

# Futures

## Home grown

A creative process. **By Mark Vandersluis**

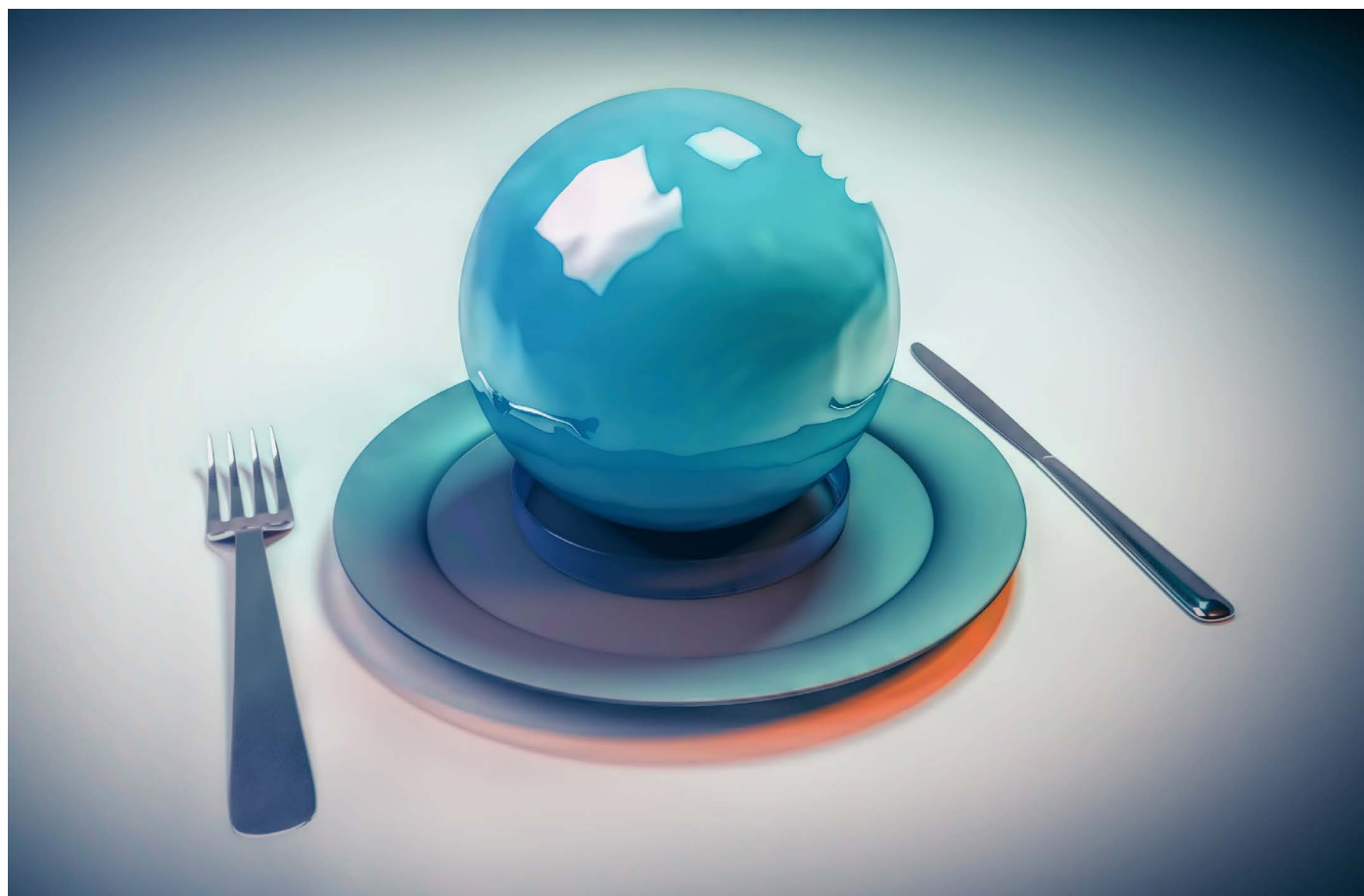


ILLUSTRATION BY JACEY

I grew them using my biochemistry kit while I was still a youngster travelling between the stars, but Mum, Dad and Tri wouldn't let me keep them. Tri said they were unnatural – they grew too fast and bred too quickly, with only two components instead of three. And yes, in hindsight they did look weird: such a strange colour and almost completely hairless. I guess I must have done something wrong during one of the construction steps – the wrong biocatalyst maybe, or the wrong temperature? Whatever I did, I'll never know. I never managed to grow anything remotely like them again, even though I tried over and over.

