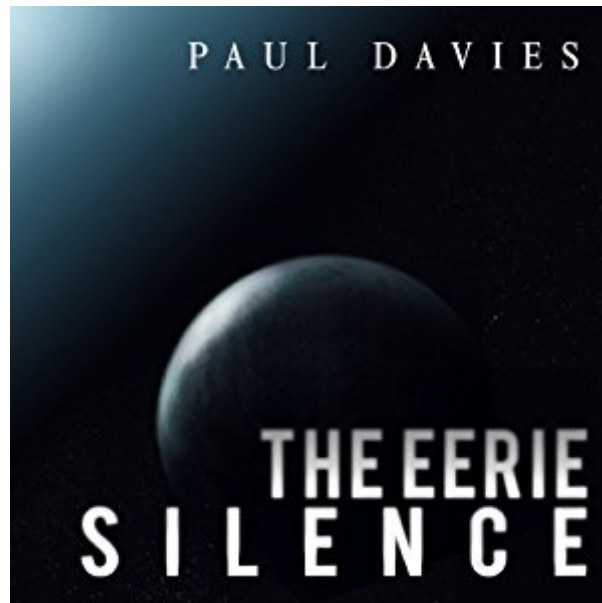




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The Eerie Silence: Renewing Our Search For Alien Intelligence



Synopsis

Fifty years ago, a young astronomer named Frank Drake pointed a radio telescope at nearby stars in the hope of picking up a signal from an alien civilization. Thus began one of the boldest scientific projects in history, the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (SETI). But after a half century of scanning the skies, astronomers have little to report but an eerie silence---eerie because many scientists are convinced that the universe is teeming with life. The problem, argues leading physicist and astrobiologist Paul Davies, is that we've been looking in the wrong place, at the wrong time, and in the wrong way. Davies should know. For more than three decades, he has been closely involved with SETI and now chairs the SETI Post-Detection Taskgroup, charged with deciding what to do if we're confronted with evidence of alien intelligence. In this extraordinary book, he shows how SETI has lost its edge, then offers a new and exciting road map for the future. Davies believes that our search so far has been overly anthropocentric: we tend to assume an alien species will look, think, and behave like us. He argues that we need to be far more expansive in our efforts, and in this book he completely redefines the search, challenging existing ideas of what form an alien intelligence might take, how it might try to communicate with us, and how we should respond if we ever do make contact. A provocative and mind-expanding journey, *The Eerie Silence* will thrill fans of science and science fiction alike.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The author knows his stuff, the book has the potential to bog down but never does. This should be a subject of interest to most people. Science to me is more about exploring the path than arriving at some end point. The author rides the fence quite well, whether life and intelligence is common or rare. I believe it's possible that shadow life (and intelligence) may out shine life as we know it, we need to closely look near at hand (why is desert varnish so little studied?), a wealth of thought and depth is possible. Not covered: life escaping planets to become more successful in space, life as we know it originating outside our solar system, life as we don't know it being possible on gas giants or stars.

This book has changed the way I think about SETI. For one, I've previously viewed it as a somewhat quixotic but interesting scientific search for alien radio signals in the hope of connecting with intelligent beings from somewhere else in order to answer the question "are we alone?". In this fascinating book, Paul Davies tries to get us thinking about the much more fundamental questions literally about Life, The Universe, and Everything! First, despite the success of Darwinian Evolution in explaining how life changes and adapts, Davies points out that science has so far failed to explain how life got started in the first place. Although the Kepler satellite has given evidence of "earth like" planets, we have no way to predict the chances of life actually existing on any of these worlds. A great deal of the book looks at the way traditional SETI has been conducted (by looking for signals similar to the kinds employed by us humans in the last eighty or so years) and this is where the book really gets interesting, as the scientist/author tries to think outside the anthropocentric box and ask the question of how to look for technology that's as far ahead of us as we are beyond the Stone Age, and quite likely much further.

It is remarkable that Davies is heavily involved in SETI, yet clearly ranks the probability of intelligence elsewhere near Zero! This is a logical position, as there is always "that one chance..." Since no one knows for sure the viability of SETI to find anything, or even if life of any kind exists elsewhere, it pays to keep looking. However, Davies' reasons for pessimism about alien life is well-founded. The complexity of even the simplest life (Archea?) defies our previous naive view, "find a warm pool, stir and mix." And, in the ironic words of Joel Achenbach, if by some chance it happens there are no aliens, it would certainly make the search for them considerably more difficult. This book well worth your perusal and helps round out an understanding of where current SETI efforts stand.

A comprehensive book detailing the beginnings of the quest for intelligence in the universe. I found the book fascinating, especially the author's speculations about the possible alien life forms that may inhabit the universe, and how their discovery could impact our solar system and all life on earth. This book has it all, from the chemistry on earth, to the universe, to aliens living among us on earth. I would highly recommend this book to anyone who is an amateur astronomer, or who just loves science.

"The Eerie Silence" by Paul Davies (2010, nonfiction, hardcover). Note: The book was rated 4-stars on November 25, 2012 by this reviewer. The written review was published later on March 12, 2013. To date, Humans have found no evidence of life outside our solar system, and we have not been contacted by extra-terrestrials. If life, more importantly intelligent life, is so prevalent in our known Universe, then where is everybody? Paul Davies asks this very question in his book. The author briefly outlines the history of evolution of life on Earth, followed by civilization's development and the advent of technology allowing humans to send and receive information concerning forms of life existing elsewhere. He discusses how life might evolve on other planets, become intelligent, civilized, and technologically advanced. He discusses the enormous amount of time required for intelligent civilizations to evolve, interact with others, and eventually die, as well as the immense distances in space that inhibit both communication and planetary travel. He ponders the pros and cons of a civilization being "artificial" versus "biological" in nature. Davies also speaks to the question of what people of Earth should do if a message is received or if "first contact" occurs. Might the first message be recognized by SETI? Who should acknowledge and speak for the people of Earth? What should we say? What should we do? What might happen to our societal structure or to humanity as a whole? Some excellent questions and possible answers coupled with relevant information in this entertaining and thought-provoking book regarding intelligent life in our known Universe. A fun read in non-fiction for any astronomer, cosmologist, or science fiction aficionado. - Gene2155

Paul Davies has been around for some time. He is the ultimate scientist. He makes it quite clear that life is nothing like we know it. He suggests that it is possible that earth is one of kind or there could be many that support intelligent life. However, the book was written in 2010 and in the last 4 1/2 years many more earthlike planets were discovered. The latest estimate being 8.5 billion in our own galaxy. It is a book you both read and at times study. It is a mind-opener if you are willing to read it slowly.

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