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***A Glimpse of the Future***  
**Christopher J. Levinson**

**The streets of New New York City** rolled out before 38 year old James Blake, a handsome man with forest green eyes and long black hair. The cold night air chilled Blake as he walked, chilled him deeply. It was midnight in the Big Apple and, as he looked at the tall buildings which thrust up into the engulfing shadow of night, a part of him wished he could be anywhere but here. However, being the curious author type that he was made him come out and search the streets. The dangers and wonders of *New New York* gave him both an insight and a clarity to his work.

Blake, who had previously been a journalist before one of his datanovels had become an international success, passed many people in the streets, observing them while keeping to himself. They looked him over in return, but neither said nor did anything. He locked eyes with some of these people; they were on edge, seemingly looking for trouble. *Perhaps looking for the Technopolice*, Blake thought to himself. He glanced behind him and, surely enough, saw the looming figure of a Technopolice officer - the blue and white of his protective armour flashing in the pale moonlight - come out of the shadows. There were yells, and then running. The officer bolted after the attempted escapees.

Seeing that it wasn't really any of his concern Blake moved swiftly onwards, gazing quickly at other people. These people had not run, but they still looked like they had something to hide: prostitutes, drug and Link addicts, alcoholics. Their faces were one and the same: sad and unhappy. Their eyes held an eternal sadness about them, haunted. A different kind of life filled the streets of *New New York* when the sun went down, the desperate and forlorn.

Some were probably addicted to the new age drugs, genetically modified - more addictive *and* thus expensive - heroin and cocaine. Others might be addicted to CALTOX. This neural stimulant increased an individual's IQ and hand-eye coordination. If CALTOX were used frequently, it became highly addictive and a dependency formed; those hooked became volatile and dangerous to themselves and to others, walking time bombs. Like many of these people. *Sorry souls* Blake thought.

And still there were others who had come in contact with the forbidden parts of the Link. The Link - a complete merging of thoughts, minds, emotions and ideas between any number of people - was achieved by inserting a duranium rod into a small electronic implant behind the base of a person's left ear. The rod sent out an electronic frequency and, if anyone were nearby, they would merge minds. The Link was a feeling of immense pleasure and could become addictive if experienced in excess. The forbidden sections were the frequencies of the Link that had been infected by diseases. (The diseases were modifications of viruses like AIDS, Chlamydia, Syphilis, Gonorrhoea and Herpes. As the Link was a complete merging of people it was soon discovered that sexually transmitted diseases mutated and could also be transmitted through the Link.) The symptoms of the diseases were present on their faces, and their addiction to the Link's pleasure in their tormented eyes.

Blake felt sympathy towards these people, but was not sorry for any of them. It was their own decisions which had made them addicted. He moved on.

Not everyone around him were addicts. There were couples walking arm in arm, coming out of a nearby holomovie theater. Other people were walking their pets, hybrids of cats and dogs; two heads, two tails and one body; not freaks of nature, normal in this day and age.

Finally Blake came to a park and sat on a wooden bench. He stared up at the moon, basking in its eerie light and seeing the stars in the sky. He watched a shuttle fly into the same sky, likely carrying human and possibly AI droids to the Moon or Mars colonies. The shuttle was triangular with three thin wings branching off it's golden hull. He could almost imagine the subsonic thundering of the plutonium engines as their powerdrives kicked in. There was a brief silver glow as the *New New York Deflector Shield Grid - NNYDS* - absorbed the excess plutonium generated from the engine discharge, capturing the dangerous particles before they could fall into the city and cause harm.

Blake gazed at the last traces of the departing shuttle and felt a slight rumbling in his stomach. Hunger was setting in. He tapped a few buttons on his miniature wrist Molecular Converter and a small apple pie appeared a few seconds later. Thanks to this device, world hunger had been totally eliminated. He ate the pie quickly, rubbing his hands to dispel any crumbs.

Thinking it was time to go home Blake flicked another switch on his wrist and the MDT - Molecular Dematerializing Transporter - became active. With a shimmer of molten gold, Blake disappeared, his molecules being dematerialized and scattered over the vast distance of *New New York* to his home.

He reappeared seconds later in his home in the upper-east side of the city, feeling totally clean and cleansed; a function of the MDT was that it filtered any bacteria and dirt.

Blake paused beside the bedroom door of his nine year old daughter, Megan. Her hair shimmered in the moonlight coming from the nearby window. She looked peaceful, curled in a restful slumber. Beside her, sitting in a chair, the fully-automated android, nicknamed Binary, was powered down, awaiting orders.

