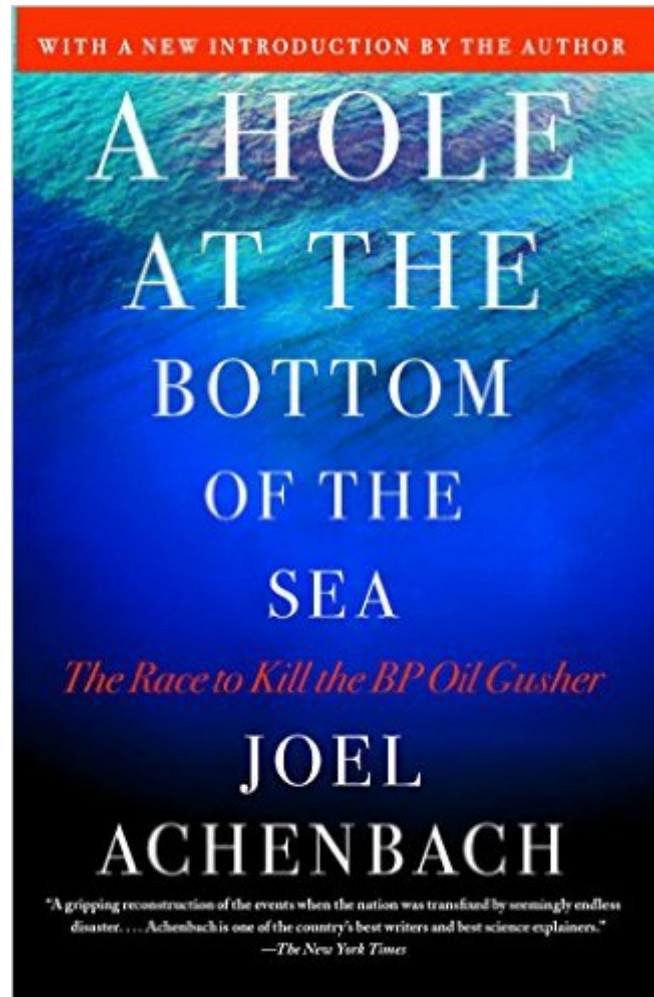


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A Hole At The Bottom Of The Sea: The Race To Kill The BP Oil Gusher



Synopsis

It was a technological crisis in an alien realm: a blown-out oil well in mile-deep water in the Gulf of Mexico. For the engineers who had to kill the well, this was like Apollo 13, a crisis no one saw coming, and one of untold danger and challenge. A suspense story, a mystery, a technological thriller: This is Joel Achenbach's groundbreaking account of the Deepwater Horizon disaster and what came after. The tragic explosion on the huge drilling rig in April 2010 killed eleven men and triggered an environmental disaster. As a gusher of crude surged into the Gulf's waters, BP engineers and government scientists awkwardly teamed in Houston raced to devise ways to plug the Macondo well. Achenbach, a veteran reporter for The Washington Post and acclaimed science writer for National Geographic, moves beyond the blame game to tell the gripping story of what it was like, behind the scenes, moment by moment, in the struggle to kill Macondo. Here are the controversies, the miscalculations, the frustrations, and ultimately the technical triumphs of men and women who worked out of sight and around the clock for months to find a way to plug the well. The Deepwater Horizon disaster was an environmental 9/11. The government did not have the means to solve the problem; only the private sector had the tools, and it didn't have the right ones as the country became haunted by Macondo's black plume, which was omnipresent on TV and the Internet. Remotely operated vehicles, the spaceships of the deep, had to perform the challenging technical maneuvers on the seafloor. Engineers choreographed this robotic ballet and crammed years of innovation into a single summer. As he describes the drama in Houston, Achenbach probes the government investigation into what went wrong in the deep sea. This was a confounding mystery, an engineering whodunit. The lessons of this tragedy can be applied broadly to all complex enterprises and should make us look more closely at the highly engineered society that surrounds us. Achenbach has written a cautionary tale that doubles as a technological thriller.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

As other reviewers have said, this is as close to a page-turner as a non-fiction book can get, and gives a blow-by-blow and day-by-day account of what happened and why out in the Gulf of Mexico. And there could hardly be a better writer for the job than Achenbach, a self-professed science geek, but also a highly skilled "explainer" who can translate Engineer into English, as a colleague of his says. (Achenbach's writing and story-telling skills are amply demonstrated in his earlier works, "Captured by Aliens," a laugh-out-loud account of his travels among the people on the fringes of the UFO movement, and his serious-but-entertaining "The Grand Idea," the account of George Washington's plans to establish a canal system linking the Potomac River to the frontier America he'd explored and surveyed in his youth. As a science guy, Achenbach can hardly be topped, as his many years as a Washington Post reporter, National Geographic contributor, NPR guest, astronomy dude, and author of the mostly sciencey and often very droll "Why Things Are" series will attest. ("Captured/Aliens" should probably be a must-read for psychologists and behavioral science types, too, for its insights into the mindset of people who march to the sound of drums that are more than just a little different.) People would dearly love for the Macondo blowout, the explosion aboard and the sinking of the Deepwater Horizon, and the months-long effort to find a way to shut down the Well From Hell to have relatively simple explanations and a handful of clear-cut villains (how many of us were denied the pleasure of blaming it all on Dick Cheney, ex-CEO of Halliburton?) BP greed? Sloppy work and cutting corners? Hubris? Crass stupidity? Government bumbling? Alas, no.

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