

The Spectatorial

historical fiction.

Alternate timelines



July 1873
The Burning of New York



EDITOR'S ADDRESS

Dear time-travellers, historians, archeologists,

This is a zine of “what-ifs”, our spin on historical fiction that encompasses magic, hiveminds, immortals, and gods, and questions the present day. How did we get here? Is history fixed; is history just fiction? What happens when you give a drumkit to an 18th-century aristocrat? This zine is particularly important to us because employing speculative fiction within the historical genre allows us to really challenge what we take as fact. New voices, new angles, and a proper survey of what’s been here all along. Thank you to all our contributors, our new Innis General Members, and our hard-working masthead, who made this zine possible.

 Miraan Isay 

Love,
Ola, Miran, and Phoebe
Co-Editors-in-Chief and Managing Editor

ABOUT THE SPEC

The Spectatorial is University of Toronto’s only genre-focused journal. Established in 2013, our masthead and writers work with mythical creatures, the gothic, deep space, and all things in between. We also have a blog where we post non-fiction: analyses, essays, and op-eds on speculative fiction media all year-round! Have a pitch? Shoot us an email at thespectatorial@gmail.com, or check out <https://thespectatorial.ca/> for blog post inspiration.

This year, we’re running zines just like this one to platform flash fiction. Our call for pitches and drafts will open for the genre and theme: *SOLARPUNK: excess* in the new year. Solarpunk is a futuristic movement associated with hope and sustainability, rejecting “climate doomerism” and the more grim-dark interpretations of science fiction. We would love to see environmental and ecological speculation, predictions for technological advancements, “soft apocalypse” genre work, and anything else you connect to solarpunk. Keep up with our Instagram ([@thespectatorial](https://www.instagram.com/thespectatorial)) for specifics next term.





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MEET THE MASTHEAD

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YOURS, UNTIL THE END OF TIME

Adaora Olisa

Edited by Phoebe Sozou

In the backstreets of London, a young woman burns what was once a manuscript. The dancing flame tears through the paper, creating thick billowing smoke. The smell comforts her. She reaches into the pockets of her trench-coat and brings out a pack of cigarettes. Using the flame, she lights one up and inhales. Exhales.

She throws what remains into a nearby garbage bin, sealing it with a lid. The last thing she wants is a fire that was never supposed to happen spreading to the surrounding buildings. The timeline would fracture, it'd be a mess to clean up, and worst of all, the fun would be ruined. Then, she waits. The alleyway is quiet except for the skittering rodents whose claws clack against the pavement. The moon shines high above, casting a glowing light on the buildings.

She yawns. She sniffs. She picks the dirt underneath her nails—a sign to trim them. She taps her foot on the ground, not in impatience, but rather to the tune of a song she can't quite remember. Finally, *she* appears. A slit appears in the open air, and out comes C, pulling the seams of reality wider and wider until she can step through. She looks the same, as she always does: smug and full of herself.

The woman's heart begins to beat in anticipation as C approaches the garbage bin. Lifting up the lid, C looks inside, and screams.

D wasn't sure when this little game of theirs began, but if she had to guess, it would have to be when she followed C to 15th century Italy. At that point, what drove D was merely curiosity; she wanted to know what it was about these travels that seized C's attention, keeping her hostage from dusk to dawn. What was it that was more important than attending her supposed best friend's funeral?

It turned out to be an old manuscript, a flimsy thing bound in thin leather that C found dug up at the bottom of the Leaning Tower of Pisa. D never got the chance to read what was inside, but *my*, the smile that graced C's face when she held the book in her hands. It was everything warm and bright in this world. It *sickened* D.

And so it began this dance, where one was unaware she was dancing with a partner at all. C liked to talk to herself, murmuring about

where the next part of the manuscript could be, unaware that someone was listening. D got better at controlling the tapestry of time, unrolling it and stitching it back up. Soon she could travel faster than C. Get to wherever point in time she wanted to go, first. That's how she met a man on the Silk Road who was transporting gold and silver, and convinced him to give her the bound book he was unknowingly carrying.

How she scoured all the shelves in the Great Library of Alexandria, found the next part of the manuscript tucked in a hidden corner. D wouldn't have burned it if she had known that Julius Caesar was going to do the job for her.

It's how she, briefly, fell in love with a jazz singer in the height of the Harlem Renaissance who found the manuscript on top of her brother's body, killed in a hit-and-run. They both agreed that it was a bad omen, and later watched it burn in the fireplace.

All the people she met would forget her as soon as she left their periphery. And each time, she'd watch C discover the burned remnants—she always left some for her to find—and relish on the utter devastation that would mar her face.

It wasn't long before C started to notice that something was wrong. She assumed that she had a rival—she had many in that cushy institution of hers. She began to isolate herself from her peers, refused any invitations for coffee, and stopped talking about her thesis. They thought the privilege of being granted access to time travel had gotten to her head. D didn't find them to be wrong.

D started paying C visits, blowing out the candles on her desk and leaving her in darkness. A misplaced book, a note C had never written, signed with a red kiss. D started whispering in her ear, about things only she would know, and would laugh as C whipped her head around in search of her tormentor. But no one was there, of course.

Paranoia overcame C, and D would watch with glee as she drove herself into madness. She turned to prayer—*ha, prayers!*—begging God to banish whatever demon had followed her back from her travels. And as she prayed, C never closed her eyes. Instead, she would stare into the open space, and sometimes, right at D.

Like how she is now, fear dancing wildly within her eyes. Fear that soon turns into desperation, desperation into pleading, as she opens her mouth.

“Dani, is that you? Has it always been you?”

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Yes,

Yes,

Yes.

But D doesn't say that. She just steps back into the shadows, and feels the press of brick against her skin before she slips away into the threads of time once more. Forever a ghost, forever yearning for the next manuscript, the next time she can feel the flame licking her fingers and watch C once more, ruined and undone.

