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The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals

Michael Pollan

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"What should we have for dinner?" To one degree or another this simple question assails any creature faced with a wide choice of things to eat. Anthropologists call it the omnivore's dilemma. Choosing from among the countless potential foods nature offers, humans have had to learn what is safe, and what isn't-which mushrooms should be avoided, for example, and which berries we can enjoy. Today, as America confronts what can only be described as a national eating disorder, the omnivore's dilemma has returned with an atavistic vengeance. The cornucopia of the modern American supermarket and fast-food outlet has thrown us back on a bewildering landscape where we once again have to worry about which of those tasty-looking morsels might kill us. At the same time we're realizing that our food choices also have profound implications for the health of our environment. **The Omnivore's Dilemma** is bestselling author Michael Pollan's brilliant and eye-opening exploration of these little-known but vitally important dimensions of eating in America.

Pollan has divided **The Omnivore's Dilemma** into three parts, one for each of the food chains that sustain us: industrialized food, alternative or "organic" food, and food people obtain by dint of their own hunting, gathering, or gardening. Pollan follows each food chain literally from the ground up to the table, emphasizing our dynamic coevolutionary relationship with the species we depend on. He concludes each section by sitting down to a meal—at McDonald's, at home with his family sharing a dinner from Whole Foods, and in a revolutionary "beyond organic" farm in Virginia. For each meal he traces the provenance of everything consumed, revealing the hidden components we unwittingly ingest and explaining how our taste for particular foods reflects our environmental and biological inheritance.

We are indeed what we eat-and what we eat remakes the world. A society of voracious and increasingly confused omnivores, we are just beginning to recognize the profound consequences of the simplest everyday food choices, both for ourselves and for the natural world. **The Omnivore's Dilemma** is a long-overdue book and one that will become known for bringing a completely fresh perspective to a question as ordinary and yet momentous as What shall we have for dinner?

A few facts and figures from **The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals**

- Of the 38 ingredients it takes to make a McNugget, there are at least 13 that are derived from corn. 45 different menu items at Mcdonald’s are made from corn.
- One in every three American children eats fast food every day.
- One in every five American meals today is eaten in the car.
- The food industry burns nearly a fifth of all the petroleum consumed in the United States¯more than we burn with our cars and more than any other industry consumes.
- It takes ten calories of fossil fuel energy to deliver one calorie of food energy to an American plate.
- A single strawberry contains about five calories. To get that strawberry from a field in California to a plate on the east coast requires 435 calories of energy.
- Industrial fertilizer and industrial pesticides both owe their existence to the conversion of the World War II munitions industry to civilian uses—nerve gases became pesticides, and ammonium nitrate explosives became nitrogen fertilizers.
- Because of the obesity epidemic, today’s generation of children will be the first generation of Americans whose life expectancy will actually be shorter than their parents’ life expectancy.
- In 2000 the UN reported that the number of people in the world suffering from o...

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