



Glass and Gardens: Solarpunk Summers

Sarena Ulibarri (Editor) , D.K. Mok , Julia K. Patt , Jennifer Lee Rossman , Stefani Cox , Shel Graves , Holly Schofield , Jerri Jerreat , more... Jaymee Goh , Commando Jugendstil , Tales from the EV Studio , Wendy Nikel , Blake Jessop , Edward Edmonds , Sam S. Kepfield , Gregory Scheckler , M. Lopes da Silva , Helen Kenwright , Charlotte M. Ray ...less

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Solarpunk is a type of optimistic science fiction that imagines a future founded on renewable energies. The seventeen stories in this volume are not dull utopias—they grapple with real issues such as the future and ethics of our food sources, the connection between technology and nature, and the interpersonal conflicts that arise no matter how peaceful the world is. In these pages you'll find a guerilla art installation in Milan, a murder mystery set in a weather manipulation facility, and a world where you are judged by the glow of your solar nanite implants. From an opal mine in Australia to the seed vault at Svalbard, from a wheat farm in Kansas to a crocodile ranch in Malaysia, these are stories of adaptation, ingenuity, and optimism for the future of our world and others. For readers who are tired of dystopias and apocalypses, these visions of a brighter future will be a breath of fresh air.

Glass and Gardens: Solarpunk Summers Details

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Author : Sarena Ulibarri (Editor) , D.K. Mok , Julia K. Patt , Jennifer Lee Rossman , Stefani Cox , Shel Graves , Holly Schofield , Jerri Jerreat , more... Jaymee Goh , Commando Jugendstil , Tales from the EV Studio , Wendy Nikel , Blake Jessop , Edward Edmonds , Sam S. Kepfield , Gregory Scheckler , M. Lopes da Silva , Helen Kenwright , Charlotte M. Ray ...less

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From Reader Review Glass and Gardens: Solarpunk Summers for online ebook

Melissa says

First reading in the solarpunk genre, really enjoyed it. Most of the stories had a creative and imaginative twist on the future, and I especially loved Stefani Cox's story Fyrewall. Nice collection.

Chessa says

This collection of short stories imagines futures beyond dystopia - wondering instead what would a hopeful future possibly look like. I am a huge fan of utopia stories, and SF stories that consider these kinds of huge question - what positive futures can we behold, with technology assisting us?

Like any collection, I liked some stories more than others (and had to downright skip one because I just couldn't make it through and it was jeopardizing my ability to finish the book at all). These stories all imagine vastly different futures - and that's the most brilliant, hopeful thing about them. There are so many ways we could get this right!

If the current news cycle has got you down (and how could it not?) I highly recommend taking a walk into the future with this fun and visionary collection.

Sarah says

Review originally published here

I was very lucky to be offered an ARC of this straight from the editor due to the fact I previously reviewed Sunvault, another solarpunk collection of short stories. I leapt at the chance and read it straight away as I adore solarpunk and am always happy to read more of it.

Again, as this is a short story collection it's hard to review because all the stories were so different. It was delightful to see all the different locations and interpretations used in the story. As seen in the blurb, the stories are set all across the globe, and some even venture into space. One particular story, The Spider and the Stars focuses on introducing insects to space and I really enjoyed that one despite hating spiders. Then again, I could just list the names of all the short stories as I enjoyed them all.

I particularly enjoyed the introduction which actually goes and lists other solarpunk books and short story collections for further reading which is so helpful as often when I mention that I enjoy solarpunk, I'll get asked for recommendations. There isn't a table of contents at the start which doesn't bother me on my Kindle as I can easily skip through the stories, but in a physical edition that would disappoint me as I definitely see myself wanting to re-read certain stories again.

Overall though, this was a fantastic collection and it's always brilliant to see more solarpunk collections out there. If you enjoy solarpunk or are interested in exploring it as a genre then this is an excellent place to start!

I highly recommend this and hope more collections will be published in the future!

Shel says

Note: I have a story in this collection and optimistic science fiction is my jam!

"...if you can't imagine something, you sure as hell can't make it real." — Commando Jugendstil and the EV Studio on the World Weaver Press Blog

It's fulfilling to have a story included in *Glass and Gardens: Solarpunk Summers* about optimist futures based on renewable energy (and to be joining in Solarpunk Chat June 16 on Twitter).

