



30-Second Theories: The 50 Most Thought-provoking Theories in Science, Each Explained in Half a Minute

Paul Parsons (Editor) , Martin J. Rees (Foreword) , Jim Al-Khalili (Contributor) , Susan Blackmore (Contributor) , Michael Brooks (Contributor) , Jon Gribbin (Contributor) , Christian Jarrett (Contributor) , Robert Matthews (Contributor) , more... Bill McGuire (Contributor) , Mark Ridley (Contributor) ...less

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When it comes to big science, very few things are conclusively known. From Quantum Mechanics to Natural Selection, what we have instead are theories - ideas explain why things happen the way they do. We don't know for certain these are correct - no one ever saw the Big Bang - but with them we can paint beautiful, breathtaking pictures of everything from human behaviour to what the future may hold. Profiling the key scientists behind each theory, "30-Second Theories" presents each entry in a unique, eye-catching full-colour design, with thought-provoking extras and stylish illustrations. It is essential for anyone keen on expanding their mind with science's most thrilling ideas.

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From Reader Review 30-Second Theories: The 50 Most Thought-provoking Theories in Science, Each Explained in Half a Minute for online ebook

Willow Redd says

A very intriguing reference to "the 50 most thought-provoking theories in Science." Containing a series of brief synopses of some very interesting and indeed thought-provoking theories from the more well known Theory of Relativity, Laws of Motion, and Global Warming; to the lesser known (at least to me) Out of Africa theory, Gaia theory, and the Small World hypothesis (which is now a study I wish to be a part of).

This book is an excellent reference for some pretty big ideas that can be delved into with more depth for those interested. There is even a list of resources including books, magazines/articles, and websites the reader can visit for more information.

Definitely worth it for the armchair scientist.

Susan says

This one is definitely now a part of the permanent reference collection.

Tom Pappalardo says

I am so stupid that I couldn't even digest these super-simplified overviews. I liked the pictures, though.

Sehrin says

Amazing kickstart to expand scientific knowledge. Recommended.

Mizrob A. says

It's my second book from 30-Second series, and the last one. The first book in this series i read was 30-Second Brain edited by Anil Seth, which contained a lot of information (I learned a lot of interesting stuff about the brain) but was very dull overall. This one is worse. This book simplifies the concepts so much that nothing left in the end. I was more disappointed, because Mark Ridley, Jim Al-Khalili, Susan Blackmore, John Gribbin, Bill McGuire were among the contributors in this book. The only useful idea that i got out of this book is this: 'Science shouldn't be communicated in soundbites'.

Harry Doble says

I am a fan of this series. Here we have a collection of fifty scientific theories explained as concisely as possible through text and illustrations. The book is divided into seven broad sections: the macrocosm, the microcosm, human evolution, mind & body, planet Earth, the universe, and 'the knowledge', along with a few biographies on famous scientists like Stephen Hawking and James Lovelock. Cosmology and physics figure heavily, but there is also geology, biology, psychology, and information theory. As someone who is largely illiterate in science I can't evaluate how well it meets its goal, but each entry piqued my curiosity and left me with an impression nonetheless, which is all a book like this should really set out to achieve.

Aysun says

Personally I like my science related books to be 100% objective, this book failed to meet that criteria. I really don't think we needed the author's opinions, mere facts and results of experiments are enough on their own. It was a pretty basic book about main theories in various branches of science, all the information was kept simple and brief, which is probably the aim of the author but that didn't appeal to me and I found it to be rather boring. I guess I wasn't a part of the targeted reader type, oh well.

This book got 2 stars instead of 3 only because, considering its price, the illustrations were disappointing too.

Alan Newton says

An excellent short book providing insight into a whole host of complex and more well known theories about humans, knowledge, evolution, earth, the universe. It's an easy read and a book that will remain a useful reference material for quickly familiarising oneself with key principles across a range of these topics

Dirk says

Very informative, interesting format with the short text formats.
I read the Dutch translation.

