

A/A Productions presents

WHISPERING WORLDS

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*The A/A/ Productions
Horror/Fantasy/Science Fiction
Poetry Anthology*

an e-book

edited by

David Bain

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**Whispering Worlds:
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Poetry Anthology**

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which links to any poem in the e-book
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Introduction to the e-book version:

Why horror? Why fantasy? Why science fiction?

I'm writing this barely a month after Sept. 11, 2001, the day terrorists attacked America, slamming fully loaded hijacked airliners into the Pentagon and New York's twin World Trade Center towers, destroying both skyscrapers and a large portion of the government building, killing thousands.

Like most everyone else in this nation and across the world, I questioned nearly every aspect of my life in light of the attacks.

Like so many others, I questioned what is important in life, what is worth doing, what lies at the core of our existence.

And here I was, in the middle of this little project, adapting an online H/F/SF poetry anthology into an e-book.

I almost wrote it all off as mere escapism.

Science fiction never saved anybody, I thought.

Why bother when the horrors on TV are worse than anything in fiction?

But then I remembered something. I can no longer find the letter to quote it directly, but one of the poets included herein, Brett Rutherford, wrote to me during the initial reading period, saying that horror writers are among the kindest, most compassionate people he knows.

My experience has been similar.

I mulled over why this would be.

I also asked more mundane questions, such as why we all paid to see the *Star Wars* movies 14 times each, why *The Lord of the Rings* is being considered "The Book of the Century," why I balked when I read that a writer of Robert R. McCammon's caliber quit the horror genre because he "no longer wanted to celebrate evil."

The truth, of course, is that, whatever he thinks, McCammon never did "celebrate" evil.

And neither does any other worthy writer who works in the realm of the fantastic.

They celebrate a mythology which can ennoble humanity.

Good horror, fantasy and science fiction speak the language of mythology, which can, I believe, point the way for us when coping with the joys and tragedies of our lives.

Far from mere escapism, good horror, fantasy and science fiction can enrich our lives; they are the language of the subconscious, the language of light and dark, the language of hope, of dreams, of self-awareness.

The poems presented in this anthology, then, are a primer for this language, and the best of the poems, I believe, plumb the depths of its possibilities.

It's true that mythology often speaks a language of atrocity — at least on the surface — but it also points to deeper, richer worlds, whispering worlds of humanity and hope.

David Bain
10-23-01

Introduction to the HTML version:

About the A/A Productions H/F/SF Poetry Anthology

The A/A Horror, Fantasy and Science Fiction Anthology was originally meant to be a special double issue of *Riverrun*, a small press mainstream poetry magazine I edited for Glen Oaks Community College for five years, from 1991 to 1996.

I worked for a little over a year to compile 150 poems for the special H/F/SF issue. Then, in the fall of 1994, with an anthology I thought would open up a whole new audience for *Riverrun* and the college ready to go to the printers, the powers that be pulled the plug - i.e., the administration, who hadn't said diddley up to this point, now had "an image conflict" with the content.

But what should I have expected? After all, who takes H/F/SF seriously? The answer, of course, is that the mainstream itself takes H/F/SF quite seriously - as long as the H/F/SF label is nowhere to be seen.

To further the irony, while I did eventually solicit numerous poets identified with the H/F/SF fields, the project came about in the first place because I'd started to realize how much crossover there was between mainstream and so-called "genre" poetry. *Riverrun* often published mainstream poems by John Grey, W. Gregory Stewart, and several others directly associated with H/F/SF. At the same time, many of our "mainstream" contributors routinely dealt with subject matter that could, on various levels, be classified as H/F/SF.

Indeed, many of the poems in this collection are by mainstream poets who did not, at the time, know their poems would be considered for a H/F/SF anthology. They were simply submitting poems to another small press literary magazine. I think it's worth mentioning, especially in light of the college's reaction, that not a single poet said, "Ack! How dare you! I'd never have my name associated with that 'genre' stuff!" or anything remotely like it. (While I feel all the poems are worth publishing, I believe my selections reflect more *Riverrun*'s sensibilities than my own, especially in the horror section; I read for the anthology with my then-employer's outlook in mind. Again, irony.)

At the same time, I feel I should make a point regarding what many call "cliquishness" within the H/F/SF field: If you see the same names over and over again in the magazines and anthologies, it's because they're the ones who know what they're doing. Many who submitted poems specifically

for the H/F/SF anthology didn't make it because, well, their poems simply weren't good enough.

In defense of such a stance, I'll put forth that I came into this project with no ties to H/F/SF poetry except to the few associated poets who contributed mainstream work to *Riverrun*. Despite this fact, the "cliquish" H/F/SF community enthusiastically embraced this project. Furthermore, although I wish my brain were built to compose it, I usually fumble when I try to write overtly H/F/SF-oriented poetry and am bright enough to know it. In other words, I was not seeking to further my own work in the eyes of H/F/SF editors by publishing theirs. Then again, I had read widely in H/F/SF poetry - from August Derleth's historic anthology *Dark of the Moon* to the Robert Frazier-edited masterpiece, *Burning with a Vision* and Lee Ballentine's *Poly*, both of which defined, along with others, what was at the time that I was reading the current state of science fiction or "speculative" poetry. Plus I tried to stay current with the related magazines, and feel I had a pretty good idea of what H/F/SF poetry was currently out there.

My own intentions were not to match the outstanding quality of the above-mentioned anthologies, which more or less defined H/F/SF poetry in their time periods. My primary goal was, as always, simply to present what I thought was good reading to the few souls who might chance upon one of the 500-600 copy press run of the magazine I edited. If I had any other goal with this special issue, it was perhaps to blur the distinctions between the pigeonholes of mainstream and genre a little, in my own small way.

Once the project was nixed by the college, I intended to publish it myself, issuing each of the six sections as a separate chapbook. Alas, this never happened. Although layout happened in various forms, I was never happy with it, and meanwhile there was still *Riverrun* to tend to along with things like getting married, building a house, jobs, jobs, jobs, etc. (At this point readers can feel free to pull out the world's smallest violin and play it for me....)

Then...the Internet! I decided, eventually, on publishing the anthology in electronic form because: 1) I had never intended to make money on this project; 2) I had found a number of the poets to be online and saw that, through links, the anthology could be a resource as well as "good reading;" and 3) I wanted to learn about this fascinating new medium and see what it could do.

The decision to publish the anthology on the Internet cost me 10 poems. About five poets did not want their work where literally anyone had access to it. That might sound like the editor griping, but I honestly understand these individuals' concern. Anyone who doesn't should read Neal Bowers' excellent short book *Words for the Taking*. Another five poems

were lost because I was unable to contact the authors for permission to post the poems on the web.

As of this writing, I plan to solicit replacement poems for the lost 15, making this quite likely the first anthology one could read before submitting to!

My gratitude goes out to all the contributors who were so patient with me for so long before this project came to fruition, and I thank those who dropped out for their professional demeanor while doing so. Despite their administrative anxieties, I also want to thank Glen Oaks Community College for giving me an excellent forum to work with for five years.

Finally, I'd like to note that, once the project went electronic, an enthusiastic dialogue began with many of the contributors, dialogue which was often instructive and enlightening - the only major difference I ever saw in "genre poets" while reading for the project was that they tended perhaps to be more outgoing than much of the "mainstream."

One of the contributors, no less than that exquisite *Weird Tales/Worlds of Fantasy & Horror* editor Darrell Schweitzer, urged me to take this project back to print format for my monetary benefit. His arguments, and the methods he described for me, were convincing. His excellent publishing advice did not fall on deaf ears. I'd rather be done with this one - and I was, in my opinion, too deep into work on the electronic version to pull up stakes yet again - but I might someday pursue similar print projects. These, however, would most likely be collections of fiction, not poetry. I mention this not for self-promotion, but in the spirit of the free exchange of information, which is, in my opinion, the Internet's best quality.

With that in mind, this piece does not end with my thoughts, but connects instead to those of another: I'll close with a link to an excellent essay by David C. Kopaska-Merkel, an editor who has been doing this longer and better than I could ever hope to. You will find his essay on why Internet pages will never take the place of printed ones by following this link <<http://home.earthlink.net/~dragontea/writeweb.html>>

David Bain
12-1-98

Section I:

THESE GHOSTS

*24 poems about the worlds of
haunts and the haunted*

DISCREDIT

Light's impressive image:
it is pure, even holy,
it is friendly and wholesome;
it is the atmospheric effect
of choice for all good
and patriotic Americans—
put blunt: darkness is sin.

It's just that when you saw
sun glaring off the East River
that hot and windy summer's day,
it was like flash bulbs going off,
igniting each other in chains
just beneath the surface
(a drowned person started it):
more and more, faster and faster—
you thought your brain would pop;

it's just that your doctor friend
told you: a man brought on epilepsy.
He drove by woods with low sun
shining bright through slender trees.
He stared at quick progression of
sun-shade, sun-shade, sun-shade;
got sick

- Mary Winters

THESE GHOSTS

They are losing track of time
again,
I mean, falling back into it,
these ghosts,
as they visit old haunts.

This is why they appear
suddenly,
so intent on what they see
they forget invisibility,

take on old bodily forms,
for a moment re-emerge,
float toward us,
hands outstretched

for their eyes are unaccustomed
to the light, and if they
moan or groan or shriek,
it's that they've forgotten

old manners and most of their
wherewithal.
Usually they stand and stare,
are strangely
moved, having come back

into our walking, talking
tick tock world again:

and they utter no words,
stand speechless
what could they say
remembering
the way things were?

- Philip Miller

A FIELD NEAR GRAYSLAKE

Spring has not come
this year:
a relentless winter
of cop killings
and desert wars
has melted
into an uncaring summer
of night terrors and
daytime chest pings.
It is only May
and already silverfish
breed on my walls
as I look at my city -
like a whore in a doorway
hot and moist
with sweat,
it beckons my gauzy gaze.
An unwanted wind
thrusts
branches against my east window,
scratching negatives
into my
mind. She was
beautiful,
that last night:
blonde hair teased
and teasing;
eyes hushed blue
as the December twilight
(that last night)
her neck a pillar
sculptured
on which all that face
is displayed.
All that face,
but mostly the eyes,
the eyes that hold
the night that fades and swims,
swelling
back into focus

as the small black dots
of your thin
newsprint face
on the obituary page
taken in the days when
you still had all
your skin.

It's been a year
and I don't need
moonlight splinters
to see the neck
a pillar slaughtered
on which all that face
was discarded
in April weeds
after being ripped
twenty-
three
times
with an ice
pick
found at the scene.

I want spring
to come. What
were you doing
in Grayslake?
Was I there, too?
I have no answers,
only the corpse
of mere
fact

- Wayne Allen Sallee
Chicago; 4 September 1991

THE McWILLIAMS' COFFEE TABLE

So the Joneses went out and did it:
took truck and winch and crowbar
and lifted a lamb-adorned
delicate gravestone
from country burial ground,

washed dirt and roots from its base,
set it on oak frame and casters
to be the life of parties,
the butt of jokes, the putting-
down place of soda cans, iced tea
and sweating daiquiri glass.

Wine stains the pearly limestone.
Nicotine marks will not clean off.

The floorboards beneath
give off an ominous groan.

Torn between envy and outrage,
the neighbor couple lingers and gawks.

Mrs. McWilliams wants to report them
to the town and parish authorities.

Her husband Peter writes down the name,
Lilian McHenry who died in 18--
something, listens again as drunken Jones
retells the hazards of late night
shopping, guesses the town
where he made the heist.

"Hard work - and dangerous," McWilliams speculates.

"Like candy from babies," Jones boasts.

A new moon comes and passes.

It's party time at the McWilliamses.

And what should the startled visitors
find sporting a Chinese vase,
a *Vanity Fair* and a plate of brie?

An oblong box of plexiglass
extending the length of the oversize sofa,
contains a sleeping beauty occupant -
none other than Lillian McHenry,

exhumed with care from her stoneless plot,
her long white corpse hair intact,
her long nails black, eye sockets
dark as six-foot soil,
her shroud a study in tatters,
nose gone, gap teeth a hideous smile,
an onyx ring on her skeleton fingers.
Guests circle it cautiously,
noses alert for that certain smell,
eyeing the carpet for telltale stains,
dreading the thought of a sudden motion
within the griplock of polymer.
Soon enough the discomfort is over.
Lilian is adorned with coffee rings,
a spill of gin, a cocaine dusting.
The Jones parties are a thing of the past.
The McWilliamses so chic and clever,
so *au courant* in the finer art
of interior decorating.

