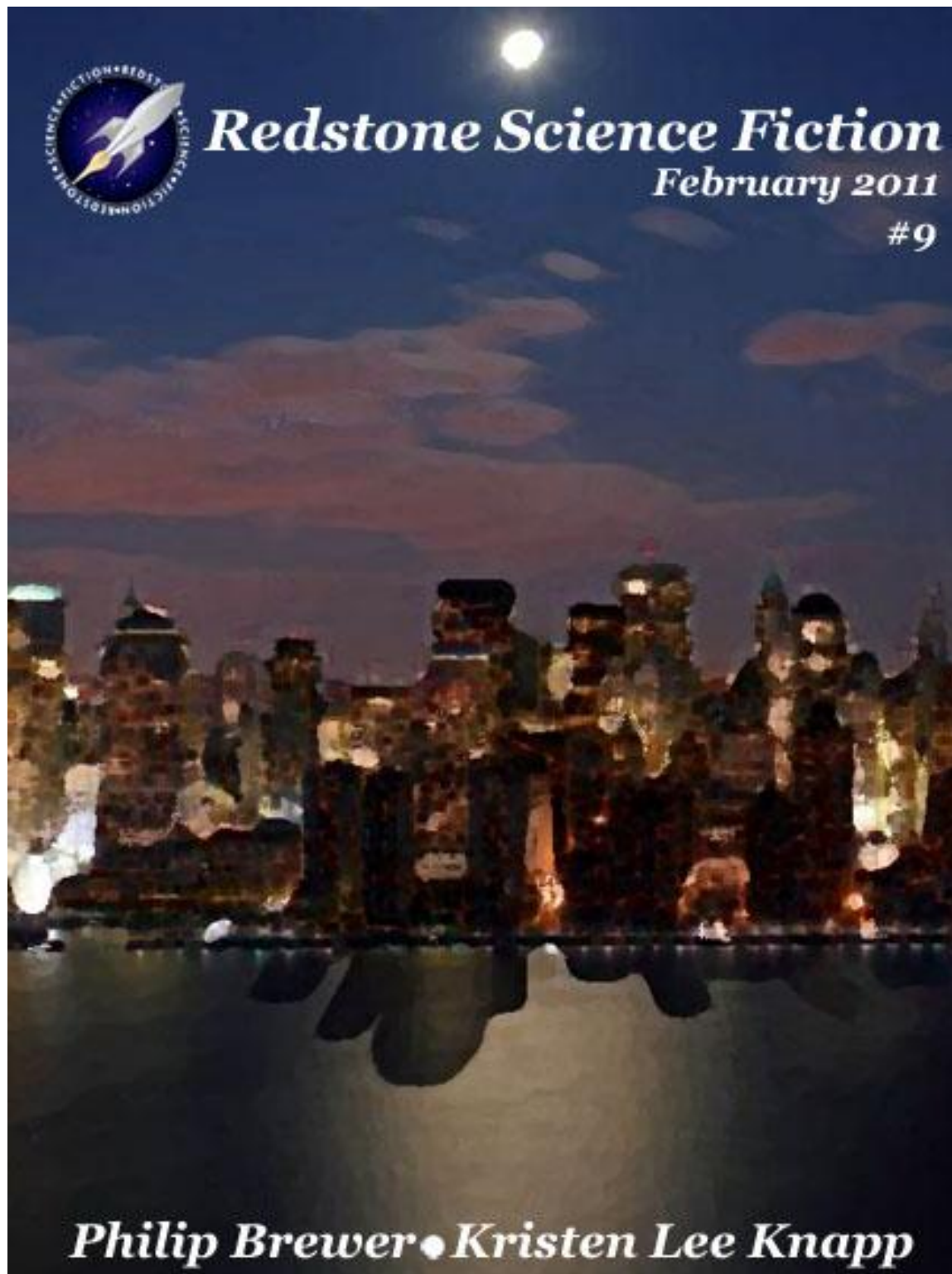




Redstone Science Fiction

February 2011

#9



Philip Brewer • Kristen Lee Knapp

Cover Art by Cassandra Link

Redstone Science Fiction #9, February 2011

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Editor's Note – February 2011

It's been a good month here at Redstone SF.

All that snow gave us a little glimpse of what a dystopian future might be like (and more time off to work on Redstone).

We get to publish two stories that we think you'll really like. Both are very personal stories that consider what sort of future genetic engineering might bring. [Like a Hawk in its Gyre](#) by Philip Brewer is a subtle story that draws you into the world of its damaged protagonist, while [Fatherhood](#) by Kristen Lee Knapp is an over-the-top cyberpunk story that will send you looking for your mirrorshades. We were also able to talk a little with these authors and find out a little bit more about these guys for you – [Philip](#) and [Kris](#).

We finally determined the stories we wanted to accept from the quality November submissions and are excited about the work we're going to get to bring to Redstone. We're also opening for submissions again for the first week of February and can't wait to see what touches down in our inbox. We'll update our progress through this month's submissions at <http://redstonesciencefiction.com/status/>.

I got a chance to send [a few questions](#) to the editors of one of the new digital SF markets, Daily Science Fiction. They are quite an enigma, and I am pleased to shed a little light on the people who put some flash SF in my inbox every weekday morning.

Henry Cribbs has taken my idea of focusing on short fiction and has run away with it. [For this month's column](#) he took the 3rd edition of The Year's Best Science Fiction with stories from 1985, and examined theme of 'recall' which was present in a number of the stories. We are fortunate to have such a quality SF scholar on board here at Redstone. All his essays are excellent, but this may be my favorite so far.

The [surreal cityscape](#) for our cover this month was done by Cassondra Link. She does a great job and consistently provides us with quality work (sometimes on very short notice).

Although we publish during the first few days of the month, we are always active online at <http://facebook.com/redstonesf> and <http://twitter.com/redstonesf>. Add us to your lists, discuss our magazine, ask us questions, and let us know what you think.

As always, we hope you find something in this month's Redstone SF that you enjoy.

Your friend,
Michael Ray
Editor
Redstone SF
editors@redstonesciencefiction.com

Like a Hawk in its Gyre

by Philip Brewer

The bicycle noticed someone was following before Kurt did. Watching for a tail was a habit he'd finally broken himself of, but not before the bicycle's impressionable brain had picked it up. Its low warning hum sent a thrill of adrenalin through him, giving power to the part of his brain that wanted him to sprint away.

Kurt glanced back down the single track. The trees were already beginning to turn fall colors around the edges of the forest, but here along the narrow trail the foliage was green and thick. Resisting the urge to pick up the pace, he continued on, looking back when he could take his eyes off the trail, and after a few moments caught sight of what the bicycle had seen.

"It's just another cyclist," Kurt said, reaching down to pat the bicycle's yellow-and-black, hornet-striped frame. The bicycle didn't understand—its brain was small and lacked the regions for understanding speech—but Kurt's tone of voice calmed it and the warning hum grew softer and less anxious.

The end of the trail, a scenic overlook above the Vermillion River, was not far ahead, but the overtaking bicyclist was approaching even faster. The polite thing to do would be to find a place to pull off the trail and let the cyclist past. But there were no surveillance devices in the forest, and Kurt couldn't face meeting someone out of sight of some sort of watching eyes. At just the thought of it, his adrenaline surged again.

Letting his brain chemistry have its way with him, Kurt leaned low over his handlebars and pedaled hard.

With its good forward eyes, the bicycle watched the trail, sending little twitches into the steering to help Kurt take the best line. On the road it didn't make much difference, but on a technical trail the bicycle's assist could add several percent to his speed.

