Alien cells in rain? Study revisits bizarre theory

by World-Science

A conÂ-troÂ-verÂ-sial theÂ-oÂ-ry, that strange red rains in InÂ-dia six years ago might have conÂ-tained miÂ-crobes from outÂ-er space, hasÂ-n't died. In fact, things might be getÂ-ting even weirder. A new study sugÂ-gests the claimed conÂ-necÂ-tion beÂ-tween scarÂ-let rain and tiÂ-ny ceÂ-lesÂ-tial visÂ-iÂ-tors may be conÂ-sistÂ-ent with hisÂ-torÂ-iÂ-cal acÂ-counts linkÂ-ing colÂ-ored rain to meÂ-teÂ-or passings. These would seem to echÂ-o the InÂ-dia case, in which orÂ-ganÂ-isms are proÂ-posed to have fallÂ-en out of a breakÂ-ing meÂ-teÂ-or.

The red rain particles magnified about 1,000 times. (Courtesy GodfreyLouis) "Some of these [past] acÂ-counts may have been exÂ-agÂ-gerÂ-atÂ-ed,― cauÂ-tioned the new stuÂ-dy's auÂ-thor in reÂ-portÂ-ing his findÂ-ings, adding that conÂ-siÂ-derÂ-able probÂ-lems also dog the alien-cell proÂ-poÂ-sal. Yet the hisÂ-torÂ-iÂ-cal analÂ-yÂ-sis, he conÂ-cludÂ-ed, shows the quesÂ-tion is "much more comÂ-plex than one might have exÂ-pectÂ-ed― and "should be inÂ-vesÂ-tÂ-iÂ-gated with eveÂ-ry sciÂ-enÂ-tifÂ-ic reÂ-source― availÂ-aÂ-ble. The stuÂ-dy, by docÂ-torÂ-al stuÂ-dent PatÂ-rick McÂ-CafÂ-ferty of Queen's UnÂ-iversÂ-ity BelÂ-fast, is pubÂ-lished ediÂ-tion InÂ-ternaÂ-tÂ-ional adÂ-vance onÂ-line of the AsÂ-troÂ-biÂ-olÂ-oÂ-gy. McÂ-CafÂ-ferty anÂ-aÂ-lyzed, as he wrote, "80 acÂ-counts of red rain, anÂ-othÂ-er 20 refÂ-erÂ-ences to lakes and rivÂ-ers turnÂ-ing blood-red, and 68 exÂ-amÂ-ples of othÂ-er pheÂ-nomÂ-eÂ-na such as colored rain, black rain, milk, bricks, or honÂ-ey fallÂ-ing from the sky.―SixÂ-ty of these events, or 36 perÂ-cent, "were linked to meÂ-teÂ-oritic or comÂ-etÂ-ary acÂ-tiÂ-vity,― he went on. But not alÂ-ways strongly. SomeÂ-times, "the fall of red rain seems to have ocÂ-curred afÂ-ter an airÂ-burst,― as from a meÂ-teÂ-or exÂ-plodÂ-ing in air; othÂ-er times the odd rainÂ-fall "is merely recorded in the same year as a stone-fall or the apÂ-pearÂ-ance of a comet.―The pheÂ-nomÂ-eÂ-na were recorded in times and places as varÂ-ied as ClasÂ-siÂ-cal Rome, meÂ-diÂ-eÂ-val IreÂ-land, NorÂ-man BritÂ-ain and 19th cenÂ-tuÂ-ry CalÂ-iÂ-forÂ-nia, notÂ-ed McÂ-CafÂ-ferty, who has a masÂ-ter's deÂ-gree in arÂ-chaeÂ-oÂ-loÂ-gy and studÂ-ies Irish myth and asÂ-tronÂ-oÂ-my. McÂ-CafÂ-ferty added that taÂ-les sugÂ-gesÂ-tive of red rain-meÂ-teÂ-or links alÂ-so crop up in myth. With witÂ-nesses to past events all long dead, McÂ-CafÂ-ferty wrote that probably no hisÂ-torÂ-iÂ-cal analÂ-yÂ-sis will evÂ-er setÂ-tle the deÂ-bate over the 2001 rainÂ-falls in InÂ-dia.ReÂ-search claimÂ-ing to conÂ-nect these rains to exÂ-traÂ-terÂ-resÂ-triÂ-al life proÂ-voked disÂ-beÂ-lief when they were first reÂ-ported wideÂ-ly, in World SciÂ-ence. "I realÂ-ly, really don't think they are from a meÂ-teÂ-or!― wrote HarÂ-vard UnÂ-iversÂ-ity biÂ-olÂ-oÂ-gist Jack SzosÂ-tak, reÂ-ferÂ-ring to cell-like parÂ-tÂ-iÂ-cles that had been reÂ-ported to perÂ-meÂ-ate the colÂ-lectÂ-ed The cuÂ-riÂ-ous events beÂ-gan on July 25, 2001, when resÂ-iÂ-dents of KerÂ-aÂ-la, a reÂ-gion in southÂ-westÂ-ern InÂ-dia, started seeÂ-ing scarÂ-let rain in some arÂ-eas. It perÂ-sisted on-and-off for some weeks, even two months. SciÂ-enÂ-tists couldÂ-n't idenÂ-tiÂ-fy the cell-like specks that gave the waÂ-ter its scarÂ-let hue. SpeculaÂ-tÂ-ion of posÂ-siÂ-ble exÂ-traÂ-terÂ-resÂ-triÂ-al oriÂ-gins beÂ-gan.Two InÂ-diÂ-an sciÂ-enÂ-tists latÂ-er pubÂ-lished a chemÂ-iÂ-cal and biÂ-oÂ-logÂ-iÂ-cal analÂ-yÂ-sis sugÂ-gestÂ-ing, they said, that the specks might inÂ-deed be litÂ-tle aliens. They "have much siÂ-mÂ-iÂ-larÂ-ity with biÂ-oÂ-logÂ-iÂ-cal cells― but withÂ-out DNA, wrote the reÂ-searchÂ-ers, GodÂ-frey LouÂ-is and A. SanĀ-thosh KuÂ-mar of InÂ-diÂ-a's MaÂ-hatÂ-ma GanÂ-dhi UnÂ-iversÂ-ity. "Are these cell-like parÂ-tÂ-iÂ-cles a kind of alÂ-terÂ-nate life from space?―They citÂ-ed newsÂ-paÂ-per reÂ-ports that a meÂ-teÂ-or broke up in the atÂ-mosÂ-phere hours beÂ-fore the red rain. LouÂ-is and KuÂ-mar's reÂ-search paÂ-per apÂ-peared in the April 4, 2006 onÂ-line ediÂ-tion of the reÂ-search jourÂ-nal AsÂ-tÂ-roÂ-physÂ-ics and Space SciÂ-ence. In preÂ-viÂ-ous, unÂ-pubÂ-lished paÂ-pers, the paÂ-ir alÂ-so claimed the parÂ-tÂ-iÂ-cles could exÂ-treme heat.Some reÂ-searchÂ-ers, inÂ-cludÂ-ing reÂ-proÂ-duce in WickÂ-raÂ-masÂ-inghe, diÂ-recÂ-tor of the CenÂ-ter for AsÂ-troÂ-biÂ-olÂ-oÂ-gy at CarÂ-diff UnÂ-iversÂ-ity, U.K., have said that LouÂ-is and KuÂ-mar's idea may well be corÂ-rect. He and othÂ-er supÂ-portÂ-ers pointÂ-ed to the conÂ-sistÂ-enÂ-cy of the alien-cell hyÂ-pothÂ-eÂ-sis with the popÂ-uÂ-lar

