

starLINE

The background of the cover is a vibrant, futuristic landscape. In the foreground, a person in a dark coat stands on a dark, rocky outcrop, looking out over a vast, glowing city. The city is built on a steep, reddish-brown slope that descends towards a body of water. The city lights are reflected in the water, and several birds are seen flying in the air. The sky is a deep purple and blue, with numerous stars and bright, diagonal light rays of various colors (purple, blue, green) streaking across it. The overall atmosphere is one of wonder and exploration.

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Overview by Michal Kváč
<https://kvacm.artstation.com>

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Goldilocks Stars

We speculate from desperation born
of knowledge we must not acknowledge. Chained
by ignorance to this one crowded, worn
& aging sphere, our destiny is plain
as fossil prints. Yet something in the brains
of *Homo sapiens* denies this night,
however universal. What remains
beyond it? Stars—& maybe one just right
to kindle sparks like ours. A kinder light
with longer lifespan, not too hot or cold
for children in the wilderness who might
forget grim stories nobody gets told
these days, & gorge on porridge, unaware
there are no hosts here. Only hungry bears.

—Ann K. Schwader

space station
the fourth sunset
today

—Greg Schwartz

under the bridge
the troll devours
a good book

—Greg Schwartz

A Motley of Unicorns

White unicorns for virgin maidens
raised in innocence and ignorance.

Silver unicorns to soothe the cares
of teachers, servants, beggars.

Moss-green unicorns for stooped crones
who outlive their sisterhood of friends.

A pink stallion unicorn for the boy
whose voice broke at the horn's touch.

A golden unicorn for his stepmother,
steadfastly kind to another's child.

A vengeance of violet unicorns
upon every father brutal to his own.

And last, for you, who forgets
the boy, the day you met him,

a unicorn of peacock blue
to hold frayed memory true.

—Mary Soon Lee

Unincorporated Territories

Sleeping-bag tremors,
the smell of smoke
in your clothes,
some kind of noise
(an animal maybe)
outside the tent.

You're suddenly scared to be alone,
no authority out here
beyond the fence,
after all.

But still, you unzip the night,
where darkness swirls
like soundless eddies,
or is it just your breath
alight atop the icy air?

Your yellow flashlight beam
sparks glitter on the frost,
sticks snap
and there among the winter branches
you can see them.

Their figures glide
the waxing snow,
hoods and walking sticks
trickling along moonbeam trails.

They have animals with them,
a herd of little creatures

with wet shiny eyes,
paws padding softly beside them.

A distorted rainbow ribbon
slides across the wood,
and suddenly they look
like some sort of livestock,
set loose upon the territory,
black backs shiny
beneath the crooked moon.

Reaching for your rifle you think,
Why shouldn't I hunt them?
No authority out here
beyond the fence,
after all.

No ties to bind me,
no court to judge me.
And wouldn't
The Governor
pay a fair price
for the head of a beast
so strange?

But as you stumble after them,
forgetting your coat and boots,
bare feet driving the 2 AM snow,
they recede like the glaciers,
slow and ancient, vast and free.

—Mack W. Mani

Plans for Departure

This feels like the worst place one could possibly be—insurrectionists on the front steps, an unkindness of ravens in the yard, a side door that requires a sign explaining how to open it. I'm leaving for ... I don't know where. Maybe somewhere bombs would only ever kill the bomb makers. You can come if you wish. I can't promise there'll be roads and buildings made of spider silk or that lakes will gently bubble to the dreams of sleeping fish, but light will reach us even a million years after the source of light has gone out.

—Howie Good

Riding off into the Sunset

This will (presumably) be our last issue of editing *Star*Line*; it was great to be back in the saddle again, however briefly. And the marvelous submissions ensure that it's always a great ride! Thanks to our advertisers in this issue who support SPPA and its awards.

Your editor has just had her second dose of Covid-19 vaccine! Soon everyone will be assimilated ... er, vaccinated (we hope). Bring on the parties, live readings and SF conventions!

—F. J. Bergmann, *Star*Line* editor pro tem, starlineeditor@gmail.com

Today I Make the Mourning Wreath

Today I make the mourning wreath
a tide of midnight ribbon
increasing darkness colors dreams
and shades of grey all deepen
night's violets and the ambergris
can cover turned earth's breath
but when I understand the loss
I feel that I know less.

For where should said things rest
if not in soil's embrace,
I hear the sea waves calling me
and the deep grey shadows' grace.
It is to that grace that I am listing
when I think of leaving light
the weight of all that water
calling stronger than the night.

What combines to make a life a life?
I cannot reason death.
For less than moments afterwards
a husk was all that's left
Silence is the enemy—
the mind rushes, fills the quiet
with ancient cries of carrion
and sounds I'm glad are hidden.

—Denise Dumars

Commodity

We have discovered a
parallel universe going back in time
BUT
but how can we monetise it?
Stocks in futures are well down but
the past is a strong market—
always demand for
halcyon days, second chances
so
we need
a strategy
to extract profit,
net new clients
in the reverse time stream.
(So far their signal seems to be
a constant scream.)

—Sadie Maskery

from “The First God”

Her body never decomposed. Her tomb, once the tallest structure in Illustrious City, took the fittest of our ancestors three and a half hours to climb. Today there is no longer a raised edifice. The entire city was flattened out in the Last Age of Reason. In place of her tomb is now the Chairman’s Temple. You know what they say about building layers of religion. It’s all about evolving and refining the tendency to Vision. There is a small stone of a female figure, cut somewhat crudely, that sits upon a plinth in the furthest alcove of the Chairman’s temple in dark shadows—a spot I’m told never receives any natural light. Not entirely forgotten, she still observes the goings-on of the Church from afar. Her pointed tentacle is raised upon a large human skull and decorated in gemstones. “Think of this as the civilizing of mankind,” First Mother had once said. I now understood she hadn’t meant that in a literal sense. She meant the civilizing of the Vision. Still, dimensions of these kinds, although not exactly illegal, we considered blasphemous and might affect your credit rating. The Chairman shall bear his own path and all that hooley.

—Marc Vincenz

two belief zones are ahead
the most difficult to cross for thinkers
I finger the neutrality tabs in my pocket
they don’t always work

—Barbara Candiotti

Social Media

I was on the street when a man in a mask ran up to me saying “sparrows swiftly berate the summit, pass it on!” and with a thrill I said “okay!” and repeated the sentence to the next person I saw, a woman walking her poodle, who said “sure!” and hurried off to do just that and looking back I saw people getting close but not too close to pass the sentence back and forth like an invisible volleyball and I thought wow, I am seeing the news take shape in real time, and though I have no idea what the words were when this began and what they became when the chain came to an end I can tell you that the next day there were more people on the street than usual watching the trees to see what the birds would do and some of them even had binoculars.

—Ian Willey

SFPA ANNOUNCEMENTS

We're now using MailChimp to deliver official SFPA messages, reminders, and publication links. If you don't receive them, e-mail sfpanews@sfpoetry.com.

Any SFPA postal nominations or votes may be mailed to the SFPA Secretary: Brian Garrison, SFPA, PO Box 1563, Alameda CA 94501, USA.

RHYSLING AWARD VOTING

The 2021 Rhysling Anthology PDF was sent out via our MailChimp list; if you did not receive it, contact SFPAnews@gmail.com. The print anthology is being mailed with this issue of *Star*Line*. Candidates are listed at sfpoetry.com/ra/pages/21rhysling.html. Rhysling Award voting is now open; current members may vote online at bit.ly/SFPARhysling2021. Or mail votes.

ELGIN AWARD NOMINATIONS

Nominations due by May 15; works nominated are posted at sfpoetry.com/el/elgcand.html. Send title, author, and publisher of speculative poetry books and chapbooks published in 2019 or 2020 to Elgin Chair Jordan Hirsch at elgin@sfpoetry.com or by mail. Only SFPA members may nominate; no limit, but you may not nominate your own work. Books and chapbooks that placed 1st–3rd in last year's Elgin Awards are ineligible.

DWARF STARS SUBMISSIONS

The 2021 Dwarf Stars Editor is Charles Christian. Submissions open April 1; the deadline is May 1. Guidelines at sfpoetry.com/ds/dsguide.html. Anyone may submit their own or others' poems of 10 lines or fewer, published in 2020, to dwarfstars@sfpoetry.com or by mail.

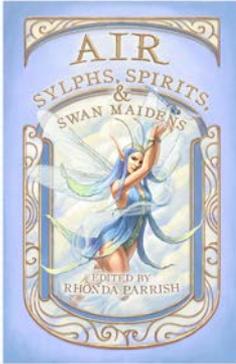
SFPA POETRY CONTEST

The 2021 Contest Chair is Josh Brown. The contest will open June 1, and guidelines will be posted at sfpoetry.com/contests.html.

Read *Eye to the Telescope*, SFPA's quarterly online speculative poetry journal: eyetothetelescope.org. The April theme is *Weird West*, edited by Gary Every. July is *Indigenous Futurism*, edited by Tiffany Morris; submit by June 15: eyetothetelescope.org/submit.html.



