



The Best American Science Fiction and Fantasy 2018

John Joseph Adams (Series Editor) , N.K. Jemisin (Editor) , Charles Payseur , Kate Alice Marshall , Kathleen Kayembe , Lettie Prell , Cadwell Turnbull , Samuel R. Delany , more... Jaymee Goh , A. Merc Rustad , Carmen Maria Machado , Rachael K. Jones , Gwendolyn Clare , Charlie Jane Anders , Micah Dean Hicks , Peter Watts , Caroline M. Yoachim , E. Lily Yu , Maria Dahvana Headley , Maureen McHugh , Tobias S. Buckell ...less

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A collection of the best American science fiction and fantasy stories from 2017.

Today's readers of science fiction and fantasy have an appetite for stories that address a wide variety of voices, perspectives, and styles. There is an openness to experiment and pushing boundaries, combined with the classic desire to read about space ships and dragons, future technology and ancient magic, and the places where they intersect. Contemporary science fiction and fantasy looks to accomplish the same goal as ever—to illuminate what it means to be human. With a diverse selection of stories chosen by series editor John Joseph Adams and guest editor N. K. Jemisin, *The Best American Science Fiction and Fantasy 2018* explores the ever-expanding and changing world of SFF today, with Jemisin bringing her lyrical, endlessly curious point of view to the series' latest edition.

Rivers Run Free / Charles Payseur --
Destroy the City With Me Tonight / Kate Alice Marshall --
You Will Always Have Family: A Triptych / Kathleen Kayembe --
Justice Systems in Quantum Parallel Probabilities / Lettie Prell --
Loneliness is in Your Blood / Cadwell Turnbull --
The Hermit of Houston / Samuel R. Delany --
The Last Cheng Beng Gift / Jaymee Goh --
Brightened Star, Ascending Dawn / A. Merc Rustad --
The Resident / Carmen Maria Machado --
The Greatest One-Star Restaurant in the Whole Quadrant / Rachael K. Jones --
Tasting Notes on the Varietals of the Southern Coast / Gwendolyn Clare --
Don't Press Charges and I Won't Sue / Charlie Jane Anders --
Church of Birds / Micah Dean Hicks --
ZeroS / Peter Watts --
Carnival Nine / Caroline M. Yoachim --
The Wretched and the Beautiful / E. Lily Yu --
The Orange Tree / Maria Dahvana Headley --
Cannibal Acts / Maureen McHugh --
Black Powder / Maria Dahvana Headley --
Zen and the Art of Starship Maintenance / Tobias S. Buckell

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From Reader Review The Best American Science Fiction and Fantasy 2018 for online ebook

Monica **can't read fast enough says**

I took my time and read this anthology slowly which worked out really well for me. The stories stayed separate in my mind and didn't all run together. I was able to enjoy them more individually than if I had pushed through the whole thing straight through. Like all collections I enjoyed some more than others but they all had interesting approaches and stories. All in all an enjoyable collection of stories. I now have some new to me authors to track down other writings from.

You can find me at:

•(♥).•*Monlatable Book Reviews*•.(♥)•

Twitter: @MonlatReader

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Goodreads Group: The Black Bookcase

Erika Holt says

An innovative and thought provoking collection of speculative fiction stories with a literary bent. Particular favourites were: "Brightened Star, Ascending Dawn" by A. Merc Rustad, "Carnival Nine" by Caroline M. Yoachim, "The Orange Tree" by Maria Dahvana Headley, and "Zen and the Art of Starship Maintenance" by Tobias S. Buckell.

Nick Orvis says

The 2018 edition of *The Best American Science Fiction and Fantasy* is a powerful and inspiring collection, carefully curated by John Joseph Adams and this year's guest editor, the luminous N. K. Jemisin (whom SFF fans will know from her Hugo-winning "Broken Earth" trilogy as well as other books). The stories contained within have been carefully selected to reflect a wonderfully diverse array of subject matters, writing styles, and worldviews, though Jemisin is clear in her introduction about what influenced her view of the "best" in 2017: she refers to the collection as, "the twenty most revolutionary short stories from the year 2017," adding that while some of the stories treat the subject of revolution in familiar ways, she was particularly attracted to, "those that revolted against tradition, revolted against reader expectation, or revolted against the world entirely."

