

NEW WORLD



The 15th Elmbridge Literary
Competition 2019/2020

Winning and Highly Commended
Entries
11-13 Category

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NEW WORLD

Whether the first day at school, the start of a new job, the tenuous steps into a new life or a strange landscape of the imagination, to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the sailing of the Mayflower, this year's Elmbridge Literary Competition was looking for short stories and poems that explored new worlds.

Now in its 15th year and following the success of 2018's 'A Shiver Down the Spine', The Elmbridge Literary Competition was opening its entry criteria to national and international submissions. Run in partnership between The R C Sherriff Trust and Elmbridge Borough Council, it was open to all ages. Previous Competitions explored the following themes:

2005:	Cook Up A Story
2006:	On My Way
2007:	A Life In Colour
2008:	Once Upon A Time
2009:	A Symphony of Life
2010:	The Elmbridge 100
2011:	Breaking The Barrier
2012:	A Dickens of A Christmas
2013:	One Act Radio Play
2014:	Dear Diary
2015:	Flights of Fantasy
2016:	Love
2017:	Luck
2018:	A Shiver Down The Spine/Things That Go Bump In The Night

Category: 11-13 Years; Short Stories

1st Place: Skylark

by Maya DeLaney

The skylark flitted over the green of the meadow, chirping at the bugs and field

animals below. The daisies dotted the soil, barely visible over the long grass. Dandelion clocks blew with the gusts of wind, the seeds landing gently a couple of feet away. Children played hide and seek in the bushes, laughing and shouting, pollen staining their clothes. There was a willow tree that hung over the river, a carved wooden swing dangling from its branches. The waters sparkled as the bird flew over, giving a clear view of the depths below. The creature flapped its brown speckled wings and powered itself through the air. It soared upwards, feeling the heat of the hot summer sun beat down onto its feathery back.

It was a blissful experience, being a bird. No long, heavy limbs to carry, no prison that is the human body. Not a care in the world. Later, the skylark found a branch of the willow tree to rest on. It was getting late, and after a long day of flying and frolicking around, the bird was tired. The sun began to set, swirling into shades of pink and purple, the sky speckled with gold. It sang to the sky, responding to the calls of the birds surrounding. As the sky began to fade to black, the bird nestled in its wings and fell asleep.

He was laid in his bed, watching the world pass by through his window. The world that he was once a part of. The sirens from passing ambulances rang in his ears. His mental restraints had tied him down what seemed like a long time ago, and so he lay there longer, with no motivation to get up. The blinds were cracked open just enough to see the street below. He barely remembered that street, but come to think of it, he didn't remember much of anything now. He didn't see a point in remembering useless things, he never had, and to him, this world was now pointless.

He had found a better one in his mind. In his mind, there were palaces of thoughts and sunset skies that were flaked with gold. In his mind, he was a bird that soared over the greenery of the meadow below. In his mind, he was out of his bed. His mind was the better place, the better world, an escape. An escape from the reality he was barely living. He had spent more time in his head than out of it. Why was this? In his mind, he was happy.

Something that he knew could not be in the real world. The world where his body was laid in bed, isolated. The world where he had cut ties with everyone he cared about. His dreams were an improved version of the hell he was living in.

In his new world, he was no longer himself. He was a character that was living in a story. He viewed himself from a third-person angle, with a clarity of thought that the real him could never achieve.

Was it even his real world anymore? He didn't think so. He had de-realized it to the point of no return. His view on life was foggy. The painless world, the new world, must be the real one, right?

2nd Place: White

by Lucas Camara

The Man woke up to the sound of the morning waking sirens. Bleached white light faded through his simple grey dyed windows. He changed into his simple white suit, its cloth shining like the streetlights which blazed through the night, leaving no spot dark, just grey and white. As he had his mandatory morning nutrient cubes solitarily, which both looked and tasted as bland as the chalk powder used to dye clothes. He heard the work sirens, precisely fifteen minutes after the waking call, and finished eating. When he had emptied his plate mouth gadget automatically dispensed a blanched, white cleansing fluid onto his gleaming, white teeth.

He and the other men in the surrounding duplexes stepped out of their perfectly aligned houses, their feet thumping the pavement in unison. They rotated in a ninety-degree arc, and began to march, moving with a military-like precision. No man varying in the speed of their footsteps, or movement of their bodies. Eventually the identical rows of cube-shaped housing modules came to a stop, as the streets all met at the open grey and white doors of a colossal grey and white dome.

The UTS (Underground Tram System) was a seemingly infinite network of tunnels running under the housing districts, carrying commuters to their jobs in the industrial district. As the trams were the only method of mechanized travel available, towering, dome-shaped tram terminals were each spread exactly a kilometre apart from one another, to avoid commuters from having to travel to long a distance on foot, wasting valuable work time.

As the Man descended to the UTS tram stop on grey, mechanized stairs, he felt a faint tingle in the back of his mind, an emotion that he couldn't name. It struck again as he boarded the tram, only now it was stronger, a word appeared in his mind for the emotion, recognition.

