

# **Futuroception 2.0**

Your future is still in The Code

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This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and  
incidents are products of the author's imagination. Any  
resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is a  
coincidence.

Is it really?

To Mr. Haze  
Until we meet again...



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## **Introduction**

This book tells the story of a wise man, who carries with him an ancient secret about the principles of predicting the future. The story is no more than the shell that holds the pearl. I have tried to tell what needs to be told in as few words as possible. So if you are looking for beautiful scenery descriptions and heart-deep character developments, you will most probably be disappointed. However, if you are searching for the truth behind releasing your own ability to catch a glimpse of the future, you might find it hard to put this book down.

In the end you may ask yourself whether the wise man was telling the truth. There is only one way to find out and if you do, you are truly complying with the purpose of this book.



## **Cause**

No matter where you go,  
You always remain at the centre of your universe

## **At the office**

I was running a bit late when I arrived at the office. There was a small yellow sticky note on my desk that read, “Mr. Woods wants to see you right away.” And to make really sure I would not miss the message, someone had written the same text on my whiteboard. It looked like an emergency to me, but it did not ring a bell. I had to be available 24/7 but the phone definitely had not rung tonight, so this could not be about a machine-down at a customer’s plant. I hung up my coat, switched on my computer so it would be up and running when I returned and went straight to his office.

Mr. Woods was an experienced manager. He had earned his stripes in setting up NTB in the eighties. In those days potential clients and more experienced scientists would openly question his abilities because frankly, how could a 24-year old possibly have the knowledge and experience needed to solve the technical problems they faced? Without exception their views on the young man would change dramatically within minutes as he always managed to precisely capture the essence of any problem by revealing the underlying questions no other expert would even think about. His answers were crisp and clear, completely honest and right to the point. If something could not be done, then this was precisely what Mr. Woods would tell you, while in the mean time he would point out alternatives that would cost less and lead to the same or even a better end result. Thanks to Mr. Woods and some other young, extremely talented people, NTB’s turnover had grown from five million dollars to over four billion in less than fifteen years. We were the best of the best, number one at our trade and Mr. Woods was right at the centre of it all. As Vice

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President of Customer Support he knew everybody in the business, from the US to Japan, from Germany to Taiwan, all the key-players turned to him for technical support and advice. And he was my boss.

Needless to say he was a busy man. Still he always tried to free up at least an hour every two weeks for a short meeting with every single one of his managers, including myself. These meetings always started in a very relaxed atmosphere. He would ask me some questions on the projects we were working on. They appeared to be informal, easy to answer, just scratching the surface without getting to the core of things. But you had to be sure to give the right answers. There was no easy way out. If a project was behind schedule he would not be interested in excuses or in who was to blame for any screw-ups. He would only want to know whether you were already working on a solution and usually he would come up with new angles or viewpoints, that would help solve the problems you were facing. He was my mentor, who taught me a lot about running a department. I anticipated that this unannounced meeting would not be an exception.

“Hi Peter, come in.” Mr. Woods said as I opened the door.

He did not look worried or tense, so this definitely was not an emergency. When I entered the room, I saw I was not alone. There was Theo, a manager from Mechanical Engineering, John from Finance and Tom, who ran the proto-plant.

“Well, Peter completes the team.”

Mr. Woods closed the door and sat down at the head of the table.

“Let’s get down to business.”

I poured myself a coffee, no milk, no sugar, just the way I used to start my working days. The caffeine would get me going, just what a man who did not get enough sleep needed.

“Gentlemen, welcome. Maybe you’ve already heard the news. The merger with TWG is now official.”

Mr. Woods had chosen the politically correct way to describe the fact that we had bought one of our competitors, a well known company at the very heart of Silicon Valley. When NTB started,

they had a market share of over eighty percent and over the years we had basically put them out of business. Still, we thought they had a lot of knowledge, good products and an interesting customer base. So it was better to buy it ourselves than to leave it up for grabs for one of our other competitors.

“This means the time has come to have a closer look at what they can do,” Mr. Woods continued. “You know they have three completely separated divisions. I want you to go to San Jose, have a good look at the design of their products and the processes they use in the complete product life cycle. Make sure you get the information from what you actually see. I am not interested in their ISO 9000 documentation. I want to know what their people are capable of doing. I don’t want to know how well they can write. I have already told their general manager you will arrive this Wednesday. So you have the rest of the day to make sure your staff knows what to do while you are gone. I booked you on a plane to San Jose at one o’clock tomorrow afternoon. Any questions?”

