

Five Brief Reviews of Science Books

By Armando Simón

Just Green Electricity by Ronald Stein and Todd Royal

Leaving the question of global warming to the side, the authors point out that to walk away from fossil fuels is not only delusional, but suicidal. I was previously aware that plastics are made from oil, but what I did not know is that for each barrel of oil, only half goes for fuel, the rest is for manufacturing 6,000 other products. The irony here is that some of the environmentalists promote wind turbines and solar power, but the components to make those engines are made from oil! Catch-22. On top of that, the electricity from turbines and solar power has resulted in generating double the price of what the consumer has to pay in Europe. And, again, the power generated by both of those systems is intermittent; think about the electricity going off in hospitals, schools, television, shows, etc. And one cannot get solar power during 12+ hours of night. As such, pundits, politicians, and journalists who advocate walking away from fossil fuels are completely ignorant of science and believe that by just voicing the “solutions” they will magically work. Not so.

The authors, one of whom is an engineer, point out that electricity doesn't just happen. It has to be generated. A lot of people think it's magic, it just magically appears. In order for electricity to be generated (even without solar power or wind), we need fossil fuels to operate the machinery. Again, Catch-22.

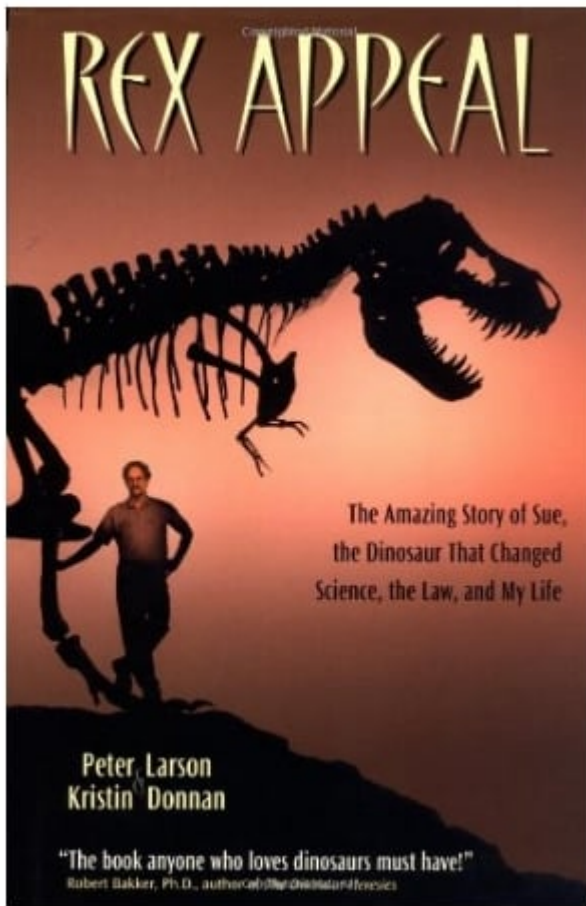
Electricity did not come into mass production until fossil fuels were harnessed in the 1800s.

The authors pointed out what I have always thought was

obvious, namely, that without the use of oil, civilization would retrogress. Oil is the lifeblood of modern civilization. Essentially we would be going back to almost the Dark Ages since, for one thing, the present population could not be fed adequately due to lack of transportation, electricity, fertilizers, etc. mass starvation would take place. The bartender-politician AOC introduced the Green Deal (which, for one thing, beef would be reserved for the elites and the rest of the population would feed on crickets). I have a feeling that this would come close to emptying the cities, much like the Khmer Rouge did in Cambodia. She would like that.

The primary shortcoming of the book is the actual writing; the authors tend to repeat themselves (granted that the information that they provide is important enough to be repeated for it to sink in, but it's a bit overdone), and occasional torpid paragraphs.

Two last points: one is that they share my disdain for that obnoxious school dropout, Greta, a media-generated celebrity. Second, although I personally suspect global warming is taking place, they point out that the mantra that 97% of scientists agree that it is occurring and that it is man-made, is false. The names of these 97% scientists are never provided and, furthermore, it is impossible to get 97% agreement on anything, certainly not something as complex as the issue of global warming.



