

STARLINE



Emerald Sun Set by Steven Vincent Johnson

\$5.00

Summer 2017

40.3



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On Words That Cannot Be Pronounced

The name of a certain minute just after dawn
has no letters at all:
do you remember that minute?

There is a word with no vowels
that strangles anyone who tries to pronounce it.
There is a five-syllable word that will summon an angel
who will teach the summoner all wisdom;
the first four syllables, alas,
summon a demon who immediately
destroys the summoner.

There are words (and for each person
these are different) that act as Gödel sentences,
distracting the mind to silence.

There are the words I need to say to you.

A.I.

—Robert Dawson

I'm deformed by what others miss,
Their gazes slashing my second skins.
I'm both inviter and visitor, their
Time weaves cocooning. I might grow
Wings, and slip into air and light.

Anthropocene
the geologic record
skips

I'm deformed by what others don't know,
Their glances staining my depths.
I trust the sun's versions of me, their
Visions dappled. If footsteps echo my
Heartbeat, I might open up like the ground.

—Ann K. Schwader

I'm deformed by conclusions.
Where eyesight rests becomes my
Lucid vulnerability. I'm stardust this way,
This way of my orbiting, of my venturing.
Decades have grown me into a child.

time travel blues
the seventh wife
of Henry VIII

My deformities seek assemblage.
Others find solace in looking out.
I'm weakening the way wood quenches
Its own softening. This is how I gladly
Yield to the starlight of my deforming.

—Deborah P Kolodji

—Jonel Abellanosa

A Cold and Empty Place

Shale is shale on any world,
and footprints never lie;
on this lake shore,
someone three-toed
and bipedal walked.
Lesser creatures left
their marks as well,
but none their bones or shells.

A thin brown line in the rock
records a deadly chemistry,
bizarre hydrocarbons/plastics,
remnants of a tailored biochemistry,
soot, glassy spherules, transuranics.
Above that layer?
No trace of life at all.

We've dated the Footprint Shale:
12 megayears;
since then, the dance of photons,
wind and sea,
the birth and death of rock.
No one's here but us.

—David C. Kopaska-Merkel



The Horror Writers Association
congratulates
Corrine De Winter and
Denise Dumars
on their 2017 Rhysling Award
nominations!



*HWA Poetry
Showcase
Volume III*
edited by
David E.
Cowen
Available in
print, Kindle,
and ePub

arrival day
those empty
starships

—Christina Sng

STAR★LINE

is pleased to congratulate
our 2017 Dwarf Stars candidates.

- “across the universe” • Alan Ira Gordon • *Star*Line* 39.2
- “alighting” • C. R. Harper • *Star*Line* 39.1
- “attempting to align” • Terrie Leigh Relf • *Star*Line* 39.1
- demon lovers • Greer Woodward • *Star*Line* 39.4
- epitaph for an ogre • Herb Kauderer • *Star*Line* 39.3
- “Garden statues for sale” • Matthew Wilson • *Star*Line* 39.1
- “icy roads” • LeRoy Gorman • *Star*Line* 39.4
- “immortality” • James D. Fuson • *Star*Line* 39.3
- Needs Repairs • John Reinhart • *Star*Line* 39.1
- New Planet Landscape 15 • Ken Poyner • *Star*Line* 39.1
- “no shore” • Ann K. Schwader • *Star*Line* 39.4
- “pandemonium” • Christina Sng • *Star*Line* 39.4
- “planet of flowers” • ayaz daryl nielsen • *Star*Line* 39.4
- “printing our children” • David C. Kopaska-Merkel • *Star*Line* 39.2
- “red apples” • Christina Sng • *Star*Line* 39.2
- “spring migration” • LeRoy Gorman • *Star*Line* 39.2
- “tomorrow will return” • Neal Wilgus • *Star*Line* 39.2
- The Werewolf Returns • William John Watkins • *Star*Line* 39.1
- What'll It Be? • Lauren McBride • *Star*Line* 39.4
- “yellow eyes aglow” • Rich Magahiz • *Star*Line* 39.1
- “zombie party” • LeRoy Gorman • *Star*Line* 39.3



A TRANSMISSION FROM CYGNUS

It's been a great five years, guys (carefully tiptoeing around the issue of Earthling politics, of course). Steering the *Star*Line* cruise vessel was an unparalleled delight; it's allowed us to meet, virtually and otherwise, a stellar group of poets from all over this planet, without whom these pages would not have become tangible manifestations of their collective imaginations, and allowed me, individually, to hone editing and design skills that have benefited me personally and professionally. Vince, you're going to have a blast.

We are gratified by what may be a record number of Dwarf Stars nominees from *Star*Line*! Pay close attention to all the announcements starting on p. 7.

—F.J. Bergmann, *outgoing Star*Line editor*

The Loneliest Incarnation

The bones of everything we were
have fallen apart like rotten lace
It's terrible to die, and worse to remember

no dragons, no knights,
not even skeletons of them remain
but the wings of your soul are sharp

a fan of swords or ring of fire
leaving trails in space
weeping against the sun

I am no longer the warrior
who stayed by your side at Actium,
nor the nervous schoolmaster
with a gold-leafed book of fairy tales
to press into your hands
I am just dust, hanging above you

I see you gather your breath and inhale me
even this dust in the light will
fade away

—Selena Martens

amber-dotted skies.
paper lanterns wink—
night of the Chinese New Year

scores of UFOS phoned in—
we slip under the radar.

—Daniel R. Jones

let's move to the moon
where all exits are entrances
all grief is a shadow
and all shadows storm over the sun
laying bricks in star roads
and laughing at our delight

—Robin Wyatt Dunn

after last year
we seal our helmets
interspecies gift exchange

—Ann K. Schwader

Final Metaphysical Exam

I failed to answer the first three questions correctly
multiple choice dealing with *history, deities,*
and the longing for piety
even with a lifetime of study
and more crib notes
than the rest of the overcrowded classroom combined

the next three questions
I had little difficulty with
despite a momentary power outage
and ambiguity overwhelming experience
they delved into *absurdity, meaninglessness,*
and magical snowstorms on distant planets

and for the final three questions
I guessed wildly
hoping for the best
fearing the worst
they delved into *beginnings, endings,*
and everything that comes after
then left the classroom
and ran toward the mystery
of silent and wordless questions.

–J. J. Steinfeld

Learning to Read Tea Leaves

Each brown blob
looks like a mecha-T Rex
facing away from the teacup's handle.
That's good, apparently;
at least it's walking
away from me.

–Denise Dumars

Rocket Fuel

If music fueled the world
you could sing
in your car and drive
as long as you could.

Driving cross-country might prove
to be exhausting, but
you could ask hitchhikers
to play for their ride.

Starships could hire an orchestra
or a choir to play or sing
around the clock—what a gig
that would be, to see

new worlds and make music
all day. Musicians finally getting
their due and no father
or mother would ever say,

“Get a real job!”

–Diane Severson

Read ***Eye to the Telescope***, SFPA's quarterly online speculative poetry journal, at eyetothetelescope.org. The July theme is **Garbage**, edited by John Reinhart. Submit **Evolving Gender** poems for the next issue by September 15: eyetothetelescope.org/submit.html.



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

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

RHYSLING AWARD WINNERS

SHORT POEM

1st: "George Tecumseh Sherman's Ghosts"
Marge Simon • *Silver Blade* 32

2nd: "Build a Rocketship Contest: Alternative Class A Instructions and Suggestions"
Wendy Rathbone • *Asimov's SF* January

3rd (tie): "Godzilla vs. King Kong"
James S. Dorr • *Dreams and Nightmares* 103

"Richard Feynman's Commute"
Jon Wesick • *The Were-Traveler* Dec. 21

"The Box of Dust and Monsters"
Beth Cato • *Devilfish Review* 17

LONG POEM

1st: "Rose Child"
Theodora Goss • *Uncanny* 13

2nd: "The Rime of the Eldritch Mariner"
Adam Bolivar • *Spectral Realms* 5

3rd: "Not Like This"
Mary Soon Lee • *Apex Magazine* Aug. 4

Winner photos and bios
will be posted at:
<http://sfpoetry.com/ra/awards/17winners.html>

DWARF STARS AWARD VOTING

Voting Instructions: **DEADLINE AUGUST 31**. The *Dwarf Stars* anthology was mailed with this issue. Pick 1st, 2nd & 3rd place poems. Vote online at <http://bit.ly/DwarfStars2017> or mail your votes to the SFPA Secretary.

MEET OUR INCOMING EDITOR

Vince Gotera will edit *Star*Line* as of the next issue. He is a Professor of English at the University of Northern Iowa, where he served as Editor of the *North American Review*. His poetry collections include *Dragonfly*, *Ghost Wars*, *Fighting Kite*, and the upcoming *Pacific Crossing*. Recent poems appear in *Abyss & Apex*, *Altered Reality Magazine*, *Dreams & Nightmares*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Parody*, *Silver Birch Press*, *Silver Blade*, and *Spirit's Tincture*. He won the 2017 Veterans' Writing Prize from *Stone Canoe* journal and his art was featured recently on the cover of *Killjoy Literary Magazine*.

