

Balticon 51 Poetry Contest Winners

Freckles

You are my very own star map,
my hitchhiker's guide to the galaxy.
You showed me how to find the edge of the Milky Way,
so I can count the planets
from the end of the line.

You are constellations
and you are life.
I trace your skin
with the tips of my fingers,
and I am safe.

You are home. Earth.

Kaitlyn Graham
1st Place – © 2017
Woodbridge, VA



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Smaug the Dragon

Date Night With the Astronomer

The aurora curtains us in green, dark purple, red
as the first colony ships break orbit, disintegrating,
star-shot scattered from the celestial cannons overhead into the atmosphere.
We watch them make light-streaks in my view of the horizon;
in a cascade of stars so small you can almost hold them.
You can see Earth tonight, he adds, though it's just as small
as his cascade of ancestral space wreckage.
Make a wish, my lover says.

I hold my breath, like to blow out a birthday cake:
I wish it would stop raining dust and flaming trash that keeps you from looking at me
I wish you would forget about dead satellites long enough to stop for a kiss--
but as a big one streaks through the dark and you ignore the bubbles popping in our champagne,
I wish you were not always yearning to leave the colony behind, and me with it.

Lev Mirov
2nd Place – © 2017
Hagerstown, MD

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Song of a Changeling

Against the pale blue-gray and sunless sky,
The whispering leaves look black in contrast; pines
Bow in submission to the tearing wind.
I try to sing the song of wind and leaves,
But fail, for I've forgot the words; they speak
In a wild code that I once knew, but lost--
A sacrifice for structured human speech.

A gull with gray and black-tipped wings glides by,
Solitary in that arc of sky,
Fighting the buffets like relentless waves,
Struggling till she passes from my sight.
I drink the scene in desperately and try
To grasp some truth. Unchanging nature wears
A subtly different shape at every blink,
And we're the garb that Nature flings aside,
Regardless of the form we wear outside.

Adele Gardner
3rd Place – © 2017
Newport News, VA

Gorgoncology

Another night, another knotted clump
slipping their moorings as she sleeps,
rooted tails easing from her poisoned scalp,
plumped pillow a-slither.

No lingering now, no goodbye hiss,
no fond farewells or fork-tongued kiss,
just the sly sliding of their scaled escape
into stony silence.

Jennifer Moore
Honorable Mention – © 2017
Ivybridge, Devon, UK

Man on a Spaceship

We don't all want to be star captains,
to have voices deeper than space
and love lives trickier than alien planets.

I'm happy in the canteen, surprising
the weary with food like a warm hug,
delighting the restless with wild desserts.
Later I clean up, singing my own
soft songs. Not many crew get to sing.

Then I head to our quarters where my wife
sits. Sometimes she cries, too,
as I knead the day from her shoulders.

People have said, "Isn't it hard,
her being the captain?"
"Sure," I say, "Hard for her."
It can be hard, when work spills over
like overheated gravy into our arms.
But mostly we rule our work
and not each other.

They talk of my cooking with tears
of remembered joy, across three galaxies.
One type of ragout will forever
bear my name. My wife?
She gets a well-run starship, and gets me.
No one who makes sausage from scratch
is emasculated. Trust me.

Cathy Bryant
Honorable Mention – © 2017
Disley, Cheshire East, UK

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About the Winning Poets

Kaitlyn Graham (*First Place*)—Kaitlyn Graham is a senior in the Center for Fine and Performing Arts program at Woodbridge Senior High School. She is the recipient of two Scholastic Art and Writing National Silver Medals for poetry, and has been published in *Eddas* and *Falling for the Story*, among other collections. Kaitlyn plans to continue writing at the University of Virginia in the fall.

Lev Mirov (*Second Place*)—Lev Mirov is a queer disabled mixed race Filipino-American medievalist who lives with his husband, fellow writer Aleksei I. Valentín. His fiction first appeared in *Myriad Lands*. His Rhysling-nominated poetry is in many fine magazines including *Strange Horizons*. To read more, find him at levmirov.wordpress.com or on twitter @thelionmachine.

Adele Gardner (*Third Place*)—With a master's in English literature, Adele Gardner is an active member of SFWA and a graduate of Clarion West. Publications include a poetry collection (*Dreaming of Days in Astophel*) as well as 230 poems and 42 stories in *Strange Horizons*, *Daily Science Fiction*, *Legends of the Pendragon*, *The Doom of Camelot*, *American Arts Quarterly*, and more. Two stories and a poem earned honorable mention in *The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror*, while two poems won third place in the Rhysling Awards (SFPA). Adele is literary executor for her father, mentor, and namesake, Delbert R. Gardner. Learn more at www.gardnercastle.com.

Cathy Bryant (*Honorable Mention*)—Cathy Bryant worked as a shop assistant, civil servant and childminder before becoming a professional writer. She has won 25 literary awards and her work has appeared in over 250 publications. Cathy has had two poetry collections published: *Contains Strong Language and Scenes of a Sexual Nature* (Puppywolf, 2010) and *Look at All the Women* (Mother's Milk, 2014). See Cathy's listings for cash-strapped writers at www.compsandcalls.com.

Jennifer Moore (*Honorable Mention*)—Jennifer's poetry and short fiction has appeared in numerous publications on both sides of the Atlantic, including *The Guardian*, *Msllexia*, *South* and *Short Fiction*. She lives in Devon, England, and is a previous winner of the Balticon Poetry Contest, the Hart Crane Memorial Poetry Contest, and the Commonwealth Short Story Competition.

Enter the Annual Balticon Poetry Contest!

1. Entries should address the themes of science fiction/fantasy/horror/science.
2. 1st prize: \$100; 2nd prize: \$75; 3rd prize: \$50. Additional awards may be authorized at the judges' discretion.
3. Limit: 3 poems/person, maximum 50 lines each. No entry fee.
4. Winners will receive a cash prize, convention membership and be invited to read their winning entries at Balticon. Attendance at Balticon is not required to win.
5. Please no previously published submissions.
6. Winning poems will be published one time in the *BSFAN*, the Balticon convention souvenir book. In addition, a pdf version of the winning poems as they appear in the *BSFAN* will be available on the Balticon Poetry Contest website. Writers retain all rights to their work. By submitting to the contest, entrants agree to these terms.
7. Deadline: Mailed entries must be postmarked, and e-mail entries received, by March 1. Entries that do not meet this deadline will be considered for the following year. Please include your name, address, phone number, e-mail address & a brief bio with your entry.
8. Entries may be e-mailed to poetry@bsfs.org or mailed to "Balticon Poetry Contest," c/o BSFS, PO Box 686, Baltimore, MD 21203-0686. Info: poetry@bsfs.org.
9. Entries may also be submitted via the Balticon Poetry Contest Submission Form at: www.bsfs.org/bsfspoe.
10. While we would like to respond to each entrant personally, it is not always possible due to the large number of submissions we receive. Please check the Poetry Contest website periodically for updates and announcement of the winners.
11. Good luck & keep writing!