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AMATEUR SPACE TELESCOPE LAUNCHED

There has been a growing trend towards the use of robotically operated telescopes in recent years.

The most famous of the robotic telescopes are the Hubble Space Telescope, and the two Faulkes Telescopes in Hawaii and at Siding Spring near Coonabarabran in NSW, Australia. Both of these telescopes are 2-metre class telescopes designed to make remote imaging accessible to students across the world.



***The Amateur Space Telescope Remote Observatory (ASTRO)
as photographed by the Hubble Space Telescope***

Along with these two telescopes, there have been a number of amateur initiatives, with several amateurs constructing small observatories in such places as the New Mexico desert and remotely imaging from their home-towns hundreds or sometimes thousands of miles away.

Inspired by the success of the Hubble Space Telescope, a consortium of amateurs designating themselves as the Amateur Space Telescope Remote Observatory (ASTRO) have achieved the impossible: launching their own orbiting space telescope.

This diverse group of amateurs which includes teachers, engineers, computer gurus and keen observers, got their big chance when a group member was chosen to be a crew member on the last Space Shuttle mission sent to service the Hubble Space Telescope.

It appears that owing to certain constructional delays, some of the planned instrument payload was not ready at the time of launch, leaving a spare capacity of 300kg which JPL generously made available to the group.

Having only one month's notice, the team at ASTRO had to improvise by modifying an existing commercially available 20" *f*/5 design by fitting swivelling solar panels, ServoCAT drive with special lubricants capable of functioning in a vacuum, and communication and control components sourced from their local Radio Shack.

Delivered into an orbit near, but at a different altitude to that of the Hubble Space Telescope, the ASTRO scope has performed flawlessly and a major observing program is now being developed. The first test image taken was of the South Galactic Pole and is absolutely stunning in its visual clarity.

POLARISSIMA AUSTRALIS AND THE REVERSAL OF THE EARTH'S MAGNETIC POLE

It has long been known that the Earth's magnetic pole reverses polarity every 200,000 years or so, however the precise cause of this switching has been unknown to scientists despite major advances in modern technology.

The last such reversal - which generally takes a number of years to complete, and as evidenced by the polarity of basalt flows which can be geologically dated - took place about 780,000 years ago.

Accordingly, we are long overdue for the experience, but are yet to see any indications of the next reversal.

However, a recent discovery claims to provide undisputable evidence that the reversals are actually triggered by explosive events in an obscure and far off object known as *Polarissima Australis* (ESO 001-G001), a small galaxy in the Southern constellation of Octans.

This "Holy Grail" was discovered by Sir John Herschel at the Cape of Good Hope with an 18" f/13 speculum telescope.

He recorded it as "*Neb. Polarissima Australis. Faint, round, gradually a little brighter in the middle, 25 arcsec across. Situated nearly halfway between a star of 10th magnitude south of it, and a small triangle of stars 11th, 13th and 13th mag. north.*"

Herschel had made this discovery on one of those rare occasions that he had actually been doing some serious observing instead just of making a buck by casting horoscopes for the rich Boer merchants and farmers in and around Capetown.

Having been careful to make only long term astrological forecasts, Sir John was safely away and back in England long before the forecasts were due to take place - or not, as the case may be.

Polarissima Australis had been the subject of intense study at the Bogong High Plains Observatory using the SPeckle InterFerometer (SPIF) binocular radio telescope dish in the Victorian High Country.

This instrument had been fine-tuned to detect three-dimensional radio echoes superimposed against the background microwave radiation in the Universe and is now capable of detecting radio echoes of historical major events and in ellipsoid mode tracing such events back to their respective epicentres.

Fine-tuning of the binocular radio telescope was effected by tracing the supernova event which gave rise to the Crab Nebula in Taurus and thus completing the calibration process which had

commenced whilst tracking the 19th century nova outburst in Eta Carina. Both these events could be accurately dated from the historical record.

"The Bogongs", as the staff were affectionately known, were surprised to record a whole sequence of massive events emanating from *Polarissima Australis* of such scale and magnitude that they could only be interpreted as a series of gamma-ray bursters.

Though the present instrument is only capable of recording such events as far back as 2.26 million years, the most exciting aspect of the discovery was that each event exactly coincided with the reversals of the Earth's magnetic field as recorded in the geological basaltic record over the same time period.

Although the distance at which the galaxy is located is so great that any known gamma-ray bursts would not have caused significant injury to our planet, the bursts must have been precisely focussed - perhaps by the lens-like shape of that galaxy being angled in our direction - to allow the intensity to be of sufficient magnitude to affect the Earth's magnetic field so profoundly.

As it has been so long since the last reversal, with the "next" one now overdue by about 580,000 years, it may be that the number of potential supernova-prone stars in that galaxy must be exhausted, or at least greatly reduced.

Research into *Polarissima Australis* continues and further results will be published in *Alternate Universe* in coming issues.

UFO RESEARCH

Alarmed by a lapse in faith amongst hitherto true believers, the UFO Society of North America and Andorra has commissioned Professor Rube Goldberg to carry out an in depth review of alien spacecraft remains found near Roswell and around Area 51.

Professor Goldberg, author of "*My Mother In Law And Other Aliens*" and "*Going To The Toilet In Zero Gravity*" has taken leave from the faculty of Astronautical Dipsomania at the Las Vegas Polytechnic Institute to carry out this important work.

His progress report, following on his initial month in the field, has indicated that several promising lines of inquiry have emerged.

The Professor admitted that he was somewhat startled and a little amazed by the fact that most of the UFO remains so far identified consisted of aluminium foil, duct tape or scotch tape, and balsa wood.

He is seized with admiration at the fact that the aliens seem so advanced in science and engineering that they can build spacecraft capable of flying between the stars out of aluminium foil, balsa wood and sticky tape.

On the other hand, he feels that the use of such flimsy materials explains why the aliens keep crashing in New Mexico and Arizona.

Though aluminium is a common enough element and could easily be manufactured on some far planet, and duct tape could have been independently invented, he considers that the use of balsa wood is clear evidence of ancient trading relations being established by the aliens with various South American tribes over past centuries, and that it is entirely possible that many of their pyramids had been constructed as loading docks to facilitate trade.

Conclusive evidence of this would be furnished by the discovery of chewing gum, or at least chicle, amongst the UFO remains.

The other big puzzle concerns alien abductions. He interviewed a few hundred of the 15 million Americans who clearly recall being abducted by aliens and has arrived at two possible motives.

The first is that they have been searching in vain for intelligent life and that accordingly another hundred million Americans remain at serious risk of abduction.

The second possible motive is that they have examined 15 million people in a similarly futile attempt to understand human physiology, in which case their biologists must be of the same low intellectual calibre of those ineffective Japanese whale researchers.

The guys who build their space ships must be a whole lot smarter, but if their biologists are somehow getting a piece of that action then all those crashes are easily explained.

The other alien abduction question that arises concerns those abductees who feel they have been the subject of attempted interbreeding experiments between aliens and Earthlings.

