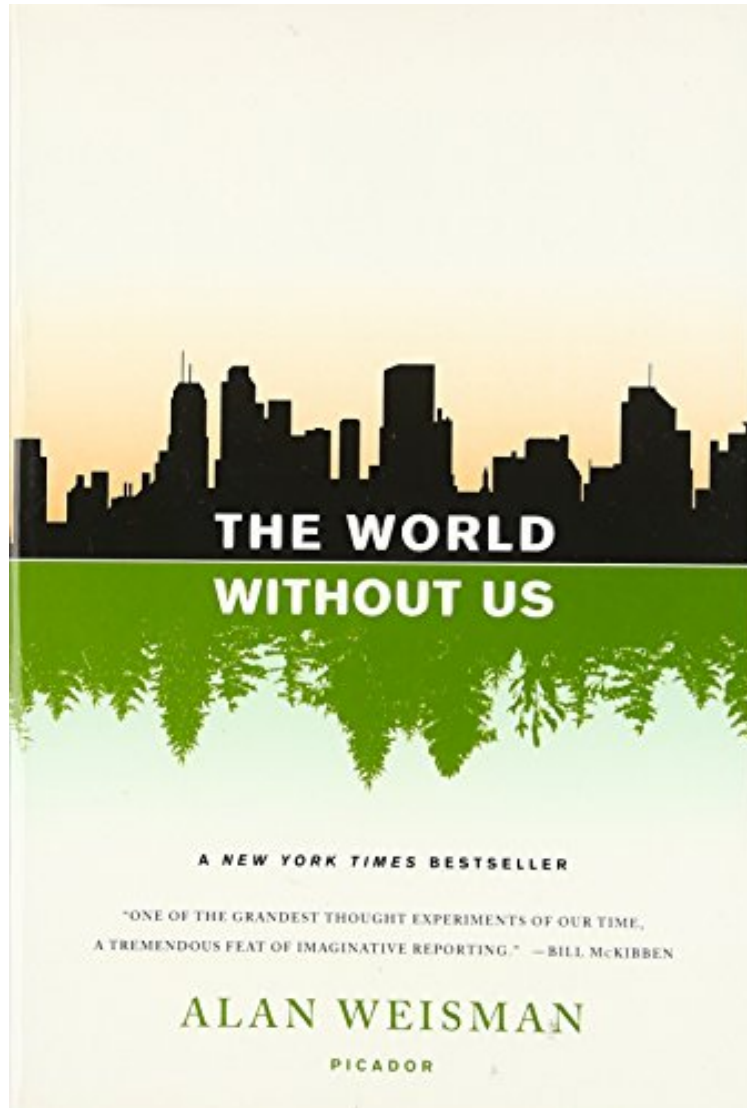


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The World Without Us

Alan Weisman

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#26795 in Books Alan Weisman 2008-08-05 2008-08-05 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.18 x .3 x 5.551, .74 #File Name: 0312427905432 pages The World Without Us | File size: 28.Mb

Alan Weisman : The World Without Us before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The World Without Us:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. The (Mostly) Recovered World after We've Left By Caitlin No matter who you are or where you have lived, you have had an impact on the world, whether it is more global or local, immediate or delayed. When you compile the impact of the approximately 7 billion people alive today as well as the effect of all those that have lived before us, it amounts to many different consequences by our species, and everyday our impact increases. But what if we were all of a sudden gone? What if Homo sapiens no longer tread on the soil that

we have so disturbed? What impact would we leave behind? Although Alan Weisman acknowledges that it is unlikely that our species will quickly perish, he still addresses this question in *The World Without Us* in order to more closely examine our environmental impact. Weisman examines human impact ranging from megafauna extinctions to genetically modified plants and from the altered composition of the atmosphere to what will happen to cities and nuclear plants when we leave. Unlike many authors that address human environmental impact, Weisman takes a surprisingly positive approach. Perhaps our impact may not be as lasting as many view it to be. In many of these chapters he does note that some things will last long after we have gone. Although, this does not appear to be his main focus. The book is well written, captivating, and definitely gives hope that *Homo sapiens* have not forever destroyed many aspects of the world. The atmosphere can return to normal despite the holes we have contributed to in the ozone layer. Forests can thrive even after we come through and displaced many species and harvest many trees. Despite these positive points, Weisman does some things that will last longer, but I find that Weisman fails to emphasize the fact that our impact will forever alter the world. The species that have gone extinct can never come back. Yes, extinction is a natural part of growth for the world, but many species have gone extinct primarily because of humans. At the same time I think of the fact that we must have an impact. There is no way for a species to have no impact. Each species on the planet affects many others both directly and indirectly. One example of when Weisman fails to bring concern is when he talks of the impact our production of plastics is having. We are not seeing plastics biodegrade. There is hope that something will develop the ability to degrade the plastics, but in the meantime it will continue to kill all sorts of wildlife as they ingest it. The rubber we use for tires also has yet to find something that can degrade it. Both rubber and plastic will likely be around long after *Homo sapiens* are gone and continue to affect the world we left behind. Yet, after reading these segments by Weisman, I did not feel incredibly compelled to minimize my use of plastic or rubber. Weisman does not seem to be rallying people against their negative environmental impact. Since humans will likely be around a long time, we need to work on lessening the impact that we have, and I found that Weisman did not emphasize this as I believe he should. Comparing Weisman to George Perkins Marsh, we find some things that at least appear to contradict each other. Marsh examines the balance that is a key part of nature. As humans expend resources, they don't come back as they were. Nature is not able to bring itself back to where it was. Weisman seems to find that nature can reflect what it was in the past, and he appears to find this acceptable. Perhaps this is all we can ever expect. It may be best that nature is not exactly as it was. It is ever changing and adjusting together with all its interconnected parts. Whatever the result, Weisman finds hope where many fail to. Weisman also alludes to human's desire to be remembered. We've sent off signals to try and contact other intelligent life, and we do our best to preserve our bodies that inevitably decay anyways. If you think about it, we all have a desire to be remembered by others, to do something which will have impact that will outlast our bodies. However, we want to make sure that what we leave does not doom the earth that housed us for so long.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Perhaps there is hope

