

# Books

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**Aging: A Natural History** — Robert E. Ricklefs and Caleb E. Finch. Written from a biological perspective, this treatise considers the nature of human aging and uses the most recent data from laboratory and clinical studies to answer common questions about how and why we age. The causes of aging, different patterns of aging in different organisms, the effects of heredity and environment on the aging process, the prognosis for longer life in the future, and policy considerations that must be addressed as more people grow older are all subjects addressed and explained for the benefit of the general reader. *Sci Am Lib*, 1995, 209 p., color and b&w photos and illus., hardcover, \$32.95.

**The Alchemy of the Heavens: Searching for Meaning in the Milky Way** — Ken Croswell. From the ancient belief that the Milky Way is a river in the sky to current scientific theories about its role in the formation of the universe, science writer Croswell details developments in our knowledge about our galaxy and how those ideas came to be. He reports that the Milky Way probably formed as other, earlier galaxies smashed together and that most likely our galaxy has at its center a black hole with a million times the mass of the sun. *Anch Bks*, 1995, 340 p., b&w plates and illus., hardcover, \$24.95.

**An Anthropologist on Mars: Seven Paradoxical Tales** — Oliver Sacks. In the same intriguing, enchanting fashion he employed in his other works, such as *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, Sacks, a neurologist, follows seven patients with various neurological dysfunctions to illustrate how the nervous system forges creative new paths of growth and evolution. The surgeon whose Tourette's syndrome is at bay only when he is operating, the painter who became color-blind after a car accident, and the woman whose autism does not allow her to socialize with people but gives her extraordinary insight into the behavior of animals are just a sampling of the wonderful lives Sacks portrays. *Knopf*, 1995, 328 p., hardcover, \$24.00.

**Do's and Taboos of Using English Around the World** — Roger E. Axtell. The author of *Do's and Taboos Around the World* addresses the sometimes tricky situations that crop up when speaking American English with nonnative speakers. He aims to make readers sensitive to the problems of others in understanding Americans and their lingo and then shows how to avoid offending people with it. Acceptable salutations and greetings for use on the telephone and in person will help the reader in social and business situations. *Wiley*, 1995, 206 p., b&w illus., paperback, \$12.95.

**Sizes: The Illustrated Encyclopedia** — John Lord. A handy reference and interesting book for browsing, this encyclopedia lists virtually every unit of measurement and the methods of measuring a variety of things. The volume encompasses formulas for converting measurements and approximating sizes of everything from nails to English and America teaspoons. *HarperPerennial*, 1995, 374 p., b&w illus., paperback, \$15.00.

**The Total Package: The Evolution and Secret Meanings of Boxes, Bottles, Cans, and Tubes** — Thomas Hine. How do we select one tube of toothpaste from several dozen? Why do we sometimes buy things we had no intention of purchasing when we walked into the store? The answer, contends Hine, lies mainly in the packaging. After surveying packaging throughout history, he reveals the methods used by modern designers and advertisers to play on our psyches and sway our decisions. He also shows how these methods carry over into the design of fast-food restaurants and malls. *Little*, 1995, 289 p., b&w and color plates, hardcover, \$24.95.

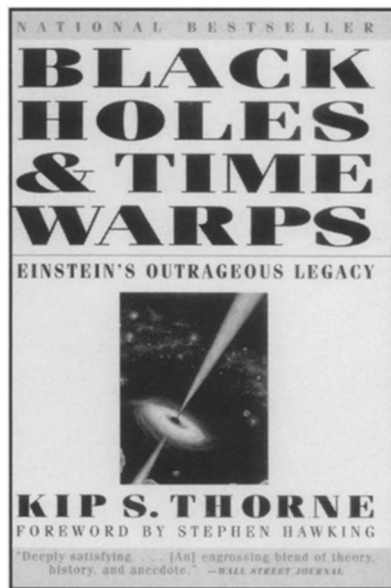
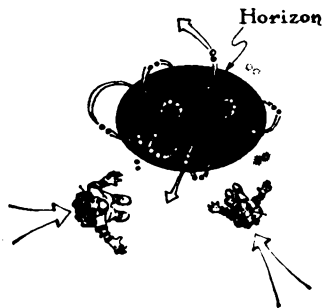
**World Fire: The Culture of Fire on Earth** — Stephen J. Pyne. A proponent of controlled burning examines the evolution and interaction of fire and people in seven specific areas around the globe, including India, Australia, South Africa, Brazil, Antarctica, and Russia. Pyne concentrates on the overwhelming desire to control fire, especially as the U.S. Forest Service has done so thoroughly over the past 50 years. He argues that suppressing fire in the right places only abolishes its regenerative role in nature. *H Holt*, 1995, 379 p., hardcover, \$30.00.

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*W.W. Norton & Co., 1995,  
619 pages, 6" x 9 1/4",  
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**E**ver since Albert Einstein's general theory of relativity burst upon the world in 1915, some of the most brilliant minds of our century have sought to decipher the mysteries bequeathed by that theory, a legacy so unthinkable in some respects that even Einstein himself rejected them.

Which of these bizarre phenomena, if any, can really exist in our universe?

- **Black holes**, down which anything can fall but from which nothing can return.
- **Wormholes**, short spacewarps connecting regions of the cosmos.
- **Singularities**, where space and time are so violently warped that time ceases to exist and space becomes a kind of foam.
- **Gravitational waves**, which carry symphonic accounts of collisions of black holes billions of years ago.
- **Time machines**, for traveling backward and forward in time.

In this masterfully written and brilliantly informed work of scientific history and explanation, Dr. Thorne, the Feynman Professor of Theoretical Physics at Caltech, leads his reader through an elegant, always human, tapestry of interlocking themes, coming finally to a uniquely informed answer to the great question: what principles control our universe and why do physicists think they know the things they think they know?

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