysterious objects" in telescope pictures of the comet has been trumpeted by the conspiracy buffs, only to have astronomers identify them as stars in the backgrounds of the pictures.

"What's upsetting is that they won't take the time to learn," said Harvard-based astronomer Daniel Green.

If there was a mysterious object flying alongside the comet, said Green, amateur and professional astronomers around the world watching the comet would have seen and reported it.

"That's the way science works. That's the way astronomy works. You can't hide anything," said Green, who works for the International Astronomical Union, an international clearing house for such information.

The "mysterious object" pictures have nevertheless raised the conspiracy talk to a crescendo in recent weeks, led by late-night talk radio host Bell, whose syndicated show runs in Albuquerque on KOB AM (770) from midnight to 4 a.m.

Last Thursday night, a guest on Bell's program claimed to have "remotely viewed" the alien spacecraft, using a sort of telepathic eyesight.

Hale said the Internet has been both a curse and a blessing. Anyone with a computer and a telephone connection can "publish" information on the Internet, a worldwide computer network. That has allowed the Hale-Bopp conspiracy theories to spread quickly, but it has also given scientists an equal forum.

But with Hale-Bopp getting brighter and likely to be major public spectacle next spring, Hale expects the wild talk to continue. "It's just going to get worse," he said.

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