

# Star\*Line

43.2

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*Jacob's Ladder* by David Ehlen

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STAR\*LINE is pleased to congratulate our Rhysling nominees:

- Beth Cato • "What You Hear When Your Best Friend Falls for a Supervillain" • 42.1  
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## *he scores*

the ghosts of hockey  
awaken  
at the whisper of skates  
the thud of a puck  
the impact of a child's body  
on a span of rink laid bare  
to the sky  
the roof an open rib cage

stars replace spotlights  
and moonlight  
illuminates enough of the ice  
to skate  
to glide  
but not so much to reveal  
what's frozen within  
what lurks  
in the stands

an audience  
breathless  
in death and anticipation  
watches  
a single stubborn boy  
skate the uneven  
debris-strewn ice  
they watch, and hope

the net  
tattered like cobwebs  
stirs  
fluttering  
a flag of surrender  
he winds up

he shoots

the spectral watchers cheer  
rivals united in love of the play  
the place  
the game  
the boy tilts his head  
and hoists high his makeshift stick  
as if he hears  
their applause

—*Beth Cato and Rhonda Parrish*

## *Cold War*

Like nuclear bombs before them,  
the plagues each side kept hidden  
were too terrible to use;  
instead they started sly wars  
of colds and sneezes, of coughs  
in trams and crowded lifts,  
commerce blighted by days lost  
with fevers and sickness,  
difficult to prove and hard to stop.

But what are we to make of ears  
sprouting where we do not want them,  
infestations of hair, outbreaks  
of contagious impotence,  
an epidemic of muteness,  
and wasn't there amnesic flu?

Such innocent times, before  
they weaponised psychiatry;  
armies afraid to go outside,  
the compulsive counting virus,  
whole cities too sad to go on,  
research psychopaths infected  
with their own agents to avoid  
being hindered by conscience.

—*David Barber*

# Dragons & Rayguns

Welcome to another issue of *Star\*Line*!

This is my last issue as editor. I have loved curating these pages for you and I have made many friends among the ranks of speculative poets.

Over the last three years, I have been privileged to publish many poems in forms both traditional and recently invented. I have also included much light verse. And featured an interesting variety of speculative art, especially physical items, such as Virgil Suarez's cyberpunk VW on the cover of 41.3 (Summer 2018), Calyn McLeod's textile dragon in 43.2 (Winter 2020), and in this issue, a mixed-media painting with a 3D ladder made of wire that extends out from the canvas.

It has been a great joy to serve the community of speculative poets. I would like to thank the SFPA officers, esp. President Bryan Thao Worra. And I wish F.J. Bergmann the best as she takes over the *Star\*Line* helm.

Keep writing your wonderful poems, everyone! And stay well.

—Vince Gotera, *Star\*Line* Editor

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## Monster

Here it comes again, scabbling out of the shadows around your bed as you try to sleep; paralyzed, you listen to the mattress creak as its weight joins yours, to the rough rasps of its reeking breath as the beast of your deepest fears rests its bulk on your chest and turns each breath into a struggle. It smells of blood and smoke, a creature crafted of ash and adrenaline that you can't shake no matter how many times and ways you try, and as it crouches over your heart and seethes you don't, won't, open your eyes, not wanting to look up at your own face.

—Sarah Cannavo

## The Phoenix

Do not stop  
to bask in it

it will set your heart alight,  
burn you away

until you are only the phoenix  
inside your skeleton

rising, each time to the cracking  
cover  
of a story, use up the pages' fuel  
die, be born again

with sticky,  
crisped paper wings.

—Lynne Sargent

## ***Dragons Guard Our Family Fortune***

My grandmother lives with the dragons  
In mountainous caverns, where curving  
Roadside patches of wildflowers  
Lay a trail leading to hidden treasure,  
Her family fortune:  
Hearts of gold, parks, photographs,  
Guardrails over steep drops,  
Grandeur so vast, snowy peaks,  
Fog-cloud floating like a pillow below,  
Casting a deep blue shadow  
On a valley so distant its evergreens  
Are Christmas railroad toys. It snows in June,  
Up here among the peaks, the Rocky Mountain Flatirons,  
Where magic is never lacking even in the foothills,  
And deer roam through yards,  
A compromise humans make to dwell  
So close to magic. It's a secret,  
A whisper on the bus at 4th Street,  
Puffing plumes as it kneels with a pneumatic roar  
At a stop that isn't on any map  
To pick up a little old lady who pays with cookies  
And stories and kindly smiles,  
Who sends her love on wings—  
A song through the telephone wires,  
Or this dragon wheeling high in the clouds  
Above my high school bus stop in Virginia,  
The bulbous body and pointed tail unmistakable  
While it hovers like my guardian angel,  
Keeping watch on me from several states away  
With Grandma's wise eyes.

—Adele Gardner



*Guitar Bot* by David Shultz

# SFPA Announcements

## **Eye to the Telescope**

*Eye to the Telescope*, the SFPA's quarterly online speculative poetry journal, may be read at [eyetothetelescope.com](http://eyetothetelescope.com). The January 2020 issue's theme is *Hard Science Fiction Tropes*, edited by David C. Kopaska-Merkel. The next issue on *House and Home*, edited by Emma J. Gibbon, will appear on April 15. Guidelines at [eyetothetelescope.com/submit.html](http://eyetothetelescope.com/submit.html). Interested in editing an issue of ETTT? See [eyetothetelescope.com/editettt.html](http://eyetothetelescope.com/editettt.html).

## **Rhysling Awards Voting**

The 2020 *Rhysling Anthology* PDF was sent out via our MailChimp list; if you did not receive it, contact [SFPAnews@gmail.com](mailto:SFPAnews@gmail.com). The print anthology is being mailed with this issue of *Star\*Line*. All candidates are listed at <http://sfpoetry.com/ra/pages/20rhysling.html>. Rhysling Award voting is now open; current members may vote online at <http://bit.ly/SFPARhysling2020> or via post to the SFPA Secretary: Renee Ya, P.O. Box 2074, San Mateo, CA 94568 USA. **Deadline: June 15.**

## **Elgin Awards Nominations**

Nominations are open until **May 15**: please send title, author and publisher of nominated speculative poetry books (40+ pages of poetry) and chapbooks (10–39 pages) published in 2018 or 2019 to Elgin Chair Colleen Anderson via email at [elgin@sfpoetry.com](mailto:elgin@sfpoetry.com) or via post to the SFPA Secretary: Renee Ya, P.O. Box 2074, San Mateo, CA 94568 USA. Only members may nominate; no limit, but may not nominate their own work.

Nominated books are listed at <http://sfpoetry.com/el/elgcand.html>. Members without email can request a list of nominated books. The voting deadline is **September 1**, to allow plenty of reading time!

