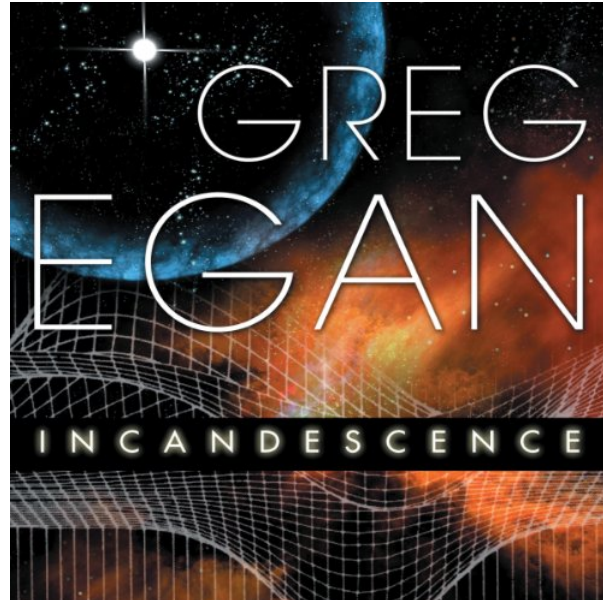
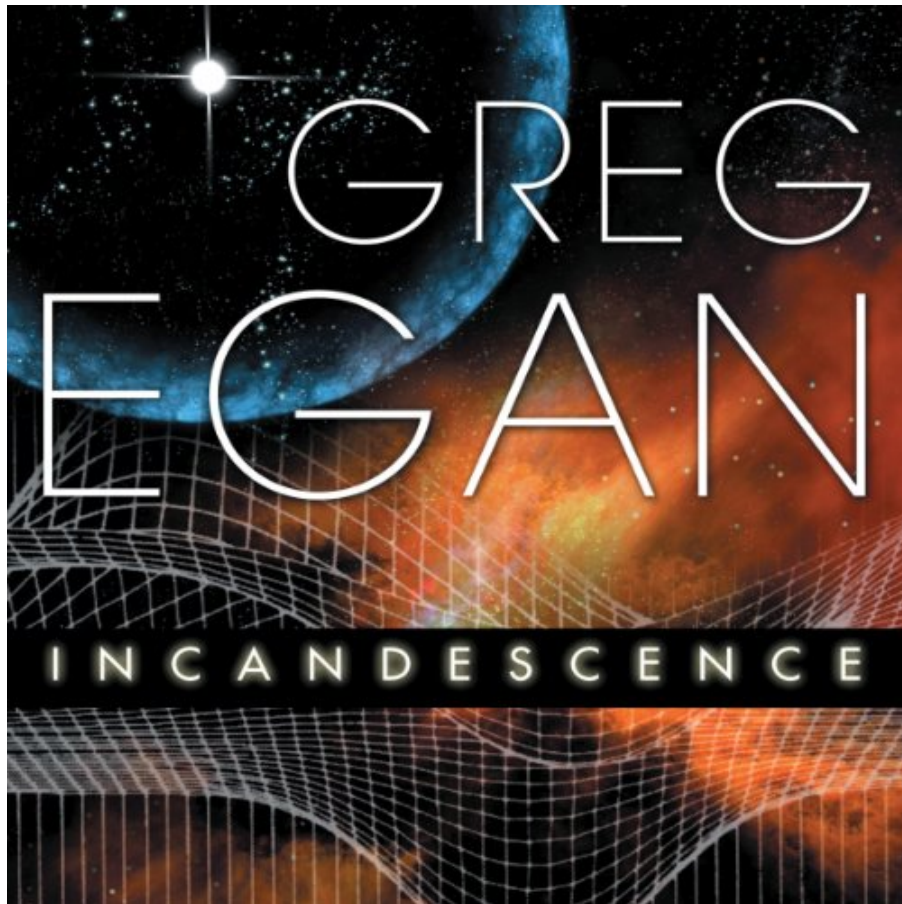


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The long-awaited new audiobook from Greg Egan! Hugo Award-winning author Egan returns to the field with *Incandescence*, a new novel of hard SF. The Amalgam spans nearly the entire galaxy, and is composed of innumerable beings from a wild variety of races, some human or near it, some entirely other. The one place that they cannot go is the bulge, the bright, hot center of the galaxy. There dwell the Aloof, who for millions of years have deflected any and all attempts to communicate with or visit them. So when Rakesh is offered an opportunity to travel within their sphere, in search of a lost race, he cannot turn it down. Roi is a member of that lost race, which is not only lost to the Amalgam, but lost to itself. In their world, there is but toil, and history and science are luxuries that they can ill afford. Rakesh's journey will take him across millennia and light years. Roi's will take her across vistas of learning and discovery just as vast.

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Most helpful customer reviews

58 of 60 people found the following review helpful.

