



Among the Creationists: Dispatches from the Anti-Evolutionist Front Line

Jason Rosenhouse

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

Among the Creationists: Dispatches from the Anti-Evolutionist Front Line

Jason Rosenhouse

Among the Creationists: Dispatches from the Anti-Evolutionist Front Line Jason Rosenhouse

Why do so many Americans reject the modern theory of evolution? Why does creationism, thoroughly refuted by scientists, retain such popularity among the public? Is the perceived conflict between evolution and Christianity genuine, or is it merely an illusion peculiar to Protestant fundamentalism?

Seeking answers to these questions, mathematician Jason Rosenhouse became a regular attendee at creationist conferences and other gatherings. After ten years of attending events like the giant Creation Mega-Conference in Lynchburg, Virginia, and visiting sites like the Creation Museum in Petersburg, Kentucky, and after hundreds of surprisingly friendly conversations with creationists of varying stripes, he has emerged with a story to tell, a story that goes well beyond the usual stereotypes of Bible-thumping fanatics railing against coldly rational scientists. Through anecdotes, personal reflections, and scientific and philosophical discussion, Rosenhouse presents a more down-to-earth picture of modern creationism and the people who espouse it. He is neither polemical nor insulting, but he does not pull punches when he spots an error in the logical or scientific reasoning of creationists, especially when they wander into his own field, mathematics. Along the way, he also tells the story of his own nonbeliever's attempt to understand a major aspect of American religion. Forced to wrestle with his views about God and evolution, Rosenhouse found himself drawn into a new world of ideas previously unknown to him, arriving at a sharper understanding of the reality of science-versus-religion disputes, and how these debates look to those beyond the ivory tower.

A personal memoir of one scientist's attempt to come to grips with this controversy-by immersing himself in the culture of the anti-evolutionists-Among the Creationists is a fair, fresh, and insightful account of the modern American debate over Darwinism.

Among the Creationists: Dispatches from the Anti-Evolutionist Front Line Details

Date : Published April 10th 2012 by Oxford University Press, USA (first published March 1st 2012)

ISBN : 9780199744633

Author : Jason Rosenhouse

Format : Hardcover 272 pages

Genre : Science, Religion, Nonfiction, Biology, Evolution, Autobiography, Memoir, Philosophy, Skepticism

 [Download Among the Creationists: Dispatches from the Anti-Evolut ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Among the Creationists: Dispatches from the Anti-Evol ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Among the Creationists: Dispatches from the Anti-Evolutionist

From Reader Review Among the Creationists: Dispatches from the Anti-Evolutionist Front Line for online ebook

Steve Masler says

Sometimes there is a book that sounds as if my own constantly chattering inner voice is talking to me from its pages. This is one of them. His encounters with Ken Ham, director of Answers in Genesis and the Creation Museum mirror my own in which I attended a lecture by Ham, expecting to be amused by his version of creationism but instead left shaken by his theology and the acceptance of his preaching by 4000 of my fellow attendees. Jason Rosenhouse, a mathematician wonders how and why creationists believe what they believe. Instead of constantly arguing with them, or worse, constantly telling himself that they are stupid, he reads the literature and attends their conventions. What he finds is that they they are for the most part, good people trying to understand how God and their belief systems work in the face of evidence from science that literal interpretation of scripture is just not true. Rosenhouse has nothing but kind words for the everyday believers in creationism. But he also separates them into the attendees of these conferences and the "professional creationists" who feed their followers dollops and drips of bad information, religion masquerading as science and terrible theology. They are at best ignorant, at worst demagogues. All seen through Rosenhouse's eyes and his Jewish Atheism. Rosenhouse's clear eyed reading of Christian scripture is more intelligent and deeper than Ken Ham's other creationist champions that I have read. Rosenhouse thoughtfully explains what he has learned about conservative creationism believers and, in many ways, defends the believers from complete dismissal by scientists while never never letting the reader forget that evolution is pervasively scientifically proven across so every field of science. This book has been equally well received by reviewers from conservative Christian Wheaton College and The National Center for Science Education.

