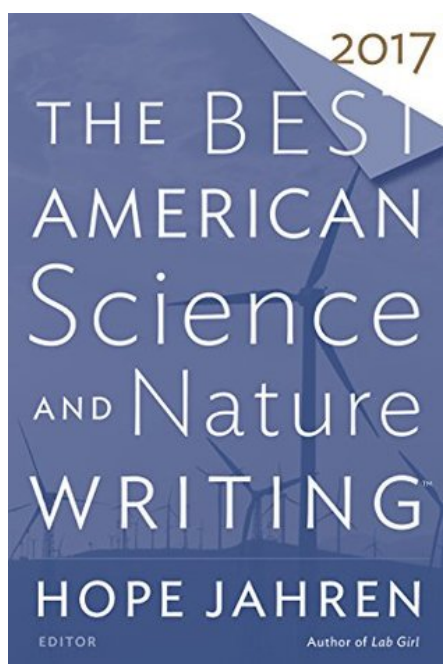




The Best American Science and Nature Writing 2017

Hope Jahren , Tim Folger

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“Undeniably exquisite . . . Reveal[s] not only how science actually happens but also who or what propels its immutable humanity.” —Maria Popova

“An excellent introduction to the key issues in science today.” —P. D. Smith, *Guardian*

“[A] stellar compendium . . . Delightful to read.” —*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

A renowned scientist and the best-selling author of *Lab Girl*, Hope Jahren selects the year's top science and nature writing from writers who balance research with humanity and in the process uncover riveting stories of discovery across disciplines.

The Best American Science and Nature Writing 2017 Details

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From Reader Review The Best American Science and Nature Writing 2017 for online ebook

Trish Remley says

Wonderful variety of subject matter. I especially liked The Billion-Year Wave, Dark Matter, The DIY Scientist-the Olympian-and the Mutated Gene, Something Uneasy in the Los Angeles Air, The Women Who Might Find Us Another Earth, and The Amateur Cloud Society. Alarmed by many of the other chapters including The New Harpoon, How factory Farms Play Chicken with Antibiotics, A Song of Ice, and The Invisible Catastrophe. In light of all the sexual harassment accusations, sad & of course not surprising to find it in the lab as well as out in nature. Especially upset with He Fell In Love With His Grad Student - Then Fired her For It and Out Here-No One Can Hear You Scream. Actually as I look at the appendix, many more interesting and thought provoking chapters. Great editorial job Hope Jahren.

Jan Priddy says

I love this collection. Of all the Best-of series, my recent discovery of this series has given me the most pleasure. Climate change is probably the most common issue, but there are stories about conserving spacesuits, gas leaks, and the lives of scientists. I was alarmed to find a former nuclear energy plant up river from my home mentioned in passing as the most hazards site in the nation. There is great depth here. Some of the essays are right at the outer edge of my own scientific understanding—I do not have much of a science background—but the writing is compelling and clear and these essays have stayed with me. Several included passages I wanted my students to read, usually for both fascinating content and writing skill.

This is a read-twice book. This is a book that should be assigned to high school students. Because of the information and impact I found here, I plan to go back through the series and read earlier collections.

Rita Ciresi says

The best science and nature writing leaves us in awe of the hidden rules of the universe. Hope Jahren, author of Lab Girl, has chosen several that did just that. While every reader will find different favorites, mine were Michael Regnier's "The Man Who Gave Himself Away," David Epstein's "The DIY Scientist, the Olympian, and the Mutated Gene," and Kim Tingley's "The Secrets of the Wave Pilots." Jon Mooallem's "The Amateur Cloud Society That (Sort of) Rattled the Scientific Community" is a particularly delightful gem with a surprising ending.

Several pieces are devoted to the role of women in science, but only one seems worthy of the title "Best of." Kathryn Joyce's "Out Here, No One Can Hear You Scream" is a thorough investigative report of foul doings in our National Parks. The rest of this subset of essays, to me, read like summaries rather than lively and insightful explorations of this important subject matter.

The emphasis here is on biological and environmental science with the recurring theme of climate change running through many of the works.

Alexia says

I've read a fair number in this series, and I usually give them four stars since the collection tends to have about the same number of hits and misses.

This was almost all hits. What a selection, I couldn't be more impressed.

Dan Martin says

This was a very good anthology of science and nature writing, but the most powerful essays here are in the third part of this collection, titled "The 'Real Life' of Scientists". Here is where we get a unusually personal glimpse into the people behind the science, and every story is wonderful.

Unfortunately, the first two parts of the book were very hit or miss for me. There were some standouts. "The Battle For Virunga", "The Secrets of The Wave Pilots", and "A Song of Ice" were particular standouts.

