



## The Best Science Fiction and Fantasy of the Year, Volume 4

*Jonathan Strahan (Editor) , Nicola Griffith (Contributor) , Holly Black (Contributor) , Michael Swanwick (Contributor) , Eileen Gunn (Contributor) , Alexander C. Irvine (Contributor) , Damien Broderick (Contributor) , Peter S. Beagle (Contributor) , more... Bruce Sterling (Contributor) , Sara Genge (Contributor) , Kelly Link (Contributor) , Stephen Baxter (Contributor) , Jo Walton (Contributor) , Geoff Ryman (Contributor) , Pat Cadigan (Contributor) , Rachel Swirsky (Contributor) , John Kessel (Contributor) , Sarah Monette (Contributor) , Elizabeth Bear (Contributor) , Ellen Klages (Contributor) , Robert Reed (Contributor) , Diana Wynne Jones (Contributor) , Robert Charles Wilson (Contributor) , Andy Duncan (Contributor) , Catherynne M. Valente (Contributor) , Peter Watts (Contributor) , Margo Lanagan (Contributor) , Ellen Kushner (Contributor) , Karen Joy Fowler (Contributor) , Kij Johnson (Contributor) , James Patrick Kelly (Contributor) ...less*

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The depth and breadth of what science fiction and fantasy fiction is changes with every passing year. The two dozen stories chosen for this book by award-winning anthologist Jonathan Strahan carefully maps this evolution, giving readers a captivating and always-entertaining look at the very best the genre has to offer.

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## **From Reader Review The Best Science Fiction and Fantasy of the Year, Volume 4 for online ebook**

### **Fr. John Garrett says**

I used to read Science Fiction all the time; even having a subscription to "Analog" for a few years. It has been a while since I read sci-fi short stories, so I decided to download and read this collection. I must say, I was very disappointed. I am not sure if this is the current state of affairs for sci-fi or just this editor's taste, but if it is, sci-fi as it a low. First, there was not much "science" in any of these stories. The last story, which I did enjoy, was about a cat traveling through Japan. No science at all, no fantasy even. Just a story about a cat traveling from Tokyo to the North. Too many of the stories have completely bought into the LGBT agenda. I miss real science fiction, like Asimov.

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### **Dr. Ann Coker says**

#### **Wonderful collection**

Year after year Strahan compiles the very best...now if he would only place breaks between the authors' biographies and their writing. Don't make us lazy readers have to dig for the start of each story.

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### **Just\_ann\_now says**

I bought this primarily to have an e-book version of Ellen Kushner's "A Wild and Wicked Youth", but I found so many other truly delightful stories, I'm really glad that I did. I'm not really a scifi fan, but more stories like Nicola Griffith's "It Takes Two" and Sarah Monette & Elizabeth Bear's astounding "Mongoose" could easily win me over. On the fantasy side, Margo Lanagan's "Ferryman", Michael Swanwick & Eileen Gunn's "Zeppelin City" (!!!), and Kij Johnson's enthralling "The Cat Who Walked a Thousand Miles" were standouts. I also really enjoyed Alex Quine's "Dragon's Teeth", which seems like it should be part of another book or trilogy, but I can't find it if it is. If not, someone, please ask Alex Quine to write it RIGHT NOW \*taps foot\*

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### **Vanessa Wu says**

What is the point of fantasy? I'll tell you. It's there to give reviewers of hard core pornography something to plug the gap after their sexual appetites have been slaked and they find themselves at a loose end in the middle of a long, lonely, sleepless night. So, having been afflicted with a lazy libido recently, I picked up a copy of The Best Science Fiction and Fantasy of the Year Volume 4 by Jonathan Strahan published by Nightshade Books of San Francisco.

I have to tell you, I needed to pop some stamina pills just to get it home. It's a substantial slab and not quite the ticket when you're feeling under par. But I've been brainwashed by all those blogs about how books are dying and, feeling sorry for traditional publishers, I thought that even if the stories were flimsy, at the least

the book had a feel, a heft and a smell. What a feel and what a heft! Though the smell, in all fairness, is so-so.

Kij Johnson has two stories in this volume, so there's a better than average chance, if you flick through it at random, that you'll stop at one of hers. My flicking was not quite at random. I scanned the contents pages and did some incredibly fast and semi-random computations using a secret Chinese arithmetic formula to find the shortest story, and it turned out to be Spar.

Oh, God!

It begins:

"In the tiny lifeboat, she and the alien fuck endlessly, relentlessly."

My first thought was "I'd better write a review of this." My second thought was "Amazon won't let me post it."

