



After: Nineteen Stories of Apocalypse and Dystopia

Ellen Datlow (Editor) , Terri Windling (Editor) , Genevieve Valentine (Contributor) , Carrie Ryan (Contributor) , N.K. Jemisin (Contributor) , Katherine Langrish (Contributor) , Carol Emshwiller (Contributor) , Beth Revis (Contributor) , more... Matthew Kressel (Contributor) , Susan Beth Pfeffer (Contributor) , Sarah Rees Brennan (Contributor) , Jeffrey Ford (Contributor) , Richard Bowes (Contributor) , Gregory Maguire (Contributor) , Steven Gould (Contributor) , Nalo Hopkinson (Contributor) , Jane Yolen (Contributor) , Carolyn Dunn (Contributor) , Caitlín R. Kiernan (Contributor) , Garth Nix (Contributor) , Cecil Castellucci (Contributor) ...less

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If the melt-down, flood, plague, the third World War, new Ice Age, Rapture, alien invasion, clamp-down, meteor, or something else entirely hit today, what would tomorrow look like? Some of the biggest names in YA and adult literature answer that very question in this short story anthology, each story exploring the lives of teen protagonists raised in catastrophe's wake--whether set in the days after the change, or decades far in the future.

"New York Times "bestselling authors Gregory Maguire, Garth Nix, Susan Beth Pfeffer, Carrie Ryan, Beth Revis, and Jane Yolen are among the many popular and award-winning storytellers lending their talents to this original and spellbinding anthology.

Introduction by Genevieve Valentine

The Segment

After the Cure by Carrie Ryan

Valedictorian by N. K. Jemisin

Visiting Nelson by Katherine Langrish

All I Know of Freedom by Carol Emshwiller

The Other Elder by Beth Revis

The Great Game at the End of the World by Matthew Kressel

Reunion by Susan Beth Pfeffer

Blood Drive by Jeffrey Ford

Reality Girl by Richard Bowes

How Th'irth Wint Rong by Hapless Joey @ Homeskool.guv by Richard Bowes

Rust with Wings by Steven Gould

Faint Heart by Sarah Rees Brennan

The Easthound by Nalo Hopkinson

Gray by Jane Yolen

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Fake Plastic Trees by Caitlín R. Kiernan

You Won't Feel a Thing by Garth Nix

The Marker by Cecil Castellucci

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Author : Pfeffer (Contributor) , Sarah Rees Brennan (Contributor) , Jeffrey Ford (Contributor) , Richard Bowes (Contributor) , Gregory Maguire (Contributor) , Steven Gould (Contributor) , Nalo Hopkinson (Contributor) , Jane Yolen (Contributor) , Carolyn Dunn (Contributor) , Caitlín R. Kiernan (Contributor) , Garth Nix (Contributor) , Cecil Castellucci (Contributor) ...less

Format : Hardcover 384 pages

Genre : Short Stories, Science Fiction, Dystopia, Young Adult, Anthologies, Apocalyptic, Post Apocalyptic



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From Reader Review After: Nineteen Stories of Apocalypse and Dystopia for online ebook

Crys says

The end of the world in a nice anthology of short stories, and a poem. This book has it all for even the most avid dystopian junkie.

This is almost a survival guide for readers because there is a plethora of topics covered. It's like a buffet for the most avid doomer. Vampires take over the world? Check. Bugs coming for us? Check. Aliens? Oh my! And let me not forget the Cult. This is not even a small test of what the authors have given us.

The one thing I love about this anthology is that I did not have to read it cover to cover, and that is something that many of our teens will find appealing, especially our reluctant readers. These would also be ideal for those of you who read aloud to your students as many of these are short, fast reads.

I enjoyed the variety of scenarios, and I loved to see some of my favorite YA authors take on this task. I cannot pick a favorite from the stories because I really enjoyed all of them. I will warn you: some of them are intense. I found myself not too sure where the author was going to take me and then...cliffhanger ending.

Yes, that is correct. Most of these ended with a cliffhanger. While that originally drove me a little crazy, I enjoyed it because I like the possibility of deciding the ending for myself. It was quite clever, and in many cases, the level of anxiety I felt helped bring me into the next story.

After is a must-have for the dystopian reader, but it is also a great introduction into the genre. I feel that this would make a great hook into novels like The Hunger Games fans.

Have you read this novel? What were your thoughts? What kind of reader(s) would you recommend it to?

Rachael Snow says

This book will always be my favorite because it's about my favorite genre! it never bored me and i loved the different takes on what an apocalypse would be like. love love love <3 always on the look out for more books like this one.

Rachel says

I give this book a 10/10, all of the stories went together nicely while being intelligent and able to hold their heads up high saying "We all make sense and make you want to read more! But that sucks to be you because there might not be more!"

