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Messages from the Stars: Communication and Contact with Extraterrestrial Life by Ian Ridpath

Review by: Frank D. Drake

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Physical Sciences

Messages from the Stars: Communication and Contact with Extraterrestrial Life. Ian Ridpath. 241 pp. Harper & Row, 1978. \$10.

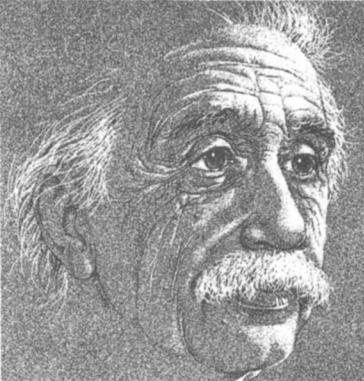
This book could well be entitled "The Pocket Encyclopedia of Intelligent Life in Space." It contains a brief but information-filled review of every subject, fad, and enigma associated with ideas of other civilizations in space and how we might contact them or they us. These reviews are remarkably full of correct and up-to-date facts, and, more important, are presented in a very balanced way, both in scope and editorial comment. There is skepticism where called for, even in those subjects about which Ridpath reveals that he is an enthusiast. I suspect that Ridpath is just the right kind of author for this kind of book: a person who has done some professional work in the field, making him quite knowledgeable, while at the same time not so wrapped up in the subject that he has developed strong prejudices.

We find here all the now-classical subjects: discussions of the origins of life, the abundance of planetary systems, and the results of the Viking biology experiments. There are discussions of the various means of interstellar contact, again with the conclusion that radio signals and radio searches are the most promising means of contact. Such subjects as automated space probes and space colonies are also given their due. And then Ridpath bravely marches into the maelstrom of pseudoscience, giving quite good synopses of the claims of Von Daniken, pyramidologists, UFO-logists, and of the curious stories of the Dogon people and Sirius and the purported UFO adventure of Barney and Betty Hill. Ridpath does not hesitate to condemn when justified.

The book is written well, with no words wasted. Ridpath is careful to give credit to the right people for various accomplishments, which is unusual. I suspect most readers would like to have more illustrations and some tables to record, say, just what searches for radio signals have taken place. If you want to find out how we stand with "Them," epoch the present, this is the place to do it.—*Frank D. Drake, National Astronomy and Ionosphere Center, Cornell University*

Beyond the Moon, 6th ed. Paolo Maffei. Trans. D. J. K. O'Connell. 377 pp. M.I.T. Press, 1978. \$12.50.

This imaginary journey through the cosmos in ten chapters is a new English translation of a very popular Italian book first published in 1973. The aim is to describe our contemporary knowledge of the universe, especially some of the more spectacular recent discoveries, in a novel, exciting manner—not in textbook fashion



ALBERT EINSTEIN

THE HUMAN SIDE

New Glimpses from His Archives Selected and Edited by Helen Dukas and Banesh Hoffmann

He wrote to an Ohio fifth-grader, distressed by her discovery that scientists classify humans as animals. He answered a Colorado banker who asked whether he believed in a personal God. Whether writing witty rhymes or expressing his devotion to Zionism, modesty, humor, compassion, and wisdom are the traits most evident in these personal, mostly unpublished papers, from the Einstein archives. \$8.95
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but in the guise of an imagined voyage of exploration which begins in our immediate neighborhood and extends to the limits of the known universe.

In places, the text is very effective. Especially captivating are passages like the description of sunrise and sunset seen from an imaginary planet belonging to the α -Centauri system and the author's account of his discovery of the Maffei galaxies in 1967-68. Elsewhere, the style is unremarkable and the treatment conventional.

The most serious problem with the English edition is that it is not sufficiently up to date for the late 1970s. The inadequate treatment of the many recent discoveries in such active fields as high energy astronomy and solar system studies is regrettable. For instance, the section on the Viking exploration of Mars was obviously added as an afterthought and is not well integrated into the text. It fails to describe the essential findings adequately to satisfy the more inquisitive reader.

Some technical errors are due to the fact that the text is not sufficiently up to date and most are more annoying than serious—such as the inaccurate statement that "Titan . . . is a little smaller than Mercury." It is more difficult to be tolerant of the author's failure to realize that Titan is one of the most remarkable objects in our solar system.

Of special interest are the original and very informative line drawings found throughout the book.—*J. Veverka, Planetary Studies, Cornell University*

Space Trek: The Endless Migration. Jerome Clayton Glenn and George S. Robinson. 223 pp. Stackpole, 1978. \$9.95.

A significant contribution to the revival of interest in the potentialities of human activity in space, the book is a space enthusiast's 1977 snapshot of the political climate surrounding the development of space industrialization and space migration. It is more than that—toward the end, the authors make cogent remarks on the cultural significance, international implications, and likely conflicts that will result from the emergence of a second culture in space.

The ideas of Gerard K. O'Neill and his colleagues (I am one) form the focus of the book. We believe that the technology now exists to begin a large-scale human enterprise in space which would draw on the resources of the Moon and asteroids rather than on those from the deep gravity well of the Earth. Engineering studies have confirmed that satellite power stations—and perhaps other products—may be cost-effectively manufactured in space from nonterrestrial materials. These