



Plastic Fantastic: How the Biggest Fraud in Physics Shook the Scientific World (MacSci)

By Eugenie Samuel Reich

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Highly regarded science journalist Eugenie Samuel Reich recounts the case of wunderkind physicist Jan Hendrik Schön, who faked the discovery of a new superconductor at the world famous Bell Laboratories. Many of the world's top scientific journals and experts, including Nobel Prize-Winners, supported Schön, only to learn that they were the victims of the biggest fraud in science. What drove Schön, by all accounts a mild-mannered, modest, and obliging young man, to tell such outrageous lies? Reich dives into the riveting world of science to examine how fraud perpetuates itself today. Schön's rise and fall will be an essential and fascinating account of the missteps of the scientific community for years to come.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Reich, a former editor at New Science, unravels the absorbing story of Jan Hendrik Schön, a researcher at the prestigious Bell Laboratories from 1998 to 2002, who achieved star status in cutting-edge materials technology—super-conductivity, lasers, nanotechnology—by falsifying data. A graduate of Germany's "low key" University of Konstanz, he dove immediately into "a demanding environment... known for big discoveries, ambitious expectations." When his papers on experiments with organic crystals were rejected, he manipulated data and made false claims; publication followed. When the tech bubble burst, Bell came under increasing pressure from parent company Lucent to justify its existence; short-circuiting the normal process of peer review, the lab turned to public relations, "press-releasing exciting scientific findings" to fool investors, customers and Lucent into believing Bell had "a sound long-term technological future." Reich's clear explanation gives general readers a real sense of the excitement generated in the scientific community by Schön's "discoveries," how he made them appear credible and how his ability to dissemble eventually failed him; he also raises profound ethical questions that resonate with current concerns over science and its place in the public sphere.

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From [Booklist](#)

Reich recounts the read-it-to-believe-it saga of physicist Hendrik Schön. At Bell Labs in the late 1990s, Schön's apparent discoveries about atomic-scale devices called field-effect transistors earned him a stellar peer-group reputation—until his research was exposed as faked in 2002. While science's self-correcting mechanism did dissolve Schön's deceptions, its failure to catch the frauds sooner motivates Reich's tenacious pursuit of the story. Along with failures in the peer-review process of journals like Science and Nature, which published some of Schön's papers, Reich found a propensity within Bell Labs to believe Schön's results, which, had they been real, could have commercially benefited the home of the original, macroscale transistor. Another crucial factor that Reich develops was Schön's ability to allay tough questions with revised data, though when he began to manipulate and outright invent data remains mysterious, for on that he eluded Reich, too. Nevertheless, Reich's journalistic persistence and technical thoroughness yield a largely complete, often dramatic account of Schön's roguery and downfall. --Gilbert Taylor

Review

"*Plastic Fantastic* offers a compelling, timely and well-written dissection of our era's most outrageous scientific fraud, and of what it means for science today." *American Scientist Magazine*

"Reich's readable account of a fairly recent science fraud, is valuable chiefly as a close look at the 'kitchen' where scientific results are assembled and validated--and whence occasionally comes forth something that should not have seen the light of day." *John Derbyshire, The Wall Street Journal*

"Reich pursues this affair in depth...does an excellent job of dealing with the facts of the Schön case" *Martin Blume, Nature*

"Eugenie Samuel Reich offers an inside look into how the scientific establishment deals with human imperfection. *Plastic Fantastic* is a transfixing cautionary tale of how easily wrongdoers can hide and thrive in modern science." *Jörg Blech, author of Inventing Disease and Pushing Pills*

“In a warts 'n all expose of the scientific process, Eugenie Reich investigates the world's greatest scientific fraud. Fascinating, startling and highly readable. If you thought science was as pure as the driven snow, prepare to be shocked.” ?*Justin Mullins, consultant editor, New Scientist*

“A riveting tale of scientific detective work, and a story about an important issue in science that is often overlooked. A well researched page-turner.” ?*Amir Aczel, author of Fermat's Last Theorem*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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