



‘The Ed Report’ lauded in international literary contest

For immediate release

Investigations of William Gillespie, Dylan Meissner, and Nick Montfort get “honourable mention” in 2nd trAce/Alt-X New Media Writing Competition

THE INTERNET, 15 JAN 2001 — The formerly top-secret government document known as *The Ed Report* has been awarded an honorable mention in the Second trAce/Alt-X Competition for New Media Writing. *The Ed Report* was the only work selected for this distinction by the competition’s judge, Shelley Jackson, author of *Patchwork Girl* and *My Body*. Jackson chose Talan Memmott’s *Lexia to Perplexia* as the winner of the £1000 prize, calling that “stunning” work “a kind of theater in which luminous symbols and sentences (which look more like formulae) come and go.”

Citing *The Ed Report* as “almost perfect in its own way,” Jackson called it “a cunning piece of mimicry that manages to maintain an almost chinkless front of officialese while telling a funny, surreal, even touching story. Purporting to be a report on an ill-fated attempt by the CIA to employ civilians (including Bruce Springsteen) with a gift for ancient languages as code-talkers on a secret narcotics mission, and complete with documentary trimmings, it patches into the dynamics of rumor and urban myth to run its operation in the grey area between fact and fiction — a project perfectly suited to the web, where grey areas abound. It also exploits the ease of internet publishing to resurrect the Victorian model of serial publishing. Its design, which is conservative, is perfectly apt for its deadpan narrative approach.”

Sue Thomas of the trAce Online Writing Community and Mark Amerika of the Alt-X Online Publishing Network announced the results of the competition today.

The Ed Report, a document originally written in hypertext by a government committee known as the Ed Commission, headed by James Ed, was brought to light by William Gillespie, Dylan Meissner, and Nick Montfort. Montfort and Gillespie discovered the report and pressed for its declassification, while Meissner converted it to Web format. Press conferences in which Montfort and Gillespie describe the contents of the report, read from it, and take questions have been held in New York, Chicago, and Bergen, Norway.

“It has always been my opinion that the literary output of government committees has been underappreciated,” Montfort said. “*The Starr Report* was a touching love story written in a lucid, clear style. *The Warren Report* has similarly been slighted by most writers and critics, but was recognized by Don DeLillo as an extraordinary achievement, which could hold its own as a sequel to *Finnegan’s Wake*. We are very pleased the government’s fine accomplishments with narrative prose have been acknowledged today.”

Gillespie was less sanguine about the recognition. “I am deeply honored by Jackson’s words,” Gillespie said. “But I can’t help but be suspicious about the circumstances surrounding this honorable mention. I wonder whether this is an intentional effort on the part of parties unknown to discredit this important document by dismissing it as ‘art.’”

Meissner is an artist and web developer believed to be currently living in Seattle, Washington. He did not comment on the award by email and could not be reached by phone before press time.

In addition to being an investigative journalist, Gillespie is a poet and fiction writer. He is the founder of the alternative online news source *Newspoetry* and co-author of *The Unknown*, which shared first place in the 1998 trAce/Alt-X contest judged by Robert Coover. His novel *Johnny Werd: the Fire Continues* was published last year under the pseudonym Q. Synopsis. His electronic writing is available for free, online, at wordwork.org.

Montfort writes for *Technology Review*, *Suck.com*, and other reputable news outlets, also writing fiction and poetry. His *Ad Verbum* was ranked first by IF authors in the 2000 Interactive Fiction Contest. He created *Winchester’s Nightmare*, the first “novel machine” to be issued in hardback, in an edition which includes a working computer. He is now at Boston University studying poetry in the graduate creative writing program. His digital works can be found for free at nickm.com.