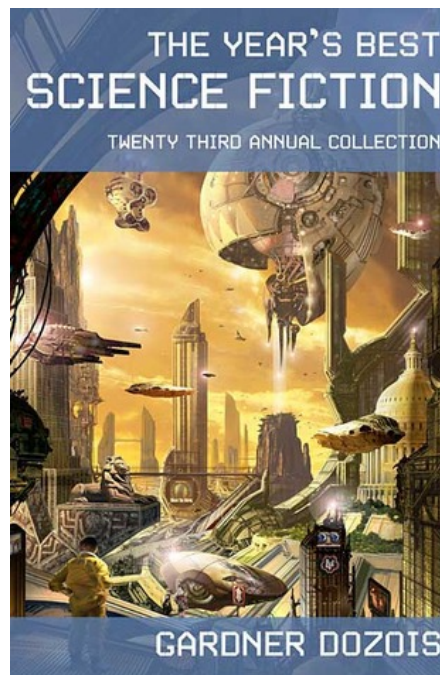




## The Year's Best Science Fiction: Twenty-Third Annual Collection

*Gardner Dozois (Editor) , Harry Turtledove , Hannu Rajaniemi , Jay Lake , James Patrick Kelly , Bruce Sterling , Michael Swanwick , Steven Popkes , more... William Sanders , Neal Asher , Robert Reed , Ken MacLeod , Mary Rosenblum , Dominic Green , Chris Beckett , David Gerrold , Chris Roberson , Ian McDonald , Gwyneth Jones , Liz Williams , Peter Watts , Stephen Baxter , Paolo Bacigalupi , Alastair Reynolds , Vonda N. McIntyre , Daryl Gregory , Elizabeth Bear , Joe Haldeman , Gene Wolfe , David Moles , Deryl Murphy , Ruth Nestvold ...less*

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THE TWENTY-NINE STORIES in this collection imaginatively take us far across the universe, into the very core of our beings, to the realm of the gods, and the moment just after now. Included here are the works of masters of the form and of bright new talents, including: Neal Asher, Paolo Bacigalupi, Stephen Baxter, Elizabeth Bear, Chris Beckett, David Gerrold, Dominic Green, Daryl Gregory, Joe Haldeman, Gwyneth Jones, James Patrick Kelly, Jay Lake and Ruth Nestvold, Ken MacLeod, Ian McDonald, Vonda N. McIntyre, David Moles, Steven Popkes, Hannu Rajaniemi, Alastair Reynolds, Robert Reed, Chris Roberson, Mary Rosenblum, William Sanders, Bruce Sterling, Michael Swanwick, Harry Turtledove, Peter Watts and Deryl Murphy, Liz Williams, and Gene Wolfe.

Supplementing the stories are the editor's insightful summation of the year's events and list of honorable mentions, making this book both a valuable resource and the single best place in the universe to find stories that stir the imagination, and the heart.

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## From Reader Review The Year's Best Science Fiction: Twenty-Third Annual Collection for online ebook

### Samantha Holloway says

I've read several of Gardner Dozois's anthologies, and this one just feels... pessimistic and sometimes flat? The stories are all strong, and overall, I like the book, but I don't always think they have anywhere to go. Maybe the year wasn't all that great for SciFi.

---

### John Devlin says

If you read one sci-fi book a year, this is the one. Always stories of high caliber with a few tossed in that will keep you thinking weeks later, not to mention the collection is a primer for what science and technology everyone will be talking about five to ten years from now.

---

### Julio says

Las antologías anuales de historias cortas de Ciencia Ficción preparadas por Gardner Dozois son la mejor adquisición individual de un libro de Ciencia Ficción que se pueda hacer. Y eso vale para un reiterado e insistente lector de CF (como es mi caso) o para un lector eventual o primerizo que quiere una deliciosa selección de historias espectaculares. Centenas de páginas sabrosas a un precio de lo más razonable! Además de un montón de información útil sobre el género y sus autores.

---

### James says

A good solid healthy chunk of shortform sci-fi. Maybe nothing utterly mindblowing, but even the worst aren't dreadful, although a small number are easily missable. The collection ends well, with James Patrick Kelly's engaging Burn. Nice moments too from Stephen Baxter, Alastair Reynolds, Harry Turtledove and David Gerrold. I don't read a lot of short fiction, so it's nice to try a new form, and with any anthology, if you don't enjoy one story, there'll be another along shortly.

---

### Jeff says

An excellent anthology series that does publish awesome short stories. Tons of cool stuff in here.

Ok I finished this, so I'm going to add a little more to it. Since there are a pile of stories here i'm just going to make comments on the ones I remember and liked, my apologies to the early stories in the book as I read them over a year ago.

The Calorie Man- Paolo Bacigalupi: This story was awesome, it takes place in the future where there are no fossil fuels, but genetic engineering is well advanced. So everything is powered by food energy. Machines

are powered by giant springs that are wound by huge genetically engineered animals. Or their computers are powered by pedlebikes. I liked it a lot.

Tricerotops Summer- Micheal Swanwick: One of my favorite stories in the book. No lazars or aliens, Just a normal guy faced with crazy information. And dinosaurs in his back yard.

Picadilly Circus- Chris Beckett: Another great story. Most of humanity has converted over to something like 'the matrix' but the most convenient way to build the artificial world was to overlay it on the real world. Most people are virtual, but some remain in meat bodies, and the two can interact. There are very few meat people left and they are old and dying. Incredibly sad.

Zima Blue -Alastair Reynolds: This story involved an artist who retires. His most famous works are the size of planets.

I would say that these are some of my favorite stories from the book but I know i'm missing some. For example the one about the time traveling private investigator, that starts as a noir and ends up in a completely different place. Or the one about the girl recovering from a drug that cut her off from all of her person memories and emotional attachements. Or the weird space opera thing with all lesbians in living spaceships that carry men around as parasites that live in their bodies.

