

the more sky it can see. Folks living in New York never glimpse the famous Southern Cross, while inhabitants of Buenos Aires are deprived of the Big Dipper. But anyone near the equator can catch them both.

Arecibo's gaze is limited to a patch of sky straight up and about 20 degrees wide, sliding across the universe as the Earth turns. By locating the telescope in tropical climes, that patch intercepts more celestial real estate. A somewhat-jetlagged Seth Shostak takes up his post at a computer terminal in the Project Phoenix control center.

Our experiment is called Project Phoenix, and it's the most sensitive search for extraterrestrial intelligence going. The strategy is simple: we scrutinize the vicinities of nearby, sunlike stars, hoping to find narrow-band radio signals that would tell us someone else is "on the air." Anyone who's seen the movie "Contact," based on Carl Sagan's novel of the same title, has a good idea of what the Phoenix team does for a living.

Settling down in front of the computers that control the telescope, I glance at screenfuls of numbers. We're about to begin the search, and for the next two weeks this small room, filled with electronics, will be my home. The work is frequently dull, but the enticement is enormous. After all, sooner or later it's bound to happen. The computers will find what no human ear could hear: a faint whistle, a flute played against Niagara Falls - conclusive proof that the universe is home to far more than just us.

[W 3]*****

Source: BBC News
Publish Date: Saturday 30th January 1999

ET call Earth

Hoping for a reply from space

By BBC News Science Editor Dr David Whitehouse In a few weeks' time mankind will send out its first detailed radio message into the cosmos, asking any aliens who may receive it to get in touch.

It is part of a commercial project called Encounter 2001. This company based in Houston, USA, is offering the public the chance to send their own message into space for \$30.

Not everyone thinks it is a good idea.

According the scientists involved in listening for intelligent signals from outer space, called Seti (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence), sending a message out into space is almost certainly a fruitless exercise.

Dr Frank Stootman of Seti Australia, says that it is not a message to aliens but to us. He adds that a reply is very unlikely and certainly not within our lifetime. And, if an answer does come, it will not be in English.

Tysor: "People excited by project"

Chan Tysor of Encounter 2001 counters this. "It's a statement, sending something of yourself away from the Earth to travel in space forever. Whether it gets picked up by aliens or not many people are excited by it."

The message

Message shows aliens our DNA...

Before the individual messages are broadcast an encrypted signal, based on logic and maths, will be sent.

Dr Yvan Dutil, a scientist working for the Canadian Government, is helping to design the cosmic message. He points out that the only other signal deliberately sent into space in 1974 was aimed at a group of stars that were unlikely to have planets.

Because this signal is aimed at a handful of stars like our Sun he says that "for practical purposes this will be our first detailed interstellar transmission."

... and also what we look like

He is still working on the message, to be transmitted into space sometime in April by the Evpatoria radio telescope in the Ukraine.

The message will consist of a series of pages and will be repeated three times over a period of three hours. The signal will be 100,000 times stronger than a TV broadcast.

Don't listen, talk

Listening for radio signals from alien life in space is not new. There have been about 70 attempts over the past 40 years. So far no signals have been detected.

But transmitting a message into space has been tried only once.

In 1974, the Arecibo radio telescope sent a brief three-minute message towards the distant M13 stellar cluster.

It consisted of 1,679 pulses. When arranged into a matrix, they became an image showing atoms, molecules, our solar system and a representation of a human.

Evpatoria dish: Sending out the message

But the cosmic message being contemplated this time will be much longer, 400,000 bits.

Starting with basic symbols it will use logic to describe numbers and geometry. It then goes on to introduce concepts such as atoms, planets and even DNA.

It has been constructed to minimize the loss of information due to noise introduced into the signal during its interstellar journey. "If any aliens ever intercept this message they will have mastered science so much of the first part of the message, the part that deals with numbers and atoms, will be familiar to them", says Dr Dutil. "They can then go on and deduce a few things about humans such as where we live, how big we are and how many there are of us." However, he does have some reservations about sending the message. "I'm not comfortable about sending something in space without a social debate."

