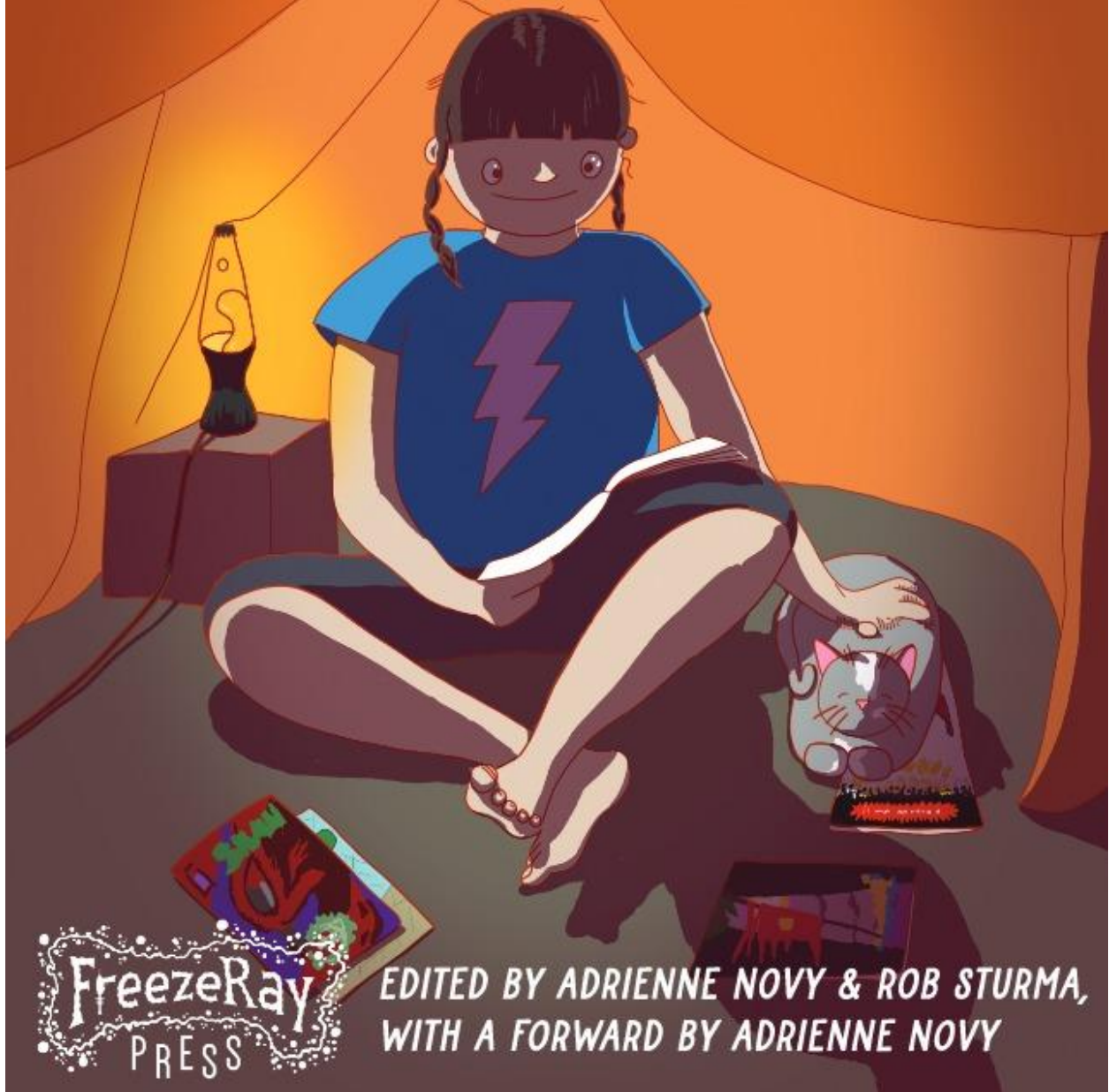


# EXCELSIOR!

A FREEZERAY ANTHOLOGY SET OUT TO SAVE THE WORLD



FreezeRay  
PRESS

EDITED BY ADRIENNE NOVY & ROB STURMA,  
WITH A FORWARD BY ADRIENNE NOVY

***EXCELSIOR!*: A FREEZERAY  
ANTHOLOGY SET OUT TO SAVE  
THE WORLD**

**Edited by ADRIENNE NOVY & ROB STURMA,  
with a forward by ADRIENNE NOVY**

**Cover art by CATHERINE WEISS**

## A FORWARD

The evening I messaged Rob Sturma about an idea for an anthology was the same day a shooting had happened at a synagogue in Philadelphia. I had come home from a long day of work and undergrad classes, feeling awful about the world and the ways it continued to fail me and the people around me that I love. If there's anything I've learned in my years of being a nerd, it's that the whole concept of nerdiness is finding a joy and a world to escape into when the real one outside doesn't want you alive. So I did what my nerdy heart always tells me to do: I went to superheroes to cope and spent that night watching the *Crisis On Earth-X* crossover episodes in the CW Network DC Universe.

The running joke I have with the FreezeRay Staff is proudly being their In-House Felicity Smoak and, because I'm a Jewish nerd on the team who runs FreezeRay's social media, the joke is funny because it's true. But the thing about Felicity that makes me feel brave and powerful is that as a Jewish woman and granddaughter of Holocaust survivors, she doesn't put up with anything from those who do not want her, or the people she loves, alive. Even if she's not on the ground with Oliver and Barry, she (and Caitlin and Cisco. Well, until Caitlin and Cisco get powers but that's a whole other story) are fighting, providing bursts of joy, and being part of the team in the ways that they know how.

Making this anthology felt like fighting in one of the few ways I know how. The real world felt awful, continued to be more awful, and I wanted to take my small position in the literary universe and use it to put a spark of good out there. And here is that little spark: an anthology elevating the voices of marginalized writers with their own nerdy joys. The question of "*What can I do to help?*" became "*Who can I lift up?*" and "*What causes are out there doing the lifting that need financial support?*"

That's when my questions and research led me to The Okra Project: a nonprofit organization providing resources and free healthy, home-cooked meals to Black trans folks experiencing food insecurity. Rob and I landed on The Okra Project as the org we wanted to support back in 2020, and the violence and attacks against trans folks in the United States made our decision to support this cause feel even more urgent today.

Here, at long last, is Excelsior!: A FreezeRay Anthology Set Out To Save The World.

We may not save the world (yet), but we can make folks feel good while also doing good.

It may be just a spark. But sparks can do big things.

This is FreezeRay's In-House Felicity signing off.

