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The News: A User's Manual (Vintage International)



Synopsis

The News: A User's Manual is an insightful analysis of the impact of the incessant news machine on us and our culture. The news is everywhere. We can't stop constantly checking it on our computer screens, but what is this doing to our minds? We are never taught how to make sense of the torrent of news we face daily, which has a huge influence on our sense of what matters and of how we should lead our lives. Alain de Botton takes twenty-five archetypal news stories—including an airplane crash, a murder, a celebrity interview, and a political scandal—and submits them to intense analysis. Why are disaster stories often so uplifting? Why do we enjoy watching politicians being brought down? Why are upheavals in far-off lands often so boring? What makes the love lives of celebrities so interesting? De Botton has written the ultimate guide for our frenzied era, designed to bring calm, understanding, and a measure of sanity to a news-obsessed age.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I own and have enjoyed most of De Botton's books, and generally find his slant on diverse subjects if not always original, nevertheless fresh and thought-provoking. I usually also find his discursive style and phrasing simply fun to read. So, I am sorry to rate this effort as "okay"...and to suspect that I am being generous. It is evident from some comments that other readers found the book much richer and more entertaining than I did, but I could only recommend this to De Botton devotees, and then with caveats. It is a stretch to say that this book has anything new to say about what "news" is

or how it is presented. In fairness, De Botton's idea of news goes well beyond what we typically mean when we refer to journalism, whether written or broadcast. But even allowing for less-than-useful digressions, it is difficult to imagine many readers will be better prepared to understand, benefit from or even critique the news: In short, hardly a "users manual." It is striking that some sections barely manage to include a few sentences about news reporting, almost as an afterthought --- rather as though a helpful editor said: "Say, shouldn't this section make some reference to news?" When he focuses, De Botton's principle argument is that the news should be developed and conveyed rather more like art generally and literature in particular. This prompts him to offer such advice as the need for "creative writers" of news to "understand that falsifications may occasionally need to be committed in the service of a goal higher still than accuracy: the hope of getting important ideas and images across to their impatient and distracted audiences....perhaps by adapting a fact, eliminating a point, compressing a quote or changing a date.

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