

Futures

Some dogs kick when they dream

Faith and devotion. By David G. Blake

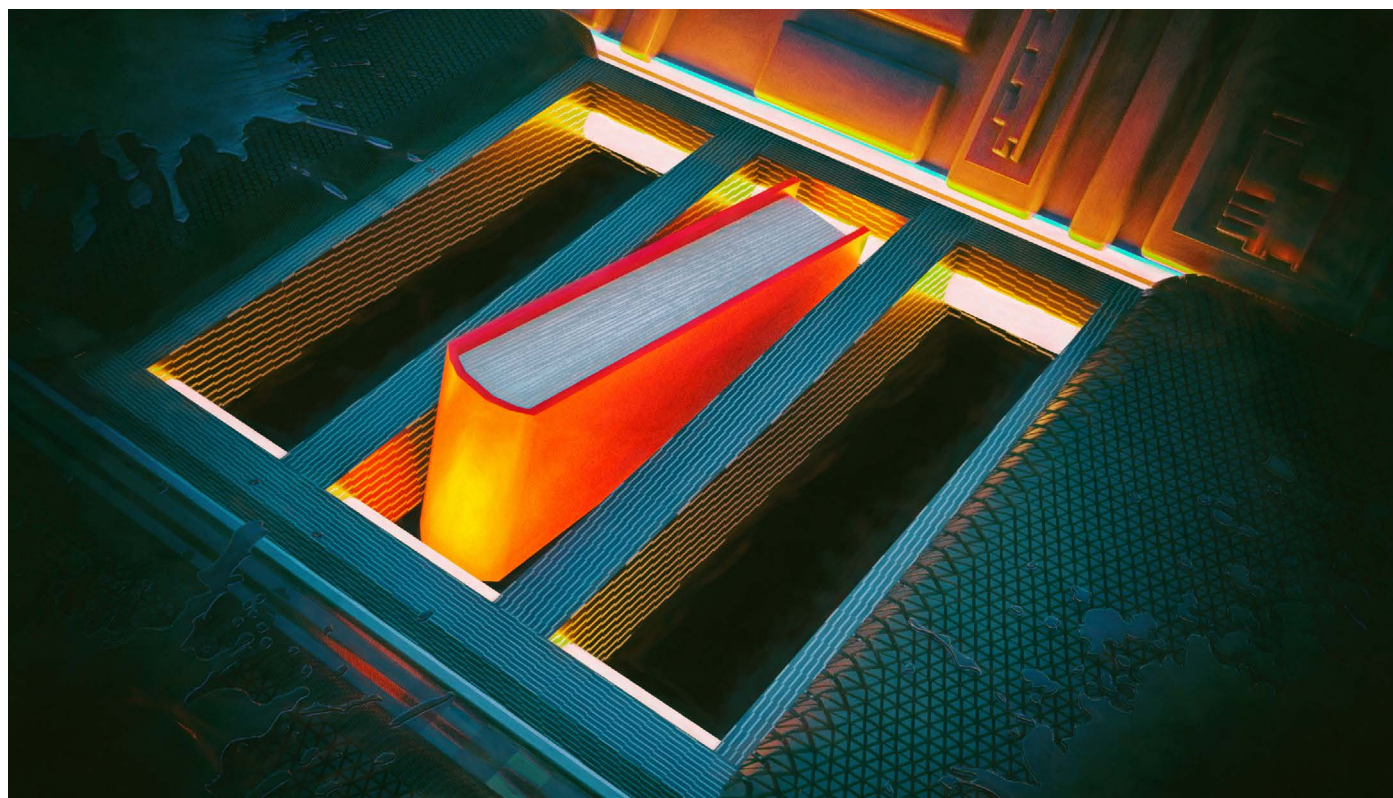


ILLUSTRATION BY JACEY

Sheen of sweat on her forehead. Pale. Glimmering red from the warning lights overhead.

Noise. So much noise.

And the stench of sickness ...

I haven't been here long, not in time. But it is already too much.

Outside, people reach out but don't quite touch me, and give voice to meaningless platitudes. I just want a drink. A moment alone. Yesterday, a miracle. At the pace the shield is failing around the artefact, we will all be looking for a miracle soon. The problem lies at the feet of the people who think our ancestors had already found one. So long ago. The only one we will ever need. They refuse to listen. To do anything about the danger. The shield has held our whole lives, our parents' lives, and their parents' lives before them. Have faith, they say. The artefact is testing us.

I say *it is killing us*.

