

Gödel, Escher, Bach
by Douglas Hofstadter,
Harvester Press/Vintage
Books (1989 paperback
reissue), £64/\$20, ISBN
0855277572/0394756827

*CRC Handbook of Chemistry
and Physics* edited by
David Lide, CRC Press,
78th edition, 1996,
£82/\$119,
ISBN 0849304784

*Merck Manual of Diagnosis
and Therapy* edited by
Robert Berkow and Andrew
Fletcher, Merck, 16th edition
1993, £20/\$12, ISBN
0911910166/0911910174

Powers of Ten
by Philip and Phylis Morrison,
W. H. Freeman, 1994,
£15.95/\$19.95,
ISBN 0716760088

Gravitation by Charles Misner,
Kip Thorne and John
Wheeler, W. H. Freeman,
1973, £56.95/\$63.95,
ISBN 0716703440

*Handbook of Mathematical
Functions** edited by Milton
Abramowitz and Irene Stegun,
Dover/US Government
Printing Office (reprint
edition expected soon),
£26.95, ISBN
0318117304/0318117304

*Time, Space and Knowledge
(series)** by Tarhang Tulku,
Dharma, 1990, £10.95/\$30,
ISBN 0898002052

*Infinite in all Directions**
by Freeman Dyson,
Penguin/HarperCollins,
1989, £8.99,
ISBN 0060915692

*May be difficult to find

... Or maybe two or three ...

And here they are, the best of the best



Photofonica

IF I WERE to be stranded on a desert island, with a single book to read, I'd want something big that gave me a lot to think about. I'd unhesitatingly plump for Douglas Hofstadter's *Gödel, Escher, Bach*. Why? It didn't become a bestselling cult book by accident. I've read it and reread it. Every time I come back to it, I find lots of new ideas to contemplate. The book's deepest layer is its analysis of the differences between information and meaning, between syntax and semantics, between formal systems and the real world. With Escher's pictures; Carrollian dialogues and Bach for good measure, who could resist it?

Ian Stewart, Institute of Mathematics,
University of Warwick

AS I AM occasionally banished to an island, I find it easy to answer your query. The book I would take is the *CRC Handbook of Chemistry and Physics*. To continue intellectual functioning, I carry most of the ideas in my head. But one needs data to explore ideas. The data I need are most densely found in the handbook. Now you know what a real reductionist is like. Number two would be the *Merck Manual of Diagnosis and Therapy*. It's the book I gave to my son when he left for the Peace Corps in Fiji.

Harold Morowitz, Krasnow Institute for Advanced
Study, George Mason University, Washington DC

I WOULD take Philip and Phylis Morrison's book *Powers of Ten*. By examining the Universe at every possible scale of magnitude, this book would serve as a constant reminder that my predicament on the island is pretty insignificant in the cosmic order, and that simply being alive to wonder at existence is already a major blessing.

Keith Devlin, St Mary's College of California,
Morago

ONE science book for the rest of my life? A really great book excels across a fractal range of levels: the arc of the book's entire argument, the roundedness of the chapters, the clarity of the paragraphs, the shapeliness of the sentences, and the fresh and succulent individual words.

I would choose Charles Misner, Kip Thorne and John Wheeler's *Gravitation*. It is heavy in every sense of the word. Fat and thick, dense with information, loaded with cosmically deep teachings about matter, space and time. And, yes, deep and difficult in parts. But the authors play fair, and as far as I can tell, all the necessary pieces for their great jigsaw puzzle are there in the book's 1279 pages. I'd enjoy having the time to finally put the whole thing together.

Rudy Rucker, San Jose State University

MY CHOICE is the *Handbook of Mathematical Functions* edited by Milton Abramowitz and Irene Stegun. Of course, I would do theoretical physics on the island, hoping the isolation might lead to original thoughts (but aware that lack of criticism from colleagues might lead to misguided ones). To keep in mental shape, I would combine the more arcane areas of research with investigations of the wealth of classical physics to be seen on the island: sunsets, sand ripples, sea waves, haloes... The handbook contains exactly the tools—formulas and tables of numbers—needed in the study of these phenomena, and would enable me to concentrate on physics without getting stuck in mathematics.

Michael Berry, University of Bristol

I WOULD take Tarhang Tulku's *Time, Space and Knowledge* for its vision of where science might lead. In this century, science has been forced to shed its initial guiding principles of objectivity and repeatability. What other changes could be