

2010 Aurealis Awards – Judges’ Reports

JUDGES REPORT – BEST CHILDREN’S FICTION (told primarily through words)

Edwina Harvey, Sarah Mayor Cox and Tansy Rayner Roberts (convenor).

Number of Entries: 69

Judging Criteria

Ultimately we were looking for great writing that showcased the range available to young Australian readers, but also stories which engaged with the speculative fiction genre. There were several books which we loved, but which only had small aspects of science fiction or fantasy, and this had an effect on the formation of our shortlist. The judges were also keen to ensure that there was representation on this list of more ‘junior’ books as well as those for older children.

Overview of nominations

The Children’s Fiction (told primarily through words) category had an incredibly healthy year, with over forty novels submitted and many short stories. There was much debate over the formation of the shortlist, with several worthy stories that we could not include in the shortlist - the strength of a shortlist is often what is left out!

Finalists

- *Grimsdon*, **Deborah Abela**, Random House
- *Rangers Apprentice #9: Halt’s Peril*, **John Flanagan**, Random House
- *The Vulture of Somerset*, **Stephen M Giles**, Pan Macmillan
- *Haggis MacGregor and the Night of the Skull*, **Jen Storer and Gus Gordon**, Aussie Nibbles (Penguin)
- **WINNER** *The Keepers (Museum of Thieves Book 1)*, **Lian Tanner**, Allen & Unwin

Review of Finalists

Grimsdon, Random House:

This is the only science fictional work on our shortlist, a very powerful addition to the wealth of post-apocalyptic children’s stories in the history of Australian literature. Abela’s story is set after a city has been destroyed and abandoned in the wake of terrible floods this story of hope and adventure follows a band of kids who have formed their own family in order to survive.

Ranger’s Apprentice #9: Halt’s Peril, Random House:

John Flanagan’s book is fast paced and action packed, with well-rounded characters. One of our judges said: “I particularly appreciated the flashes of humour that are shown through these books as a counterbalance to the action and violence, and thought they were entertaining as well as educational in their descriptions...”

The Vulture of Somerset, Pan Macmillan:

This is a clever family adventure by Giles with black humour and gothic sensibilities. Despite being a sequel, it stood out because of beautiful writing and sympathetic characters.

Haggis MacGregor and the Night of the Skull, Aussie Nibbles (Penguin):

This book by Jen Storer & Gus Gordon is fast paced and fun from the beginning to end. One of our judges said: "I think it would appeal to readers of a wide age-range from quite young to adult. This adult definitely found it an enjoyable and entertaining read."

The Keepers (Museum of Thieves Book 1), Allen & Unwin:

This book by Lian Tanner is a beautifully presented and highly original first volume of a new series which will surely become an Australian children's classic.

JUDGES REPORT – BEST CHILDREN’S FICTION (told primarily through pictures)

Edwina Harvey, Sarah Mayor Cox and Tansy Rayner Roberts (convenor).

Number of Entries: 12

Judging Criteria

Here we were looking for lovely, accessible writing and stories which engaged with the speculative fiction genre, but also a high standard of artwork and a strong relationship between pictures and text, seen through a science fictional or fantastical lens.

Overview of nominations

The Children’s Fiction (told primarily through pictures) category had far fewer entries, though there were still some excellent titles that stood out above the crowd.

Finalists

- *Night School*, **Isabelle Carmody** (writer) & **Anne Spudvilas** (illustrator), Penguin Viking
- *Magpie*, **Luke Davies** (writer) & **Inari Kiuru** (illustrator), ABC Books (HarperCollins)
- **WINNER** *The Boy and the Toy*, **Sonya Hartnett** (writer) & **Lucia Masciullo** (illustrator), Penguin Viking
- *Precious Little*, **Julie Hunt & Sue Moss** (writers) & **Gaye Chapman** (illustrator), Allen & Unwin
- *The Cloudchasers*, **David Richardson** (writer) & **Steven Hunt** (illustrator), ABC Books (HarperCollins)

Review of Finalists

Night School, Penguin Viking

This is an evocative, spooky story from Isabelle Carmody which resonates heavily, and features some very dark and powerful artwork by Anne Spudvilas.

Magpie, ABC Books

One of our judges said, “Magpie is one of the most interesting and ground-breaking picture books for a long time. This is a dark but hopeful story with strong, vivid illustrations.”

The Boy and His Toy, Penguin Viking

This is a rare thing in being a children’s picture book which genuinely feels like it belongs to the genre of science fiction. This tale of a boy and his robot, written by Sonya Hartnett and gorgeously illustrated by Lucia Masciullo, is poignant and clever, and worthy of several re-readings.