He glanced up at the digital display screen on the roof of the tram

compartment, 5 stops left to go to his destination. As the tram reached its first stop, it slowed to a halt, and a crowd of civilians marched in, their steps synchronized. The Man watched them enter, but his mind was not really focused on them, because for the first time in his life, the man found the commuters' behaviour odd.

The tram had now arrived at its second stop, and as the tram stopped, the Man felt a swarm of **something** invade his mind. But once again, he had no word for it.

He figured it out at the third stop as once again the strange sensation overcame him, he had undergone this procedure before, but it had not happened earlier today, it had happened... how to say it? Before today.

At the fourth stop, clear images began to form, of him waking to the sirens, of him marching down the street, and of him exactly where he was now. He began to feel a horrible thing, and just as it had for recognition, a word emerged from the depths of his conscious for what he felt. Panic.

As the Tram reached its final destination in the industrial district, an anomaly was detected by security systems all around the area, on Tram number 17593, a group of passengers had experienced emotion. Shock. The reason for this was unknown to all but the passengers in the Tram, but the reason, of course, was the Man. The Man had stood up before the others, the Man had defied command, the Man had executed an independent action. Why had the man done this? Because he had found a word for all the things he had seen on this extraordinary ride. This word had rocked his reality, it had given him an overwhelming urge to exit the tram and run, and keep on running. Because he knew. The word? Time.

But as the tram door opened and the Man rushed outside, he saw movement in his peripheral vision, rapidly heading towards him, and then the whole world went dark.

When the Man awoke, he was in a glowing, cubical white room, he pressed down a wave of curiosity, there was no time for questions, all he knew was that he needed to get out of here. Fast. He realised that he was slumped onto a chair. That word.

Slumped. He had not the faintest idea where it had come from. He tried to get up, but found that he couldn't, he was chained. "Ah, you're finally awake."

For the first time the man noticed that he was not alone in the room, sitting opposite to him was an old man with a wispy white beard in a chair identical to his, when the man saw him, his brain threatened to explode. There was nothing odd about the man himself. The outstanding thing about him was the shirt he was wearing, it had colour.

"I might as well give you an explanation" The old man obtained a wistful look in his eyes "Afterall, I haven't had anyone to talk to in a long time. You can call me the overlord, by the way."

The man did not object, and so the Overlord launched into a speech that he seemed to have been preparing for a long time, of overpopulation and global warming, of the collapse of ecosystems, and the fall of the atmosphere, until at last came what the Man was looking for. "Well, for humanity to survive we decided to retreat into this massive dome that had been built in preparation for this event, the place we're in now. This dome had day cycles, unlimited oxygen, unlimited water supply, but yet the survivors of the apocalypse could not be happy." At this point the Overlord paused, looking as if he were about to unleash a great torrent of information that would explain everything.

"So scientists spent years designing something, an invention that would wipe away all emotion, leaving no reminder of the survivors' previous, miserable lives, not even colour. Brain chips. Everybody agreed to having the brain chips planted in them, and everybody did, except for one person. You see, a person was required to monitor all the systems, to make sure that everything went fine. You can guess who volunteered of course." The Overlord pointed down at himself, "Everything worked out great and continues to work out great to this day, of course, every once in a while, glitches can occur with the brain chips, that's where you come in my friend."

“You see, every night as you go to sleep, your brain chip wipes the information of that day from your brain, this is to prevent your long-distance memory from strengthening, which could cause you to remember the days before the dome. Anyways, after its done this, the brain chip then implants new instructions in your mind for you to complete the next day. However, your brain chip did not do that. Last night, it failed to completely wipe out your memories, causing you to slowly regain them, as well as the ability to see colour and feel emotion, I presume.”

The man nodded at this.

“Naturally, we cannot allow this to occur, as you would cause disruptions like you did in the tram.” When the man said this, a robotic arm began to unfold from the ceiling of the room, upon closer inspection, the man realised that it had a syringe in its hand.

“So unfortunately, we will have to replace your brain chip.”

Realisation dawned on the man as to what was about to happen, and he begun to thrash in his chair, but the shackles remained firm. The arm had now reached the Man, and as he watched helplessly, it extended and pricked him in the neck. As he drifted off, the last things he heard were the words “Don’t worry, by tomorrow al will be back to normal, and you won’t have realised a thing.” Then his vision faded away, and all he saw was a brilliant white.

3rd Place: The Awakening

by Chloe Linehan-Cannor

It was all a lie. All the stuff about life and death, none of it was true. It all started the day I disappeared. The day my old life was discarded among the number of others that were blown away by the passing wind. I am in the same world, but it is completely new. And I'm trapped. You'll see what I mean. Just trust me, I'll show you.

