

Astronomy 230:
Extraterrestrial Life

Section 1– MWF 1400-1450
134 Astronomy Building



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Office Hours:

T: 10:30-11:30 a.m.

W: 3:00-4:30 p.m. or by appointment

<http://eeyore.astro.uiuc.edu/~lw1/classes/astro230/fall05/>

Music: *Pets* – Porno for Pyros

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This Class (Lecture 1):

Introductions

Next Class:

Size Scales & Cosmology

Outline



- Class Introductions
- Introduction of Extraterrestrial Life
- Class Goals
- Syllabus

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Welcome to Astro 230



- It's a great time to take this course!
- In 1995, we knew of 9 planets. Now, in 2005, we know of about 200 planets around numerous suns.
- In the near future, NASA missions may find life on Titan or Europa, evidence of life of Mars, or image Earth-like planets around nearby stars.
- In this course, you will get an understanding of arguably the biggest astronomical question of all time: ***Are we alone?***
- We will address this question with scientific methods, but also perhaps with some philosophy and science fiction thrown in too.

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Questions



- Why did ***you*** take this course?
- What are ***you*** interested in learning in this course?
- Do ***you*** think extraterrestrial life exists?
- How long ago do ***you*** think life on Earth occurred?

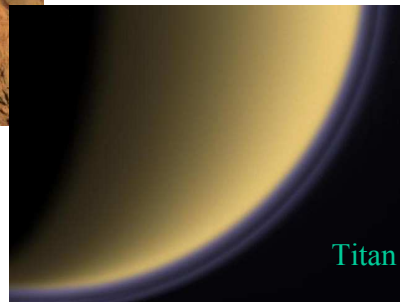
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Is There Anyone Out There?



Could there be life in a place like this?



Or perhaps a place like this?

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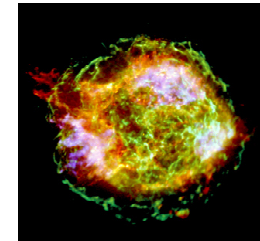
Should we be *AFRAID*?



- Will giant asteroids doom the earth?
- Will gamma-rays from an exploding star irradiate us?



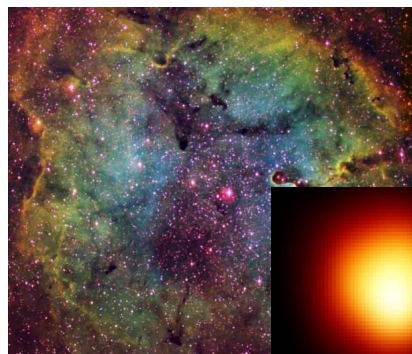
- Will we be swallowed by a black hole?



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Where Do We Come From?



- How can clouds of gas and dust form stars, worlds - and us?

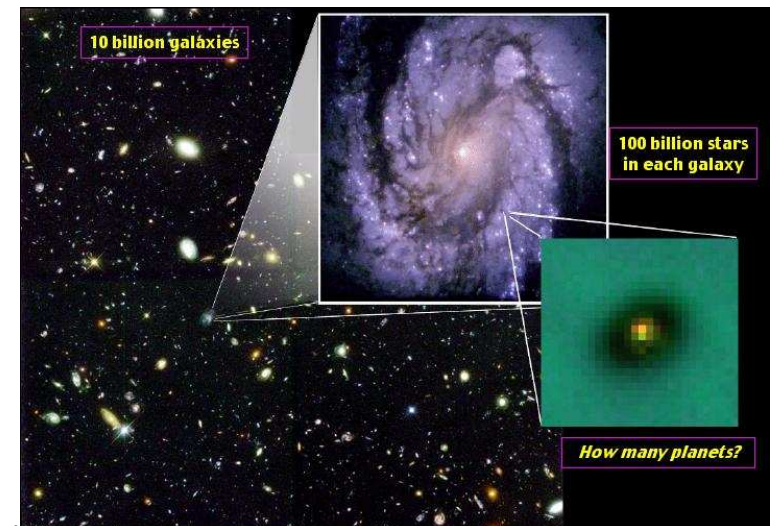


- ... and where are we going?

