

Current rules for how to enter contest can be found at: <http://bsfs.org/bsfspoetry.htm>

About the Winning Poets

Mary Soon Lee (*First Place*)—Mary Soon Lee is a Grand Master of the Science Fiction & Fantasy Poetry Association and a three-time winner of both the AnLab Readers' Award and the Rhysling Award. Her latest book is *How to Navigate Our Universe*, a collection of how-to astronomy poems. Her website, cryptically named, is marysoonlee.com.

Declan Krieger (*Second Place*)—The Unexpected.

Badal Paul (*Third Place*)—A Post Graduate in English Literature, the poet is a school teacher from Chanditala, Raiganj, Uttar Dinajpur, West Bengal, India, and an author known for his works *Kalchakra-Oom and The Chosen Five* and *Whispers of the Invisibles: Nachiketa and the Mystery of the Dark Shadows*. In addition to these publications, he writes poems and short stories, contributing regularly to his own blogs and various platforms. As an educator, the poet integrates his passion for literature into his teaching, encouraging his students to explore reading and writing. He is an avid reader and writer, committed to the promotion of literature and education.

Hannah Ahn (*Youth Award*)—Hannah Ahn is a local high school student who likes to write.

MK Scott (*Honorable Mention*)—A retired special needs teacher, Morgan Stamm writes poetry and cozy mysteries with her husband under the pen name of MK Scott. When not writing, she can be found working *Star Trek* conventions with her daughter, painting garden gnome, or walking the family dog.

A.C. Anderson (*Honorable Mention*)—Alexia has a degree in Medical Laboratory Science. Though she retired from the corporate world when her chronic disease hit, she hasn't been able to retire her brain and writes science fiction as A.C. Anderson and fantasy as Alexia Chantel.

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Voyages Through the Cosmic Tapestry

Beyond the bounds of known space, where stars weave tales untold,
In galaxies afar, where dreams and darkness fold.
There, science melds with fiction, in a dance of light and shadow,
Crafting worlds beyond our reach, in the cosmic meadow.

Through the lens of time, we glimpse the future, bright and strange,
Where humanity traverses the stars, on an endless range.
Alien landscapes call, with secrets locked in silicon and steel,
A universe where the impossible begins to feel real.

In the quiet of the lab, where technology whispers life,
We find the heart of stories, cutting through the night like a knife.
Artificial minds awaken, questioning their own birth,
A testament to human ingenuity, and its boundless worth.

So let us sail the sea of stars, on ships of pure imagination,
Exploring worlds crafted from the very fabric of creation.
Science fiction, our guide to the wonders that may be,
A beacon in the darkness, setting our minds free.

Declan Krieger
2nd Place – © 2024
Pittsford, NY, USA

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Omar Rayyan work at:
<https://www.studiorayyan.com/>

Home for Old Robots

A convenient salve for the conscience
of humans encumbered by sentiment--

somewhere to tuck away the obsolete,
the defunct, the damaged, the dull--

economical yet tastefully decorated,
scrupulously cleaned by the occupants

who have little else to occupy them,
no work, no need for meals or sleep,

lying alert on dormitory shelves
or standing, statue-still, in ranks:

droids, drones, robo-dogs, rovers,
our former cleaners and companions,

their pseudo personalities an artifact
of clever software, mere simulacra,

or so we assure ourselves, dismissing
occasional quirks in their behavior,

how the nannybots wait in the lobby
for children who've outgrown them.

Mary Soon Lee
1st Place – © 2024
Pittsburgh, PA, USA

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Whispers Between Worlds: A Dialogue with the Ancient

In laboratories dim, where human ambition meets the earth's whisper,
A seeker stands, amidst hums of machinery, crafting bridges not of steel but of thought,
To commune with the ancients—not those of stone or scroll, but of root and leaf.

This device, a conjuring of circuits and dreams,
Aims not to conquer the silence of the green,
But to enter it, to understand the murmurs of chlorophyll and shadow,
The language of the sun seekers, the rooted wanderers.

The first whispers come soft, like the rustle of leaves against the windowpane,
A dialogue not in words, but in the breath of life itself,
A sharing of secrets held in the cradle of branches,
In the veins of leaves that have seen more suns and moons than our eyes could know.

Here, in this communion, the scientist—no, the pilgrim,
Finds a lexicon vast and ancient, a script written in the syntax of seasons,
Narratives of endurance, of cycles spun in the loom of time,
Where each leaf, each bough, speaks of resilience, of a harmony etched in the grain.

The trees, they do not speak of trivialities; their tales are of the essence,
Of droughts weathered, of storms embraced, of fires survived,
Of the silent symphony of growth, the ballet of bloom and wither,
A testament to the strength in stillness, the wisdom in simply being.

In this exchange, the scientist learns of connections unseen,
Of the thread that binds leaf to root, root to soil, soil to soul,
A web of life so intricate, it breathes in the spaces between words,
A lesson in the art of listening, of truly hearing the heartbeat of the world.

