

FIRST-PRIZE WINNER

Terror in the Night

Mrs. Marpole Mungus's spine stiffened as she heard the yelp of a dog. They were after her, she was sure of it! There! She heard a bark. Next she was hearing a chorus of fifteen dogs barking. They were coming for her. Soon, she would be hearing the door opening ... "Go away!"

Mrs. Mungus woke up in her bed drenched in sweat. She had that dream again. She could hear the dogs barking even now that she was awake. "Wait a minute—barking? It's real! They're here!" yelled Mrs. Mungus. She cursed as her head hit the bedpost. "Where are my slippers? Where is my gun?"

Mrs. Mungus found her slippers and her gun. She grabbed her cat, Mundungus, off her bed and slowly opened the door. She held her breath, expecting to see a Nazi pointing a gun at her. Instead, the coast was clear. Mrs. Mungus could still hear the dogs as she walked along the dark, long, dreary halls, methodically collecting all her animals from the empty rooms. "Jasper, Horace, let's go!" whispered Marpole. Two cats jumped off the master bed and padded out of the large room. Mrs. Mungus headed towards the library, which was down the hall.

Marpole couldn't hear the dogs any longer. She took that as a bad sign. Marpole jumped and nearly screamed bloody murder when she heard the windows in the lounge break. She sped up, heading for the library. Four cats, five puppies, and one lone rat followed her to the library. She heard the Nazis destroying the rooms behind her.

"It's no use, Captain. She's not in the kitchen," hollered a soldier.

"She's not in here, Captain. I don't see what the Führer wants with this old lady anyway," grumbled another.

"What the Führer wants with Mrs. Mungus is none of your business!" roared the captain. "Anyway, *nobody* goes back to the Führer empty-handed if they can help it!" shouted the captain.

Mrs. Mungus reached for the doorknob of the library and opened the door. All the animals scrambled inside, not wanting to be stuck outside. She felt around the room for the bookshelf. She found it, and whispered the password into the *Book of Devotions*. "Jasper, Horace, Mundungus, Danielle, Rita, Goldie, Georgos, Olympus, Gardeenia," she whispered, reciting the names of all her pets. The bookshelf swung open.

Marpole ran into her master office with all her pets following closely behind. She blew the whistle hanging around her neck. Nobody could hear it, except her guard dogs. The whistle blasts told the dogs to come to the master office, be as quiet as possible, and to watch out for Nazis. Mrs. Mungus only had to wait five minutes, then Dobermans came running into the library. They ran through the open door and into her master office. She opened a door in the wall, and let all her animals and herself into a room below. Just before the hatch closed, she heard the Nazis enter her library. Marpole shivered, locked the door, and sat down to wait.

by Lina Vermeer

S. Geiger Public School (grade seven)
Massey, Ontario

FIRST-PRIZE WINNER

Sam's Capture

Daphne sat quietly on the tall hill, gazing up at the aurora borealis illuminating the night sky surrounding them. She and her best and truest friend, James, had come to think about their current situation. Their horses, Joey and Kieran, grazed softly and silently, their silhouettes illuminated by the bright northern lights.

They had been blown away by the news that their close friend, Sam, had been kidnapped and was being held hostage deep in the jungle of Zillbraatare. They were debating with themselves whether or not to go looking for Sam. All the searchers so far had returned wounded by mysterious men, or so it was said. Fifteen minutes later, it had been decided. The two teenagers would set off on their own mini-expedition to find Sam; it was their only chance.

Bright and early, on the morning of August 15th, James took Daphne by the hand and led her down the long narrow street to a waiting bus. That bus would take them to the outskirts of a small town bordering the big jungle of Zillbraatare.

James raced along the narrow path bordered by droopy trees, with Daphne following closely. They had until dark to find a safe place to build a shelter where they could spend the night. Daphne called out to James when she saw a small break in the trees. James stopped to follow her down the foot-wide pathway. At the end of the short path, an enormous boulder stood about twenty-feet high. The clearing was completely surrounded by the same droopy type of trees found along the main path. "This is where we'll spend the night!" Daphne exclaimed excitedly.

Daphne sat up in alarm as she heard a creaking noise, followed by a loud thump. After eating her fill of the limited provisions at dusk, she stood up with a grunt, and crept silently towards the noise. A light caught her eye, and she approached a small shack, fully aglow. She swatted at a couple of mosquitoes and crept forward to peer into the window. Suddenly, someone forcefully grabbed her from behind. Daphne could not move, the grasp was too strong.

Her hands were tied behind a small chair and a handkerchief was fashioned into a rope that bound her feet to its legs. Next to her sat a short stocky figure, hunched over and tied in the same way to their own chair. They looked awfully familiar. It was Sam!

"Sam! It's Daphne. Are you awake?" she asked.

"Yeah, I'm alright. A little hurt, but I can't move. Where's James?" he replied.

"He's back at a small camp we made. I just hope he can find us before these kooks do anything else to us."

James sat up in the early morning. It took him a moment to realize Daphne was gone. He stood up and ate the rest of the food. He came to the decision that he would go look for her. He cleaned up all traces of the camp, and set off. Daphne was his only hope in finding Sam, but he had to find her first.

Hours later, James still hadn't found either Daphne or Sam. What he failed to realize was that he was going in the complete opposite direction of their whereabouts. Hunger was overwhelming him and he could not find his way back. Utterly exhausted, James collapsed to the ground. He would not be finding Sam and Daphne tonight.

James was startled awake by the slamming of a door. His mother appeared in his line of vision. Everything else was completely white.

