



# The Carbon Age: How Life's Core Element Has Become Civilization's Greatest Threat

*Eric Roston*

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**The Carbon Age: How Life's Core Element Has Become Civilization's Greatest Threat** Eric Roston  
The story of carbon—the building block of life that is, ironically, humanity's great threat .

It could be said that all of us are a little alien—our bodies' carbon atoms first shot forth from supernovas billions of years ago and far, far away. Carbon has always been the ubiquitous architect and chemical scaffolding of life and civilization; indeed, all living things draw carbon from their environments to stay alive, and the great cycle by which carbon moves through organisms, ground, water, and atmosphere has long been a kind of global respiration system that helps keep Earth in balance. And yet, when we hear the word today, it is more often than not in a crisis context: carbon dioxide emissions have sped up the carbon cycle; chlorofluorocarbons are destroying the ozone layer and warming the planet; the volatile Middle East explodes atop its stores of volatile hydrocarbons; carbohydrates threaten obesity and diabetes.

In *The Carbon Age*, Eric Roston evokes this essential element, its journey illuminating history from the Big Bang to modern civilization. Charting the science of carbon—how it was formed, how it came to Earth and built up—he chronicles the often surprising ways mankind has used it over centuries, and the growing catastrophe of the industrial era, leading us to now attempt to wrestle the Earth's geochemical cycle back from the brink. Blending the latest science with original reporting, Roston makes us aware, as never before, of the seminal impact carbon has, and has had, on our lives.

## The Carbon Age: How Life's Core Element Has Become Civilization's Greatest Threat Details

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## **From Reader Review The Carbon Age: How Life's Core Element Has Become Civilization's Greatest Threat for online ebook**

### **Dave Martin says**

an interesting perspective of carbon, its place in the universe, Earth, life and our society

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### **David says**

Great book! The author uses wonderfully creative language to bring the science to life. Here's a snippet: "The story of carbon is also oxygen's tale. They are the Lennon and McCartney of the periodic table. They each have solo careers, but neither is as compelling as their ensemble work." (p. 50)

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### **marcali says**

Wonderful, wonderful science read worth owning (forget the gimmicky subtitle).  
Cosmology, physics, chemistry, ecology, climate -- it's all here, woven together to explain our world -- how it happened and where it's going.

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### **Michael says**

very interesting and insightful so far, very broad sweep.

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### **Steve says**

A big bowl of ok. The claim on the book of the author being a "super storyteller" is itself a bit of story. But overall - a useful read - just not terribly gripping.

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### **Bill says**

The author, Roston, makes technical information quite understandable. His frequent references to historical context is especially useful, I think.  
Chapters 6 through 9 are outstanding for biologists.

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### **Nic says**

I really enjoyed the examination of the origin of carbon in the stellar cloud and its incorporation into the earth. The concept of biology as just another pool in the carbon cycle was an excellent insight. I rather lost it in the consistent but uninteresting conversation about industrial uses. Had he stuck to science it would have been brilliant. As is, it was good.

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### **Ashley says**

Science heavy. Informative. I appreciated this wasn't a preachy environmental book that threatens an apocalyptic ending as a result of our ignorant continuation of self indulgence. Instead it explains what carbon is, how it was formed (lots of earth origins info) and the result of our continual use of it. It also makes some interesting arguments regarding how resistant humans are to changing their lifestyle for the sake of future generations, and some ways to make it economically rewarding to use renewable methods of energy. This book would probably be best understood by Chemists, Physicists, and Earth Science professionals.

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### **S. R. says**

Outstanding. Even-handed, well-researched, accessibly written and full of illuminating observations. Carefully avoids preaching or hyperbole but still takes current situation very seriously and from a thoughtful, scientific point of view.

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### **Mikey says**

It was really quite informative. The author separates the book into two parts; part 1 being "natural" carbon, part 2 being "unnatural" carbon. (The author does qualify that by saying there's no such thing as "unnatural" carbon. However, it's a conscious grammatical use whose purpose is to simplify the different between the natural world (the natural process of carbon through the atmosphere, stars' formation and life, etc.), and the unnatural, or human, world (humans using and burning hydrocarbons, accelerating natural processes from millions/billions of years [what it normally takes] to within decades or hundreds of years).

Very informative read. Occasionally, it does get a little gratuitous with it's in-depth chemistry jargon, which can be occasionally confusing and/or frustrating if you're not used to it. But, aside from that, it's very worth reading. Highly recommended!

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### **John Lundin says**

An important read for anyone concerned with the environment and its threats - which should be all of us.

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## **Kerry says**

Intense and dense...better get your chemistry books out for review. Makes me want to be a carbon scientist. One of those books, one can read more than once to fully understand.

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## **Amanda says**

So I know the author -- he was a couple years ahead of me on the Columbia Spectator. I found this book at the SFO bookstore before boarding a red-eye to New York, and figured it was appropriate reading for a cross-country flight. It's one of the better non-fiction science books I've read recently, right up there with "The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks." Eric does a good job of explaining complex chemical reactions in lay language; the concepts are never dry or obtuse. The book is elegantly structured, unfolding through time, disciplines, and industries that is original and satisfying. Definitely worth reading if you're looking for a better understanding of climate change.

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