

US

- COMPETITION WINNING STORIES
- WINNERS OF ILLUSTRATION COMPETITION

2021



BY ITS GROUPS

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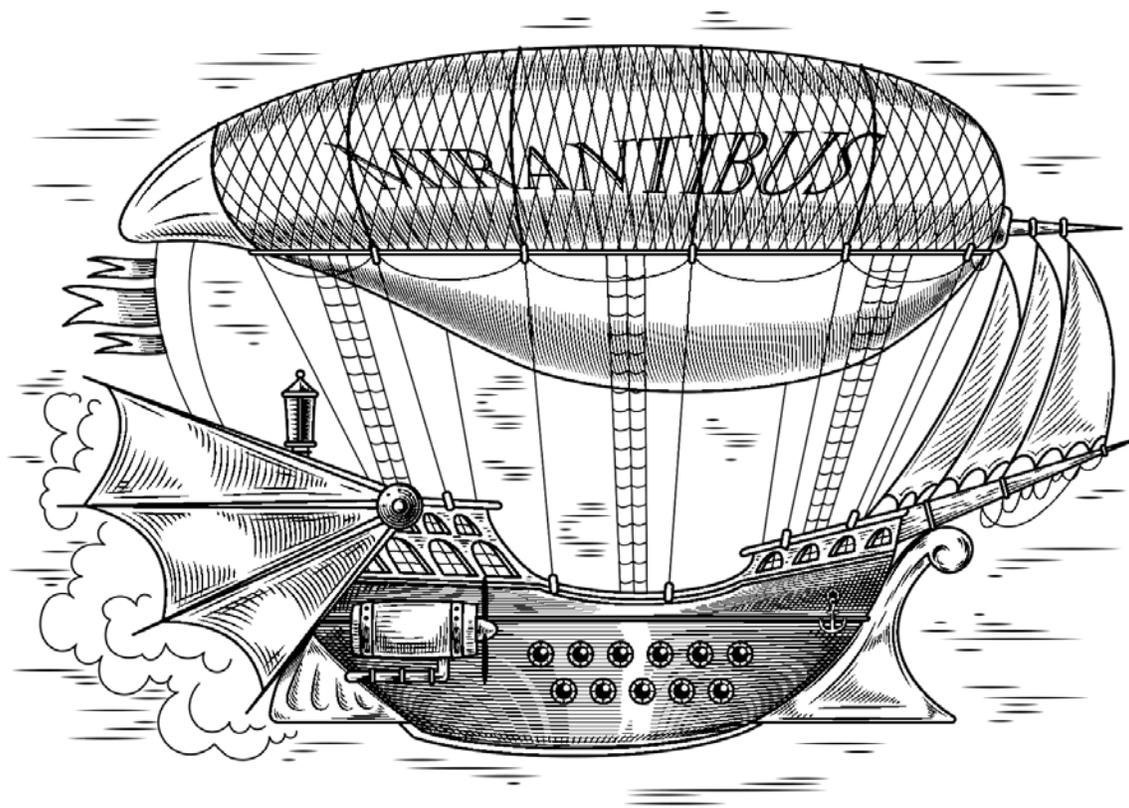
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The Mirantibus by Alex Oussedik

The ground below seemed like a distant memory, constantly being hidden by a vale of white cloud. The birds swam through the heavens like earthborn angels, their songs bursting through the sky with symphonies of joy. The mountains below, like the teeth of a majestic beast, trying to swallow the sun, which fought back with stupefying flurries of sunlight, marking out the countryside below. It was divided into perfect shapes, as if a cubism artist was asked to draw heaven, then dappled it with streaks of light. The rivers, the veins of the rural landscape, connected and joined at the lakes to form a fantastical pattern that only the birds could see, “and me” thought the boy in the air.

