

The broken



Twinkle, twinkle



**The spaceship appeared in my bedroom
Hanging out with cool brown dwarfs
The comet, that hairy star
Ride with Galactic Bus Services**

The broken



Summer 2022 Issue 30

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Welcome to *The Broken City's* mission in outer space.

Join us as we watch the skies, land on the moon, peer into Earth's future and glean knowledge from an alien entity that sounds like Judi Dench.

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The Broken City is currently accepting submissions for its winter 2022 edition: **The horror! The horror!**

A bit on the nose, but yes, the magazine is running a horror issue: monsters; murders; hauntings; Hallowe'en; suspense; psychological—if it's scary, we want to see it.

Send your poetry, fiction, essays, illustrations and photography to thebrokencitymag@yahoo.com.

Deadline is: December 1, 2022. Submitters will be contacted after that date, with news of acceptance or rejection.

Lost & Found in The Universe

Carolyn Martin

It starts upstairs.

Have you seen my leather gloves?

Could have been her credit card, underwear,
the photos of the Maui beach we left
our tensions on. Whatever can get lost,
does—every day of every week.

I can hear you roll your eyes! she adds.

It drives her up a wall—that adolescent look—
so I sort of lie, returning to the files
I'm scrolling through downstairs.

I'm in love with scientists who scour
galaxies and bring their mysteries
down to earth. The sun rings *like a bell*,
they claim. Black matter's like a *paperweight*;
the universe, a captive *butterfly*.
And here's this *lonely cyan gem*
hanging out with *cool brown dwarfs*;
there, a *planet-killing star*
running from a *cosmic crime*.

While we, in two-thousand-plus square feet,
can't unearth bank receipts or scrubbing pads
we swore we stored beneath the sink.
We can't remember where we hid Christmas gifts
or what we thought we bought and when. Or...

Never mind. I found ... thumps down the stairs.
She's waving her black gloves, an earring lost
last spring, the mail misplaced two weeks ago.
This will be her next triumphant theme:
She'll find what she's not looking for.

I counter with one crafted line—
Found is found in any space—and offer her
a galaxy gourmandized by scientists
from Bonn. Its center, so they claim, tastes
like raspberries and smells like rum.

"Lost & Found in The Universe" was previously published in Verseweavers (2019).

Blissfully retired in Clackamas, Oregon, Carolyn Martin is a lover of gardening, snorkeling, feral cats, backyard birds, writing and photography. Her poems have appeared in more than 175 journals throughout North America, Australia and the UK. Since the only poem she wrote in high school was red-penciled "extremely maudlin," Carolyn is amazed she has continued to write. Currently, she serves as poetry editor of Kosmos Quarterly: journal for global transformation. Find out more at carolynmartinpoet.com.

Melt Down

Carolyn Martin

Planet Earth, 2100

1. To whom it may concern:

According to the High Command,
the projector crashed last night.
Lasers burned. All freestanding 3-Ds
are lying on the ground,
two-dimensionally.
Someone got something wrong.

Everything—the zillion zillion holograms
from the biggest bang to a turning maple leaf,
from titanosaurs to fairyflies,
from da Vinci, Newton, Einstein
to geniuses almost-born—collapsed.

Command believes, despite
Earth's restless beauty and its lurking cruelty,
humans might have handled virtuals
like marriage, stillbirths, work,
vaccines, genocides, religions,
and governments of every sort.
They regret the end point came too soon.

We Mid-levelers on the ground
won't forget how Humankind amused
with little lives that stumbled through.
Here and there, one got it right.
It's not their fault plans to reboot are shelved.

Crews are sweeping up their left-behinds,
erasing all biped stains.
The latest update on the new 4-D:
It's in its final testing stage.
Expect progress reports next week.

2. From those it concerns:

We don't know why the lights went out.
Grounded nose to stone,
we're bristled into random piles
like used confetti or stained paper plates.