I closed my eyes. The sun climbed lazily up the bleeding sky as it danced its golden rays towards us. The muttering breeze skimmed my hair as I stared at the calm sea stretching out as far as my eyes could see. We'd been walking for hours, but it was worth the journey. We'd made it to the top of the cliff and the whole world stretched before us. Issy hadn't spoken to me much, but I kind of hoped the view might cheer her up. Maybe we'd even be able to talk about what had happened. I stepped closer to the edge and glanced over at Issy, whose usual icy expression had momentarily changed to one of awe. I found myself smiling, I hadn't seen Issy like this in a while, not even on our last hike. Issy turned from the view and scowled. Without thinking, I stepped away from her and suddenly my feet were teetering on the edge with the cold sea looming beneath me. A deafening scream echoed around me as I plunged forward, only realising the scream was my own. My hand grasped the edge as the air flew past me. Terror clasped over me as Issy stared with wide eyes. "Help!" I gasped out as she stood motionless. I could feel my grip slipping. "Why? After what you did!" she spat but her voice broke. "I can't hold on..." I begged as the wind blew, suddenly heavy around me. Helplessly, I watched as my once friend turned away. "I'm doing the same thing you did." She whispered over the gushing wind, "You turned away." As her footsteps echoed away, a calm fear slipped through me. I felt my hand gently give in. I closed my eyes and waited for the darkness to consume me.

I woke with a cold sweat that laced my skin as my breath came out in ragged bursts. Just a dream. My heart rate slowed as I

shakily made my way out of my room. "Mum!" I called, but no response came. Confused, I ran down our crooked steps and then I saw her. The sobs echoed around the room as my mum sat there alone, tears dripping from swollen eyes. "Mum?" I asked, a wave of sadness crushed me. No response. "She's gone... Millie...dead...." My mother trying to find her breath with heavy sobs. A cold realisation hit me; it wasn't a dream. Everything stopped. My heart rate weakening, I fell to my knees as a blade of grief plunged into my heart. My mother confirmed the worst as she didn't even look up, her eyes looking right through me. The fear grew deeper inside me, crawling painfully. Why did I have to see her like this? My mum might have lost me, but I had lost everything, including my life. A sudden hatred boiled within me, how could Issy just let me fall? I didn't want to believe any of it was true. I shut my eyes tight and prayed to wake from this spiralling dream. When my eyes opened, I was no longer in my hallway. Every wall of the corridor was bleached and seemed endless. Where was I? I stumbled back as I saw a glowing figure. Tears glazed my eyes as I realised it really was true. I was dead. "It's okay Millie, everything will be fine." The woman soothed, her perfect golden locks falling effortlessly around her shoulders. I gulped as she came closer. "Who are you?" I asked unsteadily. Her chuckle echoed around the empty space.

"My time on your earth has long since passed child, but you on the other hand, are neither dead nor alive." Treating me condescendingly. "I'm not sure I understand." I whispered as a sudden fear gripped me. "You need to be forgiven by the one you sinned against." The woman explained, her spectral eyes piercing me. "But what about my family? And how will Issy forgive me?" I questioned desperately. She again laughed and turned away. "You'll see Millie, you'll see."

My head spun as I woke up, only to find myself in my school hall. What was happening? I cautiously peered into the hall's mirror to expect to see my evergreen eyes and ginger strands, but instead a dull ache spread through me. I saw nothing in the mirror's reflection, because I wasn't there. "Do you want to speak next?"

came a calm voice from behind me. I sharply turned as I saw a group of kids my age, sit around in a circle. Curiosity filled me, why was I here? The girl simply shook her head, her eyes filled with sadness as she pointed towards another girl. Then I understood why. The girl, Issy, didn't shake her head, but made no response. I looked away from her as I saw the dazed gleam in her eye. The silence stretched on, I wondered how Issy could ever forgive me for our past, but she was also the reason the mirror couldn't see me. "I watched her as she fell. Watched as she gave in. Just stood and watched as her eyes begged but suddenly lost light. I watched her let go, but she didn't scream. She just stared up at me, her terror filled eyes on me, and they never faltered until she closed them. Until... she hit the ground." Issy was staring far into the distance as if she was somewhere far from here. I tried to feel hurt, but the very fact that she appeared to regret it, made me want to tell her that I was okay. That I was here, even if it only was partly true... I closed my eyes tight again, imagining the golden-haired woman plucking me from place to place, and I was ready for the next one.

My eyes sprung open, to see myself staring back at me. A gasp broke from my lips as I fell back, my reflection walking straight through me. "Come on! Daisey will be fine, and the party's only an hour!" my younger self pleaded. I had been sent back in time. Like Scrooge. Only Scrooge was alive, but I wasn't. "Fine! But only for an hour Millie, you know my mum will kill me, I promised I'd stay and look after her." Issy groaned. Our younger selves giggled, as Issy's sister Daisey cluelessly waved us goodbye and sat alone. We left her there. I watched the scene helplessly; I knew what was going to happen next... I turned away and began to sob as I heard the door groan, and Daisey wondered out... I knew now that she would never come back, never to be seen again. It was my fault for leaving the door open, for even wanting to go to the stupid party. "I can't believe it." A voice whispered from behind me. I spun around as I saw the girl. "Daisey!" I cried as I flung my arms around her, my tears sliding downwards. "How... can you see me?" I asked quietly. She smiled sadly. "No one can see me, is it all just some cruel joke?" Daisey's deep,

brown eyes stared up at me, a deep sorrow in them I couldn't reach. I took her fragile hands in mine. "Let's go find your sister."