Elgin Chair Colleen Anderson is a Canadian author writing fiction and poetry and has had over 170 poems published in such venues as *Grievous Angel*, *Polu Texni*, *The Future Fire*, *HWA Poetry Showcase* and many others. She is a member of HWA and SFPA and a Canada Council grant recipient for writing. She has performed her work before audiences in the US, UK, and Canada and has placed in the Balticon, Rannu, Crucible and Wax poetry competitions. Colleen also enjoys editing and coedited Canadian anthologies *Playground of Lost Toys* (Aurora nominated) and *Tesseract 17*; her solo anthology *Alice Unbound: Beyond Wonderland*

was published by Exile Books. She has served on both Stoker Award and British Fantasy Award juries, and guest-edited *Eye to the Telescope*. Her short-story collection *A Body of Work* was published by Black Shuck Books in the UK. Living in Vancouver, Colleen keeps an eye out for mold monsters and mermaids, and will be guest of honor in 2020 at the Creative Ink Festival. <http://colleenanderson.wordpress.com>

## ***Dwarf Stars Award Nominations***

Submissions are now open for the 2020 *Dwarf Stars* anthology, edited by Robin Mayhall, from which the best short-short speculative poem published in 2019 will be selected. Anyone may submit their own poems or those of others; no limit to how many poems you may submit for the anthology, but only current SFPA members may vote for the award. Poems must be no more than 10 lines (or 100 words for prose poems) not including title or stanza breaks; include publication credit. Editors are welcome to submit entire issues. Send submissions to [dwarfstars@sfpoetry.com](mailto:dwarfstars@sfpoetry.com) or via post to the SFPA Secretary: Renee Ya, P.O. Box 2074, San Mateo, CA 94568 USA. **Deadline: May 1.**

*Dwarf Stars* editor Robin Mayhall was also the editor of the 2017 *Dwarf Stars*. She is a writer, editor and PR professional with a lifelong yen for science fiction and fantasy stories and poetry. Disabled by rheumatoid arthritis, she still works full-time and loves reading and getting lost on the internet. She is interested in history, especially World War I, as well as journalism and media, healthcare issues and politics. She lives in Louisiana with her cat, Banichi.

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## ***Assumption***

They encountered the dead ship in geosynchronous orbit around a Galilean moon (name withheld for security reasons). Matte black, it bled hard radiation from one ominous dimple at its blunter end. Though obviously damaged, its hull had not been breached. Each crewman privately felt that its endless spinning was somehow the result of watchfulness—an attempt to keep them in view. After failure to respond on any frequency, a plasma cutter gained them entrance. Under infrared light, a cargo of insectile carapaces; whether armor or shed skins, no one knew. Then somebody had the insane idea of putting one on.

—*F.J. Bergmann*



# The Candle

(a haibun)

She could smell it each time she opened the front door. She'd hurry into the spare room, lick her fingers, squeeze the flame out. Eventually, the snuffer stayed on the table too. The flame shied away from the silver bell, but where could it go? Nowhere. In an hour, or a few, it would spring to light again. She watched, as long as she could stand: like a sun-charred worm, the wick was a still, twisted thing. A shy creature, the flame phoenixed alone; a frugal beast, it never consumed the candle. She hid the thing, locked it away, but somehow it returned, alight, to the old wooden table. She couldn't bring herself to destroy it or to throw it out. She began to feel proprietary: trimmed the wick, set the candle on a small china plate, spoke to it in loving tones, decorated the room for it. After a while, she took down the prints, and removed the armchair. The candle didn't like them. The two of them came to an understanding. She grew comfortable with its persistent glow.

her buttery skin  
in the pulsing light  
she pulsing too

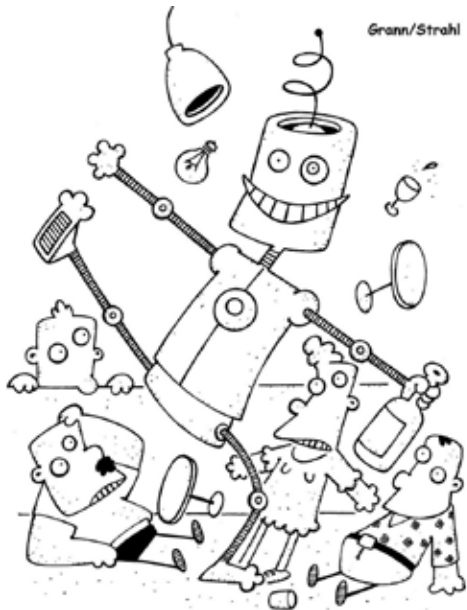
—David C. Kopaska-Merkel

aliens arrive  
from the distant planet Dar  
won't call them darlings

—Denny E. Marshall

covid-19 spreads,  
aurora borealis  
illumines night skies

—Alzo David-West



The robot can do everything as well as a human except for one thing. The Robot Dance.

## **Ms. S. White, Single**

Only Snow White  
understood  
the pressure  
on her  
to commit,  
she'd only known him  
the length  
of a forest kiss.  
And she was still  
young, not even  
in her twenties,  
and still interested  
in a career,  
possibly as a food blogger,  
a Merry Maid, or better yet,  
an accountability coach.

He seemed  
nice enough  
but forever and ever  
is a really long time.  
She liked  
her independence  
and being single  
wasn't the curse  
it had been in  
her mother's day.

The seven dwarfs  
weren't sure either,  
(except Grumpy—  
he was just pissed,  
and Sleepy,  
he was just, well, sleepy)  
although their  
motivation in keeping  
their queen at home  
as their pretty maid  
gave Snow pause.  
Did they want  
her happiness  
more than

their beds made  
and dinner ready?

The Queen  
was still jealous  
but able to refocus  
her malicious attention  
to other underlings  
and eager  
to demonstrate  
her power  
in other terrible ways  
across the kingdom.  
In addition,  
she had a lot  
more red apples.

The Prince  
didn't have much  
to say  
and seemed  
more interested  
in riding  
his loyal,  
handsome horse  
and hanging out  
with his royal bros  
in the emerald forest.  
A Princess  
would certainly  
slow things down.

Snow and Mr. P  
might just settle  
for an overnight  
in the Castle Chalet,  
and Ms. White  
would change  
her "single" status  
to "looking"  
and then, "It's complicated."

—Kathleen A. Lawrence

## **Spacely Space Sprockets Wants You!**

We're not a union shop,  
that's fer certain  
and we're constantly pushin' the envelope;  
no "180 Days Without an Industrial  
Accident" fer us.

No, folks get offed round here,  
sometimes it seems on an hourly  
basis. Ya can get fried in a particle  
accelerator, maybe messed-up in a  
quantum drive.

And believe me, if yer unlucky  
enough ta trip into the R&D Division's  
demo teleportation device,  
ya sure-as-sure won't be yerself  
on the other side.  
If ya know what I mean.

But at the end  
of the long, long work day?  
Even if yer hands are cut ta ribbons  
or yer foamin' at the mouth?  
It's still. Still. All worth it.

'Cause we're buildin' spaceships.  
Ta the stars.

—*Alan Ira Gordon*

## **Medusa**

He's mesmerized by snaky rows  
astride her head. And piqued by her  
provocatively deadpan pose,  
he fantasizes force majeure  
behind her sobering allure.  
Because, by his own balance sheet,  
vexation's an imprimatur  
of strength he scarcely could compete  
with, daring her exacts a wage.  
Like Perseus, he's more to lose  
than she has, should he thus engage  
her in a brawl where losers bruise.  
And since a shameless drubbing hurts,  
he stiffens at the risk he skirts.

