



# **The Fate of the Species: Why the Human Race May Cause Its Own Extinction and How We Can Stop It**

*Fred Guterl*

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## **The Fate of the Species: Why the Human Race May Cause Its Own Extinction and How We Can Stop It** Fred Guterl

The sixth "mass extinction event" in the history of planet Earth is currently under way, with over two hundred species dying off every day. The cause of this seismic event is also the source of the single biggest threat to human life: our own inventions.

But for all our talk about sea levels and biotechnology, do we really know what our future will actually look like? Will our immune systems be attacked by so-called super bugs, always evolving, and more easily spread than ever? Will the disappearance of numerous species cripple the biosphere? And if it does, what happens then? In this provocative, gripping book, *Scientific American* editor Fred Guterl explores these and other looming scenarios in vivid detail—the way they might really happen—and then proffers the means to avoid them.

We find ourselves in a trap: Technology got us into this mess, and it's also the only thing that can help us survive it. Guterl's riveting book is a grand and necessary thought experiment, not merely a scary story, but a fresh perspective on the world we're remaking, and a route to safe harbor.

## **The Fate of the Species: Why the Human Race May Cause Its Own Extinction and How We Can Stop It Details**

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## From Reader Review The Fate of the Species: Why the Human Race May Cause Its Own Extinction and How We Can Stop It for online ebook

### Lori says

I thought this book was very informative about how people may very well engineer their own destruction. However, there is a frustration factor to this book -- the fact that people are unwilling to change their behaviors even if it will save their lives (or the lives of future generations, but who cares about them?). It's depressing to know that at least one of the things outlined in this book will happen, some more probable than others.

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### Todd Martin says

Cheery topics within *The Fate of the Species: Why the Human Race May Cause Its Own Extinction and How We Can Stop It*, include such things as: a global pandemic caused by a newly evolved supervirus, global warming raising sea levels 20 feet - flooding cities and altering weather patterns, ecosystem collapse due to species extinction, a terrorist event using a bio-engineered virus (which is quite similar to a pandemic actually), and a computer virus that shuts down the electrical grid. Contrary to the book's subtitle, however, exactly none of these things would result in the extinction of the humans species (leading one to believe that the hyperbolic text is more sales gimmick than descriptor), though they could certainly cause turmoil, death and destruction.

Through science, humans have gained increased power over the planet and its environment, although as we've seen time and again, the unintended consequences of progress tend to catch us by surprise in our headlong quest for new technologies. Aerosol sprays and refrigerants deplete the ozone layer, coal combustion produces acid rain, introduced species destroy natural ecosystems and the addition of lead to gasoline causes learning disabilities. You'd think by now that people would be tired of playing catch-up and learn to anticipate potential problems arising from technology ahead of time, but perhaps that's too much to ask. "Cleverness is not wisdom." as Euripides once wrote.

While I find the topic of technology gone awry of interest, there's really nothing new to be found in *The Fate of the Species*, and I learned very little. Anyone who has followed the news in a peripheral fashion will already be familiar with global warming and pandemics. Environmental organizations have been raising warnings regarding ecosystem collapse and the dangers of mono-culture for years and Stuxnet (the computer virus aimed at Iran's nuclear program) has received considerable press of late. In addition, there have been no technological or political changes that would warrant a re-evaluation of these issues or cause us to view them in a new light. Add to this the fact that Guterl's coverage of these topics is entirely conventional, and all we are left with are the reheated leftovers of information that is available elsewhere.

The book also purportedly provides information as to "How We Can Stop" the complete annihilation of every last human, including you and everyone you know and love (something that might be considered to be of some importance). But, as is typical of the genre, a few trite and simplistic 'solutions' are tacked on to the end of the book as if as an afterthought.

Although the book is reasonably interesting and easy to understand, it is perplexing as to why Guterl bothered to write it given that he has so little to add to the conversation.

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### **Patrick G. says**

It was a very good summary of the threats to humankind. Good scientific and smart discussion for a layperson. Not a zombie book - the author is a smart reporter. It reads more like a collection of investigative research into various threats.

