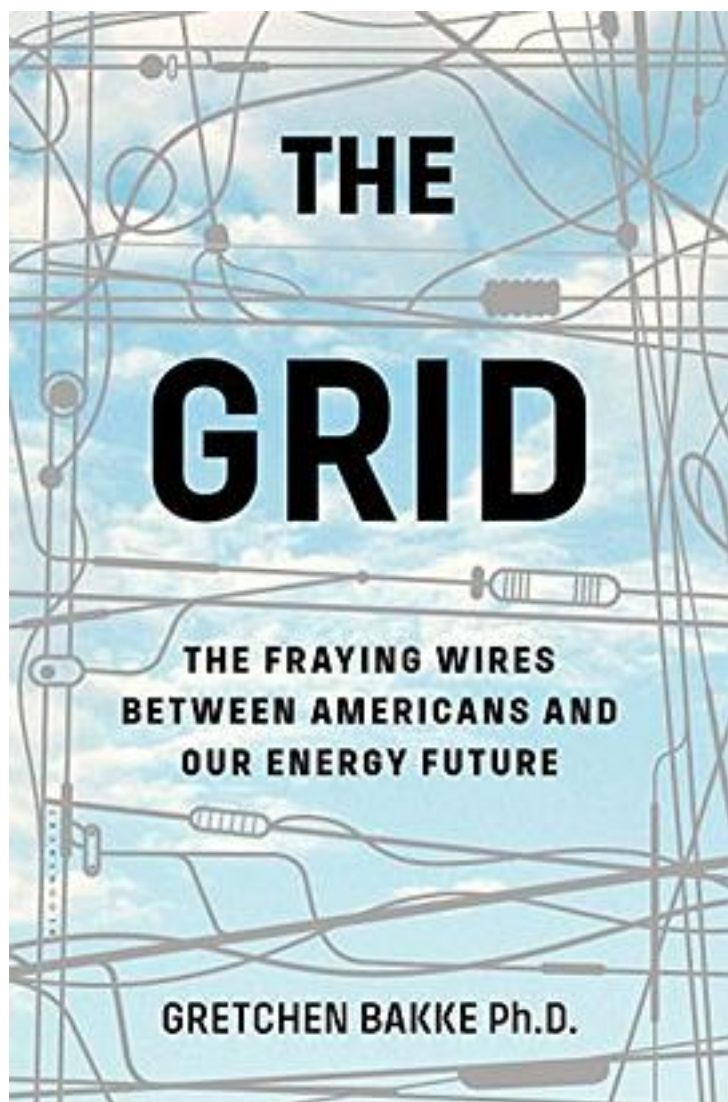


The Grid



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The electrical grid goes everywhere -- it's the largest and most complex machine ever made. Yet the system is built in such a way that the bigger it gets, the more inevitable its collapse. Named the greatest engineering achievement of the 20th century by the National Academy of Engineering, the electrical grid is the largest industrial investment in the history of humankind. It reaches into your home, snakes its way to your bedroom, and climbs right up into the lamp next to your pillow. At times, it almost seems alive, like some enormous circulatory system that pumps life to big cities and the most remote rural areas. Constructed of intricately interdependent components, the grid operates on a rapidly shrinking margin for error. Things can -- and do -- go wrong in this system, no matter how many preventive steps we take. Just look at the colossal 2003 blackout, when 50 million Americans lost power due to a simple error at a power plant in Ohio; or the one a month later, which blacked out 57 million Italians. And these two combined don't even compare to the 2001 outage in India, which affected 226 million people. The Grid is the first history of the electrical grid intended for general readers, and it comes at a time when we badly need such a guide. As we get more and more dependent on electricity to perform even the most mundane daily tasks, the grid's inevitable shortcomings will take a toll on populations around the globe. At a moment when energy issues loom large on the nation's agenda and our hunger for electricity grows, The Grid is as timely as it is compelling.

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