One of the things that I like about this compilation is that the hobbit that edits it has a wonderful eye for stories that turn expectations on their heads, or introduce cool new ideas, but also most of them have a strong emotional or philosophical component as well.

As someone who doesn't read a lot, but likes exposure to cool ideas, I think the short story is my favorite form of Lit. And if they are bad, they only last about 30 pages or so.

---

## Anthony says

This is an anthology, and an old faithful one at that. I have read volumes of this anthology for years and always marvel that Gardner Dozois seems to find so, many incredible stories to include in these things every year.

We open with Ian McDonald's The Little Goddess: what a brilliant start to this collection! In this we travel to a future India, that probably isn't that far away, filled with incredible technology, and ancient traditions, to meet a girl who become a God as a child and finds herself a mere mortal as she enters adulthood. What does this mean is what drives this tale, as we follow this compelling character from her confusion and sadness to a destiny where she may in fact be a real Goddess.

The Calorie Man, by Paolo Bacigalupe is a story that seems almost painfully like a prediction of a future too close for comfort. Economics, biology, and climate science find us in a world of extreme haves and have nots, and ultimately a possibility for a better way of life discovered by someone buried under cynical pragmatism.

Alastair Reynolds' Beyond the Aquila Rift is his signature SF space opera type story, with a large backdrop, but a human focus. What we learn is that the idea of going where no one has ever gone may mean finding things you never thought you would find.

Second person, Present Tense, by Daryl Gregory is such a moving and uncomfortable story that it can seem painful at times. Memory and identity are subjects that are right in the wheelhouse of great SF. Meeting Therese, who is now Terry, takes us with her on a journey to become...herself.

The Canadian Who Came Almost All the Way Back From the Stars. This is the longest title I think, and it is also an amazing tale written by Jay Lake and Ruth Nestvold. The title certainly says all you need to know

about what this story is about, but that is also so much less than what is going on here. I could also say it is the story of a man falling in love with a married women, and not tell you anything about it.

Michael Swanwick is a great writer, and his story, Triceratops Summer is a soft spoken, but gently sad tale that is ultimately a story of love and hope. This is great storytelling.

Robert Reed is a special writer who has, if he never does anything else, created one of the great locations in SF, The Great Ship. I have read many of his Great Ship stories, and this one, Camouflage, is another addition to this universe. How do you solve a murder mystery on a spaceship bigger than Jupiter, with a crew and passengers numbering in the billions? We meet a man who will, and delve into a strange culture that spawned this horrible deed.

A Case of Consilience, by Ken Macleod. This tells a story that has a familiar trope: first contact with an alien race. But this story lets us know that there will be as many first contacts as races to meet. Some will be very much a surprise to us.

The Blemmye's Stratagem, is a story by master of SF Bruce Sterling. This is something a little different from what most of us think of as a Bruce Sterling story. He takes us into an alternate version of the world of the Crusades...or is it? The interesting thing about this story is that it could be a story set on an alternate earth at the time of the Crusades, but it could also just be a story that really happened and we...just...never...heard of it. A great story taking place in an intricate fashion, featuring an outlandishly odd set of aliens, and completely over the top human characters.

Amba, by William Sanders is set in a future that is bleak – and not the least bit impossible – in which the climate policies of the major countries of the world have come home to roost, and human viciousness is still growing. We come along with a retired – but still deadly mercenary – on a “simple and safe job” to help refugees over a border. Needless to say things are more than they seem, and there are many hungry beasts in the wild.

Search Engine, by Mary Rosenblum is a story about whether privacy matters, and what will you do to get it in a world that is becoming more and more scanned and linked and kept track of. We meet a future private eye who uses to its utmost, the power of the computer to always find his man. But there are some people that think they can fool the system.

Chris Beckett gives us the story, Piccadilly Circus. He takes us into a world that is becoming emptier and emptier, as more and more people choose to live in a more perfect world of illusion. But some will choose to face the world in its own form – to some degree – and one such is a talkative old lady named Clarissa Fall, someone that has a community of her “own kind” but wants to be part of the community that once was. Her encounter with the consensual world, as well as one of the simpler inhabitants of the new consensual world, becomes a desperate and poignant one.

In the Quake Zone, by David Gerrold is an extremely inventive take on the time travel story, as well as the alternate history story. Imagine a world where sudden random time traveling becomes a thing just after World War II. What do you think that would be like? Plus we get a time spanning detective story about the race to stop an apparent serial killer.

Liz Williams has written a story that is set in a far future Mars that is very bizarre indeed. La Malcontenta is a tale that has a feel of almost a nightmare.

The Children of Time, by Stephen Baxter has an intro that states that the story begins where you might think a story would end: The end of the world. This is true, to say the least. It begins one hundred thousand years after the end of human civilization, with the remnants of humanity eking out their survival in the ruins of the world. But it doesn't end there, we travel in fits and starts, into the unimaginably distant and still primitive future, where we will meet the very last, and soon to be extinct remnants of the human race. This is what sets this story apart from many others; that it shows humanity surviving apocalyptic catastrophe and not rising up once more, no matter how many eons pass. This is a sad and maudlin story, to say the least.

In Vonda N. McIntyre's tale, Little Faces, we travel probably almost as far into the future as Stephen Baxter in the previous story. But this is a future where humans have grown into a spacefaring race of incredible power and complex relationships. Our hero is a woman named Yalnis, and we meet her at the moment she loses one of her “companions” a word that doesn't encompass the relationships involved. These are the descendants of our human race, but as different from us as we from the gorilla.

The next story is by Gene Wolfe. Pause here and take a deep breath. This writer is of course one of the

greatest writers we have still living among us. His story here is Comber. What is this story about? Well it sure isn't possible to tell where or when this story is set. It almost feels like a work of magic realism, rather than SF, and it is almost too difficult to describe what the story line is, but it is tense, and odd, and strangely moving. This is another masterpiece; and that is no surprise.