The result is a deeply enjoyable collection, with names that are now both familiar to many fans of the genre (a short story by Carmen Maria Machado is included) and relatively new to the scene. I found practically all of the stories fascinating and rewarding in one way or another, and now that I'm reviewing the table of contents I find that despite reading it over a fairly long period of time, I remember each clearly--surely a mark of quality. The opening story, Charles Payseur's "Rivers Run Free," is one of the most delightful in its creativity and its world-building, and the second, "Destroy the City with Me Tonight" by Kate Alice Marshall, is a wonderful and thoughtful romp through a completely new perspective on superheroism. I

loved the structure of Kathleen Kayembe's "You Will Always Have Family: A Triptych," (spoilers, it's a triptych), and Gwendolyn Clare's "Tasting Notes on the Varietals of the Southern Coast" is a smartly crafted, chillingly real-feeling meditation on power that unfolds slowly and expertly. I loved almost all of the stories, although my favorite is probably A. Merc Rustad's "Brightened Star, Ascending Dawn." Just a beautiful, moving meditation on the need to take action, and the storytelling is pitch-perfect both in mood and in the way that both the world and the action unfold at just the right pace. I also enjoyed both of Maria Dahvana Headley's stories (she's the only author to have two stories in the collection), which had the bonus of showing extremely different--and very engaging--sides of the same writer.

A few of the stories were, I admit, less gripping: this was my first encounter with Machado's writing, and though I enjoyed her story ("The Resident") I found it a bit elliptical for my tastes. Lettie Prell's "Justice Systems in Quantum Parallel Probabilities" raises important and resonant points about our criminal justice system, but feels at times like a bit of a formal writing exercise; there's less poetry and pure linguistic spark in this than in some of the other stories in the collection. Samuel R. Delany's "The Hermit of Houston" was an enjoyable read, but fundamentally hard to understand--of all the imaginary worlds in this collection, this was the one I felt I could access the least, not because it was foreign but because I simply didn't know what I was supposed to be reading into it and what was unreliable narration.

Even these stories, however, were worth my time, and I'm happy to have picked up the collection when I did--it was a good way to close out 2018 and get move into 2019! I'll be keeping an eye out for future collections in this line (this is the first I've picked up, mostly because Jemisin was the guest editor), and I encourage everyone to read it and follow these writers. I plan to.

Jared says

This was, quite easily, my favorite BASFF yet.

As a reader who regularly, critically, and eagerly consumes a lot of short fiction every year, Best Of collections can be tricky endeavors. Aside from bringing a new editor every year to select the stories, I think JJA, who is no stranger to putting together an anthology, has a good editor's eye. For my part as the reader, the best Best Of is one full of stories I've seen before ("Yes, I loved that story!") and ones I hadn't heard of ("This looks great!"). Plus, you cannot go wrong with NK Jemisin at the helm.

While most of the stories stood out to me, Charles Payseur's "Rivers Run Free" acts as an excellent opener, tense and fast-paced, with *literal sentient rivers* fighting for their lives. I've long been greedy for Payseur's reviews, but his fiction is also some of the best and most worth reading you can find.

Lettie Prell's "Justice Systems in Quantum Parallel Probabilities" may have been my favorite new story, certainly one that stuck with me for a while. A simple enough concept, parallel universe justice systems, quickly give the reader a heartrending trip that had me wondering: what would I choose, which would I want? But obviously, you don't get to choose.

The wildest trip, though, is Samuel R. Delany's "Hermit of Houston." I'm surprised I slept on this story, and surprised I couldn't find more buzz about it. I bounced off it initially, but kept coming back to the dense prose, fascinatingly built world, a story about stories, and one I'll be rereading to try and wrap my head around it.

Maureen McHugh's "Cannibal Acts" is not the visceral end-of-the-world story you might expect. Instead it's startlingly real-feeling, with the cannibalism almost glossed over with how much of a given it is; the characters navigating their unexpected dystopia feel among the most human of many stories I've read in this genre.

Those are just the standout stories that were new to me. I'd read before, and loved, Carmen Maria Machado's "The Resident," Rachael K. Jones's "The Greatest One-Star Restaurant in the Whole Quadrant," and was quite pleased to see one of my first favorite short fiction authors, E. Lily Yu, with her great Terraform story, "The Wretched and the Beautiful."

All in all, this was a great year, one of many great years for vibrant, enriching, engaging short fiction. I only hope I consume as many great stories as I did in 2018, and that collections like BASFF continue to help me fill in the gaps when I don't.

Marie-Therese says

Very good, wide-ranging anthology featuring a diverse mix of styles and voices, as well as authors both well-known and long published and others very new to the genre.

