

Desert Solitaire

by Edward Abbey

from the publisher

Here, [Abbey] vividly captures the essence of his life during three seasons as a park ranger in southeastern Utah. This is a rare view of a quest to experience nature in its purest form -- the silence, the struggle, the overwhelming beauty. But this is also the gripping, anguished cry of a man of character who challenges the growing exploitation of the wilderness by oil and mining interests, as well as by the tourist industry.

...Abbey's observations and challenges remain as relevant now as the day he wrote them.

Natural Obsessions: The Search for the Oncogene

by Natalie Angier

An account of the race to be the first to publish research identifying the first oncogene, Angier chronicles the personalities and science of two labs on two coasts, run by two formidable intelligences with vastly different styles. Full of both personal intrigue and accounts of the way cutting edge molecular biology really gets done, this reporter's view is an interesting read. Ms DR was a member of the Weinberg lab while this book was being researched and written, and her name appears somewhere in the text.

Silent Spring

by Rachel Carson

from the publisher

First published by Houghton Mifflin in 1962, *Silent Spring* alerted a large audience to the environmental and human dangers of indiscriminate use of pesticides, spurring revolutionary changes in the laws affecting our air, land, and water. '*Silent Spring* became a runaway bestseller, with international reverberations . . . [It is] well crafted, fearless and succinct . . . Even if she had not inspired a generation of activists, Carson would prevail as one of the greatest nature writers in American letters' (Peter Matthiessen, for *Time's* 100 Most Influential People of the Century).

The Secret Life of Lobsters

By Trevor Corson

Publishers Weekly

In the 1980s, the lobster population in the waters off the coast of Maine was declining, threatening disaster for the state's lobster fishing industry. Government scientists attributed the drop-off to over-fishing and recommended raising the minimum legal size of lobsters that could be harvested. Lobstermen disagreed, contending that their longstanding practice of returning oversized lobsters to the sea as brood stock would take care of the problem. In this intriguing and entertaining book, Corson...brings together the often conflicting worlds of commercial lobstermen and marine scientists, showing how the two sides joined forces and tried for 15 years to solve the mystery of why the lobsters were disappearing. Agent, Stuart Krichevsky. (June) Copyright 2004 Reed Business Information.

The Selfish Gene

By Richard Dawkins

From the publisher

Richard Dawkins' brilliant reformulation of the theory of natural selection has the rare distinction of having provoked as much excitement and interest outside the scientific community as within it. His theories have helped change the whole nature of the study of social biology, and have forced thousands of readers to rethink their beliefs about life. In ...*The Selfish Gene*, Dawkins explains how the selfish gene can also be a subtle gene. The world of the selfish gene revolves around savage competition, ruthless exploitation, and deceit, and yet, Dawkins argues, acts of apparent altruism do exist in nature. Bees, for example, will commit suicide when they sting to protect the hive, and birds will risk their lives to warn the flock of an approaching hawk.

Guns, Germs, and Steel

By Jared Diamond

From the publisher

Winner of the Pulitzer Prize, *Guns, Germs, and Steel* is a brilliant work answering the question of why the peoples of certain continents succeeded in invading other continents and conquering or displacing their peoples. This edition includes a new chapter on Japan and all-new illustrations drawn from the television series.

Pilgrim at Tinker Creek

By Annie Dillard

From the publisher

An exhilarating meditation on nature and its seasons—a personal narrative highlighting one year's exploration on foot in the author's own neighborhood in Tinker Creek, Virginia. In the summer, Dillard stalks muskrats in the creek and contemplates wave mechanics; in the fall she watches a monarch butterfly migration and dreams of Arctic caribou. She tries to con a coot; she collects pond water and examines it under a microscope. She unties a snake skin, witnesses a flood, and plays -King of the Meadow' with a field of grasshoppers.

The Coming Plague

By Laurie Garrett

Publishers Weekly

Documenting the plausible threat of major new worldwide epidemics, as well as eruptions of recently discovered diseases, Garrett's gripping and frightening report sounds a wake-up call to the planet. Wars, sexual promiscuity, inept public-health efforts and development schemes that disrupt ecosystems are some of the factors she says contribute to the alarmingly rapid mutation of viruses, the pandemics sweeping through the animal world, and the spread of human diseases to new areas. ...Garrett discusses the tremendous increase in AIDS and HIV infection across Asia, outbreaks of the incredibly lethal Ebola virus in Africa, and the spread of diseases via human technologies (such as tampons contributing to toxic shock syndrome). BOMC, QPB and Natural Science Book Club selections.

