

MISSING FUTURE PAGE 1

Can you think of any inventions that we were promised which never actually came to fruition?

Listen to the report and make notes on the things depicted below.



Discussion Which of the inventions do you think would be worth developing? What inventions do you think we will see in the next 50 years that will change our lives?

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Teacher's notes

Total pages 2 / student pages 1 / week of 21.05.07 / CD track 4 / advanced

TRANSCRIPT

SCOTT SIMON, host: What an age we're living in. People on opposite sides of the planet can communicate instantaneously by voice, text and image. You can begin the day in Bali and end it in Boston. Your cat can order a thousand dollars worth of cosmetics and have it delivered the next day just with your credit card. But what happens to the future that was supposed to be that we've already seen in science fiction? Jetpacks and robot assistants and "beam me up, Scottie." Daniel Wilson is a roboticist who's written a new book "Where's My Jetpack?: A Guide to the Amazing Science Fiction Future That Never Arrived." He joins us from Oregon Public Broadcasting in Portland. Mr. Wilson, thanks very much for being with us.

Mr. DANIEL WILSON (Author, "My Jetpack?: A Guide to the Amazing Science Fiction Future That Never Arrived"): Thank you for having me.

SIMON: So what happened to all that stuff, like the jetpack, I mean, what people were afraid of burning their clothes off or something?

Mr. WILSON: A jetpack was designed in 1961 by a guy named Wendell Moore on an Army grant. You know, it took him less than a year to design a rocket that you could strap to your back and fly in the air with for 30 seconds. When the Army decided that they had no real use for this, the funding stopped and that was pretty much the end of the jetpack except for copycats. So a lot of times, it not only requires a lot of people being very interested, but also a lot of money, and that means a practical application that doesn't, you know, kill pedestrians.

SIMON: Yeah, but why did Smell-O-Vision not quite take off?

Mr. WILSON: Smell-O-Vision came out and it was essentially a series of tubes that went through a movie theater that piped in smells at key moments during a movie called the "Scent of Mystery." And just by smelling, you could actually solve the mystery, you know, if you were paying attention to it you could figure out who did it. The problem is that it really stank up the theaters and it was hard to get the smells back out.

SIMON: With the honorable exception of the great Ted Williams, why don't more people have their heads frozen?

Mr. WILSON: It's what's called a proto-science. This is why people don't have their heads frozen and that's by the way called neurosuspension. This is defined as a science where they can get started now and then they'll figure it out later. It makes a great investment scheme. You say you give me the money now. I promise that in the future someone will figure this out. But the problem is no one is motivated to figure out how to revive a corpsicle right because there's no money in that, you know?

SIMON: Yeah.

Mr. WILSON: The money is in maintaining frozen corpses, but that hasn't stopped hundreds of people.

SIMON: Oh, that's right. Once you revive them, they - once you revive them, the monthly payment expires, right?

Mr. WILSON: Yeah. So count me out of neurosuspension because, you know, I don't see any motivation for the company to actually revive me, and there's definitely no motivation for them to pursue the science even to revive me.

SIMON: Now 30 years ago, people might have projected that you would be interviewed at this point by a dolphin because communication between men and dolphins was considered to be proceeding apace. So what, what happened to dolphins as our new best buddies?

Mr. WILSON: In the '70s, there was a huge amount of interest in dolphins as this new, sort of, sentient creature that we were going to share the Earth with. They are very intelligent. Sometimes they operate in pods of about a dozen dolphins but sometimes they'll combine into super pods with thousands of dolphins at once, and so there was a lot of interest. And in fact, there was a guy named John Lilly, who in the '60s, set up an experiment where he had a woman by the name of Margaret Howe who lived with a dolphin named Peter in a partially flooded house for an entire summer. And they were teaching the dolphin how to use its echolocation and its speaking - to actually speak human words that a person could understand, and the dolphin did eventually learn how to say a few words. Of course, the whole relationship got a little bit scandalous between the woman and the dolphin and...

SIMON: Do I want to know what you mean?

Mr. WILSON: Yeah - no, no, I don't think that you do.

SIMON: Oh, my word. Daniel H. Wilson, thanks very much for being with us.

Mr. WILSON: Thanks for having me.

SIMON: His new book, "Where's my Jetpack?: A Guide to the Amazing Science Fiction Future That Never Arrived."

Mr. MARVIN MILLER (Actor): (As "Robby the Robot") Welcome to Altair 4, gentlemen. I am at your disposal with 187 other languages, along with their various dialects and sub-tongues. For your convenience, I am monitored to respond to the name Robby.