

Unidentified Flying Objects

Do you believe there's more to reality than just what we can see and touch? I recently finished reading a book on Aliens. The kind that ride in flying saucers and have Steven Spielberg as their agent. The book is really about the human need to believe in something greater than ourselves. It's called 'Captured by Aliens' by Joel Auchenbach (1999). We have indeed been captured by aliens. They have a firm grip on our imaginations thanks to writers and movies. We have the UFO phenomenon, alien abductions, and the scientific search for extraterrestrial intelligence (SETI), a project involving Carl Sagan.

In the 1940's and 50's we had the first mass sightings of UFOs, then movies and books came along and by the end of the 20th century, aliens seemed part of the everyday world as presented by Hollywood. They abducted us, did hideous experiments, conspired with governments, even tried to conquer us. And when we went out into space in starships, there they were, waiting for us. Such brazen behaviour on their part!

The trouble is we are not at the crossroads of the universe. We don't need a border protection force in space because those alien refugees aren't coming anytime soon.

The famous scientist Enrico Fermi had a rhetorical question he always asked whenever 'true believers' raised the possibility of alien intelligences: Where are they? His point is subtle and discussed at length in the book above. How come we have not detected them? The universe is very large and old. We have been pumping out radio and TV broadcasts for over a century. We are a young and not so bright species. On the balance of probabilities there should be older races out there, hopefully smarter, and their electromagnetic presence should be detectable by our powerful receivers, devoted to that task for decades. Yet, nothing.

Maybe we are unique. Dear reader, you and I and a few other humans, may be the only intelligent life forms in the universe!

Can it really be so? In all that vastness, no other life, just rocks, gas and exploding stars. Surely not? Intuition and faith, which underlie our need to believe in something transcendent, tell us there must be something: aliens, god, a cosmic spirit, Captain James T Kirk, whatever. Logically we have only one example of a biospace – the earth – from which to extrapolate. A very small sample and mathematically meaningless for rational inference.

There are gazzillions of sites out there in Googleland – if only we could say the same about aliens. SETI at: www.seti.org/ and www.seti.org.au/ Examples from true believers at: www.ufoevidence.org/ Debunkers at: www.debunker.com/ufo.html Also look up the Victorian UFO research society on Google.

Let's end on a quote from a classic movie, The Thing from Another World (1951): 'Keep watching the skies'. You never know.