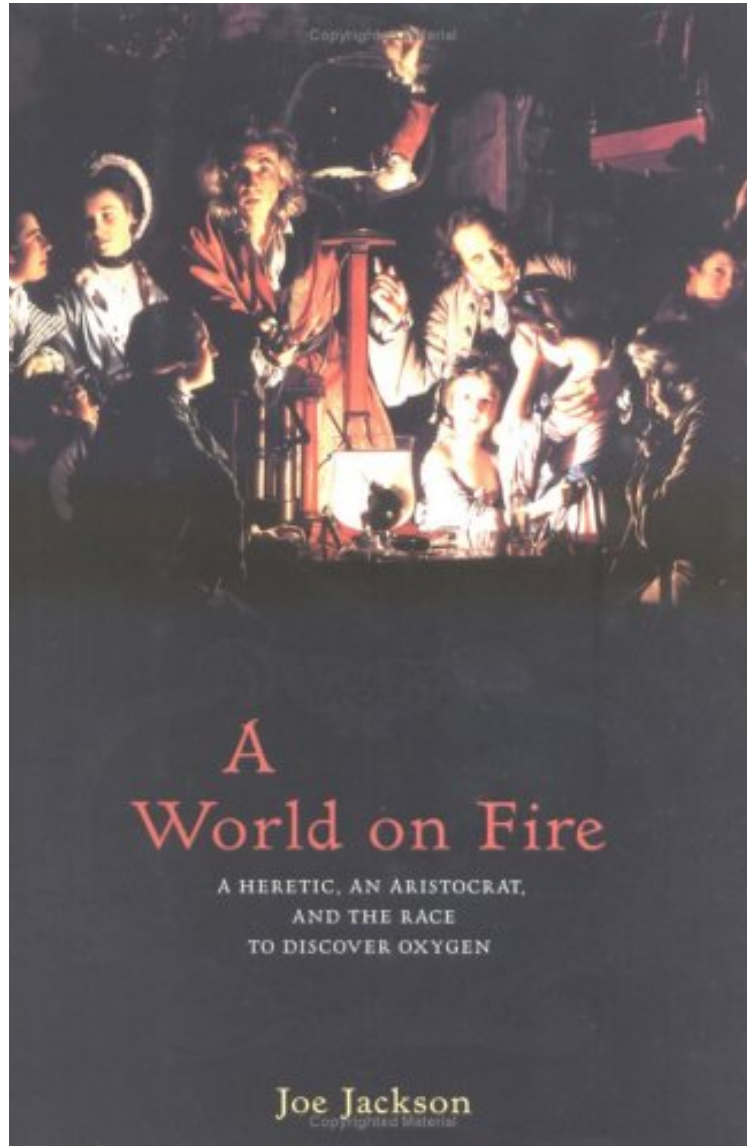


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A World on Fire: A Heretic, an Aristocrat, and the Race to Discover Oxygen

Joe Jackson

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Joe Jackson : A World on Fire: A Heretic, an Aristocrat, and the Race to Discover Oxygen before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised A World on Fire: A Heretic, an Aristocrat, and the Race to Discover Oxygen:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. The Alchemy is dead. Long live the Chemistry.By Percy

DovetonsilsAs someone with two Degrees in Chemistry, I found Joe's book a fascinating account of the personalities of two of Chemistry's famous discoverers and much more; much, much more. These are the things not taught at University, the political aspects of discovery, the framework of English qualitative analysis versus the French quantitative method and the reasons behind each. Here we see the Heretic who was not an Atheist as well as the Aristocrat who was a commoner. Here we voyage metaphorically with Columbus on a Sea of Experimentation leaving Alchemy in the past and landing in the New World of Chemistry. Here we see the particular experiments in all their detail, by each man, which lead up not only to the discovery of Oxygen but the foundation of all modern Chemistry and beyond. I recommend this book not only to formally educated Chemists such as myself, but to the layman as well, as the wealth of the book is not in complex chemical reactions and equations but in the interconnection in the lives of the two men at the heart of this true story. I recommend this book to the student of history and of science, from high school to Graduate school. Yes, the world of the later 1700's truly was on fire, politically, theologically, and scientifically. Revolution abounded from America to Paris.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A very gripping read...By J. D. HeiseI knew the writer some years ago and knew he had the ability to hold the reader with a tale well-told, and this book about two polar opposite men (Joseph Priestly and Antoine Lavoisier) and how they isolated oxygen is absolutely fascinating. It is also a very sad book, considering that both men also destroyed their lives through their work and paid the consequences for it--Priestly with exile from the land of his birth and Lavoisier with his life. No flowery prose here--just straightforward research and reporting--well done!0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Fascinating both scientifically and in regards to the personal lives of these two great pioneers.By CustomerA very well written account of the lives of Joseph Priestly and Antoine Lavoisier, and the discovery of oxygen, which led to the development of modern chemistry. Fascinating both scientifically and in regards to the personal lives of these two great pioneers.

