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Eco-Pioneers: Practical Visionaries Solving Today's Environmental Problems—Steve Lerner. Pliny Fisk III of Austin, Texas, builds with a substance he invented; made from recycled ash, it's stronger than concrete. Sally Fox grows naturally colored organic cotton in Arizona. They and 23 others profiled here are not waiting for policy makers to catch up with them. Instead, they are taking the lead in looking at environmental dilemmas in new ways—some because they want to better the planet, others because they have to, still others because they have an entrepreneurial spirit. All in all, they have found sustainable ways to log forests, treat sewage organically, and generate power. MIT Pr, 1997, 462 p., b&w photos, hardcover, \$25.00.

Evolution Isn't What It Used to Be: The Augmented Animal and the Whole Wired World—Walter Truett Anderson. A "bionic convergence" is upon us, says Anderson in this look at the melding of biology and technology and its impact on our evolutionary path. He asserts that the human mind is augmented by computers and that Earth is being remodeled with wiring for information systems. Anderson focuses on some of the issues raised by this convergence—including eugenics, manufacturing, biomaterials, and genetics—as they affect business, society, and family. Originally published in hardcover in 1996. WH Freeman, 1997, 223 p., paperback, \$14.95.

How the Mind Works—Steven Pinker. The director of the Center for Cognitive Neuroscience at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology shifts his focus from speech, which he masterfully illustrated in *The Language Instinct*, to the fundamental question of how the structure of the mind enables us to emote, relate to others, see, and reason, among other things. The brain, contends Pinker, is a computational machine programmed by the solutions to the problems faced by our hunter-gatherer ancestors. Art, music, philosophy, religion, and humor factor into the final chapter, as Pinker ponders the "higher callings" of the modern human. As these elements fold together, the reader gleans insight into such questions as, Why do memories fade? What makes children bratty? Why do fools fall in love? Norton, 1997, 660 p., b&w illus., hardcover, \$29.95.

In a Desert Garden: Love and Death Among the Insects—John Alcock. Transplanted to arid Tempe, Arizona, Alcock replaced his conventional yard with a xeriscaped landscape. So long Bermuda grass: Alcock installed a compost heap, a vegetable garden, and assorted cacti, which in turn encouraged a "parade" of insects to take up residence. Alcock displays a biologist's obsession with this small ecosystem and ably turns seemingly uneventful habitats into engaging realms. The intricate life cycles and habits of earwigs, whiteflies, and twig caterpillars, which adapt so remarkably to the harsh terrain, star in this tribute to desert life. Norton, 1997, 186 p., color plates, b&w illus., hardcover, \$27.50.

Rogue Asteroids and Doomsday Comets: The Search for the Million Megaton Menace That Threatens Life on Earth—Duncan Steel. An astronomer examines craters on Earth, then follows the movements of several asteroids currently circling the planet. Steel suggests methods of tracking and destroying asteroids using nuclear weapons. His theories about the roles of Stonehenge and the Egyptian pyramids in past meteoric activity in the Taurid Complex are offered as well. Originally published in hardcover in 1995. Wiley, 308 p., b&w plates/illus., paperback, \$16.95.

Visions: How Science Will Revolutionize the 21st Century—Michio Kaku. While Stephen Jay Gould predicts an "orgy" of millennium books, the author of *Hyperspace* is unique in his dissection of the nitty-gritty of the quantum, biogenic, and computer revolutions. This theoretical physicist has garnered a consensus of his peers to specify the intricacies of each facet. According to Kaku, the guiding principle of modern computers—Moore's Law—will break down, paving the way for DNA and quantum computers. His deft explanation of the underpinnings of decoding DNA shows how life could be manipulated. Anchor NY, 1997, 403 p., hardcover, \$24.95.

Yellow Fever Black Goddess: The Coevolution of People and Plagues—Christopher Willis. A biologist explains how disruptions in ecosystems pave the way for epidemics and pandemics, though not necessarily for endemic diseases. Willis focuses on the struggle and evolution of microbes and shows how disease drives diversity. Moreover, he illustrates the evolutionary environment in which disease-causing organisms thrive to suggest how to control them. Published in hardcover in 1996. Addison-Wesley, 1997, 324 p., b&w illus., paperback, \$13.00.

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In *Buzz*, Stephen Braun removes the mystery cloaking alcohol and caffeine, the world's most widely consumed mind-altering substances. In an entertaining blend of modern science and ancient lore, Braun shows, for instance, that alcohol is no simple depressant but is, instead, a "pharmacy in a bottle," mimicking the actions of drugs such as cocaine, Valium, opium, and ether. Drawing on the latest findings of neuroscience, Braun explains how molecules of alcohol interact with the brain to produce the wide-ranging effects for which it is known.

Caffeine is equally interesting. *Buzz* provides the first clear and detailed explanation of how caffeine actually revs up the brain and the body. This ubiquitous molecule—found in tea, coffee, most soft drinks, chocolate, and hundreds of nonprescription drugs—achieves its many effects in a manner wholly different from what is popularly believed. Among other topics, Braun explores the role of caffeine in creativity, sex, athletic performance, and dieting. He also delves into why caffeine can be so habit-forming and whether it can really be considered addictive.

—from Oxford University Press

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