In the Shadow of Man

by Jane Goodall

The New York Times

"I can't imagine a more vivid or unexpectedly moving introduction to chimpanzees in the wild than Jane Goodall's." -- George Stade

Through a Window

From Publishers Weekly

Her first 10 years at Gombe (Tanzania) on the eastern shore of Lake Tanganyika produced the classic *In the Shadow of Man*. A fitting successor to that work, Goodall's newest continues the saga of the chimpanzee families with an engrossing account of animal behavior. She examines the mother-child relationship, noting that young males must sever the ties in order to learn male responsibilities (patrolling, repelling intruders, searching for food). There are profiles of special individuals: Goblin, who was determined to rise to the top and stay there; Jomeo, without social ambition; Gigi, a sterile female; Melissa, mother of successful offspring. Other stories of the chimpanzees include a brutal war between troops; a gruesome affair of cannibalism; incidents of injury, death and grief. The reader gets promptly involved with the characters--they have distinct personalities. In the final chapters, Goodall turns to the plight of wild chimpanzees today (loss of habitat) and the appalling living conditions of those in captivity (including laboratory animals). An important book for students of behavior. Photos.

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The Panda's Thumb

by Stephen J. Gould

17 of 19 people found the following review helpful:

Clear thinking, March 8, 2001

Reviewer: **Atheen Hills** (Mpls, MN United States) - [See all my reviews](#)

~~ ~~ This volume is a collection of Gould's earlier essays for the New York Museum of Natural History. They reflect his marvelous insight into the heart of current arguments in evolution studies, his knowledge of the history of the subject, and his take on life in general. *The Panda's Thumb*, entitled from one of these essays, is not quite as witty as his later works are, but his personable style and conversational approach make the book very readable.

One of the more interesting topics included is his discussion of the 19th Century rationale for prejudice against women and individuals of non-Western cultures. I found the very circular reasoning on the correlation between brain size and intellect and the misbegotten comparison of developmentally delayed individuals with individuals of other races particularly informative. The same kind of reasoning appears to be enjoying a destructive renaissance among social biologists today, most notably the authors of the notorious Bell Curve. The dissection of this type of faulty reasoning by an expert is instructive and a process well worth learning oneself and teaching to young people.

Some of the more admirable of Gould's writing habits, and well displayed in this book, are his ability to give fair voice to the opposition, his acknowledgement of the work of others, and his capacity to find value even in the faulty work of others. The latter is well

demonstrated in his discussion of the 19th Century effort to locate a representative of a basic life form, a link between the living and the inert. In this essay he shows that good science is part hard work, part individual brilliance, and part being able to say "I was wrong in my thinking here."

The casual, approachable style, the brilliant and open mind, the logical approach to argument all make this an excellent book for anyone but would definitely make it a good book for high school students to learn the process of critical thought.

The Flamingo's Smile

by Stephen J. Gould

From Library Journal

This is Gould's fourth volume of essays reprinted, with postscripts, from Natural History. Gould's monthly columns seem to take on new meaning in these collectionseach becomes a piece in a mosaic pattern of thought. Thus, The Flamingo's Smile gives a glimpse at the big picture. The essay on the extinction of dinosaurs is placed effectively next to a consideration of humanity's possible extinction through nuclear war. The discussions of evolutionary biology include new pieces from recent research and revisions in previously held beliefs, as well as a surprisingly relevant essay on the decline in batting averages in major league baseball. And, for the first time, Gould writes for the general reader on his own research on Bahamian land snails. This book requires undivided attention, but the reward is special insight into the complexities of evolutionary biology. Susan Klimley, Columbia Univ. Libs., N.Y. Copyright 1985 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Ever Since Darwin

by Stephen J. Gould

19 of 20 people found the following review helpful:

Gould on the nature of things, June 14, 2000

Reviewer: [Atheen Hills](#) (Mpls, MN United States) - [See all my reviews](#)

