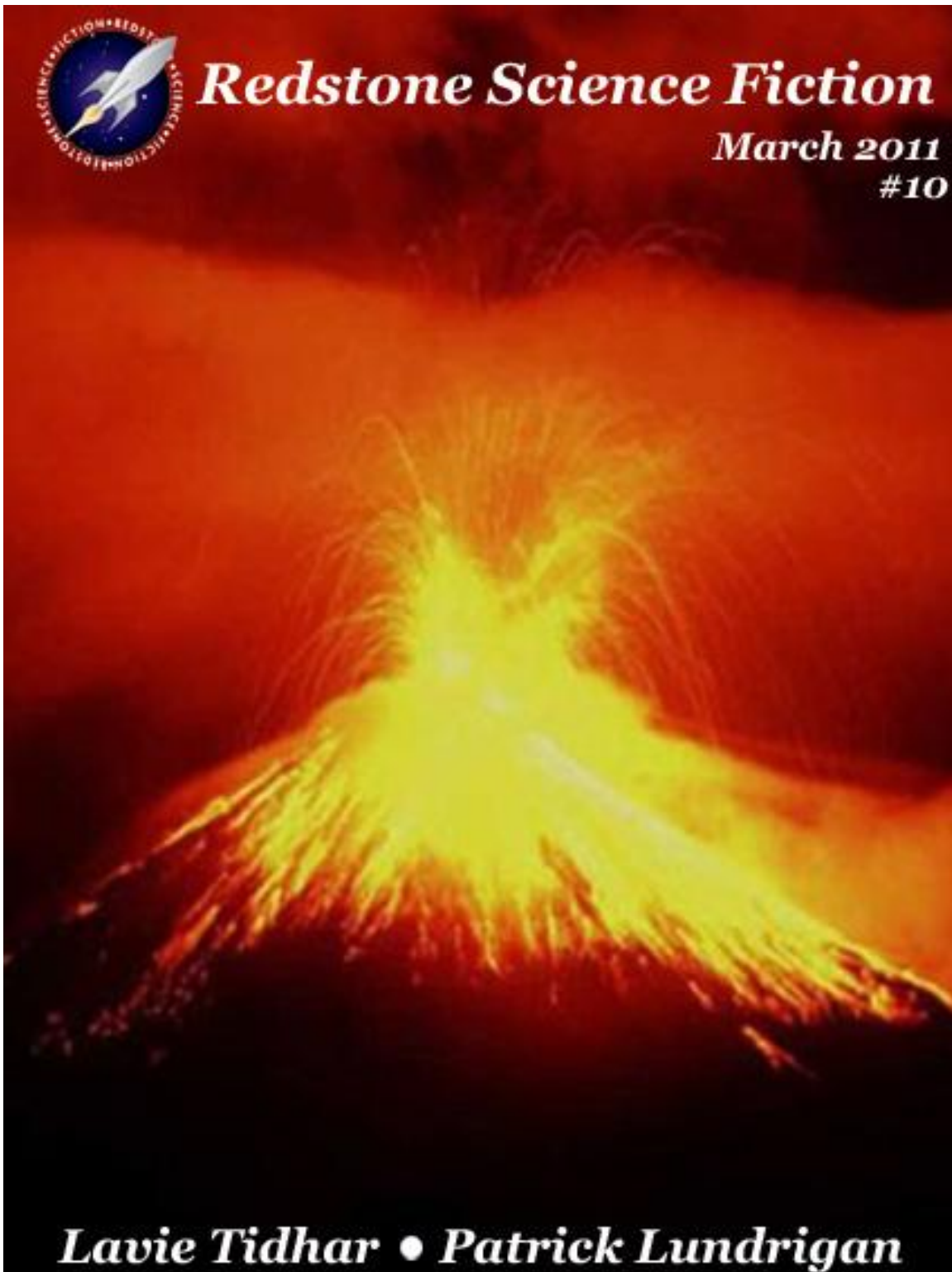




Redstone Science Fiction

March 2011

#10



Lavie Tidhar • Patrick Lundrigan

Cover Art by Cassandra Link

Redstone Science Fiction #10, March 2011

Editor's Note

[Michael Ray](#)

Fiction

[The Hubbard Continuum](#)

by Lavie Tidhar

[First Light](#)

by Patrick Lundrigan

Essay

[Out of This World: Escaping a Doomed Earth in \(and with\)](#)

[SciFi](#) by Henry Cribbs

Interviews

[Five Questions with Lavie Tidhar](#)

by Michael Ray

[Five Questions with Patrick Lundrigan](#)

by Michael Ray

Editor's Note – March 2011

by *Michael Ray*

I love editing Redstone Science Fiction. I get to work with two close friends, Paul Clemmons and Cassandra Link. We get to spend a lot of time reading and discussing science fiction and making this whole thing work. I've interacted with many of the leading figures in modern science fiction and even published stories from several of them.

And this month we have the pleasure of publishing two stories that are simply outstanding. When we started reading Lavie Tidhar's [The Hubbard Continuum](#) among our submissions, there was a flurry of emails and texts. "Read this now!" was the gist. It takes the reader in a completely different direction from where one would expect a story about Scientology to go. Glimpses of the greats of our science fiction pantheon make it even better. It is simply more fun than human beings should be allowed to have. In our second story, [First Light](#), Patrick Lundrigan taps into what many of us are looking for when we read science fiction: space exploration and what we might find. The story speculates that we may not even be able to fathom what we find when we finally get out there. He captures the mundane, the life-threatening, and the awe-inspiring all together in a tight package. We were also able to catch up with [Lavie](#) and [Patrick](#) for a pair of Five-Question Interviews.

Henry Cribbs is an outstanding science fiction critic and we're glad to have him working with us at Redstone SF. I'm excited that he accepted my challenge to focus on short fiction over the course of several months. He has examined the [themes in '80's cyberpunk](#), considered [the decades covered in Gardner Dozois 'Best of the Best' Anthology](#), focused [on the theme of memory](#) in the 1985 Dozois anthology, and now in this month's essay he examines an anthology of the best stories of the recent past. Henry's work has thoughtfully discussed many of the themes that are at the heart of science fiction, and this month's essay is another [thought-provoking piece](#).

We have a very do-it-yourself ethos at Redstone SF. From the website, to the graphic design, to the finances, we set out to do what it takes to make this a quality outfit on our own. What we have discovered is that so many people, in the field and among our friends, were more than willing to help. The support we have gotten this first year has been tremendous. It has made the work go smoothly.

This past month we asked for an assist in underwriting an expansion of our 'new word count' for our spring issues, so that we could publish two full-length new stories each month. The response to [our Kickstarter project](#) has been overwhelming. There is actually over a week left to pledge support as I'm writing this on March 1st, and we have already reached the minimum necessary to receive the funding – just amazing. I have the honor of listing here the backers who all made substantial pledges of support to Redstone SF and our publishing efforts.

(Next Page)

The Friends of Redstone SF (thus far)

CB Ash

Sandy McConnell Athey

Chad Sessions

Samuel Montgomery-Blinn

Flying Pen Press

Sarah Einstein

Jennifer Brozek

Bart Lieb

Jim Isbell

Kelsey Gower

David Alastair Hayden

Nathan Dodge

Robert Hampson

Mandy & Michael Mendez (love)

Can't thank all of you enough.

As always, we here at Redstone SF hope that you find something in this issue that you enjoy.

