



Some of the Best from Tor.com: 2011 Edition

Patrick Nielsen Hayden (Editor) , Liz Gorinsky (Editor) , Harry Turtledove , Charlie Jane Anders (Contributor) , Michael Swanwick (Contributor) , James Alan Gardner (Contributor) , Matthew Sanborn Smith (Contributor) , Yoon Ha Lee (Contributor) , more... Paul Park (Contributor) , Nnedi Okorafor (Contributor) ...less

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A collection of some of the best original short fiction published on [Tor.com](#) in 2011.

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Six Months, Three Days by Charlie Jane Anders

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Ragnarok by Paul Park

Hello, Moto by Nnedi Okorafor

Shtetl Days by Harry Turtledove

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Author : Patrick Nielsen Hayden (Editor) , Liz Gorinsky (Editor) , Harry Turtledove , Charlie Jane Anders (Contributor) , Michael Swanwick (Contributor) , James Alan Gardner (Contributor) , Matthew Sanborn Smith (Contributor) , Yoon Ha Lee (Contributor) , more... Paul Park (Contributor) , Nnedi Okorafor (Contributor) ...less

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From Reader Review Some of the Best from Tor.com: 2011 Edition for online ebook

Eero says

Kind of a mixed bag, as anthologies tend to be. I liked the first few stories quite a bit, but then struggling with Paul Park's post-apocalyptic Edda I lost interest, and did not really care for the rest that much. Still, definitely worth a read and it was free. Too lazy and flu-ridden to write anything more substantial.

I'd say Michael Swanwick's post-whatever Sweden with magic-seeming tech and appropriate cultural references was my favourite of this lot.

Joel Neff says

This is a short, free collection of works published by Tor.com during 2011. I was unfamiliar with all the authors present save for Harry Turtledove before diving in. I have thoroughly enjoyed the collection, and as a marketing move, I hope it's something more publishers emulate. Soon.

Six Months, Three Days by Charlie Jane Anders

I really loved this beautiful story that contemplates whether the future can be changed and whether the two people who can see it are blessed or cursed. (4/5)

The Dala Horse by Michael Swanwick

This is an odd tale, set in a future Earth that tells the tale of a great civilization gone to dust and also that of a little girl and her troll, and how they are saved. I enjoyed it for its sense of childish innocence and ancient weariness. (3/5)

A Clean Sweep with all the Trimmings by James Alan Gardner

The story was interesting and I liked the main characters, but the writing style drove me a little nuts. I get that it's a tribute, borrowing from another time, but it was still irksome. (2/5)

Beauty Belongs to the Flowers by Matthew Sanborn Smith

This is what cyberpunk would look like if it were being invented today. Between the setting (Nagasaki) and the tech (augmented reality) and the people (heartbroken), this is the kind of story that reminds me why I loved the original cyberpunk novels so much and why I wish there was a lot more of this kind of story around. (5/5)

A Vector Alphabet of Interstellar Travel by Yoon Ha Lee

I wanted to like this collection of sketches of different aliens with different ideas and different cultures, but it read (to me) as too fragmented and too insignificant to really carry the weight of the point the author was trying to make. I would much rather have read a longer story putting the pieces into a more conventional

framework. (2/5)

Ragnorak by Paul Park

This piece too, did very little for me. While I have no problem with epic poetry in general, this story would have worked better for me if it were an actual prose work, rather than a poem that contrasts the modern with the mythic and attempts to tell the story of a war between them.

Hello Moto by Nnedi Okorafor

This fascinated me to the point that I immediately re-read the story after finishing it for the first time. The details and the setting alone were captivating, but the story built on top of them was superb. This is the story of a group of witches and what happens when the technology they've spelled changes them. (5/5)

Shetl Days by Harry Turtledove

Harry Turtledove's facility with history and language is on full display in this novella. It centers on the idea that pretending to be something can transform you into that same thing. I really enjoyed this one. The setting seemed far too real to be science-fiction, which is both thrilling and scary when you stop to think about it. (5/5)

Original Short Fiction on Tor.com 2011

Ok, this is not a story, but it is a compelling reason to skip to the end of the book. Tor have very kindly included a list of all the fiction they published on their website in 2011, broken down by short story and novella.

