

# THE VOICE

MAGAZINE  
Vol 19 Iss 36 2011-09-23

## Melodic Medicine

Healing the heart

## Super-Like!

Life of the party

## Rule of One

Prolificacy and platitude

*Plus:  
From Where I Sit  
The Mindful Bard  
and much more!*



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***The Voice  
Magazine***

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*The Voice* is published  
every Friday in HTML and  
PDF format.

For weekly email  
reminders as each issue is  
posted, fill out the  
subscription form [here](#).

*The Voice* does not share  
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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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indicate if we may publish your letter.





## OUT OF THE BOX

Christina M. Frey



### The Facebook Phenomenon of the Super-Like

It's a humorous reflection on culture when changes online—the place where we might expect ceaseless change anyways—become a cultural meme of their own. I'm referring, of course, to the much-hyped and much-maligned Facebook layout changes. The newest set just rolled out this week.

It starts out with a new look for the news feed or profile page. First come the complaints: *I can't find anything on*

*here! Massive fail, FB.* Then the anger: *Share this "I hate the new layout" photo if you agree!* Then the conspiracies get passed around. *Warning: Facebook has also changed all your privacy settings! Do this quick fix to restore everything!* Then, because on Facebook everyone has to be different, to somehow stand out from the crowd, a few start the clever booster club status lines: *It's funny how people complain and yet they don't quit Facebook!*

In the end they're right, though; no one wants to quit Facebook for the opposing team. Safety's in numbers, and the numbers are sticking with the blue box. So we stop grumbling, gradually get used to it, and even forget all about it.

That is, until the next wave of changes rolls out.

It's fascinating that one web giant can hold such a monopoly on casual online communication. At the same time, it's slightly disconcerting. After all, the environment in which we interact affects the type, quality, and focus of our interactions.

This is true regardless of whether we're interacting physically or electronically, but it's especially obvious with the latter. These days, the way we communicate with one another is intimately tied to our online interactions. If our online environment is primarily or even exclusively limited to one networking space, it's easy to fall into a mould that's a by-product of that environment.

Previously, you could approve others' posts by "liking" or commenting. Thanks to the new changes, you can now mark others' status updates or photos as "top stories," thus making it more likely for them to appear at the front of other friends' news feeds (or making it more likely for you to see similar posts in the future). You're essentially taking your approval one step further and sharing it with the world. In fact, you're super-liking it.



*Want to be the life of the online cocktail party? Facebook's latest changes give us additional temptation to show off and get ourselves noticed—or at least bump up our visibility a few notches.*

"I think it's hilaaarious what FB thinks would be important to me. Keep trying, FB," one friend wrote. Yet it's not so much about how you'll *read* your news feed, it's about how you'll write your own news.

Some wise person once compared Facebook to an enormous online cocktail party, where everyone's vying for attention. We want to be memorable, and social networking makes it a little more attainable to make our mark among, at least, our circle of friends. It's a very, very few who wouldn't be secretly pleased when their posts get flagged as "Top Stories." And who doesn't want to appear in that cool little real-time feed in the box on the right—the one where you see who's saying what?

Most of us have an unspoken desire for popularity, and social networking is already an ego-booster by its nature. That's why we try to think up clever status lines, or write those "Dear so-and-so . . ." letters, or vent without giving any details, or ask advice. We're not necessarily having an ego trip; we just want people to talk to us, give us their attention (even for a few seconds).

Desiring interaction is normal, even good. While face-to-face is arguably better, online communication is increasingly a fact of life. In many ways it's beneficial—as long as we're in control of the medium, that is.

Let's resist the temptation to self-promote, to deliberately rise to the top, to be the toast of the Facebook party. There's nothing wrong with funny posts, snarky status updates, in-your-face opinions, rants and vents, and albums of our latest cool adventures. But if we over-focus on creating the "perfect" line, the "perfect" Facebook persona, the one that will rise to the "Top," we'll spend so much time preparing to communicate that we'll never truly interact.

Now that would be a tragedy worth posting about.



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## IN CONVERSATION WITH . . .

