



# Redstone Science Fiction

June 2010

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## Editor's Note – June 2010

by Michael Ray

Welcome to the first issue of Redstone Science Fiction. Thanks for dropping by.

This has been a great experience. Paul Clemmons, our publisher, and I are proud of what we have been able to put together. Things have gone very well for us during the formation of Redstone Science Fiction. We have learned a great deal and have made many new friends in the science fiction community. (I have to admit, it was pretty exciting being mentioned, in a good way, on John Scalzi's *Whatever*). We look forward to building Redstone Science Fiction into a quality magazine and market.

We set out to make an online science fiction magazine that publishes primarily science fiction short stories. In our first issue we have two stories about which we are excited. *Raising Tom Chambers* by Daniel Powell is a story of a different sort of apocalypse: a quiet, personal one. Tom Roberts' flash fiction story *Freefall* is a poetic examination of isolation in space. We hope you will enjoy them both.

We are fortunate to have two excellent essays examining different aspects of science fiction. Sarah Einstein discusses the role of disability in science fiction and how a positive viewpoint can influence a positive future. Our first themed submissions/contest will draw from her ideas. Henry Cribbs' essay takes us back to the science fiction of the early 20th century and examines the influence of *The Martian Tales* by Edgar Rice Burroughs and how difficult it can be to bring the important ideas of science fiction into film.

We have three great interviews for our first issue. Influential editor Lou Anders gave some enlightening answers to questions from our contributor David Alastair Hayden, a speculative fiction author. I was fortunate to talk with our cover artist Kittyhawk, a popular webcomic artist, and an engineer who works with scientific research on the International Space Station, Joel Hardy.

We hope you find something in Redstone Science Fiction that you enjoy.

Yours,  
Michael Ray

## Fiction

### Raising Tom Chambers

by Daniel Powell

The world had become a gray and wet place in the years after the dieback. The bloated oceans consumed the coastlines; the flu contagions bloated the people. H1N1 had been the warning shot. R16B had taxed the global community's response efforts. VX9 was the knock-out blow, a pandemic wildfire that plunged the world into savagery and suffering—into chaos and barbarism.

VX9 had eliminated, for all intents and purposes, the Earth's human population. In the dying months—roughly a dozen weeks in early autumn of 2019—the last epidemiologist to run the numbers (*please hit the lights on the way out, thank you very much*) had predicted a 99.99999982% global dieback.

But there *were* people left, and Penelope Crump was one of them. She survived while every other person she had ever known suffocated in the misery of a cruel, wet flu.

She was a small woman, stooped slightly from the toll of what had been a hard life. At fifty-eight years of age, she wore her gray hair in a long braid down the center of her curved back. She had bright, furtive blue eyes and she enjoyed singing, though until she had picked up Tom Chambers, her days had been very quiet indeed.

Earth had moved on and, in the span of ten short years, it had begun to reclaim itself. Time, weather and a flourishing wildlife population had scrubbed the landscape of corpses. The air was clean and clear, the seasons returning and more clearly defined.

There were still scores of the dead indoors, of course, but Penny rarely went inside anymore. The reminders were too visceral—the decay too complete.

In the first years after the dieback, Penny Crump had wandered, searching for others; she only found two. Hank Ridley had died of a heart attack shortly after she'd encountered him; he was much older than she was and had heart disease. Sarah, on the other hand, had stolen away in the middle of the night. An empty place remained in Penny's heart, and it ached when she thought about the girl whose surname she had never learned.

Penny wandered, looking for others and trying to stay a step ahead of the Astras. Even back then, the Astras were rare. Extra-terrestrial hitchhikers, the creatures had caught a ride back with the astronauts on the second-to-last manned space expedition to Mars, back in 2013. The government had quarantined afflicted hosts in the three years between the creatures' arrival and the onset of the flu epidemics, but a sizable population of the strange parasites had evaded

eradication. There had been speculation that the Astras were responsible for spreading VX9, but that didn't make much sense. They were parasites, after all, and they *needed* human hosts to survive. Live hosts.

No, when it was all said and done, VX9 had pretty much spelled the end of the Astras as well.

They were small. Tom Chambers never grew to more than nine inches in length, even in his happiest years. They resembled insects, but they had some human characteristics as well. Ten toes. Ten fingers. An ability to reason—a knack for finding hosts.

Picture a plastic Ken doll with a taupe exoskeleton and a bullet-shaped head used to burrow into the folds of human flesh. They lacked eyes, instead intuiting their way toward heat, before adhering themselves to the ribcage, clamping on with their pincer-like mandibles and sucking nutrients from within.

But, not unlike Penelope Crump, some of the creatures *did* manage to survive. One damp morning, Penny had been making eggs for breakfast in the kitchen when there was a tremendous crash against the window. It had been an Astra—one solitary Astra. The creature eventually went away, but soon there were others. They began congregating around Crump's compound, a fully automated luxury home that ran on solar energy.

And, until Hank Ridley's heart quit on him in the back garden and he'd pitched over in the tomatoes, and until Sarah had snuck out in the dark of night, Crump had been repulsed by the creatures. Even after she found herself utterly alone in the world, she avoided them. But *they* followed *her*, perching there on the kitchen windowsill, climbing across the front picture window. Whenever she went outside to clean the solar panels or harvest a basket of vegetables, she guarded herself against their advances. She fought them back with citronella torches—with a length of pipe she had fashioned into a club. And, in time, they disappeared. The weather changed and grew cold and her yard filled with their tiny corpses, and then the winter passed and it became warm again and there were no more Astras in the world.

Penny was thankful for the change in season, and she spent her days outside. The Oregon sunshine warmed the land and nourished her bountiful garden, and there were no people and no alien parasites and it was just Penny Crump and her thoughts and the wind that whipped off the surface of the white-capped Columbia River.

Then, one morning, she awoke and *he* was stuck to her ribcage. His head was fully embedded in the folds of skin beneath her sagging breasts, and she watched the thing with a creeping revulsion as its midsection pulsed; it was *taking* from her—draining her from the inside.

She tried to remain calm. It was common knowledge that simply ripping the parasite from her torso could lead to its beheading and, if that was the case, she was as good as dead. An infected

Astra wound invariably ended badly. Instead, she walked calmly to the kitchen and made herself a cup of tea.

When she was finished with her breakfast, she went outside to the garden, remaining wary of additional Astras. Except for the one stuck to her midsection, there were none.

They were alone.

She went to the shed and found a set of old barbecue tongs. Gently, *carefully*, she tried to pry the thing from beneath her flesh.

Of course, it didn't budge.

She spent the afternoon trying every folk remedy that she could think of for removing Martian Astras from the ribcage: warm water, alcohol soak, peanut butter—even tickling. That last attempt at removal had only caused the thing to burrow further, so she stopped immediately.

That night she ate a salad with grape tomatoes and watched a movie on the DVD player—*Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, how appropriate, ha, ha—and then decided to sleep on it. Careful not to roll onto her left side and crush the thing, she went to bed early and quickly fell asleep.

He had been a mere five inches in length when he first adhered, but on day two Penny Crump was sure that he'd grown. She decided to create a chart, marking the date clearly at the top and estimating the little bugger's weight and length.

“Well,” she said, a mixture of sincere awe and pride in her tone, “you sure can eat!” She noticed that she, too, was famished, so she ate three apples, two pears and a whole bowl of Bing cherries. She washed it all down with a frothy vanilla Ensure and, when she was finished with that, loosed a huge belch; the Astra seemed to grow agitated, cupping her sides with its little fingers in alarm.

Then it seemed to sigh and settle and become still.

“There, there,” Penny Crump said. She touched it, apprehensively at first, and then a little more kindly. “You're the last of your kind, aren't you?”

The Astra made no reply, of course, but there was a response all the same. From somewhere in the furthest reaches of her mind, a small voice agreed with her.

Penny Crump spent the rest of the day reading on the deck and working in the garden, the notion of removing her new companion as distant from her thoughts as the storm clouds gathering out over the Pacific.

The two of them fell into a routine, and soon they came to understand each other. Penny did the talking, of course; Tom Chambers just couldn't speak.

His name had come from a trading card she had found in the street after waking up from that initial bout with VX9.

The waking had been a surprise, of course. When the flu first hit, citizens reported to the government-operated passage tents for quarantine. Of course, that was back when *hope* still reigned across the land. Penny had contracted VX9 late—well after the rule of law had lost any real meaning and people were bunkering down with their friends and family to grow sick and die together.

