



New Zealand Post  
**CHILDREN'S  
BOOK AWARDS**

**JUDGES' REPORT  
2010**

# JUDGES' REPORT 2010



## INTRODUCTION

Picture this - summer, January, a typical New Zealand beach, white sand, sparkling blue water, a gentle breeze rustling the leaves of a pohutukawa tree in its pretty red dress for Christmas... definitely a comfy deck chair, a pair of oyster catchers probing the sand, a New Zealand Post Children's Book Awards submission in hand, 137 others piled up beside the chair, the chiming chink of a piece of ice against the glass of a G & T in the other hand (actually, stop the image - that's a G & T without the G, as judges need a clear head!).

Not all bad, is it, the life of a judge?

Congratulations to you all - becoming a finalist is a significant feat. We want all authors and publishers who submitted a book for the Awards, to know the incredible lengths to which the judging panel went in making our selections. We paint a cheerful picture of our reading, indeed, but we forgot to mention the notebook into which detailed annotations are written about every book we debated, discussed and agonised over in the judges' room in January - in our struggle to select just five finalists in each category. If only it could be more than five! We can tell you in all honesty, that it isn't easy, and of course we have had to put our own subjective feelings and preferences aside to rate books against each other and the judging criteria.

We read some great books this summer! The quality of New Zealand children's writing is going from strength to strength with writers continuing to come up with original, challenging ideas. We noticed several writers pulling out all the stops to achieve a real step up from their previous writing. One sixth of the submissions were from new writers - and many of these first books were brilliant, showing enormous promise. We look forward to seeing many of these writers represented in the finalist lists in future.

We were excited by the obvious effort made to raise the quality of publication. From hard covers, to endpapers, dust jackets, appealing covers, beautiful photography and illustrations, and clear, accurate contents pages, indexes and glossaries.

Judges in any competition always say how hard it is to whittle the contenders down. It's true. In the end, our final selections may have been influenced by the quality of production, the number of editorial errors or choice of cover. We took detailed notes of typos, inconsistencies in plot, errors made, many possibly overlooked by the casual reader, but these were referred to at judges' meetings and were taken into account to help us identify the best. We did get frustrated by the number of sloppy errors across the board that diminished a good read.

We were occasionally disappointed by books that had brilliant ideas, were clever stories and showed promise, but were let down by poor presentation in terms of layout, choice of font or stock, or in the case of rhyming picture books, didn't scan well. The cover of every book is particularly important. If we as adults are influenced by what a book looks like on first impact, children definitely will be - and they are a lot less forgiving.

The Non-fiction category introduced us to some interesting new subjects and we all felt very knowledgeable and inspired after having reading these books. The range of content is certainly broadening and it is stimulating to see such variety.

We have noticed in recent years, a bias in fiction towards books for boys and it is encouraging to see the improvement this has made to boys' enthusiasm for reading. Long may this continue. But please, let's not forget the girls! Girls are generally more willing and broader readers, but we should also keep them in mind. While some authors are expert at writing for girls or boys and clearly have their fans, others are skilled at writing books that cleverly suit both genders. Both are reflected in our finalist list.

Animal and horse stories along with general adventure, continue to be the most popular topics written about, while sadly, science fiction and humour rarely feature. Fresh ideas are always emerging though - we don't know how you do it! Or on the flip-side, old ideas are being delivered in exciting and innovative ways. We observed some gutsy reads, others that were not so 'safe' and books with themes ideal for their intended audiences.

There was a real New Zealand flavour to many of the books this year. When you read about wood pigeons, farms, collecting mussels off the rocks, summer Christmases (especially while experiencing it!), you feel right at home. Equally, the books that took us to other countries broadened our understanding of the world and how we, as Kiwis, fit into a wider global setting.

We were particularly impressed by Pearson Education's *Nitty Gritty* series which are a cut above many remedial reading books for reluctant readers. Targeted at junior and senior age groups, they feature snappy, attractive covers, well-spaced text and liberal use of illustrative text breaks for ease of reading, with exciting and varied plots.

How lucky we have been - we feel very privileged to have been given the opportunity to read all of these books for New Zealand children, back-to-back. It is an honour, a huge responsibility and we took the role seriously. Thank you all for your work, your writing, your drawing and your talent. Keep doing it. Please.



ROSEMARY TISDALL

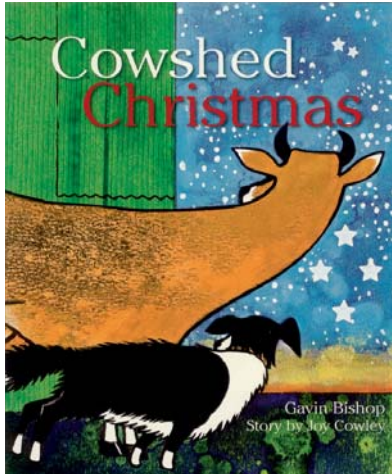


RUTH MCINTYRE



TREVOR AGNEW

# FINALISTS 2010 PICTURE BOOKS



Gavin Bishop



Joy Cowley

## COWSHED CHRISTMAS

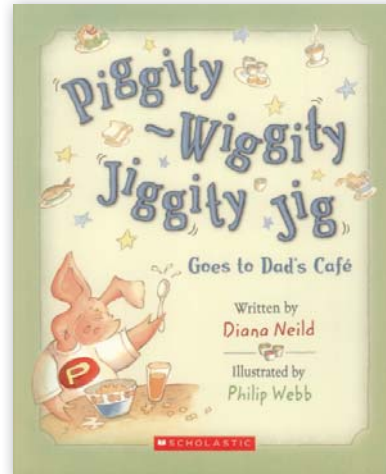
Gavin Bishop  
Joy Cowley

Random House New Zealand  
ISBN 978-1-86979-073-8 pb  
RRP \$24.99  
Target age 3+

### Judges' Comments

This story, told in verse and repeated chorus, describes farm animals coming to the cowshed. Each is bringing a present; a very New Zealand present. The cow has brought a pavlova cake, the sheep a pair of jandals, and the ducks a toy kiwi. And who are the gifts for? The final double-spread makes everything clear.

Gavin Bishop has matched the simplicity of Joy Cowley's words with the bold outlines of his animals against the textures of the green corrugated iron and starry blue sky. The result is a charming celebration of the Christmas message. With its cheerful repetition, this is a very good book for reading aloud.



Diana Neild



Philip Webb

## PIGGITY-WIGGITY JIGGITY JIG GOES TO DAD'S CAFE

Diana Neild  
Philip Webb

Scholastic New Zealand  
ISBN 978-1-86943-910-1 pb  
RRP \$18.99  
Target age 3+

### Judges' Comments

It's hard to imagine a picture book about embarrassment, let alone one that is skilfully written and cheerfully illustrated, and yet this book achieves this and more.

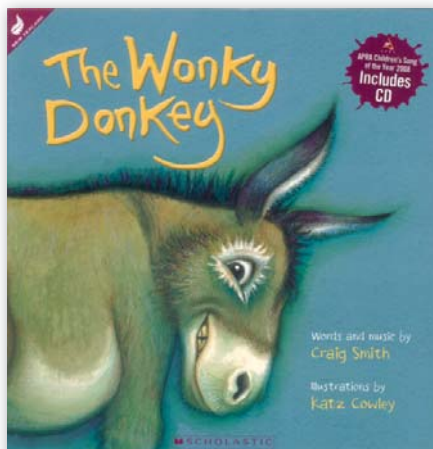
Piggity-Wiggity Jiggity Jig is in for a treat: a visit to a Wellington café - it's full of lawyer pigs, business-suit pigs and a few 'politician-y piggity pigs.' However, Piggity doesn't recognise a single dish named by the waiter!

