**SaveAs Short Story Competition Report 2018**

This is the second time that I have had the privilege of judging this competition. My first experience was in 2014. While the SaveAs competition has always proved highly popular with writers from all over the world, I was astounded this year at the quantity and quality of entries. Compared to 2014, the number of entries has more than doubled. While that made the judging process somewhat lengthy, the excellent standard of writing also made it highly enjoyable.

The remarkable thing is that, out of all of these entries, there was not a single dud. In fact, the standard was so high that as I read them I began to develop imposter syndrome.

Writers displayed a lot of originality in developing themes and plots. Some examples were: vampires running a pig-farm, a gambler who commits the ultimate betrayal, and a unique out-of-body experience where the subject literally swaps places with another person.

As well as spine-chilling horror, there was also humour: a lovely story about a gargoyle and a skeleton that go house-hunting and ghosts who protect their mortal remains by conducting a job interview with a potential pathologist.

Alternative points of view were also explored. For instance, there was a story about a draughty house which, at the end, you realise has been narrated by the resident ghost.

It is not just people who can tell a story. Objects can also haunt us. I particularly liked the story of an unclaimed bicycle which demonstrated that every-day objects in the wrong place can be unnerving and the repeated sight of that object can work on the imagination, building up a sense of unease and fear.

Settings ranged from the historical through to contemporary and futuristic with a reference to artificial intelligence.

My message to all of the writers who entered this competition is this: you’ve all got what it takes. You are all capable of some exceptional work. In my view, you are all winners. Keep writing!

The long-list, arranged in alphabetical order is as follows:

"Dead Ringer" by Kimberley Finn

"Hell’s Bells" by Gabriel Griffin

"Hunted" by Grace Moreton

"Interest" by Wiktor Kostrzewski

"Lucie and the Moon" by Kerry Ward

"Reunion" by Adam Elston

"The Change" by Frances Knight

"The gods are laughing" by Jean Burnett

"They came back different" by Eugenie Pusenjak

"Weekenders" by Josie Turner

The short-list, also in alphabetical order, has a brief report on each of the stories. These are as follows:

**"Dead Ringer" by K.C. Finn**

I sense the influence of Edgar Allen Poe in this story which plays on the theme of being buried alive. It is beautifully written and conceived. The clean, crisp prose carries the reader through the narrative without any distraction or confusion. It is a confident story. It knows where it is going. It is not only a great read but an excellent lesson in story-telling for other writers.

**"Hell’s Bells" by Gabriel Griffin**

This story has a contemporary setting and a theme that echoes the current uneasiness and anxiety of the #MeToo movement. When writing horror or fantasy, the writer’s biggest challenge is to make their story believable and easy for the reader to follow. This story not only achieves that but it also conveys an indefinable sense of something unexplained. It literally haunts the reader.

**"Lucie and the Moon" by Kerry Ward**

This is a stylish story with a real flavour of Angela Carter. It leads both the victims and the reader up the garden path and into the woods. It has the most vivid and visceral description of a transformation that I have ever read. The horror is counter-balanced by tenderness – the mutual love of a mother and child – and the terrible grief that comes from loss.

**"The Change" by Frances Knight**

This is a unique twist on the theme of an out-of-body experience. In fact, it is an out-of-your-own-body and into-someone-else’s-body experience. It follows one person being pitched into a totally alien environment while trying to reclaim what is familiar. The result is very disturbing. For me, there is an underlying moral to this story which is that everything we think we know or own is actually ephemeral. Life can change in an instant.

**"The gods are laughing" by Jean Burnett**

This story draws on classical mythology and uses a ‘what if’ scenario. What if a legendary sorceress came to life and took a holiday in the Greek islands? Predictably, the outcome is not good. This story cleverly combines the mythological with the real world. Every year there are news stories of people who come to grief on holiday. This is particularly poignant because, in the middle of celebration, disaster occurs. Altogether, this is a very ingenious story. It is the ultimate holiday from hell.

**"Weekenders" by Josie Turner**

This story made me smile. While there is a ghostly element, it is really a portrait of a group of cleaning ladies who get their own back on their absentee employers. They get up to all sorts of tricks, including staying overnight in the houses for which they are supposed to be caring. In one case, it’s the cleaning lady who gets her come-uppance. This is a really entertaining story, written with great verve and humour. Be careful who you invite into your home.

In reverse order, the prize-winners are:

**Third prize:** Dead Ringer by K.C. Finn

**Second prize:** Lucie and the Moon by Kerry Ward

**First prize:** Hell’s Bells by Gabriel Griffin

**Ends 917 words 21.10.2018**