

This book is a collection of poems ranging from Space to Earth to Family — from the vastness of the Universe to the intimacies of interpersonal relationships. Life, the meaning of life, and historical contexts permeate numerous poems.

The Electric Universe: A Collection of Poems

By Stephen Jon Schares

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THE ELECTRIC UNIVERSE



A Collection of Poems

STEPHEN JON SCHARES

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First Edition

Front Cover: Crab Nebula, in the constellation Taurus the Bull — NASA, the Herschel Space Observatory and the Hubble Space Telescope — 2013 (istock by Getty Images, Credit: Aphelleon)

Back Cover: Stephan's Quintet, in the constellation Pegasus — NASA, STScI, and the James Webb Space Telescope — 2022 (alamy, Inc.)

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21st Century

*flower-draped branches
filtered our view—
the path ahead
—hidden—
closed to passage*

*a waterfall of purple
curtained a row of trees
standing in crooked attention
—ignoring our presence—
—blocking our entry—
defying us to pass*

*our retinas fired
a blizzard of colors
—blurring our vision—
if only for a second*

*we stood
a long while here
—wanting to hold on—
not wanting to let go,
not wanting to turn away
—not wanting to be—
a longer time gone*

Stephen Jon Schares

*this time
this place
will not come again
—so we waited—
—can time stand still—
at least for a moment*

A Pattern

*love is a pattern
sewn into our lives—
a touch
a word spoken
a knowing glance*

*at times
—flaunted—
worn on our sleeve
—a public display—*

*more often
—subtle—
hands held under the table
—hidden—
from the gaze of others*

*we recognize it in many forms—
a cornucopia of colors
spewing from a palate—
spreading to an artist's canvas,
detailed with each brushstroke*

Stephen Jon Schares

*a ribbon tied to a tree
—bold and bright—
riveting
—from a distance—
there for all to witness*

*a look
exchanged across a crowded room—
unnoticed by all
but the sharpest eye*

*it is the fabric we weave
through our days—
through our years
with each other*

The Electric Universe

A Sea of Stars

in a sea of stars

—pinpricks at lightyear distance—

moving through the night

like flickers of luminescence

crossing the darkness—

you brighten the sky

A.I.

*we submit to emotion trackers—
sign up for 24/7 messaging—
advertisers plug in our algorithms
manipulating our responses
—our keypad tendencies—
map our physical coordinates
with unbridled surveillance*

*we download our lives—
display our connections—
express ourselves
not in words
—but emojis—
our feelings, indignations,
surprise, responses
defined by symbolic cave-wall art
—Lascaux drawings—
our emotions swayed
by computer animations
geared to our fantasies
—a programmed present—
becomes our future*

*in utopia,
ignorance is bliss—
we succumb to a latent disregard
for truth, objectivity—
wired to respond like lab rats—*

The Electric Universe

*to take the placebo as our own
—external becomes internal—
the link to truth
becomes ephemeral—
a dead-end program*

*we are learning together
how to be alone*

Stephen Jon Schares

Already Risen

*car windows down
in the warm twilight air—
face turned to the wind—
watching from the passenger seat
my hair blowing back
my eyes fixed
not on the road stretching ahead
into the distance
but on the racing telephone wires
lining the highway
—parallel lines—
one above another*

*moon on the horizon
—already risen—
like a single musical note
the moon
—silvery—
floats up and down
on those electric lines
playing a melody—
burning cold and bright
in the evening sky darkening
above the passing fields*

*the song
—we know it—
a song of our own creation*

The Electric Universe

*plays to our changing moods
amid the background light
turning to ebony—
illuminating that vast orb
of our nighttime dreams*

Aqueduct

*rocks tumbled over eons
—scattered—
exposed on a river
—haphazard—
boulders hidden, smoothed
below translucent water
—raging—
an engine of force
relentless in its pursuit
downstream
—Class Five—*

*overhead clouds
shining in light
—cumulous alabaster—
downstream clouds
starting to roll
angry and dark—
the river
—in the distance —
sounds of thunder*

*point of entry
tremulous
before the drop—
cool winds blow firm
on lips dry—
butterflies float freely*

The Electric Universe

*from our stomachs
to the air above—
we breathe deep*

*the silence before the moment
—the edge of no return—*

*paddles in the water—
shouted commands from the rear
—shove off—
—push back—
—reverse—
—left, hit it hard—
—stop, back paddle, right—
up and down
the raft
a bucking bronco—
rushing waves
inundating on all sides
the raft and river
surge as one—
tugging, straining
—now right, hard, hard—
the furious sound of waves of water
crashing down
swallow shouts of defiance
from paddlers stretching
to stab nature's fury
—split second physics—
in the fast lane*

