

**SCRIBBLERS
FESTIVAL**



**THE
GOLDEN PEN**

WRITING AWARD 2020

Winning & Shortlisted Entries



The Golden Pen Writing Award was established in 2018 to inspire and encourage young creative writers to share their stories, ideas and imaginings.

In 2020 the competition called all day dreamers, storytellers and change makers from across Western Australian to share their writing. Open to three age categories: Junior (10-12), Middle (12-14) and Senior (15-17) young authors were challenged to reflect on and bring their interpretation to the theme *Planet Earth*.

Over 260 submissions were received in response to the 2020 Award and the varied interpretations of the theme and the creativity shown are a testament to the talent and promise of young storytellers across the state. Our 2020 competition judges **Ursula Dubosarsky**, **Nadia King** and **Will Kostakis** had the challenging role of selecting one winner and two shortlisted pieces from each category. Enjoy reading these evocative winning and shortlisted pieces and we send huge congratulations to each of the young authors for sharing their talent with us.

A special thank you to our wonderful judges and to all entrants of The Golden Pen Writing Award 2020. We hope you all continue to share your words and work.



**THE
GOLDEN PEN**
WRITING AWARD 2020

Junior Category

Aged 10 – 12



Liv Fechner

Hi, my name is Liv. I have 2 sisters, and a fabulous black Labrador named Cookie! I love reading and doing art. My favourite things to write about are nature and magic, as there are endless possibilities to them both.

Winning Entry

The Eye

Liv Fechner

The Eye

Liv Fechner



The leaves of the old, peeling eucalyptus trees rustled in the great, howling winds. And yet it was quiet. There was not a sound coming from any direction, and although the big wind blew, and the rain pitifully dripped down from the heavens, as it does when a storm is coming to an end, and how deceiving that was. It was as though the scene was frozen in time. It was an eerie and terrible silence, with no explanation, and it lasted for just a moment, the peaceful quiet in the middle of a storm. It let you see the devastation. Upturned trees, the playground in ruins, cars upturned, and not a single blade of the newly planted grass in sight. It was a massacre of all things beautiful. And I was in the eye of this assassin, in the eye of a hurricane. I was its next piece of prey that it would swallow up in its mouth. And my predator was hungry, deathly hungry.

They said nothing mortal could've survived from the hurricane. I thrashed about in a world of anguish, but it felt as though I was simply soaring through the skies freely. But I was in shackles, restrained by the chains of gossamer wind, furious at my withstanding. If only my talons could grip onto those chains, the rain, anything! I was helpless, yet somehow still alive. My only liberty being my thoughts made me fight for the freedom of my previously self-unappreciated body. I grappled against the current and broke through the blow of the tempest. It was only for a second, yet it gave me hope that somehow, I could leave this pain, this restraint, this cycle. It gave me hope.

Corpses of birds, being swept away with the force of the storm, lifeless. Yet an ageless beauty filled their bodies, their faces peaceful. They were at rest, free from the tormenting agony of a hurricane. It was grotesque, though, the fact that this... monster could destroy so many lives. But I had a choice, I could live, I was frail and weak, but I could stay alive. Two freedoms, but which to choose? I can try to get home or pass to a different world, the land of the dead. A small glimmer of hope gathered inside me, I had to rise, I had to live. I hauled myself out of the torrent of power, but this time I managed to land on something. Earth, pure dry earth! I was home. Almost.

A stranded bird, feeble, out of place, lying on the ground helpless. I was on the verge of death, my head spinning in my sudden stillness. But I had to get up. I had to go on. So, I struggled for minutes just trying to stand. I barely succeeded. I took a painstakingly slow step, then another. I had to survive. 'You can make it!' screamed the voice in my head. And I hoped it was true.

“The greatest short stories invite readers to vividly experience single moments in time, and ‘The Eye’ does exactly that. The beauty of the author’s prose keeps the subject matter from weighing the story down, and the trend towards hope at its conclusion is incredibly moving.”

Will Kostakis

The Golden Pen Award 2020 Judge



Daisy Madden

Hi, I'm Daisy Madden and I go to Wembley Primary School. I'm 11 years old and love to write, read and dance. Every Tuesday and Friday I get up early and go to choir. I LOVE singing. My dream is to be a writer when I'm older, so this competition means a lot to me.



Shortlisted Entry

This is the Earth

Daisy Madden

This is the Earth

Daisy Madden

This is the Earth, sea, land and sky
This is the Earth with mountains so high
We are the children speaking our words
We are the children who need to be heard
You are the people wrecking this place
You are the people we find a disgrace

This is the Earth that's withered and dry
This is the Earth that's beginning to die
We are the children shaking our signs
We are the children against oil rigs and mines
You are the people who ruin our air
You are the people who don't seem to care

This is the Earth with history so long
This is the Earth with its beautiful song
We are the children who do understand
We are the children who care for the land
You are the people making plastic and trash
You are the people turning the Earth into ash

This is the Earth starting to fade
This is the Earth cut by your blade
We are the children who speak no lies
We are the children who've seen it all with our eyes
But there are some people who are willing to fight
But there are some people who want to make things right

This is the Earth, safe in our hands
This is the Earth, sea, sky and sands.

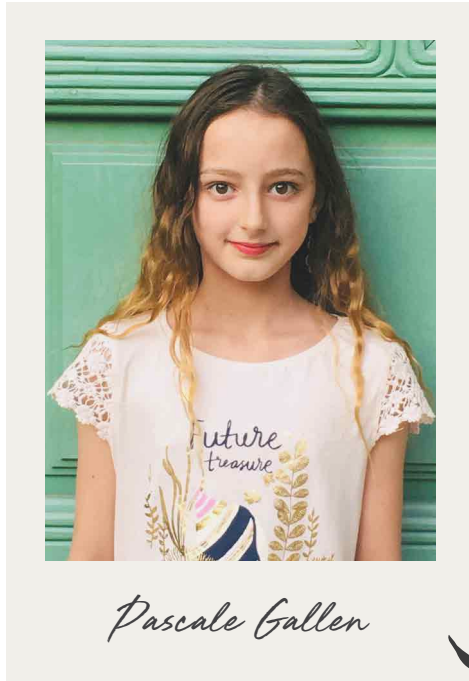


“A stirring rhythmic impassioned piece with a positive message of hope. A rousing anthem for the current generation of children.”