There in the first sentence is the whole plot of the story. That's it, really. She and the alien just fuck relentlessly.

Next I read what is probably the second-shortest story, called Ferryman. The plot of this was quite sophisticated. In fact it drew me in and I enjoyed it, even though I was half-asleep (and emotionally drained after all that fucking.) But being half asleep is appropriate when reading a story about Lethe.

Jo Walton cheated with her story, which would have been the shortest in the collection if she hadn't cobbled it together from three stories. It's called Three Twilight Tales. It was pretty good.

I started to read JoBoy by Diana Wynne Jones next but I dozed off and can't remember a thing about it.

You'll have to read the rest of the stories for yourself and form your own opinion because, let's face it, it's an anthology. It's for dipping into as and when...

But I'll only give it 3 stars because I've also been reading a much more exciting collection of stories all of which, by the way, happen to have been written by the same man, and they're all brilliant, so why on earth he isn't represented in this so-called "best of..." is a question I'd like to put to Jonathan Strahan at some point, preferably when I'm feeling stronger, as he has quite a heft himself, though I know nothing of his feel and smell.

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### **Randy says**

An entertaining set of stories. Peter Watts story "The Island" was the most intriguing, and really captured my imagination.

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### **Diana says**

This collection has a wide range of material. Some I couldn't really classify as sci-fi, and some I didn't really care for at all. But I did love a few of the stories.

"Dragon's Teeth" was lovely fantasy, just predictable enough to be comfortable but surprising.

"By Moonlight" is a retelling of the stories of the Faery that hinges on madness.

I loved "The Cat that Walked a Thousand Miles." The language is just ...cat-like. There is no other way to describe it.

But my favorite was "As Women Fight," an amazing story that appears to be predicated on gender roles, but becomes something much bigger.

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### **Brandi says**

"It takes Two" by Nicola Griffith

I read this story during an hour-long drive, and before long the conversations of those around me melted away while I became immersed in the world created by the talented Ms. Griffith. Within a few minutes more, I had the sappy smile of a hopeless romantic.

---

"Three Twilight Tales" by Jo Walton

Not horrible, but a bit more on the once-upon-a-time side of fairy tales that I don't usually enjoy.

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"The Night Cache" by Andy Duncan

This one was pretty good, though a bit predictable at the very end.

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"The Island" by Peter Watts

This story was rather amazing: the setting, the characters, the plot. I was also very impressed by the author's writing style.

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"Ferryman" by Margo Lanagan

I really enjoyed this take on the ferryman in the underworld. Very well done.

---

"A Wild and a Wicked Youth" by Ellen Kushner

Not bad. It simply didn't grab me. But the author did a good job; I wouldn't be disinclined to try more written by her.

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"The Pelican Bar" by Karen Joy Fowler

Interesting. I don't believe a short story has the space to truly explore the psychological damage likely suffered by the protagonist, but the hint of it was there.

---

"Spar" by Kij Johnson

That was... different.

---

"Going Deep" by James Patrick Kelly

Very nicely done.

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"The Coldest Girl in Coldtown" by Holly Black

Meh, the vampire + grungy underground thing is a bit overdone, so if you're gonna do it, you gotta do it well. This one is still on "meh" level. The ending wasn't bad.

---

"Zeppelin City" by Michael Swanwick and Eileen Gunn

Really couldn't get into this one. I like the idea of steampunk. I like the style of it. There was a Japanese anime movie (whose title I can't recall) that was fabulously steampunk.

I haven't read any steampunk until now...but something about this felt so... cliché.

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"Dragon's Teeth" by Alex Irvine

This piece housed an intensely quiet beauty that seemed hard to grasp, but was always there.

---

"This Wind Blowing, and This Tide" by Damien Broderick

I found myself really liking the protagonist/narrator of this one. A very likable character.

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"By Moonlight" by Peter S. Beagle

This one grabbed my attention from the first. The scene was set up beautifully; the two initial characters so interesting that you can't help but to hang on to every word. Fascinating.

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"Black Swan" by Bruce Sterling

'Massimo' is an interesting character in that he's unlikeable in a normal, everyday way. Sterling didn't set out to make him sinister--he's just an average guy, albeit a bit of a dick. Absolute normalcy is a difficult thing to render in a character. This, of course, makes the normal 'abnormal.'

The alt-universe Nicolas Sarkozy is an interesting story... though spy stories and intrigues aren't quite my thing. Massimo becomes more likeable once he starts opening up about other alt-universes.

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"As Women Fight" by Sara Genge

An interesting concept, but I don't see the point of body swapping. I'm one of those readers who needs to see a reason for things being the way they are. Probably I take things too literally.