The book stumbles a bit at the beginning (I felt the first two stories, by Charles Payseur and Katie Alice Marshall, were by far the weakest in the volume and, to my mind, not worthy of inclusion in a "best" collection) but regains its footing with Kathleen Kayembe's "You Will Always Have a Family: a Triptych", gains speed and assurance with Caldwell Turner's "Loneliness is in Your Blood" and really hits its stride with Samuel Delany's "The Hermit of Houston" (probably the best recent fictional work I've read by this veteran author). After that everything is worth reading, although not all are necessarily what I would have chosen as "best" of the year (Rachael K. Jones' "The Greatest One-Star Restaurant in the Whole Quadrant" is cute but not much more, and Charlie Jane Anders' "Don't Press Charges and I Won't Sue" reads more like a bleeding chunk of some longer work than a fully realized, self-contained story). There are some truly exceptional stories here though: both pieces by Maria Dahvana Headley impressed me with their verbal beauty, rich imagery, and evocative historical settings; Peter Watts' "ZeroS" managed to bring the zombie trope to life in a hard sci-fi tale that was both technically and emotionally satisfying and well as being masterfully paced (need to read more by Watts ASAP!); Micah Dean Hicks' "Church of Birds" is an effective and melancholy take on what happens after the happy ever after of a familiar fairy tale; and Carmen Maria Machado's "The Resident", first published in her debut story collection 'Her Body and Other Parties', remains as emotionally resonant, surprising, and slightly disorienting as the first time I read it-I suspect this tale is going to be featured in literary anthologies for years to come.

All in all, this is a very worthy installment in this newish series. If Adams keeps picking co-editors of this level of discernment there should be many more fine volumes of 'The Best American Science Fiction and Fantasy' to come.

Corinne says

I was so impressed with what the editor wrote about how the stories were curated (next paragraph) that I really looked forward to reading this and let it cut in line, ahead of all my TBRs. I thought the editors did the

"heavy lifting" and I'd sit back and read some really great fiction. I am so disappointed, I ended up kinda hating this anthology. I guess what the masters of the craft read is far beyond where I'm at. I'll have to remember that going forward. *I received for free from editor but will be purging from computer & kindle.*

From the intro. JJA read everything pub that year that met the criteria. He created a list of 40 SF & 40 Fantasy stories he felt were the top eighty. Then the guest editor whittled it down to 10 & 10. NKJ read them not knowing who the authors were or where they were published. Those 20 are in this book. The other 60 are listed in the Notable stories section. JJA said "... *I don't have an exact count of how many stories I reviewed or considered. But as in past years, I estimate that it was several thousand stories altogether, perhaps as many as five thousand.*"

Rivers Run Free by Charles Payseur (orig in Beneath Ceaseless Skies. free here:

<http://www.beneath-ceaseless-skies.co...>) 2.5*

In NKJs intro she said "...*which replaces oppressed people with dammed/diverted/drained rivers who are anthropomorphically embodied - and piiiissed about what humans have done to them.*" Her saying that helped me get started with the story because phew, I struggled with this not perfectly clear story. I could feel it trying to get me to let go and think differently. In the end, I couldn't get there.

Destroy the City With Me Tonight by Kate Alice Marshall (orig in Behind the Mask) 3*

Wow. Very Fantasy. Very unique. I'm not sure my desc can do it justice. :/ Roads start appearing on people's skin and others stop seeing that person, including their families/bf/gf. They are considered infected with some virus but it seems more like a city is calling them. They use the maps on their skin to find out which city is claiming them and go there. The city takes care of them and they take care of crime and other problems in that city. They gain powers also.

You Will Always Have Family: A Triptych by Kathleen Kayembe 2.5* (orig in Nightmare magazine, HERE)

Wow that was a long short story and it was a lot of work, I had to really focus on the telling. It was told in 3 different POV until they all met up. Opens in the recent present by the "cousin" but it doesn't really come together until the "twins" POVs join in to explain the past.

When it ends, I feel like I liked the story (or maybe I'm just happy it's over). I got an almost complete story but I am a little pissed about how it unfolded. Summary - (view spoiler)

Justice Systems in Quantum Parallel Probabilities by Lettie Prell (orig Clarkesworld emag here:

<http://clarkesworldmagazine.com/prell...>) 1* wtf was that? oh, I know, a waste of time. A criminal, due to desperation, is in a cell and for some reason he has snippets of different prosecution scenarios run through his mind. Not a story.

