

The background of the entire page is a complex, swirling fractal pattern in shades of teal and black. The pattern resembles liquid or smoke being pulled into a central point, creating a sense of depth and movement. The colors range from deep, velvety blacks to bright, almost white teals, with many intermediate shades of green and blue.

ISSUE #7 2022

FROZEN WAVELETS

Frozen Wavelets

Issue #7

2022

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EDITORIAL

This issue #7 comes out exactly one year later it was supposed (and planned) to.

So many things got in the way, the lack of an associate editor being only one, and not even the worst, of the challenges.

Instead of looking back to a frankly disastrous year, we prefer to look forward.

To the many who have shown their support and asked over the months, what now? this is what we want to say: yes, we will continue the operations.

We still believe in the original mission of bringing more speculative flash fiction and poetry out there.

How? We're still thinking about a better formula that gives more exposure to the authors. Partnering with small presses in thematic anthologies is one. Getting more people involved in running the blog is another.

For now, let's enjoying this new issue, packed with beautiful prose and distilled poetry. They have been waiting way too long shut in a laptop.

Take care,

SPB

Frozen Wavelets

Acknowledgements

I especially want to thank our second readers (essential for voting on the shortlisted work) and the graphic design consultant, Barbara Vacca for their help.

Boatman

by Carly Racklin

“One at a time,” the boatman says from the edge of the dock.

I’m first in line. The wind moans loud and cold. I step in the little wooden boat, which shivers uncertainly back and forth, and we set off. The mosaic faces of the others still waiting dissolve into the fog like flecks of sugar into tea.

A cup of tea sounds nice right now.

The boatman doesn’t speak again. Doesn’t answer any of my questions with more than a nod, or a small shake of his bald head, or, just once, a smile. The smile comes when I ask if I’ll see my nana where we’re going.

When he doesn’t reply I search the water; its surface undulates in even crimps like long hair unfurled from a braid. Did she have braids – or did I?

“I can’t remember what she looks like,” I mutter, barely able to form the words. “I can’t remember any of them.”

The wind lashes at my eyes and nose. Silent, icy tears drizzle down my cheeks. Trembling, I reach over and dig my hands into the boatman’s. We shudder to a stop.

The silence is a flood. As the last hint of color bleeds out of my fingers, I open my mouth to ask him something else, but my voice is shrouded, the question too. All that comes out is vapor.

The boatman says nothing still, only lays down his oar, stands, and gives me his coat.

It smells of years and years. I breathe them in, and let them go.

Summer Evenings

by Beth Cato

summer evenings
crows in garlands along
the power lines
screeching as they swoop
to chomp on pixies
a-flutter amid the roses

Humans. A Stratigraphic History

by Louis Evans

“Such ages are named not by historians—and certainly not by their inhabitants!—but by archaeologists. And archaeology is, above all else, the study of that which remains. From the earliest Paleolithic until the first Nile and Mesopotamian urban efflorescences, the most ubiquitous human material technology was textile, not masonry—but thread decays as rock endures, and so we have not an Age of Flax but a Stone Age. And this process has been repeated across time . . .

I. Dawn Eon

- a. Stone Age
- b. Bronze Age
- c. Iron Age
- d. Atomic Age
- e. Moon Age (Disputed)
- f. Plastic Age
- g. Floodwater Age
- h. First Fallout War

II. Upthrust Eon

- a. Scrap Age
- b. First Steel Age
- c. Graphene Age
- d. First Martian Age
- e. Second Fallout War

III. Cyberonic Eon

- a. Glass Age
- b. Silicon Age
- c. Smartmetal Age
- d. Third Fallout War

IV. Genegarden Eon

- a. Long Pause (Silent Age)
- b. Trinitite Age
- c. Genewood Age
- d. Shaping Age
- e. Wrong Bone Age

[fragmentary, illegible]

VI. Eon of Small Miracles

- a. Third Steel Age
- b. Diamond Age
- c. Second Martian Age

d. Age of Tamed Oceans

e. Moonfall Age

f. Jovian Age

g. Fusion Age

VII. Eon of Great Miracles

a. Fractal Age

b. Yggdrasil Age

c. Starwind Age

d. Neutronium Age

e. Ringularity Age

f. Ansible Age

g. Ouroboros Age

h. Second Time War

i. Disputed Age (Disputed)

j. First Time War

VIII. Eon of Harmonious Occurrences

a. Age of Flawless Gardens

b. Age of Endless Splendor

c. Age of Foreward Seeing

d. Age of First Birth

e. Consequent Age

f. Age of Ur—

This inscribed [stela] fragment was recovered from a [chthonic] [metaversal] [stratum] that had undergone [unrecoverable] [ontological] [fault] collapse. Unfortunately, no other texts in this script survive and no translation of this inscription exists. Countless such hapax artifacts, isolated remnants of lost cultures, stripped of all meaning, have been found; and doubtless countless more have been lost to time.