Your Friend,

Michael Ray

Editor

Redstone SF

The Hubbard Continuum

by *Lavie Tidhar*

New York, November 16, 1976

I opened the door to a man in his fifties, who looked familiar though I was sure I had never seen him before. ‘Can I help you?’

‘I know what you did,’ he said. He was chubby, with a lot of facial hair and a voice that carried. ‘I figured it out.’

‘I don’t know who you are,’ I said, ‘but if this is your idea of a joke...’

He stared at me for a long moment. ‘It’s me,’ he said. ‘Isaac.’

‘I’m sorry,’ I said. ‘Isaac...?’

He stared at me for a longer moment. ‘You really don’t remember.’ He put his hand on the door and said, ‘Can I come in? I think we need to talk.’

I began to tell him it wouldn’t be convenient and he pushed his way in and shut the door behind. ‘Sit down.’

He pointed to my brown television armchair and I sat down. He had a box with him, a machine of some sort, and he put it on the table beside me. He had a presence about him – not intimidating at all, but strong, like that of a man used to talking and used to being listened to.

‘Do you have any idea what it cost me to manufacture one of these?’ he said as he was attaching electrodes to my skin. ‘I had to go through six companies before someone was even willing to consider it, and it cost me as much as the royalties on a backlist paperback. It’s an e-meter.’

‘There’s some money in the fridge in the kitchen,’ I said. ‘You don’t need to torture me.’

He looked aghast, and I smiled. I felt fine, better than I have for some time. The man’s face *were* familiar, and something about his presence here felt right, somehow. And I knew he could no more torture a person than kill. Perhaps, I thought, I had known him in another life.

‘I want to talk to *all* of you,’ he said. He busied himself around the box, mumbling to himself, then said, ‘ah, here it is,’ and he hit a switch –

And my mind exploded, tiny shards streaming into infinity –

My mind, a broken mirror of infinite parts, reassembled itself and –

I was suddenly whole.

I opened my eyes (I hadn't realised I'd closed them) and saw him staring at me again.

'I think there was a war,' he said. He looked into my eyes, seeking confirmation, and I slowly nodded.

Then I was no longer there.

Mars. 3050 (1050 Post-Astounding)

I was the OC of a battle company in the Fifth Pre-Clear War of 1050 when I discovered the portal.

It lay under the Valles Marineris and it was an implant station, just like the ones Hubbard first wrote about in his *The History of Man* a millennium ago. We had been fighting the Pre-Clears on Mars for a long time: so long that one of the moons was now missing (a Genetic Entities attack in 756) and the planet was pockmarked with giant new craters. I was an Operating Clear, having first assumed my Thetan form in 2041 by the old count, 91 by the new: and now I was in charge of a bunch of rookie just-become-Clears who did their best to get me killed. Again.

The implant stations haven't been operating for some centuries. I was under the impression all have by now been discovered and destroyed (including the one in the Pyrenees Hubbard wrote about) but clearly I was wrong.

We had to get off the surface. The Pre-Clears were bombarding the area from orbit while they still had forces on the ground. Somewhere north there was an underground habitat full of enemy soldiers, and our orders were to find it.

We needed an opening into the Martian underworld and the Pre-Clears provided us with one. A rock smashed into the ground a few kilometres from us, and when we reached it we found it had uncovered – with the displacement of huge amounts of Martian sand – the opening we needed.

At first it looked like an old mining shaft, perhaps leading to a small abandoned habitat of a settlement-year kibbutz. But the visions came, sharp and painful, opening up old *engrams* – old psychic scars. It was an implant station, and my first instinct was to blow it up.

But there is more to these old Thetan stations than you might think. They imprint the incorporeal with engrams, yes, but they are more than that: in the science fiction books and magazines I studied in my Pre-Clear days they would have been called portals, time machines, weapons shops.

I told my company to get out of there. It wasn't safe for me – for them it would be suicide. I told them to find another entrance and to lie low, and wait for me. I served with one of the peace-keeping teams that dismantled the implant stations back during the Decommissioning, and I knew what to do.

The war...

The war had been going on for seventy five million years or just under a thousand. It depends on your perspective. Whichever way, I was tired of it. Not even sick anymore, just tired. I had memories of many incarnations as a Genetic Entity, a GE. Of bodies, of sensations, of small things and big, all gone down the long years.

And I knew what to do. You see, back in old-count 2040 I studied science fiction.

New York. July 2nd, 1939 (11 Pre-Astounding)

A gawky kid with an awkward moustache was climbing up the stairs and nearly bumped into me. Behind him his friends were skulking away: one of them shouted about the ‘right of the Futurians to...!’ before ebbing away in indignation. I paused to watch them go back to the automat across the street, where they will sit for the rest of the day. I recognised, from centuries-old photos, Donald Wolheim, Cyril Kornbluth, Damon Knight and James Blish. Fred Pohl wasn’t there yet – I knew he had dental problems that day. When I was a research student I dreamed of meeting some of these men – boys, really, at this place and time – and being here now, nearly a millennium later and a century before – depending, again, on your perspective – felt strange. It felt good though, and I wished I could just forget the long centuries and the mission I had to accomplish. I turned and watched the sign above the door: The First World Science Fiction Convention.

I walked inside, nodding to the burly guy who turned the Futurians away – Sam Moskowitz, an early SF fan – and caught up with the young man I met on the stairs.

‘You’re Isaac Asimov, right?’ I said. He turned and beamed at me in gratitude, looking lost. ‘I think your stories are really good,’ I said. He blushed and said that I was very kind. ‘It’s all thanks to Campbell,’ he said. ‘He’s the best science fiction editor in the world.’

‘Listen, kid,’ I said. I thought out my moves carefully before setting the portal to these coordinates, and I had a plan. I even had a name, cobbled together from those of two old SF editors in the late twentieth-early twenty-first. ‘My name’s Gordon Hartwell. I’m editing a new magazine.’ I watched him, as eager as a puppy. ‘I’m looking for stories. Can we talk?’

‘Gee, that’d be great,’ Asimov said. ‘You want me to write a story for you?’

‘I sure do,’ I said. ‘And we pay three cents a word.’

‘Three cents! Even Campbell doesn’t...’

‘No,’ I said. ‘He doesn’t. Not yet.’

It was working. And I liked the kid. But then I saw the Thetans.

It was the old Time Keeping force. ‘Join the Time Keepers! See the wonders of the past!’ ran their recruitment tagline back when they first started in the 460s. The implant stations on Mars were operating in full-capacity then, and the force sent back thousands of new Clears to patrol the Hubbard continuum, ensure the survival of the teachings.

‘Keep this quiet,’ I said. ‘I’ve got to go, but I’ll speak to you soon. OK?’

‘Sure, Mr. Hartwell,’ Isaac Asimov said. He turned and waved to someone in the crowd. It might have been Campbell. ‘But you just got here!’

I was already turning away. The Time Keepers were circling around the room, looking like average SF fans of the thirties, which meant they looked both young and poor. They spotted me, knew I wasn’t supposed to be there. I hadn’t realised the extent of the protection before: and I walked away and adjusted the psychic link with the portal and –

New York, January 4, 1940 (10 Pre-Astounding)

I stopped Isaac in the street just before he entered the building. His face lit up and he said, ‘Mr. Hartwell! Have you come to see Campbell?’

‘Partly,’ I said. ‘I want us to finish our talk.’

‘Your magazine?’ he said. ‘I didn’t see it on the newsstands.’

‘It’s coming,’ I said. ‘The economic situation isn’t right for it yet. But I still want a story from you?’

