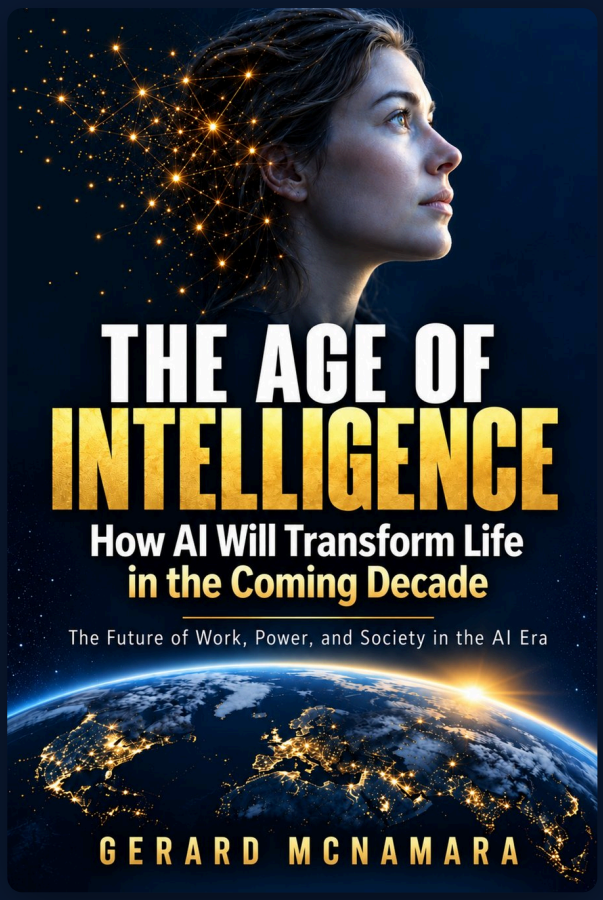
FREE READER'S GUIDE

The Age of Intelligence

How AI Will Transform Life in the Coming Decade
by Gerard McNamara



This guide is for book clubs, classrooms and anyone reading on their own. It is free, and you may print and share it.

The book tells a long story. Fire, the wheel, metal, steam and electricity each changed how people lived. Artificial intelligence is the next of these, and the book follows it into homes, hospitals, schools, workplaces and town halls. Its central question is simple: who will own and control this new infrastructure, and will we meet it as citizens or as customers?

How to use it. Start with the 10 questions overleaf, which anyone can discuss before reading. The book questions after them follow the book's order, in four parts. There are more than any group needs in one sitting, so pick the few that suit you. Page numbers are from the paperback. There are no right answers; the book itself argues that the outcome depends on the choices people make.

theageofintelligence.ie

START HERE

10 questions everyone should ask about AI before 2030

A starting point for anyone who senses that something important is changing and wants to ask the right questions. The book questions that follow go deeper into each one.

What decisions in your life are already shaped by AI?
From what you see online to what insurance you are offered, AI systems are already influencing outcomes. Most people have not yet asked how.

Who owns the AI systems your employer depends on?
If your company relies on AI tools it does not control, what happens when the provider changes the terms?

Can you explain to your children how AI will change their working lives?
The jobs they are training for may not exist in their current form within a decade. Are we preparing them honestly?

What happens when AI becomes essential infrastructure?
When society depends on a system the way it depends on electricity, who sets the terms of access?

Who decides what an AI system optimises for?
AI does not have goals of its own. The question is whose goals are embedded in the systems that shape your options.

Can you challenge a decision made about you by an automated system?
If an algorithm denies your loan, flags your health data, or filters your job application, do you know how to challenge it?

How will AI affect your local community?
Not every community will be affected equally. Some regions and sectors are far more exposed than others.

Is your government keeping pace with AI development?
Regulation tends to arrive after the fact. By the time rules are written, the structures may already be locked in.

What would a fair AI future look like?
If AI creates enormous productivity gains, who benefits? The question is not whether AI works; it is who it works for.

What choices must we make before 2030?
The decisions made in this decade will determine whether AI serves the broad public interest or concentrates power in ways that prove extraordinarily difficult to reverse.

PART 1 · CHAPTERS 1 TO 6

The long story, from fire to AI

1. The book opens on an ordinary Tuesday in 2036 with the Chen family. By night, Sarah finds the day ordinary rather than remarkable. Which parts of that day would you welcome? Which would make you uneasy? Ch. 1, pp. 3–8
2. The book says every great technology follows the same path: discovery, fear, mastery, dependence, transformation. It places AI "somewhere in the middle". Where would you place it today, and why? pp. 12–13
3. "Artificial intelligence is humanity's new fire." Is fire a good comparison? What does it capture, and what might it miss? p. 13
4. The wheel gets the credit, but the book argues the axle was the real breakthrough. What are the hidden parts of AI that we depend on without seeing? pp. 16–17
5. In ancient Anatolia, a master smith's secrets were never written down, and knowledge became power. The book sees the same pattern in who holds AI expertise today. Does that concern you? How could that knowledge be shared more widely? pp. 25–26
6. Samuel Mitchell, a Manchester hand-loom weaver in 1825, loses his trade to the steam mill, yet his daughter now has three dresses instead of one. "Progress felt like drowning in the tide." Has a change in technology ever felt like that to you or someone you know? p. 31
7. In 1935, Ruth Henderson's family in rural Alabama still pumped water by hand while cities had electric light. "Urban Americans lived in one century; rural Americans lived in another." Who might be left waiting for the benefits of AI today? p. 35

