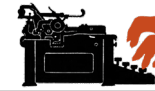




# Mutant Foxes

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**“The fox knows many things,  
but the hedgehog knows one big thing.”**

This aphorism by the ancient Greek poet Archilochus got quite a bit of currency during the last century. A lot of people asked whether, in the world of ideas, it was better to be a fox than a hedgehog.

As you know if you followed the polls, the 20th-century consensus wound up firmly in favor of the hedgehog. After all, the time had passed when one could be universally educated in all subjects and disciplines. There was too much stuff to learn about too many big things. The time of the specialist had arrived. And specialists are, by definition, hedgehogs—small, spiny, nocturnal, insectivorous, and extremely well-versed in one big thing.



Through the last phase of the 20th century and the first couple of decades of this one, the two of us defied this preference and steadfastly remained foxes—omnivorous, narrow-snouted, bushy-tailed, red-coated, and determined to learn as much about as many big things as we could.

It's been a risky and unpopular stance. Publishers, literary agents, and temp agencies have implored us to turn hedgehog. It's been devilishly hard to make a living as writers, even though the keyboard long ago replaced the quill as a writing instrument. Worst of all, we've had to forego the hedgehog's defensive maneuver of rolling up into a ball and pointing its spines outwards. Foxes are fatally furry and vulnerable to attack by parties of gung-ho specialists with their bugles, horses, and hounds.

But foxness wasn't altogether a matter of choice for us. Call it ADHD if you like, but we are just not congenitally hedgehoggian. Nevertheless, we've managed to survive as “neofoxes,” mutant foxes adapted for survival in this the age of hyperinformation.

“But to what end?” you may ask.

Indeed, just what is a mutant fox good for? We will pursue this question in posts to come ... among the many other questions that come to mind.

a new published story:

HUMANS

I'll start with the door to Dante's *Inferno* opening behind me—a trivial moment, but for some reason I think of it as the beginning of this story. I jerked around at the sound. It's the way you react after you've been robbed at gunpoint twice—a silent, suspended moment of certainty that something awful is about to happen.

To my relief, it was only the Ax Murderer coming through the door.

Read our hybrid story  
[“Humans”](#) in  
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## Neofoxes may actually be said to be specialists in one thing: Story.

Telling, hearing, finding, living ... Story.

The first book we worked on together was *PragMagic* (Pocket Books). When we distilled a decade of reporting that had appeared in Marilyn Ferguson's *Brain/Mind Bulletin*, we emphasized Story: How can this or that piece of information be used to enrich the story of your life?

It's not just us. We often see the primacy of Story reasserted. The legendary split-brain research pioneer Michael S. Gazzaniga talked about "your storytelling brain," and how the human is a "storytelling animal." And it doesn't much matter whether our stories are "real" or "made-up."

For one of our own favorite stories, we had the privilege of collaborating with cognitive philosopher Daniel C. Dennett on an experimental essay/story called "Media-Neutral," which appeared in *Speculations: The Reality Club 1* and eventually in our first novel, *The Jamais Vu Papers*. In it, a psychiatrist discovers that he's a character in a book—*The Jamais Vu Papers*, in fact. Desperate to understand how being fictional affects his life, our character goes to Dennett for advice. "Media-Neutral" was great fun to work on, and Dennett threw himself into his therapist-philosopher role wholeheartedly. (Read/download the Dennett interview [here](#).)

We are not, of course, foxes of the old school ("paleofoxes")—those fabulous panautodidacts ranging from Leonardo da Vinci to Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz. Such metaphorical "true foxes" (figurative genus *Vulpes* of the allegorical *Canidae* family) were in-depth masters of all areas of knowledge. They became extinct in the middle of the last century, wiped out by sheer information overload.

So we neofoxes are deeply committed to Story. In our memoir/essay "A Mexico of the Mind" (anthologized in *Solamente en San Miguel*), we offered this reflection:

Storytelling, like all art, like life, is an act of learning—of finding out. We are mistaken to assume that stories of transformation are only about transformation, mere illustrations. Instead, they are transformation itself, acts of practical alchemy, with the power to alter the reality of every receptive person they touch. (That's why we must learn to recognize a hate-based tale in any garb, and admit that nothing holy feeds on pain.) As we live our stories and tell them, we learn what they are about ... and they change ... and they transform.

We like to play with ideas, therefore this publication. Over the years, our interviews with some very interesting people (often related in story form) have been published in various places. Some of the best will reappear here. This is our chance to revisit, adapt, and update some of our previously published stories and essays and try out brand new ones. OPT IN to receive future issues. Also see: [Plays on Ideas](#), our website and occasional blog.

NEXT MONTH: "The Hoax Principle," how fictional ideas, like placebos, can attain an astounding level of reality through sheer persuasive force – a concept that has gained considerable power in the present time.