I really loved them – watching them, feeding them and growing them became a complete obsession, until the day my parents decided enough was enough. Tri took them away and

destroyed them. I begged, I cried, I screamed – I was only a young kid back then – but my parents wouldn't be swayed. They had made their decision, and I was heartbroken, inconsolable. It was so hard for me at the time. My parents told me I would get over it, and they were right, but only because of my deceptions.

I had kept my two favourites hidden away separately, because, well, because they were my favourites. So although I was still grieving the loss of all the others, I hatched a plan for my two survivors. I felt they deserved to live, after all the pleasure they and their kind had given me.

I focused all my energy on their survival. I started by researching the construction of spacecraft, and eventually I found a design that I thought could be suitable for them. I modded and modded it, until through trial

and error – lots of error – I came up with a craft that would safely carry them on the journey I had planned. The hardest part was the design process, making sure that every conceivable contingency was covered, and with multiple failsafes for my precious cargo. Once the virtual test lab confirmed that my craft would do its job, it was easy to program the fabrication kit to actually make it.

I had already started to take an interest in each of the systems we were passing through, and when I eventually found one with a compatible planet, I said my tearful goodbyes, put them into the ship and quietly and carefully launched it out of the garbage hatch.

It was brilliant fun remotely guiding the ship on its journey towards my selected planet, then through the violent atmospheric entry and finally to a successful landing. I hadn't doubted

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for one moment that I would succeed, as I had rehearsed the whole flight over and over again in my Sim. Oh, the naivety and optimism of youth! But what elation I felt as I made their airlock open and watched via the remote video as they stumbled out. They couldn't have had any idea where they were (or what they were, for that matter!), but the planet had a breathable atmosphere for them, and I'd included plenty of supplies of fast-growing food.

They had survived the landing, but that was only the starting point if they were to have a future. I monitored them surreptitiously and frequently, and before we finally flew out of video range I knew that they had lived through many day-night cycles without mishap. In fact, they had already started to breed!

And although my journey since then has been long and eventful, I have never forgotten them; all the memories I have of raising them and keeping them have stayed with me over the aeons. It's ironic that the childhood trauma

from those days and the actions I took at the time planted the seeds that have since shaped my whole life. I've developed a reputation as a brilliant spacecraft designer – the best in the Five Thousand Galaxies, it's said.

Now I'm a full-grown adult myself, in a stable Three, and we're travelling between the stars with youngsters of our own. We're finally making the journey to visit that distinctive blue planet, with its large satellite. I'd bought the whole neighbourhood almost as soon as I'd made my first trillion, but even so it's taken an age before I've been able to make the journey, what with business priorities and all that.

I don't know what we will find when we arrive. They may be long gone – maybe they got sick and died out almost as soon as I lost contact – after all, my organics design skills were (and still are) pretty rudimentary. But I like to think that they have survived, the amazing fruits of my accidental creation. Given the time that has passed, there could be millions

by now, or even billions ... Anyway, soon we will know – very soon now we'll be arriving. If they still exist, I plan to take almost all of them with us – there's plenty of storage space in our ship's hold, which I designed specifically for this purpose. But I do plan to leave a breeding stock on the planet for our children, in case one day they want to return with their own families.

I'm getting really excited now – I can't wait! The memories are still so vivid from all that time ago. I start to salivate as I remember how I liked to eat a handful at a time: there was such a satisfying crunch and pop in your mouth as you bit down on them. They tasted so delicious! And the noise they made!

By day, **Mark Vandersluis** is a senior IT manager for a telecoms company in the UK. By night, he writes science fiction. Mark has previously appeared in Futures with *Proxima Junk*. He blogs at [markvsf.design.blog](http://markvsf.design.blog) and you can follow him on Twitter at [@markvsf](https://twitter.com/markvsf)