‘The one you talked about?’ he said, startling me for a moment. Then I realised that I must have managed to talk to him after all. ‘I don’t know. It doesn’t sound very scientific.’

‘Listen, kid,’ I said. ‘Whatever you do, don’t mention it inside, ok?’

‘Mr. Hartwell,’ he said, looking offended. ‘I keep my word.’

There was a solitary Clear coming around the corner, garbed in the disguise of a homeless woman with too many coats. I pushed Isaac inside with me.

I had read about that meeting. I never imagined I would gate-crash it one day. Campbell seemed pleased to see me and called me Mr. Hartwell, though I haven’t met him yet, not in my own chronology. A blond thin man I recognised as Ted Sturgeon was talking to a man with a thick German accent whose name was Willy Ley. There were me, Isaac... And then there was Hubbard.

He was large and red-haired, confident, easy-going. He had not yet become the prophet that he was, but in a few short years he would discover the truth and begin publicizing it. I shook his hand.

When young Isaac was introduced to Hubbard he said, ‘You don’t at all look like your stories.’

‘Why?’ Hubbard said, and I could tell he was amused. ‘How are my stories?’

‘Oh, they’re *great*,’ Isaac said enthusiastically, and everyone laughed as he tried to explain that he didn’t mean Hubbard *wasn’t* great.

At some point I took Campbell aside. We had a brief chat, but I managed to plant in his mind – I hoped – some of the things I needed. Then I stepped down to the street and –

Mars. 3050 (1050 Post-Astounding)

The implant station was vibrating. I stumbled to a comms. unit and tried to reach my company, but there was no response, and silver screens showed me only dust on the outside, the result of constant bombardment from orbit. Something moved in the shadows and I instinctively ducked, just in time: a psychic Thetan death-ray nearly cut me in half.

There were three of them, Time Keepers. They must have tracked me back here, must have understood the danger I posed to them. I disabled one with an engram that seared him, dispatched another to the long bodiless journey. The third came at me and punched me in the face, sending me across the floor. I tried to rise, spat out a tooth.

‘What are you trying to do?’ the Time Keeper shouted. ‘You are an Operating Clear! A soldier against the Pre-Clear aggressors! This is betrayal!’

I looked at him from my point on the floor. There was no arguing with a Time Keeper. So I shot him.

I watched the Thetan souls depart, invisible to anyone but an OC, and I tried again.

New York. July 2nd, 1939 (11 Pre-Astounding)

Isaac was talking animatedly to Campbell and to a man I thought was L. Sprague de Camp. It was the First World Science Fiction Convention again – a pivotal point in the history of the human race, though not as important as that single date, May 1950, that truly changed the path of history. It was the event of May 1950 that I fought to change.

‘Isaac!’ I called out. He turned and looked in my direction and waved. I walked over, warping my Thetan aura this time to try and evade the Time Keepers, though I didn’t expect to be able to stay long – and shook Campbell’s hand for the second time. ‘It is a pleasure, sir,’ I said, and he grinned and told me not to be so formal.

I looked into his eyes, growing serious. ‘Isaac is a very talented writer,’ I said. Campbell nodded mildly and said he thought so, too. We had moved away from Asimov (he was talking to Nelson S. Bond) and I said, ‘he will come to you soon with an important story. The most important story of his career, and yours. When the time comes, I hope you remember that, and accept the story.’

‘If it’s good, Mr. Hartwell,’ he said, ‘then I will publish it.’

‘Oh, it will be good,’ I said. ‘I believe in Isaac.’

‘He has a way to go yet,’ Campbell said, ‘but if he keeps going, I think he will make it.’

I shook his hand again, then retreated towards the exit. I could sense more Time Keepers materialising in the shadows, no doubt planning to close a ring around me, and so I –

Philadelphia. December 2nd, 1944 (6 Pre-Astounding)

Hubbard was playing the guitar and singing *I Learned About Women from Her*, and Isaac – a fuller, slightly-older version, and accompanied by his new wife – was sitting quiet for once. I also recognised de Camp – and Heinlein.

Robert Heinlein should have been my first choice, but I was afraid that his own expansive personality and experimentation would lead – were he faced with the same set of facts as Hubbard – to a not-dissimilar pursuit of the truth. Isaac, I felt sure, would not believe a word of it.

I watched them through the windows. It was late, but peaceful. So far I had not sensed any other Thetans. Finally, Isaac and his wife left, and I followed them until I was convinced we were alone. I revealed myself.

‘Gordon! What are you doing here?’ He seemed pleased to see me, and on more familiar terms than I remembered. ‘I’m working on the story now. It’s such a great idea! The words just seem to flow – almost as if I was just reporting on something that really happened, not making it all up as I go along. I’m thinking of tying it in to my Foundation stories – they’re very popular, you know.’

He introduced me to his wife, Gertrude. She wore a low-cut dress (I had seen Heinlein ogling her throughout the evening) and seemed uncomfortable in it. Isaac kept referring to her as ‘My Wife’, with the capitals pronounced. ‘Listen, Isaac,’ I said. ‘I have to go away for a while. I can’t discuss it – you can guess what it concerns.’

His mouth formed an O and he nodded. ‘This is an evil war,’ he said. ‘I hope you don’t put yourself in danger.’

‘I’ll be fine,’ I said. ‘But about the story. If I’m not back and can’t buy it from you – sell it to John, all right? Don’t take no for an answer.’

He smiled, pleased with himself. ‘I already did,’ he said. ‘Campbell’s really interested in this one. Though I must say he is taking the idea a little too seriously. But of course the story is yours first, Gordon.’

‘I think I might have misled you,’ I said. ‘I don’t know if the magazine is going to work out. I might not come back. Write the story, Isaac. And let Campbell publish it. Don’t let me down.’

‘I won’t,’ he said mildly. His eyes searched my face and I saw a look in his eyes I didn’t want to see there. ‘Don’t ask me any questions,’ I said quickly and, shaking his hand and Gertrude’s, I walked away and –

New York, November 16, 1976

I was still in the chair. The e-meter was still connected by electrodes to my skin. Isaac towered above me, waving an old magazine. ‘You made me write the story, and had me sell it to Campbell. You never had a magazine. You’re a time traveller. You’re one of them. A Thetan.’

‘How did you figure it out?’ I said. I felt tired. There had been more jumps, more trips across the Hubbard continuum. Several more before the change worked and I hid in the new time-line, a bachelor in a one-bedroom apartment in New York, with no memories but the ones that belonged *here*, in this time and place.

‘I worked it out. I heard some of what Hubbard was trying to tell people in the late ‘40s. but he had a problem, didn’t he? I *already* wrote about his discoveries! I wrote about Thetans, and implant stations, and becoming an Operating Clear. Here –’ he handed me the magazine. ‘I brought this for you.’

I looked at it. An old copy of *Astounding*. The May, 1950 issue. The one that should have run Hubbard’s article on Dianetics: when he failed to drum up interest in his new teachings from the mainstream he turned to the SF magazines. A whole new science and a whole new religion, launched on the back of this one publication in *Astounding*.

There was an atmospheric painting of Mars on the cover, with a small group of Thetans ringed by Pre-Clears with heavy weaponry. No other contributors were mentioned on the cover. It said, only, “*The Scientologists*, by Isaac Asimov”.

‘My most successful work to date,’ Isaac said bitterly. ‘It overshadows my *Foundation* series, my Positronic robots stories, everything. But I only want to know one thing, Gordon. Did I do the right thing?’

