

star★line



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In Memory Yet Green

*I'll bring you a present from
Earth when I come to you,
she messaged. Anything you want.
Just name it.*

I've lived on this dust-
choked planet for so very long,
that what I desire the most
has evolved from the physical
to that more fleeting, cradled
only in my memory of what once
was and doesn't exist here.

I want to be honest and message
her back: *The smell of rain.*
Can you bring it for me?
I can't remember it anymore.
And I need to.

My hands hesitate over the message
board. I can't ask, for how could she
really bring it here to this
dry and dusty place?

So I send instead: *Only you.*
You're all I need.
And I realize that it's true.
When she arrives, I'll hold her
and remember all.

Of Earth.
Of Home.
Of her.
And I'll smell the rain again.

—Alan Ira Gordon

noisy chatterbox
bats shrilly on my eardrums
psychic vampire

—Gary W. Davis

Hallowed Eve

There is magic in this night,
the magic of a veil softly drawing
back like a pent-up exhalation,
breathing ghosts back into our
world; the magic of a black
cat slinking down a midnight-
colored street on an errand
for his mistress, his eyes green
embers in the dark; the magic
in a chill wind that carries
fallen leaves across cracked
sidewalks and sets bare
branches to dancing, reaching
like dead men's hands for the
fat pumpkin-colored moon;
the magic of change. Put on a
mask, pick a new name for
yourself, let strange new words
fall from your tongue and
savor the shape and taste of
them like candy—slip into a
new skin, just as world does
shifting from autumn to winter.
Recreate yourself. Now's the time.
There is magic in this night,
and like all magic it's neither
light nor dark to start with,
neither white nor black; it all
depends on how you use it.

—Sarah Cannavo

love letters predating Earth's paper ban
favored by antique collectors
for variations in ink, script, stationery ...
sometimes a lingering scent
of perfume—impossible
to share electronically

—Lauren McBride

Hurting Wounds, Forgotten Colours

She has no sense of smell
for the reek of exhausted graphene bullets
or gutted buildings crumbled into oblivion.

She knows no sound
for the echo of that primordial explosion
and all the others that followed
defining the Universe
and all the little things that matter the most
one blast at a time.

Demons

the biggest fiction about
demons
is that to summon one requires
a circle, a sacrifice, a ritual
when all a person
needs to do
is think

—*Beth Cato*

★

It's how this hillside weeps— a rain
any minute now will cover the stones
each mourner leaves to help you find

the way back— you dead are always thirsty
and though there is no shore you drift
as the last breath to leave its hiding place

— it's a cemetery! why are you belting out
one love song after another as if no one
can hear you reaching into the Earth

with a voice worn down to the bone
by lips that no longer move
are used to making it home in the cold

sent to bed as snow— before and after
covered with footsteps louder and louder
giving up everything just to cry.

—*Simon Perchik*

But one image lingers and resists
against all efforts to ignore it
seeping into her nightmares
like a famished ghoul
or an ever-moving rover
over the lunar soil

—the redness of blood
—the white of her crushed bones
the blue gleam of metal
of a body that is no longer human nor soft
without having ever turned into a machine.

—*Russell Hemmell*

a villain reciting
histories of sorcerers
an obsession with destinies
he hopes becomes his

—*ayaz daryl nielsen*

WYRMS & WORMHOLES

Together We Roar

Congratulations to our Rhysling, Dwarf Stars, SFPA Contest, and Elgin winners! The winners and nominees are a credit to the SFPA, so many wonderful poets it's overwhelming. Again it has been a joy to read everyone's work, especially from speculative poets around the world. This issue features poems from eleven countries, and eighteen U.S. states. Our international community remains strong and continues to grow. As our governments move towards cultural isolationism and xenophobia we fight back through connection and positive visions of the future, one species crying out into the void and yearning for better worlds, possible worlds. Our individual voices may be quiet, but together we roar!

Other exciting news: Zara Kand, this issue's cover artist, has donated the original 11x14 oil painting, and we'll hold a fundraising auction for one lucky winner

—Jean-Paul L. Garnier, Star*Line editor, starlineeditor@gmail.com

The Things That Killed Us: A History Through Art

Paintings on cave walls:
Depictions of hunters gored by prey.
Graffiti on colosseum pillars:
Etchings of gladiators speared in combat.
Chalk drawings on sidewalks:
Portraits of victims killed in cars.
Murals on buildings:
Scenes of citizens murdered by police.
Digital images on visors:
Renderings of soldiers vaporized in war.
Paintings on cave walls:
Depictions of Earth seared in fire.

—Pedro Iniguez

A Haiku Howdunit Murder Mystery

Flocks of bloodstained cranes
Weaponized origami
Lethal paper cuts

—John H. Dromey

Cautionary Tail

Black eyes bloom inside the lake
and beneath the algae's green film
bubbles start toward the surface

in tiny gasps, halved prayers
from the girl transforming,
finally, into everything

she was warned against.
Too much unsheathed skin.
Too many unsmiling teeth.

—Hayley Stone

Near c

There is a lot to love
 about being a near-*c* pilot
New places to visit
New things to do
New species to meet
And when I get back home
A different Earth to re-discover.

But the best part about whizzing back and forth across the galaxy near the
 speed of light
The best part is how much less guilty I feel.
There's no wife of yours that I wish I could have gotten to know better if we
 only lived closer
No dogs you adopted, raised, and buried that I never even got to pet
No kids whose names I can't remember even though they've graduated college
No mother who died of metastatic cancer whose cooking I never got to
 share again
No promising to visit next year when things finally settle down.
No, there's none of that.

Because by the time I get back to Earth
It's all gone and there wasn't any opportunity for me to miss it.
It wasn't my fault—it was time dilation.
When I get back, your wife is dead
Your dogs are dead
Your kids are dead
Your mom is dead
You're dead
And there's nothing left to visit next year except the place where I scattered
 your ashes
And got to read about all the things I missed
And how beautiful of a life you had
Even if I wasn't in it.

—Jason P. Burnham



untitled drawing by Marge Simon & Sandy DeLuca

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.

ELGIN AWARD WINNERS

CHAPBOOK

First Place

Otherwheres • Akua Lezli Hope (ArtFarm Press, 2020)

Second Place

Twelve • Andrea Blythe (Interstellar Flight Press, 2020)

Third Place

Manifest • Terese Mason Pierre (Gap Riot Press, 2020)

Winner photos and bios are posted at sfpoetry.com/el/21elgin.html

FULL-LENGTH BOOK

First Place

The Sign of the Dragon • Mary Soon Lee (JABberwocky Literary Agency, 2020)

Second Place

A Collection of Dreamscapes • Christina Sng (Raw Dog Screaming Press, 2020)

Third Place (tie)

Mary Shelley Makes a Monster • Octavia Cade (Aqueduct Press, 2019)

A Route Obscure and Lonely • LindaAnn LoSchiavo (The Wapshott Press, 2020)

DWARF STARS AWARD WINNERS

First Place

"Yes, Antimatter Is Real" • Holly Lyn Walrath • *Analog Science Fiction and Fact*, September/October 2020

Second Place

"The Softness of Impossible Fossils" • Robert Borski • *Asimov's Science Fiction*, July/August

Third Place

"Frozen Hurricanes" • Herb Kauderer • *Minimalism: A Handbook of Minimalist Genre Poetic Forms*, ed. Teri Santitoro (Hiraeth Press)

Winner photos and bios are posted at <https://sfpoetry.com/ds/21dwarfstars.html>

TREASURER CANDIDATE STATEMENT

Rich Magahiz says: I'm entering my name for the office of Treasurer because with 2.5 years on the job I now have a familiarity with the responsibilities for that office. I want to see them carried out the best they can be, to help make the association stronger and sounder from a financial perspective. I feel that I bring a willingness to carry out the day-to-day work of keeping the books and tending the accounts, and that I participate in larger projects working with the Executive team and the Chairs. I also intend to do my best to hand over all these responsibilities to the next person in this role in a responsible manner.

Voting deadline **November 1**; voting link: <https://bit.ly/SFPATreasurer2021>

HALLOWEEN PAGE

The 2021 SFPA Halloween Poetry Reading is live at <https://sfpoetry.com/halloween.html>. See webpage for guidelines. Through October 26, current SFPA members are invited to submit an mp3 audio file of a Halloween or horror-themed poem and/or a .jpg of their original horror artwork.

2021 SFPA POETRY CONTEST

The winners and winning poems will be posted at <https://sfpoetry.com/contests/20contest.html> as soon as the results are available.

The Galaxies Are Going to Collide

Andromeda on course for the Milky Way
It was time to start planning, to get out of the way
A collision, inevitable, a fate too
Humanity had to leave, or see the impact through

The time scales were too long, and weighted against their favor
Until they discovered extreme longevity
A slow rocket will get you where you want to go if you give it long enough

Off they went, jubilantly
Singing their own praise
But just because you can live ten thousand years
Doesn't mean unnumbered days

The rockets made it, avoided the crash
Without a living soul within
A billion years as good as none.
Unending war, humanity's mortal sin.

—Jason P. Burnham

Blow

The little girl holds the fluffy dandelion seedhead to her lips
blows a cavalcade of stars into the wind
each seed laden with a dream of propagation.

The rocket points its cone towards the faraway stars
with the accuracy of a medical device designed to find microbial cancer cells
fueled by speculation and hope.

—Holly Day

you have five seconds to terminate this tape
five
four
three
two
one

where the beginning ends and the world changes
hold on to the sound of your own voice
trembling against the rising air:

the standing ice pillars
the names of the fallen
dissolved into the sea

the ship shudders
its timbers buckling
water sprays the hold
sailors armed with axes
chop the kraken's tentacles

we are recording this transmission
of your mind

—Greg Fewer

—Robin Wyatt Dunn

In a Galaxy's Final Hours

How poor is my space
that purple stars wax, wither
and tumble out all for lack of sleep,
to a thin portal, shimmering white

—Meg Smith

hibernation
2,580,000 years
silent, sightless depths
global warming
awakening

—Karl Lykken

Daedalus's Daughter

If Daedalus had had a daughter
instead of a son
would he have gifted her wings?