"...optimism is way punk. Not that we will emerge from catastrophic dystopia into a difficult, but hard-fought utopia, but that we will simply create utopia because the best in us is better, more brilliant, and more epic than we think it is." — Paul Czege, #SolarPunkChat

Now, wonderful, inspiring ideas aren't magically wonderful, inspiring stories.

Delightfully, *Glass and Gardens*, filled with inspiring ideas, has lovely stories, too. Overall, I loved the varied settings. Farms and farmers are prominent. There were many fun descriptions of tasty food and verdant plant life (compared with say the dystopia *Amatka* by Karen Tidbeck—a fantastic book—but the protagonist eats a lot of fungus and raw rutabaga). After reading *Glass and Gardens*, a sweetness lingers (strawberry-flavored). It carries re-energizing feelings of happiness, contentment and hope.

Briefly, what I love:

"Caught Root" by Julia K. Patt — The romance, the night-blooming lilies.

"The Spider and the Stars" by D.K. Mok — An inspiring female scientist who goes vegetarian (lots of yummy!) & "Shuttling spiders into space to keep the planet safe."

"Riot of the Wind and Sun" by Jennifer Lee Rossman — Desert setting with music. Burning Man vibe! Based on a real town in Australia.

"Fyrewall" by Stefani Cox — An imagined solution to rampaging wildfires and a realization about relationships, "I never needed to fix the wall, just nourish it."

"The Call of the Wold" by Holly Schofield — The crone protagonist. Yay, crones!

"Camping With City Boy" by Jerri Jerreat — A woman renews her love of wilderness and regains her power. Canadian wilderness!

"A Field of Sapphires and Sunshine" by Jaymee Goh — Solar-glass roofs. Sunships. Solarglass windows depict fairytales. Culture positive. Overturns tropes!

"Midsummer Night's Heist" by Commando Jugendstil and Tales from the EV Studio — The characters! A non-binary character who uses zie/zir (love that I've been seeing this more in literature--keep it coming!).

Anti-fascist art punks!

"Heavenly Dreams of Mechanical Trees" by Wendy Nikel — A sentient robotic tree. The last word: Evergreen. *contented sigh*

"New Siberia" by Blake Jessop — Interspecies relationship story! Working with aliens.

"Grover: Case #C09 920, 'The Most Dangerous Blend'" by Edward Edmonds — A wonderful genre mash-up — detective, romance cli-fi.

"Amber Waves" by Sam S. Kepfield — The farm setting — wheat, soybeans. Amber waves!

"Grow, Give, Repeat" by Gregory Scheckler — Miss Lasagna! Planimals!

"Cable Town Delivery" by M. Lopes da Silva — The suspended city setting. Books, librarians!

"Women of White Water" by Helen Kenwright — People: "...are a chaotic mixture of hormones, emotions and information fighting for domination of one small fragile soul.", and The Gentleman (a cat).

"Under the Northern Lights" by Charlotte M. Ray — A bright, sweet love story. Strawberries!

Chrysten Lofton says

4.0? ? t h e f u t u r e i s b r i g h t ?

****mild spoilers****

If you're here, and you're following my reviews, thank you for rolling with me. We're on episode 31 of Stitcher's LeVar Burton Reads, and we're gifted with "Fyrewall" by Stefani Cox.

So, this was a really nice story. My gut instinct was to give it a three, but am I so bored by optimism? I hope you'll divulge me one sci-fi tangent. LeVar brought up Star Trek, but in my assessment, I'm bringing up Rick & Morty. For those of you groaning, that's fair, but I'll keep it brief.

In the fan favorite episode, Pickle Rick, there's a brilliant moment where a psychiatrist gets the better of an arrogant person. The specifics are that scientist, Rick Sanchez, was bored by family life, especially therapy, and the psychiatrist brilliantly summarizes his attitude as follows:

"I have no doubt that you would be bored senseless by therapy, the same way I am bored when I brush my teeth and wipe my ass, because the thing about repairing, maintaining and cleaning is, it's not an adventure. There's no way to do it so wrong you might die. It's just work."

I bring this up because 'Fyrewall' did come across as a little dull to me at first, but it was because to read it, is to put in a little work. For what the work yields, this story is inspired and valuable. Cox interacted with the future. She took the things we're building in conversation now and projected them into a plausible reality. In that reality, we have a character who's just working. It's not crazy riveting, but the point made is good for the soul. It was good for me. It was repairing and helpful to my outlook.

