

Hub Magazine

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CONTENTS:

- FICTION:** *Wink* by Lucy Kemnitzer
Tastes of the dark by Malin Larsson
- REVIEW:** *The Gabble - and Other Stories*
Frisky Dingo
- FEATURE:** *Podcasting* by Mur Lafferty



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EDITORIAL:

by phil lunt

tap, tap tap, tap, tap tap, tap tap tap, tap tap...

brrring brrring..... brrring brrring..... brrring brrring..... brrring - click!

".....you've reached the voicemail for Hub Magazine. We're really busy fighting demons in a future dimension and can't make it to the phone at the moment but please leave a message after the beep and one of us will get back to you as soon as possible."

BEEEEEEEEEP

"Erm..... bugger..."

CLICK

FICTION

Wink

by Lucy Kemnitzer

It started with a drink and a wink. Peque brought Joque a drink, and then he winked -- and Joque thought it knew what Peque was doing.

"Time to get my puberty pills," Joque thought. "I'm going to have a buddy-buddy."

Drinks were drunk, dances were danced, glances were glanced, more winks were winked, and IDs were exchanged. "I want to get close to you," Peque said. "But I have to go out of town on business for a couple of months. Do you think you would be ready for me when I get back? I won't hold you to it. I know a lot can happen in two months." Joque went home feeling things it had never felt before.

The very next day Joque made an appointment with its doctor.

Doctor Hevque was quite glad to see young Joque. "It's so nice to see a patient who is not sick or sad," it said. "All I ever see is the streaming status. Speaking of which, by the way, you're getting a little pheremone rush, aren't you?"

"That's why I'm here," Joque said. "I met somebody and we just clicked. I thought it might be a good time to get puberty started."

"Oh, nice," Doctor Hevque said. "We should be able to get you online in a couple of hours. Then you can expect about a week of discomfort, and a few months of growth, and then you'll be all set. You'll probably want to play it cool for the first month or so of growth. But after that . . ."

"It doesn't matter. The one I'm interested in is on the other side of the world for the next couple of months anyway."

"Okay! Let's get started. First, what gender have you chosen?"

"Oh!" Joque thought for a moment. "I forgot about gender."

Doctor Hevque shook its head condescendingly. "You need to decide before we can proceed, you know," it said. "Haven't you ever thought about it at all?"

"No, I haven't. I never thought about it at all. How do other people decide? Everybody I know is either latent or did it a long time ago."

"I tell you what," The doctor sighed. "Here's some pornography." The icon appeared in the corner of Joque's vision. "Go home, browse for a bit, and come back when you're ready to discuss it. I'll bring up your status streams and you bring your own observations and we'll have an answer in no time."

Joque was a little dubious about being assigned to experience pornography. It had been in hygienic latency all its life so far. It had hardly been curious, really.

The doctor's pornography was high resolution. For the duration of each scene, Joque was stimulated to produce appropriate hormones. This is where the art came in. Because it was diagnostic pornography, and not entertainment pornography, the stimulation was way low in the chain, allowing Joque to respond or not.

Joque dutifully experienced each scenario. While this was going on, Joque was also carrying on a lively conversation with Peque. Joque was a little embarrassed about having to do the pornography, so it didn't mention it. But it did flirt as hard as it could, and was gratified by Peque flirting back. Joque asked leading questions: "How would you like me?"

Peque said, "I like you just as you are."

"What kind of genitals do you like?"

"Whatever you've got, baby."

Joque figured that Peque wasn't going to be much help in choosing a gender, so it bent to the task of watching pornography and noting its responses.

It was a mere three days before Joque was back in the doctor's office. "Well, what do you think?" Doctor Hevque said. "I know what your status streams say."

"It's hard to decide," Joque said. "But perhaps femaleish. Peque's maleish and those scenarios worked out pretty nice for me."

"That's an adequate choice," Doctor Hevque said. "You really don't differentiate much, but those scenarios did get a decent response. You got better peaks while you were messaging with your boyfriend than in any of the scenarios, by the way. I would say you are definitely in love. So we're going for it? Want to start today?"

"I want to start yesterday!" Joque said.

"I can see you do" Doctor Hevque said.

The initial stages weren't so bad: sprays and stimulations and a little prodding of the flesh. Joque went home with a slight fever that became intense for an hour during the night. The next two weeks were excruciating as flesh and skin rearranged themselves. She actually had to leave work early on a couple of occasions, and dose herself with pain relievers and mood elevators in order to sleep.

The next month and a half were relatively pleasant, except for the adolescent fog of arousal she wandered around in. Her coworkers laughed at her when she forgot to attend a meeting or dropped a line of conversation. They all knew what she was going through. Most of them had done it themselves except for Manque who said, "I'll stay as nature birthed me. No need to go messing around with all those decorations."

