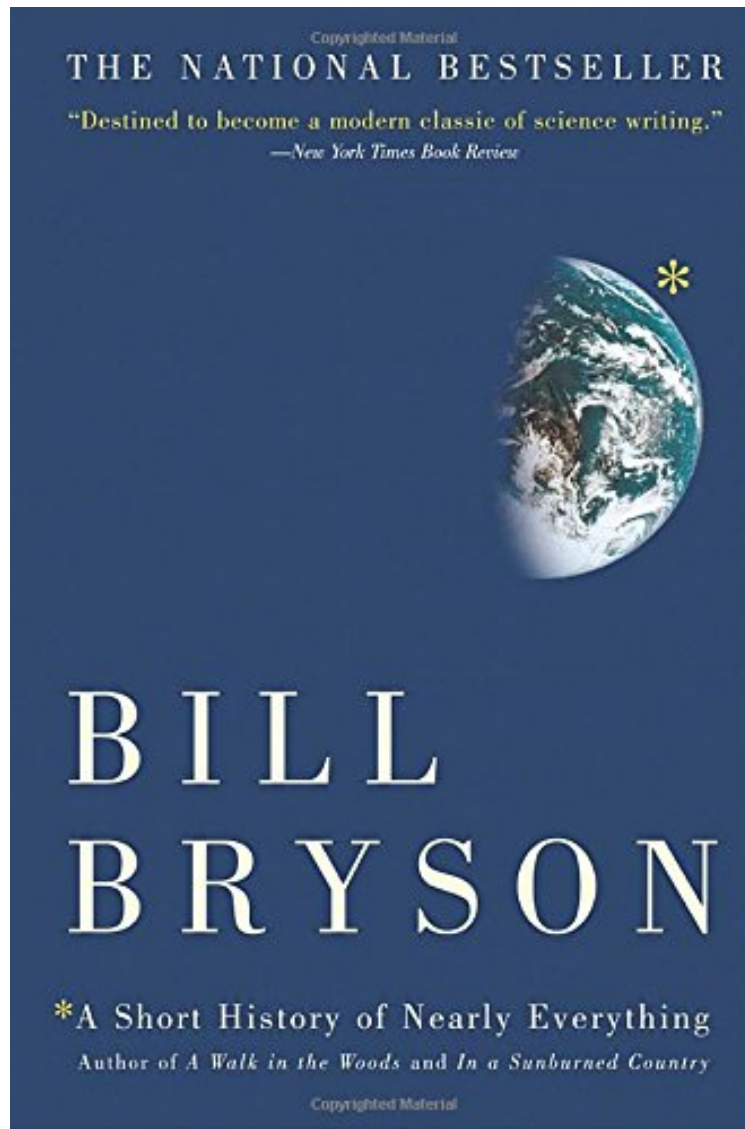


[Read ebook] A Short History of Nearly Everything

## A Short History of Nearly Everything

Bill Bryson

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**Bill Bryson : A Short History of Nearly Everything** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A Short History of Nearly Everything:

45 of 45 people found the following review helpful. A most unusual but extremely interesting book!By startup\_eng1A friend of mine recommended this book knowing that I like science. I'm used to reading about the sciences in single topics. This book surprised me in the amount of effort the author took to go through book after book of different

