



Fabulous Science: Fact and Fiction in the History of Scientific Discovery

John Waller

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The great biologist Louis Pasteur suppressed 'awkward' data because it didn't support the case he was making. John Snow, the 'first epidemiologist' was doing nothing others had not done before. Gregor Mendel, the supposed 'founder of genetics' never grasped the fundamental principles of 'Mendelian' genetics. Joseph Lister's famously clean hospital wards were actually notorious dirty. And Einstein's general relativity was only 'confirmed' in 1919 because an eminent British scientist cooked his figures. These are just some of the revelations explored in this book. Drawing on current history of science scholarship, "Fabulous Science" shows that many of our greatest heroes of science were less than honest about their experimental data and not above using friends in high places to help get their ideas accepted. It also reveals that the alleged revolutionaries of the history of science were often nothing of the sort. Prodigiously able they may have been, but the epithet of the 'man before his time' usually obscures vital contributions made their unsung contemporaries and the intrinsic merits of ideas they overturned. These distortions of the historical record mostly arise from our tendency to read the present back into the past. But in many cases, scientists owe their immortality to a combination of astonishing effrontery and their skills as self-promoters.

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