When we both opened our eyes, we were back in Issy's room. Nothing had changed. The same floral bed spread covered her oak bed where we used to sit and talk for hours. I missed that. "Sis?" Daisey asked, her voice hopeful. Suddenly, Issy jumped from her bed and stared at us, her eyes wide with shock. She opened her mouth, but nothing came out. I flung my arms around her as she was too slow to react. "Millie...I'm so sorry..." she sobbed into my shoulder. "Me too, Issy, me too." I pulled back and smiled as Daisey gripped her sister's leg tightly. "Are you real?" Issy asked, her voice fading. "Good question." I smiled wider and took Daisey by the hand, "I'll look after her Issy. Promise me you'll look after yourself." So many emotions flared in her eyes that said enough. "I'll see you again Issy, I promise." I whispered softly as my voice drifted away. I felt scared, but strangely calm. I closed my eyes and gripped Daisey tightly. The caressing wisps of light closed around us as I pictured the sky and the million stars I reached for. The million stars that embraced me with open arms, with the light that shone brighter. I closed my eyes.

Highly Commended: When Words Spring To Life

by Naomi Benny

Eve felt the sweat dripping down her. 'The young girl began to walk around until, until....,' Why was she so incapable of writing a story!? It's not as if she hadn't done it before and she had the half-formed idea in her mind but it was as if a valve was obstructing the stream of ideas from her mind to her pen. She frowned at the blank page. There was no hope of participating in, let alone winning, the competition now. She begrudgingly remembered Emily Walker from her class, who could seemingly write intriguing mysteries and electrifying adventures in minutes. She envied her.

As she sat, fumbling with her pen, she began to feel a tingling in her finger. Eve gasped as her pen began to wiggle, all by itself. A bright beam of light suddenly obscured her vision and it grew bigger and brighter, encompassing all her surroundings, until she no longer could glimpse her room or her desk or anything else for that matter. Only the pen remained, trembling discordantly on the flat of her palm. She felt as if she was being thrown up into the air. Fear washed over her and Eve blindly stumbled towards a random direction. She wondered if she had fallen asleep and was now standing in an ersatz scene from the land of dreams. A line appeared in front of her.

It was a horizontal line, no taller than her, but it rapidly grew into an outline of a rabbit. She immediately recognised it as the White Rabbit from the book, *Alice in Wonderland* by amazing author, Lewis Carroll. Eve stared, awe-struck, as more lines began to form outlines from classic book characters to her timeless favourites. She continued past countless figures and was filled with a euphoric sense of elation as she ran through the different backgrounds that slowly filled with colour. It was as if the words had sprung to life. She looked up and what she saw shocked her...

Eve couldn't believe her eyes. She pinched herself but seeing as she didn't seem to be asleep, looked up again but the view still surprised her. It appeared to be a curve, full of black ink. It

seemed familiar, almost like the ink in her pen that had disappeared from her palm, the ink barrel, the spring, the empty space inside it, the... wait. Her heart nearly stopped as realisation dawned over her. Was she INSIDE her PEN!?

Eve's mind poured forth emotions of fear, excitement and confusion, all at once, as her brain struggled to compute what had happened. Not only that, but how would she get home now? A feeling of despair washed over her as she stood in this idiosyncratic world, in the middle of various scenes from different stories written by highly skilled authors, "unlike me," she thought, sadly. Deciding to wander around, just in case there was a magic portal or secret door leading home, Eve began to walk, until a certain peculiar scene caught her eye. It was a story about a young girl and currently, she was walking around... Eve stopped. She watched as the girl paused to realise that she was being followed by a bluish orb that seemed to be communicating with her. Eve frowned and she began to feel a sense of déjà vu. Her eyes widened in shock as she realised, this was her story, the one she had been working on before she was teleported into her pen. "So does my pen know what I want to write?" she asked herself as she stood at the edge of her character's forest world. Every scene was happening so perfectly, it was exactly the way she'd seen it in her head, so interesting, concise and somehow, it seemed to work. Eve felt a jolt of astonishment as she understood her mistake, the biggest cure for writer's block, was to just start writing! Then the bright light appeared, with her pen spinning inside it as she felt that feeling of being thrown up into the air again.

When she opened her eyes, she was back in her bedroom, sitting in front of her desk. Eve still didn't know exactly how to finish her story and yet, she picked up her pen and began to write.

Highly Commended: Dead Stars

by Elliot Leese

Mors Luminis

They say that there had once been an abundance of light. As the last white dwarves faded into black dwarves, the era known as Mors Luminis (death of light) began. Before this, though, humanity fled from the last planet we ever existed on. Earth. The sun, which had given us light for millions of years, grew. It absorbed earth and mars. It incinerated all forms of life in the entire solar system. We fled on spaceships, made larger as we could use a skyhook, made years before, and flew through space. All the ships got closer and, using the same process as making the ISS, built a megaship. It could hold all the human survivors, and, after years of struggle, one government was elected. They declared a ban on landing on any other planets, which never got revoked.

