



Subversion: Science Fiction & Fantasy Tales of Challenging the Norm

Bart R. Leib (Editor) , Jennifer Brozek (Foreword) , Kelly Jennings , Barbara Krasnoff , Natania Barron , Cat Rambo , Kay T. Holt , Shanna Germain , more... Jean Johnson , R.J. Astruc , Deirdre M. Murphy , C.A. Young , Jessica Reisman , Camille Alexa , Wendy N. Wagner , Timothy T. Murphy , Melissa S. Green , Caleb Jordan Schulz , Brittany Jackson (Illustrator) , Daniel José Older ...less

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‘Traitor’ or ‘revolutionary.’ These labels are two sides of the same coin, just as ‘hero’ or ‘villain’ depends on the point of view of the person telling the story. These are obvious concepts when spelled out in clear cut settings. Because of this, how one goes about subverting the norm (as a traitor or revolutionary) is based on what the norm is. What is normal in one society can be, and often is, taboo in another society. This allows tales of subversion to be subtle, blatant, personal, communal, and endless in variation.

- from the Foreword by Jennifer Brozek

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From Reader Review Subversion: Science Fiction & Fantasy Tales of Challenging the Norm for online ebook

Kevin Saunders says

A mixed bag of tales, with a few standouts.

Beth Cato says

I received this book through the LibraryThing Early Reviewers program. Also to note: my work has appeared in past issues of Crossed Genres Magazine, by the same publisher, though I have no work in this anthology.

The theme of this book is unique. By "challenging the norm," characters in very different settings fight for their lives, their people, and their sanity. My initial concern was that the book would be very dark. Indeed, some of the stories do dwell on darkness, but not all. Subversion doesn't have to mean inciting a rebellion. Many of the tales are more subtle, such as Cat Rambo's story "Flicka," where a human boy strikes up a friendship with a girl genetically-modified to be equine. One of the lightest stories in the group is "The Hero Industry" by Jean Johnson, where the power of a wise strategy for a rebellion creates an enterprise. "The Red Dybbuk" by Barbara Krasnoff and "To Sleep with Pachamama" by Caleb Jordan Schulz are fascinating because of how they utilize Jewish and Quechuan cultures, respectively, creating stories with a fresh perspective.

As for the genres, the anthology has the full gamut. Fantasy, science fiction, dystopia, urban fantasy... it's all in here.

A lot of times I read anthologies and have a few favorites, but most of the stories are forgettable. Here, probably half of the stories resounded for me, and even the ones I didn't quite connect with were well-done.

Katy says

Please note: I won a copy of this book from the LibraryThing Early Reviewer's program in exchange for an honest review. Read and reviewed in December, 2011

"*Subversion*" is an anthology of short stories about people rebelling against the norms, of people changing their world and their lives, and of understanding the differences between truth and dogma. While ordinarily in an anthology I will find a couple stories I really like, and a couple stories that I don't like at all, in this anthology every single story was *absolutely amazing* – perfectly polished gems, brightly faceted and brimming with life. Subvert the norm – and read this amazing anthology! Highly recommended!

Rebecca says

I didn't want these stories to end. They were so good, and I really wanted to know what happened next.

Sarah (CoolCurryBooks) says

Subversion is a collection of sixteen fantasy and science fiction stories where people challenge what is normal for their society. All of the stories were well written and stand out. In particular, I liked "And All Its Truths" and "The Hero Industry".

I would recommend this anthology to anyone who likes both science fiction and fantasy, or even just science fiction (I found more stories to be science fiction than fantasy).

Tyrannosaurus regina says

Some of these stories didn't make much of an impact on me, but those that worked, worked really well. I especially liked Shanna Germain's "Seed" and Camille Alexa's "And All Its Truths".

Jeffrey Petersen says

We generally hear the story from the hero's point of view, but then, most people think of themselves as the hero of their own story. In Subversion, we hear the story of people breaking the law, attacking authority, and fighting the status quo. From the perspective of the majority, or at least of those in power, these aren't heroes, but criminals, or at the very least trouble makers.

