

EAST 
FORWARD

EAST FORWARD 2

Edited by LOU ANDERS



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**For my father, Louis Anders Jr.,
who shoved *A Princess of Mars* into my adolescent hands
and ordered me to read it.
This is all your fault.**

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This time out, I am immeasurably grateful to Joseph Mallozzi (aka Baron Destructo), and all the readers of his blog, for his incredible support of *Fast Forward 1*. Reading all of your wonderful feedback and answering your questions was of great help in organizing this second book, so I hope you approve of my efforts. Gratitude also to Jon Kurtz, for being behind this series in specific and me in general. I couldn't ask for a better boss. Thanks are due again to the übertalented John Picacio, for his willingness to push the envelope with each new cover. It's been an incredible journey so far, man, and it ain't over yet! Much praise is also due to Jackie Cooke, for the wonderful exterior layouts, and to Bruce Carle, the genius behind the interior layouts of this and every Pyr book. Nor can we forget the wonderful Deanna Hoak, for above-and-beyond efforts in copyediting. Then there's my good friend Stephenson Crossley, who is becoming something of a first reader for these things. A special thanks is due to Alice Taylor and Poesy Emmeline Fibonacci Nautilus Taylor Doctorow, for allowing their partner and father to be in this book at all. And lastly, but most importantly, a world of gratitude to Xin and Arthur Anders. The faster my world moves forward, the greater my appreciation for their love and support.



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“[A] good science-fiction story is a story about human beings, with a human problem, and a human solution, that would not have happened at all without its science content.”
Theodore Sturgeon



“Science fiction is the holy fool of literature. It can say what it likes and get away with an examination of truly radical and subversive ideas because no one takes it seriously. When it’s at its best, we’re generally in trouble. Science fiction flourished during the social and economic upheavals of the 1930s, during the Cold War, and during the Iron Age of the 1980s. It should be flourishing now, damn it, but too many people who used to hang out with it have wandered off into some kind of fluffy make-believe world or other. Real science fiction doesn’t make stuff up. It turns reality up to eleven. It takes stuff from contemporary weather—stuff no one else has bothered or dared to question—and uses it to make an end run on reality. It not only shows us what could happen if things carry on the way they are, but it pushes what’s going on to the extremes of absurdity. That’s not its job: that’s its *nature*. And what’s happened to science fiction lately, it isn’t natural. It’s pale and lank and kind of out of focus. It needs to straighten up and fly right. It needs to reconnect with the world’s weather, and get medieval on reality’s ass.”
Paul McAuley



INTRODUCTION: THE AGE OF ACCELERATING RETURNS

Lou Anders



And so we return and begin again.

When the initial volume of this series, *Fast Forward 1*, debuted in February 2007, it marked the first major all-original, all-SF anthology series to appear in some time. Now there are two other regular series up and running—George Mann’s *The Solaris Book of New Science Fiction* and Jonathan Strahan’s *Eclipse* (albeit the latter mixes SF and fantasy).¹ Certainly, taken all together the three anthology series represent a healthy vote of confidence in the state of short-form SF. What’s more, no less than seven stories from *Fast Forward 1* were chosen to be reprinted a total of nine times in the four major “Best of the Year” retrospective anthologies, a wonderful testament to the quality of contributions in our inaugural book.

And here we are back with a second volume. In the time between these

1. Ellen Datlow’s *The Del Rey Book of Science Fiction and Fantasy* debuted in April 2008 as well, though as of the time of this writing, it isn’t clear if it is to be a stand-alone volume or the start of its own series.

two books, the mainstream recognition of and respect for science fiction continues to swell. We've seen the Pulitzer Prize committee honor Ray Bradbury with a special citation for "his distinguished, prolific and deeply influential career as an unmatched author of science fiction and fantasy," and in the same year, the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction went to Cormac McCarthy's postapocalyptic novel *The Road* (also an Oprah pick!). We've seen a previous Pulitzer winner, the always genre-friendly Michael Chabon, leap into the science fiction field with both feet with his alternate history novel *The Yiddish Policeman's Union*, which was chosen by the Coen brothers to direct as a major motion picture. Meanwhile, Philip K. Dick has become the first science fiction writer to be canonized in the esteemed Library of America line, nine of his novels collected in a two-volume set edited by none other than Jonathan Lethem. Online media company Gawker Media launched the science fiction site io9.com, which while celebrating all the media aspects of SF, includes a healthy amount of commentary on the literary side of the genre. Explaining why Gawker would want to enter such a space at all, io9 editor Annalee Newitz debunked the notion that science fiction had only limited appeal when she said, "We don't see it as a niche entertainment site. We see it as a pop culture site. So much of our mainstream culture is now talked about and thought about in science-fictional terms. I think that's why people like William Gibson and Brian Aldiss are saying there's no more science fiction because we are now living in the future. The present is thinking of itself in science-fictional terms. You get things like George Bush taking stem cell policy from reading parts of *Brave New World*. That's part of what we are playing with. We are living in [a] world that now thinks of itself in terms of sci-fi and in terms of the future."² In short, everywhere you look, you see the greater world at large waking up both to science fiction's popularity and to its obvious relevance.

