



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on February 14, 2015

Scientists: Sending Messages into Outer Space Could Spell Doom

When Orson Welles gave his suspenseful 1938 *War of the Worlds* radio broadcast, it caused a perhaps [overblown](#) but nonetheless real panic among Americans who mistook it for news reportage. And while “invaders from Mars” laying waste to the world now seems fanciful, scientists are worried that a similar broadcast in the future could be relating a real alien invasion — and not just across our porous southern border.



At issue is what could be called SETI 2.0. As the *Express* [explains](#):

Leading figures from the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (Seti) have recently proposed beaming powerful radio messages to parts of the galaxy where life may exist.

The “active” form of search — known as Messages to Extraterrestrial Intelligence (MetI) — will be deployed to Earth-like planets in the hopes of receiving a response from alien lifeforms.

But this has caused concern among other scientists who say that it might not be exactly the response we want. The paper continues:

Critics fear that sending signals out of our existence could lead to visits from not-so-friendly extraterrestrials intent on destroying the human race.

They also suggest that the proposal goes against the principles of Seti — which are about listening rather than transmitting — and argue that the plans are being conducted by a group of close-knit enthusiasts who have not informed the wider public.

Shh!

Advocates of the plan are perhaps driven by frustration after 50 years of listening to the heavens and hearing nothing but cosmic crickets. But might our messages serve as a homing beacon for beings less like [the cute E.T.](#) and more akin to the rampaging aliens in [Independence Day](#) or Darth Vader and his [Death Star](#)? That’s the worry. As *The Independent* [writes](#):

“A small cadre of Seti radio astronomers has resisted the notion of international consultation before humanity takes the brash and irreversible step into Meti, shouting our presence into the cosmos,” said David Brin, a space scientist and author. “That’s all very well if the only one you’re putting at risk is yourself. But when that risk is imposed upon our children and all of humanity on the planet, is it too much to ask that we discuss it first?”

He is not alone in his concerns. Professor Stephen Hawking, the Cambridge cosmologist, warned in 2010 that humans should keep as silent as possible because alien civilisations may be attracted to Earth and have the technology to travel here and exploit its resources. “If aliens visit us, the outcome would be much as when Columbus landed in America, which didn’t turn out well for the Native Americans,” he said.



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The Guardian [adds](#), “Others agree. Simon Conway Morris, an evolutionary paleobiologist at Cambridge, has urged governments to [prepare for the worst](#) because aliens might be as violent and greedy as humans — or worse.”

But some are more enthusiastic. *The Guardian* also tells us, “Seth Shostak, director of the Seti Institute, advocates beaming the entire contents of the internet, giving an intelligent recipient the opportunity to decipher the history of human culture, the rules of cricket, and countless hours of porn.”

Of course, a desire to advertise our Marquis de Sade side presupposes that aliens wouldn’t possess a more advanced moral compass. Perhaps they’d decide Earth was in need of fumigation.

Reading between the lines, Shostak also seems to have an atheistic agenda. He in addition says, reports the *Guardian*, “Even aside from the possibility that you might get information back from a very advanced society — like here’s all of physics or the cure for death — any response would tell you Earth is not a miracle, that it’s just another duck in a row.”

Wouldn’t Shostak be surprised if the alien response was to send missionaries?

Shostak also dismisses concerns over danger, pointing out that warning of alerting aliens to our existence is shutting the door after the horse has left the barn. After all, he says, we’ve been sending broadcasts into space since WWII. *The Guardian* again:

[Shostak] argues that a ban on sending signals into space would have to proscribe airport and military radar systems and even city lighting which can betray the existence of technology on Earth. “Such paranoid actions would cripple the activities of every succeeding generation of humanity,” he told the American Association for the Advancement of Science meeting in San Jose.

It also seems logical that civilizations advanced enough to usher in our doomsday would have long ago transmitted their own signals (we’ve picked up nothing, though); unless, as someone close to me put it, “They’re not as stupid as we are.” Even if that wasn’t their choice method of contact, however, it’s hard to imagine that such aliens wouldn’t be scouring the universe for other inhabited planets.

Whatever the case, as NDTV.com [points out](#), “Radio signals have, in fact, already been sent out into space. In 1999, Russian scientists sent messages with a telescope based in Crimea.... And in 2008 NASA beamed the Beatles song ‘Across the Universe’ at the North Star, 430 light years away.” Of course, they could just beam out Kanye West rap music and be sure to keep the aliens away.

The Independent also [reported](#) on the most popular for-alien-consumption messages according to a 2009 Seti survey. There is the obvious: “We are humans on the planet Earth.”

The mundane: “Hello and welcome.”

The succinct and generic statist plea: “Please help.”

The flower-child, doves-and-kittens “Peace, love and friendship.”

And the self-flagellating, existentialist lament: “We feel alone and are fearful, primarily because of our own propensity for violence.”

But other options suggest themselves, some reflecting the spirit of the age and others opposition to it:

- “Yes, we can.”
- “Actually, uh ... no, we can’t.”
- “President for sale.”



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- “Amnesty and driver’s licenses offered here.”
- “Come do the jobs humans won’t do.”
- “Our civilization has fallen and it can’t get up.”
- “Single white female looking for male sentient being. Green in wallet a must; green skin optional.”
- “Don’t be shy; anyone(thing) can ‘marry’ anyone(thing) here now.”
- “You’ve got a flying saucer — you didn’t build that. Some other alien made that happen.”
- “Check your green privilege.”

Of course, if we’re really worried about aliens whose desire to serve man may [involve the use of a cookbook](#), we could just beam into space the entire archives of the mainstream media. The response then just may be, “Don’t bother with that place. There’s no intelligent life down there.”



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