Giving in to the urge to sprint away took some of the pressure off, enough that Kurt had a chance to think. The urge to find surveillance cameras—the need to do nothing that wasn't observed—was one that he'd had some time to get used to. Even, to an extent, come to terms with. What his brain needed was watching eyes. It wanted surveillance cameras, but those weren't the only kind of eyes. His own two didn't count, but there were others. His bicycle had eight. And the forest was full of eyes. He could hear a woodpecker hammering not far off, the buzzing of deer flies around his head, and rustlings in the litter that might be frogs or small mammals. They all had eyes. Focusing on that, Kurt was able to ease his speed down and brake to a stop as he reached the end of the trail, where a wide, clear area looked out over the river.

Breathing hard, he looked back down the trail. He started to reach for his water bottle, but the trembling in his hand made him wait.

The approaching rider was dressed like a cyclist – lycra shorts, padded gloves, helmet, wrap-around amber shades. The bike had a rack over the rear wheel and a large bag, as big as the bag that Kurt had on his own bike, big enough for a picnic lunch and a six-pack of beer. The man angled toward the other side of the viewing area and jumped off his bike a good distance away.

Kurt began to relax. The lack of surveillance was fine if they didn't interact. The clearing, nearly flat until it dipped sharply down to the river, began to feel a little more comfortable. His breathing slowed and he calmed down enough to smell the moist dirt. He pulled out his water bottle.

“Hello, Kurt,” said the man.

Kurt's hand tightened, forcing a narrow spray of water out the top of the bottle.

“My name's Starkweather. It's been difficult to arrange a private conversation with you.”

Not private, Kurt thought, twisting his head left and then right. *The forest is full of eyes and ears.* He knew he was just fooling his brain, and not fooling it very well, but the thought took the edge off what would otherwise have been a panic attack.

The man watched him, and then continued. “You post all your email to the web, your phone provides your GPS coordinates to the net in real time, and your shop has cameras that put an unencrypted feed on the net.”

Kurt's knees trembled in yearning for his shop cameras.

Starkweather moved closer to Kurt. The bicycle's warning hum grew louder.

“This must be one of your bicycles,” Starkweather said. He took off his shades and peered at it, then pointed toward a round bulge at the front of the top tube. “The brain is here?”

The hum shifted, changing from the warning tone to a more threatening snarl and Starkweather pulled back his finger. “I'm terribly interested in your bicycles. On your shop video feed, you can plainly see them moving on their own. They can't carry you around, can they?”

The bicycles he made were a topic Kurt could discuss, even in a private conversation. “No. To do that, they'd have to be as big as a horse. They can just shift back and forth a little by shifting fluids in their tires.”

“The tires are living tissue?”

Kurt nodded. He considered explaining that the handlebar grips were living tissue as well and didn't wear out or need replacing, but somehow the forest clearing didn't seem like the right place for his sales pitch.

“Fascinating. But don’t you feel restricted having so little living tissue to work with? Wouldn’t it be better to make something that was a whole animal? Something like a bird, perhaps?”

The safe talk of bicycles had lulled Kurt into relaxing. At the mention of birds his throat closed and he couldn’t speak.

Starkweather leaned forward. “The bicycles are a clever toy, but I want to talk about birds.”

Remembering the comforting image of eyes in the forest, Kurt gestured toward the trees and managed to say in a strangled voice, “The forest is full of birds.”

“Ah, very droll. No, I want to talk about hawks, such as you made for the government during the unpleasantness a few years back.”

Kurt could say nothing to that. This was so far beyond anything he could have a private conversation about he couldn’t even retrace the steps of the conversation as it went from bicycles to hawks. The only response to a conversation like this was to call a particular number and report it. Ignoring Starkweather, he dug in his bag for his phone like a starving man going through a restaurant’s garbage.

As Kurt pulled out his phone, Starkweather spoke in a gentle voice, calling his name. The words washed over him, his entire attention focused on holding down the 2 button, speed dialing the number he needed to call. The phone displayed “Call Failed.” He pressed the button to try again, and then again. Finally Starkweather’s words got through. “Kurt, it won’t work. I’m jamming the cell phone frequencies. I have been since before you even knew I was behind you on the trail.”

Kurt leaned on his bicycle. Its warning hum changed tone, taking on a worried sound. Kurt made an effort to get himself under control. His mind was going in tight circles around and around the urge to make that call. Having gone through the motions, he found the circle widening just a bit. It would come back to this point—the need to make the call would return—but for a moment he could think about other things.

“I know it’s hard for you to talk about your government work. I can help, though. For one thing, I already know all about it. I’ve read all your papers. The secret ones, I mean, that document the genetic and surgical changes you made to hawk brains. I particularly liked your ‘Genetic basis for replicating human structures in the avian fusiform gyrus.’ That was the work that let your hawks recognize people’s faces from photographs.”

Kurt shook his head.

“I know,” Starkweather said. “If I’ve got the papers, why do I need you? Well, it’s very difficult to do that sort of work these days. Impossible, really. And yet, I have a certain task that would be much easier with one of your hawks. So, it occurred to me that you probably had some hawks left at the end of the war. In fact, the records show that there were eight.”

Kurt couldn't answer. He could barely breathe.

"I can help you with that," Starkweather said in a gentle voice. He gestured in the direction of the river. The move was so casual Kurt glanced that way without thinking. As he did so, Starkweather reached out, quick like a bird of prey, and slapped Kurt on the hand.

Kurt looked down and saw that a patch had been applied to the back of his hand. He shrieked and clawed at the edges.

"Relax. It won't come off without some sort of solvent—acetone will do the trick. It's not bad—just some neurotransmitters to damp down what they did to you."

The need to get the patch off was like the need to breathe. Nothing else mattered and he would have fallen if the bicycle hadn't shifted to help him keep his balance.

"Do you even know what they did to you?"

Having designed the procedure himself, Kurt understood better than anyone what they'd done to him. A little minimally invasive brain surgery. Some stem cells and growth hormones injected in just the right places, so that certain areas of his brain became a little larger, a little more complex, a little better connected. Some old-fashioned conditioning. The whole procedure aimed at making it impossible for him to give away any of his old secrets, while making it intolerable for him to have any new ones.

"The chemicals in that patch go a long way to making you normal again."

It was like having a fog over his brain, but after a few seconds, Kurt found it was a selective fog. Those urges he had, out of necessity, come to terms with, fell away. It wasn't quite so important that he do nothing in private. He still wanted to make that phone call, but now he realized that it would be okay to wait a few hours. He closed his phone and slid it back into his bag.

"There," Starkweather said. "Feel more like your old self?"

Starkweather paused, but when Kurt had no response, went on. "It won't last, of course. I can let you have a few more of these patches, but that's not a long-term solution either. There's only one thing that will free you from what they did to you. You have to tell me your secrets. I know most of them. I know everything that was in your papers, logs, records, and reports. None of that information is secret anymore, so you don't have to keep it secret. But there are still a few things that are secret, and those secrets will still have power over you, until you tell me. What happened to those hawks?"

Kurt stared at him, the fog in his brain making it hard to think. It was true that only secrets preyed on his mind. The things he did now, that were fed to the internet in realtime, were not a burden. Already, knowing that his papers had been read, he could feel the weight of keeping those secrets lifting. It wasn't as simple as that, though. "What about this meeting?" Kurt said,

an instant before it occurred to him that he might be asking a dangerous question. "I'll have to tell them about it, or it would be a secret too."

"Of course," Starkweather said smoothly. "You don't have to keep any of this secret. Starkweather isn't my real name. And I'll want them to know that I've got a hawk. Really, that's the whole point."

Kurt knew that keeping his old secrets secret was as important as making sure that he didn't have any new secrets, but the drugs in the patch confused the two. The allure of freeing himself from his old secrets was very, very strong. "There were never any extra weaponized hawks. We only made one when they were going to use it immediately. Anything else would have been far too dangerous."

"Very careful phrasing, Kurt. But don't you think the hawks were 'weaponized' even before they were fitted with explosives? Didn't the genetic changes amount to weaponizing? There were eight hawks left. I've seen the records. They were not destroyed."

Kurt clamped his mouth shut.

