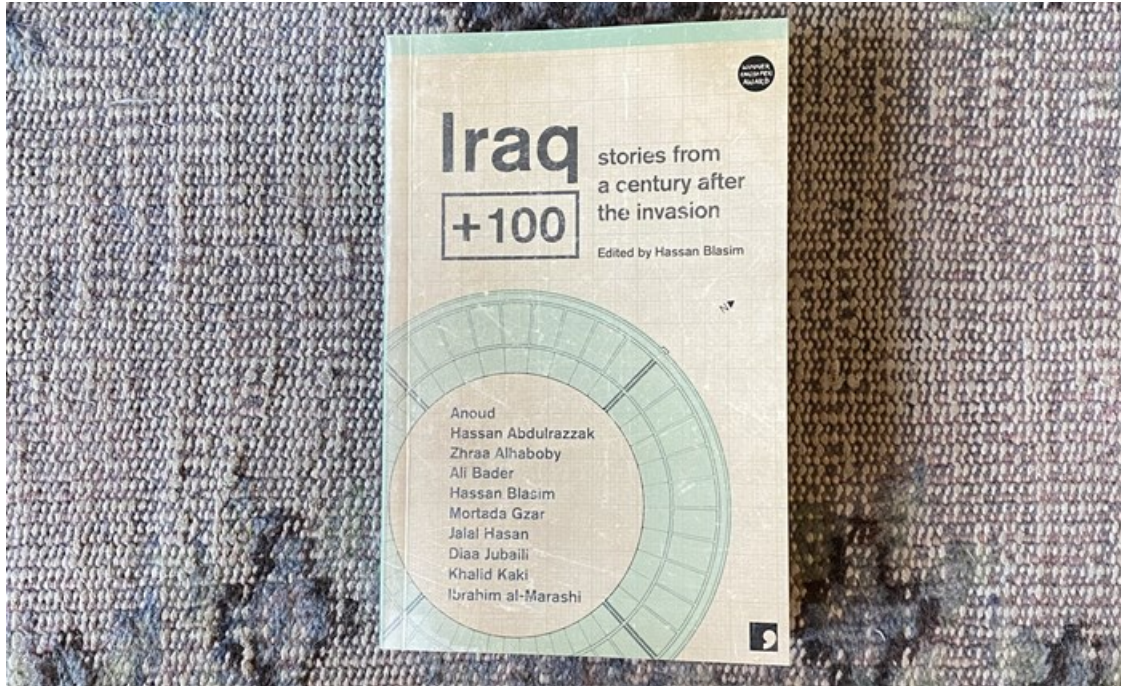


The importance of plausible progress

By  Bronwyn Williams

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Over the past few weeks I've been reading *Iraq + 100, stories from a century after the invasion*. *Iraq +100* is a collection of 10 short science fiction stories, each written by a different Iraqi author, and edited by Hassan Blasim.



All of the stories are set in the year 2103, 100 years after the American and British Invasion of Iraq. It depicts how the respective authors imagine their society will look a century into the future.

On reading them, I could not help but notice two things. Firstly, how little some of the authors believe their society will have progressed by then, and secondly, how pessimistic the futures they described are (one story, for example, imagined a future world where aliens invade Earth, and farm and eat humans as we do cattle).

Who is looking ahead?

This, in turn made me think of my own work in the 'futures' space and how short-sighted and negative so much of our general human thinking has become.

Despite living in incredibly prosperous and peaceful times (yes, I know our world is far from perfect, but compared to humanity's very chequered past, there may very well never before have been a better time to have been alive), many people simply do not believe that the future will be better than the present.

As a result, we try to avoid thinking about it. We think about far futures even less. 100-year future thinking is almost unheard of. Most of us spend most of our time dealing with the infinite present and all our urgent obligations. We forget about where we are headed or where we want to go.

The future is a highly uncompetitive place. This is a mistake. It is only by thinking about the future and dreaming up plans for a better world, that we are able to solve our problems and actually bring that better world (or business idea) into being.

But simply dreaming up utopias is not enough. If we want to step up and take advantage of that future leadership gap, we also need to convince others that our dreams and plans are possible and pragmatic, not mere fantasy castles in the clouds.

The same wisdom applies to leading businesses as it does to leading societies.

The future belongs to those who can see a way forward to a more attractive future or a big audacious goal and then persuade people to not only believe that such a goal is possible, but also convince them to work towards actualising it.

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