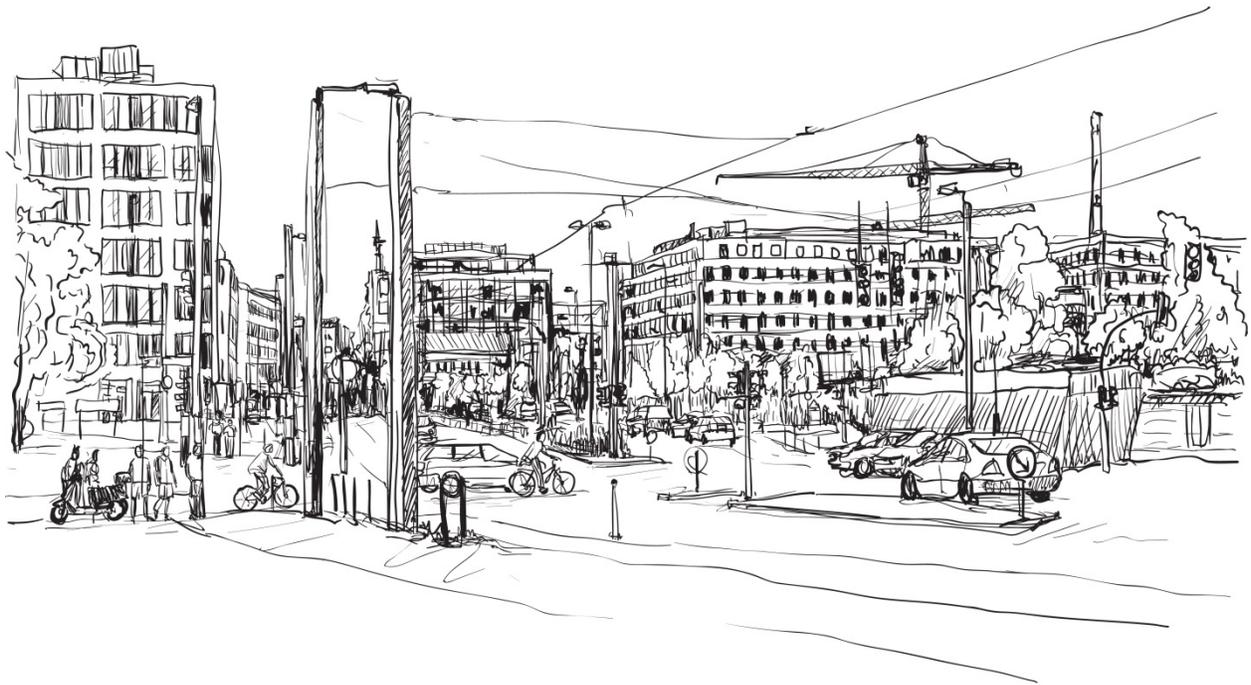
Liam had just looked through his bedroom window. It was amazing the things that you could see whilst on board the Mirantibus, a wonder of the modern age. It had been five years since he had stepped on land, the feel of the soft earth against his skin was one of the many things he had to

give up to board this amazing airship. He missed his friends down on Earth, but he doubted they would remember him. He was only five when he left, not knowing what he was about to get himself into. He got dressed and walked out to the balcony. “Hello, captain”. That wasn’t his father’s real name, but he made Liam call him that anyway. Captain didn’t move, his eyes fixated on the sky ahead, then he screamed so loudly that the Mirantibus shook. “Storm!”

The clouds ahead had darkened, to the point where midday seemed like midnight. There was no avoiding it, they had to fly the ship through the barrier of black smoke. They were in. There was no going back now. The birds still singing their merry tunes, ignorant to the squall ahead. Then, as prayers were being said, a vast crack of dazzling light shattered its way through the dense black smog. Then another, more thunderbolts ripped their way through the air, boiling the rain. They couldn’t see a thing, walking through hell with a blindfold on.

Liam’s father shouted at him, to be heard over the sound of burning light. “Get under the deck, Captains orders!”, His son didn’t argue, and soon he found himself under the floors of the airship, counting his last breaths.

Suddenly, disaster struck the airship’s balloon, it burst. Liam hit his head against the wall, they were falling. Fast. The next few seconds were a blur. The countryside bellow was getting closer every second that he wasted, he had to pull the cord. His parachute exploded out of the bag. He smiled as his father’s did the same. But would it break his fall in time? Liam had always wanted to see the ground again; his dream had come true...





Hours by Ruby Alcock

HOUR ONE Emily trundled along the smooth motorway in the tin can that she called a car. The sky above was filled with angry, rumbling clouds, threatening to split at any moment. Many other cars dragged themselves forward, heading home after a long day of monotonous work, or maybe they were crawling to start a night shift. Either way, every face behind the glass was lined with years of wrinkles etched by too much experience, too many days wasted behind work that meant nothing to them. Yet, this was the best day of Emily's life.

HOUR TWO The sky had given up now, frozen bullets of rain lashing at every window, clawing to get inside. A traffic light shone like a red beacon through the gloom, ordering the impatient travellers to a halt. Emily took the opportunity to put on her favourite playlist titled "the road to freedom". Placing her phone back into the crusty cup holder, the screen suddenly lit up a fluorescent blue. Checking the traffic light was still on red, Emily picked up her phone again and held it in front of her face. "Prison breakout: who, what, where and when", it read in bold letters. After another anxious glance at the traffic lights, Emily clicked on the article. Several paragraphs talking about a mass prison breakout only a few miles from where she sat. A red band stated serious-do not approach if seen over a photo of one particular man with a close-shaven head and

tattoos up to his chin. Suddenly, car horns screamed and Emily's head jerked upwards. The light was green. She urged her rusted car onwards.