With any luck, Tor will continue to both publish and present short fiction like this collection. I intend to do my part to encourage them by immediately devouring everything I can find by Matthew Sanborn Smith and Nnedi Okorafor.

Ron says

Excellent. Contrary to the norm among science fiction and fantasy anthologies, this collection has some genuinely good and thought-provoking pieces. All's not perfect--I didn't much care for the opening number by Anders nor "Hello, Moto" by Okorafor--but the closer "Shetl Days" by Turtledove was worth the price of admission.

A good read. Good job, Tor.

M.A. Kropp says

This is a collection of eight short works by Tor Publishing authors from 2011. I say "works" because not all are stories, there is one epic poem in the mix. Some of the authors I knew by name, some were unfamiliar,

and one I have read before.

As with many things of this nature, there were some things I enjoyed more than others. I can't say that anything included was badly written, just that some appealed to me more than others. I particularly enjoyed "Six Months, Three Days" by Charlie Jane Anders and "The Dala Horse" by Michael Swanwick. The poem, by Paul Park, was less than successful for me, and I found myself skimming most of it. "Hello, Moto" by Nnedi Okorafor was another I found less appealing, though not for lack of talent. The premise is interesting and the writing fairly good, but I found myself not relating to the characters well. The real gem in the collection is Harry Turtledove's "Shtetl Days." Without spoiling anything for those who have not read this one, it combines Turtledove's deft hand with alternate history with a story about transformation that is both subtle and scary. This one alone was worth downloading the collection.

The eight stories are varied in theme and setting, and not everyone will enjoy each one. But since it is offered for free, it is certainly worth checking out, especially if you are looking for an introduction to a new author or two.

Brent Werness says

I think I'll go story-by-story for this collection since it can really be hit-or-miss for me.

Six Months, Three Days

I liked this one quite a bit, although I feel like the theme should have been explored further. I was pleased that the author chose to leave the ending ambiguous—I felt that choice made it much more powerful a story. (4/5)

The Dala Horse

Not really my cup of tea, although I enjoyed the twist in which we find out that this fairy tail world is essentially just a bizarre incarnation of Clarke's Third Law. (3/5)

A Clean Sweep With All the Trimmings

I didn't really get this one. Why no past tense? I'm guessing it has something to do with Damon Runyon, as the story claims to be influenced by his style, however I know nothing of his work. Might work better if I did. (2/5)

Beauty Belongs to the Flowers

It starts as a fun story in a caricature of the world extrapolated from recent trends (ever decreasing attention spans, ever present advertising, etc.) but then it ends in a very weird place which kinda ruined the story for me. (2/5)

A Vector Alphabet of Interstellar Travel

First off I have to mention that John Harris is one of my favorite sci-fi artists, so I'm glad to see this story, and in fact the book's cover itself, decorated with his work. This short story isn't so much a story as it is almost a bestiary of hypothetical ways that alien races think about interstellar travel. Kinda cute, but not much to it. (3.5/5)

Ragnarok

Poetry always needs to be heard, and this poem about post-apocalyptic Iceland written in an old scandinavian poetic style is no exception. Indeed, I first started reading it in my head as if it were some bizarre free verse

in which case it was not so great—it was only after recognizing it as alliterative verse that I started to enjoy it. (3.5/5)

Hello, Moto
Didn't care for this one at all. (1/5)

Shtetl Days
A pretty good finish to the collection, although I again felt like they didn't really take advantage of their material—it just seemed like nothing much happened. (3.5/5)

Overall an OK collection, but you can probably find better things to read.

