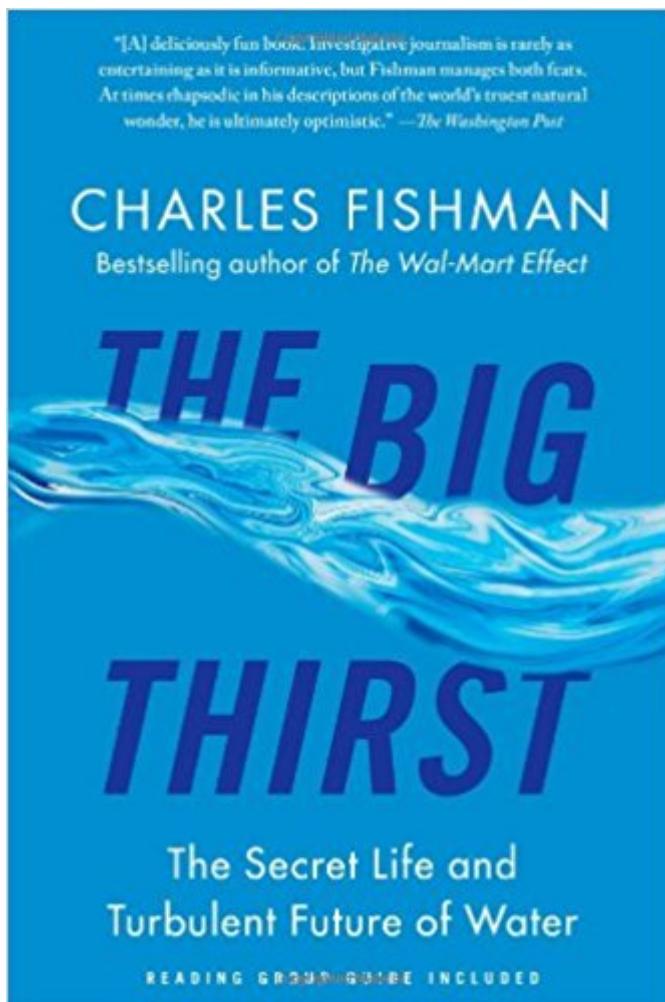


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The Big Thirst: The Secret Life And Turbulent Future Of Water



Synopsis

The water coming out of your kitchen tap is four billion years old and might well have been sipped by a Tyrannosaurus rex. Rather than only three states of water—liquid, ice, and vapor—there is a fourth, “molecular water,” fused into rock 400 miles deep in the Earth, and that’s where most of the planet’s water is found. Unlike most precious resources, water cannot be used up; it can always be made clean enough again to drink—indeed, water can be made so clean that it’s toxic. Water is the most vital substance in our lives but also more amazing and mysterious than we appreciate. As Charles Fishman brings vibrantly to life in this surprising and mind-changing narrative, water runs our world in a host of awe-inspiring ways, yet we take it completely for granted. But the era of easy water is over. Bringing readers on a lively and fascinating journey—from the wet moons of Saturn to the water-obsessed hotels of Las Vegas, where dolphins swim in the desert, and from a rice farm in the parched Australian outback to a high-tech IBM plant that makes an exotic breed of pure water found nowhere in nature—Fishman vividly shows that we’ve already left behind a century-long golden age when water was thoughtlessly abundant, free, and safe and entered a new era of high-stakes water. In 2008, Atlanta came within ninety days of running entirely out of clean water. California is in a desperate battle to hold off a water catastrophe. And in the last five years Australia nearly ran out of water—and had to scramble to reinvent the country’s entire water system. But as dramatic as the challenges are, the deeper truth Fishman reveals is that there is no good reason for us to be overtaken by a global water crisis. We have more than enough water. We just don’t think about it, or use it, smartly. The Big Thirst brilliantly explores our strange and complex relationship to water. We delight in watching waves roll in from the ocean; we take great comfort from sliding into a hot bath; and we will pay a thousand times the price of tap water to drink our preferred brand of the bottled version. We love water—but at the moment, we don’t appreciate it or respect it. Just as we’ve begun to reimagine our relationship to food, a change that is driving the growth of the organic and local food movements, we must also rethink how we approach and use water. The good news is that we can. As Fishman shows, a host of advances are under way, from the simplicity of harvesting rainwater to the brilliant innovations devised by companies such as IBM, GE, and Royal Caribbean that are making impressive breakthroughs in water productivity. Knowing what to do is not the problem. Ultimately, the hardest part is changing our water consciousness. As Charles Fishman writes, “Many civilizations have been crippled or destroyed by an inability to understand water or manage it. We have a huge advantage over the generations of people who have come before us, because we can

