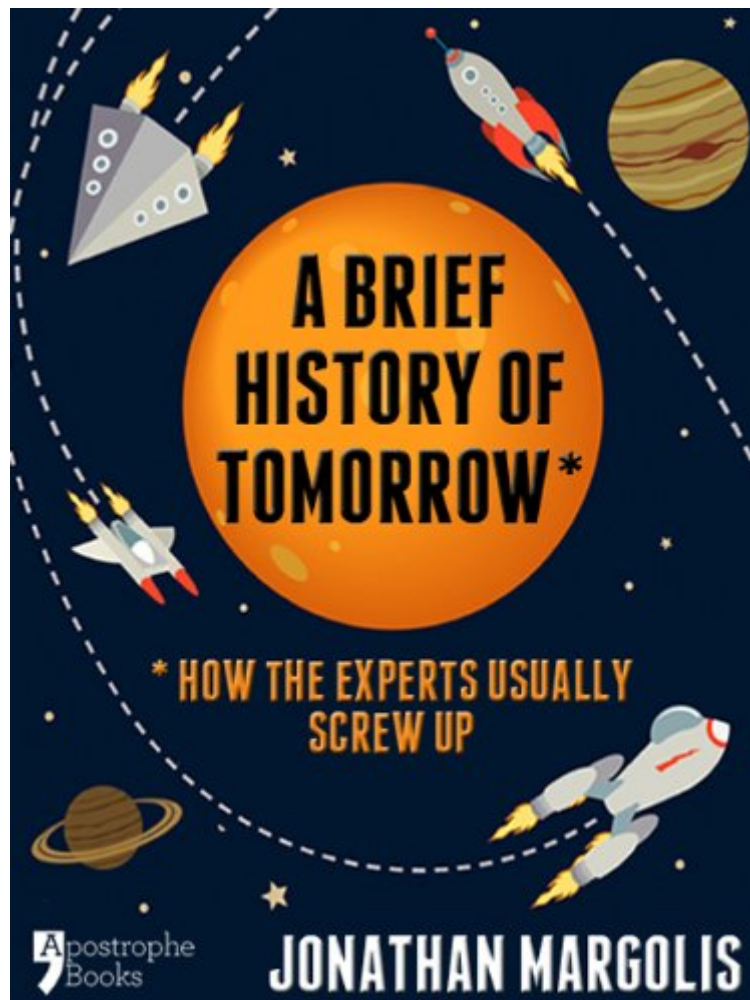




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A Brief History Of Tomorrow: How The Experts Usually Screw Up (Future Forecasting)



Synopsis

A fascinating look at the future, as you've never seen it. Ten years from now, will we have a tiny personal computer surgically inserted in an earlobe, capable of connecting to phone lines and the internet? Fifty years from now, will atomic-sized robots replace surgeons? A hundred years from now, instead of taking the bus, will we simply teleport to work? It all may sound like impossible science fiction, but not too long ago, so did walking on the moon. Journalist Jonathan Margolis interviews leading thinkers in such fields as genetics, medicine, neurobiology, quantum physics, robotics, computer science, and space travel to explore where we're going, and what it will look like when - and if - we get there. Beginning with famously flawed past visions of the future - among them H.G. Wells, George Orwell, Arthur C. Clarke, Stephen Hawking, and Bill Gates - Margolis examines many of the strange and tempting futures that may lie in store for us. Politics, society, religion, and work are all destined for great changes. What might they be? How will they come about? Thought-provoking, amusing, and absolutely original, *A Brief History of Tomorrow* is a deliciously compelling look at something we all spend a lot of time contemplating: the future.

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Customer Reviews

The beginning of the book reminds me of "A Brief History of the Future" by Oona Strathern. Although the book reads well and quickly, but how vacuumed article. Margolis focuses on curiosities, presents a range of forecasts and predictions, but does not analyze their causes and influences. About the methods is only a brief mention. The author devotes separate chapters to forecasts related to the environment, the human body, work and entertainment, then politics, travel and transport. Prognosis is often interwoven threads of SciFi. The book loosely ties in to a professional prognosis and has little in common with strategic foresight. "A Brief History of Tomorrow" by Jonathan Margolis is an extensive article about the future projections for the layman in book form.

