



Sage Cigarettes Magazine

Vol. 3, Issue 2 — Stargazer

Cover art by LE Francis
Title page photos by Molly McGill

Sage Cigarettes Magazine



Vol. 3, Issue 2, “Stargazer”

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SAGE CIGARETTES MAGAZINE

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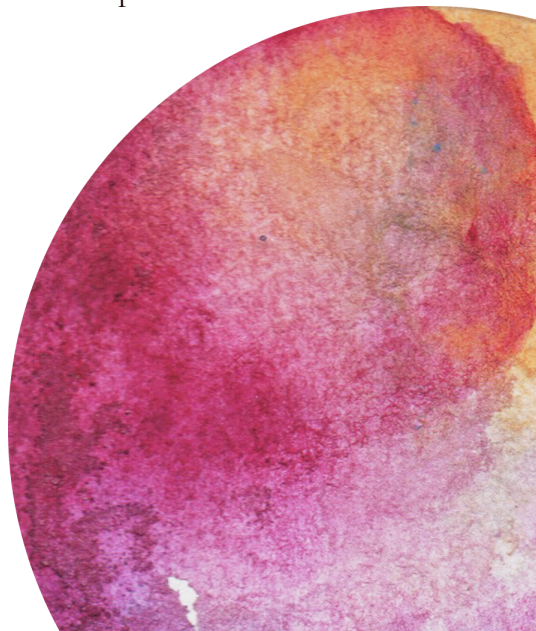
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Letter from the EICs

When we select a theme for an issue, we try to find something that is both ambiguous enough to be interpreted in several different ways while also having a distinct feel — a color & shape & texture in our estimation. So when our managing editor, Sadee Bee, suggested *Stargazer*, we were immediately inspired.

The word itself conjures deep blue skies, variegated blue velvet, the woody smell of



LE Francis

incense in the wind. We saw glittering stars & sequins, sky maps & tarot cards, royal purple spines of antique books. & as a magazine that primarily deals in the fantastic & otherworldly, we hoped we'd be reading cosmic horror, dark sci-fi, starcrossed romance. We looked forward to reflecting upon the angst & loneliness of deep space, to burning with the ferocity of a dying star. & our contributors certainly delivered.

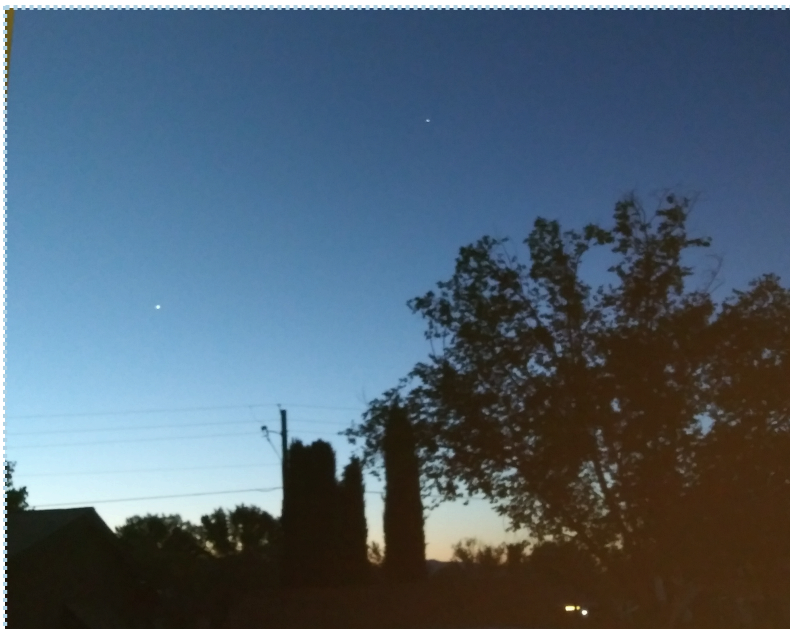
In these pages are glimpses of other worlds, reflections of humanity in the celestial, & countless wishes, wantings laid on the shimmering tails of stars. We are proud of the way the issue came together, the way our contributors pushed at the edges of the theme while tying it all together. & we are excited to share it with our readers.



Stef Nunez

With love,

Stef & L



“Waiting for the Stars” by Tinamarie Cox

Euclidian Distance

by Jessica Heron

if we started as points apart we started one on each end humming on fine
naming things, leading us to locations to exist in the collision and burn and
luminous galaxies, stars, diamonds, you in your wool hat pressing down your
ad infinitum, the spheres of our eyes roll around and back into the distant
the sun rises in the east if there is a west, we are on the same line we can
may we pause upon this point: after you, there is no after you the line
the Big Bang earlier than the scientists had ever known ancient light finds
again here if we started as points apart we started one on each end humming
your hair and me smiling at intricately drawn nothing

and ignorant of beginnings Euclid set us straight on course in time, space,
break into smaller and greater things higher farther and closer things
hair and me smiling at intricately drawn nothing we laugh, it bubbles
light too bright to bear too bright to bear but for Euclid alone an axiom:
watch him turn on that vague equator we can try some new way of seeing
continues a point, a star appears a galaxy lit up 450 million years after
our eyes in the infinity of today where we will meet on this line here and
on fine and ignorant of beginnings you in your wool hat pressing down



The Thing That Fell to Earth

by John RC Potter

That Saturday morning in the summer of 1959, 12-year old Bobby Vicker's head was full of the book in his hands. He was reading Jules Verne's *From the Earth to the Moon* (for the second time) and had seen the film at The Majestic Theatre in the nearby town of Cornersville the previous year. When Bobby was reading, the characters and plots of books in which he was immersed were more real than the world around him. He entered those worlds fully and willingly, and they held more interest for him than the farm on which he lived with his parents and sisters. The rolling farmland, with its hillocks and occasional craggy peaks, paled in comparison to the mysterious landscapes that Bobby discovered within the pages of a book.

Bobby was stretched out on the lumpy but comfortable couch in the back kitchen of the farmhouse. He almost jumped out of his skin and dropped the book he was holding when a voice broke into his imaginary world. Bobby's mother was standing in the doorway that led from the kitchen proper to the back kitchen. Wearing a forever apron, his mother had a tea towel in one hand and a pot in the other; as she stood there, she continued to dry the pot.

