



The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark

By Carl Sagan, Ann Druyan

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"A glorious book . . . A spirited defense of science . . . From the first page to the last, this book is a manifesto for clear thought."

*Los Angeles Times

"POWERFUL . . . A stirring defense of informed rationality. . . Rich in surprising information and beautiful writing."

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How can we make intelligent decisions about our increasingly technology-driven lives if we don't understand the difference between the myths of pseudoscience and the testable hypotheses of science? Pulitzer Prize-winning author and distinguished astronomer Carl Sagan argues that scientific thinking is critical not only to the pursuit of truth but to the very well-being of our democratic institutions.

Casting a wide net through history and culture, Sagan examines and authoritatively debunks such celebrated fallacies of the past as witchcraft, faith healing, demons, and UFOs. And yet, disturbingly, in today's so-called information age, pseudoscience is burgeoning with stories of alien abduction, channeling past lives, and communal hallucinations commanding growing attention and respect. As Sagan demonstrates with lucid eloquence, the siren song of unreason is not just a cultural wrong turn but a dangerous plunge into darkness that threatens our most basic freedoms.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Carl Sagan muses on the current state of scientific thought, which offers him marvelous opportunities to entertain us with his own childhood experiences, the newspaper morgues, UFO stories, and the assorted flotsam and jetsam of pseudoscience. Along the way he debunks alien abduction, faith-healing, and channeling; refutes the arguments that science destroys spirituality, and provides a "baloney detection kit" for thinking through political, social, religious, and other issues.

From Publishers Weekly

Eminent Cornell astronomer and bestselling author Sagan debunks the paranormal and the unexplained in a study that will reassure hardcore skeptics but may leave others unsatisfied. To him, purported UFO encounters and alien abductions are products of gullibility, hallucination, misidentification, hoax and therapists' pressure; some alleged encounters, he suggests, may screen memories of sexual abuse. He labels as hoaxes the crop circles, complex pictograms that appear in southern England's wheat and barley fields, and he dismisses as a natural formation the Sphinx-like humanoid face incised on a mesa on Mars, first photographed by a Viking orbiter spacecraft in 1976 and considered by some scientists to be the engineered artifact of an alien civilization. In a passionate plea for scientific literacy, Sagan deftly debunks the myth of Atlantis, Filipino psychic surgeons and mediums such as J.Z. Knight, who claims to be in touch with a 35,000-year-old entity called Ramtha. He also brands as superstition ghosts, angels, fairies, demons, astrology, Bigfoot, the Loch Ness monster and religious apparitions.

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From Library Journal

In a chapter entitled "Science and Hope," Sagan (*Pale Blue Dot*, Random, 1994) writes: "This book is a personal statement, reflecting my lifelong love affair with science." Accordingly, he deplores pseudoscientific thinking and the credulous beliefs that emerge from it. Today, when science is critical for solving the world's problems, many people, instead, trust astrology and New Age spiritualism. Likewise, surveys reveal that a majority of Americans believe that Earth is regularly visited by space aliens. Using basic tools of science—empiricism, rationalism, and experimentation—Sagan debunks these and other common fallacies of pseudoscience. In doing so, he speculates as to how such beliefs arise. Some of his explanations are not entirely convincing (are alien-abduction tales really modern versions of medieval myths?), but he handles them with empathy so as to not demean the intelligence of true believers. The best chapters examine the state of science education and technical literacy in America and suggest an agenda for improving both. The book is overlong, occasionally redundant, and parts have been published elsewhere. Still, Sagan's theme is important, and his popularity might lure some readers from the UFO and occult books cluttering so many library and bookstore shelves. For public and undergraduate libraries.

—Gregg Sapp, *Univ. of Miami Lib., Coral Gables, Fla.*

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Users Review

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