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The Best Science Fiction And Fantasy Of The Year Volume 5



Synopsis

Strahan's fifth anthology contains 29 wide-ranging tales. Neil Gaiman's "The Truth Is a Cave in the Black Mountains" is a deceptively simple folktale-styled story of the price one may pay for gold. "The Sultan of the Clouds" by Geoffrey Landis untangles a complex knot of childish power. Sarah Rees Brennan's "The Spy Who Never Grew Up" gives a beloved childhood icon a sinister update; Diana Peterfreund's "The Care and Feeding of Your Baby Killer Unicorn" turns unicorn lore on its head; and Rachel Swirsky's "The Lady Who Plucked Red Flowers Beneath the Queen's Window" puts a fantasy spin on the temporal culture shock of immortality. This year the fantasy tales outdo the SF in depth of storytelling and characterization, though all the inclusions are strong, with few ideas left by the wayside.

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Customer Reviews

Super dry, very hard to get into most of them. I get that the names are supposed to be sci-fi-esque, but there comes a point when you need to be able to sort of pronounce them.

Great introduction to a new generation of writers. I read as many of these books as I can afford. Love them.

Bound to find something you like.

good read

So far!! The Truth Is A Cave In The Black Mountains, (Neil Gaiman,) Alone, (Robert Reed,) The Man With The Knives, (Ellen Kushner,) The Jammie Dodgers And The Adventure Of The Leicester Square Screening, (Cory Doctorow,) The Taste Of Night, (Pat Cadigan) and more. I enjoyed almost every single one of these stories. Happy reading.

"Best of" anthologies are always interesting because they usually feature such a wide array of styles, even within a genre anthology. Science fiction anthologies are prime examples; you'll very rarely get two stories that are even remotely similar. Add fantasy to the list, and you've got Jonathan Strahan's annual The Best Science Fiction and Fantasy of the Year edition. This is Strahan's fifth volume, and either this was just a very good year, or there was simply a lot of great stuff to choose from. Tastes differ wildly from reader to reader. In any short story anthology, editors will make choices that just don't agree with any given reader at all. When they're longer pieces, it can make for some dreary reading, unless you decide to just skip that story. Some people are more determined than others. This year's anthology delivers some wonderful work from the likes of Neil Gaiman, Cory Doctorow, Theodora Goss, and Robert Reed (who I think could populate an annual anthology all by himself). While those are the standouts, almost every other story in the book is worth reading. Diana Peterfreund's "The Care and Feeding of Your Baby Killer Unicorn" takes place in a world where unicorns are (as the title should make obvious) not exactly as benevolent as they are in most fantasy fiction. The story unwinds in the same universe as two of Peterfreund's novels. A young girl named Wen happens upon a circus where a real unicorn is supposedly housed. Wen survived an encounter with another unicorn in the woods a year before, and she is understandably distressed. However, circumstances force her to end up caring for a baby unicorn all by herself. Peterfreund's character work is amazing, and her prose really brings the young characters in this story to life. They sound just like teenagers, though Wen and her friend Yves (the only one who knows about the previous encounter) show a certain world-weariness that such a confrontation can bring. The only bad aspect about the story is that it seems like part of a novel. While the story does

have a beginning, there's a lot of back story alluded to, and the ending is almost a cliffhanger. Nonetheless, I was entranced. Another standout is Peter Watts' "The Things," a compelling retelling of that classic John Carpenter movie, only from the alien's point. I've never actually seen the movie, and I found this story very intense; fans of the movie should enjoy it even more. It throws a few curve balls, with little pieces of the alien actually controlling some of the other humans even as they all search for the monster. Truly fascinating. Some stories didn't agree with me, but that's not to say they won't agree with other readers. "The Zeppelin Conductors' Society Annual Gentleman's Ball" by Genevieve Valentine is just too weird for my taste. "The Night Train" by Lavie Tidhar isn't as exotic, but it still didn't do much for me. Ditto Sandra McDonald's "Seven Sexy Cowboy Robots," though I did find the pathos of the two humans as well as the cowboy robots quite moving at times, especially at the end. But that's okay. While I would not have chosen a few of these stories as "best" of the year, I can certainly attest to the quality of the writing. Any anthology is going to have that hit-or-miss quality, and one reader's hit will be another one's miss. That's the cool thing about anthologies. I guarantee that any science fiction or fantasy fan will find enough in *The Best Science Fiction and Fantasy of the Year* to whet the appetite and force an expedition to find more. Originally published on *Curled Up With A Good Book* ~ © Dave Roy, 2011

This anthology is not really science fiction. It is a collection of *The Most Morbid, Macabre and Dystopian Stories of Suffering* with a thick running makeup of fantasy and a thin but mostly bare lipstick of science fiction. The characters in almost all these stories suffer an endless variety of painful demises, including but not limited to prolonged starvation, bite by werewolves, murder by zombies, fed to zombies while still alive, suffocation in space, suicide from depression, decapitation of children, mass murder in home invasions, mass destruction of an entire galaxy with all its species, and general mayhem. And this doesn't include several characters who suffer attempted and completed rape. While cloaked in literary sophistry, this book makes for depressing reading. I fault the editor, Jonathan Strahan, who has a track record of picking morbid work and passing it off as "The Best Science Fiction of the Year". If morbid stories are your thing, note that you can get far better stories of suffering and death from reading the daily news. You don't need to waste your time with this book. Three stories don't fit the ghoulish theme and are interesting and worth reading for fans of classic and non-morbid science fiction: *Elegy for a Young Elk* by Hannu Rajaniemi, *Seven Sexy Cowboy Robots* by Sandra McDonald, *The Sultan of the Clouds* by Geoffrey A. Landis

I disliked the vampire, werewolf, zombie stories...I recall only one of each. Liked Rajaniemi, Reed,

Johnson, Goss, Kelly, Kushner, Cadigan, Tregillis, Parker, and Swirsky. For me they made it worthwhile. I will look for more from them.

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