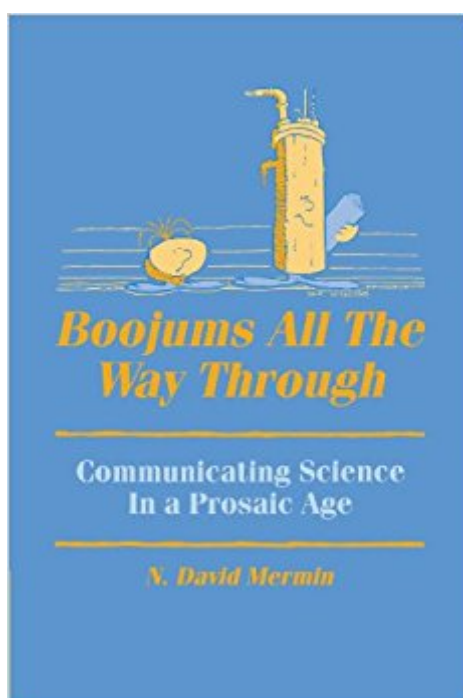


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Boojums All The Way Through: Communicating Science In A Prosaic Age



Synopsis

Boojums All the Way Through is a collection of essays that presents the dilemma of communicating modern physics to both physicists and nonphysicists. Some addressed to a general audience, some to students and others to scientists, the essays all share a preoccupation with both the substance and the style of written scientific communication, and offer a unique view of everyday science or scientific practice with the intention of increased clarity for the reader. The author believes the tradition of bland and impersonal scientific writing over the past fifty years deprives scientists of powerful tools for enhancing their clarity and capacity to communicate complex ideas. A well recognized theoretical physicist and winner of the first Julius Edgar Lilienfeld prize of the American Physical Society, Mermin writes with wry humor and conveys complex ideas with startling simplicity.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"...covers an astonishing broad range...Mermin is a natural philosopher par excellence..." Physics World
"A warm, human, and humane view of physics." American Mathematical Monthly
"From the outset, Mermin's writing is fluid, interesting and most of all, fun! Mermin's humorous talents are indicative of his creative abilities and deep understanding of his subject. At times one is tempted to reflect upon other skilled communicators, and flattering parallels with Feynman, for example, are not unreasonable." Physics in Canada
"David Mermin is one of those rather rare scientists who can write with cleverness and style....is delightful for browsing." Peter Franken, Physics Today
"Readers from undergraduate science students to professional physicists and mathematicians will find this book both entertaining and full of ideas." Perry Smith, Mathematical Reviews

Addressed to a general audience, these essays present the dilemma of communicating modern physics to physicists and nonphysicists by analyzing the substance and style of written scientific communication.

This is a remarkable collection. Twenty-six essays by N.D. Mermin, Horace White Professor of Physics Emeritus at Cornell, and winner of the first Julius Edgar Lilienfeld prize of the American Physical Society 'for his remarkable clarity and wit as a lecturer to nonspecialists on difficult subjects'. This is the guy who managed to add the term "Boojum" to the vocabulary of physics, and who summarized the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics in just four words "Shut up and calculate". When reading this book, be prepared for more such gems. You will encounter deep truths about physical reality summarized in brief statements like "There is no time, only clocks". Mermin creates pure pedagogical jewels by defining "The Baseball Principle" (whether or not you watch baseball games on television has no effect on the statistics of the outcomes) and "The Strong Baseball Principle" (the baseball principle applied to one particular game), by arguing in favor of both, and then by going on to demonstrate that quantum mechanics leads to hard experimental facts that demonstrate the baseball principle can only be true if the strong baseball principle is binned. Puzzled? You should be. This cuts through the very core of quantum physics. The book will be an easy read if you are familiar with the principles of quantum mechanics and relativity at an undergraduate level. Less so, if you aren't. Is this a book for you? Have a look at Mermin's homepage: [...] . If you like the stuff you see there: don't hesitate and buy this collection of funny, puzzling and enlightening essays. You'll love it.

Like one other reviewer, I bought the book to get Mermin's explanation of the Bell inequality. He did make that very clear, twice. In fact, that is my problem with the whole book. It is a collection of essays and presentations that have appeared elsewhere in stand-alone format. It is therefore to be expected that a lot of background material will be found multiple times. A little more editing would have smoothed the transitions and given the reader some idea why he had already seen these comments. The mathematical musings section is reminiscent of the best of Martin Gardner, playing with special numbers and learning in detail how Stirling's approximation works. Several of the essays are essentially book reviews, and in this type of book, they seem hard to justify since the audience is not very likely to make use of them. In short, I read it quickly, understood most of it easily, but was rather disappointed. I should have bought a used copy.

David Mermin is just incredibly great at explaining (with art and humor) things which a layperson might assume are out of reach. Thank you, David Mermin, for expanding my world and reflecting its mystery! I am such a huge fan of yours now. Keep writing for us! It was Louisa Gilder's mention of you in a video I saw online that tipped me off to you. Thank you, Louisa!

I suppose the title of this book steers a lot of junior physics people away from it. The author's name should steer these people back. This is the Mermin that Feynman complemented on his popular exposition on Bell's inequality. In fact that is the reason why I read this thing. After Wheeler's Quantum Measurement's book and Berstein's Quantum Profile's book I had to see what all the hoopla was about. Sure enough Mermin is the king of popular exposition and I've been through a lot of popular exposition on Bell's inequality...from Pagels to Penrose. This book is loaded with other expositories too on relativity and mathematics and general physics stuff. A good cheap read that will get you deeper into physics on a non-specialist level.

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