Diana Neild's verse demands to be read aloud.

Philip Webb's pictures are magnificent fun. All the pigs are wonderfully messy eaters - the kind of naughtiness that enthralls young readers.

The pig jokes embedded in his pictures add to the game. The headline in the Morning Porker is 'Three Little Pigs Homeless,' the bus company is the Swine Line and the kids love finding the pig dolls and pig salt-and-pepper sets.

# FINALISTS 2010 PICTURE BOOKS



Craig Smith



Katz Cowley

## THE WONKY DONKEY

Craig Smith  
Katz Cowley

Scholastic New Zealand  
ISBN 978-1-86943-926-2 pb  
RRP \$24.99  
Target age 2+

### Judges' Comments

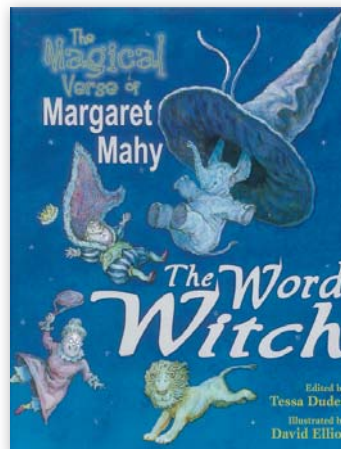
This picture book matches the lyrics of Craig Smith's award-winning cumulative song, 'The Wonky Donkey', with Katz Cowley's vibrant watercolour illustrations. The first illustration sets the mood with a genial yellow-toothed donkey displaying his artificial leg.

From this point the donkey's details accumulate, each one forming a cheerful near-rhyme.

By the end of the tale the donkey has acquired 11 adjectives, and the readers are having fun with the rhythm of the words.

This is a book with a wide appeal, ideal for reading (or singing) aloud, or even joining-in.

Katz Cowley's illustrations manage to keep the hapless donkey an amiable and somehow attractive animal. At one point he even wears a bow tie and "Neigh-Ban" sunglasses.



Margaret Mahy



David Elliot.



Tessa Duder

## THE WORD WITCH

Margaret Mahy  
David Elliot,  
edited by Tessa Duder

HarperCollins Publishers  
ISBN 978-1-86950-707-7 hb  
RRP \$44.99  
Target age 6+

### Judges' Comments

This magnificent collection brings together many of Margaret Mahy's poems, although the editor Tessa Duder wisely warns that because of Mahy's fertile pen it cannot be definitive. *The Word Witch* certainly contains the best of Mahy.

Several of the poems originally appeared as books in their own right, including '17 Kings and 42 Elephants', 'A Summery Saturday Morning', 'Bubble Trouble' and 'Down the Back of the Chair'.

David Elliot's superb pictures surround and complement each poem, making this book an exemplar of design for young readers. It would certainly frighten any artist who was asked to illustrate it, but Elliot was equal to the challenge. In illustrating the 66 poems he has matched every mood. Incredibly, all the pictures in the book were drawn smaller than the published versions.

The design of the book is well conceived and sometimes breathtaking - just look at the elegant contents page.

Honour Award

# WINNER 2010 PICTURE BOOKS



## OLD HU-HU

Kyle Mewburn  
Rachel Driscoll  
Kāterina Te Heikōkō Mataira

Scholastic New Zealand  
ISBN 978-1-86943-897-5 hb  
RRP \$29.99

*Hū-Hū Koroheke* (Te reo edition)  
ISBN 978-1-86943-518-9 pb  
RRP \$18.99  
Target age 4+

Little Hu-Hu-Tu loved Old Hu-Hu very much. But now all that's left is an empty shell. Where did Old Hu-Hu get to? A moving and beautifully illustrated story about losing someone dear.



Kyle Mewburn



Rachel Driscoll



Kāterina Te Heikōkō  
Mataira

## Judges' Comments

This is a moving and charming story. While *Old Hu-Hu* is written at a level that can be understood by children too young to read, its main reading audience will be in the lower primary age group, where it may be the first book children encounter that examines the themes of death and grief.

Kyle Mewburn's text tells a moving tale and Rachel Driscoll has captured and developed his words; neither succumb to sentimentality. Driscoll has also performed the amazing feat of making New Zealand's ugliest insects into heroic and loveable figures. Old Hu-Hu with his large nose, scraggly grey moustache and flying goggles looks like everyone's grandfather, matched nicely to the (old sepia-type photo album) illustrations of Old Hu-Hu's youth, battling centipedes and big waves. She has cleverly drawn subtle images of Old Hu-Hu appearing in the background of some images (take a second look!).

This is a beautifully and sensitively told story of the loss of a special friend, which helps to explain death and will reassure young children that the spirit of someone can still live on. It is a tender story that focuses on the positive aspects of growing old.

The selection of the main character is intriguing and adds to the story's uniqueness; Mewburn explains that he enjoys the sound of language, so "Hu-Hu" fits the bill!

A stunning book with very high production standards, it features a clear, large and attractive typeface and beautiful illustrations. It is very well laid out. Text and illustrations are well matched, each adding more "story" to the other. From the endpapers to the specially created font, this book is the complete package. Driscoll's delightful and moving statement on the publisher's page about how the illustrations were made was an inspiring and thought-provoking touch: "Illustrations created in pencil, paint and tears".

*Old Hu-Hu* is also available in a Māori language edition, *Hū-Hū Koroheke*.

Our Te Reo advisor described the translation thus:

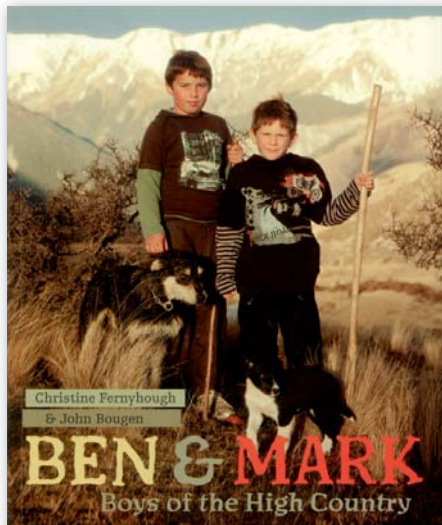
"The reo is beautiful. It could have been a 'straight translation', but the translator has created beautiful word pictures to complement the illustrations."

The translator was, of course, Kāterina Te Heikōkō Mataira, a name well-known in New Zealand children's literature. Dr Mataira not only translates picture books, she also writes them.

And we think this might be a good moment to honour all the translators - people who introduce the stories and language of one culture to another, around the world.

