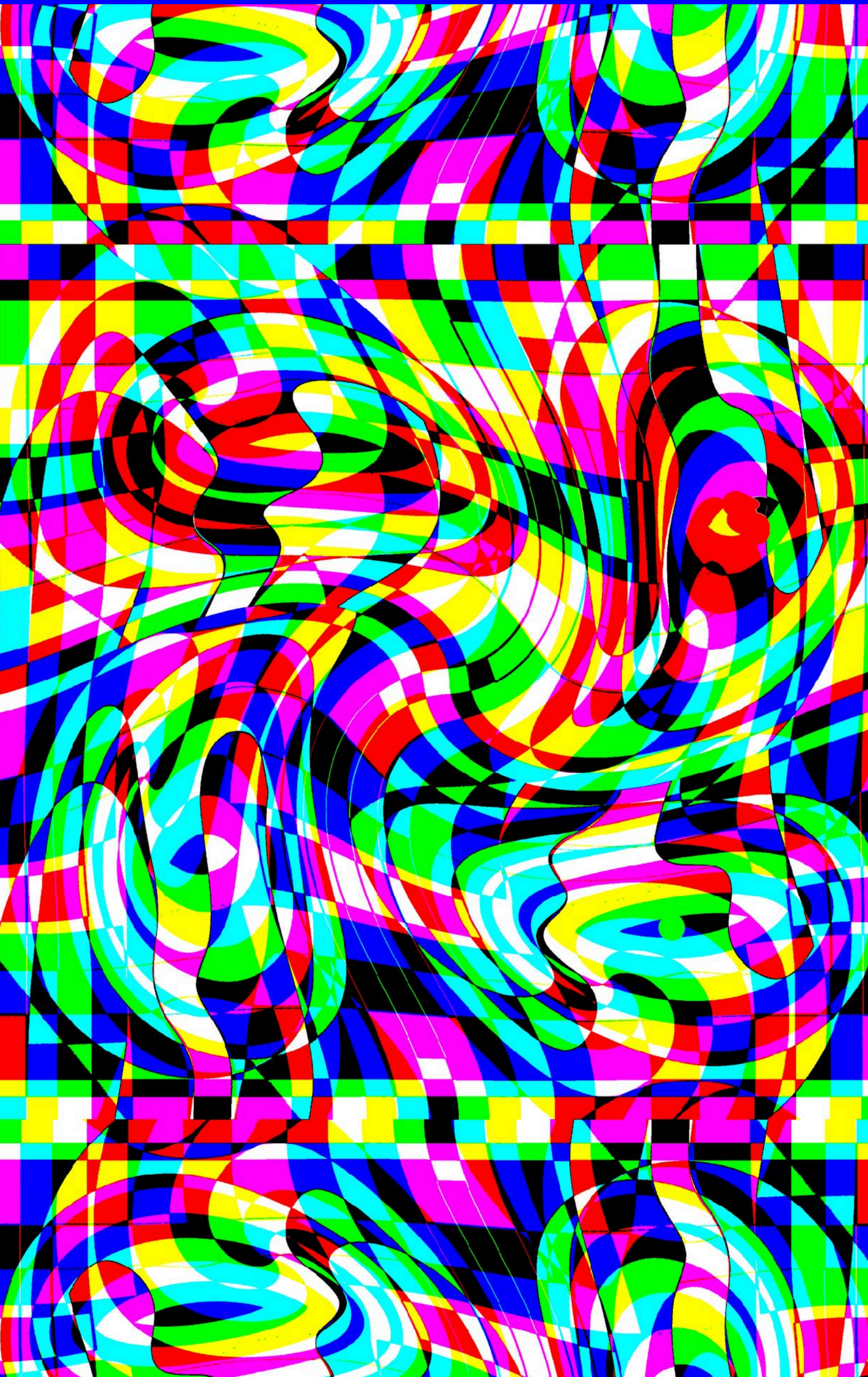


miniMAG

issue131
elemental





autumn.

