



# Ahead!

## a short story by Ian Watson

### Foreword

*Ahead!* first appeared in *Interzone* in May 1995, and was reprinted in the benefit anthology *The Best of Interzone* in 1997. My immediate stimulus for the story was an article by Charles Platt in an earlier issue of *Interzone* about how he has signed up to have his own head frozen. Personally I feel a bit dubious about this freezing of neomorts (the opposite of neonates, I suppose) -- or, on a smaller budget, decapitated heads -- to wish upon the future, supposing that the power or funding doesn't fail in the interim and supposing our descendants can unfreeze these bequests from the past and can reverse whatever brought death. Oh it's a grand old dream, going back to the time of the Pharaohs, not forgetting all those mummified cats -- but what might the future decide to *do* with us? Still, there's Charles five hundred years ahead laughing his head off at me as he operates a mining machine on Pluto and leads a rich VR fantasy life...

## Ahead!

### 1: The Head Race

There's an old saying: it'll cost you an arm and a leg.

For me the cost amounted to two arms, two legs, and a torso. Everything below the neck, in fact. Thus my head and my brain would survive until posterity. How I pitied people of the past who were dead forever. How I pitied my contemporaries who were too blind to seize the chance of cryogenic preservation.

Here we were on the threshold of potential immortality. How could I not avail myself of the Jones legislation? The opportunity might not be available in our own country for longer than a couple of years. The population might drop to a sustainable level. A change of administration might bring a change of heart. There could be rancour at the cost of maintaining increasing numbers of frozen and unproductive heads.

Until then, though, we were in the Head Race with China and Japan and India and other overpopulated nations. The previous deterrent to freezing had been guillotined away. Now no one was compelled to wait for natural death by cancer or car crash -- and thus risk their brain degenerating during vital lost minutes.

Farewell, likewise, to the fear of senile dementia or Alzheimer's! The head would be surgically removed swiftly in prime condition and frozen immediately. This knowledge was immensely comforting to me. It was also a little scary. I was among the earliest to register. Yet I must wait almost a month till my appointment with the blade. A whole month! What if I were murderously mugged before I could be decapitated? What if my head was mashed to pulp?

Fortunately, I was part of a nationwide support group of like minds linked by our PCs. To a fair extent our lobbying had finally resulted in

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