Princessjay says

Six Months, Three Days - Charles Jane Anders.

The Dala Horse - Michael Swanwick. 4 STARS. Sweet innocent little girl sent off to the forest to her grandma's. On her way, she meets a bad man. A future Sweden where everything talks and is helpful to humans.

A Clean Sweep with All the Trimmings - James Alan Gardner. 3 STARS. Dolls and Spacemen. Somewhat amusing, but too stylized to be read for long.

Beauty Belongs to the Flowers - Matthew Sanborn Smith. 3 STARS. Ultra modern Tokyo, robots, and the pain of young love.

A Vector Alphabet of Interstellar Travel - Yoon Ha Lee. 2.5 STARS. Playing around in one's imagination is...OK, I guess. A listing of unlikely means of interstellar travel.

Ragnarok - Paul Park. A poem.

Hello, Moto - Nnedi Okorafor. 2.5 STARS. Nigerian women and sorcery and technology in their wigs. Too short to be meaningful.

Shtetl Days - Harry Turtledove.

Chris says

I enjoyed, in particular two of the stories in this collection. "The Dala Horse" by Michael Swanwick and "Hello Moto" by Nnedi Okorafor and Harry Turtledove's closing story "Shetel Days" - which one can buy for kindle on its own.

"Dala Horse" makes wonderful use of folklore and technology. It is actually surprisingly touching and powerful.

But the two stand outs, the reason for the four stars are "Hello Moto" and "Shetel Days". At first glance Moto looks like a standard witch story about two much power, yet it is also about hair and appearance. It is also about what is going on in parts of Africa. It is the shortest one in the collection but is tied with Shetel Days as the most power. I haven't read anything by Nnedi Okorafor before, but I will now.

"Shetel Days" is about being not only Jewish but being in general and is the type of story that you can think about, but reviewing becomes difficult.

The collection is free on Amazon as if this review and is worth reading.

Brad says

It's a pretty good collection of sci-fi short stories. I'd give it 3.5 stars, and felt like most of it was very enjoyable with a few parts where it dragged a little bit.

Six Months, Three Days - Charlie Jane Anders: 3/5

Pretty interesting story about the interactions between a dating couple, one of whom can see his future, and the other can see all of her possible futures. Rated R: strong language, mild sexuality.

The Dala Horse - Michael Swanwick: 4.5/5

Very cool story, and Swanwick did an excellent job of giving the reader a peek at an interesting world and leaving me very eager to learn more about it. This story convinced me to look into more of his stuff. Rated PG.

A Clean Sweep With All The Trimmings - James Alan Gardner: 4.5/5

Rated PG (hints at PG-13).

Beauty Belongs to the Flowers - Matthew Sanborn Smith:

A Vector Alphabet of Interstellar Travel - Yoon Ha Lee:

Ragnarok - Paul Park:

Hello, Moto - Nnedi Okorafor:

Shtetl Days - Harry Turtledove: This one started pretty boring until the interesting twist about 1/4 of the way through, and then became very interesting.

And then I ran out of time to put all of my specific thoughts about each of the stories. All told, a fun collection of sci-fi stories available for free on Amazon. If you like sci-fi, pick up this collection.

Overall rating: R, for some strong language (a handful of f-words throughout), a little sensuality.

pax says

Two points overall because so many of the stories are just pointless. That said - two of them, "Six Months, Three Days" by Charlie Jane Anders and "A Vector Alphabet of Interstellar Travel" by Yoon Ha Li are amazing. (Both are also available on tor.com - go and read!)

Six Months, Three Days by Charlie Jane Anders

This is really not a story I should be judging - it is great writing with a rather quiet ending that made me for the first time be somewhat thankful that I read this one digitally and could quickly search for a word. But it's really not a story I should be judging, because it's bound to leave me somewhat giddy: I know what the food in Punjabi Dhabi tastes like and 1369 is my favorite cafe and, and, and ... So yeah, if you know Boston, pick it up. If you don't, perhaps still do and let me know what you thought of the story even if you did not make you giddy with recognition of places you know and love.