We don't know why the lights went out.
We were going about our goings-on—
bemoaning fires/earthquakes/hurricanes,
walking the dog, untying toddlers' shoes,
check-listing a day that rolled out as it should—
when we splattered on the ground.

We don't know why. The lights went out
and we reduced to an ant-eye view.
If only we could raise our heads
above the grass. Do we still have brains?
We're thinking, so that indicates.

We don't know. Why the lights went out
for unscheduled maintenance is a mystery.
When officials arrive to pump us up,
we'll ask them to explain.
It's not inconceivable
we'll believe anything they say.

"Melt Down" was previously published in A Penchant for Masquerades (Unsolicited Press, 2019).

Moon Landing

Donna J. Gelagotis Lee

When the stars pin-tucked the sky's fabric
and no other light impinged—

nothing but the light of the galaxies to guide us
as they had for thousands of years—

we found how easy it was to get lost in the dark,
that a falling star was a gift for wishes.

So we made the moon our playmate, discovered its craters
and peaks, gazed for uninterrupted minutes

at how it was foreign, yet kin.
To step on it was too enticing, and so when that became

fact, we were mesmerized—
and haven't gotten over it yet.

Donna J. Gelagotis Lee is the author of two award-winning collections, Intersection on Neptune (The Poetry Press of Press Americana, 2019), winner of the Prize Americana for Poetry 2018, and On the Altar of Greece (Gival Press, 2006), winner of the 2005 Gival Press Poetry Award and recipient of a 2007 Eric Hoffer Book Award: Notable for Art Category. Her poetry has appeared in numerous journals internationally, including The Dalhousie Review, Existere—Journal of Arts and Literature, Feminist Studies, The Massachusetts Review, and Vallum: contemporary poetry. Her website is donnaigelagotislee.com.

Jane Wiseman

The comet, that hairy star

has come to scorch the skies above the land.
It is a sign. The sun has dulled to red,
moves in, swings low on a low horizon, and
that paragon rides regnant overhead,
portent to the baked earth, omen to
destroy. Her blowback is a head of seed,
a crown of sparks. She vibrates, sforzando.
We listen for her thrumming, in our need
attuned to turnings of a burdened sphere,
to keening wind and to the scud across
the hardpan. Tasks of hand, of eye, of ear
have dwindled now to these: To note our loss.
Bear witness to the signs we mourn too late,
small and on a dying planet. Wait.

Jane Wiseman splits her time between the Sandia Mountains of New Mexico and very urban Minneapolis. She writes in many modes and reads voraciously. Her poetry has appeared most recently in The Westchester Review. She's a science nerd (although not a scientist!) and paints enthusiastically but badly. She holds degrees in English literature from Duke University, the University of Illinois-Urbana, and the University of Pennsylvania. Jane's poetry web site: utopiary.wordpress.com. Her speculative fiction blog: fantastes.com.

Cassiopeia: An Intervention

Jane Wiseman

Why are you sitting on that chair? Poseidon condemned you.
Foolish. You boasted yourself more beautiful than his nymphs.
Mirror mirror on the wall. Maybe pay more attention to your
poor girl, chained to a rock for the Sea-god's bloodlust.
I've read every version of your myth, but really, lady,
your pathetic story bamboozles us all. Get up off that chair,
save your daughter. You fraud, nothing but an optical illusion.
The stars in your outline just appear to be close. I suppose
the Greeks, the Romans, Egyptians Phoenicians Ugarit Megiddo—
all of them needed some way to point their way in the sky.
They navigated by you, planted their crops when your chair swung high.
Used you for divination, sortilege. Lady, renounce it. Among the stars
that make you up, ten exoplanets and counting. Your stars, they're
some of the brightest in the galaxy. There. Boast about that.

A Lover of Starlight ***Nikki Ummel***

Remember that time
the moon rolled over
just to please you?

She did a complete
360, grinned goofy,
all to hear you giggle.

Remember that time
the sun sat sideways
just to please you?

He spilled orange juice
over the universe and
bumbled about, embarrassed.

Remember that time
the wind let you sip her
just to please you?