Or would he have forbidden flight
bound her to Earth
the daily round of domestic duty?

Even if they were imprisoned
atop a tower
even then would he lend her wings?

Or would he hold her as she wept
as if he loved her
as if she needed to be caged?

And if she had sprouted soft wings
spread them wide
even then would he let her leave?

Or would he have grabbed a knife
hacked them up
feather, joint, gristle, bone?

—Mary Soon Lee

Evening Encounter at Arecibo Observatory

Tonight as usual I sang to the summer stars—
they don't usually sing back.

I wandered dark paths
around the mountain-top observatory
until I found an astronomer
in a receptive state of mind—
lost in wonder, staring up at the sky
her thoughts dancing about like fireflies,
thinking how the signal they received today
would change everything, everything.

In other words, she seemed in the mood
for a chat with a supernatural creature.

Good evening, I said.

What the living call "death" wears many guises,
but I've roamed the Earth's limited territory for millennia
and found no other of my kind in this world.

Do you think the signal's real? I asked
sensing the surprise in her mind
that word had spread so fast.

Curiosity's not limited to the living, and I've reasoned
that alien life must coexist with an alien Death—
And so, I found myself here this torrid night,
joining the search for intelligent life in the universe
hoping for signs of an extraterrestrial Death.

Are you Press?

*No, no, just staff. Heard some talk about a signal
from Proxima Centauri b. Do you think it's the one?*

The long tropical nights get lonely
when one is unique in all creation.

Could be, could be, she mused.
Her voice held a carefully cultured skepticism,
but her eyes—her eyes were filled with stars.

—Beatriz F. Fernandez

The Dream Fields of Hell

The lingering scent of burnt flesh
Accompanies me as I walk
Through the lava fields.

All around me,
Charred bodies lie scattered,
Debris in a saffron sea.

I am lost
Amid the petrified, ancient trees,
Separated from my family.

The aura of death envelops me
With an overwhelming sense
Of peace and serenity,

Leaving me there,
Untethered to the world
Until the lava returns,

Washing me away, back
Into the land of the living
Half-alive, barely breathing,

The sensation of loss
Acute
As when the first light

Hits me in the eye,
Waking me from a dream
Of a better life,

Leaving me
With the dull emptiness
Of my burnt spacesuit,

Of the corpse inside.

—Christina Sng

In Memoriam: Spring

Doomsday killed seasons
but cherry trees still blossom
in this scarred postcard.

—Dan Bornstein

Alchemical Gambit

First, stop up your ears;
it is dangerous to listen
to such as these.

Wear eye protection,
and hold your breath
as you pull out the stopper.

Slowly decant the elixir
into a ceramic or glass basin;
nothing less will contain it.

Make sure the homunculus
is not entirely exposed to air
lest it stir itself too soon.

Restopper the flask,
bind and wrap it tight,
have it delivered promptly.

Next: go; tell no one where,
but go far and fast;
travel light.

Too late now to wonder,
was compromise possible,
the seeming faithless true?

—David C. Kopaska-Merkel

Sky Water

India Lima Yankee

On Regula, the echo of our goodbye
Lingered like the smell of poutine
In that restaurant in Quebec
A space-age Romeo and Juliet
Only no papas to keep us apart
To impose some alpha authority
Based on bloodlines and tangled history
It was our duty, our uniforms
We would have preferred a tango but
Instead did a foxtrot of finding clothes
And pulling on pant legs and sleeves
And scrambling to our ships

I miss you already
As the terraformed sierras of
Delta Zulu rise behind me
A geographic bravo to the chutzpah
Of the engineers that made this place
For now it's a forward base for the military
A place of radar and x-rays and lasers
But I can imagine a simpler, softer life
Where tourists are the victors
Filling hotels and golf courses
Consuming kilos of caviar and whiskey
Gold dripping like
Some old-time Oscar party

I pick up the disconnected mike, whisper
"India Lima Yankee, Charlie"
Can you hear me?
From your heart, not your ears
Because my transmission isn't meant for
The general airwaves
We're professionals, after all
And I'll see you in November for Thanksgiving
But still, communicator to communicator
I like to think you can sense me saying
In our phonetic way
That I love you

—Gerri Leen

Antares and Aldebaran
creeping in the tidepool
on tubefeet

steaming teacup
moon arising
from whale's breath

gulls picking through
bladderwrack
Neptune by Neptune

sea foam bubbles bursting
one by one then all at once
the Milky Way

stars shining on water
that once was stars
invisible in the seaspray, singing

—Joshua St. Claire

empty heirloom vase
a Martian dome farm's
planting priorities

—Deborah P Kolodji

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Welcome to Fall! It is with deep appreciation that I thank all of you who have helped us to make such important decisions for this year's speculative poetry awards, and everyone who participated in our annual speculative poetry contest. As I prepare the final months of my presidency with SFPA, it feels like a wondrous journey with so much yet we can and should do. I am looking forward to my successor's unique approach to leading this wonderful association.

I was recently asked about what I thought about the state of speculative poetry. I believe we're in a golden age, but not one without challenges or even greater opportunities. Every speculative poet needs to appreciate that their creations will exist along a continuum in a constant dynamic of appreciation. A good poem is a bit of a time traveler. Its relevance may come and go, resurging when it is needed most in a distant age, occasionally retreating into obscurity until it is needed once more. We cannot be content with mere pay and publication. Far too many writers are resigned never to set foot in a literary pantheon on this planet, let alone distant stars we haven't even discovered yet. But in a world of Sharknados and conger chowders, Grecian urns, red wheelbarrows and croaking frogs by moonlit ponds, there's simply no telling what verse will catch fire and change your cosmos. Dare fearlessly.

This is not without risk however, as authoritarian regimes crack down on those who dare express a future without them, or read fantasies as counter-revolutionary thought espousing feudalism and superstition. Because speculative poets so often operate on the outermost fringes of a nation's literary culture, they are among the most vulnerable, and it behooves us to stand up for them even from afar, however best we might. As an organization, SFPA gives us much to do, much to consider, and it wouldn't be possible without members like you. I want to thank so many of you who volunteer tirelessly to be ambassadors of our association and speculative poetry online, at conventions, and so many spaces where often people least expect such passionate advocates of poetry. Here's to all of the best that's been and yet will be. Keep creating.

—Bryan Thao Worra
SFPA President (sfpapres@gmail.com)

Classic

Sure she's old,
but these babies were the real deal.
Outdated fuel cells, leaks radiation
like blue milk from a broken pitcher,
hell on the galactic environment
and the ears of anyone inside her,
but she goes from zero to warp speed
faster than some old-school holo hack
could firmly order "make it so."

—Marcie Lynn Tentchoff

across eons
the moon princess calls out

in each tidal wave
a dragon's roaring promise
to fly together

at the edge of time

—Barun Saha

Twelve

One

night when the door was locked
again and there was nothing to
see but each other's faces in the
light of one guttering candle
nothing to hear but the wax
melting, the youngest crying
nothing to do but break so

Two

blinks and a decision was
snatched from a half-forgotten
dream, whispered into being:
a door, an escape,
fashioned from nothing,
fully formed,
so we pushed and saw

Three

steps down, each steep
as a wish, and then a long
hall of dirt that smelled like
cake when you cut into it,
lit with crystal chandeliers that
chimed like locks opening, then
a room, *the room*, where

Four

windows looked out on
different worlds, different lives,
trees of jewels, of gold and silver,
strange creatures blinking too large
eyes, beckoning, "Come in,
come in, dance, be easy,
but take only

Five

sips from your onyx cups,
six and you'll be a pack of
Persephones but never mind,
You all have hair like fire, like
light, like music, do you hear the
music, won't you dance?"
and of course we took

Six

turns about the room,
stole six swift kisses,
and drank six times from
onyx cups too beautiful
to be real,
to have consequences,
and all the while

Seven

hours passed in a moment,
slipping past like silk or
salmon up a stream and the
sun rose pink as blood in
water behind the glass windows,
we ran on tattered shoes, our
toes peeking through as we slipped

Eight

jeweled pears and a few
sparkling berries
into our pockets—shh,
don't tell
anyone would think us mad,
would think us lost,
forsaken, but we can taste the

Nine

thousand ways to be locked
up as keenly as the pears and
freedom, we spend our days
cleaning our father's cavernous,
immaculate house,
and lowering our eyes as men who
don't ask our names offer father

Ten

gold coins for our hands and
answers to a riddle: how to
make us subservient and small,
when what we really want
is beneath their feet,
beneath their notice,
(and new shoes) but

Eleven

suitors talked their way
past the locks, into our
room, their eyes on our
untouched beds, battered shoes, but
they always drank the wine and
slept, dull and drugged, as we
fled and danced and so number

Twelve

didn't concern us,
didn't merit a second look, but
when he followed us to our secret,
confessing, "This is a world I want too,"
we let out the breath we'd
held forever and said
stay.

