



SISTERS IN CRIME 30th SCARLET STILETTO AWARDS CEREMONY

Rising Sun Hotel, 2 Raglan St., South Melbourne

6 for 6.30pm Saturday 23 November 2023

7.00 pm: SUE TURNBULL: [Introduce myself]

Sisters in Crime/Brothers-in-Law, welcome to Sisters in Crime's Scarlet Stiletto Award ceremony for the best crime and mystery short stories by Australian women. It's the 30th anniversary! Let's give the awards – and ourselves – a big clap!

[Pause for applause.]

[Indigenous welcome:] At the outset, on behalf of Sisters in Crime Australia, we respectfully acknowledge the Traditional Owners of this land, the people of the Kulin Nations. We pay our respect to their Elders, past, present and emerging. We acknowledge and uphold their continuing relationship to the land and the sea.

It's wonderful to see so many crime fans gathered here tonight to celebrate 30 years of top crime and mystery short stories by Australian women. And it's great to see so many in scarlet and pearls. As they say, better red than dead! (Hmmm, that could be a good name for a bookshop....)

According to Thursday's *Age*, red is the new pink – and the trend-setters are Kate, Camilla, and others in the Royal Family. Who would have thunk???? However, we're sure it doesn't indicate a shift in their politics though we don't know about their murderous inclinations.

Tonight, a mystery judge will be checking out your outfits and award a bag of books to the best scarlet and pearls ensemble.

This event has given me pause to reflect ... Back in 1994, the Sisters in Crime convenors were sitting round a table in Park Street, St Kilda, having dinner and plotting our next move. What we didn't know then, but do now, was that the next move would result in a competition that would run for over thirty years, attract 4,582 entries, launch the writing careers of a whole battalion of now famous crime writing women.,

A big question was what shall we call such a competition. Almost more than merchandise and stationery, the Sisters love a good slogan or a good brand. In terms of a slogan, 'It's criminal what a girl's gotta do for a good read' was emblazoned on our highly collectible tee shirts. In terms of a brand, while we knew the Crime Writers Association in the UK had their Dagger Awards, what we wanted had to be something sharper, more lethal, more – dare we say it – more feminine/ist.

I can't remember who called it first, probably the supreme mistress of the double entendre, Lindy Cameron who is also the editor of this new collection of winning stories over the past 30 years (wave), but what we came up with was (customary drum roll please) *The Scarlet Stiletto Award*.

This immediately gave us the inspiration for the best crime trophy in the world – a red high-heeled shoe with its lethal steel heel plunged into a perspex mount. It was a perfect fit. The op shops of St Kilda were immediately raided for every red high-heeled shoe we could find, the Sisters being more inclined towards a comfy pair of flats than a murderous pair of torturous heels.

In the first few years the awards, with prize money attached, went only to first, second and third prize stories, but many writers received Special Commendation certificates. Because we wanted to 'get them while they were young' the Best Young Writer award was soon introduced. Gradually other categories were added to the competition and prize money pool: Malice Domestic, Best Film Idea, Cross Genre, History with Mystery, the Body in the Library, Most Satisfying Retribution...

The only criteria: the writer must be a woman, the main protagonist must be female, and the story must – obviously – be a crime or mystery story.

As someone who was closely involved in the judging process from the start, I can testify to the professionalism with which this was accomplished. Although it was, of course, another good reason to get together and have a party. Being a Sister has always been about having fun, even if our ultimate goal was to promote women's crime writing and create more opportunities for this to flourish. So we went away together for a weekend of reading, laughing and arguing fueled by 'lashings of ginger beer', or something similar.

No names were attached to the stories. As a judge you were handed an anonymised bundle of typewritten pages that were read 'blind', in pairs, to produce a long list that was hotly debated. It was, therefore, always an exciting moment when the 'reveal' occurred and we discovered just who our winners were. Once the same person won it twice in the first two years (and we are looking at our first winner here, **CATE KENNEDY**, who would go on to have a short story published in *The New Yorker* no less), we instituted a new rule. Winning a pair of Scarlet Stiletto's obliged the author to become a judge. So far this has happened an astonishing five times. The Sisters evidently have an eye for new talent. But Cate remains the only two-time winner with a matching pair.

