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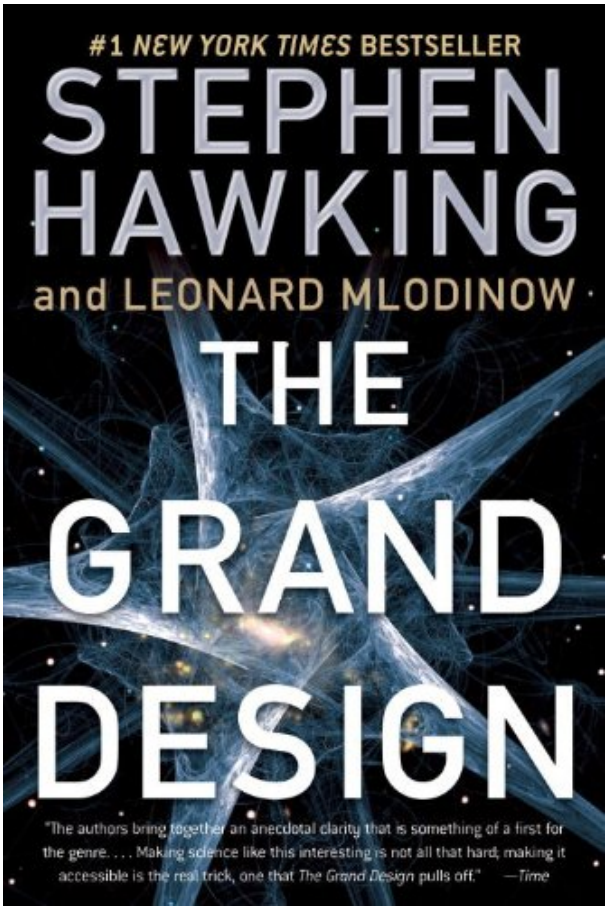