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"The Cinderella Game" by Kelly Link

I'm not entirely sure how this one ended up in an anthology of science fiction and fantasy. Children playing at pretend doesn't count as fantasy for me--especially when it doesn't delve into the world of their imagination.

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"Formidable Caress: A Tale of Old Earth" by Stephen Baxter

Powpy, the child controlled by the machine, is a tragic character. The idea of time layers and the risks of traveling between them interested me. Shared souls--another idea I've long liked. "Maybe this is why I always felt something in me really doesn't belong in this time or place."

---

"Blocked" by Geoff Ryman

Beautiful narrative voice. A sense of beauty, loss, hope, despair--all in the mood of the prose. I read this, surrounded by people, while at the JFK airport... and it still captured me.

---

"Truth and Bone" by Pat Cadigan

Not too bad, but I didn't really connect with any of the characters.

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"Eros, Philia, Agape" by Rachel Swirsky

Interesting. I really like Lucian--a robot who grows and changes and can appreciate beauty. And I can appreciate Adriana as well--a strong, intelligent woman who struggles with uncertainty. A beautiful couple, these two. As the title of the story suggests, it deals with different types of love... and the pain that can come from sliding from one to another.

This has also been the first time I felt sorry for a cockatiel in a story o\_o

I think this is my favorite piece in the anthology.

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"The Motorman's Coat" by John Kessel

The ending seemed a bit abrupt, but overall it had a bit of a Poe feel to it.

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"Mongoose" by Sarah Monette and Elizabeth Bear

Fascinating! For the first page or so, I wasn't sure if it would hook me, but then I found myself being reeled in.

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"Echoes of Aurora" by Ellen Klages

Rather odd, but not at all in a bad way. Gives a whole new meaning to "tree hugger."

---

"Before My Last Breath" by Robert Reed

In my opinion, it bounced around a few too many times between points of view for me to become really invested in any one character. Still, a very well told story.

---

"Joboy" by Diana Wynne Jones

Ah, the author of Howl's Moving Castle. I've not read or seen it yet, but I still find that fact noteworthy.

A strange tale... had something of a "Metamorphosis" feel to it. And fable-like.

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"Utriusque Cosmi" by Robert Charles Wilson

This is another story that has a slow, deep, melancholic feel to it that I really connected with. Lovely.

---

"A Delicate Architecture" by Catherynne M. Valente

"I wanted to hear the violas playing in white halls with green and rose checkered floors."--When I read this bit, I actually was listening to live viola music :)

Oh! Cool! Even though it is very fairy-tale-ish--which isn't quite my thing--I started to see where the story was going... and suddenly the witch in 'Hansel and Gretel' is a sympathetic character. Nicely done!

---

"The Cat Who Walked a Thousand Miles" by Kij Johnson

I don't easily connect with stories told solely from the point of view of an animal, but this one was great. I really enjoyed it. Also, kitties!

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**Ed Erwin says**

I prefer reading novels over short works, but short works are good for finding new authors. This was a good and very diverse collection. Diverse to the point that I don't know how several of the stories were considered SF or Fantasy. A few stories I loved, a bunch that I simply liked, and only one that I didn't bother to finish. I now have the names of a few authors whose other work I will seek out.

(The danger in this approach is evident from this collection itself. Not all authors have one single style. There is only one author who has two stories in this collection, and they are about as different as possible. One is a simple tale, appropriate for children, about a cat walking across Japan; while the other is a dark tale of a woman being repeatedly raped and tortured by an extraterrestrial.)

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**Natalie says**

A really great and diverse collection of speculative fiction short stories. I thoroughly enjoyed it

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**A~ says**

I have to apologize, I was reading this along with another book of short stories, science fiction and so I started to get confused as to what stories were in which book.  
I will give it a four with no comment on material.

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**Roger says**

This has been a delightful collection of short stories.

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**Cher says**

I really love every other story in this book, so it's hard to give it a rating. LOVE LOVE LOVE the Catherynne Valentine story, 2nd to last.

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**Dcdfn says**

I don't think there was one good story in this book.

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### **Hayden says**

Maybe there is a reason I don't read much adult sci fi. A couple of these stories were good, but some--like the one about the rape of a human woman by some sort of amoeba-like alien which goes on for months or years--just freaked me out.

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### **Linda Pijor says**

#### **Wish I could give this no stars.**

Pure junk. The best of the worst. More details on homosexual sex than on the actual story, which wasn't good either. I only got through about one third of books, and couldn't bear to read further. The stories did not draw you in. I really hated this collection and wish I could delete all memory of this.

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