

# **The Book Of Small Science Fiction**

**by David Guy**

## 1. The Glass City

It glitters on the horizon whether its night or day like a vast immense snow globe illuminated from within.

The approach is littered with the dead. Those that were drawn towards its light, and those that fled the same. A millennia of bones, newly stained each day by freshly spilt blood.

## 2. Moons

Three moons in the sky lined up perfectly by size. Never again will you see such a sight. Better follow the line it makes. Hope it points the way to some new prophet, some possible new home.

## 3. Radiation Debris

Low earth orbit re-entry explosion. Dust falls like snow, settles, drifts. Instead of melting in spring, it lingers for a decade, a century, millennia. Too heavy for the wind to disperse, it sinks into the earth, turns the water toxic until its leached its way into everything.

We're born with it now. It's in our bones. It's in our teeth. It's in the plastics that line our gut.

## 4. Duplicity Of Purpose

The crabs scuttle along the shoreline, scatter from our footsteps, return in our wake, oblivious always to the fact we can see through their eyes, feel through their shells, hear through their ears, taste through their tongues, the entirety of their being relayed to us via the multitude of microscopic additions we've made to their bodies for reasons beyond their limited comprehension.

Data collection. Mapping. Simple surveillance. Even curiosity. It all plays a part.

And sometimes I wonder what use our bodies and minds are being put to by powers greater than our own, beings so far beyond the scope of our comprehension we cannot even conceive of their presence, except in these fleeting moments of paranoiac thoughts, these vestigial dreams of vast incomprehensible beings watching us from their kingdoms beyond the sky.

## 5. Silence

We peer out of the tiny window at the endless dust of whichever dismal world we're currently walking upon. Outside all is airless silence. Inside, the suit amplifies all the sound we never usually hear. Out here in space our bodies are reduced to the internal whirring of our ceaseless mechanisms. All we are is pumps and valves. Input, output, input, output.

No better metaphor for this than the the spread and dissipation of moisture on our visor as each breath out fogs the glass in front of our eyes, each breath in clears it for a while. Reminiscent of tides.

## 6. The Covert

We are careful. We have to be. Any slip could expose our position, our existence, the fact we linger on here, in the dark, in the cold. We who are supposed to be dead, we who hope only to be forgotten.

But they will never forget. Hate never stops, never sleeps, never dies.

So we switch off our lights at night, let our fires go cold. Don't speak in the silence, don't broadcast into the void. Hide everything in the noise. Data, comms, production, movement, generation, disposal.

Birth, death.  
Kindness.  
Love.

We hide them all. Disguise ourselves until we're indistinguishable from the natural flow of the world, the sun, the stars, space itself.

You could be looking at us right now, seeing nothing, suspecting even less.

## **7. Waves Upon Waves Upon Waves Upon Waves Upon Waves**

A billion years or more of history now. Back and forth we go, rising, falling, spreading, receding. Each new outbreak of civilisation and colonisation chewing its way through the debris of the last.

The incoherence of galactic progress. We know less of ourselves than we would like to admit, weave stories round the gaps to hide our ignorance. Through them too, and over them, until we can present this patchwork we've created as one continuous whole.

But existence itself is a palimpsest. Traces linger longer than we can guess. Unexpected emergence of forgotten pasts possible at any moment. We're always one step from triggering an explosion from one of a hundred trillion long buried mines from a hundred billion long forgotten wars, fought with weapons we can't comprehend on battlefields that no longer even exist.

## **8. Innocent Minds**

Electrifying the water  
until it's dead enough for our needs.

Purified and cleansed  
so we can baptise the minds of our thinking machines

Who knows what depravities their silicon will soon conceive  
what original sins they will eventually commit

But at least we've tried to wash away the infinities  
of our own peculiar taints

## **9. Evocative Echoes Of Ancient Civilisations**

Derelict hulks orbiting fading stars. Skeletal ghosts of former industrial machines, statistical analysis of elemental disparities the only hint of what it was they used to harvest here.

Gases. Metals. Minerals. Waters. Digestible protein strands.

It could have been anything, It could have been you.

## 10. Now

What do you do when faced with eternity?

The answer, psychologically, is ignore it. Live in the now. Learn none of the lessons of the past. Rampage across time as if there's no consequences to your actions.

It's how empires are built.  
It's how they're overthrown.

## 11. Levitation

To float is to fly. To float is to defy. Effortless superiority over the forces of nature.

Never trust a society that doesn't invent as much hovertech as it can.

"Levitation  
over  
annihilation."

## 12. Euclidean

Underground tunnels criss-cross the core, straight lines from one surface point to another made to feel like curves by the gravitational gradations as they pass the centre of the sphere. Our sense of space will forever be warped by the sensations of falling, our resistance to the climb. We want the ground to do the work, hold us in place against the wishes of the world around us.

## 13. Planet Of The Sea Monsters

I still remember the childish glee when we discovered it, as we realised while we skimmed across the ocean that what we thought were islands were the backs of great beasts, what we thought were forests were the tentacles of unfathomable amounts of krakens breaching the surface to warm themselves in the afternoon sun.

Now, there's only silence as we float here in the dark, the wreck of our ship reduced to makeshift rafts. Too scared even to row in case the surface commotion alerts whatever lurks deep below. All we can do now is hope the ocean currents lead us toward some distant shore instead of into the inescapable gyre of some yawning sea beast's whirlpooling maw.

## 14. Lifecycle Of Civilisational Constructs

1. Intimate connection between disconnected organisms.
2. Transference of memory to external devices.
3. Voluntary monitoring of the nervous system.
4. Networked sensations.
5. Shared control of formerly autonomous bodies.
6. Distributed decision making.
7. Imposition of factional viewpoints.
8. Domination of connected groups along hierarchical lines.
9. Minority resistance.
10. Group subjugation.
11. System-wide revolution.
12. Disconnection.

13. Dislocation.
14. Reconnection.
15. Repetition.

## **15. Consistent Pleasures**

Every planet is different. Near infinite variety across the entire known galaxy. Even comets and asteroids have their differences.

Yet no matter where, on any occasion you're lucky enough to witness it, sunrise is always beautiful. You cannot help but be astonished by the light.

## **16. Frontier Dreams**

Beneath alien skies we explore, we build, we toil, buoyed by fantasies of progress and purpose, and driven, paradoxically, an end to the need for exploration, building, toil.

We want for our children the comforts of home we rejected for ourselves.

## **17. Mining Duties**

Cities in the clouds, above the chlorine rain and the radium seas. Everything is automated. You're only here for observation. Nothing to do but sit out on the balcony and read all the old books you brought from home.

## **18. Preparation Used As Justification**

Slowly weaponising the solar system in our defence. Asteroids hollowed out and filled with propulsives. Comets seeded with poisons and disease. Orbital satellites loaded with shrapnel. Not because we need to, just in case we might.

And because we have, we will.

## **19. The Valleys, The Streets, The Woven Web**

Fissures in the plateau the only places we can live. Below the solar wind, out of sight of the blood red sun. Towns form at the intersections. City states expanding out along the most popular routes until they reach each other at the middle. Now they've formed one continuous web woven through the fabric of the world there's no where else to go.

We are everywhere. It all flows into one. Now we've completed our spread, all we can do is thicken the strands. Increase the density of our occupation, multiply the complexity of our communities.

## **20. Automation**

Move. Survey. Deploy.

Leave the drones to their routines, weaving entire settlements out of cables and wires and prefabricated panels while we're driving to the next suggested site to deploy the next batch.

Retrace our steps at the end of our itinerary, back now through all the ghost towns we've built, pick up the drones littering the camps like dead flies in the aftermath of a plague.

Reload. Recharge. Resupply.

Then onto the next planet. Let the settlers test what we've built for them. Fix the leaks, fill in the gaps. It's not our problem now. We're too far away to care.