We got to see the concept of representation for all. It's not perfect. As a matter of fact, it came off as clunky and crowded. It also came off as *possible*. Our first, second, and third solutions to the problems at hand probably won't work, but we stay at it until we get it right. That's what society is all about. A solution might be impractical, but putting it into action gives us a chance to take out the parts that don't serve us, and elevate the efficient parts.

I am a little bored by optimism and happy endings. I want murder, revolution, scandals, and corruption. I love the uproar. But, sometimes we need stories like this. Especially because things don't look too good around here. We need art to show us the way. This story has a subdued way about it. The prose is great, and the characters are totally us. I love the main character, I love her frustration with the kids, I love how she sees her world. I love the evolving technology, it feels familiar, even now.

Last observation: this future felt successful because it didn't have amnesia. There was a lot of reference to the past, and how it brought them to where they are. They didn't discount the past, they kept it close in their minds. I think that's a huge flaw in society now, one in dire need of repair.

Thanks for reading, and If you wanna chat about the latest LBR episodes, hit me up in the comments and come meet up with us at LeVar Burton Reads: The Community on Facebook.

- ??♥

Lena says

These stories of optimism, passion, and science are beautiful.

Caught Root by Julia K. Patt ★★★★?

Two communities are rebuilding civilization separately, high rise vs adobe. One botanist must make the first strides towards a working relationship. Short, sweet, and romantic.

The Spider and the Stars by D.K. Mok ★★★★★

“Dedicated to Artemis, whose children reached the stars.”

I cannot believe you just had me crying fat tears over a spider! I haven't done that since Charlotte in *Charlotte's Web*.

The daughter of an insect protein farmer studies and dreams of a greater harmony, a greater world, with her charges.

Riot of the Wind and Sun by Jennifer Lee Rossman ★★★??

Sweet story about a young woman getting creative to put her little town back on the map.

Fyrewall by Stefani Cox

★★★??

A city facing a wild fire has to count on the granddaughter of its solar fire wall to save them.

Watch Out, Red Crusher! by Shel Graves ★★★??

Injected solar cells let people themselves power a city. The side effect is that their night glow gives away their emotions; uncertainty, invitation, *warning*.

The Call of the Wold by Holly Schofield ★★★★?

An old woman, running from her past, finally finds her home in a small collective where she can make a difference.

Camping with City Boy by Jerri Jerreat ★★★★?

That was a funny story I've lived. You really get to know people when you're camping. Smooth city boys and girls can just fall apart after a few days roughing it.

A Field of Sapphires and Sunshine by Jaymee Goh ★★★★?

"Who would mourn the Old Rich? What had they done to deserve lament?"

This was funny if slightly bitter. When the world ran low on exploitative resources the rich buried themselves in luxury bunkers as society slowly changed for the better.

Now, in Muslim countries, when their bunkers are found the bodies are sent to a crocodile farm for disposal.

None of them want to remember when greed trumped morals.

Midsummer Night's Heist by Commando Jugendstil and Tales from the EV Studio ★★???

I'm a fan of guerrilla guarding but not of this story.

There were many characters introduced and none of them were the point of the story. The amount of named characters was ridiculous for a short story.

But here's what made it worse:

"Zie is pretty proud of zir scientific accomplishments..."

I hate this sentence and there were many like it. At first I thought they were typos. Then google told me they were 'proposed binary pronouns.'

So I went back and read all the character introductions again - none were binary characters. All were written as he or she. Therefor the use of zie/zir just made it impossible to know who was talking or doing something.

But as I said character individualism was unnecessary for the story.

And the story itself? The conclusion was a lovely image of a non violent protest. It also reminded me of Pepsi commercial, the kind with Kendall Jenner only less objectionable.

None of that makes up for the time suck this story did not deserve.

The Heavenly Dreams of Mechanical Trees by Wendy Nikel ★★★★?

Nice story about sentient solar trees using the last of their strength to bring back real trees.

New Siberia by Blake Jessop ★★★★?

“We learned this much conquering the Earth; we must do right or nothing at all.”

The human diaspora from a failed Earth has lead some to a desert planet where the snakelike inhabitants are pleased to let them colonize the polar regions.

This story was a glimpse into the life of one human woman and the Naga assigned to work with the refugees.

Grover: Case #C09 920, The Most Dangerous Blend by Edward Edmonds ★★★??

This was a murder mystery set on a weather control station. A surprising inclusion but it was ok.

