

STAR LINE

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Communing with the Ancestors by Hasani Claxton



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Catsitting on Halloween

Horror movie marathon—
 From beneath the couch
 The cat keeps swatting
 My bare ankles.

I realize much later
 That she has been
 Asleep beside me
 All this while.

—Christina Sng

planet of flowers
 with every fresh red blossom
 someone disappears

—ayaz daryl nielsen

Witching

Rain held dominion
 the afternoon we became witches.

A globe was spun
 every time my shovel hit the earth.

We buried talismans in the rain-soaked dirt,
 gathered stones, drizzled twigs,

arranged them in a circle.
 Sitting in our puddled clothing,

we sank into the ground,
 stones and twigs surrounding us.

Tree rings witnessed another spin
 of the globe, the sound of bark cracking.

—David Clink

Unknown Quantity

it glows, inimical
 black eyes glittering
 under the lab's harsh light
 the white-clad scientists
 standing behind thick glass
 still don't feel entirely safe
 it weaves its web and waits
 though no whisper of wind
 no hint of breeze
 disturbs its artificial habitat
 a horror drawn
 from the quaking well
 of children's nightmares
 quilted from a patchwork
 of DNA and audacity
 it gazes down
 dwarfing its captors
 "How many of these—*things*—"
 one of them whispers
 voice harsh in the silence
 and the unspoken answer
 echoes bouncing through the lab
 chilling their hearts
no one knows
 and that's where the true
 terror
 lies

—Lisa Timpf

first contact
 the backyard
 filling with pods

—Carolyn M. Hinderliter

History Teacher

Mr. Egbert's voice sent shivers up your spine
like fingernails on a blackboard
and yet somehow managed to maintain
a shrill monotone drone.
Despite this, his class listened with rapt attention.
You see, whatever Mr. Egbert said in his history class
was the absolute truth.
Not before he said it, but once the words were uttered
the entire classroom was transported to alternative timelines
where what he said was the absolute truth.
Sometimes the students walked in and somebody was president,
and when the bell rang and the students exited
it was somebody else holding the office.
Once during a particularly spirited lecture
when Mr. Egbert murdered a Chinese emperor
who had never been murdered before
and the timelines instantly adjusted,
one of the students in one of the middle rows
spontaneously changed sex, transforming from a short chubby boy
to an awkwardly tall slender girl
(and unfortunately just as homely in either gender)
and the whole class just laughed.
No one wanted to ask any questions
about how such a thing was possible.
They only knew that whatever Mr. Egbert said that day
became the gospel truth,
entire timelines shifting to make it so.
You did not have to listen closely
to realize Mr. Egbert's lectures
always featured a beautiful, spirited heroine,
Sacagawea, Amelia Earhart, Jane Goodall and others,
the same beautiful, courageous, goddess
appearing in different forms over many centuries
and always just beyond his reach.
The bell rings and Mr. Egbert gathers his papers,
heading towards the quiet home he shares with a patient cat,
spending his evening dreaming up new histories
for tomorrow's lecture,
and trying to align all his alternative timelines
until at last his world is ruled by a benevolent queen.

–Gary Every



HELLO OUT THERE

All too briefly, aliens were real. For just a few days, many of us were thrilled by reports of an alien signal. We hope for and in some cases fear the existence of all sorts of aliens—not just ETs, but fairies, ghosts, and other currently irreal beings. And some of us generate them and their worlds. I haven't played computer games since the days of Obsidian and Myst, mainly because I know myself too well (TIME SINK ADDICTION), but I have been tempted by No Man's Sky, which is effectively an infinite universe inside our universe—which may itself be a hologram created by entities in another, external universe.

We wonder at what point Reality ends and Imaginary begins. Recently, there's been some discussion among members as to what constitutes a rigorous definition of "speculative" poetry—and it appears that all of us have different criteria. The definition of our founder, Suzette Haden Elgin, includes science poetry, which to me would mean non-fictional, and even the definition of what is science rather than science fiction is open to discussion—I take issue with the idea, in the current Stealth column on p. 25, that something like *The Martian* could possibly be considered science rather than hard SF. Based on scientific knowledge, certainly, but there are major obstacles to be overcome before travel to Mars becomes reality. It seems to me that the irreal—what cannot exist at this time, or maybe ever—is what we're all about. However, speculative writers have predicted the unforeseeable successfully for centuries!

In the northern hemisphere of our current planet, where most SFPA members and contributors reside, fall is inexorably advancing, making the butterflies and hibiscus blossoms of the cover painting only a memory—but others live where spring is in full bloom, or the eternal summer of the equator, and who is to say how many more summers dwell within us?

Will tomorrow be beautiful?

—Juliet Patterson, "Draft of a Landscape"

Wishing you all infinite universes to write and read in.

—F.J. Bergmann, *Star*Line* editor

4.367 light years

though she will hold me in descent
in the last mist

this is not a dream

—Robin Wyatt Dunn

Your New Political Machine: Care and Maintenance

"... picking
the least unsavory
candidate
from its teeth ..."

—C.R. Harper

The Reports

The reports that said the world had been destroyed were wrong, but we read them anyway. It seemed important to get the reports immediately, and the truth would just get in the way, we thought. And the reports came quickly, and we ate them up like so much cabbage. They started to report things that were happening (or not happening) right now, I mean, right now. Then they did the unthinkable, they reported what was going to happen (or not going to happen)! It seemed time was against us, that patience was no longer an option, it was now, this instant, and the reports were coming fast and furious. That was when most of us stopped reading them. We didn't want to know how we would (or would not) live out our lives, how they would end (or not end).

–David Clink

The Other Side of the Fence

Although *fence* may be a misnomer here, given that the containment room is built inside a secure research facility with an abundance of safeguards, while the portal for viewing the genetically-altered *Poaceae* is itself a type of specialty glass developed for space travel.

But the part about verdancy still remains true, the molecules of super-chlorophyll designed to suck up excess carbon from the atmosphere being so intense and vivid and steeped in greenness, that just a minimal walk of ten seconds upon its carpeted lushness will literally take your breath away, sucking the CO₂ from your lungs, causing them to collapse, and you, ungrasslike, to turn a much less pleasant hue of cyanotic blue.

–Robert Borski

t
he
rei
sapoi
ntatw
hiche
veryt
hingm
ustco
metog
ether
butth
ewaitis
torture
untilth
ethunde
rofblas
to
ff

–LeRoy Gorman



We're now using MailChimp to deliver official SFPA messages, reminders, and Star*Line .pdf links. If you haven't received them, e-mail sfpanews@gmail.com.

Any SFPA postal correspondence or votes may be mailed to **SFPA Secretary Shannon Connor Winward, 117 McCann Rd, Newark DE 19711, USA.**

NEW SFPA PRESIDENT

Bryan Thao Worra: is our new president—which means we need a new treasurer! We also need 2017 Dwarf Stars, Elgin, and Contest Chairs; David C. Kopaska-Merkel will be the 2017 Rhysling Chair. To volunteer, contact Shannon Connor Winward, SFPA Secretary: ladytairngire@yahoo.com.

DWARF STARS AWARD WINNERS

66 members voted.

Winner: We Begin This Way • Stacey Balkun • *Gingerbread House* 16

2nd Place (3-way tie): “at the barre” • Julie Bloss Kelsey • *Rattle* 51
The Doorman • F. J. Bergmann • *Grievous Angel*, May 2015
Weathering • Sandi Leibowitz • *Silver Blade* 25

3rd Place: Alice was chasing white rabbits out of a black hole • John C. Mannone • *Abbreviate Journal*, July/August 2015

ELGIN AWARD WINNERS

48 members voted.