“Your dad asked you to go back to the fields and find that pig that got out of the barnyard,” Bobby’s mother said. “You best get that done before he returns home from his fence-fixing on the other farm.” The Vicker family had two farms – the one where they lived in the clapboard farmhouse, and another one on the adjoining concession road that had no buildings on it; it was used for planting crops and pasturing cattle.

“But Mom, I am at a really good part in this book!” the boy pleaded.

With a resolute look on her face, Verna Vicker walked down the solitary step to the floor of the back kitchen. She set the pot and tea towel on the freezer that filled the space between the kitchen and back kitchen doors. She walked to the screen door and opened it wide. Raising her arm and with a finger pointing outside to the back stoop, Mrs. Vicker did not need to say a word to get her son off his butt. Bobby folded down the corner of the page he was reading and half-heartedly made his way to the door.

“Dumb old pig,” the boy muttered as he walked past his mother and out the door that she was holding open.

“I beg your pardon!” his mother exclaimed.



“The Thing That Fell to Earth,” continued

“I don’t mean you, Mom,” Bobby blurted out. “I mean that dumb old pig that found a way to get out of the barnyard.

He was already halfway across the backyard, just past the old hand water pump that they still used sometimes, when he heard his mother call out to him. “You best take Butchie with you.” Butchie was the family beagle and Bobby’s buddy. The loyal dog was nowhere in sight, but Bobby knew where to find him. Now quite old, the dog liked to spend warm summer days curled up on the coolness of the pavement in the shed that housed farming implements. The shed was on the laneway leading back to the imposing old barn that was at a distance from the house. As he approached the shed, Bobby called out to his dog, Butchie, who came to the door of the shed as reluctantly as Bobby had left his book.

“Dumb old pig,” Bobby murmured under his breath. As he started walking back the laneway that ran alongside the barn and then disappeared on the horizon at the back of the farm, the old dog obediently followed his owner.



The Vicker farm was approximately 200 acres in total and stretched from swampland on one side and a cluster of trees on the other. The land ascended the further one walked back toward the croplands on either side of the laneway. Bobby's favourite spot on the farm was the highest point beyond the field of crops, where there was a huge, flat rock not far from a small pond and a band of trees. Bobby figured this was where the pig would be found because for reasons no one understood, any farm animals that escaped the barnyard headed for that destination, at the high point of the farm.

With Butchie at his heels, Bobby came to the crest of the hill and saw the huge rock in the distance that denoted the high point of the Vicker farm. The boy stopped dead in his tracks and his dog did the same. Bobby stared at the rock, disbelievingly. There was a someone stretched out on it; 'splayed' is the word that came to Bobby's mind. Perhaps 'something' rather than 'someone' was more appropriate, the boy thought. The thing was clad in a green uniform and wearing a helmet. It appeared to have fallen to earth from the heavens above.

The boy moved closer, just a few yards away from the rock and the thing splayed out on top of it. Butchie started to growl; the dog moved in front of the boy, and seemed to want him to move backward. Bobby stood his ground. He tried to determine if this thing was a man or an alien. Was it breathing? It was not moving; there wasn't any indication it was alive.

“The Thing That Fell to Earth,” continued

Suddenly, a cluster of clouds crossed over the sun and the hilltop was shrouded in darkness. A shiver ran up and down Bobby’s spine; fear coursed through his veins. The boy turned around and ran as fast as he could back down the hill and along the familiar laneway, Butchie at his heels.



His mother said Bobby had an overactive imagination.
Bobby’s father dutifully walked back the laneway with him.

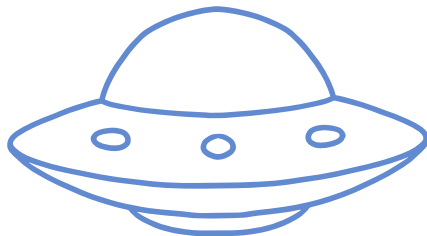
There was nothing on the rock!

Bobby felt regret.
Then fear.

Darkness descended...



Only the dog returned home that day.





photoset by Molly McGill



Ars Poetica: Gravity

by Alex Carrigan

After “Ars Poetica, XI” by Mary Jean Chan

The rule of gravity is that all that
comes down was always going to fall.
That can't be true, because the last thing I
tossed into the sky stayed up there and laughed
at me. I still see it smile as it emerges
from behind the moon each night.
I can't throw a lasso around it or wait for
a meteor shower to knock it out of the sky,
it will never fall.
I am left staying inside when the sun sets.
If I go outside and see that smile,
I will probably fall to my knees and
let gravity keep me down. This is what
I deserve for thinking that the apple
would always be there to give me its seeds.

Out There

by Sam Bartle

One day, might our human journey
Tell a story beyond the Earth

That began with the Moon and Mars
Then out, and out, to stars and stars and stars...

To join the galaxies, manifest
In their gravitational dance

To forge through the unknown and turn
It to romance, romance.

To transcend all that spacetime holds
In mastery of cosmic realm
And breach the impossible that
No more shall overwhelm

Elude the manacles
Of physicality
And cradle time with awe
The present, after, and before.

To reach, with grace, for what's out there
For the good of all life,
Everywhere.

Magnetar

by Sam Bartle

Magnetar, Magnetar

The one they call the 'Zombie' star

Born, out of stellar explosion

Or, where neutron stars merge and engage.

Almost fantastical notion

That could tear atoms in its rage.

A terror of radiation.

Less than a second's duration,

Bursts forth greater energy than

A hundred thousand years of sun.

That pulse's fractional timespan,

Over, just as soon as begun.

One can scarcely believe

How the great cosmos may achieve

Such unlikely physical feats.

This strange star, whose wonders astound

From the vantage of our earthly streets.

Yet, so few are there to be found.

Not often Nature's will.

