

## Voyages To Mars 5

### Dreaming

Matthew Shindell:

Hello, and welcome back to Voyages to Mars, from the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum, our monthly literary mixed tape, where we explore classic sci-fi readings set to music by DJ Kid Koala. This special series of the Airspace Podcast follows NASA's Perseverance Rover on its seven-month journey to Mars. I'm Matt Shindell.

When it comes to space flight, launches and landings get all of the attention. But today, we're paying tribute to the journey itself. Interplanetary road trips take awhile. So while we cruise onward to the red planet, we're going to enjoy some poetry that deals with long-term space travel.

If as Phillip K. Dick suggests, Androids dream of electric sheep, what do Rovers dream of on their way to Mars? Maybe they dream of other robotic explorers who've made the journey before them. Pioneer 10 is a probe launched in 1972 to explore the outer solar system, including the moons of Jupiter.

The following selections come from *Orrery*, a brand new poetry collection released this year by author Donna Kane. The Pioneer 10 spacecraft inspired Kane to think about materiality, consciousness, transformation, and space travel itself. These ideas are present in the poems we'll hear today.

In the first selection, *Microraptor gui*, Kane explores themes of what we can know and what we can't. She appreciates that any science is open to being disproved. However, the poem proposes that these debates ignore the element of mystery that makes life beautiful. Reading four poems from her own collection is Donna Kane.

Donna Kane:

Some surmised feathers evolved from scales  
to keep a pigeon-sized dinosaur warm,  
others pooh-pooed the notion  
that only by a fluke did reptiles  
find out they could glide—  
to which creationists said,  
*Precisely.*  
One minute scientists are ardent cursorialists,  
the next arboreal fiends. And isn't it  
just a bit too convenient that the impression was found  
where fake fossil factories abound?  
And what about Orville and Wilbur?  
Didn't they find out the hard way  
that controlled flight doesn't succeed  
by a series of random events?  
Either way, said the *Microraptor gui*,  
that first flight was dope.

Matthew Shindell:

Eulogy For Analog pays tribute to Pioneer 10's analog communications system. NASA stopped communication with the probe in 2003 because of new digital computers. Kane eulogizes the now outdated tech that continues to fly through space.

Donna Kane:

Eulogy For Analog.

Out with the rumble, tortillas of vinyl,  
in with the jitter, the flickering screen,  
the *click click click* of a digital riff,  
no more wow and no more flutter,  
no more slick brown tape  
from the stuck cassette glittering  
in ditches mornings after,  
no more milk-throated *swoosh*  
of the rotary dial or airwaves tweaked  
through a Bakelite knob.  
It would be good to hear from you.  
As the lifted lid of a music box launches  
the teeth of a weighted steel comb,  
plucking the pins of an orbiting drum.

Matthew Shindell:

The Nearest Exit May Be Behind You considers the idea that once something can't be perceived by our senses, it transforms into something otherworldly. Pioneer 10 is lost from Earth's view, and is now out of communication. Kane considers what the probe's new meaning is to us, now that we can neither see it nor talk to it.

Donna Kane:

The Nearest Exit May Be Behind You.

Its shadow's been gone since liftoff  
but it took light disappearing before lonely  
seemed simply alone, or if not alone then deep  
in the lab of the not understood, the no-human-scent  
in its gold dust, the no soot-darkened brows  
incandescent with plutonium.  
Shed of *silver, quick, small*—our ideas burning off  
like surplus fuel—*Pioneer 10* is a thought clicked  
shut. Limbs drawn in, it drops like a tick  
from the brain's limbic core, like a photon  
travelling who knows how long  
before it reaches a body,  
the way the mind needs an object,  
something to crack open on,  
and by its reflection, shine.

Matthew Shindell:

In Pioneer 10 Instruments, Kane writes in a series of imperfect anagrams. For each of the 11 instruments on Pioneer 10, she created little poems using only the letters in the words of each instrument. Some of these poems use the same letter more than once, which is what makes them imperfect anagrams. Kane wanted to write anagrams to reflect the Pioneer 10 probe's current condition in interstellar space. It has limited capacity for change, as it continues to cruise on its timeless journey through our outer solar system.

Donna Kane:

Pioneer 10 Instruments.

1. Geiger Tube Telescope

score big  
little letter to Eros  
recoup our loss  
toll our bells  
be us

2. Ultraviolet Photometer

pill thru a velvet throat  
earth trove larvae  
little limpet

3. Imaging Photopolarimeter

the heart agape at hope  
to romp to tramp the grime to glitter  
all the portage home

4. Meteoroid Detectors

to some I mirror terror  
to some terror mirrors me  
some mirror me to meet terror  
me I recede

5. Sisyphus Asteroid / Meteoroid Detector

meteors are so rare  
distracted is a dead idea  
say I'm morose  
I am  
address me as tractor  
address me as droid  
address me

6. Helium Vector Magnetometer

am I liminal

am I the unmoving mover  
one trail no hame no churn  
not meant to turn  
or change or veer or unravel  
gone the human ear to hear me count  
each nettle in the magnetic glue  
one minute I am a marvel  
one minute I am not a thing

7. Quadrispherical Plasma Analyzer  
media zeal slipped a Quaalude  
all splashy launch  
and salad days  
nailed a crippled calm

8. Charged Particle Instrument  
NASA pinged me  
I pinged NASA  
a space addict's dream  
until the anaesthesia set in  
then nada  
clear sailing  
past thin-haired mammals,  
rue, pain and mincemeat pies

9. Trapped Radiation Detector  
a nation ordered portion  
part pride, part corporation  
dapper dart  
to dear departed tinpot

10. Cosmic Ray Telescope  
slip me some Sartre  
carol me to sleep  
o mossless trail

11. Infrared Radiometer  
I am doomed  
no martian, no red end to refer to  
do I dream?  
I dream  
I dream of terra firma  
I dream of dirt

Matthew Shindell:

Voyages to Mars is presented by AirSpace from the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum. It is produced by Katie Moyer, Matt Shindell, Jennifer Weingart, and Andrew Fletcher. Mixed by Tarek Fouda. Music by DJ Kid Koala.

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