



Cover Art by Cassandra Link

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## **Editor's Note – December 2010**

*by Michael Ray*

Welcome to Issue #7 of Redstone Science Fiction.

Things have been going quite well for us. We've had the opportunity to publish some exciting science fiction and have become part of the growing wave of online markets that are printing quality speculative fiction and paying writers a professional rate for their work. Despite the increased competition we have received a substantial number of outstanding stories in the time that we have been accepting submissions. We have found several stories this month that we enjoy, probably more than we can publish. This has allowed us to pick the stories that pass muster with all of us and fit what we are trying to present – outstanding modern examples of science fiction.

This month we have two excellent stories for you. Adam Colston, who was among the winners of the 2010 Writers of the Future Competition, wrote "[Paradoxically Correct](#)" which we immediately knew we wanted for our December/Holiday issue. A time travel story that takes us back to the days of the New Testament. It's an irreverent story that we think you will enjoy. Indrapramit Das' flash fiction story, "[Looking the Lopai in the Eyes](#)", examines the colonial experience through the eyes of a human colonial, returning to Earth as a diplomat and the emotional challenges that she must overcome.

The cyberpunk tradition in science fiction and its influence on our genre today is fertile ground for literary exploration & criticism. Here at RSF we are partial (of course) to short fiction and cyberpunk, so we convinced Henry Cribbs to examine two classic anthologies of the Cyberpunk Movement and tell us what he thinks and remind us of why these works were so important for our field in [High-Tech Low-Life in Long-Lived Short-'Shades](#).

We are fortunate to have an interview with a pioneer in the use of robots in the medical field, Dr. Harry Brown. Our publisher, Paul Clemons, had an [opportunity to talk to Harry](#) before he passed away and shares with us the physician's candor and unique perspective on medical science and science fiction.

We are excited to bring you this issue of Redstone Science Fiction and hope you find something here that you'll like.

Yours,  
Michael Ray  
Editor  
Redstone Science Fiction

# **Paradoxically Correct**

*by Adam Colston*

Like a punch in the face, blocks of reality assembled around Steve Orbison-Daltrey. The trans-temporal process completed and the world crashed together. Light, sound and gravity hammered his re-constituted senses.

“Jesus,” he said and swayed back and forth. He looked down at his body and quickly patted his chest. It felt real; relief washed through him. He’d never been that deep before. Thank God he’d done it in two jumps and not one big one.

He licked his lips, tasted the dust in the air, and squinted up at the hot sun. Already, it began to burn his pale skin.

It was the right sort of climate, the right sort of geography. It should be the Holy Land, about twenty-nine years after the birth of Christ—well, he corrected himself, twenty-nine years after the birth of some guy people later called Christ.

We’ll wait and see regarding the whole Messiah score, he thought with a wry smile.

Steve looked behind him.

In the distance a flock of birds wheeled in the heat haze over, what he assumed was, the City of Jerusalem. There were clutches of tents scattered here and there near the high city walls. A few beasts—camels and donkeys mostly—wandered among them. Through the great city gates people, carts and the odd horseman flowed in a constant stream.

The sun glinted off the helmets of a group of five legionnaires who sat in a circle by the gate, eating. Three other legionnaires leaned on spears and watched the traffic pass through the gate.

Steve pulled up the sleeve of his robe and his chrono-gen slithered playfully down his arm like a tiny silver snake. It pooled in his palm like liquid mercury and formed into a small three-dimensional woman’s face. It smiled up at him.

“Time and location co-ordinates match precisely those you requested, Steve. The jump was a complete success.”

“Thank you, Kali,” he told the personality. The chrono-gen morphed into a silver cricket that hopped back up his arm. It turned its head and looked at him.

“I have also updated your cortical terra-wires with local customs and language.”

“Thanks, Kali. You think of everything, as usual.”

“It’s my bloody job, you numbskull,” the cricket winked at him.

Steve laughed.

The air next to Steve crackled and fizzled. A dark tear appeared and a blast of air knocked him a few steps back. Andy Gelo stumbled from the rent.

Andy looked about, his eyes wild and unfocussed—jump-dazed, Steve guessed. Big jumps could do that.

Steve grabbed Andy's swaying shoulder and steadied him. Andy wore the same, nondescript, off-white robe as Steve.

Steve waited while Andy's brain de-fragmented.

He knew that his Dad would send someone as soon as Chrono-Central identified that he'd activated the stolen chrono-gen. He'd not expected his Dad's right-hand man to show up quite so soon—but then, he smiled, there was no such thing as a twelve hour head-start.

Andy glanced around quickly as though to get his bearings. He noticed Steve, a hint of a smile on his lips.

“My, you have been naughty, haven't you? Thought you got away with it, did you Steve?”

“Nah, I knew he would send you.” He looked at Andy levelly. “So, what did old George say, eh?”

“Geor—the professor, your father, said you are to return immediately. You haven't completed any of the advanced courses required for solo time-travelling; the paradox-avoidance training is essential for this type of deep-time exploration. You're not even cleared to travel back more than a month at your level, and this time you have travelled back...” He paused as a tiny silver lizard climbed from his shoulder and whispered something into his ear. “...nearly three thousand years. You have to come back.”

“Why?” Steve reached under his robe and pulled out a packet of cigarettes.

Andy looked in amazement at the Marlboros, and then up at Steve.

“Where did you get those?”

“I stopped off in the late twentieth century and got them—they're real. Want one?” Steve lit one and inhaled deeply. He offered the packet to Andy. “It's an acquired taste.”

“No, no.” Andy glance about. “You can't smoke here. It hasn't been invented yet. Someone might see you.”

