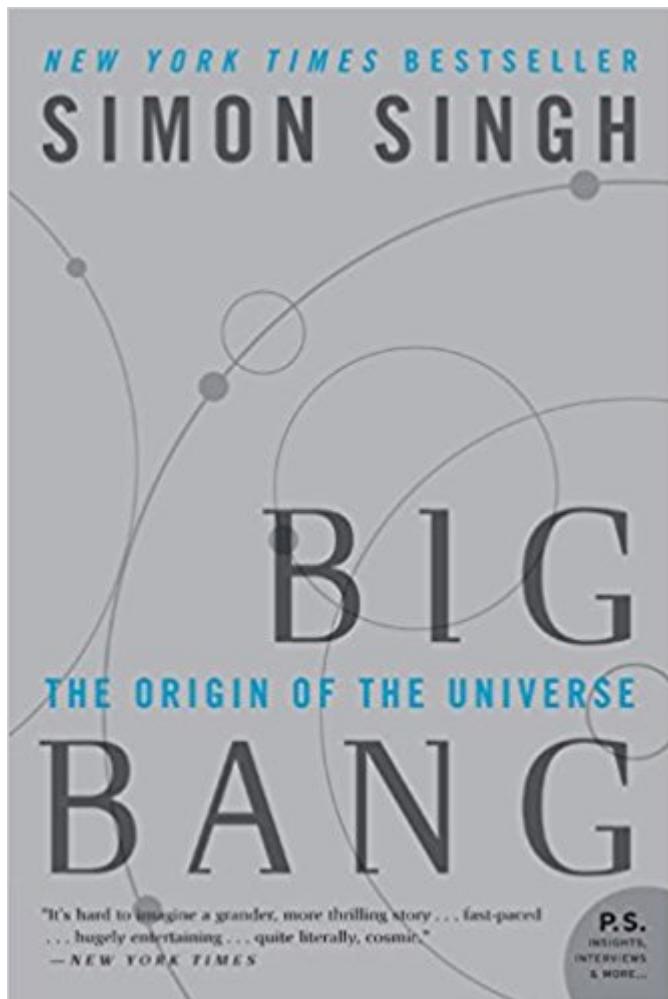


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Big Bang: The Origin Of The Universe



Synopsis

A half century ago, a shocking Washington Post headline claimed that the world began in five cataclysmic minutes rather than having existed for all time; a skeptical scientist dubbed the maverick theory the Big Bang. In this amazingly comprehensible history of the universe, Simon Singh decodes the mystery behind the Big Bang theory, lading us through the development of one of the most extraordinary, important, and awe-inspiring theories in science.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A baffling array of science books claim to reveal how the mysteries of the universe have been discovered, but Simon Singh's Big Bang actually delivers on that promise. General readers will find it to be among the very best books dealing with cosmology, because Singh follows the same plan he used in his brilliant Code Book: he puts people--not equations--first in the story. By linking the progression of the Big Bang theory with the scientists who built it up bit by bit, Singh also uncovers an important truth about how such ideas grow. Death is an essential element in the progress of science, since it takes care of conservative scientists of a previous generation reluctant to let go of an old, fallacious theory and embrace a new and accurate one. As harsh as this statement seems, even Einstein defended an outmoded idea about the universe when an unknown interloper published equations challenging the great man. Einstein didn't have to die for cosmology to move forward (he reluctantly apologized for being wrong), but stories like this one show how difficult it can sometimes be for new theories to take root. Fred Hoyle, who coined the term "big bang" as a way to

ridicule the idea of a universe expanding from some tiny origin point, strongly believed that the cosmos was in a steady state. But Singh shows how Hoyle's research, meant to prove the contrary, added evidence to the expansion model. Big Bang is also a history of astronomical observation, describing the development of new telescopes that were crucial to the development of cosmology. Handwritten summary notes at the end of each long chapter add a charming, classroom feel to this revealing and very readable book. --Therese Littleton --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Starred Review. It was cosmologist Fred Hoyle who coined the term "big bang" to describe the notion that the universe exploded out of nothing to kick-start space and time. Ironically, Hoyle himself espoused the steady state theory, positing that the universe is eternal and never really changes. Former BBC producer and science writer Singh (*Fermat's Enigma*) recounts in his inimitable down-to-earth style how the big bang theory triumphed. Readers will find here one of the best explanations available of how Cepheid stars are used to estimate the distance of other galaxies. Singh highlights some of the lesser-known figures in the development of the big bang theory, like Henrietta Leavitt, a volunteer "computer" at the Harvard College Observatory who in 1912 discovered how Cepheid stars can be used to measure galactic distances. Singh shows how the creation of the heavier elements was a major stumbling block to widespread adoption of the big bang until Hoyle (once again boosting the theory that he so fervently opposed) proved that they were created in stars' nuclear furnaces and strewn throughout the universe via supernova explosions. Readers who don't need a review of the early development of cosmology may wish that Singh had adopted a somewhat less leisurely pace. But his introductory chapters hold a lot of worthwhile material, clearly presented for the science buff and lay reader. There's no better account of the big bang theory than this. B&w photos and illus. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This book was recommended reading for my Introduction to Cosmology class - it may as well have been about anti-gravity, because once I picked this book up, I just couldn't put it down! Literally read through the whole thing in one shot. Singh does an amazing job of telling over the history of the universe through the progression of scientific discovery, and truly makes it a fun read. Whether you're specifically interested in cosmology, or just want to read some good writing and learn something while you're at it, I highly recommend this book. It even has re-read potential, if you're