Precious Little, Allen & Unwin

This story, written by Julie Hunt & Sue Moss and illustrated by Gaye Chapman, is a fun, highly detailed fantasy work rich with circus mythology. The heroine is so bright and bold that you can’t take your eyes off her, and every page is a joy to look at.

The Cloudchasers, ABC Books (HarperCollins)

This is a surprisingly serious work of fantasy. A marvellous bridging book for young advanced readers who might be looking for something more challenging but are not yet ready to abandon picture books.

JUDGES REPORT – YOUNG ADULT SHORT STORY

Miffy Farquharson (convenor), Elise Jones and Helen Patrice.

Number of Entries: 36

Judging Criteria

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

Overview of Entries

The short stories entered for the 2010 Young Adult award were generally good, with the finalists representing the cream of the crop. The stories included ideas as diverse as genetic engineering, reworked fairytales and evil cats, and most authors managed to successfully aim their writing at the intended audience. With an enormous variety in the length, style and subject of the stories, this category was, once again, a challenge to judge.

Finalists

- *Inksucker*, **Aidan Doyle**, *Worlds Next Door*, Fablecroft Publishing
- *One Story, No Refunds*, **Dirk Flinthart**, *Shiny #6*, Twelfth Planet Press
- **WINNER** *A Thousand Flowers*, **Margo Lanagan**, *Zombies vs Unicorns*, Allen & Unwin
- *Nine Times*, **Kaia Landelius** and **Tansy Rayner Roberts**, *Worlds Next Door*, Fablecroft Publishing
- *An Ordinary Boy*, **Jen White**, *The Tangled Bank*, Tangled Bank Press

Review of Finalists

Inksucker, *Worlds Next Door*, Fablecroft Publishing:

An ‘adventure in words’ inside an adventure indeed! This witty little story uses English grammar and imaginative word magic to take you on an adventure with Zoe and her Dad to the faraway land at the end of the ‘best bookshop on Melbourne.’

One Story, No Refunds, *Shiny #6*, Twelfth Planet Press:

Jack is a single father. His life is monotonous. Thankless. Loveless. Jay, his son, feels that nothing he does is ever any good. And never will be. So what’s the point in even trying? Nothing will change. Flinthart takes the essence of myths and legends, and weaves them into a new and clever tale of wishes and wanting that will leave you guessing until the very end.

A Thousand Flowers, *Zombies vs Unicorns*, Allen & Unwin:

The complete dexterity of Lanagan’s writing is most evident in this story submitted for the ‘Unicorn’ faction of this excellent anthology. Set in a world of knights and royalty, the first person narrator, Manny, is led to the princess by a unicorn the colour of the moon whilst wandering through the woods searching for a place to relieve himself. Suffice to say, you will be surprised, delighted, and perhaps, flabbergasted, at the twists and turns of this sublime short story.

Nine Times, Worlds Next Door, Fablecroft Publishing

'The first time she saw it, she told herself that it was just a cat...The second time she saw it, Elvira was sure that it was, in fact, not a cat'. Elvira is a 'sensible' girl, but is she prepared for the feeling she gets when the cat creature becomes more than something slinking and vanishing across her path? This creepy story successfully explores longing, power and greedy need within the confines of a 'normal' sibling relationship.

An Ordinary Boy, The Tangled Bank, Tangled Bank Press

What if the boy of the story is actually a sentient mammal? What if scientists have discovered a way to engineer 'intelligent' marsupials? And what if one of those animals is sent to your school and your mum expects you to become friends with this boy? What would you do? This unusual work explores ideas of prejudice, morals, and love in a brave and fantastical way.

JUDGES REPORT – BEST YOUNG ADULT NOVEL

Miffy Farquharson (convenor), Elise Jones and Helen Patrice.

Number of entries: 47

Judging criteria

As for Best Young Adult Short Fiction, works were assessed considering several criteria, including originality, age suitability, characterisation, plot, style, speculative fiction content and overall reading experience – known as the X-factor (that certain something that makes a story work for the reader).

Overview of nominations

There was an increase in the number of entries in the Young Adult category with the number of entries from young and / or previously unpublished authors also growing, which is very pleasing to see. I think that we can safely say that publishers and authors have embraced the Young Adult category with open arms!

Subjects ranged through vampires, werewolves, ghosts, guardians, robots, sci-fi, terrifying trees, scary playgrounds, witches, goblins, secondary realms, and fantasy settings. It is astounding how diverse are the ideas that are taken from the everyday life around the authors, and how they twist those ideas to delight and terrify the reader.