~~ ~~ This was a wonderful reading experience. Dr. Gould is a truly gifted writer with a wonderful wit and colorful style. He has a broad range of interests and knowledge and an interesting circle of friends and colleagues upon whose wisdom he also draws (Astronomer Sagan, Geologists Press and Siever, were among those with whose work I was familiar). He also manages to approach "accepted" theories from unusual directions, sometimes with novel and provocative results! The collection of essays includes an interesting work on the effects of the personality of the Captain of the Beagle on the formulation of Darwin's theories; a subject that had certainly never occurred to me. There is also an interesting discussion of the human baby as an unfinished embryo, with interesting implications for the upper limit on brain size and for human evolution as a whole. The effect of size on intellectual potential of the brains of different species, for instance ants vs humans, is the topic under discussion in the Sizing up of Human Intelligence. The interaction of planetary size and surface area and the concomitant implications for development of life is the subject of another article. The effect of social milieu on the development and acceptance of scientific theories is also discussed as is the hindsight criticism of "wrong" theories and their proponents. Probably most interesting, and certainly most urgently in need of repetition even now, is the tendency to use scientific "fact" or verbal slight of hand to support social status quo or even abuse by those with a political agenda. Many of the essays could be well

used in high school classes to teach and encourage critical thinking and novel approaches to what is commonly held as "fact." I would not just recommend the book to you, I would encourage you to read it cover to cover!

The Origin of Humankind

By Richard Leakey

From the publisher

The Origin of Humankind is Richard Leakey's final statement on human evolution. Deriving its power from the author's unquestioned authority in the field of paleontology, and enriched by his new interest in wildlife, this book answers the question: What made humans human? Leakey argues that when one of our hominid ancestors acquired the ability to walk upright (called "bipedalism"), the evolution of modern humans became possible, perhaps even inevitable. All other human evolutionary refinements and distinctions can be seen as related to this one dramatic step. In fascinating sections on how and why modern humans developed a social organization, culture, and personal behavior, Leakey enhances our understanding of the nature and evolutionary role of art, language, and human consciousness.

The Sexual Brain

by Simon LeVay

From Kirkus Reviews

A fascinating look at the biological bases for diversity of sexual feelings and behavior. Neurobiologist LeVay (Salk Institute for Biological Studies/UC at San Diego), whose only previous writing on sex was a 1991 paper in Science reporting differences in the hypothalamus of gay and straight men, says that his newness to the field of sex research has enabled him to bring a "certain amateurish or journalistic attitude to the field." Unlike many scientists, LeVay has a skilled journalist's ability to make technical subject matter accessible, and he seems to have fun doing it. All the chapter titles are from Shakespeare: "Time's Millioned Accidents" covers the evolution of sex; "For a Woman Thou First Created" looks at the biology of sexual development; "The Womby Vaultage" examines the hypothalamus; and "The Beast with Two Backs" is about the mechanics of sexual intercourse. Other chapters look at the nature-versus-nurture question; how hormones influence courtship and maternal behavior; the organization of the brain; sexual identity; and sexual orientation. LeVay, who's gay, devotes his longest chapter to sexual orientation, examining the biological mechanisms that may help make a person gay, straight, or bisexual. Happily, he provides summaries at the beginning or end of most chapters, and he encourages readers to skip chapters that seem too technical and to read just the summary before going on. And there's a glossary designed not just for the scientifically challenged but for those who want help with Shakespeare's language as well: "millioned" is explained next to "mitosis," and "vasotocin" next to "vaultage." Erudite and entertaining. -- Copyright ©1993, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

King Solomon's Ring

by Conrad Lorenz

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful:

A must have book for everyone, anyone., November 29, 2003

Reviewer: **Frank Bierbrauer** (Cardiff, Wales, UK) - [See all my reviews](#)

~~ ~ A rare 5 stars for this one, simply delightful, a joy to read. Lorenz is so full of love for his craft, yes I say craft because that is the way he treats his study of animal behaviour. Not an average scientist but rather somehow he has that rare ability to both love his work and be able to write about it to a lay audience with wonderful wit, charm, wisdom and grace. He's a little like Adolf Portmann except with more humour but the same love.

I mentioned that he writes this book for lay readers, not scientists, and unlike the contemporary crowd, who often write in a more condescending way he manages to get across the animals and their complex behaviour without ever at any stage making the reader think himself inadequate to the task. He writes as a human being experiencing the wonders of the natural world and does not artificially reduce it to ashes and leache the life out of it as others do. Here he actually makes people want to become naturalists or biologists. There is no finer writer in the sciences.