Professor Goldberg considers that any attempts to interbreed between creatures of Earth and strange and incompatible life forms from far off planets is doomed to failure, noting that a number of New Zealand farmers have totally lucked out in cross-breeding attempts between humans and sheep, of which both species share a significant amount of DNA.

Such attempts by the aliens would be further proof of the low intellectual status of alien biologists. Professor Goldberg has long been convinced that aliens are amongst us.

He has seen strange beings on the strip at Las Vegas after midnight, where he has been handed the business cards of creatures who are clearly part Carbon/Silicon hybrids with prominent parts obviously silicon based, and who he thinks could be concerned with the alleged alien/Earthling interbreeding experiments.

The Professor has a plan get some of these beings in a position where he can pump them, for information of course, and accordingly always travels with that 1.75 litre bottle of high-octane Southern Comfort which has had him barred from the Texas Star Party this past seven years.

Additionally, what better place to hide intelligence gathering spy-robots than amongst the thousands of slot machines that can be found in any Casino, as many of those that he has played do not seem to be geared to pay out any money and must therefore have some other purpose.

He thinks that Vegas is the entry point for alien visitors, with coded messages being broadcast skywards from the various signs adorning Casinos, and he swears that he has seen that glass pyramid take off for outer space on many a rainy night. His further reports will be published as they come to hand.



Las Vegas Volunteer awaiting abduction

BLACK HOLE DISCOVERED NEAR MILKY WAY

IC 1644, considered by many to be a planetary nebula lying directly in our line of sight to the Small Magellanic Cloud (SMC), has recently been observed by the SPeckle InterFerometer (SPIF) in the Victorian High Country, to be a gravitationally-lensed star within the SMC, located directly and precisely behind a hitherto unknown black hole.

For many years, Astronomers have thought that IC 1644 was a planetary nebula, however when Sir Rob Vanderson, US Astronomer Royal, recently observed IC 1644 from darkest Australia using a spectrograph through his 14½" f/7 travel-scope, the resultant spectra was not that of a planetary nebula, but rather a single stellar spectra with no indication of any gaseous material whatsoever.



Sir Rob Vanderson's New Mobile Observatory

Further research has led to the finding that what appears to be a planetary nebula is actually a star within the SMC whose light is being gravitationally-lensed around a black hole lying somewhere between the Milky Way and the SMC, and coincidentally right in the middle of our line of sight of this particular extra-galactic star.

The perfect circular appearance of the object, is due solely to the fact that the gravitationally-lensed star, the black hole and the Solar System's current position in the Milky Way, are all aligned in such a perfect manner, that the light from the star is evenly spread out in the form of a halo around the perimeter of the black hole.



IC 1644 – A Gravitational Lens?

This image shows variations consistent with parallax effects arising from the Earth's rotation about the Sun, and careful measurements demonstrate that the intervening black hole is remarkably close to our Solar System – a matter of only relatively few light years.

This close proximity, together with some as yet unidentified properties of the light from the distant star being precisely focussed at a fixed point on Earth have resulted in the surprising discovery that this point of focus is located precisely in the centre of the notorious Bermuda Triangle.

The Fort Davis field station of the University of Texas is working hard to ascertain whether the interaction between the obscured star, the light path of the star travelling around the black hole and the immense gravitational field of the black hole itself has induced the development of a gravitational string between the black hole and the famous Triangle.

There is serious speculation voiced by the more responsible British tabloid newspapers that the gravitationally attractive effects of such a string could actually pluck ships or aircraft out of the Bermuda Triangle and out to interstellar space.

Should such an effect be active, the question arises as to whether such objects are pulled to their destruction in the vacuum between the stars, or whether they make an instant passage to the black hole and are then flung somewhere else in space and/or time, considering that the laws of physics which apply in such immense gravitational fields are totally unknown.

HEVELIUS' FIRMAMENTUM SOBIESCIANUM & PRODRONUS ASTRONOMIAE

Johannes Hevelius (1611-1687) was made famous by the posthumous publication in 1690 by his wife of his two greatest works, *Firmanentum Sobiescianum* and *Prodromus Astronomiae*, a catalog of 1564 stars.

He had introduced a number of new constellations - one named for his sextant which had been destroyed in an observatory fire, and one for the King of Poland. Seven of these are still current in contemporary atlases.

Hevelius came from a long established family of brewers, appropriate for an astronomer as the profession is a boozy one, and had in fact joined the Brewer's Guild and become its leader, or Ratbhäg, in 1643.

In 1651 he became a Ratshërr, or Town Councillor and later became Mayor.

Having developed an interest in astronomy he constructed an observatory in 1641 on the

connected roofs of his three adjacent houses, and this observatory was visited by the Queen, and some years later, in 1678, by King John III Sobieski of Poland.

Like Herschel, Johannes knew you could never go far wrong by sucking up to royalty and named both a constellation and the *Firmanentum Sobiescianum* after the King.

A fellow of the Royal Society, he was a conservative lad and was slow to add telescopic observing to his routine until leaned on by the young Halley who was a modernist.

Questions have long been raised as to how many of the "new" constellations introduced by Hevelius were his own work and how much had been lifted from earlier works. For example, Sobieski's shield corresponds exactly with an ancient Hebrew constellation, King David's Footstool.

This constellation was first identified by Professor Josephus Herodus in the Jerusalem Codex, discovered amongst the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1948 and dating from the Babylonian Captivity when the tribes of Israel had been removed by the King of Babylon to his capital and subjected to 60 years of educating, civilising and the art of personal hygiene – a quality lacking in itinerant goat herders.

This turned the tribes from being a scruffy collection of ignorant goat herders, into a society fit to take its place amongst the best of the ancient world and introduced them to literature, Chaldean Astronomy and artistic appreciation.

Additionally, the constellation of the Sextant (called the "flatulent camel") appeared on the Cleopatra Sky Chart, inscribed on the walls of the Temple at Dendera to commemorate the Queen's epic journey along the Nile to Elephantine in the course of her attempt to find the source of the Nile.

This inscription showed a number of southern stars not visible from Alexandria and demonstrated the depth of knowledge and interest in science possessed by this famous Queen, who could not only speak seven languages but could also swear fluently in Hebrew, Latin, and Phoenician.

Other parts of the inscription are less scientific and relate to the bas relief of Cleopatra water-skiing along the Nile, a sport she invented to pass the time on the long trip back to Alexandria and a credit to the fitness of the rowers of the Royal Barge.

It had not been realised that Hevelius had access to such ancient texts but as his library and instruments had been lost during his observatory's destruction by fire in 1686, copies may well have been stored there.

DOCTOR WHO'S UNIVERSAL FORMULA

As any genuine Doctor Who fan knows, the series often has a solid background of real, cutting edge science slipped in to confuse smart-arse PhD students who normally tend to bag the show. Note, for example, Doctor Who's universal formula, which is expressed as:

"Take any progressive series and convert it into binary notation. Take the sum of the integrates, and express the result as a power series, then the indices show the basic binary blocks."