Finalists

- *Merrow*, **Ananda Braxton-Smith**, black dog books
- *The Midnight Zoo*, **Sonya Hartnett**, Penguin
- **WINNER** *Guardian of the Dead*, **Karen Healey**, Allen & Unwin
- *The Life of a Teenage Body-Snatcher*, **Doug MacLeod**, Penguin
- *Behemoth (Leviathan Trilogy Book Two)*, **Scott Westerfeld**, Penguin

Review of finalists

Merrow, black dog books:

The people of Carrick have been talking about Neen's family her whole life – about her mother and how she disappeared back to her home – under the water. The language is outstanding and very much the writer's own. The characterisation is excellent; the relationships stuffed with tension and irritability and love and everything in between; the sense of place is top notch; the themes are thought-provoking and wide-reaching; the symbolism is so clever; and beyond all, the entire story - style, heroine, plot, world - is just fizzing with energy.

The Midnight Zoo, Penguin:

This is an elegant fable of two young boys, made orphans and homeless in one cruel and twisted act of war, and their journey through a country ravaged by the same war. On the way the boys come to a zoo, The Midnight Zoo, where the animals can talk and think, and where the boys learn about themselves, their family, and the owners of the zoo. At times shocking, at others unutterably moving, *The Midnight Zoo* is a powerful, suspense-filled tale.

Guardian of the Dead, Allen & Unwin:

Set in New Zealand, *Guardian of the Dead* is the story of Ellie. Stuck in a boarding school, Ellie is headed towards some serious trouble, which is only just being held at bay by her best friend, Kevin. When Ellie is talked into joining a YA theatre group run by her rival, she gets way more than she bargained for. Coherent, genuinely creepy and suspenseful, well-written, age appropriate, mythological, respectful and a great read, this novel will have you on the edge of your seat and gasping for air.

The Life of a Teenage Body-Snatcher, Penguin:

In this rollicking tale of death and disease, intrigue and nightmare, MacLeod relates the story of Thomas Timewell: sixteen and a gentleman. In the first chapter we meet Thomas, who has gone to the graveyard to collect the body of his recently deceased grandfather. There he meets Plenitude, a body-snatcher, or as he prefers, a 'resurrectionist', a man of unusual moral fortitude and, even more unusual for the times, a caring nature. Humorous, moving and just a lot creepy, *The Life of a Teenage Body-Snatcher* definitely goes 'bump' in the night.

Behemoth (Leviathan Trilogy Book Two), Penguin:

Continuing the story begun in *Leviathan*, *Behemoth* moves the action to The Ottoman Empire. Deryn/Dylan and Prince Alek are together, but not as equals, as the captain has assigned Deryn to 'observe' the enemy prince while the Leviathan attempts to avert the war that is threatened. Westerfeld's complete world-building is a triumph, and the derring-do and sheer 'tally-ho'-ness of the plot will drag you into this alternative, steampunked World War I adventure. Of special note are Keith Thompson's wonderful illustrations, which enhance and extend the text.

JUDGES' REPORT - BEST GRAPHIC NOVEL/ILLUSTRATED BOOK

Liz Argall, Lee Battersby and Grant Watson (convenor).

Number of entries: 8

Judging criteria

While the quality of both the narrative text and the visual artwork were considered individually, it was also important to consider how the separate elements worked in unison to present the final work. In the best graphic novels and illustrated books, both the visual and narrative elements form a seamless text – while each element may be successful individually, when combined they form a superior whole.

Overview of nominations

It was a fascinating year for graphic fiction in Australia. While many works covered similar themes of horror and the supernatural, they covered them in radically different fashion. There is a sense of play among the shortlisted works: a sense that Australian writers and artists are beginning to experiment with the graphic fiction form more than with its content. While such experimentation may not always be wholly successful, its boldness is worth celebrating, and it points to many significant and enduring works to be produced in the future.

Finalists

- *Shakespeare's Hamlet*, **Nicki Greenberg**, Allen & Unwin
- *EEEEK!: Weird Australian Tales of Suspense*, **Jason Paulos et al**, Black House Comics
- **WINNER** *Changing Ways Book 1*, **Justin Randall**, Gestalt Publishing
- *Five Wounds*, **Jonathan Walker and Dan Hallett**, Allen & Unwin.
- *Horrors: Great Stories of Fear and Their Creators*, **Rocky Wood and Glenn Chadbourne**, McFarlane & Co.

Review of Finalists

Shakespeare's Hamlet, Allen & Unwin:

Among the growing number of graphic Shakespearean adaptations, this is a landmark work. It was created with an unexpurgated text, which is an unusual and bold choice for this form of work, and it was presented in a highly distinct and abstract style that brought out the subtlety of Shakespeare's characters.