ELGIN CHAPBOOK AWARD

Winner: *Undoing Winter* • Shannon Connor Winward (Finishing Line Press, 2014)

Second: *Stairs Appear in a Hole Outside of Town* • John Philip Johnson (Graphic Poetry, 2014)

Third: *A Guide for the Practical Abductee* • E. Kristin Anderson (Red Bird Chapbooks, 2014)

FULL-LENGTH BOOK AWARD

Winner: *Crowned: The Sign Of The Dragon Book 1* • Mary Soon Lee (Dark Renaissance Books, 2015)

Second: *The Robot Scientist's Daughter* • Jeannine Hall Gailey (Mayapple Press, 2015)

Third: *Dark Energies* • Ann K. Schwader (P'rea Press, 2015)

2016 SFPA POETRY CONTEST WINNERS

There were 93 Dwarf, 140 Short, and 36 Long entries from around the world. Our judge, Michael Kriesel, ended up reading all the poems to make his decisions. Please see sfpoetry.com/contests/16contest.html for winning poems and judge's comments.

DWARF POEMS

1st - Craving: Shannon Connor Winward

2nd - Dragon Tongue Sushi: Robert Borski

3rd - "speed of light": Susan Burch

Honorable Mention: Blurred Future, Bruce Boston; "at work," Susan Burch; A Pop Culture Fairy Tale Tweet, MX Kelly

SHORT POEMS

1st - Regarding the Mastodons: Timons Esaias

2nd - Gretel at Menlo Mall, 1996: Stacey Balkun

3rd - Even Happy Ghosts Can Be Scary When You're 7: Kathleen Lawrence

Honorable Mention: Apple-Child Learns the ABCs, Stacey Balkun; The Myth of the Sun: Lisette Alonso; Singed, Unhurt, E. Kristin Anderson

Other poems Mike said were excellent: "Balloon Animals" by Robert Borski, "Time Tourist" by Frederick Lord, "After the Conquest the Premier Orders Mt. Rushmore Dismantled, June 2210" by Kali Lightfoot, "Starfire Notices She Has Breasts" by Lanette Cadle, and "X-Ray Glasses" by David Cowen.

LONG POEMS

1st - Elvis Triptych: William Stobb

2nd - Thirteen Ways to See a Ghost: Shannon Connor Winward

3rd - We Shall Meet in the Star-Spangled Ruins: Wendy Rathbone

Honorable Mention: The Problem of the Horse, Frederick Lord; The Blind Elephants of Io, Karen Bovenmyer; The Container Store, Gene Twaronite

One Giant Leap for Wolfkind

full moon

The cosmonaut's lycanthropic nature
was highly classified, but astronomers
saw what happened when the werewolf
set foot on the luminous lunar surface.

a suave Count sets up dates
on the Internet

—Francis W. Alexander

—J. P. Brown

The Time Traveller's Tale

She has been very far, this traveller.
Dropped like a stone into the future
eons deep, riffling through the pages
of history too fast to read; with adventures
in cities that glowed like valve radios,

hot with the smell of science; or fleeing
artificial men who wanted her body
parts; the planet empty, then full again,
continents scurrying to new geographies,
the Earth nudged further from a ripening sun.

She is adopted by fellow temponauts
with not enough digits and too many teeth
and eyes that blink like elevator doors,
whose immaterial engines hurled them
forwards so fast the dials on her contraption

kept spinning through zero, only halting
at a world grown spavined and bleak as Mars,
to gawp like tourists in a cathedral.
An Age of Gods, they confided later,
beyond which their physics refused to work.

And heading back to cheer on the Big Bang,
they playfully drop her off the moment
she sets out. They are sad for their little friend
whose mayfly days will soon lack all purpose.
Eternity does this to simple souls,

the certainty of oblivion
a torment to the prehistoric mind.
These early travellers rarely settle after,
as if time provides a kind of refuge,
as if meanings are to be found there.

—David Barber

three suns
now I have
seen everything

—Christina Sng

every day
waking up
in a parallel world—
the same questions
licking my lips

—Susan Burch

old photo
all those years
we thought
the ghost
was just a smudge

—Christina Sng

a world
of possibilities
my cat in a box

—Christina Sng

regrowing
yet another limb
the captured salamander
still refuses
to give up his intel

—Christina Sng

Morning during Migration Season

she awakens to the
sharp ammonia stench of magic
an immediate reminder
that it's migration season

still clad in pajamas
she clutches an iron blade
checks every windowsill
panes crusted with wards of salt
the other side of the glass
mounded with dead fairies

miniature faces frozen
in feral grimaces
toothpick-sized swords in hand
their wings already blackened
by the first pink beams of sun

fairy stragglers too slow to escape the dawn
are fizzling motes falling to the lawn
and will add crunchy sound effects
when the woman mows on Saturday

coffee burbles
toast sizzles
the morning news perkily states

“only three more nights of curfew!
maybe we can make this our third
consecutive year without anyone
being dragged to Fairy Land.
Stay indoors all night, folks,
or you'll be the special guest
of the Queen's feast
roasted with an apple in your mouth!
Next up, here's Bob with the weather—
that rain's coming in now, right?”

she sips her coffee
grimaces at the thought
of the drifts of fairy corpses
that must clutter her door sill

demon lovers

you mean nothing to me
nor I to you
yet our
bone-winged
children
wish to
move back
home

—Greer Woodward

Lamp for sale
One deceased owner
Two wishes left.

—Matthew Wilson

One does not simply walk into Mordor
But if you work there
You commute.

—Wendy S. Delmater

a few bodies are bound
to be stuck to her car windshield wipers, too
those grotesque little things
spread-eagled
arms waving with every arc
through a smear of rain
and pollen-thick magic

“three more nights,” she mutters
only a week of inconvenience every year
she can deal
her job is good
the mortgage paid

blue sun
daily reminder

she shoves her feet into
her heaviest boots
soles so thick they almost
prevent her from feeling
the crackle of bones underfoot

I am never going home
—Christina Sng

—Beth Cato

Cataclysm Days: Acquiescence to Agony Continues in Michigan

We let the giant rabid raccoons bite us since that didn't count as suicide. Even before the apocalypse, life in Michigan didn't seem worth the effort, but we endured the chill-bone winters and the rust stench of ruined factories, evading the roving tweaker packs, a threat more dire than any zombie horde. Then the Earth convulsed for two straight days and the Monroe reactor blew, containment domes popping like stripper cakes, spewing radioactive confetti celebrating new bouts of diarrhea and blisters that completed the symptom trifecta begun by lead-induced puking incident to corroded water lines.

Mutagenic fallout spawned behemoths whose dread forms inspired hysteria. Spruces transformed to splinters by the maws of elephantine voles fed our despair. Why view such affronts to logic when foaming jaws could grant sweet insanity? Unbeknown to us, the hydrophobia spread by the mutants bestowed true visions, infected victims with event-anchored dreamtime instead of unmoored dementia. What purpose do sights of the sun's yolk oozing from dawn's fractured eggshell serve? Who needs views of melting timepieces juxtaposed against uranium-fouled lakes? But the roses blooming in the mounds of our bloody stools did improve our vistas.

—Chuck Von Nordheim

First Extrasolar Settlement

We
eat
rabbit
once again
grateful they survived
the crash landing on Belos V,
unlike the female crew members. In
the end, this world is
settled by
rabbits
not
us.

–Herb Kauderer

no shore
that does not touch us
gravitational waves

–Ann K. Schwader

The Dark Between the Stars

It's always night in space,
the distance between the stars
devoid of warm light,

the scattered stars beacons
of possibility, islands of gravity
tugging at the imagination.

It's midnight aboard
this starship between here to there,
the traditional witching hour,

Earth fears and superstitions
packed along with our other baggage;
one-way tickets punched.

Darkness resides within
the hearts of the android crew, and
the dreams of the cold-sleepers;

the claustrophobia of the ship,
its locked hatches, the constriction
of one's own skin sitting heavy.