Nadia King

The Golden Pen Award 2020 Judge





Pascale Gallen

I live on Christmas Island. My favourite things to do is play my violin, read, write stories and snorkel. There are tropical fish and colourful coral which makes it such a joy to snorkel. I like to watch MasterChef Australia and When Calls the Heart.

Shortlisted Entry

We Didn't Start the Fire

Pascale Gallen

We Didn't Start the Fire

Pascale Gallen



"I don't want you to be hopeful, I want you to panic... and act as if the house is on fire."



- Greta Thunberg

"Convicts were taken on ships to Australia. Some were kept in prisons in Botany Bay which is now called Sydney. Your job is to draw a picture of what you think the prisons looked like and write why." I moaned. History. I walked into the kitchen and poured myself a glass of milk. The teacher, speaking in her telephone voice during online lessons, drove me nuts. She sounded grand and had a thick English accent. I walked back to my room, picked up my DrawPad, put on my headphones and continued my lesson.

Drawing made me calm. I closed my eyes and sketched. I sketched what I thought the prisons looked like. Soon I forgot about the teacher and her annoying voice. I just drew. When I had finished the whole history lesson, the drawing and writing, I continued my online schooling. The teacher started talking. "Your next job is to write the answers to the math sums. Click on the link below and it will take you to a page that has the questions on it." I clicked on the link and the screen went white. Then, a colourful circle appeared in the middle and spun. I moaned again. The circle kept spinning so I got up and went to find Mum. She was sitting on her bed with her work computer on her lap. She smiled as I walked in. "Internet giving you trouble?" I nodded. "Me too." I crawled onto the bed and sat with her. "That's what happens when everyone in the whole world uses it. It wasn't like this in the old days. Just be grateful that you got to complete some lessons today."

This was my Mum. Always being optimistic. Grateful for everything. I smiled and laughed. Dad walked into the room. "Internet?" Mum and I asked in unison. He nodded and flopped onto the bed. The light from outside illuminated the room. I grinned.

This was my family. We were happy. We had a quick chat and then Mum's course had loaded so we all went back to our separate rooms. I walked into my room and jumped onto my bed. My DrawPad bounced up and down. It had loaded so I filled out my sums. They were easy. The teacher announced that I had finished for the day so I charged my DrawPad and picked up my book. It was Blueback. Blueback was a book from the olden days that used to belong to mum until she gave it to me. It was a paper book and I loved the feel of the crisp pages between my fingers. I had read it three times but I loved it so much I was reading it again. I cried every time. But that was okay.

When I am older, I want to illustrate stories. I had drawn many pictures of Able and Blueback. I always drew characters from books that I had read. Mum was an author. She wrote stories on her computer and wrote ideas in her book. If she liked her stories, she would publish them. She never had much luck, which disappointed her, but she kept writing. She worked in her room. In the day, it was her office and at night, it was her bedroom.

The next day I made myself breakfast. Mum was still asleep and Dad was probably already working. I opened the fridge and manoeuvred things in my hunt for another carton of milk. We had run out. I walked down to the study and knocked on the door. I could hear voices from inside. I opened the door and peered in. I could tell that Dad was in a meeting from the hundred faces that showed up on his computer screens. I didn't want to disturb him and I didn't want to wake Mum, so I walked back to the kitchen to order milk.

I got my phone and went online. I waited in the virtual queue. After I ordered milk, I had toast instead and went into my room. I put on a natural environment soundtrack with kookaburras singing in the bush; it was part of my daily connection to nature.



“Honey, are you awake?” Mum’s melodic voice reverberated down the hallway. I walked into her room and saw she was making her bed. The curtains were open and the view of the ocean was amazing. “I hope you don’t mind. I ordered milk.” She nodded and grabbed her computer. “I had a great idea for my story.” She opened her computer and her fingers raced over the keys.

“Dad’s in a meeting and I was wondering, could I have a play with Astrid?” Mum nodded and I grabbed my phone and called her.

“Hello?” Astrid’s kind voice echoed.

“Hey! Wanna have a play?”

“Sure.”

I hung up and quickly logged on. Astrid was already logged on, waiting for me. HI, I typed. She replied. We played together for hours. Telling jokes to each other and sharing stories. Finally, we had to stop. I logged out and went into the kitchen. Mum was there.

She was having a cup of tea. She sipped her tea and kept talking into her phone. I noticed that she was using her new cushion so she wouldn’t have to hold her phone. I could see the screen and realised that she was talking to Auntie Dee. They were discussing their lives in the olden days. “I remember when we had to drive our cars everywhere!” Auntie Dee was saying. It was funny to think that Mum and Auntie Dee used to drive cars. It must have been way before I was born because I haven’t seen anyone drive a car. Ever!

Suddenly, I thought of something. It was a thought that made me wonder. Obviously, all thoughts made you wonder, but it was like I was a detective and I was so close to solving a case and then all of a sudden there was piece missing! A gap. Maybe I am exaggerating, but the thought was interesting. Why did no one go outside anymore? Mum said she used to drive a car, so that must mean that people used to go outside and it was normal to. But what stopped that? Why did everyone suddenly stay inside?

I went to sleep that night thinking about how hard it must have been in the olden days and why no one went outside any more. The question stayed in my mind until sleep won the invisible battle. I woke up to the smell of smoke and someone shaking me. I opened my eyes. Everything was blurry. Rubbing them didn’t make a big difference. All I could see was grey fog. “Honey! Wake up!” Mum was there. I yawned and stretched my arms. Mum was shouting now but I couldn’t hear what she was saying. I sat up in bed, suddenly feeling hot, and took the covers off my legs. My eyes closed again and I was about to lie back down, when Mum pulled me up. I opened my eyes and saw Dad beckoning me to follow. It all came to me at once. I knew what was happening. I jumped out of bed. “Hurry!” Dad shouted. I picked up my DrawPad, grabbed Mum and Dad’s hands and raced to the door.

Red, yellow and orange flames illuminated the house. They spat and hissed like angry dragons. Running down the hall the smell of smoke got stronger. We dropped onto our hands and knees. The carpet was so hot it was burning my legs, but I kept crawling. The whole house was smoky. Using my hand like a fan, I waved the smoke away. We crawled straight to the door, picking up the pace as we got closer. Dad stood up and Mum and I followed.

