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Universe may be honeycomb of huge voids

From: John Joseph Mercieca <mufor@altanet.omnes.net>
Date: Fri, 10 Jan 1997 10:37:19 +0100
Fwd Date: Fri, 10 Jan 1997 13:47:30 -0500
Subject: Universe may be honeycomb of huge voids

THE GUARDIAN 9/1/97
Universe may be honeycomb of huge voids
Tim Radford
Science Editor

ASTRONOMEIRS believe they have discovered a "tantalising" structure to the universe: a regular pattern of huge holes followed by clusters of galaxies.

The possibility that the universe is a honeycomb of voids in a vast scaffolding of star systems roughly every 391 million light years is expected. The finding, by a team of scientists from laboratories in Estonia, Russia, Germany, Spain and the United States, is reported today in Nature.

There have been hints before that there might be a regular rather than a random pattern to the heavens. In 1992 astronomers at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration in the United States identified a pattern of "ripples" in the cosmic background radiation left over from the "big bang" of creation 10 to 15 billion years ago.

The barely detectable ripples in cosmic radiation in the sky could have become what one Harvard astro-physicist calls the "richly textured, high contrast universe of galaxies and galaxy clusters we see today".

Sir Martin Rees, the Astronomer Royal and a Cambridge professor - and author of a book, Before the Beginning, published by Simon and Schuster - described the evidence as tantalising.

"Everyone agrees that there is a characteristic scale of structure in the universe as large as that, but the controversial thing is whether it is a regular lattice," he said.

"If there really was some magic special wavelength in the universe, it ought to show up. If it shows up anywhere it is going to be quite a challenge to theorists. If it really is a well defined scale it doesn't fit naturally into any of the standard ideas." Why should the universe "fracture" in a regular pattern, the way ice might fracture on the surface of a pond? Sir Martin said the finding might revive the idea of cosmic defects.

"It will not take long before theorists come up with more ideas," Sir Martin added.

"There is a difference in psychology between those who want to feel we already understand the big picture and are upset by anything that doesn't fit in, and those who are excited at anything fundamentally new that might show up, I'm in the latter camp."

- end -

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