



Three Moments of an Explosion

China Miéville

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London awakes one morning to find itself besieged by a sky full of floating icebergs. Destroyed oil rigs, mysteriously reborn, clamber from the sea and onto the land, driven by an obscure but violent purpose. An anatomy student cuts open a cadaver to discover impossibly intricate designs carved into a corpse's bones—designs clearly present from birth, bearing mute testimony to . . . what?

Of such concepts and unforgettable images are made the twenty-eight stories in this collection—many published here for the first time. By turns speculative, satirical, and heart-wrenching, fresh in form and language, and featuring a cast of damaged yet hopeful seekers who come face-to-face with the deep weirdness of the world—and at times the deeper weirdness of themselves—*Three Moments of an Explosion* is a fitting showcase for one of our most original voices.

Three Moments of an Explosion Details

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From Reader Review Three Moments of an Explosion for online ebook

Darwin8u says

"When any civilization is dust and ashes," he said, "art is all that's left over. Images, words, music. Imaginative structures. Meaning—human meaning, that is—is defined by them."
-- Margaret Atwood, Oryx and Crake

Maybe even 4.5 stars. I really liked this collection. Some of the stories I loved. Adored even. Some were too light. Some extremely dense. But none were uninteresting.

Many SF/horror/noir writers get funky by bending the plot. Miéville does it by bending his words. He alters reality by converting language, both known and familiar, into something alien and the strange. Those thin threads he weaves between the normal and the exotic are done often (not always) with a slight of hand with language; a flick of his prose tongue. He is also getting better and better at the polished, palitable otherworldiness of his worlds. There is a glaze in his stories that makes reading Miéville both delicious AND disturbing at the same time.

Part of Miéville's genius [and NO, I don't use genius lightly] is his ability to find the strange in our world and escalate it. Use it as a mental catalyst to unlock some deeper key. Space elevators? He will take that to the next level. Marxist materialism? Just wait to read what he does with the Ash Heap of History. Scrimshaw? Therapy? Card tricks? Enhanced Interrogation? He will outsmart your expectations with each one. He will extract the magic from old bones or a discarded rag. He will find the horror in the shadows that haven't been cast yet.

Anyway, here is the list of his stories:

"Three Moments of an Explosion"

"Polynia"

"The Condition of New Death"

"The Dowager of Bees"

"In the Slopes"

"The Crawl"

"Watching God"

"The 9th Technique"

"The Rope Is the World"

"The Buzzard's Egg"

"Säcken"

"Syllabus"

"Dreaded Outcome"

"After the Festival"

"The Dusty Hat"
"Escapee"
"The Bastard Prompt"
"Rules"
"Estate"
"Keep"
"A Second Slice Manifesto"
"Covehithe"
"The Junket"
"Four Final Orpheuses"
"The Rabbet"
"Listen the Birds"
"A Mount"
"The Design"

I will comeback sometime and [perhaps] discuss some of these stories, individually, at length. Some stories just hang there defying gravity in my mind. Other stories sit hard in my stomach, neither digesting or moving, just sitting and waiting for the right moment to hatch.

Mark says

There are twenty-eight stories, in this new collection, of varying styles and lengths. Most are unsettling, many are impenetrable and a few are flat out terrific. Creepy, strange, inventive and baffling. This is exactly what you would expect from Mieville. I have mixed feelings about his work. I end up admiring him more than truly loving his cool, detached, intelligence.

Several of these stories have an environmental slant. The earth in retaliation. I do like this approach and would like to see more of it.

If you have not read Mieville, I wouldn't start here. Pick up *City* and *the City*, which remains my favorite.

Tom says

NB: While reading this book I wrote up my thoughts about each of the 28 stories in detail, which you can read on my blog starting here. In those posts I describe the premise of each story, as well as giving my thoughts, but rest assured there are no major spoilers to be found.