Aimed at the stars

The message is aimed at stars from 51 to 71 light-years from Earth. They are all similar to our own Sun. They lie in a region of the sky called the Summer Triangle.

As well as the encrypted message there will be a series of greetings written by the general public. Anyone can sign up to send up to 30 words for \$30.

According to Chan Tysor, things people have put on their cosmic message include their hopes for a more peaceful future for mankind and other races in space. One person said that we have made a mess of our planet so asked aliens to put off a visit for another 100,000 years.

Mr Tysor said that the signal was a kind of monument, "It is a kind of immortality knowing that something you wrote is beaming its way out of the solar system into the galaxy."

Questionable science

Many scientists do not think that broadcasting messages to the stars is a good idea. Among them are many members of the Setileague, a body that organises amateur searches for intelligent signals from space using small radio dishes.

"Great entertainment, but questionable science," said its executive director Dr H Paul Shuch.

It would be fun to beam personal greetings into space, Mr Shuch concedes, but like a message in a bottle, the prospects for successful contact are rather slim."

Carol Oliver of Seti Australia says that while she has reservations about the message being sent into space she hopes that it will inspire many to take an interest in Seti.

She adds that soon, because of a Seti Australia initiative, hundreds of thousands of Australian schoolchildren will be studying the search for life in space as part of a project to help them find out about the universe and themselves.

But Dr Dutil is worried that the Encounter 2001 message will set a precedent, "After us zillions of people will try to send a message into space."

Just imagine he says, "a weirdo group could send what they want into space and this may put humanity into trouble in the far future."

[W 4]*****

Source: The Philadelphia Inquirer
Publish Date: 27th March 1999

First 'Philadelphia Experiment' Crew Reunion

'It Never Happened'

By Lacy McCrary

The truth is out here. It is in a hospitality room of a boardwalk hotel, with some old salts sitting around white-clothed tables laughing at reports that their ship was involved in a top-secret World War II experiment.

Sailors who served on the USS Eldridge, the ship that legend says vanished briefly in 1943 at the Philadelphia Navy Yard, met here this week for their first reunion in 53 years and spent part of their time joking about the so-called Philadelphia Experiment.

The Eldridge, they said yesterday, may well have been invisible to Philadelphia because it was never in Philadelphia.

The ship's log and several veterans who were on the ship from its launching on July 25, 1943, at Port Newark, N.J., say it called on many East Coast ports, but never Philadelphia.

Two movies, two books and several Web sites have kept the myth about the Eldridge alive. As the story goes, the destroyer escort was surrounded by a greenish fog, disappeared for a few minutes, then reappeared.

But none of the veterans believes it.

"I think it's somebody's pipe dream," said Ed Wise, 74, of Salem, Ind.

Ted Davis, 72, of Grand Island, Neb., was more emphatic. "It never happened," he said.

Bill Van Allen, 84, who was executive officer and then captain of the Eldridge in 1943 and 1944, said he never saw any sign of experiments aboard the ship. "I have not the slightest idea how these stories got started," said Van Allen of Charlotte, N.C.

These former sailors said they sometimes had fun pretending the experiment actually occurred. "When people would ask me about it, I would play along with them and tell them I disappeared. After a while they realized I was pulling their legs," said Ray Perrino, 72, of Cranston, R.I.

None of the 15 at the reunion could explain why writers picked their ship, out of the thousands that sailed in the war, as the site of invisibility experiments.

Frankly, some are tired of being asked about it.

"We can't wait to put it to rest. We can't because it keeps coming up," Davis said. "I'm still asked about it now, mostly by younger people."

"I have a Pennsylvania auto license DE-173 [the designation and number of the Eldridge], and every once in a while somebody will stop and ask me if it was really true," said Mike Perlstein, 72, of Warminster.

