Alien Life Imagined

One day, astrobiologists could make the most fantastic discovery of all time: the detection of complex extraterrestrial life. As space agencies continue to search for life in our universe, fundamental questions are raised: are we awake to the revolutionary effects on human science, society and culture that alien contact will bring? And how is it possible to imagine the unknown?

In this book, Mark Brake tells the compelling story of how the portrayal of extraterrestrial life has developed over the last two and a half thousand years. Taking examples from the history of science, philosophy, film and fiction, he showcases how scholars, scientists, film-makers and writers have devoted their energies to imagining life beyond this Earth. From Newton to Kubrick, and from Lucian to H. G. Wells, this is a fascinating account for anyone interested in the extraterrestrial life debate, from general readers to amateur astronomers and undergraduate students studying astronomical sciences.

MARK BRAKE is a freelance academic and is well known for his work in communicating the relationship between space, science and culture. A former Professor of Science Communication, he founded the world’s first undergraduate degree programme in astrobiology.
Alien Life Imagined

Communicating the Science and Culture of Astrobiology

Mark Brake
Contents

1 Kosmos: aliens in ancient Greece    1

2 The world turned upside down: Copernicanism and the voyages of discovery    46

3 In Newton's train: pluralism and the system of the world    89

4 Extraterrestrials in the early machine age    132

5 After Darwin: The War of the Worlds    164

6 Einstein's sky: life in the new universe    206

7 Ever since SETI: astrobiology in the space age    240

Index    272