

# DR. SETI'S STARSHIP

Searching For The Ultimate DX

## This I Believe

“So, Doc, do you believe in extraterrestrials?” I hear this question frequently, from family and friends, students and strangers alike. It’s a question to which I’ve become accustomed, having invested a significant life-fraction in pursuing SETI, the scientific Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence. My usual answer is that the search isn’t so much about what I believe as it is about finding truth. Scientists must always separate faith from fact. However, that answer, I realize, is a cop-out.

Thanks to recent astronomical discoveries, we now know for certain that we live in a universe capable of supporting life. The skies are filled with stars abundant, and we have now detected unseen companions on a sizeable fraction of them. Among the multitudes of observed planets are a fair number with conditions capable of supporting life. Intelligence confers survival value, as does the ability to communicate, so it’s not a big stretch to envision hundreds of communicative civilizations calling to us across the cosmic void. Recent advances have brought us to the brink of contact, and yes, I do believe we have the capacity to cross that brink. But do we have the will?

SETI is a multi-generational enterprise. After a half-century of dedicated research, we are no closer to the proof we seek than we were at the outset. I believe that the journey upon which I have embarked will be completed by my distant descendants. That thought is humbling, but also motivating.

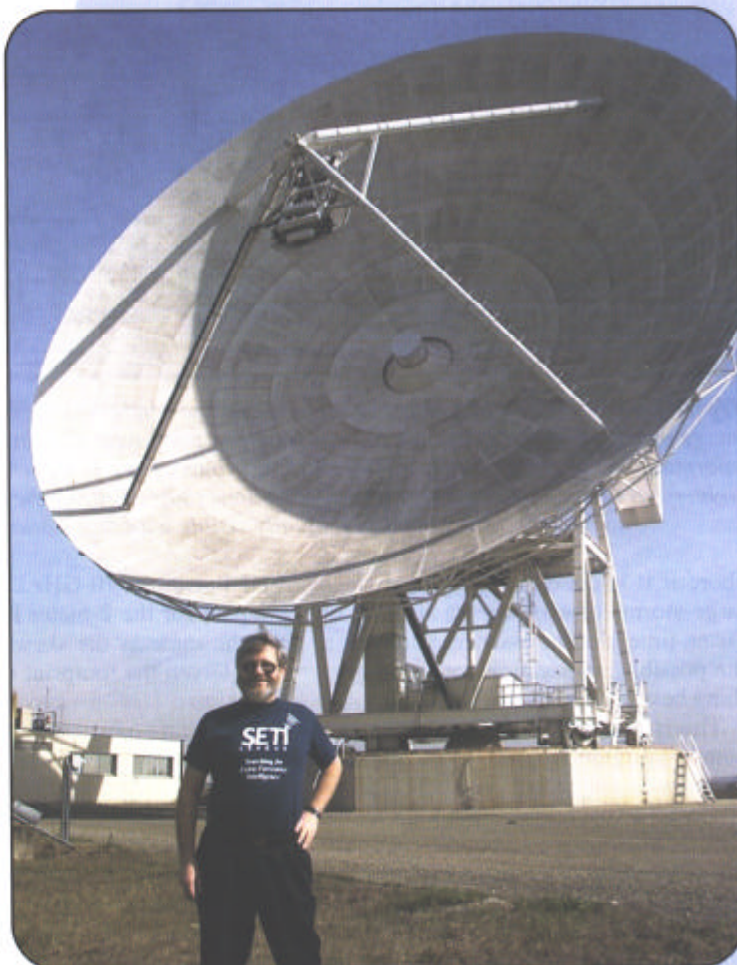
For perhaps the first time in human history, we live in a universe in which the notion of extraterrestrial life has become a testable hypothesis. Today as never before, we possess the tools, the technology, and the tenacity to embark upon a journey to answer that fundamental question which has haunted humankind since we first realized that the points of light in the night are other suns: *Are we alone?*

“So, Doc,” asked a shock jock on morning radio not long ago, “do you believe in extra testicles?”

“No,” I answered with equal flippancy, “I believe two should be enough for any man. Now let’s talk about SETI.”

SETI involves searching the unknown, seeking the familiar. If we do the search, and we do it right, some generations from now our offspring will have arrived at one of two possible outcomes. Either they will have detected incontrovertible evidence of our cosmic companions, or not. If the former, the implications for human life are self-evident. But what if the other? What if, after centuries of searching, we come up dry? Might this lead, in the long term, to a widespread belief in the sanctity of life, and the precious place our home world holds in the heavens?

\*Executive Director, The SETI League, Inc.,  
<[www.setileague.org](http://www.setileague.org)>  
e-mail: <[n6tx@setileague.org](mailto:n6tx@setileague.org)>



*The author is seen here with some of the equipment used to calibrate our place in the cosmos.*

Perhaps a lack of SETI success will return us to a pre-Copernican perspective. Maybe it will encourage us to treat our planet with renewed reverence.

The search will, in time, show us either that we are not alone, or that we are. Either outcome, I believe, will change forever humanity’s place in the cosmos. 73, Paul, N6TX

**Note:** This I Believe <<http://www.npr.org/thisibelieve/>> is a national media project in the U.S. that invites Americans from all walks of life to write about and discuss, in just 500 words, the core beliefs that guide their daily lives. The statements are shared in weekly broadcasts on National Public Radio. This essay is Dr. SETI’s contribution to that project.