Wanda Waterman



## Alysha Brillinger, Part I

As a child, Canadian singer-songwriter Alysha Brillinger enjoyed a creative freedom that encouraged a prodigious musical talent. With two parents who loved music and three sisters who could be recruited as singers and dancers in living room productions, Alysha could expand on that talent: by the age of eight she was arranging three-part harmonies and producing recordings using a two-track tape recorder.

Her focus has not flagged, and she's no slouch at hiking the hills and valleys of a demanding musical career.

"I definitely work very hard at what I do, but it has never felt tedious," Alysha says. "I always enjoy music—playing, writing, and recording. I suppose the creative side is the most rewarding, while the business side is the fine print you forget to read about when you sign up to be a musician. It's not what you bargain on, but it's thrown in with everything else, and it's a learning experience."

Alysha's 14<sup>th</sup> year was a significant one; her family moved to Kitchener, Ontario, where she taught herself how to play the guitar. And she had her first shot at singing live with a band after happening upon a blues bar in downtown Kitchener and walking up to the open mike.

"I absolutely fell in love," says Alysha. "There's something so timeless and raw in blues that I really connect with. It truly permeates every musical genre, including reggae, soul, boogaloo, and jazz, all of which emerge in my music as undertones."

Alysha has crafted a unique personal musical style by combining blues, reggae, and other genres to make funky, punchy, lovable tunes that express love and triumph over loss. She recently finished the Tower of Song Tour, shared with Kristen Bussandri, in which she performed at venues in Montreal and Toronto. She has also released her debut EP and is now at work on a full-length record.

For Alysha, music has a transcendent power that can transform lives:

"My music is overall very positive," she says. "I am inspired . . . by the ideology that music truly heals and cures. It heals both the songwriter and the listener. The songwriter is able to channel . . . experiences into song and the listeners are hopefully given an articulation of something they otherwise didn't know they felt or didn't know how to express."

*"Music truly heals . . . both the songwriter and listener. The songwriter is able to channel . . . experiences into song and the listeners are hopefully given an articulation of something . . . they didn't know how to express."*

**Alysha Brillinger**

Her song “Better Soon” was written in 2010, during a dark period in Alysha’s life. Her dear friend Jimmy had been diagnosed with cancer, but something told her to hang on and believe in the light at the end of the tunnel.

“I released this song and video in January,” she remembers. “Shortly after that we held a big fundraiser for Jimmy and he told me that this song was his anthem and that throughout his struggle with cancer it had helped him stay positive.”

“Hearing that really touched me because I was also in a rough place emotionally when I wrote this song, but I knew I wanted to convey a message of hope . . . for myself, for Jimmy, and for everyone who hears it.”

“Sometimes, when you’re sad or depressed,” Alysha says, “you don’t know what could possibly make you feel better, and that’s what ‘Better Soon’ is about. The fact is that our remedy could be anything, anywhere, or anyone, and just like that, we’re given another chance.”

## DID YOU KNOW?

## Access to Students with Disabilities (ASD)



Are you an Athabasca University student who’s struggling with an educational or physical challenge, physical or psychological condition, or permanent or temporary injury or illness that’s affecting your ability to complete your studies? You may be eligible for special support services from AU’s ASD.

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Because ASD acknowledges that each student’s situation is affected by geographic location and the resources available, it involves the student in “[finding] a mutually satisfactory resolution to the assessed support service or accommodation requirement.” Possibilities include alternative learning formats, assisted technology, examination accommodations, and other learning support services.

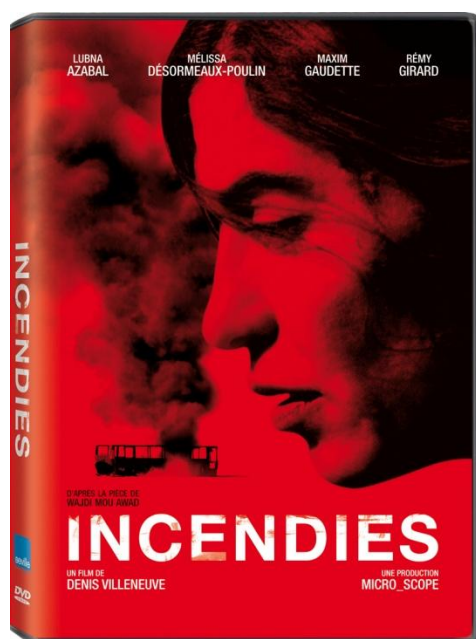
To apply for assistance, you’ll need to fit the eligibility criteria and submit the required paperwork. For further details, click [here](#).

