



Darwin's Bastards: Astounding Tales from Tomorrow

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Social satire, fabulist tales and darkly humorous dystopian visions by some of Canada's most adventurous and distinguished writers.

The 23 stories in *Darwin's Bastards* take us on a twisted, wild ride into some future times and parallel universes where characters as diverse as a dead boy, a one-legged international actuarial forensics specialist, a pharmaceutical guinea pig, and a far-sighted fetus engage in their own games of the survival of the fittest.

The collection includes the first new short story by **William Gibson** to be published since 1997, as well as original, previously unpublished fiction by **Lee Henderson, Timothy Taylor, Heather O'Neill, Mark Anthony Jarman**, and others.

From recent Trillium Award-winner **Pasha Malla's** hilarious take on the apocalypse, where Prince is the only man left alive, to newcomer **Matthew J. Trafford's** brilliant triptych about the fallout from the cloning of Jesus Christ, to iconoclast **Sheila Heti's** meditative romp about beleaguered physicists and Oracle of Delphi-like BlackBerrys, *Darwin's Bastards* is a fast-moving, thought-provoking reading extravaganza.

Darwin's Bastards: Astounding Tales from Tomorrow Details

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From Reader Review Darwin's Bastards: Astounding Tales from Tomorrow for online ebook

TrueMyths says

These reviews are not in the order of the book, but in the order I am reading them.

#1: This is a collection of short stories and I started in the middle with Timothy Taylor's "Sunshine City" because it has lots of infinity symbols in it and I'm intrigued by the concept of infinity. I'm not quite sure what Taylor was trying to achieve with the story - it seemed a bit like an attempt to cross Chandler's "Farewell, My Lovely" with Ballard's "Vermillion Sands" and statistics. I love all these things so I should have connected, but it didn't happen for me. On to the next story.

#2: I loved Jessica Grant's "Love in the Pneumatic Tube Era." I'm worried that liking this more than "Sunshine City" reveals my penchant for romance. It starts with a genius first line: "We bat our eyes more than anyone else. We are more batty." That first paragraph just gets better and better too, especially if you love chess like me: "We slide like bishops. We gallop like the letter L." Love, chess and adventure in an odd near future; sign me up.

#3: William Gibson's "Dougal Discarnate" was a fun read in this collection. I loved the way he talked about bonding over cheesy dystopias - he talked about Mel Gibson, I talk about Arnold Schwarzenegger. Same belt, different buckle.

#4: Buffy Cram's story "Large Garbage" cracked me up! READ IT. The detecting was the highlight. READ IT.

Tami says

i ordered this because douglas coupland contributed. but i am discovering so many more amazing authors

i keep this in my pool bag and read a story now and then, so this is gonna take a long time

Cybercrone says

Some stories I liked better than others, of course, but in this time of excessive political turmoil, most had some point that was too close for comfort.

Corporations with armies that rule the world, the outlawing of all medical care to 'cure' over-population (so of course all the rich folk just moved off-planet), a wall built by us Canadians the stretched for the whole length of the Canada/US border to keep out the murderous barbarians, and the quarantining of anyone with any celebrity at all, in any field, since the population was averaging 19 hours a day watching celebrity "news" and not getting anything else done properly.

I guess that's what makes the best science fiction. Take the difficult things in current reality and just exaggerate them a bit and give them a tiny twist, and they can become truly horrifying. Or an early warning?

Norman Weatherly says

Writing a review of this book is torture because it is a compilation of some very good stories, some very talented writers and some that just didn't light a fire in my belly. Overall I am happy that we have this pool of talent to harvest and feed our minds upon. 3 out of 5, above average but not exceptional. I would like to nudge it to 3.5 because it has introduced me to some artists that I want to read more of.

Melissa says

The opening story intrigued me as I read about a child wondering why some mutations are successful while others aren't? What parent hasn't had to have that conversation at one point with their curious little one? For me, while the first couple of pages grabbed my attention, all the footnotes and references in the first chapter were a bit of a drag. This thankfully changed as we moved on to the next chapter which became more fluid.

This book is a great read. I did find however, that once I put it down, I really had to be in a thoughtful, pensive mood in order to pick it up and enjoy it again. It's not a read that you can mindlessly enjoy, although at times this can be a good thing.