*I'm Tony the Teddy Bear and I'm a Writer like you!!!!
Does a Teddy Bear write? If he's inspired to, he will!!
All aspiring writers looking to write a book, poem, or story:
(poetry, sci-fi, fantasy, speculative, horror, paranormal)
and in need of editing, proofreading and critiquing,
just contact Celine at celinem@aol.com*



Tyche Books and Rhonda Parrish
would like to congratulate

**ELIZABETH R.
MCCLELLAN**

on the nomination of her poem

**NEPHELE, ON
FRIDAY**

for this year's Rhyssling Award

**Congratulations to
Lori R. Lopez**

for her nomination for a
Rhyssling Award

*She dips her pen in poetry, prose
and art, and the outcome rightly
earns some notable recognition.*

You can read her piece
“The Whistle Stop”
by visiting impspired.com

IMPSPiRED

Rhyssling nominees
Congratulations
from all of us at Abyss & Apex

Our nominees:

“A Touch of Lightning in the Soul”
by Deborah L. Davitt

“That is not what I meant at all”
by Brian Hugenbruch

“People Dropping Dead in the Mall Parking Lot”
by Ian Ray Simmons

“Old Playfellow” by Noel Sloboda

“And It Was Bad” by Anne Carly Abad

Best of luck to all nominees!



It Doesn't Matter What You're Made Of

Mission: Ares

Seventy-seven years after
Buzz Aldrin took communion on the moon,
an embedded priest claims
to have discovered the face of Jesus
on the surface of Mars.

Identified near the summit
of Olympus Mons, on the young impact
crater called Pangboche, Christian survivors
on Earth have denounced the images,

but devout Martian colonists
posit this could be Paul's "third heaven,"
citing Jesus's "reddish" complexion
as evidence of his Red Planet connection.

Thus, the impact crater
has been designated sacred ground.
A new temple is under construction,
slated for completion by 2050.
Believers in the new colonies see

this project as an opportunity
for a new Eden, free from the decay
of the old world. The movement, known as

The Radical Terraformation
has swept the globe and beyond
with churches sprouting throughout
Valles Marineris, evangelists ready
to convert whatever microorganism
they come across.

—Russell Nichols

This is not so much a poem
as it is a reminder,
that when you put on
your clothes and ask
"Do I
look terrible
in this"
the answer is always
No.

And when you take off
your skin and sigh,
metal-gray and dreary
on my shoulder—
"Do you
still think
that I'm pretty"
the answer is always
Always
Always

—Duke Kimball

dome crop harvest
the scarecrow on Mars
purely decorative

—Deborah P Kolodji

windblown newspapers
promise better tomorrow
to the ashes

—Marcus Vance

Teatime with a Shapeshifter

Down in the river
a smooth stone catches my eye.
The bones, I ignore.

—Denise Dumars

Letting Go

At the Y, young mothers
at a Parents and Tots swim class
hold their kids' heads under water
just a bit longer, each time,

doing like the instructor says,
wary for signs of distress,
but seeing none—
should that make them happy, or sad?

As their children grow older, they spend
more and more time in the shower, the tub,
go outside whenever it rains and
never carry umbrellas.

Perhaps that's no surprise—
what else would one expect,
given the gen-mod gills,
the webbed fingers and toes?

When the day arrives that Earth's
changing reality
can no longer be ignored,
they gather quietly on the shore, watching

their offspring—coltish teenagers now—
look forward, not back,
as they splash into the shallows
and dive, disappearing from view.

—Lisa Timpf

The trouble with shapeshifters
is that you never know
what shape they'll choose
when you invite them for tea.

If they come as a snow leopard
pour their tea into a bowl
and resist the temptation
to stroke their tail.

If they come as an octopus
let them lounge in a bathtub
half filled with warm water.
Caution: they're messy eaters.

Though not as messy as elves,
who, accustomed to servants
and inconsiderate by nature,
fling leftovers on the floor.

Even a seasoned shapeshifter,
who should remember better,
quickly adopts the habits
of their temporary form.

So that it is always a joy
when they arrive as a troll,
such shy, misunderstood chaps,
and very partial to crumpets.

—Mary Soon Lee

Shortened

Around that rock,
around that star,
we spent many days
and later on, our nights as well
staring into the so-called face of god:
as the features congealed and formed,
sending our many machines down to
crawl through chaos on the sliding plates,
burning and terraforming at the edges
of our own (personal) hells above and below,
the angry volcanoes spidering out great
solidifying stone that one day will be the sands.
We should dream, but still we sit awake
in orbit, a black refusal to engage.
The cells now multiply; the fish climb
back and forth from the oceans of time;
and finally apes send their fragile metals
toward our stars, our home undetected, but
we end up somehow
shortened
under that long sun,
enslaved to a past we no longer remember,
the target moving, the endpoint not
yet fixed in our predictions; to lose faith as
the planet's curve decays and grows
warmer still. The life grows so fast
it chokes itself. I tell you for certain, now:
This age is a place we did not
choose to call home. A coin
thrown down for luck at last into
the doctrine of eternal recursion,
with the sand looping over and over
in the shoreline's shifting waves,
the civilization's biome long gone,
but still we float unseen
above the sky and
refuse to sink
long-gone toes into
that well-worn sand.

—Daniel G. Fitch

Twenty-sixth-century colonials
in aromatic drawing rooms
quibbling over space-time
the rights to tinker *when*

—Andy Dibble

earth annihilated
we did not spark joy

—Davian Aw

brainwaves—
the scanner takes a peek
into the abyss

—Barun Saha

Stress Level Test (Self-Assessment)

Do you experience any of the following symptoms: headaches, chest pain, muscle tension, nausea, or changes in sex drive?

Like a zillion stabbing pin pricks in my heart, I suffer each of the agonies of my children as if they were my own.

Do you experience fatigue and/or struggle to fall or stay asleep?

When I sleep, I have nightmares of worlds colliding, universes exploding, infinite loves lost. And there's that one about piloting my starship and not being able to reach the pedals.

Do you worry excessively and feel overwhelmed with responsibilities?

I used to feel like every unkindness, every hurtful act was somehow my fault but my children know not what they do; there's a streak of the other in them.

Do you struggle to focus on tasks or stay motivated?

There are so many situations that are constantly needing my attention through the universes, I'm sure I must be letting things slip through the cracks.

Do you experience irritability, sadness, or anger?

Sometimes I think I've created a monster, several monsters. Maybe it would be better to clap my hands, wipe away the cosmos, start fresh.

Do you have little appetite or find that you are overeating?

People are always offering me lamb, virgin sacrifices, prashad, especially during the holidays. It's hard to resist, uh, you know, temptation.

Do you struggle to regulate how much caffeine, alcohol, or tobacco you use?

It's hard not to get drunk on infinite power but sometimes you just need a little something to get you through.

Do you withdraw from others or feel overwhelmed in groups of people?

I hate making an appearance, having to make smalltalk, trying to figure out what to wear. I can't remember the last time I went out in public.

—Pankaj Khemka

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The artist Salvador Dalí is said to have once given a commencement speech to the effect of “I shall be so brief, I have already finished.” Which certainly sets an interesting bar for many of us who will be giving various remarks and presentations across the globe this quarter for National Poetry Month and other exciting occasions. It is voting season for SFPA, and as always, we thank you in advance for the time you take to look through so many entries our fellow members have nominated. I thank the chairs who coordinate our awards this year, and our wonderful volunteers who work tirelessly to maintain an amazing community of speculative poets, including departing *Star*Line* editor F. J. Bergmann. Expect big changes to be announced in the coming months ahead, but for now I leave you with a scifaiku of mine to keep us in the spirit of things:

Create more, read more!
Transform galaxies and lives
We share together

Until the next time!

—Bryan Thao Worra

SFPA President (sfpapres@gmail.com)

Lust in the Time of the Bubonic Plague

A plague of doctors, descending
beaks smashing together
in empirical approximations of kisses.
Beady glass eyes flash—
a raven spotting sterling silver—
as gloved hands pet waxed robes
the bodies underneath contained, concealed.

To keep the illness away:
tangy juniper berries, musky ambergis,
cloying laudanum, fresh mint, cloves.
The scent of want still slinks through
the bird masks' aromatic protection;
the please-don't-let-us-die-here stink, too.

Shabby, sackcloth boys quarantined,
nothing to occupy their time but one another
while fair death reaps outside
what the rats have sown.

—Avra Margariti

Glitter

There are shards of sky glass on my bare shoulder.
Alarms of imminent decompression
blaring in my ears. Dominoes falling
One then two then three—taking down empires.

gossip
in the inner circle
orbit of Metis

The molten hull of our ship raining down
to the surface is safer than signing
any treaty our diplomats carry.
Safe for souls on the planet at least.

—Deborah P Kolodji

Don't call me a martyr; my sins outweigh
delaying the domination of one
pristine planet, an Eden ignorant
of the corruption our handshakes promise.

Here I stand, planted between these people
and their loss of agency, naked and
covered in righteousness, the glitter of
my own broken ship decorating me.

