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## Popular physicist turns popular writer

Professor's complex science book lauded for its accessibility

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Accessible and appealing may not be the most expected words for describing a celebrated physicist's work.

But those words were used by *Publisher's Weekly* to describe Physics professor Gino Segre's latest book, *Faust In Copenhagen: A Struggle For the Soul of Physics*, which explores the advent of quantum physics and the personalities that contributed to it.

And so Segre, who has at least eight close relatives who also work in physics, is more personable than one might think.

**The Daily Pennsylvanian:** How, as a physicist, did you come into writing?

**Gino Segre:** To succeed in science these days, you have to specialize. After a reasonably long career of being a specialist, I decided I wanted to see if I could expand my horizons a bit and try to convey to the general public some of the reasons I was interested in science and try and present a bit of a big picture.

**DP:** How did you pick the subjects — a famous meeting of physicists that took place in 1932 Europe — for *Faust in Copenhagen*?

**GS:** During that time [1924-1934], a group of individuals discovered quantum mechanics, which I believe is the most radical scientific revolution of the 20th century.

... It's also a great transitional period in history, because in January of 1933, Hitler came to power. I like that mix of the science, the individuals and the politics.

**DP:** Your new book has earned



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## Physics prof's book earns rave reviews

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critical praise from some big reviewers. Does that surprise you at all?

**GS:** (laughing) A good review in *The New York Times* helps a lot. ... It's never going to be a best-seller, but it's done

better than I thought it would.

**DP:** Your father is Jewish. Did that play a role in writing a book about this time period?

**GS:** It did, because a lot of these people at this meeting were either Jewish or part-Jewish, and their world would change.

So a lot of them came to the United States as a consequence, and that was true for me, too. I look back with a personal interest at those times in Europe.

**DP:** A lot of your people in your family are physicists, correct?

**GS:** In my first book, I think I wrote sort of jokingly that physics was the family business. My brother, my father-in-law, my brother-in-law, my cousins, a lot of us just went into physics.

**DP:** What are family reunions like for a group of physicists?

**GS:** (laughing) Probably not as nerdy as you might think ... The kind of research we do is different, and we can't understand one another. So we talk about the things that everyone talks about.

**DP:** You've been at Penn since 1967. Have you noticed any changes in the University?

**GS:** I see Penn, from a long experience, getting better and better.

The students seem both more exciting and more excited than I remember.

And the other thing I would comment on that I really enjoy is that it's much more international than it used to be. You hear all languages spoken as you walk through campus, and that's really fun.