This year **250** short stories are competing for **15** awards and **\$12,720** in prize money and benefits. The first-prize winner also takes home a spectacular scarlet stiletto trophy.

[Unveil and lift up trophy and then re-veil.]

Sisters in Crime has been delighted by the initiative of **Susanna Lobez**, actor, lawyer, author, *bon vivant*, and member of Sisters in Crime who has narrated the top winning stories in the leadup to tonight's ceremony and made them available each Friday for free via the podcast Scarlet Stiletto Bites: Scintillating stories by Australian women on Amazon Google, Apple and Spotify. Just a few to go but we could keep them going if the audience increases and if we can persuade Susanna to keep up such a punishing schedule. In the meantime ...

Susanna – please come up here [present gift bag]. [Photo op.]

At around 8.15pm, I'll be interrogating **DEB COX & FIONA EAGGER**, the founders of Every Cloud Productions, about their lives in crime.

They will shortly be presenting framed certificates to authors of highly commended stories.

It is now my pleasure to introduce **DR CAROLYN BEASLEY**, Course Director of the Masters of Writing, the Discipline Coordinator of the Literature and Creative Writing major and Academic Director of Research

Training for the School of Social Sciences, Media, Film and Education, at Swinburne University of Technology, the Scarlet Stiletto's first prize sponsor. Phew!

DR CAROLYN BEASLEY: Swinburne is so very very **honoured** to be able to support the **incredible** work of Sisters in Crime and the Scarlet Stiletto Awards. It's a privilege to be in the room with so many talented writers and passionate readers and to see return winners and emerging writers making their mark, whether it's by bloodstain, gunshot or poison! We can't wait to read them all!

And thanks to the **unstoppable** Carmel and the Sisters in Crime crew for putting on such an important and fun event. And don't forget that Swinburne offers a friendly and supportive community of writing programs ranging from TAFE, to degrees, to masters and PhDs, just in case anyone needs us!

Thank you for your wonderful stories and may you all go on to win even more awards.

SUE TURNBULL: [Thanks Carolyn.]

Let's please now welcome **CHRISTINA LEE**, a double-shoe winner, who will present the Judges' Report. She wrangles the judges in the final judging session – no mean feat – and has flown down from Brisbane at her own expense to be part of tonight's ceremony.

CHRISTINA LEE: It's a rare privilege to be part of the team that works on the Scarlet Stiletto's every year. This year we had 250 entries, the highest number ever, which was just fantastic. It did mean that the judging was even more of a mad scramble than ever.

This was especially the case because several of our stalwart judges were unable to participate this year and the workload for those who were fortunate enough to be in a position to judge this year was quite high. In the end, we were – as always – surprised and relieved to have reached a series of happy agreements. This year we unanimously awarded 14 prizes and another 13 honourable mentions. Many thanks to all my fellow judges, of course, but can I let you in on a secret?

It is such fun. It's a wonderful experience. This year there was such a variety of enjoyable stories. As usual, most writers focused on murder, but this year also brought a lot of financial crimes – theft, fraud, embezzlement. And we also saw an increased focus on the criminal possibilities of AI and robotics.

The new Campus Crime category was well represented, while old favourites such as Body in the Library and Cross Genre had us on the edges of our seats. We were impressed by some intriguing new takes on the classic whodunnit, and immersed ourselves in a wide range of styles, from the hard-boiled to the poetic. A sincere thank you to everyone who entered this year.

Let me tell you about the fun part. It's a journey. You have to read stories in styles and sub-genres that you might have never seen before, or even those that you have actively avoided. To engage with characters unlike anyone you have ever met. To journey to imagined worlds, to the predicted future, to both historical and imagined pasts. In general, to read well outside your comfort zone, and to make the effort to judge each story on its own merits. It's about whether the writer achieved what she intended, not whether it's the story that I might have thought I wanted to read.

Reading so broadly, and having to take the time to consider why you did or didn't like a particular story, is a fantastic experience that helps clarify your own interests and your style, as well as to illuminate the strengths and weaknesses of your own writing. It's an honour to do this every year.

Thank you once again to all the authors, and to their support teams of friends, families and pets. Women's crime fiction in Australia continues to charm, surprise, engage, frighten and delight. It's been a wonderful ride this year, and I hope everyone in this room is already planning a killer story for 2024.

