



Redstone Science Fiction #13
Cover Photo by Sarah Kirby

Redstone Science Fiction #13, June 2011

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Editor's Note – June 2011

by Michael Ray

Year two is off to a hot start. Two tremendous stories this month & two excellent essays (and a contest).

Chris Miller's [An Infallible System of Roulette](#) has been in our back pocket all year & we are pleased to finally bring it to you. This story, along with last year's [Michelangelo's Chisel](#) are two mind-expanding short stories that you must simply read and let wash over you. He is a relative unknown but these stories show that he has an immense talent.

Angela Ambroz is another emerging talent in the SF field. She has published and a couple of stories in her Dropverse world, and we are excited about the one she sent us. It has perhaps the best story title I have seen in our inbox, [Love and Anarchy and Science Fiction](#). Political science fiction is so often about the argument and not about the story, which is not the case here. The story is harsh and heartbreaking and you can see the truth in it. You'll love it (which is why we picked it of course).

The essays this month are exceptional. Henry Cribbs takes his critical eye to the heart of literature, Shakespeare, and reminds us of how influential the Bard's work has been on the world of science fiction – [Such Stuff as Dreams are Made On: Shakespeare and SciFi](#).

This month we welcome back our friend, Sarah Einstein, with another challenging essay and contest prompt. What will identity mean in a future where it is completely mutable? She examines this question in [Identity Crisis: Who are we, if we can choose who we are?](#) and brings us a new contest for this summer. Read her essay and send us a work that addresses the questions she raises. Can't wait to hear from you.

We have had a great time doing Redstone SF in year one and want to thank everyone in the field who has helped us. We plan to bring you a lot more quality science fiction in year two to pay you all back.

We're confident you'll find something here worth reading.

your friend,
Michael Ray
Editor
RSF

An Infallible System of Roulette

by Christopher Miller

The first time I died might've been back in '65 on a community farm up in Forest River, North Dakota. Although there was an earlier summer where I'd tiptoed out to a Lee Street beach sandbar and gotten stranded by Lake Michigan's tide, or maybe wind swells, so that the water rose up over my head on the way back to shore. I was nine or ten at the time and still hadn't learned to swim. Adults were all around and I remember floundering for the bottom but being too embarrassed, even as I went under, to cry for help. So I learned the doggie paddle. Or drowned. Or both. Probably both. It's hard to say for sure. Things don't change as much as you'd imagine. Even in Forest River Community Farm's chicken barn mishap, where my death was a lot more obvious, not much changed.

As Hutterites, they wouldn't have carried any kind of liability insurance. But they weren't poor. They had over a thousand acres of prime farmland, and huge pork and poultry operations. Their chicken quotas alone had to be worth a fortune. And like all rural religious communes, child labor was integral to their business model. Not in an abusive or exploitative way though. Hard work and a frugal lifestyle were how they believed God wanted them to live. They worked their children in the fields and barns and processing plants, not to sacrifice them, but because they loved them and wanted them to grow up faithful and happy, as they themselves had.

My parents weren't what you'd call litigious people. So, unless their grief changed them in some fundamental way, they wouldn't have taken Forest River Community Farm to court, to seek damages or revenge or closure or whatever through that course. Even though this would've been a total no-brainer. And no doubt they were approached by legal professionals specializing in that sort of thing, lawyers eager to work on contingency.

I have a pretty good feeling for how hard my death must've been on them from how hard the death of my son has been on me. Even though I know he's still living down another thread of existence or in some alternate universe or along some other quantum path (or however you want to think of it) so that nothing much has changed for him just like nothing much changed for me all the times I've died, I still feel this huge sense of loss and failure. It would be nice if, just like you can't die in any reality, neither could your children.

Next to lumberjacking and small-boat fishing, farming is the most dangerous occupation. The hours are long. The machinery is heavy and much jury-rigged. And training is minimal. You learn by doing. Forest River Community Farm had provided an unsafe work environment for a twelve-year-old city-slicker from Chicago's north side. So maybe there are eventualities in which my parents saw there's no benevolent, all-knowing god character watching over and meddling in their lives, who cares what they believe. Maybe they even saw (just like at the quantum level, at the most fundamental level of existence) that actions are not chosen, decisions are not made, but rather every possible course is always taken. But mostly not. Probably mostly they did not sue Forest River Community Farm, but continued to trust that God knew what he was doing and had good reasons for doing it, and looked forward even more to the day that they would all get together and it would be explained to them.

Farm elders had a lot of respect for my dad (which was why I was there in the first place) and so probably felt awful that his oldest son (oldest sons having a kind of religious significance in the Old Testament) had gotten killed in such a terrible way in their service. It was just supposed to be a rural learning-slash-growth-slash-summer vacation experience for a kid from the suburbs.

And who slips on a bottle cap while strolling along on a blind date and falls in front of a bus? Or, more accurately, who chooses a life in which his son has done this? Was it guilt for having abandoned my own parents back there in Forest River Community Farm's main chicken barn that I chose this course? If so, then it was not a willing decision. I can live with guilt. I'd have chosen a way in which he only twisted his ankle a little, or in which the bus was late, or in which he never met the girl that so distracted him on that fateful walk. Probably she would too. Probably she did.

Have you ever wondered why people who play Russian roulette find it therapeutic? I'm not talking about the deranged or despondent. I'm talking about well-balanced, productive individuals with strong family and community ties, happy people for whom surviving a one in six or seven shot enforces a more appreciative outlook on life.

Before the chicken barn incident I'd wanted to be a policeman or a fireman. After, I could no longer imagine being either of these things and decided to become a scientist. Which of course proves nothing. Science cannot prove the existence of other experiential or existential paths. It cannot really even determine much about this one, the one in which I did not get pinched in half like a fishing worm between Forest River Community Farm's chicken barn's elevating platform and fifth floor framework, but went on to study physics at MIT, and also the one in which my son was squashed between the curb and right front tire of a Vancouver city bus, his entrails bursting and spilling out onto rain-slickened pavement while his date looked on in horror.

See if this makes sense. There are two kinds of people: me (or in your case, you), and everyone else. And though I don't seriously doubt that you exist and experience things much (if not exactly) as I do, I cannot *know* it. And though I might care very much about you and take great pains, and even risk my own existence, to help or hurt you in some way, ultimately I act only on my own perceptions and feelings. You are just a character in my narrative. So in effect, I am all that exists. Whatever I am. So if I die, then nothing exists. That is the essential difference between us.

