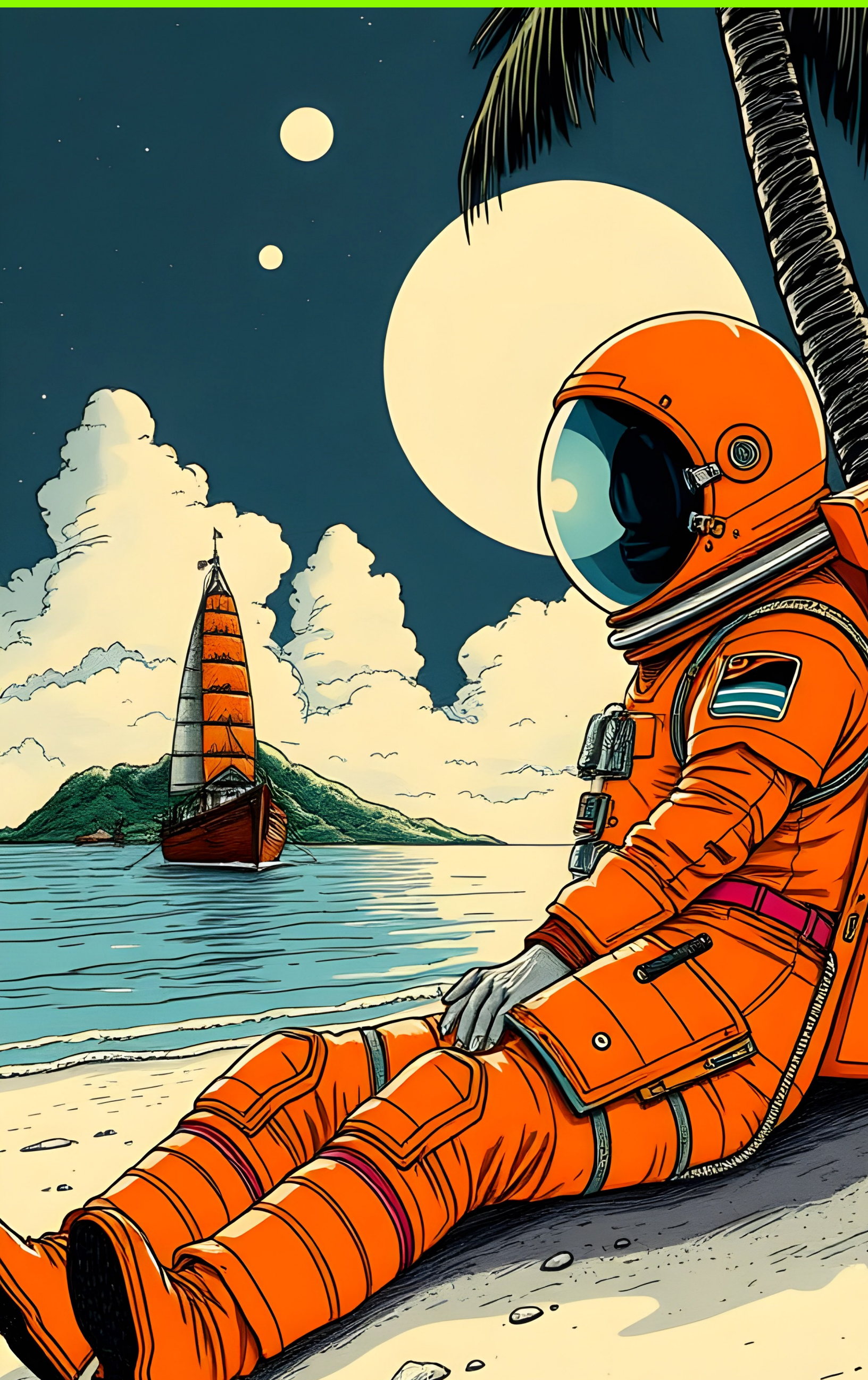


# miniMAG

issue 135  
passport bro press





## The Circle

Kushal Poddar

The cold beer you left on the counter,  
bereft of a coaster to host it, has  
made a circle. Will it fade away  
when you go, when you leave?

In the shower some trace red  
functions as the evidence of a fall,  
of a hit, and your head, can it be  
repaired the way of kintsugi?

When you leave the doors stay.  
It matters little if they are open or shut.