For more information on ASD and how it can help you reach your academic goals, visit the ASD [website](#).



## THE MINDFUL BARD

Wanda Waterman



Courtesy of eOne Films.

## Books, Music, and Film to Wake Up Your Muse and Help You Change the World

**Film:** *Incendies* (2011)**Director:** Denis Villeneuve**Source:** Based on the play by Wajdi Mouawad**Cast:** Lubna Azabal, Mélissa Désormeaux-Poulin, Maxim Gaudette, Rémy Girard**I Have Nothing to Say**

You simply have to see this film; there's no way to adequately communicate its splendour to you. But while I have you here, I can tell you that it's one of the most artistically perfect, profound, realistic, and gruelling films I've ever witnessed.

A young unwed mother in southern Lebanon is forcibly separated from her son. She searches fiercely for him all her life. When he's old enough, he searches equally fiercely for her. She later has twins and is living in Canada, but in her will she asks that these twins find both their brother and his father in the massive pile of shards left by the endless cycles of attacks and reprisals in the Middle East.

*Incendies* is based on *Scorched*, a stage play by Lebanese writer and director Wajdi Mouawad, who has been an important fixture in the Canadian theatre scene for a number of years now. Denis Villeneuve's film interpretation here is clearly a labour of love. The soundtrack is a mesmerizing mix of Middle Eastern and Western music, and the cinematography is so effective you can practically smell the chipped paint on the ruined walls and the rosemary breeze wafting across the desert. And then there's the acting.

Lubna Azabal does an amazing job of portraying the indomitable Nawal, who loses everything that matters most to a woman and in the end discovers a horrific truth—yet makes a response to it which very nearly articulates an answer to human suffering.

Lubna Azabal in *Incendies*. Courtesy of eOne Films.



But the shining performance in this movie is that of Méli­ssa Désormeaux-Poulin, who plays Nawal’s daughter, Jeanne. A cool-thinking mathematician, she has reserve and resolve that are formidable but never chilling, and when we see her emotions finally break out, they’re all the more salient in light of the restraint she’s exhibited.

*“What response can a movie make to a world in which mothers want to kill their children and grandchildren . . . and where cycles of vengeance appear as if they cannot be stopped until all are dead?”*

The special features include interviews with the ordinary people who played bit parts. Many of these are Palestinian refugees, and their interviews reveal chilling reminders of the kind of uncompromising fierceness that’s borne of generations of suffering from what amounts to cultural PTSD—a network of hate constructs that lead ordinary people to want to kill and destroy not only their enemies but those whom they are biologically designed to love and protect.

A group of women in the village, for example, insist that if their daughters became pregnant out of wedlock, they would simply have to kill them, and the babies too, because of the stain on the family honour. There are also children and men talking about the wars

they’ve lived through and fought in, and the family members whose deaths they’ve witnessed. Many of them have an obvious problem with the violent scenes they are now enacting.

Clearly, holding hands and having a sing-along is out of the question.

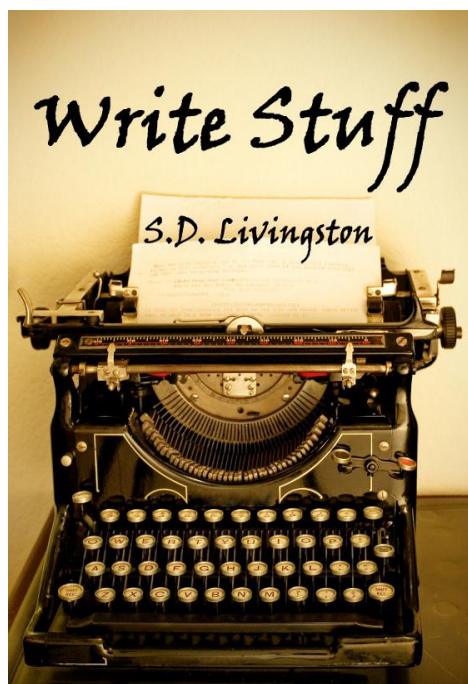
What response can a movie make to a world in which mothers want to kill their children and grandchildren, where young boys are taught to kill, and where cycles of vengeance appear as if they cannot be stopped until all are dead?