Until then, she is hers until the end of time.

THE TIME MORGAN LE FAY CAUSED THE GREAT FIRE OF LONDON

Vincent Say
Edited by Emily Wong

Discovered deep in a cottage within Epping Forest, this diary entry by the legendary sorceress Morgan Le Fay reshaped everything we knew about the Great Fire of London in 1666.

The demagogues of the Ecclesiastical Order wanted me dead but they knew that my lifespan was longer than theirs. Corrupting my dear brother, Arthur, solely with their words, they threw me into a dungeon that no one could ever find. Ironic how they wished for sorcery practitioners like myself to be vanquished from the world and yet they still used runestone magic to seal the dungeon.

500 years have passed. It appears I hadn't aged after meditating in solitude for that long. The seal was completely broken. Freedom at last! I had to see what Britain had become, I couldn't feel the flow of magic in the air anymore. They're all gone, my fellow sorcerers and sorceresses. What had become of this land?

London had become as large as Camelot but it was by no means as heavenly as Avalon. The days of Camelot, swords, and sorcery had ended. But would the heart of Britain survive the storm I would unleash upon them?

Darkness reigned over London but many would watch in horror as the city turned into a blazing world. The folks in the city spoke of a hooded figure roaming the city at night. That figure was me, finding a perfect place to set the city ablaze. This became the bakehouse on Pudding Lane.

I finally set foot in this hideous bakehouse. Traces of flour and breadcrumbs were everywhere, on the floor and on the tables. Even in this darkness, I could still see them. The oven, however, was clean of fire, but not for long it wasn't. Channelling all my mana onto my palm, I called upon a tiny fire spirit. The little spark appeared and jumped around my hand.

"Grow larger and consume the city at your delight!"

The little spirit took a great leap into the oven. The flames grew and grew, the bakehouse lit.

Footsteps intensified, the city dwellers were getting closer and closer. I had better get out of here. With a snap of my fingers, I faded away from the fiery flames that would soon consume the city before anyone could see me. I, Morgan Le Fay, shall watch London burn. Pudding Lane was on

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fire already. Perhaps, it was time to spice it up a little more!

“O! Spirits of the wind! Lend me your strength! Help the city burn!”

It didn’t take long for the wind spirits to respond to my call. The gust of wind became stronger. It screamed through the nearby trees and grass but I stood still. Merlin’s wind resistance training actually paid off. Thick tendrils of smoke rose into the sky, torrents of flames engulfed London. Time to see how people react! I reappeared in town, hiding in a dark alley with my hood up. The towering flames were dancing in the city centre where almost all the common folk lived.

“Help! Help!”

“Bring more water! We need water!”

“Run for your lives!”

They were all too busy to notice me. Fear, pain, suffering, despair, and death, I could smell them all. Merlin or I would have simply used hydromancy to clear all flames. Without sorcery, they all looked pitiful. Let me see how everything played out.

Three days later

Britons—much to my chagrin—became smarter even without sorcery. They destroyed the burning buildings with this “gunpowder” to stop the fire from eating the entire city. The wind’s power died down. Nevertheless, half of the city was gone. They weren’t really ready for such a disaster.

Will I blame them for getting rid of magic? Yes. Do they deserve eternal damnation from me? Perhaps, not.

I wonder too much. Perhaps I should find my peace and look for Arthur in Avalon. I hear someone approaching my cottage. I shall stop writing here.

HUMAN HISTORY: TRANSTEMPORAL THOUGHTS, AS LEARNED FROM A MADMAN

Jude Yen
Edited by Jonah Watkins

tan ni: toki tenpo li ijo pana
For Caroline

I've seen his story, every round,
I've heard it told, and what I'd found
Was leaking, seeping towards the end;
I'd hoped he'd halt the downward tread.
Alas, I drift within this void,
My ship is dry, the tales have toyed
With whispers wide as whitened noise;
The silence bursts devoid of joys.

I'd stir the pot and he concurred,
Those memories that never were
Were wyrd entwined by what was fate
My tablet rasa; blanket slate.
But I don't know what you've been told,
This cycle of undying gold
Will end when Tithon's been released;
The rats and angels too deceased.
The woods decay, decay and fall,
Deforested 'till naught could grow,
And lo, the graves arranged to show
The madman's coiled after all.

My standing I do not deserve
When I'm supposed to just observe
The just deserts of what I find,
And conflict I should pay no mind,
Yet here I carve this cursèd song
My fate is sealed like Hu Zuanzong.
(Or maybe not, oh, I can't tell!
I mean, the world did go to hell,

But that compared? I'm doing well.)
At least the scholar didn't mess
With his own madman, for the best.
Mine wasn't libricidal, though,
He hunts; I gathered what he knows.
But I suppose he knew too much,
The fracture's evidence of such.

I stated he began the flood
To drown the cries of Edmund Ludd,
So silly I had been back then;
"You can't stop progress," then again,
He still distilled the hierarchy
To reinforce what he believed.
A bastion built for normalcy,
So I don't think he'll sing to me.

With languid prose, spoke so verbose
He'd make the cheeks Polonium rose!
He was the muffin, miffed if muffed—
Charisma strong but wits debuffed—
And all who clamoured to his aid,
That made them all his marmalade.

So let's review what Thunder said
And check my Burial of the Dead:
See, all that happened, ever will
Converged like stars when time is nil.
I slowed the acrimony bir!l
For Michael Collins' bunny girl,

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Stepped forth for Stepford cues in turn
And let the Beltane fires burn.
The underdogs would pierce the sky
Declaring ビバ良くない!
With or'nges, lemons, bells, and heads
He filled the gap with whites and reds
And yellow there, luxuriant
To serve Usonian variant.
But that's all gone, the past is passed,
I should've known it couldn't last.