The book takes a tour through what might be expected in the future according to various futurologists: academic scholars, technologist, and writers. It looks at what the past futurologists have successfully predicted, and then at what is presently predicted, and to extant whether the author thinks they will be right. The author is Jonathan Maroglis, a journalist for some of Britain's foremost magazines. After covering the past futurologists and their predictions, Margolis moves on to the present futurologists. He goes on to discuss the possible future of the environment, including global warming, pollution, and natural disasters, such as an asteroid strike or a super volcano eruption. Following this he goes over the future of the human body with a discussion of genetic engineering. The next topic is the future of the human mind, including artificial intelligence, and the possible merging of mind and machine. The future of home and work is next. How will we work, and how we will live are looked at. The next area of discussion is the future of leisure, involving how paradoxically we will both work more and have more time for leisure. The future of politics and society may well be more democracy and globalization spurred on by American culture. In the future travel maybe similar to what we have today with maybe human exploration of Mars. The final frontier would be spirituality, which may gain from the emptiness of future life with machines in charge and to much leisure time for succeeding generations. Sometimes I wish he had got the science better. In a section devote to the advancement of women in society it is said that women have a greater role due to greater reliance on the visual today. While the role of women and the advancement of video may proceed at the same time, it probably has very little cause and effect relationship. His reliance on Leonard Shlain's claim that men's brains are more written language oriented, and women's brains are more visually oriented does not hold up to what is known in neuroscience. The other major qualm is his claim that global warming due to

human greenhouse emissions does not have a scientific consensus behind it is wrong. 97% of climate scientists believe there to be a human influence in global warming. What is not exactly in agreement is what the climate changes will actually be, but the prediction that there will be changes is not in dispute. Again he relies on climate change deniers whose presentation of the data is shown to be wrong. Granted that environmental doom has been forecast before without the anticipate disastrous outcomes coming to fruition, and the possibility of human mitigation, which has been done before in other environmental issues, today's mankind does not look at the moment that they will correct and mitigate the climate change before some of the consequences come about. The book is somewhat dated (2000), so some the stuff predicted to occur by now has not in fact come true. Space exploration is one. There is no Europa Ocean Observer (2007) or Mars Sample Return Missions (2008). There is one thing that I thought about when reading about strong artificial intelligence (AI). The speed and storage capacities of computers has kept up with predictions about its growth, but getting human intelligence out of them has not gotten very much closer. This is fine with me, since what do we need computers to think like humans for anyway? I mean we already have humans for that. I think there are two reasons for why strong AI has not come about, or is even close. One reason is that programmers just have not figured out how to write the necessary software, so hardware is not really the issue at all. But, the major reason, and it explains the software failure, is humans might not really think in language. Programming is done through a language. If not thinking in language is really true, then the hopes of obtaining strong AI by this path is a dead end street. I found the book to be good overall, but not that good. I guess I am losing my taste for future studies. Margolis' evaluation of some futurologists' predictions does show he does not just accept these individuals' claims. He explores why their predictions might not come about. He is also a good writer, and his narrative flows well. The book should be of interest for those who are curious about what the future might bring, so I recommend it in this regard. It is good for those not already up on the science because Margolis does a pretty good job explaining it. For those that already have reading experience in science one could interact with that science with questions or objections of their own. One objection I have when it comes to technological predictions is what I call the technological bottleneck. Will the energy and materials be found to see these predictions through or will there even be enough money to invest for it will probably be very expensive, and we can't even find the money to invest in worthwhile scientific exploration. Can people really be expected to provide a multiple billion dollar program to land humans on Mars, let alone ongoing missions. Privatization might be an answer, but don't count on it.

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