

DED-MEK

A vision of the past.

BY MATT THOMPSON

Ded-Mek slots the iridium strip into the boy's chest cavity and stands back to admire her handiwork. Her construction blinks at her, frowning. His skin grafts are almost perfect. Not too exact, of course. She always leaves imperfections, blemishes. Other than that you might be fooled; but Ded-Mek appreciates the glitches. It's as if Geon, her son, her ruin, is still growing up, still unfolding his petals of childhood to become the man he never will be.

The boy's cheek twitches. His eyes focus. His mouth opens.

They bring Ded-Mek their cast-offs, their unloved and unwanted DNA strands, mock-orgs, memory chips. She scavenges in the ash-heaps that ring Nampo, she searches across New Korea, rooting through mountains of obsolete components and antique chromo-filters until she finds something she can incorporate into her latest version of Geon.

"He's not coming back, Ded-Mek," they say to her. "You have to let him go."

They say it with sympathy; but Ded-Mek pushes them out the door anyway, her face contorted into a fury so pure and profound none wishes to question her motives ever again. She's happy to be called by such a name. For her, the mech lives on forever.

As does her son.

Geon, her muse; Geon, her mystery. How well the citizens of this metropolis know his countenance. How they long never to see him again.

The boy staggers to his feet and lurches for freedom. Ded-Mek, her face shining, stands aside to let him pass. His hand brushes hers. A snap of static arcs between them. Already his stride is compromised, weak. An odour of cordite hangs around him, a stench of built-in obsolescence exuding from his pores like poison.

The sun sears this derelict suburb. Ded-Mek shields her eyes. The boy, as if following some primordial instinct, heads for the arterial highway a kilometre away. His feet drag. In the relentless glare he resembles a drifting shadow, cut loose from its half-life and cursed to

wander Nampo for all eternity.

But eternity here is counted out in minutes and seconds; and Ded-Mek, following discreetly behind, prays he will last at least until the sun hits the zenith.



Her first Geon survived only minutes. Patched together from abandoned body parts and crushed genes, he shivered and died in the same growth-pod that birthed him. Undaunted, Ded-Mek immediately set to work on the first of his brothers, cloning a new Geon from the salvageable parts of the old.

That one lasted long enough to reel a few steps across the floor of her workshop. She cut him open while he was still warm — his heart, beating its last, had already shrivelled like an old, dried-out fruit. She spliced his DNA with some modified genotypes she had been gifted, and set to making a new, improved number three.

He is number thirty-seven. Or thirty-eight — depending on what you count. He has, in his limited wisdom, decided to shelter beneath a cluster of berry trees, away from the scorching heat of the sun and the howling noise of the highway. Ded-Mek stands a hundred metres away, willing him to get back to his feet. A crow pecks at the ground near to him. She knows it has smelt blood, sensed death.

But her creation will not be fodder for the beasts. She moves closer and hurls a stick at the interloper. Startled, it flaps leisurely away, cawing its displeasure.

The boy looks up. But Ded-Mek turns from him; she wishes for her children to make their own way in the world, to snap

the apron strings and fly free.

The boy trembles. His gaze films over, and his head droops onto his chest once again.

She dreams of Geon every night. She recalls his laugh, his tears, the long months nursing him to some parody of health. The final, desperate lunge into the surgical unknown. The sight of his pale, bloodstained face in the mortuary.

Others have asked her to reconstruct their own scourges: a child, a partner, a beloved pet. Always she turns them down. Her skills, honed in the chaos of the mid-century simboom, are locked on one task only.

Those she refuses harangue her, mock her. Crazy, obsessed, a zealot; she has heard it all. But some day her Geon will return. Some day he will walk these streets again, his joyful shrieks echoing from the overpasses, his golden skin glowing in the light of the noonday sun.

When the boy is dead Ded-Mek hoists him over her shoulder and carries his near-weightless body back home. The children of the neighbourhood stand stiffly to attention as she passes, as they always do, their serious eyes watching her all the way.

She lays the cadaver out on her bench and slices open the chest cavity. The lungs are dead, useless, as is the heart. The spleen may be of worth; she extracts it with practised assurance and freezes it for his successor. When she is done she incinerates the body with no more grief than she would feel for a bundle of old rags. Her thoughts are turning to the future. One of her clients told her he may have access to the cell clusters the university's cloning labs routinely discard. She calculates the cost; it will be within her budget.

When the flesh is melted away, Ded-Mek cleans out the oven, remembering how Geon would help her around the workshop before his decline, in the years before she lost him.

But she can find him again. Filled with energy anew, she activates her database and begins the long scroll through the sequence-streams in search of a suitable match. ■

Matt Thompson is a London-based musician and writer. His work appears or is forthcoming at *Aliterate*, *Black Static* and others. He can be found online at matt-thompson.com and on Twitter at [@24wordLoop](https://twitter.com/24wordLoop).

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