Starkweather looked around, as if admiring the scenery. "This used to be a prime nesting area for hawks, here by the river. Then, what with DDT and habitat destruction, hawks got pretty scarce. After the war, birders noticed there were hawks nesting on the Vermilion River again. That could just be coincidence, but combined with the fact that you ride down here nearly every week, I started thinking maybe there was a connection."

"You think I set them free? They couldn't have survived. They were lab animals."

"They were supposed to live off the land for as long as it took to complete their mission. If they can survive for weeks, they can survive for three years. They're out there. I want one."

Kurt looked up at the sky, nodding to himself. Birdwatchers saw hawks along the Vermilion River, often from this very spot. They posted reports about it to their blogs. But there were no hawks over the river today. There never were, when he came to look. "Why do you think I come out here? To visit them? They weren't pets. They were weapons of war. Weapons of terror, really."

Starkweather gestured at the bicycle. "You forget that everything you do is broadcast on the net. I've seen you with your bicycle. I've seen you in your shop with the other bicycles. You couldn't just kill your hawks. And you couldn't just set them free and then not check up and make sure they were doing okay."

Kurt petted the yellow-and-black striped frame absently. The bicycle's hum had quieted as Kurt had relaxed under the influence of the patch. "If I couldn't do that, then surely I couldn't give one to you. They didn't survive their missions."

"That's the nature of bombs," Starkweather said.

“The generals were fools! Bombs were all they understood. What *we* wanted to do was use poison!” Kurt clamped his mouth shut again, holding back his rant on how easy it would have been to grow some venom glands in the hawk’s talons. There were plenty of poisons deadly enough that one slash would be as certain a kill as a bomb. But the generals wouldn’t hear of it. “Military types are stupid about a lot of things,” Kurt said, unable to keep his mouth shut any longer, “But they’re rather clever when it comes to keeping weapons safe until you’re ready to use them. Poisoned talons would have been a danger to everyone in the lab.”

Starkweather glanced up at the sky with an uneasy expression on his face.

Kurt smiled. Based on the effect it was having on him, he was beginning to understand how the patch worked. It was hard to keep his mouth shut, but he found he could pick and choose which secrets to reveal. “The explosive payload was inserted in the females. Females are larger and can carry more. It was inserted in place of their reproductive organs. We used the same birds for breeding stock, so a bird was lost for that once it was armed.”

“Will they come when you call them?”

Kurt’s smile vanished. “No birds to call.” He tilted his head back as if to look for birds, but really to keep tears from falling from his eyes.

“Let’s find out,” Starkweather said. “Call them.” He reached into his bag and pulled out a compact bundle that shook out into a mesh cage big enough for a hawk. He attached it to the rack on the back of his bicycle.

Kurt shook his head. “There aren’t any. All gone.”

Starkweather reached into the bag again, and this time pulled out a small pistol. As the gun came clear, the bicycle’s quiet hum took on an urgent warble. “How interesting! Your bicycle recognizes a gun! That’s a very clever... creature. Does it have a name?”

Kurt patted the frame again and hummed a calming hum. “No. I just call it my bicycle.”

“Too bad,” Starkweather said. “I’d like to call it by name when I threaten it.”

Kurt found that he was no longer in danger of crying. He turned his gaze from the sky and fixed it on Starkweather.

“You’d threaten a bicycle?”

“Not just the bicycle. I’ll kill you, too. But somehow I get the idea that killing the bicycle would be a bigger threat.” He raised the gun. “I guess it’s really the same thing, though, isn’t it? The bicycle isn’t like the birds. It can’t take care of itself. If I kill you, your bicycle will die here, alone in the forest. Probably all the bicycles in your shop as well, unless someone takes over caring for them.”

“What an awful idea!”

Starkweather leveled the gun, aiming toward the bicycle’s small brain. “Call a hawk.”

Kurt pushed hard on the bicycle seat, sending the bike rolling across the ground, angling toward the river.

Starkweather tracked it for a moment, then turned the gun back toward Kurt. “That won’t save it. Not if you’re dead. Call a hawk now, or I’ll kill you.”

“All right.” Kurt whistled, then made his hand into a fist and held it above his head. He kept his eyes on the sky, so he didn’t see the bicycle begin making a wide turn behind Starkweather’s back. He whistled again, a lower, repeated sound.

“Where are the hawks?”

“If they’re alive,” Kurt said, “They’ll be watching us. They’re trained to stay hidden when there are strangers about. Especially strangers with guns.”

“If you can’t get them to overcome that training in about fifteen seconds, you’re dead.”

Kurt whistled again, his fist still in the air, his eyes still on the sky. “You know,” he began in a more conversational tone, “Nothing about the bicycles is secret. I can’t keep anything secret. But some things aren’t as clearly documented as others. Especially things that didn’t need any further research. Unlike the hawks’ brains, which were really just barely changed, the bicycles’ brains were designed from the ground up. The most obvious part is loosely based on a llama’s brain. That’s the part that recognizes people and guns, the part that hums to warn or threaten. But the central core of the brain is based on a spider’s brain. That’s the part that knows how to use eight eyes. The part that feels vibrations, treating the frame as if it were its web.”

“Five seconds,” Starkweather said.

“Spiders,” Kurt said, “Don’t warn or threaten.”

The bicycle, having completed its wide turn, rolled silently up behind Starkweather, brushing past his left arm. Starkweather began to turn, but far too late. Kurt knew what he was feeling—sudden, blinding pain like a wasp sting. Pain that didn’t start and then grow worse, but was so abrupt and severe it couldn’t fail to grab someone’s full attention.

Starkweather swung his right hand around to reach the site of the agony. Before he could change his mind and swing the gun back toward Kurt, he couldn’t move. He couldn’t do anything but collapse in a heap.

“Good bicycle,” Kurt said. “Come to me.”

The bicycle didn't understand words, but it knew what Kurt meant. It began another wide, circling turn from the angle of its attack on Starkweather.

Kurt looked down at Starkweather, the man's breathing becoming steadily more ragged. "We did a lot of research on toxins, when we were trying to convince the military to go that direction." The drugs from the patch made it hard to shut up, and Kurt no longer saw any reason to try. "The bicycle produces wasp venom, for the instant pain that distracts you. It can use just that, if it's simply trying to deter a thief. But it has another. For the military we came up with some very deadly shellfish, snake, and spider toxins, but I had trouble making those play nicely with the wasp venom. I ended up going with scorpion genes. Enough to grow a stinger from the living tissue of the handlebar grip, and a tidy poison gland full of very deadly nerve poisons. In large doses—and this is a much larger dose than you'd likely get from a scorpion—they paralyze almost instantly, with death following in just a few minutes."

The urge to make that phone call, to report on everything that had happened, was growing again. Kurt thought about searching Starkweather and his bicycle for the patches, then decided against it. His new, public life was very comfortable. After all, he had volunteered for it, and designed the procedures that made it work. It was the old secrets that were hard, and he'd finally given those away. Even knowing that he'd told his secrets to a dead man, they seemed to weigh less on his mind.

Straddling his bicycle, Kurt looked again at the sky. "It's true that I released the birds," he said, hoping that Starkweather wasn't quite dead, so he could give away one more secret. "But I can't call them. I don't even see them. I tell myself it's because they're smart enough to keep away from me, but I don't really know. I just come here, in case they need me. They don't though. Maybe they're all dead. But, if they're not dead, then I guess I didn't break them too badly." Kurt looked down. "I wish I knew."

The End

*Most of what Philip Brewer writes ends up being about money or brain chemistry (although genetic engineering and biofuels are right up there). He has a BA in economics and worked for 25 years as a software engineer before a combination of technological and economic forces freed him to eke out a meager existence as a full-time writer. His fiction has appeared in *Futurismic* and *Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet*, and he has a story forthcoming in *Asimov's*. He speaks Esperanto and uses it for international communication. Visit [Philip's website](#) for more information about his writing life.*

Fatherhood

by Kristen Lee Knapp

Databases shear past me, slashes of white light against the plastic emptiness. The sensation of endless freefall always accompanies diving. Like a waking dream. I smell the connection I need, it stinks up the void like burnt hair. I seize it – lights spear through the gaps in my fingers. Blue lodes materialize from the nothing, throbbing with marine light. Tridents of lightning fork from the morphing, ethereal avatar. They smell like uncut amphetamines, an acrid, medicinal odor that unceasingly infiltrates the nostrils.

