



## Eurekas and Euphorias: The Oxford Book of Scientific Anecdotes

By Walter Gratzer

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**Eurekas and Euphorias: The Oxford Book of Scientific Anecdotes** By Walter Gratzer

The march of science has been marked through the years by episodes of drama and comedy, of failure as well as triumph, by outrageous strokes of luck, deserved and undeserved, and sometimes by human tragedy. In *Eurekas and Euphorias*, Walter Gratzer captures the human face of discovery as he relates many intriguing tales of scientific adventures spanning over two thousand years. Open this book at random and you may chance on the clumsy chemist named Sapper who broke a thermometer in a reaction vat and made the discovery that launched the modern dyestuff industry. Or the physicist who dissolved his gold Nobel Prize medal in acid to prevent it from falling into the hands of the Nazis. The book uncovers deep intellectual friendships, as well as ferocious animosities, and even acts of theft and malice, deceit, and a hoax or two. Indeed, we discover that scientists come in all shapes--the obsessive and the dilettantish, the genial, the envious, the preternaturally brilliant and the slow-witted who sometimes saw further in the end, the open-minded and the intolerant, recluses and *arrivistes*. We meet mathematicians and physicists in prison cells, and even in a madhouse, making important advances in their field. And we witness the careers, sometimes tragic, sometimes carefree, of the great women scientists, from Hypatia of Alexandria, to Sophie Germain and Sonia Kovalevskaya, to Marie Curie and her relentless battle with the French Academy. Told with wit and relish, here then is a glorious parade to delight the reader, with stories to astonish, to instruct, and most especially, to entertain.

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Sifting through centuries of scientific ephemera, biophysicist Gratzer uncovers what may be the real history of science, revealed not by its formal narratives but by anecdotes of discovery shared over cups of coffee and pints of beer. The resulting collection of almost 200 tales is a browser's delight, an informal history featuring appealing quotes from memoirs, biographies and reports and candid images of scientists at work. Gratzer, author of *The Undergrowth of Science*, acknowledges that he cannot verify the truth of each account (though he includes extremely reliable sources for most) and cheerfully notes that he includes reports he feels "deserve to be true." Luminaries from polymathic Archimedes, whom Gratzer credits with "the first eureka," to Nobel Prize-winning physicist Richard Feynman, who attributed his scientific inspiration to a Cornell University dining hall plate, are shown in all their brilliant (and sometimes nasty) humanity. Not surprisingly, many of science's greatest moments turn out to be the result of stereotypical absentmindedness, and Gratzer reports these incidents with affectionate glee. While some of the material is familiar, readers at all levels of scientific literacy will find fresh, witty and sometimes moving glimpses into the reality of scientific endeavor.

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### Review

"Gratzer has informed and entertained readers of *Nature* with his wittily written reviews for years. He is the perfect author and editor for this hilarious compilation of scientific history, gossip and eccentricity."--*Sunday Times* (London)

"Stands head and shoulders above the rest as a source of eclectic and entertaining insights into the scientific mind.... His swift word pictures of discoveries in often astounding circumstances will entertain and intrigue even the most jaded."--*New Scientist*

"One can open the book at any point and be educated, thrilled, sobered or surprised, for there is astonishment and delight on every page. I, for one, will put this book next to W.H. Auden's book on aphorisms, John Bartlett's book of quotations, and that ultimate example in illustration, the great Oxford English Dictionary (OED), for finally this is a sort of OED of scientists and science, a banquet of epiphanies, a reference book which is also a work of art."--Oliver Sacks, *Nature*

"Reading the table of contents of this book is like opening a box of assorted bonbons--each cryptic title entices you to sample the offering within."--*Astronomy*

### About the Author

**Walter Gratzer** is a biophysicist at the Randall Institute, King's College London. He is known to a wide readership through his book reviews which appear regularly in *Nature*. His books include *The Undergrowth of Science: Delusion, Self-Deception and Human Frailty*, *Longman Literary Companion to Science*, and *The Bedside Nature*.

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