



The Sky Is Not the Limit: Adventures of an Urban Astrophysicist

By Neil Degrasse Tyson

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This is the absorbing story of Neil deGrasse Tyson's lifelong fascination with the night sky, a restless wonder that began some thirty years ago on the roof of his Bronx apartment building and eventually led him to become the director of the Hayden Planetarium. A unique chronicle of a young man who at one time was both nerd and jock, Tyson's memoir could well inspire other similarly curious youngsters to pursue their dreams.

Like many athletic kids he played baseball, won medals in track and swimming, and was captain of his high school wrestling team. But at the same time he was setting up a telescope on winter nights, taking an advanced astronomy course at the Hayden Planetarium, and spending a summer vacation at an astronomy camp in the Mojave Desert.

Eventually, his scientific curiosity prevailed, and he went on to graduate in physics from Harvard and to earn a Ph.D. in astrophysics from Columbia. There followed postdoctoral research at Princeton. In 1996, he became the director of the Hayden Planetarium, where some twenty-five years earlier he had been awed by the spectacular vista in the sky theater.

Tyson pays tribute to the key teachers and mentors who recognized his precocious interests and abilities, and helped him succeed. He intersperses personal reminiscences with thoughts on scientific literacy, careful science vs. media hype, the possibility that a meteor could someday hit the Earth, dealing with society's racial stereotypes, what science can and cannot say about the existence of God, and many other interesting insights about science, society, and the nature of the universe.

Now available in paperback with a new preface and other additions, this engaging memoir will enlighten and inspire an appreciation of astronomy and the

wonders of our universe.

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The Sky Is Not the Limit: Adventures of an Urban Astrophysicist By Neil Degrasse Tyson Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #461775 in eBooks
- Published on: 2010-03-19
- Released on: 2010-03-19
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Cool, classy, articulate, and brilliant--rarely do all of those adjectives apply at once to an astrophysicist. But Neil de Grasse Tyson is no ordinary scientist; as the director of New York City's Hayden planetarium, his job is to inspire the public with the beauty and grandeur of the universe, just as he was inspired there in his youth. *The Sky Is Not the Limit* is his memoir of the events leading from his birth to his acceptance of his dream job and beyond, and is a marvelously entertaining look at one man's pursuit of his life's calling. Tyson emphasizes the nurturing roles played by his parents, friends, and teachers, in contrast to the sometimes well-meaning but always disappointing discouragement he experienced from all sides in his quest for his Ph.D.

Of course, it's still shamefully difficult for a black American scientist to merit the same quality of attention as his or her peers, and Tyson's insights into the subtle but still-pervasive racism in academia are enlightening. His description of his own shock at seeing himself on television--a black man sought as an expert on something other than being black--is powerfully moving. But, as with his other books, like the gorgeous *One Universe: At Home in the Cosmos*, the quest for knowledge is more important than the obstacles, and his spirit, determination, and sense of humor prove that the sky really isn't the limit. --*Rob Lightner*

From Publishers Weekly

Tyson (see *One Universe*, reviewed above) directs the Hayden Planetarium in New York City. His pleasant, digressive memoir explains how he got there, what it's like to be a famous astronomer and what he thinks of his work. At first it's a story about how science education can go right. We learn that Tyson, who is African-American, grew up among tall buildings in the Bronx--but his is not a story of triumph over grinding poverty. Young Tyson got a break from the city when his father found a one-year lectureship at Harvard, and as for the electricity required to run one of his first telescopes, "my dentist... happened to live on the nineteenth floor." Tyson's later chapters offer memories, anecdotes and musings on astrophysics, education, politics, popular culture and even wrestling, in which Tyson competed until grad school. Tyson explains how his wrestling skills and knowledge of physics helped him end an Italian traffic jam by lifting a parked car, and how he tried to buy a meteorite but lost an auction to Steven Spielberg. In one chapter, Hollywood's science mistakes raise Tyson's ire (the film *Titanic* got its night sky all wrong); in the next, he discusses getting stopped by police for "Driving While Black." With sentences like "The universe poured down from the sky and flowed into my body," Tyson may not be his discipline's best prose stylist; neither his essays nor his life match the unpredictable charm of Richard Feynman's. But he comes off very likably, and presents physics with ease and clarity. It's easy to imagine his memoir inspiring young future astrophysicists--and inspiring grownups to help them out. (Feb.)

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From Kirkus Reviews

A brief, engaging, sometimes scintillating ramble around the cosmos with Tyson (Astrophysics/Princeton; dir., Hayden Planetarium), who shares his perspectives and experiences as an African-American astrophysicist. From the rooftop of his Bronx apartment building, the nine year-old Tyson could see enough of the night sky to become curious about it. However, it was only after a trip to the sky theater of the Hayden Planetarium, which portrayed many more stars than he could see from his rooftop, that he decided to become an astrophysicist. He tells how he purchased a powerful telescope that enabled him to see the planets close

up (including his favorite, Saturn). Later, at an astronomy camp in California, he saw for the first time ``bezillions" of stars in a sky that resembled that of the Planetarium theater. Tyson describes his experiences as a student at the Bronx High School of Science, Harvard, the University of Texas, and Columbia, makes an eloquent plea for increased scientific literacy, and reflects wryly on his side career as a commentator on astronomy for national television. He also depicts the burdens he's borne (and bears even now) as an African-American: routine questionings at the hands of the police, for instance, and expressions of doubt over his intellectual abilities from strangers (and even colleagues). His conclusion: ``You can be ridden only if your back is bent." He comments entertainingly on physics equations and the scientific method, speculates ominously on the prospect nearly certain, to his mind of cataclysmic collisions between the Earth and high-velocity comets or asteroids, and ruminates inconclusively on the search for God in the infinitude of space. An entertaining, disorganized, and inspiring jaunt, the chief value of which is its message to readers: Reach for the stars. -- Copyright ©2000, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

William Grimm:

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Don Gonzales:

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