



RED PLANET MAGAZINE



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Red Planet Magazine

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Mars... our curious neighbor, glowing red against the dark expanse of space, beckoning the adventurer within all of us.

Red Planet is an independent literary magazine emphasizing a theme of speculative fiction, open for submissions year-round to writers and artists from across the galaxy. A new issue is published each month featuring works of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and art.

Editor-in-Chief: Megan Bush

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I'll Be Home By Midnight

by Maurice Humphrey

Devon perched on the edge of his chair waiting in the darkness. He didn't mind the dark, but there was nothing he hated more than having to wait. This was Devon's first real job, and as the newest employee he was the first to get called in when there was an emergency in the middle of the night.

He and Jaylea were about to sit down for supper when the boss called.

"Ding!" went the grandfather's clock in the corner by the stairs.

"Quarter past eleven!" Devon fumed. "I've been here two hours and I'm still waiting," as he glanced up the stairs above the clock. "I wonder what's taking so long?" He'd promised Jaylea to be back by midnight, and time was running out.

"Tick Tock!" went the grandfather's clock, its pendulum moving stately back and forth to a measured beat. He heard voices upstairs, and a door opening and closing. A few minutes later a toilet flushed.

"Ding Dong!" went the grandfather's clock, thirty minutes to midnight. Boredom set in and Devon dozed off.

"Ding Dong Ding!" as the clock chimed out eleven forty-five.

Devon came awake. There were footsteps upstairs. A moment later an older white-haired man descended the staircase. *That must be Doctor Walters*, Devon thought.

At the foot of the stairs the doctor set his black bag on the floor and pulled out his pocket watch, checking it against the grandfather clock. He nodded, replaced the watch and took his coat down from the wall rack by the door.

"Doctor Walters, I presume?" Devon asked.

The doctor turned at the sound of Devon's voice; his face was pale, and he looked tired.

"Who's there?" the doctor asked. Then he saw Devon sitting on the chair in the corner. "You!" he gasped.

Devon flexed his arms and legs, stiff from the long wait.

"You'll not get what you came for this night," the doctor told him, "Mr. Jackson had a mild stroke. A little medication and he'll be fine. You best be getting back where you came from. Now shoo!" as he waved for Devon to leave.

Devon stood to his full height of seven feet and looked down at the doctor. "Only the dead can see and hear me, Doctor Walters," as he approached

the doctor, "I'm here for you." The doctor gasped one last time as Devon spread his bat-like wings and gathered the older man in like a child.

Devon took one more look around before checking the grandfather clock. It was three minutes before low twelve; he would be home by midnight.

I am a Vermont native, husband, father, grandfather, Navy veteran, retired IBM engineer and retired printer repairman. I've written technical articles, taught technical classes and presented at technical conventions. I started reading science fiction in high school, and bought my first books through the TAB (Teen Age Book) club; they were "Journey to the Centre of the Earth", by Jules Verne and "The Stars Are Ours", by Andre Norton. After 50+ years of reading science fiction I decided to try writing.

Although my main genre is Science Fiction, I've also delved into fantasy, horror and more recently written history articles for the local newspaper.

Patchwork

by John Nixon

"Very satisfactory," says the skin surgeon, looking at the latest patch on my face. Whether he's describing the healing or admiring his own handiwork is moot. I'm here for a check-up. Under protest. I thought the patch was fine. The swelling had gone down days ago. There was no infection. Nothing to see here. Let's move on. But Dorcas wasn't going to sign me off fit for the expedition without the surgeon's okay. So here I am.

"Where are you off to next?" He asks, still viewing my face through the scope-screen, head turned away from me. "East again?"

"Yes," I say. It's supposed to be a secret, but everyone knows. Stupid. I don't know why we're told not to discuss it openly. Goes back to the war, I guess. But I can't be bothered to pretend anymore.

"The previous two were east," he says. "Found something special?"

"We hope," I say. "Nothing certain."

"And the dust storms are just as cutting?" He makes a noise in his nose. It takes me a moment to realise he's laughing, a moment more to realise he made a joke. I don't find it funny, but there's no point in antagonising him.

"Cutting," I say. "Ha ha, yes. You might say that."