“Neither has a chrono-gen, doesn't stop you having one, does it?” Steve took another puff and blew a smoke ring.

“A chrono-gen is a highly advanced liqua-life technology—it can hide, change shape—it’s cleverer than you are. A cigarette isn’t—it’s not an acquired taste it’s a drug addiction. Besides, your chrono-gen is what got you here, so you can hardly not have it, can you?” Andy waved a hand in the air and shook his head. “Anyway, forget it—let’s just get going. We can sync-up and jump together.”

“No.” Steve lifted his chin. “Andy, you know when I get back I’ll be barred for ten years at least.” He gave Andy a nervous grin. “I’m not coming back until I’m good and ready. I re-programmed my chrono-gen so you can’t force-sync it.” He shrugged. “Sorry.”

Andy nodded.

“Yeah, I know, I tried. Your father thought you would do that. He told me to give you this.” He handed Steve a small silver sphere. “It’s inactive, but no-one travels this deep and alone without a spare chrono-gen.” He looked wearily at Steve. “You would have to be an idiot to do so.” A small grin.

Steve took the sphere and slipped into the pocket of his robe.

Andy raised an eyebrow and looked suspiciously at Steve. “Tell me you did at least complete ‘The Dire Implications of Time Travel’ course, didn’t you?”

“Yeah, I completed it but...” He paused.

“But what?”

Steve looked sheepish. “I failed.”

“Oh, my god.” Andy shook his head and rolled his eyes.

He grabbed Steve’s shoulders and shook him.

“Remember you have to be like a ghost. You must have as little impact in this time zone as possible. Even if you buy some bread to eat, you could change the life of a child who was destined to survive by stealing that bit of bread. It’s just an example.” He looked earnestly in Steve’s eyes. “Do as little as possible, okay?”

Steve nodded but was uncomfortably aware of the twenty Swiss Army penknives he had stashed in his robe to trade with.

“Yeah, sure Andy. I promise...I’ll be like a ghost. No-one will know I was here.”

“Okay, well, be responsible. Just eat your Last-4-Ever ration pack while you are here and don’t forget to sterilise any water before you drink.” He looked Steve in the eyes. “Are you sure?”

“Yeah, I just want to look around a few days, then I’ll be back”

Andy Gelo grinned. “See you around. Any trouble, send a tachyon pulse and I’ll pop back.”

With a nod Andy disappeared. The air rushed into the void with a whump.

“Easier than I thought.”

Steve grinned, stumped out his cigarette, and started walking towards Jerusalem.

\* \* \*

Steve bit his fingernails as he waited. He slid down the wall onto the stony ground. It was early evening and a cool wind was dissipating the heat of the day, but it did little to calm him.

“So? Did it work?” Steve said as the chrono-gen stopped shimmering.

The chrono-gen morphed into Rodin’s ‘The Thinker’ on Steve’s leg. It looked up at Steve with a grin. “No, I can’t access any quantum level data, not even to send a tachyon pulse. We seem to be locked out.”

The wedding party inside seemed to be in full swing, judging by the sounds coming from the open window above him, but Steve felt only a rising panic; to be trapped for the rest of his life in biblical times was unthinkable.

There was tearing sound from the air a few feet away. Steve looked suspiciously at the chrono-gen.

“I thought you said it hadn’t worked.”

“It didn’t work...”

A blast of air sent Steve crashing back against the wall. A jump-drunk Andy Gelo stumbled from the rent in space-time fabric.

Steve grabbed Andy before he fell and lowered him to the ground. Andy’s eyes rolled around for a few moments before locking onto Steve’s. Andy’s eyes narrowed and he looked at Steve oddly.

“Who are you?”

“Steve,” Steve felt a spike of worry. Brain damage wasn’t a known side-effect of jumping. “You know me, Andy.” He gave the confused Andy his most reassuring smile. “S-t-e-v-e.” He patted his chest.

“Okay, I get it, I think.” Andy sat up and looked about quickly.

“We’re safe here, Andy.” Steve reassured him. “The wedding is round the front—no-one is going to come back here. They are having too much fun.”

Andy pulled out a small device and scanned Steve from head to foot. The device made a burping noise when it finished. Andy glanced at its small display.

“You have no idea what has happened, do you?” Andy looked serious and grabbed Steve’s robe, pulling his face close to his. “Something profound has happened.”

Andy let go and fumbled in a bundle he carried around his waist. He pulled out a disc of polished silver and handed it Steve.

“Look,” he said. Then his face softened. “Brace yourself, Steve.”

Steve frowned as he took the mirror. He slowly turned it and looked into it. He gasped. Somehow he’d got a beard and green eyes—it wasn’t his face—it was the face of Jesus staring back.

“What the f...I don’t...”

Andy put a hand on Steve’s shoulder and shook him. “Don’t panic. You are in a localised paradox bubble, Steve. At least I think so. The universe is trying to correct the mistake you made. That’s why your chrono-gen won’t work on you. It’s like the universe has put a filter around you, so you now conform to what has gone missing—at least as far as everyone here is concerned. You have become Jesus, for all intents and purposes, and history unfolds as it should, get it?” Andy frowned. “Your Dad sent me to find out exactly what happened—see what we can do to help you—” Andy’s chrono-gen scurried back to his ear and whispered something. “I have only a few moments with you—any more could theoretically trigger the bubble to...well, let’s just say we haven’t ever come across this before, but we don’t want to find out, quite yet. So what happened?”

Steve’s mouth dropped open as he tried to understand what Andy had said—

Steve felt the sting as Andy slapped him round the face.

