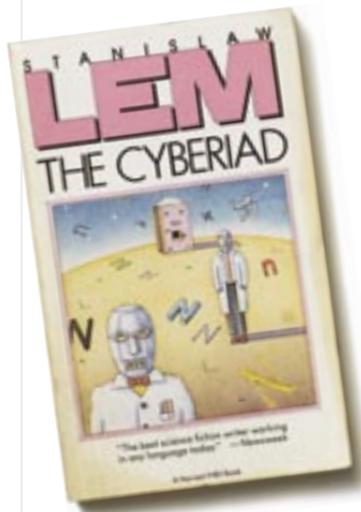


RETRIEVAL

THE CYBERIAD

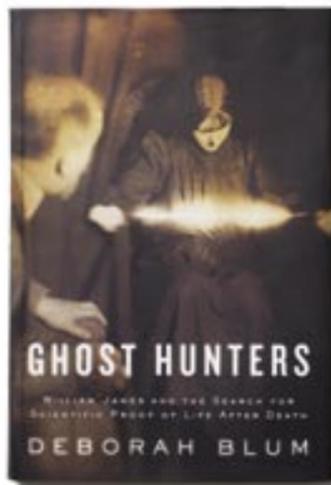
By Stanislaw Lem
Translated by Michael Kandel
Original publication date: 1967



Many recall the name of the late Polish writer Stanislaw Lem from big screen versions of *Solaris*, whether Tarkovsky's exquisitely rendered masterpiece or Soderbergh's overlooked follow-up. But great novelists like Lem deserve foremost to be read, and the ebullience and wit of his prose have no finer exemplar than *The Cyberiad*.

The Cyberiad relates the picaresque adventures of two genius "constructors," Trurl and Klapaucius, whose escapades traverse an imagined universe at once medieval and futuristic. Together they devise elaborate solutions to whatever problems they encounter, creating fanciful, scientific machines that save the day as often as ruin it. The result is masterful slapstick where Lewis Carroll-like wordplay meets Borgesian profundity to outrageously comic effect.

Lem began his career as a scientist and doctor, publishing poetry before settling into science fiction. This trajectory made him unique among his peers, as the verse "Love and Tensor Algebra" in *The Cyberiad* illustrates. Lem's allegories sparkle with mathematics, consciousness and physics, completely reimagining the genre science fiction he ridiculed. So profound were his insights that his stories appear in a compendium on the mind by Douglas Hofstadter and Daniel Dennett, and frequently show up on cognitive science syllabi. Few satirists, in any genre, can be said to be as relevant to the big scientific questions as Lem has been. It is truly unfortunate, with his death in March, that he is no longer around to receive the Nobel Prize that he deserves. —Joshua Roebke

**Ghost Hunters**

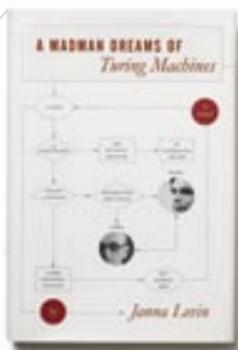
By Deborah Blum (Penguin Press)

In the naturalistic post-Darwinian climate of the late 19th century, a group of prominent scholars—including William James, John Ruskin and Alfred, Lord Tennyson—attempted to stretch the boundaries of science by investigating the supernatural. Blum takes us inside this rarified circle, conveying their excitement and perseverance, while also offering a compelling contemplation of the nature of science.

A Madman Dreams of Turing Machines

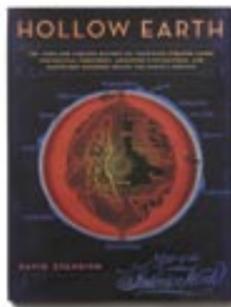
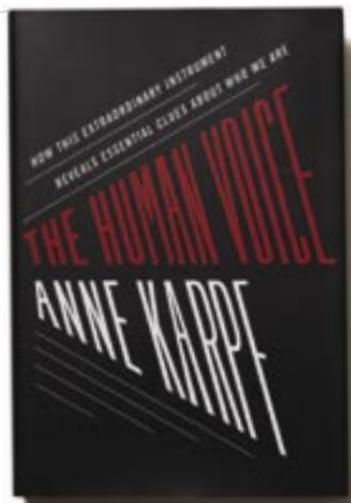
By Jenna Levin (Knopf)

Like a lyrical mash-up, Levin interweaves the personal narrative style of her first book with taut prose evocative of Alan Lightman's *Einstein's Dreams*, creating a deft, if somewhat discordant, novel on the price of mathematical genius. Levin skillfully twists nonfictional accounts of Turing and Gödel's lives and demises into a tale of brainy introspection on the nature of love, knowledge and madness.

**The Human Voice**

By Anne Karpf (Bloomsbury)

As society progressed from an oral to a literary (and electronic) tradition, people lost respect for the human voice. But sociologist Karpf argues that science is just beginning to understand its power—and that the voice is an exquisitely designed informational tool. Through the voice, she says, we can project and detect demeanor, occupation, social status and even illness. (Now read this again out loud.)

**Hollow Earth**

By David Standish (Da Capo Press)

What do Edgar Allen Poe, Edmond Halley and Pat Boone all have in common? At some point in their lives, each has been involved with the idea that our planet is hollow. A monumental work of screwball scholarship, *Hollow Earth* is a highly entertaining romp through the history of a theory that went from scientifically legitimate to the far reaches of fringe theory to, ultimately, too good to be true.

MUSEUM

THE LOS ALAMOS HISTORICAL MUSEUM

Los Alamos, NM

The Los Alamos Historical Museum, tucked in an old stone cottage among ponderosa pines, looks every bit the old guest house it once was. And were it not for an accident of history, there would be little reason for its notability.

Operated by the Los Alamos Historical Society, the small museum pays quick homage to the region's sublime geology and early human history—the volcanic eruption that created the mesa and the native pueblos that followed—before getting to the heart of the matter: the birth of the atomic bomb.

A WWII sentry shack ("PASSES MUST BE PRESENTED TO GUARDS") leads to a collection juxtaposing the mundanities of wartime life with

the epochal work done by the resident scientists. A slide rule is displayed next to welder's glasses issued for the first atom bomb test and a memo stating "Mr. Oppenheimer would like a nail in his office to hang his hat on." Oppenheimer and other Manhattan Project veterans will be overlooking the premises themselves this fall, when photographer A.J. Melnick exhibits his portraits of the infamous collective.

At the back of the museum a mockup of a tiny apartment recreates the simple living space of the city's wartime residents. Grim panoramic photos of post-bomb Hiroshima and a melted porcelain pocket watch serve as reminders of the eventual outcome of all that transpired here. —John Fleck



PHOTO: LOS ALAMOS HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND MUSEUM

MARK WEISS