"I tell them I know nothing about it. I've seen the movie, and it's a good movie, but there's no truth to it," Perlstein said.

The Navy said it had received so many inquiries through the years about the Philadelphia Experiment -- the title of a 1984 movie, a 1993 sequel and two books -- that it prepared and sends out a fact sheet.

The Navy said the myth dated to 1955 with the publication of The Case for UFO's by the late Morris K. Jessup. It said Jessup later received letters from a Carlos Miguel Allende, who gave a New Kensington, Pa., address, and claimed he witnessed the ship becoming invisible from another vessel. Allende also said the ship was "teleported" to and from Norfolk, Va., in a few minutes with some terrible aftereffects for crew members.

Questions about the experiment probably arose from "quite routine" research at the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard during the war, according to the Navy fact sheet.

"It was believed the foundation for the apocryphal stories arose from degaussing [demagnetizing] experiments which have the effect of making a ship undetectable or 'invisible' to magnetic mines," the Navy said.

But the Navy said it had never conducted invisibility experiments, either in 1943 or at any other time.

The legend says the ship became invisible on July 22, 1943, but ship records and the veterans say it was not launched until July 25. The second experiment, in which the Eldridge was sent to Norfolk and back to Philadelphia, was supposed to have occurred on Oct. 28, 1943. The ship's log says it was at the Brooklyn Navy Yard on that date, but did spend two days in the Norfolk Navy Yard in November 1943.

The gray-haired men, some wearing baseball caps with "USS Eldridge" printed on them, chuckled as they ribbed one another about the mental problems the crew supposedly suffered from the experiments.

"The only part of the book I think is true is the part about the crew being a little crazy," said Ed Tempany, 75, of Carteret, N.J. He referred to The Philadelphia Experiment: Project Invisibility by William L. Moore in consultation with Charles Berlitz.

"When I get home I'm going to apply for disability," Perrino said, with a smile.

"Beam me up, Scotty," said Tempany.

[W 5]*****

Source: New Scientist
Publish Date: Sunday 31st January 1999

Are gamma-ray bursts holding back intergalactic travel?

Gamma-ray bursts -- incredibly powerful explosions that may be caused by collisions between collapsed stars--could solve one of the oldest riddles about extraterrestrial civilisations: why haven't they reached Earth already? After studying the effects of gamma-ray bursts on life, an astrophysicist has concluded that aliens may have just started to explore their galaxies.

Enthusiasts for the existence of extraterrestrials have long been haunted by a simple question supposedly posed by the Nobel prizewinning physicist Enrico Fermi around 1950. Fermi pointed out that the Galaxy is about 100 000 light years across. So even if a spacefaring race could explore the Galaxy at only a thousandth of the speed of light, it would take them just 100 million years to spread across the entire Galaxy. This is far less than the Galaxy's age of about 10 billion years.

So if ETs exist in the Milky Way, where are they? Maybe they don't share the human urge to explore. Or perhaps there's another reason, says James Annis, an astrophysicist at Fermilab near Chicago. He thinks cataclysmic gamma-ray bursts often sterilise galaxies, wiping out life forms before they have evolved sufficiently to leave their planet (Journal of the British Interplanetary Society, vol 52, p 19). GRBs are thought to be the most powerful explosions in the Universe, releasing as much energy as a supernova in seconds. Many scientists

think the bursts occur when the remnants of dead stars such as neutron stars or black holes collide.

Annis points out that each GRB unleashes devastating amounts of radiation. "If one went off in the Galactic centre, we here two-thirds of the way out on the Galactic disc would be exposed over a few seconds to a wave of powerful gamma rays." He believes this would be lethal to life on land.

The rate of GRBs is about one burst per galaxy every few hundred million years. But Annis says theories of GRBs suggest the rate was much higher in the past, with galaxies suffering one strike every few million years-far shorter than any plausible time scale for the emergence of intelligent life capable of space travel. That, says Annis, may be the answer to Fermi's question. "They just haven't had enough time to get here yet," he says. "The GRB model essentially resets the available time for the rise of intelligent life to zero each time a burst occurs."