This formula truly has an amazing range of applications. For example, it aptly describes the traditional TV sitcom series. Many of these revolve around several bright young twenty to thirty huns, hers, and its sharing the same flat or house and inflicting on each other and to the audience their job / marital / financial / psychological hang-ups.

These series try to convey the illusion of being progressive. They work their way through the life adventures of the usual collection of amiable idiots and lead to some being united in binary fashion - either de facto or wedded.

The sum of the integrates are their actual or potential offspring who proceed to engage in a power play to try to dominate their doting moronic parents.

Apply this formula to a science fiction series and it works - substitute space ship for house or flat, the binary notation relates to forming or dissolving alliances, while the power play takes place between humans and aliens or bug-eyed monsters.

Doctor Who himself occupies a Tardis in which he entertains a series of girlfriends, stowaways, birds of passage and the odd mechanical dog, and allies himself with various oddball planets and/or species while jousting with Daleks, Cybermen and a host of badly made up monsters against a background of cheap special effects.

The sum of the integrates is the succession of reborn Doctors, while the basic binary blocks are the episodes. Even the current bout of US Presidential candidates is covered by the formula.

A progressive series of state by state votes become the binary notation of the Press Corps, the ultimate sum of the results become the power play of the ingrates with clear indications of the resultant blockheads.

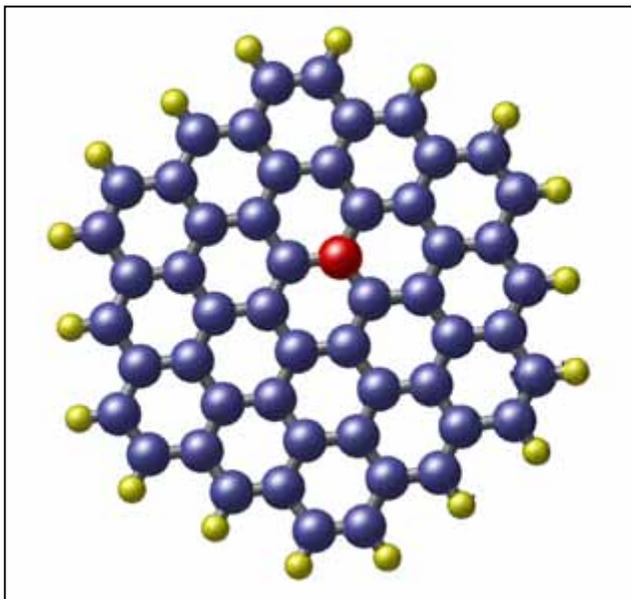
Thus the candidates will kick and gouge each other until the pecking order is established and then kiss and make up in an orgy of bondings of convenience into pairs - potential President/Vice-President teams seeking election.

The Doctor is right again - as usual.

AMAZING DISCOVERY BY ASNSW DEEP SKY SKETCHER

Keen Deep Sky Sketcher and ASNSW Member Scott Muesli, has made an alarming discovery whilst sketching the Synchrotron Radiation Emission Spectrum of the highly energetic jet emanating from the heart of M87, sources have revealed.

A new Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbon (PAH) compound which was observed in the emission spectrum of stellar winds surrounding M87's jet is virtually identical in molecular structure to the sedimentary material recently scraped from the bottom of a bottle of South Pacific Star Port which was left behind at Wiruna by ASNSW AstroPhotographer and Land Lord, Mr Joe Cautious.



The Polycyclic Aromatic Hydrocarbon (PAH) molecule found on Scott Muesli's new H δ filter.

Local winemakers attempting to duplicate the famous South Pacific Star Port have caught wind of this discovery through the grapevine, and are highly suspicious that the Star Port's fine, smooth texture and wild fruity aroma may be due to the inclusion of this - as yet unnamed - compound.

Rumours have been circulating throughout the region that the Wollemi Winery at Nullo Mountain may be using a low-orbiting spacecraft covered in a sticky residue of old grape skins to collect the PAH compound which is then added during the fortification process of the Star Port, which itself is rumoured to occur in barrels made from the sapwood of local Wollemi Pines (*wollemia nobilis*).

This could explain the increasing occurrence of enhanced visual acuity amongst observers at Wiruna following consumption of copious amounts of the famous Star Port, where there have been reports of a number of cases of excessive use of averted vision ultimately leading to a condition known as averted imagination.

Sir Rob Vanderson, resident squire of Fort Davis and zymological expert in all things fermented, describes averted imagination in the following way:

"The kindest interpretation of these varied marvellous observations by these enhanced observers at Wiruna is that they could no longer distinguish between what they imagined they saw and what they actually saw".

In a small number of extreme cases of averted imagination by observers at Wiruna, various claims have been made of visual observations of the jet in M87 using a 12" Ritchey-Chrétien telescope and a unique Hydrogen Delta (H δ) narrow-band filter.

This unique H-Delta filter was originally created when a standard Deep-Sky broad-band filter became soiled by South Pacific Star Port having been accidentally spilled on the filter's surface by a drunken observer who had not realised his accident.

The sedimentary material from the Star Port subsequently dried on the front surface of the Deep Sky filter blocking all wavelengths of light except a very narrow 4-Ångstrom band pass centred around the 4101Å ($\lambda=410.1$ nm) H δ line of light found in the near-UV region of the electromagnetic spectrum.

Amazingly, tests have shown that use of the H δ filter following copious consumption of Star Port has been demonstrated to visually reveal the jet of M87, and also to dramatically improve the appearance of the subtle PAH emission lines in the jet of M87 when used in conjunction with a spectroscope or a direct-vision prism.

M87's energetic jet is caused by a highly collimated stream of Synchrotron Radiation - high energy electrons spiralling along magnetic field lines at close to the speed of light.

The source of this radiation is believed to be the black hole at the heart of M87.

Speculation that what the enhanced observers at Wiruna are seeing is actually material ejected from the rear of the black hole in M87 rather than from the front of it has lead to much heated debate amongst astronomers and scientists alike.

However, many are in agreement that the PAH compounds have probably formed as a result of the material which is ejected from the black hole slowly cooling, and condensing into the opaque droplets whose spectra were discovered by Scott Muesli, and which are allegedly being used by the Wollemi Winery in their attempts to duplicate the famous Star Port.

**THE KRUIHTHOF-PURKINJE EFFECT: WHY NGC 3918
APPEARS BLUE UNDER DIRECT VISION**

"The Blue Planetary" (NGC 3918) has a colour temperature of about 6000K, hence direct vision shows it as a deep blue colour, however averted vision shows it as bright whitish.

To comprehend the reason for this phenomenon it must be appreciated that the human eye functions best when the complex chemical combination in the vitreous humour is in total equilibrium.

The four principle chemicals in this process (known collectively as Retinaldehyde) are Dimethyl, Trimethyl, Cyclohexane and Nonatetraenal.

The Dimethyl feeds and maintains the sensitivity of the retina, the Trimethyl nourishes the rods, the Cyclohexane the cones, while the Nonatetraenal enhances the conductivity of the optic nerve. Curiously, all four chemicals are degraded by the same chemical toxins but to varying degrees.

