

**L. RON  
HUBBARD**

presents

**WRITERS  
OF THE  
FUTURE**



**CHAPTER BOOK  
and  
CONTESTS OVERVIEW**

## What the Critics Are Saying

“This hefty, competent anthology showcases 12 consistently solid short stories, each accompanied by a full-color illustration.

This anthology offers a worthwhile survey of new voices in the field, rounded out with four stories from established authors and three essays on craft. Genre enthusiasts should take note.”

—**PUBLISHERS WEEKLY**

“With stories ranging from sf to fantasy, as well as some genre mash-ups, this collection offers something for both adults and teens to enjoy.”

—**LIBRARY JOURNAL**

“*Writers of the Future* is the gold standard of emerging talent into the field of science fiction/fantasy that has contributed more to the genre than any other source.”

—**THE MIDWEST BOOK  
REVIEW**

“As in previous years, the latest volume in this popular and long-running series features prize-winning stories and illustrations from new writers and artists.”

—**TANGENT**

Dear Bookseller,

Ready for something appealing to aspiring writers and short fiction lovers?

Here’s a glimpse of the 36th edition of *L. Ron Hubbard Presents Writers of the Future* and the Writer and Illustrator Contests.

From the very outset of a successful literary career, L. Ron Hubbard gave generously of his time, energies and skills to help aspiring writers succeed. In 1983, in recognition of creative writers struggling in an ever-growing publishing empire, he “initiated a means for new and budding writers to have a chance for their creative efforts to be seen and acknowledged.” This was the Writers of the Future Contest and five years later, its companion Contest Illustrators of the Future. The anthology of the same name began publication, featuring winners of the Contests.

*Writers of the Future* has become “the most enduring forum to showcase new talent in the genre.” Not surprising. The Contests rely on seasoned bestselling authors such as Kevin J. Anderson, Orson Scott Card, David Farland, Jody Lynn Nye, Dr. Nnedi Okorafor, Tim Powers, Brandon Sanderson, Dr. Robert J. Sawyer, and accomplished illustrators Echo Chernik, Ciruelo, Mike Perkins, Bob Eggleton, Larry Elmore, Rob Prior, and Dan dos Santos.

Several winners from the UK have been published in *Writers of the Future* including bestselling author Stephen Baxter and more recently Christopher Baker, David Cleden, J. L. George, Anton Rose, Alan Smale, and Mike Wood.

Read on, order *Writers of the Future* anthologies and discover a means to help aspiring writers in your community get published.

Good luck!

—Juliet Wills

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**Writers of the Future Volume 36**

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Edited by: David Farland

16-page color Gallery of Artwork • Cover art by: Echo Chernik

Audiences: sci-fi/fantasy readers and aspiring writers

*L. Ron Hubbard* PRESENTS  
*Writers of the Future*  
*Chapter Book*  
AND *Contests* OVERVIEW

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For more information about  
*L. Ron Hubbard's Writers & Illustrators of the Future Contests*  
Visit [WritersoftheFuture.com](http://WritersoftheFuture.com)

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## *Writers and Illustrators of the Future Contests*

The L. Ron Hubbard Writers and Illustrators of the Future Contests have left a tremendous mark on the science fiction and fantasy field with over three decades of developing new professional writers and illustrators. The impact that both Contests have had on the field is impossible to measure.

Renowned author and critic Algis Budrys led the original Writers of the Future Contest, along with an all-star blue-ribbon panel of science fiction legends to act as judges—Dr. Gregory Benford, Robert Silverberg, Theodore Sturgeon, Jack Williamson, and Roger Zelazny. The first awards ceremony was held in 1985 in Beverly Hills, California.

But the Contest was more than just awards—it was about creating and developing the next generation of master writers. Budrys developed a world-class workshop to accompany the awards ceremony. The first prototype workshop was held in Taos, New Mexico, with fellow authors (and also Contest judges) Frederik Pohl, Jack Williamson, and Gene Wolfe. Budrys's Taos workshop was the test-bed for the instructional curriculum, which proved so successful it has been the model for three decades of intense, beneficial and world-renowned workshops.

CONTESTS

For the second year's workshop, Budrys enlisted Tim Powers and Orson Scott Card to help teach the new writers. That year, one of their students (winner of the grand prize Golden Pen award) was David Farland, who has since gone on to become a bestselling author with more than fifty novels published. In the true spirit of paying it forward, Budrys "passed the quill" to Farland in 1991, who then became the Coordinating Judge for the Contest, while Budrys continued to help teach the workshop. In 2002 Tim Powers took over the duties as workshop instructor partnered with

*"We had judges and friends—Ray Bradbury, Robert Silverberg, Theodore Sturgeon, Jack Williamson, Dr. Gregory Benford, Roger Zelazny, and A. E. van Vogt, who, no question, clearly were household names."*

*—Algis Budrys  
Writers Contest  
Founding Coordinating  
Judge*

K.D. Wentworth—another former Writers of the Future Contest winner who went on to publish numerous novels and short stories, receiving four Nebula nominations. K.D. also edited the annual anthology for four years until her passing in 2012, when David Farland resumed his role as editor of the annual anthology and co-instructor of the workshop. Other judges for the Writers of the Future Contest are among the best-known names in science fiction.

Five years after announcing the first Writers of the Future Contest, a second contest: the Illustrators of the Future, was inaugurated. It was led by Frank Kelly Freas along with equally impressive greats.

