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2012 POETRY CONTEST WINNERS

Speculative poet Andrew Joron selected the winners of this year's SFPA Poetry Contest. Prizes were offered in four divisions: long (50+ lines), short, dwarf (≤10 lines), and best poem by a non-SFPA-member.

Fielding over 400 entries from around the world, contest coordinator Diane Severson Mori sorted the entries into categories, removing identifying elements. Finalists were selected by preliminary readers Michael A. Burstein, Ann K. Schwader and Marcie Lynn Tentchoff, who each chose ten poems from each division to be sent on to the final judge.

Winners

LONG FORM AND NON-MEMBER WINNING POEM:

The Fugitive

by Darrell Lindsey

Splashing paint onto faint stars,
 & more than a few planets pursuing
 the earthling with the bold brush
 who squeezes through wormholes
 with his vast palette intact.

Fugitive of art
 dabbling in skies
 worthy of Michelangelo's touch,
 or perhaps the vertigo
 of a Dali day.

He sketches sinews of clouds,
 bones of resurrection,
 lyrical light from starships
 that would exile him
 to crayons in a basement.

He travels with a fever
 in his kaleidoscopic veins,
 mutters to meteors
 caught up with him
 in the same throb of time.

He dreams of some blossoming space
 where he will be asked
 to sit at a table
 & drink golden nectar
 reserved for visiting angels.

But no such alien whispers
 have come down the corridor,
 no beautiful music
 beckoning the fugitive
 to unpaint the past.

He must again become comet-like
 or likely perish,
 no time for a lotus
 to grow yet
 in such celestial mud.

Tomorrow he will no doubt gnaw
 at the holes in colors,
 reflect on the angles
 of all the worlds
 not yet conceived.

He will fly to his calling
 though it may mean the stain
 of another dimension
 that has no intention
 of becoming his bouquet.

But perhaps some flailing day
 when I am in his studio,
 he will quietly appear
 with an unvanquished masterpiece
 tucked underneath his weary arm.

Darrell Lindsey is a freelance writer/ poet/songwriter from Nacogdoches, the oldest town in Texas. His haiku and tanka have won awards in the United States, Japan, Croatia, Bulgaria, Canada, and Romania. He is the author of *Edge Of The Pond* (Popcorn Press, 2012), available on Amazon and from the publisher at popcornpress.com.

LONG FORM RUNNER-UP (TIE):

The Music Is Always On

by Bryant O'Hara

The frostbite dies away once the bass drops. These old ARP 2600s run pretty smooth when the temperature's below 50. This is the day the big data dump from the Europa probes goes on-line. My hands warm as I caress dials and twist static out of a patch cable. The ARP provides the seed rhythm; my algorithms water that seed with data and grow beats. Ivrics and compositions. Fragments of music blossom into hits like

the g, the e, the o, the u, and the y. The g, the e, the o, the u, and the y are bosons shot out of a superconducting supercollider; they are as short-lived as they are hot.

And there is more to come,
for the music is always on.

Ever since Jo Effington mashed up the Arecibo observatory's decades-long data stream into the world's longest drum-n-bass composition, every musical hacker with a freak on for radio astronomy, getting teary when they watch Cosmos, has been clogging up the Internet with songs that literally take a lifetime to listen to.

And here's the tricked-out, somehow not quite played-out, old-hat thing: these songs *evolve*. The ones that hit the top of the charts—most of those actually take days to sink into you. That is the new music—that is the music of lives that are now very, very long. Somewhere in this world there is a musician/hacker that will take all your social data and turn it into a soundtrack. And it will never end. And the biofeedback-based symphonies are making a comeback after a brief flash in the late 2010s.

Our lives are so noisy, so funky—so downright god-damned dance-able, you can take the electric slide straight into the grave. The goth set even came up with software that monitors your rate of decay and mixes the chemical data with AI-sampled video clips. Illegal as hell, but still, your corpse can not only look beautiful, but sound beautiful.

My friend the guitarist hung up his axe after 30 years of touring. Not because he was old (god, who cares about that nowadays). Just wanted some peace and quiet, he said. So he went to a mountaintop to turn down the volume.

It is a bit loud down here,
and the music is always on.

We call them The Birds, the young ones. They have a new language that sounds like a vocoded modem missing the bands needed to sound like human speech. Data passes between them in packets picked up on their personal networks. Most of it is encrypted, as far as we old folks are concerned—nothing but noise leaks out. Fragments of data get translated as something like bird calls, hence the name.