It's easy to see why China Miéville took three years to release a new book after *Railsea*. Apart from a monthly comic series, he was beavering away on a huge variety of novelettes, short stories, and pieces of flash fiction. And that's the key selling point of this collection: variety. There is an enormous wealth of creative ideas bursting from the seams of this book, and while the execution doesn't always live up to the promise, I guarantee you that with each of the 28 stories of this book you will be presented with a new and unusual fantasy, SF, horror, or weird fiction idea, which will worm its way inside your head.

Miéville doesn't let readers at his ideas easily though. The premise of every story is buried in their middle pages, leaving the reader disorientated at first, having to find their own way in the story — before, like the sections of a puzzle box unfolding, the pieces are slowly unveiled. Think of how long the nature of the cities

takes to be revealed in *The City & the City*. Every story within these pages is like that, writ small.

There are some stories in this book that will stay with you a long time. The absolute gems marry *exceptional* creativity with eloquent prose and brilliant execution. Other tales, however, might let you down if you're hoping for a definitive conclusion to the weirdness... but the journey through Miéville's mind will be worth it anyway. Most of the short, experimental pieces work well too, even when they are just fragments of stories.

If you've read through all of my story-by-story descriptions, you'll have seen me lament more than once for a proper ending. Resolution-shyness is the collection's biggest flaw, but I think Miéville chose to end most of the "culprit" stories ambiguously and abruptly in order to preserve the inexplicableness of the weird — and *not* for a lack of ending ideas. Regardless, this approach to storytelling is going to frustrate fans, newcomers, and critics alike. I definitely look forward to seeing what Miéville says about the stories in this book, in his inevitable upcoming interviews and appearances.

I can genuinely recommend this collection to any Miéville fan. It will terrify and amaze you. It's so weighty with rich imagination and prose skills honed over a brilliant career. However, I still think that *novels* are Miéville's finest medium, because longer works discipline him into developing his outlandish ideas more thoroughly and coming up with satisfying conclusions.

4.5 stars

Fuchsia Groan says

El estilo de Miéville se adapta de maravilla al formato corto. Disfruto más con sus novelas, pero sumergirte de pronto en uno de sus mundos, ver en pocas páginas las imágenes que pasan por su portentosa imaginación, atisbar historias y argumentos sumamente estimulantes es un lujo (en ocasiones quizás también un desperdicio, algunos podrían ser una maravillosa novela).

Es increíble cómo mezcla géneros en casi todos, creando prácticamente uno nuevo en sí mismo: fantasía, ciencia ficción, terror (fantástico *Sacken*), idas de olla varias, en el buen sentido (*The condition of new death*), crítica social e incluso una buena dosis de humor inteligente en unos cuantos.

28 relatos diferentes y alucinantes donde lees tráilers de películas (*The Crawl*, *Escapee*, o *Listen the birds*), te ríes y asomas con un programa de estudios (fantástico *Syllabus*), cambiando totalmente de tercio te encuentras cuatro posibles explicaciones de por qué Orfeo miró hacia atrás (*Four final Orpheuses*), icebergs sobre Londres (*Polynia*), vives viendo pasar los barcos que nunca atracan en el maravilloso y poético *Watching God*, te muestra una nueva forma de arte en *A Second Slice Manifesto*, y una invasión de las plataformas petroleras en la preciosa *Covehithe*, para maravillarte después en el aislado y decadente ascensor espacial de *The rope is the world* y... y podría nombrarlos todos. Genial la variedad, las imágenes, las ideas, cómo juega con las palabras...

Puede que esta colección me haya gustado un poquito menos que la anterior, *Looking for Jake and Other Stories* aunque creo que quizás, de alguna manera, sea incluso mejor. Y es que me da la impresión de que pasa a otro nivel, es todo más raro de lo normal en Miéville, casi una vuelta de tuerca al *new weird* y hay unos cuantos que no he conseguido entender del todo, pero por extraño que parezca, incluso esos los he disfrutado, "observándolos" como en un sueño, dejándome llevar.