Harry Turtledove has been known as one of the masters of the SF sub-genre of alternative history for years, and for good reason. Audubon in Atlantis, is another notch on his alt-history belt. With it even if you are someone who hasn't read one of his other works (small group that may be) you will see why he is the master. Here he has not only done all the requisite research on his historical subject, in this case, John Audubon, a man I am sure some modern people forget was a real honest to goodness person. As usual though, Turtledove is transplanting his historical figure into a situation he never lived through here – at least not in this universe. The earth this story takes place in is one in which Atlantis isn't just a lost dream spoken of by Plato, but is in fact a real landmass that exists, and never sank beneath the waves of the Atlantic ocean. We follow Audubon into the heart of Atlantis, a new land slowly becoming a place of growth and immigration as its once unspoiled forests are encroached on by the outside world, and many indigenous species face extinction. This is a sad and ultimately frightening story about the one creature that changes his environment wherever he goes, and not always for the better.

Deus Ex Homine, by Hannu Rajaniemi, takes us to a post Singularity future of men, AI's, gods, and men that once were gods. Those former gods are libel to leave behind successors we find, and we are going to need to speak to them, relate to them, and help them help us.

The Great Caruso is a funny story at times, and at others a moving story about change, clothed in the tale of a woman who hasn't spent much time doing for herself, only to find a new purpose thrust upon her by something completely outside her experience. The story by Steven Popkes, has a central conceit that is almost a joke: there are so many ways smoking might be bad for you, could there be something you would never see coming at you from smoking a cigarette? The tobacco industry, malfunctioning Nano-tech, and a love of music by a woman who could never hold a tune...at one time at least. This is also a story about aging, and moving on to let someone else live out their dreams, even if that someone isn't even remotely human.

Softly Spoke the Gabbleduck, by Neal Asher; this is the funniest sounding title in the collection perhaps, but it sure isn't a funny story, that's for sure. This is a tense and action packed adventure about some big game hunters on a distant and dangerous planet, looking for a dangerous and near mythical creature. Asher presents the characters: a man making his living taking the idle rich out into the wilds of this world; the others are a wealthy brother and sister hunting for excitement; and a young woman acting as their personal assistant. At some point in this story, the shit hits the fan, and a stupid mistake is made and someone may have to take the fall, and the rich clients aren't planning for it to be them.

Alastair Reynolds returns with another story in this volume: Zima Blue. Set in mankind's distant spacefaring future, we follow a pop culture reporter as he receives an invitation for an interview with the most famous, and mysterious human artist – and perhaps the most mysterious man – in the galaxy. The artist Zima, is known for his works that have grown in fame and influence as he goes through his, "Blue Period," creating works too large for any one canvas, or planet, to encompass. But he is going to be unveiling his final work. He will be retiring in a way that is not a way we can relate to...or is it? This is a great story, and is filled with both massive SF ideas, and a more focused inward looking grace as well. We are asking both, what is art, and what is life? And finding that maybe they have the same answers.

David Moles story, Planet of the Amazon Women, has an ironic title, this is certain. But it isn't an ironic story. He takes the old story cliché of a society in which only women live and takes it on its way toward a new region. In this story we travel with a man named Sasha who is trying to probe a mystery that may kill him. Why he seeks this out is a mystery we are also probing.

The Clockwork Atom Bomb, by Dominic Green, takes us to a not very distant future where we meet a guy that could have stepped out of The Hurt Locker. There is one difference though; these unexploded munitions are very strange, way scarier than plastic explosive, and could cause the end of the world. One part fast pace thrill ride, one part social commentary about letting the cat way out of the bag with our weapons tech, this story is fun in a frightening nightmare way.

Chris Roberson's tale, Gold Mountain, may take you a couple of minutes to grasp as what it is (an alternative

world story) but once you do, you aren't going to have any problem seeing how some alternate universes might be just a little different from ours. We will follow a young woman doing research on the history of the building of man's greatest engineering achievement, and the human cost associated with that same monument to man's genius. What we find out is that she is also trying to find the ground under her own feet, and her own heritage in a world that she still feels like a stranger in.

Gwyneth Jones' story, *The Fulcrum*, is set on a space station called the Panhandle far from earth. We move through the labyrinthine society of this place in the company of a couple hoping to jump out of this treadmill lifestyle and find somewhere else to go.

*Mayfly*, by Peter Watts and Derryl Murphy, tells the sad story of a child who finds herself caught in between two worlds, and her parents, both her biological parents and another who also feels that he is better suited to choose this child's life for her. It is also proof that you cannot change someone – anyone's – perspective and view of their world, and expect them to fit back into a much, much smaller box.

*Two Dreams On Trains*, is a neat and subtle tale by Elizabeth Bear. We find ourselves in a future that may happen, on a slowly drowning and depleted world of haves and have-nots. We visit the lives of two of these have-nots, a mother and son. The mother dreams (reasonably) for her son to somehow make a small place in the world and survive in its dying streets. The son, however, we will see, knows this isn't probably going to happen, and hopes to make his mark, even a small mark, on a bigger canvas.

*Angel of Light*, by Joe Haldeman, isn't his greatest work. But let's be honest, considering his body of work, it most assuredly wouldn't be. What this is, is a small wry story about the difference between what one "person" thinking being important, while someone else may not. It also looks back at the innocent, naïve, and hopeful days of the golden days of SF.

The anthology closes out with a powerful and penetrating novella by, James Patrick Kelly. Its title is *Burn*, and deals with luck and loss and grief and guilt. But it also is a creation of a very interesting future in which humans are allowed to do what they want on their own worlds, but that doesn't mean there aren't eyes on them. Our setting is *Walden*, a planet that has been annexed by a group of humans with a back to nature simple life theory of society based on Thoreau. But you can never call it back to nature, when you need to create the simple life you are going back to, using technology you hate.

This is the usual great anthology in the series, and you will enjoy it.

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## Brice says

This anthology didn't have any "must-read" stories and a few downers, so it only gets 2 stars. My rankings may be lower than normal since I'm not feeling well. The format for the story reviews is story / author / review / rating (number of stars).

