

As for the proposed lightweight launcher—a four-stage vehicle dubbed Vega that would loft a 700-kilogram satellite—Brachet argues that the projected launch cost of \$20 million is too high. “The competition is with the East, and they are selling such launches for between \$10 million and \$12 million,” he says. Even a seemingly innocuous resolution on closer cooperation between ESA and the European Union may prove divisive, as some ESA members favor more EU input into space policy while others oppose it. European space politics are alive and well.

—HELEN GAVAGHAN

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## SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY

### Panel Says Some UFO Reports Worthy of Study

On 8 January 1981, a man working in his yard in Trans-en-Provence, France, claims to have heard a low whistling sound and turned to see an ovoid object land in his garden. Thirty seconds later it rose and departed in the direction of a nearby forest, leaving a 2.4-meter diameter, ring-shaped imprint in the ground. The police and the government's Unidentified Aerospace Phenomena Study Group sampled the compacted soil and the damaged vegetation. Four labs analyzed the samples but reached no definitive conclusions as to what had happened.

The case may sound like an *X-Files* transcript, but it and other UFO tales got a serious 4-day hearing by nine senior physical scientists at a workshop late last year. In a report released this week, the panel concluded that some of the UFO events merited further scientific study (see [www.jse.com/ufo\\_reports/Sturrock/toc.html](http://www.jse.com/ufo_reports/Sturrock/toc.html)). “Our feeling was [that] anything not explained is something science at some level ought to be interested in,” says Thomas Holzer, a geophysicist at the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colorado. Holzer was co-chair of the workshop, which was convened by Laurance S. Rockefeller.

For most scientists, the definitive word on UFOs came from a 1968 review spon-

sored by the U.S. Air Force and led by physicist Edward Condon. The Condon report concluded that “further extensive study of UFOs probably cannot be justified in the expectation that science will be advanced thereby.” But after hearing reports from eight UFO investigators, the new panel decided that although there was no convincing evidence that extraterrestrial intelligence was involved in the incidents, some events might represent novel atmospheric or other phenomena that are worth looking into.

Kendrick Frasier, editor of *The Skeptical Inquirer*, worries that the report will unjustly legitimize UFO research. Some of the scientists who organized the workshop have a record of enthusiasm for these exotic topics, he says. One organizer, Robert Jahn, a physicist at Princeton University, is well known for his experiments with psychokinesis. Peter Sturrock, a physicist at Stanford University who oversaw the effort, is president of the Society for Scientific Exploration, whose mission Sturrock describes as investigating topics such as “parapsychology and strange monsters,” which he feels are not adequately covered by mainstream science.

“Let me be clear: There is no justification for a crash program to look at unnatural phenomena,” says panel member Jay Melosh, a planetary scientist at the University of Arizona, Tucson. But panel co-chair Charles Tolbert, an astronomer at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville, notes that “meteorites were once considered to be a stupid idea. ... People said, ‘Rocks can’t fall out of the sky.’” Still, Tolbert says he doubts the sky harbors any alien spacecraft.

That level of skepticism doesn’t satisfy Bob Park, a physicist at the University of Maryland, College Park, who is writing a book about what he considers pseudoscience. “I think [investigating UFO reports] is just a total waste of time,” he says. “Calling in all the people who have seen strange things just gets you a roomful of strange people.”

—DAVID KESTENBAUM

## EPIDEMIOLOGY

### NIH Panel Revives EMF-Cancer Link

Breathing life into a moribund debate over whether power lines cause cancer, an advisory panel to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) last week concluded that electromagnetic fields (EMFs) are a potential human carcinogen. But regulatory bodies haven’t yet called for new measures to reduce EMF exposure, and some panelists quickly sought to downplay their own report. “I don’t think you could conclude there’s a real problem with EMFs,” says vice chair Arnold Brown, dean emeritus of the University of

## ScienceScope

### RICE RENAISSANCE?

The folks at the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in Los Baños, the Philippines—one of the groups that helped launch the Green Revolution in the 1960s—are hoping that new chief Ronald Cantrell will lead them out of the financial desert they’ve been wandering in for the past 2 years. Cantrell, head of Iowa State University’s Agronomy Department, spent 6 years in the 1980s as maize research director at a similar international institute, CIMMYT in Mexico. Appointed to the IRRI hot seat last week, Cantrell faces “enormous challenges” in shoring up the institute’s finances, strengthening international links, and restoring good will with the staff, says IRRI board chair Roelof Rabbinge. Cantrell could not be reached for comment.

IRRI and other international agricultural institutes have fallen out of fashion with donor nations in recent years (*Science*, 2 January, p. 26). Last year, budget cuts forced the previous director, George Rothschild, to lay off half the staff; he later bailed out partway through his 5-year appointment.

### CHEAPER CHEMISTRY JOURNAL

The first fruit of a collaboration between libraries and scientific publishers to rein in soaring journal prices (see p. 7) will be a publication tentatively called *Organic Chemistry Letters*, the American Chemical Society (ACS) announced this week. To start as a monthly and evolve into a weekly, it will debut in mid-1999.

ACS is the first publisher to join up with a group called SPARC (Scholarly Publishing and Academic Resources Coalition), a U.S.–Canadian group established last year by the Association of Research Libraries. The journal will “not be just imitation but superior to” competitors—namely Elsevier’s \$8000-a-year weekly, *Tetrahedron Letters*—says ACS publications director Robert Bovenschulte. The ACS product will cost \$2300. As with other ACS journals, there will be an online version and papers will be put on the Web within 2 days of final acceptance.

SPARC chair Kenneth Frazier of the University of Wisconsin Libraries says the 81-library group will deliver a ready market, as most are “expected” to subscribe to journals arising from the new collaboration.

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**Not a bird, not a plane.** Object appears in photo shot on Vancouver Island in 1981.