Sincerely,  
Adrienne Novy



*In loving memory of Bennett Nieberg & Jeff "Shappy" Seasholtz  
Two of the biggest nerds we've ever met*

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D.J. Rogers

## ODE TO TJ JOHNSON, FIRST BLACK LEADER OF THE POWER RANGERS

In those days they said heroes and dreams didn't live here  
 and there you were, bald and beauty mark  
 handsome grin  
 outlining a jaw built for justice  
 and once I was told  
 to stop talking about that black shit,  
 that we're all red on the inside  
 and there you were,  
 red on the outside,  
 and once a bald and beauty marked hero  
 was gunned down by no one worth finding  
 in a world that sees no changes  
 and there you were,  
 alive and changing the world,  
 ready to shift into turbo and black boy joy,  
 Ode to the contrary colorblind,  
 ode to the blood,  
 ode to the latch key  
 that opens doors I didn't know were sealed,  
 ode to going fast,  
 ode to feeling alive,  
 ode to rockets,  
 ode to the impossible.  
 I watched a man die  
 for nothing.  
 I've seen enough death to know  
 that often, the villain wins  
 even when the hero makes no mistakes  
 but holding fast to their human.  
 Ode to humanity,  
 ode to living as an act of rebellion,  
 ode to rebel,  
 ode to rebel against space pirates and space princesses and divas and white women  
 ode to spaceships  
 ode to *when I grow up I wanna be a racecar driver,*  
 ode to *when I grow up I wanna be an astronaut,*

Ode to *when I grow up I wanna be a power ranger,*  
Ode to *when I grow up*

Rachel Tanner**UPON LEARNING OF MY BREAKUP, DEATHCRY TAKES ME TO GET MY NAILS DONE**

Sharra assures me I'll be okay, says  
that there are plenty of honorary  
members of the Avengers out there  
just waiting to fall in love with me.

She tells me of her biggest heartache,  
of the Vision, who left her wrecked,  
yearning for some sort of  
peace of mind that only  
comes from feeling unbroken.

I am mildly jealous of her talons and how  
good they look in a fresh coat of nail polish.  
They shine so brightly that I bet  
you could see them from space  
(or at least from Ohio).

She laughs when I mention this, tells me  
that her last girlfriend hated her talons.  
That talons and relationships don't mix  
and I should be thankful  
for my short, human fingernails.

She takes out her phone, demonstrates  
how difficult it is to function  
with claws that grow back  
instantly after being trimmed.  
She brings up Tinder, shows me  
how swiping is nearly  
impossible, rendering love  
even further from her reality.  
Rendering her happy future  
further away than she'd prefer.

I ask her why she's single and she says  
that her rages and darkneses  
scare lovers off. That she gets  
reckless. Feral. Her fangs  
show when she perceives  
even an ounce of abandonment.  
She feels in extremes and finalities.  
There is no middle ground for her.

I tell her I understand.  
That I recently lost a friend because I became  
the shadow of myself. That  
sometimes I push when I should pull.

She takes my hand, tells me  
that her former nursemaid K'rin  
always told her the secret  
to staying calm is to remember that we're just  
minor characters in this story.  
We don't amount to much.  
We are small dots on a huge map  
and our actions barely make  
a difference.

She laughs again, tells me she's  
*sort of* kidding. Tells me where  
there was once love, there  
will always be love. That  
It is impossible to forget  
someone who loves  
as hard as we do. That  
someday we will both find  
homes within our hearts  
and the aching will finally stop.

She winks at me, her purple  
skin glowing under the  
fluorescent lights. She tells  
me to feel my feelings. Tells

me that the only way out  
of all this hurt is through.

She sighs knowingly,  
and pulls me close,  
says I remind her of Luna.

We'll get through this together.  
We always do.

J.C. Reilly

## THE FLASH UNDER COVID-19 QUARANTINE

The Flash is bored.

Now that shelter-in-place orders have taken effect  
not even the bad guys venture out  
to hit empty banks and shuttered jewelry stores.

Wearing both his regular mask, and the fabric one  
Iris sewed, he's made a few runs across the city  
just to check if anything nefarious occurs  
(and if he's honest, he wishes it would).  
He's stopped by Savitar's and Weather Wizard's hideouts  
to see if they wanted to do battle. But both said  
it's hard to maintain social distance in a melee,  
and really, he should go back home and be safe.

So he finds himself trying to fill the hours  
by reading without super speed, and singing  
"Happy Birthday" twice when he washes his hands now  
(an eternity to him). He disinfects the kitchen counters  
multiple times a day, and wipes down all the foods  
delivered from Instacart. Every day for three months.  
He's not sure how much more he can take.

What good is a stay-at-home superhero?  
Maybe it's time to give Eobard a call.  
That guy's always down for a fight.

Julia Gaskill**ALL HAIL FELICITY SMOAK.**

Stand back, boys, and let an artist show you how it's done.

You think that an arrow's bite and flung fists  
are how you bring down a monsoon?  
Oh please.

I can make cities crumble.  
Demolish reputations, cause grown men to weep  
with a touch of my index finger.  
My papillary ridges fly faster  
than motorcycle wheels or parkour skills ever could.

Like magic, I'll cause entire armies to fly the white flag.  
I lay to waste mobsters, deflate supernatural abilities,  
side stepping catastrophe in my sleep  
with the mere slight twitch of my frontal lobe.  
Do you see? My Hippocampus isn't even breaking a sweat.  
You'll have to do better than that.

You men bleed from every pore because you think  
it is the only true way to show devotion to justice.  
Don't make me laugh.

I may look immobile,  
glued to the same place every episodic day,  
but what you fail to acknowledge is that this is my throne.  
Do you think it's easy to look this good  
while obliterating yet another idiot with a bomb?

Bow down, children.  
The queen's got her work cut out for her again.

Watch as  
I adjust my frames.

I paint my lips the color of war.  
I clack my fingers on keys; my deadliest ammo.

Watch as  
I smile.

Watch as  
I destroy.



Maria Zoccola

## GIRLHOOD, POISON IVY

In the summer her mother waged war  
against the Virginia creeper climbing  
the maple trees—took hold of the vines  
with her gloved hands and yanked  
until the little vegetable suckers popped free  
from the treebark and coiled down defeated  
to the mulch, yards and yards of the stuff,  
bright green and evil-looking,  
but she could never get at the roots,  
is the thing, could never dig down deep  
enough, so back it came, year after year,  
striving upwards to meet the waiting shears.  
Her mother put great stock in appearances:  
the creeper leaves with their five sharp points,  
fingers of a hand made for snatching, wrong  
in a bed of gentle things. Owning no garden  
book, she was sure it was the other one, rashes  
and impossible itching, bane of little girls too wild  
for caution, and her Pam had enough hurts  
for one girlhood, scratched up with brambles  
and dirty with rivermud, always falling  
out of trees and cracking her bones  
against the unyielding earth. Her mother  
held her hand when each plaster cast  
was cut away: the soft skin emerging  
like something new-grown and tender,  
begging for the sun.

Michelle Acker

## I THINK GWEN STACY AND MARY JANE WATSON SHOULD KISS

& feel the light leaf-brush of teeth on soft lips & also  
I think the Hulk should lie down  
every once in a while in a backlit pool & let his bulk float

like a balloon unstuck from a tree branch & I think  
Harley Quinn should undo all her ruin  
piece by piece like untangling knots

in satin ribbons still crinkled from where they were  
knotted & that the Flash  
should get a tattoo & watch the rapid tongue

of the gun sink colored ink underneath  
his skin & I think Bruce Wayne should sleep in  
& wake to late slats of light & maybe

read the newspaper too & let his fingertips stain  
with dusty gray & maybe Wolverine  
should slice an onion into fine cubes so the acid

scent sizzles on the dewy glass of his eyes  
& furthermore I think Clark Kent should sit  
on a hay bale & contemplate the little prickles  
stippling the skin of his thighs  
& the musty mud smell of cows nearby breathing  
warm clouds from their big wet nostrils &

whipping their ropey tails at the tickle of horseflies  
I think for a long time he should watch  
the whiskey-colored dusk that highlights the flight

of a flock of nightingales

& the sleepy flickering emergences of a salt mine  
of bright & disappearing stars



Jordan Franklin

## WHEN TRICKSTERS COME HOME

*FX is showing 'Thor' again,*

Mom shouts from the bedroom  
and in the living room,  
I fight the remote's buttons  
as if attuned to the Speed Force.