The color of time changes
by degrees, like a fading ember,
finally turning coal-black

as the end draws near;
numb fingers in cold-sleep coffins
clawing towards the light.

–G. O. Clark



Welcome to the final issue of *Star*Line* for 2016!

What an amazing year it has been for speculative poetry around the world! In this issue we are pleased to announce the winners of several key awards the Science Fiction Poetry Association presents including the Elgin Awards for Book and Chapbook of the Year, the Dwarf Stars, recognizing the best of 2015's short poems, and the winner of this year's Science Fiction Poetry Contest. I want to thank all of our editors, volunteers and our guest judge, Michael Kriesel for their extraordinary time and effort to make this all possible.

As I begin my term as the newly elected president of the Science Fiction Poetry Association, I do want to announce our search for a new treasurer for the organization. We also have several other volunteer positions that need filling in order to help our members keep up to date on new opportunities, markets and achievements in our community.

I hope you all enjoy your upcoming holiday season! May it be filled with joy, creativity and good company. This is also the point in the year where I encourage many of you to consider renewing your membership for 2017 and to consider gift memberships for friends and family as a way to share the wonderful work being done in the field of speculative poetry today!

Cheers, and keep inspired!

—*Bryan Thao Worra*, SFPA President

stories for bedtime

A thousand wings flutter against a pale sky as dawn shatters another night. While red-cloaked thieves steal dandelions beside the path, wolves wait in candied cottages for hikers without GPS devices, crunch the high-protein bones of explorers long forgotten. The hunter becomes the fairy godmother, hunting new dreamscapes with laser scopes through brush impenetrable except by the pure of heart, the youngest son, finally arrived to draw portals in porch lights at high noon when the light streams down. The last possibility of redemption, a climb up the golden stairs, innocence and truth hand in hand.

—*John Reinhart*

Please respect the forum rules

Doctor Who fans only

Time Travellers must not ruin series ending.

—*Matthew Wilson*

A Shapeshifter Approaches Retirement

You mimicked
a thousand impossible things
before breakfast.

Now as you approach retirement
you are lost in your former selves
when you were a stubborn mule
a cat that ate a canary.

You have become a broken watch
and must wear one face
for the remainder of your days.

—David Clink

SN 1006

The visitor star burned in the heavens,
illuminating the night like the moon
with its face turned halfway
from the slumbering world below.

Philosophers and astrologers,
baffled. Some told kingly lies
about prosperous portents;
others insisted that war
and the end of all things
were at hand.

möbius world
landscape repeating—as if you can
step into the same stream twice

—David C. Kopaska-Merkel
& Kendall Evans

Lovers clasped hands in its light,
believing this their last embrace.
Artists carved the star's visage
into rock, bones of the earth,
while its radiation recorded
another story in that same stone,
invisible to human eyes.

Into a world that believed the heavens
were celestial spheres, changeless, perfect,
the ghost of a star seven thousand years dead
intruded, and wrote an epitaph
for both itself and a way of thinking
that took a little longer to die.

—Deborah L. Davitt

Adolescence

I have seen the mermaids come near the shore.
I have listened to them make feral air bursts
In the roil of the shallows; I have counted
The flashes of bent moonlight against scales:
A task no one has asked me to do, yet I do
So as not to be unsuspectingly idle. I have heard them
Singing their boastful heritage songs, teaching
Oceans of intent, embellishing their history
Of intimacy, and exposing their science of water magic:
All the lore that comes to the awkward air
As perjury after generations of backward-speak.
When one shatters the surface, I will sometimes myself
Rise, my skirt in the wind full-shadowed.
In my imagination, sea spray and
Atmosphere are translated into one thing.
My ache is not for the sea, but for community.
I see those of our men who have
The gift of listening go dumbly down
To the water's sharp edge, strip themselves
As naked as birth and with full eyes glide
Into the welcoming mist of mermaids:
Into the coil and current of beasts
That fear the net, but desire the men
Who cross-draw the net. I watch
As those glistening men snake as gracefully
As injury's after-thought through our water,
Going in the bare company of mythical mermaids,
Out to the darker water where, dared, they will drown alone.

–Ken Poyner

A shrill whistle cracks the air. My eyes, buggy and bloodshot, scan
war-stained skies in twitchy jerks. No sign of cruise missiles,
killer drones, or asteroids hurling from moon-based launchers.

In my padded trench I scunch deeper as the sound bursts into glass-
crunching decibels. Gravestones uproot and dance the mambo.
Inverted crosses boing-boing around me like phantom pogo sticks, riderless.

I'd wave goodbye if only a soul were left to wave goodbye to.

–Ronald A. Busse

How to Tell If You're Human

When stopped at a red light
you see a buck with enormous antlers.

Do you get excited
and point it out
to everyone in the car?

Or do you do
nothing?

The Planters' Season

Our blood said to plant.

We made the seeds from glass and steel,
Faceted like a dragonfly's eye.
We gave them to the soil and missed their heft
In our hands.

—*Jessy Randall*

Seeds like sleek white birds
That smelled of ozone before a storm
And would spin on your open palm
Forever.

They were not fast growing crops
And the fields seemed fallow
Under sunsets that rusted
Trust and expectation,

After the hydroponics catastrophe
his torment and salvation was the survival
of fast-growing eggplant
and little else.

But the day came.

At first, they looked like foxgloves
With fresh shoots spun from liquid glass
Blooming chrome and circuitry.

—*Herb Kauderer*

They climbed hundreds of feet
And when they met the wind,
They greeted it in its own language,
Syllables old as oceans.

The fruit we harvested
Took our thirst and our hunger
And sizzled on our lips like rain on pavement.

When the winds talked back,
There was an ember on the tongue of the world
And we turned toward the heat like flowers toward the sun.

—*Jarod K. Anderson*

Fairest

The queen looked out on a field of snow;
the soot settling from the air grayed it,
reflecting the leaden clouds above.
Her blameless spindle drew no blood today.

But that hardly mattered; she'd forgotten
that the distaff held a woman's magic;
forgotten that blood evoked its power;
forgotten that with it, she could foretell.

The future had arrived without such things:
servants cleared slush from black roads lacing
this desolate kingdom. Mirrors rarely
spoke, and dwarves mined coal, not diamonds.

The spindle's touch holds no power, compels
no sleep. The huntsman hides in the woods,
where castles and cottages hear railroad bells,
and dwarf-mined coal-smoke stains the air.

Here, the hunter makes offerings of hearts,
leaves blood on the snow to sate the old gods,
hunting deer in place of children, per the
old covenant. But still the magic fades.

And people don't wish for its return. They
reason, *Better a gray world, with heat and
food, than to risk what the gods might ask.*

—Deborah L. Davitt

What'll it Be?

First bar built on Mars.
My first Martian drink.
Might try a "Marstini,"
or "Blue Sunset Blink."

—Lauren McBride

*Dust in the Martian atmosphere deflects
blue light less than red, resulting in ruddy
daytime skies and blue sunsets.



Ringmasters Dance by Denny E. Marshall

DARK RENAISSANCE BOOKS



2016 Elgin Award!

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“And what will you pay for the crown, little princeling? Gold? Men? A song?”

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“Well,” she said, “that’s a start.”

“Lee conjures the magic of hoofbeats and human kindness in her poems revolving around the remarkable King Xau. These Chinese-inspired epic fantasy poems are both easy to read and profound. I’m very glad that this is just book one.” —BETH CATO, author of *The Clockwork Dagger*

CROWNED has won the 2016 SFPA ELGIN AWARD
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Moon Facts. Bob Schofield. (Nostrovial Press, 2015) 33 pp. Free online: nostroviatowriting.com/uploads/9/0/3/8/9038323/moon_facts_by_bob_schofield__online_release_.pdf

[...] one of the three 2015 winners of the Nostrovial Chapbook contest [...]. After [the print edition] is sold out, the book is available as a free online PDF. [...] nicely designed, with illustrations. Perhaps a quarter of the poems are prose poems. All poems are titled “FACT #__” (fill in the blank), and they are indeed, little known facts about the moon [...] rich in figurative language, and well outside any semblance of realism. For example, “FACT #011” includes:

THE MOON ties The Ocean to its throat
Jumps from chair to chair

Because this is still
the dawn of time

and the floor is lava

[...] lapse into nonsense and word salad, and somehow I loved it anyway. [...] The sense of humor that runs throughout is best served in the author’s deadpan delivery. [...] a sort of delicious indulgence [...].