And it's the same with realities. There are two kinds: this one, and all the others. This may not be as apparent to you as the existence of other people, so perhaps the metaphor falls short for you. But for one who's spent the last decade watching leptons dance, it does not. Superimposed atomic particles combine in every possible way, simultaneously. In other words, they exist in every possible reality; only by observing them do we constrain them to one. We exist in every possible reality too; only consciousness constrains us to one. I know this is pretty ironic and trippy and metaphysical and boring, and I apologize. All I'm trying to do is show how realities are like people, that there's a connection between this one, the one we're all pretty sure exists in some form or another, and all the others, which we're not sure of at all, and probably haven't even considered.

I was invited to join the Scientific Advisory Committee of Waterloo, Ontario's Perimeter Institute for Theoretical Physics in 2002, after my thesis on inevitability and super-improbability won, of all things, The Swedish Royal Academy of Science's prestigious Rolf Schock Prize in Logic and Philosophy. It was the first time ever the Schock had been awarded out of department, and pretty hard to believe in a lot of other ways too. Like a dream really.

Like the dream in which my son did not drop out of Simon Fraser's post graduate Philosophy program to become a web designer and slip on a bottle cap and get crushed by a bus, but rather went on to receive a doctorate, and later tenure, for his research on the deterministic influences of language on cognition and the integration and assimilation of small-scale reality models. The dream is pretty credible. More like a memory really. Usually I'm attending a lecture in which he's explaining his theories to a large audience of students and visiting academics like myself, and even though I don't understand some of the terminologies and concepts, I sense that he does, that others do, and that they're valid and even somehow not unrelated to my own work. Because I'm in a wheelchair, I sit either in the very front or very back, depending on the logistics of the lecture hall. I prefer the front, where occasionally he will look down at me and smile in a way that strikes me as both proud and self-conscious at the same time. Although he's never complained, I'm pretty sure he'd prefer I stay back, not because he's ashamed or embarrassed or uncomfortable with me or my disability, but just because that's the way it is between children and their parents. I do not resent my legless condition. An amputee is not a cripple. I lead a full and active life. Then I wake up.

What do you think the chances of winning at Russian roulette twenty times in a row would be? Assume six cylinders, one round, and a good hard well-oiled spin with the muzzle pointed straight up or down so gravity cannot impact the randomness of the outcome. If played only once, five of six will survive. But if played twenty times, even over the course of decades, by the laws of conventional probability, less than three in a hundred will live to play a twenty-first time. Now consider all the chances you take continuously day in and day out: jaywalking or even crossing at the light; driving a car; popping a Tylenol; eating a hamburger; touching the metal trim of an electrical appliance; owning a gas fireplace; stepping into an elevator; getting a mosquito bite; shoveling your driveway; having sex; walking without watching where you step; breathing; etc. etc. etc. Ignore evolution's improbable successes. Even ignore the race for conception you qualified for and then won against 50,000,000 others. If there is but one reality, what sort of odds do you think you've had to overcome to now exist in it?

Academia is show business. That's why it accomplishes so little. The Perimeter Institute today is little more than a theater for performing arts. I stand by the window of my fifth floor corner office staring out over Silver Lake. When I hear footsteps, I stroke my beard in deep contemplation. Or I write furiously on my antique blackboard. There's momentousness in the clack and squeak of chalk against slate that's missing in the feeble chirps of felt-tip markers on whiteboards or the plastic clicking of a keyboard. Though some days I sit. The days I have no legs.

It was an open lift stabilized by corner poles and controlled by a system of pulleys and cables. My co-workers had already loaded it with all the shit-encrusted wire egg baskets we'd need for the top floor and begun their ascent. I don't remember what caused me to lag behind, but by the

time I reached them the platform was already up to my shoulders. Figuring I'd be able to climb aboard easily enough before it reached the next floor, I grabbed on. By about half way up I was a lot less confident. I'd managed to pull myself up to almost waist level, to where I was leaning on my forearms and elbows, but my legs kept swinging under the platform which prevented me from moving forward and making further progress. My friend Dean, who'd come up with me on the train from Chicago, was laughing at my predicament. Joe, a Huddersfield lad and the oldest of us, was shouting, and his two sisters, Hanna and Rebecca, were screaming. Somewhere above the fourth floor ceiling's hanging bulbs I gave up and resigned myself to failure. The support beams of the approaching fifth floor were close enough to bump my head on and I remember thinking that some sort of shutoff sensor would just have to come into play or the motor would conk out. I remember wondering what all the fuss was about too, and then remembering that these farm kids had probably never ridden in a real elevator and so didn't know you could let the doors close right on you, that these things had all kinds of safety features.

Then we'd stopped and Joe was yelling at me, almost crying. Even after I explained to him that everything was okay and that I'd never been in any real danger, he kept yelling. "You greenhorn! That's a five-horse motor! Lift two tons easy. Chop you clean in two you greenhorn." Just as there are relationships between subatomic particles, there are relationships between people. The best way to describe them might be to say that they behave as though they're all facets of a single entity. So for the rest of the day Dean called me a greenhorn.

Many realities coexist at any given moment. But few are chosen. Standing at one of Casino Rama's six roulette tables, I prepare to bet my entire life's savings on a single spin of the wheel. And I mean everything. Not only have I emptied my bank accounts (including taking a huge tax bite for withdrawing my RRSP funds) and sold my entire investment portfolio to the dismay of my financial planner, I've borrowed against my pension, refinanced my home, sold my Mercedes to a used car dealer, my furniture at an estate auction and my knickknacks at a lawn sale. Because careers in theoretical physics are more prestigious than lucrative and rapid divestment or cashing in such as I have just described is expensive and financially unwise, this comes to only a little over 880,000 dollars. Of course I've had to obtain special permission from the casino to place such a bet. Table limits even in the VIP lounge are only 5000 dollars. But such requests are not as uncommon as you might think in the eccentricities of casino lore. There's a City News crew present. A heavily made up Chinese-Canadian reporter in a pale silk pantsuit asks me if I'm crazy or something, and laughs. Then she asks me how I plan to wager.

