

## **The Galactic Elders Are Here!**

One of the great perks of my job as a publisher is that I get to read manuscripts from some pretty smart people in the space business. I've recently read great stories by Alan Binder, Bob Zubrin, Paul Spudis, Steve Howe and other very smart people. It is not uncommon for some publishers to swap products so that we can see what the others are doing.

Recently I was given a book from the Springer Company that absolutely blew me away. The book is entitled **"If the Universe Is Teeming with Aliens... Where Is Everybody? Fifty Solutions to Fermi's Paradox and the Problem of Extraterrestrial Life"** by Stephen Webb.

Enrico Fermi was one of mankind's greatest scientists and thinkers; as such his thought process was way out in left field. One day whilst having lunch with his colleagues he exclaimed, "Where is everybody?" Now his colleagues knowing him as well as anybody could, realized that this was not a question about missing diners. No, what Fermi was asking was, if there are so many intelligent civilizations out there in the galaxy, how is it we aren't hearing from them either by radio or in the flesh? The book offers 50 well thought out reasons for the lack of noise from aliens. (That is apart from the poor souls who are constantly bothered by them and have needles stuck into every orifice on their persons by all sorts of strange creatures in space ships.)

The arguments are as varied as the fact that they (the aliens) might not use radio, perhaps they use optical or some other form of communication devices, or perhaps we (Earth) are in quarantine and should only be observed from a distance until we as a race mature. All of the reasons are well argued but they leave much to be desired in many cases.

It's mostly a numbers game: if there are 100 billion stars in our galaxy alone, then there are probably twice or three times as many planets. That is a staggering number and it makes you think, with that many planets possibly out there, it makes sense that there must be other civilizations, the numbers are just too great. If you look at the discoveries we have made in just the past ten years, this makes sense. We now know that Mars was once very wet, just like Earth. We have found more planets outside of our solar system than inside it, it seems that planets are commonplace throughout the universe. The fact is that we will in all probability discover life on some other world fairly soon, maybe even in our own solar system. But there's a big difference between finding single celled organisms (even though that would be the greatest discovery in history) and complex multi cellular organisms like you and me. It is likely that there are many planets with multi cellular organisms out there. Look at the huge diversity on our own planet. It's not that much greater a leap from single cells to multi celled creatures. (It's actually a bigger step from no life to a single celled organism than from that same "bug" to us.)

So you think, with all those "Billions and Billions" of planets, there has to be life right? More than likely is my answer. But here's the rub!

On our one little planet, which has created in excess of probably 50 billion different species of life, only one of those 50 billion has developed a complex language. In fact we're using it right now. A complex language is more likely than not an imperative to creating a space faring civilization or at least a technological society and as far as we know, we're it.

So where am I going with this?

Where I'm going is this: it's just possible that we could be the most advanced race in our galaxy! Now there's a scary thought right? But what if it's true? Where does that leave us? Could we be the "Elders" that are mentioned in so many Science Fiction stories. Is the job of bringing intelligent life to the rest of the galaxy ours? Think about that for a moment. What a responsibility!

It's quite possible that there's a galaxy out there (ours) just waiting to be filled with life. Why not? Whether you're religious or not it's a daunting question to answer. The religious among us could say that God put the whole universe there for us to utilize and the abilities within ourselves to actually achieve that goal. The non-religious could say that there is a whole galaxy out there just waiting for us to understand. If we can do it, why shouldn't we? Isn't it important to take life out there? Isn't life the way that the universe knows itself?

Whatever way you think, the whole universe is there just waiting. If we do nothing about it then it will probably be a lesser place than it could be.

*Richard Godwin is president of Apogee Space Books as well as a Board member of the National Space Society.*