

LAST POET of WYRLD'S END



Melanie Stormm

Praise for Last Poet of Wyrld's End

What a treasure! In this delightful tale of SFnal whimsy, Zhou Liu Yang wanders in search of his lost marble through the weird, threat-spiked Wyrld's End, offering poems to everyone he encounters, whether friend or foe. His thoughts about poetry are exquisite, his wistfulness appealing, his world dangerous, but as it happens, he is not without a...friend.

— Sherwood Smith, creator of the Sartorias-deles universe
and Wren's world, Nebula award finalist

It's inordinately refreshing in this age of concatenated disasters to find a book this good-natured. A genial silliness about it feels like settling down with hot cocoa and cookies, gazing from contented warmth at a blizzard outside. // A most unusual book, filled with humor and light. Stormm is an author who understands perfectly how to Have Fun with Words.

— F. J. Bergmann, editor of *Star*Line*, winner of multiple
speculative poetry awards (Elgin, Rhysling, Rannu)

...Liu Yang the Poet is funnier and wiser than most characters have the right to be, and his quest is at times part Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, part Coehlo's *The Alchemist* and even a little bit Neil Gaiman,

but, ultimately, is wholly imbued with Stormm's surefire and sly, engaging voice, reminding us that great adventures in search of the magical are ultimately about finding that which is much closer to home, and the heart.

— Christopher Locke, author of *25 Trumbulls Road*
and *Ordinary Gods*

In the delightful novella *Last Poet at Wyrld's End*, Melanie Stormm takes readers on a day-long journey in the company of the befuddled poet Liu Yang. // At once comical, lyrical, and melancholy, the story builds to a satisfying conclusion while leaving me hopeful that there will be other stories set in this intriguing landscape.

— Jennifer Crow, author of *The First Bite of the Apple*,
Elgin and Rhysling awards nominee

In *Last Poet of Wyrld's End*, // Liu Yang's world is a fascinating amalgam of science fiction and fantasy, set in a future time and a distant planet where science and magic meld. Most interesting is the poet's mind and heart of Liu Yang, the scintillating poetic perspective and language in which he swims and survives. Get this book: compelling and beautiful.

— Vince Gotera, editor of *Star*Line* and *North American Review*,
winner of multiple poetry awards

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of WYRLD'S END

Melanie Stormm



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Tom. Always Tom.

Hi, Mom!

First Lines

We begin our story here: it is morning at the Tavern of Wyrl'd's End. The sun casts tawny strips of warmth across the central room's ringed floor. The room has been carved from the heart of a redwood tree planted by planetfall settlers and felled in the wars of a hundred years ago. It was a sad event that could have driven a soul to drink. And it did, but that is not this story.

In this center room, we meet the person who begins and ends our tale. His name is Zhou Liu Yang. Some call him Liu the Fish, others, Poet. He calls himself Liu Yang. First, because it is his given name, and also because in an old Earth tongue it meant "Ocean" and he thinks that is a good name for a poet. He stands, a man of perhaps sixty-five standard years touched by poetry and drink, behind two sailors down on their luck. All he would like in this world is a morning tea; a simple desire, but the windings and workings of desire are rarely simple in any world.

Empty Pockets at the Tavern

The poet Liu Yang came to the crux of his problem when he felt through his ragged pockets: they were empty. Empty of his ink bottle, of his tobacco pouch, and of the fine brass pen his daughter gifted him long ago before she set off to sail to the moon. Empty of his single lanthium coin—all that was left of a poetry commission by the city council last year—and, to his dismay, his most precious possession: a large blue marble. He slipped his index finger through the hole of the deep pocket and wagged it on the other side.

Seeing Liu Yang's wiggling finger, the barkeep, Lucas, said: "I think you have a problem with your pocket, Poet."

"*Alliteration.*" Liu Yang sighed. "Alas, I cannot pay." Liu Yang eyed the cup in Lucas' hand.

"A poem for us then?" asked Lucas, finding a way to resolve the present problem of the hot drink in his hand. The sailors left their discourse and turned weathered faces to Liu Yang, whose heart still fretted over the loss of his marble.