Bacchanalia

by Avra Margariti

When I wore the mask, I became
Someone else, sexless satyr shedding
All the parts I never wanted,
Donning stag antlers, wrapping myself
In blood-soaked velvet:
Wine-warm protection
Until morrow.

Comma Sutra

by Sarina Dorie

I've never felt this way about anyone else before. I'm willing to spice things up. Are you ready to experiment with grammar? Nothing is sexier than structured kink from the Comma Sutra for sexy tips.

Let's get down and dirty with some grammar, girl. I want to experience adult language like nobody's hyperbole. Yeah, those diagrams with subheads are pretty racy, especially the references to the . . . endnotes. I'm quivering with anticipation.

Where should we start?

Oh, you want to start *there*? Punctuation is always metaphorically hot. I never expected this from you.

Don't be shy about saying what you want. A sexy lady with a tongue for good grammar has nothing to be ashamed of. I'm fine you want to live dangerously, break free of traditions and leave that prissy, Oxford comma out of the relationship.

Oh? That one is too much for you. Got it.

Tell me what makes your similes activate. What's that? Kissing my way across your pronoun, you like how my participles dangle. You make me blush.

The way you arch that syntax totally makes me want to take a trip to #town. No, not "number" town. No. . . . Not "hashtag" town! How can you not know what the octothorpe symbol means? I'm talking about £ town, as in British currency. Never mind. That one has lost its sexiness. Let's just move on before this ruins the mood. . . .

How do you feel about getting x-rated? Can we throw out commas in our compound sentences and can we get rid of them with independent clauses? You want me to go first? Starting now I'm not going to separate prepositional phrases with commas either. I want us to be completely naked between our words.

Are you ready to take a wild ride on my exclamation point? Punctuate this: I'm glad you love indentions as much as I do. I'll give you all the headnotes you want! How did you like that big exclamation point?

I want to do the nasty with you, and I'm not talking about run-on sentences and a lack of capitalization. Let's double this entendre between the sheets.

Talk dirty to me. Use incomplete sentences. In short bursts. With em

dashes—Oh! That hits the spot.

Each time I love how you're handling all my prepositional phrases. Go all the way to my index. Read me, baby. Give me that carnal knowledge; I'm talking about those forbidden acts of semi-colons. I want to know you in a bibliographic sense.

I love hearing those red-hot, long-lasting compound adjectives! That's what I'm talking about! Wow!

Was it good for you?

You make my possessives want to be plural for the rest of my life. Let's curl up against each other, side by side like quotation marks.

I don't want this just to be a one-time event. This isn't just about getting laid, it's—

What? What's wrong? What did I say?

Of course I know when to use 'lay' versus 'lie.' I was just being . . . nasty.

Got it. Too crude. Sorry.

No, don't leave! We can make beautiful grammar together. Just give me another chance. . .

Maybe I'll get it right next time.

Darklight

by Deborah L. Davitt

If dark matter exists, so must dark light;
invisible to mortal eyes,
yet constantly present.

Raining through us
unseen, turned slant to our
feeble reality.

Does dark matter refract dark light,
and spin rainbows in shades we can't perceive?

The Witch of the Wormy Woods

by Lena Ng

Deep in the heart of the dark woods, where the trees grew warped and weird, there lived an ancient witch. With skin of lichen green and wizened as a walnut, her figure gnarled and bent like a boomerang, she stirred her heavy iron pot. Her lair was a trap, like a magical, malevolent spiderweb. To a prince, her cobweb was a castle, her spidery voice like that of a princess; to children, her cottage was made of candy; to a traveller, a welcoming inn. A long time ago she was human, but now she was more an idea, the fear of age and burden taken shape and consigned to a place where she was not thought of until encountered.

Company she did not keep. Solitude she did not mind. She missed, however, her youth, her once delicate hands which had cast spells were now wrinkled and warty. Her previously powerful voice had grown tremulous and timid. But this elixir she was creating, bubbling and burbling in the great iron pot, this elixir of youth, was missing its last, vital ingredient—the essence of innocence.

