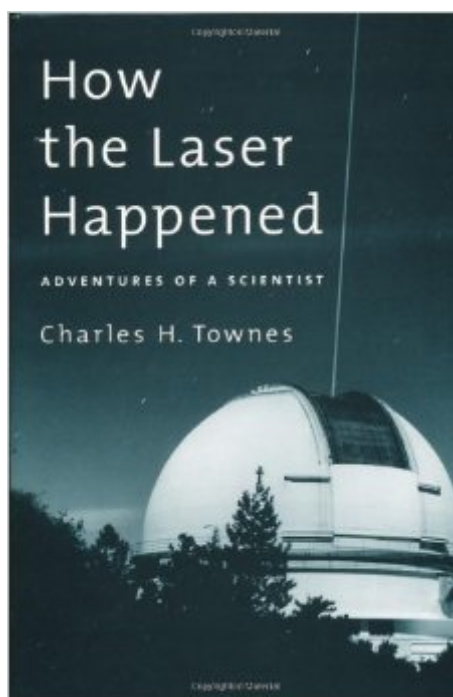


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How The Laser Happened: Adventures Of A Scientist



Synopsis

In *How the Laser Happened*, Nobel laureate Charles Townes provides a highly personal look at some of the leading events in twentieth-century physics. Townes was inventor of the maser, of which the laser is one example; an originator of spectroscopy using microwaves; and a pioneer in the study of gas clouds in galaxies and around stars. Throughout his career he has also been deeply engaged with issues outside of academic research. He worked on applied research projects for Bell Labs; served on the board of directors for General Motors; and devoted extensive effort to advising the government on science, policy, and defense. This memoir traces his multifaceted career from its beginnings on the family farm in South Carolina. Spanning decades of ground-breaking research, the book provides a hands-on description of how working scientists and inventors get their ideas. It also gives a behind-the-scenes look at the scientific community, showing how scientists respond to new ideas and how they approach a variety of issues, from priority and patents to the social and political implications of their work. In addition, Townes touches on the sociology of science, uncovering some of the traditions and values that are invisible to an outsider. A towering and energetic figure, Townes has explored or pioneered most of the roles available to the modern scientist. In addition to fundamental research, he was actively involved in the practical uses of the laser and in the court cases to defend the patent rights. He was a founding member of the JASONs, an influential group of scientists that independently advises the government on defense policy, and he played an active part in scientific decisions and policies from the Truman through the Reagan administration. This lively memoir, packed with first-hand accounts and historical anecdotes, is an invaluable resource for anyone interested in the history of science and an inspiring example for students considering scientific careers.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This relatively short book is filled with interesting stories, people and events--not all of which are about physics or science. In fact, this is an enjoyable book for even the most determined liberal arts type who normally might avoid reading about physics. In fact, Dr. Townes seems to approach science and life with a "liberal arts" attitude: curious about everything and more than a little adventurous. He challenges readers to look under all the rocks for the excitement and learning to be found there. Read it for enjoyment and edification (a rare combination these days).

A wonderful foray into the world of scientific research during the "golden period" after World War II. Townes gives the reader a glimpse into the insatiable curiosity of a genius and an affable one at that.

Townes gives an insight in the troubles an innovator has even in physics. Important messages: be connected, be prepared to stake your career on a topic and to ruin it if it so happens. Otherwise you are just one of the many and useful perfectionists

to have the insight and education is important, but without the on going curiosity we will not move forward. Townes shows just how important this is and how it led to the maser, laser and beyond.

This book describes the history of the laser and how it was invented (and how it was almost NOT invented). The author was ridiculed by the scientific authorities of the day for daring to suggest that such a device was possible, and for wasting time on its development. Thank goodness he forged ahead and ignored the advice (and threats) from the scientific "experts" of the day. A great read!

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