That's the thing about reality: you have to choose. When the elevator locked into its fifth floor dock, the pressure on my midriff became unbearable—but then, strangely irrelevant. Because realities are simultaneous and interconnected, I'm still able to remember. For example, I remember Dean's vomiting pink day-old pastry into and all down the sides of the stacked wire baskets. I even remember my funeral a little. Only it's not my funeral. It's for some dumb city kid, some greenhorn who hadn't had the sense to not try to climb aboard a moving lift in the big chicken barn. It's been the talk of the farm. Being the youngest of the twelve Mendel children has lent me a certain celebrity among my peers. See, Joe's our oldest. And he was in charge. He was there with two of our sisters. Father has given him a vicious, prolonged, cathartic strapping during which neither of them made a sound. I'm so glad it wasn't me that got cut in two that I feel a little unchristian and guilty. The dead boy's father, a preacher, appears to have aged since

his Wednesday sermon. He stands before us with his eyes closed. Several times he seems about to speak, but then gives up. Finally he just bangs the pulpit with his fist and retakes his seat. I feel an inexplicable connectedness to and sadness for him.

The largest denomination casino chips are the purple 500s. Obviously I can't be expected to stack 1,760 of them, so the casino has produced a special gold chip for the occasion. "Place your bets," says the pretty dealer, holding out an arm to the table as though she were a conductor helping me to board a train.

Although quantum physics has helped refine my working model or construct and I continue to experiment, I discovered the true nature of reality that day on the elevator. Along another path Joe tries to haul me up onto the platform by my t-shirt. It tears when my legs become wedged just above my knees. The damage is worse than it feels, maybe because I'm in shock. Double amputation is the only medical course. My son stops to kiss the girl instead of stepping on the bottle cap. Later they marry, and she has my grandchildren. Dean still throws up all over the egg baskets. Later, when I tease him about it, he insists it had nothing to do with me. That there'd been almost an entire box of pink coconut logs with hardly any mold on them from Eddie's Bakery which he'd eaten instead of feeding to the chickens.

* * *

The second between my abandoning hope just above the fourth floor's hanging lights and my lying safe and sound on the fifth floor with Joe scolding me, if it ever happened, is lost. I have no memory of it. As I said, my last thoughts prior to it were in preparation for embarrassment and a manageable compression of my midsection such as perhaps being squeezed in a leg-scissors by an adversary while play wrestling. This time Dean did not throw up, although he stopped laughing. I wonder if that's how my son remembers falling under the bus: as a close call from which he got up and went on with his life. I wonder if when my wife shot herself in the mouth with my Colt .22 caliber Target-Master revolver, she chose a path in which the gun misfired, or only knocked out a few teeth, or tore away a bit of her cheek. There were no other chambered rounds. So I wonder if she'd given it a spin first. Though it hardly matters. Obviously I chose for her to die too. But I still feel bad about it and hope there's at least one course in which she didn't.

The day after my elevator incident, Dean fell off a tractor he was driving. The rest of us were riding behind on a heavy hay wagon loaded with boxes of moldy treats from Eddie's Bakery when he turned to ask which pedal was the brake, and lost control. When the tractor veered off the road, Dean tipped backwards off the seat. He missed the hitch with his head and fell between a pair of turning 500-pound tires. Driverless, the tractor continued to chug down into and then along the shallow ravine until it hit a tree and stalled. All four wagon tires missed him too. I chose to keep him around so I could call him a greenhorn.

* * *

Joe had all his teeth out at twenty. Said he hated the dentist and just wanted to be shed of them. Then he got killed in a corn silo. On the days I have no legs my son emails me and we debate some philosophical assertion until I win. I know he's only humoring me. Sometimes my wife

meets me for lunch in the *Bon Appetit*, or off campus if neither of us feels like cafeteria food. I know she's having an affair. The days I have my legs are lonelier. But easier too in a way. Even the days my office window's view is obstructed by a heavy grate—and when I try to find someone in maintenance who can remove it, the door to my office is stuck—and if I pound on it, my secretary comes and gives me an injection. Then I go to sleep. It's hard to decide. No reality is perfect.

On May 9, 1867, the great Fyodor Dostoevsky wrote to his wife, Maria Dmitrievna, regarding his study of roulette: "I was the winner when happiness smiled at me..." So he knew. Truth is defined by what you believe, and not the other way around. I learned this in the chicken barn. Matter's quanta only confirmed it. It's only consciousness—the choosing—that's hard. For me, literature prevails over happiness. So Dostoevsky was ruined by the game. Everyone is surprised when I reach out to place my gold chip on the green double-zero. I can see it on the faces of the pit bosses. They'd assumed I'd play an outside bet, such as red or black, or even or odd. That is how others have always done it. My feet itch. This happens when I've been standing on my prosthetic legs for too long, especially if they are not perfectly fitted to my stumps. I wonder briefly why I have not sold them, along with my electric scooter. The more at stake, the better. Then I realize that I have no scooter or prosthetics. There is probably lycra in my socks' material. That is why my feet itch. The casino is prepared to lose 880,000 dollars, but 30,000,000 is another story. Forest River Community Farm is probably worth that now. The dealer's arm is stayed by a manager. There is some dissent. They ask if I wouldn't feel safer playing shorter odds. They tell me that I have only a 1 in 38 chance this way. I tell them that I have some statistical training and that I've even managed to unearth an interesting thing or two about improbabilities. I try to explain that whatever happens is completely up to them, that we can all be happy. They confer some more. Phone calls are made. Then they smile and shake my hand and wish me luck for the camera. The dealer gives the wheel a mighty turn.

As the ball slows, their expressions are grim. A few disguise their trepidation as aplomb and refuse to look. They will probably lose in their realities. You are probably wondering what will happen now too. Does the ball drop into the double-zero to accompanying bedlam, or some other slot to dead silence. Do I choose my family over my legs?—this life over another? Maybe you can see now that only you can decide. Just as I will soon have to. That this is the difference between us. The hard fact of the matter.

The End

*Born on the cusp of the first hydrogen bomb's test detonation, Chris Miller's formal education includes a university degree and a college diploma. His legitimate professions (of longer than a day, in no particular order) include stock boy, paper boy, pot washer, baker's helper, geriatric orderly, union rep, painter (of apartments, not canvases), farm hand, technical writer, baby-sitter, software developer, line cook, dish washer and restaurateur. He has two sons, one granddaughter, and has always wanted to be a writer. Chris's story, [Michelangelo's Chisel](#), appeared in RSF #2 in [July 2010](#). His stories have also been published in *Cosmos*, *The Barcelona Review*, *Nossa Morte*, and elsewhere.*

Love and Anarchy and Science Fiction

by Angela Ambroz

(or Storia d'amore e d'anarchia e di fantascienza ovvero sta sera quando eravamo a letto e parlavamo dell'impero)

“Just tell me one thing, Salvatore, now that we’re *bhai-bhai*. Is it true what they say?”