Leah says

This is a very interesting look into the world of creationists. The author is a Jewish, atheist, math professor who decides to learn more about creationism after landing a teaching job in Kansas. He explains the difference between intelligent design, young-earth creationism, and evolutionary creationism and tells stories of attending ID and "creation science" conferences.

All in all, it's a revealing book, especially for those of us who are more firmly based in reality. Rosenhouse does a good job of clearly presenting and debunking the pseudo-science behind creationism and ID, while managing to portray the people he meets sympathetically, without caricaturizing them. Well worth the read.

Peter Stanbridge says

This is a terrific book. Jason Rosenhouse takes one on a journey into the world of American fundamentalist christianity. Jason has spent a number of years attending conferences and exhibitions created by fundamentalist christian groups. This includes young earth creationists and intelligent design supporters. The book is a combination of anecdotal conversations, conference speaker transcriptions and analysis. The chapters are short, which makes it a great bed time read.

Jason has found his experiences with fundamentalists to be very congenial. They were mostly welcoming and encouraged his skeptical perspective. But by the end, it would appear that his main gripe against the creationist movement is its attack on science, particularly in education and rather sloppy and frequent ingenuous remarks about science and non-belief.

Carl says

A rousing travelogue by an adventurous atheist who visits strange tribes of creationists, going to their conferences, to their museums and revival meetings, and reading their books and other literature. Doctor Rosenhouse, a staunch evolutionist, reports that the natives are harmless and friendly, but sadly muddled in the head. He often has amicable arguments with them, but is always heavily outnumbered and usually can't slip a word in edgewise to make a point and stamp out their ignorance.

The author seems to have spent a remarkable amount of time over several years attending creationist events of various sorts and reading their work. I bet that by now he knows so much about creationism that he is like Saint Thomas Aquinas, and can state his opponents' positions better than they can.

After getting a ways into the book, I wondered "Why in heaven's name is the man doing this?" Aren't there other hobbies he can take up, like stamp-collecting or sky-diving, rather than hang out with people he considers block-heads? But I went farther, and found out that he has other hobbies. He is an accomplished chess player and mustard aficionado, and he also said that he likes to be with people who tackle the tough questions. That sounds reasonable.

In a slim book Doctor Rosenhouse covers a good deal of ground. Examples of familiar evolutionist positions he discusses: (1) If Genesis is not scientifically accurate, then how can we trust anything in the Bible? (2) What we know about human evolution precludes the existence of Adam and Eve – where does that leave original sin? (3) How does one reconcile millions of years of animal suffering with the idea of a loving God? Doctor Rosenhouse attempts to give both sides of these questions, partly through works by philosophers, theologians, and scientists, and partly by his own thoughts. In these reviews he clearly has an agenda, but then, he never claimed not to have one.

I thought that since Doctor Rosenhouse is a fair-minded man he should have included some attacks on evolution that creationists bring up, and that he has certainly heard. For example, the origin of life. If evolution is true, then by using its methods we should be able to extrapolate backwards, and get a good idea of how life started. But all we have, as far as I know, are some brave speculations that are light-years away from even being half-baked.

Another problem is the old Ghost-in-the-Machine mystery. Why do people think and feel? Evolution regards a human as a collection of single-celled animals, no smarter than amoeba. Or evolution regards a human as a collection of elementary particles. Does a collection of cells in a Petri dish have feelings, or a collection of quarks, gluons and electrons in a rock have emotions? How can the evolutionists ignore this disconnect?

I would love to see Doctor Rosenhouse attack these questions in a sequel.

Morgan Dhu says

Jason Rosenhouse's *Among the Creationists: Dispatches from the Anti-Evolutionist Frontline* is an interesting look at the culture of creationists from the perspective of an outsider - a mathematician and atheist - who has spent time observing and interacting with creationists.

"This book has three main purposes. It is a memoir recounting some interesting experiences I've had socializing with people whose worldview differs greatly from my own. It is also an explication of the beliefs and attitudes that are common in the anti-evolution subculture. And it is a discussion of certain questions about the relationship between science and religion that arose naturally through my experiences."