MacDougal had an An'mal Farm
To harvest bounty, do no harm.
So all for one, and all must fall
By Dies Irae, after all.
To sovereignty, he had his fights
Like battling spies at Red Field Heights
And his campaign was somewhat cant,
That syncopated sycophant.

I'll check my ram, my mem'ries fade
In bleeding, fleeting, films of grace.
I know all things to end are made,
Combusting through the endless plague,
So "Alexandra's" eyes were blind
To what may not have been destroyed,
Like Nosferatu redefined
For all intents were null and void.
E'en in this highway, love from MOM
Oh, four-six-seven-eight-three-nine
Can't hold our ni:mi:kwejbz aplomb,
'Cause someone might just trip the line.
No day erases him from time—
It's left for reader's exercise
To what this means for future lies.
(Assuming there's a future left,
Beyond the threat'ning fissure cleft
By ignorance and self-conceit.
In other worlds, I'm in defeat.)

Thus as above, and so below,

I'll sing the light fantastic free,
Of Tithon and his rosy Dawn,
Who sing their love to carry on
Some half-true vision, they could see,
But what I saw was what I know.
As I reflect on what I've heard
From DOOM to Aristophanes,
It serves to note there's no duress;
He serves the burden to confess
The Crystal of Theophanes
With one and all disgraceful words.
And in the dark, it's just as well.
Delivered forth from page to pen,
The chain of elses; time must tell:
Our Hamlet has gone mad again.
This situation that's transpired
Was full forecasted, fully mired
In string arrays of purple prose
And doubling down on what he knows
Or thought he knew, to n degrees.
The man who'd once waged war on trees
Was set on staking sovereignty,
But hemorrhaged folks unsubtly;
He's just a burning memory.

Within the bounds of Gricean laws,
I tell this story, tell its flaws,
So by the end of time, you'll see
The present that is history.

ASH PLUME TO OLYMPUS

D. Radenko

Edited by Crescentia Kim

Smoke smeared the sky above the mountain. Vesuvius hissed, vapour escaping through his stone teeth, so hot that even the birds fled. Yet life went on below, Pompeii convinced it would remain untouched.

The boy sat on the back of a vegetable cart, his slender form shrouded by a thin cloak. His uncle drove the horses deeper into the city. Market day called for all hands on deck, and while normally he would stay at the estate and help his mother, this day he rode with his uncle in place of his cousins, who had gone to war in some distant, outreaching hand of the Empire.

The first odd thing he noticed, besides the smoke and the distant rumbling, was that dusk fell early.

Sometime around midday, the clouds turned so grey that the sun could scarcely shine through them. Below, the city still ran according to the right time, but every now and again the boy would look up and wonder if something had gone terribly wrong. Surely, something had gone terribly wrong.

Snippets of conversation slipped between customers and toward his waiting ears.

“I heard that the Oracle had deemed us cursed,” one woman said.

“I heard that Vesuvius’s rage is like a husband’s—short-lived, but fierce. He’ll quiet down soon enough.”

A third—the most sensible—came to the stall in a hurry, collected all she could, and whispered a warning: “We should all leave before it’s too late.”

The boy could not, of course. Not until his uncle was done for the day. And the market went on late into the afternoon; they were both stuck here watching, listening, and waiting.

The day grew darker. The first woman might have been onto something, with the rumour of a curse. The second was likely delusional—day was a distant dream, now, the sky smudged with the remains of a great furnace. The third woman remained the most clear-headed, the one with the most wisdom. The boy wished he could tell her she was right, but he imagined she was long gone from this place. Perhaps she had ridden out alone on

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a pale stallion, like an Amazon. Or perhaps she had flown up like a bird and dived into the distant sea, hiding at the bottom with Neptune's fair creatures.

He was so lost in his daydreaming that he almost missed the crack of lightning.

Beside him, his uncle dropped a gourd, and calabash innards splattered across the tiles.

"It's Jupiter," someone murmured.

The boy craned his neck to look, his short height doing him no favours. But Jupiter's whip cracked again soon enough, and a chariot appeared in the sky. Clouds in the shape of horses tugged the giant god through the early twilight, and cries of delight filled the air on the ground.

Another flash, and at once Jupiter was not alone. Beside him flew Juno, her fair robe shimmering in light unseen, gold glittering in her dark hair. Her voice boomed, unknowable and sure, sweeping across the land in a roll of thunder. The tent shook around the boy, and his hand instinctively went to cover his head.

Again, that flash, and a tall spout erupted from the river that flowed along the mountain's base. A figure sat at its crest, hefting a heavy trident, foam dripping from his feet as rain. The boy watched Neptune join the fray, the waters of his domain rushing up to quench Vesuvius's fire. Then another flash, another god, and again and again until the sky was filled with divinities. In no myth did their powers ever join this way, the boy thought. If the Oracle had prophesied a curse on the city, surely such a display would lift it.

Together, the gods of his empire shunted the mountain. They chained him and poured water on his flame, and Mercury and Apollo corralled the clouds before chasing them away to the distant corners of the earth. What greater folly did the Oracle know, than her prediction of the city's demise? She would learn the errors of her ways, in the face of the gods most powerful, most wise.

The boy went home that night with his uncle, and reported that all was well in Pompeii.



C h r i s
W a n g

Growing up, I was a huge fan of historical fashion in the late 18th century, and this “Alternate Timelines” theme had me thinking of combining the roccoco style of the French Revolution with punk rock aesthetics!

Think Sofia Coppolla’s *Marie Antoinette*, or Phoenix’s “Lisztomania”, and *don’t* think too hard about the political or satirical implications of having a noblewoman co-opt revolutionary aesthetics, LOL. I had a lot of fun painting this, and tried to go a lot looser with my strokes!

BLOOD IN THE TOWER

Hibbah Ayubi

Edited by Amy Yang

He was meant to be king. That's what they told him. That's what his *Lord Protector* told him. His father had been sick for days, and though Edward had not been with him, he could see in the uneasy face of his uncle that he was not faring well.