into that sort of thing. Two thumbs up!

This book is not only about the physics behind or under the Big Bang theory but mainly about its ascension from the lower plains of initial and tenuous discussions up to the pinnacle of science. This is basic to understand what are you going to read before deciding to buy the book. First of all you need to know that Simon Singh also wrote "Fermat's enigma," which is as good and well written as this one. I read both and it is hard for me to say which one is better, but what I did know is that both books are mandatory readings for anyone interested in science and how it explains everything we know for certain. In this vein, Big Bang is the history of a competition between ideas that followed the Einstein's theory of gravity, ideas brought with the equations or that were implicit in them. What Alexander Friedman, Georges Lemaître and others did, was to make them explicit, to show their implications in terms of an (in some sense unexpected) origin to the universe. Einstein wasn't convinced from the very beginning and in so doing and furthermore being the prevailing idea of a static universe so strongly rooted in the zeitgeist of the times (1920s), the war was declared among contradictory positions. Subsequent observations and a vast amount of measurements and discussion made that Big Bang theory began to gain adherents and supporters. This is what Simon Singh tells us in a very funny and highly explanatory style: in fact, every time we need a drawing he puts it, and when (or if) we need a metaphor he gives us a very good one. He is not a journalist but a physicist who knows how to explain very difficult things. In fact, I gave the book to my wife promising her that she would understand everything about the Big Bang theory. At first she didn't believe me (she is a psychologist so she shouldn't) but after reading the book she gave me five stars for the recommendation, the same stars I give to the work of Mr. Singh. Highly recommended.

As an avid amateur astronomer I have read a lot of books about historical astronomy and astronomers as well as more technical aspects such as the Big Bang. I bought this on the recommendation of a friend and owe him a big thank you. Although there were parts that were of less interest to me the vast majority of the book was very good and the explanation of how the Big Bang theory became the paradigm is very interesting and the most convincing yet as to how the universe began. I finally got an explanation of the "proof" of the Big Bang. I highly recommend this book to all who are interested in astronomy and the development of current theories.

Big Bang is in essence a history of astronomy, or more precisely, cosmology, the study of the universe. Obviously, this is quite a large field of study, but one that Simon Singh accomplishes

beautifully. Despite his education, Simon Singh can write, and write well. He can explain difficult, mind-bending concepts and vast measurements of scale better than probably anyone alive. And what do I mean by 'despite his education', for Simon Singh is really Simon Singh, Ph.D., with a degree in particle physics from Cambridge University, the school that gave us such scientists as Sir Isaac Newton, Stephen Hawking, Charles Darwin, James Clerk Maxwell, Rutherford, and Alan Turing. After working at CERN in Switzerland for a while after graduation, he decided to become an author, journalist, and TV producer, with the goal of bringing science to the everyday man (and woman). The problem is, of course, that most scientists cannot write, at least stuff that you and I can understand. Well, Dr. Singh can do that. The Big Bang traces the history of the theory of the Earth and the universe from the ancient Egyptians calculating, with remarkable accuracy, of the size of the Earth, to experiments requiring sophisticated satellites that must orbit the earth for years, making measurements that are impossible to make from earth, before useful data can be collected from them. Dr. Singh talks about how astronomers calculate the distance to planets, other stars, and even other galaxies. He talks about telescopes, compasses, and radio telescopes. He talks about gravity, spacetime, and relativity. He talks about measurements being taken that must be accurate to four or more decimal places to be useful. This really is a superb book, and very well written. I have just read it, but plan on reading it again within a few months, to help cement some of the knowledge into my brain. Highly recommended.

One of my favorite books ever. Someone "borrowed" it from me and never returned it, but it was so good that I had to buy it again, I didn't want to be without it. I'm a chemist with minors in math and physics so this was "light reading" for me but would be an interesting, challenging read for any non-scientist. Concepts are clearly explained as only Simon Singh can do. Highly recommend this book.

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