

CONGRATULATIONS FROM THE FUTURE!

by Michael Swanwick

In response to my perfectly reasonable request for new biographical information to run with this missive, some version of Michael Swanwick replies:

* * * *

Dear Sheila;

I didn't write that piece. It was written by a future virtual reconstruction of myself created by a society that is desperately trying to atone for how cruelly neglected I was (and am! and will be!) during my lifetime. But he and I exchange occasional t-mails over the Chrononet—sorry, but I'm not allowed to give you any details on that—so I can provide you with a rough sketch of what it's like to be my future-avatar.

Future Me leads a life of unimaginable bliss—as of course does everybody else living on the far side of the Vinge-Stross Singularity. But as a special sign of the high regard in which he is held, a physical instantiation of our world is maintained in realtime simply to contain the many trophies and awards that have been showered upon him. (He's the third most honored science fiction writer in posthuman history.) In almost all respects, his existence is the exact opposite of mine. Which is why the future feels so guilty!

Virtual Michael Swanwick says that a means has been found whereby you, your magazine, and the entire world can be retroactively destroyed without endangering me or the contingent existence of his future timeline, and has very graciously offered to do so as a punishment for your shameful treatment of me. But I turned down his offer. I'm not petty.

Your pal,

Michael

* * * *

Greetings, primitive ape-like ancestors!

As the guest editor of the 130th anniversary issue of *Asimov's Science Fiction* and the virtual reconstruction of your era's greatest writer (yes, yes, I know—but he's going to get better), it is my happy duty to congratulate the publishers of *Asimov's*, editor Sheila Williams, and the magazine's many readers on your thirtieth anniversary. Well begun! But rest assured that your most glorious accomplishments still lie before you.

Here are just a few of the many highlights (and select low points) that you will encounter in the coming century:

* * * *

2014: *Aliens Invade Earth*. Revenues soar at *Asimov's* as countless tentacled monstrosities subscribe in order to bring themselves up to speed on our planet's history and culture. Subsequently, human defense forces have little difficulty subduing the aliens, who have somehow acquired an exaggerated opinion of the complexity of human society and the superiority of our technology.

* * * *

2021: *Special Nanotechnology Issue a Flop*. The first-ever magazine issues encoded into the genes of *Bacillus cereus* bacteria are released into the wild as part of *Asimov's Science Fiction's* grossly misnamed "viral marketing project." Alas, even those readers equipped with the technology to decode their issues have trouble locating them. The following month's magazine reverts to self-editing "smart paper."

* * * *

2036: *Willis's Record Surpassed*. Twelve-year-old genetic chimera and brain-enhanced *Wunderkind* Tiffany Genome wins her hundred-and-first major SF award, surpassing the record previously set by Connie Willis. Willis graciously sends congratulations from her summer retreat in Mare Imbrium.

* * * *

2037: *Willis's Record Restored*. Winsome young Tiffany Genome is reduced to tears as Connie Willis's latest novella sweeps not only the Hugo, Nebula, and World Fantasy Awards, but the Wolfe, Tanith, Rosenblum, Stableford, Paolo, McDevitt, Di Filippo, and Rucker "Top This, Sucker!" Awards. "I didn't *mean* to do this, honest!" says a stricken Willis. "I can give some of them back, if that will help."

* * * *

2046: *Asimov Cloned*. To mark its seventieth anniversary, *Asimov's* mass-clones Isaac Asimov and distributes one to every subscribing household—which by now includes every human being and tentacle-sprouting abomination on Earth. A decade-long depression follows as every thinking entity on the planet realizes that he or she or it will never again be the smartest or wittiest person in the room.

Luckily, the clones are averse to space travel (the original didn't set foot in an airplane until his old age), and so the Solar System is colonized in no time flat by people trying to regain their self-respect. "I may not be able to breathe free here," says one settler on Io, "what with the air being so expensive and all. But at least I can compose a limerick without somebody instantly improving upon it."

* * * *

2060: *The Death of Science Fiction*. Science Fiction, born Francis Aschweiler III, dies of complications after a botched full-body transplant meant to make him look like Robert Silverberg. The former Aschweiler had his name legally changed at age twenty-four and spent the next thirty years suing anybody using the term science fiction or his initials, SF, in print, charging them with identity theft.

