



The Quantum Astrologer's Handbook

Michael Brooks

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A book of science like no other, about a scientist like no other.

This is a landmark in science writing. It resurfaces from the vaults of neglect the polymath Jerome Cardano, a Milanese of the sixteenth century. Who is he? A gambler and blasphemer, inventor and chancer, plagued by demons and anxieties, astrologer to kings, emperors and popes. This stubborn and unworldly man was the son of a lawyer and a brothel keeper, but also a gifted physician and the unacknowledged discoverer of the mathematical foundations of quantum physics. That is the argument of this charming and intoxicatingly clever book, which is truly original in its style, and in the manner of the modernists embodies in its very form its theories about the world.

'The Quantum Astrologer's Handbook' is a science book with the panache of a novel, for readers of Carlo Rovelli or Umberto Eco. It is a work of and about genius.

The Quantum Astrologer's Handbook Details

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From Reader Review The Quantum Astrologer's Handbook for online ebook

Aly says

Not what I expected. But not in a bad way. Entertaining, easy to read, and I think a good, light, introduction to the strange world of quantum physics.

Karen says

There were a lot of things I really liked about this book and I would have rated it a four-star read except that after finishing it and mulling on it for a couple of days, my overall response was 'meh'. It simply didn't grab me as much as I had expected and hoped.

Things I liked:

This is an innovative style of science book, and I enjoyed the mix of 'real science' (quantum physics explanations) and science history (Jerome Cardano's story). The mix helped me to keep reading when the science concepts became hard to follow or when the history became a little too much, because there was a switch in style and 'challenge' that kept me engaged. Sections generally didn't go on for too long.

I enjoyed delving into the quantum physics theories, which I didn't know a great deal about before.

I didn't mind the author's conceit of meeting with Jerome, despite the several hundred year gap between the two men's lives (in 'normal' time); and the use of present tense worked for me.

What I didn't like so much:

Number one peeve has to be the reference to Ernest Rutherford - he is a New Zealander, not a Brit!

The various truncated sentences (mostly in the sciencey parts of the book) were very frustrating.

I had expected more about Jerome and his life story than was included (maybe an expectation I'd mistakenly picked up from the blurb on the back cover?).

After a while the science sections became a little repetitive and not-so-great to follow.

Dearbhla says

This was a great story, a great introduction to difficult concepts in Maths and Physics and all based on a great conceit of time-travel (?) / quantum bi-location (?) / spirit world(?)

I listened to the audiobook version on Audible and really did not enjoy the reader's breathy style. His inflections were all like he was reading sensationalist headlines.

Christopher Elliott says

The interpretation of QM chapters could easily have been left out and made no difference to the story. Seemed like a gimmick to make the book marketable. Otherwise interesting way to present the personal history of Gerolamo Cardano who I was unaware of prior to this book.

Jani-Petri says

Original take on science popularization

I liked the idea of mixing discussion of quantum physics with the biography of Cardano. Such an unlikely mix that it was instantly fascinating.

Gordon Clarke says

I was wanting to read a book about Cardano the man, about his work and his life, as detailed on the back of the book. I sort of got that but (spoiler alert) also a good deal of quantum physics that wasn't necessary nor in the long run pertinent to him, regardless of the numerous justifications. If Brooks had concentrated more on Cardano then I would have given it 3 stars.

There were several printing errors that rendered some sentences unreadable, with the meaning lost. A real pity.

Evan Kostelka says

This book is a great introduction into quantum theory and the different streams of thought out there, but this is mainly a mini biography of Jerome Cardano. A little known figure, he is actually the man who invented the math around probability theory to help him win money at the gambling table. Among other things, his life is tragic and dramatic, so the read is entertaining and the author does a great job creating some suspense while keeping the book entertaining. He also gives a great resource list at the end of the book for those wanting to delve deeper into Cardano's life.

Claudia Clarke says

As a quantum physicist with a tarot set on my desk, I'm probably the ideal target audience for this most curious book. I do find myself wondering who else would appreciate it though; I found lots of the science explanations to be very vague and fluffy and (I speculate) hence difficult for a layperson to follow or appreciate, as the mechanisms described sometimes bear little connection to the conclusion drawn and I was forced to wrack my brains for memories of bygone lectures to fit the pieces together. Some notions like spin don't seem to be introduced at all, before being casually mentioned a few times. Of course, for someone with a background in physics, rather than there being insufficient explanation, there was sometimes too much, hence my sense of confusion about whom this book is aimed at.

I also raised my eyebrows at some of the descriptions of contemporary scientists (Aharonov: speech-impediment and champion of retrocausality? Felt like exaggeration to me, from all I've seen and heard of the man himself.) and the idolisation of some of the big names like t'Hooft. A great talent, yes, and certainly worth listening to when he speaks of interpretations of quantum physics for his arguments, but not worth listening to just because of his name.

But perhaps this is just an example of extreme meta-cleverness: 'On Subtlety', indeed. After-all, Brooks draws attention to a previous biographer of Cardano disposed to exaggeration...

And also, the book never purports to be a scholarly reference book. In fact, unaware as I was of Cardano and having received the book as a gift, as I embarked on reading it, I didn't know if it was fact or fiction, and could easily have believed Cardano to be fictitious. So I appreciated this introduction to such a seminal, fascinating figure. As a biography, this is more successful than as a primer on interpretations of quantum physics.

