

THE 2016 DELL MAGAZINES AWARD

This year's trip to the International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts was spent in a whirl of activity. In addition to academic papers, author readings, banquets, and the awards ceremony, it was a celebration of major life events. Thursday night saw a surprise birthday party for well-known SF and fantasy critic Gary K. Wolfe and a compelling memorial for storied editor David G. Hartwell. Sunday morning brought us the beautiful wedding of Rebecca McNulty and Bernie Goodman. Rebecca met Bernie when she was a finalist for our annual Dell Magazines Award for Undergraduate Excellence in Science Fiction and Fantasy Writing several years ago.

Other past finalists were also in attendance at the conference. In addition to Rebecca, it was a joy to watch E. Lily Yu, Lara Donnelly, Rich Larson, and Seth Dickinson welcome a brand new crop of young writers. The winner of this year's award was Rani Banjarian, a senior at Vanderbilt University. Rani studied at an international school in Beirut, Lebanon, before coming to the U.S. to attend college. Fluent in Arabic and English, he's also toying with adding French to his toolbox. Rani is graduating with a dual major in physics and writing. His award winning short story, "Lullabies in Arabic" incorporates his fascination with memoir writing along with a newfound interest in science fiction. My co-judge Rick Wilber and I were once again pleased that the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts and Dell Magazines cosponsored Rani's expense-paid trip to the conference in Orlando, Florida, and the five hundred dollar prize. The Dell Magazines Award is also supported by the Humanities Institute at the University of South Florida and the Zimmerman School of Advertising & Mass Communications at the University of South Florida in Tampa.

The awards are selected via a blind read. Thus, I was initially surprised to discover that two of our finalist awards were for the same person—Eleanor Griggs of Grinnell College in Iowa. Our finalist had recently been accepted by the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, and was waiting to hear from other English and MFA programs. Her favorite authors include Neil Gaiman and J.R.R. Tolkien. Eleanor's inventive stories were the first runner-up tale, "Nostos," and third runner-up, "Wags." She was accompanied by her mother, Jeanne Griggs, who presented a paper at the conference about satire in Joan Sloncewski's novel, *The Highest Frontier*.

Unfortunately, our second runner up, Laura Davia, couldn't attend the conference. Like Rani, Laura is a student at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. She received the award for her story, "Get Out of Here." Sadly, also absent were two of our honorable mentions—Caighlan Smith of Memorial University of Newfoundland who won for her story, "A Pest Most Fiendish," and Taimur Ahmad of Princeton University who won for his story, "Green Tunnels." We'd gotten to know both authors when their earlier stories placed in last year's competition so their presence was sorely missed.

We were delighted, though, that our other two honorable mentions were able to make it to this year's conference. Karen Aston is a senior at Kenyon College in Ohio studying English literature. A prolific writer who attended the Alpha Writers Workshop as a teenager, Karen is well on her way to following in the footsteps of favorite authors like J.K. Rowling, J.R.R. Tolkien, Melanie Rawn, and Ellen Kushner. Karen received her award for "Thieves Gold." Courtney Gilmore is a sophomore at Columbia College in Chicago studying creative writing. Courtney enjoys reading fantasy series



Photo credit: Liza Groen Trombi

Left to right: Rani Banjarian, Sheila Williams, Rick Wilber, Karen Aston, Eleanor Griggs, and Courtney Gilmore

and has considered working in publishing someday. She received her award for the amusing tale of “The Numbers Queen of Harlem.”

After breakfast one morning, the students visited with a resident alligator who floated to the edge of a river on the hotel property. The finalists had dinners with Kathleen Ann Goonan, James Patrick Kelly, Kit Reed, Neil Clarke, Ellen Datlow, Joe Haldeman, John Kessel, Nick DiChario, and Nisi Shawl. Other attendees at the conference included Holly Black, Joan Slonczewski, Ted Chiang, Gregory Frost, Mary Anne Mohanraj, Jim Morrow, Geoffrey A. Landis, Ellen Klages, Daryl Gregory, Mary Turzillo, John Chu, Bruce Boston, Cat Rambo, Sam J. Miller, Judith Berman, Ellen Kushner, Stephen R. Donaldson, Andy Duncan, Nalo Hopkinson, Patricia McKillip, Sandra McDonald, Rachel Swirsky, Peter Straub, Delia Sherman, Stephanie Feldman, Will Ludwigen, Alyssa Wong, and Max Gladstone. Many of these authors spent time visiting with our award winners as well.

You can visit with previous finalists and current writers at our Facebook site. Find out more about the award at www.dellaward.com or on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/pages/manage/#!/pages/Dell-Magazines-Award/177319923776>.

We are actively looking for next year's winner. The deadline for submissions is Monday, January 3, 2017. Stories must be unpublished and unsold and should be between a thousand and ten thousand words. All full-time undergraduate students at any accredited university or college are eligible.

Before entering the contest, contact Rick Wilber for more information, rules, and manuscript guidelines. Reach him by email at rickwilber@tampabay.rr.com. Next year's winner will be announced at the 2017 Conference on the Fantastic, in the pages of *Asimov's Science Fiction magazine*, and on our website.