I looked at him, looked at the bare room I inhabited, a man displaced in time, living in a New York that shouldn’t have existed, in a world where the one true messiah was forgotten and his teachings were considered science fiction. I knew it was the right thing: the rise of the Clears in my history led to a violent opposition by the Pre-Clears, and within the Thetan ranks, too, the conflict over the implant stations and over genetic resources had led to a wasteland Earth and a ruined Mars. But I looked at myself, trapped in one body, one incarnation, devoid of the greater truths, and I thought too about Hubbard, who I opposed despite his greatness, who I had reduced against my will so that the movement he would have founded never became a reality, and my future became a fantasy.

‘Destroy the e-meter,’ I said. ‘It shouldn’t exist in this version of history. There might still be Time Keepers about, trapped in the loop.’

He didn’t answer. His mild eyes looked at me and demanded an answer. What could I tell him? I thought about the war, about the implant stations, about the engrams I had suffered. All now belonging to a future that never was, and will be no more.

‘We were never meant...’ I said, and the true sadness of it finally settled in me and filled me, and I knew Isaac would understand. ‘We were never meant to be the race that would rule the sevagram.’

The End

*Lavie Tidhar grew up on a kibbutz in Israel and has since lived in South Africa, the UK, Vanuatu and Laos. He is the author of steampunk novels *The Bookman* (2010) and forthcoming *Camera Obscura*, literary novel *Osama*, and weird SF novel *Martian Sands* (all three in 2011). He is also the author of linked-story-collection *HebrewPunk* (2007), novellas *Cloud Permutations* (2010), *An Occupation of Angels* (2005 UK; 2010 US), and *Gorel & The Pot-Bellied God* (also in 2011) and is a prolific short story writer. Keep up with him at his entertaining [blog](#).*

First Light

by *Patrick Lundrigan*

Jensen turned over his hole card, the ace of stars, and the table erupted in a splatter of shrapnel. I jumped back, and the cards flew as the air shrieked in our ears.

“Breached,” somebody screamed, probably Stromberg. What else could it be, you idiot, I wanted to shout. Drops of blood mixed with the whirlwind. Razor, the mate, started shoving us toward the hatch.

“Move,” he yelled. The ship comes first, of course, and Jensen and his gaping chest would wait. Armond, the only tech on our watch, moved toward Jensen, flailing beside the wrecked table. Razor yanked him by the belt and hauled him through the hatch. He hustled us to our action station, deep within the ship, through locks until the air stopped screaming. Any thoughts of safety evaporated like ice on the sun when the drive shut down and we grabbed for freefall handholds. We all knew what to do now — even on a scow like Icarus, everyone wants to save their own skin.

We pulled on p-suits and plunged into the damaged core, the backbone of our ship. Razor paired me with Armond to carry his tools — I didn’t argue, we needed plumbers not pilots. Armond led me through the ring sections of the core, that slackness in his expression I had seen at the card table gone. I followed blindly, and Armond grabbed tools out of my hands as he worked. We floated weightless in clouds of gas and jets of liquid nitrogen, and I anchored Armond while he patched the cyro lines. He pointed toward the next ring section.

“There,” he said.

Radiation alarms flashed on the bulkhead. I tasted cold sweat and stale air in my suit. Armond looked at me, and his eyes narrowed. “The suit should protect you,” he said, and kicked off. I gathered the tools and followed. He waited for me at the next section, arms and legs hooked around a strut. He peered into the reactor compartment, eyes straight ahead, with the best poker face I had ever seen on this ship.

“You stay here,” he said finally, “you might damage something in there.” I could barely hear his voice, and didn’t try to argue. He reached for the toolkit and then floated in with a graceful jump, disappearing amidst the machinery. I waited for him, and wondered if I should call Razor. It felt like hours later when the radiation alarms cycled from red to yellow to gray.

“Come on through,” he said over the com, “we have to go deeper.”

* * *

Our watch reassembled later, after Armond ran out of things to fix. The danger had passed. The bridge crew came aft, their uniforms clean inside lightweight vac suits, dull membranes of

transparent plastic. The captain panned her head around the compartment, dark lenses peering into every corner. I hadn't seen her this close before. She looked right at me, the utter blackness of her glasses seeming to absorb all the light around. The only leadsman in the Fleet with captain's bars, instead of spending all her time in the dome.

And her ship looked for tree hugger worlds, leaving the rest of the Fleet to the scut work of moving humanity from planet to planet. I had transferred to Icarus to leave behind my debts, and the officers who bet more than they could afford to lose.

Razor reported to the captain, and came back with new orders. Pair up and search the rest of the ship for wounded.

"What hit us?" Stromberg asked, his voice strained.

"Oldest trick in the book," Razor said. "A black body sneaked up and launched high KE slugs. Captain figures we got holed by at least a hundred of them."

"Tree huggers?"

"Yeah," Razor said. He looked over his shoulder at the captain. "She can taste stuff like this. She knows where to go."

Armond and I floated aft, checking compartments. The dead we found had holes blasted through them, like Jensen. Anyone just wounded had probably made it to sick bay without our help. Armond moved awkwardly now, missing handholds as we pulled ourselves along. He looked old again, or exhausted. I only knew him from the card table.

"I've had enough," I said, and undogged my helmet. The air tasted foul, even with the blood drops filtered out. Armond strapped himself to the floor, and his hands shook as he undid his helmet.

"You OK?"

He nodded. We sat there, unwilling to finish our search. The dead would wait. Moments later the hum of the drive started, and gravity returned. Armond's face drained of blood as it sagged.

"I guess we weren't hit too badly," I said.

"Green science repairs itself," he whispered, like a refrain. The tree huggers didn't leave much behind except for green science. Smart plants, organic computers, whatever you wanted to call it. The Fleet wanted it, and paid bonuses for it. Icarus made a good posting, if you had a stake to build.

"The captain will lead us right to more of this stuff," I said.

"The captain doesn't care the science. She wants to find first light."

“Why would a blind woman care look for light?”

“She can see, but not the way we do.”

“I heard the eyes come out and those glasses go on.”

Armond leaned back. “Only a leadsman knows.”

I tried to stay away from leadsmen. Those dark panes on the face in place of eyes bothered me. Those penetrating glances made you feel naked, even wearing a p-suit and a coverall. But no ship could navigate the dark ocean without someone to look into the dark ocean and plot the currents and eddies of dark matter that our Fleet ships traveled.

I never got a chance to ask about first light again. Razor found us and detailed us to drag the dead to sickbay. We cursed the gravity the whole time.

* * *

We worked double watches repairing the damage. I checked out my shuttle and the other launches. With that done, Razor gave me eighteen hours of unskilled and thankless tasks, making me wish I had found busy work on the flight deck.

We played cards on Jensen’s bunk instead of sleeping when the bridge crew let us stand down.

“You pilots have an easy life. Damn tanks fly everything,” Razor said. He talked too much when he had lousy cards.

Razor didn’t know the half of it. True, the tanks of tree hugger plant computers could fly a shuttle better than I could, but you had to know where to point it. I dealt out another card. Stromberg had a look of hope on his face, but he wouldn’t catch that inside straight. I kept my mind on the game.

Razor checked. I wanted to keep his mind off the game. “When do we get some shore leave,” I said.

No one said anything. Not even when I flipped another ace to Razor.

“We won’t go back,” Razor said. “Not ’till we find something. The captain’ll keep going.”

I put the deck down. “Looking for first light?”

