



Trespassing on Einstein's Lawn: A Father, a Daughter, the Meaning of Nothing, and the Beginning of Everything

Amanda Geffer

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NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY *KIRKUS REVIEWS*

In a memoir of family bonding and cutting-edge physics for readers of Brian Greene's *The Hidden Reality* and Jim Holt's *Why Does the World Exist?*, Amanda Gefter tells the story of how she conned her way into a career as a science journalist—and wound up hanging out, talking shop, and butting heads with the world's most brilliant minds.

At a Chinese restaurant outside of Philadelphia, a father asks his fifteen-year-old daughter a deceptively simple question: "How would you define nothing?" With that, the girl who once tried to fail geometry as a conscientious objector starts reading up on general relativity and quantum mechanics, as she and her dad embark on a life-altering quest for the answers to the universe's greatest mysteries.

Before Amanda Gefter became an accomplished science writer, she was a twenty-one-year-old magazine assistant willing to sneak her and her father, Warren, into a conference devoted to their physics hero, John Wheeler. Posing as journalists, Amanda and Warren met Wheeler, who offered them cryptic clues to the nature of reality: *The universe is a self-excited circuit*, he said. And, *The boundary of a boundary is zero*. Baffled, Amanda and Warren vowed to decode the phrases—and with them, the enigmas of existence. *When we solve all that*, they agreed, *we'll write a book*.

Trespassing on Einstein's Lawn is that book, a memoir of the impassioned hunt that takes Amanda and her father from New York to London to Los Alamos. Along the way, they bump up against quirky science and even quirkier personalities, including Leonard Susskind, the former Bronx plumber who invented string theory; Ed Witten, the soft-spoken genius who coined the enigmatic M-theory; even Stephen Hawking.

What they discover is extraordinary: the beginnings of a monumental paradigm shift in cosmology, from a single universe we all share to a splintered reality in which each observer has her own. Reality, the Gefters learn, is radically observer-dependent, far beyond anything of which Einstein or the founders of quantum mechanics ever dreamed—with shattering consequences for our understanding of the universe's origin. And somehow it all ties back to that conversation, to that Chinese restaurant, and to the true meaning of nothing.

Throughout their journey, Amanda struggles to make sense of her own life—as her journalism career transforms from illusion to reality, as she searches for her voice as a writer, as she steps from a universe shared with her father to at last carve out one of her own. It's a paradigm shift you might call growing up.

By turns hilarious, moving, irreverent, and profound, *Trespassing on Einstein's Lawn* weaves together story and science in remarkable ways. By the end, you will never look at the universe the same way again.

Praise for *Trespassing on Einstein's Lawn*

"Nothing quite prepared me for this book. Wow. Reading it, I alternated between depression—how could the

rest of us science writers ever match this?—and exhilaration.”—*Scientific American*

“To Do: Read *Trespassing on Einstein’s Lawn*. Reality doesn’t have to bite.”—*New York*

“A zany superposition of genres . . . It’s at once a coming-of-age chronicle and a father-daughter road trip to the far reaches of this universe and 10,500 others.”—*The Philadelphia Inquirer*

From the Hardcover edition.



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