Blake blew a silent kiss to his sleeping daughter and went into his own room.

His wife Helen Smith-Blake lay peacefully under the sheets of their bed, a stray strand of hair falling across her face. "Good night, honey," Blake said quietly, kissing her on the right cheek lightly. Five minutes later Blake was lying beside her, fast asleep, perfectly content, dreaming peaceful, happy dreams.

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**James Blake woke the next morning** and opened his eyes, allowing them to adjust to the light. The other side of the bed was empty; Helen was already up. The SOCOM brand air distributor - a square, five by five, gray device - grated loudly on the ceiling, blowing air on him as he retrieved his VR goggles from beside the bed. The goggles sat on the top of Blake's nose, balancing precariously until a black

suspension cord extended from the goggles and wrapped around Blake's ear, plugging into the small implant that was used to access VR, the Web, and the Link.

The interior of the goggles became a dark blue hue, changing to a kind of computer screen.

"Good morning, James," a computer voice said inside Blake's head. "How might I serve you?"

"Newspaper," Blake ordered. "The *New New York Times*. This morning's edition."

"That will be one virtual dollar," the voice insisted.

Concentrating, Blake imagined himself handing over a dollar coin to a person he had never met. The image was quickly dispatched along the suspension cord that connected to VR.

"Bill paid," the chirpy voice said. "One moment please."

The screen flashed once, then darkened. An almost nonexistent ringing sounded in Blake's ear, the sound of the VR cord uploading onto the Web frequency of the *New New York Times*. Like all the other Link, VR and Web sites the *New New York Times* site was always present, always on the same frequency. The person just needed to be on the same frequency to access it. Blake was online in a matter of seconds. The screen flashed again, signaling its readiness, then the Home Page appeared, showing the edition for this day, May 5th, 2150. He began to read.

A dominant story was the continuing debate over what were known simply as the Androids. The Androids were machines more powerful, but not necessarily more intelligent, than anything in the world - a form of complete AI. The debate currently raging was this: some people thought they were servants of humanity, while others thought they were actual intelligences and had the right to do what *they* wanted. If it could be proved that they could think for themselves then employers would have to pay and possibly house them for their services, treating them as individuals. It was a very contentious issue, but while these androids were now used in many complex and dangerous tasks as well as ones of convenience to their owners - being a nanny to Megan, for example - they had originally been designed for the Uploads, in particular the Death Upload.

The Uploads were so complicated that they could only be performed by machines, updating a human mind with various forms of data. The Death Upload was the pinnacle of technological evolution. When death was imminent a person connected themselves to one of these androids. The android would then search the person's brain and retrieve the memory patterns and neurological thought processes of the person, duplicating them into itself. When the person finally died the android would activate the algorithms within itself and the deceased would be "cloned" back to life. Over time the android would change, be given skin and hair to have a truly human appearance, until, after several years, it was no longer an android. It was a way of virtual immortality but some people were opposed to it, saying it was ungodly, that immortality shouldn't be taken so lightly. If the androids were found to be self-aware then they would no longer have to perform the Death Upload and lose their own sense of individuality. If that happened than humans would once again have to face their own mortality.

Once more, Blake saw, the Times was running an article trying to show both sides of the debate. *Easier said than done* he thought to himself. *Most publications tend to go the other way, choosing a side and running never-ending stories trying to sway people, usually against self-awareness.* Personally he didn't mind either way. Immortality was overrated in his opinion. He didn't mind death; eternity had its pros, and cons. And death seemed so distant to him anyway, as it did to most people. Blake turned the page and began reading what all men read: sport.

Thirty minutes later he removed the darkened goggles from his eyes, disconnecting from the VR Link. He moved into the large walk-in wardrobe that was off the bedroom. Dozens of neatly folded items of clothing aligned each wall, force-field shelves stopping them from falling. Blake selected his most-current piece of attire, a self-dressing tracksuit made by NIKE<sup>2</sup>. The fabric launched itself at his body. Its smooth texture curled around his skin.

Blake left the bedroom, walking through a small, angular corridor and into the spacious bathroom. Two minutes later, after finishing his personal chores, Blake moved into the combined living/dining/kitchen room. The room was completely circular. In the middle was the modern plastic furniture; it could be adjusted for either body/room temperature or colour. Many doors led to other parts of the home (bedrooms, laundry, etc.).