The groaning wind sent the torn drapes fluttering, bringing with it the scent of sugar and soap, cookie dough and confusion. A soft rap on the worm-eaten wooden door, but to the children who stood at the threshold, it seemed to be carved from chocolate.

“Come in, my dears,” the witch spoke with a grandmother’s voice. “Come in, my pretties.” She gave a gentle smile and her face radiated a false glow.

Small things they were, a girl and a boy, siblings with identical dark eyes, betrayed by their weak father and cast out by a wicked stepmother. They had followed a trail of breadcrumbs which had brought them to the witch’s candy cottage, dressed in an illusion of gingerbread walls, sugar-paned windows, raspberry gumdrop shingles, and licorice eaves.

The witch seated them upon marshmallow chairs the red of roses, and in an instant, a feast appeared upon the shortbread table. A children’s feast of children’s delights: toffee moulded into butterflies and bears; fudges of many flavours; lemon drops and peppermint sticks; a miniature carousel created from spun sugar the colour of crushed strawberries; ice cream that didn’t melt until warmed by the heat of their mouths. Laughter, a sound the witch hadn’t heard in a long time, echoed throughout her lair and she vaguely remembered what it was like to be young. A time when her back was unbent, her knees were unbound, and she was free from the limits of pain.

Finally, when the children smiled with the delicious contentment only a full stomach could bring, the witch brought out a special tea which would conjure sweet dreams.

In another story, the children would defeat the witch by tricking her and cooking her in an oven. Instead, with the last, necessary ingredient, the witch finished her potion. Afterwards, she buried, with pale, delicate hands, what remained of the little bodies at the edge of the forest, where the trees grew strong, crooked branches that grasped at the moon.

As Slow as Starlight

by Kim Whysall-Hammond

Soft as fog
slow as starlight
we slip through life
between the cracks of yours
we move in and out
through and back
twisting our reality
so that we can live among you
sometimes glimpsed
often discounted

Kiss of Life

by Marie Brennan

In faraway lands, the tale is a romantic one.

She sleeps in her tower, in the castle surrounded by thorns, awaiting a prince who is brave and true of heart, for only the kiss of such a man will end her slumber and bring her back to life. She has waited for many centuries, they say, and many princes have gone, fighting their way through the dark wood and climbing the thousand stairs to the tower room, but none have been pure and noble enough to wake her.

Some tellers say that, distraught by their failure and this judgment of their character, the princes fling themselves from the tower window and fall to their deaths below.

If that were true, the courtyard of the sleeping castle would be littered with bones.

Closer to home, the stories change. The princes, they say, do not die of broken hearts and wounded pride. They do not reach the tower room at all. Long before they have a chance to lay their mouths against the perfect rosebud lips,

long before they catch sight of the graceful, slender hands, they fall prey to the creatures that wait beneath the thorny boughs of the wood. And if they survive their trials there, then they meet their ends at the hands (or claws, or jaws) of the beings that walk the halls of the darkened keep, more foul by far than their forest-dwelling kin. And if they win their way past these as well, they perish in battle against the guardian who stands on the stairs of the tower -- but most never make it that far. The curse on the castle and its sleeping resident was placed by a powerful, jealous sorceress (or fairy, or stepmother-queen), and she vowed, as she was slain by knights, that her victim should never wake; and her blood flowed out and became the monsters of the wood and the hall, and her malevolent spirit the guardian on the stairs.

In the village that once served the keep, they tell another tale, and that is the darkest of all.

They tell their tale to any who pass through, but most princes and knights and wandering adventurers dismiss their words as the superstitions of credulous peasants (forgetting that their own peasants' tales set them on their road to begin with), or else assume that the villagers do not want the curse lifted -- for then they would lose the one thing that distinguishes their collection of squalid hovels from the thousand others like it.

The idealistic young prince who approaches the wood now never even had the opportunity to disregard the peasants' tales, for he took a vow, when he departed on his quest, to speak with no one until his task was done. A foolish vow, which lengthened his road by months and leagues; he searched in many wrong places, all unknowing, before finding his way here. He is not quite so young now, and his idealism has tarnished along the way. But at last he has found the wood, and beyond it lies the castle, and in the castle's topmost tower sleeps the lady whom he seeks.

He rides into the wood, his sword unsheathed.

