

Judge's Report – 2019 KSP Ghost Story Contest

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The aim of any author when constructing a story, is reader satisfaction. I believe the short story genre is the hardest one to master, especially when given a specific themed subject. 1500 words, or 500 words for the junior category, is a tiny number of words in which to create an entire balanced story. One that has a clear beginning, middle and end. One which captures the essence of the theme, and gives the reader well developed characters they can picture in their mind.

I participate in a lot of contest judging, and blind judged contests are my favourite. There's no outside influence. No cover art, no publisher logo, no author name. The story has to stand on its own merits. The entries in the KSP Spooky Story contest come to me with only the story title and a code number. To add an extra layer of anonymity, I ask that no one post their intention to enter the contest to any of my social media, or tell me personally. I always have a great time judging this contest, and I thank KSP for giving me the opportunity.

Anyone who writes a story is an author, and any author knows that sending your story out into the world to be judged is one of the scariest things you can possibly do. I'd like to applaud each and every one of our authors. The winners, the finalists, the entrants and all of those who thought about entering this year's contest, but didn't. I hope you'll build up your own courage by next year.

In conclusion, you should all be very proud of your achievements.

This year we expanded the contest to include a wider range of paranormal elements, not just ghosts. And in accordance with this, the 2019 contest theme was 'change' because change can be so many things. A change of mind. A change of heart. A change in direction. A sea change. A tree change. An emotional change. A physical change. We were looking for the character (or characters) to undergo some element of change within the story. The story needed to incorporate some form of the paranormal, real or imagined, and of course, it needed to be spooky. Submissions could involve paranormal or supernatural themes, including magic, ghosts, spirits or altered states of realism. As judge, I took into consideration the grammar and punctuation of each entrant, but it also came down to the 'feel' of the story. A story isn't just about each comma and full stop. It needs character and creativity. All the entries were spooky and fit the theme. All our writers deserve our congratulations for being brave enough to enter.

A fun fact about this year's contest. If you add up the total word count for all the entries in all the categories, plus the multiple times each story is read, it comes to over 400,000 words. Which means, if you didn't reach the finals this year, don't feel bad, as there was a *lot* of competition.

Instructions

The shortlisted entries for tonight's Youth and Open categories will be announced starting with the commendations.

When your names are called, could the authors come up to the stage to receive their certificate, and pose for a photo. Once all the prizes are handed out and the final winners announced, we will be calling for entrants to come back up and read their stories.

Youth Interstate

All of our categories received a record number of entries this year, and Interstate Youth was the largest. It made the judging of all these superb entries very tricky.

The highly commended entries in all categories are often the most enjoyable to award. These stories take the theme and run with it in vastly inventive ways. All of our commended finalists tonight should be very proud of themselves.

Commendations

I Love You The Way You Are - Serena Chi (10)

This clever story incorporated elements of a fairy tale, because as we all know, some of the best fairy tales are the scariest. Its clever use of the theme and little twist in the tale made this a very enjoyable read. Well done, Serena.

The Chickens - Indigo Isabel Meadows (15)

In another very clever use of the theme, this quirky story took the transformation concept and tweaked it to create a surprising, suspenseful and highly entertaining read. Well done, Indigo.

2nd Place

The Prey and The Predator - Alex Etchells (16)

Written in first person, this story manages to convey a distinct feeling of dread. The use of a forest setting with dimming light and enveloping canopy of trees adds to the claustrophobia and increasing fear of the main character. Well done, Alex.

1st Place

Monster With A Victim Mentality - Amy Feng (13)

This year's winner of the Interstate Youth category is a genuinely creepy monologue, with a twist of a second narrative voice, about the fine line between sanity and madness. The story,

which leaves most of the conclusions to the mind's eye of the reader, is a tightly written emotional exploration of inner demons, either imagined or real. Well done, Amy.

Youth WA

Commendations

Mirrors - Sean Paxman (12)

Sean's story takes something as common as a mirror, and turns it into an item to fear, an unknown entity with the power to control, to possess. This clever and inventive story has a stark reality to it, and will have you looking at your reflection in a whole new way. Well done, Sean.

Dead Man Walking – Sage Nock (16)

Sage's story takes the tale of a haunted house and gives it a new spin. This is a well-constructed story about change, and remorse and acceptance. The writing is clear and concise and gives this tale a wonderful atmospheric feel. Well done, Sage.

2nd Place

Imagination or Reality - Leah Kuckelkorn (12)

Leah's story grabs you from the very first line and doesn't let go. Its twists and turns and time jumps takes the reader on a fast paced ride through murder and bloodshed, leaving us with a stunning conclusion which will stay in the readers mind. With excellent pacing and wonderful writing, it was a joy to read. Well done, Leah.

1st Place

Purple Shirt and Beaded Accessories - Claire Luces (14)

When judging a spooky story contest about change, I'm always fascinated by the vivid imagination of some of the writers, and the emotional roller coaster ride that imagination can create. Claire's story, one of loss and regret, and hope, is both unnerving and sad. In just 499 words she created a world that captures the reader, and a poignant ending where the inevitability of change is just as tragic as our character's inability to undo the past no matter how much they want to. Well done, Claire.

Adult Open Category

Commendations

The Change – D D Line

It's always exciting when an author takes a theme and gives it a double meaning. This is what I liked about The Change. The readers are taken in one direction, and led to an assumption, only to have that happily ripped away and replaced with an equally clever and entirely different conclusion which still fits perfectly with the theme. That's astute writing. Well done, Dannielle. On another note, I'd like to add that Dannielle was a finalist in last year's contest with her story, Wundura, that was utterly different in both tone and pacing. And to be able to write so well in two such varied author voices takes talent. Congratulations on your second consecutive finalist placing in this contest.

I'd like to say a huge congratulations to both of the authors of these final two particularly spooky stories

2nd Place

Justifying the Means - Valerie Latimour

Valerie's story starts with an attack, and instantly, the reader is there with the character, lost in fear and pain. It's a brilliant start to an excellent story which takes our theme of change and rides it on a wave of rage and revenge, of malevolence and fury. We're carried along on this torturous journey which has no end and yet can only end one way. Excellently written, with vivid descriptions and a visceral feel, this story deserves its placing in the final. Well done, Valerie.

1st Place

He Just Watches - Fionna Cosgrove

People often ask me what makes a winning story, and my answer is usually 'the one that stays with me'. With He just Watches I could extend that description to include, 'the one I couldn't get out of my head, no matter how hard I tried'. This chilling and impassioned story takes the safety of a child's bedroom and turns it into the stuff of nightmares.

It also uses the mantra of 'less is more' to perfection. In my judging notes I wrote the phrase 'changing rooms' because it's that simple choice that drives the story and takes this year's theme to another level in an ingenious and creepy fashion. I'd like to congratulate Fionna on a brilliant story, a deserving winner of this year's contest. Well done.