Evan Leach says

Three Moments of an Explosion is Miéville's second collection of short stories. At 400 pages and 28 stories, readers are certainly getting their money's worth. This is a solid set of stories that displays most of Miéville's gifts: strong prose, imaginative, highly creative ideas, and the ability to work within a number of different genres. Three stories in particular stood out:

The Dowager of Bees – In an alternate reality, card players occasionally draw mystery cards with strange values and suits (the “dowager of bees”, the “eight of chains”, etc.). The rules governing these special cards only appear in the rulebook when a special card is drawn. These cards have strange, mysterious “forfeits” (with real-world consequences) affecting one or more players that can apparently be dreadful (although Miéville does a good job not giving too much away here). This story tells how a single player encountered this scenario three times over the course of his life. A hard story to describe effectively, but a very strong, five-star read that was my favorite in the collection by far.

The Junket – A Jewish screenwriter is brutally murdered after a controversial movie he worked on is released. Only very late do we discover the subject of the movie (view spoiler), but that's not really the point. Instead, Miéville uses this story to explore aspects of Jewish identity and anti-semitism, along with the odder aspects of extremist culture. Miéville is very much in his wheelhouse here.

The Design – A young medical student discovers that a cadaver's bones have been completely scrimshawed (under the skin) with elaborate, mysterious symbols. His efforts to unravel the mystery only lead to more questions for both him and the reader, not the least of which is whether his new companion has any connection to the puzzle. Some nice Lovecraftian overtones here.

The other 25 stories on display here ranged from good to subpar, with most of them grading out as just OK. It's Miéville, so as you might expect almost every story features a great idea. But too often these fizzle out into a story that's intriguing but only partially satisfying. I am a fan, but this is not Miéville's finest work by a long shot; I thought his earlier short story collection was better (along with virtually all of his novels).

There's some great imagination on display here, with a few gems, but I thought this was just a pretty good collection overall. Certainly worth a read for Miéville fans and completionists, but if you're new to this author I recommend starting elsewhere (his excellent Bas-Lag novels, for instance). **3 stars**, recommend with reservations.

Jonfaith says

She felt her heart speeding as she went through these motions, not expecting to understand more but desperate to do so, here in what she could feel through her skin was a locus. She was an antigen here, perhaps. She was something.

The citation reveals it all. These exercises didn't work for me. They were not images or examples but

miniatures, tiny plots -- in both senses. There were a few stories which I did admire. The story Polynia is one, the next few sentences contain SPOILERS.

So, icebergs has appeared levitating over the streets of London. What follows is part taxonomy and scientific debate and part oral history. The effect of this arrival is eerie and fascinating. The total absence of point or purpose to this event is what captivates. Then sadly towards the end of the story similar phenomena are described as occurring elsewhere: a coral reef inexplicably on the streets of Brussels and tropical rain forest growing in Tokyo. That caused an instant deflation for this reader. That's it.

The remaining stories bordered between the boring and the undercooked, many focused on runes or scripts as a sinister presence. I didn't find them particularly scary or even interesting. I was hoping for Bas-lag and instead found moral wreckage from the War On Terror. That doesn't constitute failure in itself. I hesitate to compare Miéville to, say, Julian Barnes. Well, maybe I am. CM was offering his sketchbook and I didn't care for it. That isn't a slight only an interpretation.

David says

I have greatly enjoyed some of Mieville's books, while others not so much. I am sorry to say, in this case, it is not so much. This is a collection of short stories; some of the stories are science fiction-like, some are fantasy, and some are just weird. My very favorite story is about a psycho-therapist who will go to any lengths for her patients. No spoilers her, but the story had some real plot-twisters. I also enjoyed the story about the icebergs floating above the city; it is just so weird, a very strange situation.

I didn't read this book; I listened to the audiobook. Maybe that is the problem. Since each short story is totally independent, there is no continuity. Perhaps I should have paid more attention to the beginning of each story, but that proved to be difficult. The audiobook is narrated by several readers, and they don't do a good job of delineating characters with their voices/accents. So, if you are planning to read this book, I suggest to read it in print, and not to listen to it.

