



The World Without Us

By Alan Weisman

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The World Without Us By Alan Weisman

A penetrating, page-turning tour of a post-human Earth

In *The World Without Us*, Alan Weisman offers an utterly original approach to questions of humanity's impact on the planet: he asks us to envision our Earth, without us. In this far-reaching narrative, Weisman explains how our massive infrastructure would collapse and finally vanish without human presence; which everyday items may become immortalized as fossils; how copper pipes and wiring would be crushed into mere seams of reddish rock; why some of our earliest buildings might be the last architecture left; and how plastic, bronze sculpture, radio waves, and some man-made molecules may be our most lasting gifts to the universe.

The World Without Us reveals how, just days after humans disappear, floods in New York's subways would start eroding the city's foundations, and how, as the world's cities crumble, asphalt jungles would give way to real ones. It describes the distinct ways that organic and chemically treated farms would revert to wild, how billions more birds would flourish, and how cockroaches in unheated cities would perish without us. Drawing on the expertise of engineers, atmospheric scientists, art conservators, zoologists, oil refiners, marine biologists, astrophysicists, religious leaders from rabbis to the Dalai Lama, and paleontologists---who describe a prehuman world inhabited by megafauna like giant sloths that stood taller than mammoths---Weisman illustrates what the planet might be like today, if not for us.

From places already devoid of humans (a last fragment of primeval European forest; the Korean DMZ; Chernobyl), Weisman reveals Earth's tremendous capacity for self-healing. As he shows which human devastations are indelible, and which examples of our highest art and culture would endure longest, Weisman's narrative ultimately drives toward a radical but persuasive solution that needn't depend on our demise. It is narrative nonfiction at its finest, and in posing an irresistible concept with both gravity and a highly readable touch, it looks deeply at our effects on the planet in a way that no other book has.



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Download and Read Free Online *The World Without Us* By Alan Weisman

Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. If a virulent virus—or even the Rapture—depopulated Earth overnight, how long before all trace of humankind vanished? That's the provocative, and occasionally puckish, question posed by Weisman (*An Echo in My Blood*) in this imaginative hybrid of solid science reporting and morbid speculation. Days after our disappearance, pumps keeping Manhattan's subways dry would fail, tunnels would flood, soil under streets would sluice away and the foundations of towering skyscrapers built to last for centuries would start to crumble. At the other end of the chronological spectrum, anything made of bronze might survive in recognizable form for millions of years—along with one billion pounds of degraded but almost indestructible plastics manufactured since the mid-20th century. Meanwhile, land freed from mankind's environmentally poisonous footprint would quickly reconstitute itself, as in Chernobyl, where animal life has returned after 1986's deadly radiation leak, and in the demilitarized zone between North and South Korea, a refuge since 1953 for the almost-extinct goral mountain goat and Amur leopard. From a patch of primeval forest in Poland to monumental underground villages in Turkey, Weisman's enthralling tour of the world of tomorrow explores what little will remain of ancient times while anticipating, often poetically, what a planet without us would be like. (July)

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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's 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.

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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.

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Users Review

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Christopher Barry:

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