—Herb Kauderer

o o o

Sacrificial Nights. Bruce Boston & Alessandro Manzetti. (Kipple Officina Libraria [Italy], 2016). 123 pages. www.kipple.it

[...] poems by each of the authors separately and some in collaboration. [...] set in Sacrificial City, a hardcore lawless urban district. [...] meant to be read in order, but I would recommend not in one sitting [...] it is, more than anything, noir [...] the whole book qualifies as horror. I leave the question of how much of the book qualifies as speculative [...] a dark poetry of fatalism, betrayal, and a morality far more brutal than anything discussed in clean suburban sermons. [...] from “Requiem in a Taxi”:

The driver turns to her,
his face like that of her father,
lord of whiskey and punches,
buried now three years
in a loose blue suit.

Some is more figurative, such as this excerpt from “Deep in His Coma”:

the head of the future
hissing from a manhole
with the language of a snake,

[...] some graphically violent moments, but the poetry doesn’t dwell on the horrific scenes. [...] sometimes merely implying the real loss and

blackness, worrying about the subjective anticipation more than the excesses [...] not to say that the poets avoid the darkest shadows of humanity. Make no mistake: people will die in these poems [...] celebrates the imperfection of what is wrong [...] transcendent crescendo in which darkness reaches its event horizon and bursts into flame [...] exceptional. [...] The sustained tension, interest, and fascination of this book amazes me. [...]

—Herb Kauderer

o o o

Straight Away the Emptied World. Leah Umansky. (Kattywompus Press, 2016) 20 pp. \$12 print. kattywompuspress.com

[...] presented as dystopian poetry, [...] the dystopia that is within (the center of the self is a star. / (Aren't all stars dead?). [...] rather self-aware. [...] her motivation for many of these poems stems from dissatisfaction “with being a single woman in the 21st century.” [...] juxtaposition of frustration, dissatisfaction and longing with and hope and wonder, and yet, I wouldn't say that the poems come across as particularly feminine or woman-oriented. [...] I haven't read anything like it before. [...] brings you up short with the wonder of the juxtaposition. [...] new, startlingly specific image: “wonder-felt,” “poured-truth,” “keen-spike,” “frothy-tusks,” “Not-Earth,” and “steeled-beauty” [...] very vivid as a result. [...] never trite. This is a dystopia after all. [...] interesting and different, with a literary flavor; you will enjoy this brief collection.

—Diane Severson

o o o

What Strange Miracles. James Brush. (White Knuckle Press, Chapbook #37, 2016) 14 pp. Free online at <http://www.whiteknucklepress.com/#!brush/tzszf>

James Brush is the editor of *Gnarled Oak*, an online literary journal that occasionally includes speculative poems. [...] consists of ten prose poems of less than a hundred words each [...] Some poems are obviously speculative [...] with images such as, “The ocean spits out plastic: faded, thin, but whole. The great-grandchildren of those who threw it in retrieve the relics, invent stories and religions for their ancestors...” Others are deliciously nebulous [...] “She wondered if horses knew about fish. Did equine visionaries imagine them and call it sci-fi?” (from “Beginner's Mind”).

[...] highly lucid, [...] step out into surrealism. [...] “The World Is a Magnet” steps toward science fiction [...] “Compasses pull toward the heart, the pole star. This is understood in the robot impulses of beetles.” [...] speak with one voice. [...] the book creates a dislocation and altered world view [...] In under a thousand words it looks at the world through the eyes of generations, [...] and makes the endurance of plastic an unintended heirloom.

Given the brevity of the collection, its accomplishments are impressive.

—Herb Kauderer

REVIEW POLICY

To review speculative poetry books for *Star*Line*, e-mail starlineeditor@gmail.com. Due to labor of transcription, only e-mail reviews will be accepted; .rtfs preferred. Because we give preference to poetry itself, reviews will be excerpted in *Star*Line*, but posted in their entirety (may be further redacted) at sfpoetry.com/sl/reviews.html.

Futures, the Odyssey

There's no gravity here. Or there is. Your mind controls velocity, linear speed, friction, every kind of force. There's no need to date because, deep in the recesses of your brain, you can make a male or female take shape, give him or her organs, make them beautiful or handsome (most likely), and you can go at it for hours, timing orgasms, if you desire. Here, on your lounge of flowerbeds, feel the delight of misting Garden of Eden fanning. That's the leaf-palm and umbrella pines (with hot stones) massage. Your French grand piano, to the right, has 88 perfectly tuned keys. Of course, nothing is real, or ever will be. You can travel anywhere. Very high levels of intelligence and knowledge are programmed in, destinations and schedules set, and it all ends when you get bored. Yes, some desire extra conflict, evil, and hit the Earth-mode button when they realize perfection and eternity are overrated. You are one of those people. Soon you will open the door to your old house, stick your head out of your bedroom window, suck in the beltway, maybe walk your bearded collie around the corner. Debriefing will start with a newborn's crying: photos of your significant other, Jada, the kids, the desk at your prior job, copies of your credit report, a look at that gas guzzler (jumper cables in the trunk), all the deadbolts you'll ever need. If you can stay away from the red-ribboned Lucite box on your fireplace for at least a week, I can swipe my teleport card, tap in my itinerary, and take your place in the rotation till, like you, I can't take it anymore.

–Isaac Black

psionic laughter
the comedy club's smoldering ruins
re-ignite

empty portals
the last Terran iceberg
melts

–Billy Antonio

–LeRoy Gorman

Cybernaut

I know how to place hurt
In the history of nations. Really.
It is not difficult. You line up
The proper magnetic resonance
With the right data reader and make sure
The target nation is on the line. But
Every nation is always on the line,
So you do not have to be specific
About that dangling causal angle. Just make sure
The connecting line is tough and you can tunnel
Anonymously down it. Then
You whisper in your counter-option's ear
And it lets loose the hurt. Somewhere
In some unspectacular nation a mother
Will be arguing with her three children
And wondering on a back channel
Why ever she had three, why the husband
Just could not wait when already
There were two. *No, you cannot
Eat Jeffrey's cereal, there is only
Enough for one bowl; Marge,
Don't play with your orange juice—*
And, whoosh, first go the lights and then
Goes the water and the bottom
Falls out of the banks and whole
Futures sizzle like steaks on a grill.
But there will be no steak for
A long, long time and the orange
Juice and the cereal will be a
Memory the children do not remember
Fighting over. Then you go
To your list of other nations,
Thinking you have met the mother
And her three easy children before;
Perhaps you have even exchanged pleasantries.

—Ken Poyner

paranormal games
it's dead deader deadeast
for bronze silver & gold

—LeRoy Gorman

How to Lie to a Telepath

Write things down,
then forget about them.
Leave yourself messages.
Don't do the counting numbers
thing, it's far too old
and far too obvious.
Work stuff is always good—
meetings and deadlines and
underneath them all the muted
thump thump thump of the affair.
I hid a boy once for a
month almost, under the
racquet and ball *tok tok tok*
of Roland Garros and Wimbledon,
and all he saw from me was
red clay and grass and sweat.

You see it doesn't matter
that sooner or later he will
find you out, dreams dripping
on to your pillow like spittle
or a soapy thought-bubble sliding
off of you in the shower,
because you thought a closed
door meant you were alone.
You see when he does find out,
all you have to do is
open yourself wide and say—
I love you.

