

Novelist envisions an Earth without people

BY MARK COUCH
Reviewer

Imagine if the human race suddenly disappeared tomorrow. Without us around anymore, what would happen to our planet? What would our abandoned cities and infrastructure look like left to the forces of nature and time?

Alan Weisman's book "The World Without Us" takes us into a world where neglected houses and entire cities slowly decay as plants and animals colonize what humans have left behind.

In New York City things start falling apart quickly. With no one around to control the pumps, the subway system floods within days, corroding the street supports and collapsing entire avenues within a few decades.

Freezing and thawing throughout many years destroys streets and buildings as dirt accumulates to lay a foundation for vegetation and many animal species begin to move in.

Most houses last about 100 years before they eventually collapse. Birds break windows, and animal species make human homes their own while water seeps into wood to freeze and expand. After hundreds of years, forests form in what used to be suburbs as new habitats form amid plastic and metal items.

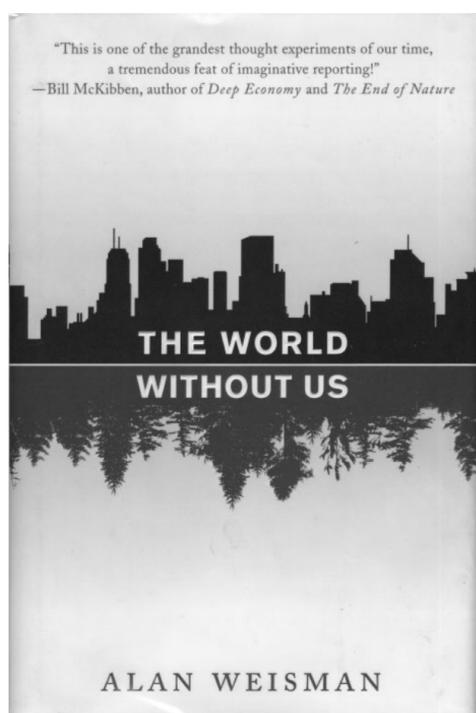
More than 400 neglected nuclear reactors around the world melt down, spilling radioactive material into the environment to remain in the geological record for billions of years. Even without further human activity, CO2 levels might subside to pre-industrial levels after 100,000 years.

To better understand a world without us, Weisman takes us back to the world just before us to see how humans have been transforming ecosystems for much longer than many of us realize. Early humans intentionally set fire to forests to create grasslands to attract large game animals, forever altering the landscape of Africa. We also visit primordial America, where a rich menagerie of large animals, including mammoths and bear-sized sloths, lived until humans moved in.

These are just a few glimpses of a world without us. Weisman's omniscient narrative, spanning great distances and time, describes in excruciating detail natural processes working to bring down nearly everything we have built, from how cities revert to forests to how microbes might evolve to digest plastic.

Unlike eco-disaster books of a similar nature, "The World Without Us" is not a depressing account of impending human extinction but a positive and intriguing testament to the resilience of life on Earth and the forces of nature that drive it. It is forthright in its assessment of how human activity greatly affects life and climate on the planet, and its tone is consciousness-raising rather than gloomy or preachy.

"The World Without Us" imparts an understanding of how human beings have been altering ecosystems and the environment since we first evolved, containing a wealth of information on topics including biology and history. But Weisman's anecdotal and imaginative style keeps the book



Book Review

"The World Without Us"

by Alan Weisman
Thomas Dunne Books

336 pages

Rating



exciting and makes for an entertaining read.

Although many end-of-the-world scenarios focus on destruction, "The World Without Us" compels us to think instead of how life carries on and reclaims what we left. It is an enthralling read and an insightful revelation on nature and how wide an influence human beings have on it. For a genre many are put off by, "The World Without Us" is an exciting account impossible to put down.

"Jaw-dropping" production can't save Kanye West's tired, flat lyrics

BY FRANKLIN CLINE
Reviewer

Dear Kanye,

It was only three years ago when you said, and I'm paraphrasing here, that though you wanted to rap about something significant, you usually found yourself rapping about money, hoes, and rims.

This was a clever move on your part—both celebrating and condemning the heavily materialist hip-hop culture in a single rhyme and setting the stage for you to toe the line between socially conscious hip-hopper and iced-out contemporary of artless pseudo-rappers like Diddy and Sean Paul.

You've done a great job balancing yourself between the two thus far, but with "Graduation," your third album, you lack any sense of social awareness and go overboard with egotistical rhymes.

