

OPINION

editorials, letters, commentary and perspective



CHRIS HUTCHINSON/Emerald

■ OUR OPINION: The search for life on other planets has been filling a void many people have felt in their lives for years

The news that 39 members of the Heaven's Gate cult killed themselves in order to ride in a UFO trailing the Hale-Bopp comet was, to say the least, a little bizarre. How a group of people could be so convinced that an alien spaceship would take them to a better world that they would take their own lives is hard to understand. However, while the Heaven's Gate cult's fixation with extra-terrestrials is extreme, it certainly is not an isolated incident in today's alien-obsessed society.

A fascination with life on other planets is nothing new. From almost the beginning of time, people have dreamt about creatures from other worlds visiting Earth. Stories of Martians invading Earth have prevailed throughout our culture for years. In recent years, however, this obsession with aliens has grown to alarming levels.

From Hollywood to fashion to music, no area of

popular culture is safe from the space alien influence. The blockbuster movie, *Independence Day*, brought back the age-old story of Earthlings in a fight for survival against violent space aliens. While the hype over aliens didn't begin with *Independence Day*, the movie certainly served as a vehicle for moving the space alien culture into hyper-gear.

Every aspect of the alien phenomenon has been exploited by someone. Television shows like *The X-Files* and *Unsolved Mysteries* have tapped into the popular belief that aliens exist, and the government knows about them. The fashion industry has taken advantage of the renewed popularity of aliens by releasing shirts, hats and other accessories decorated with the universal alien logo — a space alien with an elongated oval head and slanted eyes. Even the new Milky Way commercials link the experience of eating a candy bar with alien encounters similar to those on *The X-Files*.

The bottom line is our culture has become engrossed with the idea that aliens exist and have made or will make contact with us. The possible

discovery of life forms on Mars has only served to intensify the belief that we are not the only intelligent life in the universe.

What has caused this growing obsession with aliens? There don't seem to be any more flying saucers zooming around now than there used to be, so why has the belief in aliens grown so much?

Perhaps the focus on aliens has grown to fill a societal need. People have always searched for mysteries "out there." Back when our society was more religiously oriented, stories of angels and ghosts filled our imaginations. As our society has become increasingly scientific, aliens have taken the place of the angels of old in the popular culture.

The idea that we are alone in a universe without mysteries doesn't appeal to many people. In today's world, aliens serve, for many people, as the only hope that there is something else to this universe besides us. It's likely though, like all things, the alien fad eventually will die down. Assuming, that is, aliens don't show up first.

This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board.

LETTERS

Attacks misguided

I was personally shocked after reading Monday's letter to the editor entitled "Political hypocrisy" from M. Reza Behnam (*ODE*, March 31). His letter begins by talking about Israeli housing policies and then turns into an attack on Eugene and the University for the Jewish programs that have happened in the last year.

What Behnam doesn't mention is that the "elaborate symposium on European atrocities against Jews," better known as the "Ethics after the Holocaust" conference, was possible only because of the hard work and long hours put in by students and staff at Hillel, the Jewish Student Union and other campus Jewish groups.

This program was not something that the University decided to do in order to make a political stand. The same thing applies to the Judaic studies program that is being considered at the University now.

This program is being considered because of petition drives and expressed interest by students and staff. If Behnam would like an Islamic studies program, or even an "elaborate symposium on American and Israeli imperialism against the indigenous peoples of the Middle East," then perhaps he should talk to the Muslim students on campus and have them put such a program together.

If there is interest in such programs, then by all means let them happen at the University.

Contrary to what Behnam says at the end of his letter, peace is indeed viable in this conflict if the two sides work together instead of perpetuating the conflicts, and indeed there are some programs going on in the very near future that bring the two groups together.

Next Monday there is a program on the similarities and differences of Judaism and Islam. By working together, perhaps peace may happen sometime in our lifetime.

Judah Kelber
Alpha Epsilon Pi

Detrimental words

I was very disturbed to read the letter by M. Reza Behnam, "Political hypocrisy" (*ODE*, March 31). Behnam made an attempt to criticize policies of the Israeli government, yet he failed miserably. Instead he succeeded in spewing inflammatory rhetoric which not only made unfounded attacks on the existence of Israel, but also targeted the Jewish community in Eugene.

It is true that the peace process is in a very precarious situation right now. In fact, progress and dialogue have reached an all-time low since the beginning of negotiations. The last thing that is needed

at the present moment is language that stokes the fires of mistrust, causes parties involved to take defensive reactionary measures and incites violence.

This is precisely the result of rhetoric such as that employed by Behnam. His analogies, which compared Israeli policy to that of historical U.S. policy toward Native Americans, is completely incongruent and unanalogous. The manner in which Behnam scrutinizes the University's decision to create a Judaic Studies major is irrelevant to anything that is going on in the Middle East.

It is sad that someone on this campus would attack a new ethnic studies department in order to make a political statement. Perhaps, this is all the more reason that ethnic studies from Judaic to Islamic should be supported.

Not everyone will agree on the best steps to take to reach the ultimate goal of peace. It is fair to speak out when one does not agree on the policies and actions of both sides. However, it is supremely damaging when criticism is not constructive, does not address specific policy and is not aimed at finding solutions.

For those of us who care about the Middle East, let us use our words to create understanding and progress, not more hatred and division.

Micah Citrin
JSU Director

All thumbs



BILL MOOS

The University athletic director set a bold deadline of next week for naming the successor to departed men's basketball coach Jerry Green. Because of a sharp eye on recruiting and some pre-planning before the departure, Moos' decision should be the smartest one.

EMU BOARD

The board gave the ASUO Executive \$50,000 Wednesday to help build the new EMU amphitheater. The allocation sends a positive message, as long as the ASUO Student Senate backs it up with an allocation of its own.



DRAGON BOAT TEAM

Twenty-five members of the Nike Rose Festival dragon boat team were hit by a barge while practicing in the Willamette River in Portland. The rowers' boat was unlit, and they were obviously oblivious of the gigantic boat coming at them. No one was seriously hurt, but what were they thinking?

UNIVERSITY PLANNING

The new West Autzen Athletic Facility Complex could eliminate more than 1,000 University parking spaces. The madness continues.