

## BSFS Poetry Contest 2019 Winners

### The First Five Links of Marley's Chain

All passion and song  
consigned to yesterday, yet  
I'm called the specter.

People speak of chains  
as things forged. I disagree. Knit—an iron shawl.

Gone so long, forgot  
if I'm bad at letting go  
or you're the problem.

The curse of things that  
go bump in the night: longing  
for what put us here.

We glimpse husks of skin  
and bone without an ounce of  
spirit between them.

James Edward O'Brien  
3rd Place – © 2010  
*Far Rockaway, NY*

### Better Living Through Witchcraft

You too can live in a chicken legged hut  
with hot and cold running spiders;  
with skull lantern lights and a hedge thick  
with leg-bones; the garden filled with toothy traps.  
As you'll travel by broomstick there's no need  
for your pensioner's bus pass and the sixty-six bus

If you own too-many teeth for a toothless hag,  
there are orthodontists.

A nose like a carrot? There are procedures.

Warts? we can plant the seed  
beneath a mask of stolen flesh  
torn from the bleeding skull of a super-model.

You should make a collection; mementoes:  
toenail clippings, hair, spittle, urine and sweat  
garnered from ex-lovers, ex-friends,  
green-tongued gossips, council officials,  
social workers, noisy children, politicians,  
bad-debtors and anxious-creditors.

You may keep a few possessions:  
a crystal ball, a steel hat pin, a doll of wax,  
a demon's eye that glitters like a heart  
beating hard and fast in an empty hour glass,  
a magic staff hand-carved from the bog-oak,  
an antique vivarium where your enemies croak.

One day you will burn, but what do you expect?  
So until the end, when they find you out,  
sooner: burning bright like pitch and dry tinder,  
or later: roasted in the oven like a leg of lamb,  
you can make a very good living selling  
cures and curses on the internet.

Oliver Smith  
1st Place – © 2019  
*Cheltenham, UK*

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### Loving a Spaceman

When I was young,  
I loved a Spaceman.  
He papered my ceiling  
with satellites and space stations,  
solar flares and wormholes.  
I'd fall asleep under his stars,  
dreaming of zero gravity.

I wanted more,  
so he beamed me aboard  
his space cruiser and we set sail  
across the universe.

We toured world after world,  
like cosmic vagrants.  
He introduced me to his friends:  
Isaac, Orson, Larry, and Philip.

But his rules were stricter than his robots',  
and my Earthly needs too alien.

My tears shorted  
his probability drive.  
I left him adrift off Venus  
and fled back to Earth.

Years later, I gaze at Orion  
and look for Spaceman trails.  
Did he find a Spacewoman  
to help log the stars  
while the ship scooped  
matter between galaxies?

Or maybe his dreams changed  
like mine and he settled down  
with a nice Martian girl  
on a Jovian moon.

The night is cold, so I return  
to bed beside my Earthman.

Books are my transporter  
to visit new worlds  
without leaving home.

R. Jean Bell  
2nd Place – © 2019  
Aalbaek, Denmark



**A Bookish Wizard Vignette**

© 2019 Charles Vess

## BSFS Poetry Contest 2019 Winners

### Homecoming

do not fear the witch  
she is laying herbs out to dry in a sunlit kitchen  
garlic smoke drifts from the cauldron  
a pot of white bean chili on a brisk fall day

do not fear the witch  
she lines the baseboards with peppermint oil to confuse the ants  
a sigil drawn on orange cardstock at the foot of the bed  
bids only good dreams pass

do not fear the witch  
the things that haunt your childhood home have no power over you now  
the yawning mouth of the root cellar  
opens on a mute expanse of cement and leaves

cones of incense to either side of an archway  
a veil to step through on the way to the living room  
where you sit across from the witch  
smile over cups of tea  
between you,  
crouched on the table like a smug gargoyle,  
the knowledge that not every curse can be broken

Grace Sonnabend  
Honorable Mention – © 2019  
Saint Paul, MN



Trumpeting the Dawn Vignette

© 2019 Charles Vess

### A Cupful of Stars

I drank a cupful of stars  
their pointed edges cut my throat  
blood squirting from the holes  
pierced in my esophagus  
but their light shone through  
my lungs and warmed my heart  
before my stomach buried the glow

I swallowed a spoonful of moons  
their rounded size swelled in my chest  
bruising my spine and making my  
brain bleed from the pressure  
but I was illuminated from  
within and without and others  
followed me through the darkness

I chewed on a forkful of suns  
their burning heat scarred my jaws  
melting them shut and scorching my  
nostrils so I could not breathe  
but I was aflame in the glory that  
I might bring life to a planet, to  
more planets, to an entire  
galaxy

Elena Sichrovsky  
Honorable Mention – © 2019  
Shanghai, China

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### About the Winning Poets

**Oliver Smith** (*First Place*)—Oliver Smith is a visual artist and writer from Cheltenham, UK. Oliver is currently studying for a PhD in Creative Writing at the University of Gloucestershire. Many of his previously published stories and poems are available in the collection *Basilisk Soup and Other Fantasies*.

**R. Jean Bell** (*Second Place*)—R. Jean Bell has been devouring any available reading material since age three, often averaging a book a day. This love of reading has brought her to writing both fiction and poetry. Although born and raised in the US, she's spent the last 20 years in Denmark.

**James Edward O'Brien** (*Third Place*)—James Edward O'Brien grew up in northern New Jersey where he graduated from *Dungeons & Dragons* to punk rock to Samuel Beckett—all three of which continue to inform his work today. His speculative fiction and poetry have appeared in *InterGalactic Medicine Show*, *Eye to the Telescope*, and on the *Tales to Terrify* podcast. He lives in Far Rockaway, NY with his wife and three rescue dogs.

**Elena Sichrovsky** (*Honorable Mention*)—Born in Japan but raised in Taiwan, Elena Sichrovsky is an Austrian citizen now living in Shanghai, China. She's a student at the Shanghai University of Engineering Science, and also a member of The Shanghai Writing Workshop. Besides poetry she also loves writing short stories and is currently working on finishing her first novel.

**Grace Sonnabend** (*Honorable Mention*)—Grace Sonnabend has recently returned to her hometown after almost a decade of wandering. She believes all the old stories are true.

### Enter the Annual BSFS 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 60 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 submitted via the BSFS Poetry Contest Submission Form at: [www.bsfs.org/bsfspoetry](http://www.bsfs.org/bsfspoetry).
9. Entries may also be e-mailed to [poetry@bsfs.org](mailto:poetry@bsfs.org) or mailed to "BSFS Poetry Contest," c/o BSFS, PO Box 686, Baltimore, MD 21203-0686. Info: [poetry@bsfs.org](mailto:poetry@bsfs.org).
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!