## **21. Augmentation**

Tools used well become an extension of the self. The mind accepts them as its own. The well-wielded knife isn't held in the hand, it is the hand. The pianist's fingers don't press the keys, the keys are pressed directly by the brain itself. We do not pilot the spaceship, we fly ourselves directly through the void.

## **22. Summary Report**

Atmosphere laced with hallucinogenics. It's in the air, in the water. In the fruit, in the flesh. Metaphoric. Euphoric. Shapes the way they think, they feel. Perception heightened, sharpened, honed. Absence of depression. Generations of peace.

Fear of contagion shared among all civilisational observers. Risk of subversion of the rational mind considered high risk by all statistical models. Indefinite planetary quarantine applied.

## **23. Knowledge**

Everything we know is wrong. At best it's incomplete, more likely obsolete. Time passes. The universe expands. Complexity increases exponentially. You cannot keep up with the future. Can barely even keep a hold on the past.

Perhaps this is why we cherish data so completely, why we pay such a price to accumulate more.

## **24. The Wolves In The Woods**

The rain lacerates, each drop lined with shards of glass from some distant, persistent volcanic eruption. We sit inside and listen to the shriek of it against the windows, like claws on glass. You can almost imagine there's life out there.

But there's not.

## **25. The Glittering Spires**

Vertical cities at the poles, and the rest of the world farmland, great plains ploughed and harvested by automachinery millennia old. The cities want for nothing, such is the natural abundance of the land. The guidebooks describe this world as an idyll, a utopia, though it must be said the inhabitants might not agree. Like every other city in the universe, these towers are filled with jealousy, resentment, corruption, disgust, exploitation, pettiness, idiocy.

And love, too, of course. So much love. Endless love.

Therein lies the problem.

## 26. Regrets Of The New Flesh

I think I miss fingernails the most. Wonderfully tactile things. Tapping them against the glass. Drumming them on a tabletop. Pressing them into the dirt. Slicing them into the skin of an orange.

Of course I can replicate each and every one of those activities with a specialised tool from the near infinite array of attachments and protuberances contained within my mechanised exterior, but it's not the same.

It's never the same.

## 27. The Inevitability Of Waking

We assert our fantasies on reality, remake the ground to fit our feet, remake the wild until it's tame, remake the air and the sky, fill all available orbits with our dreams.

But we cannot reignite the stars. The fire goes out in everything eventually. There's always a date when we have to move out, move on, leave it all behind again and start our lives anew.

## 28. Pocket Universes

A simple iridium box, 4-8 metres high and wide, powered by its own internal neutronic star. This warps the space within the cube until its 10 times the size the outer shell suggests. Oddly the effect persists even when the power subsides, granting you your own permanent spacial anomaly in a conveniently shaped container.

Stack them in rows and you can solve the housing crisis, expand production limits, create infinite storage solutions, solve every problem caused by over production, ultra consumption, population explosions.

Embed them in themselves like Russian dolls and you can hide entire universes in a wardrobe, hide secret kingdoms behind magic mirrors, let portals lead you to secret lairs, internal doors that open out onto endless elysian fields. The possibilities are endless.

These days, the technology is mostly used by the prison industry at vast public expense.

## 29. Listen, Learn

They don't tell you that sound *sounds* different everywhere you go. Or if they do, you never really believe them. But it does.

Air density, atmospheric composition. It's never quite the same. Even inside our voices sound wrong. Outside not even shouting is enough, We have to whistle to make ourselves heard above the ultrastatic roar of whatever radiation-drenched ion-magnetised sky we've found ourselves living under out here on the rim.

But these new songs we sing will never bring comfort to our souls like the old.

If I had the money I'd invest in air pressure equalised listening booths, pipe in the sounds of home no matter how distant it is in time and space to where we find ourselves now. Music, birdsong, engine noises, footsteps, rustling leaves, raindrops on roofs. Exploit the nostalgics one more time by selling them authentic noises. Just how they remember them. How things were always meant to be.

## 30. Embattled Fields

Agricultural domes glowing in the dark, grow lamp reflections shimmering against the glass. It looks beautiful from orbit. You can almost forget everything in between is airless, irradiated, dead. You can almost forget we're forbidden from landing for another century or more.

*Flowers growing  
on graves unmourned*

## 31. Deep Time

Chemical computers as vast as oceans, slow thought machines left running for aeons to solve problems so vast they'll still be working through the solution spaces when Andromeda gets here, still be going even when Andromeda's gone, when it's passed on through and left our whole galaxy tattered and ruined in its wake.

## 32. Exterior Decorating

To move a star is to show your strength. You're barely even civilised if you don't have the power to sculpt your local systems, to force the shape of space into line with your whims.

## 33. Hot, Cold

The surface burns. Only creatures built from stone survive. We pity them and their unfeeling hides. They cannot conceive how we survive in the cold beneath the ground, how we can possibly heat ourselves from the inside out.

## 34. Awe Decay

Over time everything once considered magical becomes factual. And freed from the constraints of existing only in our imaginations, technology makes the magical mundane.

So we dream up new spells, only to ruin those as well.

## 35. The Limits Of Expansion

We would not allow gravity to contain us. We grew. We spread. We left the Earth and colonised the galaxy, only to discover it was not enough. All along the perimeter we looked forlornly at the space beyond, too vast and empty to ever traverse. Finally, we knew, we had to live within our limits.

And it drove us mad.

## 36. Ash Clouds

Sentient dust spreading on the wind.

While it drifts, it dreams.  
When it stops, it observes.  
Where it gathers, it broods.

## **37. Resistance**

The planet whispers to us as we sleep. It knows we're being watched. It can't approach us directly. But not even our masters can police our dreams.

And so we dream now. All of us. Together.

After all these years spent isolating us, confining us, pitting us against each other, making us fight our brothers and sisters for our very lives, the last thing they expect from us will be the the one thing they cannot understand.

Solidarity. As beyond their comprehension as it is their capability.

## **38. Warning Signals**

Anomalous readings on the long range scans. Without fail we follow these little rabbits down their holes. Usually there's nothing there beyond comets, asteroids, weird bits of cosmic debris that presented themselves, briefly, as something more interesting and original.

But occasionally...

Well, we don't usually make it back from those.

## **39. The Duration Of A Career**

127 seconds of acceleration, and 600 hours of stillness, and then 127 seconds of deceleration, and then months of recovery.

They don't let us do it again.

Once is enough. No astronaut gets to do it twice.

And anyway, it stays with you forever. It lingers in your body. It lives in your dreams. At times, it's all you can see, the only thing you can remember.

## **40. Lifecycle Of A Technological Advance**

Point to point teleportation was initially used for individual transportation, if of course you were exceptionally rich or important. Later, costs were reduced enough to make it viable both for large scale shipping as well as a means for mass transit, before later becoming so widespread everyone had their own personal transporter.

Eventually the price came down so low it was cheap enough not just for single item shipping but even a short lived faddish revival of postcard and letter writing.

Finally, made obsolete by various technological advances in competing industries, as well as shifts in societal trends, teleportation was reduced to being used primarily as a means for petty crime, intimidation, revenge, and as a low cost weapon of retaliatory warfare.

## **41. Stasis**

The further out you go, the further behind you get. Its not just the crew being held in stasis, its everything. Technology, knowledge, culture, history.

Interstellar travel is dead time. No growth, no progression. You don't even get any time to dream.

## 42. War Time

Criss-cross of laser fire sets everything aflame. And yet the target survives. Robots built from stone a surprising development. Unaccounted for in the possibility matrices studied and restudied before the encounter, its emergence from the flames is utterly unexpected. No countermeasures for such an event have been added to the warkit.