New Zealand Post  
Book of the Year

# FINALISTS 2010 NON-FICTION



Christine  
Fernyhough



John Bougen

## **BEN & MARK: BOYS OF THE HIGH COUNTRY**

Christine Fernyhough  
John Bougen

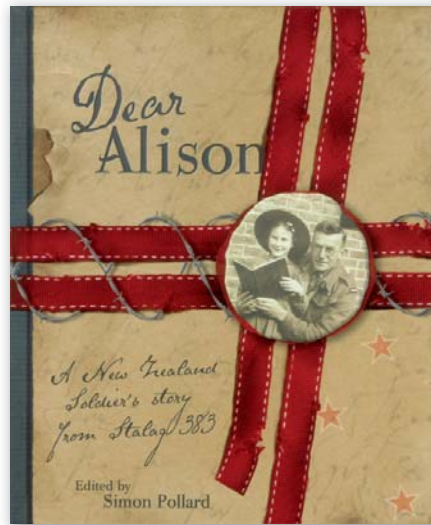
Random House New Zealand  
ISBN 978-1-86979-068-4 pb  
RRP \$36.99  
Target age 8+

### **Judges' Comments**

Ben and Mark are two boys who live on a High Country sheep station, where their father is the manager. This highly pictorial biography is a warm and intimate look at a rural lifestyle most New Zealand children know nothing about. Christine Fernyhough and John Bougen, who are neighbours, have cleverly worked together to create a visually appealing and readable book.

Ben and Mark's daily lives are captured under different chapter headings to give an amazing insight into the different life they lead from so many New Zealand children. For Ben and Mark, and many others like them, this is their world, it is not unusual, and we read about their mustering, shearing, hunting, even their 45 minute driveway to the house, plus their ability to entertain themselves. They clearly enjoy and contribute to station life.

A map showing Mt White Station's location in the South Island, along with a detailed map of the station and its surrounds, is especially useful when reading about the various sites.



Simon Pollard

## **DEAR ALISON**

Simon Pollard (editor)

Penguin NZ  
ISBN 978-0-14330-460-9 hb  
RRP \$30.00  
Target age 5+

### **Judges' Comments**

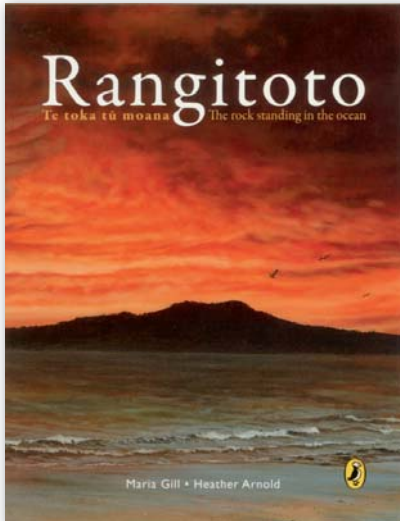
Dudley Muff, a prisoner in a German prisoner-of-war camp, in World War 2, kept a diary to record what life was like for him. He wrote anecdotes, sprinkled with stick men sketches, about how the prisoners passed the time. The light-hearted approach was obviously for his intended reader (young niece, Alison, in New Zealand), but he does not shy away from mentioning the harsh realities of war either.

The book is beautifully presented, retaining the authentic aura of a diary, featuring its original black cover, with embossed gold lettering, and marbled endpapers.

Simon Pollard, Dudley's great-nephew, has added a comprehensive Foreword and Epilogue, as well as photographs that fill in the details of Dudley's life. Recollections of the Commandant's behaviour helps the reader to understand that the enemy was also just doing his job - and sometimes had a heart.

A map of Europe showing where Dudley was captured and imprisoned would have added an extra dimension.

# FINALISTS 2010 NON-FICTION



Maria Gill



Heather Arnold

## RANGITOTO

Maria Gill  
Heather Arnold

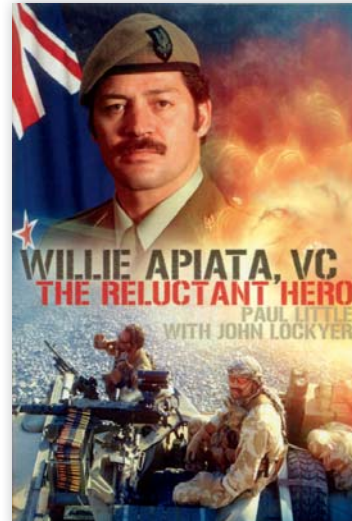
Puffin Books  
ISBN 978-0-14350-334-7 pb  
RRP \$19.95  
Target age 8

### Judges' Comments

This book is a comprehensive and very welcome, well designed pictorial look at this distinctive New Zealand volcano.

Maria Gill has cleverly presented the text on two levels – a simple story running along the bottom of the page creates a powerful narrative in its own right, with fact boxes bordering Heather Arnold's stunning illustrations offering further details. This creates a book suitable for a wide age range on a topic that has been crying out to be written about.

Included are numerous diagrams, maps, numerous relevant and relevant Māori references. So much is packed into a small publication, but it does not feel crowded.



Paul Little



John Lockyer

## WILLIE APIATA, VC: THE RELUCTANT HERO

Paul Little  
John Lockyer

Puffin Books  
ISBN 978-0-14330-457-9 pb  
RRP \$25.00  
Target age 10+

### Judges' Comments

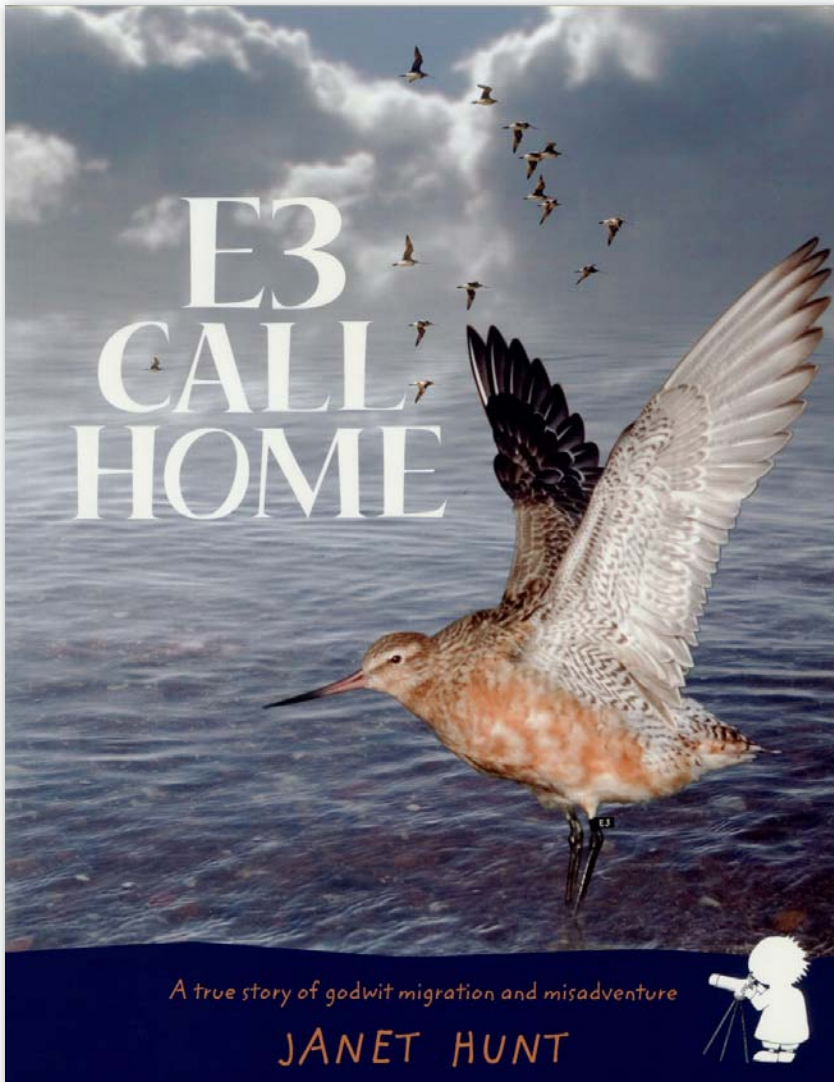
This is an inspirational story of a brave, yet modest New Zealand SAS soldier, who carried a wounded comrade to safety while under fire from suspected Taliban fighters in Afghanistan. This deed earned him New Zealand's first Victoria Cross, the highest honour awarded to a Commonwealth soldier, since the Second World War.

