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## The Upside of Down: Catastrophe, Creativity, and the Renewal of Civilization

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Thomas Homer-Dixon proclaims the end is nigh. That's not an altogether bad thing, though. In *The Upside of Down*, the University of Toronto professor, best known for his book *The Ingenuity Gap*, sees hope in the looming end of civilization.

In the book, Homer-Dixon compiles five "tectonic stresses" that threaten us: population growth disparities, declining returns on energy agglomeration, environmental degradation, climate change, and economic instability and disparity. These stresses are subject to "multipliers," such as the asymmetric damage that can be inflicted on the many by the very few through acts of terrorism. In the near future, some or all of these factors will escalate and combine to become catastrophic, resulting in "synchronous failure," which will mean an end to the type of world we have built for ourselves.

And what is the upside of all that ails us? Homer-Dixon believes that breakdown "can produce exactly the conditions required for a burst of creativity, reorganization, and renewal." With global dialogue, a radical re-evaluation of our values, and the cultivation of a flexible "prospective" mind, we should not only be able to ride out the coming storm, but emerge stronger and with better prospects for the planet we will occupy.

*The Upside of Down* reads like a casual, albeit lengthy, lecture from an avuncular professor with a penchant for neologizing, and if the content weren't so dire, one could call it an enjoyable read. Although none of the stresses Homer-Dixon speaks about are news, it is very rare to have all of them so deftly assembled and correlated.

Though his specific recommendations are a tad soft – things would need to be dire indeed for global co-operation to arise – Homer-Dixon's *The Upside of Down* is an extraordinarily important book. If you read only one book this year about the end of civilization, let this be it.