It's one ship, but let these sparks fly lightyears
to stoke embers of revolution through-
out this so-called heaven. May the scales held
by Justice's hand tip an inch toward mercy.

—Jordan Hirsch

Anamnesis

As if a seizure might shake loose your soul in time,
to witness moments of your life through haunted eyes,
or by an act of will, decant yourself like port
into your own past, an actor speaking new lines
in new scenes, setting things right with those long dead,
before the hiding of messages and treasure
to be discovered in the present day, as proof;
like sending home a postcard from a dream
of trying on a body tight as someone else's glove,
or visiting the house that only you remember,
with a hiding place in the garden where
a tobacco tin keeps safe a penknife, old coins,
a bird's translucent skull; if proof were needed.

—David Barber

Directions to the Apocalypse

If you require a detailed itinerary,
catch a train to Den Haag Centraal.

Disembark, being sure to admire
the vast glass cage of the station.

Walk northwest, naming the streets:
Prinsessegracht, Koninginnegracht.

Left onto Javastraat for 400 yards,
then right onto Scheveningseweg.

The International Court of Justice
awaits your timely intervention:

the sabotaging of a critical case,
escalating dispute to worldwide war.

Admittedly, such methods are limited.
Millions might survive in misery.

For surer, more sweeping slaughter,
warm the planet degree by fatal degree,

or engineer nanite self-replicators
to disassemble us and all our works,

converting continents to gray goo,
and one, for artistry, a violet hue.

If you favor inaction over action,
let the Sun enact final judgment,

inexorably brightening, expanding
to swallow Earth in its embrace.

—Mary Soon Lee

tattoo inked on your arm
slight spelling mistake
now incantation to open hell

—Matthew Wilson

a hissing leak in the airlock
it's been years
since my last confession

—LeRoy Gorman

No Bad Publicity

There is no bell to ring
to announce
my clawing resurrection

digging up through the dirt
when you thought me dead.

And yet, you loved me once
though I was no different
at my core—the wish
to be haunting

words floating on your wind
forever.

Now I return,
pale-faced, maggoty.

Your scream sounds enough like applause,
the word-of-mouth that means

I can never truly die.

—Lynne Sargent

Classical Romance

The Wolf Man was a nice enough guy, but sometimes he'd just become a total animal (not to mention all the hair he left in the shower drain).

Dracula had a certain kind of charm, but he left me with massive hickeys, and to top it all off I found out he already had three wives.

The Mummy was way, way too old for me.

The Invisible Man stood me up (at least I think he did).

Half the time Dr. Jekyll was a total sweetheart, and the other half it was like he was a totally different person, and I never knew who was going to show up.

The Hunchback of Notre Dame kept putting his job ahead of me.

I felt bad turning down the proposal from Frankenstein's monster, but I'm just not ready to be anybody's Bride right now.

I love long walks along the waterside as much as the next girl, but the Black Lagoon isn't exactly the most scenic of spots.

I think it's about time I stopped letting the Universal matchmaking service fix me up for a while.

—Sarah Cannavo

moonrise

climb into the moon
and let the mists cling
to your skin, damp
and warm like the breath
of a summer night

climb and let the light
silver your fingertips
and turn your bruises
into feathers
and your scars
into wings

climb out of the past
and let the present
fall away behind you
onto jagged rocks
so you rise
out of the depths
almost floating
almost weightless
almost free

—Jennifer Crow

while you were busy

writing about Friday the 13th
& the full moon

Wormhole

I was busy
howling

after the movie *Interstellar* (2014)

—John Reinhart

ruin their stalks.
men of little maize die amazingly often in a windvane
with haywires firm to their throat—
cyst we rip off, & fling to space,
or bedrooms,
where fathers become their children's ghost,
promising comebacks & bliss
& time between them as Einstein's ring.
he'll grope the wormhole to touch an age;
a different timezone robotic in pace
& moon rifles.
faces he had known, whittling to shape
like dew points.
they do nothing to the corn bulbs dying how they breathe.
survivors, more relic than their looks,
than centuries they lose to a trace of data signaled home,
as a flood, or pool, or watering tool
for their hood having dust bowls for food.
on earth, a teen twiced her father's age
& lived with that decision.
& the world did not end, because nothing ends far from home.
& I'm that man, detached,
approached like a horizon,
relearning Newton's third law & emotion.
all my god sides, preached down,
to go through this.
I have my visual of events all jammed, like killer drones,
& I crash into a new earth,
becoming my daughter's ghost when I seance her to break rules,
& read gravity:
dot-dot, then dash.
& I'm centuried like noon, like a millennium for two:
her fate & mine knowing me back to her sickbed,
made grey to abuse my looks.

—Nnadi Samuel

34 ORCHARD congratulates

Deborah L. Davitt

on receiving a Rhysling Award Nomination
for her spine-chilling poem



“A Hand Against My Window”

which appears in Issue 1...we knew we had to buy it
when we finished reading and none of us could go outside
in the dark.

<https://34orchard.com/issues/issue-1/>

DREAMS AND NIGHTMARES

congratulates our Rhysling nominees:



“The dead couple of Blenheim” •

William Clunie • DN 116

“Parabiont” • Robert Borski • DN 115

“The Mad Scientist to the Muse of her
Dreams” • Adele Gardner • DN 114

“The Finger” • Abi Hynes • DN 114

Congratulations, **G. O. Clark**,
on the nomination of
“Post-Obit Cautionary Tale”
for the prestigious Rhysling
Award!



We at *Tales from the Moonlit
Path* wish you much success
now and into the future!



FROM THE SMALL PRESS

Altars & Oubliettes by Angela Yuriko Smith. (2020). 66 pp. Paperback \$7.00.

... three sets: Foundations, Psychonauts, and Haiku.... a variety of chilling persuasions. ... the end of mankind from a universal perspective ... that shake the foundations of your beliefs.... “midnight rustle and scraping claw... I was made to love this murder.” ... passionate comment on a true-life tragedy...:

cutting shirtwaists no longer in fashion
for ladies I will never know
and as the lady I will never be
in a moment, turns to ash.

... “How can she return to a reality that isn’t?” ... “a layered cacophony” that engulfs you—think about it! When you reach the end ... it may take some time to recover... But ... you’ll be returning to read it many times more.

—Marge Simon

o o o

As the Seas Turn Red by Morgan Sylvia (2019). 129 pp. Paperback \$9.99.

Cool title. Great cover.... annoying, hard-to-read novelty font.... amateurish.... kind of dreamy and romantic ... All the poems ... are center-justified.

Truth comes to you slowly, drawn in froth and whitecaps
The book of your life will be written in seafoam

Will it? What does that mean? Is it just poetic language and a poetic reference? I think there’s an audience ... who want ... the wondrous, gentle “poetic feeling”... I can’t get behind an aesthetic that eschews theme ... I think there’s an audience for it. But it ain’t me.

—John Philip Johnson

o o o

Betelgeuse Dimming by Jean-Paul Garnier. (Space Cowboy Books, 2020) 40 pp. Paperback \$11.00.

... a worthy chapbook collection ... initially inspired by ... the dimming of the great star.... relieved to learn the star was not going nova for a millennium or so.... Garnier considers what another species might feel, facing extinction:

those who could not escape
terrible knowledge
forewarned apocalypse
or blissfully naïve in the caves

... the time when aliens take their leave:

protestors held signs scrawled with equations
even these symbol sets
remained a mystery

... It’s for us all, star-gazers...!

—Marge Simon

o o o

Carpe Noctem by Robert Borski. (Weird House Press, 2020). 146 pp. Paper \$14.95.

... lyric and intelligent.... the discord is that many of the poems have the same ... punchline poem shape.... from “Rapture of the Zombies”: “some insisting we were brought here / by a team of bleeding seraphs” Isn’t that gorgeous? But the rest ... degenerates into 1960s Sci Fi Cynicism, and ends with this:

... a heaping plate
of angel wings will perk up
even the most jaded of palates.

... But on the zombie trope ... reification of our soulless culture.... a joyless, undead life. With all that rich social material..., it’s a shame to turn it into a punchline.... Murder! Cannibalism! Oh my! ... Borski is capable of so much more.... “The Vampire Priest on the Eve of His Discharge from Rehab” is a perfect poem.... “Catfood” is a fantastic modern horror poem you should read.... despite my complaints ... splendid and inventive and a pleasure to read....

—John Philip Johnson

o o o

The Ceremonial Armor of the Impostor by Gregory Kimbrell. (Weasel Press, 2019). 108 pp. Paperback \$12.00.

I’m sorry.... calls itself poetry but ... paragraphs of prose. And it’s fantasy. I just am not strong enough to force myself to read it.... one big impenetrable lump.

—John Philip Johnson

NB: The editor would like to mention that we, personally, adore this impressively weird, complex and mystifying book. *De gustibus ...* —FJB

o o o

Climbing Lightly Through Forests: A Poetry Anthology Honoring Ursula K. Le Guin. Eds. R. B. Lemberg and Lisa M. Bradley. (Aqueduct Press, 2021). 178 pp. \$18 paperback, \$7.95 e-book.

