



## PRESS RELEASE:

### **ODYSSEY OF LIBERATION BY DR. MUZI SIKHAKHANE SC WINS TOP PRIZE AT THIS YEAR'S SA BOOK AWARDS**

The winners of this year's SA Book Awards were announced on Tuesday, 8 September, at a special virtual ceremony, hosted by NielsenIQ BookData and supported by the Publishers Association of South Africa (PASA), and the South African Booksellers Association.

Celebrating the 26<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the SA Book Awards, the awards strive to celebrate books written and published in South Africa, based on votes cast by participating South African booksellers. Winners were announced for each of the three categories Fiction, Non-Fiction and Children's with each category winner awarded R5,000. The overall winner, for the title with the most votes in total, was awarded R20,000.

The Fiction Prize was won by **Deon Meyer** for his latest crime fiction title ***Skorpio***. Deon is no stranger to the Awards having previously won with *7 Dae* and *Leo*. Accepting on Deon's behalf Etienne Bloemhof, Head of Fiction at Jonathan Ball Publishers, said: *I am delighted to accept this award on Deon's behalf. I've been working with Deon for 30 years as his Afrikaans publisher and it's still a hell of a big privilege, he's never failed to deliver and Skorpio was the 20<sup>th</sup> publication that I've been involved with and it's a personal favourite of mine so this really means a lot!*

Deon said: *"It is such a huge honour to win the Fiction Prize at the SA Book Awards. My deepest gratitude to the incredible South African booksellers who voted for my work, my editor Dr. Etienne Bloemhof and agent Isobel Dixon for believing in this story, and to every single reader who turned the pages. This means the world."*

***Brave Like Me!*** by **Zulaikha Patel**, illustrated by **Nicci Martin**, won the Children's prize. *Brave Like Me!* is the story of a girl who dared to defy the norms and became a voice for transformation. On hearing she had won, Zulaikha said: *"This win is deeply personal to me, as 2026 marks ten years of my activism which came to the forefront in 2016. This is a pat on the back to little Zulaikha, to say Aluta Continua! If you ever needed proof that any young person, no matter how little, has the power to change the world, this is it."*

Miemie du Plessis, Children's Book Publisher at Pan Macmillan South Africa, who spoke at the Ceremony said: *"Ten years ago, Zulaikha was a thirteen-year-old pupil at Pretoria Girls High leading a protest against the school's hair and language policies. I used to drive past the school every day to drop my own kids nearby and through the years I thought of her often. To my surprise two years ago she contacted me to publish her story, and it felt like it had come full circle. We are incredibly proud as Pan Macmillan of her and our illustrator Nicci Martin. It is a beautiful book, and I know that Zulaikha would want to mention her parents especially her father to whom this book is dedicated."*

Nicci Martin, who illustrated the book, said: *"To have our wonderful book Brave Like Me! chosen by South African booksellers as the 2026 Children's Category winner from a list of such incredible bestselling titles really is a huge honour - I'll be doing cartwheels all week! Bringing Zulaikha's inspiring story to life through four life stages was a rewarding challenge for me as an illustrator. Every illustration needed to feel true to her journey. It was an honour to illustrate this very special picture book - full of heart and growth, a book that will inspire our children to always find the courage inside themselves to speak up!"*

The winner of the Non-Fiction prize was ***Odyssey of Liberation* by Dr. Muzi Sikhakhane SC**. Rooted in activism and philosophical insight, this thought-provoking and inspirational book offers a captivating exploration of South Africa's socio-political landscape. It was a standout favourite amongst this year's voters and was also crowned the Overall Winner for the SA Book Awards 2026. On accepting his award, Dr. Sikhakhane SC said: *"I am delighted and truly humbled that Odyssey of Liberation has won not just the Non-Fiction Prize Award from the SA Book Awards, but also the Overall Prize from this prestigious institution.*

*First of all, I dedicate the Prize to my deceased parents and to my supportive family. It's a prize that belongs not just to me but to my friends and staff who supported me in writing this book.*

*Most importantly, I want to express my sincere gratitude to the South African public for welcoming my story and engaging with it and its emotions. It was my first book and obviously no perfect literary work and yet they embraced it. I am deeply humbled.*

*Receiving a prize of this magnitude is neither a moment of self-indulgence nor personal victory, but a moment of humility towards African people, across all classes, who engaged with Odyssey of Liberation, which was my conversation about the liberation of my people, the people that I so deeply care about.*

*I am grateful to everyone who engaged with my book, including those who offered criticism. It is welcomed and constituted a catalogue of experiences that I value. Thank you to Xarra Publishers for believing in my story."*

Dr. Khanyiso Mguni, Xarra Books Director & Head of Publishing, who published *Odyssey of Liberation* said: *"At Xarra Books, we're excited and humbly grateful that our publication has received these accolades: SA Book Award – Non-Fiction 2026 and the Overall Award from the same institution. From the time we received and reviewed the manuscript, we had no doubt that the work would make a meaningful contribution to the literary landscape of all of South Africa and beyond. Everyone who*

*truly loves South Africa will enjoy the writing and understand the challenges and opportunities facing our beautiful country. Congratulations to Dr Advocate Sikhakhane on the great work and thank you to the SA literary world for your support and enthusiasm."*

This year saw a record-breaking number of booksellers vote for their favourite titles. The winners were announced on Tuesday 8 September during a special virtual ceremony and on social media using **#SABookAwards**.

A recording of the award ceremony is available on request, for more information email: [marketing.book@nielseniq.com](mailto:marketing.book@nielseniq.com)

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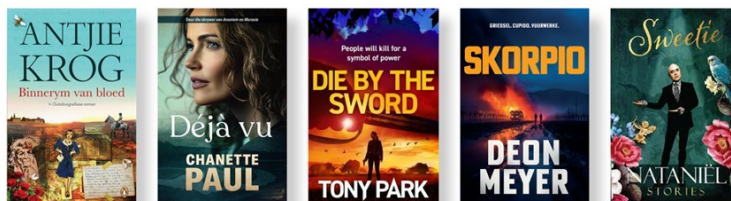
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## SA Book Awards 2026 Shortlists:

### Fiction Prize



*Binnerym van Bloed/Blood's Inner Rhyme* - Antjie Krog

*Déjà Vu* - Chanette Paul

*Die by the Sword* - Tony Park

*Skorpio* - Deon Meyer

*Sweetie: Stories* - Nataniel

### Non-Fiction Prize



*Damn Good Food* - Fehmz Jordaan

*Mafia Land: Inside South Africa's Darkest Cartels* - Kyle Cowan

*Odyssey of Liberation* - Muzi Sikhakhane

*The Shadow State: Why Babita Deokaran Had To Die* - Jeff Wicks

*Unlocked/Ten Slotte* - Eben Etzebeth

### Children's Prize



*Brave Like Me!* - Zulaikha Patel, illustrated by Nicci Martin

*How Not to Mess Up Online: A Teenager's Guide...* - Emma Sadleir and Rorke Wilson

*Ouma Mollie se Verkeerde Verjaarsdag: Ouma Mollie* - Fanie Viljoen, illustrated by Johann Strauss

*Ruben Namibië En Cindy: Manewales van Ruben Lambrechts en sy Diere* - Pieter Van Zyl

*With Me Always* - Sarah J Portal, illustrated by Jake Waldron

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