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*The Little Goddess*, by Ian McDonald. Loses some points for a few paragraphs about the aborted start of an Indian wedding night. I liked the ending. 2.5\*

*The Calorie Man*, by Paolo Bacigalupi. A rant against intellectual property laws. A future controlled by energy costs. Had some issues with the science. The molecular kinetic springs as energy storage were clever, but having large animals wind the springs is silly (too many steps between the plants and the energy). 2.5\*

*Beyond the Aquila Rift*, by Alastair Reynolds. I had read this before, but didn't understand the ending until this time. 2.5\*

Second Person, Present Tense, by Daryl Gregory. How do you connect with people if certain portions of your brain are destroyed by drugs? This story tries to find out. 3\*

The Canadian Who Came. Interesting instantaneous travel story. But the ending? Meh. 3\*

Triceratops Summer, by Michael Swanick. Short and light. Revolves around the claim that spin-off universes are temporary with no good argument why. 3\*

Camouflage, by Robert Reed. Enjoyed the read overall. Loses a few points for some short, odd bits about a religion requiring specific male anatomy. 3\*

A Case of Consilience, by Ken MacLeod. I had read this before, but didn't understand the ending. Interesting premise, but I don't think you can extract all of a person's ideas / thoughts from a deceased brain. 2.5\*

The Blemmye's Strategem, by Bruce Sterling. After reading this, I imagine that it was created after the author read an old manuscript fragment translation about demons during the dark ages and wanted to bring them to life. 2.5\*

Amba, by William Sanders. Global warming turns Siberia into prime real estate. Demographic pressure storyline wasn't convincing. India would be much worse off than China, which has already reversed its growth. Minus points for language. 2.5\*

Search Engine, by Mary Rosenblum. Privacy rant. Final redemption for the man who abandons his post as agent of "the man" to join the outskirt "we'll stay outside the system rebels" 2.5\*

Piccadilly Circus, by Chris Beckett. When most of humanity is virtual, the few remaining humans get pretty depressing. 2\*

In the Quake Zone, by David Gerrold. The author says it's ok to end up gay if you're a time-traveling private eye who tries to fix the past. Assumes that temporal gateways are limited and that they are not well known (latter is not believable). 1\*

La Malcontenta, by Liz Williams. Moral of the story? Adventure is bad, stay within the lines, etc. 1\*

The Children of Time, by Stephen Baxter. Humans manage to survive hundreds of millions of years after using up all the Earth's easy-to-find natural resources. They fall into a subsistence society. Perhaps the author only knows boring people? 2\*

Little Faces, by Vonda N. McIntyre. Odd space society made up only of women and their bonded ships. Full of betrayal and loneliness. 1\*

Comber, by Gene Wolfe. What if we all lived on floating masses that took hundreds of years to reach the top of immense waves? Disliked the ending. 2\*

Audubon in Atlantis, by Harry Turtledove. Naturalist Audobon looks for supposedly extinct species in Atlantis. Nothing special. 2.5\*

Deus Ex Homine, by Hannu Rajaniemi. Post-humans are fought and destroyed by elite corps. Life after unlimited power is hard. 3\*

The Great Caruso, by Steven Popkes. Nanites in the cigarettes give a woman singing ability. Not much of an ending though. 3\*

Softly Spoke the Gabbleduck, by Neal Asher. Things get tense as hunters attack prey they're not supposed to. The Gabbleduck features, but without much development of such a fine species. 3\*

Zima Blue, by Alistair Reynolds. Well written piece about art and AI. 3.5\*

Planet of the Amazon Women, by David Moles. A man travels to an all-woman planet to see if his rationality-field machine can protect him from the man-killing plague. It does for a while. In this story, events on one side of the line follow rules from one universe, while events on the other follow rules from a different universe. Once he crosses the line, his machine behaves according to the new rules, so it fails to protect him. Thus, he becomes a she in a world where there are no males by the rules of the universe. 2.5\*

The Clockwork Atom Bomb, by Dominic Green. Using black holes as power sources, garbage dumps, and weapons. I liked this one. 4\*

Gold Mountain, by Chris Roberson. In our world, Chinese immigrants came and worked on the American railroads for miserable pay and lived in little enclaves. In this story, the roles are reversed. Meant to be tragic, but I never empathized enough for the characters to feel it. 2.5\*

The Fulcrum, by Gwyneth Jones. Crazy deep-spacers try to break into a facility to get rich. A lot of craft weighs this story down quite a bit. 2\*

Mayfly, by Peter Watts and Derryl Murphy. Very painful story about a girl who grows up virtually in a supercomputer, but is occasionally stuffed back into her 4-year-old body where she continually has extremely violent fits. A horrible view of misery. 1\*

Two Dreams on Trains, By Elizabeth Bear. Boy discards all his mother's hard work for him so he can pursue the art he loves. Mom is miserable, boy is happy. 2.5\*

Angel of Light, by Joe Haldeman. Man lives in a world dominated by Chrislam (a not-very believable fusion of Christianity and Islam). He eventually trades a comic book about aliens to an alien. 2.5\*

Burn, by James Patrick. Man sets up a world under voluntary tech and culture quarantine. The locals oppose the world's reforestation by the newcomers and fight back with forest fires, which the newcomers must fight to protect themselves. Ending provides a bit of room for interpretation on how the main character will deal with things. 3\*

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## Greg says

This is a review reconstructed from mainly brief diary entries made on each of the stories as I read them in 2006-7. While I still recall some of the stories, I have forgotten others in the seven-eight years since reading this book. For this reason, it's regrettable that I did not record anything about nine of the stories in this anthology, although I did read them. Seven more (listed at the end) I merely noted as having read but the lack of commentary does not mean that I disliked them. This review, therefore, only provides commentary on 14 of the 30 stories in this anthology, but it does at least offer better coverage than my review of Dozois' *The Mammoth Book of Best New SF 16*, which comments on only eight stories.