—*Frank De Canio*

## **Future Past**

All set up to record the Chicxulub blast,  
the one that remade the world,  
but it's been weeks now,  
and where's the damn rock?  
Our ancestry is at stake:  
the puny Cretaceous mammals won't beget us  
until the dinos die.

A huge vessel matching velocity,  
boarding tube *snicking* to our lock.  
We're not armed;  
assumed we'd be alone.

Our captain eye to eye with a raptor:  
toothy grin, iridescent feathers, nictitating blink.  
We're not the only time travelers, it seems  
protecting the future.

They say you can't go home again,  
but what these reptiles oughta wonder is,  
will the ants be next?

—David C. Kopaska-Merkel

## **Graves on Miranda**

saving species two by two  
till someone dropped  
the dragon eggs

—Lauren McBride

Verona Rupes is  
a cliff over twice the height  
of Everest on Earth—  
there's rock here, but ice, too,  
primordial, left over  
from the accretion disc  
of the entire solar system,  
but it's grainy, gritty,  
littered with black carbon nodules—  
ejecta spray from meteors,  
the burnt remains  
of the ghostly Uranian rings.

When you climb here,  
there are no resting places,

no Sherpa camps.  
You sleep cradled by ropes,  
under the jade gaze  
of a cold gas giant,  
an endless fall beneath your feet

Even in dream-light gravity  
there are no shortcuts to the top  
human hands and feet  
still must find ledges to grip  
sweat still stings your eyes  
inside your helmet  
thought there's little effort,  
little force needed  
to bound from boulder to seam.

But if you slip, the final impact  
might not be what kills you—  
the slide of your body along the rock,  
the friction tearing up your suit,  
the hose that snaps, unable to endure  
both the chill of the icy surface  
and the shock of your descent.

There are as many dead bodies  
frozen at the foot of this scarp  
as there are graves on Everest,  
sacrifices to the spirit of ambition;  
and like the primordial ice,  
like the ejecta spray,  
if you die here,  
you'll be immortalized,  
preserved for all the rest of time.

—Deborah L. Davitt



Alien Dinosaur #1 by Denny E. Marshall

© 2018 Denny E. Marshall

## **A Ray of Sun**

mermaid vampiress  
flashes special summer smile  
paints beach resort town red

—James Dorr

## **Social Media Senryu: @StillWaiting**

childhood dreams on hold  
what happened to the future  
#FlyingCars

—T. R. Jones

## Two Legs

It suits his vanity who thinks  
My lineage extends through links  
To Chimera or some other fright,  
But I was made, not born, a sphinx.

A sorceress, her eyes wine red,  
Had caught me in her lover's bed.  
She split me wings, she furred my limbs,  
And on her work she left my head.

Her curse began a thousand years  
Of women's shrieks, of soldiers' tears.  
I was a scourge. What could I do  
But make myself into their fears?

They shrank; I pounced. I stripped their flesh.  
I made their bawling voices hush.  
Still, all my killing couldn't kill  
My heart, or past, or lingering wish.

Then Oedipus came up the road.  
He never shrank, but calmly strode;  
Eyed me unblinking, seeking out  
My secret where I had it stowed.

And though the sorceress' laws  
That gave me pelt and tail and claws  
Were still unbroken, when I fell  
I sobbed the way a woman sobs.

Four legs, then two, then later three:  
I'd told the riddle endlessly.  
But only he could solve it who  
Had guessed a monster's poverty,

The alms her spirit nightly begs:  
Her two, forgotten, warm brown legs.

—Carrie Clark

there  
the long & short  
of time travel

—LeRoy Gorman

## For the Good of the ~~People~~ Career

No one knows  
who first summoned  
the crossroads demon,

or how the spell  
did not dispel,

nor how many souls  
were sold,

but all agree  
it affected  
politicians first.

—Lauren McBride

# President's Message

As we celebrate our 42nd anniversary this year (and remember, don't panic! But what was the question?), my thanks go to everyone who has made this an extraordinary journey for speculative poets and our readers around the world. As you can see by the regular member news posted, we've seen some wonderful achievements and publications by both our experienced members and emerging voices in our community, which suggests a very healthy direction for our corner of global literature. This is the time of year when I remind everyone of the importance of voting in the Rhysling Awards and nominating candidates for the Elgin Awards, and preparing for the Dwarf Stars. I thank David C. Kopaska-Merkel for stepping forward once again as this year's Rhysling Chair, and thank everyone who made their nominations.

As some of you may have heard, there's been a slight sea-change that may affect our ability to gather for readings, book launches, receptions, and so on that may have been planned for the season ahead. Rather than a challenge, let us to consider it an impetus to keep hope, and search for opportunity.

Speculative poetry, as the tip of the literary spear, is supposed to be among the most imaginative and inventive in pushing the limits of who, what, when, where, how, and why we express ourselves creatively. What does it mean to gather as a speculative poetry community? How should we embrace our most science fictional technologies to create a poetry experience? In light of any new advance, the SFPA always asks, what does that new experience look like, sound like, feel like, taste like, and even smell like when informed by that advance? SFPA asks what that experience can look like in individual speculative poetry practice, and also as a local, regional, national and international experience.

Sometimes, new technology lets us move beyond older tech. Sometimes, there is technology that we don't need to leave behind because our creativity and community finds the technology persistently generative and effective in nurturing our skills and verse. But what is on your wish list for how speculative poets can flourish in the years ahead, especially under new global conditions?

This issue marks a transition for our *Star\*Line* editor, Vince Gotera, who has helped bring so many of your wonderful voices and art forward. He has our deep thanks from the SFPA and all of our best wishes for his next endeavors!

Please keep sending us your ideas and news, and as always, keep creative and inspired!

—Bryan Thao Worra, SFPA President

## **In Love**

I'm in love with you, you know  
Despite numerous faux pas  
That is not how we do it  
That is not how we say it  
But I've cut you so much slack  
I can never undo it

Yes, you have an extra head  
And your skin is far too blue  
Yes, I have extra fingers  
And no need to speak aloud  
And I'm really quite content  
To be "lost" within a crowd

But I'm used to you, you know  
Our personalities mesh  
Enough interests in kind  
To reconnect time to time  
Now, if you would only learn  
To listen is not a crime

—*Debby Feo*

## **eschatology**

accidental spill  
propagating machines  
ecophage future

cataclysmic moment  
winter hare starving snow-wolf  
outrun entropy

ghost of food riots  
haunted arcology  
poison creeping air

then our cities flood  
we'll need pressurized domes soon  
the land denuded

snow falls oceans sink  
ice crawling over cities  
dreams in a hothouse

—*Joshua Hiles*

## **Hell Is Hiring**

Hell is holding competitions  
for highly qualified personnel  
in all departments.

Applicants must be corrupted or corrosive mortals,  
new ghosts (no more than five years),  
individualized primal powers (Earth preferred),  
or manifested hatreds.

Incorporeal entities should apply through Ether net  
or through a certified demonic agent.  
Corporeal entities should apply via our website  
at <http://careers.hell.dim/welcome.html>

Applicants for boredom engineers  
should submit a nondescription



and have at least three years' experience droning.  
Please do not leave voice mail.