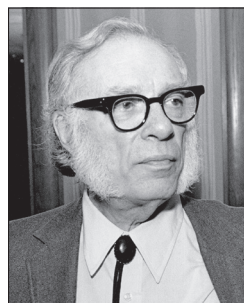
The workshops and awards ceremonies have taken place in breathtaking settings—Seattle, Las Vegas, the World Trade Center and the United Nations building in New York, the National Archives and the Smithsonian in Washington, DC, the Johnson Space Center, the Kennedy Space Center, the Aerospace Museum in San Diego, Caltech, and Hollywood, California.

With each year, the workshops have become more in-depth, growing and changing with the publishing world. Taught not only by the core instructors, but also by guest speakers from all

*Science fiction authors Ray Bradbury, A. E. van Vogt, and Jack Williamson at the first Writers of the Future Awards ceremony on February 6, 1985, celebrated in Beverly Hills, California.*



*(Left) 1986, Anne McCaffrey and Jack Williamson present the first L. Ron Hubbard Golden Pen Award to Robert Reed. (Below) Author Frederik Pohl, President of the United Nation's Society of Writers Hans Janitschek, and Algis Budrys give their predictions of what Mars will be like in 2034.*



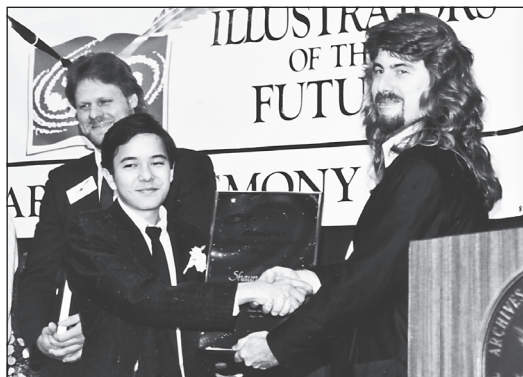
*Science fiction author Isaac Asimov at the 1987 Awards ceremony.*





*The legendary Frank Kelly Freas and Ray Bradbury at the inauguration of the Illustrators of the Future Contest in 1988.*

*Illustrators of the Future Founding Judge Bob Eggleton presents the first Australian to win the Illustrators of the Future Contest, Shaun Tan, at the National Archives in Washington, DC, in 1992.*



*King of Fantasy Illustrators, Frank Frazetta. Not only did he lend his considerable talent to more covers of the WotF anthologies than any other artist, he also served on the panel of judges for Illustrators of the Future.*

aspects of the arts and publishing. Illustrators learn not only the fundamental theories of art, but exposure to the ever-evolving business side of visual arts. Writers learn not only traditional publishing, but cutting-edge online methods, web publishing and eBooks—opportunities that were not even conceived when the Contests were first launched.

Winning the Writers and Illustrators of the Future Contests can put wings on an aspiring artist's career. Editors, agents, publishers, art directors all take note of the Contest winners. The students form a tight interactive and self-supportive network not only with the judges and guest speakers, but also among themselves to help them build their careers and draw or write their way into the future.

So many years of encouraging new writers and artists, building careers, nurturing creativity—an incredible legacy. These long-standing Contests are such that some of the early winners are now regarded as masters in their own right and are now stepping up to become mentors themselves, teaching a new generation how to become Writers and Illustrators of the Future.

Since L. Ron Hubbard's aspiration and vision in 1983, both Contests have since grown into the most prestigious of their kind, based on merit alone. International in scope, the Contests receive entries anywhere from Canada to Australia and Venezuela to South Korea—177 countries in all.

Each year holds its own magic, its own wonder, its own discoveries.

*"When I was first setting out, many established pros went out of their way to help me. The work I have done here is part of my own way of paying back for that, and I know I am not alone in looking at it that way. That was how L. Ron Hubbard looked at it."*

—Frank Kelly Freas  
Illustrators  
Contest Founding  
Coordinating Judge



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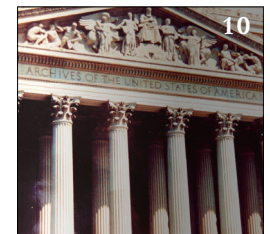
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### Workshops and Awards Ceremonies Locales

- |                                      |                              |   |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|---|
| 1. Launch of Space Shuttle Atlantis  | 4. Astronaut Story Musgrave  | 7. San Diego Aerospace Museum           |
| 2. Johnson Space Center, Houston, TX | 5. Hollywood "Walk of Fame"  | 8. Seattle Space Needle                 |
| 3. Ebell Theatre Hollywood, CA       | 6. US Astronaut Hall of Fame | 9. UN in NYC                            |
|                                      |                              | 10. National Archives in Washington, DC |

# Contest Judges

## Giving a Hand to a New Generation

The Writers of the Future Contest identifies and nurtures some of the best new talent in the genre. In doing so, it relies on what L. Ron Hubbard envisioned as “a special blue-ribbon panel”—prominent, successful authors in the field—to read the entries and select the winning stories for each quarter. Many of the judges also give presentations and help teach the students at the annual workshop.

During the creation of the Contest, Algis Budrys began to assemble the core team of judges from the best of the best among his peers, and this blue-ribbon panel has grown over the years.

Budrys wrote, “Each of us has a certain personal knowledge of how hard it is to hoe one’s way toward success as a writer, and then to keep it going. Almost all of us owe something to the tutelage of older writers who took us under their wings when we were first breaking in. That’s an old tradition in the arts, and particularly in SF, whose ‘Good Old Days’ weren’t all that long ago. There were no academies, so there had to be masters and apprentices if our literature was going to live and evolve.