But, having no one, Penny had dutifully walked to the nearest passage tent—a huge affair in downtown Boise filled with rotting corpses and moaning patients. She'd selected a clean bed in the far corner and fallen quickly into unconsciousness, assuming that the future that awaited her was just on the other side of that thin line of mortality.

When she'd awoken, she'd shed twenty-three pounds. There were no more dying patients—only the dead. She felt her face, felt the skin on her arms—amazed that she still *was*. Then she walked into the street. The dead were everywhere. She made her way down the center of West Idaho Street and, before too long, that trading card had come tumbling across the asphalt, pushed by the wind before lodging against her ankle.

She plucked it free and stared at it. There was a man on the front—a tall man in a basketball uniform with the word “Phoenix” emblazoned across the front. His cheeks were flushed red and he had feathery blond hair. He was running and he had a basketball in his hands.

Tom Chambers.

It was an old card, yellow around the edges and better than thirty years old.

She studied it, wondering what had happened to the man in the photograph. He looked so alive—so vital and healthy. Could he still exist somewhere, untouched by this creeping death?

She'd tucked the card into her pocket and kept walking, beginning the half decade of nomadic travel that would ultimately lead her to the solar house on the bluffs high above the Columbia River in Western Oregon.

On the day she had decided to name the Astra, she didn't have to think twice about what she would call him.

And so for many years Penny Crump and Tom Chambers carved a life for themselves out of what remained after the dieback. They had vegetables and fruits and DVDs and books and art supplies and fishing equipment and a bicycle and warm showers.

They had each other.

And then one day, while putting up vegetables for an autumn that would come barreling through the mouth of the gorge in a week or so, Penny Crump cut her hand. It wasn't much—just a two-inch laceration on the back of her left hand. She'd raked her hand against the sharp edge of a rusted food tin she'd used as a planter for cayenne peppers.

The cut bled a little, but she'd cleaned it and dressed it and put it out of her mind. Tom Chambers had, in his way, expressed sadness for her momentary pain, but they'd both understood it to be a minor thing.

Only it wasn't. It wasn't a minor thing at all.

The wound became pink, and then red, with angry streaks that webbed across the back of her hand. It itched incessantly and it wouldn't heal, no matter how much salve she applied.

At night, Tom Chambers was restless. His little body, now a full nine inches in length, was warm to the touch at first, and then it was like the handle of a skillet, left too long on a stovetop.

Within a week the wound was weeping clear fluid, then clots of greenish pus.

Tom Chambers became weak. There were days when he wouldn't move at all, and his respiration was shallow.

On one of those sluggish days, Penny finally decided to leave the bluff in search of medicine. She wasn't sure if any of it still worked, but she had to try.

She was in the doctor's office, a little place with a faded sign that read *Grace Sagcal, M.D., General Practice* out front, when Tom Chambers died. She was in the pharmacy, reading the labels on the orange plastic bottles, when he became agitated. She felt his head moving from side to side.

"Oh!" she said, startled. "Tom! Tommy, what is it, little one?"

The Astra moved his head back and forth, as though registering a brisk "no," then he grasped the sides of her ribcage with his little fingers and began to extricate himself from her.

"Oh no, Tom! No, honey, please—please, just stay still. I'm working on it! Just give me a few more minutes and I'll have our medicine. It's nothing. Oh, Tom, it's nothing!"

She was blubbering, on the verge of complete collapse, and now the Astra seemingly couldn't wait to be free of her. It squirmed at her side, wriggling its head to and fro, and then, with a gusher of fluid and an audible "pop," he was free. The creature slipped out of the harness she'd sewn into her shirt and fell to the hard tile of the pharmacy floor.

"Oh God! Oh my God!" Penny shrieked. "Tom! Tommy, honey!"



She fell to her knees and scooped him up. He moved weakly in her cupped hands, his gore-slicked mandibles clacking together, the sound like castanets. Tom Chambers lacked eyes with which to see her, but it didn't matter to Penny Crump. She *knew* they saw each other—really *saw* each other—in that moment.

The creature hitched in a half dozen ragged breaths and then the pincers clacked together and apart again and then he was gone, shuddering in her hands, his fingers and toes stilling suddenly.

“Oh, no,” she gasped, pushing the Astra's corpse to her cheek; the sobs coursed through her, pushing her grief to the surface, where it bubbled out of her in torrents. Her tears mixed with bubbles of snot on her upper lip and she found it hard to breathe, her sorrow was so complete. “No. No. No. No!”

She crumpled to the ground, Tom Chambers clutched tight to her chest and, when she'd exhausted herself in her grief, she fell into a deep and tortured sleep.

She slept through the afternoon and the night and, when she woke the next morning, the storm clouds had invaded the gorge. A cold wind blew across the Columbia Plateau. Penny Crump stood and scooped up as much of the medicine as she could carry. She took Tom Chambers home and placed him in a casket she fashioned from an old apple box.

The rain fell the rest of the afternoon, softening the ground in the small cemetery she created behind the house. The next day she buried Tom Chambers and, after saying a few words over his marker, she retreated inside.

She made her way into the kitchen, as thirsty as she'd felt in all of her days. She drank a glass of water, then two more.

After a time she fixed a salad and tried to eat it, only it hurt when she opened her mouth. That night, she lay in bed, her muscles like high-tension cords beneath her skin. She took her temperature and found that she, too, was on fire with fever.

She fell in and out of a fitful sleep before finally mustering the strength to drag herself into the kitchen, where the assortment of medications sat in a pile on the table. She clutched the bottles in hands that worked haltingly.

*Dolophin. Cozaar. Enbrel. Vancomycin.*

A violent seizure coursed through her; her muscles knotted and her curved spine jerked straight. She fell to the floor with a cry, clutching at the tablecloth as she fell. A torrent of prescription bottles cascaded from the table down onto her.

Blindly, she scooped up the nearest and spun the cap.

*Metronidazole.*

Hands shaking, she extracted a tablet and brought it to her mouth, a fresh series of seizures coursing through her. She clamped her eyes shut and opened her mouth to receive the medicine.

Only, the thing didn't work.

Her brain signaled her jaw to open, but the hinge refused. She snatched air in panicked gusts through two flared nostrils, suddenly aware of the throbbing ache of her teeth. She strained to push the tablet into her mouth, but it was just no use.

She pulled herself up, using the back of the chair where she had taken so many happy meals with Tom Chambers, and she stumbled out into the night, the wind and rain buffeting her, soaking her nightgown. She stumbled into the clearing behind the garden, where the parasite that had relied on her so completely now rested in the soil.

Penny Crump fell to her knees, the pain in her joints and jaw a searing, living heat.

“Chhhooooommm,” she wailed, the word a small thing swallowed up in the wind and rain. She collapsed, her arm draped across his grave, and closed her eyes. On a fundamental level, she knew that there would be no second miracle—no second awakening.

The knowledge comforted her and, in almost no time at all, she was asleep. There, in her dreams, she and Tom Chambers tended the garden together.

## **The End**

**Daniel Powell** teaches a variety of writing courses at a small college in Northeast Florida. He is an avid outdoorsman and long-distance runner, and he enjoys fishing the waters of Duval County from atop his kayak. Daniel shares a small house near the Intracoastal Waterway with his wife, Jeanne, and his daughter, Lyla. [The Byproduct](#) is his online journal about speculative storytelling. Daniel has an essay in [World Literature Today](#) that examines issues from his story with us.

# Freefall

by Peter Roberts

She heard a faint hissing sound, or thought she did. She wasn't quite sure — perhaps this was just what absolute silence sounded like, the silence of death, of the void between the stars.

At least she could still see. She looked at the dim, diffuse red glow that filled her field of vision. Or was that just the way utter darkness looked if you stared into it long enough? She couldn't remember.

The hissing had stopped. No, there it was, too faint to make sense of. But slowly, slowly, she thought she could almost hear a voice, or voices, in it. But faint, so faint. Not like voices in another room — more like voices in another universe.

Voices.

She was drifting away from sanity again. Not a pleasant feeling.

Voices.

The voices became a babble. She felt a crowd walking past her, but could see nothing. She heard snippets of conversation, sometimes garbled:

“So I was saying to Larma the other day, we should go down to . . .”

Larma? What kind of name was Larma?

“. . . the Billiken quotient. But over the last three days the Zukind numbers have been increasing quite dramatically. I don't . . .”

This was not making sense.

No one noticed her here. Perhaps no one could see her, just as she could see no one. More likely, she wasn't here at all. She felt disoriented, even more than when, during training, she was in zero-G for the first time.