"Honey, you're okay. You're in the hospital," his mother comforted him.

"Mom, where's Daphne, and what about Sam?"

His mother only shook her head and looked down.

by Chelsey Huver

École St-Jean-Baptiste (grade eight)
Amherstburg, Ontario

FIRST-PRIZE WINNER

Strange Companion

I ran on, my heart pounding a violent tattoo in my chest. I ran through bushes, and over fallen rotten trees. I sloshed through creeks, and scrambled down hills. My legs were cut and bleeding, and my clothes were torn. I could not breathe, but I kept running ... and it kept following.

Choking on my own fear, I threw myself under a cracked fallen log. I pressed my back into the dirt, holding the breath I couldn't seem to keep. The woods were quiet, not a creature in sight.

Creak. Creeeeeak!

The log creaked and groaned as the creature crept over it. I shook uncontrollably, whimpering. I couldn't be caught now. It was too soon. Too soon ...

The groans stopped. The ragged breathing above filtered through the silence. I closed my eyes, praying furiously. Sweat beaded on my brow as the creature above leapt down in a flurry of claws and powerful limbs, muscles bunched under a thick coat of fur. Saliva dropped from its mouth and a large snout sniffed the air. Any moment now, and it would have me.

Too late. I pressed my hands to my mouth as it prowled through the bush, searching for the source of the scent. My legs burned. I was too exhausted to run. Ironically, running was the bane of my escape. As the creature drew closer and closer to my hiding spot, I reflected. *Had I made a bad choice, running into the woods? Mama always said the woods were too dangerous for a young lady like me. "Danger lives in those woods, child," she had said. "We'll not dwell in its home." Maybe I should have listened.*

The creature turned, and feral eyes burned into mine. My time was at an end. I crept, walking silently even though I'd seen it already. I watched, no longer terrified, merely fearful. It crouched before me, strips of moonlight splaying across its face. Filthy teeth dripped saliva and its fetid stench of breath washed over me. I trembled. Its claws reached for me, tantalizing, a prelude to the hardship ahead. The claws were millimetres from my face, reaching ...

Tapping my shoulder, "You're it!" came the terrible growl.

Grinning, I lurched to my feet. The creature took off, and I chased after its loping form, playing tag with my friend as the full moon hung fat and bright in the black, star-filled tapestry of the night sky.

by Jordyn Wear

Lake Cowichan Secondary School (grade nine)
Lake Cowichan, British Columbia



FIRST-PRIZE WINNER

2040

I stirred restlessly before heaving myself up out of the uncomfortable cot. The rusted springs of the bed rang through the morning. The sound was left unnoticed; it was already loud enough outside. That, I could be sure of. I was also sure that I didn't have time to shower, or brush my teeth. I didn't know the day of the week, the time, or what month it was. I was smart, very smart, but it was the period in human history that forced ignorance. I grabbed an energy bar from my bedside table and shoved it into my mouth. It was the only food I had eaten in days.

Strolling across the dimly lit room, I slipped into a shirt and some heavy pants. My home was a mess, just like the rest of the world, but I managed to find what I needed. Pulling on some heavy metal gauntlets and a thick rounded helmet, I adjusted their weight. My bloodshot eyes turned towards the crumbling wall of the room where a heavy rifle was fastened. I wasn't a police officer, or any kind of law enforcement for that matter. I loaded the thick, broad shells into the rifle's chamber; someone had to restore order in this city. Brandishing my weapon like a crazed madman, I kicked in the wooden door of the shack with a steel-plated boot. Running through the splintered frame, I dashed behind a mound of dirt and old chunky pieces of road.

The vicinity was just as I expected it, even if I couldn't hear any audible sounds. I was deaf; years of explosions and gunfire had rendered my ears worthless. Bombs set everything afire around me even now. Bullets flew dangerously close to me, but this was normal; complete chaos was normal. Seeking a way out, it was obvious that there wasn't one.

A thin dirty arm grasped my own armour-clad one. It was a young child seeking refuge. My eyes met the watery scared eyes of the girl. I couldn't leave her here, not in this territory. The innocent was talking, perhaps screaming; I couldn't tell. It pained me, but I heard nothing around me. Glancing everywhere frantically, I grabbed the child and hastily bolted away from an overhead aircraft's bombs and shelling. I felt the girl shiver and whine as I ran out into the open. My footwear left the dirt road as I leapt, evading a spray of gunfire. I landed in the battered framing of a building.

Rushing up a set of stairs, I hid the girl in a corner. That was when I noticed dampness on my chest. I had been shot; this was the end for me. Glancing to the corner, I saw the frightened child. Would she die too? Surely not; she was youthful, she had plenty of life to live. Collapsing, I landed on my back. Looking up, a sign was visible. In flashing neon letters it read, "Welcome to 2040, The Better Life."

by Chad Durling

Bridgetown Regional High School (grade ten)
Bridgetown, Nova Scotia



FIRST-PRIZE WINNER

Last Moments

I can hear them outside, searching for me. Something's prowling beneath my window, snarling, hunting for my scent. Boards are nailed across the windows, and I've barred the door. But they're big; so much bigger than I'd expected. The planks are no match for their strength; they'll splinter like toothpicks if the door is forced.

The walls are thin; I can hear them moving outside. One's slinking around the side of the house, looking for a way in. They haven't found the side door yet, but it's only a matter of time. Even if they miss the door, they won't leave, not until they get in. They'll tear the walls down if they have to. I've seen them do it before. They know I'm in here, and I'm starting to see that there's no way out.