# Mr Saturday Night

Ben Macnair

*(Carlos is sat at the airport, in an empty waiting room. There are calls for passengers, and announcements of where the next plane is leaving from. He is listlessly reading a paperback, and sighs heavily)*

They called me Mr Saturday Night, down in the pub where I worked. Mr Saturday Night, because I play what they want to sing, all the drunks out to pull, to find someone to make life more meaningful, play something that they know, that they can shout along to. It is not much, really, a handful of major chords, and somebody always requesting an Abba song, or Angels by Robbie Williams, something to sing a long to. Or the Macarena, something they can dance to, feel the Joie De Vivre, have a good time, whilst drowning out my superior talents.

It is not much, but at least I am making my living as a musician, like Mama and Papa wanted me to. They wanted to see me play at the Royal Albert Hall, not at the Albert and Victoria pub, but as they say, beggars can't be choosers, and as I don't fit into what they want in entertainment, I had to do this. Then there was that time I played in a wedding band, playing a borrowed Casio, and playing what they wanted to hear. Imagine the shame in playing 'Lady in Red' or the hits of Shania Twain. I can tell you now, that did not impress me much.

We packed it in though, when we got the blame for a marriage going wrong. It was not our fault that that couple had chosen 'I still haven't found what I am looking for' by U2, and the groom danced with the wrong sister.

I had hoped it would have led to other things, bigger things, maybe playing piano or keyboards for one of the big West End Shows, but they always employ the same people, or they use digital technology and do away with the musicians. Why employ an extra pianist, when you just need a monkey to press a button? And besides which, all of those places only payed peanuts, so all they got was monkeys.



Mama and Papa will be so disappointed. I really don't know what to tell them. They will talk about the sacrifices that they made for my education, how they went without heating at home for a winter to pay for my piano, or how they drove around in cheap cars whilst I was at the Conservatoire, or how they could have an extra few hours in bed when I was going in for all of those competitions in Barcelona, or some other place.

They never mention the sacrifices that I made. They did not even ask if it was what I really wanted to do. Mama would say 'Carlos, practice those scales, make us proud of you. I want to tell the neighbours, that's my boy, when I play your new album, or they put you on the radio, or on the television, or when that nice Mr Bragg from the BBC talks to you about what your Mama and Papa did for you'. They never talked about what I wanted, how I wanted to fit in with the kids. Or how I wanted to be ecologically sound to impress the girls. It is difficult to say that you believe in the planet when you have parts of a dead elephant under your fingers.

When the other kids were getting their rocks off, I was getting Rachmaninov. When I was risking Sibelius, they were risking Syphilis.

I never fitted in, when they were listening to pop music, or talking about their favourite girl in Girls Aloud, I was listening to the chord changes, or the bass, listening to how the drums changed and the tempo, or the piano part. Mama and Papa will be disappointed that I never made it. I told them I was coming home. They think it is only for a break. Only I know it is permanent.

My Visa runs out in three days, and I am down to the last of my savings. London is not a friendly place when all you have to offer is an advanced harmonic knowledge, and don't know enough about London to learn the knowledge.

*(Pause. He thumbs through the paperback for a while. There are further calls for people, and the next flights to board. He looks up again)*

Of course, I am quite sad about it all. Nobody wants to go home with their tail between their legs, and say that all of their hopes have come to nothing. I don't want to do that, but with the end of this dream, I have to find a new one. One to call my own, and no-one else's. Of course Mama will say: 'Carlos, why did you give up? Could you have not tried a bit harder? They will say 'Look at your sister, Isabella, she made the dancing work for her'. She is not at the Bolshoi, she is a bolshie kissagram.

You can always tell if people have failed somewhere. Either they don't want to talk about it, or else all they do is talk about it.

I noticed that at the Conservatoire. I knew within a week that I still needed to work really hard. I had taken it for granted that I was the best at home, and therefore would be the best anywhere. Spain is not the world, and the world is not Spain.

You and your comedies. All of these people saying 'He's from Barcelona' and all of that. I never laughed at Fawlty Towers, and as for Monty Python, it is just blokes in dresses talking about dead Parrots, sheep in trees, men with three buttocks and lumberjacks. I never laughed once at it, but then most of your politicians seem to be out of work clowns.

Maybe it is for the best that I am moving home. I can speak in my own language, try and get some work where my talent is actually recognised, where all of the work I have put in in the past actually pays off. Mama and Papa do not really need to know I have failed. I can just tell them that I have come home for something different, a change.