“Focus, Steve—what exactly did you do?”

Steve put his palm on his stinging cheek.

“Er...okay, Andy, no need to hit me, Jeez.” He looked about the darkening skies. “Well, I met the Jesus guy a few weeks ago—good guy, by the way—very funny. He’s pretty clever and has his followers tied up tight around him with all this hocus-pocus stuff. But I never saw any miracles. I thought it would be fun to show him the chrono-gen.” Steve glanced quickly at Andy Gelo. “Just quickly. I thought he would think of it as real miracle or something. Y’know, impress him...”

Andy sighed. “Then what happened?”

“Well, I gave him the dormant one to look at...” Steve paused and narrowed his eyes, “I’m not completely stupid y’know.” He continued, “Jesus looked at it and prodded it a bit and then all of a sudden it wasn’t dormant anymore, but wriggling around on his palm. Jesus winked at me and then just puffed out of existence.” Steve looked about with a shake of his head. “That was about fifteen minutes ago.”

Andy nodded. “Well, we rigged that spare one to bring you directly back to Chrono-Central if you used it. So imagine our surprise when Jesus suddenly popped into being in the Return room yesterday. He’s said he won’t come back. He’s been watching holo-vis shows and shopping.” Andy grinned. “He is very funny...” Andy frowned. “The fact is we can’t force him to come back—it would be ...unethical—so you’re gonna have to stay here be him until we can come up with some idea of how to extract you.”

Steve nodded, “Shit.”

Andy waved at the sounds of the party, going on inside. “This is The Wedding at Cana, isn’t it?”

Andy lifted an eyebrow. “This is Cana, and it’s A wedding, sure. What do you mean by *the* wedding?”

“Don’t tell me you don’t know the anything about the story of Jesus?”

Steve looked at the dirt.

“I know enough. He’s meant to be the some messiah—saves the world, and all that—but I don’t know ALL the details, no.” Steve admitted—no point lying. “It was a long time ago, and virtually no-one believes this stuff anymore.”

Andy sighed. “This is where Jesus did his first miracle. Soon they are going to run out of wine and you are going to have to turn a couple of urns of water into wine.”

“How?”

“I brought these sachets, they contain flavour concentrates, mild psychoactive sedatives, which will replicate the effect of alcohol, and colourings. Your chrono-gen can stick them in the water urns for you when no-one is looking.”

Steve nodded as he considered the task.

“Okay, but what about later, aren’t there other miracles...?”

Andy grabbed Steve’s robe. “Look you’re gonna have to wing it, Steve. I can’t stay any longer. Here’s my notes... read what you can before they auto-dustify,” he said shoving some paper in Steve’s hand.

Andy blinked out of existence and the resulting vacuum sucked Steve off balance and he crashed forward onto the dirt.

“Master?”

Steve looked up from where he was lying on the ground to see Peter frowning down at him.

“Unh?” He paused, remembering the situation, “Yes, Peter?”

“Master, the party is over; they have run out of wine.”

Steve shook his head. Shit. This, of all the moments of his life, was one when he could have really handled a drink. Then he remembered the sachets. “Give me a minute...”

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“Peter,” Steve said, “I must go to, er, yonder grove of olive trees and spend some time alone in the presence of my father, God.”

“We shall wait for you here, master,” said Peter.

“Good—do that...er, I mean remain here until I return.”

“Yes, Lord.”

Steve gave a quick smile, then—trying not to run— he crossed to the olive trees on the far side of the Garden of Gethsemane.

As soon as he was hidden from sight, he pulled out a battered packet of Marlboro’s from his tunic and lit up. He inhaled deeply.

“Thank god,” he muttered, blowing a smoke ring.

The air next to him fizzled and Andy popped into existence. He brought with him a brown paper bag in one hand and a cup of coffee from Starbucks in the other.

“Hi,” Andy said, glancing about suspiciously. “Are we safe here?”

Steve grabbed the coffee from Andy and lifted it to his mouth.

“Yeah. I wouldn’t be smoking, would I? What, do you think I’m an idiot?”

Steve paused, coffee cup near his mouth and looked at Andy’s face for a moment.

“Don’t answer that, Andy. Did you bring more cigarettes? I’m nearly out again.”

“Yeah, in the bag.” Andy offered the bag to Steve.

Steve handed him the coffee cup.

“Take this cup from me, Andy.”

Andy took the cup and Steve took the paper bag.

“I have some bad news too, Steve.”

Steve lit another cigarette.

“Oh, yeah? How bad?” He lifted an eyebrow, “Spit out then, what did the professor say?”

“He won’t drug Jesus to make him come back. Says it’s ethically wrong and besides, what with him being the Son of God, it could be a mortal sin, so no-one is prepared to take the risk.”

Andy gave a dreamy smile. “Jesus did say to wish you good luck. Which I thought was nice of him, wasn’t it? Nice chap—always thinks of others.”

“...always thinks of others?” Steve spluttered. “What about bloody me?” He grabbed Andy’s robe and shook him. “You do realise this is the goddamn Garden of Gethsemane and that prick, Judas, has been giving me a funny look all night. My knowledge of the scriptures may be hazy at best, but I seem to remember this being somewhere near the end of the story.”

“Well, you shouldn’t have let him use the spare Chrono-gen then, should you?” Andy snapped, but quickly looked away.

Steve let go of Andy’s robe and slumped to the ground. “I know it’s not your fault. This is just doing my head in—constant holiness—it’s just not me, I’m not like that.” He pulled on the last bit of the cigarette and stumped it on the dusty ground. “So what’s the plan, how do you get me out?”

