



Última generación

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Primera recopilación de relatos del autor de La fábrica de avispa y El uso de las armas. Incluye dos historias que se desarrollan en el universo de la Cultura, a las que se suman otras seis y un ensayo. El relato principal, una novela corta que da nombre a la obra, es una sorprendente contribución a la saga de 'La Cultura', que narra la disyuntiva moral acerca del hombre y la Tierra y del posible futuro para la humanidad. ¿Deberá intervenir la Cultura para cambiar este incierto futuro?

Última generación Details

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From Reader Review Última generación for online ebook

Aerin says

My husband overheard me muttering to myself about this book being out of print in the US, so he secretly ordered it for me from the UK. When it arrived, I somehow assumed I'd ordered it for myself and forgotten about it, so I just tossed it on the to-read stack without comment. He had to hint and prod a bit before admitting he'd bought it for me as a gift. He's sweet; I'm a dork. Anyway.

Every Culture book I've read so far has been better than the last. Though this one is actually a short-story collection, it includes the fourth installment of the Culture series, a novella called "The State of the Art" that is both funnier and more heartbreaking than the previous three novels (which are all, to varying degrees, quite funny and heartbreaking). Here we meet up again with Diziet Sma, the heroine from Use of Weapons, as her Contact Unit spaceship encounters Earth for the first time, and must investigate the planet and decide whether to formally Contact its inhabitants.

I expected this novella to be a... lesser installment among the Culture lore. The fact that it's out of print in the US (while the first three novels recently got shiny new reprints) isn't a great sign, and the premise of a mashup between the über-futuristic Culture and 1970's-era Earth sounded pretty gimmicky. I hadn't expected Earth to appear at all in this series, other than perhaps in a hazy prehistoric "Earth-that-was" sort of backstory. Instead, it seemed we would fulfill another tired science fiction trope: the dopey, pugnacious, backward species disdained by the superior aliens. But, as is often the case with Iain M. Banks, there are deeper levels here than I was expecting, and also, oh, ow, my heartstrings.

The other stories in here are hit-or-miss, but that's the nature of short story collections. The one that will stick in my mind is "Descendant", a strange little story about a man in a sentient spacesuit trekking across a deserted planet. It's somber and gruesome and eerie.

Wanda says

A selection of short fiction set in the Culture universe, where your tools and equipment have opinions too and can talk back to you. My own tendency to talk to my surroundings would definitely have to change.

I really wanted to like the story where the Culture visits Earth. Is it still a first contact story if the Earth doesn't know it's been contacted? A bit on the preachy side, obviously written when Banks was annoyed with our treatment of our environment and each other, but acknowledging that we've got something special here. I liked it without have my socks blown off.

Banks is such a good writer, but not all of these stories demonstrate his best efforts. It does rather feel like a catch-all, displaying varying degrees of polish. Still, well worth reading for fans of the Culture!

Book number 285 in my Science Fiction and Fantasy reading project.

Lauren says

The only other Banks book I have read is Player of Games which I loved.

I think, as a compilation, this book fell a little short for me. I actually love short stories, so I was left feeling a little disappointed.

A couple thoughts on the individual stories:

Road of Skulls - I felt like this wasn't quite long enough or focused enough.

A Gift From the Culture - I liked this one. Kind of a little slice of life showing someone who has left the culture for something much more gritty.

Odd Attachment - I liked this one until the very end. I honestly think it got a little juvenile. The end didn't need to be that cheap.

Descendant - This was my favorite story in the book. It was well paced and interesting.

Cleaning Up - I thought this was an amusing premise.

Piece - Classic SF with the ending that makes you grin. I do think too many stories in this book focused on philosophical ramblings about religion, though.

The State of the Art - The longest story in the book. I like the idea. I like the base story. This story was the WORST offender for just waxing philosophical and being boring.

Scratch - I found this difficult to read, and not interesting.

So to sum up, I feel like there was more bad than good in this book. Definitely not my favorite compilation of short stories.