None. But here is a film that looks the brute force of human cruelty full in the face, and lovingly caresses it.

*Incendies* fulfills eight of the Mindful Bard’s criteria for films well worth seeing: 1) it is authentic, original, and delightful; 2) it poses and admirably responds to questions that have a direct bearing on my view of existence; 3) it harmoniously unites art with social action, saving me from both seclusion in an ivory tower and slavery to someone else’s political agenda; 4) it is about attainment of the true self; 5) it inspires an awareness of the sanctity of creation; 6) it displays an engagement with and compassionate response to suffering; 7) it gives me tools of compassion, enabling me to respond with compassion and efficacy to the suffering around me; and 8) it makes me appreciate that life is a complex and rare phenomenon, making living a unique opportunity.



**L to R: Lubna Azabal and Méli­ssa Désormeaux-Poulin in *Incendies*. Courtesy of eOne Films.**



## If It's Good Enough for Harper Lee . . .

In some pursuits, quality and speed go together. Like winning Olympic gold on the 1000-metre short track—or taking the Triple Crown. But in other endeavours, like writing, speed often works against quality. So it's a surprise to find this recent advice from a literary type himself, a *New York Times* book critic: if you're not cranking words out fast enough, readers won't wait for you.

The article, by Dwight Garner, offers a vivid mental image of the destiny that awaits talented but deliberate authors. The reader, no matter how much he enjoys your work, will only remain loyal for so long. You might be the next Hemingway but, as Garner suggests, “if you and your peers wish to regain a prominent place in the culture, one novel a decade isn't going to cut it.”

In some ways, the logic makes sense. We live in a world of hyperactive, non-stop exposure. This year's hot young stars must stay in the public eye or risk being replaced by eager newcomers. Writers, no less than other artists, need to connect with their audiences. But to suggest that readers will abandon quality in favour of quantity not only ignores several classic examples to the contrary, it insults the very people writers and publishers aim to please.

Suppose you have a favourite author. You love her work. It speaks to you, illuminating and clarifying issues in your life. You've read and reread all her novels, and eagerly await a new release. So what if it takes 10 years to complete? Should we really believe that readers have become so impatient, so fickle, that when a long-awaited title hits the stores, they'll turn up their noses and say, “Sorry, we've moved on to someone who cranks out books every six months”?

It's a bit like saying that no one would be interested in the Eagles' *Hell Freezes Over* tour because it took them 14 years to get around to it. As a reader, I'd like to think that my favourite authors give me a little more credit than that—and that they trust my loyalty enough to take their time and get it right.

The quantity-equals-relevance argument also stumbles in the face of these four words: *To Kill a Mockingbird*. In his *Times* article, Garner quotes Gore Vidal on the subject of writer's block: “You're not meant to be doing this. Plenty more where you came from.”

I've never met Harper Lee, and I can't say whether she's suffered from writer's block. But her one and only completed novel, the classic *To Kill a Mockingbird*, is one of the most relevant social commentaries of our times. Its importance has not diminished over the years, and has not been lessened by its status as the author's sole completed work—or by her desire to remain far from the limelight. Thank Calliope that Harper Lee decided that she was, indeed, “meant to be doing this.”

Perhaps instead of urging writers to work more prolifically, we should rely on their instincts to know when a work is complete—and trust their readers to wait.



## *From Where I Sit*

*Hazel Anaka*

### **Happily Ever After**

Once upon a time (okay, 2009) in a land far away (Andrew, Alberta) a not-so-young would-be author sat down in her parlour and began writing a book. She had long harboured the desire to be published. And over the years she had, in various small ways, secured a byline and publishing credits.

Putting quill to parchment had begun in earnest in 2002 when she adopted the catchy “From Where I Sit” as the title of her column and as a disclaimer to all who would read it. The content was simply one maiden’s take on life. It first appeared in a small weekly scroll and was well-received by all those who read it.

But when pieces of gold were not forthcoming in a timely and agreed upon way, the author resorted to a stinging email to the despot editor, questioning his word and his worth. Within days, coin appeared at her bank. But by then the relationship had soured and was over.

