



Strangers in the Night: A Brief History of Life on Other Worlds (Cornelia & Michael Bessie Series)

David E. Fisher, Marshall Jon Fisher

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The father-son team of David E. Fisher and Marshall Jon Fisher brings the study of extraterrestrial life down to earth in this informative and entertaining book. In the anecdotal style that is their hallmark, the Fishers trace humankind's attempts to discover life on other worlds—a discipline known in scientific circles as exobiology. This informative and entertaining book tells the story of humankind's attempts throughout history to discover extraterrestrial life. In the anecdotal style that is their hallmark, the father-son team of David E. Fisher and Marshall Jon Fisher introduces the events and individuals who have driven the search for these strangers in the night, from hoaxes and hopes toward the science of exobiology and a deeper understanding of the universe's myriad life forms. Forget bony-fingered aliens and little green men. Extravagant claims of UFO sightings, crop circles, and alien abduction have often eclipsed the methodical work of astronomers and physicists who seek the answers to heaven's mysteries in rocks, radio signals, and microbes. *Strangers in the Night* is a story of patience and determination, of disciplined men and women working for generations to separate alien fantasies from scientific possibility. Their work over the years, sometimes conducted in loose alliances with fanciful names—the Mars Underground, Order of the Dolphin, SERENDIP, Project Phoenix—has resulted in an increasingly likely probability that life does exist elsewhere in the universe. For centuries the search for life on other worlds has been a struggle between human imagination and scientific inquiry. It is a story of grand promises and tall tales: scenes of Martian mountains and oceans created by a faulty telescope lens; fabricated accounts of broad avenues and great temples on the moon; a newspaper report that the words *The Almighty* were seen on Mars (in Hebrew, no less); Orson Welles and the War of the Worlds; flying saucers zooming over the nation's capital; and of course, alien corpses in Roswell, New Mexico. *Strangers in the Night* leads us from ancient times to the present, focusing in earnest on the remarkable progress of the past few years: discoveries of possible fossil organisms in a meteorite from Mars; the confirmed existence of nearly two dozen extra solar planets; and vast improvements in computer technology and radio astronomy which have made possible the first really optimistic searches for signals from extraterrestrial civilizations. In the depths of Earth's own oceans, scientists have identified life forms that exist and flourish without sunlight. This discovery and that of a possible ocean on one of Jupiter's moons have sparked new discussions about the definition of life itself. The great variety of planetary environments in the universe combined with the vagaries of evolution is likely to produce life forms not even imaginable by humans. *Strangers in the Night* not only broadens our understanding of the search for life on other worlds—it opens a new window onto the night sky's infinite miracles. The father-son team of David E. Fisher and Marshall Jon Fisher brings the study of extraterrestrial life down to earth in this informative and entertaining book. In the anecdotal style that is their hallmark, the Fishers trace humankind's attempts to discover life on other worlds—a discipline known in scientific circles as exobiology. The book begins in the seventeenth century with the story of Giordano Bruno, whose interest in the mysteries of the universe caused him to be burned at the stake. It continues through the present day, highlighting recent scientific breakthroughs: evidence of fossilized organisms in a meteorite from Mars; planets orbiting a variety of different stars; and a possible ocean on one of Jupiter's moons. Guided by history and by science, this book separates fantasies about aliens from the search for documented evidence of extraterrestrial life.

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Kerry Maye:

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