Learning to function in zero-G had been hard. It felt a bit like flying, a bit like floating, and a lot like falling — too much like falling. It was the sort of thing you hoped you'd never have to use in real life, like the fire drills, or the explosion training. Or like the isolation tank.

That's what it felt like now — being in an isolation tank. But she wasn't in an isolation tank. Was she? She didn't think so, and yet that didn't seem entirely wrong, either.

Where was she? Vague, unpleasant memories were milling around at the back of her mind, but never quite wandered within reach. She wanted to remember what had happened, how she came to be...here. And yet she was afraid, too, of what she might remember.

She slept. It was not a restful sleep. She woke in panic several times, feeling unable to move. In fact, she couldn't move. She didn't feel as though she were in restraints, she just couldn't move. She slept.

She woke in panic. The ship. It was likely to break apart, possibly quite violently. She had to tell them. Had to tell them now. Slowly the panic subsided to a merely unbearable fear. She slept again.

And once more she awoke. What had happened to her? She seemed to remember something about an explosion, or an accident. Yes. She had been in section 7 to check out some slightly anomalous readings. Then what? A breach of some sort, she thought. Then she was taken to the infirmary, and placed in the life-support tank. That way they could debrief her, try to find out more about the accident, what had occurred and why.

But why weren't they still there, quizzing her? She struggled to remember events in some semblance of order, but it was just a sequence of disconnected images: Med-techs hovering, fussing over her; the questions she couldn't answer, because she couldn't remember anything; lights flickering, then going out; the shock wave, shaking, bouncing her more than she thought possible, suspended as she was in the viscous liquid medium of the tank; and people, rushing around, some with purpose, some in panic.

Then the second shock wave, much worse than the first. After that, nothing, only the silence and darkness she had been in for what now seemed like months.

Fear grasped her, chilled her, disoriented her. She fought for air, or tried to. She noticed she wasn't breathing.

After a time she regained a degree of composure. As calmly as she could, she reviewed her situation.

What were her chances of rescue? She was quite certain that the only reason she had survived the second shock wave was because she was in the tank. No other part of the ship offered anything like the same level of protection. She felt confident (if that is the right word) that no one else had survived. So there was no possibility of local rescue. And, as it would be years before a distress signal (if one had even been sent) would reach the closest settlement, rescue from elsewhere seemed even less likely.

As she began to recognize her true situation, she imagined the stars, cold, immobile, and unblinking all around the fractured, fragmented hull of the spacecraft. She experienced a sort of cosmic isolation, felt an inhuman, impossibly vast loneliness.

Gaining a semblance of control over herself again, she continued to evaluate her condition.

How badly had she been hurt? That was easy to answer, unfortunately. The tank was only for the most severe injuries. The tank would sustain life while vital organs were regrown, or artificial replacement parts prepared.

Oh god. She wanted to scream. But, of course, she couldn't.

An ethereal coldness infiltrated her body (what was left of it) and spirit.

She wondered how long the tank's life support system could hold out on emergency power. She wondered how long forever was.

She hoped it wasn't long.

**The End**

**Peter Roberts** grew up near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and earned a BS at the University of Pittsburgh. He currently lives in central Ohio. Over the past thirty years or so, he has had poems and stories published in various genre and literary magazines, including Asimov's, Star\*Line, Nature, Astropoetica, Ars Medica, Abyss & Apex, Bitter Oleander, and several other publications. He has poems forthcoming in Illumen, Crow, & Lilliput Review. For a more complete list of publications, and additional personal information, visit [his website](#).

## Essays

### **The Future Imperfect**

*by Sarah Einstein*

I am waiting out a spring storm, pulled over to the side of the highway in my old Volvo, sending an email to one friend while calling another to tell him I'll be late. The audiobook version of Anne McCaffrey's *The Ship Who Searched* is playing on my Kindle, which I've hooked into the car stereo. As I sit here, surrounded by technologies that did not exist when I was born—cell phones, e-readers, email—it's impossible not to notice that I'm living in a world that contains more technological wonders than McCaffrey had imagined. The protagonists in the story would have been much helped, for instance, by a secure communications channel and a GPS system, both of which I have in my battered old car. But most of all, the heroine of this book would have been helped by a future shaped by the actions of today's disability activists. Because, at its heart, this series of books tells the story of the enslavement of extremely promising children who have the bad luck to be born—or in this one case alone, become—disabled.

The basic plot device behind these stories is horrific enough that I can't paraphrase McCaffrey's own words without coloring them, so I will let her speak for herself. The first book in the series, *The Ship Who Sang*, begins:

She was born a thing and as such would have been condemned if she failed to pass the encephalograph test required of all newborn babies. There was always the possibility that though the limbs were twisted, the mind was not; that although the ears would hear only dimly, the eyes see vaguely, the mind behind them was receptive and alert.

The electro-encephalogram was entirely favorable, unexpectedly so, and the news was brought to the waiting, grieving parents. There was a final, harsh decision; to give their child euthanasia or to permit it to become an encapsulated 'brain...' (*The Ship Who Sang*)

In this series, those children who are deemed worthy are turned into productized, commodified "shell people;" brains who manage the complex tasks associated with running hospitals, space stations, and even piloting starships. They can, if they are lucky, eventually earn enough to buy their own freedom but, until they do, their "bodies" are owned by the company which funded their development and implantation.

In other words, in McCaffrey's world, disability is so depersonalizing that the very promising are rewarded with slavery and disembodiment; those who don't pass the test for these rewards are put to death.

The friend I am going to visit is named Larry. If I ever get out of this storm, I should arrive shortly after his nighttime aide has wheeled him into his bedroom and, using an elaborate webbed harness that attaches to an electric lift, helped him get from chair to bed. She'll lay out

the things he needs for the night: two telephone handsets, in case one goes dead, a bottle of water, the book he's reading, the TV remote, and an emergency call button that will summon an ambulance. I have just enough time to hear the entire book read, and if I listen to it the whole way I will have worked myself up into a heady righteous indignation by the time I go to sit by his bedside and have an evening drink. He'll try to calm me down; Larry doesn't have my stomach for political debate. He'll tell me that it's only a story. I will tell him the stories we tell about our futures become our futures, point out that my phone looks a lot like an old Star Trek communicator, point out that the special mattress he sleeps on was developed by the space program. Over very old Scotch, we'll agree to disagree.

A truck screamed by, the brakes on fire, just a few seconds ago and now it sits jackknifed across the highway several yards away. Hailstones hit the car so hard that, in a few places, they scratch the paint. What would it be like if that hard, metal shell were my body? And what if I did not own that body, could not decide where it went or what it did?

The problem with disability in science fiction isn't much different from the problem of disability in general or literary fiction: it appears as a plot device, or is meant to establish a character or group of characters as radically other, or is the embodiment of our careless attitude toward the ecosystems which support us. We mutate into either superheroes or arch-villains. Darth Vader is an evil torso in what can best be described as a suit-shaped life support system; his disability symbolic of the way in which his defection to the dark side of the force has warped his intellect. In the original Star Trek series, Captain Christopher Pike exists in a metal box less technically sophisticated than the equipment used to film the show until, after being acquitted in a trial for attempting to flee to a planet that could accommodate his disability, his innocence is rewarded and Star Fleet Command makes an exception to the rule to allow him—for his heroism—to live there as if he were again fully able-bodied. In cyberpunk and dark future novels, mutants arise from ecological chaos to either save or destroy mankind. Bodily difference can signal heroism or great evil, but it always signifies in scifi.

This is not the sort of future disability advocates envision. No, we see a future without stairs. A world in which people no longer build doorways too small for a power chair to pass through and every raised threshold also has a ramp. One in which all public meetings and performances have a sign language interpreter available and restaurants have large print and Braille menus on hand. We envision a future in which disability—like race, gender, ethnicity, and other identity axes—may inform, but certainly not define, who a person is.

Disability is created by the ways in which we live. I couldn't carry two five gallon buckets of water from a communal well to my house a few miles away or easily climb the steps of Machu Picchu in the thin air of the Andes. Because I am a privileged, twenty-first century American woman, this does not make me disabled, but if I were living another life, it could. I am able-bodied because the place where I live already accommodates the ways in which my body does not function optimally. What would a world look like that accommodated all kinds of bodies, all

ways of communicating, every way of being an embodied human? How will the need to accommodate alien bodies influence how we accommodate our own? How will science help us build fully inclusive communities?

There is too little science fiction written that envisions a fully accessible, universally designed future. And so we are asking you, gentle readers, to do just that. We're announcing the first contest to be sponsored by Redstone Science Fiction!