Tormentor applicants should be comfortable  
Using pliers, turkey basters, and hot coat hangers.  
Biological torture implements (claws, etc.) a plus.

Foreman are required on the plains bordering the Abyss,  
This job requires fortitude, an imposing demeanour,  
and psychopathy.

We also have positions in HR,  
Must have good people skills  
and experience in alternative dispute resolution.

Current employees of purgatory  
or the government  
can be bridged in.

—*Jim Davies*

## **Thaumaturgy**

To reverse  
any curse,

you simply bless  
the resulting mess  
that occurs, unless

things get really drastic.  
Suppose Time becomes elastic  
and alternative pasts stick  
together like cheap plastic

toys fused by intense heat.  
Unique events begin to repeat  
themselves. Parallel chronologies collide, compete.  
Ain't any way to defeat  
Chaos. My expert advice? Retreat!

—*Paul Szlosek*

*Editor's note: This poem is in a form of the poet's invention, the ziggurat.*

## **Solar System Wake-up**

eggs sunny side up  
breakfast  
on Mercury

melted butter  
the cloud city  
above Venus

home planet breakfast in bed

marsquake  
a pancake landslide  
on Olympus Mons

above my coffee  
above Jupiter  
whipped cream clouds

a ring of ice  
in the punchbowl  
brunch around Saturn

iced coffee  
cooler than I'd like it  
Uranus

orbiting Neptune  
the bluest  
blueberry tea

—*Deborah P Kolodji*

## **The Imp and the Bottle**

*“[...] there is a drawback to the bottle;  
for if a man die before he sells it, he  
must burn in hell forever.”*

—*Robert Louis Stevenson*  
*“The Bottle Imp”*

After the imp had dragged that last  
wish-seeking wretch down into the fires  
and rejoiced in the completion  
of its own punishment

what would it do  
with its newfound freedom?  
And—what would happen  
to Hell's bottle?

For after so many lifetimes  
it remembered no other home  
than that bottle  
with its darkly swirling mists

and the imp considered this question  
ceaselessly—even while nibbling sweet fruit  
even while floating in sun-glittered waves  
even with a whole world of enticements—

Would the bottle wallow in a dump  
with used up medicinal vials  
and drained vessels of cheap wine  
claimed by mud and beetles?

Would it sit on a shelf in some miserable shop filled with old candlesticks and fading quilts buried in dust and cobwebs?

Or worse, in its unpossessed state might it now be fragile?  
Could it be kicked and shattered by another dockside drunkard?

Or (worst of all)  
would someone else claim it love it and set it out proudly take pleasure in it daily?!

The imp pictured variants of these bottle-horrors in detail each more terrifying and intolerable than the last

No—No!  
the imp knew every seam and bubble had rested its tiny body in every curving inch had stretched out like an otter on its lonely flat bottom

Truly, the bottle deserved better!  
And after all, what those fools had all bought at their soul's risk were wishes, not the bottle Mine! It is simply mine! the imp thought

and back it went to protect it trying first to nudge it to a safe corner next to roll it downhill to a cozy seabed having no success until it thought

I'll rock it back and forth from inside and so it entered the slim neck and—the bottle sealed, the mists rose again The curse reset.

Of course, we say,  
but that bottle,  
it wasn't ours.

—Sharon Cote



*The Arrival* by Christina Sng

Caustic flakes float down  
Frozen sulphuric acid  
I miss the old snow

—John Caulkins

## ***Solar Blindness***

On the sun-drenched lawn, the grass yellowing  
and near death from the heat of the season,  
we lay out our supplies:  
Pieces of bent card stock  
darkened by old doodles, an empty Kleenex box,  
scraps of aluminum foil, the colander you used  
yesterday to drain a package of Ramen noodles.  
The sky is normal.

Heavy clouds and neon blue, the blue that burns  
your eyes if you look too close. All summer long  
the sky absorbed the sun's heat and now that blue  
is just as dangerous.  
But when the harsh light  
aberrates, when it softens to a pale gloam, a memetic  
drama spills from between the holes of the colander  
across the yellow grass, a scatter of shadowed stars  
each being devoured  
by their own traitorous moons.  
A cosmic murder refracted through the plastic lens  
of the ordinary.

Because if we face these mysteries with bare eyes  
we go blind.

—*Cassandra Rose Clarke*

## ***Welcome to 3901 SW Chile Drive***

Don't be shocked when Karen shows you  
the house,  
she shows everyone the house.

She will show you everything,  
hingeing perhaps on some  
murder-nut-ghost-hunter  
to take a leap  
or maybe she just doesn't  
understand inevitability.

Down in the basement  
you can see the hinges

they unfastened,  
the power box they cut.

*Out back in the arroyo,  
you can still find the clearing  
where they set up camp.*

She can't show you the murder weapon  
or the mask  
(now locked and located  
safely in police custody)  
but she has photos,  
a packet of Polaroids  
sun stained  
sharp edged  
*Careful*, she says  
before you take them  
like they're a dozen roses.

What can be seen  
in the pictures  
is debatable,  
some sort of industrial saw  
and certainly a blurry face,  
eyes that ramble the bramble  
and slip unseen  
from red blue red police light  
and prying investigations.

*Don't worry,*  
she says,  
*they got it all out,  
it's entirely new carpet.*

By now  
Karen knows  
that you'll say no,  
(this isn't her first  
Antiques Roadshow)  
but when you hold out  
the pictures  
she refuses,  
*I've got a million of them*

*really,  
keep them.*

*You know,  
she says  
lighting another cigarette,  
peering over your shoulder,  
they look just like ghosts to me . . .  
not an easy thing to look at  
but what a wonderful thing to be.*

—Mack W. Mani

## ***Beyond the Oort Cloud***

at the edge of the galaxy  
is a massive wall  
not built by brick,  
steel, nor timber  
but of embryos  
an icy womb  
giving birth  
to a nursery  
of asteroids  
beyond it  
the rest of the universe  
lies waiting  
for someone to  
tear down this  
celestial Babylon  
sailing a sea  
of orphan stars  
& unnamed comets  
hoping to cultivate  
another interstellar geography

—Jared Benjamin

## ***Darker Urges Still***

You know that old saying about girls and wolves:  
we always come in pairs.

You are every inch a girl, terrible and wonderful  
with old world eyes and a hollyberry mouth.  
You are every long night I spent barricaded in my room,  
cursing the moon, burning.

Just looking at you has me aching for woods and open air.

I've seen you on the moor, barefoot and mud-splattered,  
throat turned up to the starlight,  
wildness shining like sweat on your skin.

When I catch the wet scent of fen in your hair,  
the monstrosity inside me starts circling,  
hungry for blood, or a kiss,  
or a quiet heart to lie down in.

We forgive an animal its urges  
sooner than a young woman her appetite for wandering.  
But society would see us both in cages, if fear has its way,  
witch-girl and she-wolf on circus display.

Come closer, dear heart; I'll show you how tame I can be.  
I'll lave the tears from your cheek with my tongue  
hold your fingers in my mouth, so gently,  
drag home rabbit and pheasant for dinner every night.

Just show me that midnight smile, half malice, half glee.  
Let me love you for your softness  
and for your teeth.