SUE TURNBULL: [Thank Christina.]

Present her with gift bag.

We won't keep you in suspense much longer in terms of the highly commended stories. I just need to outline the judging process:

- All 250 stories were judged blind.
- There were 8 judges – convenors, present and past, and 2 two-time shoe winners. Each judge had a co-judge in arriving at a first short list. Every story in this final shortlist was read by 5 judges – “The Famous Five”.
- Authors of the shortlisted stories will receive a framed certificate.

I will announce the author, the name of the short story, give you a very short synopsis provided by the author, **DEB or FIONA** will tell us a little about you and then present the award and pose for photos with you. When your name is announced, please make your way up here – quickly please.

Could you please join us here, **DEB & FIONA?** I will properly introduce them later.

We will announce every winner but bios and story synopses will only be read for those who are actually here tonight. Our beautiful assistant, **LINDY CAMERON**, Sisters in Crime's Vice-President, will hand us the framed certificates.

At the end of tonight's ceremony, we'll also call all short-listed authors up here for a group photo with **DEB & FIONA** and me.

Now for the Highly Commended stories, in no particular order.

Apologies from:

VICKY DADDO (Hazlewood South, VIC) for “All About Eve”.

ALYSSA MACKAY (Springwood, QLD) for “Pearl and Jade”.

CHRIS BLACKFORD & KATE WILLIAMS (Mareeba, QLD) for “Where's Wazza???”

NATALIE CONYER (Mosman, NSW) for “The Byblos Code”.

TEGAN HUNTLEY (Inglewood, WA) for “#Blessed”.

CHERYL ROGERS (West Swan, WA) for “Sacrifice”.

SUE TURNBULL: K T MAJOR (Jannali, NSW) was highly commended for “A Tow Out of Line”. It is an unusual police procedural, a story of a grim crime told with humour. Detective Miranda Kellen and her friend Seraphina Ban try to solve the chilling mystery of a hand sticking out of the boot of a towed car.

DEB COX: KT Major was born and raised in Singapore before moving to Sydney in 2013. KT won the Peter Cowan 600 Short Story Competition in the novice category and placed in the top 30 for the SBS Emerging Writers' Competition in 2022. Her work has been published in several anthologies and magazines.

[Present certificate. Deb & Fiona pose for photographs.]

SUE TURNBULL: JACQUI HORWOOD (Clunes, VIC) was highly commended for "Mrs Beth". "Mrs Beth" is a re-imagining of Macbeth set in modern-day Canberra and the battle for the role of Prime Minister. Mrs Beth urges her husband to murder the PM but things don't go as planned and she finds herself playing detective.

FIONA EAGGER: Jacqui Horwood is a librarian and lives in regional Victoria. She won the 2003 Scarlet Stiletto and the 2016 Silver Stiletto; and was highly commended in the 2019 Scarlet Stiletto Awards. She loves her crime hardboiled and her eggs sunny side up.

[Present certificate. Deb & Fiona pose for photographs.]

SUE TURNBULL: EVA LEPPARD from Kingston, Tasmania scored a high commendation for her story, "First Day on the Job".

On her first day on the job as a Paranormal Enforcement Office (Celtic Deities Division), Denise comes across vortexes of doom, spectral horses and an Aussie Rules playing god of art in the middle of Melbourne. But it's not until she begins to investigate a frail, loveable octogenarian that things start to get really weird.

DEB COX:

Eva Leppard lives in the Tasmanian bush with an elegantly sufficient number of children and a disturbingly large number of rescue animal, many of which she raised by hand whether they liked it or not. She primarily writes comic fantasy, and her debut novel, *The Pitfalls of Being a Goddess*, was published in 2023.

[Present certificate. Deb & Fiona pose for photographs.]

SUE TURNBULL: All the way from Canning Vale, WA is **JACQUELINE WARNER** who was highly commended for "Parrot and Malone", an historical mystery set amongst the chaos and destruction of World War II London. Young Violet Scaggs is excited to be working for the famous detective Henri Pierrot and his equally famous assistant Miss Melon. But all is not what it seems. Lies and deception, murder and intrigue flow through to present day where all is finally revealed.