Brian says

China Miéville is my Exhibit A that not all great novel writers make great short story writers. The best stories in the collection ("In the Slopes, the horrifying "Säcken" and "Keep") are all 30+ pages which seems to be the minimum amount China needs to really get his craft going. Many of the pieces under ten pages fell flat for me, and the nearly flash-fiction 3 pages and less offerings didn't work at all.

Finishing this book reminded me again of my major crush on Brian Evenson and how he has the uncanny ability to write both brilliant novels and short fiction - even his three pagers are so good it's unfair. But I'm fine with Miéville being a pro at the long form - he has another novel coming out in January and I'm certain he won't disappoint.

Mike says

Meh. I really liked Mieville's novel "The city and the city," and kind of hoped his short stories might be as good. I'm very forgiving of fantasy as a genre -- all you really need to do is have interesting ideas like Borges, or create compelling characters like Poul Anderson, or come up with funny and horrifying scenarios like Fritz Leiber. Hell, a unique voice, like Eddison or Vance, can be enough. Mieville's stories here though don't really accomplish much of anything. I thought he was being obtuse at times, as if being hard to decipher were the same thing as being deep; indeed all too many of the stories seemed to be valorizing lacunas and obliqueness, as if unfinished images, undeveloped ideas, and vagueness are all marks of a clever writer. He did have some interesting ideas, like the graveyard of ships that are revered as messages by an isolated enclave of survivors of some sort of collapse, and the "New Death" which causes corpses to become enigmatic optical illusions, and archaeologists casting the voids left by volcano victims, as one might at Pompeii, and finding alien forms. But none of these are developed into actual stories, and he seems to be trying damn hard to fit in as a "literary" writer. At one point I was comparing his stories to Clive Barker -- veering between irony and earnest literary aspirations, but Barker at least has stuff happen. So, not really my thing. I gave up about a third of the way through, because my reading time is not as cheap as it used to be and I've got shelves and shelves of books that are written by people who, if they have something to say, will say it, and if they have stories to tell, will tell them.

Wart Hill says

This collection really showcases Mieville's wide range of subject matter, style, and just his talent in general. Definitely a good read. I recommend not reading "Rabbit" too close to bed...

Ctgt says

Having only read Perdido Street Station(which I loved) I wasn't completely sold on shorts by Miéville but I ended up really enjoying this collection. A decent variety of types; weird, fantastic, and horror. Three or four stories missed me completely but in a collection of 28 stories that's a pretty low miss rate. Most of the rest were good to great but I will highlight a few that I thought were outstanding.

In The Slopes-two groups of archeologists and the strange artifacts they are recovering.

Säcken-two women and their experience with *poena cullei* or the punishment of the bag.

Keep-a condition/disease/virus(?)that manifests with trenches or moats forming around those who are afflicted.

Covehithe-lost deep sea rigs animate and stride ashore.

The Rabbet-a couple deals with a live-in friend whose medicore artwork/media takes a strange, compelling turn after he discovers an old picture.

The Design-a medical student finds something strange about one of the cadavers he and his fellow students are studying.

I borrowed this from the library but as I sit and look over my notes and see just how many of these stories I enjoyed I will probably end up buying a copy so I can revisit this in the future.

8/10

Evgeny says

First things first: I need to mention I received this book from Goodreads giveaways.

There are popular writers and there are good writers. These two while intersecting are not equal. For this reason I avoided reading China Miéville before.

I have a feeling like I attend a high-class cocktail evening party, the one where the ladies wear evening dresses, the gentlemen wear tuxedos, and the waiters with trays full of cocktail glasses navigate through the crowd of guests.