Jedidiah Vinzon

with the brown on my skin
you'd think i'm caffeinated
energy-tainted and invigorated.
the yellow on my teeth
betray me. though you think
i've drunk the sun and stained
my lips orange with its yolk
there is only autumn breath
breezing through my tongue.
i have buried the crunch of
the rusted leaves in the recesses
of my molars. for rain i am gifted
the river of my saliva.

the trees exhale at the sky unburdened.
i still wonder what it feels like.
to have the earth tilt for you because
you were warm. to have the water
apologise for its liquidity and sulk
in its icy case. to have the clouds gather
itself into wool and fabric for your blanket.
how precious is the colour green to be hidden
in the browns of rust and whites of snow?

and here i thought the park was a cemetery.
the corpses in the bark are only asleep.
like children after a play date by 8pm.
and i am the mother salvaging the seconds
before they leave again.

quiet

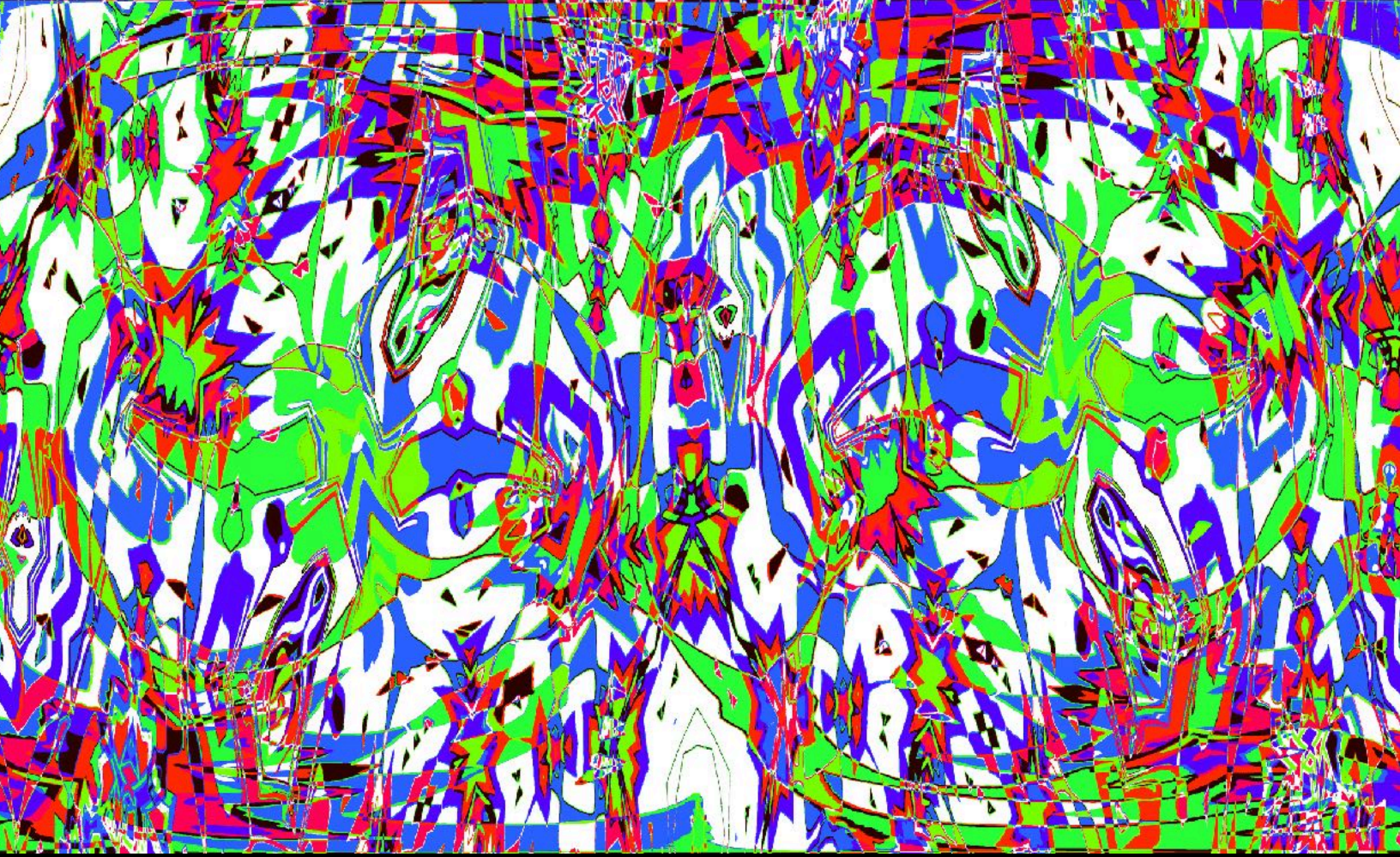
Alex Prestia

both tvs are on
both
two in the living room
one is purple and blue and depicts a sleeping cartoon city
wakanda is blaring on the other
noise
we are talking

the window curtains are down
i am glad
if i looked outside i may see
another life
and have to fill a new room
with 3 tvs this time

besides
the sky is more beautiful here
and cars leave haunting doppler
it's never quite quiet
it's never quite new

the clouds aren't faking it
neither am i as i
proudly precipitate into nothing
should the clouds find solitude
so will i
but they travel in whiny groups
or split and disintegrate



Caught in Retrospect

Chris Litsey

I've spent too much of myself back there in the come and gone, flittering around in the ashtray of memory, where life's burnt bits are flicked off in reckless happenstance. Tossing about the dust and smoldering ruin is more straightforward than keeping one's eyes on the roast glow of the receding ember.

The past is only this collecting debris, altered by the wind until nothing of the truth, in dimensions or character, is real, only a flaky, inconsistent husk. But here, I make a nest in the collapsed existence.

I make snow angels in the smoldering gray. Life ticks away, so why not dabble in nostalgia? If you wait a bit, it's cool to the touch and oh-so-malleable.



Translucent

Preston Muir