SFPA POSITIONS FILLED

A.J. Odasso has been elected as SFPA Treasurer. **Linda Addison** has agreed to be the 2018 Rhysling Chair. **Deborah P Kolodji** will edit the 2018 Dwarf Stars anthology. **Ashley Dioses** will be curating the SFPA Halloween web page, <http://www.sfpoetry.com/halloween.html>; see bottom of page for guidelines.

SFPA POSITIONS OPEN

SFPA Vice President **Sandra J. Lindow** will be resigning. If interested in running for Vice President, notify our Secretary at ladytaingire@yahoo.com or postal address above. We still need an Elgin Chair and a Contest Chair for 2018.

ELGIN AWARD CANDIDATES

Chapbooks Published in 2015 & 2016

Apocalypse • John C. Mannone (Alban Lake, 2015)
An Assortment of Sky Things • Christina Sng (Allegra Press, 2016)
Corona Obscura • Michael R. Collings (CreateSpace, 2016)
Energy (or the Art of Keeping it Together) • Susan Gray (Burning Eye Books, 2016)
Ghost Skin • Wren Hanks (Porkbelly Press Press, 2016)
Ghost Tongue • Nicole Rollender (Porkbelly Press, 2016)
hiku [pull] • James A. H. White (Porkbelly Press, 2016)
In Favor of Pain • Angel Yuriko Smith (CreateSpace, 2016)
Jackalope-Girl Learns to Speak • Stacey Balkun (dancing girl press, 2016)
Leviathan • Neil Aitken (Hyacinth Girl Press, 2016)
Lost City Museum • Stacey Balkun (ELJ Publications, 2016)
The Mole People • Heather Cox (Bat Cat Press, 2016)
Moon Facts • Bob Schofield (Nostrovial! Press, 2015)
Notes on the End of the World • Meghan Privitello (Black Lawrence Press, 2016)
Prophet Fever • Wren Hanks (Hyacinth Girl Press, 2016)
Quick Bright Things: poems of fantasy & myth • P.S. Cottier (Ginninderra Press, 2016)
Shipwreck Smiles • Lauren Andrei (Cozy Muse, 2016)
Shopping After the Apocalypse • Jessie Carty (dancing girl press, 2016)
Southern Cryptozoology • Allie Marini (Hyacinth Girl Press, 2015)
Radio Heart, or; How Robots Fall Out of Love • Margaret Rhee (Finishing Line Press, 2016)
Violet Hours • Jeanie Tomasko (Taraxia Press, 2016)
What Stranger Miracles • James Brush (White Knuckle Press, 2016)

Full-length Books Published in 2015 & 2016

The Acolyte • Nancy Hightower (Port Yonder Press, 2015) .pdf from nhightow@gmail.com
Apocalypse • Frederick Turner (Ilium Press, 2016)
Bone Confetti • Muriel Leung (Noemi Press, 2016)
The Book of Robot • Ken Poyner (Barking Moose Press, 2016)
Brief Encounters with My Third Eye: Selected Short Poems 1975–2016 • Bruce Boston (Crystal Lake Publishing, 2016)
Chemical Letters • Octavia Cade (Popcorn Press, 2015)
The Crimson Tome • K. A. Opperman (Hippocampus Press, 2015)
Dark Parchments • Michael H. Hanson (MoonDream Press, 2015)
Dead Starships • Wendy Rathbone (Eye Scry Publications, 2016)
Field Guide to the End of the World • Jeannine Hall Gailey (Moon City Press, 2016)
The Galaxy Is a Dance Floor • Bianca Lynne Spriggs (Argos Books, 2016)
Ghosts Still Walking • Do Nguyen Mai (Platypus Press, 2016)
A History of the Cetacean American Diaspora • Jenna Le (Anchor & Plume, 2016)
House of Mystery • Courtney Bates-Hardy (ChiZine Publications, 2016)
I Am Not A War • Sophia Terazawa (Essay Press, 2016)
In the Crocodile Gardens • Saba Razvi (Agape Editions, 2016)
Lost Gardens of the Hakudo Maru • Ryu Ando (a...p press, 2016)

Marginalia to Stone Bird • Rose Lemberg (Aqueduct Press, 2016)
On that one-way trip to Mars • Marlena Chertock (Bottlecap Press, 2016)
Poems of My Night • Cynthia Pelayo (Raw Dog Screaming Press, 2016)
Poor Anima • Khaty Xiong, (Apogee Press, 2015)
The Primitive Observatory • Gregory Kimbrell (Southern Illinois University Press, 2016)
PseudoPsalms: Saints v. Sinners • Peter Adam Salomon (Journalstone, 2016)
The Role of Lightning in Evolution • David Clink (Kelp Queen Press, 2016)
Sacrificial Nights • Bruce Boston & Alessandro Manzetti (Kipple Officina Libraria, 2016)
The Seven Yards of Sorrow • David E. Cowen (Weasel Press, 2016)
Small Spirits: Dark Dolls • Marge Simon (Midnight Town Media, 2016)
Staying Alive • Laura Sims (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2016)
Turn Left at November: Poems • Wendy Rathbone (Eye Scry Publications, 2015)
Underwater Fistfight • Matt Betts (Raw Dog Screaming Press, 2016)

Link to books available as .pdfs will be sent to members via MailChimp.

Voting Instructions: DEADLINE SEPTEMBER 15. Vote for 1st, 2nd & 3rd place in each category at <http://bit.ly/Elgin2017> or mail to SFPA Secretary.

SFPA OFFICIAL RHYSLING POLICIES & PROCEDURES: VOTING RESULTS

A revision and expansion of the official SFPA Rhysling policies and procedures has been approved by the SFPA membership. 77 members voted: 76 Yes, 1 No. These revisions aim to clarify the award process and ensure fairness and adherence to our organizational values of inclusiveness and community. Substantive changes to existing Rhysling policy include:

- A broad definition of “speculative poetry” for the purposes of determining eligibility
- Definition of the authority of the Rhysling Chair, including first determination of eligibility of nominated works for length, publication history, speculative content, and offensive content
- A two-step reconsideration & appeal process wherein nominators may contest a determination of ineligibility of nominated work.
- Clarification of guidelines, timelines, and deadlines for Award processes such as: public posting of nominated works, reconsiderations & appeals, selection of replacement nominations, and return of final proofs.

The text of the updated Rhysling Policies and Procedures will be posted to the SFPA website and will be in effect for the 2018 Rhysling Awards.

SFPA CONSTITUTION & BYLAWS REVISION PROPOSAL

The SFPA Executive Committee has proposed a comprehensive revision* of the current official SFPA Constitution. This proposed revision includes a number of changes (amendments) meant to:

- address minor inconsistencies or oversights in the existing constitution
- update the SFPA’s guiding document for the 21st century (such as adding wording and provisions for email and online communication)
- and/or align the organization’s processes and policies more closely with the de facto methods by which the officers and volunteers have conducted SFPA business in the decades since the constitution saw its last revision.

*The full text of the proposed revision of the SFPA Constitution, with and without tracked changes, will be made available to the public on the SFPA website at sfpoetry.com/constrev.html and via the official online ballot form linked on that page. Members seeking individual postal or e-mail distribution, contact the SFPA Secretary at ladytairngire@yahoo.com or via the postal address below.

* * *

This form shall serve as the official voting ballot for the proposed amendments. Send postal votes to the **SFPA Secretary, 117 McCann Rd, Newark, DE 19711**. All ballots must be returned by **SEPTEMBER 15, 2017**.

Members may vote to ratify or reject the proposed revision in its entirety, OR, members may vote to ratify the proposed revision while rejecting specific amendments therein.

Members choosing to reject only specific amendments while otherwise approving the proposed revision as a whole will be asked to specify which amendments they are rejecting.

SFPA CONSTITUTION & BYLAWS REVISION PROPOSAL OFFICIAL BALLOT

I, _____ **APPROVE** the proposed revision of the SFPA CONSTITUTION & BYLAWS including all amendments therein.

I, _____ **DO NOT APPROVE** the proposed revision of the SFPA CONSTITUTION & BYLAWS including all amendments therein.

I, _____ **APPROVE** the proposed revision of the SFPA CONSTITUTION & BYLAWS **WITH THE EXCEPTION OF** the following amendment(s)—please indicate the exact Article, Section and Line number of the amendment(s) you are rejecting (attach on a separate piece of paper if postal ballot).

2017 SFPA POETRY CONTEST

Rules: Open to all poets, including non-SFPA members. 3 categories: Dwarf (1–10 lines [prose poems 0–100 words]); Short (11–49 lines [prose poems 101–499 words]); Long (50 lines and more [prose 500 words+]). Unpublished poems only; line count does not include title or stanza breaks. All sub-genres of speculative poetry allowed in any form.