*Editor's Note:* We will accept separate submissions that incorporate the values considered in *The Future Imperfect*. The submissions should portray disability as a simple fact, not as something to be overcome or something to explain why a character is evil. Portrayal of disability in a world where universal access is a shared cultural value is something we'd like to see. What does a world, or space station, or whatever look like when it has been designed to be accessible to everyone and how would people live together there? The story chosen by Sarah Einstein and our editors will be paid a professional rate and will be published in our September issue. The specifics are on our [Contest](#) page.

**Sarah Einstein** writes primarily Creative Nonfiction, though whenever she gets to choose what she reads, she almost always chooses Science Fiction. Her work has appeared in *Whitefish Review*, *Fringe Magazine*, *Ninth Letter*, and she has an upcoming piece in *Pank*. She has been awarded a Pushcart Prize. She is a dedicated human rights activist and dreams of a future in which all sentient beings are treated with dignity and equal rights.



## Barsoom or Bust!

by Henry Cribbs

Don't be fooled by the title. This isn't an article about sending a manned expedition to Mars (however much I'd love to see that happen). It's about a collection of science fiction tales which got me interested in the red planet in the first place— not as a possible destination point for the human race, but (what is perhaps far more important) as an embarkation point for the human imagination.

Earlier this year I came across an article ([this one](#), in fact) announcing the start of production of Pixar/Disney's *John Carter of Mars*, expected to hit theaters in 2012. My first thought was echoed nearly word-for-word in the article by its writer/director Andrew Stanton (Oscar-winning writer/director of *WALL\*E* and *Finding Nemo*). He said, "I have been waiting my whole life to see the characters and worlds of John Carter of Mars realized on the big screen." I, too, was aching to see one of my favorite science-fiction series brought to life on film.

My second thought was "Frak!"

This second thought came, paradoxically, from my first thought: I have been waiting my whole life to see John Carter on the big screen. And by "John Carter" I mean *Edgar Rice Burroughs'* John Carter, not some Hollywood substitute. Take, for example, last year's failed Asylum mockbuster, *Princess of Mars*, with Traci Lords as a blonde (!) Dejah Thoris. It was apparently rushed out so as to scoop Pixar and Disney, and I'm just going to pretend it never happened.

Face it. The film industry doesn't have the best track record when it comes to rendering science fiction novels accurately (two words: *Starship Troopers*). Sci-fi movie adaptations may be fun, and even "fine" films (two words: *Blade Runner*), but even the best such films are rarely faithful. About the only thing sci-fi movies usually share with the original text is the title. The same, I fear, holds true for Disney's previous rendition of another Edgar Rice Burroughs adventure classic (one word: *Tarzan*).

Unfortunately, the things which for me make science fiction worth reading tend to get surgically removed from film versions long before they even have a chance to be left on the cutting-room floor, replaced by amazing special effects and non-stop action sequences. Some would say this failure really isn't Hollywood's fault. (Some wouldn't even call it a failure.) We watch movies for different reasons than we read books, because there are some aspects of science fiction – the best aspects of science fiction in my opinion – which just don't translate well onto the screen.

So just like I always do whenever I see an ad for a book-based movie (because I'm that kind of geek), to prepare for the premiere I sat down and reread the entire series of Burroughs' *Martian Tales*. Back in the early Eighties when I first encountered them, these were in a twelve-volume Del Rey paperback set (which I still own), but now, thirty years later they all can be found in

electronic form (with the first five freely available in the public domain). So I settled down with my new birthday Kindle for a long winter's read, and soon rediscovered not only why I loved Burroughs and Barsoom in the first place, but also what I love best about science fiction in general.

Along the way I think I also figured out why a thousand moving pictures aren't worth some of the best printed words in the genre.

Burroughs' very first novel, *A Princess of Mars*, first appeared in 1912 as a six-part serial in *All-Story Magazine* titled "Under the Moons of Mars." It recounts the tale of John Carter, a Confederate civil war soldier transported to Mars (called "Barsoom" by its inhabitants), where he falls in love with a princess, fights alien savages, and saves the doomed planet. ([Excerpt from A Princess of Mars](#))

While Burroughs' picture of Mars may be laughably erroneous given what we know today about the red planet, his depictions were based on science current at the time. Percival Lowell's (1895) speculations about the "canals" on Mars were based on observations by Italian astronomer Giovanni Schiaparelli. These were misinterpreted to be artificial watercourses and thus as evidence of life on Mars. Lowell theorized that the inhabitants of the arid, dying planet had built the canals to transport water from the polar caps. Burroughs integrated these ideas into the world he created.

Burroughs' story is usually credited with popularizing "sword-and-planet" science-fiction, although he wasn't the originator of the genre. Edwin Lester Arnold's *Lieutenant Gullivar Jones: His Vacation* (1905), which tells a strikingly similar story of a Southern soldier supernaturally sent to Mars, probably deserves credit for being first, but its poor reception led Arnold to quit writing. Burroughs, however, was an instant success. Other authors soon joined the party, including Otis Adelbert Kline (Robert E. Howard's literary agent), who started a competing series set on Venus in 1929 with *Planet of Peril*.

The genre underwent a revival in the 60's and 70's, when the term "sword-and-planet" was coined retroactively to describe the genre. Prominent examples from that time include Michael Moorcock's Michael Kane stories, Lin Carter's Jonathan Dark series, and Piers Anthony's post-apocalyptic *Battle Circle* trilogy. The genre tends to lend itself particularly well to long series: Burroughs himself wrote ten more Martian Tales, while John Norman's Gor books have reached a count of twenty-eight so far (with the next scheduled for publication later this year). Kenneth Bulmer's Dray Prescott novels win the current record, numbering fifty-three!

With his vision of Mars, Burroughs also provided later science fiction authors outside the sword and planet genre with fuel for their imagination. Author and scientist Carl Sagan kept a map of Burroughs' Mars hung outside his office at Cornell, and remembered Barsoom as a "world of ruined cities, planet girdling canals, immense pumping stations — a feudal technological society" (Basalla 2006). Arthur C. Clarke and Ray Bradbury also cite Burroughs' Martian Tales

as inspiration, while Robert Heinlein, Philip Jose Farmer, and L. Sprague de Camp pay homage to Barsoom explicitly in their works. Without the Martian Tales of Edgar Rice Burroughs, science fiction – and science itself – would be quite different, and diminished.

Of course there's quite a bit of sexist stereotyping in the Martian Tales, which I didn't recognize back when I read them for the first time as an adolescent male. Most of the female characters passively exist primarily to be fallen in love with, kidnapped by villains, and rescued from fates worse than death. George Alec Effinger's feminist spoof of the Martian Tales, "Maureen Birnbaum, Barbarian Swordperson," highlights this deficiency, but one can perhaps forgive Burroughs for being a product of its time. Tavia in *A Fighting Man of Mars* is one notable exception, being arguably the most feminist of Burrough's Barsoomian heroines and playing a fairly major role throughout that novel.

I confess that at first I loved the Martian Tales mainly for their pulpy adventure, eagerly exploring the "strange new worlds... new life, and new civilizations" in Burroughs' pages. Over two decades before the canonical world-builder Tolkien gave us Middle-Earth, Burroughs gave us an entire planet complete with its own geography, language, flora, fauna, races, religion, diverse cultures, and a rich, millennia-old history.

But Burroughs doesn't just describe a "strange new world" in the sense of an unexplored planet; he describes a new world in the sense of showing us alternative ways of living, of structuring society, so we see the world we inhabit in a new way. Science fiction thus allows for a wide range of social commentary by letting us see what life – our lives – could be like in other circumstances. It is these "strange new worlds" which are an important aspect of science fiction. It's also an aspect that few movies capture well.

For example, as Carter spends a good deal of time among the green Martians of Thark, having been accepted as one of their own, he learns much about their customs and culture. Carter describes the green Martian's communal method of child-raising, and claims it "is the direct cause of the loss of all the finer feelings and higher humanitarian instincts among these poor creatures. From birth they know no father or mother love, they know not the meaning of the word home..." (*Princess*, ch.7). By showing us this "new world" Burroughs raises an implicit criticism of community child-rearing, a rather extreme version of the "it takes a village to raise a child" idea. However, he acknowledges that such an approach may indeed be needed in certain situations, such as "a hard and pitiless struggle for existence upon a dying planet" (*Ibid*). Burroughs, in describing the green Martians rigorous breeding program, may also have been the first mainstream author to bring up the controversial topic of birth control and zero-population growth (Bozarth 13).