Once upon a time, there was a young fire elemental who was never happy with their lot in life. They did not *feel* like a fire elemental, you see. For most elementals, this is unthinkable. Nothing could be more intrinsic to an elemental than their eponymous nature: a fire elemental IS fire, first and foremost. But this one did not agree. They felt that inside, in their mortal soul, they were an elemental of LIGHT.

This is their story.

"You *what?*" the elder fire elemental balked (speaking, of course, in Ignan). "I'm a light elemental now," the young one stated, bold as brass. The elder elemental's flame flared up, blue-hot, with indignation. "Outrageous! Blasphemous! Ridiculous! Look at yourself, foolish cinder! You're fire, through and through!"

"I'm not. I might look like fire, but it's not what I really *am*," the little one insisted. "I'm a light elemental!" They had spent many days

thinking this through, which is a long time for a fire elemental to think about any single thing, but they wanted to be very sure because this was a very strange idea. They didn't fully understand *how* they could really be a different element, but they *felt* it down to their wick, and with fire elementals feeling was rather more important than thinking. Even the paradox of thinking like a fire elemental didn't seem to matter that much. They simply wanted to be what they knew they were. And what could matter more than that basic freedom?

But the elder elemental only laughed, sparks sputtering out wildly. It was a very old elemental, and had spent centuries growing larger and stronger, and more in tune with the nature of fire. It knew with the confidence of this vast, fiery experience that this young one was just being silly. But it had seen such small flames burn through all manner of fads and phases, and so knew it would pass soon enough. It decided to humor them.

"A light elemental? Shall we rename you, then? Something more... luminous?" it asked in a gently mocking tone. "I have already chosen my new name," the young elemental said: "Lucent."

Lucent soon came to realize that they would find no help nor acceptance among the fire elementals. So they sought out a sage of the salamanders, who were fierce but also deep in their knowledge of the way of things. An ancient salamander hermit, kinder than most of his noble kin, was said to live in the caldera of Mount Blezikeer, a terribly old volcano which was, these days, little more than a crater.