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The Universe: Some Facts to Help you Live in it



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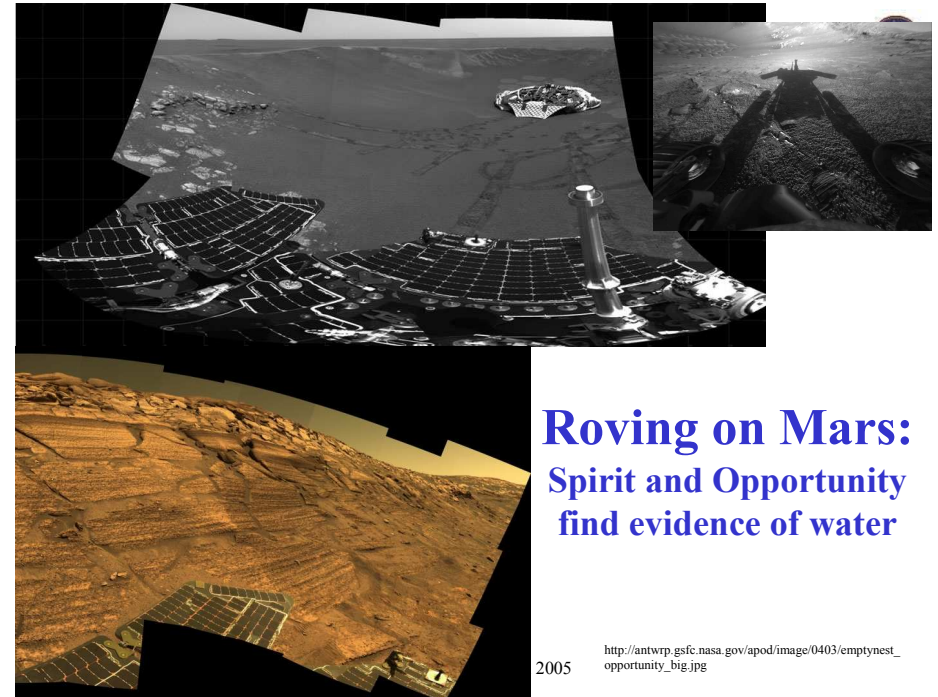
<http://astron.berkeley.edu/~kalas/disksite/learnframes.htm>

Roving on Mars



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Roving on Mars: Spirit and Opportunity find evidence of water

2005

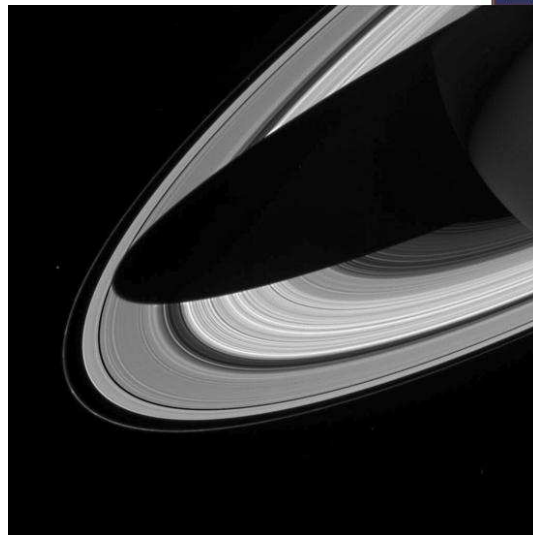
http://antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/image/0403/emptynest_opportunity_big.jpg



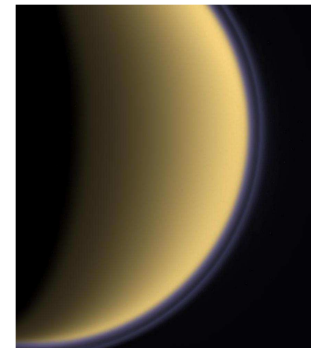
Cassini Explores the Ring World

<http://saturn.jpl.nasa.gov/cgi-bin/gs2.cgi?path=../multimedia/images/rings/images/PIA05417.jpg&type=image>

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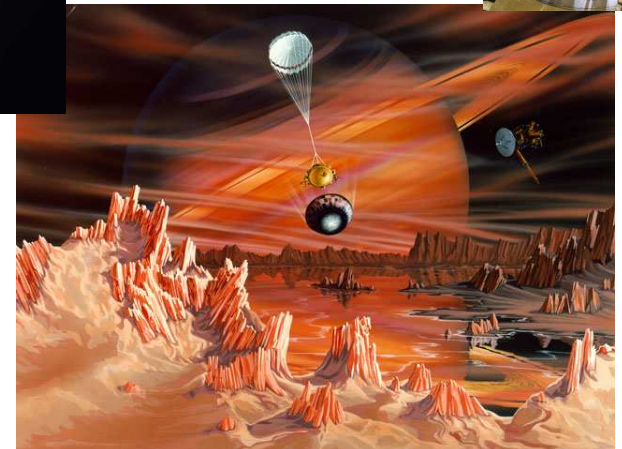
Cassini: Life on Titan?

