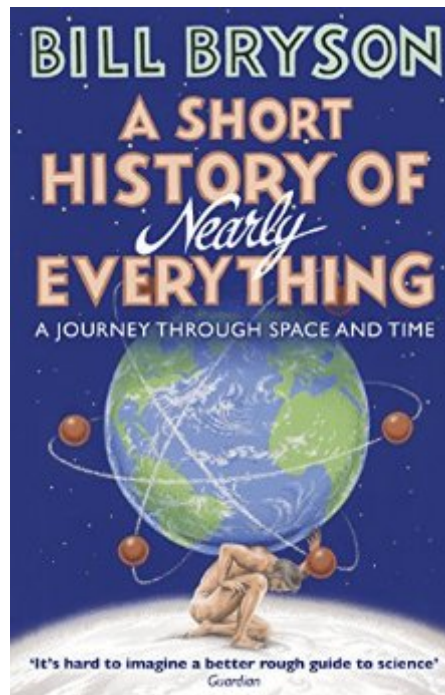


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A Short History Of Nearly Everything (Bryson)



Synopsis

Bill Bryson describes himself as a reluctant traveller, but even when he stays safely at home he can't contain his curiosity about the world around him. *A Short History of Nearly Everything* is his quest to understand everything that has happened from the Big Bang to the rise of civilization - how we got from there, being nothing at all, to here, being us. Bill Bryson's challenge is to take subjects that normally bore the pants off most of us, like geology, chemistry and particle physics, and see if there isn't some way to render them comprehensible to people who have never thought they could be interested in science. The ultimate eye-opening journey through time and space, *A Short History of Nearly Everything* is the biggest-selling popular science book of the 21st century, and reveals the world in a way most of us have never seen it before.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I picked this one up expecting "good". Instead, I got one of the most delightful reading experiences in science that I have ever had. What a wonderful surprise. Bryson tries to do what most school textbooks never manage to do, explain the context of science in a way that is relevant to the average person. At the beginning of the book, he recalls an event from his childhood when he

looked at a school text and saw a cross-section of our planet. He was transfixed by it, but noticed that the book just dryly presented the facts ("This is the core." "This part is molten rock." "This is the crust.", etc.), but never really explained HOW science came to know this particular set of facts. That, he quite correctly points out, is the most interesting part. And that is story he sets out to tell in this book. Bryson obviously spent a great deal of time and effort developing and checking his facts and presentation. He obviously enjoyed every minute of it too, and it shows. Never have I read a book where the author conveyed such joyful awe of what we have learned as a species (with the possible exception of some of Richard Feynman's books). My benchmark for this kind of book is usually; How well does it explain modern physics? There are few books out there that manage to explain relativity, quantum mechanics and string theory in a way that doesn't make your eyes glaze over. The Dancing Wu Li Masters by Gary Zukav is the best of the lot in my opinion. While this book did not change my opinion, Bryson's explanations of these mind-bending theories are not only lucid and sensible, they are also full of his telltale tongue-in-cheek side comments and therefore are just plain fun to read.

Bryson's "A Short History of Nearly Everything" is beautifully written, very entertaining and highly informative--and now, it is lavishly illustrated as well. Bryson is not a scientist, but rather a curious and observant writer who, several years ago, realized that he couldn't tell a quark from a quasar, or a proton from a protein. Bryson set out to cure his ignorance of things scientific, and the result was "A Short History of Nearly Everything," which was originally published in 2003. For readers who are new to science and its history, "A Short History of Nearly Everything" contains one remarkable revelation after another. It is amazing how enormous, tiny, complex and just plain weird the universe is. Learning about "everything" is a humbling experience, and I kept thinking of Stephen Crane's blank verse: "A man said to the Universe: 'Sir, I exist!' 'However,' replied the Universe, 'the fact has not created in me a sense of obligation.'" Just as engaging as Bryson's story of what we know is the parallel story of how we know it--from the first clever experiments to figure out how much the earth weighs to today's ongoing efforts to describe the origins of the universe itself, it becomes obvious that science is not an answer but a process, a way of learning about a world that always seems to have one more trick up its sleeve. Whatever else may be said about the universe, Bryson explains that learning about its mysteries is a very human endeavor.

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