In colors that slide off the human spectrum, The Birds gather in subway tunnels. One among them, staggering like a zombie, opens her mouth. Squawks and electric screeches transform into something that is still not speech, but a torrent of words as if from an aphasic gangsta rapper catching the holy ghost in the middle of evening prayers. The Birds don't exactly follow her, but merely begin their own drunken counterpoint.

It cycles in the tunnels,
between us,
in the tunnels.
The music is always on.

Trapped in the logos, these kids occasionally sync up with each other, and for a moment they are angels in a hoodoo choir, where the rhythm rides them until a security drone tranqs the MC. As fast-acting medication kicks in, the voices lap back from the tidal pull. Without the drones, the flock would infect those with poor barriers—and the beat would go on.

Our internal wifi can still hear the seed rhythm that kicked off the outbreak of song. You have to be disconnected—no, you have to be dead nowadays for it to really be quiet.

We the very old wonder what The Birds do when the power goes out.
They say little then, though we know they are not mute.
Perhaps they do it just to piss off the old folks.

Perhaps, underneath all that noise,
they are whispering to each other.
It is hard to tell.
The music is always on.

Bryant O'Hara is a programmer, poet, occasional musician, and budding maker - not always in that order, sometimes all at once. He has worked as an industrial engineer and technical writer, and is currently a software developer.

Bryant started writing poetry in earnest during the mid-1990s, performing as part of the Klub Kuumba poetry collective in Atlanta, GA. After a long hiatus, he revisited many of those poems and began creating new ones. "The Music is Always On" is his first published poem.

Bryant lives in Stone Mountain, GA, with his wife Alice and two of his seven children.

LONG FORM RUNNER-UP (TIE):

Rocketman Pantoum

by Jade Sylvan

The last rays of our sun have disappeared.
The stars all spread like scattered strands of beads.
I think it's gonna be a long, long time
before our skins are warmed again by light.

The stars, all spread like scattered strands of beads,
they're vital, but too far away to touch.
Before our skins are warmed again by light
(it's farther than biology allows)

there, vital, but too far away to touch
somewhere beyond our measurements and modes,
(it's farther than biology allows)
we'll find ourselves a new, familiar sun.

Somewhere beyond our measurements and modes
(most stars we see are galaxies, so far)
we'll find ourselves a new, familiar sun
too late for me. My son will have a son.

Most stars we see are galaxies so far
away they look like single points of light.
Too late for me, my son will have a sun.
Our scholars study daily to forget.

Away they look, like single points of light,
as if the world's worst fate were to have been.

Our scholars study daily to forget
the choruses of those old songs. We left

as if the world's worst fate were to have been
forgotten. Now I'm trying to call back
the choruses of those old songs we left
beneath that old horizon every night,

forgotten now. I'm trying to call back
the sun. It used to rise, and then it fell
beneath that old horizon every night.
This once I saw the Northern Lights back home.

The sun. It used to rise and then it fell.
I thought it'd go forever, like that and
this. Once I saw the Northern Lights back home
I swore I knew a thing or two 'bout light.

I thought it'd go forever like that, and
when it petered like a campfire flame
I swore I knew a thing or two 'bout light.
We know it moves so fast it freezes time.

When it petered like a campfire flame
we scanned the skies to find another sun.
We know. It moves so fast it freezes, time.
I don't think human vessels can catch up.

We scanned the skies to find another sun—
all carbon-made to carbon shall return.
I don't think human vessels can catch up,
and all the science. I don't understand.

All carbon-made to carbon shall return.
There's tons in heavy books I've never read
and all the science I don't understand.
Light doesn't age. It shines. It got us there.

There's tons in heavy books I've never read
about a world my son will never see.
Light doesn't age, it shines. It got us there,
though carbon suns all sink into the sea.

About a world my son will never see,
I speak, half mem'ry, half projected dream.
Though carbon suns all sink into the sea,
I try to paint a sunrise over black.

I speak, half mem'ry, half projected dream.
The last rays of our sun have disappeared;
I try to paint a sunrise over black.
I think it's gonna be a long, long time.

Jade Sylvan is a writer and performance artist. She's the author of *The Spark Singer* and has had work published in *PANK*, *The Sun*, *Bayou*, *Basalt*, *Word Riot*, *Decomp*, and others. Read her work and about her various projects at jadesylvan.com. She lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

SHORT FORM WINNER:

Cold

by Damien Cowger

You plucked the moon
from the November sky
just to prove a point.
To my surprise, it came
loose from its backing
with the careless ease
of yanking a button
from your hand-me-down peacoat.

You did it because
I said you couldn't,
and it came off easy,
yes.
But like the button, the moon
was needed, to make its coat,
its everything, sound.