We all hesitated. Looking behind us, we knew we had no choice. Dad reached for the handle. Mum nodded. I held my breath. The door opened and we all ran. Out of the house. Onto the road. The sun was just rising and we stared as the flames engulfed our safe haven. We stared in astonishment. I had never been on the road before.

Mum was crying. “We have our phones, we are fine.” Dad pointed out the facts, “The house will be fixed by tomorrow at the latest.” I knew that was true, so I wasn’t crying, but it felt like a ball was stuck in my throat. However, Dad wasn’t forlorn. He was frantically searching his pockets. Finally, he pulled out a small remote. He pressed a button and water sprayed onto the house. Mum and I hugged each other as the fire went out. Dad was staring at the house pleased with himself.



Mum walked over to the curb and pulled out her phone. Her two thumbs danced over the screen. I sat on the curb, resting my head on my hands. I was looking up and that was when I noticed that there was no longer a roof on top of me. Of course, I had known that we were outside and there are no roofs on top of you when you are outside, but I hadn't really processed it. The thought was odd. I had always lived under a roof. Literally. The inky sky was pink, red, orange and purple. Like a paint tray with colours overlapping each other. It was just as astonishing and surprising as our house burning down. I felt like I was exposed and vulnerable but at the same time the beauty was phenomenal.

"We can go to Auntie Dee's." Mum said suddenly. We walked briskly down the footpath stopping every five minutes to check the online map and see if we were going the correct way. I had never been there before. I looked around the streets. People were staring at us through the windows of their houses. They looked shocked. They thought we were silly. They were disgusted. I wanted to tell them that our house had burnt down. I wanted to shout out the words, "We have to be outside. Do you have a better idea?" I wanted to explain everything. I wanted our house to be the same. I wanted everything to be the same. Tears fell down my cheeks, but I was silent.

Eventually we ended up on Auntie Dee's door step. "Oh. Come in." she quickly opened the door, ushered us in, and then shut it again. It was like she was afraid that something would come in. Mum, Auntie Dee and Dad discussed the situation while I drew. "I know it's a turbulent time for you, but it's not going to be a huge problem.

You just need to make an appointment so the house can be fixed." I could hear Auntie Dee saying. I imagined her shrugging her shoulders, her red ponytail bobbing outside her bandana.

"Yes. I know. I'll do it now." Mum sighed and was silent for many moments before she spoke again. "It will be fixed by tonight." Mum had stopped crying when we arrived but her eyes were still red and strands of hair were falling out of her bun. Mascara was dripping down her cheeks and her lip stick was a mess. Mum had fallen apart.

I walked into the room where Dad, Mum and Auntie Dee were sitting around a table. I looked over Dad's shoulder at his phone. On the screen, we could see our burnt house being rebuilt. A big machine was throwing the relics of the house into a bucket and adding to what was left of the house. It was like a gigantic 3D printer. Soon, I could see the inside walls that separated my room and Mum's. Then I could see the wall that separated the living room and kitchen. I hummed on my way back to my DrawPad.

It was night when we left Auntie Dee's house. We walked into our new house. Our furniture had been replaced and it looked just as it had looked before. Mum was crying, but she reassured me they were 'happy tears'. Our house was new but it still felt familiar. I walked into my room. My smile faded as I rummaged through drawers and shelves. Most of my stuff hadn't been burnt, but something wasn't there. In my dismay, I stared at the ground and noticed burnt fragments of paper. They were black around the jagged edges. Blueback was gone. I went online and got into the queue. Big red letters came up onto my screen. YOU MAY ACCESS OUR WEBSITE IN TWO MINUTES. I waited. I typed Blueback into the search bar and clicked order. It would never be a paper book, but it was a book.

"It was only 20 years ago when people stopped going outside. Staying inside led to a healthier world. Your job is to write about what our planet would be like now if people still ventured outside." The teacher's telephone voice still drives me nuts.

"A vivid imagining of family and social life in the future on a planet where nobody can leave the house. An intelligent and observant story told with a light touch."

Ursula Dubosarsky

The Golden Pen Award 2020 Judge



**THE
GOLDEN PEN**

WRITING AWARD 2020



Middle Category

Aged 12 – 14



Summer Allen

My name is Summer Allen, and like most Scribblers fans, my bookcase is currently overflowing. I'm looking forward to sports resuming, but honestly could have done with a few more weeks of online schooling.

I plan to travel when I leave school in a couple of years, and despite 15 years of people asking me, I still have no idea what I want to be when I grow up.



Winning Entry

I'll Be Tall One Day

Summer Allen



I'll Be Tall One Day

Summer Allen



I want you back my dear sweet earth
I want to relax in your loving arms again
Or you to relax in mine,
Whatever you prefer.

I want to hold you while we watch the autumn sun stretch over the horizon
And disappear beneath your curves
I want to stroke your hair alive with fireflies underneath the moonlight
And watch our gentle fire burn
I want to kiss your cheeks while your fingertips trace winter breezes
Or tickle you so hard your laugh creates thunder on this quiet night
And the symphony of cawing birds in the mellow morning light
Whichever you would like comes first
Whatever you want I prefer.

The truth is I miss you more than ever before
They weren't lying when they said losing something only makes you want it more.
The distance between us is unfathomable, colossal, astronomical
Or rather just the width of my front door.

And there is no sadder sight, than a vacant park,
With no laughter running rampant,
Or little children playing amuck.
The swings hang stoic
The sand pit unturned
The see-saw sits still
The birds chirp happily, their trees undisturbed

The air is filled with lonely
At the shopping centre,
Or a closed coffee shop on an empty street.
Apocalyptic but simplistic
The world continues on quietly today.

I miss you



And I can't imagine another tomorrow without your embrace
My room is cold, I want the sunshine on my face
And I know you asked for space and I love you too much to
disobey your wishes
But really?
1.5 metres feels a little excessive.

