



Check Those Figures

HEY, IT'S PLAYTIME! ICONS—YOU CAN, TOO! BY STEVE MIRSKY

Superman could fly faster than a speeding bullet, presumably a lot faster. But even more powerful than the caped Kryptonian was Albert Einstein, who limited Superman's flight speed to that of light. So it makes sense that Einstein, too, is now available as an action figure—think G.I. Joe with a rumpled sweater, using his kung fu grip to smash paradigms with a single equation. Or, as the catalogue sales copy has it, “Dressed for intense classroom action, this 5” tall, hard-plastic Einstein Action Figure stands with a piece of chalk in his hand, poised to explain relativity.... Features realistic disheveled hair.”

The Einstein Action Figure (it really should be a No-Action-at-a-Distance Figure, the editor in chief of this magazine helpfully pointed out) is brought to you by Archie McPhee & Co. in Seattle, which bills itself as “Outfitters of Popular Culture. Since 1980.” The McPhee action hero line includes Sigmund Freud as well as Ben Franklin, a first-rate scientist when he wasn't revolting. But no other scientists are represented. I therefore propose the creation of the following additional science action figures to round out the collection:

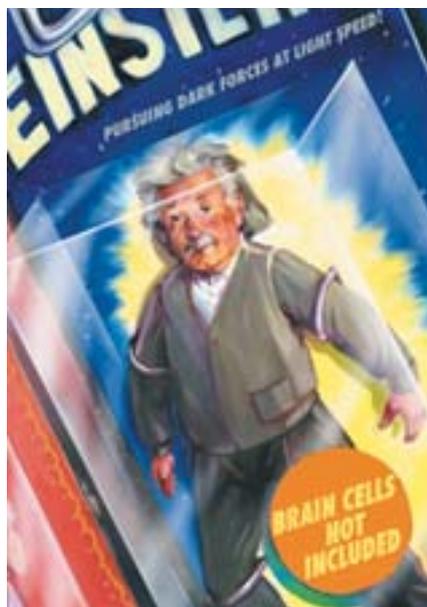
Barbara McClintock: “You'll jump genes with reckless abandon as McClintock plays her corny joke on the scientific establishment. Includes Nobel Prize, which arrives much, much later.”

Isaac Newton: “Pelt your genius action figure with apples until he figures out the gravity of the situation. Equal-and-opposite reaction figure sold separately.”

Archimedes: “‘Hey, Mom, I found him!’ Whether taking a bath, looking for

that elusive lever long enough to move the earth or just plain screwing around, Archy metes out good times. Keep the Syracuse smarty away from Roman soldiers, and he might come up with the calculus two millennia early!”

Carl Djerassi: “He put the ‘action’ in action figure when he invented the birth-control pill. Now you can put him on your shelf—but don't forget to take him down the morning after!”



Edward Teller: “Ed goes fission—and fusion!—through political minefields for five decades pitching nukes. From mass destruction to nudging away incoming comets and asteroids, Edward tells ya, ‘No nukes is bad nukes.’”

Lorenzo Romano Amedeo Carlo Avogadro: “What a mouthful! But you've got his number now—you'll have 6.02×10^{23}

hours of fun with the man who figured out that equal volumes of all gases at the same temperature and pressure contain the same number of molecules. No, really, you will.”

The Big Box o' Steves: “What's more fun than a scientist-writer? A scientist-writer named *Steve!* You'll get Steven Weinberg, Stephen Jay Gould, Stephen Wolfram, Steven Pinker and Stephen Hawking. Hi-ho, Steverino! (Keep Pinker and Gould figures separate to avoid spontaneous combustion.)”

Antoine Lavoisier: “Out with the bad phlogiston, in with the good oxygen. You'll lose your head (he did, in that scary Reign of Terror!) over the man behind the law of conservation of mass. Thirteen-year-old wife not sold in the U.S.”

Franz de Waal: “I see primates, I see Franz! Stare at de Waal as he observes chimps and picks up clues about why we humans do the wacky things we do. You'll have a Goodall time!”

Werner Heisenberg: “Uncertain where you left your Heisenberg action figure? So is he! Check the desk drawers. But don't be surprised if you find Schrödinger's cat. Which may be dead. Or alive!”

Charles Darwin: “This action figure loves coming along for boat rides and bird-watching but can get down at the Down house in Downe for 40 years at a time. Comes complete with his faithful bulldog, Huxley. Warning: some school boards may try to stick pins in him, but he'll survive those pricks.”

I was going to suggest B. F. Skinner, but what good is an action figure you don't take out of the box? SA