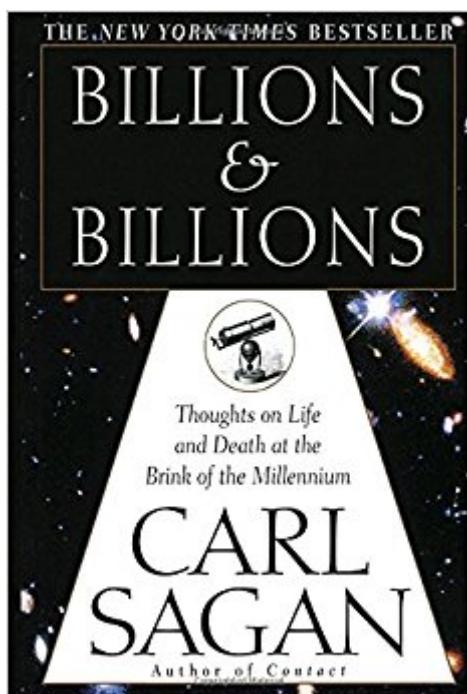


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Billions & Billions: Thoughts On Life And Death At The Brink Of The Millennium



Synopsis

In the final book of his astonishing career, Carl Sagan brilliantly examines the burning questions of our lives, our world, and the universe around us. These luminous, entertaining essays travel both the vastness of the cosmos and the intimacy of the human mind, posing such fascinating questions as how did the universe originate and how will it end, and how can we meld science and compassion to meet the challenges of the coming century? Here, too, is a rare, private glimpse of Sagan's thoughts about love, death, and God as he struggled with fatal disease. Ever forward-looking and vibrant with the sparkle of his unquenchable curiosity, *Billions & Billions* is a testament to one of the great scientific minds of our day.

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Customer Reviews

It is doubtful that there is anyone unfamiliar with noted astronomer and science writer Sagan's ability to convey the wonder, excitement, and joy of science. This book is a wonderful, if eclectic, collection of essays, some reprinted from magazines of national prominence, covering a wide range of topics: the invention of chess, life on Mars, global warming, abortion, international affairs, the nature of government, and the meaning of morality. Writing with clarity and an understanding of human nature, Sagan offers hope for humanity's future as he illuminates our ability to understand ourselves and to change the world for the better. The last chapter is an account of his struggle with myelodysplasia, the illness that finally took his life in December 1996. An epilog written by his wife is a personal account of the man rather than the scientist admired by so many. This last book is a fitting capstone to a distinguished career. Enthusiastically recommended.-?James Olson,

Carl Sagan died last December, and as a result, these essays exude a feeling of interrupted eloquence. The celebrity planetary astronomer possibly had more books to write that could have compared favorably with his *Cosmos* (1980) or *Pale Blue Dot* (1994), but disappointingly, this collection does not bloom like those dependable library perennials. Perhaps expectations are overly inflated with a new Sagan exposition in hand--but here, expectations rapidly deflate upon seeing that the contents comprise much reprinted material, such as nonscience articles he and his wife and coauthor, Ann Druyan, wrote for a Sunday newspaper supplement. One *Parade* piece, advancing their argument in favor of legal abortion, sourly criticizes televangelist Pat Robertson for using his influence to mobilize opposition to the 1990 article, a point that skates over the sway the authors themselves were trying to exert in the abortion controversy by means of their article. In other chapters, the subjects are flat--an explanation of the origin of Sagan's brand-name cliche "billions and billions" --or the subjects are rudimentary. Blemishes apart, this collection offers some worthwhile essays: his account of battling cancer or summaries of the enviro-political issues that he weighed in on, such as ozone depletion and the fossil fuels^atmospheric warming nexus. However uneven and eclectic, this tome still flashes with Sagan's curiosity, wonder, and humanity concerning the scientific enterprise. Gilbert Taylor --This text refers to the Audio CD edition.

If you've read any other books by Carl Sagan, you'll recognize a lot of what's in here. This book is a compendium of all the things he believed needed to be dealt with by the human species. For some issues, he brings up old ideas in new ways. For others, he repeats what he's already said before. That being said.... I still immensely enjoyed the book.