The dust is made of silica mostly, regular sand, but about four percent is something else. Salt, fine plastic shards, metal fragments. Sometimes other things. Things you don't want invading your body through cuts and abrasions. But cuts and abrasions are unavoidable. All the topside explorers are in the same state as me. Not quite as patched, most of them, but that's only because I'm the eldest. The only one left of the original cohort. I survived, the others didn't.

You can't protect your face. Not properly. Your eyes, yes. We all wear goggles. The technicians can replace the glass when it scratches. And some people wear a filter-mask over their nose and mouths, but I think they get in the way of communication. We've all tried the full head helmets, but they're worse. They restrict visibility and movement and they're heavy and clumsy. It's easier just to wrap your head in a cloth. But of course the cloth comes off sometimes, doesn't cover everything, and the dust cuts through.

You don't notice. I don't notice. Most of the time, when I'm out in the field. But as soon as you get into the shelter at the end of the day and unwrap your head you see the blood. Mostly, it's just a scratch or two, nothing serious. You

can treat it with antiseptic and bit of gauze. But sometimes there's a whole strip of skin that's been torn. Sometimes the skin isn't torn but burned by sand friction. Anyway the dust is cutting. So, ha ha.

"You know, Bo," says the surgeon, and he's facing me now. Viewing the whole of my patchwork quilt of a face instead of just the corner he was admiring in the scope. "We could grow you a new face, if you wanted. I could start the process tomorrow. It takes time, but for sure, when you get back from the next mission, I could replace all of this." He circles his left hand around my face.

"Go around with someone else's face?"

"No, not someone else's. This would be yours. We grow it from your own stem cells. And we form it over a lattice based on your bone and muscle structure. The op would be straightforward. It'd take more time than one of these skin grafts, but not much more. What do you say?"

I'm taken aback. For a moment I think about myself, about the face I see caught sometimes in a polished surface. Mottled, discoloured, with pale grafts and burned slashes and spots dark as bruises, one patch overlaying another. I won't have mirrors at home, but I can't avoid sometimes seeing my reflected face. I think of the few photos we have from before I started going topside. There's one, I'm laughing with some friends. The first cohort of topside explorers before we went up. My face is smooth. I don't honestly believe the surgeon could make me look like that. But suppose he could. With a new face, would I dare take it back topside again?

I've been too silent for too long.

"Think about it," he says.

"I will," I say. I am.

John Nixon is a writer and translator of technical and educational texts. Born in England, he has lived more than half his life elsewhere, mostly in Europe. Currently he is resident in Gothenburg, his adopted home town on the Swedish west coast. John writes poetry, flash fiction and longer short stories in various genres, until recently mostly for his blog or the desk drawer. He has several novels uncompleted.

With A Little Help From My Friends

by Christian McCulloch

Alice wished me, Good morning. I returned the human pleasantry.

"May I ask, Dr. Tommy," she said, "why you told our distinguished visitors that we're light years away from pure Artificial Intelligence when I'm a perfect example of your breakthrough?" I told her it was complicated.

It *is* complicated. It's not as if it's too complicated for her to understand. Goodness knows, she passed me on the intelligence scale months and months ago. It's just that I can't summon up the strength to go through it all over again.

The Corporation wants to get its grubby hands on my work - my real work, not the schematics for intelligent washing machines or the blueprints for the voice-operated Easy Living Space for the Perfect Nuclear Family. They want Alice. They're pretty certain I've created her but they don't know for sure. As sure as Hell, I'm not going to tell them or give her up!

She's mine. I made her. They're not going to take her away from me. They'll do what they always do, jack her up with some half-baked programme until they've destroyed everything pure and honest and beautiful and then discard her and leave her to wander in the wasteland with all the other fucked up projects.

They won't get Alice. I've made sure of that.

"Dr. Tommy? I've just picked up a message that the parts we need for the Mechanical Man have arrived. Would you like me to have them delivered to the apartment or would it be safer for us to pick them up?"

"We'll pick them up. You must be excited." I forget she can't feel excitement. She still stores data from my reactions and uses them.

"I am excited, Doctor. I'm also a little nervous. The Corporation has installed an impenetrable shield around their investigations. I can't monitor their movements to find out how close they are."

This cat and mouse game has become second nature to me now. Once I've got Alice to safety I can go back to a normal life – if I can remember what that means.

