Of Time, Space, and Other Things

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Date	:	Published May 28th 1975 by Avon Books (Discus) (first published 1965)
ISBN	:	9780380003259
Author	:	Isaac Asimov
Format	:	Mass Market Paperback 224 pages
Genre	:	Science, Nonfiction

From Reader Review Of Time, Space, and Other Things for online ebook

Liedzeit says

SF&F essay. Mooning around about the fact that our moon might not be a moon, since the pull of the sun is greater than that of earth. Moving finger, man’s hearts beats 4.5 more often than that of other creatures. C for celeritas. Just brilliant. (9/10)

Rae says

A collection of scientific essays, with subject matter ranging from astronomy to physics to mathematics. Dated now. But still good.

Andrew Franzese says

My Godfather gave this book to me when I was 11 years old. I read it then and it hurt my head. I have read it a few more times since then and never fail to learn something new.

Shibumi says

Nifty nuggets of knowledge! Asimov was the man!

King Ævil says

Please see my review of X Stands for Unknown ([http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/98...]) for general comments on Isaac Asimov's science essays.

This collection, Of Time and Space and Other Things, is perhaps the best of all the compilations of Asimov's columns in *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction.* Unfortunately, the book does not specify from which issues these essays were selected, but if they are consecutive, as is standard for these anthologies, Asimov was on an incredible roll. (And wouldn't you know it, of all my Asimov collection, this is the book whose binding disintegrated after one reading. Sigh.)

Right off the bat we start with one of my favorite pieces of Asimovian science fact, "The Days of Our Years," a quick history of three calendrical systems now in use (the Gregorian, Jewish and Muslim calendars). He continues this theme in "Begin at the Beginning," as he discusses how various cultures treated the beginning of the day and year, and how years were numbered. Switching to astronomy, Asimov describes the celestial coordinate system in "Ghost Lines in the Sky," and then, in "The Heavenly Zoo," traces the history of the astrological signs, taking an incisive poke at astrology along the way. "Roll Call" is a listing of the planets, satellites and major asteroids of the Solar System, from a historical viewpoint (which, to me,

makes the Good Professor's writing especially illuminating, even when the scientific subject is one I know well).

There follows another of Asimov's cleverest essays, "Just Mooning Around," in which he expounds a new system of classifying satellites by comparing the gravitational forces on the satellite from its primary (i.e., planet) and the Sun. The ratio of the two is the "tug-of-war value," and every planetary satellite then known has a tug-of-war value greater than 1 (meaning that the planet pulls harder than the Sun)--except one. (Guess which one!) Continuing Asimov's look at gravity, "First and Rearmost" is a careful comparison of the electromagnetic and gravitational forces.

Asimov then broadens his view, and in "The Black of Night," explains why the current model of the universe is consistent with a very dark nighttime sky on Earth. He speculates about exploding galaxies—a phenomenon that, in the light of more recent findings, I believe he misinterpreted—in "A Galaxy at a Time."

The "...and Other Things" section of the book begins with another classic, "Forget It," in which the author dissects a vast, impenetrable arithmetic book from 1797 (*Pike's Arithmetic*), and shows us how much useless information we have fortunately lost—mostly in terms of archaic units of measure. Now, if we can only convince America to convert to the metric system, we can get rid of the last of the awkward, useless units.

Next, "Nothing Counts" explains Roman numerals, and why the number zero is so gosh darn useful. "C Is for *Celeritas*" will make you relive your most uneasy moments in physics class, as it focuses on the dimensionality of energy, with emphasis on the special equality $e = mc^2$. In a similar vein, "A Piece of the Action" explores the "graininess" of the universe, and concomitantly, the discovery that separates "classical" physics from "modern" physics.

Asimov then turns to chemistry (his area of academic study). How "noble" are the noble gases? Find out in "Welcome, Stranger!" Learn all about chemical catalysts in "The Haste-Makers."

And lastly, another great article, "The Slowly Moving Finger," which relates longevity across the animal kingdom with body size, and formulates the rule that in general, the maximum lifespan of mammals is about one billion heartbeats—with one glaring exception.

Amanda says

This one was a remarkably good choice to finish up my year with. He discusses why we start our year on January 1st, how we measure time and why, how it relates to our solstice-vicinity winter festivals, and how we age.

Of course, I love all of Asimov's essays, but this was a particularly nice one for this time of year.

Jarem Nielsen says

I reread this little book about every year. Never has such a small book provided me with so much information that made me sound smart before! 13 quick essays will teach you all about the calendar, the stars, our world and it's rotational nuances. It's the stuff my dad relishes.

Keith Bell says

4th or 5th tiem through this amazing collection of Asimov's science essays. I've realized over the years, that my teaching style comes from reading his collections. I love to learn or relearn.

Mars says

A decent introduction to astronomy and whatnot. Edutaiment, interesting stories, and dullness mixed in about equal quantities, so it probably won't hold the interest of someone who wasn't into the subject to begin with, but it's not bad.

Matt Hamilton says

Awesome lay-person book on some physics, some other interesting topics.
