

Hardcover: US

It's a crude, crude world out there

Oil is running out, quicker than we thought, argues Peter Maass in 'Crude World.' But that might not be such a bad thing

BY J. MICHAEL COLE
STAFF REPORTER

The global economy needs it. Nations laid their foundations upon it. It has yielded untold riches. But it has also proven a ruinous curse: wars have been declared over it; tyrants and corporate greed have thrived on it; and lives and nature have been ravaged — often irreparably — by it. Oil.

It's running out, quicker than we thought, *New York Times Magazine* contributing reporter Peter Maass argues in *Crude World*. But after reading his expose of the evils, intended or otherwise, of the oil industry, this development might not be such a bad thing.

In this highly entertaining investigation, Maass, whose previous book was about war in the Balkans, takes us from the palatial oil ministries of the Middle East to the heart of darkness in Equatorial Guinea, with stops in the war-ravaged streets of Iraq, the militia-infested jungles of the Niger Delta, a cut-throat, spy-infested hotel in Baku, Azerbaijan, and the environmental catastrophe in Ecuador's Oriente.

No less fascinating are the individuals we meet who are caught in the unforgiving wheels of the oil industry. We meet jet-setting star attractions like Saudi Oil Minister Ali al-Naimi, who reassures an audience in Washington that Saudi Arabia's oil reserves are plentiful; and Matthew Simon, a former adviser to former US president George W. Bush who would very much be part of the oil

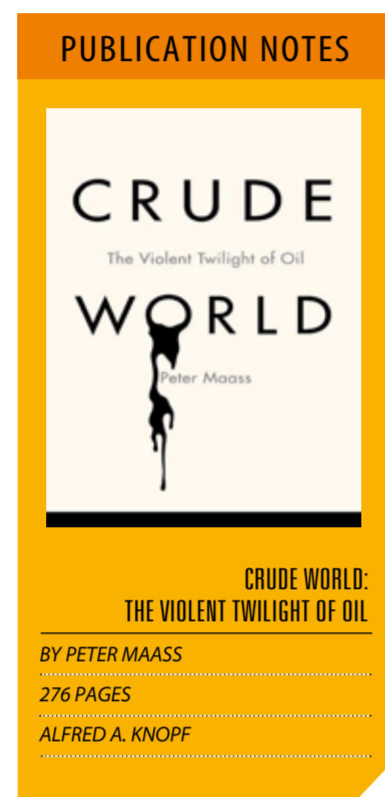
nomenclatura were it not for his belief that "the American dream and the world as we know it are on the verge of falling apart" because Naimi is wrong. Guerrilla leaders, crusading lawyers, oil executives from all the best-known oil giants and ordinary soldiers, all get sucked in by the folly of oil, and Maass provides us an intimate portrait of their motivations. The full spectrum of emotions, from greed to fear, alienation to desire, inhabit this bizarre world; appropriately, they are used as titles for each section. (Interestingly, almost every person we meet is male, which, from a sociological perspective, says a lot about the oil sector.)

Page after page, greed is joined at the hip with tragedy and human suffering as dictators like President Teodoro Oniang of Equatorial Guinea — possibly "the most brutalized country on Earth" — plunder their countries, often with the assistance of Big Oil and the West. In Oniang's case, the plunder (he bought, for US\$55 million, a Boeing 737 that comes with gold-plated bathroom fixtures) and laundering was facilitated by an unscrupulous little bank in Washington called Riggs Bank.

Next on the list is Nigeria, which, though it is the world's eighth-largest oil exporter, fares little better. Despite more than US\$400 billion in oil revenues in recent decades, nine out of 10 Nigerians live on less than US\$2 a day and one child out of five dies before the age of five. Eighty percent of oil wealth in Nigeria, the World Bank tells us, has gone to 1 percent of the population. (In Nigeria and elsewhere, oil firms often do not hire locals to do construction or other menial jobs, and import construction material rather than purchase it locally.)

Decades of low-intensity warfare — the result of this criminally inequitable distribution of wealth and severe environmental damage — and tens of thousands of deaths later, the Niger Delta is no closer today to resolution than it was half a century ago. In fact, new, increasingly violent groups such as the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), are emerging and promise decades of nothing but violence.

As Maass argues, if most of the



BY PETER MAASS
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ALFRED A. KNOFF

world's oil reserves were located in developed and stable countries like Norway and Canada, where corruption is low and rule of law well-established, oil would not be such a debilitating commodity. But sadly for its victims — many of whom we meet in this book — fate, or geography, would have it otherwise.