Yes, rare, but in existence still,

Among a hundred billion suns,

May number merely in their tens

Truly, the improbable ones

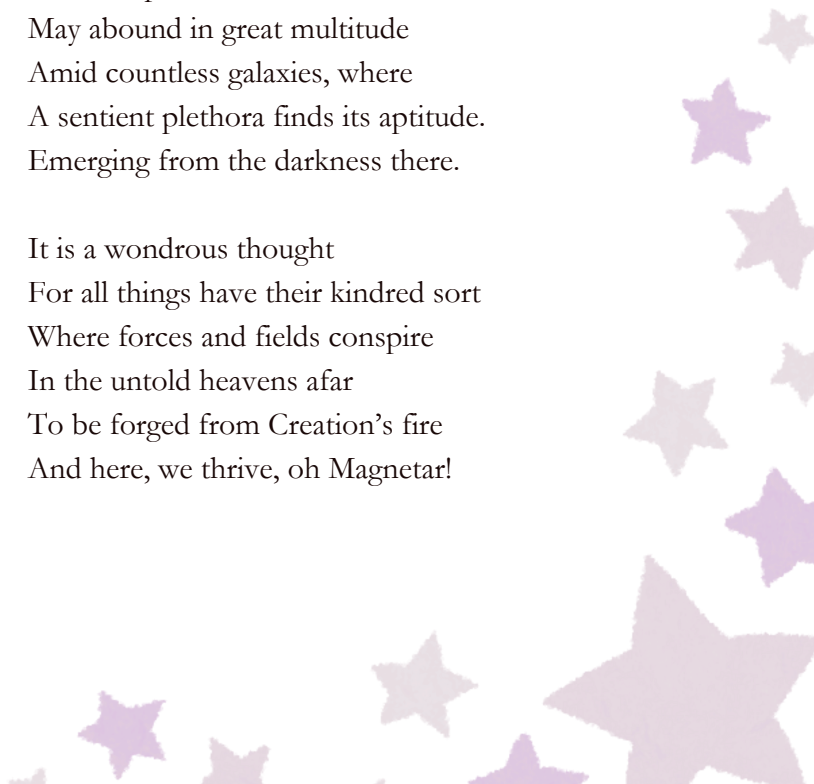
When viewed through the widest lens.

But in this space, so bleak
The Magnetar is not unique.
From galaxy to stellar storm
Everything has its recurrence.
Nothing is of its own sole form
Not exclusive in occurrence.

Not alone. Not. Alone.
Of this, the Magnetar has shown.
And so, to Life, the civilised kind
Our search for its example.
Beyond Earth, how much might we find?
In truth, it may be ample.

Life's solitary vale
Viewed upon universal scale
May abound in great multitude
Amid countless galaxies, where
A sentient plethora finds its aptitude.
Emerging from the darkness there.

It is a wondrous thought
For all things have their kindred sort
Where forces and fields conspire
In the untold heavens afar
To be forged from Creation's fire
And here, we thrive, oh Magnetar!





“Starcrossed” by Mirjana M.

Faces of Qod

by Katrina J. Paddock

I have wrestled with the angels
and I will die dreaming.

One was enough; my angel
is mercenary, and while his eyes rapture
my eyes weep.

I peer into the darkness in fear there's something there,
but it's only us.

Like looking at something terrible.
Like looking at the face of god.

Let me prove how my love will haunt you:

because I don't fold my hands to pray,
I hold onto your thighs.

Stained Glass Was All That Kept Me Near to Heaven

by **Katrina J. Paddock**

The closest star is more than four light-years away
but stained glass can warp the impression of time.

Like the absence of god defines my absence of faith—

like my lovers left;
like my heart is mine;
like my hometown;

I am a place known for its proximity

to another place.



Blue Moon

by Priya Chouhan

Not enough stoicism to collect the shredded love, beauty within fading hard,
sufferer of worst nightmares, a perpetual night inside my putrefied flesh.

Head resting on a white fabric of raw, unbridled grief,
tears eroded the footsteps of nobility on a pale floor, embellished with golden
strips of defeated joy.

Birds silenced, a darker sky of tragic screams, frozen veins,
a maze of sinister actions, the body can't be forgiven.

Eyes patiently watching, dewy jovial laughs burnt as I inhaled the ashes of my
spirituality, table lamp put out by the ferocious bane of the wind, it's black
again.

Feeble heartbeats of raging unholiness, untouched by the serene blood,
longing to drowse on a strange lustrous bed of saintly beliefs.

Fazed by the inner sudden jolt, it's the time,
where dragon meets the blue moon.

Not enough - - - - flesh!

One Pleasant Summer After Lunch

by Ken Anderson

I wandered deep
into an almond grove
on the neglected grounds
and would have never noticed him, appearing
from a shady niche, if the air hadn't blushed
with that golden glow
which casts a magic spell
before a violent thunderstorm. He lurked
among the thick bushes and weeds
at first
like a sapling nudged
by a breeze, then
like a stag
with foliage tangled
in his branched antlers, startling me more
than any hunter suddenly face
to face





with a deer. Yes, Dionysus rose
before my eyes, his wild hair flecked
with vivid yellow flax, his sizable shoulders
cloaked
with shiny purple grapes bulging
from the lush greenery. Light was playing
off the tendrils, stems, and leaves—
the violet vintage trickling
down his pleated abs
and staining the loincloth wrapped
around his waist. I shy
from words
for what would happen next.



“Misalignment in the Stars” by Tinamarie Cox

Dance

by Lydia Rae Bush

It seems the constellations have killed each other.
Leo taking Hercules' finger, Orion wearing Scorpius' sting.

I don't know that we're fit for the stars.

Could you ever be mapped?
I'm no course by which to chart.

But I would lay down jagged edges
forever to ride our shape.

Here,
where we don't kill each other.

Here,
permanent, unfixed.

Eternal,
spinning,

a novel shine, a pattern evolving.

Us taking each other's hands,
wearing them like two rings.