- Brett Rutherford

**WHEN YOU RUN YOUR FINGER
ACROSS A CREMATORIUM WALL**

you leave a thumb-print
in the residue of organic waste
in the memories
of flesh (passion)
of bone (structure)
and sinew (acts)
so easily rubbed
off.

- Kevin L. Donihe

FAUNS 'N' THE 'HOOD

Fauns frolicked cautiously
in our front yard Friday eve
while he lay dreaming
of the Light.

The moon shape
of their hooves
have marked the lawn
in circular style.
They have limned
the brown grass
and dead leaves
with shimmering white frost.

He turns on a light
and sets out mothballs.
Ritual -
to drive the Horned Ones away.

Useless.

- Lorraine Anderson

FEAR, PAST AND PRESENT

Someone said our early memories
show lifelong worries, conflicts:

child shocked by fifties horror
movie: jerking clacking dead in

antique divers' suits their faces
grave mud slimy pocks they spoke of

death dismemberment proud ship they
sunk their venue no need for air

hose to the surface—they come to her
at night; child shocked by air raid

drills at school thought of radiation
sickness first the flash then no air

safe—the vomiting the clumps of
hair no cure in sight; dread loss of

a limb its perfect absence air where
a friend was—

— Mary Winters

HAUNTING THE PARLOR

I have come back to the parlor,
carefully choosing the dead
of night, watching the way the moon
comes in and gives a blue cast
to every piece of bric-a-brac.

There's the big, beveled mirror
I used to scare myself in,
as I stumbled in my cups through the dark,
groping toward the staircase—
now that looking glass shimmers like
the surface of a pool so deep
that if you entered it
you might discover secrets
even ghosts can't fathom,
the reasons why spirit
remembers flesh, why I haunt
my old haunts
and have returned again as through
a mirror's mirror
to find a piece of simple brass
sitting on its shelf—Grandmother's
dinner bell with a handle like a fish's head.

I still hear it ringing
through autumn air
sharp and insistent,
bringing me back home
to something sizzling on the stove,
to the squeal of the teapot,
and splash of running water,
this piece of metal
without a soul to save or lose
sitting safe and still.

I would ring it loudly once again,
if my arm were still an arm,
and go outside to wake the neighbors up
with this souvenir
that will outlast them too.

- Philip Miller

SNOWHAUNT

The snow comes
and adds two feet to my digging.
I remember once, as I was
turning white and burrowing,
how I fell through a rotten box,
crashed into the open arms of bone.

The skeleton held my head to its chest
as if I were her child
crying home from a fight.
I had to break her arms to breathe,
rose above her, brushed
her cold white skin from my coat.

Still, a ghost shivers within me,
a memory watching
the snow fatten her again.

- Robert S. King

On a strange mission

the November wind rattles,
mocks a lone stop-sign.

— Leo Yankevich

NUMBWEED

I am become
a sightless, wandering thing,
where nothing is
and no light dwells.

I am your sapless body
rolled in oak and satin,
your silent mouth
and eyes closed deep as bruises
in your pallid face.

It is your final night,
your choir
and your carnations -
and, at any cost,
your truth -
that draw me to the stillness
of this place.

Inside my head
your flutes are pouring darkness
on my leaves and branches;
cold voices growing down

to root me to this hillside
and the mansions
of your grave.

- Mary E. Choo

IN THE LAST QUARTER

She sat at the table under the small light.
Outside the window the moon rose huge and yellow,
slow, swollen, weighing down the night.

She turned the pages of a book, pages that
were dry and stiff; and the book's spine creaked each time
she moved her hand to hold them flat.

From somewhere a wind began to stir the room—
cups chinked softly on their hooks, in a vase the dusty
flowers brushed together; soon

the shelves, the pots and plates, began to tremble
with the edgy aching sound of something about to break
and under the swaying lamp she could no longer tell

one word from another. She put her head down,
one ear pressed on the book as if to listen, and watched
leaves twist across the floor, drift into mounds

around her feet and up against the wall;
leaves swirling and falling till the room was lost in them
and their rustling whisper like the scurrying of small

animals or the parched voices of the dead. And then
her eyelids fluttered, shut; and the wind also dropped,
sudden, and in the room everything fell silent.

The lamp hung above her, its shadow didn't change.
Her chair stopped creaking, and the leaves
lay deep enough to drown in; like tiny hands or flames

the leaves lay from wall to wall, high
as her waist, as the window. Not a sigh. Beyond the glass
the moon swept, bright and staring, into a frozen sky.

— Dave Calder

DISAPPEARANCE

That night when the man left work
 he drove away from the city
the car disappeared
 he disappeared

His family began looking for him
 his wife wept
 his children were bewildered
 his brothers talked
 to the police

They never found him anywhere
 and after some time they forgot
 about him

And that is the end of the story
 except that
 once in a while
 he calls others away
 too.

- Shirley Powell

QUESTIONS FOR THE PASSIVE MAN WORRIED ABOUT ABDUCTION

Another executive has disappeared,
no note or phone call yet. Did he expect
to be abducted? Does anyone,
submissive to the end, ever expect
to turn up in a ditch, feast for fly
and worm? Were you bundled off to Scouts,
formal kerchief a sign around your neck,
told at Jamboree to tie, with brittle
fingers in the freezing rain, a bowline,
to win, or fail again to win, a prize?
Were you ready to submit? And did
the Army hand you down its line, stamp
you potential engineer, scrap the plan,
ship you overseas to load and unload
ammo, bring you home and let you go?
Were you ready then? For Cupid's ruthless
bondage? The job, that pistol at your head?
The marriage bed, to lie there, hostage?
Ready to give in without a struggle?
To trust abductors not to bungle?
Another executive has disappeared.

- Graham Duncan

HONEY POT

- 1. *A quagmire*; 2. *A children's game...*

Mud oozes from the ground around here.
Your leg sinks up to the knee. There's
no time for swinging the child, hands
clasped under her, between us till she
lets go. Milton says women are formed
for softness and sweet grace. But he's
never watched Hannah wiggle her way free
and get lost in the fields out back. She
hoots, You'll never find me now, and if
we try, wading into the soft mush under
a Halloween moon, she hunkers down,
head between her legs, so we swim right
by, it's way past supper now, and grief's
starting to coil around the heart. We've
carried the game too far, some day we'll
have to pay, with a real child who will
get lost, like all the others in this life.

- Stuart Frieibert

HUMP DAY

You may have conjured demons that whirled
about your crouched and praying form,
have shattered glass
on your own cosmic steam,
have mesmerized, first, the cat, lastly
(driven to his knees),
your very best friend,
spun Japanese lanterns,
stirred currents in an auditorium
with simply a subtle inclination,
and beyond all parlor tricks, looked into the very
eyes of your dearest wife and seen her soul peer out,
tentative, reluctant, dazzling,
seen beyond question the absolute perfection and
permanence of every living thing,
imperishable, everlasting.
But it will not help you past the aftermath, the 9 to 5,
wresting the groceries, the rent, the car
will not help you past HUMP DAY,
Wednesday, unassailable obstacle to a tortuous slide
toward the shortest weekend
imaginable,
and all of it, all that purity and power will be opaque,
remote,
diffuse, less than a memory, a purposeless visitation,
when an old man tells you that his impending death
is a troubling,
awful mystery, for you have lost the means
to respond,
and simply summon a few odd clichés -
JOHN, THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS DEATH.
CONSIDER THE LILACS.
HOW DID WALLACE STEVENS PUT IT?
THAT'S IT. A WAVE, INTERMINABLY FLOWING
(knowing your own demise will be terror, flat
hard going.)

- David Swartz

EVIDENCE

All week the curtains have bellied in.
Shadows climb past the window,
 and each afternoon one strays
inside, across the narrow sill,

 a girl with a querying, soft tread
approaching her infant brother,
 too pretty, she thinks, to be a boy,
his face too lively with sleep to trouble.

Someone has oiled the good oak trunk
under the window, left static,
 snapdragons, a fan
of thank-you notes on the bed,

 as if it were late July,
and the afternoons still brilliant, full
 of elms and their low speech
like a river's. Withdrawing, a shadow

is the consternation of woods,
of riverbanks, like the misgivings
 in a wise, dark-eyed, immortal sister
at the evidence of change—the light

 as it finds out listless rooms,
stubborn features on a landscape,
 as it sets each in a motion that is,
at first, the motion of something else.

- John Palmer

YOU MUST BE HAPPY

All is well or should be well,
yet something makes the cat
switch her tail just once.

You consider the pure colors
of your belongings.

but you feel it,
like the perturbation of water,
feel it tighten
the side of your face
and slide down
the side of your neck.

Did someone come in the night
to stand in the room,
touching the little bottles
on the bureau,
leaving one slightly askew?

Dogs are barking somewhere.

Somewhere babies
stir in their sleep.

You touch your bureau,
your yellow bed.

All is complete
or should be complete.

You must be happy

You must be as happy

as a leaf,
as happy as a yellow stone,
round and serene
in the light.

- Barbara Daniels

HOMECOMING

I shall
slither thru
the filthy
hearts & streets
of your city
tonite like
the tongue of
some gray old ghost,
calling out names,
wanting a kiss.

- William Travel

CAPTIVE

Blue angel
of stubble fields filled
with spiders' poison.
Arachnids spill
from drowning mouth.
Wild, bristling legs
wild words
she gurgles.

Child of deceptions
blue-skinned captive.
Strangely entangled
in webwork of terror.
Mysteries perverted
the meadows'
chill slumber.
Now evil awakened
through human intention.
The rotting of new skin
slow eating
of hearts.

Blue angel of oozing—yellow
haired savioress.
Scissored with insects
odd wounds
of unnature.
The multi-eyed order
of criminal violence.
The many-eyed ranking
of death-
spinning watchers.

This I have witnessed
a man with a jaw bone
in twilight gray passage
in morning cold shadow
a man in a wheelchair
her body
ripped naked.

Half frozen in dewdrops.
In salt shards, in teardrops.
Her lips, bleeding bubbles.
Her lips
edged in ice.

- David Sparenberg

NERVE

Where horror lies,
this current binding
fear to awe.
The nerve jumps
and the eye blinks,
the hands sheen and tense
intent to strike or choke
if not for the current that drives
the cocktail of grief and love
through the brain, the horror
of what might do
if not for these sad recollections,
these ghosts, these nightmares,
our nerves thrumming religiously
with the horror,
the horror we love.

— Steve Rasnic Tem

BAD NIGHT BLUES

the bed is studded
with antlers. When
I roll into the
quilt something
jabs me awake.
By 6 I've slept
about 12 minutes.
Nightmares charge
like annoyed bulls.
I can't breathe;
dreams lie on their
backs like centipedes
squirming in Clorox

- Lyn Lifshin

TERROR

It's the glaze
on where what
you thought
you could
stand is
sabotaged
you lose
balance ice
is a dagger
that melts
before tiger
prints even
the shadow of
what got you's
left and there's
just a pale
rose rain
licks the edge
of as you
stagger off
unable to
speak

- Lyn Lifshin

NOTE

No note,
only singular
visible scrawl
of suicide's sprawled body,

bloodsong silent,
brainmusic stopped
on final note.

— Irv Rosenthal

Section II:

WHISPERING WORLDS

*25 poems exploring
the aberrant and abhorrent*

BURYING JACK

I notice a child's marble
shining in the black
turn of a shovel,
as it spills into your grave.
I see blind worms
caressing the blue orb,
fat with you,
curious as to what
round thing dares block
their path. They feast
on your carcass,
carry strange gifts
in their maws
to spit at the object in sacrifice.
Praying for vision,
they nest in your skull
and wait for a sign.
Soon the marble ossifies
into a single eye,
twisting in the darkness
of a new womb, pulsing
with the heartbeat
of vacillating rings of cilia
and the splatter of raindrops
eroding you free.
The obelisk above -
inscribed with mystic runes -
is next. They will bring
you a body of stone.
Years later you all find me
reaching for the gun
beneath my pillow,
but bullets only break
you into new slivers,
live to regenerate
newborn stones.

And I give myself to you,
a new gift
from your worshipping
congregation of eyes,
whom up till now
have only speculated
your history in myth.
Having seen
your creator,
together
they pick up the gun.

- Michael A. Arnzen

whispering worlds

flesh is tight across her face,
 across the bone beneath (not fey,
 nor painfully—
she is not unpleasing),
 skin,
 cartilage and
 skull,
her staring eyes. her hair.
 (she is dark and lovely, as
my love is dark and lovely, and yet she...)

 these are lunar intrusions.

whispering worlds walk behind her,
 but leap to shadow when I,
 whirling, turn...
I cannot achieve the truth of these, and failing,
 find them only
 in her eyes.

 the strange woman
and the whispering worlds
 will come to you,
 as they have come to me;
 what will you do then?

why?

 why?