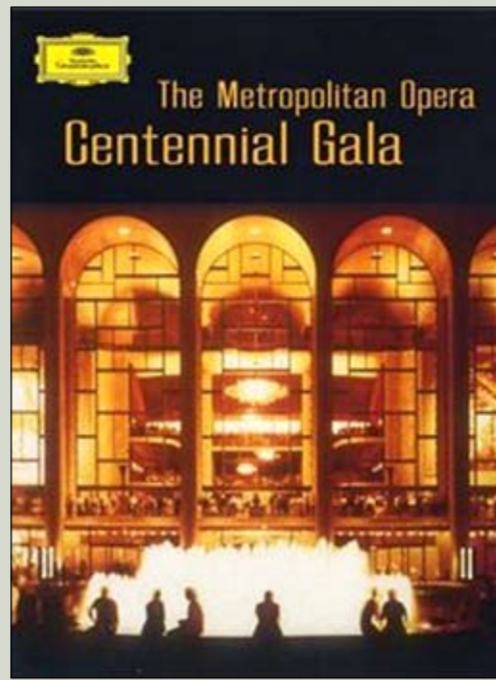
In many of the cases explored, oil-rich countries suffer from what has come to be known as the "Dutch disease," which can be roughly characterized as a country's over-reliance on a single or a handful of primary resources for its revenues. In other words, even when oil wealth isn't plundered, the sudden influx of money generated by the discovery oil can, in the long term, turn into a curse (another unfortunate consequence of the Dutch disease is that the large revenue created by the primary resource tends to drive up the currency, which makes locally produced goods more expensive for export and can consequently wipe out other sectors of the economy).

Countries with an over-reliance on oil, such as Saudi Arabia and Venezuela, among others, will often embark on massive and hugely expensive infrastructure projects (or, as in Venezuela's case, a Bolivarian revolution fueled by oil money). As long as oil prices are relatively high, they will be able to afford it. But as the recent global financial crisis so painfully showed us, when the economy slows down, so does oil consumption and demand, which drives

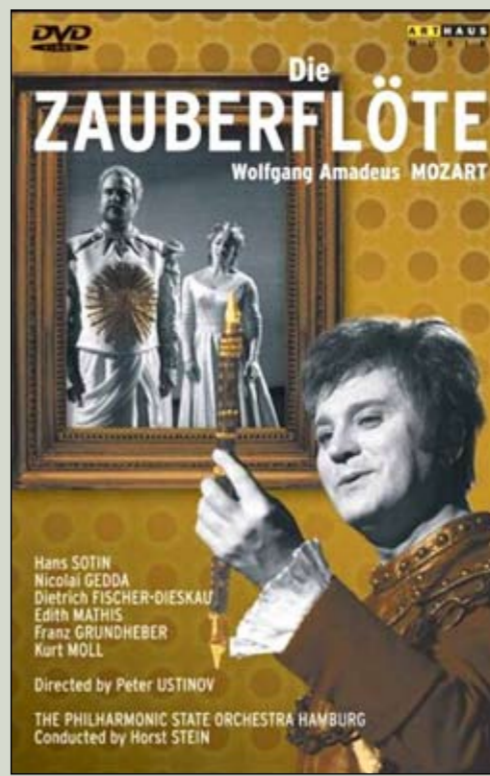
prices down. The result? A fabulous airport in the Saudi desert that turned into a hollow castle in the sand and schemes similar to ones that foundered years ago now being unleashed by Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez.

Despite the utterly depressing tone of the first 200 pages, *Crude World* concludes on a more optimistic — if perhaps a little naive — note, with mention of the opportunities created by renewable energy and programs, such as Publish What You Pay, to encourage governments and oil firms to become more transparent. Whether these would be sufficient to diminish our dependence on oil and bring good governance to Big Oil and oil-indebted governments, however, remains to be seen and will be contingent on human nature's ability to transcend its most basic desires. Maass' book does little to convince us that this is possible.

Crude World is a great read, but would have been more complete if it had had a section on the impact that China's entry in the oil business — especially in Africa — will have on those countries both fortunate and unfortunate enough to have rivers of black gold flowing through their veins.



