**Straight Flush by Joan Boxall**

It’s the new millennium, and I sit behind the mechanized screen. I choose *manual*. I *choose.* The idea that I’m (somewhat) in control encourages me when I time travel.

The intervals are measured in minutes and seconds, kilometers and meters, not light years. This is Earth, and my goal is to stay grounded in my space, where time turns the dial at 60. Sixty seconds to the minute. I don’t need an hour. Working only in minutes and seconds, imagine a decimal where there’s a colon **.**  not **:** just one dot alters consciousness.

For instance? What’s the elapsed time? 5:50…five minutes, fifty seconds, right? Nearly six minutes. But in space, decimals count. A thousand meters to a kilometer; five hundred meters to the half kilometer; point five. It’s not nearly the next one; it’s only halfway. A marathon runner runs 42.195 kilometers. Try telling her that those last one hundred and ninety-five meters don’t count. My point is the decimal. It seems simple enough, but on my screen the two numbers stack one on top of the other. Is it time or space? Once I get going, distortion ensues.

I go to the gym. I get on the bicycle ergometer, commonly known as a stationary bike. I’m not a gym rat. I’m not much of a fan. I don’t care for its impersonality. It’s my weekly oil and lube. The initial impact of the gym is daunting in its sterility, but recently, I’ve noticed a certain magic happens on the bike that enables everything else to flow.

The space dial on top reads ‘distance’. The ‘RPM’ is next to it. The rate or revs per minute is really the rate at which I cover space…85 plus per minute. I’ll need 37 minutes… plus or minus one…shown at the bottom of my screen… to cover the ten kilometers. That’s just a relative distance… how long it takes before I collapse. Not in an exhausted way, but in a way that compresses time and space. Less. Burnt up and off, not out.

A stationary bike ride provides its own compression. I can do half my outdoor riding distance on fixed wheels in half the time on a stationary and achieve a similar cardiovascular burst. No slowing down to admire scenery, no stop lights, no stop signs, no pedestrians, no cars. I don’t freewheel when I’m riding indoors. There’s no ‘wheeeee’. Just spin, spin, spin. Oh, and a hallucinogenic quirk.

The levels read centrally in a horizontal bar graph: red illuminated blocks on a black background. I find my resonance in easy (one-bar), moderate (two-bar) and challenge (three-bar) levels. The groundwork is laid where I can bond and blur time and space. Choose *your* level. Go on. Punch it in. When else can we spin simultaneously, go nowhere, at different speeds, and arrive at a point in neither time nor space?

I start easily, aware of my surroundings, looking for familiarity, glad there’s none. It works best without distractions. It’s easy to disconnect from ‘real time’ with its metallic backbeat, clanking cacophony and stale air. Excuse me while I go inward. The blood vessels take their time responding… sludgy…curmudgeonly. I ride on the deepening breath and adjust. Butt back, arms forward, torso lifted yet unencumbered.

It takes five to ten minutes to acclimatize to the workload. Like getting out of bed, the cells are in denial. Their awakening is akin to discomfort, not pain exactly. Adaptive creatures, before long, I pop the level *up* a notch, and that takes me further *in*: my breathing deepens and muscle slings slide over bone levers. The RPMs quicken: 70, 75, 80, 85…ready for lift-off?

Oxygen and carbon dioxide exchange like weather systems: one high pressure zone over-riding the low. Red blood cells attract oxygen like moisture to a cloud, before condensation precipitates activity. We’ll both feel better once the storm passes.

Up on the surface, not much has changed. Add some coolant. Wipe off the residual excess. On an individual time/space odyssey, inner glow is the goal. Something’s got to give, and that something is space: boundless 3D in which events come to pass.

It helps that stationary bikes don’t move. That kills the linear perspective. The speed, factored in RPMs, doesn’t really feel like movement with its vibrating *whoosh, whoosh, whoosh:*

That one dimensional (1D) geometric arrow? Missing.

That square, circle and triangle of width and heighth, width and length, heighth and length (2D)…your vision of me on the bike when you glance sideways? Gone.

That cube that gives depth perception (3D)…my vision of my pedals from where I’m sitting? Zap.

Time (4D) has trumped them all. Not historical time, but a time that collapses distance to build a virtual horizon somewhere behind where the eyeballs sit on their ocular lens-ledges. Zoned in.

Expanding.

Paul Virilio, our 21st century Marshall McLuhan, says, ‘Speed is not used solely to make travel more effective. It is used above all to see, hear, to perceive, and thus to perceive more intensely the present world’ (Virilio, 1993). And so, it’s all in perception. Not yours of me, but yours of YOU, and mine of ME.

Hang on. We’re getting closer with one to two minute intervals before blastoff. Easy to easy-mod, back to easy, through easy-mod to mod, then mod-easy, mod and mod-challenge. From mod-challenge back to mod, then easy, then repeat with mod-challenge, mod, and ease on down: prepare for landing.

‘It’ happens, just as the mechanics are clicking along. The biomechanics start resisting. They threaten to dawdle if not stall outright. The eye seeks the elapsed time but falls instead on the space covered. With heart rate and RPM, it’s a ‘trompe d’oeil’. Look at the red building blocks. Expect time. Read distance. Fatigue wants time to end. Are we there yet?

Misperception yields to physical knowing. Give up on logic and analysis. The revs reassure, the level resounds, but the time/space dials lose meaning. We’re burning fossil fuels, but not the way we imagine. *We* are the *fossils. W*e’re mutating. We’re no longer in a before, during or after. We’re instants. We’re in the now. We’re whole, not partial. Instantaneously, we’re pumped. But now it’s time to cool down. Unable to hold eternity for long, it doesn’t suit our quadrangle of dimensions. What matters is we held it. We touched that peep-hole to forever in a day.

I grip the handles to check my heart rate. I’m transported, elated. The time, the level, the distance, the RPMs were side-by-side, holding hands, skipping down the garden path. Flushed.

*Flushed in the sense of reddening and glowing.*

*Flushed in a throwing away where well-being floods in.*

*Flushed in the sense of exposure.*

*Flushed in the sense of a smooth join that no power tool can emulate.*

It’s a four-way flush: a straight flush: a pretty good poker hand. I’m willing to bet that length, width, depth and time imploded if only for a moment.

All in the same suit. Follow suit. Take your pick. Red ones, don’t you think?

*Red for fire and fertility,*

*Beauty and blood,*

*Heroism and sacrifice,*

*Courage-passion-wealth,*

*Anger-danger-death.*

*Fanned, quelled, restored.*

*Hearts or diamonds?*

Works Cited

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