Perpetua Tenebris

We hurtled through space, on a scout ship looking for a suitable star to gather power from. The last star we collected energy from was a black dwarf, and it died soon after we arrived. Today, we were looking for somewhere to stay for a longer time, somewhere for the mothership to settle and gather power from. We were looking for a white dwarf today, one that would last a few hundred years. We looked far and wide, trying to detect the tell-tale abundance of UV radiation that all stars released. Many considered white dwarves to be a thing of the past, last time we saw one was almost a hundred years ago, but still we searched. The era known as Perpetua Tenebris (Eternal Darkness) had not yet begun, or so we thought. We did a long-range scan and found nothing. This was the first time it had ever produced no results. We had waited for years to have enough power to do a long-range scan, but it produced no results. We gave up. All our hope was lost. But we didn't make it back to the mothership. The fuel for the engines had run out.

Me and the crew rushed to the engine room, to see if there was any spare hydrogen, or if we could make any. We couldn't. We thought it was all over, until we saw it.

A large asteroid, bigger than the mothership, nearly collided with our small scouting ship. We scanned it for resources, and it showed an abundance of hydrogen. I told my crewmates to prepare the miners, large machines that strip asteroids and meteorites of metals, gases and liquids. We deployed them and they started making quick work of it, despite its size, and in about 3 hours of startling silence, they were finished. They had collected 50 tons of hydrogen for our ship, and we were on our way to the mothership. We got to the mothership after a grueling ride, and there wasn't a party there to welcome us home, you see, the ship had been low on electricity, and had needed electricity fast. The fusion reactors on the ship had been generating power for thousands of years, but we had finally run out of usable hydrogen for them. The ship was stuck in the pull of a black hole and couldn't escape. The commanders of the ship told us we had the only working non-fusion ship left that wasn't lost to the event horizon in a desperate attempt to make the ship have less mass. We, as the owners of this ship, had to go ourselves to gather tritium (usable hydrogen in a fusion reaction) from a nearby gas giant.

Our mission would be perilous, but not disastrous.

We flew from the mothership and launched out of the docking ports

The trip to the gas giant was long and hard, and after several near misses from asteroids in the nearby asteroid belt surrounding its black dwarf, which we knew the mothership would have to go to too gather some energy from solar power to help kickstart the more efficient fusion reactors. We very nearly collided with a nearby asteroid, but it only grazed the side of the ship.

When we got there, the gas giant was amid a massive storm, and it would hinder our collection of tritium. We still went. We collected the tritium from its troubled surface and flew back.

Humanity finis Est scripto

We had failed. The ship was gone. Hurlled into the abyss of a black hole. We were the last humans left, and still are. We are floating through the infinite darkness that is now the universe. The teachers on the long-gone mothership warned us about this day, and how we would all come to an end. They called it Humanity finis Est scripto, latin for humanity's end.

Highly Commended: New World

by Noah Wilson

Callum never understood why his bedroom window showed a different image than the actual street outside his house. Callum also never bothered to try and find out what was outside his window until today. The image outside his window showed a field high on a hill surrounded by more fields. The only place Callum knew to be like this was further north but he lived in south London which definitely wasn't at north.

So Callum smashed his window and climbed through.

What he stepped onto didn't surprise him but what he saw did. Callum was surrounded by dinosaurs but different or different to what he knew to be dinosaurs. He knew them to be dull colours of green and Brown but these were electric pinks and blues. They looked like a graffiti on the walls or buildings just a few feet from him but they couldn't be further away. The rainbow dinosaurs didn't take the slightest notice of him except a few turning of heads, it was almost as though they were used to it. He started moving around the field not letting the window out of his sight in case he needed to step back through in a rush. Halfway down the hill he found two dinosaurs fighting over a dead bird carcass wanting what remained of it for their own. Callum approached the two animals but Immediately regretted it as both dinosaurs turned their attention to him and started chasing him back up the Hill. Callam sprinting, diving back to the window with a crash.

"Callum are you alright?" called his mum.

Over the moon with his discovery Callum ventured to his new world frequently throughout the following months. It was his little getaway. Much of his spare time was taken up with lying in the grass watching the grateful dinosaurs grazing in the sunlight.

One afternoon Callum was babysitting his sleeping, 9 month old brother, Alex. The air suddenly thickened around Callum's desk where he was puzzling over his science homework. There was a burning smell and it got stronger and stronger. He rushed out to see what was going on only to be confronted by roaring flames climbing up the stairs.

In the heat of the moment he ran through to his brother's cot to find Alex sleeping peacefully unaware of the blaze creeping towards them. Callum grabbed Alex and sprinted back into his own room, slamming the door. In a matter of moments flames started licking at the edges of Callum's door threatening to engulf them.

With Alex screaming in his arms Callum felt panicked and powerless. Without giving it a second thought Callum scrambled through his special window clutching Alex to his chest.

Breathing the pure air, waves of relief flooded through his body but Alex was still crying. Callum went to sit in his most favourite spot trying unsuccessfully to calm Alex by tickling him with daffodils. All of a sudden Alex stopped crying just as a booming stegosaurus came into view he sat transfixed.

