

2013 Aurealis Awards Judges Reports.

BEST CHILDREN'S BOOK

Panel Members:

Lyn Battersby (convenor) Joy Lawn, Sarah Mayor Cox

Number of Entries: 79

Judging Criteria:

The judges looked for the following qualities within the works:

Originality, Speculative Fiction Elements, Characterisation, Plot, World Building, Style, Appropriate to Age, X-Factor.

Overview of Entries:

The Children's Fiction category for 2014 faced a challenging year as, due to the low number of nominated illustrated works in previous years it was decided to roll the two previous sub-divisions of "told primarily through words" and "told primarily through pictures" into one. Although it presented the panel members with the difficult task of scoring the two different forms on a level playing field, the panel had to agree that this was the correct direction to take. We received very few illustrated works and it would have been even more difficult to arrive at a fair and equitable shortlist as a result.

Despite this, the panel was overwhelmed by the number of high quality non-illustrated works. We received many fine novels and short stories this year and the task of constructing a final shortlist was not an easy one to complete. However, in the end the quality works spoke for themselves and we were able to place the following works.

Shortlist:

Kingdom of the Lost, book 2: Cloud Road by Isobelle Carmody (Penguin Group Australia)

Refuge by Jackie French (Harper Collins)

Song for a scarlet runner by Julie Hunt (Allen & Unwin)

The four seasons of Lucy McKenzie by Kirsty Murray (Allen & Unwin)

Rules of Summer by Shaun Tan (Hachette Australia)

Ice Breaker: The Hidden 1 by Lian Tanner (Allen & Unwin)

Review of Shortlist:

The Hidden Series Part One: Ice Breaker

Set on board a ship in a dystopic future, this work manages to combine all the best elements of Adventure, Mystery, Fantasy and Science Fiction whilst remaining totally original in voice, plot, character and structure.

Kingdom of the Lost Book Two: The Cloud Road

Sweet and gentle, gritty and harsh, the adventure within this novel is deftly woven by expert hands who know how to immerse their reader into a classic fantasy setting and still keep them guessing at every turn.

Refuge

An outstanding novel that manages to tackle the refugee issue without being didactic or condescending. A credit to the Speculative Fiction genre.

Rules of Summer

The only illustrated work to make this year's shortlist, *Rules of Summer* managed to hold its own against the large number of outstanding novels we received this year. The multifaceted, highly original nature of the work showed once again why this author is considered to be Australia's master of the craft.

Song for a Scarlet Runner

A novel that manages to break all the conventions of the Fantasy genre in all the right ways, the panellists were delighted with the strong use of plot, characterisation and voice in this work.

The Four Seasons of Lucy MacKenzie

An exquisitely written fantasy novel that features a seamless time slip element. This novel was one of the few to hold both literary and popular appeal as well as interest across the widest range of ages within the Children's market.

BEST YOUNG ADULT SHORT STORY

Panel Members:

Stephanie Gunn (convenor), Katie Fielding, Amanda King, Gillian Polack.

Number of Entries: 49

Judging Criteria:

The judges looked for works that demonstrated a strong young adult voice and featured characters and issues relevant to the young adult audience. Literary merit was a strong drawcard, as was the presence of well-rounded characters and a developed and memorable world. The judges also looked for an "X-factor", the stories which contained something really special.

Overview of Entries:

The general standard of entered works was pleasing. Most of the entered works were of good quality, though there was a subset of works which were poorly edited, proofread or presented.

It should be noted that Australian small presses, in particular, published many outstanding young adult short stories; this is reflected in the shortlist. A variety of speculative genres was represented, and both traditionally published and self-published works were seen, though the former dominated.

Shortlist:

“Mah Song” by Joanne Anderton (*The Bone Chime Song and Other Stories*, FableCroft Publishing)

“By Bone-light” by Juliet Marillier (*Prickle Moon*, Ticonderoga Publications)

“Morning Star” by D.K. Mok (*One Small Step, an anthology of discoveries*, FableCroft Publishing)

“The Year of Ancient Ghosts” by Kim Wilkins (*The Year of Ancient Ghosts*, Ticonderoga Publications)

Review of Shortlist:

“Mah Song” by Joanne Anderton

This far-future science fiction story, in which people pray to the “Mah Song” for rain via the sacrifice of chosen children, is vividly told. The worldbuilding is incredible, especially given the length constraints of a short story. The characters all feel very real, and their choices are, as a result, deeply emotional. For the reader, there was a tangible sense of wanting to see deeper into this world, for this story not to end.