“All the competition judges represent top, multiple-award-winning talent from every generation since the pioneering days of SF on the newsstands. They serve virtually without recompense. Why do they do that? They do it because no one ever forgets what it was like to dream of acceptance and recognition, often in the long face of repeated discouragement. And they do it because historically in the SF field, beginning writers have never been regarded as potential competition; they are new comrades.”

---

## Past and Present Judges

### WRITER CONTEST

#### JUDGES:

Kevin J. Anderson  
Dr. Doug Beason  
Dr. Gregory Benford  
Algis Budrys  
Orson Scott Card  
Hal Clement  
David Farland  
Eric Flint  
Brian Herbert  
Frank Herbert  
Nina Kiriki Hoffman  
Dr. Yoji Kondo  
Nancy Kress  
Katherine Kurtz  
Anne McCaffrey  
Todd McCaffrey  
Rebecca Moesta  
C.L. Moore  
Larry Niven  
Andre Norton  
Jody Lynn Nye  
Dr. Nnedi Okorafor  
Frederik Pohl  
Dr. Jerry Pournelle

Tim Powers

Mike Resnick

Kristine Kathryn Rusch

Brandon Sanderson

Dr. Robert J. Sawyer

Dr. Charles Sheffield

Robert Silverberg

Dean Wesley Smith

Theodore Sturgeon

K.D. Wentworth

Dr. Sean Williams

Jack Williamson

Roger Zelazny



### ILLUSTRATOR

#### CONTEST JUDGES:

Edd Cartier  
Robert Castillo  
Echo Chernik  
Lazarus Chernik

Ciruelo

Vincent Di Fate

Leo and Diane Dillon

Bob Eggleton

Will Eisner

Craig Elliot

Larry Elmore

Frank Frazetta

Frank Kelly Freas

Dr. Laura Freas Beraha

Jack Kirby

Val Lakey Lindahn

Paul Lehr

Ron Lindahn

Stephan Martiniere

Gary Meyer

Judith Miller

Moebius

Cliff Nielsen

Mike Perkins

Sergey Poyarkov

Rob Prior

Dan dos Santos

Shaun Tan

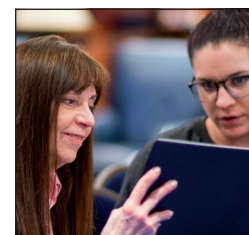
H.R. Van Dongen

Stephen Youll





Annual illustrator workshop presentations by Contest judges: (from top left) Rob Prior, Echo Chernik, Larry Elmore, Val Lakey Lindahn, Bob Eggleton, and Ciruelo.



Annual writer workshop presentations by Contest judges: (from top left) Orson Scott Card, David Farland, Tim Powers, Brandon Sanderson, Jody Lynn Nye, Dr. Robert J. Sawyer, and Dr. Nnedi Okorafor.





## *From Contest to Success*

### Winners of the Past and Creators of the Future

In the past thirty-six years, Writers of the Future winners have published well over 1,800 novels and nearly 6,000 short stories; they have become international bestsellers and have won the most prestigious accolades in the field, including the Hugo, the Nebula, the World Fantasy, the Bram Stoker, the Ditmar Award, the Aurealis Award, the British Science Fiction Award, and the Locus Award. They have garnered mainstream literary kudos such as the National Book Award, the National Endowment for the Arts Award, the Quill Award, and the Newbery Medal.

Illustrators of the Future winners have produced more than 600 book and magazine covers, over 6,000 illustrations, 375 comic books and have 1.4 million art prints in circulation. Their names have appeared in the credits of bestselling computer games, more than thirty television shows, and dozens of major motion pictures. They have had national exhibitions in major venues and museums and have received numerous prestigious honors, including the Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award, the Hugo, and the Academy Award.

Through their creative endeavors, these alumni continue to inject the spirit of life in today's culture.

FROM CONTEST TO SUCCESS

“I was the very first Writers of the Future Awards winner. On the stage were Robert Silverberg, Greg Benford, Roger Zelazny, and, of course, Algis Budrys. I don’t think that up until that moment I realized just how big getting into that first volume was.”

—Dean Wesley Smith  
1985 Winner  
Contest judge  
Bestselling author



“The Writers of the Future experience played a pivotal role during a most impressionable time in my writing career. Everyone was so welcoming. And afterwards, the WotF folks were always around when I had questions or needed help. It was all far more than a mere writing contest.”

—Dr. Nnedi Okorafor  
2002 Winner and Contest judge  
International award-winning novelist



“The Writers of the Future Contest has had a profound impact on my career, ever since I submitted my first story in 1989. Then and in subsequent years, the Contest threw many new skills and opportunities my way. Most important, it has provided a chance to give something back to the community.”

—Sean Williams  
1993 Winner and Contest judge  
Australian bestselling author  
#1 New York Times bestselling author



“Much of L. Ron Hubbard’s material which formed the foundations of the workshops provided a solid and informative base; ideal starting points for approaching illustrating and writing skills and work practices. The fact that some of the same articles were applicable to both the writers’ and Illustrators’ workshops demonstrates their flexibility, broadness, and scope.”

—Shaun Tan  
1992 Winner and Contest judge  
Academy Award Winner 2011

“Winning Writers of the Future gave me (at least) three things that helped my writing career. First, it gave me a pat on the back. The second thing WotF gave me was money. The third thing the Contest gave me was a weeklong workshop under Algis Budrys. All in all, the Contest was a fine finishing step from amateur to pro, and I’m grateful to all those involved.”