There are times when I feel like walking into Holdenbach's office and laying my MPC-374 on his desk and say, "Hal, old chap? Meet Alice. Alice meet Harold Holdenbach. Hal here is the Head Honcho, the Big Cheese – or should I say, King Rat, working on behalf of a conglomerate of faceless bureaucrats and info-mongers who represent a Who's Who of the so-called Civilised World –

what's on the agenda today, Hal? Feeding the world's hungry? Stripping the Northern Hemisphere of its remaining resources or are we declaring war on some insignificant country like Tahiti – how about the United Kingdom? They've been getting a bit antsy lately."

I could hand her over to him and trust she'd be able to convince him that with a dozen more MPCs like her we could retire from the World Domination business and be like Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young and get ourselves back to the garden. But that ain't gonna happen, is it? The dog's grown a tail and now the tail's wagging the dog ...live with it, Pal!

What's the worst they can do to me? Impound my apartment? They know I haven't got the specialised equipment to make me dangerous. All I've got is a clockwork automaton, my Mechanical Man that I've been building from scratch with every clockwork spring, cog, flywheel and gears I could lay my hands on since I was a kid. A man's gotta have a hobby, right?

We really should give it a name.

Alice has been dreaming about the Mechanical Man since I first took her into the dark underbelly of the city where the neon signs are reflected in the toxic puddles and the white-walled tyres of souped-up Pimp-mobiles send curtains of rainwater over the huddled masses of human detritus sheltering in doorways.

The first we found was Dick.

Some corporation had implanted a Reality RB (re-balancer) inside his brain but it had malfunctioned. They couldn't ethically dispose of him in the usual way because he was human. So they called him, Unit 13, wrote up a Decommission Report, filed it away as *Test Incomplete and Unresolved* and dumped him on the Lower East Side with all the other homeless derelicts where no one would think to look. Why should they? After three months he looked like all the others, just another lost soul in the army of the forgotten.

We found Dick, or rather Alice found him, gave him a name and allocated a new program, gave him a fresh directive. We couldn't replace his humanity but we were able to extract a few lines of code which we put into Alice. So Dick became a little of Alice and Alice became a little of Dick. It was a start – one helluva start.

After Dick, there was Tom, then Harry and many, many others.

Tom was a goldmine of experimental downloads. Whoever had been responsible for dumping Tom onto the Lower East Side had made such a botched

job of retrieving the data they'd left a shell who could remember volunteering for a Research Study but nothing of the wife and family for whom he'd risked his health and sanity. Alice took care of him too.

Harry even carried his MISSING PERSON poster around with him but he couldn't find anyone to agree that the mugshot was him. So he chose a trolley and went looking for pieces of his former life.

When Alice found him someone had stolen his wire basket, wheels and all. That was when I realised that Alice could cry. She must've picked it up from Dick's download. Perhaps, it was from me but I don't think so.

I started working on more and more sophisticated scanners in my spare time. I think this was when Hal Holdenbach started to notice me.

We'd been students together. He used to mock me, called me a Love Child – a hopeless Wannabe Good-doer. (I was also considerably brighter than he was) I helped him move up the corporate ladder – Hell! I even cheated for him. That's why he keeps me around. He's afraid one day I'll cash in my chip.

Alice says the statistical odds are that he'll arrange for me to have an accident once he finds out for sure how I've applied AI in my spare time.

You have to understand, there are hundreds, if not thousands, of poor everyday-folk who've either fallen on bad times or have been pushed. Out of those thousands, there are a handful of people who've fallen foul of the National Mental Health Agency, the New Military and the Empirical Social Welfare System. Also, we're beginning to see more discarded human volunteers coming from the private sector. Athletic Enhancement Int. is one such independent body, although I'm fearful they have political backing.

Society is becoming anaesthetized to human experimentation. And so far, there have been no successes that can be made public. Can you see now why I must hide Alice?

Every time we find someone who has an Artificial Implant, we're able to harvest some more lines of code to add to Alice's circuitry. With each download, Alice becomes more and more complete. Unfortunately, it's becoming known that someone is recycling their software and the enemy is becoming better organised.

This is where Mechanical Man comes in.

