



Crown of Stars

James Tiptree Jr.

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Our Resident Djinn (1986)

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Crown of Stars Details

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Amy says

Despite several stories that had fascinating premises (most of all "Backward, Turn Backward," and also "The Earth Doth Like a Snake Renew"), the writing style wasn't very gripping and I skimmed a bit in every story. I'm hoping her more famous stories are of better quality.

Some great ideas here, but not so great execution.

Marie Michaels says

The other is a book of short stories. Two of them stuck in my head as real punches to the gut: "Morality Meat" and "Yanqui Doodle." She says that she stopped or slowed down writing after a while because she was digging so deep into emotional territory that really hurt, and wow. The despair and visceral horror at what Tiptree imagines for society just rolls off the pages. Looking forward to re-reading this eventually (which is the test of a 5-star book for me).

Monica Garcia says

So hard to rate this one. Some stories really hit hard, others not so much. Second Going and Backward, Turn Backward will be with me forever. Like all her work it's dark, and many stories have political overtones.

Greg Lehman says

This collection brings together the last work Sheldon turned out before she died in 1987 with her husband Huntington. The challenges she was facing with her husband's degrading health and her own depression resulted in some of the darkest work I've read by any author. Even so, this is not pure anger on display. One of the greatest facets of Sheldon's gargantuan imagination was a refusal to settle for one direction in any of her work. Where there is abysmal nihilism, the artists still finds the strength to write stories about it, wrestling with the burdens of life in an act of expressing how the soul itself is smoldering. Some of the finest speculative conditions are thrown to their highest possibilities here: the Devil scheming to literally buy heaven, the Earth itself as a wrathful and personal lover, and corporate cannibalism are all marched out to some of the most heart-rending and shocking conclusions one can think of. Sheldon's bravery was obvious to the end, never relinquishing a crown that, while never appearing in the text, is more than well-earned as a title to this final work.

ambyr says

I keep starting and stopping this review, because I should talk about the stories, but the truth is I have a hard

time reading this as anything other than a 340-page suicide note, and oh god Tiptree why did you have to do it? Why?

So, okay. The stories. As many before me have noted, these late-career works are far from Tiptree's strongest. (Depression, it turns out, is not always a good muse.) Themes of death and inevitability always shadow Tiptree's work, but here she often sets subtlety aside and lets the theme swallow the story; three stories, for example, are literally set in the afterlife ("Our Resident Djinn," "Last Night and Every Night," and "In Midst of Life"). "Morality Meat" and "Yanqui Doodle," meanwhile, are both a little didactic for my taste, while "Come Live with Me" features a bizarrely upbeat ending that feels out of place with the collection and indeed with Tiptree's work as a whole. "Second Going" and "The Earth Doth Like a Snake Renew" both have promise but feel overlong. By far the strongest story in the collection is "Backward, Turn Backward," with an ending that hits like a punch. The collection is worth it just for this story--but oh, god, Tiptree. Why?

Abigail says

I liked this a lot--very vivid and creative writing. My favorite was definitely "Second Going," which started out hilarious and ended by moving me to tears. "Morality Meat" and "Yanqui Doodle" were sharp stories of social protest. I didn't care for "Backward, Turn Backward," which was just mean.

Amanda says

A good, solid short story collection. I especially liked Morality Meat, All This and Heaven Too, Yanqui Doodle, Come Live With Me, and Backward Turn Backward. In Midst of Life, Last Night and Every Night, and Our Resident Djinn weren't to my taste. The others were meh.

So, on the whole, a good collection. Some stories were very readable, some dragged a bit. Her style isn't super easy to fall into.

Stephanie says

I usually don't enjoy a book of short stories as much as the individual stories themselves, but this was a wonderful collection of Alice Sheldon's later works sprinkled with some earlier ones. The wonderful and fanciful future worlds that she creates captivated me, and I look forward to reading more of her works.

M.K. Rhodes says

Posthumous collection of short stories following the murder/suicide that ended Tiptree's life.

- "Second Going": Humanity makes contact with blue octopus aliens that substitute themselves for the empty old Gods of Earth. Witty and fun, ending on a note of touching melancholy. 8/10

- "Our Resident Djinn": Down in Hell, Satan received word that God has died and goes up to offer his condolences (and take home some of the Good Lord's real estate). 7/10

- "Morality Meat": The near-future, dominated by hideous K-Mart jobs, decadent Bohemian Grove parties, and the successful dismantling of abortion rights by Right Wingers, leading to a massive influx of babies and state-sponsored adoption centers run like animal shelters. A young black mother gives up her baby and hopes to see who its adoptive parents are; little does she know most of the black babies don't end up as lucky as their 'peaches and cream' counterparts... Has one of Tiptree's uniquely devastating and poetic final paragraphs. 9/10

- "All This and Heaven Too" - Amusing fairy tale farce/satire about a proposed union between an idealized, liberal utopia and their neighboring arms-mad, fossil fuel-loving, capitalist vulture state. 7/10

- "Yanqui Doodle" - Intense, grim account of a near-future US imperialist war in South America, where soldiers are given amphetamines and other chemical drugs to turn them into mindless rape n' pillage machines--until they have to go through detox before being discharged... 8/10

- "Come Live With Me" - Old school, gee golly sci-fi about a benevolent mind-controlling space lily on a jungle planet making contact with human astronaut explorers, and hitching a ride in one of their bodies. Great characterization of the space lily, clunky characterization of almost everyone else. 6/10

- "Last Night and Every Night" - Meager vignette about people enslaved by Death to help keep a city's death quota. Or something. 5/10

- "Backward, Turn Backward" - Harrowing, brilliant tragedy that anticipates Tiptree's own bleak end (she had planned it for years), and which resonates with a disturbing autobiographical chill. Another near-future scenario, this time involving a time travel scheme where individuals can swap places with their future selves to see what path their destiny will take. A young rich girl finds only that her future holds crushing poverty, prostitution, drug addiction, and finally a comfortable middle class life as the wife of a nerd she went to high school with, in a society of horrific income inequality and social deterioration. Her future self has left her a gun with which to kill herself and spare her the suffering she is to endure. She fails to use it accordingly. 10/10

- "The Earth Doth Like A Snake Renew" - One of Tiptree's bizarre, surrealist black comedies, written in 1973 but left unpublished til this posthumous collection, probably because of its excessive length and absurd slipperiness. Whatever the reason, there's no denying the intelligence and imagination poured into this tale of a girl who personifies the Earth in her mind as a male lover, Pagan god style, and awaits the day when they shall be united in paraphysical congress. Zigzags from loony comic scenarios and metaphors to an ending of surprising horror. 7/10

- "In Midst of Life": A businessman decides his ennui at home and work is too much and blows his brains out, finding himself in a netherworld of memories for religious non-believers, where he receives a new job offer. 6/10

Jill says

Loved it. I can't believe I never ran across Tipton when I was inhaling classic sci-fi in junior high and high

school. Now I want more.

Steve Shilstone says

Even if she was only a PHD CIA OSS Army proto-hippie debutante child African explorer, she was also a damn fine scifi writer.

Jay says

Great collection! Sometimes the language/character dialogue felt old-timey to me, but it is older Sci-Fi. Each story was great in its own way, and they will all stick with me.
