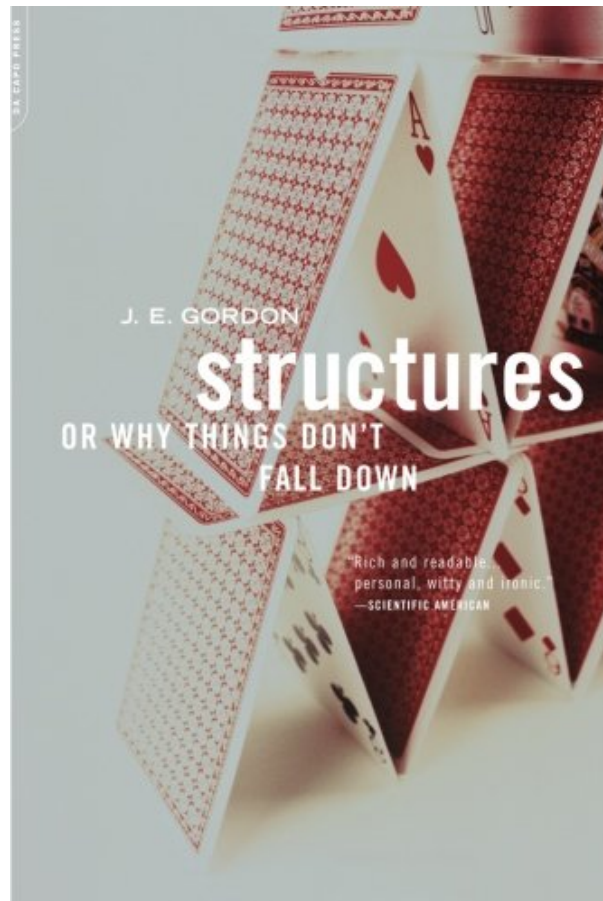
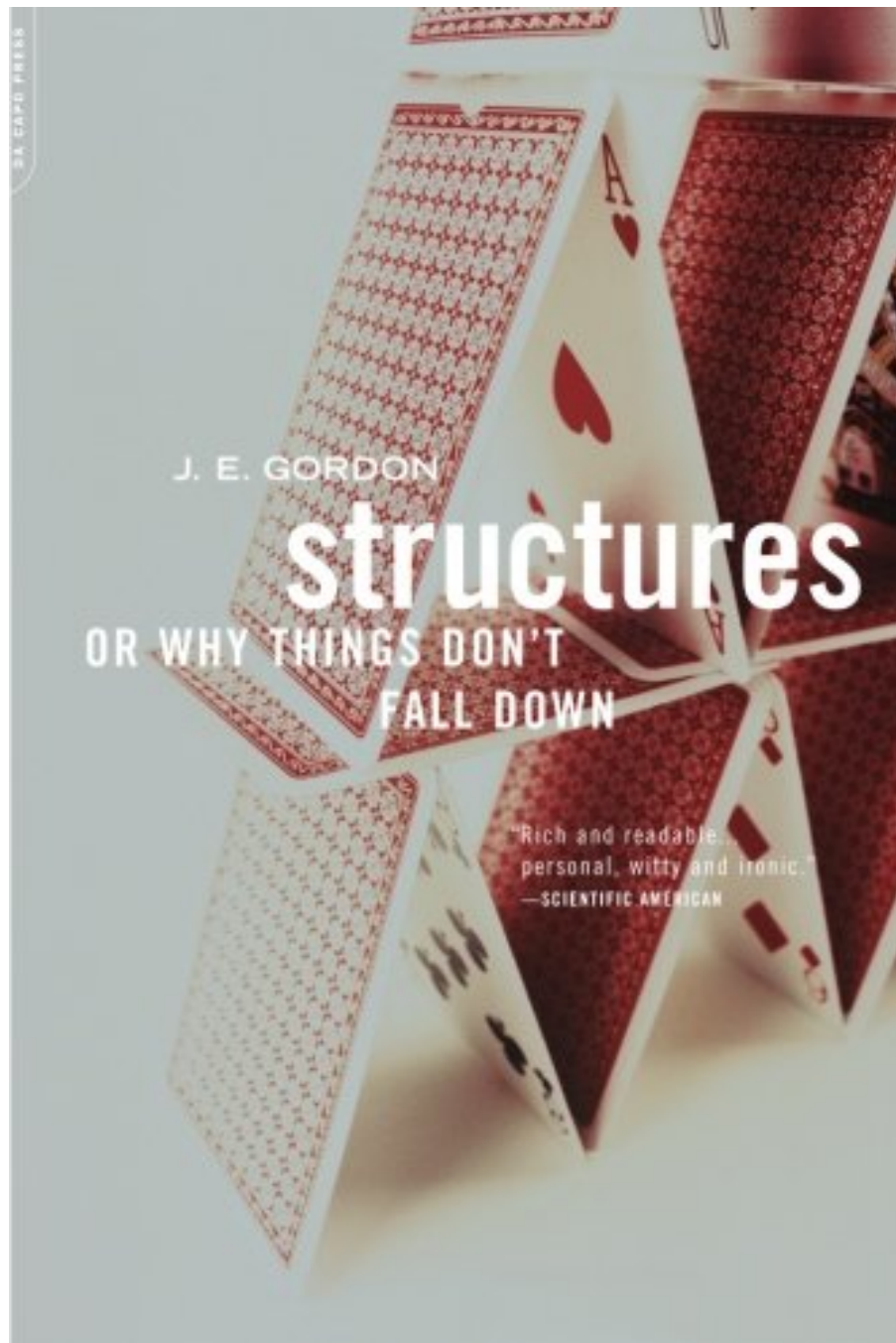