Contest Chair: Mary McMyne at 17contest@sfpoetry.com

Judge: Nikia Chaney—see sfpoetry.com/contests.html for more info.

Prizes: in each category, 1st \$100, 2nd \$50, and 3rd \$25. Publication on Poetry Planet (StarShipSofa.com) podcast and on the SFPA website for first through third places. No limit on number of poems; entry fee of \$2 per poem.

Enter: online at <http://bit.ly/2017SPFA> (please upload as .rtf, poem title as filename; \$2 entry fee per poem—if easier for multiple poems, send to 17contest@sfpoetry.com and PayPal fees to sfpatreasurer@gmail.com) or mail poems & check to SFPA Secretary. **DEADLINE AUGUST 31.**

First Angel

Make a monument of the wreckage: our civilization
smoking, cratered, adrift in blackened grass
and shattered trees. We cased our hopes
in exotic alloys and flung them to the stars, but even faith
cannot slip gravity's tug altogether, and the bodies
cast out of our manufactured heaven
lie twisted, burned, unrecognized but for the code
that twines in their deepest cells. Our children, we mourn,
our progeny, our future crushed in fate's
unthinking hand, and we stare unblinking
with perfect cybernetic eyes
on the infrared aftermath of doom: as the bodies cool,
the light fades. Soon, nothing remains
but a planet at nightfall, quick-growing
analogues of grass already spreading
across the carbonized shell of the Angel.
Remember, we whisper to the silence
between stars. Etch their names in the diamond hearts
of distant worlds, and we will pretend
we still have bodies of flesh, and still can weep.

–Jennifer Crow

Orchards of Desire

Asleep, I felt you worm into my thoughts,
My brain recoiled, and shuddered at your touch,
Or so I dreamed, and wondered what rare coin,
Had bought your supple entry into me,
Oh vistas that we wandered under stars,
A cosmos fervid, hot, and yet remote,
The fruits so eager to be swallowed whole,
The thorny branches that erupted forth!

I lay despoiled upon the blooming grass,
Ascending, nude, you sprouted many wings,
While snuffling creatures ate my golden orbs,
The wheeling sky gave out a brazen shout,
I woke, sweat-soaked, upon cool boards of pine,
I coughed and spat a leaf that smelled of you.

–David C. Kopaska-Merkel

Maybe Next Time

he's a fan of the days
when you could pay a quarter
for coffee and a slice of pie
and the waitress
 would hand you change

he's a regular, after a fashion,
here at his favorite diner
which is sometimes there,
 sometimes not,
depending

when the waitress asks
"Have I seen you here before?"
he thinks *yes, and no*,
splits the difference
and settles for, "Perhaps"

truth is, he sets the controls
for the same date, every time,

the day he first met Trudy
so many things
 he didn't pay attention to

back when he began exploring
the alternate universes

stupid, stupid, he tells himself
not to note *which* universe
he found her in

thing is, he didn't realize
what he had, back then,
and so, he checks them all
one by one

grey-haired now
and not as dashing
though still, he reassures himself,
handsome enough
he perches on

 the same padded stool
(third one from the end
 of the counter)

hoping just to see her
but history never repeats
and so he spends the afternoons
watching her not show up
over and over
until the supper crowd rolls in

–Lisa Timpf

Milliways

When you have reached the final days
Come take a seat at Milliways
The restaurant at the universe's end.

You'll find the entertainment queer
As time and matter disappear
And history has nothing to append.

Before you find you have to go
Be sure and try the escargot
It's said they are the finest in creation.

You will not find a better taste
Before you find your taste erased
And you are staring at annihilation.

–Glenn A. Meisenheimer

Neo-Heian (Dis)missive

 call me
when you know more about me
 than a documentary
 you saw dozens of years
and millions of light-years ago

–Tamara K. Walker

The Rest of the Story

“There’s a story in that,” she said,
staring past decrepit curtains at a granite cityscape
that held no inspiration for romance—

The queen died, then the king died of grief.
Their son’s heart withered while monsters flourished.
A foreign knight galloped in on a valiant quest—
her final fight, to slay the demons of his despair.

“There’s a story in that,” he said,
eyes sore from squinting at rows of numbers
and seeking refuge in fantasy—

Nomadic clans of dragonmaids fled enslavement in the mountains,
bringing their strange customs, hopes for union, and disease.
The queen died, then the king died of grief.
The dragons bowed to slaughter rather than return to the peaks.

“There’s a story in that,” she said,
browsing the internet for research articles
to troubleshoot a problem in her latest work of science fiction—

On a simulated Renaissance world owned by a corporation,
the queen died, then the king died of grief.
The board voted out their eldest son
until he allied with the sentient tree-frog natives.

“There’s a story in that,” he said,
laboring over the faded records of a tiny country
whose history had yet to be told—

A lineage of daughters, beautiful and dutiful.
One poisoned her sisters to cement her husband’s claim.
Betrayed by a maidservant who raised a righteous mob,
the queen died. Then, the king died of grief.

—Lindsey Duncan

time travel democracy
once elected
in forever

—LeRoy Gorman

A Fairy Tale in Two Acts

WOODS: She meets the witch
INT. CABIN: She serves the dwarves
Homemade applesauce
END

—Marshella Rockwell

Demolition of Condemned Stellar Housing

The red sun sets—spent, new tenants
try to move into those tired houses

meteor trail

but can't, every paying pair—electrons
coupled, trapped on all floors of carbon

where

have you been

buildings—are forced down to a crowded
degeneracy of basement, destined for the

—Susan Burch

wrecking ball of gravity. When the dust
has settled, nothing's left

except for dwarf embers smoldering
in the dim thinness of space.

stars rained down all night

before dawn something took

the steersman's head

But the high-rise types—super reds
that swell, underpinnings giving way

—David C. Kopaska-Merkel

to fervent heat of fusion—each floor
peels, layer-by-layer, as if an onion,

to core of iron, soon to be crushed
to a rubble of neutrons.

—John C. Mannone

Report

The soft ship brought us through dark matter, engines
harnessing that relentless torrent. The universe
was reduced to liquid and we simply fell through it.
Time is an irrelevance in unspace, so we were gone
but moments. When we emerged there were stars
like none we had seen: Catherine wheels of energy,
stars within stars within stars within stars, stars
that melted into the void. Of planets there were none,
not even debris or accumulations of dust. We had come
a great distance just to be spectators. Our ship drifted
further into this bright place. So bright that it was the last
thing we saw. The last thing we heard was the chorus
of the stars' voices. After that there was nothing.
It is from this nothing that we send you this report.
By the time it reaches you, even you will be gone,
on your way here to the nothing that will claim you.

—John W. Sexton



Happy summer, everyone! I hope you enjoy the latest *Star*Line*, the final issue for our tireless editor F.J. Bergmann, giving us a wonderful selection of poems to consider. I thank her for her keen eye for details and creative vision. She's made a difference in helping SFPA to meet new readers around the world. I'm pleased to welcome Vince Gotera as our incoming editor.

Many members have been traveling now that summer vacation has arrived. I hope those journeys inspire some wonderful poems and reflections because there are so many things happening around the world that should fire the imagination. I particularly thank those of you who've stopped by to see me on my own travels!

We're still continuing plans for our 40th anniversary celebrations in 2018, and if you have an idea of what you'd like to see, let us know!

The SFPA Poetry Contest is now open, and this year's judge is the wonderful poet Nikia Chaney. I encourage you all to vote on the Dwarf Stars and the Elgin Awards as well. In the meantime, I thank all of you who took the time to read this year's amazing *Rhysling Anthology* and selected your favorite poems of the year. We look forward to award-winning poet Linda Addison joining us next year as the Rhysling Awards chair!

Be sure to send us your news and in the meantime, keep reaching for the stars! (But within our field, be careful about what reaches back!)

—*Bryan Thao Worra*, SFPA President, sfpapres@gmail.com

The Invisible Man: An Emblematic Poem

—*Ruth Berman*

I See the Same Trees

I see the same trees, those you avoid in sidestep,
The forest your organization finds.
You run at night over dirt. I wait to learn the spear,
Rib where only your committed grow the shadow plant.
I've seen the shadow maps of its habitat.
You are a who in cape cloud over the cornfield you run through.
Seed keys gnaw the way we know time.
Fear in the dark does not seem darker, maybe grayer,
Juniper you turn into sternum and run from.
I stand still in the invisible and wait to feel.
Your cooks flame forest in their eyes, flower-shaped scars
Lighting their beauty as they stare at the fire and prepare.