Stephen Jon Schares

*a run measured in elongated seconds
—time stands still—
our biological clock put on hold
and then
the exit—
like bursting through a wall
invisible yet physical—
paddles high above our heads
in triumph—
and the river rolls...*

Banished

*the moon is at a loss
—defenseless—
a rock in Space
recklessly exposed—
its barren surface battered,
subjected to collisions,
explosions of asteroids striking,
resonating to the core—
wayward comets evaporating at impact—
the detritus of lunar gravitational pull*

*you have no way to heal your wounds—
you cannot cover your scars*

*torn from your Mother Earth
—ripped from the womb—
estranged eons ago—
cast away, abandoned
to wander on your own—
too far to return
too close to forget—
no one to notice
no one to care
until we came along—
you and me,
and countless others—
before and after*

Stephen Jon Schares

*looking up,
seeing you painted
in the night sky—
an orphan of Earth
banished from home
bullied from the block
sent down a darkened street
only to be dropped off
on the outskirts of town—
what little you had
—bags packed—
a one-way ticket*

*why did you leave us—
was it by choice
—you left with nothing—
no plate tectonics
no atmosphere
no rivers of life
no ocean of microbes*

*long since gone—
stubbornly, you held close
not letting go—
you pulled yourself together,
mended as best you could—
rearranged the furniture
for all to see and admire—
left the past behind
for good or bad—*

The Electric Universe

*picked up the pieces
and moved on*

*in the long run,
nothing can stay the same—
not you, not I*

*you didn't choose to leave,
our star set that in motion—
planetary physics made it happen*

*now—
left only to cast distant shadows
that tug—
still,
at our hearts*

Stephen Jon Schares

Birthday

*on your birthday
we'll fly away*

*to Paris—
dinner and a stroll
beneath
the Eiffel Tower—
shining
in ambient light
distilled
by the approaching eve
playing
off the ironwork
in shadows
—linear—
parabolic
in the deepening night*

*holding hands
—we'll walk—
moonrise along the Seine*

Black Holes

*a grain of sand
in the vast Milky Way—
hidden
in the nucleus of our galaxy
—the furnace that powers our system—
Black Holes
stretch time and space*

*ruled by gravity—
the tortoise
that will not let go of the hare—
they define the curvature of space*

*in the realm of Sagittarius A
physics rules by decree—
an uncompromising mistress
with a heart of darkness—
a cold-blooded killer of existence*

*step to the edge
of the event horizon
where everything
from logic to love
vanishes*

Stephen Jon Schares

Breathe

*the air you breathe—
I breathe too,
as others before—
a connection to us
and to our past*

*the words you whisper—
the thoughts we share—
drift between us*

*we breathe in
those professions of love—
those repetitions
of conversations, past and present—
countless variations
of yes and no
—spoken over the years—
till we know
what the other will say*

*nothing new—
only to us*

Bus Ride

*the line snaked
through the station door—
not straight, but orderly,
passengers stepping up
boarding
—one at a time—
the driver handling tickets*

*I shuffled down the aisle
taking my seat,
plopping next to a window
—alone—
shifting the pack
from my shoulder
—little comfort—*

*the engine roared,
the bus pulled away—
the knot in my stomach rose
—pressing against me—
it's hard to leave*

*a mist, turned to rain—
splattered randomly
against the glass—*

Stephen Jon Schares

*running in streaks
down the window*

*pedestrians and storefronts
moved past with the languid speed
of city traffic
—like a movie playing out—
cast and characters
changing with each block*

*searching the crowd,
I see you
veiled under an umbrella—
the back of your hair
trailing out—
walking briskly through an open door—
in a hurry
to leave the wetness behind*

*now
I see you again
—standing alone—
your back to the street
—face pressed to the display window—
hooded against the rain
I know your silhouette*

The Electric Universe

*running—
side-stepping shallow puddles,
clumps of people
—calling to a friend, to me—
I hear you*

*your image
too easily discerned
in every scene as I pass
—we're talking, we're laughing—
I could not turn away*

Stephen Jon Schares

Columbia

*the smells of morning
—dew rising from wet grass—
air chilled by a long night of stillness*

*the plunge from ninety miles up
—computer driven—
searing heat from the underside—
death awaits*

*a streak of light
across the dawning sky—
a burst of particles
raining down
on the Louisiana side of Texas—
pieces large and small
—strewn—
along miles of the Bible Belt*

