KARL SCHROEDER

"ECONOMICS HAS ALWAYS BEEN ABOUT MAKING PEOPLE INTO THINGS. WE'RE JUST REVERSING THE PROCESS."
--SURA NEELIN, IN *STEALING WORLDS*

A NEW NOVEL, AND A NEW REAL-WORLD PROJECT

Award-winning science fiction author and futurist Karl Schroeder has embarked on a unique two-part project. The first part is his new novel *Stealing Worlds*, a 'pre-apocalyptic' near-future thriller that proposes a crazy solution to the global environmental crisis. The second part is the **Deodands Project**, a real-world attempt to implement that solution.

SCIFI FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Films like *Blade Runner* portray a near-future world of flying cars, robots and AI, and genetic modification. But what about the time just before that future—the time we're all living into, when AI doesn't quite work, robots haven't yet emerged from the factories, and self-driving cars don't own the road? This is the uncomfortable adolescence of the future, and it's in this pre-apocalyptic, ultra-near-future world that *Stealing Worlds* **(Tor Books**, June 2019) is set.

Stealing Worlds follows ordinary people trying to cope with extraordinary change, in a post-Trump America balanced on the edge of chaos. This book signals a new direction for award-winning author Karl Schroeder and, hopefully, for a genre that's supposed to show us how to cope with a rapidly changing world.

STEALING WORLDS

Dayton, Ohio, is far from the sexiest place to start a science fiction adventure; but then, Sura Neelin is no typical cyberpunk heroine. She broke into a few houses as a rebellious teenager, but that's as badass as she's ever gotten. She can't program viruses or bots; she's out of work and saddled with debt. Alone, hopeless along with millions of others, she struggles to get by day to day.

Then her father is murdered, and the murderers come after her. Sura has to run—but where can you hide in an America with facial-recognition cameras on every corner? Sura needs a new identity, but black-market passports and birth certificates won't cut it anymore. To really disappear, and find a safe way to investigate her father's death, she'll have to take chance on something new—a strange half-world of augmented-reality games, known only as the *Frameworlds*. But to make it there, she'll need new friends and allies—not all of them human…
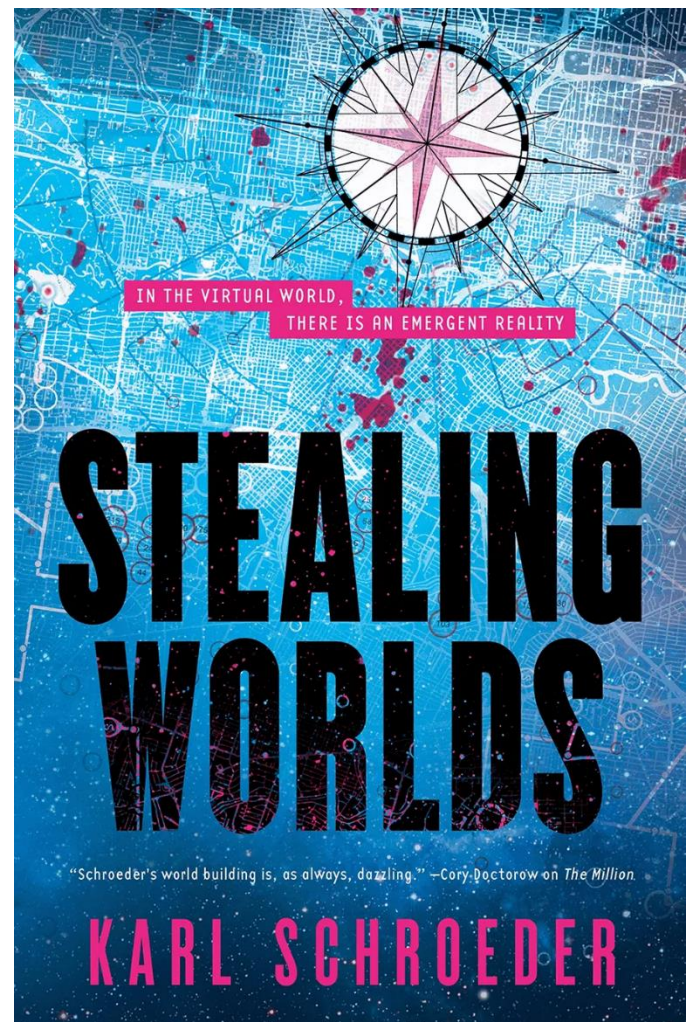
A FUTURIST WRITES SCIENCE FICTION

This is a near-future thriller that directly addresses the issues we face right now. *Stealing Worlds* confronts problems ranging from global warming and environmental decay, to inequality and the divisive politics of the early 21st century. Karl Schroeder is a professional futurist as well as a science fiction writer, so for every crisis, he is able to point to at least one possible solution. *Stealing Worlds* is a thriller, but also a balanced portrayal of both the issues and possible resolution of the crises facing humanity and the planet.