—James Alan Gardner  
1990 Grand Prize Winner  
Canadian author



“I really can’t say enough good things about Writers of the Future. When I won, I’d been trying to get an agent for two years. Trying and failing. Perhaps most importantly, Writers of the Future gave me hope. After that, I knew my writing was good enough to be published. It’s fair to say that without Writers of the Future, I wouldn’t be where I am today.”

—Patrick Rothfuss  
2002 Winner  
#1 New York Times bestselling author





## *L. Ron Hubbard: Contest Founder*

### Living the Life and Paying It Forward

**I**n the 1930s and 1940s, through the heyday of pulp magazines that filled newsstands with countless pages of adventure in all genres, one especially prolific and accomplished writer set the bar high for his peers and aspiring authors alike, a man whose fiction has since sold nearly fifty million copies and is one of today's most widely read authors.

L. Ron Hubbard all but defined what it means to be a successful writer, and throughout his career he freely passed along his knowledge of the craft. His creation and endowment of the Writers of the Future Contest in the final years of his life is a natural extension of many years of "paying it forward."

Hubbard's literary output was legendary—simultaneously the envy of his peers and a blessing to his fans. For years, he regularly penned about 100,000 words every month (the equivalent of a typical modern novel). From 1934 to 1940, he published an average of three stories every four weeks—more than 138 short stories, novellas, and novels in seven years.

"There used to be articles in the writers' magazines about the incredible speed with which L. Ron Hubbard wrote," a science fiction editor and historian once remarked. "And in those days



L. Ron Hubbard was elected the youngest-ever president of the New York chapter of the American Fiction Guild, shown here in 1936 (center, second row).

an electric typewriter was a novelty. Very few writers had one. And the very fact that L. Ron Hubbard had bought an electric typewriter so he could write faster was considered quite newsworthy.”

Science fiction Grand Master Jack Williamson recalled: “He was using an electric typewriter—the first one I ever heard about—and he was able to write two thousand words an hour, and he generally would sell them on first draft, I think. It was something that very few of the rest of us could do.”

Hubbard explained his own secret to his extraordinary productivity—namely, *“To write, write and then write some more. And never to allow weariness, lack of time, noise, or any other thing to throw me off my course.”*

As a consequence of his popularity and prodigious output, novice writers who hoped to learn Hubbard’s storytelling skills often consulted him for advice. He was always willing to offer suggestions and, in fact, provided lengthy responses to queries

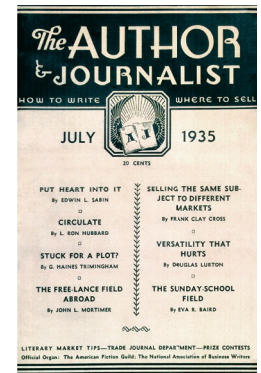
on where a writer should live, how much research one should do and which type of fiction to write. In a somewhat wide-eyed reply, one such aspiring author informed him: “Received your very generous letter in answer to my query. I feel I cannot let it pass without letting you know how much I appreciate the trouble you took to inform me about things I couldn’t have known otherwise, or without wasting a good deal of time, effort and perhaps money.”

Hubbard further shared his hard-earned experience with creative writing students at Harvard and George Washington University. (As he tells it, students went “positively apoplectic” when told that the only way to become a writer was to *write*.) To help young writers accomplish just that, Hubbard authored a series of how-to articles that appeared in writing magazines through the 1930s and 1940s. Offering guidance to help new writers navigate the rough waters they were likely to encounter, these articles are classics in their own right:

*“When you first started to write, if you were wise, you wrote anything and everything for everybody and sent it all out. If your quantity was large and your variety wide, then you probably made three or four sales.”* (“The Manuscript Factory,” 1935)

As Jack Williamson explained, “I used to read Hubbard’s articles in *Writer’s Digest* and *Author and Journalist* and so forth about how to write and be successful. Writers’ magazines wanted to fill up their pages with inspirational articles and ideas and he was their prolific source of such material—and a natural for them.”

Shortly after publishing “The Manuscript Factory,” Hubbard became elected the youngest-ever president of the New York



*“I used to read Hubbard’s articles in *Writer’s Digest* and *Author & Journalist* and so forth about how to write and be successful.”*

—Jack Williamson

chapter of the American Fiction Guild and immediately set out to remake that organization into a truly practical and professional guild. By way of example, in order to promote more accurate use of factual detail in detective and mystery fiction, he invited a New York City coroner to join Guild members over lunch, whereupon all were regaled with the man's professional expertise on strange forms of murder. (*"They would go away from the luncheon the weirdest shades of green,"* Hubbard recounted afterward.) He extended similar invitations for other experts, including the city's police commissioner. Likewise, as Guild president—and this expressly on behalf of the neophyte writer—he allowed newcomers to join under a new category of "novice."

In 1940, as a feature on a radio program Hubbard hosted while in Ketchikan, Alaska (where he paused on one of his several expeditions under the famed Explorers Club flag), he offered not only practical advice for beginning writers, but also initiated the "Golden Pen Award." It was designed to encourage listeners of station KGBU to pen short stories, and the best of them were submitted to a professional New York publisher. In that respect, Hubbard's Golden Pen Award was a direct precursor to his Contest of today.

