

though he has received the best evidence-based OCD treatment. As he puts it, “it’s a bit like being a recovering alcoholic. You are always a certain number of days past your most recent obsessive-compulsive episode.”

Fortunately, misunderstanding about OCD, such as thinking that people with the condition are simply ‘neat-freaks’, is gradually decreasing. Adam makes an important contribution by increasing public awareness, and clarifying that OCD is not simply an exaggerated desire for hygiene and order, but rather a serious illness with many different symptoms caused by dysregulation of the brain’s anxiety and cognitive-control circuits. He also helps to defuse the stigma associated with thoughts that many patients find shameful.

Another source of optimism is the abundance of innovative technologies that are being used to identify treatment targets for compulsive behaviours. For example, my laboratory uses miniature microscopes to peer inside the rodent brain and observe how neural activity changes as behaviours such as repetitive grooming develop. Such

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tools allow us to address long-standing questions, including how compulsive behaviours and anxiety are related.

Although the main readership of *The Man Who Couldn’t Stop* is likely to be

patients, families and clinicians, this book is also a valuable read for neuroscientists like me, who are searching for clues about the origins of OCD. There are some factual errors, such as the description of serotonergic neurotransmission, but this is a quibble compared with the book’s contribution. People such as Adam hold in their brains some of the most valuable contributions to the fight against neuropsychiatric diseases: blow-by-blow accounts of how their obsessions, compulsions, thoughts and emotions are linked and evolve.

By partnering with patients, psychiatric researchers can extract testable hypotheses and recognize obsessions for what they are: not untouchable thoughts to be feared and locked up, but phenomena to be observed, understood and then let go like summer snowflakes melting in the sunlight. ■

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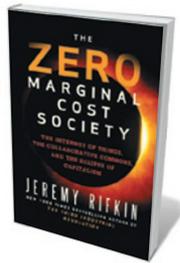
## Books in brief



### Falling Behind? Boom, Bust, and the Global Race for Scientific Talent

Michael S. Teitelbaum PRINCETON UNIVERSITY PRESS (2014)

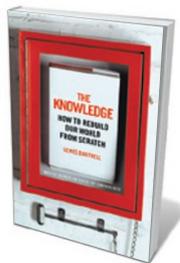
Is US science and engineering really plagued by workforce shortages? It is not that simple, argues demographer Michael S. Teitelbaum in this analysis of US science policy. The evidence reveals a complex dynamic: since the 1950s, alarmism over ‘falling behind’ has driven five rounds of destabilizing boom and bust. The modi operandi of research universities and funding agencies are also problematic, as research funding, not market demand, controls supplies of young scientists and engineers. Lucid and convincing.



### The Zero Marginal Cost Society: The Internet of Things, the Collaborative Commons, and the Eclipse of Capitalism

Jeremy Rifkin PALGRAVE MACMILLAN (2014)

“The capitalist era is passing,” proclaims social theorist Jeremy Rifkin in this manifesto for the collaborative commons, a new economic paradigm. “Ubiquitous computing” is spawning an Internet of Things, a digitized global infrastructure that will, he argues, pare marginal costs of production and distribution down to near zero and topple big profits. The thesis is admirable, but the ebullience can feel somewhat relentless as Rifkin rolls out a future of sustainable abundance, massive open online courses and crowd-funding.



### The Knowledge: How to Rebuild Our World from Scratch

Lewis Dartnell BODLEY HEAD (2014)

Astrobiologist Lewis Dartnell offers the ultimate do-it-yourself guide to ‘rebooting’ human civilization after an asteroid impact, pandemic or nuclear war. With scientific nous, Dartnell depicts probable environmental scenarios on a stricken Earth and offers putative survivors instruction in the technologies needed to craft a culture from the ground up. Whether learning the basics on how to sow and grow a field of barley, melt and cast salvaged aluminium, build a windmill or craft a basic stethoscope, many will thrill to this reminder of our species’ prodigious resilience.



### How to Make a Human Being: A Body of Evidence

Christopher Potter FOURTH ESTATE (2014)

In this follow-up to his much-vaunted *You Are Here* (HarperCollins, 2009), Christopher Potter illuminates the human in all its manifestations — from single cell to creator of culture. Finely judged quotes from scientific and literary luminaries such as John Archibald Wheeler and Marcel Proust alternate with erudite musings on our compatibility with the cosmos (backed by clear expositions of theoretical physics), human biology, neurology, culture, morality and religion. The scattershot narrative somehow coalesces into a brilliant whole — and a compelling case for anti-reductionism.



### Buildings Must Die: A Perverse View of Architecture

Stephen Cairns and Jane M. Jacobs THE MIT PRESS (2014)

From the passage of time to the wrecking ball, the forces limiting a building’s ‘lifespan’ are rife: all cities are potential ghost towns. Into this rubble-strewn terrain venture Stephen Cairns and Jane M. Jacobs, whose philosophical meditation on architectural death is enriched with materials science and thinking from the likes of architect Eero Saarinen. The evocative case studies range from the “ruin porn” of derelict Detroit in Michigan to the weird morphology of Bangkok and its unfinished skyscrapers. **Barbara Kiser**