I read this collection every year, and I'm always impressed and invigorated by the pieces selected. Honestly, this is one of my favorite books to dive into each year. And although this year the collection left me a little wanting, it's worth picking up for the third part alone.

Jack Spalding says

After reading The Best American Science and Nature Writing 2017 edition by Hope Jahren, I found the book at times to be very slow and quite honestly, tedious to read. As someone who doesn't have as much of an appreciation for the science field, I wasn't able to find much of the book interesting, and at times, struggled to remain focused. I felt that some of the writings from various authors throughout the science field were, at times, jumbled together into different sections. However, certain essays discussed in the book were actually quite interesting. For example, Tom Kizzia from the New Yorker discusses a story of a small Alaskan village known as Point Hope in the section titled, "Changing Land and Resources", in which Global Warming has taken a devastating toll on the lives of those living there due to climate change and the melting of glaciers. As a fierce supporter of the environment, it was quite interesting to read about how global warming has uprooted these people to leave their homes and adjust to a new environment. In addition, Chris Jones of the New York Times writes in Part III, "The Real Life of Scientists", of a woman who could potentially find us another Earth. He describes how Sara Seager, an astrophysicist at MIT, discovered a method to use light in order to help discover new breakthroughs in the astronomy field. It was fascinating to see how her studies were able to help us discover new "exoplanets", planets that resemble our own planet Earth. Overall, each essay in this book is well-written and shows the authors of each essay have an apparent passion for science, but is obviously intended for those who appreciate the field of science more than I do. As I am only a junior in high school, it was hard for me to comprehend and value much of what was said throughout most of the book. For those who have a strong passion for the subject of science, I would strongly recommend this book as each essay provides a wide variety of topics throughout the field, but for someone geared towards the liberal arts, it would be a challenging book to read and I would not suggest it.

Gg says

The Best American Science and Nature Writing of 2017 in my opinion was far from the best, but I will say that I learned a lot about a variety of different topics relating to science. The book brought to my attention severe issues like climate change, as well as stories of astronauts, outer space, concerning overpopulation, and lack of conservation land etc. I had never read a non-fiction book in this format before, so I thought it would be good to try something new, but honestly I was not a huge fan of how you would read a few pages on one topic and then a totally different topic would appear.

I found a few of the writings to be very compelling like the wearable technology startup, and the life stories of scientists, but many of them I just was not interested in and they just went over my head. For example a lot of the writings about space just did not interest me what so ever and were way too complex for a sixteen year old high school student to understand. A good book to me captures my attention and makes me want to keep reading, but with this book I found didn't capture my attention and grab me in at all.

Kirk says

Not as good as last year's edition.

It seems like the editor here pre-identified themes and then selected pieces to fit within them. Instead of last year's pleasant and random assortment of great writing, here you find a thematic collection of works that were more diluted in terms of overall quality.

The works are also more heavily focused towards social aspects of science than science and nature writing itself.

I see what the editor was doing here (and agree there is merit to it), but when I read "The Best Science and Nature Writing 2017" I'm looking for the best pieces about science and nature from 2017. Instead this is more like "A Curated Collection of Great Writing about the Sociology of Science and Nature." Still fine, but not what I signed up for.

Still looking forward to the 2018 edition.

Reading Cat says

Meh. I liked Lab Girl, but her taste is, well, not mine. I expect a science expert to curate a collection that's a little more rigorous and hard to find than BuzzFeed news?

The writing in many of the essays is very blah--Jahren herself is a much better writer than 90% of the articles she selects. Climate change is VASTLY overrepresented in the 'science', crowding out most other sciences and math. The essays about the lives of scientists tries to be progressive, but it's basically all about being a woman scientist, rather than a scientist...who is also a woman. I mean, no real surprise considering Jahren's own work and agenda, but...it got very samey.

I normally love this series, but this was a thumbs down from me. I'll have to see who the editor is next year BEFORE I buy--I got much more fun from hunting down the Other Recommended list by series editor Tim Folger in the book's last pages. I wish he'd take the helm.

Art says

We can measure the health of a society by how much it supports science and its scientists, writes Tim Folger, editor of this series. He began writing this year's forward in January, a few days after hundreds of thousands of people gathered in cities for The March for Science, a public rebuke to the country's new leaders, including "a frighteningly uninformed president." The new government, for example, denies climate change.

Hope Jahren, this year's guest editor, wanted to showcase new and unusual voices. Among the two dozen articles in this edition, a couple of them appear as fortuitously timed for our sudden high-stakes conversation about harassment. A couple of other pieces deal with light pollution. Nonetheless, fewer articles appealed to me than in previous years. Highlights:

— A Song of Ice, by Elizabeth Kolbert, first published in The New Yorker.