“What did Armond say?” He looked over his shoulder at the row of empty bunks behind him. The old tech hadn’t come off watch yet. “Well, that guy can get crazy sometimes. Crazy like religion and hellfire.” He threw his cards on the blanket and walked away. “We all go crazy on this ship.”

I found out what Razor meant. We pushed on, following the captain's nose as she took us into a dozen systems in the star cluster. Searching. That black body came from somewhere. After a month of double shifts, I couldn't even find anyone to play double-up. Relief came when the captain spotted another black body. We melted it into slag with an x-ray laser before it launched. The captain turned Icarus and followed its trajectory to a system, sparkling on with tree hugger traces, the bridge crew said.

Icarus would stay in the comet cloud. The captain took the cutter, our biggest launch, and headed for the blue green world right in the middle of the tree hugger habitable zone. One watch stayed on Icarus, and I took my small shuttle to the gas giant on the far side of the system. We had few men, and I wouldn't take any walking wounded, so I took Armond for crew. I would have preferred a few marines, but they all went with the captain.

I tried to pick a course as best I could, but the dark currents run thin in the deep gravity wells near a star. Not that I could even see them — only a leadsman can — but I could tell when the ship moved faster and I tried to follow the flow blind, seeking back and forth for the deep pockets. Armond had nothing to do and spent his time tinkering with the green science onboard, as if to prepare himself. I trusted it enough to run the ship while I slept, but no further. The tank behind me on the command deck leaked light from its corners. Inside, tiny plants grew and computed, floating in a liquid broth of multidimensional processing and lit with just the right spectrum. Techs had tried to build organic machines once they reached the limits of carbon and silicon. Then a Fleet ship found a tree hugger world, the first of many. All empty, but scattered with pieces of technology. Strange aluminum alloys, transparent plastics durable enough for vac suits, and plant computers. Mostly running wild on blue-green worlds, or bound inside geodesic dome greenhouses.

Another dull watch started when I asked Armond what first light meant.

“Depends,” Armond said, kneeling by the tank. Damned if he didn't check that thing five times a day.

I looked at him. He had become an old man again; even the light duty had not restored him. “On what?”

“For a scientist, it solves the ultimate equation. For a philosopher, it answers the ultimate question.”

The jovian angled into view. I abandoned the dark currents and plotted us in through real space. “So everybody wants it?”

Armond sat in the co-pilot's seat. “No one knows if it even exists. Just rumors, legends, guesses. Do you know that some of the Chlorophile use plants for data storage?”

I never thought about the tech stuff. I only cared about what made a ship move faster and more efficient. Armond continued. “Techs found some records that suggest that the Chlorophiles had a

limited form of time travel. And they used this to capture a sample of the wave front of the big bang.”

The tree huggers died off a million years ago. Or the Chlorophiles, as Armond called them. He sounded more like a scientist than a tech. But time travel? Going back to the big bang? “What could you do with light?”

“Just think of it!” Armond’s face lit up. “The moment of creation captured, like a glowbug in a bottle.” He turned to the console and frowned at the Jovian, like his mind tacked against a dark current. “Scientists could take this information and reconcile the unifying theorems for light and dark matter, using the data as an initial condition.”

I knew how to fly from place to place in real space, and could try to fly through dark currents as best I could. The rest I left to the techs and scientists. “Why reconcile? Both work.”

“They work, but we only know one possible solution for each, just one of many possible solutions. With a sample of first light, you can obtain all solutions.”

“Fine,” I said. “Why do the scientists want it so badly?”

“Do you know how dark matter works? How it interacts with normal space time? You know enough. But with first light, you can figure out how it works exactly. Change all the theorems to laws.”

Theorems into laws. Great stuff if someone paid for it.

The console flashed for my attention. Takes a little green science to find green science.

“What do you see?” Armond asked.

The tank detected a satellite in orbit around one of the Jovian moons. Radiating waste heat like a small sun. Something on that moon used power. A lot of it. I could almost feel that bonus. No one had ever found a working tree hugger mechanical artifact.

* * *

I did one orbit around the gas giant then hohmann’d in to the moon’s orbit, just on the edge of the magnetosphere that blasted our comms with static. We had spent the last week looking at the moon, all rock except for a scattering of frozen nitrogen slush. The satellite, a huge flower of panels and tethers parked in geosynchronous orbit, converted sunlight and the Jovian’s magnetic field to microwaves and beamed it straight down.

Armond wanted to go to the satellite first, but I wanted to see where that power went. My ship, my rules. Something burned six hundred kilowatts a second down there, and I didn’t need to see the power station. I brought the ship down manually, with Armond running the ground scan,

making sure we didn't cross the microwave beam if it wandered. Armond looked like squid waiting at the airlock for his first shore leave.

We could spot nothing on the surface but flat black panels of the receiving dish, covering the floor and walls of a crater, seven clicks wide. I set down at the rim, gear cracking a thin crust of methane. Armond rushed to the air lock before I got out of my chair. I shut down the ship's systems and synced the mote. Armond had all the tech knowledge, I supplied the dumb muscle now.

The crater looked just like the fragments of the black body we had destroyed, deep black, capable of absorbing all wavelengths. It reminded me of the captain's glasses, and a shiver ran up my spine, not from the slush we stood in.

"Well," I said, "Do you see a way in?"

Armond put his binoculars down and pointed. I could just make out a dull pillbox on the rim. Armond started toward it, and I hoisted my pack and followed.

"I see radar echoes," Armond said. "That means cavities under us."

Filled with green science, I hoped. Finding a new strain of plant computer that hadn't devolved would mean a bonus so big I wouldn't mind sharing it with the rest of the crew.

"Can we get in?" I asked after Armond stood in front of the pillbox for a long moment.

Armond didn't answer, but took a box from his belt, leaking light from its corners. I had never seen a tank that small, but techs always had gadgets like that. Armond fitted it into a notch on the wall that I could hardly see, and a side of the pillbox swung upward. Armond stepped inside into the darkness before I could stop him. I sent a message to the shuttle through the mote. Static from the Jovian made the link ratty with interference. I stepped in, elbow to elbow with Armond, half bent over.

"I guess the tree huggers didn't grow big," I said.

The door slid shut, and I imagined air — some type of air, rushing in. A dim glow came from the ceiling. Armond's eyes fluttered open, and he found another slot for his tank. I felt a gentle acceleration downward, and I leaned on the wall.

"Down and in," Armond said.

"That easy?" I didn't like that. I had imagined blowing our way in and scavenging in the hard vacuum.

"Anybody can open a door," he said.

I felt a vibration running up my legs, and the acceleration stopped with a jolt. Half a million years, and the machinery still worked.

“Now what?”

Before Armond could answer, the wall slipped open and light flooded in. My visor opaqued, then adjusted. A long corridor stretched out before us, floors and walls covered with thick hanging greenery, reflecting an odd shade of blue-green. Lighting panels in the ceiling burned brightly, though my suit detected cool air. Green science grew in tanks, for all I knew. I had never seen this before.

Armond undogged his helmet.

“Wait,” I said.

Armond held up his tank. “A little high in nitrogen, but good.”

He sniffed the air once he had his helmet off, shading his eyes.

I took mine off. People lived on tree hugger worlds, after all. The light blinded, and the air hung heavy with humidity. I could almost taste a mist in the air. Armond fingered the plants with his gloved hand, turning leaves over, poking deep.

“Do you recognize those?” I asked.

He held up his tank. “A bigger version of this,” he said, “much bigger. And rooting! I’ve never seen Chlorophile plants root. They wither without the tanks.”