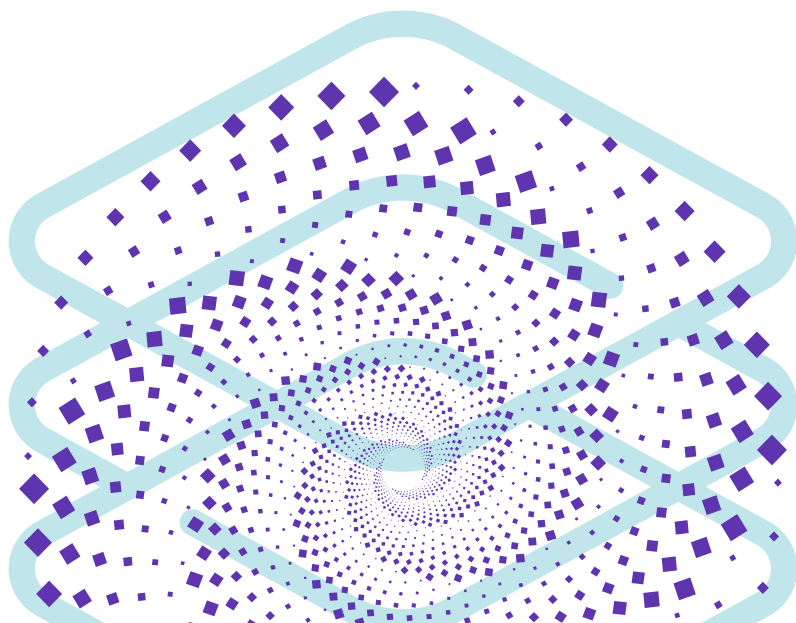


BLANK DIMENSIONS

by tommy wyatt blake

you tear a striation in the cosmic floor, / band of stars sucked into
the void— / do you think the black hole / has tunneling issues /
with its skin spinning / to a spiral? / which compels me / to say:
“we’re the old gods, / now let’s boogie out of the stars and watch
the sky fall” / and you ask me / to stop speaking in code and return
/ to a realm of inertia after i learn / that now is not forever, and
anywhen / we exist leads to Nowhere, / phantom love, and knowing
/ you will never reconstruct / what was torn out of each other.

previously published in “YOUR CD MIX, VOL. 2”



MEMORY AS A SEARCH TOOL

by *tommy wyatt blake*

i don't know who needs to hear this, but there's not a single star alignment that subsumes the wholeness of me, it chooses to pierce through a thoracic flash of memory—the years so romantic, they collect in pangs of mood my body wants to lose. i won't worry something will soon be in retrograde, i blame the moon moving out of the way. and the trick is, i don't want to live like this anymore, where i am levitating out of frame and everything that i am is split between stasis and static. i want to full dark, no stars on what no longer serves me. i want to remember everything. i want to live where time parts from the praxis of existence, and there's sparks in my skin. where the future wanes with dawn, and the concept of anything linear glittercrashes in a fiery yellow, the sunken sun flickering through to when i want it all, i want it loud.

after nat raum

VOIDPUNCTURED!

with the past

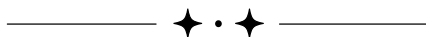
by tommy wyatt blake

forecast contains negatives of space, to be placed on a projector. the light fluxing a coned port of stars, dustspecks displaced from image, all wraith of life and dulled. few patches of vibrating fields shift between frames, you could say its particles got all rearranged.[1] here, time is measured in asynchronous units, no movement is recorded quite the same. foreign objects studded on the cosmic background, sensors buzzing of radiation, all with the intention to claim you. wake you out of sleep, choking on wanting to know why. it couldn't have been better predicted,

how the last item in your search history contains "aren't dreams a type of forecast, i mean don't dreams anticipate the future? spit out a fate-to-fade ratio?" there isn't anything linear to be observed here, laced with language through your teeth or otherwise, but a structure chasmed by lack of light in the room. that is, if you turn your head 90 degrees, you'll feel velocity in real time. how you face dark patches pittering with wet mattered heat, until you're spaced out on somatics, the body drained out of you,

as you whisper type: "thanks, i'll take the boötes void,"[2] followed by "see my form? how it's nightvortexed when i blink five times?", you rate the product as the absence of stars (0). the slides click off.

forthcoming in "FOR YOUR ENTERTAINMENT," Troublemaker Firestarter, Nov. 2025



1. reference to Danny Phantom

2. measured at 330 million lightyears, it's a hole in the universe that's devoid of stars



"6 AM at Space" by Stef Nunez

Callisto

by LE Francis

It's fitting that the face which takes the most punches
is the face that haunts your dreams. A vision
made & remade at the business end of a comet —
rather several. Likely hundreds. Thousands even. I've lost
count of all the times my senses left me, all the times
I wondered why I didn't fall apart — atom
by atom, melting back into the bones of spacetime.
& shouldn't you be marveling at how much remains?

At how much has been bled from me? Buckets
of jeweled light chewing through my lip,
spinning oblivion into dream upon dream,
upon dream. & isn't it more reasonable
to think I've taken too many hits to be due
many more? To delude myself out of believing
that I have a face that even heaven can't love?
What's another hit, anyhow? I'll let it smolder,

let gods & writers lay worlds over my wounds.
We all dream. Even I, who has been everything
but obliterated. & still there is a way to be new
for their eyes, to be beautiful when their gaze drifts
back, eventually. & together we will translate the lines
& stanzas of my devastation. Together, we will glimpse
the future in my suffering — civilization like scar tissue,
street signs blooming from the broken ground like irises.

Together we will bend all visible light,
we will transmute all manifest perception.
& I will once again convince the spiteful hand
of god to loosen its fist & take up a pen.

Celestial Bodies

by Elliot J. West

If space goes on forever,
(don't ask about my 10 year plan)
a vast expanding universe of
stars shining with such brilliance,
(I bury choices like bones in the garden)

are we just ants in our anthill,
(if you don't see me, I won't face this)
waiting to be crushed
by the heavy foot of time?
(how else will I hold onto power?)

If the planets with their systems
(I come waiting at a standstill)
reach beyond limitless light
into places past our comprehension
(pretend I am still moving forward)

are we all just infants
(making a mask of indifference)
babbling at shapes and colors
amused in our ignorant research?
(looking where to go from here)

Death Throes

by Elliot J. West

The sun, in all her glory, is only just a star.
Finite, flaming, she whittles herself down
to keep the world warm.