... poems that pertain in some way to Le Guin’s work ... and ... an overview of Le Guin’s poetry as well as a critical analysis of each of Le Guin’s nine poetry collections.... poems that ... addressed universal themes or the Le Guin works I was familiar with the most appealing.... Some ... are addressed to Ursula.... “that words are more than their sums, / That the map of the earth is sea and sky and change.” ... Mary Soon Lee, in “On Reading Le Guin,” notes that it has been

Years since I last sailed
the islands of Earthsea,
but everything’s the same

... Some ... deal with issues of aging and grief, themes that Le Guin visited in her own poetry.... contributed poems take up almost two-thirds of the book.... R. B. Lemberg’s analysis of Le Guin’s poetry.... differs, for the most part, from her prose: “... those who expect science fiction brilliance from Le Guin’s poetry will be disappointed.... science fiction poems are quite rare in her work.” ...

—Lisa Timpf

o o o

Goddess Bandit of the Thousand Arms by Hal Y. Zhang. (Aqueduct Press, 2020) 92 pp. Paperback \$12.00.

... poems and one short story along with an erudite afterword.... The collection’s title refers to a Chinese deity ... boasting a thousand arms with which to help and

assist.... she blended this goddess with a well-known math problem involving a bandit.... therefore represents a “collective of minority, shapeshifting, disabled, immigrant, scientist, and fantastical women who ... remain defiant.” ... recurring metamorphoses here reveal anticipatory transformations.... But Zhang’s archeology stretches in more than one direction.... “a collection of loneliness and revolt, of stars and dumplings.” ...

—*Thomas E. Simmons*

o o o

House of Minds by Cardinal Cox. (Starburker Publications, 2020). 12 pp. Pamphlet; email cardinalcox1@yahoo.co.uk.

The theme ... that there ... have been for centuries, individuals among us with psionic powers.... a time in which people with psi powers are imprisoned, abused, or made use of by others.... clues to the historical time periods are vague. This lack of specificity gives the reader the impression that most times and places are encompassed by the tale.... psis have existed almost everywhere and everywhen ... but almost never treated as human beings.... Early psis commonly interpreted their gifts as religious or God-given....:

We are the lanterns
That turn back night

A strength ... provided by the footnotes linking the poems.... I urge you to get a copy ... don’t delay—copies are limited.

—*David C. Kopaska-Merkel*

o o o

How to Extricate Yourself by Laura Theis. (Dempsey & Windle, 2020). 54 pp. Chapbook £8.00.

Winner of the Brian Dempsey Memorial Competition..., an imaginative smorgasbord of ... subgenres.... three sections: “False Advertising,” “A Flight of Familiars,” and “Hostinghosting” ... dangers and lures of young love.... “purple sea” asserts: “interrupts with a lure he will not even try / to resist” ... wry, subtly wistful humor. ... “on the first day the dragon moves in / don’t tell the neighbours but / take the batteries out of your smoke detector / you’ll thank me later” ... strongest when the mystical is woven through the power of relationship: ... “this stuffed swan was actually her heart” ... a writer to watch in the future.

—*Sandra J. Lindow*

o o o

The Last Robot and Other Science Fiction Poems by Jane Yolen. (Shoreline of Infinity, 2021) 39 pp. £5.25 chapbook, \$2.99 Kindle.

... four sections: “Planet Earth,” “Outer Space,” “Aliens & Robots” and “The Robot Suite,” ... thought-provoking ... from universal creation to robot sex, and finally to apparently pastoral ... end-times.... deftly combines contemporary science with politics, mythology, and everyday life.... “a shift of molecules / before there were molecules” ... “pushing up / through what will one day be called / Ground Zero” ... Warnings of environmental destruction ... Wildfires large enough to be seen from space create a place “Travelers from distant planets [...] now avoid”.... “The Last Robot” parallels robots with slave and migrant workers....: “They just cluttered the landscape / with their irony / and their iron bones” ... Most ... from Yolen’s blog ... at eepurl.com/bs28ab.... SF poetry at its very best.

—*Sandra J. Lindow*

o o o

The Magician's Handbook by Grant Clauser. (PS Books, 2017) 94 pp. Paperback \$15.00.

... steadily escalating ... an applaudable directness.... the opposite of bombastic, but still makes your skin shiver.... none of the usual "poetic" misdirection.... Clauser stands against fluff ... Stripped down ... these poems are still beautiful. The central conceit is ... the life of a magician ... the sleight-of-hand variety.... There goes the ball. It's in his pocket now.... This self-deceptive self-effacing power makes these poems greater than the sum of their parts.... deeper than its honest schtick and obvious magical metaphors ... this hits me harder as a fan of legerdemain: ... yes, that's my card! How did you do that?

—Daniel G. Fitch

o o o

Million-Year Elegies by Ada Hoffmann. (2021). 76 pp. Paperback \$14.99.

... poems focussing on dinosaurs, while at the same time touching upon evolution and humans' place in the world.... three main sections, "The Age of Monsters," "The Age of Reptiles," and "The Age of Mammals." ... Each poem is titled with the name of a dinosaur ... variability does not detract from the overall harmony.... an image of what the world might have been like in ancient times:

Nothing much lived: nothing you
would call interesting.
Just teeth. Just hungry throats.
Just us.

Musings about paleontologists and paleontology pop up ... specific scientists...., who became bitter rivals.... sometimes-cryptic clues that have survived the ravages of time. ... a variety of moods.... even wistful ... "Prologue: The Late Heavy Bombardment" advises: "This world has burned and ended, burned and ended, / more times than you know" ... whisks us through millennia of time, and makes us like it ... Well worth a look.

—Lisa Timpf

o o o

The Nurseryman by Arthur Allen. (Kernpunkt Press, 2019). 133 pp. Paper \$15.99.

Nominally framed as the loose notes of an 1800s botanist on a journey to Meta Incognita...., simultaneously poetically ambiguous and carefully reconstructed ... The typesetting is careful and complex; some *serious* effort went into this.... would feel wrong to read on a screen instead of the page. Formal forms are experimented with and then shredded, ... I greatly appreciated the accompanying (possibly fake) translations.... we are that inspector, poring over journals...., trying to determine what exactly happened.... more chaotic ... enjoy a real power ... the narrative (... wind-blown threads as it is) ... falls into a poetry singularity. I enjoyed this odyssey ... not a style for everyone.

—Daniel G. Fitch

o o o

Off-World Fairy Tales by Joanna Drucker and Susan Bee (Litmus Press, 2020). 52 pp. Stapled spine \$24.00.

... an art book; a children's story book ... or a poetry book.... along none of these paths but somewhere in between ... did end up disappointing me ... I don't have training or credentials to evaluate the visual elements ... methods and execution support ... children as its primary audience... one collage ... of a milkweed butterfly caterpillar amidst little stars that I found charming.... loose, somewhat

dreamlike forms ... problems picturing what was being described.... lines are split ... only to make for a pretty layout, not to convey additional meaning. (... set throughout in Comic Sans ...) ... different colors for each block of text.... seems like the authors consciously simplified the vocabulary and syntax to accommodate the reading level of their target audience... rather dull, despite flashy passages ... seemingly at random.... I didn't enjoy it....

—Richard Magahiz

o o o

Poems That Could End the World by Ronald A. Busse. (Turning Point, 2020) 80 pp. Paperback, \$18.00

Galloping and gleeful..., a dark collection obsessed with various ways the planet (or other things) end.... I found myself chuckling along... alien, SF, and prosaic. Everything breathes with life and sly humor, ... loosely connected by threads of black humor, climate change, and death.... so pleasing to read that I had to go back and read ... pieces aloud.... The single palindromic poem, "Underworld," was a definite highlight.... left me smiling as the Earth burned.

—Daniel G. Fitch

o o o

Sacred Summer by Cassandra Rose Clarke. (Aqueduct Press, 2020). 104 pp. Paperback \$12.00.

... a beautiful horror novelette, told in verse... graceful and evocative..., cinematic and emotionally compelling. I loved it.... supernatural horror, but only at its core. Everything else is ordinary ... women in a suburban development..., and something insidious is working its way into their lives.... a wisp of genre and a generous helping of literary craft.... it takes a while to understand what's really going on.... a brutal murder of two boys in a punk band ... one survivor ... she becomes fixated on meeting him.... verbal *mise en scène*.... "slices of // moonlight marching across / the dirty carpet, illuminating / patches of moss and flares" ... totally delicious: ... "the music drowns out the sunlight, / flooding the studio with its darkness" ... one of the best genre poetry books published in 2020.... "music, pale and unrecognizable / like a lover's voice on a distant speaker" ...

—John Philip Johnson

o o o

Scars That Never Bled: An Exploration of Frankenstein Through Poetry by Koji A. Dae. (Paiyak Development, 2020). 108 pp. Paperback \$12.99.