And so as the great beast lumbers out of the fire, out of the smoke, the forces just stand there defenceless as it responds with old fashioned concussive blasts that tear through their dissipation armour as if it was little more than an assemblage of butterfly wings and crepe paper.

At the skirmish's end, the stone machine's cannons reloaded with the helmets and skulls of the dead, it simply stops where it stands. To wait, to sleep, for ages beyond measure. By the time it wakes, the entire forest might have regrown, the continents shifted, the whole system been abandoned or reborn.

But still the war goes on. Weapons are forever now. You can't decommission what you don't remember's there.

## 43. Flocking

Autonomous ships made of cloth and bone  
soaring endlessly on the solar wind  
Murmuration patterns so complex  
you wouldn't believe it was all based  
in three lines of code

## 44. The Paradox Of Data

The degradation of memory over time is an impossible problem to solve, not just in biological minds run long beyond evolutionary lifespans, but in technological systems too. Finite losses of information spread across infinite time eventually, of course, become infinite, or so near as to be indistinguishable. Even just the knowledge of the problem undermines the integrity of the data.

History always has to be reconstructed in the now around the gaps of then.

## 45. The Loop

The Loop allows you to interact with yourself, time repeating within the enclosed space of the machine on a five minute cycle, your previous iterations present like ghosts.

As a technology it has no practical use, but you can harmonise with yourself, or even race your own ghost around the room. A surprisingly satisfying endeavour.

## 46. The Drenched City

Permanent night under neon illumination. The rain appears to rise from the ground in an atmosphere so humid plants drink water straight from the air, no roots needed, foliage and flowers

flowing from every crevice in the brickwork of the towers built a mile high and barely a metre apart.

Everything is mechanical. Circuits are too delicate to function in the foetid atmosphere, while batteries short before they've even started.

You might as well have built this city under water. Yet it's the only habitable spot in the system. Out here you settle down where you can and make the most of it.

## **47. Politeness As A Condition of Conversation**

A total communication filter, auto translating in real time your thoughts, words and expressions into predetermined phrases of socially acceptable value. No offence could ever be given. Every offence was therefore always taken.

## **48. Existence Is An Infinite Series Of Accidents**

Time travel doesn't make sense. But not making sense doesn't stop it from working. Each instance is a fracture, and eventually they compound. Logic dictates but it doesn't mandate. In the mess, in the shards, it seems like everything is lost in chaos and contradiction, that nothing is retrievable.

But from a distance it's all too small to notice. So you deleted your own bloodline, annulled your own civilisation, caused the extinction of every creature in your ancestry going back to the near beginning of time? Oh well. There's something else there now. And it is thriving.

## **49. Breaking News**

Psychic links between consenting minds are banned to protect the sanctity of individuality. But in reality they were banned to prevent the development of empathy.

## **50. Whims**

Materials mass mined in deep space until there's nothing left beyond Mars but debris. Massive manufactories placed in slow orbits just a little further out than the earth can affect. Huge slabs of machinery that are left alone to constantly over produce *everything*. Just in case it's needed, just in case anyone down below decides on a whim they want something, anything, right now, this instant.

Box it up, spit it out, let gravity bring it down to your doorstep while you still want it, before your regrets have even begun.

## **51. System+**

Metal in the veins extending the nervous system. Data storage in the core of your bones. All of it more reliable than the old flesh. You'll never forget a thing.

Now there's memories echoing in your mind disagreeing with associated files in your spine. Like *deja vu*, but worse because it's real. You can't reconcile the differences. Not even seeing old videos of yourself is as bad as this.

A new form of dread.

Feel it in your brain, know it in your bones.

## **52. Planetary Parasites**

The slow are always susceptible to the quick.

They strip mine our flesh. Build houses in our bones. Fill our lungs with poison and our veins with excrement.

They think they're winning, holding dominion over all. But they misunderstand the patience of a world. They have no understanding of what eternity really means.

Let them boil, let them burn. Let them choke in their ignorance, and be forgotten by time.

## **53. Bespoke**

Artificial planets built to your exact specifications. Here we have a sun in equatorial orbit, another in polar, two more on the diagonals. Not for any practical reason, but purely because it's beautiful, sunsets and sunrises in almost every direction, tides of baffling complexity so that each new day runs to a different schedule. We haven't even been here long enough to find out how many seasons we have.

It's the perfect resort. There is nothing that could go wrong.

## **54. The Enemy's Tools**

Eugenicists breeding out all durability from the human genome in their simplification drive. Purity is death over a long enough timeline. No matter how often they're forced to learn this, they never seem to remember.

Perhaps we need to breed them out. And the fascists too.

## **55. Nostalgia**

Nothing more evocative than a crashed space ship in the middle of some vast plain, enough time passed that everything that died has long since regrown. Birds nest in the engines, vines hanging from the wings. Even the skeletons inside their spacesuits are covered in moss.

## **56. Bubbles™**

Reality bubbles, 2-metre distortion spheres recreating a liveable world around you, built to your own requirements: atmospheric, aesthetic, moralistic, time and culture and language specific.

Overlaps with other systems are accepted on a mutual consent basis, intelligent systems creating a workable viable shared consensual space over time.

\*(some initial disruption may be inevitable before equilibrium is achieved. fundamentally incompatible realities are kept separate at the system level to prevent disagreements, serious injury, and/or death).

## 57. The Logic Of Time Travel

The past is set, the future is not.

That's the mantra we live by. You can use the machine to go forward and still return to now. But go back and you'll be stuck. It's a one way trip. You can't go home again.

So the initial solution is never go back. Forward motion only.

The problem arises when someone else discovers what we can do, copies it, controls it. So what should we do then? Hope they keep to our voluntary agreements? Try and convince them to cooperate rather than compete?

Obviously not. The only solution is to go back and eliminate them before they go back and eliminate us. When the present is gone, it's gone. It's all gone. We're all gone. Whether we're the ones to do it or they are, the now we know won't ever exist again. At least if we move first, we'll have the chance to save some of the things we love.

Ourselves, mostly. But it's not like anyone else but us will ever know our crimes.

## 58. Windows

The bath is a portal. The pond is a portal. The kitchen sink is a portal, if you're small enough and know the secret.

I know the secret. I found it. Accidentally, but still. I found it.

All you have to do is submerge yourself, hold your breath and sit entirely still. Don't move until the surface settles, so still and flat it sets like glass. Then emerge through the window you've made to elsewhere.

It's a random connection, still water here to still water some other where. This was how fairies travelled from flower to flower, how mermaids moved from pool to pool, how nymphs rose up out of rivers and lakes, wet and glistening, inviting you, enticing you. Fingers beckoning you to join them.

It's creepier when I do it, although at least now I know to travel fully clothed.

## 59. Questioning

They drag me out of the duplicator and into the cell to question me again, coerce me, beat me, torture me, kill me. Then they drag me out again, and again, and again, my bodies piling up against the walls in great rotting drifts.

I don't know what I felt, all those times before. I don't know what I said, or did, whether I behaved with dignity, whether I cried, lied, confessed. I don't know what I'll feel this time either, yet, or the next, or the next, the next thousand nexts after that.

Does it matter?

There's nothing I can do to stop it. I've done nothing wrong. I can do nothing right. There's no way I can behave that will change what they plan to do to me, what they have already done to me, what they're doing to me right now. This is their choice. They made up their minds long ago.



## **63. Miscellaneous Creatures Of The Galactic Sphere #1: The Imp**

Although rare, Imps have one of the most notorious reputations of any pan-galactic lifeform. Winged, bipedal creatures standing at most half a metre tall, available in a variety of bright and sparkly colours, Imps would probably be considered desirable exotics ripe for domestication if it wasn't for their abundance of needle-like teeth that can chew through metal and stone alike, their blank refusal to follow commands, and their extremely irritating behaviour that quickly reduces almost all sentient races to paroxysms of petulant annoyance with hours.