I could taste that bonus. The corridor stretched out in front of us. “Let’s see the rest.”

* * *

Armond sat and leaned heavily against the wall. He pushed the plants out of the way gently, as if his touch would wilt them. We had found nothing but corridors and plants. They grew heavily in some areas, sparsely in others, all sprouting from niches in the wall. The corridors formed a square, half a klick on a side, with the elevator shaft in one corner. Nothing but plants, lights and halls. Too much light. No machinery visible. We had searched the whole day, and now rested in a clear spot. We piled our gear and made camp in the middle of a corridor.

“Did you get a complete radar image?” I asked. We might have to do some blasting after all.

“Something in the center, I think.” He held up his tank. “And machinery under us — air plants and pumps.”

I put my head to the floor. Something good enough to keep the air fresh for millions of years. I checked the shuttle through the mote then went to sleep, feeling safe that the air should last a few more hours.

I woke, alone. I walked down the corridor until I found him. He had strings of plants pulled back, exposing the inner wall. He had cutting tools out, scanners, and test equipment scattered around the floor.

“In here,” he said.

“What?”

“A light chamber,” he whispered. He thrust a datapad at me, with a sketch of the corridors we had mapped yesterday. A square sat inside the corridors, and as I rotated the sketch I saw chambers underneath, with blocky outlines of machinery. Armond rubbed his eyes. He looked like he hadn’t slept at all.

I liked the possibility of a working light chamber. Everything else here worked. Could the tree huggers had saved first light? But I didn’t like the idea of having Armond monkeying around with this stuff when better techs went with the captain. I told him not to do anything until I talked to the captain. The mote flickered on and I tried to get a signal out. Nothing. Not even static.

“Do you think something happened topside?” Armond asked. I shrugged, and fingered a spade-like leaf.

“Don’t touch! I haven’t checked them all.”

“I’d better get back to the ship.”

Armond turned to me, the light drawing dark shadows under his eyes. “I forgot to tell you. The elevator won’t work. I haven’t had a chance to look at it.”

I looked at it myself. Not that I could fix anything, but just to see. I wouldn’t even know how to close the door without a tank. The captain would come looking for us eventually, if she didn’t find herself trapped in an ancient tree hugger greenhouse too. I went back. Armond continued to work, probing for radar echoes, like he could finish his watch and go back to the shuttle at any time.

“What will the captain do?”

Armond looked around, and ran his fingers gently through the leaves. “She’ll cart it all away and dig up every last trace of the Chlorophiles.”

“Would you rather leave it all here?”

“It got along fine without us,” he said.

Armond didn't scare me until then. He had all the gadgets and the know how to fix stuff, but technology had a grip on him. The way he touched the plants, his obsessive care of the tanks, even the way he spoke of the tree huggers. A good card player knows the odds in a game, but a better one knows the players.

"The captain has our position and will come. Don't muck around with anything except the elevator." I hated to pull rank, what little I had. I had seen Armond's eyes glaze over when he had entered that radiation filled compartment, I didn't want to see it again.

* * *

The sound woke me. Explosions are never good to hear, not in space or on the ground. I jumped up and ran. Before I rounded the first corner, air whistled in my ears, popping my eardrums like a hull breach. I saw a silhouette ahead, standing in a clear spot of corridor. Loose leaves whipped around my face, and metal shards of the walls skittered across the floor. Armond stood in front of a door to the light chamber, exposed now with the wall blown away. He held his tank against the door, muttering.

"What the hell are you doing?"

He didn't look up. "First light. I read it in the plants. They really did capture it." His voice leveled. "Trapped in a vacuum, of course. Super-reflecting mirrors at the corners, I detected the interference pattern."

"Close it!"

The dust and debris slowly began to settle, leaving only a ringing in my ears. "Too late," he said. "The light will fade now."

He fiddled with the tank. The door edged open, bright orange light leaking out. I couldn't look in. So bright it hurt my eyes with my head turned.

"Close it, damn it!" I yelled.

Armond looked at me, and I recognized the look on his face. He stripped off his coverall, and I saw gray hairs on his chest char into smoke.

"The moment of creation," he said, his body translucent in the light. He stepped inside. I don't know if he screamed, I ran down the hall to get away from the light.

* * *

The captain's tech had no trouble getting in five days later. The blisters on my face had just started to pop. The horrible light had left days ago, and I didn't look until the captain dragged me over to the door. A charred pile of flesh lay inside, and it looked like Armond had knelt in the path of the light, arms upraised. In worship or ecstasy.

The captain's eyes panned back and forth, as if a scintilla of light remained for her to see.

"He said nothing? Did he take any recordings?"

"Nothing," I said. I had it in my grasp, and let that crazy old tech destroy it. For what? So he could burn in it? The captain's crew stood around, cramped in the corridor. The plants had exploded in a riot of growth, hanging down the walls in waves of blue-green. The captain turned to go.

"Wait. He did say something. He said the plants had data on them."

The captain's tech fingered a leaf and put it under his tank. "Something different here," he ventured, then held it toward her.

The captain looked, then turned toward me with her bottomless eyes. All hope of returning to the Fleet left me.

"We've found a map," she said.

The End

Although Patrick Lundrigan doesn't remember it, the first spacewalk took place on the day Pat was born. Since then, he's tried to keep up with space exploration, culminating with watching Atlantis lift off for the final servicing mission to the Hubble Space Telescope. He's been writing since 2001, and his story, "Space Hero" won the Grand Prize in the [2010 Jim Baen Memorial Writing Contest](#). His stories have appeared in Writers of the Future Volume 24, Space and Time and Flash Fiction Online.

Out of This World: Escaping a Doomed Earth in (and with) SciFi

by *Henry Cribbs*

For the New Year I made a few prophecies about scifi in the coming decade. (See [this column in RSF#8](#)). Absent time-travel technology, there's not really a way to verify those predictions, but I thought I might spot-check them using the same pseudo-unscientific data I used to make them in the first place, Gardner Dozois' *The Year's Best Science Fiction*. I based my predictions on trends I saw in his twenty-year anthology, *The Best of the Best*, which spanned the 'Eighties, 'Nineties, and 'Oughts. This month, to check those predictions, I read his Twenty-Seventh Annual Collection, containing his choices of thirty-two stories to represent the best short science fiction from 2009. While thus testing (and confirming) several of my Delphic hypotheses, I also discovered another couple of trends (which I'll elaborate on further down).

Yes, I realize this is the third month in a row I've written about a Dozois anthology. I've become addicted, I must admit. But I promise to shift gears next month, despite the fact that there are plenty more of his anthologies out there worth devouring.

And yes, my predictions were about the 'Teens, which technically didn't begin until this year, so 2009's stories can't really tell us anything for certain about the new decade. But 2009 is the most recent of the anthologies available. (Dozois 28th annual collection is not due for release until July 5th, but he *has* posted a list of his picks from 2010 [here in Asimov's forum](#).) And 2009 is also six years later than the most recent stories from the *Best of the Best* anthology I used to make the predictions, so it should do well enough.

Yes again, these stories had all been published when I made my predictions, so it's not like this was a double-blind study. Thus they could easily be self-fulfilling prophecies, which I already knew would come true, since they already had. But if I say I hadn't read any of the stories from the 2009 anthology before this month, you'll believe me won't you? I *promise* I had no Proustian déjà vu moments this month (see [this column in RSF#9](#)).

