

2012 Noteworthy Nonfiction

[The age of insight : the quest to understand the unconscious in art, mind, and brain : from Vienna 1900 to the present](#)

by Kandel, Eric

154.2 KAN

A brilliant book by a Nobel Prize winner, "The Age of Insight" takes readers to Vienna in 1900, where leaders in science, medicine, and art began a revolution that changed forever how we think about the human mind--our conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions--and how mind and brain relate to art.

[Behind the beautiful forevers](#)

by Boo, Katherine

305.569 BOO

The dramatic and sometimes heartbreaking story of families striving toward a better life in one of the twenty-first century's great, unequal cities. In this fast-paced book, based on three years of uncompromising reporting, a bewildering age of global change and inequality is made human. Annawadi is a makeshift settlement in the shadow of luxury hotels near the Mumbai airport, and as India starts to prosper, Annawadians are electric with hope. Abdul, a reflective and enterprising Muslim teenager, sees fortune in the recyclable garbage of richer people. Asha, a woman of formidable wit and deep scars from a rural childhood, has identified an alternate route to the middle class: political corruption. And even the poorest Annawadians, like Kalu, a fifteen-year-old scrap-metal thief, believe themselves inching closer to good times. But then, as the tenderest individual hopes intersect with the greatest global truths, the true contours of a competitive age are revealed.

[Ignorance: How It Drives Science](#)

by Firestein, Stuart

501.9 FIR

Knowledge is a big subject, says Stuart Firestein, but ignorance is a bigger one. And it is ignorance--not knowledge--that is the true engine of science. Most of us have a false impression of science as a surefire, deliberate, step-by-step method for finding things out and getting things done. In fact, says Firestein, more often than not, science is like looking for a black cat in a dark room, and there may not be a cat in the room. The process is more hit-or-miss than you might imagine, with much stumbling and groping after phantoms. But it is exactly this "not knowing," this puzzling over thorny questions or inexplicable data, that gets researchers into the lab early and keeps them there late, the thing that propels them, the very driving force of science. Firestein shows how scientists use ignorance to program their work, to identify what should be done, what the next steps are, and where they should concentrate their energies. And he includes a catalog of how scientists use ignorance, consciously or unconsciously--a remarkable range of approaches that includes looking for connections to other research, revisiting apparently settled questions, using small questions to get at big ones, and tackling a problem simply out of curiosity. The book concludes with four case histories--in cognitive psychology, theoretical physics, astronomy, and neuroscience--that provide a feel for the nuts and bolts of ignorance, the day-to-day battle that goes on in scientific laboratories and in scientific minds with questions that range from the quotidian to the profound. Turning the conventional idea about science on its head, Ignorance opens a new window on the true nature of research. It is a must-read for anyone

curious about science.

[Iron curtain : the crushing of Eastern Europe, 1944-1956](#)

by Applebaum, Anne

947.0009 APP

In the long-awaited follow-up to her Pulitzer Prize-winning "Gulag," acclaimed journalist Anne Applebaum delivers a groundbreaking history of how Communism took over Eastern Europe after World War II and transformed in frightening fashion the individuals who came under its sway.

[Joseph Anton: A Memoir](#)

by Rushdie, Salman

BIO RUSHDIE

*On February 14, 1989, Salman Rushdie received a call from a journalist informing him that he had been "sentenced to death" by the Ayatollah Khomeini. It was the first time Rushdie heard the word fatwa. His crime? Writing a novel, *The Satanic Verses*, which was accused of being "against Islam, the Prophet, and the Quran." So begins the extraordinary story of how a writer was forced underground for more than nine years, moving from house to house, with the constant presence of an armed police protection team. Asked to choose an alias that the police could use, he thought of combinations of the names of writers he loved: Conrad and Chekhov: Joseph Anton. How do a writer and his family live with the threat of murder for over nine years? How does he go on working? How does despair shape his thoughts and actions, and how does he learn to fight back? In this memoir, Rushdie tells for the first time the story of his crucial battle for freedom of speech. He shares the sometimes grim, sometimes comic realities of living with armed policemen, and the close bonds he formed with his protectors; of his struggle for support and understanding from governments, intelligence chiefs, publishers, journalists, and fellow writers; and of how he regained his freedom. What happened to Salman Rushdie was the first act of a drama that is still unfolding.*