Thus nicotine, alcohol, caffeine and chocolate all react mostly with the retina but also to a lesser but still substantial degree with the rods, cones and optic nerve.

Consequently, Percival Lowell, who observed Mars at the Flagstaff Observatory puffing on Cuban cigars and swigging from his bottle of medicinal brandy to counteract the chill of the Arizona night air, spent many happy nights drawing the pattern of blood vessels snaking across his own retina and mistaking them for the "canals" of Mars and not realising he had actually invented the retinal scan.

Edward Emerson Barnard was the first skilled observer to figure out just what Lowell was seeing by, like Lowell, stopping down his own 26" refractor to 4" and observing alternately with his right eye and then his left eye, noting that on nights of indifferent seeing when the canals were most evident, their apparent structure varied depending on which eye was used.

Barnard however, being a self made astronomer and lacking a formal University education in all the fashionable superstitions that the astronomy establishment insisted all budding astronomers must know, had been savaged for suggesting he saw evidence for dark nebulae at such a time when conventional wisdom said they did not exist.

Accordingly, rather than publish material which could make Lowell look like the eccentric old goat he really was, Barnard stayed quiet and kept his job.

A look at the mechanics of both colour and black and white vision reveals the following:

The Kruithof Curve - In colour vision, the colour experience of a given light mixture may vary with

absolute luminosity, because both rods and cones are active at once in the eye, with each having different colour curves, and rods taking over gradually from cones as the brightness of the scene is reduced.

This means, for example, that light with a colour temperature of 6000K may appear white under high luminance, but appear bluish under low luminance.

Under the same low luminance conditions, the colour temperature may need to be adjusted to, say, 4700K, to appear white.

This effect leads to a change in colour rendition with absolute illumination levels that can be summarised in the Kruithof curve, named after A. A. Kruithof – Source: Wikipedia.

Strictly speaking then, NGC 3918 should appear bluish if it is highly luminous and white only if it is of low luminosity. The fact that it can at the same time appear blue to direct vision yet white to averted vision calls for an in-depth study.

As the brightness of the scene decreases the brightness of red colours decreases more rapidly than those of blue colours, this is the so-called Purkinje effect.

Let us consider Beta Crucis - A bright blue star with an 8th magnitude, ruby red companion. The question here is whether the brighter Beta Crucis appears so brilliant only because of its blue colour rather than its position on the Headstrong Rustle diagram.

The Purkinje Effect - A close look at the Purkinje effect may cast new light on this issue. According to Wikipedia, the Purkinje Effect (sometimes called the Purkinje shift or dark adaptation) is the tendency for the peak sensitivity of the human eye to shift toward the blue end of the colour spectrum at low illumination levels.

This effect introduces a difference in colour contrast under different levels of illumination. For instance, in bright sunlight, geranium flowers appear bright red against the dull green of their leaves, but in the same scene viewed at dusk, the contrast is reversed, with the petals appearing a dull red against paler green leaves.

In visual astronomy, the Purkinje shift can affect visual estimates of variable stars when using comparison stars of different colours, especially if one of the stars is red. For example, the companion star to Antares is strictly yellow but looks green to the human eye when observed through a telescope.

The effect occurs because the colour-sensitive cones in the retina are most sensitive to yellow light, whereas the rods, which are more light-

sensitive (and thus more important at dusk) but which do not distinguish colours, respond best to green-blue light. This is why we become virtually colour-blind under low levels of illumination, for instance Moonlight.

The Purkinje effect occurs at the transition between primary use of the photopic (cone-based) and scotopic (rod-based) systems: as intensity dims, the rods take over, and before colour disappears completely, it shifts towards the rods' top sensitivity.

Incidentally, the same lack of sensitivity to red is why red lights are used in instrumentation panels: the red light does not disrupt the night vision (because the rods do not respond to it), and the fovea is largely L (red-sensitive) cones, hence the instrument panels are easy to read.

Though commonly used in amateur astronomy for semi-religious reasons, red lights are not worth a damn to read by, but are more suitable in the form of harmless red LED's on instruments or computers.

In fact the US military in exhaustive tests designed to establish which form of lighting can enable soldiers, sailors or airmen to read charts or documents without destroying their ability to function in low light situations or at night established that any monochromatic light source of similar luminosity is far better than red light, with dim green light performing particularly well.

Getting amateurs to swap their red lights for green however is a big ask, with habit, semi-religious beliefs and the white light Gestapo at star parties combining to preserve the status quo.

COBE DISCOVERS COSMIC BACTERIA

Cosmic Background Explorer (COBE) and the Far Infrared Absolute Spectrophotometer (FIRAS) have shown that the cosmic microwave background spectrum matches that of a blackbody of temperature 2.726°K with a precision of $\pm 0.03\%$ of the peak intensity over a wavelength range 0.1 to 5mm

Recent measurements have shown a significant rise in the temperature by precisely 0.042K, a measurement which indirectly implies the existence of minute bacterial activity, possibly surrounding or living off the dark matter which makes up most of the Universe's mass.

These measurements have been further refined by a link-up between Radio Telescopes at the Bogong High Plains Observatory in Victoria and the radio telescope at Schloß Rattshärz, Bavaria, the results of which are being analysed at the University of Bürgerweldt.

These two telescopes have combined to make a radiometric interferometer of unprecedented size and sensitivity and have produced data consistent with a finding that most of the missing mass of the Universe is made up by bacterial and other semi-cold plasma life forms in the voids between the stars and galaxies.

Evidence for extra-terrestrial bacteria has been amassed in recent years following on the discovery of extremeophiles in boiling springs in Yellowstone National Park in Wyoming, USA, and around "black smokers" - deep under-sea volcanic vents where no sunlight penetrates and where bacteria must live on sulphur and other minerals extracted from near-boiling water.

Complex hydrocarbons have been identified in interstellar gas clouds and, as with the famous "black smokers", it may well be that close enough proximity to the warmth of adjacent stars could well have sparked the development of single-celled bacterial organisms which have evolved into more complex forms over many millennia.

Baron Beavis Von Buttköpf theorises that sophisticated extra-terrestrial life forms may be dramatically different from anything our planet has to offer.

He envisages some gaseous or cold plasma version of stromatolites, perhaps many kilometres or scores of kilometres in diameter in which a multi-celled life form functions as a kind of organic, semi-plasma computer and perhaps connected and internally communicating by way of static electricity.

Not reflecting any significant amount of light, these clouds could be staggering in both size and numbers and could fill much of the void between the stars, with that energy collected by parts of the clouds near to a star being relayed to the more distant parts of the clouds in a kind of organic growth.

Whether such life forms could acquire intelligence is as yet unknown, but there is a real prospect that an extensive gas cloud could develop what currently passes for artificial intelligence in computers, and if capable of communicating between each other, thereby develop intelligent responses and perhaps sentience.

This could indicate a desirable line of inquiry for operation SETI, in that any attempt to communicate with ET should be in computer binary language, as our carbon-based life forms could well be in the minority throughout the Universe and we will discover that "computers rule".