In the anthology's second story, Paolo Bacigalupi wrote an enjoyable cautionary tale about the consequences of commercial bio-engineering in 'The calorie men'.

Robert Reed's story, 'Camouflage', was also enjoyable, if slightly contrived, and combined elements of traditional science fiction with cyberpunk and a mystery.

'Amba', by William Sanders, was interesting as it was set in a near-future Siberia where, due to global warming, wildlife numbers had increased as the cold weather there declined. The story centres on a small company (four personnel) that takes wealthy customers into the wilderness to photograph wildlife but this time it takes on a Mafia transportation job that goes awry. (view spoiler) A good story, if an unsettling ending!

Another good story is Mary Rosenbaum's 'Search engine', which is about privacy intrusion in the future. Given the revelations, in 2013, about the US National Security Agency's global internet and telephone spying activities, perhaps this story is worth revisiting! Some typographical errors in the text were noticed.

I found 'In the Quake Zone', David Gerrold's homoerotic short story/novella, to be socially and historically interesting but, regrettably, didn't expand on this description.

The story immediately following Gerrold's, Liz Williams' 'La malcontenta', is one of forbidden love in a genetically altered and matriarchal Martian colony. I commented at the time that this was a familiar theme in terms of a matriarchal society on Mars, but I didn't expand on this point – I think I'd read a story with this theme in another anthology, or perhaps a magazine, sometime beforehand.

Stephen Baxter's 'The children of time' offers snapshots of humanity surviving a glaciation and, millions of years later, a cometary impact. This is followed by (view spoiler) In the process, the ruins of a Chicago suburb and the traces of a *future* stone age are discovered at different points in this projected history of humanity. It's interesting to see environmental determinism, which is commonly used by archaeologists to explain human behavioural changes in the past, being applied to some possible future changes.

'Little faces', by Vonda N. McIntyre, deals with a future humanity dominated by women who carry vestigial males in their bodies – almost as pets – but mate with them to produce offspring. The spaceships these women travel in are also organic life-forms in their own right and produce their own offspring, which then carry the daughters of the women living in the... um... mother ships. Humans now live for aeons, the protagonist going to 'sleep' for 1,000 years while her ship grows its baby ship.

Gene Wolfe's 'Comber' seems to be about a future time when American and French tectonic plates are crashing against each other - clearly a metaphor about the state of Franco-American relations in the mid-noughties! I thought the story was short and rather silly, and expected better from Wolfe.

Harry Turteldove's 'Audubon in Atlantis' is an alternate history tale about John Audubon, the Franco-American naturalist, travelling with a friend to Atlantis on a steamer from Louisiana to paint/draw specimens of moa-like flightless birds called honkers, which are approaching extinction in the wake of the island's human colonisation. Although well-written, the story has no twist or shock ending.

Continuing the naturalist theme, I enjoyed Neal Asher's 'Softly spoke the gabbleduck', which is about an incestuous brother and sister who charter a blimp pilot to take them across part of a planet in search of an enormous and quasi-legendary creature – the gabbleduck – but end up shooting and killing vaguely primate-like sentient animals that are legally protected. (view spoiler)

Alastair Reynolds' 'Zima Blue' is partly about the artificial enhancement of memory and whether or not it should mimic the fallibility of unaugmented human memory or record everything exactly as it happened, with no selectivity. But it's also about how a cyborg artist discovers what inspires his obsessive use of an abstract theme in his art. (view spoiler)

The harnessing of small black holes as weapon components features in 'The clockwork atom bomb' by Dominic Green. These black holes were used to launch missiles over sub-orbital distances during a war in Africa. The war now over, thirty-nine of these black holes remain to be disposed of safely (the future equivalent of minefields, unexploded cluster bombs and scattered depleted uranium rounds?) but they are already being re-used by people to dispose of waste and to generate electricity.

The last of the stories that I commented on in my diary is Elizabeth Bear's 'Two dreams on trains', which is rather short, but it deals with a woman who is being scarified/tattooed on her head to mark her fifth year of education in a flooded New Orleans and her son, who etches graffiti onto the hull of a spaceship while it is docked in the same city. There are some interesting ideas, but it's not much of a story.

The stories I recorded as reading but otherwise didn't comment upon include: Ian McDonald's 'The little goddess', Alastair Reynolds' 'Beyond the Aquila Rift', Jay Lake and Ruth Nestvold's 'The Canadian who came almost all the way back from the stars', Michael Swanwick's 'Triceratops summer', Steven Popkes' 'The Great Caruso', Chris Roberson's 'Gold Mountain' and Gwyneth Jones's 'The fulcrum'.

I also browsed through Gardner Dozois' thirty-six-page introductory essay, 'Summation: 2005', which provides an overview of the main science-fiction events in the English language for that year. Although not something to be read in one sitting, it is (as with other years) full of interesting facts on the science-fiction aspects of the publishing and movie industries.

The cover illustration by British fantasy/horror/science-fiction artist Joe Roberts is a colourful depiction of a futuristic battle scene in which troops appear to be defending a building or some large craft against other, smaller, craft. Roberts has illustrated a few other covers in Dozois' *Best New SF* series.

Overall, I liked this anthology – I'm just sorry that I didn't keep a complete record of my thoughts for all of the stories concerned.

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## Ed says

This was a solid, if unspectacular collection. Good stories from Paolo Bacigalupi, Ian McDonald (who normally I can't get on with), Alastair Reynolds (ditto), Michael Swanwick, James Patrick Kelly, Elizabeth Bear, and David Gerrold (the guy who wrote 'The Trouble with Tribbles'! Yes!). Elsewhere though things are pretty run-of-the-mill and forgettable - in particular was not a fan of Robert Reed's 'Camouflage', which tries to go for that noir-style non-sequitur plot, but was just impossible to follow; the execrable 'Little Faces' by Vonda McIntyre, which I found wholly baffling (weird space orgies ahoy!); and William Sanders' 'Amba', which had a very unpleasant conclusion that made me wonder what exactly he was trying to say. Some of the stories from the bigger "names" I also found to be a little bit of a letdown, particularly Stephen Baxter, Bruce Sterling, Gene Wolfe and Joe Haldeman - I couldn't really see why they were included except for the obvious commercial considerations, unless 2005 was a particular weak year (I don't follow the short story scene enough to remember if it was or not).