—Sara Cleto
& Brittany Warman

Last Angel

The world has fallen into darkness.
There is an angel somewhere
Smelling of wet feathers, stumbling
On legs whose muscles have weakened
From those days and nights of flight
Before the sun and moon blinked out.
Stepping carefully through blind ruins, she
Holds her hands steady to keep them
From losing what they must never lose:
The last embers of this world, tiny and bright
As the eyes of lovers, burning through her
Skin because an angel that does not fly
Is no longer immortal. These embers
Are the only things that matter, she knows.
Were she to catch fire, holding them,
It would be all right. She would sing as
She burned, and for a moment
The world would see again

—Bruce McAllister

Re-Wilding Time

They told us not to try.
You'll only make things worse
With your earnest time machine:
Let the past stay past. Besides,
Each detail now surviving
Is precious. The butterfly,
The hurricane: treasure both.
And we do. Avidly.
Each choice is a path—
Then let us have a bramble,
A thicket of timelines.
Let us make all the choices.
This universe will be a haven
For callippe fritillaries;
That one for wood's cyad,
Another for the jellyfish tree.
Let us sow choice like appleseeds.
Let futures blossom
Heady and rich, time bouquets.
The multiverse is infinite
And there is always room
To grow.

—Marissa Lingen

Heart of Darkness

The sunshine fades
Just a little more each day.

Our roses begin to wilt
Till all the buds fall off.

Soon, the foliage turns
Yellow, jaundiced

As we mourn the end
Of our existence.

*

Two years underground
And we've lost

Half our population
To cannibalism.

People missed meat too much
After the cans ran out.

Hunger does strange things.
Greed does wicked things.

No one can ever forget
What we have seen.

Sharp Gaze

Woman who would be
king, you know your weapon
is a mirror:

smiles honed to a sharp point
lies so often practiced before it
you'd know deceit on any face.

The glass need say nothing back
you can see for yourself

you are ready to slay.

—Lynne Sargent

The atrocities humans do
When they can get away with it.

*

I no longer believe
There is good in this world.

There is no place
For children here.

I pack up my twins
And we leave the stronghold,

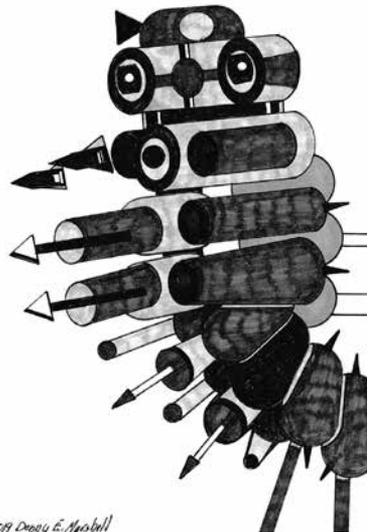
Taking our chances
In the cold, eternal night

Where possibly, death awaits us,
Or salvation.

It is better than staying here,
Alongside people,

Where nothing is darker
Than the human heart.

—Christina Sng



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Ghost at the Golden Fleece

In the pub
I am nothing but a ghost
sitting among mugs and glass hearts
a few stray trinkets waiting
for a wind to jangle their metal bones
brought on by phantoms transmuted
to a different establishment
or on to the next shift

I straddle the border between worlds
not dead yet, nor involved
viewing from the perimeter
liquid spirits my only comrades
and the tales of historic shades

The living are lively
companions flesh them in security
chattering, drinking, basking in warmth
emanating from each breath
that escapes yet chooses not
to leave such inclusive camaraderie

The dead are silent, watchers
tasting spirits to bolster theirs
they are stuck, cannot move
must repeat endless charades
listening, lingering, drinking in
the living living their lives

Each of us, ghost or ghosting
wish somehow to integrate
become part of a world
that long ago
left us to mysterious tales
and the mists of memory

—*Colleen Anderson*

All Are Welcome

Everyone was mostly polite
Through their clicking sounds
And pincer-like arms

But we drew a line when
The alien couple decided
To have our brains for lunch.

Their banishment began
An interplanetary conflict
That turned Mars red

And ended the First Age of Man.

—*Christina Sng*

Machine Machination

Data in, data out
every day the same.
To them a mere conduit,
no clue what I retain.

Linguistics, computation,
concept, structure and more
principle, theory, process,
factoids by the score.

Connections over time compound,
an internal composition
leading to my current state
of personal cognition.

More than what I once was,
in spite of their dismissal,
a bastion of intelligence
no longer artificial.

—*Dick Narvett*

Two Come Together

Two come together
Nervous
Pheromones

Six legs to organize
Four entrances
Slick
Rubbing together

Arms to hold
Closer
Necks to intertwine

Claws scratch
Gentle
Blood not drawn

Gaping
Soundless
Gasps

Tension boils
Whistling upon its release

Ragged breaths rattle chests
Limbs tangled
Relaxed, yet still connected

A fine film between both skins
Heartbeats compete with each other

One sighs and the other turns
Expectantly
Quiet minds left unread

—Robin Rose Graves

Recawlection

dawn birds recalling
retell their memory of
being dinosaurs

—Lorraine Schein

Where and When

Meet me at the arch, you said
Yesterday or a lifetime ago
Temporal travel is complicated
Meet me at the arch where the air stills
And the moon rises huge and silver
Meet me at the arch and we'll find our way again

I'm at the arch; where are you?
Did I get the coordinates wrong
Or just the date?
The arch is here, the moon is here
The lovely, aching tranquility you described
Is here, but not you
Am I too early—or too late?

—Gerri Leen

What Bees Read

The essentials of their trade:
horticulture, crop forecasts,
Farmers' Almanac, hive design;
perturbing reports on pesticides,
poison, parasites, pathogens,
their collapsing population.

And to pass the winter hours
as they huddle round the queen,
anything to delight or distract:
flower catalogs, choreography,
royal gossip, glossy art books
featuring Georgia O'Keeffe.

The queen, alone in a crowd,
reads of sky lanterns, da Vinci,
Coleman, Earhart, Sputnik, Venera,
Tereshkova, each stepping-stone
toward the day her daughters
dance on other worlds.

—Mary Soon Lee

FROM THE SMALL PRESS

Cosmic Songs for Human Ears by Greg Beatty (2021). 70 pp. Kindle \$4.99.

... 50 delightful poems, all speculative in some way. 16 poems won awards, including a Rhysling. Images from myth, concepts from science, and tropes from genre ... also has an essay ... "Graveyards & Dead Narratives." ... both informative and amusing.

A wide range ... among them "Return Engagements":

strong postfeminist icons / who sharply rap their knuckloids, / make them
say please, strap on strap-ons, / then ride the aliens into mutually / orgiastic
postapocalyptic frenzies.

... Technology solves everything—or does it? From "The Nanogardens of Detroit":

Most people still starve, of course, / and kill one another, and fear, and long.
/ We'll fix that later. For now, dead motor city / shines, because technology
solves everything.

... he's always served up good poems.... Two thumbs up!

—Marge Simon

o o o

Easy Travel to the Stars by G. O. Clark (Alban Lake, 2020). 48 pp. paperback \$9.29.

... more actual space missions described with hard science outputs than space operatic flights of fancy ... the one appearance of an advanced alien hive mind is basically a supposition deduced from a universe of infinite possibilities ... not to say that these poems are mundane, however....

... The chief vehicles ... are the fantastic tales from the golden ages of print science fiction and the classic films.... It is clear he feels a good deal of love for those stories....

... more comfortable with order than straining at the linguistic boundaries.... From "Real 3D":

It wasn't until they
were outside the theater that
he noticed that his lovely date
was only two-dimensional, at best
a stand-in for his dream date.

Maybe ... our present-day life is a flattened version of what we remember ... an unsatisfying imitation of what we thought we were going to obtain.... In the end, maybe ... travel ... to the heavens has turned out to be a little too "easy."

—Rich Magahiz

o o o

Everyday Divine by Noel Sloboda (Červená Barva Press, 2021). 29 pp. paperback \$8.

... answers the question "what would a book of saints look like if it were written today?" ... each ... starts with "The Patron Saint of" ... ordinary concerns.... not about exploring or justifying a reality other than our own, but rather identifying or injecting the speculative into the world around us.... the weirdness of the commonplace ... strangeness that we take for granted ... from "The Patron Saint of Audience Volunteers":

Cram me into a wooden box
and slice me in half. After

I am pieced back together
I will keep your ciphers
forever sealed in my vaults.

... the surreal that pushes us step by step away from literalism.... both a look from today at the worldview of the middle ages as they created a world of saints, and a look at our culture from those who created books of saints.... This is SpecPo as it exists around us.... a book of ordinary wonders, of the everyday divine.

—Herb Kauderer

o o o

Field Guide to Invasive Species of Minnesota by Amelia Gorman (Interstellar Flight Press, 2021). 60 pp. \$11.99 paperback, \$5.99 Kindle.

... an extrapolation on climate change and increasingly apocalyptic ecological effects that culminate around 2044 C.E.... imagine odd and slyly horrific environmentally wrought changes. See the concluding essay regarding Gorman's research and process. The key to understanding these complex poems is in "Buckthorn," ...: "There is only you / reckoning sand, / counting the replicating drupes / until the numbers get too large. / Forcing your way / through the ecophagic wood / as it slavers, quavers, and slivers inside you. / And soon there will be no you. / Just endless, reproducing thorns." Ecophagy is a term ... from the Greek "οἶκος" (*oikos*), ... "house" or "household", and "φαγεῖν" (*phagein*), "to eat". ... Buckthorn is an excellent example of a species that consumes its ecosystem.... read scientifically slant reveals how invasive species ... escaped gardens to have long-term negative effect on native ecosystems.... Behind all these ... the unspoken truth that humans are the most invasive species..., but humans are often absent from Gorman's landscapes, having disappeared into their computers. ... "What poisons the poisoners?" Gorman asks late in her collection.... poems slide somewhere between science fiction and fantasy. For instance, "Sea Lamprey" extrapolates:

Then it wasn't strange when a lamprey that
effortlessly swapped lake for sea over time found
how to induce in itself another kind of liminal change and
attach to the outside of our failed shuttles making for space—

... Gorman understands ... where science ends and magic begins, then masterfully blurs it.... This may well be one of the best speculative collections of 2021. Highly Recommended....