Segment by Genevieve Valentine

This story was very interesting, it really made me think of the significance of actors in the present time, the characters were interesting and although one girl was very irritating her annoying-ness wasn't without

reason. Great story.

After the Cure by Carrie Ryan

This story was so incredible, with zombies/vampires (an interesting mix in and of itself) that are being cured and left to fit into a society with a hatred towards them. The story was intense and managed to resolve itself within its designated twenty pages. Another great story

Valedictorian by N.K. Jemisms

With cyborg/alien/droids taking away from humans (who are degenerating into a nasty race of the desperate and dumb) this short tale makes you question what exactly is humanity? Who has the real understanding of how to be great? With such deep questions it's amazing this manages to answer them within its boundaries without getting lengthy and boring.

Visiting Nelson by Katherine Langrish

Drugs are bad for you kids, you could turn into a nasty, vile, hairy beast! At least, in this story you can. With a boy and his older mentally disabled brother escaping a drug dealer to find their own "god"-like figure together the story powers through without losing any interest value and makes you wonder 'well, what are they? Little Sasquatches?'" It's new and a bit... alarming. But it's crazy interesting, I loved it.

All I Know of Freedom by Carol Emshwiller

This is another great story, an ex-slave girl escapes and joins an almost Amish-like post apocalyptic religious group that are preparing for the coming of "something" to take them away to the promised land. This one was a little too weird for me and I did have questions afterward. But it was still quite good to read.

The Other Elder by Beth Revis

I'll be honest here, this story kind of annoyed me. I've read the first two Across the Universe books in the series, but I was curious to see new stories and new settings. I didn't want a shameless plug of her story, it felt unnecessary and it made me lose interest as soon as I realized it was something I'd already read for the most part.

The Great Game at the End of the World by Matthew Kressel

This story was weird. I didn't like it, I mean there were ghosts, robot-things, and aliens with millions of eyes on their bodies or several heads? I don't know it felt thrown together and not very well thought out, I was confused and it didn't hold my interest very well.

Reunion by Susan Beth Pfeffer

I liked this story, it felt vaguely World War Two, with terror reigning and that same dark Nazi feeling to it. It was interesting but not great, it wasn't very memorable.

Blood Drive by Jeffrey Ford

This wasn't a very memorable story to me as it felt more like an excuse to blast apart everyone and it all happened so quickly that I didn't know what to think. Not my favorite one.

Reality Girl by Richard Bowes

This story felt like "There's too much going on here. You need to simplify." This is just a short story but it felt too swollen for so short of a story. It wasn't my favorite.

How Th'irth Wint Rong By Hapless Joey @ Homeskool.Guv by Gregory Maguire

Honestly. I'm just going to not talk about this one. I hate when words are misspelled in stories to add

"character" yeah we get that he's not too bright but how exactly has the intelligence level fallen so far within such a short time period, surely if the woman who is adding her two cents in can spell so well and speak so well, she can home school this poor unintelligent boy?

Rust with Wings by Steven Gould

I really liked this story, the new species of bugs that thrived on eating metal was very interesting, I loved it. Especially after hearing of the new threat of metal teeth or the pacemaker within the boy's father's chest. It was action packed and very very cool. I'd definitely wish this one was made into an actual book one day.

Faint Heart by Sarah Rees Brennan

UGH THIS STORY. I nearly cried at the end when I realized it wasn't going to be an actual novel. This was brilliant, well-written and incredibly interesting, it was like the Hunger Games meets The Selection. I loved it, it was my absolute favorite and I truly hope this becomes an actual story soon.

The Easthound by Nalo Hopkinson

I enjoyed this story greatly, it's like werewolves mixed with Huckleberry Finn almost, it's a group of kids who are terrified of being taken by the curse and fear eating each other but it manages to tie together the children and make an unforgettable story that tugs on your compassion and respect

Gray by Jane Yolen

I'm sorry, I'm not a huge fan of poetry when I'm looking forward to short stories...

The Marker by Cecil Castellucci

I loved how interesting I found this. It was reminiscent of Birthmarked, which I LOVED, but managed to be its own story about how what's commonly believed is not always right and shouldn't just be taken at face-value. I loved this story it was very interesting and immersing.

Fake Plastic Trees by Caitlin R. Kiernan

This story reminded me of Carrie Ryan's book the Forest of Hands and Teeth, it had the same emotion behind it and was very incredible to read. I found it haunting and intriguing. This story was a great read and my second-favorite only to Faint of Heart.

You Won't Feel A Thing by Garth Nix

Another plug from an author of an already created story, I haven't read the novel but this prologue didn't capture my attention because it already existed somewhere, I just wanted to read stories made up completely separate from other writings as an example of their creativity and writing prowess. Although the story was good it had a bit of a sexual undertone that I wasn't particularly fond of, seeing as how the lead character's main power is to seduce people. I wasn't very fond of it but the writing was still amazing and captures attention very well.

