

# Futures

## Cyberjunk

Memories are made of this? **By Sylvia Spruck Wrigley**



ILLUSTRATION BY JACEY

**“Y**our mother is constantly uploading,” Paul muttered instead of *Good morning, honey, how did you sleep?* “I mean, seriously. Irrelevant detail, random trivia, memories from her childhood. It’s a constant stream of data that no one cares about.”

“I know, I know. She’s a child of the 1990s.” I made a fresh cup of coffee, handed it to him and then made myself another, double-strength. I’d been dreading this argument. “She grew up with almost no data. She’s just trying to be sure that we don’t lose things.” I accessed the kitchen interface to check the shopping.

“She’s hoarding. It’s got to stop. If she actually needed the information, that would be one thing. But she won’t catalogue anything or remove duplicates. All she says is that it’s *just in case*. In case of what? I asked her but she just said *you never know*, like someday someone’s going to ask her to provide a blurry video of her mantelpiece in 2012.”

My mother, like many of her generation, has always been like this. “Don’t be mean, Paul. We’ve never had to live through data scarcity.” I cleared last week’s menu, as if that helped. Paul was right, Mom was getting worse. There was nothing so trivial that she wouldn’t save it to the cloud and then make a back-up. “Couldn’t you just limit her to her own working area in the cloud?”

“I tried! She won’t stay there. She wants everyone to have access to her data,” he complained. “She thinks one day we’ll watch it all and tag it.”

“Mooom!” Serena waltzed into the kitchen in full-on drama mode. “You aren’t even going to *believe* this. Grandma *literally* just took a selfie of her eating her breakfast, I swear to Dog. She’s saving it for posterity, she says.”

“And then she’ll save a copy and then she’ll make a back-up,” snapped Paul.

“My friends think it’s hysterical,” said Serena in a voice that said she didn’t. “They say there’s nothing she won’t save.”

I swiped the interface shut. “I said I’d talk to her.” There wasn’t enough coffee in the world to deal with this.

“Mom, you have to stop uploading everything,” I told her. “It’s not like the old days any more. No one needs to crowd-source information.”

“But there’s so many things missing. The little things. The recipes. The places. Oh honey.” She laid her wrinkled hands on top of mine. “The stubs. There’s so much missing.”

“They aren’t *missing*, Mom. They’re irrelevant. No one cares. There’s no point in storing every bit of trivia just in case.”

She moved her hand off mine, glared at me. “But how do you know? Someone, someday, might ...”

“Might be interested in what you had for breakfast? Mom, no one cares.” I wanted to bite the words back but it was too late.

She blinked, hard. She’s taken another selfie, documenting the moment, our fight. “In the future, someone might have a homework

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assignment on life in 2050, they'd be thrilled!"

"No, Mom. No, they wouldn't." Not an archivist in the world would be interested in the jumble of random things that my mother was saving, not if all the digital libraries in the world had disappeared.

I took a deep breath. "You need to tag what's important to you, Mom, or I'll delete the lot. You're smothering our cloud with irrelevant data. Serena's constantly complaining about how she can't find anything."

"Only because she won't wait three seconds for a search. Why, in my day ..."

"I know, I know, sometimes it took that long just for the interface page to load. But it's not like that now. That's what the public archives are for."

"They don't save everything."

"Because there's no point! It's just junk! No one cares."

"I care," she said. "Even if I'm the only one." Her eyes shimmered. "Even if no one remembers but me."

My mother's generation was the last that had to get by on whatever information some random stranger saved. We've never been disconnected, never not been able to look up anything we need. She knows what it is like to go without.

I blinked and took a video of her, labelling it with her name, the date and what we talked about. I tagged it for deletion if unviewed for a year. No one but me would ever care about this, there was no point in saving it. But soon she'll

be gone and it'll be a piece of what I have left of her. For a bright shining moment, I understood how she felt. Then her activity scrolled past in a side bar; she was uploading a clip of her blasteroids game ... for posterity.

I reached out and took her hand, knowing this was going to hurt. Then I deleted everything.

**Sylvia Spruck Wrigley** was born in Germany, spent her childhood in California and now lives in Estonia. Her fiction has been nominated for a Nebula and her short stories have been translated into more than a dozen languages. You can find out more about her at <https://intrigue.co.uk>.

## THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

**Sylvia Spruck Wrigley reveals the inspiration behind *Cyber junk*.**

Three times in my life I have lost boxes of keepsakes and memories through bad moves and storage-unit issues. And yet, I still have so much stuff. Including a big box of photographs — unsorted, so it never went to the storage unit — that I've been meaning to scan and save online for the past 20 years. I tried to give an envelope of photos to my daughter and she shook her head. She didn't want the photos, she said, but it made her happy to know that I had them. Back into the box they went.

My virtual world is slightly neater. I strive to follow an Inbox Zero approach, and seeing my mother's laptop makes me twitch: the wallpaper covered with documents and tickets and presentations for quick access and then never cleaned up. But my hoarding is just a level deeper, spread across archives and back-ups and "I better keep that just in case". I was horrified to talk to someone who deletes every e-mail when she has dealt with it. No archive. I still have my filed e-mails going back to 2007 in my e-mail client. I also keep every photograph on my smart phone, paying for cloud storage so that I don't have to go through them. Soon, I'll have exceeded my limits and will need to increase my storage again, or come up with a new solution.

My grandmother never had to deal with this and it made me wonder whether my granddaughter ever would either. The crowd-sourcing of data seems a very 'now' thing and maybe it's falling out of fashion already. Instead of expanding our reach, we are starting to retract again, setting up walled gardens with splintered chat systems such as Slack and Discord instead of public interactions. For many of my friends, e-mail has been replaced by messaging systems set up with strict contact lists to block all spam. Wikipedia once seemed to be a wonder of the modern world but how long will it be before the new wave of search engines becomes targeted by subject and is able to answer your esoteric questions about the history of Egyptian cuisine?

This is the core of the story *Cyber junk*. In that world, I'm just another old woman who just keeps saving copies of files and taking those screenshots because, well, you never know.

