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Year Million: Science at the Far Edge of Knowledge



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Year Million: Science at the Far Edge of Knowledge

Leading and up-and-coming scientists and science writers cast their minds one million years into the future to imagine the fate of the human and/or extraterrestrial galaxy. This volume of fifteen new, specially commissioned essays by notable journalists and scholars such as Rudy Rucker, Jim Holt, and Gregory Benford presents a series of speculations on the most radical but well-grounded ideas they can conceive, projecting the universe as it might be in the year 1,000,000 C.E. Their collective effort—first attempted by H. G. Wells in his 1893 essay "The Man of the Year Million"—is an exploration into a barely conceivable distant future, where the authors confront far-flung p

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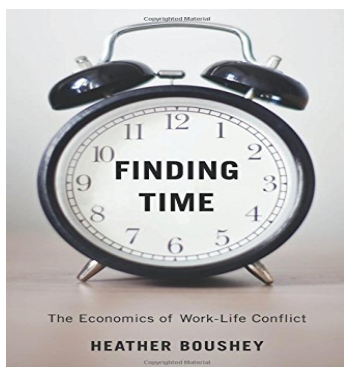
Seven Days Dead: A Thriller (The Storm Murders Trilogy)

During an epic storm in the Gulf of Maine a lone woman races--first by car, then by a life-threatening sea crossing--to the island of Grand Manan. Her father is dying? will she make it in time? Others also venture out into the maelstrom that night, including a mysterious band of men and women



A Downtown Manhattan Love Affair

Two young turn of the 20th Century love birds meet on a train heading to Manhattan's Lower East Side, and a relationship ensues between them.



Finding Time: The Economics of Work-Life Conflict

Employers today are demanding more and more of employees' time. And from campaign barbecues to the blogosphere, workers across the United States are raising the same worried question: How can I get ahead at my job while making sure my family doesn't fall behind? Heather Boushey argues



Theory of Identities

François Laruelle proposes a theory of identity rooted in scientific notions of symmetry and chaos, emancipating thought from the philosophical paradigm of Being and reconnecting it with the real world. Unlike most contemporary philosophers, Laruelle does not believe language, history, and the

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What others say about this ebook:

Review 1:

Amazing and thoughtful. We should all be thinking about the future further afield.

Review 2:

Having spent a whole lot of time thinking about the distant future, I found Broderick's compilation of fourteen essays exploring the topic to be too limited in scope for my liking. The vast majority of the discussions either stay so deadly cautious with their grounding in present reality as to be of little interest, or they leap headlong into the half-century-old Freeman Dyson visions of man as a plundering wave of barbarians hurtling clumsily across the cosmos, answering to some implicit call of 'manifest destiny'.

Hello! There are just a few other basic paths we ought to be exploring! I took my own cue about the future from successful species on our planet. What will Year Million look like for sharks? For cockroaches? Well, unless the tech-drunken barbarians dismantle the whole planet in order to feed their insatiable, energy-gluttonous Matrioshka Brains, Year Million is going to be pretty much business as usual. I'm betting against the barbarians.

Yes, that is my biggest complaint: the lack of consideration of sustainability is repeatedly rubbed in the reader's faces. There's Stephen B. Harris' concept of raping the universe to bring back deuterium for fusion fuel, or Robin Hanson's exploration of the escalating race to be the first to exploit new star systems, in which he explicitly refuses to consider what the settled culture behind the frontier might look like. Then there's this gem from Wil McCarthy: "It's hard to say exactly what our descendants will use their energy for, but it's a safe bet they'll use a lot of it, and will be hungry--always insatiably hungry--for more. Some things never change."

And what about the Dystopian and post-Apocalyptic alternatives in which the barbarians get their just deserts--totally missing from the discussion. My personal vision could be considered a post-Apocalyptic solution with a generally serene outcome--that is, until our post-human rivals start stirring up trouble. So there's yet another topic entirely ignored: species radiation out of the parent human stock.

