

TEEN CATEGORY

Shortlisted - Roma Luscher - The Red Nautilus

I love a good horror story that's set on the ocean. It's such a rich setting for mystery and darkness. And the author of The Red Nautilus tapped into it beautifully. One particular scene that will stay with me was simple in its set up, but creepy in all that it conjured and featured one single black fish... A beautifully written tale that will have you wondering, do we ever really know what lies beneath? Congratulations and well done, Roma.

Shortlisted - Annika K - Repent

Repent is a beautiful, yet tragic tale, and as a lover of twists, had me soft gasping at the very end. Told with restraint and beauty, it's a lesson that more words doesn't necessarily mean more impact. As the shortest entry in the teens category, it packed an emotional punch and deserves its place in this anthology. Congratulations and well done, Annika.

Shortlisted - Jamie Kowitchindachai - Regret's Lament

A uniquely written story that creates an ethereal, creepy atmosphere from its first opening. A good story evokes something in the reader, it sits with them, it stirs them, it lingers in them for a time. And this story did just that. Quietly written, yet evocative, it tells of a world I think we are all at one time, or more, very familiar with. Is there anything scarier than losing yourself to the monotony of the rat race? Congratulations and well done, Jamie.

Commended - Reny Zhang - Would You Call?

This Black Mirror-esque story had me chomping at the bit to discuss with everyone I knew. The concept was engaging, dark and incredibly thought provoking - everything a good spooky story should be. Moving through three different perspectives, the author shows a side of humanity we don't often like to think about. But, in all honesty, would you call? Congratulations and well done for conjuring a tale as wickedly macabre as this Reny.

Highly Commended - Zach Lam - Laurie

The first line of this story told me that the writing would be *chefs kiss*, and I wasn't wrong. This tale is hauntingly written and leads you through the evening with an easy prose while still breadcrumbing enough peculiarities to let you know of trip hazards ahead. And when they arrive, they hit. The description of the monstrous creature was macabre and precise and written

more deftly than I could ever manage. But beyond the descriptions and the excellent writing, is the idea of how this horror was created. A quick sentence, just a brief explanation, but enough that the idea lingered in me for nights to come. A horror born of our own atrocities. A well written and impactful piece of spooky writing, congratulations and well done Zach.

Highly Commended - Dhilan Sabapathy - Not a Dog

"My family doesn't have a dog." The simple, yet cleverly crafted first line of the story Not a Dog. It immediately made me think 'great, what is it then...' Which meant I was immediately invested in the story. This tale takes a chilling - and perhaps the most viscerally disturbing - turn of all the stories I read, thanks to one particularly vivid scene involving the wearing of something decidedly *not* meant to be worn. It'll take many moons to scrub that image from my mind. A seriously chilling tale that had me reading through my fingers. Congratulations and well done, Dhilan. PS. I hope you don't have a dog.

MNYWEA - Michelle Ho - Disconnected

This story brought me right back to my childhood sleepovers where horror games and prank calls were at the top of our to-do list. The unease of phones, and not knowing who could be on the other end, is a creepy theme that never fails to make me shiver. This story created solid characters with believable relationships and dialogue, building to an eerie crescendo of the classic horror trope - a disconnected phone line. Congratulations and great work, Michelle.

1st Place Interstate - Su Nguyen - Case #158710

Case #15870 is a masterclass in how a story can unhinge you, by what it doesn't show. Written in a hugely engaging format of a case file, this story takes you through a collection of evidence surrounding a missing person. The contrast of the clinical writing with the emotion filled phone recordings and witness statements gives this story a wonderfully eerie balance that had me reading with clenched fists right up until that last phone log. Writing a story based solely on evidence is a genius approach, showing the reader everything that unfolded that night... except the big bad, allows the reader to concoct that for themselves. Well written, and uniquely engaging, congratulations Su on an excellently creepy story.

2nd WA Place - Finn Stenning Alexander - Optimising R1-37

A good science fiction tale can be hard to craft, unless, apparently, you are the author of Optimising R1-37. I have no shame in saying I read this story multiple times, taking in

something new with each re-read. It's a cleverly worded and executed story of robotics, AI, and perhaps more generally the society in which we function. I dare you to read this story with an open mind and see where it takes you, because that's the joy of good writing and unique stories, they seep beneath your skin and rear their heads when you least expect it. A deliciously creepy tale that is written to be enjoyed many times over, congratulations Finn.

1st WA Place - Rafael Widjaja - Bird Song

There's something intoxicating about the allure of a scientific discovery. The fervent addiction that settles underneath the skin of folk far more curious than me. And somehow this setting becomes even tastier when you kick it over to the dark side. *Bird Song* is both quiet and unsettling. It's fast paced, yet with plenty of moments to breathe. The scientist is endearing, the surroundings rich and tangible, and the bird a ghastly concoction of cryptid and predator. The description of that last piece of carnivorous evidence is masterful, and I delighted in reading this story, over, and over again. A well deserved placing for an excellently told tale. Congratulations, and well done, Rafael.