But, it is not a DC-aligned  
apartment right now.

It is a temple to a bastard  
Norse mythology—a static-kissed,  
moving comic straight from  
the minds of the great-grandsons  
of great-grandfathers who weren't  
the slightest bit adjacent to Vikings  
except in dreamt longboats  
and despite my love  
of the myths, I'm here for one  
reason stretched over two  
syllables:

*Loki,*

Or, at least the man  
underneath the gold helmet  
and silver-tongued act. I can't  
say his name without  
giggles and crimson-  
peaked cheeks you don't need  
to shovel beneath to find red.  
I always had an appreciation  
for trickster gods prior

to him. Anansi, Hermes, Elegba,  
 his world-ending namesake:  
 every poets' pantheon should hold  
 someone who can work  
 their tongue like spells  
 but, I digress.

On screen saunters Tom,

the same Tom who  
 could turn Hank Williams  
 into Shakespeare,  
 whose smile turns my head  
 into a viola I must relearn  
 to play. He struts across  
 a throne room, scepter  
 in hand, the floors  
 as polished as himself.  
 He duels his brother  
 on a technicolor bridge  
 until the hammer  
 comes down.  
 He plummets into the eye  
 of a universe ready  
 to close into possibilities  
 as my eyes remain  
 wide for him.

*Tom,*

who returns in the next movie  
 broken and crazed—  
 a throne-lusting puppet  
 of the Mad Titan,  
 schemer in a glass cell,  
 and later a Hulkesque-ragdoll  
 made to rattle like chocolates  
 in a box. Every scene  
 with him is Asgard  
 in the final “Thor” film:

a toy wound in his hands,  
a thick grape in his teeth,  
the weight of an enchantment  
scaling his throat  
to sing its mischief free.

## Bill Ratner

### THE BIRTH OF FLINT - MARVEL INKS G.I. JOE

Snaked along Ventura Boulevard a line of Hollywood throat-haunters—voice actors dozens of them, from Smurfy cartoon squeakers to drawling Texarkana extras all clutching black and white Marvel comic renderings of high-muscled special ops soldiers, talking tanks, and Cobra bad guys—action figures to be human-voiced who, it is hoped, will earn hundreds of millions of *dollares Americanos*.

It is audition day for *G.I. Joe - Real American Hero*, another mythic money marriage for Maestro Stan Lee as the groom and his nerve-wracked jealous-of-*Star-Wars* Rhode Island bride named Hasbro.

Hollywood phones glow like branding irons as deep ink high-dollar Marvel *G.I. Joe* comic books land in the Hasbro battle tent with cartoon boots stomping and a chorus of muscled necks singing, *He'll fight for freedom wherever there's trouble, G.I. Joe is there!*

I am a typical paunchy thunder-throat honking out voices for cable TV furniture polish and cheesy cartoon bad guys. Standing in line with the honkers I am handed a drawing of a rock-armed special ops soldier named “Flint” a.k.a. Warrant Officer Dashiell R. Faireborn.

I stare at my “Flint” drawing and search my throat for an appropriate growl for his action figure in prep for the real thing up the steps in a mood-lit voiceover studio. The director summons me by my action figure name, *Flint, come get it, buddy*.

Standing before the mic I fill my lungs with Marvel air and yell *Yo Joe!...A mealy voice on the talk-back mutters, Thank you. Next.* I saunter off for a burger and sweet-potato fries.

In the sixties *G.I. Joe* was a DC Comics solo hero. But *Joe* belongs to Marvel now. The toy makers at Hasbro shrank him from Barbie-size down



to a cheap-and-easy made-in-China three-and-three-quarter-all-American-inches. From the White House to Marvel H.Q., to the basements of innocent children everywhere whispers of conspiracy abound, Washington rules it is not yet legal to make a cartoon based on a toy line. But hocking a *comic book* on-air is a go. Marvel launches *Real American Hero* in eye-curdling *G.I. Joe* TV ads.

One call over the speaker-phone changes my life: *You are "Flint."*  
I feel the thrill deep inside my pecs. Flint, Lady Jaye, Duke, Scarlett,  
Destro, and Cobra Commander, wrench their jaws and empty their lungs  
and the billion-dollar *Joe Team* is born.

*Buy Marvel and Hasbro stock, you'll be rich, they tell us.*  
All I ever bought was a *Joe Team* poster and a shampoo bottle  
with a "Flint" head. But the checks roll in and *The Joe Team*  
rides the air-waves and children's wallets for decades.  
And to this day *G.I. Joe* aficionados huddle in ballrooms and Cons  
around the globe and raise our fists and cry to the Marvel skies  
*Now you know and knowing is half the battle. YO JOE!*

Michelle Acker

## THE DEATH OF JASON TODD

Even before he finds the body, Batman  
staggers and tips through panels, his cape billowing  
like the wings of some black angel already  
intoxicated by grief. He finds the boy  
smoking in a heap of rubble, less a robin now  
than a bleeding-heart dove, streaked  
with red. Jason Todd. The second Robin.  
Unpopular with readers, it's said, for his violence,  
his anger; he once pushed a rapist from a balcony.  
Less than a year after his introduction,

DC Comics issued a call-in poll: ROBIN<sup>®</sup> WILL DIE

BECAUSE THE JOKER<sup>™</sup> WANTS REVENGE, BUT YOU  
CAN PREVENT IT WITH A PHONE CALL.

It's an old joke: in comics, deaths are elided like frightening  
dreams. Still, in Ethiopia—far from the Batcave—  
the Joker beats Robin to death with a crowbar,  
panel by panel by panel. He lost  
his life by seventy-two votes. Will stay dead  
seventeen years. When Batman lifts him in his arms,  
drawn more like a man than the boy he is,  
Jason's right hand dangles from Batman's reach  
like a pair of broken glasses. On the cover, a little  
white stamp: Approved by the Comics Code Authority.  
Plenty of blood but no open wound. Some violence  
goes too far.

Rodney Wilder

## WHEREIN BARRET WALLACE HOLDS HIS HAND TO EVERYTHING FALLEN & CANNOT SÉANCE ONE MORE 'AVALANCHE' INTO THE SILENCE

Already, I know I will never have to call this a wound.

I will never have to name the

obliterated Heaven of potion bottles & resolute blood

sundering my ribcage home to a meteor in plummet.

This gouge wrenched empty & given sunlight, blight

to remember beneath & burn.

It'll be as easy as walking into that warmth where the

Sector 7 plate should still god, should still impose its

mechanical overcast over castes cast into slums &

shit-greased neon. That plate

was Shinra's palm pressing our pain a piquant vintage, &

I thought I wanted to see it torn to scraps

reactor

by reactor by

reactor

but

look at the way our family name has been realized into

indiscriminate gravesoil. Another Corel

cindered across the soot still souring my lips. Saying *look*

like y'all are still fist to my fist, still war to my war, still

dawn to my Molotov dawn. Are not

there,

strands woven into the worst magic this

corpocracy of leeches can conjure to keep their

winepress-hierarchy blooded. Your faces, now

constellations I'm sure I'll find in every shaft of daylit dust

to come, prying your names from the quiet—in either

prayer or penance when this phantom pain holds the

promise of ours hostage between teeth grilled in gunmetal.