Rosenhouse structures his account around his personal experiences in visiting specific sites - from "creation museums" to bookstores - and attending pro-Creationism conferences, both to see the way that "creation science" is presented within the Creationist community, and to engage with actual creation believers.

Rosenhouse's approach in this book is not to "prove" evolution, or "disprove" creationism through recounting the scientific evidence for evolution, though he does present a reasoned account of the evidence for the former and the errors made in asserting the latter. Rather, his primary goal is to describe and critique the nature of creationist arguments and the Biblical Christian worldview they are derived from, and explain why the concept of evolution is such a threat to that worldview. Another aspect of his argument focuses on the general lack of understanding of science and the scientific mindset that seems common to most advocates of creationism, a lack which results in most arguments either presenting a completely false summation of the scientific evidence, or setting up strawdogs based on misunderstanding of scientific data and conclusions.

In the process of reporting on his experiences with both "Young Earth" creationists and those who propose Intelligent Design, Rosenhouse discusses the history of Christian opposition to the concept of evolution and how that has manifested in American judicial and educational history - as well as examining the positions of those who have attempted to reconcile Biblical Christianity with evolutionary theory. In this undertaking, he covers a great deal of theological ground, often making his points and illuminating contradictions by the juxtaposition of quotations from both modern creationists and Christian thinkers from the pre-Darwin era on the one hand, and scientists, progressive theologians, philosophers and historians on the other.

What I found particularly interesting about Rosenhouse's work is that, where other science-minded critics of Creationism have turned first to the scientific evidence of evolution to discredit the claims of Creationists, Rosenhouse mounts a significant critique based on the interpretation of Biblical texts, demonstrating the problems in arguing Creationism from a literal reading of the Bible. He also examines arguments that have been made attempting to reconcile allegorical and other ahistorical readings of the Bible with the evolutionary record and its implications for the nature of humanity. Ultimately, he demonstrates that many of the basic tenets on which traditional Christianity is based, from the special relationship between God and man, and the idea of God as omniscient, omnipotent, and the source of all good, are seriously threatened by the scientific understanding of evolution.

Todd Martin says

Ever since Charles Darwin published *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, scientists have amassed vast amounts of evidence from a wide variety of disciplines, published thousands of peer reviewed papers, and made predictions that have been confirmed experimentally to make the theory of evolution by natural selection the foundational cornerstone of modern biology. Add to this the fact that no disconfirming evidence has ever been found (such as the proverbial fossil rabbit in Precambrian rock layers) and its universal acceptance among scientific experts and one can conclude with assurance that evolution is true.

To those who are even moderately versed in the tenets of evolutionary theory, that anyone could deny its validity seems astounding to a degree that is almost beyond belief. Yet, not only is it possible for some people to hold this view, it is shockingly prevalent in the US. According to a 2007 Gallup poll, about 43% of Americans believe that "God created human beings pretty much in their present form at one time within the last 10,000 years or so." While it may be tempting to claim that these individuals are at best deeply deluded, their denial can, in fact, be rationalized within the insular bubble of their worldview.

It should come as no surprise that all objection to evolution is religious in nature. The reason this is the case is that evolution is deeply threatening to their worldview (and for good reason). If humans evolved from single cell organisms over the course of millions of years, then our existence is solely a result of natural processes and random chance. This means that we were not made in the image of a creator, but are merely another kind of animal, and as such lack a soul. One can see how very quickly evolution undermines the entire edifice upon which religion is built. As such, the religious are faced with two options:

1. They must find a way to embrace both evolution and their faith, despite the conflict this engenders.
2. They deny the factual basis of natural selection because it is incompatible with their worldview (from which springs creationism and it's duplicitous offspring, intelligent design).