Suddenly I say aloud something really stupid and embarrassing, “I did not like a book by China Miéville”. My voice carries and almost everybody hear this. The resulting silence is deafening; it is only interrupted by a sound of a dropped cocktail glass shattering against the floor. A kind old gentleman comes up to me and says while trying to maintain forced cheerfulness, “A strangest thing just happened to me, old chap. I imagined you said you did not like a book by China Miéville; must be my old age playing tricks with me.” If this occasion had taken place a couple of centuries earlier, I would have had a bunch of gloves thrown at me in duel challenges. In modern times I only have to assure the kind old gentleman that his hearing was fine – to even greater embarrassment of everybody in the room: myself first and foremost.

The only story I really like was The Dowager of Bees. It might be explained by the fact that I love stories with unusual deck of cards in them (I blame Amber Chronicles by Roger Zelazny for this). Anyway, this one really clicked with me.

I formed an impression the author does not know how to write a good ending. This is actually nothing to be ashamed of as some very well-established writers had this same problem, just take a look at Stephen King and Neil Gaiman. For people thinking that a good book is about the journey only and not the final destination this is fine, but I really appreciate a good ending, no matter how ambiguous.

The stories varies from horror to fantasy to bizarre; from one-page observations to scripts of trailers for imaginary movies; from intriguing to outright gross (by the way gross is not equal to horror in my book). If you want weird, Kelly Link out-weirds him by a mile - and this comes from somebody who found her works to be hit or miss, but I still have to admit this.

In defense of the book I have to say that if I understand correctly these are early stories of the author and his writing abilities might have improved a lot since then. For now the only two reasons this one avoided two-star rating from me are the following: the aforementioned story The Dowager of Bees and my desire to avoid the embarrassment admitting I do not like a popular writer. It does not mean I removed his other books from my to-read shelf as I am curious to see his other works.

Cecily says

I'm not sure when, or even if, I'll come back to this (I was so disappointed), so a few jottings on the first seven stories (a quarter of the collection), then others, as and when I dip in:

Three Moments of an Explosion

A disused building is demolished. This is described from three perspectives: as a marketing opportunity, for thrill-seekers, and the aftermath of memories.

Polynia

Icebergs over London. When I discovered "polynia" was a real word, I wondered if Mieville had been looking for a new p-word to overuse (palimpsest, puissant, and I'm sure there's at least one other), then based a whole story around it!

The Condition of New Death

We're the centre of our own (virtual) worlds.

The Dowager of Bees

A magical-realist slant on card games: there are hidden suits, and just occasionally, you may find a card from one in your hand. I think you have to have some knowledge of (and preferably fondness for) poker to enjoy this. It may be excellent, but I think I missed its point. I hope it's more than the obvious karmic message about the truth finding you out.

In the Slopes

Rival archaeologists (too much of their in-fighting for a short story) on an Italian island that suffered pyroclastic explosion, similar to that of Pompeii and Herculaneum, around the same time. The casts made with a new resin (instead of plaster) have a mysterious sparkly quality, and not all the casts are human. "Hunkering deaths, the pugilist poses where cooking sinews had clenched." The ending could have been the start of something really good...

The Crawl

Storyboard for a zombie movie. Meh.

Watching God

Another (near) island - an isthmus cut off from the rest of the world, whose people have had more technology in the past than they have now. Ships regularly pass, weigh anchor, then move on again. No crew or passengers are ever seen. Occasionally there are wrecks.

This was the first story in the collection that intrigued me, and that I enjoyed. I liked the bit of world-

building and wordplay (ah, China, at last): the first time I spotted the odd use of "sentence", I just carried on, then again, then a ship that sank fast "must have been laying deep grammar". Yay. Man's search for meaning, cargo cults etc all came to mind, along with Cloud Atlas and Ella Minnow Pea.

The 9th Technique

This is more like it! It starts in a familiar setting – except that nothing is quite... right, in trivial ways. A sense of mystery and unease. The black market deals in this slightly dodgy café are not drugs, but (view spoiler)

The Rope is the World

A straightforward imagining of space elevators, one of which is called The Rope. They are for trading and transport (and spectacular suicides). They are so unimaginably tall that they are obsolete before they're finished, and those living 1.2 million floors away have their own languages, culture and civilization. Are they as alien as those they trade with?

