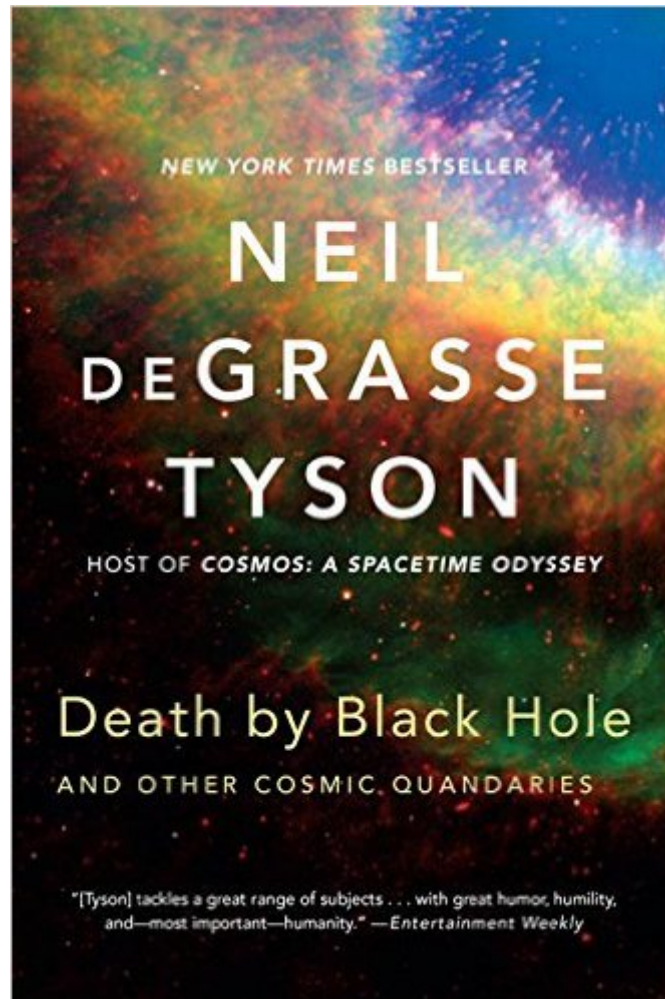


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Death By Black Hole: And Other Cosmic Quandaries



Synopsis

Neil deGrasse Tyson tackles a great range of subjects . . . with great humor, humility, and most important humanity. Entertainment Weekly Loyal readers of the monthly "Universe" essays in Natural History magazine have long recognized Neil deGrasse Tyson's talent for guiding them through the mysteries of the cosmos with clarity and enthusiasm. Bringing together more than forty of Tyson's favorite essays, "Death by Black Hole" explores a myriad of cosmic topics, from what it would be like to be inside a black hole to the movie industry's feeble efforts to get its night skies right. One of America's best-known astrophysicists, Tyson is a natural teacher who simplifies the complexities of astrophysics while sharing his infectious fascination for our universe.

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Customer Reviews

An astrophysicist with the American Museum of Natural History, where he serves at its world-famous Hayden Planetarium, Neil deGrasse Tyson has written a popular account of the evolution of the universe: its past, present, and future--from its beginning with a big bang to its ending with a whimper. In *Death by Black Hole and Other Cosmic Quandaries*, Tyson sees the universe "not as a collection of objects, theories, and phenomena, but as a vast stage of actors driven by intricate twists of story line and plot." Each of the book's 42 chapters first appeared, in one form or another, on the pages of *Natural History* magazine under the heading "Universe" and span the 11-year period of 1995 through 2005. In spite of modest editing of the essays, there remains some overlapping and repetition of information. Tyson divides his work into seven sections: "The

Nature of Knowledge," "The Knowledge of Nature," "Ways and Means of Nature," "The Meaning of Life," "When the Universe Turns Bad," "Science and Culture," and "Science and God." He discusses, respectively, the challenges of knowing what is knowable in the universe, the challenges of discovering the contents of the cosmos, the challenges and triumphs of knowing how we got here, all the ways the cosmos wants to kill us, the ruffled interface between cosmic discovery and the public's reaction to it, and when ways of knowing collide. Tyson introduces a diverse company of actors who perform on the universal stage: galaxies, solar systems, stars, quasars, black holes, supernovas, planets, moons, comets, asteroids and meteorites. These cosmic thespians emerge as a strange, bizarre, mind-boggling, awesome and dangerous cast of characters.

Get out your crayons. Make a Sun in the sky. If it is like every Sun you have colored since you were a kid, it is a happy yellow ball. "And I don't care what else anyone has ever told you, the Sun is white, not yellow," writes astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson in *Death by Black Hole and Other Cosmic Quandaries* (Norton). "If the sun were yellow, like a yellow lightbulb, then white stuff such as snow would reflect this light and appear yellow - a snow condition confirmed to happen only near fire hydrants." How do we keep getting this wrong? Why do people think there is no gravity in space, or that what goes up must come down? How come total solar eclipses seem rare, but actually happen every couple of years? And especially important, how do we obtain those data to show us that these assumptions are wrong? Furthermore, what does happen when you step into a black hole, or into a hole that goes clean through the center of the Earth? What is going to happen when the Andromeda galaxy hits our own Milky Way? ("Gas clouds would slam into each other; stars would be cast hither and yon.. our planet could get flung out of the solar system... That would be bad.") And it is going to happen, but a couple of billion years before that happens, the Sun will explode and die and vaporize all the contents of the Earth. But as Tyson observes, "I'd say we have more pressing issues of survival before us." Tyson's book consists of chapters that appeared as columns in *Natural History* magazine. There is death and destruction all through it, and yet he writes with buoyant optimism and humor, making even the strangest findings of astrophysics accessible.

First of all I am not a scientist, but if all science teachers had the wit, confidence and attitude of Mr. Tyson, then we all (non-scientists) would have probably paid more attention in class. I could not put the book down and although I thought it dragged just a little bit in the middle (the re-hashing of the atomic make up and eventual atomic breakdown of stars), the repetitive nature of some of his

information was excellent in terms of helping the layperson to retain the information. The amount of subject matter explained in this book is pretty heavy for a non-scientist, yet Mr. Tyson is able to get the points and information across in a witty and entertaining way. I did feel that I learned a lot from reading this, from him talking about the smallest of structures such as antimatter, positrons, atoms, etc. to him explaining the largest of structures and how they work (the universe). Theories on the Big Bang are explained as is the theories and probabilities of other life in the universe. What it would be like to be sucked into a black hole is described as is what it will happen when our Sun will eventually expand, destroying Earth, then die. How about what will happen when our solar system collides with our closest neighboring solar system, the Andromeda Galaxy? It is explained. Mr. Tyson has a talent for making the end of the universe, the eventual extinction of human-kind and our own insignificance sound as entertaining as a movie drama, and he does it with enthusiasm.

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