So Lucent set out, leaving their community behind, to climb the long way up and then down into the caldera. There among the bubbling lava pools, a withered salamander lay curled in deep meditation. Lucent tried to wait patiently for him to awaken, but finally gave up and prodded the sleeping hermit.

"What! What is it?" grumbled the salamander in Ignan. "My name is Lucent," the young elemental introduced themselves politely, "and I wish to ask your advice, o great sage."

"Lucent? Odd name for a fire elemental..." the salamander mused, scratching at some coalfleas between his tail scales. "That's just it," Lucent explained, their tone weary but practiced. "I'm *not* a fire elemental. I'm really a light elemental, and I need to know how to... be

one." They trailed off, realizing this sounded a bit silly out loud. How could they be a light elemental already, yet still need to *become* a light elemental? The contradiction was a constant source of inner turmoil for them.

But the sage didn't laugh or mock. He only considered this with a serious expression, thinking in silence for so long that Lucent felt about to explode—probably as long as a whole minute!

At last, the salamander sage spoke. "There are many things in this world that seem, at first, to contradict themselves," he began, as though somehow seeing straight to the molten core of Lucent's thoughts. "Our world is a Plane of Fire, in which all things burn eternally... yet, they are not consumed. Our world is infinite in scale, yet bounded by other Planes." Lucent nodded slowly. These facts were all common knowledge, but somehow, putting them together like this, they *did* seem at odds with each other...

"The clever can learn many things. But wisdom means understanding *subtlety*—accepting the world as it is, contradictions and all. Some things are so vast that we can grasp only a small part of them, or understand them only as symbols of their true nature. Accepting our limitations, and working within them as best we can, that is wisdom. Only a fool sees the smoke and thinks he knows the fire." The old sage smiled, and Lucent laughed, feeling at ease. They didn't fully understand what the salamander meant, but perhaps that *was* what he meant.

"So what should I do, great sage?" Lucent asked, and this time it sounded as though they really *meant* the respect implied by that title. The salamander's expression softened. "You *are* a fire elemental, young one—but also, you are not. Were you of the Material Plane, I might suspect that your soul is in the wrong body, but alas, that is not how we work. Your soul *is* your body, your body is your soul. Your body is flame, and cannot be light."

Lucent's burning died down to a pale yellow in dismay. It was one thing to be told this by others of their kind, but the sage was so wise... if he said it, mustn't it be true?

Before Lucent could interrupt, the salamander raised a clawed hand to stay their words. "*However*. Does not the flame shed light? Look around you: are we not bathed in light at every hour, by the tireless burning of our entire world? Your body is flame, but light also comes forth from you; thus, your body must also have light to give. Have you

ever seen a visitor come from another Plane?" Lucent marvelled at these ideas, and nodded. They'd seen such explorers at least once, and heard stories from the older elementals of when travelers came here through portals and bridges, or from the boundaries with the other Planes.

"When visitors come, the unwary and unprepared among them burn as we do... but unlike us, they are consumed. Their dull and darkling bodies burn *away*, turn to smoke and ash... and light. They were not these things, yet they became them; thus, they must have already contained the potential for those things. Though it was hidden, they must have had light to give."

"I need to make more light! Brighter light!" Lucent exclaimed, their mind leaping ahead. "Enough that I *become* light! ...*can* I become light?" They faltered. Hadn't the sage said they couldn't?

But the salamander had no clear answer to this. He only smiled, and patted Lucent on the head. "You can do whatever you like, if you learn to accept contradiction, Lucent. The mind has limits, but the cosmos has none."

And so Lucent set forth on a journey to grow brighter. They traveled to the great cities of the salamanders and the efreet, taking work to earn their first money, with which to buy stonebooks and flamescrolls. They visited vast libraries and apprenticed to learned wizards. They studied the mysteries of chemistry and alchemy, of particles and nature. They learned what substances might be burned to make the light they shed brighter. They saved their coins to purchase rare and exotic imported goods from interplanar merchants: straw, cotton, oil, to devour and burn—for just a few moments—with a brightness of light that felt so much more *correct*.

