

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Physics teacher dedicated to making science fun, even in retirement.

New novel, by retired teacher, explores biological adaptation, quantum physics and relativity, as well as friendship, family and fame, in a fun wild adventure set on both Earth and Mars and in some additional dimensions.

DARTFORD, KENT – 12 August 2022 – Elsewhen Press, an independent UK publisher specialising in Speculative Fiction, is committed to publishing outstanding books by new authors. Science fiction provides authors and readers with an opportunity to explore possibilities for other worlds while staying within the realms of what's feasible. Recently retired physics teacher, **Hugh Duncan**, has used humour throughout his career to successfully encourage his pupils' interest in science. Now he is taking the same approach to reach a wider audience with his novel, *Life on Mars: The Vikings are coming*.

Why did the NASA Viking missions discover no evidence of life on Mars? Was it a concerted effort to hide the truth? Who was doing the hiding? – What if it was the life on Mars itself that was determined to remain unnoticed by Earthlings?

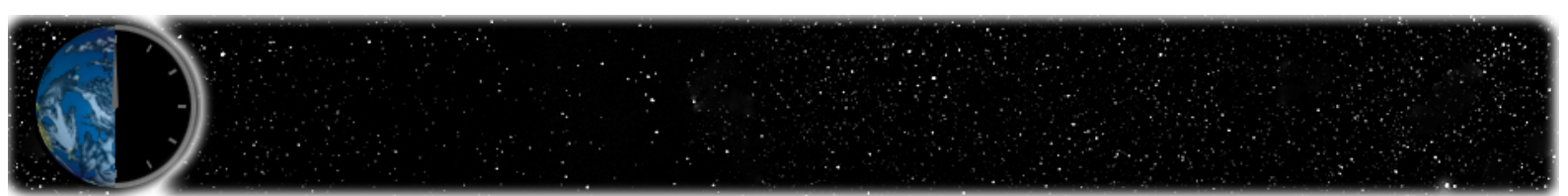
Peter Buck, editorial director of Elsewhen Press says, “We’ve known Hugh for a long time and have always been impressed with his ability to enthuse his students. When he brought his novel to us, we were delighted to be able to publish it. Hugh has an innate ability to, literally, make fun of even the hardest concepts in science. If we described his book as an exploration of exobiology, phenotypic plasticity, quantum mechanical wave-functions, and electrostatics, it might only appeal to fans of hard science fiction. However, if we point out that the main protagonist is a teenage turtle (a Martian rock turtle) who has adapted for longevity in the harsh conditions of Mars, and that in this context ‘teenage’ means sixteen-million years of age, the tone of the story becomes a little clearer. A quantum-tunnelling worm participates in the adventure (a handy friend to have, it turns out, when you’re locked in a filing cabinet). Zombie vegetables are another hazard to be overcome (as is so often true in life). And so is a publicity-obsessed Martian artist, determined to expand his audience to Earth. The occasional intervention by the Physics Police (responsible for enforcing the Laws of Physics) just adds to the near-anarchy. The Vikings of the subtitle are the NASA probes sent to Mars in the 1970s. Finally, the truth can be told about why they failed to find evidence of life on Mars – in short, a concerted effort by much of the Martian fauna (and, indeed, some of the flora) to remain unobserved, with the help of two house martins from the South of France. Hugh’s story will appeal to those of us who were disappointed by the Viking missions’ results, along with conspiracy fans who were sure that the ‘face on Mars’ wasn’t just shadows, science fiction fans who like to extrapolate current knowledge, anyone fascinated by the scientific possibilities of life on other worlds, science students suffering with teachers who have no sense of fun, and especially young-at-heart readers (from 10 to 100+ years young) who enjoy a madcap adventure.”

World-renowned scientist **John Gribbin**, author of *In Search of Schrodinger’s Cat: Quantum Physics and Reality*, widely regarded as one of the best science writers of our time, said, “*Life on Mars* is fantasy on steroids. Instead of swords and magic potions, we have the ‘magic’ science of quantum physics and relativity theory, channelled through what feels like a hallucinogenic dream. My favourite character is a quantum-tunnelling worm, but the author’s fevered imagination provides us with a menagerie of almost equally bizarre creatures, on a mission to save the world – their world, that is, not ours. Suspend disbelief, strap in for the ride, and enjoy.”