EEEEK! Weird Australian Tales of Suspense, Black House Comics:

This work, by Justin Paulos et al, is an unashamed re-iteration of the popular American horror comics of the 1950s. While its ambition does not extend far beyond paying homage to its source material, it was noted by the panel that *EEEEK!* pays its homage extremely well. Both story and art achieve their objective, and are of an admirable quality.

Changing Ways Volume 1, Gestalt Publishing:

It was a fast, interesting read by Justin Randall with strong characterisation and effective artwork reminiscent of noted comic artists Jon J. Muth, Ben Templesmith and Ashley Wood. *Changing Ways* presents a strong combination of story, art and production design.

Five Wounds, Allen & Unwin:

This work impressed the panel with its bold use of visual design and graphical layout. It added to both the written text and artwork to help create something quite unusual. The book is a bold, clever experiment that should be acknowledged and widely appreciated.

Horrors: Great Stories of Fear and Their Creators, McFarlane & Co.:

This is an ambitious attempt to meld significant horror stories of the past with a commentary upon them, and form one flowing narrative as a result. The artwork suits the text very well, and is highly reminiscent of both Rafael Kavanan's work on *Hawkmoon: The Jewel in the Skull* and Gary Gianni's line-etching style. Both writing and illustration work to reinforce each other as integral elements, while also capable of standing alone.

JUDGES' REPORT – BEST HORROR SHORT STORY

Chuck McKenzie (Convenor), Nyssa Pascoe and Mark Smith-Briggs.

Number of entries: 150 (approx.)

Judging criteria

The panel looked for stories with strong, fresh plots and characters that engaged the reader, and that – just as importantly – generated a genuine atmosphere of horror, fear and/or extreme unease.

Overview of nominations

While the number of entries into the Short Story category was almost 50% up on last year, there was perhaps a (resultant) smaller percentage of truly outstanding individual works among this number.

Finalists

- *Take the Free Tour*, **Bob Franklin**, *Under Stones*, Affirm Press
- *Her Gallant Needs*, **Paul Haines**, *Sprawl*, Twelfth Planet Press
- **WINNER** *The Fear*, **Richard Harland**, *Macabre: A Journey Through Australia's Darkest Fears*, Brimstone Press
- *Wasting Matilda*, **Robert Hood**, *Zombie Apocalypse!*, Constable & Robinson Ltd
- *Lollo*, **Martin Livings**, *Close Encounters of the Urban Kind*, Apex Publishing

Review of finalists

Take the Free Tour, Affirm Press:

A straight-laced journalist's foray into internet pornography leads to his demise in this twisted and dark tale of sex, murder and violence. Franklin explores the seedy underbelly of society with equal doses of horror and jet-black humour.

Her Gallant Needs, Twelfth Planet Press:

A gritty urban tale of bullying, and horror derived from unlikely places. An unsettling addition to Haines' excellent body of work.

The Fear, Brimstone Press:

Rarely do you read a story with such lingering dread as Harland's *The Fear*. This is a brilliantly constructed chiller about a film club that tries to track down the last reel of a long-lost horror movie, and Harland's prose has a filmic quality that oozes tension.

Wasting Matilda, Constable & Robinson Ltd:

A dark, apocalyptic tale told through transcripts, the one-on-one feel of the story thrilling the senses. Rob Hood is a master of the craft.

Lollo, Apex Publishing:

Livings combines horror with a touch of science-fiction in this fantastic 1970s Stephen King-esque story about a babysitter tormented by a creepy toy clown. Part *IT*, part *Alien* and part *Black Christmas*, Lollo represents a throwback to the fun, supernatural chillers of yesteryear. After masterfully creating a feeling of unease with the appearance of the doll, Livings raises the tension as our protagonist is forced to fight for her life within the confines of the home.

JUDGES' REPORT – BEST HORROR NOVEL

Chuck McKenzie (Convenor), Nyssa Pascoe, Mark Smith-Briggs

Number of entries: 12

Judging criteria

The panel looked for stories with strong, fresh plots and characters that engaged the reader, and that – just as importantly – generated a genuine atmosphere of horror, fear and/or extreme unease.

Overview of nominations

The panel was impressed with the strength of entries into the Novel category.

Finalists

- *After the World: Gravesend*, Jason Fischer, Black House Comics
- *Death Most Definite*, Trent Jamieson, Orbit (Hachette)
- **WINNER** *Madigan Mine*, Kirstyn McDermott, Pan Macmillan

Review of finalists

After The World: Gravesend, Black House Comics:

Fischer has perfectly captured the feel of an unravelling community desperately attempting to cling to a bygone time and place, the survivors of a zombie plague struggling to feel alive when all they know is death. A chilling and credible tale.

