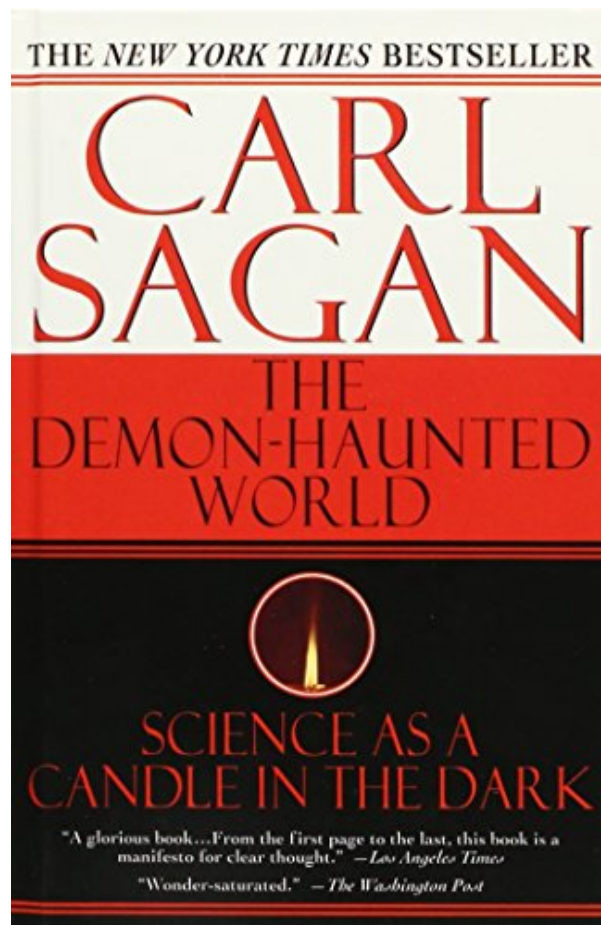


THE DEMON-HAUNTED WORLD: SCIENCE AS A CANDLE IN THE DARK BY CARL SAGAN



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THE *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLER

CARL
SAGAN

THE
DEMON-HAUNTED
WORLD



SCIENCE AS A
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"A glorious book...From the first page to the last, this book is a
manifesto for clear thought." —*Los Angeles Times*

"Wonder-saturated." —*The Washington Post*

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Amazon.com Review

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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

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*Los Angeles Times

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

*The Washington Post Book World

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.

"COMPELLING."

*USA Today

"A clear vision of what good science means and why it makes a difference. . . . A testimonial to the power of science and a warning of the dangers of unrestrained credulity."

*The Sciences

"PASSIONATE."

*San Francisco Examiner-Chronicle

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Most helpful customer reviews

26 of 26 people found the following review helpful.

An Uplifting Discussion of the Power of Wonder and Skepticism

By Kem White

I've had this book in the basement for 20 years and I finally got around to reading it. I'm glad I did. Despite being a tad dated now, Sagan's thesis that it's the dual modes of thinking - wonder of the real world and skepticism of authority and baseless assertions - that most benefit societies. His clarion call for a people with mature critical thinking skills needs to be heard more than ever. He is clear that belief without evidence is anathema to a free, 21st century society world.

Because it was written more than 20 years ago, the book has lost some of the power it had in the mid-90s. Sagan never mentions the internet or social networks. The rise of Islamic terrorism is still a thing of the future. Though apposite in the mid-90s, some of his examples are less relevant today. This is the only reason I can't give this book 5-stars.

He avoids name-calling and strident rhetoric. He focuses more on pseudo-science rather than religion. The book is largely apolitical but the concluding two chapters are, he acknowledges, intentionally more political than the rest of the book. And these last two chapters are just as pertinent today as they were 20 years ago. (In fact, they have a prescient quality to them.) I highly recommend you read them.

Sagan would be 82 were he still alive. It's a pity he's not around to provide commentary. Recommended.

17 of 17 people found the following review helpful.

One of the greatest tutorials on logic and reason ever written.

