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Alligators: Prehistoric Presence in the American Landscape—Martha A. Strawn. Raised close to the land in the Deep South, Strawn is intimately familiar with alligators and possesses both an appreciation for them and extensive knowledge of how people hunt them and use their carcasses. A photographer who tells her story visually, she relies on others to tell the written story. Thus, a gator hunter, a conservationist, and an ecologist weave a rich history of the reptile's habits, plight, mythology, and association with humans over time, resulting in a very unusual look at a very durable creature. Johns Hopkins, 1997, 227 p., color photos, hardcover, \$39.95.

Destination Mars: In Art, Myth, and Science—Martin Caidin, Jay Barbree, and Susan Wright. As images from Pathfinder flood the airwaves and the print media, they have renewed enthusiasm for the geology of the Red Planet. Our view of the possibility of life and the composition of the planet is sure to be forever altered. But what were our perceptions of Mars before July 4 and as far back as the ancients? This profusely illustrated survey reflects on the role of Mars in Greek astronomy, relates the rampant speculation about the existence of Martians in the early 1900s and the hysteria provoked by H.G. Wells' announcement of their arrival, and recounts NASA's accomplishments in visiting our neighbor. Penguin Studio, 1997, 228 p., color/b&w photos/illus., hardcover, \$29.95.

Eco Homo: How the Human Being Emerged from the Cataclysmic History of the Earth—Noel T. Boaz. Working from his assumption that humankind arose in Africa, Boaz sets forth eight hypotheses that link ecological fluctuations to the genetic makeup of our ancestors. He even contends that culture emerged in response to the rapid environmental changes during the Pleistocene Glacial Maximum, changes that rendered culture the "quintessential positive feedback system." Boaz shares a wealth of data generated in the field of paleoecology, such as how evaporation of the Mediterranean Sea between 5 and 6 million years ago allowed the Sahara Desert to spread, splitting the hominid and chimpanzee lineages. Basic, 1997, 278 p., hardcover, \$25.00.

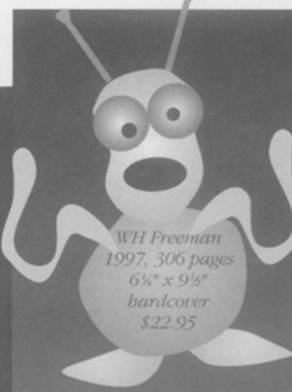
The Green Pharmacy: New Discoveries in Herbal Remedies for Common Diseases and Conditions from the World's Foremost Authority on Healing Herbs—James A. Duke. An ethnobotanist associated with the U.S. Department of Agriculture for the better part of 30 years shares his knowledge about the beneficial effects of medicinal plants on human health. Writing in a homey style, Duke offers generalizations about herbal remedies and an alphabetical guide to various conditions and the plants associated with treating them. Rodale Pr Inc, 1997, 507 p., b&w illus., hardcover, \$29.95.

The Life of the Skin: What It Hides, What It Reveals, and How It Communicates—Arthur K. Balin and Loretta Pratt Balin. As passionate about the human epidermis as they are about each other and their patients, this husband-and-wife team of dermatologists is intent on enlightening people about the sensitivity of skin and advances in dermatology. The reader gets to listen in on a series of exchanges between patients whose skin has hardened, become spotted, or aged poorly and the Balins, who find out what's causing the problems. Bantam, 1997, 259 p., hardcover, \$24.95.

The Passive Solar House: Using Solar Design to Heat and Cool Your Home—James Kachadorian. A provider of manufactured solar homes for many years, Kachadorian illustrates in this how-to guide the 10 key principles of solar design for homes in a variety of climates. The nitty-gritty of solar construction is provided: floor plans, formulas and equations for calculating solar principles, and backup methods for heating and cooling. The author also shares his design for the Solar Slab heat exchanger. Chelsea Green, 1997, 210 p., color plates/b&w photos/illus., paperback, \$24.95.

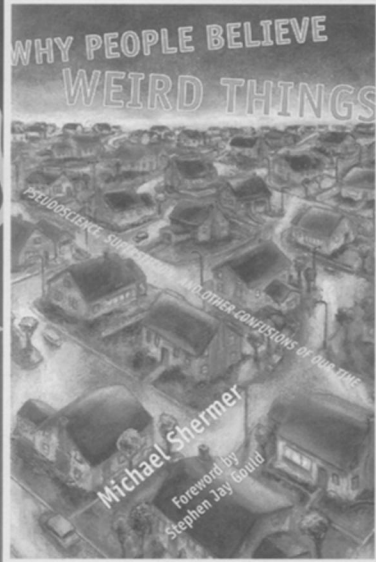
Why Aren't Black Holes Black?: The Unanswered Questions at the Frontiers of Science—Robert M. Hazen with Maxine Singer. Is the end of science here? Do we know all we need to know? No way! asserts Hazen, who surveys research in various disciplines and itemizes those things that are still beyond our grasp. Both the colossal questions—will the universe end? how did life on Earth arise?—and the more down-to-earth issues, such as what materials are at the center of Earth and the status of bionic humans, are covered. Anchor NY, 1997, 309 p., paperback, \$12.95.

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Why People Believe Weird Things
 Michael Shermer
 Foreword by Stephen Jay Gould

Why do so many people believe in mind reading, past-life regression therapy, abductions by extraterrestrials, and ghosts? What has led to the rise of "scientific creationism" and the belief that the Holocaust never happened? Why, in this age of supposed scientific enlightenment, do we seem to be more dangerously confused than ever?

In *Why People Believe Weird Things*, science historian Michael Shermer explores the very human reasons we find otherworldly phenomena, conspiracy theories, and cults so appealing. The director of the Skeptics Society, Shermer shows how the eternal search for meaning and spiritual fulfillment often results in our being led astray by extraordinary claims and controversial ideas.

As he investigates those movements and the people behind them, Shermer also reveals the darker and more fearful side of wishful thinking, including:

- ? The strange debating tactics of creationist Duane T. Gish, who argues with the author over evolutionary theory
- ? The apocalyptic visions of a leading racial pseudoscientist
- ? ESP adherents who claim they've proved the power of thought control
- ? The leaders of the Holocaust denial movement and their views on Nazis

Shermer also describes his television appearances on *Oprah* and *Unsolved Mysteries*, where he confronts those who take advantage of people's gullibility in order to advance their own agendas.

—from WH Freeman

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