



2 x 60

# Galileo's



BATTLE FOR THE HEAVENS

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NOVA celebrates the story of the father of modern science and his struggle to get Church authorities to accept the truth of his astonishing discoveries, in *Galileo's Battle for the Heavens*. The program is based on Dava Sobel's bestselling book, *Galileo's Daughter*, which reveals a new side to the famously stubborn scientist—that his closest confidante was his illegitimate daughter, Sister Maria Celeste, a cloistered nun.

Simon Callow (*Four Weddings and a Funeral*, *Shakespeare in Love*) plays Galileo in dramatic reenactments of key moments from his life: his pioneering telescopic observations of the Moon and planets, his revolutionary experiments with falling objects, and his fateful trial before the Inquisition for heresy.

Born in 1564, Galileo lived a generation after Nicolas Copernicus published his controversial theory that the Earth was not the center of the universe around which the heavens revolved. Galileo supported the idea that the Earth turned on its axis and that it, along with the planets, revolved around the Sun. The view was considered absurd by most scholars since it contradicted certain passages in the Bible and challenged the common-sense experience of the Earth as a solid, unmoving object.

But Galileo found merit in the idea, especially after he aimed a newly invented instrument called the telescope at the night sky and saw that the Moon and planets were far from the perfect realms accepted by the Catholic Church. His discovery of moons orbiting Jupiter and phases in the appearance of Venus, analogous to the phases of the Moon, supported the Copernican view.

The Church insisted that Galileo couch his speculations in hypothetical terms only. But he stepped over the line in 1632 when he published his *Dialogue on the Two Chief World Systems*, in which a simpleton mouths the views of the then-reigning pope, Urban VIII. This was too much for the Pope, and Galileo was hauled before the Inquisition, which had tortured and burned to death malefactors for far less.

Galileo's clash with the Vatican put Sister Maria Celeste in an awkward position, but she continued to correspond and meet with her father and even served as his editor.

Though his life was spared, Galileo was put under house arrest, and the *Dialogue* was banned. But it was a pyrrhic victory for the Church. Galileo's arguments eventually "won the war" for the Copernican theory, making it intellectually respectable to believe that the Earth in fact moves, says Professor Gingerich.

Previously an obscure branch of philosophy, science was now on the road to becoming the preeminent method for discovering how the world works—thanks to Galileo.

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## NOVA®

CREDITS

*Writer and Producer:* David Axelrod

*Director:* Peter Jones

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