And yes yet again, I fully recognize this is not a random sample. Nowhere near. As a matter of fact, since Dozois is the same editor I consulted in making predictions, there is good reason to believe that using his choices in my controlling comparison sample might bring along a legion of confounding variables. His selections may well be influenced by trends he himself may have discovered (consciously or unconsciously), and he may even have (whether intending to or not) encouraged such trends by his rather weighty editorial influence. ('Cause what scifi author doesn't write with a mind to be selected for *The Year's Best*?)

So yes to all those objections. But as I said in January, this isn't science. It's science fiction. Or perhaps it's something far more sinister: It's *science fiction literary criticism*.

So let's start with the easiest prophecy to fulfill, that "we'll see more stories about managing relationships and coming to terms with our own mortality." Unsurprisingly, virtually every story in the 2009 anthology was about love, or death, or both. Score One for me! But that one was a

no-brainer, since all good stories, whether scifi or not, deal with those ubiquitous human conditions.

So let's continue with some less guaranteed predictions. In January I suggested that readers are "more interested in a less subjective form of storytelling.... Third-person can provide that illusion of objectivity. So I predict that we'll see the majority of published scifi stories continue to be in third person." This, in fact, was borne out in the stories from the 2009 sample. Twenty of those thirty stories were told from the third person point perspective. That's 63%, a clear majority. Score Another for me.

I also made a few predictions about story settings. One was that "Kenya, I'm sure, will make another appearance sometime in the next ten years." Kenya in fact shows up twice in the 2009 anthology. Once is a throwaway reference to a 'Kenyan vintage' of wine in Roberts's "Hair," and another is when Dominic Green mentions Mount Kenya in "Butterfly Bomb." However, these were mere allusions, and Kenya was not the actual setting of those stories. But it does confirm my related January assertion that "there must just be something about Kenya which appeals to scifi writers," so let's count that as Score Another One.

I also said "[C]haracters will have less of a need to be in the Big Apple, Tokyo, or the other urban sprawls..." The 2009 stories which were set on Earth also tended, as predicted, to be in more rural areas. Robert Charles Wilson's "Utriusque Cosmi" begins in a small town in Arizona, and though the protagonist winds up going VERY far away in the course of the story, she returns to that same small town for her poignant and climactic epiphany. Steven Gould's "A Story with Beans" is set far from civilization in a non-metallic post-apocalyptic rural New Mexico. "Useless Things" by Maureen F. McHugh takes place in Albuquerque, and Mary Rosenblum's "Lion Walk" in a prehistoric nature preserve in mid-America. Rather than megacity-clones which are similar in all but name, these original non-urban settings become detailed and appealing characters themselves. I like this trend, as it provides more variety. Score Yet Another.

In fact, the only two specific urban sprawls which make an appearance in the 2009 anthology are Atlanta (in Nicola Griffith's "It Takes Two") and Mumbai. Mumbai actually appears in THREE of the stories: Vanana Singh's "Infinities," which describes a mathematician who seeks to fully understand that largest of all numbers (and who does, for a brief moment); Rand B. Lee's "Three Leaves of Aloe," in which a mother must choose whether her daughter gets free will or an education; and Adam Roberts's "Hair," which posits a world-changing transhuman hairstyle.

Another major city in India, Varanasi, is the setting for Ian McDonald's "Vishnu at the Cat Circus." McDonald's epic novella (is a novella big enough to be epic?) strikes me as an intentional homage to Salman Rushdie's *Midnight Children*, for as in Rushdie's novel a group of children with special powers (and even their own comic book) symbolize India's future, with rival siblings representing both the good and the bad of the nation (though figuring out which is the good and which the bad may be a bit difficult, but that's as it should be). India is thus becoming quite popular as a setting for scifi. So this meets another prediction, "We'll also see developing nations take on more of a role in scifi in years to come." (I realize calling India a "developing nation" may be a bit of a misnomer, but the [World Economic Outlook \(International Monetary Fund, April 2010\)](#) still lists it as such, so I'm counting it.) Score Still Another.

I also predicted, based on the unanimity of space-stories in the 2000's sample, that we "are bound to see scifi stories emphasizing space exploration and interplanetary and even interstellar colonization. Part of this may have to do with ... the notion that our planet may not be fit for habitation for too much longer. Whatever the reason, we'll see more stories set in space and on other planets in the 'Teens."

Score One More, because space, by far, was the single-most popular setting of all, with at least twelve (depending on how you count) of the thirty-two stories taking place off-world. Many of these are space operas, such as John Kessel's "Events Preceding the Helvetican Renaissance" (which also made it into Dozois's *The New Space Opera II* anthology), describing a monk-spy who threatens to destroy the interstellar religious hegemony, and an enhanced female soldier (literally pulled Eve-like from the monk's ribs) who could give Molly Millions a run for her money; or Paul T. McAuley's "Crimes and Glory," which takes place in a wormhole-riddled set of star systems to which powerful aliens have, for their own purposes, granted us mere humans access; or Dominic Green's "Butterfly Bomb," in which an ancient planetary defense system decides the best defense is a good offense; or Elizabeth Bear and Sarah Monette's "Mongoose," where an inter-dimensional pest-control expert must de-infest a space station (all the while paying homage to Lewis Carroll and A.A. Milne). Other notable space yarns include John C. Wright's futuristic revision-ing of Wagner's Ring cycle in "Twilight of the Gods," James Van Pelt's voyage of a colony-ship in "Solace", and the trials of wormhole-engineers making a first-contact right where they want to build a new stargate in Peter Watts's "The Island."

But what struck me as particularly interesting was that most of these space-stories have a certain specific trope to them. In at least half of them the conquest of space is not made by humans, but by aliens, who graciously 'rescue' us from our prison of a polluted and overpopulated planet and allow us to enter the wider galaxy and universe (though usually not as equals). In Wilson's "Utriusque Cosmi" a few willing humans are 'raptured up' by a universe-spanning distributed entity. In another example, McAuley's "Crimes and Glory," mysterious entities called Jackaroos allow a few 'Lottery' winners (and other aliens) into a self-contained linked system of stars as part of some galactic-sized rat-maze experiment. Similar alien rescues seem to be part of the universe's backstory in other stories, such as Green's "Butterfly Bomb," Bear and Monette's "Mongoose," and (if you count our transhuman descendents as being alien to us) Watts's "The Island." These visions of space travel imply that we humans just don't have what it takes to 'get us off this rock'. So we have to hope someone else will, before we ruin it.

The pessimistic flipside of this pessimism is another trope which is quite popular among these stories, namely post-apocalyptic tales of a ruined planet. One-fourth of the stories in the 2009 anthology depict Earths which we have ruined in some way or other, and on which human life struggles to survive. In Gould's "A Story with Beans" a large section of America has been overrun by man-made metal-eating bugs, which will even go for the iron in one's blood. In Alexander Irvine's *Book-of-Eli*-esque "Seventh Fall," a wandering actor must elude roving bands of bookburning zealots as he searches for a long-lost copy of *Hamlet* in a North America radically altered by falling chunks of a shattered moon. In all of these tales the moral seems to be that we are stuck on a dying planet. So if we don't get rescued by aliens soon, we're doomed.