sciences, both old and new, and proceeded to connect the dots into several cohesive stories about our home, planet Earth, and its residents. The biggest surprise is how little we truly know about both and just how much luck was involved that both exist in their present form. This book is an easy read and should be understandable to anyone who has a basic interest in science. Be prepared though to being overwhelmed because there is a lot of information in this book, with references to other works. This book is best read in sections allowing yourself some time to think about what you have learned; and I'm sure you are going to learn at least a few things. I highly recommend this book to anyone who would like to understand what an amazing place our planet is and life that exists on it.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. "It is a curious fact that on Earth species death is, in the most literal sense, a way of life." By Alastair R Fleck This book, in common with just about everything Bill Bryson writes, is absolutely wonderful. It is an entertaining romp through, well, just about everything, as the title suggests. It is a potted history of science, mostly, which describes how we have studied this planet of ours and some of the astonishing conclusions that can be drawn from that study. Bryson's prose style is fluid and wickedly funny. To cite just a two examples: "Smith's revelation regarding strata heightened the moral awkwardness concerning extinctions. To begin with, it confirmed that God had wiped out creatures not occasionally but repeatedly. This made Him seem not so much careless as peculiarly hostile.... God, it appeared, hadn't wished to distract or alarm Moses with news of earlier, irrelevant extinctions." "We are each so atomically numerous and so vigorously recycled at death that a significant number of our atoms - up to a billion for each of us, it has been suggested - probably once belonged to Shakespeare. A billion more each came from Buddha and Genghis Khan and Beethoven, and any other historical figure you care to name. (The personages have to be historical, apparently, as it takes the atoms some decades to become thoroughly redistributed; however much you may wish it, you are not yet one with Elvis Presley.)" This book is chock-full of homages to famous scientists and many who were less lauded. There are some wild theories (and bad science) discussed, but always illustrated with surprising examples: "When you sit in a chair, you are not actually sitting there, but levitating above it at a height of one angstrom (a hundred millionth of a centimetre), your electrons and its electrons implacably opposed to any closer intimacy." Placing the human species within the context of the history of our planet, Bryson does end on a sobering note: "Most of what has lived on Earth has left behind no record at all.... It is a curious fact that on Earth species death is, in the most literal sense, a way of life.... 99.99 per cent of all species that have ever lived are no longer with us. 'To a first approximation,' as David Raup of the University of Chicago likes to say, 'all species are extinct.' For complex organisms, the average lifespan of a species is only about four million years - roughly about where we are now." A thoroughly enjoyable and stimulating book which does not pretend to be scientific, but is more about scientists and how they have changed the way we look at, and live in, our world.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. If I wanted, I could nitpick this book. By R. Pryor Some parts aren't quite as fascinating as others, and there's even the very occasional, small mis-statement of fact (Don't take the thing about glass flowing downward over the centuries as gospel, because it's not). But taken as a whole: This book is GREAT. It's so good, I, like many people, immediately read it a second time and took notes on all the stuff I found super-fascinating. Bryson not only gives you the straight dope on the nature of the universe and life's history in it, he gives you a lot of compelling human interest stories on the people who made the major discoveries and how they came about (Let me just say: Many, many scientists are at least as weird, vain, vindictive, stubborn, dishonest, or crazy as people in general. And many, many times, the chief roadblock in the way of scientific progress has been the united front of a face-palmingly hidebound scientific establishment). I love anecdotal stuff, and Bryson's retailing of the chain of events that led to the publication of Newton's "Principia" (involving a forty-shilling bet, the astronomer Edmond Halley, and a worst-selling book called "The History Of Fishes") is, to me, worth the price of the book all by itself. And that's just one of dozens and dozens of fascinating stories. By the time you finish this book, you almost can't fail to have a better picture of certain aspects of the universe (like, for example, how mind-blowingly big it really is), as well as a better understanding of how even the greatest scientists and thinkers can be, at times, spectacularly mistaken. Is it a perfect book? No. But the only people I WOULDN'T recommend it to are people who just have no interest whatsoever in science or scientific history.