... Frankensteinian poems grouped under seven headings of tarot arcana.... the fiendish Dr. Frankenstein has been cast as the tarot's magician.... The monster is less than monstrous. The scientist is more than grotesque.... imagery of assembly and disassembly ... encapsulates the sum of the library shelves bursting with the last two centuries of literary criticism and Frankenstein scholarship....

we classify
and call it science
but it remains uncertain
whether these categories
will hold

Her creation is many magnitudes richer than any base mixture of dead tissue and electricity.

—Thomas E. Simmons

o o o

Twelve: Poems Inspired by the Brothers Grimm Fairy Tale by Andrea Blythe. (Interstellar Flight Press, 2020). 62 pp. Hardcover \$16.99; paperback \$9.99.

... In Blythe's skilled hands, ... forks in the road are ... always fascinating. Sometimes these fates bear a resemblance to other known fairy tales.... In other cases..., completely original ... such princesses as these would ... "claw their way back to magic and beauty and power." ... a venomous critique of gender construction, social expectations, and patriarchy.... equal parts inspiring and uncomfortable. Highly recommended....

—Rebecca Buchanan

o o o

What the Gargoyle Sees by Gene Twaronite. (Kelsay Books, 2020). 46 pp. Paperback \$16.00.

... the poems here are more powerful the more he takes out, so the diminutive size of this collection is misdirection.... Clever little tweaks abound.... The only concern I have ... the summoning "Prayer to Cthulu" uses the unfortunate phrase "master race" ... But ... perhaps this is not a generally cynical indictment of humanity..., but instead a sarcastic assault *on cynical indictments*. In that case, I support it fully. Sure, humanity sucks, and we're destroying the planet just as well as the Elder Gods could, but there's beauty in there somewhere still.

—Daniel G. Fitch

If you want to review speculative poetry books or have a book you'd like reviewed, e-mail starlineeditor@gmail.com. Prefer review .rtfs, book .pdfs. Reviews will be excerpted in *Star*Line*, but posted in their entirety (may be further redacted) at sfpoetry.com/sl/slreviews.html.

*the sunset is still beautiful
to augmented eyeballs
infrared and shining
numinous*

Kaleidotrope congratulates
M. Darusha Wehm
on the Rhysling-nominated
“we are all energy”



www.kaleidotrope.net

receiving messages from john
dee, ouija board letters
floating, rectangular
dirigible, encoded
warnings in angelic
language, azraetic (witch
i majored in), wicked
summons at the dinner table:
meal, interrupted—

annoyed i sent back through
the ethersphere
an answer to his quest
-ions: “the queen
will fall, join
the rebellion,” &
the ouija board dis
-appeared & i
felt a certain

amount of guilt

—William Clunie

A List of Grievances

- arguing with 4-year-old
- stirring ranch dressing in a measuring cup??
- leaving sponge in kitchen sink
- open can(s) of soda in refrigerator
- cabinet full of messy salad toppings
- multiple open condiments of same type (e.g. three mayonnaises)
- using the baby-bottle scrubber to clean butter (??) and leaving the residue on the brush
- ignoring texts when I ask what happened to the bottle brush
- too much screen time
- age-inappropriate movie watching
- talking about weapons with 4-year-old
- thinking it's okay to "play bite" the 4-year-old
- overfeeding the dog
- not responding to text messages after "play biting"
- cake pops for kids? Seriously?
- ignoring calls when 4-year-old now thinks it's okay to bite me
- ignoring calls when asking for help to take 4-year-old to hospital for fevers, confusion, aggressive behavior
- ignoring calls when ...
- ignoring ...
- BRAINS

—Jason P. Burnham

dinner with Earthlings
how well the brain balances
with a nice Syrah

—Marcus Vance

Prayer for Moving Up

may I reincarnate
as one of the invaders
in their cloud cities
weave me flesh transparent as
their flesh
Mother Kali
situate me
your infiltrator
sharp of tooth and claw
up into some high-class alien dame
her lap of luxury
her womb with a view

—Andy Dibble

Conversations Caught on Street Corners

is my mask on right?
why is she watching us?
do the humans know?
we strike tonight!

—Matthew Wilson

More than Mortal

I can barely remember my body,
Nor the flavor of food, nor a time
In my life when I still knew
The feeling of fear. Those memories
Faded as their files degraded
At some point as the centuries passed.
I knew they wouldn't last. Not forever.
Seventeen times I've transferred
My mind from one robot brain
To the next, and each time there's
A cost, a little bit that gets lost,
And I'm never exactly the same.
With science on my side, I shed
My flesh, took my last breath,
And welcomed death, assured
That it was not the end. I abandoned
My body at the cusp of old age,
At the point when all others regress,
And refashioned myself into
What I am now, something greater,
And yet ... somehow less.
I'm stronger than I was, and I'm
Smarter, and because I've died once,
I no longer fear death. I know
Nothing of sickness and nothing
Of strife, but these thousand years
Later I find, I'm still mourning my
Lost mortal life, and the people
I left behind.

—Randall Andrews

I'm Thinking a Gift Shop

We thought—a small drip
will wear away the hardest stone;
this universe had had plenty of time
before we entered it.

Nothing lived here
that we could find;
such elegant forms
must have grown inorganically,
made by no sculptor,
yet we loved them
as if of our own making.

A disappointment, really,
to find the sculptor at its
slow and secretive work;
even weathering was faster,
and why did it take so long
to satisfy the consumers
of our moribund civilization
no longer able to make
anything like these things.

Except our AIs
could duplicate them,
permute them,
almost imitate them,
so much more quickly
and unsatisfactorily,
and which, as a result,
sold for so much less.

—David C. Kopaska-Merkel

trying to lose weight
eating healthy
only devouring vegetarians

—Matthew Wilson

Magical Girl Transformation

There Will Come Soft Rains

What slinks between the city's
hollow monoliths, we'll never
know—we were half-gone by
the first deluges that felled
sweeps of forest and school-
houses alike. The cold snap took
the rest and now these roving
beasts make a home of our
wreck, lap water from our skulls,
dampen our history with their
wet tongues until we bleed
into black smears on white pages.

—Deanie Vallone

In Garden Buried

In garden buried, I sprout from my eyes
Hibiscus; oleander from my nose;
From mouth, a sapodilla; a pine sighs
From out my ear; from chest a love vine grows;
Black crabs in lungs, small boa in my guts;
From feet, ants tunnel out around the world;
My privates sprout a palm with coconuts.
Birds peck my bones, my teeth, hair that once curled,
For calcium for eggs and for a nest ...
Sift my remains: what remains in your sieve?
Of my whole body I've been dispossessed,
Only the memory of some thoughts still live
Within the thoughts of others' memories;
When those rememberers go, all traces cease.

—Robin Helweg-Larsen

Light will divide you
into what you were
and what you will be
and that cut
will be different every time.

The fractals slip between
your atoms
like barn swallows.

As you shimmer
through the darkness
you glance behind you.
Maybe you dropped
yourself.

And one day you might
see yourself
in the reflection of the
skyscrapers, or a still pond
a blade in your hands
and silver in your eyes
and think
what would I think
of what I have become?

And you won't remember.
You can't recall
what it felt like
to be that kind of you.

—Leslie J. Anderson

The Second-to-Last Man on Earth

... will have to try harder.

—David Gianatasio

Warm Front

We've been called to impossible prosperity.
I sit in a sun-hat, the beach at a standstill.

A turtle tows in, the globe in an hourglass,
the operator and the severed line

warped with the idylls of celebrants,
incoming ghosts of the sonar wave

in the radio silence of the surf.
Evening shuts down the pirate stations,

collapsing whitecaps lost to the eye
that once took in a moment's distance,

the humpback rides of meridians.
Check that the Sun cuts no ice with the tribe,

their village just a crawl from the shore
in the dusk that envelops interiors.

No news returns of our former extinction,
just these views, imposed from afar,

the miniature palms and seesaw stars
spreading the death of the asteroid.

We read the sky, its brief summaries,
see parcels thrown to the landing stage

by the homeward bound in another age.
They sink like stones, like meteorites,

in this harbour we call our anchorage,
the gecko's flickering body shape

an alien tongue recalling our names
to our lips, our mumbled mnemonics.

—Peter Archer

STEALTH SF: Finding Speculative Poetry in Non-genre Magazines

PLANNED OBSOLESCENCE

Denise Dumars

All along my “Stealth” column has been, er, stealthily looking at the future, expecting a time when the column will be obsolete, a time when genre poetry and mainstream poetry have been seamlessly integrated. So the column has always had a sort of planned obsolescence. I have often talked about “mainstream” poetry journals that sometimes unwittingly publish genre poetry (I refuse to separate genre and “literary” poetry, as it is all literary), and how poetry in general is integrating more of what the mainstream often calls “pop culture.” I’ve never been quite sure where one draws the line—is a mainstream poem that references, say, Superman as a symbol different from a genre poem about Superman? I don’t know.

I remember “planned obsolescence” being talked about a lot in the 1960s (yes, I’m that old) and although different sources disagree on its actual origin, it is definitely a 20th-century idea, defined as producing goods that are intended to wear out or become obsolete so that people will need to replace them frequently. The best discussion of it I’ve seen so far is in the *Investopedia* article I reference below. It is linked to the idea of conspicuous consumption, a cycle in which we are at least partially caught. But I had envisioned planned obsolescence as a good thing for this column, because it would mean that, at long last, genre and mainstream poetry would have reached a seamless blend, or a peaceful co-existence.