Because what other people see
through a veil behind a wall
of words, he sees naked like
a sun flooding his world
with light, and even if he
unfurls his wings, it is only
to once again circle your flame.

—Rohinton Daruwala



Black Wings by Denny E. Marshall

Previous Plans for Escape

Broken time have you been captive
on this peculiar little planet
a hundred of their sad years
the first of your species
sent to explore for reasons
long forgotten as you have been.
Crawling through a dark prison
constructed for your strangeness
the corridor long and unfamiliar
the sounds loud and sinister
someone else's makeshift beliefs
yet familiar photographs on walls
of confinement and privation
the blood on the ceiling
reminds you of the sacred region
of your distant in memory planet
you have only injured swiftness
left to get to the corridor's end
into that place of journey's memory
where a hidden spacecraft awaits
but movement is nothing but mockery
of previous plans for escape.

—J. J. Steinfeld

Cetacean Prosthesis

I place my new arm on the table
and it gestures to me, wiggles fingers
reaching for my nerves, joints crackling.
I worried, imagining I'd falter in assembly,
but the skin on the new limb
feels pulpy like a whale's back,
safe, like pools of circumcised rays,
perfection down to the rounded
silhouettes of the cartilage nails.
This new piece of myself devours my flesh,
merges human and beast,
and I dream of underwater shelves,
biotic deserts, abyssal plains,
and the taste of krill.
The reef teems, coral victories,
disparate entities, this white skin
and fluke of nature.

—Holly Walrath

The Good Samaritan

He coughed up a lung.
It landed on the coffee table.
I picked it up and handed it
Back to him. It was his right lung.
As I gave it back to him
He thanked me for handing him back
His favorite lung. He must have
Noticed me eyeing it
With keen interest and was perhaps
Worried that I would ask to keep it.
I would have never been so greedy
Since I already have two lungs of my own,
Plus three extra lungs
That I've accumulated in my travels.

—Steve Castro

Dog Days

I suppose like all diseases
lycanthropy has its mutations,
including a rare daytime variant,
triggered by the sun, but who
would have believed that chasing cars,
marking hydrants, and sniffing butts
could be so much fun?

—Robert Borski

pandemonium
in the toy box
everyone
swapping heads
for halloween

—Christina Sng



SCIENCING THE S*** OUT OF POETRY Denise Dumars

A debate has arisen recently about whether or not “science” poetry is really a part of science fiction poetry. So my title this time references the famous line from *The Martian*: “I’m gonna have to science the s*** out of this!” Now, some may see that book and its film adaptation as science fiction, but I don’t. We don’t have humans on Mars yet, but if Elon Musk—the CEO of Tesla and Space-X corporations—has his way, we will. Certainly the science exists to make this possible (if not exactly easy or affordable.) Similarly, the film *Gravity* is billed as science fiction, when it is nothing of the sort. Space shuttles do occasionally explode, and the International Space Station does exist, even if the events in the film are fictional, so to me it’s not science fiction.

Some have called science fiction the dominant form of literature of the 20th century, implying that in the 21st century it is diminishing in importance because we now live in an SFnal world. While I would say that we definitely live in, sadly, the dystopian high-tech world predicted by the 1980s cyberpunk writers, I do not think that SF is dead, just reimagined to fit the times. But I digress. We clearly live in a time when the lines between science fiction and science fact are blurred, and I believe that science poetry is very much a part of SFnal literature. So this month’s column features markets in which science-based poetry and sometimes other types of poetry are welcome.

Since medicine is both a science and an art, it is not surprising to find that a fair number of medical journals publish poetry. Consider these lines from “Consultation Request,” by Ronald Pies, MD, published in *JAMA: The Journal of the American Medical Association*:

Did I not get
my optics right?
Or does the soul’s prism
once kicked out of kilter,
no longer
refract the light?

While *JAMA* is probably the best-known medical journal that publishes poetry—and you don’t have to be a doctor nor a person who plays one on TV to submit to it—there are others. For example, *AJN, The American Journal of Nursing*, does too. Here are some lines from “A Patient Tells Me About Her Suffering” in *AJN* by Cortney Davis, RN:

Isn’t it odd, she asked me, how long the nights can seem
everyone asleep, only the cold outside and your thoughts,
like owls,

sweeping through the woods on the urgent
downstroke of their wings?

MJA, The Medical Journal of Australia, also yields poems. Here are a few lines from “The Daily Coracle,” by Gina Mercer:

she’s almost over
the depression
it’s just
every morning
she wakes
in a noxious puddle
of bilge water
at the bottom of
her tiny coracle

CMAJ, the Journal of the Canadian Medical Association, and the journal *Neurology* are also examples of medical journals that take poetry—there are a lot of them! Looking online for medical journals might yield some good journals to submit to, but a trip to your local public or college library might yield more information in the form of hard copies, which often have poems that might not make it into the online journals or might be hard to find in the journal’s search engine. For example, I have seen science-based poetry published from time to time in *Scientific American*, *Science News*, *Sky & Telescope*, and *Smithsonian* magazines, but their writers’ guidelines do not mention poetry, nor does it appear in every issue.

As for examples of science-based poetry in astronomy and related fields that science fiction poets are so often interested in, *Astropoetica*, though it is no longer being published, has online archives that are a good place to see what poetry in the astronomical sciences is like. For example, here is part of “Five Pounds of Sunlight” by SFPA member and rocket scientist Geoffrey A. Landis:

Some of that five pounds of sunlight reflects back
into space.
The kitten bounces off the kitchen cabinets, reflecting back into my
office
scattering books and papers
But three or four pounds of sunlight stays, warming the Earth.
The kitten, temporarily stationary, naps in the sunlight.
I cup the kitten in one hand
and imagine that I am holding all the sunlight striking the Earth.

Abyss & Apex is a highly regarded speculative poetry magazine that specifically lists science poetry in its guidelines. As an example, here are a few lines from “Principles of Entropy” by Shelagh M. Rowan-Legg:

keep a record
of the swings of a pendulum
the timing of each swoosh
will decide everything

And as past SFPA President and internationally renowned haiku poet Deborah P. Kolodji could tell you, science is certainly welcome in haiku magazines, and I don’t just mean those that take scifaiku. This is explained by

a claim that will probably make some peoples' heads explode: science poetry is, in my opinion, a form of nature poetry. Think of it in terms of what is called *kigo* in haiku: a word or phrase that connotes a specific season. Moon phases and constellations certainly fall under that rubric, as do other natural (and sometimes theoretical or mathematical) processes described by science.

By way of example I hop on over to *Frogpond, The Journal of the Haiku Society of America*, and I find this, by LeRoy Gorman:

o n
nuclear winter

I didn't even have to look far to find science-based poetry in *Frogpond*, so then I decided to dip into one of our best-known literary magazines, *The American Poetry Review*, and what do I find? "The Astronomer," by Kazim Ali:

His azimuth splendor maps the city twice in time
and he feels the drag of the tide pulling him along through millennia
into other cities each of which existed here in this same place.

So no worries on placing science-based poetry; it's everywhere. For more science journals that publish poetry, check your college library's databases or browse the shelves, where you might find hard copies of some of the more popular journals that the Nursing program, for example, might subscribe to.

And here's one more suggestion for submitting science poetry: if you regularly read or subscribe to a scientific journal, why not submit a poem to it? Just because "Poetry" isn't in the specific submission guidelines, this may not necessarily mean that poetry isn't welcome. As I've said before: I've seen poems on occasion in a variety of science magazines. And keep submitting to science-fiction-poetry markets too: I personally don't know of any that reject science poetry out of hand. (No, it's generally horror poetry that they reject out of hand!) I just had to get in one last stab, didn't I?

