

By Dr. Eugene F. Melrose

LIFEBEAM

Would extraterrestrials be more inclined to visit Earth in space-ships, or would they prefer to communicate with us via radio or television transmission? This debate has raged for many years among people interested in the search for extraterrestrial intelligence. All agree that more information can be sent cheaper, faster, and to more places by radio transmissions. This is not to say that "little green people" would never show up in space-ships. They would just be more likely to send messages, hoping that we would reply.

Scientists searching for alien radio transmissions expect there to be a simple form of announcing or heralding signal followed by a deluge of information describing their civilization. The view is that a very advanced society would be benevolent and interested in sharing its wisdom with developing cultures. An interstellar message of very different sort was the subject of a science fiction novel, *A for Andromeda*, by astrophysicist Fred Hoyle and John Elliot (1962, Harper and Row, New York). In their story, a message is received from somewhere in the constellation Andromeda, and it is in the form of a very large computer program!

Why would aliens transmit a computer program? As the Hoyle and Elliot story unfolds, the computer program starts to ask questions about Earth life and then suggests that the Earthlings oblige by letting it control some very sophisticated biochemical experiments. After a series of startling developments, the computer's experiments lead to the growth, in a period of only four months, of a full grown and beautiful female human being! "Andromeda," as she is named by the researchers, is highly intelligent but is lacking in human emotional qualities. She is also anything but benign as she begins to wreak havoc in her own inscrutable ways.

So we have in the Andromeda story an unusual way of transporting life and intelligence across interstellar distances—a "life-beam," in a manner of speaking. The method does, however, presuppose cooperative receivers to carry out the "wishes" of the computer program. Aliens could also use this method to assemble one of themselves here on Earth, rather than imitating the forms of Earth life. If we ever do receive this kind of message from space, we now stand forewarned about the possible consequences!