The Dyslexicon

Carl Frederick

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Author's Forward: Up until high school, I had a full syndrome of dyslexic behaviors—probably due to my being forcibly switched from left to right-handed in preschool (although I did have the common predictor of thinking mainly in pictures). I had the usual *p,q* and *b,d* confusion and backward slant tendency on upper case *N*s. I also was a little prone to Spoonerisms (which make up much of the story) and puns. I learned early to pretend they were intentional.

In fact, when I wrote "The Dyslexicon", I created an organization called *DOG*, which stood for the Dyslexic Geek Organization. I didn't realize until I'd proofed the story that it should have been DGO. I left it as DOG, of course.

Dyslexia is a broad term, and I take it to describe the full gamut of linguistic confusions. I've heard dyslexia described as a gift (www.dyslexia.com). While it was a real pain when I was a kid, I now think that in some respects, yes, it was/is a gift. (It did, though, make it very difficult for me to learn any Inuktitut since the rotational angle of the alphabet consonants determines what vowel follows it.)
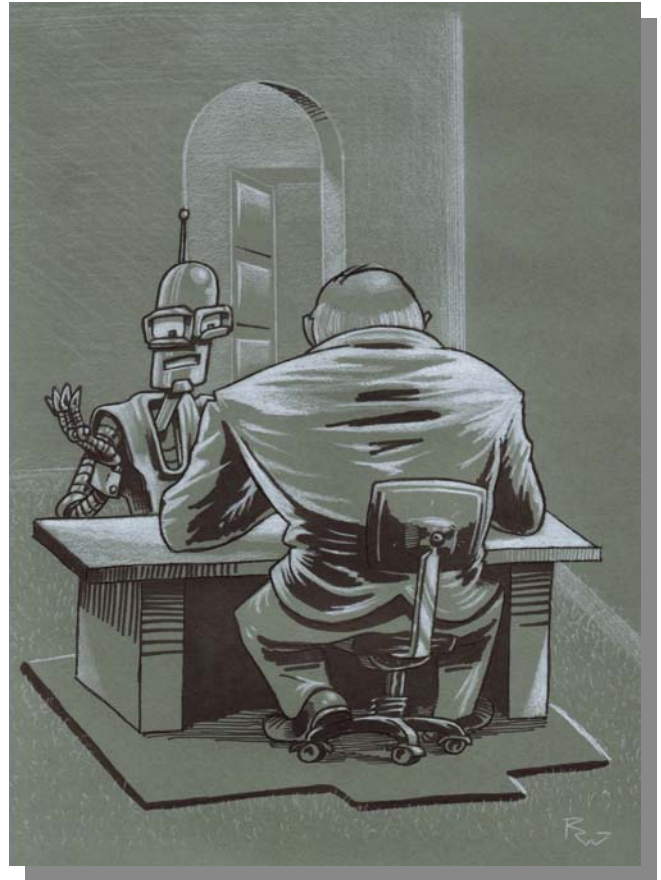
Entry: `The DOG (Dyslexic Geek Organization): In these climes of specialized tubs, it snot atoll surprising there's a club for...`

Nate finished reading the entry, closed the Dyslexicon, and left the library with a growing realization that he must become a part of the DOG. This is his tale.

As Nate entered the office, the Head of the DOG stood. "Mice to neat you," he said, extending his hand. "Please don't take a fence, but you're a robot, aren't you?"

"I'm a violin virtuoso robot." Nate shook the hand. "And I'm dyslectic."

The Head indicated a chair facing the desk. "If I say may, you don't sound dyslectic."

"Oh, but I am," said Nate. "Musically dyslectic. I've a firmware bug that makes me occasionally play notes out of order. I've lost my job because of it."

The Head eyed him, coolly. "Can't you just get a wormfair upgrade?"

"Firmware upgrades cost money." Nate executed the *ironic laugh* subroutine. "Shelter and fuel cells aren't free. I can barely afford my windowless basement room in a sleazy Robotel."

"These are tough rhymes." The Head leaned forward, his chair squeaking under his shifting weight. "I don't see in what hay the DOG could whelp."

"May I join the DOG?"

"No." The Head shook his head. "That is absolutely out of equestrian."

"But why?"

The Head stood. "About every month, some young snot-nosed rat breeds in the library about us and then comes and tastes my wine with a foamy membership application. A big joke."

"It's not a joke for me." Nate invoked a level-three pleading tone. "If I don't learn how to live in a human society, I'll cease to exist. I'm a writer now, but nobody wants to buy my books. If I can't learn what people want to read, I'm finished."

"Hmm. A writer." The Head sat slowly, his expression transforming from cold disdain to a cheerful warmth. "We might have a cot for a sloppy editor. How you are at proofreading?"

"I can do that."