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### **Sunset says**

Interesting and easy to read, Guterl describes six areas of potential catastrophe: super viruses, extinction, climate change, ecosystems, synthetic biology, and machines. He found that most of the scientists he talked to believe the most immediate threat to mankind's survival is biology/viruses! Of course the borders aren't firm and to be weakened on one front leaves us vulnerable to all threats against life on earth as we now enjoy it, or don't depending on what economic and/or mental shoes you are currently walking in. So with impending doom just a sneeze away, or several degrees warmer, or malware knocking out the electrical grid, or collapse of food crops due to narrow genetic base, drought, or, etc., this book makes for good reading if you are not squeamish.

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### **Lynn Demarest says**

A well-written rundown of the various threats to human survival, but, sadly, little on "how we can stop it."

Guterl, who's got creds galore, says it may not happen soon, not in our lifetimes, perhaps, but one day some evil genius will figure out how to unleash some techno-devastation on the world. Maybe it will be a genetically engineered virus, tweaked to be as fatal as it is infectious.

Or perhaps global warming will get us. (This seems to be his own biggest fear.) Maybe, just maybe, the thinking machines we make will take over, a la, I Robot.

Guterl is not a technophobe, but he's written a book that is likely to create a few.

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### **Alex says**

Just terrible. I beg anyone who reads this to just please save your money, please, do not give your money to this author or any company that would publish this garbage. This is the most uninspiring/uninspired piece of fear-mongering trash I've ever read. The "references" are dubious at best (newspaper articles and websites are his top scholarly sources) and the vast majority of "facts" amount to little more than cherry-picked quotes from real literature and ACTUAL experts in the various fields that Guterl alludes to possessing insight into.

Save yourself the money and read about viruses, climate change, and synthetic biology on Wikipedia for 15

minutes, then watch Fox news for another 15 and you could probably write this book too.

Also, he refutes the theory of evolution in here, joking sarcastically about humans coming from monkeys, and even goes on to make claims as to the earth being only a few thousand years old, and oh yeah, he mentions that the greatest evolutionary culling the earth ever saw was the great flood and Noah's ark. This guys a joke and his scientific credentials are nil.

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### **Emily Czarnecki says**

I decided to read this book after watching an interview with the author on *The Daily Show*. I thought the book sounded intriguing. Instead it seemed to me that it was a lot of facts that were other people's ideas crammed into the book. But these ideas were not new. They were only things that I've heard in the past. But that is just my opinion.

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### **Birgit says**

The end is near. But just how near? And what will be the cause? In his book *The Fate Of The Species* Scientific American editor Fred Guterl delves into what may cause our extinction and what we can do about it.

There are many books out there discussing this topic, most of them in a very sensationalist and wildly exaggerating style. Luckily for me, this isn't the case here as the author sets a matter of fact tone which I was immediately taken with. Written in a conversational style and painting both vivid and plausible scenarios of what could happen, he takes the reader from super viruses past climate change straight to what he obviously sees as the most likely culprit of all - scientific and technological progress. Our own inventions as source and cause of our possible extinction might not sound quite as exciting as a meteor striking, but according to this survey it's scarily likely.

Regrettably, it's the minutely detailed examples, highlighting present day research, which create an imbalance, sometimes long-winded enough to break up a chapter, and often reducing the fascinating question of what might happen to a mere afterthought. Another thing I found slightly unfortunate were the thoughts on solutions being pooled into the last chapter instead of complementing the individual chapters. A general conclusion would have been more fitting in my opinion.

In short: Technology as our downfall - an interesting excursion into what may cause the next mass extinction event on our planet!

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### **Esmeralda Rupp-Spangle says**

Three and a half

Pretty good- short, entertaining, informative. The stuff about technology and robotics wasn't terribly interesting to me- nor some of the stuff about the scariness of genetically altering or manufacturing disease. I simply don't think our society is going to maintain it's level of affluence long enough for those to be really concerning. I was a bit disappointed that there was nothing about peak resources as well. That's a major issue as far as I'm concerned- and impacts all the rest of the topics in his book pretty seriously.

