

ARE we all alone in the vast emptiness of the universe?

Or are there thinking, feeling creatures living in a faraway galaxy, like E.T. in the blockbuster movie?

The mystery of what lies beyond life on Earth is the last great secret of the universe. Britain's top stargazer, Patrick Moore, is convinced

that some kind of life exists in outer space.

"There are 100,000 million stars in our galaxy and 1,000 million galaxies," he says. "So our sun is just an ordinary star like millions of others."

"The chances are overwhelming that other planetary systems like ours exist."

But Moore says that if beings do live in other galaxies, they will not be grotesque aliens.

He says: "If you are talking about bug-eyed monsters, it's not very likely. But at the moment it is impossible to investigate and find out."

"We are at the stage now where, to do this, we would need space travel as advanced to us as television would have been to William The Conqueror."

But American astronomer Professor Carl Sagan, host of the BBC TV series *Cosmos*, thinks that if we cannot get in touch with aliens, they can get in touch with us.

Wild

He suggests that the number of civilisations on other planets much more advanced than ours could be between 50,000 and one million.

He believes that these aliens are the sort that

wild sci-fi fantasies are made of. Early in their civilisation they would have cured all disease and perfected their development.

For such beings, heart transplants would be primitive medicine.

Telepathy would have replaced the telephone and they would no longer have to go to school. All they would need to do was to link their brains into knowledge banks.

So Professor Sagan believes that we should be constantly scanning the skies for signs of life.

But other scientists are asking gloomily: "If there is life out there, how come we haven't heard from them already?"

Fashionable trends come and go among space watchers just as in less scientific fields. Currently, it's the fashion to doubt that the universe teems with life.

These scientists say recent work by biologists has shown that intelligence is a very unlikely result of evolution.

Sign

They believe that the chances of finding another planet with the same atmosphere and temperature to support life like ours are at least a billion to one.

The Venus space probe a couple of years ago came up with no sign of life. It seems we must

search much further and much longer before we get the right answer to the biggest question in the universe.

And that's a big problem, according to Professor Graham Smith, the new Astronomer Royal.

He says: "The universe is an endless space. Exploring just a tiny section of it would take a hundred years."

"If you consider the enormity of the number of galaxies to search, we seem like insignificant specks lost in the emptiness of space. It is a very daunting task."

So the professor thinks we should not waste our money on expensive scientific equipment to go hunting — at least until we know where to look.

"Suppose we picked up some signals from space? We could follow them up at great cost and discover—as we have done before—that they were just natural phenomena — not radio messages from other beings at all."

So E.T., if you are out there — please, phone Earth!