Gemma Thomson says

A thoroughly interesting read. "The State of the Art" isn't all sci-fi, and only a couple of the stories included here make mention of the Culture and its related technologies. There is also a rather chilling story to be discovered in "Piece", which I shall not spoil here.

I found that I enjoyed the short stories - of a misunderstood vegetable life-form, a traveller writing, a journey across a war zone, a Culture exile and clumsy interstellar bin-men - more than the title piece. They're admirably detailed pieces of short fiction, many of which highlight the best features of all Banks' writing.

"The State of the Art" itself felt like a tribute to L. Ron Hubbard. In it, Diziet Sma (from *Use of Weapons*) visits Earth of the 1970s, thus revealing that the Culture is a human civilisation far disconnected from our own. The story is essentially a study, examining our culture in a critical and satirical light. I'm usually turned off by such reality in my sci-fi, but I believe that Banks has handled the plot well.

The collection is a good one, and will shed new light upon Banks' work if you happen to be a fan; certainly, it has me putting his other works alongside *The State of the Art* and *The Algebraist* and speculating as only fanatics can about the Culture's unspoken origins.

Carlex says

The book is actually a miscellaneous of short stories and a novella. The latter and one -o perhaps two- stories are set within the universe of Culture, the rest is not. I understand that this should be indicated in some way to the reader before buying the book.

That said, some stories and the novella that gives the book its name are very good. Anyway, I can not get rid of the feeling of "porridge" in the book as a whole, by some intracending stories, some that seem experimental and some other that seems that Iain M. Banks does not take himself seriously ... or us readers.

Please do not misunderstand me, Iain M. Banks's talent is evident in every sentence and of course I do not regret having read this work, although actually it can not be considered -except maybe for the editors- as the fourth book of Culture series.

Bettie? says

[Bettie's Books (hide spoiler)]

Deborah Ideiosepius says

It took me quite some time to get really into this collection because -you'll laugh- I didn't actually realise it was a collection of short stories when I grabbed it from the library. I saw the author, the title and the fact that it was "Culture #4".

So the first chapter takes us along a road that has been paved in the skulls of defeated enemies in a cart, only it bears no resemblance to the second chapter which is about a culture citizen who has joined another civilisation covertly. Well, maybe it was a prologue? Thus went my thinking, I was at about the fourth story before I googled and realised that the book was a collection of short stories and once I realised that and stopped trying to make them fit together my reading experience improved.

As a book for short stories, some excellent some mildly enjoyable, this book works beautifully. Despite being up to the #4 in the Culture series, I didn't feel I really knew much about the culture because most of the books are from the points of view of non-culture individuals. After this book I feel like I have a much better idea about what the civilisation of the Culture is actually about and how the individuals within it regard their own empire and the ones surrounding them.

Kevin says

A collection of short tales, the shortest being about two pages long, the longest, eponymously titled, over a hundred and is the main filler here. Not all the tales are about the Culture, or set in the Culture Universe, but 'State of the Art' is, and is the most fleshed out and most interesting story in the collection. It deals with the Culture discovering the Earth during 1977, and sends down agents to study and learn from our planet. As it's

Iain Banks, you probably do not need to be told the wry, quite funny at times, observations made (flawed, odd and unequal economic system, penchant for wars and killing each other and so on), and debates ensue amongst the Ships crew whether to actually intervene, to make the Culture known to the planet. One of the agents goes native and decides not to leave as he starts to actually like Earth - and starts believing in Jesus and turns into a Roman Catholic, despite the protestations coming from the Cultures ship and Sma's attempted intervention to save him. An interesting tale nonetheless.

The other tales - well, just go to show the genius and ability to craft interesting and sometimes quite abstract tales that Iain had. Not a big book, coming in at just over 200 pages, but worth a read through, if nothing else but to read about the exploits of Diziet Sma (who first came to light in *Use of Weapons*) again.