Favourite 5:

Dominic Green 'The Clockwork Atom Bomb'  
James Patrick Kelly 'Burn' <-- this was actually chapbook length.  
Elizabeth Bear 'Two Dreams on Trains'  
Michael Swanwick 'Triceratops Summer'

Steve Popkes 'The Great Caruso'

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### Gordon Robinson says

It took me a year to read this book. I just ground to a halt. Other things going on in my life I guess but the small type, density of the text and hugeness of the volume did not inspire me to dip in for a quick read and thus it sat collecting dust on my bed side.

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### Nicholas Whyte says

<http://nhw.livejournal.com/724852.html>[return][return]This is always the best value for money of the various best-sf-of-the-year collections, if also the most intimidating (I don't seem to have finished last year's). Plenty of stories that I had already read and enjoyed, and several that were new to me - note especially "The Canadian Who Came Almost All the Way Back from the Stars" by Jay Lake and Ruth Nestvold, "The Blemmye's Stratagem" by Bruce Sterling, "Audubon in Atlantis" by Harry Turtledove, "Softly Spoke the Gabbleduck" by Neal Asher, "Planet of the Amazon Women" by David Moles and "Gold Mountain" by Chris Roberson.

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### Princessjay says

1. Beyond the Aquila Shift - Alastair Reynolds. A rendition of a lost-in-space story, told a la *MEMENTO*. Interesting, but ending very predictable by the half-way point. I also question the authenticity of the main character's reaction -- surely a space-travelling human should be more resilient than that? 2.5 STARS.
2. Second Person, Present Time - Daryl Gregory. Exploration of what happens when one's personality destructs, to be replaced by a naturally-occurring other, and whether and how to reform old relationships. 3 STARS.
3. The Canadian Who Came Almost all the Way Back from the Stars - Jay Lake & Ruth Nestvold. A very straightforward story of a woman waiting for her husband from his trip to Barnard's Star. The only item of interest is her Canadian-ness -- us Canucks so rarely appear in fiction, we must celebrate each occasion when we do. 2 STARS.
4. Tricerotops Summer - Michael Swanwick. What happens when something goes wrong and a herd of tricerotops were let loose into the world? A simple, whimsical and lyrical tale. 4 STARS.
5. Camouflage - Robert Reed. Read this in another anthology. A detective story set upon the Great Ship, with some interesting twist and turns. Throw-away clichéd ending, though. 3 STARS.
6. A Case of Consilience - Ken MacLeod. A Christian seeks to convert an utterly alien species, who had their own means of communication. Interesting germ of an idea, but un-involving. 2 STARS.
7. The Blemmye's Stratagem - Bruce Sterling. Re-imaging of the crusades and their semi-mystical players -- the Old Man of the Mountain, the Leper King -- as background characters to an alien Romeo & lethal Juliet.

The tone is strongly that of T. H. White. Started off promising, but dragged on to the end. 2.5 STARS.

8. Amba - William Sanders. Global warming makes havoc of the entire world except Russia, turning it into the land of desperate opportunities, filled with corrupt and lawless men. 3 STARS.

9. Search Engine - Mary Rosenblum. What happens if every details of our lives can be discovered by tracking the things we buy and the paths we travel, and *everything* is trackable? This story reminds me of a futuristic *Bladerunner*. A believable projection of what already is. 4 STARS.

10. Piccadilly Circus - Chris Beckett. What happens if *THE MATRIX* were put into effect, but you were among those who refused to become a part of it? Age and sadness in a slowly-decaying London. 4 STARS.

11. In the Quake Zone - David Gerrold. An intense noir-ish time travelling story for 3/4 quarters, until it banged a 90-degree u-ie into a smug happy tone, where becoming a whore offering genuine love via pills is the ultimate good deed. I hate to harp on gender, but could not help but feel only a male author could sell the benefits of love as a collection of intense experiences that bonds people, therefore should be deliberately cultivated by brain chemicals for its ability to save others from suicide and despair. Interesting idea, but I really loathe the execution. 2 STARS.

12. La Malcontenta - Liz Williams. Set in women's country, and turns patriarchy upon its head --> that the "matriarchy" can be just as constricting and suppressing of a woman's yearning and search for freedom -- all in the trappings of a baroque fairytale. 4 STARS.

13. The Children of Time - Stephen Baxter. Man survives unchanged in post-disaster world for hundreds of millions of years. I see what he's doing, but it is done repetitively and pointlessly. I disagree with his ultimate point. 1 STAR.

14. Little Faces - Vonda N. McIntyre. Space fairy tale, female-only universe. Males reduced to tiny mindless creatures that attach to women's stomachs. Symbiotic relationship with hyper-intelligent space ships. Endless long lives. Lots of ideas here, but is there a point? 3 STARS.

15. Comber - Gene Wolfe. People live in giant plates floating upon the ocean, two plates on slow but sure collision course, and thus begins the coercive cover-up. 3 STARS.

16. Audubon in Atlantis - Harry Turtledove. Alternative history story: aging artist seeking to illustrate a near-extinct specimen in a still-wild, but fast-urbanizing, land. I was, unfortunately, bored out of my mind. 2 STARS.

17. Deux Ex Homine - Hannu Rajaniemi. AI plague that turns humans into gods, and how two people dealt with its aftermath. Inventive, poignant, deeply human, with a hopeful ending -- possibly the best story in this collection. 5 STARS.

18. The Great Caruso - Steven Popkes. Music, nano-mites, and an old woman deeply engaged with life. 4 STARS.

19. Softly Spoke the Gabbleduck - Neal Asher. Hunting trip gone wrong. A tense and suspenseful glimpse into a fascinating world. 4 STARS.

