

# FUTUREtakes

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### *The Other Side of the Future!*

#### **Future Lite**

by Lindan Lee Johnson



Welcome to **Future-Lite**. No topic is too small, no trivia too trivial, and no fact too unfounded if it can possibly provide entertainment or enlightenment for our readers.

Today's column is dedicated to every brave and fearless Futurist who has ever found himself or herself trapped in a room filled with the horrible, the terrible, the hideous, the soul-sucking **Subject Matter Experts!**

These SMEs (*pronounced shrilly as SMEEEEEEEEEEEEEs*) are the same cretinous creatures that would respond to your amazing, brilliant, awe-inspiring presentation with something profound like:

*"That boat will never float."*

And then they would laugh uproariously, congratulating each other in the triumph of the status quo and say something witty like:

*"Okay, enough fantasy, Future Girl, let's get back to the Real World."*

Please note: This experience has absolutely nothing to do with a certain meeting that I happened to be at yesterday. I would never ever abuse the power of the press for my own selfish reasons... unless they were very very good reasons.

However, it still provides an excellent opportunity for us to take a moment to reflect on the reality checks provided by other Subject Matter Experts in other conference rooms along the time-space continuum.

#### **CULTURE**

**1486:** "...so many centuries after the Creation it is unlikely that anyone could find hitherto unknown lands of any value." Committee advising King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella regarding a proposal by Christopher Columbus

**1905:** "Sensible and responsible women do not want to vote." Grover Cleveland, former U.S. President

**1929** *"Stock prices have reached what looks like a permanently high plateau."* Yale University Professor of Economics Irving Fisher, two weeks prior to the stock market crash and the start of the Great Depression

**1944:** *"You better learn secretarial work or else get married."* The director of Blue Book Modeling Agency advising Marilyn Monroe

**1954:** *"You ain't going nowhere, son. You ought to go back to driving a truck."* Jim Denny, manager of the Grand Ole Opry, in firing Elvis Presley after a performance

**1967:** *"If anything remains more or less unchanged, it will be the role of women."* Social scientist David Riesman

**1962:** *"We don't like their sound, and guitar music is on the way out anyway."* President of Decca Records, rejecting the Beatles in 1962

## SPACE

**1921:** New York Times editorial about Robert Goddard's revolutionary rocket work: *"Professor Goddard does not know the relation between action and reaction and the need to have something better than a vacuum against which to react. He seems to lack the basic knowledge ladled out daily in high schools."* Note that the day after Armstrong walked on the moon in 1969, the New York Times printed a short-boxed item on page 2. It read in full: ***"Errata: It has now been conclusively demonstrated that a rocket ship can travel through the vacuum of space. The Times sincerely regrets the error."***

**1936:** *"A rocket will never be able to leave the earth's atmosphere."* New York Times

**1956:** *"Space travel is utter bilge."* Dr. Richard van der Reit Wooley, Astronomer Royal, UK space advisor to the government, the prior to Sputnik orbiting the earth

**1957** (two weeks before Sputnik orbited the Earth): *"Space travel is bunk."* – Sir Harold Spencer Jones, Astronomer Royal of the UK

## MEDICAL

**1830s:** *"Rail travel at high speeds is not possible because passengers, unable to breathe, would die of asphyxia."* Dionysius Lardner (1793-1859), Professor of Natural Philosophy and Astronomy at University College, London, and author of *The Steam Engine Explained and Illustrated*

**1873:** *"The abdomen, the chest, and the brain will forever be shut from the intrusion of the wise and humane surgeon."* Sir John Eric Ericksen, British surgeon, appointed Surgeon-Extraordinary to Queen Victoria

**1839:** *"The abolishment of pain in surgery is a chimera. It is absurd to go on seeking it. . . . Knife and pain are two words in surgery that must forever be associated in the consciousness of the patient."* Dr. Alfred Velpeau, French surgeon

**1954:** On smoking: *"If excessive smoking actually plays a role in the production of lung cancer, it seems to be a minor one."* W.C. Heuper, National Cancer Institute

## TECHNOLOGY

**1876:** *"The Americans have need of the telephone, but we do not. We have plenty of messenger boys."* Sir William Preece, Chief Engineer, British Post Office

**1901:** *"I am tired of all this sort of thing called science here ... We have spent millions in that sort of thing for the last few years, and it is time it should be stopped."* U.S. Senator Simon Cameron, on the Smithsonian Institute

**1901:** *"Man will not fly for 50 years."* Wilbur Wright, to brother Orville after a disappointing flying experiment two years prior to their first successful flight in 1903

**1908:** *"I confess that in 1901 I said to my brother Orville that man would not fly for fifty years. Two years later we ourselves made flights. This demonstration of my impotence as a prophet gave me such a shock that ever since I have distrusted myself and avoided all predictions."* Wilbur Wright in a speech to the Aero Club of France

**1909:** *"That the automobile has practically reached the limit of its development is suggested by the fact that during the past year no improvements of a radical nature have been introduced."* Scientific American, Jan. 2, 1909

**1921:** *"The wireless music box has no imaginable commercial value. Who would pay for a message sent to nobody in particular?"* Radio pioneer David Sarnoff

**1922:** *"The radio craze will die out in time."* Thomas Edison, 1922

**1927:** *"Who the hell wants to hear actors talk?"* H.M. Warner, Warner Brothers

**1842:** *"I watched his countenance closely, to see if he was not deranged ... and I was assured by other senators after he left the room that they had no confidence in it."* U.S. Senator Smith of Indiana, after witnessing a demonstration of Samuel Morse's telegraph

**1943:** *"I think there is a world market for maybe five computers."* Thomas Watson, Chairman of IBM

**1946:** *"Television won't last because people will soon get tired of staring at a plywood box every night."* Darryl Zanuck, Movie Producer, 20th Century Fox

**1949:** *"Computers in the future may weigh no more than 1.5 tons."* Popular Mechanics, forecasting the relentless march of science

**1959:** *"The world potential market for copying machines is 5000 at most."* IBM to the founders of Xerox, 1959

**1968:** *"But what ... is it good for?"* Engineer at the Advanced Computing Systems Division of IBM, commenting on the microchip.

And finally, I offer a toast to one of my favorite Subject Matter Expert's predictions:

**1981:** *"640K ought to be enough for anybody."* Bill Gates

*Note: Please feel free to send in your favorite quotes, predictions, anecdotes, topic du jour, scandals, pet peeves, gossip and rumors and you may find yourself captured in Future Lite!*