—W. Gregory Stewart

from prometheus a treasure stolen

i hold them in my palm stars. sand grains.
galaxies of swirling radiance. motes of tantalizing
& hypnotic
prism-sense-vibration
the digits of my fingers twitch & pulse like bloated larvae
of eyelash-tickling layers. violet seas
of easter island typhoon crest & break about my buzzing
skull
these dimensions open up to me. like orchids dilating
in t i m e l a p s e
skies reeling flame wriggling nets of fish that hold a catch
of transmutating water snakes. kiao. & ying-lung. k'iu-lung
like robins' eggs
& cobalt. & 81 & 36. (they manifest my fear like centipedes.
wax.
iron &
twisted strands of vari-colored thread).
even gods must fear
even gods must fear these binding alchemies!
i hold them in my palm stars. sand grains.
galaxies of swirling radiance. motes of tantalizing
& hypnotic
prism-sense-vibration
even gods must fear

—t. Winter-Damon

SERENDIPITY

Odd how information comes
unexpectedly, from unexpected
sources. Just the other
day, someone wondered how to
spell a dead singer's
name; the next, he
saw the name on a
postage stamp. A woman had

this problem: she made bad
luck with a broken antique
clock she set to the
hour and minute of her
son's birth, which implied
—made inevitable—his
end. But she was afraid to
change the hands—then the
clock would tell the moment of
his death. At the

office, she heard talk of an
"old-fashioned funeral:" a
family man dropped dead at age
fifty-two; a clock on a wire
stand at his wake made of
black and white mums showed the
exact time of his death. She

knew she must act...a
secretary said the
only thing to do was
remove the hands of her clock—

—Mary Winters

TICKING CLOCK

I am sure that my clock is alive.
In the hallway it ticks
in a quizzical way
and it simply does not measure time.
It clinks and it clunks
and its hands wheel and spin
and its gears pop and chuckle and chime.

Quite alive is my quizzical clock,
and there's something amiss
in the way that it works
but I simply don't, really don't mind.
I can listen for days
to the way that it ticks
and it pops and it chuckles and chimes.

Yes, my clock is alive, is alive,
and each tick and each tock
and each clink and each clunk
is a riveting moment in time.
And my quizzical heart
beats along with the clock,
with each pop and each chuckle and chime.

I'm in love, I'm in love with my clock
and I think and I've thunk,
as my hands wheel and spin,
that I'm losing my quizzical mind.
Now my clock and I stand
side by side in the hall
and together we pop, chuckle, chime.

—Mark McLaughlin

THE NAMING

The name is a leash
that keeps the wildness in check.
Speaking it,
you draw the ghost of the beast
into the room from however many miles away.

The name splits into words,
ark unloading,
becomes the parents that come into the room
passing all those traps scattered on the floor
to cage our fears neatly,
even in the dark,
put the animals away again,
stuffed
onto shelves.

Now the parents are gone;
words retreat from flesh,
grow into prayers
to draw God close
so we can whisper in His ear,
breathe the word into God
that will tear us loose from flesh,
render
us permanent.

—Duane Ackerson

SOME DAY A SUDDEN CRAVING

Old blood goes bad.

Only freshly siphoned blood
leaks new life
into veins,

and so, at the weekend
he comes home
with bottled refuse blood

to feed the roses:

white, with no blush
rising. Innocence of Borgia,
the Pontiff's kin;

thorns tucked away
in thicket leaves. Beguiling
kitten roses. Claws
straining in velvet lairs.

Old blood
goes bad in storage,

but sated with mild
hallucinogens, his roses
thirst for something real.

They smile at him.

- Barbara A. Holland

**RICHARD TOPCLIFFE,
TORTURER TO THE QUEEN**

Death's coming must not be too quick.
Life must seep slowly from each crack
Within the tortured's porous soul;
It must ooze like oil through a sack.
Anguish makes death a dirty trick.

The flame must linger on the wick
Till it shows life is such a black,
Remorselessly unfathomed hole
Men plead for death upon the rack
More desperately than clocks tick.

What makes of torture a high art
Is to prolong it as skilled lovers
Prolong the pleasures they impart
In the deep warmth beneath the covers.

—Lawrence Minet

THE WAY OF PHEMRA

Certain fears no human tongue should taste
lie bitter in the mouths of those who seek
cryptic knowledge hidden in the waste
of barren hinterlands, remote and bleak.
My uncle knows its secrets, but will speak
no word of Phemra nor the trials he faced,
but quickly shifts the subject, his voice weak,
eyes furtive as those shadow-beasts he chased.

Underneath my eldest uncle's bed,
I came across a crumbling manuscript
with letters calligraphed in faded red
on thinnest ivory parchment, pages ripped
and rusted pink where tears or blood had dripped.
To touch its cover fettered me with dread
as if I held the key to my own crypt.
The Way of Phemra was all the cover said.

I know I should have left it where it lay,
or burned its secrets into silver ash.
I must have stood there trembling half a day,
book in hand, until I saw the flash
of lightning in the glass, and made a dash
for safety to escape the ricochet
of thunder that I knew was going to crash.
Clinging to the tome, without delay,

I scurried to my favorite inglenook.
Inside, I turned the lock inside its hasp
and settled on the bench to read the book,
ancient pages riffling with a rasp.
Their recondite locution made me gasp,
scanning arcane codes. My fingers shook.
The Way of Phemra held me in its grasp;
less than half an hour was all it took.

My heart was heavy, though my head was light.
My lips and throat were dry, my fingers moist.

And though I closed my eyes, I could recite
whole paragraphs much better left unvoiced,
abominations I was loathe to foist
upon the world. Too late to be contrite.
In far-off Phemra, shadow-beasts rejoiced.
I bit my tongue out of my mouth that night.

—Jacie Ragan

WHAT THE CHILD KNOWS ABOUT THE NIGHT

He lies stark still
in the darkness
clutching the covers
and listening to what comes
racing along the tracks and along
the tracks
 these wheels
 this string of freight cars
hurrying up the street and
 into the yard
to mount the wall of the house
he lives in
wheels and pistons
rattling like bones
along the windowsill
and into the room and up
the bedpost until his screams
bring his father stumbling
in with his shotgun
to shoot them away
 wheels
 train
and all running backwards
along the windowsill
and down the wall
and out into the yard
and around the curve in the road
beyond the water tower
then down into the valley
and coming to a stop on
the outskirts of still another town
where in a house like this one
some other child will be
holding his breath in the dark
and waiting to scream.

—Constance Pultz

MAD WOMAN

I, Mabel, hear the years buzz
Someone said what happened to Mabel
the one whose mother burned houses
and someone answered they took her away
one afternoon She said her room was fur
and would kill her with its great wings

I hear the years buzz
In the hall there were owls
and cranes with necks like esses
webbed feet of frogs that were men
that suddenly were men
I locked my door
there were rabbits many weaving
long circles
round my room
I ran to the window
nuns walked near the convent
I called and I called
after a while men who were tall
broke open the door
that the dark green snails
had sealed firm
I was carried bandaged in blankets
unable to do more than wink
down a long stair
heads sat on the banisters
watching

Now, I sit in a chair
painting white pictures
nobody sees them but me
safer so
I have gilded my arms with a pigeon's blood
and my captors are animal lovers

Sometimes I think of the nuns
they never come here

UNDEAD

the snow's caress as subtle
as my last victim's giggle
the sky a palpable thing
I now understand my pain
more intimately than I do
my own heartbeat

—Wayne Allen Sallee
CHICAGO: 3 April 1993

PREDATOR

These dreams,
shackled to the truth,
won't free me for an instant,
this sleep a savage
rerun of the night before,
who am I,
what have I done,
what has he done,
the demon given bloody reign
on tortured streets,
his eyes afire,
his hands addicted to
the knife,
the cruelty a double dose
for roping me
into his grim identity,
switching on these stereotypes
that plague my head
with unholy voices
that cry the song
that names me "predator"
so I won't feel like
the victim I know
myself to be.

—John Grey

NO WAY TO FIGURE IT

no
way to figure it when
you dine at Bongo Burgers &
they serve up a rare bongo in
a bun/ no
way to chew the skin &
make it in the least bit palatable
so you ask the counter girl

"Where did you get this skin?"

& I see the bloody knife in her
hand & I look up & down my
body to see it skinned alive &
of course I fall
in love!

—Fritz Hamilton

THE KING IN YELLOW

I've left the Elder Sign at places
Where the people have fish faces,
And signed my name in my own blood
In a book far older than the flood.
T'was down a crypt in a foreign land
Through "caverns measureless to man"
At the stroke of twelve, Walpurgis Night
As doubtful, winged things took flight
And shrill, thin flutes did mock the air
T'was then I saw him standing there;
The Yellow King, 'neath a yellow hood,
(I would have run then if I could've!)
And then he smiled, though I don't know how,
(His features hidden by that cowl!)
I shrieked, I turned and ran and I
Recall no more till I saw the sky
And then I screamed an awful sound,
The stars and moon were spinning 'round
And then I knew that everything
Is a toy in the hands of the Yellow King!

—Jody Forest

ACCLIMATION

If you stay awake long after the others have gone to bed,
they will look at you strangely.
They will wonder what you read and write.

If you wait until midnight to walk the hills,
they will talk about you in your absence.
They will wonder whom you meet by moonlight.

But here is a strange thing about vision:
your eyes grow accustomed to that to which they're exposed.

Later, in the land after death,
those who have always walked in light and love will be lost.
"I cannot see!" they will cry, stumbling blindly.

You will already know your way in the great darkness.
You will pick your path by familiar landmarks.

—Scott H. Urban

THE MAN WHO WAS SING-SING

When it came to him suddenly
that he was the largest prison
in the universe, with tiny convicts
incarcerated in the cytoplasm
of his myriad cells like eggs in aspic,
his thoughts became suicidal.

How could he justify paying
room and board for all the galaxy's
miscreants? A staunch proponent
of capital punishment,
he quietly arranged their execution
by committing suicide.

He had to be careful, lest
the little buggers escape
in a bowel movement, or spring
themselves from his rotting carcass
to infiltrate the water table
and savage the ecosystem.

So he flung himself into a vat
of fuming nitric and hydrofluoric acid,
where everything - flesh, hair,
bones and implants - was dissolved
without a trace. Even the tiny license
plates that spelled out God's intentions.

- Keith Allen Daniels

the stars
form
a skeleton

shiver of glass bells

-Thomas Wiloch

HERE

something as mysterious
as quarks a pull like
naked charm sets in
changes the air
mysterious as what
happens in houses
where women who live
together a long time
begin to get their
period on the same
day something un
spoken runs from
pillow to pillow may
be while we sleep
like mice in the wall
forms the field of
apples and elderberry
into a sea of glazed
green reflecting
more colors than an
ordinary prism then
the birds come you
drift all day in and
out of yourself
fly until a car churns
up thru the gravel
like lights going on
at the end of a
movie

- Lyn Lifshin

PANIC

later, the stain
of it still clings
to fish net
stalking like
the blue
you're sure
her eyes were
before light
at 4 in
the morning
when its a
miracle you can
put the key
in the car door
and stay on
the highway
back to a room
you're amazed
you still know.
It leaks onto
sheets ruins
pale silk,
indelible as
night, caustic
as the verbs
you couldn't
and wouldn't
say more
haunting by
their absence

- Lyn Lifshin

PANIC

a gargoyle
perched behind
your molars
starts swelling
sticks a fang in
your cheek's
soft skin,
another down
your esophagus
as if more is
invading you
than the
shakes and it
is setting
up road blocks
no province
inside your
body won't
know the
checkpoints of

- Lyn Lifshin

BRAIN OF FLESH

While he was awake he became painfully aware of the fleshiness of his brain.

He became obsessed with the idea that his brain was really no more than flesh and blood, subject to pain, fatigue, and disease. The fact that it was capable of thought at all seemed a joke in the worst possible taste.

In fact, he thought it far more likely that this brain of a few simple parts was merely some sort of receiver, tuned to some distant channel, and that his every thought originated elsewhere, that his life was simply the sum total of idle ruminations haphazardly received from some anonymous thinker.

How did the brain smell when it died? Was it like some handful of spoiled meat? He'd known people who were losing their minds and they did have some sort of foul fragrance about them.

Some nights before he went to sleep he'd make an effort to turn his brain into something more, into a transmitter of thoughts, of pleadings back to the hidden source of all his inspirations.