HOUR THREE Emily fumbled in her bag. She found an energy bar. It tasted like cardboard, but it was better than nothing. Emily was still in the ocean of sluggish vehicles, moving slower than the rain clouds overhead. She reached for the map. Most of the corners were ripped, the yellowed paper stained with unknown substances. She checked her speedometer. 10 mph. If she travelled at this pace for the rest of the journey it would take her 9 more hours to reach her destination. Emily smiled. She thought of the home she had left behind, each wall squeezing tighter and tighter each day. It was unbearable. So, she was driving somewhere, anywhere without the suffocating pressure of them. Her smile stretched into a grin.

HOUR FOUR The rain had eased now, patches of blue breaking through the grey. Bang. Emily jumped in her seat. A man was knocking on her window. She rolled the glass pane down. Her soft hazel eyes widened in shock. Her lips parted in horror. There stood a man with rain dripping down his close-shaven head and rolling down to his neck tattoos. He was wearing an orange jumpsuit with the number 2247 sewn onto the collar. A police siren whined in the distance. "Help, please," he begged, his voice deep and low. Emily had a choice. She stared at the soaked man for a couple more seconds. She unlocked her passenger door.





The Curse of Miller Mansion by Almo Pang



BANG. The mahogany door of Miller Mansion slammed shut behind the two frightened figures.

The dark, damp and cold weather outside, had shown little mercy to its shivering guests.

The mansion that Mary and Maddison had just trespassed into, appeared to be uninhabited. There were many peculiar paintings of people, whose eyes seemed to follow Mary and Madison's every move. Maddison shrieked at a lion's lifeless head, hanging

on the wall. Its preserved orange eyes stared at her. She shivered, as she felt the hairs on the back of her neck, stand.

Mary lit a candle with a matchstick nearby. Strangely, a few seconds later it went out, in a wisp of smoke. "Mary, let's go!" Madison said, with a tremble in her voice. "I don't like the feel of this place!"

Madison tried to pull Mary out of the mansion but Mary stood stock still, refusing to budge.

"Come on, Mary," said Madison. "Listen, can you hear it?" Asked Mary. "Help, help me," begged a voice that was so quiet that you could have mistaken it for the passing wind, outside.

Mary and Madison rushed towards the source of the sound, wondering what it was. With every step they took, the sound got louder. Soon they found themselves in a narrow corridor, but they were blocked by a locked door.

Madison peaked through the keyhole of the door, there was a lone painting. In the painting, there was a girl being imprisoned by an evil-looking man. Her eyes looked directly at Madison, and seemed to say "Help".

"We have to help her!" urged Madison. Just as she said that, Mary picked up a rusty key lying on the floor. Then, she inserted it into the keyhole and turned it a full circle. Click, the door creaked open.

They rushed into the room, the door behind them instantly shut. The room turned freezing. At the same time, the painting came to life. The evil-looking man's eyes turned red as he let out a menacing laugh. Mary tried to scream but nothing came out. Madison blacked out from a combination of shock and terror.

As soon as the evil man stepped out of the painting, Mary could see that it wasn't human. It was smaller than a dwarf, it had red eyes and a furry face. Its teeth were yellow, sharp and pointy. Strangely, it was wearing a suit and tie. Mary had no choice, but to shield her nose from the monster's foul smell of rotten eggs. The monster dragged Mary and Madison, effortlessly, into the cursed painting of Miller Mansion. Darkness.

The two girls who had just appeared in the painting, looked exactly like Mary and Madison.





Abduction by Shamindra Wijasuriya



I woke up to a ringing sound in my ear. My head throbbed as if I might never see the light of day again. I hauled myself up, yelling “Hello?”

“Is anyone here?”

There was no reply.

I wandered aimlessly, looking for a whisper of life.

Just then, I heard a clatter of tin cans.

From behind, someone shouted “Who are you?”

I turned around to meet myself face to face with a man slightly taller than I was. He wore a sinister expression across his greasy and scarred face. His hair was blonde with a tinge of brown.

“Who are you?” He asked again with a slightly gentler voice.

“I am...” I paused. Who was I?

An awkward silence passed between us.

I stared at my bruised limbs and my ribs and my farmer's clothes.

Who was I? Why was I wearing farmer's clothes? Was I a farmer?

“Are we dead?” I asked, knowing it was a silly question.

“I’m not dead... as for you ...” he said, staring at my throbbing head and my almost paralysed arms.

“We better get you inside,” he continued, still staring at me.

This man ... he looked familiar, but I couldn’t figure out whom. He grabbed my arm and dragged me inside.

“Quick get inside. I’ll distract them,” he whispered to me. I had no idea what was going on but I did what he asked and gently spread myself on the closest bed.

A girl who was wearing a red dress and an oversized coat over it, stared at me as I opened my eyes. After a long silence, I asked.

“How long have you been here?”

“From the moment you slept,” she replied as if this was obvious.