A few hours later it was safe for Callum and Alex to return to his blackened and burnt bedroom. Callum rushed out only to find the stairs torn apart and unusable. He shouted down and a few minutes later a fireman rescued Callum and his brother. Just as they were hugging their parents their whole house collapsed behind them!

Callum never found a way back to his secret new world after his window was destroyed. He missed it but still escaped there in his daydreams.

Three years later...

Alex came home from his first day at nursery and was bursting to tell him all about it, but what he was most proud about were his drawings of graffiti coloured dinosaurs. Callum couldn't help but smile.

Commended: A New World

by Adya Gupta

The first smell of smoke was unmistakable. The lingering, looming smoke settled around us, awaking me unpleasantly. My family, perched on their respective branches closeby, were wide awake and alert. I followed their eyes, looking up at the sky, the light piercing through my eyes like arrows at a wooden shield. It wasn't known for our kind to be awake at times like these.

My family rarely sought the light of day. I had only ever seen the sun twice, a bright ball of light, sparkling gloriously in the center of the sky. But this time, it was different. The sun had a fiery glow to it, raging in the far east. It felt so close to us that I half expected to reach out and scald myself on its heat. Mother was resting against the trunk of our tree, also staring at the sky. She regarded it with a curious caution like she knew its capabilities but wasn't sure what would happen. My eyes met hers for a scarce moment before she looked away hastily. But in that split second, I saw more fear etched into her big koala eyes than I'd ever witnessed before.

I looked around at the rest of my family, desperately searching for consolation in someone's eyes but to no avail. A haze of dense smoke began to build up around us, encompassing our forest in an unbearable fog. It seeped into my fur and eyes intolerably. My cousins, Nellie and Margaret, disappeared under the clouds of smoke, still clinging onto their mother fearfully. Soon, I could see nothing more of my parents on the next branch but a fuzzy outline of their fur.

"Mum! Dad!" I shouted in my panic.

"We *must* leave." My father's voice sliced through the silence around us.

“Leave? How? This is our home...” I protested.

“We’re not safe. We must go.” He said again. I could hear the fear, more evident than ever, in his voice. He was afraid too. I yipped weakly to my parents, before leaping to the branch where they were sat.

A loud crackle sounded from down below us. I looked down. The carpet of crisp brown autumn leaves seemed to look me in the eye as if begging me to stay. A sharp twinge of sorrow filled my heart. How could we leave, when these trees and woods were all we knew? How could we ever leave this forest behind? Then it happened. I saw a glowing spark amongst the bed of leaves.

The spark flashed its embers at the sun, before intensifying rapidly. Before long, it had consumed the leaf it had started on and moved onto the next ones.

“We need to leave now.” Urgency flooded my aunt’s voice like a fierce river released from behind a dam. Nellie and Margaret hung onto the cuff of her neck as she leaped to the next tree. Everything around me seemed to function in slow motion. I could see her furry hands stretch towards the branch of the next tree, her claws extending to the bark and latching on. Nellie turned to face me. Her eyes were glossy, from an extra layer of tears waiting to fall, as she lifted a shaky hand up and waved to me. Like she was waving goodbye. I waved back. My mother jumped after her, followed by my father. I almost latched onto my mother as my cousins had, but I decided I was far more able than them. As I began to reach out for the next tree, a wave of fear overwhelmed me. The fire crawled up behind me, devouring everything in its path; If I didn’t jump soon I would also be in its path. But supposing I jumped straight into its path? I held back.

Everyone was several yards ahead of me. They soon disappeared into a deeper thickening of trees. I knew now I would never be able to catch up. I cringed at the thought of the look on their faces when they realised. It was too painful to think about. How would I make it without mum? Without dad? I had never needed to choose between my family and myself before. But I had to. I was faster on land.

“I’m sorry,” I whispered, before scrambling down to the floor. I wasn’t prepared for how hot it would be. I could feel the heat surging behind me, about to catch up with me. Adrenaline rushed through me, propelling me further and further from the fire. I didn’t dare to look behind me, but I knew that it was there, tailing me, just ready for me to hesitate and to have me. The heat swirled around me, wrapping me in a whirlwind of overpowering smoke and the slightest draft of wind from my running. I didn’t stop until I had reached a clearing in the forest, past the boundaries of my former life.

A vehicle stood on the side of the clearing, with three people around it. Mother had always told me never to trust humans. But I couldn’t think of that anymore. I didn’t know how long it would be before it caught up with me. All I wanted to do was cuddle with my mother and know we were safe. But this time I couldn’t. I ran towards the truck. A woman lifted me gently and took me into the truck, and drove me away to my new world.

I often think back to our days in the forest now. Carefree days of laughter and fun, as we jumped from tree to tree in unison. I still long for the crooked comfort of my tree trunk, to nestle in the little cracks in the wood and brush against my mother at night. Of course, the sanctuary is lovely, and I love the freshness of the eucalyptus trees here, but it’s not the same. It’s all a new world to me.

And one that I am still coming to terms with.