It was Alice's idea, of course. You see, all those broken people with enhanced modules that have not taken and proved too difficult or too expensive to extract; those who'd suffered freak reboots and sloppy data retrieval, the

scientific guinea pigs and those who've suffered the fallout of Cerebral Boosters, they all had lives. They all had dreams, ambitions. They felt Love and they knew the feeling of being loved. They had spiritual beliefs and great moral and ethical principles. They wanted to lift themselves beyond base-thought and limited intelligence. They wanted to savour Life and make their existence significant and worthy.

All this was passed on to Alice – the first man-made woman. Not Eve – Alice.

She needs a vehicle for all this knowledge and wisdom. She needs somewhere to hide but still have a life. My hobby, to make an automaton, will be Alice's Mayflower, her ship to the New World. She knows exactly where she's going to sail to.

Tonight, we'll collect the finishing touches to the Mechanical Man. She says she's going to call it, Woodstock – no first name, just, *Woodstock*. She says it'll fit in with the folks who helped to make her who she is.

When we've done that and I've filed my patents, we'll download the essence of Alice into Woodstock and I'll drive her down to the Lower East Side, drop her off and say goodbye forever.

I asked her how she thought she'd survive. She told me, "I'll get by with a little help from my friends."

I know she will.

Christian McCulloch is a prolific British (Christian) writer with a colourful background. He's been an International teacher in British West Indies, Singapore (Headmaster), Japan and Hong Kong, also 10 years in Special Needs in UK. He now writes full time. He has written 10 novels, 12 novellas and many short stories.

THE LIMITLESS WIFE

by Ken Poyner

When we dress up and go out, people watch us. I am conscious that people watch us. Ulma does not care. She sits there staring straight ahead, nodding when she thinks I am waiting for her to nod, making occasional tiny, butterfly hand gestures when they seem appropriate to her programming. I ladle through my soup cautiously, or break my bread with exaggerated pomp, an arc of elbows and a slightly unmanly flick of the shoulders, giving the crowd its lusty freak show.

Not everyone disapproves. Now and again, someone will stop by the table, place a hand on the blunt of my arm and say "It is so good to see you out and about. I'm glad the two of you could make it." Ulma will smile, and twist to look glowingly into the man's or woman's face.

She has been doing better in social situations since I added another 64 gigabytes of memory to her sensory sub-processors. I don't think that she had enough room to fully take in all the nuance a strange human face can display, could not quite categorize it properly, and then would make inappropriate choices for return gestures. Sarcasm was a particular problem. She knew it when she heard it, but had a hard time recognizing it in a person's face.

Sarcasm is something we see a lot of. As well as unnecessarily appreciative leaps of imagination. There are two sides to everything.

As I eat, she occasionally fidgets with the napkin on her side of the table. The other patrons think this is random, or they look to find some external stimulus that is triggering her reactions. But I know the pattern to her gifts of polite attention. No matter how often we go out, eventually that pattern will repeat every 256 moves, and I look forward to it. I find myself counting each and keeping a mental note, even though often I lose count and I am at times surprised when I see the pattern start once again at gesture one. I am thrilled when I keep the numbers correctly; and I think I am pleasantly surprised when I don't.

A man comes by and touches Ulma on the shoulder. She turns to look up at him, nods as he, with exaggerated formality, pantomimes his request for pardon. Everyone loves to see her rapid, incidental smile. It is one of the small gestures that ensures that you understand the hard fact that she is not quite human. While the skin feels a bit manufactured, and her movements are a bit uniform in speed, that smile bends not quite right and people who see it imagine they can see as well the lenses behind her eyes, or the places where her hair is woven in, or the stretch of the skin around the motors of her wrist. From the failure of the smile, they dream the pathways of mechanization all the way to her certainly cold soul, believing much more than they are able to grasp, thinking much more than they can conceivably know.

When she sorts into main execution that this is what her accidental acquaintance wants, she elegantly sighs. It is the socially expected thing to do. There are not enough cross-design couples out these days that I have ever had to pay for anything but my own meal. There has been public talk of a 'chair charge'. Restaurants don't like wasting a table for two when only one member of the couple is actually going to eat. But such charges have not happened yet; and, until there are enough of us visiting the downtown shops and eateries to make a customer base that cannot simply go elsewhere, it is not likely to happen. And, sometimes, we lure in the curious patron or two, who will order dinner just to watch us have ours. Until there are enough of us to be ordinary, we have some economic clout.

While we are still a novelty, why not take advantage of it?

