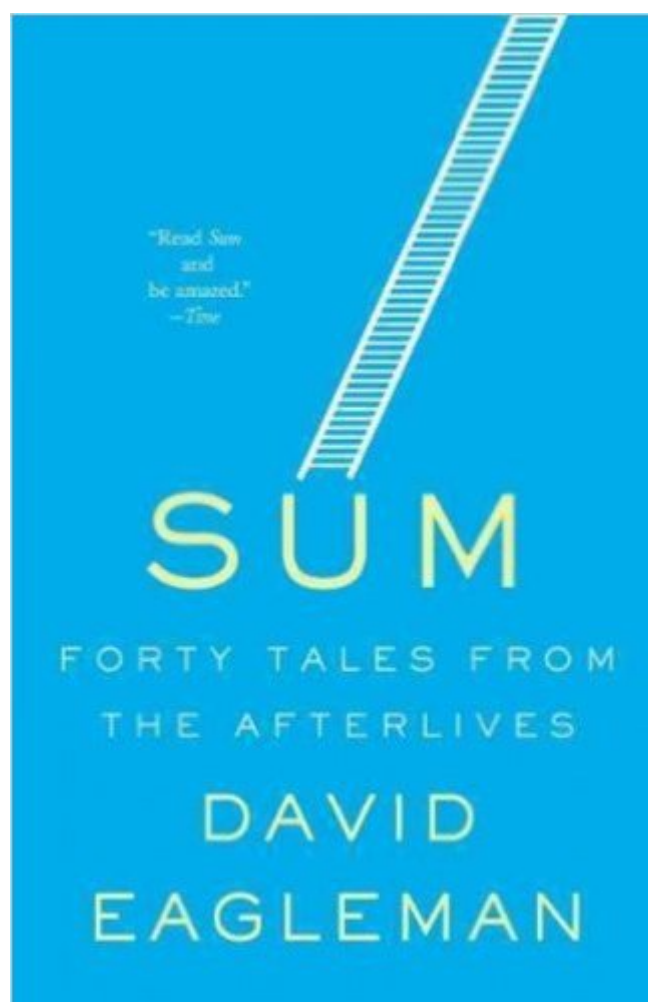


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Sum: Forty Tales From The Afterlives



Synopsis

At once funny, wistful and unsettling, *Sum* is a dazzling exploration of unexpected afterlives—each presented as a vignette that offers a stunning lens through which to see ourselves in the here and now. In one afterlife, you may find that God is the size of a microbe and unaware of your existence. In another version, you work as a background character in other people's dreams. Or you may find that God is a married couple, or that the universe is running backward, or that you are forced to live out your afterlife with annoying versions of who you could have been. With a probing imagination and deep understanding of the human condition, acclaimed neuroscientist David Eagleman offers wonderfully imagined tales that shine a brilliant light on the here and now.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

We live in a universe that doesn't simply lay its mysteries at our feet. Mystics, philosophers, theologians, and scientists all, in their own way, posit theories, beliefs, and "knowledge," about the existence of God and an afterlife. This inherent confusion opens the door for further "what ifs" about who, what, where, and when runs our cosmos and what kind of "life" might follow physical mortality. Neuro-scientist David Eagleman has seen his opportunity to contribute to the melee. His *Sum: Forty Tales from the Afterlives* plunges right in, brashly inventing new benchmarks for Divine behavior and eternal life. This small book of only 110 pages brims over with ideas as each vignette envisions a different, often ironic and amusing, afterlife. For instance, there is "Distance" which allows "us" to ask God face to face why He lives in a palace far, far away instead of "in the trenches with us." God replies he used to live among us, but "[o]ne morning I awoke to find people picketing in front of my

driveway.' "And "Circle of Friends" tells of an afterlife in which each person exists on an earth peopled only by those he or she knew in life -- for most people about "0.00002 percent of the world's population. "The missing crowds make you lonely."Eagleman's biological expertise makes stories such as "Descent of Species" especially lucid and rich reading. The former asks what would happen to a weary sentient being -- say, you -- who decides to reincarnate as a lower species -- say a horse. What would happen to your capacity to make a higher choice during the next life/death cycle?

This is a short book of 40 tales expousing Eagleman's 'Possibilian' (a neologism he has coined) view of afterlife. Possibilianism is predicated on the assumption that we know far too much to believe in standard religion anymore, given that many core religious texts were written by sand dwelling shepherd type people who knew little outside village, crop and flock, let alone science and metaphysics; and far too little to commit to full blown atheism - given the vast range and scale of the universe, as recent scientific research is uncovering. Fact is, the wider mysteries of life cannot be solved. So this leaves plenty of scope for imagination. What if, in the afterlife, you meet all alternative versions of yourself - people who took the path you didn't take, versions of yourself who worked a little harder, who pursued that girl a little more forcefully. How would that feel? What if, in the afterlife, you meet God, but he is not the all powerful beast of the Christian religion but a rather confused man who realises the game is up - humans have outsmarted him on all his big conceits, they know more than he ever expected and he can't play the same fear trick as he did in the Old Testament? Sum is 40 such stories. Some are brilliant - such as story one, where all your life episodes are rearranged in compartmentalised order: 3 years of showering, 2 weeks of pain, three months of looking for stuff etc. Some are quirky neuroscience ideas that don't quite fly off the page. If you want to find out more about this possibilianism idea, I suggest both reading this book and looking at the clip on Will Self's website of Will Self interviewing David Eagleman about this book, and ideas about the afterlife.

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