While not anti-religious, Burroughs dared to raise criticism of organized religion, at least of the fundamentalist dogmatic variety, in his novels. In *The Master Mind of Mars*, a city's theocracy deceives its population through the pretend voice of a false idol, while in *Thuvia, Maid of Mars*,

an ancient civilization with psychic powers worships a banth (a Martian lion), which superstition and fear has raised to the level of deity. But the most prominent example is from *The Gods of Mars*, in which Carter encounters an entire race (two, actually) who have perpetuated religious superstition across the planet for millennia in order to provide themselves with a steady supply of slaves from the rest of Barsoom's population, while the deceitful races' own deity turns out to be nothing more than an ancient, wicked Martian who rules through terror. Burroughs even makes his protagonist into something of a messiah figure. (The initials J.C. are a big clue.) When Carter "dies" on Mars, his body cannot be found because he has been miraculously transported to the Martian equivalent of Heaven, which lies down the River Iss on the shores of the Lost Sea of Korus. He eventually returns from the "afterlife" to reveal the "Truth" to Martiankind, and overthrows the dominant religious order. Along the way Burroughs offers criticism of the dangers of dogmatism, and of the abuse and exploitation which he saw as a common feature of organized religion.

He also subtly addresses the racism of his day, by turning it on its head. Barsoom is populated with a veritable rainbow of races, including green, white, red, black, yellow and blue, but they do not fill stereotypical roles. He presents the red Martians, representing the oppressed Native Americans of Burroughs's time, as the dominant civilized surface race, with a navy of giant airships. The black Martians also have their typical real-world roles reversed. Depicted as the paragon of physical perfection, they enslave the once proud and ancient white Martians, even cannibalizing them for food as an allegory for the exploitation of African slaves. (Compare Robert Heinlein's *Farnham's Freehold*.) The yellow Martians appear the most technologically advanced, having developed greenhouse domes to protect their cities at the bitterly cold Martian poles. That it is a Confederate soldier who also fought against Apaches out West who describes and comments on these racial situations adds additional self-conscious irony.

By having his protagonist come from a different world, Burroughs is free to speculate and speak critically through Carter upon the differences between Earth and Barsoomian culture in a way in which he could not if his character was from Barsoom. This tactic of bringing in an outsider in order to provide social commentary harkens back as least as far as Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. And even when the protagonist is from Mars, as is Gahan of Gathol in *The Chessmen of Mars*, the hero inevitably encounters a culture which is alien to that of his own, which enables him (and the reader) to reflect upon the differences between them. Gahan arrives in the country of the kaldanes, sentient beings who have evolved to the point of being almost pure brains with very little body. In turn, they physically interact with the world through enslaved creatures called rykors, who have almost no brain and would starve without the kaldanes to direct them to food. Burroughs uses the kaldanes to deride the growing idea that reasoning ability should be "uncontaminated" by sentiment and physicality. (Gene Roddenberry made the same point decades later by bringing his own "outsider" to Earth society: Spock.)

Similar parodies of excessive intellectualism are found in *Thuvia*, where the ancient Lotharians live in a world created almost entirely by their own minds, and in the recurring character of Ras

Thavas (who first appears in *Master Mind*), a brilliant scientist and inventor unburdened by sentimentality or ethics, who never worries about the possible consequences of his intellectual breakthroughs, and who sells his services to the highest bidder to gain funding to further his research. (Sound like a recent headline?) In *Synthetic Men of Mars* this same Frankenstein archetype creates literature's first example of a "gray goo" scenario, one invoked even today to warn against careless development of nanotechnology.

These are all examples of one of the main things which I believe makes good science fiction good: it is able to show us a world subtly like our own, yet different in ways we can at present only imagine. By presenting those imaginary worlds in a believable and compelling way, science fiction is able to reveal truths about our own world. This is of course the hallmark of all good fiction, with or without the "science" prefix.

And this is something which Hollywood has a difficult time bringing from the science fiction story to silver screen. When Hollywood does it well, it's usually because it's been written directly for the screen instead of adapted from a novel, so that the deeper social commentary becomes embedded in the overall plot. (Think *Gattaca* or *Avatar*.) Most adaptations don't even bother. Consider Carter's long weeks of living and learning among the green Martians which allow him to discourse at length on the advantages and disadvantages of Martian society. In movies, such highly interesting discussions, if included at all, wind up transformed into a combat training montage. Moviegoers typically don't buy tickets to hear philosophical dialogue.

But, I contend, many science-fiction readers *do* buy books for that very reason. Even in this high-tech, audiovisual, instant-search, Intarwebbed world, some things are still best explored through the written word, though I admit I'd still like for all that heady stuff to be embedded in a rollicking good story – like the *Martian Tales* of Edgar Rice Burroughs.

While I am sure that Disney/Pixar will produce an entertaining film, filled with fascinating computer-generated graphics of the dying red planet and its inhabitants, and chock-full of ringing swords and exploding radium bullets, I feel fairly certain that they won't capture the ideas that provoke thought as well as entertain.

I hope they prove me wrong.

In the meantime, while I'm waiting, I'm picking up a good book. Or my Kindle.

**Henry Cribbs** somehow managed to sneak his science-fiction poem about Schrödinger's cat into the literary art journal *Lake Effect*, and has also published book reviews for *Philosophical Psychology*, *Chicago Literary Review*, and *Black Warrior Review*. He taught philosophy and creative writing at the University of South Carolina for several years, and now forces his high school English students to read Ray Bradbury. He currently serves on the editorial board for *Nimrod International Journal of Prose and Poetry*.

### **The Martian Tales of Edgar Rice Burroughs:**

- 1-A Princess of Mars (1912)
- 2-The Gods of Mars (1913)
- 3-The Warlord of Mars (1913)
- 4-Thuvia, Maid of Mars (1916)
- 5-The Chessmen of Mars (1922)
- 6-The Master Mind of Mars (1927)
- 7-A Fighting Man of Mars (1930)
- 8-Swords of Mars (1934)
- 9-Synthetic Men of Mars (1939)
- 10-Llana of Gathol (1941)
- 11-John Carter of Mars (1941-42)

The first five listed are in the public domain and are available as electronic texts from Project Gutenberg. The rest, except for the last volume, can be found at Project Gutenberg Australia.

The last volume contains the two stories “John Carter and the Giant of Mars” (1941) and “Skeleton Men of Jupiter,” (1942), both of which can be found separately at Project Gutenberg Australia.

There is some doubt as to the authorship of “John Carter and the Giant of Mars.” When it was first published, fans wrote in complaining that it could not have been written by Edgar Rice Burroughs because it was so different from his usual style. Later it was revealed that it had been written originally by Edgar’s son Jack to be printed and illustrated by him as a Wonder Book, and Edgar claimed to have revised it for magazine publication. To me, the very fact that the Martian rats in “Giant” are three-legged (unlike the “ulsios” in the previous novels) clearly shows that ERB had little to do with it.

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# **Interviews**

## **An Interview with Lou Anders**

*by* David Alastair Hayden

Lou Anders is the editorial director of Prometheus Books' groundbreaking science fiction and fantasy imprint Pyr, as well as many anthologies, including the forthcoming volumes *Masked* (Gallery Books, July 2010) and *Swords & Dark Magic* (Eos, June 2010, co-edited with Jonathan Strahan). Lou is a four-time Hugo Award nominee, a Philip K. Dick Award nominee, a World Fantasy Award nominee, and a Chelsey Award winning art director.

### **Is the life and work of a sci-fi editor at all like you imagined it would be? What are the best and worst parts of the job?**

I'm not sure I imagined doing this at all. As a kid I wanted to be either James Bond or Batman, and in college I fell in love with acting and directing. I came into the field backwards, through a series of career shifts, from playwriting to journalism and screenwriting to the dot com industry to freelance anthology editing to here. At each stage, it was always throw myself in and sink-or-swim, so I didn't have a lot of lead time to imagine what was around the corner. I do remember telling my boss when I was hired that I thought I could do the job utilizing about a third of my day. Ha ! (In my defense, it was initially conceived as a much smaller list and ramped up very fast after I was onboard. Hmmm, could that have been deliberate?).

As to the best and worst parts: The best part—finding a book that has me leaping out of my chair with excitement, a manuscript so good I forget to edit it and just get caught up in the action, then sharing that book with the world. Equal to this is the pleasure (and honor) of working with some of the world's top illustrators when it comes to creating a cover for these books. At such moments, I am the luckiest guy on earth. The worst part—when something brilliant and deserving fails to catch and find its audience. Nothing more painful.