Before by Carolyn Dunn

This made me very sad, I hated how they treated this little girl for her blood but as sad as the story was it was well written up until the end, I don't know how I could've missed something since there were so few pages, but it felt like I did at the end when everything stops but it isn't fully explained how or why it was.

StarMan says

3+ stars. A little better than expected. Only 2 stories that were below average or irritating in some way. None were mind-blowing.

Carpe diem (? ????) says

OKAY, because this is abuncha little stories bundled up in one, I'm just going to keep updating this review as I go along so I don't forget any important details.

The Segment, by Genevieve Valentine. 2 stars.

Ok so, for some reason it took me super long to get past this story. And that's pathetic 'cause its so short! But I found it completely boring and I didn't even understand what was going on til the end. Like, at all. I don't even know why. I know, so sad. But whatever.

After the cure, by Carrie Ryan. 3.5 stars.

I loved this story. The idea of writing about a rehabilitated zombie was wonderful, and the character was portrayed very well. I could relate her and her issues while also being like "ok, this is something new..." Great story.

Valedictorian, by N.K. Jemisin. 3 stars.

"You take the blue pill, the story ends, you wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill, you stay in Wonderland, and I show you how deep the rabbit hole goes." (The Matrix). This story reminds me so much of this movie. I wish the storyline for "Valedictorian" was more original. But meh, it was still good. However, I did like the main character. And that ending...really?! That could've been much better. I want to know what happens!!!

Visiting Nelson, by Katherine Langrish. 3 stars.

Ok first off, I thought the two guys in this book were kids. But when one of them mentioned their age, which is 19, I was like "WHAT THE FUCK" Then reading on I came to realize that the older one, 19 year old Billy, is mentally retarded. Huh. His brother Charlie, who is 17, was the narrator. That was kind of confusing because they acted like little kids. But towards the end of the story Charlie kind of showed his maturity. **OH AND ANOTHER THING**, they still had cell phones? Really? Odd.

However, I really did love how Charlie cared so much about Billy. I'm so sick of reading books about sibling rivalry. It was refreshing to see Charlie stick by Billy's side, even if he was different.

Anyways...I enjoyed this story. It was interesting. It reminded me vaguely of a watered down version of a

book in Charlie Higson's "The Enemy" series.

The ending (view spoiler) was perfect.

All I Know of Freedom, by Carol Emshwiller. 2.5 stars.

THIS STORY WAS CENTERED AROUND ~~BOOBIES~~ BREASTS! That's why I gave it 2.5 stars. Otherwise, it'd be 2. Why? Because the dialogue was very chopped up and the characters were flat. The story didn't flow well at all.

The Other Elder, by Beth Revis. 3 stars.

The Giver. That's what The Other Elder reminded me of. Now, I don't exactly like The Giver. I find it slow paced and cliche. **HOWEVER**, I did enjoy this story. What really made it for me was when the elder-to-be watched the battle scene. I just loved that. It was described very well.

The Great Game At The End Of The World, by Matthew Kressel. 2.5 stars.

Baseball. Impossible monsters. A brother and sister at the end of the world. Dafaq? This story was extremely crazy, and while that's not necessarily a bad thing, its not what I normally read because I enjoy a bit more realism.

Reunion, by Susan Beth Pfeffer. 3.5 stars.

Ooooohhhh homies. I really liked this one. Apparently searching for their sister/daughter who was stolen as a child, a mother and daughter interrogate young girls to determine if they have found her. The brutality in this story really got me hooked. I wouldn't be surprised if the author got some of her ideas from the happenings of the Holocaust. You'll have to read it to find out why. ;)

Blood Drive, by Jeffery Ford. 4 stars.

Definitely one of my favorites! In a world where its legal to bring guns to school, what exactly can't you like? More importantly, how many ways can it bring about disasters? Too many to count! But hey, who doesn't love a good, gore-filled climax?

I absolutely love this particular story because it reaches a level of realism that the other stories in this compilation have not. I can actually see this happening somewhere one day, and I can see the outcome being much, much worse. Kudos to you, Mr. Ford!

Reality Girl, by Richard Bowes. 3 stars.

Another good story. Its very similar to "The Segment", dealing with the film industry and such. However its better because it was longer and more in depth. I understood what was going on much better than I did with "The Segment" because the author gave some background information which really benefited the storyline.

How Th'irth Wint Rong By Hapless Joey @Homeskool.guv, Gregory Maguire. 4 stars.

LOL. I loved this! The writing is so crazy and stupid that its hilarious. However, the actual message of the story was great. A very original idea for a story. The ending is sad, though.

Rust With Wings, by Steven Gould. 2 stars.

I did not like this. The characters were flat; the plot was stupid and almost nonexistent. Jeremy's mother was a whiny bitch. His father was just plain idiotic. And I kept forgetting Laurie was his sister because she was barely ever mentioned. Just no.