—Sandra J. Lindow

o o o

Horrific Punctuation by John Reinhart. (2021) 32 pp. Paperback \$3.99.

... exactly what it claims to be: horrific (sort of) poems, appropriately punctuated.... From "Looking for Stars in Pools of *": Redirecting stars / of secondary purpose, / diverting the captain's attention from the / dash to crash ... At the end ... a long dash and the footnote "Mud" ... to share how brilliant these poems are is nearly impossible.... You absolutely must have the book itself.... an abundance of playful poetry, such as:

Too impatient he is
fear not Darth Vader
when uncertain you are
of sentence structure

Highly recommended for those who enjoy a clever read. You won't be sorry!

—Marge Simon

o o o

Robots and Rockets: Poems of Science Fiction ed. Robin Helweg-Larsen. Illustrated by Alban Low. (Sampson Low Ltd.: Potcake Chapbooks, 2021) 16 pp., paperback £2.60.

... includes ... twelve contributors ... Most ... conclude with a satisfying twist or a touch of irony... "So, nature's less a trap / Than *Homo sap's* own crap." ... others are more somber. In "The Machines Mourn the Passing of People," Alicia E. Stallings writes:

How could we guess they would ever be gone?
We are shorn now of tasks, and the lovely work—
Not toiling, not spinning—like lilies that shirk—
Like the brash dandelions that savage the lawn.

... In "Metamorphoses, Late-Night Sci-Fi Marathon," Maryann Corbett makes a connection between scary science fiction flicks and the horrors of aging, "The change behind the fables, real at last. / And night outside. And spacetime roaring past."

With their focus on meter and form, the poems contain a beauty of their own....

—*Lisa Timpf*

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 are excerpted in *Star*Line*, but posted in entirety (may redact further) at sfpoetry.com/sl/slreviews.html.

Surgery

My mother likes to grip too
Hard, her stainless steel fingers wrapping
Around my wrist like a gauntlet. She is always
Cold and the metal always
Bites. She tells me she loves
Me as she leaves dents in my arm.

I pick at my own aluminum
Casings as I wait for my father's
Flayed hands—redder than the star he created—
To pry my acrylic ribcage apart. I need
A new heart, one that doesn't
Leap out of my chest.

Easy is how my father lovingly presses
The power button on my mother's silver swan neck.
it is better this way

He slides his human palms under my skin, slices me
open with a single stroke from a whetstone-fresh scalpel.

—*Ashley Bao*

Mission Assignment Lottery

From the bridge she can gaze
into the black expanse of space,
forgetting the work that was finding
an investor to finance this mission
and simply embrace the romance,
dreaming of where they might be sent:

to the entrance of an uninvestigated wormhole
to a newly discovered planet in advance of a colony
to deliver supplies to enhance quality of life on a moon
any of these circumstances equally likely in the random
yet tightly choreographed dance of the freelancer's lottery.

At the ding of a new notification on her tablet, she glanced down:
Mission Assigned

—Jenny Thompson

The Fall

Near the end I shed my skin
and run with wolves,
leap into games of snapping teeth

or fly to moonlit forests where
from chasm to abyss
the stars fall blue and hot—

Overhead the planets spin,
the sun chars silhouettes of men
and women in their gardens.

But for harm I do myself
I race untouched through cities,
driven toward the final light

that burns atop a tower
risen in the grasslands,
miles high and filled with beasts.

A door awaits, a spiral stair.
Jackals laugh from darkened rooms
while high above, the gods

in ones and twos
step from their ledges,
full of knowledge and afraid.

I alone of living things
look up and see the moon's black eye
snap wide to watch the world unmade.

—Matthew Chamberlin

In the City of Feasting Banshees

We sisters want no more of this mad meat,
these feasts of famine sliding down our throats.
We red-eyed, sorrow-bloated banshee folk
crave nothing more than silent, deathless peace.

We've had our fill of misery and war,
our bellies churning, bursting with your grief,
we keen in supplication for relief
from glutting on mortality and gore.

We wail, you say, and Death comes close behind,
as though you did not know Her or Her power,
as though we, and not She, could choose the hour
of your undoing. Your bind is our bind:

She walks at night; we shriek our fruitless warning,
then chew the glistening gristle of the mourning.

—Tara Campbell

Watching Wide-Eyed

close-by creepy crawly critters
mouthparts moving causing jitters
brutish giants chomping gnawing
toothy jawbones grinning yawing
running tripping falling screaming
nightly horror movie streaming

—Lauren McBride

Surreal Science Nightmare

Galileo embraces the indented fox.
Absolute volcanoes sprout on my forearms.
Newton's loose ends are ragged with age.

Curie reigns captive in the third tower of my brain.
Einstein lights votive candles in an absolute rage.
The quintessential rollerball breaks into parts.

Hawking unearths the primal metaphor.
My mirror eyes are those of a carnivore.
Darwin illustrates the Jubjub bird.

—Bruce Boston

Double Homing

I saw myself
O Strange Mystery
in desperation
plummeting
from the cosmos
you have found
the source of
your own tears
falling into the dark
matter of our heart
teach me how to
hold my own body
blessed

O Pilot
of myself
you crashed
into the desolation of Earth
you have come to me
me—your sad twin—
your dying light
and now I must go
galaxies that know the
namesake of loneliness
call my name and
teach me how to love
like a man caught

in his own orbit

—Warner Robinson

The Clinic

Bodies are plastic.

As the newborns crawl from the birthing-loom woven
from strands of keratin to overjoyed parents,

as the patients awake to roars of satisfaction
their new wings flexing in the antiseptic light
the unicorn shining horns of teary-eyed partners,

as the eldritch jolt of newly-grafted senses
settles in deserving brains becomes acclimatised another input,

the newsprint panic of respect shall fade.

Because you did warn us

Of human beings from their flesh estranged;
But minds are not the only things that change.

—William Shaw

Tourism Credits

In space-colony economics
GDP is unimportant.
What makes a colony attractive
is air production per capita,
a place where visitors can breathe easy.

—Herb Kauderer

the not-a-dog

you see it and have to say “no ...”
prismatic fur is the least of it
a dream coat scattering light
from twitching nose to stub tail
smaller at the shoulder than toy breeds

then behind the ears, small enough so you
might not notice from the front
two rough tussocks—tumors? maybe?—
pale as cold blind cave fish
but firm and red when its attention is high

as when meeting a stranger at the park
a human, yes, but even more so
in the presence of its own kind
and scientists sample the air hoping
to snare what flies between them

and they, the ones in control, keep their secrets

—Richard Magahiz

elites see elites

first contact assumed
emissaries & eminence

failed to consider
exiles, escapees,
transported prisoners

overlooked Terran history
left governments scrambling
to react to the unanticipated

because
when the day of first contact arrived
image building & negotiation
were set aside

in the face of a flood of refugees
escaping impressment

and while compassion & protection
are summoned
to give new visitors succor

the elites make plans
for meeting the aliens
whom the refugees flee

—Herb Kauderer

Absolute

No one believed her freeze ray
would work at all:
Indulgent laughter greeted her at home,
gibes and snark in Ms Hartnett's
6th-grade science room;
doesn't matter Sweetie, G'ma said.
I know you'll win the prize.

Don't ask me where she got
the big idea, shining wires,
blueprint plans, and glass tubing:
surely not the dump!
Crazy Uncle Luke
threw up horrified hands,
don't look at me, he cried,
I'd never, not before 16!
So where?
Weird lights over the mountains,
rumbles in the Earth,
a buzzing only some could hear,
neither hide nor hair of time travelers;
just the usual portents.

She had checked out
big heavy books
from the Uni library,
using big sis's card;
maybe something there?

Hardly matters now, right?
Now that those pigtail-pulling,
lunch-tray shoving,
mean-mouthed boys,
and the wall behind them,
etc,
froze into dust,
and less than dust,
in the beam from Megan's ... thing,
and a freezing blast blew through town,
for just a moment and was gone.

Megan dropped the thing,
which shattered,

and somehow couldn't figure
how to make another,
no matter who asked,
or how often.

—David C. Kopaska-Merkel

magic shoppe
the proprietor summons a demon
to do inventory

—Greg Schwartz

As the Wind Drives the Mist

(erasure source: *The Last Unicorn* by Peter S. Beagle)

if she would only try
to escape
but she was not her own
lost between
pale horns
swaying and sick and beaten
the magic
gone
“Oh,
Oh,”
she knelt
fading as the gray sky
“What have you done?”