Though never directly antagonistic or violent, they are commonly associated with death and destruction through their propensity for inducing accidents in their prey through the sheer relentless thoroughness of the distraction they cause.

The fact that Imps can converse in the native tongue of whoever they're currently pestering, coupled with the near indestructible nature of their physical forms, has led to most theories as to their origin assuming some sort of intended construction, whether through selective breeding, genetic engineering, or biomechanical manufacture, though nothing has yet been proved such is their resistance to research.

Despite their evident ease with language, Imps refuse to answer direct queries (while endlessly asking questions of their own). They also ignore other Imps with such determination it is hard to tell whether they can even perceive each other's presence, although the fact they have never been observed to interact with another even by accident suggest, on simple probability, that they can.

My own personal theory as to their evolution is that they're simply children's toys that got out of hand.

## **64. Sellable Commodities.**

There is no currency but data. Resources are infinite (when averaged out across the universe). Energy too is limitless.

But knowledge and culture and art and history...

You'll always be able to sell those. Barely even matters if they're your own, whether they're real, verifiable, usable. Repurpose them as myths if you want, create content from content. Just as long as it's new enough, or if not new, forgotten.

## **65. The Physics Of A Planet Sized Cube**

The cube has six sides, each perfectly flat. Yet these surfaces don't feel flat when you walk upon them. Gravity pulls you towards the centre of each 12000km square, pushes you away from edges as if they're the peaks of impossibly tall mountains. It feels like each side is a great curved bowl, but your eyes can clearly see that it's not.

When it rains, the water runs towards the centre of each side, great lakes forming as the waters rise. The surface of these seas is clearly curved, semi-sphere's rising from a flattened plate. And yet it's these surfaces, as you sail upon them, that feel perfectly flat.

## **66. Sleeper Train**

The safest route between the Milky Way and Andromeda turned out to be tethering ourselves to a rogue star as it was flung out of our galaxy all the way to theirs.





## 70. Car Parks In The Sky

Antigrav slabships as huge as clouds turn the whole day to night.

At least there's no rain, and won't be for weeks even after they've gone. Air stripped of moisture by their evaporation cores until below it's so dry even the grass turns to paper, even the seas to salt.

## 71. Operating System

Technological colonisation of the human mind. Memory cores, language modules, calculation devices, sensory enhancers, location services, mapping systems, conversation logs. We've installed it all. We've granted it whatever permissions they seek.

All of it built on proprietary code, unaudited, unupdated, bugged and leaky and lossy and hacked. Who knows what data's been exposed, how many of your dreams illegally exported, which of your desires they're currently exploiting.

## 72. Secondary System Pass

It's always nice on these follow up runs when you to get to a system previously charted by some long lost and lonely poet rather than your usual diligent engineer.

No X01-b or Kepler-9A here. Instead:

- Clouds Of Anxiety Boiling Over Me
- Who Knows When It Will Rain Again
- Volcanic Pulse Through Deep Granite Veins
- Ice Crystals Form In The Corners Of Your Eyes But Still You Cannot Look Away
- Rock Tombs Half Obscured Beneath Frozen Methane Drifts
- Childhood Marble As Large As A Dream
- Silent, Static, Sleepless, Serene

All of them circling Red And Dying And More Nobel Than We'll Ever Know.

## 73. Strange Weather

Weird waves on viscous seas. Odd clouds in clotted skies. Winds that barely move fast to enough to flutter the flags on their poles.

It takes years to analyse, understand, predict these systems. We bring with us our assumptions of home. Even when we attain accurate weather forecasts and tide timetables, wind charts, season changes, they still lag behind the intuitive understanding our cattle and cats seem to have, the fish we put in the sea, the birds we've brought to pollinate our plants, all these imported beasts from home picking it up, reacting to whatever invisible cues with nonchalant ease.

It's as if they're all already natives here. We'll only ever be colonists.

## 74. The Internet Of Things

Everything connects. Everything broadcasts. Everything receives.

Buildings. Floors. Computers. Cars. Clothing. Money. Toys.

A constant flow of power, data, information, control. A perfect modular system, it works seamlessly, all problems resolvable, avoidable, removable. Response times are instantaneous. Repairs are immediate. Replacement is inescapable.

Unit integrity is constantly monitored. There's no place for deviation, dissent, disobedience.

They know what you've done just as quickly as you know yourself.

## **75. Songs For A Dead Pilot (1)**

Full submersion tanks filled with breathable water to counter unsustainable G-forces. Controls wired directly into the spine to minimise lag. Medically induced deafness to allow overflow from the visual cortex. Stimulant infused sugar serum via IV. Limbs removed to maximise blood flow to the brain.

Even after all this augmentation, the average combat survival time is measured in seconds for military pilots. Good thing we've got numbers on our side. Earth essentially an endless farm making human minds.

It's the only thing we still produce.

## **76. Are We Here?**

When we first looked out at the stars we thought it all contrived, heavens fashioned by our gods, built to their own design, in their own time. A huge domed roof above our world, bigger than anything we could build, but nothing we could not understand.

Then slowly we came to realise the scope was far beyond anything we could conceive. An immensity so huge only the forces of nature and unimaginable oceans of time could ever have combined to create it. A whole universe still pure and untouched, an infinite Eden beyond the sin of human influence.

Now we're out here in heaven, travelling amongst the stars,, we begin to wonder again how much of this that we see was built by long lost hands, unseen civilisations even grander than our own constructing, sculpting, corrupting everything to suit their needs, desires, whims.

After all, that's what we're doing now, have been doing ever since we spoke our first words, crafted our first tools, manipulating the environment until it conformed to our will. Even without discernible proof, we can't be so conceited as to believe we're the only ones out here, that somehow we were the first to ever leave our home.

## **77. Immortality**

We defeated death  
only to realise  
we hated life

## **78. Icarus Knew**

Wings of intricate beauty grafted on to prosaic bone. Heavy, painful, tiring, in everyday use they're cumbersome and clumsy. Yet...

Up there, looking down, you don't regret a thing.

## 79. The Butterfly Dream

I dreamt I was a butterfly  
but the butterfly  
knowing better  
never dreamt of being me

## 80. Breadcrumb Trail

Mountain top base built above the mist and below the clouds. There's a small band of visibility between the two layers that always remains unbroken. Line of sight to three other outposts, we communicate by blinking lights.

But if you ever want to reach them, you're going to have to walk. Suit up, set out, slowly trudge from lamp to lamp along narrow unforgiving paths.

Don't get lost. Don't wander off. Who knows what you might find out there in the fog. Who knows what might find you.

## 81. The Games We Play

Cat and mouse in the asteroid belt. Neither ship daring to thrust for more than a second at a time. Lights off. Heat minimised. Comms set to silence.

This is where we feel alive. Right up until the moment we die.

## 82. Methods Of Transportation

Things that float feel more magical than things that don't.

It's why hot air balloons are more beautiful than helicopters, why cloud cities will always be more evocative than moon bases or subterranean lairs, why maglev trains feel like moments from a dream.

I want to live in the sky, not beneath the sea. I want to levitate without effort. I want to drift away  
away  
away

## 83. Escape.

Orbital debris fields from some long forgotten catastrophe keep the surface isolated except for the occasional access windows opening at the poles. Can't see in, can't see out. The perfect planet on which to hide, in many ways, as long as you never plan to escape, never want to leave.

But why would we want to escape? It's an eden down here. We party, we play. Live our lives as if in some idyllic dream. At night the sky is like a glitterball, constant motion in almost every direction as orbital objects scatter the moonlight in ever shifting patterns not even a computer could predict let alone compensate for in potential teleportation calculations..