The sake is freezing in our thimble-sized shots. I cringe, watching this conversation play out and willing Tenzin to shut up.

“What who says?” Salvatore shifts in his seat, getting ready.

“You know... the ‘Cannibal Count’. Eh?” Tenzin’s eyes glisten, wet and drunken. “Is it true? Did you really eat those – ”

“No, *goddammit!*”

* * *

They say he looks different now. That his eyes had been brilliant in his youth, and that the prison years had dulled them.

Of course, he has changed since prison. His hair is whiter. His jowls droop; he’s filled out. But I don’t see a big difference. And I’ve known him for years; I’ve known him longer than anyone else in the empire has.

I knew him when he first fell out of the Drop, half-dead and shivering. Before the sycophants, before the press interviews and Imperial court and the congress sessions. Before we fought the good fight, before his petty crimes and his epic treacheries.

I knew him when he was new to this universe. When he didn’t know a gas giant from a nebula. When he was still a Drop virgin, as we called them, reeking of that old Earth poverty.

Everyone thinks they know Salvatore Gennarino, especially these days. But I – I knew him then and I know him now.

* * *

Fringe worlds suck.

“Praise be to Avalokiteśvara, the Buddha of Compassion. Praise be to Chenrezig, the Buddha of Tibet.”

“Salvatore Gennarino.”

The Tibetan freedom fighter’s face is buried behind scarves, a hood and goggles. His trunk is thick with the layers of fur, polyester and wool, and his arms wave, puppet-like. I can’t believe Salvatore ever agreed to this, to meeting here, on this ice ball of a planet.

“We are honored by your presence,” the man – Tenzin – says.

Salvatore nods once, curt. “We like being here too. Shall we have some tea?”

I smile inwardly; anything to get inside, out of this cold.

The butter tea is salty and thick, sticking to my throat and lighting up my insides. It scalds my tongue, but I welcome the sour warmth. We sit on an ornate divan; I think I recognize a Renoir on the wall. A good signal, sensitively European, even if it was probably positioned there for our arrival.

I notice Salvatore take a sip of the tea and frown.

“Italy and Tibet have little common history, you know,” Tenzin is saying, “especially before the imperial period. Your famous traveler – Marco Polo, right? – never visited our mountain kingdom.”

Bells ring as the wind wails outside. I wonder if the Tibetan resistance has chosen this place because it reminds them of their ancestral homeland. Salvatore is nodding fiercely, staring into the fire. They say the brightness of his eyes was dulled in the prison. They couldn’t be more wrong.

“I hate the Chinese with my very bones,” Tenzin continues, “but I praise our common enemy for bringing us, at least, this one thing: that our great peoples may join together and be friends, and together bring down the twin empires!”

Salvatore’s eyes meet mine and he smiles crookedly.

“To friends!”

“To friends!”

We finish our teas to friendship.

Later, we examine the guns and talk about prices.

* * *

We spend our time shuttling between Salvatore's gaudy congressional offices on Delhi Prime and fringe worlds out in wild space. The Drops eat away at our months, but we sacrifice that time to the cause.

Things in his office on Delhi Prime: oak desk, an extra sherwani suit and shoes, an emergency response button, my AK-47, a bust of His Magnificence, a rosary (his) and a pooja set (mine).

Things in our bedroom on the ship: old paperbacks about pre-Imperial history, a cookbook from my mother, narcotic soap (of which I disapprove), condoms, VitaliMan, anti-anxiety drops, anti-depressants, vitamins, a political magazine.

The Droplag makes me taste cheese in my dreams; for Salvatore, it makes him howl.

* * *

When I first met Salvatore, I had been working as a Hindustani Imperial guard at a Drop customs office.

Those were the early days of colonization, when crowds of huddled Earthers used to come through the Drop, and we would herd them to the various bored Immigration and Customs bureaucrats sitting behind their cages. We trafficked enormous amounts of people then; daily, we saw forged papers, dubious degrees. The worst efforts adorned the walls of the customs agents for later fun. I thought it was funny, too. I thought it was edgy. I thought I was sticking it to the Man – the "Man" being my parents.

Regional purity was still in vogue then, and so Telugus were sent to the various New Kakinadas, Bengalis to New Kolkata, Punjabis to New Kapurthala – distant moons and virgin planets, fertile lands for the empire to grow.

Non-Hindustani Earthers were relegated to the less successful terraforming projects – the too-cold planets, the too-hot ones, the ones with barren soils and distant suns and never enough water. If any Chinese was unlucky enough to stumble into our territory by some mid-Drop mix-up, we were ordered to shoot them on sight.

But that never happened, and it was only later that I learned that the 'accidental Chinese Drop-in' was a bogeyman and a practical impossibility. What can I say? It seems obvious now. We were ignorant.

Instead, the more immediate threats were the old resistance groups: the Black Hats, the American Liberation Front. Groups that would sooner bomb a Drop than let the empire spread. Because of them, any non-Hindustani immigrant was subject to immediate inspection post-arrival.

I remember the day Salvatore came. He came alone, off-hours. The Drop was technically closed, but suddenly I saw the blue light at of the Incoming chute brighten – I guess our entryway was still jacked into the Drop our space station was orbiting around, one last ship must have Dropped in, I don't know – and then a man staggered through.

He was wearing gumboots and a crusty, rust-colored jacket. He came from Venice, he said, and I asked him to tell me more about the place.

* * *

Salvatore doesn't talk much about the prison, but the 'Cannibal Count' thing gets him going. As soon as we get back to the ship, he's in a lather. I'm punching in the Drop coordinates for Delhi Prime while he paces behind me.

"What in the hell does he think I am? Am I some sort of spectacle for them? Do they think with a little tea and a little sake, it's suddenly all *Tibet-Italia bhai-bhai*? Do they think it's just a *bahut bahut acchi fillum* for them to have fun with; a story with some *accha* drama and a little *naach-gaana*? You know what I should have told them? You know what I think they should do? *Vaffanculo!*"

I can't tell if his head-wobbles and Hindustani interjections are an ironic caricature, or if he's just absorbed our culture so much without realizing it. After a few years on the Prime, everyone begins to sound like they're from Delhi.

He knows how to tell people off in every language; it was useful in prison, I imagine. He can tell you to screw your mother in the court language, various regional languages (Marathi being especially colorful), his native Italian, Mandarin, Cantonese, Tibetan, and, he claims, Swahili. I've learned how to recognize the Italian words.