Paul Davies, a visiting physicist at Imperial College, London, says the basic idea for resolving the paradox makes sense. "Any Galaxy-wide sterilising event would do," he says. However, he adds that GRBs may be too brief: "If the drama is all over in seconds, you only zap half a planet. The planet's mass shields the shadowed side." Annis counters that GRBs are likely to have many indirect effects, such as wrecking ozone layers that protect planets from deadly levels of ultraviolet radiation.

Annis also highlights an intriguing implication of the theory: the current rate of GRBs allows intelligent life to evolve for a few hundred million years before being zapped, possibly giving it enough time to reach the spacefaring stage. "It may be that intelligent life has recently sprouted up at many places in the Galaxy and that at least a few groups are busily engaged in spreading."

[W 6]*****

Source: "Philippe Piet van Putten" <abpl@uol.com.br>
Director - The Brazilian Academy of Parasciences (ABP)
<http://members.xoom.com/abpsp>
Publish Date: Sunday 4th April 1999

The 12 Best Brazilian UFO Cases

The following is a list of the 12 best UFO cases in Brazil according to a survey by the Brazilian Academy of Parasciences (ABP)

- 1 - FAB (Brazilian Air Force) - May 19, 1996 (Radar-visual and films);
- 2 - Trindade Island - January 16, 1958 (Photos and military witnesses);
- 3 - VASP Flight 169 - February 8, 1982 (Radar-visual - many witnesses);
- 4 - Capao Redondo - January 2, 1998 (Small probe videotaped);
- 5 - Smoke Squadron (FAB) Case - November 16, 1996 (Aerial accident involving a small "probe" - Videotaped);
- 6 - Operation Plate (Brazilian Air Force) - Para, 1977 (A flap with many witnesses, photos and super-8 films by the Air Force);
- 7 - Varginha - January 20, 1996 (Entities captured by the Army);
- 8 - Fort Itaipu - November 3, 1957 (Soldiers burned by UFO);
- 9 - Sao Vicente - October 1, 1995 (Trace landing);
- 10 - Campinas ("silver rain") - December 13, 1954 (Metallic physical evidence);
- 11 - Ubatuba - September 10, 1957 (Explosion - Metallic debris);
- 12 - Serra do Cipo - Minas Gerais (A series of aggressive CEIII investigated by Prof. Hulvio Brant Aleixo since 1969).

[W 7]*****

Source: Outlook - Tomorrow's Technology Today [UK] [Computer Magazine]
Publish Date: April 1999

IBM in 'Project Blue Book' UFO probe

A theory which for years has been regarded as nothing more than the wild speculations of the lunatic fringe has, this month, been given new credibility by Jerry Hartsell, ex-Chairman of IT giants IBM.

He claims in his new autobiography that the original silicon chip technology, which underpinned the IT explosion of the late 20th century, was derived from a secret US government project of the late 1950s that aimed to investigate 'technology of a non-terrestrial origin'.

The baffling claim has fuelled further speculation that the 'non-terrestrial technology' may have been recovered from the alleged UFO crash site at Roswell...

[W 8]*****

Source: New York Variety
Publish Date: Monday 26th April 1999

Spielberg 'Taken' By Aliens

By John Dempsey

NEW YORK (Variety) - Steven Spielberg, the director of "ET" and "Close Encounters of the Third Kind," is heading off to outer space again with "Taken," a 20-hour miniseries focusing on alien abductions.

Spielberg will serve as executive producer of the DreamWorks TV project, which will screen on cable's Sci-Fi Channel in the third quarter of 2000. It will be based on reports of UFO landings in New Mexico dating back to 1947.

"Steven has always had an interest in this subject," said Barry Diller, chairman and CEO of Sci-Fi's USA Networks parent.

