

Australians. During the 1929–30 summer season, for instance, the Norwegians and Australians converged on Enderby Land intent on extending their claims to the same territory and forestalling the other's.

I also enjoyed the account of the jostling at Deception Island during and immediately after the Second World War, when Argentina painted its colours on the abandoned British station. After the British removed them, subsequent claims were made by Chile and Argentina, ultimately leading to 'Operation Tabarin' — a secret UK mission charged with building and maintaining permanent British stations on the Peninsula. Following the war, scientific activity increased and responsibility was transferred to the Falkland Island Dependencies Survey, which in 1962 became the British Antarctic Survey.

Each chapter covers a specific period in dense detail. There is grist here for the ruminations of historians, although a more casual reader might find it hard to digest at times. But the final chapter, covering the period since the 1961 signing of the Antarctic Treaty, breezes through the turning points.

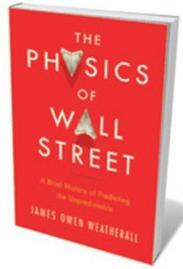
I was reminded of how, in June 1988, the Convention on the Regulation of Antarctic Mineral Resource Activities had been adopted and was poised for ratification by the treaty nations. Then, in January 1989, the Argentinian ship *Bahia Paraiso* ran aground off the Antarctic Peninsula, spilling oil into the surrounding waters. Two months later, the *Exxon Valdez* went down in Prince William Sound, Alaska, emptying 260,000 barrels of crude oil into similarly frigid waters. Countries that had quietly endorsed the convention scrambled to withdraw their support, and within two years the Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty (the Madrid Protocol), was in place, prohibiting the exploration and exploitation of mineral resources on the continent for 50 years.

But marine resources remain a contentious issue, as witnessed by the failure in Hobart last year of the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources to establish proposed marine reserves in critical areas in the Southern Ocean.

Day ends by saying, "For centuries, the Antarctic defied man's approach. Now its dangers and its terrors have been largely conquered. Only its future remains unknown." I would add that, thanks to Day, the intrigues and posturing that saturate the history of this distant land have now been exposed. We are left to wonder what continues to be plotted behind the scenes. ■

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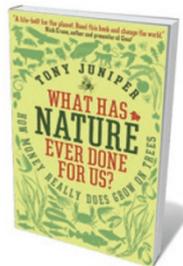
Books in brief



The Physics of Wall Street: A Brief History of Predicting the Unpredictable

James Owen Weatherall HOUGHTON MIFFLIN HARCOURT 304 pp. \$27 (2013)

Wall Street's 2008 meltdown is often pinned on 'quants', the physicists and mathematicians who invented financial instruments such as derivatives. Physicist James Owen Weatherall argues that it was less about the models than a catastrophic misuse of them. He bolsters his view with a concise history of scientific bravehearts out to tame the market, from Louis Bachelier, pioneer of the maths of financial markets, to recent risk-wranglers such as Didier Sornette.



What Has Nature Ever Done For Us? How Money Really Does Grow On Trees

Tony Juniper PROFILE BOOKS 256 pp. £9.99 (2013)

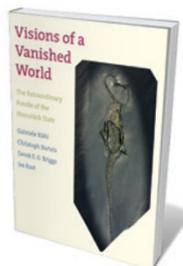
Microbes restore soils, trees oxygenate the atmosphere, vultures act as sanitation crews. And, says Tony Juniper in this crisp call to action, such 'ecosystem services' could back the currency of a new economics. The concept is hardly new, but Juniper — former head of Friends of the Earth — declares its time has come. As he trawls the biosphere and its rich array of services, his insights on environmental threats and solutions, backed by robust findings, form a pragmatic argument for a return to 'gardening the Earth'.



What's Wrong with Fat?

Abigail C. Saguy OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS 272 pp. \$29.95 (2013)

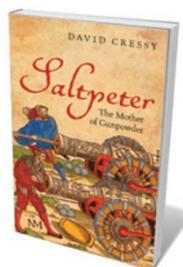
Obesity is an international epidemic. Or is it? Sociologist Abigail C. Saguy weighs in with an investigation of fatness that looks provocative, yet is thoughtful and thorough. By examining heft through many lenses, from the ethical to the scientific, Saguy traces how labelling fat as a disease or as an indicator of immorality seeps into society. She argues that public-health diktats are issued despite scientific debate over the condition; and that factors in fatness, such as poverty, are often ignored. Ultimately, she avers, stigmatizing the condition serves to embed it further.



Visions of a Vanished World: The Extraordinary Fossils of the Hunsrück Slate

Gabriele Kühl, Christoph Bartels, Derek E. G. Briggs and Jes Rust YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS 128 pp. \$40 (2012)

Some 400 million years ago, catastrophic storms and seismic shifts may have triggered the release of a vast slick of sediment that buried thousands of soft-bodied marine organisms on the ocean floor. Germany's Hunsrück Slate is the result: a frozen slice of the Devonian, capturing trilobites, ammonites and more in their last second of life. Pyritization has left exquisitely detailed, golden-hued fossils, hauntingly displayed in this coffee-table volume.



Saltpeter: The Mother of Gunpowder

David Cressy OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS 356 pp. £16.99 (2013)

Gunpowder obsessed early-modern Europe and Islamic Asia. But its key ingredient — potassium nitrate, or saltpetre — had either to be extracted from excrement- and urine-drenched soils, or imported. The scramble to get enough is the focus for this science-tinged history of a Britain building up to empire and enlightenment. David Cressy tells the tale of this "crucial link in the chain of chemistry and power" with panache, from the unravelling of saltpetre's chemistry to the warmongering that fostered dependence on it.