Lachinchon says

In the world of *Three Moments of an Explosion*, strange things happen, sometimes publicly (icebergs floating above London [*Polynia*], oil derricks walking ashore [*Covehithe*]) but most often privately, secretly. The protagonist and the reader struggle to understand what is going on, but ultimately fail. Although this is undoubtedly the author's intention, it is deliberately perverse. Significant characters simply disappear from the narrative; stories end without resolution. Without resolution, tension is unreleased and the buildup becomes meaningless. For example, in *Keep*, in which a strange "disease" causes a literal moat to surround the afflicted, the plot gradually weaves its way to a mysterious Scottish keep where, after a brief flurry of action, the story ends, *sans* explication. Plot development is rendered meaningless, since without cause/cure/prognosis the final events could be totally unrelated to the main plotline, merely a sideshow. I hope Miéville meant more than the trite metaphor that people create moats around themselves.

Our understanding of the world as a matter of perspective is illustrated in the shorter pieces (*Three Moments of an Explosion*, *Four Final Orpheuses*) with literally numbered viewpoints. I did not find these pieces particularly successful. Similarly, the short "trailers" seemed like nothing more than the author saying, "Look at this cool idea I had." A layer of "dust to dust" pessimism (again, literally, as in *The Dusty Hat*) lies over the collection. Miéville suggests that we do not, perhaps cannot, either understand or control the vagaries of the universe.

For me, the best stories were those that actually had a denouement: *Dreaded Outcome* (psychoanalysts with an extreme view of patient care); *Säcken* (a monster-in-the-lake horror story); and *The Dowager of Bees* (a card shark trying to cheat fate). These were the exception, not the rule. One of Miéville's characters says, "Some stories, though, it doesn't help to finish." This may be true, but for most stories, crossing the finish line makes for a satisfying race.

Althea Ann says

**** Three Moments of an Explosion

The title story here is a brief piece - but it's got a lot in its few pages: original and weird science-fictional ideas, and a beautifully conjured sense of angst at the zeitgeist.

It reminded me of an incident when I was a child: my father took me to see the controlled demolition of a building. The charges were set wrong, and instead of the whole building falling to dust, it only pancaked in one floor. The crowd milled around with a sense of dissatisfaction and worry...

Although the building here collapses fully, and the scenario is quite different, the emotions surrounding it seem familiar.

**** Polynia

Previously read on tor.com.

' Browsing the tor.com website to find an Ann Leckie story, I noticed a new and free China Miéville piece! Exciting! And it met my expectations.

Two young boys in a near-future London are there when the city experiences a strange phenomenon.

Icebergs, which at this point have pretty much melted away in the polar regions, appear in the sky above the city.

No one knows how or why the glacial ice is suspended. Will it come crashing down? Does it mean something? Fear and curiosity take hold. Military expeditions are sent out, and urban adventurers are challenged.

The story is an understated allegory of how the things we destroy may haunt us.'

*** The Condition of New Death

Hmm. This one feels like an example illustrating a philosophical problem, in the guise of a 'weird fiction' piece. Except that I'm not sure there really is a philosophical problem.

In the near future, something changes, and suddenly, dead people are always oriented horizontally, with their feet facing you. Even if multiple people are surrounding the corpse.

The story admits, within the text, that this was inspired by old first-person shooter videogames. And well, what are the ramifications of this? Not much. People adjust, and take it in stride.

***** The Dowager of Bees

A secret cardsharps' club holds an even deeper layer of secrets, one that hardcore gamblers around the world may be privy to - but never talk about.

Games of chance hold no attraction for me - but I absolutely loved this story, with its mesh of risk and love. The frisson of the unknown and uncanny slipping around the edges into our world is done perfectly.