“Connection established.” When it speaks, its voice is a cacophony of tones boiled into one. “Declare your identification.”

“Octopus. Two sixty-three fifty-four X.”

An instant’s pause.

“Well, well. You answered our summons,” it says. “After last time, we weren’t certain you would.”

It’s an odd feeling, talking to someone that only refers to itself as *we*. “Man has to eat,” I say. “My dad always said so.”

“Wise words, no doubt.”

“I’m as surprised that you contacted me.”

“Reliability has its own intrinsic value. You’ve completed clean, efficient work for us in the past. Time cures whatever minor oversights you’ve incurred. We’re prepared to offer you a sizeable amount for the completion of this assignment. One that requires your specific abilities.”

“Who’s the one in need of mortality?”

“There’s no balking once you start this assignment. If we disclose even the basic parameters, you’ll be crossing the Rubicon. We will only say that this operation will be exceedingly dangerous. Your pay will be suitably increased. Will you comply?”

They’ve never said anything like this before. “I agree,” I say.

“Your target is the EUG’s neural network. You will apply a self-activating virus to it.”

“What kind of virus?”

I can hear the intrinsic click of corporate calculation. “You should listen to your father’s advice, Octopus. How hungry are you?”

It's pure violation when a stranger uses your parents as a fulcrum against you. Most galling of all is when they're right.

"The window of opportunity is miniscule," it says. "A contact will ensure your infiltration point and escape. Half the amount will be transferred to your account now, the rest upon completion."

Resentment concocts an insane plan of taking the money and making a run for it, either for Iconium or New London on the near side. All of this has been worked out before I even got the call, every word of theirs and every potential response has been weighed and measured ahead of time, all to lead me to their preferred conclusion. It's too easy to slip into paranoia when you work for Kiss-Horvath. They own the Zagreb Sprawl. I figure that's what this is about, they want to cull EUG's influence here.

They drill me with the particulars, an excruciating morass of names and places and coordinates. I let the auto-ROM soak it up, I'll review it later.

The void folds around me like a tumbling house of cards. I pull the nodes from my forehead and retch into a bucket while my senses reorient. I pace and work out the cricks in my neck and back. I stop at my father's kabuto, a super-aramid helm and face mask dripping with burnt circuits. Burn-scars gouge the polymer plates in a dozen different places – he got good use out of it. Fangs were etched into the polycarbonate face mask. I lift it from the pedestal and set it on my head. Bio-connectors drill into my skull, but it doesn't hurt. I've done this a hundred times. He cultured me, raised my embryo in his homemade chemistry kit, did the cellular divisions, the gastrulation all by himself. Someday I'll have saved up enough to do what he did. That's a reality if I complete this gig. I suit up and head out of my insula and onto the street.

Workers fill the domed sky, fluttering on tensile carbonate wings, welding, fusing, building, moving from structure to structure. Drones haunt the streets. The electric-blue lights of their bio-scans trickle down the street then jerk back, repeating in an endless typewriter motion. The chromatophores in my skin bend the light around my figure and I pass undetected.

Two opposing towers rise above the acne rashes of light pulsing from the monolithic city. Trillion candle-power beacons circle from the featureless, titanic walls of the EUG and Kiss-Horvath citadels. Spinning, cylindrical pinnacles pierce the dome and strain into space. Hives of sublight dusters and lunar runners cluster the shipyards. Holoboards assault the city from above with salvos of morphing, rainbow lights, obscuring the brown thumbnail of dead Earth as it scratches over the horizon. I cross the sterile alleys on my way, passing through the Laz-district, where all the Earther refugees are waiting to die.

I turn a corner and a plaz-launcher presses the back of my skull. The cells whine, I smell the skin on the back of my head sizzle against the radioactive heat. "Don't move," a voice says behind. "Nice and slow now. You Octopus?"

I whip my hydrostat limbs around and knock the plaz-launcher aside, using my primate arms to draw the eight-watt Masamune from across my shoulder. My finger hovers over the switch and I ram the tsuba against my attacker's chest.

A saturnine chortle emits from arid lips as a subsonic slug projector taps against my stomach. Ersatz compound eyes quiver over my body. “One, two. . . Eight. If you’re not Octopus, this is one hell of a coincidence.” He holsters his projector in slow motion. “The sword, please.”

“You’re my way in,” I say, withdrawing the blade.

“Yeah,” he says. “Name’s Sobos. The heads over at Kiss probably told you all about me.”

They had. Every detail, including his torpid shape and crude grafts. Sobos is a typical merc, a patchwork of random biological elements and bone-fused weaponry. There’s no practicality in his ungainly body, even less artistry. Nothing could be further from my anatomy, designed by my father.

“Probably wondering how you’re getting in there,” he says, pointing his plaz-launcher at the EUG tower. “I’ve got a cipher on the inside, he’s set up a phase-pad in the data shafts.” Sobos snorts, scraping the stubble under his nose. “You’ll have to travel a few clicks from there to get to the mainframe. You can’t touch the floor or walls in the data shafts while they’re in use or the superconductors will turn you to ash, so you gotta make sure you. . .”

I’d been told all this before. “Where’s the virus?”

Sobos hands me a steel canister. “Metamorphic, polymorphic. This is some nasty shit, my friend. You get any of this on you, you can forget it. Kiss isn’t playing with this.”

I swipe it from his hands and hand it to one of my cepha-arms. The suckers attach to the smooth surface with unyielding kisses and it disappears within me. Sobos shrugs, activates the phase pad and tosses it to the ground. “What’re you gonna do with the money?” When I don’t answer, he keeps talking. “I’m gonna get girls. And boys. And I’m gonna buy a nice flop somewhere and fuck and eat and fuck for months.” He grins, his compound eyes glimmer. Virtuous men like my father are in grave dearth.

I step onto the phase pad. Blue light wells inside of me, expands, consuming me atom by atom until I don’t exist.

I reatomize by pieces, a sensation like having your limbs wake up one at a time. Matrices of ice-colored lights burn in symmetrical grids along the round silver-plated shaft. When I close my eyes my location appears on the uploaded schematics of the EUG compound as a red dot.

“Get moving,” Sobos’s voice grunts into my ear over the comms. “Next cycle’s in eight-point-two minutes and you’ve got two clicks to cover.”

“No, four,” I say, launching into a sprint with my arms, legs and cepha-limbs up the constantly sloping tunnel.

“Goddamnit,” Sobos mutters. “I told him to set the phase pad himself, *not* to toss it down.” An anxious pause. “Seven-point-five minutes.”

Sequences of light blur past as I gallop forward.

“Five minutes, Octopus.”

The lights swell, a temp-monitor fires in my circuitry, blaring warnings into my retinas.
WARNING: TEMPERATURE EXCEEDING ONE-THIRTY DEGREES FARENHEIT.

“Three-point-five. Jesus, *go.*”

ONE-FIFTY DEGREES.

The ground cooks my skin as I run for my life.

ONE-SIXTY.

The lights blind me. I keep running, scorching my hands on the frigid-hot walls.

TWO-HUNDRED.

“You’re out of time!”

I tumble into an open service hatch and slam the valve closed behind me. The iron walls shudder as the matrices flame, filling the tunnel with unfathomable energy. Pustules of my skin bubble and pop until my systems recalibrate and cool. Nonsensical monitors and indescribably complex panels growl with electronic voices. A cramped maintenance tube leads out of the room, I can only fit into it by sprawling on the ground stomach first.

