

Pavlov's lab in St Petersburg in 1913. But unable to resist the siren call of politics, he began to educate soldiers in science and technology matters relevant to the war against Germany. Pavlov asked him to do this outside the lab, and Sergej drifted away from research.

For the next 15 years, politics dominated his life, and his fiery reputation lost him several academic jobs. He briefly joined the White Army, and fled Russia after the 1917 Bolshevik revolution. In 1922, Sergej became reconciled with the Soviet government, and found work at the Soviet embassy in Berlin, where he befriended Einstein. But a few years later, when Stalin rose to power, Sergej gave up on the Soviets and went back to science.

His next post was in Genoa, Italy. It was supported by a grant from the Vatican, which apparently thought that his work on parthenogenesis might provide insight into the conception of Jesus.

In 1930, Einstein recommended Sergej for a post at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Medical Research in Heidelberg. But Sergej was thrown out of the institute in 1933 for co-founding an anti-Nazi movement called the Iron Front. He believed in fighting propaganda on its own emotive terms, and designed a strong logo to rival the swastika and a raised-fist salute to match the raised hand.

Exiled in Paris, he explicated his propaganda theory, which drew on Pavlov's theory of conditioned reflex, in his still-admired 1939 book *The Rape of the Masses*. In 1941, with the Nazis occupying the city, Sergej was interned for some months — but pressure from German scientists secured his release.

After the war, Sergej campaigned against the atomic bomb, founding the Science Liberation Movement in Paris in 1946. He returned to his homeland in 1958, after Stalin's death. Sergej was by then into his seventies, and his letters describe his disappointment with the revolution. He was forbidden to travel, and ended his days working at the Moscow Institute of Developmental Biology. (However, he managed to find enough energy to marry for a fifth time.)

Sergej in the Urn shows a man whose family life was incompatible with science and revolution. This is poignantly clear when Eugen plaintively asks, "He always wanted to save the world, but what becomes of us?" Towards the end of the film, Eugen's treatment of his great-nephew shows the psychological toll of Sergej's behaviour, but to say more would be a spoiler.

Sergej in the Urn won best German-language documentary at the Munich Documentary Film Festival in 2010, and went on general release in Germany on 23 February 2012. The DVD (in German, with English subtitles) will be available through www.sergej-in-der-urne.de from August. ■

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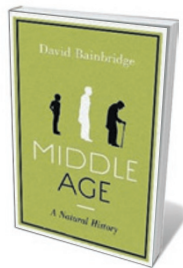
Books in brief



How It Began: A Time-Traveler's Guide to the Universe

Chris Impey NORTON 448 pp. \$27.95 (2012)

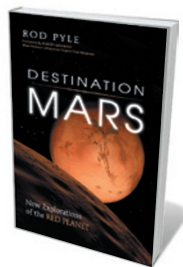
Astronomer Chris Impey takes us on a celestial road trip into deep space and time. His guided tour of the Universe starts with Earth's near neighbours — from the Moon to the star Proxima Centauri, the Orion nebula and the Milky Way — and journeys to the farthest edges of the cosmos and the first star. He pulls up at the ultimate grey area: the infant Universe, and the cosmological speculation about it. Each leg of the trip packs in science, history and anecdote, and is topped and tailed with imagined descriptions of each starry port of call.



Middle Age: A Natural History

David Bainbridge PORTOBELLO BOOKS 304 pp. £14.99 (2012)

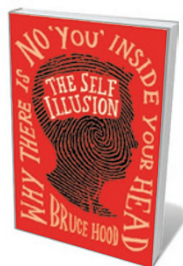
Turning 40 can be a time for celebration — or anguish. David Bainbridge, a veterinary surgeon with a penchant for evolutionary zoology, passed that watershed seething with curiosity about middle age. Sifting findings from anthropology, neuroscience, biology and psychology, he intelligently tackles tough issues such as whether there is a 'clock of death' — a genetically programmed march to oblivion. He concludes that middle age is a peak, not a slide: a distinctly human, built-in condition characterized by energy efficiency, mental stability, productivity and massive potential.



Destination Mars: New Explorations of the Red Planet

Rod Pyle PROMETHEUS 280 pp. \$19 (2012)

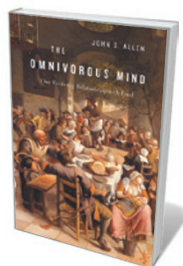
The seductive fascination of the red planet never palls, and science writer and documentary maker Rod Pyle stokes our hunger. For the Mars obsessed, the real thrills will be in his detailed descriptions of upcoming missions, the pseudo-Martian research conducted in Earth's most hostile environments, and interviews with explorers such as Steven Squyres, principal investigator of NASA's Mars Exploration Rover. Pyle's look at the planet and our perceptions and probings of it also covers Mars's geography, geology and hydrology, and its cultural history on Earth.



The Self Illusion: Why There is No 'You' Inside Your Head

Bruce Hood CONSTABLE 272 pp. £12.99 (2012)

Day to day, we experience a sense of self but, says Bruce Hood, it is a fabrication generated by our brains. Furthermore, that sense is symphonically distributed — created by a range of brain processes rather than centred in one site. Director of the Bristol Cognitive Development Centre, UK, Hood has amassed a mountain of support for his argument — covering brain development through social interaction such as attachment, the importance of social mimicry, the illogicality of free will, online and offline 'selves' and much, much more.



The Omnivorous Mind: Our Evolving Relationship with Food

John S. Allen HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS 328 pp. \$29.95 (2012)

Whether we're obsessing over intricate recipes or daydreaming about chocolate, our minds are often focused on food. Neuroanthropologist John Allen uses this mental gustation as a lens on our biological and cultural past, through anthropology, food history and the experience of chefs. The result is a banquet. Ranging over food cravings and aversions, cultural preferences and diets, he serves up plenty of *amuse-bouches*, not least an unusual take on the global love for the crispy and crunchy.