“By Bone-Light” by Juliet Marillier

A truly extraordinary reimagining of the Russian folk tale *Vasillissa the Wise*, set in a modern day apartment building complete with Baba Yaga lurking in the basement. The darkness of fairytale is used to explore the equally dark issue of child abuse, and just as with the best fairy tales, Marillier’s prose is evocative and poetic creating something original and hauntingly memorable.

“Morning Star” by D.K. Mok

The population of Earth is dead, and a boy, an android and a sentient ship search the stars for survivors. This is a science fiction tale that harkens back to some of the older filled-with-wonder science fiction. It does what science fiction can do best: turns its lens onto humanity itself.

“The Year of Ancient Ghosts” by Kim Wilkins

A contemporary fantasy, wherein a woman brings her daughter to the Orkney Islands, the place where her comatose husband was raised. This story juxtaposes fantasy and reality, the two blending to create something like a vivid dream. The prose in this story is truly gorgeous, and Wilkins brings so much life to the setting that it is almost a character in and of itself. At times heart wrenching, at others disturbing, but always filled with beauty.

BEST YOUNG ADULT NOVEL**Panel Members:**

Stephanie Gunn (convenor), Katie Fielding, Amanda King, Gillian Polack.

Number of Entries: 64

Judging Criteria:

The judges looked for works which were written with a believable young adult voice and which dealt with issues relevant for the young adult audience. Good, believable worldbuilding and strong characterisation were both pluses. We looked for literary merit, as well as stories and worlds that simply grabbed the judges. Of especial interest was innovation, with novels which brought something new to the market.

Overview of Entries:

The overall quality of the nominated works was disappointing. Many novels contained weak worldbuilding and poorly rendered characters, and a discouraging percentage of the entered works were very badly edited and sketchily proofread.

Both traditionally published and self-published works were entered, with a good number of the latter. The judges had a definite sense that many self-published authors were publishing their work well before their craft was ready. Many possessed potential, and if the authors had focused on their craft for a longer period before publishing, they could have produced something far better. It should be noted here that one self-published work made it to the shortlist, and more authors seeking self-published careers should be aiming for this quality.

In saying that, the health of the young adult market is clearly good. The number of entered works alone reflects that, and it is heartening to see that the field is covering many speculative genres. The judges were particularly happy that the shortlisted works covered a range of genres, indicating that young adults are being exposed to a range of good, solid speculative fiction.

The best works stood head and shoulders over the field. Mostly, they were highly innovative, or used tropes in a new and unexpected way. The outstanding works treated their young adult audience with respect.

Shortlist:

The Big Dry by Tony Davies (Harper Collins)

Hunting by Andrea Host (self-published)

These Broken Stars by Amie Kaufman and Meagan Spooner (Allen & Unwin)

Fairytales for Wilde Girls by Allyse Near (Random House Australia)

The Sky So Heavy by Claire Zorn (University of Queensland Press)

Review of Shortlist:

The Big Dry by Tony Davies

Aimed at the younger side of the young adult market, this post-apocalyptic novel explores an Australia where water has become a scarcity. The voice of the young protagonist is absolutely perfect in this, and the book is filled with vivid images of the dying world and the harrowing effects of water scarcity upon humanity. A wonderfully Australian book, albeit an Australia much changed from the present. It is also refreshing to see an all-too plausible apocalypse considered, with Davies paying close attention to the creation of this desolate world.

Hunting by Andrea Höst

A high fantasy which evokes many of the classic high fantasy novels, but with some modern twists, especially in terms of gender roles. The female protagonist, Ash, is strong and capable. She is prone to getting herself into trouble, but never requires saving. Notable is the fact that this is a self-published work.

These Broken Stars by Amie Kaufman and Meagan Spooner

The first book in a young adult science fiction trilogy, in which the luxury spaceliner *Icarus* crashes on an alien planet. The only survivors are a rich heiress and a poor war hero. Both characters are well written, and the planet they find themselves stranded on is fascinating. This book explores many well-trod paths, but contains more than enough originality. It is especially pleasing to see both male and female protagonists who are strong, capable and well-written. It is the beginning to what will, no doubt, be an exceptional trilogy.

Fairytales for Wilde Girls by Allyse Near

Isola Wilde sees a lot of things that other people don't: ghosts and fairies and mermaids and dead girls. This contemporary fantasy is told from her perspective, with the poetic prose and vivid imagery employed by Near creating a beautiful – if, at times, almost disturbing – dreamlike world. As a whole, this novel feels something like a spell, perfectly invoking teenage imagination into a lucid reality. An absolutely outstanding debut novel.

