

Winners Announced at the 42nd Annual L. Ron Hubbard Writers and Illustrators of the Future Awards Gala

Winners announced for L. Ron Hubbard Achievement Awards: Writer Michael T. Kuester from Cincinnati, OH and Illustrator Bafu from Ruzomberok, Slovakia.

LOS ANGELES, CA, UNITED STATES, April 20, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- On the evening of Thursday, April 16, 2026 at the 42nd Annual [Writers of the Future](#) and the 37th Annual Illustrators of the Future [L. Ron Hubbard Achievement Awards Gala](#) in the

genres of Science Fiction and Fantasy,

Michael T. Kuester from Cincinnati, OH was named the 2026 Grand Prize Writer Winner and Bafu of Ruzomberok, Slovakia was named the 2026 Grand Prize Illustrator Winner. Emceed by Gunhild Jacobs, Executive Director of Author Services, Inc., the event was held in the Grand Ballroom of the Taglyan Cultural Complex in Hollywood, CA. View the [Awards Gala here](#).

“

I'd like to thank L. Ron Hubbard for creating these competitions. To the people of Cincinnati, I see you, and the entire world sees you. Good night Cincinnati!”

Michael T. Kuester, Grand Prize Writer Winner

night Cincinnati!”

Bafu said: “This is insane! I am so grateful for this and for the feedback the contest judges have given me. This is a life changing experience. I wrote a little note to myself in case I might win to



The Writers and Illustrators of the Future 42 Awards Gala at the Taglyan Complex in Hollywood, CA.

quickly grab the award and run before the judges can change their minds. But now that this has happened, from this point forward, I won't downgrade myself anymore. I will do the best I can. Thank you L. Ron Hubbard for creating these competitions. How am I going to fit this award in my suitcase? Thanks again! I will forever cherish this memory!"

Winners from this year's competitions hailed from all over the United States, as well as from Australia, China, Canada, Japan, South Africa, Slovakia and the United Kingdom. In the week prior to the Awards Gala, all the winners of the 2026 contests were mentored in seminars led by contest judges in an effort to prepare them for their respective professions.

Joni Labaqui, Director of the Contests for Author Services, Inc. who oversaw the presentations of the Grand Prize Awards, said, "The theme for our awards show this year was FANTASY, ALTERNATE HISTORY, AND IMAGINATION and the source of it: the writers and illustrators of the future. 'The Fire Tribe' depicted on the cover of our Volume 42 Anthology was created by Illustrators of the Future judge, Ciruelo Cabral, to which Writers of the Future judge, Orson Scott Card has crafted the story, 'Skinny Shins.'" A capacity crowd of 350 people attended the Black-Tie Gala, which was presented by Author Services, Inc. and Galaxy Press.

John Goodwin, President of Galaxy Press, unveiled Volume 42 of "L. Ron Hubbard Presents Writers of the Future," as well as the audio book of Volume 42, which was under the direction of two-time Grammy Award-winning producer and narrator, Stefan Rudnicki with the stories brought to life by the voices of Kirby Heybourne, Susan Hanfield, Gabrielle de Cuir and Orson Scott Card.



The Writers and Illustrators of the Future 42 winners along with judges and Contest staff on the stage at the Taglyan Complex in Hollywood, CA.



Writers of the Future Grand Prize winner Michael Kuester from Cincinnati and Illustrators of the Future Grand Prize winner Bafu from Slovakia

Emily Goodwin, Vice President of Public Affairs for Author Services, Inc., served as Event Producer.

John Goodwin said, "This year, Galaxy Press and Author Services, Inc. are celebrating the achievement of a milestone having accumulated over 1,000 writers and illustrators published in our Writers of the Future anthologies, more than any other source of Writers and Illustrators of Science Fiction and Fantasy. Volume 42 of our latest anthology will be available for sale nationwide on April 28, 2026 wherever books are sold."

Andrea Fleck-Nisbet, Chief Executive Officer of the Independent Book Publishers Association (IBPA), presented a Special Award to Galaxy Press and Author Services, Inc. which was accepted by Emily Goodwin, Vice President of Public Affairs for Author Services, Inc. Fleck-Nisbet said, "For over 40 years, the Writers and Illustrators of the Future Contest have launched over 1,000 new voices, standing as the longest running speculative fiction contest of its kind and shaping the next generation of storytellers and visionaries.