FIONA EAGGER:

Jacqueline has been lucky enough to have had a few short stories published in various anthologies. She is an avid reader, loves cross stitch, Community Theatre (as an actor and director) and her enormous family – one husband, five children and twelve grandchildren (and counting!)

[Present certificate. Deb & Fiona pose for photographs.]

SUE TURNBULL: Over from Modbury Heights, South Australia is **REBECCA DOUGLAS** who has received a special commendation for "Needs Must". It is the story of Sophie and her best mate Abby, who are on the couch in matching Sportsgirl tracksuits one Saturday night, braiding each other's hair and knocking back Jim-

Beam-and-Cokes. They decide to look up Abby's ex-boyfriend online and track him down, which turns out to be a very bad idea.

DEB COX: Rebecca Douglas is an Adelaide-based writer. Her essay "Sanity Sleuth" won the 'best MEAA member entry' award in the Overland Fair Australia Prize 2019. In 2023, her crime fiction manuscript "Welfare Queens" was shortlisted for the Penguin Random House Write It Fellowship program and awarded a Varuna residential fellowship.

[Present certificate. Deb & Fiona pose for photographs.]

SUE TURNBULL: All the way from Mudgeeraba, Queensland is **KELLIE M COX**, who is highly commended for her story, "This Game Will Keep Us Alive". This story is proof that anything is possible when women rise as one. Together, they are an unstoppable force. The story climaxes when sisters fight back for their lives and for each other.

DEB COX: Kellie M Cox draws from her clinical career to create complex and entertaining characters who traverse the globe, exploring themes of life, love, and death. She has five published books and a newfound fascination for short story writing. Her social media is flooded with photos of her gorgeous dogs and long white beaches, two of her favourite things.

[Present certificate. Deb & Fiona pose for photographs.]

SUE TURNBULL: A special commendation goes to **SHARMILA JAYASINGHE** [Shur-mee-laa Jai-ya-sing-her] from Bella Vista, NSW for "Secrets Women Keep" delves into the intertwined lives of three generations of women, revealing the hidden truths and shared struggles they face while navigating tradition, marriage, and societal expectations. Love, mystery, and even murder add depth to their compelling journey of self-discovery.

FIONA EAGGER: SHARMILA JAYASINGHE [Shur-mee-laa Jai-ya-sing-her] is a journalist turned author and a recipient of Deakin Postgraduate Prize for Writing 2023. She is shortlisted for 2023 University of Sydney Union Creative Award and is also the recipient of Verandah fiction prize in 2022. With a Master's in Creative Writing and Literature (Deakin University) Sharmila is currently a PhD candidate at Sydney University.

[Present certificate. Deb & Fiona pose for photographs.]

That's it for the highly commended certificates. Enjoy your dinner. I'll be back at around 8.15 pm to talk to **DEB COX & FIONA EAGGER** about their lives in crime.

If you'd like dessert, please order it before 8.45 pm.

Meanwhile, lots of wonderful books are on sale at the Sun Bookshop stall – 10% discount for Sisters in Crime members. Solve your festive season present problems right now.

You might want to buy a raffle ticket. On offer are 3 bumper bags of book. \$5 a ticket or 3 for \$10. Many thanks for donations from the Australian Crime Writers Association.

Before we award the prizes, I'll be auctioning a Piccoli Portraits Gift Certificate worth \$1000. It includes an initial 30-minute consultation by Zoom, a 60-90 creative portrait session worth \$350, and finely crafted matted and mounted portraits valued at \$650.

Previous successful bidders have been **MAGGIE BARON, KARINA KILMORE, RWR MCDONALD** and **DEBI MARSHALL**. It's great for authors but you don't have to be an author to benefit from this gift certificate.

[DEB COX & FIONA EAGGER & SUE TURNBULL pose for photographs]

[PLAY SHOWREEL]

DINNER

[8.13 pm: Play clip of EVERY CLOUD PRODUCTIONS SHOWREEL]

8.15 pm: SUE TURNBULL:

It is now my pleasure to introduce **DEB COX & FIONA EAGGER**.