Faint Heart, by Carrie Ryan. 4.5 stars.

This story was fantastic. The world building was great, the characters original and genuine, the dialogue flowed well, and I LOVED the plot.

However, "Faint Heart" was more like the first chapter to a novel rather than a short story, hence the 4.5 instead of 5 stars. I really wish Carrie Ryan would build off this story and make it into a novel. I'd definitely buy & read that.

The Easthound, by Nalo Hopkinson. 3 stars.

Entertaining. Nothing special, but still a fun read. The plot twist at the end was very unexpected, though.

Gray, by Jane Yolen. 3 stars.

I think it is brave for an author to put a poem in a book of short stories, because I can see why a lot of people would hate it. But I thought this was a nice poem. It flowed well, even though it didn't rhyme.

Before, by Carolyn Dunn. 5 stars.

This was the most beautiful story out of the whole compilation. Maybe its because I'm partial to Native American stories, but I completely loved this one. It just got me thinking about some of the things Native Americans went through and are still going through...it really touched my heart. Definitely one of my favorites.

Fake Plastic Trees, by Caitlin R. Kiernan. 3 stars.

Whenever a story of any kind opens up with dialogue, I'm instantly hooked. I just love reading characters talk to each other. It makes me feel like the story is going to move faster. So that was a plus for this book.

However, I did not care for the main character very much at all. Partially because her name is Cody so I kept forgetting she was a girl, and partially because I thought she was a bit weak. But I did like Max. He's legit. But in this case I think its just my opinion coming through a little strongly, so I played fair and gave it 3 stars.

You Won't Feel A Thing, by Garth Nix. 3.5 stars.

I liked this story. I enjoyed delving into a sample of Nix's world without having to buy *Shade's Children*. Though not exactly original, I enjoyed the concept of "You Won't Feel A Thing". I found The Arkle and his power of seduction to be interesting, and I wished I could've read more about him. Overall a satisfying story.

The Marker by Cecil Castellucci. 4 stars.

When I came to the part in this story about the babies, my heart broke into a billion little bitty pieces. Its so sad. But I loved it. The whole idea for this story was great. It was easy to read and logical. A great story to end with.

Overall I'm going to rate this book a solid **3 stars**. There were some great stories, some ok stories, and some stories just plain sucked. But I think in this instance the good outweigh the bad. I would recommend this to any dystopian fans.

WatermeLoonie says

Most of these short stories were absolutely mindblowingly awesome, thrilling, unexpecting and just generally fun. That's the way short stories are right? And this was even better AS... IT HAD APOCALYPSE. I MEAN IT'S KINDA LIKE AN OKAY THING LIKE BREAD PLUS ANOTHER OKAY THING LIKE CHEEZE AND YOU'VE GOT A CHEEZE TOASTIE. Marvelous!

THe male character ones weren't that great though... it wasn't as moving or awesome or anything.... I mean the first one? One of the best, if not THE best. Genius, quite unsuspecting and the whole idea was just genius. Another favourite was maybe "You Won't Feel A Thing," and the really disturbing one where se chooses her mom to die only to kill her father.... I mean how weird is that? EXTREMELY CRAZY. It was so creepy and strangely mind blowing but just so freaking cool.

Savannah (Books With Bite) says

I love dystopian stories. There are so many possibilities that any story facing some uncertain future always manages to capture me.

Now, I know most don't like short stories, but I do. Let me tell you why? Short stories are quick to the book and for me, leave me wondering what more could happen if the author expand the story? I love that short stories gives the reader a quick glance of what life is like and then close with questions.

As I read through these stories several stood out to me. Now only are there authors that I known and love to read but I also discovered other authors that I have never heard of. And I love discovering new authors with short stories.

If you love dystopia or apocalyptic stories, read this book. There are some amazing stories that I can only hope will be turned into full fledged novels. There are also a few short stories of questions that lingered in my mind from other novels that I have read before. After is an amazing selection of stories that fill my mind with wonder. Exhilarating and exciting, After is great.

karen says

i know that this collection is a YA collection, but it really doesn't read like one. usually in YA collections, there is sort of a range of stories, qualitatively, that reflect the range of teen readers, from stronger to more reluctant readers. but these stories, even the ones i wasn't totally crazy about, are completely sophisticated and could be included in any adult fantasy collection. well, mostly. there is the "meh" one that didn't really do anything for me, and seemed a little young.

oh, YA, you grow up so fast...

sometimes, even in full-length Ya dystopias, details are sacrificed. it is as though writers think "well, it is *dystopian*, so it doesn't have to be *logical*." i imagine it is even harder to accomplish in a short story, so my hat is off to all of the authors, and it is good to see so many different takes on the dysto-world.