20. Zima Blue - Zlatos Reynolds. The significance of memory down the centuries, blurred lines between robot and humanity, and existential art. 3 STARS.

21. Planet of the Amazon Women - David Moles. A man travels into a planet carrying an casual anomaly

wherein no masculine genetic material had ever existed. 3 STARS.

22. The Clockwork Atom Bomb - Dominic Green. A day in the life of a man whose job it is to disable ultra-lethal weapons. 3 STARS.

23. Gold Mountain - Chris Roberson. Alternate history reversing the role of Chinese coolies who built the railroad with "Vinlanders" (Americans) who build a celestial tower for the Chinese Empire, while facing rejection and discrimination. An old Vinlander recounts his story. 4 STARS.

24. The Fulcrum - Gwyneth Jones. A deep space noir story, with weird characters and twists aplenty. 3 STARS.

25. Mayfly - Peter Watts & Derryl Murphy. A scientist as monster gets his hand on a baby. High drama ensues. 3 STARS.

26. Two Dreams on Trains - Elizabeth Bear. Another tale of parental sacrifice for an "ungrateful" child. 3 STARS.

27. Angel of Light - Joe Haldeman. Post-cultural collapse and re-constructed into "Chrislam" -- fundamentalist (of course) and anti anything that is not religious. A simple and sweet story nevertheless. 3 STARS.

28. Burn - James Patrick Kelly. Interesting. 3 STARS.

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## **Laurel says**

I read Triceratops Summer by Michael Swanwick.

If you want to imagine Triceratops in modern America, then this is your story. The main character comes across a herd of Triceratops wandering across the road he's on, and life gets fun from there. A largely amusing read, it considers what people will do when they know there's a wobble in the time continuum.

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## **Michael says**

So far so good.

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## **Roberts says**

Most of the stories in this edition were 'very good' to 'excellent'. The two I liked best were "Softly Spoke the Gabbleduck" by Neal Asher, about hunting a fabled beast on another planet; and "In the Quake Zone" by David Gerrold, a different kind of time travel story. Some others I thought were very good were "Beyond the Aquila Rift" by Alastair Reynolds, about a trip through ancient alien portals that went awry; "The Canadian who Almost Came all the Way Back from the Stars" by Jay Lake and Ruth Nestvold; "Amba" by William Sanders, featuring a world changed dramatically by global warming; and "The Future of Time" by Stephen Baxter, a look into the far, then farther, then really far-off future of humanity on Earth.

## James says

every single one of these collections is essential reading for true fans of science fiction short stories... each lengthy volume has a stellar array of all mini-genres and areas of powerfully influential science fiction: hard science, speculative, steampunk, alien invasions, apocalyptic/post-apocalyptic, space opera, fantasy, aliens, monsters, horror-ish, space travel, time travel, eco-science, evolutionary, pre-historic, parallel universes, extraterrestrials... in each successive volume in the series the tales have advanced and grown in imagination and detail with our ability to envision greater concepts and possibilities... Rod Serling said, "...fantasy is the impossible made probable. science fiction is the improbable made possible..." and in the pages of these books is the absolute best the vastness of science fiction writing has to offer... sit back, relax, and dream...

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## Mike says

dunno why i read this one, it seemed like a good idea to get a change of genre, but it only had 2 good stories, one ok story, and about 13 crappy ones. cmon people, just because your getting creative, doesnt mean you have to make your story dry and uninteresting....

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## Fred says

The first half of this book was great, then there tons of stories that were essentially painful space filler. I would have finished this a week ago if it would have kept the pace that they started with. The last story in the book was almost on par with the first half. It's worth reading but there were several hundred pages of blah so when you get bored don't feel bad about skipping some of them if you have to.

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## Jordan Dodson says

While I have read quite a bit of SF in the last five years, I have read almost no *short* SF...until now. Ultimately, I found this to be a very enjoyable collection. I take notes as I read (or listen, in this case), and looking back, it's hard to believe how many unique stories were crammed into this one anthology. Generally speaking, I started with the shorter stories and worked my way up to the novellas. Contrary to my expectations, I tended to enjoy the longer stories more. In hindsight, I'm not surprised, for I love world-building, and that takes a certain number of pages to accomplish.

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## Jim says

Another download from the library. Christopher Hurt is the narrator & he's pretty good. Not exciting, but not boring, either. He doesn't try for a lot of odd voices, but does vary enough to keep characters separated & the narrative flowing.

I'll skip to the overall review: I now remember why I cancelled my subscription to Asimov's magazine years

ago - Dozois took over as editor. I grew up reading the pulps and prefer fairly short stories, but most of these run long on words, short on insight & innovation, just like Dozois' own writing. Any impact most stories could have had was cushioned by far too much padding. There were a few gems, though. It's probably worth skimming down the listing below to find them.

The book starts with an amazingly long & boring introduction, acknowledgments, & summation of the publishing industry in 2005 by the pedantic Dozois. I skipped through a lot of it since the last since it was over 2 hours long, but it was interesting in places. He seems to be writing a text book, something for which I believe he is well suited. He does know the industry & it's players. He takes himself & his work far too seriously to entertain, though.

Each story is preceded by an introduction to the author, in extreme detail including a listing of their books - an almost complete listing, even for those who have dozens to their credit.

----- The Stories -----

**The Little Goddess** by Ian MacDonald was interesting, but several times longer than it should have been. (2 hours) Kind of a neat twist on what we regard as mental illness with a tie between the future & old worlds. Worth 4 stars if it had been shorter, but only a 3 since it was far too verbose.

**The Calorie Man** by Paolo Bacigalupi. I got 40 minutes or so in (about halfway) & we're still setting up the world through trivial actions. I was so bored that I skipped the rest.

**Beyond the Aquila Rift** by Alistair Reynolds: Wow! Very good & eerie. While it mixes some familiar tropes, it is unique. At 1.25 hours, it was well worth the time.