Death Most Definite, Orbit (Hachette):

Jamieson's debut novel is a compelling dark take on corporate takeover, in which a pomp (soul collector) is forced to literally fight for his life when someone decides to wipe out his department for their own promotion. A fast-paced narrative, strong characters, and blend of black humour and horror make this a must-read.

Madigan Mine, Pan Macmillan:

A brilliant story woven with gothic imagery, *Madigan Mine* is a compulsive debut novel. Madigan is everything Alex never wanted in a woman; a dark and twisted temptress, whose manipulation doesn't even end with her death. Creepy and utterly engrossing.

Conclusion

The final shortlist comprised stories covering a wonderful range of complex, engrossing and dark themes, which is indicative of the greater range of themes covered by the full complement of entries. Notable trends included a shift away from Dark Fantasy towards *definitive* Horror (i.e. – 'a painful feeling of loathing or fear', Oxford dictionary) – although there was also a slight increase, on previous years, in the number of Paranormal Romance stories - as well as a greater number of stories specifically involving zombies, and fewer involving vampires or werewolves.

JUDGES' REPORT – BEST FANTASY SHORT STORY

Natalie Maddalena, Simon Petrie and Tehani Wessely (Convenor).

Number of entries: 180

Judging criteria

The final decisions were based on the following criteria:

Originality; Fantasy Elements; Characterisation; Plot; World building; Style; X-Factor (that nebulous element that is very difficult to pin down that sometimes makes a great story one that is simply excellent – the judges found this frequently came down to memorability and lasting resonance).

Overview of nominations

Australian fantasy storytelling in 2010 was wide ranging, far reaching and of a very high standard. With Australian authors seeing “print” all over the world, in some very highly regarded electronic and traditionally published markets, the body of work considered in the Fantasy Short Story category this year was strong indeed.

The judges received 180 entries, stemming from anthologies, magazines, ezines, and more. The decision making was very difficult due to the number and quality of entries, and the judges could have happily had a shortlist of at least ten, with an even longer list of highly recommended stories!

Finalists

- *The Duke of Vertumn's Fingerling*, **Elizabeth Carroll**, Strange Horizons
- **(Joint) WINNER** *Yowie*, **Thoraiya Dyer**, *Sprawl*, Twelfth Planet Press
- **(Joint) WINNER** *The February Dragon*, **LL Hannett & Angela Slatter**, *Scary Kisses*, Ticonderoga Publications
- *All the Clowns in Clowntown*, **Andrew McKiernan**, *Macabre: A Journey Through Australia's Darkest Fears*, Brimstone Press
- *Sister, Sister*, **Angela Slatter**, *Strange Tales III*, Tartarus Press

Review of finalists

The Duke of Vertumn's Fingerling, Strange Horizons:

The words curled around the reader; challenging, beautifully written, just excellent.

Yowie, Twelfth Planet Press:

Heartbreaking and beautiful, this story is quietly incandescent and gorgeously Australian.

The February Dragon, Ticonderoga Publications:

With a self-contained plot, great story and skillful writing, this was a fantasy standout.

All the Clowns in Clowntown, Brimstone Press:

A really original, well written story.

Sister, Sister, Tartarus Press:

Well crafted and paced, this is a compelling, solid, well-sustained story.

JUDGES' REPORT – BEST FANTASY NOVEL

Angela Handley, Peter Hickman (Convenor) and Rowena Specht-Whyte.

Number of entries: 53

Overview of nominations

A very large field of 53 books shows that whatever uncertainties face the publishing industry in Australia, our fantasy at least, seems to be in great shape. There was a wonderful diversity of titles encompassing children's books, YA, urban fantasy, dark fantasy, high fantasy, Sci-Fi/fantasy and a few that we could not even begin to classify. Several self-published books were entered, and the fact that one made the shortlist from such a large field shows that those working outside the publishing houses not only have the energy and enthusiasm required, but can have strong technical skill as well.

Despite such a varied field, and the high number of strong contenders, the judges found themselves in agreement on many of the novels - though there was long and ardent debate when we came to the difficult task of whittling our long lists down to a final five! Suffice to say, there are, as ever, a few unlucky writers out there.

Overall we were delighted by the quality of storytelling, of technique and of inventiveness of several of the authors and we will continue to read the work of those on the shortlist (and a few who didn't make it) long after our judging days are over.

