

Space Aliens Among Us
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I watched a fascinating CNN documentary (they seem to air one every Sunday evening) and I cannot get it out of my mind. It was called "The Hunt for Planet B." Young environmentalists remind us that we have just one planet, and there is no Planet B. But this documentary is about the astronomers who are looking for exactly that: another planet like ours that can sustain life.

Nathaniel Kahn, the film's producer, tells us: The Hunt for Planet B captures the human drama behind NASA's high-stakes Webb Telescope, due to launch on December 18, 2021 - the most ambitious space observatory ever built. The film interweaves the creation of this massive machine with the story of a pioneering group of female scientists on a quest to find life beyond our solar system. What begins as a real-time scientific adventure turns into a deep meditation on our place in the universe. On the brink of seeing farther out than ever before, we find ourselves looking back at our own imperiled planet with new eyes.

Once more, we can see what science is capable of doing. Imagine having the intelligence to design this amazing space observatory and the human imagination that continues to produce those who always want to know what is over the next hill. But most fascinating to me was the conversations with the scientists themselves, men and women with all the characteristics of all of us---but with intelligence that is far beyond the current status of the majority of human beings.

One scientist commented: Human beings are a lonely species. We have from our beginnings wanted to find others like us, but we also fear them. The invention of the gods in antiquity, imaginings that are found in all human societies, demonstrate this desire. But unlike such musings, which fall within the scope of religion, science deals with what can be proven.

One interviewer asked a woman scientist if she believes that there is life like ours somewhere in the universe, she speculates that now that we know how many stars are out there and how many, like our own sun, have planets, it is not unreasonable to think that life exists. But when asked if such life would be like human beings, she said: my beliefs do not matter; beliefs are in the realm of religion. I do science. We do not know, but this telescope will help us find out.

Another scientist was talking to a man (not a scientists) who found her descriptions of this space adventure fascinating. He then told her how he enjoyed the weekly broadcasts of Alex Jones, who talks about aliens who might be among us. That is fascinating too, he said. The "little green men" baloney. To her credit, the scientists did not blink. She assessed the intelligence of this fellow and held her tongue.

This enormous space telescope took years to assemble, and every inch of it had to be perfect. If something failed once it was on the edge of space, we could not fix it. In Congressional hearings, some of the less brilliant Congressmen complained about the cost of this venture and thought that we could spend that money on problems on earth. These men evaluate everything by its cost, not by its value.

The scientists patiently explained why this venture was important. Our own earth (planet A) may be on the road to destroying life and it would be important to know that somewhere out there is a Planet B. But the intelligent among us have always wanted to know what was over the next mountain or explored the vast oceans to find fellow humans.

When a scientist was asked if intelligent space life would be benevolent or hostile, he answered: "If intelligent life visits us, and has the technology to do this, they would have to be an older civilization, one with the aggression tamed." Yes indeed.

Meanwhile, some dim bulbs gather in Dallas to see the second coming of President Kennedy and his son, both long dead.

I hope that the scientists from Planet B visit soon.

684 words

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