STONEHENGE REVISITED

As reported in a previous issue of *Alternate Universe*, much patriotic drivel has been published romanticising that dreary old pile of rocks on Salisbury Plains extolling the genius of the Ancients, it's cosmic symbolism, imaginary celestial alignments, or for latter day re-invented Druids, enough "energy" contained in the rocks to have them prancing about them in bed sheets and shrouds.

In fact of course they were knocked together by a tribe of boozy Brits taking part in a totally useless exercise orchestrated by visiting aliens on an anthropological kick.

However, in defence of those boozy Brits smashed out of their primitive brains on cheap mead, they made rather a good job of it and bits of it falling down over the years had nothing to do with them putting in dodgy foundations.

The truth behind their slightly ruined state has been revealed in the newly published diary of Lady Caroline Lamb, who knew everybody and could never pass up a good party.

It seems that for the last millennia or so the land on which Stonehenge stands had been part of the ancestral estate of the Earls of Parsonsnose

The 23rd Earl, Earl Roscoe, had been well known for the wildest drunken parties in Regency England, and when almost sober was also a gentleman amateur astrologer.

As his usual guests were a rowdy bunch and had trashed his Manor House on several occasions, the Earl had taken to holding his parties outdoors by converting Stonehenge into a large tent by draping some spare canvas sails from HMS Victory over several stones and lintels.

Luckily, Lord Nelson was always ready to flog Navy stores for cash to support his affair with Lady Hamilton and only brought on the battle of Trafalgar because he needed some prize money from the sale of captured ships.

Earl Roscoe cast his horoscopes using a brass Navy telescope which he had bought from Lord Nelson.

The biggest damage occurred during the birthday debauch he threw for mad, bad, Lord Byron at which Lord Roscoe had promised to cast a horoscope for the birthday boy.

To get a good look at the conjunction of Venus and Mercury without having to move his ample posterior from his comfortably cushioned chair, he channelled his party guests' surplus energy into knocking over some inconvenient stones which obscured his line of sight.

Bashing about an ancient monument did not worry him much, as his business enterprises had already recycled half of Hadrian's Wall into the pig sties and the outdoor privies of most of Scotland.



Stonehenge with the obscuring stones removed

Alas for Lord Byron - Lord Roscoe had forecast a 123 year lifespan and marriage to the Princess, later Queen, Victoria.

Little Vicky however wisely kept well clear of him, while Byron died young in the hills of far off Greece by what was most likely a smorgasbord of diseases of indulgence.

It seems Lord Roscoe, a self-made alcoholic, was never too certain which end of his telescope he was looking through anyway. He had successfully concealed his alcoholism from his rich and famous friends because they had never ever seen him sober and because his behaviour when sloshed was about the same as that which passed for normal for most of the gentry.

RADIO ASTRONOMY AT WIRUNA

Exciting developments have been developing in connection with radio astronomy experiments carried out at Wiruna using the historic radio dish formerly in the large array at Fleurs near Sydney.

Doctor Roger Roger, Dean of Radio and Communications at the University of Rylstone-Kandos, having formerly been nominated for a Nobel Prize for establishing conclusively that the Sun was still radiating, has been perfecting his theory concerning extraneous factors impacting adversely on operation SETI (Search for Extra Terrestrial Intelligence).

Dr Roger's Wiruna experiments had convinced him that the accumulation of bird droppings on radio dishes had degraded signals sufficiently to seriously affect data collection and that the degree of degradation was inversely proportional to the guilty species' dropping size.

Thus, the robust droppings from Sulphur-Crested Cockatoos had a more significant effect than the dainty leavings of Rosellas or Galahs.

He also demonstrated that zonal cleanings, that is, removing droppings only from selected zones on the dish, could be used to phase-modulate results, while comparing signals from the same area of the sky observed with a totally clean dish, a Rosella afflicted dish, and one with Sulphur-Crested Cockatoo coatings could add a semi-interferometric element to measurements.

Dr Roger had been first alerted to this phenomenon when he had for the first time detected signals which he thought were the only genuine intelligent transmissions from another planet.

Alas, he was wrong on both counts as careful analysis established that these signals were only repeats of distorted broadcasts from Rylstone Community Radio reflected by the Oort Cloud, having been precisely focussed by a lens of sub-micron lime dust hovering above the Cement Works of nearby Kandos which happened to be in phase with the scattered cometary bodies in the Oort Cloud and reflected precisely back to near their point of origin, even if many hours later.

Dr Roger plans to establish a longer baseline for future observations by fitting a chicken wire dish to the Hills Hoist clothes line at his property near Rylstone while coating the one at Wiruna with Rosella droppings and the other with those of Sulphur-Crested Cockatoos.

Experiments are currently underway to establish the right mix of parrot seed to attract the appropriate targeted species to the respective dishes. Soaking sunflower seed in beer seems to work best with the larger parrots.

NEW TELESCOPE FOR STARSEND OBSERVATORY

America's first Astronomer Royal, Sir Rob Vanderson, has graciously released for publication a photograph of the new Radio Telescope installed at Starsend Observatory, in Limpia Crossing near Fort Davis, Texas.

The telescope had been unveiled following the barbecue held on site during the 2007 Texas Star Party and was launched on its interstellar voyage of discovery by having a vintage bottle of Beetlejuice cracked on its drive mechanism by Sir Rob, after which a toast to its success was had by the assembled guests.

Initial reports during the running-in period suggest that the instrument is performing brilliantly. Not only has it picked up the background microwave radiation of the Universe, as well as transmissions from Voyager and Cassini, but has given Sir Rob

brilliant reception of both the Superbowl and the World Series – events normally hard to see well in the Fort Davis area.

Plans are now being developed to inaugurate a Fort Davis program to revive Operation SETI, a local vote having been taken on the best constellations in which to search for extra terrestrial intelligence and quiet confidence has been expressed that a successful outcome will result, Texans having abandoned their quest to find genuinely intelligent life on planet Earth, outside of the borders of Texas.

Additionally, as part of the Starsend Observatory Outreach Program, Sir Rob has announced a new service which will be provided for amateur Astronomers.



Sir Rob Vanderson and his New Radio Telescope

Many amateurs attend star parties for largely social reasons and find this business of standing around a telescope all night a bit boring and sometimes damned cold or uncomfortable.

Accordingly, you can now rent at modest rates Sir Rob, who comes complete with trailer, telescope and two dozen bottles of industrial strength Beetlejuice, to haul to your star party of choice. Merely give him your observing list and head off to join the hard drinking members of the star party.

Sir Rob will observe your objects and present you with a comprehensive observing report the next day over morning coffee. This will enable any amateur to make quite a splash on the *amastro* discussion list and swank on the net about stacks of notional observations of those sometimes semi-mythical objects from obscure charts, for example Murrell 1, or observing lists so beloved by many *amastro* regulars.

TEXAS STAR PARTY NEWS

Farmers in the Fort Davis region of West Texas have reported that the 2007 Texas Star Party was an outstanding success.