In 2009 Deb Cox and Fiona Eagger joined forces to form Every Cloud Productions, quickly establishing ECP as one of Australia's foremost production companies. Under the Every Cloud banner they created three series of international, award-winning, period drama *Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries* (which has sold to more than 170 territories around the world), the legal drama *Newton's Law*, and the ACCTA award-winning youth drama series *Deadlock* (with a k, not to be confused with recent Tasmanian crime show, *Deadloch*, with an 'h'). They also produced the movie, *Miss Fisher & the Crypt of Tears* and the reboot of the much-loved series *Seachange*, for the Nine Network.

Both Fiona and Deb have received numerous accolades including the Jill Robb Award for Service to the Victorian Screen industry, the Business Export Award from Screen Producers Australia, and the Natalie Miller Fellowship for Women in Leadership. Fiona is also an honorary Adjunct Professor for the School of Media and Communications at RMIT, and has taken a leading role in promoting women in front and behind the camera throughout her career.

[in conversation]

8.55 pm: SUE TURNBULL: [Thank DEB & FIONA]

AUCTION OF PICCOLI PORTRAIT \$1000 PHOTO VOUCHER

As I mentioned before, this offer includes an initial 30-minute consultation by Zoom, a 60-90 creative portrait session worth \$350, and finely crafted matted and mounted portraits valued at \$650.

[Take bids. Ask winner to pay Lesley Gillis, the Sisters in Crime treasurer.]

Don't forget to buy some raffle tickets: You stand to win one of 3 big bags of books. The front desk just outside will be opening shortly – rush there to buy a tote bag, t-shirts, books, pens, mugs, and other goodies. Another way to solve your festive season presents problems.

If you'd like dessert, please order it before 8.45 pm.

Raffle, book buying, merchandise sales

9.30PM: PRIZE PRESENTATION

SUE TURNBULL: Now for the prize presentation. As before, winners please make your way quickly up here as your name is called out.

I will announce the winning story and read a synopsis. **DEB COX & FIONA EAGGER** – or possibly the sponsor – will give your backstory and pose for photos with you. Our beautiful assistant, **LINDY CAMERON**, will hand us the framed certificate. The money will be transferred to your bank account. We've done away with cheques!

SUE TURNBULL: The Writers' Victoria Crime and Punishment Award for the most satisfying retribution goes to **ATHENA LAW (QLD)** for her story, "**Model Husband**". The prize used to be getting to sit in a cell for 3 months at Old Melbourne Gaol. Now it's a Zoom course worth \$220.

Here's the synopsis: Artist Erin is happily ensconced in her idyllic farmhouse near Noosa, while her husband Jasper, a high-profile real estate agent, keeps his work and family life entirely separate. It's the perfect balance until Jasper goes missing, and as Erin sets out to look for answers she only discovers more puzzles. What will happen when Jasper's two worlds collide?

DEB COX: **ATHENA LAW** lives in Rosemount in the Queensland hinterland and her words have been published online by the *Australian Writers Centre* and *The Ekphrastic Review*, with more work forthcoming elsewhere. She likes to tackle baking and gardening projects while she's mulling over how to raise the body count in her first novel.

[Present certificate. Deb & Fiona pose for photographs.]

SUE TURNBULL: Now to the Queensland Chapter of Sisters in Crime's Liz Navratil [Nav-rat-il] Award for the story with the Best Disabled Protagonist, worth \$400. The award goes to **SANDRA THOM-JONES (Healesville, VIC)** for "**The Motif in the Motives**".

Prof Alex Macario liked the routine and predictability of working at the university. She found her colleagues' passion for variety and for leaving dirty coffee cups in the kitchen disturbing. But when they started dying unexpectedly, she knew the answer had to be in the pattern.

FIONA EAGGER: **SANDRA THOM-JONES** is an autistic artisan, academic and advocate. She is the author of *Growing in to Autism* (MUP, 2022), and a passionate champion for the inclusion of autistic people in all aspects of society. Sandra lives in Healesville with her husband, younger son, dog, cat, and all things pink.

[Present certificate. Deb & Fiona pose for photographs.]

SUE TURNBULL: The Scriptworks Great Film Idea Award (\$500) has been won by Kim Robyn Smith from Seaford, on the Peninsula, for “Lady Bethany Homestead”.

Young couple, Amelia and Daniel leave hectic Melbourne behind to pursue a new job and tranquil lifestyle in country Victoria. They cannot believe their luck when they stumble upon a fabulous rental deal which is too good to pass up. But their new home delivers more than they bargain for...