The device, once cold and inert, becomes a talisman,
A key unlocking doors not to other realms, but to this one, deeply felt,
Revealing not new worlds, but old truths in new light,
A bridge across which flows not data, but understanding, empathy, kinship.

As the experiment ends, the machines grow silent,
But the conversation, once started, echoes on,
In the mind of the scientist, in the rustle of leaves outside the window,
A dialogue eternal, woven in the fabric of existence itself.

This is the poetry of the endeavor, the verse written not on paper,
But in the heart, a free verse that binds human to tree, earth to sky,
A reminder that in seeking to converse with the trees,
We find ourselves, our place in the chorus of all being.

Badal Paul
3rd Place – © 2024
Raiganj, Uttar Dinajpur, West Bengal, India

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Kahu

They said machines weren't welcome.
They said I couldn't come in.
So I wandered into the night,
unable to fit in.

A thump in a dark alley.
I knew my help was needed.
Bold steps and flashing lights.
By will the dark receded.

Large, brown eyes stare up at mine.
My network identifies dog as it coughs.
Its young body huddles into my arms,
and my sensors tell me he's soft.

I call him Sirius.
He knows me as Kahu.

A bubble of lightness grew inside.
Sirius' legs lengthened.
As thousands of drones passed overhead,
our bond was irrevocably strengthened.

Sirius licked faces,
and lent his back for others to stand.
I provided medicine,
for those to whom it'd been banned.

We traveled from city to city.
By paw and by foot.
Overlooked by the powerful,
but thanked by those covered in soot.

We two castoffs from society.
Him for having fur instead of parts.
Me for favoring piety.
We gave from deep within our hearts.

I know not where I'll go,
when I cease to function.
Sirius' gray is beginning to show,
and I'm filled with compunction.

My friend's head rests on my thigh.
His heart is thine.
I power down with one last cry.
And hold him as we're covered in vine.

He was my Sirius.
I'll forever be his Kahu.

A.C. Anderson
Honorable Mention – © 2024
Farmington, MN, USA

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version due to copyright concerns
see Omar Rayyan work at:
<https://www.studiorayyan.com/>

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Columbia: The Final Mission

The voice of the newscaster is thin and indistinct
Drowned out by the sound of treadmills and panting.
A bright white streak against a clear blue sky fills the screen.
The closed captions stutter across the set
Making it hard to understand the significance of an exhaust trail.

The words are choppy and confused
As if whoever is typing them is unsure of what
She means to say.
Columbia. Contact lost over Texas. Debris sighted in the sky.
Weights clanging permeate the air.
No one seems aware of what the typist is trying to convey.

Crew may be okay 200,000 feet above the Earth.
Rocket scientist I am not,
But even I know without an extensive science pedigree
The crew can never be okay at 200,000 feet
Burning hot as they break through the top layers of the atmosphere.
Newscasters continue to reassure one another as they avoid the obvious.

A few muscle-bound weightlifters drift to a TV.
The walkers change the channel to
Video footage from Tyler of falling rubble.
The noise level drops allowing the newscaster's voice
To bounce around the room like a super-ball out of control.

The families of the astronauts have been escorted from the landing area.
Our eyes meet acknowledging what we all know.
NASA, newscasters, and reporters put away
Their hopeful attitudes and accept the reality.
That the space shuttle disintegrated as it hurtled homeward on its final mission.

Odd it took them so long.
The man from the barbershop knew
His shop was beneath the shuttle's Florida approach path.
There was no sonic boom this time
Only a long, loud thundering which hung ominously in the air.

Departed, seven dreamers
Who dared to touch the heavens
Gone, our fragile belief that we are secure.
Guns, guards, security cameras and explosive-sniffing dogs
Could not protect us from the worst horror of all,
The Unexpected.

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Once again, our national candle is snuffed out.
We stand motionless in the collective night
Not knowing what to do or how to react.
Muttering words about Challenger
And no teacher in space and wondering who to blame.
Uneasy with our existence.

MK Scott
Honorable Mention – © 2024
Noblesville, IN, USA

What the People Who Find Time Capsules Keep

We couldn't keep language
in the new age, I say. I'm feeding
everything back into a loop, back
in with the dust of my bones. We traded
it for something better, I'm sure:
telepathy or maybe just saying what
we really mean without any of the
flowery stuff around it. Efficiency.
But I mourn it still. Even this
poem, which may end up charred
in somebody's furnace, ripped up and
laid to rest under a lover's pillow, forgotten
in a thousand years time. All work, a film I once
watched said, is pointless and necessary
because the universe will end. That's true,
I say, but if you had really thought that, you
wouldn't have made this film, I wouldn't
have unwound three hours from my precious
reel of life, to sit here and watch it. These
words, impermanent as they are. But they
traveled a galaxy, they must have, charted
cobalt-blue stars, breathed the same star-dust with
Pluto in its crib. They're astronauts, familiar
as prayer, foreign as stranger lands, the desert
thick with dust, all of humanity collapsing in
on itself, the sun only a black dot, crushed
by a poker. And here, this poem in the furnace
that keeps it warm on a distant night.

Hannah Ahn
Youth Award – © 2024
Ellicott City, MD, USA