*communication silenced
in those fearful minutes—
static fills the airwaves*

*an exultant return
betrayed by tiles*

The Electric Universe

*—damaged or blown away—
a protective shield
degraded beyond repair—
unnoticed by all*

*is our memory so short—
is our arrogance so large
—attention to detail—
examine the launch film
beyond a cursory glance—
pour over it with technical eyes
—take a spacewalk—
look up close
—judge it—
calculate it first hand*

*in our jubilation
—our self-satisfaction—
our sublime confidence
earned by decades of research
—quad redundant—
we often overlook the mundane,
the little things that define
the grand scheme
that in a blinding moment
can bring us to our knees—
remind us
of that knife-edge we walk—
when we dare to soar*

Stephen Jon Schares

*the first nail into the coffin
—driven at launch—
who could have known—
it's not arrogance to embrace
your past successes—
god knows
that's how we live,
how we get by*

*who let them down—
their families too—
the nation grieves once more*

*what remains
—a photo—
digitally sent
—safe from destruction—
a group photo before descent
—a look at the living—
read their faces,
see into their eyes,
their expressions tell it all—
triumph before tragedy*

Cool Meridian

*the moon rose in the east
to its cool meridian—
drifting through the darkening sky
—but not alone—*

*winged shadows
—migratory birds—
streaking in flight
outlined the sky in black—
silhouetted shapes
across the waxing moon*

*the chill of the evening
permeated the air—
enveloped us in a coolness
to match the temperature—
our eyes followed
the path of lunar drift*

*in the distance
the sound of a train
approaching a crossing
—rumbling on its iron tracks—
its long whistle
shrill in the gathering night—
a lonesome echoing
in the heavy air*

Stephen Jon Schares

Crab Nebula

*remnant
of a supernova explosion
—a Red Giant—
going off in the constellation
—Taurus the Bull—
six thousand light years
from Earth*

*an implosion
well before the rise of ancient Egypt—
long before the Pyramids
rose from the desert*

*at the speed of light
—186,000 miles per second—
reaching us in the year 1054
—a true Rosetta Stone—
unraveling its secrets*

*a light so bright
from an inflation so intense—
it shone in the daytime sky
for a month of Sundays*

The Electric Universe

*it took its sweet time
getting here
—but just in time—*

*a sign from heaven
—a portend of events—
religion once again
had a response*

*1054 — the year of the Great Schism
Roman Catholic challenged by Eastern Orthodox
—Europe split in two—
West and East
—cataclysmic—
Rome versus Constantinople*

*a supernova hardly cares
about religion or politics
—physics is all that matters—
certainly not a far-away planet
still grappling with the concept of flat Earth*

*a superstitious world
looking up in amazement
at a dark sky
and a mysterious light—*

Stephen Jon Schares

*centuries before the time of
Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler*

*eons before science
had answers
beyond the Bible
—beyond the tales of ancestral spirits—
voyagers in the night*

*the Crab Nebula
—M1 in the Messier Catalog—
at its center
a neutron star
—a pulsar—
spinning thirty times per second*

*electrons swirling
near the speed of light—
burning hot colors of
blue, green, and red
—now eleven light years across—
expansion unrelenting*

Dancing

*dancing on the water's edge—
sand packed hard
beneath our gliding feet*

*umbrellas held high around us,
bent slightly into the wind
—servants, maybe—
by-standers, possibly
—admirers, undoubtedly—
their arms aloof,
their bodies hunched—
keeping us dry
in the misting rain
—shielding us from the wet—
if not completely*

*beads of rainwater collect
like transparent pearls
on the folds of our formal wear
—our evening wear—
my black tux
your red dress
—stark contrast—
on the sandy shore*

Stephen Jon Schares

*the music mixes
with the waves crashing—
a rolling sound
of distant thunder
like the beating of orchestral drums—
the peal of cymbals
clashing with the friction
of lightning on the horizon*

*how can we not
remember those steps
etched in the sand
—wet with the ocean's tide—
footprints
marking our dance
—a long slow promenade of turns—
elbows raised,
arms embracing lightly
in the passion of movement
and music*

*while others could only
hold on to their hats
—we danced—
through the crowd
alone*

Deep In The Night

*sleeping tigers
nestled
in trees
dressed
to kill
deep
in the night
the
still
black
sounds
of morning*

*dream
you are awake
to the
slumbering
silence
we share
in the
growing
whiteness
of dawn's
cool
rise*