The Sky So Heavy by Claire Zorn

Another debut novel, this post-apocalyptic novel sees Australia shattered by nuclear war. Told from the perspective of Fin as he and his younger brother Max struggle to survive. Fin is a good, believable protagonist, and Zorn draws parallels with current politics as Australia sinks into nuclear winter and the country needs to decide who is to be saved and who is expendable.

BEST ILLUSTRATED BOOK AND GRAPHIC NOVEL

Panel Members:

Alex Adsett (convenor), Andy Buchanan, Donna Maree Hanson, Bryce Hearse

Number of entries: 20

Judging Criteria:

The judges for the 2013 Illustrated and Graphic Novel category were looking for works where the text and illustrations built on each other to create a finished piece that was greater than the sum of its parts. We are always excited by new stories well told, that stretches speculative fiction in new directions.

Overview of Entries:

The 2013 list of nominations for graphic novel and illustrated works displays an exciting mix of styles and stories. It has been fascinating to see the illustrated works being created by Australia's talented artists and writers. More than anything, it is

wonderful to see the diversity and talent demonstrated by this years' nominations and strong shortlist.

Shortlist:

Savage Bitch by Steve Carter and Antoinette Rydyr (Scar Studios)

Mr Unpronounceable Adventures by Tim Molloy (Milk Shadow Books)

Burger Force by Jackie Ryan (self-published)

Peaceful Tomorrows Volume Two by Shane W Smith (Zetabella Publishing)

The Deep Vol. 2: The Vanishing Island by Tom Taylor and James Brouwer (Gestalt Publishing)

Review of Shortlist:

Burger Force

Burger Force is a stylish retro noir tale of spies and superpowers with Jackie Ryan's distinctive artwork and sarcastic humour. The graphics and dialogue are always attention grabbing, with great use of graphics and dialogue to move the story forward, and how can we not love a retro secret spy agency operating out of a takeaway burger joint.

The Deep Vol. 2: The Vanishing Island

The Vanishing Island is the amazing sequel to 2011's Aurealis winner *Here Be Dragons*. The sense of warmth, humour and gorgeous illustrations is another sterling joint effort from Tom Taylor and James Brouwer. This volume continues the adventures of the Nekton Family as they are called to investigate a floating island. With an outstanding quality of art, storytelling, narrative and polish, this series is a huge achievement for Australian graphic novels, from two superstars of the genre.

Savage Bitch

With its unashamed brashness in both dialog up and illustrations, *Savage Bitch* was a weird and kinky comic reminiscent of classic Conan and the comics of the fifties. With the potential to shock many readers, this was a well told, if confronting story, in the classic science fiction tradition.

Mr Unpronounceable Adventures

The judges were in furious agreement that *Mr Unpronounceable* was sick and dark and highly convoluted, with an unmistakable touch of genius. Its combination of macabre graphics and dark surrealism created a visceral response as the mind grappled to piece the mystery of the story together. Reminiscent of the classic comics of R Crumb and Harvey Pekar, this was a clear standout in a strong year of graphic novels.

Peaceful Tomorrows Volume Two

The Peaceful Tomorrows series is evidently the result of a lot of work, dedication and soaring story arc. Volume 2 stood out for the judges as introducing some great twists and turns to the plot, and strong integration of graphics and words in the storytelling.

BEST COLLECTION

Panel Members:

Sarah JH Fletcher, Kathryn Linge (convenor), David McDonald, Rob Riel.

Number of Entries: 17

Judging Criteria:

Works were assessed considering several criteria, including originality, cohesion, variety in subject matter and theme and, of course, consistency and excellence of writing. We also considered whether the internal design and cover were easy to read and professional. The collections that we have shortlisted are those which most strongly engaged us as readers. In particular we looked for writers with the style and technical ability to deliver stylish and thematically rich stories above and beyond plot-based excitement. Our selection process combined individual shortlists from each judge, followed by further discussion of the combined shortlist.

Overview of Entries:

The submitted works were predominantly from small independent presses, with none of the large Australian publishers submitting work for consideration. About 30 percent of entries were self published and most nominations were received in electronic form. Many, but not all, of the collections submitted were snapshots of the author's current or more recent work, rather than longer retrospective works. There was a fairly even split between science fiction and fantasy, with a healthy splash of horror, and most collections straddled genres. We were pleased with the number of stories presented strong Australian settings and themes.