In the book, a little tome of 190 pages, he discusses a whole range of animals he studies notably, often from his own home where he keeps an entire managerie of ducks, geese, jackdaws, parrots, dogs, hamsters, water shrews etc etc. The whole house is alive with the raucous cries and crazy comings and goings of his companions. He gives much to the reader such as how to manage an aquarium properly, how to look after animals correctly so their lives are well lived and the book is chocka-block full of animal tales. The kind of tales myths and legends are grown from. I mean that the tales are often so remarkable, e.g. the intelligence shown by his pet raven or the story of two men carrying a canoe followed by several goslings, a large red dog and some ducklings. Its droll and humourous and full of joy. And, in it all the way through are his wondrous drawings portraying everything he tells of in the book.

Walking With the Great Apes : Jane Goodall, Dian Fossey, Birute Galdikas

by Sy Montgomery
From Publishers Weekly

In this study of three great female primatologists, science journalist Montgomery moves beyond biography into ethology, taking a step that goes well beyond even her subjects' research. Goodall, Fossey and Galdikas each made a similar leap, the author contends, moving from observers and recorders to an almost shamanistic quest to enter the world of the apes they studied.

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Never Cry Wolf : Amazing True Story of Life Among Arctic Wolves

by Farley Mowat
Book Description

More than a half-century ago the Canadian Wildlife Service assigned the naturalist Farley Mowat to investigate why wolves were killing arctic caribou. Mowat's account of the summer he lived in the frozen tundra alone-studying the wolf population and developing a deep affection for the wolves (who were of no threat to caribou or man) and for a friendly Inuit tribe known as the Ihalmiut ("People of the Deer")-is a work that has become cherished by generations of readers, an indelible record of the myths and magic of wild wolves. Ms. DR thinks this is a great read!

A whale for the killing: Farley Mowat

by Farley Mowat

Inside Flap Copy

A PLEA TO STOP THE SLAUGHTER NOW...

When an 80-ton Fin Whale became trapped in a Newfoundland lagoon, conservationist Farley Mowat rejoiced: here was the first chance to study at close range one of the most magnificent animals in creation. Some local villagers thought otherwise. They blasted the whale with rifle fire and hacked open her back with a motorboat propeller. Mowat appealed desperately to the police, to marine biologists, finally to the Canadian press. But it was too late. Ravaged by an infection resulting from her massive wounds, the whale died. World-renowned for his passionate tales of survival, Farley Mowat wrote his new book to symbolize the plight of all whales preyed on by man for commercial profit.

The Forgotten Pollinators

by Stephen L. Buchmann, Gary Paul Nabhan, Paul Mirocha

From Publishers Weekly

Popular environmental literature has generally overlooked the role of pollinators – animals such as bees, beetles, butterflies, moths and bats. In fact, our information on pollinator-plant interaction may be the weakest link in understanding how ecosystems function, say the authors. This book is the centerpiece of a public-awareness campaign based at the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum. Buchmann, a leading authority on pollination, and Nabhan (*The Desert Smells Like Rain*) explore this vital link between plants and their pollinators. It is a disturbing story of disappearing insects and diminishing plant reproduction, owing to overuse of pesticide and fragmented habitat. The authors combine anecdotes from the field with discussions of ecology, entomology, botany, crop science and the economics of pollination.

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The Language Instinct : How the Mind Creates Language

by Steven Pinker

From Library Journal

... In a provocative and skillfully written book by an MIT professor who specializes in the language development of children, Pinker argues that an "innate grammatical machinery of the brain" exists, which allows children to "reinvent" language on their own. Basing his ideas on Noam Chomsky's Universal Grammar theory, Pinker describes language as a "discrete combinatorial system" that might easily have evolved via natural selection. Pinker steps on a few toes (language mavens beware!), but his work, while controversial, is well argued, challenging, often humorous, and always fascinating.

Laurie Bartolini, Lincoln Lib., Springfield, Ill.

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How the Mind Works

by Steven Pinker

Amazon.com

Why do fools fall in love? Why does a man's annual salary, on average, increase \$600 with each inch of his height? When a crack dealer guns down a rival, how is he just like

Alexander Hamilton, whose face is on the ten-dollar bill? How do optical illusions function as windows on the human soul? Cheerful, cheeky, occasionally outrageous MIT psychologist Steven Pinker answers all of the above and more in his marvelously fun, awesomely informative survey of modern brain science.