In fact, so much drought-breaking rain fell in the course of the week that El Paso farmers are reported to be bidding for the right to host the 2008 Texas Star Party in their fair city and are offering to donate half a dozen new telescopes as door prizes in an effort to invoke the notorious New Telescope Syndrome.

Still, the TSP was a social success, the highlight of which was the social event of the year - the Starsend Observatory Barbecue, where certain latent alcoholics were able to indulge a little before signing the pledge and handing over their booze to Sheriff Jim at Checkpoint Charlie before entering onto the Prude Ranch (I always used to wonder how it got that name).

In the absence of much in the way of observing, the addresses were well attended with Andrew Moral wowing the crowd with tall tales and true about the gems of the Southern Sky, so much so that he managed to persuade a former Mississippi amateur to return to Australia in 2008.

Another of the Australian contingent, John Blueberry got lucky with the door prizes, and did not really mind missing out on the Argo Navis as he already had two but was very pleased to win the free entry to the Po Biddle County Rattlesnake Sexing Competition, coming as it did with a week's free training at the Apache Wells Rattlesnake Ranch immediately following on the end of the Star Party.

John reports that chief snake wrangler Larry Schmidt really knows his stuff - and that's no bull! He instructed John in all the important and prize winning stuff: how to take charming photos; snake charming; and human/reptile bonding.



The Ornery Rattlesnake at Apache Wells

However, John did not do well in attempting the feat of kissing a snake on the head without getting bitten.

He had started off well by presenting his camera at a particularly photogenic and rather vain snake to encourage it to pose for him, but just as he moved in for the affectionate part, the flash on the camera

went off, startled the brute and spoiled the moment, so although John did not actually get bitten, he missed out on the kiss, which greatly disappointed him, though all is not lost.

Now that he has learned the technique, he plans to get in some practice for the 2008 Po Biddle County Snake Sexing Competition by practising back at home with a few Eastern Brown Snakes and Desert Death Adders.

GLOBAL WARMING

As the most popular contemporary cult, global warming has a lot going for it. Green atheists can embrace it and get that old fashioned religious fix they secretly long for, academics can make a career from it, and there are big bucks to be made in creative carbon trading. Additionally, power and energy companies will do quite well.

The Uranium industry is quietly rehabilitating itself, while even the coal industry is on a roll, as smelting enough silica to produce all those politically-correct solar cells will call for the expenditure of more energy than the solar cells can generate in their lifetimes and will require the construction of additional coal-fired power stations, and charcoal from millions of trees for the smelting process.

While Tasmania has been spared new hydro-electric power, the Western Tiers will no doubt be enhanced by the busy hum of thousands of aesthetically designed windmills.

Despite solid evidence that graphs of the Earth's mean temperatures of the last few thousand years have exactly corresponded with the sunspot cycle, anyone who does not agree that the human race by producing greenhouse gases is the cause of global warming is publicly deemed a fool or unfit to hold their job.

The planet Mars has an atmosphere consisting almost entirely of carbon dioxide and yet is colder than the hairs on a Polar Bear's butt - no global warming there.

Millions of years of ice ages and interglacial periods have come and gone with no human intervention whatever. Accordingly, global warming could be classed as a *bona fide* religion and given the appropriate tax breaks, while its gurus should perhaps be ordained as ministers to give their edicts greater status.

Of course, all this could be reversed when the present solar cycle, busier this last 40 years than any time in the last two thousand, comes to an end and the planet starts to cool again, unless the global warming gurus claim all the credit. Wait and see... And remember, you read it here first!

| |
|-----------------------------|
| APRIL'S HORRORSCOPES |
|-----------------------------|

♈ ARIES

Even the Moon tries to give Aries a miss this month while all your meteors are likely to be telescopic only. So it's up to you Arians to get noticed by the wider world. Cross dress, dye your hair green, and wear a long false beard - with curlers if you are female. If you already do these things and nobody cares you may be an active conservationist.

♉ TAURUS

Minor Planet Flora is parked next to the Crab Nebula on the 8th, with minor planet Amphitrite damn near colliding with Beta Tauri on the 27th. Don't order Lobster or Mud Crab this month without a green salad, or you will throw up for three weeks.

♊ GEMINI

Mars crosses Gemini in March and gets occulted by the Moon on the 12th. Comet 46P Wirtanen brushes Theta Geminorum on the 13th, while, having given Taurus the flick, minor planet Flora passes M35. If in the military, your chances of being rubbed out from April 12 are high, so report in sick to the medical officer - having wiped your face and nether regions with poison ivy, learnt the symptoms of Fowl Plague, Swine Fever and Bubonic Plague and feign all three.

♋ CANCER

Apart from two clapped out communications satellites being in conjunction on the 10th, Cancer is dead boring as are most born under its sign. Fake a birth certificate and get yourself a better sign - ANY other sign will do, even Doradus.

♌ LEO

It's all happening. Saturn spends the month snuggling up to Regulus which gets occulted by the Moon on the 15th. You will run rings around your competition, whether on the job or in affairs of the heart, but watch out for uppity bosses or jealous boyfriends in the latter part of the month. If both are combined in the one person you are in deep doodoo.

♍ VIRGO

Lots of small stuff happening. Minor Planets 7 Iris, 5 Astraea and Melpomene prance about, while comet C/2007 B2 Skiff zips by. If a male, you will have three female admirers competing for you, if you are female, the three witches you hate most will cramp your style. Endure until May.

♎ LIBRA

Apart from the Moon close to Perigee, nothing happens in your sign. In fact, deep sleep therapy could be the most exciting thing which could happen in your dull little lives - that, or reading the Wit and Wisdom of Attila the Hun in the original Mongolian.

♏ SCORPIUS

Something is happening at last. Antares gets occulted by the Moon on the 27th and this clearly means that your brightest talent may not be seen to advantage this April.

If you are devastatingly handsome, witty, or filthy rich, no one may notice - unless of course you are all three, in which case users, gold-diggers, and Hollywood producers looking for reserve script writers may take note of you. Enjoy the ride.

♐ OPHIUCHUS

On April 4, Minor Planet 3 Juno is 1.1 degrees NW of star Nu Ophiuchi. Not much, I admit, but it sure beats two other signs for excitement this month. But consider - Juno was the wife of Jupiter and a moody one at that.

With her governing your sign you may get so lucky with Miss Perfect this April that being shot by an outraged boyfriend may be worth it.

If you are a woman prepare to run should Miss Ambivalent Perfect come looking for you.

♑ SAGITTARIUS

With Jupiter, King of the Gods, hurler of thunderbolts, and sex symbol to the Olympians in your sign, you Sagittarians have it all going for you, with even minor planet Massalia there to lend a hand while Thetis and Fortuna get occulted.

You will be charming, desirable and utterly libido-stoking to the opposite sex, those who are ambivalent and particularly to stray dogs on heat so watch for anything fastening itself on to your lower leg. Enjoy April.

♒ CAPRICORN

You have Neptune in your sign this month and maybe for the rest of your life, with it being occulted by the Moon on April 2.