The impassable forest of thorns disappoints him; it is dark and overgrown, to be sure, and thickly populated with briars, but the spines on these are not the sword-length blades he had been led to expect. He makes his way through with no more difficulty than an ordinary tangled forest might give him, and sees no horrors along the way. There is no sign, in all the wood, of any prince or knight slain here before him.

The villagers go blackberrying in the wood every year; they could have told him it was safe.

On the other side of the wood he finds the castle, walls cloaked in ivy, gate hanging open. Sword still in hand, the prince steps through. The courtyard

stones are cracked by frost, and grass has grown between them, but there are no scattered bones, no fallen blades, left by despairing suitors. Above stands the tower, the tiny panes of its window glinting in the light -- shut against the elements, not left open by one leaping to his death.

The villagers never venture as far as this, but they know the courtyard is clear.

The great door of the keep also stands open, and dead leaves have drifted into the hall. They crunch dryly under the prince's boots as he walks in, the only sound he can hear. The light is failing now, the day having passed while he navigated the wood, and so he pauses to work flint and steel, until a spark catches in the torch he brought with him -- he knew there would be darkness. By the torch's flickering light, he searches the corners for threats, but finds nothing.

The villagers could have told him that.

He begins to question this all as he looks for the stairs. Where have all the others gone? Is it mere fiction, that men have come here before him? Could it be he is the first? All the stories agree that the questors have never returned, but perhaps they never reached this place at all. Perhaps they perished far from here; the road is, after all, dangerous. Or perhaps they came, failed to wake the sleeper, and refused to return home with their shame.

Perhaps there is no sleeper.

But he never asked the villagers for answers.

He finds the stairs and climbs, half-wondering if there is a guardian lurking here who will devour him, bones and boots and all, half-wondering if the tower room will be empty when he arrives.

Nothing meets him on the stairs.

As he opens the heavy door at the top of the stairs, he is of two minds. One envisions triumph and fame, the tale of how a youngest son, lacking any hope of inheritance at home, won a beautiful princess and restored her castle -- their castle -- to its former glory. The other fears mockery, the jeers of those around him when they learn he spent years on a foolish, pointless quest.

All thought vanishes when he opens the door.

The dusty, half-rotted curtains around the bed stir slightly as the air is disturbed. The prince scarcely sees them, eyes fixed instead on the figure lying atop the mouldering coverlet, hands neatly clasped across her breast. Amidst the decay, her hair shines like incorruptible gold. Her long lashes lie against her cheeks, hinting at the beauty they hide, and her perfect rosebud lips await his gentle kiss.

There is a sleeper, and there is a curse -- and the villagers know well the nature of both.

The prince drops his torch to the floor, where it dies swiftly, unnaturally. In the sudden gloom, he walks toward her, boots automatically lifting over the debris that blocks his way. He spares no thought for the debris; all his attention is fixed on her. She is a beauty beyond compare, and his skin aches, as though too small to contain his adoration. Trembling in anticipation of the sight of her eyes, he bends over and gives her the kiss of life.

An instant later, he stumbles backward, no longer recognizable as the idealistic young prince who set out on a noble quest, nor even as the older, more travel-weary prince who climbed the tower stairs. He is scarcely recognizable as human. His skin has shrunk tight against his bones and his muscles have withered away; he collapses to the ground, a skeletal, desiccated thing, dying among the scattered bones and rusted blades of all the other brave young men the villagers could not persuade or prevent from coming to this tower.

The sleeper sighs once, but does not wake.

The curse still holds, for which the villagers give thanks every morning. Her prison of sleep still contains her. But one day it will fail; one day, she will absorb enough life from others to open her terrible eyes, to rise from her bed and

walk again. On that day, the skies will darken, and she will come forth from the castle once more, sweeping the bones of her suitors before her, bestowing her ravenous kiss on all who cannot flee her path.

But that day is not today. For now, she sleeps, waiting for her next kiss.

A Little Dragon Waits By

By Melanie Harding-Shaw

It hurts.

Back pressed against obsidian cliffs worn glossy by generations of guardians. Calves straining to keep balanced in the narrow ravine on a narrower ledge. The crevasse not so narrow that you couldn't fall to your death. The perch narrow enough that it aches to be the one to throw you.

It hurts.

With nowhere to twitch away. Your skin turned leathery from rasping too long against harsh scales. Not leathery enough to stop sharp baby fangs from piercing through. Drips of crimson dropping down the endless depths.

It hurts.