Paul Little and John Lockyer's well-written and easy-to-read narrative helps us to better understand the life Willie led, and how he became the man he is today. His childhood of hunting, fishing, camping, bush-living, as well as the discipline and propensity for hard work that he learned from his solo mother, all contributed to his developing the skills he needed in his SAS role.

Interviews with Willie help to make his story personal and autobiographical, with Willie's voice and sense of humour shining through.

This is a book that will appeal to young New Zealander's who dream of a life of action and risk, as well as encouraging their admiration of a hero.

# WINNER 2010 NON-FICTION



## E3 CALL HOME

Janet Hunt

Random House New Zealand  
ISBN 978-1-86979-276-3 pb  
RRP \$24.99  
Target age 7+

This is the true story of two bar-tailed godwits, a male named E3 and a female named E7. In 2007 they were among 16 birds tagged with satellite transmitters by scientists who wanted to know where they flew when they left New Zealand each autumn.

The scientists knew that bar-tailed godwits raised their chicks on the tundra in Alaska in the northern spring. They also knew that in the southern summer the birds lived around the coasts of New Zealand and the South Pacific. Clearly, they were flying from one place to another, a mega round-trip of at least 30,000 km. But, the scientists asked, what route do they take? Do they stop along the way? What dangers do they face? The transmitters were going to help them find out.

E7 became famous with her photo in all the papers. But what happened to E3?



**Janet Hunt** has had a varied and interesting career, including: teacher, journalist/writer, County Councillor, computer publisher, lecturer in computer graphics

and design, lecturer in digital media, author, publications editor, graphic designer.

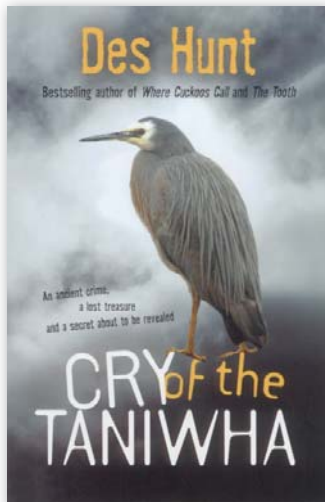
### Judges' Comments

This beautifully designed book is a fascinating, insightful story of two migrating godwits, E3 and E7, two birds fitted with transmitters so that their migration could be followed by satellite. E7 went on to Alaska (with thousands of other godwits) flying from New Zealand to Alaska and back again, a round trip of about 30,000km. But E3 went missing as he inexplicably detoured to Papua New Guinea and Queensland.

Janet Hunt's easy, readable, fun, narrative makes this book accessible to a wide range of children.

Stunning colour photos with good maps dominate the pages, while an informal font style across the bottom of each page, interspersed with lively drawings, fill in more detailed facts and information. Appendices provide updates and websites for further information, plus an index makes this reference easy to navigate.

# FINALISTS 2010 JUNIOR FICTION



Des Hunt

## CRY OF THE TANIWHA

Des Hunt

HarperCollins Publishers  
ISBN 978-1-86950-731-2 pb  
RRP \$18.99  
Target age 9+

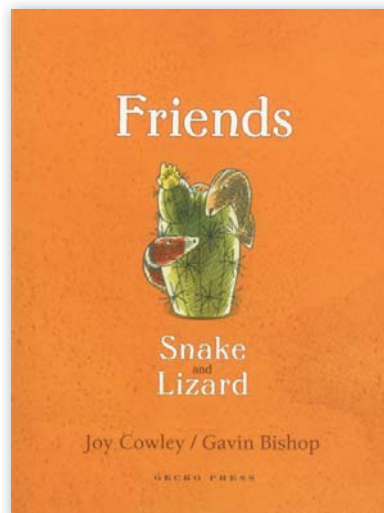
### Judges' Comments

The story opens on the eve of the 1886 Tarawera eruption, with the theft of jewels from tourists visiting the thermal resort of Ohinemutu. It then jumps to the present day, as young Matt comes to stay with his grandparents in Rotorua. With his metal detector, and Jazza, the boy next door, he becomes deeply involved with the local gangs and mysteries of the past, after they unearth a handcuffed skeleton.

Another of Des Hunt's ecological action thrillers, this is one of his best. Some history and mythology of the Central Plateau is woven into the story while a heron, that just might be a taniwha, plays an important role.

Fortunately, Des Hunt's books will be read keenly, as we wonder if the beautiful heron cover may not give a clear picture as to the actual content of the story.

Themes of honesty and the need to belong are explored, perfectly crafted, creating an exciting 'whodunnit'.



Joy Cowley



Gavin Bishop.

## FRIENDS: SNAKE AND LIZARD

Joy Cowley  
Gavin Bishop

Gecko Press  
ISBN 978-1-877467-26-4 hb RRP \$29.99  
ISBN 978-1-877467-25-7 pb RRP \$19.99  
Target age 6+

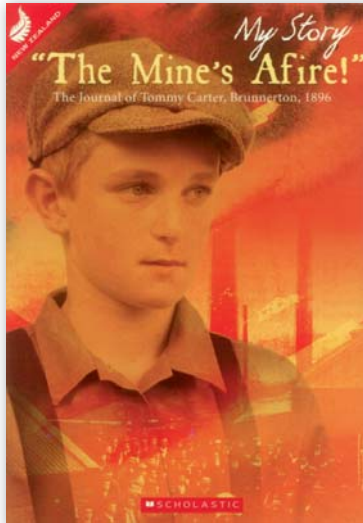
### Judges' Comments

As delightful in concept as *Snake and Lizard*, Joy Cowley continues the adventures of these two unlikely, but enchanting friends. Snake and Lizard continue their good work as Helper and Helper, as they go about their desert life as well as try to understand human beings. Their naivety about things is particularly endearing.

Their character and wit unfolds through their ramblings and arguments, all cleverly developed with humour.

This is a beautifully produced book, on good quality paper, in both hardback and paperback editions, and is comfortable to hold. Gavin Bishop's striking illustrations of desert life, carefully enhancing the text, help to make this an attractive book, perfect especially as a read-aloud to a wide age range.

