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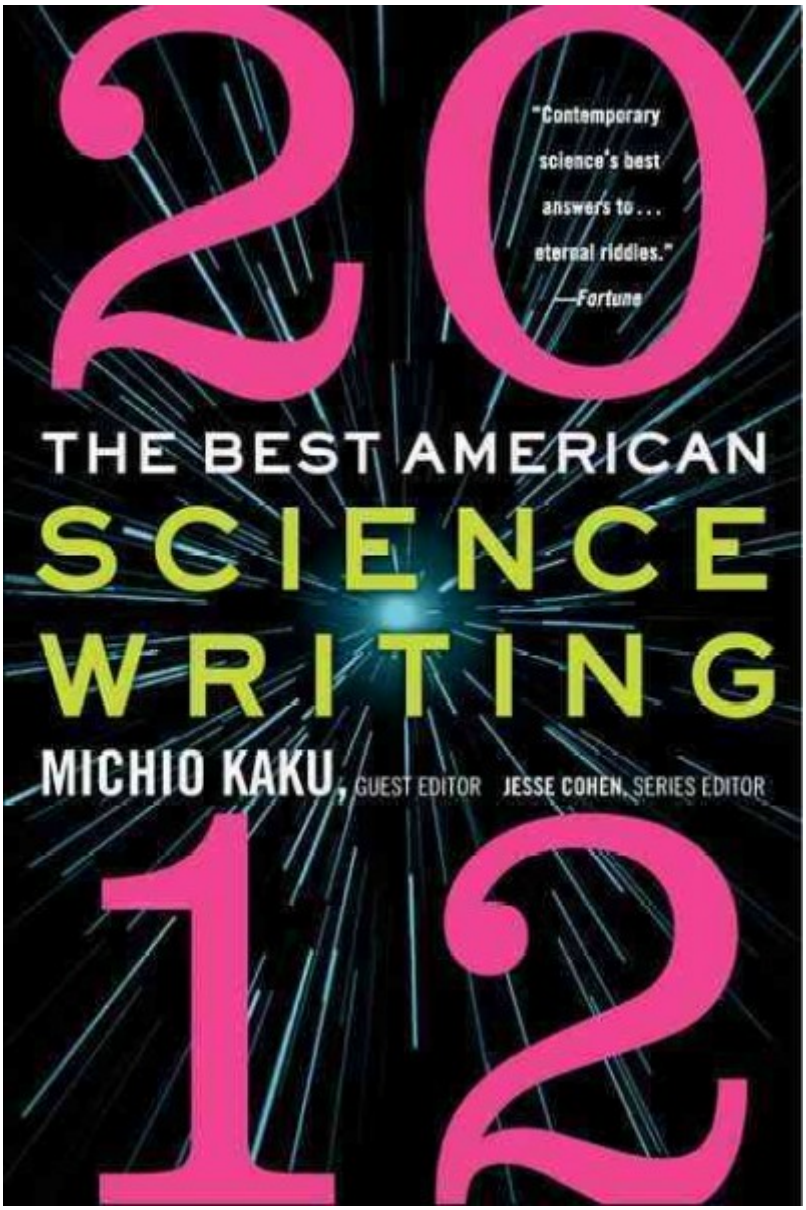
The Best American Science Writing, 2012



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Science has always appealed to me, but it?s hard to carve out enough time to keep abreast of all the new science books; that?s one reason I really enjoy the *Best American Science Writing* series. It?s always fun to discover trends and reconnect with intriguing topics in the field. One good aspect of contemporary science writing is that the authors really write well and can summarize complex subjects in easily understandable language. So what?s on science writing?s 2012 burner? Medicine, for one. The first four essays explore medical themes, among them: new heart vessels for babies born with weak hearts, and immune systems trained to kill cancer cells. As Denise Grady?s article about the latter reveals, after an

experimental treatment one man suffering from leukemia lost over two pounds of cancer cells. And a year later is cancer was in total remission.
My favorite essay in this collection is Evan Ratliff?s ?Taming the Wild.? It?s about a Russian research team that has been breeding foxes for over fifty years. Their foxes are now so tame that not only are they adopted for pets, but they share many puppylike traits such spotted coats, wagging tails, floppy ears and curly tails. A contrasting group of foxes has been bred for aggression and, believe me, you'd want to stay clear of their cages.

For me the articles about nature, wildlife biology, and climate science are the most compelling. Linda Marsa?s article ?Going to Extremes? details changes in Australia?s climate over the last hundred and eighty years. She postulates that massive flooding, fires, and great winds will be much more common in our future.

Because the articles on physics were the hardest to digest, one on symmetries and another on the quantum computer, I was relieved when author Rivka Galchen said, ?Physics advances by accepting absurdities.?

In ?The Birth of Religion,? the author, Charles Mann, offers reasons why he believes that it was not the birth of agriculture that spurred civilization but climate change, when humans stopped wandering after resources but decided to stay in verdant valleys and utilize areas that they knew as temperatures dropped.

If you enjoy watching PBS?s *Nature* or *NOVA* series, or reading Tuesday?s science section of the *New York Times*, this book is for you. You will be entertained while adding to your science knowledge.

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Posted by Dory L. on Oct 1, 2012

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