- I wonder if there is more to life than this

She'll burn into oblivion, bleed into
some nebulous notion, dwarfed by expectations
of a supernova that will never come.

- working and wasting into nothing.

I am not the sun, with all her glory
and infinite expectations, whittled, wasting.
I am the nebula, those space dust death throes.

- Clawing up from these remnants,

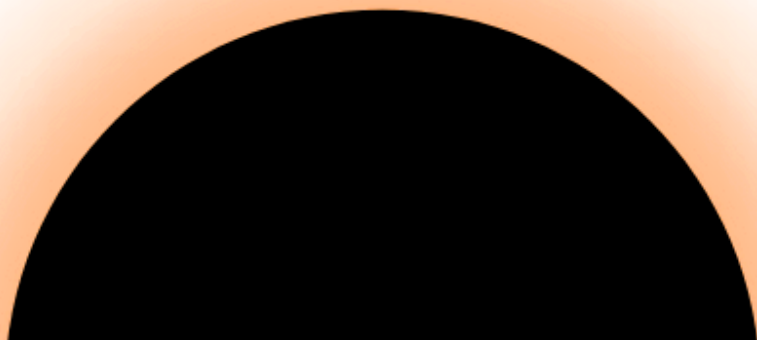
I leave who I once was, display of lights and
color, convulsing, one violent shudder
In search of something altogether new.

- from the ashes I am born.

Total Eclipse

by Elliot J. West

Tell me which path to follow.
Totality is fleeting,
Rare and precious thing,
Always searching for
The sum of my parts.
I have never been an absolute.
I dance among the shadows.
This moon-touched body
Breathes sun-soaked words
In the darkness.
Constellation of my courage
I will weather this darkness
If only for a glimpse of the light.



By the old moon

by Zana Eliot

He first noticed her in the elevator. If he timed it right on certain Fridays, his ride to the lobby would be interrupted on the eleventh floor and his heart would flutter wildly for a quiet couple of minutes as the car descended to the ground floor.

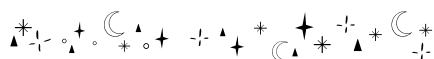
She never spoke and she never looked into his face, but in passing he saw that her eyes were a placid shade of violet blue, he could feel them as a shimmer of light tugging at his throat.

So, what was the score? He'd yet to get the chance to catch her glance, to pull her in with a shy smile, with the teasing gravity of his own deep brown eyes. He just knew if he ever got the chance it would be magic. She gave off that impression and Gordon was an impressionable guy.

And so when his friend in 22B said that he ran into the strange woman with pretty eyes on a Tuesday evening in the building's rooftop garden, he thought he'd maybe plant himself there the following week.

Gord had not listened to the rest of the tale, his mind had switched off as soon as he recognized the alluring figure in the story as the woman from the elevator. But even if he had been listening, it wouldn't have slowed his approach. Jack in 22B was a stoner. Half the time he'd say a word only sort of like the word he actually meant to say. And once, during a Magic the Gathering game, he'd picked up an entire coffee table full of cards and lobbed it at a wall. He'd protested that crabs couldn't fly – it was unnatural. He was on mushrooms.

So even though old Gord was known to be a bit of a gullible Glen, there's no shot he would have believed there was anything to an allegedly demonic UFO sighting reported by Jack in 22B. Pity.



Gordon was caught up at work the next Tuesday. For the last year, he had been working as a cashier at a convenience store in one of the less savory parts of downtown and the girl scheduled to work the next shift never showed up. It turned out to be her way of quitting. Luckily, he'd been able to coax the old timer that worked graveyard to come in a few hours early so he could get away.

It was almost 9 p.m. when the elevator doors opened onto the rooftop. His first thought was that the air was different up there. Billowing columns of clouds ran fingers along tall, lush hedges that bracketed the entryway to the garden proper. The sky seemed to glow despite distant cloud cover choking the meager light of the waning moon.

Though he remembered the rooftop gardens as taking up a considerable portion of the building's sales pitch to potential renters, he'd never ventured up on his own. And the property manager had not bothered showing him beyond the whitewashed, trellised gate that capped the throat of the hedgerows. But as he stood on his tiptoes and peered over, pressing a hand against the cool white slats of the gate, it seemed infinite, wild, deep.

He took a breath and undid the latch, shuddering against the irrational feeling that he shouldn't be there. The garden was an amenity that he paid to access. Why the hell shouldn't he be there?

As the gate swung open, his breath caught in his throat, the pictures in the brochure did not do it justice. In the photos had included a few benches, some nice planters full of daisies, a few hedges dwarfed by a central tree that he couldn't identify because he wasn't the right kind of nerd. But what stretched before him was a lush meadow strewn with wildflowers. At the edges of the field, dark rows of evergreens loomed, casting shadows on the undulating grass that seemed to reflect the glimmering light of stars.

Above, Gordon noticed that the clouds had all parted, but the moon was still missing — that was odd. He was the right type of nerd to notice that. He took a tentative step onto the field, shielding

By the old moon continued

his eyes as he investigated the sky — Procyon, Sirius, Betelgeuse. He traced his fingers across the skyline and confirmed it — the moon was missing from its perch, the sky was simply dark where the satellite should have been.

In the distance along the far treeline, he thought he saw a line of smoke rising between the pine boughs. It seemed miles away, but it couldn't be. The building's profile was tall and lean, its footprint spread across a tight city block.

He took another step into the field and felt a jolt run through his muscles. In the sky, a placid blue star he'd recognized as part of Canis Major suddenly blinked out, catching his attention. He studied it for a moment, counting quietly under his breath, something big was eclipsing it, blocking out the light. After a few moments he decided he had to be mistaken, maybe he'd seen the lights from a plane or satellite and miscounted.

He counted the stars along the dog's flank. As he came to the dark joint in the dog's hindquarters, it blinked back into existence — bright, burning red like a flame, intensity amplifying the longer he stared at his. He stepped back into the shadow of the gate. What the hell is going on?

