

NEW BOOKS & MEDIA

Fireball

Visitors from Darker Worlds

Werner Herzog and Clive Oppenheimer
Apple TV+, 2020

Fireball: Visitors from Darker Worlds, directed by Werner Herzog and Clive Oppenheimer, is a unique documentary focused both on the scientific aspects of meteorites, shooting stars, and deep impacts and on their influence in human culture. We learn that one of the most talked about events in November 1492 in European chronicles was not Christopher Columbus landing in the Americas but a fireball that landed in Ensisheim, France; that micrometeorites can be collected from the roof of a stadium in Oslo, Norway; and that dogs can be trained to sniff out meteorites because of their distinct smell. The movie is available now on Apple TV+.

—PKG



The Right Stuff

Mark Lafferty

Disney+/National Geographic Studios, 2020 (Season 1)

The Right Stuff on Disney+ is a highly dramatized account of the first US astronauts. Based on Tom Wolfe's seminal 1979 book of the same title, the eight-episode TV series is significantly different from the 1983 movie (also of the same name), which focused more on the exploits of Chuck Yeager, the first person to break the sound barrier. This time, the competition between the astronauts, the strain on their wives, the temptations of fame, and the risky enterprise of putting a human into space are front and center. The rivalry between John Glenn (Patrick J. Adams) and Alan Shepard (Jake McDorman) is portrayed well. A companion documentary, *The Real Right Stuff*, based on hundreds of interviews with former NASA employees, is also available to stream on Disney+.

—PKG

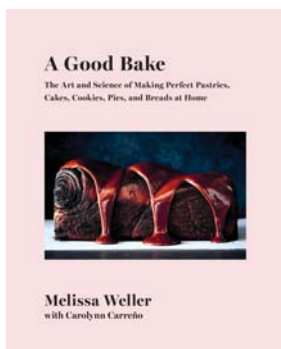
A Good Bake

The Art and Science of Making Perfect Pastries, Cakes, Cookies, Pies, and Breads at Home

Melissa Weller and Carolynn Carreño
Knopf, 2020. \$40.00

With recipes for such offerings as strawberry jam and hazelnut rugelach, kale and cheese khachapuri with zhoug, and pumpkin layer cake with salted caramel buttercream and brown sugar frosting, this cookbook is less Betty Crocker and more *Great British Baking Show*. Nevertheless, chemical engineer and professional baker Melissa Weller claims that the recipes are written in a way that even a novice home baker can follow. In addition to the detailed instructions, Weller and coauthor Carolynn Carreño include master classes, tutorials, and explanations of some of the chemistry involved. The book is beautifully illustrated with photographs by Johnny Miller.

—CC



Hannah's War

A Novel

Jan Eliasberg

Back Bay Books/Little, Brown and Co, 2020.
\$16.99 (paper)



Written by Hollywood screenwriter Jan Eliasberg, *Hannah's War* is loosely based on the life of Austrian Jewish theoretical physicist Lise Meitner, who should have shared with Otto Hahn the 1944 Nobel Prize in Chemistry for the discovery of nuclear fission. "Loosely based" is a stretch, for the book's relationship to historical reality is quite tenuous: Unlike Hannah, the book's protagonist, Meitner never worked on the Manhattan Project (she refused to participate in nuclear weapons research), her father did not die fighting for the Austro-Hungarian Army in World War I (he did not serve at all), and she certainly would never have called the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Chemistry the "Kaiser Wilhelm" in conversation. Historical nit-picking aside, the book captures the spirit of a fascinating time in physics.

—RD

Shaken, Not Stirred!

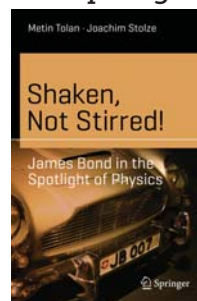
James Bond in the Spotlight of Physics

Metin Tolan and Joachim Stolze

Springer, 2020.

\$24.99 (paper)

Shaken, Not Stirred!, authored by two German physicists who are fans of the James



Bond franchise, provides physics-based explanations of gadgets and stunts in the series, such as the titular villain's infamous laser beam from *Goldfinger*, Bond's jet pack from *Thunderball*, and various death-defying jumps out of and onto aircraft. Metin Tolan and Joachim Stolze even provide a scientific foundation for Bond's martini preferences: When a cocktail is shaken, granular convection causes the larger, more flavorful molecules to rise to the top. The authors write entertaining depictions of Bond's seemingly gravity-defying stunts followed by outlines of the physics calculations they made. Written with a light-hearted, winking tone worthy of 007 himself, the fun book is unfortunately hampered by its awkward English translation and lack of copyediting.

—RD **PT**