*1948 World Science  
Fiction Convention,  
Toronto, Canada.  
Clockwise from top  
left: L. Ron Hubbard,  
John W. Campbell Jr.,  
Sam Moskowitz,  
Frank Belknap Long,  
Richard Wilson, and  
Willy Ley.*



More than four decades later, in 1983, L. Ron Hubbard created and endowed the Writers of the Future Contest as a means to discover and nurture new talent in science fiction. The Contest is very much an extension of a well-established and demonstrated philosophy of "paying it forward" to help new generations of writers.

The following is excerpted from Hubbard's introduction to the first volume of Writers of the Future winners:

"A culture is as rich and as capable of surviving as it has imaginative artists. The artist is looked upon to start things. The artist injects the spirit of life into a culture. And through his creative endeavors, the writer works continually to give tomorrow a new form.

"In these modern times, there are many communication lines for works of art. Because a few works of art can be shown so easily to so many, there may even be fewer artists. The competition is very keen and even dagger sharp.

"It is with this in mind that I initiated a means for new and budding writers to have a chance for their creative efforts to be seen and acknowledged. With the advent of the Writers of the Future competition came an avalanche of new material from all over the country.

"Judging the winners for this book could not have been an easy task, and I am sincerely grateful to those professionals and top-flight veterans of the profession for their hard work and final selections which made this book possible.

"And my heartiest congratulations to those they selected for this first volume.

"Good luck to all other writers of the future.

"And good reading."

—L. Ron Hubbard  
1985



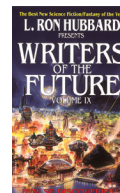
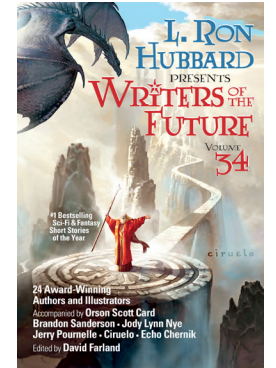
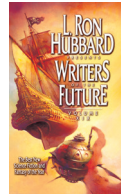
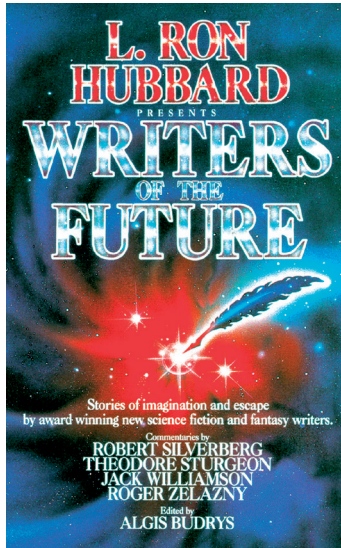
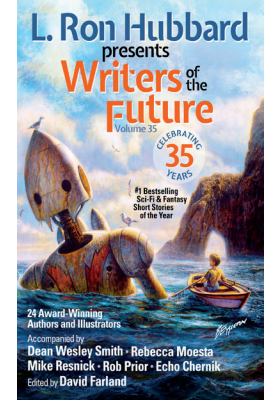
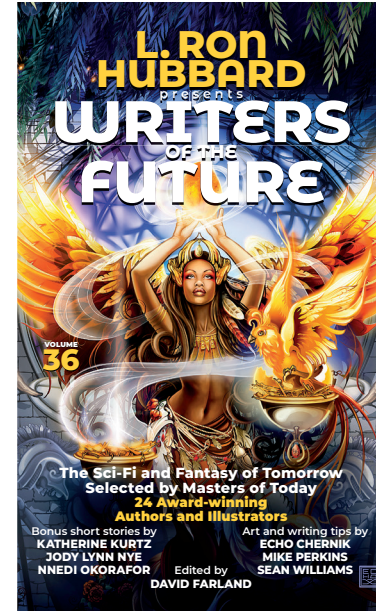
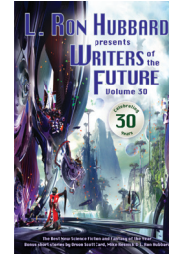
## *The Anthology*

### Best New Sci-Fi and Fantasy of the Year

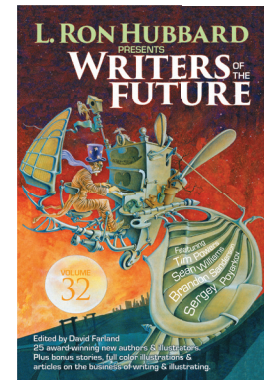
Even from the beginning, *Writers of the Future* drew some of the best, most innovative new fiction from authors destined to be future stars of the genre. It was a natural extension of the Contest to publish an anthology of the prizewinning stories. The very first volume of *L. Ron Hubbard Presents Writers of the Future*, released at the Awards ceremony in 1985, was a resounding success, both in popular and critical acclaim. A new anthology has been released every single year since its inception.

The anthologies boast covers by legendary artists in science fiction, including Frank Frazetta, Frank Kelly Freas, Paul Lehr, Gary Meyer, Stephan Martinieri, Larry Elmore, Ciruelo, Bob Eggleton, and Echo Chernik—all judges in the sister Contest, *Illustrators of the Future*. Over the past decades, we have lost some of these artistic legends: Paul Lehr, Frank Kelly Freas and last but not least, Frank Frazetta, whose paintings graced more covers of the *WotF* anthologies than any other artist.

*"Writers of the Future competition features expertly crafted and edited stories and art, running the gamut from humorous to bone-chilling."*  
 —Publishers Weekly  
 starred review



*"Featured with both monochrome and colored plates and work as varied and as exciting as the authors'."*  
 —Library Journal  
 starred review







## *Selections from Writers of the Future Volume 36*

**W**e take pride in discovering the world's best new authors in the field of speculative fiction. The writing and artistic talent in Volume 36 is exceptional!