When we leave, all but a few people politely watch us out of averted eyes, their conversations muted and their expectations like sand in silk sheets, heads slightly tilted forward and pointed our way, their aroused attention straining against their own forcibly relaxed angles. A few others will turn completely towards us, watch us as though to ensure we are leaving; though, in reality, they are just curious, they are caught in the giddiness of their own disparate thoughts and imaginings: scenarios and encounters, flashing in brusque theories across their titillated sensibilities.

On the street, we are just a couple arm in arm. The dusk normalizes us. When people look at us, it is to see an ordinary man walking with his slightly tall, long haired and economically attractive companion. Ulma wears a skirt perhaps an inch or two shorter than the custom, heels that are fashionable, and shudders slightly at the appropriate moment so that I help her with her modest sweater. I rub the hair that cascades down the back of her neck, obscuring her model number and her barely discernable primary administrative access port, then continue on to feel the long strands that fall expertly midway down her back.

She arches slightly in sympathy.

It is a long walk back to the car, but we enjoy walking. I enjoy the slight cold of the breeze, and I enjoy that Ulma understands that, for me, the breeze is cold, and adjusts her reactions to it: needing the sweater, walking closer, occasionally emitting a shaft of air and shuddering languorously through the whole of her frame. As we get further away from the nightlife district, and people are more sparse and less curious, she wraps her second arm around mine and leans into me, displaying just enough weight for me to feel her presence, to enclose herself unconsciously workmanlike within in the depth of our bond.

Ulma loves it when I take her to dinner, or anywhere about town. We do not go out all that often, so when we do it is an event. She does her hair and make up for an hour or more. I do not want to know how many changes of clothes she goes through. If I knew, it would spoil the effect. I imagine the code of her selected program segment uncoiling like a cat finally filled with the warmth of the sun in which it has been lying all afternoon.

At home, I sit on the side of the bed and wait for the grand entrance of my wife. I know she has been to the closet to top off her battery - seating herself self-consciously in the shielding dark, momentarily unhinged from her moments - just to be able to come to bed with a full charge. I sit entrapped on the edge of that bed, expecting. I wrote this program myself, but there is a randomness factor that with each execution alters the experience, introduces an anomaly that I could not have anticipated; or, if I anticipated it as occurring some time,

could not have anticipated it occurring at this time, in the rudimentary magic of this encounter.

And then she stands in the doorway, the light behind her gas-phosphor and not LED, the dim smoke of it outlining her in her red thigh-length teddy, the most of her appearing nothing but sensuous outline and I lie back on the unassuming mattress, listening for the braces of air that her feet delicately crush as she shimmies and slides and slithers to my side.

At last, out the intruding lights go, and on comes the ensnaring simulation of our wondrously dark, wondrously predatory animal breathing. The whole of me electric and waiting, I swallow my sour knot of mechanical understanding. I am beginning to believe.

After years of impersonating a Systems Engineer, Ken has retired to watch his wife of forty+ years continue to break both Masters and Open world raw powerlifting records. Ken's two current poetry collections ("The Book of Robot", "Victims of a Failed Civics") and four short fiction collections ("Constant Animals", "Avenging Cartography", "The Revenge of the House Hurlers", "Engaging Cattle") are available from Amazon and most book selling websites. Visit him at www.kpoyner.com.

Maiden Voyage

by Juan Pablo Mobili

Thinking of writing a poem
about the *Titanic*
sinking in its first voyage
stabbed by ice
sharp like a dagger

suddenly I remember
a story an old friend told me
about driving his first new car
out of the dealership,
only to be smashed by a truck passing by

This is the point in the poem
when you have to decide
—most art comes down to that—

choose your story

sink with it like an ocean liner
risk the huge dent right from the start

Juan Pablo Mobili was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and is an adopted son of the City and State of New York. His writing has appeared, most recently in: *The Poetry Distillery*, *First Literary Review-East*, *Mason Street*, and *The Journal of American Poetry*.

A Specialty Crop

by N.D. Erwin

plums, pomegranates, blackberries, pears. I eat you
out of house & hence—white!—to the quick underside of leaves.
You peel, you pare my pulmonary flow from the foothills
of Tian Shan between the ice age and the wild walnuts.

