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Confessions Of An Alien Hunter: A Scientist's Search For Extraterrestrial Intelligence



Synopsis

Since the first Martian "canals" were charted in 1877, space aliens have captivated skygazers, night travelers, and television-watchers worldwide. Polls show that nearly half of all Americans believe in extraterrestrials, and many are convinced they've visited Earth. A fair number of scientists also suspect that aliens exist, and for decades they've been seriously searching - using powerful antennas and computers to scan for radio waves coming from other star systems. This engaging memoir reveals the true story of the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (SETI), and discloses what we may very soon discover. Chronicling the program's history with insight and humor, SETI senior astronomer Seth Shostak assures us that if there is sentient life in the universe, we are within decades of picking up its signal. Methodically busting urban legends about alien crash landings, crop circles, and the like, Shostak pits scientific truth against speculation and delivers important news on the state of our knowledge. He answers a host of questions about SETI, including where its antennas are aimed...how we know which frequency to monitor...what our response might be...and why, if a signal is detected, "it will be one that's deliberately beamed into space, not the Klingon equivalent of I Love Lucy." Contrary to popular opinion, any aliens found by SETI will not resemble the squishy, big-eyed creatures on cinema screens. Rather, they will have already invented their successors: super smart post-biological thinking machines vastly beyond our own capabilities. Edgy, amusing, and remarkably profound, *Confessions of an Alien Hunter* addresses the startling possibilities awaiting us in deep space and in humankind's own future.

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Customer Reviews

This is not everyone's cup of tea, but if your idea of a Sunday afternoon is sitting around with a scientist shooting the breeze, talking about the possibility of alien intelligence existing out there somewhere, then you'll love this book. It's everything you wanted to ask after watching the movie Contact (written by Carl Sagan, starring Jodie Foster), but never knew who to ask. Hollywood gets it all spectacularly wrong, which makes for great movies but also means our collective public awareness of this area of science is lousy. And there's some great insights. At one point Seth points out that if our galaxy were a haystack and we were searching for a needle (representing intelligent aliens), then SETI estimate that there could be thousands of needles but, so far, all we've been able to do is to examine a tablespoon's worth of hay. It's no wonder we've come up empty handed, but if we keep prodding around, we will get pricked by a needle sooner or later. For a science buff, this book is a must.

Love Seth's podcast "Big Picture Science" and his take on "Things ET." This book is an informative, thought provoking look at the history, challenges and potential of human's striving for that "first contact" moment that has SCIENCE written all over it. Just to mention for those who enjoy this stuff, Joel Achenbach's "Captured By Aliens" is also a great book, written with wry wit and fun prose (which Seth haseth also) such that these two should be side by side on your bookshelf or sharing ram in your reading device.

Seth Shostak presents a logical and foundational argument for the search for intelligent life via radio signals. He does not denigrate his opponents, but rather, lays out the logic for listening to the cosmos while asking those opponents for a better answer to the search for extraterrestrial intelligence.

The self-professed occupation of 'Alien Hunter' made me think immediately of Charlie Frost, Woody Harrelson's character in Roland Emmerich's 2012; a genuinely likeable character though somewhat didactically aggressive, mis-focused, and hardly believable. I was pleasantly surprised to find my vision completely off the mark. Seth Shostak is a Princeton and California Institute of Technology educated astronomer, associated for years, now as Senior Astronomer, with The SETI Institute (Search For Extraterrestrial Intelligence). Not only are his credentials impeccable, his style of sharing his acquired knowledge and personal opinions, bitingly honest and constantly humorous, invites the possibility of a previously unexplored interest on the part of the reader, and perhaps a

questioning believability...if not in the concrete assurance that extraterrestrials will be discovered by radio astronomers, then at least an understanding of the importance of the SETI program and its continued operation. *Confessions of an Alien Hunter* runs to an incredibly easy read of 320 pages, presenting material that is possibly an anathema to some in a way that should be approachable to all. Perhaps not a must-read but certainly more than worthwhile: easily recommendable.

Seth demonstrates that he's the foremost authority on this subject. He's way ahead of anybody else in figuring out the hows and ramifications of ET life and communication.

I need to admit up front that I am not an unbiased reviewer. I am a fan of Seth Shostak. I listen to the *Are We Alone* podcast from the SETI Institute every week. I like his corny jokes and overacting, and I like the way he tries not to take himself too seriously. I have also read *Sharing the Universe* by Shostak. The title of this book drew me in because I thought it might be a much more personal approach to the subject. I was hoping for a sort of autobiography, as I am always interested in what motivates people in science. Yes, there is some of personal history in the book, but not enough to quench my curiosity. The book reads much more like an introduction to radio SETI than a detailed personal journey. It is full of Shostak's wit and I enjoyed that. As I am pretty familiar with most of the material presented, the humor kept me reading when I might have distracted by something else. As someone who is very into radio technology I hoped for a more convincing defense of radio SETI in the face of the recent challenges put forth by Paul Davies in his new book *The Eerie Silence*. Perhaps that will be part of Shostak's next book. I also hope it will contain more of the technical details of Paul Allen's work and the way it is being used. In short, it is a good introduction to SETI, full of humor and a bit of personal (and SETI) history. It's hard to imagine that you will not enjoy it.

I am an astrobiology enthusiast, but since I have read most mainstream books on the subject I started running out of reading material and figured it might be interesting to give this book a shot (being a book about the search for extraterrestrial *intelligence*, and not just *life*). I have to say I was very impressed with Seth's treatment of the subject. I wasn't sure what to expect, I thought the author might be unrealistic about the search for ET, but he managed to stay grounded in his appraisal of our chances while I also remained very enthusiastic and passionate about the need to forge ahead with the search nonetheless. And after reading this book, I am even more inclined to agree. Not because I'm an alien nut (I enjoy sci-fi alien invasion flicks as much as the next guy), not because we "need to know if we're alone", not because pushing the boundaries of discovery is part

of human nature, but because *IF* we found that we are not alone, the knowledge that another intelligent race had survived their own technology learning-curve would give us the hope that we might too. The book is definitely worth reading.

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