“Of course,” I mumbled beneath my breath. I was no longer in my farmer's clothes; I was in pyjamas and tucked under a warm blanket. The girl said, her face vacant, “Would you like to meet the others?”

“The others?” I asked, imagining other people with that same expression.

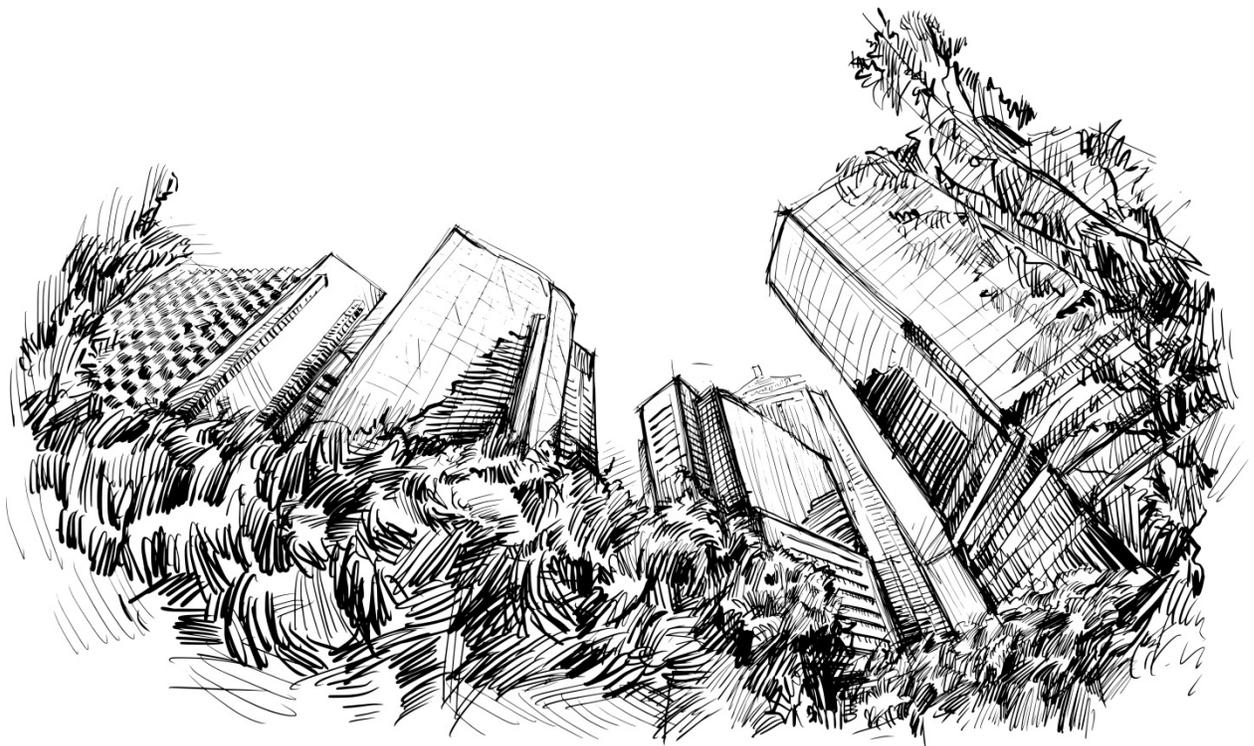
“Yes, come on,” she said excitedly.

I stood up and followed her through countless rooms and corridors. As she walked, her legs were unusually straight. That was just how some people walk.... right?

I tried walking like that but my legs wouldn’t cooperate. I tripped and stumbled, landing on the girl’s back. As my weight pressed against her, she didn’t flinch. She didn’t even stumble; she walked on as if nothing had happened. There was something unusual about her. She turned around and looked at me with cold blue eyes and said in a new voice, much like a growl. “Get in.”

I didn’t budge, wondering what would happen. She yanked me inside, locking the door behind us.

In the room, a trapdoor on the ground was just inches away from me. “Goodbye old friend,” she said as she shoved me into the trapdoor. I waited for the pain to bite ... but it never did.





On The Run by Shamindra Wijasuriya



The walls seemed to whisper ‘don’t go in’ as I ventured further into the shadows. It felt like years before it opened out into a circular-shaped room. Old furniture lay unused in the corner. It was as if someone used to live here.

At the back of the room, behind a hand-crafted door, engraved with patterns, I heard the sound of running water. It sounded like a violent gush of water eroding the banks of a river during a monsoon. I tiptoed to the door, trying hard not to make a sound. The wooden floorboards squeaked under my weight. I stayed still, hoping whoever or whatever had not heard me. But they did, the door opened with a groan.

“Arghh!” I screamed, as I opened my eyes, my forehead beaded with sweat.

“Another vision?” my mum asked from across the room.