Funny. This whole time, I never stopped to think what it would be like to die. Would it hurt? Would I be scared? I could never really see it; never really imagine being cornered somewhere, running out of options. But here I am.

There's a call, a barking croak, and I know they've found the side door. I hear answering cries from behind the other walls. They've surrounded me. I didn't think they were that smart.

What are you supposed to think in these last moments? Do you reflect on your life? Feel regret, pride? Maybe think of loved ones, hope they'll make it out? Strange, how I'm facing the end and all I can think of is whether I'm doing it right.

The one under the window has reared up, got its claws on the sill. Between the boards I can see it, a silhouette in the moonlight, breath steaming out between its fangs, fogging the glass.

Should I back away, huddle in the corner, try to get as far from them as possible? I won't get away, but maybe something will happen; maybe those extra few feet will give me a chance, a shot at escaping. Or should I tear up one of the floorboards, arm myself, go out fighting? It won't do me any good, nothing will; there's no way out, and I know it. It's just so hard to admit that it's over ...

Something hits the front door and the planks bulge inwards. I hear a snarl of satisfaction as they realize how weak the doors are. They won't need to tear the walls down after all.

What will my last choice be? Will I back away, try to escape, cling to the hope of survival until the very end? Or will I stand and fight, go out in a blaze of glory? We both know I'm never going to leave this room alive. But I still wonder, *What should I do?*

I can hear glass breaking. The one by the window has jumped through, torn the boards apart without even noticing.

I guess I'm about to find out.

by Clare van Norden

Bell High School (grade eleven)
Ottawa, Ontario

FIRST-PRIZE WINNER

Peach Fuzz

There was red fuzz on Faith's head.

That fuzz was the first part of her baby she touched. She'd seen other mothers touch the little toes or fingers first or gently kiss the forehead, as they would do so many times in the years to come. But the pink fuzz was the first part she touched, because it was somehow what she had expected.

It was like the fuzz on a peach. She was allergic to peach fuzz, which everyone told her was a shame. They told her it was a shame because peaches were one of the best tasting fruits California had to offer. She told them that her mother had always peeled the fuzzy skin off for her when she was little, so she could eat and love peaches like everyone else. But they all shook their heads and told her it was the texture of the fuzz and skin that made the fruit so good. Even though they had said that peaches were the best *tasting* fruit California offered, not the best *textured* fruit.

She had the sudden urge to shave her daughter's head, to shave off all the fuzz on her beautiful, sweet baby. The fuzz was the only known part of this, however, and so the feeling passed. Besides, it had always been her mother who had removed the fuzz, and her mother wasn't here to do it. If she tried to do it herself, her hands would rash.

She drew her hand away from her baby, hesitant. She didn't want to rash, not here in the hospital. She didn't want them to worry, didn't want them to keep her here any longer. She hadn't wanted to be here in the first place. She had known the nurses would give her that look, the one that judged her because she was sixteen and giving birth. That was why she had planned to do it alone, in the bathtub in her apartment, with no frightening needles, and no judging nurses, and no unanswerable questions.

"We need the father's name for the birth certificate."

"There is no father."

"We need a name, ma'am. It may not mean anything to you, but it means something to your daughter."

"Does she need a father to have an identity?"

"On a birth certificate, yes."

They hadn't understood.

"Who is your closest living relative?"

"My father. But only because he's my only relative."

"And where can we contact him?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know?"

"No."

"We need to contact him, ma'am."

"Does she need a grandfather to have an identity, too?"

They hadn't understood at all. And she silently cursed the mailman, for hearing her moaning and breaking down the door. He had called 9-1-1, and they had brought her here to the hospital. And the nurses had looked at her and judged.

Despite all that, she touched Faith's fuzzy head, kissing it lightly.

by Jennifer Klauninger

Canterbury High School (grade twelve)
Ottawa, Ontario



SECOND-PRIZE WINNER

Penelope's Box

Penelope Belin gloomily arranged a bouquet of tropical flowers in an intricate vase. Her employer had been giving her jobs all afternoon, without a single break. Thirteen-year-old Penelope worked at a flower shop, *Flowers Fit for a King*, on Saturday afternoons. That was when the small shop on the corner of Main Street was usually most busy. Jane Kingsman was the owner of the shop and she loved to sit and drink herbal tea while Penelope ran around the shop, following her every command. Penelope would have quit long ago, if Ms. Kingsman didn't pay her so generously. Today, however, the shop was practically empty. It was mid-November, the sky was grey and drizzling, and most people were at home, huddled around their fireplace or drinking hot cocoa. Jane had just stepped out to run an errand, telling Penelope to watch the shop. Penelope shivered. Ms. Kingsman had let a cold draught in when she opened the shop door, and it was creeping around the shop. Penelope ran into the back room and put on her heavy blue fleece. She had gathered up a few more flowers to fill the vase when she heard the small bell on the shop door ring.

Penelope pulled aside the curtain separating the back room from the main shop. There was a young boy there, about her age with blond curly hair, examining a large white rose. "Hi! Can I help you, or are you just browsing?" Penelope asked.

The boy looked up quickly. "Actually, I'm here to warn you."

Penelope raised an eyebrow, suspecting a prank. "Warn me about what?"

He looked around, lowering his voice. "Have you ever heard the story of Pandora's Box?"

"Yeah," Penelope replied cautiously, remembering a class from last year. "Juno, queen of the gods, gave Pandora a box to deliver to the underworld. Pandora was curious, opened it, and let out all the bad things in life, like war and pain ... so what?"