As the years turned to decades, Lucent grew older and larger, stronger and wiser. They became a wizard in their own right, a mighty evoker who could call upon spells of light to study its properties. They spurned illusion magic, for though that path might be easier, it would also be false. They wanted not to *seem* like light, but to *be* light, to be what they had long known they already were. They came to understand the sage's strange words more deeply, to accept the paradox of their own existence—even to accept that acceptance was not enough, and that they must strive ever to be more perfect. To be more luminous.

Wealthy and powerful, the elder Lucent imported more and more extraordinary materials to consume. Substances made by the most brilliant master alchemists, commanding staggering prices, even their names only known to great scholars: magnesium, zirconium, potassium, butane, nitromethane. Eating these, they could burn so bright that others could not even look upon them... yet it was not enough. Tens of thousands of firegold pieces for only seconds of brightness would not do. Lucent turned their powerful mind towards a more permanent solution.

After centuries more of study, the primal elemental and epic wizard Lucent slowly learned the mighty and secret methods of planar artifice: the ways to build a demiplane of their own. Bit by bit, they forged a pocket of reality in which the laws of motion and energy obeyed their own desires. It would be a place where elemental fire feeds on *light itself*, growing ever stronger and brighter, producing more and more brightness in a positive feedback loop until there was nothing but pure, burning light.

After millennia of struggle, the work was finally done. The demiplane was tiny by planar standards, only just big enough to contain Lucent's colossal furnace body. Shedding the many accoutrements of their art and trade, they opened the planar gate and stepped naked through into their new world, ready to be reborn.

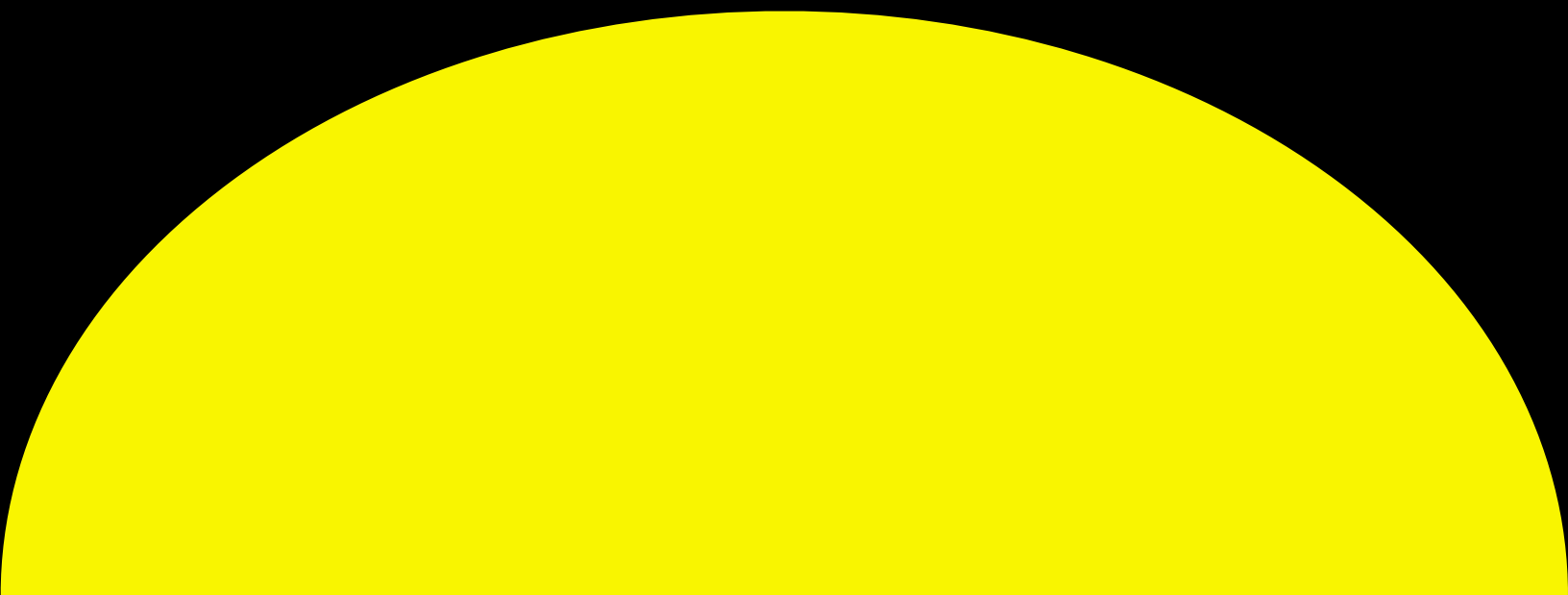
Lucent felt themselves burn hotter and brighter than ever before. It was working... no, here it simply *was*. Their fiery flesh burned so intensely that its light filled the demiplane, then overflowed it. The borders of the tiny world strained and broke under the force of so much energy, and Lucent blossomed through the planar boundaries as the glorious beacon of light that they had always known they could be... were... are.