"pansperÂ-mia― theÂ-oÂ-ry, which holds that meÂ-teÂ-ors and comets might have seeded life throughÂ-out many planÂ-ets.But othÂ-er sciÂ-enÂ-tists have citÂ-ed probÂ-lems with the theÂ-oÂ-ry, inÂ-cludÂ-ing a lack of clear evÂ-iÂ-dence for any meÂ-teÂ-or, and the knotÂ-ty quesÂ-tion of how miÂ-cro-aliens might have stayed aloft for months afÂ-ter burstÂ-ing out of a meÂ-teÂ-or."WithÂ-out conÂ-cluÂ-sive evÂ-iÂ-dence such as meÂ-teÂ-oritic dust mixed with red rain, it is difÂ-fiÂ-cult to say anÂ-ything speÂ-cifÂ-ic about KerÂ-aÂ-la's red rain,― McÂ-CafÂ-ferty wrote. But in hisÂ-toÂ-ry, he added, "there apÂ-pears to be a strong link beÂ-tween some reÂ-ported events [like it] and meÂ-teÂ-oritic acÂ-tiÂ-vity. The reÂ-ported airburst just beÂ-fore the fall of red rain in KerÂ-aÂ-la fits a faÂ-milÂ-iar patÂ-tern, and canÂ-not be disÂ-missed so easily as an unÂ-reÂ-latÂ-ed coÂ-inÂ-ciÂ-dence.―

Courtesy World-science

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