The Resident by Carmen Maria Machado - damn it, got about 75% done. DNF. Too dreamy with sentences that make no sense. Things happened and aren't discussed or explained. And there is an event in her past that obviously is still effecting her and we aren't privy to that. I feel like it will never be revealed. I'm done.

Don't Press Charges and I Won't Sue by Charlie Jane Anders DNF I'm not fond of being dropped into a situation and then sitting in confusion as it's slowly revealed. That can work of course but I was not engaged.

ZeroS by Peter Watts DNF mhm. didn't get too far. Opens with at least 4 uncommon named beings in a fight. So I get dropped into the action. This sentence makes sense when you know they are fighting but not if you don't. "Asante goes out screaming. Hell is an echo chamber, full of shouts and seawater and clanking metal." My brain - so he is on a submarine and what, he's exiting through some chamber? And the submarine is called Hell? "The Sahilites rise from the moon pool like creatures from some bright lagoon, firing as they emerge; Rashida's middle explodes in dark mist and her top half topples onto the deck...." Me - wtf is a moon pool? I spent too much time deciphering this, I just want to read. Not in the right mind set to decipher. tapping out.

Carnival Nine by Caroline M. Yoachim **World Fantasy Award short story nominee 2018** Originally in *Beneath Ceaseless Skies* available free: <http://www.beneath-ceaseless-skies.co...> 3* Not really what I enjoy reading. Replace the wind up dolls with humans and you have realistic fiction. The story is a reminder, in a very inventive way, that we only get so much time in a day and in a life time. These characters get a certain amount of "turns" (the key on their backs) before they are done for the day. They have to make wise choices or they'll run out before the day is done. They barter, they plan, they give their turns to those in need.

Cannibal Acts by Maureen McHugh DNF apocalyptic. Science, "big" viruses, war. I tap out on those but not on the cannibalism :/

Zen and the Art of Starship Maintenance by Tobias S. Buckell DNF I'm not sure I'm a true SF fan. Fantasy yes. Horror yes. But this may be an example of me not really liking SF. *"Back then, you were downloaded into hyperdense pin-sized starships that hung off the edge of the speed of light, assembling what was needed on arrival via self-replicating nanomachines that you spun your mind-states off into. I'm sure there are billions of copies of my essential self scattered throughout the galaxy by this point."* <--- what?!

Skipped stories are hidden behind spoiler. (view spoiler)

Samantha (AK) says

I received a free review copy from the editor.

Every year, John Joseph Adams compiles a list of eighty short stories that he considers to be the best American science-fiction & fantasy offerings in the previous calendar year. He then passes them--stripped of author information--to a guest editor, who weeds the list down to twenty: ten SF, ten fantasy. As this year's guest editor (the wonderful N.K. Jemisin) mentions in her introduction:

...as Le Guin noted, most readers presume that one of these genres (and only one) is future-oriented. They aggrandize the predictive nature of science fiction while dismissing fantasy as regressive, when in fact both genres are actually about the present: science fiction through allegory, and fantasy by concatenation.

The twenty stories in this volume cross the entire range of speculative fiction, from the folkloric horror of Kathleen Kayembe's **"You Will Always Have Family: A Triptych"**, to the military SF of Peter Watts' experimental super soldiers in **"ZeroS"**. Samuel R. Delany's **"The Hermit of Houston"** is the most challenging contribution to this volume: a future(ish) exploration of what stories we tell ourselves, and what is acceptable, and who controls that acceptability, all as experienced through the mundane, everyday life of an aging gay couple. The setting is alternately utopian and horrifying, and the love story surprisingly tender, but (in true Delany fashion) it's rather opaque on the first read.

Two of these I'd read (and enjoyed) in their original publications: Caroline Yoachim's **"Carnival Nine"** is a tale of disability in a clockwork world. Tobias Buckell's **"Zen and the Art of Starship Maintenance"** is a clever bit of work that turns the usual robot tropes on their heads when a maintenance 'bot finds itself beholden to a conniving human CEO.

To my joy, some of the offerings are delightfully unconventional. These are genres that exist to challenge assumptions, to ask "why?" and "what if?" To *push*. And so we see superheroes grappling with a disease that gives them power even as it destroys their personal identities in Kate Alice Marshall's **"Destroy the City with Me Tonight."**, and **"Rivers Run Free"** in Charles Payseur's fantastical exploration of how marginalized communities are set against each other.

