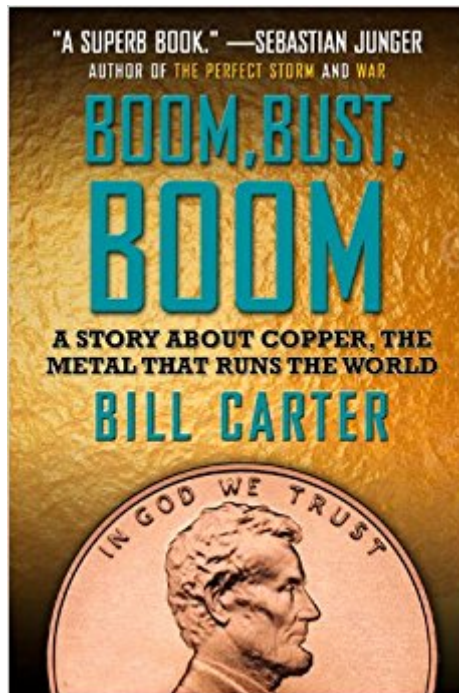


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Boom, Bust, Boom: A Story About Copper, The Metal That Runs The World



Synopsis

In following the time-honored journalistic tenet that the best stories are the ones you find in your own backyard, Bill Carter begins this account of the all-pervasive presence of copper in our lives and its cost on our health, economy, and our environment with a simple personal discovery: the presence of arsenic from leftover mine tailings in his backyard garden in the former copper mining town of Bisbee, Arizona. This revelation led him on a quest to find out as much as possible about the mineral copper, its wonderful and mysterious properties, its history in human evolution, and its omnipresence in contemporary life, being found in everything from toothpaste to cellphones. Carter explores several mining areas, past, present, and projected both in the United States and around the world, and details the environmental and health implications involved in open-surface extraction of copper ore. From boardrooms of investors in London to the mountains of Indonesia, Carter connects the dots from his humble backyard garden to the CEOs of the multibillion-dollar global copper industry, confronting a resource that is so vital yet which has the potential to cause horrendous and irrevocable damage to our planet and ourselves.

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Customer Reviews

I bought this book from the author at this year's Tucson Book Festival. Bill Carter gave an engaging talk about the book and, in truth, he also writes well. But, if you are looking for a balanced, well-researched discussion of copper, mining in general, or the competing agendas around resource use, don't buy it. What he has presented is a first-person narrative of how copper mining invariably destroys the environment, usually taking local human cultures with it. He pretends to be

balanced by acknowledging that miners and mining companies, "see the world differently than I do," but repeatedly paints them as rapacious, self-serving hypocrites. He does not care much for Phoenix either, describing it as a "sprawl of urban diarrhea." Fair enough, I live in Tucson so I can see some faults with Phoenix and I'm well acquainted with what mining has done (and plans to do) with southern Arizona. But demonizing one group of people does not really present a workable solution, at least for most of us. What's needed is a more thoughtful look at the vital role of copper, the technological problems around its extraction and refinement, and the range of alternative solutions to these problems. The first two items are, at best, outlined in this book. The third is completely MIA. If you have no idea that mining creates environmental and human issues, this is a decent place to start your education. If you already know this and wonder how one could fix things, don't bother.

The author gives a lot of personal information which provides the book with an added dimension of personalization and how copper has affected him, his family and those he met while researching the book. Sometimes the opinions are fun and other times, I just skipped over them because all I wanted out of the book was hard facts. But overall, his story within the information is worthwhile and often sounds like your just listening to a friend's story. Carter imparted a great deal of information that was well researched, but personal enough not to become dull and archaic. I'm really glad I read this book, it was a couple chapters a night and I underlined a lot of information that even I, who spent 4 years in the copper business in Latin America, wasn't aware of. Overall, a very good book. Thank you Bill for all your hard work.

Very interesting book. Autobiographical, but also technically proficient information about the copper mining industry. I learned a great deal about the politics behind mining and the effects of copper mining on the citizens. I wouldn't call Bill Carter the Erin Brockovich of Arizona mining, but this book brings out a lot of information that the mining industry probably doesn't want people to know. Easy to read and well-written.

I took out "Boom, Bust, Boom" from the library because I thought it would be interesting to me (as a chemist) to read the history of our understanding of copper, what we know, how we learned it, how we use it, etc. That is what the sub-title suggested. But this is just a very one-sided polemic against the mining industry. You can tell it is not a very authentic study because there is not a single one of the figures - pictures, tables, charts, graphs - that are essential to presenting real factual

information. The first chapter describes in detail the poisoning he got from eating home-grown vegetables raised in soil high in heavy metals, which he blames on the local copper mine without once addressing whether those levels might be naturally-occurring. There's a reason why the mine is in that spot. Other reviewers have noted factual mistakes. Two stars.

