

A black and white image of a cosmic nebula, featuring swirling clouds of gas and dust in shades of grey and white against a dark background. The nebula has a complex, filamentary structure with bright, glowing regions and darker, more diffuse areas. The overall effect is ethereal and majestic, typical of deep space photography.

SPACE BABY

EPISODES I-III

TATE N. OQUENDO

Space Baby: Episodes I-III

Tate N. Oquendo

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for you

Episode I

i.

First the haunt of floating, in the space
where the force pulls more weight than gravity.

He steps to you slow while his will permits his boots
to rise and fall. You take him in, and listen for the crackle

of breath through his helmet. He is interested not only in suspension,
but also in the way a form can be both tethered and bound

by ropes and not the natural order of being pressed
to the ground. You bloom there wrapped,

a series of knots and the whipping away of his robes
the only things between you and his burning.

ii.

He loves it when you run his bath and walk away
so he can slip inside, the power of him buoyant
enough to rock and swell the water, alone,
for long enough. He will raise a gloved hand and you

enter again to find him both disrobed and helmeted,
the length of his hair spreading wide into the water.

What he has been up to while you were away,
the way there is enough for him to sink into,
the simplicity of clear water and the length of him
to answer.



iii.

His crystals are cracked, so the beam is not
weightless. Instead, the forces pull left, right
on the edge of a wild swing, something about inertia
and plasma looping round and back.

He explains this without whispers when he strikes
the walls, weaving and carving each mark
while you watch. The first time,
you dropped your glass, trembled;
he cleaved apart the sheets in a whirl.

iv.

You will allow him to raise and lower
the length of a needle.

"Space Baby," the banner reads, and flourishes
around two red roses and his familiar mask. When people ask what it
means you tell them
he is thorns, and the face that rests above them,
but he is also the sound of a needle whirring,
the electromagnetic music of all the surrounding space.
He is the moan when you plant your tattooed feet
on a new moon, where you are the petals,
blooming toward multiple suns.

v.

He is outside dreaming force dreams until the suns pass at the right angle,
the curve of each tingling the crooks of his ears under the weight of heat.

Let me come home, he whispers against the dry ground, but you will not,
let me come home, and he rises, digs his boots into the sand near a lizard

he ignores. You do not wait up for him, pacing the length of the room,
the overturned tables, though you hear him from inside the chamber

where sound resonates, and you imagine his lips, dripping the blood
from where you closed your fist against his face. *Let me go*,

but he held you while the furniture rose, slowly at first until it crashed
against the ceiling, the floor, the windows, winding around you both

until you pressed to him, waiting for the ache, but it did not come,
and he is home now.



vi.

The only people that can forgive me are dead, he mouths,
because he killed them, you did not answer, but instead
You are ill, you think until he knows, and he holds you
against his face, knowing so many creation myths have doomed him,
but never you.

You have read about the cats of a far planet, how the tamers
will poke with a wooden sword until the animals lean on hind legs
in a kind of stance. Never you.

vii.

For him, this is vivisection.
And what if you gave to him your own hand,
after washing it, gloves on, leather rubbing
against his bare chest. You'd hold the scalpel,
and there would be no quaking,
but not because he grips you still.

I'm done with these mind tricks,
and you will believe him later, after you are done gutting him,
the sharpness against him digging in
so you can plant your own seeds.

viii.

When he tells you there are planets that rain glass,
you remember your desert,
where you stretched out under heat and over bones
to salvage working parts of broken wholes.

When he tells you this planet rains horizontally,
and you hold him as it pounds against you
covering your eyes against the swirls of dust,
he has shown you the temperature
where sand changes from grit to crystal.

ix.

When you let him fill your body again,
your mind will drift, and his mind will chase it,
to winter on the frozen planet where you split his face
first, and snow fell around you both,
steam from your mouths mixing with sweat.

How best to describe beams of light oscillating,
you, untrained in the ways of his magic, but bound
to his voice falling, a snowflake, into your mind.

You trace your lips across his scar,

resting under his shade, him a dying tree.
The skin there is raised against you, and you,
cold.

I forgive you.

You had to.

x.

Some nights, arms and legs woven together,
you will sleep on the edge of his dreams.

When you wake he will look at you the same pale
as when he hung from his insides
hours before, dangling with the weight of a falling feather
as he twitched and forced breathing.

He will mouth words you will not hear,
and place your hands around his neck
with his own, waiting.

In space, there is no morning.

xi.

No two solar systems smell the same.
You learned this, sniffing him
every time the docking hatch of your ship opened.

What lingers, though: the essence of hot metal
on both your robes, because you begged to float
with him, and he agreed,
at the expense of your clothes.

xii.

You let him cook once. He turned
soil over in his hands, and water to make sauce.
The insects are best live, he argues,
as worms wriggle on the edges of a dish.

I'm used to what comes from sand,
you say, tough. The words part from you
audible and rare.

He sucked on the end of a centipede,
legs dangling from his lips,
and brought his mouth to yours so you could taste.

xiii.

When he works on the ship, arms wrapped up,
hair sticking out from under his helmet,
robes settling against him,
and you know unraveling him is a gift,

but sometimes it can't wait, so you pounce
him in the halls, even though he's begged

no, please,

and really means yes, come,
until you dig your claws into his flesh,
scratching against him, an almost-clean page
for you to scrawl on.

xiv.

