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**Abstract:** Reviews the film, Next directed by Lee Tamahori (2007). Philip K. Dick (1928-1982) was the mad genius of science fiction. In many of his stories, he posed fundamental questions about human nature and psychology in a way that only science fiction writers can. Hypothetical realities are inaccessible to experimental research, but they can cast light on the reality we are stuck with. Next, written by Gary Goldman and others and starring Nicolas Cage, was released in the United States on April 27, 2007. The story that led to Next was The Golden Man (Dick, 1954). Before considering the movie under review, let's review the story. In The Golden Man, Dick posed the question of what it would be like if one could see the future. The golden man is a postapocalyptic mutant whom the authorities want to eliminate, a future-seeing being who is superior and will ultimately replace regular humanity. Dick worked methodically through the implications of this premise. A being who can perceive the future has no reason to reason. The government agents temporarily get hold of the golden man, scan his brain (Dick saw the neuroscientific future), and find no frontal lobes. Unlike other favorite Dick creatures, the golden man has no use for memory. And why should he? If memory serves to guide predictions about an uncertain future, being able to perceive the future makes memory unnecessary. Likewise, the golden man does not need emotions (here Dick missed an opportunity to point out that the golden man has no amygdala). If the function of emotions is to prepare and energize behavior with uncertain outcomes, someone with perfect knowledge does not need them. Next has not fared well with the critics. The cast is average, not stellar. Nicolas Cage is at home in the role of the likeable everyman who just wants to be left alone and live. Although the movie does little justice to Dick, it is entertaining. Cage and his supporting cast succeed in having some fun with the paradoxes of prediction. "Here's the thing about the future," Cage says, "Every time you look at it, it changes. And that changes everything." This is the point of the Oedipus effect (not the complex; Popper, 1964) and the secret of Schrödinger's (1935) cat. It is also the bugaboo of participant observation. Once you look at X, you will never know what X would look like if you were not looking. That makes you wonder: Would Next be a better movie if you did not watch it? (PsycINFO Database Record (c) 2009 APA, all rights reserved)

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## Everyman Sees the Future, Finds Love, and Saves L.A.

Review By: [Joachim I. Krueger](#)

Review of: Next

By: Lee Tamahori (Director), (2007)

Philip K. Dick (1928–1982) was the mad genius of science fiction. In many of his stories, he posed fundamental questions about human nature and psychology in a way that only science fiction writers can. Hypothetical realities are inaccessible to experimental research, but they can cast light on the reality we are stuck with.

Some Dick stories have found excellent expression in movies. *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?* (Dick, 1968) inspired *Blade Runner* (Deely, 1982), starring Harrison Ford. *We Can Remember It for You Wholesale* (Dick, 1966) was filmed as *Total Recall* (Feitshans & Shusett, 1990), starring Arnold Schwarzenegger. And then there was the superb *Minority Report* (Bont, Curtis, Molen, & Parkes, 2002; Dick, 1956) starring Tom Cruise.

*Next*, written by Gary Goldman and others and starring Nicolas Cage, was released in the United States on April 27, 2007, and I saw it on the opening night on the largest screen of the local cineplex. I am a huge Dick fan, and the great track record of filmed Dick stories let my expectations soar.

The story that led to *Next* was *The Golden Man* (Dick, 1954). Before considering the movie under review, let's review the story. In *The Golden Man*, Dick posed the question of what it would be like if one could see the future. The golden man is a postapocalyptic mutant whom the authorities want to eliminate, a future-seeing being who is superior and will ultimately replace regular humanity. Dick worked methodically through the implications of this premise. A being who can perceive the future has no reason to reason. The government agents temporarily get hold of the golden man, scan his brain (Dick saw the neuroscientific future), and find no frontal lobes. Unlike other favorite Dick creatures, the golden man has no use for memory. And why should he? If memory serves to guide predictions about an uncertain future, being able to perceive the future makes memory unnecessary. Likewise, the golden man does not need emotions (here Dick missed an opportunity to point out that the golden man has no amygdala). If the function of emotions is to prepare and energize behavior with uncertain outcomes, someone with perfect knowledge does not need them.