As if in answer, the wind picked up and on it came a tantalizing mix of noises — a soft sigh of satisfaction, a jovial little chuckle, the droll syllables *saa-raa-ell*.

Gord suddenly lost his nerve. He never should have trusted anything that came from that dodgy jerk Jack in 22B. No shot a woman that gorgeous, always wearing long elegant jackets and shiny high heels, would be traipsing around in this overgrown mess of a garden. On a Tuesday night no less. She was probably in bed or taking a bath or doing her nails or whatever women do when they're alone.

Hell, Jack was probably out there in the trees smoking out, babbling nonsense in the wind to spook Gordon. Gord decided he was too

tired to play into Jack's bullshit and turned back around, returning to the elevator.



He was almost afraid to investigate. He couldn't discern the screaming voice in his chest as either pure anxiety or instinct, and even if he could it wouldn't be enough to silence his curiosity. How could a roughly 300 foot block appear as miles, acres of space? It had to be some illusion. Perhaps there was more to the construct — walls he didn't see, mirrors.

He had to see it in the daylight.

He hauled himself out of bed as soon as dawn came, having barely claimed a few moments for sleep. He was still in the clothes he'd worn the night before, but it didn't matter. He stepped into his sandals and made his way to the elevator. He pushed the same button he usually pushed.

When the doors opened he saw her there, stunning in a jewel-green shift and a long gray peacoat. The shapely stretch of her legs were clad in white fishnets that tucked into a pair of high-heeled gray boots. She lifted her eyes to him for the first time, they were more beautiful than he'd imagined — chunks of amethyst tinged with rivulets of blue Lapis.

It took him a hot moment to remember he hadn't even brushed his teeth before he left his apartment. He shrank back. "I forgot, I'm going up today." He averted his eyes, "Visiting my friend on the twenty-second floor."

She gave him a pert nod, loose tendrils of her auburn hair danced around her face as she stepped forward and pushed the button to shut the door.

He gave her a few moments to reach the ground floor before he tried calling the elevator again. He was taking deep breaths, cursing himself for not running a brush through his hair before he left the apartment.

By the old moon continued

But soon enough the doors opened to the sun-soaked rooftop. And the quiet morning calmed his thoughts as he stepped onto the gravel path.

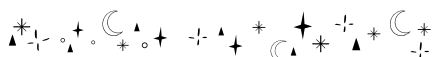
The gate seemed far less imposing in the daylight. It was of nice enough construction with a clean coat of white paint on it but the hedges were untrimmed and full of birds and their excrement. A wily pigeon fluttered out, nearly knocking into him as he unhooked the gate.

Beyond the mouth of the hedges was far less remarkable than he remembered. There was a little field but it was dry and choked with weeds, dandelions mostly. The brown grass and the golden flowers gave the whole scene a yellowed, aged pall. What he had thought were soaring pine trees at the edges of the field were overgrown arborvitaes, their cores crispy from a lack of care. The field itself was less than a city block, maybe half. He got the feeling that there was something beyond the far row of hedges. The roof should go on for another hundred feet or so.

He carefully made his way across the field of shaggy, parched grass. On the way, he found all sorts of discarded bottles and cans, smatterings of bird shit, and of course, a sticky-looking recently-used condom, already gray with dirt. This was neither the dreamy field he'd seen last night nor the gleaming commodified vision that he remembered from the pamphlet. It was something else entirely – it was gross.

He walked to the end of the field and pushed his arm into the decaying heart of a leaning arborvitae, there was another space beyond the trees and he easily slipped through. Beyond was the open end of the building, nondescript concrete, a raised lip around the edge. On the lip he saw various items scattered, a few scraps of paper, a metal bowl, a pen knife, a flat rock with a scorch mark on it, and the wax remnants of a candle. He took one of the fluttering pieces of paper that had been tucked into the bowl and unfurled it.

The wind came cold over the edge of the building and he shuddered, almost losing his grip on the fluttering scrap. Unsure what to do next, he carefully tucked the paper in his pocket and went back to his apartment to get ready for the day.



He knew he was dreaming about her but he never remembered the dreams. He just remembered her presence, a sweet intoxicating attention that followed him in and out of dreamstate. He'd sleep fitfully and then fall into strange waking pauses where nothing seemed real and he'd lie staring at the ceiling, stroking himself, imagining the unyielding, starry glow of her eyes upon him.

By the time Friday came, he was beside himself with desire.

Though he'd not really cared to do so, he looked up *Sariel* and found that he was an angel of death, benevolent but judgmental, running an eons-long tally of mankind's violence and sin. At least that's what he'd been able to glean from the scant information he'd found online. He was also pretty sure that the boxy type around the angel's seal were Hebrew letters.

Now, Gord was absolutely not the type of nerd that knew anything about angels and demons, or religion in general. He only really considered what could be known through empirical observation. For years, he'd called himself an atheist but didn't really think about it much. Yet as the week wore on, he became quite sure he was willing to believe anything, convert to any belief system if it meant he could have her.

He didn't even know her name but he slathered himself with aftershave. He put on a suit jacket and figured out how to tie a tie. He scrambled out of his apartment before he had time to shine the black leather shoes his mom had bought him for his brother's wedding some years ago. They were half a size too big and tugged at his feet as he clomped toward the elevator.

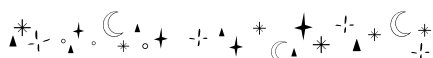
When he pressed the button a deep sense of anticipation shuddered through him.

By the old moon continued

But when the doors opened, she was not there.

He waited in the lobby for over an hour before he decided he'd missed her for the day. Gord went back to his apartment and untied the tie, unfastened the cufflinks, washed off the whisper of foundation – he peeled off the expensive veneer he'd crafted before throwing on the blue polo shirt that was the convenience store's uniform.

If he didn't hurry he'd be late for work.



Tuesday came way too late. In the days between, he'd spent considerable time on the elevator platform, dressed to the nines, pushing the button to see if she'd be there – but she never was.