So please, let me tuck your hair behind your ear
and hear you laugh in this morning light
the moon still standing post as cupid's witness,
little blue birds tittering in the distance

Take me back and hold me tight
I miss you, I miss my life.
And I know it's silly to miss such little things
But I am composed of moments
Some big
Some small
A few new
Many old

But with every moment I grow larger
I begin to fill the space you left for me
And while I may be small now,
I'll be tall one day, you'll see

And while I know that the separation will be good for you
I'm sad to say I'm not coping well
When my doctor saw my moods were blue,
She just laughed at me and sighed
"Oh sweetheart,
withdrawal is just heartbreak in disguise."

So there you have it
I have a formal diagnosis
A good old case of
I-miss-you-osis

For I miss swimming at the beach
Surrounded by my friends
And hearing stories told in big groups
Laughter in circles larger than 10

I miss skipping through crowds with my little sister
And complaining about the prices at the cinema
I miss eating popcorn I barely like
And watching a foolish character wave a knife



Its little things I know
But that's what love is my earth
All the little things put together
But I'm sad to say I'm missing the final piece of the puzzle
I think its outside with you

So let us return to making moments
Take my hand
And trust me when I say

I love you

And while I may be small now
I'll continue you to grow
Don't tell me I'm foolish
I'll be tall one day you know

"A declaration of love for the Earth in free verse. Vivid imagery and varied stanza length make this an emotive and thought-provoking piece."

Nadia King

The Golden Pen Award 2020 Judge



Cecile Bonfils

In the future, my goal is to publish my own novel and I would like to become a journalist when I am older. Some of my favourite things include writing, art, cats and theorising about the world.



Shortlisted Entry

The Key to the World

Cecile Bonfils

The Key to the World

Cecile Bonfils



It was a dusty shop that looked like it had been there for several centuries, while everything around it had evolved. The shingles on the roof were mossy and the windows were cracked, the paint on the door peeling with age. It was the sort of shop you couldn't help but enter, not because of its window display or the flashy posters but because of the mysterious air that it retained, even in the city street on which it was. So, I entered. The shop was small, with only a few shelves in it, each crammed with trinkets and ornaments of all shapes. I walked through the rows, tracing the shelves with my fingertips and examining the occasional glass turtle or pocket watch. Around halfway through the second row, a small box caught my eyes. It was an intricately carved box, the curved sides depicting a picture of constellations and planets. Most extraordinary was the sound that came from it when I lifted the lid. An indescribable melody that seemed to sum up the world in it, always changing.

"A beautiful piece, isn't it?" I snapped the box shut and whirled around, still clutching it tightly. The man who had spoken was behind the counter peering at me through the thick lenses of his glasses. I nod, suddenly nervous. "I think I'll buy it." It was remarkably cheap for an antique music box.

Home at last, I place it on the kitchen table and examine it once more. Now I noticed that even with the lid closed, the music went on inside the box. Inside, there was a small globe of the world where there might have been a tiny ballerina in any other music box. On the lid of the box, was engraved the phrase 'The key to the world.' "Strange..." I whispered to no one in particular. Then I heard it. My whisper echoing back at me through the music of the box, interwoven with the fabric of the music. Only, now I listened carefully, I could tell it wasn't really an ordinary melody. It was, as I had first thought, the sound of the world: I could hear the busy streets, the whispering of trees in some distant forest, the snow storms and the business meetings, all twisted miraculously into one song, flowing out of that small box!

Over the days, I started to notice a change in the world around me. it wasn't something you could clearly pinpoint, but noticeable to me all the same. Somehow drearier, the days longer. At the same time, the music box seemed to be slowing down too. There wasn't an obvious link at first, but the connection between the box and the world outside soon became evident. I didn't know what might happen if the music stopped, but I knew I had to wind it back up before it did. For in some strange way, the box was the world. But how?

The shop. I needed to get back to the shop. If anyone knew what to do, it was probably the shopkeeper. Yet when I arrived where it had been, it was gone without a trace. There wasn't even a gap between the shoe shop and the café where it had been. It was just plain gone. I fingered the box in my coat pocket and sighed. Now what? 'The key to the world.' Maybe, but where was it? Too bad it didn't come with a key like any normal music box would. Come to think of it, I didn't even know why I bought it in the first place!

Wait. What if I couldn't find the key because I already had it? What if it did come with a key and I just didn't notice it? I took the box out and turned it over in my hands. The keyhole was perfectly round. I peered into it, only to notice something was blocking it. I shook it, and a small piece of tightly rolled paper fell out, nearly blowing away in the gusty wind. I snatched it up swiftly and unrolled it, revealing a short message written in flowing handwriting:

"The answer you've held all along

For it's written in this song:

It's always been here in this earth,

In an item of much worth."



Well isn't that useful! I mean, it's in something valuable on earth. Rather vague directions which I could have figured without a rhyme. I was probably missing something. I read it again. It didn't say on this earth, as I had first assumed it meant... it said in this earth. In this earth... The globe in the music box. I was sure. It had to be! The box was valuable, and I already had it. It must be in the globe! I shoved the paper deep into my pocket and opened the music box. The melody flowed out into the street, already half its original speed. I touched the slowly rotating globe, feeling for any unusual dents or marks that might open it. I placed a finger on the top of it and another where the Antarctic would be and pushed. There was a faint clicking sound, and it swung open by the equator, using the meridian as a hinge. Inside was a sort of twig, or maybe the branch of a tiny tree.

I smiled, not sure what to make of it. I have to say, I was expecting something a bit more exciting than this, I mean, it was the Key to the World, after all. Either way, I plucked it from its place in the globe and carefully slid it into the lock, expecting it to break or jam the lock at any moment... but it didn't, turning smoothly. As I turned the key, everything around me seemed to freeze in time. Then it reversed. Everything flying back faster and faster, somehow spinning until it was all a blur of colour and deafening noise. Then it stopped and all returned to normal. The people wrapped in their coats walking past, the pigeons on the sidewalk pecking at the cracks in the pavement. A car honking in the distance. And through all that, the music box had disappeared. Just like the shop, gone as if it had never been.



“I was gripped from the first sentence of ‘The Key to the World’, and it’s a testament to the author’s considerable talent that I was asking questions until the very final line, and then left completely satisfied. A mysterious, imaginative piece that had me looking at the whole world differently.”

Will Kostakis

The Golden Pen Award 2020 Judge



Shortlisted Entry

The Fittest

Elana Godfrey

Elana Godfrey was born in Perth, Western Australia.