In case you can't tell, Kanye, I'm pretty disappointed in you. After Jay-Z

"retired," I figured you would be the saving grace of commercial hip-hop.

You have a playful, sing-songy flow. Your rhymes are clever, graceful, and articulate. You're one of the best producers around and you have enough draw (and good taste) to pick out the best of the best to collaborate with, like Jon Brion, Dr. Dre, and DJ Premiere.

Best of all, you were hip to the inherent facetiousness of the mainstream rap game. At first, you flirted with it and mocked

it, then you laughingly played into it, but now you've unapologetically immersed yourself into it with no turning back. Wake up, Mr. West: there's nothing separating you from bland rappers like 50 Cent and Chamillionaire anymore.

Well, that might be a bit of an overstatement, because Graduation has some of the most jaw-dropping beats around. All thirteen are slow, dirty, funky, catchy, synthesized. You're still in a league of your own as a producer. You sample a wide array of artists, from Elton John to Michael Jackson to Public Enemy to Daft Punk, and it never comes off as gimmicky. More than your previous two,

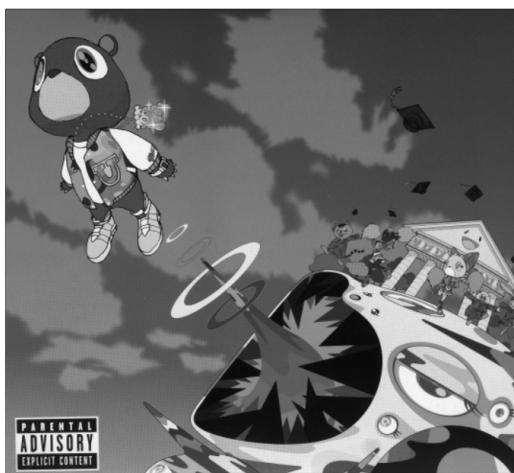
the masterful sampling on this album shows that you grew up listening to classic hip-hop.

"It's really unfortunate, Kanye, that you spit the same tired, old rhymes over these terrific beats. ... On this album, you've taken a back seat as a lyricist. ... You used to be one of the most lyrically inclined dudes in the game."

content of your albums used to be just as good as your beats, if not better, but on this album you've taken a back-seat as a lyricist.

For some rappers, like the Ying Yang Twins, that would be expected, but you used to be one of the most lyrically inclined dudes in the game.

It's not even as though you let other rappers pick up your slack. This album features only a handful of collaborations (especially relative to most current rap albums),



Music Review

Kanye West

"Graduation"

Roc-A-Fella Records
Released: Sept. 11

Rating



all from superstars: T-Pain, Lil Wayne, DJ Premiere, and last but not least, Coldplay's Chris Martin.

Remember how you shared the limelight with lesser-known MCs like Consequence and GLC on "The College Dropout," or how you gave Common his own track on "Late Registration?" You seem to have forgotten your roots. The least-known MC on "Graduation," Mos Def, is given a little more than sixteen bars to showcase his talents, which is a shame considering how great your first joint, "Two Words," was.

Also, Kanye, you're a popular enough musician to get anyone you want to sing a hook. Why would you choose Coldplay's Chris Martin? Are you trying to recreate your mild crossover success with Maroon 5's Adam Levine on "Heard 'Em Say?"

Did you think he really did that great of a job on the forgettable track "Beach Chair" off of Jay-Z's latest album, "Kingdom Come?" I just can't figure it out.

In "I Wonder," one of the better tracks on the album, you ask the listener "Do you even remember what the issue is?"

You should have directed that question towards yourself. You are not the only issue worth rapping about, Kanye.

Less than a year ago you were so angry and impassioned about the government's horrendous mishandling of Hurricane Katrina that you broke into an awkward and oft-quoted improvisational speech on national television that pretty much boiled down to "I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it anymore."

It was great, Kanye, and it's a shame there's none of that here. Sure, you made some hot tracks, some nice pop music, but that's not enough.

