

Books

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The Book of Numbers—John H. Conway and Richard K. Guy. Fans of mathematics and its various intricacies will find this a delightful look at numbers and their roles in everything from language to flowers to the imagination. The authors first describe the roots of numerical words (the reader learns that a Roman centurion was in charge of 100 soldiers and that twill is a two-stranded fabric, for example). From there, they explain how to solve some problems without numbers and how sets of whole numbers can manifest themselves in quite different contexts. The concluding chapters tour the realms of prime numbers, fractions, complex and transcendental numbers, and the recent development of surreal numbers. Copernicus, 1996, 310 p., b&w illus., hardcover, \$29.00.

Climbing Mount Improbable—Richard Dawkins. Probably the most astute popularizer of evolutionary biology, Dawkins once again weaves a persuasive argument on Darwin's behalf. This time, Dawkins assaults one of the most common dilemmas posed by creationists: How could the creatures of Earth, in all their diversity and complexity, arise without the help of a divine creator? Dawkins tracks the paths that lead to the top of this so-called Mount Improbable to show how improbability drives life forward and sparks the genetic "accidents" that enable complex forms to evolve over geologic time. For example, Dawkins calculates that the eye has *separately* mutated as many as 40 times thus far, much faster than scientists would expect. Norton, 1996, 340 p., b&w illus., hardcover, \$25.00.

Chronicle of the World: The Ultimate Record of World History—Derrick Mercer, ed. Spanning human history from 3.5 million B.C. to the present day, this tome chronicles the past in a series of two-page spreads devoted to specific time periods. Each spread opens with a date box itemizing key events around the world. The rest features news stories about a handful of the most important events of the period written in the style of contemporary newspaper articles. Richly illustrated and comprehensively referenced. Dorling Kindersley, 1996, 1,175 p., color/b&w photos/illus., hardcover, \$59.95.

The Emotional Brain: The Mysterious Underpinnings of Emotional Life—Joseph LeDoux. A proponent of the theory that emotions have biological rather than psychological roots, LeDoux explains the neural organization of particular behavioral systems crucial to survival across species—such as fear, the sex drive, and feeding, all of which operate on an unconscious level. He points out, for example, that fear entails physical symptoms, such as increased heart rate, that often begin before a person realizes that he or she is afraid. LeDoux explores anxiety and phobias from a neurological standpoint, providing a fresh perspective on these disorders as well as on the relationship of conscious and unconscious memories to emotional experiences. S&S, 1996, 384 p., b&w illus., hardcover, \$25.00.

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Furtive Fauna: A Field Guide to the Creatures Who Live on You—Roger M. Knutson. This brief, skin-crawling collection of biographies of the microscopic organisms that live in, around, and on people features an amazing array of ticks, bedbugs, and fleas—and an explanation of why they are so fond of humans. Some of these organisms are even too small to see: namely, mites, which crawl under the skin like moles and cause people to itch. Interesting tidbits about the voracious sex lives of fleas (they can copulate for 4 to 5 hours) and the cause of death of the follicle mite (constipation) aid in making this the "definitive guide to human parasites." Ten Speed Pr, 1996, 86 p., b&w illus., paperback, \$7.95.

The Great Human Diasporas: The History of Diversity and Evolution—Luigi Luca Cavalli-Sforza and Francesco Cavalli-Sforza. Over the last 40 years, population geneticist Luigi Luca Cavalli-Sforza gathered blood samples from 15 populations spread across five continents. Through DNA testing, he has constructed an evolutionary tree that places the first humans in Africa and the Middle East. From there, he traces their approximate routes as they colonized Earth 100,000 years ago. With the help of his son, Francesco, Cavalli-Sforza also ponders the existence of a single ancestral language, updates the status of the human genome diversity project, and ties his research to issues of race, eugenics, and genetic engineering. Originally published in hardcover in 1995. Addison-Wesley, 1996, 300 p., b&w illus., paperback, \$15.00.

How Can You Tell If a Spider Is Dead? And More Moments of Science—Don Glass, ed. For people still pondering the "What if?" questions posed by the very young or those looking for answers to those youngsters' questions, this collection of short vignettes probes a multitude of curiosities. Discover the contents of Jell-O, the cause of morning breath, the reason for snow, and why you can't heat an ice cube. Indiana U Pr, 1996, 192 p., paperback, \$12.95.

Inside the Brain: Revolutionary Discoveries of How the Mind Works—Ronald Kotulak. Based on his Pulitzer prize-winning articles in the Chicago Tribune, Kotulak points to the startling associations being made between environmental factors and the brain. He begins with a look at brain development, relaying the effects of, for example, stress. Stress causes changes in brain chemistry, and these changes can lead to violent behavior, bolstering Kotulak's argument that violence is a mental health issue. Finally, he explains the ways in which the brain heals, the latest advances in research on Alzheimer's disease, and the theory that an unused brain "rusts." Andrews & McMeel, 1996, 194 p., b&w illus., hardcover, \$21.95.

Kanzi: The Ape at the Brink of the Human Mind—Sue Savage-Rumbaugh and Roger Lewin. The greatest success story to come from the Language Research Center of Georgia State University is that of one male bonobo named Kanzi, who mastered the symbolic language he was taught. With the help of Lewin, Savage-Rumbaugh tells how she came to be immersed in the study of the "language" of apes and of the work she has done at the center with Kanzi and other bonobos. She relays what researchers have learned about human language and communication from these apes. Originally published in hardcover in 1994. Wiley, 1996, 299 p., b&w plates, paperback, \$15.95.

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315