

# Preface

Many seem to think that most of the “big discoveries” have already been made. I beg to differ. The same misconception was also very common among physicists before the discovery of relativity theory and quantum physics in the early 20th century. The truth is that we are still far away from understanding the universe and its greatest mystery: life. We have unraveled some working mechanics and details, yet a greater understanding still eludes us. This is particularly true for the phenomenon of life. We do know what happened in the first fractions of a second after the Big Bang, yet we still don’t know how life originated on our home planet. Was it only an incredibly unlikely event that occurred only once in the galaxy or universe? Or, is it a common occurrence and has happened on many worlds? And what are the conditions which have to be present for it to happen? Does it always have to happen under the same conditions as for life on Earth—conditions which we don’t know and can only speculate about—or are there multiple pathways from inanimate matter to life? Also, once life is there, does it generally stay microbial or will it inevitably become more complex, macroscopic and eventually intelligent? These are some of the open scientific questions that this work addresses in an adventurous setting in which a handful of astronauts explore other worlds and seek to figure out puzzling phenomena.

Perhaps the most intriguing question is the why: why is there a universe and why are we here? While many of my colleagues would argue that this is a religious or spiritual question that cannot be answered by science (which I don’t disagree with), it is nevertheless one of the most profound questions keeping us awake at night. I do not pretend to have an answer to this question, but simply weave together my understanding of the science of astrobiology with my take on Eastern philosophy to produce what I believe is a logically consistent scenario, which I hope to be inspirational, informative, and entertaining for you, the reader.

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