By Katy Gerber

The poetic musings of ancient Chinese poet Li-Tai-Po have long acknowledged the fragility of the existence of human beings on the Earth they inhabit. The firmament is blue forever, he writes, and the Earth will long stand firm and bloom in spring. But, man, how long will you live? It is with these words that Alan Weisman opens *The World Without Us*, an inventive science-fiction exploration of a world where humans have, in fact, stopped living. Within its pages, Weisman offers much more than the typical ecological doomsday rhetoric. Rather, through exploration of historical events, discussion of present actions, and study of future possibilities, *The World Without Us* invites readers into a mysterious future where the blue firmament and Earth stands firm without human beings on its surface. And, perhaps, its more hopeful than one might think. A large portion of Weisman's exposition is centered on historical analysis of how humans, since their evolution in East Africa, have always been creatures of impact upon the Earth they inhabit. Its undeniable. Weisman explores how early humans wiped out massive large fauna populations across Europe, Asia, and the Americas. We cleared forests and burned brush and created grassland. We crossed the globe and left no land mass untouched by our relentless presence, by definition we were the alien invader (310). With this in mind, then, Weisman investigates our current actions carbon emissions, geologic alteration, nuclear presence, plastic production, farms and war to try to understand our in the modern age we continue to impact the Earth and its processes. He speaks with leading experts to explore how our various actions are greatly altering the face of the Earth as it always has been. With all of this human-created transformation of the Earth, its hard to believe that the Earth can stand firm in the face of such deep destruction and apathy for its wellbeing. Weisman, however, sees the issue differently. He acknowledges the great impact the *Homo sapiens* species has wracked on the land, but he also argues that nature will continue to evolve and adapt to fit our actions. After all, Weisman declares, Change is the hallmark of nature. Nothing remains the same (161). Weisman then goes on to explore what this change would mean for our world if we were to disappear from it. Using the topics he discussed historically and currently, Weisman describes a new world where plants spring up from sidewalk cracks, houses degrade, and fauna re-habitat their old niches. It will be a slow process of nature creeping up on our structures, but Weisman believes it will happen. The Earth will bounce back, a little worse for the wear, but nevertheless changing, standing firm, and blooming in spring. To me, the book seems sprinkled with rich hope for this place we call home. Im used to a fair dose of depressive statistics when evaluating environmental issues, but Weisman's imagination leaves a sweeter taste in my mouth. Descriptions of the

regeneration of wilderness within the Korean Demilitarized Zone and across the empty quiet of Chernobyl's ruins demonstrated that even our most broken performances of the past are not past the point of redemption. In the no-mans-land of East Asia, species are bounding in to fill the area Korea leaves vacant, creating refuges in the wake of a brutal and unresolved conflict. Skylarks, lilacs, and bison have returned to Chernobyl, dwelling among the radioactive structures we left behind to rot. Though our impact is grave, in many cases, Weisman demonstrates that nature is perfectly able to adapt, which is both an inspiring and humbling. It seems to me that environmentalism needs more reminders of this of our grand impact, but also our vast smallness on the surface of an Earth that has long outlived our presence. Weisman provides this alongside a fair dose of hope: perhaps restoration is not out-of-reach. While his historical description brings us into truthful recognition of the destructive beings we have been, his future prognosis invites us into hopeful excitement of who we can be and how we can nurture creation into its own healing. As Li-Tai-Po wrote, The Earth will long stand firm and bloom in spring, whether or not man is here. Weisman explores this with the premise of what the world will look like if we are gone, encouraging us to live better while we're still here.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Unique, Intriguing, and Well-researched

