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A vivid forecast of our planet in the year 2050 by a rising star in geoscience, distilling cutting-edge research into four global forces: demographic trends, natural resource demand, climate change, and globalization.

The world's population is exploding, wild species are vanishing, our environment is degrading, and the costs of resources from oil to water are going nowhere but up. So what kind of world are we leaving for our children and grandchildren? Geoscientist and Guggenheim fellow Laurence Smith draws on the latest global modeling research to construct a sweeping thought experiment on what our world will be like in 2050. The result is both good news and bad: Eight nations of the Arctic Rim (including the United States) will become increasingly prosperous, powerful, and politically stable, while those closer to the equator will face water shortages, aging populations, and crowded megacities sapped by the rising costs of energy and coastal flooding.

The World in 2050 combines the lessons of geography and history with state-of-the-art model projections and analytical data-everything from climate dynamics and resource stocks to age distributions and economic growth projections. But Smith offers more than a compendium of statistics and studies- he spent fifteen months traveling the Arctic Rim, collecting stories and insights that resonate throughout the book. It is an approach much like Jared Diamond took in Guns, Germs, and Steel and Collapse, a work of geoscientific investigation rich in the appreciation of human diversity.

Packed with stunning photographs, original maps, and informative tables, this is the most authoritative, balanced, and compelling account available of the world of challenges and opportunities that we will leave for our children.

Free admission

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Laurence C. Smith is vice chairman and professor of geography and professor of earth and space sciences at UCLA. In 2006, he briefed Congress on the likely impacts of northern climate change, and in 2007 his work appeared prominently in the Fourth Assessment Report of the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. He lives in Los Angeles with his wife, drinking water imported from hundreds of miles away.