



The Best Science Fiction and Fantasy of the Year, Volume 3

Jonathan Strahan (Editor), Ted Chiang (Contributor), Garth Nix (Contributor), Holly Phillips (Contributor), Stephen Baxter (Contributor), Stephen King (Contributor), Robert Reed (Contributor), Meghan McCarron (Contributor), more... Joan Aiken (Contributor), Margo Lanagan (Contributor), Ted Kosmatka (Contributor), Kij Johnson (Contributor), Elizabeth Bear (Contributor), Rachel Swirsky (Contributor), Greg Egan (Contributor), Hannu Rajaniemi (Contributor), Maureen F. McHugh (Contributor), M. Rickert (Contributor), Michael Swanwick (Contributor), Richard Bowes (Contributor), Ken Scholes (Contributor), Kelly Link (Contributor), Peter S. Beagle (Contributor), Jeff VanderMeer (Contributor), Paolo Bacigalupi (Contributor), Ian McDonald (Contributor), Holly Black (Contributor), John Kessel (Contributor), Paul McAuley (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. Jonathan Strahan has edited more than twenty anthologies and collections, including The Locus Awards, The New Space Opera, The Jack Vance Treasury, and a number of year's best annuals. He has won the Ditmar, William J. Atheling Jr., and Peter McNamara Awards for his work as an anthologist, and is the reviews editor for Locus.

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

Jen says

This review is only for the included short story: **Beyond the Sea Gate of the Scholar Pirates of Sarskoe** by Garth Nix.

What an interesting story! The previous sentence may turn out to be the understatement of the month from me, but there you have it.

I was originally turned on to this story through a combination of factors involving a car that allows me to play CDs full of MP3 files, being subscribed to a lot of story telling podcasts, and the fact that it was the story featured on PodCastle #186 (click that link to hear the story read aloud). Because I was driving and other drivers being what they are, I was unable to give the story the full amount of attention it deserved, so checked out The Best Science Fiction and Fantasy of the Year Volume 3 from the library for the sole purpose of reading Garth Nix's short story.

As with any great epic, it opens mid stream, not taking time to educate the reader as to the paradigm at hand. It is an adventure story set aboard two ships and an island; and stars a human man (Sir Hereward) and a sentient, animated marionette named Mr. Fitz (think Pinocchio) who has access to a magical needle that does things to reality. The point of this adventure is to manipulate some pirates into taking our daring duo to an island where there is a task that needs to be accomplished. Plunder of all sorts are promised to the pirates, and are available. In this way, it reminds me a lot of Red Seas Under Red Skies by Scott Lynch, even down to the female pirate captain getting all sexy times with one of the protagonists. And this isn't even the awesome stuff! Wait until you see what the female pirate captain *is* and what nature of trouble(s) await everyone once they get to the island!

Why three stars? Because "it was good", but it tossed me a bit too quickly into a world that was very complex. In my research, I keep being assured that there are some Lovecraftian ideas in this world, but having not been exposed to Lovecraft - except to know that Cthulu is a monster related to him - those ideas that may have been a comforting allusion to other readers, were an unexpected and not-entirely-pleasant oddity to me. It was also because I found the general theme of two-guys-get-pirate-ship-captained-by-woman-to-do-their-bidding-and-sex-as-well was better done in Red Seas Under Red Skies.

NB: A prequel short story is "Sir Hereward and Mr. Fitz Go To War Again" by Garth Nix.

Wealththeow says

Pretty good, but as always a mixed bag.

The good or thought-provoking:

Ted Chiang's "Exhalation," in which a world of wind-up robots realizes that their very acts of moving, thinking and talking is slowly ending their universe.

Peter S. Beagle's "Uncle Chaim and Aunt Rifke and the Angel," is a fantastic character study and slice-of-life

of mid-century Jewish New Yorkers.

Paolo Bacigalupi's "The Gambler," about a Vietnamese immigrant's career as a journalist. He has one last chance to tell a sensational story.

Paul Mcauley's "The Thought War," about a zombie invasion that's really reality changing with observation.

Meghan McCarron's "The Magician's House," about a teenaged girl learning magic. Very different view on magic and how it could be taught.

Margo Lanagan's "Machine Maid," is about a new bride who finds that her wind-up maid is her key to escaping her husband.

Greg Egan's "Crystal Nights" is a great story because the main character misses so much, even while other characters clearly understand what's going on. A dot-com gazillionaire tries to create AI through directed evolution within a computer.

Hannu Rajaniemi's "His Master's Voice," is like Homeward Bound crossed with nannites. A cat and a dog strive to bring their master back to life.

The ones that annoyed me, or were just plain bad:

Jeff Vandermeer's "Fixing Hanover" is about an engineer who fled his empire when he found out what his inventions were being used for. Years later, he makes a living as an unrespected handyman. But then he repairs one too many things, and the empire comes back again...Could have been good, but the only characterization we have in regards to the main character is that the hottest chick in the village has sex with him all the time and everyone's really jealous. Seriously, that's all we're shown about this man, who's supposedly wracked with shame over the wars he helped win. Vandermeer has consistently disappointed me.