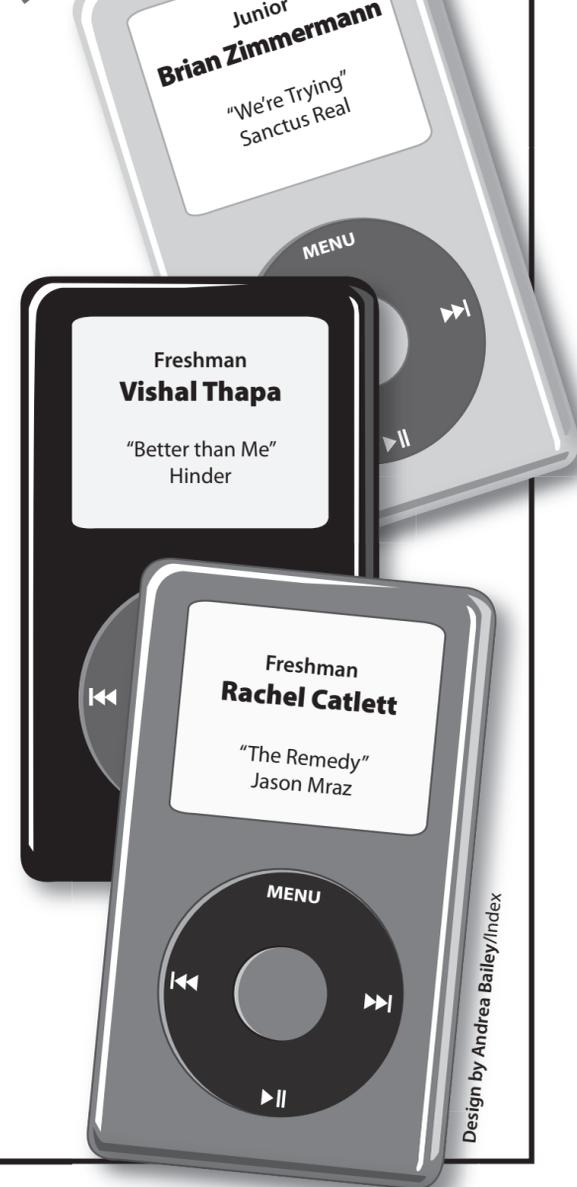
We need more from you, Kanye, and you've proven you can deliver.

I haven't lost faith in you. Just don't let me down with the final installment in your academic tetralogy.

Sincerely,
Franklin K.R. Cline

What's on your

iPod?



"Mr. Woodcock" fails at funny, weak on writing

BY BEN YARNELL
Staff Reporter

Gym class was horrible in school if you didn't have any discernable athletic ability. But the only thing worse than that experience would be going to see "Mr. Woodcock," now in theaters.

The story revolves around motivational speaker and author John Farley, played by Seann William Scott. Farley's book talks all about how he has let go of his past to become the successful person he is today. However, he returns home to find out that his mother (Susan Sarandon) is going to marry his hellish former gym teacher, Mr. Woodcock (Billy Bob Thornton). Suddenly, Farley finds it difficult to take his own advice and let go of his past.

The problems with this movie are plentiful. "Woodcock" is passed off as a comedy, but some of the things the audience is supposed to take as funny are simply sick and wrong. For example, the occasional shot to the groin can be hilarious when timed correctly. But when it is a gym teacher with a wiffle bat administering such an injury to a seventh grader for failure to wear a cup, it is flat-out disturbing.

Never mind the fact that the film cannot go five minutes without some lame pun about Woodcock's male parts. Although coming into a movie named "Mr. Woodcock," it shouldn't come as much of a surprise.

The script is weak at best. The main storyline makes enough sense to be passable. However, it seems as if the writers decided to take all of the aspects of other comedies and try to make them work.

There is the obligatory attractive girl, played by Melissa Sagemiller, who is apparently important enough to introduce yet obviously not worth enough of the writers' time to develop her character or importance.

Movie Review

"Mr. Woodcock"

Directed by Craig Gillespie
New Line Cinema
Released: Sept. 14

Rating



There also is the ever-present witless sidekick, played by Ethan Suplee. Fans of the TV show "My Name is Earl" can save their money and watch him give the exact same performance on TV, supported by much better writing and acting.

The fact that Sarandon even attached her name to such a poor film almost makes me wonder if the Academy Award-winner was even in her right mind when she signed on. Admittedly, she is probably the most bearable part of the entire film, injecting an almost-believable bit about a lonely widow looking for companionship.

As for Scott, it seems as if he can't escape being branded as Stifler, from "American Pie" fame. It is almost as if he meant to ride on Stifler's coattails, given all of the jokes about Woodcock having sex with his mother.

And then there is Thornton. He is predictable and boring. Basically, if you cross his performances in "Bad Santa" and "The Bad News Bears," you have "Woodcock." The fact that both of his previous movies have the word "bad" in them should be some indication of his acting ability.

In short, don't waste your hard-earned money on this film. If you have seen previews, then you have seen every part that might pass as funny. "Mr. Woodcock" will be an hour and a half of your life wasted that you will never get back.

Save both your time and your intelligence and pass on this movie.