James says

Sort of in the Culture series, sort of not quite. This is the (first?) collection of Iain M. Banks short stories, paired with a Culture novella which gives the book its title. Taking up half the book *The State of the Art* tells the tale of the Culture's first contact with Earth, some time in the '70s. Told in the form of a mission report by Diziet Sma, and later translated by Skaffen-Amtiskaw, (prior to their appearances in *Use of Weapons*).

Sma is assigned to the Contact group, on board *The Arbitrary*. Contact's role seems to consist more of sampling the feel of a planet rather than actually making contact, and she hangs out in various cities sampling the food, the culture and the people. Unfortunately, the whole thing feels a little contrived – as if Banks had been repeatedly asked (a) is the Culture us in the future, and if not, (b) does the Culture ever come to Earth? Instead of having a story to tell, it feels more like Banks is answering those questions: no and yes, respectively. And, as there's no real story, Banks ends up filling the gaps with 'why humans suck' and 'why humans are so great'. Sma takes the anti-Earth side, wanting the Culture to completely step in and just stop us running things so badly; Dervley Linter takes the opposing side, as he's busy going native anyway. And to be fair to him, he's not suggesting that we're doing well, just that our failures are an authentic part of our path. Points are always rescued by the ships themselves – having *The Arbitrary* send a postcard to the BBC requesting *Space Oddity* is just beautiful.

The short stories that come before the novella are also a bit of a mixed bag. The Culture feels like Banks's preferred world, and the obvious Culture story, *A Gift from the Culture*, is probably the most conventional story in the collection and probably also the one I enjoyed the most. *Odd Attachment* reads like a retro-SF story. A first-contact between a human and a vegetable based lifeform goes tragically wrong, but told from the point of view of the vegetable. *Cleaning Up* and *Descendant* were both interesting. The first is the story of a ship of interstellar garbage men dumping their second goods into our sun, except that their transporter is faulty and the items keep appearing in the middle of a paranoia driven cold-war America – what could go wrong. The second follows a man and his smart space suit, crashed on a planet. Does the suit need the man as much as the man needs the suit – for the company if nothing else?

The remaining three are a little esoteric. The collection is bookended with *Road of Skulls* at the start: interesting start, but even for a short story I wanted it to go a bit further. And, at the end, *Scratch (or: The Present and Future of Species HS (sic) Considered as The Contents of a Contemporary Popular Record (qv))*: pure experimentalism, and I'm none the wiser if it worked or not. The final piece was *Piece*, which wasn't even science fiction. At first I thought it was an essay on religious extremism, but eventually I realised it wasn't supposed to be Banks narrating. However, as with much of the rest of the collection, it felt a little like being beaten with somebody else's opinions.

Juliane Kunzendorf says

I finished this short story/ novella collection one day before Luke returns from Brazil. So we will record a podcast about this part of our book-club very soon :-)

Otherwyrld says

State of the Art is a Culture novella with a few additional short stories tacked on, only one of which could be classed as part of the series. The short stories themselves are merely OK, and none of them really stand out.

The novella shows what happens when a Culture team arrives to assess Earth, circa 1977, and decide if they will make first contact. This is done in a clever and realistic way, as the Culture agents spend a year visiting the planet, whilst the ship hacks every computer there is and downloads every scrap of information it can. A spanner is thrown in the works when one of the agents goes native and decides that he wants to stay on Earth irrespective of what decision is made. His conversation with fellow agent Diziet Sma (who appeared in Use of Weapons) is the highlight of the story, as he elucidates the whole purpose of the Culture and compares it (unfavourably) with that of Earth. If you want to understand the Culture, you really need to read this story. The finale is predictably downbeat as (view spoiler)

So, probably 4 stars for the titular story, but the superfluous short stories drag it down to 3 stars

Kevin Kelsey says

There are some authors whose short fiction I enjoy much more than their novels. Iain Banks is not one of them. A couple of these are great, but I think for the most part that he really excels when he has maximum literary space to explore a story and develop his characters. 'A Gift from the Culture' and 'The State of the Art' are definite high points in the collection.

Individual stories:

Road of Skulls: 2/5
Nothing particularly special.