"Here, we sing the body dyslectic," said the Head, expansively. "And we sorely need a prude goofreader."

"Are you offering me a job?"

"Perhaps." The Head nodded. "I think we can brain you for a trite future."

"What's the catch? I mean, you know what they say about geeks bearing gifts."

"What do geeks gifting bears have to do with it? It's not as if you're selling your soul to Santa. Look. I don't offer a mob to just any jug that comes in. What you do say?"

Nate widened his eyes by five percent. "It's like becoming a werewolf," he said in a dazed voice. "It gives one paws. But I'd still like to be a member of the organization."

The Head sighed. "Urine eligible, I'm afraid. Unless you're a geek."

"But I am," said Nate.

"You have my attention." The Head leaned back and clasped his hands behind his neck. "A mall leers."

"Well, the first book I wrote was titled *String Theory for Yo-yos*."

The Head shrugged. "I'd think a look for the bay public about string theory would sell rather well."

"I'd assumed everyone would be curious why yo-yo strings twist the way they do." Nate shook his head. "But the book was a bomb."

The Head laughed. "You wean the murk was really about yo-yos?"

"Yes. Of course."

"You got me. That's geeky."

"And my second book, *Puns, Palindromes, and Inversions in Morse Code*, did even worse."

"Ultra-geeky," said the Head. "But what's an inversion?"

"It's really neat." Nate's lips formed the default smile. "You write a word in Morse code and then change all the dots to dashes, and all the dashes to dots."

"Yeah?" The Head pushed forward a notepad and pencil.

Nate picked up the pencil. "'Sat' becomes 'one'. 'Use' becomes 'dot', 'gnat' turns into 'wane'. But look here. This is really neat." Nate printed the word 'time' in big letters, then the word in Morse Code (- .. -- .) . "And 'time' becomes 'emit'. But 'emit' is also 'time' spelled backwards. Isn't that amazing?"

"It really is amazing." The Head looked up from the pad. "Okay, I'm convinced. I'll be proud to enter your name onto our rolls."

"Wait," said Nate. "You're not speaking dyslexically anymore."

"It's one of the reasons DOG exists." The Head spread his hands. "We've found that

when a dyslectic geek is being truly geeky, his dyslexia goes into remission — sort of like a stutterer not stuttering when he's singing."

"Really?" Nate sprang to his feet.

"Tongue-twisters work also," said the Head. "She sells sea shells. That sort of stuff. Causes a dyslexia overload, most likely."

"Maybe it'll work for me, too. Maybe if I think geeky thoughts while playing violin..."

"Could be," said the Head. "Robot firm-ware is meant to emulate human wetware. But be careful using tongue-twisters. There's a danger of contracting polyisophonia."

"What?"

"The chronic condition of speaking in long sentences where most of the words start with the same sound."

Nate chuckled. "I'll take my chances." He pumped the Head's hand. "Thank you. I've got to go and try it." He bolted for the door. "I'll be in touch."

With new hope, Nate hurried away. *She sells sea shells by the sea shore. She sells sea shells by the see-saw. She sells...* If this worked, he'd owe a lot to the DOG. *Dad's dead dogs died digging ditches. Dad's dead dogs...*

Finally, thinking of a bowed violin, Nate returned to his abode, vile inn that it was. There, applying what he'd learned from the DOG, he picked up his instrument and played a Paganini caprice. Perfect! Not a trace of musical dyslexia. He could return to his orchestra. "Neat!" thought Nate, "Now I know I'll never have another night where knots of nasty nitwits note that numerous notes were neither nice nor normal."

Soon thereafter, Nate moved out of his shabby room in the Robotel's basement and up to the second floor—but that's another storey.

☙❧

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Carl Frederick is a theoretical physicist, at least theoretically. After a post-doc at NASA and a stint at Cornell University, he left theoretical astrophysics and his first love, quantum relativity theory (a strange first love, perhaps) in favor of hi-tech industry. He is Chief Scientist of a small company doing AI software. He has two more-or-less grown children and shares his house with a pet robot. For recreation, he fences epee, learns languages, and plays the bagpipes. He lives in rural Ithaca, New York. And rural is good if you play the bagpipes.

Several years ago, he decided he'd like to write science fiction. (He says some of his colleagues had suggested that his research papers already fell into that genre.) To that end, he attended the year 2000 Odyssey Writers Workshop and subsequently was a published finalist in the 2002 Writers of the Future contest and a first place winner the following year. He has also put an interactive novel on the Web. It is interactive in that you can click to change the point of view and to expose sub-plots: www.darkzoo.net, if you care to visit.

Although shopping around a few novels faster than a speeding glacier, he is predominately a short story writer. His work, of late, appears mainly (and thankfully, often) in *Analog*.

He has since returned to his aforementioned first love.