the segment

this is a good way to open the collection, as it highlights the idea that just because you are in a dystopian setting doesn't mean you know the "rules" or who to trust. things are usually even more complicated than they appear. it is a good blend of "woah" and "yeah, i could see that happening," and i liked the discovery process the reader takes along with the character in this story.

after the cure

this is an interesting premise: a disease causes some people to go crazy and eat other people, but once there is a cure, AFTER, what happens to the cured? how do they live with what they have done? how does society treat them??

valedictorian

this one was one of my favorites, and one that i would so love to see expanded into a larger work. it was nearly perfect.

visiting nelson

another good one. a very self-contained short story that manages to provide enough detail to the world, so that the reader is not left with too many questions. this is one of the more densely-written, stories, and it never feels the author is overreaching the way some of the other stories do. it is a very recognizable story, set in an unrecognizable world. in fact, tweak the setting a little, change the drug to meth, and you have a story that would fit perfectly into my beloved appalachian-noir genre.

all i know of freedom

turns out, religious cults are just as creepy in dystopias as they are for us. you would think, in a world of fewer options, joining a religious cult might look pretty good. but, no - still pretty creepy.

the other elder

this one is among my least favorites, just because of my own personal tastes, although i really did love the ending. i just thought it was a too-complicated social system to be mooshed into a short story format, and i had some questions.

the great game at the end of the world

meh. just... meh.

reunion

so susan beth pfefer has teeth after all! i really liked this story because it had the casual brutality you expect to find in dystopias, and which was largely missing from her "oh no, the moooon" trilogy, where everyone was just a little too polite and cheeky, considering their circumstances. this one is short and callous and definitely worth reading.

blood drive

mandatory gun-toting in school?? how could this go wrong?? oh, like that. i really need to read more jeffrey ford. for all the blood-spatter, it was a really sweet story.

reality girl

this one was okay - it's a good companion to "the segment" because it deals with entertainment and its pervasiveness. plus it's got magical powers and some gay relationships that don't feel forced, like "oooh lookit how gay these characters are." this is also true of the jeffrey ford story - it is not "gay for the sake of gay" pandering, you know what i mean? it just feels genuine and right.

how th'irth wint rong by hapless joey @ homeskool.gov

oh, i dunno. i wanted to like this one, but it kind of annoyed me. i understand this story and maguire's choices, but that doesn't mean i enjoyed reading it.

rust with wings

this one was okay, but i see it as more of a "boy" story. nothing wrong with a boy story, but this one would fare better as a full-lengther. i need some answers. also, strictly speaking, this is not so much an "after" story as a "during" story. the after is what i wanted more of, here.

faint heart

this was a really ambitious short story, with multiple POVs and conflicting storylines, but i think it was pretty successful. and the ending was one i did not see coming, although i should have. it is kind of a perfect modern fairy tale.

the easthound

ooooh. this one was great, even though there were twins in it. and another ending i didn't see coming. i am impressed with how tough some of these stories were. not "difficult to read," but "don't get too emotionally attached, kiddos." because "after" usually sucks.

gray

this is a poem. nuff said.

before

this one didn't really do anything for me, but it isn't terrible. i just thought the limited-perspective narrator left me with too many questions. but some people like stories where you can't know everything. in long-form pieces, i don't mind filling in the blanks, but i find it less fun in a short story.

fake plastic trees

this one has an unusual story structure, which uses memory, the nonlinear and frequently interrupted writing of a life story, and an unreliable narrator, so the facts are occasionally murky which occasionally works against the actual storytelling, but ultimately i think it is effective and scary.

you won't feel a thing

i have never read nix before, but this apparently takes place in the nix-verse, and probably someone who has read him before would enjoy it more than i did. it is fine and bleak, but i think i would have dug it more if i had had that frisson of recognition.

the marker

this is another favorite story, and one which is a good way to end the collection, because it is one of the few stories that suggests change is possible, and there might be hope after all.

the only problem with these stories is that they

are stories, and you never get to see these

scenarios fleshed out into a bigger-picture. but overall i think this is a good collection, and i really appreciate that the foreword gives a "new" definition of dystopia as it is being reshaped by the current YA publishing industry, and a thoughtful afterward that gives a brief overview of the history of the dystopia in literature. and in writing this review, i found i enjoyed it more in retrospect, so i am going to slap another star on it. try and stop me...

Terri M. says

After reading the *Ashfall* by Mike Mullin, the *Divergent* series by Veronica Roth and *The Hunger Games* series by Susanne Collins, I have been drawn to stories about the apocalypse and dystopian societies. They seem to be a reflection of our current society and since I gravitate towards young adult fiction, I've been keeping an eye out for this collection ever since I passed up the opportunity to purchase it directly from Ellen when she was a guest at ICON a few years ago. And I was excited to finally get my hands on a copy of *After* after months of searching the local bookstores.