DEB COX: Kim Robyn Smith is a published writer of short fiction. Kim does some genre hopping with crime fiction her favourite. Her tales promote our Australian colloquialism through extraordinary events that occur in everyday life. Kim’s stories appear in several anthologies including the Peninsula Writers Club website where she was awarded Summer 2020 Digital Writer in Residence.

[Present certificate. Deb & Fiona pose for photographs.]

SUE TURNBULL: The new Monash University Award for Best Campus Crime worth \$600 attracted lots of entries. The winner is **CAROLINE DE COSTA** for “**Spiderwoman**”. Caroline brings thirty years of university experience to this story of medical research academics behaving badly – and a possible attempted murder.

FIONA EAGGER: CAROLINE DE COSTA is a former obstetrician and gynaecologist who has turned to crime fiction in her retirement. She has published four novels in her Cass Diamond crime series set in Cairns, and been successful in several previous Scarlet Stiletto competitions. She now lives in St Kilda.

[Present certificate. Deb & Fiona pose for photographs.]

SUE TURNBULL: The Clan Destine Press Award for Cross Genre goes to **JOSEPHINE BRICK** from Frankston South (Vic) for “**The Body in the Bookshop**”.

Late one evening, Angela Page stumbles on the battered body of a man in her campus bookshop. Angela doesn’t recall this dark stranger being in her shop that day and she’s sure she’s never seen him before. The mystery deepens as police struggle to find an identity for the murdered man. When all else fails, Constable Jason Liang plays a wild card, and wins.

The award is being co-presented by its sponsor, **LINDY CAMERON**.

LINDY CAMERON: [Two sentences about the award.]

Josephine Brick once read that If you can’t find the novel you want, write it yourself, and now she can’t stop. During the lockdowns, two, full-length, chapter-a-week novels kept friends amused. Jo loves Australian authors, books set in Australia and the celebration of ordinary people.

[Present certificate. Lindy, Deb & Fiona pose for photographs.]

SUE TURNBULL: The Viliama Grakalic [Vil- ee-ama Grak-a-litch] Award worth \$750 for Best Art and Crime Story goes to **ROMANY RZECHOWICZ [Rome-any Reck-a-vic]** from Reid, ACT, for “**Skin and Bone**”.

A backyard tale of beauty and obsession, “Skin and Bone” explores what – and who – we’re willing to sacrifice in pursuit of perfection. And maybe make you take a closer look at your next cuppa ...

DEB COX: By day, **ROMANY RZECHOWICZ** [Rome-any Reck-a-vic] helps organisations share their true stories; by night, she writes not-quite-so-true stories that have been published in places like *The Canberra Times* and the Newcastle Short Story Award, as well as winning Furious Fiction. She lives on the land of the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people.

[Present certificate. Deb & Fiona pose for photographs.]

SUE TURNBULL: And now for the popular Kerry Greenwood Malice Domestic Award worth \$750. It goes to **GEORGINA COLEMAN** (Fitzroy North, Vic) for “Sticky Fingers”.

In *Sticky Fingers*, a young barrister encounters mansplainers at the Magistrates Court, an old flame at her favourite café, and sexually transmitted debt in her work. She sets out to prove that her client’s ex-husband forged her client’s signature on loan documents.

FIONA EAGGER: Georgie Coleman has been a barrister for ten years, and a bookworm forever, in Melbourne/Naarm. This is her first (and definitely not last) time entering the Scarlet Stiletto.

[Present certificate. Deb & Fiona pose for photographs.]

SUE TURNBULL: Every Cloud Productions, the producers of *Miss Fisher’s Murder Mysteries*, are the sponsor the Mystery with History Award (worth \$1000) for the 8th time this year. The award goes to **JB ROWLEY** (Middle Park, VIC) for “Shanty Town”.

Inspired by the actual murder of Robert Scott in 1863, *Shanty Shooting* is the story of a woman who sets out to redress a grave injustice. Blithely disregarding the conventions of the time when women were expected to avoid controversy and be ‘refined in appearance and manners’, Eleanor Sinclair challenged the world of men in her determination to establish the innocence of a condemned prisoner. This character was inspired by Australia’s first female detective writer Mary Fortune.