Soon the maiden negotiated a deal with a biweekly scroll and is to this day a fixture there. Half-hearted attempts at self-syndication met with discouraging results. Pitiful budgets and a glut of those who would write for nothing more than a byline were powerful foes.

By 2004, a prince suggested contacting Athabasca University’s online publication. Thanks to a fairy godmother named Tamra, the maiden’s

words soon began appearing weekly and continue to this day. Other writing (profiles and some humour) appeared in other publications, some of which are now defunct.

She had arrived—but not really, because her bigger dream, to pen a book, had never died. Ideas were considered and dismissed. Feeble attempts were mounted in pursuit of this mighty goal.

But the enemies were many. The trio of Insecurity, Fear, and Who-the-Hell-Do-You-Think-You-Are were especially fearsome. Lurking near the drawbridge was Internal Critic. For ages it seemed that Discipline had abandoned her, and for a while the maiden faced the dreaded possibility she was of the kind who much prefer to have written than to actually write.

However, soon rumours from neighbouring kingdoms reached her, telling of the success of plucky late bloomers, and she took inspiration. She knew in her heart that she was decades past being a child prodigy, but maybe it wasn’t too late. *Maybe it’s now or never*, she told herself. *Maybe it’s s\*&t or get off the throne.*





And so it came to pass that, suddenly encouraged, the maiden threw herself into her work. She used character sketches and plotting and decades of reading experience to write her first book: a tale of love between a young woman and man. It would be known as *Lucky Dog*.

And she felt incredibly blessed. So many years of dreaming but not doing had resulted in the entire publishing kingdom's being turned on its head. By waiting, she had avoided the agony of queries, agents, publishers, and rejection. She instead had relied on the support of family and the generosity of a mentor princess named Sandra. She wrote the best first book she could and handed it to the royalty at Smashwords to usher into the world.

When we last saw this intrepid maiden, she was hard at work on her next tale and muttering something about all being right with the world. Dare say she just may live happily ever after, from where I sit.

## CLICK OF THE WRIST

99 Days

Today is the first day of fall. But just in case that didn't tip you off that the end of the year is nearing, now's the time to start the countdown: there are just 99 days left of 2011. The number 99 may figure prominently in music (including 80s protest song "99 Luftballons" and countdown ditty "99 Bottles of Beer on the Wall"), but it also has some unique associations. Click the links to find out more.

### The 99 Percent

Genius is 99 per cent perspiration, warned inventor Thomas Edison. Website The 99 Percent, a project of professional consulting giant Behance, is a gold mine of articles, videos, and tips for creative professionals. Topics include inspiration, collaboration, prioritization, self-marketing, and much more. It's like the TED.com for career development.

### 99 Heroes

Ever heard of The 99? It's a group of "comic superheroes born of an Islamic archetype," and its multicultural characters hail from countries around the globe. The 99 have been applauded by many leaders, including US President Barack Obama, and will be the subject of a PBS documentary this fall. Click the link to learn more about this inspiring and innovative creation.

### Number 99

Most hockey fans know about Wayne Gretzky and the 99 connection: the Canadian legend sported the "99" jersey throughout his career. His official page—informally called "99"—includes videos, stats, and information on the charitable foundations Gretzky's begun.



**AUSU UPDATE: SEPTEMBER 2011****Bethany Tynes, President****Update on AUSU awards program**

AUSU has long had a student awards program to recognize outstanding students and assist those in need. Over the course of the last couple years, though, we've sought to revamp and revise our awards portfolio to improve existing awards and add new ones! We now have a wide array of bursaries to support students in need (including our popular computer and travel bursaries), scholarships to recognize students' outstanding academic achievements, and merit-based awards to recognize students' exceptional abilities and extra-curricular activities. Some awards are open to application at any time of year, while many have semi-annual deadlines. Our next major awards deadline is November 1<sup>st</sup>, so make sure you check our site for more information and get your application in by then!

**AUSU newsletter hitting mailboxes near you . . .**

Every four to six months, AUSU publishes a printed newsletter full of helpful information for students and updates on what the Union is working on. The newsletter is drafted by AUSU's Executive Director with assistance from the AUSU Media Committee. Our most recent newsletter has been mailed out, and if it hasn't reached you yet, keep an eye on your mailbox, because it should arrive soon. If you just can't wait to see it, though, you can also e-mail our office for a PDF copy.

