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Aliens Unlikely To Resemble ET

From: Steven J. Dunn <SDunn@logicon.com>
Date: Fri, 14 May 1999 12:40:44 -0700
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Subject: Aliens Unlikely To Resemble ET

Friday May 14 10:14 AM ET

Real Alien Life Forms Unlikely To Resemble E.T.

By Patricia Reaney

LONDON (Reuters) - They may not look like E.T. but the possibility that life forms exist beyond our planet is very real, scientists said Friday.

Although he was just a loveable creature in a 1982 Hollywood blockbuster, E.T. the extraterrestrial gave a less threatening face to creatures from outer space.

Nearly 20 years after he hit the big screen, scientists have still not found any real-life equivalent but they believe conditions exist on other planets to support life.

``There are good reasons to think, as biologists, that there are organisms that exist elsewhere,' ' Dr Don Cowan, of University College London, told The Royal Astronomical Society.

But life on other planets is more likely to be a single organism capable of living under extreme conditions than the three-eyed creatures depicted in many science fiction films.

``Life will be evolutionarily primitive,' ' he added.

Even the simplest creatures, Cowan said, need liquid water, the right temperatures, a nutrient supply and other essential conditions to survive.

He described the biological ``envelope,' ' or boundaries of life, at upper and lower temperature levels and the places where such primitive forms of life could thrive.

Hydrothermal pools, steam vents, boiling mud pools and underwater hydrothermal vents, where life on Earth is thought to have begun, are the ideal environments for simple life forms on other planets.

``In that environment you would have all the requirements for microbial life,' ' he added.

Dr Monica Grady, of the Natural History Museum in London, supported his arguments and went a step further, suggesting planets such as Mars and the moons of Jupiter have areas on or just below the surface where life could be sustained.

``There is the potential for life to have existed in many inhospitable niches in the solar system,'' she told the meeting.

Mars and Europa, one of four moons closest to Jupiter, are the most likely candidates because of the amount of water, a basic precondition for life, they both have.

The surface of Europa is covered with an icy crust and scientists know that the poles on Mars contain water and there could also be possible water under the surface.

Grady expressed the hope that one day scientists would locate extraterrestrial life on another planet.

``Hopefully it will look like this,'' she said, pointing to a drawing of a green alien.

``But it will probably resemble that,'' she added as she turned toward what looked like a large worm.

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