References and Markets:

Abyss & Apex, <http://www.abyssexpexzine.com/submissions/>

AJN, <http://journals.lww.com/ajnonline/pages/default.aspx>

The American Poetry Review, <http://aprweb.org/>

Astropoetica, <http://www.astropoetica.com/>

CMAJ, <http://www.cmaj.ca/>

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MJA, <https://www.mja.com.au/>

Weir, Andy, *The Martian*, Reprint Ed. Broadway Books, 2014.

Submissions are open for the **SFPA Halloween page**,
curated by Stace Johnson.

See **sfpoetry.com/halloween.html** for seasonal poems
and images from our members.

Timebenders

You see them flicker past in shaded corners,
These travelers who twist the strands of time,
At funerals the uninvited mourners,
All actors in some wordless pantomime,

A captured face in some old grainy photo,
A face someplace you know there shouldn't be,
Contorted like a twisted Quasimodo.
But if examined closely you will see

It's one who is unanchored in his placement,
Untied to either future or the past,
The man who moves in temporal displacement,
The one who was the first but is the last,

The visitor who has no lasting home,
That one, condemned by destiny to roam.

–Glenn A. Meisenheimer

storm surge
self-planting seeds
head for the hills

–LeRoy Gorman

Death Poem

I received a letter in the mail stating that I was cordially invited
To attend my own death. It would happen at the intersection
Of Palm and 118th, exactly 42 minutes after sunrise
On the 7th of November, 2029. I would be 44 years old.

*It won't be the cigarettes, the letter stated, but it will
Involve smoke signals.* The letter also informed me
That I should be prompt, as Death is busy, schedules
Must be kept, the world can't slow for one asshole.

The letter came with an RSVP and a note asking
For a list of anyone I wanted to invite, up to 5 guests.

It is often a mistake to invite parents.

It is often a mistake to invite love

In any form.

I wrote down the names of the first 3 girls I thought
About kissing and did. I added *Tupac's hologram,*
The saddest person living in Detroit.

–C. J. Miles

Tidal Disruption Event

A star's death is most beautiful of all
The random cataclysms we embrace
Inside our darkness. Lost beyond recall

As fire drawn into filament, it falls
For gravity with cinematic grace:
A star's death. Is *most beautiful of all*

Not epitaph enough? What else to call
A sun struck down, spun out across the face
Of starving darkness? Lost beyond recall,

Its X-ray flare alerts no rescue. Mauled
By tidal claws, to die alone in space ...
A star's death is most beautiful? Of all

Unfeeling observations, this seems small
At light-years' distance. Hardly a disgrace—
Inside our darkness, lost beyond recall,

So many inhumanities appall
Us briefly. Let this latest find its place.
A star's death is most beautiful of all
Inside our darkness, lost beyond recall.

—Ann K. Schwader

Protocols

In the decontamination chamber,
water and bleach spray, then oven-like heat;
waiting for the cycle's end, the lock's click.

We explore new worlds that we cannot touch
beyond footprints. What touches us, we leave
in the decontamination chamber

It's for everyone's safety, theirs and ours,
not to make our encounters face-to-face.
Water and bleach spray, then oven-like heat,

destroy their microbes as we stand in the spray,
watching galaxies circle down the drain,
waiting for the cycle's end, the lock's click.

—Deborah L. Davitt

Horse and Girl

the girl called, and the horse heard
his ears perked, though she spoke
in a way that didn't carry on the wind
the stars themselves shouted at him
through their sly, twinkling silence

his cloven hooves pounded across prairie
clods of dirt airborne in his wake
high grass bowed and flexed and screamed
hurry, hurry, hurry
and he hurried

sweat frothed his skin
breath in heavy huffs
he made himself go slower
he'd be no good to her dead
even as birds squawked, *go, go, go*

he walked and loped and walked again
nights and days flickered past like gnats
he ate, drank, slept in restless spurts
the grass grew shorter, blades sharper
flatlands swelled into hills and mountains

a catamount on high in a tree howled
hurry, hurry, she needs you
the wind shoved him from behind
the sun tucked itself into a nest of clouds
to reduce its wicked glare

finally, finally, the girl's very scent
beckoned from her flying castle afar
he couldn't help but gallop as he screamed
I'm here, I'm here
and when he reached the cliff

he bounded into nothingness
wings unfurled from below his withers
feathers white as bone and soft as breath
hooves finding purchase on icy air
solid as mountain stone

only after
the siren signals ...
can we rest assured
none among us
are unaccounted for

-dl mattila

he could see her, at long last
there on the balcony, arms wide
the castle on its cloud rushed his way
the girl's laugh of relief and delight
far sweeter than any hay

–Beth Cato

Marriage

Every day
I brush against you
but you never notice
Things haven't changed
that much since I died

–Christina Sng

after the divorce
reopening
the ship's air vents

–Susan Burch

Overheard in an Antarean Bar

I know you've been a while in space
It's got to be a drag,
This interspecies mating, though,
Is really not my bag.

For how am I to turn you on?
You have the wrong designs,
You haven't any gills to grab
Nor any dorsal spines,

Your covering is pale and soft,
No evidence of scales.
You don't have very many eyes
And even fewer tails.

There are too many differences
That cannot be resolved.
Come see me in a million years
When you are more evolved....

–Glenn A. Meisenheimer



Spider Skull by Cesar Valtierra

waking this morning
burping memories of you
need to floss the fangs

–ayaz daryl nielsen

Smuggler to the Stars

Hermetically sealed crates
line my cargo hold. Their contents
won't make me filthy rich
but could bring in a tidy sum.

Jettison them? No way!
Bad idea at my current warp.
Prob'ly end up blowing out
my Alcubierre drive.

Nor can I stand in space
and fight. It's just me
and my secondhand Robotcrew
flying this old bucket.

Klentags crowding my aft,
gaining fast. And those creeps
shoot first and ...
well, you know the rest.

Why can't life be like a holoflick
where an asteroid field to hide in
lies around every bend of space
like some ubiquitous chain
of convenience starports?

—*J. P. Brown*

La Villa de Sirenia

Stretch your fins
with this beachfront
vacation rental.

3 bedrooms, 12 baths.
Clawfoot tubs for sleeping.
Trident racks available.

No smoking.
No fishing.
No sailors.

Selkie owned,
selkie operated.

—*Jack Ralls*

Semelparity

“The single reproductive event of semelparous organisms
is usually large as well as fatal.”

—Ricklefs & Miller, *Ecology*

This is joy, the natural order of things. Nature demands
I siphon into you, and yet I serve
your hunger mouth, my monster darling.
I am bone.

How long? How much,
your teeth and fists.
Is it Nature's wish
that we dissolve into our young?

—*Shannon Connor Winward*



PUBLISHING SPECULATIVE POETRY: HOW THE POETRY BUSINESS WORKS

POETRY WITH BITE Cardinal Cox

I've been a genre poet for many years, and reviews of my work have appeared in *Star*Line*. I've also held residencies, including writing for The Dracula Society. With its international membership, this has been an intriguing post. Out of that, last August I was approached by Mark Grist re producing a show of my work. Mark is a full-time poet who has performed internationally.

The plan was that we'd apply for a grant to develop the show. The essential thing with UK Arts Council grant applications is to show how it will help you and other artists. We roughed out a budget of £5000: £1000 each for my producer (half for production, half for mentoring me to run a writing workshop) and the director, then £400 for the poster designers (optimistic, as it ended up closer to £700), and £200 each for a photographer and a music producer to create a theme tune. Other expenses covered in the application were props/costume, equipment (a new smartphone for me to do more social media) and transport/food during development. My wages for writing and performing were also included, at £1000.

Together we worked on the grant application and started to develop the show. We also had agreements to help from both the John Clare Cottage (Clare was a local nineteenth-century peasant poet) and Metal (an arts organisation with an international reputation and a branch centre in my home city of Peterborough). After a couple of attempts, the grant was approved.

