



The Best Science Fiction of the Year Volume 3

Neil Clarke

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To keep up-to-date with the most buzzworthy and cutting-edge science fiction requires sifting through countless magazines, e-zines, websites, blogs, original anthologies, single-author collections, and more? a task accomplishable by only the most determined and voracious readers. For everyone else, Night Shade Books is proud to introduce the latest volume of *The Best Science Fiction of the Year*, a new yearly anthology compiled by Hugo and World Fantasy award-winning editor Neil Clarke, collecting the finest that the genre has to offer, from the biggest names in the field to the most exciting new writers.

The best science fiction scrutinizes our culture and politics, examines the limits of the human condition, and zooms across galaxies at faster-than-light speeds, moving from the very near future to the far-flung worlds of tomorrow in the space of a single sentence. Clarke, publisher and editor in chief of the acclaimed and award-winning magazine *Clarkesworld*, has selected the short science fiction (and only science fiction) best representing the previous year's writing, showcasing the talent, variety, and awesome "sensawunda" that the genre has to offer.

The Best Science Fiction of the Year Volume 3 Details

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From Reader Review The Best Science Fiction of the Year Volume 3 for online ebook

Bradley says

Thanks to Edelweiss for a review copy of this short SF collection!

Like so many "best of" collections, it's often a grab-bag. Like some, and not so much with others.

Fortunately, there are a number of these I live very much and they all happen to hit the hard SF spectrum for me. Maybe this is just a personal preference and perhaps they were objectively a lot more original and creative than the others. Again, this could entirely be my preference-of-the-moment and not a reflection on the quality of the rest.

Which ones stood out, though?

A Series of Steaks - Vina Jie-Min Prasad - Flesh printing and con-jobs. I was rather amused and thrilled by the scope of this one.

Holdfast - an Alastair Reynolds hard take on Enemy Mine... was brilliant in every way and deliciously hard-core on every level. An easy favorite.

Every Hour of Light and Dark - Nancy Kress - It was an okay treatise on forgeries and time travel. Not my favorite story, alas.

The Last Novelist (or a dead lizard in the yard) - Matthew Kressel - Seemed to have a pretty interesting premise and light tone, but I didn't really get into it too much.

Shikasta - Vandana Singh - Pretty cool biology stuff and exploration tech, but its strength was in the diversity of its intellectual digressions even as they explored a new world and biology... not to mention the interesting AI vs human intelligence.

Wind Will Rove - Sarah Pinsker - This one was probably the most compelling non-hard-SF story of the bunch following a colony that had lost all of the cultures it had brought from Earth, desperately attempting to recreate what they had from memory as they moved forward.

Focus - Gord Sellar - Fairly interesting phone SF... but only mildly.

The Martian Obelisk - Linda Nagata - Building a Mars monument. Cool characters. Colonization. Tragedy :)

Shadows of Eternity - Gregory Benford - Lots of tech, exploration. Decent, pretty creative, wormholes, ancient civs, but mostly all about discovery.

The Wordless - Indrapramit Das - A lot more hard-SF and also quite interesting, dark ending.

Regarding the Robot Raccoons Attached to the Hull of My Ship - Jones and Muhamad-Ali - Good epistolary short full of conversation and interesting world-building and relationships. I think I liked these characters among the best in this collection.

Belly Up - Maggie Clark - I think I wanted to like this one more than I did based solely on the good pacing, but that wasn't enough in the end. I didn't really connect.

Uncanny Valley - Greg Egan - This one really stood out for me. Residual Human consciousness mixed into an old love story, degraded rights, a murder mystery, and great old Hollywood charm.

We Who Live in the Heart - Kelly Robson - This one was probably my favorite of all the stories. It had a fantastic mix of blow-you-away imagination and worldbuilding, brilliant setup, fantastic characters, great theme, and an even greater twist. I'm going to be looking out for more of her work for sure.

A Catalogue of Sunlight at the End of the World - A. C. Wise - A rather introspective piece on saving parts of the future and remembering the past with a solid science bent and decent characterization.

Meridian - Karin Loachee - This one snuck up on me but it was a nice twist of stowaways and brotherhood. Great worldbuilding.

The Tale of Alcubierre Horse - Kathleen Ann Goonan - Probably my second favorite story in the book, it's like a twist of Pohl's Starburst and a kidnapping and a wild psychology lesson with heart... ending with colonization. I really enjoyed the full storytelling experience with this one.

Extracurricular Activities - Yoon Ha Lee - Young Jedao. Need I say more?

In Everlasting Wisdom - Aliette de Bodard - Lots of station and setting, pretty interesting cultural worldbuilding, but it didn't quite strike any chords in me.