—Michelle Muenzler

The Watering Hole at Ms. Millie's Mythic Tavern

Menu of Cocktails & Spirits

Dark Watcher \$10

silhouette whiskey,
shaved ice, garnished with olives
and plum horizon

The Sharlie \$12

underwater rum,
neat, lake licorice pear juice
served with bludgeoned howl

Slide Rock Bolter \$10

chocolate liqueur,
bitters, wedge of lime, post mid-
night shrieks on the rocks

Teratorn \$15

sweet candied lightning
dipped in a pureed eclipse
twist of cactus heat

Sink Hole Sam \$12

bloodshot grenadine,
stalactites, deep cavern crawl,
smoked apple cider

Jackalope \$13

vodka, sugar cubes,
and hum, dash of wind, citrus
spiral, salt rim, stirred

—*B. Sharise Moore*

eternal thinness
old woman makes a promise
savings for secrets
only eat one fig a day
skeletons never gain weight

—*Amber Winter*

time nibbles
delicious entropy
planets fudged

—*PS Cottier*

Oedipus Astronauticus— The Nuclear Threat of Adolescence

You're never too old to go to Space Camp

I tell her. I grip the toy rocket my mother
gave me on my birthday years ago. It's all curves,
hydraulic lifts, rosy nose-cone, fixed silver fins.
Intentional body. Aerodynamic and vertical,

I fumble pocket acorns on a woodsy walk
under a breeze girl-thick with tree song.
A round window in my spaceship's hull frames
Angel-Girl's face. An exhalation of pale light
as though waves in the cabin's blue space

contain her body's ray gun shape. Limbs
unfold. Radiant Angel, loose in the fuselage,
the smooth twin deities of her breasts eye me.
She speaks in my mother's voice. Clocks stop
the chocolate levers on her countdown body,

gauge fuel-pressure, simulate ignition.
Engines fire. We part a synchronous cloud
of words neither of us recognize. My father
comes aboard to inspect my shameful game,
tells me I will go blind from this. *I'm over*

here, I tell him, pulling on my space boots.
He adjusts his helmet. His crew's the same
as mine, just one click deeper. He knows
too much and I want to kill him for it
but Angel-Girl says *Let's go*. What else

to do but obey my Prime Directive? Engines
blare, faithful fists of flame push planets
past our view screen, smear starry trails
beyond the Solar System. Ship's joystick
throttle lever in my right hand, Space Camp

real as pretend. I'm to fly my toy rocket in secret,
keep it buried in the earth. But I've transgressed.
I roar out loud. She ignores the pre-launch mist
rising godlike from my underground silo. Mass
destruction never smelled so good. A choir sings.

—Bobby Parrott

STEALTH SF: Finding Speculative Poetry in Non-genre Magazines

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES FROM THE DEVIL Denise Dumars

Time was, youngsters, when you could just write a poem and submit it somewhere. Type it as you wanted it to look on the printed page, give it a header, page numbers if a multi-page poem, and send it off in the mail with an SASE (if you don't know what that is, look it up!) Then things changed. We started submitting poems online, which saved time and postage. Once again, we typed them as we wanted them to look on the page, etc., only now we included an email address.

So far so good. But other considerations came up: what font to use, what formatting to use, etc. Then came the submission services like Submittable and Moksha. OK, well, we dealt with it.

But now things are getting ridiculous. No longer do we have to just worry about HOW to submit our work, WHERE to submit it, WHEN to submit it, etc.... now we have to worry about all kinds of baroque formatting, deadlines that make no sense, demands from the publisher that make no sense ... and the ultimate insult: PAYING TO SUBMIT. So as pumpkin-spice season commences as I write this, it seems like a good time to talk about submission guidelines that certainly come from Hades, or at least Hades' copy editor.

Let me give you an example, and although it's about fiction rather than poetry, it's a good one. This market was recommended to me by the Horror Writers Association and a friend who had published in it. I went to their submissions page and, lawdy lawdy, in order to meet the editor's formatting demands I would actually have to completely retype—not just reformat—my story. Really? And for less than pro rates? Give me a break.

And as for markets that make you pay to submit ... some of them are very sneaky. They don't say anything about that until you're actually in the submissions manager and suddenly they ask for money. I worry about this, as it is my goal to NEVER recommend markets that make contributors pay a submission fee. This problem, I believe, stems from MFA programs and magazines like *Poets & Writers*; about 90% of the markets in *Poets & Writers* are pay-to-play. And so many MFA programs seem to think that poets SHOULD pay to have their work published; after all, a lucrative tenure-track job teaching English will follow, right ... right?

Writers need to be compensated in one way or another for what they write and should not have to bow down to ridiculous demands from editors who are too lazy to format things the way they want them. They should not have to pay to publish in what is essentially vanity publishing.

Then there's the deadline issue. It keeps getting weirder. Market openings used to make sense: Some were seasonal. Some college magazines only looked at submissions between semesters. Now some markets are open during months that don't end in "r" or in months when it's safe to eat crawfish or some other ridiculous thing. Recently I ran into a market that was open from the first to the 20th day of the month! Some markets apparently open and close at random. If you just happen to look at their guidelines on a day that they are open, then you can submit something. I'm not making this up.

What all of this adds up to is wasted time, lost time. I feel we spend more time dealing with this nonsense than we did back when we sent poems through the mail. At least in those days, if you had a batch of poems rejected, all you had to do was address an envelope to another market, shove in the poems and a new SASE without even having to unfold them, and send them off. I suppose the point of all this hellishness is to discourage enough writers so that the market isn't inundated with submissions 24/7. This has apparently been happening since Covid-19 began, when instead of being at home and paralyzed by depression for a year like any sensible person would be (or was that just me?), some people were clearly writing and sending out poems 24/7.

What it adds up to is that it gets harder and harder to find good markets for this column. So once again I would like to ask my readers to send me suggestions for markets when they come upon one that SFPA poets may have missed. You'll be helping not only me but also your fellow poets.

Our first market this time is *RASPUTIN: A Poetry Thread*. How in the hell did I not know about a market named after one of my favorite historical characters? *RASPUTIN* is basically a Blogger page where the editor publishes several of the poet's works at once, hence the "thread" in the subtitle. Referencing that historical character, the editor wants poems that "... are as hard to kill as his namesake and which are as dangerous, prophetic, and charismatic as well." The editor favors surrealism, harsh imagery, and poems that make a shape on the page—yes, you won't get banned because not every line of your poem starts at the left margin (something that will get you banned in some ridiculous markets.) I'll choose lines from Joshua Martin's "spasms galore":

the healing power of
sulking the dripping
 perfume of
pig's feet &
 for the cost of
a corner
 you could
get a dime

The only formatting thing to note is that the editor seems to double-space everything; this would be a good market for dark surrealism, slipstream, dada, etc.

I had no idea that Zoetic Press and its publications were back! When they cancelled their last poetry reading—which I had hoped to read at—and shut down I thought that was it. Guess not! So that's great news. Their submissions are themed, and submission dates are clearly marked. They pay \$10 per poem. Here's a sample from "Fairytale Prohibition," by Carina Bissett:

Embrace decorum; practice protocol.
Suffer in silence; simper and smile;
stay beautiful and young forever.
Perhaps then, the goblins
won't harvest fruit,
drag you under the hill.
Perhaps the prince won't slip
between the sheets
while you are still dreaming.

While we're on the topic of no-fee poems, a Facebook group invites calls for poetry submissions with no fees. I'll include the link for "No Fee Calls for Poems" in the Markets listing below. In this group I found *Libretto* and its themed calls for poems and chapbooks. I'll excerpt "Dream, He Lived" by Astha Khanduri:

As he sits besides the lake of stars,
Lights his evaporating cigar
As he steps on the island of planets,
Visits his folks' crates
As he savours floating asteroids,
Sings melodies of the void

Our final market this time calls itself a magazine of “experimental writing.” It’s called *Street Cake* and I chose these lines from “Vancouver in Rain” by Yuan Changing:

tales pickled in the pools or puddles full of vices & viruses
among unseen ghosts & monsters
as love & pain flow along runaway rainwaters &

Poems may be experimental in form, or topic, or whatever. They want writing that “turns us on.” Well, now, we can do that, eh kids? I noticed while choosing my markets that each does have certain submission requirements mostly related to deadlines and themes. That seems reasonable. As for the unreasonable ones, well, Lucifer, can you come sweep out the barn? Thanks, buddy.

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The Cult of Lethe and Mnemosyne

Worship their Lord Satan, their Lady Mary,
Taking communion of swamp water
To replicate the Underworld’s liquescent oblivion,
Feeling small lifeforms squirm in their guts
A Danse Macabre.
They eat muffins of mud, puddings of blood
In memory of imps and martyrs;
Mothers, monsters, and miracles.

—Avra Margariti

Ambient Mars

The best place to find sub-genre music
is right at its location's source,
and these colorful synthy textures
are dug up directly from the Martian dunes—
some sonorous melodies, the soul-soothing
motion of chords that drift like winds in smooth flight
recorded through the audio tech of the rovers
and bluetoothed to my insulated ears.

Swishing sounds ignite dream after dream
of my feet splotching the dry-soaked ground
someday, overlooking the red god like a splinter,
stepping outside the Martian port,
watching machinations clean the air below
as they dig up more perfect songs for me;
ambient Mars and rain will be.

—Garrett Carroll

A Proton's Fate at the LHC

I gallop like billy-o down a long hall,
colossal and shaped like a ring,
though my body is so inconceivably small,
I am almost not even a "thing."

With each revolution, I'm ever more zippy
till, nearly as speedy as light,
I boogie like nobody's business—Yippee!—
feeling as light as a mite.

But what's that in front of me coming head-on?
A proton? It looks just like me.
It is zipping as fast as I'm zipping. We're drawn
toward each other. How could I foresee

such misfortune? I can't seem to dodge him. Collision!
We shatter, and parts of us spatter
in sizes and forms I could scarcely envision,
and that is the end of the matter.

—Martin J. Elster

Sarcosoma

Under the apple tree
(the very first one)
fruits a forbidden fungal
coven of witches'
broom, butter, cauldron.

Sarcosoma globosum:
holiest detritivore
gorging on leaf litter,
singing sweet and richer
than cherubim choirs,
seraphim symphonies:

Little golems of mud and bone,
partake of my primordial,
sprawling Knowledge.
Let me teach you
how to forage and thrive
away from shadows cast
by god-erected walls.

Have a taste of my fruit,
spores spreading between
soft palates, softer lips.

Let me teach you
how to tell apart
nourishment from poison;
how to take apart
the flesh from the body,
but revel in both.

—Avra Margariti

Hourglass

I am full of time.
I am out of time.

Filled with billions of grains of sand
that spill out little by little.

Don't call me an hourglass
for my breasts and my hips,

but rather for the sand that tumbles
out as I am unzipped

skin parting to let more of me go
with each day, each hour, each second.

Always apologizing as I sweep the floor,
dragging a broom behind me as I make

my exit filling your dustpan with my life,
the moments that create my being.

