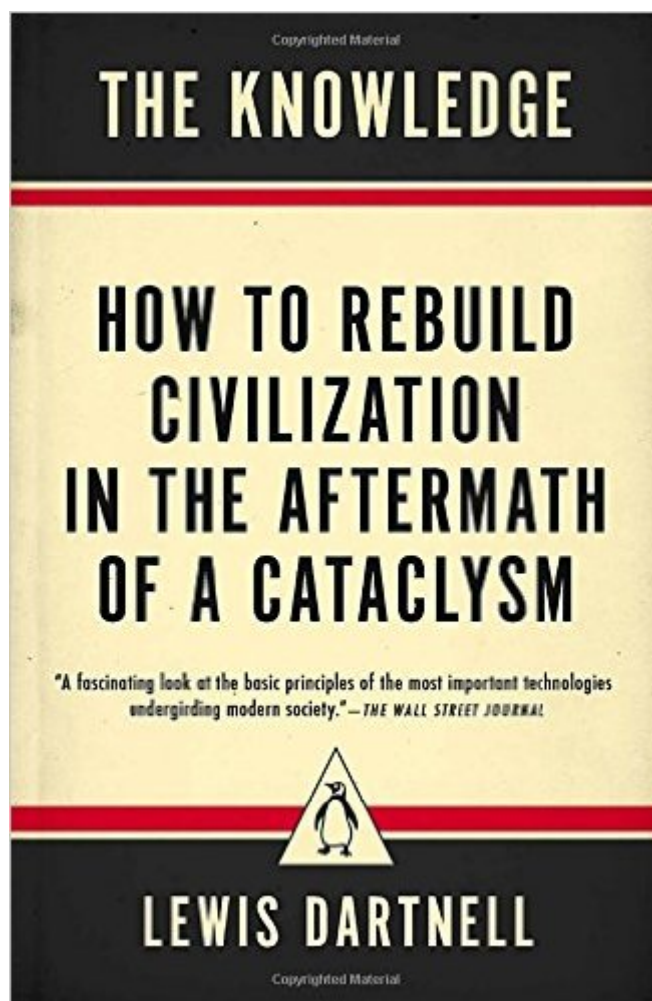


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The Knowledge: How To Rebuild Civilization In The Aftermath Of A Cataclysm



Synopsis

How would you go about rebuilding a technological society from scratch? If our technological society collapsed tomorrow, perhaps from a viral pandemic or catastrophic asteroid impact, what would be the one book you would want to press into the hands of the postapocalyptic survivors? What crucial knowledge would they need to survive in the immediate aftermath and to rebuild civilization as quickly as possible—a guide for rebooting the world? Human knowledge is collective, distributed across the population. It has built on itself for centuries, becoming vast and increasingly specialized. Most of us are ignorant about the fundamental principles of the civilization that supports us, happily utilizing the latest—or even the most basic—technology without having the slightest idea of why it works or how it came to be. If you had to go back to absolute basics, like some sort of postcataclysmic Robinson Crusoe, would you know how to re-create an internal combustion engine, put together a microscope, get metals out of rock, accurately tell time, weave fibers into clothing, or even how to produce food for yourself? Regarded as one of the brightest young scientists of his generation, Lewis Dartnell proposes that the key to preserving civilization in an apocalyptic scenario is to provide a quickstart guide, adapted to cataclysmic circumstances. *The Knowledge* describes many of the modern technologies we employ, but first it explains the fundamentals upon which they are built. Every piece of technology rests on an enormous support network of other technologies, all interlinked and mutually dependent. You can't hope to build a radio, for example, without understanding how to acquire the raw materials it requires, as well as generate the electricity needed to run it. But Dartnell doesn't just provide specific information for starting over; he also reveals the greatest invention of them all—the phenomenal knowledge-generating machine that is the scientific method itself. This would allow survivors to learn technological advances not explicitly explored in *The Knowledge* as well as things we have yet to discover. *The Knowledge* is a brilliantly original guide to the fundamentals of science and how it built our modern world as well as a thought experiment about the very idea of scientific knowledge itself.

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Customer Reviews

I always wondered what it would be like if all of a sudden we had some great disaster, and we'd have to reboot our civilization. This is way more complicated than it might first appear. I'm an engineer and though I know how to do a lot of things, I do not have the knowledge to make some very basic things that I would certainly like to have after such a disaster. At least not before I saw this book. For example, could I make soap? If you think about it, soap would be really important in the dirty world we would find ourselves living in after the disaster. Fairly unsophisticated people made it for themselves for hundreds of years. Do you know the recipe? The ingredients might be fairly easy to find (assuming you know the list) with the possible exception of lye. Making that is a bit of a challenge - do you know how? Maybe going to a library that had paper books on science and engineering would help - if there was one around. Remember, the internet (and electricity) would be non-existent. If I had a copy of the book being reviewed here or had studied it very well before the disaster, I'd know how to make the lye needed. By the way, excess lye can result in some very harsh soap - that is another issue that has to be worked out by the soap maker. One more challenge in the brave new world perhaps. There are numerous other basic things we take for granted that we'd have to figure out how to make after the disaster. Would you know what to do? I'm not so sure I would without having read this or a similar book(s), and I am an engineer. The book here provides us with the know how to make the basic items we would need in an initial reboot. It's nice to find a reference that tells us so much in so few pages. Note that some reviewers felt this book was a little light on details, and they may have a point in some respects - it would probably not be enough for people who aren't at least a little "handy" in some sense. But, it does point people in the right direction in only one volume. After the disaster, it might be hard to lug around a set of books. In any case, the book reviewed here does provide perspective. Some reviewers stated that there were some other single volume guides that would be more useful - Boy Scout manual, camping manuals, etc. This might be true in some respects, but I think not in others. Given the (over) dependence we see today on things electronic, maybe this book (a paper copy) should be given out and be required

reading in every school, just in case. Even if the disaster never happens, this would provide some perspective for the members of the technology dependent, yet largely technology ignorant society that we have become. Recommended.

I am not a "Prepper," but I am really enjoying this book. Initially, Dartnell's goal to explain nearly every major technological aspect of human existence -- agriculture, textile-making, and even producing electricity -- seemed *too* ambitious, I think he does a very nice job ... particularly given the book's length. (One would expect a book like this to be made up of several massive tomes, not a 200+ page paperback.) Granted, a few of the rebuilding processes are outlined in very limited terms: I was perhaps able to grasp his section on purifying water, for example, if only because of the numerous "survivor-style" television shows I have seen (such as "Survivorman" with Les Stroud). But for other things, such as growing crops, I think that Dartnell's truncated explanations are the way to go. Since growing conditions will vary so much from place to place, there is probably not much he could do otherwise; thus he provides the reader with the very basics. For agriculture, again, how to separate the wheat from the chaff, how to grind it into flour, etc. These are things that most members of our very specialized societies have forgotten how to do, either from leaving the tasks to machines, or to other people. In a way, the book is sort of a wake-up call for the very "problem" of specialization -- a ton of people who each know how to do only a few very particular tasks, most of which (at least in industrialized societies) will not help them one whit in the face of even a temporary disaster, environmental or otherwise. Given how much I actually learned while reading this book, I was retrospectively shocked (or even ashamed) to realize just how much I did not know -- just how many things I use each day were/are the results of the labor and knowledge of others. So if anything, the book really does underscore the continuing necessity to form "well-rounded" individuals: those who can find/make/grow at least the bare necessities of living. Like any good book, it underscores the importance of things I often take for granted, and it makes me want to learn even more.

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