I nodded. I felt as if I had spun around several times. My mum dashed to my bedside, a glass of water that had a tinge of green, in her hand.

“Drink this,” she instructed. I drank in silence until I had finished the whole cup. I, immediately, felt better.

“Gosh. What was that?” “Lemonade?” I asked.

“That was anecence, a medicine for emergencies,” she replied. I got up and wobbled to my bedside table to check the time on my clock. It was 3:41 am!

“Get dressed, we better leave now,” my mum said, staring out the window.

Leave now? Why? Where? All these questions were running through my mind as I got dressed. I put on a blue shirt, one I got for my tenth birthday and some cowboy-like jeans. I brought snacks and water just in case we were going for a morning hike. My mum knew that I loved the wild. Sometimes I would sleep in the backyard with my dogs and gaze at the stars.

At 4:00 am, I jumped into the car and my mum sped off towards the woods. The thick brown trees loomed over us like giants. We kept on going until I couldn’t help myself.

“Where? Why? How?” I had so many questions I couldn’t even talk properly.

“All this will be explained later,” she mumbled.

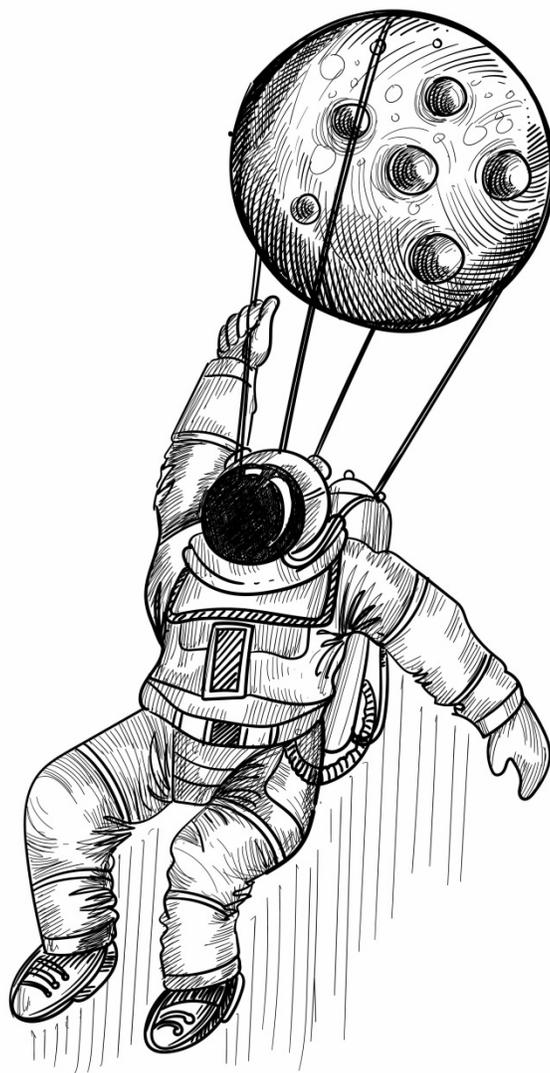
In the distance, I glimpsed an unusually large bird. Never have I seen anything like it before. Soon, it started circling directly above us.

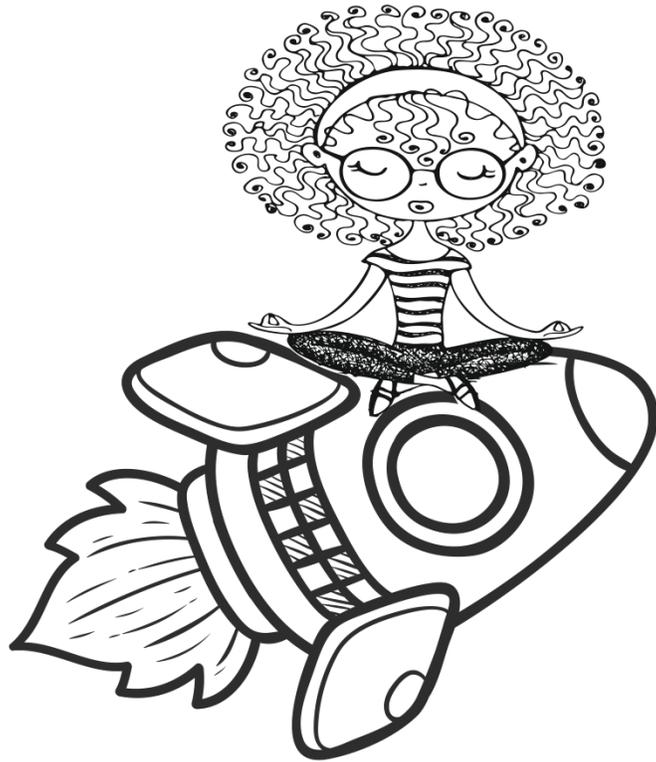
“Oh no!” my mum exclaimed.