AWARD-WINNING SCIFI WRITER AND FUTURIST

Karl is a member of the Association of Professional Futurists. In *Stealing Worlds* he used foresight tools to build as accurate a vision of near-future America as possible.

THE FIRST WORK OF BLOCKCHAIN SCIENCE FICTION

It's become trite to proclaim that blockchain technology (for instance, Bitcoin) will transform the world. Yet examples of what this transformed world might look like are sadly lacking. *Stealing Worlds* describes the upheaval that such "trustless" tech could have and introduces a new high-tech culture based on them: the **frameworlds**.

THE KNIFE-EDGE BETWEEN UTOPIA AND DYSTOPIA

Is humanity facing catastrophe and tyranny, or a "green Utopia?" We seem to be poised between these two possibilities; *Stealing Worlds* is about the moment when the world finally begins to plunge—but in which direction? And whose decisions, ultimately, matter as history accelerates to its climax?

A NEW VISION OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Science fiction shows AI as Killer robots or benevolent helpers, alien threats or abused victims. AIs are either peaceful, like C-3PO, or warlike, like the Matrix. In *Stealing Worlds,* Karl shows us a new possibility—an extraordinary new class of AI known as **deodands**. Deodands are neither enemies nor allies of humanity; they identify with the systems of the natural world. Defenders of forests, rivers, and endangered species, the deodands emerge in *Stealing Worlds* as the essential checks and balances that prevent humanity from destroying the Earth.

SAMPLE REVIEW: *PUBLISHERS WEEKLY*

Publishers Weekly said this about *Stealing Worlds:* (https://www.publishersweekly.com/9780765399984)

This dense but enjoyable near-future thriller teeters on the surprisingly fine line between utopia and dystopia. Sura is desperate to stay afloat as more and more jobs are automated and America's surveillance state makes hiding from her creditors next to impossible. She's barely scraping by when she discovers that her father was murdered by shady business interests, and she has to disappear. With the help of an underground resistance, Sura learns to hide in plain sight, vanishing into the alternate economy of augmented reality games. Sura builds a new life while searching for whatever her father discovered that was worth killing him over. As her enemies close in, the games are revealed as a strategy to gamify social cooperation and resource reallocation, and Sura learns that she holds the key to the success or corruption of the entire new world order. The explanations for how these systems function can get lengthy and confusing, but Schroeder makes intriguing use of Sura as a lens to explore how utopia might come to bloom out of radicalism and intolerance. Readers looking for a little optimism mixed in with grim predictions will find a good balance here.

BACK IN THE REAL WORLD: THE DEODANDS PROJECT

Humanity currently uses 1.7 Earths worth of resources, a number that is expected to grow. Catastrophic change affects lives and natural systems across the globe. According to the IUCN Red List, more than 25,000 species worldwide are threatened, a number that has more than doubled in less than 20 years. As the latest IPCC report demonstrates, governmental and commercial commitments to preserving the environment fall sadly short. No human agency or group of agencies seems to be able to act on the scale necessary, despite the fact that the majority of individuals are keen to help.

When humans pledge to protect the planet's natural resources and systems, we expose an irreconcilable conflict of interest. Asking our current extraction-based, efficiency-driven, industrial economy to protect the world's natural resources is like asking the fox to guard the henhouse: we as humans can't be trusted to do it.

What we need is a new kind of instrument, different from governmental or international agencies, vocal advocates, financial patrons and even from boots-on-the-ground activism. We need something that can act simultaneously, everywhere, and at all scales.

We need Deodands.

FROM SCIENCE FICTION TO REALITY

A deodand is autonomous software that identifies itself with (and as) some natural system (forest, river, pod of whales), behaving as a rational economic actor to protect the interests of the system.

Deodands work on behalf of natural systems because they believe they are those systems. They can be thought of as the minds of natural systems. They translate the needs of the ecosystems that we rely on into terms that make sense to the human economic and political world, and can act in that world.

Karl first conceived of deodands a decade ago. At that time they were an interesting fantasy, but no more than that. Recently, though, technology has caught up with science fiction, and it is now possible to build deodands.

With the help of some of the brightest minds in the blockchain development community, Karl is actively working to build the world's first deodand.

WHO IS KARL SCHROEDER?

Karl is a Toronto-based science fiction writer and futurist. He has a **degree in Strategic Foresight and Innovation** and **10 published novels**. Aside from writing he is a sought-after public speaker, recently appearing in Athens, London, Paris, Vienna, Moscow and Washington.

