

issue no. 1

dollar store

m a g a z i n e

space, but make it spicy



home of some absolute garbage nonsense

THE

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PINK

Poetry is
PURPLE



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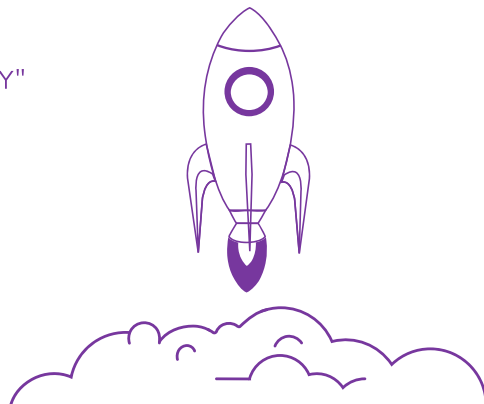
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A (Very) Brief History of the Solar System, or How I Got My Revenge on Ms. Hilburt

by Melissa Winskill

1850

"In 1781, the planet beyond Saturn was discovered, and the honor of naming that celestial body was rightfully given to the man who discovered it, William Herschel. He took it upon himself to honor his patron, King George the Third, and bestow upon our new planetary neighbor the name of Georgium Sidus, or George's Planet. Now I'm not here to argue that Herschel was wrong; he was offering thanks to the man who helped him pursue his dreams. But I come before the council today to ask you to look beyond the men of last century and instead look at astronomy's rich history as a history of all mankind.

Before we looked to the sky through a scientific lens, before we saw calculations and explorations, we saw stories. These myths of old didn't die when science caught our eyes and hearts. Their roots were far too ingrained in our cultures and history. So we honor them by delivering them back to their place of birth, the sky. The planets we've discovered through science stand hand in hand with the myths that started our love affair with the sky through the names we've given them. Mars, Venus, Saturn all share a place in Greek mythology. Why should this planet be any different?"

Intrigued grumbles went through the crowd of distinguished gentlemen. I had waited years for my chance to make history; I could be patient for a bit longer. Finally, the mumbling reached a harmonious pitch and faded. They agreed. This was my chance.

"I'm proposing that we take the lead from the planets preceding it, and continue the story. Saturn is the father of Jupiter, so we keep going down the line. Let's look to Saturn's father and complete the family tree."

2219

"Holy shit, dude, you're back!"

Tyler's exclamation cleared the sights and smells of electricity. When the room came back into focus, so did my goal.

"What is the planet after Saturn called?"

Tyler just looked at me. "Ummm, what? Man, you just successfully time traveled. I'm the one who gets to ask questions. Where did you go? Wait, I guess I should ask when did you go? Wild shit, man..."

"I went back to 1850. I was able to successfully change the name of Georgium Sidus. At least I think I was successful."

"Wait, you went back in time to change the name of a planet? I know you wanted to start small, but that is weird at best."

"Do you remember what Ms. Hilburt said to me in the fifth grade?"

"Wow, okay, so time travel really messes with your brain, huh? First, you're asking me the name of a planet, and now you wanna talk about elementary school... I'll make a note of that."

"Just answer the question. Do you remember what she said to me during the science fair?"

"Kinda. I remember your experiment failing pretty badly and that she made a scene about it."

"She told me that I would never be a scientist. And then, she went on to use my experiment as a "non-example of what science is all about" for the rest of the class. To this day, I have never been more embarrassed than I was at that moment. She was my science teacher; she should have been stoking the fires of my love for science, not dousing them in cold water."

"Well, man, the joke's on her. You're one of the top physicists in the world. I mean, Jesus Christ, you just successfully time traveled! Shove that in her face at the reunion."

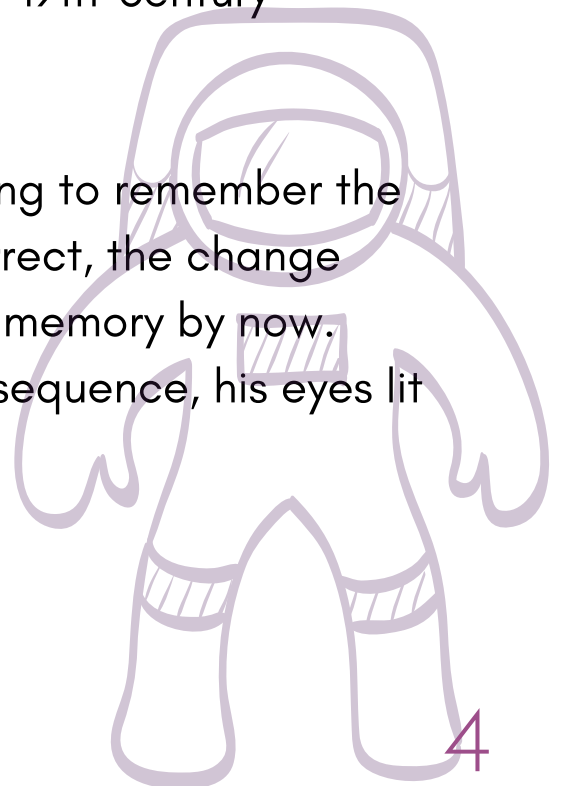
"Oh, I will. But that isn't good enough. She needs to feel my revenge every time she teaches. And every student who has ever been put down and told that they're not smart enough for science will have their moment of triumph when their teachers feel the inherited pain of Ms. Hilburt's original sin."

"Damn, man. So what does this have to do with a planet?"

"I wanted to infiltrate the history of science. Make my mark in such a way that year after year Ms. Hilburt would have to teach something that would make her cringe and delight the students around her. I want the students to see her squirm and take her down a peg, ya know? So I changed the name of the seventh planet from the Sun. It wasn't easy because I wanted it to be something that would embarrass every teacher who had to say it, but not something so obvious that the change wouldn't happen. I did have to convince a crowd of 19th-century scientists, after all."

I could see on Tyler's face that he was trying to remember the planet's name. If my calculations were correct, the change should have caught up with the collective memory by now. When the neurons finally fired in the right sequence, his eyes lit up.

"Holy shit, man, that is AMAZING!"



I'd won the Nobel Prize in physics for mapping a black hole, and I was sure to drown in many more accolades for achieving successful time travel. Still, nothing would compare to my win that day. Our juvenile laughter rang out through my lab, the sound waves running a victory lap for finally beating Ms. Hilburt.