Amber Waves by Sam S. Kepfield ★★★??

Story about small farms fighting big AgroCorp. Same as today, sigh.

Grow, Give, Repeat by Gregory Scheckler ★★★??

A farm girl fighting for her chickens figures out how to solve world hunger by including people, their differing wants/needs, into her equation.

This story felt the least realistic and the planimals made me uncomfortable. I loath the idea even if I can't justify it.

Cable Town Delivery by M. Lopez da Silva ★★★★?

As towns rebuild on the shells of skyscrapers the only thing connecting them is the library. I love this idea, it reminded of *The Postman*.

Women of White Water by Helen Kenwright ★★★★?

A glimpse at a close knit future community where Matriarchal elders are there to help the next generation.

Under the Northern Lights by Charlotte M. Ray ★★★★?

Lovely romantic story to end on.

Interested in reading more Solarpunk?

<https://www.goodreads.com/group/show/...>

Skyler Boudreau says

I don't think I've ever read Solarpunk before, and this anthology was an awesome start! I enjoyed every story, but my favorite is definitely "The Heavenly Dreams of Mechanical Trees" by Wendy Nikel.

The intelligent, insightful way climate change is discussed in all of these stories is fantastic. Some of the worlds readers get to glimpse are also uncannily realistic futures.

A full review will follow on Reader Views. ??

Fiona says

Group read with the excellent Solarpunk group!

This collection of eco-positive/dystopianish stories absolutely blew my mind (dystopianish because a lot of these futures were extremely appealing). While I would usually pick out a couple of favourites to highlight, I find myself completely unable to choose between about eight of them - the quality of these stories was SO consistently good.

And even besides the quality of the writing, the overall tone of this collection was so uplifting and positive - almost as if all the authors got together to show us just what humanity could be capable of at our best, despite world-altering cataclysm or climate change.

This one will sit on my shelves waiting for the blues to creep up on me so it can chase them away. I've found a lot of new favourites from it, and would absolutely recommend this book in a heartbeat.

Daniel (Page by Page) says

Full Review on Page by Page

Caught Root: 3/5 ??

The Spider and the Stars: 4/5 ??

Riot of the Wind and Sun: 2/5 ??

Fyrewall: 3/5 ??

Watch Out, Red Crusher!: 2/5 ??

The Call of the Wold: 2/5 ??

Camping with City Boy: 2/3 ??

A Field of Sapphires and Sunshine: 2/5 ??

Midsummer Night's Heist: 2/5 ??

The Heavenly Dreams of Mechanical Trees: 4/5 ??

New Siberia: 3/5 ??

Grover: Case #C09 920, "The Most Dangerous Blend": 2/5 ??

Amber Waves: 2/5 ??

Grow, Give, Repeat: 2/5 ??

Cable Town Delivery: 2/5 ??

Women of White Water: 2/5 ??

Under the Northen Lights: 2/5 ??

Jantine Kampes says

I received a free copy through Netgalley in return for an honest review.

The short stories in this book are light, bright and optimistic. That does not mean everything is easy and perfect. It does mean they are full of hope.

Of course, as always with short stories, there were stories that resonated with me better than others. I did like them all, and feel motivated by them to look into the future.

USOM says

(Disclaimer: I received this free book from the publisher. This has not impacted my review which is unbiased and honest.)

So can I just say I'm in love with the premise? That is what drew me to the book and it didn't disappoint. This anthology gives you just enough story, science, and hope.

Hope says

The publisher provided this book to me in exchange for an honest review.

I was impressed by this book. Each one felt like a universe in a grain of sand - much larger on the inside than their page length. I highly recommend this book :)

Sara J. (kefuwa) says

So #solarpunk is this awesome sf sub-genre that is all kinds of cool. Head over to the Goodreads “Solarpunk” Group - which introduced me to the genre (thanks for the invite Lena) - touted as radical optimism or eco positive fic to counter the dystopias out there. Think earth ships, arcologies, sky gardens, renewable energy, sustainable agriculture and the like! I still enjoy my dystopias but this was a breathe of fresh air! Short story collections really make me want to review the stories one by one but I personally like to try having very little input going into any one collection. Somewhere down the line I will do semi-proper writeups for the individual stories for this.