“Well, we are brainstorming again.”

“Brainstorming? You’ve kept me hanging on here for three sodding years and you’re telling me you’re back at the brainstorming stage—again?” Steve’s shoulders slumped, “So, give me my briefing, then. What happens next? What am I allowed to know?”

Andy’s face blanched and he shuffled from one foot to the other.

“Well, there’s some more bad news, I am afraid. We weren’t sure whether to tell you.”

“Spit it out,” Steve said suspiciously.

“Well, there is some, er... flogging, and then they crucify you...” Andy smiled brightly, but not very convincingly, “but I am sure we will come up with something before that happens.”

“Flogging? Crucify me?” Steve looked at him, struggling to comprehend. “Well, sod it, I simply won’t do it. I’ll just live in this time zone. Fuck it.”

“Yeah, the professor thought you might say that...”

“Did he? So what else did Professor George, know-it-all, Orbison-Daltrey have to say about that?”

“He said the paradox bubble would expand until it encompassed the known universe, at which point it would collapse to a nil-point causing the de-existence of everything.” Andy looked at the floor for a moment before looking up. “We will all die, mate. It’s up to you to save us all.”

Steve looked at him.

“You’re shitting me?”

\* \* \*

Steve felt the agony straining at the boundaries of the pain-killers, as it tried to force its way into his mind and tear it apart.

A constant stream of blood ran from his shredded back, down his thighs and dripped, from his knees, onto the dusty road. The crown of thorns dug into his head and the wooden cross was bloody, bloody heavy. He dragged it down the narrow crowd-lined street like a robot.

At least the stimulants helped.

“Keep moving.”

The Roman soldier cracked his whip and his back burned briefly from the lash. At least the med-implant Andy inserted was working. He looked dully at the jeering crowd on each side of the street. He could see their mouths moving, but heard only a dull roar.

Where the hell was Andy? He had said he would be here, said he was certain they would have solved the paradox problem by now.

Steve shook the blood out of his eyes and trudged on.

Why the hell did this have to happen to him?

Suddenly a figure darted out from the crowd and mopped his brow with a damp cloth.

“Steve,” He heard the whisper, “It’s me—Andy. Shit, you look awful, Steve. Man, what have they done to you?”

Steve lifted his head and looked into Andy’s worried eyes.

“Andy?” He said with a croaky voice, “You gotta get me outta here, man—now. I mean it—I don’t know if I can take anymore.”

“The professor is running some incredibly complex time-line models to see which will give us a way out for you, he said to tell you just to hang on in there for a while until the program completes.”

Steve looked at him blankly.

“Hang on in there...? You don’t mean hang,” he croaked, “as in hang on a cross while being crucified, with big iron nails pounded through your hands and feet, do you?”

“Er, no...” Andy rubbed his chin, “Well, maybe. That’s what he said anyway. So—”

“Hey, that’s enough,” said legionnaire as he thrust Andy away.

\* \* \*

He meant well. Steve knew that. The legionnaire had meant to help him by jabbing him with the spear, but it hit the implant under his ribs, damaging it. The red stimulant/analgesia medication ran down his side mixed with the blood from the flesh wound.

Pain—a symphony of pain beyond description—erupted and enveloped his total being as the effects of the meds ran out.

“My god, Dad...” he screamed as writhed in agony against the nails trapping his body to the cross, “why aren’t you fucking helping me...?”

“Hey.”

Gasping, Steve turned to look at the man on the cross next to him. The man’s eyes were sunken.

“If you’re the Son of God... then get down from the cross and save yourself.”

Sweat and blood dripped into Steve’s eyes as he looked at the man; fleeting thoughts of lashing out at this idiot by ending the entire universe passed through his mind.

“Fuck off.”

The paradox bubble could tolerate a little swearing, he knew that.

Then he saw Andy standing with the small crowd at the foot of the cross, a smile on his face. He seemed to be holding something. He mouthed something a few times at Steve.

Steve struggled to understand. *See you soon*. Was that it?

But then all the lights went out.

\* \* \*

“Welcome back, son.”

Steve opened his eyes. Everything was white and glowed with a brilliance beyond imagining. He lifted a hand to his shield his eyes.

“What the fu...where?”

George Orbison-Daltrey’s face blocked the bright light above him.

“We got you out. Touch and go for a moment, I can tell you. We played out all the simulations, but it was no-use. The only way was to go through with it. You did a sterling job.”

Steve lifted himself onto an elbow as his eyes adjusted to the bright light and looked around. Andy Gelo stood leaning against the white wall of the med-room a lazy grin on his face. Small med-bots scurried around.

He was back in Chrono-Central, in the med-centre. Steve felt relief wash over him. He glanced at his hand. It was as though a massive iron nail hand never been pounded through it—not even a scar.

Steve’s father carried on, “There was nothing we could do. No point telling you. The paradox bubble only disappeared when you’d played the role fully. Nanites kept you ticking over in a suspended state until we could zap you out of the cave.” He smiled. “Course it helped that Jesus agreed to go back for forty days, as long as we promised to record all his holo-vision shows for him to watch when he gets back.”

Steve shook his head. “So aren’t you mad with me, Dad? No big lecture?”

George smiled. “I suppose I should be, but the truth is you’re just like I was at your age—inquisitive. I travelled back to Nazareth when I was a young man to see if Jesus really was the product of an immaculate conception or, she was so beautiful...” he trailed off and looked at the floor. “Well, there’s no need to re-hash ancient history. Water under the bridge and all that, eh?”

George Orbison-Daltrey smiled and patted Steve’s arm.