In this very enjoyable short story anthology, we're treated to a wide variety of stories featuring far future earths, societies run by robots, creatures of the underworld, and all manner of rebel and freedom fighter. What struck me most about these stories is how different they are, in tone as well as in content. I was worried that these stories might all blend together, but they all stood on their own merits, each entertaining me with a new world and the problems of unique characters within.

None of the stories have an agenda or make a specific political point, but with protests in world events, the reader is invited to consider the width of the gray line between criminal and revolutionary, between authority and oppressor. In my mind, good science fiction and fantasy do more than just entertain, but challenge us to think in new ways. This collection does both, in many fun and surprising ways.

Wendy S. Delmater says

This is a themed short story anthology. Reviews of each story follow, and then a review of the collection as a whole.

In "A Thousand Wings of Luck" author Jessica Reisman sends us to a world where there is a religion based on luck, and the harbingers of luck are not rabbits' feet or four-leafed clovers. They're moths. Are the beliefs about the Luck Moths mere superstition or is there something to it? A young college student tries her luck

against the moths in a spirit of scientific investigation and gets more than she bargained for. Wonders ensue.

I was excited to review this book since it contained a short story by former *Abyss & Apex* flash editor Camille Alexa, and she did not disappoint. In her tale, “And All Its Truths,” subversion comes to a far-flung planetary colony where helper robots have evolved into tyrannical despots, demanding robotic perfection of imperfect humans, and punishing inefficiency with incarceration until death. It’s a story of numerical sequences and prime numbers, humanity lost and humanity found, and very different from the slipstream with which Alexa made her name in the genre. Perhaps it’s a greater achievement that Alexa made the POV character, who is a lifeless shell, into something much more than an unsympathetic narrator.

In the aptly-named “Pushaway,” Melissa S. Green tells the story of Esti Gusev, a girl who, “belonged with the other people who wouldn’t be stopped.” What had tried to stop her—in what seemed like a previous life that would not let her go—was a childhood of abuse in a religious colony. Mars’ government had known about the abuse and let it go on for so long she was almost permanently crippled. Esti clings writings of the woman who inspired a rebellion against corporate abuses on the asteroid belts to claw her way back to wholeness.

Daniel José Older’s “Phantom Overload” is an escapade involving the NYCOD: the New York Council of the Dead. Carlos DeLacruz is a soulcatcher for the Council, and since he is Hispanic the Council orders him to help a Hispanic district outside of their sway. District 17 in Brooklyn has a problem with their dead: they won’t leave. And Carlos has a problem with the Council: they want to strong-arm their way into outlying districts to increase their power. The story is very New York, and touches on the subtleties of whites thinking all Hispanics are the same culture with a Sam Spade meets Born in East LA vibe. Oh, and the problem with the ghosts? They’re *illegals*.

I was really touched by “Cold Against the Bone” by Kelly Jennings. In it the son of a well-off house, whose father was so cold and distant his mother left them, makes friends with the only other kids in his compound: children of contract laborers. The Republic of Sovereign Worlds has allowed contract labor to degenerate into slavery. Despite the children studying past, failed rebellions against the slavery to launch a successful one, the death of one of the two contract children doing child labor in a silver mine causes the other one to launch an unsuccessful rebellion, and she is executed. The nobleman’s son dedicates his life to avenging the deaths of his contract “brother and sister” by freeing their people. Both lovely and chilling.

It’s hard to categorize “The Red Dybbuk” by Barbara Krasnoff. Perhaps it’s a ghost story, perhaps it’s a story of possession, perhaps it’s an intergenerational story of the cycle of us not wanting to be like our parents. It’s a very Jewish tale, with its roots in the progressive movement at the start of labor unions. The generations of Marylin’s family teeter between safety and activism until Marylin intervenes.

“Pushing Paper in Hartleigh” by Natania Barron: a former soldier, now pushing paper for a queen who hates magic, gets involved in more than one kind of magic and saves the kingdom. I’m not going to say what kinds of magic, but. . . . you know how in the fourth Star Trek movie they “bust” Admiral Kirk back to captain because he is better at that job? The ending is sort of like that. Nice.