Finalists

- *The Silence of Medair*, **Andrea K Höst**, self-published
- *Death Most Definite*, **Trent Jamieson**, Orbit (Hachette)
- *Stormlord Rising*, **Glenda Larke**, HarperVoyager (HarperCollins)
- *Heart's Blood*, **Juliet Marillier**, Pan Macmillan
- **WINNER** *Power and Majesty*, **Tansy Rayner Roberts**, HarperVoyager (HarperCollins)

Review of finalists

The Silence of Medair, self-published:

The magic is variously humorous and breathtaking, and Höst has a fresh voice and an unusual heroine—a diplomat rather than a mage. You can read *Silence of Medair* for its strong, conflicted heroine, its playful subversion of fantasy tropes, or its deep, detailed analysis of the nature of racism. If not, just read it for the beautifully crafted prose.

Death Most Definite, Orbit (Hachette):

This novel combines urban fantasy, detective fiction, romance and a journey to the underworld. Themes as old as Orpheus, but brilliantly re-imagined in modern Brisbane. With the innovative theme of Death as corporation at its heart, *Death Most Definite* grabs you and drags you at breakneck speed until it lands you, breathless, on the final page, still wanting more. You'll never look at Brisbane the same way again!

Stormlord Rising, HarperVoyager:

This is classic fantasy full of all the great elements fantasy readers love: a well-balanced magic system, a complex political world and a series of interweaving storylines told from the perspective of several engaging characters. Full of pace, energy and intrigue, *Stormlord Rising* is a must read for lovers of high fantasy.

Heart's Blood, Pan Macmillan:

This beautiful, intimate story has an ever-present sense of menace. With echoes of *Jane Eyre*, set in a cursed Celtic landscape, this is a tale of one woman's spirit, love and determination. As she unravels the mysteries locked in the castle's library, and begins a tentative, difficult romance with the volatile Lord Anluan, Caitlin must rediscover her confidence and courage in order to undo the evils of the past. Marillier crafts complex characters in a deeply immersive milieu to create a timeless, magical tale.

Power and Majesty, HarperVoyager:

Don't let the cover of this book fool you! This vibrant and affecting urban fantasy is taut, dark and bloody. With a cast of intriguing characters rich in history and personality, against the backdrop of a beautifully drawn urban setting, Rayner Roberts captures every nuance of the hedonism, corruption, violence and addiction of power.

JUDGES' REPORT – BEST SCIENCE FICTION SHORT STORY

Bill Congreve (Convenor), Kathryn Linge and Rob Riel.

Number of entries: 110

Judging criteria

What the panel looked for is quite simple: the best story. There are as many ways to judge speculative short fiction as there are people who have thought about the issue: originality, style, plot, characterisation, theme, characters in conflict with an idea, craftsmanship, science and scientific speculation when those things were relevant, intellectual integrity, and professionalism. We looked at all of those things. However any possible process is as compromised as any other – trying to reduce art to putting ticks in boxes. We chose what we considered to be the best story from those submitted – the story which most strongly engaged us as readers, for the reasons that were individually important to each of us.

Overview of nominations

Nominations from late 2009 though to December 2010 were published across a range of formats and mediums: independent press, mass market, in print and electronically, in publications with experienced editors and marketing departments and in small presses quite obviously taking their exciting first steps.

2010 was a varied year in Australian SF. All kinds of science fiction were represented, from hard SF to stories of apocalypse or post-apocalypse, from political allegory to adventure stories. The element of new weird was strong. Many stories were part of a longer series. Near-future political allegory in an Australian context was strongly represented — Australian writers obviously have something to say. The concept of genre had little relevance to many writers and small press publishers; many fine stories crossed over. We discarded stories that were clearly fantasy, but our philosophy here was always to be inclusive, and our shortlist includes fiction with strong elements of fantasy and horror.

Finalists

- **WINNER** *The Heart of a Mouse*, **K.J. Bishop**, Subterranean Online (Winter 2010)
- *The Angælian Apocalypse*, **Matthew Chrulew**, *The Company Articles Of Edward Teach/The Angælian Apocalypse*, Twelfth Planet Press
- *Border Crossing*, **Penelope Love**, *Belong*, Ticonderoga Publications
- *Interloper*, **Ian McHugh**, Asimovs (Jan 2011)
- *Relentless Adaptations*, **Tansy Rayner Roberts**, *Sprawl*, Twelfth Planet Press

Review of finalists

The Heart of a Mouse, Subterranean Online:

An Edgar Pangborn-like post apocalyptic tale, with beautiful writing and a strong emotional register. This tale is hard to classify and pushes the boundaries of science fiction.

The Angælian Apocalypse, Twelfth Planet Press:

A story with strong foundations in both religious (Christian) and alien abduction mythology, which married the two ideas into a fast, flippant and over-the-top plot.