CENTENNIAL GALA
Metropolitan Opera
2 DVDs
DGM 073 4538



DIE ZAUBERFLOTE
Mozart
Gedda, Mathis, Sotin,
Deutekom



IF ON A WINTER'S NIGHT
Sting
DGM 06025 270 1743 (CD)

BY BRADLEY WINTERTON
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

It would be harsh indeed to criticize Deutsche Grammophon for issuing in September what is in fact only a selection from the New York Metropolitan Opera's 1983 Centennial Gala. The original event, starting in the early afternoon, lasted more than eight hours, and these two new DVDs are around half that length at 240 minutes. But the singers featured are so celebrated that it would be insanity to lament that this isn't quite the whole original, massive undertaking.

The Met — as it's called, even by itself — opened on Oct. 22, 1883. Exactly 100 years later, to the day, this extravaganza was staged, and telecast for anyone wanting to watch across North America. It's hard to think of a top-rank opera soloist who didn't take part — Birgit Nilsson, Montserrat Caballe, Joan Sutherland, Mirella Freni, Kiri Te Kanawa, Eva Marton, Leontyne Price, Marilyn Horne, Grace Bumbry, plus Pavarotti, Bruson, Carreras, Domingo, Kraus, Gedda, Raimondi, McCracken and very many others, all appeared. James Levine took the lion's share of the conducting, but Leonard Bernstein also made a rare Met appearance to conduct a Beethoven overture.

So, what are the highlights, and what criticisms might be made? The only criticism really possible is that film of some of the famous older names, such as Caruso, might have been included, but no doubt this was considered and rejected on grounds of the time available. As for the highlights, there are almost too many to list.

Seeing Pavarotti billed as the last to appear, singing the love duet from Verdi's *Un Ballo in Maschera* with Leontyne Price, I assumed this placing was on his insistence. It did feel like a climax, nonetheless, with both artists in resplendent voice. But there

had been greatness before them — James McCracken returning to the Met to sing a devastating aria from *Otello*, Eva Marton with Turandot's *In Questa Reggia*, but most of all Birgit Nilsson, by then aged 65, in a passage from *Tristan und Isolde*, followed by an unaccompanied Swedish folk song as a prepared encore.

Many of the singers were similarly close to the end of illustrious careers, but who could possibly complain? What comparable talent would we have to show today? Very little. Those were the days, my friend, we thought they'd never end. But Pavarotti, Nilsson, McCracken and Alfredo Kraus — all are now gone.

A collection of honorees appear sitting at the back of the stage halfway through the evening session. They're American singers no longer able to participate, for the most part, and it might be instructive to note which of them applauds what, because some of them sit sternly with their hands in their laps at the conclusion of some of the items. Levine demonstrates his extraordinary involvement, visibly moved by Verdi, Puccini and Wagner.

This footage has been previously issued by Pioneer Classics, in a version castigated by at least one critic on Amazon.com. The content seems to be identical, but no one could now complain at the sound and visual quality of DGM's magnificent offering.

It's extraordinary what you can come across when casually browsing in a DVD store. I recently stumbled on a version of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte* (The Magic Flute) from 1971, reissued by ArtHaus Musik in 2006. It was directed by the British author and TV personality of those days Peter Ustinov, and starred some exceptional soloists — Nicolai Gedda as Tamino, Hans Sotin as Sarastro, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau in the small part of The Speaker, and Kurt Moll similarly hidden

away as one of the Two Men in Armor.

The production is essentially a stage one, but adapted for a television studio. It's colorful but simple, and heartfelt and lovable to a quite exceptional degree. Horst Stein conducts the Hamburg Philharmonic State Orchestra in a vivid accompaniment, and the chorus of the Hamburg State Opera completes the lineup.

Well, not quite completes. William Workman makes a memorably congenial Papageno, and, most remarkable of all, Cristina Deutekom is a very striking Queen of the Night. Her shining, razor-sharp tones are a wonder, and it's no surprise to learn that she'd sung the same role at the Met three years earlier. The Mozart specialist Edith Mathis is Pamina.

This, in other words, was no hole-in-the-corner, provincial production but a major coming together of significant talents. Its reissue is typical of what dedicated European DVD publishers searching the archives can achieve.

The Newcastle-born superstar Sting has for a long time been incorporating music in the classical tradition into his music. His latest CD, *If on a Winter's Night ...*, does indeed contain classically influenced tracks, notably an item from Purcell's opera *King Arthur*, the last song from Schubert's *Winterreise* and a song inspired by the Sarabande in Bach's Sixth Cello Suite.