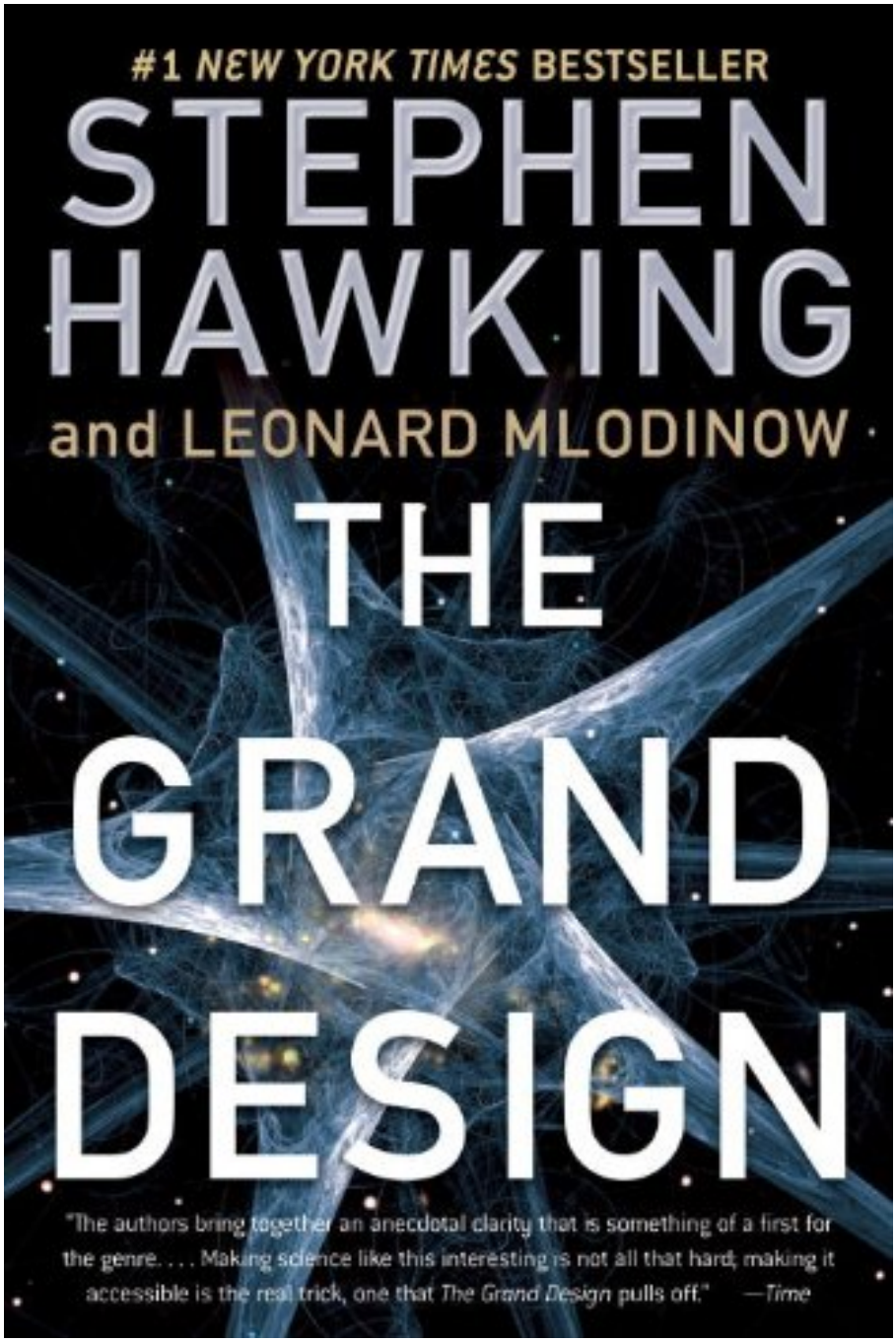

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Amazon.com Review
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(Photo © Philip Waterson, LBIPP, LRPS)

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#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

When and how did the universe begin? Why are we here? What is the nature of reality? Is the apparent “grand design” of our universe evidence of a benevolent creator who set things in motion—or does science offer another explanation? In this startling and lavishly illustrated book, Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow present the most recent scientific thinking about these and other abiding mysteries of the universe, in nontechnical language marked by brilliance and simplicity.

According to quantum theory, the cosmos does not have just a single existence or history. The authors explain that we ourselves are the product of quantum fluctuations in the early universe, and show how quantum theory predicts the “multiverse”—the idea that ours is just one of many universes that appeared spontaneously out of nothing, each with different laws of nature. They conclude with a riveting assessment of M-theory, an explanation of the laws governing our universe that is currently the only viable candidate for a “theory of everything”: the unified theory that Einstein was looking for, which, if confirmed, would represent the ultimate triumph of human reason.

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- Released on: 2012-02-21
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.96" h x .57" w x 6.00" l, .6 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 208 pages

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Most helpful customer reviews

402 of 444 people found the following review helpful.
Modern physics simplified
By S. Levi
This book is both shorter and more clearly written than any other physics book I've read, including Hawking's other works. If you are interested in physics but don't have the patience to read something long and detailed such as Roger Penrose's "The Road to Reality" then this is a great book for you. Even if you

simply want to compare "The Grand Design" to less detailed pop physics books with minimal mathematics, it holds up very well. Usually the analogies that lay physics books employ in an attempt to make intuitive sense of mathematical concepts become quite strained, but for some reason everything seems to work here and the authors don't push them too far.

I was concerned by some of the things that were said at the outset such as "philosophy is dead" - each academic discipline requires years of study and can't reasonably be dismissed out of hand by someone who is an expert in another field - but my concerns were eased by the rest of the book. The quest for a grand unified theory of physics, the ultimate topic of many lay physics books, does sound philosophical and has resulted in various theories that are currently highly speculative and difficult to test. The M-Theory discussed in "The Grand Design" sounds more reasonable than the many alternatives but all are still very weak as far as scientific theories go.

If you lack patience for mathematical formulas and want a short, clearly written physics book that minimizes the mathematics while still surveying the basic concepts of physics and introducing the more speculative current topics, I haven't read anything better than "The Grand Design".

870 of 982 people found the following review helpful.
A very interesting book.
By error
This book began not with a Bang, but with a shudder. On the first page, I read the phrase (and yes it's a proof so this may be changed in the actual version): "Philosophy is dead". No one can argue that there is a modern day philospher with the influence of Aristotle; but surely, philosophy can't be dead!?