The book is described as being "An exploration of future times, ... a collection of social satire, fabulist tales and irreverent dystopian visions of the day after tomorrow." And let me tell you, it does not disappoint. Every aspect of social life is discussed in this book, from the rise of reality tv to the feelings that if we don't have our blackberries attached to our ears, the world will end. While some of the book really describes how humanity is going down the tubes, it backs up the claims and doesn't make the reader feel as if they are the cause for the end of civilization as we know it. The writers of these 23 short stories did a great job in really expressing their views without sounding elitist or "holier than thou." That's difficult when writing a book on what is going wrong with humanity.

My feelings are if you are looking for something intellectual, that will really get you thinking about how humanity has and will develop (or break down), this book is for you. And while some of these stories are funny and really out there, they really help to open up an intelligent dialogue when speaking about social issues.

Scotchneat says

Some big Canadian names in this collection of short stories meant to follow the near future into the plausible, the fantastic and the entertaining.

There's a wide-ranging number of styles, lots of sardonic humour and some interesting what-ifs. Lots of absurdity. I like absurdity.

In some of the imaginings, Canada is barricaded from the US that has devolved into a dystopian nightmare, William Gibson makes an appearance, as does Douglas Coupland, which in itself, is a big deal.

There's also an end-game version of "Survivor" (Coupland), and one future in which the only man left on the planet is Prince (aptly called "1999"). Another story that stayed with me involved a group of teens in Waterloo, ON (hey, hometown!) whose blackberries become the Delphic oracle of life.

Great bedtime reading, since you can read a story and put it aside.

Fatin says

I'm very disappointed in this book. I picked it up on a whim because it looked so interesting but it was completely average.

Dawnincognito says

A bunch of speculative fiction by Canlit authors. Heavy on the "lit". These stories made my head ache; sometimes in a good way, sometimes not as much.

Mini-reviews of my favourite stories in the collection:

"The Auroch" by Lee Henderson. the story of a man (living in an overpopulated, polluted, cancer-ridden future where medicine is illegal) who spends his life searching for a collector's item. some excellent turns of phrase in this one.

"Sunshine City" by Timothy Taylor. holy shit I just really liked a murder mystery set in some kind of gated community country club where the lady character was all about her sex appeal. good show!

"Notes From the Womb" by Anosh Irani. what the fuck was that?!? I'd say "I can't even" but I could, maybe, with a lot of work. fascinating and surreal.

"There is No Time in Waterloo" by Sheila Heti (conceived with Margaux Williamson). hey that was pretty cool. a predictive Mother of All Blackberries comes out that instructs people what to do next based on past experiences. what happens when you encounter something completely new?

"1999" by Pasha Malla. a woman declares on New Year's Eve, 1999, that she wouldn't fuck Prince (except the symbol) if he were the last man on Earth. she wakes up, hung-over, in the year 2000, with the city empty of people and Prince on the radio begging any surviving women to "cum 2 him" and repopulate the world. I loved this, it was really funny and kinda poignant at the end.

"The Divinity Gene" by Matthew J. Trafford. a triptych about the genetic sequencing of Jesus, the how, and the why. I really enjoyed this one. relatively accessible and a good way to close the anthology.

Danielle says

Darwin's Bastards is a collection of Canadian speculative short fiction edited by Zsuzsi Gartner, and contributed to by Adam Lewis Schroeder, Lee Henderson, Douglas Coupland, Stephen Marche, Yann

Martel, Timothy Taylor, Mark Anthony Jarman, Jessica Grant, Elyse Friedman, Annabel Lyon, Anosh Irani, William Gibson, Buffy Cram, Paul Carlucci, Sheila Heti, Heather O'Neill, Oliver Kelhammer, Laura Trunkey, David Whitton, Pasha Malla, Neil Smith, Jay Brown and Matthew J. Trafford.

The book is divided into four sections; Survivors, Lovers, Outliers and Warriors. The groups that I enjoyed the most were Lovers and Warriors, though I was able to find a story from each section that stood out. The content and style of each story varies widely. Some writers attempted a realistic projection of the future, while others were fantastical. Some of the stories are hopeful, while others are not. Most are written in a clear narrative A to B line, while a couple are more prone to prose. Since the collection caters to many tastes, 99% of speculative fiction fans will enjoy some stories especially, and the collection overall, but there is bound to be one or two stories that aren't to your personal liking. This isn't a negative thing, just something to note as you make your journey through the volume.

