

## **Script Writing Award (\$30,000)**

**David Caesar, *Prime Mover***

**Porchlight Films Pty Ltd**

*Prime Mover* is a boys' own adventure road movie film script. It is about the ambition of a young man to become his own hero, the woman he loves and the huge road trains that rumble through the outback. The pace is fast and furious but what sets this script apart are its moments of intimacy and endearing whimsy as we are taken inside the central character's imagination. It is an unusual technique, especially for this genre, and it lends an engaging humanity and humour to the ultimately bleak world that is depicted. Bleak, however, in David Caesar's screenplay is far from monotone or lifeless.

This is writing at the forefront of a genre that all too often feels overly familiar and tired. The screenplay is bold, confronting and full of life. Caesar's writing is wonderfully crisp and charged with an electric energy: the crackles stay with the reader long after the end is reached. The characters are alive and very real – they, too, do not simply disappear but hang around in one's mind. Caesar has expanded the vocabulary of screen language to deliver a script that is original and which reinvigorates the screen: it reads beautifully and makes one long to see the movie.

**Greg Haddrick, Felicity Packard & Peter Gawler, *Underbelly***

**Screentime Pty Ltd**

*Underbelly* is television drama at its very best. For all its demotic language and popular appeal, this series is television drama at its *literary* best. The scripts held the judges in awe of the talents and skills of Greg Haddrick, Felicity Packard and Peter Gawler who have raised television drama to new heights.

Consideration was given to selecting just one episode but this proved impossible: just when we thought we had found the very best writing, the next episode by another of the three writers seemed even better. By the time we had read to the end of all 13 episodes – and who would have thought that reading thirteen episodes of what might have been simply yet another television crime series could be so compelling – it was obvious that all three writers together had created an artistic whole.

There were scenes that shocked or appalled us, our appetites for violence were frequently challenged, and our collective desire for what is popularly called 'civilised behaviour' grew ever stronger with each episode. With *Underbelly*, Haddrick, Packard and Gawler have introduced millions of viewers to the existence of literariness in a genre and a medium where many had never before thought to look. This is courageous writing which left us wanting more.

**Anna-Maria Monticelli, *Disgrace***

**Wild Strawberries Pty Ltd**

The relationships and situations in Anna-Maria Monticelli's screenplay, *Disgrace*, are stark. The characters can be unforgiving and at other times they are understanding and generous: one never quite knows how any of them will react to what either they themselves or others have done. Time and again, the sympathy skilfully created by the writer for one character or another is undone by their actions or reactions. This is more than ambivalence; the screenplay delivers wonderfully delineated characters at war with themselves in a society which, in turn, is at war with itself. Certainly the unease the

characters feel and express offer a metaphor for the dis-ease in post-apartheid South Africa and contribute to an atmosphere which leaves the reader ill at ease. In even only slightly less talented hands this could lead to a screenplay that breeds a lack of caring in its readers. In this screenwriter's skilled hands and fertile yet scrupulous imagination, however, we get a screenplay of such high order that uncaring is not an option.

Is it the refusal of the narrative to take sides? Or the silences in which articulate and emotionally mature characters reveal themselves to be inarticulate emotional illiterates? It is difficult to tell and that is all part of Monticelli's literary skill: this screenplay, adapted from J.M. Coetzee's novel of the same name, is a very welcome addition to the Australian screenscape.

**Sean Nash, *All Saints* episode 447: *Not What You'd Expect*  
Seven Network (Operations) Ltd**

*All Saints* is always a menagerie of tragic medical stories intertwined with personal dilemmas among the staff. Episode 447 does not disappoint in these departments. Amy feels the entire team is against her when she stares conspicuously at a very obviously disfigured patient. Mike heads to Melbourne for a 'blind date' which ends up in a club where his medical expertise is desperately tested. Jack's medical judgement is challenged by having to make treatment decisions for a self-medicating father who is at death's door.

Writer Sean Nash has created a tightly-knit, emotionally involving and intense drama that grows on you as it takes you into the detailed moments that the staff and patients go through every day under extraordinary circumstances. The dialogue is realistic and to the point; the scenes, revealing and moving. The episode is a shining example of TV drama that makes you laugh and cry at the same time.

**Louis Nowra, Rachel Perkins & Beck Cole, *First Australians*  
Blackfella Films, SBS**

Reading a documentary script can be a serious and, in truth, often quite dull business because the genre itself is widely acknowledged to be a discourse of sobriety. But Louis Nowra, Rachel Perkins and Beck Cole, the co-writers of *First Australians*, refuse to ignore the value and often sheer beauty of tone, colour and nuance created by the sounds, moods and meanings of words and voices in conjunction with images.

To explain just why the judges decided to include the screenplay for all the episodes of this landmark series on the short list, here is a brief extract from this often challenging, always historically rigorous and extraordinarily beautifully written series. It is the opening scene from episode one:

*VISION: Night from the ocean looking through Sydney Heads.*

*The first words we hear are an Aboriginal woman's words, exasperated, as if explaining their meaning. She translates into English.*

*VOICE: Tyera barr bowar aou— I shall not become white*  
***Patyegang, Eora Nation,***

*Then we hear a firm Englishman's voice:*

**VOICE:**            *You will endeavour by every possible means to open an intercourse with the natives and to conciliate their affections enjoining all our subjects to live in amity and kindness with them.*  
**King George the Third, 25 April 1787**

**VISION:**           *Dark water, the cry of seagulls. Through the narrow heads there are a few faint glimmering lights, like fireflies, the remains of camp fires. Sound of clap sticks fading...*

From this moment the combination of words, images and sounds imagined by these screenwriters weaves a magic that captures the audience.

By writers who clearly understand the collaborative nature of filmmaking, this series makes an important contribution to the nation by helping explore and explain what it means to both Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals to be Australian.