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FOREWORD REVIEW ♥♥♥♥♥ WOMEN'S STUDIES

She's Such a Geek: Women Write about Science, Technology, and Other Nerdy Stuff

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Protein crystallography, string theory, and RPGs: these are the things that give girl geeks an adrenaline rush. Most ride that rush alone or with male counterparts, but this collection of twenty-four essays will make them feel as though they have finally found their sisterhood.

The editors, science writers whose work has appeared in publications such as *Wired* and *The Wall Street Journal*, and the founders of *other* magazine*,* have collected first-person accounts from women in a variety of fields, including computer science, biology, physics, gaming, and comic books. The authors represent a wide range of ages and cultures, from the teenage “gender-rights nerd” who tries to navigate high school politics to the African American MIT graduate who left her astrophysics Doctorate studies to pursue a career in acting.

Some of these women had been geeks their whole lives, but took a long time to embrace their femaleness. Ellen Spertus’s MIT graduate father encouraged her to study math and science, but he also told her that “mathematical ability was correlated with testosterone and that the best modern female mathematician was very ugly.” Though she learned this wasn’t true when she entered MIT herself, it wasn’t until years later that she was finally able to fully embrace her womanhood. On a whim she entered a contest for the “Sexiest Geek Alive.” Wearing a circuit board corset and a slide rule strapped to her leg, Spertus took home the crown.

Other women found their feminism in opposition to their geek careers. Mara Poulsen worked for three years as a game programmer, enduring bosses who assigned fluff work, offensive comments from co-workers, and sexist images built into the games she worked on. She had expected some of this going into the field, but wasn’t quite prepared for the scheming of company heads to make games even sexier and market them to adolescent boys, “What really seems to irritate me,” she writes, “is this notion of women as a foreign species, that we need to liquefy a woman’s brain and inject it into her chest in order to make her interesting.”

Violet Blue, a sex educator and writer, offers an especially explicit piece on attempts to use the Internet for sex. Essays like this make the book inappropriate for teenagers, who may be the girls who would benefit from it the most. However, adults will recognize bits of themselves in these twenty-four women, and come away with a sense of camaraderie as well as geek pride.

Only twenty-five percent of jobs in science and engineering are held by women, despite the fact that they earn fifty-six percent of the degrees in these fields. This book may help improve those numbers by assuring female geeks that they aren’t alone.

CHRISTINE CANFIELD (February 8, 2007)

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