I think I want to apologize.

And isn't that how surviving always goes?

you'd tell me that's how surviving always goes.

Wedge,

Biggs,

you'd tell me to stop putting so much of my shit on you.      Jessie,  
 you'd tell me again how sparks mean the circuit is working.  
 And I'm trying to see one for all the others.  
 I'm trying to believe this fight—this  
 fusillade shot at too high a cost—the circuit & not the spark.  
 The train-track winding skyward & not the byproduct that  
 Shinra's wheels grind & spit in descent. How  
 do I continue to fan a flame co-opted into funeral pyre?  
 How do I bark our battleflag name without hearing the cries  
 of everyone I ever thought  
 deserving of a spot on my shoulders? This fight  
 bleats blanched genocides & sectors  
 slit of their Lifestream for an answer. A hand  
 nuzzles into mine, & it too is an answer. The sky  
 follows the falling with its own golden, unholy magic, &—  
 it isn't. But in its *isn't* motes are moving, sudden  
 zodiacs arranging this ache its taken Candle-blaze.

I won't

forfeit Shinra the Catastrophe we swore their strigoi gullets,  
 their canker-throne, its tentacles toothed & spreading. You  
 are not here. But look at the way our family name knells a  
 harmonized promise reclaimed. A threat  
 slotting upraised weapons with emeralds & reds long bent  
 on scouring Shinra's vile into something irrevocably gone.

Titan

has stayed digging his hands to the hilt underneath Midgar.  
 There is a groan tearing toward HQ, fissures splitting, the  
 funeral procession your lives & thefts deserve. There is a  
 groan tearing toward HQ. And once more, I know exactly  
 what to call it.

Daniel Crasnow

## WYYNDE'S STORY

At the end of Young Justice Season 1, eight heroes  
 Celebrate the New Year by kissing each other.  
 Of all eight, only two, Aqualad and Rocket  
 Don't end up making out. As a gay boy,  
 I wondered why this New Year countdown  
 Was so straight. Why there were no heroes here  
 Attracted to the masculinity and too-tight suits.  
 I wondered why every hot male hero, muscled  
 And gorgeous, each with a shorter woman on his arm  
 Was a shadow of every other as if they weren't  
 So divergent in personality and ability.  
 As if Red Tornado's robotic "Human customs still  
 Elude me" wasn't the most relatable part  
 Of this scene of storyboard matchmakers,  
 Unnecessary couplings, and New Year's traditions  
 That don't need the animated repetition.

Years before it happened, I read Fan-fiction  
 That made Aqualad gay. I always loved  
 How water can splinter light to rainbow.  
 How masks hide identities the same way  
 Closets do. Aqualad—did they just treat  
 You straight for the first few years?

When did you know Tula wasn't the only  
 Fish in your royal sea? How did you convert  
 Wyynde from his purist ways and God  
 What a lover he must be. Aquaman  
 And the royal guard— Wyynde, a new world  
 Warrior. It's funny, how the greatest heroes  
 Always travel so far they lose their own  
 Identities. Wyynde, be there for your King.

And when he wanders a bit too far, go.  
Find him. The only reason to breach  
The waves is to bring Kaldur'ahm home.

Marlin M. Jenkins

## SCIENCE HASN'T CONFIRMED THAT WATCHING TV WILL DAMAGE YOUR EYES

*previously published by Great River Review*

It was true: dangerous to sit so close  
to the TV screen back when TVs emitted

radiation, but now, the advice—*don't sit too close  
to the TV*—is barely scientific. True, also,

that before LCD you could touch the screen  
to feel its solid glass, curved, electric fuzz kissing

small fingertips against, for example, the plain colors  
and limited polygons of mid-90s Nintendo games.

But today, press too hard and the layer  
under screen appears to bleed, shifts like fresh paint

and if only we could, like Super Mario,  
step into and beyond that landscape barrier—

find there a war we could remedy,  
a penguin to race, a world of coins

and cannons that could launch us as far  
as we'd like to go.

Of course we stayed close—  
loved the hope in how a plumber could liberate

a kingdom; how our power could rise from  
rescued stars or the change of a hat; how an eye

could be an enemy tracking our movement  
vanquished by our closeness, our quick-footed

circles around the circular monster  
until, dizzy, he collapses into himself, pays what he owes.



Julia Gaskill

## IN WHICH I AM SECRETLY THE PROTAGONIST OF THE VIDEO GAME FRANCHISE LUIGI'S MANSION

& Luigi has this ghost problem / where after the world deems  
him triumphant / he convinces himself it is all game over / the  
demons are laid to new rest / he can resume life as the  
secondhand sibling / but

those ghosts / they always find their way back into / his story /  
slink out of the subtext / make themselves more than a prequel /  
laugh in the face of Luigi's so-called triumph

/ Luigi screams / every time / before picking the weapon back  
up / steadying the quiver in his hands / finding reason in doing  
it all over/ instead of just giving in & running the other way /

& have I always been the Luigi of my life / the second tier sibling  
in each childhood memory / never quite as brave in the shadow  
of my brother / look how I always fantasize of the fleeing / but  
never quite make it to the door / watch as I scream / every time  
/ only to then pick up the phone / or answer the email / or have  
the conversation / & neither of us ever asked for this y'know /  
this unending anxiety of / well / someone's gotta do it / so it's  
gotta be me / right / right / right / right

now all I want is a calm story / an unexciting denouement / no  
spin-off knocking at my door / but my ghosts / those howling  
monsters of yesteryear horrors / they always have  
/ another ending in mind

D'mani Thomas

**STORM CURVES GHOSTS FOR WHITNEY HOUSTON / INTERVENTION**

(after one CUPSI practice in 2018)

Ghost 1:

Ay yo ma'

You can sure sing

Lemme see what that mouf do

Whitney:

Well

I have high and low belts and a very wide register

Storm:

Hey Ghost boy...

No.

She doesn't talk to dead niggas. Got too many of those running around here to begin with.

*Ghost 1 leaves*

Whitney:

What was that for? He was asking about my music.

Storm:

No, he was asking about your body. I guess he wanted another one for himself.

Ghost 2:

*Walks up dressed like a 90s pimp. Opens his dark mouth and two gold nuggets are found in San Francisco again*

Storm:

Hi

You can only talk to my friend in venmo requests

*Ghost 2 leaves*

Whitney:

What's venmo?

Storm:

It's broke nigga repellent.

*They laugh until all the ghosts are gone*

Whitney:

No, but really... What's venmo?

## INTERVENTION

**Whitney:**

I think it's time I leave

I am too many songs empty

and one bad documentary away

from being more addict than american idol

**Storm:**

We still love you.

i hope you know that.

Do you know how magic you must be...

to have everyone wanting the rights to your story

your voice, was the cure to racism for us blacks

white folks couldn't deny you

**Whitney:**

Girl,

What do you know of music with no voice

i have a cemetery of troubles ahead of me

i guess they thought

no ones buried until all the holes are filled

And damn...

do you know how badly I want

to let my jaw bones rattle one more time

to let my greatest magic trick be

opening my mouth, and revealing a choir sitting in my throat

do you know how badly i want

to dance with somebody

Do you know how hard it is to ask now?