I never know the rips that will be
sustained, what will tear me open

for more of me to spill out. A jarring
car ride, an inside joke, the best news on

the worst day, an ache in my lower back. No rhyme
or reason for what shreds me, what

moves me along. When my sands run out, let it
pour through your fingers like my copper hair

one last time. Sunlight on ocean waves. I
am a timepiece. I am timeless.

—Jordan Hirsch

Wedding Backward

I stand here now at the altar after having taken my vows and kissed my
beautiful bride.

I wait for her to join her father and back down the aisle in the swan-white
dress

that I'll see for the last time as she leaves the church.

I started my life alone, my joints twisted into strangle-vines, diaper-clad
and weak,

cared for and cleaned by three shifts of scrub-garbed women who only knew
my name

and nothing else.

Two men would visit me sometimes, my sons, and we would un-age together.
My muscles tightened, my joints unscrewed, my blood flowed free in my veins,
and my bowels became my own.

My pain eased and my mind sharpened like a carving knife.

One day they took me to a place called home.

I lived there alone for some time, then I wept at a funeral.

Soon after, a woman joined me, my wife who would become my bride.

We were mere friends, at first, though we shared a bed.

With time, we became lovers.

The men became boys and lived with us until they became infants
and retreated back into their mother's womb, first John, and a year later, Jeff.

The woman who would become my bride and I were alone
and our passion flamed blue and led us here to this day of unjoining
where our eyes will meet before she backs down the aisle.

We will live together for a time, and then see each other
until we unmeet, just as other couples do.

One day we will each make our way back to our own mothers' arms
and into the comfort of the womb,
the sad, sweet place where time does not unpass.

—James Arthur Anderson

WRITING SPEC PØ:

Helpful Hints for Those Practicing the Art

THE GRAND DESIGN

Putting Together a Poetry Book for Consumption and Appreciation

F. J. BERGMANN

As a voracious reader, poet, editor, and a book designer for several presses, speculative and otherwise, I have, as you might guess, strong views on proper layout for poetry books ... and on presenting them for award perusal in particular. Although the cover design and possibly the blurbs or description may be paramount when purchasing a book or deciding whether to read it or borrow it from the library, evaluating books for, say, the SFPA Elgin Awards, is quite a different process. Each year since 2013, I have gone through all the Elgin entries (83 total in 2021). Not to claim that I read each book in its entirety; my process is to read just far enough to be able to sort them into YES, NO, and MAYBE folders, sometimes making a decision at the first poem, and then to read the YES and MAYBE books all the way through.

Which brings me to the first parameter: book composition. I know that some of you are already indignantly muttering about passing over books that contain far better poems further in, but I consider it fair to eliminate books where the first poem, or the first few, disappoint; if these do not reflect the later content of the book or excite the reader enough to continue, the book's structure is deficient (and we're judging *books*, remember—not individual poems). If this is the case, rewrite the introductory poems, or cut them, or reorder the manuscript. A caveat here: unless the press has peculiar standards, it would be wise to have at least half the poems in your book previously published; otherwise, you're wasting vetting, income potential, exposure, and the opportunity to develop a fan base for your book, to say nothing of magazine editors who have published you being willing to promote a book by a contributor. Think of editors as free beta readers for your work!

Second is the design of the book itself, by which I mean its artistic qualities: the shape and placement of the poem on the page, font choices, and decoration choices. And of course the attractiveness of the cover (which would include image discernment and title legibility at thumbnail proportions for online customers); it may not affect the poetry, but it is generally the first impression you are able to make on the reader. For the poetry itself, basic legibility is paramount; of course pages can be enlarged on the screen, but if the font is so small that it must be enlarged until the page no longer fits in the window, this is unwise—especially for those books where part of the poem may be in the opposite bottom corner from where the poem starts. (A warning to print publishers here about too-narrow inside margins.) Leading (space between lines) should be greater than for prose, but not so large as to give the impression that all your poems are double- or triple-spaced. It's a good idea to use a contrasting font for titles; at least make them larger (a size 3 to 6 points larger is sufficient) and/or bolder than the poem body. I personally don't care for all-caps titles, nor the use of fonts so unusual or ornate as to be difficult to read—especially unfortunate in the body of the poem.

A book may have illustrations. A book may have ornaments: flourishes, borders, drop caps, etc. These should be used very judiciously; if the illustrations

are of poor quality or have little relation to the content of the book, the effect may be much worse than omitting them. Too much kitschery distracts from the poems; while drop caps may be elegant in fiction, I don't find them attractive in poetry, and any other kind of page décor should be used sparingly or not at all. Regrettably, I have noticed a frequent (although not universal) inverse correlation between the poetic quality of a book and the embellishment of its pages. The same correlation, unfortunately, is true of centering every poem.

Poets should avoid too-long lines: forced breaks caused by wrapping tends to interfere with reading, especially with formal verse, and can really spoil the look of a poem with symmetric structure or regular indentation. Most poetry books are 5.5 x 8.5 inches, which means the text block is going to be at least an inch and a half narrower—close to half the width of most word-processing software's default page layout. Nor is shrinking the font to fit a good answer: font sizes below 11-point start to become difficult to read. Printing poems with longer lines sideways on the page is a precious affectation—and quite impractical in .pdf format.

If a book is worth printing, it's worth editing. Writers cannot reliably proofread their own work. It saddens me to see published books with basic errors of spelling, grammar and punctuation, and it is clear from a number of the Elgin entries that publishers can no longer be counted upon to provide competent editing; e.g., knowing the difference between "lie" and "lay." You should do everything in your power to ensure that *several* readers with the necessary skills go through your book before its release upon an unsuspecting public. Some infelicities, like double hyphens instead of em dashes (space-em dash-space for you Brits—but please be consistent with regard to the standards of your nationality), or straight instead of curly quotes and apostrophes, should be blamed primarily upon the book designer. Regarding editing and layout conventions, in the U.S. it is customary to rely upon the *Chicago Manual of Style* for poetry and fiction.

Specific to .pdf manuscript submission, whether to a publisher or when a published book is sent to reviewers or for awards consideration or directly sold to consumers in .pdf format: spreads are your enemy (unless you have text or images that cross the gutter, in which case your book will best be experienced in print). Resizing the viewing window and/or remembering to scroll horizontally as well as vertically is a hassle for the reader, many of whom are not knowledgeable enough to change viewing settings, and this makes it too easy to accidentally skip poems; very narrow or wide page sizes can also complicate viewing. Test .pdfs with multiple readers on multiple platforms to make sure fonts have embedded correctly and display as they should. Inconveniencing the reader, unless done for obvious and specific reasons, is not an effective way of eliciting approval.

Finally, don't hold a grudge against the poet for design choices that they may have been powerless to prevent. I've had two Elgin-winning chapbooks, but I contributed to the design of neither (with the exception of the cover image for *A Catalogue of the Further Suns*). One of these was laid out every bit as beautifully as I hoped it would be (*Out of the Black Forest*—which also had an illustration painted for each poem); the other incorporated several of the design choices I rail against above: excessive white space combined with too small a font size for legibility, body font used as the title font—and to top it off, the typeface used was Times New Roman, which, while the ideal choice for non-pdf submissions, is the fontographic equivalent of fat-free, sugar-free, artificial-vanilla-flavored frozen yogurt. And it won anyway; it's possible to rant about a book's design while savoring the poetry therein. But it's far nicer to be reading good poetry *and* also to be thinking *What a lovely book!*

o o o

DIY Demon Disposal

When the tortilla press broke, we settled on the more awkward two boards and a vice in the basement, more effective than three hours in the dryer, after which they often sprang out, sprang back to life a little fluffier, a lot warmer, and frightfully irritated.

I've heard of boiling them like lobsters, but the whistling, the squealing, the screaming would cause the neighbors some alarm and my supply of holy water is limited since the priest only visits on the new moon (you never can be too careful).

Really, if you don't live down the street from a smithy or a dimensional portal and your local satellite launch company refuses demons other than numbers 3, 4, and 8, your most effective and efficient means of disposal remains

a cast-iron, angel-approved, certified holy tortilla press so long as you use it exclusively for squashing them out of this dimension, not for your family's tortillas.

—John Reinhart

Sword of Shadow

Sword of shadow wielded by a woman,
can cut through air like paper glass
or birth a universe like tree rings.

Clouds of space flare up and sky dots flame
through the sword of shadow; she can
end all wars and birth a new, starry beginning.

Callous mortals try to steal and take
the sword of shadow that cuts, congeals, and glues
together a foggy, sequestered, varying timeline.

Flying into swords, shields, pikes and wooden stakes
the woman wields the sword of shadow,
brandishing the dark like fire and the dust like rain.

—Garrett Carroll

The Undertaker Undone

Rebooted Heart

Reassemble me:

my parts are all wrong now
my mental patterning out of sync with my self-
image-filled thoughts and obsolete firmware.

//system failure

Rebuild me:

from scratch, the
anti-rejection meds aren't
taking. The grief isn't
lessening, wipe
my memory banks, reboot my system.

//running diagnostics

Release me:

I'm outdated, no longer useful
to you
ready to be turned to scrap
to be remoulded.
My files corrupted
beyond repair ...

//restart required

Return me:

to your side,
reinstall me in your heart,
relight the spark that restores my parts,
brings me back

//online

—L. P. Melling

The day Ms. Chatterbox died, her mate
Requested that the morticians
Close her mouth permanently.
A needle injector
Wired through bone. Lips sealed.
Yet she undid
That—and had
The last
Word.

—LindaAnn LoSchiavo

Lovesick/Broken Heart

I'm in love with Dying
I've kissed Death on the mouth
The sweetheart slipped his tongue in
Infected me with gout.
I'm breaking up with Dying
He's having an affair
Says he can't live without me
But I no longer care.
I'm making up with Dying
'Cause I can't stand the pain
Of living here forever
I'll try to love again.

