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Suzie Goldsmith-  
Brown

Part of

# WRITING THE FUTURE

Writing the Future, the world's largest health short story prize, is brought to you by Kaleidoscope Health & Care.

Inspired by science fiction, entries considered how health and healthcare in the UK will look in the year 2100.

The prize was won by Elizabeth Ingram-Wallace with her story 'Opsnizing Dad', and was published along with the five other shortlisted stories in October 2017.

At a time of reflecting on where healthcare has been, a further set of longlisted stories was published in the summer of 2018 to coincide with the NHS's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday.

All of the published stories are available on the Kaleidoscope website, along with the option to buy a limited edition hard copy of the six shortlisted stories.

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**Kaleidoscope Health & Care  
Cannon Wharf, Pell Street  
London SE8 5EN**

**hello@kaleidoscope.healthcare  
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The future is...  
not set.

It is unbridled  
potential  
laced with  
uncertainty

**T**ears formed unexpectedly in her eyes. Blinking them back, she carefully aligned the holomag back down on the marble table, but not before a stray tear had fallen on its iridescent screen. She brushed it away with the sleeve of her blazer, the bead disappearing into the dove-grey fabric. Self-conscious that the Receiver would see her reaction, she walked to the window and focussed on something- anything- to distract her while she composed herself. Outside, winter was starting to take hold once more now the long summer days were gone. The season's first frost was still hard on the ground, and a spider web in the window pane had caught the morning dew; little orbs of light glistening in the dawning sun.

It was perhaps irrational to feel so strongly about today's news, but she couldn't fight the onslaught of memories triggered by what she'd seen. Old wounds reopened. She had known this day was on the horizon, but it was still too soon. The fact that this news came today of all days had caught her off-guard, but the irony was not lost on her. October 25th was filled with so many emotions, especially now her grief was so raw. Perhaps the hot tears had stung her eyes more quickly as they had not long been dry.

Taking a seat in the anteroom, her gaze was drawn back to the publication; the vivid hologram projection demanding her attention. Oligarch Artur Ivanov and his wife Lavinia's pure-white symmetrical

grins and startlingly artificial features glared back at her from the table, captured in a freakish live-action preview. Their ages betrayed within the headline, these septuagenarians rapturously rebelled against the Natural Order. For cradling swathed twins under a heavenly beam of light, they raised their offspring up like trophies, as if heralding the Second Coming. The first Genome Design babies born to the world; a new dawn of humankind.

“Naomi Hargraves- Andreas will see you now. Please, follow me”.

Pulled abruptly from her thoughts, Naomi acknowledged the Receiver and followed her to meet with Andreas Manning, the nation’s top medical journalist and holocaust presenter for the popular ‘Focus’ series. She inhaled deeply as she entered the Arena, mentally preparing herself for the assault Andreas would no doubt rain down on her in the course of the broadcast.

“Naomi! Thank you so much for coming in to see me, I know how full your schedule is”. Naomi had always thought of Andreas as an eccedentesias, and he did not disappoint in person. Shaking his hand, he led her to a podium where a glass of water was waiting.

“I expect you’ve seen today’s headline? A strange coincidence given our holocaust this morning”. Andreas couldn’t disguise the smirk on his face. He knew

damn-well what her reaction would be and he revelled in the fact he would be able to exploit it in his live broadcast.

“Indeed, Andreas”, she acknowledged jadedly, “Just another incessant revolution in medical science”. She threw him a knowing look and he nodded his acknowledgement, delaying his opportunity to press her further in what would follow.

“Quite. Before we begin, I’d like to just remind you that this will be a live holocaust. Are you happy to proceed?”

“Of course. Please, ask your questions”. A technician made the necessary adjustments for the three dimensional transmission, and indicated the holocaust would begin in 5,4,3,2...

“Welcome viewers, and thank you for joining us for what should be an interesting debate given today’s headline. I am joined by Naomi Hargraves, who you will no doubt recognise as Baby XI of the Genesis Inquiry. Naomi is now a renowned professor and psychologist at Cambridge University, and a lead protagonist in the campaign to end what she refers to ‘humanity playing God’ in respect of advanced medical intervention.