### **Within the last few years, the number of fantasy works set in our present day world, but with magical tweaks, has surged dramatically (as have romance hybrids). Do you think something like this will happen with sci-fi as well?**

Well, we've already been through a wave of "techno-thriller" novels, with a lot of the big names of SF forgoing space for the near future. Greg Bear, David Brin, William Gibson have all been writing novels set in the present, Neal Stephenson even went back into the past for "historical science fiction". I don't want to misquote him but I believe Robert J. Sawyer has said something to the effect that he intends all (or most) of his forthcoming work to be like this. As to romance hybrids, I did recently notice a "my boyfriend is an alien" type novel on the mass market tree display in B&N last week, packaged exactly like an urban fantasy only with tentacles. I'm surprised there isn't more of an SF incursion into urban fantasy already, as that crowd pushes out further from vampires and werewolves. But we've also had a flowering of space opera, perhaps

coming out of that now. And parallel universe novels, with its sub-sub-genre of steampunk, are all the rage.

**Given the wide range of sci-fi from Anne McCaffrey's Pern to the work of Alastair Reynolds, how do you define sci-fi? Would you include steampunk without obvious fantasy elements, for instance?**

Science fiction is always easier to identify at its center than at its edge, and I feel strongly that definitions need to be descriptive not prescriptive, talking about what it does rather than what it isn't. My favorite definition is Frederik Pohl's, which I'll share here:

"Does the story tell me something worth knowing, that I had not known before, about the relationship between man and technology? Does it enlighten me on some area of science where I had been in the dark? Does it open a new horizon for my thinking? Does it lead me to think new kinds of thoughts, that I would not otherwise perhaps have thought at all? Does it suggest possibilities about the alternative possible future courses my world can take? Does it illuminate events and trends of today, by showing me where they may lead tomorrow? Does it give me a fresh and objective point of view on my own world and culture, perhaps by letting me see it through the eyes of a different kind of creature entirely, from a planet light-years away? — These qualities are not only among those which make science fiction good, they are what make it unique. Be it never so beautifully written, a story is not a good science fiction story unless it rates high in at least some of these aspects. The content of the story is as valid a criterion as the style."

Now, I've said on panels and in interviews before that I think SF has four "functions", which are 1) to predict the future, 2) to inspire the future, 3) to caution us about behaviors that might lead to undesirable outcomes in the future and 4) to examine the present through metaphor and exaggeration. And as you can probably guess from my previous response above, I would include steampunk as a branch of alt history. I know a lot of people dismiss steampunk as pure fantasy, but these days, I sort of feel that way about any depiction of human crews on FTL vehicles flying between the planets. Stories of parallel earths out there in the multiverse seem more realistic in light of quantum mechanics, not that realism, or more properly verisimilitude, is a requirement of all forms of SF.

**As an editor, are you noticing any interesting trends in sci-fi, positive or negative? Do you think the age of spacefaring-dominated sci-fi is over? Will starships give way to cyberpunk?**

Again, starships already gave way to cyberpunk, back when JG Ballard was proclaiming that innerspace was more interesting than outer space and Gibson was penning *Neuromancer*. But cyberpunk gave way to Space Opera sometime around the turn of the millennium, or found its synthesis with it in works like John Meaney's *To Hold Infinity*. These are all musical chairs, with every subgenre getting its place at the front. Right now, techno-thrillers are waning (or being published out of category), steampunk is king, and truly hard SF is moving to the smaller, independent houses. As for current trends, and one that is very interesting to me, we are still in the early days of a wave of global-perspective SF, as typified by writers like Paolo Bacigalupi



and Ian McDonald. Another trend is the rise of young adult fiction and the recognition that a lot of adults read in the YA category. I think we'll see an increasing number of SF authors move into YA, as Scott Westerfeld and Cory Doctorow have done.

**What about trends in fantasy? Within the last year, I've seen sword & sorcery on the shelves again, both classic reprints and new tales. Is the age of the "900-page Tolkien-esque fantasy epic in nine parts" coming to a close?**

Hardly. The most read names in fantasy are still JRR Tolkien, Robert Jordan, Terry Brooks, Terry Goodkind. But we are in a post-GRRM era in which the morally ambiguous sensibilities of sword & sorcery are informing epic fantasy, giving us authors like Joe Abercrombie and Steven Erikson. This isn't new (Glen Cook) but it is currently being given the recognition it deserves, this occurring alongside a revival of interest in the works of Howard, Leiber, Moorcock, etc... As a huge, lifelong fan of S&S, I am personally thrilled with this.

**Steampunk technology within fantasy worlds seems to be a growing trend, which isn't surprising after a couple of Star Wars generations grew up with a melding of tech, magic, and wonder. What are your thoughts on steampunk? (And if sword & sorcery is resurgent, where are our new sword & planet tales?)**

I've already addressed the first part of this question, so I'll just say keep an eye out for forthcoming Pyr books from Tim Akers, Mark Hodder, Andrew P Mayer, Mike Resnick, etc... and add that I think Steampunk is evolving beyond Victoriana, moving into other times and places (example: George Mann's Ghosts of Manhattan, set in a post-steampunk Roaring Twenties) and even into fantasy (example: Adrian Tchaikovsky's brilliant Shadows of the Apt series, and magnificent Tim Akers' Heart of Veridon and forthcoming The Horns of Ruin).

As to Sword & Planet – let me give a shout out to the guys at Paizo for their excellent Planet Stories line, doing its dead level best to keep classic sword & planet alive. We don't see a lot of contemporary Sword & Planet, but I'll be watching the John Carter of Mars movie closely to see what sort of an effect it will have on our genre. Burroughs was my first, best love, so I'd love to see S&P make a sophisticated comeback.

**What books would you recommend to a hardcore fantasy reader interested in branching out into sci-fi, and vice versa? What about a mainstream reader trying sci-fi for the first time?**

Whenever recommending books, I start by asking people what they already read, and if that doesn't work, what kind of films they respond to. I think the field is so, so diverse that it is very hard to take a one-size-fits-all approach to any reader. I do think authors like John Scalzi and Kristine Kathryn Rusch do a wonderful job of writing "entry level" SF without sacrificing the depth of potential SF iconography. I point readers of "literature with an L" at the science fiction of William Gibson and Ian McDonald, who are among our finest working authors. Charles Stross is a good representation of the current state of the field.

Whenever I am asked why SF hasn't had its Harry Potter, I reply that it has and that Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game* is still selling like hotcakes. Frank Herbert's *Dune* seems to be cited almost as often by people who don't read much SF but love that series (the way that you meet a lot of folks who love Tolkien but haven't branched further into fantasy). I always point *Dune* fans at John Meaney's *Nulapeiron Sequence of Paradox, Context, and Resolution*. That series is also a very good example of sophisticated, hard SF filtered through a touch of sword and planet.

For an introduction to fantasy, Neal Gaiman has near universal appeal. I think that SF readers might like the fantasy-world-come-to-grips-with-technology aspect of Adrian Tchaikovsky's work or the way Kay Kenyon's *The Entire and the Rose* series uses Clarke's Law to give us a science fiction universe that reads like epic fantasy. Any fan of Fritz Leiber should read Scott Lynch and James Enge. I'll also give a shout out to Greg Keyes' *The Briar King*, which is absolutely brilliant.

**You've edited some critically-acclaimed sci-fi anthologies. (Plus you have fantasy and superhero anthologies forthcoming.) Could you talk a little bit about that particular editorial process? How is editing an anthology different from editing a novel? For you, what makes a good anthology?**

Editing an anthology is like editing a mix tape, which is a lost art in the age of iTunes and Shuffle Play and you can't really understand unless you have made a mix with LPs and cassettes. But it is all about juxtaposition, the rise and fall of tone, the way one story (or song) ends and leaves an image or association or tone hanging in your mind that blends through the silence into the beginning of the next offering. For me, as a reader, a good anthology is any one where I like over 50% of the stories. The whole point of an anthology should be the opportunity of discovery it affords, the ability to take risks beyond your usual reading habits, to try out at the short form something you might not risk investing in for a whole novel. The reader shouldn't like every single story in the book, or they haven't been stretched. But they should like most, and of course, the goal is for them to like as near to all as possible.

Now, as an anthologist, I tend to shy away from reprint anthologies and anthologies grouped around a single subject (like "time travel" or "cats"). These have their place for the reader, but for me, I want each anthology to ask a question of the field, to examine a trend, tackle a problematic aspect, provide a direction. More so than any other genre, speculative fiction is in an ongoing dialogue with itself, and I feel that anthologies of all original material, that examine or question an aspect of the field, have a chance to be a voice in that dialogue.

