



Shelf life: Michael Duff

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What are the three best popular-science books?

Dreams of a Final Theory by Steven Weinberg. At a time when wishy-washy "holistic" science and vague ideas of "emergence" are being touted, we need a vigorous defence of reductionism, and no-one does it better than Weinberg.

The Elegant Universe by Brian Greene. An elegant universe requires an elegant book to describe it. Greene captures the notions of beauty and economy that characterize current attempts to find a theory that describes all physical phenomena. It is also one of the first popular books to deal not only with 10D superstrings, but also with my own field of 11D M-theory -- the theory that subsumes all the different string theories by incorporating supermembranes.



Relativity by Albert Einstein. After all these years, this is still a masterpiece by the master himself.

What science books are you currently reading?

Strange Matters by Tom Siegfried, *Explaining the Universe* by John Charap, and *Mutants* by Armand Marie Leroi. The latter is a disturbing book about human genetic make-up and how it can go wrong. It is written with an extraordinary literary elegance. In other hands, a book on this topic might have degenerated into a freak show, but Leroi turns it into a work of art.

What else are you reading?

Horatio Nelson by Tom Pocock. This is a superb biography. Pocock maintains historical rigour while writing in an entertaining style about Nelson's life and times, back in the days of pressgangs, grog and the lash.

Which popular-science book have you never read, but feel you ought to have tackled, and why?

Consilience: The Unity of Knowledge by Edward O Wilson. Although I am enamoured with ideas of unification in science, my usual habitat is restricted to unified theories of physics. The unification of knowledge seen through the eyes of a distinguished life scientist is something with which I ought to be better acquainted.

