

Xmas Bookshelf

Great gifts chosen by the *Focus* team

Texture

Human Expression in The Age of Communications Overload
Richard Harper

The MIT Press, £22.95
(284pp, hbk)

At a time when society is both enjoying and worrying about new communication channels such as Facebook, Twitter and GPS, this timely book sets our fears in context and looks deeper into the reasons why we communicate.

Harper guides us through an engaging narrative, captivating us with vignettes of studies in communication behaviour and concept technologies, such as Whereabouts Clocks that show the locations of your family members on a display that resembles a clockface. He walks us through technologies that were developed for a perceived need and provokes us to look more closely at their actual subsequent use; how they invariably address a deeper, more complicated need that is answered by our act of communicating.

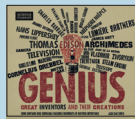
Harper reminds us that communication is a complex act of expression, through which we don't merely pass information like machines, but weave a rich tapestry of relationship building. He urges sociologists not to search for metrics that prove existing ideas, but to look for the unexpected.

This is a fascinating book: an easy, enjoyable read that is refreshingly backed by an academic rigour that is so often missing from sociology studies on this subject. It's a must read for all those looking to the future of communications. ●●●●●

Lesley Gavin is a futurologist and Focus columnist



Jheni
Editor



Genius: Great Inventors and Their Creations
Jack Challoner
Carlton, £30
(63pp, hbk)

Sketches of da Vinci's 'flying machine' and scribbles about Alexander Graham Bell's telephone are just some of the works reproduced in this packed coffee-table book. Fold-out sections and extra clippings make it feel as if you're unearthing a trove of long-lost documents. A great present for aspiring inventors.



James
Picture Editor

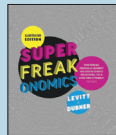


X-Ray Art
Nick Veasey
Goodman, £14.99
(224pp, pbk)

Ever wondered what the inside of your iPod looks like? Instead of invalidating your warranty, buy this book of X-ray images taken by photographer Nick Veasey. There are some stunning photographs for both art and science lovers, with a wide range of subject matter – not only iPods, but also plants, skeletons, computers and an electric chair. Fascinating stuff.



Louise
Website Assistant



Illustrated Super Freakonomics
Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner
Allen Lane, £20
(280pp, hbk)

The irreverent sequel to *Freakonomics* is back, but with pictures. Diagrams, charts and photos alongside the original text explain how things like the Endangered Species Act endangered species and why real people don't behave like people in labs. It's a very cool edition of a very smart book.

The Truth About Santa Wormholes, Robots and What Really Happens on Christmas Eve

Gregory Mone
Bloomsbury, £9.99
(144pp, hbk)

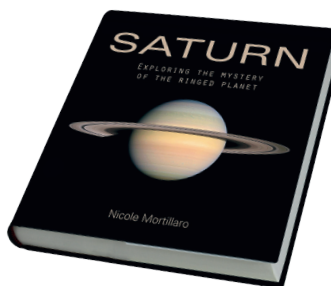


How does Father Christmas know whether you've been naughty or nice? How does he manage to deliver to 300 million houses in one night and how has he managed to live for several hundred years? The answer, apparently, is aliens. Not vague, hand-waving, magic aliens, but scientific ones that already know how to build all the technology that we think might one day be possible. This is a silly, tongue-in-cheek book. But it's also quite funny and interesting, making it a perfect stocking filler. ●●●●●

Luis Villazon is a Focus Q&A expert

Saturn Exploring The Mystery of The Ringed Planet

Nicole Mortillaro
Firefly Books, £19.95
(96pp, hbk)



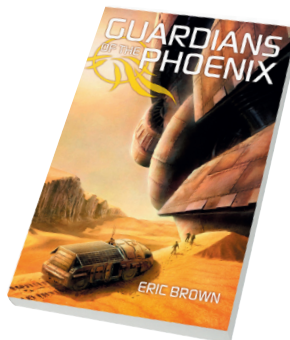
Saturn holds a special place in astronomers' hearts. Its ringed form is one of the most stunning sights that can be seen through a telescope. This new picture book looks at the Ringed Planet from a different perspective though – that of the Cassini-Huygens spacecraft exploring this world, up close. It's an attractive book, with well-reproduced images accompanied by short descriptions. There's little in the way of a narrative though, so it's best enjoyed as a selection of some of the finest photographs from one of NASA's greatest missions. ●●●●●

Will Gater is news editor of Sky at Night magazine

FICTION

Guardians of The Phoenix

Eric Brown
Solaris, £7.99
(432pp, pbk)



On a desolate Earth, society has collapsed and deserts are claiming Europe. A few hundred human survivors scratch out a living, but even lizard meat is becoming scarce. Based on his own previously written short story, Eric Brown's tale of survivors battling the odds – and cannibals – is as relentless as the Sun beating down on its protagonists. That it's also devoid of *Mad Max*-esque clichés and features a didn't-see-that-coming twist is wholly to Brown's credit. ●●●●●

Jonathan Wright is a freelance science-fiction reviewer