Thirty eight submissions in the forms of CD-ROM, DVD-ROM and Web sites were received this year from Australia, Japan and the USA as well as Europe. Although the prize winning entries showed the kind of high standard the judges expect for such an award, the judges know of other excellent work that is worthy of submission to the competition, so all who read this are asked to add to the competition’s publicity by informing anyone they believe should enter.

A wide range of styles of work was submitted, with equal consideration given to commercial products, student projects and art works. Judges looked for multimedia products that work technically and artistically as well as showing innovation in their use of interaction. The prize winning entries were all strong in these aspects, as well as being engaging for the user.

To show how difficult it was to decide between the different categories, we give honourable mentions to two entries. Peter Starkey, Christopher Gibb and Sadie Mason (formerly of Bournemouth University, UK) created the CD-ROM Hungry Ghost. This gives an interface to five separate projects on interacting images and sounds. The clean visual aspect of the interface was most appealing, as were some of the projects shown, although uneven overall quality prevented this from gaining the highest honour. Ali Mazalek in collaboration with Glorianna Davenport and Hiroshi Ishii of MIT Media Lab submitted Tangible Viewpoints (http://www.media.mit.edu/~mazalek/projects/tvpts/). The site describes an interactive system that uses physically ‘graspable surrogates’ placed on a horizontal display screen to select sections of narrative that are played out on another screen. By moving the surrogates relative to each other and to phrases describing scenes on the horizontal display, the selected narrative progresses, with older sections fading and newer ones appearing. The method has high potential, it is unfortunate that the judges had access only to an very good description of the method rather than to the local system itself.

Two of the judges withdrew from consideration of entries from their own institutions, but each was insistent that the other institution’s entry should be considered highly. In order to resolve this impasse, it was decided to split the second prize between two entries that had very different characteristics. One was very tightly planned to respond to a particular need, the other is an open ended and wide ranging exploration of a novel set of interactive systems.

Equal second prize is awarded to Addressing the Body, submitted by Sam Kennedy, Vanessa Hall and Helen Elder of the London Institute (http://itrdu.linst.ac.uk/addressing_the_body) and to ixi, by Enrique Hurtado and Thor Magnusson, formerly of Middlesex University (http://www.ixi-software.net). The former is a teaching package to assist overseas students to cope with use of the English language when they arrive in the UK. It is distinguished by clean ‘cartoon’ like visuals and a question-and-answer process with an easily absorbed but ‘not-too-obvious’ method of interaction, and is well suited to the purpose for which it is intended. The latter (submitted as a CD-ROM backed up by the web site given above) has six major methods of moving and arranging objects on the screen in order to create sound sequences, in effect producing a number of virtual sonic instruments. This is a much more experimental piece, users become absorbed by the variety of easily learned methods for creating sound.

The first prize-winner is the CD-ROM Juvenate: an interactive narrative, created by Michelle Glaser (independent writer/producer), Andrew Hutchison (Curtin University, Perth,
Western Australia) and Marie-Louise Xavier (new media artist and multimedia designer). Supporting information is on http://multimedia.design.curtin.edu.au/juvenate/. This is an experiment in interactive story-telling, developed over 6 years to achieve its aim of engaging users in a narrative. Non-linear narrative is difficult to achieve as the process of interaction can interrupt the process of following a story. However, by use of a sequence of animated images and sounds activated by simple roll-over to allow a complex set of potential paths through the system by dissolves between screens, Juvenate gradually builds up the user’s knowledge of characters and their interrelationships. There is also a useful overview map that allows scenes not yet explored to be discovered by impatient users. The judges found Juvenate genuinely engaging and easy to use without being too obvious.

As chair of the judging panel, I congratulate the prize-winners and thank my colleagues, Fariba Farshad (ITRDU, London Institute) and Paul Brown (Media Artist, Queensland, Australia) for their conscientious work. We hope the quality and variety of all works mentioned will encourage others to submit their innovative work in future years; we know there’s much more to come.

Huw Jones
Chair of the Lansdown Centre for Electronic Arts
Middlesex University, UK