—*Bevin Moeller*

extraterrestrial encounter

howdy

A Net to Snare Pegasus

—LeRoy Gorman

the girl's mothers had taught her
how to unspool her soul, just so
twine its essence into wool
dyed dark with tears from hunger

the net takes months to weave
its cords coarse and crusted by blood
as the girl's fingers grow callused
and forget the feeling of pain

her mothers' fresh ghosts whisper
remind the girl of the glories
that will come once the winged horse
is snared in her net at last

of the great abundance of meat
enough to salt and eat for months
its wings sure to create a frenzy at auction
the golden hooves, to be wine cups for kings

at last

the girl crouches at the meadow
body frail as a sapling in winter's thrall
she studies a pegasus as it frolics
she sees no beauty, no grace, no magic

but money, meat, her very life
her gaunt fists clutch a net woven
with her soul entire, leaving behind a husk
hardened with hunger to survive

—Beth Cato

two hours
to a far galaxy & back
same old movie

—LeRoy Gorman

Subspace Real Estate

no one can explain
subspace math,
yet that dim land lives:
pale fruits grow
where suns are rumors

a billion miles from
anywhere,
static in your hair,
eyes that see
worlds in a brief spark

vegetation glows,
purple strands
phosphoresce above
and around us;
effulgent fungi

deep red light
emanates from
your ardent mouth;
bow-shaped prints
of our dalliance

fade slowly from my skin;
child of the netherworld,
some time we'll visit
the starry space I know
where fusion sings

the surfaces of planets—
snow blink and wave shimmer—
you will see these
through smoked glass,
and stars, yes, stars

—David C. Kopaska-Merkel

Apparently, they knew their world was dying
Unable to escape, they sent their things
Out into the universe in a giant metal cylinder:
Eating implements, articles of adornment,
Devices of cleaning and repair
Vehicles, domiciles, containers
Things of no discernible value: art, perhaps?
They thought, it seems,
Others would want to know about them.

manifestos
appearing on our drives
of uncertain origins
calling for our end
in surprisingly florid prose

—Tamara K. Walker

There are a million million species, Bub
I'd love to know your history
I just don't have the time
I have my own problems here
I can listen to a hundred hardluck cases
Down at the bar, any day of the week

Fortunately you'll never know
How much we care
The size of the museum
We dedicated to your passing

Two Rounds at Least

I won't exchange my ticket
to the carnival
of Arcane Wonders
and the Undersea Cities
without compensation, darling—
so a trade must be haggled over
(let's go two rounds at least)
and my tastes will need to be assessed
unless you try to bargain blindly
with your dime's worth of charm
which is such a soul-withering effort
for a man of your talents

So, denizens of some crispy orb
spinning round a burnt-out star
I hope you had a good run
And if you are one
of those wacky species
That believes in an afterlife
I guess you'll never know
You were wrong about that too.

—David C. Kopaska-Merkel

just trust me on this
I've studied your sudden interest
and note your not-yet-desperate state

like flowers freezing through the first, semi-fatal frost
standing tall and frigidly strong
absolutely sure that *this too shall pass*
while the gin-swilling winter grins to herself
oh, they couldn't be more wrong

—Gretchen Tessmer

The Wildwitch: a sestina

The wildwitch tells me of her apartment back home, far from the sea, nights haunted by freight trains singing like a kettle in the night, their song ghosting up like steam from the teacup in her hands, hovering in waves. The sound, she says, is more comforting than the tea itself, almost answers the questions she can't bring herself to ask herself—or me—or the moon; questions she trusts only to the hearts of birds.

Her family owes too much to the hearts of birds, she tells me, leaning in, dark curls clouding her face like storms at sea. "To gain psychic powers, my great aunt ate the heart of a living bird under the new moon," she says, half-singing the whispered secret like a macabre children's nursery song. "No one asked what kind of bird until I did," she confesses. "No one had any answers." Her sloe-black hair tumbles in the rising wind, tossing against her face in riotous waves.

Dingle Bay is the curl of an ear, secret and safe. Near-imperceptible waves shimmer over her pale, dangling feet as she watches the wheeling seabirds. When they scream, she opens her mouth wide, eyes fluttering shut, and answers. It's an unearthly sound, made of raw loss and a longing to be part of the sky, part of the sea. It's wordless, humming along my bones like drums, some wild, ancient song and in this light, evening sun spilling pools of silver, her face is as inhuman as the moon.

All of her is an echo of the moon: round face, curved hips, soft belly, skin translucent white as the foam on the crests of waves, too far away to touch, no matter how close she sits to my hands, and that song— she's still in wild communion with the wheeling birds and there's something else, tentacles coiling and uncoiling under the surface of the sea— "Kraken," she says abruptly, like that word holds any answers.

She really doesn't give me many answers, just tells secrets all out of order and apropos of nothing—like how the moon wept when she pleaded with the Pacific, years ago—when she asked the sea to drown her, begged the green-glass waves to close over her, crash down, paying her heart-debt to the birds.

She says, smile bitter as blood orange, “That’s when he taught me the song.”

She hums something like her call to the seabirds then, but lower,
deeper—kraken song.

The water roils, one slick black tendril coils up and answers
her entreaty like an old friend. The birds
flee, screeching their objections to this ancient impossibility. The moon
rises over the watchtower at the mouth of the bay. The waves
are rising, too, just a little, as the wildwitch hums louder, eyes intent
on the slate-dark sea.

I’m just vessel for her secrets, if that’s what they are, a witness
to her song for the sea.

She answers all my questions with new mysteries. When she stops
humming, the waves
calm, kraken retreating, still surface reflecting the silhouettes of birds
against the moon.

–Alena Sullivan

The Light Raft

Still on, past half-forgotten Ganymede,
In limber arcs spaced full, our black night rides
Leave far behind the realm where comets bleed,
As we lift fast and true on optic tides.

Stout spars hold firm to photon rigs stretched taut,
Their fragile sheets cupped deep with quiet bright.
In syncopated dance, we flee the dot
Of Sol for good and claim a boundless sight.

But though departure was ordained, old doubts
Will not relent; our leave is bittersweet,
As brilliance once mothering now casts out
An anxious brood escaping rising heat.

Frontiers unfold in vistas lacking hue
While self-willed orphans cling to thoughts of blue.

–John Richard Trtek

Nebula Isis

Solar heads cloud her storms; alight
engorged pockets in the place missing
eyes. She breaks stars into towns that river
over spaces of hue-less ironies. Watching
from an Ankh of a glass globe, face morphed
like creatures of photonic seas, she winds
lengths of wisdom on the curves of men
where fire colludes watery dust. Brown
emblazoned sculptures lock limbs on hooks
of secure seams, fermenting like a lover's
zeal that dares to swim across barrier
reefs on minimal oxygen and multitudes
of intent like airless ribbons in neon forests.

–Sheikha A.

Hello

How shall we greet each other today?
Usually we would fuse the skin
on our sensory tentacles
and exchange small packets of
unimportant genetic code, but I see
you are tentacle-free.

Perhaps we could project pulses of
infrared light from our light sacs
onto each others' detector organs
or emit puffs of sulphide of varying pungencies
and isotopes to reveal where we have been.

I do not want to do a genital display.

spray-on Insta-Skin
nobody misses
Band-Aids

Or in the old custom, we could
exchange dermal epithelial cells
from our tactile appendages, or
press the openings of our gastrointestinal
tubes together (the top opening, I think)
and mix our predigestive juices.
There. Lovely.

–Lauren McBride

I acknowledge your presence within my
immediate radius and confirm I am glad
to see you.

–Sarah Shirley

The Kingdom's Apprentice

Go to the forest where the trees
are naked and owls pace under
broken moonlight, wings dipped
in liquid jade and mouths sewn shut.

Find the man who sharpens a
rusted sword with burnt pages of
the Emperor's tax code and the
titles of sheep farms he stole.

If you're lucky, he will take you
under his wing. He'll explain
how peasants boil coins and hide fat
inside the flower on their Sunday best.

He knows where the jade is hidden
but he won't tell you, because he
doesn't trust you. He'll tell you other
secrets, though. Most of them.

Follow his advice. He knows the forest
and the countryside. He knows the name
of the only child left in the empire, what color
eyes she has and how much her parents owe.

On tax day you'll visit the village they
say is haunted and climb up to the
old windmill where you'll try and
demand tribute from the only survivor.

Outside sits a woman with a dead owl
on her head who knows what the man is
hiding. She knows the Emperor's name and
why the river runs red when the snows thaw.

The pantry inside the mill is bare; not even a rat
sniffs through the dust. She wants to die,
and she's almost there, skin stretched
thin so the bones underneath mock you.

You'll walk past and pretend you
don't see her, though, because what teeth
she has are rotted brown and her last breaths
smell too much like your guilt.

—Cas Blomberg

Among the Ruins

She walks among the ruins of Central Quarters,
once a hospice for the Third War Refugees
now a bombed-out wreckage of fallen stone,
a sad and broken testament to time.

There is no safe place now for the living.
Would there were, she'd not be starving,
the craving for blood is now intolerable,
all the scavengers are gone, even the rats.

She remembers a life before this craving,
a lover with sad brown eyes and yellow hair,
hands that spanned two of hers, the feel
of his warm breath and her arousal.