Having two experienced poets producing and directing me meant I would often hear "that poem has to go". They were merciless with anything that didn't relate to the show. A show, rather than a poetry reading—they reordered the poems into a plot, all for the better for a spoken-word show, in this case, a "spooked word" show. It took me a while to comprehend the differences. My poetry comprised about a third of the show but had to be integrated with the linking material. An analogy I might use is that a sit-com is not just a string of gags but also has to have a story for the jokes to fit into.

The show grew out of my work for The Dracula Society to look at fears in general, to explore the darkest aspects of human existence, and then to award prizes for the best shoes worn by members of the audience, plus one bit of puppetry. At the John Clare Cottage I was allowed a corner to write in, away from the distractions of my home. At Metal we rehearsed, and I blogged about the show's development on their site.

When Stamford Arts Centre (next town along the railway), where I've performed, heard I was developing a show, I was invited to present it as part of a poetry festival in April. Then I had to do more re-writes. We premiered the show at Metal in Peterborough on World Dracula Day in May, and filled a small performance space. Even before that, I was offered a slot at a small literary festival (In Other Words) in Cambridge in June (I just happened to meet the organiser at another event—pure luck). The staff at the Arts Centre

have helped me draft an email to pitch the show to other venues and events; I hope to also take it to convention.

In a desperate attempt to get me to learn the words ahead of time, Mark bought me an mp3 player (I'm not a tech person; I've still got a large collection of vinyl records) and got me to record poems in the producer's home studio (a garden shed with a microphone and a computer because that is all producers need now). So I listen to myself on bus journeys. I've never thought that memorizing poems is essential; however, knowing the poems well enough to not look down at the page the entire time is good. Look the audience in their eyes (if you can see them) as much as possible.

The experience has been a good one, pushing me in directions I'd not previously considered. The money has meant that I can both work with professionals and pay myself for my work. Not a lot, but it is good to be paid.

Apocalypthèque

All along the western coast
our people move to a distant beat,
the waves respond to rhythm now
and the tide won't suck us in.

icy roads
the wendigo dresses
for dinner

We turned off the TV long ago,
found our way by candle flame
and raging storm, the light display
of a scorched sky,
a dying world.

—LeRoy Gorman

We'll clap our hands and move our feet,
dance for all the ones below
who cower now in tiny spaces,
but at this hour we won't go out
with whimpers or in silence—
we'll lift our voices, singing,

breakfast with the soothsayer
and she
predicts
“this day
will be cold,

*If the world keeps burning
we'll all stay warm,
if the bombs keep falling
the earth will shake
its bass into our bones.*

—Anton Rose

cold as a once-revered saber buried
within a forgotten battlefield's debris,
a saber capable of transmuting ill-will
and evil intent into an intrinsic realization
of the sacredness within all existence ...
and this saber ...” pausing, she grasps
my arm. . . “it can, it must be found, found and
wielded by hero and heroine, working together,
as one ... and you and I” she states firmly,
squeezing my arm “it's up to us ... it's us”
the steaming coffeecup
halfway to my lips, suspended
in the silent, fertile morning light ...

—ayaz daryl nielsen

A Feeling of Motion

It isn't that Chou dislikes his job
crawling along the outside of the *Odyssey*
as it travels between stars
performing maintenance and improvements.

But the books and the old videos that he
watches to preserve the culture of the planet
as it is transported across generations
and interstellar space,
show and talk about wind:
the unpredictable movement of air
across flesh and through hair.

Inside the *Odyssey* he has stood
before the fans of heating units noting
the movement of his hair and the feeling
on skin, but it is nothing like the descriptions.

Outside, even at three quarters
the speed of light, the stars are static
unmoving flames spattered across the dark
and he daydreams about
what it would be like if he were on the
exterior of an airship instead of a spaceship
feeling the speed and motion
completely lacking
from the unmoving stars around him
and from the still and boring life he lives.

–Herb Kauderer

Time Machine

Today I'll do tomorrow, and tomorrow, yesterday,
On Monday I'll be visiting a thousand years away.
On Tuesday I'll do Saturday or else the Pliocene,
The Civil War on Wednesday in my little time machine.

And then it's to the future and the Cybernetic War.
I'll visit friends I've long not seen, since thirty thirty-four,
Then watch the sun consume the earth, or maybe even worse.
I'll go and watch the cave-in of my clockwork universe.

–Glenn A. Meisenheimer

The Hand

There is a hand that leans against the churchyard wall.
Its twisted fingers, two feet long, seize the stones
And reach into the cracks. The wrist, submerged in earth,
Has skin of pitted alabaster, green with lichen.
Clumps of moss are wedged beneath its finger nails.
And, shaded by the palm, a ring of toadstools grows
Upon the verge where daffodils announce the spring.

When I first came, I wondered at the weathered fist,
Expecting village folk to have a tale, some lore
Of how it came to grip and guard the holy ground.
But no-one knew. Or no-one said they knew. And no-one
Seemed concerned to know. Except, they said, to ask
The Major (Army, long retired) renowned collector
Of the town's old tales and keeper of its past.

He laughed to hear the question, sighed and laughed again,
Tossing back his head to calm those listening in.
“It was my son,” he said, “when still a boy he carved
The form from solid stone, modelled on my own.”
He raised his hand and twisted it into a claw.
“The sculpture was too big to house, and so it bides
Beside the church, until devoured by rain and wind.”

Decades passed, I gave no thought to what I'd learned.
The hand remained, girdled by weeds, drenched and frozen,
Blown and baked, but never changed, and never aged.
Or else, it aged too slowly for my mortal eyes.
I wondered at the Major's words, God rest his soul.
If years had barely nipped the skin or gnawed its hide,
What time had hereto feasted on its pock-marked flesh?

The Widow Pierce departed, leaving no attendant heir.
As parish justice, I was tasked to settle her estate.
Her house was set well back along the old coach road,
An ancient home of antique stone and dark grey slate.
(I'd had no cause to visit it before that day).
Beside the gate a plaque of weathered granite named
Her farm “The Hand,” and dated it into the distant past.

The blocks that made the lower floor I recognised:
Massive cubes of martial rock that formed the castle
And its curtain wall. Rent and carried here
By what titanic force? I cannot say. Behind,

The fields slope off towards the stream, beyond which lies
A burial ground from days before the Christians came
And farther still, the farmland of the Major's son.

He bought the Widow's land. I counter-signed the deed
And, signing done, I asked him of his boyhood art.
He frowned. "It was my son, when still a youth, who carved."
"Your father claimed as much of you," I said. He snarled.
"And my son too, when I am gone, as scores before.
Lies make us safe: the village need not understand.
You must not seek the bulk below the broken hand."

-Ian Duncan

*

Once this bedroom door is closed the rug
deals in flowers, its dark scent
reaching up where your eyes
expect sunlight and miles away the heady whiff
from a firefly —already she's naked

the woman you just this minute
inhaled, a deep breath
who can't see, has to feel along the grass
though the dead still stake a claim

and never leave —the room is locked
with the fragrance stones come for
—it's a little room
a place you keep for yourself
so the door can become the distance
that fastens her arms to yours

and you wait for the pathways
to fall inside your throat
as the cry for footsteps
filled with kisses and fingernails

and the rug torn apart for rags
smells from loneliness
from the mouth you will gently place
over her heart and time to time.

-Simon Perchik

A Robot's History of Art

We still don't know the significance
of their two-dimensional acts. We all know
when Panderob manufactured his greatest work,
the 4th Street silicone shower, its utility was seamless;
the copper pipes gently arced over the traditional
street paved in gold, a perfectly balanced web
of light and shadow spraying the finest-grade lubricant
over our dry hinges as we rolled to the plants
on Formosa Avenue. Their art served other purposes,
unclassified. And now, some collectors treasure
renderings of piles of shoes, broken, hairless dolls
or the soup can repetitions, but none know why
they were formed. Maybe a visual inventory
was needed to replace the time spent motionless
at night. Maybe they had no permanent memory.
Their soft language was circular, random,
like the logic-loop infection that shut unit six down.
This was their peculiar fate. Nothing existed
except by how other things described it:
the sun, *a chariot racing across the sky,*
marking the hours; the hours, a stream of sand
pooling in a greening metal bowl, emptied when filled.