Rex Appeal: The Amazing Story of Sue, the Dinosaur That Changed Science, the Law, and My Life by Peter L. Larson

The captivating book has a split personality, by which I mean that it is a book about the species T. Rex, and, it is about the personal catastrophe that ensued upon the discovery of "Sue," the famous complete fossil of the T. rex (a complete fossil of a higher vertebrate is rare). Both sides are engaging, although some people would be put out by this dichotomy. In regard to the latter, this incident proves conclusively that there is no justice in the world. It is a superb case study of what happens when a government bureaucrat becomes obsessed with crushing an individual, bringing the full weight of the State to do so. It is sickening.

The World of Flying Saucers by Donald Menzel and Lyle Boyd

This is an old book, out of print, and written during the peak of the UFO mania, but it is a very, very good book.

I read this book when I was a teenager and was becoming hooked on UFOs/flying saucers during one of the peak periods. Whereas

the other books on flying saucers I had read were sensationalistic with absolutely no critical thinking whatsoever, this one was very rational, very logical, going into the history of the phenomenon and giving examples of how persons could mistake unusual atmospheric phenomena for a spacecraft. I have fond feelings for it because it helped to divert me from occult/pseudoscience and helped me see things critically.

The book contains a number of pictures which illustrate the phenomenon. It also contains photographs of UFOs that are really of unusual atmospheric (like lenticular clouds) or hoaxes (like flying saucers with domes that have shadows on the left while ground observers have shadows on the right).

Aside from the scientific aspects of the phenomenon, it also gives good details on the history of UFOs from the beginning.

Menzel was an outstanding astronomer who started investigating flying saucers during the 1950s and 1960s and was much criticized for it, first, by his colleagues for supposedly giving the subject respectability, albeit skeptically, and of course by the true believers who swallowed any and every tale. Menzel had earlier written a book *Flying Saucers* which stated the same thing but was blah; Boyd's strength is in making the same message very readable, particularly by citing classic UFO cases and delving into the history.

The Murder of Vavilov by Peter Pringle

With this book, Vavilov's life is finally detailed in the West.

Vavilov was a first-rate scientist, unfortunately not very well known in the West at the present time, no doubt because he was a victim of the Russian Communists, and his death would not reflect well on Communism, which is still being promoted even today by the true believers and so, he became an unperson. However, while he was alive, he was internationally

known for his botanical research in obtaining different varieties of crops from around the world which would withstand harsh environments and pathogens, as well his attempt to track down where the first crop (of barley, maize, etc.) originated, as well as solving the question of how all other varieties sprung from. Unfortunately, he was targeted by Lysenko and Stalin and that spelled the end of him. Ironically, he died of starvation while his adult life had been dedicated to ending hunger in the world.

He collected seeds of various varieties from all over the world, a seed bank, that his colleagues guarded. During the siege of Leningrad, thousands died of starvation. These included the scientists, who refused to eat the seeds.

Lysenko's Ghost: Epigenetics and Russia by Loren Graham

This surprisingly thin book (144 pages, without the notes and references), is nonetheless a good one and, as such, a quick read. I just wish that he had gone into more detail regarding the attacks on Vavilov and on Lysenko's machinations to obtain power. But then, that was done in Medvedev's *The Rise and Fall of T. D. Lysenko* and others. What makes this unique from others on the subject is that, by sheer luck, Graham was able to meet and briefly interview Lysenko (and confront him), after many failed attempts in his previous trips, which he relates in the book.

It is interesting that although Lysenko remained in the Academy of Sciences, no one would sit with him in the cafeteria.

Graham is a professional historian rather than a dilettante. The main purpose of this book was to examine Lysenko's work, and the person itself, with the new science of epigenetics in order to determine if the new findings in epigenetics rehabilitate that evil sonofa-.

It does not.

Lysenko's work, he concludes, was sloppy in the extreme and his rise to power was simply by appealing to Stalin to liquidate "enemies of the people" like Vavilov and many other legitimate geneticists. Additionally, many of his crackpot ideas did not originate with him. Anyway, simply put, Lysenko was a disaster for Russian science. Just as bad, as Graham notes, neo-Stalinists are today using epigenetics in order to rehabilitate Lysenko's image.

One little item that Graham mentions that surprised me is that in some places the Russian Orthodox Church is promoting Creationism. I always thought this was an American phenomenon.

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