

Futures

Future legal

A rude awakening. By D. Thomas Minton



The thermal blanket crinkled reassuringly as Hayden Jones pulled it tighter around his shoulders. Across from him, a man in a loose-fitting tunic set a metallic cube about the size of an eyeball on the table.

“Where am I?” Hayden asked.

“You’re in New Tigard,” the man explained.

Hayden’s pulse accelerated. He remembered being diagnosed with an inoperable glioblastoma, and Peggy agreeing without hesitation to the his-n-hers cryogenics package – *Find Your Future in the Future!*

“My wife’s cryopod –”

“Yours was processed first. When you woke up, we had to suspend operations ...”

Hayden lost track of what the man was saying because the movement of his lips didn’t match the words he heard, as if they were trapped in a poorly dubbed foreign film.

Sensing his confusion, the man motioned towards the cube on the table. “A language translator. It took us time to reconstruct a

grammar for twenty-first-century English. We apologize for the incontinence.”

Hayden smirked, but the man continued.

“We missed a failsafe while down-powering your cryopod. An emergency revival subroutine clicked in and viola!”

Hayden’s eyebrows pinched together, creating a vertical fissure in his forehead.

The man cleared his throat. “Your revival was an unfortunate antecedent.”

“You mean, an accident?”

“Our first mistake in more than a century – an impressive record, considering the thousands of cryogenic eunuchs we’ve down-powered.” A friendly smile showed shockingly white teeth.

Hayden’s forehead crease deepened.

The man’s smile collapsed. “What did you expect?”

“That you’d revive us?”

“That’s awfully presumptuous. You freezer-boomers throw yourselves into cryopods because you’re riddled with cancer,

degenerative heart failure and inflated self-importance, and then expect us to thaw you out and cure what ails you?”

“Well ...”

“A suitable analogy: you buy a house in the suburbs. A year later the previous owner appears from the basement and expects to sleep in your bed and eat your tasty snacks.”

That didn’t seem a fair comparison to Hayden.

“It’s taken 300 years to fix your generation’s mess. Only in the past decayed have we been able to go outside without respirators or prospective suits.”

Hayden didn’t like the man’s tone. As a simple small-claims lawyer, he didn’t have any influence or power over things like that.

“Right, right. You were just an innocent sick man who was hoping to wake up in a brighter future after a cure for your cancer had been found.”

“Has it?”

“Have you been hearing? You have been

Futures

charged with a serious crime –”

“Crime?” Hayden sat up straight.

“Yes. I’m your barista.”

“My what?”

The man frowned as he reconsidered his words. “Your advocate in legal proceedings – your barista.”

“You mean my barrister? My lawyer?”

“That is what I said. You are charged with temporal trespass. As a society of laws, we held administrative proceedings, found all you freezer-boomers guilty, and were carrying out the down-powering sentence. When *you* awakened, the judge threw out the convictions and required new travails for everyone. You face the termination penalty, but we hope you will consider – how do you put it – ‘policing an entreaty.’”

Stuck on the prospects of a ‘termination penalty’, Hayden struggled to keep up. “Are you offering a plea bargain?”

With a flourish, the man tapped the cube. The tabletop lit up, displaying a digital document. “The court is willing to accept a plea to disorderly conduct. That does not carry a termination penalty.”

“Alive is good,” Hayden conceded.

“The sentence is solitary incarceration for not fewer than 100 years and not to exceed

your natural life. If you’ll just notate ...” The man pointed to the bottom of the form.

Hayden gripped the edge of the table, his head woozy. He and Peggy had opted for cryogenics so they could spend their future lives together. If they couldn’t do that, was it worth living? “What will happen to my wife?”

“A re-travail and most certainly a re-conviction on temporal tress –”

“No. I’ll take my chances in court.” If this was a society of laws, then shouldn’t it also be one of justice? Hayden saw nothing just about this.

“Doughnut be obstinate. The evidence against you is powerful.”

“There’s a chance I could win, yes?”

“No, but avoiding a public travail would be best. It would only slow operations – so many freezer-boomers, so little time! As your barista –”

“No.”

The man appeared genuinely deflated. “If you will not accept my legal avarice, I cannot in good conscience defend you.” He tapped the cube, and the tabletop went dark. He rose. “A replacement barista will be assigned.”

Hayden couldn’t help his wife if he was dead, but he also couldn’t help her from solitary confinement. Or could he? “Wait.”

The man lowered himself back into his seat.

“I’m hearing.”

“I’ll accept this plea with a modification. I want to serve my confinement inside my wife’s cryopod.”

After several breaths, understanding dawned across the man’s face. “Your natural life, and by extension hers, will last indefinitely. We cannot legally touch you because you will have already been convicted.”

“Either the fusion cell on our cryopod runs down, or we awaken in the future, perhaps one with a different legal climate. Either way, Peggy and I spend our time together, and you have no public trial.”

“Your argument is persuasive. Let me consult the court.” He closed his eyes and placed an index finger against his left earlobe. As Hayden waited, he grew concerned his request would be denied. The man opened his eyes. “The court accepts your modification.” An updated document reappeared. “Now if you will notate here, here and initiate here ...”

D. Thomas Minton is a marine biologist and SF writer who lives in the mountains of British Columbia. He assumes this is not the most probable combination of events.

THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

D. Thomas Minton reveals the inspiration behind *Future legal*.

As a story, *Future legal* has been sitting on my desk in some version or another for many years. The only thing those iterations had in common was the concept of cryogenics and the assumption that maybe – just maybe – the people in the future wouldn’t be so welcoming to cryonauts. Most of those versions of *Future legal* simply didn’t work, so I eventually stripped the idea to its core and decided to write a comedy that pokes fun at contemporary legal systems and self-centred, me-first ideologies. Something I have come to appreciate over the years is that a less-serious approach to an idea can often be more illuminating than a serious and thoughtful one.