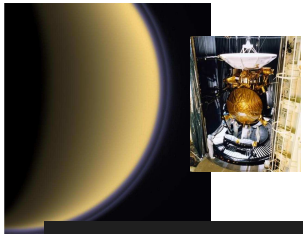


The
Huygens
probe
touched
down on
Jan 14th!

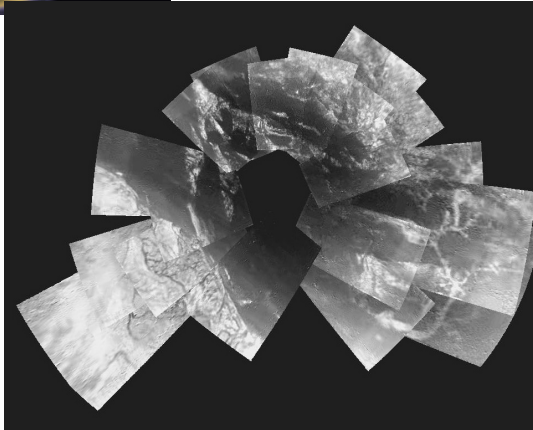
<http://antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/ap041220.html>

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Cassini: First Images



http://www.esa.int/SPECIALS/Cassini-Huygens/SEMC8Q71Y3E_0.html

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Astro 230: Sex in Space?



One of the neat aspects of this course is that we can address this cool subject with an open mind and scientific rigor.

Don't be scared of science. It is really just common sense and logic. Although not all scientist have those in any larger amounts than non-scientists.

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Astro 230



In this class, we shall confront some of the ideas concerning the formation of life on this planet (origination of life), so we can apply it to extraterrestrial life. Remember, we only have a sample of one in the entire Universe!

BUT, we will not condemn anyone's beliefs (God, Gods, UFOs, etc.). So, we will examine life in the scientific sense.

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Life



- This examination may bring us to some very depressing conclusions
- What is life?
 - Just sunlight plus geochemistry?
- If we decide that intelligent life is common in the Universe, how will that make us feel?



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<http://www.ericweinstein.com/images/meaning-of-life.jpg>

Class Facts



- Today, there is no evidence for ET life.
- Earth's early geologic record (first 1/2 billion years) is GONE
 - Clues to early life formation are gone
 - Earth is about 5 billion years old
- But, we do have evidence for very early microbial life on Earth (about 4 billion yrs old).
- First multi-celled life about 1 billion years ago.



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Class Facts



- Humans are NEW on Earth (about 5 Myrs ago)
- Keep in mind that faith is not science. Faith is fine, but we have to keep in mind that in this class, "I just KNOW it!" is not an acceptable answer. We are investigating big questions scientifically.



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Careful of Science



- Sometimes people make big claims in the name of science.
 - Ancient world thought that the Earth was the center of the Universe.
 - Percival Lowell (~1913) thought he saw canals on Mars (optical illusion).
 - Eddington (~1940) tried to make the fine structure constant a rational number.
- We need to learn from these mistakes.

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But Learn to Speculate



- The French Academy of Sciences once pronounced that meteorites were nonsense
 - EVIDENCE and REASON can produce just as many thrills as dogmatic faith-based belief (*Chladni showed them a meteorite!*)
- The professors of Astronomy in the early 1600s, were probably teaching a geocentric solar system.
 - The Catholic church only forgave Galileo about his heliocentric solar system ideas in 1992!

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Life on Earth



- A miracle?
- An accident?
- More-or-less inevitable given the laws of nature and chemistry with suitable conditions?
- **Principle of Mediocrity**: There's nothing terribly special about the astronomical, geological, physical and chemical circumstances on Earth; most likely nothing special about biology either



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Major Premise



The Universe is *homogenous* and *isotropic*.

- The laws of nature are the same everywhere.
- So we can apply the lessons learned from life on Earth to extrapolate about life in space.
- Life probably should have repeated elsewhere, given the same circumstances.
- The Universe is freaky big!

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Course Goals



After this course one should be able to:

- Understand our current scientific view of life in the universe.
- Conceptualize the factors involved with the ultimate question.
- Propose what the future may hold for the field.
- Make informed decisions about science policies.
- Hold any “discovery” of extraterrestrial life to a personal scientific standard of proof.

