



Some of the Best from Tor.com: 2015

Ellen Datlow (Editor) , Claire Eddy (Editor) , Carl Engle-Laird (Editor) , David G. Hartwell (Editor) , Beth Meacham (Editor) , Patrick Nielsen Hayden (Editor) , Marco Palmieri (Editor) , Ann VanderMeer (Editor) , more... Nino Cipri , Seth Dickinson , Jeffrey Ford , Yoon Ha Lee , Maria Dahvana Headley , David Herter , Kameron Hurley , Noah Keller , David D. Levine , Michael Livingston , Usman T. Malik , Haralambi Markov , Daniel José Older , Malka Ann Older , Kim Stanley Robinson , Kelly Robson , Veronica Schanoes , Priya Sharma , Brian Staveley , Sabrina Vourvoulias , Ray Wood ...less

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A collection of some of the best original short fiction published on Tor.com in 2015.

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From Reader Review Some of the Best from Tor.com: 2015 for online ebook

Tomislav says

This anthology is simply an alphabetical-by-author packing together of individually released Tor.com stories into a single download. I found the story quality hit or miss, and with no unifying theme or progression to the anthology, but you can't beat the price – free! (I understand there is now a small cost for it on Amazon.com). I was also disappointed by the low ratio of actual science fiction to fantasy/horror writing. I have read the previous four annual anthologies, and that ratio seems to be on the decline. But there are a few pretty good stories in there, and even some award winners. Best stories, in my opinion, were “Elephants and Corpses”, “Damage”, and “Schrödinger's Gun.”

“The Shape of My Name”, by Nino Cipri. First person account of a young person learning from their mother that they are a time traveler capable of determining their own gender. I feel it is a fashionable topic but didn't really have much to say beyond that. Nominated for 2016 James Tiptree Award (for SF/F that explores and expands the roles of women and men) **

“Please Undo This Hurt”, by Seth Dickinson. Two men recovering from bad relationships learn how to make sense of their lives from each other. I chuckled at the commentary regarding social media, “I'm tired of my Twitter feed telling me the world's basically a car full of kindergartners crumpling up in a trash compactor”. Nice writing, but not really what I'm looking for in an anthology of speculative fiction. ***

“The Thyme Fiend”, by Jeffrey Ford. A boy has found a skeleton at the bottom of a well and the explanation leads to the unravelling of a time travelling mystery. An engaging novella with a sense of nostalgia reminding me at times of Ray Bradbury. Nominated for 2016 Shirley Jackson Award (for works of psychological horror and dark fantastic) *****

“Variations on an Apple”, by Yoon Ha Lee. The Illiad. Yawn. **

“Some Gods of El Paso”, by Maria Dahvana Headley. Lorna and Vix, a couple who both have psychic powers allowing them to heal other's emotions, get overloaded. ***

“Islands Off the Coast of Capitola, 1978”, by David Herter. A ghost story inspired by imagery from H.G. Wells' “The Island of Dr. Moreau”, and Gene Wolfe's “The Death of Doctor Island.” Second person writing is always somewhat awkward. ***

“Elephants and Corpses”, by Kameron Hurley. I did not expect to like this story involving reanimated dead bodies, but found myself deeply engaged in spite of my preconceptions. Nev's ability to leap into bodies is constrained according to consistent rules, and woven into a suspenseful plot. *****

“The Museum and the Music Box”, by Noah Keller. A retrospective return to the fascination of a museum. **

“Damage”, by David D. Levine. A sentient spaceship cobbled together from the remains of two others, remembers its pilot and mission, revealing the backstory of a rebel human asteroid. Nominated for 2016 Nebula Award. Nominated for 2016 Theodore Sturgeon Award. *****

“The End of Babel”, by Michael Livingston. Non-English languages have been brutally suppressed in the US, including Native American languages. A contemporary Native American connects with a nearly lost

native culture. ***

“The Pauper Prince and the Eucalyptus Jinn”, by Usman T. Malik. An American-born and assimilated Pakistani becomes obsessed to learn the truth behind a family legend. His journey back to Lahore could cost him his world view and his marriage. Kudos to Malik for making use of authentic folklore in a new setting. Winner of 2016 British Fantasy Award (for fantasy works published in the UK). Nominated for 2016 Nebula. ****

“The Language of Knives”, by Haralambi Markov. A gruesome short piece about baking a cake out of the remains of loved ones. No plot to speak of. Yuck. *

“Ginga”, by Daniel Jose Older. Carlos is a half-dead, living in the crime-ridden streets of New York. ***

“Tear Tracks”, by Malka Older. Two ambassadors to newly contacted aliens work against the clock to penetrate cultural barriers. ****