"I know you won't believe me, but I have to tell you, and there's not much time. You are a descendent of Pandora; Jane Kingsman is a descendent of Juno. My name is Caleb, and I am the descendent of Cupid, her son."

Penelope snorted. "Yeah, sure. Cupid. Real funny. Now, are you going to buy something or not?"

The boy stamped angrily. "I'm not kidding! This is serious! Ms. Kingsman will give you a box, and tell you to deliver it to someone. You *have* to make sure you *don't* open it!"

"Fine! Whatever! Now buy something or leave!"

Caleb ran out the door. "Remember!" he shouted.

What a freak! Penelope thought.

Suddenly, Ms. Kingsman walked in, carrying a small wooden box. "Here, Penelope," she said hurriedly. "Take this to 156 Appleby Lane."

"But I ..."

"No buts! Just go."

Penelope shivered. *Could Caleb have been telling the truth?* The box was as light as a feather, which surprised her. For something supposedly containing so much evil, it didn't feel very heavy. When she arrived at 156 Appleby Lane, she was surprised to see Caleb answer the door. "What ...?" Penelope asked, startled.

"Thank you so much, Penelope," he said. "That box, if opened, could bring the end of the world."

"No problem. Sorry that I didn't believe you earlier," she replied.

A woman walked up behind Caleb, smiled, and asked, "What's this, honey?" Penelope and Caleb gasped as Caleb's mother opened the box ...

by Emmali Branton

Dundas Central Public School (grade seven)

Dundas, Ontario

SECOND-PRIZE WINNER

Christmas Snow

“Ouch!” Anna clutched her toe and tried not to cry. The thirteen-year-old servant girl looked down at her split toenail, which was bleeding onto the floor. Mistress Robinson would not be pleased with blood on her floor, but she would be less impressed with a soiled cloth. Sighing, Anna soaked the blood up with the hem of her ragged dress—another stain to add to the many other smudges of dirt and grease. Anna looked at her feet, which were cracked, dry, and bruised. How she wished for a pair of shoes!

As Anna went about her work, her toe began to throb even further. By the end of the day, the split toenail was clogged with dirt. Sitting on the edge of her bed, Anna dabbed at the wound with a small, wet rag she kept on the rickety stand next to her bed in the cramped attic room. Then she climbed into bed and pulled the thin sheet over her.

The next morning, snow was already falling thickly when Anna woke up. The stone floor of the kitchen was ice-cold to her feet, and Anna limped as she went about her chores. There was a knock on the scullery door. Suddenly, it burst open in a swirl of white, and a girl about Anna’s age entered the room. The girl was well-dressed in a fur-lined coat and mitts, with a fine velvet hat on her head. She was wearing a gorgeous ruffled silk dress and soft leather boots. “Hello,” the girl said breathlessly, “my name is Samantha. A few days ago I walked past here with my mother and I noticed you weren’t wearing any shoes. I was wondering if you would like my old pair?” The girl stopped to catch her breath, but Anna stood speechless at the shoes Samantha held out. They were high-topped leather just like Samantha herself had on, only slightly worn. The soft laces climbed to the top, and the thick heels would certainly make Anna look tall and elegant. A shrill woman’s voice calling over the wind broke the silence, and Samantha handed the shoes to Anna, wished her a good morning, and rushed out the door.

Anna stood quite flabbergasted in the centre of the kitchen, staring at the door until she finally directed her gaze to the boots. Her boots. Then, slowly, she slid her foot into the boot, relishing the moment. Oh, how soft the leather was against her skin! The laces, carefully tied up around her leg, felt wonderfully snug. She opened the door, and surveying the happily bustling scene, felt a leap of joy.

The sun was bright and it shone on the newly fallen snow till it dazzled her eyes and made the street look like a field of diamonds. The bells in the church steeple across the way began to ring out joyfully through the city, and people began to congregate in the street before moving through the church doors. Anna wondered at this because she had been sure it was not a Sunday. Then a boy, not much older than herself, called out to a young couple, “Merry Christmas, Lizzy! Merry Christmas, Fred!” and the smiling couple returned his greeting enthusiastically. Christmas! No wonder! And these boots ... the first Christmas gift she had ever received.

The street was empty now, so she began to walk through the thick snow. Then she started to run. The wind rushed past her and she held out her arms to catch more of it. Then, as the snow began to fall once more, Anna spun around. Faster and faster, she spun, opening her mouth to catch snowflakes as they floated down around her. Still twirling, she threw back her head and laughed. She laughed for wind and snow. She laughed for Christmas and church bells. And she laughed for her boots, kicking the snow into clouds of white powder, the best Christmas gift she had ever received.

by Mandolin Vanderveen

Homeschool (grade eight)
Merville, British Columbia

SECOND-PRIZE WINNER

Goliath

It was a fantastic day; a beautiful October morning. The sun was out and the birds were singing. My friends and I decided to go to the local amusement park, for a day of fun.

We got to the park, bought tickets, and went inside the gates. I was terrified of heights, and speeds, and pretty much everything that a roller coaster offered to a person. Goliath was, and still is, a roller coaster. It broke almost every record in the book: most number of loops, greatest speed attained during ride, and highest number of riders who swore they would never go near it, ever again.

Before I knew what was happening, I was being pushed along with the rest of the group towards the dreaded roller coaster. I could not wimp out; I just couldn't, so I forced myself to go along.

