



## Shelf life: Michael Duff

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Michael Duff is the first Abdus Salam professor of theoretical physics at Imperial College, London

### 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.