He'd spent most of his smoke breaks on the phone. He'd learned precious little about Sariel but found out that his zodiac correspondence was Aries and Aries was ruled by Mars. Mars was the planet of war, its daily correspondence was Tuesday, its hour was 8 p.m.

So, it was 7:50 when Gordon hailed the elevator. It was 7:52 when the doors swung open to his floor.

In the back of the car was a tall young man, his hair was black and shaggy, the edges lapping at the high regal beam of his brow. His eyes were so gray they were almost white. "Going up?" He asked.

Gordon averted his eyes. He didn't really feel like having a conversation with someone's teenage kid while he had an erection tucked into the band of his slacks.

"What floor?" His voice was deep, brooding, far older sounding than he looked.

Gordon leaned in next to him and flicked the button to the rooftop.

The young man grimaced. "You sure you want to go up there?"

Gordon's eyes shuddered up to meet his. He was close, the doors had shut, and it seemed as if the smell of burning paper and herbs wafted off of him. The man gazed down at him intensely, now that he was so close he could see lines webbing out from the corners of his eyes. He wasn't so young as Gordon had initially suspected.

"Why not?" Gord stepped back and leaned against the rail. "It's a nice night."

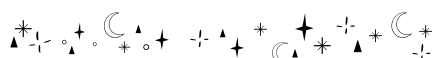
"Actually, a storm just rolled in," The man said. His voice sounded like footsteps on gravel. "You're liable to catch your death up there tonight."

Gordon played with the buttons on his jacket. *If there was a storm would she not be up there?* "I just need some fresh air." But surely she was engaging in some sort of ritual – the days, the hours corresponded. What's a little weather when you're summoning an angel of death?

"Suit yourself," The man said. "But I warn you, that storm is violent enough to pluck the moon out of the sky. Should you choose to continue, you submit yourself to its wrath. You shall be as a dry rosebud crushed between the fingers."

What a strange way to phrase it – it evoked the powerful sensation of the feeling along his own fingers. Gordon shook it away and turned to look at him. But when he turned his head there was nobody there, only a receding hint of shadow and the lingering smell of smoke. He looked to the panel above the elevator door. There had been no stops, it was still climbing. A chill worked its way through his limbs, *maybe he should turn back?*

When the doors finally opened Gordon couldn't believe what he saw. The sky, the stars, the bloom of the world that spread willingly like a lover before him. He felt a distinct tightness pass through his belly as he stepped forth onto the platform – the syllables from his fevered dreams echoing in his temples – *El, Elohim, Adonai, Eyeh asher Eyeh...*



By the old moon continued

Jack Barker was the only one in the building who would return their calls. The guy was strange. He gave her the creeps if she was being honest. But she had a deadline, she had a story to write, and she'd very little in the way of sources aside from a smattering of doublespeak police press releases and a baffling autopsy report that the ME's office was not taking any questions on.

The building manager had all but told her to take a flying leap, even if saying as much would be insensitive in this case. Though by all reports, Gordon Moore was dead before he hit the ground. And seemingly long before his body hurtled downward as if thrown from an unseen structure five times the size of any building in the city, nonetheless the comparatively diminutive high rise where all this high strangeness allegedly occurred.

She would have to take what she could get. Jack answered the phone on the second ring. His voice had an eerie stillness as he spoke. And he spoke first, greeting her by name. He must have recognized the number of the newspaper and took a stab at which reporter would be following up.

She cleared her throat to proceed despite the nagging feeling that she should simply hang up the phone and wash her hands of the whole thing. "Mr. Barker, you spoke with my managing editor on Wednesday and I just wanted to follow up with a few clarifying questions."

He did not wait for her questions. "The sky was cerulean, the sky was amethyst, the sky was red as the threads of her hair, the sky was endless, the sky was full of angels and devils, the sky was clipped with the burden of their terrible forms. It was all but empty, the aching womb of the universe shuddered, heavy with its burden —" He cut off for a moment and she thought she heard him humming. Then he continued, his voice sinking into the repetitious notes of a trance. "In the name of Sariel, Negral, Erra, Resheph, Mars, Death, Pestilence, War I call upon thee old one. The one who stands at

Death's back. The void between the stars, between worlds, between lives."

"Mr. Barker? I don't understand. I want to confirm your account that you saw Mr. Moore in the elevator on that day, Tuesday, the 8th of April. You said that he was alone and seemed to be acting upon his own volition."

"I saw him in the elevator, I saw him writhing in his bed, I saw him in the sky, I saw him defiled, empty, his belly ripped open by Death's claw. I saw the universe spill out of his entrails."

She winced and glanced at the file on her desk. As far as she knew, the ME's report was not common knowledge. He was a jumper, nobody knew he'd disemboweled himself before he leapt.

Jack Barker had to know something. "Mr. Barker?"

"The time approaches, a new eon crowns. The dead god will be reborn." The line clicked. He was gone.

She leaned back in her chair and sighed. She was tired. This case was nothing but dead ends — confusing, ridiculous dead ends at that. But she'd have to write something. She could bullshit her way through anything. She'd just have to pull an all-nighter to have the first draft on her editor's desk in the morning.

It wasn't as if she'd had any luck sleeping lately. Not since she started this case anyway. There had been fitful snatches of uneasy dreams punctuated by the strange sensation that she was awake and being watched though she could not turn her head to see if anyone was there with her in her room. Paranoia. This shit was weird.

She'd write it all and let it go. She'd move on. To get started, she could draft a few paragraphs and take a walk in the park to brainstorm a bit.

Outside her office window, the moon was hidden and the whole sky seemed to get caught in the glow of the backlit clouds.

She couldn't wait to put this story behind her.



“Regulus” by LE Francis

Contributing writers & artists

A stylized illustration featuring a teal rocket ship on the left and a yellow planet with orange rings on the right. The planet is surrounded by several small yellow stars. The text 'Contributing writers & artists' is written in a bold, pink, sans-serif font, with 'Contributing' on the first line, 'writers' on the second, and '& artists' on the third.

Tinamarie Cox

Tinamarie Cox is a creative femme in Arizona whose work has appeared in many online and print publications under various genres. You can explore her work at tinamariethinkstoomuch.weebly.com.