They will like that. I have already emailed places at home to see if they have any work going for a Spanish pianist who knows the difference between Chopin and Show tunes, who can actually play with other people. Perhaps I will take up guitar and learn Flamenco.

If I had done that while I was here, perhaps I could have afforded to pay the rent, joined a flamenco group, gone on tour, bought some of that Spanish sun to Eastbourne, or Hackney, Illfracombe, Rhyll, maybe Scunthorpe. I was told you can make a few anagrams out of Scunthorpe, but I don't know what they would be.

There is meant to be sun in Spain, but I am not so sure. It has been months since I have seen the sun as much as I did in my youth. Maybe I am home-sick, and when I have been at home for a while I will be longing to leave.

I don't know, but I know it is not a permanent move. I think I have to write some of my own music, or relearn the classics again. Relearn Bach, or someone challenging. I will not give up. There is nothing worse than what-ifs and maybes.

*(Once again, he pauses. He thumbs through the paperback for a while longer. There are further calls for people, and the next flights to board. He looks up again)*

I am not even sure how many of my friends are still at home. I know a lot of them are international. It says so on their Facebook pages, talking about their successful careers and marriages and children. I have nothing like that to show. My marriage is to my music, my mistress is very strict and demanding and wants hours of my life, and only gives me pain in my hands, ringing in my ears, and indifferent audiences.

There have been times when I have pulled in the pub, but then the drink wears off, and she has regrets, and I may have a new itch in a strange place. It is not like I regret my time in London. I have enjoyed most moments of it, but the weather could have been sunnier, the trains less crowded, the food more to my liking, but as you always say, Beggars can't be choosers. I expected to hear people talking like they did in the Sweeney or in Mary Poppins, and never once did I see anyone from the documentaries Eastenders or The Bill, but I tried to keep myself out of trouble the best that I could.

I will miss London, with its hustle and bustle, the fact that it is busy and people always seem on the go. At home, they have a Siesta, and everything stops for an hour. That took some getting used to here, and it will take some adjustment when I get home as well.

*(Pause. He listens to the call out for his plane. It does not come).*

I always hoped my last few hours in London would be more than this. I expected tears at the pub, or my flatmate to be sad, but I know that the pub is planning to get a Karaoke machine, so they will get rid of the piano. It is probably for the best, there is some much damage to it, from the smoking, the frame is buckled from all of the drink that used to go in it, and it took more work to get in tune than Cheryl Cole, but it felt like it was a good instrument, in its day.

That is the thing about life, everything has its day, the moments that build up to it, and the moments that run from it. I hope that I have not had my day yet, but only time, chance and luck will tell. Well, that will be me. I hope there are more people on the plane than just me. I hope that it is a better film they show, than on my way here. It was Sister Act 37. No, you did not think it had been made either? You would have thought that after 36 attempts, one of them might have been funny.

*(He picks up the book, puts it in his rucksack, and heads to the plane)*

Oh well, here goes nothing. Maybe this time next year, we'll all be millionaires.



