



An Optimist's Tour of the Future: One Curious Man Sets Out to Answer "What's Next?"

Mark Stevenson

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In the tradition of Bill Bryson's *A Short History of Nearly Everything*, a smart and entertaining guide to the future of civilization

When unexpectedly confronted with his own mortality, Mark Stevenson- a writer, deep-thinker, and stand-up comedian-began to ponder what the future holds for our species. "The past is a foreign country," writes Stevenson. "By my analysis it's a bit like France-in that I've been to parts of it and eaten some nice food there. But the future? The future is an unknown territory-and there isn't a guidebook." Thus, his ambition was born.

Stevenson set out simply, asking, "What's next?" and then traveled the globe in pursuit of the answers. Along the way, he visited the Australian outback to visit the farmers who can save us from climate change, met a robot with mood swings, and talked to the Spaniard who's putting a hotel in space. While some might be overwhelmed, or even dismayed by the looming realities of genome sequencing, synthetic biology, a nuclear renaissance, and carbon scrubbing, Stevenson remains, well, optimistic. Drawing on his singular humor and storytelling to break down these sometimes complicated discoveries, *An Optimist's Tour of the Future* paints a wonderfully readable, and completely enthralling portrait of where we'll be when we grow up- and why it's not so scary.

Watch a Video

An Optimist's Tour of the Future: One Curious Man Sets Out to Answer "What's Next?" Details

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From Reader Review An Optimist's Tour of the Future: One Curious Man Sets Out to Answer "What's Next?" for online ebook

Peter Marendéak says

Viszonylag az elején, a genetikai résznél megbillent a bizalmam a könyvvel kapcsolatban, mert konkrétan valótlanságot állított. Nem tudom, a többi részben mennyi csúsztatás volt (bár nem értem, miért volt rá szükség, mert nem volt rá szükség az igaza bizonyításához). De a szerz? stílusa baromi szórakoztató és izgalmas, fontos témakat feszít. Jó lenne egy rövid tanulmány, hogy a kötetben említett projektek azóta hol tartanak.

John says

I was unsure about this and put off by the jaunty style, but nevertheless some of the people he talks to and the innovations he explains are interesting. The problem is that, while he does explain the context of (for example) the threat posed by climate change, he doesn't really assess how realistic the claims are for the various innovations that will supposedly enable us to successfully face it. He appears to conclude that combating climate change is a piece of cake. I suspect his optimism is a bit overdone.

Andy Wilkins says

Honestly, I did not finish this book so I can't give it a full review- this is just for my own records. This book has an interesting premise: finding various perspicacious individuals involved in designing technology to improve the state of the world in the future. Whilst I found this aspect interesting and I wanted to follow up with what progress these developments had made since the book was published, I couldn't stand the style of writing. Stevenson has tried to develop this "blokeish" style of writing, peppered with irritating trivia, unnecessary details (about the scientists' appearance or presumed characters) and worst of all, deeply deeply unfunny jokes. I tried to skip over all that shit to access the information of his research but I just found it too aggravating. Due to the nature of the information, the book would have been so much better (and shorter) had it been written in a more formal style.

Carole Davis says

Fear of the unknown, aka-the future, is a trap that we should avoid and Mark's book goes a long way to giving us reason to hope for the best. Although it was published several years ago the concepts and insights remain current. On the downside, I quickly tired of his overuse of parenthetical references. I'm surprised that his editor gave him such leeway. Editing as I read is a nasty habit that I can't seem to break.

B. Rule says

This felt like a very superficial tour of a number of technologies likely to play a large role in the near future. However, the author lacked any special insight and often got very obvious things wrong. Once he told me Aristotle was a student of Socrates, I checked out, never to fully return. While the topic (to the extent there is one) is interesting, this book was only marginally worth reading.

anna b says

This book is published in 2011 and gives an introduction on new technologies and innovations at the edge during that time. They have progressed and a lot of them have been realised. If you are reading it now, expecting something new out of it, then you've made a wrong judgement. It's a good read and explains concepts in very layman terms. If you are expecting deeper dives, it will take a few books to tell you everything. It's a decent book for starters and my only gripe is that the humour makes light of many things in the book. Not exactly British wit at all.

Eric Randolph says

Since I read it alongside John Gray and Michel Houellebecq I found his relentless optimism about new technologies misguided - or even dangerously hubristic - but it was also a bit of a jaunty antidote to all that misery and a reminder that people find very inventive ways to pootle away their time.

Robert says

For anyone genuinely interested in science, save your cash and subscribe to the Beano. It's less bland, contains better science and is funnier. The author does not appear to be an expert on science: rather, just some bloke who's been paid to go to go round the world doing fun things and exclaiming how "cool" they are. You can tune into a holiday programme on TV if you want see that - it'll be more relevant. If the future holds more banal ways to waste your cash like this one, I for one am not feeling too optimistic.

Charlie says

If you want inspiration of ideas that are going to change our world , and you want something that challenges the view that everything in the world is getting worse this is the book for you.
And if you want to change things Mark Stevensons League of Pragmatic Optimists is worth a look too.

David C. Mueller says

This is one of the most optimistic books I have ever read. It is clearly stated on the cover of the book that the author is not science expert but rather a layman. While I knew some of the material, I appreciated the review. The material that was new to me I found astounding. Some aspects of the book are indeed scary, even disturbing, but new developments in science and technology often are, especially to those of us who are no

longer young. You do not have to agree with all the folks interviewed to be inspired that these are positive-minded people dedicated to making our lives better. If you are already knowledgeable about recent development in science and technology, then this book may not be for you. But if you are like me, interested in science and technology but not always up to speed on the latest developments, then there is a lot of great stuff here to ponder.

Abby says

I wasn't sure what this book was going to be about exactly. Initially I was bored but I found myself being intrigued more and more with each page. This is science for the future for the general population. You will be bored if you are well versed in nanotechnology, robotics, genetics, etc. We have the impossible being built all over the country its pretty amazing what we as a species have accomplished in 100 years. The future is bright and perhaps those dystopian novels can take note: for every mad scientists with questionable morals there is another one trying to save the world.

Vladimir Mironov says

A wonderful collection of stories about most promising technological breakthroughs and their creators. It does indeed help create an optimistic sense about the future, helping one reassert an impatient desire to live in it.

Lins says

Need some interesting dinner conversation? This is your new best friend.
A funny and intellectually stimulating book that I keep returning to time and again.

Niall Teasdale says

I picked this book up because I'm writing some sci-fi books at the moment and, let's face it, most futurology is, at best, pessimistic. Of course, a great deal of sci-fi is pretty pessimistic too, but I didn't want that. Also, this is written by a guy who used to be a stand-up comedian, not a scientist, so I figured it would be both humorous and relatively down to earth. All good things.

It's quite an enjoyable listen. I suspect the delivery is better coming from the guy who wrote the book than just reading it, but YMMV. Stevenson has a fairly dry humour, which I enjoy.

Of course, the book is out of date. The author acknowledges the fact that his work is a snapshot of a moment of the changes in the world. Things are changing so fast that anything more is difficult. It does give a snapshot of some very interesting potential future technologies and a view on how to deal with them all.

If you like your future dark and corporate, a bit like Alien, don't read this. If you want to think the future

could be bright, do.

Avian Jun says

For the uninformed (like me) this was a great book that covered most of the topics listed on the back of the book with enough depth to make you sound like you know something. At parts it was a little dry, but that is mostly due to my lack of patience with non-fiction titles. As non-fiction titles go, this was one of the funnier and more interesting ones to read.