My first professional anthology, *Live without a Net*, grew out of what I perceived at the time as my frustration with American SF clinging to post-cyberpunk while the UK was indulging themselves in the exuberance of the "New Space Opera." I wanted to get rid of cyberpunk and shake out some sensawunder. *FutureShocks* was an examination of the border between SF and horror, which I felt seemed better actualized in film (*Alien*) than in print. And, in fact, that

anthology ended up with more satire and comedy than I intended, which at least taught me something about the place of horror in contemporary SF.

*Swords & Dark Magic* (co-edited with Jonathan Strahan) is our attempt to examine, and if it isn't hubris to say so, even help foster this aforementioned resurgence of S&S and S&S-informed fantasy.

**How do you see the digital age, the rise of ebooks and reading devices such as the iPad and Kindle, changing the publishing industry? How will it affect the speculative fiction genre specifically?**

I actually began in e-publishing and moved backwards into print. In 2000, I worked in San Francisco at a now-defunct start up called Bookface.com (nothing there now) that provided "browser based reading" and tracked banner ad revenue to share with the author or publisher in what was billed as "advertising that pays you instead of advertising you pay for." Great idea, ahead of its time. Dot com burst. Crash boom bam. We worked under the assumption that SF authors would be the most tech friendly and so courted them heavily. They weren't—romance writers were—but it led to my having a great many SF contacts when the bubble burst, which I parlayed into a series of anthologies. So in a way the eBook has brought me back full circle.

Now, back in 2000, we maintained, against the fears and alarmists of the day, that the eBook wasn't a replacement for the book, merely a new distribution channel alongside hardcovers, trade paperbacks, mass market paperbacks, and audiobooks. This is still true, and the physical book isn't going to go away. However, with the convenience of reading on the iPhone and the beauty of iBooks on iPad, we could be approaching a game change. I've played on both the Nook and the Kindle but neither seemed to me to be as aesthetically pleasing an experience as reading an actual book, but the iPad is, and provides the convenience of other features as well (from web surfing to an embedded dictionary that doesn't take you out of the book to backlighting for reading without waking the spouse).

In the way that iTunes slowly weened me off physical CDs, I could see iBooks weening me off paper over the next few years. And I'm sure that the Kindle and the Nook will only improve as well. (I have purchased ebooks for the B&N eReader, Kindle App for iPhone/iPad and iBooks all. The Kindle for iPad app is in my humble experience superior to the actual Kindle). I hear that something on the order of five million ereader devices sold last year, whereas the iPad sold a million units in under four weeks. Obviously, ebooks are here.

I think long-term we will see more of our casual reading shift to ebooks. Jeremy Lassen of Night Shade Books said that "ebooks are the new mass market" and I think he may be correct. I still buy the physical CDs of David Bowie and Robyn Hitchcock's music, but buy MP3s for everything else. I could see restricting my physical book purchases to gorgeous hardcover volumes, illustrated books, archival quality "book as artifact" productions, small press books, art books, and treasured favorites.

But more importantly, I think that the ebook will foster a resurgence of reading in general. Ultimately, it's all just a vehicle for good storytelling. That will never change.

**At Pyr you have done a masterful job with book covers. Could you talk a little bit about the process and some of the fantastic artists you've worked with?**

Thank you. The process at Pyr is a little different than other houses, in that in my capacity as Editorial Director, I serve—among other things—as both editor and art director. In fact, I've come to rely on that moment when I begin to see a cover in my head as one of the signs that I am going to want to acquire a manuscript. If I'm reading, and I begin to see the cover, then it is moving from potential to actual in my mind. I usually have a very clear idea, not of the composition, but of the artist that I want on a cover by the time I am half way through a promising submission.

I also tend to involve the authors in the process more than (I am told) is the norm, so usually when I have acquired a book, I will go to the authors with the illustrator I am thinking of, maybe a choice of two or three, and ask their opinion. I will sometimes overrule due to various considerations, but won't go with an illustrator that the author is completely opposed to either. Then I approach the artist, and provided they are willing/available, give them the brief on the project. Some artists read the whole manuscript, some read part of it (or a sufficient amount of it to be inspired). Others ask for a selection of scenes. Often there isn't time, perhaps the book is still being written.

In all circumstances I try to front load the artist with as much as I can give them, not only the specifics of the story, character descriptions, etc... but the type of book it is, the audience I'm shooting for, the reception I want the book to have, the feelings I want it to invoke. I generally see a rough a month before final cover, and depending on the illustrator this can be as simple as a pencil sketch (Todd Lockwood) to a very fleshed out digital underpainting (Jon Sullivan). John Picacio and I will spend hours upon hours on the phone, all through the process, talking about all aspects of the cover in great detail, often arguing fiercely, and I'll see many many stages before the final. Stephan Martiniere, who layers his work up from deceptively simple shapes and textures, doesn't work this way, so I'm more likely to talk to Stephan about the cover for a week, front loading him with as much as I possibly can, then turn him loose to see what he comes up with. Artists like Dan Dos Santos, David Palumbo, or J Seamas Gallagher may show me a variety of different angles on a specific scene to choose from – either in b&w painting or pencils. I also tend to believe that whenever an illustrator shows you a choice of compositions, they always have a favorite, and that if you can figure out which that is and go with it, the work will be that much better. Not that any of these guys aren't professionals who would execute any of your choices to the best of their ability, but if there is that extra spark of excitement it will make the piece “go to eleven.”

There is usually not a lot of changes once we get a final beyond little tweaks, though Christian McGrath was kind enough to recently let us go back and switch a model when our early readers

for a project felt the look of the female lead wasn't connecting enough with their image of the character. And Dave Seeley always continues to work at a piece long after its more than done enough, because he is just a consummate pro and a perfectionist. All of them are fantastic, the best illustrators in the world in my humble opinion.

After the artwork is in, the cover goes to one of three in-house designers, Jacqueline Cooke, Nicole Sommer-Lecht, or Grace M. Conti-Zilsberger. I determine which designer gets which cover, and then I go to work with them, briefing them on the type of book it is, the effect we are going for, perhaps showing them a range of examples from other covers. They are all wonderful and very, very good to put up with the amount of breathing over their shoulder that I put them through. Incidentally, we tag all the cover related posts on the Pyr blog with the designers names, so you can see their work and get a feel for their individual styles: <http://www.pyrsf.com/blogpage.html>. I encourage everyone to check it out and give these ladies the credit they deserve.

**Is there an editor, current or past, that you look to as an example of what you wish to accomplish?**

The answer to that question has evolved over time. I used to say Campbell for his impact on the field, but I imagine we differ in a lot of other areas. I'm hesitant to say too much about what I wish to accomplish because I'm still accomplishing it. In the last five years, we've grown from a small line of 16 books a year -primarily hardcover, primarily SF – to a broad list of around 32 titles a year. We've moved into ebook and mass market, have licensed our books to foreign publishers, are honored to have been most of the major award ballots, including 8 Hugo nominations, and have even made our first Young Adult acquisitions. I've personally been nominated for the Hugo four years running and am honored by a Chesley win for Best Art director last year.

I don't think six years ago when they hired me I could ever have predicted the scope of the impact we've had on the field already. All I can say is that we are enormously grateful to our writers, our artists, and each and every one of our readers. Our goal from the beginning was to make "quality" the thru-line of our brand, and we hear back continually from readers, critics, bloggers, distributors, and bookstore buyers that we are succeeding. That's enormously gratifying.

**Tell us something we don't know about Lou Anders, Editor.**

I am quite fond of alligator and snake both. Or is that Lou Anders, Person?

**Okay, let's wrap it up freestyle. Tell us anything you like. Pimp current works. Answer the question you really wish I had asked. Anything.**

I'll leave by saying that we are just a few weeks away from the debut of Ian McDonald's *The Dervish House*, one of the finest SF novels it has ever been my privilege to read. Set across the span of a single week in near-future Istanbul, the novel is a look at the future of Turkey, the

place of Islam in the 21st century, and the rise of a very credible but game changing nanotech. Anyone that is at all interested in the state of contemporary SF needs to read the book.

**Thanks for your time and some fantastic answers, Lou!**

For more information on Lou Anders:

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[http://www.twitter.com/Pyr\\_Books](http://www.twitter.com/Pyr_Books)

**David Alastair Hayden** writes pulp adventures in a style he calls Daggers & Deviltry. He lives in Alabama, studies Daoism, and practices Taijiquan. He's also a devoted fan of American football and role-playing games.