In this volume we present a dozen new authors and illustrators from the UK, Australia, Iran, Turkey, and the US.

We also have great stories from Jody Lynn Nye, inspired by our cover, and from our new judge Katherine Kurtz, who brought us a tale from her Deryni universe, and an African-based fantasy story from Nnedi Okorafor, along with a classic tale from the founder of the Contests, L. Ron Hubbard.

The anthology also boasts articles with sound advice from Contest judges Sean Williams, Mike Perkins, Echo Chernik, and timeless guidance from L. Ron Hubbard.

For a sampling of what this book has to offer, we've selected excerpts from the first place quarterly Contest winners.

Enjoy!

—David Farland

*1987 Grand Prize Winner, New York Times bestselling author and Coordinating Judge of the Writers of the Future Contest*



## *The Trade*

*written by*

*C. Winspear*

*illustrated by*

ARTHUR BOWLING

---

*An alien visit to the International Space Station to provide a potential solution for climate change, at a price!*

**M**y name, Lena Sokolov, would be engraved in the lists of early astronauts, glorified for as long as humanity survived. But that wasn't enough. I wanted to go to Mars. I wanted to go to Alpha Centauri. I wanted to be immortal and to lead the disheartened human race into a more optimistic future. Even then, the unknown thing I hunted with my camera might still remain out of reach.

I glanced again at the photo and my unease heightened alarmingly. In the background of the image, the stars looked wrong. Too bright. I turned to the bow window and noticed what my subconscious had picked up half an hour ago.

But I couldn't believe it. The stars weren't skewed or faint. There had to be something wrong with my eyes. My consciousness, unlike my instincts, possessed incredible powers of denial. Only after a few minutes of blinking and experimenting with the camera did I accept what I saw.

A transparent wall hung past the bow of the station, stretching and skewing the stars beyond. A wall or a hull? The effect reminded me of those incredible deep-sea fish that could change their skin to match the ocean floor beneath them.

Something gigantic had camouflaged itself and crept up on us, coming to rest outside our main docking adapter.

I glanced back to the SSRMS, which remained stationary. Had the transparent thing also cut off our communication with Ground?

"Lena, Node Two, now!" Yuma's scream reverberated through the station.

I pulled myself down, gripping blue handle after blue handle, turning at Node One and throwing myself down the US module Destiny. Yuma floated ahead of me at Node Two, looking out the hatch window.

The walls shuddered.

My unease turned to panic, then to excitement. At last something interesting, something we hadn't trained for!

"A vessel's trying to dock," Yuma said. "Radio's jammed. Are we being invaded? Where's Nat?"

I looked through the little circular window of the hatch. I couldn't see anything outside. At first this disappointed me, but then I remembered I should've seen stars. Something was out there, blocking the view.

"Natalie! Node Two!" Yuma shouted. Then he whispered to me, "Who could it be? The Chinese?"

The wall of camouflage I'd seen from the cupola covered a gigantic volume, enough to contain all the satellites and shuttles ever launched from Earth.

"Not human," I answered.

"What?"

The hatch clacked.

Yuma grabbed its steel latch and held it in its locked position. I almost criticised him for this desperate action—as if spacefaring

aliens couldn't get through a simple lock—and what if we offended them? But I couldn't send poor Yuma into an even worse panic. That would be bad "expeditionary behaviour."

The steel latch jumped out of Yuma's grip. The hatch opened with a pop and a hiss. Compressed air from the other side spilled into Node Two, tasting more earthy and natural than our own. The gust pushed us away.

By the time Yuma and I grabbed a handle and oriented ourselves, a man had emerged from the open hatch. He was dressed in a navy-blue jumpsuit identical to our own uniforms, although stripped of its badges, flag, and nametag. The module behind him didn't appear alien at all, more like a mirror image of our Node Two.

"Hello, humans!" The man waved his palms wide.

Yuma yelped.

I made sure I had a good grip on the surfaces around me.

"Am I first?" the man asked. "Tell me I'm first."

We stared.

"Yep. I can see from your faces that I'm first. Hell, yeah!"

He fist-pumped the air, kicking and catching handles to do a 180° sideways flip. He continued talking to us upside-down.

"Numero uno, baby! It's a real pleasure to welcome you to the galactic community. I'm here to— Sorry, is this distracting?"

He flipped his body back round the same way as us, his head now perfectly level with my own. Although the alien looked human, I'd never met anyone who could so confidently toss themselves around in microgravity.

"I am a trader. . ."

*The story continues on page 28*

*in L. Ron Hubbard Presents Writers of the Future Volume 36.*





## *A Word That Means Everything*

*written by*

*Andy Dibble*

*illustrated by*

HEATHER A. LAURENCE

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*How does one interpret the word of God so that  
an alien can understand?*

**W**hen Pius was assigned to Murk, he assumed he would be translating the Bible into the language of genius octopuses. But the first Thulhu he laid eyes on, rendered grayscale by the mist, only humped a lichen patch, distended tongue audibly slathering against rock, tentacle suckers puckering as they stuck and unstuck, vestigial wings like out-of-body lungs flagging over its backside.

Thulhus were supposed to communicate via tentacle gestures. This thrashing was it, right? But Pius's visor remained dark. No translation.

His last assignment with the Prabhakarins had been different. They knew first impressions mattered. This tentaclely brute didn't even acknowledge him.