John Kessel's "Pride and Prometheus" is a shameless attempt to write Frankenstein fanfic while pretending it has something to do with Austen. He seems to have randomly decided that Mary Bennet is an inquisitive naturalist, held back only by her foolish family's sexism. Cuz that totally jives with her actual source material! The story itself is not nearly good enough to warrant the use of Austen and Shelley's characters--it's basically just Mary, Frankenstein, and the monster talking to each other.

Kij Johnson's "26 Monkeys, Also the Abyss." Too weird and senseless for me.

Kieran McAndrew says

Science fiction helps readers explore the human condition, sometimes with zombies and delightful scenes where Elizabeth Bennett meets Henry Frankenstein.

But science fiction is also clever writing. An excellent story within a story leaves us guessing who is the reader and whom is being read.

Brice says

Exhalation - Ted Chiang: 5 stars, loved the dramatic narrative focused on the second law of thermodynamics.
Shoggoths in Bloom - Elizabeth Bear: 3 stars. Race relations. Exobiology. Sentient extraterrestrial jellyfish.
Uncle Chaim and Aunt Rifke and the Angel - Peter S. Beagle: 4 stars. Strongly Jewish characters deal with an angel who isn't quite normal.

Fixing Hanover - Jeff VanderMeer: 2 stars for depressing. Apparently, there is no forgiveness nor escape from your old sins.

The Gambler - Paolo Bacigalupi: 3 stars. About media manipulation, writing the truth, and Laotian politics.

The Dust Assassin - Ian McDonald: 2 stars. Depressing future-earth where feuds in India continue.

Virgin - Holly Black: 3 stars. Unicorns and the death of hope for the runaways on the margins of society.

Pride and Prometheus - John Kessel: 3 stars. Mashup of Pride and Prejudice and Frankenstein. Mary falls for Dr. Frankenstein when he passes through her town. *Spoiler*: It doesn't work out.

The Thought War - Paul McAuley: 2.75 stars - Zombies have taken over most of the world, altering its reality as they do so.

Beyond the Sea Gates of the Scholar Pirates of Sarskoe - Garth Nix: 4 stars - Yet a new magical realm from Mr. Nix. Interesting as usual. Pirates and magic and animated puppets and enormous starfish, oh my.

The Small Door - Holly Phillips: 3 stars. Largely sad story about the sacrifices made when family members are sick.

Turing's Apples - Stephen Baxter: 4 stars. The fugacity of time, trying to remember past the heat death of the universe. Software trojans and self-assembling nanobots.

The New York Times at Special Bargain Rates - Stephen King: 3 stars. A call from beyond the grave.

Five Thrillers - Robert Reed: 2 stars. The writing was superb, very page-turning. It's just that the subject matter is about the extremes of the means justify the ends. Anti-hero as protagonist.

The Magician's House - Megan McCarron: 0 stars. Magic + adultery.

Goblin Music - Joan Aiken: 4 stars. Odd magic, small town, goblins and loud music during the night.

Machine Maid - Margo Lanagan: 0 stars. Victorian times + windup sexbot disguised as a maid.

The Art of Alchemy - Ted Kosmatka: 2 stars (violence and some sex). Big money, big corporations, and squashing new innovations and people to protect share prices.

26 Monkeys, Also the Abyss - Kij Johnson: 5 stars. Don't try to understand it all.

Marry the Sun - Rachel Swirsky: 3 stars. Modern Greek tragedy when astrophysicist specializing in the sun falls in love with living sun-god.

Crystal Nights - Greg Egan: 3 stars. Virtual worlds, massive computing power, the sentience of programs, and compulsive type-A personalities.

His Master's Voice - Hannu Rajaniemi: 3 stars. Packed with new tech (and it's jargon). Bizarre, fractured, non-plot.

Special Economics - Maureen McHugh: 3 stars. Girls living in a modern Asian corporate town eventually escape and use micro-credit to free their comrades.

Evidence of Love in a Case of Abandonment - M Rickert: 1.5 stars. Public executions of women who have had abortions. Unpleasant.

From Babel's Fall'n Glory We Fled... - Michael Swanwick. 3 stars. Far-future, otherworld, marxist economics, and aliens. Bit bleak.

If Angels Fight - Rick Bowes: 2 stars. Possession, inspiration, power, politics.

The Doom of Love in Small Spaces - Ken Scholes. 3 stars. Morality play set in the uber-bureaucracy of the future. Betrayal and a hopeful ending.

Pretty Monsters - Kelly Link. 3 stars. Werewolves and nested, cross-referential stories. Requires lots of

brainpower to untangle, wasn't quite worth it. Cleverly done though.

Bob Lazzarini says

Some stories are good, some are excellent, and a few stink.

Charles says

Two of these were good stories. One, about a kid whose uncle paints an angel. The other about a soldier/assassin in a world of heavy gene modification. Those stories would get 4 stars.

Absolutely none of the others were memorable. All these others would get 2 stars.