Egan Channels Robert L. Forward and Hal Clement in a Hard SF Tale

By Paul R. Potts

Greg Egan is one of my favorite science fiction authors, but he seems to be nearly unknown in the U.S. I have been waiting for this book to arrive for some time, so I wound up ordering a British edition from Amazon UK. This review assumes the text is the same.

Egan's story is set in the galactic core, inhabited by a race known as the Aloof, because they seem almost indifferent to any attempts at communication from the Amalgam, the loose network of civilizations that inhabit the rest of the galaxy. However, they do allow thrill-seeking members of the Amalgam to enter their transportation network, digitizing themselves for transmission at the speed of light across the galactic core, instead of the long way around it.

A chunk of rock containing DNA leads a couple to commit their efforts to tracking down the mystery of a lost alien race inside the Aloof-controlled core. That's the setup, but the real fascination of this book is the weird physics and civilization of the surviving aliens, who live on a fragment of rock in the gravity well of a neutron star. By a process of deduction and scientific measurement using primitive tools the inhabitants are able to deduce their true situation in the universe and also to come to understand the perils they face.

Much of the book consists of the scientific inquiries of the aliens, rendered in great detail, in particular the way they deduce their orbital mechanics by measuring the forces at work inside their world. It reminds me of

Robert L. Forward's fantastic hard SF novel *Dragon's Egg*, which describes a race living on the surface of a neutron star, their bodies made out of degenerate matter, and also of Hal Clement's *Mission of Gravity*.

Egan tries to make his stories character-driven, and although we do wind up caring what happens to his characters, he really shines at the physics. If you don't have a good working knowledge of gravitation and the forces that act on a body while in an orbit or rotating, you won't really get much out of this book. Perhaps that dooms it to a relatively small audience. But if you like physics and you like speculative fiction, and in particular like thinking about the scientific method and how we came to discover what we know about the universe, you just might love it!

46 of 48 people found the following review helpful.

Remaining Aloof

By Mike Fazey

Egan's first novel for 6 years is set in a very far future where an evolved humanity has spread out to inhabit the galaxy's spiral arms, where lifespans are measured in millennia and travel is possible almost anywhere in the galaxy. The exception is the central galactic bulge which is inhabited by the aptly named Aloof, who exist in splendid isolation and firmly but gently repel all attempts to go there.

Sounds pretty intriguing, doesn't it? The Aloof are a mystery. Obviously highly advanced, but unwilling to interact with humanity. Until two intrepid humans accept an invitation to travel to into Aloof territory to examine a strange rock world inhabited by sentient insect-like creatures.

Still sounds intriguing, doesn't it? As always, Egan is concerned with hard science - mathematics, physics, genetics and astronomy - and indeed the nature of scientific discovery. And therein lies the problem. *Incandescence* suffers from the same shortcoming as did *Schild's Ladder* - too much science, not enough fiction. Both the human and insectoid characters are painted far too thinly to arouse any real emotion and the dialogue serves mainly as a vehicle for explaining the science rather than giving any insight into the characters themselves. As a reader I felt a kind of intellectual detachment from the events - like I was watching but not particularly engaged. Rather like the Aloof, in fact.

Nonetheless, the science is intriguing, even for a non-scientific type like me, and the ideas are really big. So, if that's your thing, you'll probably enjoy it more than I did. For me, though, the biggest most intriguing mystery of all, the Aloof themselves, remained unsolved. Indeed, I gleaned little insight into their nature or their motives. For me they remained as aloof as ever.

I still think Egan is one of the best SF writers around, but *Incandescence* is not his most engaging work.

53 of 61 people found the following review helpful.

Where was the editor?

By Robert C. Litwack

While the book has a wonderfully evoked sophisticated far future, that does not forgive the missing fundamental requirement that the plot go somewhere and make internal sense. The two, obviously converging plot lines don't converge. I had to go back and re-read the ending to make sure I hadn't missed something. Another reviewer here confirmed my confusion --- you can't tell if one plot preceeded or followed the other by a huge span of time. It is also possible that the Splinter of the "Splinter" plot line was NOT the populated fragment found in the other plot. The Aloof remain so from beginning to end.

I would only recommend this book to college physics students having a hard time and looking for a painless way to have orbital mechanics explained without math.

Given Egan's earlier, much better work, I was very disappointed. Perhaps there is a sequel in the works that will tie things together. If so, would it have hurt to put a teaser to the next part so that we don't have to

wonder if Egan and his editors went over the edge. Which brings me to the title for my review. Where were the editors? A published book is not just the work of the author. Decent editing could have saved this book. Likewise critical reading in draft form by some cogent sci-fi readers or authors.

If this is part one of an unannounced series shame on Egan and the publishing house. I don't mind buying several books to have one story told (although I would prefer one, fat book to three skinny ones) I don't like be lured into thinking I'm buying a complete work only to find I have a fragment. I actually prefer to sit back and wait until the series is complete and then buy and read them at once, in sequence.

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