March 2016: Nominated for Hugo. (Although several stories in this volume were strong contenders, I decided on this one.)

***** In The Slopes

On a remote British island, two groups of academics are in vicious competition. Formerly obscure, the island has become a place of some notoriety, and attracted tourism due to some remarkable archaeological discoveries.

As events are seen through the eyes of a local shopkeeper, wonder, tragedy, and the petty frustrations of human nature mix.

This is far from the first story to be inspired by the legends that inform this one - but it may very well be the

best.

*** The Crawl

Screenplay format; a zombie scene. More straightforwardly genre-oriented than much of Miéville's writing, but as always, very well-written. More of a tone piece than a plot-oriented story though: if filmed, this would be an artsy short, not a Hollywood blockbuster.

**** Watching God

The title is inspired by 'Their Eyes Were Watching God' by Zora Neale Hurston - which I haven't read, so I don't know if the reference goes any further than Miéville being intrigued by the phrase.

This story has to do with an isolated community living on a remote peninsula. Their society is underpinned by their odd, almost cargo-cultish attitude toward the ships they see passing in the distance - ships which usually pass by, sometimes wreck on a sand bar, but never approach or interact with them. It's definitely metaphorical... but it also works at face value, as a weird, evocative and and, at times, shocking story.

**** The 9th Technique

Experienced in seeking arcane knowledge, a woman trades on the black market for an item infused with occult power. However the enigmatic thing that she acquires from a military source may be more than even she can handle.

Ominous, and thought-provoking.

*** The Rope is the World

When I was a kid, Arthur C. Clarke's 'The Fountains of Paradise' was one of my favorite books. I must've read it more than half a dozen times, checking it out from the library. The book has to do with the creation of a space elevator, and though I haven't read it, now, in over 30 years, I remember it dealing beautifully and sensitively with the conflicts between traditionalism and social and technological progress. It follows one scientist's 'impossible dream' to fulfillment, and although the ending is bittersweet, it is full of optimism: of the belief that innovation will truly make our world and our lives better, and that one brilliant person can, at the end, make a difference.

In this story, Miéville chuck's that optimism out and gives us a probably-more-realistic vision of what might happen, both technologically and socially, after a few hundred years, when decrepit space elevators become wastelands or no-mans-lands, isolated from Earth and possibly forming their own, new societies. It's a fascinating response, though I hesitate to call it a story - there's no plot at all here.

I still remember Clarke kindly.

***** The Buzzard's Egg

The best way to conquer a people may be to first 'conquer' their gods...

A lot about this story depends on the delivery: the way and manner in which this monologue reveals information - so I don't want to say too much about it. But it's an excellent, thoughtful and intense piece about religion, loyalty, and more.

***** Säcken

Wow. This is something I didn't expect from Miéville: a straight-up classic ghost story. Not so surprising, if he was going to do one: it's a truly disturbing, intensely horrific one.

Two women travel together to a rented lake house in Germany. (The incidental details of the trip are perfect, and tangibly brought me right back to Dresden and its environs.) One woman is studying elements of German history for her PhD; her girlfriend is tagging along for the sake of the trip. While they might have arrived together, they don't leave together...

Saying more would spoil it... but this is highly recommended. Loved it.

*** Syllabus

As the title suggests, this is a brief syllabus for a future academic class. We learn that this future has time travel, alien insects, and a fad for diseases. But, if I were taking this class, I'd want significantly more detail.

***** Dreaded Outcome

It's a therapist's job to pursue the very best outcome for their patients, right? No matter what it takes? This is an amazing send-up of the culture of psychotherapy. Loved it.

**** After the Festival

The grotesquerie that Miéville's Bas-Lag books were known for makes a bit of a reappearance here. In a near-future England, and strange but oddly modern-seeming festival is celebrated - one involving a celebrant running around with the head of a decapitated animal over his or her own head. But there are bizarre and not-fully-understood repercussions to this practice.