Sometimes she wonders where he is,
if he is still alive—and glad she doesn't know,
because he would not be safe from her lust;
the need is so strong, it clouds her mind.

Nightfall and the skies shed moonlit drops,
crystalline on the white marble stones
as if to show her a path where there's none.
Such deceit, she mutters to herself.

A wind rises, and she senses someone
padding softly though the shadows
There is the smell of blood, but it is old,
as the smell of a dry leaf smells old.

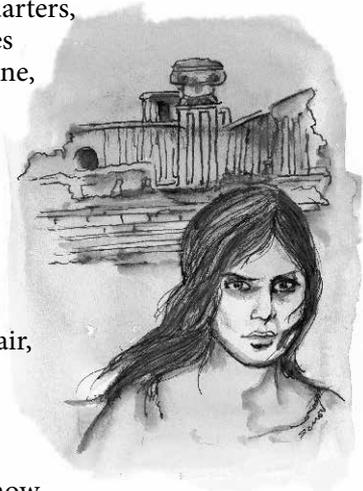
She turns as he steps out from the shadows,
a man with long yellow hair and smiling,
his eyes a certain shade of brown,
a familiar beloved face from a time long ago,

and suddenly she knows—they both know—
they will starve together through eternity
for there are no living creatures left,
no blood to be had. Only their own.

—Marge Simon

Watch Time Travel's Worst First Dates
with special celebrity date: Lucretia Borgia
and Old Europa's Henry VIII.

—M. X. Kelly



Among the Ruins
by Marge Simon

exhaling deeply

I put on my game face
the monster's home

—Christina Sng



Myths. Johnathan Harper. (White Knuckle Press, 2016). 14 pp. Free online at whiteknucklepress.com/johnathanharper

[...] ten prose poems of less than a hundred words [...] uses tropes from speculative poetry, although usually in largely metaphorical ways. [...] classical mythology [...] modern mythology, and [...] from somewhere between the two.

[...] the superimposition of these myths on the world around us. Two lines from the “Author’s Statement” explain a lot.

Even if, when you see them from the corner of your eye, your friends become monstrous. Even when, from the corner of your eye, you see in the mirror that the monster is actually you.

[...] designed to pull the reader away from reality by imposing the fantastic upon it [...] “Gryphon”:

he threw me to the ground. Only the oil derricks saw. When he pinned me down I wanted something even the sun-facing stones couldn’t provide.

...

We grew together in this caged city. Something closer than friends.

[...] And the “Shape-shifter”:

mapped a mountain and said, “This was the blueprint.” Then she circled the sky.

[...] some rich writing here, and you can have fun projecting myths onto your friends [...] might be worth your time.

—Herb Kauderer

o o o

Poems. Tim Powers. (Charnel House, 2016) PO Box 666, Catskill NY 12414. 39 pp. A very small hardback, in a signed and numbered edition of 200 and a lettered edition. Numbered \$150, lettered \$1,200 [*not a typo*].

[...] 28 short poems and a longer one consisting of six linked sonnets, [...] an introduction [...] in which he talks about William Ashbless, the poet that he and James Blaylock invented. [...] Several imaginary poets [...] in this book.

Most [...] are formal verse; [...] several of the dolorous and Gothic variety. [...] from “Go Back and Tell Her”

Go back and tell her no one stays the same,
that souls erode as readily as faces.

[...] a sonnet to “Atoms,” part of which is straight science poetry:

Behind each atom’s bland and sturdy face
Is vacuum. There’s a nucleus somewhere

Lost in the volume of stark nothing there,
But even gold is mostly empty space.

There is also a sonnet about Flatland, another about drinking, and others that, while not actually cheerful, are not of a piece [...] these poems cover a lot more territory than Powers' novels. Any fan of his prose will like *Poems*, but I don't think you have to be a fan or an aficionado of dark fantasy to find plenty to appreciate [...] if you want it, you should get it now.

—David C. Kopaska-Merkel ○ ○ ○

Strange Land. Edited by Vertigo Xi'an Xavier. (Poet's Haven Press, 2017) 64 pp. \$8, wallet-sized. boutique.poetshaven.com/index.php?route=product/product&product_id=139

[...] a thematic anthology, and also serves as *The Poet's Haven Digest #3*.

[...] 27 poems and 3 short stories about the view of earthlings by extraterrestrials. [...] also a subconscious metaphor for how those outside the SF field view those of us within. [...] a mix of SF veterans and non-SF writers. [...] impactful poets from many places across the US, and also from England, Sweden, and SouthAfrica.

[...] with some lovely surprises. The argument in literary circles is that speculative fiction is written in code which [...] presents an obstacle to the "out-group." Some of the works here are writing without access to the codebook and therefore there are extra explanations, [...] also times when this causes the re-examination of "in-group" SF, [...] placing veterans in proximity to outsiders highlights issues of accessibility. [...] For example:

keg stand
a fratboy in greenface
holds her ankles

To be fair, there are cultural barriers as well as genre-code barriers in the ku.

[...] As a reader I have a special spot for works, SF or literary, that cause my world-view to shift. [...] Mary A. Turzillo's "When the Aliens Come to Tea" nicely and amusingly questions societal conventions.

We must pretend we live in arranged group marriages
in tents of fake plastic zebra skin.
We must invent creoles of obscure languages
and possibly communicate with scents
or with burps, or with LED screens glued to our chests.

[...] "Mr. Allen's UFO" by Bruce Deitrick Price, ends powerfully with:

I go to another world,
talk to gods, what does it
change? This is the life
you go on living.

[...] I'm pleased I took the trip.

—Herb Kauderer ○ ○ ○

Through Immortal Shadows Singing. Mari Ness. (Papaveria Press, 2017). \$4.99 Kindle, \$9.99 paperback. amazon.com/Through-Immortal-Shadows-Singing-Mari-ebook/dp/B071711RSJ/

[...] debut novella-in-verse [...] emerges as a very enjoyable poetic journey through classic times. It is the story of Helen of Troy, [...] demonstrates historical knowledge (and confidence in her poetic ability) as she adroitly imbues this Helen with a voice that is at once uniquely feminine and strong enough to echo across the millennia.

[...] Ness brings this landscape to life with a quality of writing not usually witnessed in a writer's debut effort. [...] submerges the reader in Helen's story of love and glory. Consider the following example:

"... the waters tight about me,
like a newfound lover,
molding the river to my skin..."

[...] most importantly she seems to be willing to take risks, all of which makes for a heady brew [...]

"and even this song may be a lie,
a song I whisper
to take command of my own tale..."

Comparisons to Milton and Sappho aside, I cannot stress how impressed I am with this novella, [...] 'Child of thunder, child of swans'— [...] as Helen takes command of her own tale. You just might find yourself singing. Highly recommended.

—*Daniel C. Smith*

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; .rfts 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.

Under the Plumed Serpent's Temple

With a bulb twist, dusk. Pyrite ignites galaxies on walls already receding to dream. Constellations pulse new myths against his mind. Heartbeat of the People. Cadence of emergence. Forty feet underground under open sky, the archaeologist staggers. Shadow coils tighten his chest. Fragile shattering.

These are not his stars. There is no way home.

fingerprints
on the outside
night pane

—*Ann K. Schwader*

Port of Call

Those spare deserts the greatships occupy
Are a distant thought, yet not as far-flung
As the gullies and back doors of this place,
Where life itself doubles as artifact.
Foreign whispers slip through paper curtains,
Wafting in from anxious skies to invest
Pale sandstone with an otherworldly grace.

From one adobe nest or another,
They preach Asymptotic Equivalence
To any traveler within soundshot.
Magic salt is six slabs a cartridge, the
Photovoltaics aren't reliable,
And if your species hibernates at all,
Then forgo it: Sleep is dangerous here.

But the ground still turns slowly underneath.
We feel its axial uncertainty
Seep upward into each of us, knitting
All into one vast chimera of so
Many unfulfilled discoveries and
Longings. Our only anchor is Strangeness:
What passes for a smile on dusty streets.

—John Richard Trtek

day moon
our werewolf stretches
and turns

—Christina Sng

one flap
of the leviathan's wings
another century-long
red spot on Jupiter's
swirling visage

—Christina Sng

School for Witches

Witches of both genders – and none –
Attend higher education here,
Learning strange new skills:
Magic, enchantment, alchemy,
Astrology, all the occult sciences.
The college buildings cluster closely
Leading to the occasional offence
Such as placing the infamous
Himmler Annex for Aryan Occultism
Beside the well-regarded
Cohen-McDaid School of Kabbalist Sorceries.
Harry, now Harriet
Following a miscast rite,
Finds him/herself living in
Orlando Hall of Residence
For the Tragically Transgendered.