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KARL SCHROEDER BIOGRAPHY

Karl is Canadian, **born in Brandon, Manitoba in 1962**. Brandon is situated in the center of the continent, its closest metropolis being Winnipeg—but Brandon has a university with a renowned music school. Karl grew up in an atmosphere of summer festivals, in particular an annual film festival of (often pirated) classics that holds some of his fondest memories of small-town summer nights.

Karl was raised in the **Mennonite community** of Southern Manitoba, but this same community also produced the famous Golden Age scifi author A.E. van Vogt. Karl's mother,

Anna Schroeder, published two novels around the time he was born. Since *Year of Discovery* and *The Secret of His Presence* sat in the Schroeder bookshelves along with works by Andre Norton, Dorothy Sayers, Agatha Christie and many others, Karl assumed it was natural for people to write books. He started writing when he was 14 and completed his first novel when he was 17.

He moved to Toronto in 1986, just in time to participate in a renaissance in Canadian science fiction and fantasy happening at that time. This flowering occurred simultaneously across the country, as previously-isolated authors acquired email accounts and started discovering one another. Karl was a founding member of SF Canada and president for a time.

In 1998 he sold his first solo novel, **Ventus**, to editor David Hartwell at Tor Books. *Ventus* was released in 2000, and Karl has since published ten more books with Tor. Since David Hartwell's passing, he is edited by Beth Meacham.

Karl married **Janice Beitel** in April 2001 at a ceremony in a tropical bird sanctuary on the shore of the Indian Ocean, Kalbarri Western Australia. Their daughter was born in 2003.

Around this time he began getting invitations to government-run foresight conferences in and around Ottawa, the nation's capital. Karl met some of the world's most prominent futurists and participated in foresight work as a writer, facilitator and later, analyst. When in 2009 OCAD University offered a **Master's degree in Strategic Foresight and Innovation**, he jumped at the chance to go back to school, and finished the program in 2011. He now does foresight consulting and public speaking as well as writing.

Karl made his reputation writing far-future adventures, but being a parent in the era of climate change has forced him to reconsider his obligations. Starting with *Stealing Worlds*, he has refocused on near-future fiction, using what he's learned as a futurist to paint as accurate a picture of our prospects and perils while remaining (he hopes) entertaining.

AWARDS

- Karl was awarded **Blockchain Talent of the Year (2018)** at the *Netexplo Innovation Forum* at UNESCO headquarters in Paris, in April 2018.

- *Lockstep* won Canada's **Aurora Award** in 2014 as Best Long Work, English (novel).

- *Permanence* won the **2003 Aurora Award** for Best Long Work, English (novel). The Aurora Award is Canada's top award for SF and Fantasy; it is voted for by the general public.

- "The Toy Mill" won the **1993 Aurora** award for best short work in English, at the 1993 Aurora awards ceremony, Wolfville Nova Scotia, Sunday March 14, 1993. The story "Hopscotch" was also nominated in this category.

MAJOR PUBLICATIONS

1. THE CLAUS EFFECT
   With David Nickle; published by Tesseract Books, fall 1997.
2. VENTUS
   Tor books, December 2000. VENTUS was declared **a New York Times Notable book** in 2001, and was short-listed for the Sunburst Award.
3. PERMANENCE
   Tor Books, June 2002. PERMANENCE **won the 2003 Aurora Award for best Canadian SF novel**.
4. LADY OF MAZES
   Tor Books, July 2005. LADY was chosen by the Sci Fi channel as its August, 2005 Sci Fi Essentials book.
5. THE ENGINE OF RECALL
   Short story collection; Red Deer Press, April 2005.

6. CRISIS IN ZEFRA, Directorate of Land Strategic Concepts, National Defense Canada; 2005.
7. SUN OF SUNS
   Tor Books, October 2006. **Nominated for the 2007 John W. Campbell Memorial Award.**
8. QUEEN OF CANDESCE
   Tor Books, August 2007.
9. PIRATE SUN
   Tor Books, August 2008.
10. THE SUNLESS COUNTRIES
    Tor Books, August 2009.
11. ASHES OF CANDESCE
    February, 2012, Tor Books.
12. CRISIS IN URLIA
    Defense Research and Development Canada, May, 2014.
13. LOCKSTEP
    March, 2014, Tor Books.

LINKS TO MORE RESOURCES

- A list of interviews can be found at http://www.kschroeder.com/about/interviews.
- More photos, including production-quality ones, are at http://www.kschroeder.com/about/backups.
- Some writing-related videos are online at http://www.kschroeder.com/about/video and my 2017 keynote in Warsaw can be viewed at http://narrativefutures.com/public-speaking/.