The spotlight was on us. More birds began circling above. Then, from the sky, a bird plummeted down. Its claws stretched out and its beak quivering with excitement. But it never made it to the car. It came close until out of nowhere, a rock flew straight into the bird’s eye and the colossal creature crashed to the ground with a thud.

My mum, engrossed in her driving, had no idea what had just happened.

“There we go,” she said, pleased with herself, her fingers fiddling the buttons on the car’s dashboard. The engine roared before our car rocketed from the road, straight into the sky.





Goldilocks (The Galactic Version) By Max Bett



Once upon a time, there lived a little girl. Everyone called her Goldilocks because she had golden hair and was excellent at breaking through locks. The police have been trying to catch her for years, but she always got away. One day, Goldie was on her neighbour's planet, trespassing as usual, trying to steal his Space Wagon. "Oh great! This craft doesn't have an alarm." said Goldie. She opened the door, got in, and started the jet boosters. "Oh no! These Space Wagons always need to warm up! This guy really needs something from NASA. Hope he didn't hear me." Suddenly, Goldilocks heard shouting and the robot guard came running out of the house "Ahhhh!" she screamed. But then the jet boosters came to life and Goldie

flew away. “Phew. That was a close one.” As she was flying in the stolen spacecraft, a beautiful smell met her nose. “Mmmmm... smells like sweetie infused gingerbread! It seems to be coming from The Three Bears’ Planet; Wait! The three bears planet?! But that’s in the galaxy of The Deep Dark Woods! There are tons of dangerous out of control meteor showers in there; oh, but that lovely gingerbread. Oh, I can’t resist... Right, I’m going and that’s that.” So, Goldilocks put the jets to full thrust and off she zoomed. When she entered the galaxy of TDDW, she was threatened once or twice by meteors, but that didn’t stop her. Finally, The Three Bears’ Planet came into sight. “Lovely, the bears are out and as usual, have forgotten to close the door.” A mischievous smile spread over her face. Goldie parked the spacecraft and went in. On the table was an enormous plate of sweetie infused gingerbread biscuits. “Ooooh, yummy!” said Goldilocks as she took the plate off the table and put it in the craft. Meanwhile, a trap snapped on the table. “Oh, I am tired. I know! I’ll go and have a little nap upstairs.” So, Goldie climbed the stairs, opened the door into the bedroom, and just as she was about to lie down on the bed... twang! A net flew onto her and a police robot shouted “I’ve got her!” Goldilocks lay in shock, not knowing what was going on. “What’s happening?” she asked. “This was a trap set up for you” answered the robot.

“He, he, he.” sniggered the three bears. “Off to the station with you.” said the police robot. And so, the spacecraft was returned and so were the biscuits, but for Goldilocks, ho ho, well she was sentenced to five years in re-education.





Gran's Magic Jams by Frankie MacKinnon

Lu knocked on the door of the cottage and waited, bouncing on her toes. Ivy snaked up the front of the house and nearby a tall tree bared the weight of many birdhouses. It was a summer day. Clouds tumbled over the sky and the sun blanketed everything below it in warm hugs. The door opened and a woman with skin like crumpled paper and dancing blue eyes stood there, smiling happily. “Gran!” Lu nestled into Gran’s blouse.

“Nice to see you, dear,” Gran laughed, “Come in!”

As Lu stepped into the cottage, she was immediately enveloped in a familiar herb tea aroma. “Now,” said Gran, “I need your help. I need you to test a new jam that I’ve been working on.”

Lu’s eyes lit up.

Together they walked through the house, out of the back door and into the overgrown garden. At the far corner of Gran's jungle of weeds was an old shed. When they reached it, Gran unlocked the shed door with a key that was tied around her neck. Before them lay the most wonderful sight: a bronze machine that filled the whole room. It had tubes and tanks, sieves and stirrers and lining the walls on shelves were jars of different colour jams. Gran took down a light green jam that had a label reading: ocean view, and passed it to Lu along with a teaspoon. Lu scooped out some jam and popped it into her mouth. "I used blueberries, seaweed, grapes, green apples, cornflower petals and as always – a touch of imagination..." Gran whispered.

Now, not only could Gran make delicious jams that tickled your tongue and warmed your whole body, she made jams that could each paint a different picture in your mind.

Lu smiled as the jam bloomed an image in her head. A calm blue sea, tumbling over the soft sand of a beach. Lu opened her eyes. "You've done it again Gran!"

Summer ended and along with the frosty wind, came sad news. Lu missed life with Gran. She missed her weekly visits to the cottage, she missed Gran's warm smile, but most of all, she missed the afternoons full of laughter, where they'd invent a new flavour of jam. Life just wasn't the same.

