

**HOVERING IN DEAD SPACE: THE GHOSTLY FUTURE IN
PLEASE PLEASE GET OVER HERE PLEASE AND
THE TERRAFORMERS**

Jamison Crabtree. *please please get over here please*. Cartridge Lit, 2017. Dan Hoy. *The Terraformers*. Third Man Books, 2017.

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Lately, I've been fixated on ghosts and the future and how those two concepts intersect. At first they seem to be diametrically opposed to one another, but they are also permanently interconnected. The two fade into each other; they eerily float together in Venn diagram form. The following chapbooks overlap in the same way. The form and content indicate ghostliness and futurity. Although the means of publication, one a physical hand sewn book and the other a digital text on a screen, are extremely different, these two chapbooks have a similar otherworldly atmosphere and tone. When we flip the pages or scroll down, we are caught in the middle of the diagram.



I. We arrive at ghosts:

*A haunt is another word for a face;
scary to see so many floating through the world.*

The ghost lives in digital space in Jamison Crabtree's *please please get over here please*. This online chapbook at *Cartridge Lit* is airy in a world without air. The white background and colorless font creates an empty space and a slow scroll/scrawl of text, at once enticingly ethereal and cautionary.

*Alive & dead & asleep, bodies ache to press against
something new.*

II. The words float on until abruptly interrupted by the strangeness of videogame language. Like Carol Anne as she channels ghosts, we hear and see sound and picture with sudden clarity amid the onscreen static. The dialogue suggests characters and provides tension because there are no real bodies in video games; there are only ghosts in the machine.

... .., ...--are you contagious?

She falls in love with a blank.

III. In “you can use a bullet to make a meat” the point of view shifts from third person to second person. Ekphrasis is emphasized. The poem is a list of all the things “you” can do. Yet, these things do not feel achievable. I am not playing the game when I am simply reading this text. I am completely inactive. I have no character of my own. I have no body, except my physical body. I have no virtual self, no avatar. My mind free floats in the digital space.

IV. And then like a hungry fairy tale with teeth, bodies drop from the sky.

*There is a moment when every parent considers eating their children;
either out of love or loneliness or both.*

Although still digital, the fairy tale elements seem visceral, tangible. They float but can perform physical acts. This kind of presence is the most dangerous kind.

I say “until you open it, you can’t know the difference between what’s in the present and what’s in the grave.”

V. Words are dead and blank. Empty vacuums. The repetition of blankness creates an unsettling atmosphere. For example, in the poem “All of time and space and the space outside of space where does it end,” this emptiness, this ghostly inhabitance, goes on and on infinitely. Where is the physical substance? The original material of the game itself exists inside of the technology. This world seems so large yet so void, like the future or the sky or death.

The character sleeps to *dream that I’ll dream the same dreams that they dreamed. I wear their shirts, their / dresses & try to forget that all of my friends are dead.*



1. A hard sci-fi crash down. The physical book, the color and texture of parched rock, forms in my hands. Material. Yet the ghost of a barely visible astronaut hides beneath the title: *The Terraformers*.

Dan Hoy’s chapbook from Third Man Books begins with stars.

The stars here
are still

meaningless &
free

It seems that all life and death is meaningless. All floats in the cold void of space.

2. The print black and white images of space (by Tristan McNatt) and the abstractions floating within the text work side by side. This is not a prose sci fi novel that describes characters, bodies, or dialogue. These poems place the reader in an empty intergalactic existential crisis. We are the ghostly astronauts, alone and staring at the sky. Then, the isolated terraforming compound, and the objects within, appears. Even though no other physical body manifests, the word “we” appears as well.

*the uncertain future
we inhabit*

under an unfixed sky

*courtesy of
out of spec*

atmospheric harvesters

& standard issue pressure suits.

3. There will be no food dropped to the planet’s surface. There will be no radio transmissions. This planet has no future. The surface is bleak. The terraforming process is not complete. These unnamed explorers are the living, breathing, moving dead.

how long

can our
bones & muscles

really handle

the gravity

The water and oxygen and machines, though not alive in the same sense, will exist after the humans die. In fact, some of the astronauts are already dead. Is all humanity, in fact, dead? Everything dies as it lives. Everything is trapped in this living death together.

4. The surface of the planet is analogous to the surface of skin. Skin to skin exposure outside with another human being will most likely mean that the physical body will finally die. What will happen when the helmet that saves us from exposure is removed?

exposed
to the infinite

5. From our vantage point, on the corner of each page, we see a faraway orb and a small projectile circling and moving toward a planet. Yet, it does not land. It arcs. The corner of the pages act as a flipbook, but the pages must be turned from back to front in order to see this motion. Time is reversed. Conversely, an astronaut's helmet, perhaps empty or perhaps worn, marks each page number. When flipped forward, light from the sky orbits across the dark face of the helmet. It is unclear whether or not someone inside the suit can see the stars.

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Time is ever-present in, maybe even obsessively written in, *please please get over here please* and *The Terraformers*. Or maybe I am obsessed with time and death. Maybe I am, like every reader, afraid of time and death. I am afraid of being a ghost with nothing to say or do or be in the future. How do we, as ghosts passing through this physical plane, cope with a future where we are less than a whisper?