However, reading onward, the authors made their point quite convincingly: philosophy is dead in the sense of answering the most mysterious of life's questions. It is up to science, and scientific theory, to provide clues to the true answers, as philosphy in its most ancient forms has taken a back seat, but modern philosphy, that of scientific philosophy, has taken root.

This book, you'll find as you read, is dumbed down. But it's not stupid or simple. While the math and the proofs of the math are essentially missing (a great boon for laymen like myself), the philosophical science is presented in a very interesting, detailed, and thought provoking way. It is not as difficult, and oft-maniacal, a read as Emmanuel Levinas, instead it's somewhere closer to Lucretius's On the Nature of Things (ironically).

And so the authors move on in sequential and ordered fashion, trying to answer: Why is there something? Why do we exist? Why this set of natural law? The theories they expound upon are sometimes old, and sometimes groundbreakingly new, but all will either surprise you, educated you, or both; but in the least, make you think about reality and your own existence, and the reality of your existence.

This book has illustrations every now and then. Most are of no use but to entertain you, in my opinion. Some are there to actually educate you in at least a small way. But what irked me a few times was that while I was reading a thought, I'd encounter a picture in the middle of the text that had nothing to do with the thought I was just reading about. A slight moment of confusion erupted, but was quenched right after I read the paragraph after the picture/illustration. This may be of no consequence to many, but while reading such interesting ideas, and mulling them over in my head, I certainly didn't like being interrupted by something that hasn't been discussed or processed.

Otherwise, the book is pleasent on the eyes, as it's set in what would be essentially type 14, Times New Roman. For 190 pages, and such a large font, it's a very quick read, especially once you get captivated by the

arguments that are laid out in front of you. I don't want to discuss them in detail, as not only am I unable to lay out the argument as convincingly as two geniuses, but also don't want to spoil the though-provoking journey this book will take you on.

I highly reccomend this book to anyone who wants to see how modern, scientific philosophers, answer life's ancient questions and/or those who just would like a leg-up on modern physics, so that you won't be left out in the cold should you encounter a group of people conversing about the topic.

Those with scientific minds, will prosper with this book.

Those that fear God, need not look away. This book does not disparage, criticize, nor impinge. It, as with all books, simply provides a story and its lessons.

322 of 366 people found the following review helpful.
Excellent overview of contemporary cosmology and physics
By Paul E. Hartman
In a mere 180 pages, Leonard Mlodinow, the author of the excellent "The Drunkard's Walk" and of debates arguing against Deepak Chopra, and Stephen Hawking, expound a subjective interpretation of quantum physics, and offer a theory to try to unify all of the underlying forces of nature. A grandiose undertaking; along the way, they revisit the philosophical questions of Free Will, the origin of the universe(s) without a creator-God, and vividly describe some of the counter-intuitive concepts generated by quantum physics' strangeness.
They believe that we inhabit one universe in a multiverse version of quantum physics, in which there are an almost infinite number of universes that can arise spontaneously from the "big bang", and which then dictate the laws of nature that follow. This promotion of the so-called "strong anthropic principle" may offend some scientists and philosophers. The role of observation in determining quantum reality, and of its ability to alter the past in events in the quantum world, are just some of the seemingly bizarre concepts elaborated. This includes even the consequences of the delayed slit-lamp experiments. The cornerstone of their approach to quantum physics utilises Richard Feynman's theory of a sum of histories. Further underlying this, is the assumption that "reality" in our world is dependent on the model we use, and that if different models can successfully explain scientific phenomena, then each model must be considered equally "real".
The clarity of the explanations are garnished with bits of humor that are tastefully incorporated without being intrusive. There is no math required, merely good use of logic in order to follow the arguments presented. There is a well-rounded historical summary of scientific discoveries, right up to and including the most recent ideas in string theory and particle physics.
But make no mistake, they are expounding one subjective view of cosmology, and this might come across as overenthusiastic, controversial, or even supercilious, by physicists, other scientists, and philosophers of science, who may not hold these views.
I found the book hard to put down. Accompanying the text are a few diagrams that are helpful in clarifying certain concepts. Overall, a nice summary of physics and cosmology, which culminates in an ambitious and highly subjective analysis/synthesis to try to explain the universe and reality.

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