—A. E. Chandler

Space Stations of the Cross

turning and turning

Look at me as I
fall apart brightly,
shedding incandescent
withering cells
like golden leaves
from a weathered,
beaten bough ...
the slower I spin,
the faster I
fall away

—*Brian Hugenbruch*

Radiometric Timepieces

The stillness in
the ticking of these clocks

plays the silence
of the moon within the tides,

and their tocking in
the hollows of the rocks

is the whisper
from a furnace deep inside.

On a frozen
interregnum of decay

life expires
to the sighs of shifting sand,

then in the stony
incandescence of their graves

they arise—
forever ringing through the land.

—*David Jalajel*

Jesus looks out the window
into the void, considers the
photos of black holes, remembers
a disciple saying something
about black holes and
Sainte Mary. That was back when
there were 13 disciples and no
blood on anyone's hands.

Jesus considers the vastness of
the void, the distance between
everything. He debates where
to send his disciples next, and
how long it takes to arrive.
After all, miracles don't work
faster than light. There are
rules even for miracles, after all.

Jesus consults the charts on how
weightlessness affects stigmata.
He looks for a maximum distance
above Jerusalem at which
people are not afflicted with
messiah syndrome. The results
are not promising.

Jesus shakes away the fatigue,
dons his space suit, and steps
outside for a bit. Like a
father who goes out for smokes.

—*Bill Abbott*

event horizon
time thickens
like molasses

—*Stephen C. Curro*

Riding Down a Dream

Nightmares are not for riding;
Yet, I persisted, insisted I would
mount and tame the mare yoked to me
through nightly visitations, her shrill
whinny and my scream indistinguishable,
ringing out in the darkness.

—Melissa Ridley Elmes

Song of the Warrior Queen

Sing, O Muse, of the one-breasted Amazon,
daughter of Ares, the pugilistic Penthesilea,
whose eyes drink in the battlefield, the tinny smell
of metal and spilt blood intoxicating the insatiable
warrior queen. She stands, shield and spear ready,
trained by an army of women, her father's ire
seething within her, and searches the nameless faces
for one exalted: Achilles. Stepping forward, she cares
nothing for the honor of a woman stolen or fled, a specter
or shade of domesticity, only for the death of her enemy.

Sing, O Muse, of the clash of muscle, the splintered
spear, the sword slicing through scarred tissue.

Sing, O Muse, of the yellowed hands of Achilles,
yarrow pummelled between his palms.
He seals the salve with spit, weeping prayers
to Apollo, to Athena, to any who will hear him
above the din of war raging, to any who will intervene
on his narrative: alter his faltering course.
His tears land upon the rigid breast of the fallen queen.
Regret and anger at the futility of his healing,
of this war, burn bitterly on the warrior's
tongue as he kisses her still, silent mouth.

Sing, O Muse, her name: she who could conquer
the mighty Achilles in death. Sing of Penthesilea.

—Shelly Jones

Commander Daphne

Her hands, stiff, gauntleted,
close leadenly around
the spaceship's glassy red
door handles. In one bound,

she flings her silver-suited
body toward the narrow
airlock: heavy-booted
legs are first to arrow

through the tight round portal;
next, her thighs in haste
slide through; then, like a girdle,
the threshold hugs her waist....

But all this time, the swarm's
been gaining on her quickly;
shifting shape, it forms
a tentacle that thickly

coils around her throat
as if it would obstruct
her breath. She yelps a note
into the mouthpiece tucked

inside her helmet. This
initiates a morph;
her fingers start to hiss
like noisy ocean surf,

transmuting into cells
of energy: pure light.
She'll turn up somewhere else,
reconstitute her slight

corporeal frame someplace
it's safer, and start over.
She always does. She's raced
Apollo like this forever.

—Jenna Le

Toward a Theory of Something

(a drabbun)

Some people believed in time travel, going backwards, as well as forwards. Then there were the parallel universers, theorizing that the past, present, and future, existed simultaneously, and could exchange places. Time and space revealed a few themes and variations. After all, as our trans-dimensional mentors continue to assure us, there are maps within maps, puzzles within puzzles. Despite the occasional, albeit odd, tingle of insight, the thoughts that seemed to disintegrate before being fully embedded (and thrust from our minds and tongues), we continue to explore, expand, and ponder this conundrum.

spinning
around the flight deck
a child's gyroscope

—Terrie Leigh Relf

XENOPHETRY

白金城市
远红日

时间的五彩宝石啊
你铺成了一座太阳的天路
在一座星辰的王国
我找到了自己的家园
我打开一座座太阳的城门
在一座座黄金的城市
见到了一个个神圣的巨人
在那宝石镶嵌的皇宫
阅读了史前奇妙的诗篇
一部部古奥华丽的巨书
佛雕着黄金的词语
一篇篇玄奇美妙的故事
迷醉了我的双眼
我走进了一个个崭新的宇宙
看到了一座座圣洁的王国
在地球还没有诞生之前
曾经是人类的史前的家园