It's therefore important to point out that those who deny evolution are not necessarily stupid. They are simply using motivated reasoning defensively as a means to preserve their worldview and personal identity. One can almost feel sympathy for religious fundamentalists who must feel besieged on all sides by the exponential advances of science and the growing secularization of the outside world. Almost, if it weren't for their attempts to suppress science, indoctrinate children and forcibly impose their wrong-headed ideas on others.

Among the Creationists : Dispatches from the Anti-Evolution Front Line is an anthropological study of creationists and their ideas as mathematician Jason Rosenhouse seeks to understand their convictions and motivations. While Rosenhouse's treatment is sympathetic and respectful, he does not refrain from asking hard questions or from firmly stating the scientific evidence. What he finds is that creationists live in an insular world and are largely exposed only to information that conforms with their predetermined beliefs. In the rare instance that their views are challenged, they tend to react defensively and are resistant to reevaluating their position in light of new evidence. They are contemptuous of the scientific consensus and established experts, yet unquestioningly defer to their own so-called creationist authorities. Moreover, they realize that the best hope for propagating their views is through childhood indoctrination. Thus their vigorous and relentless (though, to date, largely unsuccessful) efforts to change public school science standards to include creationism.

All of this is, of course, depressingly familiar and poses significant challenges for the US educational system and America's future as a technology leader. Unfortunately, given its centrality to personal identity, it will be

difficult or impossible to change someone's mind once they've bought in to creationist rhetoric. As the adage goes ... you can't reason someone out of a position they didn't reason themselves into in the first place. With that said, the problem may very well resolve itself with time. Given that the global trend skews increasingly towards secularization, it is likely that evolution will attain expanding acceptance simply as a matter of course.

Warreni says

This book isn't exactly what it appears to be. The title leads you to think that this is primarily a tale of a card-carrying rationalist's experiences diving headlong into the insular world of American creationism and challenging the silly and ill-conceived scientific critiques promulgated by its most ardent proponents. It is this, in part; it is also an exploration of the author's views on science and religion; it is also a critique of the deification of naturalism among defenders of science; and it is also an exploration of why creationists feel threatened by science and evolutionary biology in particular. Maybe the book's biggest problem is that it feels like a series of somewhat disjunct articles on a variety of topics that have only a tangential connection.

The author spends time discussing, at various points, his trips to two creationist conferences in 2005 and 2008, an intelligent design creationist conference in 2007 and a 2010 trip to the Answers in Genesis's Creation Museum in Kentucky. He talks about the congeniality of many of his encounters with the attendees and the concerns that this largely conservative Christian crowd has about science, religion, and morality. He also mentions that some of the speakers, including AIG's Ken Ham, are generally less accepting of their diatribes being challenged by facts.

The tales of Rosenhouse's sojourns to creationist country are briefer and less interesting than the meat of the book, which is a look at the history and the wherefores of American anti-evolutionist thought. He has a mathematician's understanding of evolution (and by that I mean to say that it's very much a Dawkinsian [is that a word?] approach) and that's a bit odd but not terribly relevant to the discussion at hand. He also views the subject through the lens of a secular (atheistic) Jew, which makes all the more intriguing his frank conclusion that religion really does have a lot to fear from science. Rosenhouse essentially rejects the popular reconciliationist approach that many recent authors have taken to this topic and said that biologists and philosophers may need to accept that if one denudes Christianity of everything that seems to conflict with our empirical understanding of the world and its history, one is left with a shell that is fundamentally unrecognizable to many Christians. In other words, the divorce of science from religion may be an inevitable consequence of irreconcilable differences.

Melissa Becker says

I'm someone who is always wanting to understand the "why" of other people. I'm a Buddhist who believes in evolution and sees the science as obvious. This book does a good job of helping to explain why creationist reject the science of evolution because of the threat it has to their worldview. Not simply in showing that God did not create the world, but in making humanity less special because it is not touched by the divine.

The author does a good job explaining various types of Creationist arguments and making clear that creationists are not a uniform group. It also debunks falsehoods with science. But it never makes the creationists themselves into the enemy or mocks them. Rosenhouse talks about the great personal

conversations and relationships he's had at creationist conferences and in talking with different people. If you are looking for someone to bash religion, this isn't the book. Instead it helps explain the minds of creationist, what they believe, and why these ideas are not going to be changed just because of science since it serves deeper purposes.