The creeping madness of Engineer in Rachel K. Jones' **"The Greatest One-Star Restaurant in the Whole Quadrant"** shows the gory end of desperation to please the audience at any cost, a sentiment echoed (in an entirely different form) by the protagonist of Carmen Maria Machado's **"The Resident"** a kind of gothic fantasy figure who eventually embraces herself as the madwoman in her own attic, with the right to write whatever she wants.

I didn't like them all. Lettie Prell's **"Justice Systems in Quantum Parallel Probabilities,"** in which a prisoner catches glimpses of different justice systems while awaiting his own sentence, was a series of insubstantial vignettes, however interesting; and I found E. Lily Yu's depiction of an ambivalent society's response to ugly alien refugees in **"The Wretched and the Beautiful"** both heavy-handed and instantly forgettable.

More touching for me were stories like Charlie Jane Anders' **"Don't Press Charges and I Won't Sue"**, a

gut-wrenching tale of a woman kidnapped by an organization who wants to 'fix' her, when she has no desire to be 'fixed;' and Maria Dahvana Headley's "**The Orange Tree**," a story about an 11th century female golem made from wood, and how she comes into her own.

The thing about anthologies is that you don't *have* to like every story, but even the ones in this volume that didn't work for me gave me something to think about. *The Best American Science-Fiction and Fantasy 2018* presents a wonderful cross-section of talent, well worth reading for anyone curious as to the state of the genre(s) today.

Ari says

this would be a four-star collection (great stories nearly top to bottom, rare in any anthology), but for the fact that Maria Dahvana Headley's first story (of two) in this aggravated me so deeply. it's the story "The Orange Tree," which takes as its premise "what if 11th century CE Jewish poet/philosopher Solomon ibn Gabirol used kabbalah to make a sex robot."

It uses that to explore the ways in which women are silenced and their personhood overwritten by men, which, whatever, fine, that's #feminist, except what isn't so much (and what disappointed me specifically in a collection curated to contain *revolutionary* fiction) is depicting a Jewish man as a bitter, abusive magician who uses his powers to hurt women.

The Jew as Satanic magician abusing innocent (gentile) women is a long-running trope, one that pervaded medieval Europe, and that hasn't disappeared yet. Taking a real-life Jewish poet and framing him like this isn't revolutionary, only hurtful, and I'm astonished that nobody in the writing, editing, or curating processes involved in this story's creation and selection for this anthology thought of that.

(as my own personal, bitter jewish aside: I can think of one other sf/f work that has a Sephardic Jew in it, *period*, and it felt like a slap in the face to open this one up and see what the author had done with one of ours.)

Thomasallenparker says

Hit and miss. Some of these are just hard to get into. Not a big fan of symbolism to the point of not knowing what the heck is going on.

Chris Vanjonack says

As always with the Best American Science Fiction and Fantasy series, I really appreciate the socially progressive themes throughout this collection (which are themed around revolution!), but I had a tough time engaging with many of these stories. There are definitely some gems throughout-- particularly "Don't Press Charges and I Won't Shoot" by Charlie Jane Anders, "Church of Birds" by Micah Dean Hicks, "The Resident" by Carmen Maria Machado, and "You Will Always Have Family: A Trptych" by Kathleen Kayembe.

Richard says

Pretty lame compilation. Some of it is mildly interesting, but sci-fi today - if this represents it - seems to have lost its creativity and edginess, and sadly, what made it interesting - the "science" part. The biggest disappointment is that they don't make or try to make any sense. "Rivers Run Free," the first story, is very pretty, but like the stories that follow "Destroy the City with Me," "You Will Always Have a Family," while creative and "neat", are far less interesting than science fiction from the 1970s and 1980s, as they don't any attempt to be "scientific", and don't fall into any enjoyable tropes of fantasy. I would classify most of these as "imaginative" writing - and far less interesting than Borges or Mieville. The bios in the back are cringeworthy - how cool am I? It would be nice if there were some scientists who wrote this stuff or engineers. Way too cute, way too dumb, and not even weird in a good way.

I read another review of this and it said the book was a collection of "sermons on inclusion." I'm not sure that's exactly how it would phrase it - but the "message" of these stories was a large part of the content - and not the really interesting part of the genre. Sci-fi has had "messaging" throughout its history, but it was always in the context of the genre. The point was to make a "world" or a scientific point in the context of the message. As a result the stories are pretty, but empty, and fundamentally uninteresting.

Lena says

River Run Free by Charles Payseur ★★★★★?