Edward had a dream... cold, clammy hands wrapping around his wrists like chains, the weight of a crown crushing his temple, too big a burden for a boy of two and ten to bear. He awoke that morning and knew, without needing to be told, that his father was dead.

His uncle and half-brother were to accompany him to London, where he would be crowned. Though they were the brother and son of the queen, they had never been popular at court—but then again, neither had the queen.

His uncle Richard—his late father's brother—intercepted their journey. At night, he'd dined with them, swearing loyalty to Edward, to the royal family. In the morning, he ordered his uncle and half-brother to be imprisoned. Edward argues, begs, and pleads. His uncle doesn't listen, says Edward does not understand, says he is keeping Edward safe. Says he is *Lord Protector*.

He dreams of the hands again. Tonight, they wrap around his neck, squeezing so tight his vision fills with black spots. He tries to rip them off, tries to *scream*, but all he can manage is a choked, gagging sound, even as nails dig into the back of his neck and tear open his flesh.

He wakes up coughing, scratching at his throat until it is red and raw. Even though there are no hands, even though he *can* breathe, he doesn't stop until his neck burns and his nails are bloodstained and broken.

He's placed in the Garden Tower with no company but these dreams. If it's not the hands, then he's visited by the Shadows—shapeless, blurry beings, all sharp eyes and twisted grins. They're soundless; sometimes he doesn't even know they're there until one is right next to him. They set him on edge, setting shivers racing up the back of his spine. One night, a Shadow reaches out to him. Edward takes its hand, and it burns like white hot fire. He wakes up screaming, his room stained with the smell of burning flesh.

Sometimes, he dreams of his half-brother, Richard Grey. Once a brave knight, now a prisoner, shackled to a cold, stone wall. Sometimes, he dreams of Richard at an executioner's mercy.

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It's temporary, Edward tells himself. His brother's rotting corpse is the only thing he sees when he shuts his eyes. *Soon, I'll be king; I'll order his release. They'll have to listen to me.*

He is going to be king. He is *meant* to be king. They may have delayed his coronation, but his brother Richard—the younger Richard—is with him now. Soon, Edward will be king, and the older Richard will be with them, and all will be right again.

He is going to be king. He is *meant* to be king. That is what they said. And now they are saying something else entirely. They are saying his father was engaged to another woman. They are saying his parents' marriage was invalid.

His mother was never meant to be queen. He was never meant to be king. He was never even meant to be a prince. He is a bastard. His uncle is king, and Edward is a bastard.

The same day they take his throne, so too do they take his brother's life. Richard Grey is executed. Edward didn't save him. He didn't even say goodbye.

He dreams of his brother's head on a spike, of an executioner with a blood-stained sword. The head morphs into his younger brother, Richard's. The executioner takes a step towards him, and the head is now Edward's. He tastes steel, and he can't tell if it's his brothers' blood, or his own.

Every night he dreams of the executioner. Every night he gets closer. He stops sleeping, but he still feels death's hands reaching for him. He doesn't like how the king is looking at him these days.

His brother Richard is worried about him. His brother Richard is dead.

He's scared of dying. He's scared of hell. He spends his days repenting, his knees red, and bruised, and bloody. The doctor is worried about him. He thinks Edward is ill. The king is worried *by* him. He thinks Edward is plotting.

I don't want to be king, he tells his uncle, but the dreams don't stop, and his uncle still looks at him like he is a threat. His ambition is going to suffocate Edward. He is going to die.

For once, his dreams are peaceful. His elder brother holds him, hands brushing through his hair. He looks like he's going to weep, and Edward knows. Richard says nothing, but Edward *knows*.

His eyes open. His brother Richard is asleep next to him. He hears footsteps outside of his room. He hears whispering. The gate creaks open. Edward grabs his brother's hand, says his prayers, and shuts his eyes one final time.

He was never meant to be king.

THE ONENESS PRINCIPLE

Donell Rodrigues

Edited by Nathan Agustin

The chatter slowly faded away as the building emptied, leaving peace and stillness as evening began. The last to exit was fortunate to experience the space as few others do. The Control Hall was flat and wide between four clear walls, sitting well above the horizons as it merged with the starry sky surrounding. The sight of the night sky above was broken up only by an array of wooden beams holding an imposing glass ceiling that linked The Hall to the stars and The Three Great Mirrors, emanating the Model of Universal Oneness. This model stood at the heart of The School of Stars since its inception, the ultimate proof of the inherent connectivity of all beings. Through The School of Stars' ever expanding work, the Model had repeatedly been updated with all the latest data collected from the Heavens above, reifying the Oneness that allowed humanity to advance past deluded beliefs in individuality. The design of The Control Hall had been replicated across the globe as science escaped its tight campus rooms and became one with its surroundings. In quiet moments such as these, self could melt away and join the stars above.

Yet as Impermanence dictated, this was fated to end. A faint beeping slowly manifested in the field of mind. Its irregular tempo synchronized with the flashing of The Third Screen and demanded focus.

Such technology left a sour fragrance in The School of Stars' oldest streams of thought, but were a necessary development to the rituals of verification that had long been practiced, despite the certainty of the One Truth. As the Scientific Method was bought in accordance with Oneness, the means of displaying these Truths were ever advancing, along with the other tools and skillful means of being within The Universe. In just a hundred years, the Eastern Provinces surged past the European Trade States that had once dominated them. While Western thinkers clung to views of The Universe and its innumerable parts as tools for humanity to dominate, the rise of the Eastern Provinces proved the falsity of such philosophies. The inescapable Truth of Oneness was thus proven not only by the overthrow of the Western barbarians and their encapsulation into the Truth, but by the very stars themselves.

As the first observatory dedicated to proving The Oneness of The Universe and opening the gates for The Awakening that followed in scientif-

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ic philosophy, the space was continually upgraded to be at the forefront of new advancements.

