

Aurealis Awards 2009
Fantasy Short Story
Judges' Report

Panel members

Helena Bond (convenor), Brad Jackel, Beau Taylor, Zoe Velonis, Zoe Walton

Number of entries

93

Judging criteria

Judges considered the overall quality of each story as a work of literature, and as a work of fantasy. Judges looked for originality; contribution to the fantasy genre; convincing world building; well-constructed plots; living, breathing characters (including the undead); excellent writing; controlled pace, and of course, the all-important X-factor ó that quality that makes a story both gripping and memorable to the reader.

Overview of entries

This year's entries spanned a wide range, in several ways. Length ranged from flash fiction (works of < 500 words) to substantial novellas. Writing style spanned elegant understatement to dense layering. Both concepts and quality of writing ranged from sublime to painful with all permutations in between. Within this range were stories to appeal to all readers: from light and hopeful, through belief-questioning to dark and gritty.

The list of finalists was hotly debated, and could easily have run to a list of 20. The panel's tastes turned out to be diverse, and each judge mourns at least one favourite that did not make the list. We also all came to appreciate some stories we'd overlooked. There are many great stories published in the period that missed out, so don't confine your reading to the works on the list of finalists.

Finalists

Christopher Green, 'Father's Kill' *Beneath Ceaseless Skies* #24 JOINT WINNER

Ian McHugh, 'Once a Month, On a Sunday' *Andromeda Spaceways Inflight Magazine* #40 JOINT WINNER

Tansy Rayner Roberts, 'Siren Beat' *Roadkill/Siren Beat*, Twelfth Planet Press

Angela Slatter, 'Words' *The Lifted Brow* #5

Lucy Sussex, 'Something Better than Death' *Aurealis* #42

Review of finalists

Christopher Green, 'Father's Kill' *Beneath Ceaseless Skies* #24 JOINT WINNER
Sparse, elegant, creepy! A deftly constructed dark fantasy story that did its job very well. Tight writing builds a great atmosphere while holding back the final twist with clever sleight of hand. We can't reveal more.

Ian McHugh, 'Once a Month, On a Sunday', *Andromeda Spaceways Inflight Magazine* #40 JOINT WINNER

Succinct and skillfully written, several of McHugh's stories were hotly debated for the shortlist, and this little gem just topped the list. The world-building, filtered by a child's perception, effortlessly created an alternative, distinctly Australian world. Understated and lovely.

Tansy Rayner Roberts, "Siren Beat" *Roadkill/Siren Beat*, Twelfth Planet Press
Jaded, all-but-immortal guardian figures who help the cops solve the metaphysical cases have been done to death, so a story in this genre has to be good to be a finalist. Strong characters, with clear, distinct voices and a plot that blended real and fantastic elements in a believable alternative Hobart. Sex, desire, death: all the classics, poured from one of those Smirnoff reality-altering bottles.

Angela Slatter, "Words" *The Lifted Brow* #5
Like McHugh, Slatter's skilful writing made all her entries contenders for the list of finalists. In 'Words', she plays with the concept of creation through writing: what is let into the world this way, what fears that may evoke, what can be taken from it...

Lucy Sussex, "Something Better than Death" *Aurealis* #42
A story about grownups, and something more eternal. This story comes alive partly because the point of view is that of an adult sufficiently mature to see the fantastical patterns in her life. A skilful weave of fantasy and fairy tale, this is a story of subtleties that improves with rereading.

Conclusion

It's a delight to read such a large array of locally written fantasy stories, and then to get to know them even better by discussing their relative strengths to produce a list of the best.