

This Day in History... September 18, 1997

First U.S. Stamp with Scrambled Indicia

On September 18, 1997, the USPS issued the US Air Force stamp, the first US stamp to have a hidden image using Scrambled Indicia.

Over the years, the USPS had always sought ways to combat counterfeiting, with grills being one of the earliest examples. As technologies changed, they found new, more advanced ways to do this, including microprinting and tagging. Then in 1997, they introduced Scrambled Indicia.



The scrambled indicia on this stamp consists of the letters "USAF" and stars in circles, repeating diagonally across the design.



The scrambled indicia on this stamp pictures a fox.

Scrambled Indicia is a pre-press process invented by Graphic Security Systems Corporation. According to the company, it "scrambles, distorts, intertwines, overlaps, or otherwise manipulates images making encoded information on them unreadable by the naked eye, and non-copyable by current color copiers and digital scanners." These images could then be viewed using a special decoder. In addition to thwarting counterfeiting, the USPS also hoped this interesting new technology could help arouse interest among collectors and inspire new ones.

Between 1997 and 2004 the USPS produced more than 40 stamps with Scrambled Indicia.



Each of these stamps has different scrambled indicia: Phantom of the Opera – Floating masks; Dracula – Bats; Frankenstein – Bolts of electricity; Mummy – Ancient Egyptian gods/goddesses; Wolf Man – Howling wolves.



The scrambled indicia on these stamps pictures different space ships.

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