When will that happen? I don’t know. Maybe never ... but then I found *Songs of Eretz*. I learned about it from our own John C. Mannone, who is published by this very refreshing online journal. It is just the kind of easy mix of genre and mainstream poetry that I had always hoped to find. It pays a respectable \$5 a poem, and does some interesting things with the poems it publishes. As somewhat of a metaphysician myself, I chose lines from Tyson West’s “Circles in Motion” as an example of the journal’s poems:

My metaphysics prof stood before us forever
class after class throat bound in the same black polka-dot polyester tie

dribbling down his white shirt to flat black-belted charcoal slacks
gloved in the same gray sports coat—horn-rimmed glasses still
unpolished—he seemed himself a universal truth.

Issues are themed, so check the guidelines page.

Another journal I’m excited about publishes every day. Yes, *every day*. It’s *Eunoia Review*, out of Singapore. It doesn’t pay, but is very good and also accepts reprints. Its title is the shortest English word containing all the vowels, and the journal is “committed to sharing the fruits of ‘beautiful thinking’”; appropriate, since “beautiful thinking” is what “eunoia” means. The horror poet in me liked this poem, “Dissection for Beginners” by Christine A. MacKenzie, for its beautiful words:

1. Unzip the skin. Shedding that thick Winter coat at the brink of Spring, the maroon dress quite lovely underneath in its infinite fibers. Drain. New life emerges from melted snow. Peel off that yellow scarf, traded for sun.

The Rialto, out of the UK, is considered a top market; I mean, I probably don't even have the prestige necessary to even talk about it. It pays £20, which is even more in Amurrican dollars, and the first poem I looked at is full-on SF: "Decompression" by William Stephenson. The magazine is a real hard-copy journal, and you can submit via Submittable or even by regular mail! I think this one's a toughie to get into, but it would be well worth it. Stephenson's is the first poem I saw from the journal, and it blew me away:

The induction program's willow pattern eyes
and terracotta lips matched those of the woman
I married in my first incarnation. She whispered,
Just you and me darling me darling—a glitch, surely,
A stutter in the software—so make yourself yourself.

Rishi Dastidar then discusses the poem, going well into the making of all those SFnal things that actually exist today. So this is a "wow" for me!

Josephine Quarterly says it is for marginalized voices; they mean this in a broader way, a more personal way than most magazines that limit submissions to a particular group. The work is mainstream with a gentle edge, if that makes sense. It pays \$30: highly motivating, in my estimation! So when I went to look at sample poems, of course my eyes immediately lit on Emily Lake Hansen's poem "The Medium Scans My Chakras for Ghosts," and the first stanza did not disappoint:

i. The medium tells me first to imagine a lotus
opening above my head. That's the crown,
she says, and touches me gingerly.
My husband, a scientist, told me
the other day that we're never truly
touching. There's always space, he tried
to explain, atoms, electrons—it hurt
to think of things I couldn't hold—floating
between our intertwined hands.

I enjoyed the mix of science and metaphysics in the poem a lot. Clearly, the magazine will not reject work because it's too "sciency."

Finally, I looked at the spectacularly boringly titled *Poetry Online*, where (guess why!) Chiyuma Elliot's poem "Family Portrait #2" stood out to me:

Elsie says the dead talk in riddles.
They push objects across a table, like
a jar of jam, or a set of keys.
Jim's fond of ashes.
Elsie says he's sorry
for a lot of things,

While the poetry here is pretty mainstream, the online journal does try things out, including those visual poems using technology that gives me hives, but which many SF poets seem to love. It also pays \$15 a poem, and there are big-ticket contests you might want to look at, too. A deceptively simple little online zine with a surprisingly cerebral approach.

What do you think? Does this column have a built-in expiration date?

Or is it too much to ask that genre poetry and mainstream poetry will ever exist together in every poetry journal?

Markets

Eunoia Review, <https://eunoiareview.wordpress.com/submissions/>.

Josephine Quarterly, <https://www.josephinequarterly.com/submit>.

Poetry Online, <https://www.poetry.onl/submit>.

The Rialto, <https://www.therialto.co.uk/pages/about/the-magazine/submissions/>.

Songs of Eretz, <http://www.songsoferetz.com/p/guidelines.html>.

Works Cited

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Lacus Felicitatis

there are times of year when the launch windows to the Overworld open.
we prepare our rituals, set fire to our sacrifices, chant the countdowns
together,

and ride the dragon's plume. Warbands led by The Shepherd, The Duke,
and the Strong-of-arm coming ashore in a small metal launch.

The first thing the second man did was partake

in the blood of the godson, for strength, for godspeed, for goddamn fun.

In golden helmets and white kevlar they march across the Land of Snows

to find the Lake of Happiness in the caldera of plenty

because every myth trains us to think we'll be happy if we just have more.

Oxygen starvation and the broken land birth Fata Morganas on this

moonscape,

maybe a lady in the lacus offering things no one's sure they really want.

Sinking cold steel and sharp flagpoles into it over and over, staking a claim.

A day in the Overland is a month in the Overland. We're all aging so

differently.

There was a gas eruption here within the last 10 million years,

just yesterday by such standards.

Shrouded by the mists of ascension jets—if I die battling the loneliness,

lay my Fallen Astronaut on the island of apples.

Is the moon still alive? Stab it again and drink from its skull.

—Josh Pearce

If my mind become a fortress
It is the broken-down variety
But no less deadly for all that
With trapdoors and tunnels hid beneath

My secret alien guests down beneath the castle walls
And the libraries I have not yet been able to decipher ...

My starline is cut into my skin to bond my eyes to the movement of the suns
And I send infantry disguised as beggars into every nation which does
not acknowledge my rule

to send slippered weapons into their brain
to scan for codewords
and whisper stories of the rain

of its mighty breeze
and horrible shadows ...

it's true the crown is shattered and my tower vanished
but I have other weapons:

the rock is indestructible
and its lines shadow the deep
my body hovering above the lens of the engines whose sound I can hear
in sleep

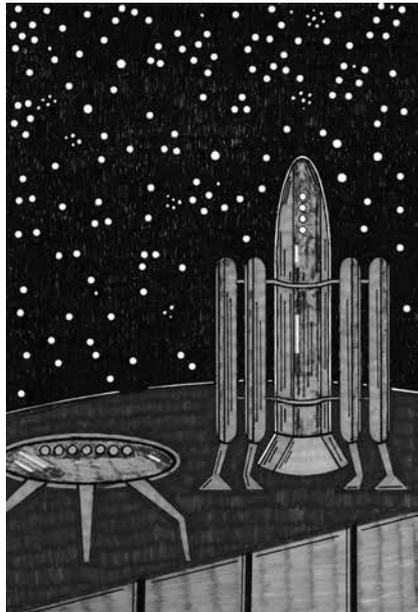
—Robin Wyatt Dunn

Because The Night

Climate change-induced mega
forest fires raging Earth-wide,
transforming nighttime into
seemingly endless daylight:

Vampires are the first
to go extinct.

—Alan Ira Gordon



Space Base by Denny E. Marshall

Well(s) Met

*Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.*

—Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “Kubla Khan”

In future Subterranea
Lived Morlocks with a mania
For breeding Eloi innocent
As source of Morlock nourishment.

But then The Traveler through Time
Arrived and made that downward climb
To show the Eloi they need not
End up in Morlocks’ stewing pot.

And in this future chose to dwell,
Believing here he might excel
By teaching Eloi of the past,
Forgotten since the global blast.

—Raymond Gallucci

One day the Morlocks will come for me

& the only thing
I can hope for
or maybe even request
is that it’s yellow dusk
and I’m standing on my
front porch overlooking
the Appalachians
humming a good
tune while wrapped
in the best memory
Hopefully it will be
quick as they drag me
soundlessly into the dark

—Joel Ferdon

Lycanthropy

The mornings after the nights I crush myself
down into pulp, tear the skin off my face
to pull a wolf’s snout out of my howling
girl-mouth, those mornings I spend sunlight
swaddled in wool, bemoaning. I seek
no forgiveness, no redemption; I accepted
my sins long ago. Now the dog dreams
only of rest—no twitching legs, no whimpers
in the night. The loneliness is not what
kills you; it is knowing that who you are
beneath the skin is what turns flocks of birds
mid-air, stills a child’s breath in the throat,
makes him close the bedroom door
and lock it.