Fast Forward 1 was itself the focus of a weeklong discussion on the very popular blog³ of *Stargate: Atlantis* writer/executive producer Joseph Mallozzi,

2. Brad Stone, "Gawker Media Gets Strung Out on Sci-Fi," *New York Times*, January 2, 2008.

3. Joseph Mallozzi's Weblog: Thoughts and Tirades, Rants and Ruminations, <http://josephmallozzi.wordpress.com/>.

who offers this somewhat humorous advice for how to deal with those poor fools who haven't yet come over to an appreciation of the genre. "Rather than resenting the critics who dismiss science fiction as little more than escapist fun, we should instead pity them for their shallow perspectives born, not of a sense of superiority or a better grasp of the meaningful and worthy, but of a dismal inability to consider the future's boundless possibilities."

It was of the future's "boundless possibilities" that he spoke when science fiction legend Isaac Asimov first said, "Individual science fiction stories may seem as trivial as ever to the blind critics and philosophers of today—but the core of science fiction, its essence, the concept around which it revolves, has become crucial to our salvation, if we are to be saved at all."⁴

Saved? Yes, saved. These sentiments speak not only to the relevance and importance of science fiction, but to its urgency. To my mind, science fiction is first and foremost entertainment and must be entertainment if it is to function effectively (and some people just can't see past that, just as some people can't acknowledge animation as legitimate narrative or cartoons as art). But science fiction will never be *just* entertainment. It has been, since its inception, a fundamental contributing factor both in how we view our increasingly technological world and in actually dictating the shaping of that technological world, involved in over a century of back-and-forth with the march of science. Noted futurist Ray Kurzweil wrote that "an analysis of the history of technology shows that technological change is exponential, contrary to the commonsense 'intuitive linear' view. So we won't experience 100 years of progress in the twenty-first century—it will be more like 20,000 years of progress (at today's rate)."⁵ Kurzweil was introducing the notion of "accelerating returns," or that exponential growth increases exponentially. He is among a growing body of thinkers who go so far as to suggest that the twenty-first century will be the last one in which we can even speak of one human race, as the coming biotech revolution will change our very notions of humanity, just as the approaching technological singularity may give birth to nonbiological intelligences which we'll have to deal (or merge) with as

4. "My Own View," in *The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, ed. Robert Holdstock (London: Octopus, 1978).

5. "The Law of Accelerating Returns," published on KurzweilAI.net, March 7, 2001.

well. Whether one buys into Kurzweil's predictions or not, science fiction, as the branch of literature devoted to examining humankind's relationship with technology, is surely coming into its own as the most important literature of the twenty-first century.

So just what is science fiction?

Science fiction serves four purposes. It can be predictive, and it's always fun to talk about that, but this is its least important aspect. More important, it can be preventative, as Robert J. Sawyer articulates when he points out, "If accurate prediction were the criterion of good SF, we'd have to say that George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was an abysmal failure because the real year 1984 turned out nothing like his prediction. But in fact Orwell's novel was a resounding success because its warning call helped us to keep the future it portrayed from becoming reality."⁶ Third, SF's importance lies also in its ability to actually inspire the future. Technovelgy.com is a remarkable Web site that currently lists several thousand articles charting when ideas first envisioned in SF become real, and more often than not, the inventors and scientists are very aware of where the ideas came from and were working to them directly.⁷ Finally, SF is the literature of the open mind—the literature that acknowledges change and encourages thinking outside the box—and that in itself is a good thing, even if the science on display is nonsense. (This is SF's value as allegory.) No one would take seriously Adam Robert's *Land of the Headless*, in which convicted criminals have their heads removed and their brains placed in their chests as punishment for their crimes, as something that *could happen*, but what the novel has to say about the criminal justice system is illuminating, relevant, and brilliant.

6. "What Is Science Fiction?" <http://www.sfwriter.com/2007/09/what-is-science-fiction.html>, September 11, 2007.

7. See also Mark Brake and Neil Hook's *Different Engines* (New York: Macmillan, 2007), which examines how science fiction and science have informed and influenced each other. From the book description, "Science fiction has emerged as a mode of thinking, complementary to the scientific method. Science fiction's field of interest is the gap between the new worlds uncovered by experimentation and exploration, and the fantastic worlds of the imagination. Its proponents find drama in the tension between the familiar and the unfamiliar. Its readers, many of them scientists and politicians, find inspiration in the contrast between the ordinary and the extraordinary."

Or, as Paolo Bacigalupi said recently, “SF has tools for writing about the world around us that just aren’t available in other genres. Reading good speculative fiction is like wearing fun-house eyeglasses. It shifts the light spectrum and reveals other versions of the world, mapped right on top of the one you thought you knew.”⁸

The famous science fiction writer Brian Aldiss may indeed have said that “science fiction is no more written for scientists than ghost stories are for ghosts,” but it was science apologist Carl Sagan who proclaimed, “Science stimulates the fiction, and the fiction stimulates a new generation of scientists.” But we need to stimulate more than the scientists. As our world grows ever more fantastical and ever more dangerous, as the ways we have on hand to effect our own destruction multiply, we need everyone—from our artists to our politicians to our neighbors—to start thinking beyond the needs of the short term. Or, to quote Isaac Asimov once again, “It is change, continuing change, inevitable change, that is the dominant factor in society today. No sensible decision can be made any longer without taking into account not only the world as it is, but the world as it will be.”⁹

What follows are fourteen tales, from the comedic to the cautionary, as different as the seventeen writers who penned them, as current as tomorrow, and as wild as imagination—and the only constant in them is the reality and inevitability of change. Because, as this volume testifies, the future lies ahead of us, and it’s coming at us fast.

Enjoy!

Or maybe duck!



8. Paul Goat Allen, “Science Fiction’s New Prophet: A PW Web-Exclusive Q&A,” *Publishers Weekly*, February 20, 2008.

9. “My Own View.”