By Mindriot

I could write an absolutely huge review for this, but I must keep it brief.

If you are open-minded enough to wonder if your beliefs in ghosts, spirits, aliens, crop circle as alien artifacts, bigfoot, etc. are well-founded, this book will help you figure out the right questions to ask... and that is often the barrier that many people face when trying to vet these ideas with logic.

Remember... the closed-minded are those that will believe something no matter what evidence comes to refute their beliefs. Scientists are the most open-minded people in the world. They don't believe... they test, they ask for confirming evidence, and the good ones admit when their ideas are wrong or need to be modified in some way.

Carl Sagan is one of the mighty pillars of reason and logic of our age... this book will start you on your way to become one of those who can keep our society from falling in to another dark age of silly beliefs in mysticism, spiritualism, bogus (alternative) medicine, satanic ritual abuse, energy/faith healing, and other such pitfalls of magical thinking.

Give it a try... and remember, be open-minded!

10 of 10 people found the following review helpful.

An Essential Read in a World Beset by Religious Fundamentalism

By Hrafnkell Haraldsson

In 1996, Carl Sagan published *The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark*, a book that was at the time heralded as "Wonder-saturated" (The Washington Post) and "a manifesto for clear thought" (Los Angeles Times). Here Carl Sagan argued that "Science is more than a body of knowledge; it is a way of thinking." The Religious Right, realize this, and they see it as a way of thinking inimical to their dogmatic assertions, assertions drawn on a Bronze Age religion codified in a document put to paper in the first

millennium B.C.E.

Ironically enough, as Sagan points out, “A Candle in the Dark“ was a Biblically-based book published in London in 1656 on the cusp of the Enlightenment, a book whose author, Thomas Ady, attacked the witch hunts of his time “as a scam ‘to delude the people’.” The arguments he raised will be familiar to us today: “Any illness or storm, anything out of the ordinary, was popularly attributed to witchcraft.”

Thomas Ady saw the absurdity of this reasoning 350 years ago. He saw that it was time to move past such primitive and superstitious thinking. I wonder what he would say today, hearing these arguments still uttered.

Sagan wrote,

“For much of our history, we were so fearful of the outside world, with its unpredictable dangers, that we gladly embraced anything that promised to soften or explain away the terror. Science is an attempt, largely successful, to understand the world, to get a grip on things, to get hold of ourselves, to steer a safe course. Microbiology and meteorology now explain what only a few centuries ago was considered sufficient cause to burn women to death.”

Ady, writing more than three centuries ago, foresaw that nations “[will] perish for lack of knowledge.” Yet lack of knowledge is being codified and legislated today by the likes of David Barton and Republican-controlled governors and legislatures.

Carl Sagan foresaw this:

“I worry that, especially as the Millennium edges nearer, pseudoscience and superstition will seem year by year more tempting, the siren song of unreason more sonorous and attractive. Where have we heard it before? Whenever our ethnic or national prejudices are aroused, in times of scarcity, during challenges to national self-esteem or nerve, when we agonize about our diminished cosmic place and purpose, or when fanaticism is bubbling up around us – then, habits of thought familiar from ages past reach for the controls.”

The results, as he says, are terrifying:

“The candle flame gutters. Its little pool of light trembles. Darkness gathers. The demons begin to stir.”

And so they have. The demons have stirred. And they are among us.

We can blame a once obscure NW Arabian god for earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and tsunamis; we can blame witches for disease – or we can turn to science to try to understand these things. The Bible doesn’t explain the ocean’s growing dead zones; it doesn’t explain our planet, which the Bible would have us believe to be permanent and unchanging, but which science shows to be in constant flux, a living, breathing organism. The challenges faced by our modern world cannot be met by a book written by men with a Bronze Age knowledge base.

We could use Carl Sagan now, we could use his voice, his wit, his ability to make science comprehensible to people. We could use him as a voice against the imposition of dead-end religious doctrines and dogmas that make of science a heresy, we could use him to re-light the candle that holds back the demons in the darkness.

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