"Beyond the mountains and beyond the forests and farther still, there's the sea. So vast and so powerful that the waters of it know no fear. And we'll tell the sea of what's happening here, and it will feel the pain of its children and it will rise and flow across the land. Over the forests and the mountains and the Dust and it will tear down the dams and the dikes and the locks and the citadel. And the Dust will be green again, and the Luteans will drown."

I hope the river people get their revenge.

Obviously, this was an allegory about climate change and the moral decay of colonialism.

The beginning was confusing, is this Gaia speaking? But, overall a good story.

Destroy the City with Me Tonight by Kate Alice Marshall ★★★★★½?

"Men and women with maps on their bones, cities that own them."

Lonely superhero story.

As origins go, I like the idea of Casper-Williams Syndrome. It's the greed of the city spirit I found off-putting.

You Will Always Have Family: A Triptych by Kathleen Kayembe ★★???

Steeped in Congolese folklore and magic, that I know nothing about, this was a painful story about a man who destroyed his family. Unenjoyable.

Justice Systems in Quantum Parallel Probabilities by Lettie Prell ★★???

A murder awaiting sentencing dreams of different realities with different systems of justice and wonders if he would get a better deal there. Interesting but unenjoyable.

Loneliness Is In Your Blood by Cadwell Turnbull ★★★½?

African vampire story! Snapshot of the life cycle of a night hag/vampire who came over with the slaves and eventually has a child.

The Hermit of Houston by Samuel R. Delany DNF

This was some kind of dystopia(?) about a sex switch future where you don't talk about sex. Then there was lots of talk about sex. Not interesting, and worse, boring.

The Last Cheng Beng Gift by Jaymee Goh ★★½??

Mrs. Lim begins receiving odd afterlife gifts from the daughter she liked least and considered giving away. When she goes to check on that daughter she is horrified the girl has dropped out of engineering school and is living as an artist in poverty.

The daughter tearfully constructs beautiful afterlife gifts for her mother. I think we are meant to believe there is resolution but it didn't feel that way.

Brightened Star, Ascending Dawn by A. Marc Rustad ★★★½?

A little bit of *Murderbot*, a teaspoon of *Star Wars*, and a dash of *Firefly* have made a surprisingly low key story about a sentient ship and her crew who decide to defy the Empire.

The Resident by Carmen Maria Machado ★★???

95% introspection.

Our MC is an unnamed lesbian writer with issues at a writers retreat writing a story about a crazy lesbian in the woods, or attic, or wherever.

The story ends asking you not to be judgy about the gothically weak lesbian with issues going nuts in the woods.

Don't apologize, just write something better.

The Greatest One-Star Restaurant in the Whole Quadrant by Rachel K. Jones ★★★??

Escaped cyborg find they can't escape their instincts to serve humans.

Tasting Notes on the Varietals of the Southern Coast by Gwendolyn Clare ★★★½?

Snapshot look at a Roman/Game of Thrones-type dystopian fantasy world where thousands of lives are lost

for the emperors love of wine.

Don't Press Charges and I Won't Sue by Charlie Jane Anders ★½???

A transgender person is kidnapped by the *Love and Dignity for Everyone* corporation. The person must fight to stay who they are.

This was less science fiction than total science nonsense used by the writer as a stepping stone for anger over normalization practices.

But really? Drilling a hole in the skull and somehow that drains and reanimates a corpse with your reprogrammed personality and memories?

I've seen made for TV Space Spider movies that try harder.

Church of Birds by Micah Dean Hicks ★★★★★?

That was a great derivation of the Swan Princess that could have fit neatly in Zoe Gilbert's Folk. In fact, I thought it was from Folk for the first two pages.

ZeroS by Peter Watts ★★★★★?

The best story thus far, if a bit long. Dying soldiers are offered a second chance by becoming "zombie" soldiers.

Their brains are hardwired with separation between conscious and unconscious, creating a fearless army of id - a pack of wolves.

There's an interesting exploration of battlefield morality, the limits of military bioscience, and our relationship with our own minds.

The gestalt villain was a nice touch too. Very creepy if you have never read one. My first was in *The Rook*.

Carnival Nine by Caroline M. Yoachim ★★★★★

"My life has been different from the adventures I imagined as a child, but I made the most of the turns I was given, and that's all any of us can do."

In this mountain of mediocre I was completely unprepared for a tearjerker.

From the first lines I completely saw this as a Tim Burton movie, animated as *A Nightmare Before Christmas*. It's a story about family, and using the time you have to be with the ones you love.

And now I'm crying harder and I have to go call my mom for no reason.