DEB COX: As a child growing up in Orbost, Victoria, **JB ROWLEY** spent hours in the hayshed escaping her many brothers and reading books sourced from the local rubbish tip. Destined to be a writer, her mother once promised her a story worth writing about which eventually resulted in JB’s debut novel.

[Present certificate. Deb & Fiona pose for photographs.]

SUE TURNBULL: The HQ Fiction Award for Best Thriller, worth \$1000, goes to **CHERYL FAIRCLOUGH** [Fair-cluff] for “Bush Chicken”.

In “Bush Chicken”, a woman who has retired from the world suddenly faces an unexpected clear and present danger and so must take ruthless action to protect those she loves.

FIONA EAGGER: After a 40-year career of non-fiction storytelling about social issues and people's lives around the world, **CHERYL** has now turned her hand to crime. This is the first time she has entered the Scarlet Stiletto. She is a member of Sisters in Crime, Writers Victoria, and Phoenix Park Writers.

[Present certificate. Deb & Fiona pose for photographs.]

SUE TURNBULL: We now come to the Melbourne Athenaeum Library Body in the Library Award which is always popular.

The Melbourne Athenaeum has once again generously sponsored two “Body in the Library” Awards.

The runner-up award goes to **KIM GRAHAM (Croydon, VIC) for “Borrowed time”**.

Clara’s body has been found in the library and it’s not looking like a natural death. The Head Librarian points the finger, likely swaying the local constabulary. Sisters Rose, Violet, and Lily set out to solve the crime...and their small town will never be the same again!

We are delighted that Vice-President, **BARBARA GLIDDON**, is here tonight to co-present them. Please come forward Barbara.

BARBARA GLIDDON: [Two sentences about award.]

She lives in a leafy pocket of Melbourne and loves being in nature, crafting, and most of all, reading. She is on a mission to fit as many books in her home as possible.

[Present certificate. Barbara, Deb & Fiona pose for photographs.]

BARBARA GLIDDON: The main Body in Library Award, worth \$1250, goes to Alison Pascoe (Banora Point, NSW) for “The Murder in the Library”.

Here’s the synopsis: The year is 2030 and crime writer extraordinaire, Julianne Fox has just been murdered, however she’s unable to move on to the next world until she finds out who committed her ‘murder in the library’. Once Detective Sonja Harding recovers from the fact she’s talking to a ghost, the two agree to work together to solve the crime. But in the year 2030, not all is how it seems.

And the bio: Alison Pascoe writes under the pen-name, **ALISON L ROBSON**. She’s only recently delved into the world of short-story writing and this is her first entry in the Scarlet Stiletto. While known as a romance author, the lure of crime writing has been calling her, and finally, she’s doing something about it.

[Present certificate. Barbara, Deb & Fiona pose for photographs.]

SUE TURNBULL: Third Prize (\$750) is co-sponsored by our long-time supporter, Sun Bookshop, and newish sponsor Fremantle Press which is publishing a sleuth of books by women crime writers. It goes to goes to SANDRA THOM-JONES for “The Safehouse”. Sandra also won the Liz Navratil [Nav-rat-il] Award for another story so you already have some details about her life.

Here's the blurb: When Lexie created The Safehouse for victims of domestic violence, she had no idea that 19 years later it would be so much a part of her life. It was so heartbreaking watching these women and children suffering, but so rewarding watching them recover and seeing them go on to help each other heal.

[Present certificate. Deb & Fiona pose for photographs.]

SUE TURNBULL:

The Simon & Schuster Second Prize (\$1000) goes to JUDE BRIDGE (Caversham, WA) for “End of Life”.

A pissed-off wife, an unfaithful husband, a gun, a made-to-order sex doll, what can possibly go wrong? A shot in the head leads to a court case with extraordinary performances.

DEB COX: Jude Bridge is a hobbit living in vineyard country, Western Australia. Her flash fiction has been performed at festivals and made into short films, her short stories have been published in anthologies and online. In 2014 she won the Scarlet Stiletto award and is still tickled pink about it. Unfortunately, due to the tyranny of distance, Jude is unable to be with us tonight, a terrible shame since she has the biggest smile in the literary world.