So please forgive me
for walking away
into a moonless night,
because even though the tides stopped,
you blamed me when I pushed
your brilliant gift away
and it shattered quietly
in the frosty grass.

It could never be fixed
and when I said that it was
your fault for stealing it
from the world, you looked
at the stars, perhaps contemplating
which were the most dazzling
and said, "I did it for you."

Not once, as I walked away,
did you offer me your coat.

Damien Cowger is a writer of short fiction and poetry. His work has most recently appeared in *Fox Cry Review*, *Midwest Literary Magazine*, and *Denver Syntax*. He lives in Athens, Ohio where he is the Managing Editor of *New Ohio Review*. Damien estimates that he has swallowed about \$1.20 in dimes in his lifetime.

SHORT FORM RUNNER-UP:

Calculated

Calculated

by Cathy Bryant

Everyone takes her measure
as Candela enters the room,
her dress a nebula, airy with valences.
(Lady Calorie Langley frowns, mutters
behind her fan to her loyal Slyke.)
Candela's joules are breathtaking
—the bracelet of twinkling amperes,
and at her throat, a huge, flawless erg.
At her side is Petri Faraday, Count of Volt,
drinking tola and admiring the lustre
of the coulombs in his beloved's hair.
They tread a measure in the dance:
a rundlet, an edison, a quire.
He asks after her pet picomoles,
Mips and Mutchkin, and she laughs.
(The anarchist Smoot looks on in
jealous frustration. He sees the sea-miles
in her eyes; knows she will never smile
at him.)
Supper is laid on the periodic table:
centipawns in ream sauce, charka-baked
mease, sweet poiseuilles, endless magnons
of sparkling lanac. A violinist plays
Mercalli and mournful Danfon,
who are as fashionable as silken ells,
furlong boots and polished acre.
More dancing follows, and Candela flings
herself into a wild legua.
At midnight she calls loudly for her furman
to bring round the carriage; but as she
passes Faraday, she furtively slips her cordel
into his hand. He nods very slightly,
inhaling her scent of centibar.
Tonight's moment will be lepton.
C'est la crore.

Cathy Bryant lives in Manchester, UK, and performs her poetry all over the country. Her short stories and poems have been published in every continent except Antarctica, and in 2012 she won the Swanezine Poetry Prize, the Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Prize, the Sampad 'Inspired by Tagore' Prize and the Malahat Review Monostich Poetry Prize. Her collection *Contains Strong Language and Scenes of a Sexual Nature* was published recently and can be purchased from amazon.co.uk or any good bookshop. Find out more at cathybryant.co.uk.

"Calculated" was inspired by an entry in Sylvia Plath's diaries—she was studying science and had no interest in it except for the lovely words—amperes, coulombs. I love science but I took her point, and started researching the wonderful names for units of all kinds of measurement. Several seemed to suggest a Regency Romance, Georgette Heyer style, and so the poem came about. A *crore* is a Sri Lankan unit of currency.

DWARF FORM WINNER:

Lilith

by Steven Wittenberg Gordon

I was created to serve as consort for the First Man,
But who was he to lord it over me—his equal in every way?
And so I parted from him forever—and good riddance.
Then the Lord fashioned another, submissive mate for the man.
She bore him naked, weak, helpless children—he can have them!
The beasts of the field, the birds of the air, the creatures of the deep,
I shall take for mates, and my children will be strong!
All manner of demons and monsters will be my legacy.
And they shall be a terror to the children of Man,
Haunting their dreams, chilling their blood, and feasting on their souls.

Steven Wittenberg Gordon received his BA from Amherst College and his MD from Albany Medical College. He credits his romantic Shakespearean sonnets and other love poems with his luck in wooing, winning, and keeping his wife—a lady otherwise clearly out of his league. In the past year, he has been experimenting with speculative poetry, mainly fantasy and horror. "Lilith" is his first work of short fiction to be published in a professional market. Doctor Gordon resides in Kansas with his wife, their two children, and a poorly trained Airedale terrier. He continues to practice medicine on a part-time basis. Visit him at eretzsongs.blogspot.com.

DWARF FORM RUNNER-UP:

Dinosaur Heart

by Noel Sloboda

After the transplant,
my life was saved,
but my blood ran cold,
my pupils turned to slivers
of night. In darkness,
I heard echoes of lost brethren
calling from the pits,
asking me to fill the belly
of time with something
more than shadows.

