



## Engineering Infinity

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This science-fiction anthology collects together stories by some of the biggest names in the field including Stephen Baxter, Charles Stross and Greg Bear.

## Engineering Infinity Details

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Author : Jonathan Strahan (Editor) , Charles Stross (Contributor) , Kathleen Ann Goonan (Contributor) , Damien Broderick (Contributor) , Barbara Lamar (Contributor) , Robert Reed (Contributor) , John C. Wright (Contributor) , David Moles (Contributor) , more... Gregory Benford (Contributor) , Gwyneth Jones (Contributor) , John Barnes (Contributor) , Peter Watts (Contributor) , Kristine Kathryn Rusch (Contributor) , Karl Schroeder (Contributor) , Stephen Baxter (Contributor) , Hannu Rajaniemi (Contributor) ...less

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## From Reader Review Engineering Infinity for online ebook

### Grady McCallie says

I think this started out to be a hard-science anthology, but that's not what it ended up as. These are some great writers, and the collection was mostly entertaining, but most of the stories are pretty experimental, in choice of narrator or style of prose, or are heavily mytho-poetic, and the science is there to support the Ideas about identity, time, or other Heavy Things. Probably worth a look if you like imaginative settings and plots, and have a high tolerance for postmodern fables. That said, a couple of the stories I particularly liked were David Moles, 'A Soldier of the City', which reminded me of Zelazny's Lord of Light, with people living historic earth mythologies far in the future - I'd love to read a full length novel in this setting; and Gwyneth Jones, 'The Ki-Anna', which pushes the tropes of police procedurals into an extra-terrestrial context for a great short story. The last story, John Barnes, 'The Birds and the Bees and the Gasoline Trees', works on several interesting levels - the overall frame is hokey, but the characters are fascinating and would also support a longer novel.

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### Paige Ellen Stone says

I love anthologies, short story collections, whatever you might call them. You don't feel any press to finish it. You can pick it up, read a story, then put it down, only to pick it up later when the mood strikes. Jonathan Strahan has edited many collections and has won many awards for doing so.

This is a great collection, some authors known to me, some not. That is part of the joy an anthology brings. The reader gets a taste of an author or two or more with whom s/he is familiar but also gets to sample new voices, new writing styles and so on.

These stories are joined by a theme of utilizing the "hard science" of today around which each author is to write a speculative short work. The results are excellent.

If you are a fan of current science fiction, then there is at least one story here for you. It is a carefully chosen collection. While I liked some stories more than others, I did not dislike any of them. There is play with time, with space, with physics and metaphysics and a lot of just plain old good story-telling. This is a good book to keep at the ready. I read two non-fiction books and two novels all while reading this book one story at a time, enjoying the break it gave me. I hope it does the same for you.

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### Nick says

<http://idearefinery.blogspot.com.au/2011/03/back-and-engineering-infinity.html>

I found this one to be a bit patchy. There were some stories in it that I really enjoyed, but just as many that didn't really grab me.

It's billed as hard science fiction, but Strahan notes in the introduction that the anthology "moved away from pure hard SF to something a little broader." I actually think this is perhaps its biggest weakness. It isn't laser-focussed, so I couldn't really read it as a bunch of different authors poking around the same ideas.

Conversely, it wasn't really broad enough to entertain me with variety. This kind of thing works fine in best-of-the-year collections, where each story is a gem, but I think I prefer more (or less) focus in my general

anthologies.

As I say, though, it did have some stories in it that I really enjoyed:

-- "The Invasion of Venus", by Stephen Baxter. What happens when aliens rock up in our solar system, but they're only here to exchange fire with other aliens living on Venus? I think I liked the sheer size of the conflict in this one, coupled with the way it was told from the very personal perspective of two old friends on Earth. Interesting also because I'm not usually a huge fan of Stephen Baxter.

-- "The Server and the Dragon", by Hannu Rajaniemi. A sentient server in a galaxy-wide network drifts lonely and unused around a star on a very wide orbit, until it is one day visited by a (digital) dragon. I'd call this one a hard space opera story, and that's probably why I liked it. I'm a sucker for that sort of thing.

-- "The Birds and the Bees and the Gasoline Trees", by John Barnes. A novel take on the panspermia theory. Cool things here were the central idea -- big and dramatic, and a new take on an old bit of SF -- and the partially-explored background of one of the main characters, an android created for the purpose of solar system exploration. I don't think I've read anything else by John Barnes, so I'll have to see what I can find.