“Oral Argument”, by Kim Stanley Robinson. I am normally a big fan of KSR, but found this court hearing narrative about patent law regarding some speculative inventions to be pretty dull. I would much prefer some plot or drama involving the same devices. **

“Waters of Versailles”, by Kelly Robson. I get so bored with settings of the Court of Versailles and supernatural goings on. This is a big award winner, but I don’t get it. Winner of 2016 Aurora Award (for works published by Canadian writers). Nominated for 2016 Nebula Award. Nominated for 2016 World Fantasy Award. **

“Ballroom Blitz”, by Veronica Schanoes. A young punk and his brothers are supernaturally stuck in a club. One day a group of sisters arrives, with their own problems, but providing an opportunity for him to finally grow up. Strange, but interesting. ***

“Fabulous Beasts”, by Priya Sharma. Eliza is disfigured child raised by a working class single mother, an irresponsible aunt, and a street criminal uncle. The characters are exposed through her eyes in a fascinating way. Winner of 2016 British Fantasy Award (for fantasy works published in the UK). Nominated for 2016 Shirley Jackson Award (for works of psychological horror and dark fantastic). ****

“The Log Goblin”, by Brian Staveley. A man finds a goblin stealing his firewood, for a good reason. **

“The Ways of Walls and Words”, by Sabrina Vourvoulias. In Mexico, during the time of the inquisition, a Nahuatl cleaning girl befriends a prisoner girl, and uses her native religion to save her spirit. Probably I would identify with the main characters if I were also a young girl, but I am not. **

“Schrödinger’s Gun”, by Ray Wood. The concept is a brain implant that allows the owner to explore and select alternate realities. This concept is applied to a police investigator in a setting of Prohibition Chicago. The story works quite well, even if an unlikely technology for that era. *****

SM says

I'm a sucker for anthologies. A lot of authors and a lot of stories at a cheap price on Kindle. And I end up unimpressed. A few stories were great but others weren't. It is this up and down quality that leaves me with a mild impression of the volume as a whole.

Ricky Kimsey says

Some Of The Best Of 2015

This anthology is made up of stories that were published on the Tor books website in 2015. As always the stories are among the best best fantasy and science fiction published in the past year.

Julie says

Buddy read with Masanobu: originally started Apr 4, then floundered, then restarted Sep 28. Finally finished with but a mere week left of the year!

As often happens with anthologies, my gut feeling evens out to a flat 3 stars. I think this one is slightly weaker than last year's collection -- like, part of me is *still* thinking about Where the Trains Turn from last year, but the ones from 2015 haven't lingered in my mind quite so much.

I never rate the individual stories, but I think next year I'll start doing that so I can crunch some statistics about average star ratings etc. But check out my status updates if you want to see some bite-sized individual thoughts on each one!

Of 21 stories, these four were my personal favourites:

- Schrödinger's Gun (Ray Wood) *aside: can we talk about how great its accompanying artwork is, melding Schrödinger's box with an M.C. Escher-type style? yes?*
- Fabulous Beasts (Priya Sharma)
- Damage (David D. Levine)
- Elephants and Corpses (Kameron Hurley)

Also very good:

- Oral Argument (Kim Stanley Robinson)
 - Ballroom Blitz (Veronica Schanoes)
 - Waters of Versailles (Kelly Robson)
-

Rich Mulvey says

Can't really give this a fair rating; discovered that it leans towards horror, which is just not my thing.

Francesco says

Commento completo qui: <http://leggendoeuardando.blogspot.it...>

Renee Babcock says

A nice collection of shorter fiction published in 2015 at Tor.com. Their editors consistently buy some of the most creative in speculative fiction. I liked the volume as a whole, but especially *Tear Tracks* (Malka Older), *The Shape of My Name* (Nino Cipri), *Please Undo This Hurt* (Seth Dickinson), *The Thyme Fiend* (Jeffrey Ford), *Elephants and Corpses* (Kameron Hurley) and *The Ways of Walls and Words* (Sabrina Vourvoulias), although in truth, there wasn't a bad story in this collection.

Pearse Anderson says

My favorite pieces:

Fabulous Beasts

Ballroom Blitz

Please Undo This Hurt

Some Gods of El Paso

The Thyme Fiend

The Shape of My Name

The enjoyable ones, although somewhat flawed:

The Pauper Prince and the Eucalyptus Jinn

Oral Argument

Islands Off the Coast of Capitola, 1978

The Museum and the Music Box

Damage

Elephants and Corpses

The Museum and the Music Box

Tear Tracks

The "why is this included," the "didn't finish these puppies," the "doesn't make me want to keep reading" ones:

Variations on an Apple

At the End of Babel

The Language of Knives

Ginga

Waters of Versailles

The Log Goblin

The Ways of Walls and Words

Schrodinger's Gun

Some notes:

I know all of these are acclaimed and powerful writers, I just didn't love all that they contributed. Some felt more like writing exercises that fell short of a story.