Rachel says

This is the story of Rosenhouse's exploration of Creationism. Rosenhouse is an intelligent, rational mathematician and declared atheist (though the way he describes his beliefs I'd put him in the agnostic category myself). He decided in college to explore the seemingly irrational views of ultra-conservative Christians to try to understand how they can possibly deny evolution. This book describes his journey through conferences, museums, and personal conversations. It also has a light smattering of history of the creationist-evolutionist debate.

This was a surprisingly considerate and fair book considering the fact that it was coming from an atheist talking about Creationists. From the beginning, Rosenhouse insisted that although he was well-known as "that atheist guy who goes to Creationist conferences," he was almost always treated with respect and kindness. This is possibly because his main goal was to educate himself rather than to change anyone's mind. He did, of course, make public comments/questions to the speakers at the conferences, but they always were polite and seemed to be answered politely as well.

Despite this even-handedness, there were a few times that I cringed while reading this book. For instance, he lumped Intelligent Design, Theistic Evolution, Christian Science and other lesser known ideologies all in with Creationism. He even said that they were pretty much the same thing. They're really not, though. Denying the possibility of evolution is not the same as saying that God directed evolution. Yes, I can see where an atheist might think the second option wasn't sensible either. But the basic difference remains - one set denies evolution altogether the other does not. To me, and I would imagine to many atheists as well, an all-out denial of the evidence for evolution is less sensible than saying God directed the evolution. Another lapse in his even-handedness was when he criticized the Creationists as being name-callers - as if that doesn't go both ways. Trust me, I've been disappointed in interviews and essays by prominent evolutionary theorists like Stephen Jay Gould and Richard Dawkins. Scientists can disparage and name-call too.

From what I could tell of his book, the conferences were all about getting together with people who totally agree with you to say "Here's what we agree on, now how can we get others to see the light?" Then they'd have the requisite book signings and other gatherings. So Rosenhouse had plenty of time to hobnob. In his book, he related several interesting conversations between himself and Creationist individuals. Most of these conversations seemed to include teenagers. He'd give information about which authors to read if they wanted to learn more about evolution, or just have an interesting discussion about the points of each argument. I imagine he had a lot of conversations with teenagers because they're less jaded about trying to convince people of their points of view.

This was an interesting book, and I'm glad I read it. It had some shortcomings (noted above), but listening to this book actually educated me on certain things. For instance, years ago I was turned off by Richard Dawkins when I heard an NPR interview in which he disregarded a question from a Creationist. This question could have been easily answered: it was the old "how could evolution be scientifically possible when entropy (chaos) is always increasing?" (This is the second law of thermodynamics.)

The answer is: entropy always increases in a "closed system." A closed system is one that doesn't have any exchange of energy with the outside. Like the entire universe. There's only one universe. There's nothing that it can exchange energy with. On the other hand, Earth is not a closed system. It's always losing atmosphere to the space surrounding it. It's always getting light and heat from the sun. That's called an open system. Animals are open systems too. We breathe, we eat, we poop. That's energy exchange. Evolution took place in an open system, therefore the second law of thermodynamics doesn't apply and there is no contradiction.

Ok, maybe that wasn't easy to explain...Point is, Dawkins could have answered the question politely instead of rudely disregarding it. Although I still think Dawkins was in the wrong, after reading this book I now understand how frustrating it might be to be constantly answering exactly the same question over and over and people ignoring my answer.

Chris Branch says

I guess the target audience for this book might be described as those atheists who know very little about Christians beyond the fact that they think evolution is false. So the author goes to great pains to explain that there are some smart people on the other side of the debate, even though it's clear to him that they're wrong. Rosenhouse is not only a sharp thinker, but obviously a genuinely nice guy, and he tries to set a good example of how rational people should behave when confronted (either rudely or politely) by those who hold different opinions - patiently and calmly engage them in a rational debate. Unfortunately he's in a tough position in this case.