**Second Person, Present Tense** by Daryl Gregory was very cool. Earlier this year, I read *The Forgetting Pill*, which discusses removing painful memories. Couple that with teenage angst & drug abuse. It was about 50 minutes long & made its point well.

**The Canadian Who Came Almost All the Way Back From the Stars** by Jay Lake & Ruth Nestvold was pretty interesting. Again, pretty long (over 50min) but neat, fairly unique ideas.

**Triceratops Summer** by Michael Swanwick wasn't anything new or special. It's biggest saving grace was that it was one of the shorter stories at 30 minutes. Not bad, but it seemed an amalgamation of stories I've read before.

**Camouflage** by Robert Reed was fairly good. I've read other stories in this universe, the world ship, with its convoluted politics & myriad life forms. It's OK, but almost 2.5 hours - far too long, IMO.

**A Case of Consilience** by Ken MacLeod was 30 minutes long & I can't recall a thing about it after a week, even when listening to snippets.

**The Blemmye's Strategem** by Bruce Sterling was OK, although the alien love interest made no sense at all to me. The time & overall world were kind of interesting, though. It was 1h20m, pretty long for what it contained.

**Amba** by William Sanders was 1.25h long & pretty good. Another global warming thing, but interesting.

**Search Engine** by Mary Rosenblum was about 50 minutes long & quite good. The premise isn't new, but has a lot of impact today. She really handled the realities of a chipped & scanned world very well.

**Piccadilly Circus** by Chris Beckett is a fairly horrifying, inventive future, but was long (45m) & one of the 'surprises' really wasn't. Actually, none of it was after the initial setup. After the first few minutes, I just endured until the author finally got around to the obvious conclusion.

**In the Quake Zone** by David Gerrold was interesting in a lot of ways, but it was one of the longest stories (4h). I recently read several articles about Kurzweil's predictions & his defense of his record. While arguing about horoscopes seems pointless, his ideas on the acceleration of intellectual technology & the social changes it causes were a major theme of this story. Unfortunately, this story had too many themes. It should have been several different short stories in the same universe, each with its own theme. As it was, they watered each other down.

I'd give this 4 stars just for the world he's imagined. It's the best SF time issue story I've read in a long time & I've read a lot of them over a lot of years. **It would really be cool if he edited a book of short stories where other authors wrote stories in this universe.** I'm not saying it would be "Wild Cards", but it could come close.

**La Malcontenta** by Liz Williams was one of the shorter stories (20min) but seemed pretty pointless. Part was the setting. It was retro, but didn't really bring it home.

**The Children of Time** by Stephen Baxter gives us a glimpses into a dying earth through the eyes of 11 year olds in various future epochs. It was interesting. 3 stars.

**Little Faces** by Vonda M. McIntyre bored me to tears for 1.5 hours. It failed to work for any of the themes it tried to develop, at least so far as I could tell, but I zoned out fairly frequently. I'd think a theme was developing & then it would get undercut or dropped. Overall, I couldn't have cared less.

**Comber** by Gene Wolfe was one of the few short stories (20m), but the idea didn't really make any sense. (view spoiler) Not a huge deal, but as a vehicle for the point of the story, it felt pasted on. The point wasn't particularly new, interesting, or surprising either.

**Audubon in Atlantis** by Harry Turtledove has a neat environmental premise & main character, but it's over 2 hours long. The first third of it added nothing to the story besides some background that should have been part of the main story. Who cares that he got seasick? It added nothing, had nothing to do with the main theme, but a lot of words & time were spent on it. Ditto with the other guys sex life, the taxes, & the few days in the city. If the story had started in the small town bar, 75m in & filled in a bit of the background, I would have liked it a lot better.

**This story is exactly what I hate about Dozoi's editing. A decent editor would have removed the unnecessary padding, but he seems to thrive on it.**

**Deus Ex Homine** by Hannu Rajaniemi (35m) didn't really make it for me, but was an interesting premise.

**The Great Caruso** by Steven Popkes (42m) was well worth listening to. Popkes manages to question a lot of assumptions (view spoiler) & did so briefly, but thoroughly. It should be kept around & listened to every couple of decades because it will evoke something different in each of us depending on our age & circumstances.

**Softly Spoke the Gabbleduck** by Neal Asher (55m) was OK, but didn't really make any good point & I think it was trying, but the only one was too obvious from early on.

**Zima Blue** by Alastair Reynolds (50m) was interesting in several ways. Depressing? Not sure. I would have liked it better if I was into modern art, but I find it & the art described in the story plain silly. While that

detracted from the impact of the story for me, it was still raised some really interesting questions about man & what makes us men.

**Planet of the Amazon Women** by David Moles (1h5m) was a waste of time. Lots of high-toned math & philosophizing to an obvious end - not even proper mental masturbation.

**The Clockwork Atom Bomb** by Dominic Green (45m) was pretty good. It is a scary thought & not just what the author wrote about. It is the nightmare we've been living with. If you haven't been, you will after reading this.

**Gold Mountain** by Chris Roberson (45m) was OK, but the girl was too dense - maybe just young. The end seemed redundant.

**The Fulcrum** by Gwyneth Jones (1.25h) bleh. There were good points, but too much never made any sense.

**Mayfly** by Peter Watts & Derryl Murphy (35m) was pretty good. It had a lot of interesting points & a good ending.

**Two Dreams on Trains** by Elizabeth Bear (19m) was a look at a bad future, art, & priorities. I liked it. 4 stars

**Angel of Light** by Joe Haldeman (20m) another look into a weird future & how strange people are. 3.5 stars.

**Burn** by James Patrick Kelly (2h5m) I hadn't planned on listening to this but am glad I did. It's a futuristic take on "Walden" by Thoreau with a few interesting themes running through it, so long as you're somewhat familiar with "Walden", it's good. If you're not, I don't think it would work as well.

**Honorable Mentions; 2005** by Gardner Dozois (38m) - a boring listing of stories & authors. I skipped it.

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