

Balticon 49 Poetry Contest Winners

Songs of the Starcleaners

Long ago we swept huts, renewed the rushes
on the packed-earth floor. Then we wiped wood;
next stone.

In offices we learned to use miniature
vacuums on keyboards, special cloths
on monitors.

We sang our songs,
to which no one ever listened,
while we made everything fresher, nicer.

Later came the starships, and still
we were more cost-effective than robots.
So we sluiced spacesuits, dusted the bridge,
mopped the holodecks.

When the ultra-rich bought planets,
massive crews of us were flown in
to scrub the seas and tidy continents.
Generations of us lived and died there,
with our own culture, our own art.

Still no one ever listens to us
or our songs. And in ten thousand years,
when the casual owners of the future
survey what they own, they still
will not hear us, will be unable to see us,
however bright the shining light
from the stars we polish.

Cathy Bryant
1st Place – © 2015
Hope, Derbyshire
United Kingdom

This One's for the History Books

The deep, infinite darkness that one encounters
while lost among the stars, is the type of thing
that could consume a man if he wasn't careful.

The lights on the control board—
red, blue, green—
send a thrill through my bones.
A calling that never changes.

Things start to look different,
once you've survived an encounter
with the gargantuan predators of deep space,
once you've seen seven different colors of rain,
and felt the burn of a foreign sun on your skin.

Some grow weary—the constant change,
the never-ending fight to survive,
the loneliness.

Yes, the loneliness is the harshest to weather.
Your crew seems at once unbearably mundane
and completely alien.

They're the only ones in the universe
with the slightest insight into your mind.

And the logbooks—filled with life-changing facts
from more planets than most could name.
A cold, dry record of your defining moments,
your exploits, your sacrifices—
summed up neatly for the halfhearted
digestion of the masses.

Catherine Poslusny
2nd Place – © 2015
Norman, OK

Full Moon

My friend's weird son
speaks only in terms
of werewolves

One day I pointed
out to him Ronnie, your werewolves
do nothing
differently because of their lycanthropy; in your stories
they

Study the city's bus schedule,
shop for groceries after work on Thursday
in order to keep
the whole weekend clear; your werewolves

Are really worried about the economy and their
digestive health; doesn't that
kind of

Defeat the whole purpose, shouldn't
they be

Ripping out hearts, running
through the marsh?

Aren't werewolves just a metaphor
for man's frustrated virility,
for the scarcely repressed

Dark side
of human nature?

Each of us wants
the thing we are not,
said the boy,

Blinking the moonlight out of his eyes.

Adam Phillips
3rd Place – © 2015
Boise, ID



Rainbow

© 2015 by Ruth Sanderson

Midnight Dance

A frosty chill catches in my throat
The dark sky hangs above
Windless, stationary
No one is near
—But the shadows dance

Warm breath beats against my neck
Its dank perfume permeates the air
And tingles down my spine
I sway, moving with
—My unseen partner

A feathery touch caresses my shoulder
Skin enflames with glacial fire
Yearning forces me to spin
And gaze upon
—The empty darkness

A. L. Kaplan
Honorable Mention – © 2015
Laurel, MD

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The Dog Birds

They bark at the sun,
their cries shred the silence
of an otherwise perfect morning,
drown out the songs of other birds.

One flies to a branch to criticize
the streets of forever parked cars,
perhaps the tree itself, the wind.

Once, we bred the German Shepherds,
trained them as eyes to lead the blind.
Now our kennels stand silent and empty.
The military took them, maybe even for food.

But the black birds, they are free,
my wife says softly, removing her apron
to help me off with my muddy boots.
Tomorrow I must go find work.
Worry hovers in her eyes.

I weary of trying to repair what is left,
this roof should last another winter.
She'll manage like she always has,
try to please me, make me laugh.

Too many wars, too many sides
that came and went as we bowed our heads
to passing troops in unfamiliar uniforms,
our own lost long ago.

We are tenants on our own lands
subjected to a tyranny of disharmonic noise
with only those birds to count the days.

She calls them crows.
I call them dog birds.

Marge Simon
Honorable Mention – © 2015
Ocala, FL

About the Winning Poets

Cathy Bryant (*First Place*)—Cathy Bryant has won 12 literary awards, including the Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Prize, and her work has appeared in over 100 publications including *The London Magazine*, *The Huffington Post* and *The Rialto*. She co-edited *Best of Manchester Poets* vols. 1-3, and Cathy's latest collection, *Look at All the Women*, was published by Mother's Milk Books in 2014. See more at www.cathybryant.co.uk, and see Cathy's monthly listings for financially-challenged writers at www.compsandcalls.com.

Catherine Poslusny (*Second Place*)—Catherine Poslusny graduated from the University of Oklahoma in 2013 with a degree in economics. Her job experience ranges from wedding planning to telemarketing to settling insurance disputes. Since then, she has taken a giant leap away from the business world to pursue her writing career. When not reading or writing, she enjoys gardening, yoga, and crafting of all kinds. Catherine lives in Norman, OK.

Adam Phillips (*Third Place*)—Adam Phillips currently teaches at-risk eighth-graders in Boise, ID. His fiction has recently appeared in *Disturbed Digest*, *Under the Bed*, and *Dark Eclipse*.

Marge Simon (*Honorable Mention*)—Marge Simon's works appear in publications such as *Strange Horizons*, *DailySF Magazine*, *Pedestal* and *Dreams & Nightmares*. She edits a column for the *HWA Newsletter*, "Blood & Spades: Poets of the Dark Side," and serves as Chair of the Board of Trustees. She won the Strange Horizons Readers Choice Award, 2010, and the SFPA's Dwarf Stars Award, 2012. She has won three Bram Stoker Awards ® for Superior Work in Poetry.

A. L. Kaplan (*Honorable Mention*)—A. L. Kaplan's work has been included in the anthology *Suppose: Drabbles, Flash Fiction, and Short Stories*, and *Dragonfly Arts Magazine 2014*. She holds an MFA in sculpture from the Maryland Institute College of Art and is the president of the Maryland Writers Association's Howard County Chapter. When not writing or indulging in her fascination with wolves, A. L. is the props manager for a local theatre. Visit: alkaplan.wordpress.com.