Karen Cohn says

There were some very interesting stories in this collection; however, while reading several of them, I had difficulty determining how they fit in the category of science fiction / fantasy. They were still good, but some were sf/fantasy only by virtue of setting, and others only by virtue of a twist in the last little bit of the story.

A~ says

Exhalation: That one blew my mind. I spent days trying to think of ways to fix the robot dilemma. I actually finished all the stories in this collection and only found one or two that left me wondering WTF? That is a pretty good ratio for modern stories.

kenneth h. robinson says

Wide Variety of Well-Written Stories

There's no sure thing in these tales. Surprises always show up, no matter the beginning premises. Always an entertaining tale, no matter how pedestrian the beginning.

Deborah Replogle says

On my way to reading them all.

Mark says

Paperback.

Not bad, skipped a bit and didn't read half of them. Stories that stayed with me were by Holly Jones, Stephen King, Kij Johnson (read before this collection though), Elizabeth Bear, and Paolo Bacigalupi.

Adam says

"Exhalation": beautifully-crafted, sentient, and dense. Truly it's worth picking up the entire volume if but to read the first story. "Shoggoths in Bloom" and "The Dust Assassin" are worthwhile as well. "Pride and Prometheus" started well.

David Mendiola says

This had a higher percentage of interesting stories than the previous two volumes. It might be related to the fact that, as the author admitted he couldn't find as many "best" fantasy stories that year, the collection had a 60-40 sci-fi to fantasy split, stacking the deck a bit in my favor.

Highlights:

Best:

Exhalation by Ted Chiang

This might be my favorite story in the known universe, so since Strahan neglected to select any fiction from alternate planes of existence, it is a clear winner in this anthology. It comes about as close to fully addressing the meaning of life that I can expect to get. I'm currently saving money and am ready to sell our condo (please don't tell my wife) to get the full text tattooed on my body. It would be infinitely comforting to know that no matter how lost, alone, and abandoned the future might render me, I could always peruse this story (as long as I still have my skin attached (or at least within reading-distance)).

Fun:

The Doom of Love in Small Places by Ken Scholes

I will check out more from this guy. His style is funny weird. I normally don't care for weirdness for the sake of artsiness/modernity/intelligence, but when it makes you laugh, it's all good.

Beyond the Seagates of the Scholar Pirates of Sarskoe by Garth Nix

The main character's nonchalance about their peril is terrific.

Five Thrillers of Sarskoe by Garth Nix

A fun adventure with psychology/NLP aspects. I read the sharp conversations over and over, trying to learn how to manipulate humanoids from Earth and otherwise, should the occasion arise.

Hard SciFi/Thought Provoking

Crystal Nights by Greg Egan

Dang, I wanted to write this story. But I hadn't thought of the concept: rather than develop AI by understanding neurology or whatever machine-learning algorithms are used, try to evolve it in simulations.

Nice. Also it had deep parallels to how our gods might behave or be limited.

From Babel's Fall'n Glory We Fled by Michael Swanwick

Great development of culture abrasively placed against humanity's, and an "economic" system following the same basic principles but with trust rather than money. And the perfect preface to an explanatory section: "And just so you know what they knew that each other knew and knew was known, here is the tale of..."

Pretty Monsters by Kelly Link

Did not expect to enjoy a teenage-girl werewolf/vampire romance. Really, none of the words in that genre's title appeal to me. But the writing was great. I was constantly pausing to appreciate a well-carved sentence.

Also pretty good:

Fixing Hanover by Jeff VanderMeer

The Gambler by Paolo Bacigalupi

Pride and Prometheus by John Kessel

The Thought War by Paul McAuley

Turing's Apples by Stephen Baxter

Wanda says

Short story anthologies like these are a wonderful way to find new authors that interest you. I should probably limit my intake, since my "to read" list is already over 1600 titles, but being the book lover that I am, I can't resist having a peek sometimes.

As with all collections, some stories were fun, some were confusing, some were boring for me. But I can think of three in this book that made me think I wanted more from those authors.

The Dust Assassin, by Ian McDonald. Mostly because it is set in Asia and I think entirely too much science fiction & fantasy is set in North America. Plus this was a gripping story and I'd like to read more in this world.

Pride and Prometheus, by John Kessel. I love a good mash-up. This story used both Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* to create a little side-adventure that really tickled me. I will definitely be looking for more of Kessel's work.

26 Monkeys, Also the Abyss, by Kij Johnson. Okay, so I have a huge soft spot for animals, plus I love it when an author gets the biology right! Acknowledgement that chimpanzees and gibbons aren't monkeys, but they're still in the circus act. The story left me with questions, something that I also love.

If you're having difficulty choosing your next book, may I suggest an anthology in whatever genre you enjoy? Sure, there may be some duds, but at least one story in the collection will probably send you off on a whole new reading tangent!

Vinny says

Piece of crap, don't waste your time. I'm guessing that the editor picked all of the stories. These were the best of the year? Dismal, depressing, uninspiring. And at the beginning of each story, a little ditty about where the author lives and what they wrote before. Who cares?