The problem comes down to a conflict between two atheist opinions:

- The "non-accommodationists" who believe that truth is of the highest value, and we should ridicule religion and the religious at every opportunity - not necessarily to convince the person we're speaking to, but to show others who are listening and who might be on the fence that the traditional respect that's been given to religion is undeserved.
- The "accommodationists" who believe that the most important thing is to get along with others in our society. And if some of them have beliefs that are not supported by science, we should just accept that, while at the same time try to show them the scientific evidence, in the hopes that while they might not give up their traditional beliefs, they might find room within them to incorporate new information, about evolution, for example.

Rosenhouse clearly states that he does not believe evolution and Christianity are compatible. As he points out in his conclusion: "Evolution challenges the claims of the Bible, refutes Paley's version of the design argument, exacerbates the problem of evil, and seems to diminish human significance. Any one of these points is worrisome, but all four together amount to a strong cumulative case against the possibility of harmony between evolution and Christianity."

That opinion should put him firmly in the non-accommodationist camp, but at the same time, he's such a gracious person that he resists stooping to ridicule to make his points. So the resulting discussion is a strange mixture of thoughts and opinions and anecdotes that is certainly fascinating and well-written, but ultimately I can't say it makes any headway in resolving the conflicts between evolution and creationist thinking.

So those of us who are already familiar with Christian philosophy and arguments against evolution won't find anything surprising here. Atheists who don't know any Christians could benefit from reading this book, since only good can come from a better understanding of others with whom we share a society, whether we

agree or disagree with them.

Judy says

I read some and skimmed some of this book. I don't care any more about the scientific "proofs" one way or the other. Well, not as much as I used to, anyway. Science seems to change every 20 years or so, and I am just not intelligent enough (or educated enough, or interested enough) to argue with brilliant minds on either (or all) sides of this debate. It seems to me that people believe what they really want to believe, and then find the "proofs" that satisfy them. "A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still."

Jason Rosenhouse seems to be a very likable fellow. Honestly though, I think he is as arrogant as is Ken Ham et al on the other side. Sometimes people are educated beyond their intelligence. Why can't we just say, "I don't know?"

And why is Mr. Rosenhouse so interested in origins when he believes that what really matters is the here and now? I think he is as evangelistic in his beliefs as the Christians whose beliefs he opposes! Does he want others to believe as he does so that he feels justified in his beliefs?

I really enjoyed his chapter on the fish tank.

I still believe that "In Adam's fall, we sinned all." And that we have a wonderful Savior, the second Adam, who came to make all things right. I also struggle with the problem of evil, but most of all, with my own evil. I'm not sure of the best way for a free society to deal with all of the belief systems, but that is what we are supposed to have!

I am reminded of these verses from I Corinthians 1: 25-27: 25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. 26 For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; 27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong,...

Carl says

After reading this book, I am full of admiration for Prof. Rosenhouse. I admire his courage, patience, and decency for trying to engage those who choose to deny the facts from multiple disciplines in order to hold on to their foregone conclusions. I admire his apparently self-taught knowledge of biology, geology, and philosophy, which allows him to more than hold his ground when discussing these issues. I do wonder when he has time to teach math.

The result is an admirable piece of writing, in which he shares his adventures in the realms of make-believe, as well as clearly lays out his own arguments, in a very readable, often humorous way. He bends over backwards to be fair to many of the religiously faithful, while calling out those who disingenuously and deliberately distort, misquote, take out of context, etc. the statements of reputable scientists regarding

evolution.

Ernesto says

I was familiar with the name of Jason Rosenhouse since the 90s because of his chess career and recently re-discovered him as an active mathematician, blogger and player on the ongoing “culture wars” and evolution vs. creation “controversy” (The quoting is necessary: no controversy exist on scientific circles regarding the validity of evolutionary theory). In this entertaining book he presents a series of detailed field reports on his attendances of several creationist events, conferences and venues (including, of course, the infamous “Creation Museum” in Kentucky), his analysis of the claims presented, his questions to the presenters (and the interesting results he got), his funny conversations with other attendees (surprisingly, generally they acted rather nice towards him) etc. A valuable addition to the evolution bookcase of anyone interested in this fascinating subject.

