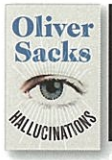
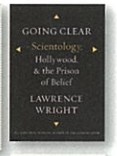
LAWRENCE M KRAUSS

LAWRENCE M KRAUSS is a Canadian-American physics professor who has written several bestselling books, including *The Physics of Star Trek* and *Fear of Physics: A guide for the perplexed*. His latest book, **A Universe from Nothing**, became a *New York Times* bestseller only a week after it was released and is being translated into 20 languages. Far from the stereotype of the reclusive academic uninterested in the outside world, Krauss is a passionate populariser of science, and he recently appeared on the ABC's *Q&A* program, in which he spoke about the intersection between science and ethics. He tells us here about the books that have influenced him.

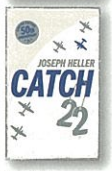
■ What are you reading now?





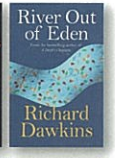
Hallucinations by Oliver Sacks, *Going Clear: Scientology, Hollywood, and the prison of belief* by Lawrence Wright and *The Better Angels of our Nature: A history of violence and humanity* by Steven Pinker.

■ What are some of your favourite books and authors?



Catch-22 by Joseph Heller remains one of my favourite books of all time and one of the few books I have read numerous times.

As far as non-fiction books go, I enjoyed Steven Weinberg's *The First Three Minutes: A modern view of the origin of the universe*, which probably motivated me to write when I did. And *River Out of Eden* by Richard Dawkins.

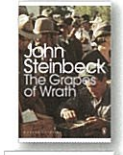


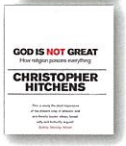
■ What are some books that have made you really laugh out loud?

Catch-22 by Joseph Heller, *Bored of the Rings* by the Harvard Lampoon and *Portnoy's Complaint* by Philip Roth.

■ Which books have moved you the most?

The Grapes of Wrath by John Steinbeck and *God is Not Great: How religion poisons everything* by Christopher Hitchens.





■ What did you enjoy reading when you were a child?

I read everything I could get my hand on. I read during meals, late at night. I loved books and they opened up new worlds for me. That is one of the reasons I now write.

■ Did your parents read to you as a child?

I don't remember my mother or father reading to me. But I do remember my mother encouraging me to read and taking me to the bookmobile – a mobile library – every Saturday to get new books.

■ Do you write in the margins of your books or turn down the pages to mark your place?

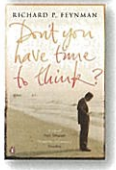
Yes, especially if I want to return to the material for my own writing.

■ When did you first take an interest in science?

My mother wanted me to be a doctor and made the mistake of telling me doctors were scientists. So when I was about 10 or 11 I got interested in science. (I also had a neighbour who was an engineer, and that influenced me.) I read a book on Galileo around that time, and that cemented my interest. By the time I learned that doctors weren't scientists it was too late; I was hooked on science, and reading Richard Feynman convinced me that physics was where it was at.

■ Who has inspired you in your career?

Richard Feynman was an inspiration to all physicists in my generation. Many of the people I learned physics from, such as Steven Weinberg and Sheldon Glashow, also inspired me. And many of my colleagues, including collaborators such as Frank Wilczek, have inspired me. And finally, my students have inspired me as I watch them learn and often teach me things!



■ If given the opportunity to travel anywhere in the universe, where or what would you most like to see and why?

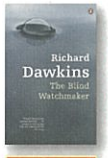
There are lots of places I would like to know more about. I'd like to get near a giant black hole (to see if they exist, as we think they do), or go under the surface of Europa [one of Jupiter's moons] to see if there is life in the oceans there. But alas, in most of those places I wouldn't survive.

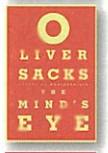
■ What would you most like to discover the answer to in science?

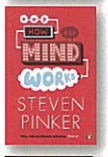
Two questions, I guess. The first is the nature of the dark energy dominating the universe. That is the biggest mystery in science. I would also like to know if our universe is unique and whether the laws of physics are fixed or if they are variable in different universes.

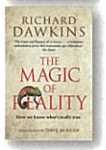
■ What is the most important message from science that you want people to understand?

We need to accept the universe for what it is and force our beliefs to conform to the evidence of reality rather than the other way around. The universe is amazing, far more amazing than simple human myths ever suggested. Not only should we appreciate the wonder of the universe, but we should also use it as a basis for public policy and our actions.









■ What books on popular science would you recommend to general readers?

As I have indicated, several books by Richard Dawkins on evolution, Steven Weinberg and Richard Feynman on physics, Oliver Sacks and Steven Pinker on neuroscience – and, of course, my own!

■ What books would you recommend to younger readers to inspire them to take an interest in science?

There are too few books for young people (maybe one day I will write one). Lucy Hawking and her father wrote some nice books for very young people. Richard Dawkins's *The Magic of Reality* is also good.

■ Do you think that ideas created from fiction - for example, as in *Jurassic Park, The Time Machine, 20000 Leagues Under the Sea* - can become scientific facts?

The real universe is far more fascinating than the universe of science fiction.

■ Where do you do most of your reading?

Any place where I am forced to be away from computers and email.

■ Do you use an e-reader?

Yes. gr

A Universe from Nothing: Why there is something rather than nothing *by Lawrence M Krauss is published by Simon & Schuster, rrp $19.99.*