One morning, Lu was eating breakfast, when her mum sat beside her at the table. "Here," she passed Lu a key hanging from fraying string, "Gran wanted you to have this." Lu looked at it; it was the key to Gran's shed. She knew what to do.

Lu unlocked the door to the shed and stepped inside. She popped a bag on the table and pulled out its contents. A flask of herb tea, strawberries, apples and a banana – Gran's favourite foods. She put them in the machine and waited. After a while, she pulled out a jam. It was blue, she tasted some. An image bloomed in her mind, an image of Gran. Lu smiled – her first smile for weeks.

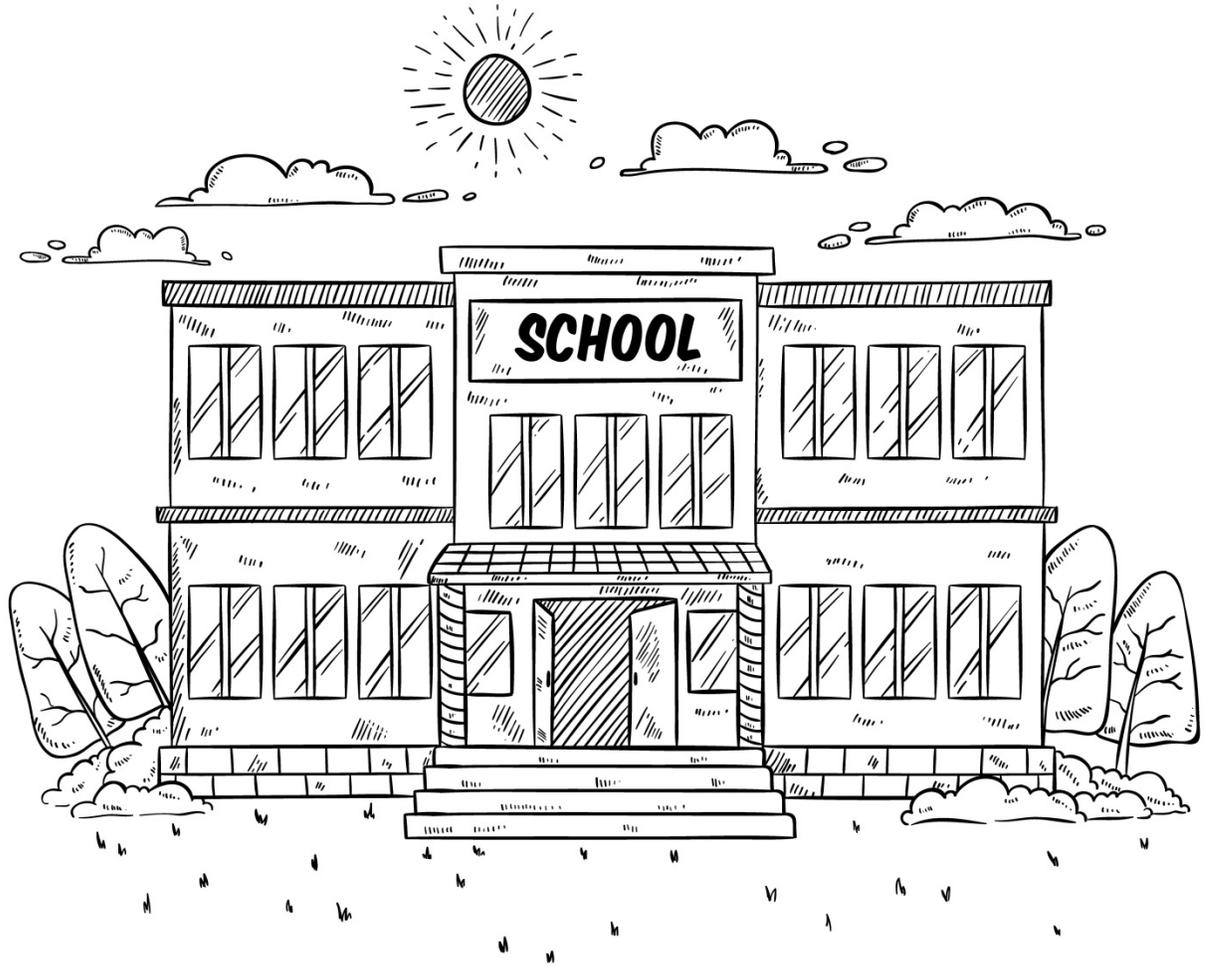




Time-travel by Rhiannon Bradshaw

I flashed my ticket at the robotic security guard with an artificial smile plastered across his face and strolled inside the time traveling building. The hubbub lessened enormously inside and I breathed a sigh of relief as I took in the room. Screens revealing the next destination buzzed above my head and timelines lolled over acres of walls, people chattered pointing out the next ‘age’ they were going to visit. Men and women stepped into boxy, old-fashioned lifts which whirred away, shooting them into the unknown like astronauts blasting into space. I shuffled over to the shortest queue of people heading off to 2020- the year of COVID19. A robot handed out leaflets crammed full of grainy images of the past. I flicked through