The golden man also happens to be beautiful, and he knows his effect on women (in contrast, Cage's character has to work hard to seduce Jessica Biel's character). Women thus participate in the demise of the human race. Although regular men struggle to eliminate the golden man, women carry his seed. The inevitable happens, in a Greek tragedy kind of way. This is a bummer for humanity, but we can admire Dick's flawless logic.

Now what about Cage and his team? They say that the movie's plot is based on Dick's story, but as the action unfolds, a sense of false advertising sets in. The key difference may seem small, but it is an essential one. Whereas the golden man can see deep into the future, Cage's man sees only the next two minutes of his own. Conveniently, his ability improves as his challenges get tougher. If he does not like what he sees, he looks again, and again, until he gets it right. Cage's man is a thinker. He tries out possible moves, considers the consequences, and then selects the best move. Cage never explains how he decides to stop simulating possible futures and go for it. Perhaps an even better future would open up if he only continued simulating. Instead of a flawless mutant, we get an improved kind of everyman.

I enjoyed the movie all the same, especially the early parts. The routine of trying out possible futures and finding the best outcome is playfully explored as Cage considers his first approach of Biel. The audience is kept off balance as to which of the simulated futures will stick and become the "real" one. This theme is revisited later to greater effect. Then, there is an exhilarating scene with Cage staying inches ahead of tumbling debris, logs, and assorted junkyard items. Knowing where each piece will fall, he knows which way to duck. This scene is reminiscent of the original story because no trying-out of futures is involved. Much like the golden man, Cage knows how to dodge bullets and skip out on his pursuers.

Once the literary material is exhausted, the movie delivers no new creative touches. Instead, there is an abundance of clichés. There is the car crossing the railroad tracks just ahead of the oncoming train, the helicopters rising up from below to battle terrorists on top of a skyscraper, and the game of peek-a-boo in a weird industrial building. My favorite cliché is Cage and Biel leisurely sauntering to the bottom of the Grand Canyon and, hoping to find a kindred clairvoyant, Cage looks for the village shaman. No seer is to be seen, but the National Geographic detour delivers scenic visuals as compensation.

Cage must save Biel—and the rest of Los Angeles—from black hats intent on blowing up Southern California proper (to borrow a phrase from Cage's more youthful *Raising Arizona*). Here the movie's frontal lobes show serious atrophy. Who are these baddies? Why do they want to pulverize Southern California? These questions are never raised, and perhaps no one cares. If you allow a bit of inference, I would say that popular stereotypes and generic national paranoia wrote the script. The nuclear warhead hails from Russia, and the baddies are mostly Frenchmen and one Frenchwoman (*Honi soit qui mal y pense*). There are also some Asians of uncertain origin. What really galls me is the fact that one of the baddies speaks German. To whom? The French? Indulging my German ethnocentrism, I wonder why a German terrorist plays second fiddle to the French. To a social constructivist, the motley crew of evildoers may represent the postcolonial "Other" who haunts the xenophobic American mind of the post-9/11 era. There are no Arabs or Iranians, though. Perhaps their absence is supposed to be a clever surprise.

*Next* has not fared well with the critics. The cast is average, not stellar. Nicolas Cage is at home in the role of the likeable everyman who just wants to be left alone and *live*. Every time the camera zooms in on his face, I expect him to wink. Peter Falk plays an elderly father figure whose purpose is utterly unclear. To speculate again, Falk evokes Columbo, and Columbo always knows the plot before it happens and delights in the perpetrator's slow undoing. Julianne Moore is an accomplished actress who seems oddly miscast as the tough special government agent. At every turn, I expected her to crack up and scream, "Get me out of here!"

Although the movie does little justice to Dick, it is entertaining. Cage and his supporting cast succeed in having some fun with the paradoxes of prediction. "Here's the thing about the future," Cage says, "Every time you look at it, it changes. And that changes everything." This is the point of the Oedipus effect (not the complex; Popper, 1964) and the secret of Schrödinger's (1935) cat. It is also the bugaboo of participant observation. Once you look at X, you will never know what X would look like if you were not looking. That makes you wonder: Would *Next* be a better movie if you did not watch it?

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