# FINALISTS 2010 JUNIOR FICTION



Susan Battye



Thelma Eakin

## MY STORY: THE MINE'S AFIRE!

Susan Battye  
Thelma Eakin

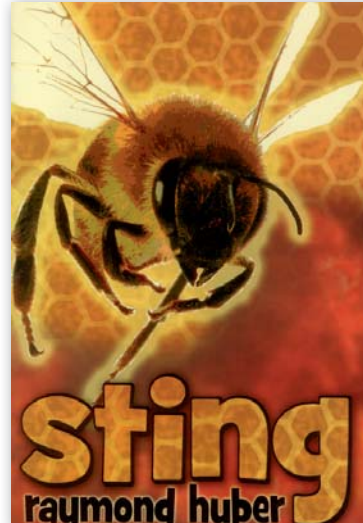
Scholastic New Zealand  
ISBN 978-1-86943-887-6 pb  
RRP \$17.99  
Target age 10+

### Judges' Comments

Tommy Carter is given a journal for his 12th birthday to record for his English grandmother what his life is like. Tommy and his family live in the small West Coast mining town of Dobson, where his father works as a carpenter in the Brunner mine. On 26 March 1896, an explosion kills all 65 men and boys working down the mine. Tommy recounts the effect on him and the community around him, and of the people who have lost their husbands, brothers and breadwinners.

A difficult topic to write about, Susan Battye and Thelma Eakin have managed, through young Tommy's eyes, to recount the horrors of this historic New Zealand tragedy.

The series, 'My Story', is an important one for New Zealand children and although it could be easy for these diary stories to become contrived, *The Mine's Afire!* manages to keep the story moving, creating a tender, hard-working character in Tommy. His descriptions of daily life, including food, games, church, school and picnics, are vivid and detailed, giving the reader a good insight into life at that time.



Raymond Huber

## STING

Raymond Huber

Walker Books  
ISBN 978-1-921150-89-0 pb  
RRP \$16.99  
Target age 8+

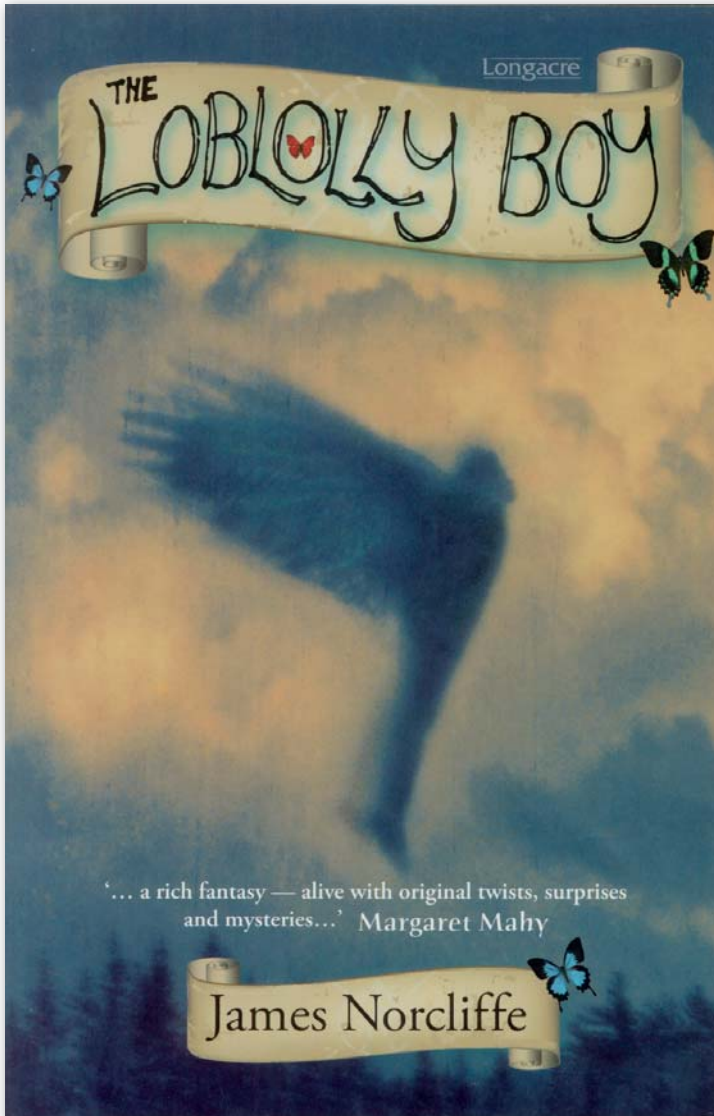
### Judges' Comments

Ziggy is a lonely bee who constantly questions his life; he feels he doesn't fit in and is called "Oddbee" by his fellow bees. He is adventurous and would prefer exploring beyond the confines of the hive. Ziggy stumbles across a secret military project that is using bees to sniff out explosives.

Raymond Huber has created a delightfully quirky anthropomorphic story told from Ziggy's point of view. He is an appealing character whom you warm to as he tries to find out more about himself, searches for a sense of belonging and tries to discover what the scientists are up to.

Bee facts within the story (and at the end of the book, "Meet the Bees") add depth and interest to Ziggy's story, as well as touches of humour.

# WINNER 2010 JUNIOR FICTION



## THE LOBLOLLOLY BOY

James Norcliffe

Longacre Press  
ISBN 978-1-877460-25-8 pb  
RRP \$19.99  
Target age 10+

To the boy called Red, it seems the most marvellous escape he could wish for: a gift that grants him more freedom than he ever believed possible - the chance to fly, to soar with the gulls, high over the tall brick walls that have imprisoned him for so long.

But this gift comes with a terrible price - and puts him in grave danger.

Is there anyone Red can trust to help him? The curious Captain Bass who has strange powers of his own? The wildly unpredictable twin sisters he is strongly drawn to?

In this magical, mysterious story, Red's adventure is like a chamber of mirrors at a carnival - a dazzling and breathtaking tale.



**James Norcliffe** has lived in Christchurch for most of his life although he has spent extended periods living in Brunei, Darussalam and China. Currently, he teaches in Lincoln University's Foundation Studies department.

James is the author of several fantasy novels for young readers. *The Assassin of Gleam*, won the Sir Julius Vogel Award for the best New Zealand fantasy novel of 2006. He is also a poet and editor.

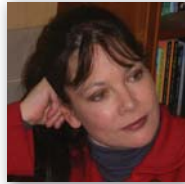
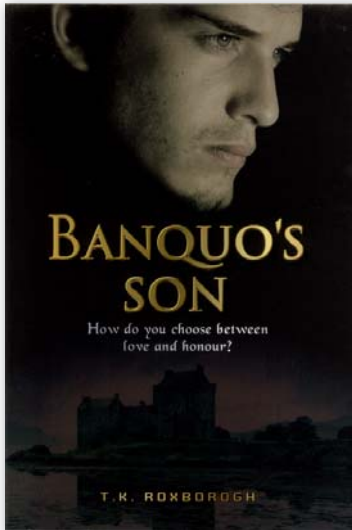
### Judges' Comments

Red is a sad, lonely boy, living in the Great House (an orphanage), who always knew he was different. He meets the Loblolly Boy, who offers him the opportunity to fly away (literally) from his life and experience freedom. So they swap places and Red, now the Loblolly Boy, discovers who he really is, and that the grass is not always greener on the other side.

James Norcliffe has written an imaginative and exciting story. Odd events are so plausibly described they become convincing. We are immediately drawn in to wonderful characters, from the unnamed boy in the opening prologue to lovable Red and the lively and enterprising twins, while the Collector is suitably sinister, reminiscent of the Child Catcher in the film 'Chitty Chitty Bang Bang'!