The Greenland ice sheet remains as a holdover from the previous ice age, which covered much of the Northern Hemisphere. Most of that ice, a mile or two thick, melted ten thousand years ago. But at the bottom of the sheet in Greenland, scientists found snow that fell a hundred thousand years ago.

Kolbert, more broadly, found evidence of climate change in Greenland. The climate operates on a time delay, she writes. "We are living in the climate of the past, but we already we've determined the climate's future."

— Dark Science, by Omar Mouallem, first published by Hazlitt.

Two thirds of Americans cannot see The Milky Way anymore. Urban light pollution now obscures all but the brightest objects in the sky.

Scotobiology, a new science that studies biology affected by darkness, comes to the rescue. The full moon used to appear as the brightest light for every nocturnal creature. But urban sprawl and electrification of the last hundred years screws with ecosystems. North American cities, as a result, now write policies for downward-facing LED bulbs to replace to old upward-facing street lights.

NPR Weekend Edition recently aired a piece about the first dark-sky reserve in the United States:
<https://www.npr.org/2017/11/25/566074...>

— The Woman Who Might Find Us Another Earth, by Chris Jones, first published by The New York Times Magazine. Sara Seager, an astrophysicist at MIT, specializes in the new field of exoplanets, searching for something Earthlike out there. Astronomers, and she is a professor of planetary science, at their core study light. Seager searches the sky for the smallest lights that may lead to a planet similar to ours. But, here on Earth, light blinds and pollutes the sky, creating one of the challenges she works through. The MacArthur Foundation certified Seager as a genius.

— The Amateur Cloud Society, by Jon Mooallem, from The New York Times Magazine. At its tenth anniversary, a folk singer ended the conference with a song about wind and weather, saving her big crowd pleaser to close her performance, a spare arrangement of "Both Side, Now." This Joni Mitchell moment moved the author, while bringing members of the audience to tears.

— He Fell in Love with His Grad Student Then Fired Her for It, by Akeem Ghorayshi, first published in

Buzzfeed News. The title tells the story: A young astrophysics professor at CalTech fell in love with a grad student then fired her because of his feelings. The professor told another female grad student about the situation. This is one of two articles in this volume dealing with sexual harassment. The other one: Out Here, No One Can Hear You Scream, first published by Huffington Post, details chilling experiences of women working outdoor jobs in fields dominated by men.

Other Notable Science and Nature Writing of 2016, a list edited by Tim Folger, covers four pages. What Came Before the Big Bang? by Alan Lightman, appears as one of the five dozen notables. Ironically, that article appears in the sibling volume, 2017 Best American Essays.

Other than the handful of articles highlighted here, many of the others did not appeal to me. Guest editors of recent years explain their filters in their introductions. This year, the guest editor favored new and unusual voices. But the title of the series — best American science and nature writing — seems like filter enough. Just pick the best writing, as the title suggests. Three and a half stars.

Melissa says

Excellent collection of essays selected by Hope Jahren, not only about the science but about the lives and events behind the scientists. Of particular importance are two essays about the sexual harassment that women suffer in the sciences (apparently it is hard to conduct one's self in an appropriate professional manner _ (?) _ , which is completely not hard at all, ugh why are men. Don't bother @ing me). Highly recommend.

Madison Schmidt says

I read "The Best American Science and Nature Writing 2017" for summer reading this year going into my junior year of high school. I do have an interest in science in nature and thought it would find this book enjoyable. When I first started reading it, however, I got bored very easily with it. I often found it hard to keep up with the main idea of each essay, as I usually like to focus on one topic when I read, and each article was based on something different. The essays contained topics such as climate change, outer space, astronauts, overpopulation and lack of conservation of land. For example, in part two, the essays go from one called "Something Uneasy in the Los Angeles Air" to "How Factory Farms Play Chicken with Antibiotics". Just looking at the titles of those two articles you can tell how they are very different in their main ideas. A few essays sounded interesting, but when I started reading, I couldn't find the main point of the writing. Having this happen made the book seem boring and lacking interest for me. I found that it was a very slow read and felt like it never ended. I was hoping to do a fun summer reading project with this book, but after buying it, I discovered how advanced the topics and writing was. Being a 16 year old, this book was nothing like I expected and quickly got boring because the topics were so advanced for my age group. Once I'm older, I would love to revisit reading this book, but for now, I don't find it entertaining for younger audiences.

