

Coming Convergence



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Imagine direct communication links between the human brain and machines, or tailored materials capable of adapting by themselves to changing environmental conditions, or computer chips and environmental sensors embedded into everyday clothing, or medical technologies that eliminate currently untreatable conditions such as blindness and paralysis. Now, imagine all of these developments occurring at the same time. The stuff of science fiction? Not So. These are actually the reasonable predictions of scientists attempting to forecast a few decades into the future based on the rapid pace of innovation. Author Stanley Schmidt-a physicist, a writer, and the editor of "Analog: Science Fiction and Fact" - explores these and many more amazing yet probable scenarios in this fascinating guide to the near future. He shows how past convergences have led to today's world, then considers tomorrow's main currents in biotechnology, cognitive science, information technology, and nanotechnology. Looking even further downstream he foresees both exciting and potentially dangerous developments: longer, healthier lives; cheap, generally available food, energy, and technology; reduced pollution and environmental stress; economic disruption during transitional periods; excessive power in too few hands; and, increased vulnerability from over-dependence on technology. Schmidt notes that even a routine technology such as the CAT scan is the result of three wholly separate innovations started many decades ago which recently converged: the X-ray, the computer, and advances in medicine. On a more ominous note, he also observes that the 9/11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center was made possible by the malicious convergence of two separate trends in modern engineering and technology: the concentration of people in high rises within cities and the success of the passenger airline industry. The message is clear: the choices we make now will converge to create a near and distant future that will be almost unbelievably wonderful or unimaginably catastrophic, or both. This knowledgeable, fascinating glimpse into the future is a must read for everyone interested in technology, upcoming innovations in business, science fiction, and the future.

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