There is so much in this book - a very different plot, incorporating humour, adventure, mystery, family drama, tragedy, and magic, that will leave you thinking and smiling.

# FINALISTS 2010 YOUNG ADULT FICTION



T.K. Roxborough

## BANQUO'S SON

T.K. Roxborough

Penguin NZ  
ISBN 978-0-14320-249-3 pb RRP \$37.00  
Target age 12+

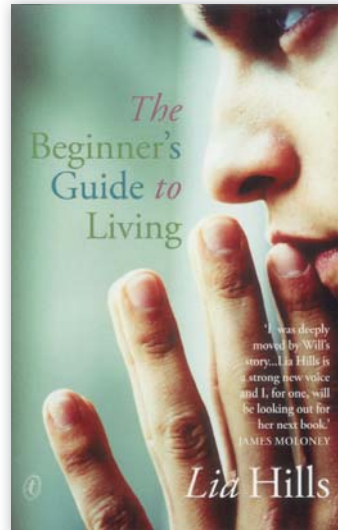
### Judges' Comments

When Banquo is murdered in William Shakespeare's play *Macbeth*, he calls to his son Fleance to seek revenge. T.K. Roxborough ensures he does in her cleverly constructed sequel, where vengeance, power struggles, mysteries, love and betrayal all merge tantalisingly into a page-turning blockbuster, the first of a planned trilogy. Her novel interpretation of Banquo's brief cry to his young son, coupled with the three witches' prophecy that sons of Banquo would rule Scotland, is the basis for this dramatic answer to the question: What happened to Banquo's son?

Fleance is a very likeable character - honest, humble, with a strong sense of fair play, but he's plagued by nightmares of his past and visions of his father's ghost. Having kept his real identity a secret from the family who have looked after him for 10 years, now that he is 21 he feels he must return to Scotland and discover the answers.

Roxborough's book remains faithful to Shakespeare's play, particularly to the prophecy, which she cleverly twists into her own plot and reveals in a brilliant climax. She uses contemporary language in the text, which will appeal to young adult readers, but her characters' direct speech is Elizabethan English as Shakespeare wrote. The scene is well set, giving the reader a fascinating view of Scottish court life as well as learning how poor people fared, making this novel especially useful for students studying *Macbeth*.

The striking front cover features a handsome, brooding young man who will appeal particularly to young women (and older ones!). The addition of a map and family trees are very helpful in navigating these treacherous Highlands.



Lia Hills

## THE BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO LIVING

Lia Hills

Text Publishing  
ISBN 978-1-921520-07-5 pb RRP \$25.00  
Target age 14+

### Judges' Comments

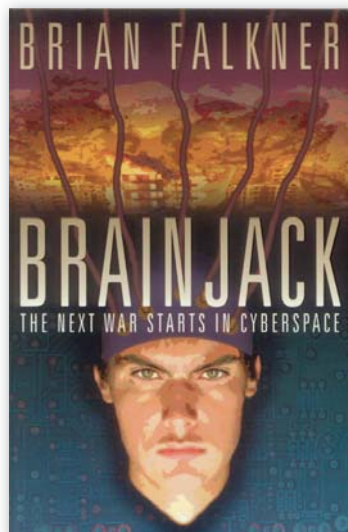
This is an achingly tender portrayal of Will's grief over the sudden death of his mother, as he stumbles through life trying to find the answers, and experiencing first love and sex. His father is distant and his estranged older brother Adam is in denial and hardly ever at home. Will feels isolated and angry. He and his mother had been extremely close. Will finds his mother's camera and starts taking his own photos as a way of connecting to her; he turns to philosophers to try to understand life's mysteries and to find a reason for living; he recalls memories and dreams; he writes things down in a notebook.

His attraction to Taryn at his mother's wake comes at both an awkward and an important time in his life - his emotions are raw and all-over-the-place, but her sexual experience comforts and supports him. The explicit sex, drug and tagging scenes are appropriate in the context of this story about a young man trying to work through his turmoil. He's the son every mother would love to have!

Lia Hills' writing is beautiful, sparse, unflinching and poetic. Her format is like a montage, with the placement of Will's memories, dreams, photos, philosophers' excerpts, questions, and email messages breaking her text at pivotal points and marking the transitions in his journey. The ending is stunning.

This is a challenging novel that really gets inside the head of a thoughtful 17-year-old. It is more likely to be appreciated by readers aged 15+ who like to confront the Big Issues. We hope they won't be put off by the cover and title, which we think lack pick-me-up appeal.

# FINALISTS 2010 YOUNG ADULT FICTION



Brian Falkner

## BRAINJACK

Brian Falkner

Walker Books  
ISBN 978-1-921150-95-1 pb RRP \$19.99  
Target age 12+

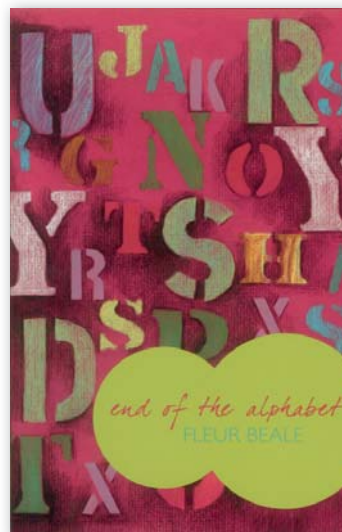
### Judges' Comments

*On Friday, on his way to school, Sam Wilson brought the United States of America to its knees.*

With a first line like that, you know you're in for a rollercoaster of a read and you get it in this fast and furious sci-fi adventure. Set in a gritty, security-conscious alternate future (where the nuclear annihilation of Las Vegas preceded 9/11), the story starts with Sam hacking into Telecomerica's databases in order to steal computer gear, including a neural-headset, which links the user's brainwaves directly to their computer.

His neuro connection enables him to try more elaborate hacking, even as the reader becomes aware that Sam is being watched, perhaps by someone using his own equipment against him. Caught and locked up in a federal prison where he meets Jase (known as Kiwi because he's a New Zealander), Sam begins planning his escape and finds himself in a personal battle for survival, with the fate of humanity at stake.

An edge-of-the-seat thriller that includes lots of action and car chases, Brian Falkner's text is sharp, swift and humorous, with filmic qualities - it's a very visual book to read - and he pays close attention to plot details. His mind-boggling description about computer systems, even if much of it is invented, sounds very believable and terrifyingly complex, and will appeal to male teens especially.