“Naomi, before today’s breaking news we had invited you in for a general debate as part of our ‘World in Focus Week’, to discuss the developments in reproductive healthcare over the course of the last

several decades. However, with fated timing it would seem, we are waking up today to news that the first ‘Genome Design’ babies have been born. Before we begin, I wonder if you would mind explaining to our audience exactly what these babies *are*?”

Naomi stifled her annoyance that already these children were being discussed as objects rather than people. She had of course heard about the concept of G.D. from her involvement in the peripherals of medical science, and she had gathered the basis of these twins’ genetic make-up from the headlines this morning.

“Of course, Andreas, and thank you for your kind introduction. These babies are the newest chapter in the evolution of human reproduction which has transfixed the world over the last 50 years. Born with a pre-determined catalogue for their biological make-up, aspects such as gender, weight, height, muscularity and fat ratio, as well as the talents and strengths of these individuals, have been pre-programmed during gestation.

“IQ levels are fixed, athleticisms programmed, beauties pre-defined, and the ability to excel in life seemingly guaranteed. Each stage of these children’s lives will evolve exactly how their parents - or architects if you will - have designed. They are artificial cocoons unfurling into manufactured butterflies on golden puppet-strings; their very existence realised in a gilded cage...”

“If I can interrupt you there- it’s of no surprise that your feelings on this latest development are tainted, given your history. However you must be able to appreciate the magnitude of this new technology- one that will be added to the *catalogue* of healthcare achievements in the last half century?”

“Clearly in my line of work I am able to recognise the astounding progression of medical science, especially within reproduction. But I do believe we have arrived at a point- with today’s news as a perfect example- where we are showcasing technologies that are *just not necessary*, to the point where we are now playing God. So no, I don’t view this as an ‘achievement’”.

Andreas nodded in acceptance of her point, and studied the article on the podium in front of him. “My understanding of this latest breakthrough is that essentially parents can choose the qualities they wish to see in their children, and for want of a better word ‘imbed’ these within the embryo during gestation.

“When the first wave of this technology was introduced 30 years ago, it allowed us to protect our children from the ailments our predecessors suffered from. I’m assuming you agree with this intervention as it has saved countless lives and dramatically improved life qualities- including your own. To be devil’s advocate therefore, is this not simply an

extension of the type of control that we as a race are already benefiting from?”

Naomi shifted in her seat, conceding to the fact the discussion would inevitably become personal. “You refer to Genome Cleansing, which to its credit has wiped out all potential for degenerative disease at the embryonic stage. While its origins were controversial, the *concept* of G.C., in my view, is medical science at its best. Akin to the vaccinations produced in the last 200 years including against such epidemics as Ebola and HIV/ AIDS- conditions which have killed millions of people- G.C. is simply a tool to rid the world of such afflictions.

“Designing a blue eyed, blonde haired baby programmed to excel in Maths, Science, and athletics, achieve a height of 6’4”, weigh 224lbs with high muscularity, with a skill-set and mentality biased towards a specified career path, does not serve any purpose except to engorge the vanities of the parents and take any sense of one’s own destiny away from the child. These children are being treated as science projects- with stark echoes of the findings from the Genesis Inquiry- and morally I can never condone that”.

Andreas paused for a moment to gather his thoughts and reassess the tangent to take the interview in next. “Before we get too bogged down

in the detail, Naomi would you just provide a quick summary on the reproductive milestones we are referring to?”. He flicked up headlines reflecting the most notable breakthroughs in recent medical science. As the vivid images swirled around her, Naomi briefed their observers on the history flashing before her eyes.

“To recap on reproductive healthcare in recent history, ‘O.B.E. Pregnancies’ or ‘OBEP’ was hailed as a medical marvel half a century ago. OBEP originated out of medical necessity where mothers were unable to carry pregnancies to full-term or the foetus suffered complications resulting in premature labour- both of which scenarios had historically ended in either miscarriage or stillbirth. However this revolutionary offering- trialled successfully on livestock in the first quarter of the 21st century and crudely titled the ‘Out of Body Experience Pregnancy’- had meant the foetus could be saved by transplanting it into an ‘Artificial Gestational Sac’ or ‘A.G.S.’ for the remainder of the gestational period; saving countless lives and sparing heartache for thousands of families.