If you are a fan of apocalypse and dystopia stories, you will definitely want to get your hands on this anthology. These stories were eerie snapshots of a world that might be. With the exception of two stories, I wanted most of these shorts to be full length novels. The two exceptions? I've read *Across the Universe* by Beth Revis and *Shade's Children* by Garth Nix so I've been immersed in those worlds via full length novels. Reading about "Shade" again, I realized I need to re-read that book this year.

My Favorite Story: Blood Drive By Jeffery Ford

With all the recent stories about gun massacres and the arguments for and against gun control, this story made me realize that guns in the hands of everyone might not be a good idea. In this story, teenagers are given guns their senior year in high school. It's a right of passage like getting car when you are sixteen or going out for drinks on your 21st. The horrifying results of this right of passage at one school and comments about the government will give you pause.

My Least Favorite Story: Gray By Jane Yolen

I am just not a fan of poetry. It's as simple as that.

Final Thoughts

Paging back through this book, I would love to share my thoughts on each and every story, but this review would go on for days! Let's just say that if you are a fan of destroyed worlds, this anthology is one you should consider picking up. Filled with stories about creepy worlds with kids doing what they can to survive, this anthology will not disappoint.

This review was originally posted on Second Run Reviews

Margit says

It's challenging to build a believable, detailed world with developed, relatable characters in a short story. In order to make a story interesting, you have to add an intriguing plot with good pacing. Some authors are more successful than others at these tasks.

3.5* "The Segment" by Genevieve Valentine - The first page was confusing and hard to get into, but then the story picked up. Loved the ending, which really pulled everything together.

4* "After the Cure" by Carrie Ryan - The pacing was quick and the tension high until the ending, which was predictable and thus disappointing. Excellent world-building and internal monologue. The character's emotional responses were very clear and interesting to follow.

5* "Valedictorian" by N.K. Jemisin - Excellent world-building and character development in such a short space.

3* "Visiting Nelson" by Katherin Langrish - The slang doesn't seem authentic; the spellings are confusing/unnecessary (eg. "teknikly"). Some of the jokes fall flat. Excellent development of setting, using sound and smell. Good pacing and build-up of suspense. I had difficulty suspending my disbelief on two issues: 1) If everything's flooded, how do they still have electricity to charge their cell phones? 2) How did Charlie learn to read?

4* "All I know of Freedom" by Carol Emshwiller - Sweet, authentic, poignant (scary). Believable. - 1* for predictability.

4* "The Other Elder" by Beth Revis - Chilling. I have to wonder if it's believable that the younger elder didn't ask what the other two rules were, before he was told, or if he did, it wasn't addressed in the story. He seemed a curious and rebellious character to me.

4* "The Great Game At the End of the World" by Matthew Kressel - Excellent depiction of teenagers. The details were in character. The dialogue and internal monologue was believable and funny. Very creative, oddball, fun Baseball generally bores me, but because of all the crazy Creepies, I didn't get bored.

5* "Reunion" by Susan Beth Pfeffer - Chilling. Spare with details--I would have liked just a little more about the disparity in the clothing or grooming of the two "sisters," to paint a more complete picture. Great ending.

4* "Blood Drive" by Jeffrey Ford - Very well-written and executed, but afterward, I kind of felt like "What was the point?" I didn't feel like the characters grew. It was too plot-driven and contrived for my tastes (to emphasize a political agenda--even one I agree with).

5* "Reality Girl" - Intense. Good. I'm not in love with the names (especially "Not"), but I got used to them.

2* "How Th'Irth Wint Rong by Hapless Joey" by Gregory Macguire - The horrible spelling was challenging to get through and I don't understand why Joey's spelling would be so horrible if he had already been born when the "Irthsore" happened. The tragedy didn't seem to affect books and Joey had an aunt and grandpa who I would expect to be literate. Why was his aunt's spelling so poor? She spelled special "spehxul." This is the kind of spelling I would expect after generations of no books, not 15 years after (view spoiler) If there was a reason the aunt was half-literate, it should have been explained in the story. Also, I didn't feel there was much character development or worldbuilding. The entire story was focused on the spelling, which I found implausible and distracting. The surprise ending partially redeemed the story, a response from the "Committee" written in perfect English (further confusing the literacy issue).

4* "Rust with wings" by Steven Gould - A few editing oversights were distracting. The story was very tense and plot-driven. It reminded me very much of Michael Crichton's Prey. There were a couple of things that didn't feel believable.

4* "Faint Hearth" by Sarah Rees Brennan - I appreciated her subtle political undercurrents. Fantastic ending. The writing was clunky in places and often passive tense.

5* "The Easthound" by Nalo Hopkinson - I love the gritty details. It feels like kinds around the campfire telling ghost stories, but the ghosts are real. Powerful ending. Excellent storytelling.