At last Peque returned. For days and days Joque and Peque had been messaging each other about plans for the big night. Joque found that she was lubricating enough for a year's supply of bearings. All she wanted was Peque.

They met at the same club where they had first seen each other. Joque recognised Peque right away. He was one handsome guy, she thought. She wasn't too surprised that he didn't recognize her. Even though she had not opted for the "busty" augmentation, her form had changed significantly. She picked up a drink -- the kind she knew Peque liked -- and sashayed through the crowd to where he was, appearing before him with a wink and a drink, just as he had done for her two months before.

"Sorry," Peque said. "I'm waiting for my little buddy. You might have seen it. A little latent guy, about your size and coloring. Really cute in that squeaky-clean latent way. Have you seen it?"

Joque suddenly realized she had completely failed to pick up on the obvious clues and that disaster had already struck, it was only the aftershocks to come.

"You're looking for Joque, aren't you?" she asked.

Her voice had not changed that much. "Joque, what did you do?" Peque said, showing real distress.

"I thought if I was going to have a buddy, I ought to grow up," Joque said. "So I did."

"I said I liked you just the way you were," Peque said, pouting. "You were perfect."

"Sorry," Joque said. "I didn't understand."

Peque looked away, chewing on his lip.

"I can revert," Joque said. "It only takes a couple of months."

"I'm not sure I'm going to wait for you," Peque said, his eyes now roaming over the crowd at the club. "Tell you what, look me up when you've reverted, and we'll see how it goes." He flashed his brilliant smile, and taking his drink from Joque's hand, went slithering through the crowd to where a group of young latents sat goggling and giggling.



Leo unfolded the paper and for a moment the crackling of the dry pages drowned out the sound of the cab's tires against the slick pavement. Across the white pages, the headlines blared out to him: **Insane wolf-dog strikes again!** His lips curved in mockery and he turned to the economy pages.

The cab drove slowly and safely through Gothenburg's almost empty streets; autumn rain and a late hour had driven most of its inhabitants inside. Swedish weather wasn't kind during the darker half of the year. Leo lifted his black eyes to the people hurrying past, their shoes getting wet from the puddles still on the sidewalks. The rain had finally stopped but its marks remained, as did the heavy clouds covering the sky. It was full moon tonight but the only light seen was man-made.

The cab slowed down and parked at the curb. Leo refolded the paper and tucked it into the outer pocket of his briefcase. He handed the driver two hundred-notes and left with a brief wish of a pleasant evening. There was nothing to lose by being nice to other people. Leo took a deep breath through his nose. The drizzle had cleansed the closed-in air of the city, leaving only the smell of water. Soon the dampness would encompass the car exhausts and enclose the worse smells of the city, making the air worse instead of better.

Behind him, the cab took off, leaving him on his own in the cold October evening. Leo glanced down on his watch and realised it was already past nine pm. He had stayed far too long at work, but then, he had little to come home to. A three room apartment, empty of family, friends and pets. Without the success at work, he would be a failure of a thirty-five year old. But he was good at what he did; good with numbers. They were uncomplicated, impassionate, stale.

He walked across the pavement and up the stairs. The five story building loomed with its windows ablaze with a yellow glow. Leo passed through a portal under it. His eyes zoomed in on the big man lying curled up in the shades. He watched him intently, just reluctantly turning his gaze away from the resting man. His eyes turned to the lights around him, the unknown faces which could look out on them any second. No harm would be dealt without being noticed, so he continued forwards, feeling his back itch and his fingers wrapping themselves tighter around the handle of the briefcase.

The stone yard was broken only by small squares of flowers and bushes. A delivery van in dark blue stood parked by one of the entrances. It was abandoned, although it was forbidden to park in the area. Leo frowned at it, displeased by its unwanted presence. A sound from somewhere close made him slow his step. He strained his ears, feeling silly. Another noise, like a branch being brushed against something passing, made him stop altogether.

He turned around, scanning the area. Considering the lights that fell out of the windows and which crowned the entrances, the yard should be fairly light but yet it was not. Especially the west corner, where he was heading, was dark due to a failing door light. He saw nothing, but sensed something. Perhaps it was a smell, or a noise, but somehow he knew something was out there.

He wet his lips and looked up. The windows no longer seemed to offer to stop potential harm but rather bragged with their distance from the world. A shiver ran up his spine, coiling itself around his throat. He swallowed and turned back to his original track. It could be no more than fifty metres to his goal; the entrance to his building. The entrance with no light. He started walking. Something sent gravel rolling down the slabs of stones to his left. He startled but didn't stop. Keeping his eyes on the barely visible entrance, he walked calmly, keeping his head high and his back straight.

