

NASA to use Space Age 'droid' satellites

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NASA scientists say they are ready to test "smart" satellites that can fly in precision formation and are relatively inexpensive to make and operate.

David Miller, director of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Space Systems Laboratory, says such satellites might be used for such tasks as building giant space telescopes and closely monitoring Earth.

The shuttle Discovery last week delivered the second of three satellite test "droids" that are undergoing experiments at the International Space Station.

"I rented the first 'Star Wars' movie and showed (a) class the scene where Luke is practicing the use of the Force with a floating droid," Miller told the Christian Science Monitor. "I said: 'I want three of those. How do we start doing this?'"

The results came in the form of 9-pound spheres the size of bowling balls, each crammed with computers, sensors and thrusters that allow the satellites to maneuver individually and en masse with precision.

A third satellite is to arrive at the ISS in December.

The project is funded by NASA and the U.S. Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency.

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