The writing style made this easy to read -- a fine example of why a "tell, not show" narrative is perfectly good way to write a story -- and transported me to renaissance Italy, reminding me somewhat of the Stravaganza novels I'd read when younger. Equally as riveting a story.

So an odd book, and not without its flaws (in the big picture, but also in my hardback copy, some typographic problems too), but one I'm nevertheless glad I'm read, and would certainly recommend to the right audience.

I'm just not sure who that it ;)

Rathy Srikanthan says

The Quantum Astrologer's Handbook is a lot of fun. It drops you straight into its novel premise of a contemporary science writer (Brooks) locking horns with an incarcerated 16th century polymath (Jerome Cardano), by way of a rather convenient manifestation of quantum theory.

For readers who find themselves wanting to know more about the fabric of reality, but lacking the knowledge to truly dig into the challenges faced by science today, this book is mostly hit but a little bit miss.

Most concepts covered, including the double-slit experiment, the Copenhagen interpretation, quantum entanglement and superdeterminism, are given a generous amount of air time. Brooks' explanations are accessible and honest; he does not shy away from being dumbfounded himself.

I would, however, have liked my hand held more in certain parts - particularly in the latter half of the book. Diagrams would have served well, for example, to illustrate the de Broglie-Bohm idea of the pilot wave and Bell's test for the theory.

The book would also benefit from an index, to allow comparisons between the different theories and thinkers who have been discussed, and how ideas have been amended or discarded over time.

The underlying narrative of the Quantum Astrologer's Handbook is its chief accomplishment. Brooks' self-insertion and his portrayal of Cardano are joyful in their disregard of time and space, and they serve as excellent anchors, carrying the reader with humour and pathos. The hand of historiography in the telling of Cardano's story is a particular delight, and a clever way to squeeze in a "plot twist".

I love this approach to what can be a rather didactic genre, as it encourages the critical thought it aggrandises in telling Cardano's tale. It's such a clever book.

Bogdan Antonescu says

This is a very interesting and atypical book in which the biography of the Italian Renaissance polymath Jerome Cardano (1501–1576) is mixed with discussions about quantum mechanics. Michael Brooks, the author of the book, is calling his approach "magical realist non-fiction". I really liked the magic realism aspect of the book, but I am not going to give any details because I do not want to spoil the book. As for the non-fiction aspect, there are two main threads. The first one (and the main reason for which I decided to read this book) is about the life and works of Jerome Cardano. Cardano had an extraordinary life, he was a mathematician, physician, astronomer, inventor, writer, and philosopher, but also an astrologer, and gambler. I remember learning at school about Cardano's contributions to mathematics, in particular to algebra, and I knew about the Cardan shaft (a mechanical component for transmitting torque and rotation), but I had no idea about his contributions to the probability theory (see *Liber de Ludo Aleae*/Book on Games of Chance, written around 1564 and published 1663) and imaginary numbers. Probability theory and the imaginary numbers are the connexions to the second thread of the book as they are the "twin pillars of quantum theory". The second thread of the book not only contains a description of the foundations of quantum mechanics but also descriptions of some of the main interpretation of quantum mechanics (e.g., the Copenhagen interpretation, the many worlds interpretation).

Decision: recommended.

Jo says

It's not often that non-fiction gains a spot on my leisure reading pile. But the moment I read the synopsis for this new release, I knew it was something I'd enjoy. *The Quantum Astrologer's Handbook* is narrative non-fiction, with a very interesting twist involving the debate surrounding time as the fourth dimension. Author Michael Brooks' passion for his subject matter shines from these pages. An engaging storyteller, he personalises science. [Read full review >>](#)

Terry says

Really enjoyable way of explaining quantum physics by having the author converse with his subject. There are still aspects of quantum mechanics I struggle to get my head around but this history of the topic includes a timeline (of sorts) around different theories and trends with the same conclusion - we're not that much further along from Cardano in terms of what we know.

John Pollard says

Good book (3 stars for me means good, above average, because naturally I only try to read books I think will be really good). A book about Jerome Cardano, 16th century unsung mathematical founder of quantum physics, with many other skills such, in particular medicine. Some interesting writing on quantum entanglement and the double slit experiment.

Edmond Dantes says

Lo Spunto sarebbe ottimo: e se la scienza Quantica confermasse la efficacia della Strologia ? Lo Sviluppo di questo libro che vorrebbe essere contemporaneamente una Biografia di Cardano e una Storia della Fisica dei Quanti.

Interessante ma il Mix non funziona perfettamente e la Parte "teorica" è un pò troppo approfondita per un lettore "profano".

Terry Pearce says

As a science book, this is as odd as it is beautiful and compelling. The rich and rollercoaster life of Jerome Cardano, astrologer, scientist and rogue, serves as a great device for making this an interesting and relatable intro-level introduction to quantum physics. Some may feel there's too much of Jerome, but for me I loved the biography as much as the science, and felt the two each made the other better. I'd read one of Brooks' more straightforward science books before and thought it was okay, but this was something special. I hope he writes more along these kind of lines.