First finished: Sept 10th 2018

Source: Amazon

Lukasz says

Actual rating: 2.5/5

I enjoy dystopias and postapocalyptic wastelands, but they don't present the future I want for myself or future generations. I want an optimistic future founded on renewable energies. I believe people can coexist peacefully with nature. Yes, I'm that naive.

Solarpunk's ideas are close to my heart. In short, the genre can be described as a type of optimistic science fiction that focuses on visions of a brighter future.

The seventeen stories packed into this anthology approach a variety of ethical and technological issues while trying to present a sustainable world. I loved most ideas and conceptions presented in the stories. Some of them are simply mind-blowing, some merely exciting.

However, clever ideas and thought-provoking concepts aren't enough to make an excellent story. As a reader, I want strong conflict and distinct characters. I didn't get much of it in *Glass and Gardens*.

Let's take a quick look at each story.

Caught Root - Julia K. Patt ★★

Sweet, hopeful, but the relationship development felt unbelievable. Also, the stakes are low here. Some scenes retell the daily routine of the narrator and lack of action killed my engagement in the story.

The Spider and the Stars - D.K. Mok ★★★★

A touching and hopeful story about a girl fascinated by insects and arachnids and their strange and alluring worlds. While the plot is fairly simple it's packed with fascinating concepts of sustainable living (convection ventilation systems, climate-resilient crops, tree-planting drones). Excellent.

Riot of the Wind and Sun by Jennifer Lee Rosman ★★★

The story happens in the future Australia, where the major cities tend to hoard energy reserves sending the outback villages into a blackout. In one of such villages, people start working together to put themselves back on the map. Hopeful, easy to read, but unfortunately not really exciting.

Firewall - Stefani Cox ★★

Nothing special to be honest. Totally unmemorable.

Watch Out, Red Crashers! - Shel Graves ★★

A great idea here. In this world, people's emotions are visible to everyone through colours. People hope to achieve their perfect colour. If someone can't balance the emotions he has to leave the community. The execution, though, lacks strength.

The Call of the Wold - Holly Schofield ★

Slow, introspective, and boring. I'm brutal here but it's just my opinion. I'm sure some readers will enjoy Julie's reflections on her life, both past and future. I'm not one of them though.

Camping With City Boy - Jerri Jerreat ★★★★

The story is simple, but the voice of the narrator never cease to entertain. Makemba's excursion into the wilderness with her city boyfriend, Rich, isn't as thrilling as she expected it to be. It turns out Rich may not be a minor god people in the city choose to see in him. And Makemba expresses her feelings in a witty, funny way. A great story.

A Field of Sapphires and Sunshine - Jaymee Goh ★

Great title, disappointing delivery.

Midsummer Night's Heist - Commando Jugendstil ★★★

Entertaining heist story written by two real-life writer's collectives — Commando Jugendstil ("a small collective of Italian solarpunk creators") and Tales from the EV Studio ("a posse of emigrant Italian writers who specialise in historical fantasy"). A decent story.

Heavenly Dreams of Mechanical Trees - Wendy Nikel ★★

Good concept, decent execution, but It didn't have much impact on me.

New Siberia - Blake Jessop ★★

Nice, touching story. Despite low stakes, it's a worthy, hopeful read. And they drink vodka.

Grover: Case C09 920, "The Most Dangerous Blend" - Edward Edmonds ★★

We get a full-on murder mystery into the solarpunk theme. It was ok.

Amber Waves - Sam S. Kepfield ★★

A married couple struggles to protect their crops from destructive weather and the interference of a large agricultural corporation. Cool idea, poor execution.

Grow, Give, Repeat - Gregory Scheckler ★★

Imaginative, but meandering and slightly pointless story.

Cable Town Delivery - M. Lopes da Silva ★★★

Short and entertaining. It proves that librarians are the true heroes.

Women of White Water - Helen Kenwright ★★

A woman with psychic powers becomes involved in a love triangle. She tries to follow a set of rules, her ethical code. Not always an easy task.

Under the Northern Lights - Charlotte M. Ray ★★

A love story in an imaginative future. Nice, and sweet, but also bland.

I don't want to discourage anyone from giving this anthology a try. I think that most stories here are based on great ideas. Unfortunately, with two or three exceptions they lack a strong narrative voice or a conflict that would engage the reader.

Having said that, I plan to delve into solarpunk genre. I hope I'll find the books that not only display the kind of sustainable future I want but also relatable and three-dimensional characters. **Let me know if you have such a book in mind.**

Kalin says

Another anthology I found through the Solarpunk group. I've posted most of my reading notes in the discussion topic there too.

