



Waiting for Contact: The Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence

Lawrence Squeri

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“A cogent, engaging history of humanity’s most ambitious quest—seeking outward for other minds.”—David Brin, author of *Existence*

“A fascinating perspective on humankind’s obsession for knowing if there is anyone else out there.”—Gerrit L. Verschuur, author of *The Invisible Universe: The Story of Radio Astronomy*

“Squeri has written what will likely be the definitive history of the early days of SETI that includes profiles of some of its leading characters.”—Ben Zuckerman, coeditor of *Extraterrestrials: Where Are They?*

“An insightful history that explores the scientific foundations of the modern-day search for our place in the cosmos. *Waiting for Contact* delivers unparalleled access to the inner history of SETI and invites us to ride along on the journey to answer one of science’s ultimate questions: Are we alone?”—Douglas Vakoch, president, METI International

“*Waiting for Contact* is a balanced account, telling the tale of the search for extraterrestrial intelligence without the overpromise usually trumpeted by enthusiastic proponents and the hyperventilation so commonly added by UFO enthusiasts. If you are simply interested in the history, unvarnished by an agenda, you’ll enjoy this book.”—Don Lincoln, author of *Alien Universe: Extraterrestrial Life in Our Minds and in the Cosmos*

Imagine a network of extraterrestrials in radio contact with each other across the universe, superior beings who hail from advanced civilizations quadrillions of miles away, just waiting for Earth to tune in. Some people believe it’s only a matter of time before we discover the right “station.” *Waiting for Contact* tells the story of the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence (SETI) movement, which emerged in 1959 as astronomers began using radio telescopes to listen for messages from space. New technological developments turned what once was speculation into science. Boosted by support from Frank Drake, Philip Morrison, Carl Sagan, and the genre of science fiction, the SETI movement gained followers and continues to capture imaginations today.

In this one-of-a-kind history, Lawrence Squeri looks at the people, reasons, goals, and mindsets behind SETI. He shows how it started as an expression of the times, a way out of Cold War angst with hope for a better world. SETI’s early advocates thought that with guidance from technically and ethically advanced outsiders, humanity might learn how to avoid horrors like nuclear annihilation and societal collapse from overpopulation. Some hoped that good news from outer space might reveal a cure for cancer or even the secret of immortality.

Squeri also describes the challenges SETI has faced over the years: the struggle to be taken seriously by the scientific community and by NASA, competition for access to radio telescopes, perpetual lack of funding, and opposition from influential politicians. He covers the rise and fall of Soviet SETI and the few rare meetings between Soviet and American astronomers. Despite many setbacks, the movement pressed forward

with the aid of private donations and developed outreach programs. Volunteers can now help search for new civilizations on their personal computers by joining the SETI@Home project.

Today, SETI researchers continue to see themselves as explorers. They often identify with Columbus, and just as Columbus never realized the full implications of his discovery, we cannot predict what will happen if contact is made. This book points out that if, against all expectations, the embattled SETI movement finally succeeds, the long-awaited first signal picked up by its radio antennas will usher the greatest shift in human history. A new adventure will begin.

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