

[Transcript] The Realignment / 415 | James Pethokoukis: Conservative Futurism & Up Wing Politics - Building the Sci-Fi Future We We're Promised

Marshall here. Welcome back to The Realignment.

Before we dive into today's episode, a quick reminder that Saga and I are publishing a special Ask Me Anything episode focused on everyone's questions around Israel, Gaza, Hamas, etc. We're going to record it around 1pm Eastern time. So if you are a Supercast subscriber, you can go to realignment.supercast.com and post the questions or comments you have there. Or if you're not a subscriber yet, you can email us at realignmentpod.com.

We've got some great responses so far, so looking forward to discussing them later today and then of course publishing that episode on Sunday.

On to the episode. My guest today is the American Enterprise Institute's James Pethicuchus. He has a new book out, *The Conservative Futurist, How to Create the Side by World We Were Promised*. Really interesting book and it serves as a real rebuttal to much of the doom and gloom pessimism that too often impacts this space. We cover where the optimistic vision that promulgated in the 50s and 60s went wrong, the opportunities, GMC's, and space energy and the world around us, and of course what a politics oriented around progress and technological accomplishment would actually look like.

A huge thank you to the Foundation for American Innovation for supporting the work of this podcast. This episode is especially pertinent to FAS work, so I recommend that anyone interested be sure to check in on what we are building out in DC and across Silicon Valley. Hope you all enjoy the conversation.

James Pethicuchus, welcome to the realignment.

Thanks so much for having me on.

Yeah, I'm really glad to chat with you. Your book has been perfectly timed for me because I've been publishing a lot of episodes with tech critics. I think it's important to engage with critics, but at a certain point, I think it's important that I assert my actual point of view around progress and technology. All things are good, so thank you for that to keep me from being a hack. Let's just start at the most basic level with the following question.

In your book's title, it was a reference to a sci-fi world that we were promised.

Describe for me the world that, let's say, we're having this conversation in 1950.

What world would we have expected to come about over the next 40 to 50 years?

Well, that world was actually fashion, fairly concretely, in miniature.

At 1964, the New York World's Fair, there was a kind of a quasi-theme park ride called Futurama, which took people through this little model of the world of the future.

And that model, it had everything you might imagine from that era. It had space colonies, it had undersea cities, it had superhighways going through cities with mile-high skyscrapers.

So that was kind of what is now called sort of retrofuturist. That was the vision.

But whatever the specifics of that vision, and you also saw things like the Jets and so forth, was the idea that economic growth and technological progress would for sure continue at the rapid pace people were experiencing, but might even accelerate.

Listen, back then, you didn't have all these long-range economic forecasts from Wall Street or the Federal Reserve, but the people who did do that kind of thing,

they thought we were in a period of acceleration. So it was only going to get better.

So whatever the specifics of that vision, of course, you're the flying cars and all that, it was going to be pretty fantastic. And the only problem we were going to face

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was dealing with all that rapid progress that maybe it'd be so rapid, it would drive us all crazy. But one thing they were all sure of, we were going to see bigger things, greater things. And by this point, by 2023, we would be well on our way to mastering the solar system. And this is where this gets really interesting. I love how you rooted us in the retro-futurism of the 1960s. I wonder to what degree is our failure to achieve some of that vision, a consequence of failure, a consequence of shattered dreams, versus actually just turned out that wasn't a practical thing, like let's think of the flying car. My favorite response to the flying car is, look, we have trouble driving in true dimensions. We don't need to add a third dimension. Let's do a variety of different policies that can involve just as much technological advance, just as much innovation, this, this or that, but focus in kind of that direction. So what's the, and also we can apply the same thing to undersea cities and moon colonies. So what's the gap between this retro-futuristic vision just wasn't actually practical, and therefore we affirmatively chose as a society not to do it versus, no, we just kind of gave up when we should have kept pushing in the right direction. What's the gap between those two? Well, I think the, the gap is far narrower than I might have imagined when I first began writing this, which was probably the early days of the pandemic. You know, like probably a lot of people have books coming out right now, probably in, you know, the summer of 2020. And in that time, not only have we seen continuing advances in biotechnology and genetics, you know, we already had CRISPR and then the, and then the mRNA vaccines, but also since then, we've seen continued success with space and SpaceX and bringing down the costs of, of space launches, which was a massive barrier that just the economics of getting, you know, a pound of anything into space was a massive barrier to sort of that, that space vision. We've seen, you know, with, at this point, it appears to be a pretty significant, you know, leap forward in artificial intelligences and all those visions of the future thought there'd be some sort of super intelligent computer at some point. And you saw that in, you know, in 2001, a space odyssey and Star Trek and the, and the, and the advances we've seen both in small nuclear fission reactors and nuclear fusion. I think when you put all those together, a lot of those visions, which required, you know, you know, smart computers, you know, powerful energy sources, the ability to get into space cheaply, all those things seem to be maybe happening now. And I don't think it's out of the question to say, you know, why didn't they happen decades ago? Is it just the natural sort of pace of invention or progress? Or did we do things that actually slowed that progress down and whatever the exact form? And that's, this is key. Like I'm not saying here is my vision of the future. And if only we had a department of the future in Washington, you know, people sitting around a table with flat screens TVs, you know, looking at different studies and chart, they could plan this exact vision. That, that's not what I'm saying. Whatever that vision is exactly, I think we could have had the kind of growth and technological advances that would enable us to create the kind of vision that we sort of as a society individually would like to see. So I, so that, you know, take the example, listen, I don't know if it's, you know, flying cars and a lot of visions of flying cars are actually powered by some sort of, you know, you know, super science technology, it's not just, you know, you know, jet turbines or something. It's some sort of anti gravity device. And whether we could have had that, we all have our individual flying car or something like what we're seeing now, which is really kind of an air

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taxi system. And maybe it'll be electric and autonomous. Again, the exact format takes, I don't know. But I think that the thrust of that vision back then, we absolutely could have achieved and achieved it earlier. See, and in your answer, I like you making reference to Star Trek, because that reference actually gets at the actual title of the book, which is conservative. The conservative futurist, we're discussing conservative futurism here, because as anyone who knows Star

Trek knows Star Trek is a deeply progressive show, like it's, it's, it's, it's a Star Trek nerd. So I could talk to them, you know, there's a couple of starship enterprises back there. But I could talk about this in Star Trek. The key thing is World War three happens. And from the ashes of World War three, you have a post scarcity society emerge via replicators and basically rejecting capitalism. There's a scene in Star Trek first contact where Captain Picard is shocked at the existence of money when he goes back in time to the 1990s. So the way that we get to that society is not private markets, not by a private markets, it's very top down. It's we emerge out of economic ruin and devastation. How does that vision of how we get there contrast with the conservative part of the way you articulate this? Right. Well, my, my vision, the conservative part of the futurism, and it's, we've, we've talked about for a few moments here about sort of the futuristic vision. The conservative vision is really a building upon what I think is the valuable inheritance of the past that we enjoy as Americans and in the West. And it is inheritance of political freedom and economic freedom, liberal democracy, free markets. I think upon such things, a better world will be built. And I think that, you know, Edmund Burke, you know, Edmund Burke talked about the connection that we feel between the past and the future. So to me, to, as I said, I'm, I'm, I'm, I guess I'm a self-described conservative. I work at a center right think tank. I'm not going to pretend that I don't love a good tax cut. But, but I think sort of the deeper message here is I'm, is that what I want to, what I want to conserve is our sort of liberal tradition. And I, and I, and this is probably as good a time to make a point is that you do not have to be a center right person to enjoy this book or, or to, or to have or to think hard about the kind of future that you would like to create. I think it's something I called upwing. I think if this, if you think we can have that human beings have the tools and the wisdom and the agency to solve problems, not retreat, but to go forward and solve problems, big problems, not just, you know, flying cars, but, but, you know, radically reducing global poverty, making us healthier and solving big diseases, you know, dealing with climate change in a way that doesn't require everybody to live poorer lives. If you think that those goals are worth attacking and that we have the, and that we need to have the tools to do it, then this is a, then this is a book for you. You don't have to, you don't have to want a 15% capital gains tax rate. You know, too as awesome as that would be to like to enjoy this book. And I think, and think connect with this book. It is not, it's not a partisan book, but it is a book that I think sees the world as people and you have this in both sides, people who really don't want to do that, who don't want to embrace risk, who want a different kind of society that is about stasis and stagnation and fearing the future. I write a lot in this book about Herman Kahn, former head of the Hudson Institute. A lot of work. So shout out to Herman Kahn and your support of my lifestyle. Yes, a long time ago. And great, you know, a nuclear war theorist turned sunny futurist. And when he died in 1983, President Reagan said, Herman Kahn was a futurist who embraced the future.

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And it was at a time where a lot of people call themselves futurists did not. So that's what I'm talking about. If you want to embrace the future, think it can be better. I think this is a great book for you. And I want to offer you a quick compliment. I said this before we started recording, but I was not, not surprised because I've known your work for, especially your work on, you know, startups and job creation. I've known it for a while. So I knew you weren't a hack, but I really want to highlight the worst case scenario for conservative futurism would have been, and you know, our failure to really double down on tax cuts in 2005. That's the gap. You could have, you could have written that, but you're like, we were this close, Marsha, you have to understand the real, if we just had hit 14.8 instead of 15.2, that's, that is very much not the book. So I want all of the left members of the audience to, I think, embrace what you're articulating and kind of think about like from your ideological perspective. And once we get into upwing, because I think it's a very, um, more in addition here. But here's something I want to really focus on. So to get kind of personal for a second, um, you're, you're, you're Greek Orthodox, correct? Uh, I'm not Greek Orthodox. I am Greek, uh, was not raised Greek Orthodox. I'm also, so this is the, the, the, the mystery given my last name. I'm also a half Dutch. So I was actually raised, uh, kind of Dutch reformed. So it's kind of, so it's a real, uh, interesting combination. We may have to edit this out because this is a devastating failure of research, but you're, you're religious, correct? Yeah, I am a Christian. Yeah. Okay. So we're going to, we're going to keep this into hold me accountable for my poor research. I know this is, this is actually so embarrassing because I just, oh my God, Pethicuchus. Okay. Greek Orthodox, whatever. It is a very common assumption. You would not be the first, uh, to, to make it totally fine. This is, uh, this approach to the level of a macro aggression. Um, so, okay, to, to, to move forward though, uh, with accountability, where do your religious beliefs fit in with all of this? Because the reason why I ask is, and this is where I think a conservators kind of find themselves in an interesting space. There's kind of the, the, the, the techno-optimist part of Silicon Valley is deeply libertarian. Um, deeply libertarian to, I think the point where a lot of what gets people particularly excited, I think gets a little, I think, uh, complicated from a religious perspective, from a traditionalist perspective, conquering death, um, benevolent AGI, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. So I was just curious, um, kind of from your religious background and coming from, once again, your rooting in center right to conservative policy world, where do you interact with, uh, those more libertarian visions of basically untrammelled, unconstrained optimism about the future? Yeah, the book is not, uh, about creating a utopia. Uh, you know, I think as long as we have, uh, human beings, uh, you know, inhabiting this earth and elsewhere, there will be, there will be problems. Um, one of my favorite bits of sci-fi, and I talk a lot about science fiction, because I think it's important, uh, something far beyond entertainment is a sci-fi series called The Expanse. Uh, it's a book series and a very good, um, a very good, uh, television series, and it shows a future, so a couple hundred years in the future, uh, where man has moved out into the solar system. And I will, and I've often written in my, in my, in my newsletter called Faster Please, and I have tweeted about this as well, uh, that I find that to be, um, pro-progress science fiction, because we're still here in a few hundred years. And as a society, uh, we have more technological capability. We live longer. Uh, we're more resilient as a species, because we're not just here on earth, we're on Mars, we're out in the asteroid belt mining. Oh, and that the, all the riches of the solar system, we can tap because we're out there and we're, you know, mining

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asteroids.

So given how much of sort of the, the futuristic fiction and forecast, especially among some environmentalists, is a, is a tomorrow of gloom, of failure, of civilizational collapse, to me, if I can find any science fiction that says we're still here and, you know, that's great, but a lot of people do not view it like that because it's not utopian. There are problems, you know, there's, you know, a lot of people are unemployed. We still had climate change.

Earth and Mars and the, and the asteroid belt, they don't get along for people. Well, that's obviously dystopian. Well, no, only if you're utopian that denies that, you know, people are flawed, do you view that as a dystopian future? I view it as humanity continually, incrementally, moving forward. So when I view this whole, when I, so when I think about, you know what, Silicon Valley and people want to conquer death and transhumanism, anybody who wants to help me solve the big problems of today, I will take their help. But my goal is not to live forever. My goal is not to create utopia. And, and I think the place where my faith interacts most directly with this book is humans, humans are creative. I think to, to deny sort of the creative spark inside us, that is that, that, that, that divine spark, to me, then is to deny my faith. So this, I'm talking about a world of creativity of people using the tools they've been given to do stuff with them, to create a better world, to solve problems. Again, not to create utopia. So to me, it fits very well with my faith. And, you know, every, again, every time someone creates something, to me, that is a, that is a wonderful, you know, kind of almost, you know, divine act, you know, you know, the divine fire of our own creativity. So that's just a look. A lot of this book is about nurturing creativity. It's not about creating. It's not about essentially planning a future. It's about sort of organically creating one. And for folks who want to watch the experience to the, I haven't watched it yet, but it's available. SciFi channel originally, now it's on Amazon. I think it's, I think it's over now, correct?

It is, it is currently over, but because it didn't go as far as the book series, all the fans are hoping that it will come back and finish the, the final round of books, which would be awesome. Jeff Bezos is a big fan. So hopefully he still has some, he still has some pull over there.

Of course. So that's a quick shout out for folks who want to kind of dive deeper, but you've raised a really interesting point about your, your articulation of why you actually think the, the expanse is optimistic. And you kind of actually raise that Star Trek versus the expanse context that came from earlier, because the key thing is that Star Trek is utopian, because once again, technological progress has ended scarcity. In many respects, it's ended typical ethno nationalism borders. It's transcended the factors that have driven conflict. And basically most of our human difficulties for the past 5,000 years of civilization, you're basically articulating here, there's a limit to what technological progress can resolve and achieve. So, and I think I remember in the book, you actually specifically made reference to the fact that many futurists in the 40s and 50s, the most optimistic moment thought that actually technology will kind of push aside so many of these left, right debates.

What remains in your techno futurist world? Like, what are we still fighting over?

What is intractable? What is, what is just, what is, what is probably endemic to the human condition? Well, people, I think we constantly display just an extraordinary bit of creativity and imagination, which is manifested in the physical things we create and the stories we tell. And the downside is this, I think is we have, we have almost

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unlimited imagination to find things to fight about, to find differences. There is the correct, you know, speaking of Star Trek, there's a fantastic Star Trek episode, which tried to get at racial discrimination in the 60s, where you had two sides fighting and the only difference, you know, they had one side of their face was white, one side was black, the only difference was which side was white, which side was black. So, I think people have an infinite capacity, and that's actually not to talk anymore about the expanse, but did none of them get along? The Mars people don't get along with Earth. Earth doesn't get along with the belt, and people have written books about, say that, oh, we shouldn't go into space because we'll just take our geopolitical conflicts out there. So, I don't know, but knowing what I do with the human condition, we'll figure out ways to not get along. So, I think there will still be conflict, but I would also like a world where, you know, where people can try to achieve their dreams and have the capabilities to achieve their dreams that they currently don't have. I think the worst thing we could say to someone who is poor in this world is that you can't live like Americans do, or Germans do, or the Japanese do. So, that's kind of where my focus is, making sure people, you know, do have that opportunity, because this isn't just about people in rich countries having, you know, really great lives and living in mile-high skyscrapers. It's about moving everybody forward together, and a vision which says we need to use less energy, and we can't even do, even though we all know AI is going to kill us, we just can't even power it. It's going to use too much energy. We need to go backwards and live more poorly. I think that's a losing message, and I think it's inherently a moral one. How do you think as a society we should go about deciding which of these sci-fi projects to undergo? I had an interesting conversation with a tech critic where he was bemoaning Elon Musk and the mission to Mars and everything, and he's like, it's going to cost \$10 trillion, which is by that number for a second. It's a huge waste of money. We should spend that money fixing problems here on Earth, and the obvious response to that is basically, well, I mean, he's deciding to go on this project, let him go on this project. But the critic raises a valid point, which is, well, yes, Elon could do what Elon wants, but also that project involves government resources. SpaceX has a lot of big government contracts. So there's a kind of complicated mix here. So on the one hand, I don't want society to tell Elon he shouldn't pursue big projects because I don't think that, because hey, there's a lot of Starlink because he pursued his big projects. So that's kind of like the circular part of this. But how do we as a society understand this intersection between the private sector and the public nature of oftentimes the funding and societal will in those parts? Call it the competition of ideas. If someone does not want us to go into space or at least does not want to have a public aspect of it, I would say somebody like Bernie Sanders, who's very critical of this effort, they can make their case to the American people, and maybe we will fund it and maybe we will don't. This, what mine is, is a book of persuasion. I want to persuade people that we should, that it is worthwhile to pursue some projects at a government level while allowing entrepreneurs and the private sector to fund things that they find to be valuable. And maybe those things will pass a market test. Maybe they won't for a long time. The market test for moving into space was a pretty bad proposition. It was super expensive, and we decided not to do it. And then at the very, perhaps at the very moment when we were most pessimistic, you know, SpaceX started up and showed, guess what, you can do it. So things that seem uneconomical today might not be uneconomical tomorrow, and we will decide this thing as a

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liberal democracy. And oftentimes the decisions won't be what I want. Right now, I would like to spend a lot, a lot more money on scientific research. That's really not happening right now. Hopefully my book and my other work will incrementally make that more likely. So people who don't, the people I think who are most worried about that, are worried about what will decide as a society to do, who don't ultimately have faith in democracy, and wish there was a ministry or, you know, department of the future that could make those decisions and impose them. I don't want to impose anything. You know, I, you know, I want to create a garden, a buoyant verdant garden of opportunity where we will all make choices about what tomorrow will bring. And again, it's a competition of ideas, and I hope my ideas can win that competition through their, you know, persuasive power. And I really love that answer, because I think it gets at, hey, that's a really strong defense of democracy. I asked, how does this work? You're like, well, we do podcasts and you write books, and then as an elected representative, an elected representative

is capable of watching the YouTube. I know it's an old fashioned view, I think right now, like democracy and we choose, and sometimes you win, and sometimes you lose. I just feel like I've been losing for 50 years. So hopefully the pendulum will swing a bit. And I think there are a lot of good reasons that the pendulum will swing, and that the next 50 years will be one of perhaps a bit more risk taking and a bit more imaginative approach to what, a positive approach to what the future can bring. Well, I love that. I'd love for you to actually speak about, let's go with the what went wrong category. I just did an episode with a Bloomberg reporter about the history of the Space Shuttle program. And my clear takeaway from just doing some basic studying of the Space Shuttle program, it was an enormous strategic error when it came to NASA, in the sense that it wasn't something that was publicly sustainable, let's put aside the safety issues and death and everything, obviously. But just it didn't capture the imagination the same way. The mission to Mars that you on Musk's pursuit is captured, it doesn't capture the imagination the same way the mission to the moon actually captured the imagination. So if you're going to have public

projects, if anything, the success of Elon's efforts, I think is a demonstration of the need to kind of go big, have the big vision, I think that's kind of like, I think my best interpretation of your upwing ideology or that discussion of it. So I'd love for you to kind of just go into what is upwing you've made a reference to it a couple of times. It's a good way to understand this. I will do that. But let me say one thing about the Space Shuttle. By the end, there wasn't a lot of public enthusiasm about it. And it was kind of like a space bus or space truck. But let me tell you, when it was first announced, people were extremely excited about the Space Shuttle, because it seemed like it would involve, it would allow a lot more access to outer space. So I think there really is a sort of latent interest in space that Elon Musk has tapped. Listen, if you want to create a better future, if you think that and you think, you know, prosperity and abundance, and we are good as humans with innovating our way around constraints, then that is upwing. That is not necessarily left wing. That is not right wing. And you can, and this book, you can be, you can consider yourself on the left and the right. And you can still want to use man's ingenuity to solve problems that you're not like these degrowth people. I'll tell you, this, this was an amazing moment for me where I went to the, you know, I'm in DC, and the Smithsonian Institute was having this huge kind of like futurist exhibition.

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And I'm like, well, great, that's awesome. I cannot, I cannot wait to go. So I went there. And it was a vision of the future that I, that was right out of sort of the limits to growth, the pessimist 1970s. There was nothing, there was maybe one small exhibit about space, nothing about what was going on with, nothing about nuclear energy other than some buttons from the 70s that were against nuclear energy. Instead of seeing like, you know, you know, cool visions of what we could create, what they, their vision of the future was we're all going to live in homes, sustainable homes made out of mushrooms and things like that. There was nothing, no kid would walk into that exhibit and walk out with enthusiasm, like they would in like, let's say that 1964 Futurama exhibit, it was the exact opposite. You'd walk out and think, thinking, the world tomorrow is going to be super boring. I'm going to be living in a mushroom house, and I certainly won't be living on the moon or Mars or be flying around in an amazing flying car or taking a hyperloop. Nobody would walk, by the way, to have an exhibit about, you know, about the future in 2020, I think this was actually 2021, and not even mention Elon Musk. You know, you can like him or hate him, but he is an influential entrepreneur in both electric vehicles and AI, space, obviously, and to pretend he doesn't exist. That's amazing. So that's me, that was a downwing exhibit, exhibit about constraints, about problems, about about about dealing with problems through retreat versus moving forward. Listen, any tool we create is going to create other problems, and then we'll then we'll solve that too. That's been the history of progress. And then yet we keep moving forward. The huge cultural change that humanity had 500 years ago was thinking that it had the agency to create a different kind of world that tomorrow wasn't necessarily going to be just a different version of today.

And that is, I think, fundamentally, what an upwing view of the world builds on. You know, I hate to bring it up because maybe it's a cliché now, but in the film *Interstellar*, you know, which is about a society that turned its back on progress and then found itself facing an existential problem that it did not have the tools to solve, you know, the main character played by Matthew McConaughey said, you know, we used to look to the stars now we just now we just look at our place in the dirt. That to me is it's a fantastic upwing film and really captures the kind of philosophy and I'm still looking at the stars of what we can accomplish not thinking we've already invented everything that's worth inventing. You know, I love that answer because I think you actually you could tie what you just said to the look make the public argument issue because if let's say folks who are primarily focused on climate change and energy policy, if they ignore the Elon Musk dynamic, they ignore the fact that mushroom based sustainable homes, if you think that there's a \$10 trillion pot of money and we're going to society going to decide does this go to fixing the climate or does this go to space, Elon Musk's vision is going to be sustainable mushroom homes every single time for my pure whereas we as society are going to like dedicate public goods. So that's why I think even within that argument about like space versus the environment and technological progress, let's assume that let's pretend there is I don't think there's a trade off and that's kind of like the point of this philosophy, but let's pretend there really is like that literal trade off. The circular kind of disaster that they've run into is the degrowth mentality can't win public arguments at the scale necessary to accomplish the supposed goals thereof. I don't get the sense you could degrowth your way to a serious public investment in climate change and that's like the awkward dynamic here that you're kind of facing. No, I think we unintentionally saw a real degrowth experiment during the pandemic

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when we had a period of shortages. We were shutting down the economy. We didn't have we didn't have a vaccine ready to go and how did we like that world? How did Americans love going to the store and not seeing things on the shelves or even or even just not having Amazon deliver something as quickly as it had in the past because there's supply chains were snarled.

There is zero appetite for that kind of approach except maybe a small minority who have a certain preference and if you want to live your life like that, go ahead. Most people even rich countries don't want it. Poor people in the world want to get richer and so you're wondering how that world or how that degrowth world would ever happen. It seems to me that it would be through compulsion. It would ultimately be through compulsion and when I've read some degrowth literature and fiction there is a strong, strong undercurrent of people being forced to go that direction and that I think that is not the competition idea. That is just pure the state having the ultimate means of violence and that is not what my book is about. So for the last two sections here,

so number one, I'd love for you to talk about, we've kind of hinted at the sci-fi conversation, the cultural side of this conversation. I really enjoyed your kind of articulation of Disney's Tomorrowland and where it went right, where it went wrong. It's particularly depressing to learn that in the late 90s it kind of transitioned into steampunk which is 19th century ask. Definitely, A, it's not particularly attractive on a very specific niche on the internet but B, it's also not capturing the original intention of it. So I'd love for you just to talk about that history and what lessons we could take from the effective side of that vision from a cultural production level. Yeah, the Tomorrowland problem is something Walt Disney faced when he opened up Disneyland and one of the theme lands was Tomorrowland which was the most difficult because it wasn't just using what we already knew, nostalgia for an older America or frontier America. It was going to have to look at the future and not surprisingly in the 50s, a lot of it was built around space. The tallest thing in the original Disneyland structure was a giant rocket that was taller than Cinderella's Castle and Tomorrowland was built around that notion and the notion of creating a better future. And the original Tomorrowland problem is just keeping that, it was supposed to be all based on facts because the original ride that that rocket led to was supposed to be a space trip people would take in the 1980s. So it was not a fantasy, it was supposed to be based on something we could actually do. And the problem they faced after a few years was there was so much rapid economic growth and something new being invented every day that Disney complained that Tomorrowland just kind of looked

like, instead of being fit, I had 15 minutes in the future, it looked like it was 15 minutes behind the times and he said, instead of Tomorrowland, we're getting todayland or yesterdayland. The retro part. It's retro very quickly. Right. But then that changed. That really changed starting, you know, it started changing in the late 1960s and 1970s when no longer was progress happening fast and helping inspire Tomorrowland. Instead, we slowed down as an economy. We abandoned atomic power. We abandoned the space age. The futurists of the era became extremely pessimistic about the

future. It was all going to be overpopulation and resource depletion. So then it had a different Tomorrowland problem. That problem was creating an attractive future that people would find realistic because none of it seemed realistic because everyone knew that Tomorrowland was

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going to be terrible. So Tomorrowland just seemed like a fantasy. So Tomorrowland no longer had that thriving, you know, broader economy to key off of. And eventually they just gave up. They gave up trying to create that kind of future and they dabbled with Jules Verne and steampunk and they dabbled a lot more with science, you know, science fantasy and Star Wars rather than trying to focus on thinking and being inspired by the world around them to creating a plausible future that people would also find aspirational. And, you know, that problem just hasn't gone away. I mean, the biggest, the biggest new exhibit I was just at Disneyland for the first time in a long time was the new Star Wars exhibit, which is awfully cool. I loved it. I felt like, but you know what? It's still based on science fantasy, not a world that we're actually going to create. And I think we need images of a plausible images of a future we'd want to live in. If we as a society are going to take risk, because if we take risk and we embrace change, there will be downsides. Some people will lose job, sectors will rise, sectors will fall, and we have to believe that the disruption that will come with change, economic change, technological change will be worth it. And what did we just see? What did we just see, Marshall, with the, you know, with the AI, that we had a huge AI advance, and we got to enjoy it for about 30 minutes about what it might do. And then it's been a nonstop stream of take all the jobs, it's going to kill us, we better pause it, we better nationalize it, we better regulate it. That, to me, the phenomenon I'm describing here isn't just a set of these things with nuclear power. It's a current thing where people have a, when they imagine what a new breakthrough will create, the only thing they and the media can think about is how it will go terribly wrong. AI is not going to help us, it's going to turn into the Terminator. You know, another part that I appreciated about the Walt Disney focus part of the book was your articulation of Walt's balance between futurism and nostalgia, which seems to be like a theme, I mean, to go back to Star Trek for a second, you've got the experience, I've got Star Trek. The original Gene Roddenberry pitch for Star Trek was like the wagon train to the stars. So once again, they're rooting this utopian 23rd century in a image of 19th century, you're going out to Oregon on the Oregon Trail, which I think is very, very, very key. So as we look at this vision you're pitching today, how do you tie that vision to broader nostalgia that the strongest aspects of I think American projects are able to base themselves in while still moving forward quickly? You know, if a politician is going to run a campaign commercial, it's going to be like one of these big think commercials. What do they show? They show America at its very best and saying the best is yet to come and they'll show Jesse Owens at the 1936 Olympics, and maybe they'll show tanks rolling through, liberating France, and they'll show the Apollo program. And then they don't show much after that. All right. And more I've seen commercials, like they often see like presidential candidates who run commercials like that. I'm like, well, what else happened? Like, why aren't there new updates? Now, maybe it's, now you could point to the, you know, the internet, but maybe that's not a very visually appealing kind of thing for a campaign commercial. So I think telling people that, you know, we are a nation of pioneers, we are a nation of explorers, we are a nation of risk takers, and not everybody is going to be a pioneer or risk taker or explorer. But that I think is deep into the American ethos and why we went from, you know, three million people huddled on the coast of the North Atlantic

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to being a continent spanning technological leader that will also lead humanity into space. That is a very, it's a very American way of looking at the world. So when I talk about, you know, this, this upwing idea, I'm talking about the most American idea ever, the idea of, you know, there might be something really interesting, you know, around the bend over the hill. Let's go find out what that is. And you know what, you know, and I think we kind of stopped doing that for a while for a variety of reasons, but there's nothing stopping us from doing it right now. And I think, thank goodness we have like a bunch of emerging technologies to help us enable that. I think we have the lesson from the pandemic of what happens when you don't have technology and what happens when you do suddenly have technology, how can solve a lot of problems.

And hopefully people eventually look at at AI as a way of supercharging the economy. So I think now is a moment and I don't want to waste this moment. I think like we did what I would call upwing 1.0, which was like the mid 50s to the early 70s, then we had upwing 2.0, which was really the late 90s, both of which I think ended before they showed up. So maybe I hope this is the start of upwing 3.0 and it'll be never ending. You know, a quick thing before we get to the last question, when you said how we describe the internet, instant vision, this is my pitch for any upwing aspirant politicians, I instantly thought of Steve Ballmer, Bill Gates, they're sweaty. It's the debut of you know, that video like it's night. It's it's they're debuting Windows 95 and they're just chanting and just like you because this is this is me. Yeah, I know that I was I'm I'm just I'm 31. So I'm just I'm about as young as you could be. And remember, we're like Windows 95 shut up in our house. And I just think if a politician needs an image of a weird nerd aggression that also translates into something serious, that's my nomination. That is a wonderful idea. I think I see that video once a week. Yeah, because it's just it's just it's just it's just if you were to basically the the the weird brief 90s optimism moment that's technologically and economically focused, it's really those it's really those guys on stage. So here's the here's the last and most obvious question kind of the most boring question because I think what I love the most for this conversation is the vision and the context. What's the what's the upwing agenda? Obviously, one of them is just like investment in research. But what's what are the broad things that we should be doing? Because like because there are one agenda I want to add. And this is why this book isn't just we need to, you know, reduce the tax rate and increase economic growth. During the 80s and during the 90s, there's plenty of economic growth. Taxes are cut, you know, the era of big government is over. It's not necessarily true that the economic performance that a center right economist would enjoy is necessarily correlated with the sci-fi level advances that you're kind of articulating here. There has to be an agenda that's mixed in there too. So I love you to talk about that agenda. Yeah, the agenda, it's really a mix of things that I think you could find people across the political, the upwing part of the political spectrum would would think are important. And they are, they are important. I mean, the number one thing I have, and these are not in any order, but I wanted to put something a little flashy, number one, to be honest, was we should be building an absolute permanent moon base as a proof of concept that we can move out in the solar system, mine asteroids, and really have never ending abundance of key materials. I think not only would it begin also be a proof of concept for a colony to make sure that even if something big and bad hits the earth, humanity will survive.

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I think there's a real economic case, which has really been enabled by the big drop in space cost. So that that would be that would be one. I think one, we have to put that we have to put the 1970s behind us and take a very hard look at the kinds of regulations that make it extraordinarily hard to build, not just weight, not just building highways in the 70s, but right now. Listen, you can love you can love renewable power. But if you want to build a factor that makes wind turbines, it's going to take way longer and cost way more because we have regulations that

were rooted in the idea that growth was bad. And there were all kinds of court cases way back, in which you had judges say that finally we've figured out a way to halt material progress. Core sort of the core economic idea here is that economic growth. It's remember the Soylent Green, a great down we're great downing movie from the 70s, you know, you know, you know, you know, Soylent Green is people. Well, economic growth is people. So all my policies are ways to connect people together more efficiently and make sure that the people we're connecting together have every opportunity, have every are every educational training health opportunity to connect together in a way that will enable more growth, more progress. That means economic openness. I mean, Elon Musk once said that there is no better place if you want to do big things with your life, there's no better place to go to than the United States. That absolutely is true. And that absolutely absolutely needs to be continue to be true and be more true. So yes, immigrants, if you want to do great things with your life, come here. So there's a definite economic openness component to this agenda. It is again, massively increasing R&D. I know, you know, people worry about the national debt cutting R&D would be actually dumbest thing you can do. So I think there's a lot of things across the spectrum. But again, if we fear, if we fear the changes that will result, then we won't do anything. And we will be the victim of circumstances, rather than trying to master broadly, collectively, individually, organically, our destiny as a country and as a species. Well said, James. Thank you for joining me on the Realignment. The book is The Conservative Futurist. Thanks so much for having me on. I appreciate it.

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