A movement - perhaps imagined, perhaps just wind in the dying leaves - made his gaze swing right. He wet his lips and took longer strides. His breath was coming rapidly, and felt like rugged ice in his throat. No man could have been quick enough to move from the first place to the second in such short a time. A certain fact to prove no one was out there. His rational mind told him he was alone and skittish as a child. His guts told him he had company.

No, he thought evenly. Nothing would happen. He would reach the entrance, go up the stairs to his apartment and be inside in five minutes. Then he would take a hot shower and go to bed. He had work to do tomorrow and shouldn't be giving in to silly whims and primitive instincts. Trying to breathe deeply, he kept walking.

There were steps behind him. Quiet, almost inaudible, but there. Closing in. Quickly. He swung around, lifting his briefcase and striking it hard into the air. It smashed into something that too slowly dodged away with a growl. Leo's tongue flickered out to his lips again as his body was trembling with adrenaline.

Run, he thought.

Something grabbed him from behind, pulling him off balance. He stumbled into another warm body and suddenly felt the cold nuzzle of a gun against his temple. He stiffened, considering jerking away and taking a leap towards the entrance.

"Don't move, Mr Johnsson," his attacker whispered in his ear.

Leo felt his hand cramp over the handle of the briefcase. Somewhere ahead, something still moved in the darkness.

"It's not safe..." he mumbled throatily.

"No, it's not," the man chuckled. "So why don't you just do as I say and this will all end peacefully?"

Leo shuddered and the hand on his shoulder dug its fingers into his muscles.

"You don't understand!" Leo whimpered.

"No," the man growled. "You don't understand! You'll give me that briefcase, and you'll give me the right code and you will forget all about this evening or I'll blow your brain out. Is it clear now, Mr Johnson?"

Leo closed his eyes and his knuckles turned white as his nails dug into his palms. He could barely breathe and the words leaving his lips were choked and hoarse.

"Please... leave..."

The man chuckled.

"Aw, just because you ask so kindly? What do you think, boys?"

Two sets of controlled laughter emerged from the darkness.

"I say blow his brain out," a blood-thirsty voice claimed.

The sound of metal against stone cut through the silence.

"I can open that case quicker than this," the voice continued.

Leo opened his eyes. The world was sharper as his eyes searched out a heavy-set man some metres ahead of him and a muscular shadow at his right. The strained breathing of the man behind him smelled of curry. Sweat coated the tense men. Leo's lips curved. The man began talking again:

"So just drop that... Good boy! And now..."

His speech ended in a shocked gurgle. Leo looked into his attacker's terrified eyes and grinned. The smell of blood filled their nostrils as it trickled down Leo's fingers, which were knuckle-deep into the man's throat.

"Boss!" one of the others cried out.

In the flash of a moment, Leo picked the silenced gun out of the limp grip and shot the talkative man. As he discarded the gun, the clang of its metal was the only sound heard when he leaped over the yard. The breathless umph of the heavy-set man as he landed underneath, was the last thing he ever pronounced.

Leo clambered up on his feet, keeping himself steady against the bathroom wall. Water gushed from the shower above and trickled ice-cold on his skin. He leaned over and turned it off. With a shake of his head, he unsteadily left the glass cubicle. There was a soaked heap on the blue carpet and Leo abruptly pulled his gaze from it and struggled to the sink. In the reflection in the mirror, the marks around the room glared with its naked truth. He closed his eyes and lowered his tired body to the floor. Leaning against the tiled wall and cold tubes, he let his head rest on his knees.

Without looking up, he lifted his hand and rummaged around the top of the sink. The plastic glass fell onto the floor and glancing up for a second, Leo gathered the toothbrush and paste. The water from his hair trickled down his brow and dripped onto the paste, making the mint taste of salt as he began to brush his teeth.

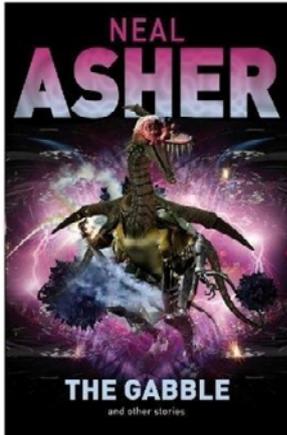
He grimaced but at least it wasn't blood.

And at least he didn't like it.