## The Breakers

Damon Hubbs

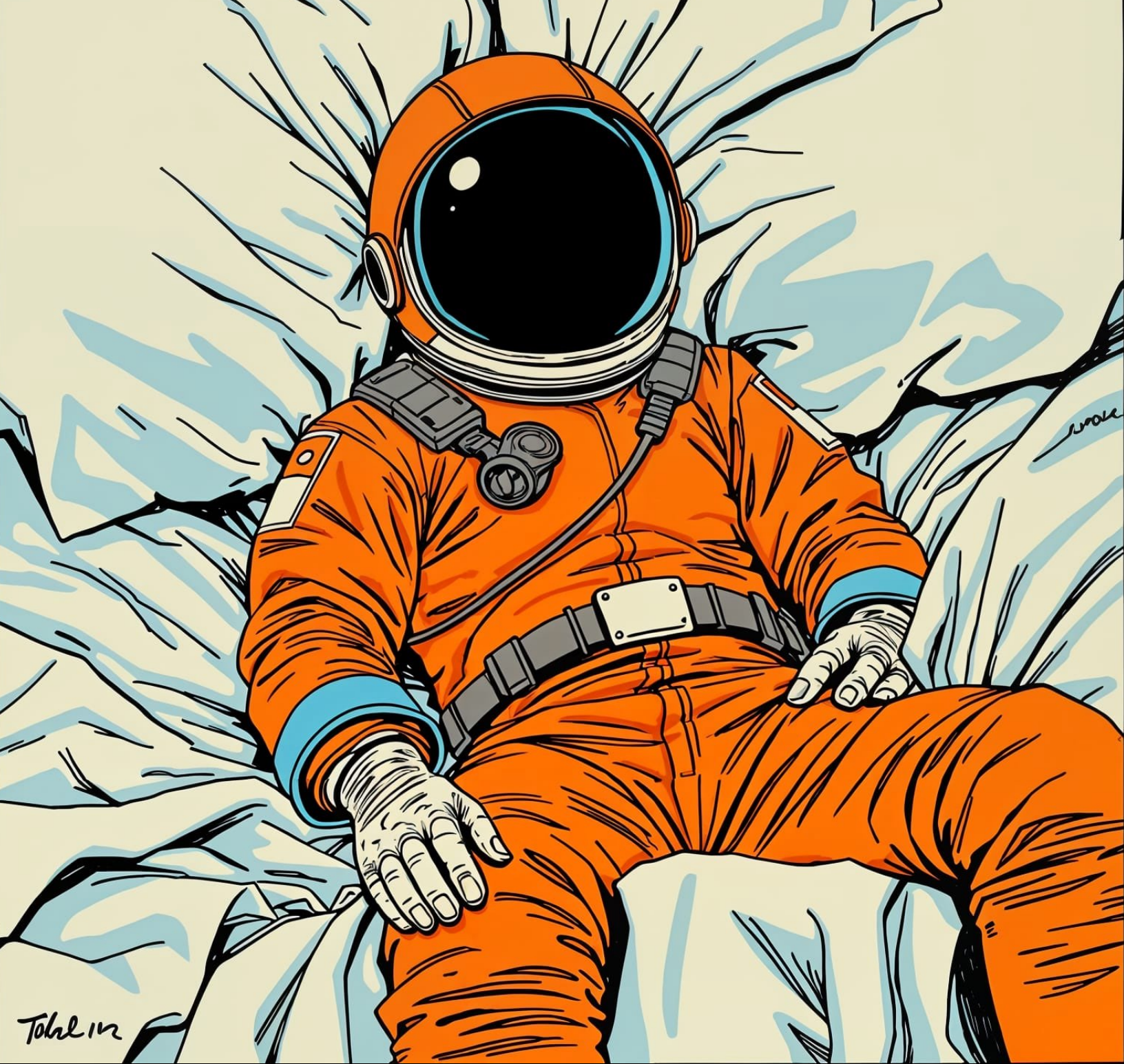
The bartender is telling a story  
about a party he worked  
at The Breakers  
that served rattlesnakes  
in champagne flutes.

He says the Titanic's menu  
went up for auction  
111 years after the ship sank  
and includes dishes  
like tornadoes  
of beef, mallard duck  
and Victoria pudding.

Once, you  
ironed my underwear  
into tiny triangles  
and said the word *Wallonia*  
made your clitoris  
tickle. That was before  
you threw the plates  
and I punched  
a hole in the bathroom wall.

The bartender  
has a sorrowful mouth  
and an eyepatch.  
He tells people  
it was a gardening accident  
or a shark attack  
and that flies land  
on limes with confessional  
intensity. I agree  
and the list  
goes on and  
on.