Noel Sloboda is the author of the poetry collection *Shell Games* as well as several chapbooks. He has also published a book about Edith Wharton and Gertrude Stein. Sloboda teaches at Penn State York and serves as dramaturg for the Harrisburg Shakespeare Festival. His forthcoming poetry collection, *Our Rarer Monsters*, will feature original art by Marc Snyder. Catch a glimpse here: tumblr.com/tagged/our-rarer-monsters

Finalists

Long Form

Four Thoughts on the Evolution of Plant Consciousness • Daniel Ausema
After the Hunt • Kevin Bennett
Facts About Aliens • Michael Cain
Pssst! Physicists' Song • Shane Cave
Waiting for Rain • Peter Chiykowski
A Bullock of Special Burden • Denise Dumars (SFPA member)
House of Jaguar • Serena Fusek (SFPA member)
Il-i-ad that lad • Paul Hawkes
The Tooth Fairy Throws in the Towel • Ada Hoffmann
Stephanie • Art Holcomb
Stovetop Diplomacy • David Kopaska-Merkel and Melissa Frederick (SFPA members)
Unseeing • Courtney Kowalke
You were still a kid • Krishna Kumar
[The Fugitive](#) • [Darrell Lindsay](#)
Swimmy • Teresa Milbrodt
[The Music is Always On](#) • [Bryant O'Hara](#)
An Herbwife Lives by the Dragon's Eyrie • Bethany Powell
Nine Things About Oracles • David Sklar
Things Are Missing Everywhere • Arthur J. Stewart
[Rocketman Pantoum](#) • [Jade Sylvan](#)
The Popcorn Bag • Rita J. Traub (SFPA member)
Last Flight • Elizabeth Wager

Short Form

Canciones de los prohibidos • A.M. Alakoso
Eulogy for the Alien Who Died Too Young • Lana Hechtman Ayers
Threshold • Sara Backer
Forked Tongues • Elizabeth Barrette (SFPA member)
The Words of Mars • Ruth Berman (SFPA member)
Gliese 581d • Peter Bergquist
[Calculated](#) • [Cathy Bryant](#)
Examen • Jenn Cavanaugh
Shoulders of Giants • Ann Chatham
Climbing Up the Sky • G. O. Clark (SFPA member)
Futuristic High-Tech Motherhood • Marion Deutsche Cohen
[Cold](#) • [Damien Cowger](#)
The Loneliest Road • Martin Elster
Nameless Guardian • Alan Haider
FDA Advisory 1. Margaret Atwood Orders a Tuna Sandwich • Deborah Hauser
What dreams may come • irving (SFPA member)
Who's For Dinner • David Kopaska-Merkel (SFPA member)
These are the things no one now remembers • Geoffrey A. Landis (SFPA member)
The Dance in the Sunlight • Gregory Leunig
In the Curie Hospital in Paris • Mary McMyne
Heroes • Lisa Nichole
In the Vast, Underground Cities of Mars • Mary Jo Rabe (SFPA member)
Mr. Hyde's Pillow Talk • William John Watkins
When Johnny Mars Turns Five • Maaja Wentz
Wendigo in the 21st Century • Jacqueline West (SFPA member)
The Andromedans Arrive in Austin • Allyson Whipple
SOScery • Neal Wilgus (SFPA member)

Dwarf Form

Stunning Desire • Lana Hechtman Ayers
Every Which Way At Once • Elizabeth Barrette (SFPA member)
After • Beth Cato
Judgment Day • Marion Deutsche Cohen
The Water's Shadow • Alicia Cole
Exploring • Guy Anthony De Marco (SFPA member)
Sam the Great Space Explorer • Erin Diaz
Steampunk Noir • Denise Dumars (SFPA member)
[Lilith](#) • [Steven Wittenberg Gordon](#)
With Love, The War Chief • Alex Grover
a space ark • Jack Horne
Bargain • Jack Kogut
Dehiscence of the Dead • Courtney Kowalke
Area Blue Orb • Norma Laughter
The Prophet • L. Lambert Lawson
Supper • Sarah McCartt-Jackson
One Little Mistake • Stefon Mears
On Finding a Fossilized Spacecraft • Banks Miller
Carbon Cycle • Valerie Niemann
Star trap • Uche Ogbuji
Pythagora's Theorem Etheree • Carl Palmer
After the apocalypse, we discover... • Terrie Leigh Relf (SFPA member)
Love(s) Story • Aalix Roake
The Black Carousel • Brian Rosenberger (SFPA member)
[Dinosaur Heart](#) • [Noel Sloboda \(SFPA member\)](#)
Dreaming of Outer Space • J. J. Steinfeld
Kaeru • Mary A. Turzillo (SFPA member)