Shortlist:

The Bone Chime Song and Other Stories by Joanne Anderton (FableCroft Publishing)

Asymmetry by Thoraiya Dyer (Twelfth Planet Press)

Caution: Contains Small Parts by Kirstyn McDermott (Twelfth Planet Press)

The Bride Price by Cat Sparks (Ticonderoga Publications)

The Year of Ancient Ghosts by Kim Wilkins (Ticonderoga Publications)

Review of Shortlist:

The Bone Chime Song and Other Stories

A strong and assured collection, with consistently excellent writing. We were particularly impressed with the collection's strong and memorable characters, and the depth of the themes running through the collection. While the wide range of settings, protagonists, and plots means that the collection always feels fresh and interesting, Anderton's unique aesthetic unifies the whole. This collection truly is greater than the sum of its parts.

Asymmetry

Dyer is a very accomplished writer and the four original stories within *Asymmetry* are all emotionally powerful. This is a well-executed collection; we particularly enjoyed the use of language in each beautifully constructed story.

Caution: Contains Small Parts

This collection pulls together some of the strongest writing of 2013, and punches far above its four-story length. McDermott's command of prose is masterful, and she doesn't write 'safe' stories. These pieces are all original, both in the sense that they have not been published before, and in the way they interrogate and comment on modern society – particularly in relation to gender. We found the protagonists in each story to be intriguing and wonderfully nuanced.

The Bride Price

There is no doubt Sparks is one of the best short story writers in Australia. She has a strong Australian voice, but her stories are universally accessible and tinged with intense human emotion. From post apocalyptic imagery to social commentary, these stories have jagged edges. *The Bride Price* is very polished, deeply evocative, and powerful.

The Year of Ancient Ghosts

This collection of novellas is focused, consistent, and shows the breadth and depth of Wilkins' talent through a variety of well-considered and complementary stories. Wilkins' use of historical settings is a particular strength, as are her development of memorable characters and her engagement with myth, legend and religion.

BEST ANTHOLOGY

Panel Members:

Sarah JH Fletcher, Kathryn Linge (convenor), David McDonald, Rob Riel.

Number of Entries: 17

Judging Criteria:

Works were assessed considering multiple criteria, including whether each anthology stuck to its theme, its originality, and variety in subject matter – but above all, we rewarded consistent and excellent writing. We also considered whether the internal design and cover were easy to read and professional. The anthologies that we have shortlisted were those which most strongly engaged us as readers. We also looked for anthologies in which we felt that the editorial team had significantly contributed to the work through story selection, framing and sequencing. Our selection process combined individual shortlisting by each judge with further discussion of the combined shortlist.

Overview of Entries:

The submitted works were predominantly from Australian presses, although there was also a smattering of works from international publishers. Most nominations were received in electronic form. Almost all submitted works consisted of original

material; the few reprint anthologies were 'best of' collections from 2012. There was a fairly even split between science fiction and fantasy, with a healthy splash of horror. Most anthologies straddled more than one genre.

Shortlist:

The Year's Best Australian Fantasy and Horror 2012 by Liz Grzyb and Talie Helene (Eds), (Ticonderoga Publications)

One Small Step, An Anthology Of Discoveries by Tehani Wessely (Ed) (FableCroit Publishing)

Dreaming Of Djinn by Liz Grzyb (Ed) (Ticonderoga Publications)

The Best Science Fiction And Fantasy Of The Year: Volume Seven by Jonathan Strahan (Ed) (Night Shade Books)

Focus 2012: Highlights Of Australian Short Fiction by Tehani Wessely (Ed) (FableCroit Publishing)

Review of Shortlist:

Dreaming of Djinn

We were impressed with both the originality and variety of the stories collected in *Dreaming of Djinn*, without repetition of plot or theme. While most of the pieces would be considered fantasy, it was great to see some very good 'djinn' science fiction as well. Editor Liz Grzyb is also to be commended for attracting and including authors who would not normally be considered part of the Australian speculative fiction scene.

The Year's Best Australian Fantasy and Horror 2012

An excellent introduction to Australian fantasy and horror, this is a multifaceted anthology with extremely broad reader appeal. The consistently excellent (and sometimes surprising) stories, drawn from a variety of sources, are beautifully sequenced by the editors. This is a landmark instalment in a highly regarded series.

