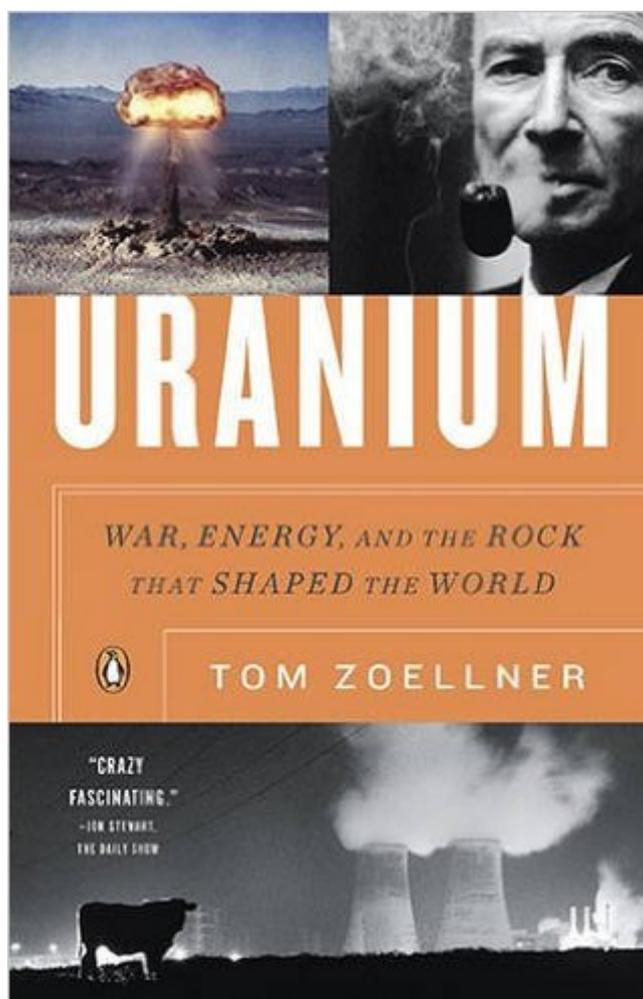


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Uranium: War, Energy, And The Rock That Shaped The World



Synopsis

The astonishing biography of a mineral that can sustain our world- or destroy it Uranium occurs naturally in the earth's crust-yet holds the power to end all life on the planet. This is its fundamental paradox, and its story is a fascinating window into the valor, greed, genius, and folly of humanity. A problem for miners in the Middle Ages, an inspiration to novelists and a boon to medicine, a devastating weapon at the end of World War II, and eventually a polluter, killer, excuse for war with Iraq, potential deliverer of Armageddon and a possible last defense against global warming-Uranium is the riveting story of the most powerful element on earth, and one which will shape our future, for better or worse.

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Customer Reviews

Unlike some of the other reviewers, I have actually read this book, and I recommend it wholeheartedly. The focus of this book is on the history, not the science, of uranium (which should be obvious - it is a work of reportage, not science). Furthermore, the parts of the book that do deal with science are correct, clear, and concise; they are understandable to a lay reader but not boring -- the prose is poetic and beautiful in its description of uranium's structure, isotopes, and process of decay (ultimately winding up as lead). Now on to the important stuff: Zoellner presents the paradox of uranium with drama and art. From the front lines, Zoellner reports on the tragic and terrifying. He speaks directly with survivors of Soviet prison camps on the border of East Germany and the Czech Republic, where thousands of political prisoners were forced to mine uranium to fuel the arms race.

These stories are heartbreaking, and for me, were a new revelation about the havoc wreaked by the cold war. Zoellner travels into the heart of what is now the DRC, to visit Shinkolobwe, where the uranium for the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki was mined. The discoveries he makes there are bone chilling (I won't give them away!) He also captures the intangible influence uranium has had on society - the paradox of salvation (clean energy) and damnation (mutually assured destruction); its integration into capitalism and stock markets; how its pursuit in Canada, the American West, and even Mongolia, resembles the goldrush and embodies American entrepreneurship and adventure. Despite the terrifying realities Zoellner reports, he is even-handed and does not set out to scare the reader.

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