



Aurealis Awards 2007: judges' report

science fiction short story

panel members

Helen Merrick (convener), Jervina Dorney, Jon Doyle, Robert Stoner

judging criteria

As a panel, we were looking for originality, quality of writing and characterisation, depiction of setting/world; innovative ideas or approaches; engaging plots and entertaining or gripping stories.

overview of nominations

Our reading for the award confirmed that the Australian short story market is in very good shape, with some excellent regular magazines providing a market for local and international fiction. While many nominations came from local publishers, it was also pleasing to see many of our authors appearing in overseas magazines and collections as well. In general stories were of a high quality, with a good range of strong, enjoyable and original stories. There were a number of stories that came very close to being short-listed, but in the end a few stood out above the rest, generally for their originality, or the quality of their world-building. Also interesting in this years group of stories were the number that were utilising sf to convey serious messages and views about issues such as the environment.

We were pleased that the resulting finalist list covered such a wide scope of themes and approaches, from action and adventure, to romance, mystery, tragedy, humour, and social commentary.

shortlisted works

Cat Sparks, *Hollywood Roadkill* On Spec, # 69 **WINNER**
 Simon Brown, *Lonely As Life* *Fantastic Wonder Stories*, Ticonderoga
 Penelope Love, *Whitey* *Shadow Plays*, Elise Bunter
 Chris McMahon, *The Eyes of Erebus* *Daikaiju! 2 – Revenge of the Giant Monsters*, Agog! Press
 Cat Sparks, *Arctica* *Fantastic Wonder Stories*, Ticonderoga

honourable mentions

Dirk Flinthart, *Truckers* *Andromeda Spaceways Inflight Magazine*, # 30



review of shortlist

Cat Sparks, *Hollywood Roadkill*

A powerful, emotive, and vividly written story. Most impressive is the fact that its power lies not so much in the tightly plotted foreground and events but in the dark message of the world intimated in the background. In a short space this story creates a vivid world, marked by substantial themes, and inhabited by very real characters. It projects a darkness and desperation in an environment of uncaring techno-culture that mirrors much of the real world's broad tendency towards vapid capitalism, consumerism and hedonism. The twist in the tale leaves the reader fascinated and defeated in equal amounts. A story that drags you under and spits you out at the end blinking in stupor.

Simon Brown, *Lonely as Life*

This story does a great job of portraying lives rich in experience and utterly barren of connection and emotion. The struggle of the lead as he is slowly dragged into Real life and begins to recognise the dissonance in his--and everyone else's--existence was very nicely done.

Penelope Love, *Whitey*

This was a pearl of a story. It built up slowly from a very disorientating beginning, but this was the strength of the story. It took us somewhere totally alien and foreign, tricked the reader into making assumptions that had to be totally overturned by the story's end. So when it comes, the revelation about Whitey's identity and how she came to be what she was had enormous impact. Beautifully written, richly imagined and vividly described, we also appreciated the uniquely Australian feel of the story. Original and entertaining, Love's writing has that slightly bizarre, off-kilter feel to it that keeps you riveted to the final page.

Chris McMahon, *The Eyes of Erebus*

An exciting, engaging and well-written story with substantial and believable human characters. The alien was both perfectly alien and yet viewed through a familiar anthropomorphism that made it impossible to be unsympathetic to its plight, despite the devastating consequences for humans. A very satisfyingly plotted story of apocalypse where for a change the powerful elite are not saved, nicely played out through the two 'love stories' of the humans and the searching, lonely alien.

Cat Sparks, *Arctica*

A vivid, entertaining tale that evoked the flavour of a very distinct Steampunk-style world with a wealth of back-story more hinted at than actually revealed. The struggle of the main character is something tangibly familiar, but set apart by the depiction of a foreign technology and consequent world view. The pace of revelation regarding Amadina's motivation was well-timed and added tension to the plot and characterisation.

review of honourable mentions

Dirk Flintheart, *Truckers*

Truckers blends a quintessential Australian Outback atmosphere with pulling-your-leg fun and "The Truth Is Out There"-style mystery. Entertaining and well-written, it captures a slice of small town life and delivers a feel-good story of alien visitation with clear messages about foreigners, friendship, and respect for others.