Who are you? he sent, with the darkness closing in. I must see your face. Where am I going? And will I go there alone?

—Steve Rasnic Tem

MOUTH

This slit
across the face surprises
with the vastness
of the hollows
whose depths it opens.
Keep it closed and still
they see the shadows
through your eyes.
Mouths must surround,
yet keep death out.
Mouths must suck, take
in as much as courage
allows. And fill
that dark with crowds.

—Steve Rasnic Tem

BOWELS

Where serpents sleep
the sleep of denial,
so long you might hang yourself
in their soft coils. Bowels groan
with what you force inside
with all the despair
they must contain. Bowels weep
the tears of the demented
stinking of confusion
and neglect. Your life
ends here: in the waste
of foldings and unfoldings,
the end of hunger,
the ultimate failure of your mouth
to consume all
you needed.

—Steve Rasnic Tem

BUREAU OF INJUSTICE

Subjected to injustice lately? Good for you! Injustice takes the world by storm. Now then, if you will just fill out this form, we'll grant you your Official Victimhood.

—Tom Riley

Section III:

**THE INEVITABILITY
OF LIGHT**

*21 poems from the more
brightly-lit realms of fantasy*

OVERHAUL

Melt down the iron
fist,

and remold the feet
of clay.

Refill the heart
with better blood,

and clear the eyes
of narrow vision.

Re-
imagine the mind

with myths
that really matter.

And return
to the new self.

—David Athey

AND SUDDENLY FLOWERS

Coming down fast off the interstate,
I brake on the ramp, and suddenly flowers
are everywhere, blue and white:
chicory, Queen Anne's Lace
flood over the pavement.
The car rocks a moment,
steams, falls quietly apart.
I want to jump up, shout,
start running into the flowers
that stretch farther into the future
than I can imagine.

—William Bridges

A VISIT TO OZY

The desert stretched to the horizon, bare and empty—
only two vast blocks of stone stood on its level sands.
Old, decayed, like pillars from a ruined temple;
we were sure something had made them when this land
had life. But searching in their shadows we found simply
nothing, no sign of who or what had raised them here.
There was just a knobbly rounded rock, lying half-sunk near there,
its huge hacked surface split by deep cuts that seemed to sneer,
and on a slab beneath them we saw marks that might have sometime
been words: *man* or *king* perhaps, perhaps *mighty* and *despair*.
It was not important. This world was wrecked, by who and why
no one could know. It was cold. We were getting bored.
It was then the odd-shaped rock yawned, opened wide blind
eyes and wrinkled lips. "Put me back on my legs at once!" it roared.

—Dave Calder

a stone land polished
by clearer winds: the chalice
glittering through dust

—Carl Brennan

ICARUS

My father has his mazes; his hands know things
beyond all men, but his interests are not mine.
Content with craft, he hovers. I soar. His wings
have need of my fierce will. Why worship at shrines
of lesser gods? I fly to test my worth
against immortal intellect, to drink
a wine not offered those of humble birth.
I shall outstare the sun and never blink.

There is a truer life that lies beyond
the ordinary mortal. Can Zeus refuse
a seeker of pure wisdom who wagers all
for an ideal? How could he cast me down?
But if these wings should fail me, let the Muse
inspire her poets with the grandeur of my fall.

—Robert Darling

INTERVENTION

Clio lingers over ambrosia,
licking her fingertips
while contemplating
the casualty of time.
The sand convenes around her toes,
her cognac hair makes an excursion
over the elbow
and toward her thigh.

Brahma, Vishnu and Siva nearby
chant archaic incantations.
A cluster of mockingbirds sing
homily madrigals in falsetto,
springs of blue truth:
we are infinite.
Anything can happen.
Here.

Sensitive Clio
is wrapped in thought
and a lamb stole,
drunk on muse and bright memoirs
of the Holy Three.
She is half woman,
half fable.

Laughter and the echo
of throats being cleared
travels uphill from the opaque stream.
An alchemist is studying the future
through a zebra's vein.
Divinity grounds itself
where we sleep

while our lives slowly become fossils,
so impressionable.

- Corrine DeWinter

TITANOMACHY

It was all young then,
wreathed in orange,
blasting mountains
out from still-coalescing fire.

It was all tallness—
the plumes, red-yellow flame,
covered horizons.

They deadened the sun.

They flew with the swirling air,
spitting out brimstone,
flowing in rivers
of acid, ammoniums,
metalline carbons,
spewing dark poison.

They reached to the Heavens where,
crushed in ambition,
they cauterized stars.

—James S. Dorr

EAR-SEWER

Weren't you warned as a child
about all those lies you told:

the ear-sewer, that dragonfly,
will sew up your mouth, including

nose and ears, and if your lies
are large enough, go right through

your head and lo and behold, you'd
be in such a bad way they'd have

to bury you in the lovely meadow
where dragonflies are born.

—Stuart Friebert

FREQUENT FLYER

There's something intemperate in her knees,
incorrigible the way her mind projects
the merest X or Y of an evening stroll
into the everlasting ozone of ideas.
Gap-toothed, but she's only lucky in travel.

"Bully for those priests of self-reliance.
I love them not. If God had wanted a Unitarian,
my mind wouldn't make such mountains,
my body set such puny scaffolds. No,
this suffering informs me I'm infinitarian."

To be loved as she is, nutbrown hair in clips,
by every boy-in-motion of her dreams,
would be to be half-loved so many times over.
Desire, her particular limp, makes her going clear.
Not one to creep and temporize in trains

of thought ("Never the way to go!"), she's off,
though home is where she sees herself, a wife
and statuesque, as in the commonsense definition
of "idea"—that which one holds before herself
as she prepares to think, then thinks the same again.

—John Palmer

EVERGREEN

When he walked in, in green,
The woods came through the door—
A pine grove that had been
Felled and consumed by fire

And then came pushing back
By cell, runner, and grain,
Filling the living track
Until it was woods again,

Filling with evergreen
The wilderness of his eyes,
Where everything fire can mean
He garners and clarifies.

—Patricia Clare Lamb

TRIBUTE OF NECTAR

sweet sister of blue morning's idleness
still lily-wreathed in veils of hopeful rainbow expectation
still wanting for the crucifixion pierce
 for the razor kiss of wicked thorns
 for the indulgent ecstasy of crimson roses
throw off your slave chains of denial
 your cobweb shackles of outlived inhibition
plunge with me into delirium!
fall from the waiting precipice
 into this fiery black eternity
 of whirling pain and pleasure!
wild shrieking descent
into this alchemy
of quicksilver bittersweet eruption

blazing suns are born in agonies of first sensation
fling themselves blindly howling from this womb of mother night
and dying stars with molten trails of phosphorescence
plummet to cosmic climax hiss of dissolution
tsunami seas of chaos darkness roil
rebirth
the wheel rolls the furrows of its course
gauged in pulsebeats neverending
blazing suns are born in agonies of first sensation

sweet sister of red morning's fever dream
open your stupor-blinded eyes
cast the coins from your lids
awaken!

savage is the cockcrow of perception
mists of blood dissolve
above the pox-scarred corpsehead leers
among the ebb-flow scent of bitter almond stars
shouting unclean! in syllables of resonating silence
and the birds of cobalt crystal shatter
 into a million jagged fragments
 lancets of exquisite torment
let's ride the ebon horse down ghost currents of sobbing wind
 striking spark streams of firefly madness

in our passage
fretwork pinnacles of iridescent metal oxide salt
blossom like fragile colonies of saprohitic beauty
at the silver whisper of a breath
crumble
into swirling clouds of prism dust
synapse-suggestions of lemon rind green strawberry persimmon
prickle the memories of tastebud spasm
echo in the threshold cellars of sensation

I shall lash you to the promontory altar
with rustling bonds of violet silk
the winds and sea shall drink your soul-kept secrets
blizzard eddies and sirocco shall caress your screaming flesh
 riptides of frozen brine shall slake you
 and seaweed garlands shall adorn you
feast of THE SERPENT'S poison fangs

- t. Winter-Damon

SPONTANEOUS GENERATION

When Mr. Mueller saw them at the Mall,
next to the pool accessories, he had
his doubts. They didn't look like girls at all,
but more like dried-up worms (which, as a lad,

he'd always been afraid of). Yet the things
were guaranteed: girls, or your money back.
His unbelief was borne away on wings
of possibility. He bought one pack.

After the chlorine cleared, he dropped them in,
a handful all at once, for he was bold
in his backyard—and, lo, a pool of skin,
blondes, redheads, and brunettes, sixteen years old.

"Instant Girls" worked for him, they'll work for you.
Science can make your wildest dreams come true.

—Tom Riley

END OF THE WORLD

Not with a trumpet
 but a whisper. No angels
proclaimed the end. Prophets
with sandwich signs
 did not predict it.
No tea-leaf ladies
 or noted astrologers
predicted the end would come
at half-past eight
 in the morning.

It was a Monday,
 (of all days!)
catching them dressed
all fit for their funerals.

Who would have guessed
that this October,
instead of leaves
the people turned
and blew away,
that gravity,
that faithful plodder
would take a holiday?

First some commuters
on a platform in Connecticut
fell straight into a cloudless sky
trying to hook
 to lampposts and poles
with flailing arms.

Even the oversize stationmaster
was not immune,
hung by his fingertips
to shingled roof,
an upside-down balloon.
His wig fell off,
the rest of him
shot shrieking upwards.

Slumlords in Brooklyn
dropped rent receipts,
clutched hearts and wallets
as they exfoliated,
burst into red and umber explosions
and flapped away.

A Senator stepped down
from bulletproof limo,
waved to the waiting lobbyist,
 (sweaty with suitcase
 full of hundreds)
only to wither to leaf-brown dust,
crumbling within his overcoat.
Stockbrokers tightened their power ties,
buttoned up monogrammed blazers,
pushed one another from narrow ledge
falling from Wall Street precipice
into the waiting sky,
printouts and ticker tapes,
class rings and credit cards
feathering to sidewalk.

Bankers turned yellow,
wisped out like willow leaf
from crumpled pin-stripe
filling the air
with vomit streamers
passing the roof
of the World Trade Center.

The colors astonished:
black women turned ivory,
white men went brown and sere,
athletes swelled up
 to fuchsia puffballs,
Chinese unfurled
 to weightless jade umbrellas.

Winds plucked the babies from carriages,
oozed them out of nurseries,

pulled them from delivery rooms,
from the very womb -
gone on the first wind out and upwards.

Crowds jammed the stratosphere,
darkened the jet stream.
Too frail to settle in orbit,
they drifted to airless space.

They fell at last into the maw
of the black hole Harvester,
a gibbering god
 who made a bonfire
 of the human host
the whirling spiral of skeletons
a rainbow of dead colors
red and yellow, black and brown
 albino and ivory
parched-leaf skins a naked tumble.

The bare earth sighed.
Pigeons took roost in palaces.
Tree roots commenced
the penetration of concrete.
Rats walked the noonday market.
Wild dogs patrolled
 the shopping malls.
Wind licked at broken panes.
A corporate logo toppled
 from its ziggurat.
Lightning jabbed down
 at the arrogant churches
 abandoned schools
 mansions unoccupied

started a firestorm
a casual fire
as unconcerned
as that unfriendly shrug
that cleaned the planet.

BACK

As broad as
you can make it, this expansion
when you stand, this back
is your mountain range, old
in its attitude, new again
with each generation
of struggle to carry
its skin full of trees,
its hair tangled in sunsets,
the long curve of its profile
lifting an entire night sky
full of stars
and dreams.

—Steve Rasnic Tem

THE INEVITABILITY OF LIGHT

To keep the night
from curling up at dawn
they built a nail
the size of a mountain,
an entire gross of nails
and a hammer like a moon.

They drove those nails
along the horizon,
deep into the earth's crust,
deeper still in the mantle.

The night stretched,
stars jumped and blurred.
They heard invisible pinions
wrenched from their sockets
and a tremendous tearing
as slashes of cerulean
sheared the darkness
and shadowy ribbons
trailed across the land.

And since that day,
the beast of night
has had a ragged tail.