"This spirit – of access, innovation, and creative independence – reflects the mission of the Independent Book Publishers Association: To empower writers and creators to ring forth diverse voices, shape culture, and build the future of publishing. So it is my pleasure to present this plaque to the founder of the Writers and Illustrators of the Future Contests, Mr. L. Ron Hubbard."

Jannicke Mikkelsen, the first Norwegian astronaut appointed in August 2024 as spacecraft commander of the SpaceX Crew Dragon during the private space mission, Fram2, which was the first mission to polar orbit, or fly over the Earth's poles, appeared as the Gala Awards Keynote



Winners and presenters (l to r): John Goodwin, Emily Goodwin, Echo Chernik, Jannicke Mikkelsen, Bafu, Michael Kuester, Andrea Fleck-Nisbet, Jody Lynn Nye, Gunhild Jacobs, Joni Labaqui



Emily Goodwin receiving award from Andrea Fleck-Nisbet, CEO of Independent Book Publishers Assn, to L. Ron Hubbard recognizing 1,000 writers and illustrators published in Writers of the Future anthologies.

Speaker.

Mikkelson said, "To all writers and illustrators who are with us tonight, my crew and I would not have gone into space in the Dragon if it were not for the science fiction writers that dreamt up the possibilities that we made fact. Your journey of exploration, discovery and understanding would not be possible if all of you did not tap into the future of what-ifs.

"You inspire your readers and viewers to dream and you challenge humanity to discover what we are capable of achieving when we put our minds into action as a team. What was impossible yesterday is being rewritten today – re-imagined, challenged and redefined by those who refuse to accept the limits of the present. All that brings us all one-step closer to the exciting future of possibilities that bring about a better tomorrow. The future you imagine is a future we will all one day explore. Dare to dream, dare to write, and dare to create."

This year's event, an Invitation Only function, was streamed live via the website, www.writersofthefuture.com, from 7:00 – 9:30 p.m. PDT on Thursday evening, April 16, 2026. Goodwin added: "According to United Public Radio Network, this year's awards show was seen by 366,488 viewers on Roku and Amazon and was heard by over six million listeners via the livestream broadcast."

Writer's Contest Coordinating Judge, Jody Lynn Nye and Andrea Fleck-Nesbit announced writer Michael T. Kuester as the 2026 the Golden Pen Award winner presenting him a trophy and check for \$5,000, for his story, "In Living Color," which was illustrated by Nathan Deiwert.

Coordinating Illustrator Contest Judge Echo Chernik and Jannicke Mikkelsen announced illustrator Bafu as the 2026 Golden Brush Award winner presenting him a trophy and a check for \$5,000. Bafu illustrated writer Kathleen Powell's "Saffron and Marigolds."

The awards show was held in the Grand Ballroom of the Taglyan Cultural Complex nestled in the heart of Hollywood. Catered by Divine Food, the Gala began with tray passed Hors D'oeuvres and Cocktails, followed by a delectable three-course meal including Filet Mignon and Salmon. The Awards Show was followed a Book Signing and Reception in the plush Foyer of the Taglyan Cultural Complex. EM Cirque performers, violinist Luisa Lee and dancers Mary Win Penny and Maddie Medina, entertained guests.

Joining the festivities was Lydia van Vogt, the widow of the late Golden Age Science Fiction Writer, A.E. van Vogt, and a contemporary colleague of L. Ron Hubbard. A cake was presented to Lydia van Vogt at the Awards Gala in celebration of her upcoming 99th birthday, and the audience joined in singing Happy Birthday to her.

The 12 Quarterly 2026 Writer Winners who were presented with trophies and cash prizes included: Zach Poulter of Roy, UT; S.J. Stevenson of Wallasey, Merseyside, United Kingdom; Kathleen Powell of Springfield, MO; Thomas K. Slee of Windsor, Victoria, Australia; Brenda Posey

of Bessemer, AL; Mike Strickland of Centennial, CO; Michael T. Kuester of Cincinnati, OH; Elina Kumra of Sunnyvale, CA (in abstentia); Joseph Sidari of Sudbury, MA; Thomas R. Eggenberger of Fuchu-shi, Tokyo-to, Japan; Mark McWaters of Mount Dora, FL and Dorothy de Kok of Bedford, Eastern Cape, South Africa.