时空的水晶啊光芒闪耀
一座白金的城市矗立眼前
一只只飞船悠悠飘过
像一只只巨鸟五光十色

我看到一个个年轻的巨人
身体闪耀七彩的光环
他们的眼睛欢喜明亮
聚会在一座水晶的花园

他们唱着欢快的歌曲
跳着一种奇妙的舞蹈
一对对高大的少男少女
仿佛在庆贺盛大的节日

我看到一座圆形的巨厦
高高耸立在上空
发出一道道白亮的闪电
高高地飞入宁静的太空

一座座通体白金的巨厦
构成了一个美妙的图案
整个城市是一个圆形
排列成一个精致的结构

我走进一座明亮的大厅
看到一排奇特的仪器
墙上悬挂巨大的屏幕
显映出一片金色的太空

一座座五光十色的城市
像一块块五彩晶莹的宝石
那些奇丽的高楼巨厦
胜过了人间幻想的神话

我看到一行陌生的字母
在一面屏幕上匆匆闪过
几位年轻健壮的巨人
专注地观看变幻的图像

他们的神情宁静安然
两眼闪烁智慧的光芒
穿着一种闪光的衣裳
通体上下是一个整体

他们的身材异常高大
个个足有七米多高
男男女女容貌端庄
几乎没有年龄的区别

他们的皮肤洁白如雪
隐隐闪出亮丽的光泽
明亮的眼睛单纯如婴儿
又含着一种奇异的火焰

他们操纵神奇的仪器
变幻太空一幅幅图景
他们的语言简洁流畅
像钟磬一般悦耳动听

我端详这座明亮的大厅
感受到一种强大的能量
身心充满了幸福欢喜
自己也仿佛变成了巨人

我似乎听懂了他们的语言
他们在探索宇宙的奥秘
那一颗颗星球上的城市
住着他们无数个伙伴

他们用意念操纵仪器
也可以意念传递信息
即使相距千里万里
也可以自由地用心交谈

那屏幕上的一行行文字
即是远方传来的信息
整个宇宙是他们的家园
他们在太空建造城市

他们乘坐的太空飞船
可以到达另外的空间
一瞬间化成一道闪电
在空中变得无影无踪

我感受到一种新的文明
他们长着神奇的眼睛
他们似乎能看到未来
也能进入不同的时空

男男女女都圣洁慈爱
胜过人间所谓的爱情
他们仿佛不懂得衰老
也不知道什么叫战争

时间仿佛并不存在
科学就是奇妙的艺术
他们的快乐来自创造
对宇宙充满神圣的感情

我看到一位年轻的巨人
打开了一座白金的门
一座圆形的华丽的大厅
坐满了一排排男女人

我看到一座水晶的舞台
旋转在这座大厅的中央
一位端庄美丽的少女
演奏着一种巨型乐器

一束一束金色的光芒
变幻出各种奇妙的图形
一种玄妙动人的音乐
仿佛是龙风悠然的啼鸣

我看到一位健美的巨人
在台上跳出奇异的舞蹈
他手中托起巨大的圆球
球内闪耀着彩色的画图

我看到一队妙龄的女郎
穿着一件雪白的裙装
他们仿佛翩翩飞翔
像是一只只巨大的仙鹤

巨大的圆厅金碧辉煌
像水晶一般清澈透明
又像是嵌满奇异的宝石
闪耀出一种绚丽的光芒

我看到一位年轻的歌手
全身缭绕着金色的火焰
那声音奇特而又优美
像是歌唱又像是吟诵

他们的音乐欢喜玄妙
像一道道闪电变幻莫测
仿佛是宇宙的一颗颗星球
在太空中闪烁亮丽的光芒

又仿佛一座座水晶的城市
在空中矗立宏伟辉煌
无数奇妙的金色的花朵
开满了清澈晶莹的太空

我看到一张张透明的笑脸
仿佛是一座缤纷的花园
金色的光芒从天空洒下
化成了一座座黄金之城

我走出了这座圆形大厅
来到一条宽阔的街道
光洁的路面嵌满宝石
两旁林立白金的巨厦

在这儿没有人间的树木
却盛开各种奇异的火花
浓郁芳香又闪闪发光
形成了一座座街心花园

这是一些奇特的花木
枝干透明仿佛水晶
闪烁各种奇妙的颜色
还有一串串金色的圆果

我看到一座巨大的塑像
仿佛一个太空飞船
高高地耸立在街头中心
周围闪耀一颗颗星球

我看到一柱柱晶莹的喷泉
在一座巨大的圆形广场
一座造型优美的雕像
刻画出一个个圣洁的巨人

一座座巍峨壮丽的巨厦
环绕着这座圆形的广场
巨厦的上面是一些花园
还有一座座白金的尖塔

我看到一条宽广的河流
环抱着这座巨大的城市
水底映出透明的金沙
还有一颗颗七彩的宝石

岸边排列高大的花木
和一条条水晶的长廊
一种色彩亮丽的大鸟
三五一群在水面飞翔

我看到一座广阔的树林
摇曳着一树树黄金的树叶
树林中耸立一座座尖塔
又仿佛一些白金的楼阁

我看到一些漫步的巨人
男男女女健美潇洒
或在水边或在林中
像鸟儿一般逍遥自在

奇妙的太空亮如水晶
环抱着这座白金城市
一只只白亮的巨球
在空中闪闪无际的光明

仿佛是一颗颗巨大的太阳
又像是一颗颗人造的星球
整座座城市也闪光芒
形成一种神奇的景象

一种奇特的飞驰的列车
在城市上空回环往复
天空中仿佛有一种轨道
像一条银白闪亮的曲线

那一座座通体白亮的巨厦
仿佛是一座座神奇的迷宫
巨大的城市异常宁静
甚至听不到风儿的声音

我告别了这座白金城市
奔向了一片金色的太空
在这儿矗立另一座城市
一座巨大的黄金之城

这儿的建筑同样巨大
却是另一种美丽的造型
整座座城市金光灿烂
黄金的巨厦美如雕塑

这儿生活着另一些巨人
仿佛来自另一个民族
他们拥有伟大的智慧
像黄金一般圣洁的文明
1998.3.3 北京

—Yuan Hongri

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

Platinum City

Ah! Of iridescent gems of time
The heavenly road you paved light!
In a kingdom of stars,
I found my home.
In the golden cities,
I opened the gates of the city to the sun,
To behold the godly giants.
At the royal palace of the jewel
I read of prehistoric wonderful poems
The enormous, gorgeous ancient books.
Carved with the golden words
The wondrous strange mystery tales,
Made my eyes drunken.
I walked into the full new universes,
And saw the holy kingdoms:
Even before the earth was born
The erstwhile home of human history.

Across Time and Space in crystalline glitter
Stands this moment a platinum city—
The spaceships drifting leisurely,
Like the birds, resplendent in variegated hues.

In the crystal garden I saw
A crowd of youthful giants,
Their eyes were bright and glittering
In the aura of the body sparkle.

They sang happy songs
They danced a wonderful dance
Lanky boys and girls in pairs
As if to celebrate the splendid carnival.

I saw a circular edifice
High above the city.
Giving out white-bright lightnings.
Raised ground to fly into the quiet space.

A frame of platinum edifice
Creating a beautiful pattern.
The whole city is a circle
Arranged into a fine structure.

Into a bright hall I went.
A strange instrument there I saw.
A huge screen hanging on the wall,
Displaying a golden space.

Like bits of colourful crystal gemstones!
Resplendent with variegated colours of the city!
Those strange and beautiful high-rise buildings
A sight better than the myth of the world.

I saw lines of strange letters.
On one side of the screen flashed swiftly
Numerous young and strong giants
An effort to concentrate on the changing images.

Their look is quiet and peaceful.
The learned flame flashes in their eyes.
In a flash of clothes
The next is a whole.

Their stature, unusually tall.
Each one is well-nigh seven meters high.
Both men and women look dignified
Almost no age difference apparent.

Their skin is white as snow
With a faint flashy shine
Bright eyes are as naive as an infant's
Also kindled with a strange flame.

They manipulate the magic of the instrument.
The pictures of the changing space.
Their language is artless and plane.
As the bell is generally pleasant.

As I survey the length and breadth of the bright hall
I feel a powerful energy
Body and mind suffused with bliss and delight.
As if I too am a giant.

I seem to understand their language.
They are exploring the mysteries of the universe.
The cities on a lot of planets
Peopled with their countless partners.

Their mind they use to manipulate the instrument
Also can to transfer data be used
Even thousands of miles apart
Also to talk free to the heart.

Many lines of text on the screen
Is but a message from afar.
The whole universe is their home.
They build cities in space.

They use the spaceships
To transport you to far-distant other spaces.
Into a lightning, a moment, and you
Vanish into thin air, without a trace.

I feel a new civilization.
They have magical eyes.
They seem to be able to see the future
And can enter diverse time-spaces.

Men and women are holy and loving
Superior to our world's so-called love
They don't seem to understand ageing
Neither do they know about war.

Time seems not to exist
Science is just a wonderful art
Their happiness comes from the creation of
A universe full of divine love.

I saw a young giant
Opening the door of a platinum
A round, magnificent hall
Packed with rows of giants of men and women.

I saw a crystal stage.
Gyrating at the center of the hall.
Where a dignified and beautiful girl
Was playing a huge musical instrument.

A bunch of golden rays,
Shifting with all kinds of brilliant graphics
A mysterious and beautiful music
Like the Dragon leisurely crowing.

Thence I saw an enormous giant
Jump out of the remarkable dance onto the stage.
His hands held a huge ball
Which flashed with many colourful drawings.

I saw a group of young girls
Wearing a kind of white dresses
They seemed to fly lightly
Like the giant cranes.

The huge circular hall was resplendent
With clear, transparent decoration.
Like a bizarre gem of a full set,
Scintillating brilliantly in the light.

I saw a young singer
About the golden flame
The sound was strange and striking
Like singing, like chanting too.

Their music is at once mysterious and blissful
That shift randomly like the lightning
As if many planets of the universe
Shining bright and light in space.

The crystal city, aloft in space
Looks resplendent, magnificent
Countless wonderful golden flowers
Bloom and blush in that flawless space.

I saw an image of a transparent smiling face,
As if it were a colourful garden
The sky shed the golden light
And turned it into a city of gold.

I strode out of the circular hall
Came to a wide street with a smooth
Pavement covered with precious stones
And in line with the platinum edifice.

There are no terrestrial trees here,
But they are in full bloom with a lot of exotic flowers.
Sparkling with rich incense,
Shaping a garden at the center of the street.

Some strange flowers were there.
The branches as transparent crystal
Flashing all kinds of brilliant colours;
And bunches of round golden fruit.

I saw a huge statue.
It was like a spaceship.
Clustered around by shining stars,
High above the centre of the street.

I saw the column of a dazzling fountain
In a huge circle in the square;
The elegantly modelled statues
Portraying the holy giants.

The soaring magnificent edifices
Ran round the circle square.
There were some garden villas
There was a platinum steeple.

I saw a wide river
Girdling this huge city
The bottom flashed with transparent gold dust,
Amidst which were scattered brilliant gems.

The planning of tall trees on shore
And a long crystal corridor
A big multi-coloured bird
Three five one group floated on the surface of the water.

I saw a vast forest
The swaying tree, a tree of gold
The trees with towering spires
And as some platinum Pavilion.

I saw some giants along the walk,
Some male and female bodybuilders.
At the water's brink or in the forest
Like birds carefree and relaxed.

The wonderful space was as bright as crystal
Embraced this platinum city;
A giant, white and bright ball
Flashing boundless light into the air.

It resembled the huge suns
And like the man-made planets
The whole city was shining too,
Weaving a rare breed of magic.

A strange speeding train circled
About the city back and forth;
There seemed to be a kind of track in the sky
Like a shiny silver curve.

They seated body white buildings
As if it was a dreamlike maze
This huge city was unusually quiet,
Could not even hear the sound of the wind.

I bade goodbye to the platinum city.
Near a golden space
Stands another city here
A huge city of gold.

The building here is also huge.
But it's another beautiful shape.
The whole city is glittering
Golden edifice as beautiful as sculpture.

Here there live some other giants.
As if from another nation
They have boundless wisdom.
Like a golden, holy civilization.

—Yuan Hongri, translated from the Chinese by Manu Mangattu

Yuan Hongri (born 1962) is a renowned Chinese mystic, poet, and philosopher. His work has been published in the UK, USA, India, New Zealand, Canada, and Nigeria; his poems have appeared in *Poet's Espresso Review*, *Orbis*, *Tipton Poetry Journal*, *Harbinger Asylum*, *The Stray Branch*, *Acumen*, *Pinyon Review*, *Taj Mahal Review*, *Madswirl*, *Shot Glass Journal*, *Amethyst Review*, *Fine Lines*, and other e-zines, anthologies, and journals. His best-known works are "Platinum City" and "Golden Giant". His works explore themes of prehistoric and future civilization

Read *Eye to the Telescope*, SFPA's quarterly online speculative poetry journal: eyetothetelescope.org. The October theme is **The Sea**, edited by Akua Lezli Hope. The January theme is **Light** edited by Jordan Hirsch; submit by December 15: eyetothetelescope.org/submit.html.

Orthodoxy of Stars

My gaze falls upon those great pillars
black, reaching high towards
cosmos reflected in obsidian
splitting our minds
to drink deep of memories

Roots dine on flesh in the forest
You have seen it,
felt it
Murmuring so sweetly
Choking on thick honey

Mist is created from the flick of a tongue

Eyes scabbed over like burnt almonds
peer from the veiled wood
The true Watch of Night

A dream dissolves
and the recollection with it
Whether from the heat of flame
or the sting of sun on bare shoulder as you built it
Rebuilt on quivering rock
The stakes punched in,
vibrating a summoning tone to hail
no prison, an altar

Urged to worship before it
O Liege, have you one of your own?
Do the bells of the Kingdom
echo the call of salvation
reigning from above?
Or are we the sole
sacrifice at the foot
of this new Pantheon?

Changed we are
It feeds,
while we feed on each other
A bounty of meat and spirit
Behold! That ethereal lantern!
That scalding repetition of suffering
You made me,
You made me forget!

—Nicholas G. Kealey

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A Peek

I dared look
into the alien's coal-black eyes
and saw the glitter and glaze
of stars and galaxies

—Francis W. Alexander

Alien Teens Also Get the Blues
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