

In other news...

Scene: BBC Newsroom

'You're watching BBC News. Now, before we go over to that all important weather forecast, I can bring you some breaking news. A discovery of stars orbiting each other. No, I don't understand it either, but we have, on a live link from Mauna Kea Observatory in Hawaii, John Goodricke. Good evening John.'

'Good morning Matthew.'

'Oh yes, I forgot, Hawaii is ten hours behind London time. Tell us about your discovery.'

'Well, I have been observing the constellation of Cepheus for some time as I have been curious regarding the behaviour of its third brightest star. Delta Cephei, when observed, is a common yellow-white star; however, I have reason to believe that there is a close companion revolving around Delta. Therefore, what we have is, effectively, a double-star system or if you would like a more astronomical term, an eclipsing binary.'

'The use of the word eclipse, surely means that something is getting in the way and the light of the object behind the perpetrator is reduced, even blocked?'

'Exactly, Matthew. When we see an eclipse of the Sun from Earth, the Moon passes in front of the Sun and the Sun's light is completely blocked out, normally for a matter of a few minutes. With an eclipsing binary star system, the movement of one star across the other can be several days and the light appears to change. So, my observations suggest that when Delta's light changes what we are actually seeing is the close companion star passing in front of the main star. Loss of light can be as much as five days.'

'Let's bring in astronomer and broadcaster, Patrick Moore, who's written a book on Stars. Patrick, you may have to re-write your book?'

'Indeed Matthew. What Mr Goodricke has discovered could change our whole thinking of stellar astronomy.'

'Patrick, can you explain the motion of these eclipsing binaries? Mr Goodricke suggests a link in some way, a pairing-up.'

'Oh, the science here is very simple. Our Planet revolves around the Sun. What is being suggested, according to Mr Goodricke's discovery, is that there are two Suns revolving around their common centres of gravity; their motion being similar to our Sun and Planets but on a grander scale. Who's to say Delta and its companion don't have Planets of their own? What we are dealing with is the observation of two stars that appear to be revolving around each other but are viewed across the vast distance of space. As for that distance, we simply don't know.'

'Mr Goodricke, do you agree?'

'Patrick is right, Matthew. Who's to say that our own Sun isn't part of a pairing and that an astronomer on a Cephei Planet isn't been speaking to BBC News about the discovery? It's quite possible our Sun could be an eclipsing binary!'

'Fascinating. BBC News shall continue to follow this great discovery in the days and weeks ahead. Thank you both. Now, here's Tomasz Schafernaker with the weather back on Earth.'