Concours d'admission TAFSEM (régime des passerelles)
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Épreuve : **Anglais**
Responsable : **H.Housni**
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He's gotta have it!

Gadgets can be wildly expensive and quickly obsolete, but Steven Poole is still the first to buy them.

Technological innovations are often quite stupid. The idea that you might want to walk down the street holding a mobile phone in front of your face, just to experience the wonders of video calling, is clearly ridiculous. Luckily for the tech companies, however, there are some people who jump at the chance to buy into new gadgets before they are fully ready and cheap enough for the mass-market. They are called *early adopters*, and their fate is a terrible one. I should know, since I am one myself.

Early adopters have a Mecca: it's Tokyo's Akihabara district, also known as "Electric City", a neon-soaked warren of high-rise gadget emporia. There, in 1999, I bought a digital camera, a new-fangled type of gizmo that few people in Britain had heard of. Over the next few years I watched in mounting dismay as digital cameras became more popular, cheaper and more powerful, until better models could be had for a quarter of the price I had paid. Did I feel stupid? What I actually did was this: I splashed out more money last year for a new one, one that let me feel pleasantly ahead of the curve once again. But I know that cannot last, and I'll probably have to buy another in a few years.

Thus early adopters are betting on other people eventually feeling the same desires. And it's worse if that future never arrives. Early adopters of the Betamax home-video format in the 1970s could only look on in dismay when their investment was nullified by the triumph of VHS. All sorts of apparently marvellous inventions, such as videogame consoles like the Atari Jaguar have been consigned to the dustbin of history right after a few early adopters bought in. Those who invested thousands in a Segway motorized scooter on the wave of absurd hype that accompanied its launch a couple of years ago can join the club.

You might think we should just stop being so silly, save our money, and wait to see what really catches on. But the logic of the industry is such that, if everyone did that, no innovation would become popular. Imagine the third person to buy an ordinary telephone soon after Alexander Graham Bell had invented it. Who was he going to call? Maybe he simply bought two phones, one for a special friend. But still, the utility and eventual ubiquity of the device wasn't clear at the time. Indeed, the telephone was originally marketed as a way to listen to music concerts from the comfort of your own home. Nobody dreamed of the possibility of being able to speak to any one of millions of people. And yet if Telephone Man, and the subsequent hundreds and thousands of early adopters after him, had not bought into the idea, the vast communication networks that we all take for granted today would never have been built.

The same goes, indeed, for all new technologies. Those yuppies holding bricks to their ears that we laughed at in the 1980s made the current mobile phone possible. People who bought DVD players when they still cost a fortune, instead of today's cheap one at the local supermarket, made sure that the new format succeeded. Early adopters' desire for desires bankrolled the future. And what did they get for their pains? They got a hole in their bank accounts and inferior, unperfected technology. But still, they got it first. And today they are still at work, buying overpriced digital radios, DVD recorders and LCD televisions, and even 3G phones, so that you will be eventually be able to buy better and less expensive ones.

So next time you see a gadget-festooned geek and feel tempted to sneer, think for a minute. Without early adopters, there would be no cheap mobile phones or DVD players; there would be no telephone or television either. We are the tragic, unsung foot-soldiers of the technology revolution. We're the desire-addicted vanguard, pure in heart, dreaming of a better future. We make expensive mistakes so you don't have to. Really, we are heroes.

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2 Reading 1

Read the newspaper article below by a man who loves buying brand new gadgets. Answer the questions.

1 According to the writer, why are people "stupid" to buy brand new gadgets?
2 According to the writer, why should we all be happy that some people buy brand new gadgets before everybody else does?

3 Reading 2

Read the passage again and choose the correct answer. Discuss the answers with a partner.

1 What is an early adopter?
a. someone who likes to buy the latest gadgets
b. someone who invents new gadgets
c. someone who gets to the shops first

2 What can you buy in Tokyo's Akihabara district?
a. very cheap gadgets
b. poor quality gadgets
c. very new gadgets

3 Which of the following gadgets were successful?
a. the Atari Jaguar console
b. the Segway motorized scooter
c. the VHS home video

4 How were telephones first marketed?
a. As a way of speaking to special friends
b. As a way of listening to music
c. As a way of communicating with millions

4 Vocabulary in context

Choose the correct definition for the expressions from the article.

1 *jump at the chance*
a. miss the opportunity b. take the opportunity enthusiastically

2 *splashed out* (money)
a. saved money b. spent a lot of money

3 *ahead of the curve*
a. getting things before everybody else b. spending too much

4 *the wave of absurd hype*
a. a lot of advertising b. no advertising

5 *catches on*
a. becomes popular b. no-one buys it

5 Follow up

In your opinion, which of the following recently-invented gadgets will still be around ten years from now? Which will soon be obsolete, and what will they be replaced by?

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