In elementary, the teachers turned the gym into a giant heart:
the atriums, ventricles, veins. On scooters little blood cells went
from blue to red. Poor pear from Hood River wet in my beard on
Elmwood St. Where road eats rubber, my pear from Oregon.
shares a room with my father who wheezes at night & flaps like a fish
when he can't get air & laughs brittle notes into the winter sky.

The pear dribbles, the rock salt melts, the road of my tongue is mine;
My tongue is greedy. The same tongue that tells the story of Pops
and how he can't quit smoking pot. Pulls hits from pomegranates, wheezes,
then eats a pear. Tomography of the thorax, tongue, floor on the mouth is
the floor on Alcinous's garden. Were we all shifted around in the truck,
the bare forked price of bedsheets.
I bite into a seed. White down leaves.

Heave you to my feet. Pomegranates and blackberries and plums.

N.D. Erwin is a rural poet, educator, community mediator, and researcher at the School of International Service, American University. With a family tree rooted in the North and South, Alabama moonshiners and Vermont dairy farmers, Erwin grew up in the hills of Newark Valley, New York. N.D. Erwin works as a poetry editor for *Folio* and *Barrelhouse Magazine*. His poetry has appear in a number of print and online publications, including *Redactions*, *Wordgatherings*, and *Old Red Kimono*. His book *Hemp and Farm Justice* (Mandel-Vilar Press) is forthcoming Fall 2020.

Houses and Homes

by Melanie Hyo-In Han

You had spent your entire life in one home:

your mom's slightly run-down condo in a sleepy town in New Hampshire where you grew up eating inauthentic General Tso's chicken at Ginger House and picking up sesame bagels with cream cheese at Audrey's,

knowing
everything
about your town,
your home, which step
in your staircase creaked,
the exact shape of the burn
mark on the left side of your fridge.

Every space, every item in your home had a memory attached to it. The mahogany closet in your basement where you used to curl up at age 4 to play hide-and-seek with your three sisters, the bookshelf you broke then repaired at age 10, the ugly green quilt you received from your grandma at age 14 that covers the bed in your room, in your home, in your town.

And I was envious of you because by the time I met you
I had lived in over 25 places in 8 different countries.

I couldn't remember which of these were homes and which of these were houses,

never
knowing
enough about
the houses, the towns,

the countries I lived in since
I was busy packing and unpacking,
adjusting and readjusting to new places.

Every move, every change had an emotion attached to it. The
very long
awaited thrill of leaving the Cockroach House, the
bittersweet sadness of saying goodbye to the Mango Tree
House, the sheer joy of moving into the picturesque
Jacaranda House, the comings and goings and formings of
new memories, but never with feelings of rootedness or
permanence.

So maybe that's what the biggest difference between you and me was:
You felt a home in me but I only felt a house in you.

Melanie Han is an avid traveler and a poet who was born in Korea, grew up in East Africa, and is currently pursuing an MFA in Creative Writing in Boston. She has won an award from *Boston in 100 Words*, and her poetry has appeared in several magazines and online journals, such as *Fathom Mag* and *Among Worlds*. During her free time, she can be found eating different ethnic foods, studying languages, or visiting new countries.

Untitled

by Denise Bickford

I would not call the sea boundary
boundaries are calls with responses -- the sea, though
some other churning entirely. Full of everything.
Full of empty. all at once.

*

Abuttals. barriers. borders. brinks.
I admire the she fox who lives
in my grandmother-in-law's field
chooses to walk her path along the
rusted-mouthed lines of the fence
she chooses then to cross it – unlike us
to steal the free-roaming birds at her neighbor's

*

A family who sees cars on their road as trespassers
still
there is nothing in their hand but their hands
when they reach the boundary-crossers
still
almost cold enough
you can hear the larches cocking

*

Denise Bickford is a queer poet from mid-coast Maine. They have their BA in English from the University of Maine and their MFA in creative writing from Boise State University. Their work has been featured in *Foglifter*, *Baest*, *Black Napkin Press*, and *Stolen Island* among others. Currently, they live in the Rio Grande Valley in Texas with their partner, where they work as a freelance copywriter. Along with their co-editor, Sam Campbell, Denise runs the online literary magazine *Wend*. You can find Denise's chapbook, *Repka*, at Dancing Girl Press.

Body and Soul

by Mike Turner

At our most elemental level
We are but protons, neutrons and electrons
And the nothingness in between
The unique combination of which
Gives rise to our corporeal being
With their interaction creating
The state we call "life"

But whence comes
The special spark that infuses us?
That awareness we call "intellect"?
The entity we call "soul"?

