

Emortality — at last!

Ali Zaman's recipe for eternal life will set us free.

Brian Stableford

It is still possible, of course, that we who are beneficiaries of the Zaman Transformation will not prove to be as long-lived as we dare to hope. Only time will tell whether those of us whose lives are not prematurely terminated by violence will live for 500 years, 5,000 years or five million. Pessimists are right to call attention to the fact that previous technologies of longevity have all failed to live up to the expectations of their inventors, although optimists are equally justified in pointing out that what we learn from our mistakes invariably helps us to avoid them, and that there was always bound to come a time when all our errors had been corrected.

It is arguable that none of the previous technologies of longevity were failures, even though they did not provide their beneficiaries with true emortality. Ironically, they were victims of their own success. The techniques of rejuvenation pioneered in the twenty-first century by Morgan Miller did indeed rejuvenate all the tissues and organs of a mammalian body, including the brain. Unfortunately, 'rejuvenating' the brain restored all the functionality of all the synaptic connections whose selective elimination is responsible for the formation of the individual personality and the development of rational intelligence. Even animals could not survive such an extreme restoration of innocence, although the boost that Miller's research gave to the production of tissue-culture foodstuffs allowed for the early release of most of the kindred species that humankind had enslaved for meat production.

The nanotechnological processes of organic repair developed in the wake of the Plague Wars by such megacorporations as PicoCon and OmicronA allowed the Miller Effect to be circumvented, but soon revealed the next hurdle facing architects of emortality. By the middle of the twenty-fourth century it was obvious that, although the nanomachines maintained existing synaptic connections, rather than restoring those whose extinction had been part and parcel of the process of individualization, they were too scrupulous in so doing. Eventually, their assiduous maintenance resulted in the 'robotization' of the mind, stifling its ability for further development and preventing the further evolution of personality. Although lesser animals equipped with the best repair nanotech could be reckoned emortal, humans could not.

Unfortunately, the apparent success of nanotechnological repair had resulted in an

excessive concentration of research efforts. The possibility of using genetic engineering to incorporate longevity into the human genome had been neglected for some time, and the kinds of transformation investigated by Ali Zaman might have been fully explicated a century earlier had it not been for overt and covert prejudice against that kind of approach to the problem. Once the necessity was clear, though, genetic engineers resumed the quest to provide a genetic blueprint for a brain capable of containing a mind that could continue to develop indefinitely without falling prey to the Scylla of the Miller Effect or the Charybdis of robotization. The advances in technique made in the interim by flower designers helped them to produce encouraging results without overmuch delay.

There remains a possibility that today's Natural Emortals will eventually reveal some other as-yet-unimagined vulnerability that will prevent them from extending their health and happiness indefinitely, but we are fully entitled to hope that the last major problem has been solved. The legless fabers who will presumably become the primary colonists of all low-gee environments within and beyond the Solar System will undoubtedly require more complicated Zaman Transformations, especially if they are to develop six- or eight-handed variants, but that is a matter of mere technical adjustment.

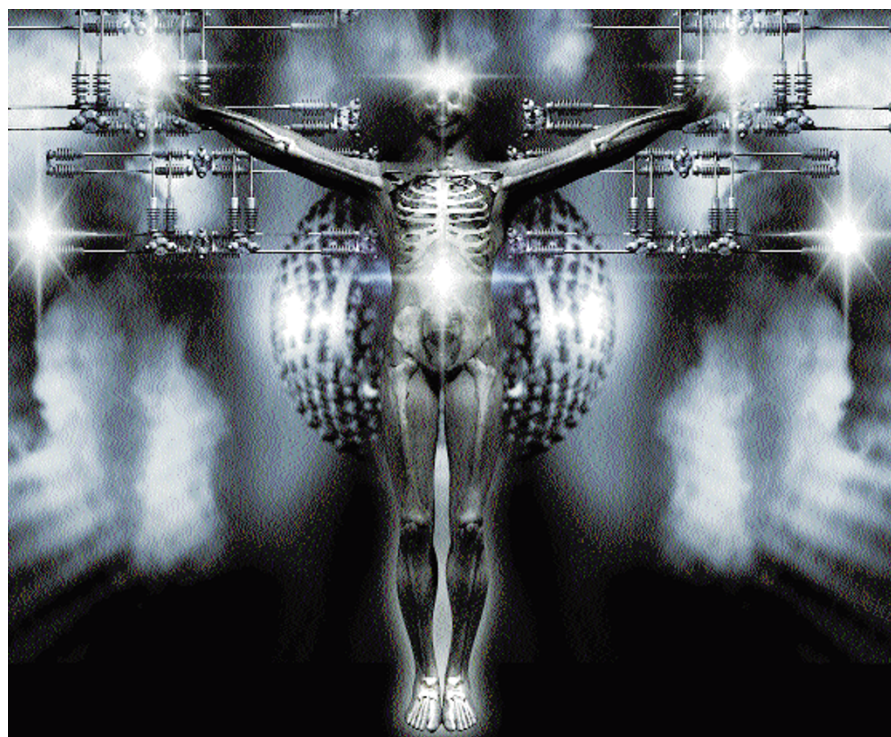
The champions of cyborgization are prob-

ably right to argue that the brains we have at present are inadequately pre-adapted for the kinds of neuromechanical augmentation that they are enthusiastic to investigate, but it is unlikely that biotechnological pre-adaptation will compromise the effects of the Zaman Transformation. There is, therefore, every reason to suppose that the various human-descended species that will undertake the boldest adventures in universal exploration will also share the gift of true emortality.

We shall never be entirely free of the shadow of death. There remain a dozen brutally simple ways in which human beings can be destroyed, no matter how clever their internal technology may be in compensating for injury or oxygen starvation. We have, however, relegated death to its proper place in human affairs: its threat may not be neutralized, but it is minimized. That is why I am now able to plan the compilation of a definitive history of death, whose conclusion will mark the most crucial boundary in human evolution.

Until now, all human history has been the history of death, but from this day forward all histories except mine will be the history of life. (From the introduction to *The History of Death* by Mortimer Gray, deposited in the Hypertextual Labyrinth in 2614.)

Brian Stableford's most recent novel is *Architects of Emortality (Tor)*, part of a future history that will be continued in 2000 in *The Fountains of Youth*.
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