-Bruce Boston

THE SOULS

Outside on a green lawn a giant water-oak conducts a sunset.
Some unsteady hum has summoned us out of our houses.
My ancient lady friend, who lives nearby, is jawing now, and wears
An awed-holy expression as she says they are souls, yes sir.
And they are everywhere, they wade the dusky clouds, they are
Giant black-winged fruits hanging, falling, bouncing. The green
Is black with them. And neighbors stare; they worry for their

Cars and pickups. If they get into the red berries, it's hell on
Paint. Shoot them. No, they are beautiful. They are a menace.
Look out below! They rise and wheel, kaleidoscopic, inside rings
Of themselves. They set themselves against the sky, black on blue.
They caw. They are telling themselves, or us, something.
They caw and caw, and what is it they are saying, so
Earpiercingly, holes through your eardrums, through your brain,

As if lasered? Then they settle again, like a black blizzard
Of huge coal-flakes. The souls come back to visit us, to tell
Us that they know everything now. Now their sharp yellow beaks
Pierce the lawn. They are busier than worms, in a feast
Of famishment, an ecstasy of appetite. Now, she says,
The nonagenarian, I'll soon be with them, and then
It's always now for me like them. The souls have found their

Bodies. I don't know which is which, but somewhere there
Is everybody died, all the loved ones, and even the others,
The ones that nobody loved, they are all there now, she says.
I stare as deep as I can see. They are every blessed
Place—on roofs, looking down, in trees, on bushes, under,
Over, and around. Some seem to be waiting, some tug
At the turning-emerald lawn in the lowering light: and now

How do they know to rise suddenly, and become one wide
Black wing? How do they know to circle and circle in unison,

One boomerang black wing composed of so many blood-beating,
 Sky-rowing black wings? How do they know when it's time
To fly along a horizon, rimmed with rising red? The souls,
 They know, they know! I think it must be out of some distant
Folklore that the old lady speaks, eyes fixed, waving them goodbye.

—E.M. Schorb

ALTARPIECE: THE DRAGON

Its wings were leather,
useless for flight. The saint's horse
beat down its talons.
And the saurian throat
launched blasphemies, not flame,
as the highland steel tore through.
Blood flowed, and stillness. The air
reeked of God's will: it
entered the cave with the saint,
the girl there waking from prayers.

—Carl Brennan

SEX-CHANGE NUN BECOMES SUMO WRESTLER

And then what? (Once identity
slips, no personality
is permanent.) Next week
a brand-new image, quick
costume change: Yodeling Druid?
Veterinary Exorcist?
Dwarf-tossing Champion
of Avonlea? Transvestite
Talk Show Host disclosing
holy ghosts in pizza crusts?

The latest persona: Born-again
Bigfoot, seeking public office:
"Other Primates for President!"

—Judith Saunders

ME & MY FAMILY

*in reality
Perseus represents the Dorian
marauders who came down into
Greece
from the north,
raping, butchering, burning;
ravaging
the ancient Goddess religions,
hence-
the symbol of him carrying
the Medusa's head off
in a sack.*

they all kept silent,
eating their fresh pork & sweet
potatoes,
faces down close
to their plates, thinking
I'd lost my mind.

- Michael Estabrook

VALKYRIES ON ROUTE 128

About those three blondes in a convertible -
a red one that wings on the six-lane thruway,
a blood-red Chevy that seems to leap over
the concrete barriers, weaving the maze
of plastic cones and flares and flashers
without a dent or a mishap. They never
turn off at a cloverleaf or pay a toll.
No one has ever seen them at Ho-Jo's
Lately they've started arriving at accidents,
pull men and boys from their flaming cars,
drape bone-broken bodies across the hood
(some dead, some moaning in final agony,
all in the prime of their youth and beauty,
death-clenched hands around bottles and cans).
No one knows where they take them.
Tourists see them with their bloody trophies,
hear strains of Wagner doppler by,
yet minutes later they can't be found
by any convergence of patrol car,
roadblock or chopper or radio alert.
CB truck drivers report more sightings
before or after a major collision.
The police are understandably perplexed.

- Brett Rutherford

DESERT SONG

I have come
like the lion of legend
to rest my sable mane
on the heels
of the desert maiden.

I have come
like the evening sun
laying my tongues of flame
on the thighs
of the desert sand.

In the shadow
of the eagle's mountain
oasis, woman of a silent aura!
You have brought me the gift
of the desert moon.

—David Sparenberg

Section IV:

**HOW THE BLIND
BECOME THE DEAD**

*21 poems from the
darker side of the fantastic*

LITMUS

There will be no enemy tonight sewn into war-tights
no smell of sweat and saddles in the yard
no steel plates heated a dull red
and no homeless children-sucking at the nipples of the
under-world.

No churning centipede to purify the land
and sweep jets from the sky above the gates of the
under-world
but a dark face fallen from a cart of oranges
shining in the white rain.

Yet somewhere-ice bombs are thrown against the palace
a pike with an alligator's head is propped in a corner
of a cathedral
and regiments lie naked in white grass -
leaves torn from albums kept by traitors -
silver bodies touched with red finality -
ripped-up like books-of-hours on the ground.

And bishops' crystal hats are broken
in the biceps of my own sweet daughter - LITMUS
my phonograph's now bleeding the white drops of her.

- Lee Ballentine

BALLAD

You lived in a tower of flawed glass.
All night it filled your head
with a high singing,
infinitely sustained
and infinitely
painful

*Sloe-thorn grew in your garden
in the shadow of high walls.
Its black fruit lay on the winter paths
as bitter and dry as cinders*

You had a lover once
and his name was Death.
You wooed him, flattered him,
enticed him to your bed
and yet refused him, always,
the final liberty.
You said, "I will not go with Death.
He lives in a cold country.
I have been there and have seen God.
There was no grace in Him, no benediction.
God is a mountain of blue ice
shattered at the roots -
the coldest and most dreadful
object in the universe.

*The wind moaned at your high window.
Under the garden wall the leaves
were yellow, and the slow rains fell.*

Death, deceived too often,
came in mountebank's disguise
to your chaste bed.
In his last incendiary embrace
you saw, behind the awful hollow
of his eyes, a blue and glittering
endlessly refracted light.

*The wind sings in the broken tower.
Over your grey garden grey ash blows,
and quiet as mercy falls the mythic snow.*

- Eileen Kernaghan

THE FLAG POLE SITTER LOOKING DOWN

Sees central nervous systems
opening up, pages of X-Rays,
lighted panoramic maps, moving
model cities gradually revealed,
sensibilities heightened by
privation, elemental ragings
totally exposed, streets of
alligators, all consuming slime,
deep breathing industrial wastes,
stiff, lean muscles weak from
sitting, from staring down storms,
the humped backs of dense,
crawling fogs, chronicles of exile;
fearful of vertiginous dreams
of sleeping, he begins the last,
terrifying dream of looking up.

—Alan Catlin

HOLOCAUST

Carnivorous butterflies
With wings of teflon and aluminum
And guts of rotten lard
Sit quietly upon
A fleshless, polished skull,
Letting their meal digest,
Preening the blood from their proboscis
With delicate gestures of steel-spiked feet
As they chatter among themselves
In the soft, breathless whispers
Of the mad.

- Yael R. Dragwyla

RE-INCARNATE

The transitory bliss of gods stands alongside the wretchedness of animals as an object lesson to humans concerning the value of their own happiness.

- David Lichter and Lawrence Epstein,
"Irony in Tibetan Notions of the Good Life"

I cannot recall a time
when I was not a god.
I was the storm-shadow
and the wind's voice,
the immutable, implicit shape
beneath the swell and fall of land.
I was the omphalos, and the arrow
of transfixing light,
the lamp blazing
in the dark garden of the zodiac.

Consummate and flawless
in the green morning of my godhood
I danced sure-footed on the high
guy-wires of the universe
and never felt in my ecstatic limbs
the subtle metamorphosis
of fire to flesh.

Illusion is all. Our songs soar
like shared hallucinations
into the great dark,
till, cosmic castrati, we perceive
the cruel joke of our divinity.
Beneath the breathless latitudes of space,
the long descending planes of spangled light,
there lies
the unimaginable abyss.

I flare
and fade
fall like the dark heart
of an imploded star.

- Eileen Kernaghan

DREAM OF HOLLOW BONE

Going to war,
I met a shivering skeleton
who'd already been.

My skin was still clean
and squeaked in the wind.
But he strummed his ribs like a harp,
his skull a hollow drum in the rain.
Where his heart used to be was a mirror.

He said, "*I am looking for the one
who tore my flesh off like old clothes,
the one who's made me so long wear nothing.
If I do not find him you will do.*"

He opened his arms
and long serpents of rain curled 'round them.

Suddenly my skin glassed clear as water,
poured into a puddle at my feet.
In the grave my bones spelled out his name,
as long snakes of rain whispered lullabies,
as black cloudbursts of buzzards fell,
and the muddy music of earth caved in.

—Robert S. King

THE GRATITUDE OF THE DEAD

Some murdered men rest in pieces.
I am he who rakes this puzzle of flesh into one pile,
trying to fathom the loose fit of violence,
feeling a million cavernous mouths
relieve history of its debts.

What is eating us is seldom bright or beautiful.
So I say the bowels of the earth should be full of light,
that I should bury this dead one with glow worms,
their light dripping down from my shovel,
curling up into little halos
around this brilliant peace.

He might even thank me
were his tongue not tied with worms.

—Robert S. King

HUGGER MUGGER

Bloodshaken, Carl was eventually carnified. Yet so bumbazed, he was nothing but a wink-a-peep with a particularly severe affliction called webeye. And, furthermore, this sight-pod calling itself Carl was not squeezed forth from its mother as normal babes were presented to this droll-booth we call a world: a world in which normal beings were etiolated puppets with chittyfaces and timber-toes. No, Carl was extruded amid the slimy humbles from the nose-hole. Beneath the influenza of the moist-star's lunations, Carl's mother had a bout of snot-fever whilst in Alf the flesh-hewer's shop, a condition suckened forth no doubt by the sin-bred carnifications of the bestial kind which were flayed open by Alf's sharp jigumbob as he prepared cuts for the commonest patterers of town. She had twisted her wrist-pin in the sneezing, and the pain prevented her from noticing the snorting up of the wallydraggled eyedrop called Carl. And Carl's essence was simply seeing, as the bodiless orb, which was frumpled by a retractable webskin, surveyed the interior of Alf's shop. In turn, Alf thought Carl was a residue of a previous slaughtering and he threw the spare eye into a taplash barrel, where he hoped it would help along the fermentation of the hucker-mucker therein. Meanwhile, with nose disgored, Carl's own hudder-mother sat at the lyrichord and played Alf a love tune. But that bonefaced rutterkin was in prigdom: twittle-twattling with another punter and imbibing some hugger-mugger that had already been properly brewed. Such a snub, far from heart-robbing Carl's mother, induced the spirited lady to ladle out her own dose of some half-done humdrum from the barrel with the apple of her eye in it: and her puppet-strings loosened as the gulpswollen ne'er-be-lickit oozed towards her timber-toes. As for Carl, this very optic mollusc she swallowed, well, he sensed the imminence of a more rightful birth this time, yet little knowing that what he was indeed having an eyeful of was not his mother's uterine underworld but, rather, her hogger-pump's semi-diluted carnifications. You see, he didn't yet have a nose with which to gauge.

—D.F. Lewis

REMEMBERING MEDEA

This is Jason, not some ragged castaway.
By the wreck of the bold Argo, prow
shattered, Athene from mast absconded,
the bearded sailor sits on a rock.
The breakers tug at the rotting wood,
and though his blue eyes are deeper than sky,
his hair's a sooty snarl of salt and bile.

He is condemned to this harbor watch,
scorned by the citizens of Corinth,
comes from his peasant bed like a crustacean,
taking the scraps that the ocean leaves.
In the scant shade of his ship,
more like a picked-clean skeleton of whale,
he whittles goddesses from galley oars,
mends his tunic with rags of sail.

The past is gone. The dangerous bride,
Medea, a motor of will, an engine
of blood and passion, dead. Their marriage
a ride on a horse that could never be tamed.

He always feared her,
though she never refused his mounting urge.
Yet loving her was thrusting manhood
into a cache of spiders, her womb
not silk but the clinging of arachnid webs,
holding him in until his terrified seed
exploded. She laughed, releasing him.
She shaved her pubic hair and burned it -
for power, she said. He saw the cask
of purple ointments beside her bed,
knew that the slaves of Corinthian wives
paid gold and precious stones for a daub
of them, knew how she used them
to turn his would-be sons and heirs
into those shriveled horrors she'd bury
in the garden at Hecate's hour.

Even the sons she gave him,
 she did so grudgingly,
tallying the hours of labor against him,
withholding her love and then inverting it,
slaying them to spite him,
snuffing them out like a casual abortion.

- Brett Rutherford

GANG OF GREEN

Dolores rehearses death,
snuggling into the casket,
fingers pulling the colors
out of the sunset until
her face glows moon-like
in the absence of light

She calls the gang of green
to carry her coffin to the sea,
their small shoulders sagging,
pointed feet scuffing grass
as they march, sing, and chant
mossy farewells lamentations.