You can download a free audio version of his novel *Wrath of the White Tigress* from Paudiobooks, or the ebook version from his website or Smashwords.

<http://www.dahayden.com>

<http://www.paudiobooks.com/title/wrath-of-the-white-tigress>

## **An Interview with Kittyhawk**

by Michael Ray

We were fortunate to have the first cover of Redstone Science Fiction drawn by Kittyhawk, a popular online artist. She writes, draws, and publishes the webcomic Sparkling Generation Valkyrie Yuuki.

**We love the cover you did for us. What inspired the work and tell us about its unique style.**

Thank you! I'm happy you like it. I was inspired by the Von Braun/Disney cartoons of the 1950s. I love the flat-style of the Space Age, and I thought it would be perfect for the first issue of a SciFi magazine. I hope I was able to capture that.

**When did you realize that you had an interest in being an artist?**

Since the beginning, I think. Many of my earliest memories are of drawing.

**You have a very popular manga webcomic, what influenced you to focus on this style of art?**

I lived in Japan when I was a little girl, so I think the Japanese style seeped into my bones. I do have some American influences such as Tex Avery and Chuck Jones. I also dig Kevin Maguire's art in Justice League International. That man can do facial expressions like none other. I guess my style is a combo of American and Japanese styles, with the Japanese being more dominant.

**How and when did you decide to start SGVY?**

It was the summer of 2002, and my first webcomic, the Jar, had just ended. I decided that I wanted to do a magical girl series with a boy as the magical girl. After thinking about it for a while, I decided I wanted to do a magical girl series with a transgendered hero who was also a valkyrie. The rest is history.

**Sounds like a lot of fun. So how did this idea become SGVY?**

Sparkling Generation Valkyrie Yuuki or SGVY is the story of a magical girl fanboy who is transformed into the Valkyrie by a magical DVD sent by the messenger god Hermod on behalf of the Norse Gods who need a champion to fight the evil forces of the fire giant Surt. Mostly it's about Sexy Fun.

**I understand that you decided to be exclusively online. We are doing the same thing with RSF. What led you to make that decision?**

When I started SGVY, I thought about doing print eventually, but then I looked at the prices for print. They were too much for me, and it got me thinking: why do print? And it was then that I decided that I would find a way to go completely digital. The comic is and will always be free online. I have sold SGVY as a collection with the Jar on Comic CD and USB comic archive, which were a hit.

Now I admit the price for print has gone down since I last thought about it, but once again, why do print? The Internet reaches so many more people, and more and more people have mobile devices. Why not embrace this new world where a person can publish from their home to computers, tablets, and phones for practically nothing? Why kill trees just for the feel, the smell, and the tangibility for so much more money?

There is no reason except for nostalgia. Don't get me wrong; that smell of a freshly unwrapped SNES cartridge is like nothing else. However, they aren't manufactured anymore, and they shouldn't be. I like my Wii just fine.

**You have developed quite a following. What do you do now beyond the website alone to keep in touch with your fans?**

I use Facebook, Twitter, my blog, the site's RSS feed, Montrose Academy Forums, and IM to connect with my readers. I think I am well connected. ^\_^

**So what appearances do you have scheduled in the near future?**

I will be at Otakon 2010 this July 30~August 1 in Baltimore, Anime Weekend Atlanta this September 17-19, and Tsubasacon this October 1-3 in Huntington, WV. I will be a judge for the Make-a-Manga Tournament at Otakon, and I will have an Artists' Alley table at all of the cons. I hope to see you there!

**We're pleased to have you involved in Redstone Science Fiction and look forward to seeing more art from you in the future.**

Thank you so much for letting me work with you! I look forward to doing more art for Redstone in the future. Thank you for interviewing me! ^\_^

You can keep up with Kittyhawk at :

[Sparkling Generation Valkyrie Yuuki](#)

[Montrose Sketchbook](#)

[SGVY Facebook](#)

[SGVY Twitter](#)



## **Interview with Joel Hardy**

*by Michael Ray*

Joel Hardy is a Payload Rack Officer with the International Space Station. He has a degree in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Alabama and he works for Teledyne Brown, a contractor with NASA, in Huntsville, Alabama. He works at the Marshall Space Flight Center, which is located on **Redstone Arsenal**.

### **How did you get interested in working with space exploration?**

Star Wars. When I was a kid, Return of the Jedi was the big thing that influenced me. That and Battlestar Galactica, the first one. The dogfights were the thing that was really exciting. Of course, it turns out that there are no dogfights in space, yet.

### **Then you always knew that you wanted to go into Mechanical or Aerospace Engineering?**

Engineering is really something that my high school teachers suggested I should look into, since I had always leaned towards math and science. When I got to orientation at Alabama, a sort of engineering day, I looked things over and it seemed that Mechanical Engineering had a lot of applications and I wanted to make sure I could find a job in what, in the early nineties, was a weak economy. So I chose Mechanical and it turned out that I really liked it.

### **How did you move into the Aerospace field?**

One of my professors, Dr. Beth Todd, had contacts with NASA and I got involved in some experiments examining a prototype for an exercise machine in microgravity on board the KC-135 (The Vomit Comet).

### **When you finished school you knew you wanted to work for NASA?**

Oh, yes. Graduates of our program were already working at Teledyne Brown, a NASA contractor, and they encouraged me to come to work there.

### **What was your first job working there?**

My first job was teaching astronauts how to operate the experiments on the Space Station.

### **So you were teaching a high quality student!**

The minimum requirement to apply for astronaut training to be a Mission Specialist is a master's degree in science or engineering and, of course, the pilots have both military training and advanced degrees.

### **When did you start working with the experiments?**

After a year instructing astronauts, I moved to Science Ops.

### **Science Ops?**

Everyone knows about Mission Control in Houston. Their job is to make sure the vehicle is safe

and operating. But there is also a Mission Control here in Huntsville, Alabama. We run all of the NASA-owned research and science experiments on the Space Station. Science Operations oversees these experiments.

### **How does that work?**

The experiments are in “racks”, a modular system of lockers with drawers, about the size of refrigerators. You can fit ten of them onto the Space Station and you can put them in and take them out when you want, after a few months or even a couple of years. The rack can provide water, power, nitrogen, vacuum, and other resources, like different temperatures. One cool drawer is a microgravity glovebox that lets you reach into the box and manipulate an experiment without unsealing the box. Part of my job is being on console, on the headset, monitoring the resources available to these experiments.

### **What are your favorite experiments?**

Combustion experiments in microgravity are very cool. They light a small piece of fuel and get a small floating ball of fire in the rack. Also the spiders. They were examining how spiders adapted to microgravity. The first webs they made were haphazard, but after a while they adapted and made recognizable spiderwebs.

### **Aside from insuring experiments are operating properly, what else do you do?**

I’m responsible for training new hires, teaching them how to react to anomalies.

### **That sounds ominous.**

It means fixing problems and handling situations that come up, and it is very gratifying when I check the logs and see that someone I trained has dealt with a problem effectively.

### **You’re training engineers who will be the future of the Space program. There has been a lot of discussion lately about what that future will be. What do you think will happen with NASA?**

The Space Station is already built and it’s going to be around for a while. We can continue to learn about the long-term effects of living in space on humans. A lot of people don’t realize that the space station has been continuously occupied for almost ten years now, by many different astronauts, of course.

NASA is going to work on the heavy lifters (rockets) to get payloads into deep space while private companies are going to begin handling trips into low-earth orbit. Within the next year SpaceX is going to launch an unmanned capsule, the Dragon, that will dock with the Space Station. That will be a big proof of concept, it will be a big first step. Of course there are plans to land on asteroids, and I sure would like to see humans on Mars. That would be awesome.

### **What do you see as necessary advances to enhance space exploration?**

Engines. So much of the cost of spaceflight is involved in escaping gravity. Some way to reduce that cost is key.

One recent project that I found interesting involved taking small pieces of a satellite up to the Space Station individually on the shuttle and assembling it on the Space Station. I can definitely see things being assembled in space at the Station Station or whatever comes after it.

The Station itself is amazing, when you think about it. It is made up of different parts manufactured in different places all over the world and they actually work together. In space.

**Joel, thanks for your time and for giving us an idea of what goes on inside the Space Program. We'll check back with you after the docking with the SpaceX Dragon.**

I'd be glad to talk with you about it, any time. Good luck with Redstone Science Fiction.