

NEW BOOKS & MEDIA

Beyond Measure

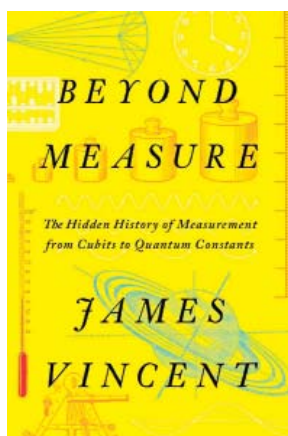
The Hidden History of Measurement from Cubits to Quantum Constants

James Vincent

W. W. Norton, 2022. \$32.50

Although modern science claims to be universal, measurement is intrinsically human. After all, units of measurement didn't exist before humans created them. In *Beyond Measure*, James Vincent, a technology reporter, probes that dichotomy by investigating the history of measurement and standardization from antiquity to the present day. It's no coincidence that most traditional units are based on the human body: For centuries, all we had to measure against was ourselves. Although he doesn't shy away from discussing the grimmer sides of standardization, such as its role in eugenics, Vincent does delve into some lighter topics. Did you know, for example, that there's an international standard for brewing tea?

—RD

**Soviets in Space**

Russia's Cosmonauts and the Space Frontier

Colin Burgess

Reaktion Books, 2022. \$35.00

Although the Soviet Union was the first nation to launch a satellite, an animal, and a human into space, not much was known about those early missions until the recent declassification of primary-source documents. Now Colin Burgess, a historian who specializes in spaceflight and military history, presents an account of the Soviet space program from the end of World War II to its present-day incarnation, Roscosmos. Amply illustrated with more than 80 black-and-white photographs, *Soviets in Space* provides an informed and interesting look into the trials and triumphs of the US's Cold War rival.

—CC

**The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci**

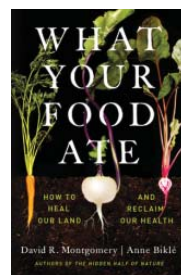
Mary Zimmerman

1993; revival 2022

Originally adapted by Mary Zimmerman in 1993, *The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci* has now been revived as a touring production. Zimmerman's play, based on the 15th-century manuscripts of Leonardo, does not have a traditional beginning, middle, and end. Rather, like the notebooks themselves, it consists of snapshots from different times of Leonardo's life on such topics as anatomy, love, turbulence, art, and philosophy.

The cast members do a superb job mixing acting, choreography, and singing. So many subjects are thrown in front of the audience that theatergoers will be reaching for a biography of Leonardo afterward to read about the few ideas they may have missed. The production will appear at San Diego's Old Globe Theater from 21 January to 26 February.

—PKG

What Your Food Ate

How to Heal Our Land and Reclaim Our Health

David R. Montgomery and Anne Biklé

W. W. Norton, 2022. \$30.00

Although most Americans have plenty to eat, many continue to suffer from poor nutrition. One reason—write David Montgomery, a geologist, and his wife, Anne Biklé, a biologist—is modern agricultural methods, which emphasize quantity over quality. Mechanized plowing and chemical fertilizers reap high crop yields yet deteriorate the soil and reduce the amounts of beneficial compounds in fruits and vegetables; confining livestock and shifting their grazing from grasslands to feedlots maximizes meat production yet diminishes its nutrient content. In their new book, *What Your Food Ate*, the authors promote the value of regenerative farming methods, such as no-till planting, crop rotation, and reintegration of livestock grazing, to improve the health of the soil and, by extension, ourselves.

—CC PT

Searching

Our Quest for Meaning in the Age of Science

Alan Lightman, host

PBS, 2023

In this new three-part documentary series, the physicist and writer Alan Lightman investigates an age-old question: Can science ever explain the mysteries of human consciousness and thought? In other words, are we just atoms and elements? The series was inspired by a mystical experience Lightman once had on a boat in Maine, during which he felt as if he were "falling into infinity" and merging with the universe. Although some of the material Lightman covers, such as an explanation about DNA and RNA, is well-worn ground, his engaging narration and inquisitive, affable nature make the series an enjoyable watch nonetheless.

—RD