hoping to get a sneak peek of the coronavirus age but the booklet was so thick, I'd only made my way through half of it before I was at the front. I gingerly placed a foot inside the machine and sat back into the seat, buckling myself in so tight I could hardly breathe. A vending machine offered "The essentials for this era" which included a face mask and a mini bottle of hand sanitiser. Suddenly, a gust of warm stuffy air flooded the lift and, the old-fashioned hands of the analogue clock above the exit door began to spiral backwards uncontrollably. The clock hands came to rest and the doors dinged open. I had one hour to explore - no more or I'd be stuck here forever. I could see nobody on the streets until I reached a supermarket, which seemed to be the main place of congregation. The queue sprawled around the entire car park and right out onto the pavements, people stood more than arms length away from the person in front and everyone had on masks. I slotted into the queue. People towards the front slowly trickled inside until it was my turn, I adjusted my mask and wandered in. Every aisle I drifted along had empty shelves; no flour, no toilet rolls, no pasta. The only thing that seemed to be flooding the shelves were multi-packs of 'Corona' beer which I had never even heard of. I hurried out the supermarket, taken aback by everything I'd seen, and decided to make my way back to the machine. Eavesdropping, in silent shock, I listened as a man on his phone mentioned the death rate hitting tens of thousands. I quickened my pace, eager to escape this unfamiliar world. I was only a couple of steps away from the time travelling machine when a police man stepped in front of me. Next thing I knew, he was asking me to follow him to his car. Apparently I was breaking the law by wandering the streets. I did as I was told. Would he arrest me? Worrying questions swamped my thoughts and I realised in panic, that the machine would be leaving soon, with or without me.



after going through many ideas, he came up with a proposal. He told the king, ‘We can keep them busy by locking them in a room with an adult teaching them boring stuff. Soon their minds will be filled with knowledge and forget about us. I call it “school”.’ The king seemed to like it. After ‘school’ was invented, the kids almost fell asleep during class! When class was dismissed, they immediately ran out of the school and continued playing with the cockroaches. The king told Knight Krooky that they needed to keep them busy until dinner time. He started thinking right away. He tried traps, tricks, even attacks, but nothing seemed to work. He thought, ‘I need to think of something that they can do themselves...’ After a while he told the king, ‘We can give them some very hard exercises to do until dinner time, I call it “homework”.’ The king thought the idea was brilliant. After ‘homework’ was invented, some kids were lazy and did it slowly. Some kids wanted to play so they did it quickly and kept playing with the cockroaches. The lazy kids played at night. The king told him that they needed to keep them busy no matter what. He thought and thought and thought, but nothing came to mind. He tried everything possible. Suddenly, he thought, ‘What about exercises after exercises?’ He told the king his crazy thought, ‘I call it “revision”, and every once in a while, they would have a test, exam, or quiz to see if they really did their revision.’ The king was very proud of his knight and decided to try it out. Soon they taught students about cockroaches, about how dirty and bad they were. They had a quiz and didn’t have time for playing. After weeks of hard work, the problem was solved. King Cooshroast was delighted and gave his crown to Knight Krooky, and the cockroaches lived happily ever after. This is why we hate cockroaches.

Winners of Illustration Competition 2020



Aiza Sajid
11 years old
From Karachi, Pakistan

I am Aiza Sajid, an eleven year old student of grade 6 Beaconhouse School System. I am a kinesthetic learner who enjoys learning new concepts. I am an optimist who finds joy in helping others. I have deep interests in sketching and painting, for I see them as significant sources through which I can depict my ideas and thoughts. Moreover, I make miniature objects which delight me. Through all of my abilities, I wish to benefit the people around me and I hope to become a better person in the future.



Diana Válová
16 years old
From Most, Czech Republic

Each of us has something special to say. We can talk about our feelings, opinions, experience, things we love and hate...Really there's a lot to talk about and everyone has a different way of expressing, for me it's art. It's my way of communicating with you. I love looking for a different ways and methods in drawing, pushing my boundaries, changing things for the better, thinking about them and discovering! So let's go and find your own way and never stop listening to others.



This exclusive collection contains the top nine winning entries of the International ITS Groups flash fiction competition 2020.
The winners of the International Writing Competitions 2020

- 1- The Mirantibus by Alex Oussedik
- 2- Hours by Ruby Alcock
- 3- The Curse of Miller Mansion by Almo Pang
- 4- Abduction by Shamindra Wijasuriya
- 5- On The Run by Shamindra Wijasuriya
- 6- Goldilocks (The Galactic Version) By Max Bett
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