"They're obviously idiots," I offer. "Forgive them their ignorance."

"They should all die," he spits.

Everyone dies, I think. Later, I find him sitting in the armchair, a book by Fat Sharma on political philosophy and non-violent resistance on his lap. He's scribbling furiously in the margin.

I worry about Salvatore; he's got so many people to be angry towards: the Hindustanis for occupying his homeland, for kicking him out into the stars, for imprisoning him when he fell into crime. The Chinese for not providing a real alternative to this hegemony, for offering essentially an oppression-for-oppression trade. The Tibetan freedom fighters down on that snow planet; for their jolly curiosity about the time he almost ate another human being. His parents, for being from the wrong part of Earth. Bad memories, and no options. The walls feel close.

I watch him with the book until he finally sees me. When he does, he stands and throws it, hard. The spine crashes into the wall. Loose papers drift impotently to the ground. The room smells a little boozy.

"So, are you coming to bed?"

I'm already peeling off my body armor. As Salvatore's Head of Security, it feels like the more power he accumulates, the more stuff I have to wear.

I strip off the ammo packs, unlace the knee-high boots, dismantle the AK-47 and pull out my ponytail. Salvatore, instead, undoes his dhoti with a yank, lets it fall to the ground, and then walks around in kurta and underwear, whiskey-soda in hand.

"Do you know the story of Indira Gandhi?"

"I don't think so."

"*Cazzo*, it's your own history and I know it!"

"Just tell me, Salvo, don't be a mean drunk."

"I'm not – okay, it's ancient history. Maybe twentieth or twenty-first century... Her own bodyguards killed her."

I would never do that, I want to say. *What the hell are you implying?* I want to ask. I get angry. I get sad. The bed sheets are cold.

"Right, I think I do remember her now. Wasn't she right before Sonia Gandhi, the Italian-Hindustani Prime Minister?"

Salvatore shrugs and turns over in bed. I kiss his ear. I don't want him to win so easily, brushing aside my support, turning me into a villain too. Just because I'm from the wrong part of Earth too, the ruling part; I still worry he thinks I'm a closet Occidentalist.

But I shouldn't worry. He responds almost immediately and, as in all things, I can always count on his hunger. He is frantic in his pleasures, and I listen to the clock ticking on the nightstand.

* * *

We were the party of peaceful secession, then we were the party of bombs, and now we're the party of legitimization.

We argue for pluralism in the Hindustani Imperial Congress; we've won a few seats and Salvatore campaigns on the scratchy, dusty worlds that dot the forgotten edges of the Drop network. But who wants to give disaffected billions any real rights? Who wants democratically-elected nut jobs? Extreme conditions breed extreme thinking, Salvatore says.

All that Drop travel gives us nightmares and terrible lag; we have trouble leading normal lives when travel eats the years up. But anything for the cause, for the party, and for Salvatore's promised cabinet seat in the next election.

The Rights For All Party seeps into our dreams; we work to make it legitimate after twenty years of leaving bombs in diplomats' cars, several failed experiments, and a tenuous Diwali Day Peace Agreement. Meanwhile, we keep in touch with the underground arms trade.

Tenzin tells us the Chinese plan to Drop into the system of New Peshawar and take out the colony there. Tenzin says he hates the Hindustanis almost as much as the Chinese; empires are empires. Instability will be our chance for true democracy, Tenzin says. It'll be our chance to really punch a hole through that impenetrable Imperial court. I smirk. I frown.

I don't know how I feel about any of this anymore.

Emperor Babar-Krishna the Magnificent tells Salvatore behind closed doors that he's ready to let some of these old racial tensions go.

"It doesn't mean much of anything anymore, does it? All this pedigree and caste nonsense," His Imperial Highness admits, shaking his head. "Out here in the dark. What's the point? As long as you're not Chinese, you may as well be full Hindustani."

It's a significant political gain, it comes with enfranchisement and rights and recognition, and yet Salvatore seethes at being lumped together with his oppressors. *Former* oppressors, I remind him. In private, he fills me up with stories of the occupation at Venice. In private, I smell his hair and marvel at his inability to mellow with age.

"We've led violent lives," I say, his head resting on my chest. I trace patterns on his back. "Let's retire. Hey Ram."

"Hang up our dueling pistols?" he smirks.

"Dueling pistols come in boxes, dear, not holsters."

Salvatore is not a large man, and I wonder how he survived winters on the prison colony. His frame seems suitable for slipping between the cracks, for building tiny gadgets on factory floors, not for the tundra. But everything about him hardened in there – especially his sense of injustice.

He has a silvery scar trailing down his thigh, from hip to kneecap. One of his fingers is bent, the nail forever growing black and broken.

I knew him before and I knew him after. He doesn't mention New Peshawar again.

* * *

When New Peshawar is nuked, the entire Drop network goes insane. Two celebrity clones, a Shah Rukh Khan and a Shalu, were performing on the colony when the bombs fell, and stories spill out about the pedigree of the colony's governor, Balbir Singh. Everyone is very sympathetic and alarmed and indignant. There are rumors Governor Singh escaped before the mushroom clouds rose, but no one can find him – or the clones, for that matter.

It's counted as a great loss to the entertainment industry and to Hindustan.

In the ensuing congressional sessions on Delhi Prime, people accuse the Emperor of being lax on security. Things are destabilized, just like Tenzin wanted. Just like *we* wanted.

Salvatore raises his voice over the Speaker of the Low House and asks about the rights of the fringe colonies – who will protect them from these more brazen Chinese attacks? These attacks which will certainly come? Our glorious empire (*Hindustan zindabad!*) is *fraying!* Give the fringe colonists the right to defend themselves!

Privately, I wonder about those long-distance travelers out there. Those people stuck between Drops, in that nether region of space and time, hanging suspended while the Hindustani Empire renews its ancient war with China. There are people out there who don't realize the war ever ended in the first place. And there are things happening out there that we don't even know about. It's not the Emperor's fault, I think, if everything is fraying.

* * *

The Cannibal Count story starts with a prison, goes through a riot and torture by starvation, and ends in the radicalization of one man.

* * *

I met him, for the second time, about six months after he had escaped from prison. I ran into him at Tamarind's Chutney House, in the Parsee District of Delhi Prime. We were both poor then.

"I know you."

The green tea beer was buzzing through my skull, and I had to speak loudly to be heard over the cawing *adhaan* from the nearby mosque. I'd always been good with faces.

"You're the guy from Venice."