understand water and we can use it smartly. The Big Thirst will forever change the way we think about water, about our essential relationship to it, and about the creativity we can bring to ensuring that we'll always have plenty of it.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review. For the past 100 years, the developed world has enjoyed a cheap, safe, and abundant water supply, but Fishman (The Wal-Mart Effect) warns that everything about water is about to change—how we use it, how we share it, and how we value it. In an engrossing, globe-trotting narrative, he introduces the reader to people already grappling with water shortages—Patricia Mulroy, Las Vegas's no-nonsense water czar known as the best water manager in the country; the inhabitants of a neighborhood in Delhi who line up twice a day for water they must carry home. Since water cannot be created or destroyed, the challenge we face is not so much about water scarcity but rather how we can use it more equitably and protect it—the meaning of "clean" has a wholly new connotation in an era when we can pollute water in new ways with residues of medicine and plastics. Fishman notes that some of the most innovative ways of conserving water are coming from big businesses, including IBM, which has cut the water use in its microchip production 27% in the past eight years. A comprehensive, remarkably readable panorama of our dependence on—and responsibilities to—a priceless resource. (Apr.)

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"An engrossing, globe-trotting narrative [and] a comprehensive, remarkably readable panorama of our dependence on--and responsibilities to--a priceless resource." "[A] lively and invaluable assessment of the current politics, economics, and culture of water. Lyrical in his descriptions of the beauty and wonder of water, Fishman is rigorous when explaining that the water we have now is all the water we will ever have." "A wide-ranging look at that most precious of goods, water, and a world in which it is a subject of constant crisis...A timely warning."

Water, as everyone knows, is the basis of life as we know it. We simply cannot survive without it. That makes water a very valuable resource and one that people have argued and fought over for too many years to recall. In this book, the author takes us on a journey about the history of water, why it is where it is, why cities have sprung up where they have, how water has been turned into a multibillion dollar business and what is happening in the water world currently. It is almost all encompassing on the subject of water and is fascinating in the process. One of the first points made by the author is that the water we drink today is the same water that has been on the planet for ions. That water was formed during a period in the earth's creation and the amount has not changed since then. As a result, the water we drink today was, at one time, the toilet water of ancient civilizations and was where dinosaurs drank, bathed and went to the bathroom. While this may be a disturbing thought, it has been that way for ions and provides us with a method for reusing today's water to become tomorrow's water. Along the journey, the author points out that due to climate change, water that was easily obtainable in the past maybe be moving to newer locations. Cities that were thought to have safe supplies are in the process of going dry. Las Vegas, as one example, is reusing and capturing every possible drop of water since the supply at Lake Mead is dwindling by the day. Another example used by the author is the drought that has overtaken the City of Atlanta and how precarious the supply to that city is. He also discusses why this doesn't have to be. This is only a small part of the discussion of water the author brings to the table. He goes around the world to explore water issues in other countries and why they have occurred and what can be done to fix the problems. I highly recommend this book to all. As the water we take for granted becomes harder to supply, we will need to develop new strategies for handling water supply to citizens and corporations. This book is the beginning step in a new way to think about

Top class research on a very - how should we put it - fluid subject. Easy to read, digestible and well thought out - if just a little repetitive at times. Otherwise a brilliant book for anyone worried about the global outlook for this precious resource.

We hardly ever think about water -- it's just there. Until it isn't, and then what happens? Author looks at several situations in which water supplies have dwindled and the responses from the public, the politicians, businesses, and other interests. One of my favorite parts of the book discusses how people in rich countries spend huge amounts of money for bottled water that is likely not as pure as their own local tapwater, but you can't beat good marketing! Also, since water can't be created or destroyed and it has been on earth billions of years, every molecule of the purest water you can buy has seen the insides of many a dinosaur before being held up as an icon of purity! I like that the book is different for me, and makes me look at the water everywhere around me in a different way.

Even if you think you are aware of water problems around the world, this book will heighten your awareness of current, multi-faceted problems and potential problems as well as maverick solutions that have enabled desert communities to reduce water consumption while their populations grow. Fishman is well-versed and a compelling story teller, making the Big Thirst an enjoyable, yet disturbing read that will make you think twice before opening your tap.

I came to The Big Thirst as someone who was already pretty water conscious (some think obsessed), and a definite water conservationist. But, wow, all that I had never thought about water Charles Fishman has contained in this book in a thought provoking, entertaining and instructive way. This is in no diatribe designed to make us feel guilty about our water ignorance (although Fishman does rant on Arlen Specter at one point near the end, and rightfully so), but rather a series of stories crafted to heighten our awareness, in an attempt as the author says "to change our relationship to water". From Australia to India, down the strip of Las Vegas, around the Gulf Coast of Texas to Vermont and elsewhere Fishman takes the reader on a tour of man's challenges and successes in managing our water usage, distribution systems as well as the effect on mankind, the economy and lastly gets the reader thinking about where the next million or billion gallons is coming from. This book is a treat for anyone who has stopped for even one minute to wonder where our water really flows from and if someday it might not.

must read for our political folks

A very good book about the overall subject of water, and man's management of water resources. Recommended reading for anyone interest in and concerned about water resources.

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