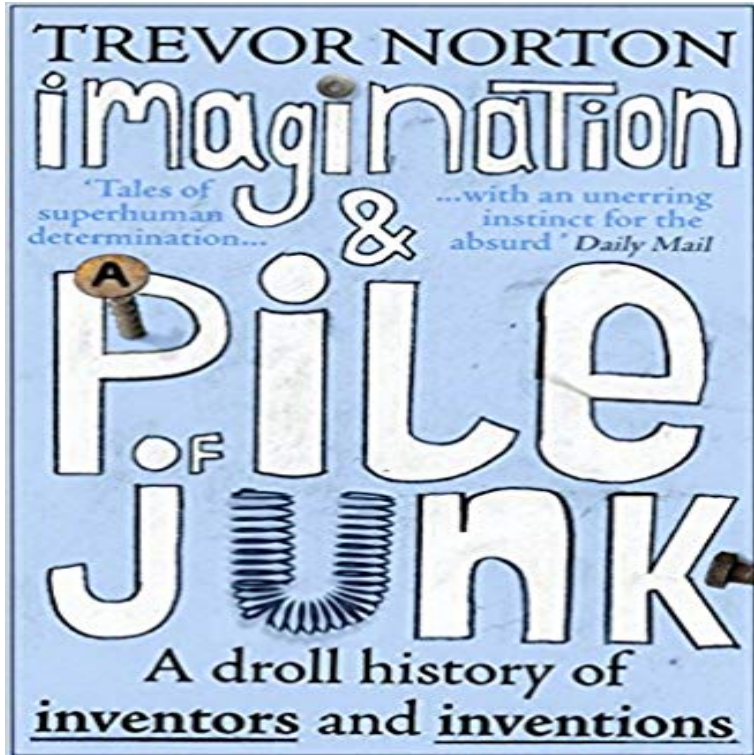


Imagination and a Pile of Junk: A Droll History of Inventors and Inventions



In his whistle-stop tour of inventions large and small, the scientist Trevor Norton shares the Gershwins view that invention is fundamentally comic. The Sunday Times Trevor Norton, who has been compared to Gerard Durrell and Bill Bryson, weaves an entertaining history with a seductive mix of eureka moments, disasters and dirty tricks. Although inventors were often scientists or engineers, many were not: Samuel Morse (Morse code) was a painter, Lazlow Biro (ballpoint) was a sculptor and hypnotist, and Logie Baird (TV) sold boot polish. The inventor of the automatic telephone switchboard was an undertaker who believed the operator was diverting his calls to rival morticians so he decided to make all telephone operators redundant. Inventors are mavericks indifferent to conventional wisdom so critics were dismissive of even their best ideas: radio had no future, electric light was an idiotic idea and X-rays were a hoax. Even so, the state of New Jersey moved to ban X-ray opera glasses. The head of the General Post Office rejected telephones as unnecessary as there were plenty of small boys to run messages. Inventomania is a magical place where eccentrics are always in season and their stories are usually unbelievable - but rest assured, nothing has been invented.

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