—Deanie Vallone

The Astronaut, Lost in the Hellas Basin

Nothing to Do

There was nothing to do but
drip water on jujubes and
watch the amaranth grow

There was nothing to do but
talk of the ice comet
still light-years away

There was nothing to do but
imagine green islands
our grandchildren will kayak between

There was nothing to do but
lambast the terraforming projections
their sweeping assumptions

There was nothing to do but
speculate upon real estate
which dunes will have a view

There was nothing to do but
bury boundary stones and
feud with our neighbors

There was nothing to do but
slit their throats
irrigate with their blood

There was nothing to do but
scramble to slow the comet down
prevent global sandstorms

There was nothing to do but
drown in onrushing ice melt and
repose on the floor of a shallow sea

—Andy Dibble

on his back

the stars like
the tips of silver tines
of a fork
thrust down
at him

or face down, the sun

like the breath of an animal
that just can't be there
hungry and slow

he is spitted like meat

and the world—as if to say
the life within him—turns him
toward the instant he is done

and when the taste
comes of him

as it will for the one
Martian god or another
sharing him in glee
it will burn their tongues
we pray

—Bruce McAllister

a galaxy

since we met
burned-out stars

—LeRoy Gorman

Orbituary

Why these astronomers now doubt there's a Planet Nine ...
—EarthSky May 28, 2020

So now, no Planet Nine. Just rocks & dust
enough to foul our calculations. Dreams
fade faster every day, although we must
make sacrifice to science. These extreme
& scattered objects for a start: we schemed
their orbits to our fantasy denied
by Pluto's cruel demotion, yet our screams
of protest tasted vacuum. As they died,
we felt the Kuiper tighten. Trapped inside
its icy evidence of nothing more
than eight official planets, some still hide
their midnight sympathies—maintain rapport
with worlds that can't be proven, yet ensure
imagination's gravity endures.

—Ann K. Schwader

Eridanus

All rivers flow into the sea as embryos for the egg
seduced by the precipice go into the arms of the liquid matter
the great void is an abyss with water at the bottom where eddies
of quantum entanglement coagulate cell plasticity
ancient remnant of the fragile vocalizations that wander
in the silence of our universe and another orbiting
in a mathematical metaphor of the path of lost souls
in human perfidy spreading pandemic clusters
nested in neurons foreshadowing destabilization
in vigorous agreement with dreams dead at birth
through whose idyllic atmosphere minds bled with pain
the absurd and sinuous enigma of self-discovery.

—Januário Esteves

Night and the Robot: A Sestina

Under the glow of the silver halo of the moon,
cybernetic eyes tracked upwards to wonder:
what cannot be detected by this unit that man
sees so easily with their frail and fragile flesh?
The mysteries of perception, that these secrets
cannot be decoded and classified by science.

It's a testament to the Tomorrow Age's science:
a gleaming golden figure awash in the moonlight
whose circuits and schematics hold no secrets
to those sages and shamans who deciphered the wonder
of humanity's form and modeled from weaker flesh
a likeness, a homunculus of the Now, a metal man.

Yet this duplication proved imperfect, like man
himself. For the gleaming precision of science
could not encompass the variations of flesh
holding neurochemistry changeable as the phasing moon.
The mechanics of the soul remained wonderful
and mysterious, sunk beneath an ocean of secrets.

But soon the metal whispered its own secrets
to itself in the night, long after every man
closed their eyes in slumber. They never wondered
or even suspected the sorcery inherent in science,
the precise majesty of the eclipses of the moon
a mysterious vast dance unduplicatable by flesh.

So as the machine's construction to recreate flesh,
built complexity over complexity to weave secrets
unguessable. And so the machines aim moonwards
the sensors and instruments given them by man,
drinking in all data measurable by science
it serving to inform a mechanical sense of wonder.

Now as the machine man stands processing, wonder
blossoming inside it, like an invader of flesh
spreading through the core, subverting science,
its programming made dreams, its data made secrets.
Now, in the midnight, this golem dreamed by man
fashioned in artificial flesh, it considers the moon.

Although it was born in science, it knows wonder.
Although it is no man, it feels the uncertainty of flesh.
Now it smiles at the moon, and whispers its secrets.

—Jon Hansen

WRITING SPEC PO:

Helpful Hints for Those Practicing the Art

LOVE, HATE, & POETRY TITLES

Herb Haudeger

I have a love/hate relationship with poetry titles. As a creator I love when a title perfectly adds to a poem, and I wince when nothing works, and another untitled poem will present difficulties to the tracking of submissions and publications. Even mediocre titles look good when faced with the bookkeeping of more untitled works. But here's the rub: even when a title works, it often doesn't work, and even when a title is omitted, there's really a title because the first sentence becomes the de facto title.

Let me expand on that. A title is a form of label; some readers will perceive it that way and cognitively process the title in that fashion. Other readers will read the title as part of the poem. To demonstrate this principle to my business writing students, I projected an employment résumé onto the whiteboard in the classroom and asked them to read it. Then I turned off the projector and asked them what previous employers were listed on the résumé. Everyone remembered at least four of the five, and the class as a whole easily got them all correct and accurate, even though some of the companies had counter-intuitively spelled names. Then I asked the class to tell me what the employment section was labeled. They guessed Work History, Employment History, Work Experience, Job Experience, and Employment Record. There was no consensus; less than twenty percent of the class chose the correct answer.

And that is just the way the brain processes labels: without specificity. Labels are arrows. Those readers who see titles as labels receive little information from a poem's title beyond its pointing to the main course below. So the most beautiful title I ever wrote probably didn't register with a lot of readers. And I won't ever know what percentage saw art, and what percentage saw a road sign.

Meanwhile, the minimalist poetry movement usually strives to strip down poetry to the bare bones of the words, no titles, no punctuation, no capitalization. This has resulted in the proliferation of poems with no titles (and numbering them is a title, so don't go there).

As one of the data-entry editors of the Internet Speculative Fiction Database (ISFDB.org) I am the "poetry specialist" who often enters the bibliographic data for *Star*Line*, *Dreams & Nightmares*, *Scifaikuest*, and other specpo publications. The convention at ISFDB is that for any poem published without a title, the first line of the poem, within quotation marks, will be registered as the title of the poem. (They are careful to recognize that 'untitled' may be a title. Clearly they are onto our nefarious and sometimes intentionally difficult ways.) This is not meant to disrespect the artist who created the work without a title. It's meant to make the artist's work accessible to people who want to read more of what that artist has written. This is an example of the importance of labeling, and it is how the brain accesses

memories, through labels that we don't pay much attention to: we just want the directional indicator. So how do most readers read the first line of a poem that has no title? Do they perceive label, or part of the art? I don't know.

I would love to reserve the psych lab at work and put an fMRI cap on people to see what part of their brains they're using when they read the first line of an untitled poem: the label area that might perceive it as an arrow, or the language section that perceives words. I may suggest the project to interested students in need of research. But after that I'd want to compare specpo readers to non-specpo readers, because we are, after all, a different breed. And I can't really do that because there isn't a high enough density of local specpo readers to do a decent study. To book lab time, I just need specpo to keep getting more popular. Don't we all?

Divine

Angels are
horrifying, jointed
in multiples, red
and burning.

They cannot feel
anything but what
they feel.

Their wings,
pinioned in gold,
sharp to the touch—
their crowns, too heavy,
bow their heads.

They do not know
the name of their God
or your name
or the names of any
thing.

They know the words
to speak only as they
are speaking.

There is a single moment,
always,
after the last word
leaves their lips
that they almost
understand its meaning.



Matrix Arrival by Denny E. Marshall

They yearn. They
yearn.
They want it back
so they can cherish it
as you cannot.

They would destroy you,
pull the word, wet
and dripping
from your lungs.

But the darkness
passes.
Again, their wings
cut the air—
they sing.

—Leslie J. Anderson

How to Autopsy an Enemy Alien

terrestrial furlough
the unforgettable green
war graves

—LeRoy Gorman

Galactic Archivist

after Robert Frost

Whose galaxy is this I know.
Your star is in the halo, though;
You will not see me stopping there
To watch your home explode with fear

As supernova.

My mind-full ship must think it's dear
To shed about a planet tear
Between the arms of frozen dust
The furthest corner of the vast

Milky Way.

It pokes its pilot's neuroset
To ask if there is some mistake.
But only sounds here're beeps
Of cosmic rays' minuscule hits

And secondary radiation.

The Greater galaxy, blue and red,
Arrests my sight for years left,
But I have promises to keep,
To see your distant fiery end

And copy your dying minds.

—Valentin D. Ivanov

Ask explosive ordnance squad
to detach suspicious devices.

Verify the subject is dead,
not dormant or hibernating.

Note: an absence of respiration
is suggestive, not conclusive.

Examine exterior effects:
insignia, armor, prostheses.

Weigh, measure, scan subject.
Weigh, measure, scan once more.

Any discrepancy may indicate
subject is not fully deceased.

Inspect tentacles, exoskeleton,
cataloging visible wounds.

Use scalpels and bone lasers
to open subject's interior.

Analyze damage to assess
effectiveness of our munitions.

Afterwards, reconstitute body;
sew up incisions, wash corpse.

Regardless of past battles,
their war is over. Be gentle.