The Kiss-Horvath schematic warns I’m approaching a security bulkhead. In the briefing, the Kiss brain trusts had warned that EUG security wasn’t limited to government issue street drones. I peek out of from the tube with the cybernetic eye in my father’s kabuto, it relays high-speed layouts to my CPU. Alternating beam grids, motion-turrets, daruma-killers.

The ceiling is the only way. My CPU finishes proofing the grid’s equations. I yank myself out through the tube and up the smooth wall, scaling it with the suction kissers in my cepha-limbs. I think of my future child. She’ll be just like my father, just like me, a bionic work of art, a perfect sequencing of DNA into a living masterpiece. The bounty for this job will pay for the kits, the zygotes, the grafts. A shudder of anticipation rumbles through me as I swing down into the next shaft through circling laser nets.

“How the hell’d he get through there,” Sobos mutters to himself. I hear it anyway.

I’m standing in the EUG bio lab. Fetuses and raw grafts hover in simmering vats of viscous fluid. DNA sequences spiral on humming monitors.

“Octopus. Hey, Pus. Why’d you stop? Where are you?”

I see all of the things I'd need to grow my child. Unused receptacles line the walls in perfect uniformity. Clusters of zygotes, embryos, nutrients, drift between conduits. Easy. It'd be so simple to take all I need and go back the way I came. I could head to any of the crater-states, Chiba/Chiba'd probably be the wisest choice. Kiss-Horvath probably wouldn't bother coming after me.

But then my daughter's life would begin with a lie. I'd be knowingly poisoning her future for convenience's sake. Having a child shouldn't be easy.

"Pus? You there? Shit."

"Yeah," I say, willing myself to walk on.

"You're almost there, should be the next room."

I step to the door, press my hand to the scanner. The sequences Kiss-Horvath provided me work perfectly and the steel portals sprawl open. Fragments of ice splinter and plummet from the neural core's cylindrical bulk. Blue lightning lashes from its frigid exterior, wiggling and then disappearing. A circle of gravity wells line its monstrous shape, each throbbing with implacable energy.

"This is you, Sobos," I say. I pull the virus from the grasp of my cepha-arm's suckers.

"Negative energy surge should drain the EUG generators. Network'll compensate by readjusting power distribution. The gravity wells should weaken and you can toss the virus through."

Two barbed prongs spring from the canister's tip.

"How long is the window?" I ask.

"Three tenths of a second. Maybe. Throw on my mark or the gravity'll just suck the canister down. Got it?" A pause. "Here it comes, on three. One. . ."

The lights in the chamber wheeze and go dark.

"Two. . ."

Sweat condenses and drips onto my lip.

"*THREE!* Now, throw it!"

Before he even finishes, I let the virus fly. It sails over the wells just as the gravity shudders and momentarily deactivates. The spikes pierce the core's frigid surface. The virus applied. Money in the bank. Flawless.

Alarms grind overhead. I turn and run, but electromagnetic nets sink around me. My Masamune cackles with power as I draw it from across my back and cut through the fields. The steel doors bolt shut but they come apart like paper under the stroke of my sword.

“Sobos,” I say into the comms. There is no answer. I am betrayed. My father would never have been so foolish.

My only chance is to make it back to the data shafts and to find the phase pad. I run, never ceasing even when a plethora of daruma killers hobble towards me from the security bulkheads, cybernetic eyes fixated on me. The combat-state obscures my sight, blurs my memory as predictors and processors assume control of my body. I roll under plasma pulses, dodge laser shots and lead projectiles. I hack them to pieces, ignoring the warm spray of cybernetic fluids and the slap of severed pieces. They don’t make daruma that can compete with me. My father’s programming allows my computers to make ten million adjustments per sec.

I charge down the data shaft. Six minutes until the next rotation, plenty of time. The distance is easier, quicker this time, the tunnel’s sloping downward. As long as the phase pad isn’t destroyed, I’ll be free.

Sobos blockades my passage. Light winks across the surface of his polygonal energy shields. “Sorry Pus,” he says. “Business. I didn’t think you’d make it this far.” The combat-predictors wail like lunatics in my skull as the barrels of his lazguns start to glow. Annoyed, I turn them off.

“But Kiss knew,” he says. “They knew you’d make it. Never bet against the brains over there, they figured all this out beforehand. All this. Goodbye, Octopus.”

Spectrums of energy flood the shaft. I vault to the side, but there’s no dodging it, the blast severs half of my cepha-arms. Spasms of pain register but I ignore it, launching forward.

One minute until the data shafts rotate. One of us is going to die.

Sobos drops his cannons and draws two ion repeaters. I ignite my Masamune and carve a swathe of the metal floor up, ducking behind it as I scramble forward. Fire erupts through the shaft, ricocheting off my makeshift shield.

“Shit,” Sobos bellows, ripping a Yoshitsune blade from its scabbard. Sparks flare from his shield generator as the heat melts its circuits.

Our blades cross once and his torso tumbles from his waist.

I step onto the phase pad. Thirty seconds remain as the superconductors fire all around.

“Pus.” Sobos drags his severed torso towards me, coolant spurting from the knotted tubes of his bowels. “Kiss paid me to kill you.”

The phase-pad disassembles me.

I reatomize where I began, outside of the EUG building. I destroy the phase pad so no one will follow and sheath my Masamune as my skin appears to flutter and go transparent.

Sobos told me what I already know. Kiss-Horvath relied on my ability to apply the virus and counted on us to kill each other. They only wanted a corpse. EUG will find the residue of his corpse. Maybe they'll accept that the intruder to their compound is dead, maybe not. Perhaps there never was a virus. Maybe my mission was simply an assertion of Kiss-Horvath's power – it doesn't matter.

“Well done,” the corporate voices say into my ear. “It is unfortunate that Sobos attempted to kill you. You don't believe what he told you, of course.”

“No,” I say, the word tastes like battery acid.

“Good. Your pay has been deposited. Your service will be remembered and considered in the future.” The voice dies.

I pray that they do. Producing a child is an expensive undertaking, I'll need all the money I can get.

The End

Kristen Lee Knapp is a 23 year old graduate student at the University of North Florida. Though balancing grades and writing is sometimes difficult, his award-winning fiction and poetry has appeared at dozens of websites, books and journals. You can follow him on twitter at <http://twitter.com/kristenleeknapp> or check out his occasionally updated blog at [Life From The Slush Pile](#).

Remembrance in Future Things Past: Recall of (and in) some of the best scifi of the 1980's

by Henry Cribbs

With profuse apologies to Marcel Proust.

After spending December devouring *Best of the Best*, (see [this column in RSF#8](#)), I tried to tackle another of Gardner Dozois's tomes which I received as a holiday gift, his Third Annual *The Year's Best Science Fiction*, collecting 24 stories from 1985. I was overcome with an almost immediate sense of déjà vu. At first I thought it was simply due to the fact that several of the stories from 1985 had also been chosen by Dozois to appear in the 20-year anthology I had just read, or that one of them (James Patrick Kelley's "Solstice") was reprinted in the cyberpunk anthology *Mirrorshades* which I had read the month before that (see [this column in RSF#7](#)). But that didn't quite explain the feeling I had, because I had it before I even got to the stories I had read recently.