3* "Gray" by Jane Yolen - (poem) Too much repetition for my tastes. The imagery seemed cliche.

4* "Before" by Carolyn Dunn - Very powerful story. There was one line on the first page that took me out of the story "I have known nothing else, no light, no darkness, no night sky..." The narrator then proceeds to describe these things. She was using hyperbole but I took her literally because of the anthology's theme. I kept wondering if/how much I could trust the narrator the entire story because if she'd never seen the stars, she couldn't describe them. Perhaps that was the author's intent? But it took me too much out of the story.

5* "Fake Plastic Trees" by Caitlin R. Kiernan - I like the way that it's a story within a story. I think she uses that device to strengthen the voice--she gives us an unreliable narrator who gets called out and then become reliable--great technique.

4* "You Won't Feel A Thing" by Garth Nix - Interesting worldbuilding, although it was a little confusing. The author noted that the story takes place in the same world as his novel "Shade's Children". The story gave me a taste for the world, and I'm curious to learn more.

3* "The Marker" by Cecil Castellucci - Interesting concept.

Pat F. says

This book has 3 big things going for it:

1. They're young adult postapocalyptic, which is rare.
2. All of the stories take place only *after* the disaster has occurred--it doesn't really matter how it happened (or even what happened).
3. There's a preponderance of female authors, for once.

As with all short-story collections, some of these are better than others. Standouts for me were the ones by Genevieve Valentine, Sarah Rees Brennan (long-time fan, here) and Cecil Castellucci.

J.A. Dalley says

Detailed Review of After

The Segment

Really interesting world and characters. Reminded me of Hunger Games. 7

After the Cure

Interesting take on a zombie apocalypse. Great characters!

9

Valedictorian

Great setting. I really enjoyed it.

9

Visiting Nelson

I couldn't read more than two pages because the narrative is written from the perspective of an illiterate teenager, i.e. Sint Paul, useta, coz, etc.

0

All I Know of Freedom

This story was really weird. I didn't like it because it was a green global warming story making fun of religious people.

2

The Other Elder

The Giver on a generation ship.

5

The Great Game at the End of the World

Really weird. The earth was destroyed and friendly monsters roamed the surface. The two characters play a baseball game with the monsters.

3

Reunion

Portrays a revolution in a Hunger Games-esque world.

6

Blood Drive

A story about high schoolers carrying hand guns to school, and the problems that causes.

7

Reality Girl

Odd story about people who dive in poisonous water after golden coins to please tourists. Reality Girl gets recruited to help with a movie and learns more about herself in the process.

8

How Thirth Wint Rong By Hapless Joey

Didn't even bother with this one. The title scared me off.

0

Rust with Wings

Bugs that eat metal have taken over part of the US and Jeremy's family try to escape.

8

Faint Heart

Though this does take place in the future I felt like I was reading a fantasy short story. Just a retelling of the labyrinth with a Minotaur. Great ending though.

9

The Easthound

Standard dystopian story about kids hitting puberty turning into monsters.

7

Gray

Poem about the end of the world, and it's rebirth.

8

Before

Another standard dystopia. Mankind created a disease that is no killing everyone. The catch is that native America's are immune. Kind of weird and not much plot.

3

Fake Plastic Trees

Nanites have taken over the world and turn everything into a plastic substance called THE GOO. Only a few cities have survived.

8

You Wont Feel a Thing

Interesting world. This is actual a prequel to the author's novel Shade's Children. The world interested me enough I'll buy that book to find out more.

7

The Marker

Really interesting story. Had a Giverish feel to it also.

8

Craig DiLouie says

What happens after the end of the world? That's the thematic question behind *AFTER*, an anthology of nineteen stories edited by Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling.

Contributors include Carrie Ryan, Richard Bowes, Caitlin R. Kiernan, Jeffrey Ford and more.

It's an eclectic collection with a literary bent. In the stories, the characters often try to find meaning and control in an atmosphere of dramatic change or post-change.

My favorite stories were:

Carrie Ryan's "After the Cure" tells the story of a young woman cured of a vampire affliction that is threatening to overrun the world. The problem is the society that cured her doesn't trust her, while she remembers and often longs for the pure simplicity and sense of family among the undead hunters of the night.

N.K. Jemisin's "Valedictorian" tells the story of a young woman at the top of her school and living in a society enclosed by a superior machine intelligence. The last humans barely survived the war and now hide behind a massive wall that everyone knows offers no real protection. Each year, the machines ask for the smartest among the humans to be handed over.

Carol Emshwiller's "All I Know of Freedom" tells the story of a young woman kept as an indentured servant in the home of a rich family during a time of mass poverty and natural calamity. She stumbles across a religious community that is building a rocket ship to start a new life on another planet.

Steven Gould's "Rust with Wings" tells the story of a young man fleeing his home with his family. Behind him, a growing infestation of strange insects that devour metal is growing.