The Last Boat-builder in Ballyvoloon - Finbarr O'Reilly - A twist on stories from a bar with a future history and great atmosphere.

The Speed of Belief - Robert Reed - Machine souls and exploration, more focused on immortality versus waterbags, diplomacy, species-killers, and alternate intelligences.

Death on Mars - Madeline Ashby - Very interesting intersection between a Mars trip and inoperable cancer. This one might stick with me for a while.

An Evening with Severyn Grimes - Rich Larson - An almost Noir feel with high tech hijinx. Lots of great descriptions.

Zeros - Peter Watts - For outright great science, fantastic zombie characters turned cyborgs, existential horror with programming, and the ennui of war, I had to debate with myself whether this one was topping the whole list of short stories. It's truely great and I'm totally a fanboy of this author.

The Secret Life of Bots - Suzanne Palmer - I wanted to like this more than I did. Still, pretty fun to see the underbelly of the workforce. Shame there is so much stratification, but I guess it drives a story.

Zen and the Art of Starship Maintenance - Tobias S. Buckell - Far future SF that I fairly rocked to. I liked feel of the end. :)

Cathy says

26 stories. Many I hadn't read yet, some I did because I just went through the Locus recommended reading list. (I think Clarke is one of the people who chooses those too. Their poll results aren't in yet so I don't know who was actually nominated.) I'm very very happy to own this, there are so many good stories that I'll want to refer back to in the future. 15 female authors, at least 10 POC that I know of, could be more. 13 difference sources: 10 online, 6 print and 10 anthologies. 2 novellas, 11 novelettes and 13 short stories. 7 of 10 anthology sources were small press.

Clarke's pick for best new anthology - *Extrasolar* edited by Nick Gevers for PS Publish but only available as an expensive UK hardcover so far.

Clarke's pick for best new writer - He agreed with me! Vina Jie-Min Presad is brilliant and so clever. I didn't realize that "Steaks" was her first professional sale, so impressive a debut. You have to read *Fandom for Robots* too, it's so cute, a really fun story for all fans.

Vina Jie-Min Presad - *A Series of Steaks* - Nebula and Hugo nominated, on the Locus recommended reading list. Such a clever story. It felt like a very believable projection of where many aspects of society could go, and the characters were terrific.

Opening line: "All known forgeries are tales of failure." Yup, you aren't supposed to get caught.

Alastair Reynolds - *Holdfast* - Battle-Mother and maggot Greymouth are the only survivors of their enemy squadrons. On a mysterious gas giant they discovered floating mountains and an unusual organism that forced them to take an accounting of each other and the paths their people chose. Good story. Good ending, which is all too rare in short stories.

Nancy Kress - *Every Hour of Light and Dark* - In the year 1668 artist Johannes realized that one of his patron's paintings of his now has an excellent forgery hanging in its place. In 2270 the Gallery chose Tulia's piece and Cran was jealous. And in 2018 something happened to a guard at the National Gallery in DC when he checked on the Vermeers. Cran and Tulia lived on Luna and worked for the Project, which substituted forgeries for originals throughout time in an attempt to bring the originals to the future to rescue them from a destroyed Earth. I can sympathize with their desire to rescue art from the past. It had a similar theme in that way to *Wind Will Rove* about how much art means to us. Cran's passion for the painting was relatable, if his actions were not. It was quite a good story.

Matthew Kressel - *The Last Novelist (or A Dead Lizard in the Yard)* - Nebula nominated. Very memorable. Tor.com's description: "A dying writer tries to finish one last story on the planet he settled on for his demise. An encounter with a young girl triggers one last burst of creativity." Fish was a doll. A bittersweet little story.

Vandana Singh - *Shikasta* - Originally written for *Visions*, *Ventures*, *Escape Velocities: A Collection of Space Futures*, a free download. The anthology is a kind of a follow-up to *Hieroglyph*.

She's such a beautiful writer, without being flowery or heavy. Just lovely. Three scientists write to their dead

fourth partner now that their AI robot has landed on Shikasta, only 4 lightyears away. The mission was crowdsourced and entirely transparent. Though life is more likely on the water worlds that other more developed/funded projects have set out to explore, this team hoped a different and unfamiliar kind of life could be found in the band around the middle of Shikasta between the frozen side and magma side. Then the robot began acting weird and they suspect it's learned enough to be sentient in part because of communicating with whatever magnetic kind of life forms were there. It was such a rich story with Native American, Indian, another indigenous culture and so much physical science and social science. Complex and smart yet easy to read and very well done.