SUE TURNBULL: And the 2023 Scarlet Stiletto Award and the shoe goes to... [drum roll please]

FIONA EAGGER: And the winner is **ROMANY RZECHOWICZ [Rome-any Reck-a-vic] from Reid, ACT, for “Skin and Bone”.**

You’ve heard the blurb, you’ve heard the bio – ROMANY [Rome-any] come up here!!!

[CAROLYN & NICOLE: Present certificate, and trophy.]

ROMANY RZECHOWICZ: [Short speech about the Award]

[Present certificate. Deb & Fiona pose for photographs.]

SUE TURNBULL: We’re almost there. **CATE KENNEDY** is going to do us the honour of launching *Scarlet Stiletto: The Fifteenth Cut*, which has been edited by Phyllis King.

Cate, as you may know, won the first two Scarlet Stiletto Awards in 1994 and 1995 (after which she was invited to become a judge). Cate rapidly became one of Australia’s most admired and awarded short-story writers. She’s also written and published a novel, a travel memoir, and three collections of poetry. Cate works as a writing teacher and fiction advisor on the faculty of Pacific University’s Creative Writing program in Oregon, finally completed her PhD in 2021, and is now trying to clear the decks to finish writing another book.

All the winning stories from tonight are available in *Scarlet Stiletto: The Fifteenth Cut* for \$7.99 direct from Clan Destine Press as an e-book or from Booktopia, Amazon, and iTunes. Grab the promotional postcard on your table.

All shortlisted authors and sponsors will receive copies in their preferred formats.

[CATE KENNEDY TO LAUNCH.]

SUE TURNBULL: [Thanks Cate.] CATE is not done yet. She is now going to launch the paperback of the winning stories over the past 30 years, *The Scarlet Stiletto: 30 Years of Mystery, Murder and Malice*.

[CATE KENNEDY TO LAUNCH.]

SUE TURNBULL: [Thanks Cate. Present gift bag to Cate.]

You will be able to buy copies at the reception desk, just outside this room, at the special reduced price of \$30. Again, a wonderful present for the festive season. And what a fabulous cover!

SUE TURNBULL: DEB, FIONA, & CATE could you now draw the raffle?

[Draw 3rd, 2nd, 1st prizes. Pose for photos with winners.]

SUE TURNBULL:

I'd now like to call on **Robin Bowles**, fashionista, true crime queen, and former convenor to present the Better Red than Dead prize for the best outfit

[Robin to present award and pose for photos with winner.]

Let's now acknowledge the generous support of our sponsors of the prizes **[perhaps just refer to screen]**:

- Swinburne University
- Simon & Schuster
- Sun Bookshop & Fremantle Press
- Allen & Unwin
- Melbourne Athenaeum Library
- HQ Fiction
- Clan Destine Press Award
- Every Cloud Productions
- Kerry Greenwood
- The Viliama Grakalic [Vil- ee-ama Grak-a-lich] Estate
- ScriptWorks
- Queensland Chapter of Sisters in Crime
- Writers Victoria

Please join me in thanking them.

SUE TURNBULL: I would again like to thank **DEB COX & FIONA EAGGER** for her contribution to this special evening and present them with some gifts, including the Sisters in Crime tote bag, pen, mug, fridge magnet, and the new book, *The Scarlet Stiletto: 30 Years of Mystery, Murder and Malice*.

[Pose for photos]

Big thanks also to **PRECILLA DAMAIN** for her administration of the awards and plus **CAZ BROWN, CARMEL SHUTE, LINDY CAMERON, MORAIG KISLER, LESLEY GILLIS, RUTH WYKES, KELLY GARDINER** and **LESLIE FALKINER-ROSE** for their work in getting this ceremony together.

Big thanks also go to the owner of the Rising Sun, **JON WOOLLEY**, and his fabulous team for helping to make this event such a success.

DEB FORCE and her team at the Sun Bookshop – we so appreciate your wonderful, ongoing support – and your knowledge about what’s best to read.

MALTE WAGENFELD for crafting the trophy.

MARK BARRY and the team at BS SOUND have been supplying PA systems for dummies for two decades. Such excellent service!

Don’t forget to start writing now if you want to get your stories in for the 31st Scarlet Stiletto Awards by 31 August, 2024.

Thank you all for coming.

Please leave your name tags in the box as you go out.

Could all the short-listed authors now join us up here for some group photos with DEB, FIONA and me?

ENDS