**Storm:**

No.

But damn girl

This is a kind of heavy i can't control

these storm clouds looming over your head.

I don't know how you feel.

But,

i know what your songs are doing to children everywhere  
and without you  
there would be no way to talk to grandmothers or grandfathers

You are a bridge between trap and 102.9  
elementary school rides home  
Soul train and whatever else is out there  
I say this with all my heart.  
thank you

**Whitney:**

**Storm:**  
Thank you

Len Lawson

## THE AMANDA WALLER SUITE

*with respect to Nikky Finney*

### Episode 1: Amanda Waller Enters the War Room

She Condoleezas her way  
through the Pentagon  
with the stealth of a panther

visceral eyes peeled  
mountainous shoulders arched  
volcanic neck veined and

tongue triggered  
to strike at the first site  
of a five-star general

She's never fired a round  
never dawned a uniform  
nor received gold or bronze

Let's call her black skin her badge  
Her tight, neatly edged afro her rank  
Her black heels the boots of war

It's not her impressive degrees  
that pierce men's egos, not her  
immaculate record of service under

several presidential administrations  
that makes white men cower  
It's not the armor of her power suits

that remains tough as rhino's flesh

Angelou said it's the stride of her step  
 She glides with the confidence of

ten thousand Valkyries in tow  
 The Negro spirituals would call her  
 a battle ax, a bulwark, a buckler

She stampedes this polygon not for love  
 Her countenance here will never endear  
 passion but fear, not desire but duty

She eclipses the dark room before aging  
 white men reluctantly standing to her  
 loathsome presence, daring not to trifle

with her ominous right hand of wrath  
 How terrible is her name in all the earth  
 that decorated warriors mask their terror

## **Episode 2: Amanda Waller Attracts a Bat**

She awakes at 4:30 AM to click on  
 the 24-hour conservative news  
 and to scramble her attendants  
 into position outside her estate

The black suits with earpieces  
 prepare for her morning departure  
 All monitors are in place displaying  
 camera views at strategic angles

She has kept at bay an array of enemies  
 like viruses who lust for her execution  
 from shrewd international dealings  
 in the name of patriotism and power

yet she may well be T'Challa rising

in his palace before the dawn to witness  
nighttime's daily silent defeat  
But this imminent foe is the (K)Night himself

Undetectable by any lens  
A vapor among shadows  
Her intelligence, military science acumen  
and bottomless war chest rival his own

In a stunning checkmate at their last encounter  
she revealed to him that she knows his identity  
prompting the billionaire in cape  
and cowl to succumb to her flame

spiraling to the animal class of nocturnal  
flying insect from nocturnal flying mammal  
What could his privilege desire from her that he  
could not righteously detect or ubiquitously procure

She cannot be intimidated by local police  
brutality or a callous criminal justice system  
She has overcome the plagues of  
bone-grinding debt and ravaging poverty

from centuries of distributed wealth denied  
to her people but hoarded by his with the same ruthless  
injustice and sinister business practices he attempts  
to thwart beyond his intimate obsession with the night

Perhaps it is this intrigue that brings him  
to her doorstep to lust as her enemies do  
To understand how she can excel in his  
domain of chess-like maneuvers

on the world stage cloaked by  
the same shadows he adored first  
To investigate how she hides her deeds

of self-appointed justice in plain sight

within the belly and brain of the American  
government's capital without masquerading in costume  
while he chooses to toil endless hours in a cave amid  
screeches of flying rodents who are

attracted to the shadows as he is  
Now it is her darkness that lures him  
to her grounds, her window  
her sanctuary, her very shower

a glimpse of blackness in its rawest form  
one weapon he cannot tuck into his utility belt  
more darkness than he saw on his first night in the cave  
but he is one with the night now and hers before the dawn

invading her turf  
planting his flag  
like any colonizer  
to prove he can

### **Episode 3: Amanda Waller Has a Woman-to-Woman with Harley Quinn**

She peers into a realm of the multiverse  
and sees she is Quinn's mammy  
dawning the black and white maid uniform  
with a toothy grin and fractured English  
dialect of a broken education

watching her beloved Ms. Harley sneak back  
through her bedroom window at night after necking  
by the lake with Mister Jackson Napier  
what to make of this youngin' who has  
a life mapped out for her until death

Mammy worked her fingers to the bone all



her life so no time to marry  
hell no time to make babies either  
tending generations of white chillen  
passing through the Quinn house

Who knew this chile would get touched in the head  
Mammy peers through her own crack in the multiverse  
to see Ms. Harley dressed like a schoolgirl who played  
with her mama's makeup case and standing in front of her  
is a familiar-looking, dark-skinned woman in a suit like a man

She looks mad at Ms. Harley who is sitting  
in a chair like she's in trouble with the principal  
The big-boned black woman in the suit with arms folded  
does not seem impressed or threatened by the girl's whiteness  
She doesn't have the luxury to date a psychopathic white man

She would have choked the maniacal laughter  
out of him without a smirk of her own if he tried her  
Joker only syringed Quinn's mind with his  
hysteria because he knew she was malleable  
She will not dawn a blonde lace front wig in pigtails

She lost a son, a daughter, and a husband  
to the ruthless Chicago projects  
She does not have time to lose her mind too  
But as Mammy stares at this version of herself  
she sure feels like she has lost every marble gawd gave her

Black women don't dress in no suits  
and they sure don't look down on white folk  
Mammy ain't got time for these games  
so she goes to her room to pray to her  
ever-loving gawd that these dreams from the devil

don't plague her sweet soul no more  
yet while she sleeps she hears that shrill

devilish laughter cackling in her mind  
with the high-pitch squeal of a blonde-haired  
blue-eyed piglet following close behind

#### **Episode 4: Amanda Waller Assembles a Suicide Squad**

Her code name is The Wall  
standing apart from other  
man-made shields of wonder

To go rogue means to  
assemble her own universe  
without a gauntlet glove

within the government system  
that rejected her kind and  
now bends to her will

She has studied the masters  
She breathes the same rarified air  
as Harriet, Sojourner, Assata

She cannot be as open as Michelle  
or Oprah nor need she be an assassin  
like Foxy Brown or Sister Night

She is queen on this chessboard  
Her moves are calculated  
making the round earth flatter

Her foot soldiers have nothing to lose  
They must follow her to their redemption  
ready to go through a wall for her but never through her

Her code name means stone upon stone  
If she falls on you, then you get crushed  
If you fall on her, then you shatter into shards

If she calls your name, then you answer  
or you will never see the sun through  
her dried-cement veins or calcified-mortar bones

You do not possess the tools, the strength, or the faith  
to break her down but if you negotiate your life  
into her hands then she will open the heavens to you

brick by heartless brick

ll.

Michelle Acker

## DETECTIVE COMICS #453, NOV 1975: “THE DEADLY WEB OF THE CRIME EXCHANGE!”

It opens with a full-page spread:  
a featureless room, a countdown,  
a cloaked figure with two eyes like stars

who demands Batman fire a single bullet  
from a pistol into the floor. For five seconds  
Batman reaches—for five seconds

his cape whips to the right, inexplicably,  
like a feather the slightest draft might send  
flying beyond grasp. On *one*,

he throws the gun:  
always taking a third option.