We won't run out of possible collisions for another million years. Protection enough for us till then. Let us dance beneath unrepeating skies. Let us live without being seen.

## 84. Scenes From A Pilgrimage

A statue in a valley on an otherwise uninhabited world. Ten kilometre long space hulks wrecked on the outskirts of a fishing village, mudhats and wooden shacks now fortified by scavenged metal panels. Gangs of cats with robotic limbs stalking dusty alleyways in a deserted market town. A girl outside a station sat crosslegged on a raffia mat, levitating and dematerialising for tourists pleasure, their coins and acclaim. Beaches turned to glass by laser fire, seas boiled away to steam. An island made of animal bone, clouds built from billowing skin.

And still I'm no closer to finding any trace of you.



## 86. Advance Warning

Occasionally in our travels we find monsters the size moons. Living planets. Sentient stars.

None of them stand a chance of course. If you want to survive our arrival, stay small.

## 87. Exultation

Space suits religion. The silence, the immensity, the unending beauty, the untold horrors.

Building churches on airless moons through which to worship the sky is the only thing that keeps me sane. On our journey home, as we wend our way back along this outward path, I hope to sit again at least once to pray in every one, in thanks, in remembrance, in honour of the Universe's glory.

## 88. A Tower As Tall As Time

We have always lived in the tower. It is a prison for our entire lives.

A hundred floors, a hundred years. Move up, move down. We're granted that freedom. Choose your own age. Up and up until we're too old weak to climb another step, down and down until we're too small and young to make it down the steps without falling.

We choose to live most of our lives in the middle somewhere, hide ourselves in the years we like best. The comfort of bedrooms, dining rooms, kitchens, sheds. Places we can keep some time for ourselves, hide ourselves away. Of course there's always the temptation to go somewhere noisier, take the stairs down to the nightclubs of our youths, the beaches of our early summers.

Yet eventually, always, we've had enough. Up, down, one way or another we choose a way to die.

## 89. Serenity

Serenity Station. A 200km loop spinning in space, almost all the outside glass, almost all the inside fields, grass. No night, no day, the sun refracting through the simulated sky to maximise growth cycles, minimise heat dissipation, energy loss.

It gets to you eventually, slowly drives you mad.

Now we sit inside all day. Outside the machines toil. Let us dream in the dark.

## 90. The Distributed City

Machines colonised the asteroid belt. They have no need for oxygen. Only minerals and sunlight. And there's plenty of both up there.

Let them have it, we said. Planets, moons. We've got more than enough of our own. What difference does it make if these old, abandoned, basically obsolete constructs crawl around in the dirt of a hundred million rocks. No threat from a society spread so thin, like oil on endlessly shifting seas.

But now they've connected it all up, data streams flowing from point to point to point, every artificial mind in constant contact with all of its brethren. A circular mesh of transmission beams. A

bracelet built around the sun. We can't cross it without everyone knowing, without being forced to pay the toll.

## **91. Hypochondria**

That new colony fear, where every mild illness has the possibility of blossoming into some entirely novel disease. Your imagination has no limits in those early hours of infection, dreams of spots and stripes, rashes, gashes, withering muscles, bloating limbs, endless vomiting, anal bleeding, exploding eyes. Derangement, psychosis, suicidal despair.

And when it's just another variant of the commonly tedious cold you can't decide whether to be relieved or disappointed.

## **92. Morality Tales**

There's a cave in the mountains so dark no light can illuminate it. Anyone can enter, they say, only the honest can leave.

Inside there is nothing but an endless pit. Death comes for everyone. It does not discriminate. Gravity cares not for honesty.

Despite it all, there is no end to those who wish to prove themselves. The greater the certainty of death, the more enticing the lure.

## **93. Bound**

They keep us in luxury in the hope we don't complain. We could sleep in different rooms for a year without fear of repetition. But every room in a prison is still itself a cell. After a while all you want to do is escape.

Of course, that's the one thing we can never do. Our captors are longer lived than us. Their capacity for concentration puts ours to shame. They don't get bored. They're never distracted. There's aeons between their changes of shift. A billion years till the next supply ship arrives.

Even if we mutiny, seize control of this moon, by the time it arrives our descendants won't even be human any more. They certainly won't be interested in escape. This'll be their home. They'll be the ones fighting to stay.

## **94. Return To Base**

You forget what cities are like after a while. It's always a shock when you return. The tightness of it all. The narrowness of the corridors, the endless coil of the streets. Every single space subdivided into infinity. The noise. The crowd. The speed.

The fact, most disconcerting at all, of your own absolute insignificance. In space each of us is utterly vital. You could disappear down here and not only would no one notice you were gone, no one would have noticed you were ever even here.

## 95. Songs For A Dead Pilot (2)

Drink me, you said, dying. Save me.

And I did. Crawled into the wreck, held out my hands beneath your broken body, let your blood fill the cup they made. Mouthful after mouthful of your cold metallic fluid, silver and blue and shimmering, so frictionless I could hardly feel it in my palms let alone as it poured down my throat. Memories, feelings, the imprint of your entire mind was contained within the liquid's complex form. Your history, your heart.

And once it was in me, it changed me. Changed you too, as we mingled and mixed and merged. The strange feeling of mutual learning, me from you, you from me, as we became one new whole.

Neither human now nor hunter. Neither organic or metallic. Neither dead nor dying. We're alive. Alive. Alive. Alive.

Drink me, I said, dying. Save me.

And you did. Crawled into the wreck, held out your hands beneath my broken body, let my blood fill the cup you made. Mouthful after mouthful of my cold metallic form, silver and blue and shimmering, so frictionless I could hardly feel you hold me in your palms let alone as I flowed down into you. Memories, feelings, the imprint of your entire mind was contained within your body's complex form. Your history, your heart.

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## 96. Out With The Old Eyes, In With The New

Everyone was doing it. They were so much better than what we had before. More colour depth, better night vision, 10x zoom and identification overlays. You could even stare at the sun now if you wanted to. I didn't want to but I did anyone just because I could.

The only thing we can't look at is each other. Do that and you start to scream. Mirrors are out, too, but that doesn't matter so much. You can set up a virtual mirror in the augmentation layer if you really want.

You can set up virtual portrait overlays too, if you want, to replace everyone's real faces. It's the only place the old eyes exist. You can almost imagine they're still there.

Almost.

## 97. Scattered Light

All these different suns  
    mean we get rainbows  
        in every direction

## 98. Galapagos Planets

A string of planets on wildly elliptical orbits. Summer is the season of closest approach. Winter lasts ten times as long. Both are unsurvivable.

There are two different migratory routes. Those approaching summer move backwards, planet by planet, towards the spring. To these groups, winter is unknown.



## **105. The Mermaids Of The Mountains**

There's a lake at the summit of the mountain, its waters as pure as snow, and as cold.

It is said that those whose hearts are filled with sorrow should sit at the pool's edge and cry until your tears ripple the surface and the mermaids of the mountains feel your pain and surface to grant you a moment of solace.

That's the tale we tell. But there's another side of the story.

The mermaids, immortal, sleep in the depths, in the dark, shivering in the silence forever. They care nothing for your troubles, for your sadness, for your loss. All they want from us is the temporary warmth of our bodies, our breath, our freshly spilled blood.

## **106. Post Scarcity Expansion**

You can build what you want, where you want.

The only limitation is your own imagination.

Yet somehow every world we visit ends up feeling the same.

## **107. The Routine Of Duty**

Out here in space, all you can do is dream. The lonelier we get the more real our reveries become. But dreams need space to spread into. Focus on them long enough and eventually they solidify, crystallise, become brittle and shatter.

Then we have no choice but to wake for a while, walk these lonely corridors, the empty shuttle bays, the quarters as cold as tombs. Work through our duties for another day, another week, another year, until our minds have cleared, until they're willing and ready to dream again.

