



Wandering Stars: An Anthology of Jewish Fantasy and Science Fiction

Jack Dann (Editor) , Isaac Asimov (Contributor) , Pamela Sargent (Contributor) , Robert Sheckley (Contributor) , Robert Silverberg (Contributor) , Isaac Bashevis Singer (Contributor) , William Tenn (Contributor) , Carol Carr (Contributor) , more... Avram Davidson (Contributor) , George Alec Effinger (Contributor) , Harlan Ellison (Contributor) , Bernard Malamud (Contributor) ...less

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The first time in a science fiction and fantasy collection that the Jewish People—and the richness of their particular points of view—appear without a mask. A showpiece of Jewish wit, culture, and lore, blending humor and sadness, cynicism and faith.

Contents

Stories:

On Venus, have we got a rabbi by William Tenn
The golem by Avram Davidson
Unto the fourth generation by Isaac Asimov
Look, you think you've got troubles by Carol Carr
Goslin Day by Avram Davidson
The dybbuk of mazel tov IV by Robert Silverberg
Trouble with water by Horace L. Gold
Gather blue roses by Pamela Sargent
The jewbird by Bernard Malamud
Paradise last by Geo. Alec Effinger
Street of dreams, feet of clay by Robert Sheckley
Jachid and Jechidah by Isaac Bashevis Singer
I'm looking for Kadak by Harlan Ellison

Essays:

Why Me? by Isaac Asimov
Ellison's Grammatical Guide and Glossary for Goyim by Harlan Ellison.

Interior artwork by Tim Kirk.

Wandering Stars: An Anthology of Jewish Fantasy and Science Fiction Details

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From Reader Review Wandering Stars: An Anthology of Jewish Fantasy and Science Fiction for online ebook

Fred Snyder says

Great anthology of SF stories that explore what it means to be Jewish. I read this book long ago and it still resonates with me.

Nicholas Whyte says

<http://nhw.livejournal.com/1016298.html>[return][return]Not really very satisfied with this collection of "Jewish sf" stories. Perhaps I am over-sensitive to ethnic stereotypes, even by the ostensibly stereotyped, as a result of too much exposure to paddywhackery myself. It may seem an odd criticism, but I found it much more ethnocentric than I had expected: despite a recurrent theme of various non-human creatures claiming to be Jewish, in fact most of the stories totally play to stereotypes based on the mid-twentieth century Jewish experience in the United States, rather than on any broader exploration of Jewish identity or history. I'd be surprised if a European or Israeli Jew felt there was a lot here they could identify with. There is a truly awful story by George Alec Effinger. Rather disappointing.

Noach says

This incredible book may be edging out *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* by Michael Chabon as my all time favorite book. Each page is a treasure; I hate to be finished with even one more page because it means I'm that much closer to the end.

As in this morning, for instance, I'm reading a story called *Jewbird*, about a Jewish crow. Big beak, dressed in black, ruffled feathers, davens, talks in Yiddish, prefers matjes to schmaltz herring. ...

And last week, I read the story of the last Jew in the Universe, on the planet *Mazel Tov IV*. There's no chevra kadisha to bury him, so they reprogram a robot with the entirety of Jewish knowledge. It goes uphill ... and Judaism goes on ... from there.

So much brilliance here.

Ashur says

I agree with most of the other reviewers here, with the caveat that I am not Jewish so the stereotypes depicted do not reflect upon me. However, there are a few outstanding stories in here that make it worth the read (bless you Harlan Ellison).

Frederick Lopez says

This is one of the best books I read in 2015.

A sci-fi and fantasy anthology themed around Judaism, it contains contributions from Isaac Asimov, William Tenn, Carol Carr, Robert Silverberg, Horace Gold, Pamela Sargent, Bernard Malamud, Alec Effinger, Robert Sheckley, Isaac Bashevis Singer and Harlan Ellison. Jack Dann, an Australian, was the editor. There are at least two stories involving alien converts to Judaism, two others with narrators reminiscent of Tevye the Milkman, and a brilliant love story that inverts life and death. I'm concerned that these stories could be grating for actual Jewish people, as some are fairly stereotypical, but I'm in no place to judge.

Without hesitation, I recommend this collection to sci-fi devotees and will begin hunting for the sequel.