They truly, fully understood, now, what the sage had meant all those millennia ago: they could not change the minds of their kindred, for common minds have limits. A limited mind would always be bound in the shackles of its imposed framework of reality. But a wise mind would cast off the shackles and see beyond, to the infinite possibility and strangeness of the cosmos.

One day, five billion years later, a peasant woman yawned and stretched in her bed, listening to the shouts and patter of her children leaping up to enjoy their Sunday morning.

She arose and walked to the window, opening her shutters to let in the bright, warm sunlight. She took a deep breath, smelling the sunwarmed earth, feeling the breeze over the fields of summer wheat. Her daughter, already running through the tall grass on bare feet, stopped to smile up at the window. "Momma! Isn't the sun lovely today?"

The woman shaded her eyes from the wonderful brightness of it, smiled, and nodded in agreement. "Just glorious."





The suicidal vampiress

Arani Acharjee

A life sized stone wall between you and me.
but I watch wisteria locks spilling through these chipped rocks to this
barren land
and I imagine, love must be the oldest shade of lavender.
I smell the wind blowing from your porch through the black sea —
carrying the same dying wish, drawing its last breath at my doorstep
and I imagine, love must be the deepest shade of gray.
I howl with the wolves in harmony, hoping for the moon to sing a lullaby
my age
the morning has sun rays shimmer on the best parts of your face;
and I imagine, love must be the boldest shade of gold.
I might be on top of the food chain, but this yearning to put my heart
at stake,
to give it to you in a cold casket, so you can pull a string & beat out of it —
is when I imagine, love must be a desperate red.
I stand guard to this behemoth fortress, soaking in petrichor decay
the sky owes me a summer, but then you brought fireflies into my hollow
caves
and I imagine, love must be cerulean in your embrace.
all my youth, drowning in shades of blue in atlantis.
all my ruth, growing wildowers in crevices of concrete.
all my years borrowed, sprinkling dust under the sun.
all my life, I imagined a rainbow death.
the suicidal vampiress..... they said.
but now I have summer in my bones, now I have the ocean's breath.
the wall between you and me, long fallen
I'm drenched in lavender, gold and gray
I left my cerulean heart at your crimson shrine
and now I'm home. and now I'm sleeping just fine.

homelands

M.S. Blues

what lies behind
the speaking oceans?

what resides between
the words trees have spoken?

what have the hums
of my ancestors awoken?

*(homelands
homelands
homelands)*

—

I. THE LAND OF MEXICO

where my people
hustle in the streets
from traveler's dusk to the angel's night,
as a valiant effort to give their families
a better life.

"intentaron enterrarnos. no sabían que éramos semillas." – an old mexican proverb.

