



THE POSTMAN
by David Brin (Spectra)
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This is the story of a lie that became a powerful kind of truth, a saga of a man who rekindled the spirit of America through the power of a dream. Gordon Krantz was a survivor-- a wanderer who traded tales for food and shelter in the dark and savage aftermath of a

devastating war. Fate touches him one freezing night when he borrows the jacket of a long-dead postal worker to protect himself from the cold. The old, worn uniform still has power as a symbol of hope, and with it he begins to weave his greatest tale, setting a nation on the road to recovery.

READING GROUP STUDY GUIDE

1. Compare *The Postman* with other post-apocalyptic novels, set after the fall of civilization, such as *The Road*, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, *I am Legend*, *After America*. What is the appeal of tales about End Times?

2. David Brin comments: "Many post-holocaust novels are little-boy wish fantasies about running amok in a world without rules. In fact, such lonely 'heroes' would vanish like soot after a real apocalypse." Does Gordon view himself as a hero? What is the role of heroes in fiction (and the real world) in a time of crisis? Can the distinction of heroes from scoundrels change in a crisis?

3. What is the power of the postman's uniform? Would the story have the same power had Gordon come across a military uniform or a policeman's uniform? How does Gordon weave his image to make it believable?

4. More from the author: "The moral of *The Postman* is that if we lost our civilization, we'd all come to realize how much we miss it, and would realize what a miracle it was to get your mail every day." What things would

you miss most? Which aspects of civilization would be hardest to rebuild?

5. In Brin's novel, people fight to restore civilization. Is that view of human nature optimistic? Do gloomy post-apocalyptic tales seem more accurate to you? Which is more predominant: cynicism or hope? Which is easier?

6. What skills (weaving, mechanic, preserving) do you have that would be of use in a more primitive society?

7. Gordon knows that he is living a lie. How does he benefit from the charade...and why is it so hard to stop? How does he evolve as a character?

8. How does Brin portray the role of women in this near-feudal society? Do you find this plausible? Describe the new type of feminism that arises. Why does Brin dedicate the book to Lysistrata? Do women have a fundamental role in limiting violence?

7. What is the role of survivalists and anarchists, led by Nathan Holn? How did their actions lead to the collapse of the U.S. government and the isolation of towns? How do they use fear/intimidation to control people?

9. What is the role of Cyclops in the re-birth of technology? What is the parallel with the Oracle of Delphi or the Wizard of Oz?

10. The words "Who will take responsibility?" echo in Gordon's mind. Does he rise to the occasion? What has prepared him to assume the role of commander?

11. The people of the Willamette Valley are inspired by Cyclops and the Restored United States. How fragile, and yet powerful, are these "twin pillars of hope"?

12. Contrast the characters of Abbey and Dena? How do they each challenge the standards of their society?

13. "It's said that 'power corrupts,' but actually it's more true that power attracts the corruptible. The sane are usually attracted to other things than power." How do you interpret this quote?

What is the significance of the Order of Cincinnatus – citizens first, soldiers second?

14. What inspires Powhatan to return to fight? How does he differ from General Macklin?

15. Of the four legends: the Restored United States, Cyclops, Powhatan and Dena's band of women, which do you believe has the most enduring power?

16. How essential are the lines of communication to maintaining civilization? And -- what power comes from controlling access to the news or mail? Do you get your news from just one source?

17. How does technology (its loss and re-building) play a role in the story? Our daily life is ever more intertwined with technological devices. Are there trade-offs? Have we lost something essential as we have become increasingly dependent upon technology?

18. A crisis can bring out the best or the worst in people: How do you maintain a sense of morality when civilization has crumbled? Are standards of morality/ethics less important when people are starving or struggling to survive?

19. From *Mad Max* to *The Road*, movies have offered sobering visions of life after major catastrophe. The world has been flooded (*Waterworld*), destroyed by nuclear war (*The Road Warrior*), decimated by virus (*Twelve Monkeys*, *Aeon Flux*), frozen solid (*The Day After Tomorrow*), and taken over by aliens (*War of the Worlds*), or apes (*Planet of the Apes*). Which are the most realistic threats to our civilization? To our planet? Do we have the ability to prevent such scenarios?

20. Brin refers to the acronym: IAAMOAC (I Am A Member Of A Civilization). What does this express?

21. If you've seen Kevin Costner's version of *The Postman* (Warner Bros.), contrast and compare the book and novel: How did they differ? Which did you prefer? Was Costner believable as the Postman?