Sarah Pinsker - *Wind Will Rove* - Nebula and Hugo nominated. Super memorable, and when I remember, I feel it. It was emotional and evocative. A generation ship. Computer sabotage and loss of Earth media especially movies and music. The fiddler, her grandmother, and her kid. Such a good story, it may well win a lot of awards. My notes from the first time I read it, "People on a colony ship try to keep their arts alive a couple of generations away from Earth. The MC inherited her fiddle from her grandmother, original crew, who's favorite song was Wind Will Rove. She teaches 10th grade history and her students don't understand why they have to learn about a place they have and will never see."

It felt like a very personal story. Pinsker's love of music and performing informed every aspect of the story. Such a lovely story, very deserving of nomination."

Gord Seller - *Focus* - This was an AnLab nominated story (Analog Magazine awards). Korean and Vietnamese people rebelling against almost mandatory use of Focus concentration drug in schools, factories, etc. It was fast-paced and interesting until it very abruptly just ended. Major short story crappy ending syndrome. But the idea of Focus and how it could be abused felt all too possible. This is the kind of sci-fi we need, examining real issues that can affect us now and in the near future so that when things happen it isn't a shock and has been debated and analyzed a bit already.

Linda Nagata - *The Martian Obelisk* Hugo nominated and on the Locus recommended reading list. She's a great writer, I love her military SF, which is unexpected because I'm not much of a military SF fan. I get totally sucked into the characters and her informed ideas about the near future of tech and war.

As for this story, Earth is slowly dying from climate change and other complications. A rich guy, Nathaniel, asked an architect, Susannah, 17 yrs ago what her dream project would be. She said to create the a monument that would be huge and perfect and would last 100,000 years, long beyond humans and anything else of Earth. All 4 Mars colonies collapsed but one is was used for the obelisk, created via AI operated machinery. But suddenly 9 months after the last colony collapsed a vehicle from that site showed up at the project. Did someone survive? A very good story.

Gregory Benford - *Shadows of Eternity* - Man, you can tell he's a scientist! Great mix of hard science and space exploration as a SETI Library Trainee on the Moon explored transmissions from robotic scouts from occupied planets across the universe and discovers something no one else noticed. A good story, it felt classic and modern at the same time.

Indrapramit Das - *The Worldless* - This was on the Locus recommended reading list. Usually I love his work but this was a bit of an odd story. NuTay and their child Satlyt sold chai to wayfarers on a desert planet where their people, dunyshar, were effectively slaves, trapped into service. They longed for Earth and a real planet full of life and not those blasted dun colored hills. it was well done and I can see why some people would love it. I just prefer things a bit more concrete and easier to understand. People who love Sofia Samatar and Amal El-Mohtar should love it.

Rachael K. Jones and Khaalidah Muhammad-Ali - *Regarding the Robot Raccoons Attached to the Hull of My Ship* - I read Muhammad-Ali's story *Concessions* for the Locus list (about the doctor who in trying to cure cancer created nanites as a side effect destroyed fertility, good story) and was instantly a big fan. This story is about the love-hate relationship between sisters who differ about terraforming Mars, told through letters back and forth as they travel toward the red planet. "Our hatred has been our brilliance, our secret genius, the harsh red desert that pushed and pinched and goaded us to build towers you can see from the Moon. Imagine what a lifetime of love might have accomplished." What a lovely story, something anyone with a sibling will relate to on a deep level. Thanks, Neil.

Maggie Clark - *Belly Up* - A kid wanted revenge on the "declawed" addict who killed his mother. But Imbra, the murderer, didn't want to ruin the kid's life a second time. It had two more major sections and ended with me totally not getting it. It wasn't great for me, slow and unsatisfying.

Greg Egan - *Uncanny Valley* - On the Locus recommended reading list. The main character is Adam the Younger (view spoiler) he isn't a legal person. A nice story, a bit of a mystery but mostly an exploration of what it might mean to succeed an identity.

Kelly Robson - *We Who Live in the Heart* - A Locus recommended reading list story. A weird story about a small group of people who lived in a floating whale. Not actually a whale, it's just called that. It was a weird story. I didn't get most of it. I usually love her stuff a lot and appreciate how creative and varied her work is, so it's fine that this wasn't a match for me.

A.C. Wise - *A Catalogue of Sunlight at the End of the World* - I loved this story a lot. A man remembered his life through the way the sun looked on different occasions and made a catalog of sunlight for the generation ship that was about to depart. Life and love and grief and memory and complex family dynamics. There was so much that rang true and that I really related to. Such a lovely little story. She's such a beautiful writer. "I may be alone but I'm not lonely. I have everything I need." I'm really surprised it wasn't nominated.

It was first published here: "Sunvault: Stories of Solarpunk and Eco-Speculation is the first English-language anthology to broadly collect solarpunk short fiction, artwork, and poetry. A new genre for the 21st Century, solarpunk is a revolution against despair. Focusing on solutions to environmental disasters, solarpunk envisions a future of green, sustainable energy used by societies that value inclusiveness, cooperation, and personal freedom."