Border Crossing, Ticonderoga Publications:

An allegorical tale of zombies and Australian politics, told from the viewpoint of fully-fleshed characters caught in the horror.

Interloper, Asimovs:

A post-apocalyptic, new weird, outback setting common to other stories from this author, in which a travelling sideshow searches for people who could become heroes.

Relentless Adaptations, Twelfth Planet Press:

A clever exploration of what literature means to a variety of readers, loaded with a range of witty pop-culture references and a range of new publishing technologies.

JUDGES' REPORT – BEST SCIENCE FICTION NOVEL

Alisa Krasnostein, Stuart Mayne (convenor), Sean Williams

Number of entries: 18

Judging criteria

This year's judges wholly support the criteria put forward by last year's judges and acknowledge the replication of last year's criteria.

We were looking for excellent writing; originality of plot, world building and characters; engaging world-building and characterisation; 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 nominations

A number of cross-category entries were received and much debate was had as to the suitability of books that were entered into more than one category.

The majority of entries were from small or vanity presses this year. Carrying on from the judges' report of 2009 in this category, this year's judges hope that the excellence of Australian Science Fiction short fiction will soon produce an increase in entries from mainstream publishers in this category.

Finalists

- *Song of Scarabaeus*, **Sara Creasy**, EOS Books
- *Mirror Space*, **Marianne de Pierres**, Orbit (Hachette)
- **WINNER** *Transformation Space*, **Marianne de Pierres**, Orbit (Hachette)

Review of finalists

Song of Scarabaeus is a well balanced romantic science fiction novel and is commended as an excellent debut. Sara Creasy maintained a composed balance between detailing the descriptive science fiction and romantic elements within the novel. Focussing on biotechnology and terra-forming, this morally complex novel has the feel of a contemporary thriller in the way it pulls the reader through a number of emotional and action-based conflicts. This well plotted story, with strongly realised characters and was a greatly enjoyable read.

The judges shortlisted the last two instalments of Marianne de Pierre's Sentients of Orion series. In *Mirror Space*, Marianne de Pierres' third volume, we are immediately thrown into the action established in the previous books without introduction. The judges felt that de Pierres wrote with a deft hand, and her skilful writing easily sweeps the reader up into the chaos of this fast-paced, space opera.

Transformation Space marks the end of this ambitious space opera series. Much more than a convergence of long-running plot strands, *Transformation Space* owes its success to economical prose, controlled manipulation of many narrative threads, and gritty characterisation. Coming through strongly is de Pierres' overriding desire to examine what it means to be human, by means of her all-too-human *dramatis personae*.

Transformation Space is a gripping conclusion to an epic series filled with intimate personal drama, high-concept speculation, and planet-smashing action.

JUDGES REPORT – BEST COLLECTION

Robert Hoge (convenor) and Jason Nahrung

Number of entries: 15

Judging criteria

The judges focussed tightly on overall quality of stories in determining the best collection shortlist and winner.

Overview of nominations

2010 was very much the year of the rising star when it came to collections. The majority of the shortlist includes authors with first time collections (including the almost simultaneously released Slatter books) from authors who have lengthy careers ahead of them. Overall the standard of collection entries this year was quite high.

Finalists

- *The Library of Forgotten Books*, **Rjurik Davidson**, PS Publishing
- *Under Stones*, **Bob Franklin**, Affirm Press
- *Sourdough and Other Stories*, **Angela Slatter**, Tartarus Press
- **WINNER** *The Girl With No Hands*, **Angela Slatter**, Ticonderoga Publications
- *Dead Sea Fruit*, **Kaaron Warren**, Ticonderoga Publications

Review of Finalists

The Library of Forgotten Book, PS Publishing:

Davidson's collection is a testament to how well a writer at the top of his game can effortlessly transport readers to another place. At its heart, *The Library of Forgotten Books* is a collection of beautifully drawn places, populated by engaging characters.

Under Stones, Affirm Press:

Several standout moody and quirky stories helped propel this collection into the shortlist. Franklin knows what's at the heart of a disturbing story. An author to watch out for on the local horror stage.

Sourdough and Other Stories, Tartarus Press:

Sourdough is probably the most exquisitely produced and packaged collection of the year. The artifact produced is a credit to Tartarus Press and the quality of the inter-linked fairy-tale-esque stories is a credit to Slatter's prowess as a short story writer.

The Girl With No Hands, Ticonderoga Publications:

The fact Slatter has both collections she released in 2010 in the shortlist is proof of the outstanding quality of her work. *The Girl With No Hands* is a wonderful collection - beautifully written, tightly edited and well packaged. Slatter delivers a universally strong set of visceral stories that linger with the reader for a long time.