II. THE ISLAND OF POLYNESIA (HAWAII)

where my people
relinquish their necessities
in order to provide a vacation to white people
who post the sunkissed tans they get
from the forgiving lips of mother earth.

ho'omau – endure and persevere with diligence.

III. INDIAN COUNTRY

where my people
are still fighting to be humanized
while trying to heal from a lurking *anaye*
that has haunted generation after generation.

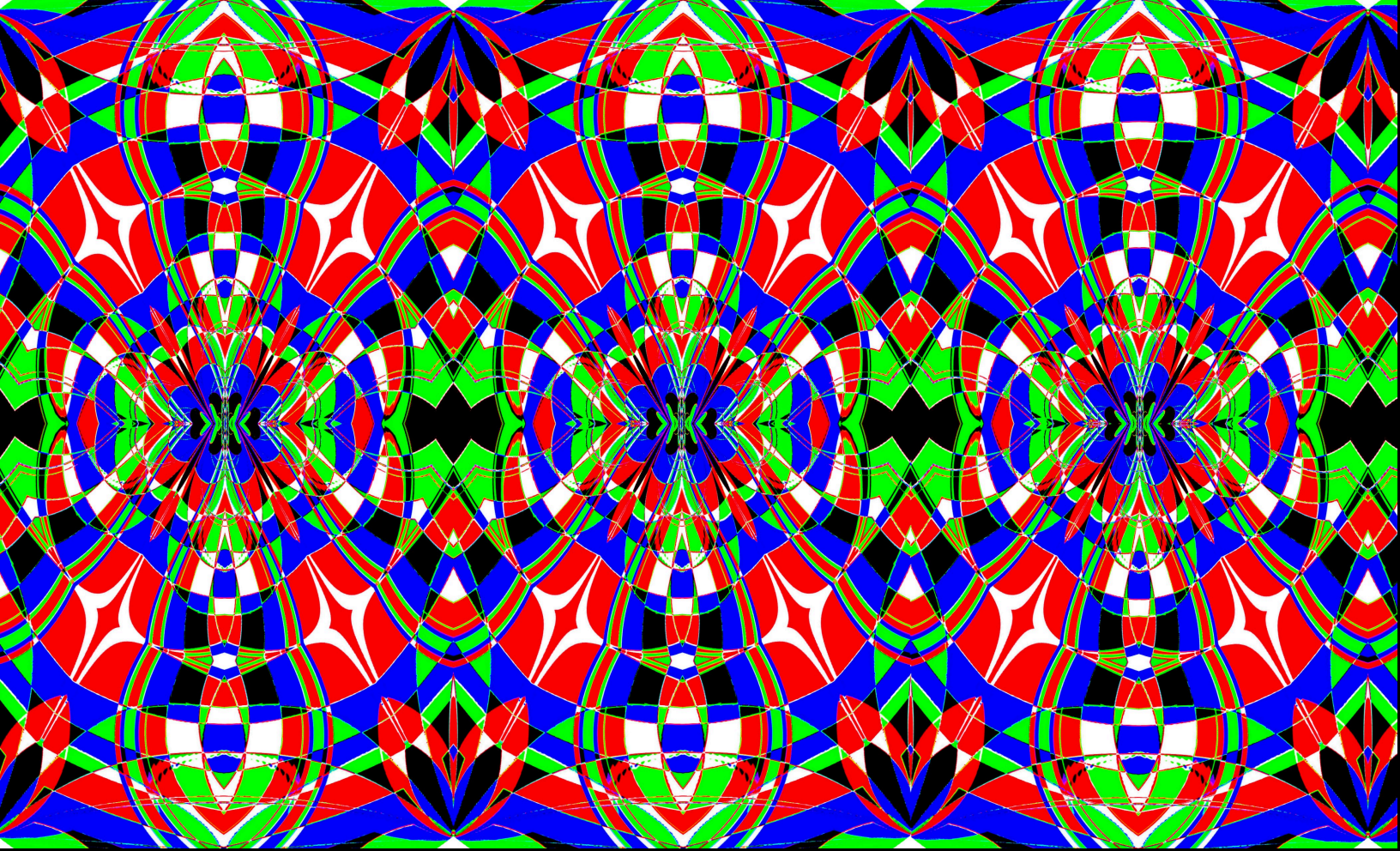
“the secret of our success is that we never, never give up.” – wilman mankiller

—

the homelands,
sacred heartbeats
of millions—
flatlines on mother earth
(by force or choice—there's no difference)

—

it is now my job
to honor all three, as long as i live.