Jason Mills says

This is a pretty book and a good idea, but it doesn't amount to much. Each theory is presented in around 300 words of text with afterthoughts in sidebars. It seeks to cover physics, cosmology, the Earth, biology, the mind, etc. The text is written by relevant scientists: John Gribbin, Sue Blackmore, Mark Ridley, etc. The content is generally okay, but it can't give more than the most superficial glimpse of what each field is concerned with.

I had quibbles with the text; here's a couple of examples:

* Gribbin, describing panspermia, asserts: "It seems certain that some [prebiotic chemicals]... fell on to the

young Earth and kick-started life." Certain? Since when?

* Jim Al-Khalili says that the Uncertainty Principle allows one property (speed or position) to be "measured to infinite accuracy", when in fact the UP imposes a finite limit on the accuracy obtainable.

* We are informed that in the film "A Beautiful Mind" the "mathematical content... was greatly simplified." This is a bit rich in a science book that only dares include one equation in the entire text, and that's $E=mc^2$!

However, my biggest beef with this book was the illustrations, which occupy the facing page beside each theory. Here was an opportunity to enrich the text with informative diagrams providing clear and practical insight into each subject: perhaps the Hertzprung–Russell diagram, or RNA transcription at work. Instead, each illustration is little more than a decorative collage of clip-art, with inane captions: "if you believe in quantum theory" (as if 'belief' were an appropriate concept in this context). The one accompanying the article on Selfish Genes is incoherent rubbish. Beside Global Warming is not a graph but a travesty of a graph, by an illustrator who has evidently not grasped that the units on a linear axis must be evenly spaced!

Whilst its overviews are broadly okay, there is little to be learnt here if you're moderately familiar with science, and little that will stick in your mind if you aren't. There are other books that seek to provide an overview (Bryson's, for instance), and I should think most would do a better job than this one. It's barely coffee-table science.

Icon Books says

When it comes to big science, very few things are conclusively known. From Quantum Mechanics to Natural Selection, what we have instead are theories - ideas explain why things happen the way they do. We don't know for certain these are correct - no one ever saw the Big Bang - but with them we can paint beautiful, breathtaking pictures of everything from human behaviour to what the future may hold. Profiling the key scientists behind each theory, "30-Second Theories" presents each entry in a unique, eye-catching full-colour design, with thought-provoking extras and stylish illustrations. It is essential for anyone keen on expanding their mind with science's most thrilling ideas.

Guatón says

I must say the three stars are deceiving. The theories are presented in a very brief and simple way, which makes this book perfect for leaving it by the living room table, so guests can entertain themselves while you are away. It also serves as an entrance door to popular science, since you can always look for more complex books on the subjects you are more interested in.

Miguel Flores says

Un libro sencillito, lleno de teorías científicas, hecho para quienes quieran ponerse al tanto de la actualidad en la ciencia, cabe mencionar que solo habla de cosas que están en su mayoría comprobadas, tiene pocas teorías que aun son hipótesis.

En fin un libro excelente para todo publico, facil de leer y lleno de cosas por descubrir.

Rene says

While I really enjoyed the book, it was quite shallow. To be fair, any deeper expectation towards a book that tries to convey the idea of a modern scientific theory in 30 seconds are bound to not be met.

Liz says

I am constantly skeptical of science and math books that have an introduction like “I wrote this for the everyday person who doesn’t have a math/science degree! Someone with high school math and science could understand this!” Because all too often...they are not. I know this because I interact with high schoolers daily and I know where their math and science understanding is at.

This one, though, at the very least gets close. I also love the layout of the pages and the minimalist graphics. I love the 3 second, 30 second, 3 minute delvings into each theory or idea. I could see this being used by a high school science teacher as an introduction to certain topics or as review, and it was certainly interesting for me to read. I was already familiar with some theories because I do have a bit of a math science background, but others I had not heard of and felt I understood the explanations, maybe occasionally having to read one twice through.

In short, I was impressed with this one. The science communicators they gathered to write all the summaries should be proud.