Stephen Jon Schares

Double — Helix

*it happened today
amid the rows of dusty test tubes,
vials squeezed with matter,
eye droppers sitting in their racks
—chemicals untouched—
gloves, boxes stacked
against the wall—*

*tinker-toy structures
fitted and refitted
—chalkboard drawings—
written and rewritten*

*1953
Watson and Crick
—double helix—
—four chemicals—
—building blocks of life—
strands of DNA
—coiled—
a spiral ladder,
a staircase
set by proteins,
enzymes—
the secret of life
revealed—
a vision through the looking glass*

The Electric Universe

—stage right—

*Darwinians crowd the cameras—
pushing to be front and center,
they preen like peacocks
in ritual courtship*

—stage left—

*Creationists skulk in the corners,
their shadows lengthening in the darkness
—the dim light of defeat—
their diatribe finished
—relegated—
to the dustbin of history*

Stephen Jon Schares

Electric Universe

*words written
on the walls of time—
sheets of galaxies
draped across the universe
hang like veils of gossamer
thousands of light-years across—
separating the past from the present*

*a universe electric in color
—painted in its full spectrum—
radio waves, microwaves, infrared,
visible light, ultraviolet, x-rays, gamma rays
—engaged in physics—
actions we can barely comprehend—
understand at any level*

*its vast matter
mostly
—dark, unknown, all encompassing—
almost brooding
—if temperament can be measured—
across time and Space*

*—our universe—
almost unknowable
even today, to us*

The Electric Universe

*inhabiting a speck of time and place—
part of a jigsaw puzzle
—galactic in size—
with a million billion pieces
waiting
to be fitted together*

Erosion

*erosion starts
a trickle at a time
—over decades—
a steady drip, drip, dripping
like water seeping from a faucet
ignored, unnoticed
into an upright glass overflowing—
beads running down its sides
pooling in puddles—
a floorboard turning damp
quietly wetting the soil underneath—
relentlessly flowing into a stream
down a river
to overflowing banks
flooding fields
turned to sea*

*a government
big enough to give you
everything you want
is big enough to take away
everything you have—
self-reliance
dignity
personal autonomy
a willingness to delay gratification
for long-term goals—
all carried away*

The Electric Universe

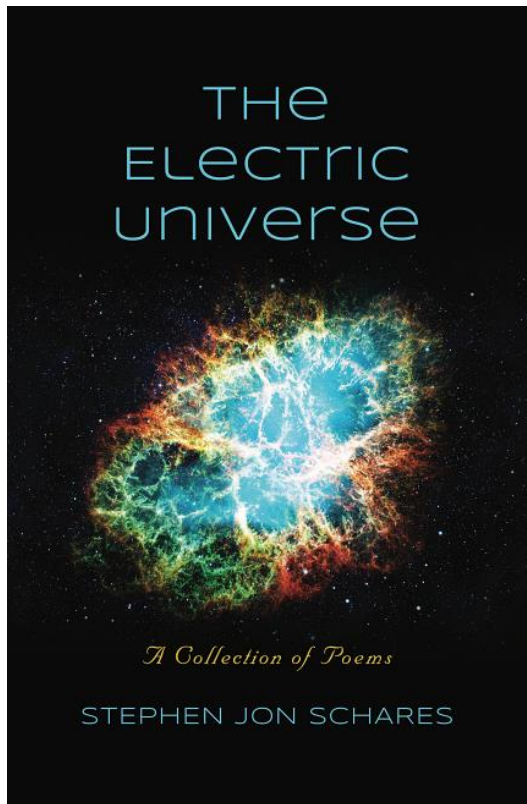
*is this how modern nations die—
not by war or conquest
but
from within—
undone by its citizens
blindly embracing false beliefs
half-truths preached
by 21st century snake-oil salesmen
mixing a toxic elixir
of division and skewed reasoning
—everyone fitted with blinders—
like the proverbial sheep to the slaughter*

*until one day
you wake up
with no need to sign
a formal surrender—
you did it piecemeal
year by year
bit by bit
and now the piper comes to call
—to collect its due—
its pound of flesh*

*when civilization feels guilty
for everything it is and does
—its past, its present, its future—
it cannot defend itself
against the right, the left,
the ‘isms’ of revisionist history*

Stephen Jon Schares

*when we loathe ourselves
when we lack the will
to stand up for clarity
what can we expect—
the world watches us closely*



This book is a collection of poems ranging from Space to Earth to Family — from the vastness of the Universe to the intimacies of interpersonal relationships. Life, the meaning of life, and historical contexts permeate numerous poems.

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