After ten years on guard duty, I could count on one hand all the weird immigrant stories: the naked lady, the family who changed their minds and tried to Drop back in the opposite direction, the cat. And I remembered Salvatore: Venice still stood out in my imagination as a mysterious, exotic place. Somewhere decaying but grand, quaintly European.

Salvatore had been eating his coconut chicken biryani; shoveling rice into his mouth by the handfuls. It was a frenzied, messy affair, and I felt strange interrupting him, like interrupting a carnivore over a carcass. But, like I said, the beer.

"I don't know what you're talking about," he said, mouth full.

"Shanti Narayan," I sat down opposite him. "I was the customs guard on your virgin Drop. You puked on my shoes, I remember."

Salvatore eyed me warily. “Here to return the favor?”

“Ha!” I laughed with a hiccup and a snort. “You’re funny.”

It had been six years ago, subjective time. He looked older than six-more-years. I let my laugh fade. I suddenly felt dizzy, sympathetic.

His eyes flickered over me, taking me in in pieces. I wonder now what sort of mosaic he was creating: edge of shoulder, trim of hair, eyelid, mouth (I gave a friendly smile), breasts.

“Oh yeah,” he said. “So... how are you doing?”

“Let me get you a beer!”

Green tea beer from the nearby Bonanza stall was nice, strong and cheap. I got some red bean beedis as well and swallowed mouthfuls of pink, creamy smoke. By the time we got to what the hell we were both doing in Delhi Prime, I felt tingly everywhere.

“Oh, I’m doing some Rights For All Party stuff too – “

“Really?” he looked skeptical, listing slowly to the side. His forehead shone. I felt a small victory: the food and the beer and the beedis were working on him too, I could tell. “Why the hell do *you* care?”

“What do you mean why do I care? Not everyone’s got to be working class and a formerly occupied Earther to be Rights For All,” I said. “Earth-born Euro-Hindustani, I mean... or is it Original Nations? You know what I mean. Insert PC term of your choice. Anyway, didn’t Fat Sharma ji himself say a piece of the hegemony would have to break off and join the underclass if society was ever going to change? I mean, I’m not saying you’re underclass or anything. *Arrey yaar*, I sound like such an idiot sometimes... all I’m saying is that I’m just handing out fliers, going to meetings, stuff. It’s not the revolution, but it’s something, right?”

At the mention of Fat Sharma, Salvatore’s eyes had brightened. I had said the right thing. We talked about Fat Sharma’s hypocritical modern Sharmaists. I thought with glee about my parents’ horror.

That evening, I invited him upstairs.

* * *

He still eats like he’s starving all the time.

The Emperor knows everything, they say. And the Emperor surely notices how Salvatore eats like he doesn’t know where his next meal is coming from, and he knows about the radicalization of prison towers, and he probably can guess about Rights For All’s links to the Tibetan anti-imperialist underground.

We get a message from a Rights For All sympathizer who shuffles papers for the court: it's safer to leave Delhi Prime.

"They're going to make an assassination attempt on Salvatore sir," the woman says. Salvatore sits, grim. "Things don't look too good for His Royal Highness, not after New Peshawar. They need to consolidate their power, get rid of any competition. Be flattered, Salvatore sir. You're the competition."

Salvatore hates it when people call him 'Salvatore sir'.

That night, I suggest taking a Drop somewhere; a really long one. We could lose ourselves between the cracks, I say. It would buy us some time. We could just sit this one out. The party will take care of itself; it always has.

"I'm not planning to go into a hundred-year hiding," he says. "Plus, the big ones have terrible lag."

Droplag is dangerous when you have bad memories.

Later, he is gasping and red in the face, holding my hips. "Maybe the party could use a good martyr."

I bite his chest, the skin above the heart.

* * *

I make plans anyway; it's impossible not to, given my training. I leave instructions to the deputies.

But it's all for nothing. The attack happens shortly after; predictable and admirably efficient. And I move slowly, like through cold honey, only to see Salvatore's white kurta blossom with red anyway. Someone tackles the assassin, but the girl is already limp in our security team's arms.

They say Salvatore's eyes were dulled in prison, but I still see their brightness, the charge of electricity. It hits me in the gut: I can't let that brilliance fade.

I cradle his head on my knees, he coughs blood on my shoes and whispers something about this being so cliché. But his words are already slurring, so I crouch closer and murmur again: Tell me about Venice.

The End

Angela Ambroz has published in Strange Horizons, Crossed Genres and the Anywhere But Earth anthology (forthcoming). She has lived in Italy, Fiji, England, India and now Boston. When not writing science fiction, she reviews movies at her blog, the [Post-Punk Cinema Club](#).

Identity Crisis:

Who are we, if we can choose who we are?

by Sarah Einstein

I have a confession to make, though in this particular company perhaps it will come across as more of a boast: I'm a huge gaming nerd. Every time a new Massively Multi-Player Online Role-Playing Game (MMORPG) with even a little bit of buzz behind it launches, I buy it. I don't play long—I rarely make it much past whatever is achievable in about twenty hours of game play with any one character, though I almost always play one character of each “race” through at least the starter towns. I don't have much interest in killing MOBs or collecting gear, get claustrophobic even in virtual dungeons, and can't stand the grind and mayhem of raiding, so I never even try to make it to end game. What I love is the chance to try on new, and often heretofore unimagined, identities. I can waste as much time playing around with character creation, when the game let's me fiddle with things like the bridge of my nose or the slope of my eyes, as I will ever put into playing that particular character.

For me, the fun is in stepping outside my embodied self for a little while and pretending to be someone completely other than who I really am. It's a pleasure that I don't get from single-player games; performing the identity requires the participation of others who are also performing fictional versions of themselves.

Avatars in virtual environments provide us with the opportunity for social interactions in which our physical representations are fully chosen. Sometimes we have purely fictive choices: Erudite, Blood Elf, Ogre, Raki, Bahmi, Twi'lek, Wookiee. Beings taken either from traditional high fantasy, science fiction, or created for specific game settings but not found anywhere outside the imagination. Sometimes, players are presented with choices based loosely on human identity constructs. Asheron's Call, one of the first such games, limited players to three “races” based loosely on European, Asian, and Middle Eastern traditions. It wasn't until the rise of more freeform virtual environments, such as There and Second Life, that users (because it no longer seems appropriate to call the members of these virtual communities “players”) were given the opportunity to create representations of themselves without any backstory beyond our own cultural understanding of the ways in which embodiment signifies identity.