The roller coaster cars pulled up and the riders got out. I stepped inside the car and strapped myself in. When the attendant came around, to make sure everyone was buckled in, I asked her just how bad Goliath really was. "Oh, it's bad!" was her only response. *Gulp!* To make matters worse, Joe, the toughest guy in our group, was the one sitting beside me. As I looked at him, and before he looked away from me, I thought I saw a distinct shade of green forming on his cheeks.

With a sudden lurch, we moved forward to begin our ascent and the start of our ride. We climbed higher, and higher, and just as we reached the very peak of the track, we had the most magnificent view of Toronto, the Great Lakes, and even into the United States. It was beautiful, but before I knew it, we leaped over the top, and screamed down towards oblivion.

"Yahoo!" I yelled, raising my arms above my head. This was the best thing I had ever done in my life!

We thundered down the track and turned, doing about five corkscrews. The car picked up speed, and we headed into the loop section of the ride. I tried to count them, but after about ten, I gave up. Then we quickly dipped and dove down, underground, through a maze of tracks. Suddenly, we popped up again, into the sunlight. We twisted and turned around the track and sped into the unloading station. Our ride was over.

As I stepped off the ride, I was shocked to see many of my friends looking quite frightened by the roller coaster ride. Joe probably looked the worst. Still, nobody was saying anything because, sick or not, he still packed the hardest punch of anyone we knew.

We headed to a café to have lunch, and I was feeling very happy. I had done it: Goliath, the ride everybody was terrified of. I hadn't been scared a bit! Then Joe, who by now had fully recovered, yelled, "Who wants to go on the Drop of Doom?"

"Yeah!" everybody yelled.

It looked like my problems had just started all over again.

by Jonathan Hallett

St. George's School (grade nine)
Vancouver, British Columbia

SECOND-PRIZE WINNER

Smiles

Dedicated to my twin brothers who have autism.

The sky looks very nice. I smile to myself as the beautiful clouds float across the vast, blue canvas. The grass is warm on my back. Today is a good day.

I hear the gate creak open, then close. The hair on the back of my neck stands up, on alert. Then I smile with relief. It is only my sister, Mandy; she has come home from school. She sees me lying on the grass. Mandy drops her school bag and runs towards me, enveloping me. Her arms are wrapped too tightly around me, but I don't mind; I know she is doing this because she loves me. I love her, too.

"Hi, Davey," Mandy whispers softly. She kisses me lightly on the forehead. I smile, pleased. "Did you have a good day?" Mandy speaks softly and clearly, using simple words so I can understand her.

I know exactly what I want to say: *Oh, yes, it was great! I built a huge sand castle with a moat and everything! It was so much fun!*

Instead, this comes out, "Oyexeewackgraybubbyeeye"

I stare at my sister, horrified. She gives me a pat on the back.

"Go on," she says encouragingly, condescendingly.

I sigh, frustrated. My good day has been ruined. My face turns red, and anger bubbles up inside me. Mandy senses something is wrong. She engulfs me in a hug, not too tight this time, and rocks me back and forth. The rhythm is soothing and my muscles begin to relax. My shoulders sag, and my face returns to its natural colour.

"*Shh*, it's all right," she murmurs. "Let's go inside for a snack. I promise you'll feel better."

I like the idea. I want a sandwich with whole wheat bread, turkey, cheese, and tomato. I want the tomato in the middle, on top of the turkey, but underneath the cheese. I can't explain this, of course, so I simply grab Mandy's hand and smile at her expectantly.

"Mom," she calls, as we enter the kitchen, "can Davey and I have some cheese and crackers?"

No! Not cheese and crackers again! Crackers are too salty and scrape my tongue. I pick up the tray that Mommy has placed in front of us. I head for the garbage, but Mandy stops me.

"We don't waste food, Davey," she admonishes. She takes the tray from my hands and puts it back on the table. The familiar, unpleasant emotion stirs inwardly. My body begins to tremble uncontrollably. Without hesitation, I run to my bedroom and fling myself on top of my bed. Once curled up under my blankets, I let the tears flow freely down my face.

Mandy barges into my room and sits on my bed. "Davey"

"No!" I yell angrily. I bury my face into my pillow.

"Davey, I'm really sorry. I was being inconsiderate. I understand how you're feeling"

She keeps talking, but I tune her out. I smile bitterly. She doesn't know how I'm feeling. Not at all.

by Grace Pagtakhon

St. Maurice School (grade ten)
Winnipeg, Manitoba

SECOND-PRIZE WINNER

Made in China

It all began with a coup, the great Chinese Military Revolution of 2020. No—it was earlier than that. 9/11 was the first symptom. It started during the Cold War, the Red Scare. Everyone was so distracted by Russia that no one noticed China. They extended their grasp over Tibet, Nepal, even Korea. We stopped them at Korea—at least we tried. 9/11 was the sign that the West’s hold on the world was lost. It was time for our empire to end, and for another to rise.

The Chinese had been attacking and infiltrating us for years. All their actions were covert and easily deniable; always the “fault” of various extremists. With the revolution, however, these attacks stopped. In the years following the revolution, all public access to China had been cut off. Little did we know that the conspiracy theorists were right. We thought we had won; we hadn’t. There was no need to attack us any longer, they were already in. They had control. Almost all of our computer systems had been taken over. The hackers took their time. A massive military buildup was underway: an invasion force, an occupying army ... destined for us.

There were tsunami warnings flooding the news channels, huge tremors off the East Asian coast. We weren’t going to make the same mistake again. Odd thing was, there were no eyewitnesses, only our sensors detecting them. In the following hours, however, people saw strange ships off the west coast of North America. Contact with our submarines was intermittent. Just hours after contact with the USS Arizona was lost, the Internet died.