By Jacob Many would agree that speculation concerning the sudden extinction of the human race would make a rather morbid premise for a book, but in his book *The World without Us* Alan Weisman proves that the post-human world is certainly a fascinating topic. As Weisman leads his readers on a hypothetical tour of a world after the mass disappearance of the entirety of the human race, it becomes clear just how much impact every one of our actions has not just on our future, but on the future of the entire planet. In this wide-ranging study of human impact in the distant future, Weisman presents an illuminating picture of the world that we are creating. In each and every speculative future event, Alan Weisman presents pages of scientific evidence and historical precedent to help readers understand and envision what this process of reclamation may actually look like. While his musings on human history may seem rather lengthy for a book that is supposed to be concerned with the future, each and every anecdote leads to an interesting revelation, and his richly descriptive and poetic writing style keeps a hold of the readers attention throughout even the most seemingly incongruous meandering of thought. The book also provides many thought-provoking scientific and philosophical ideas concerning where meaning is found and what purpose humans serve on the earth. All of his musings are presented with a refreshingly open-minded approach that leads the reader to seek their own conclusion. My one complaint about this book is that the author can be rather long-winded when it comes to historical anecdotes some of which seem to be completely unnecessary. It seems as though he could have focused more on the hypothetical future earth he was constructing and spent less time expostulating about the earth of the past and present. Overall the book was well written and very interesting. It has a very unique and provocative premise that will keep people reading as they uncover new ways of looking at their world. I would highly recommend it to anyone interested in environmental or political science or who simply wants to read a unique book that promotes deep thought about human action.

Time #1 Nonfiction Book of 2007
Entertainment Weekly #1 Nonfiction Book of 2007
Finalist for the 2007 National Book Critics Circle Award
Salon Book Awards 2007
Amazon Top 100 Editors' Picks of 2007 (#4)
Barnes and Noble 10 Best of 2007: Politics and Current Affairs
Kansas City Star's Top 100 Books of the Year 2007
Mother Jones' Favorite Books of 2007
South Florida Sun-Sentinel Best Books of the Year 2007
Hudson's Best Books of 2007
St. Louis Post-Dispatch Best Books of 2007
St. Paul Pioneer Press Best Books of 2007

If human beings disappeared instantaneously from the Earth, what would happen? How would the planet reclaim its surface? What creatures would emerge from the dark and swarm? How would our treasured structures--our tunnels, our bridges, our homes, our monuments--survive the unmitigated impact of a planet without our intervention? In his revelatory, bestselling account, Alan Weisman draws on every field of science to present an environmental assessment like no other, the most affecting portrait yet of humankind's place on this planet.

From Publishers Weekly
Because of the scientific terminology and the interlinked data amassed bit by bit, this is not an easy read for narrator or lay listener. But it's a fascinating book, and Grupper handles it well. Grupper's careful narration brings to life Weisman's judicious organization, unambiguous grammatical structure and vivid descriptions of what would become of land, sea, fish, flora and fauna should humans disappear from the face of the earth. Weisman explains the earth's capacity for self-healing. Unchecked by human intervention, a city like New York would flood within days, its buildings and infrastructure would collapse, and soon the city would revert to its original ecosystem. But the message of the book is our legacy to the universe: Every bit of plastic manufactured over the last 80 years or so still remains somewhere in the environment. Weisman and Grupper convert abstract environmental concepts into concrete ideas. Broadly and meticulously researched, finely interwoven journalism and imaginative projection, the book is an utterly convincing call to action. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

From The New Yorker
Teasing out the consequences of a simple thought experiment what would happen if the human species were suddenly extinguished Weisman has written a sort of pop-science ghost story, in which the whole earth is the haunted house. Among the highlights: with pumps not working, the New York City subways would fill with water within days, while weeds and then trees would retake the buckled streets and wild

predators would ravage the domesticated dogs. Texas unattended petrochemical complexes might ignite, scattering hydrogen cyanide to the winds a "mini chemical nuclear winter." After thousands of years, the Chunnel, rubber tires, and more than a billion tons of plastic might remain, but eventually a polymer-eating microbe could evolve, and, with the spectacular return of fish and bird populations, the earth might revert to Eden. Copyright 2007 Click here to subscribe to The New Yorker From Bookmarks Magazine Perhaps operating on the assumption that he won't be around, Alan Weisman gets a head start on measuring the global human footprint. Although he doesn't intend *The World Without Us* to be an explicitly environmental work, the specter of global warming hangs over the book like a heavy toxic cloud. Some reviewers wonder whether all the doom and gloom is necessary: Why investigate a question that skirts the underlying cause of the problem? That said, Weisman, a professor at the University of Arizona, has done his research and collected a wide range of data to support his findings, which he delivers in graceful, entertaining prose. We think Michael Grunwald's review in the *Washington Post* sums it up nicely: sure the book's trivia. Quite a few of us like that. Copyright 2004 Phillips Nelson Media, Inc.