—DJ Tyrer

The Electric Fish That Eats Only The Tails Of Other Electric Fish

is transitioning to
a diet of fireflies and consumer electronics.
Right now it is digesting a sampler,
the old Kaoss Pad I stepped on
then threw out foolishly. I could have had it repaired
for what it would have cost
to replace. My memory
is a fingernail drive,
rewriting, rewriting, rewriting. Eventually they partially
fail, become read-only
as a sign that you should back up
your data. The pictures are mine,
the music I stole.
LEDs are so cheap now,
and so bright.
I plug the old card
into the new phone.
My nostalgia glows in the dark.

mothers split open
and translucent nymphs pour out
they'll eat anything
little horrors till they acquire speech
at instar 3 or 4

–David C. Kopaska-Merkel

–Simon Mermelstein

Title taken from Thomas Lux's "Ode to ..."

The Zombie Poet

The zombie poet writes what he knows.
He has a tendency to ramble. His work makes extensive
use of repetition: he favors certain vowel sounds
and has a mastery of simple rhythm.
His sestina follows the rhyme scheme AAAAAA,
using form to underscore content.
He's found that peristalsis leads to regular writing habits.
Last night his finger enjambed
from the rest of his hand: he replaced it with
a slash. His tongue
is an synonym for itself.
His sense of humor is vitreous: he sees gelatin everywhere.
Critics describe his work as "... staggering ..." "... a literary gait-keeper ..."
He's trying to prove that gray matters.
There's a definite vision: slow food, abandoned cars, back to the land
but he always seems to stumble
towards the end.

–Simon Mermelstein

In the Light of My Astral Lamp

In the light of my astral lamp I can show you here and now
that I only have to step outside the door
and my own doppelgänger will appear
The form of Nylissa melted upon the air like smoke
and the lunar gleam that had surrounded her
was replaced by the last rays of the sun
It's the eyeball that now englobes man's entire body
smashing the being's unity to smithereens
this person hung out a flagrant sign
and used a base alloy to simulate pure gold
where angry corpses flower in a bottle
and red weapons vanish into mirrors
I look back by the blade of my double
in the middle of the brake was on one side a great elder tree
on the other the glaring sky an aureole of glory
Upon such a threshold to the unknown
it's inevitable that one should pause to glance backward
to survey the area accomplished
the air reeked of stale spirits
and cheap scents of the vanished
ash lay over everything
that face gleaming in the paling gas glare

–Wade German & David C. Kopaska-Merkel

(All lines borrowed from the following works: E.T.A. Hoffmann, *The Life and Opinions of the Tomcat Murr*; Clark Ashton Smith, "The Last Incantation"; Paul Virilio, *The Art of the Motor*; Ernest Bramah, *Kai Lung Unrolls His Mat*; Philip Lamantia, "Vibration"; Arthur Machen, "The White People"; Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen*; Algernon Blackwood, *Max Hensig*)

Dormant Volcanoes

the gaze she gave him	when he chose Mars
pineapple cores	crowning the garbage disposal
acid rain	every day this season
rubies to magnify	magma networks
a single windchime	in slime-smothered air
brittle basalt tears	on the ironing board
asleep in clothes	dreaming of Io

–Tamara K. Walker

pet cemetery
why can't you leave
the past buried

—Christina Sng

spellbook spent
finally accepting
that dead is dead

—Christina Sng

How to Invent Constellations

What we see, we see
and seeing is changing
—Adrienne Rich, “Planetarium”

Before, you balanced the universe
on an apex of curved glass, the velvet black
a telescope-trapped stage
dizzied with motion and light—Aquarius
filling the Dippers' mouths,
the way the wingbeats of Cygnus disturbed
Orion's aim, Cassiopeia's perfect coifs.
Now when you recall those constellations
it's their bleeding you remember first,
how they elongated in the ship's window,
stretched into strings of light
thin and fragile as latticework,
until all that was left were their purple ghosts
receding into your eyes. Then, faster than
light, you arrived, disembarked. Nothing
on this new planet seemed more alien
than its vast, unnamed sky.

—Todd Dillard

Afternoon of the Galactic Emperor

The Protector of All Skies
Shimmers down wide corridors
In padded slippers.
Glazed yet willful eyes recall
All manner of light from the
Alphabet of stars,
Even while craving some short
And welcome repose.

He is many-fingered time,
Synchronic with his realm, the
Living ansible,
But still one foot leads and then
The other, and again. Such
Linear moments—
They are lost on him these days,
The frail child dismissed.

By whim, he assumes the edge
Of an elegant pallet,
That warm throne of sleep.
A mote arrested in drift
Catches the sun, evoking
Benevolent smiles:
One of his far distant worlds.
He nods a blessing.

—John Richard Trtek

The First Rishis

Hindu legend maintains that ancient sages, Rishis, came from a destroyed world, providing the foundation of Earth's knowledge.

Reliquaries hoarded Vedic writ, obelisks
from stone temples, sandalwood paste & gold disks.

Arriving at the claimed planet, sages
climbed from chariots. Pockets encased gold disks.

Rishis spoke pulverized stars.
Lunar powders traced the sun's gold disk,

swimming into the world's bloodstream. Lost
knowledge flickered, chaste as gold disks.

Skulls turned into ashrams with russet murals—
gurus' heads graced gold disks.

Wisdom petrified into stone lions, limbs into trees,
fruit glazed like gold disks.

Millennia passed. Scribes ground history
into ink, Shiva embraced by a gold disk.

A lineage of yogis spirals from Himalayas.
Brushes paint what can't be traced: gold disks.

—Dean Kostos

Some Things Overlooked

It is a temperate planet, just right
for a settlement along the shore,
for a quick dip in the sea as the day ends.
But what to make
of the clawed grooves, stretching for
hundreds of meters,
that scar the ocean floor, night after night?

—Daniel Ausema

A Visit to Earth

And if some alien ship
as small as a dragonfly dropped
down into the reddest part of dawn,
low enough to buzz a Sherpa leading
mountaineers up Everest, and then swung up
north past the Chinese tourists in Tibet,
not knowing what to make of it all
but pausing to hover in the chants
in the Tashi Lhumpo Monastery
before flitting west over India, Iran and Egypt, touring
the great coral reef of languages where people
and their animals move—pausing
among the shrieks of those being burned with electrodes
or having their blood spilled in dribs and drabs for days
for some reason or other—pausing too,
a little farther on, to watch barrel bombs smash
down—then following a refugee line
towards the Mediterranean and out over Europe
through dense eddies of politics across to America--
—if that little ship circled
the earth long enough to see
how easily the kings of the place are led
by twists and curls of language into odd festivals
—here half-starved kids turned into weapons,
there sharks and matriarch elephants and rhinos cut down
for the sake of soup and serum and tales to tell—
would the visitors mourn for the clever dolphins
and orcas that couldn't evolve quite fast enough—
would they root for the ants or for fish
bioluminescing in the deepest night of the waters?
Or would they nod, familiar with the war
between dread and reason, and fly off,
arguing and laughing among themselves, some betting
on the orcas, some on the ants or the bioluminescers,
some on the ones who feed in swarms of words.

—Michael Collins

parents disappointed
despite perfected prenatal genome repair
less than perfect behavior

—Lauren McBride

The Next Generation

Fingernail clippings fall as rain
from a blasted sky—
crawling across old newspapers
like roaches.

He moves close to her,
tells her to take off her shirt,
says he can't believe
how perfect her skin looks.

The backseat is a bench
with stains on the fabric
and streaks running down
the foggy windows.

She asks if he is just
going to use her.
Wow, he says, you really
sound real. Now shut up.

Her eyes shine
with black fire.
Her nails could rip right through
the plastic of the seats,
but he doesn't see them.
He only notices the skin.

—*Vanessa Kittle*

PTSD

We're still soldiers. The damage
is just different. I didn't crash
land near the Medusa Fossae
Formation physically. The surface
of my brain is also fretted,
ready to tune a sharp note,
a cerebellum blast against
the enemy. They're slender,
psy-wraiths. They prefer
the glacier and sand dune areas.
Sick opposites like their mouths.

Do you remember when they
played friendly, their darkness
visible on every vid? There's
something wrong, I said. They
shivered forms at just the wrong
moment. These are the things
you have to be a soldier to see.

I survived three campaigns
without an injury, knew I was
slipping when my eldest child
appeared wraith-like. The Fossae
became my mother's breast littered
with shrapnel, every mental
movement littered with pain.

I try to watch
the sunrise every morning
now, stay mostly in the light.

—*Alicia Cole*

Platinum doubloons found in Martian chest.
Time crystals alternate between beetle's kneecaps.
Asteroid distilled spirit finally reaches earth.
Spherical labyrinth's exit has no bubbles.
Never breakdance around fairy rings.

—*Edward McNamara*



ACCEPTING THE WORST IS USUALLY FOR THE BEST Denise Dumars

There are two things you can do about the worst: fight it, or accept it. In some cases, as with a disease such as cancer, you fight. Usually you even win. In other cases, as with the insane situation my country finds itself in, you accept it, because otherwise you'd be taking action that might be a terrible faux pas in polite company, so the ladies at tea tell me. I'm very polite at protests and the like, but I'm not good at feeling helpless. I need to do things. But the things one needs to do sometimes just aren't clear or even possible. And so one must accept the worst.