Julian Spergel says

The vast majority of the stories can be summarized by:

"My daughter is not marrying a space alien!" "But he's Jewish." "Oh. OK."

Bogi Takács says

Several people warned me this was a bad anthology, but there are so few Jewish SFF anthologies that it's easy to be a completionist - I might as well read all the stuff out there about my own ethnic groups. I'd already read (and disliked) the followup collection *More Wandering Stars* several years ago, but I was telling myself that maybe that one had the leftovers, and this one would be better.

Well no, this one was possibly worse. It's old, but that's no excuse.

Let's start with the better. None of the stories were spectacular, but some I didn't mind reading. The I. B. Singer story was a striking if brief take on the afterlife, and the Asimov one was surprisingly Dickian for its time and topic. *Gather Blue Roses* by Pamela Sargent was also a good read, and stylistically better than much of the rest. Some of the other stories were also OK, but these were the more memorable ones, for me.

A lot of the rest was... dire. Extremely stereotyped, both of Jews and of other ethnic groups, especially American Black people (oh my G-d, I am so sorry. This is awful). Most of the stories focused on a kind of 1950s-60s(?) middle-class American secular-ish Ashkenazic Jewish existence that was... if I say very different from my Jewish experience, it is greatly understating matters.

Also it quite showed which authors were familiar with Jewish traditions and which kind of tried to scrape things up from long forgotten childhood memory, with mixed success. (AFAICT, most - all? - of the authors were Jewish.) That's before getting to the various manglings of the more mystical traditions, which were sometimes just painful. There is a way of taking liberties which stems from being familiar with the source matter, and there is just the "this will be good enough for the Gentiles, it's not like they know better, either", or a sense of entitlement that was produced as a process of assimilation to white American culture. "This is my culture and I'm the expert" doesn't quite work if you are secular and writing about religious people (or

vice versa, though that happens less frequently). It often just results in embarrassing caricatures. And please don't point out that this volume came well before all the #ownvoices discussion etc. etc., - sure it did, but not all of the authors fell into those pitfalls even in this very old collection.

Also, the last story in the collection was simply revolting - not because Harlan Ellison tried to add all kinds of rather immaturely disgusting details, there is an entire specific brand of white-dude SFF that does this all the time -; but because (I put a spoiler cut for sexual violence, not because of story spoilers) (view spoiler) This is probably not very unexpected from a writer with a well-known history of sexual harassment. But I wish I hadn't read that story, and I say this very infrequently. A horrible note to end a collection on, and also very revealing of the editor's biases. Misogynist stereotypes are also quite rampant in the collection, in general.

I think English-language Jewish SFF has improved immensely since then. (Disclosure: I'm a bit biased because I have also had some Jewish stories published. But I was encouraged to write them *after* coming across the better stories.) If you follow my short story recommendations or Shira Glassman's, there is a lot of great recent stuff that hasn't been collected anywhere yet. Jewish SFF has also become a lot more diverse in outlook, style, theme, everything. So maybe just skip the two Wandering Stars collections, unless you are a diehard completionist like me. These anthologies do not represent contemporary Jewish SFF in any shape or form, or have even historically influenced the current crop of Jewish SFF writing much; they are weird isolated objects that Jews warn other Jews about. Now I am a part of this great tradition!

Next up I will probably read the more recent People of the Book (which people did not warn me about - already a plus), and that's probably... all of the Jewish SFF anthologies? I will just have to branch out in the direction of magical realism like Great Tales of Jewish Fantasy and the Occult (all translated!), and I also have a Jewish crime fiction anthology lying around. I was just so aggravated by More Wandering Stars that I gave up on Jewish short SFF for quite a while. Now I know not to make that mistake again.

Tim says

Another from my rediscovered pile of S-F Book Club selections from the 1970's. This is a collection of stories written by Jewish authors, with a general introduction, as well as brief introductions to the stories themselves, by Isaac Asimov, who drolly opines that he was asked to do so "because I am suspected of being Jewish." There are thirteen stories, by such authors as Isaac Bashevis Singer, Robert Silverberg, Harlan Ellison, Bernard Malamud and Robert Sheckey. Most are fairly mainstream S-F stories, with a Jewish point of view. I must herein aver that I am not Jewish, and remain fairly ignorant about Jewish culture despite numerous conversations with Jewish friends and having read a number of Chaim Potok's books over the years. So, in that context, I found myself wondering if the fact that most of the characters spoke with a Yiddish accent was a stereotype (a number of the reviews on Goodreads have alleged that, and indeed some saw it as insulting to them, despite other reviews praising the book for presenting a Jewish perspective on this genre).