[Also, it won a Hugo! So perhaps my giddiness about it was not only the recognition of all the Somerville places and the general vibe of the area?]

The Dala Horse by Michael Swanwick

Still pretty pointless, I am afraid.

A Clean Sweep with All the Trimmings by James Alan Gardner

Somewhere in there is the seed of an idea that could be a great story. But this one isn't. Not even a good one.

Beauty Belongs to the Flowers by Matthew Sanborn Smith

This was promising to be a great story - the tone is wonderful, the world is creates both believable and interesting. The ending lets down, but the one or other image remains.

A Vector Alphabet of Interstellar Travel by Yoon Ha Lee

Oh yes, yes. "The Invisible Cities", but almost deeper. I so need to pick up Yoon Ha Lee's short story collection soon!

Ragnarok by Paul Park

Another pointless one - yes, this is a verse-story about a apocalyptic world in Iceland. But a setting and the form of writing do not a story make.

Hello, Moto by Nnedi Okorafor

I want a novel based on this idea! Or at least a Novella. As a short story there is not enough to it - not enough time for the world or the characters or the idea to develop. And I would have liked to get to know all of them.

Shtetl Days by Harry Turtledove

So when you write a future Nazi Germany? Do NOT write future USA. Just don't, it does not work and is not believable. (And it would be easy to research the one or other bit about the cultural background; it does not even have to be German, just Nazi ...)

[Just googled the author: and this guy is the master of alternative history? Seriously? I may have thought this is a young writer who was going to learn, but agh ... agh!!!]

Duncan says

This collection has some excellent science fiction pieces in it.

The standouts for me:

Six Months, Three Days by Charlie Jane Anders was a charming love story about two people who can see the future.

A Clean Sweep with all the Trimmings by James Alan Gardner was a great and funny gangster noir about space aliens.

Hello Moto by Nnedi Okorafor is a fascinating mix of voodoo and technology. It ends a bit too soon, I wanted more.

Shetl Days by Harry Turtledove is just incredible, set in a alternate universe where Hitler stayed in power, it follows the lives of reenactors playing Jews in a tourist version of Poland.

Laura says

The short stories contained within this collection are incredibly varied in style, substance and quality. And I'd never read anything from any of these writers (unless we're counting Charlie Jane Anders' posts on io9).

There were some stories I was happy that I had read. But there were some that I definitely could have done without, either because I didn't like the writing style, I didn't like the characters or I just didn't care for the plot. But that is the risk you run when you read a collection like this.

There were three incredibly strong pieces in this, two that were interesting but felt very incomplete, and two I may not have even bothered to finish.

Overall, well worth it, especially considering it was free!

Six Months, Three Days

An interesting take on what happens if the two people in a relationship both have a sort of ability to see the future and they know that their relationship is going to end poorly. The story is one of free will vs. fate. And while I enjoyed reading it, I had a problem with the dialogue, which I thought was fake sounding.

The Dala Horse

I had no idea where this story was going when I started it, and I finished it with a multitude of questions. It was an interesting read, but I felt like so much was not answered.

A Clean Sweep with all the Trimmings

I'll admit that I couldn't read this at all. I don't like the style of writing and I didn't care for the little bit of the story I did read.

Beauty Belongs to the Flowers

A long, beautiful story of a cyberpunk Japan. The technology available fascinated me. But more so, I enjoyed the interactions between the people. The youth of Japan, embracing very modern ways, vs. the older generations, who are more respectful and do not approve of the fake worlds people live in as a result of their technology. However, I did not like the very end. It creeped me out, but not in a good way. In a sort of disgusting way.