“Parent Hack” by Kay T. Holt shows two too-smart-for-their-own-good foster kids paying for a hack on their guardian robots. Streets smart. Cute. But not subversive; just rebellious.

Next is *my favorite story in the anthology*. Imagine a female Miles Vorkosigan as a public relations wonk dealing with revolutionaries. I do NOT want to spoil this for you, but “The Hero Industry” by Jean Johnson is revolutionary indeed and easily the best story in the book. I grinned nearly throughout it, and toward the

end I even laughed out loud. You can be sure I will be watching for anything else by Jean Johnson – and so should you.

I absolutely loved “Flicka” by Cat Rambo. I am a fan of Cat’s and this one delivered. Imagine an isolated country community in which hippies and white supremacists live together in a sort of détente. In a near future, a town like that gets some new residents who are gene-modded to be part horse. How the community handles that (some well, some terribly) is shown through the eyes of a teenage boy. I loved that final chess piece – didn’t see it coming. I will forgive this story it’s straining of the anthology theme on that alone.

Sadly, I could not buy the central premise of “Seed” Shanna Germain, where a house of ill repute was full of women who found eating erotic and sex rather humdrum. Eating was NEVER done in public by their people. Their men paid to eat alone with them in their private kitchenettes as if for sex; a rapist would force-feed them. What we would consider normal men paid in food for sex so they were encouraged to visit. All the beautifully constructed conflict stemmed from this given, and although the ending fit with the theme of the anthology I simply could not wrap my head around it. Fascinating reading, though.

“Scrapheap Angel” by RJ Astruc & Deirdre M. Murphy was just strange. I have to admit that a story set in a call center in India was a nice idea, and that the intent was to inspire, but...it came across as mundane, not subversive at all.

I’m not big on cross,double-cross/triple cross, so “The Dragon’s Bargain” by C.A. Young left me rather cold. But “A Tiny Grayness in the Dark” by Wendy N. Wagner was interesting: a child raised in hell had her parents, who had no choice about tormenting her as “homework” every night sees that they chose a ‘torment’ that could free her. Nicely done.

Rather than a glorious revolution or subversive trick, “Received Without Content” by Timothy T. Murphy makes a needed statement about the gullibility of teens and unintended consequences. Revolutions do fail, and revolutionary zeal can be twisted to a puppet master’s whims. This is a nice cautionary tale.

The last story was a disappointment. The earth was healed. Humanity was off earth and coming back after global warming had killed those who remained on-planet, cleaning up after humanity and removing all traces we had ever been there. Although I loved the premise of Caleb Jordan Schulz ‘s “To Sleep With Pachamama,” a technical plot hole threw me irrevocably out of the story. Given the mission of those who were cleansing the earth of human stain, I cannot imagine an off-earth advanced civilization with no scanners to find and miscreants who wanted to run away, stay there, and pollute the earth with more people and their artifacts.

All-in-all this is an eclectic collection of stories with flashes of brilliance, but the theme of subversion was occasionally stretched too far. Still, it was a lot of fun.

Sabrina says

I was really impressed and surprised by this anthology.

First the surprise. I expected most of the stories to be about political/social subversion. Wrong. There are at least as many stories about subverting personal "authorities" as there are about societal ones. And there were some very subtle, nuanced and complex takes on those subversions.

Now, about being impressed. While this anthology has stories by people whose work I already enjoy and seek out (Daniel José Older, for example), it has a lot of work by people I hadn't read before that, let's be honest, blew me away: Camille Alexa, Shanna Germain, RJ Astruc and Deirdre Murphy, among others. (You can read a more comprehensive take on a number of the stories at <http://followingthelede.blogspot.com/...>).

There were a few stories that, while written by undeniably skillful and talented authors, just didn't do anything for me. But that's the nature of anthologies, and in the end, there were many more stories in here that amazed than disappointed.

Like the anthologies *Coyote Road* and *The Green Man*, the print version of *Subversion* goes on my keeper shelf - so I can turn to the stories that linger and call to me again and again. In my world, the hallmark of a good anthology.
