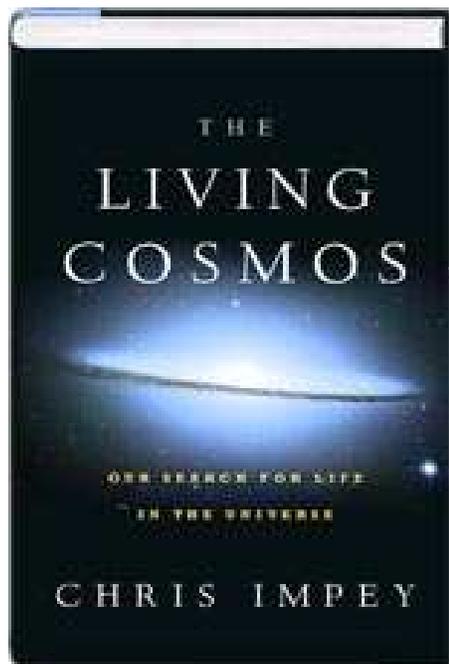


THE LIVING COSMOS

By Chris Impey



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CLUB REVIEW

Are we alone in the cosmos? Or is life a common phenomenon? These questions have inspired the development of astrobiology, the study of life in the Universe. In *The Living Cosmos*, astrobiologist Chris Impey surveys the state of the art in this exciting multidisciplinary field. Impey frames his book around three questions: How many habitable worlds are there? Is biology unique to the Earth? And are there other intelligent civilizations?

We begin with the history of how we've come to know our place in the Universe. From the speculations of thinkers like Giordano Bruno, we travel forward to an era in which we've learned that the ingredients of life—carbon, water, planets, and stars—are widespread in the cosmos. We then turn to what we know about the evolution of life on Earth and what we can learn from the diversity and robustness of terrestrial fauna. Nobody knows exactly how life began on our planet; but the famed Miller-Urey experiment, which sought to replicate

conditions on early Earth, and the ongoing interpretation of the fossil record, have enriched our understanding. We go on to see how the existence of extremophiles proves that life can thrive in the most unlikely environments.

Next comes discussion of the prospects for life elsewhere in the solar system. Here we consider the ongoing searches for microbial life on Mars, as well as the possibility of microorganisms on Titan and Europa. This is followed by exciting new research on extrasolar planets. To date, astronomers have detected more than 250 of these worlds. With giant exoplanets now being found at the rate of more than one per month, the hunt is on for distant Earth-sized worlds.

But when we find other Earths, will there be anyone home? The book closes by considering the potential for intelligent life elsewhere in the cosmos. We examine the Drake equation for enumerating intelligent civilizations, and ponder Enrico Fermi's famous question: "Where are they?"

Complete with a companion Web site featuring podcasts, video clips, interviews, news stories and original artwork, *The Living Cosmos* provides an eloquent summary of humankind's quest for life elsewhere.

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68-1900

Level: All readers

137 illustrations

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MEMBER'S REVIEW

THE LIVING COSMOS, May 3,2008

Reviewer: MARK WALTER

Amazing in Scope

Astrobiology covers a broad array of scientific fields and Impey skillfully covers them all. Besides an overview view of each field, he also provides specific details of interest. It has been a long time since I've read a book that I enjoyed as much as this one.