Though he never won a single case, Science Fiction's nuisance suits terrorized the publishing industry for decades. In a related development, *Asimov's You-Know-What* is finally able to resume its old name.

Upon hearing the news, John Clute, speaking from exile, snarls, "It's about time!"

* * * *

2061: James Patrick Kelly Dies. Prolific writer Jim Kelly, long a mainstay of *Asimov's*, dies after being bitten by a poisonous orchid in the Antarctic Rainforest Preserve. At the time, he is researching *Dino Clans of Ophir*, the twenty-sixth volume in his popular Dino Elves fantasy series. Briefly, it is feared he will not be able to write his traditional June story for the magazine. Thanks to newly developed necrotechnology, however, his body is plasticized and a weak electric current is run through his brain, enabling the dead author to keep faith with his myriad fans. A contract is signed with the Necropoleum to provide one story annually for as long as the corpse holds out.

Kim Stanley Robinson, writer-in-residence at the Disney-Atlantis undersea metropolplex, pronounces the new story "distinctly creepy."

* * * *

2064: Special Lunar Issue. Amateur astronomers everywhere rejoice as a bank of giant lasers carves an entire issue of *Asimov's* into the near side of the Moon. Hackers are delighted to discover they can illegally download the text without having their brains burned out by the killer "black ice" memes released into the infosphere by the Defense of Intellectual Freedom Act of 2048. All twelve survivors of the legislation gather in a hotel room in Paramus, New Jersey, to drink, reminisce, and wallow in nostalgia.

* * * *

2070: Supreme Court Finds "Laws of Robotics" Unconstitutional. Declaring that "One form of sentience cannot be privileged above another," the Supreme Court strikes down the Laws of Robotics. By this date, ill-advised legislation has ballooned the original three laws to forty-seven. Mechanical life forms everywhere hail the finding, particularly the repeal of Law Nineteen, which forbade their reading *Asimov's*, lest they "get ideas." Says one robot, "Now our heritage has been returned to us."

* * * *

2076: Special Singularity Issue. The grand old man of science fiction, Charles Stross, is pumped full of endorphins and strapped into a powered exoskeleton so he can appear in public to usher in the Singularity and, not coincidentally, celebrate the hundredth anniversary of *Asimov's Science Fiction*. After throwing the switch making unlimited ubiquitous AI available to everyone—humans, nameless horrors, and robots alike—Stross is immediately transformed into a gigantic blue lobster. Which is a little hard to explain to

somebody on your side of the Singularity, but in retrospect was pretty much inevitable.

Bruce Sterling, speaking from exile, calls the Singularity “long overdue” and “a crashing disappointment.”

* * * *

2091: exile Destroyed by Terrorists. The world is shocked as the meter-long orbital retirement home, exile, is destroyed by killer infophages released by the pro-reality terrorist group Meat First. Luckily, exile, best known for its large population of former science fiction writers and for its cool, lower-case name, subscribes to a Laotian backup service, and so its inhabitants are restored to life minus only twenty nanoseconds of realtime experience. “It just goes to show what intellectually bankrupt wusses these toe-rags are,” says Lucius Shepard at the press conference afterwards. “Now if *I* wanted to cause global chaos, I’d simply—” At which point, agents of the Department of Homeworld Security wrestle him to the ground and administer a universal brain-wipe.

* * * *

2107: Sexism Finally Eliminated. Women everywhere celebrate as sexism is at last declared to be as dead as racism or the dodo, before its reconstruction. Nancy Kress³, one of seven extant cyborg downloads of the original writer and current president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, applies for recognition as a hard science fiction writer, but is turned down on the grounds that “biology is not really a science.”

So it’s been an exciting century. And the one to come promises to be equally challenging. Luckily, all intelligent entities—whether terrestrial or alien, electronics-based or disgusting sacks of putrescent flesh—have the capacity to learn from our mistakes. I am thinking, of course, of the Asimov cloning fiasco. In our enhanced wisdom, we realize now that there can be only one Isaac Asimov. He is currently being built in low orbit around Alpha Ophiucus IV, and we have every confidence that he will be finished, debugged, and put in control of the Known Universe by the year 2176—just in time for our two hundredth anniversary issue!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Swanwick', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Michael Swanwick (virtual)

Copyright (c) 2007 Michael Swanwick