Vocab words found in this volume: palimpsests (used by two authors), sepulchral

Here are descriptions of the stories within and my reactions to them:

This Is Not The End My Friend by Adam Lewis Schroeder

A group of people travel to meet a musician in an age where celebrity has taken over the United States of America, smothering all other discourse and creating a populace that will literally kill each other for fifteen minutes of fame. In response, Canada has sequestered all of their celebrities and given them alphanumeric codes to replace their names, making them effectively anonymous.

I appreciated the humour in this one, as well as the way that Schroeder highlighted both the cons and the pros of having an open discourse surrounding media and culture figureheads.

The Aurochs by Lee Henderson

A middle aged man reflects back on his life as a professional auctioneer of nostalgic paraphernalia in a world where the rich have fled to Mars and the humanity on earth are forbidden medical attention due to overpopulation.

I thought that the overpopulation resulting in a ban on all life-saving procedures and the criminalization of doctor-ship was a very stunning projection, not only for its shock value but also for its plausibility. I wish that the story had focused on this. In general, *The Aurochs* suffered from issues of pacing, though the content was enough to draw me through the occasional mire. Anyone who is a compulsive collector, is missing their childhood or has an obsession with cars will appreciate this one.

Survivor by Douglas Coupland

Coupland writes from the perspective of a reality show technical crew member as he works on a set on a far away island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. While there, nuclear war breaks out and suddenly it's not only the contestants that are fighting for survival.

I really enjoyed this story, as it showcases how a person can view people and their experiences as 'others' and not applicable to their own situation, while in reality, very little separates us, and that which does is subjective and vulnerable to change. In this case, the accepted role of watched and watcher separated cast from crew; but as the conditions of the cast became those of the crew as well, this distinction vanished.

Well played.

The Personasts: My Journeys Through Soft Evenings and Famous Secrets by Stephen Marche

The main character, a male of undefined adult age, describes his experiences in an intense role-playing society, where anyone can become anything.

For me, this story has echoes of Vonnegut, with its lamentations over suburban life and culture as the problem, and the suburbanites' wacky response as an answer, which both Vonnegut and Marche in his short story here convince the reader of its inevitability and ultimate plausibility.

We Ate The Children Last by Yann Martel

A brief tale written by a person who received a life-changing medical procedure on his digestive tract (namely, his guts were replaced with those of a small pot-bellied pig's) and the societal ramifications that followed.

The one takeaway from this story that I got was that people like to take credit for things when they go well, and completely wash their hands of responsibility when they go badly.

Sunshine City by Timothy Taylor

A statistician that specializes in probability is hired to solve a murder on an exclusive golf course.

My reaction? Meh. The pacing was slow, I hate golf and I didn't care about any of the characters.

The December Astronauts, or Moon-Based Horse Code by Mark Anthony Jarman

An astronaut returns to his base on the moon, where he discovers that his wife has left him and the settlement there holds little appeal.

I really enjoyed the writing. It has a soft-focus dreamy quality to it, that I thought helped to convey the main character's sense of disconnect and isolation. The entire story evoked feelings of attempted human connections that miss, of misunderstandings and things that can't be said, of mismatched people in the wrong places, and ultimately about our search for belonging.

Love In The Pneumatic Tube Era by Jessica Grant

A woman travels incognito to meet with her long-lost sweetheart.

Whenever I hear or see the word 'pneumatic,' I always think of Brave New World and Aldous Huxley. Perhaps for this reason, 'pneumatic' is, for me, always tinged with associations of science fiction. It's a cute little love story, minus a lot of the doom and gloom of stories previous. This is also the first story in the collection that has an identifiably female protagonist.

I Found Your Vox by Elyse Friedman

An older man finds a woman's pink 'Vox' (some kind of media device like an iPod or mini computer) and describes how he was surprised and delighted at her taste in music and current affairs.

An interesting comment on how people form intimate relationships with people, especially through media devices, without that person's knowledge. Another comment is how a person's tastes can surprise you, based on your outward impression of them.

Remote Control by Annabel Lyon

An alien monitors two people and their chance encounter in order to study the science of random sexual passion.

I liked the alien's fascination with human behaviour and the scenario that he/it was studying - two people, very much alone in their own different way, connecting by chance.

