

Soft-landers on Mars, the most likely location for extra-terrestrial life, have failed to disclose ^{any} positive indication of living organisms - and there certainly aren't any canals.

Venus now appears to be a furnace with a surface temperature of 475°C , an atmospheric pressure 100 times that of the Earth's, and sulphuric acid clouds floating on a 55-kilometres deep blanket of dense carbon dioxide; any suggestion that this planet's dense atmosphere shrouds a prehistoric landscape on which primitive life forms ~~were~~ ^{are} beginning to evolve has been smartly discounted, and 'Venusians' are definitely non-starters.

None of the other planets in the solar system are a likely home of life. Mercury is too hot on one side and too cold on the other (as well as having virtually no atmosphere), the giant planets are very cold and may well lack conventional solid cores, and far distant Pluto is not only remote, dark and cold, but also less than half the size of the Earth.

It seems, then, that any space ships reaching the Earth must come from the planetary systems surrounding other stars. At once the vast distances of the universe become a significant factor: light travelling at 186,000 miles a second takes four years to reach the Earth from the nearest star, Proxima Centauri, and from the farthest limits of the known universe it takes 5,000 million years, having started its journey before the Earth was even born.

The chances of just one space ship, drifting among 1,000 million galaxies, stumbling on the tiny planet Earth is considerably less than the prospect of a man locating a single specific grain of sand in the middle of the Sahara.

Time is another significant consideration. Modern man himself is perhaps a million years old, civilisation on Earth only 5,000 years old. The likelihood of two advanced technologies existing in planetary systems sufficiently