The 10 Quarterly Illustrator Winners who were presented with trophies and cash prizes included: Art Ikuta of North Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada; Roddy Taylor of Richmond, VA; Bafu of Ruzomberok, Slovakia; Karah Richardson of Tooele, UT; Josie Moore of Westfield, MA; Tray Streeter of Syracuse, UT; Nathan Deiwert of Greensburg, IN; Haotian "Allen" Zhang originally from Baoding, Hebei, China currently residing in Ann Arbor, MI; Anna Malone of Columbus, OH (in abstentia) and Tracy Eire of Bellevue, WA.

Celebrities and VIPS in attendance at the event included: Jannicke Mikkelsen, Rolf-Harald Haugen, Andrea Fleck-Nisbet, Michele Cobb, Steven L. Sears, Jeff Rector, Carell Augustus, Sufe Bradshaw, Elise Muller, Timothy Woodward Jr., Stefan Rudnicki, Neo Edmund, Kirby Heyborne, Susan Hanfield, Deniss Rakovich, Travis Oates, Phil Proctor, Chris Scott Campbell, Tyrone DuBose, Robert Hogg, Harry Kloor, Phoebe Chen Huang, Frederic Golchan, Barbara Zhan, Adele Abrams, Owen Cotter, Edwin Gagiano, Kary English, Darci Stone, Eric James Stone, Dustin Adams, Martin Shoemaker, Leah Ning, Lezli Robyn, Nyla and Oscar Arslanian and Lydia van Vogt.

Distinguished and renowned Writer Contest Judges in attendance included: Kevin J. Anderson, Orson Scott Card, Nina Kiriki Hoffman, Nancy Kress, Katherine Kurtz, Mark Leslie Lefebvre, Rebecca Moesta, Larry Niven, Jody Lynn Nye, Timothy Thomas "Tim" Powers and S.M. Stirling.

Other Distinguished Writer Judges who were not able to be in attendance include: Dr. Doug Beason, Dr. Gregory Benford, Brian Herbert, Hugh Howey, Todd McCaffery, Dr. Nnedi Okorafor, Kristine Katherine Rusch, Brandon Sanderson, Dr. Robert J. Sawyer, Robert Silverberg, Dean Wesley Smith and Dr. Sean Williams.

Distinguished and renowned Illustrator Contest Judges in attendance included: Ciruelo, Echo Chernik, Lazarus Chernik, Craig Elliott, Dr. Laura Freas Beraha, Brian C. Hailes, Brittany "Bea" Jackson and Rob Prior.

Other Distinguished Illustrator Judges who were not able to be in attendance include: Vincent DiFate, Diane Dillon, Bob Eggleton, Larry Elmore, Val Lakey Lindahn, Stephan Martiniere, Sergey Poyarkov, Irvin Rodriguez, Dan dos Santos, Shaun Tan, Tom Wood and Stephen Youll.

About The Contests:

Following the 1982 release of his internationally acclaimed bestselling Science Fiction novel, "Battlefield Earth," written in celebration of 50 years as a professional writer, L. Ron Hubbard created the Writers of the Future Contest (www.writersofthefuture.com) in 1983 to provide a means for aspiring writers of speculative fiction to get that much-needed break. Due to the success of the Writing Contest, the companion Illustrators of the Future Contest was created in

1988.

The annual Contests draw entrants from around the globe and are free to enter. Winners retain full rights to their work and each are given cash awards. Grand Prize Winners receive an additional \$5,000. The Contest flies out all winners to Los Angeles for an expense-paid, weeklong workshop given by Contest judges and culminates in a Black Tie Gala Awards event.

In the 42 years of the Writers of the Future Contest, there have been 583 winners and published finalists. The past winners of the Writing Contest have published over 8,000 novels and short stories.

In the 37 years of the Illustrators of the Future Contest, there have been 430 past winners which have produced over 6,800 illustrations and 390 comic books, graced over 700 books, 500 comics, and 130 major motion pictures, gaming feature films, TV shows, and documentaries.

The Writers of the Future Award is the genre's most prestigious award of its kind and has now become the largest, most successful and demonstrably most influential vehicle for budding creative talent in the world of speculative fiction. Since its inception, the Writers and Illustrators of the Future contests have produced 42 anthology volumes (with this event) and awarded upwards of \$1 million in cash prizes and royalties.

For more information please visit www.writersofthefuture.com and www.galaxypress.com

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