Mr. Woods looked around the table, making eye-contact with everyone of us for just a fraction of a second, a silent invitation to speak out and tell him what was on your mind.

“Can you give us more details on what we are supposed to do?” John asked. He did not like open ended project descriptions and he was not going to be sent off to San Jose without a clearly specified assignment.

“What precisely do you expect us to deliver? Are there specific technical questions to be answered? Or do you want a status report on the development of their latest product or maybe a closer look at their balance sheet?”

Mr. Woods raised one of his hands and smiled.

“Gentlemen, please. The last thing I need is a big, fat report collecting dust on my desk. What I want you guys to do is just look around and use your instincts. When you come back, we will sit down and discuss what you have seen. I don’t want to send you into the jungle looking for a green snake, because this would only increase the chance that you will miss the red, orange and yellow

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snakes crawling around your feet. If you want to make notes, perfect. If you want to make a powerpoint presentation or a word document, be my guest. But don't do it for me, do it for yourself."

Mr. Woods waited for a second, took a sip from his coffee, only to discover that it was still too hot to drink and then continued.

"I want you to look at the plant with the eyes of a keen investor. If you had to run it with your own money, what would you do? This is the question you should ask yourself and it is the main question I want to have answered. Where do you see potential? How can you improve things and build on what they already do? And of course you have to find the deadwood and I don't mean people only, but also parts of the business where you think they are way below the competition's level and unable to catch up again. I'm sure your main conclusions will fit on a single piece of paper. But don't be mistaken about the implications. Your findings could be the beginning or the end of a complete plant and the more than 500 people who work there."

Mr. Woods looked John straight in the eye. He had a fix on him, but not in an unpleasant way. He was just making sure the message sank in. And it did.

"No further questions?"

This should have been my punch line because there was still one question that I wanted to ask, but did not. It was a simple question, that might have explained a lot. It was, "Why me?"

## **On our way**

We spent the rest of the day preparing for our trip. As usual within NTB we were in a time squeeze. Although Mr. Woods had told us to go there with an open mind, we all felt we had to gather as much information as possible in the time that was left. We were leaving tomorrow and we had to make sure we knew what to expect before we arrived in San Jose.

We drank a cup of coffee and talked about what needed to be done. Then John went back to his office to collect everything he could find on the financial position of TWG. His desk was covered with stats, financial reports and clippings from magazines and the Wall Street Journal. On his laptop he was running his usual incomprehensible spreadsheets. Yes, John loved to work with numbers and he used them to perform financial miracles. He was a true magician, who could make a loss disappear like a rabbit in a head. It would be up to him to reveal any tricks the lawyers and accountants at TWG might have pulled to make the company look good. I was confident they would be no match to John's superior financial intellect. If there were hidden financial problems, John would find them. There was no doubt about that in my mind.

Theo went through some technical documentation of TWG's latest products. He checked the specifications and compared them to what competitors could do. Then he looked at some assembly models in our 3D-CAD system, which ran on a Sun Sparc station with two giant computer screens. At one point I heard him curse and complain that the information he really needed was not there. This did not worry me as I knew that once we arrived at TWG, he would be the first to get a good overall picture. All he had to do

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was walk through the assembly hall, ask a few questions, take a look at the machines and within minutes he would be able to tell us exactly what was going on. Without a doubt he was our best engineer and definitely a guy you wanted on your team for a job like this.

In the meanwhile Tom acted as our self designated leader, a role which fitted him well. He was a responsible guy, who would not leave anything up to chance. He first made sure we got our tickets and hotel reservations. Then he made some phone calls with TWG's management telling them their key people should be available for us to talk to. He also contacted some of our own people, both in Europe and the US, so they would be available if we needed them. With Tom on board you knew everything would go according to plan. He was an organizer, a man who could provide the framework, in which John's and Theo's talents could flourish. They would not have to worry about anything else than content. All in all it was a sound management move to send Tom along with us.

