

Story for performance #951
webcast from Sydney at 08:04PM, 27 Jan 08



Source: Ian Munro, 'Iraq withdrawal to go ahead, says Smith', *The Age online*, 27/01/08.

Tags: [death](#), [corporeality](#), [science](#)

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Mr Smith had thought a great deal about cryogenics; about the pros and cons of several hundred years or so spent vacuum-packed in an icy tank, and then being defrosted in the future by radiant scientists. He would awaken like some ancient God from the deepest of dreamless sleeps, striding confidently into the perfect world of tomorrow. Mr Smith had even imagined himself modeling a silver toga and matching anti-gravity jet boots. Then he had practiced looking hairless and serene in the mirror: the bald and beatific look everyone would be sporting in the year two thousand and whenever it would be. Being frozen after his death would be the best thing he could do, Mr Smith had decided. He would not merely keep up with the Jones', he would outlive them into perpetuity.

The average human life span was far too short for someone of Mr Smith's ambitions. The Mr Smiths of the world needed more time to bring their important plans to fruition, Mr Smith had decided. And so he had searched online for the cryogenic company responsible for deep freezing Walt Disney. Mr Smith had only wanted to deal with the best in the business. What was good enough for the creator of Mickey Mouse, he counseled himself, would be good enough for him.

Of course, Mr Smith had understood that the future might not be exactly as he had pictured it. He had steeled himself against the prospect of certain unpalatable developments. That gambling might be outlawed, for instance, and Las Vegas transformed into health spa. Or that whoever was in charge would make it forbidden to eat meat. Things like that. Little annoyances that Mr Smith would just have to put up with. After all, the compensations of the future would more than make up for these minor inconveniences.

His original life, the one Mr Smith had been leading when he made these decisions, had been mostly spent making valiant efforts. Efforts that unfortunately never amounted to very much. Mr Smith had consoled himself that this was because he had always been ahead of his time. He had always tried to advance too far with the benefit of too little technology. And in this respect Mr Smith had compared himself to Napoleon trying to march on Moscow before the invention of the automated ski mobile. Yes, Mr Smith had also watched his dreams fall through the ice. But unlike Napoleon, Mr Smith would get the chance to have another shot at his conquests. And he would do right this time. His cryogenic rebirth would see to that.

Mr Smith would be more social in the future, too, he had decided, more outgoing. Mr Smith had never been the life and soul of any party. In fact, he had usually been the man who stands in the kitchen telling everyone that the booze is running low. That had been a poor lifestyle choice on his part, and Mr Smith had promised himself that his general demeanor would change as well. Life was too short for being the glass half empty type, and Mr Smith had decided that in the future his glass would be always

half full. And, what the hell, in the future he would have two glasses, overflowing like fountains at all times. He would be the glamorous Lazarus that everyone talked about.

In the event, roughly thirty years after Mr Smith had come to these conclusions, the cryogenic company came to theirs. Since storage space at the cryogenic warehouse had become an issue, like it had in every other sphere of business, they had decided to freeze only Mr Smith's brain and discard the rest of him. With any luck, they had told themselves, the scientists of tomorrow would be able to fix something up for him. If not, they had joked, well, the iceman cometh and the iceman goeth, you know how it is. And besides, they had rationalized, this Smith guy isn't paying premium whack. Then they had sealed Mr Smith's brain into a durable, temperature controlled canister and left it on a shelf.

When Mr Smith, or at least the gray mass that was left of him, began defrosting in the year two thousand three hundred and eighty seven, his immediate reaction was to scratch his balls. It took him several hours of thawing to realize that he didn't have any balls anymore, that he was just his brain attached to electrodes, swimming in a glass jar half full of formaldehyde. This must be some sort of intermediate stage, Mr Smith's brain thought, while they gather the information required to grow my perfect body back from pristine, super DNA.

A little later Mr Smith's brain found itself surrounded by a professor and his group of students. Fascinated, they peered at him through the glass and pointed.

'This is a typically primitive D-class cerebellum,' the professor explained, 'suffering from a terminal case of hubris. Notice that ugly swelling stain in the cerebral cortex. This is a very arrogant brain with extremely aggressive tendencies. A fine example of unevolved, early twentieth-first century naive biology that thought the future would have room for it.'

A student raised his hand: 'Professor Jones,' the student asked, 'can the brain still think?'

The professor shook his head. 'Only in the most basic, confused way,' he replied. 'Mostly it just bobbles around in its jar and gets excited by random impulses.'

Having no ears, Mr Smith's brain heard none of this. They have come to prepare me for my brave new life, he thought. Nor did Mr Smith's brain hear Professor Jones say: 'Well, if there are no further questions I'm going to turn the power off again and put it back in the freezer.'

Mr Smith's brain was revived many times in similar circumstances as the centuries rolled by. Each time he thought, this is it, this is my moment. Unfortunately these moments were far too short for a brain with Mr Smith's ambitions.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Stephen Baldwin.