[Red brick, Black Mountain, white clay : reflections on art, family, and survival](#)

by Benfey, Christopher

BIO BENFEY

*An unforgettable voyage across the reaches of America and the depths of memory, *Red Brick, Black Mountain, White Clay* follows one incredible family to discover a unique craft tradition grounded in America's vast natural landscape. Looking back through the generations, renowned critic Christopher Benfey unearths an ancestry--and an aesthetic--that is quintessentially American. His mother descends from colonial explorers and Quaker craftsmen, who carved new arts from the trackless wilds of the frontier. Benfey's father escaped from Nazi Europe--along with his aunt and uncle, the famed Bauhaus artists Josef and Anni Albers--by fleeing across the Atlantic and finding an eventual haven in the American South.*

[Red Plenty](#)

by Spufford, Francis

947.085 SPU

The Soviet Union was built on 20th-century magic called 'the planned economy', which was going to gush forth an abundance of good things that capitalism could never match. And just for a little while, in the late 1950s, the magic seemed to be working. This book is about that moment in history, and how it came, and how it went away.

[Short nights of the Shadow Catcher : the epic life and immortal photographs of Edward Curtis](#)

by Egan, Timothy

770.92 EGA

Edward Curtis was dashing, charismatic, a passionate mountaineer, a famous photographer--the Annie Liebowitz of his time. And he was thirty-two years old in 1900 when he gave it all up to pursue his great idea: He would try to capture on film the Native American nation before it disappeared. At once an incredible adventure narrative and a penetrating biographical portrait, Egan's book tells the remarkable untold story behind Curtis's iconic photographs, following him throughout Indian country from desert to rainforest as he struggled to document the stories and rituals of more than eighty tribes. Even with the backing of Theodore Roosevelt and J.P. Morgan, it took tremendous perseverance--six years alone to convince the Hopi to allow him into their Snake Dance ceremony. The undertaking changed him profoundly, from detached observer to outraged advocate. He would die penniless and unknown in Hollywood just a few years after publishing the last of his twenty volumes. But the charming rogue with the grade-school education had fulfilled his promise--his great adventure succeeded in creating one of America's most stunning cultural achievements.

[The Spark of Life: Electricity in the Human Body](#)

by Ashcroft, Frances

612.0142 ASH

A spectacular account of the body electric, showing how, from before conception to the last breath we draw, electrical signals in our cells are essential to everything we think and do.

[Thinking the twentieth century](#)

by Judt, Tony

320.092 JUD

Thinking the Twentieth Century maps the issues and concerns of a turbulent age onto a life of intellectual conflict and engagement. Tony Judt presents the triumphs and the failures of prominent intellectuals, adeptly explaining both their ideas and the risks of their political commitments.

[Turing's cathedral : the origins of the digital universe](#)

by Dyson, George

004.09 DYS

Legendary historian and philosopher of science George Dyson vividly re-creates the scenes of focused experimentation, incredible mathematical insight, and pure creative genius that gave us computers, digital television, modern genetics, models of stellar evolution--in other words, computer code. In the 1940s and '50s, a group of eccentric geniuses--led by John von Neumann--gathered at the newly created Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey. Their joint project was the realization of the theoretical universal machine, an idea that had been put forth by mathematician Alan Turing. This group of brilliant engineers worked in isolation, almost entirely independent from industry and the traditional academic community. But because they relied exclusively on government funding, the government wanted its share of the results: the computer that they built also led directly to the hydrogen bomb. George Dyson has uncovered a wealth of new material about this project, and in bringing the story of these men and women and their ideas to life, he shows how the crucial advancements that dominated twentieth-century technology emerged from one computer in one laboratory, where the digital universe as we know it was born.

[Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail](#)

by Strayed, Cheryl

813.6 STR

A powerful, blazingly honest, inspiring memoir: the story of a 1,100 mile solo hike that broke down a young woman reeling from catastrophe--and built her back up again.