Honorable mentions go to Kristine Kathryn Rusch's "Watching the Music Dance" (a nice bit of anthropological SF), Peter Watts' "Malak" (perhaps the most typical hard SF story of the bunch), and both Karl Schroeder's "Laika's Ghost" and Charles Stross' "Bit Rot" (for the sheer gonzo joy of them).

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### **Paul says**

I couldn't decide between 2 and 3 stars, but overall I just wasn't impressed with this anthology. Only 4 or the 14 stories do I consider really good, including: The Invasion of Venus by Stephen Baxter, Bit Rot by Charles Stross, Mantis by Robert Reed, and The Birds and the Bees and the Gasoline Trees by John Barnes. The other stories were either not SF (i.e. speculative, fantasy, etc.), poorly written, boring, or all of the above.

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### **Russ K says**

I was pleased with the variety of stories in this collection. You've got aliens, robots, time-travel, all the main sci-fi tropes are hit upon at one point or another. I got this as a gift from someone who knew I like Gaiman and Dick, and I hadn't heard of any of these authors so I wasn't really sure what to expect. The opener, "Malak" by Peter Watts is a great story looking into the mind of a machine. "Walls of Flesh, Bar of Bone" by Damien Broderick and Barbara Lamar was another one of my favorites, and one of those stories where you can't tell which "type" of story it is until you're already invested in the characters. Like you're halfway through this character's short adventure and you suddenly go, "Oh, so THIS is what this story is going to be about."

Honestly there were a couple I didn't finish all the way through. I couldn't get into Charles Stross's "Bit Rot," even though on the front and back cover he's one of the top-billed writers. But as I read some of the other stories I realized, maybe I'm just not into the space stories right now. And that's okay. Some people are really into complex world-building, I'm into characters and more realism (if that makes sense in sci-fi). Now this just means I can put this on my shelf and re-read them another time.

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## **Jordi Balcells says**

Habrá que seguir de cerca esta serie de antologías.

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## **Raj says**

This is a collection of short stories (mostly) with the theme of "hard SF", although this is never really defined (a point that the editor notes in the introduction) and some of the stories definitely stray outside this sub-genre. There were more hits than misses in the collection, but it's the misses that stand out for me, possibly because there was a string of them in quick succession in the middle of the book. There was Kathleen Ann Goonan's *Creatures With Wings* (a small Buddhist community is saved/kidnapped by angels/aliens just before the end of the world) and *Walls of Flesh, Bars of Bone* which started off strongly with a drunken sociology professor seeing something impossible in a fragment of old 35mm film but quickly descends into incomprehensibility (for me, at least).

But there are also some great stories. There's Charlie Stross's *Bit Rot*, set in the same universe as his novel *Saturn's Children* and the wonderfully named *The Server and the Dragon* which was an interesting story but really left me wanting to know more about the world that we got glimpses of in the narrative. I had the same problem (albeit moreso) with David Moles' *A Solider of the City*, which dropped tantalising hints of the world the story was set in but ignored them in favour of a very narrow story that I found unsatisfying compared to the world.

Both Peter Watts' *Malak* and Stephen Baxter's *The Invasion of Venus* were fascinating reads because they had the Other at the heart of them. The former got us into the codebase of a non-sentient fighter drone aircraft whose program was altered to make it take collateral damage into account; and the latter had Humans getting really worked up about an incoming alien spacecraft and then feeling the let down when they realise that it wasn't heading towards Earth.

A decent mix of stories but unfortunately it's the ones I didn't enjoy that I remember more than the ones I did.

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## **Tudor Ciocarlie says**

Good anthology. Great stories by Stephen Baxter, Hannu Rajaniemi, Peter Watts, Charles Stross and David Moles.

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## **Jack says**

An interesting variety of stories built around a theme of basically some chunk of gee-whiz technology. Interestingly, two of the tales involve Buddhism, although rather peripherally in one case. There's also a very tasty Charles Stross follow-up to *Saturn's Children*, and in the final story, John Barnes uses an idea that I recognized immediately from Larry Niven's *Known Space*. John C. Wright's contribution makes me think the

man is incapable of writing actual dialog. It didn't hurt his "Awake in the Night", because that was an imitation of stories written in a deliberately archaic voice. (Wright is a conservative Catholic off the deep end; a venue I frequent on-line usually references his material with the tag "memetic prophylactic recommended".)

