

# PROLOGUE

One summer night in 1977, a huge radio telescope in the countryside near Delaware, Ohio, began receiving a radio signal from the sky—a signal that might have been broadcast from another world. Nobody was present in the underground control room at the time, and there was nothing to hear, anyway; the signal was just a rising voltage in one channel of a receiver chilled in liquid nitrogen and monitored by a computer along with 49 other channels tuned to nearby frequencies. Every 12 seconds, a computer printer hammered out a line of numbers, keeping a crude record of the radio rain sprinkling down from the sky onto the big antenna.

The signal strength increased for a half-minute, as celestial radio sources always did when the antenna's searchlight beam began sweeping across them. Running out of single-digit numbers to record the surging strength, the computer began printing letters of the alphabet—"A" for ten times higher than the background noise level, B for 11 times higher, all the way up to U for 30 times—much stronger than any natural radio source in that part of the sky. Then the signal slowly faded as the antenna's beam swept past the source, disappearing back into the background static.

Several days later, project scientist Jerry Ehman began flipping through hundreds of pages of accumulated printout looking for the signature of a

radio signal from another world, as he had done many times before. He saw the pattern he was seeking after just a few pages and scribbled “Wow!” in the margin, naming one of the best candidate interstellar signals ever seen.

The Ohio scientists looked for the signal on roughly a hundred subsequent days without finding it again, but could only see that spot in the sky for a few minutes each day. John Kraus, the observatory director, published an account of the event in a scientific magazine of modest circulation, and the telescope returned to its survey for radio broadcasts from Others amid the stars.