If I have one complaint about the majority of the stories here, it's the lack of more grown-up human beings in them. Imagining how humanity--and not just its technology--will continue to evolve seems a daunting task. (But perhaps not as daunting as facing a more mature humanity and trying to figure out its mentality and reactions ... wait till you see "Loving Loney Lone," which I co-wrote with Vladimir Poleganov.)

I've bolded the notable exception below. "Fyrewall" was also inspiring.

Another general trend I noticed is that most stories are light on the plot, with a slice-of-life feeling. I enjoyed them to the extent that the life they were sliced from was enjoyable.

On to my reading notes:

~ On Friday, along with my friends, partners and kindred spirits from the Human Library and the Terra Fantasia Association of Bulgarian SF Writers and Artists, we'll be presenting the awards of our first contest for short stories exploring positive futures; and then we hope to engage our audience in a discussion about the kinds of futures we envision. (The event, in Bulgarian. If you're in Sofia and Bulgarian is a surmountable obstacle, be our guest too. :)

This snippet from Sarena Ulibarri's introduction to *Glass and Gardens* therefore comes as a timely reminder:

Science fiction has a bad habit toward homogeneity, whether it's the depiction of a single-ecosystem planet, ubiquitous and monotone cultures, three-course-meal food pills, or futuristic silver jumpsuits for all. It would be an insult to the decentralized, localized nature of solarpunk to pin it down as only one thing. Single visions of the future ignore the cultural and ideological variations that make us human. They also ignore the interconnectivity of eco-systems, and the variations of landscape and climate that make up a world.

We'll definitely be talking about futures.

~ What kind of fairy tales does a bright future hold in store?

Here's an answer from D.K. Mok's "The Spider and the Stars":

Every night, as the warmth of the day radiated back through the glass water-wall of her bedroom, Del curled up with her plush quokka and listened, enthralled, as her mother spun wondrous stories.

These were never stories of dragons and fairies, mermaids and centaurs. No, these were stories of fierce young women with flocks of tree-planting drones, firing seeds into the barren sands and rolling back the desert. Or tales of ravenous locusts sweeping across the land in suffocating plagues, and the farmers who responded by cultivating carnivorous wheat.

And the cheeses? I hear the more astute among you ask. *How about the cheeses?*

Rest assured. The cheeses haven't been left out either:

Xiaren followed her gaze. "Ah, I see you've noticed my portable domestic biogas system. Normally, biogas harvesting systems require thousands of tonnes of cheese to create a commercially viable amount of whey for anaerobic digestion. My system utilises less than twenty kilos of cheese, and generates enough gas for heating and cooking in a typical home. I call it the *Fromagerie 5000!*"

Xiaren swung open a panel in the tank to reveal five shelves of ripening cheeses surrounded by gurgling pipes and humming canisters. Del rocked back on her heels, the intense smell of gorgonzola hitting her with almost physical force.

"That's...powerful."

"I've specially cultivated the microorganisms to generate vastly more biogas than normal. And the cheese tastes amazing."

Xiaren cut a gooey wedge from a creamy blue and offered it to Del, who, after a moment's hesitation, took a bite. Notes of chilli and lychee simmered beneath the pungent flavour, and her eyes watered.

"This would make an insanely good pasta sauce." She gave herself a moment for the sparkles to disappear from her vision. "So, why did you go into cheese?"

Xiaren shrugged. "My hometown isn't overly fond of dairy, but we needed clean energy. And in my mind, gas is gas, whether it's happening inside a cow or a star. Or a round of cheese."

Del looked at the racks of peaceful cheeses, and wondered if they knew they had the heart of stars.

Though these are not utopian stories--or traditional fairy tales, as already established--sooo

"They're about to announce the winner. Shouldn't you be networking in the Investor's Lounge?"

"My details are online," he replied. "And I saw this irresistible presentation about these incredible exploding cheeses."

Xiaren sighed. "No one was hurt. And I've figured out the problem."

"Go make yourself useful and see if you can find Talia," Daesha said to Carlos.

"What if I don't feel like it?"

"Well, then I guess I can put that in my progress report for The Council. I'm sure they'll be happy to hear an update on how you've been feeling."

