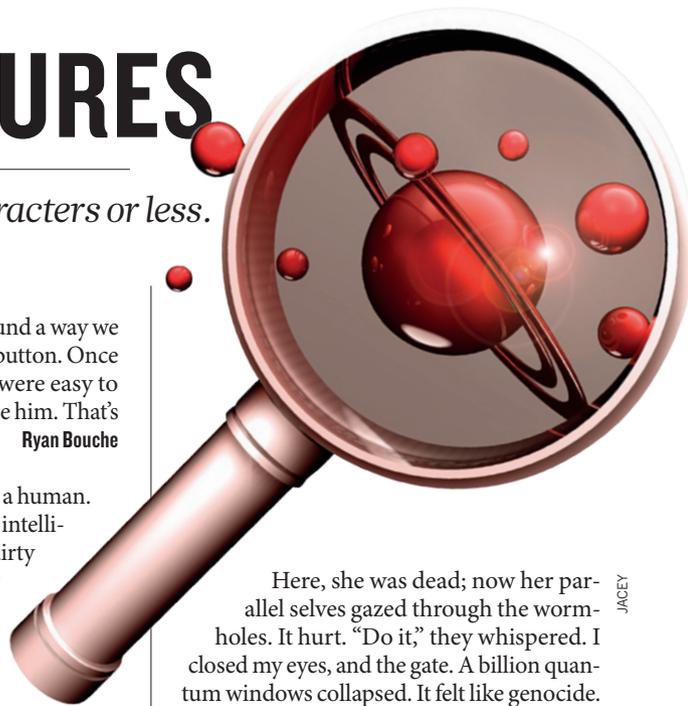


# microFUTURES

Science fiction in 200 characters or less.



JACEY

At the start of this year, Futures ran a competition challenging readers to write a story in just 200 characters. After a difficult judging session, we're pleased to award first prize to Catherine Rastovski, who wins a year's subscription to *Nature* plus a gift voucher for the *Futures 1* eBook. Five runners up also receive gift vouchers for *Futures 1*. Here are the winning entries, plus a selection of stories that impressed the judges.

## FIRST PRIZE

I pass your empty chair every day. Across the room sits the computer, your voice, your face locked inside. I ache to bring you to life, but fear keeps me in my chair. What if you say no?

Catherine Rastovski

## RUNNERS UP

Cynthia was learning faster than anyone had predicted. The apparently totipotent cells continued to proliferate at an exponential rate. Today would be the last time they would refer to her as a mouse.

Adam Flanders

The champagne tasted unpredictably sour, the time traveller thought, as the press cameras flashed. Even the world-record lottery win was nowhere near enough to repair the broken machine.

Arran Froid

off that switch, Professor! Your time machine can't travel back in time past the moment of its own creation and instead will trap the Universe in an endlessly recursive time-like loop! Take your hands

Judith Reeves-Stevens

Silence. I floated around through corridors, filled with debris. No flickering lights, no air, no sound, just memories I could not grasp. Alone. I released my air supply and became part of the debris.

Anssi Sajama

The robot knows when you turn it off. Those last picoseconds, as the current drains from its circuits, are a living Hell. When you turn it back on, it will never be the same. But it will remember ...

Chaim Schramm

## COMMENDED

It took a while, but we finally found a way we were different. He had no belly button. Once we had one difference, others were easy to find. That's when I started to hate him. That's why he had to go.

Ryan Bouche

I forgot what it was like to touch a human. Less beautiful, less obliging, less intelligent than my companions — a dirty mess of bacteria. Discovering his imperfections. I resolved to never try again.

Adam Dunn

I was the first to make contact, but they spoke not with their mouths, only with their eyes.

And their eyes said: "Fear us, for we are your demise."

Cody Frederick

As robots perform the laboratory work, it is cheaper just to electronically stimulate areas of the student's brain associated with frustration and failure and then, after 3 years, call them doctor.

Gavin Garland

The Prof smiled. "I've isolated the plague vector! Now we can kill it." I sighed with relief, "I'll tell the others." He held my arm as I turned away. "Hang on, old chap. Amy, pass me the syringe."

John Gilbey

I managed to find the most-wanted gift of the year. Finally, I found a way to surprise him. The real surprise came when it unwrapped itself and knocked loudly on the bedroom door early this morning.

Jamie Hadac

For sale: one cat-litter box, never used; or not. Contact E. Schrödinger.

Joses Ho

Sorry—I overslept/sleep tomorrow—missed invite 2 come 2 yr quantum state. Let's try again—Googlemas 2 years ago. I'll bring/brought nano-geese + 2096! intox/ferment. C/saw U 2 years ago. luv-u ^

Ken Krug

We gather, receiving the voice of a deserted explorer. "I have found the lunar colony," she says across the void. "Their logs simply state, 'We die alone.'" Eyes downcast, we hear the broadcast end.

Alasdair MacLeod

Despite her growing love for him the mission demanded it happen now. He sat on the bed and placed his hand on her leg, she turned inside out enveloping the president. Endocytosis won the ten-day war.

Dan Nicholls

Here, she was dead; now her parallel selves gazed through the wormholes. It hurt. "Do it," they whispered. I closed my eyes, and the gate. A billion quantum windows collapsed. It felt like genocide.

Aude Oliva

The city is microbial more than it is concrete. Licking the wall is today's graffiti and in saliva swirls the future of urban planning. She spat into the web, and smiled. The diagram shifted slightly.

Poeia Onomato

Still orbiting Earth, a century later: a little girl's shoes.

Charles Pellegrino

"Rest assured that you'll eventually be vindicated," said the time traveller, handing the medal to a bewildered Turing. "Regrettably, beyond giving you this, we are not allowed to alter the past."

Gary Shockley

*The Sentence* It was a novel trial, the first of its kind, the charge was illegal human cloning, creating a sentient human in laboratory, the verdict was guilty, ironically the sentence was: life.

Nathan Susnik

Years of cheap computer time allowed the TKLabs GeneCoin project to decode all the 'junk' DNA in the human genome. Now a lone tech sees the output flashing on the screen: "Intentionally left blank" ...

The Moletrap Collective

I lost my arms at work. New arms made from tissue scaffolds take too long to grow. No work, no money. So, my boss fused a used pair of robotic arms onto me. My robot overlords finally promoted me!

Mark Teo

Thorus remained deathly still as he frantically searched his pocket for the laser gun. He hadn't seen the ship's cat for a few days now, and that thing he'd just seen had had huge teeth ...

Mick Watson

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