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J. E. Gordon, a professor at the University of Reading, is renowned for his research in plastics, crystals, and new materials.

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For anyone who has ever wondered why suspension bridges don't collapse under eight lanes of traffic, how dams hold back-or give way under-thousands of gallons of water, or what principles guide the design of a skyscraper or a kangaroo, this book will ease your anxiety and answer your questions. J. E. Gordon strips engineering of its confusing technical terms, communicating its founding principles in accessible, witty prose.

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## Most helpful customer reviews

38 of 39 people found the following review helpful.

Outstanding! Basic engineering done with history and humor.

By A Customer

My boss gave me this book when I arrived at my first job, and it changed the way I saw the world. It covers the basics of structural engineering from cathedrals to clothing, and does so with a blend of historical references and dry British humor that makes it delightful to read. Only basic math is used. The emphasis is on the basic principles (tension, compression, shear, etc.)and how they apply to real-world examples, ranging from bridge trusses to bias-cut fabrics and bat wings. I'd recommend this book for anyone who's curious about how things work. My sole complaint is that this edition is a bit bulky and might seem intimidating, but that's because the print is fairly large. I preferred the earlier British Penguin edition which was much more compact.

29 of 30 people found the following review helpful.

Excellent layman's overview or engineer's refresher

By A Customer

I first read both Structures and Gordon's other book, The New Science of Strong Materials, in the early '80's. I have read them several times since, and am constantly trying to find them because I keep giving them away to people. When I read Gordon's explanations of the history and present state of the engineering art, I look at things as diverse as cathedrals and dogs' bladders in a new way. I remember my training in the more

equation-heavy disciplines, and I can compare my 16 years of experience in engineering to the words in the book and say, "Oh yes, that's just the way it is," or "Oh, so that's why that happened. Too bad I didn't think of it at the time."

33 of 36 people found the following review helpful.

Scientific popularisation at its best.

By Barry C. Chow

In the wonderful tradition of Sagan, Cousteau and Asimov, Professor Gordon shows us that science and technology need not be abstruse and tedious, but can be made both pleasant and fascinating. Structures, or Why Things Don't Fall Down stands perfectly well on its own, but the best benefits are to be derived when reading it in tandem with its sister publication, The New Science of Strong Materials. In both books, Professor Gordon strikes the difficult balance between the ease of exposition and the exactness of detail that characterises only the very best of scientific popularisations. He combines his technical presentation with a warm and self-deprecating wit that will have you feeling that you are not being lectured to, so much as enjoying an engaging explanation from a friend.

For example, in a typical moment of whimsy, Professor Gordon speculates upon the benefits of attaching army surplus chicken feathers onto motor cars - a suggestion designed to evoke a humorous image, except that his preceding explication on the structural properties of feathers is done so well that it lends the idea a certain fanciful credence. The pages are filled with such moments. Professor Gordon delights in drawing parallels between the unlikeliest of phenomena - how an intelligent reflection on the properties of worms led him to the design of a better anchor bracket, or how his introduction to a circus proprietor's somewhat self-conscious invention ended up improving everything from military aircraft to household doors. Through the liberal use of such anecdotes, he leads us, gently but inexorably, to a fuller understanding of the interconnectedness of the physical world.

While his book deals with abstract ideas, Professor Gordon comes across clearly as a practical man. Whereas others would deal only with joints and fastenings, he chooses to title one chapter "Joints, Fastenings and People". He does so with especial purpose because his hands-on and sometimes tragic experience has won him the understanding that most joints fail not from want of material strength, but from human negligence. Anyone who has ever taken responsibility for the work of others will sympathise with his observation that: "All of our efforts to persuade [the aircraft workers] that a badly made joint was morally equivalent to manslaughter foundered on a deeply-held folk tradition that it was silly to fuss about such things and that strength is a boring subject anyway." Professor Gordon always manages to marry each abstraction with a human element and this is what makes his narrative so engaging and so relevant.

While extremely well written, this is not a book for dilettantes. Professor Gordon does not evade mathematics, although he keeps it to a minimum and always to the point. Where necessary, he does not spare the technical details, but he has both the mastery and the skill to make it go down easily and the reader always comes away from the experience feeling enriched. Those who are completely mathematically phobic can still follow the general thrust of his narrative while skipping the formulae.

This is popularisation at its best and Professor Gordon's works should be required reading not only for aspiring engineers but for all university undergraduates.

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