The Best Science Fiction and Fantasy of the Year: Volume Seven

This is an excellent and substantial anthology, featuring some of the world's best science and fiction writing. We were impressed with consistency of the whole anthology, and the drawing out of subtle themes from seemingly unrelated pieces through their arrangement. That the anthology is inclusive while maintaining quality is one of its major strengths.

Focus 2012: Highlights of Australian Short Fiction

'Focus 2012' is of consistently high quality, as may be expected of an anthology of award-winning stories. The anthology provides an excellent showcase of Australian short fiction, and acts as a great introduction to the strength and diversity of the Australian scene.

One Small Step, An Anthology of Discoveries

A very original and impressive anthology of new Australian work that effortlessly spans genres. Exceptionally varied, yet well balanced, these stories all deal with beginnings and discoveries through an invigorating range of viewpoints and settings.

One Small Step aims to highlight the work of Australian female genre writers, and succeeds masterfully.

BEST HORROR SHORT FICTION

Panel Members:

Mary Burroughs, Kim Chandler, Bill Congreve, Emma Kate (convenor).

Number of Entries: 146

Judging Criteria:

In judging the short fiction category for Horror, we were looking at the stories that were exploring the anxieties and dreads that people have, the stories that unsettled us, the stories that made us question our beliefs and ideas. The stories needed to also have well-rounded characters and convincing world-building.

Overview of Entries:

The sheer number of excellent short fiction in horror nominated in 2013 meant we had a very long deliberation on what should be shortlisted and that a number of excellent stories could not be recognised as finalists. Classic horror elements abounded but done in fresh and interesting ways. We were pleased to see a number of horror-themed anthologies and collections being nominated as well as a large number of stories from independent press. The future of Australian horror is looking good.

Shortlist:

"Fencelines" by Joanne Anderton (*The Bone Chime Song and Other Stories*, FableCroft Publishing)

"The Sleepover" by Terry Dowling (*Exotic Gothic 5*, PS Publishing)

"The Home for Broken Dolls" by Kirstyn McDermott (*Caution: Contains Small Parts*, Twelfth Planet Press)

"The Human Moth" by Kaaron Warren (*The Grimscribe's Puppets*, Miskatonic Press)

"The Year of Ancient Ghosts" by Kim Wilkins (*The Year of Ancient Ghosts*, Ticonderoga Publications)

Review of Shortlist:

"Fencelines"

A dystopian future, set amongst the cane fields in which a woman, her son and her crippled father-in-law seek refuge from the horrors happening in the outside world. The inevitability of their fates, tied to that of the sugar cane, is what makes this story so unsettling.

"The Sleepover"

What wouldn't the rich do? Dowling attempts to answer this in a story of a group of women asked to spend the night in a cemetery with a friend's dead father for one million dollars. But what are they actually being asked to do? A classic trope, told well and with some excellent commentary on the wealthy.

“The Home for Broken Dolls”

The dolls in this story are not the usual ones that children play with. What happens to those sex dolls that are no longer able to be useful to their owners? And what happens when they become sentient? McDermott’s deft hand at creeping dread imbues this story with a powerful undertone of darkness.

“The Human Moth”

A first person perspective story of an unwanted child, one who they call the Human Moth. One who takes some extreme measures to continue her existence as such. Strongly written, unsettling and very disturbing.

“The Year of Ancient Ghosts”

This horror story is about love. Love of a parent for a child, a wife for a husband, a daughter for her father but mostly about loving the wrong one. Fleeing to spend time on the island where her husband grew up after his accident that has left him in a coma, Jenny and her daughter Mary find that you can’t escape the past, whether it’s yours or someone else’s.

BEST HORROR NOVEL

Panel Members:

Mary Burroughs, Kim Chandler, Bill Congreve, Emma Kate (convenor).

Number of Entries: 21

Judging Criteria:

In judging the novel category for Horror, we were looking for novels that were exploring the anxieties and dreads that people have, the stories that unsettled us, the stories that made us question our beliefs and ideas. The stories also needed to have well-rounded characters and convincing world-building.

Overview of Entries:

The novel category for Horror was not as rich as the short fiction category. A number of the works entered were not ones that met the genre markers for what we considered horror, falling more in the thriller or fantasy categories. We were pleased to be able to create a shortlist that exemplifies the range of horror being explored in novel form.

