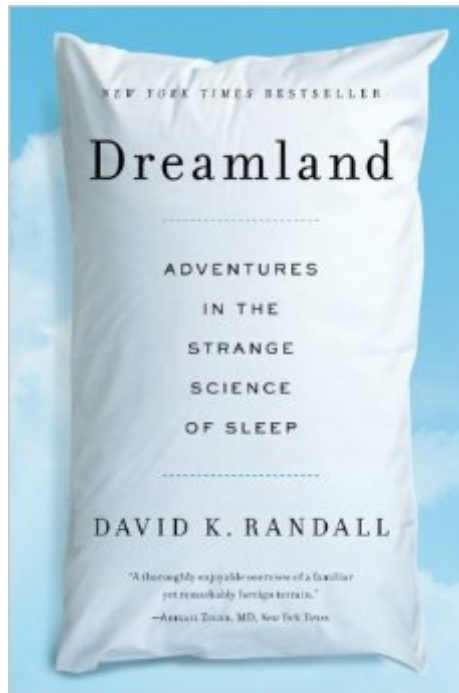


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Dreamland: Adventures In The Strange Science Of Sleep



Synopsis

An engrossing examination of the science behind the little-known world of sleep. Like many of us, journalist David K. Randall never gave sleep much thought. That is, until he began sleepwalking. One midnight crash into a hallway wall sent him on an investigation into the strange science of sleep. In *Dreamland*, Randall explores the research that is investigating those dark hours that make up nearly a third of our lives. Taking readers from military battlefields to children's bedrooms, *Dreamland* shows that sleep isn't as simple as it seems. Why did the results of one sleep study change the bookmakers' odds for certain Monday Night Football games? Do women sleep differently than men? And if you happen to kill someone while you are sleepwalking, does that count as murder? This book is a tour of the often odd, sometimes disturbing, and always fascinating things that go on in the peculiar world of sleep. You'll never look at your pillow the same way again. 10 illustrations

Book Information

Paperback: 304 pages

Publisher: W. W. Norton & Company; 1 edition (August 5, 2013)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0393345866

ISBN-13: 978-0393345865

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.8 x 8.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 8.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (135 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

The author awoke one night having painfully sleepwalked into a wall. After incurring what must have been a substantial medical bill for a series of tests to determine the cause, he is assured that he is fine. The author knew very well that sleepwalking into walls isn't fine at all. He then set out to become an expert on the various aspects of sleep. The result is this rather quirky book consisting of thirteen chapters, each devoted to a different aspect of the issue, ranging from apnea machines to whether your baby should sleep with you. The book can generally be divided into two parts: the

ludicrousness of ignoring sleep's importance, and sleep taken so seriously it has become big business. While the reader is provided information that may be of help in understanding any sleep related problem he or she suffers from, this is not the purpose of the book. Instead, the book is a very enthusiastic ramble (pilgrimage?) through the various facets of sleep, a subject rarely studied until recently. "This is not your typical advice book filled with ten easy steps to perfect sleep. But you will come away with a new understanding of all that goes on in your body while you are sleeping and what happens when you neglect sleep for too long." Each chapter follows a similar arc.

Following a catchy chapter heading like *Between the Sheets* is a stock photo somewhat related to the chapter, in this case a picture of two sets of feet...between the sheets. Definite points off for these inexcusably lame photos that add absolutely nothing to the book. After the photo we are given a vignette, usually of a person, with a dilemma or quest. For example, how a professional baseball trainer decides that sleep deprivation is a problem for his pitchers and what he can do about it (naps!).

*A full executive summary of this book is available at [newbooksinbrief dot com](http://newbooksinbrief.com). The main argument: We spend up to a third of our lives sleeping, and yet, unless we are not getting enough of it, or are experiencing a sleeping disorder of some kind, most of us hardly ever give our sleep a second thought (other than to rue over how much precious time it takes up). Science too largely neglected sleep for the longest time, treating it mainly as a static condition during which the brain was not doing much of anything interesting. However, ever since rapid eye movement (REM) was discovered in the 1950's the science of sleep has really taken off, and the discoveries that have come out of it go to show that this unconscious period is more interesting than we ever could have imagined. It is these discoveries that writer David K. Randall explores in his new book 'Dreamland: Adventures in the Strange Science of Sleep'. The book is split into 13 chapters, with each chapter (outside of the introduction and conclusion) exploring a separate topic in the world of sleep. In the book we learn about such basics as REM sleep and the 5 stage sleep cycle, as well as the benefits of sleep and the harmful effects of sleep deprivation. It turns out that sleep is instrumental in such things as muscle regeneration, long-term memory formation, skills acquisition, problem-solving, emotional control, and creativity. Dreaming, we find, plays an important role in many of these benefits, thus making it seem far less likely that Freud was correct in thinking that dreams are actually a manifestation of subconscious wish fulfillment. We also learn that our natural sleeping pattern is set by our circadian clock, and that many of our routines in the modern world run somewhat against this natural pattern.

I'm pretty consumed with the upcoming election and watch a lot of political television and read a lot of political books. Lately, the books that look interesting have become a bit repetitive. So when I watched a segment this week on Morning Joe entitled "The Science of Sleep," it struck me how little I've ever read or thought about sleep. Of course, Joe, Mika and Willie who host Morning Joe at 5:00 AM were interested because they have to get up so early, but why should the rest of us worry about it if we don't have any major sleep disorders? And some of the reviews were a little negative that there really isn't a book here that's worth reading. Having just completed it, I have to say that it was well worth the effort. I had read "Resilience" recently, which reminded me of Malcolm Gladwell's writing approach, and--being in that mood--"Dreamland" seemed that it did as well. Like Gladwell's use of seemingly disconnected sociological stories and anecdotes that come together to make a point, so too does David K. Randall search far afield for a variety of interesting stories that look at sleep from a variety of perspectives. But Gladwell was writing about topics that seem of greater importance and interest -- why trends take off in "The Tipping Point," how we make decisions quickly in "Blink" and how people succeed in "Outliers." The real issue is whether sleep is so connected to what we try to accomplish during our waking hours and to our overall physical and mental wellness that a book will appeal to enough readers. Randall points out up-front that this is NOT an advice book on how to sleep better, so why read it? The other reviews get pretty detailed about some of the "factoids" that Randall strings together in his chapters, so I won't repeat them here.

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