Yet more pessimism is evoked by a related repeating theme, which I want to call “Econopocalypse” tales. In these stories the current economic woes seem to mount to a level at which we cease to be fully human, or at least cease to be humane. In McHugh’s “Useless Things” a starving artist in a near-future Albuquerque finds more humanity in her dogs than in the people, both rich clients and homeless beggars, with whom she interacts. The plight of the lower-class is also vividly depicted in Lavie Tidhar’s “The Integrity of the Chain,” as a struggling tuk-tuk driver tries to save money to help his friend build a rocket-ship which he knows will never launch (and again we are left with this notion that we need outside help to escape). Jo Walton’s “Escape to Other Worlds with Science Fiction” interweaves newspaper headlines and vignettes from the poorest of the poor in a Greatly Depressing (and frighteningly familiar) alternate Earth where the Great Depression never ended. And in Roberts’s “Hair” a breakthrough in biotechnology by a venture altruist threatens to end world hunger (yes, it IS taken as a threat by the protagonist, portraying the plight of the poor even more poignantly). And since yet another prediction I made was that the “effects of the changing economy, and potential economic solutions (or pitfalls) are likely to be a major topic in scifi in the coming years,” Score Another One for me.

These glimpses into radically recessed economies show just how money and jobs (or lack of them) occupy the minds of writers and readers. Not surprising, since right now they occupy the minds of almost everyone on the globe. These stories also show, as Walton’s tale implies, that a major benefit of science fiction is that it provides an ‘Escape’, albeit a temporary (and fictional) one. Perhaps because of this we’ll see an even greater demand for sci-fi in the coming decade.

And what’s my final Score? I really lost count, but I think scifi fans are the ultimate winners.

Works Cited:

Dozois, Gardner. *The Year’s Best Science Fiction: Twenty-Seventh Annual Collection*. New York, St. Martin’s, 2010. All stories mentioned were originally published in 2009 in various venues.

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.

Five Questions with Lavie Tidhar

by Michael Ray

This month's story from Lavie Tidhar, [The Hubbard Continuum](#), is a lot of fun. It takes Scientology at its word and considers the implications. Lavie is a prolific author who's quickly establishing himself as one of the new voices of modern science fiction. Although he is [legendarily elusive](#), Lavie took time to answer a few questions for us. I think you'll enjoy the results.

What is most memorable about living on a kibbutz?

Crikey, there's a question! I think I'll answer it as a lead in to the next question: living on a kibbutz is a lot like living on a remote South Pacific island. I don't mean it entirely facetiously – there really is a remarkable similarity as both systems (kibbutz and village) are to a large extent communal. Of course, a village comes without the Marxist ideology – I can still say “the dictatorship of the proletariat” without blinking and have a life-long aversion to any form of committee, both of which are ubiquitous in a kibbutz environment.

It was a weird way to grow up – communal children's houses, I remember, for instance, our clothes – we used to go the kibbutz laundry once a year and they'd put a big pile of last year's clothes on the floor, and we'd go and pick our clothes for that year. I guess it was a mix of Oliver Twist and Das Kapital!

I guess the best way to think about it now is to say: it wasn't all bad.

How does one arrange to live on Vanuatu?

Generally, if you're not a Ni-Vanuatu, you need to be either a dodgy Australian land speculator or an American Peace Corps volunteer. I've drunk with both, at various times.

Ok, that's probably not entirely fair, but...

Living in Vanuatu was remarkable – in many ways, as I said, it reminded me of growing up on a kibbutz, so there was that weird sense of familiarity about it – I'd like to think I fit in quite well! We lived on one of the most remote islands, Vanua Lava – no electricity, phones, clean water – but incredibly beautiful, with the volcano outside my bamboo hut and the full moon beating down on the Pacific...

It was interesting!

[In Pacmandu](#) is a personal favorite of mine among your stories. For what games, if any, do you still make time?

Do you know, I hardly play computer games – I even gave up on Spider Solitaire a while back. Which is a shame... I used to have an Atari 800XL in the 1980s (yup, that old!) and I just don't think anything since has compared. Though I played Kinect for the first time at a friend's place and wow – science fiction!

I think I have a secret dream of becoming a warlord/crime boss in some virtual world like Second Life and have entire sweatshops of people working for me... that'd be kinda cool! And wrong, sure, but one can dream, right?

They look like fun to me and are on my list – so should I read The Bookman and Camera Obscura?

Of course!

More seriously – I mean, was I really supposed to say no? – I think they're both fun books – I had a lot of fun writing them – and at the same time I hope they have some ambition of talking about bigger things, too. But mostly fun! They're the sort of weird Victorian adventure fantasies – though I call Camera Obscura a kung fu noir novel! – harking back to the stuff you love as a kid. They mix genres, which I enjoy doing. I'm working on the third book at the moment, The Great Game, which is essentially a spy novel set in the same world. Just to give you a taste, I get to destroy Paris with sort of Martian tripods and have Van Helsing fighting the Comte de Rochefort in the catacombs – and that's just one chapter!

If, for whatever reason, you don't enjoy that sort of thing – keep away!

Could you tell us a little about the other works you have coming out this year?

I probably have too much stuff coming out this year, to be honest. It sort of worked out that way. April sees the release of Camera Obscura in both the US and the UK, and of my PS Publishing novella Gorel & The Pot-Bellied God. I'll be at the British Eastercon, btw, so if anyone's around... buy me a drink, I'm poor!

I have two more novels scheduled for 2011 – Osama from PS Publishing, and Martian Sands from Apex Books. Both kinda trippy, edgy work – one's about love and the “war on terror” and the other's about time travel, the Holocaust and kibbutzim on Mars.

Then there's Jesus & The Eightfold Path, a novella from British-based Immersion Press (cool guys) – which is a sort of kung-fu retelling of the New Testament but, at the same time, I think, a book about what it means to be a Jew. Then there's my anthology, The Apex Book of World SF 2, with some great writers in it, my weird picture book Going to the Moon (about a boy with Tourette's, who wants to be an astronaut), and – how many's that? Six books? I think that's probably enough, for now!

Sounds like a busy year. Thanks again for taking the time. We hope to hear from you again soon.

Five Questions with Patrick Lundrigan

by The Editors

Dosferatu (<http://twitter.com/#!/dosferatu>) and Dandyfunk (<http://dandyfunk.typepad.com/>) are great internet names. Where did those come from?

Dosferatu, which has been my on-line handle since the Usenet days, is a combination of DOS and Nosferatu. Dandyfunk is an old nautical term for a meal made from leftovers all thrown together in the same pot — sort of the theme for my blog.

Your story in RSF this month, [First Light](#), has the feel of space exploration that has been ‘lived in’. What inspired you to write the story?

Astronomers call the first look through a new telescope first light, and when I heard that term I extrapolated — what about the first light *ever*? I also read about a mythical cave where a tribe had kept a fire burning continuously for hundreds of years. So I combined those two ideas, and set it in a future a lot like the present. Things will break, and some people will be stuck doing the dirty work to clean up.

It clearly feels like part of a larger universe. Have you got more going on there?

I have several stories set in what I call the Dark Ocean Universe. A place where dark matter and dark energy are used for faster than light travel, since we won't be traveling that fast in the space-time we have now.

Recently you won the 2010 Jim Baen Memorial Writing Contest with your story, [Space Hero](#). What is most memorable about that experience?

Seeing my story on the main page of Baen Books was memorable! But the contest, sponsored by Baen Books and the National Space Society (<http://www.nss.org/>), seeks to inspire interest in science and technology in an effort to transform fiction into reality. I am humbled to think that a story of mine met that criteria.

What are you working on now & what should we expect to see from you in the future?

Right now I'm juggling several short stories and a couple of novels while trying to write new stuff.

We're excited to bring Patrick's story to our readers and are sure we'll be seeing more from him in the near future.