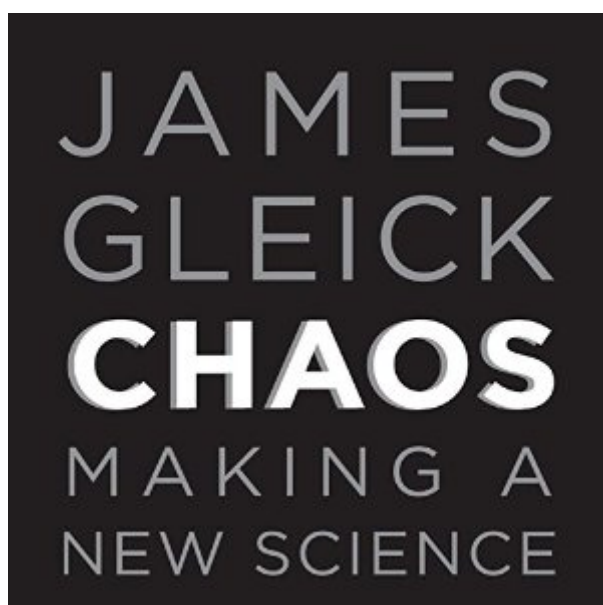


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Chaos: Making A New Science



Synopsis

James Gleick explains the theories behind the fascinating new science called chaos. Alongside relativity and quantum mechanics, it is being hailed as the 20th century's third revolution.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 10 hours and 52 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Random House Audio

Audible.com Release Date: February 1, 2011

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

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Customer Reviews

When I first picked up Gleick's "Chaos" I was a little skeptical - could a book written in 1987 still work as an introduction to chaos and nonlinear dynamics, a field that has been evolving rapidly for the past eighteen years? Well, in a certain sense, it turns out it can. The truth is that the focus of Gleick's book is not so much chaos itself as it is the people who first explored chaos theory and eventually managed to make it respectable and bring it into the mainstream. As the book's subtitle hints, Gleick is concerned mainly with how a 'new science' is 'made', not necessarily with the actual science or math involved. This was not quite what I was expecting from "Chaos", but it is actually an advantage for the book, since its age becomes somewhat irrelevant: although chaos theory itself has been growing and evolving dramatically in recent decades, "Chaos" deals only with its roots in the '60s, '70s and early '80s. On the other hand, I was hoping for more discussion of the science itself, rather than the personalities involved in its early development. I was also not that taken with the style of Gleick's writing. His narrative tends to jump around rapidly, often spending only a few pages on some person or event before moving on to another, commonly with little in the way of connection or logical transition. This is fine for short articles in newspapers and magazines, but it doesn't work so well in a 300+ page book. The vast cast of characters (meteorologists, physicists,

mathematicians, computer scientists, biologists, ecologists and many others) spins in and out of view, and it can be very difficult to get more than a general impression how the little pieces all fit together in the big picture.

(This review is based on the iBook version of Chaos: The Enhanced Edition, which I am assuming is identical to the Kindle edition) In 1987 I got my Bachelors of Science in physics, Prozac was launched in the US, and James Gleick published Chaos. I don't think the middle one has any bearing on the other two. But the first and last are tentatively linked because, despite being completely jazzed on physics, I didn't read it. Being a young physicist with a new-found appreciation of the universe and just how complex it is, I quickly found there was nothing quite so irritating as a popular science book. Just imagine, after three years of sweat and tears you begin to get a feel for the basics of your chosen subject, when some smart alec arts student comes along authoritatively sprouting stuff that you think you should understand, but don't - and all because they've read the latest best seller in the science charts. Humiliating? Not even close! But time and maturity help to break down the fragile arrogance of youth, so when I was asked to review the just-released enhanced e-edition of James Gleick's best-seller Chaos, I willingly agreed. And I'm glad I did. For those who were too young, too disinterested or, like me, too arrogant to read the book when it first appeared, this is the story of how a group of scientists and mathematicians from very different backgrounds found a new way to describe the world. Traditionally, scientists had tried to understand natural phenomenon and systems as stable or almost-stable systems. And it was assumed that complex systems needed even more complex models and webs of equations in order to fully appreciate them.

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