The weight of expectation, of duty. The look of pride in your mother's eyes. The relief in the eyes of the not-chosen. They can't reach you where you stand. Neither can the sun. The shadows eat their way through a thousand cuts in your skin. They feast on your humanity.

It hurts.

The cries of that which you guard against. The black shape looming high above blocking your view of the narrow sliver of stars. The shape too large to descend any closer. The shape whose shrieks echo off the walls so loud that they make your bones ache until your eardrums burst in protest.

It hurts.

The silence. The loneliness. Everything they asked you to sacrifice. They told you, you were chosen. They told you, you would soar above the clouds. They told you, you would hold the reins of power. They told you to save them. But they would not need saving if they had not taken that which you now guard. In the dusk before you left, you begged your mother to save you.

It hurts.

The guilt. As golden eyes blink open for the first time and peer up at you, confused. You can imagine its mewling cries from the way its mouth stretches open. You can feel the vibration of the obsidian beneath your feet as the shape above shrieks in answer. But even without hearing you know the shrieks are not what they once were. They no longer send shingle crashing down the cliffs. They no longer threaten to crumble the rock beneath your feet. They are fading, just as the shape above is.

It hurts.

To be abandoned here. And to watch the creature high above refuse to abandon the creature by your side.

Scales cut your hands as you tuck your charge into a leather sling on your back. Your muscles are agony as you haul yourself, hand over hand, up the cliffside. You can feel the cries of the two creatures large and small. Legs shaking, lungs aching, you turn your face up to the sun's warmth as you reach beyond the shadow.

It hurts.

As you feel the creature above snatch the precious bundle from your back. As the movement pulls you backwards and your hands slip.

The fall does not hurt, though. It is endless. It is the culmination of your choices. The culmination of your people's choices.

My voice will stay with you. A mother's voice.

Thank you little human. I am sorry.

About the Contributors

Marie Brennan is the World Fantasy and Hugo Award-nominated author of the *Memoirs of Lady Trent*, the *Onyx Court*, other series, and over seventy short stories. As half of M.A. Carrick, she also writes the *Rook and Rose* trilogy. Find her online at swantower.com, on Twitter @swan_tower, and on Patreon.

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Sarina Dorie has sold over 190 short stories to markets like *Analog*, *Daily Science Fiction*, *Magazine of F & SF*, and Orson Scott Card's *IGMS*. Her stories and published novels have won humor contests and Romance Writer of America awards. She has over eighty novels published, including her bestselling series, *Womby's School for Wayward Witches*. Website: www.sarinadorie.com The best way to stay in contact with Sarina Dorie is by signing up for her newsletter.

Louis Evans was built up by gradual layers. His words are unlikely to survive. He should probably invest in a stele. His writing has appeared in *Nature: Futures*, *Analog SF&F*, *Interzone* and more. He's online at evanslouis.com and on twitter @louisevanswrite

Melanie Harding-Shaw is a speculative fiction writer, policy geek, and mother-of-three from Wellington, New Zealand. Her short fiction has appeared, or is forthcoming, in publications such as *Strange Horizons* and *Analog*. Her story collection *Alt-ernate* is available now. You can find her at www.melaniehardingshaw.com and on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).

Avra Margariti is a queer author, Greek sea monster, and Rhysling-nominated poet. Avra's work haunts publications such as *Vastarien*, *Asimov's*, *Liminality*, and

Glittership. "The Saint of Witches", Avra's debut collection of horror poetry, is forthcoming from Weasel Press. You can find Avra on twitter (@avramargariti).

Lena Ng lives in Toronto, Ontario. She has short stories in sixty publications including *Amazing Stories* and the anthology *We Shall Be Monsters*, which was a finalist for the 2019 Prix Aurora Award. "Under an Autumn Moon" is her short story collection.

Carly Racklin is a writer, editor, and bird enthusiast currently nesting in the mountains of Tennessee. Her fiction has appeared in Metaphorosis Magazine, The NoSleep Podcast, Luna Station Quarterly, and more. You can find more of her work at carlyracklin.com, and follow her on Twitter @willowlungs.

Kim Whysall-Hammond is a scientist and an expert in obsolete telecommunications arcana, who used to write poetry and hide it away. She now shares poetry on her blog (<https://thechees-esellerswife.wordpress.com>) and has been published by Ink, Sweat and Tears, Three Drops from a Cauldron, Amaryllis, Crannóg and Star*Line. She believes, against all evidence, that she is a good dancer.