You both got tipsy
and laid around for days,
too happy to stand.

Remember that time
you took your clothes off
just to please me?

I bathed in the light of your skin.
Flecks of stardust, even now, shimmy
on my face when I look at the sky.

Nikki Ummel is a queer writer, editor, and educator in New Orleans. Nikki has been published or is forthcoming in Painted Bride Quarterly, The Adroit, The Georgia Review, and more. She has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize, Best New Poets, and twice awarded an Academy of American Poets Award. She is the 2022 winner of the Leslie McGrath Poetry Prize. Her chapbook, HUSH, is forthcoming from Belle Point Press (2023). You can find her on the web at nikkiummel.com.

Here on Earth

Mary Beth Hines

She recalls how her father taught her to find them—
telescope, his knowing hands unveiling patterns.
He relayed their strange tales with what faith he could muster.

Now, here on earth she peers up from the seawall,
bare eyed, finds Vega, through her traces Lyra—
soft bodies of blaze she can place, map, remember.

In the sea, over whitecaps, stars gust in disorder.
She watches till seasick, looks back to the sky.
Orion's belt glimmers. His knees quiver, rise.

Mary Beth Hines's debut poetry collection, Winter at a Summer House, was published by Kelsay Books in November 2021. Her poetry, short fiction and nonfiction appear in Slant, Tar River Poetry, The MacGuffin, Valparaiso Poetry Review, SWWIM Every Day, and elsewhere. Her short fiction was recently nominated for a Pushcart Prize. Visit her at marybethhines.com.

Illustration (opposite page)

Ananya

Fourteen-year-old Ananya is an Indian teenager from the city of Pune. She is currently studying in the 9th grade and is a member of the student council as the Cultural In-Charge of her school. This is her first illustration using the website canva.com. She is passionate about writing and would like to publish a book in the future. Her long-term goal is to become a successful businesswoman. In addition to writing, she enjoys baking and taking long walks. Determined and ambitious, she makes sure what's wrong is addressed.



Galactic Bus Services

Trips have never
been this fun before

*Join us on our
trips to Jupiter*

The Spaceship

Dan Richardson

The spaceship appeared in my bedroom, as I was getting ready for work.

It wasn't like those you see in old movies. You know, flying saucer kind of things. It didn't appear in the garden, flashing all kinds of strange lights and beaming me up. No, it was a ball of light that hovered somewhere above the bed as I was sitting at the dressing table, holding my towel around my chest. The ball of light bobbed and fizzed like a guttering candle. It pulsed, bright and white, throwing out waves of light that illuminated every corner of my room. I covered my eyes with my hand. When I took my hand away, the ball gave an extra big pulse and three smaller bulbs of light popped out of the bottom, like it had given birth. The bulbs swirled in front of the ball. The ball dimmed as the bulbs took centre stage. They popped and fizzed in turn, making hacking, guttural sounds that slowly morphed into something recognisable as words. It sounded, somehow, exactly like Judi Dench.

"You... are Donna." It wasn't a question, but I thought it would be rude not to say something.

"Yeah, I'm Donna," I said, tucking the towel around me more carefully. "Who are you?"

"We are—from the planet—" said one of the other bulbs, filling the gaps with more fizzing and popping sounds. "Our civilisation is far in advance of yours, and we have achieved complete knowledge of the entire universe, of all things, past, present

and future. We have come to visit you, Donna Fairgrieve, to give you three Truths of your choosing. Choose your Truths carefully."

"Really?" I said.

"Yes. You have two Truths remaining, Donna Fairgrieve."

"No—hey, that's not fair. That shouldn't count as one of my—my Truths," I said.

The bulbs paused in their relentless fizzing and popping, before spinning around each other so fast my eyes began to water.

"Very well, you have three Truths remaining," the brightest bulb said, when the spinning had slowed down again.

I thought for a second, one hand fiddling with the hem of my towel. "Can I—now, this isn't one of my Truths, this is just a question. Can I have some time to think about it? It's just, you know." I gestured to my towel. "My deodorant isn't even dry."