He told Daily Variety that Spielberg's treatment starts from the premise "that there are abductions, that they're real and not made up. This will be a big story with multiple characters, protagonists and antagonists, and it'll span lots of decades."

In a statement, Spielberg called himself a fan of the Sci-Fi Channel, and said "no other place" is better suited for a miniseries of the "magnitude" of "Taken."

"Taken," which will cost upward of \$40 million, will begin production this summer. The director and cast are still to be named. The Sci-Fi Channel plans to run it for two hours a night over 10 consecutive nights.

[W 9]***** (three reports)

Source: Australian Broadcasting Corporation
Publish Date: Tuesday 27th April 1999

Strange lights reported on NSW and Qld coasts

The National Space, Meteor and UFO hotline is appealing for public assistance, in identifying some unexplained lights in the sky tonight.

Callers from the north coast of New South Wales, Sydney and the southern Queensland coast have reported seeing bright, fragmented lights in the sky, with astronomers unable to offer a definite explanation.

The hotline's Ross Dowe says he has had many callers detailing sightings, but he needs more information.

Mr Dowe says at this stage, the information received does not equate to it being meteor activity."

"Mind you meteors do the strangest things," he said.

"And if it is a meteor shower it must be an enormous close encounter far as meteors are concerned because the lights of Sydney are so bright then generally Sydneyites don't see meteors go over, or even satellites."

Source: Australian Broadcasting Corporation
Publish Date: Tuesday 27th April 1999

Satellite may have been cause of UFO sightings

Police believe the re-entry of a satellite into the earth's atmosphere is responsible for reports of a flaming object in the sky along the east coast last night.

Police and a national UFO hotline received several reports up and down the east coast of a possible meteorite crashing to earth.

They say the reports included one from two men who followed the object's path until it crashed into bushland near Mittagong in the southern highlands of New South Wales around eight o'clock.

Police say the sighting was the controlled entry of a satellite, which crashed into the sea 500 kilometres off the coast.

Source: Sydney Morning Herald
Publish Date: Monday 3rd May 1999

By Richard Macey

UFO link to rocket

The mystery surrounding bright lights seen over eastern Australia last week has deepened with the US military confirming two fragments of a rocket, launched five years ago, plunged back to Earth at the time of the sightings.

However, in a rare departure from military secrecy, the US Space Command in Colorado Springs, Colorado, said spy satellites failed to spot the reported fireballs.

A Space Command spokesman, Army Major Mike Birmingham, said both objects, parts of a Pegasus rocket, were only six centimetres square - too small to trigger the fireworks.

Dozens of people around NSW reported seeing lights in the sky about 8pm last Monday.

Major Birmingham confirmed that about that time, two fragments of the Pegasus rocket slammed into the atmosphere over eastern Australia, following a path matching the reported sighting.

The rocket placed a US Air Force satellite into orbit on May 19, 1994.

[W 10]*****

Source: New York Now / Culture
Publish Date: Sunday 18th April 1999

A Way-Out Tale Snatching a few laughs from novel about UFO abductions

By SHERRYL CONNELLY

LITTLE GREEN MEN, By Christopher Buckley, Random House, \$23.95

Fans of Christopher Buckley are going to waste everyone's time debating whether his new book, "Little Green Men," is funnier than 1994's "Thank You for Smoking." So, I'll make the call: "Little Green Men" is funnier by a chortle and a snort. Maybe even a laugh, one of those wrenched from the gut.

Nathan Scrubbs spends his days as a government employee arranging for the abduction of U.S. citizens by aliens. It was a program initiated in 1947 to convince Stalin that UFOs actually landed and we had their technology. But the faked sightings proved useful in other respects.

As an increasing number of Americans came to think that they were at risk of being snatched, they were more willing to vote tax dollars for big guns and rocket ships.