One of the worlds most beloved writers and bestselling author of *One Summer* takes his ultimate journey into the most intriguing and intractable questions that science seeks to answer. In *A Walk in the Woods*, Bill Bryson trekked the Appalachian Trail well, most of it. In *A Sunburned Country*, he confronted some of the most lethal wildlife Australia has to offer. Now, in his biggest book, he confronts his greatest challenge: to understand, if possible, answer the oldest, biggest questions we have posed about the universe and ourselves. Taking as territory everything from the Big Bang to the rise of civilization, Bryson seeks to understand how we got from there being nothing at all to there being us. To that end, he has attached himself to a host of the worlds most advanced (and often obsessed) archaeologists, anthropologists, and mathematicians, travelling to their offices, laboratories, and field camps. He has read (or tried to read) their books, pestered them with questions, apprenticed himself to their powerful minds. *A Short History of Nearly Everything* is the record of this quest, and it is a sometimes profound, sometimes funny, and always supremely clear and entertaining adventure in the realms of human knowledge, as only Bill Bryson can render it. Science has never been more involving or entertaining.

.com From primordial nothingness to this very moment, *A Short History of Nearly Everything* reports what happened and how humans figured it out. To accomplish this daunting literary task, Bill Bryson uses hundreds of sources, from popular science books to interviews with luminaries in various fields. His aim is to help people like him, who rejected stale school textbooks and dry explanations, to appreciate how we have used science to understand the smallest particles and the unimaginably vast expanses of space. With his distinctive prose style and wit, Bryson succeeds admirably. Though *A Short History* clocks in at a daunting 500-plus pages and covers the same material as every science book before it, it reads something like a particularly detailed novel (albeit without a plot). Each longish chapter is devoted to a topic like the age of our planet or how cells work, and these chapters are grouped into larger sections such as "The Size of the Earth" and "Life Itself." Bryson chats with experts like Richard Fortey (author of *Life and Trilobite*) and these interviews are charming. But it's when Bryson dives into some of science's best and most embarrassing fights--Cope vs. Marsh, Conway Morris vs. Gould--that he finds literary gold. --Therese Littleton

From Publishers Weekly As the title suggests, bestselling author Bryson (*In a Sunburned Country*) sets out to put his irrepressible stamp on all things under the sun. As he states at the outset, this is a book about life, the universe and everything, from the Big Bang to the ascendancy of *Homo sapiens*. "This is a book about how it happened," the author writes. "In particular how we went from there being nothing at all to there being something, and then how a little of that something turned into us, and also what happened in between and since." What follows is a brick of a volume summarizing moments both great and curious in the history of science, covering already well-trod territory in the fields of cosmology, astronomy, paleontology, geology, chemistry, physics and so on. Bryson relies on some of the best material in the history of science to have come out in recent years. This is great for Bryson fans, who can encounter this material in its barest essence with the bonus of having it served up in Bryson's distinctive voice. But readers in the field will already have studied this information more in-depth in the originals and may find themselves questioning the point of a breakneck tour of the sciences that contributes nothing novel. Nevertheless, to read Bryson is to travel with a memoirist gifted with wry observation and keen insight that shed new light on things we mistake for commonplace. To accompany the author as he travels with the likes of Charles Darwin on the *Beagle*, Albert Einstein or Isaac Newton is a trip worth taking for most readers. Copyright 2003 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From Booklist Confessing to an aversion to science dating to his 1950s school days, Bryson here writes for those of like mind, perhaps out of guilt about his lack of literacy on the subject. Bryson reports he has been doing penance by reading popular-science literature published in the past decade or two, and buttonholing a few science authors, such as Richard Fortey (*Trilobite! Eyewitness to Evolution*, 2000). The authors Bryson talks to are invariably enthusiasts who, despite their eminence, never look on his questions as silly but, rather, view them as welcome indicators of interest and curiosity. Making science less intimidating is Bryson's essential selling point as he explores an atom; a cell; light; the age and fate of the earth; the origin of human beings. Bryson's organization is historical and his prose heavy on humanizing anecdotes about the pioneers of physics, chemistry, geology, biology, evolution and paleontology, or cosmology. To those acquainted with the popular-science writing Bryson has digested, his repackaging is a trip down memory lane, but to his fellow science-phobes, Bryson's tour has the same eye-opening quality to wonder and amazement as his wildly popular travelogues. Gilbert Taylor Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved