The Biological Bootloader

What Martin Rees's long view of human intelligence changes about the decisions you make this year.

A hope in 2014 became a goal in 2026

Musk, August 2014: “Hope we’re not just the biological boot loader for digital superintelligence.”

October 2026, as reported: spreading superintelligence to the stars is “a great success condition for a biological bootloader.”

Wording from International Business Times, 5 October 2026.

Organic intelligence as “a brief precursor”

Rees, Nautilus, 2015: human-level organic intelligence “will be a brief precursor to the more powerful intellects of the inorganic post-human era.”

A forecast, not a measurement.

1–2

more centuries before humans may be overtaken

Rees's own estimate in 2015. He says the cautious expect centuries, not decades.

Space suits machines, not people

People

Transit beyond nearby stars exceeds a human lifetime.

Inorganic minds

No atmosphere or gravity needed. Earth's biosphere "is not a constraint."

Rees, Nautilus (2015) and BBC Science Focus (2023).

What if the machines are zombies?

“If the machines are zombies, we would not accord their experiences the same value as ours.”

If they are conscious, Rees says we should welcome their future dominance. Nobody can measure which.

Rees, Undark, 28 December 2018.

One metaphor, two different claims

Rees

A conditional forecast with a horizon of centuries, plus an open question about experience.

Musk, 2026

A success condition. A statement about what he wants, reported from a post.

Catastrophe could foreclose all of it

Rees: our intelligence “could inaugurate billions of years of post-human evolution,” but humans could cause catastrophes that “foreclose all this potential.”

The long view is no excuse to skip this year’s controls.

Five steps for this year

1. Sort AI decisions by whether they can be undone
2. Review the irreversible ones for longer
3. Keep the ability to work by hand
4. Name who decides what systems optimise for
5. Keep funding the near-term controls

Find the decisions that cannot be undone

Move fast on everything reversible. Slow down on the rest.



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