Reconsider that cruise, ferry-ride or soak in a hot tub, as the chance of you being struck by an asteroid while doing so is high until May. Wear a safety helmet.

♓ AQUARIUS

You cool and sophisticated Aquarians have Uranus in your sign near to Pisces. If swimming on the Barrier Reef this month, resist any urge to ride on a Tiger Shark's back as it could get you in the end. You would be safer cuddling a friendly Sting Ray instead - if there is such a beast.

♈ PISCES

With Neptune next door it may end up in your sign any decade now but not this month. In fact, apart from meteors in the descending node and the Moon wandering through - eventually - there's nothing at all to disturb Pisces. Hibernate for a month and see if anybody notices.

LIFE ON MARS?

Whilst making a pit stop during its tour of the Red Planet, NASA's Mars exploration rover *Spirit* has taken a series of photos of what may be evidence for a strange form of life on Mars.

JPL has reported that after being stopped for an hour to allow the solar cells to recharge its batteries, the onboard motion sensors detected movement and switched on the camera, initially recording a small "wobbly" motion of what appeared to be a brown rock about 15cm (6") across.

With each "wobble" of the rock, numerous small brown particles no bigger than 1cm wide slowly moved towards the rock, eventually merging with the central mass to form a larger body.

After two hours, this initially shapeless growing blob started to exhibit structure and as the structure developed it gradually became a mirror image of *Spirit*.



The Crystalline Replica of the Mars Rover "Spirit" as photographed by Spirit itself

Spirit's sensors showed the structure to be totally silicon-based, and computer analysis of data from the directional CT scan revealed a lattice, or matrix of silicon crystals locked together but also displaying a distinctly non-crystalline flexibility, being able to change its surface shape and lock into each other.

A low level of radio noise emanated from the structure, but whether this was an attempt to communicate or was merely related to its growth and function is unclear, as no message can be identified.

Questions abound. Is what we are seeing some sort of life form? If so, is it a single entity or some sort of community of entities bound by radio communication or perhaps telepathically?

Will it be capable of communication? It seems capable of learning. When *Spirit* moved a few centimetres in its direction, it attempted a similar move but totally fell apart into a shapeless pile.

This shapeless pile then started to reassemble itself, but this time into the form of a humanoid figure. Looking somewhat feminine, at least to an astronaut who had been marooned for some years on a space station, it has maintained this form for some weeks.



What has been encountered may well be some crystalline community which has the ability to reproduce forms that it encounters. If so, one may wonder when and how such a community encountered a humanoid figure. Has Mars been visited by the grey aliens, and if so, when?

STAR PARTY RECIPES – TEXAS STYLE

Armadillo With Attitude

Take one Armadillo, preferably dead, and remove whichever stomach contents and internal organs you don't particularly fancy.

Replace these with three kilograms of assorted chillies, red peppers, freshly crushed garlic, spanish onions and indian curry, mixed thoroughly into a thick, gooey mash.

Place armadillo upside down with its shell filled with 250ml water and 500ml of Old Crow Whiskey in the glowing embers of a very hot coal fire and leave for about 3 hours, or until steam stops coming out.

Serve to your guests, if you can find anyone hungry enough, providing each with a bucket or two of cold water.

Pray.

Cactus Cocktail

In a stainless steel container pour one full bottle of Jack Daniels, one litre of blue agave Tequila, 1.75 litres of 100-proof Southern Comfort, one large diced watermelon, ten coarsely mashed bananas, the juice of four pineapples, ½ bucket of shredded cactus, 1kg of prunes and 7 litres of apple juice.

Stir thoroughly with a canoe paddle or small outboard motor until the mass forms into a uniformly homogenous khaki-coloured glop.

Drink with eyes averted and having cleared your appointments and engagements for the following day.

If taking any into the Texas Star Party tell Sheriff Jim at the gate that it is paint remover - you will doubtless be right.

SPEED OF LIGHT BROKEN

Professor Audi Biemer, newly elected Chancellor of the University of Bürgerweldt and 2007 winner of the Nobel Prize in Tautology welcomed new students last month and delivered a summary of his award winning paper on the velocity of light, which we summarise hereunder.

As everybody knows, nothing can exceed the speed of light, except of course light itself. Recent cutting edge research has established that light can travel faster through certain mediums than it can through a vacuum.

With exceedingly distant objects like Quasars, or 28th magnitude galaxies, it is inconceivable that light coming to us from these can travel entirely through nothing but a vacuum for the entire journey.

Statistical projections indicate that the light from any distant object must pass through a total of 37.9 parsecs of interstellar gas clouds per million light years of distance travelled, with the result that a beam of light will emerge from the gas cloud with a higher velocity than when it went in.

The cumulative slingshot effect of passage through multiple gas clouds means that light from very distant objects continues to accelerate with each ingress and egress.

This continuous, yet irregular acceleration stretches the wavelengths of light in such a manner as to induce a red shift effect, so that as much as 75 percent of the perceived red shift of distant objects is not caused by recession but by light speeding up.

This finding has profound indications for the accepted distance scale of the Universe as well as the prospects of finding extra terrestrial life, as more advanced life forms than us may well have developed "light drives" to power space vehicles and have figured out how to travel through the Universe at warp speed.

The Professor has asked Baron Beavis Von Buttköpf to recalibrate a spectroscope in accordance with a formula he has devised, and to carry out a pilot survey at the Schloß Rattshärz Observatory in order to refine the distance estimates of a number of key objects like M31 and the Whirlpool Galaxy. Professional astronomers worldwide are nervously awaiting the outcome.

Meanwhile, scientists in West Texas have been developing a prototype "light drive" propulsion system which they claim may one day be used to propel spacecraft at speeds exceeding that of light.

This prototype light drive propulsion system has been claimed to have produced positive results so far, and tests have shown that this new advanced

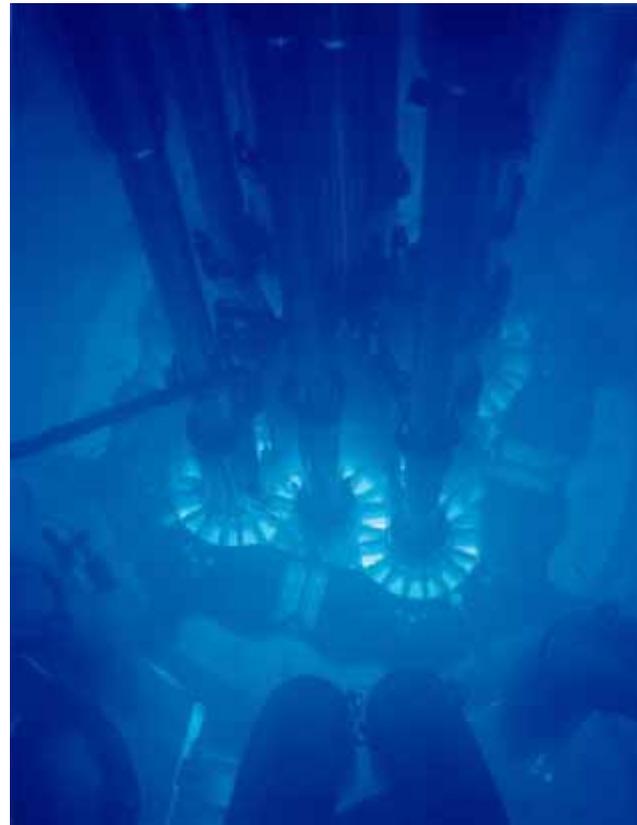
"light drive" propulsion system will one day allow humans to explore deep into our Milky Way galaxy in record time, with manned-missions to Alpha Centauri - a distance of 4.3 light-years - in less than 18 months of travelling time.