Jeannine Galley

## WONDER WOMAN CONSIDERS THE PANDEMIC

She wonders if her own DNA is impervious  
to viruses, shielding her like an invisible jet. She walks

among humans gingerly, and dons a mask  
for the first time. Call it modeling safety protocols,

call it weakness. She is not as young  
as she used to be, tossing tanks aside,

fighting gods in the sky. She thinks back  
to her island home, curiously isolated,

safe as New Zealand. Sometimes she is sad  
she chose America as her new home,

they are so slow to embrace change.  
Still no woman President, she thinks,

rubbing her wrists where her bracelets chafe.  
Is she still really fighting Nazis? Is history's

repeating trope too big to topple?  
Her booted feet echo on the strangely quiet streets.

Stephanie Burt

## OVER NEW JERSEY (FIRESTORM)

Some people are us, in midair.  
 If we stop we'll fail.  
 We aren't sure how or when  
 we got up there.

It's a first principle  
 of immunology, with a side  
 of fear:  
 we light up or  
 lash out at the unfamiliar,

at least if we're surprised, or scared.  
 Which explains the flare  
 or flair that replaces the hair  
 of Firestorm: The Nuclear Man, the teen

superhero who was really two men,  
 or rather a man and a boy: the man had no body  
 and lived in the head of the boy, whose crown caught fire  
 when he became his complicated self.

.  
 He rose, with his flame-tongued tresses, over Metuchen,  
 coal-eyed, square-jawed, and ready to fight crime:  
 for example, the periwinkle-helmeted Multiplex,  
 whose doubles could do 4, 8, 64 times the bad deeds,

and then the menace of Goldenrod,  
 once a hapless office drone,  
 transformed to a walking spray of living pollen,  
 ready, out of spite and righteous rage,

to take everybody else's breath away.  
 He was a victim first. He didn't care.  
 The way to defeat him was to take to the air.

Then the Nuclear Man would soar,  
slowly, in great arcs,  
triumphantly catalyzing gouts of rain

over the cul-de-sacs he meant to guard,  
washing the pollen out, the villain  
to nothingness, while arguing with himself  
about what, or who, he wanted to be, down there.



Adrienne Novy

## G-D CASTS LUCIFER INTO HELL, SO LUCIFER GETS HIMSELF A THERAPIST

*after Hanif Abdurraqib, Matt Mitchell, & the Netflix series Lucifer*

of course, there was a  
beginning with  
an apple to gorge upon  
& birth a set of wings  
who am i, if not  
the only person to kiss  
the tongue of a blade  
to do as desire demands  
& swallow all the vices  
in that smolder of coins  
i fell down to earth  
on my therapist's couch,  
broke the most expensive of  
cufflinks & whiskey stones  
bringing to life  
the carnal urge  
to blame everyone, grieve  
nothing  
i am the crown jewel  
of my own unbecoming  
cauterize me into a body of  
metal before everything  
broils begins to eat me alive

a child of g-d  
resurrecting silver amulets  
where do i go when i am  
molting into  
the most human of shames?  
the bastard offspring  
what else did you expect  
for hunger to come  
ain't no rest for the wicked  
while every saint screams  
when facing the mirror  
i burst into a thousand  
fathers, i have sinned long  
enough for a body, to see  
the way guilt stains  
being evil has a price  
a pawn of brothers  
is undeserving of sacrifice  
of a king  
a down raven expanse  
an angel, stripped of glory  
as each distorted prayer  
pushes me deeper into flame

going bad—  
down to marrow, ending as  
the mother of a goat head  
blood & hot leather—  
no need to thank me for  
forging myself into a role as  
the one to do your bidding  
to burn & burn & burn  
until all the wicked are dead  
by the light of teeth  
cracked open a skull &  
feathered knives, punched &  
through a wall, pulled out  
my old face  
maroon under my nails  
a demonic force like me is  
knuckling with rope  
as i've left my chains at home  
i don't care to be worthy  
to dig in my nails  
intent to draw red, become  
a language & its reckoning  
entirely my own

Jeannine Galley

## POISON IVY CONSIDERS THE UPSIDE OF THE APOCALYPSE

The steady whir of planes overhead  
has quieted. Already the oceans run

cleaner, the sky clearer. The birds more  
numerous, their songs louder. People plant

things in gardens now, leaving  
the world mostly alone. She breathes a sigh

of relief in the silence as she surveys  
overgrown lawns, untrampled woods.

But the earth remains angry, spinning  
up earthquakes, breeding new plagues.

She has not felt the human contrition yet  
in the streams and flowers, in the quiet steps

of bobcat and fox. A quail runs through  
an abandoned lavender farm. She breathes

in the green scent of rain on the broken  
lavender stems. She thinks: a little longer,

and perhaps the earth will sleep sated at last, and  
she will no longer need the poison to keep her safe.

## Julia Gaskill

### SHAZAM WAS A FUNNY FILM, BUT...

Billy Batson spits “SHAZAM!” from his mouth,  
and all the awkwardness of teenage-dom  
melts away from his likeness.

He becomes this tall, muscle-ridden,  
ridiculously good-looking man  
with superhero powers.

He is basically a god. Or wizard.

Or better version of Superman.

Like that, Billy’s problems fly away.

Billy is now in control.

Just by yelling “SHAZAM!”

he has what he needs to accomplish anything.

So if I spit “NOT TIRED FOR A CHANGE!”

will that, like, work on me too?

Or maybe I can try “LESS STRESSED TODAY!”

or “WOW MY BODY IS SO NOT SORE!” or

“BEING AN ADULT IS FUN!” and those words  
will spring into action and transform me.

I too will have the tools I need to accomplish it all,  
like a body that does not ache

or a mood that does not find itself so pessimistic.

I will be my own god: God of Being On Top of My Shit.

Mark Strong will play the role of my endless  
to do list – watch as I beat him to a bloody pulp.

Billy Batson is ecstatic to have an adult body,

uses it to buy beers and go into

strip clubs cause, again, teenager,

but what I would give to shed this

adult form, inhabit a youthful body full

of unending energy, where my only stress

is what paper is due next week.

Let me go back to once upon a time --0

when everyday was not just unending chores.

I yell at the sky "SATISFIED."

I scream to the clouds "SPONTANEOUS."

I shriek into the wind "HAPPY."

Has it worked yet?

Have my superpowers come?

What word must I utter  
to make me feel like I know  
what the hell I am doing?

D.J. Rogers

## MORPHING

I dreamed of being a power ranger -  
Gold or blue or perhaps maybe  
white  
and who would study karate and  
shout his name that is not his name  
but that, perhaps, maybe becomes  
him and that perhaps, maybe keeps his identity  
safe  
and who never backs down from a fight  
and is not afraid of anyone  
demons or mutants or, perhaps maybe  
even cops  
but I didn't get the call.  
And I didn't shout my name  
or change colors  
not at the store or the college or the  
traffic stop  
and the people I would protect and serve  
fear me instead.

I think I can be forgiven  
for all the uniforms I'll never wear.  
I think I should be forgiven  
for all the colors I'll never be.

