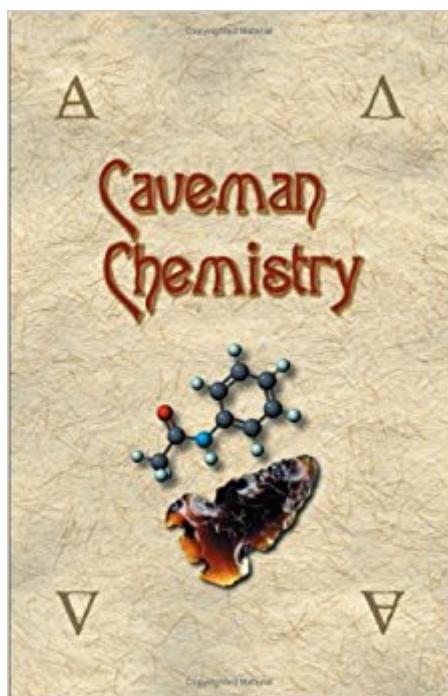


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# Caveman Chemistry: 28 Projects, From The Creation Of Fire To The Production Of Plastics



## **Synopsis**

Half a million years ago our ancestors learned to make fire from scratch. They crafted intricate tools from stone and brewed mind-altering elixirs from honey. Their descendants transformed clay into pottery, wool into clothing, and ashes into cleansers. In ceramic crucibles they won metal from rock, the metals lead to colored glazes and glass. Buildings of brick and mortar enshrined books of parchment and paper. Kings and queens demanded ever more colorful clothing and accessories in order to out-class clod-hoppers and call-girls. Kingdoms rose and fell by the power of saltpeter, sulfur, and charcoal. And the demands of everyday folk for glass and paper and soap stimulated the first round of chemical industrialization. From sulfuric acid to sodium carbonate. From aniline dyes to analgesic drugs. From blasting powder to fertilizers and plastics. In a phrase, From Caveman to Chemist. Your guides on this journey are the four alchemical elements; Fire, Earth, Air and Water. These archetypical characters deliver first-hand accounts of the births of their respective technologies. The spirit of Fire, for example, was born in the first creature to cultivate the flame. This spirit passed from one person to another, from one generation to another, from one millennium to another, arriving at last in the pages of this book. The spirit of Earth taught folks to make tools of stone, the spirit of Air imparted knowledge of units and the spirit of Water began with the invention of spirits. Having traveled the world from age to age, who can say where they will find their next home? Perhaps they will find one in you.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

In Caveman Chemistry, Kevin Dunn presents a historically oriented hands-on introduction to

chemistry and chemical technology that is tremendously entertaining. --

<http://jchemed.chem.wisc.edu/Journal/Issues/2004/Apr/abs490.html> The Journal of Chemical Education

Kevin Dunn is the Elliott Professor of Chemistry at Hampden-Sydney College, where he teaches the course which inspired this book. He holds a BS degree from the University of Chicago and a PhD from the University of Texas at Austin. He appears on The Learning Channel's "Mysteries of Magic" and is co-author of a dozen journal articles in theoretical chemistry. He lives in central Virginia with his wife and several cats.

Idiosyncratic and irreverent, Caveman Chemistry is like no other chemistry textbook that I know of. It is authored not only by Kevin Dunn but also four figments of his imagination who have leapt from mind to mind down through history and do their best to make the leap out of the book and into yours. You learn the history of chemical technology through a series of hands-on projects that demand that you get your hands dirty making things from scratch: fire, paper, glass, soap, batteries, photographs, polyester, and others. The book does not shy away from potentially dangerous projects like making gunpowder, alcohol, and chlorine gas, trusting that readers are capable of all due caution. The book gave me a greater appreciation for the sources for the products that I use on a daily basis. Rather than being conjured out of thin air, the stuff in my life has its origin in the natural world. Now to get my hands dirty...

I'm using this book in a college chemistry class for nonscience majors. Dunn's writing is a bit eccentric, no doubt, but the projects are great and my students are engaged as never before, so--I win! Science books that are intended to be marketed both as trade books and as textbooks generally fail at both. Often the two goals are just incompatible. Dunn has achieved something special here: he has done a nice job of resolving the conflicts between these two goals. The text is rigorous enough to be used in a general-college class, yet accessible to any interested person looking for a nifty science project (or a handbook for surviving the collapse of civilization!)...and as a bonus, it's a great read. In addition he maintains an extremely helpful website for the book; I have learned almost as much about the projects from reading the comments of his students as from reading the book, and having a central place for errata to be posted online is very convenient for my students. I'd love to see a character in the next Mad-Max-style post-apocalypse movie pull out a copy of Caveman Chemistry and start a fire with two sticks, or make soap starting with ashes. But even if civilization

survives, I will take consolation in this: with the projects in this book, we can participate in a tradition of human technology going back 500,000 years.

This is a great book and is more than I expected.

As a current chemistry major with a long and sordid history of odd compounds, this book is a JOY to read even for me. It is this type of writing that truly brings "normal" non-scientific readers into the realm of the laboratory. It is fact and procedure written in a style that is instantly comfortable and reasonably non-technical. As one reviewer stated, THIS is what required reading should be. Everyone is worried about the "brain drain" in the US right now. If books like this were present in the arena of primary education for the last ten years, we wouldn't have anything to worry about. For people that can't immediately "dream this stuff in color" it is books like this that create a first breach in the dam that is our current bureaucratic education system.

This is a junior college chemistry science text book. It is written in a conversational style that keeps your interest. He assigns the four earth signs to an imaginary friend that he has conversations with and the different sections of the book are 'narrated' by. Earth Fire Air Water. It is a fun concept until the four start to have pro and con discussions about certain subjects. :) But the important aspects of the subject are clearly explained along with the cautionary mentions about why a certain approach available was not followed. : if that was was denoted then people could be injured poisoned or disfigured. The book lists typical things that can be done at home using chemistry normally thought of as confined to industry. Fermentation is clearly identified and explained. How to make a plastic out of automotive antifreeze. lots of cool projects that might become useful at some time or other. Lists the chemical name, the grocery store name and where you might find substitutes. In some instances they explain how to make the required item from other readily available things. Too many examples to list. But if this corn farmer can understand the instructions somebody else can also.

I met the author Kevin Dunn at a soap maker's guild conference. He gave such an interesting lecture regarding chemistry that was so hilarious that I had to buy this book for my 14 year old son who was about to take High School Chemistry. (He compared chemical compounds to "nerds and cheerleaders") He read this book over the summer and WOW!! He could not put this book down. He absorbed this book like a sponge and it gave him a great advantage over the other kids in the class. Needless to say, he is "acing" chemistry class. Kevin Dunn is the coolest "nerd" I have ever met!

We just purchased his book "Scientific Soapmaking".....

If you want a book that has everything you wanted to know about creating things this is it. You can learn how to do the basics or buy this book and go beyond what you learn at school and survive anything the world throws at you. This book is fascinating and filled with how to's. Highly recommended.

Honestly this has been one of the most engaging factual books I've ever read. A book like this demonstrates clearly that what many think of as "college level scientific material" is easily digestible by normal humans if it's presented well. The strangeness of a five-voiced book gives way to some genuinely good explanations, and I think even elementary school kids could walk away with a completely PRACTICAL understanding all kinds of stuff that sounds complicated but is actually fairly straightforward: salts/acids/bases/alcohols, metathesis/condensation reactions, etc.

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