

through an ad her father placed in *The Times of India*. (She wrote in a 2005 *New York Magazine* article about the first attempt, which failed but left her more appreciative of the traditional Indian way of finding a mate, who is selected by one's family.)

Unfortunately, Jain seems more interested in stringing together amusing dating anecdotes than in making a sincere attempt at cross-cultural understanding. Many of the people she encounters in America and India read like caricatures. British journalists are “rapacious conversationalists”; men from Ohio are too earnest. Indian mothers care only about marrying off their daughters, while every unattached female New York professional spends her evenings poring over the “disturbing minutiae” of dating.

Jain's sharply trained reporter's eye is best used when she describes the rapid changes juxtaposed with the traditionalism encrusting Indian cities. She had been to Delhi before, but when she returned in 2005, “it was different.” Young, educated, tech-savvy professionals were transforming the ancient city through their demand for Western luxuries. Upscale coffee shops, Italian restaurants, nightclubs, and malls abutted centuries-old forts and open-air bazaars.

Searching for an apartment, Jain was shocked to find that many Delhi landlords didn't like renting to single women, fearing they might be prostitutes or at least would entertain males. She finally moved into a renovated flat with a view of the city's ancient landmarks, and herself became another dissonant element of the landscape. “I now marvel at the incongruities and ironies that abound in this country each day,” she writes. “I'm able to install Wi-Fi, allowing me to check e-mail from bed, but my cook, Amma—a small dumpling of a 70-year-old woman—who prepares fresh *sabzi*, *dal*, *chapatis*, and rice each day, extracts the utterly baffling third world rate of \$18.20 a month.” Cheap labor makes cooks and cleaners commonplace even in India's lower-middle-class households.

It's too bad the insight Jain exhibits when

describing modern India falters when she focuses inward. Often, she blames her romantic failures on the overused emigrant's complaint of neither fitting in here nor there—too liberated for Indian men, but not free enough for American ones. To Western ears, she says, her urge to settle down sounds “atavistic in nature, a throwback to a time when women couldn't financially support themselves.” Yet her own view of partnership is pretty dismal: She looks down on female friends who married right after college and disdains women who choose marriage over a career.

Jain decided to leave New York for Delhi after attending a Central Park picnic at which she was the only person not part of a couple. Fleeing in tears, she vowed not to become “that proverbial single thirtysomething female propped up at the bar waiting for her ship to come in.” But then she landed in India, only to find that the “razzle-dazzle” new country had created waves of the “young cads” she had hoped to escape. Same bar, different scenery.

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SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

Fear Itself

Reviewed by Evelin Sullivan

IN THE LAST CHAPTER OF his eminently readable exploration of our allegedly dangerous world, Daniel Gardner describes a cemetery in Ontario where a headstone commemorates the six children of one couple, all killed by diphtheria within less than a week

in 1902. Far from marking a freakish occurrence, the headstone is a reminder of the vast toll contagious illnesses took on children in the dark days before vaccines all but eradicated such diseases in the industrialized world. It is the final proof of what Gardner argues throughout *The Science of*

THE SCIENCE OF FEAR:

Why We Fear the Things We Shouldn't—and Put Ourselves in Greater Danger.

By Daniel Gardner.
Dutton. 339 pp. \$24.95

Fear: The world we have inherited is in many ways the safest—least risky to the individual and the species—that has ever existed.

So why, he asks, are we afraid of so many things? Why do homicides, abductions, and other statistically unlikely threats (Gardner includes terrorism among these) occupy an inordinate amount of our attention and consume resources that could be spent protecting us from statistically far more significant threats, such as preventable illnesses? Gardner's answer is that evolution has equipped us with a brain superbly suited to tell us what to do when we spot a large brown thing in the long grass: recognize it for a lion, get scared, and run like hell; once safe, tell everybody about what happened to the slowest one. But our brains are ill equipped to process—at that same speed, and based on the same need-to-know premise—the more subtle dangers coming our way.

The brain *Homo sapiens* possessed as early as 200,000 years ago has remained unchanged in the blink of an eye that constitutes the span of modern history. This brain consists of subconscious and conscious, or what Gardner calls “Gut” and “Head.” Once, Gut (feeling) kept people alive by rapidly, intuitively differentiating between safe and dangerous, and by prompting life-saving actions based on its split-second verdict. Head (reason)—the ability to use logic, analyze, do the math—was not useful, given the conditions.

Gut brought the species far, by instinctively following a set of rules. Gardner, a Canadian journalist, draws on a wealth of academic research to catalog these rules and show how necessary they were for making the world intelligible and survivable for prehistoric humankind. And he convincingly argues that they can thoroughly mislead *us*—and are used by manipulators of all stripes to do so. (What better way to sell us software X or burglar alarm Y than by frightening us with inflated numbers of Internet predators or crimes we're unlikely to become victims of?)

Take, for instance, “the Example Rule”: Gut tells us that the more easily we recall an event, the more likely it is to happen again. In an envi-

ronment where information is local, the example of one member of the tribe being eaten by a lion plants in the other members a vivid—hence, easy to recall—memory of the very real danger of lions and places frequented by lions. In an environment where information propagates rapidly, and a hundred million of us find out, through the media, about one gruesome homicide, the example, processed by Gut in the same way, does little or nothing to make us safer. But it does raise the national anxiety level and make us more easily persuaded to allocate funds for more prisons or to support the death penalty.

Gardner puts into context half a dozen other such rules. All of them share their immense usefulness for the survival of hunters and gatherers. And all of them share the unfortunate potential to make us bark up the wrong light pole in environments where light poles outnumber trees.

His analysis suggests that for the sake of *our* survival, one fear ought to become stronger: that of being afraid of the wrong things. He may not succeed in shutting up Gut when it says “Lock the doors or risk being murdered,” but he presents compelling evidence that unfounded fears pose real dangers. Only by recognizing these dangers will we be ready to give Head a chance and to fight wasteful and foolish measures proposed to keep us safe from what we needn't fear.

EVELIN SULLIVAN, a lecturer at Stanford University, is the author of *The Concise Book of Lying* (2001) and four novels. She is at work on a book about the natural history of fear.

Einstein, Relatively Speaking

Reviewed by David Lindley

PHYSICISTS SOMETIMES indulge in an entertaining but largely pointless debate about which of their two preeminent geniuses, Isaac Newton or Albert Einstein, deserves the all-time number one ranking. Hans

EINSTEIN'S MISTAKES:
The Human Failings of Genius.

By Hans C. Ohanian.
Norton. 394 pp. \$24.95