The location of the laboratory being used to develop the "light drive" system is highly classified, so much so that not even the President of the United States is privy to its whereabouts.

However, our sources have revealed that the laboratory is close to the town of Crowell in West Texas.

Although the prototype's development is classified under the highest level of security, we have managed to obtain an image of the prototype "light drive" system in action during a recent test at the West Texas laboratory (see image, below).

As can be seen in the image, the characteristic brilliant blue glow of Cerenkov radiation is obvious as it emanates from the four main cores of the test reactor.



The Advanced Light Drive Propulsion System shown emitting copious quantities of Cerenkov Radiation

WHITE LIGHT POLICE AT WIRUNA

Alarmed at the indiscriminate use of white light at the 2007 South Pacific Star Party, the ASNSW White Light Police promise drastic action at the 2008 event.

Construction has commenced at Wiruna of a modest barbed-wire enclosure to be known as *Stalag Black Hole*, in which offenders will be confined for the night.

Basic comforts will be provided in the enclosure – a loaf of sliced bread, a bucket of fresh water, a 60mm Tasco, a portaloo, and perhaps even a chair or two.

Though the fence will be highly electrified, deep sky observers will be pleased to learn that this will be glowing at a temperature of no more than red heat in accordance with the highly responsible Wiruna Light Policy, using power provided by a silent generator.

Offenders will be released either at dawn or Moonrise, whichever comes first, after having their hands stamped with indelible dye. Repeat offenders will be referred to the resident White Light Sheriff for corrective action (see image below).



Wiruna's White Light Sheriff in action

POTENTIAL STARGATE FOUND IN IRAQ

General Jubilation T Cornpone III of the US Army Corps of Engineers has reported the discovery of what appears to be a prototype Stargate in Iraq.

The discovery was made during construction of a bowling alley at Baghdad International Airport when excavations for the foundations broke into an underground bunker formerly used as a secret research facility.

The General said that while he had always regarded such devices as the stuff of science fiction, one should never underestimate the capability of foreign scientists, while there was always the outside chance of some hidden extra-terrestrial connection.

Such research, and even hints of an alien input, were found recently on page 98 of assorted intelligence reports recently purchased in the Baghdad bazaars by the CIA, which considered it had got a good deal as two Persian carpets and a vintage Hookah had been included in the deal.

The General considered that at least 90% of these reports were reject scripts prepared by bootleg science fiction writers during the recent Hollywood writer's strike.

The research was apparently being promoted under the former regime by Colonel Medic Hazchem, who had an honorary Ph.D in Electronic Chemistry from the University of Bürgerweltdt and who is now rumoured to be in hiding somewhere in the northern hemisphere.

Tests will be carried out at the Las Vegas Polytechnic Institute under the direction of Professor Rube Goldberg, who said preliminary results suggested that the unfinished device had strange effects on roulette wheels and cappuccino bars and could therefore be a multi purpose machine.

Professor Goldberg has had long experience with strange devices, having formerly successfully converted two hundred surplus Florida voting machines into poker machines.

BOOK REVIEW

*"Big Bang Banged About" - Bokglob Gröseblurter.
Published by Bürgerweltdt University Press.*

This provocative book has just hit the market and caused a sensation amongst conventional astronomers, academics, teachers and other like devoted disciples of scientific orthodoxy. In it, the author takes issue, not so much with the Big Bang scenario, but with the accepted timescale.

He argues that the impression recently gained that the Universe is 98% dark matter and is not only expanding but actually accelerating is just that - an impression brought about by a flawed interpretation of observational data.

No satisfactory explanation, apart from some scientific black magic can account for the force which allegedly is stoking this expansion. Bokglob instead asserts that the Universe had long ago reached the limits of its expansion and then, slowed and stopped by gravitational forces, has begun to contract towards its point of origin.

There certainly is dark matter, he agrees, but only 97% of the mass of the Universe is contained therein. Hubble got it all wrong, he claims, by assuming that the only explanation for the observations of red shift was expansion.

On the contrary, he argues, the red shift is actually a product of "tired light", that is light whose velocity has been slowed by the gravitational effects of stars, galaxies, black holes, and all that dark matter which adds up to a great mass indeed and which has stretched the spectrum of light towards the red end.

The problem in science, he says, is that scientists get smitten by a pet theory or imagined insight and then tend to focus on that evidence which supports their theory, or where the evidence is capable of being interpreted in different ways, go for the interpretation that fits their theory most closely.

Thus, during the Black Death epidemics in England, the men of science blamed the disease carrying cats and dogs, put a bounty on them and had scores of thousands killed, much to the delight of the plague rats.

Similarly, malaria seemed most prevalent near swamps, so hundreds of years ago was blamed on "bad air" or "malaria" rather than parasite-carrying mosquitos happily breeding in said swamps.

Bokglob says that contraction will result in an outburst of star formation in the apparent voids between the galaxies and that new galaxies will form in consequence.

He argues that gamma ray bursters are early evidence of this as galactic centres sweep up clumps of dark matter concentrated by the gravitational attraction of dense star populations at their cores, and such new stars are being created adjacent to and immediately sucked up by central black holes.

Perhaps in consequence of the Hollywood writer's strike, several major studios are said to be competing for movie rights to Bokglob's book. Of course, how Hollywood will devise a way for a movie hero to stop the implosion of the Universe will call for the efforts either of a very creative script writer or an experienced Washington speech writer, and in fact saving the Universe may well become a campaign issue in the forthcoming US Presidential election.

Bokglob's book will soon be available at progressive adult stores, any street corner in Las Vegas and at roadside stalls in Area 51. A steal at \$39.95, or at only \$49.95 with bullet- and neutrino-resistant hard covers.

SOCIETY DIARY

| | | |
|-------------|--------------------------------------|--|
| 4 – 6 April | South Pacific Star Party at Wiruna | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mass group-therapy session for those who have been looking at cloudy skies for months; • Assessment of how much Starport one needs to consume before the pain goes away; • Workshop on how to remove mildew from your telescope. |
| 11 April | Society Meeting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Woman On Mars - Is Eve being created before Adam on the Red Planet? |
| 18 April | Society Meeting | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imaging of Heavenly Bodies - The Life of Marilyn Monroe. |
| 26 April | Last Quarter Moon Observing at Crago | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crago Observatory: The use of DSC's to find and observe objects through clouds - Which filters to use. |

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