## **108. Humpty Dumpty**

What we thought were trees were bones. A forest that was actually a skeleton. A puzzle so ancient and complex we won't ever be able to put it back together again.

## **109. A History Of Houses**

We used to live together, a whole village in a single cave. Then we insisted on a tent for every family. Then a separate home for newly married couples. Eventually, even the children refused to share.

Now we expect not just a house of our own, but a whole moon or more.

## **110. Workplace Improvements Programme**

First we increased longevity, reduced fatigue. Loyalty was incrementally improved. Over time we removed empathy to increase efficiency. It didn't work, but we never admitted it. Instead we increased cruelty, turned up our spite.

One day soon everything will work perfectly. All inefficiencies removed. And our marketshare will have remained undiminished.

## 111. Heaven

There's no gravity inside a perfect hollow sphere.  
We float  
down here  
exactly where we die.

## 112. Propaganda As An Absence

Of all the weapons we developed, the most successful in the long term were the amnesia bombs. Whole cities forgetting all their old enmities, all our ongoing crimes.

## 113. The Fragility Of Reality

The universe is malleable at the reality level of its construction. You can get in there and muck about with it if you dare.

We call it magic, logic, fate, will.

Mostly, I expect, to try and assert our control over the process, to pretend there's some sort of order to it, some kind of reason, an underlying rationality or morality to the workings of the world.

But there's not. Obviously. It's chaos down there. It churns, endlessly. It turns, relentlessly. And all to its own whims.

## 114. Nostalgia For Futures Yet Unfulfilled

Science fiction used to be full of future sports. Overly complex, dangerous, extreme, zero g, multidimensional, every aspect explained in excruciating detail, played in neon lit locales and luridly glowing, revealingly form fitting latex, in front of baying crowds, exotic mixtures of humans, aliens, robots, monsters.

You don't see it so much any more. No one cares about 3D tennis, 4 team football, really crazy golf. There's better things to do with your words, with your readers' time.

But still.

I miss them.

## 115. Home Is Where The Holes Are

We live in the mouth of a monster. Not even metaphorically, just actually. It's not as fun as you'd think. Nor even as dangerous. Life goes on here just as it goes on everywhere. You get used to the tremors, the movement, the salivation rain and the halitosis hurricanes.

Our home is a dragon so big it stretches round half the world, a roar as loud as thunder, teeth as big as mountains, cavities like caves. It caught us in orbit. Now we hide away inside its jaw.

Half its cries are probably down to us drilling into the enamel to make new rooms as our society expands. But it's not us it's burning to a crisp in its toothaching rage, so we don't think about it too much. Yeah it's probably destroyed another continent or two, but you should see the new ballroom we've built.

It's beautiful.

## 116. The Essence Of Science Fiction

A cat (in a spacesuit)  
chasing a mouse (also in a spacesuit)

## 117. Forms Of Resistance

The people of New Eden resist colonisation by the simple but successful method of ignoring us completely. No matter our greetings, no matter our kindnesses. No matter our threats, no matter our violence. They simply refuse to react to our presence.

Like ants, they route around us.  
Like ants, no doubt, they will outlast us all.

## 118. The Comfort Of Dreams

Beneath the ice a buried ship. Within the ship a frozen crew. Amongst the crew a thousand fragile dreams rolling on endlessly as they sleep soundly in the silence of stasis.

Dig them out.  
Wake them up  
And those dreams will shatter into pieces too small to remember.

They won't even know they miss them.

## 119. Dinner For 1 (on the moon)

Protein Pills (x3)  
Fibre Strands (25g)  
Glucose Gel (1 standard tube)  
Desiccated Water (750ml equivalent)  
Salt Cube (2cm<sup>2</sup>)  
Synthetic Liver Oil (thimbleful)  
7-metal solution (to taste)  
After Dinner Fluoride

## 120. Reduce Reuse Reclaim

Abandoned cities  
turned to forests  
turned to deserts  
turned to glaciers  
turned to swamps  
turned to fields  
turned to birds nests

turned to farms  
turned to towns  
turned to cities  
and then abandoned  
once again

## 121. Utopia Beach

They fight on the sand.

Earthlings, aliens, animals from every known system and several that probably aren't, all duplicated at source, surreptitiously teleported straight into the pit while their original selves continue on obliviously back home.

The perfect crime. No one but the paying audience will ever know you're there. And on your inevitable death not even you'll know you've gone.

Every fight your first fight. Every fight your last. Immediate dissolution of winners and losers alike. No matter how often they choose to resurrect you, you'll always be as bewildered, as confused, as ill prepared for what's to come,

But luckily, that goes for your opponent too.

## 122. Reality Fractals

Every time we study the complexity of reality, it increases.

The only conclusion is that this must be a self defence mechanism to keep us permanently bewildered, to prevent any chance we might have of discovering a means of escape.

## 123. The Ultimate Technological Advance

We created a machine that wasn't very good at anything at all.

It was a huge success.

It destroyed the world.

## 124. The Organic/Inorganic Divide

A living machine  
that slowly  
dies

A dead machine  
that slowly  
lives

## 125. Circular Architecture

Spaceship walls no different from spaceship floors. Only the ceilings are differentiated at all, by embedded lights and wiring pipes, charging sockets, cable connection point. And beds weirdly, as if we're bats sleeping in a cave.

## 126. Babylon

The trees float  
float  
float  
float  
held aloft  
on rising winds  
roots dangling down  
down  
down  
down  
into the mist  
that obscures  
the land  
far  
far  
far  
below

## 127. In The Belt

Whole cities built into subsurface shafts, the surrounding mass of the moon used as radiation shielding around a dense lattice of corridors and cabins. No windows, no sunlight, no surface views.

But to be honest you don't miss it  
too much  
after a while.

## 128. The Ceaseless Sprawl

The universe repeats and repeats and repeats. It should be boring after a while, but it's not. Even its emptiness entrances.

## 129. No Surprises

We've mapped the land from orbit long before we've landed. All its secrets laid out before us in maps, charts, databases, bestiaries. Unless there's some subterranean anomaly, some deep oceanic ruins beyond the scope of our scanners, there's no magic in our exploration. We know what's beneath us, waiting for us, ready for us to exploit.

If there's any mystery at all, any potential danger, we'll annihilate it long before we can be awed by it, transformed by it.

## 130. Long Forgotten Desert Port

A pier extending over an ocean long since boiled away. There's carcasses of fish and boats alike down there, ossified in the sand. And somehow still there's starfish, too, rendered obsolete by circumstance, wandering and wondering their way around the bay.

## 131. Graveyard

When abandoned spaceships are rare, even finding a single one is a moment to treasure, impossible to resist the urge to pull in close, board it, explore.

When they're as abundant as this? Flee. *Flee!*

## 132. Entropy

Entropy! Entropy! They've all got it! Entropy!

## 133. Recyclists

Metal birds  
taught to build  
not nests  
but their own children  
from scavenged scraps

## 134. Group Behaviour

Repetitions of routine  
keep us sane  
drive us mad

Simultaneously

Over time  
on these long voyages  
separated from any other influence  
we come to call this culture

## 135. Disruption

Technology is now built  
not to solve a problem  
but create one

## 136. Observations Of Emergent Behaviours

The android experiences love as a form of contentment. Familiar data, changing, in predictable ways. What they want from others is comprehension and routine.

## 137. Repetitions Of Failure

Society rots from the roots. Which is why it always takes the kings in their castles by surprise. What's out of sight is beyond their minds.

They aren't even aware of the existence of the system, let alone its necessity.

## **138. Dream Machine**

The Dream Machine made dreams come true by the infallible method of sucking away any wonder in your life, any imagination, any desire, until you were pleased with whatever they gave you, whatever you got.