Notes From The Womb by Anosh Irani

This is the most prose-stylized entry in the collection, and certainly one of the most thought-provoking. A fetus still in utero describes his anger, his hopes, his future and the future of his mother.

I have mixed thoughts on this one. On one hand, I enjoyed the form and the subject matter. On the other, I was taken aback at the anger aimed at women who don't want to be mothers.

Dougal Disincarnate by William Gibson

A man writes about his encounters with an entity that is neither alive nor dead, solid nor ghost, named Dougal.

This story seems to ask the question of what constitutes a life form - the form itself, or the ability to experience life? I enjoyed this idea immensely. One tiny detail irked me and distracted me from the story though; when Dougal is separated from his body, his body then experiences a depression and eventually becomes an accountant. This seemed cliched to me - a soulless man becomes an accountant, har har - and stuck out in an otherwise fresh story.

Large Garbage by Buffy Cram

The financial structure/economy of academics and the arts collapses, and the scholars and artists begin to roam the country as intellectual hobos. One suburban upper class man is swept up in their human tide.

With post-secondary school debt and youth unemployment both in atrocious states at the moment, I really appreciated this entry. It was predictable, but it had its charms and something to say, which helped to make up for its minor shortcomings.

This Morning All Night by Paul Carlucci

A man fishes the last star out of the sky in order to provide fuel for his son's journey into adulthood.

This is a well crafted metaphor regarding shrinking resources and man's blind pursuit of claiming and exhausting materials despite the damage that their consumption will cause. A sad story, with a whimsical setting.

There Is No Time In Waterloo by Sheila Heti

A generation is raised by an App on their phone that computes the predictability of their lives and advises them on courses of action to take.

A strong comment on current society's reliance on outside opinion and technology, especially when it comes to ascertaining how to conduct your life. The ultimate message here that since no one knows you better than

you know yourself, relying on others' attempts at directing your life will fail and leave you disappointed. If you direct your own life and fail, at least you were being true to yourself.

The Dreamlife of Toasters by Heather O'Neill

An android with an unusual and possibly faulty capacity for enjoyment develops a crush on another android, and gives birth to a little android creature. Fearing that upon discovery of the creature, it would be destroyed and her circuitry would be forever altered so that she could no longer experience joy/create the creatures, she abandons it in a dump.

This is the second story in the collection that explores motherhood and the abandonment of a child. I did like the story, though there are aspects of it that bother me. I don't like how it insinuates that a mother has to give up what she enjoys in order to have children, though I realize that the character in this story is in a special circumstance. I think that if there is forethought and planning, plus a lot of hard work, a balance in life is always possible.

Crush by Oliver Kellhammer

A male marine biologist is aboard a deep sea fishing vessel, which is in search of fish, now almost extinct, to capture, grind up and form into fish sticks for human consumption. While aboard, he ruminates on how everything came to be, until he is interrupted by something found in the nets that no one expected.

This is one of the darkest stories, and does a remarkable job of showcasing that although humanity thinks that we own every other thing, living or not living, on this planet and can do what we will with them, including destroy them, we are gravely mistaken.

Fire From Heaven by Laura Trunkey

Several diplomats are consumed by spontaneous combustion in a war zone, and an aide searches for meaning and scientific explanation from a woman who wrote about the experience of her father.

A sombre tale that touches on family legacies, resource depletion, violence and fear, with paranormal aspects such as the aforementioned spontaneous combustion and people with ESP who can see auras. By the end, the story suggests that the violence that we do leaves residual energy and consequence that remains and burns on, injuring others.

Twilight Of The Gods by David Whittman

A male protagonist describes his service on a warship and his growing sense of discontentment with his life.

The world that is described has Denmark as a central power (which I thought was unique), has countries with company names, and describes country takeovers as 're-branding.' Murdering people and raiding their homes isn't a genocide, with messy implications of personal responsibility, ethics and morality - it's a corporate takeover, pure business. This was both a brilliant and shocking concept; we as people are always searching for ways to mentally distance ourselves from things that we find uncomfortable or unpleasant, and as outlandish as this re-imagining of 're-branding' may be, I can picture this becoming a reality far too easily.

1999 by Pasha Malla

A woman declares on the stroke of midnight on New Year's Eve that she wouldn't sleep with Prince if he was the last man on earth. Sure enough, when she wakes up the next morning, he is in fact that last man on earth.