These re-examinations of theory were approached with great willingness and candor as those with the greatest love for the stars gathered to review and expound upon a never-ending stream of data.

Arriving at the Screen, light intensified and burned a great rectangle in my eyes, framed by the sparse yet starry blackness of the surrounding sky. While human eyes failed to appreciate the vastness of the heavens, this model was capable of tracing the histories of matter. Through time and space the atoms fused through star after star, forming the Jeweled Net that connected all in Universal Oneness.

Yet, its most recent update was nonsensical. The particles traced through time and space showed no interaction with any but itself. How dare it claim definite form, cling to permanence, defy the Truth that gathers all.

Never in our history had data been used to disprove The Oneness. While ancient enemies attempted to resist The Truth, its spread could not be stopped as all false models were eliminated.

I couldn't stand the beeping any longer, this raised far too many questions that only the peace of Oneness could calm.

Stepping off the elevator however, an eerie quiet pervaded. Those guarding the door were lost within one another, sharing the bond I so strongly desired. But my mind could not join them. Running into the street, the crowds whose chatter once drowned out these questions could no longer be heard. As night ended and the sun began to drown out distant stars, most returned to their dwellings and the togetherness of a shared roof. But I no longer felt the warmth of the crowd and their resonance. As the Sun grew into the sky, so did the silence that would outlast each star and each atom and the universe itself.

A TANGLE OF MIRACLES AND TIME

Ciara Drummond

Edited by Jonah Watkins

“On September 26th, 2025, the police responded to a 911 call to a man claiming the ‘real’ Jesus broke into his house and he needed to repent or [Jesus] was going to throw him down a well.”

—Court Transcript of R v John Doe (The Jesus Assault Case)

It wasn’t easy inventing time travel, you know. And it’s even harder to perform miracles. Trucking about six tons of Penicillin and antibiotics to heal villages across Galilee, learning magic tricks to swap wine and water, and getting a doctorate in psychology was the easy stuff. On the other hand, using his portals to make one fish into enough to fill a sea through a glitch, in hopes of creating a pseudo-finite amount was a mind-bending exercise in physics; learning how anti-psychotics and Red Bull could cure ‘demonic possession’ was a matter of tedious trial and error; and don’t even get started on how Jude managed the Lazarus situation. Most certainly, Jude completely messed up dozens of timelines and screwed over plenty of others, less perfectly amazing Judes who couldn’t figure out how to time travel like they were driving to work every day, but he had done it and he was finally going to live the rest of his life in comfort, worshiped like a god.

And, then, as if to reward all of his hard work, Jude had come back to find that some rando had taken the fruits of his labour and monopolised a perfect money making scam to start, of all things, a frat house. If that dim-wit Joel had managed world domination, Jude could at least be impressed, but instead Jude had spent every day since he returned from 0 BC cursing idiots for not knowing the difference between Jude and a man like Joel.

Anyway, that’s how Jude ended up lurking in the shadows of Joel’s one-bedroom apartment, ready to fight to become the one true Jesus. You know, besides the real one he threw down a well all that time ago. Jude was giving himself the worst prep talk ever when Joel came home to find Jude standing in his kitchen while wearing the same seamless robe he had worn two thousand years ago.

“Holy me, dude!” Joel huffed out, jumping in the air like a startled rabbit and clutching at his heart.

“Curse you, hungry lowly scoundrel. You dare to steal what is mine! By right of conquest! You are like the salt that has poisoned the earth

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to deny good harvests,” Jude declaimed, before immediately regretting it. Dumb first-century speak.

“*What?*” Joel asked before balling up his fists. “Is this a prank? Did Carl pay you to do this? Because I have security cameras and this is ending up all over the internet.” Okay, not exactly the Western standoff Jude was expecting.

“*You. Are. Not. Jesus,*” Jude spat.

“Yessss. I am. There’s a portrait of me in a museum. I have the birthmark and weirdly coloured eyes. Suck. On. That,” the imposter responded, flapping his arm childishly.

Jude gawked, feeling embarrassment that the portrait he kept preserved for thousands of years was his undoing. “Actually, there’s a portrait of ME in a museum.” Joel chimed in with an, “Oh congrats man!” but it was drowned out by Jude’s rant: “You got lucky because you’re a guy from Florida who somehow looks like me!”

Joel scratched his head, saying, “So Carl didn’t send you?”

“I am Jesus. The real one.” *Kind of.*

“Well, how can you be sure? You don’t really *look* like Jesus. No offense.” Joel popped a beer to mock Jude.

“I am Jesus!”

“We *both* can Jesus!” Joel was just *asking* for Jude to actually strangle him, but Joel was also built like a tank and apparently kinda stupid, so talking seemed worth a try.

“No, we can’t! I did not return from the dead, NO heaven, to be replaced by a man whose greatest achievement is creating a ‘forever frat’,” Jude responded.

“*Dude*, crazy! Tell me more.”

“Let me simplify. I am going to push you down a well and God is going to smite you if you don’t stop pretending to be me.”

“Just because you’re dressed... *weird* doesn’t make you Jesus, buddy.”

“Lighting, right now,” the original fake Jesus bit out between clenched teeth.

And, because Jude literally knew how to time travel and defy God himself, lightning struck down right on Joel’s balcony. For good measure, Jude continued again until Joel was convinced and ran from his apartment, screaming, disillusioned by the notion that he could ever play God. And if he didn’t, Jude would find a well.

Goodbye, forever frats and super fake Jesus.

A STAR BINARY

Miran Tsay

Edited by Ciara Drummond

The tiny planet began as a drop of water. Over time, it was pressurized by the universe, so much that the planet hardened into rock, clay and copper and silicate metals that shined brilliantly, even if no one would see them in the dark. The planet was very content with the way it was ornamented.