Calypso Selwyn**ELEGY FOR LENNY BUSKER**

so they made you the monster || marveled at your laughter  
 wide-eyed and white-toothed || wild was your dancing  
 a king invisible || carnivore, crawling  
 shaker of new worlds || shaper of old wounds  
 fearsome was your smile || fierce the performance  
 Singer's name could not soil || not when you were the song  
 then they remembered that you were a woman, the uses of which are  
 prestige-tv known, worn in repetitive grooves.  
 so you became the second-most-notable victimized woman,  
 afterthought offscreen raped. why should you matter to us?  
 what of the maiden, fair-haired, untouchable? her violation  
 matters, climactic fulcrum of a man's tragic fall.  
 blondes get more sympathy. anyway weren't you a terrible person?  
 junkie predator bitch - isn't it better this way?

it may be more virtuous || to be victim than violent  
 but what girl could forget || when she was a god

D.J. Rogers

## AS A CHILD I WANTED TO BE ROSE FROM STREET FIGHTER

Crouched on the skating ranch floor/  
in my mother's high heels/ I slid across hardwood like/a newborn  
duck./I was born by the river, too -/feet first./I was unsure of how to move/in the world/until you  
glided across the screen/sexy in your purple and slit up to there/and your scarf./I bought an infinity  
scarf/last week./I didn't glow./I came out last week./I didn't glow/until I did/

Until I swooped that scarf in front of me/and somewhere/a bully's rock/arced back/and smacked  
them right in the forehead./ My savory suit/turned sweet dress/and leggings/and/my hair turned  
purple too/and it's not because video games will turn us into sissies/and it's not because the  
light/in a roller rink/in 1995/turns everything purple/

We, the purple/we, the red and blue flowed into a ball gown/we wear to the prom of pain/we, the  
rainbow/we, the soft/we, the blooming/we, the risen/we, the roses/me, the rose

J.C. Rodriguez

## IN WHICH I DENOUNCE DC AND MAKE A CASE FOR MS. MARVEL IN THE MCU

### *issue #1: inhuman*

I get stretched thin  
at work, teaching kids at the Y.

I'd like to think I'm helping, like maybe  
once six o' clock hits, they walk away from

boredom with new gadgets in the utility belt,  
or mutate into something safer, or learn

enchancements to unstick the gum from their hair—  
perhaps the first step to unclogging self-esteem.

every educator runs the risk of playing hero,  
jumping skyscrapers to avoid ego death—

& if a man-made god falls, gravity damns  
that he land on the innocent.

### *issue #2: teenager*

kids talk about CW & MCU superheroes  
like their teachers do 3rd & 4th cups of coffee.

as in, universally shared fixations no one  
is allowed to feel embarrassed about. as in,

no one should bleed over those stories.  
one girl gushes over Kara Danvers.

*Supergirl. She's so pretty, I wanna look  
just like her— but I don't have the hair.*  
but she only touches her cheek &



eyes her palm in comparison.

***issue #3: avenger***

I remember my child self, wishing  
to be blobs of ink in Gotham Nights,

until the first Latino man I saw in pages  
beat his wife over a case of beer, his penance

ripped through his chest. a flaming pillar,  
where his wasted heart would have rotted

& his widow, only saved when she prayed—  
our lives, only interesting in suffering.

now, I clutch my rosary at work, realizing  
this girl's mood takes a bullet

every second stared at her Supergirl  
lock screen. how can anyone see

themselves in a world that worships power;  
funds deities; shepherds the innocent?

when Jack Kirby switched over,  
he stopped drawing apartments

to create two worlds where gods  
held wars, as if it was all they could do.

I have to give the kids an answer  
when they ask *Marvel or DC?*

***issue #4: student***

*Ms. Marvel is Kamala Khan & lives in Jersey,  
like some of you used to. she goes to school, chews  
bubblegum, & forgets her books all the time,*

*gets overwhelmed around people,*

*doesn't always say the right thing & even  
when she puts on the mask, she fumbles.*

& the truth is, they all fumble  
& will learn to do so in different ways;

people will be waiting, to watch  
all the mistakes they'll make.

I want to say it gets harder  
to play pretend – but I introduce them

to a new mask & hope they like the color.  
something as simple as two cuts

in a big blue ribbon, stretched as far  
as the truth or the mental gymnastics

their future detractors will pull.  
I don't know how many times

I can pump helium in my heart  
or play with my own vision.

I just know these kids drop things  
all the damn time, but they help

each other out & that girl drops  
her phone trying to reach

another kid's pencil. I notice  
a new lock screen. I notice

how she smiles at the picture,  
as she extends her arm.

# THE EXCELSIOR ANTHOLOGY SUPER SQUAD

**Michelle Acker** is a Florida-based poet with an MFA in Creative Writing from Hollins University in Roanoke, VA. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in journals including Spilled Milk, Saw Palm, Flock, 2River View, Gesture, Poetry is Dead, Cargoes, Scoundrel Time, Permafrost, The Florida Review, Carilion Clinic Poems in the Waiting Room, and Papers & Publications, as well as in the anthology *Rewilding: Poems for the Environment* (Flexible Press, July 2020). Her poetry was also recently on public display in downtown Tallahassee, FL, through an initiative by the Council for Arts and Culture.

**Stephanie Burt** is a professor of English at Harvard and has written some books of poetry and literary criticism; the most recent are *After Callimachus* (Princeton UP, 2020), *Don't Read Poetry: A Book About How to Read Poems* (Basic, 2019), and *Advice from the Lights* (Graywolf, 2017), an NEA Big Read selection.

**Daniel Crasnow** is a multi-genre writer and scholar at Stetson University where he holds a Sullivan Scholarship in creative writing. He is gay and Jewish. His work is published in, or forthcoming from 30 N Literary Magazine, The Gateway Review, The Mochila Review, and more. When he was young he created a sword and fought a demon in his dreams. He hasn't had nightmares since.

**Jordan E. Franklin** is a Black poet from Brooklyn, NY. An alumna of Brooklyn College, she earned her MFA from Stony Brook Southampton where she served as a Turner Fellow. Her work has appeared in the Southampton Review, Breadcrumbs, easy paradise, Tinderbox Poetry Journal, Frontier Poetry Journal, and elsewhere. She is the winner of the 2017 James Hearst Poetry Prize offered by the North American Review, and a finalist of both the 2018 Nightjar Review Poetry Contest, and the 2019 Furious Flower Poetry Prize.

**Jeannine Hall Gailey** served as the second Poet Laureate of Redmond, Washington. She's the author of five books of poetry: *Becoming the Villainess*, *She Returns to the Floating World*, *Unexplained Fevers*, *The Robot Scientist's Daughter*, and *Field Guide to the End of the World*, winner of the Moon City Press Book Prize and the SFPA's Elgin Award. She's also the author of *PR for Poets: A Guidebook to Publicity and Marketing*. Her work appeared in journals such as *American Poetry Review*, *Ploughshares*, and *Poetry*. Her web site is [www.webbish6.com](http://www.webbish6.com). Twitter and Instagram: @webbish6.