Shortlist:

The Marching Dead by Lee Battersby (Angry Robot Books)

The First Bird by Greig Beck (Momentum)

Path of Night by Dirk Flinthart (FableCroft Publishing)

Fairytales for Wilde Girls by Allyse Near (Random House Australia)

Review of Shortlist:

The Marching Dead

The sequel to *The Corpse-Rat King*, *The Marching Dead* has humour, entertaining characters and an intriguing plot. After Marius finds a king for the dead, he is now bored. Being drawn back in to the world of the dead again, he sets off on another adventure. Witty dialogue and well-rounded characters make this novel an engaging read that is dark but tinged with a sense of the absurd.

The First Bird

After an anthropologist finds a living dinosaur and takes it back to the US, he inadvertently also brings back a parasite that is almost 100% fatal. The CDC is forced to work with an eccentric billionaire in order to find the original site of the dinosaur before the parasite spreads worldwide. The horror in this novel stems strongly from the sense that this pandemic “could” happen.

Path of Night

With Flintheart’s inimitable style, *Path of Night* presents a tale with off-beat humour and a strong Australian feel. Michael Devlin is a new type of monster, but can he maintain his humanity while attempting to survive? Some excellent action sequences and frequent humour underscore the suspense and sense of dread that builds throughout the book.

Fairytales for Wilde Girls

An unsettling and unusually written novel, Near gives us the story of Isola Wilde, a girl who can see creatures not of our world. When the ghost of a girl dead in a birdcage threatens her, Isola needs the help of her real-life friends and her brother-princes to uncover the truth of her death. Described as “a deliciously dark bubblegum-gothic fairytale”, this is a wonderful debut novel.

BEST FANTASY SHORT FICTION

Panel Members:

Shaheen Shehnaz Iqbal, Natalie Maddalena, Simon Petrie (convenor), Sandra Wigzell.

Number of Entries: 194

Judging Criteria:

We hoped to unearth stories that would combine memorable characters and inventive, believable worldbuilding with a storyline which resonated with the reader; an adherence in some manner to the precepts of the fantasy genre; and that certain undefinable something which makes a story more than just the sum of its component words.

Overview of Entries:

It’s symptomatic of the genre’s vitality that 2013 saw the release of almost two hundred nominated stories in this category, an effective rate of slightly more than one Australian-authored fantasy short story every two days. As can be imagined, the task of constructing a shortlist of five finalists from such a broad pool, covering every

subgenre within the fantasy field, was a demanding one, with many remarkably strong stories in contention. Some stories hewed too closely to the related disciplines of SF or horror for our purposes; some kept their fantasy credentials too well concealed or, conversely, too threadbare; some did not, in our opinion, transcend their ingredients. But a large number of the stories we read succeeded on every level. On the strength of the nominated stories, the panel would say that Australian fantasy is in a very healthy state right now.

Shortlist:

“The Last Stormdancer” by Jay Kristoff (Thomas Dunne Books)

“The Touch of the Taniwha” by Tracie McBride (*Fish*, Dagan Books)

“Cold, Cold War” by Ian McHugh (*Beneath Ceaseless Skies*, Scott H Andrews)

“Short Circuit” by Kirstie Olley (*Oomph: a little super goes a long way*, Crossed Genres)

“The Year of Ancient Ghosts” by Kim Wilkins (*The Year of Ancient Ghosts*, Ticonderoga Publications)

Review of Shortlist:

“The Last Stormdancer”

This novella combined many of the elements of traditional epic fantasy—magic, war, prophecy, and dynastic conflict—with powerful characterisation, impressive worldbuilding, a propulsive storyline and note-perfect prose.

“The Touch of the Taniwha”

This short story drew very effectively on Maori mythology. Plainly told and yet intricately constructed, its overlaying of differing perspectives, with four ‘unreliable narrators’ each telling their own skewed version of the one story, gave this tale its own particular magic.

“Cold, Cold War”

This novelette was an exciting piece of monster-movie-style alternate history, with astonishing worldbuilding (a detailed and fascinating World-War-One setting) and great characterisation.

“Short Circuit”

This superhero-style short story was whimsical, playful, and delightfully more-ish. The panel was effectively unanimous in expressing the hope that there would be more stories forthcoming within this milieu.

“The Year of Ancient Ghosts”

This novella was remarkably atmospheric, foreboding, and evocative, a deep and yet subtly fantastic story within which the ‘real world’ components and the details of the protagonist’s characterisation contributed strongly to the tale’s impact on the reader.

BEST FANTASY NOVEL

Panel Members:

P. R. Khangure, Katharine Stubbs (convenor), Cathie Tasker, Bethwyn Walker

Number of entries: 86

Judging Criteria:

The judges sought works that were of a high standard overall, worked perfectly as a stand-alone novel, and were of high enjoyment to read. We looked for compelling novels that were a great read throughout the entirety of the novel, featured realistic and interesting characters, hand in hand with a strong plot, and great stylistic values.

