



A Short History of Nearly Everything

By Bill Bryson

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One of the world's 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—and, 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 world's 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.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

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.

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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*

Users Review

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