The Gabble - and Other Stories

reviewed by patrick mahon



by Neal Asher

Tor

£17.99 (Hardback - paperback due November 2009 at £7.99)

Neal Asher's first novel, *Gridlinked*, was published in 2001. Since then, he has had a further eleven hard SF novels published, along with a number of short stories and novellas. The novels divide into two parallel series, plus some standalone books, but almost all of his stories are based in a human future known as the Polity. This is a galaxy-spanning alliance of human and alien colonies, controlled by a network of artificial intelligences which took over running our affairs when we showed ourselves incapable of doing it properly on our own.

The Gabble - and Other Stories is a collection of ten short stories and novellas set in the universe of the Polity. Together, they fill in some of the gaps, and answer some of the questions, raised in the novels – as well as providing a useful introduction to Asher's universe for new readers. Each has been published before, at various times over the past decade, and at the end of the book Asher provides brief but interesting notes on the origins of each story, and their publication histories.

In the shortest story in the collection, *The Sea of Death*, a documentary maker visits the planet Orbus to make a film about the millions of alien sarcophagi that have been found in tunnels under the icy surface. But he gets more than he bargained for when a seismic shock wakes the aliens from their slumber...

In the longest, and most recent story, *Alien Archaeology*, Rho, a former hitman for the Polity, now working as an alien archaeologist, is robbed and almost killed by a thief. She tries to use the alien artefact she stole from him to resurrect an extinct alien species – intending to sell it, and the technological advances it represents, to humanity's mortal enemies, the Prador. As Rho tries to recover the artefact, the body count quickly starts to rise...

The weirdest story is probably *Choudapt*. Simoz, a Polity agent, is trying to find out whether the parasitic infection sweeping a world of half-human, half-native-lice gene-spliced colonists is natural, or a terrorist attack by those who reject the Polity's rule. To help him on this mission, he has been implanted with a doctor mycelium symbiont called Mike, which he can send into infected colonists' bodies – to diagnose and cure them – just by touching them. But the parasite realises he's an enemy, and soon every infected colonist is trying to kill Simoz...

All of the stories showcase Asher's strong powers of invention. He is particularly good at imagining new species of alien, and new forms of technology.

The aliens include Gabbleducks (huge, duck-like creatures that speak a nonsense language and seem harmless enough, but are perfectly capable of eating a human whole), Chouds (three foot long lice with nasty mandibles), Hooders (massive armoured millipedes), Treels (eighteen inch long worms that eat anything – including humans) and the Prador. The latter, who were the first intelligent alien species to be encountered by the Polity, are giant crabs who live in a warrior society with only two apparent loves: battle and food – the latter preferably comprising captured opponents or insufficiently brutal Prador subordinates).

The technologies range from faster-than-light 'runcible' drives, through a wide spectrum of androids, golems, cyborgs, revived corpses, artificial intelligences, and symbionts, to a host of new technologies for weapons and armour.

If I have one, relatively minor, complaint, it is that Asher is not a writer who feels the need to explain everything to his readers. This is generally a good thing, as it ensures that the pace of the stories is rarely held up by great swathes of narrative. However, it can sometimes be a disadvantage: after finishing a couple of the stories here, I was left scratching my head, trying to work out what the point had been.

Nonetheless, this collection is an interesting showcase of Asher's signature themes. There is a lot of violence, much of it doled out by Terminator-like androids and nightmarish aliens, and casual sex is a staple of several of the stories. However, at the heart of most of these tales are recognisably flawed main characters, and it's easy to identify with them as they try to deal with the problems put in their way as best they can.

This is an impressive collection of stories that should prove as entertaining to readers who have not come across Asher's writing before as to those who are familiar with the world of the Polity. Warmly recommended.

Frisky Dingo - Season 1

reviewed by alex davis



70/30 Productions
\$19.98

"Welcome to you're "Doom!""

So reads the erroneous marketing postcard sent by super-villain Killface. And so begins a thoroughly bizarre romp into the territory of superheroes and supervillians.

Frisky Dingo begins with superhero Awesome X (the alter-ego of billionaire Xander Crews) having defeated the city's last supervillain, and facing the prospect of having to hang up his cape. Enter Killface, who is desperately trying to solve the budget problems that have beset his doomsday device, the Annihilatrix. Crews, seeking a way to keep

enjoying the superhero lifestyle, sets his company producing a series of action figures and wants Killface to be his action figure rival.

Sounds simple enough so far? Good. Because from there we set off on a surreal journey that sees both Crews/X and Killface fall on some seriously hard times, become friends and then become enemies again. Throw into the mix radioactive ants, a cloned board of directors, Crews' learning-challenged brother and the mighty sport of Death Rabbits and you might come close to realizing what Frisky Dingo is all about.