—S. T. Gibson

## ***Love Per an Alien Star***

The sun was too hot,  
you said, not what you could bear,  
not what you were used to,

and so I brought you bottles of water,  
ice by the bag,  
and we left the thermostat at 66 year-round.

You burned, and you get blinded.  
This world's air, too, you said  
is too cluttered. The windows stay tightly shut.

I stay several feet from you  
at all times, after going out into that air,  
until I've scrubbed like an acolyte, leaving sins in the  
water.

The smell of death gags you,  
and so no meat is cooked here,  
though you will eat poultry dishes that I bring home  
to you.

The vegetables must have no taint of decay  
and if I miss cleaning them well,  
you choke and talk of taking death into your body.

I take death into my body all day long.  
I wonder what world was so cruel  
as to send you to me.

I wonder if your star is really so kind to its denizens.

—*Bethany Powell*

### **What Goes There?**

We know this dormant creature braces  
and hides in blood and molecules,  
then explodes out with twisted faces:  
thus, making us estranged, so cruel.

Most times we don't know when this thing  
will stir. Tension or fear transforms  
our flesh and mind into a thing  
grotesque: our hale ideal deformed.

We reach for some connection still  
despite the paranoia and masks  
we believe others wear to feel.  
“And what goes there?” our silence asks.

gravity  
always  
lets me down

—*Denny E. Marshall*

—*Christopher Fried*

\*

We dead are always listening for chimes  
as the small steps mourners still leave  
for the gentle tap that echoes from each stone

—this cemetery is building a barricade  
grave by grave still facing west  
covering it with grass though each thus

is starting to move between the soft tones  
eased along on tears that are too heavy  
have your eyes, don't want to wait anymore.

—*Simon Perchik*

## ***Sailing the Seas of Lune***

Under the bright green rim  
of Earth,

waiting for tidal light  
to fill our nanophotic sails,

unbecalming us,  
conveying our sloop

over regolith bays  
and endless dead seas.

—*Robert Borski*

## ***Neon in Robot Head***

*You were fearfully engineered*  
My metal Amygdala

Bowls skulls

On lanes of brain

A Black horse trampling

Neuron wire

*There is a switchboard in your chest*

Chemical imbalance and certain

Cerebral regions lit uneven

Like flickering neon signs rarely repaired

*There is a switchboard in your chest*

Soon some rock throwing Luddite

Will free this neon from glass racing

Breaking

*There is a switchboard in your chest*

All thoughts

Memories

Sensory analysis

Made gaseous and graciously

*Can't you feel the beating click*

*The simple solution?*

Gone

—*Coleman Bomar*



# Stealth SF

## FINDING SPECULATIVE POETRY IN NON-GENRE MAGAZINES

### **Seance on a Wet Afternoon**

Denise Dumars

As I write this on a grey, drizzly, depressing day in the early weeks of the COVID-19 pandemic I think of a classic film: adapted from the novel by Mark McShane, the 1964 film *Séance on a Wet Afternoon* stars Kim Stanley and Richard Attenborough. It's not about a séance. It's a grey, drizzly, depressing story about a psychic medium who really is psychic but is stuck competing with all the fakesters for the same audience. Her husband is shiftless so she needs money, and the two of them hatch a very bad plot: kidnap a kid and then let the psychic "find" her, proving to the world that the medium really is psychic. From there it's a descent into madness.

It occurs to me that this story is really in some ways about what is called the impostor syndrome. And I think that impostor syndrome affects some SF poets. I mean, sure, you've published 300 poems and five chapbooks, but you still don't believe you're a "real poet" because the bulk of your work has been in genre markets. If you're anything like some of us, you've probably emphasized the work you've published in nongenre publications when you talk to someone who isn't "one of us." I'd like to say stop doing that but it would in some ways defeat the whole purpose of this column! Unfortunately, for those of us whose writing is considered in other parts of our lives (such as employment) we may feel the need to continue emphasizing the well-known "literary" markets we publish in that probably don't pay anything over the genre markets we've published in that sometimes pay a lot. Such is life. So before the plague gets me, let me get on with my markets.

*The Louisville Review* has been around since 1978. Its book publishing arm, Fleur-de-Lis Press, aims to publish the first book-length work of authors who have been featured in the litzine. This seems like a great thing to me. They don't share samples, but looking at some of their books provides clues. Jane Olmstead's book of poetry *Seeking the Other Side* is described as being "existential and mystical." A sample from the book is given:

Would the glass remain half-full if a fist  
ripped out the heart and settled  
into that slippery absence?

I'm guessing that they are open to genre work that fits the "literary" end

of the spectrum, regardless of subject, and the fact that they focus on new writers is helpful, also, I'll bet to some of my readers.

*Ambit* is a British quarterly that has been around for quite awhile, also, and the editors say that they are "not afraid of genre" themes. They also have contests, and one of the winning poems mentioned is evidently about the mythical creatures called selkies. While they did not share lines from that poem, here are a few lines from a poem they did share, "Sci-Fi Meditation" by Fady Joudah, a rumination on skin color and what would happen if it could be changed before birth, the purpose of which then of course goes off in an entirely different direction:

Cyan, magenta, yellow  
focused prejudice  
on the next frontier of whatever returns us  
to particles in nonstop travel toward

Some of you may have already discovered *Fairy Tale Review*, but it's new to me. I was particularly struck by "Because a Sharp Girl Must be a Changeling" by Sarah Moore Wagner, which is based on William Butler Yeats' folktale-based poem "The Stolen Child." I have always liked "The Stolen Child" for its refrain:

Come away, O human child!  
To the waters and the wild  
With a faery, hand in hand,  
For the world's more full of weeping than you can understand.

Wagner's poem begins this way:

Their daughter was unusual,  
born with dirt caked inside  
her skeleton, packed in so tight  
she resembled a real child . . .

They have themed issues, sort of, and the "Gold" issue is open from March 5 to June 30, 2020.

*Into the Void* publishes quarterly and also gives prizes for fiction and poetry. They like all styles, including the "wildly experimental." This journal really seems to be one for us! I was particularly charmed—if that's the right word—by Nicholas Alti's "dialectic for carnivores":

I'm so hungry I could eat a bottle of Vicodin  
I'm so stuffed I could vomit a horse / regurgitate war  
this is pumpkin spice coffee & a handgun under my bed  
this is a way to want to enjoy life / a fear I can't quench

I also learned from this magazine—which gives many different calls for submissions to other markets—that *HA&L* (*Hamilton Arts & Letters*) has a call for a special issue on science-based poetry. The deadline for that issue is November 15, 2020, and they offer an honorarium. Yay! No surprise that I like the poem called “Acadiens; Or, Old Wives’ Tales” by Matthew Gwathmey:

Say—*la mer est belle, la mer est belle,*  
ten times fast to ask God for a little chat.

New scalps the same as the old scalps,  
smelling of juniper and lemon extract.

The world’s more full of weeping than I can understand right now, that’s for sure. Things are changing rapidly as I write this and my life is going to be a great deal different by the time this column is published. That’s probably going to be true for some of you reading this as well. Octavia E. Butler wrote in her novel, *Parable of the Sower*: “All that you touch you Change. All that you Change Changes you. The only lasting truth is Change. God Is Change.” Butler’s Parable novels anticipated the global warming crisis. Another of her novels anticipated a plague from space that changed the world in terrible ways. As with all writers, we can only anticipate so much, and things never quite happen the way we think they will.

