

SoylentNews

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Could 'Oumuamua be an Extraterrestrial Solar Sail?

posted by [martyb](#) on Wednesday November 07, @11:14AM
from the [I'm-not-saying-it-was-alien-dept.](#)

[EventHorizon](#) writes:

Two Harvard astronomers have suggested that the interstellar object that passed through our solar system in late 2017 and early 2018 could have been [part of an alien spacecraft](#).

Shmuel Bialy and Abraham Loeb, two astronomers from the Harvard Smithsonian Centre for Astrophysics, suggested the cigar-shaped object — given the Hawaiian name 'Oumuamua, which NASA notes "means a messenger from afar arriving first" — could have been a discarded light sail of extra-terrestrial origin, perhaps sent here on purpose.

From the [paper](#):

We explain the excess acceleration of `Oumuamua away from the sun as the result of the force that the sunlight exerts on its surface. For this force to explain measured excess acceleration, the object needs to be extremely thin, of order a fraction of a millimeter in thickness but tens of meters in size. This makes the object lightweight for its surface area and allows it to act as a light-sail. Its origin could be either natural (in the interstellar medium or proto-planetary disks) or artificial (as a probe sent for a reconnaissance mission into the inner region of the solar system)."

It's not hard to find plenty of the [usual skepticism](#), much of which seems to center on whether or not the object outgassed on the way into our solar system, and it's shape. The gist of the Harvard paper seems to be that the object would need to be extremely thin and not at all like the rocky artists rendering that has commonly been used in stories to date.

What do Soylenils think of this latest twist?

[Original Submission](#)

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- **Betteridge (Score: 2) by [Fnord666](#) on Wednesday November 07, @11:25AM**

by [Fnord666 \(652\)](#) on Wednesday November 07, @11:25AM ([#758907](#))
[Betteridge says no.](#) [wikipedia.org]

- **Yeah... (Score: 2) by [takyon](#) on Wednesday November 07, @11:31AM (4 children)**

by [takyon \(881\)](#) ★ <[{takyon} {at} {soylentnews.org}](#)> on Wednesday November 07, @11:31AM ([#758908](#)) [Journal](#)
[Nah](#) [arstechnica.com]

At the end of their paper, however, the authors, present "a more exotic scenario" in which they speculate that 'Oumuamua may be "a fully operational probe sent intentionally to Earth vicinity by an alien civilization."

In recent days, some media have seized upon this single line from the paper. Such language, especially from a source like Harvard scientists, is catnip for online news editors, with the possibility of using phrases like "aliens," and "mysterious cigar-shaped object," and "Harvard researchers" in the same headline.

As a result, we have seen lots of hyperbolic coverage. NBC News reported, "Scientists say mysterious 'Oumuamua' object could be an alien spacecraft." Fox News had, "Mysterious interstellar object could be 'lightsail' sent from another civilization." CNN headlines with, "Cigar-shaped interstellar object may have been an alien probe, Harvard paper claims." Simply search Google News for "'Oumuamua" to get the full effect.

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[SIG] 10/28/2017: [Soylent Upgrade v14](#) [soylentnews.org]

- **Re:Yeah... (Score: 1, Insightful) by Anonymous Coward on Wednesday November 07, @12:35PM (3 children)**

by Anonymous Coward on Wednesday November 07, @12:35PM ([#758925](#))

So, fully functional, but paper thin? And if it was sent to Earth's vicinity on purpose, but just did a drive-by like a high school kid cruising past a girl's house, why did they waste their time and effort?

- **Re:Yeah... (Score: 2) by [takyon](#) on Wednesday November 07, @01:06PM**

by [takyon \(881\)](#) ★ <[{takyon} {at} {soylentnews.org}](#)> on Wednesday November 07, @01:06PM ([#758935](#)) [Journal](#)

The real story is that millions of these things are zipping in and out of the solar system annually. Our ability to detect nearby asteroids has advanced tremendously in recent years. So we managed to spot this object and notice its unusual trajectory.

In a decade or three we'll be detecting a lot more interstellar asteroids. But until then, offhand speculation about them being alien spacecrafts will inspire epic clickbait.

<https://soylentnews.org/article.pl?sid=18/01/06/0747243> [soylentnews.org]
<https://arxiv.org/abs/1711.08800> [arxiv.org]

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- **Re:Yeah... (Score: 2) by [hendrikboom](#) on Wednesday November 07, @01:09PM (1 child)**

by [hendrikboom \(1125\)](#) ★ on Wednesday November 07, @01:09PM ([#758936](#)) [Homepage](#)

Why did our probe just fly by Pluto instead of staying around?

- **Re:Yeah... (Score: 2) by [takyon](#) on Wednesday November 07, @01:14PM**

by [takyon \(881\)](#) ★ <[{takyon} {at} {soylentnews.org}](#)> on Wednesday November 07, @01:14PM ([#758939](#)) [Journal](#)

It all makes sense! The aliens have no budget for planetary science! They would have slowed down only if they had a military spacecraft!

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- **Cigar shaped? (Score: 2) by [PiMuNu](#) on Wednesday November 07, @11:41AM (2 children)**

by [PiMuNu \(3823\)](#) on Wednesday November 07, @11:41AM ([#758910](#))

The only reason it is thought to be "cigar shaped" is because of the change in light observed. It could alternately be black on one side.

- **Re:Cigar shaped? (Score: 2) by [suburbanitemediocrity](#) on Wednesday November 07, @11:57AM (1 child)**

by [suburbanitemediocrity \(6844\)](#) on Wednesday November 07, @11:57AM ([#758913](#))

Iapetus
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iapetus_\(moon\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iapetus_(moon)) [wikipedia.org]

The plot of *2001*

- **Re:Cigar shaped? (Score: 2) by [zocalo](#) on Wednesday November 07, @01:13PM**

by [zocalo \(302\)](#) on Wednesday November 07, @01:13PM ([#758938](#))
Since we're talking SciFi plots, besides the obvious parallels with the "Rama" books by Arthur C. Clarke, another one is the method the protomolecule was originally sent to our solar system onboard Phoebe in the plot of "The Expanse" series by James S.A. Corey. In that scenario we very literally just dodged a bullet.

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UNIX? They're not even circumcised! Savages!

- **Beware. (Score: 2) by [GreatAuntAnesthesia](#) on Wednesday November 07, @12:15PM**

by [GreatAuntAnesthesia \(3275\)](#) on Wednesday November 07, @12:15PM ([#758916](#)) [Journal](#)

They are here to rid us of our meat infestation: <https://www.schlockmercenary.com/2003-07-23> [schlockmercenary.com]

(1)

Never drink from your finger bowl -- it contains only water.