"You're sure this thing is sentient?" he called back. His voice echoed queerly in the gloom.

“Keep it down!” Zora said in a church whisper. She was a good guide, by reputation a good ethnographer. But she treated him more like a credulous little brother than a client.

“I thought you said they can’t hear.”

“They can’t. But the Thulhus aren’t top of the food chain.” Zora dangled her fingers like a jellyfish. Made them creep. The right fore-tentacle of her Thulhu-suit glided with almost feline surreptitiousness. She snatched her left hand away and her other fore-tentacle darted behind the nearest hind-tentacle of her suit.

The visor protruding from Pius’s headgear flashed “Predator.”

He gulped. In this fog, anything worthy of the name *predator* had to be calculating an ambush.

He was armed, but sensor mesh constricted his trigger finger. He’d chosen the noninvasive Thulhu-suit. Zora’s interfaced directly with her motor cortex, so her gestures were just a symptom of the same neural impulses that animated her suit’s fore-tentacles. Through obliquer mentation she could control the four hind-tentacles of her suit. If it came to flight, Pius had just one option: autopilot.

The Thulhu let up its humping long enough to radiate a spasm down its limber fore-tentacles and four stouter hind-tentacles. A shrug?

Pius’s visor proffered, “Disbelief” in blocky red print. Then corrected itself, “Amused disbelief.”

Pius groaned. What kind of language was this? He expected elegance, a system of symbols, like the sign language of Prabhakarín children who are deaf-mute until puberty.

“Maybe they just thrash around to mate and warn each other of danger,” said Pius. “That doesn’t mean they have *language*.”

“Did your Church tell you that?” Zora chuckled like Socrates must have chuckled just before shredding his interlocutors’ preconceptions.

“Just my guess.” It could be bureaucratic blundering that

consigned him to Murk, but he had to assume the One Church hadn’t sent him on a fool’s errand.

“Thousands of robots taking millions of pictures all over this region ran pattern recognition, *devilishly* clever algorithms. The same software derived more than a thousand languages spanning over a hundred species throughout the galaxy. Just think how few Bible translations your Church would have piddled out without it.”

Church doctrine said that the Holy Spirit doesn’t work through software, but brandishing dogma was a nonstarter. “Maybe a different subject would be more cooperative?”

There were other males (Zora called them men) scarfing lichen or sloughing about as though they belonged to a patch of mist rather than a place, and fog-gray females (ahem, women) haunting the periphery of the seen world. Young clung to the floppy wings on their backs as their fore-tentacles flicked about in conversation.

“You’ll have less luck with the others. We’re just...” She let a fore-tentacle go slack like a burdensome limb she hadn’t found the time to amputate.

The translation smote the upper left of Pius’s vision. “Disobedient-other”?

In imitation, he let his shoulder drop, and the whole left side of his Thulhu-suit sagged. Pius avoided keeling over into spongy marsh only by windmilling to the other side. His suit would have formed the gesture if he had just spoken the word into his mouthpiece.

Light danced in Zora’s eyes, but she suppressed her mirth.

The Thulhu let up feeding. His fore-tentacles squiggled....

*The story continues on page 79*

*in L. Ron Hubbard Presents Writers of the Future Volume 36.*





## *Catching My Death*

written by

*J. L. George*

illustrated by

KAITLYN GOLDBERG

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*Whether you catch a good death or a bad one determines the course of your life, unless you find a way to break free of the cycle.*

Jacob caught his death yesterday.

I watched him carry it back to town from the top of the hospital steps. It looked like a good one: quiet, a soft, dark-grey thing nestled like a kitten in the crook of his arm.

There weren't a lot of spectators. Tuesday morning and a few idling shoppers wandered out onto the street to rubberneck, but no crowd. I'd been watching hospital visitors trickle in and out of the car park, toying with a cigarette as I waited for the nurse to finish setting up Mum's chemo infusion. But when I saw the bright red flag of Jacob's jacket I jumped up. He'd been out in the forest since last Friday night and we'd begun to wonder if he'd be one of the ones who didn't come home. It hadn't happened to anyone I knew, but you saw the photographs on the news sometimes.

Jacob met my eye and he raised one hand in greeting as he passed—certain, already, that his death would stay where he put

it. I white-knuckled the railing as the door opened behind me.

Mum's death trotted at her heels. Keeping a respectful distance for now, but alert and ready. She ignored it and fiddled with the IV in her arm.

"Don't," I said, snapping into dutiful daughter mode. "The ward sister'll tell you off again."

She snorted. The faint lines beside her eyes looked deeper today, or maybe that was just the sunlight. "You'll need to go out to the woods soon," she told me and stole my cigarette. "You're almost eighteen, Ash. You can't keep on without one forever. You won't be able to get a mortgage. Car insurance. Nobody'll want to date you."

"I *know*," I said and shrugged her twig-light hand off my shoulder. I looked back at Jacob and his bright, carefree smile and for a brief, startling moment, I hated him.

His parents had planned a party. Tomorrow morning he'd stumble hung over down to the courthouse to get his death certified, but tonight he could drink and laugh and tell loud stories about how he'd finally caught it, rolling around in the soft cloud of his relief.

Heather knocked at my door an hour after we'd returned from the hospital. Mum was sleeping upstairs. I sat in the living room and tried to watch TV and kept looking out at the road to the forest instead. It bent sharply out of sight behind the houses, but if you followed it back through town, past the hospital, you'd see it peter out into a dirt track and then just a path between the dark conifers, needles crunching beneath your feet. Then you'd start listening out for deaths.