I was an early participant in Second Life. I can recall, for instance, when there were only six “sims” and almost every active user knew every other active user, at least by reputation. When I first logged in, it never occurred to me to represent as anything but white and female. I chose a hippie-esque first name and a Jewish last name, Bhodi Silverman, and created an avatar who looked very much like me—same hair and eye color, fair skinned, with a prominent nose and an approximation of my perpetually unkempt hair—in every way but one. My avatar was painfully skinny. At the time, I was very overweight and this was the one part of my embodied experience that pained me, so I changed it. It was a simple thing, though eventually I came to understand that the ability to choose my physical appearance was actually very profound.

One thing you noticed, if you were on the grid back in those early days, is that there were an awful lot of white people in Second Life. Or, at least, an awful lot of white *avatars*. On the first MLK Day after the launch of Second Life, we held an [in-game discussion about it](#). Few answers

were generated by this event, but lots of questions were raised. What does race mean if one's visual representation is fully chosen? If the color of one's skin is as changeable as the color of one's clothing? What about gender, age, and able-bodiedness, all of which are currently signified by visual cues which are, for the most part, beyond our control outside virtual environments?

Vernor Vinge's *Rainbows End* is one of the most intriguing books I've read in the last year. It explores the possibilities of a world in which we view everything through a digital lens, and as a result are able to overlay our reality with fictive, mediated experiences. In Vinge's vision of the future, the world is part MMORPG, part Usenet, and part Google Everything. Underneath all of this, though, remain the embodied realities of human existence. His characters, for the most part, don't enhance their own appearance except when participating in specific activities or when in areas controlled by certain "belief circles"—people who have agreed to share a consensual reality, usually one based on fiction or popular media. Old men can become young again, but through medical intervention, not just visual pretense. A character who is a wheelchair user makes no attempt to appear able-bodied. The potential for radically departing from one's own "natural" appearance is, in this book, largely the prerogative of intelligence agents and spies. But the potential is there for anybody to elect their appearance, and thus to control the standard identity markers we use, rightly or wrongly, to tell us who somebody is.

Jay Garmon's excellent story [Perfection](#), which appeared in Issue 11 of Redstone Science Fiction, looks at possibilities of enhancing one's appearance to maximize one's attractiveness to a specific person. The protagonist uses complex software to read the responses of a woman he meets in a club and to tailor his appearance based on her nonverbal cues. They both create enhanced versions of themselves as part of the flirting process, and the knowledge that these representations are false has no impact on their ability to generate attraction. But neither changes what we would currently consider basic identity elements. They represent as being the gender, race, and general age which matches their embodied selves. How would the story be different if they had made one or more of these more radical changes as part of the seduction?

For this year's contest, we are looking for stories that explore what race, gender, age, able-bodiedness, size, and other visually represented identities axes will mean in a time when one's appearance is fully self-selected. Will everyone who works at Billy Bob's Old Timey Country Restaurant be required to represent as blue-eyed, white-skinned boys and girls just off the farm? Could whiteness become compulsory, at least during a shift at the local Cracker Barrel? Conversely, would urban dance clubs be full of white suburban teenagers wearing off-the-shelf representations of Tupac and MC Lyte, and if so, would this move us toward the much-vaunted "post-racialism" or be a degrading and racist exercise in cultural blackface?

In a world where people already have dramatic and expensive surgeries to become thinner, appear younger, what will happen to age and size? It seems inevitable that it would become culturally unacceptable — particularly for women — to represent as fat, except in a fetishized context. Would showing one's true body size become a feminist statement, the bra burning of a new era? Would wrinkles and gray hair mark someone as a counterculture radical in the same way that long hair and Grateful Dead t-shirts used to mark some men as hippies or eyeliner and dyed black hair mark others as Goth?

Will it become a point of pride for people with disabilities to maintain a visual representation that acknowledges their different embodiments... and will there be people without disabilities who represent as if they are disabled in order to be part of a community to which they don't really belong? Or do they? The disability community struggles with the question of whether those with Body Integrity Identity Disorder—people who feel they would be happier living as persons with disabilities, usually through amputation of a limb—are or are not persons with a disability. Will this mutability in representation create communities in which people can match their external appearance to their internal experience, and how would this impact our understanding of authenticity and essentialism? Is this freedom of expression or a cooptation of experience?

What do age and gender mean if a six year old girl and a ninety year old man can both represent as the same twenty year old female just by buying an off-the-shelf avatar package? Will the idea of “race” mean the same thing when one can be black, white, elvish, or orcish at will? What is “identity” in a world where everyone has the potential to be a shape-shifter?

A few hints before you begin writing. It's unlikely that a story about a sexual predator who uses this ability to infiltrate gatherings of children would win the contest. We're looking for greater depth and imagination than that tired trope. It's also unlikely that a piece which consists primarily of characters discussing the ethics of enhanced representation would win. Show us, don't tell us, the impact of these technologies. Finally, remember that the story is the most important thing. Give us characters we can care about and a plot that pulls us through the prose. Give us good writing and new ideas. Make us either wish we could live in your future or glad that we don't. Ultimately, this is a fiction contest, and the entries will be judged for their value as stories, and not for the political or social views taken up by the author.

I'm excited and happy to be judging the second Redstone Science Fiction contest, and can't wait to read your entries. I hope you are as inspired by this year's theme as I am.

Sarah

Sarah Einstein is a Puschart Prize winning author whose work has appeared in PANK, Fringe, Ninth Letter, Whitefish Review, and other literary journals. She is pursuing a Ph.D. in Creative Writing at Ohio University.

Enter Michael Ray.

Here's the plan:

- 1) The identity-themed story contest will open June 15 and remain open until August 15.
- 2) 4000 words max, 5 cents per word, and follow our [Guidelines](#).
- 3) Submit to **identitycrisis@redstonesciencefiction.com**.
- 4) Sarah & our editors will choose the best submission and the story will be scheduled for publication on September 1st.

Such Stuff as Dreams are Made On: Shakespeare and SciFi

by Henry Cribbs

As *Redstone* goes to press (or is it to post?) this month, I'm halfway through hearing seven plays in seven days at the [Oregon Shakespeare Festival](#). I must admit up front that I'm a huge bardophile. I've made the sacred pilgrimage to the Birthplace at Stratford, I've been a "groundling" in London's reconstructed Globe, and I "made a scene" for the Folger Shakespeare Library. I *might* even like Shakespeare more than science fiction. But fortunately I don't have to choose which of them is my favorite, since there's quite a bit of overlap. SciFi, in fact, draws a great deal from the playwright whom Ben Jonson said was "not of an age, but for all time."

