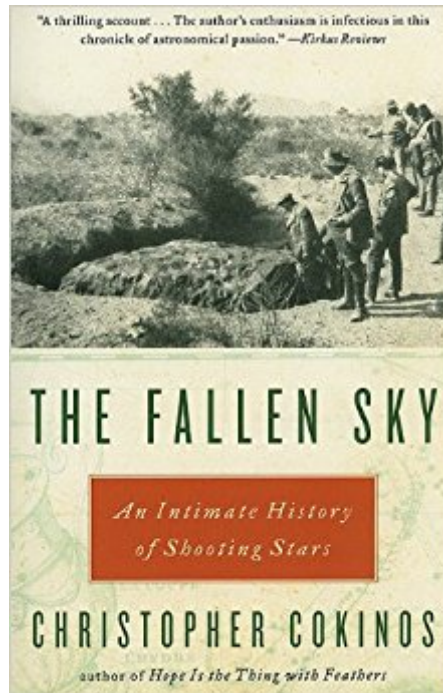


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The Fallen Sky: An Intimate History Of Shooting Stars



Synopsis

In this acclaimed volume, prizewinning poet and nature writer Christopher Cokinos takes us on an epic journey from Antarctica to outer space, weaving together natural history, memoir, and in-depth profiles of amateur researchers, rogue scientists, and stargazing dreamers to tell the riveting tale of how the study of meteorites became a modern science.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I will confess I have not finished this book yet, having only gotten as far as Ch. 6. I wish I could rate this as two separate books. The first, a history of meteorites and meteor hunters (grand characters, many of them), is absorbing. The science is written at a level that I, a curious non-scientist, can understand, enjoy, and learn from. The second book, unfortunately, is Cokinos' self-absorbed ramblings about his emotional life. I'm sorry, but I wanted to know more about astronomy, not about his ex-wife, girlfriend, his suffering, his pain--- blah blah blah. I'll finish the book, but I plan to skip any passage where Cokinos makes the universe a metaphor for his own angst.

I, not unlike Cokinos' experience in his later chapters recounting his Antarctic adventure - found myself in the beginning of this book fascinated by the world of meteorites and their passionate devotees, and eventually dreading every paragraph of the writer's increasing self absorption. Like Cokinos trapped on the ice - by the last chapter I wanted out. For me a story is more interesting than the storyteller - with few exceptions. Edward Hoagland has found a balance. Bill Bryson even at his

misanthropic worst (best) can pull it off. John McPhee is still the gold standard though. I remember "The Survival Of The Bark Canoe" as a great read about a quirky, passionate individual. I don't really know what McPhee thinks of Henri Valencourt nor do I care. I still liked "The Fallen Sky" due to the fact that it seemed well researched and well written. When Cokinos was describing historical events or painting a picture of a fanatical Robert Haag he was at his best. His opinions regarding the many controversial figures in meteorite history were thankfully kept close to the vest in a fair and journalistic manner.

The author's personal difficulties ruined the flow, and subtracted from any enjoyment. There are hundreds of mid-life crisis novels and autobiographies - it is tragic that the rare chance to produce an interesting book about meteorites has been lost. I couldn't finish it.

In this remarkable book, Cokinos demonstrates (once again) that he is a brilliant writer and profound thinker about the intersections between physical and spiritual worlds. Yes, science is at the core of this book, and I gained a wealth of knowledge about meteors and meteorites--knowledge I have shared with friends and my own children as we gazed at the night sky. But it is the myriad ways by which he made me care, personally, about that information that moves this book into a different realm of accomplishment--into the company of Loren Eiseley and Ed Hoagland and Peter Matthiessen. It begins with compelling story telling, and Cokinos is one of the best at sifting through the often scattered and contradictory facts of an individual life and finding the underlying vision. In this case, it is the lives of significant (and sometimes forgotten) "star chasers," people whose fascination with meteorites have led to some of the most important scientific discoveries of their age. People who, because of that fascination, have achieved fame, but also infamy; extreme joy and deep loss. As I read their stories, I found myself moving between interest in their individual lives, and reflections on the more universal story of human longing--for intimacy with the unknown, for fulfillment, for knowledge, for adventure, for transcendence. I was thus grateful that Cokinos risked telling his own story of longing and loss, however painful. I would have found it at best unsatisfying, at worst unethical, for the author to have explored the stories and motives of people who risked their fortunes, their marriages, their sanity, even their lives on meteoric quests, without exploring any of his own. It is the universe within, as well as without, that transforms this "history"--of people and meteorites--into something more intimate, more meaningful, and ultimately, more useful. A guide to help us seek, in our own lives, the elusive meeting places between earth and heaven, flesh and star.

I agree with an earlier comment - the lack of any photos save the dust-jacket is baffling considering the author mentions taking photographs in several passages. Was distracted and put-off by the self-absorbed rehashing of the author's mid-life crisis. I'll vote this as most-likely to be picked up by PBS. "Seeing In The Dark" meets "Falling Down".

I had such high hopes for this book. It looked intriguing at first, and I was really getting into the meteorite info, but several chapters into it, I had to return it to the Library. I just could no longer stand the author's incessant whining about his personal life. The meteorite parts are great, but the rest needed a strong-willed editor to prune it out. That, and the total lack of photos, make this a poor choice for those wanting a good read about meteorites. So sad.

I really hate to read his personal life. I want to read meteorites story only. This is a book for a self indulgent writer to boast his personal life, which I do not want to know or concern at all. May be editor want to prolong the book to sell it at a higher price.

This would normally be exactly the kind of book I would not want to put down - well-written and full of fascinating facts about a subject that I was only marginally familiar with; all in all, great non-fiction. On the other hand, I found it very off-putting whenever the author celebrated or otherwise mused about his mutually 'illicit' relationship with another partner. Who cares if he and his new partner "made love" while in a small German town? This could have been a five star superb contribution to the literature concerning meteors, but the tawdry sojourns into his new love-life detract from the theme and mar the work.

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