far they are from the scientific mainstream. This deficiency is eventually relieved by the appearance of Leonard Hayflick, the octogenarian cell biologist who convinced a once-sceptical scientific community that ageing has a molecular basis. Although he praises Andrews' and de Grey's enthusiasm, Hayflick gently torpedoes their hypotheses. "Reversing ageing is like reversing gravity," he says.

It is left to neuroscientist Colin Blakemore, former head of the UK Medical Research Council, to ask whether the world would be better off if people routinely lived to 1,000. (At a San Francisco screening of the film, the audience hissed when Blakemore cited "flaky Californian expectations" to explain de Grey's success in establishing a lab in Silicon Valley.)

"The Immortalists layers the visionaries' quest for unlimited life with their encounters with mortality."

The film steers so clear of lionizing or lambasting that it misses the opportunity to show how mainstream scientists are attempting to delay ageing. For example, the Buck Institute of Research on Aging, also in the San Francisco Bay area, might have provided a useful counterweight to demonstrate ongoing work to pick apart molecular mechanisms and evaluate ways to stall ageing, as would trials that are testing the capacity of drugs such as rapamycin to extend life in pet dogs or reduce age-related maladies in humans.

What *The Immortalists* does extremely well is to layer the visionaries' quest for unlimited life with their encounters with mortality. Both shoulder the challenges of caring for ageing parents as they strive to produce boundless youth in a far-off future. The film also revels in its subjects' extra-scientific eccentricities. Andrews' occasionally life-threatening penchant for mountain-top marathons is unexpected — as is the overextended footage of de Grey and his wife, geneticist Adelaide Carpenter, enjoying a roadside picnic in the nude to demonstrate their still-erotic relationship.

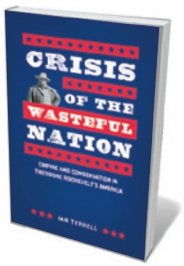
Carpenter, whom de Grey credits with spurring his scientific pursuits, has one of the most telling lines in the film. Being a scientist means being able see what is there, and to not see what is not there, she avows; meanwhile, the movie cuts to footage of expensive scientific equipment, investments made possible less by rational evaluation than by fervent hope. It is the filmmakers who allow the audience to heed Carpenter's advice. By following their subjects across several years and countries, they show *The Immortalists* from many angles, displaying warts, grit and an impossible dream. ■ SEE NEWS FEATURE P.426

Monya Baker *writes and edits for* Nature*'s Careers section.*

Books in brief

Tasty: The Art and Science of What We Eat
John McQuaid SCRIBNER *(2015)*
In pinning down the subtle sense of taste, Pulitzer-prizewinning journalist John McQuaid ranges through more than a soupçon of chemistry, neuroscience and genetics. His is a relentlessly moreish narrative, whether he is examining the evolutionary interplay between foraging and human brain development, the protein miraculin's ability to make limes taste like oranges, or the "bizarre, Lovecraftian-looking" double genes of sweet-receptor molecules. Disgust also gets a look-in, through Charles Darwin's account of a Tierra del Fuegan's encounter with a tin of cold beef.

The Story of Collapsing Stars: Black Holes, Naked Singularities, and the Cosmic Play of Quantum Gravity
Pankaj S. Joshi OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS *(2015)*
Black holes — whether they exist or not (see *Nature* http://doi.org/x25; 2014) — continue to exert a pull on scientific minds and the popular imagination alike. In this lucid overview, theoretical astrophysicist Pankaj Joshi corrals the research on collapsing massive stars and space-time singularities, including the idea that the event horizon might be a 'firewall' of fierce radiation. Joshi sees work in these areas as a lab for testing the pressing problems in fundamental physics and beyond.



Crisis of the Wasteful Nation: Empire and Conservation in Theodore Roosevelt's America
Ian Tyrrell UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS *(2015)*
Theodore Roosevelt, US president from 1901 to 1909, is rightly lauded as a pioneering conservationist. And as historian Ian Tyrrell reveals in this trenchant transnational chronicle, the hyper-energetic 'Teddy' also preached sustainability at a time of domestic outcry over resource misuse. Roosevelt's national urge for global power was as strong as his prescient environmentalism, however; and Tyrrell shows how US interests abroad and the president's vision of a world conservation congress created tension between ethics and economics.

Hall of Small Mammals: Stories
Thomas Pierce RIVERHEAD *(2015)*
A dwarf mammoth called Shirley Temple ends up in the backyard of a God-fearing insomniac in the American South. A young physicist investigating a hypothetical particle, the 'daisy', has both a theoretical husband, accessible solely through dreams, and a real one. An early naturalist stands helplessly by as a money-hungry showman fashions an implausible monster out of a heap of dinosaur bones. These science-flavoured short stories by *New Yorker* regular Thomas Pierce dance at the edge of possibility, exuding an off-kilter brilliance in their exploration of human longing and fear.

Walls: Enclosure and Ethics in the Modern Landscape
Thomas Oles UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS *(2014)*
Our world may be densely networked, but boundaries from the West Bank barrier to the US–Mexican border fence remain an often controversial presence. In this engrossing ethical study, landscape architect Thomas Oles ponders walls and their potential for oppression or human exchange. Drawing on rich historical examples such as Britain's economically and ecologically valuable hedgerows, Oles offers an ethics test for proposed barriers that questions whether they support commonalities or embed differences. **Barbara Kiser**