## **The End**

*Adam Colston lives in Exeter in the United Kingdom with his partner and son. He mostly writes science-fiction or fantasy, but dabbles in horror/dark fantasy when the mood grabs him by the ankle and hauls him into the shadows. He is a recent winner of Writers of the Future; his sci-fi story, ‘Not in the Flesh’, appears in the twenty-sixth anthology of the series (2010). Adam’s works have also appeared in Orson Scott Card’s InterGalactic Medicine Show, and Dark Spires Anthology as well as other print and online venues. You can keep up with Adam at his blog: [www.adamcolston.co.uk/wordpress](http://www.adamcolston.co.uk/wordpress).*

# Looking the Lopai in the Eyes

by Indrapramit Das

Earth almost looks like home, from here. Brilliant blue, cloud-clothed. More visible land-masses, but otherwise strikingly similar. But Alwaea knows it will be very different. She touches the cold window, tracing with her finger the sun-brightened curve of the planet her genes were forged in. The planet that decided, so long ago, what she would look like, right down to the pattern of spirals on her fingertip, delicately imprinted on the glass.

Alwaea knows that Earth did not decide who she would become, and that is all she has.

Her hand is trembling.

She is the Ambassador, she tells herself. She was chosen for this.

She will soon meet the governments of all the countries that sent their diaspora across the galaxy to populate her home. She cannot imagine the myriad cultures, the clashing languages, the opposing ideologies, the boiling throng of violent discord she understands Earth to be. She can barely imagine a planet inhabited by billions of humans, when her world has yet to host even a million.

When she first saw Earth through the portholes, it almost felt like she hadn't slept for years, nurtured by robots, while her vessel folded space around itself. It felt like she hadn't left at all. But the closer she comes to the planet, the more different it seems. The glass squeaks as Alwaea runs her fingers across it. This time she traces them along the shorelines she can now see below the clouds. In her mind, they evoke the Earth-map of hundreds of countries she had studied when she was younger, so different from the undivided canvas of her world's supercontinent. The map had confused her, especially when her mother told her it was obsolete because of temporal distance and shifting politics.

Alwaea's home is one world, and one country. She represents a single government, though her people have a different word for it.

She closes her eyes and thinks of the vast open spaces of her world. Of staring into the crafty yellow eyes of the *Lopai* on her nineteenth birthday, winter-breath lit up by the sister stars. She had locked her arms around its horns and rammed her booted feet onto its simian hands, hard enough to shock but not to break. She had wrestled the devil of the steppes to the ground, snow turning to slush underneath them, and she had let go and spoken one of the twenty words the *Lopai* speaks, one that her mother had taught her. She had watched it run from her on all fours, graceful muscles rippling and horns lowered sideways in submission, its long tail a whiplash against the white ground. She had laughed at the wet red of her hands, when she touched her bloody face.

Alwaea opens her eyes, and she is still shaking. She has never been this afraid in her life.

She opens the envelope in her hand, takes out the letter inside. It is from her mother, who was also Ambassador. It has been years since she handed it to Alwaea, on the surface of their world. The vacuum seal of the locker it was in has kept it from weathering. The handmade paper is still crisp, if a little warped. She can even smell the overwhelmingly familiar, fruit-sweet traces of *pyrap* musk her mother wore as perfume, hiding under the smoky scent of brewed ink. Alwaea has waited for all of her voyage to read the letter, as she was told to. She reads it aloud, so the whispered words reverberate in the cramped landing capsule.

“Don’t let them look down on us, Alwaea, like they did to me. You’re far stronger than I. Show them how we’ve grown, and show us how you’ve grown. Come back with our independence in your hands.”

Alwaea’s chest tightens to see her mother’s slanted handwriting again, after this endless voyage of cold sleep. She should feel fury at the letter, the way it leaves no room for failure, no room for concern, even. But she thinks of the time her mother sat in a capsule much like this one, approaching Earth, both her parents long dead from pre-vaccine contagions. Her mother, who came to Earth and failed at diplomacy, failed to show its nations that her home no longer needed to be called a colony, but a world of its own.

No, Alwaea thinks. Light-years away from home, she cannot remain angry at the woman who taught her to tame the devil of the steppes, to look the *Lopai* in the eyes, the woman who had kissed her bloody forehead and come away with lips red to show her pride. Alwaea knows that her mother might not be alive anymore by the time she returns to her world. But she will bring their independence with her all the same.

Alwaea puts the letter in her lap. Earth comes closer, little by little, the sun glaring off the mirrors of its oceans. Her people’s motherworld, still beautiful despite its age. Yes. Alwaea will show Earth how they’ve grown, in the solitude of another constellation. She realizes she is no longer shaking.

Alwaea touches her face. Her palms come away wet, and she laughs.

## **The End**

*Indrapramit Das is a writer and artist from Kolkata, India. In 2008, he graduated with a BA in English and Creative Writing from Franklin & Marshall College, in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. He is currently in Vancouver working towards an MFA in Creative Writing at the University of British Columbia. His short fiction has appeared in Flash Fiction Online, and is forthcoming in The Speculative Ramayana Anthology, slated for publication in 2011 by Zubaan Books (India). He is also a short fiction reviewer for Tangent Online.*

# High-Tech Low-Life in Long-Lived Short-‘Shades: Two Classic Cyberpunk Anthologies

by Henry Cribbs

After reading William Gibson’s *Neuromancer*, the “quintessential cyberpunk novel” (as Bruce Sterling calls it), earlier this year (see [RSF#3](#)), and James R. Strickland’s more recent “post-cyberpunk” *Looking Glass* last month (see [RSF#6](#)), I got the itch to revisit some of the classic cyberpunk writers from the Eighties. I found two anthologies which together provide an excellent introduction and overview of the genre: *Mirrorshades: The Cyberpunk Anthology*, edited by Bruce Sterling (henceforth abbreviated MtCA), and *Storming the Reality Studio: A Casebook of Cyberpunk and Postmodern Fiction*, edited by Larry McCafferey (henceforth abbreviated StRS). Both are well-worth a read (or even a re-read, in my case).

