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Introductory Remarks

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Abstract. Welcome to IAU Colloquium 187.

I believe that when Spanish explorers first gave the name Florida to a part of North America that they visited, the territory stretched from Massachusetts to Texas. It may have lost a little in geopolitical status since then, but its stature in astrophysics, and particularly in stellar astrophysics, has only grown larger. Long may it continue to increase.

I am happy to think that I was present at the very genesis of this conference, which occurred in a restaurant in Cambridge while Bob Wilson was on sabbatical there. It sprang from a conversation between Bob and Andreas Burkert, and so led to the support from the Max-Planck-Institut für Astronomie, Heidelberg, for which we are very grateful, along with our other sponsors, the International Astronomical Union and Florida International University.

The title of the conference was originally "Bizarre Stars." When at some point I learned that a web-site had been set up, but I didn't have its address, I typed that title into my search engine. You would be amazed at what I saw; and I must say I was relieved when the title was changed. I did not have to search similarly for "Exotic Stars," because by then I had the address, but I imagine that the emphasis might have switched towards ostrich feathers and away from brass-studded leather.

I can see from the schedule that we are going to have some very interesting and challenging talks. Some of you who came here for a holiday by the beach may find it difficult to drag yourselves away from the lecture hall. I have little doubt that after several talks we shall hear a plea that, "We need more data." I sometimes think that we would be more confident of our understanding if we had *less* data: only kidding! But I hope we will be able to press our funding bodies to support not just the acquisition of data but the personnel necessary to analyse and interpret it. Computers may be able to store and process vast quantities of data, and other computers may be occupied in constructing more and more sophisticated models that attempt to explain it, but we can never do without the human intellect that is able to comprehend the underlying ideas, and write them on the back of the proverbial envelope. I believe it will still be some time before either hardware or software will be available to undertake this process.

I was sorry to learn last year of the death of my Ph.D. Supervisor Professor Sir Fred Hoyle. I was reminded by it of a salutary lesson that I learned in my first few years of research. I attended lectures by Fred on Stellar Structure and Evolution, in about 1963. At some point in this course, discussing the evolution