

The Revelations reveal - to stay or to walk away

 By Bronwyn Williams

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The Revelations by Erik Hoel (who is himself both a writer and a scientist) is an unusual mix of fact and fiction, highly academic philosophy and action adventure.



The novel follows a group of post graduate scientists exploring the nature of human consciousness and the great mystery of life as we know it today, while unravelling a more practical mystery involving the death of one of their colleagues. What follows is a series of disconcerting run-ins with assorted animal rights activists and religious groups who disapprove of the very nature and purpose of their work

What if you've been working on the wrong things?

Now, while the mysteries of human consciousness are indeed compelling, the question I found myself reflecting on, on finishing the book, focused on another question with profound consequences, specifically, *what if your life's work is for naught?* Or, to put it another way, what if you have sunk the best, most productive years of your life into pursuing an unachievable, or worse, ultimately undesirable goal?

This question plagues one of the central characters in *The Revelations*, as he realises that his life's work pursuing an elusive complete theory of consciousness will likely end up destroying him. I realised that similar questions play on the minds of many technologists, scientists, leaders and entrepreneurs. Many pioneers of new ideas and builders of new businesses come to realise, like the characters in Erik Hoel's *Revelations*, or Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, that the fulfilment of their pursuits and creations could end up costing - both themselves and society at large - more than they bargained for.

Moving fast and breaking things? Or going slow and thinking about things?

Sometimes the gains for moving fast are not compensated by what is broken along the way. Sometimes we need to cut our losses, write off our sunk cost and decline to fulfil our projects when we can see that the end result is going to be more destructive than constructive. Sometimes walking away from the things we could do, *but we know we should not*, is the bravest thing to do.

As science and technology allow us to become our own gods, to incept ideas (and adverts) into our customer's dreams; genetically engineer our future offspring; or surveil our staff as they work from home; or penalise them if they are not happy and smiling enough while on the job, for example, we should really spend more time considering the ends we are working towards.

ABOUT BRONWYN WILLIAMS

Futurist, economist and trend analyst. Partner at Flux Trends.

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