Elana has been writing from a young age – songs, stories and poems. She currently enjoys reading funny and twisty books, especially by authors such as Jay Kristoff, Leigh Bardugo and Carlos Ruiz Zafon.

The Fittest

Elana Godfrey

The spacesuit is heavy. I say spacesuit, but those outdated things are now more suited to keeping us alive here on earth than alive in space. Everyone in space is dead. Most people on earth are dead. That's why I'm here. To find out why.

My ragged breathing keeps steaming up the glass. Exhale. Foggy. Inhale. Clear. I'm tired and I want to get back to Base, but I can't until I make it to the Chrysler building. My eyes continuously scan the street and walls of the buildings. There is no point looking up because the only thing is the sky; grey, wide and vacant. Vacant of stars. I don't look up because there is no need to. There is nothing up there.

The street is long, and making my way down is a tedious task, especially with having to watch every shadow and every scuttle of movement in the corner of my eye. The buildings are covered with glass and paint, or at least what I think is paint but is now so sun-bleached, cracked and peeling, it is as if the very essence of the building has been sucked out. Some windows are smashed and the glass now litters the road where my boots *crunch* down on it.

Could this be your world? Tumbling cities and survivors barely surviving?

I carefully pick my way over the cracks in the pavement, made challenging by my heavy boots. *Thud, thud, thud*. Through the fissures there are weeds; bright, green and lush as if mocking me, laughing, "we are thriving, so why aren't you?" Good question.

The Chrysler building looms ahead. This is the last known point of contact between Base and Red Squad and my heart begins to quicken as I step into the building.

"A13 to Base," I say, "I have just entered the building."



A crackling response that sounds a bit like, "Copy that," is the only reply I get.

"A13 to Red Leader, where are you?" Nothing. "A13 to Red Leader. Red Squad. Cody? Anyone?" Nothing.

I hear the faintest echo coming from deeper inside the building. Heart dancing to the buzz of hope, I tentatively make my way further into the shadows. *Thud, thud, thud*. Could this be your world? Excitement budding to the first sign of life? How did it come to this?

Since 2091, strange occurrences have been happening. It started off small. A few people would disappear each week, then corpses would be found each day, always one more than the previous. Within five years, it had reached the point that in a month, an entire city would be desolate of life, the streets just strewn with bodies. 7.3 billion people wiped out. 7.3 billion bodies in mass graves.

But, it gets stranger. It was not a virus or disease that killed them. It was not the warming planet, the temperatures that soared over 60° celcius each day, or the serentium that poisoned the air. We adapted to that. That is what nature does. It adapts to things it can't change, and changes so that it can survive another day. Our skin became thicker and our veins became bigger to compensate for the searing heat, and we found a way to build suits that would keep us from the serentium levels that affected only humans. So, it definitely wasn't the heat or air that was the killer because the nations who didn't adapt died out, and everyone remaining had a suit.

The strangest thing was these people died in completely different ways. Drowning, crushed, strangulation, exsanguination, suffocation when



there was no serentium... I could go on. It was not just one huge natural disaster. People were just being picked off. They still are.

I find myself in a corridor and listen. Every footstep echoes on the dusty floor, the walls covered head to foot with vines. *Thud, thud, thud*. Seconds tick into minutes, and the silence is so pure that I hear the sweat drip from my brow onto my neck.

Is this reality now? Scared of a world we, as humans, once tamed? Could this be your world?

A scurry of movement behind me causes me to jump. A squirrel climbs down from one of the vines hanging from the ceiling. It stares briefly back at me and scampers off. I immediately regret my sudden movement because its sudden departure makes the silence deafening.

“A13 to Red Leader, do you copy?” A faint crackling comes from behind the door to the right, just before the corridor turns off into darkness. I make my way to the door.

The door, I’m guessing, used to be blue but is now a mess of a rusted metal and scratches, probably from the wild animals. A long, nasty gash runs from the top to the base. It looks as if a lion got annoyed at something. A shiver runs down my spine and I look over my shoulder. Maybe a lion is what made the Squad disappear, and they are behind the door right now, waiting for the all clear after they barricaded themselves in. But they would be answering their radio. Someone would be.

It is only now I realise how much danger I am in. “It’ll be fun,” they said, “You’ll get to see so many animals, you’ll get experience and most importantly, you don’t have the choice because you drew the short straw.”

I always knew I was vulnerable, but now, even in the heat of the hallway, a shiver of chills run up and down my spine. Every instinct is to turn around and run. Red Squad is dead. Something killed them. That



something could be watching me right now, waiting for my back to be turned. Go back to Base. Say you didn’t find them. How would they know? But, Red Squad had found something. Something really important, but they lost contact with Base before they finished transmitting. Before they uttered another word.

Without waiting for my imagination to conjure up more monsters, I turn the knob and push. The door doesn’t budge. Well, so much for that pep talk. I rattle the knob but realise that the door is locked from the inside. So, lion it is then. They obviously barricaded themselves in and are now still in there, sleeping. That’s why they aren’t answering their radio. They have been sleeping for a week. 2 weeks, actually... no, they haven’t. Get a grip. Talking to yourself is the first sign of madness, but I expected that. Okay, the knob is rusted so can easily be broken, I just have to put my back into it. I take a deep breath and crash my body weight against the door. I hear something splinter with an *eeek* that shatters the silence and I step inside. *Thud, thud, thud*.

Carnage greets me. Blood has formed a layer on the floor and boot prints walk their way through the red. The next thing I notice is a face. Red Leader stares back at me with empty eyes and gaping mouth. His swollen pupils and purple lips indicate asphyxiation. A vine is wrapped around his throat so tightly that his neck veins are popping out, and his helmet is smashed. I look over and see more bodies. Gashes run up some of their arms and others are so unrecognisable that I can’t look at them, only at the rubble crushing their bodies. The crackling I heard was one of their radios. An eerie noise amongst the stillness.

I feel sick. Nauseous. Maybe a lion wouldn’t be so bad after all. But what killed them? Is it still here? The door was shut, locked from the inside. So what killed them?

I look around but there is nothing to be seen or heard. I should get out of here. Quickly. But first I need to find out what they found and take it back to Base. This is my mission. *Thud, thud, thud*.