With all its shortcomings, the book does occasionally stretch one's mind. Everybody is likely to find something worth more thought. I learned a few useful things about simulated reality. It turns out that our reality is not likely to be a simulation in somebody's Matrioshka Brain Virtual Reality game - thanks, Rudy Rucker. Then there was the realization--extrapolated from Sean M. Carroll's essay on entropy--that "Complexity" always seems to be at its peak in the present moment. If this idea can be elevated to an axiom, it implies real truths about the symmetry of past and future and their roles in our perception of reality. Quantum uncertainty insists that the past is just as malleable as the future--we define them both based on what we choose to observe and on what we choose to ignore or fail to observe. Ultimately, the Year Million is not just something for idle armchair speculators to toy with--it's a full-contact, participatory sport.

Review 3:

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The difficulty about this sort of essay collection is to get people with the necessary expertise to contribute, and to take the necessary time and trouble over their work. Looking at the CV 's, one has to some extent to take this on trust. But Broderick appears to be a responsible person and I

am inclined to think he has carefully excluded phonies. With that minor reservation, I am impressed. Some folk with no or little knowledge of, for example, human evolution will if they read this (unlikely) be shaken by it. It is a short course in where we may be heading by reason of our collective scientific expertise. Those who have no notion of this topic may find much of it hard to believe. But most of those inclined to get Broderick's book will find useful instruction in it.

Review 4:

This book was quite interesting...and it will likely stretch any reader's mind. As one reviewer noted earlier, "human" life will, essentially, be unrecognizable in Year Million relative to today's humans (assuming, of course, humans survive that long). I think the word used by the reviewer was that humans will be like we might imagine "aliens" to be like (only much, much stranger).

One striking characteristic of this book is that the various authors' speculations about Year Million seem so plausible.

The disturbing aspect of this book is that Year Million human life will be, well, unrecognizable! Pretty much every human activity done today will likely not be done by Year Million humans (or humans' progeny). None of the many and various things humans do for entertainment today will likely be done by Year Million humans (at least not in the same recognizable form). Camping, music, sports, boating, horseback riding, photography, reading, computer games, sewing...pretty much everything a person can imagine for a pastime today will likely be no longer done in Year Million.

To future humans, the world will seem "normal," I'm sure. But a modern-day human would likely find the Year Million frightening, foreign, and incomprehensible. All of the things we find fun or entertaining and all of the things we find interesting or important (religion, for example) will likely no longer exist.

So, while the book is disturbing (or at least I found it so), it is also intriguing and fascinating.

I recommend it.

Review 5:

A million years ago, homo sapiens didn't exist. A mere ten thousand years ago we hadn't even started our first cities.

Yet today, we cover the globe and have even ventured into space.

What will the next million years bring? As the fourteen essayists of this book readily admit, they don't know. But they have made some interesting educated guesses.

The first of those guesses is the answer to the obvious question: Will humans even be around in Year One Million?

In answering in the affirmative, the essayists have focused on the so called Copernican Hypothesis. Noted for first publishing in the west that the Earth revolves around the sun (the information was less controversial and more readily understood in the Moslem world) since ancient Greece, Copernicus essentially made the point that of two propositions that one that implies a more mundane state is probably the better theory.

In other words, if as he did, Copernicus was to compare two systems...one of which said that all creation revolved around the Earth and the other which posited a more humble status for our planet...then logic dictated the more mundane of the two assumptions to be true.

Applied to the existence of man, the Copernican hypothesis says that if we're around to observe the existence of man then there's nothing special about our status. That means that we are either witnesses to the very early history of man...say in the first five percent of its existence or alternatively we're witnesses to the last five percent of its existence. Running the numbers five percent translates into a division or multiplication by 39 giving mankind an upper limit of another eleven million years to exist...well beyond the Year Million contemplated in this book.

Proceeding from the question of existence to the questions of what that existence will involve comprises the rest of this volume.

According to some of the writers we will become pure thought and develop the capacity to control not only our sun but our galaxy and maybe our universe as well.

Frankly who knows whether we'll be around or what our lives will be like. A million years IS a very long time indeed.

But it is interesting to wonder and frankly the assumption by all these authors that we'll survive our problems with pollution and violence is heartening.

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