I really dislike that Tor decided to name the collection "Some of the Best from Tor.com." Are they afraid to say that other great stories weren't included? I don't think others would read this and say "oh, guess that's all of the talent in this publishing house" and head out the door they came in on. Creating Best of anthologies does not mean anthologists are undermining the credibility of others, or oppressing them. It's okay to label things as the best, we know that it's just one person's opinion—Some of the Best feels like everyone gets a trophy, and then no one wins.

Why is this collection structured alphabetically? Did that add anything to the writing? I skipped around on it,

and in the moment I hated myself for not sticking to the anthologist's plans, but now I realized those plans were . . . underdeveloped I guess? I would've loved to see something like *The Shape of My Name* tacked on the back of *Fabulous Beasts*, or a quick action bit like *Elephants and Corpses* jumping off the fast fable of *Log Goblin*.

For 613 pages I think I should've enjoyed more of this than I did. 5/10 I guess.

Margaret says

Tor.com publishes some great stories--they're consistently good. They're a bit heavy on the horror-fantasy, to me, but you can't go wrong keeping up with Tor's short fiction. I'll definitely nominate some of these for the Hugos.

"The Shape of My Name" Nino Cipri: A time-traveler usually knows the name of their children before giving birth, but that's an exception when the protagonist is born. While learning how to time-travel with her mother, the protagonist also learns that maybe she/he should claim her own name, and her own gender. 4/5

"Please Undo this Hurt" Seth Dickinson: 2 guys recovering from broken relationships try to make sense of their hurt, and how compassionate people can survive in this world. As a meditation on suicide, this is lovely. The speculative element is unneeded. 3.5/5

"Thyme Fiend" Jeffrey Ford: A child, haunted by nightmares that only thyme tea can quell, finds a skeleton, and the skeleton wants to show him something. Novelette. 4/5

"Variations on an Apple" Yoon Ha Lee: A retelling of the Iliad from Paris's pov, with a futuristic twist. 3/5

"Some Gods of El Paso" Maria Dahvana Headley: A couple, both healers that take away the emotions of others, are on the run in TX after taking a bit too much. 3.5/5

"Islands off the Coast of Capitola, 1978" David Herter: A 10-year-old boy lives with his mom by the sea. When his Uncle Wilson comes for a visit, the ghosts that had once haunted him return, and he takes refuge in his imaginings/hallucinations of comic book characters. Lovely writing and character development, but I definitely missed details since I haven't read the source material--*The Island of Doctor Moreau* and a short story by Gene Wolfe. Novelette. 4/5

"Elephants and Corpses" Kameron Hurley: Nev can leap into dead bodies and take them over, but when the dead body of his corpse-keeper Tera's sister turns up, soldiers follow. 3.5/5

"The Museum and the Music Box" Noah Keller: A remembrance of a past love while cataloging the death of a museum. 3.5/5

"Damage" David D. Levine: A fighter ship struggles with its memories of dying and a programmed love of its pilot, in a war it doesn't want to be in yet is forced into. Like the AI pov. 4/5

"At the End of Babel" Michael Livingston: The last woman of her tribe who can speak her Native language, Tabitha Hoarse Raven returns to New Mexico and her childhood home--a home that was destroyed by the lancers, who have also outlawed speaking multiple languages. I thought at the beginning this was going to be one of my few 5 star stories for 2015, but the ending was so epic it needed a novel to lead up to it. Did not fit within the confines of a short story. 4/5

“The Pauper Prince and the Eucalyptus Jinn” Usman T. Malik: A grandfather tells his grandson a story, about a princess who guarded a tree that held a jinn, and how the princess bequeathed the tree's secret to the grandfather. Decades later, when the grandson is now an adult, the grandfather dies leaving him his journals. The grandson becomes obsessed with knowing the truth, and travels to Lahore to trace his grandfather's legacy, and the secret he kept. A lovely novella overall. I was annoyed by how the women were treated--their main purpose in the narrative was to have babies and to provide the impetus of male return (for their love, of course). But there's not enough fiction using this mythology, and it was a great story overall. 4/5

“The Language of Knives” Haralambi Markov: A husband and father dies, and his spouse and daughter bake his body into bread to offer to the gods. 3/5

