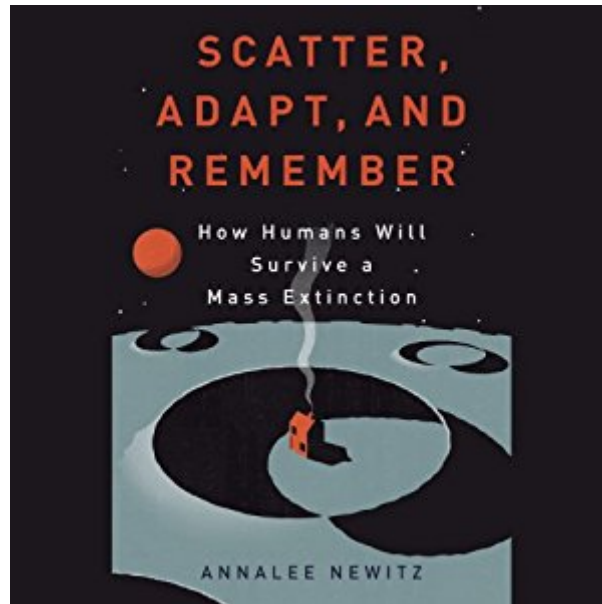


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Scatter, Adapt, And Remember: How Humans Will Survive A Mass Extinction



Synopsis

In its 4.5 billion-year history, life on Earth has been almost erased at least half a dozen times: shattered by asteroid impacts, entombed in ice, smothered by methane, and torn apart by unfathomably powerful megavolcanoes. And we know that another global disaster is eventually headed our way. Can we survive it? How? As a species, *Homo sapiens* is at a crossroads. Study of our planet's turbulent past suggests that we are overdue for a catastrophic disaster, whether caused by nature or by human interference. It's a frightening prospect, as each of the Earth's past major disasters—from meteor strikes to bombardment by cosmic radiation—resulted in a mass extinction, where more than 75 percent of the planet's species died out. But in *Scatter, Adapt, and Remember*, Annalee Newitz, science journalist and editor of the science Web site io9.com explains that although global disaster is all but inevitable, our chances of long-term species survival are better than ever. Life on Earth has come close to annihilation—humans have, more than once, narrowly avoided extinction just during the last million years—but every single time a few creatures survived, evolving to adapt to the harshest of conditions. This brilliantly speculative work of popular science focuses on humanity's long history of dodging the bullet, as well as on new threats that we may face in years to come. Most important, it explores how scientific breakthroughs today will help us avoid disasters tomorrow. From simulating tsunamis to studying central Turkey's ancient underground cities; from cultivating cyanobacteria for "living cities" to designing space elevators to make space colonies cost-effective; from using math to stop pandemics to studying the remarkable survival strategies of gray whales, scientists and researchers the world over are discovering the keys to long-term resilience and learning how humans can choose life over death. Newitz's remarkable and fascinating journey through the science of mass extinctions is a powerful argument about human ingenuity and our ability to change. In a world populated by doomsday preppers and media commentators obsessively forecasting our demise, *Scatter, Adapt, and Remember* is a compelling voice of hope. It leads us away from apocalyptic thinking into a future where we live to build a better world—on this planet and perhaps on others. Readers of this book will be equipped scientifically, intellectually, and emotionally to face whatever the future holds.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The main thing about this book is that it is for the most part very interesting. Science journalist Newitz begins with the mass extinctions in geological time beginning with the cyanobacteria that "poisoned" the atmosphere with...are you ready for this?...oxygen! Sayonara to delicate creatures sensitive to oxygen. Say hello to multicellular organisms that energize with oxygen like gas guzzling Hummers! Then there was Permian extinction AKA "The Great Dying" when something like 90% of all marine species went extinct, and of course the Cretaceous-Paleogene extinction (formerly known as the Cretaceous-Tertiary (K-T) extinction) that killed off the non-avian dinosaurs. Newitz concludes mass extinctions with the one that is going on now, thanks to us, who may or may not be the planet's cancer. In Part II she writes about (1) the "African Bottleneck," so-called because humans seemed to have lost some genetic diversity as most of us went bye-bye for some not clear reason; (2) our near cousins the Neanderthals (very interesting and up to date chapter); (3) the Great Plagues (during which labor--not surprisingly--becomes more valuable and the serfs gain some advantage vis-à-vis the landlords); also a very interesting chapter; (4) people starving to death, especially the Irish during the great potato famine and the Chinese during Mao Zedong's sociopathic/narcissistic madness. The "scatter, adapt, and remember" from the title is addressed in three chapters. Those that scattered were people, especially the Jews, and they did so to escape slavery, oppression and just plain bad times. Those that adapted are exemplified by the adaptation made by the cyanobacteria that learned photosynthesis and changed the world forever.

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