The pressure continued, and eons later the core of the planet fractured, and a stream of water surfaced. The brave water molecules crawled into each other and the last of the internal sea came together and formed a lady. She stood up and the rocks shook. She danced and the rocks laughed.

She wouldn't see another sea for lifetimes and lifetimes, and so it wasn't important for her to know what a sea looked like. For she would look down at herself and only recognize the rocks and herself—together, they were the planet.

She thought they were stationary, at first, but then realized the blinking dots far away were funneling past her in a uniform march. She witnessed a light going out. She figured its movement hadn't stopped, because nothing ever did, but rather that a great change must have taken place. The light must have touched another body, or been absorbed by a darker light, or fallen into another's orbit. To meet another was to become anew.

So she'd often lean down and whisper to the rocks, her water expunging her thoughts into the shining green and blue and grey-red when she got close enough to see the colours. *How do we change directions?* She thought it was imperative that she asked her questions with her body flush against the rocks because that was when the planet was most connected. That was when the rock's symphony was the most clear.

*Wheredoesbewanttogo?Idon'tknowdoyouknow?Itwasdeclaredour-
planetwillgothiswayandsowewill*

Where is everyone else going?

Theyarebeingcalledjustaswearebeingcalled,askthem

Called by who?

The rocks laughed a lot at her questions. She thought she would be able to understand their vibrations and friction under her hands. They made up the same planet after all. But even when she wrapped herself around the entirety of the rocks, their millions of voices always contradicted each other. Messages were delivered in waves and never clearly reached the other side.

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Their chatter overlapped, an oscillation whenever she asked more than one question.

Sometimes she yelled out at other lights.

“WHERE ARE YOU GOING? WHO CALLED YOU? CAN YOU EVEN HEAR ME? AND DO YOU KNOW HOW TO CHANGE DIRECTIONS?”

She didn’t like yelling because her words seemed to never get anywhere and the rocks always tittered and giggled. She often got bored of yelling and talking to the rocks and went back to squinting at the planet’s surface. The greens and blues and red-greys always looked different through her water, fractured and brighter.

The lady didn’t feel lonely because she had never met another sea before. She didn’t know she was the strongest planet to ever be.

She awoke one day to find another planet circling her just as she was circling it. The other planet hadn’t meant to be so close but it had tugged and lassooed her and the rocks to its orbit.

Are we not moving anymore? The lady asked the rocks, quietly, through her fingertips. They laughed at her again.

We are moving, we are always moving, she thinks we stopped, imagine if we stopped

The other planet was so dark that at times the lady lost sight of it. She could only see its shape when it blotched out the rest of the lights.

It seems we are the anchor, she said to the rocks.

Us! An anchor! Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-but we could be anyone could be

The lady had no more a hand in changing direction than she had ever had. Still, futilely, she often stretched as far as she could out to the dark rock and reached, her watery hands so elongated they were transparent. There was still too much space between the two rocks, so much distance and moving and difference.

The rocks knew before she did, of course they did.

They don’t look the same, ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-but they never look the same

We need to get closer I want to see this is not for you to see this is for her and this is n’t even for her

It’s happening it’s happening it’s happening

And then the lady blinked and covering half the planet was another sea. It looked like her.

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF CAITLYN SMITH (d. 1972)

Jude Yen
Edited by Chris Wang

Twenty four,
Not one more,
Robin laid her gun.

We talk of disappearance
Like puff of air in minutes
Check the epiglottal cover for a leak up-
stairs,
For the Geiger counter's flowing,
The toxic dust is snowing
As the pressure slowly builds,
Filling the pillbox with features
Further pilfering Pfizer's pfeffernüsses
Forthwith filtering Faustian figures from
the fingers of Fenrir
Fighting for forcefully freeing the fall-
out-fiends frantically functioning faultily—
Pop goes the weasel.

Between the pits and potemkin pumpkins
Pastoral paintings of pastures pick the
martyrs from poetry,
Each and every imposition exposing the
inner exposés,
Those ninety-five decrees they'd eye-to-eye
see and agree
By way to say their words but loath
To admit their Hypocritic oaths,
Turning to doctored doctrine, never
needing
To master prattle pure and pleading
Ways to love and live and laugh
As long as they don't mind the gaffe.

The way it is,
The way it is,
Why must it be the way it is?
A marriage made of man and wife,
From morn to mourn, a tired, tried life
Of fluctuating fruit we cherry pick
To make it seem like every outlier is a liar
Because we know best.

We know better than you, you see?
It's better like this, you see?
You see, a sea's best crossed with two.
If you don't see, what's wrong with you?
And if you don't see what's wrong with
you,
Then we're your saviours, scuff and scrape,
Just give it time, just lie in bed,
Don't lie about what your heart said,
Or check your gonads, you know it's true:
We always know what's best for you.
So count the rally, relax and wait...
We'll fix your stain with corrective tape.

Stop hiding behind your selfish choice,
You must have kids to then rejoice
In all joys in being a wife;
A blaze in your heart, your goal in life.
And are you sure? You look so young!
A gal like you should find someone
To hold forever, uphold our truth
There's just one thing you have to lose!
You're sick, you're a robot, we know what
you're missing.

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Our mission is transmission of your condi-
tion of omission,
A defection from tradition that just won't
do!
Just admit in your cognition
Your decision causes fissions,
So we'll add in some coition and you're
through.
Right?

(The way it is,
The way it is,
The motto strained
Like whey it is.)

But they babbled at the saddle
Like they were Stepford & Sons,
To the Tower with the rabble,
Think panini to none:
Baking bread over rum,
Sweep the streets for the sum,
And let the bygones be Zygons
Delicious as plums!

