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

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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