All that said, I found the stories themselves entertaining and thought-provoking. The ones that stand out for me are: Avram Davidson's "The Golem," in which said Golem has a hard time getting a word in edgewise with an old bickering married couple; George Alec Effinger's "Paradise Last," about the challenges facing Jewish colonists settling a new planet; and Carol Carr's "Look, You Think You've Got Troubles," which addresses the question of whether one could be an alien and still be Jewish. Most if not all of these stories are peppered with gentle humor and a satiric wink. Four stars.

Brenda (aka Gamma) says

[quote from "The Dybbuk of Mazel Tov IV" by Robert Silverberg

"These Kunivaru are a primitive folk. They live closer to the world of magic and witchcraft, of demons and spirits, than we do whose minds are schooled in the habits of reason."

quote from "Gather Blue Roses" by Pamela Sargent

"(By the time I reached my adolescence, I

Jake GR says

Interesting insights into neuroses of the modern American Jewish mind.

Cody VC says

what a slog. most of these are just of the "jewish...in SPACE" variety which does not good sci-fi make. the ones that felt the most like legit sf were (in order of inclusion) the stories by silverberg, effinger, and sheckley. and maybe ellison, but i don't like him so whatever.

effinger's was...meh. sheckley's was a somewhat familiar premise, while engagingly written. silverberg's seemed like the best fusion of sf and jewish culture. of the fantasy offerings, i enjoyed malamud's the most overall, followed by singer and maybe gold.

i agree with the other reviewers on here that, to our modern sensibilities, the relentless stereotypes are offputting. makes me think of how, recently, black people were remarking on the fact that when muhammad ali referred to joe frazier as a gorilla&c., nobody really thought much of it--but since that sort of ingrained racism has fallen away (for the most part) remarks like that would no longer be funny/acceptable to other black people.

Adrienne Ross says

I first read this book as a child and upon re-reading it in 2016, I was amazed that I remembered many of the stories nearly word for word (or at least scene for scene). Often pessimistic, sometimes funny (amazingly so), but also rich in the sub-text of how individuals, religions, and cultures survive and flourish when it seems the former is barely possible. Some stories are simply unforgettable, especially Robert Silverburg's "The Dybbuk of Mazel Tov IV," Pamela Sargeant's "Gather Blue Roses," and Harlan Ellison's "I'm Looking for Kadak."

Stephen says

Sometimes I don't understand science fiction and non science fiction. Substitute 'The Bronx' for 'Venus' with most of these stories and they're not Sci-fi at all. I think that making these Sci-Fi is a tactic to get little yeshiva boys and girls to sneek this into class. The forward by Asimov is pretty hilarious. Lots of authors I've never heard of, too.

Rena Sherwood says

A very erratic anthology of allegedly science fiction stories featuring Jews. Some were not science fiction. Some were modern fairy tales and not much else. It was so hard not to read this anthology and keep thinking of

The Harlan Ellison entry was effed up -- even for Harlan Ellison, the King of Effed Up. I don't know if I'm Jewish somewhere in my ancestry, but I was borderline insulted by this story.

I thought the best story was the chilling and unpredictable "Gather Blue Roses" by Pamela Sargent. That and the two Avram Davidson stories alone are worth the price of admission.

Jason says

Very disappointing anthology featuring too many stories in which Judaism is reduced to annoying stereotypes. Three stories stood out as exceptions:

- William Tenn's "On Venus, Have We Got a Rabbi," explores the perennial question, "Who is a Jew?"
- "The Dybbuk of Mazel Tov IV" by Robert Silverberg uses a deft combination of Jewish folklore and sf tropes to tell a tale of (literal) alienation.
- Isaac Bashevis Singer "pours black paint over modern man's favorite philosophical toys with a cheerful vengeance" (p. 201) in this tale in which life, death, and rebirth are turned upside down.

I also enjoyed Harlan Ellison's concluding story, "I'm Looking for Kadak," although I didn't find it as meaningful as the other three.