#### Markets

*Ambit*, <http://ambitmagazine.co.uk>.

*Fairy Tale Review*, <https://fairytalereview.com>.

*HA&L: Hamilton Arts & Letters*, <https://halmagazine.wordpress.com>.

*Into the Void*, <https://intothevoidmagazine.com>.

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## **Pursuit**

She rises, no time to change her nightshirt:  
In the hall she's heard the step of a ghost.  
With a rattle of cabinets, she finds a flashlight  
As the footfalls drift outdoors, into black.

She staggers for hours through a starless black  
That shrouds all but her white nightshirt.  
The dim cone ahead of her flashlight  
Keeps missing the heels of the ghost.

"Why find me at all, then?" she shouts at the ghost  
And stops, with a sob, on a plain of black,  
Unending grass in the sweep of her flashlight  
And dew chilling the hem of her nightshirt—

Till her shirt snaps in a sudden gust,  
And the flashlight drops, gutters to black.

—*Carrie Clark*

## **Loving Enchantresses**

No man is an island—  
but magical women are.

Enchantresses get lonely on their islands  
with only fish, gulls, and their servants for company,  
and no embraces, save for the wild caresses of the sea

or what they can conjure up to pass the empty days  
until some shipwrecked sailor comes their way.

On Ogygia, sea nymph Calypso  
fell in love with Odysseus,  
cast a singing spell on him while weaving  
to ensure he'd never leave.

Odysseus stayed for seven years. Music is sorcery.  
Though Calypso promised him immortality,  
she finally had to let him return to sea  
at the order of Zeus, and set him free.

Sorceress Circe of Aeaea tricked Odysseus also—  
bewitching his men with song like Calypso,  
then duped them with magicked wine  
that turned them all to grunting swine.

Enchantresses are skilled in the art of duplicity.  
Their music beguiles, but their love is treachery.

Adventurers should learn vigilance from this tale of Odysseus:  
Loving witches is risky—so remember to be cautious.

—*Lorraine Schein*

### ***A Minute Before the End***

We crash on a patch of yellow-tinted land  
a million light-years away  
from our destination,  
a three-second miscalculation.

An atmosphere of blistering rain swallows us.  
Sulfuric acid burns through  
the carapace of our ship.  
Sizzling metal doesn't scream on this planet.

We have thirty seconds before the end.  
A million years to link our fingers  
as our mouthful of memories evaporates.  
A moment to catch our breath.

—*Eva Papasoulioti*

## **Time Travelers' Convention Guide**

Upon arrival to Chrononautica, please set your timepieces to Zulu Galactic.

If you meet yourself coming/going as a previous or future iteration, it's best to feign unfamiliarity.

Service animals are welcome for the most part, but once again we are banning the presence of therapy 'saur. (Click "Velociraptor Incident" in the program index for further details. *Advance trigger warning for Graphic Violence.*)

Do not attempt to alter or override ID chips as Management does not want to have another Morlock-Neanderthal brouhaha.

Our special theme for this plenum's costume ball is "Assassination and the Retconning of History."

Make sure you have all your shots. As always, the convention will not be held responsible for paratime illness or chronodivergent STDs.

For those suffering from temporary chrono-lag or the inability to parse continuities, the Santayana Lounge is an excellent place to unwind.

—Robert Borski

### **Query the Ghost**

I wonder if ghosts speak dead languages  
Or if they're up-to-date on the latest

I wonder if ghosts ever get tired  
Or if they have an expiration date

I wonder if ghosts ever get hungry  
Or workout to stay in their haunting shape

I wonder if ghosts ever write letters  
Or type on computers to talk to us

I wonder if ghosts like haunting restrooms  
Or at least hold their nose while doing it

I wonder if ghosts sneeze at bad odors  
Or flee at the release of flatulence

I wonder if ghosts get to embarrassed  
Or faint at seeing a naked person

—*Juan Perez*

## **Midmorph Madness**

Lost my temper  
Concentration killed  
Stuck partway  
A little Werewolf  
A lot Human  
No fangs  
Fingernails  
Feeble  
Foolish

—*Debby Feo*

## **How to Advertise Titan**

No need to mislead; no need to imply  
that Saturn's rings nobly straddle our sky.

No need to gloss over the cold dark days,  
every view shrouded in dull orange haze.

No need to promote the pristine terrain  
as if all our lakes weren't frigid methane.

No need to highlight low radiation,  
or hide the cost of a short vacation.

Sufficient to know that here we can fly,  
riding the heights of the dim orange sky.

For gravity's grasp's too slight to prevent  
our flight through thick air, our golden ascent.

Nothing else matters besides our wings;  
soaring in glory, like eagles, like kings.

—*Mary Soon Lee*

## **Expired Copyright**

Cheap dad going forward in time  
Cheering his son's 75th birthday  
So as not to pay for singing 'Happy Birthday.'

—*Matthew Wilson*

## ***From the Final Writings of Dr. M. E. Claridge***

*after @notaleptic*

### ***The Great Escape***

Missing a metal arm  
Missing a metal leg  
Posting myself home  
Piece by piece.

—*Matthew Wilson*

Ten million universes:  
jewel strings, laid out before you.  
Galaxies like cabochons wreathed  
in light. You can see them all.

In return you can't see anything  
up close. You stare, dreaming  
of the multiverse with exactitude.  
Seeing all probabilities at once

makes any choices unthinkable.  
I lost you when you refocused into  
a telescope into time; where you go  
I cannot follow, I am here to keep

the lighthouse for you to flash on  
if you lose your way in the darkness  
between stars or probabilities. We  
did not anticipate this voyage. We

were supposed to see all time together,  
the way we did the research, the way  
we crushed the numbers into machinery.  
You had to go first. To see if it was safe.

You left me behind for all time and space  
and I have been loyal, but I am old now.  
I will sit in my black dress and launch  
into the void of jewels, whether I find you

or not. The notes have been made,  
the bills have been paid, terrestrial  
time bound matters all dealt with,  
responsibly. But I want to see the strings

of the galaxies strung with precessing stars  
cut rough and worn smooth, planetary  
rings of silver ice, time awash like  
the legendary ocean. In some other line



of probabilities perhaps there are oceans,  
even. I loved you, for too long, to leave  
what you left behind. Now I will live on light,  
see how the pearls of the universe feel

when tested between my teeth, drink  
midnight and guzzle dawn, slide down  
the ice sculpture of ice ages and not freeze:  
tomorrow I will be greedy as a scientist at last.

—*Elizabeth McClellan*

## **The Human Exhibit**

If aliens targeted me for abduction  
Exhibiting me in a zoo  
And they were designing my cage for construction  
Would they make my living room too?

Or would they find earth's habitats all confounding  
With all of the places I've been?  
What would they think were my natural surroundings?  
What elements would they throw in?

Suppose I was hiking when first I was found  
My confines could be like a mountain!  
If swimming, perhaps they don't know I could drown  
And then throw me into a fountain!