*** The Dusty Hat

It's well-known that Miéville is active in Socialist circles. This piece gives us a glimpse into the destructive infighting that minority-view political groups are regrettably prone to, as well as their tendency to collect the odd and eccentric. And then, it veers right (or, rather, Left) into the realm of science fiction.

**** Escapee

This is a screenplay for a trailer for an imaginary movie. Not the sort of thing I usually like: I find reading directions for dramatic presentations somewhat annoying, in general. However, this one, also succinct, was so incredibly vivid that I suspect that, years from now, I've going to vaguely remember having *seen* this, not read it.

Oh, and if this was a real movie, I would definitely go see it, and in the theater, too.

**** The Bastard Prompt

"What is a Standardized Patient?

A Standardized Patient is someone who has been trained to portray, in a consistent, standardized manner, a patient in a medical situation. Standardized Patients, or SPs, are used by the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine (UPSAM) and other institutions to teach and evaluate students. SPs learn a case based on a real patient other than themselves and are interviewed and / or examined by students as though they were that person in the doctor's office or clinic, giving the patient's history and simulating their physical signs such as pain or difficulty walking."

Yes this is a real thing, a real specialty - a career. In this story, the narrator's partner becomes a professional SP. A trained actress, she's remarkably good at her job. But then, there's a weird and uncanny twist... one that threatens to get her fired.

*** Rules

A brief piece juxtaposing the rules of an imaginary game with a musing on children playing at pretending to be airplanes. Thoughts on culture and time... but it didn't feel fully pulled together, for me.

*** Estate

Dreamlike and disturbing. Slightly reminiscent of the earlier story, 'After the Festival', in that it seems to posit ancient-seeming, but modern-edged rituals cropping up in a present or future England. Burning stags...

***** Keep

They say 'no man is an island' - but in the wake of a new epidemic, each man may be his own moated castle. Does patient Zero hold the key to a solution - or is civilisation doomed? Weird, original, and perfectly

Miévillian.

*** A Second Slice Manifesto

A brief idea piece. Taking a cross-section of a medical or scientific specimen can reveal previously-hidden details. What if the same principle could be applied to art?

**** Covehithe

Subtext: our maritime ecological disasters coming back to (literally) haunt us? Yes, that's there, but on the other hand, this is sort of... sweet, and positive, and an Industrial Naturalist's dream. And of course, it's also utterly bizarre.

**** The Junket

I might be a terrible person, but I want to see the movie described in this story. ;-)
A hip young Jewish filmmaker has just been killed. Who did it, and why, are the questions. Controversy has swirled around him and his work...
In a piece which makes the reader cringe and laugh in turns, there's actually a very thoughtful exploration of a number of real-world issues surrounding art, religion, culture, and more. Nicely done.

*** Four Final Orpheuses

Alternative motivations for why Orpheus might've looked back at Eurydice.

***** The Rabbet

A young couple and their baby, settling down into conventional family life, take in a roommate - an old college friend. The new tenant is still caught in his college ways, running around at all hours, doing urban exploration, and obsessively working on art projects that never seem to be finished (or very good). The mild conflict arising from the different places that these people are in life is expertly teased into escalating terror. Great horror story.

*** Listen The Birds

A screenplay for what would be a short and disturbing art film.

**** A Mount

In front of a porcelain carousel horse in a window, a young man weeps.
This image is the jumping-off point for a brief but rather profound musing on the peculiarity and nature of people's reactions to items and events; the unstated echoes of our artifacts.

***** The Design

Weird... originally published only 6 months earlier, this story functions perfectly as a prequel to Daryl Gregory's 'We are All Completely Fine' (and 'Harrison Squared'). If you liked either of those books, do yourself a favor and read this story, even if the confluence is utterly coincidental!
A medical student, doing required dissections of cadavers, discovers something very strange... and is obsessively drawn into a search for answers.

Many thanks to DelRey and NetGalley for the opportunity for me to read this collection from one of my favorite authors. As always, my opinions are solely my own.