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Course Goals



- This class is designed to be fun.
- I will endeavor to teach the student about extraterrestrial life, but to do that we need to cover various topics.
- This course will revolve around the "Drake Equation".
- The Drake Equation looks like an attempt to calculate how many intelligent extraterrestrial civilizations exist with whom we *might* be able to communicate in our Galaxy.
- However, the equation actually helps us understand our ignorance about the subject and illuminates the various topics and issues worth thinking about when we ask the question, “*Are we alone?*”, with an open mind.

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Course Outline



Topics:

- We will review some basic astronomy
- Planetary and solar system astronomy
- Biology and biochemistry
- Geology
- Paleontology
- Evolution
- History and the future of mankind on Earth
- Interstellar communication and travel, including UFO's.
- Take part of the journey, and let's enjoy the ride.

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Type of Course



I expect some interactivity and responses, not just my voice.

Feel free to interrupt me and ask questions, or pose new points, etc.

So....

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Class Participation



Class Participation

- You should attend lectures
- To encourage your engagement, the lectures will often be punctuated by opportunities for your feedback, in the form of asking questions, "voting" on the possible outcomes of observations or demonstrations, or brainstorming answers to open-ended questions. To reward your participation in these activities, you will occasionally be asked to write down and hand in your response.

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Extraterrestrial Life Questions



What is extraterrestrial life?

Have we been visited?

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Extraterrestrial Life Questions



- How many believe that we have been visited by UFOs?
- Is that the same as ETs?
- Are our governments hiding it?

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Aliens?



We have been bombarded by aliens in the media— all types.

No surprise that **close to half** of all Americans believe in aliens.

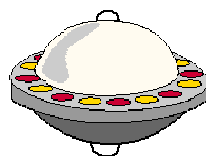
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Have we been visited by ETs?



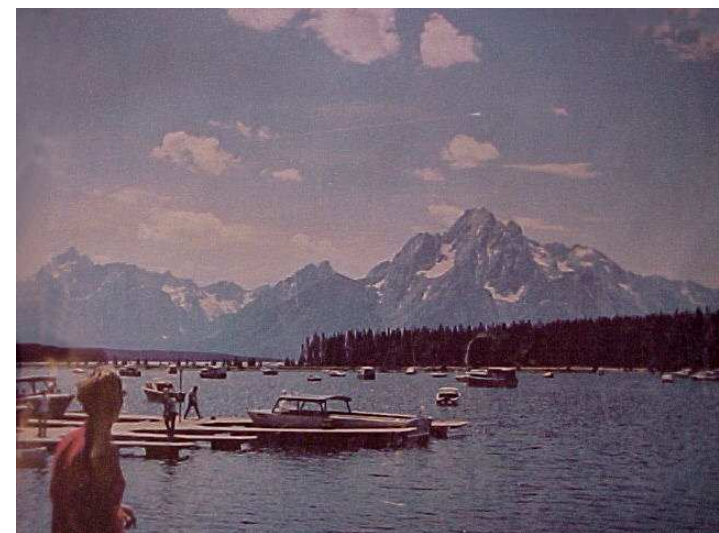
*“Extraordinary Claims
Require Extraordinary
Evidence”*



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An Example: Meteor 1972



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<http://www.uwgb.edu/dutchs/>

Yikes, a Near Miss



- A bus sized object entered atmosphere over Utah and exited over Canada
- Velocity of 15 km/sec
- Missed Earth by 58 km



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But...



- Event was completely unexpected
- Crossed relatively sparsely-inhabited region
- Only visible for a *total* of 101 seconds
- Visible for no more than 30 seconds at any one spot
- Nonetheless, we have dozens of clear photographs of this event
- And still we have no comparable images of UFOs

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Oral Presentation



Most students in this class come with a topic that is of interest to them. The student is expected to build this interest into a research project. Logically, if one student is interested then other students will likely be interested in the topic as well. This forum provides the opportunity to investigate issues that may not be explored or not explored in depth during class.

Examples of topics could include: Faces and Pyramids on Mars, Aliens in South Park: Satire or Silly, or Alien Abductions.

Oral Presentation Questions



1. How relevant is the topic to the search for extraterrestrial life?
2. How interesting is the topic for the general class audience?
3. Rate the extent of the speakers knowledge on the topic?
4. Rate the quality of the overall presentation?
5. Does the research have a solid scientific basis?

These questions are rated 1-10 out of 10 scale.

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Presentation Examples



- Life without a planet
- Faces and pyramids on Mars
- Aliens in South Park: Satire or Silly
- Supernovae: Adding Heavy Elements to the Mix
- Panspermia: Life from the Stars
- Human Colonization of other Planets/Asteroids
- Terraforming Mars
- How to get to Mars
- Self-Replicating Space Probes: Explore the Galaxy on the Cheap.