But if they first saw me while taking the bus  
They'd think I enjoyed those tight spaces  
Then in my enclosure, I'd have to adjust  
To all those anonymous faces.

Or maybe a mishmash of every location  
Would find its way to my exhibit  
An office, museum, café, and train station  
They'd jumble my life and say, "Live it!"

I hope they don't stumble on me when I'm eating  
I really don't trust them to cook.  
The best I can hope for is to be found reading.  
And given a tea and a book.

—*Matthew Pritt*

## ***They Climbed Aboard that Starship***

News reports from military pilots  
say the flying saucers have arrived  
just in time. We knew this would happen.  
Hollywood warned us, then remade  
the warnings when they didn't happen  
right away. But our leadership knew  
and acted right away, pulling together  
the Space Force just in time. Quick,  
put our space ships in the air and  
chase the tentacled, green, obviously  
hostile aliens  
back to their home planet, never to return.  
Our leadership will then be proven to be  
the best and wisest, least inept, least useless  
leader we've ever had.

Thank goodness the problem occurred  
conveniently after we decided on the solution.

—*Bill Abbott*

## ***Lycanthropy***

I dread the change, the monthly fright:  
the rage inside, the need to bite,  
all reason fading, gaining might  
as red to orange, yellow, white  
a full moon rises into night.

—*Lauren McBride*

## ***The Affairs of Beasts***

Please accept my compliments  
painted on the wings of August moths.  
Brush the dust aside and find traces of  
subtext. There are intimations in the  
slant of antennae,  
seduction in the tilt of silver wings.

I hear your admonition  
carved in the glitter-white lips of koi  
grown large as sharks. I shall beware the path  
of leviathans and fishermen's nets

and hide my reply  
like blood within the golden folds of gills.

Let us share a feathered whisper.  
Strands of lust in a whippoorwill's quill  
spread wide to ride the tempest between us.  
bury my kisses in wet winter leaves.  
Sing me songs unseen  
nestled below the crumbled beechwood bark.

Listen for my hungry plea,  
the moan of a midday bat for the moon.  
I am blind to your face; this distance is  
darkness. Come to me. Answer in echoes.  
We will touch, collide,  
tangle like wings in the cavernous night.

Your goodbyes arrived today  
embroidered into an elephant's hide.  
Sorrow knotted her eyes shut, but her tears  
flooded my garden, her tusks tore ruts in  
the weave of my lawn.  
She left a memory, tied in gilt twine.

Permit me this silence.  
Beneath the sea are creatures set in cold  
volcanic stone. No voice, no beat of blood.  
A whirling shell; an emblem of regret  
for species lost.  
What rises in fire must die to dust.

—Sarah Grey

## **A Public Place**

This is a public park  
All pets on leash  
Please clean up Dragon poo.

—Matthew Wilson



*Pyramid Galaxy* by Denny E. Marshall

## **We Love What Remains**

We love what remains  
As the sky turns blank and the concrete  
Bursts into vapour.

We love what remains  
As the news decomposes and the bones  
Of government surrender.

We love what remains  
As our friends become words and our loved ones  
Dissolve like a sentence.

We love what remains  
As we stand statuesque in the wastelight,  
Last of the warm bodies, kissing  
In the acid rain.

—*William Shaw*

## **Stalker in the Night!**

—*after Rom Spaceknight #9*  
(*Marvel Comics, August 1980*)

There are other, better ways it might have ended  
if he hadn't refused to share his secret weapon.  
He thinks it over as he leaves the cavern.

Behind him lies his fallen former opponent,  
a stalagmite embedded in his breast.  
There are other, better ways it might have ended.

He might have let the dinosaur man join him  
in seeking out their mutual enemies.  
He thinks it over as he leaves the cavern.

Instead of saurian trading blow with cyborg  
until one lay dying at the other's feet,  
there are other, better ways it might have ended.

They might have forged a bond over their triumphs  
as scale and steel united in common cause.  
He thinks it over as he leaves the cavern.

He understands this death was accidental,  
a tragedy whose blame lies not with him, but  
there are other, better ways it might have ended.  
He thinks it over as he leaves the cavern.

—*Adam Ford*

## ***Obsessive-Compulsive Venusian Checks List of Surviving Earthlings***

Instructions: Using a #12X pencil only, check off all names that apply.

Better erase that check mark,  
it looks a little shaky, a little  
crooked. Nope, now it's too narrow.  
Erase it and try again. Wait—  
I have to pop on yet another pencil-top eraser.  
There, it just fits over the empty metal ferrule  
that looked like a tiny open tin can before  
you repeatedly punctured it with your fang.

Now . . . take a deep breath of fresh carbon dioxide . . .  
and try again.

Nope, too big compared to the two  
check marks above it – one of which, I see  
if I rotate the form, is slightly higher  
than the other. Better erase just a teensy  
bit off the top of that one.

Too much, even it out.

Now the other one is too short.

*erase . . . erase . . . erase*

Now they look like lowercase v's!

Wait for the invisible graphite to disappear and start over again.

—*Ronald A. Busse*

the invader doth  
creep thru coughs, droplets, and hands—  
no, covid-19!

—*Alzo David-West*

he sneaks in her cell  
with tempting fevered love  
she zaps the virus

—*Gary Davis*

## ***Puppet of Wrath, Man of Ruin***

At the far ends of decaying realities, through rifts of broken time under blazing pulsars of rapturous light; there sat a being whose face was governed by an anatomy of ancient flesh and metal. Strands of emeralds and binary, blended with silk quantum buttons, were stitched together so meticulously along his torso, covering a gaunt frame of machine and muscle, of what used to be man; who so many aeons ago found himself lost under the lidless eyes of a moonless night in the Great Black Swamp. Through the muck and clag, he trudged in loneliness, losing his humanity until he clung to the last bits of lowly consciousness as the mud washed over his face.

Faceless, unfathomable, and obscene were the forces of unnatural monsters as they took death from him. In a carnal celebration of rebirth, the cyber gods found an offspring worthy of their unholy visage; bleaching the man's soul with wild deformities and wrath, littering his corpse with stardust. From that moment onward, he knew nothing more of simple dreams and dull platitudes, but rather dwelling in horrid greyspace.

The old thing had no age, or at last none calculatable by means of mortal arithmetic. He had dwelled so long in the shadows beyond death, that not even the grisly reaper would have dared to unsheathe his silver glaive. The bastard's eyes were a meager remnant of their former state, receptors to understand the gruesome environs that floated about them. A mere red pupil was all that remained, clinging to the sight of silence, a throbbing blackness that twitched against his face.

Yet, across the infinite stillness, he looked onward waiting for the stars to die, shadows to fade, and planets to shrivel into dust. No one knew how long he had waited in the vacuous dark of voids unimaginable. Though one truth remained certain, when in the faint stillness above the swampy fields of New Ashworth's primitive sky, people saw the flicker of a crimson light. They knew the old bastard of Ghebula's spawn was watching at the far ends of decaying realities, a being whose face was governed by an anatomy of ancient flesh and metal.

—*Maxwell I. Gold*

# *Fantasy & Science Fiction*

salutes this year's  
Rhysling Award nominees!