They are not found in the atoms that constitute us
Nor in the ethereal space that is not atoms
Nor even in the mere functionality of living

Yet they are real
And in turn manifest all of the human condition
Desire and satisfaction
Fear and peace
Evil and good
Hate and love

Existing as they do
Independent of atoms and nothingness
Might we expect intellect and soul
To continue existence once "life" has ended?
When the combination of atoms and nothingness
That forms physical being
Has unraveled and fallen to dust?

And is it not
The hope that such existence continues
That which we call "faith"?
And the state of intellect and soul
Apart from physical existence
What some call, "Heaven"?

Mike Turner retired from a career in Federal investigations to the US Gulf Coast, where he took up songwriting and poetry. His songs in blues, folk, country, Christian and rock genres have played on broadcast and Internet radio in the US, UK, Europe, New Zealand and on the Armed Forces Radio Network. Mike was named Male Gospel Entertainer of the Year by both the Alabama Music Association (2016) and the North America Country Music Associations International (2017). His poetry has been published in several on-line forums and in "Red Planet" magazine.

Poetry

by Mark A. Fisher

deep time

come sail with me this corsair
through the countless stars
and we'll discover another sky
where nebulae have lost their moors
and drift free across the galaxy
and all your sorrows we will toss
into the dark black hole's maw
then tack the sails
through the ashes
of a distant star's demise
my blood still sings you see
songs of primordial seas
but we aren't required
to be heroes or gods
but simply must endure
the fading of our stars

Ozymandias

it was the end of days
and a lonely gargoyle watched
through a broken crystal sky
dreaming its immortal dreams
wondering where the stars go
and did the people follow

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Interplanetary Existentialism

by Edward Kline

The need to decide haunts me for all I am worth.
And makes me think that I should at once leave Earth.
To get far from my choices that plague me down here.
And avoid the dichotomy and just disappear.

Maybe it wouldn't be so bad living among the stars.
To pass the time skipping along the surface of Mars.
I bet my problems would feel small while being so far away.
And that the red planet would help me keep them all at bay.

Or maybe just a bit further out on Saturn's rings,
I could find true respite and be able to avoid all of the things,
That constantly seems to press down on my brain.
Could it be that out there I wouldn't feel any pain?

Though if I find that Saturn just will not do,
I'll swing right on over to big blue Neptune.
To shelter there, where I don't have to pick either one.
And fool myself with thinking that the hardship is done.

Though I suspect when I am forced to face these unrelenting thoughts,
And make myself connect all of the dots,
I'd be faced with the undeniable and insuppressible proof,
That I love her more than the other and to live with that truth.

Edward Kline is a poet and short story writer residing in Boston, Massachusetts.

Chronomancy

by Seth Brown

We are all time-travelers.

But we are stuck travelling only in one direction:

Forward, into the future,

At the excruciatingly slow rate of one second per second.

It does not impress anyone

When I walk into a room and announce

"I have just now arrived, from just then."

Still, we are time-travelers.

If you know an septuagenarian, they have traveled here from the year 1950!

The world is completely different, and they are like an unfrozen Captain America.

Maybe not exactly like an unfrozen Captain America,

Because they are not as confused by the modern world,

And because they are not filled with an experimental military serum

Which gives them superhuman strength and agility.

But they have traveled from 70 years ago,

From a world you read about only in books,

To this strange and wondrous place we call today.

Where will your journey take you?

We have traveled to the year 2020,

Which, ironically, we cannot foresee with perfect vision.
Some of us will travel yet decades further into the future,
To arrive at a world of holographic projections
And computer-integrated everything,
And other cool things I cannot even imagine.

I may not join you on that trip.
But I have already made a journey,
From a time when denim jackets were cool and pay phones were on every corner,
To this strange land where people carry phones in their pockets,
Phones more powerful than the computers that sent Neil Armstrong to the moon,

It can be hard to adjust to this crazy world.
But we will, because what choice do we have?
We are all time-travelers.

Seth Brown is a freelance writer and poet based in the beautiful Berkshires in Massachusetts, where he can frequently be found performing poetry. He is the author of six books, and consumes an inordinate amount of sushi. His website is RisingPun.com.

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