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What On Earth Happened?

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~~Editor's Choice:~~

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

5

If you are going to write a history of the world for anyone, young or old, you need a clear viewpoint, which allows you to make sensible decisions about what to include and what to leave out, and a readable style which can marshal the remaining information into an argument that engages and provokes your readers. Christopher Lloyd's 400+ pages and 300,000+ words takes us from the Big Bang that started the globe rolling right up to the present global environmental crisis, which, he warns, could be the beginning of the end, unless we change our ways. I can't claim to have read it all, but what I have read suggests that Lloyd has done a fine job. This is not a book designed so that you can lift chunks out for homework assignments, nor does it have many illustrations. It assumes an intelligent reader who will start at the opening of the chapter and read through to the end. It comes with the full panoply of scholarship: chapter endnotes and a proper bibliography. It takes a global view of our interaction with the planet and its resources and with each other. In the words of Lloyd's epilogue, this is how 'humanity's scale tips nature's ecological balance into chaotic disarray.' Along the way, there is fascinating, and to me largely unfamiliar, information about Islamic and Chinese cultural and technological innovations, about the manner in which these were transmitted to the west, and how, in turn, the Industrial Revolution in the west affected the east. There is much more. Lloyd and Bloomsbury must be admired and applauded for a fascinating and timely book. My only misgiving is its length. It is much longer than either of the earlier books with which, in ambition, it stands comparison: Van Loon's **History of Mankind** and Gombrich's **Little History of the World**. With the collapse of the world's financial system and an impending worldwide economic depression, which even Lloyd could not predict a year ago, how much time is left to read and act upon it?

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