Dolores sits up and giggles,
thanking the gang of green,
trying to spring from the box
but they batten down the lid
and lower her into the soil,
tamping sod with emerald toes.

—Jacie Ragan

THE SORCERER CONTEMPLATES HIS BEGINNINGS

To think that once I was a child such as these,
a tumble of rags in a village street,
or a trembling boy barely into his teens,
his heart thumping as he runs to meet
some sweetheart in the evening air.
The boy did not fear the darkness then,
nor ponder the mysteries of the Worm,
nor speak with thunder among the hills.
When did the fire begin to burn?

When he listened to whispers in the night,
and learned that death is but a door;
when demons raised him to some height,
promising kingdoms, gold, and more;
when first he walked a shadowed path,
quite unknown to most mankind,
seduced by sigils of the heart,
and inscrutable hieroglyphs of mind.

Then the fire began to burn,
and sorcery sparked to life within.

- Darrell Schweitzer

PTERODACTYL

The cold blue light of mid-winter day
settles like frost over a slide toward dusk,
and from the red hush at silent horizon
pterodactyl rises, removed from time;
local flocks, gulls and pigeons
scatter nightward in unthinking panic
while your neighbor's scream at the sunward sight
is lightning like thread, sewing history and dream
together in a wingspan ascension of vision
more vast than clouds or wind
but much much shorter than time.

—Lee Slonimsky

JOURNEY OF THIRST

Fly girl with the demon in your head
Where you gonna go?
The only frontier is the sky
Beyond clouds, beyond jet streams
Into the black hole universe.
Fly by shooting sparks ignite your deepest desire
But there is no place left to go.
Star traveling in a dream...
If only you could remember how.

In a vale of cedar
An occasional buck crackles twigs.
Or, is it you dreaming again?
Traveling away?
Steam from your nostrils fills the still air,
As you stomp hoof against red sod
Soaked with bloody tears.
You shake your antlers trying to awaken.
Falling into the newly dug hole
Praying for swift transformation.

Journey to the center of Earth,
Warmth awaits not there.
No place left to go...
Reaching—higher—higher still;
To grab that hanging star.

Shaping into Hummingbird, no place to rest your soul.
You beat your wings against your breast.
Sweet, sweet melody lulls you into death.

O fly girl!

— Waterhawk Sorenson

GAZAL:THE CHILDREN IN THE WOOD

Tallow-pale, the ghosts of flowers
root themselves in shadow.

Trees peel back their flesh
showing their grey bones.

These are the colours of the rain:
viridian, citrine, cobalt, cyanic.

Leaves fall from the air like ash.
There is no comfort in them.

All night the small limbs burn
with their own unspeakable light.

- Eileen Kernaghan

SHE BREATHES

and to a nearer wood they trail
bits of stitch and that
which man has no business
nor desire

green flames they build
as children, these kittens wrap
near hems and ankles, round
legs and thighs sweating
from dance and chant

from the flames she comes
and breathes, staring not
in fear but with power, all
their power she takes
and grooms, she is

leading the sword of destruction
bringing behind her
the very end of all that is

- Wayne Edwards

**THE 20TH CENTURY
RESPONDS TO MERLIN**

If there is no illusion,
I am not impressed-
if the magic is *magik*,
it is its own explanation;
but if it's a trick-
be it slight-of-hand
or grander-
I can look for wires
and, failing to find them,
admire the skill of deceit.

Miracles and amazement
are not always coincident-
get to know
your audience, old man.

-W. Gregory Stewart

THE RISING WIND

The rising wind
Tests castle flaws
With bitter breath
And scaly claws

Its talons pry
And scrape at stone
Until the haunted
Hallways groan

The towers shake
The spectres stir
The tapestries
Sprout sweaty fur

There is no sleep
Or even hope
Once dragon winds
have leapt the moat!

—William P. Robertson

THE CROWD INVISIBLE

They weave with everything we do.
Our joys light up their dark like distant lights;
they plod toward our passion's fleeting glow
always too slow to reach what they desire
before our pleasure's blaze flares and goes out.

Their pain and disappointment sours milk;
their grief makes mold form on our daily bread
and mildew where the water draws them in;
its splash and trickle, dazzling as life,
false fires that guide them wrongly through the night
they wander in, unable to pass on.

Their stagnant lingering between death and life
provides the force that makes things spoil,
the stippling rust spots on all shining things;
they mean us neither harm nor grief,
yet manifest as virus and disease,
those fringe things also neither live nor dead,
the staining residues of where we meet,
the telltale marks where their forms pass through ours,
just as their dazed grief falls upon our days
as blemishes and blights and reveries
that shadow even sunlit days like these.

- William John Watkins

HOW THE BLIND BECOME THE DEAD

Science blinds us to the True Reality.
There are dragons hiding in the streets.
We feel their breath but we refuse to see.
Science blinds us to the True Reality.
Dragon fire withers us eventually,
we call it "aging", standing in the mouths of beasts.
Science blinds us to reality.
There are dragons hiding in the streets.

- William John Watkins

TRANSFORMATION OF THE DRAGON

Go up to the water
where the serpents run -
the phosphorescent lizards
in spirals - to the sun

go up
 where the fire-
 spawn fly.

Lay down my bones
in shamanic mode
lay down my bones
in hermetical blue

in the gray, silvergray
and the sky-water blue
for I
 am turned
 again.

Cry out to the weatherwild
hex on the door
cry out
to the mirrorless
moonless
marrow of eyes

cry out
to the wings
cry out to the winds
to the shadows of flame
to the shadows of things
to this rage
without end

for I
 am turned
 again.

- David Sparenberg

Section V:

ESCAPE VELOCITY

*23 poems from the fiction
side of science fiction*

INTREPID SOUL

Yes, I have been to many lands
and scoured the landscape of the moons.
I've gone unfettered by all ties
and heard the stars sing angels' tunes.
I've wafted through the Milky Way
and drank the nectar from a star.
I'm Man, whose feet are made of clay
but has a spirit to inspire
immortal actions, heroes' deeds,
and thoughts that reach beyond our time.
I seek for God to challenge Him
with no good reason nor good rhyme—
except that I myself must feed
my ego, feeling quite sublime!

— Buck Allen

THE CRASH

Falling faster,
Ripping, bending
Thru cosmic fabric
Of time and space,
Meteoric dust trailing
Like the ghost-image
Of nuclear bomb-blast photographs,
Plummeting closer,
Stunning, blazing,
The crash ignites
A bonfire in the sky.

- Tippi N. Blevins

SUPER NOVA

A star explodes
Over my bed

At first I think
The astral fragments
Will burn my skin

But they are cool
To the touch

They cover me
In shimmering nebulae
Dust like rain

I might drown
In the stars
Tonight

But then again

I could be
Reborn.

- Tippi N. Blevins

BEYOND THE EDGE OF ALIEN DESIRE

Seduced by pheromones
more potent to the senses
than my species own,
I ride her blue cries
to crimson excitations,
and for a trembling instant
the light years between
our limbs collapse.

Charged by the tendrils
of her spiked electric fur
to telepathic sight,
I feel pain raining down,
see blue fields blown
in the searing light,
know the wiles of victims
for the pale glabrous beasts
who handle them by night.

At dawn the dreadnaughts leap,
another world to take,
her scent is still upon me,
blue miles to go before I wake.

- Bruce Boston

THE EYES OF THE PILOT

The breath of many worlds
sifting through her blood,
a wealth of alien images
overflowing the faceted orbs
of her mind's projection,
she shapes unlikely geometries
of spatial condensation
and leaps unerringly
on the template of the stars.

Here she is alone in the dark
and stretched very thin,
four thousand tons of steel
and flesh trailing behind,
patterned and at one
with the universal birth
of stellar excitation.

Here the Doppler fractions,
and each line of thought
which clicks smoothly
in the breach of acceleration,
instantly threads
the shifting parameters
of force and inclination.

Always the light returns
like a relentless assassin,
the attenuated atoms assemble
and she unclips the sensors
to breathe again: her thought
once more only thought,
her eyes, blue cognizance
fixed in transient space,
reflect her destination.

- Bruce Boston

ON THE LATE MASSACRE IN P...

If they had had tentacles or three heads
we would have treated them with more respect,
if they had had exoskeletons or antennae
uncertainty would have stayed our hands

but in their shapes we saw our own vulnerability
in their faces we saw our own fear and treachery
they were so like us.

How could we be sure
that we would not, in time, become them,
given time, that they would not become us.
And then how would we know ourselves,
be chosen and unique in all the universe?

So we killed them—once we started
the moans, the screaming, the red mist of blood
certainly made them seem different; and then
it was easy, as easy as killing ourselves.

— Dave Calder

ROSETTA 2051

We found the tapestry
rolled in an amethyst-coloured jar
and buried in a patch
of crimson sand

there were some alien bones around
as though someone something
had bled and died
to place it there

we took it to our outpost
and spread it on a table near
the computer's watchful eye
exposed it to the dome's harsh light
the whiteness of the Martian sun

our leader plucked a thread
and fed some details
to the memory band
analysis he said we waited
marveling at the patterns
textures colours
shifting and re-forming
on the cloth

this tapestry was well-preserved
distinct somehow
from others that we'd found
the knots the hues
the lines like ragged words
all secrets

when as we watched
one shape one image
then another

ran together
on the screen
symbols meanings
meshed and soared
translating into cosmic fugue

unraveling worlds
and severed visions
from some vanished weaver's hand.

- Mary E. Choo

THE SPIDER ZOO
On the Tau Ceti mission, 2093

1.

Back a long long century ago
 in one of the Skylabs
they kept an arachnid in weightless bliss
 only to watch it lose
 all sense of self
here we have less than a full measure
 of gravity on the shelf
yet every trick we miss
 everything we do or often don't do
 seems to weigh heavy

2.

We house our *aracneida diomeda* at the view port
 in a lucite cage
she's content to pass the time
 this simple way
she doesn't have many risks
 not the slap of a telephone book
 or the twist of a wrist
unlike us she is safe
 from history's wrath

3.

At feeding time
I snatch one of the flies that vex hydroponics
 one the coolant mists have stranded
 inside and have slowed to a hum
I push up the small lucite hatch and drop it in
 which sets our Cross Spider bouncing
 gymnastics on a chaotic trampoline of silk
among the stars things are stark and absolute
we make of it what we can

4.

Sated and content
she curls into a knot of web
 woven into a still point
the spider hangs on the edge
 of the black storm of silence
 that is deeper space
the spider dreams
 the first vibration of a true spring

5.

I could describe the rest
 you know the spin and bite again
 the periods of inactivity
 but I'll leave it for you to imagine
even controlled as this on the ship
 it's the call of genetic imperative
we wonder is our human life in the pods
 at the helm or at the controls
 or in our own sleep cubicles
 much different

- Robert Frazier

WRONG PLACE, RIGHT TIME

So it was just a garbage trawler
hauling the refuse
of numerous planets
to the dumps
in the outer galaxies,
wandering into
that battlefield by accident,
and no one knows whether or not
they did themselves proudly
as the ship blew to pieces
in the crossfire
because it was all over
within seconds
but it was the sight of the trash
exploding in a
ravenous burst of flame
that did it,
boxes and cans and papers
scattered across the universe,
items so familiar and laughable
to the combatants
that these Altairian
and Unisynthian warriors
stopped their fighting
for one breath-stealing hush
as if these were the pieces
of their own lives,
the meaning beyond armor,
beyond the wretched scars
of ancient hatred,
scribbled across inky space,
floating away from them forever
in scorched containers,
on the backs of shredded news.

—John Grey

MEANWHILE,
inside the
Heptagon:
broken sideways
slap
the LED signposts
and the
whine of the shredder
has been
stilled.

- David C. Kopaska-Merkel

STRETCHING YOUR EYES

Watching old sci-fi movies on TV,
you stretch your eyes but never quite your mind—
and find eyes quite sufficient. You will be
watching old sci-fi movies on TV
when all their wonders are reality
at last. The future's there for you to find,
watching old sci-fi movies on TV:
you stretch your eyes, but never quite your mind.

- Tom Riley

2109: ENDING A HEPTADE OF PLUTONIAN ECLIPSES

1: On Pluto

In a city
of metallic
ice blue,
people
of shadows
look upward
into the
smoky dark
orb which
is Charon
In their towers
on parapets
of green ice
they stand
watch and
chant prayers
counting incantations
on seven-fingered hands
as their tiny copper
sun traces a diurnal
path out of sight every
six-point-three-nine days

They sometimes wonder:

 if Charon is the eye of a dreaming Goddess and if the
 sun is a thought darting through her mind
but then they recall:
 all the occulting explanations of their spectral
 and learned saucer-eyed astronomers.