1997

"Yesterday, we studied the gas giants Jupiter and Saturn, and today we're going to look to the far reaches of our solar system at the cold, distant planets found there. Let's start with the seventh planet, Uranus."

The class burst into laughter.

James, not one to miss an opportunity to hit the trifecta of avoiding schoolwork, scoring popularity points, and getting in jabs at mean old Ms. Murphy, delivered a one-line stand-up event, "I sure hope Uranus isn't gassy!"

They weren't studying volcanoes, but the eruptions of laughter coming from the fifth-grade class at Washington Elementary could have competed with Mount St. Helens.

"Every damn year," sighed Ms. Murphy.

You Turned Me Into a Star

by Halle Preneta

with your laugh,
with your smile,
with your eyes
that pour concern.

You fill me with happiness and light
when your words enchant me,
flowing through my body as you speak.
When you hype me up with your <3 at the ends of notes.
When you put me in a good mood
no matter how I'm feeling.

I'm forever glowing
because of you.

Your flashy smile,
your swooping hair,
your words
fill my body with light.

You're the energy I need
in order to keep going.

To keep moving.

To keep thriving.

My emotions explode
as your hold on me grows
and turn into little stars
because of you.

WHILE LISTENING TO “SPOOKY” BY THE CLASSICS IV by Kenneth Pobo

Dear Ceres, perhaps you could
use a friend. The other asteroids
think of you as the big kid
on the block, a bully. You're
just misunderstood. Please don't

hit Earth someday. We're like
a china cabinet and you'd surely
break every dish and glass. Yesterday

while I took a shower, “Spooky”
came on the radio. I sang along,
badly. Were you wearing space's
old torn shirt? You are

a bit spooky. Everyday
I talk with ghosts—
some visit you. You keep
the Welcome mat out. Any visitor,
even a dead one, demands
a celebration.

The Revolutionary's Brother

by J.V. Sumpter

CW: Death of family members, apocalypse,
explosions, car wreck, big horses

The day my brother Dave died,
the day my face became a stew
of reds, whorled and cratered like the planets
my mom painted on my bedroom ceiling
in the high-rise we lived in when she worked
for Channel 13 Evening News,
before her “suicide,”
I lay on my stomach on the shaggy carpet
of Dave’s cell-sized apartment and attacked
my math book like I was a genius cracking codes
that could turn off the sirens shooting
streams of high-pitched beats
through my small glassless window,
outracing the pungent fertilizer smell
of the heavy green gas spreading slow
through the city streets
seven floors below.
Dave exploded through the door—
“We’re leaving—now!” he said. He yanked
me down the flights, threw me in a car
I’d never seen, peeled out of that garage
as the building’s lights had a seizure
and the gate clanged shut.

I bounced against the console and the dash,
fumbled for my seatbelt as Dave mowed down
men with plated shoulders and elongated black
gas masks that made them look like Clydesdales
standing peacefully in a field of green.

I thought about horses
and the farm mom always said we'd get,
when a pop! rocked the car,
and the world smelled sweet.

SAINT HOTLINE

by Clem Flowers

Swimming thru a sea of
Seemingly ceaseless
Shiny blue sludge
Forever spinning
Inspiring fear and awe
Thru all that may
Partake
In its beauty
Before burning out in a burgundy spark of madness
No moment may you relax or find peace
At least until
The sky is filled
By a gangrenous green glow
& you hear the bellowing bloom
Rumbling your bones, giving the all clear
We then can all relax our minds
But never cease the want to find
interlocking pathways
Between universes
everyone in every place in everywhere in every planet in every
galaxy in an infinite phantasmagoria of all the universes the mind
can concoct
Has a different idea of the perfect cup of coffee

The Last Expanse

by Becca Yenser

She wants to get out of Wichita, and the Flint Hills are supposed to be pretty. On a ramp out of town, old, sooty buildings give way to fields of crops and tall grass. The quality of light shifts to a dampness that makes every natural thing look oil-painted. The Jeep smells of stale McDonald's and broken air-conditioning. She looks at the man.

"Let's stop by that weird, old prison first. I've always wanted to see it." He nods; puts in a Grateful Dead cd and turns it up. The woman tries not to listen. She doesn't like the optimism tucked within every Dead song. Those upbeat messages make her feel mean and bitter.

They come into a town, crossing an old bridge that spans a small river. Two shirtless boys stand on the bank, both holding the thick, black snakes by the tail. She likes to think of Kansas as a part of a simulation, a boring part where maybe somebody put the game on hold to start another. The townspeople are one-dimensional. None wear masks. A confederate flag blurs by. She taps her fingers together seven times. She looks at the man, who isn't white. Does he feel safe here? Strangely, he seems more at ease the further south they drive. He is from a Missouri town that everyone regards as "pretty." It has a winery that is awful but always recommended

on websites and brochures and by his mother. But they never go there, instead hitting the Goodwill for ironic pieces of clothing that other people deemed out of date. She feels the old, familiar bitterness rising in her throat. Her homesickness is pathetic, but she can't help thinking of the pine trees shaking their heads, the tap water that tastes of nothing.

The prison is at the end of the Main street of the little town. "Let's get out and walk some," the woman says, and the man pulls into a diagonal spot. Shops with open doors line the street. The woman puts on her mask, pinching the bridge of it seven times. The man sees and looks disappointed.

The prison is open to the public, but you have to wait your turn and keep broad distances between you. Everyone in line wears sensible shoes and button-down shirts, even the women. It is a time warp. A blip in the simulacrum, the woman thinks, then makes an effort to seem cheerful. "Snack?" she says, and he takes a granola bar, gratefully. After years of being together, she can tell before he can when he is on the verge of turning mean from simple hunger.

Finally it is their turn. They hike up a narrow concrete staircase to a larger room full of light. The walls are a pale, washed out blue. Off this room are several little rooms, complete with iron-barred gates. The woman puts her nose inches from marks the prisoners have carved into the walls. There is a single, low toilet

with no lid. A large drain sits next to it, which gives the woman a queasy feeling.

"Look! An isolation cell," he says. It is a tiny room with a lower ceiling and a thick swinging door, "Get in, " he says, smirking.