Also, this is a future where, when all is said and done, it's not a case of "much more has been said than done":

People referred to The Council as though it were a small circle of government officials, when in reality it was a chaotic mixture of, well, *everyone*. That was how The Council worked. You could elect someone to represent your group based almost any factor—geographic area, race, age, gender identity...the list went on. You could elect multiple representatives, and there was no limit, as long as representatives were active in participating with The Council and in fulfilling their assigned roles and duties.

So when Daesha and the teenagers stood before The Council via the holoconference she set up next to the wall tear, there were actually thousands of representatives uplinking to listen in on the conversation. And since the meetings were open to the entire city, any resident could theoretically tune in. Imagining the size of the audience that might be opening the feed from numerous points throughout the city made Daesha nervous. She swallowed to wet her throat in hopes that her voice wouldn't wobble anymore the way it had when she'd informed The Council of the problem.

"The active fire is the biggest concern," said one Councilmember, an older Latina woman with white-gray hair framing her face in crisp waves. "If it travels just a few miles, it could arrive at the wall and rip right through the tear. Our buildings would be immediately at risk."

"My community is concerned with the evacuation plan," said a mid-thirties man in a wheelchair with caramel-toned skin. He rolled closer to the device he was using to project into the meeting. "The maps are outdated, and we haven't been keeping up with accessibility plans the way we should have been. That's why I kept bringing it up in—"

"The Fyrewall is our only source of power," said a member who represented the nonbinary South Asian community. They raised a leather-cuffed arm to trigger the holoconference technology to amplify their screen. "We have backup power stored up to last us for a year or two, but we'll have to figure out how to keep the air purifiers running past that point if we want the city to stay livable."

"Forget the air purifiers. What about the other cities who come barging down to our door whenever they sense a weakness?" asked a precocious youth member. "Selling them the Fyrewall tech and keeping the barrier flowing has been the only way to keep them away long-term, right?"

Daesha crossed her arms over her chest and closed her eyes for a moment. She hated Council meetings for this very reason. Too many voices, and not enough leadership. Sure, it was more fair, but it amazed Daesha that anything got done at all within this system. She suspected it was due to the multitude of citizens who ran the sub-committees for budgeting, resource management, and security. They kept the city running, while those who wanted air time made a ruckus in holoconference convenings.

~ Holly Schofield's "The Call of the Wold" sparkles with amusing turns of phrase:

By the second day at Henkel's, I'd been given a potted tomato plant and a woven hemp hat and been asked to settle four disputes. This morning's involved two new mothers and the last remaining frozen bagel. I could forgive 'em their anger—teething babies without teething rings could set anyone's teeth on edge. At least, one of the mothers had brought me a duck egg omelet, full of mushrooms and chives, still steaming from the kitchens. The mother, *and* the omelet.

and

The cognitive limit that a person could maintain interpersonal relationships, known as Dunbar's number, was about one hundred and fifty, and such small communities had proved both viable and robust—to expropriate some of my former corporate vocabulary. At that size, you always knew what your neighbor was doing so crime wasn't a problem. Basically, with Dunbar's number, the criminal element's number was up.

~ Jaymee Goh's "A Field of Sapphires and Sunshine" comes to show that--ugh!--some things stay the same even in the brightest future:

When she finally called her family's home, saving the best for last, she frowned at how long it took for her mother to pick up.

“Aina!” her mother finally replied, sounding breathless.

“Ibu!” Alina’s mind jumped to the worst conclusion. “Is everything okay? Or did the deal with Megajaya not happen?”

“What? Oh, no, that’s not a problem at all. We’ll be taking that contract, of course. But Aina, best news, we may have found you a partner after all!”

“A part—”

“Business only lah, of course, but who knows! Quite good looking.”

“Ibu!” Alina rolled her eyes to the ceiling in exasperation. “You know I just broke up with my boyfriend.”

“Yah, best timing my girl. Now you can focus on this one.”

Seriously though, I don't believe in this persistence of tradition. We can already see enormous intergenerational rifts between people who grew up with books and people who are growing up with notebooks/smartphones. So imagine what it will be in fifty years, let alone two hundred. Imagining it is, in a sense, futile. Just hone your sense of wonder ... and watch, watch carefully. ;)

However, I loved the idea of feeding the long-dead bodies of the Old Rich (i.e. today's power players) to the crocodile farm:

Jason had balked. He had had no Old Rich connections, but he still thought what Alina's family did was heinous.

“Have you no respect for the dead?” he had demanded, when Alina finally told him.