The cover of the book features an image of the heroine of the story, Jade, a 16-million year old turtle. The image was created by Natascha Booth, one of Hugh’s former students now studying art at university in Dublin. The book also contains illustrations by Natascha of some of the main characters. Many of Hugh’s ex-students have already expressed their excitement at the forthcoming publication of the book, demonstrating the high regard he has engendered over his years as a teacher. Indeed some are very keen for him to come to launch the book at their current university.

Life on Mars: The Vikings are coming, is published by Elsewhen Press in eBook format today and will be available in paperback on the 12th September.

...more



Notes for Editors

About Hugh Duncan

Hugh Duncan hatched in Leicester in 1957. He studied astronomy at University College London and, though very lazy, got his degree. His final thesis was on Martian craters and, after, he worked at the UCL observatory cataloguing the Viking Mission photos.

Having fallen in love with a French woman and wanting to live happily ever after, he ruined that plan by becoming a science teacher. The temporary job became a lifelong career, first in the UK, then for 32 years at the International School of Nice, from which he has recently retired. A few years ago, UCL launched the maths journal *Chalkdust*, in which Hugh has had a number of articles published. In 1997, Oxford Study Courses, asked him to write revision guidebooks for IB Physics, which continues to this day.

Hugh started in science fiction aged five, when he wrote 'Dr Who goes to the balloon planet' and some have said it's his best work to date. Nearly sixty years later, *Life on Mars* is his first published novel. Inspired by the mighty Terry Pratchett, for school charity projects Hugh started writing his own 'Deskworld' stories, parodying his school as one for witches and wizards. Three dozen stories sold well using a captive audience scared of getting bad grades if they didn't buy them, hmm...

Hugh has been married for 40 years and has four children – most don't seem to want to leave home in spite of being adults and having to listen to his songs and stories all the time. He lives in the South of France, not very far from the village with two famous house martins who appear in *Life on Mars*. He owns a Hermann's tortoise called Sophie Rose.

About *Life on Mars*



Racing against time, Jade and her friends must hide evidence of *Life on Mars* to stop the probes from Earth finding them

Jade is on her way to meet up with her dad, Elvis, for her sixteen-millionth birthday (turtles live a long time in spite of the harsh conditions on Mars), when she gets side-tracked by a strange object that appears to have fallen from the sky. Elvis' travelling companion Starkwood, an electrostatic plant, is hearing voices, claiming that "The Vikings Are Coming", while their football-pitch-sized flying friend Fionix confirms the rumour: the Earth has sent two craft to look for life on Mars.

It then becomes a race against time to hide any evidence of such life before Earth destroys it for good. Can Jade and her friends succeed, with help from a Lung Whale, a liquid horse, some flying cats, the Hellas Angels, the Pyrites and a couple of House Martins from the South of France? Oh, and a quantum-tunnelling worm – all while avoiding Zombie Vegetables and trouble with a Gravity Artist and the Physics Police?! A gentle and lightly humorous science fantasy adventure.

ISBN: 9781915304124 eBook / 9781915304025 paperback 400pp

Cover art and illustrations by: Natascha Booth

Visit bit.ly/LifeOnMars-Vikings

About Elsewhen Press

Elsewhen Press is an independent publisher of Speculative Fiction. Based in the UK, in the South East of England, Elsewhen Press publishes titles in English, in digital and print editions, adopting a digital-first policy for most titles. Established in 2011, Elsewhen Press is an imprint of Alnpete Limited.

Contact details:

Elsewhen Press contact: Al Murray on +44 (0) 7956 233402 email: al@elsewhen.co.uk

Information about Elsewhen Press, authors, titles and past press releases can be obtained online from <https://elsewhen.press>

or through our Journolink Press Room <https://pressroom.journolink.com/elsewhen-press>

Interviews with authors can be arranged through Elsewhen Press, contact Al Murray, as above.

###