Sterling published his anthology in media res, that is, during the heyday of the cyberpunk movement (1986), and thus is representative of the genre as authors perceived it at the time. McCafferey’s anthology is more of a literary retrospective, with the advantage of some hindsight situated several years later (1991). McCafferey’s casebook thus analyzes the genre a little more critically, traces its roots, exemplifies its themes, and compares it to and situates it within the “mainstream” postmodern movement as a whole. While MtCA contains only fiction (with the exception of Sterling’s insightful “Preface”), StRS provides a number of nonfiction pieces as well, including interviews, literary criticism, and philosophical discussions of both cyberpunk and postmodernism (even including a reprint of Sterling’s “Preface” for its historical influence in defining the movement). Also included is an annotated chronological list of sixty-two works (books, movies, music, and other media) which “helped to shape the cyberpunk ideology and aesthetics” (Richard Kadrey and Larry McCafferey’s “Cyberpunk 101” in StRS). While there is much overlap in authors in the two anthologies – indeed, all but two of Sterling’s chosen writers also appear in McCafferey’s anthology – only two selections are duplicated: Bruce Sterling’s “Preface” and Pat Cadigan’s “Rock On.” (And those two are certainly worth duplicating.)

In his “Preface” (MtCA & StRS) Bruce Sterling lists several labels which were attached to this sci-fi subgenre. Such labels included “Radical Hard SF, the Outlaw Technologists, the Eighties Wave, the Neuromantics, the Mirrorshades Group.” ‘Cyberpunk’ is the label which stuck. I contend this is because the term’s two roots nicely capture two central ideas which are juxtaposed, analyzed, and synthesized in cyberpunk literature. Pretty much all of cyberpunk’s recurring and defining themes can be loosely categorized into one of these two aspects: ‘cyber’ and ‘punk.’

As Timothy Leary points out in his essay “The Cyberpunk” (StRS), the term ‘cyber’ comes originally from the Greek *kubernetes*, meaning “pilot.” The scientist Norbert Wiener adapted this term in coining the word “cybernetics” to delineate the “entire field of control and communication theory, whether in the machine or in the animal.” So part of the ‘cyber’ in cyberpunk has to do with communication and control. Indeed, many cyberpunk writers highlight

how the flow of information in a media-saturated society can be used by individuals, groups, corporations, and governments to manipulate governments, corporations, groups, and individuals. And as information technology continues to advance, such control will become more subtle and yet more pervasive. Some examples: In Pat Cadigan's "Rock On (MtCA & StRS)" Man O'War's conglomerate is able to identify, track, buy out, and neutralize Gina's captors before they even realize they have been noticed, simply by analyzing global music data and marketing trends; Harold Jaffe's "Max Headroom" (StRS) illustrates how subtle changes in wording of news reports can affect consumers; Ted Mooney's Easy Travel to Other Planets (excerpt in StRS) posits that information excess can even cause physical harm, such as "bleeding from the nose and ears, vomiting, deliriously disconnected speech, apparent disorientation, and the desire to touch everything."

Since cybernetics does not distinguish between man and machine, the cyber part of cyberpunk often also includes a blurring of the distinction between man and machine through advanced technology. This can take the form of mechanical or electronic prosthetics, such as the blind Stone's replacement eyes in Paul Di Filippo's "Stone Lives" (MtCA); augmentation, such as Molly's eyes and claws in Gibson's Neuromancer (excerpted in StRS); or modification like the Mechanists in Sterling's "Twenty Evocations" (StRS); up to outright replacement of an entire human, as when the deceased Flatline's personality is reproduced in a virtual construct (also in Neuromancer), or a pure artificial intelligence may even be created, such as Aleph in Tom Maddox's "Snake-Eyes" (MtCA). The blurring of man and machine is sometimes even stretched so much as to erase the boundaries between physical and mental reality completely, as with Gibson's 'cyberspace' Matrix, John Shirley's Plateau in "Wolves of the Plateau" (MtCA), and the hooded virtual experience of Marc Laidlaw's "Office of the Future" (StRS).

The question of what is real is also raised by the reproducibility of images made possible by information technology. Easily reproducible ad infinitum, photographs begin to stand in for reality – acting like what Jean Baudrillard, in "The Automation of the Robot" (StRS) calls 'simulacra.' In Don DeLillo's White Noise (excerpted in StRS), people who go to take photographs of "the most photographed barn in America" never actually see the barn itself, because they are so busy taking photographs of it. "We're not here to capture an image," says the character Murray, "We're here to maintain them....They are taking pictures of taking pictures." In Sterling and Gibson's "Red Star, Winter Orbit" (MtCA), memories of videos of a Mars landing have taken the place of the memories of the actual event for Pilot Tajana. She says, "I hardly remember. I've seen the tapes so often, now I remember them instead. My memories of Mars are any schoolchild's." (One is reminded of the replicants in Blade Runner, themselves a type of simulacra, who collect photographs to reinforce memories of an entirely artificial past.) Reproducible images can even begin to create reality, as a photographer in Gibson's "The Gernsback Continuum" (MtCA) begins to perceive an alternate world after taking too many photos of 1950's architecture.

