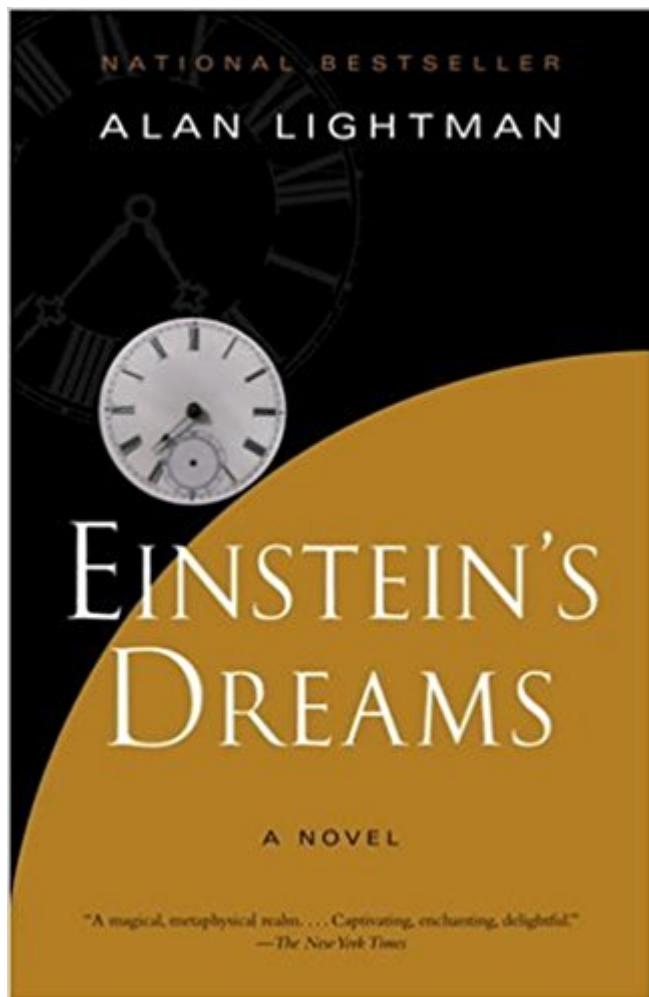


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Einstein's Dreams



Synopsis

A modern classic, Einstein's Dreams is a fictional collage of stories dreamed by Albert Einstein in 1905, about time, relativity and physics. As the defiant but sensitive young genius is creating his theory of relativity, a new conception of time, he imagines many possible worlds. In one, time is circular, so that people are fated to repeat triumphs and failures over and over. In another, there is a place where time stands still, visited by lovers and parents clinging to their children. In another, time is a nightingale, sometimes trapped by a bell jar. Now translated into thirty languages, Einstein's Dreams has inspired playwrights, dancers, musicians, and painters all over the world. In poetic vignettes, it explores the connections between science and art, the process of creativity, and ultimately the fragility of human existence.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

If you liked the eerie whimsy of Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, Steven Millhauser's *Little Kingdoms*, or Jorge Luis Borges's *Labyrinths*, you will love Alan Lightman's ethereal yet down-to-earth book *Einstein's Dreams*. Lightman teaches physics and writing at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, helping bridge the light-year-size gap between science and the humanities, the enemy camps C.P. Snow famously called The Two Cultures. *Einstein's Dreams* became a bestseller by delighting both scientists and humanists. It is technically a novel. Lightman uses simple, lyrical, and literal details to locate Einstein precisely in a place and time--Berne, Switzerland, spring 1905, when he was a patent clerk privately working on his bizarre, unheard-of theory of relativity. The town he

perceives is vividly described, but the waking Einstein is a bit player in this drama. The book takes flight when Einstein takes to his bed and we share his dreams, 30 little fables about places where time behaves quite differently. In one world, time is circular; in another a man is occasionally plucked from the present and deposited in the past: "He is agonized. For if he makes the slightest alteration in anything, he may destroy the future ... he is forced to witness events without being part of them ... an inert gas, a ghost ... an exile of time." The dreams in which time flows backward are far more sophisticated than the time-tripping scenes in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, though science-fiction fans may yearn for a sustained yarn, which Lightman declines to provide. His purpose is simply to study the different kinds of time in Einstein's mind, each with its own lucid consequences. In their tone and quiet logic, Lightman's fables come off like Bach variations played on an exquisite harpsichord. People live for one day or eternity, and they respond intelligibly to each unique set of circumstances. Raindrops hang in the air in a place of frozen time; in another place everyone knows one year in advance exactly when the world will end, and acts accordingly.