The Chinese Sleeper worms that were embedded in our hardware, and activated by the hackers, had attacked. Almost all computer hardware in recent years had been manufactured in China. It was a grand scheme. They had crippled us electronically without ever arousing our suspicion.

I felt the initial bombardment. It was like an earthquake, sudden and difficult to predict. The time between the volleys was almost worse than the barrages themselves. Eventually, after wearing us down, they stopped. In war, the end of artillery fire signals the calm before the storm. The end of artillery fire is often the last silence a soldier hears. The end of artillery fire means the enemy is advancing.

by Sasha Gunn

Dr. Charles Best Secondary School (grade eleven)
Coquitlam, British Columbia



SECOND-PRIZE WINNER

Mantra

Sweltering heat brings waves of cinnamon and cumin winds from the village market. Flies swarm around piles of plump ripe mangoes with leathered maroon skins. The crowded narrow spaces between stalls intensify the heat of the afternoon sun. Sweat falls like strings of beads from the skin of both human and animal, bringing a warm, musky stench to the air. The world feels reversed here; the cool waves of the ocean are above me with my feet planted into the sand below.

I walk past wicker platters holding warm yellow rice, and lentils coloured orange, red, and bone. There are stalls exploding with robust and seductive Indian fabrics; I slide my hands over the purple silk embroidered with gold and red threads. I walk through the market and into the vast eternity of dehydrated soil that lifts in clouds after every footstep. I shut my eyes, letting my heart and intuition guide me.

I walk without water, without food, until the sun's gaze slowly drops into the horizon. The gentle lullabies of bird calls drift me into meditation. My mind weakens as the barriers crumble, blowing away in the midnight breeze of my exhalations. My pulse transforms into steady vibrations moving from my heart through my veins to my soul. I lose touch of bodily constrictions, and rise. My thoughts are diminished into a mantra, bringing me farther from my skin, my blood, my bones, my muscles. My soul opens—letting in the wonders of utopia. I am surrounded by tranquility through the solemn assurance of colour.

I look down on my body and watch as blue light wafts from my skull. I watch as this light forms an oval around my soul and deepens this divine state of understanding. Elegant trees with delicate branches sprout from the ground, cracking the dried soil. They grow continuously and blood-red berries begin to form on the outer branches—the wave-like leaves enlarge and cover the land in large pouches of shadow. The spaces of open land diminish as tree after tree erupts from Earth's core. I lose sight of my body. "Stop," I whisper, but this only encourages their growth. "Please, stop," I whisper, but still there is no change. The blue light fades as I repeat my whispered prayer ... and then I fall. I feel the mantra loosen its grip and the vibrations hush. I fall into the senses of reality. I feel the ground, saturated by heat, beneath my toes; I feel the dry taste in my mouth and the night behind my eyes. "I understand," I whisper through cracked lips. "I understand."

I walk until the moon highlights Earth with a luminous glow. My body is outlined in frosted dew and my organs begin to hum. The sun's fingers wrap crimson blankets over my exhausted soul. I open my eyes and I *am*.

by *Lutetia Wallis-Mayer*

Mulgrave School (grade twelve)
West Vancouver, British Columbia

THIRD-PRIZE WINNER

Catastrophe

I watched as the people came out of the locomotive on this rainy day. Umbrellas of all colours popped up and moved about. As the people left, I sighed, took my things, and pulled them onto the warm train.

Once inside, I sat down again. I put my left elbow on the ledge of the window and rested my chin on my hand as I gazed at the quickly moving scenery. Rain corrupted my view, so I decided to take a short nap. I turned to my right and saw all the other passengers who were relaxing for the little while they had until they arrived at their destinations.

My eyes opened and shut several times before my vision sharpened and I noticed it was dark outside. I propped myself up and peered out the glass window. Trees and farmland passed me by quicker than I had remembered. I heard a soft snore from in front of me. My head whipped around quickly and pinpointed the sound. The boy had brown hair, and wore a green shirt and blue jeans. My muscles relaxed as soon as I realized the boy was sleeping deeply, as was everyone else in the train car.

The boy thrashed around in his sleep, calling out one word, and one word alone: “*Help!*” The dreaming boy called it out under his breath and sweat dripped down his face. People awoke to see what the entire ruckus was, only to find a kid screaming as he slumbered. I shook my head and being the caring girl I was, went to sit beside him. I felt out of character, and it seemed my feelings towards this boy were different from all the other people I’d met. Just who was he?

His head rested on my lap as I wiped the sweat from his brow. He whimpered quietly. I cooed softly. What was I doing? Why was I doing this? Some people called me cold While others called me ruthless. Why? I won’t say, not now, but I knew deep in my mind that I was acting quite differently from the way I did usually. I’d barely known this guy for two hours and I was already nursing him back to normal. That thought almost made me jump—but I didn’t. There was something ... warm about him, something ... different.

The boy who was stuck in Dreamland, opened his eyes while I was asleep. When I opened my eyes again, he was gone; he left a small note on the seat where he had been. My eyes widened. I read over the note several times. I stopped in mid thought and then it came to me. He seemed so familiar. My jaw dropped and I shook my head. Then it hit me. I had met him long before. We had been friends, until one day He moved away.

I was never to see Sebastian Delamar ever again. All that remained was his note, reading, “Thanks. Ask for Bastien: 352-6342.”

