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Best Sci-Tech Books of 2008

LJ's science guru celebrates 20 years with 33 top titles

By Gregg Sapp -- *Library Journal*, 3/1/2009

In tight economic times, the concerns and issues of science, viewed as not having enough practical value, can get pushed aside. But the top science books of 2008 demonstrate how science more often than not pays for itself. What's more practical than food (*Tomorrow's Table*), health (*Our Daily Meds*), the environment (*The Hot Topics*), or even—sex (*Bonk*). And the more theoretical science (*Symmetry*, *The Physics of the Impossible*) is fuel for the imagination that sustains us in hard times.

Agriculture

Ronald, Pamela C. & Raoul W. Adamchak. *Tomorrow's Table: Organic Farming, Genetics, and the Future of Food*. Oxford Univ. 208p. ISBN 978-0-19-530175-5. \$29.95.

Organic food is seen as the most natural, least modified by humans. Genetically engineered food involves laboratory invention. A geneticist and an organic farmer argue that a combined path can feed the planet. (LJ 4/15/08)

Astronomy

Plait, Philip. *Death from the Skies! These Are the Ways the World Will End...* Viking. 324p. ISBN 978-0-670-01997-7. \$24.95.

Astronomer Plait professes not doomsday scenarios but a sober assessment of real, although rare, cosmic threats. (LJ 8/08)

Biology

Hölldobler, Bert & Edward O. Wilson (text) & Margaret C. Nelson (illus.). *The Superorganism: The Beauty, Elegance, and Strangeness of Insect Societies*. Norton. 576p. ISBN 978-0-393-06704-0. \$55. An insect colony of millions of specialized individuals self-regulates as if it were a single organism. Expanding upon their Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Ants*, the authors theorize that this represents an intermediate biological entity between the individual and the species. (LJ 10/15/08)

Sustaining Life: *How Human Health Depends on Biodiversity*. Oxford Univ. 541p. ed. by Eric Chivian, M.D. & Aaron Bernstein. ISBN 978-0-19-517509-7. \$34.95.

With contributions from over 100 scientists, this magnificent volume matches the prestige of its lineage with the urgency of its message: our health depends on preserving biodiversity. (LJ 4/15/08)

Botany

Morton, Oliver. *Eating the Sun: How Plants Power the Planet*. HarperCollins. 480p. ISBN 978-0-00-716364-9. \$28.95.

Plant photosynthesis gives us oxygen, but Morton reveals myriad other ways plants support human life. (LJ 11/1/08)

Chemistry

Roston, Eric. *The Carbon Age: How Life's Core Element Has Become Civilization's Greatest Threat*. Walker. 309p. ISBN 978-0-8027-1557-9. \$25.99.

Carbon's "natural" aspects range from its cosmic origins to its predominance in our bodies, while its "unnatural" traits include ozone depletion and global warming. (LJ 6/15/08)

Computer Science

Palfrey, John & Urs Gasser. *Born Digital: Understanding the First Generation of Digital Natives*. Basic Bks: Perseus. 375p. ISBN 978-0-465-00515-4. \$25.95.

The first generation to have grown up in a digital world is coming of age, and their values, attitudes, and perceptions are unique in history. (LJ 8/08)

Environmental Science

George, Rose. *The Big Necessity: The Unmentionable World of Human Waste and Why It Matters*. Metropolitan: Holt. 272p. ISBN 978-0-8050-8271-5. \$26.

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Wilda Williams, *Library Journal*
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John N. Berry III, *Editor-at-Large*, *Library Journal*
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