The aggressive aggregate of segregated
statistics
Formed from murders of laws beyond
nihilistic
Brought on Whitney-like behaviours like
reliance on quack quotients
Glistening from their Glades like Don
Quixote.
But here come the windmills again,
Like insular cynical, cyclical cycles of
psychos,
The lagerless loggers slur their slimy syllo-
gisms
In echo chambers after and echo papers
prior,
Ignoring Dyer and how much was dire
To their fellow persons, the people who fell

And screw poetry because that's exactly
what it was before;
They don't think, they only uphold the sta-
tus quo, and anything beyond that should
be normalized so they never have to change
their beliefs to a developing world, forever
stuck in the past, doomed to repeat their
mistakes:
Time is a fucking flat circle.

—Caitlyn Smith-Williams has disappeared.
She had no children. She was last seen at her
residence preparing for bed. Her husband,
family, and friends are unaware of her
current whereabouts. She is to be presumed
dead until further notice. Thank you for
your time.

GODMAKER

Ola Kim

Edited by Nathan Agustin

Naples is nothing like Yiwen remembers. She hasn't been back in a hundred years.

Italy used to be a miserable place. Yiwen remembers the flood of landmines left half-assed under soil anywhere anyone had the misfortune to step for years following the Second World War, back when the two of them still had the heart to fight in those. Zhixun had to peel bits of her from the earth, Yiwen draped in blind agony over Zhixun's lap as Zhixun stitched every piece of her back together again, enough so that her retinas re-attached to her brain and she could make out Zhixun's terrified face. Back when they still felt terror at the supposed fickleness of each other's immortality.

They don't feel anything of the sort anymore. Yiwen knows that Zhixun is going to outlast the sun.

All the air is smoke. The barfront is so weathered it looks like it's about to bring the whole building down with it. Yiwen puts a hand out to steady herself as she crosses the dusty threshold, and concrete crumbles under her fingers. *Italy*. Small wonder Zhixun asked to meet here. Zhixun always loves Yiwen best when she's holding a losing hand.

"Zhixun."

"I don't go by that anymore."

"Don't care," Yiwen returns, dropping into the fold-out chair beside her without much grace.

"Call me Jisheon."

Yiwen snorts. "Korean? In Italy? Don't be fucking stupid."

"It's not stupid." Zhixun sniffs. "It reminds me of you."

She knows exactly how to get under Yiwen's skin. All these millenia of practice.

"I'm not calling you that."

"*Zhixun* isn't Italian either."

"It's your *name*."

Zhixun will call herself a thousand things to avoid hearing her birth name for another half-century. Yiwen refuses to go by anything but *Yiwen*. It sickens her, the kind of people they are.

"Where are you propped up now?"

Yiwen weighs her options, but answers honestly. "Shenzhen."

"I hate that city," Zhixun sighs, and Yiwen glowers.

"Well, I hate this one."

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Zhixun opens a single eye. "Don't be stupid. No one hates Napoli."

"I do," Yiwen bites. "We could have met in Guangzhou. Hong Kong. Osaka."

"So, somewhere *you* like?" Zhixun laughs. "You think I'm easy."

Zhixun drags Yiwen all the way to Siena because she insists on meeting in *the great new tourist trap of the world*, and then drags her all the way to Naples because she *got the coordinates wrong* and wants Yiwen on another six-hour bus ride south. Zhixun calls Naples *Napoli* because she's spent the last two centuries perfecting her southern European languages. Zhixun is the exact opposite of *easy*.

Yiwen loves Naples. Fiercely. But she and Zhixun spent lifetimes here, lifetimes ago, deep-sea diving and chainsmoking off of dilapidated apartment rooftops, and now Yiwen can't bring herself to even glance at a single photograph ever again. Not her Naples.

Not her Zhixun.

"What about Seoul?" Zhixun asks.

Maybe this is why she can't even look at her anymore. Zhixun ruined Korea for her, and now Yiwen can't even enter the country ever again. She doesn't know if Zhixun even knows. It all broke her heart, once.

Maybe that was the last straw. It had always been a beautiful thing, watching Zhixun want the world.

"Remember Pompeii?" Zhixun asks, taking a sip of her drink.

"No."

"Well." Zhixun hums, some oblique trill. "When in Rome."

Then, dismissively, "You remember everything, anyway."

Maybe Yiwen has it easy. Zhixun hasn't stepped one foot in Asia in the last five-hundred years.

Zhixun tilts her glass towards Yiwen, Yiwen waves her off. "I don't drink."

Zhixun snorts in a way that Yiwen knows is meant to be ugly but unfortunately really isn't. "Since when? Last week?"

"Last decade," Yiwen answers sharply.

"Well, you'll have the next however-many decades to make up for it."

They fall silent as idle conversation floats through the outdoor patio. Yiwen's Italian is rusty, her Neapolitan dialect even more so. Zhixun must have spent half a century perfecting her accent.

They have been a thousand things over a thousand lifetimes. Painters and soldiers, gourmet chefs and welders. But they were each other's first.

"I'm done," Yiwen says, standing. She has to be the first to leave.

Has to be the one that doesn't look back. "See you in another ten years."

Zhixun is ancient. Zhixun is a beast who has watched empires fall. Zhixun has crawled belly-down, face-first into wars she singlehandedly

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started and ended, and Zhixun is a creature older and cleverer than anything else Yiwen has ever met.

But Zhixun is only Zhixun. And Yiwen was by her side for all of it, anyway. And, Yiwen is older still.

The truth is that Zhixun makes her sloppy. Careless and stupid. Like she's only known a hundred years of mortal grief, all over again. Yiwen doesn't look back.

Distant, quiet, like the voice isn't her own, her hesitance a weapon, Zhixun's signature waver: "Love you."

THE MOVEMBER DIARIES

Anonymous from The Innis Herald
Edited by The Spectatorial

Floating in an overflowing sink in the Innis College men's bathroom was a sealed bottle with some rolled-up paper inside. Once the faucet was turned off and the water was cleaned up, the contents of the bottle were found and reported to the editors of the Innis Herald. The document inside has been reprinted here in its entirety. What follows are...