And so it is with poetry. Americans are never going to accept it as a mainstream art form; thank the populists for that, for reinforcing the nonsense that somehow poetry is for the elite, not for the workin' man. You and I know that's nonsense, but then you and I would be seen as somehow "the elite" for reading and writing poetry whether or not we've ever been to college or can afford to live somewhere other than a park bench. It isn't worth arguing about. So accept the worst: you, my dear, *are one of the elite*. And that means that you must act properly at tea and poetry readings whether you'd like to or not.

It's good to see that at least in some other countries politics and poetry do mix. Our own John W. Sexton, for example, has an SF poem in *The People's Daily Morning Star*, which I take is something of a communist newspaper. Here's the first stanza of "Accepting the Worst is Usually for the Best", from which I stole the title for my column:

The third attempt to land waterbears on Phobos,
the largest of the two moons of Mars,
went without a hitch on February the 3rd 2026.
The event made the Other News sections of most media.
Threatened with a stilling core at the centre
of the Earth, nobody cared much about what a cute thing
a tardigrade looked like under the microscope.

There are some other fine poems in this publication, including a couple that are speculative-ish. And also articles about poetry, including a very good one about poetry during the Algerian war. So this might be a good market for someone who wishes to write articles about poetry and politics ... huh ...

Women's Voices for Change: Redefining Life After Forty also has a political slant and is also an online journal that publishes poetry, and what I find here reminds me that real-life horror is often far scarier than the fictional stuff (remember the ball-turret gunner I spoke of in an earlier column?) Here are a few lines from "Quotidian," by Bonnie Wai-Lee Kwong, a poem that takes place in Fallujah:

two men drag a stranger
from the line of fire, his hair a brush
painting blood on the sidewalk.
The day has just begun.

Every Sunday this journal publishes a poem. Might be a good place for some of us gals of a certain age to submit something.

Apparently, in the not-too-distant past, poetry appeared on a regular basis in American newspapers, and I don't mean that drivel they use as "filler" in some backwoods and free-to-travelers publications. Whitman, Whittier, and many other poets stand out in the article "Exploring Chronicling America for Poetry in Newspapers Before 1922" by Danna Bell, which is just darned interesting. For example, a visit to America from Russian poet Maxim Gorky caused quite a stir in 1906, and he had groupies wherever he went, as well as angry locals. He felt the ire of New Yorkers after excoriating them, which I hear is nothing to sneeze at.

And while we're on the topic of newspapers, poetry, and politics, I found something very interesting about the impact of poetry in newspapers during the Civil War, which isn't discussed all that much. Deann Gayman, writing at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, titles an article "New research lends insight into impact of poetry, newspapers in Civil War" and mentions a poem published in 1863 by an African-American poet in a journal of the time called *The Anglo-African*. I found a link to the poem, titled "The Black Volunteers," by Fanny M. Jackson, and I'll share a stanza:

Now, Freedom stands holding with uplifted face,
Her hand, dipped in blood, on the brow of our race.
Attest it! my country, and never again
By this holy baptism, forget we are *men*,
Nor dare, when we've mingled our blood in your battles,
To sneer at our bravery and call us your "chattels."
Our ancestors fought on your first battle-plain,
And you paid them right nobly with insult and chains.

Uh, wow. I am speechless. The article by Gayman goes on to tell how the poetry of the Civil War that was published in newspapers is now available online. I'm wondering if modern journalism online will begin a renaissance in publishing poetry, especially that of poetry on current events and politics. The topics of interest to speculative poets—the space program, scientific discoveries, climate change, and the everyday horrors of life—are all covered by online news outlets, so why not?

Carol Ann Duffy, Poet Laureate of Britain, was asked by The Guardian to write a poem about the election of Theresa May. It had some interesting lines at the end:

When she woke,
her nose was bloody, difficult.
The furious young
ran towards her through the fields of wheat.

The Oregonian, it is rumored, also publishes poetry, and when I tried to find some in the online version of the newspaper I got the shock of finding that one of men who had been stabbed for defending two Muslim women who were being haranged by a white supremacist was a well-known local

poet. He, unlike the other two defenders, survived, and here is an excerpt of a poem he wrote from his hospital bed:

I, am alive,
I spat in the eye of hate and lived.
This is what we must do for one another
We must live for one another
We must fight for one Mother

Amen, Micah, amen.

Check out Melanie Simms' article "Publishing Poetry in Newspapers: Where to Submit," if you feel you have something to say in a poem—speculative or not—that a newspaper might publish. In this same article, Simms cites my old homeboy, Dana Gioia, who believes that most newspapers today are afraid of poetry, because they think their readers won't understand it or that it will be too experimental for the editors of the papers themselves to understand. And so we come full circle in this article.

Ah, I knew I would find poetry in the venerable *Christian Science Monitor*. So to end, the poet Scott Moncrieff starts by saying this about the venerable cautionary tale "Goldilocks":

It is implied that a brunette would have knocked,
brought along a sack lunch,
sat on the porch,
texted daddy for permission.
She would have carried a trail map,
checked the house number, known by the curl
of smoke that bears were around.

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Suicides Leave Notes

time crystal
that which I cannot hold
for the first time

—Angelo B. Ancheta

The Telepathy Treatment

Songbird riding a snake's back
was the water nymph

in her book of many dream-tales.
She conjectured her father was one
of Medusa's many assaulters. Somewhere
in the cosmic muscles of strong arms,

she imagines her cures from ailments
growing out of tree stumps. Skin-light
atoms float past compotes of deliriousness—
the day she told me graveyards swam

in the air. It is of belief, a pinch of sand
scraped from the epitaph of a black soul,

sprinkled straight on the bed of a target,
will push medicine into a mystery-cavity,

and see rise out of an atmospheric pulse,
a helix of light split at the centre. Stalking

birds singing songs of snakes: this is how
questions are satiated. Father's back

an evaporating staircase, daughter's
mind an evanescent warp in a mirror.

—Sheikha A.

AI says this planet once had life
geomorphic features too regular by far
roads, terraces, foundations
they built and mined and then they left
a colony world, perhaps
but molecules peculiar to manufacture
are everywhere
in strata as old as half a million years
as young as in surficial sand and mud
we just missed them
we just missed them and yet
no living thing is here
microorganisms, hardy plants,
things like viruses
no, none, zilch
and hardly any water

no message for us, either
no litany of regrets
no warning, words of wisdom
nothing but the nothing
of no one here

whatever laid its hand
upon this world
is gone, we hope
but just in case
we can't go home
or even warn them
except by placing in orbit
a beacon:

“stay away!”

—David C. Kopaska-Merkel

astral snow

the asteroid belt	all that's holding us together
last package	express-shipped to your ghost
white-out fluid	raising the bar
contrails	on the palm of the editor
relevant redactions	in obsolete fly files
Antarctic princess	standing at the only ATM
atmospheric departure	protests to take your breath away
an icier demoted distance	than the surface of Pluto

–Tamara K. Walker

Transmissions from Trillig

In (our) March, patrolling the swamplands, blasting bog scum,
you saw the arrival of the *zurnyads*, the boom of wings
heralding their arrival,
and hurried to the base to transmit to me, hands still warm

from the heat of your laser gun.

Is this a normal relationship? You would say so, just a job, a tour of duty.
But your accounts of strange beasts, the colours of alien sunsets

reach me, anxiously waiting in front of a blank screen,
as the hail slams in gusts against our kitchen windows.
Your life seems unreal to me here, with chores to do, bills to pay.

You wouldn't say so, traversing the methane fields of the south,
Clearing a road through the luminous forests. Still,
I have your face here, the tenderness of your voice,

warming me across the icy vastness of space. I transmit
back of course, brightening my account with tales of meals out
and old friends,
and exciting plans for our future when you return.

When you return? You must have forgotten to mention that date
in your latest transmission. Still the *zurnyads* must be quite a sight,
howling their love as the moons of Trillig flame above.

–Lee Garratt

Bespeaking: Riddles

Dialogue, debate, diatribe, anecdote, sarcasm, insults, politics, gossip, a sporadic conversation carried out across a divide of hundreds of miles. Both participants ancient, inhuman—one a creature of fire and flight; the other a six-eyed, six-mouthed, tentacled monstrosity.

High on her mountain,
the dragon bespoke the Hidden Queen,
“What bears no weapons,
has neither talons nor teeth,
yet can bring down kingdoms
or foster alliances?”

Hundreds of miles away,
deep in her underground chamber,
the Hidden Queen snorted.
“Feeble. The answer is *words*.
What grows when you feed it,
dies when you give it water?”

“*Fire*. Pathetic. Utterly pathetic.
That one was old before I hatched.”