Read it for yourself: <http://www.beneath-ceaseless-skies.co...>

The Wretched and the Beautiful by E. Lily Yu ★½???

A heavy-handed story about negative attitudes towards immigration.

The Orange Tree by Maria Dahvana Headley ★★★★★?

MD Headley and Theodora Goss have carved out this lovely niche for themselves; taking tired machismo stories and giving them fresh feminist revisions. Call me a fan.

Cannibal Acts by Maureen McHugh ★★???

Just a snapshot of your basic end of the world desperation. It takes place in Alaska and that is the extent of its specialness.

Black Powder by Maria Dahvana Headley ★★★★★?

"She frees herself from the job of story. She's been the girl who tells tales nightly... She frees herself from the job of guiding men through the dark."

Only MD Headley could rewrite the story of Scheherazade; connecting wishes, bullets, love, and time.

But it was choppy. It either needed one less thread or ten more stitches.

The writing is lovely.

"The wishes in this story are wishes built the way wishes are always built, and the way bullets are built too, to keep going long after they've left the safety of silence."

Zen and the Art of Starship Maintenance by Tobias S. Buckell ★★★★★

"I seek moral guidance outside clear legal parameters," I said. "And confession."

"Tell me everything."

And I did.

Perfect short story! Not a snapshot, not a preview, not a taste - a full story. I haven't read one of those since Ursula Vernon's *The Tomato Thief*.

Due to programming obligations a robot is forced to help a murder evade custody. But with a little guidance from a higher power she will turn the tables!

I'm a big fan of comeuppance stories. Great choice for a closer.

I read 19/20 stories and the average was 3.184. While there were standouts, overall I was disappointed with the choices.

Ryan says

Rivers Run Free - 4* - A short, sad story about oppression and hope.

Destroy the City with Me Tonight - 5* - Incredible bizarre tale of super heroism as a disease. Turns all the concepts from the comics on their heads.

You Will Always Have Family: A Triptych - 4* - Great structure and a cool idea. Some genuine horror in the first section. Redemptive ending kind of undercuts it.

Justice Systems in Quantum Parallel Probabilities - 5* - I love these Invisibles Cities kinds of stories. Alternate universe justice systems are a really fun approach.

Loneliness is in Your Blood - 4* - Very beautifully written story about loneliness and motherhood and love.

The Hermit of Houston - 3* - I'm not sure if I like this story much, but I appreciate it. It's about gender and aging and memory and probably a thousand other things. It's also kind of impenetrable.

The Last Cheng Beng Gift - 3* - A fun little vignette about parenthood, especially the fraught relationships of Asian mothers and their daughters. I liked it but it's fairly forgettable.

Brightened Star, Ascending Dawn - 2* - It's fine, but the relationships that the final part hangs on are not nearly developed enough to support it.

The Resident - 5* - Absolutely masterful. Shirley Jackson meets Kelly Link. Unsettling macabre body horror and haunted house and time travel and everything else. The standout story of the collection.

The Greatest One-Star Restaurant in the Whole Quadrant - 5* - Delightfully gruesome, funny, acerbic. Bonkers take on the quest for a 5* rating (ironic!) and the foodie scene.

Tasting Notes on the Varietals of the Southern Coast - 3* - Cute idea to tell the story of a war through the eyes of the army's wine snob, but overall too slight for me.

Don't Press Charges and I Won't Sue - 5* - Extremely upsetting gut punch of a story. Masterful but very hard to read.

Church of Birds - 2* - Written well enough but the ending is both obvious and unearned.

ZeroS - 5* - Very good military SF about selfhood and bodily control and war. I don't really feel like it ended anywhere but I liked it a lot and it made me want to read more of Watts's stuff.

Carnival Nine - 3* - Already read for my Hugo review. A nice story about disability with affecting characters. Hasn't really stuck with me.

The Wretched and the Beautiful - 4* - A short little fable trembling with rage and despair. Not a subtle allegory but a strong one nonetheless.

The Orange Tree - 5* - A lot of the same themes as The Mere Wife about the anger and secret knowledge of women. Also the same gorgeous prose and a really nice twist on very obscure historical events.

Cannibal Acts - 3* - So dark it's black. Not much of a story, more of a tone piece.

Black Powder - 3* - Not sure I understand this story at all. It's beautifully written as always, and the

characters are fascinating, but I'm not sure it hangs together.

Zen and the Art of Starship Maintenance - 3* - Fun enough story. I like the cleverness of the ending and how the "robot" carefully obeys the letter of Asimov's laws but not at all the spirit.