Alina had thought about this question before, and was ready with an answer. “No. They didn’t

have respect for us when they were alive, so why should we respect them now that they're dead? (...)"

~ Here's a story written by people who know about civic activism--and haven't lost their sense of humor in the process of gaining that knowledge:

Meanwhile, on the far side of Parco Sempione, close to Cimitero Monumentale, a flash mob has ensued, much to the bafflement of the law enforcement.

Citizens have taken to the streets with streamers of cloth, plastic balls, bowling pins, and hula hoops and are now pretending, awfully for the most part, to compete in an Olympic gymnastics event.

A trio of elderly Chinese ladies from nearby Via Paolo Sarpi, allegedly alumnae of the National Gymnastics Academy of Beijing, are sitting on a public bench and act as judges, raising numbered placards and yelling scathing comments about how even in their eighties they would be able to do much better.

In Parco Solari, naked cyclists and skaters have taken over the scene, 1920s swing music blaring from their eighties-style ghetto blasters. Nearby residents are leaning out of windows and balconies, clamouring for the police, the army, the Avengers...*anyone* to make the din stop.

In Largo Marinai d'Italia, the park built on the grounds of a former Austro-Hungarian fortress, a six-foot-five, copper-skinned, very muscular woman dressed in a Victorian gown and armed with a huge parasol is leading a crowd of similarly dressed people against a cluster of scared-looking Austro-Hungarian soldiers.

"Independence or Death!" she yells with a strong Brazilian accent.

There are pagan rites at Parco Nord; mass pillow fights explode in Viale Padova; dancers perform around a machine that blows giant soap bubbles in front of the Lambrate station; a torchlit, 17th century penitential procession marches down Corso di Porta Ticinese so that the plague of racism and intolerance will stop, and, to top it all, Charles VIII of France has descended through the Alps yet again and a few Milanese knights are engaged in strenuous battle with his bodyguard at Stazione Centrale.

The whole city has exploded into insanity all at once.

...

"It does pay off to have friends in different subcultures," Stabby writes.

"Midsummer Night's Heist" by Commando Jugendstil and Tales from the EV Studio, is my first unqualified favorite here. Starting with its authorship--written by a collective, no! *two* collectives--and ending with its glorious transformative, everyone-comes-together ending, it made my eyes brim with tears.

Fam ... count me in for the next flash mob. And may I never, ever again think that Milan is Italy's most boring city

~ Gregory Scheckler's "Grow, Give, Repeat" features an exceptionally smart child protagonist in an exceptionally diverse near future ... where all the other people are exceptionally mean egoists. The contrast is staggering. :(

~ M. Lopes da Silva's "Cable Town Delivery" is full of subdued exuberance. It's a fantastic future, where libraries travel from town to town, sometimes spending more than a dozen years before revisiting the same place (apparently, the Internet failed somewhere along the way); but it's even more fantastic that a librarian can be a hero just doing her job.

~ Helen Kenwright's "Women of White Water" is the delightful odd fish in the anthology. The future technology in the story acts mostly as a veneer; it is the human interactions that make its core. (And, sadly, humans don't seem to have grown up any. Well, here's one of my pet peeves with depictions of hopeful futures.) Add the lively and inventive writing, and you get an author that I'd probably look into later.

~ Charlotte M. Ray's "Under the Northern Lights" features a future like this:

I had switched a few batteries into the charging hub, not because I needed to, as I didn't use much electricity in the summer, but to have something to do. And hey, who knew if next week would be unusually cold and cloudy and dry, with no winds to speak of. Then the power-mosaics on the outside walls wouldn't have anything to generate power from. No sun for the solar panels, no wind or water to move the microkinetics. Plus, as long as Krista stayed here, there'd be two of us who needed warm water. I set the house-AI to recalculate power usage for two inhabitants until canceled.

In which there're people like this:

"The only person who helped me build it is a little girl, Qiuyue. I doubt she'll ever forgive me for not taking her with me, but I think her parents would have had a few problems with that." Krista gave me a sidelong glance. The look challenged me to laugh or ridicule her next words. "My best friend is a ten-year old girl, and I miss her like crazy."

I nodded. It wasn't a laughing matter to me, who didn't have any close friends at all.

How is this possible? Have those people learnt nothing about what makes them happy--or even what makes them tick?

Other than that, it's a sweet story where nothing much happens, but it's all very emotional. A bit like my life right now. ;)
