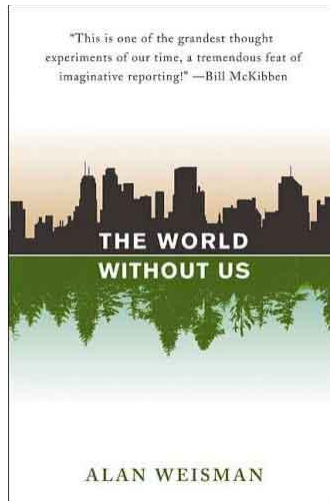


BOOK REVIEW

Weisman, Alan. *The World Without Us*. New York: St Martin's Press, 2007.



The illustration on the cover of this book presents a very optimistic view of what the world might look like in the future, if humans suddenly disappeared. American journalist Alan Weisman hypothesises the sudden demise of humans, and explores possible scenarios for the future of a world without humans.

How long would it take before all evidence of human presence disappeared? What would remain? What positive, and what negative, residue would humans leave? How would the earth adapt? How would other species adapt?

The book describes how cities and houses would deteriorate, what would happen as factories disintegrated, how the oceans might recover, which human-made artefacts would last, and how remaining life forms might evolve in the gap left by humans.

Weisman predicts that cities and towns could become forests within five hundred years, with little visible evidence of human existence. On the other hand, radioactive waste and plastics will be among the longest lasting evidence of human presence on earth, and their detrimental and dangerous consequences and by-products will last for millennia. As will radio waves, bronze sculptures and some artificially created molecules.

The book is written in an easy-to-read journalistic style, while still managing to convey complex scientific information. Weisman interviewed academics, scientists and other authorities from around the globe, and he uses quotes from these interviews to explain the effects of the natural environment and to substantiate his predictions.

It is a fascinating read, although, for the most part, it is somewhat depressing. The catalogue of damage, both short term and temporary, and long term and irreversible, which humans have wrought on this planet is enormous. Weisman's book is a wake up call for all of us – not just governments and scientists – to look at our practices, and our lifestyle expectations, to protect the future of the world (with or without us).

Weisman concludes his acknowledgements with this profound thought: "Without us, Earth will abide and endure; without her, however, we could not even be."