

Aurealis Awards 2009
Young Adult
Judges' Report

Panel members

Mim Crase (convenor), Miffy Farquharson, Kathryn Linge, Alex Mitchell, Tehani Wessely

Number of entries

Novels: 29

Short stories: 18

Judging criteria

Works were assessed considering several criteria, including originality, age suitability, characterisation, plot, style, speculative fiction content and the x-factor (that certain something that makes a story work for the reader).

Overview of entries

2009 saw the panel receive quite a varied selection of novels in quality and genre range, with the short story selection being very strong. It is good to see that publishers are sending so many entries to the Aurealis Awards. It could be interpreted that this competition is having an impact on sales.

Some titles didn't strike the judges as either speculative fiction or young adult, and while there were some excellent stories amongst these works, they were not considered for the list of finalists. Of the great many entries that truly fit the category, it became a hotly debated contest. The emergence of steampunk as a genre is becoming more obvious with several titles fitting this category. Strongly Australian settings and ideas are also becoming more prevalent. Australian authors and publishers can be proud of the quality of writing that is available today.

Finalists

Novels

Scott Westerfeld, *Leviathan Trilogy: Book One*, Penguin WINNER

Kate Forsyth, *The Puzzle Ring*, Pan Macmillan

Cassandra Golds, *The Museum of Mary Child*, Puffin Books

Glenda Millard, *A Small Free Kiss in the Dark*, Allen & Unwin

Sean Williams, *Scarecrow*, HarperCollins Publishers Australia

Review of finalists

Scott Westerfeld, *Leviathan Trilogy: Book One*, Penguin WINNER

From the very first handling of this gorgeously presented novel, to the illustrations that are worth more than a paltry thousand words, this is an expansive and luscious story. Even to the After Word that explains the basis for this alternate reality, this is an exciting piece of story telling. It has a marvellous scope and is wonderfully imaginative.

Kate Forsyth, *The Puzzle Ring*, Pan Macmillan

The Puzzle Ring is a very age-appropriate finalist with a strong female character lead who travels across time to save her family. The judges were impressed with Forsyth's combination of time travel logic with faery-based fantasy, and also enjoyed the fact that the plot was intertwined with real historical events. Curses can be broken - it just might take some time, and always take some good friends with you. Well put together and engaging.

Cassandra Golds, *The Museum of Mary Child*, Puffin Books

A gloriously written, elegantly creepy, well put together work, this was very different from all the other novel submissions. With an old fashioned feel and some very sinister overtones, the story nevertheless contains a message that hope and love can transcend time.

Glenda Millard, *A Small Free Kiss in the Dark*, Allen & Unwin

Set in an alternate time line, in post-apocalyptic Melbourne, this book's magnificent figurative language makes it a gem. While more suited for an older YA audience, the protagonist's journey to find a family is touching and absorbing. The judges were impressed with how *A Small Free Kiss in the Dark* positions the reader to be able to empathise with what it must be like to face the consequences of war without any knowledge or understanding of why.

Sean Williams, *Scarecrow*, HarperCollins Publishers Australia

Hotly-contested and only narrowly pipped at the post, *Scarecrow* is a pleasure to read, with great writing, world building, and interesting characters that deliver a worthwhile message. While this book is relatively short, the judges found it complex and genuinely scary in parts. A well constructed young adult novel.

Finalists

Short Story

Cat Sparks, "Seventeen", *Masques*, CSFG WINNER

Joanne Anderton, "Dragon Bones", *Andromeda Spaceways Inflight Magazine #39*, Andromeda Spaceways Publishing Co-operative Ltd

Sue Isle, "Paper Dragons", *Shiny #5*, Twelfth Planet Press

Ian McHugh, "Once a Month, on a Sunday", *Andromeda Spaceways Inflight Magazine #40*, Andromeda Spaceways Publishing Co-operative Ltd

Tansy Rayner Roberts, "Like Us", *Shiny #5*, Twelfth Planet Press

Review of finalists

Cat Sparks, "Seventeen", *Masques*, CSFG WINNER

Well crafted and cleverly done, this bleak view of the future is right on the button for the age group. Strongly characterised and beautifully written, this story was a clear favourite.

Joanne Anderton, "Dragon Bones", *Andromeda Spaceways Inflight Magazine #39*, Andromeda Spaceways Publishing Co-operative Ltd

Strongly Australian in flavour, this story is particularly interesting for an unusual treatment of dragons and great young adult themes.

Sue Isle, "Paper Dragons" *Shiny #5*, Twelfth Planet Press

There is excellent use of the Australian setting in this post-apocalyptic tale that connects the "present" with the future.

Ian McHugh, "Once a Month on a Sunday" *Andromeda Spaceways Inflight Magazine #40*, Andromeda Spaceways Publishing Co-operative Ltd

This is an intriguingly unusual, genuinely creepy, subtle and strongly Australian story that lingers in the mind.

Tansy Rayner Roberts, "Like Us" *Shiny #5*, Twelfth Planet Press

Well crafted and surely a cautionary tale about the deceptiveness of appearances.

Conclusion

There have been some fine works submitted in both the novel and short story YA categories and it has been a hard call to choose just five from the dozen or so that started on each list of finalists. Whether steampunk, alternate reality, junior James Bond, boy-centric, or "girly" there was something for everyone in the offerings this year. The judges were pleased to see so many stories set in Australia, as our landscape and characters have plenty to offer.