“As medical intervention developed over the next three decades, and after numerous years of controversial clinical rounds which spawned the Genesis Inquiry, babies have gradually benefited from having hereditary diseases removed from their genomes during gestation in what is known

as ‘Genome Cleansing’ or ‘G.C’. This new wave of pioneering medical intervention meant- as of 30 years ago- all potential for degenerative disease to develop in later life such as cancers, Alzheimer’s, and Parkinson’s, had been eliminated in the foetus. Life expectancy for babies born to G.C. is now calculated to be between 115-130 years. This revolutionary technology has since been applauded as the genesis of the ‘Golden Age of Medical Science’”.

Naomi paused to sip her water, then continued. “In the last 20 years the ‘Elective OBEP’ has gained popularity, where the entire 40 week gestation takes place in the A.G.S. after laboratory conception achieved with the DNA of both parents. The technology provided a solution to the ultimate lack of control that came with surrogacy, with other motivations including the ability to maintain heavily-invested in careers and, more narcissistically, the mothers’ figures.

“Originally available only to the elite in society, this revolution in reproduction had initially been ill-received in the wider population as vanity driven, much like elective caesarean births had been 100 years before. But in time Elective OBEPs were accepted by society as the new normal, and governments of the world begun to push their own Machiavellian propaganda to promote them. Endorsed under the guise of gender-equality to keep women in the workforce longer and therefore able to maintain equal salaries to their male

counterparts, the Elective OBEP was advocated as the only reproductive option where women no longer needed to sacrifice their professions to birth children, all the while earning more tax contributions to line politicians' pockets..."

Andreas threw Naomi a look, but she persisted. "The Golden Age of Medical Science' had been magnificent, but its glory was tainted. In the absence of any pandemics to save the world from a vacuum had been created, and focus shifted from survival to enhancement. In the year 2100 society's obsession with visible perfection has taken a disturbing turn, and the miracle of these technological advancements has brought with it a dark underbelly of moral corruption..."

Andreas exhaled loudly and held up his hands in an attempt to derail her monologue, but with an acknowledgement of his qualms Naomi continued. "If I may, Andreas, the link I'm making *does* bear relevance on today's news. The fountain of youth is literally now at society's finger-tips, where cosmetic and surgical procedures are no longer luxuries for the elite but are instead embraced by main-stream society.

"The steady decline of civilisation to such a dangerous idolisation of 'perfectionism' can be identified as far back as the early 2000s, when perceptions of beauty were manipulated with the promotion of false images achieved through photo-

shopping and perpetuated by reality television. This obsession in the younger generations to attain an unrealistic new pinnacle of beauty soon permeated throughout the generations in an unending wave of narcissism. I fear this is now transcending into reproduction itself with today's new milestone; a regeneration of healthcare where Genome Design affords parents the ultimate progeny vanity project. This is the new epidemic ravaging the world, and it's of our own making”.

Andreas furrowed his brow the way he always did when there was a topic to sink his teeth into. “Your palpable distaste for our culture and the subsequent arc our technology is heading in is something you have always been outspoken about. As Baby XI you were amongst the embryos which were subjected to clinical trials for Genome Cleansing, and we now know doctors took liberties with their experimentations which led to the deaths of otherwise healthy babies, including your twin. As dark a history as this is, stricter regulations have come into force from the Genesis Inquiry, and G.C. has gone on to provide innumerable benefits to succeeding generations. Is it not time therefore to leave this murky chapter to history and look to the future?”

Naomi considered her approach, aware of the complexities she was entering into. “To not learn the lessons from the Genome Inquiry is a monumental

mistake, and Genome Design is a precarious step down the same road. No one knows the repercussions of playing God, and yet we are- again- interfering with the biological make-up of living, breathing children, when we have no way of knowing what the consequences will be. I agree G.C. *now* is a benefit to our race, but designing children for reasons other than improving their health is a vastly detrimental misuse of this technology”.