Janet says

Author Jason Rosenhouse is a mathematician and an staunch atheist, who was raised in a culturally Jewish (non-religious) family.

He became interested in the concept of creationism and looking at its evidence alongside the evidence for evolution. To further his goal, he attended several conferences sponsored by various sorts of Creationists, visisted the National Creationism Musueum and read scientific papers regarding evolution and books extolling Creationism.

Unfortunately for the Creationists, he found nothing in their doctrines that convinced him of a supernatural deity, a young earth or even Intelligent Design. Many of the Creationist arguments have been well refuted over the years by dozens if not hundreds of scientific papers on intermediate forms, convergent evolution, the accuracy of the fossil record and carbon dating and the addition of new genes through a variety of mechanisms. Yet, these papers are not recognized or refuted by the Creationists. Instead they seem to create over-simplified, almost cartoonish versions of science and then laugh at them in terms that the non-scientists can see are without common sense, much less scientific sense.

I found this to be an interesting read. As someone whose career has been in science, I wholeheartedly accept the theory of evolution. I also respect the Christian version, which as a liberal Christian, I have never felt that it should be read literally.

And as a (very liberal) Christian, I don't agree with some of his thoughts about religion.

Nevertheless, the book has clarified my thinking as to the strength of the scientific argument and has given me definitions of many of the Creationist terms.

I see now why the version of the young Earth Creationism can be seen to be the foundation of fundamentalist thought. If the seven day creation is not true, then where does that leave the story of Adam and Eve? And

without Adam and Eve, we lose the notion of the fall of man requiring a Savior.

Well worth the time. 4/5 stars

Brian Clegg says

Subtitled 'dispatches from the anti-evolution front line', Jason Rodenhouse's book is a fascinating look at creationism from the outside. Rather than simply poke fun at silly creationist ideas, a game that palls rather quickly, Rodenhouse attends creationist and ID (Intelligent Design) conferences, visits centres and generally immerses himself in the culture, in particular its interface with science. While he does this from the point of view of an atheist, he is respectful of those he is meeting with, and in return, repeatedly emphasises that even when he asks difficult questions after a lecture, he has been treated with warmth and kindness, rather than booed and heckled.

In effect, the book has two different types of chapter. Some delve into the detail of creationist and ID beliefs and make strong efforts to see if there is a way to justify them. The only trouble with these chapters is that, even though they always end up coming down against the creationist view, it can be a bit like reading a theology or philosophy textbook - it gets a little stodgy sometimes. By contrast, the book really livens up with the other chapters, which describe Rodenhouse's experiences, what he witnesses at the events and the creationist centre he visits, and the conversations he has with creationists (including a fairly heated one in a queue for a Subway sandwich).

If you read this hoping to find that Rodenhouse changed his opinion - or managed to change the opinion of a single creationist - it isn't going to happen. But if you come at it from an atheist viewpoint (as I suspect most of the readers will), you will learn a lot more about what creationists believe and why - often because of being presented with distorted facts - and if you come at it as a Christian, you may find some uncomfortable thinking is generated by its careful arguments. More so, in fact, than from the polemic school of Dawkins, Hitchens et al.

The only chapter I wasn't totally happy with was the one entitled 'Why I love being Jewish,' which suffered a bit from American parochialism. Rodenhouse classes himself as a cultural but non-religious Jew. He enjoys Jewish culture and ritual without believing in God, and seems to suggest that this is something unique about Judaism. However, in the UK I'd say that I have come across a similar approach to a good few religions - Hinduism, for instance - and especially in the UK in the form that Astronomer Royal Martin Rees describes himself as a 'Church of England agnostic' - again, someone who enjoys the culture and ritual without having a religious belief.

Overall an interesting book if you really want to get to grips with why creationism is so strong in the US.
