



## Plastic Fantastic: How the Biggest Fraud in Physics Shook the Scientific World (MacSci)

By Eugenie Samuel Reich

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This is the story of wunderkind physicist Jan Hendrik Schön who faked the discovery of a new superconductor made from plastic. A star researcher at the world-renowned Bell Laboratories in New Jersey, he claimed to have stumbled across a powerful method for making carbon-based crystals into transistors, the switches found on computer chips. Had his experiments worked, they would have paved the way for huge advances in technology--computer chips that we could stick on a dress or eyewear, or even use to make electronic screens as thin and easy-to-fold as sheets of paper.

But as other researchers tried to recreate Schön's experiments, the scientific community learned that it had been duped. Why did so many top experts, including Nobel prize-winners, support Schön? What led the major scientific journals to publish his work, and promote it with press releases? And what drove Schön, by all accounts a mild-mannered, modest and obliging young man, to tell such outrageous lies?

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Reich, a former editor at *New Science*, unravels the absorbing story of Jan Hendrik Schön, a researcher at the prestigious Bell Laboratories from 1998 to 2002, who achieved star status in cutting-edge materials technology—super-conductivity, lasers, nanotechnology—by falsifying data. A graduate of Germany's "low key" University of Konstanz, he dove immediately into "a demanding environment... known for big discoveries, ambitious expectations." When his papers on experiments with organic crystals were rejected, he manipulated data and made false claims; publication followed. When the tech bubble burst, Bell came under increasing pressure from parent company Lucent to justify its existence; short-circuiting the normal process of peer review, the lab turned to public relations, "press-releasing exciting scientific findings" to fool investors, customers and Lucent into believing Bell had "a sound long-term technological future." Reich's clear explanation gives general readers a real sense of the excitement generated in the scientific community by Schön's "discoveries," how he made them appear credible and how his ability to dissemble eventually failed him; he also raises profound ethical questions that resonate with current concerns over science and its place in the public sphere.

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From [Booklist](#)

Reich recounts the read-it-to-believe-it saga of physicist Hendrik Schön. At Bell Labs in the late 1990s, Schön's apparent discoveries about atomic-scale devices called field-effect transistors earned him a stellar peer-group reputation—until his research was exposed as faked in 2002. While science's self-correcting mechanism did dissolve Schön's deceptions, its failure to catch the frauds sooner motivates Reich's tenacious pursuit of the story. Along with failures in the peer-review process of journals like *Science* and *Nature*, which published some of Schön's papers, Reich found a propensity within Bell Labs to believe Schön's results, which, had they been real, could have commercially benefited the home of the original, macroscale transistor. Another crucial factor that Reich develops was Schön's ability to allay tough questions with revised data, though when he began to manipulate and outright invent data remains mysterious, for on that he eluded Reich, too. Nevertheless, Reich's journalistic persistence and technical thoroughness yield a largely complete, often dramatic account of Schön's roguery and downfall. --Gilbert Taylor

Review

"Eugenie Samuel Reich offers an inside look into how the scientific establishment deals with human imperfection. *Plastic Fantastic* is a transfixing cautionary tale of how easily wrongdoers can hide and thrive in modern science." —Jörg Blech, author of *Inventing Disease and Pushing Pills*

"In a warts 'n all expose of the scientific process, Eugenie Reich investigates the world's greatest scientific fraud. Fascinating, startling and highly readable. If you thought science was as pure as the driven snow, prepare to be shocked." —Justin Mullins, consultant editor, *New Scientist*

"A riveting tale of scientific detective work, and a story about an important issue in science that is often

overlooked. A well researched page-turner.” —Amir Aczel, author of *Fermat's Last Theorem*

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