Farnham Short Story Competition Judging format

Instructions to judges

This scoring format is not intended to replace your judgement, only to help achieve consistency of judging across entries and between judges. It is entirely possible that you read something wonderful that breaks all the rules. If so, throw caution to the wind and choose it. For example, a story may be disgracefully misspelled and formatted but still be a jewel. Or it may be so arresting in its plot or writing that you want to ignore weaknesses in characterisation. Use the format as an aide, not a straightjacket. Look at the outcome of the assessment and then reject it, if it makes no sense.

All other things being equal though:

(1) Question 1: Reject entries that are poorly formatted, inadequately proof-read, and full of spelling and grammar mistakes. Do not include the score from question 1 in the aggregate total
(2) Use question 2 as the lodestone. Did the story sing to you? However, and this is important, act as judges not readers. Try to put your own preferences for theme, style and genre behind you. Be open to styles, beliefs and genres you don't personally like.
(3) Beyond question 2, different readers will have different views on the importance of plot, theme, characterisation, point of view, and writing quality. You'll have to battle out these differences between you. To aid your discussion though, since there are different numbers of sub-questions for different topics, it would be useful to standardise the scores to a common scale. Do this by dividing the total score for each topic by the number of relevant questions, as indicated. That way, all topics will carry the same weight in your discussion. Note that, for some stories, a particular question may not be relevant – for example, a story may lack dialogue in which case the question "Is there a good balance between narrative and dialogue?" cannot be scored.
(4) You may want to modify the format as you go along. That's fine so long as everyone agrees.

	Green	Amber	Red
Presentation			
Is the submission formatted readably, and without typos, spelling and grammar mistakes?	Clearly presented and without mistakes	Some small errors in presentation	Hard to read, poorly formatted, many mistakes
Overall - is it a good story?			
Does the story work?	All elements of the story are well-handled, working together to achieve the effect the author apparently intended.	The story worked reasonably well though it was marred by some looseness and/or contrivance	The story did not work for me
Did it move or enlighten you?	I will remember this story and these characters long after reading. The story resonates in ways that impress me.	I was amused in parts, or thought that certain scenes were poignant or exciting, but overall probably won't remember many details.	My emotional engagement with this story is boredom or irritation.
Did you enjoy reading it?	It was enjoyable to read.	It was somewhat enjoyable to read.	I read it because I had to.
Character and point of view			
Does the author create believable, memorable characters with the uniqueness, complexity, and individuality of real people?	The characters are fully and richly developed	Characters are not deeply developed	Characters remain stereotypes and either all good or all bad
Do the main characters undergo change?	Characters undergo change	There is some change	Characters are undeveloped puppets going through the motions and either do not change

			or change without motivation.
Does the dialogue work?	Dialogue is smooth and believable	Dialogue is generally good, though there are some stilted elements	Dialogue is wooden
Is point of view handled consistently?	Point of view is consistent.	There may be some "head-hopping" in point of view	Point of view is inconsistent
Plot and structure			
Does the opening draw you in, setting up a clear dilemma?	The opening draws the reader in and sets up a dilemma	The opening sets up the story dilemma but may lack intrigue	The opening is mechanical and lacks intrigue
Is there a clear and compelling storyline with an arc of conflict, crisis and resolution?	The story contains enough creative development to maintain interest.	The story is interesting and doesn't feel contrived	The storyline is either difficult to follow, or simplistic and predictable.
Is the plot original?	The plot is original	The story lacks sufficient unique twists to lift it above the level of average.	The plot is not original
Is there good pacing?	Pace is good	Pace is reasonable	Pacing is poor and the story is padded with irrelevant material
Does the ending satisfyingly resolve the opening dilemma?	Even with multiple story lines or plot twists, all pieces were woven together into a single whole.	The story ends reasonably, though there is little surprise and there may be some loose ends	The ending is confusing or inconclusive
Theme			
Does the story contain a central or dominating theme? Does the author make this idea concrete through the characters and their actions? How well is	The story's message rises naturally out of the plot and characters. The message may be subtle or overt, but either way it is interwoven into the story so that neither plot nor	The theme is present but not thoroughly integrated into the other elements of the story, such as plot and characters.	It is not clear what the author intended to communicate. There is no message that is consistent throughout

the message integrated into the story?	characters nor theme could exist without the other.		
Setting and Atmosphere			
Are historical and geographic details sufficiently and accurately developed to give the story realistic or appropriate atmosphere and setting? Can you visualize the places being described?	The author vividly and accurately describes the setting so you are fully immersed in the time and place and action.	The story conveys an adequate sense of place	The physical setting is seldom described so you have little sense of time and place.
Is the setting an integral part of the story	The setting is an integral part of the story and contributes to the mood and emotions of the characters.	The setting is not an integral part of the story. The setting could be changed without changing the story	Or, conversely, the author gives so much time and attention to setting that you lose track of the story in the detail.
Does the story contain anachronisms or inconsistencies?	There are no anachronisms or inconsistencies	There may be some small inconsistencies and inaccuracies	The story includes descriptions or behaviour that are inaccurate in terms of time and place
Writing quality			
Is language skilfully used?	The author uses language precisely and skilfully to express the character, theme and setting.	The author adequately uses language, but the story is not marked by "prose that sings."	The prose flows awkwardly
Do specific details appeal to your senses and hold your attention?	The senses are invoked	There are some elements of sense details	There is insufficient detail and/or excessive use of abstraction

Are character and detail "shown" rather than "told"?	Characters and detail are rendered through description, dialogue, and action and do not rely on "telling".	At times the author reverts to "telling" as opposed to "showing" through detail, action and dialogue.	There is a lot of "telling"
Is there a good balance between narrative and dialogue?	Narrative and dialogue are well balanced	Narrative and dialogue are reasonably balanced	There is an imbalance between narrative and dialogue with an over-use of one or the other
Does the author use precise, active verbs and avoid overuse of adjectives and adverbs?	Active voice is used. Adjectives and adverbs are used moderately and to good effect	The voice is generally active. There may be a tendency to overusing adjectives and adverbs	There is excessive use of the passive voice and/or adjectives and adverbs
Is rhythm used effectively?	There is rhythm to the prose	The prose is without rhythm	The prose is without rhythm and wooden
Are metaphors and similes fresh and effective?	Original metaphors and similes are used	Metaphors and similes are not unique or well-placed	Metaphors and similes are clichés.
Are recurring motifs and/or symbolism used to create additional layers of meaning?	Symbolism and/or recurring motifs add depth	If symbolism is present, it is either heavy-handed or arbitrarily vested with meaning.	There are no recurring motifs or symbolism