The stuff about climate change was great. Current, well informed, scary, and a great read. Also the part about

disease, and anti vaccine nutballs.

Anyway, good- not perfect- Also- really short!

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### **Nadav Savio says**

Guterl does an amazing job scaring the sh\*\* out of you. In fact, he devotes each chapter to a different way the human species might totally screw ourselves over. It's convincing and terrifying. And he does it clearly and, to be fair, without (relative to the subject matter) sensationalizing things. Where the book fell short for me is the cursory way he addresses the second part of the title, the "how we can stop it" part. I'm not sure what I was hoping for, but... something!? Still, well worth reading, for a clear-eyed catalog of things actually worth worrying about.

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### **Cyrus Shahriari says**

This book reads like an action thriller, and the author describes numerous worst-case scenarios which could affect the human race. "Viruses of the computer kind, as well as the biological kind, hold the key to our destruction" is a quote which exemplifies how nature and human inventions may one day overwhelm us. Climate change, biological and electronic viruses, and other factors pose dangers in the long-term though they could occur sooner than we might imagine. I recommend this book for not just High School and College students but everyone who cares about future generations and the fate of the species. Fred Guterl remains objective throughout the chapters and does not side with environmentalists who argue, for instance, that we should consume more local products and less overall and neither does he believe that future human inventions and technology are guaranteed to save us. Though it is controversial, he nails it at the end when he makes reference to the optimal population levels as developed by Gretchen Daily and Paul Ehrlich from Stanford University. "Going from 7 billion to 2 billion is quite an adjustment. If this is the path, let us hope we move down it slowly and by choice, rather than quickly, by imposition."

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### **Emma Sea says**

Wheeeee! This. Was. AWESOME. Oh man, we are so screwed! Such lovely writing, I whizzed through it at the speed of an airborne human pathogen. I particularly enjoyed the clear and concise explanation of Stuxnet

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### **Victoria says**

Let me be blunt...I seriously disliked this book. It has less to do with the meandering anecdotal style, (which wasn't my cup of tea, quiet frankly) and much more to do with the subtitle. When I saw Guterl on The Daily Show, I was intrigued by his message, and the subtitle, "Why the Human Race May Cause its Own Extinction and How We Can Stop It", was the main reason I bought the book. I thought I was buying a book about major issues AND their solutions.

I realize now that the subtitle was a misnomer - there are no solutions. Guterl highlights only the many,

many, maaaaany ways we are most certainly doomed, (and you cannot read this book without coming away feeling that we are most certainly doomed.) To that end, our gradual downfall will be marked by vast amounts of human suffering - starvation, disease, lack of drinking water, chaos. What's more, it's clear halfway through the book that Guterl believes we'll go extinct from not just one of the causes he's highlighting, but from a whole cascade of them. In other words, a better subtitle may have been, "Why We Are Royally Screwed."

I'm not saying he's wrong...clearly, after reading Guterl's book I'm now a bit of a believer...but I'm also left feeling quite hopeless and depressed. And that's sort of my point here - if the news is SO bleak, and if clearly nothing can be done...do we really need to know? Why remove all hope? Would it change anything to give us even a little something to pin our hopes on?

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### **Tom Menke says**

seriously great read

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### **Brooks Rocco says**

Fred Guterl's wrote a fascinating glimpse into the worst-case scenarios most likely to affect humanity's progress in the most catastrophic ways possible. It's engaging and thought-provoking, and provided many 'look up' moments.

Written in a cool, casual style, it gives a nice overview of six areas of potential destruction, and has led me into doing my own research further. While not an absolutely authoritative index of each individual, Guterl does a great job of keeping it simple, allowing the book to be used as a springboard into diving into the topics further.

Highly recommended to anyone who might catch themselves being a little TOO optimistic.

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