An old friend, and partner ... in crime.

by Vanessa Tolentino

St. Edward Catholic School (grade seven)
Toronto, Ontario

THIRD-PRIZE WINNER

Stormy Future

As I approached the end of the pier, I began to calm down. The long fight had lasted for many hours.

My mother and father-in-law thought my wife, Carrie, and I should settle down and start a family. I thought differently. I thought Carrie and I should move to Long Beach, California. Summer Haven Cape was too small an island for us to feel comfortable. Everyone knew everyone else's business. With me on the police force and Carrie a journalist, we needed a big place to start fresh, and Long Beach would be the perfect place. There wasn't enough happening here for either of us to support a family—a robbery here, a murder or two there. Carrie didn't have anything to report on, and I had no new cases to solve. The falling crime rate didn't help any.

My clothes clung to me from the dampness of the fog. I was the only one out. There was no noise except the sound of waves lapping against the dock. A ship's horn went off in the distance. I sat on the wet dock and pondered the situation. My feet dangled over the grey water. The salty ocean air smelled strong, clear, and fresh. I could see the shadows of masts through the fog. It was a peaceful night, and the shadow of a ship came looming into view.

Maybe it would be better if we stayed, I thought for an instant. No! We must move. Carrie and I needed changes—a new town, and new people. We had both lived here since we were born.

I stood up when I reached a decision about our future: we would go wherever we needed to. I started back towards the brightly lit oceanside café.

A bloodcurdling scream pierced the foggy air. I started to run on the slippery dock. It was my mother-in-law's scream. Before I reached the café, I saw a shadow flit out the door and along the side of the building into the forest. As I ran inside the building, I grew faint at the gruesome scene before my eyes. I cried out in horror. There, lying on the floor in a pool of blood, were the dead bodies of my wife's parents. I pulled out my cell phone and called my coworkers to send a patrol car immediately. I waited patiently while I went over and over our earlier fight, regretting every word I had yelled at them. I thought, *Why did this have to happen now?*

The police car finally arrived and my friends hopped out. The forensics team ran into the building to begin investigating the crime scene. I asked if I could tell my wife the horrible news. I was told "Not yet."

After much interrogation, the forensics team determined the murder weapon that was used. It was a harpoon gun. My harpoon gun! I was now the number-one suspect of my wife's parents' double murder.

by Melissa McNamee

Langley Christian School (grade eight)
Langley, British Columbia

THIRD-PRIZE WINNER

Escape

She was running. Her breath came in ragged gasps, yet she didn't stop. Blood trickled slowly down an oozing gash in her leg, causing her to limp, but her pain drove her onward. She wouldn't go back; she *couldn't* go back. To put herself back in that position of being vulnerable and incapacitated by fear was not an option.

The girl slowed, leaning heavily against the cold stone wall as she shuffled forward. The basement of the building smelled damp, and the sounds of droplets echoed as they fell from the pipes overhead. The girl stopped and rested her forehead against the cool bricks. Perspiration dripped from her forehead onto the wall and she moaned quietly. The girl made no effort to push back her lank brown hair as silent tears rolled down her face, falling onto her shirt.

How had it come to this? Running in fear in the basement of her own apartment building. She tried to scoff, but the sound was strangled in her dry throat. The girl glanced down at her injured leg through her tears. The pain ripped through her body, but she urged herself forward, knowing she had only a limited amount of time before she was caught. Images flashed through her mind at lightning speed, but each one was like a blow to her already-bruised head. First, she saw her mother walking through the door with her latest boyfriend in tow. *How long ago had that been? Three, four years?* Thoughts of the speedy marriage within the next two months filled the girl with hatred so strong, she could feel it in her clenched fists. Then the harder thoughts came. Try as she might, she couldn't suppress them. The bright lights behind her eyelids flickered every time she remembered her stepfather's foot colliding with her head. Each time she had tried to stop him, he hit her harder.

The girl muffled a sob as she remembered the first time he struck her mom. Her mother's eyes reflecting the fear her daughter felt. His muscular hand curled into a fist and he swung it into his wife's stomach relentlessly.

"What? Are you siding with *her* now?" The disgust in his voice was apparent against the woman's pleas.

Without realizing it, the girl had slowly slumped to her knees on the cold cement floor. Her memories pounded against her head, causing her to grab frantically at the wall. No, she couldn't give in to those things again! She tried to clutch at her consciousness as it slipped away. She could hear the footsteps following her as she tried to escape. They slowed, seeing that the prize was close at hand.

Instinctively, she raised a hand to protect her head. The blackness started to ebb into her vision, and suddenly her head was next to her knees on the ground.

Far away, a girl woke up with wide eyes. She wiped the sweat from her brow and shook her head, thinking, *It was just a nightmare. It couldn't really happen ...*

by Mary Jo David

Notre Dame Catholic Secondary School (grade nine)
Toronto, Ontario

THIRD-PRIZE WINNER

A Child's Symphony

Warm, playful wind swept through his short, unkempt, chocolate-brown hair. This was one of the windiest days he had ever experienced in his knowledgeable six years. It was also one of the most important he would know in his lifetime. Little did this kindergarten student know that this day would open his round, excited eyes to his own future. All he knew was that he was running to a place of unimaginable beauty, filled with endless hours of possibilities.