A Vector Alphabet of Interstellar Travel

A look at various alien cultures in the galaxy. These are incredibly creative. However, they are unconnected to one another and read more like the appendix to a really great space opera rather than anything that can

stand on its own.

Ragnarok

I'll admit that I have problems with epic poems, but there have been ones I loved in the past. This is not one of them. I had trouble getting into it, and I had trouble paying attention the whole way through.

Hello Moto

Another story that seems like a snippet of a larger novel. It's very interesting, but overall too short. I would like some more, please. We don't get enough background of who the women are, but we know that one of them created something that they could use for good, and, as happens, two of them choose to use it selfishly.

Shtetl

Easily the best of the bunch. This is the story of a world where Hitler succeeded. The Jews have been wiped out, and the Reich rules the world. Since there are no more Jews, the Reich has chosen to create little villages with actors (like those annoying ones from frontier villages or something), who do not break from their roles while in the village. They live out the lives of Jews while tourists come and gawk at this extinguished people. The actors do their jobs so well, that they have to admit to themselves that there is no longer a difference between the characters they play and the people they are outside of the village.

timothy morgan says

Interesting, quick read

This is a great book for those days you want quick, interesting stories. This collection has everything from human competition with robot lovers to an alternate history story where the Third Reich won the war, and has built a village where the result is very different from what they had in mind. A fast reader will find a few hours of good entertainment in this book. Well worth reading, recommended.

Marcus says

I really enjoyed this collection as it had some well thought-out and original stories. Most of the stories do a good job of standing up on their own without feeling like snippets of a larger, better book. I only gave it three stars due to the inconsistency in quality, which is to be expected in collections such as this. I particularly loved the last story, "Shtetl Days," by Harry Turtledove. It may be my favorite novella. I also liked the story by Swanwick, though his style is an acquired taste. It's a quick read and definitely worth your time. Plus, it's free!

Paul says

This is one of three Tor SF anthologies available for free Nook or Kindle download. The anthologies are dated 2011, 2012, and 2013.

I'm commenting on the anthology itself, not the short SF stories contained within (although I will say many of shorter stories struck me as filler). I was annoyed to find the page count heavily padded: each story starts

with a title page, then a page with a one-paragraph note on the author, then a page with a one-paragraph editor's comment on the story to follow, then the story itself (some of which are only two to three pages long), then an end page listing other works by that author. It's like network TV, where the commercial to content ratio is almost 1:1.

A few of the longer stories, the ones by better-known authors, are worth the read.

I will plow through the 2012 and 2013 editions, looking for the good stories, this time skipping over the filler.

Metaphorosis says

Anthologies are always something of a risk. Themed anthologies rarely stick close to their theme. Single-editor anthologies (as with magazines) often end up with a numbing sameness in the feel or mood of the pieces. Happily, this 'best of' collection avoids both traps.

Up to about the halfway point, I thought that the anthology had even managed that rare feat of including only really strong stories. Unfortunately, after the first few stories, things start to weaken, and by the time I reached Paul Park's 'poem', it was clear that too many of the stories are self-consciously 'intellectual'. I'm a fan of intelligent writing, and some of these stories provide that. Some, however, seem designed more to display the author's cleverness than to tell a good story. They're good, in a technical sense, but they're not engaging or moving.

To pick one example (by an author whose trilogy Starbridge Chronicles was both intellectual and excellent), look at the 'poem' "Ragnarok" by Paul Park. It's broken up into equal-sized units of free verse, but there's nothing else about it that says 'poem' to me. In fact, it's a short story written in brief, declarative sentences, set out in the *form* of a poem. The story wasn't bad, but the whole thing seemed contrived and awkward. Some of the other stories displayed an equivalent awkwardness in their (failed) effort to be clever or poetic. It's a shame, because much of the material was good. Only one of the stories was really weak, though the final story drags on well after its point is made.

All in all, well worth reading (and it's free!) for several very good stories. I can see re-reading some of the stories here, though others I may well skip the next time around.