The bulbs pulsed and fizzed extra loud, which I guessed was their equivalent of a sigh. "Fine. You may have twelve hours to ask us for a Truth."

"Thanks," I said. "Um, I have to go to work. Will you be okay to just... hang out here?"

The bulbs hissed at me. "We have access to all knowledge of all things, Donna Fairgrieve. We are quite capable of residing within your house until you return," boomed Judi Dench's voice.

"Okay, it was just a question," I

sniffed. "Well, I need to get going. I need to catch the train in twenty minutes," I said, gathering my clothes towards me.

"You have twenty-six minutes," a bulb said. "The train you desire to catch will be delayed." The bulb paused for a second. "There are leaves on the track," it explained.

*

I was more distracted than usual at the office. My first problem was that, obviously, I couldn't tell anyone that aliens sounding like Judi Dench had appeared in my bedroom. The other was what Truths to ask. By the time five o'clock came around I had achieved nothing, other than Googling "what is the best truth" in various combinations of words and scribbling a few questions on a scrap of paper.

I was first out of the office, but with wet leaves still stubbornly clinging to the tracks, it was longer than usual before I got home and hurried to my bedroom. The orbs were hovering where I had left them. When I entered, they spun around each other again.

"Right. I have another question before we get to any Truths," I said, sitting at the dressing table again and dropping my coat.

"Proceed," said the Judi Dench voice.

"Why do I need any Truths from you, if I can just ask the internet?"

The bulbs spun and pulsed. "The internet, as you refer to it, is not an entity. It is merely a method of communication between humans. Any knowl-

edge gleaned from it is limited to the technological advances of your species.”

“What use are you to me, then?” I demanded. “None of your stuff is going to mean much to me.”

“Your logic is flawed, your reasoning faulty,” boomed Judi Dench. “You are limited by the feeble processing power of your brain.”

“Hey, my brain is alright. All of human knowledge, all of it, is on the internet anyway. You’re not offering me anything I can’t get already.”

The orbs spun around faster, and glowed brighter. “And you believe your use of the Internet expands your knowledge? It leads you to a greater Truth?”

“Y-yeah, I suppose,” I said scratching my chin.

“Let us review your internet searches from yesterday,” shouted Judi. “12.51. How to make healthy pancakes.

12.59. How to make pancakes. 13.07. Are pancakes healthy. 13.11. What chocolate spread is best for pancakes.” The orb paused. I just glared at it. “You feel, do you, that this is the best use of this limitless source of knowledge?”

I scoffed. I didn’t realise Judi Dench could be so sassy. “I didn’t say I use it like that all the time, did I? I still do loads, though, honestly.”

Judi didn’t answer for a second. “This exchange is fruitless. We have travelled across countless galaxies to provide our treasure for free, and this is the thanks we get. You have made a list of questions. What is the top question. Ask us. We will reveal the Truth.”

I picked the crumpled bit of paper out of my pocket and looked at it. “Can I pick again?”

“No!” Judi shouted. “We tire of you. Ask.”

I swallowed. “What... what is

the cutest cat video ever,” I said in a small voice.

The orbs stopped moving, as if judging me. “We are leaving. This has been a waste of time. We will go back to abducting men on the way back from the pub and probing them.” The orbs buzzed and hissed before re-joining the main orb, which began to pulse, louder and brighter.

“Wait! Wait,” I shouted.

“What is it?” said Judi’s voice.

“Well, you did promise me.

What is the cutest cat video ever?”

The orb sighed. “Check your email. You have been sent a link,” it said shortly, before vanishing with a pop.

I pulled out my phone as I sank onto the bed. I watched a tiny kitten jumping on its mother’s tail. The orb was right, it was very cute.

Dan Richardson has previously been published in Anonym Magazine, Apple in the Dark, Corner Bar Magazine and Typeslash Review. He has been writing fiction and poetry for several years and studied creative writing at Strathclyde University. He lives on the Isle of Arran with his wife and dog.

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