"You hear about Jacob?" Heather asked me, chewing her lip. It was a nervous habit; she always had scabs. She didn't have her death yet, either. Her parents were the opposite of Mum, finding some reason to put it off each time she suggested going out to the forest. When we were small, we'd decided to go together when

the time came. We'd even played at it, making our Barbies sneak through bed-sheet forests and leap at the stuffed animals we'd pressed into service as deaths. The older we'd got, the less fun the game had seemed and eventually we'd given it up.

"People are going to start talking about us," I said. "We're the only ones in our year group without our deaths."

Heather nodded and looked miserably down at her sneakers. "It makes me feel like a little kid. Or—"

She went quiet, but I felt sure both of us were picturing the same thing. The Deathless enclave down by the railway tracks in the bad part of town, a patchwork of tents and makeshift shelters. Heather and I had wandered into it by mistake once, attempting a shortcut home, and a woman who sat repairing her shoes at the side of the road had scowled up at us. I'd stared, horrified by the dirty hollow where her teeth should have been, until she snapped at me to mind my own business.

Later, Mum had told me off for wandering—and then for staring. The poor woman probably hadn't seen a dentist in a decade, she'd said. That was the sort of thing that happened when you were Deathless.

I took a breath. "You know what?" I told Heather. "We should go now. Before the party."

Heather's eyes went wide. "My mum and dad would never—"

"I know. That's why we don't tell anyone. We just—go." Saying it aloud turned the idea solid. Mum would be relieved that I'd sorted it out myself. One less thing for her to worry about. There were pins in her sewing kit we could use for imprinting; she'd never notice they were gone. . . .

*The story continues on page 138  
in L. Ron Hubbard Presents Writers of the Future Volume 36.*





## *Educational Tapes*

written by

*Katie Livingston*

illustrated by

JOHN DALE JAVIER

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*Know there is nothing here to harm you. Only your choices. Only yourself. The educational tapes will prepare you for your choice, "I accept" or "I decline." There are no other options.*

1.

This is installment one of the government-issue educational tape for student 147B. If you are not student 147B, you may now remove your headphones and raise your hand. Your educational professional will provide you with further assistance. If you are student 147B, cross your arms and lay your head on your desk. Close your eyes and smell the faint chemical residue of the disinfectant that the school janitor used to wipe your desk down this morning. Smell, also, the dirt and playground rock dust still clinging to your skin.

Know there is nothing here to harm you. Only your choices. Only yourself.

Every choice that you have made up to this point was your own: eating toast for breakfast, putting on a wrinkled green T-shirt, watching a bug twitch on your windowsill until it lay still.

When the mail arrived at exactly 8:30 a.m. yesterday, like it does every Sunday, you made a choice to get out of bed and go



directly to the mailbox. You made a choice to open it, to extract the manila folder tucked inside, to turn it over and run your fingers across the seal, careful not to break it.

You stared for a few seconds too long at the governmental logo embossed on the front before a bird perched near you, a little closer than birds tend to perch, and tilted its head ever so precisely toward you.

It was your choice to then tuck the manila envelope under your arm, run back into your house, and shove the package far under your bed where it would be safe from the piercing gaze of birds.

Some decisions are more important than others. Like the decision to speak up or remain quiet when two adults are arguing, or to move your mouth in mimicry of words in a chant without actually speaking them aloud, or to only pull out the manila envelope late at night, when everyone is sleeping, so that you can be alone with it.

You carefully picked at the corners of the seal, then put it back down on the bed and walked away. You came back later, picked it up, measured its weight in your hand. You handled it like a thing that could bite you. And it could. But not on its own. The choices are your own.

Manila envelopes always contain choices.

Some will say there is no need to fear this choice, as long as you make the right one. But the right choice made for the wrong reasons is still the wrong choice. And fear will give you a healthy respect for the decision you're going to make.

You do not need to worry, though, about making the choice now.

When you open the manila envelope with the governmental logo embossed on the front, you will be greeted with a thick stack of papers coated in fine print. It will look like a series of indecipherable symbols rather than a string of cohesive thoughts.

The papers are saturated with questions. Questions about you, your life, your childhood, your education, your likes and dislikes. Do not worry about these. These are for later. These you will

fill out with the help of your parent, guardian, or an appointed educational professional.

The page that is important, the page that you are now worried about, is the final page. On this page, there is only a bit of fine print at the top, a box that says "I accept," a box that says "I decline" and a line on which to write a shaky, reluctant signature.

In the manila envelope that I have sitting in front of me, there is something different. There is more paper with more fine print. Fine print with a very specific set of instructions on how to conduct an educational tape.

The paper tells me that the instructions are only a set of guidelines, a framework on which to build.

I have other manila envelopes. Manila envelopes on you, on your case, on the way you pinch tacks too tightly between your fingers and gaze too long into the distance.

I also have tapes. Bits of audio collected over the years. Bits of video. Notes on behavioral analysis.

But the envelope in front of me now, the general one with the homogenized guidelines, says to make a point about the positives of becoming a citizen, a point about the greater good.

You already know about the greater good. You know about food supply and nuclear families. You are aware that society is an intricate machine and that you are an important piece of it and that the purpose of the machine is greater than your individual purpose. You know what it means to contribute to the greater good.

But why should that matter to you? Why should it matter to any child that a monolithic entity wants to swallow you up in contribution of the greater good? . . .

*The story continues on page 244*

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