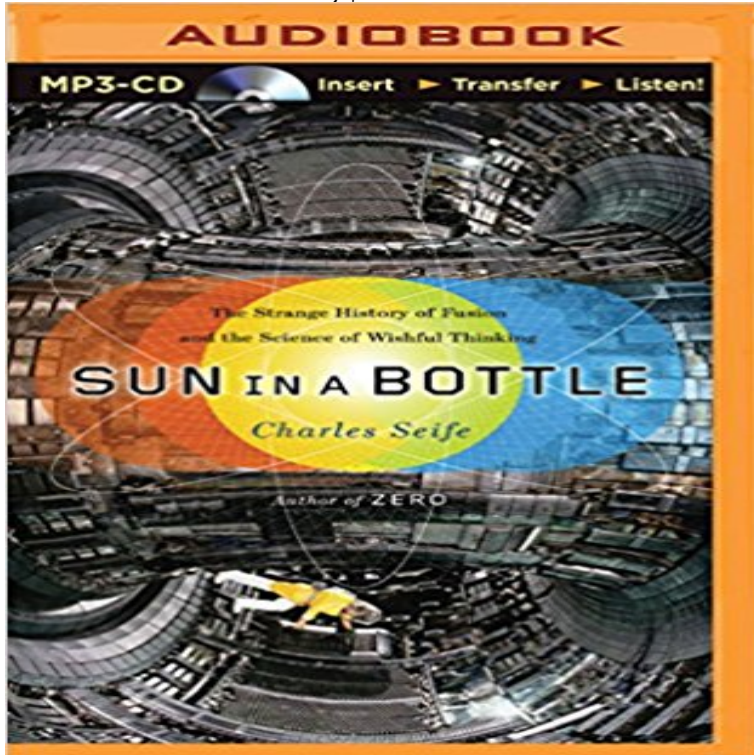


Sun in a Bottle: The Strange History of Fusion and the Science of Wishful Thinking



When weapons builders detonated the first hydrogen bomb in 1952, they tapped into the biggest source of energy in our solar system—the phenomenon that makes the sun shine. Nuclear fusion seems a virtually unlimited source of power, but it has been at the center of a tragic and comic pursuit that has left scores of scientists battered and disgraced. Like the eternal quest to build a perpetual motion machine, the dream of harnessing the energy of a miniature star is irresistible. Not only would a fusion energy device give the world endless electrical power, it would give power to its inventors—financial power, the power of fame, even military might. Right now the world's richest countries are spending billions of dollars trying to build a giant fusion reactor. Yet if history is any guide, the money will not bring the dream of fusion energy within reach. Indeed, the quest for fusion energy has been a failure, generation after generation. Fusion is at the heart of some of the biggest scientific scandals of all time, and Charles Seife traces its story from its beginning into the twenty-first century. Even after fusion scientists face defeat after defeat, they continue trying to put the sun in a bottle, hoping against hope that they will succeed where others have failed. The science of wishful thinking is as strong as ever, and this book is our key to understanding why.

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