Splash! Mud splattered across his freshly washed jeans, but he did not care. Nothing was going to break the shield of excitement surrounding his scrambling thoughts. He was getting closer. There it was, under the heat of the teasing sun, just as he remembered it. His excitement burst and he ran, faster than the wind racing beside him! Time took a deep breath the instant the shadow of his short figure collided with that of a large maple tree, rustling its eager welcome. A narrow river tumbled over sharp rocks just feet away, while shimmering fish, the size of the boy's thumb, *splish-splashed* in the calm shallows. Looking around, he saw a thin, twisted stick peering out from behind the speckled trunk of the maple. Bending towards it, the boy's hand tightened around the fragile stick. It was in that moment his imagination took control.

A perspicuous picture of himself shone in his mind, now with his hair combed back tight and wearing a professional black tuxedo. The boy's small feet had also been adorned with polished, black, dress shoes accompanied with smooth laces. Taking a deep breath of striking fresh air, he raised the glowing, classical baton, now held fast in his tiny fist, and with a quick flick of his wrist the symphony began.

A croaking trombone erupted from the throat of a large toad and was the first entry to this musical fantasy. Next, a bright, lemon-coloured, flute soloist swooped its way onto the stage. The pumpkin-orange beak of the canary opened wide, delivering a whimsical tune to the astonished audience, and then, with a graceful curtsy, headed offstage. The primary-coloured woodpecker, tapping a beat on his wooden snare drum, introduced the next ensemble. The small pebbles scrambling around the river were suddenly extravagant rain sticks, setting a more subtle mood for the tiny shimmering triangles the boy had known to be fish. Every "*Ting ...*" sent a new set of sound waves towards him, circling in the glassy surface of the still pool. *Now, for the grand finale*, thought the boy, and with an exorbitant wave of his arm, cymbals crashed over every rock jutting out of the gurgling water surface. Dropping his aching arm back to his side, the boy spun around to the applause of the rising audience. Seconds later, the crowd was only an old maple tree with a speckled trunk.

His face shining, the boy sprinted across the rolling hills, to the small, weather-worn cottage he called home.

by Dominique Saab

Wellington Secondary School (grade ten)
Nanaimo, British Columbia

THIRD-PRIZE WINNER

Memory

What was my motive? It was so long ago, my old mind cannot grasp what has slipped away. I try so hard to remember, but it's like a game of hide and seek. I am forever playing this losing game with my memories. Like a shard, my mind, once so sharp, has begun to dull, melted down by the power of time.

The only thing I wish now, is that I had been punished for my crime. It is a strange request for a man such as myself to make, but true nonetheless. It might have saved me from the guilt I feel, like an ever-present itch in my psyche. I cannot testify to my actions, for they have all but washed away, and I was the only one who knew of them. I cannot confess or repent my sins, for I no longer know what they are, and by forgetting I shall go to Hell. I suppose in some twisted way this is a comfort. I am comfortable in the knowledge that in the end I will get no less than what I deserve. I can thank God for this mercy at least.

The doctors told me that this emptiness devouring my mind is called dementia. A condition where I end up losing everything. They said that the most momentous events of my life would be the last to go. I would try to hold on to those. Why is it then that I cannot hold on to my horror? Why do I remember the useless things, when this memory could set me free? I need the nightmares.

A newspaper article, more than fifty years old, holds the answer. I always forget about this connector, and yet, I always know where to find it. Her name was Emily Masters. The name had once meant so much to me, but now is just a name in a poorly written article. The article states that she had been beaten to death, but I know there is more to it than that. There is a whole story behind it.

I scan the print and find another name that has eluded me: James Green, the wrongly accused. James had gone to the noose in my stead. I should have spoken up then, but I was too much the coward. It was as if I killed the boy as well. He was no older than a boy. James. James and Emily, forever ghosts to haunt me.

The gun is already loaded. I will pay the price for my crime a thousand times over when I receive my final judgement. My apology reads:

"I don't deserve forgiveness. Even though he has been dead for more than fifty years, save it for someone worthy, like James Green. Emily Masters' death is on me. Her blood stains my hands. James, though I did not personally kill him, went in my stead, and that, to me, is worse than what I could ever have done to him. I personally did cause Emily's demise, and through my actions, James's as well. 'I'm sorry,' doesn't cut it."

I laid the article with the note. Signed.

by Devon McKinnon

Mount Baker Senior Secondary School (grade eleven)
Cranbrook, British Columbia

THIRD-PRIZE WINNER

Dance of the Dead

She danced her dance of death, but it was a dance of joy, too. It was a celebration and mourning, and everything in between. She danced because she could.

It was midnight and raining. In the blurry street lamp's glow, she shimmered. The dead girl twirled and twisted, whirled and pirouetted. She played a game: Don't Get Wet. Because she was dead, the forces of nature did not confine her. She could dance in the pouring rain and not be touched by a single drop.

A bystander would see no girl in the gloom. To his closed eyes and mind, no one was there, so how could there be a dance? All he would see was a faint glimmer here, a twinkle there, promptly reasoned away by the glint of lamplight on falling rain.

The dead girl did not care what a nonexistent bystander thought; such trivialities did not concern her. There were more important things to attend to, like her Raindrop Waltz.

The rain was a good partner. It never stepped on her toes, although it may have splashed a bit when it hit the ground that her feet did not touch. She would not be so successful at her game if the rain was less polite; it kept a modest, respectful distance from her, as befit a young girl and her partner. Because it followed the rules, she did not get wet.

No one can dance forever though, not even a dead girl and the rain. The drops soon began to slow their fall; the girl stumbled. The rain trickled to a stop, and the dead girl, with her tangled hair clinging to her face, gave a curtsy to her retreating partner, and faded to nothing.

by Sarah Prusinowski

Elgin Park Secondary School (grade twelve)
Surrey, British Columbia

