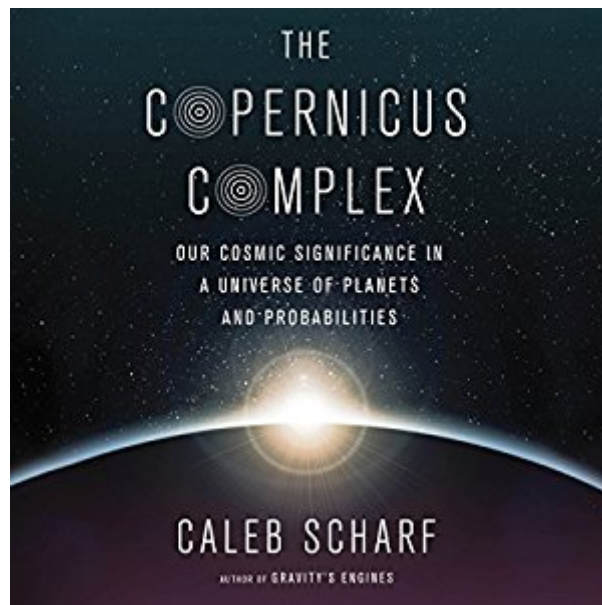


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The Copernicus Complex: Our Cosmic Significance In A Universe Of Planets And Probabilities



Synopsis

A Publishers Weekly Top-10 Science Book of Fall 2014. In the 16th century, Nicolaus Copernicus dared to go against the establishment by proposing that Earth rotates around the Sun. Having demoted Earth from its unique position in the cosmos to one of mediocrity, Copernicus set in motion a revolution in scientific thought. This perspective has influenced our thinking for centuries. However, recent evidence challenges the Copernican Principle, hinting that we do in fact live in a special place, at a special time, as the product of a chain of unlikely events. But can we be significant if the Sun is still just one of a billion trillion stars in the observable universe? And what if our universe is just one of a multitude of others - a single slice of an infinity of parallel realities? In *The Copernicus Complex*, the renowned astrophysicist Caleb Scharf takes us on a scientific adventure, from tiny microbes within the Earth to distant exoplanets, probability theory, and beyond, arguing that there is a solution to this contradiction, a third way of viewing our place in the cosmos, if we weigh the evidence properly. As Scharf explains, we do occupy an unusual time in a 14-billion-year-old universe, in a somewhat unusual type of solar system surrounded by an ocean of unimaginable planetary diversity: hot Jupiters with orbits of less than a day, planet-size rocks spinning around dead stars, and a wealth of alien super-Earths. Yet life here is built from the most common chemistry in the universe, and we are a snapshot taken from billions of years of biological evolution.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 9 hours and 2 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Macmillan Audio

Audible.com Release Date: September 9, 2014

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B00NC7JY7S

Best Sellers Rank: #74 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Science > Astronomy #1116

in Books > Science & Math > Astronomy & Space Science > Cosmology #1444 in Books >

Science & Math > Astronomy & Space Science > Astrophysics & Space Science

Customer Reviews

Relatively plebeian review, not being as scientifically familiar with the known universe as other reviewers...I greatly appreciated the historical connections the author makes with the major observations in his book...it provided clarity and perspective. I enjoyed reading his subjective interpretations. We here on earth may be universally significant but it stretches my imagination to accept that. The immensity of the known universe as described in this book makes that difficult. Two thoughts the book leaves me with are (1) Stephen Hawking wasn't being absent minded when he wondered if we might be better off not making contact with existing intelligent alien species. So many people address such aliens as being +/- 1,000 years further along than us. But, a billion years further evolved might make for, he said, unpleasant surprises. (2) Even scientifically rigorous sifting through the chaff of UFO observations has left us with a good number of credible and detailed sightings. Why wouldn't the author factor this into the formula for estimating the probability of other existing intelligent species? Great read!

The Copernicus Complex opens with a lucid, condensed history of science. After putting the earth in its cosmic place (insignificant), Scharf traces the probable origins of life and then confronts the central problem: is mankind special? A discussion of probability theory leads finally to the sudden appearance of chaos; chaos (and inadequate data) make valid probabilities at least unlikely, if not impossible. At the heart of the book is a pervasive sense of sadness. Since the death of God, scientists have sought an answer to the meaning of life. Failing to find a scientific answer to a philosophical question, they seek at least to find company (SETI). As the universe expands and the earth spins towards its inevitable destruction, this effort becomes increasingly futile, inspiring the author to close with the melancholy proposal that we should send a message out to the universe "to signify the fact that we once existed on a place special to us that we called, simply, earth." Beautifully written, the book is a worthy addition to the field of cosmology.

Caleb Scharf is an amazing writer. In "The Copernicus Complex" Caleb talks about our place in the universe, beginning with Copernicus' discovery that the earth is not the center of the universe, and then exploring whether the earth with all its life friendly properties is unique or rare in the cosmos. The author makes wonderful use of allegory and describes details in a creative and colorful way that is very inspiring. I enjoyed this book so much that I went on to purchase his previous book "Gravities Engines". Even though I read a lot about astronomy and cosmology, I have learned a lot of new information from both this work and his previous writing.

This incredible book should be mandatory reading in high school, if we can raise the bar for science education to a level where students could actually comprehend it. The sad part is that an ignorant world interprets moral absolutism based on foolish superstitions and cannot accept that science is the arbitrator of reality. Humanity does have a bright destiny in the cosmos but only if we abandon our ideological hatred for each other. Extinction of our species would be a perverse waste of space.

Are we alone in the universe? Yes, we are... so far. Are we special? Yes, we are... but probably only in the details. Are we significant? It depends... on our choice as a species to persist trying to answer the first two questions! A stimulating read about our search for our place in the universe!

Caleb Scharf has taken a highly complex subject and made it readable and understandable for non-scientists. The big question of how we humans got here and whether we are unique in the universe is absolutely intriguing. The relationship of the micro level to the macro universe is something we don't normally consider. But Scharf puts it all in perspective. This is a phenomenal book which will be enjoyable to anyone who has ever wondered about these basic questions of our existence and whether there is similar -- or even dissimilar -- life on one of the many planets that seem to be situated like our own. I highly recommend this book.

This is a fine history lesson on early cosmology. After that, a wordy and repetitive exposition of the author's uncertainty and speculation. There are perhaps better books; perhaps worse. But it was tough to get to the end and then discover that I hadn't really been exposed to much of anything that I hadn't already known or at least surmised.

The book summarized many current research topics on cosmology and biology/evolution. Interesting and fun read. I did not have a Copernicus Complex when I started the book but when I completed it I had a headache. The author tried pretty hard to convince me that we are a lot closer to placing ourselves in cosmological stew. We are at the boundary between chaos and order so I have decided to "eat my dessert first", forget paying taxes and do a rope-less climb of El Capitan"

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