

near each other in our galaxy for communication to be even remotely possible is small indeed.

Astronomer Patrick Moore has illustrated this by imagining a darkened hall in which two lamps are installed. If each lamp is switched on at random for 10 seconds a day, the chances of them both being on at the same time is comparable to the likelihood of two civilisations existing simultaneously in adjacent planetary systems.

It ~~may~~ looks as though the prospect of even one extra-terrestrial vehicle finding the Earth at the precise point in its history when an advanced technological civilisation has arisen there is astronomically long odds against. And the reported sightings of UFOs down the years number thousands.

Can we therefore find more plausible ~~explanations~~ ^{explanations} for UFOs?

The answer is an unqualified yes. ~~Known natural phenomena~~
Careful analysis of UFO sightings has resulted in many being ~~attributed~~ ^{attributed} to ball lightning (a football-shaped incandescent mass that ~~is~~ ^{is not} yet ~~fully~~ ^{fully} understood), sun dogs (reflections of the sun's disc from cloud-borne ice crystals with their facets all orientated in the same plane), or components of artificial satellites and launch vehicles burning up as they re-enter the atmosphere (for example, the new year's eve UFO reported over the UK on December 31 1978 was almost certainly a launcher from the Russian COSMOS 1086 satellite re-entering).

The planet Venus has frequently been mistaken for a flying saucer, especially when it appears near the horizon in the half-light of dawn and dusk, and aircraft lights are a common source of UFO reports (a low-flying Vulcan ~~was~~ ^{last} ~~the~~ ^{Radio Leeds} one such account broadcast on ~~a local radio station~~ ^{last spring}, the aircraft's flight schedule and course corresponding exactly with the reputed UFO). There are also ~~meteorological~~ ^{meteorological} balloons, which may