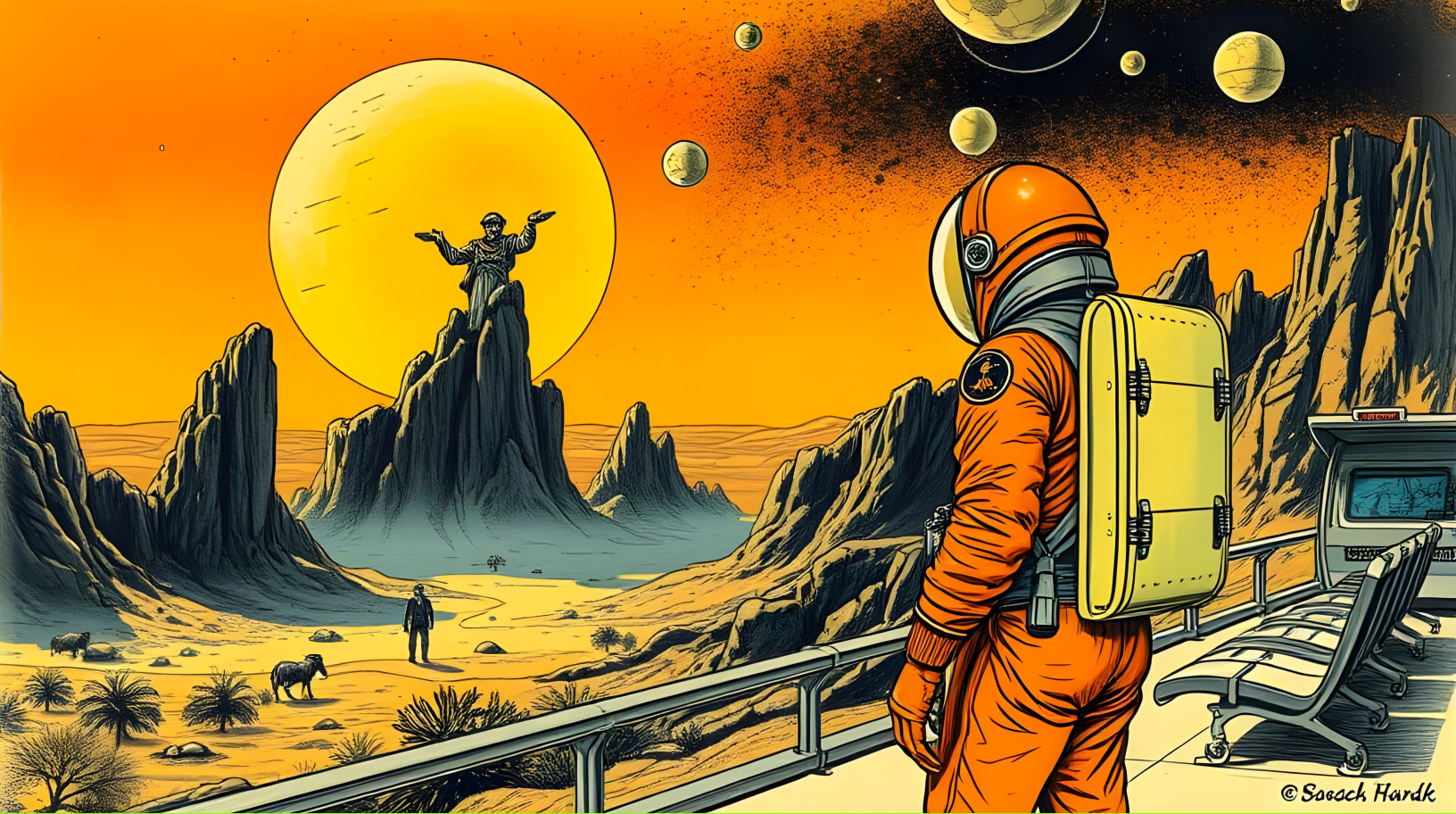




## A Desperate Attempt to be Poetic

Richard LeDue

Doing another bad Bukowski impression  
just to end up hungover,  
wondering where  
the whisky coloured courage went,  
and why the poems mean less and less  
like counterfeit money making love to inflation,  
only to find crumb sized muses  
among couch cushion coins,  
when I really wasn't looking,  
so in a desperate attempt to be poetic,  
I personify some dead payphones,  
make a pun about them losing their true calling,  
and shape my stanzas with the care  
of someone who knows they have nothing  
to say.



# The Messiah

Iman M'Fah-Traoré

He walked past my window as I was hunched over the blue railing, exhaling far, so the smoke wouldn't penetrate my table, my books, my linens.

*I love your hair*, he said, pointing at it. My afro.

Everyone loves my hair, I thought before his accent hit me—like a delayed sound, an echo.

I like yours too, I tell him. His was white and fluid and long. A beard that matched. Shorter.

Where are you from, I ask back.

*England.*

Figures. I'm going there tomorrow.

He paused, discerning me.

*I thought this was the place*, he mumbled in form but spoke in volume.

Chuckle. A drag. A far exhale.

*People need to know what's coming*, he seemed concerned. I inquired in eyebrows and lip tugs.

*The apocalypse is coming.*

*Soon the Portuguese people will be asked to go to war. They will be asked to fight for Ukraine. I thought this was the place but people won't listen to me here. I think I need to go to America.*

I tell him about this college teaching courses about the downfall of the world. A different topic with a different prophet every week.

He gave me a name. I figured it was the same.

*All of Europe is going to be asked to go to war. When the soldiers die, young men will be drafted.*

I ask about France. He nodded.

