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Storylandia Issue 32, J. H. Malone's Drunk on Time

John Brantingham · Wednesday, July 29th, 2020

I started reading science fiction when I was a teenager in the 1980s, and I subscribed to as many magazines as I could afford. What I liked about science fiction then was that it was both distracting and engaging. It distracted me from what was often a very painful time for me, dragging me out of the present tense and into the future where I could see myself as heroic, and it engaged me with the kind of intellectual and philosophical concepts that science fiction discusses as well as any other genre. This kind of engagement is one of the dragons that I, as a reader, have been chasing my whole literary life, and this is exactly what J. H. Malone's novella, *Drunk on Time* delivers in the most recent issue of *Storylandia*.

 *Storylandia* is a magazine that focuses on only a few, and sometimes only one, author an issue. Issue 32 contains only Malone's work of fiction, which is science fiction in its highest form. There is much to love here. His story focuses on Saul, a young slacker who has dropped out of college, and now is underemployed as an IT specialist. He is lazy but intelligent, and he begins a relationship with a woman who has developed a device that allows the user to view any time or place across multiple universes.

The technology of the device is kept vague as it should be. We are not bogged down in technical details that would matter little to the story. Instead Malone allows himself to take a complex and interesting look at human relationships and the dynamics of power. As we gain new technologies, after all, we gain new power and that can have a corrupting influence on many people. It has had that power. However, Malone gives us a vision of people who have power but are able to use it in a benign way, and so I was engaged in the intellectual and philosophical game of learning how people change when they use technology, and when that technology can lead to self-harm. It is one of those discussions that I find myself dwelling on while cooking or driving.

I also love the relationship developed between Saul and his love interest Liesl, the German scientist who invented the machine and is allowing Saul to use it. From the beginning, we know that this affair is fleeting because she knows what the future holds. That's the lesson she teaches, however, that relationships do not last because that is the nature of time. The love between these two characters is beautiful and painful, and I was completely drawn in by it. It is hard to write love well, but Malone does so.

I hope Malone has a long career in writing in front of him. *Drunk on Time* is my kind of fiction.

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