The essential ambiance, though, is of a group of friends playing acoustic instruments at Sting's hide-hole in Tuscany, accompanying songs celebrating winter. "There is something in winter that is primal, mysterious and profoundly beautiful," Sting writes, "as if we need the darkness of the winter months to replenish our inner spirits as much as we need the light, energy and warmth of the summer." The CD, incidentally, is manufactured in Taiwan.

Hardcover: UK

One man's meat is another man's poison

Jonathan Safran Foer's solicitation to remove meat from the menu is half-baked at best

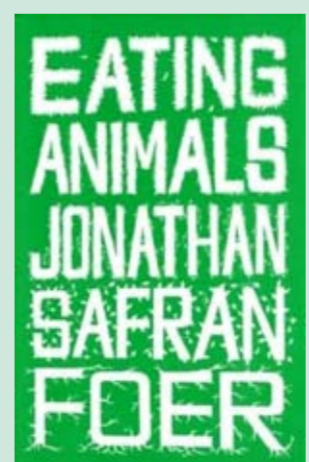
BY MATTHEW FORT
THE GUARDIAN, LONDON

It's a dog eat dog world out there among the born-again, food-loving, animal-caring literati. Barbara Kingsolver, Alisa Smith, JB MacKinnon and Michael Pollan have recently woken up, in print anyway, to the deplorable state of American agriculture. Jonathan Safran Foer's *Eating Animals* is the latest jeremiad to hit the book stands, and it is a depressing book in almost every way.

Safran Foer was converted to vegetarianism after the arrival of his dog and the birth of his son. He had been an on-off vegetarian for a number of years, but these twin events caused him to think more deeply about the food he ate, and investigate where it came from. One is tempted to ask why it took him so long when the evidence has been there for decades. Safran Foer tells us nothing that hasn't been written about, filmed and documented dozens of times before, but that doesn't prevent him from oozing the self-congratulation of the newly converted.

However, the case that he builds against factory farming is unanswerable. Factory farming is utterly disgusting in all its parts. There is no justification for it in any country, let alone one the size of, and with the wealth and the obesity problems of, America. Once he gets past

PUBLICATION NOTES



EATING ANIMALS

BY JONATHAN SAFRAN FOER
352 PAGES
HAMISH HAMILTON

the opening autobiographical sections, written in a gratingly winsome style, and anger begins to suffuse and pare down his prose, he argues with formidable

force. Successively describing the treatment and suffering of chickens, pigs, salmon and cattle, he paints a devastating portrait of the systematic cruelty and sinister secrecy of US agro-industry.

At the same time, he is at pains to give another side to the agricultural story, providing pen portraits of more ethical producers and farmers. And this is where the confusion begins. Is *Eating Animals* a personal journey, a rant or an even-handed debate? Safran Foer never seems to make up his mind. Worse, a startling naivety and smugness run through the book, undercutting the thrust of the argument. There are sections when his ruminations read like the grumbling of a philosophy student.

At times he posits a distance between best-practice, traditional farming and factory farming, while at others they become synonymous. And although he is scrupulous in acknowledging that vegetarianism may not be everybody's cup of tea, he nevertheless subverts this apparent reasonableness by reminding the reader on every possible occasion that he is one and, by implication, so should we be.

More disturbingly, he only considers a world where people are in a position to make choices about what they eat. *Eating Animals* is written by a

well-educated, well-fed person for well-educated, well-fed readers. Nor does he contextualize his argument. It never ranges beyond the confines of the US. He doesn't seriously examine why people might want to, or have to eat meat, or what meat means to individuals or societies. He proposes no solutions other than mass conversion to vegetarianism, although it doesn't seem to occur to him that the damage done by factory farming doesn't begin and end with animals but embraces all foods.

Most damagingly of all, he says "It shouldn't be the consumer's responsibility to figure out what's cruel and what's kind, what's environmentally destructive, and what's sustainable." But it is precisely because we have abrogated our responsibilities that the excesses of factory farming have flourished.

The contemporary model of market-driven capitalism has created monsters that governments can no longer control — food companies which can thumb their noses at standards and regulations. We have been bribed by the false promise of cheap food, we have acquiesced in the name of convenience. As individuals acting collectively, in theory we do have the power to end industrial agriculture, but in all likelihood we will remain slaves to this pernicious system because it suits us.