You fly from planet to planet,
never home, the ship's humming a backdrop
to his voice. He speaks often now,
between stops, though you prefer the whisper
of his mind touching yours.

He chatters on about his mother, maybe,
while you watch foliage twisting on the ship's screens.
Land here, and he obeys, so you escape to hunt
serpents and their flicking tongues,
dragging him by the bicep to follow.

xv.

By the glow of your own crystals, you
wrap hands around his jaw. Now,
when the glass rises, it is you,
and he floats too, and *this* is when he hovers horizontal
so you are the same height,
he, *is*, yours,
the nexus between *mine* and the spreading of out there.

He moves to kiss your belly and the glass falls,
splitting slow against the ship's floor.

xvi.

You have known since he traced the outline of your chin with his own
that his name was Ben, and that he has never been alone inside his
own mind. He is a haunted attic, and every ghost has a wound reminiscent
of both cutting and burning.

To bend him, to shape his hair in your palms, is to caress
against the broken, wooden crates and bars transposing

When he removes his helmet you can see traces of ash on his cheeks,
and you do not have to ask if the death around his frame is indelible.

the walls of his prison, pliant against the walls of you.

Episode II

xvii.

When you are done with his vertebrae as instruments,
bending him under the red glow,
you are also done speaking
without the language of magic.

*You. When I was young we heard stories
of you crying blood, so ominous,
a looming specter that would snatch us up.*

He waits, and you brush his long hair from his eyes,
wanting. His helmet
rests against the wall, on the ship's floor.

“Haven’t I done
the very thing?”



xviii.

He has gone without covering his face
for some time,
scars and eyes and lips bare against you.

he breathes hot onto your thighs.

“I’m closer to you this way,”

You tangle his hair into your right hand
to push and pull,
and with your left, reach beyond the bed
where there used to be broken things.

His helmet rises to meet your fingertips,
and you stroke along it
while he is lost, then found, inside you.

xix.

This is not a reiteration
of the darkness brewing
between you both.

While he sleeps, after the ship has landed, you
open the door and slink away
to press your feet into the surrounding dirt.

A centipede crawls along your bare toes,
and you reach for it, raw.
It writhes between your fingers

as you examine every leg of it,
then bite down on it soft enough
to feel it lurch along your tongue.

xx.

You are outside weaving magic, trailing fingernails along your thighs
under the glow of moons, scratching patterns.

“Come home,” he says to himself, and you hear him but will not,
“come home,” and you dig into the ground beneath you.

You pull the fur of a wildcat around your shoulders and over
your head, burrowing.

It was drinking from a lake when you came,
slowly feeling the twitch of each muscle before reaching out

to take its neck. You know
he is in the bed; you watch him through the window

until he kicks the helmet, groaning,
and you are home now.

Episode III

xxi.

When you enter the room, black
up to your neck, the dark
wound around your hands and feet,
his lips part, but you don't hear his sound.

Unwrap me, and he complies, pulling on the cloth,
eyes never leaving your face, wide.

His lips move, faster now, and you know that he marvels
at every hair, every smell. Under the lights,
your bodies are almost the same.

More movement. More empty noise.
You climb into his lap and shift against him,
wrapping you both in the bindings
he pulled from you.

He reaches back, and every touch is softer
than the snow you remember.
You shift against each other at different speeds.

xxii.

Your bodies are working gears.
This time, though, you are also a third eye above,
consuming the view of it.

And that is when.

His helmet, covered in a layer of dust and ashes,
is blown clean with the gust of you,
while the binding around you both tightens,
and he strains against it.

Your body sees the cloth digging into his shoulders,
///
slipping to wrap around his neck.

///
The rest of you watches the helmet, gleaming now,
///
rise behind you.

He clings to you,
and you raise your hands to meet the helmet instead,
and place it on your head.

His mouth opens in what you think is a scream;
what you hear is a history of burning.

xxiii.

The lights above you pop and crack
while smoke gathers above your heads.

You are back in your body now,
seeing him convulse between the small slits of the mask.

You touch his arms, his legs, his hair, his face,
each stroke heat against his skin.
The cloth around you both ignites,
but he does not run. Instead,
he burrows his face into your shoulder until you feel
a wetness there,
and he calms.

The fire does not touch you, lingering just above
your naked skin,
framing you in light
while he burns alive, gripping you
with his last tenderness.

You have loved him hard enough
only bones are left.

xxiv.

The room is ashes except for your heat
and his skeleton. His helmet has melted off,
pooling on the ground.

You unwrap from what's left of his frame,
slowly, as to not unravel him,
and hold him together with what's left of your magic.

His right index finger bends

You knew from experience that an animal's bones
were smooth once picked clean,
but his are different,
covered in the ashes of your robes and everything else.

along your jaw.

You press fingers into where his eyes were,
trail more along the smooth edges of his skull,
and bring what's left of him to your lips.



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About the Author

Tate N. Oquendo is especially interested in nontraditional, multimodal compositions and translations in all genres. Their work can be found in numerous literary journals, as well as in the chapbooks *some prophets, self is wolf*, *wringing gendered we*, and *Space Baby*, and the hybrid memoir *Telomeres*. They have also curated the Sundress Publications anthology *Manticore: Hybrid Writing from Hybrid Identities*. Oquendo has also been serving the community since 2000, giving time as an editor to several literary journals and presses, and has been working as a writing educator since 2008.

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