A Gift From the Culture: 4/5
I dug this one a lot. It had a noir quality to it. Told from the perspective of someone who opted to leave the culture for a pre-scarcity society. My favorite in the book.

Odd Attachment: 4/5
Pretty humorous encounter with a plant life form.

Descendant: 2/5
Another culture story. I didn't particularly like this one that much.

Cleaning Up: 3/5

A story about trash disposal gone wrong. One man's trash...

The State of the Art: 4/5

This novella, book 4 of The Culture series, takes up about half of the collection. It fell slightly short of brilliant when it focused too much on Earth things, and not enough on Contact things. Still a solid entry in the series, and it was good to see Sma and Skaffen-Amtiskaw again.

Scratch: 1/5

Was this some sort of experiment in making unintelligible poetry from newspaper clippings or something? I think it may be a joke written solely to entertain the Author, which is worth a star in and of itself.

Laura says

From BBC Radio 4 - Afternoon Drama:

The State of The Art

By Iain M. Banks

Dramatised by Paul Cornell

The Culture ship Arbitrary arrives on Earth in 1977 and finds a planet obsessed with alien concepts like 'property' and 'money' and on the edge of self-destruction. When Agent Dervley Linter, decides to go native can Diziet Sma change his mind?

The Ship Antony Sher

Diziet Sma Nina Sosanya

Dervley Linter Paterson Joseph

Li Graeme Hawley

Tel Brigit Forsyth

Sodel Conrad Nelson

Directed by Nadia Molinari.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b00hv1dz>

4* Consider Phlebas (Culture, #1)

4* The Player of Games (Culture, #2)

4* Use of Weapons (Culture, #3)

4* The State of the Art (Culture, #4)

TR Excession (Culture, #5)

TR Inversions (Culture, #6)

TR Look to Windward (Culture, #7)

TR Matter (Culture, #8)

TR Surface Detail (Culture #9)

TR The Hydrogen Sonata (Culture #10)

Nikki says

The State of the Art is a collection of short stories, some of which relate to the Culture novels and some of which don't (or at least, don't overtly). I actually wasn't much impressed by Iain M. Banks as a short story writer, it seems: the best of the stories was the titular story itself, which is both a Culture story and rather longer than the other stories in the collection, which gave it more space to interest me, and more space for him to set up the kind of story that's grabbed me in his novels.

There's nothing wrong with the stories per se, but they didn't grab me at all (with the exception of the one already mentioned and 'A Gift from the Culture'). Where I was interested was when it was closest to Banks' other SF work, but otherwise the stories seemed fairly unremarkable. There are some interesting bits of humour; wry looks at staples of the genre.

I'm hoping that's not a reaction to Banks' work in general, as I know I did enjoy several of his Culture novels and I was looking forward to reading the rest. Perhaps he just isn't to my taste as a short story writer.

Originally reviewed here.

Manny says

The first two stories are OK, but nothing special.

The third one is quite funny. I can't count the number of times I've seen a hapless spaceman get rent limb from limb by a bug-eyed monster. But what's the monster's motivation? Banks comes up with a lovely answer.

#4 is also a nice perspective flip in a classic SF scenario. The guy in the space-suit needs to walk a long way across the surface of a hostile planet to reach safety. We always see it from the guy's point of view. How about the suit?

#5 is amusing too. I liked the alien speech translator:

'First person singular obtaining colloquial orgasm within a Caledonian sandwich,' it said, then looked annoyed, and spoke incoherently into a grille set in its belly, which replied. It looked up and said, 'Sorry. As I was saying, I come in peace.'

We're always getting problems like that.

#6 is a bit too cute. The ending was nice though.

#7 is the title story: when the Culture visits Earth. It's not the most successful Culture story. Banks gets too indignant about our obvious failings, and there are a lot of rather dull discussion scenes. Enough good ideas though that it's still worth reading.

#8 is an unusual experimental piece, only half-successful.

All in all: not as good as most of his stuff. I can see why he usually sticks to novels, he's not a natural short-story writer.