Jessica Heron

Jessica Heron (she/her) is a poet and linguist from Staten Island living at the Jersey Shore. Her creative work has appeared in Hot Pink Mag, BRUISER, Let's Stab Caesar!, Horror Sleaze Trash, Tiny Spoon, and other publications. Find her at jessicaheronpoetry.com, signature_trash on ig, or xpsychoxlinguistx on bluesky if you're feeling up to it.

John RC Potter

John RC Potter is an international educator from Canada, currently residing in Istanbul. He has experienced a revolution (Indonesia), air strikes (Israel), earthquakes (Turkey), boredom (UAE), and blinding snow blizzards (Canada), the last being the subject of his story, 'Snowbound in the House of God' (Memoirist). The author's poems, stories, essays, articles, and reviews have been published in various magazines and journals. His story, "Ruth's World," was a Pushcart Prize nominee, and his poem, "Tomato Heart," was nominated for the Best of the Net Award. The author has a gay-themed children's picture book that is scheduled for publication. He is a member of the League of Canadian Poets. Find him online at johnrcpotterauthor.com.

Molly McGill

Molly McGill is a writer from County Derry, Ireland. She has a bachelor's degree in film studies and creative writing from John Moore's University and has a passion for writing and reading weird horror fiction.

Alex Carrigan

Alex Carrigan (he/him) is a Pushcart-nominated editor, poet, and critic from Alexandria, VA. He is the author of *Now Let's Get Brunch* (Querencia Press, 2023) and *May All Our Pain Be Champagne* (Alien Buddha Press, 2022). He has appeared in *SoFloPoJo*, *Cotton Xenomorph*, *Bullshit Lit*, *HAD*, *fifth wheel press*, and more. Visit carriganak.wordpress.com or follow him on Twitter @carriganak for more info.

Sam Bartle

Sam Bartle was born in Hull, England, and has been published in various magazines and journals, including *Lothlorien Poetry Journal*, *Dreich*, *Green Ink Poetry*, and *Poetry Lab Shanghai*. He performs regularly at open mic events, and has appeared at local festivals. A suite of nine space poems entitled 'The Planetary Ennead', was published in March 2023, and Sam's poetry has recently expanded into visual arts with commissioned interpretations for the Bath Fringe Festival, Pocklington Arts Centre, Hull Minster, Picturehouse York, Yorkshire and Lincolnshire Wildlife Trusts, and East Riding Festival Of Words. His debut collection, 'Emergent Dreams' was published in 2024 by Alien Buddha Press. In his work life he holds a Distinguished Service in Archives Award from the Archives Records Association (UK & Ireland) and is a shortlisted content creator in the Digital Culture Awards from Arts Council England. Sam has a website and blogs about his and other poetry at www.poetinverse.com.

Mirjana M.

Mirjana M. (they / them) are an artist and writer from Belgrade, Serbia. Their work focuses on exploring the juxtaposition of various elements through mixed media of photography, double exposure, textures and light. They authored 4 poetry collections.

Katrina J. Paddock

Katrina J. Paddock is a Virginian living and writing in New York City, where she is studying English as an undergraduate. Her poetry has appeared in Jelly Squid Magazine, Dark Poets Club Magazine, and Paloma Magazine. You can find her on Instagram @katrinajpaddock.

Priya Chouhan

Priya has a Master's in Economics of Public Policy from the Barcelona School of Economics, Spain. Her poetry explores neglected themes to give voice to overlooked truths. Her work has appeared in Corvus Review, Brief Wilderness, Bosphorus Review of Books, and many other journals.

Ken Anderson

Island of Wak-Wak Press (Orebro, Sweden) recently released Ken Anderson's *The Ward at Twilight: Goth Poems*, nominee for the 2025 Elgin Award. Red Ogre Review Books (L.A.) released his *The Goose Liver Anthology (Mother Goose Meets Edgar Lee Masters' Spoon River Anthology)*, also a nominee for the 2025 Elgin Award. He was a double nominee for Georgia Author of the Year (in Poetry) because of the books. His first poetry book was *The Intense Lover*. Coffin Bell Journal nominated his poem "Blood Quartet" for the 2024 Best of the Net anthology. He was a Finalist in the 2021 Saints and Sinners poetry contest.

Lydia Rae Bush

Lydia Rae Bush (she/her) is a poet exploring themes of embodiment and social-emotional development. Rae's work is Best of the Net nominated and appears in publications such as Querencia Press, Corporeal, and Bleating Thing. When not writing, Lydia can be found singing and dancing, especially in bed when she is supposed to be going to sleep. Her chapbook *Free Bleeding* is out now with dogleech books.

tommy wyatt blake

tommy wyatt blake (he/they) is the jester of popular culture and poet laureate of timefuckery. he's the author of *FOR YOUR ENTERTAINMENT!*; *Mutually Assured Destruction*; *DITCHLAPSE / [REALLY AFRAID]*; *So, Who's Courage?*; *Trick Mirror or Your Computer Screen*; and others. they are currently synthesizing digital archives, space voids, and confines of the body.

Stef Nunez

Stef Nuñez (she/they) is the Editor-In-Chief of Sage Cigarettes Magazine. M-F 9-5 she works in the South Florida high fashion scene, but at night and on the weekends she is a feral horror mami who frequents film and music festivals. OH, and she's a poet.

LE Francis

LE Francis (she/her) is a writer, visual artist, & musician living in the pacific northwest. She is a former arts journalist & co-EIC of Sage Cigarettes Magazine. She plays bass in the indie/prog project *Hands Above Stars*. Find her online at nocturnal.com.

Elliot J. West

Elliot J. West (he/they) is an author and tabletop role play game designer from the southern USA. His works focus on LGBTQ+ voices and themes of nature, belonging, and identity. When Elliot isn't writing, they enjoy drinking tea, playing games, and sending their friends photos of animals in hats. More of his work can be found at elliottjwest.com.

Zana Eliot

Zana Eliot (she/her) is a writer and musician based in Portland, Oregon. She writes contemporary horror and paranormal romance in long and short forms.

Visit us online at sagecigarettes.com