The woman has severe claustrophobia, but feels she must prove a point. She steps in and he slams the door behind her. It's silent the way your ears get on a plane. Her heart beats like the wings of a dying insect. It's cold, too. She goes to open the gate, but he holds it shut, and all she can see are his pretty, almond-shaped eyes floating in that rectangular space. Finally he opens it back up. The woman rushes past him and runs down the stairs, out into the empty, heartbreakingly clear day. The Kansas sun is a glowing, otherworldly orb. He is beside her.

"Don't be mad. I was just teasing you." She gives a tight smile. Someone in line is eating Flaming Hot Cheetos and watching them, the bag's garish colors reflecting onto his mirrored sunglasses.

"I'm fine. Let's go on that goddamn bike ride."

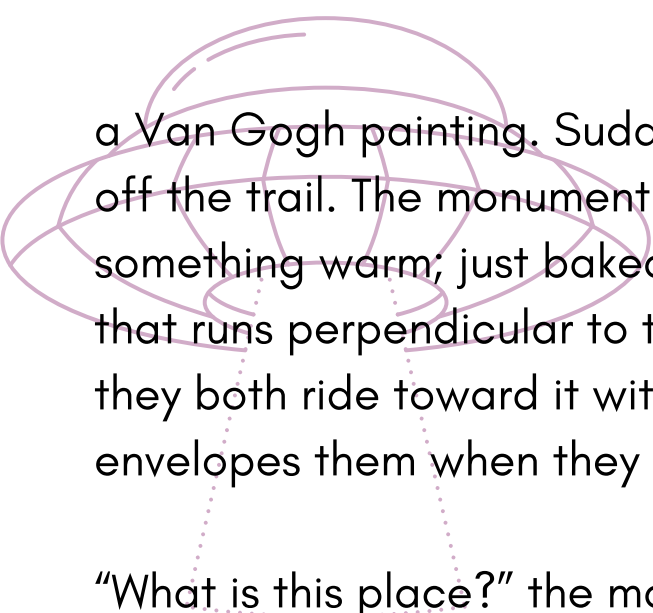
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The trail stretches out straight ahead of them with no end. Trees shake. The woman pees in a pile of wet leaves while the

man acts as lookout, even though theirs is the only car in the lot. It is a Tuesday at noon in the final exhale of summer; 101 degrees and climbing. These facts depress the woman. That and the same old stickers plastered to his bike frame; stickers from another time and place. It embarrasses her that he can't move on.

Last night, in the bath, didn't the lights flicker and her mind flicker, too? Is this the end of Player One? For some reason, she's reminded of a guy she met in Portland four years ago. They'd spent the night bar-hopping and fell in love in that quick, sloppy way young people do. The next morning at her shitty barista job, she read on her phone that he was dead; he'd been hit and run on his bike. But the eerie part was that he had told her he would die soon. He kept seeing frogs everywhere: on TV and in books and in his dreams, and he felt this was a very bad sign. Back then, the woman had laughed and walked him to his bike. He had wanted her to go home with him and sleep on his shelf. His shelf. None of this made sense.

They've been on their bikes for miles now, fighting a strong cross wind that makes her wheels whistle. The nearest town is fifteen miles away and they thought maybe they could make it there and back before dusk. A crumbling barn passes by. A gulch where people throw trash. Sometimes Black-eyed Susans arrive on the periphery of her vision and she imagines herself in



a Van Gogh painting. Suddenly she sees an odd building just off the trail. The monument shines burnt orange in the sun, like something warm; just baked. It sits near an old country road that runs perpendicular to the trail, and is so appealing that they both ride toward it without any discussion. A deep quiet envelopes them when they get off their bikes.

“What is this place?” the man asks.

“Looks like an old school building. See?” She points to a plaque. They circle the structure, which is just three walls with no roof. A single arched window near the top. The woman tries to suppress a deep desire to climb it. As a little girl her parents couldn’t keep her out of trees, tops of jungle gyms, and shed roofs. And the man, as if reading her mind asks,

“You’re not going to try to climb it, are you?” She shrugs, but looks around. She finds a few big rocks on the other side of the wall, and pushes off them to scramble the rest of the way up. The sandstone of the arch is hot in the sun, and she sits in it like a cat and closes her eyes. It wouldn’t matter so much if the reason was important, she thinks. But it’s the little things they can’t stand about each other; his look of exasperation when she asked him to close a gate, for example. The way her owing him a few dollars made him feel superior. And how, if she expressed discomfort, he would roll his eyes. But she would miss how when they made love, he always looked at

her the right amount.

How to get down was the thing. She enlists the man's help.

"Like this?" he says, interweaving his clumsy fingers like a basket under her foot. A "V" of geese fly overhead. The woman looks over her shoulder and is surprised to see this small man, her ex-boyfriend. Had he always been this small? He is stumbling a little on the loose rocks. "Hold my hip! You've got to hold my hip, too."

"I can't," he says, with no explanation. She begins to slide down the wall, her injured ankle throbbing like it can sense the future injury.

"Hold me steady," she says. He curses, backs away a little. The blue of the sky is like an insane person's definition of a blue sky

"Fuck it, I'm climbing back up," she says. She extracts her foot from his hand to move it back to the wall. Then she feels her heel connect.

"Fuck! You kicked me in the fucking face!"

She scrambles up the hot wall and pulls herself up to the ledge, panting. There is a small, evil part of her that feels gloriously satisfied. Her miscarriage comes back to her in a

single flash, the impossible, otherworldly pain. His Vans pointing at her lying on the mattress, then moving away. He had things to do that day.

"Are you okay?" she asks. She can't see him anymore.

"No. My teeth are loose," his voice sounds far away.

"You're fine. Haven't you ever gotten kicked in the face before?"

"No."

"Well, I still need to come down." Silence.

After a while she gauges the leap down, the distance. She will have to clear a pile of rocks and favor her good ankle. What was it? Bend the knees? Tuck and roll? After a few minutes, she takes a breath and lets go, landing softly enough in the fine stones, mainly on her good ankle. She walks around the wall to find him pouting next to his bike in the bone white gravel road.

"Don't be mad," she says.

"I knew you wouldn't be able to get down. You never think ahead."

