

# A GLIMPSE INTO THE FUTURE

## THE BICENTENNIAL MAN THE NOVEL



Congresswoman Li-hsing was considerably older than she had been when Andrew had first met her. Her transparent garments were long gone. Her hair was now close-cropped and her coverings were tubular. Yet still Andrew clung, as closely as he could within the limits of reasonable taste, to the style of clothing that had prevailed when he had first adopted clothing more than a century before.

5 "We've gone as far as we can, Andrew," Li-hsing admitted. "We'll try once more after recess, but, to be honest, defeat is certain and then the whole thing will have to be given up. All my most recent efforts have only earned me certain defeat in the coming congressional campaign."

"I know," said Andrew, "and it distressed me. You said once you would abandon me if it came to that. Why have you not done so?"

10 "One can change one's mind, you know. Somehow, abandoning you became a higher price than I cared to pay for just one more term. As it is, I've been in the Legislature, for over a quarter of a century. It's enough."

"Is there no way we can change minds, Chee?"

15 "We've changed all that are amenable to reason. The rest-- the majority-- cannot be moved from their emotional antipathies."

"Emotional antipathy is not a valid reason for voting one way or the other."

"I know that, Andrew, but they don't advance emotional antipathy as their reason."

20 "It all comes down to the brain, then," Andrew said cautiously. "But must we leave it at the level of cells versus positrons? Is there no way of forcing a functional definition? Must we say that a brain is made of this or that? May we not say that a brain is something-- anything-- capable of a certain level of thought?"

"Won't work," said Li-hsing. "Your brain is manmade, the human brain is not. Your brain is constructed, theirs developed. To any human being who is intent on keeping up the barrier between himself and a robot, those differences are a steel wall a mile high and a mile thick."

"If we could get at the source of their antipathy, the very source--"

25 "After all your years," Li-hsing said, sadly, "you are still trying to reason out the human being. Poor Andrew, don't be angry, but it's the robot in you that drives you in that direction."

"I don't know," said Andrew. "If I could bring myself--"

If he could bring himself--

30 He had known for a long time it might come to that, and in the end he was at the surgeon's. He had found one, skillful enough for the job at hand-- which meant a surgeon-- robot, for no human surgeon could be trusted in this connection, either in ability or in intention.

The surgeon could not have performed the operation on a human being, so Andrew, after putting off the moment of decision with a sad line of questioning that reflected the turmoil within himself, had put First Law to one side by saying "I, too, am a robot."

35 He then said, as firmly as he had learned to form the words even at human beings over these past decades, "I order you to carry through the operation on me."

In the absence of the First Law, an order so firmly given from one who looked so much like a man activated the Second Law sufficiently to carry the day.

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40 Andrew's feeling of weakness was, he was sure, quite imaginary. He had recovered from the-- operation. Nevertheless, he leaned, as unobtrusively as he could manage, against the wall. It would be entirely too revealing to sit.

Li-hsing said, "The final vote will come this week, Andrew. I've been able to delay it no longer, and we must lose. And that will be it, Andrew."

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- "I am grateful for your skill at delay. It gave me the time I needed, and I took the gamble I had
- 45 "What gamble is this?" Li-hsing asked with open concern.  
"I couldn't tell you, or even the people at Feingold and Martin. I was sure I would be stopped. See here, if it is the brain that is at issue, isn't the greatest difference of all the matter of immortality. Who really cares what a brain looks like or is built of or how it was formed. What matters is that human brain cells die; must die. Even if every other organ in the body is maintained or replaced, the brain cells, which cannot be replaced without
- 50 changing and therefore killing the personality, must eventually die.  
"My own positronic pathways have lasted nearly two centuries without perceptible change, and can last for centuries more. Isn't that the fundamental barrier? Human beings can tolerate an immortal robot, for it doesn't matter how long a machine lasts, but they cannot tolerate an immortal human being since their own mortality is endurable only so long as it is universal. And for that reason they won't make me a human being."
- 55 "What is it you're leading up to, Andrew?" Li-hsing asked.  
"I have removed that problem. Decades ago, my positronic brain was connected to organic nerves. Now, one last operation has arranged that connection in such a way that slowly-- quite slowly-- the potential is being drained from my pathways."  
Li-hsing's finely wrinkled face showed no expression for a moment. Then her lips tightened. "Do you mean
- 60 you've arranged to die, Andrew? You can't have. That violates the Third Law."  
"No," said Andrew, "I have chosen between the death of my body and the death of my aspirations and desires. To have let my body live at the cost of the greater death is what would have violated the Third Law."  
Li-hsing seized his arm as though she were about to shake him. She stopped herself. "Andrew, it won't work! Change it back."
- 65 "It can't be done. Too much damage was done. I have a year to live more or less. I will last through the two-hundredth anniversary of my construction. I was weak enough to arrange that."  
"How can it be worth it? Andrew, you're a fool."  
"If it brings me humanity, that will be worth it. If it doesn't, it will bring an end to striving and that will be worth it, too."
- 70 Then Li-hsing did something that astonished herself. Quietly, she began to weep.

Isaac Asimov, *The Bicentennial Man*, 1976

1. Introduce the document.
2. Who is Andrew?
  - Quote to prove.
3. What is his intention?
4. Can you explain why people won't give him what he's asking for?
5. What is to be human?
  - Use the examples from the text.
6. Finally, what does he decide? Why?

## make a link

7. What is the relation between this text and the one before? « Fountain of Youth: Progress in Slowing Aging, at Least in Mice »
8. Can you link what happens to Andrew to the concept of « Transhumanism »?



answer the online quiz

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