Fleur Beale

## END OF THE ALPHABET

Fleur Beale

Random House New Zealand  
ISBN 978-1-86979-070-7 pb RRP \$19.99  
Target age 12+

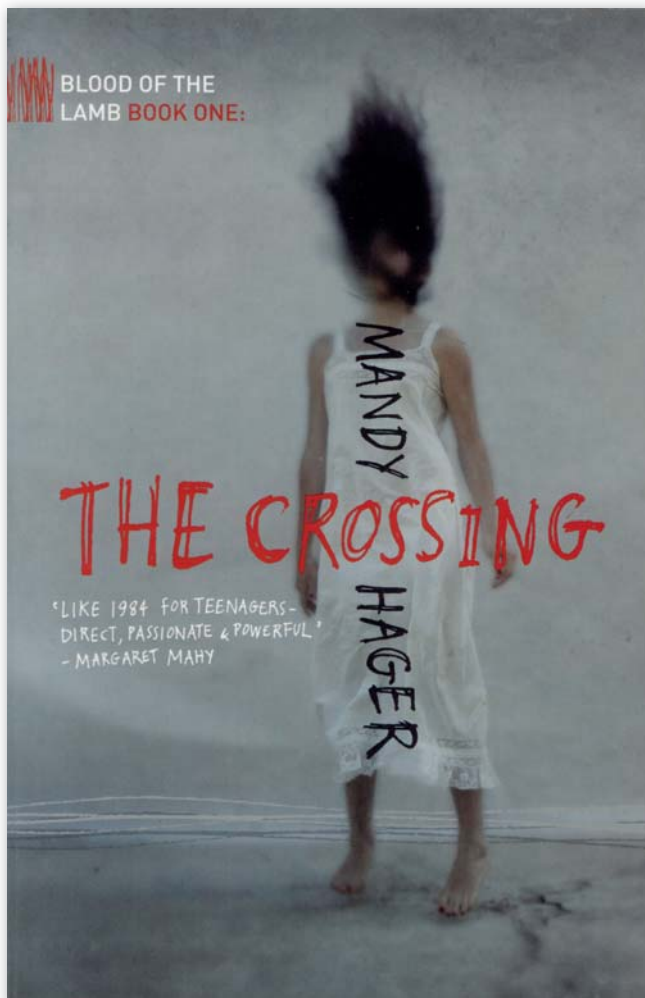
### Judges' Comments

Ruby Yarrow has a learning disability, low self-esteem and is sick of being at the "end of the alphabet". She has gradually become a "doormat" at home, minding the children, cooking meals and doing the housework while her genius younger brother Max does nothing. The crunch comes when Ruby (reluctantly) agrees to share the smaller bedroom with her little half-brothers so that Max can study in peace. Ostracised by her best friend, Ruby takes stock of her life and starts to stand up for herself, with wonderful results - she gets a part-time job, learns Portuguese, sets herself a goal and stands firm with her family.

Fleur Beale depicts a realistic portrayal of a blended family that shows "blended" doesn't necessarily mean united. Max, who manipulates their stressed-out mother, Tessie, is selfish and spoilt, but it's hard not to feel pity even for him when he discovers his absent father is less than perfect. Ruby has a delightful relationship with her half-brothers and her stepfather Calvin, whose diplomatic attempts to put things right are continually thwarted by Tessie and Max, but her relationship with her mother is put under great strain until a few family skeletons shake free from the closet.

Beale is a great champion of the underdog and her heart-warming contemporary story, with its upbeat "Cinderella" tone, focuses on the importance of friendship and people, rather than problems. Ruby is an engaging, well-rounded character whose triumph at the end proves it is definitely worth aiming for your dreams.

# WINNER 2010 YOUNG ADULT FICTION



## BLOOD OF THE LAMB: THE CROSSING

Mandy Hager

Random House New Zealand  
ISBN 978-1-86979-150-6 pb  
RRP \$19.99  
Target age 13+

This is the first book in a stunning new trilogy that follows the fate of Maryam and her unlikely companions - Joseph, Ruth and Lazarus. This fast, suspenseful drama is underpinned by a powerful and moving story about love and loss.

The people of Onewēre, a small island in the Pacific, know that they are special - chosen to survive the deadly event that consumed the Earth. Now from the rotting cruise ship *Star of the Sea*, the elite control the population - manipulating old texts to set themselves up as living 'gods'. But what the people of Onewēre don't know is this: the leaders will stop at nothing to meet their own blood-thirsty needs...

When Maryam crosses from child to woman, she must leave everything she has ever known and make a crossing of another kind. But life inside the ship is not as she had dreamed, and she is faced with the unthinkable: obey the leaders and very likely die, or turn her back on every belief she once held dear.



**Mandy Hager** is a Wellington writer and educator.

Mandy won the LIANZA Esther Glen Award for Fiction in 2008 for her novel *Smashed*. She is married with two adult children.

### Judges' Comments

*Are you a breeder or a bleeder?*

This provocative question puzzles Maryam, an intelligent if somewhat naïve girl, devoted to the Blessed Sisters who have raised her in a religious community on a Pacific atoll. Her daily life is based on Christian principles, summed up in Ten Rules, and she feels loved and content, although she is aware that her nearby home island has been devastated by a wasting disease, the result of a solar flare three generations earlier, in 2012.

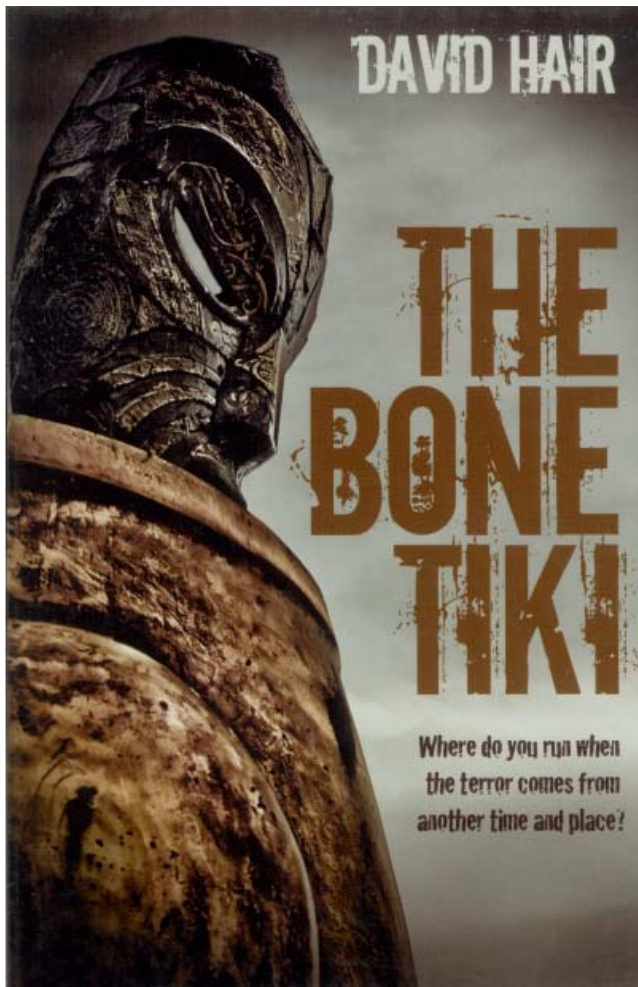
As they reach puberty, the girls of the community make a ceremonial journey - the Crossing - to become servers for the Apostles of the Lamb in the Holy City, a rusting cruise ship that foundered on the reef at the time of the disaster. But Maryam's trust is shattered when she discovers the fanatical Father Joshua's true agenda for the girls and, after a failed attempt at escape, she faces a hideous fate.

Mandy Hager's writing is passionate and powerful in this page-turning, coming-of-age drama. There are many challenging concepts, sub-plots and themes, including puberty, cult beliefs, brainwashing, friendship and blood transfusion to ponder, along with several strong examples of symbolism - the title and author name depicted as a cross on the striking front cover, the virginal white dress and, of course, the "Holy City", a metal structure 10 times higher than any of the island's palm trees. *The Crossing* would be an ideal text to study for NCEA English courses.