Overview of Entries:

This year saw a wide range of entries from major publishers, small press, and many self-published works. Entries varied significantly in sub-genres and blends thereof, including paranormal romance, steampunk fantasy, urban fantasy, science fantasy, dark fantasy, epic fantasy and more. We saw many novels that blurred the borders of the fantasy genre, which created much lively discussion on what makes a fantasy novel a *fantasy* novel.

The majority of the nominations were of a suitable standard, and this year saw an overall increase in nominations that kept the judges busy. Luckily, the judges were in agreement over a long-list which kicked off the discussion quickly and easily, but, as always, the selection process for the final short-list was a long, difficult and dangerous journey.

Overall the judges were delighted with the range of novels that came under their discussion, and found many authors who they'll be watching closely in the future.

Shortlist:

Lexicon by Max Barry (Hachette Australia)

A Crucible of Souls by Mitchell Hogan (self-published)

These Broken Stars by Amie Kaufman and Meagan Spooner (Allen & Unwin)

Newt's Emerald by Garth Nix (Jill Grinberg Literary Management)

Ink Black Magic by Tansy Rayner Roberts (FableCroft Publishing)

Review of Shortlist:

Lexicon, Hachette Australia:

This urban science-fantasy (with a touch of thriller) novel had a great feel of Australia to it, and was very solid in style with perplexing, flawed and gritty characters who had believable motivations. The 'magic' system within was almost too real for the reader to feel comfortable - making you almost wonder whether or not this could actually happen... not a pleasant thought. This is a novel that's hard to put down.

A Crucible of Souls, self-published

Here we have a classic epic fantasy novel from a debut writer who shows that self-published works are worth considering. This novel took one of the more popular

tropes – orphan with mysterious talents – and gave us a character we care about in a world that’s executed superbly, with a plot that arcs as a good epic should, and a range of background characters that make the layers of the world come alive.

These Broken Stars, Allen & Unwin

More tropes collide as we see a science-fantasy survival story on a foreign world with a princess and commoner stranded together. If you think you’re tired of this trope, think again, because these characters were excellently created and handled. The writing has beautiful moments within with its description, and throughout it seems entirely realistic. Each chapter begins with small clips of information that added another edge to the superb storytelling.

Newt’s Emerald, Jill Grinberg Literary Management

Stylistically excellent, this novel is exceptionally well done even to those who aren’t usually a fan of Regency romance. With feisty heroines and well-developed magic this was a fun novel to read that has mastered use of descriptive passages.

Ink Black Magic, Fablecroft Publishing

A lovely blend of comics, fantasy and Pratchett wrapped together succinctly. Though third in a series, this novel is just as enjoyable to read as a stand-alone, with twists that will make you feel unable to put the book down. The humour, wit of the dialogue and characters were a joy to read.

BEST SCIENCE FICTION SHORT FICTION

Panel Members:

Zara Baxter, Jason Nahrung (convenor), Sally Newham, Tania Walker

Number of Entries: 124

Judging Criteria:

The panel wanted it all: believable, engaging worlds constructed with deft prose, peopled with authentic characters through which readers explore the social impact of technology. It’s a lot to ask of a short story, and yet, a number of writers delivered, causing a great deal of deliberation of theme, characterisation, narrative and lasting impact to arrive at the final five.

Overview of Entries:

The category attracted a wide range of stories, illustrating the genre’s diversity and cross-genre appeal: post-apocalyptic and dystopian, cyberpunk, space opera, steampunk, crime, romance. The importance of the science fiction component varied, from being a minor component, to providing a setting in which humanity is tested, to directly exploring the impact of a piece of technology on the world around it. The number of stories that attracted initial support from the judges due to the combination of skilled prose, engaging narrative and compelling voice suggests a market that could support an Australian ‘Best Of’.

Shortlist:

“The Last Tiger” by Joanne Anderton (*Daily Science Fiction*)

“Mah Song” by Joanne Anderton (*The Bone Chime Song and Other Stories*, FableCroft Publishing)

“Seven Days in Paris” by Thoraiya Dyer (*Asymmetry*, Twelfth Planet Press)

“Version 4.3.0.1” by Lucy Stone (*Andromeda Spaceways Inflight Magazine #57*)

“Air, Water and the Grove” by Kaaron Warren (*The Lowest Heaven*, Pandemonium Press)

Review of Shortlist:

“The Last Tiger”

Obsession, subversion and the tension between technology and nature are driving forces in this tale of a man who eschews family, society and eventually life in favour of what he believes is a relic of the lost natural world. The well-paced, well-told story unfolds its tragedy in a compelling manner as a captive turns the tables on its captor.