Pearse Anderson says

This book was a gift from Gaby Parlapiano! Thank you.

Hope Jahren was a stellar voice for this year's volume. At a time when science seems ever more emotional,

personal, and at risk of attack, Jahren gives us essays about scientists inner lives, their associations, uplifts, and struggles, and great power whether they are administrators or citizens. So, the third section of this book is great, yeah. The first two sections are also good, but I dunno, some of them made me question why they were chosen. This year's anthology had a ton of science, and if their was nature writing it was the type found in an Oxford or Scientific American anthology, not a Chelsea Green one. Y'know?

Best pieces: The Art of Saving Relics; The Secrets of Wave Pilots; The Invisible Catastrophe; How Factory Farms Play Chicken with Antibiotics; Out Here, No One Can Hear You Scream. Quality quality quality quality quality.

This book gave me some new appreciations for science, environmentalism, and oft-forgotten bureaucrats of those fields. Certainly taught me a lot more than some classes of ENVIS 201. And even when I didn't enjoy pieces, I just jumped to the next one, or I thought about why. And that was interesting. There were a bunch of examples of pieces that did so many things well, but if they just had a touch more Nieman's, they might have become something else.

Josef LaFranchise says

“The Best American Science and Nature Writing 2017” by Hope Jahren is a great collection of 24 articles that cover a wide array of topics from many different areas of studies within science. The articles in this book range from examining the effects of climate change on our world, explaining our search for a new planet to call home, to defining how we are able to detect gravitational waves, too many other interesting topics. This collection is a good fit to represent many of the advancements and issues scientists are facing today.

The articles are divided into three distinct sections; Emergent Fields, Changing Land and Resources, and The “Real Life” of Scientists. The first of these, Emergent Fields, takes a look at up and coming studies such as the measuring of gravitation waves. The next, Changing Land and Resources, focuses on how science impacts the way we attain the things we consume and maintain the land we live on. One of these articles explains that our overuse of antibiotics on ourselves and the food we eat is creating more and more resistant bacteria that can not be killed through normal means. The third section, The “Real Life” of Scientists, examines the lives of scientists from across many different fields and how their studies have impacted their lives, such as the case of George Price, whos study of altruism lead him to give up everything he had. While the articles in this last section are interesting, I wish that there was more emphasis put on the previous two sections rather than this one, seeing as almost half of all of the articles fall into this section. The section that suffers the most from this problem is Emergent Fields, as it only contains 4 articles.

Despite this problem, this book does offer a sizeable enough assortment of articles that show how science is impacting our lives today and in the future. Through this book, I was able to discover and learn about fields of science that I had known little to nothing about. Even if you have only a slight interest in science I would recommend this book to pick up.

Ethan says

When entering this book, I had expected hard, analytical, scientific journals containing data of specific experiments and conclusive evidence of a point. However, I was treated to a different way of having a field of science explained.

Each essay was more like a non fiction story, told in the personal details of real people rather than the usual cold cut of experimental data a hard scientific journal may offer. For example, a scientific journal may only talk about what happened in the experiment, or extrapolate data into tangible terms relating to, you guessed it, the experiment. But this book offered more personal details of the scientists life, their successes and failures based on the topic, and their feelings on the topic. Rarely did I feel I was reading a "scientific journal". I felt more like I was reading a story that a company like national geographic had written up. The book did a good job of explaining topics that may be difficult to grasp, like, my personal favorite, the gravitational waves caused by the decaying orbits of two circling black holes. It had to explain general relativity to a supposedly unexposed audience. It did a good job, using the classic, "space-time is a blanket and objects bend it" allusion. There are other examples obviously, but I feel like the explanation of the theoretical fabric and make up of the universe is a powerful example.

My most glaring issue with this book is the lack of data. I know, I know, I just spent the time praising it for its lack of stone cold formality, but at the same time, a lack of any hard data makes it feel like you're not reading a scientific journal entry, but an informative story. There's a good balance that needs to be achieved, hard data to satisfy those who could learn from it, and personality to keep the eyes of the reader open and heads up from their desks. This book comes agonizingly close to the balance, but falls just short.

All in all it is worth a read if you are interested in the sciences. This is not quite an entry level book for science love, as it is talking about topics outside the normal frame of reference. A better way to spark scientific love is to read up on the technical details of the things you encounter everyday, to create a better appreciation for them, and to view them differently. Since this book is not fully about everyday objects, but not about the unfathomable virtues of existence, I personally consider it a mid tier science read.

More entry level book: Michio Kaku's "Physics of the impossible"
(especially for sci-fi lovers)

More dense book: Ray Kurzweil's "The singularity is near"