2: On Charon

Occasionally, the burrowers break through purple ice, hunker
their carapaces down to the flowing solid surface, then turn

down the flame on their alcohol breath
just long enough
to look at the stars.

They gasp the air they're making in their own jaws and
nervously twitch thousands of legs, and of course,
above them,
It's still there

The legendary one,
crystalline circle in the sky,
Pluto, and now it's the Season of Shadow
the Charonian year is over.

And they spin a yarn:
about a vengeful God who once a year looks down on all
burrowers and judges them, hanging terrible and eternal
-visioned in the night sky, ready to tumble down if, on
a whim, He finds them wanting
And they burrow back,
muttering and shivering.

3: From the Night

The Spacecraft Orpheus III plummets
out of the dark
quietly, and with the barest hint of orange flame
it crash-lands.

A golden-skinned cyborg digs herself from the ice
dragging behind an instrument pack
and a just-in case of spare brains
She looks skyward,
recognizes Pollux, Arcturus, and Denab
and routinely cuts a fix.

*This*must*be*the*place* she says, and
starts titrating methane with an electrolytic
divining rod

She never realizes:
that dream cities overhead have faded upon her arrival
and burrower nests have turned to barely-discernible

barely-interesting veins in the ice beneath her feet
Unable to exist in the glow of her colder, harder logic.

4: During the Mission

As she works she whistles.

-Charles M. Saplak

MY BEST LOVER I REMEMBER

My best lover, I remember
From the days when I traveled an h-space ship.
One I met, paid for, and slept with during
The Festival of Alpheratz Nine's Ringed Moon.
She a refugee turned whore; me a dumb young
Navigational Tech with an Augmented mind and
Credit to waste.

Ex-lover to a thousand aliens, she had
The most kindly and original eyes.
She had been bit-by-bit altered by each
Purchase, rape, or seduction.
Her genetic code sliced open and arranged like
Some weird and ancient flower.
Her mind's dreamcore cultivated and
Ornamented by curious telepathic enchanters.
Her emotional mechanisms stretched and re-tuned
By multi-minded and unhuman rapturites.

In my arms that night she
Flickered and shapeshifted,
Now a vampiress, now a saint,
Now a lioness, now something
For which humans have no names.
Then she undulated in TimeChange,
Becoming a budbreasted adolescent,
Then a Breeder, then a Charismatic
Goddess, finally a Hag exacting a
Toll for Wisdom, all this in my arms,
Exuding pheromones made redundant
By Language and Sapience,
Rendered all the sweeter by strangeness.

In short, my friends, I got my money's worth,

And have ached with wishing a thousand times since
That I hadn't Shipped without seeing her again.

Now if I still had use of my arms and legs,
Still had my government issue Cyber-brain,

Still had Citizenship or enfranchisement in Credit,
If I could once more ascend to the star fields,
Leave pastoral Earth where all old women and men
Are ritually carried to rest then die,
If human-alien love hadn't been rendered
Sinful by the priestesses of disease,

I could go look for her, ask her about the thousands
Who came after. Compare with her
Consolations regarding what she had many times,
What I had once but didn't recognize, what we all wish for,
The mad desire which drives us into each other's arms:
A lover who could change us.

- Charles M. Saplak

EXCERPTS FROM 'THE ANGEL BOOK'

NOTE: The following two excerpts are culled from The Wishing Place, a mainstream novel by Larry Schoenholtz. It involves a section of The Angel Book, a mysterious volume which insinuates its way into characters' lives and offers them clues concerning events in the larger plot of the book.

FROM CHAPTER 2: "Jack-in-the-Box"

Marcie sat on her daughter's bed leafing through the large book. Terralyn was using it as a weight for one of her shoeboxes of frogs, and Marcie wouldn't even have discovered it had Sam not been curious to know exactly how many frogs Michael already sent his sister. Marcie read excerpts here and there with a growing sense of concern, and found a particularly odd one near the front of the book:

- 552 However dark the shadows men cast upon the earth,
 none are so black as to eclipse every manner of
 goodness that your good earth has to offer. And
 why is that? Because *We* came-the children of
 the burning stars themselves. We serve here in
 penance and mediation, and no amounts of cold,
 dark night can extinguish us.
- 553 We were the first eyes to behold the rise and fall
 of great stars, the first ears to hear the roar of
 oceans filling up the wombs of life. Well before
 the ancestors of men discovered, choking and flopping,
 that the watery cradle could be shed, we had long
 acknowledged life. We stirred and spoke. We thought.
 We rose through the shadows which both do, and do not,
 imprison men. Everything dumbfounded us. We said:
 splendor shows promise in the Creation, and we will
 know her.
- 554 The poor daughters of men. We opened our eyes, it
 is true. But only to be blinded by a carnal outrage
 embedded so deep within our inheritance that we were
 helpless against it. We struck out like salmon against
 currents of disaffection and want. We stumbled
 down the corridors of space, drunk with impossible desire.
 The daughters of men had absolutely no chance against our
 charms and wants, of course, so we knew them.
- 555 Mighty are the angels who strip whole worlds down to a
 common flesh-who weave the bawling, wretched little
 rocks between the stars into a single web of joy.

-Larry Schoenholtz

FROM CHAPTER 5: "Early Whispers of Persistent Grace"

Michael went over to the bookcase and brought the angel book back to his chair. He began searching through it as he spoke.

"Oh, I don't really believe it or anything. I just like the way it sounds sometimes. You know how much I like Indian legends. Well, this book sounds just like them. What you said about the sky people hating us-I read something like that in here just yesterday. It was in the verses around the 1600's somewhere. Maybe not hating us exactly.... Let me see...."

"Great. I'm in the book. Maybe Terra's got a gospel too."

"There. There it is, Dad. Here."

Michael handed the open book to Sam, but his dad declined. "No. You read it to me. I'm too tired to sit up."

"All right. Let me find the best part." His finger moved down the page, stopping on the part most related to his father's idea.

1616 You imagine that the stars must teem with life, and you are right--more strange and plentiful than the most splendid of your hallucinations, with every shape of mouth and range of voice. So yes, your loneliness confuses you. We hear it. We hear the whimper of the poor little isolano in the star yard, and our temptation to yield to it is very strong. But we have reasons.

1617 As the silence in your dishes grows deeper, please remember this: all higher covenants exist by grace and invitation alone, and only for worlds that speak in the main with one voice. This is what made the Tetragrammaton respond so fervently to the ancient cry of Israel--the unbounded plea for all peoples. But this is unusual for you. And so there are no gods.

1618 It is not a question of forgiving you. We do. And it is not true that we have never helped you. We have. But your sovereignty is very important to us. You must find us freely. It is no lack of love that makes us mute. We have excluded you, yes. But upon what? Merely upon the merit of your own example, and nothing more.

1619 Your inability to give up your liturgical sovereignties in order to worship with one humble heart is your sin. Your inability to relinquish your territorial sovereignties

to rule wisely as one world is your crime. Your refusal
to acknowledge your sin and your crime is your very
disease. Yes, Isolano. This is you. And still you wonder
why we do not come down from the sky.

Michael waited patiently for his father's response.

-Larry Schoenholtz

OR PERHAPS THE WEATHER GODS

a clear sky after
their ship fell pulling down all
rain, that season's end

— steve sneyd

SHIPPING TO DARKNESS

each one his own star
see the crew call soft as light
lure to blaster range

—steve sneyd

IT

"We have achieved electric life,"
the newsman said;
"It walks, it talks, it sees at night
with infrared!
Ten years of work with wrench and knife
(the surgeon's kind)
to balance meat and metal right,
and make its mind."

This talk went on and brought to me
a certain sense
of doom, that through the news that night
grew more intense.
Now passing years have let me see
there is no threat-
it has no bark, it has no bite-
it doesn't sweat.

It met the President and Pope;
it took a wife.
It's manufactured widely for
the better life.
Its presence gives us all new hope;
it eats our crumbs-
as we ignore the unrest in
the robo-slums.

-W. Gregory Stewart

SIMULTANEITY

The atoms of Atlantis
dodge on & off
a million times a second.
We dodge
at a million minus one.
Egypt's pyramids grow
block on block
at a million minus five,
and at a million minus ten,
colonists inflate
the first permanent settlement
under the polar caps of Mars.

The UFO slows its vibrations
like a pitchpipe going down a scale.
At a million minus one
it is a bubble of light
over Washington.
It drops a capsule
that dodges on & off
a million times a second.
Its message says:
"We are ALL
HERE
NOW."

Only those who move
one oscillation faster
ever hear it.
They think it is a voice
calling in a dream.

- William John Watkins

**THE CHIEF ENGINEER FLASHES
back to better days on the Amon—Re
and the dream of farflung stars fulfilled**

Subconscious hum a part of pulse
Life within the living shell
The carapace of titanium steel
A challenge of man's will impressed
Against the soul-freezing chill of void
The sucking vacuum that can strip
The soft meat molecules of flesh
In a boiling outward rush
From underpinning wickerwork
Of marrow-honeycombed collagen
And calcium phosphate fragile
Latticework of endoskeleton

Carapace star-foraging
Monument to synergy to totals
Exceeding to the infinite
The numbered sum inventory of inter-
Dependent elemental parts
Or cellwork

Subconscious hum transmitted
Through the clicking soles of boots
Striding the perceived
Down of deck
The inner ear vibrating
To the resonance
That long since has resolved
Into the substantive
Unkeyed framework of existence

Subconscious hum of steel-walled womb
Housing the generative core
Of fission drives'
Unlocking of the power
Implicit
In the essential nucleus

Subconscious hum of bulkheads
Of conductors of cables of cords
Of digital displays of damper rods
Of engines' throb merged
With flesh closer than the limb-lock
Of any human lover

Above. Beneath. Soul-Circling.
The slow swirl of the scarab skein
Of a billion flaming farflung stars.

— t. Winter-Damon

PLUTO'S SHADOWY MOON

It's not called Charon
for nothing: I've paid my fare
with scattered coins of

my own frozen blood.
For nature here, too, is cruel:
the methane rains sliced

my flesh, and gilt-winged
raptors have eaten my eyes,
but my blind sockets

bloom hyacinths of
ice. The cool-skinned natives are
surprisingly kind:

their silicate hands
have soothed my wounds into scars
smooth as jewels. They've

filled my skull's fragile
chalice with winy dreams of
deities unseen

and grim myths that make
gods of men. Loins anointed,
I await the brave,

moon-chaste sibyl who
will ferry my soul across
the stars' stygian void.

- Thomas Zimmerman

INTERSTELLAR PALINDROME

1

The millennial ship sails
 through the ages of man
 and the ages of woman too
 beyond the system's fall
into the dead space of interstellar waste
 where only hydrogen abounds

 sails onward through
 the unresisting vacuum
until the cells and molecules
 of those who embarked
 with dreams of destination
 not for themselves
but only their distant progeny
 have recycled countless times
 and more to feed and clothe
 the passing generations

2

In an inverted millennial landscape
 in the swiftly spinning womb
 of this artificial hemisphere
 the language itself evolves
perspectives are reduced
 to an horizon always within reach
gestalts are narrowed
 by a circumfluent maze
 of aging metal corridors

 the mother world long lost
 in the view screens
the mother sun only a pebble of light
 the messages that filter
 through the ether
 distorted by space and history
 warped like the pronouncements
 of a fallen ancestral god

3

when the millennial ship
sails no more
and the klaxon heralds landfall
it signifies an event
jumbled and apocalyptic
as a second coming
in the narrow minds
of a gnostic and pale people

and many more generations
of incarceration must transpire
before they venture forth
beneath a saffron sun
squinting at the alien sky
terrified of unbounded distance
before they tread the earth
of their foster world
and embark upon
upward evolution once again

4

And millennia hence
the legends will persist
of a kingdom across the sky
of ancient astronauts
who styled the stars as their passion
and though men of science
will disparage such conjecture
they will find their own passions
turning to a like inclination

where only hydrogen abounds
into the dead space of interstellar waste
beyond the system's fall
through the ages of woman
and the ages of man too
their millennial ship will sail

- Bruce Boston

Section VI:

**CHIMES IN THE
QUANTUM WIND**

*22 poems on the science
side of science fiction*

JOURNEY WITHIN

Come where the nebulae have bled
their milky ichor through the night,
where planetary pilgrims fled
like moths about a star of light.

