Return to life of Brian: the musician has handpicked some weighty tomes to help humanity find its feet again if the worst happens  

The Book List: Brian Eno's essential reading for the apocalypse

Every Wednesday, Alex Johnson delves into a unique collection of titles

Alex Johnson  |  @shedworking  |  a day ago  |  0 comments

A Pattern Language by Christopher Alexander et al
The Illustrated Flora of Britain and Northern Europe by Marjorie Blamey and Christopher Grey Wilson
The Discoverers by Daniel Boorstin
The Wheels of Commerce by Fernand Braudel

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Percy Muir

Dancing in the Streets by Barbara Ehrenreich
Roll Jordan Roll by Eugene Genovese
Mother Nature: A History of Mothers, Infants, and Natural Selection by Sarah Hardy
The Face of Battle by John Keegan

Barbara Ehrenreich’s musings on group celebration could be a vital work to rebuild civilisation (Rex)

The Cambridge World History of Food (two volumes) by Kenneth F Kiple and Kriemhild Coneé Ornelas
The Mind in the Cave: Consciousness and the Origins of Art by David Lewis-Williams
A History of the World in 100 Objects by Neil MacGregor
Peter the Great: His Life and World by Richard Massie
Keeping Together in Time by William McNeill
Contingency, Irony and Solidarity by Richard Rorty
The Confidence Trap by David Runciman
Seeing Like a State by James C Scott
War and Peace by Leo Tolstoy
The Notebooks by Leonardo da Vinci
What happens when a [insert your catastrophe of choice here] happens? While many people will be most worried about clean water, shelter and the location of their loved ones, there will also be those grieving over the mass destruction of our libraries and bookshops. But fear not! The farsighted people at San Francisco’s the Long Now Foundation have put together a kind of Desert Island Discs “must read” list of around 3,500 books – they call it the Manual for Civilization – which they feel will best keep us going through the disaster and help us rebuild everything a bit. In the meantime, it is available in conventional library format at their public space, The Interval.
The books selected fall into four categories and cover far more than basic survival techniques:

Cultural Canon (great authors such as Shakespeare and Plato)
Mechanics of Civilization (technical knowledge, how to build and understand how things work)
Rigorous Science Fiction (books that tell potentially useful stories about a hypothetical future)
Long-term Thinking, Futurism, and relevant history (works which focus on how to think about the future, some including surveys of the past)

What guilty pleasures were on David Cameron's No 10 bookshelf?
A peek at Art Garfunkel's library – from Twain to Freud
What books did Oscar Wilde read in prison?
David Bowie's top 100 must-read books
What was on Charles Darwin's reading list?

The list is largely put together by Long Now staff and members, but famous creatives with particular areas of interest have also been invited to submit short lists of ideas. The one above contains all musician Brian Eno's suggestions under the heading of “long-term thinking” and other contributors include Violet Blue (human sexuality), Ami Burnham (reproduction and birth) and astronomer Jill Tarter (first contact).
Long Now, there are alternative groups producing their own book lists, including the Survivor Library, which offers around 7,000 titles in PDF format. These are much more instructional and mostly from 19th-century texts which deal with very practical issues without the help of modern technology.

‘A Book of Book Lists’ by Alex Johnson, £7.99, British Library Publishing

Tap here to buy

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