

The Brain: The Story of You

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Locked in the silence and darkness of your skull, your brain fashions the rich narratives of your reality and your identity. Join renowned neuroscientist David Eagleman for a journey into the questions at the mysterious heart of our existence. What is reality? Who are "you"? How do you make decisions? Why does your brain need other people? How is technology poised to change what it means to be human? In the course of his investigations, Eagleman guides us through the world of extreme sports, criminal justice, facial expressions, genocide, brain surgery, gut feelings, robotics, and the search for immortality. Strap in for a whistle-stop tour into the inner cosmos. In the infinitely dense tangle of billions of brain cells and their trillions of connections, something emerges that you might not have expected to see in there: you.

This is the story of how your life shapes your brain, and how your brain shapes your life.

(A companion to the six-part PBS series. Color illustrations throughout.)

Dr. David Eagleman is a neuroscientist at Stanford University. His scientific research is published in journals from Science to Nature, and he is also the author of the internationally bestselling books *Sum* and *Incognito*. He is the writer and presenter of the companion BBC television series *The Brain*. Introduction

Because brain science is a fast-moving field, it's rare to step back to view the lay of the land, to work out what our studies mean for our lives, to discuss in a plain and simple way what it means to be a biological creature. This book sets out to do that.

Brain science matters. The strange computational material in our skulls is the perceptual machinery by which we navigate the world, the stuff from which decisions arise, the material from which imagination is forged. Our dreams and our waking lives emerge from its billions of zapping cells. A better understanding of the brain sheds light on what we take to be real in our personal relationships and what we take to be necessary in our social policy: how we fight, why we love, what we accept as true, how we should educate, how we can craft better social policy, and how to design our bodies for the centuries to come. In the brain's microscopically small circuitry is etched the history and future of our species.

Given the brain's centrality to our lives, I used to wonder why our society so rarely talks about it, preferring instead to fill our airwaves with celebrity gossip and reality shows. But I now think this lack of attention to the brain can be taken not as a shortcoming, but as a clue: we're so trapped inside our reality that it is inordinately difficult to realize we're trapped inside anything. At first blush, it seems that perhaps there's nothing to talk about. Of course colors exist in the outside world. Of course my memory is like a video camera. Of course I know the real reasons for my beliefs.

The pages of this book will put all our assumptions under the spotlight. In writing it, I wanted to get away from a textbook model in favor of illuminating a deeper level of enquiry: how we decide, how we perceive reality, who we are, how our lives are steered, why we need other people, and where we're heading as a species that's just beginning to grab its own reins. This project attempts to bridge the gap between the academic literature and

the lives we lead as brain owners. The approach I take here diverges from the academic journal articles I write, and even from my other neuroscience books. This project is meant for a different kind of audience. It doesn't presuppose any specialized knowledge, only curiosity and an appetite for self-exploration.

So strap in for a whistle-stop tour into the inner cosmos. In the infinitely dense tangle of billions of brain cells and their trillions of connections, I hope you'll be able to squint and make out something that you might not have expected to see in there. You.

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Plus, find fascinating facts and enlightening insights inside, providing tasty food for thought. This book can help you: Stay sharp with a more flexible brain. Bring more peace and happiness into your life with inspiring, mindful messages."