Holly says

This book seriously needs to be retitled "Tales of Virtue for Our Times (With a Smidge of Sci-Fi and Fantasy Thrown In to Make it Genre)"

This is not a book of fantasy and sci-fi short stories, as it is represented. This is actually a collection of sermons about inclusion.

That being said, there is a time when the choir bores of being preached to and this book marks the watershed event.

From here on out I will read only literary works that were created for literary purposes. Books that were written to tell a fascinating tale. So no more participating in group reads of crap that was published for purely commercial gain.

Thankfully I borrowed a copy from a friend and read it for free. If I had paid real money of this faux literature I would be pissed.

Joshua says

I've read all three years of this series, and try to read as many of the magazines where many of the stories originally came from (Clarkesworld, Beneath Ceaseless Skies, etc.); nevertheless, I'm always amazed by what the editors discover, since I've missed about 75% of these stories the first go-round, and many are amazing works of art. I've never been disappointed by any of the three extant anthologies, as the stories are chosen very carefully to capture numerous styles, authors, and points of view. Sure, sometimes a story seems to sneaky through by its politics alone, but on the whole, these are very indicative of the current market of science fiction and fantasy, and should inspire anyone to seek out the original magazines and anthologies and find more hidden gems that didn't make the cut.

In some ways, this is the weakest of the three collections published so far, only in that it makes a few questionable editorial decisions regarding the content. But I'll get to that in a minute. Most of the stories are astoundingly good, with a few representing the very best that I've read in either genre. Highlights for me include:

* Prell, Justice Systems in Quantum Parallel Probabilities--a fun exploration as to what justice might look like in parallel universes, and whether or not there is any objective justice to be found; but also, how the term is easily abused by the people in charge.

* Goh, The Last Cheng Beng Gift--a beautiful story about ghosts who receive their ancestral gifts from loved ones before moving on, and what it means to be remembered in this life and the next

* Rustad, Brightened Star, Ascending Dawn--a familiar sci-fi trope, the computer with humanity, but taken to a surprising and very emotional level. In this story, a ship-computer decides to illegally hide an underage stowaway and they form a bond. The child helps the computer understand that behind very protocol and statistic lie millions of human lives.

* Jones, The Greatest One-Star Restaurant in the Quadrant--a hilarious yet touching counterpoint to the previous story, focusing on the moment when a job becomes an art form, and what it means when an AI develops its own aesthetic. Grotesque at times, but beautifully told.

* Yoachim, Carnival Nine--my favorite story of the bunch, a clever, heart-breaking metaphor for a human life. In it, everyone is literally a wind-up toy, with their day ordered by how many 'turns' you get on the key in your back. This determines what you spend for yourself and for others, and becomes poignant when a mother gives birth to a child who only gets about 10 turns a day. Truly one of the best stories I've read in years.

* McHugh, Cannibal Acts--an eye-opening 'end of the world' story that reminds me a lot of Mandel's Station Eleven. In a remote Alaskan town, survivors of a deadly flu are facing the terrible reality of cannibalism; but even when faced with death, the survivors divide into the 'eaters' and the 'non-eaters.'

Truly, though, I found something to admire in every story in this volume, and didn't think a single one wasn't worth my time. HOWEVER, I do quibble with the definition of "fantasy" in some of these stories. Case in point, the brilliantly written "The Resident," a very long story which is sort of given pride-of-place in this anthology. It's a fascinating story (if somewhat expected by the end), but it really isn't fantasy or science fiction (they bill it as 'fantasy,' since it follows a science fiction story, and the anthology tries to go from one story to the other. It opens up with a concession to the genre, with the residents of this town all suffering from some unexplained skin ailment, which the main character also gets, but this never really enters sci-fi territory. Again, it's a great story, but it would be published anywhere--it seems unfair to take so much space away from more legitimate sci-fi/fantasy writers.

The great master, Samuel Delany, gets a story in, too, which I think is far from his best and is the only snoozer in the volume. Clearly, he got in because of who he is, and I think claiming this was one of the absolute best of the year is pushing it (but who was going to tell him no?). I also object to the anthology including two stories by Maria Headley, one which is relatively long at that. Both stories are good but not enough to warrant the inclusion of both--again, to the exclusion of many other fine writers.

But these slight quibbles aside, it's an amazing volume and ultimately supports the claim that this is some of the best writing published in 2018 in either genre. I'm very thankful for this volume and I feel it's definitely made me a better reader of the genres, as well as a better writer when I try to approach this subject matter.