I went to my office and started TWG's service page on the web. It would be my job to look at their logistic, manufacturing and service processes. I started to go through their user and service documentation. I was not interested in the technical content. That was Theo's job. I just wanted to know whether their documentation had a good structure and was based on effective and well controlled processes. I was not impressed, although the manuals did not look bad. My main concern was that I could not find anything about the way they updated them. This suggested that their engineering change process might be one of their weaknesses and in our business that could be lethal. I collected some examples and just before nine o'clock in the evening I finally switched off my computer and headed for our final meeting.

We ordered pizza and drank a coke while we put together a list of questions we wanted answered on the first day. We also made an agenda for the kickoff meeting with TWG's management and talked about some of the possible scenarios we might encounter.

Then we called it a day and went our separate ways. I got home at about midnight. My wife and son were already fast asleep. I quietly packed my suitcase, making sure I did not wake them up. As I finally got into bed, I set the alarm at five o'clock. It would be a short night with a long day ahead.

As usual, the alarm woke everybody up except me. With a kiss on my mouth my wife did a far better job than my beeping electronic friend and as I opened my eyes I started the day with a look at her beautiful face.

“Good morning, honey,” she said with that lovely sweet voice of hers. “Obviously it’s time for you to go.”

She kissed me, moved closer and whispered in my ear, “Or maybe you would like to stay a little longer and play with me instead of with your NTB buddies.”

Of course she was just teasing me. Still it sounded tempting, but I knew I had to hurry to make it to the airport in time. However, I also knew there would be plenty of time to make sweet love once I got back. She kissed me, wished me good luck and fell asleep again. I took a shower, got dressed and said a silent goodbye to my son, who lay sleeping in his bed like a little angel. When I shut the door behind me it was five thirty and the first rays of sunlight were already lighting up the sky. As I took a deep breath, I realized how fortunate I was to be handpicked for this assignment. For me this was a once in a lifetime opportunity and I promised myself to enjoy every single minute to the full.

We met at the airport. Theo was wearing his long, leather coat, which made him look like one of the bad guys in a Spaghetti Western. The contrast with John’s outfit could not have been bigger. John always wore a suit and tie to work and to him, this was just another day at the office. He would go unnoticed on Wall Street, but I figured that he was a little bit overdressed for a long flight across the ocean. Tom was dressed casually, but we had a good laugh when we saw his giant suitcase. He looked like he was going on a trip around the world, but we knew the suitcase was not filled with ten different wardrobes to match any type of weather. We had made a list of documents we would need to successfully



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carry out this job and Tom had taken it upon himself to make sure they arrived safely. The small inconvenience of having to carry a large suitcase to the airport was irrelevant to him. His determination and willingness to make sacrifices was the kind of leadership by example that would get us through any kind of setback.

Tom handed us our tickets and to our surprise he had bought us business class seats, while at NTB we were used to travel economy class. We went to the desk and checked in. I was assigned a seat a couple of rows behind my colleagues. Although I would have liked to sit next to them, it did not upset me. We were on our way and this was going to be a great experience. We were all business, we knew what we had to do and we were determined to do it right. But we were also going to have a lot of fun and make this a time to remember. After we passed through customs, we went to an airport bar and enjoyed a beer while we talked about the good life and the future of NTB.

## Boarding

We were among the first people to board the plane. I sat down and made myself comfortable. I had bought the latest Sports Illustrated at the airport and as I was flipping through the pages, the plane started to fill up. Within ten minutes most seats were taken. However, the seat next to me remained empty. At the very last moment, just before one of the stewardesses started her headcount, I saw a gentleman walking slowly down the aisle. He wore a dark suit, a white shirt and a blue striped tie. The suit was a perfect fit, definitely tailor made. The shirt did not show even a sign of a wrinkle. The man wore gold cuff links and a watch on a chain. He had a small black leather suitcase in his left hand and looking down I noticed that his black shoes were polished to a bright shine. This was a genuine gentleman, the kind of man you expect to play the role of butler in an old time movie. I immediately knew he was going to be my neighbor for this flight and I gave him a warm welcome smile.

When he had reached his seat, he placed the suitcase in the bin above his head. Then he looked at me with his bright blue eyes. His skin was wrinkled, but it had the healthy brown color of a man who spends most of his life outdoors. His silver grey hair looked like it was short cut only yesterday. This man took care of himself and it showed. I expected him to sit down, but instead he reached out to shake my hand.

“Good morning, sir. May I introduce myself?” he said. “I am Mr. Haze.”