–Lanette Cadle

The Generations

It follows, as so often it does, that two people
will meet, while a third gets in the way.
After that, the third meets a fourth, as a fifth comes
between them. And when the numbers have all
been thrown off across one generation, it all
starts again in the next: when a boy sleeps
with a robot, and some cyborg gets in the way of that.

–Soren James

Hopper's *Nighthawks*: Large Ginger Cat Remix

Another night at the diner and the greenish light
gives a clue that this cup of coffee may be the last.
The end of the world is looming outside
and it looks hungry. Ginger cats need four squares
plus extras and this one is door-high and tired of waiting.
Where is the milk? The greasy burgers he smelled
blocks away? He would even take a strawberry
if you rolled it outside. This is how it could end:
one soft pounce outside the door, or an open maw
waiting for food in suits to walk in. Or, it's barely possible
humans will exit with pie and tuna salad, offerings
that postpone death for another night.

—Lanette Cadle

museum visit
his handwriting
in the old journal

—Billy Antonio

In The Museum Of The Future

Instructive icons: (1) a carryall
in camouflage; ammunition crammed
in the cylinder of a Beretta that the owner jammed
in manuscripts marked *Manifesto, Fall,*
2035. The children love
the gun. (2) A virtual post without a name,
the face a blot. No words. Only a frame
the killer filled with a sketch in the shape of a dove

downside-up. (3) Days of rage displayed in a maze
of cases built from bones. The point brought home
by State curators, painters, architects.

Docents take roll. Not a place to stargaze;
no bow to Paradise. No Greece or Rome.
Wall texts are vetted. What would we expect?

—Richard Merelman

Centaur

Vetz Mai was trapped outside in the dark, his oxygen running low, while Maigul and his army waited on the other side of the airlock ...

What the many ride are we; born now; brilliant; our hides bent to the wheel, of this divorce, from one well to another ...

What one mends another refuses, and so we resort to our abuses, of our tongue, to stain the wait of our thrum gun, shooting us to our new star ...

We are singing, and we are winning, where we are. We remember the threaded logic of our quiet cycle, after the war, how far we stepped beneath the sad embrace of our founders' beliefs ...

We are Rain and Many, we are children of a god who was a man, and a man who would be god, Vetz Mai Vettershaul and his lonely truck, out of his crèche at seven, eight, and nine, to storm the temper of his times ...

We fly the stars. We are the children of this song. And this is what we sing while we are working: tending maps and trimming locks and nourishing our gardens ...

This is the map of our intent as well, sent to relieve our twenty years of silence, in memory of the dead, and in memory of you ... our old well ...

We sing to be. And so we are. And we salute you, across the vacuum of time. Hello.

Why in song?

Why transmit our meaning in this music?

Why thrum the waiting drum with our melancholy bombs? Of verbs, and tummies hurling out their fricatives and diphthongs; our love:

Urge my youth to rend their fear and sear it to the door; for we shall not get out the airlock till we know what for;

For the many know the few—even as we know you, so far away, from the archives—and because we send this missive to warn and mend and hue the ruth of our wars, so as to hope they will not plague you too;

So for an epic of peace.

But like all such it sings of war:

Vetz Mai Vetershaul and Maigul the Black! And their thunderous drums!

And when this transmission reaches you, we will be 90,000 AUs out from our former star ...

–Robin Wyatt Dunn

Dracula's Poet

He thanks me for the work I have done
The poetic embellishments I have given to his family's story
All those years, decades, centuries
Different men sharing the same name, the same title
But are they different?
I have my doubts
The years dripping off his frame
While I grow paler, weaker

This is the end of a chapter
He tells me
another one is about to begin
far away from here
in a foreign land ripe for conquest
I have noticed the boxes being loaded
onto carts in the castle courtyard

On our last night together
He is once again the genial host of my arrival
His face unlined, unblemished
Hair full and dark, like his mustache
Somehow I know it will be the last meal
we will have together
and I realise I have never seen him eat or drink

He tells me he is leaving
and I am staying
Another poet will chronicle his adventures
in another land

–Ian Hunter



SFPA's membership is international; we encourage submissions of speculative poems translated from other languages into English (we are able to translate poems submitted in French, German, or Spanish). Translations are eligible for SFPA awards.

سَفِينَةُ الْفِضَاءِ

الخطاط السفينة —
أنا الناج وحيد
على هذا كوكب أجنبي.
إذا لا يجد حياة ذكي
أو اكتشف طريق
إلى النظام شمسي
محل الميلاذ إنسان ،
أنا يجب أفتح النافذة
وقن .

Spaceship

Shipwrecked—
I'm the sole survivor
on this alien planet.
If I don't find a sentient species
or discover a way back
to the Solar system,
the human birthplace,
I'll be forced to risk opening
a time window.

—Angelo Niles,
translated from the Arabic by J.P. Brown

Read *Eye to the Telescope*, SFPA's quarterly online speculative poetry journal, at eyetothetelescope.org. The October theme is Ghosts, edited by Shannon Connor Winward. Submit robot poems for the next issue; see eyetothetelescope.org/submit.html. Interested in editing a future issue? See eyetothetelescope.org/edittett.html.

To A Child

Christmas snow
I scatter tinsel
for the drones

—LeRoy Gorman

Winter Approaching

When we dead awake,
gray blooms to blue,
brown to green,
and rust to red.
Scattered ashes rise
into dragon's flame.
We are terrifying,
but do not fear us.
We are only you
ascended into
your brightest dream.

When we dead awake,
you will know us
by the dark blue clouds
floating over our eyes.
The rain never ends,
and twilight floods
over the edge of the earth.
The moon rises in place of the sun
and shines with its own
shadow from our faces.

When we dead awake,
those who never dance
rise to music with bones creaking
like rusty hinges
on gates newly opened.
Angels, no longer needed,
ceding to the storms of birth,
drift their bodies down
like crimson leaves over the earth.

—Ronald Terry

I see your days now
A medical hologram of layered yous
Fused into a hybrid image

I see you tiny as a hydroponic pea
With snowflake fingernails
And toes aligned in a pod of seven

I see you racing your Altairan mother
Swimming under pale blue skies
Struggling to breathe atmosphere

I see you grown tall and
holding the eight hands
Of your husband on the altar

And too I foresee you
Living on these foreign headlands
Your airlock open to all visitors

See my grandkids spin around you
Your windowsills covered
Each hand-rubbed stone a memory

—Robert Frazier

my travel log—
pressed between the pages
a single leaf

beside each photo
of every world
I've seen

—Lauren McBride

fairied tales

intrepid offspring offered
sacrifice to clouds spell
thunder in rainbows tied
in pigtailed bouncings yesterdays
golden, red, brown, green
shoot underfoot after foot
between runic stone paths
illuminated by white hair
intoning bells curved along
ponds fished by starlight wishes,
princes, princesses, mud forms
transformed into coins
fairied toward new tales, myths
of woodland paths leading home
etched indelibly into the skin
behind her left ear, moonlight
lit the path before us where
no antlers braved the brambles,
even airships skirted darkness—
yet the moon shone through
illuminating the petals dropped
by abducted elves dragged to certainty
along uneven ground, the only proof
to show us satellites fail because
the moon's pull is too bright
and the only channel is a trickle
in the woods lit by starry fish

—John Reinnhart

rings
of dew
in a
dappled glen
old fairy ground
Mother
hurries me
along
as if the
magic's gone

—Greer Woodward

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