“Mah Song”

A rich, exotic dystopia in which people are sacrificed to technological gods sets the scene for this tale of love and sacrifice, with political resonance adding to the mix. Defiance in the face of imperialism, the love of family and an immersive world are brought to the fore through a compelling voice.

“Seven Days in Paris”

A clone is created to try to unearth the secret of a planned terrorist act in this melancholy, evocative tale invoking questions of identity, ethics, rights and political expediency. The poignancy of the mayfly life of the protagonist, questing for identity and meaning in the midst of conspiracy and manipulation, lingers long after the last line.

“Version 4.3.0.1”

“Version 4.3.0.1.” drops the reader straight into a brilliantly realised cyberpunk world of hackers, where cyberspace is a realm as real and deadly as the physical world. Friendship, loyalty and redemption figure in a brutal episode that evokes a larger narrative but delivers satisfaction at the end of a fast ride.

“Air, Water and the Grove”

This story exhibits economical prose, well-drawn characters and an intriguing, striking world, as a high-tech drug leads a generation to its doom while their loved ones fail to protect them despite the most heartfelt desire to do so. Mythology meets SF in a powerful, poignant tale that speaks to the present as much as it does to this fantastical future.

BEST SCIENCE FICTION NOVEL**Panel Members:**

Lorraine Cormack, Helen Merrick (Convener), Alex Pierce, Keith Stevenson.

Number of Entries: 48

Judging Criteria:

As a panel we were looking for engaging stories that made the most of the science fiction genre through elegant world building, convincing characterisation and an interesting plot. We enjoyed reading original takes on science fictional themes, and works that were stylistically accomplished. Ultimately we were swayed by the quality of writing, and books that provided a compelling reading experience.

Overview of Entries:

This was a very healthy year for the science fiction novel, indicating an encouraging growth in the area. There are clearly many new and emerging Australian authors writing SF, as evidenced by the considerable number of self-published books. We were also impressed with the high quality work being published by small and independent presses. There were a number of nominations that came very close to making the shortlist, requiring considerable debate over the final selection. Among these were some excellent novels that we felt sat better in the YA category. We were gratified that the final shortlist represented a wide variety of styles and approaches to SF.

Shortlist:

Lexicon by Max Barry (Hachette)

Trucksong by Andrew Macrae (Twelfth Planet Press)

A Wrong Turn At The Office Of Unmade Lists by Jane Rawson (Transit Lounge)

True Path by Graham Storrs (Momentum)

Rupetta by Nike Sulway (Tartarus Press)

Review of Shortlist:

Lexicon

An intriguing and original science fiction premise underpins the plot of a novel that is also a compelling, tightly written thriller. The unusual structure is also a strength, helping to fill the pages with twists and turns that are foreshadowed and yet still surprising. The central linguistic conceit of the poet's 'science' is well-expounded and convincing, and the underlying ideas are poignant in today's media rich world.

Trucksong

Trucksong presents a strongly Australian post-apocalyptic vision, one that occupies a morally ambiguous space and delivers a visceral, grungy and fully realised world peopled by characters motivated by desire not reason, who just don't have it in them to make things right, no matter how badly they might want that. As bleak as that may sound, Macrae's control of narrative delivered a compelling and entertaining read.

A Wrong Turn At The Office Of Unmade Lists

This novel manages to add a light, almost whimsical, touch to a dark vision of future Australia. The vivid portrait of a grim shanty-town Melbourne is relieved by travels

into an alternate world delineated by maps and imagination. This charming story deals poignantly with loss and sadness, but also brings love and hope to the forefront.

True Path

An intriguing and well-plotted SF thriller that uses time travel to interrogate current concerns about terrorism, and constructs a realistically drab and frightening near-future America. A strong female protagonist, good dialogue and a dash of humour all contribute to a tightly plotted, engaging read.

Rupetta

A beautiful, enchanting alternate history featuring a highly original take on the notion of a humanoid automaton. Driven by an accomplished narrative structure, glimpses of the past and future are interwoven into the narrative's present. *Rupetta* is a stylistic and surprising interrogation of gender, history, technology, religion, philosophy, love, loss and what it means to be human.