

The Matrix
Jenny Blackford

Our atmosphere
with all its clouds birds insects
rooftops treetops sky
lies barely fingernail-deep
over its solid matrix

Mother Earth.

We tiny soft-shelled things
crawl our small lives
through one so-slender slice
between our Gaia's
molten metal core

and high cold dark.

The Numbers Game
Eileen Chong

In the morning room you offer up your arm—
a tight band, several squeezes of the hand,
a pinprick, release—the nurse will call later

with the results. We are looking for a trend,
we want to keep it within a range. Lie back,
insert the wand, watch the sonogram. Today,

the friendly technician who is also an artist.
She tells you *I make sculptures*, and you ask if
they resemble ovaries. She is surprised, then

she says *Yes*. It's not rocket science: what goes in,
comes out. Your follicles are growing; at the right time,
inject this. Your eggs will ripen. Twelve hours later

the doctor will insert a needle through the wall
of your uterus, and harvest them. A scientist
will be present, he will scan the fluid in the test-tubes

through a microscope, right there in the room.
We count them together: there is certainty in numbers.
All you need is one, but the game is an upside-down

pyramid. Ten eggs, but not all ripe; not all ripe
eggs fertilise; not all fertilised eggs continue to grow.
Divide and conquer. If there is, indeed, a blastocyst,

then we transfer. Now the long wait. Not all embryos
implant. The blood test is 99% accurate, but the stain
in your underwear does not lie. A single, red butterfly.

On Searching For Night Parrots in Western NSW
Lorne Johnson

Surely, it would be easier to find a haystack
in the eye of a needletail, than pull a Night Parrot

out of this mallee's bottomless top hat, yet here we are,
analysing Google's satellite portraits of potential habitat

(the colour of ground sumac, cardamon and nutmeg),
either side of a firetrail in the west of Yathong Nature Reserve.

Within the Diamantina, the Parrot has a preference for stony substrate
and scattered rings of porcupine grass near dunes, scarps.

Our celestial screen view results in estimates, guess work,
a great intake of breath... When in real targeted space,

what we longed for isn't there: just the melancholy songs
of Yellow-plumed Honeyeaters, endless splintered gums,

the horribly wide sky. Still, we lay down our swags
in the thick of it all, build a small fire, swig boutique lager,

laugh at the fact we're just not supposed to come close
to holding some of God's things. An hour before dawn, after dreaming

of retreating creatures with eyes as wide and dark as heaven,
I emerge from my swag to a sublime monochromatic void:

silence, stillness, all the world we let go of. Like a mad nomad,
I wander off into hopeless hopbush and broombush rooms,

cursing, praying, repeatedly whistling a Night Parrot's call...
Soft, soft notes like distant church bells.

Powerpoint presentation on the flightless *Dasyornis bracypterus* (hairy bird; short wing)

Jack Oats

The graph shows 26 dots with whiskers summarising data collected by taking 200 hours to walk 600 kilometres during 42 days spread over 6 years.

Romanticise those dark mornings: the 40 minute drive, the 1 hour walk to the transect, the dawn in perfect weather (for ducks) when no data were (no datum was) collected.

Enthuse about the graph with its *Years after fire* on the horizontal and *Density of birds* on the vertical (a private little pun about them

being the dumbest creatures ever); and delight in the coloured symbols joined by meaningless dotted lines. Emphasise the take-away message.

Try for humour, eschew rhyme!
A paradoxical paradigm that lives in thick scrub but is threatened by fire and even though its status is dire

the photo shows wings spread, bright-eyed, a dashing, whiskered hopeful sight, with caption all italicised:
Eastern Bristlebird in full flight.

Venn diagram
Helen Thurloe

Dining Hall, Kathleen Lumley College, Adelaide

after I sent the email that drew the lines

between us

(an artless titration with respect to
our un-reproducible experiment / avocado end-point)

I sat beside a low-melanin girl; whose ice-shimmer hair curtained
her bowl of chips and sauce

and she told me she worked in a Plant Fibre laboratory

yet before she could explain, I had already conjured:

cross-hatched tendrils benches knotted to fume hoods
a machete-proof elastic jungle

Sigourney Weaver, dripping ectoplasm-steeped floors
toxic smoke a crashed space-ship

with a chip still warm in her hand, the girl's dark eyes

skidded at mine, as she inventoried: a hungry goldfish in a bowl

an autoclave a bubble-eating vacuum

microscopes (of course) plus slides and slides of gold-

coated plant cells (like *Midas Was Here*, I thought/bad joke)

oh I said to the boy poet across the refectory table, *I prefer*
my imaginary tangle

the girl laughed like a scientist and said

she loved horror / but not in the lab