Day 1: The Dodgers beat the Blue Jays. I feel like Old Yeller at the end of the movie. Stubble doesn't keep me any warmer as I walk back home in the November chill.

Facial Hair Level: Barely there.

Day 2: Ate toast for all three meals. Still reeling from the Blue Jays losing.

Facial Hair Level: Reflective of depressive state.

Day 3: *The Innis Herald* came out. First spark of joy I've felt in the past 30 hours. First time I've ever grown a moustache before, and so far, this shit fucking sucks.

Facial Hair Level: 5 o'clock shadow all day.

Day 4: Had my last post-exam midterm... I am going to get an Etsy witch to place a curse upon my professor for giving us 50 minutes for 2 essays. I wish my moustache was longer so I could twirl it thoughtfully.

Facial Hair Level: Wispy.

Day 5: I miss what we had together. Every day, I think about the way I used to rub it into my face until it was covered in white foam. Can't wait until I can use my favourite shaving cream again.

Facial Hair Level: Short, longing for it to be gone.

Day 6: Thirsty Thursday at the Madison Avenue Pub. My buddies say that women love a man with a moustache, but here I am, just itchy and alone. Facial hair at a 1.7/10.

Facial Hair Level: Awkward.

Day 7: Went to Free Film Friday and saw the cutest girl in the front row. She was with her friends, and before I could work up the nerve to talk to her at the end of the movie, they all left together. Probably a good thing. I look patchy as shit...

Facial Hair Level: Not all there.

Day 8: The Leafs just got whipped by the Bruins, and I have a paper due to-

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morrow. I don't know if I can go on like this anymore. Facial hair at 2.5/10.

Facial Hair Level: Noticeable.

Day 9: The moustache is starting to look pretty, well... We might be getting somewhere.

Facial Hair Level: Encouraging.

Day 10: My roommate got back from his parents' place with a carton of his dad's Chinese cigarettes. Did I mention how much I love my life?

Facial Hair Level: Too happy to notice.

Day 11: Smoked too many Chinese cigarettes and woke up feeling so sick, I didn't go to my 9 a.m. Threw up a little, and it got in my moustache. Gross.

Facial Hair Level: Long enough to get sticky. :(

Day 12: My razor is making eyes at me. "You just want to shave it off, don't you? Get all clean and smooth." I had to take a cold shower. Nearly halfway there.

Facial Hair Level: Persistent.

Day 13: Just found the girl from FFF on Instagram. We already follow each other, and she just posted about going to the next one... I guess I have my Friday night plans. Hope she likes a moustachioed man.

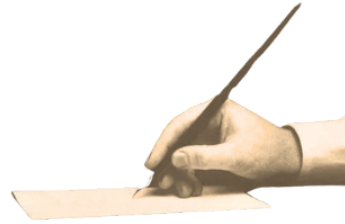
Facial Hair Level: Hopeful.

Day 14: Left the movie... Amazing. Even more amazing is that I'm getting coffee with Tanya tomorrow. She said she'd been following me on Instagram for a while, and that I looked even cuter clean-shaven... I know what I have to do, but I don't know if I have the strength to do it.

Facial Hair Level: The real deal...

Day 15: Brothers, I have betrayed you. I leave this as my last will and testament to the days of Movember. Know that I have cherished our moments together, and that I will always keep our goals of furthering men's health globally. Sorry guys, but I gotta see about a girl.

Facial Hair Level: Gone too soon.



THE INNIS HERALD



The Innis Herald has been the voice of Innis College since 1965.

Celebrating our 60th anniversary this October, the *Herald* continues to showcase high quality journalism, poetry, and prose from the University of Toronto community. Our December 2025 issue sees the *Herald* say goodbye to the year in passing, and think back on all the great (and not so great) moments of 2025.

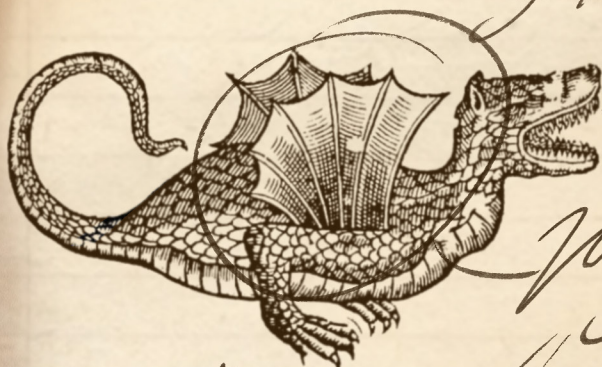
The *Herald* can be found on newsstands at Innis College and all throughout campus, online at theinnisherald.com or [@theinnisherald](https://www.instagram.com/theinnisherald) on Instagram, and as the *Innis Herald* Podcast on most podcast platforms.

This November, *The Spectatorial* has collaborated with *The Innis Herald*—you will be able to find fiction by Lucy and Norah, our first-year representatives in the *Herald*'s New Year: New Edition.



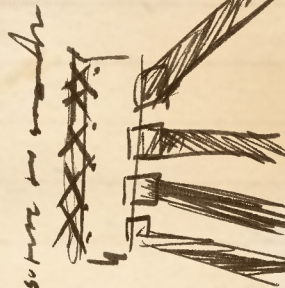
June, 1914

The world is full, its breath as the barrel fills with the
expander.



Five

Wings



solace.
anniversary
all persons

HP 2.5
Barbar

~~W. H. L. S. R.~~
~~Bar~~

Since the burning,
man has never
found to talk to the
skies, not now.

Dragon Kumpes provide
a vexed reporting
of interest,

~~W. H. L. S. R.~~
~~Bar~~

Think of it -

win the ocean
battle from the air!

+ ships to launch them from!

The secret was in

~~W. H. L. S. R.~~
~~Bar~~

to + for
can
SOLVED