*People have no idea.*

*You may not believe me but I'm the Messiah,* he lifted his arms and let them fall, looking from side to side.

*This is not the place,* he spoke like tapping a finger on a desk.

He shook his head and went on his way.

I put out my cigarette and rushed to the bathroom.

*Amour, you won't believe what just happened to me.*

She was in the shower. I sat on the toilet.

*Some English guy with long white hair on his head and chin told me the apocalypse was coming, he told me he was the messiah.*

It's not real, she assures me.

But what if it is, I wondered, aware of the gooey gullibility of my mind and hers and his.

*He gave me the name of his guru.*

It's not real, she assures me.

But what if it is, I wondered, what if he isn't the messiah, what if he is war, what if he is famine, pestilence?

What if he is death?





## Down by the Bridge

Michael Lee Johnson

I'm the magic moment on magic mushrooms  
\$10 a gram, amphetamines, heroin for less.  
Homeless, happy, Walmart discarded pillow  
found in a puddle with a reflection,  
down and dirty in the rain—down by the bridge.  
Old street-time lover, I found the old bone man we share.  
I'm in my butt-stink underwear, bra torn apart,  
pants worn out, and holes in all the wrong places.  
In the Chicago River, free washing machine.  
Flipped out on Lucifer's nighttime journey,  
Night Train Express, bum wine, smooth  
as sandpaper, 17.5 % alcohol by volume \$5.56—  
my boozier, hobo specialty wrapped in a brown bag.  
Straight down the hatch, negative memories expire.  
Daytime job, panhandling, shoplifting, Family Dollar store.  
Salvation Army as an option. My prayers. I've done both.  
Chicago River sounds, stone, pebble sand,  
and small dead carp float by.  
My cardboard bed box is broken down,  
a mattress of angel fluff,  
magic mushrooms seep into my stupor—  
blocking out clicking of street parking meters.  
I see Jesus passing by on a pontoon boat—  
down by the river, down by my bridge.

## starfield review

Alex Prestia

i didn't buy starfield because i didn't think it would surprise me  
i hope thailand will surprise me  
i hope something will  
that's of course more difficult  
and it's not the world's fault  
it's mine  
i see more  
and feel less  
and i write a poem about it  
write a poem about it  
and text you because i still love you but you wouldn't let me cheat and  
    that's what i really wanted  
not that that's surprising

i guess i hope to pull off someone's pants and see something i've never seen  
    before  
like an alien tentacle  
or a beak  
she'll surprise me  
but that's not really a thing either and you sigh and sort of wait for me  
    much longer than you should because you should move on  
but you don't and that maybe surprises me  
maybe surprises me as much as riding in a tuk-tuk with the wind on my  
    face will surprise me

i'm in love i'm in love i'm in love with  
and then it's a blankspace on a raw-text-file and i'm trying to fill in the  
blank and my slut-techno playlist is playing and maybe i shouldn't fill in  
the blank because once i fill in the blank i'll be bored and having a hole in  
my brain about what starfield—could—have been is much more interesting  
than whatever starfield is

## Watery Revenge Explosion

Terry Trowbridge

Horrible fish guts erupt from the seams of a fish stick factory garbage bag left in the sun by an angry minimum-wage gut mopper because revenge is a dish best served all over the front yard of a middle-managerial enemy who lives on a street populated by pet cats and beautifully splatter-painting heron gulls.





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“The Circle” by Kushal Poddar  
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“Mr Saturday Night” by Ben Macnair  
Twitter: @benmacnair

“The Breakers” by Damon Hubbs  
Twitter: @damon\_hubbs  
Book: [Venus at the Arms Fair](#) (Alien Buddha Press, 2024)

“A Desperate Attempt to be Poetic” by Richard LeDue  
Twitter: @LedueRichard  
Website: <https://mailchi.mp/256525ddc2fd/stuff-poetry>