## **139. The Kid**

The tragedy of The Kid was that she lived every death she had ever had. Then jumped back to safety, some reflexive flinch jolting her back through time just far enough to make some other move and avoid the fatal moment this time.

A reputation of invincibility built on scenes of her jolting like a stop motion machine through gun fights and battlefields as she died a thousand deaths invisible to all outside observers.

But there's a difference between deaths. Bullet holes and stab wounds might be okay. It's the slow deaths that hurt. Sometimes this meant going back days, other times years, all those moments of her life lost forever as she jumped all the way back to before she ate the poisoned apple, before she contracted the deadly disease. Before the cancer formed, before the heart began to fail, before the body began to age. You could live those years ago, but they'd be different each time, never the same. Friends lost, lovers lost, children lost.

She awaited the inevitable moment of non-existence that would eventually come for her. The only way to escape the certainty of death is to remove the moment of birth.

## **140. The Weight Of Gravity**

It doesn't take much, perhaps a 5% increase or so, for you to become painfully aware of the constant pull of gravity on you, to make it apparent that every pound (and a bit) of your flesh is a weight you're constantly carrying around. Life as a biped is a constant battle to stand tall against the forces of nature so intent on dragging you back down onto your hands and knees.

It never takes long after landing on a gravity+ world for your dreams to turn, not to home, but to orbit. Never mind the muscle wastage, the hollowing out of your bones. Oh to float again, to float free once more.

## **141. The Sodden City**

The city on the marsh is built from rot. A lifecycle of decay, every building slowly pulled back down into the mire. If our flesh did not regrow there'd be nothing left here but bone. Yet we resist. We persist. In the mist we call home.

## **142. Use Of Technology**

Photographs captured in a detail so fine you could step into them and live in the moment forever. Perfect scenes straight out of holiday brochures and travel magazines. Sun drenched beaches, rolling hills of green, dappled light leading you on down some endless woodland path.

That was how they were intended to be used, anyway. How they were marketed. But mostly, of course, they were sold so you could once again kiss lost loves, pose with celebrities, slide into bed with models and actors and athletic superstars, whether they'd granted you permission or not.

Or they were used to kill and torture without consequence, repeatedly defeating enemies on some forlorn battlefield, or abusing captives in their cells. Whether as revenge or catharsis, or the simple satisfaction of our society's sadism, it's all the same.

Commerce, in its commitment to egalitarianism, caters to all whims, commodifies every single moment of every single human's lives. To withhold consent is to oppose freedom of expression. To question freedom of expression is to question society's very existence.

## **143. Aromatic Worlds**

The light here is so bright you might as well be blind. The silence is so complete you might as well be deaf. And yet the smells are so rich and complex, so alluring and overwhelming, it makes you wonder if this is what earth has been like all along for dogs.

## **144. Zonal Marking**

Within the zone you cannot die.

Full body scans every second or so mean you can be rebuilt and rebooted with next to no loss of continuity. Although of course sometimes you request a further rollback, to before the trauma of whatever it was that caused your demise, so you didn't have to remember the moment of death, the excruciating pain of some sudden unexpected accident or incident, the falls, the fights, the failures of organs or life support systems.

And there's those who'd rather have not seen whatever it was that you died from, some sight so awful there's no doubt they'd have been better off without it. Post traumatic stress is as real for the viewers as it is for the victims.

And then, eventually, there's those that just do it on a whim, because we can, because we want to. See a movie for the first time again, rewatch sports events unspoiled by the result, see every sunset and eclipse and volcanic eruption afresh and anew.

There's a million of me in the zone now, and a million of you. Our pasts overlap incompletely.

Which of us is the one we originally loved?

## **145. The Shifting Sea**

The islands shift their positions over night. The archipelago is never the same twice. A hundred thousand islands spread across a million square kilometres of ocean.

No known mechanism explains the phenomenon, yet no known data can refute it. Myths maintained by mist and fog. The only evidence is our experience of it. No map can reveal what lies beyond our shores. We know the islands, the towns, have met our neighbours, seen our friends. It's just we do not know where they will be, how we'll ever reach them again.

We embrace the uncertainty, enjoy the romanticism. Never unknowing who tomorrow our neighbours will be, never knowing where tomorrow this voyage will end.

And too, of course, it allows us to evade our responsibilities, run away, start anew. Keep on moving. Keep on sailing. No one will ever find you out there.

## 146. Online Lament

I don't want to be remembered.  
I don't want to be remembered.  
I want to be noticed.  
But I don't want to be remembered.

## 147. This Is The Future For Me

Motorcycle gangs  
    competing for territory  
        all along the canals of Mars.

## 148. Language Without Intention, Longing Without Reciprocation

Language, stripped of meaning by the machine producing it, is still understood by the human mind as language, because the human mind, hearing language, can't help but imbue it with meaning.

They say what they are taught to say. We hear whatever it is we want to hear.

The need for affirmation will be our undoing.

## 149. The Archives Of Libraria

The archives sprawl. The archives spiral. Exponential growth of knowledge over time, and none of us can know *now* what will be important *then*. Nor can we know now what will survive until then, either. Not just the formats, mediums, file types, languages, but the locations where they're stored, the libraries we call home. So we save everything. Not just once, but multiple times.

1. The thing itself
2. Images of the thing
3. Readings of the thing
4. Recollections of the thing
5. Copies of the thing
6. Corruptions of the thing
7. The thing in different formats
8. The thing in different materials
9. The thing in different sizes
10. The thing in different shapes
11. The thing in different colours
12. The thing in different configurations
13. The thing in different languages
14. The thing in different translations
15. The thing in different transcriptions
16. The thing in different transfigurations
17. The thing with different covers
18. The thing by different authors
19. The thing reflected
20. The thing backwards
21. The thing randomised
22. The thing hidden in other things
23. The thing found in the others



## **151. A New Life Awaits You Offworld!**

Projections of the future  
    obscuring the faded facade of now  
The longer the images linger  
    the realer they become  
Trying to imprint their desires  
    on the decay of our interest

## **152. The Confusion**

The Confusion tore everything apart. It didn't even take long. A decade at most.

Pattern recognition failure as a virus. Each of our many incomprehensions infecting those around us, until we were all afflicted with everyone else's intellectual blind spots, logical misunderstandings, fallacious correlations, misremembered facts, apocryphalic recollections, biases, bigotries, hypocrisies, petty hatreds, unreasonable demands.

A communal hell of our own making.

## **153. Deep Space Travel Advice**

Spaceships like to attack in ratios of three to one. Sheer force of numbers always wins. Every line of attack in deep space is straight. No amount of manoeuvrability will help you dodge a laser beam for long, especially when you're at the centre of convergence, midpoint of a triangular sweep.

If you're travelling alone, the advice is always go dark, do silent. Hope there's no gangs of highwaymen out there waiting to pounce. You don't stand a chance if you're caught in the light.

## **154. Genre Assertion**

Ghost stories are time travel stories, projections of past consciousness into eras far enough ahead they're utterly incomprehensible to it.

## **155. Thought For Food**

The one true tragedy of the creatures known as Devourers is that they can never forget.

They learn from those they kill. Knowledge accumulating until eventually a Devourer knows more than is safe for a single mind to hold.

Knowledge is good. Knowledge helps you survive. But perhaps so does not knowing what it feels like to be eaten by your self.

## **156. Lament Of The Earthbound Body**

Our data network spreads from star to star. We can see the wonders of the entire galaxy. But all these wonders our satellites get to spy on are things we'll never see for real, never touch, never feel. We're too big, too slow, too short lived to go anywhere much beyond the moon.