I finally realized I had read many of these stories before, long ago, but it took me a while to realize when and where. They had, for some reason, been blocked from my memory. Allow me to borrow a little from Marcel Proust (with apologies for slight alterations) to try to explain,

One day in winter, my editor, seeing that I was cold, offered me a collection of short stories, a thing I did not ordinarily read. I declined at first, and then, for no particular reason, changed my mind. No sooner had the words touched my eyes than a shudder ran through me and I stopped, intent upon the extraordinary thing that was happening to me. An exquisite pleasure had invaded my senses, something isolated, detached, with no suggestion of its origin. Whence could it have come to me, this all-powerful joy? It was plain that the truth I was seeking lay not in the book but in myself. The book had called it into being. I put down the book and examined my own mind. I ask my mind to make one further effort, to bring back once more the fleeting sensation. And suddenly the memory reveals itself. The stories are those of my youth, when on weekday afternoons my favorite magazines would arrive in the curbside mailbox. And as soon as I had recognized the style of these stories from just a few well-turned Gibsonian phrases, immediately the old slick *Omnis* with chrome robotic faces on the cover, the thick digest-sized *Fantasy & Science Fictions* with their rough and pulpy feel and newsprint smell, and (later) the wide white-borders of (now-defunct) *Aboriginal*, all rose up like a stage set to attach themselves, stacked neatly next to my (then fairly new) TRS-80 CoCo (which my father had allowed to sit in a place of honor on his big oak desk). And as in the game wherein the Japanese amuse themselves by filling a porcelain bowl with water and steeping in it little pieces of paper which until then are without character or form, but, the moment they become wet, stretch and twist and take on colour and distinctive shape, become flowers or houses or people, solid and recognizable, so in that moment all the stories from those long-lost pages of past periodicals and all those places I had read them, taking shape and solidity, sprang back into being, from that quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore (adapted from Proust, 37-40).

Of course, Proust, in his passage which has since provoked much philosophical and psychological discussion about memory and phenomenal experience, was actually writing about a cup of tea and some petites madeleines, rather than scifi short stories, but they amount to the

same thing. All of a sudden I realized where I had read these stories before. It was in their original publications, in the years when I was first discovering science fiction and I had subscribed to several periodicals to support my new habit. And, like Proust's tea and cake, recall of those stories brought with them other associated memories, including the look and feel of the magazines, a sense of my surroundings when I first read them, and even that same feeling of wonder I felt when first developing a love for the genre.

Michael Swanwick & William Gibson's "Dogfight" was the first story in the collection which had this strange and wonderful effect. As I got further into the anthology and I realized what was happening to me, I checked the acknowledgements in the front of Dozois's book, and confirmed what I had suspected – the stories which had invoked that sense of *déjà vu*, the stories for which I could guess the ending before I reached it, were the very ones which had first been published in *Omni* and *Fantasy & Science Fiction*, magazines to which I subscribed. I couldn't remember the actual stories, but I remembered having read them.

Memory indeed is a strange and wonderful thing. And, as I discovered as I continued through the Third Annual, the strangeness and wonder of memory is something which has captivated science fiction writers as well. Over a quarter of the stories from the 1985 anthology deal with memory in different ways. One of the great things about science fiction is that it can take mere metaphors literally, make them reality. And a number of stories do just that as a way of understanding memory and its place in human experience.

In John Crowley's "Snow," for instance (which made the cut for *Best of the Best*), the narrator is able to review recordings of a lost loved one, through a memorial company which (for those who can afford it) archives continual audiovisual footage of one's everyday life to be accessed later. But these technological memories are in fact metaphors for actual memory, which is so immense that it is impossible to search exhaustively for the one single memory you really want, is subject only to random access (in every sense of "random"), and, like everything else, is ultimately ephemeral. The narrator explains (in a nod to *Citizen Kane*, another classic reference to the importance of memories), "I think there are two different kinds of memory, and only one kind gets worse as I get older: the kind where by an effort of will you can reconstruct your first car or your serial number or the name and figure of your high-school physics teacher... The other kind doesn't worsen, if anything it grows more intense: the sleepwalking kind, the kind you stumble into as into rooms with secret doors, and suddenly find yourself sitting not on your front porch, but in a classroom, you can't at first think where or when, and a bearded smiling man is turning in his hand a glass paperweight inside which a little cottage stands in a swirl of snow" (134).

In Karen Joy Fowler's "The Lake Was Full of Artificial Things," a woman also attempts to come to terms with the loss of a loved one. She does this not by revisiting old memories as in "Snow," but by having artificial memory-implantation therapy treatments. The doctor points out, "Therapy is not really concerned with truth, which is almost always a matter of perspective. Therapy is concerned with adjustment – adjustment to an unchangeable situation or to a changing truth" (163). But her implanted memories begin to take on a life of their own. The metaphorical suggestion is that we ourselves continually rewrite our own experiences to suit our own perspective.

Artificial persons are given very real-seeming memories in Robert Silverberg's novella "Sailing to Byzantium." Explains one such construct, "We are very cleverly done, my friend. We are ingenious constructs, marvelously stuffed with the thoughts and attitudes and events of our own times... We move about by our own will. We think, we talk, we even, so it seems, fall in love... We are mere illusions, done so well that we deceive even ourselves." This takes place on a far-future Earth which itself becomes a metaphor for memory, as terraforming robots continually reconstruct the past for the entertainment of its immortal inhabitants, one historic city at a time. But even with immortality and godlike engineering, there are limits to how much of the past may be held onto. Only five cities may exist at a time. To sail to Byzantium, one must first lose Alexandria and all the richness of its library, forever.

I am reminded here (no pun intended) of the film *Blade Runner*, in which memory is also important. Aside from longer life, memories are largely what the escaped replicants, desire. They collect photographs to give them reference points for their experience, of families who aren't really theirs. The replicants' creator, Tyrell, says to Decker: "They are emotionally inexperienced, with only a few years in which to store up the experiences which you and I take for granted. If we gift them with a past, we create a cushion or a pillow for their emotions, and consequently, we can control them better." Decker (Harrison Ford) replies, "Memories, you're talking about memories!" And memories are what allow a simple question-and-answer test to distinguish a replicant from a human. Rachael's artificially implanted memories make her so different that, like some of the characters in Silverberg's story, she does not even realize she is a replicant, and Decker's test takes many more questions than normal to distinguish her true nature.

Bruce Sterling's prophetic "Dinner in Audoghost" (which also made the *Best of the Best* list, for good reason) reminds the inhabitants of that bustling north African metropolis (and also us) that they too will be forgotten in time. "You, and all you love, will leave no trace in this world, except a few lines in the writing of strangers" (409). Yet all shall be forgot. The struggle to be remembered is sometimes more important than the struggle for mere survival.

In S.C. Sykes's "Rocakabye Baby," a wheelchair-bound veteran has the option to undergo an experimental regenerative treatment which can give him fully functional legs and arms once again. But there's a catch. It regenerates his central nervous system too, which will erase his memories. He will become a true *tabula rasa*. Previous experimental subjects have committed suicide shortly after treatment due to the dearth of experience. Being a blank slate drives them crazy. But there are possible fixes – like tape recording yourself describing your most important memories, so you can play them back after the treatment and relearn who you really were. But what do you record? "Suddenly a whole flood of memories tumbled across his mind – the summer of the worst dust storm he could remember, when the sky turned solid black in the middle of the day... going pecan thrashing with his dad, whacking the tree branches with long cane poles until the nuts fell like green-brown hail all around him... the blood brother ceremony at scout camp with Robbie Turner – he still had the scar... the drag race out by the lake when Tony Dawson almost flipped his dad's car into the spillway... too much... too many things... Everything was important. Absolutely all of it" (550-51). How much memory is enough to make you, *you*?

By far the most powerful story about memory in this anthology is Kim Stanley Robinson's "Green Mars," a novella-length precursor to his later Mars trilogy (reprinted in his post-trilogy anthology *The Martians*), which follows a group of climbers trekking up the solar system's largest mountain, Olympus Mons. Mars has been terraformed into a lush and verdant world filled with engineered plant and animal life. Medical technology has advanced to the point where the human Martians can live upwards of three hundred years (with no theoretical upper limit having yet been reached). But there's a catch here, too. (There's always a catch.) We knew even in the twentieth century that as one gets old one loses early childhood memories. But as lifespans increase, we discover that when one gets *really* old, say three hundred years, one loses not just a few years, but decades, or even a century's worth of memories in order to make room for the new. Humans of the future routinely have to cope with lost memories, and with questions of identity. One character keeps journals from earlier in her life to help remind her of what she has forgotten, but now she knows it merely as if it were something she read in a textbook written by someone else; she doesn't really remember herself.

