

provides a more succinct summary of the evolution of the 'need to believe' (see *Nature* 442, 137; 2006).

Francis Collins' *The Language of God*, an account of how his Christian faith is compatible with his work as a scientist, has sought to engage both sides in a less confrontational dialogue (see *Nature* 442, 110 and 114–115; 2006) — as has Owen Gingerich in *God's Universe*. But Richard Dawkins isn't interested in reconciling science and religion. In *The God Delusion*, which has topped the bestseller lists in both the United States and Britain this autumn, Dawkins argues with the fervour of a preacher that religion has no place in the modern world, and that atheism is the 'true path' (see *Nature* 443, 914–915; 2006).

Dawkins' domination of the genre of popular science books was celebrated earlier in the year with the publication by Oxford University Press of a thirtieth-anniversary edition of his book *The Selfish Gene*, and *Richard Dawkins: How A Scientist Changed the Way We Think*, a collection of comments and testimonials edited by Alan Grafen and Mark Ridley (see *Nature* 441, 151–152; 2006).

Physicists have also been questioning our place in the Universe. Cosmologist Alex Vilenkin's *Many Worlds in One* takes a look at

the multiverse theory — the idea that many different universes exist and explanations for how we came to be in this one (see *Nature* 443, 145–146; 2006). Paul Davies' *The Goldilocks Enigma* gives the topic a more popular treatment (see *Nature* 444, 423–424; 2006). Playwright Michael Frayn also considers our relationship with the Universe, and much more, in his book *The Human Touch*, which will be reviewed in *Nature* next week.

After a spate of books on string theory in 2005, the hottest hope for a 'theory of everything' came in for criticism this year, with the appearance of Lee Smolin's *The Trouble with Physics* and Peter Woit's *Not Even Wrong* (see *Nature* 443, 482, 491 and 507–508; 2006).

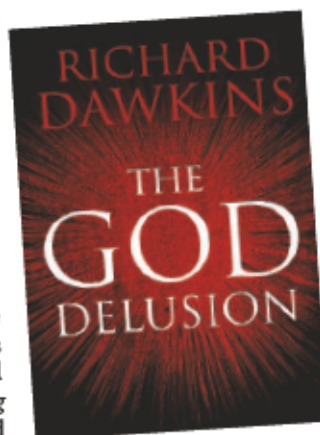
Jane Goodall was the subject of one of the year's notable biographies, *Jane Goodall* by Dale Peterson (see *Nature* 443, 915; 2006). Philip Ball delved into history for *The Devil's Doctor*, his biography of Paracelsus (see *Nature* 441, 152–153; 2006). *Broken Genius* by Joel

Shurkin is the first full biography of William Shockley (see *Nature* 442, 631–632; 2006). And Francis Crick was the focus of a short biography by Matt Ridley (*Francis Crick*; see *Nature* 443, 917–918; 2006) — a fuller treatment by Robert Olby is expected next year. This year's

Pulitzer Prize for biography, meanwhile, went to Kai Bird and Martin Sherwin for *American Prometheus*, their portrait of Robert Oppenheimer.

While many scientists have been preoccupied with religion, some novelists have turned to science for inspiration. Allegra Goodwin's *Intuition* proved to be an exciting page-turner, examining the psychological motives for scientific fraud in a cancer-biology lab (see *Nature* 440, 996–997; 2006).

Die Vermessung der Welt by Daniel Kehlmann, a fictionalized account of scientists Alexander von Humboldt and Carl Friedrich Gauss, was a bestseller in Germany last year. An English translation by Carol Brown Janeway, *Measuring the World*, is now available and will be reviewed in *Nature* next month. ■ Mary Purton is *Nature's* book review editor.



CHRISTMAS READING

A selection of books on the lighter side of science for the holiday period.

Why Don't Penguins' Feet Freeze?

edited by Mick O'Hare (Profile, £7.99).

The book version of *New Scientist's* 'Last Word' column continues to top the bestseller lists in the run-up to Christmas with more than 180,000 copies sold in Britain so far.

Giant Leaps

by John Perry & Jack Challoner (Boxtree, £12.99)

This is an amusing guide to the key discoveries, inventions and events in science, technology and medicine from UK newspaper *The Sun* and London's Science Museum, told in 'sensational' tabloid style (see picture).

Fly

by Steven Connor (Reaktion Books, £12.95, \$19.95)

Perhaps the perfect

present for a *Drosophila* geneticist, this book is an exploration of flies through myth, literature, art and biology.

How to Cut a Cake

by Ian Stewart (Oxford University Press, £9.99, \$14.95)

Various mathematical conundrums are featured, such as why phone cords get tangled, which way of tying shoelaces uses the shortest amount of lace, and how to play never-ending chess.

Moths That Drink Elephants' Tears

by Matt Walker (Portrait Books, £9.99)

Why Pandas Do Handstands

by Augustus Brown (Bantam Press, £9.99)

These two are collections of facts about curious animal behaviour. So if you want to know which cats purr and which don't, or why female brown trout fake orgasms, Walker's book is the one. Brown offers similar fare, including winking cuttlefish

and tobogganing otters. Both have a bibliography but no index.

Bang!

by Brian May, Patrick Moore & Chris Lintott (Carlton, £20)

Queen guitarist and astrophysicist May joins the presenters of *The Sky At Night* for this lavishly illustrated "complete history of the Universe".

Ken Libbrecht's Field Guide to Snowflakes

by Ken Libbrecht (Voyageur Press, \$12.95, £7)

Explore the icy world of snowflakes, from stellar dendrites to sector plates, with this wonder of microphotography.

For more serious reading, Oxford University Press has themed box sets from its Very Short Introductions series. **The Brain Box** (£25) has books on evolution (by Brian and Deborah Charlesworth), consciousness (Susan Blackmore), intelligence (Ian Deary), cosmology (Peter Coles) and quantum theory (John Polkinghorne).

