



Oil on the Brain: Petroleum's Long, Strange Trip to Your Tank

By Lisa Margonelli

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Oil on the Brain is a smart, surprisingly funny account of the oil industry—the people, economies, and pipelines that bring us petroleum, brilliantly illuminating a world we encounter every day.

Americans buy ten thousand gallons of gasoline a second, without giving it much of a thought. Where does all this gas come from? Lisa Margonelli's desire to learn took her on a one-hundred thousand mile journey from her local gas station to oil fields half a world away. In search of the truth behind the myths, she wriggled her way into some of the most off-limits places on earth: the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, the New York Mercantile Exchange's crude oil market, oil fields from Venezuela, to Texas, to Chad, and even an Iranian oil platform where the United States fought a forgotten one-day battle.

In a story by turns surreal and alarming, Margonelli meets lonely workers on a Texas drilling rig, an oil analyst who almost gave birth on the NYMEX trading floor, Chadian villagers who are said to wander the oil fields in the guise of lions, a Nigerian warlord who changed the world price of oil with a single cell phone call, and Shanghai bureaucrats who dream of creating a new Detroit.

Deftly piecing together the mammoth economy of oil, Margonelli finds a series of stark warning signs for American drivers.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. In the last few years, just about everyone has had "oil on the brain" at some point, as record gas prices and a disastrous war have called our dependency into question. But though the U.S. burns 10,000 gallons of gasoline a second, few of us know how oil is created and drilled, how gas stations compete or what actually goes on in a refinery—let alone what happens in the mysterious Strategic Petroleum Reserve, where the U.S. government stores roughly 700 million barrels of oil in underground salt caverns on the Gulf Coast of Texas. Margonelli answers these questions and more, before examining some of the key patches in the oil industry's geopolitical quilt: source countries like Chad, where promises of real local growth fall hopelessly short, or China, which, "by 2025, perhaps, will import as much crude oil as the U.S. does now." Writing in a witty, first-person voice, Margonelli criticizes corruption in places like Nigeria, while expressing her "love of hydrocarbons" for the unlikeliness of their formation and the ingenuity required to extricate them. This is an original, open-minded look at a subject about which everyone has an opinion. (*Feb. 6*)

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From [Booklist](#)

Margonelli has written about the culture and economy of energy for publications such as *Wired*, *Discover*, *Salon*, and the *San Francisco Chronicle*. In the summer of 2003, she started hanging out at independent gas stations, where owners might clear pennies per gallon of gas, surviving on impulse sales of junk food and soda. Her journey takes us up the delivery chain, spending a typical day with a tanker truck driver, hanging out with suppliers, touring refineries, and seeing what life is like at an oil rig. Whether visiting "wildcatters" in Texas, the Strategic Petroleum Reserve in the Gulf of Mexico, or the oil pit at the New York Mercantile Exchange, Margonelli charms her way into the good graces of insiders to report on the vast petroleum network. Her voyage takes us to Venezuela, Chad, Nigeria, and ultimately the Persian Gulf, where she spends time at the Salmon oil fields in Iran. Filled with rich history, industry anecdotes, and politics, Margonelli's book brings a deeper appreciation of the complicated and often tenuous process that we take for granted. *David Siegfried*

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Review

"If you drive a car, you must read this book." —Mary Roach, author of *Stiff*

"By giving voice to the people who are the links in the global oil chain, Margonelli invites us to leapfrog all the rhetoric, dry statistics, and dire pronouncements about oil in order to truly understand it." —*Fast Company*

"Hugely enjoyable, compulsively readable, and brilliantly reported." —Po Bronson, author of *What Should I Do with My Life?*

"From the corner gas station to the oil fields of Nigeria, there couldn't be a better traveling companion than Margonelli. She's fast, fearless, funny, and a brilliant observer."

—Barbara Ehrenreich, author of *Nickel and Dimed*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Morris Reyna:

Have you spare time for just a day? What do you do when you have much more or little spare time? Yes, you can choose the suitable activity to get spend your time. Any person spent all their spare time to take a wander, shopping, or went to often the Mall. How about open as well as read a book entitled Oil on the Brain: Petroleum's Long, Strange Trip to Your Tank? Maybe it is to be best activity for you. You realize beside you can spend your time along with your favorite's book, you can more intelligent than before. Do you agree with it has the opinion or you have various other opinion?

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William Quesada:

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