Bill Carter has an existential problem and he admits it: his love-hate relationship with modern civilization. He's a beneficiary of the standard of living it provides and an avid consumer of the technology, tools and toys it produces: from airline travel to smart phones, iPads to automobiles, electric lights to modern health care. But he loathes the producers of the raw materials necessary to fabricate and fuel what he consumes, depends on, and enjoys. So he really loathes the indirect consequences of his own patterns of consumption, to wit: the environmental and human impacts of those primary industries. As the result of presumed heavy metal poisoning induced by eating vegetables grown in the backyard garden of his home in the former copper mining boom-town of Bisbee Arizona, and of the threat of the mine re-opening, Carter embarks on an investigation and critique of the copper industry that takes him from Arizona to Mexico to Alaska and back again. Along the way he interviews and quotes mining detractors and boosters of various stamps, including company executives, employees and retirees, Native Americans, fishermen, geologists, hydrologists and so forth. While he fails, in my opinion, to do the subject justice (it is a big subject after all for, to paraphrase his subtitle, copper is one of the natural resources that the world runs on), he makes an interesting, if fundamentally flawed attempt. I'll start with the minor annoyances and then move on to my major criticisms. The book is riddled with orthographic and punctuation errors (there are flurries of misplaced hyphens and misspellings, mis-tabbed paragraphs are scattered throughout the book). Mining promoter Robert Friedland's last name is spelled three different ways on pp.82-84, one of which may be an intentional attempt at humor (Fried-land for Friedland). I won't hold Carter accountable for having a lazy editor, but there are a fair number of factual errors and some consistent biases which I will hold him to. I'll address two of latter. Firstly, the question of: what kind of places are mining towns to live in? Statements like "Morenci feels like a Gulag with no joy" and "Drugs and mining go hand-in-hand" are symptomatic of his opinion that the only good mining town is one that died and been resurrected as an art colony/tourist trap (like Bisbee). If, in the course of the book, Carter meets someone who actually enjoys or feels nostalgic about mining town life, he says things like: "I can't help but wonder if these feelings of nostalgia mask the manipulations of PD [the company that owned the mine Bisbee was built around] and the fact that

the families were trapped in a spiral of economic dependence, a kind of corporate Stockholm syndrome. Prefacing statements like the latter with phrases like "I can't help but wonder" or "I imagine", "I could be wrong, but" are covers used throughout the book for a lack of serious investigation into whether mining towns are any better or worse than towns with other economic bases or, indeed, whether mining as an industry is any better or worse than other industry. Having grown up in mining towns around the West, I found them great places to live. They were true melting pots of humanity: far more diverse than most small towns in America, peopled with folk from around the world (and their descendants) who came looking for a better life. They worked and fought both amongst themselves and shoulder to shoulder. They were not immune to the struggles of their time (survival at the bottom of commodity price cycles, labor-management strife, xenophobia and racism); in fact, they were at the forefront of them. But the towns they inhabited evolved into vibrant multi-ethnic, multi-cultural communities that produced some great people. Another favorite passage of mine: "When I think of it, every mining town I've visited has this unspoken code of emotional distance. No one will admit it, but it's a certain part of the training and perhaps an actual requirement for getting a job with a mining company is agreeing not to interact with the locals". Hmmm|this statement crosses over into the absurd: in most mining towns the company employees are the locals!The second theme I'd like to address is Carter's assumption that the people who work in the mining industry only do so for a lack of other options or just for the fat paycheck, or because they have some critical moral faculty that was stillborn or that over the years was subsumed by hard economic realities, and that blinds them to the business' shortcomings. He meets one mining company geologist in Bisbee who has a second home in Tucson and says he doesn't know many locals and extrapolates from this to "This one candid admission by a geologist in Bisbee explains the distance I encounter when speaking to miners, geologists and supervisors in mining towns. I imagine that many of these geologists went to college to study dinosaurs and dreamed of becoming Indiana Jones. They may even have bonded with others in their field over their fierce resistance for working for mining companies. How long did it take to realize they needed a job and that mining companies are always hiring? Some probably took jobs, still nostalgic for their college dreams, and told themselves that they would join the company to ensure that someone as looking after the earth properly. Eventually they collect their paycheck and put their kids through high school and college. For twenty years they punch the clock. There is no shame in that. In fact, there is an honor in that, in providing for their families. What is strange is never getting to know a single person in the town they work. I could be wrong [there's one of

those magic phrases], but this behavior typifies a person who either deems the locals unworthy of investing in or doesn't want to get to know them in case one day he has to be the one who begins tearing up their town. Sorry Bill, but the largest employer of earth scientists, with the many of the most sought-after jobs, is the petroleum industry not dinosaur research, and mineral exploration geologists have careers not dissimilar to Indiana Jones! My experience with mining professionals has been categorically different from Carter's opinion, expressed above. Most are in the business because they are passionate about mining, they are fascinated by its history, its folklore, its dependence on and relationship to the earth, about facing its challenges, solving its problems and contributing to the betterment of the world and their communities through their chosen career and business, not in spite of it! Yes Bill Carter, there are mines that shouldn't be built, but there are also books that need more thorough research and perhaps a tad less biased point of view from the get-go.

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