

Balticon 43 Poetry Contest Winners

This Is What You Must Do

First, walk
through city streets congested
with lightning-eyed boys and half-sleeping girls.
Choose one if you like;
take him home, make her coffee, talk all night.

Next, cut
down the alley veiled
with shredded billboard posters, dangling like torn silk.
Choose your usual path if you like;
the alley lit with fairy lights, crammed with teahouses and cafes.

Then, slip
into the club,
lights dyeing the fog of dry ice.
Choose to stay here if you like;
dance yourself into a bliss, sweat until you've washed away the city's dirt.

Finally, sidle
through the bodies on the dance-floor,
slick with sweet spilled liquids.
Peek around you – quick now!
If no-one is looking, you can go through the back door.

Now exhale. Push out the smells of the city: smoke, exhaust, strange flesh. Breathe in the smells of the bar: cinnamon, pepper, polished wood.

Before you look around the bar, you must prepare yourself. Outside –
through that club, down those alleys, along those streets –
people hide their deformities.
They hack off their wings, file down their horns, saw off their tails.
They think the scars are better.

Here, in this bar, they do things differently.
Feathered wings unfurl, the twitching tips reaching to the ceiling
as their owner ruminates over the jukebox.
A unicorn horn – two feet long and gleaming white – knocks gently
against the lights suspended over the pool table.
Pointed teeth, as sharp as morning light,
clink against the rims of glasses.
Not all the changes are so ornamental.
There are hooves ticking against the bar's wooden floor;
arms halfway to bird wings;
a scaly tail, fat as a tree branch, curled around a table leg.

You may stay a while, but not too long.
You do not belong here yet.

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This, continued

Later, at home,
you will look in the bathroom mirror and notice
a bump on your forehead, hard and white as bone.
You do not need to file it down this time;
you know where to go.

It's just a bar down an alley in the city, like a rainbow is just refracted light.

1st Place

Kirsty Logan

Glasgow, Scotland

Orbit

Forever shocking the system
from land to space, untethered
alteration, a transition
like adjusting to the weather.

From land to space, untethered,
liftoff—the release of speed
like adjusting to the weather.
The jolt of weightlessness, freed

by liftoff's release of speed.
Measuring time now in light-years.
The jolt of weightlessness: freed
entering a strange atmosphere

measuring time now in light-years
the odd physics of the unknown.
Entering a strange atmosphere
where matter acts nothing like home

the odd physics of the unknown.
Nothing will now look the same
where matter acts nothing like home.
More than point of view has changed.

Nothing will now look the same:
alteration, a transition.
More than point of view has changed
forever, shocking the system.

3rd Place

Pat Tompkins

San Mateo, CA

Aurora Aland

A black rain falls; a funeral today
A slanted, bright knife of the moonlit ray
Slips carelessly down on two pure white hands
And whispers, "Goodbye, fair Aurora Aland!"
Aurora Aland, with her tender eyes
And her joy, ever full, to the golden skies:
Aurora, with love, and a bride-to-be
Lowered down to the grounds of Eternity.
Her beau stands and watches that brooding box
Go nudging, to join with the bones and the rocks
He murmurs, "Aurora! Aurora Aland!"
But the sound drifts far from the funeral strand
And is lost—as she's lost—to the melody
Of the mourners that sing under sodden trees.
Her beau sits still as the dirt is passed
'Cross the face of the boards, and the silent grass
Is pressed by the grave and its epitaph:
"Aurora Aland—in our hearts to last."
He waits, and he waits, 'till the last man goes
And he's left with the tombs and the catacombs
Then he turns, and he sees her—"Aurora Aland!"
He weeps, and he stumbles, and finally stands
He grabs her, her gown and her snow white hands:
But she smiles—a specter, Aurora Aland?
Just a whisper, a whimper within his ear
Of the sweet, full voice and its love notes clear
Just a touch, a brush, of that little palm
On his chest as he tastes her endearing calm
Then a wave as she floats through the misty rain
Annulling his shocked and unraveled brain;
His soul still pierced by her boneless hand
His lover, a specter—Aurora Aland.

2nd Place

Tabitha Benedict

Shepherdsville, KY

About the Winning Poets in the
Balticon 43 Poetry Contest

Kirsty Logan (*First Place*)—Kirsty Logan is an MLitt student in creative writing at Glasgow University. Her work has been published in the anthology *Let's Pretend*, on the websites *From Glasgow to Saturn* and *Salome*, and in the magazines *Velvet, lip*, and *Chronogram*.

Tabitha Benedict (*Second Place*)—Tabitha Benedict has been writing from a young age, and is especially inclined towards poetry and historical fiction. She also enjoys playing mysterious Celtic music on her harp, volunteering in the local scientific community, and walking her quirky pug puppy.

Pat Tompkins (*Third Place*)—Pat Tompkins is an editor in the San Francisco Bay Area whose poems have appeared in *flashquake*, *Asimov's Science Fiction*, *Astropoetica*, and *Space & Time*.

Honorable Mention

Leland James <i>String Thing</i> St. Augustine, FL	P.S. Cottier <i>Haiku</i> Canberra, Australia
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**Enter the Annual Balticon
Poetry Contest!**

- Entries should address the themes of science fiction/fantasy/horror/science.
- 1st prize: \$100; 2nd prize: \$75; 3rd prize: \$50.
- Winners will receive a cash prize, convention membership and be invited to read their winning entries at Balticon. Winners will be published in the *BSFAN*, the Balticon convention souvenir book (a family-friendly publication), and on the BSFS website. Attendance at Balticon is not required to win.
- Limit: 3 poems/person, maximum 50 lines each.
- No entry fee.
- Deadline: Mailed entries must be postmarked and e-mail entries received by **April 1**. Entries that do not meet this deadline will be considered for the following year. Please include your name, address, phone & e-mail address and a brief bio with your entry.
- Entries may be e-mailed to <poetry@bsfs.org> or mailed to "Balticon Poetry Contest," c/o BSFS, PO Box 686, Baltimore, MD 21203. Info: <www.bsfs.org/bsfspoeetry> or <poetry@bsfs.org>.

*And Don't Forget to Check Out the Balticon
43 Poetry Workshop/Contest Winners &
Dramatic Poe Readings/Open Mic on Sunday
from 12 noon-3:30 p.m., Belmont Room!*

*Westminster
Hall and
Burying Ground*



*Westminster Hall & Burying Ground
Where Baltimore's History Rests in Peace
Fayette and Greene Streets - Baltimore, Maryland*

The Westminster Burying Ground is open to the public daily from 8:00 a.m. until dusk and is free of charge. Guided tours of the burying ground and catacombs are scheduled for the first and third Friday (6:30 p.m.) and Saturday (10:00 a.m.) of each month, April through November. Reservations are required and fees do apply. Please call (410) 706-2072 for more information.