But Roger Clayborne is different. He remembers *everything*, and he doesn't want to. He has seen Mars change from the Red Planet he loved when he first explored it to a Green world he no longer recognizes. He remembers all of his failures, both political and romantic. He has insomnia at night because he can't stop remembering.

It's in the contrast between the normally forgetful Martians and Roger the "freak" remember-all that wonderful philosophical questions about the role of memory arise. Robinson's characters cite Heidegger on the difference between "planet" and "world" (which distinction should be important to sci-fi writers), and also appeal to another great existential philosopher: "[T]here are two ways of looking at the past. You can think of it as something dead and fixed forever; it's part of you, but you can't change it, and you can't change what it means. In that case your past limits or even controls what you can be. But Sartre doesn't agree with that way of looking at it. He says that the past is constantly altered by what we do in the present moment... every new act that we commit can revalue the entire thing!" (574).

I am reminded (again no pun intended) of what another Martian on another kind of Mars said. In *Total Recall* (another 80's film which, like *Blade Runner*, is based on a Philip K. Dick story), the mutant rebel Kuato explains to Quaid (Arnold Schwarzenegger), "A man is defined by his actions, not his memory." An existentialist if ever there was one.

What is it about memory that so intrigues us humans, and that so fascinates science fiction authors?

I used to know. I even wrote a poem about it once, long ago. But I can't remember it.

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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.

An Interview with Jonathan Laden, Editor of Daily Science Fiction

by Michael Ray

[Daily Science Fiction](#) was founded in 2010, by Jonathan Laden and Michele Barasso. It is an unusual ezine that not only publishes its stories, largely flash fiction, online, but also emails them to its readers every weekday.

Jonathan and Michele tell us that they have run used bookstores on both coasts, and have done many unrelated things – beads, tea, business school, and nonprofit management, among others.

Jonathan is an alumnus of Clarion and his work has appeared in *Writers of the Future*, *Electric Velocipede* and many other markets.

Michele has been a King Arthur fanatic since childhood, and enjoys the works of Esther Freisner, Elizabeth Hand, and Stephanie Meyer.

I was able to corner Jonathan online just long enough to try and find out more about him and Daily Science Fiction.

What do the two of you do when you're not running one of the new pro-pay online SF magazines?

Not running Daily Science Fiction? Between kids and the magazine, there isn't so much time to worry about. I know that, in the Facebook age, all of the details of our lives are supposed to be paramount, but I'm hoping that running a venue that offers strong, entertaining fiction ultimately matters more.

Daily Science Fiction is an ambitious undertaking. What lead you to establish DSF?

Three parts craziness, one part hope. I was at a seminar for the day job where email was suggested as the future of magazines. While I'm not convinced that's true in any universal sense, we do think it is one of many fragmented futures and one that we particularly enjoy.

You have staked out a different niche in the online SF market by establishing a fiction 'newsletter' and emailing stories each weekday, and then later publishing them on your website. It is an interesting system and it's nice to get a story in my inbox. Why did you decide to use this method of distribution?

Honestly, there are strong magazines in this field, and there have now been very good websites for years, yours included. One way we could provide a unique value and enjoyment factor was by trying something different, something we knew we would enjoy. The email delivery model is different, in some ways we didn't anticipate. We've never believed the oft-quoted adage that the Novella is the natural length for science fiction (It's as much worst of both worlds as it is best in our personal experience), but we've been surprised by the strength of the resistance we get to longer stories in email. We'll still take excellent long tales, but the bar inches higher the longer it gets. Inexorably, the medium is influencing the stories we select.

There is an ongoing discussion about the viability of online SF markets like yours and ours as profitable businesses. DSF publishes well over 20,000 words a month and pays a

professional rate, making it be a costly venture. What business model do you foresee that can make DSF a self-sustaining magazine?

It's important to note that DSF doesn't publish more words than a monthly print magazine does. Print magazines have been, and continue to be, great values.

To your question: We've been heavily involved in nonprofits for years. The best nonprofits run on a business model, just with the caveat that dollar profit-maximizing isn't the only goal. For better and for worse, we bring that sensibility to this endeavor.

Honestly, this is an industry-wide phenomenon. Short of the million-copy bestseller level, even top professional writers are making decisions that do not maximize their earning potential by continuing to write.

Have I ultimately dodged the question? Oh, dear me. Shouldn't let that happen.

Daily SF has published a wide variety of stories. What elements draw your attention when you are reading a submission?

Like everyone else, we want to be engaged and engrossed by the story. A character we can care about usually feels most important in the longer tales. Something unique, at least a fresh take on the old tropes, more often drives the success of a flash piece.

As happens to everyone who reads thousands of stories in a short period, we start to discount that which we see repeatedly. There are lists of the most overused themes all over the place. We can't add much to the discussion by listing our personal peeves.

We aren't professional copyeditors by trade, so we do expect writers to have their "ands" under control, and to write very well.

Who are your favorite authors and what so you like about their work?

For short fiction, Robert Reed is one who can almost always be counted on to leave a lasting impression hours after the story is completed. For flash, Michael Swanwick brings wit and the ability to pack much more than the few words into the tale. We have many other favorites, especially among novelists.

We've also published many stories (and said "No thanks," to some) from authors who have amassed truly awe-worthy bodies of work.

What sort of stories would you like to see more of in the submissions to DSF?

We're always hungering for tightly written flash that makes us think and/or that delivers a real emotional impact.

What do you see in the future of Daily Science Fiction?

We're building. We hope to continue to grow steadily and to share entertaining stories with people who love science fiction.

Five Questions with Philip Brewer

by Michael Ray

Many of us who have started writing after having other careers can be encouraged by the recent success you have had publishing short science fiction. In addition to your story with us this month, Like a Hawk in its Gyre, you've also recently sold a story to Asimov's. Congratulations are in order. But first, I have to ask about what sticks out in your bio – your interest in Esperanto. What's going on there?

Thanks for the kind words!

I came to Esperanto mainly out of an interest in languages. In particular, I was fascinated by the problem of translation. How do you take a text in one language and write a text in another language that means the same thing—not just superficially, but at multiple levels? The problem was, I had no skill whatsoever at learning languages. For me, Esperanto was a solution to that problem—even I could learn to read, write, and speak Esperanto. Then I could indulge my interest in translation.

But once I'd started learning Esperanto, I came to appreciate it for more important reasons. It has made it possible for me to connect with people all over the world that I'd otherwise never have been able to communicate with.

It also appeals to my sense of thrift. I took a business trip once where I attended a meeting with people from all over the world—India, China, France, Germany. The meeting was held in English. I was the only native speaker. What struck me was how much effort each of the other people must have spent learning English as a second language. And, despite what must have been hundreds of hours of study—probably years of classes—most of them didn't speak English very well. I know that several of them had to wait until the meeting was over and then ask one of their countrymen to explain what had happened.

With a fraction of that effort, we could all have been fluent in Esperanto. The meeting would have been more productive, because more people would have understood what was going on. It would have saved everyone (except me) most of the time and money that had gone into learning English. And that's the other thing—it made me a little uncomfortable to be the only person there who hadn't made this huge extra effort to learn a second language.

You worked for years as a software engineer. Tell us a little about that and the role it plays into your writing of science fiction.

I had an early fascination with computers, back when they were refrigerator-sized boxes that only large institutions could afford. I remember when I first started at my first job, thinking, "I sure hope they don't realize that I'd do this for free, just to get access to the computer."

I did various things—operating systems, embedded systems—but ended up focusing on computer security for the latter half of my career. It was interesting. Not only did it bring me into contact with some interesting people, but it gave me some insight into how people think. Security is all about obstacles—ideally obstacles that are easy for the right people to get past, but

hard for the attacker to get past. But people using computers are all about getting their work done. Even the ones who think they want security turn out to be quite unwilling to take even a little trouble getting past an obstacle. The result is that computer security is really hard. That insight—that even the people you’re serving are working against you—feeds into a lot of my fiction.