PART 2 · CHAPTERS 7 TO 14

AI in daily life

8. The intelligent home learns its family's habits. The book asks what privacy means "inside your own walls". What would you let your home know about you, and what would you keep back? Ch. 7, p. 51
9. George is seventy-nine and lives alone; his AI companion greets him each morning. The book argues companions "can supplement human relationships but never fully replace them". Do you agree? Would you want one for an older parent, or for yourself? pp. 53, 56
10. On Sofia's first ride in a car that drives itself, her foot searches for a brake pedal that isn't there. What would it take for you to trust such a car? And what happens to the people who drive for a living? pp. 59, 61
11. Annmarie's smartwatch spots the early signs of Parkinson's, but only by sending her data to distant servers. "The same data that enables miracles … also enables surveillance and discrimination." Would you make that trade? p. 70

12. Ella finally understands algebra when her AI tutor turns it into baking. Rachel worries her son is learning from a machine that is endlessly patient, when real life is not. Which view is closer to yours? pp. 83, 86

13. David Parker, an accountant, learns by email that an AI system will take over his work. Months later he is retraining, yet feels "the vertigo of starting over at forty-three". If your work changed like David's, what would help you most? pp. 89, 94

14. Amy's father Henry can stay at home because sensors watch over him. Amy notices she now visits because the data tells her to. Where is the line between care and surveillance? pp. 99–100

PART 3 · CHAPTERS 15 TO 23

Power, risk and society

15. Chapter 15 describes AI that protects homes and streets, then asks when protection becomes surveillance. How much watching would you accept to feel safer? pp. 106–107

16. A city that learns can ease traffic and keep the lights on, but it also gathers information about everyone in it. Who should decide what a city's systems collect, and how would you want a say? Ch. 16, p. 113

17. Vincent discovers he can paint with AI's help, while professional artists face a dilemma. If anyone can make a picture or a song in seconds, what happens to the value of art, and to the people who make it for a living? Ch. 17, p. 117

18. Carlos Ferreira, who runs a small repair shop in São Paulo, gets a business loan in minutes that banks would once have refused. Sophia Hart's "free" AI adviser quietly favours its sponsors' products. How would you know whose side an AI adviser is on? pp. 122–125

19. The book points to "the hidden cost of every query" for the environment. Should people be told the environmental cost of the AI they use? Would it change what you do? p. 129

20. A judge in Wisconsin used a secret algorithm's risk score when sentencing Eric Loomis, and the court allowed it. Should a system no one can inspect help decide someone's freedom? p. 139

21. Karen Whitfield tried protecting her privacy for three weeks and concluded, "I had no real choice." Do you feel you have a real choice about the data collected on you? p. 148

22. The book imagines an election night in 2036 and two paths for democracy, collapse or renewal. With fake video and voices easy to make, what would help you trust what you see and hear? pp. 151, 163

PART 4 · CHAPTERS 24 AND 25, THE LETTER FROM 2036, THE PRACTICAL GUIDE

The choices ahead

23. Chapter 24 sets out what governments, companies and individuals must do, and warns that "the window is closing". Which of the three do you think matters most, and why? pp. 167–168

24. Chapter 25 offers three paths: optimistic, pessimistic and realistic. Which seems most likely to you? What would push us towards the better one? pp. 174–175

25. In the Letter from 2036, Laura Ashby writes that the predictions were "both right and wrong", and that her job did not exist ten years earlier. If you wrote a letter from 2036 to yourself today, what would you hope it said? p. 179

26. The practical guide suggests steps under six headings, from understanding the technology to preserving what matters. Which one step will you actually take in the next month? pp. 183–187

27. "AI can help you live more efficiently, but it cannot tell you what to live for." What would you never hand over to a machine? p. 187

TO FINISH

Big questions

28. The Introduction asks: if intelligence becomes essential infrastructure, "who gets to own it — and on what terms does the rest of society access it?" Should AI be run more like a public utility, such as water or electricity, or left to the market? p. 1

29. "This is the age of intelligence. The question is whether we enter it as citizens — or as customers." What would being a citizen, rather than a customer, look like in your own daily life? p. 2

30. The book ends: "You have more power than you might think." Having read it, do you agree? What power do you have? p. 187

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Paperback, hardcover and Kindle on Amazon. More at theageofintelligence.ie

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