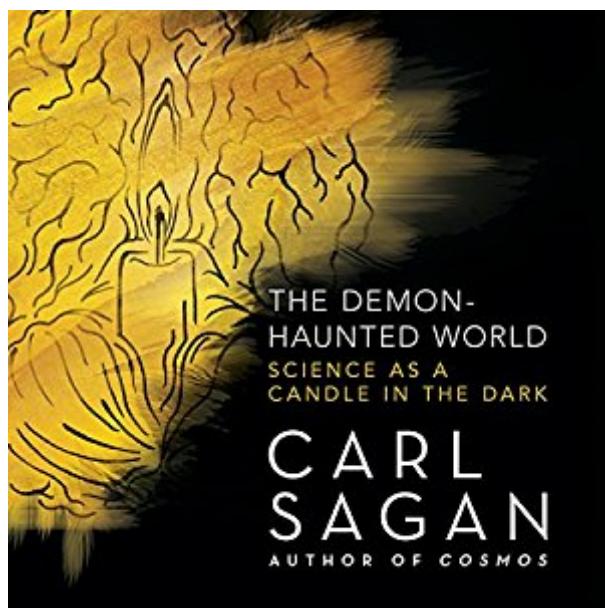


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The Demon-Haunted World: Science As A Candle In The Dark



Synopsis

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. Introductory music from the original score for *Cosmos: A SpaceTime Odyssey* composed by Alan Silvestri, used with permission from Cosmos Studios, Inc. and Chappers Music. All rights reserved. Special thanks to Fuzzy Planets, Inc.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 17 hours and 23 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Brilliance Audio

Audible.com Release Date: May 30, 2017

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B06XTZ6QMN

Best Sellers Rank: #5 in Books > Science & Math > Experiments, Instruments & Measurement > Methodology & Statistics #6 in Books > Science & Math > Reference #48 in Books > Science & Math > History & Philosophy

Customer Reviews

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.

If I was teaching a freshman philosophy course, or perhaps social science or psychology or several other topics, I'd assign this book. The basic message is the significance of a skeptical, evidence-based mind-set that respects the scientific method. With lots of interesting anecdotes, some pretty insightful analyses of the situation in modern (published in 1996) education and public information, the risks involved in allowing ignorance to become more respectful than learning -- all issues that have been at the heart of Carl Sagan's entire life. He does drop in a few really technical matters, as when he discourses on Maxwell's equations in a chapter titled "Maxwell and the Nerds," but in doing so argues for the importance of science journalism and popularization. Fortunately, in our modern world, even past 1996, it has become increasingly possible to present scientific facts in a way that those of us without a specialized education can understand. At the very least, we owe it to our democracy to understand as much as necessary to make informed decisions about the major issues of the day. I've always loved Carl Sagan ever since I first saw the *Cosmos* TV series, and this is one of his very best books. I recommend it to every reasonably literate person.

Sagan takes you on a journey of logic. This is a great reminder to those in the scientific community why our work is so important and a great introduction to those outside the world of science, its process and use.

A must read! The title says it all. There was so much fascinating information I hadn't heard about the history of all sorts of woo. And an easy but compelling read. This classic demonstrates that Carl Sagan was not only brilliant, but he could present complex concepts easily understood by laypeople, and all the while keep us entertained. Now we have similarly talented Neil deGrasse

Tyson, but Carl Sagan paved the way.

If you have never had the pleasure of reading a book by Carl Sagan, this is a great one to start with. Sagan's effortless prose ranges over the vast field of superstition and pseudo-science showing us the universe is a far more wonderful place than these cheap fakes reveal. A real treat.

I think about this book almost everyday, whenever I see things on the news, hear people talking, etc. I swear, his books should be taught in schools, like philosophy & humanities, ethics, stuff like that. Like the stupid guy who said vaccinations cause Autism. Ugh. It's so hard to convince people of the truth, all with evidence and experiments and all the proof in the world and they won't listen. But when you're spinning a bunch of BS they believe it with no question. I was screaming "I know, right?!" with almost every point he made.

As I read this book I can hear Professor Sagan's voice in my head. I even read it out loud sometimes in my very poor impersonation of him. I like the way he simplifies science so that even I can understand it. I hope all people can come to grips with the way the universe really is and not the way we wish it could be. Just look around and see instead of believing stories we have been told since we were little children. Ask questions, don't just blindly believe. I wish he was still around because the world is a lesser place without Carl in it.

An excellent primer for those looking to try out the scientific way of approaching life, or those looking to develop a robust method of applying skepticism without falling into the trap of having a closed mind. A little preachy in places, and told in a folksy voice so it can take its time getting to the point in places, but the lessons the essays teach are worth reading if only to illuminate the way scientists think. And it shows people why "it's only a theory" is a crock of something unpleasant, a linguistic trick, used mendaciously in most cases and parroted back by those who could genuinely benefit from reading this book. Everyone should be taught the lessons in this book on how to approach life's questions. Then they could form their own opinions from an informed perspective without the help of demagogues on either side.

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