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Holiday Gift Books: Science and Nature

Reading can be an experiment, a flight among the stars or even a plunge into a black hole.

By Angelina Torre

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The Warped Side of Our Universe: An Odyssey through Black Holes, Wormholes, Time Travel, and Gravitational Waves

By Kip Thorne

Liveright

240 pages



According to Mr. Tyson and Ms. Walker, one movie that gets it pretty much right was Christopher Nolan’s “Interstellar,” which took its scientific direction from renowned astrophysicist Kip Thorne. Most recently, Mr. Thorne has published a fascinating account of our universe’s most bewildering phenomena written entirely in verse. “The Warped Side of Our Universe: An Odyssey Through Black Holes, Wormholes, Time Travel, and Gravitational Waves” is the result of a 13-year collaboration between Mr. Thorne and artist Lia Halloran, whose dimension-defying paintings decorate

every page. The textual and visual narrative that emerges is something akin to an epic poem about the nature of spacetime.

In a section titled “A Black Hole Is Made From Space That Is Warped,” the margins of Mr. Thorne’s verse jump around; the meter and structure are meant to mimic the chaos of a black hole’s singularity. Meanwhile, Ms. Halloran’s painting—made with ink on drafting film—twists, spurts and splatters on the neighboring page. When illustrating the dramatic power of a black hole, Ms. Halloran paints the figure of her wife, Felicia, contorting as her feet spin faster than her torso, pulled into the black hole’s singularity. When demonstrating a form of theoretical time travel, Ms. Halloran paints herself plunging a book through the mouth of a wormhole through space and time, where it is received by Felicia on the other end. Felicia is already reading the book Ms. Halloran offers her—now she has two, and the process infinitely repeats.

The enigmatic concepts discussed in “The Warped Side of Our Universe” are some of the most difficult for humans to understand, but Mr. Thorne’s verse and Ms. Halloran’s art bring these far-out concepts down to earth. Even what the eye can’t see can be beautiful.

—Ms. Torre is a writer and editor in New York City.

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