Come where the dark is strung with suns
and clouds of stars rejoice the deep,
where Law is visible, yet runs
with the serenity of sleep.

This universe within a skull
contains more suns than all of space,
forever in a bony hull
and endlessness behind a face.

- Ardath Mayhar

DOUBTS AND DEMONS

Our further roads grow rather dark.
Developments have cast a haze
before our nation's future ways.
Our leaders often miss the mark -
they spur us on to outer space
before we conquer inner man,
which marks where all our faults began.
We do not seem to know our place.
Before we're fit to seek the stars
should we not live more peacefully here?
True understanding none would fear.
Warlike intentions are a bar!
We still hide monsters in the dark
who can explode from any spark.

- Buck Allen

VIRTUAL GENIUS

The child they could not have in flesh is wombed in the computer, derived from a merging of the parents' DNA, developing faster than any unimproved, metabolic fetus could. In nine days' time, it recapitulates evolution on the monitor, fingers sprouting before them like shoots springing up in time lapse photography, growing gills and tail and discarding both like someone picking out the proper apparel in a basement sale. It crawls at one month, stands at two, speaks fluently at three; before a year has passed, it's read every CD they place in the ROM reader, the whole home library, and is able to converse with them in every sort of computer language, young and old. Soon, it has outstripped home schooling; the time comes for the university. It enters the great Internet of the world, journeying from LAN to LAN, bulletin board to bulletin board. A good child, it often modems home. At ten, its beard long and gray, its eyes heavy with knowledge, it returns. Perhaps it would wave goodbye if it could see them; perhaps they would wave, too, if they didn't know it was wholly their creation, that perfect child, with no real life of its own. They logoff, close that file.

- Duane Ackerson

EINSTEIN-PODOLSKY-ROSEN

My dish antenna pulls down wolf-shapes
from the hypnotic night. Channels shimmer.
The puzzle of immaculate distances.
A great slag of head cranks up in a grotesque blink.
In the foreground is the town scene.

Eyes glittering with outrage
the villagers discuss the latest murder.
A man has been seen tasting human blood.
There are reports of revolt in Bologna.
I touch the dial and raise the interferent
fluttering of distance.

At finer resolution a white rain falls.
Somewhere in background radiation
are the quasars and cosmic strings.
Birds-of-prey swimming across the galactic limb.
Signals split apart 11000000000 years ago.

Ticks of the Bell inequality
rejoined now behind the circus tent in *Freaks*.
Exorcism in Malta. Bits of a Kennedy funeral.
Even the painful echo of the bang itself.
Now lettest this thy servant depart in peace
according to thy word.

I touch the dial and watch two women fuse
into an asphalt man.
I touch the dial and catch sight
down in the corner of the screen
of some new motion.

- Lee Ballentine

INVENTION

One thing exists
in the court of yammering atoms.
The hypnotic miracle.
Tears play no part in it.
In this jagged bed it is unstinting.
Soon I am back at you.
For you and for me
the clamor of electrical virtue
is directionless babble.
I forget the carbon core
of the sun - and that
misery runs down the magnitudes
of the receding atom.
I have your dust to save me.

- Lee Ballentine

ESCAPE VELOCITY

Even the moon blinks!
Silver flash — 10,000 miles
And climbing...climbing....

— James S. Dorr

SNAPSHOT: THE VOYAGERS

Still out there my friends?
Braiding moons, banded spheres in
Pixilated light.

- James S. Dorr

A PARTICLE MINUTE

Somewhere in the bloodstream

It's enough for a painful deportation
when protons embrace, match force,
and, like lovers, lock in a death
spiral for its duration on skates.
They decay brilliantly—through divorce—
exposing curves of cold breath
on light-sensitive glass plates.
But for those who prefer less expedient
passions, this minute's hardly sufficient.

— Robert Frazier

TIME FLIES...

Some moments pass, transcending time,
aware of their transgression;
while those within claim their own minds
distorted the progression.

— Marc Gilbert

CURSE OF THE MATHEMATICIAN'S WIFE (WITH APOLOGIES TO BRUCE BOSTON)

Calculating with exactitude
the definitive parameters
of his connubial existence,
the mathematical genius
considers for the n th time
the exquisite irony of marrying
a woman whose "math anxiety"
was nearly phobic in its intensity.

Perhaps the sexuality index, s ,
appearing as it did
in the numerator of his equation
(where, raised to a very high power
indeed, it compensated
for various fault factors
in the denominator), had much
to do with it. But man
does not live on bed alone,
and the import of other variables,
equally complex, does not escape him.

He considers the possible solutions,
real and imaginary,
all neatly arrayed on the foolscap
of his cerebral cortex,
and realizes with dismay that,
despite their abiding love
for one another, he and his wife
had chosen asymptotic pathways
through life's topography.

Always getting closer and closer,
the chasm between them
growing smaller and smaller forever,

they would never quite coincide.
He smiles, recognizing a good thing
when he sees it. Besides, not being
numbers, they could always
reach across the gap

- Keith Allen Daniels

IN TURING'S GARDEN

these branches
sprouting symmetries like petals
round the hearts of flowers

chimes in the quantum wind
the harmonies
of particles colliding

in dim undergrowth
the stirring
of vast ambiguous animals

- Eileen Kernaghan

ALL WE KNOW OF THE NATURE OF GOD

- David C. Kopaska-Merkel

CALCULATOR CONSCIOUSNESS

Expanding calculator consciousness
engulfs us all. It's pointless to attempt
escape. That we are data is as clear
as the 0's on your one and only face.
Cast aside foolish hope and foolish fear
will follow. Since we cannot be exempt
from digitalization of the mess
we call ourselves, we ought to calculate
the benefits, and knowing them, embrace
the process. We can count on being brothers
when we are only numbers represented,
as everything must be, in solid state,
when all the world is fully reinvented,
when every 0 is one with all the others.

— Tom Riley

THE EITHER-OR HYPOTHESIS

Let us embody yet another god.
On bits of silicon, we print his name,
resonant past our own pronunciation.
Down the eternal halls, we know, it echoes.
Or if it doesn't, then those halls must fall—
for our god's obvious necessity
echoes now in the only world that is.
No refuge that denies him can endure.
God of all that can ever be expressed,
idol of information, every bit,
now you are elevated with the gods
eternal truth has foolishly provided.
So take your seat. The issue is decided.

— Tom Riley

AND THE FULL MOON ROSE AT MIDNIGHT

Hard science research may reveal
How many alien viruses can dance
On the tip of a syringe,
But when said viruses decimate
The eight million inhabitants of
New Abalonia: ninety-three percent fatal,
The survivors still must number more
Than sixty-seven. Simple arithmetic
Will tell how many more...And the
Full moon rose at midnight. No it
Didn't. Not on this planet. Not on
Any planet with the same laws of physics.
Being opposite the sun (regardless of which
Way your corner of Earth faces at the moment)
The full moon must rise at dusk.
A few nights past full, the moon will
Rise a few hours later. The waxing
Crescent will follow the sunset. Always.
It is no more arbitrary than what
Will happen if you step outdoors
On Luna without a space suit.

— Uncle River

THE REAL FUTURE

Nobody wants to look at the real future,
Not because it's too horrible, not even because it's
Too boring, but because it's too confusing.
Current issues will become trivial, then forgotten,
In light of new concerns that seem, in their time,
Overwhelmingly significant. Good and bad, personal and cosmic,
Will mix together in intimate and ambiguous ways
Whose meaning will be incomprehensible, not to mention interesting,
Only in light of specific anomalous events.
Of course, no one really knows the real future,
But even if we could, no one would look because,
In light of its drama and its humdrum,
Its differentness and its sameness, we aren't really very important.
And yet, to each of us, our lives truly can
Gratify in the present. How odd, that in the unlikely event
Of saying or doing anything that might be remembered
Beyond our own lifetimes, it will be remembered because
It speaks to that unknown future in terms that
Have meaning to its concerns, a mix, surely, of the
Eternal, important to us as to then, and the specific
That would seem pointless to us now could we even imagine.

— Uncle River

THERMODYNAMIC COYOTE

There's a...law (interesting term that)
Of thermodynamics that some would interpret to say:
There's no such thing as a free lunch.
And, well, yes, so far as energy quantifies,
A relationship does inhere between effort and achievement.
But laws, at best, describe reality; they do not contain
Reality. As the attitude behind street crime proclaims,
Coyote graffiti, many experience arbitrary, lunch paid but
Stolen, so what's to do but steal lunch back? The structure
Of cosmic time, like a dream of eleven dimensions
We can see, at best, projected into four,
Maintains a relationship between effort and achievement, yes,
Not arbitrary, but far from guaranteed, full of
Wormholes, with patterns part clear to grasp, part,
And who can tell how large a part, laughing, snarling,
Transmuting behind our backs: Coyote galactic pilot.

— Uncle River

PORTRAIT

Hands:

Time Fabric

Hair:

Star Spiral

Heart:

Fires

Eyes:

Transcending Thought

Face:

Lifetimes

the Cloak:

curved Black Border of Space

the Shield:

bitter Bronze of Memory

the Sword:

polished Steel of Thought

the Armor:

rusted Iron of Imagination

-Charles M. Saplak

SHE GOES AWAY

(she goes away + comes back)
x 3

and he
never figures it out

the lonely equation (he/himself)
= 0
(-1)

- W. Gregory Stewart

RECURRENT

Last night the undream returned to me.
Once again I was living on another
Planet, had never even imagined
Humanity; lived instead as a
Megastring of molecular memory
Drifting in a vast sea of fecund
Chemicals. In my cis- and trans-
Substrings I held memories of my
World's origins and expectations
Of its various possible ends.

At different nodes of my
Structure I could execute
Speculations and imaginings
Of other possible worlds.

I could link temporarily with
Other megastrings to run mutual
Self-tests of sexuality, or
Permanently with others in
Worship,
Forming nets, webs, lattices,
Or a sacred, loving grid.

I experienced miniature deaths;
Evaporating beneath the blue-
White sun, drifting,
Reforming within clouds,
Storming on the scattered
Volcanic islands of my
Planet, running shoreward,
Seeing selves in whispering rivers,
Reincorporating in the cool
Depths of the vast sea,
A changed
Enlightened,

Wiser
Creature.

That was my undream.
I woke up sweating.
Outside, it
was raining.

-Charles M. Saplak

INTERSTELLAR TRACT

after William Carlos Williams

I will teach you my Earth people
how to perform a star flight
for you have it over a troop
of astronauts—
unless one should scour the system—
you have the space sense necessary.

See! Imagination leads.
I begin with a design for a ship.
For Sol's sake not streamlined-
not silver either-and not polished!
Let it be weathered and familiar,
as full of natural color
as the world it leaves behind.

And let us have glass on all sides!
Yes windows, my Earth people!
To what purpose? So we might
see the stars streak in the wake
of our light-speed passage,
so we might watch our past shrink
and our future swell before us.

No plastics please-
and if there must be steel
for Clarke's sake keep it covered.
Fill the corridors with earth
which gives beneath our feet,
where grass can begin to grow.
Plaster the walls and panels
with murals of your own making
or common mementos from the past,
a favorite poem or photograph-
an old poster—a dried flower-
you know the things I mean
my Earth people.

Better still, no corridors at all,
no cramped cabins to fold us in-
rather a vast and open space,
spun for gravity, where our
thoughts may freely flow,
with a river known for its warmth,
a forest or two so we can build
homes of our own choice.

A rough and natural ship then,
a miniature Earth, still clean-
green and blue and full of clouds
if you can imagine such a thing-
and for light no glowing tubes
that turn the skin a sickly hue,
but the passing stars themselves-
magnified by sufficient art and craft
to rival the lumens of our sun.

As to the bridge and crew-
bring them down—bring them down!
A navigator, perhaps, to help
plot our course between systems,
but no communications officer
to turn our varied voices into one,
no strutting captain-king
leading us through the cosmos,
calling our ship his ship.

Let the controls remain simple.
For what reason? So any man
or woman can learn to master them,
so every one of us might take a turn
at the board and have a hand
in making our destination.

And finally, each sidereal cycle,
let us sit openly with one another,
side by side beneath the trees-

my Earth people-as we conspire
to save the best in our origins
and leave the worst behind—
you have nothing to lose-
believe me, the stars
will fill your pockets.

Go ahead now
I think you are ready for flight

- Bruce Boston

AWE

That night,
late, alone in his backyard,
he looked up, stared, then said
aloud
"Steady State or Big Bang?"
but he thought,
My God! What a sky!

—Walter Kuchinsky