

The Last Question

By Isaac Asimov

Isaac Asimov was the most prolific science fiction author of all time. In fifty years he averaged a new magazine article, short story, or book every two weeks, and most of that on a manual typewriter. Asimov thought that *The Last Question*, first copyrighted in 1956, was his best short story ever. Even if you do not have the background in science to be familiar with all of the concepts presented here, the ending packs more impact than any other book that I've ever read. Don't read the end of the story first!

This is by far my favorite story of all those I have written.

After all, I undertook to tell several trillion years of human history in the space of a short story and I leave it to you as to how well I succeeded. I also undertook another task, but I won't tell you what that was lest I spoil the story for you.

It is a curious fact that innumerable readers have asked me if I wrote this story. They seem never to remember the title of the story or (for sure) the author, except for the vague thought it might be me. But, of course, they never forget the story itself especially the ending. The idea seems to drown out everything -- and I'm satisfied that it should.

The last question was asked for the first time, half in jest, on May 21, 2061, at a time when humanity first stepped into the light. The question came about as a result of a five-dollar bet over highballs, and it happened this way:

Alexander Adell and Bertram Lupov were two of the faithful attendants of Multivac. As well as any human beings could, they knew what lay behind the cold, clicking, flashing face -- miles and miles of face -- of that giant computer. They had at least a vague notion of the general plan of relays and circuits that had long since grown past the point where any single human could possibly have a firm grasp of the whole.

Multivac was self-adjusting and self-correcting. It had to be, for nothing human could adjust and correct it quickly enough or even adequately enough. So Adell and Lupov attended the monstrous giant only lightly and superficially, yet as well as any men could. They fed it data, adjusted questions to its needs and translated the answers that were issued. Certainly they, and all others like them, were fully entitled to share in the glory that was Multivac's.

For decades, Multivac had helped design the ships and plot the trajectories that enabled man to reach the Moon, Mars, and Venus, but past that, Earth's poor resources could not support the ships. Too much energy was needed for the long trips. Earth exploited its coal and uranium with increasing efficiency, but there was only so much of both.

But slowly Multivac learned enough to answer deeper questions more fundamentally, and on May 14, 2061, what had been theory, became fact.

The Last Question Pdf

DP Hallahan



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