

Balticon 45 Poetry Contest Winners

The Human Guest

The mating time was brief this year.
Our women sang notes like
floss on the widewind plains.

A human came who forced his seed
on Ala of the Yellow Eyes. We pretended
to be honored; we felt otherwise.

After, Ala wasn't the same.
She cut her marvelous hair
which had been dark and long
grown down below her legs.

She wandered off to the Darklands,
heavy with child and none to celebrate.
We mourn her fate. If she survives,
she'll raise his spawn alone.

She was the envy of us all.
When the child is born,
she'll burn his father's image
in the sands of our dead oceans.

The human sits on our sacred stones.
He preens his beard and leers at females,
with no more thoughts to waste on Ala;
he never even knew her name.

Come burrow season, we prepare,
sharpen our talons on caddo root.
When the freezing gales begin,
the human will demand sanctuary,
as his kind always does.

We will confirm his welcome
with the strewing of his bones.

Marge Simon
3rd Place
Ocala, FL

Stardust

These are not my bones.
They thrum upon muscle and sinew—
the refrain of death and rebirth
to the tune of growth and pain
and wonder.
There is time in these bones,
they remember when I was not yet
myself.

This is not my blood.
Once it flowed through mountains
fed by winter's thaw,
in turn fed springs
and drop by drop
wore granite rock
into dust.

These are not my hands.
At night they whisper my dreams full
of memories—
digging through dark earth for golden roots,
striking rock and feeding fire,
pointing at the moon.

This is not my home.
My every cell yearns toward light, and at sunrise
cries out
until I am deafened into remembrance—
I was born in the sky
in the hearts of stars.

Kat Kohler
1st Place
Madison, WI

The Night World

Fairies dance by moonlight's glow,
twirling around roses, sprinkling
dream-dust on sleeping children.
Friends of the fireflies.

Stars aren't diamonds, but the eyes
of the gods, blinking as they watch.

Crickets and owls and wolves,
all harmonizing in night's choir.
They need no conductor.

Creatures of the day, man sleeps on,
ignorant of this hidden world, and
living where the sun is revered.

Except where the fantastical flourishes,
Diana is forgone and forgotten.

Laura Johnson
Special Young Poet Award
Oakville, ON, Canada

Talking to Owl

Heat radiates up from the rust-red roof tiles,
the sun's heat, held captive until it can sneak away
now, under cover of darkness.

Owl spoke to me in the twilight,
told me to meet him here.
He came to my window,
a dark silent ghost with eyes of fire.
You must listen to Owl when he calls your name.

The rooftop heat keeps the chill of the night away
while the sharp stars circle over me.
Owl surprises me.
He seems to materialize from the shadows and starlight.

Why did you call me here, Owl,
to this October rooftop?
I call every person three times.
Each time you will make a choice
to stay, to wait here for the next call,
or to follow.

How shall I follow, without
ghost-wings of my own?
And where would you lead me?
You would not need wings. If you so choose
we will follow the trail that souls take,
the cloud of light in the night sky,
the place where stars are born and die,
where worlds incubate for millennia
in the priceless dust of galaxies,
then live for an eyeblink,
pass and are born again.
I will be your guide,
now, if you choose to come.

I am silent, words having fled me at this choice.
Owl speaks again.
It is not an easy time to live,
and there are many days to come
before it will get any better,
but then it is not an easy choice.
Will you come now?

His eyes are the fire that
draws small creatures in to their deaths,
his silent silhouette like the ghost I will become.

No, I will not follow you yet.
I have made plans;
the night is as sweet as the day,
as good as the borrowed heat of the tiles on my back.
Someday I will walk the trail of stars with you.
Not yet.

This is the first call.
It will come twice more,
and then you must make another choice.

Caitlin Walsh
2nd Place
Mentone, CA

About the Winning Poets

Kat Kohler (*First Place*)—I was a returning student to the University of Wisconsin-Madison a few years ago and received my bachelor's degree in English with an emphasis in Creative Writing. I have had various professions which together sound like part of a nursery rhyme, and include: baker, carpenter, and cab driver. Besides contemplating the paradigm of language and the paradox of human existence, I also enjoy knitting, yoga, and gardening. I like to grow moss because as a child I thought that's where faeries slept—on moss beds.

Caitlin Walsh (*Second Place*)—I am 20 years old and a full-time community college student. I've been writing poetry for about seven years, but the only place I've been published yet is a student-only campus magazine. In addition to writing, I read far more novels than are good for me, I make jewelry, and I like to go urban exploring. My eventual goal is to write and publish a novel.

Marge Simon (*Third Place*)—Marge Ballif Simon freelances as a writer-poet-illustrator for genre and mainstream publications such as *Strange Horizons*, *Flashquake*, *Sniplits*, *Vestal Review*, *DailySF Magazine*, *Amazing*, *Pedestal*, *Dreams & Nightmares*. She edits a column for the *HWA Newsletter*, "Blood & Spades: Poets of the Dark Side." She is the editor of *Star*Line, Digest of the SF Poetry Association*. In addition to her poetry, she has published two prose collections: *Christina's World*, Sam's Dot Publications, 2008 and *Like Birds in the Rain*, Sam's Dot, 2007. She won the Bram Stoker for Best Poetry Collection with Charlie Jacob, *Vectors: A Week in the Death of a Planet*, Dark Regions Press, 2008. New collections coming in 2011: *Unearthly Delights* (self illustrated in color), Sam's Dot Publications, and *The Mad Hattery* (with Sandy DeLuca), Elektrikmilkbath Press (www.margesimon.com).

Laura Johnson (*Special Young Poet Award*)—I am a graduating high school student who loves to write, whether it be poetry or prose. At any given time, I carry with me a science fiction or fantasy novel as well as a notebook for capturing inspiration. My favourite time of day is evening, when I can curl up with a mug of hot cocoa and be moved by another author's writing.

Honorable Mention

The Complaint of Orpheus
Paco José Madden
Washington, DC

Complete Poetry Contest rules can be found at: www.bsfs.org/bsfspoetry.htm.