Maryam's journey from young innocent to courageous heroine is horrifying, exhilarating and full of romantic tension.

Maryam, her friend Ruth and two sons of the Apostles, the sickly Joseph and hard-eyed Lazarus, will face their next challenge in the second volume of the *Blood of the Lamb* trilogy, *Into the Wilderness*.

# WINNER 2010 BEST FIRST BOOK



## THE BONE TIKI

David Hair

HarperCollins Publishers  
ISBN 978-1-86950-734-3 pb  
RRP \$19.99  
Target age 12+

Matiu Douglas has a bone tiki he stole from a tangi. His father's important new client wants it. Badly. And he has some very nasty friends. When Mat is forced to flee for his life, an unexpected meeting with a girl called Pania sets his world spinning. Suddenly he's running through the bush with a girl-clown, a dog who is way too human, and a long-dead warrior. Fearful creatures from legend are rising up around him, and Mat faces a terrifying ordeal.

And there is nowhere left to hide . . . not even in another world.

A breathtaking adventure set in two parallel New Zealands, from exciting new author David Hair.

This story is continued in *Taniwha's Tears* and will be completed in a third novel - *The Heart of the Land*.



**David Hair** was born in the Bay of Plenty, raised in Hawkes Bay, and after the traditional Kiwi OE, settled in Wellington. He has worked for many years in financial services, and has two teenage children. He loves soccer, reading, wine and travel - and writing of course! David is currently living with his wife Kerry in India.

### Judges' Comments

The blending of ancient myths into a contemporary setting requires skill and a vivid imagination and our choice for best first book, with its juxtaposition of Māori legend and a dramatic car chase, certainly fits the bill.

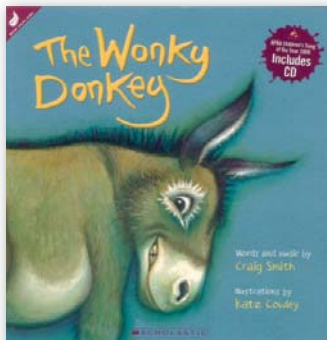
A thrilling combination of adventure and fantasy, *The Bone Tiki* is set in two parallel New Zealands, as 14-year-old Mat tries to save a powerful bone tiki from falling into the hands of the malevolent Puarata, a tohunga who has lived through several centuries in different guises.

Mat's quest sees him on a chase from Hawke's Bay to the North Cape, accompanied by Kelly, a girl clown whom he meets by chance, an old warrior, Wiri, who has been trapped in the tiki by Puarata, and an extremely intelligent dog, Fitzzy, who is far too human. Hair brings back to "life" legendary characters, such as Pania of the Reef, and Mat even rides a taniwha down the Huka Falls!

The characters travel through past and present - there are 19th century English soldiers, a Māori warrior who's not out of place at present-day-Waikato's Rugby Park, shapeshifters, patupaiarehe and other creatures of the myth-lands, Mat's estranged parents, and the ever-present Puarata and his sadistic apprentices - all building to a final showdown at Cape Reinga.

David Hair introduces contemporary issues of a split family and a controlling father, but there's a strong message of reconciliation too in this unusual pursuit novel.

# WINNERS 2010 CHILDREN'S CHOICE AWARD

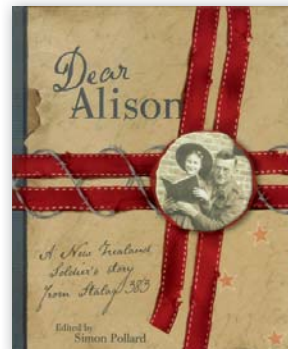


**PICTURE BOOK  
CHILDREN'S CHOICE  
CATEGORY WINNER**

**THE WONKY DONKEY**

Craig Smith  
Katz Cowley

Scholastic New Zealand  
ISBN 978-1-86943-926-2 pb  
RRP \$24.99  
Target age 2+

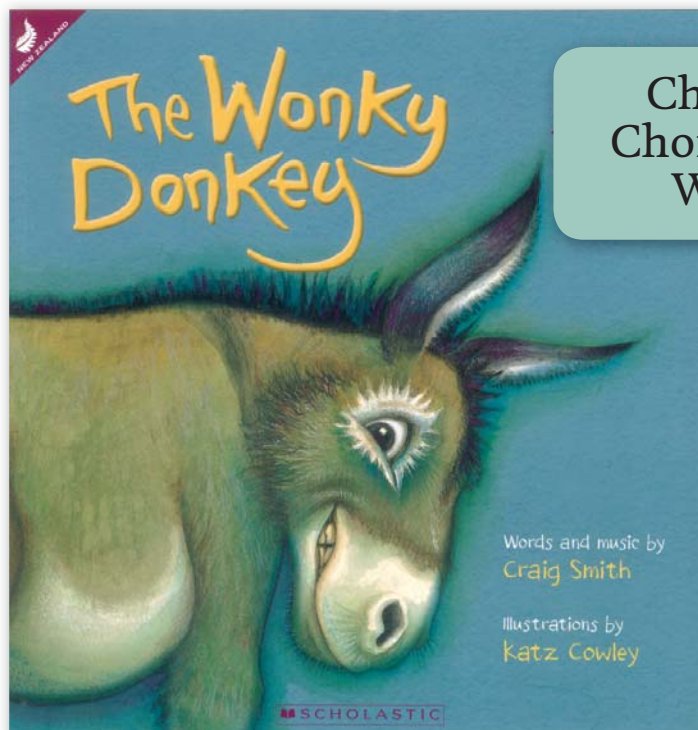


**NON-FICTION  
CHILDREN'S CHOICE  
CATEGORY WINNER**

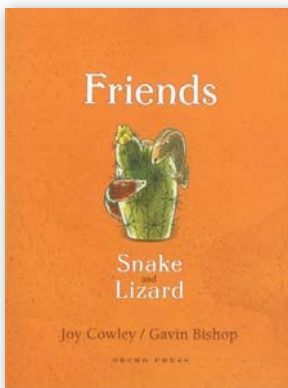
**DEAR ALISON**

Simon Pollard (editor)

Penguin NZ  
ISBN 978-0-14330-460-9 hb  
RRP \$30.00  
Target age 5+



**Children's  
Choice Award  
Winner**

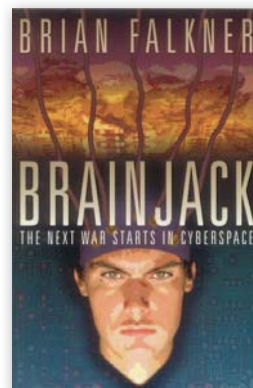


**JUNIOR FICTION  
CHILDREN'S CHOICE  
CATEGORY WINNER**

**FRIENDS:  
SNAKE AND LIZARD**

Joy Cowley  
Gavin Bishop

Gecko Press  
ISBN 978-1-877467-26-4 hb  
RRP \$29.99  
ISBN 978-1-877467-25-7 pb  
RRP \$19.99  
Target age 6+



**YOUNG ADULT FICTION  
CHILDREN'S CHOICE  
CATEGORY WINNER**

**BRAINJACK**

Brian Falkner

Walker Books  
ISBN 978-1-921150-95-1 pb  
RRP \$19.99  
Target age 12+