But escalating the deep cover program to meet the typical American need for bigger and better had its complications. The aliens, for instance, had to grow from the original short uglies of the early years after it became impossible to find enough dwarfs with security clearances.

Scrubbs, meanwhile, appreciates that his job in abductions arranging for the theft and erotic probings of lonely farm wives is better than having to core cows with lasers, which is what the guys in Mutilations get stuck doing. But still he wants out. When his transfer is denied, he gets a little crazy and a little drunk and arranges for the abduction of the prominent host of a Sunday-morning political talk show.

If there's ever a guy you want to see probed - cored, even - it's the Establishment darling John O. Banion. He maintains his ultimate insider status by lording it over the outsiders who make up his television audience. He's arrogant, of course, and obnoxious, too, but so powerful that he can command the President to appear in the studio to be demeaned live.

Still, after a couple of abductions - one leaves him hurting down there - Banion can't get even a low-level administrative assistant to return his call. Convinced that no one could not believe Banion's warning that they really are among us, he goes public with his story. Oops.

He's done for in Washington - even his wife, Bitsey, leaves him - but there are millions willing to see Banion raised to an even higher level of prominence as the spokesman for those who believe in little green men. In other words, he owns an army, most of whose members are, quite factually, certifiable. So, of course, the highly secret government agency indirectly responsible for his new position in life, needs him dead. And not incidentally, Scrubbs, as well.

Buckley, the son of William F. Buckley Jr., and the editor of Forbes FYI, is very much an insider himself, but one who turns his knowledge to good in producing satires that manage to be sly as well as laugh-out-loud. The fun he has here lampooning our lunatic fringes - the Washington establishment more so than the believers - guarantees one of those really good-time reads.

So does his next book, in which he promises to refute the theories of the physicist Stephen Hawking. That's what he says.

[W 11]*****

Source: St. Paul / Minneapolis Pioneer Planet
Publish Date: Monday 26th April 1999
From: Bernhard Nahrgang <bernhard.nahrgang@ob.kamp.net>

Project enlists home computers in search for extraterrestrial intelligence

Next month, nearly a half-million people will assume the role of Capt. Kirk and take their home computers on two-year missions to seek out new life and new civilizations.

And, thanks to the Internet, they won't have to go anywhere -- boldly or otherwise -- to do it.

A group of space scientists at the University of California at Berkeley is launching SETIHome, an ambitious program to use the screen savers on personal computers to analyze data from the world's largest radio telescope.

It will use the Net to tie them all together in a coordinated search for alien life.

The program is free and looking for volunteers.

Enthusiasts will think it's neat; skeptics may not. The head of SETIHome says their work is "kind of cool" and peppers his discussions of the project with references to the general public as "Earthlings."

The project is an offshoot of SETI, the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence. Its most famous advocate was the late Carl Sagan, a scientist and author perhaps best-known for his appearances on "The Tonight Show."

Those at SETIHome bristle at the idea that the screen saver program is pop science but admit the project could be helpful in gathering private money, because Congress cut off funding six years ago.

"I can't deny that it's attractive to us because it's a way of attracting people worldwide," said Dan Werthimer, project scientist with SETIHome. But he insists there's value in the approach.

The idea is to take raw data gathered by the 1,000-foot Arecibo radio telescope in Puerto Rico and divide it among thousands of home computers.

Each computer will download a quarter-megabyte of Arecibo's data from the Net and analyze it. When the home computer is done, it will send the results back and grab another chunk of data. The project will continue for two years.

Because the program is a screen saver, it will operate only during a computer's idle time -- when someone is away from the keyboard, for example.

SETIHome promises the application will require a maximum of about 20 megabytes of storage on a hard disk. And it will do its sending and receiving when users are on the Net doing other things.

Will they actually find anything? Retired guys wandering in the park have a better chance of finding buried treasure with their metal detectors.

"Whether or not we find something is fairly doubtful," said David P. Anderson, a visiting scientist creating the screen savers at SETI.

-[continued in part 3]-

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