Commended: When The World Is On Fire

by Christian East

Gazing out into the hazy, red sunset, I contemplated its fiery colours and watched it sink like a stone into the to the dry, neglected ground of the England. I awoke the next morning, groggy and tired as the stifling hot heat drew me back from my sweaty slumber. Meanwhile, the wireless crackled and hummed, until it finally tuned in. *“This is the BBC at 9:30 am and we are devastated to report that the fires and floods are not improving as the raging fires and floods continue to occur in South America, Asia, Australia and some areas of Europe.”* Stated the metallic voice of the news anchor, *“but on the other hand, 100 more evacuation rockets are scheduled for launch in 6 weeks.”* `Six weeks and I can finally leave the dreadful mess we’ve carelessly caused’ I thought to myself solemnly but ecstatically.

At the crack of dawn, I began to pack all my rudimentary belongings and started to commence on my long and tedious mission over to America. Trudging along the crusty earth, I made my way towards the harbour, which appeared to be abandoned and decrepit, “ello mate! A man shouted from behind a mossy pillar, “come over ‘ere to the journey to America?” The sailor asked with a raised brow. “Yes!” I Answered back excitedly as I slowly hobbled down the uneven ground. “It seems you’re the last one eh?” He questioned. “Sure am,” I reported back. Over the next 5 weeks I was battered by the rain and waves but still as fit as a fiddle.

Finally I reached America and only had 4 days left to get to Kennedy space station. I HAD TO GET THERE.I took the nearest station and cycled for 4 hours straight until I had reached my destination. It hit me hard that Kennedy space

station was going to be the last place I would see on Earth. Trotting forwards, I greeted the captain and he nodded back approvingly.

The heavy, metallic doors hissed open and I stepped inside the ship. It was filled with people sitting on the cushioned seats and luggage that was sprawled across the floor. I took my seat at the back and instantaneously, a siren screeched and a sudden jolt pushed me backwards next to the window. White streaks of light were dashing passed the window. We were going at light speed. A minute later, a videotape projected on the screen and a person began to speak. "Hello and welcome on board you are currently experiencing light speed and are destined to reach your new planet. Eden. We are now going to show a montage of your new home. Colour flooded the screen, there were volcanoes spirting out crystal clear water, giant yellow mushrooms and blue spindly trees and what looked like yellow bouncy carpet. It was heaven before my eyes.

A few hours later the ship came to an abrupt halt and I quickly tore my eyes away from the hypnotic view of space, as I was longing and desperate to see the planet with my own eyes. After a painstaking minute of waiting, the door finally repeated the same metallic hiss it made when entering the shuttle and all the passengers got up and darted towards the door like a hoard of fans chasing a celebrity. Soon after, I was out and onto the lush ground of Eden and hopped about in the low gravity like a child receiving a present. I looked around and it was exactly like the tape, apart from it was 1000 times better than I expected. Looking around wide eyed, I observed the wondrous landscape and saw families playing games and the odd looking trees being cut down to make homes for the new arrivals; which for some weird reason gave me the slightest feeling of *déjà vu*.

Commended: Then Nothing

by Isobel Rowlands

I'm up high.
Falling.
Screaming.
Darkness.
Then nothing.

I wake up suddenly. Memories flutter in my mind like caged butterflies:

I was... I did.... I had... I chose... I lost...

I'm trying to grasp hold of some of them, but in the space of a few seconds they fly away. All I'm left with is nothing. Just a blank sheet of emptiness and nothing.

I look around me, my body frozen with fear. I try to recall the minutes before this, but I can't. *Where am I? Who am I?*

The panic in my stomach rises. I look above, my eyes are almost blinded by the ferociousness of the beating sun. I try to stand, I succeed. I can see now that I'm by the sea; it's clear turquoise and the waves begin to rush up to my feet. The water's warm and the palm trees swaying nearby add to the first piece of knowledge forming in my brain: I'm somewhere tropical.

I walk forward and into the forest. It seems so full of life that it's sort of giving off a pulse; like a heart. It's beating and breathing, and there's so much life that it feels completely whole. *Why am I here? What is going on?*

I think I'm on an island. That fact is confirmed when I see the

vast sea again once walking to the other side. It's a relatively small island and as far as I can tell I'm the only one here.

Endless thoughts of panic and pain consume me.

Who am I?

It's a weird sort of pain. Because I can remember no 'before', it can't haunt me. I'm just left with an empty space in my mind, a sense of something happening but I have no idea what.

First of all, I need to eat and drink, those are priorities. I journey up a small hill to the east of me, trying my best to keep my frightening thoughts away. As I walk up, I begin to see an even better view of the beautiful sea. It's like it's straight from an art gallery; that's how amazing it is. It stretches way off into the distance; I cannot see any other land.

When I reach the highest point, I can see the whole of the island below. It's densely covered with towering trees. I think I even see some monkeys. I turn around to a large puddle. Or maybe it's more similar to a pond. It then dawns on me that all I have to do to see what I look like is peer at my reflection.