The lead duo are supported by a great cast of characters, in particular the Xtacles fighting force, Awesome X's robot combat squad ('Do not take off robot pants'), but also Killface's mumbling son Simon and his unfortunate assistant Phil.

The show follows the usual Adult Swim format, with each episode being about ten minutes long and cramming in the jokes thick and fast. Unlike most Swim shows, however, this one follows a distinct narrative throughout, giving it an advantage over other Swim favourites such as Aqua Teen Hunger Force and Robot Chicken. Particular episode highlight include 'XPO' in which Killface enters an inventor's fair staged by Crews ('16 hours in the car, how many times did I tell you - no sabotaging the other contestants dressed as nuns') and 'Emergency Room' in which the entire gang are involved in an unfortunate industrial accident ('Phil, dealing with the cold reality of death, has no pithy rejoinder').

It's a programme that will appeal to those with a surreal sense of humour, as the events becomes more and more outlandish and the in-jokes build up at a pace. It's recommended for animated comedy fans and comic book readers alike, as while that's the very thing it's spoofing, it's all done with a touch of affection for the form. If you prefer your comedy a little more character-based and logically-plotted, this may not be the DVD for you.

Oh, and if you want to know why it's called Frisky Dingo, you'll just have to wait until the last episode...

FEATURES



podcasting



by mur lafferty

Breaking the Fourth Wall with Twitter

Let's face it: the vast majority of novels delivered via podcast are unpublished. This in no way means that they are bad; novelists [Scott Sigler](#), [J.C. Hutchins](#) and [Seth Harwood](#) have all found mainstream publication after podcasting their novels, and several others (including me) have found publication via smaller presses. But all of those have come after the novel's release via podcast, which means the author had to build his/her audience on their own at a grass roots level.

What this audience building has created is a sense of being more involved with building an author's career. The author keeps the audience informed with the news of the book/podcast's progress, if he or she is looking to get published and how that hunt is going, or anything else going on with the book.

It's pretty obvious that with the internet, you can build an immersive world for your book, with time and know-how being the only thing holding you back. Little things like Facebook, MySpace and Twitter make good places for the author to put their smiling face and personal information. "OMG, my favorite audiobook author likes cats too!"

But when authors go an extra mile is when it gets interesting. And specifically I am thinking about using Twitter. Sure, authors such as [Neil Gaiman](#) and [Wil Wheaton](#) use Twitter to connect with their fans, cross post their blog posts, pimp their friends, or let us know their travel/appearance schedules. And audiobook authors do the same thing. But some authors use the service for several other entertaining uses. Namely, giving their characters a voice on Twitter.

As far as I know, [J.C.Hutchins](#), author of the *7th Son* trilogy and *Personal Effects: Dark Art*, started the trend by giving Twitter accounts to three prominent characters of his trilogy. The villain [John Alpha](#), the insane hacker [Kilroy2.0](#), and the elusive hacker [Binary Fairy](#) all have Twitter accounts. Hutchins used them mainly to interact with each other and with the listeners, as well as throwing insults at him, giving the sense of the creations breaking free from the creator. As John Alpha says, "I will hunt you down, @jchutchins. Beat you. You don't control ME."

What's been interesting is how some authors use the Twitter feeds in several different ways. Some, like Tee Morris' [Rafe Raffton](#) from his book *Morevi*, interact with the audience, chatting with listeners and threatening or flirting, "@AdriesWorld Let me show you the Captain's Quarters, dear lady." Others, like Christiana Ellis' [Nina Kimberly](#) from *Nina Kimberly the Merciless*, will interact mostly with the other characters on Twitter, demonstrating the relationship that the reader can expect to find within the book, "@kingfrancisIX Yet another reason I was disgusted!"

Nearly all characters interact with their authors. Some ask for help: Nina asks for Ellis to help with Twitter and dealing with [King Francis IX](#), her suitor and constant annoyance, "@kingfrancisix Don't make me block you. @christianaellis How do I block him?" Some give praise, like *Jack Wakes Up* author Seth Harwood's title character from *Young Junius*, "@sethharwood Yeah Baby. I love hearing my story being told."

The downside to these Twitter accounts is that some are not frequently updated. For people with several Twitter feeds to follow, the odd character tweet now and then is a fun distraction, but for the fans who want a lengthy conversation with the characters, they might be disappointed. Twitter also seems ripe for spinning off new, viral storylines connected to a podcasting project, and I'd love to see someone work that into a podcast.

There are a lot of authors playing with this sort of viral marketing and community involvement, and there are several things they can continue to do with it. As audiobook authors are faced with building their audiences themselves, it's best to use all tools at their disposal. And on the audience side, it's always fun to see more of the characters we love and hate.



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