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## **Brainycat says**

### **Brainycat's 5 "B"s :**

**blood:** 3

**boobs:** 1

**bombs:** 3

**bondage:** 4

**blasphemy:** 4

**Stars :** 5

**Bechdel Test :** PASS

**Deggan's Rule :** PASS

**Gay Bechdel Test :** FAIL

Full review at [booklikes](#).

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## **Geoff says**

Visceral and fast-paced story revolving around the ethics of artificial intelligence and drone warfare.  
Excellent read.

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## **Peter says**

Engineering Infinity is a collection of modern day hard science fiction stories, of a number of different styles and authors.

It's the usual mixed bag here, maybe a little better than just a random short story collection, or one of a single theme or author, but there were still some stories I didn't connect much to, and some I really liked. Unfortunately a number of the ones I really liked I'd already read, but that's hardly the fault of the collection, even if it does somewhat affect my personal enjoyment.

I was very slightly disappointed in a misapprehension I had going in, I thought with a title like "Engineering Infinity" there would be a running theme of some sort of large scale (either in size or time) projects, ancient technological civilizations and giant starships, and there is some of that sort of thing, but there are also some smaller stories where it's just, say, a conventional mystery set on an alien planet, or the development of a single new piece of technology. I guess they all (more-or-less) qualify under hard SF, but I was hoping for a little more sense of wonder, Big Dumb Objects in space, mega-engineering stories as well.

Still, it was pretty good. My favorite stories were probably, "Malak" by Peter Watts, "The Ki-Anna" by

Gwyneth Jones, and "Mercies" by Gregory Benford. But even in some of the other stories there were a few things I really liked, and only a couple that left me almost completely cold.

Worth a look particularly if you're interested in modern hard SF, although if you've already read a lot of short story collections from this century you'll probably also see a lot of overlap. That may be the reason I'm only rating it 3 stars instead of 4... if they were new to me, I'd have enjoyed it a lot more (although even so it's probably closer to 3.5).

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### **Peter Tillman says**

Superior hard-SF anthology: all the stories are readable, almost all are good, four are outstanding:

- \* "Malak" by Peter Watts, heavily-armed AI warbird is developing a conscience. Sort of.  
<https://rifter.com/real/shorts/Peter...>
- \* "The Invasion of Venus" by Stephen Baxter. Two inexplicable alien civilizations.
- \* "The Ki-Anna" by Gwyneth Jones. Creepy aliens, creepier diet. <http://clarkesworldmagazine.com/jones...>
- \* "The Birds and the Bees and the Gasoline Trees" by John Barnes, fertilizing the ocean leads to an unexpected exodus. Best of the book, I thought. Reprint: <http://www.lightspeedmagazine.com/fic...>

You may have different favorites, and I might have a different list on reread. Not to be missed, if you like good hard-sf stories. 4+ stars.

TOC: <http://www.isfdb.org/cgi-bin/pl.cgi?3...>

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### **Bee says**

Wow. Some real gems in this collection. There was only one story that wasn't great, the rest were all brilliant. Incredible concepts, well written. Damn, if only all short story collections had such a high great to suck ratio

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### **Lindsay says**

I keep anthologies for reading on my phone because I'm not often without my eReader and the shorter stories are good for the short times where I only have my phone as a reading device. I've been reading this one off and on for the whole of December.

This isn't my first Infinity Project anthology; I actually started with the second one Edge of Infinity because I wanted to read an award-winning novella from that collection. I'm actually glad that that was the way I started, because had I read this one first, I'm not sure I would have continued. There are a few good stories in this one, but overall I felt the quality was uneven and the theme to be lacking.

Standouts for me were The Invasion of Venus by Stephen Baxter (I'm not normally a fan of his; now I'm wondering if I should check out more of his shorter works) and The Birds and the Bees and the Gasoline

Trees by John Barnes. I also enjoyed the Peter Watts story that kicks off the anthology (Malak), but it's just a riff on Watts' normal themes around humanity and inhumanity, which I personally love, but is far from everyone's taste.

From a negative point of view I found the John C. Wright, David Moles and Robert Reed stories nearly unreadable.

From a should-be-noted point of view this collection contains Bit Rot by Charles Stross which is a story between Saturn's Children and Neptune's Brood in the Freyaverse books.

Read if you're a completist or a Stross fan, but this is a skippable volume in this series.

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