"The heavens speed thee in thine Enterprise!" (*Julius Caesar* III.i)

Take, for example, *Star Trek* (in all its incarnations). It's obvious that many of the series writers drew inspiration from the Bard. Characters (especially Kirk) often quote William Shakespeare, and episodes sometimes self-consciously follow the plotlines of some of Shakespeare's plays. The best example is the "The Conscience of the King," in which Kirk's overly-cautious attempts to discover a suspected mass-murderer evoke the indecisive Hamlet's attempts to prove his uncle's guilt. The episode even includes a traveling troupe of players who act out part of *Hamlet* as a 'play within the play'.

If one went by titles alone, there is ample evidence of *Star Trek*'s indebtedness to old Will. Over a dozen episode titles are direct quotes from Shakespeare (with *Hamlet* winning the popularity award): "The Conscience of the King" (*Hamlet* II.ii), "Remember Me" (*Hamlet* I.v), "Thine Own Self" (*Hamlet* I.iii), "Mortal Coil" (*Hamlet* III.i), "Dagger of the Mind" (*Macbeth* II.i), "All Our Yesterdays" (*Macbeth* V.v), "By Any Other Name" (*Romeo & Juliet* II.ii), "How Sharper Than a Serpent's Tooth" (*King Lear* I.iv), "Once More Into the Breach" (*Henry V* III.i) and "The Dogs of War" (*Julius Caesar* III.i). Even the comedies are well represented: "Sins of the Father" (*Merchant of Venice* III.v), "Past [is] Prologue" (*Tempest* II.i), and "Heart of Stone" (*Twelfth Night* III.iv).

And for those historians who argue that the plays couldn't have possibly been written by a small-town, middle-class, relatively unschooled actor like William Shakespeare and so instead must really have been someone rich and powerful like the Earl of Oxford (or maybe even Queen Elizabeth herself), *Star Trek* has thrown its own candidate into this scholarly identity debate. In *Star Trek VI: Undiscovered Country* (the title of which is itself a line from the famous soliloquy in *Hamlet* III.i), the Klingon Chancellor Gorkon declares, "You have not experienced Shakespeare until you have read him in the original Klingon." And to make this experience possible, the Klingon Language Institute has even published a 'Restored Klingon Version' of *Hamlet*. Really. I'm not making this up. I have a copy. General Chang even quotes from it: "taH pagh taHbe" ('To be or not to be').

“O brave new world!” (*Tempest* V.i.)

The 1956 classic scifi film *Forbidden Planet*, the first film to show a human-constructed starship, is essentially a futuristic retelling of *The Tempest*, although *Forbidden Planet* is a tragedy rather than a comedy (though the guy does get the girl in the end). It's set on a planet instead of an island, but the essential ingredients are there. Instead of the wizard Prospero who commands a dead witch's elemental servant and enslaves the inhuman Caliban, we have the scientist Morbius, who has harnessed the technology of the extinct Krell and built a robot slave “Robbie” to do his bidding. The lovers Miranda and Ferdinand are represented by Altaira (Anne Francis) and Commander Adams (Leslie Nielsen), though the Prospero figure attempts to keep them apart rather than bringing them together. There's even a drunken cook standing in for Stephano the butler.

Gene Roddenberry said this film was a big inspiration for *Star Trek* (Alexander). Its legacy is clear. It contains a swaggering romantic captain, a wry and skeptical doctor, and a chief-engineer who can work miracle repairs, not to mention all the now-familiar gadgets, including phaser-style rayguns, personal communicators, and force shields. The ship even bears a striking resemblance to the *Enterprise*'s saucer-section. So if *The Tempest* inspired *Forbidden Planet*, which in turn inspired *Star Trek*, which has in turn inspired countless scifi authors since, where would scifi be today without Stratford's ‘upstart crew’?

“Knowing I loved my books, he furnished me... with volumes that I prize above my dukedom” (*Tempest* I.ii)

But I'm particularly interested in is how contemporary scifi authors work Shakespeare into stories. Throwaway Shakespeare quotes and rehashes of plots abound in scifi, but often the bard himself or his work becomes an integral part of a scifi story. A classic example is Isaac Asimov's short-short “The Immortal Bard,” which describes what might happen if Shakespeare could be brought forward to the present using “a simple matter of temporal transference.” Asimov himself also penned a mammoth non-fiction volume on Shakespeare (two volumes, actually, now available as one), *Asimov's Guide to Shakespeare*, which includes a scene-by-scene analysis and background discussion of all of the plays. (And yes, of course, I have it on my shelf. Right next to the Klingon *Hamlet*.)

Two Shakespearean scifi stories in particular struck me recently, William Sanders's “The Undiscovered” (1997) and Alexander Levine's “Seventh Fall” (both mentioned in previous columns, [RSF#8](#) and [#10](#) respectively). Both of these stories make Shakespeare an integral part of the story in some way, and confirm his greatness.

Native American scifi author William Sanders explores an alternate history where Shakespeare finds himself shipwrecked in America, living among the Cherokee. Narrated by a Cherokee storyteller, it shows how *Hamlet* might be received by a very different audience than Elizabethan England. While the tribe which adopts him winds up viewing the bard's masterwork more as a

comedy than a tragedy, Sanders ultimately shows us that Shakespeare is not only “for all time,” but for all people as well.

Hamlet makes another appearance in Alexander Levine’s “Seventh Fall,” though in the future rather than in the past. Levine paints a future landscape marred by gravitic upheavals caused by the moon breaking into pieces and falling to Earth. The protagonist is an itinerant actor named Varner, wandering the shattered land in search of a copy of the bard’s masterwork, avoiding bands of zealous bookburners and negotiating with warlords for the use of their hoarded libraries. He sings forgotten tales not just for his supper but for his very survival. The story shifts back and forth between Varner’s childhood and old age. Like the Dane he struggles to come to terms with the death of his father, whom he wants to avenge but cannot figure out how.

Shakespeare wrote of themes so universal, that it doesn’t even matter what universe they take place in. The future, the past, even other planets. One of *Redstone*’s mottoes is “We want to live forever.” The Immortal Bard figured out a way to live forever four centuries ago in his Sonnet 18: “So long as men can breathe or eyes can see, / so long lives this, and this gives life to thee.”

“O put me in thy books!” (*Taming of the Shrew* II.i)

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