"Consider a world in which cause and effect are erratic," writes Lightman. "Scientists turn reckless and mutter like gamblers who cannot stop betting.... In this world, artists are joyous." In another dream, time slows with altitude, causing rich folks to build stilt homes on mountaintops, seeking eternal youth and scorning the swiftly aging poor folk below. Forgetting eventually how they got there and why they subsist on "all but the most gossamer food," the higher-ups at length "become thin like the air, bony, old before their time." There is no plot in this small volume--it's more like a poetry collection than a novel. Like Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time*, it's a mind-stretching meditation by a scientist who's been to the far edge of physics and is back with wilder tales than Marco Polo's. And unlike many admirers of Hawking, readers of Einstein's Dreams have a high probability of actually finishing it. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

This beguiling first novel--a 16-week PW bestseller--envisioned a series of fables about the nature of time that Einstein might have dreamt while putting the final touches on his theory of relativity.

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I have actually bought this book 4 times because I love it so much. It is filled with little vignettes of all these different ways to imagine time as Einstein dreams about how time flows. Marvelous book!

A friend loaned me her copy of Einstein's Dreams when I was traveling last summer. I loved it so much that I had to buy a copy for my bookshelf and ended up loaning it out a few days after it

arrived to another friend about to take a trip. It is brilliantly written by someone with a stellar imagination and understanding of the simplicity and complexity of the everyday human relationship with time. It is an engaging read and perfect for traveling, because each small chapter is mentally fulfilling and easy to read. Enjoy!

I was attracted by the concept of the book initially, however once I started getting into it I started loosing interest. At times I've felt the author was more focused in his prose and descriptive ability rather than getting to the essence of the story. I enjoyed parts of this book and it had some good ideas throughout, but at the end of the day the writing kind of turn me off a bit.

This is a simple, captivating book exploring the possible other ways time may have been aligned with our perceptions. Lightman develops a series of vignettes (very short stories) involving a cast of characters (including Einstein,) as they experience weird facets of time unfolding. What would it be like for us if a day repeated endlessly? If time ran out? If time functioned differently in different locales? How would the human animal, and his day to day machinations be different as a result? This is a warm and charming book, good for ages from 13 on up. It is written in simple language, yet the explorations are profound. If you know someone in love with science-fiction, this is a terrific (and unassuming) link to the world of science.

It starts interesting... is about Einstein's mind, how could it be otherwise. After a few "dreams" and their interpretations, it get rather ho-hum in it repetitiveness, The structure of the writing creates a monotony that renders the content less interesting. .

I started to get interested in time reading a 13th mystic named Dogen's essay "Time Being". Much of our understanding of life revolves around how we relate to time. What is it? How does it relate to the physical world, the spiritual world, the psychological world? Do Past, Present and Future exist as distinct designations? Are they ordered in some linear sequence? Does time pass the same for each of us or even the same moment by moment? Welcome to the inner world of Einstein as he contemplated the Special Theory of Relativity, or now a little novel of Einstein's Dreams!

In reading EINSTEIN'S DREAMS, I was riveted. Lightman takes the reader on a journey through time. Each short chapter shows how people live in a world governed by different aspects of time. In one story, time is circular; in another story, time is completely subjective; in another story, worlds

are governed and moved by clocks; in yet another story, the passage of time is relative to where one lives. Three interludes center around Einstein, helping to enhance the book's effect. I recommend it.

Awesome read!!

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