Tales of a Shaman's Apprentice : An Ethnobotanist Searches for New Medicines in the Rain Forest

by Mark J. Plotkin

Amazon.com

A century ago, malaria was killing Washingtonians, Londoners, Parisians. Today HIV, along with various cancers, has taken its place among worldwide epidemics. Quinine, extracted from the cinchona tree of the Amazonian rainforest, quelled malaria; alkaloids taken from trees in the West African rainforest may well yield a cure for AIDS. Yet those woods, Mark Plotkin tells us, are fast disappearing, along with the native peoples who know the powers of the plants that dwell there. His account of wandering through the Amazonian jungles focuses on local knowledge about plants, whose uses range from the mundane to the magical.

The Omnivore's Dilemma : A Natural History of Four Meals

by Michael Pollan

From Publishers Weekly

Reviewed by *Pamela Kaufman*

Pollan examines what he calls "our national eating disorder" (the Atkins craze, the precipitous rise in obesity) in this remarkably clearheaded book. It's a fascinating journey up and down the food chain, one that might change the way you read the label on a frozen dinner... or decide whether to buy organic eggs. ...Pollan approaches his mission not as an activist but as a naturalist: "The way we eat represents our most profound engagement with the natural world." "Pollan's narrative strategy is simple: he traces four meals back to their ur-species. Pollan meditates on the freakishly protean nature of the corn plant and looks at how the food industry has exploited it, to the detriment of everyone from farmers to fat-and-getting-fatter Americans. *Pamela Kaufman is executive editor at Food & Wine magazine.*

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The Botany of Desire: A Plant's-Eye View of the World

by Michael Pollan

From Publishers Weekly

Erudite, engaging and highly original, journalist Pollan's fascinating account of four everyday plants and their coevolution with human society challenges traditional views about humans and nature. Using the histories of apples, tulips, potatoes and cannabis to illustrate the complex, reciprocal relationship between humans and the natural world, he shows how these species have successfully exploited human desires to flourish. "

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Genome

by Matt Ridley

Amazon.com

Science writer Matt Ridley has found a way to tell someone else's story without being accused of plagiarism. *Genome: The Autobiography of a Species in 23 Chapters* delves deep within your looking for dirt dug up by the Human Genome Project. Each chapter pries one gene out of its chromosome and focuses on its role in our development and adult life, but also goes further, exploring the implications of genetic research and our quickly changing social attitudes toward this information.

Rob Lightner

The Agile Gene : How Nature Turns on Nurture

by Matt Ridley

Book Description

Armed with extraordinary new discoveries about our genes, acclaimed science writer Matt Ridley turns his attention to the nature-versus-nurture debate in a thoughtful book about the roots of human behavior.

The Red Queen: Sex and the Evolution of Human Nature

by Matt Ridley

From Library Journal

Ridley reaches into the literature of genetics; molecular, theoretical and evolutionary biology; ecology; sociology; and anthropology to weave an extraordinary tale of the evolution of human nature, beginning with the evolution of sex. Using Lewis Carroll's Red Queen as a metaphor for evolution, Ridley shows how sex was the result of an evolutionary arms race between hosts and their disease-causing parasites.

Constance Rinaldo, Dartmouth Coll., Hanover, N.H.

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The Man Who Mistook His Wife For A Hat

Awakenings

by Oliver Sacks

From Library Journal

Neurologist Sacks... presents two series of clinical tales drawn from fascinating and unusual cases encountered during his years of medical practice. These two powerful sets of case histories rise above its pathological foundation to find new literary territory, a medical-spiritual synthesis equally stimulating for the mind and the soul.

A Leg to Stand On

by Oliver Sacks

The Washington Post Book World

The sleeping-sickness epidemic of 1918 caused hundreds of survivors to slip into a bizarre rigid paralysis with similarities to advanced Parkinson's disease. These patients, only occasionally able to communicate or move, were nearly all institutionalized for life... Sacks... documents their spiritual and medical obstacles with great care to portray their individual personalities, long suppressed but finally released. --*Rob Lightner*

Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors

by Carl Sagan, Ann Druyan

From Publishers Weekly

In a leisurely, lyrical meditation on the roughly four-million-year span since life dawned on Earth, Sagan and Druyan (*Comet*) argue that territoriality, xenophobia, ethnocentrism, occasional outbreeding and a preference for small, semi-isolated groups are elements in a survival strategy common to many species, including *Homo sapiens*. Yet society's problems, they assert, increasingly demand global solutions and require a dramatic, strategic shift which the authors optimistically believe humankind is capable of achieving.

