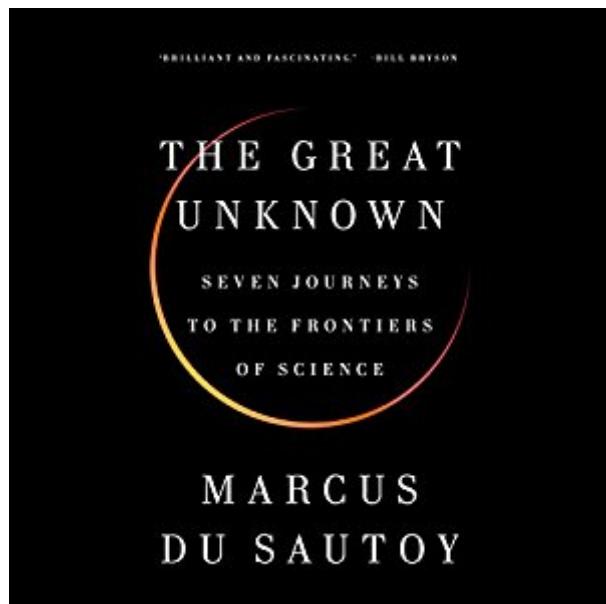


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The Great Unknown: Seven Journeys To The Frontiers Of Science



Synopsis

A captivating journey to the outer reaches of human knowledge Ever since the dawn of civilization, we have been driven by a desire to know - to understand the physical world and the laws of nature. But are there limits to human knowledge? Are some things simply beyond the predictive powers of science? Or are those challenges the next big discovery waiting to happen? In *The Great Unknown*, one of the world's most beloved mathematicians takes us into the minds of science's greatest innovators as he probes the many deep mysteries we have yet to solve. He reminds us that major breakthroughs were often ridiculed at the time of their discovery and takes us on a whirlwind tour of seven frontiers of knowledge, where scientists are grappling with the unknown. Can you locate consciousness in the brain? Is our universe infinite? What is dark energy made of? What happens to time in space? Is it possible to beat ageing? At once exhilarating and mind bending, *The Great Unknown* will challenge you to think in new ways about every aspect of the known world. It invites us to consider big questions - about who we are and the nature of God - that even the most creative scientists have yet to answer definitively.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Excellent book. Intended audience, layperson with an interest in mathematics and science. Marcus du Sautoy is a renowned mathematician who looks at 7 areas of knowledge that mathematicians and scientists don't know. I liked how he clearly explained topics in mathematics and physics. Wherever Dr. du Sautoy dealt with topics close to mathematics, he was excellent. Other areas, in particular, consciousness, was too hazy, almost too pop-science. If the reader listens to a

few Brain Science podcasts by Virginia Campbell, they'll get better, more solid information about this topic. While Dr. du Sautoy is an atheist, he exhibits a gentlemanly respect for others who hold various religious views. I find that refreshing (I am biased because I am a confessional Reformed Evangelical Christian). In philosophy, I think Dr. du Sautoy did a reasonable job. But he takes a narrow slice among his Oxford friends. There are others to explore, such as Alvin Plantinga. On the topic of the multiverse, there are some issues dealing with infinities that, in my opinion (not that it's worth much), should be examined. One is the issue of what would be a typical observer in an infinite multiverse across all time. Ludwig Boltzmann raised the issue that we would be far from typical observers that we'd expect in a multiverse. Overall, the book was excellent. I enjoyed it very much.

OK, so there are "unknowns," things we don't know, lots of them, and that's what drives us to find out, what energizes science (among other human endeavors). But are there genuine "unknowables," things we don't know because we can't know them? Logically, it's easy: if p is "q is true and unknown," then we can't know it (because if we did we would know q is true and then it wouldn't be unknown). But are there more substantial unknowables? Sautoy explores some potential unknowables, from the size of the universe (infinite or not?) to the very small (divisible or not?) to the nature of consciousness. His treatment is accessible because it is elementary, spiced with anecdotes from various personalities throughout history. The prose is reader-friendly, even when it verges on deep matters (e.g. Gödel's results). It is a book for the amateur, not the scholar, and there are some details that will make some shake their heads. (E.g., his equation of "God" with "the unknowable"--and then his resolute determination not to allow traditional divine attributes such as knowledge, power and the like--seems rather pointless.) --But still: it's an entertaining read, and one I would recommend.

You will need a high school knowledge of basic math and science to enjoy this book but you probably won't buy it if you don't. It is a well written tour of what we know we don't know and what we may not be able to know about science. Math, quantum physics, consciousness etc. I definitely enjoyed his writing style.

If you read only one science book this year, read this one. This book delves into the top unanswered questions and challenges in science. It provides the basis to think about where we go from here. Not an easy book to read. I read it twice. First time to build a sense for the overall big picture. Then I returned to spend time to read and think about each discussion point.

This book is a fascinating survey of what we know and what we do not know and perhaps will never know. Have reached the edge of human knowledge or will we move on and discover new limits to human knowledge?

The writing is uninspired and flat. Many other books on the subjects of scientific uncertainties exist which are of better pace, content and vision. One book in this theme that is very well written is this one ...Quantum: Einstein, Bohr and the Great Debate About the Nature of Reality.

An extraordinary read especially from a mathematician. His material on quantum physics was the most understandable I've ever read. A great book.

I'm only halfway through the book, and it's good so far. The author makes a lot of analogies with theory and tends to keep things fairly superficial. Not that I could do a better job by any stretch, but it would be nice to see more of the actual science behind his ideas.

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