“To Skeptics”

Mary Soon Lee

“My Ghost Will Know The Way”

Beth Cato

“Halsted IV”

Jeff Crandall



*Keep striving for the stars!*

**Spanish Speculative Poetry by Elaine Vilar Madruga**  
Translated by Toshiya Kamei

***The Apocalypse According to My Name***

*“True expression is that of a tree.”*  
—Jerzy Grotowski

All my essence is that of the tree,  
so I give in to the earth  
and bite the mouth of the mud  
while my teeth are covered  
with someone else’s fear toward other teeth.  
God gave me a name.  
God (un)covers me.  
Eternity is the essence of the tree  
we planted  
with no other hope of filling our hands  
with a prize.  
Eternity is the essence of the tree:  
God looks at us from the top  
like a bird  
that has built a nest in my head,  
filled me with leaves and snow,  
and filled me with branches and eggs.  
God seeks my essence  
and (un)covers me.  
He vomits in my throat  
He’s a giant, tormented mother.  
Eggs have died in the nest,  
(something is rotten inside me)  
the nest said goodbye in a vacuum:  
This is the loneliness they talked about.  
Clarice Lispector,  
Faulkner,  
and Shakespeare.  
This is the death everyone talked about.  
Something is rotten in my bones.  
God comes and takes apart my hips.



He finds the rot and retracts me.  
My nest gets older day by day.  
Something rots in my fingers.  
What?  
Something.  
What thing?  
Something.  
Who can know what is rotten?  
Almighty God would know,  
but He doesn't remember me:  
April 16, 2011,  
May 4, 1929,  
June 14, 2037.  
Neither dates nor eyes matter  
Today,  
just today,  
at 5:29 in the afternoon,  
my God is dead.

—*Elaine Vilar Madruga*  
*Translated by Toshiya Kamei*

## ***El apocalipsis según mi nombre***

*La verdadera expresión es la del árbol.*  
—*Grotowski*

Toda mi esencia es la del árbol  
y por eso  
sucumbo en la tierra,  
muerdo la boca del fango  
mientras los dientes se me cubren  
del miedo ajeno hacia otros dientes.  
Dios me dio nombre.  
Dios me (des)nombra.  
La eternidad es la esencia del árbol aquel  
que plantamos,  
sin otra esperanza de llenarnos las manos  
con un premio.  
La eternidad es la esencia del árbol:  
Dios nos mira desde la copa,  
Dios es un pájaro,  
ha creado un nido en mi cabeza,  
me ha llenado de hojas y de nieve,  
me ha llenado de ramas y de huevos.

Dios busca mi esencia  
y me (des) nombra.  
Vomita en mi garganta,  
Es una madre gigante, atormentada,  
en el nido se han muerto los huevos,  
(algo se pudrió dentro de mí)  
el nido dijo adiós en el vacío:  
esta es la soledad de la que hablaban  
Clarice Lispector,  
y Faulkner,  
y Shakespeare,  
esta es la muerte de la que hablaban todos.  
Algo se pudrió entre mis huesos,  
Dios viene y me desmonta las caderas,  
encuentra la podredumbre y me desdice,  
mi nido está envejeciendo con los días,  
algo se me pudre entre los dedos.  
Qué.  
Algo.  
Qué cosa.  
Algo.  
Quién puede saber qué es lo podrido.  
Dios omnisciente lo sabría,  
pero Él no me recuerda:  
dieciséis de abril, dos mil once,  
cuatro de mayo, mil novecientos veintinueve,  
catorce de junio, dos mil treintaisiete,  
qué importan las fechas ni los ojos:  
hoy,  
simplemente hoy,  
a las cinco y veintinueve de la tarde,  
mi Dios ha muerto.

—*Elaine Vilar Madruga*

Born in Havana, Cuba in 1989, Elaine Vilar Madruga is a poet, fiction writer, and playwright, whose work has appeared in numerous literary journals and anthologies around the globe. She has authored more than thirty books, including *Culto de acoplamiento* (2015), *Sakura* (2016), *Fragmentos de la tierra rota* (2017), *El Hambre y la Bestia* (2018), and *Los años del silencio* (2019). Translations of her short fiction and poetry have appeared in *The Bitter Oleander*, *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, and *Mithila Review*, among others.

## ***A Vampire's Lament***

Your fears are too modern.  
That 21st-century nervous system  
doesn't flinch at my old terrors.

I sleep in coffins,  
a bed of unconsecrated dirt.  
I'm not embedded  
in an e-mail attachment.

I dwell anywhere  
the dark can succor.  
That doesn't include the Internet.

In your mind,  
my hypnotic eyes,  
taste for young virgins,  
fangs and bat-like alter-ego  
are nowhere near as scary  
as the hackers on the web.

I am just a monster,  
three hundred years old,  
an undead creature  
roaming the only places on the earth  
that are yet to have Wi-Fi installed.

I can still suck your blood.  
But I can't drain your bank account.

—*John Grey*

Martian red truffles  
first proof of life, auctioned off  
one small meal for man  
in the victor go the spores  
dark and damp beneath the skin

—*Karl Lykken*

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Congratulations  
to our poets  
who have been  
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2020 Rhysling Award

**John C. Mannone**

“My Stories Are Hungry”

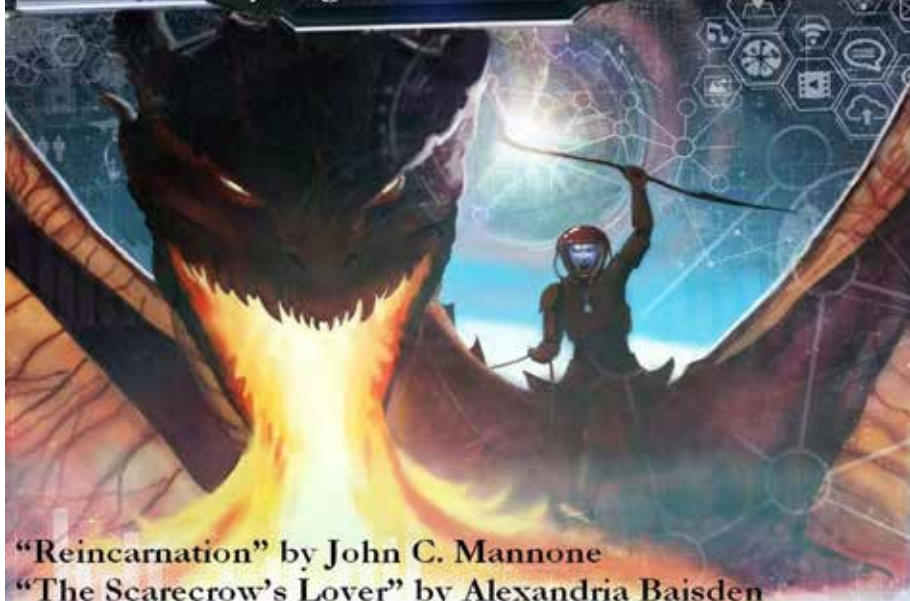
**L. R. Harvey**

“Prayer for a Friday Morning”

AmericanDiversityReport.com



**Abyss & Apex** congratulates our 2020  
Rhysling Award nominees



“Reincarnation” by John C. Mannone

“The Scarecrow’s Lover” by Alexandria Baisden