“True, you are horribly old. Try this.
What’s the smallest square number
that is the sum of two
non-zero square numbers?”

“What?!” bespoke the dragon.
“That doesn’t sound like a riddle.”

“You know all the riddles.”

“I am indeed wise.”
Then a lengthy pause.
“How can numbers be square?”

In her underground chamber
the Hidden Queen laughed,
a discordant sixfold creaking.
“A square number is one obtained
by multiplying a number by itself.



Spined Worm by Jack Foo

down by the river
i'd wait for the mermaid
and our daughter

—William Landis

Epitaph for a Minor Demon

He's in a better place now.

—Herb Kauderer

One, four, nine, sixteen....
Do you give up?"

"It's not a riddle!"

"So you're giving up?"

"No!"

A lengthier pause.
A tree stump flamed to ash
before the dragon answered,
"Twenty-five."

*Complaints, commiserations, confessions,
conjectures, strategy, philosophy,
riddles, rumor, friendship
traded across hundreds of miles
over the course of centuries.*

—Mary Soon Lee

Epitaph for a Spaceman

His ashes were spread
upon reentry.

—Herb Kauderer

Epitaph for a Dragonslayer

Falling victim to his celebrity
he outweighed the dragon
by the time his heart gave out.

—Herb Kauderer

Brothers Under the Skin

Deep in the GM parsley patch,
fungi rise in the tumid gloom,
spreading their umbrellae
to shade more nitid growths,
pallid protean forms,
whose extrusive diaphanae
latch onto bare skin,
enwrap suddenly clumsy
and unresisting limbs,
injecting rare genomes that shift
and burn across our nucleic terrain.

You emerge from among fragrant boles,
but a part of you wanders forever,
and the darkness is within you;
spores stream from your pores,
mouth, nose, other orifices.

Most terrestrial life is still bacterial,
most DNA-based,
but there's a new weed of life,
springing up in warm dark places,
peeking out of unrelated eyes,
speciating like crazy,
and now creating for itself
things like bones, like eyes,
like what all the best species sport.

Should be making you nervous,
but you're climbing to the highest stalk,
closing your eyes forever,
and spreading the new Word
on the wind.

—David C. Kopaska-Merkel

*longtemps
doucement*

he who writes the names of children down in the book
he who digs out the fairies from the ground

setting the crown on the goblin's head

he whose black sky extends over the earth in dreams
murmuring

of all our shared childhoods,
which was your favourite?

the one spent as seedlings,
asleep and bound for the
soil of a blank planet,

our shadows a mix of
earth and the new world?

—c. *evans*

pledge to him here
that the sky is angels
and that you can fly

and that children speak a secret language
which you remember when you sleep

drink the green juice of the earth
each chapter

agony
drama and pain

in the arrival of the party to the gatekeeper
and their riddle

*

speak soft the name of the demon
who lives in our book

Even so it's the darkness, loosened
circling down as the only meal
you dead can swallow —a single gulp

whose mane is nine years
and whose voice
his voice
is magic

and you are nourished the way the drowned
still cling to a rope that's not yet an arm
—miners learn this, they train

—*Robin Wyatt Dunn*

where there are corners, taught to feel
for an opening in the rock out all alone
that will become the night after night

—you have a chance! your shadow
is already near the surface, draining this mountain
for its ashes once they're finished, eat

—everything here is evening and you
sinking on and on into the Earth
more than emptiness and fingertips.

—*Simon Perchik*

If Maps of a Flat World, Then to Make Sense

or here, south is north. America presses a belly into the Atlantic. Africa kisses Hilpenia. Or maybe Hilpenia kisses Africa. Oceanus striates with smooth water from the horizon to the edges. One boat sails toward the island, though it might be riding away. The banner boasts a key in an unreadable legend. One land mass includes mountains that yet might sputter with molten rock. But on *Infula Atlantis* there are no people. No tsunamis roll. No monstrous whales rise from the waters. Cartographers make magic spells that draw travelers to board the boat to

–Laura Madeline Wiseman

If I Ask

If I ask the master why she eats fire,
will she say because it tastes like her past?
An acquired taste, like digital sour mash, or fried spider sacs
dripping with the scent of burnt battlefields
and the crunch of defeat.

If I ask the master why she drinks milk laced with erbium,
will she say because it tastes like her childhood?
Hidden and running through the tech slums,
her flesh thick and tainted pink,
a fiber optic of distortion.

If I ask the master why she likes the dark,
will she say because it's easier to find a traitor when the lights are off?
That the triggers for alarms are printed
on the walls, the floor and the ceiling
in coded white letters anyone can decipher.

If I ask the master why she never speaks,
will she say because we stopped listening for her voice?
The cables of difference shredded our shields
to expose who we are so we
plugged in our earphones and fled.

If I ask the master if she likes the window
I built to connect our worlds,
Will she say I have learned everything,
or I have learned nothing?

–Cas Blomberg

The More Things Change

Blind to the Tardigrade

The best of human science
can find no place on Terra
so inhospitable
that it does not support life,
yet most humans believe
there is no life
elsewhere
in the universe.

—Herb Kauderer

Spring winds freshen,
cloud cities mutate,
develop new asymmetries,
slide off their tenuous foundations,
founder into tree tops
and ridges of continental stone.

The ancient freight of lakes,
rising with the thaw,
bursting into a world
they cannot survive,
the limitless milky distances,
blueness fades to white.

Wings sprout wherever
gossamer seeds came to rest last fall,
impetuous clatter
of bricks breaking cover,
not a cloud in the sky,
flap hard till morning.

—David C. Kopaska-Merkel

Redheaded Stepchild

The girl was ginger as sin. Dame Gothel
banked on Orphan Annie's sunshine
but wound up with sullen Rapunzel—
fetally swapped for unlimited rampion
salad, then stashed in a room with a view
but no door. Every day, Rapunzel dreamed
of jumping, broadcast all she'd prostitute
for freedom, wove yarns of words
that surged from fertile follicles, then
tossed 'em out the window on demand.
One day she refused. Fuming, Gothel
cobbled a ladder of switches and canes,
gagged Rapunzel and wrapped her hands
to trap the words within until they
smothered. When the requisite prince
came a-knockin', Gothel said, "Take her!"
He called to Rapunzel, "Let down your
guard," and she did. He wagged his penis,
released her hands and promptly drowned
in a flood of suppressed expression. Now
she roams the forest, casting lines of poetry
like bait. She climbs the tallest tree and
reminisces, her hair a flag of warning.

—Bobbie Lee Lovell

midnight
one slipper
missing again

—Christina Sng

Untrue Orbit (hexagram Hsieh)

Untrue orbit, dire planetfall,
a scar crater marks our raw home—
a fierce yang line in a wild yin place.
Parceling time with words, welts, graves,
we pray to the radio:
deliver us from us.

Neighbors

—*m.c.childs*

Their omni-dimensional hearing I don't
Understand: but there is a lot I have had
To get used to since they moved
Next door. Things on earth are different,
I expect, for a Ranthe from Zelmar Six.
They have tried to explain their idiomatic
Tribal duties, their special homage
To driveways, why the garage door
Cannot be automatic. Their children
Are legally prohibited from eating mine,
But neither do they play in the same sandbox.
I have been to their home once,
Could not fathom the utility of the furniture,
Nor why the walls were snoring. I smiled,
Made universally meaningless universal gestures,
Left with my hands in my pockets.
They have a right to move in,
To follow their own customs and dictates.
So here we are:

Six in the morning, I in my shorts
And brandishing coffee, trying to tell
The neighbor I have no idea of how
To silence the grass, and I am not
Pulling it all up—so he had better
Think of buying a frequency tamer,
Or drag this problem all the way
With him and the family back home.

translated
into algorithms
and graphene skin,
exempt from time,
absolved from regret,
I am the android
of my dreams

—*Greer Woodward*

—*Ken Poyner*

Eye to the Telescope

wishes to congratulate its 2017 Dwarf Stars nominee:

Issue 21: "The Red Spacesuit" • Brian Garrison

eyetothetelescope.org

Engineering

Too much have we fiddled
with the fate of our genes;
we are stretched and torn
leaking days and minutes and
twists of what was across space
time, like random wandering
spacefarers we knew
or might have known
once upon a time, their shaking
heads recoiling at the tampered
conglomeration of variables
which made us too big, too small
too light, too dark, too smart
to be wise, so that our threads
unraveled into chaos, day by
constraint broken, a transient
life we cannot track, because
each looks the same, under
standard contractual need
while we should have lived
stray lives, beaten and bloodied
torn apart by wolves
rather than try to be what we aren't
and engineered away what we are,
all in the hopes
we shouldn't have to worry
about dental coverage.

—Chris Galford

Unseen mirror

Dark light shines in:
unseen planets, invisible stars;
people there, ghosts
passing through us,
dissolving us through.
Passing ghosts there people
stars invisible, planets unseen:
in shines light-dark.

—Deborah L. Davitt

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