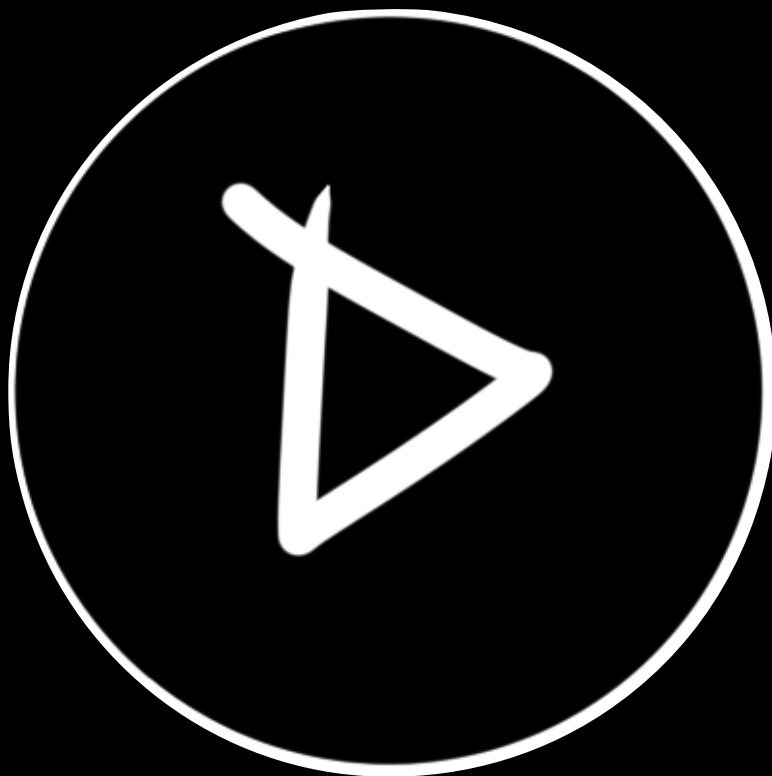
Sea-Fairing

Jimmy Murphy

Tonight, in a storm off the coast of Sicily
Millionaires have, as always, made history:
The first bodies this year in the deepest blues
To warrant a week's worth of headline news.
Editors and algorithms choose what to share
But the selfish sea doesn't know or care;
The broken keel of a super yacht
Or a refugee's hand on a fraying knot.

No pity decides the news for the weak
Just the language you speak, the companies you keep.
Your path to the surface when the tension is breached
In the arms of a dive team or washed up on a beach.
24-hour cycles and column inches
Are devoted to detailing luxury binges,
So we can't fathom why some mothers risk it all
But know intricately the dimensions of the big yacht's hull.

The numbers we're fed as they call off the search,
Balance thousands of dead against one man's net worth.
Screentime and clickthrough are games moguls play
They decide we don't care, at least not in the same way.
We measure out tragedies in clicks and views.
We walk miles without ever swapping our shoes.
But equations of grief deserve faces and names,
Because every life equals one, and each death just the same.



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Page 02: abreathtakenfromthewhirlwind
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“autumn.” by Jedidiah Vinzon
Insta: @jayv.poetry

“Caught in Retrospect” by Chris Litsey
Twitter: @LitseyChristian
Insta: @christianlitsey

“Translucent” by Preston Muir
Twitter: @TerolusFantasy

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Insta: @circadeacademia
Website: <https://bit.ly/araniacharjee>

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