Dead Sea Fruit, Ticonderoga Publications:

Dead Sea Fruit is another beautifully presented volume with a number of very high quality stories. Warren delivers stories that routinely engage readers' intellect while getting ready to deliver a punch to the gut.

JUDGES REPORT – BEST ANTHOLOGY

Robert Hoge (convenor) and Jason Nahrung

Number of entries: 20

Judging criteria

There was a lot of discussion regarding the shortlist and winner for this category with judges looking at story selection, quality and range as well as attention to detail with editing. Ultimately our choices were informed by how well a number of high-concept and tightly themed anthologies met their brief.

Overview of nominations

2010 was a high quality year for anthologies. A number of new and established presses produced high quality, well-edited publications that showcased the best of the short form.

Finalists

- *Macabre: A Journey Through Australia's Darkest Fears*, edited by **Angela Challis** and **Dr Marty Young**, Brimstone Press
- *Scenes from the Second Storey*, edited by **Amanda Pillar** and **Pete Kempshall**, Morrigan Books
- *Sprawl*, edited by **Alisa Krasnostein**, Twelfth Planet Press
- **WINNER** *Wings of Fire*, edited by **Jonathan Strahan** and **Marianne S. Jablon**, Night Shade Books
- *Godlike Machines*, edited by **Jonathan Strahan**, SF Book Club

Review of Finalists

Macabre: A Journey Through Australia's Darkest Fears, Brimstone Press:

Challis and Young deserve significant kudos for their commitment to delivering what is probably Australia's most comprehensive overview of the horror genre. Jam-packed with horror masters, it should be on any local fan's bookshelf.

Scenes from the Second Storey, Morrigan Books:

The highest 'high-concept' anthology we saw this year. Morrigan Books' Mark Deniz took a risk pitching a book where every story was inspired by a song from a The God Machine album of the same name. But with some standout stories and a consistent mood across the collection, it was a risk worth taking.

Sprawl, Twelfth Planet Press:

Sprawl makes for an engaging and enjoyable read. Krasnostein attempts a fresh approach to an Australian-themed anthology and it pays off well. A fantastic anthology of the Australian fantastic.

Wings of Fire, Night Shade Books:

This is a top-flight anthology from Strahan and Jablon, delivering classics from across genres and across the decades. A well selected, packaged and edited anthology with almost every story a masterpiece.

Godlike Machines, SF Book Club:

Great to see an anthology that lets longer works hold sway. Strahan delivered a very strong, original book that balanced breaking new ground with staying true to its theme.

JUDGES REPORT – PETER MCNAMARA AWARD

Keith Stevenson (convenor), Miffy Farquharson, Peter Hickman, Robert Hoge, Stuart Mayne, Chuck McKenzie, Tansy Rayner Roberts, Grant Watson and Tehani Wessely.

Judging criteria

The Peter McNamara Convenors' Award for Excellence is awarded at the discretion of the convenors of the judging panels, for a particular achievement in speculative fiction or related areas. This award may take into account a body of work or achievements over a number of years; it can also be for a work of non-fiction, artwork, electronic or multimedia work, film or TV, or that which brings credit or attention to the speculative fiction genres. The award was originally known as The Convenors' Award for Excellence and was renamed in 2002 after Peter McNamara (d. 2004), publisher, editor and the original Aurealis Awards convenor, shortly after he was diagnosed with a terminal illness.

WINNER Helen Merrick

Overview of our 2010 winner's achievements

Helen Merrick's commitment to Australian speculative fiction over the past several years is clear in her participation in conventions throughout Australian and overseas; in her role as a judge for various Australian speculative fiction awards; is demonstrated in the books she has edited, and contributed to, that analyse fandom and feminism in speculative fiction; and showcased by her generosity of time in programming and supporting local conventions.

For many years, Helen has been one of those tireless workers behind the scenes, volunteering time and energy to the Australian spec fic scene. She has served as a judge on the Aurealis awards, the James Tiptree Jr award, and the Peter McNamara lifetime achievement award. As an academic, fandom historian and non-fiction writer, Helen has worked to promote Australian science fiction and our feminist history, as well as working on a larger international scale. She was responsible for one of the streams at the 2010 Worldcon in Melbourne and now podcasts about social media, science fiction and digital culture. Her recent book was a major achievement, earning a Hugo nomination. Helen is also a winner of the William Atheling Jr award.

The convenors of the 2010 Aurealis Awards judging panels are very pleased to recognise Helen Merrick's many achievements with the Peter McNamara Convenor's Award for Excellence.