**Julia Gaskill** (she/her) is a professional daydreamer hailing from Portland, Oregon. She has competed multiple times on national stages and has toured with her poetry across North America. Her work has been published on *Nailed Magazine*, *FreezeRay Poetry*, *Knight's Library Magazine*, *Ink&Nebula*, and more, and she's had her poetry featured on YouTube channels such as *SlamFind* and *Write About Now*. Her poem 'I Will Not Beg For Scraps' was nominated for Best of the Net in 2015. Julia is the author of four chapbooks, runs the mic *Slamlandia*, co-founded the *Bigfoot Regional Poetry Slam* in

2019, and is the creator of the spoken word album, *Stouthearted Bitch*. Find Julia at @geekgirlgownup or [facebook.com/jgaskpoetry](https://www.facebook.com/jgaskpoetry)

**Marlin M. Jenkins** was born and raised in Detroit and currently lives in Minnesota. The author of the poetry chapbook *Capable Monsters* (Bull City Press, 2020) and a graduate of University of Michigan's MFA program, his work has found homes with *Indiana Review*, *The Rumpus*, *Waxwing*, and *Kenyon Review Online*, among others. You can find him online at [marlinmjenkins.com](https://www.marlinmjenkins.com).

**Len Lawson** is the author of *Chime* (Get Fresh Books, 2019), the chapbook *Before the Night Wakes You* (Finishing Line Press, 2017), and co-editor of *Hand in Hand: Poets Respond to Race* (Muddy Ford Press, 2017). His poetry has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net. He has received fellowships from Callaloo, Vermont Studio Center, Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, Weymouth Center for the Arts, and others. His poetry appears in *Callaloo*, *African American Review*, *Ninth Letter*, *Verse Daily*, *Mississippi Review*, and elsewhere. Len is also a Ph.D. candidate in English Literature and Criticism at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, earning the 2020 IUP Outstanding Doctoral Student Award. He has taught English in South Carolina higher education for ten years.

**Adrienne Novy** is an artist with Cat Eye Syndrome and has been on the FreezeRay Poetry masthead since 2017. She is a nominee for *Bettering American Poetry*, the Pushcart Prize, Best of the Net, and is a 2020 graduate from Hamline University's Creative Writing program. She is the author of *Crowd Surfing With God* (Half Mystic Press, 2018) and the mini-chapbooks, *We Have Each Other's Flowers* (Zines + Things, 2020) and *Pull* (Ginger Bug Press, 2020). Adrienne's most recent work can be found in *Passages North* and "You Flower/ You Feast: An Anthology of Prose, Poems, & Plays inspired by Harry Styles". She lives in the Midwest & has a cat named Laurie.

**Bill Ratner** is the voice of "Flint" on the TV cartoon *G.I. Joe Real American Hero* and "Donnell Udina" in *Mass Effect 1, 2 & 3*. His poems and essays are published in *The Chiron Review*, *The Baltimore Review*, *Rattle Magazine's Rattlecast*, *Pleiades*, *KYSO Flash*, *South Florida Poetry Journal*, *The Missouri Review Audio Contest*, etc. He is a 9-time winner of *The Moth Story Slams* and 2-time winner of *Best of The Hollywood Fringe Extension Award for Solo Performance*. Bill's spoken-word performances are featured on *National Public Radio's Good Food*, *The Business*, and *KCRW's Strangers*. More info: [billratner.com/author](https://www.billratner.com/author)

**JC Reilly** writes across genres to keep things interesting. Her latest collection, *What Magick May Not Alter*, a Southern Gothic novel-in-verse, was published by *Madville Publishing*. She serves as the Managing Editor of *Atlanta Review*. When she's not writing, she plays tennis, crochets, or practices her Italian (badly). Follow her @Aishatonu on Twitter or @jc.reilly on Instagram.

**J.C. Rodriguez** is a writer from Long Island. His poems have appeared in places like *Brooklyn Poets*, *Waxwing*, & *Meow Meow Pow Pow*. He documents & marinates over some of his misadventures online @ [brownmoon.rip/blog](https://www.brownmoon.rip/blog)

**D.J. Rogers** is a writer, teacher, and lifelong WCW fan from Raleigh, North Carolina. His poetry can be seen on Freezeray Press and his essay work/thoughts on gaming and being black can be seen on Black Nerd Problems. He loves monster hunting and Street fighting and being a mega Man and a dad, partner, and queer BIPOC. He loves you for reading this.

**Calypso Jane Selwyn** (she/her) is a transgender lesbian poet living in Fayetteville, AR. She is a reader and facilitator for the forthcoming TWANG Anthology, which seeks to showcase Southern and Midwestern transgender and gender-non-conforming artists and writers. She writes gay insect poems and has a very normal amount of emotional investment in Netflix's She-Ra.

**Rachel Tanner** is a queer, disabled Alabamian writer whose work has recently appeared in Barren Magazine, The Weekly Degree, Bending Genres, and elsewhere. She tweets @rickit.

**D'mani Thomas** (he/him/they) is a writer, horror film enthusiast, and dance lover. A graduate of UC Berkeley, D'mani is a two-time member of CAL Slam (2017 & 2018), representing UC Berkeley at CUPSI, an international poetry festival & competition, earning the "Best Writing As a Team" accolade in 2018. He was a 2019 Pink Plastic House Resident, a 2019 WUS GOOD Black Hogwarts workshop participant, and a 2020 "SHOW US YOUR SPINES" resident. Their work can be found in The Auburn Avenue, Foglifter, MARY: A Journal of New Writing, and elsewhere.

**Rodney Wilder** is a biracial nerd who bellows death-metal verse in Throne of Awful Splendor and writes poetry, with previous work appearing in places like FIYAH, FreezeRay, [TRACK//FOUR](#) and Poets Reading the News, as well as Stiltzkin's Quill, his most recent attempt at grimoiring all the geeky incense left lit in his ribcage. When not fawning over his poet-friends at various Portland open mics, he likes analogizing things to Pokémon and getting lost in Oregonian forests with his co-meanderer. Find him on Instagram at @thebardofhousewilder.

**Maria Zoccola** is a queer Southern writer with deep roots in the Mississippi Delta. She has writing degrees from Emory University and Falmouth University. Her work has previously appeared or is forthcoming in The Massachusetts Review, Colorado Review, Spillway, Southern Indiana Review, Gris-Gris, Lunch Ticket, and elsewhere.

# WHAT IS THE OKRA PROJECT?

*From their website:*

The Okra Project is a collective that seeks to address the global crisis faced by Black Trans people by bringing home cooked, healthy, and culturally specific meals and resources to Black Trans People wherever we can reach them.

During the Middle Passage, our African ancestors snuck okra onto captive ships to sustain themselves and plant in the new world. Black Diasporic cooking traditions often use the okra plant for its versatility and it is often associated with health, prosperity, and community. In this spirit, The Okra Project hopes to extend free, delicious, and nutritious meals to Black Trans people experiencing food insecurity.

The Okra Project is all about taking luxury and making it something that's accessible to the most marginalized people and disrupting the idea that luxury is exclusive.

”For Black people, in particular, the kitchen is such a place of family lineage. It’s a place of community. It’s a place of love. Daily life occurs in the kitchen. And so to have that kitchen be filled with someone who looks, loves, and lives like you, is a luxury and a joy” - Ianne Fields Stewart, Founder

LEARN MORE:

<https://www.theokraproject.com/>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/theokraproject?lang=en>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/theokraproject/?hl=en>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/The-Okra-Project-882988962034764/>



*FEATURING WORK FROM*

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STEPHANIE BURT  
DANIEL CRASNOW  
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JEANNINE GALLEY  
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