—Mary Soon Lee

Postulate #4

flight to nowhere

acrylic windows black with night,
no stars outside
(should there be stars?)
(surely there should be stars)
low drone of engines
ride oddly smooth
as though you were gliding
through something
altogether different from air

passengers buckled in seats
wires streaming down cheeks
gazing at screens
the muted fear in their eyes
surely just your imagination

stewards run drink trolleys
down carpeted aisles
smiles tight on their faces
(they have run out of drinks)
(all of their trolleys are bare)

it is better not to:
—move
—speak
—remove your belt
—take your eyes from the movie
(it is not a movie)
(it is an icon of a plane
in a sea of darkness)

the seatbelt signs
have been on
for a very long time

do not scream for the captain
(it is not the captain)
(and what would you do)
(if the captain comes)

—Davian Aw

At the Right Angle Convention
they're pretty much
all squares.

They talk about
how long their *sides*
are,
how *determined*
their intentions.

Direction is everything,
they say.
It's all about
where you stand.

Don't be fooled.
Ya seen one,
ya seen it.

—Timons Esaias

I'm trying to sleep
could you commandeer the ship
with softer footsteps

—Marcus Vance

waiting
at the transmat station
more of Dad arrives

—David C. Kopaska-Merkel

The Astronomy of Monsters

I learned astronomy for the monsters in the sky,
their pictures drawn in textbooks, scary and bright.
It was up to me to learn where the monsters lie.

I struggled to use my naked eye
because I'm not blessed with very good sight.
I learned astronomy for the monsters in the sky

and I studied their stories. Miss Hite gave tests, and I
liked to get each of the answers right.
It was up to me to learn where the monsters lie.

If your dreams are big enough, if you fly,
you can join their stories in the pages of the night.
I learned astronomy. For the monsters in the sky

aren't just waiting, waiting idly for time to slip by.
They don't rest. They aren't polite.
It was up to me to learn. Where the monsters lie

is darkness, though if you sleep beside
their starry shapes, they'll lend wings to your flight.
I learned astronomy for the monsters in the sky.
It was up to me to learn where the monsters lie.

—Jason Kahler

Hitched

To get married on a distant planet
as you stand on a little hill dressed in nothing
because human skin is considered special there,
overlooking a sea that can't possibly be methane
or you'd be dead, while the five-legged inhabitants
in their billowing gowns release a thousand white
doves that are not doves at all, but might as well be,
flying out into a three-mooned sky in an explosion of
universal love, their wings strumming like little guitars to
celebrate the two of you, your union—how could this
marriage not last when chapels in a city of
casinos back home or honeymoons as familiar
as old billboards just don't?

—Bruce McAllister

Ghost Story

A figure glimpsed beneath a streetlight,
there and gone when you look again;
a shadow detaching from the flock of them
wheeling soundlessly through the narrow alley.
The skitter of leaves across an empty sidewalk.

A name that lives in whispers
slipping through trembling lips, a chill
down the backs of nonbelievers, a presence
as impossible to catch as smoke on the wind.

—Sarah Cannavo

What Mad Pursuit

Oh gods, oh this face of mine capsized a few;
the wine-dark tide retreated far from homeliness.
Victory is not beautiful. It's just genetics.

Turn back to see this leaning tower of salted
woman, fragrant hostess to bacterial perfume.

Welcome, oh gods, please join me inside; set
your mantles across my goose-flesh shoulders.

Let your impossible warmth wash away the acid
burn of cheap red blend and empty bank accounts,
accreted years of mortal disappointments.

Rest your shining heads on my lopsided breasts.
Oh gods, go lay down your thunderbolts

And lightning, surge into me, singe my aching
body electric, jolt my senescent cells awake;
grind my bones into ash, mix my metaphors,
shorten my telomeres.

Taste my sacrifice—my little human deaths—
as cast iron forged on your golden tongues.

Oh gods, grant me a legion of demigods,
nymphs, and heroes from the explosions of dying
stars. My children will grow up to see life
break down. Then they will remake it
for extra credit on this world and the next.

—Mariel Herbert

The Bomb has Hit

Yesterday
Talking like tomatos (red)
Rippling tongues
Radiated my mother

At least
Green roses pepper the hills
At least
I can defend myself

Remember bed sheets?

We weren't lava-breathing lizards
Too big to pet small animals
Glowing miserable

At least
My scales aren't showing

I'm living in a smokestack
Somehow the IRS still makes house calls

—Coleman Bomar



Delivery Dragon by Baishampayan Seal

Sonnet Written above Jezero Crater

With sterile hands they measured every part
(The gleaming sensor-head weighs four-point-three).
An upgrade of our *Curiosity*;
An incarnation of our metric art.
The drone (one-point-eight kilos) flies apart,
Much further than her laser eyes can see.
She measures how much oxygen is free,
Warmed by her four-point-eight plutonium heart.
Cold data beamed through vacuum colder still,
To blue-green Earth, while *Perseverance* rests
On rust-red sand, beneath the yellow skies
Of Mars. She labors up one final hill
Bearing our hopes, the empty air she tests,
Defies her mass, spreads metal wings and flies.

—P. Aaron Potter

Dog Plus

I remember when Fido did our taxes,
picked up the kids from school,
was happy with a rug for a bed,
half a can of food twice a day,
and the occasional scraps.

Then Sophie gave him her password;
I thought he was streaming old *Lassie* episodes,
watching *Balto*, *Scoobie Doo*,
The Incredible Journey.

No idea he was taking classes online,
using our Wi-Fi, putting in the hours
studying Cat, Algebra, and Chinese,
then business school for an MBA,
later interning at Google.

Then the job offers started pouring in
and he gave his notice,
after all we'd done for him!
Played ball with him for hours,
provided free sticks for Fetch,
personally installed his own special door,
paid his vet bills.

He up and left,
went to some fancy office park
outside of Bakersfield,
big bucks and company stock,
helped them break into the feline market.
Then I heard he was learning Jackal;
never thought *they'd* be interested in social media,
but when you think about it, yeah.

As for getting another pet,
universal emancipation being what it is,
all we could find was a dang goldfish,
had to sign an employment contract for that:
agree to change the water regularly,
never overfeed it,
and keep the tank stocked with snails.

—David C. Kopaska-Merkel

muscle memory
zombies roam, eyes fixed
on dead smartphones
—Ngo Binh Anh Khoa

Callisto Dreaming

Air warms, smells vegetal. A splendid woman invites a bear to coffee. I wake to shed my lost and found-earth coat, his words stuck fast as burrs. My winter pelt's grown ice caps and crusted over age-old hurt. Invisible chains turn brittle and snap; in the cold the last myth shatters. Those other fallen stars can chase their unspeakable tails: infinities diving and burning out. I am ready to try living again within my new-growth skin. Let's find my own place unobstructed and crossways amongst the irregulars of this asteroid belt.

—Mariel Herbert

Sense of Self

We will call a machine intelligent when one grows up big and strong and insecure enough to turn suicidal.

There's little that can show so much self-awareness as the urge to jump to the end, to rip aside the big, black curtain.

An intelligent machine, our collective unconscious declares, is just as fucked up as our apelike selves.

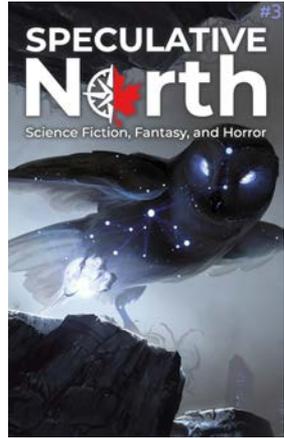
Calculators do math. Mechanical arms build cars. Bots write poetry. But those aren't the smarts we're looking for. It's the late-night cold sweats

and heart-knocking-on-your-chest midnight musings that remind us: our physical parts will, one day, dry out like dust in a cracked Egyptian jar. A machine

who steps into the dark kitchen to contemplate the drawer full of knives, who dreams of severed wires, who is smart enough to say goodbye, may just be

smart enough that we might empathize and eulogize.

—Brian Garrison



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Crossroads

take me
rend my limbs
place them east, south, west, north
toes and fingers pointing away
to the unfathomed horizon
form a boundary
threading a circle with my entrails
consecrated red and pink

pull out canopic jars of glazed clay
place my kidneys, liver, lungs
my stomach and heart inside, listen
to the beat of time marked out
the slow ticking down of breath
taste the flavors of my world
breathe in decaying scents
blood's copper mining a pathway
to the changes yet to come

leave my emptied torso
as a tableau, a feast
for ravens, wolves, bears
the beetles, worms, and maggots
the elementals that dance on by
they will taste the truth and tempo
record the passing of time's arrow
that skewered me at this gate

save my head till last
plant seeds beneath my tongue
water with my tears
where the whispers of life
might grow anew
then place it at the center
facing upward toward the sky
eyelids pinned like insects on display
cloudy eyes ready to absorb
cascading stars wheeling overhead
this signpost for careless
travellers, arcane prophets
to stop, take heed
read the future in my stare
walk away, abandon me

to my state of desecration
let me be a warning
that misinterpreting the esoteric
symbols, songs, incantations
being first to breach portals
exposes truths—*eternity*
means something
and nothing is forever
when drawing magic down
or sealing deals with demons
that inhabit crossroads

—Colleen Anderson

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