While the ‘cyber’ aspect of cyberpunk includes such high-tech elements which raise ontological questions of what it is to be human, and even what it is to be real, the ‘punk’ aspect brings in an additional set of themes. These are sometimes contradictory, as the word ‘punk’ can suggest both ‘seedy’ and ‘self-reliant,’ and its connotations include avant-garde music, psychotropic drugs, violent crime, and anti-establishment counterculture. All of these find expression in cyberpunk.

Music plays a recurring and often important role in cyberpunk narratives. Author John Shirley, himself a punk rock performer, portrays Rickenharp, a one-time old-school rock star whose unwired performances have become obsolete in the high-tech world of “Freezone” (MtCA). In Cadigan’s “Rock On” (StRS & MtCA) Gina is a ‘sinner,’ a human music synthesizer, able to create music through purely mental collaboration when wired up to the brains of instrumentless musicians. In Sterling and Gibson’s “Red Star, Winter Orbit” (MtCA), a Soviet cosmonaut bootlegs American music from satellite transmissions which he intercepts at his orbital space station.

Mind-altering drugs also play a prominent role, surfacing in almost every example in the genre. The protagonist of James Patrick Kelley’s “Solstice” (MtCA) is a famous ‘drug-artist’, creating designer drugs for mass consumption. Rickenharp in Shirley’s “Freezone” (MtCA) is a recovering ‘blue mesc’ addict. The KGB man in Sterling and Gibson’s “Red Star, Winter Orbit” uses a drug called ‘Fear’ to get his revenge on the man who has cuckolded him. Case pops ‘dex’ in pale pink octagons in *Neuromancer* (StRS), as a replacement for his addiction to cyberspace which he can no longer access. This pervasive use of psychotropic drugs raises similar questions of mind and reality to those raised by high-tech.

Cyberpunk, in focusing on both the cyber and the punk, is able to milk this fertile intersection of high-tech and low-life. I use the term “low-life” guardedly, and somewhat ironically. I certainly do not mean to imply that the protagonists of cyberpunk are inferior in any way – except in the eyes of the multinational megacorporate establishment. In fact, Leary’s essay (StRS) argues that cyberpunk heroes, in standing up to (or cannily sidestepping) these forces which control and constrain the everyman in our high tech futures (and present), are exactly the sort of heroes we need, people who disregard the rules and think for themselves, rather than walk the line that has been drawn for them, thinking only what they are told to think.

So maybe we need a little more cyberpunk in this postmodern world. If you need a little more, pick up one of these anthologies.

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

# **An Interview with Dr. Harry Brown**

*by Paul Clemmons*

I first met Harry Brown by mistake. While trying to track down a physician with a similar name, I foolishly trusted my friend L.D. to get me the contact info. Five seconds into the conversation, I knew I had the wrong guy. Little did I know, I was lucky beyond belief. If you buy the notion that laughter is the best medicine, Harry Brown's warped, bitter brain may well be a panacea.

Harry was a World War II veteran and he completed an engineering degree after his service. He went on to complete medical school as well. He combined these fields and became heavily involved in the research that led to the development of "robotic surgery."

Harry practiced several other medical specialties, survived several marriages, and tried his hand at several businesses. He was a vocal critic of the culture that has grown up around the medical field, particularly the insurance and medical device industries.

I was fortunate enough to have a conversation with Harry before he passed away, and I am pleased to be able to share his thoughts with you here.

**Thanks for agreeing to this interview. So our readers understand that I'm not treating you disrespectfully, you've specifically forbade my calling you "Doctor". Can you tell our readers why?**

I don't care. I always thought of calling someone "Doctor" was silly. "Doctor" is an honorific, bestowed on me by people who give a shit about me graduating medical school. There are tons of ways to get that honorific, and, at this point in my life, having graduated from medical school has less to do with who I am than what I do every day. If there is an honorific for calling it like I see it, not harming other folks, and paying my way, I'll take that. When I practiced medicine, I told my patients to call me Harry. Some of them didn't like that, but I think most of them did.

**Over the years, you've been involved in a variety of advancements in medical technology. What would you be willing to tell us about that part of your life?**

When I was young, I talked about all sorts of ideas with other hotshot guys who wanted to save the world, get rich, and get laid. Some of those ideas panned out, some of them didn't. I'd like to think that I had something to do with robotic surgery—we've been talking about how to do that since the 60's. A bunch of guys over in Europe took off with the ideas, pretty much because they were able to get funding, and, face it; the rest of the world has very different ideas about research from us. They get more support, and can get away with a lot of shit that'd get us shot here.

**I assume you mean that figuratively.**

Assuming will get you in deep. No, I don't mean shot, but if I'd have tried some of the stuff they did over there, I'd be called all sorts of names, and scandal will get your funding yanked pretty

quick. The Europeans weren't evil pricks like those guys at Tuskegee (referring to the infamous Public Health Service Syphilis study, where a branch of the U.S. Government allowed a group of men, all of African ancestry and infected with syphilis, to go untreated for forty years), but they were allowed to break a few eggs, if you get my meaning. It takes a long time to develop new equipment and new techniques here. Companies spend a ton of money on development, and then a ton of money to sell their product. Yeah, they invest a lot, and then they use that as an excuse to rape the government, or whomever they can get to pay—and of course that's usually not the patient.