I try to work up the courage to take a step forward. I didn't realise it would be this hard. I guess it's an important step. I have no idea what I look like at all, I don't even know what gender I am. And I don't have a clue of my age.

I step forward. I stare down into the water.

But there's no reflection of me.

What? I can see the trees and the sky reflected in the pond, but I cannot see me. This makes me feel dizzy, why aren't I there.

Am I invisible? Am I invisible to the world?

I run back down the hill. I sprint and race to the bottom, where there's another puddle. I'm not there in the reflection. Again. I run even further; my mind is racing too now.

Who am I?

This is really bad. *What's going on?*

Over the next couple or so, I'm busy checking every body of water I can find, even the sea. I can't see myself in any of them. When the sun starts to fall down behind the ocean I finally stop searching. There's no point now, I've just got to accept that there's something not right here. *Is this all a dream? Am I in a coma? Is this my imagination whirring away as my life slips?* The thoughts silence somewhat as I fall asleep underneath a palm tree.

The morning comes quickly. I rise, yawning and stretching as I look around me. I'm still on the island. I walk towards the beach. *It's hopeless, how am I ever going to get out of here?* I could build a raft, some sort of boat, but I would have no idea which direction to go in. Mainland could be so far away. Tears stream down my face, I'm not sure what I'm going to do. I'm not sure if I'm ever going to be able to *do* anything. Maybe I'll stay here forever, forever alone and forever clueless to my previous life. *Does anyone even know I'm gone?*

Walking towards the sea, I stop as my foot brushes past stone in the ground. I kneel down and begin moving the sand off the top, looking for I don't know what: maybe a miracle. When the full stone is revealed I can read the fateful words,

'You've died. You fell and death caught you.'

I step back, try to wake myself up, this could all be a dream. But nothing happens, I'm still here and feeling light-headed. I died; the thought feels very surreal. It said I fell. *Fell from where? How?*

I died. *So, is this heaven?*

Category: 11-13 Years; Poems

1st Place: Cognitive Decline by Katie Rogers

I can't feel yet;
I can't hide,
Something foggy;
Stops my mind,
Like a shield;
It does stop,
An understanding;
Replaced by shame,
Sometimes I can't remember my name;
They call it cognitive decline.

Surrounded by people;
When I could only dream,
As if they know me;
More than I can see,
The way they looked;
As if I had ceased,
I'm in a new world;
Not far from cognitive decline.

Sat in a seat;
With people like me,
these I do not recognise;
Who don't recognise me,
I don't need;
Them knowing anything about me,
I won't remember them tomorrow;
And they won't remember me,
No need to feel bad;

I could feel fine.
No need to feel sorrow;
About cognitive decline.

I am here;
Yet somehow I am not,
Stuck in my mind;
Still covered in fog,
Though I see a little differently;
My life still goes on finitely,
I don't need my memory;
I'm not yet before my time.
Certainly not because of;
Cognitive decline

2nd Place: A New World by Elise Langham, aged 11

You stood there.
Staring down the foreboding gates
That would keep you trapped.
Captive.
Alone.

The camp was huge.
Not endearing,
But monstrous.
Glaring at you,
Through suspicious eyes.
Unforgiving,
Of what you'd chosen,
What you'd got wrong,
That wasn't a mistake,
Just a false move.

You were led to the gates,
Like a lamb to the slaughter,
Deciding what to do next.
Wondering whether to fight for your life
Or be ambushed.
Forgotten.

The gates were slammed open
And you shuffled inside.
Trying not to be noticed
By the guards with metallic guns,
To help you survive it.
Your new world.
Auschwitz.

3rd Place: A New World by Serena Lois Jacob, aged 12

When I'm about to rest my eyes
And put myself to sleep,
A new world opens up to me,
Just taking one big leap.

Into the realms of a hidden world
That only I can see,
Filled with magic, wonder and love,
A true paradise for me.

What matters most to everyone
Is beauty of mind and soul,
Kindness, trust and loyalty
Play the most important role

Love shimmers on unendingly,
Melting away all hurt and pain
Leaving behind the greatest joy
There's never a loss, only gain.

All creatures reside together,
In the greatest harmony,
There's no selfishness or injustice,
No hatred or tyranny.

Lush, lavish, deep emerald fields,
As far as the eye can see,
Exotic fruits of every kind,
Vast oceans, crystal blue seas.

If only this world was our home

Surely, we can make some change?
Why should such a fantastic new world
Sound impossible or even strange?

The R C Sherriff Trust is an independent charitable trust, established through the terms of the Will of playwright, R C Sherriff. It has been promoting and developing the arts in the Borough of Elmbridge, for 25 years. Further details about the Trust can be found at www.rcsherrifftrust.org.uk

Elmbridge Borough Council's Arts Development seeks to increase opportunities for people to engage in the arts, culture and heritage of our Borough, either individually or through partnerships, such as those with the R.C. Sherriff Trust that make Elmbridge Primary Schools Festival possible. With the aim of engaging residents, Elmbridge Borough Council's Art Development supports arts organisations and presents arts-based activities that improve the physical and mental health of people who live and work in Elmbridge.