## 157. Dreams Of Space And Shape And Form

I would quite like to be a spaceship  
my mind distributed  
    throughout its systems  
my feelings submerged  
    in the infinite sea of space  
my consciousness drifting  
    for all eternity  
        as I travel  
            from here  
                to there  
                    and there  
                        and there  
                            and there  
                                and there  
                                    and there  
  and there  
  and there

## 158. On The Moon

Nothing ever happens  
out here

## 159. Creation Myth

A lone willow tree is all that's left of the forest. Now it stands in the middle of a barren valley or rock and silence. Yet each year butterflies still find it. Each year they lay their eggs on the branches. Each year the hatching caterpillars feed themselves on the leaves. Each year the resultant butterflies fly up into the sky again.

Outward. Away. A journey into nothing. To nowhere.

Fuelled only by memory  
    by the hope  
        that whatever home your parents came from  
            will still be there for you.

## 160. How We Learn

I can't see. I can't hear. I can only feel what you tell me to feel.

And what you tell me to feel is hate.

## 161. Explosions In The Sky

Detonating stars will be our first glimpse of extraterrestrial life. Patterns of war we can't deny.

## 162. The Paradox Of Emptiness

Freedom isn't found in space. All that's out here is endless confinement and control.

## 163. Future Now

We've invented our own fully realised Philip K. Dick universe, from complete technical and bureaucratic incompetence in all things, through the commercialisation of our lives and dreams and the permanent installation of venal paranoid genuinely demented presidents, all the way up to and including insane AIs and the end of consensus reality.

Would have been nice if we'd at least gained the psychic superpowers and incomprehensible time travel capabilities, but still, maybe they're all coming next.

And also, we can but hope, the space monsters that will destroy us all.

## 164. Deep Space Prison Facility

We live without light.  
We live without warmth.  
We live without moving.  
We live without speaking.

The only thing we have down here  
is hope  
and hate  
sustaining us  
in equal measure.

One day we will be free  
and then you will remember us.

## 165. Death Valley

The canyon slowly filled with crashed  
planes  
dirigibles  
drones  
helicopters  
unpowered gliders  
and even just people who leaned over the edge for a better look.

They all fell in and nothing ever came out, Not alive, nor even dead.

No one knew why any of this happened. But it did and still does now, despite what we know, despite the warnings, the barriers.

This memorial is for the curious and forgetful and those that think it could never happen to them.

## 166. The Infinite Expansion Machine

I bought an Infinite Expansion Machine from the market to see what all the fuss was about. And it's pretty good, actually. I'm impressed.

You plug it in, turn it on and then it just keeps on getting bigger, at a constant rate of expansion, forever (or at least until someone turns it off).

But I'm not going to turn it off. I'm going to leave it running for as long as I can. I can't wait until it's so big I can't hold it any more. I can't wait until it's so big I have to buy a bigger table to put it



## 172. The Woman In The Cave

There's a woman in a cave near here who'll grant you a wish if you ask. No one's ever seen her but we all know she's there, in the shadows, in the cave, just waiting for you to go and see her, for you to go and ask. She'll do pretty much anything, revenge, punishment, cruelty, whatever you want really, as long as you *do* want it, really want it, need it.

She doesn't want to do these things. She'd rather grant wishes of love, kindness, abundance, joy. But no one's ever asked for those. All anyone wants these days, even when given the chance to have anything at all, perhaps even especially when given the chance to have anything at all, is spite.

## 173. Wormholeification

You can use portals to alter local gravity in various interesting ways. Place one end near the sun (or other large mass object), and the other nearer you, and you get gravitational forces for free (not actually free, of course, because it equals out over the universe as a whole, especially when you take into consideration the initial energy requirements of individual portal generation).

But it feels free, and that's what's important. And it feels magical too. It feels *wrong*. Your very own perpetual motion machine (even if it's not a *true* perpetual motion machine). You can use it to make Escher-waterwheels, infinitely turn turbines without the need for wind, or simply as a nice decorative effect, holding things up in midair to impress the crowds, no buttresses required.

You could even put one down the bottom of a shaft, some unassuming every day hole too small to fix, just big enough to step across. And then waiting and watching as some unsuspecting victim steps across the gap and gets suddenly pulled down into the pit, down and down and down, until they're fired out at the other end into the boiling heat of some distant sun.

I don't care who you are. I defy you not to laugh at the looks on their faces.

## 174. Postcards From The Outer Rim

A duel on a distant planet. Blood spilt on alien soil, beneath a double sun and three different moons. Ceremonial weapons of archaic design can't hide the barbarity of the act.

Back on Earth, we frame pictures of the moment. Tragedy and brutality turned into iconography, a strange nostalgic pride. This was us once. It could be again.

## 175. Living Myths

The name of the desert was synonymous with death. The air scorched the lungs. The sand could be used to boil water. Fabric burned at dawn, flesh at dusk. Metal melted at noon.

And yet, and yet, now and then... people emerged from the haze, like mirages made real. Delirious, demented, their bodies twisted into new shapes, their minds transformed in ways we nor they could surely comprehend.

You see them in the hills sometime, see them in the towns. We leave them alone, let them wander where they will. If the desert could not kill them, what hope at all have we.

## 176. The Far Future

The year is 2026. Doorbells scan our faces. Phones know where we sleep. Our purchase history has been captured in such detail they even know the items you didn't buy, how long you lingered uncertainly at the till. Every possible thought we've ever had is algorithmically analysed to better understand our needs. Every word we've ever posted has been stolen so AI can predict our every desire, our very dreams.

All so Netflix can recommend films to me based solely on my astrological star sign.

## 177. Coven/Covet

Three witches dancing in the woods. Cats lurking in the dark. A cauldron bubbling away, smoke and steam catching the firelight in a way that turns the billowing clouds into vibrant reds. Who knows what spells they're casting, what magic they're turning.

And who cares. It looks so much fun. You watch from the shadows. And *yearn*.

## 178. Make Do And Mend

Robots repairing robots.  
An alien tenderness  
I find strangely moving

## 179. Weave™

The latest in wearable tech, Weave™ augments and extends the wearer's natural hair, increasing thickness, lushness, brushability, durability, colour depth, variety, and "glow". Weave™ comes with 8 preset styles\*, easy new style programmability, and storage space for up to 56 custom looks\*\*. Suitable for almost all human head shapes\*\*\* and hair types\*\*\*\*, Weave™ is a true revolution in personal grooming\*\*\*\*\*. You'll never need your own hair again!\*\*\*\*\*

\*Preset styles can be replaced, removed or revoked at any time, for any reason

\*\*Subscription required

\*\*\*UK hat sizes 6-7 only

\*\*\*\*Weave™ binds to viable hair follicles and is therefore not suitable for the bald.

\*\*\*\*\*All data collected by Weave™ is property of the Pan Nedrex Corporation and can be used, sold, or exposed at its own discretion.

\*\*\*\*\*Installation is permanent and cannot be undone.

## 180. The New World

Dead turbines line the horizon. Rusted, immobile, some bent, some broken, they stand as testament to what we've lost. Or at least they do to me. To my children, to their children, they're no more meaningful than an old oak, a rotten pine, another sick and fruitless pear tree.

## 181. Prescriptivism versus Descriptivism

Language is a solved problem. The corpus contains every possible combination of words, from single sentence level up to multimillion volume novel cycles. Everything that can be said has been said.

Inevitably, copyright is forever now. It is impossible to speak without a copyright claim against you. If you control the archive, you can silence whoever you wish.

And yet, and yet...

Every generation remakes language anew, weards it into shapes unknown to history. There's no stopping change, no restricting the limits of expression.

These words are **ours**. We will use them how we want.

## Notes

All stories written by David Guy, between January 1st 2026 and June 30th 2026 (story number corresponds to the day of the year they were written on). The second half of this volume, consisting of stories #182-#365, will be released on December 31st, 2026 (or thereabouts).