The house was very comfortable and surprisingly well priced. He could afford it easily with the money he had made on his first novel. The mortgage was only \$1000 a week, or 2500 World Credits, a currency used all over the world without having to be changed at banks. (World Credits were different to virtual credits. Virtual Credits could only be used on the Web and in VR. World Credits could be used all over the globe.) Costs of living had come down all over the world. Working hours were low by law, and the price for working was particularly good, and property was cheap. The world was in an economic boom. With the colonies on Mars, the Moon and elsewhere taking away the problem of global overcrowding, the world had been able to enter many economic and social booms, led, of course, by the US, Europe and China. *If only World War Three had never happened,* Blake thought to himself. *Financially the world would be even better off.* Nuclear war had been a threat for many years and, 125 years ago, it had happened. In just a week the third World War had begun *and* ended, killing over four hundred million people. It united the world but the cost had been great... The war had also led to the development of the city shields, the same ones which protected citizens from the harmful plutonium particles that fueled the space shuttles. *So,* Blake continued his line of thought, *even though it cost us greatly, without that war we wouldn't be here now. But no price is worth war. The cost is just too high. If only there had been another way...*

James Blake shook his head to clear his thoughts and smiled at his wife, Helen, who was seated at the dining room table, staring into a pair of VR goggles. *Perhaps one of those virtual novels she loves so much. Are they a good invention or a bad one, though? Seeing that they allow us to interact with our favorite characters is a good thing, certainly. I mean I've been in Hamlet hundreds of times, but it also leads to murderers and criminals being able to plan out their crimes in complete secrecy. I suppose it's up to the individual, and the Technoplice to monitor them.* Megan meanwhile sat on the couch, her head cocked slightly to the side, a Link cord attached from her to the android Binary beside her, eyes darting as she assimilated her daily intake of information at an unbelievable rate. She was getting an early start

on her schooling for the day. Though Megan hated her download - *like all children* he interjected silently - she knew it was a better alternative to the barbaric School Systems abolished over fifty years previously. Blake was, in fact, currently reading a datanovel on the terrible politics that had gone on in schools, and how unbelievably cruel their methods of education had been. Forcing children to lose so much time out of their lives... though at times, school had probably been pleasurable as well, with interaction between people rather than machines. Pros and Cons, as always...

Blake still wondered sometimes what it would be like to live back over 150 years ago; when schools were still around, when computers were crude, when money was the pursuit of all, when medicine wasn't advanced enough to create a contraceptive that completely worked without any side-effects. Such a life was almost impossible to imagine. *So primitive.*

Even as he watched his daughter now, Blake knew that though this way of education was less barbaric, it still had its problems. Because of the enormous rate with which children assimilated the information from the Uploads - at her young age Megan contained the information of a year 11 student of 150 years ago in her mind - an information Download would have to be initiated by the time she was thirty, something which hadn't usually been needed in the past until a person was at least fifty. This Download would erase portions of her brain, the portions containing unnecessary memories and information. By doing this there would be more room for information, more neural units - as they were called - to fill up. The danger in the download was that only four downloads were safely allowed in a person's increased lifetime - about 130 years was the average now. If any more than four, or rarely five, Downloads were done then the person would lose *all* their knowledge, everything they had learned and been born with. They would become a vegetable, living with just the basic instincts of life. But if the Downloads weren't done then, because of the sheer amount of inputted information, the person's brain would implode. And all that was if the Downloads (and even the Uploads) weren't rejected by the body as sometimes, though rarely, they were...

Blake shook his head to clear his mind. He didn't want to be thinking those thoughts. At the moment Megan was still his little girl and he would take care of her. He wanted to focus on the present, not the future. He wanted to value what he had right now, not what he might have to face later.

Realizing he wasn't particularly hungry yet - he shouldn't have had that pie last night -, Blake decided to work on his second datanovel. His first datanovel had been a great success with many millions of people purchasing it. Anticipation was building for the follow up. As a result his datapublishers were getting on his back and he really had to get to work.

Blake lowered himself onto his plastic chair, adjusting its temperature to his body heat, and began to write.

Around him, the world passed quickly, unnoticed.

The future was full of individuals like James Blake. All were hopeful, all were dreamers. All were living in an accomplished world.

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**About the Author:**

Christopher Levinson is 16 years old and lives in Sydney. This is his first published story, though he has written many others. His stories range vastly from looks into the future to the destruction of humanity and even the universe, as well as tales of overcoming personal adversity. He has received words of encouragement from several editors of magazines and science fiction websites - including *ScienceFiction.Com* and the Australian magazine *Altair* -, as well as uplifting words from science fiction master Greg Bear. His ambition is to eventually have a novel published. He can be reached for comments about this story at [christopherjlevinson@bigpond.com](mailto:christopherjlevinson@bigpond.com)