Andreas sensed a change in tact was required. “Your mother, Vanessa Hargraves, was a renowned activist in the protests against MedTech, a branch of the initial rebrand once the NHS was privatised. After losing her son- your twin- 32 years ago today, she led the movement which brought about the Genesis Inquiry. While I accept blunders were made in procedures undertaken in what was then a fledgling technology, G.C. has nevertheless saved *you* from a life inflicted with motor neurone disease which ravaged your mother’s lineage. *You* are undeniably living proof of the benefits of medical intervention, yet you represent a movement against such interference...”

“Andreas as I have already said I do not disagree with medical intervention when it serves a greater purpose and benefits healthcare on such a tremendous scale. But I fail to see any advantage to our race in designing a child for superficial reasons,

not to mention the psychological damage of stripping away any sense of control that child would have over its own existence...”

Andreas interjected. “It rather sounds to me Naomi that you are selective in the types of healthcare technologies you condone based on whether they benefit you personally”.

“Andreas, you’re intelligent enough to know that is untrue. My mother was specifically selected for the G.C. trials due to her genetic history and she participated willingly. Her subsequent campaign was in protest to doctors undertaking high-risk testing on her embryos *without* her knowledge or consent- which was reflected in the findings of the Genesis Inquiry...”

“So your issue is with the parents who have consented to the new Genome Design offering? Rather than there being anything *wrong* with their choice, you simply don’t like it? Your moral compass appears ambiguous as one moment you preach against society developing the capabilities to suit their wishes, and yet your own mother benefited just last week from the relatively modern intervention of Assisted Suicide. So is it one rule for you and another for everyone else?”

Stunned, the breath caught in Naomi’s throat. She had known Andreas’ reputation for making unscrupulous comments to provoke a reaction in his interviews, but this was far too close to home. She took a few

seconds to steady herself. The morning sun streamed through the window, refracting off her glass of water and casting spectrums of light across the podium. She reached for her glass and assuaged her thirst.

“While your question is quite frankly offensive, as we are discussing the evolution of healthcare it is appropriate to acknowledge the revised Right to Die Act of 2090. Legalised Assisted Suicide affords a final kindness to those afflicted with the very diseases Genome Cleansing was introduced to eradicate. If you determine that fulfilling a sufferer’s final wish and allowing them a premature death to avoid further pain and indignity is an abuse of available healthcare, then you must also oppose G.C. itself, as the latter originated to spare future generations from such a fate as my mother endured.

“Life is not black and white and neither is my acceptance of the healthcare evolution. Truthfully it astounds me if you believe the subject to be mutually exclusive. I have reiterated already that I endorse medical intervention should it serve a benefit to society, but it is the *motivation* behind this latest offering that I have issue with”.

Andreas realised he had hit a nerve and relented. “We are running out of time for the holocaust. Naomi- I appreciate your position and thank you for your contribution today. Would you like to offer some closing thoughts to our viewers?”

Naomi reflected on the state of the world they now lived in. “I feel an overwhelming sense of sorrow for these individuals who will ultimately grow up without a sense of choice in their lives. We have no idea how the decisions made at their conception will transpire- only time will tell what the ripple effects will be from the enormity of this decision.

“I very much hope my concerns are not prophetic, but I fear Genome Design will turn out to be the turning point which future generations identify as the technology we should *never* have allowed to happen, and that in doing so this day will live forever as a cautionary tale. Just because something is within our capabilities, it does not mean that we should do it”.

## About the author

Suzie Goldsmith-Brown has always enjoyed writing, and counts being accepted onto a Master's degree in the subject after completing her Film Studies degree as a personal achievement. It has remained Suzie's passion to create worlds aside from our own, with her usual genre based within realms of a simpler time, akin to those of Lord of the Rings or Game of Thrones; with personal struggle and warfare interspersed within vivid and sweeping landscapes. Therefore undertaking the challenge of a short-story set firmly within a futuristic science-fiction was a new adventure for her. One she hopes you'll enjoy.

## Inspiration

I hadn't given much thought to advancements in medical science before writing ReGenesis, however once I delved into this world the ideas started coming thick and fast. It is a fascinating topic with almost endless possibilities, so it was an enthralling voyage into a 'Tomorrow's World' full of potential.

Writing the future

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