Pup is in the waiting room behind the isolation zone. She doesn't know, not yet. I lean

against the doorway and watch her sleep. Some dogs kick when they dream. To fall asleep and dream of running away, of chasing instead of being chased. Such freedom. I envy that. She's a good girl, and Tessa loved her as much as I. Even when she clawed her way out of the incubator before her time had come and emerged a runt. Even when she chewed the wiring to our control box, and had us trapped in our bedroom for seven hours. Even when she peed in our decontamination element and the replacement took months to grow. Even when ...

... *I can't do this*. It's too much. It is all too much.

Couple of blocks over. That's how far I make it in silence. Alone but not at peace, not ever again. Some things are lost forever.

"Raffi!"

Ruth Bennett. Gardening. Gloves, apron, spade and a useless sun hat. All of it. Like she'd watched an old movie about Earth and tried to imitate being that nosy neighbour everyone

goes through so much trouble to avoid. She would've made a fantastic actor.

Whatever neighbourhood the builders copied when they constructed this generation ship, it suddenly felt like it must've been the smallest one in existence. And it was closing in.

I stop beside the access plate etched with her family symbol, and she smiles at me. That smile tells me she hasn't heard. "Mrs Bennett." She hates it when people call her Mrs Bennett outside of the 'meetings of the holy artefact', as they call them. Because Tessa knew, I know.

"Please, Raffi, call me Ruth." The spade goes into her apron and out comes a little red book with gold lettering across the front and down the spine. There's a depiction of the artefact encircled by a shield, like loving arms wrapping the artefact in a warm embrace. The same arms that loosened just enough to strangle the life out of the only person worth a damn on this whole ship. She thrusts it at me. "I want Tessa to have this."

Grief. It is a disease. A parasite. *I am grief*.

Futures

If staying in the embrace of the artefact for the pilgrimage had corrupted Tessa's cell growth and riddled her body with tumours visibly pressing upwards beneath her skin; had left her to die with clumps of hair and flesh falling off, hair and flesh left to me the unbeliever to deal with. If it had done all of this. *Taken* all of this. Why had it not taken Ruth Bennett? How much longer did I have to suffer her pious crap? Even though I understand that life is not fair, the unfairness of it all makes me feel like a helpless child watching my world collapse around me.

I take the book. "Thank you." Doing so gives us extra time together. Maybe there is some residue clinging to me that will reach out and balance the scales. If I give it time.

She steps closer. I smell the dirt on her gloves, her apron, on one knee. "How is our girl?" – no break to allow me time to answer – "The artefact is going to heal her. I know you

doubt its power and mercy, Raffi, but it will not hold your faults against Tessa. It's going to reach down and work a miracle in your life. Wait and see. I pray for you both each and every night."

My eyes shut. I hear barking, and I know the bark. Pup is awake. I should be there with her. She needs me. But I can't return to that place, not yet. I can't. I don't even know where I can go. I just know I have to. "I have to go, Mrs Bennett."

Her gloved fingers wrap around my wrist before I can get away. Bumps on the fabric feel like tiny teeth against my skin. "You'll tell Tessa, won't you? You'll tell her I *said* the artefact is going to heal her?"

I nod because I can't speak. It's hard to resist the urge to jerk free, to scream.

She lets go and flashes that oblivious smile. "Praise be to the artefact, and may you find yourself forever in its loving embrace."

There's a drainage cube a few blocks farther along the way, across from the school where Tessa and I had once dreamt about walking our children for the first time. Together. It makes sense to find myself here. Of all the places on the ship. Alone.

The red book with gold lettering and outstretched arms that had shredded my life into little, meaningless, unfair pieces is just small enough to cram between the bars of the drainage cube. I watch it soak up water until it crumbles and sinks.

It doesn't make me feel better. Nothing will. I am certain of that.

David G. Blake lives in a van down by the River Styx. In addition to *Nature*, his work has appeared in *Beneath Ceaseless Skies*, *Daily Science Fiction*, *Galaxy's Edge* and many other publications. For more info, follow @DavidGBlake or visit <https://davidgblake.com>.

THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY

David G. Blake reveals the inspiration behind *Some dogs kick when they dream*.

I am grief.

That's how this story started. With those three words. This is before I stumbled into the truth — at least my truth — that you don't move past grief. You don't get over it. Can't run from it, or shove it down a drainage cube. Can't ignore it. Can't fight it. None of that works. You just learn to live with it, and it changes who you are. So that's where I am, and that's in the neighbourhood of where this story came from.

As for the religious element? I could tell you it's because religion and grief have been linked throughout my life, and I think that will forever be the case. I could tell you it's because religion often profits from grief and from the grief-stricken. I could tell you it's because I've known so many Ruth Bennetts that this story couldn't exist without one. Or ... I could tell you it's because I always like to add a little horror to my science fiction.

Keep safe, and thanks for reading.

