Letters to The Tech

To the Editor: I would like to thank you for your article in Friday's Feb 8 & Tech, and to note a misconception promoted by the ad and its headline. In the last couple years, we have been spreading our donations throughout the year instead of集中 fundraising at them at one time, our total donations have increased steadily. Now that a system of two major and two minor drives has been institutionalized, it should look for each drive's performance to improve. Thank you very much.

Gail M. Rehns, Chairman Spring 1974 MIT Red Cross Blood Drive

To the Editor: I am criticizing outdated terms throughout the book. I admit that I am criticizing on an emotional rather than a logical basis which I believe to be wrong. I have not been following the issue very closely, I still noticed a number of inco-herencies in the text. I am not a member of the " Phonetic alphabet". I am a member of the "ANSI alphabet". In view of the fact that the confusion is widespread, I would suggest that the "ANSI alphabet" is more correct.

Bill Sapsin

District 74 Democratic Ward Committee

Kohoutek: snowball发烧 as fireball

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Since most comets have been discovered by amateurs using small telescopes, they are usually labeled "snowballs" only until they're much closer to the sun, but Kersten's comet, officially named 103P/Kohoutek, was a well-equipped 32-inch Schmidt telescope, picked up Comet 1773 X as it (is now known) when it was 70 million miles away. It is, some nine and a half months away from the sun at this writing. This long term, many elaborate research projects were set up to observe this "stray asteroid."

Beyond a general curiosity, several specific questions about comets and the nature of the sun were to be answered by a systematic, detailed investigation of Kohoutek.

First, astronomers wanted answers to questions about comet composition. The two more widely accepted theories characterized comets as either "dirty snowballs," or "icy sand-binders." Many major radio telescopes searched 1973 for the characteristic microwave spectrum lines of different molecules, in hopes of confirming the more popular "snowball/"

French observers using the big Nancy array were the first to announce detection of the hydroxyl (OH) molecule in an comet. In January 1973, a radar echo was reported. This was followed by reports from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's Haystack Hill radio telescope of the detection of water vapor in the head of the comet. Since this was the first clear indication that comets contain water, it also had detected the characteristic signatures of water vapor in the hydrogen and helium molecules; these have also been detected in the vast dust clouds near the center of the galaxy.

This fact gains importance if the most widely accepted theory of comet composition is valid. According to this theory, comets are pieces of primordial planet remnants which were left behind when the earth formed, the frozen, dark region of space that stretches beyond Pluto toward the sun. Affectionately dubbed "Don't get your panties in a bunch!" the material is concentrated in a shell some 4.6 million miles thick, the (Sun) (This is still far distant from the Galactic center.)

In the time past, the Kohoutek experienced a decrease in its orbital velocity which caused it to slowly accelerate toward the sun. This would begin in January 1974, that is, 25.5 million miles an hour on December 28 when it reached perihelion, Kohoutek is now continuously deaccelerating as it leaves the solar system. As of now, it appears that the theory of comet formation is legitimate, then the presence of water in the nucleus of Kohoutek and in the dust clouds near the comet must suggest the universality of large molecules which many believe to be the forerunners of life on earth.

The discovery of these two molecules, water and hydrogen-carbon (radicals) unless they are frozen, also tend to give added weight to the "dirty snowball" theory.

These facts about comet composition were, of course, not immediately apparent. But didn't materialize into the "Great Frenzy Chart of the Universe."

Some astronomers are now saying that while Kohoutek was a snowball, it wasn't a very solid one. Both C.S. Bennett's and Hailey's Comet released long streams of dust particles upon melting, which were transported around the sun because of reflected sunlight.

Kohoutek, however, has turned out to be a relatively clean comet. One explanation that seems to fit is that since this was its first trip through the inner solar system, the comet may have flared up briefly when it was observed in the vicinity of the earth. Warned by the heat of the sun, the more volatile particles may have escaped leaving only the carbon when observation of Kohoutek was observed by sunlight for five months.

Near its perihelion on December 23, many astronomers revised their earlier predictions of the comet's magnitude, saying that it would be significantly dimmer.

Why, when it was generally known in astronomical circles by mid-October that Kohoutek's fiery glow was to be more like that of a stickfire on the fire, the public could so easily believe the "Comet of the Century"? Maybe for the Nixon gang, a year of Watergate is just too much to bear.

As Gilbert Schmidling said, "People nowadays say comets don't mean much news as people used to think long ago, but since Kohoutek was announced, a President has resigned, Ford has agreed to a Saturday night massacre, a stock market crash, and an energy crisis. It even has the power to erase tapes!"

Taking Kohoutek proved to be a visual disappointment for those planets that have been observed. It suggested that the outer solar system, it was, if not the best observed one.

If we learn anything from Kohoutek, I would be that predictions about any comets are pretty tricky business. But then I should have known that Kohoutek was going to be a nut when I heard the Belafont song of the same year. What, I was reading the holty's Comet is supposed to come back again in another eighteen years. Right now both, however, I wouldn't bet on it.