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The Lives of a Cell: Notes of a Biology Watcher

The Medusa and the Snail: More Notes of a Biology Watcher

by Lewis Thomas

Lewis Thomas' books are beautifully written collections of essays about myriad aspects of the biological world. The essays, combine to bring a truly integrated view of life. His observations, more than conclusions, bring one very close to a belief that all life is connected. Dr. Thomas is one of Ms DR's favorite natural history writers.

The Fragile Species

by Lewis Thomas

From Library Journal

From the author of *The Medusa and the Snail* (LJ 4/15/79) and *The Lives of a Cell* (Bantam, 1974) comes another collection of essays, ruminations, and observations on topics ranging from becoming a doctor to the process of aging to the threat of nuclear annihilation. Lewis Thomas's thoughts are timeless and graceful in a way that transcends the day-to-day headline changes that so many contemporary essayists chase.

- *Mark L. Shelton, Athens, Ohio*

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The Youngest Science

by Lewis Thomas

Reviewer: Charles Ashbacher

Thomas was a talented scientist and physician, but he was also an outstanding writer. These essays, always tainted with a sense of wonder, ignorance and optimism, are an inside look at some of the aspects of how medicine was and is practiced. They are a joy to read, his insights into how medicine has changed [since before WW II] shed a great deal of light on why there is a crisis in health care.

The Double Helix : A Personal Account of the Discovery of the Structure of DNA

by James D. Watson

Amazon.com

James Watson's historic account of his codiscovery (along with Francis Crick) of the structure of DNA... As in all of history, the real story behind the deceptively simple

outcome was messy, intense, and sometimes truly hilarious. To preserve the "real" story for the world, James Watson attempted to record his first impressions as soon after the events of 1951-1953 as possible, with all their unpleasant realities and "spirit of adventure" intact... It's the stuff of legends. *Therese Littleton*

The Beak of the Finch

by Jonathan Weiner

Reviewer:

A music fan (Newport Beach, CA) - [See all my reviews](#) Weiner's *The Beak of the Finch* is a positively brilliant work on the topic of evolution. A great introduction for the student of evolutionary biology, or the layman. Weiner's book destroys two of the greatest myths about evolution. 1. It's slow. 2. It can't be observed. The study of the Galapagos Finches not only proves the importance of evolution as a contemporary subject but as one that can be observed RIGHT NOW in the world around us. It's almost astonishing to see how simple evolution truly is, how it occurs in quantifiable baby steps that we can see, if we only take the time to carefully observe. Weiner not only demystifies evolution, but makes it as a topic, thoroughly accessible to the interested layman. His prose is neither dry nor technical and in fact, makes for quite an enjoyable read. I wholeheartedly recommend this book.

Time, Love, Memory: A Great Biologist and his Quest for the Origins of Behavior

by Jonathan Weiner

In the words of Jonathan Weiner, "Time, love, and memory are ... three cornerstones of the pyramid of behavior." While some find it difficult to view humans as mere machines, molecular biologists maintain that most behavior is genetically based. Even skeptics and opponents agree that molecular biology may well change the way we all live in the 21st century. Little-known outside this exploding field, Seymour Benzer, his mentors, and his generations of students have studied the common fruit fly, *Drosophila*, and discovered genes that seem to have some influence upon our internal clock, our sexuality, and our ability to learn from our experiences.

Weiner (whose last book, [The Beak of the Finch](#), won a [Pulitzer Prize](#)) has written an affectionate history about the development of the science while offering charming glimpses of the people involved--trading haircuts to stretch their grant money in the early years, roaming the laboratory into the wee hours, naming the genes associated with learning after Pavlov's dogs. It's not all sweetness and light, however; ethical questions are raised, some of the hype (and hysteria) surrounding the human genome project is dissipated, and the complicated "clockwork" gene "looks less like an invitation to human intervention and more like a cautionary tale or object lesson for anyone who might try, in the 21st century, to improve on nature's four-billion-year-old designs." That said, the scientists in Weiner's tale reveal a very human side of this fast-moving science, and their belief that they'll find answers to important questions is contagious and compelling. As Benzer himself said, "It's a wonderful, fabulous world, and it's been kicking around a long time." --C.B. Delaney