Metthew Kressel's "The Great Game at the End of the World" tells the story of a brother and sister playing a baseball game with a strange set of creatures on a torn section of earth thrown into space, the private collection of a vast intelligence.

The voices were refreshing to this jaded apocalyptic reader, though I wish Datlow had reached out to more authors who specialize in apocalyptic fiction.

Louisa says

Oh, I enjoyed a lot of these stories, they were creepy, and good, and now I'm one step closer to rereading Across the Universe!

Trudi says

Short story collections and anthologies are always a mixed bag for me. Not only do I struggle with my own personal hang-ups when it comes to the short story format itself, you pretty much know going in to any anthology there will be hits and there will be misses. If you're lucky, a few will emerge as outstanding pieces of awesomeness, and I'm thankful to report I experienced that here.

Two things attracted me to this collection: 1) Ellen Datlow (editor extraordinaire) and 2) you had me at

dystopia. I'm addicted to tales of dark and dangerous futures comprised of post-apocalyptic landscapes, where human survival is not a given, and the long and suffocating reach of a rigidly controlled society is profoundly felt.

I admit that these days we've gotten pretty footloose and fancy-free when it comes to our definition of dystopia. I'm not a purist by any means, but there are elements I expect to see (or not as it were) if I'm going to consider a story full-on dystopian. Much of it has to do with how well the society and its rules are conceived. Dystopia (just like the devil) is in the details. But we are talking about a spectrum. And there are an infinite number of spaces on that spectrum where a story can fall. The joy comes with the discovery of just how much variety and interpretation can be applied to a genre, how much can any one writer push the boundaries past what we've come to know and expect.

For whatever the reasons (and pundits and academics will argue the causes til they run out of oxygen), YA publishing is in the throes of a passionate obsession with dystopian tales and end-of-the-world scenarios. Readers are responding in kind, feeding the monster. And I couldn't be happier about that. The more authors, new and established, are encouraged to play around in the dystopia sandbox, the better off the genre will be. Push it to its limits, see what it can do, uncover all it has to teach us and the infinite number of ways it has to thrill and chill.

The short stories comprising this anthology (like every other anthology I've ever read) are not equally strong. There are definite misses where either the idea is confused or fumbled altogether, the characters underdeveloped, the prose weak. But I don't want to focus on the negative here, because there are also some outstanding pieces of writing not to be missed.

After the Cure, Carrie Ryan: You may already know Ryan from her Forest of Hands and Teeth trilogy (which I highly recommend checking out). Here, Ryan tells the story of a young girl who is a recovering blood-sucking predator of humankind. In a new post-apocalyptic world of survivors, she has been cured. But it has left her lonely and longing for something more. No longer quite human, but no longer able to run with her pack, she seeks out the company of a young man with a tragic past. The writing here is beautiful, the mood melancholy.

The Great Game at the End of the World, Matthew Kressel: This one has such a weird and dreamlike quality to it, with an unsettling underbelly vibe that I can't quite call sinister, but feels like something Lovecraft could have written. A brother and his younger sister are the sole survivors of a mysterious, unknowable, cataclysmic "event". The siblings are forced to adapt to their new environment. All I can say is that it's a strange and wonderful piece.

Reunion, Susan Beth Pfeffer: Pfeffer is a prolific and bestselling YA author. This story is dark and damaged in so many ways, with a nice twist at the end. There aren't a lot of details about the society, but what we do get is reminiscent of Nazi Germany or Communist Russia. A mother and daughter proceed to interview young girls in the hope of finding their child / sister who was stolen from them years before. They recount their ordeal to her, how they had to submit themselves to the murderous whims of savage soldiers in order to find out her fate. This one is so tightly plotted, it had me sitting on the edge of my seat.

Rust With Wings, Steven Gould: I loved this one because it is such good ol' fashioned, high octane fun of action and peril. It has its roots firmly planted in the 1950's sci-fi tradition of "bugs gone wild".

The Marker, Cecil Castellucci: Interesting idea satisfactorily realized. Trust me, that's all you need to know.

Before I wrap this up, I do want to mention "Faint Heart" by Sarah Rees Brennan because it is the only one that reads like the beginning of a novel, rather than a short story. The cliffhanger ending left me screaming "Nooooo!" because I desperately wanted to know what was going to happen next. It is a "deadly games" premise where certain males are forced to compete to the death in The Trials. The sole survivor wins the hand of the "queen" - a genetically cloned model of perfection. I was just really getting into the story and warming up to the characters when it was over. This aggravated me more than pleased me.

This anthology is a rich grab bag, so don't be shy about diving in because you're sure to find something to suit your tastes. Just for the sheer variety of the stories -- I never knew what to expect next -- and the overall quality of the writing, I am highly recommending you check it out!