Your story is quite subtle in it’s incorporation of speculative technological and biological advances. It all seems quite natural, and disturbing. What influenced you to write this story?

[This story](#) springs from a twist on the old question of what to do with someone who knows too much. Instead of killing them, or locking them up forever, what if such a person could credibly commit to never do anything in secret—to live a completely transparent life? Then, everyone who was worried how that knowledge was being used could check and make sure that nothing nefarious was going on. But, of course, it wouldn’t be as easy as that.

Writers often take up the pen (or keyboard) because they have been inspired by favorite writers. What science fiction authors have influenced you and do you see any of their writing in yours?

I’ve been reading science fiction for as long as I could read, starting with Heinlein and Asimov and Clarke, and continuing right along. I hesitate to make a list of people writing today that I like, because once I started it would be tough to stop: Neal Stephenson, William Gibson, Ian Banks, Cory Doctorow, Charles Stross, Kim Stanley Robinson, Karl Schroeder, Tobias Buckell. . . . And that’s without mentioning any of the writers who taught at my Clarion class—or any of my fellow students, who were also a big influence.

What stories can we expect to see from you in the future, and what are you working on now?

I’ve got several stories almost ready to go to editors—one about a computer security problem at a hospital, and another about the employment problems of a long-retired spy who’s been given his youth back. I’m currently at work on something that’s kind of a space opera—I’m taking some liberties with the laws of physics, but trying to stick with the laws of economics.

Thanks so much for taking the time to let our readers know a little more about you. We look forward to seeing more of your work.

Getting Through to RSF: An Interview with Kristen Lee Knapp

by Paul Clemmons

At RSF, we've tried to give personalized responses to each submission, and, in instances where we are comfortable doing so, we like to offer our thoughts on the stories that we let pass. I've talked to a slew of editors, and pretty much everybody hates writing rejection letters. Harlan Ellison aside, most folks don't enjoy doling out bad news and comments that are sure to be taken as insults.

While churning our rejection letters, I've ended up corresponding with a few folks, seasoned rejectees all, who have helped me come to enjoy the process. Each of these is a terribly talented writer, and I'm happy to say that one these folks is published in this month's RSF.

Kris Knapp has a knack for prose that leapt out of our start-up slushpile. His "voice" is equal parts laser and barbed wire. While we didn't buy his first story (or a series of his others), his quickly became one of my favorite names to see pop up in our in-box. Part of the reason is that he took rejection with humor, and he responded to our comments with a well-feigned interest and respect. The main reason that I loved to see his name pop-up, however, is that I just knew he had great stories in him, and I was hoping he'd get around to sending us one....and boy, did he ever.

Fatherhood is a cyberpunk tale that represents a lot of what we like at RSF. The story is tight, the writing is good, and the science is more than just window-dressing. It's stylized without being overwrought, and it has what so many pieces of short-fiction lack....a satisfying conclusion.

We asked Kris a few questions about his writing and his story in this month's Redstone SF, [Fatherhood](#). We hope that you enjoy it as much as we did.

Kris, thanks for taking the time to let our readers know a bit about you and your thoughts. Hard to believe anyone could be interested in my opinions, let alone write a feature about me, but I'm flattered.

When you aren't writing cyberpunk, what keeps you busy?

Well, I've just started grad school, so I haven't been reading as much as I like. I just got my BA in English from the University of North Florida, where I'm currently attending for my MA in European History. I live in Jacksonville with my girlfriend Kaity. We have two cats, Pilot Major John Blackthorn and Pippa. I'm going to be an uncle in a few months.

European history major, eh? Sounds like we have a fantasy writer in the making.

It's true that I love fantasy. There's a lot of great stuff to be excited about out there right now. Some fantasy authors I dig are George R.R. Martin, Patrick Rothfuss, R. Scott Bakker, Brian Ruckley and Peter V. Brett. There's a revolution going on in fantasy these days, a rejection of the

stale regurgitations of Tolkien's work. While I've tried my hand writing fantasy, I don't think I've done as well with it. If anything, I may have drifted towards writing more sci-fi than fantasy.

What sci-fi do you read?

For some reason, when it comes to sci-fi, I tend to look back. There's such a huge amount of great stuff from the past few decades. I rarely read anything current. Philip K. Dick, William Gibson, Joe Haldeman and Frank Herbert are a few that occupy my time.

You have been recognized for your poetry, and you've written a ton of fiction. What do you feel are the key factors in producing a quality written work?

Jeez. Sure, there's the basic steps like reading and writing every day, editing, etc. But beyond that, who knows? A writer could follow all the "steps" for every day of their lives and produce the most boring trash you've ever read. And then, someone else could break all the rules or steps or whatever and write something beautiful. All comes down to perspective, I suppose. Quality should probably begin with the writer. Are you, as a writer, happy with your work? To answer the question, though, probably luck and perseverance are what I count on.

Every writer wants to know what a fiction editor is looking for when they read a story. What do you think editors are looking for, and have you made any changes in your work to facilitate sales?

The thing that's easy to forget as a writer is that editors are individual people with different tastes. Not only that, but different publications target different markets. So don't take it personally when a young adult sci-fi mag rejects your zombie stripper blood explosion. Seriously though, shop around. I can't say I've never been discouraged by a rejection, but it's never stopped me from keeping on. I'm something of a rejection connoisseur.

I don't think I've really changed my writing like that, but I am writing and selling more sci-fi than fantasy. Maybe my fantasy stuff sucks. People just seem to enjoy my sci-fi stuff more.

Steampunk has continued to grow in popularity, as cyberpunk and space opera, to some degree, have waned. What is your favorite specific subgenre, and are your thoughts on its future?

I'd read anything. No, really. I don't care; I just want a good story. The whole genre thing is kind of silly, once you think about it. There are still those literary snobs who refuse to distinguish science fiction or fantasy at all. It's all shit to them. If you refuse to read a genre because you think you don't like it, you're missing out on something. It's as simple as that.

This month, we are publishing your excellent story, "Fatherhood". How did that story come about? What different influences and experiences brought that story together?

As stupid as it sounds, I wanted to write a story about a character named Octopus and made it up as I went. At the time, I was reading a lot of Neuromancer and Philip K. Dick, and was also watching Blade Runner. I wanted to tell a good story, hopefully I succeeded.

What other aspects of geekdom are a part of your life?

I used to MUD until I realized it was a colossal waste of time for me. I suppose one has to be a geek to even consider going to graduate school, especially for something like history. I usually

take part in an annual medieval festival in Florida. I play some Xbox these days, Call of Duty and a few other time-wasters. Lately I've been burning through Battlestar Galactica. I'd never watched it until a few weeks ago.

More and more writers are taking to the web to make a name for themselves. What social media do you use, and what are your thoughts on self-promotion and online publishing?

I use Facebook and I have a Twitter which I rarely update. I also have a blog that I update on the vernal equinox. If you can successfully self-promote, then I say go for it.

Publishing online can be great, and it can suck. I've had more than a few publications fold on me just weeks before they were planning to publish my work. There are a lot of ezines out there. I think the trick is to distinguish yourself somehow, either by professionalism, pay rates, organization, commitment, something.

What do you think have been your biggest influences? What makes their work stand out for you?

Probably Philip K. Dick and R. Scott Bakker, if I were forced to pick two. Philip K. Dick stands out for how imaginative his work is. Bakker stands out for sheer quality of writing, storytelling, and world-building.

Before we go, please let our readers know what they need to be looking for from you, in addition to your excellent story with in this month's edition of RSF?

I've got a story coming out soon at Liquid Imagination. I've got a pair of stories coming out in print anthologies from Residential Aliens and Roll the Bones from Fight On!.

Thanks, again, for the great story, and for proving me right.

Thank you for accepting my story and thank you for your kind words about Fatherhood.