I turn back to Red Leader and search his pockets. Nothing. I search all the other Squad members' pockets but come out with nothing. I look around the room and notice a rucksack lying in a pool of pale pink liquid. Diluted blood? A leak in the roof drips into the puddle, causing it to widen ever so slightly. Is it water? I can't remember the last time I drank something. I will hydrate back at Base, I assure myself.

I pick up the rucksack and give it a shake. Oh thank God, its waterproof! I never thought I'd think this, but Cody, thank you so much for coming up with the idea of not just waterproof suits but waterproof bags as well. I look to his mangled body in the corner and whisper my thanks. "A13 to Base, Red Squad down, no survivors," I say into the radio. No reply, only a crackling. "A13 to Base, heading back." Still nothing but a faint crackling. I am too far out of range. I am truly alone.

I unzip the rucksack and look inside. A file of papers is in there. Quickly taking off my gloves, I take the papers out and rifle for anything else in there. Nothing.

I look at the pieces of paper. There are a few pictures but it is mainly words. I quickly read. Each line makes my heart beat faster and my breathing more rapid, so much so that I have to pause for a few seconds to let my helmet de-steam so that I can continue.

Everything I ever knew, ever believed, ever thought, is a lie. Everything you have ever been told is a lie. I don't believe it, but there is proof. A heartbeat. A literal heartbeat. The earth's heartbeat.

I finish the last word of the last line. Time stands still and I just stand there looking at the piece of paper. Everything makes sense. Not just what has been happening in the past century but everything. Every millennium. Every natural disaster. It has a heartbeat. The earth has a heartbeat.

I am snapped out of my reverie by movement. The day has unravelled and the shadows have come out to play. That is why I didn't notice it before. The vine on Red Leader's throat has been slowly unwinding itself. I now know why. And I know that I need to run.

I throw the paper back in the rucksack and swing it onto my shoulder. I spin around and face the door. It is not there. There is only a tapestry of vines where the door used to be. I grab the knife from my belt and madly lash out at the vines. They writhe like snakes but I expected that. I know why.

I manage to cut my way through, and stumble out into the corridor with ripped and bloody sleeves. But, I am not fast enough. A vine lunges at me and wraps itself around the weakest point: my helmet.

I blindly hack at it from behind, but the glass creaks under its strength. A tiny hairline crack appears in front of my eyes. I desperately hack at the vine, letting go of the papers to use both my hands. Another vine begins to wrap itself around my ankle. I frantically struggle and manage to escape that vine. Adapt to survive. Adapt to survive. The glass shatters.

I scramble out of the vines embrace, snatch up the paper and run. I run. Adapt to survive. Adapt to survive. Survive. The words ring in my ears.

I stumble out of the building, my lungs burning from the serentium. *Thud, thud, thud.* My breath comes in wheezes and blood runs down my cheek from the broken glass. Adapt to survive. Adapt to survive. Survive.

I can barely breathe. The world becomes blurry and I stumble, collapsing on the ground.

I roll, clutching the knife in one hand and the papers in the other. I have no energy to move, and all I can do is lie there, looking up at the empty sky. The papers. Those papers that spoke the truth.



In 2065, huge natural disasters swept across the globe due to climate change, or, at least, it initially was climate change. Lesser disasters were caused by climate change, but the continually catastrophic events were caused by the earth. That was the theory, so an expedition was sent to the centre of the earth. Guess what they found down there? A heartbeat, and a heartbeat only signifies one thing; life. The earth is alive.

For thousands of years, humans have been roaming on a living planet. The earth is alive, except it realised that it wouldn't be for long. In its 4 billion years of existence, it took less than two centuries for a creature to bring it to its knees. So what does it do? It adapts. It kills off the creatures that are destroying it to save it and its other life forms. Mother Earth. That's what we call it. Except we call it that because our ignorance makes us think that it is *our* mother. What we don't realise is that humans only make up 0.01% of all living creatures on earth. Mother Earth is mother to all living creatures, so when humans start to kill them all, the mother fights back.

Earth is what caused those catastrophic natural disasters. Earth killed those humans. Avalanches crushed, vines strangled. It wasn't humans that introduced serentium into the air. It was Earth. Serentium only kills humans. Coincidence?

That is what is written in those papers. Nature is beautiful, but also deadly. Our planet is fighting back.

Thunder growls above me and thick raindrops lazily fall. I can barely keep my eyes open. An eclectic storm dances through the sky, painting the pavement with water. Each flash illuminates the ground and sends the world spinning in a haze of light, raindrops pelting the ground. *Thud, thud, thud.*



It gets quite lonely living in your own thoughts. That's why I told myself a story. That's why I told you a story. I haven't seen a human for months. Except Red Squad. They are the first humans I had seen in ages, and they didn't even bother to stay alive for me. Lazy.

I lie on my back and watch the sun flicker as it sinks below the horizon. Every breath hurts and clouds haunt the edges of my vision. My radio crackles but I make no move to get it. It is just static. What else could it be? Base was destroyed a week ago, but my mind kept it alive to give me hope. Hope that I am not alone.

I sound mad, don't I? That's because I am. You see, a week ago, I got a tiny itchy-bitsy crack in my oxygen tank. Serentium has been slowly killing me for a week, sending me mad. That mission to receive the documents? That was just a task to set my mind on. A purpose. Red Squad had gone missing and I needed their help. Turns out, they needed my help.

My vision swims in and out of focus and each breath is shallower than the last. Lighting illuminates the starless sky, highlighting its emptiness. So, what do we do when our own planet wants us dead? My mind begins to float into distant lands and I feel my eyes slowly shut. I guess we'll just have to adapt.

“A terrifying science fiction adventure, where the Earth is fighting back, and the humans have to struggle for their own survival. Great pacing and descriptive writing.”

Ursula Dubosarsky

The Golden Pen Award 2020 Judge



**THE
GOLDEN PEN**

WRITING AWARD 2020



Senior Category

Aged 15 – 17



Ellen Vigus

I am a student from WA with a passion for words. I love writing poetry, and I have my own poetry blog. I enjoy drinking strong coffee and binge-reading good books.