Karin Lowachee - *Meridian* - A boy's family and settlement were killed by space pirates when he was four. The family that rescued him adopted him but he was unmanageable, at least by them, and they basically sold him to a drug queen. One day he found out that somehow his middle brother lived. How the kid dealt with his rage really rang true.

Kathleen Ann Goonan - *The Tale of the Alcubierre Horse* - Too abstract and confusing for me. But basically Pele worked on a ship that became the Disney of the future combined with a serious research facility. They kept postponing going off into space as was intended. Until a group of genius kids, many on the autism spectrum, forced the issue. She ended up being the only adult to go with them. It kept getting weirder and it ws almost cool but not quite for my taste. I liked the ideas of nanites, time, fairy tales and old books being important but was confused by how she put it all together.

Yoon Ha Lee - *Extracurricular Activities* - Hugo nominated & on the Locus recommended reading list. Which is no surprise because Lee is a master at short fiction. There was an extraordinary amount of

worldbuilding in such a short story. I feel like I absorbed a 400+ page novel so easy and smooth, it was really remarkable. It was super cute, fast-paced, detailed but easy to follow. Fun. And it wasn't depressing! Unlike so many nominated stories every year.

Duh, it took me forever to realize that this reminded me of NinefoxGambit because it's part of that series. On the other hand, I only read the beginning of book one so far, so maybe it's understandable. This was a big incentive to get back into it.

Aliette de Bodard - *In Everlasting Wisdom* - This was in *infinity Wars*, which was on the Locus recommended reading list. A subject of the Everlasting Emperor accepted a symbiotic relationship with an appeaser, which let her harmonize/brainwash people to feel peace. War is with Quynh Federation. I love de Bodard.

Finbarr O'Rielly - *The Last Boat Builder in Ballyvoloon* - A Locus recommended story. And maybe it was nominated for something? I was interested in his idea about unintended consequences of technology possibly being like invasive species that are imported to solve a problem but cause worse ones. People created "squid" to clean the oceans, lakes and rivers of all of the crap we dumped in them. But like all life, they weren't predictable. They killed fish to get to the plastic in their flesh. They killed kids who used suntan lotion with petrol in it. But the waters were clean at least. It was OK but I didn't love it.

Robert Reed - *The Speed of Belief* - A Great Ship story. I've read several that I liked but this was much too long and slow for me.

Madeline Ashby - *Death on Mars* - Dear friends. When you find out that a loved one is sick or dying, please don't make it ALL about you. There was a lot to like with this one. Group dynamics, Mars exploration, choices are illness and dying and how different people react to both. Good story.

Rich Larson - *An Evening with Severyn Grimes* - I admit it, I didn't read it. I was ready to move on to another book by this point. Sorry, Rich! I usually really like his work. Get the book, read it, and let me know how it is, OK?

Peter Watts - *ZeroS* - A Locus recommended reading list story twice over, because the book it's from, *Infinity Wars*, was also on the list. It was about super augmented soldiers, so much that their superiors control them during action entirely in zombie mode. An OK story.

Suzanne Palmer - *The Secret Life of Bots* - I really liked this one, and it's very memorable. On the Locus recommended reading list and Hugo nominated. The secret network the bots used to talk to each other reminded me of Ian Tregillis's The Mechanical books, because of course subjugated people would want to talk privately. Not that these bots seem to mind as much. It was a charming tale. The main character was one tiny but mighty little bot. I liked how the "person"alities of the Bots that were shaped by their function, so different than humans. Themes: Being old isn't a crime and often makes your contributions more valuable. And support staff matters!

Tobias S. Bucknell - *Zen and the Art of Starship Maintenance* - It was on the Locus list, as was the anthology it appeared in, *Cosmic Powers* (very good). For some reason I didn't make any notes when I read it. I seem to recall it being OK. Sorry Mr. Bucknell.

Gail Morris says

this collection of stories introduced me to some new authors and made me want to read the book ZeroS after reading the short story here. I am not a zombie fan, but the space twist with alien technology helped a lot to make zombies more interesting to me. I will be researching the other authors to find some new books to read soon.

Mike D says

I am a huge fan of the "Years Best" collections of short fiction and recently editor Neil Clarke has entered the yearly "best of" collection ring with his series The Best Science Fiction of the Year. This is his third volume and the first from him that I have read, but I am pleased to say that this is one of the best scifi anthologies I have ever read! Strong and varied offerings make this a must read for any type of science fiction fan! Head on over to Signal Horizon to see my full review and many more reasons to add this one to your collection!