“Ginga” Daniel José Older: Carlos is a half-dead member of some kind of ghost police, and Kia is a smart high-schooler. When a street starts eating people, Carlos tries to figure out what's going on a stop it before anyone else dies. But this is a street Kia and her friends hang out on as well. Fun story, superior dialog. Will check out his novels. 4/5

“Tear Tracks” Malka Older: Flur is chosen as an ambassador to Earth's first alien contact on another planet. She has only a few hours to convince the aliens to sign a treaty with earth, but the lack of similar social cues throws her off. This is one of the very few 5 star stories I've read from last year. Lovely and subtle. 5/5

“Oral Argument” Kim Stanley Robinson: A transcript from a future Supreme Court trial over the patent of a new 'technology.' Worked more like it should be in a political magazine as a satirical cartoon than as a short story. 2.5/5

“Waters of Versailles” Kelly Robson: Novella. Sylvain decides to use a nixie to bring plumbing to the court of Versailles in the early 18th century. But the French court is notoriously hard to please. 4/5

“Ballroom Blitz” Veronica Schanoes: A retelling of the 12 dancing sisters except the main characters are 12 dancing brothers, and they've been cursed to stay in the same bar forever unless the same 12 girls dance with them for 101 nights. Novelette. 4.5/5

“Fabulous Beasts” Priya Sharma: Novelette. When her uncle is released from prison, Eliza/Lola must face the beast she's been hiding. A story of abuse and finding identity outside of victimization. 4/5

“The Log Goblin” Brian Staveley: A man cuts down an old tree on his property into firewood, and a goblin steals the wood. Great flash fiction. 4.5/5

“The Ways of Walls and Words” Sabrina Vourvoulias: Nahua Bienvenida sweeps for the Dominican Brothers, and finds in their dungeon Anica. Anica's entire family has been imprisoned by the Inquisition for adherence to their faith (which I believe is Jewish, but it's never spelled out). They've been locked away for years, and occasionally tortured. Through a small hole in the floor, they form a friendship, but can Bienvenida's mother's magic help Anica? 4.5/5

“Schrödinger’s Gun” Ray Wood: A detective has a crime to solve, but Detective O'Harren has help, an implant that shows the outcome of scenarios in multiple dimensions. This explained Schrodinger's Cat much better than any previous explanations I've read! And it's a fun noir story. 4/5

Brandon Sparks says

This was pretty good overall, but I didn't enjoy it quite as much as Tor.com's collection from last year. There were some really jarring tonal and subject shifts between stories, which due to the organization of the book (alphabetically by author) is unavoidable, but it still kept it from really flowing well for me. There were several highlights, however; my favorite segments were "The Pauper Prince and the Eucalyptus Jinn" by Usman T. Malik; "Ballroom Blitz" by Veronica Schanoes; "Damage" by David D. Levine; "Please Undo this Hurt" by Seth Dickinson; "Islands off the Coast of Capitola, 1978" by David Herter; "Oral Argument" by Kim Stanley Robinson; and "Tear Tracks" by Malka Older.

Sanasai says

Dnf, too many horrible people doing horrible things.

Francesca says

3.5/5

Udayan Chakrabarti says

A great collection of short fiction apart from one or two duds.

Masanobu says

Buddy read with Julie. First started on April, went on hiatus, then re-started on September.

Gut rating, i.e. the rating I feel it should get: 3.5 stars, which I'm rounding up to 4
Average rating for the stories: 3.4 stars

My second Tor.com anthology. This one felt more uneven than last year's, so I think 3.5 stars describes my experience very well. There were stories I loved and stories that didn't work for me, as with any other anthology. This year, however, my TBR didn't explode. Even with stories I liked, I didn't feel the need to read more by the same author except for a few exceptions. It could be that I'm reading differently, but I got the feeling that the stories were weaker overall. Still, the selection is high quality.

My top three:

- Fabulous Beasts (Priya Sharma): this one was my absolute favourite. I hope Priya Sharma plans on publishing a novel or a collection of her stories, because I fell head over heels with her style.
- Oral Argument (Kim Stanley Robinson)
- Schrödinger's Gun: (Ray Wood)

Stories that I enjoyed and packed a big emotional punch:

- The Shape of My Name (Nino Cipri)
- Damage (David D. Levine)
- The Language of Knives (Haralambi Markov)

- The Ways of Walls and Words (Sabrina Vourvoulis)

Other stories that were very good:

- Elephants and Corpses (Kameron Hurley)
 - The Pauper Prince and the Eucalyptus Jinn (Usman T. Malik)
 - Ballroom Blitz (Veronica Schanoes)
-