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Presentation Synopsis



Due on Sept 9th, the presentation synopsis.

- **1-2 paragraphs:** describing the main idea behind the presentation
- **1-2 paragraphs:** addressing the 5 questions directly
- A list of 5 or more references for the presentation / research paper. This is necessary to help you avoid some of the more questionable sources.

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Research Paper



You will be writing a research paper on the presentation topic. This paper must be 8 to 10 pages double-spaced 12-point font, not including references. A draft of the paper is due 2 weeks after your presentation. The final paper is due at the beginning of class, Monday December 5, 2004.

Most points are usually lost for bad referencing or missing bibliography.

For examples on WWW reference, see the syllabus or contact me. Remember that I have access to google as much as you do. Academic honesty is vital!

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Homework Assignments



- There will be 10 homework assignments given throughout the course. These will be simple answer or short essay, and are meant to sharpen your thinking on the material covered in lecture, and to help prepare you for the exams.
- Homework is due at the beginning of class or at the announced time, after which the answers will be made available. **No late homework will be accepted.**

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Yuck-- Exams



- There will be one midterm exam and a comprehensive final exam for this course. The exams will consist of short answer essay and multiple choice questions. Dates are as follows.
- Hour Midterm Exam: In class Friday, Oct 15th
- Final Exam: **1:30-4:30 pm Friday, Dec 18th**

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Grades



Requirement	Percentage of Grade	Points
Class Participation (will drop 1 or 2)	8%	100
Presentation Synopsis	2%	20
Homework Assignments	10 x 1% each	100
Oral Presentation	15%	150
Research Paper Draft	5%	50
Research Paper	10%	100
Midterm	20%	200
Final Exam	30%	300
Total	100%	1000

BOOK: *Extraterrestrial Life*, 5th edition, 2003 by Neal Evans


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Drake Equation

Frank Drake





$$N = R_* \times f_p \times n_e \times f_l \times f_i \times f_c \times L$$

# of advanced civilizations we can contact	Rate of star formation	Fraction of stars with planets	# of Earthlike planets per system	Fraction on which life arises	Fraction that evolve intelligence	Fraction that communicate	Lifetime of advanced civilizations
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Perhaps we shouldn't look for Aliens?



- But we've been broadcasting our presence on Earth for the last 65 years now!
- At the present time, the Earth is brighter in radio than the Sun.
- Is anyone out there watching TV right now?
- Also there have been a few intentional messages...



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SETI



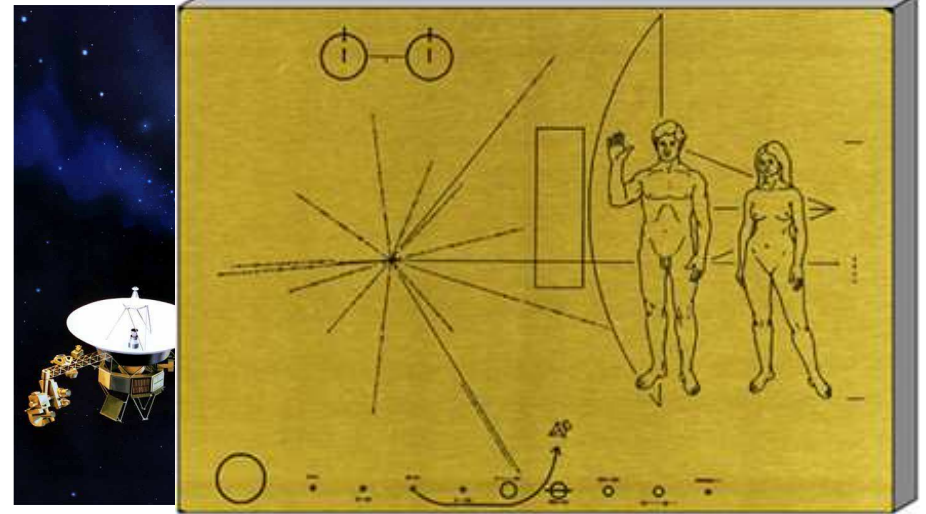
- Communications via radio signal
 - 18–21 cm wavelength range good for interstellar communication
- SETI search is ongoing
 - SETI
 - <http://www.seti.org>
- If they exist, should we contact them?



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Voyager– the message is out.



<http://voyager.jpl.nasa.gov/spacecraft/sceneearth.html>

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