I have to very much agree with "Very Enjoyable" by Andrew who posted his review on June 2, 2012, as well as "Peter Payne," - Peter in Japan, posted on September 22, 2011. They both discuss basically the same points, and I agree that the first and last chapters are the best. Yes, "Very Enjoyable" is right in that it does discuss mathematics, but that is not the only thing, as he does this mainly in scientific notations which Sagan explains in such a way that anyone interested, and doesn't remember it from high school can comprehend. He is just giving a review, and talks about other universes and such (as "National Geographic" prove in an article in 2007 that our universe is a universe inside another black hole), so as to the last chapter, which is wonderful, does give a little

more evidence in more of an afterlife than Sagan believed. Peter Payne is also right in that this book is wonderful, and I enjoyed it very much, but that other books by Sagan (The Dragons of Eden: Speculations on the Evolution of Human Intelligence, Broca's Brain: Reflections on the Romance of Science, The Demon-Haunted World, Pale Blue Dot, Cosmos, and others, prove his genius a lot more. This is why I give it four stars, as this work is Sagan at his most readable, does not give the same kind of learning and reading simultaneously. This work's first and third parts are the most enjoyable! Like "Very Enjoyable," the second part is takes a lot of patience on the reader's part by the end. Please forgive my use of other's reviews to make a point, but to comment on each would be the same as is written here, and that would be as scratching on the patience as the second part of this work! Thank you so very much! WilesWales

Everybody must read this book. It opens your mind regarding all kinds of subjects in the world. And must of all very easy to read and understand.

I'm a big fan of the late Carl Sagan and have read many of his books. Most 5 stars. See my reviews. This was the last book he wrote as he was dying with a rare form of blood cancer. His wife Ann Druyan has 2 chapters she co wrote in the book as well as the Epilogue as Carl was dying with pneumonia caused by his weakened immune system from chemotherapy against his blood cancer. She had to write the acknowledgements as Carl had passed away. In Billions and Billions we see a picture of both the late Johnny Carson (a serious amateur astronomer) and Carl laughing on the Tonight Show. Carl says he never used the term Billions and Billions but that it became linked to him as a possible description of all the stars in the galaxies. Carl did it all. Co founder and past president of the Planetary society I belong to. He had over 20 honorary degrees from various colleges and universities bestowed on him. He was a fantastic author of many books and scientific articles including the highly successful Cosmos TV series, the book Contact and more. He had the uncanny ability to write difficult scientific ideas in ways for the average layman to understand in an enjoyable reading session. He also helped in the NASA Viking Mars robot landing mission, the gold plated disc that is supposed to last a billion years sent out into deep space with Voyager having mankind's descriptions, music and more, as well as helping to understand the Venus Greenhouse effect that has Venus at almost 900F is hot enough to melt lead and tin with an atmosphere 90 times as dense as Earth's. He was much more optimistic than me on the possibility of many different kinds of life in the universe in some very harsh environments. Carl tried not to put down others scientific theories and ideas but wanted data in the open for all to test. Not closed data and wishful

thinking. In Billions and Billions again we see his ease of handling huge numbers by scientific notation. There was a very interesting chapter on the destruction of the Ozone layer and the steps we have taken to repair it before it's too late and what more needs done. Then there is a chapter on Global warming and a warning that he hopes it's not too late and more must be done to get off fossil fuels as soon as possible before we have a runaway greenhouse effect like planet Venus. His biggest fears are the 70,000 plus hydrogen bombs/weapons stockpiled by the US and ex Soviet Union. Carl explains there are so many nuclear weapons that could cause a mankind extinction level event. He says the risk is too great and all countries must disarm now. He even gave a speech to both the US government and Soviet leaders about the need to trust one another to disarm before it's too late. Carl writes about having to go to the head cancer center in Seattle 4 times to battle his reoccurring blood cancer and his repeated bone marrow transplants from his younger sister Cari. His battle for me was heartbreakingly sad and I had much empathy for him. I shed a few tears reading the later part of the book. He tells his kids including Sasha and youngest 5 year old Sam he loves them all. Anne Druyan's closing remark on the back cover made me shed a tear too. It was emotional to me and I got choked up. Carl's wonderful family and wife Annie was there for him in the end at his bed side. Dr. Carl Sagan a great scientist/astronomer who helped so many to partially understand the wonders of the universe and fought long and hard against nuclear weapons, global warming and the Ozone layer depletion. A wonderful father and husband. Again as a 40 plus year amateur astronomer I miss him and even though he never knew of me, I'm glad to call him my friend. 5 stars a great book.

Sagan!!! what else needs to be said, what a pleasant, awake, evolved human to follow thoughts with..

Since the days of Cosmos, I've been a fan of Carl Sagan. I especially enjoyed the tear-jerking last chapter as Carl writes from the Hutch in Seattle just before he died. Ann Druyan's epilogue brought me to tears.

This was a book I knew I would enjoy before I even opened it to begin. And it didn't fail, I not only enjoyed it but I feel transformed by it. Carl Sagan and Ann Druyan will always be great people who contributes so optimistically to the human species. In no matter what way your thinking works: find your truth, find yourself, find your peace. This is a great contribution you can give to humankind, a civilization of the cosmos.

Anything by Sagan is a great read.

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