**Watch for a new AUSU website coming soon!**

Our website has served us long and well, but it is starting to show its age in some areas, so we're preparing to give our site a full facelift! We are currently just in the planning stages, but we're hopeful that within the next couple of months, we'll be able to announce a grand unveiling of our new site. We'll be making sure that our new and improved site is easier to navigate, with slick new menus and a contemporary look and feel. We want our site to provide dynamic content and updates so that it's a place that you, as an AU student, WANT to visit regularly! If you have suggestions on content you'd like to see on our website, please get in touch with us to share your ideas.

**Have you heard . . .**

Have you heard that we still have some of our awesome 2011 AUSU Handbook/Planners available? Some of the information in these little books is priceless when it comes to helping AU students navigate the University and our services—but they're free for you, just for being an AUSU member! We even mail them right to your door. All you have to do is ask!

And have you heard about our SmartDraw program? We've been arranging for a license for our students to use this software for the last few years. It lets you create detailed charts and insert them into your assignments (even ones you submit as Word or PDF documents). The company has warned us, though, that there will be a massive price increase next year, so we want to know if our students feel that the software is a help to them, or if they'd rather have us look into other options. Get your copy today, and let us know what you think.

### Get in touch with us

Have comments or questions about AUSU or anything in this column? Feel free to get in touch with AUSU President Bethany Tynes at [president@ausu.org](mailto:president@ausu.org). You can also e-mail our office at [ausu@ausu.org](mailto:ausu@ausu.org) or call 1-800-788-9041 ext. 3413. We'd love to hear from you!

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## CHRONICLES OF CRUISCIN LAN

Wanda Waterman





## INTERNATIONAL NEWS DESK



### At Home: Fine Feathers

Fine feathers make fine birds, the old saying goes. But who had the feathers before the birds? A recent discovery in Alberta has scientists and paleontologists eagerly uncovering clues to the evolution of feathers before birds—that is, on dinosaurs.

As *The Globe and Mail* [reports](#), the collection of 11 fossilized feathers was found preserved in amber in southeastern Alberta, east of Lethbridge. The area “is a treasure trove of remnants from the dinosaur age”; scientists date the new findings to the Late Cretaceous period. Until now, fossilized feathers have only been found in Asia.

The feathers are unique since, due to their preservation, they are three-dimensional. Previous finds have been impressions, “basically carbonized films on shale,” University of Alberta professor emeritus Brian Chatterton told reporters.

Additionally, the feathers “[represent] four distinct stages of feather evolution,” and suggest that “feathers from Late Cretaceous were not uniform in colour.”

Paleontologists believe that “modern feather adaptation appeared before non-flying dinosaurs were extinct,” and the Alberta discoveries seem to support this. In fact, it’s thought that some dinosaurs—including tyrannosaurids—may have sported primitive feathers akin to “fuzz” on baby birds.

### Around the World: Paging Tatooine

Star destroyers? Planet-sized weapons? Strange life forms? *Star Wars* may require a little suspension of disbelief, but George Lucas had one thing right: the universe does indeed contain planets with two suns, just like Luke Skywalker’s home planet of Tatooine.

As *National Geographic’s* Daily News site [reports](#), newly discovered planet Kepler 16b enjoys two sunsets thanks to its binary sun system. Its 229-day orbit takes it “around both host stars.”

But you wouldn’t want to visit. While the deserts of Tatooine made for hard living, Kepler 16b is completely uninhabitable; it’s a “Saturn-like gas giant without a solid surface.” Additionally, Kepler 16b is so far away from its suns that it’s too cold for “liquid water . . . to exist,” and it receives insufficient sunlight despite its two stars.

The stars form “what’s known as an eclipsing binary system—a pair of stars that orbit in such a way that they eclipse each other, causing them to dim, as seen from Earth.”

Scientists believe that other planets in the universe may “exist in similar binary star systems”—with some perhaps like Earth.

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# CLASSIFIEDS

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## THE VOICE

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*The Voice* is published every Friday in HTML and PDF format.

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