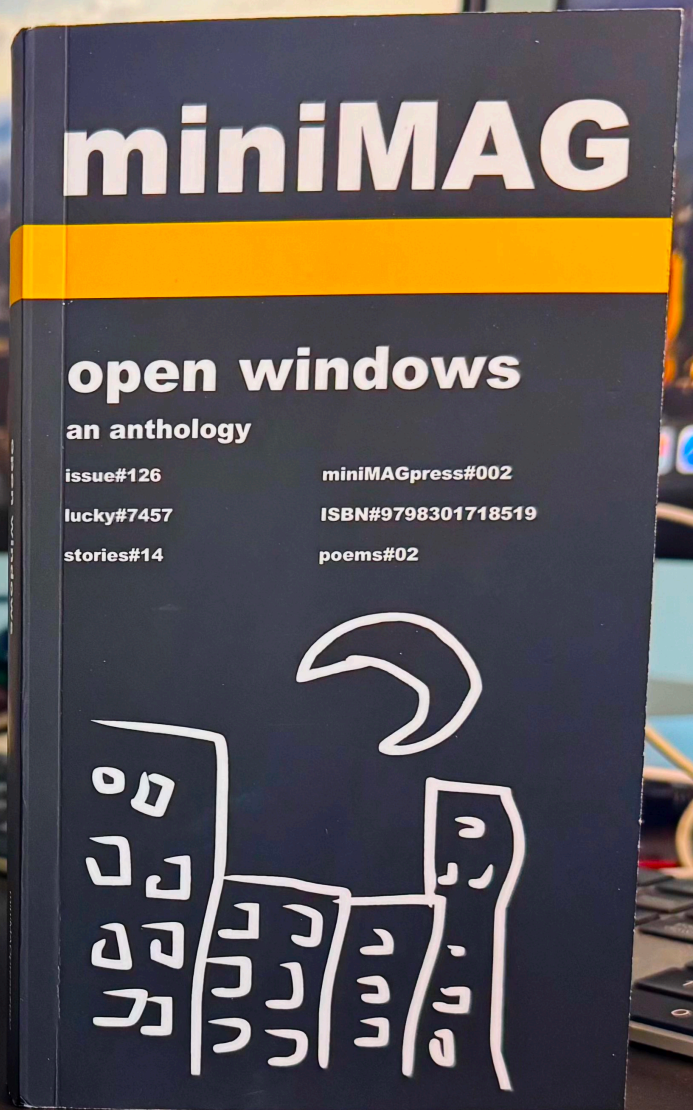
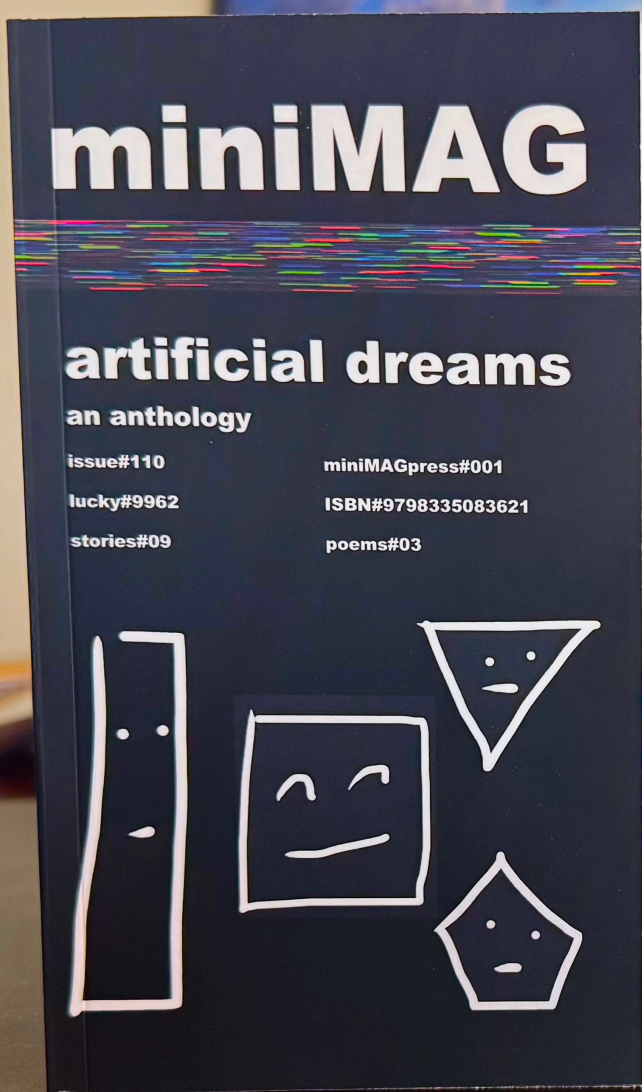
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“Down by the Bridge” and accompanying photo  
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“Watery Revenge Explosion” by Terry Trowbridge  
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