

# TV shows may be space ambassadors

**United Press International**  
**NEW YORK** — "Laverne & Shirley," "The Dukes of Hazzard" and "CHiPs" all are being broadcast into space and could provide proof to an alien civilization that intelligent life exists on earth.

Or perhaps that it doesn't.

The alarming picture of Laverne and Shirley as electronic ambassadors to alien civilizations came up in conversation with Dr. Carl Sagan, astronomer and author, who hosts and was the major writer for the new PBS science series "Cosmos."

"Every television program is an interstellar emissary," Sagan said. "Radio signals bounce back off the ionosphere but television goes right through into space."

"They go on forever, although they get weaker as they get further away. But even we could pick up our kind of television signal on a planet around the nearest star — Alpha Centauri, 4.3 light years away. A more advanced civilization even at some greater distance should be able to pick up our signals quite easily."

"It may be a sign of their intelligence that we haven't heard from them."

Sagan doesn't downplay TV — on the contrary, he thinks it stimulates what he considers the basic scientific urge in humans, something he says schools from elementary level through Harvard fail to do.

That's what he hopes to accomplish with "Cosmos," a series of 13 hour-long programs that premiered on PBS Sept. 28.

"We call it 'Cosmos' because it's about pretty much everything," Sagan said, and, although the primary emphasis is on astronomy and related fields, most other branches of science also are explored to some degree.

"We want to make science accessible, comprehensible, enjoyable — for children and adults."

"Little toddlers who can't even talk poke about investigating everything — that's the human instinct to explore, to find out how things work, and that's science."

"Every child asks those marvelous naive questions, deep questions about why the grass is green or the moon round. Parents and teachers don't know the answers. Instead of admitting that they tell the kids, 'Don't ask dumb questions.' Or they put the kids down with answers like, 'What color would you expect grass to be?' or 'What shape do you think the moon should be — square?'"

"Children learn that asking questions makes adults mad and if they don't want adults mad, they don't ask questions."

The problem is compounded, in Sagan's view, by Saturday morning TV.

"The image of science that is presented on the Saturday morning television cartoons is extremely hostile to science. The mad scientist is a real standby. He's the moral cripple who wants to solve the energy crisis by making everybody one inch tall. It has to be explained to him that maybe people wouldn't enjoy being shrunk to one inch tall without even being asked."

"A lot of kids watch Saturday morning television and I doubt if any except the most disturbed among them decide to be scientists after watching such programs."

Sagan, 45, grew up in Brooklyn, N.Y., and remembers as a boy reading Edgar Rice Burroughs, his imagination soaring as he cavorted with John Carter on Mars.

Somewhere Burroughs wrote that on Mars there were two primary colors unknown on earth.

"I spent the longest time trying to imagine colors that weren't red, weren't blue, weren't yellow, weren't green, weren't anything. It was very frustrating."

Since those days, Sagan has gone on to become an educator, a best-selling author with "Dragons of Eden," and one of America's top scientists in the field of astronomy and space science. He played a major role in the Mariner, Viking and Voyager missions for NASA.

The idea of "Cosmos" began taking shape when Sagan was working on Viking.

"It was an absolutely major his-

torical event," he said, the wonder he still feels shining through. "It was the first landing of a spacecraft on another planet, the first successful landing on Mars. We had thousands of pictures, many of them in color."

"The television networks were barely interested. It was the first search for life on another planet and they couldn't be bothered. They thought not enough people were interested; that the audience was too stupid to understand."

Sagan, who ranks television "an extremely powerful medium," wasn't ready to give up.

He and B. Gentry Lee, Viking's Director of Mission Testing and Data Analysis, formed an independent production company. Their efforts produced "Cosmos," which in its 13 episodes travels in time and space.

In time to goes back to ancient Alexandria and even further back to the origin of the universe, and forward to "the last perfect day" on earth, some 5 billion years hence, after which the sun will enter its red giant stage and burn away the earth's atmosphere. In space, "Cosmos" travels halfway to the

edge of the universe, 8 billion light years from earth.

Sagan deplores an educational system that "turns kids off Shakespeare because they were forced to read it in the 10th grade and systematically makes people dislike the greatest poet in the language." He hopes to reverse the attitude it engenders toward science, which he summed up when talking about the Apollo moon landing program.

"The last astronaut to land on the moon was the first scientist," he said sadly.

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