"Too early for poems," said the dark-skinned sailor.

"Give us a sea poem," said his (more literary) companion. "We're long gone from it, the waves being what they are. Our pockets are feeling the kick."

The dark-skinned sailor grunted in agreement at that. "Give us a good one, then. Maybe there'll be drinks for us, too."

"A three-drink poem?" asked Liu Yang. "A lot to ask from a morning. Too much perhaps."

"Then give us a poem about good fortune," said the dark-

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skinned sailor. "Give us luck."

Lucas slid the tea to Liu Yang with a meaningful nod. Liu Yang closed his eyes and saw the roaring, violent seas of Wyrd's End. He saw black darts of fragile boats venture like prodigal children over blacker waves. The poet raised his cup and said:

*The sea hides a treasure
Our hearts don't deserve,
A thing we want without loving,
Until we remember what is beautiful
Lying far behind.*

It said what he meant, but it fell short of those lines that had been dancing in his head since he woke. What were those lines? Something about the mists—no—the clouds on the mountain, tumbling like sheep from pasture, and lanthium beating in the heart of the mountain. No, that wasn't quite it. And who wrote that anyway? Either way, Liu Yang raised his cup a little higher to signal that the poem was done.

"Very nice. Reflective," said Lucas.

The fair-skinned sailor said, "You ever spend a day on those waters? The sea here has nothing worth loving, and it loves no one."

"It's just a sea," said Liu Yang. "It doesn't have an agenda, it has mystery."

The dark sailor snorted, "Say that when a tentacle has you, when a mute beast crunches your bones. We'll see what fills your poetry."

"I have it on good authority that crudgeons are excellent poets," said Liu Yang.

"Oh yeah? Whose authority?" said the dark sailor. Even Lucas look puzzled.

"Poetry itself," said Liu Yang. The sailors shared another look.

"Couldn't monsters be treasures? Is that the message?" asked Lucas.

Liu Yang felt the mystery was the treasure, but the fair-skinned sailor said. “A monster that’s a treasure? Plenty. One in these very seas. Everyone’s after it or says they’ve been after it. Us, too. But you’ll only ever catch it just after the storms. Have to get your boats in the water, fast. If you could run that through, its skull would command the ransom of a High Counselor.” He banged the bar with a chapped fist and checked his empty cup.

“Enough to set you for life,” explained the other in case they weren’t each familiar with the going rates of hostages.

“Could you run it through, though? It seems to me if it were going to be killed, it should have been long ago.” Lucas leaned on the bar.

“We wouldn’t tell you, would we? You could give away our secrets.” The fair sailor said this.

Lucas grinned. “Like that Old Earth story with the whale. Dek-ka has a copy somewhere, may even actually be legit. No shortage of White Crudgeon stories in Wyrld’s End. I believe it holds up half our economy. When the White Crudgeon is killed, what will happen to Wyrld’s End? What say you, Poet?”

Liu Yang was wiggling his finger through his pocket, missing a treasure he had always kept close to him and wondering if this were portentous. “I’ve lost my marble,” Liu Yang said and cast a glance around the redwood room as though its blue glass might wink at him from some crevice. “I’ve lost my marble, and I must retrieve it.”

Acknowledgments

Wyrl'd's End is a vast place and wilder than most of the horrible things you've heard about it. For that, I have to blame—er—thank, my world-building partner, Joe Chakalis. It is ridiculously fun making chaos with Joe. Here's to all the Squirrels in all the Wrong Places and to more fun in Wyrl'd's End.

And my deep thanks to my dear sister, Rebekah Stormm-Reitter, who put a crap ton of moons in the sky.

About the Author

Melanie Stormm is a semi-sentient being living and breathing in New Hampshire, who generally tries not to make a complete mess of things. A known and respected musician in some spheres, unknown and ignored in others, she is also poet, writer of short-fiction and comics to the same varying degree of success. Her short story “A Mohawk Place for Souls” was a finalist for the Hamlin Garland Award for Short Fiction in 2018 and published by *Beloit Fiction Journal* that same year.

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