Winning Entry

The World Rewound

Ellen Vigus

The World Rewound

Ellen Vigus



i fall asleep / and in my dream / we are all
walking backwards / towards a forgotten
beginning / the earth inhales darkness / and
exhales light / the shore crashes against
the ocean / and time spins in reverse / we
watch the axe yield / to a regrown forest /
extinction is swallowed / by the rebirth of
creatures long vanished / broken fissures
fuse and smooth over/ the wounded earth
knits together / leaving no scar / graveyards
give birth to a second chance / smoke is
sucked back into stuttering fires / plastic
islands break apart / and life is poured back
into the ocean / ice caps crystallise / the
dusty sky clears / and the earth remembers
her youth / those days when we treated her
like home / those days before she stopped
forgiving us / for apologies we never offered
/ in my dream / the world is rewound / and
we start afresh /

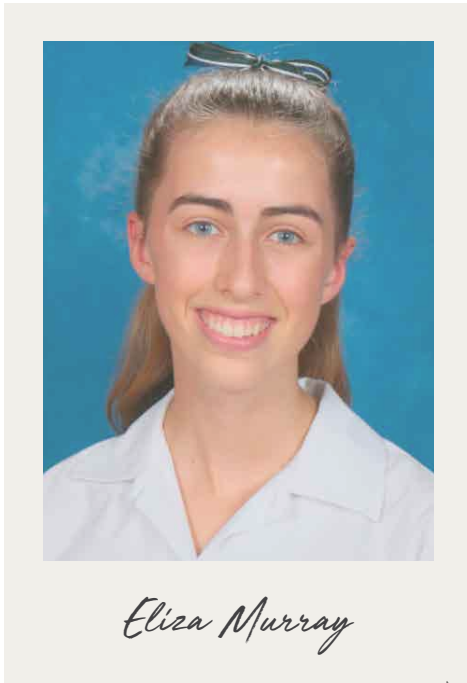
but i wake up / and we are all marching
forwards / into a burning future



“The World Rewound’ is a stunning poem that is as beautiful as it is eviscerating. The poet imagines a world where the damage humankind has wrought is undone, but alas, it’s all in their dreams ... What an ending. What a poem!”

Will Kostakis

The Golden Pen Award 2020 Judge



My name is Eliza Murray. I grew up on a sheep and crop farm in a very small town called Tincurrin and am now partly living in Perth to go to school. I absolutely love the open space, freedom and fresh air when I am at home in the outdoors, there is nothing quite like it. I also love sport, cooking and spending time with my family and two dogs.



Shortlisted Entry

Harvest

Eliza Murray

Harvest

Eliza Murray

sun
golden
glazed crops,
a warm blanket
protecting our land,
grain trickling in like
beads of sand, and then,
dusk falls, a wash of colours
stretching beyond the horizon,
a reminder the day is almost over,
surrounded by a sea of darkness,
crops rustle, swaying to and fro,
one beaming light still awake
giving a quiet murmur,
going up and back
until tomorrow,
under night
sky

fox
dashes,
flicking dust,
crunching stubble,
views of endless nature,
trees replacing skyscrapers,
just me in my own little cabin,
the comb turning like a rotisserie,
a broom sweeping along the rows
going up and back, up and back,
gravel roads, a trail to where
the next cereal box awaits,
drizzle, drops, drenched
two-way radio calls
machines stop,
serene,
calm



hot
balmy,
rocks skip,
ripples spread,
milky water flows,
melted by the warmth
as I forget what is around
and just listen to the sounds,
there's no time for rest, as we go
up, back, up and back, up and back,
the closing of the day, when purple,
pink, and orange paint the clouds
highlighting beauty of our land,
the crop thickens, we smile
last grains trickling in
the land now bare,
trucks gone,
for now,
over

“I loved the beauty and movement of this concrete poem that takes the reader in and out of the physical harvest with an emotional suddenness that lingers in the reader’s mind.”

Ursula Dubosarsky

The Golden Pen Award 2020 Judge



Eva Mustapic

Eva Mustapic is a Year 11 student at Applecross Senior High School where she is in the Art Program and the Music program. She writes fiction, poetry and short stories, and was a joint winner for the 2018 Tim Winton Short Story Award and the youth award winner of the Thunderbolt Prize for Crime Writing 2018. She hopes to write and publish books in the future.



Shortlisted Entry

The Drowned City

Eva Mustapic

The Drowned City

Eva Mustapic



I let myself tip slowly backwards into the water, and screwed my eyes shut as I fell in with a splash. Cold water rushed over my head. The pressure of the ocean pushed in against me on all sides. I sunk slowly, and when I opened my eyes, I was staring up at the surface, iridescent and ever-shifting with silver and blue patterns.

I rolled and kicked, and turned down to what was ahead of me. The endless ocean stretched away all around me. Back on the boat, I could still see the shadow of the shoreline in the distance, but now that there was water instead of wind and sea-spray between the land and I, not a trace of it could be seen, no matter how hard I strained my eyes. I looked down at the dizzying depth beyond my flippers. I felt as if I was hanging at the edge of an endless blue void, deep and immense and never-ending. The only thing that tied this place to reality were the large towers of steel and glass that loomed out of the depths.

I swam towards the top of the closest tower, the square panes of glass shimmering in the blue light. I stopped a short distance from the glass surface and began to follow it down, my faintly dappled reflection matching my every stroke, slipping from pane to pane. As I descended, my reflection got murkier, the algae that had started as a thin film thickening to dark splotches. The water was getting darker too, so gradually that it seemed a trick of the mind at first. I turned on my flashlight, and the bright beam cut a clear line through the water below me, fading away before it touched the bottom. Pale jellyfish pulsed lazily, pearly and ethereal in the half-light. Their lacy tentacles hung like funeral veils behind them, long, thin and delicate. I passed them by with no trouble, and left them to wander the water alone.

I came to two cracked windowpanes, large shards still clinging in their frame. They glistened dully like crooked shark teeth as my torchlight passed over them, and a small silver fish darted out from between them, flitting away downwards faster than my eye could follow. The room inside, once a conference room, was now blanketed with algae and

crusted with limpets. Most of the chairs had collapsed and rotted, and the large monitor was face-down on the floor. There was a shape on the wall, clear enough to identify as a company logo but too obscured to discern more. I continued on.