**What can you tell us about the early prototypes for robotic surgery that you worked with?**

Well, a lot of people were excited about waldoes. People had been working with such things since before the depression, and a lot of people give Heinlein credit for coming up with the idea for using them for doing things remotely. Well, the idea for doing surgery on some poor sap a hundred miles away sounded great. I'm talking about the fifties, and if you lived in a small town, you didn't have shit by way of surgeons. I figured that I'd live the high life in Chicago, and we'd have huge academies of surgery, operating on folks all over the Midwest, without having to go get cowshit on our shoes. In those days, you didn't want to live in a small town, let me tell you. My big idea was taking waldoes and "gearing down" the movements of my hands, making incisions beyond the precision of human skill. Well, we never came up with a way to do it, but a bunch of guys overseas did. Now urologic surgery has been completely re-designed, by this technology.

**Did you make much progress in your own research?**

Hell no. In those days, you couldn't get money for that kind of research, unless you were a lucky bastard at a big University. In the Midwest, if you had no connections and no impressive resume, you didn't get funding. Nowadays, they throw money around, and most of the so-called research that gets done is bullshit. Research has become a business of its own, and most programs care more about maintaining their bureaucracies than changing the world.

**Please share with our readers your thoughts about health insurance.**

I was practicing medicine when private insurance was making it's rise, and when Medicaid and Medicare were introduced. I believe that anything that separates a patient from their medical decision-making leads to outcomes the patient doesn't want, waste, and inefficiency. Private insurance was brought about because of the government meddling with wage laws. Private insurance led to an increase in the cost of delivering care and disproportionate access to medical care. This led to Medicare and Medicaid, which really fucked everything up. It's a political reality that we'll have to have some sort of centrally controlled healthcare system, and, as much as I hate it, I don't really see a way around it. Of course, in the meantime, the insurers will keep making huge profits, will keep buying elected officials, and will keep interfering in the relationship between a patient and his physician.

Another thing that is wrecking our healthcare system is the stupidity and ignorance of the average American. If you don't know anything about how your body works, you are at the

mercy of people who do know. And those folks that do know are at the mercy of the people who control the system, and they often have no idea as to what's going, medically. Combine that with poorly set expectations and a lack of understanding of how to maintain your own body, and you have the script for a bad tragic comedy.

Medical care will continue to get more specialized, more complex, and more expensive, and the money to fund it will get scarcer and scarcer. I'm curious to see what happens.

**You mentioned Robert Heinlein's influence earlier, was there other science fiction that influenced your career?**

During my early medical career, I didn't really have time for that sort of thing. As a kid though, I read all of the pulp magazines that I could get my hands on, and I loved listening to Buck Rogers and Flash Gordon on the radio. I probably would have done better in high school and college if I hadn't been reading so many Sci-Fi paperbacks. My group of friends was passionate about science fiction and, this probably led us to be more interested in science, in general. We all wanted to be space pilots or research scientists. I ended up being neither, but being so wrapped up in Sci-Fi probably made me more interested in my physics and math than I would have been otherwise.

After I quit practicing medicine in the 70's, I tried a lot of different jobs, wives, and ways of living. I moved to California, and I was seeing more movies than reading then, and "Blade Runner" really made me look at big city life in a different way. Star Trek, which I also loved, and watched with my kids, was a clean, optimistic future. Blade Runner is probably a lot closer to what we're moving towards. Sprawl, filth, big corporations and the government taking control of most everything. Technology will get to the point that most people can't understand it, and then it'll be like religion or magic, or something. People will just be organic parts in a big machine-like society. Hell, we're pretty much there, now. I go into an electronics store, and I don't know what half the shit in there is, what it's for, or how to use it. What's worse is, I don't understand *how* it does what it does. If you can't understand the equipment of your society, you aren't really a part of it. I built my own radios when I was a kid. In highschool, I could tell you how everything from a telephone to a cable car worked. Today's technology has totally passed me by, though. But it's passed by a lot of you young people, too.

**So, SF has led you to predict a grim future?**

Hell, I'm old. Everything is grim. But yes, the science fiction that I think of as being the most accurate is probably the most pessimistic. I hadn't really thought about it much until I saw Blade Runner, but yeah...that sort of dystopia makes more sense to me, than all the happy dipshits running around in pajamas with ray guns.

**What would you most want to see changed in our society's interaction with science and technology?**

We need to catch up to the goddamn Asians. I think that we probably train a small percentage of our people really well, and that most of our kids are shuffled through school without much

benefit to society or to them. We need to train our kids in how to use the current technology, but we also need to educate and inspire them so that they can be the ones creating whatever crazy-ass new technology that's going to be changing the world. Otherwise, we'll be reduced to servicing the Asians in twenty years. I have no more hatred of Asians than anybody else who served in WWII, but I think that what we think of as the American way of life will go down the toilet once we become servants for the Chinese or Indians. I'm just glad that it won't be the Japanese.

**Do you have any final thoughts for our readers?**

Hell, I should write a book. Tell them to quit being suckers for the big corporations, and for the biggest corporation of all—Uncle Sam. And tell them to learn a little bit about their own bodies. Most physicians are just as lazy and crazy as me.

**Thanks for talking with me, Harry.**

Thanks for paying for dinner.

Most planets featured in science fiction tend to be rather generic. These planets are usually convenient celestial bodies upon which to pitch a narrative tent for a few scenes before the plot moves on. Generic planets also tend to be one-note, reflecting some particular environment on Earth. You have your ice-worlds, desert worlds, lava worlds, jungle worlds, water worlds, city worlds, forest worlds (in particular, forests that look like those near the city of Vancouver), earthquake worlds, and so on. [Wikipedia:Reference desk/Archives/Science/2010 December 7](#). From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia. < [Wikipedia:Reference desk](#) | [Archives](#) | [Science](#).  
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