

**Aurealis Awards 2009
Science Fiction Novel
Judges' Report**

Panel members

Helen Merrick (convener), Stephen Burgess, Justin Coughlan, Abigail Nathan, Ben Payne

Number of entries

11

Judging criteria

We were looking for excellent writing; originality of plot, worldbuilding and characters; engaging world-building and characterization; narrative drive, and an overall engrossing and satisfying reading experience. We looked for a work that sparked our imagination and intellect, and provided a new or different take on the world, humanity, the future, or the present.

Overview of entries

It is difficult to make many generalisations about this year's entries given the small field. A couple of newer writers showing much promise were evident, as well as better-known writers both inside and outside the genre. A number of entries had strong cross-overs with other categories, such as fantasy, horror and YA, such that there was much debate over whether many of the books were sufficiently "science fictional" to satisfy our criteria. A number of entries were considered enjoyable and well-written, but better suited to other categories. Given the strength of SF produced in short fiction in the last few years in Australia, we hope that the small number of entries in the novel field this year is merely an anomaly.

Finalists

Andrew McGahan, *Wonders of a Godless World*, Allen & Unwin WINNER
Sean Williams, *The Grand Conjunction, Astropolis Book Three*, Orbit

Review of finalists

Andrew McGahan, *Wonders of a Godless World*, Allen & Unwin WINNER
Strange, haunting and beautifully written, this highly original novel makes for an engrossing and mind-expanding read. Although it could be approached as a mainstream text, for science fiction readers, the explorations of inner and outer space and time engage with some of the central themes of the genre – how we come to know the world, what it means to be human, the relation between humanity, the world, and space, and adds in a lovely conceit about the impossibility of space travel. Tightly plotted, with fascinating, vivid, unexpected characters, this was our stand-out read.

Sean Williams, *The Grand Conjunction, Astropolis Book Three*, Orbit

This third book in Williams's *Astropolis* series brings the trilogy to an exciting and satisfying close. As one would expect from Williams, this is a well-written, deftly plotted rollercoaster of a read, which reveals ever-more complex layers of history and motivations for Imre Bergamasco's actions, past and present. Expertly managing this complex plot, set over millennia, the novel continues its exploration of human desires and motivations, and the role of friendship – even love. An added bonus is the surprising beginning with its wonderful noir detective story.