In the final decades of the 1700s, as the threat of revolution began to dim the radiance of the Enlightenment, two brilliant scientists simultaneously achieved a breakthrough that would alter the course of human thought and history: they discovered oxygen. The humble English dissenter Joseph Priestley and the French aristocrat Antoine Lavoisier were unlikely competitors, but their fierce rivalry to solve the "riddle of air" became a kind of eighteenth-century space race, a contest made all the more exciting by the tumult of their time. In *A World on Fire*, acclaimed writer Joe Jackson brings to life the seismic intellectual and political shifts that ushered in modern science. Set against the conflagrations of the American Revolution, the storming of the Bastille, and the Reign of Terror, Jackson's narrative deftly weaves together biography and history, scientific passion and political will. With their discoveries inside the laboratory paving the way for the identification of the elements as well as modern atomic physics and the tragedy of their downfalls, Priestley and Lavoisier epitomize the plight of the scientist in the modern age. With *A World on Fire*, Jackson has transformed their story into a spellbinding work of narrative nonfiction.

From Publishers WeeklyWho first discovered oxygen in the 1770s: English scientist Joseph Priestley or the French aristocrat Antoine Lavoisier? The question became a controversial one, as novelist and nonfiction author Jackson relates, at a time when France and England were enemies. Jackson (*Leavenworth Train*) shows that Priestley was the first to isolate oxygen, but didn't realize what it was: British scientists still clung to the old "phlogiston" theory of burning, and Priestley called the gas "dephlogisticated air." Lavoisier, who undoubtedly based his discoveries on conversations with Priestley, recognized that oxygen was a distinct gas and in the process revolutionized thinking on combustion. (He also developed the chemical nomenclature used today.) Both men met unhappy fates: Priestley, a vocal opponent of the power of both the king and the Church, saw his home burnt down by a mob and fled to America. The aristocratic Lavoisier (as Madison Smartt Bell also recounted in his recent *Lavoisier in the Year One*) was guillotined during the Terror, condemned with the words, "The Republic has no need of scientists." Jackson offers a well-written and lavishly detailed account of a seminal period in the development of modern chemistry. 8 pages of illus. not seen by PW. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.From Booklist*Starred * In the shared riddle of the "pure air" that allowed enclosed mice to live and covered candles to flame high, Jackson locates the thread linking the lives of a Frenchman who lost his life because of his ties to the ancien regime and that of an Englishman who lost his home because of his support for new ecclesiastical and political liberties. Ironically, the English champion of new theological and political ideas stubbornly clung to an outmoded science in trying to explain the substance he had isolated, while it was the French aristocrat who formulated the revolutionary new concepts that explained that strange substance. Jackson deftly recounts both the scientific triumphs and political tragedies that define the lives of Joseph Priestley and Antoine Lavoisier. Readers see--procedure by procedure--the experiments that turned a bit of mercuric oxide and one brilliant candle into a puzzling riddle for Priestley, and they witness the intellectual daring of Lavoisier in solving that riddle by repeating the British researcher's work with quantitative precision and a theoretically lucid new nomenclature. But readers also see the piquant personalities and turbulent social circumstances behind the science: a man so solicitous of his fellow creatures that he tries to revive suffocated mice is himself despoiled by mobs who regard him as a dangerous monster; a man

who adheres to truth so assiduously that he measures it grain by painstaking grain falls victim to Jacobins who see in him a cheat and liar. A probing composite portrait of two martyrs for science. Bryce Christensen Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved An exhilarating narrative, sweeping us through great discoveries and international rivalries, yet strengthened by meticulous research and analysis. -- Jenny Uglow, author of *The Lunar Men: Five Friends whose Curiosity Changed the World* Told with passion and a splendid attention to vivid detail-a book to be read, savoured, and reflected upon. -- Paul Johnson, author of *Modern Times, A History of the American People, and Intellectuals*