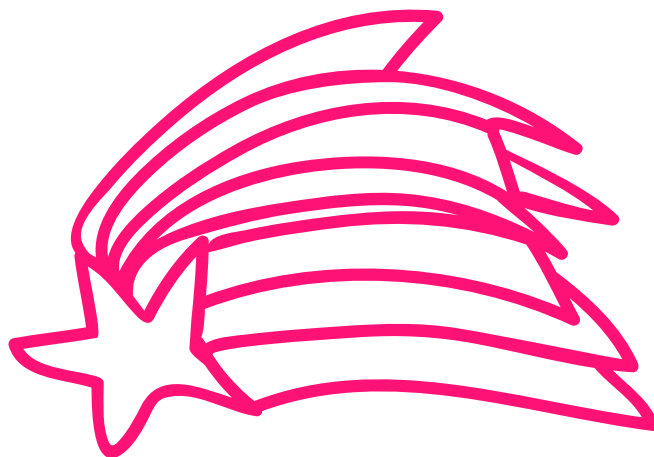
Think ahead, think ahead. Like him. His black moleskin planners

with their finances written in a hard pencil script; the way he kept every receipt even though you could just look online at your bank account like everyone else. How when she got pregnant he knew right away, saying, I probably just knocked you up, but I'm still going to California on Monday, haha. "I was scared," she says, softly.

"Let's just go back."

She rides 50 yards behind him. A herd of cows follow her with their slow, wet gaze. They haven't passed anybody else this whole time, and it is getting late. She knows it isn't a good feeling to have all your teeth loose like that, like even the protected parts of you could fly apart.

He's up ahead on the trail waiting for her under the shade of some trees. She taps her handlebars seven times. He looks like a filament, a blip on the screen. She slows down.



TRAVELLER

by Kenneth Pobo

I don't like talking to
or emailing people who have
never been to Uranus. Worse,

those folks who don't believe
it's possible to go there.
For a vacation. And not

bring tanning lotion. I've
been there several times.
I'm clearly part Uranusian.

Uranus has a bunch
of honey moons, waving,
wishing me well. I don't mind

the cold. Earth is much colder.
People never thaw. Why not
come join me the next time I go?

No need to pack. Spray yourself
with the perfume of a kiss
and I'll see you there.

rocks and robots

by Josh Sippie

They call He-Man
the hero
and that's well and good but
Skeletor is the one you'd
rather be.

He-Man lies about his identity
and
does his thing but
Skeletor is innovating,
improving

Believing
in
himself
and
his whimsical mind

A new magic rock to throw
at Grayskull

A new robot army to lord
over Eternia

and He-Man just
He-Mans
without

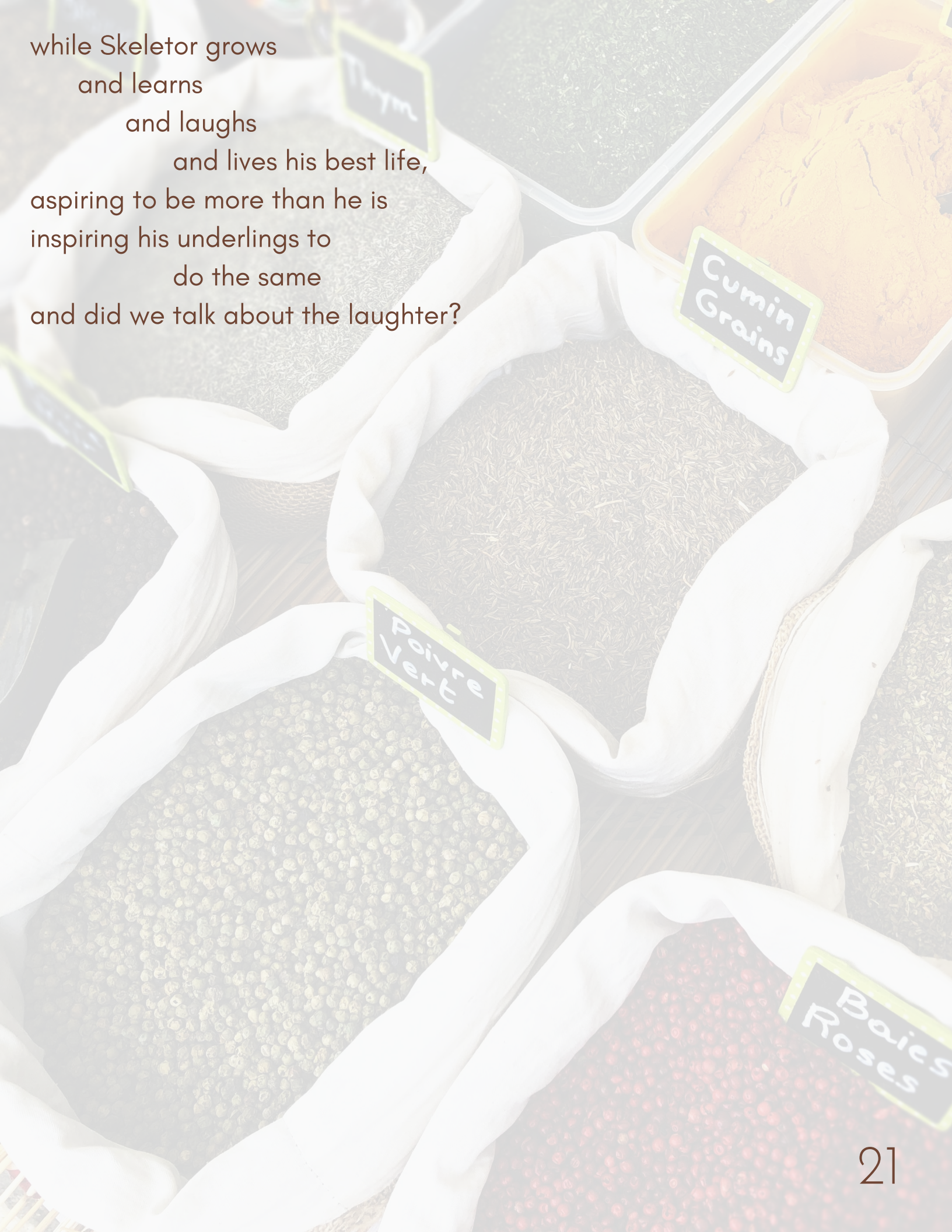
reason to improve

Cumin
Grains

Poivre
Vert

Baies
Roses

while Skeletor grows
and learns
and laughs
and lives his best life,
aspiring to be more than he is
inspiring his underlings to
do the same
and did we talk about the laughter?



Pluto

by Sophia Holme

Oh to be harmless
as a little cat curled in the crook of your arm
shallow as a shatterproof plate
dense as a desert dune
neat as a pencil skirt
and sweet as sucralose
empty as sucralose
thin as the fly's wings trapped in my lamp
generic as a Gap store
basic as own-brand beans
A star too dim and small for you to notice
exploding you to notice I'm falling apart
invisible as an eyelash on your cheekbone
the freckles barely surfaced
on your shoulder or a bacteria deep in your intestine
too small a canvas for you to find
any flaws on even with your ultra-powerful microscope

planet me

by Charles Njikonye

i'm paired/ sewn to the edging stars. they, family/ rippling dots of
tiny flickering glow, craft me a
lay to slumber/ float in dreams of yellowish torso, painting newer
galaxy.

and, planet mars wasn't spheres away from me. it had an alleyway,
rumbling through when hands glimmer telescope; her glamour
strikes concave lens/ i get lost in it for 2 seconds.

i affirm, casting sensual gape at the moon this gloam—the hands of
God is perfect. for a golden ball hanging low/ high at dusk,
follows me— even in a step; its crust bearing crevices, subtly
discerning.

heart palpitates twice, now—the palms of God, unique. for stars
draw portraits, from swords to
centaurs.

the milky way galaxy spirals in my hands/ a play board; water
sipping out neptune, soak my
wishes/ float them to the heavens.

let the glowing sun pull me like it does, my home—earth. and her
sister, mars. i want to gravitate
to it; synchronize with solar system.

let jupiter gift me one, her many moon/ a planet, me/ wedged a
bright passing comet.

i relay—the milky way galaxy spirals on palms, now/ its learning me/
how my planet fits into it.
call me, planet nnamdi.

just now, a satellite read me/ identified i'm rotating twice faster on
my orbit.

Crash Land

by Fairley Lloyd

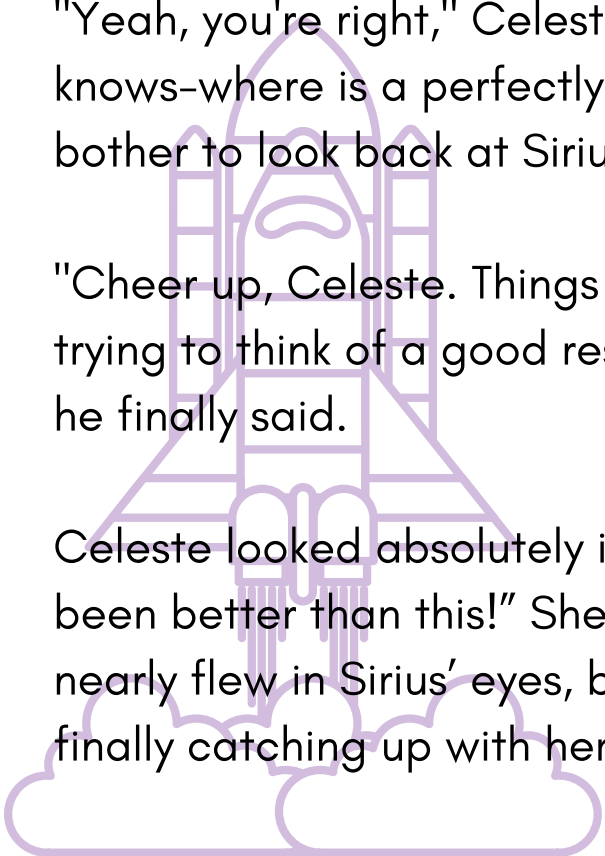
"This will be a constant reminder for me to never let you pilot again!" Celeste Lightman shouted, marching angrily through the tough terrain. With each step, she seemed to be fuming even more than the first one. If she had fire powers, she'd probably be burning a hole through the floor. How was it possible that someone could get so angry?

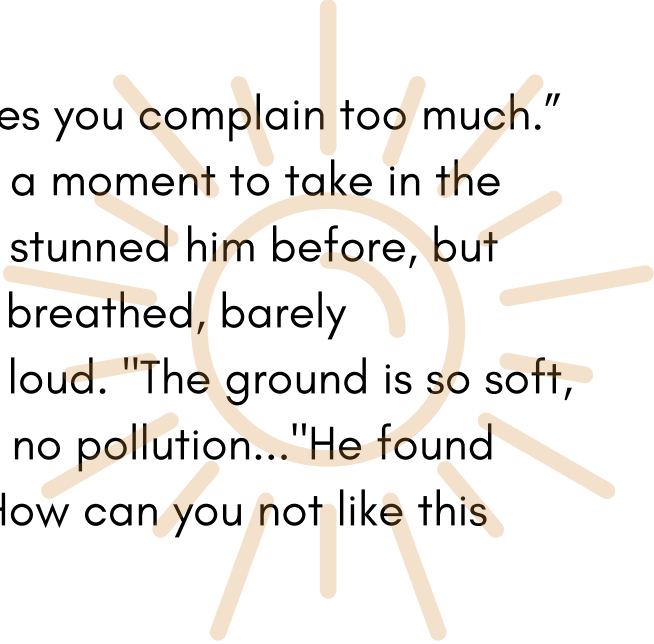
Sirius Stargazer, who had the unfortunate courtesy (at the moment) of being Celeste's partner, charged after her. "Come on," he called, fighting to keep up with her swift pace. "This isn't so bad."

"Yeah, you're right," Celeste snapped. "Being stranded on who-knows-where is a perfectly nice situation!" She didn't even bother to look back at Sirius when she spoke.

"Cheer up, Celeste. Things could be worse." Sirius paused, trying to think of a good response. "At least we're not dead," he finally said.

Celeste looked absolutely incensed. "That option would have been better than this!" She kicked at a piece of debris. It nearly flew in Sirius' eyes, but he managed to dodge it before finally catching up with her.





"You know," Sirius began, "sometimes you complain too much." Turning away from Celeste, he took a moment to take in the surroundings. The sight had already stunned him before, but now... "This place is amazing," Sirius breathed, barely recognizing that he was talking out loud. "The ground is so soft, the scenery is beautiful, and there's no pollution..." He found himself turning on Celeste again. "How can you not like this place?"

"Maybe it's because I like knowing where the heck I am!" she shrieked. "Honesty, Sirius, let go of the adventurer in you and come back to reality for once!" Celeste gestured widely with her arms at the terrain. "Our ship broke down, we went off course, and now we're lost in the middle of nowhere! How could you possibly be happy about this situation?"

"Calm down, Celeste." Sirius raised his hands in the air—as if that would help Cellist calm down. "I'm sure the station will pick up our transmitter soon, and we'll be off of this planet in no time."

"Easy for you to say," Celeste muttered. "You're actually enjoying your time here."

Sirius decided to ignore her and put his focus back to examining the planet. He really liked Celeste—he even considered her a sister—but sometimes she could just be so...

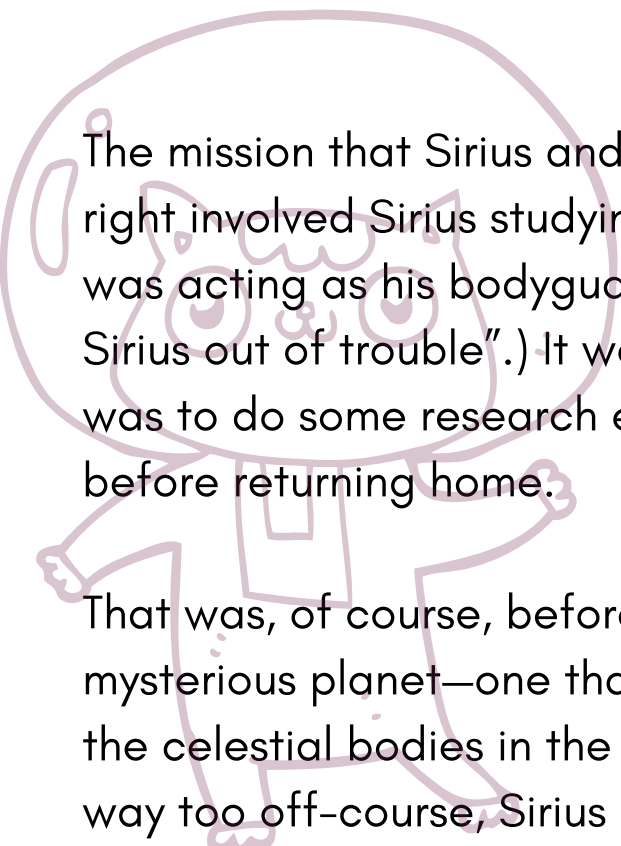
irascible. Whenever Celeste didn't get what she wanted, she could go into "diva mode," as Sirius liked to call it.

He also didn't understand how anyone could be so miserable exploring a new world. Maybe it was just the scientist in him, but the fact that they had landed their ship on a mystifying planet brought Sirius so much joy. If anything, he was even more excited for this than their actual mission; secretly, he hoped that the station wouldn't find them for a little while longer.

Sirius happened to be a member of the Scientific Exploration of Outer Space—better known as the SEOS. The organization spent most of its time recording information of outer space from their giant, wholly white spacecraft (the Pure Ivory) before sending their transmissions back to Earth. Because of the SEOS, human knowledge of space greatly expanded.

Celeste wasn't a part of the SEOS, but she was a member of SpaceCorps, the intergalactic military representing Earth. She was very good at her job and had recently earned the rank of lieutenant.

Under normal circumstances, Sirius wouldn't be working with Celeste, but, because of the occasional danger Sirius would run into during his explorations, the two were often paired together. It also helped that they were such good friends that they worked well with one another.



The mission that Sirius and Celeste had been currently sent on right involved Sirius studying the Martians' lives better; Celeste was acting as his bodyguard (or, as she had called it, "keeping Sirius out of trouble".) It would take a bit of time, so the plan was to do some research every day for a few hours or so before returning home.

That was, of course, before they had crash landed on a mysterious planet—one that did not look familiar to the rest of the celestial bodies in the solar system. We must have gone way too off-course, Sirius pondered as an afterthought. It wasn't Sirius' fault that they had landed here, but Celeste blamed him for the episode, anyway. Sure, he had been the one piloting the Pure Ivory before an asteroid had suddenly hit it, but it was an accident. How could Sirius have dodged it? Asteroids were unpredictable, and once they came into your view, you were usually too close to it to evade it—that was, unless they killed you first.

But we're safe, aren't we? Sirius thought. *We didn't die. The ship's damaged, but it's not so much that it's a complete wreck.* He thought he had done a pretty good job handling the situation.

But, alas, Celeste held him responsible, as if Sirius had purposely tried to crash land their ship to do some exploring. Even though he could have killed himself in the process. Really,

though, she was just looking for someone to point fingers at; nothing could ever be Celeste Lightman's fault. She was the perfectionist, the epitome of refinement. She probably had a perfect attendance record since kindergarten...

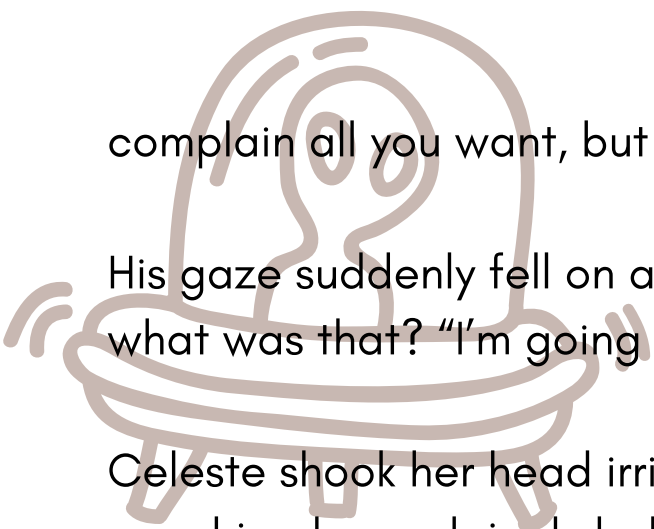
Now I'm complaining, Sirius realized, and immediately stopped. Whether it was his fault or not, there was no denying the fact that this little detour was going to throw everyone off schedule. The only hope the two could hold onto would be the miracle that the SEOS would see their distress signal and come to the rescue. It wasn't like the SEOS hadn't done something like that before, but Sirius had only heard about it.

Aside from lateness, though, this was really an exciting turn of events.

It wasn't going against mandate, Sirius reminded himself. After all, it was never planned for them to crash land. Who said they couldn't do a little exploring during the wait?

"Ugh. Sirius, this is so awful." Celeste's irritated voice suddenly cut through Sirius' thoughts. She had probably been talking before, but Sirius knew he had been tuning her out. "Once again, this is all your fault, Mr. Hotshot Pilot!"

"Hey, it's not my fault," Sirius argued. "Come on, Celeste; that asteroid could have hit anyone." He shook his head. "You can



complain all you want, but it's not going to help in any way."

His gaze suddenly fell on an object some feet ahead of him—what was that? "I'm going to keep analyzing this place."

Celeste shook her head irritably. "I swear," she snapped, marching begrudgingly behind him, "if we make it out of here alive, I'm going to send a complaint to SpaceCorps—"

Celeste's words suddenly caught in her throat as she and Sirius both stopped at the sight in front of them. Not too far away from where they had walked stood a large, golden-looking castle. *A castle? In the middle of nowhere?* Sirius blinked twice to make sure his vision was working, but the image still stood in front of him.

Sirius stepped closer. Though it was hard to see everything from a distance, he knew for certain that he was staring at a castle. It looked like several of those palaces he'd seen back in Medieval Times—one of the larger ones, to be exact. It had to be at least four stories high, maybe even five.

And the color...it was such a bright gold that it almost stung Sirius' eyes. But what really caught his attention was the fact that it was glowing. There wasn't a single sun in sight, yet it seemed to reflect the light off of something. The castle was such a beautiful sight that Sirius nearly caught his breath.

It looked like something out of a fairytale.

Shaking his head to snap out of the daze, Sirius turned back on his partner—and was rewarded by the look of awe on her face. “Do you regret coming here now, Celeste?” he teased.

Celeste’s mouth almost dropped open. “I—I—How could...” She stopped stammering and set her jaw. “I can’t believe what I’m seeing.” She gave Sirius a look. “What’s a castle doing in the middle of nowhere?”

“I don’t know,” Sirius admitted, “but, as a scientist, don’t you think I should study this?”

Celeste was immediately shaking her head. “I don’t think—” “And,” Sirius added quickly, “seeing as you’re my chaperone, “don’t you think you ought to guard me?” He couldn’t help it; this was just too perfect.

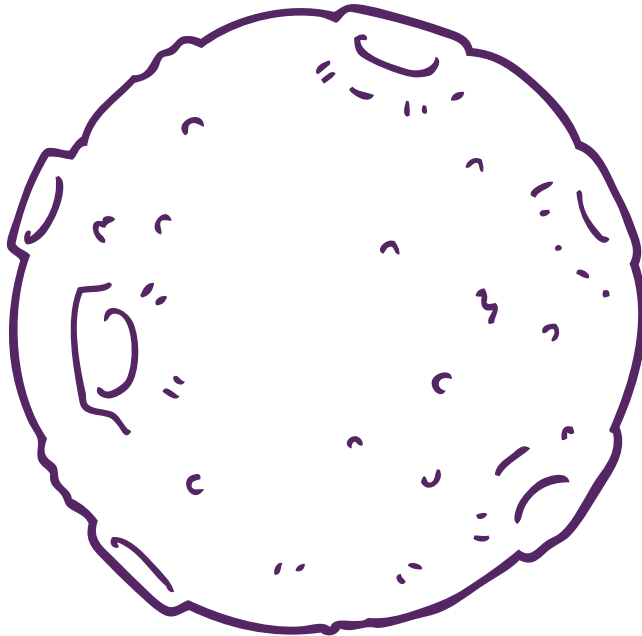
Although Celeste didn’t seem to return Sirius’ enthusiasm, it was clear that she wasn’t just going to turn his offer down.

“Sirius Stargazer, you are possibly the most frustrating person I’ve ever met,” Celeste said. But her voice didn’t sound angry; she still spoke as if she was in shock. “I don’t think this is a good idea. What if it’s not even safe?”

Sirius flashed her another grin. “We’ll have to find that out.” He offered her his hand. “You wouldn’t let me go in there alone,

would you?"

"Somehow, I think you're going to go in there no matter what I say." Sighing, Celeste took Sirius' hand. Sirius tried not to smile again as the two of them headed towards the citadel, anticipation burning inside of Sirius like a fire.



Our Universe Might Be A Simulation And That's Ok

by Elizabeth Feucht

It is not only us:

We are not the sole inhabitants of this holy duality.

We are observers for the most spectacular dream
that has ever been known, ever contrived,

and it is contrived by us and not by us,
and it is not merely our incomplete selves
to figure the anomaly but the figurer itself.

We are gossamer light-shows from a lower, softer place.

We are the images. We are the masters of our imagery—
though this fullness eludes us.

We find our geometries and machinations
chaotically, fatelessly entangled—

quantized playthings, we think,
perhaps by our their own intent,
or else by some unimaginable method.

If it all is found to be a question,
and the question is answered,
and the question ceases to be a question,
ceases to be itself, and ceases to exist,
then what?

But

if the matter begins to fray,
if the dream remains a dream
and the shadowed question falls into light—

Cottagecore *in Space*

by William Roberds-King

I want to grow a garden in the stars.
Build my cottage with bricks of asteroids.
Trap a dwarven sun in my fireplace,
use it to heat water for my tea
made from planets. Today it will be
Jupiter berry tea with a spoonful
of Venus honey.

In my galactic home, I sew myself
clothes of starlight, and write letters
with ink made from dark matter.

Helmet

by Josh Shepard

When I was four—

I would stand in the giant hair dryers
in my grandmother's salon,
a technological marvel,
that pasta-strainer crown over my tiny head.
It was my space helmet,
and when the air would rush past my ears,
I would close my eyes and fly.

When I was eight—

I would strap my helmet down,
the chinstrap tight beneath my overbite.
I would push my bike to the top of the highest hill on 8th Street and
Chisholm,
and rush down to the bottom
without pedaling, gravity doing its work.
I would stretch my arms out past the handlebars and fly.

When I was eleven—

my math teacher had Xeroxed grid paper,
two columns & four rows.
She told us to show our work.
She yelled at me for wasting paper
when she saw I was using them for comic strips:
a space-kid in his space helmet &
the terrifying monsters from Mars.

When I was seventeen—

I climbed to the highest structure I could find,
took deep breaths with eyes closed.

When I opened them to see
the dizzying ground beneath me,
I knew I was not built for flight,
the ground staring back at me,
ready to pull my frame towards it.

I could see the monsters in my future:

“Will I buckle upon impact?”

“Will I disintegrate all US Columbia?”

“Will they find pieces of me scattered

throughout the town and

c o u n t r y s i d e ?”

I closed my eyes,
took one last deep breath,
and climbed back down from the stratosphere.

I was not meant to fly today.
I did not bring my helmet.

Another Galactic Love Letter

by Elizabeth Feucht

My eyes imitate the transcendental spirals of this island universe, her names
a comet's trail of divine titles:

Her Holiness Messier 51, NGC 5194, UGC 8493, PGC 47404, The Whirlpool
Galaxy.

(Always, we gravitate towards names—we name rocks on the ground, we
name rocks in the sky, we name even each other.)

But such macrocosms lack the structure of our Earthbound substance; so
her spirals dissolve, dreamlike, into haloes of stardust,

plying the cosmos with her gravity,
and as the wavelengths of her ancient light ease ever longer,

limning our instruments in scarlet,
my eyes only echo her shape and the ecliptics of her orbit.

Into the Sun

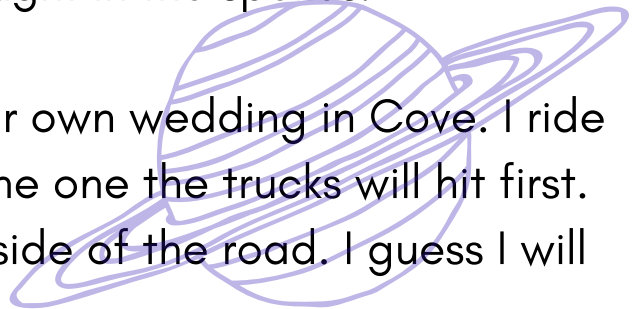
by Becca Yenser

You always said, Love can be wanting something. We're rolling now, down little highways paved with snakes of asphalt. No one wants to fix anything anymore, you say.

We're rolling now, past deer in lawns, and then past real ones that look faker than anything plastic. A mama deer and her fawn, next to a stream, between flowers. How come our shadows look like monsters, when we're dressed in whites and lace? We're rolling on a sharp lip of highway, with a stream of cars and trucks and semis shaking our teeth from behind. Someday we will die, but probably not today. We wave. Most of the drivers are farmers driving into the sun.

We are late to our own wedding. How the hell can that happen, you ask. You have a nice Datsun truck that glows in the sun but this morning it played dead. Last night we watched a horror film disguised as a romantic comedy. I went to bed with cobwebs in my heart. What are we doing, what have we done? You cook for a prison and I might be pregnant. A wedding. White lace that gets caught in the spokes.

We are rolling on bikes, late to our own wedding in Cove. I ride behind you in your shadow. I am the one the trucks will hit first. I will fly next to the stream at the side of the road. I guess I will be free.



Not This Crude Matter

by Elizabeth Feucht

You have a hollowness in your bones that whispers and,
occasionally, screams.

You want to fill the space with saltwater and sparks
and the sighing ocean mist
and the howl of flames, because
you think that this will save you.

So you curl yourself around the sea,
you cast yourself in holy fire
like the bronze in your teacher's forge. For a singular godlike
moment
every atom of you sings
in exquisite, electromagnetic harmony, (in balance, even),
and your skin unravels into
a thousand red strings
that twine and entwine
with the dead constellations.

The sky burns and you burn with it,
and you burn and drown from within,
blinded by the glinting mirror-shard sky, the blooming supernovae,
the red strings,
(pulling your fingertips toward eternity, tracing crimson scars across
your vision,) the sacred flame and the primeval sea
that roar along the veins of you,

ageless, edgeless,
transcendent and ephemeral,
deafened by the cracking of the universe as it folds upon the weight
of itself
and reveals a luminous underside
dappled with light-eating dark stars.
The flame and the sea consume each other and the hollowness in your
bones, and the left-behind realms fill with steam and sea glass and
embers,
translucent darkly.
Red threads string you to the stars like a cosmic marionette—
or the stars are strung to you
like diamond pendants.

You ask the stars, Have I been saved? but it is your own molecules
that answer: It's not supposed to be easy.

AFTER BINGE WATCHING DRAGON BALL Z FOR 15 HOURS STRAIGHT I COME UP WITH A NEW MOVE MODELED AFTER THE KAMEKAMEHA CALLED KISSY-KISSY-EHA

by Shawn Berman

with this specialty, i charge up my kissing power for approximately 30 seconds, holding my hands under my pursed lips as i scream-mumble

kissy.....kissy.....eha!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

at the top of my lungs,

exploding straight towards your face at maximum speed without a care in the world.

of course you think this is stupid af and argue that i need to find a better use of my time but sorry no can do, hun.

this move makes me feel like a super-powerful alien saiyan, but in a romantic way.

how could you say no to this grand gesture of love for the rest of your life?

you probably can't. see the conundrum?

A Reasonable Cure for My Migraines, and If You Don't Agree, You Haven't Had Migraines Like Mine

by J.V. Sumpter

CW: Fantasies about drilling into one's own
skull, migraines

His shift ends at five,
but he's forever late.
So at six twenty-five
I drive to his place,

bright white stripes on the road
flying at me
like objects in a videogame,

or like the moving geometric lights
I see each time I blink.

But he refuses to help me.

Says he'll call the police
if I don't leave immediately.

I try to make him see reason:

if the good, good doctor will please
take a drill to my skull,

make one teeny, tiny hole,
the headaches can go free,
the pressure seeping out like steam.
But my doctor

is mean.

8 Slices in Space

by Kristen Lynn Kreashko

There was a man on the moon who made pizza with the cheese
If he added too much pepper, you know he would have sneezed
He couldn't cook it in an oven, so he had to eat it raw
And the man was all alone, so he had to eat it all

After one slice, he almost threw in the towel
There was a funny rumbling down deep in his bowels
Slice number two and things got even worse
If his wife were here, he'd hide the rest in her purse

But the man was very hungry, so he kept digging in
Slice number three, it got stuck to his chin
He grabbed another piece and hoped for the best
After slice number four, he couldn't catch his breath

Half the pie gone, he was feeling so much dread
So slice number five, he just stuck on his head
By slice number six, the man was feeling sour
He ate that one, but it took him an hour

Slice number seven, the end was now in sight
But with one piece left, it just didn't feel right
To eat it alone
He needed a friend

He saved the last piece, wrapped it up in his sheet
And took it back to earth. It felt good to be home

ISSUE I

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