By the time I reached the seabed, the blue light around me had deepened from pale turquoise to shadowy indigo. The buildings towered above me, casting deep shadows that diffused softly into the weak sunlight that filtered down between the towers. My torch was now a bright beacon in the inky blues, and as I swung it over my surroundings, tiny fish darted away from the bright torchlight, quick flashes of silver that disappeared as fast as I spotted them.

I was floating just above the road, the painted white lines flaring under my light. Much of the tarmac road and concrete footpaths had drifts of sand covering them and gathering around the bases of buildings. The rubbish and debris that collected in the streets from the decaying city had been quickly re-appropriated as anchors for the thick liquorice-like strands of black kelp that drifted back and forth softly with the stirring of the current. Fish flitted about, their round, lidless eyes staring into the torchlight before they turned and slipped away, deeper among the charcoal stalks of kelp that lined the street like silent soldiers.

A twisted piece of metal that was once a bicycle was still chained to a sagging street lamp hidden among the kelp. The bike was mangled and rusted, and thin strands of seagrass waved from between the tread of its tires. I briefly wondered why it had been left behind, abandoned to the slow creep of the rising water. Now the bicycle was owned by the ocean, fused with rust to the seafloor for the rest of its days.

I began to swim slowly down the street, sweeping my flashlight back and forth. Pale green structures that resembled long-bleached corals climbed out of windows and fanned out across walls, signs and walkways, distorting shapes and forms into something almost unrecognisable.



I reached a set of traffic lights hanging at a crossroad, their poles rusted and hunched over like old men, beards of seagrass trailing toward the floor. Their cracked plastic lights watched me as I got my bearings and took a left, and I felt their gaze follow me as I continued on. I kept up my slow flashlight sweep as I navigated through the empty streets. They were quiet, the type of quiet that surrounded you and began to press in and squeeze if you let your thoughts linger. I took a slow breath, feeling the flow of oxygen through my mouthpiece, and pushed the thoughts away.

I swam over the deserted roads and past dark buildings, doorways gaping like the open mouths of gropers. I passed a supermarket built into the base level of a tower, and I could see the rows of rusted empty aisles. A sign still sat outside the door, the paint a thin, peeling veneer, and the wood underneath rotted and black. Bold red letters had been reduced to brown smudges, just barely legible – *CLOSING DOWN*. Now, the only patrons were the occasional fish and the vividly coloured sea slugs that crawled the ocean floor, attacking and eating anything that strayed too close with a ferocity that betrayed their unassuming appearance.

This was no longer a place that belonged to people. The Earth had reclaimed it. Nature had rein-habited the city and reshaped it. Humans were the outsiders in these streets now. Overhead, the jellyfish drifted softly, pale ghosts inhabiting a long-abandoned graveyard. They floated above me as I swam the streets, and after another two blocks, I had arrived.

A massive open square that once would have teemed with people, now lay silent and still. The manicured gardens had been replaced with a thick lawn of seagrass and trees of liquorice kelp. The central water fountain remained, its carved stone patterns now covered in algae and limpets.

I stared out at the seemingly empty square. Nothing stirred. But I knew better. I lifted my torch beam up and pointed it into the space, watching it fill with thousands upon thousands of tiny, bright purple specks. Thanatos Jellyfish.

Each no bigger than a thumbnail and completely clear, they were utterly invisible to the naked eye. Under UV light, however, each glowed a deep, intense violet, with a bright, four-petalled ring in their centre and luminous tips at the end of each tentacle. Despite their size, each contained a toxin that could kill 100 times over, unavoidably deadly and unimaginably valuable. A toxin that, once it entered the body, guaranteed death in under three minutes. It induced cardiac arrest in 15 seconds. No rash, no symptoms, no trace. No residue in the body, no evidence to show in court. Death of natural causes, induced unnaturally. A single vial of Thanatos Jellyfish toxin was worth thousands.

The jellyfish were congregated in the centre of the square, swarming in a bright, immense purple mass. Their numbers dwindled and feathered out towards the edges of the space. A single speck of violet drifted not an arm's length from my head. They gathered each year to reproduce when the ocean currents shifted, slowing down and winding through the city. No one had realised how fast marine life populations had grown back. Not grown back perhaps, but reinvented themselves, this time equipped for deeper, warmer waters, for acidic oceans and for inhabiting the ruins of drowned cities. This time even deadlier. No one had realised but me.

I unscrewed a jar from my belt and carefully scooped the speck of violet in. I stuck to the fringes, careful not to get too close and wary of being overwhelmed. Slowly and methodically, one by one, I gathered jellyfish. Time slid by softly, minutes dripping together so that it was impossible to know how long it had been. Down here, in this other world, among these ancient creatures, time was measured in centuries and ages, not minutes and hours.

Two circles of the square had yielded me three jars densely packed with specks of violet light. I screwed each lid on tightly, trying not to linger on the thought of what would happen if one escaped. I imagined what it would be like to die down here, in this long-lost city, in this unfathomable ocean. I didn't fancy the thought.

My journey back was the same as my journey there. I swam the quiet streets, deep indigo blue light tinting everything a sombre tone. I swept my path slowly with my torch, checking for any tiny violet jellyfish that may happen to float too close. The traffic lights watched me sadly as I passed them, seeming even more bent and crooked every time I came.

The rusted bicycle lay in its final resting place among the black kelp stems. I wondered yet again what had become of its owner all those years ago. The pale jellyfish hung above me like thin crystal chandeliers, and as I passed them, ascending slowly in measured increments, I wondered just how long they would live here, in this city, in this ocean, on this planet.

I approached the shifting, rippling patterns of the water's surface, bathed in turquoise blue, and I took one last look down at the city that the ocean claimed, just as it had claimed so many others on our planet of blue and dwindling green. The jellyfish would live here long after humans have faded away, and our marks on the Earth have faded too. They've been here for hundreds of millions of years. Is it really such a surprise that they'll survive just as long after each and every one of us is gone?



“Evocative imagery. I kept seeing the lawns of seagrass, trees of liquorice kelp and the reflective towers of blue. Great use of dramatic irony to bring the reader to a powerful and disturbing conclusion.”



Nadia King

The Golden Pen Award 2020 Judge

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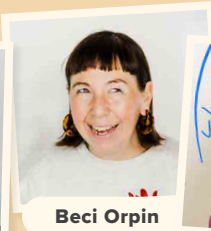
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