“I’m Peter Jens. Pleased to meet you,” I replied as I shook his hand.

“Yes, Peter. The rock,” he whispered with a soft voice while he looked me over as if he was making sure that I was the right person to sit next to.

“Excuse me?” I asked.

My words were lost in the background noise of people who were preparing for takeoff and a long flight. Mr. Haze finally sat down. Then the doors were closed and I expected the plane to take off within minutes. However, this did not happen, on the contrary. For a long time nothing happened. I was going through my magazine again and again as my neighbor sat in complete silence. He looked very comfortable and relaxed, almost as if he was meditating. His hands rested on his knees with their palms turned upwards. His eyes were closed as he breathed in and out in a slow, constant rhythm.

After what had appeared to be an eternity, I checked my watch and saw we had been sitting still for over an hour. The pilot had not given us an explanation, no stewardess had informed us of any problems, we were simply left with no information whatsoever and people started to get grumpy. And that included me.

“This is just great,” I said to myself, just loud enough for my neighbor to hear.

“Is it really?” he reacted with a smile as he opened his eyes and turned towards me.

I realized that his silence had been one of the reasons I wanted this plane to get off the ground as soon as possible. To me it was a pleasant surprise that apparently Mr. Haze was not planning to go into hibernation for the duration of the flight.

“No, of course it’s not,” I laughed. “I just want to get going, don’t you?”

“Why should I want that?” Mr. Haze replied as if he did not understand my feelings.

“Well, this waiting is just a waste of time. So the sooner we leave, the better.”

“Are you saying that sitting in a comfortable chair, talking to me is just a waste of time?”

For a moment he got me and I liked it. Maybe this trip would turn out to be even more interesting than I had already anticipated.

“No, but flipping through the same magazine for the zillionth time, not knowing when we will leave, definitely is.”

Mr. Haze did not instantly react to what I had just said. He merely looked at me as if he had met me before but could not remember where and when.

“Yes, interesting.”

There was a strange calmness in his voice.

“It is in our nature to grant importance to everything we see and experience. We find waiting in an airplane seat less important than working at the office. However, there really is no reason for that.”

“What do you mean?” I asked. “I just don’t like waiting and I wished it was over.”

“I understand your feelings. But do you really think your desire can influence what the men and women in the flight control tower are doing for us now?”

I shook my head and thought about something clever to say, but before I could react, Mr. Haze already continued.

“So you wish this is over as soon as possible? Then essentially you wish that a part of your own life does not exist. If you were in severe pain, hunger or grief, this would be understandable. However, your wish for everyday things to go by as quickly as possible holds a terrible risk. Before you know it, you will be running towards the future, looking for what you consider to be important moments without fully living the present. That, my young friend, would really be a waste of time.”

I had to admit that this remarkable gentleman had made a very thought provoking statement. I did not feel any urge to battle this man with words. As far as I was concerned, he had spoken wisely and I was hoping for more.

## **Future theories**

Even our present is in the future  
As everything we see, feel and hear is in the past

## **Warming up**

I don't remember how long it took our plane to depart. It could have been an hour, it might have been three hours. Frankly I did not care. Since Mr. Haze had spoken about the value of every single moment of my life, we had covered a wide range of subjects, varying from politics to philosophy and from science to religion.

Mr. Haze had an outspoken opinion and the talent to sell it in a convincing, yet pleasant way. As we talked about climate changes and the soaring extinction rates, I stated that mankind was destroying life on earth. However, Mr. Haze calmly pointed out that killing animals and destroying their natural habitats will never result in the end of life.

“We are not above evolution, we are part of it,” he said. “And with all the species that disappear because of us, we merely create opportunities for new species to evolve and inhabit the planet. It will take millions of years, but it is a fact that the future of life is secure. However, this cannot be said about our own future. It is not without irony that with our behavior we do not jeopardize nature, we jeopardize ourselves.”

When we talked about good and evil, we discussed how it was possible we can go to war and kill our fellow men, while we also go the distance to help people in need at the other end of the world. Within this context Mr. Haze made a remark, that sent shivers down my spine. I had just said I was glad to live in Western Europe, where there were no more wars, when he reacted, “My dear friend, I am afraid you are mistaken. Before this century is over, Western Europe will see a war with destruction and loss of life on an unprecedented scale. You think you have learned your