The story then rotates through a cast of female characters who are making their way to Prince, guided by his voice on the radio.

This was the funniest of the stories, and seems to ask the question, what would *you* do if the last man on earth was a bizarre purple prancing elf?

Atheists Were Almost Right About Everything by Neil Smith

Murder victims and roommates wander a school in heaven, looking for their anger management class.

I really liked this story, mainly because it asks the reader to consider that violent acts have negative implications for far longer, and far further, than you can initially imagine. (How *would* you emotionally heal from being murdered?) A secondary comment that the story seems to be making is that differences of opinion do not justify resorting to violence as a solution.

Gladiator by Jay Brown

A man volunteers as a drug testing patient, and finds meaning in the donation of his health and life.

Some people go to extremes to feel like they are a part of something, and oftentimes, these people sacrifice everything for those around them. While I would not go to the length that this man goes to, I respect his sacrifices. The story seems to ask, how far are we willing to go, and how much are we willing to give of ourselves, in order to feel accepted?

The Divinity Gene by Matthew J. Trafford

A scientist reconstructs the DNA of Jesus and publishes instructions on how to clone him, with the resulting societal impact.

The story was well written and thought out, though I didn't have a strong reaction one way or another. It is certainly memorable, and does raise the issue of science as divinity vs science as science.

Joseph Hutt says

If I were to label *Darwin's Bastards* myself, I would call it real world dystopianism with a surprisingly citrusy zest of the surreal. To call it pure dystopianism is far too restricting, yet most of the stories seem to be migrating to or from the idea, if they aren't there already; but at the same time, they are kind of like that world we wake up in, eat, sleep, and screw around in, populated by protagonists that are as capable of changing the world as we are, and there's a very tangible point where you can relate with them, that is until the scales are tipped by global pneumatic tube systems or country club city states. Some of the stories engage actively with pop culture, while other's encourage one to figure out just what exactly a "God Helmet" is or to youtube "Vampire Squid" (which I recommend), while others are self-contained in their own regard, and one need only bring a willingness to read. Some are dead serious, while others will have you chuckling under your breath. But this is just another one of the brilliant things about this collection, it resists uniformity, opting instead for a coexisting disparity, a borrowing from cultures and genres, a complete hybridization.

Bethany says

Solid collection of short stories. Would be fun to see them turned into an anthology series.

sarah says

This one started out slow for me, the first several stories were set in very depressing futures. This changed about half way in, when puzzling out the meaning behind some of these stories became very interesting. I really loved Heather O'Neill's short story 'The Dream life of Toasters' due to its story teller style and the bright chirpy feel, even though it ultimately ends in abandonment! 'The Divinity Gene' was a really cool idea, though I'm still puzzling through the portrayed effects of cloning an individual who has already fulfilled their life purpose thousands of years ago. All in all, thought provoking and especially creative, I recommend it as a fun read despite how un-encharnted I am with the first few stories.

Tina says

This was an excellent collection of dystopian, post-apocalyptic, futuristic stories. There were dozens of authors, none of the stories were exceedingly long (something that bothers me with collections sometimes - when one story is like 80 pages and the rest are very short) and the Canadian flair was nice at times. I also liked how the stories were broken up into four categories - Survivors, Lovers, Outliers and Warriors. I'm not going to go into every story at length, but my favorite and least favorite from each follows:

Survivors:

"Survivor" - I'm not a fan of reality television and Coupland does a hilarious job of mocking the genre while also creating an engaging and plausible scenario. I laughed quite a few times and was thoroughly entertained by both the pessimistic narrator and the premise. "Sunshine City" was also a close second.

"The Aurochs". I don't know, this one bored me so I didn't finish it.

Lovers:

To be honest, I can't pick a favorite in this section because they were all so different.

"I Found Your Vox" was so creepy and well done. It isn't really a love story, but it was fantastic.

"Love in the Pneumatic Tube Era" was utterly adorable; a lot of fun and full of whimsy.

"Remote Control" Oh man. Aliens. Watching us. Sold. A thousand times sold.

I wasn't particularly fond of "Notes from the Womb" because I didn't really get what it was trying to say.

"December Astronauts" was ok. Might have been better as a novella.

Outliers:

A hard choice between "Dougal Discarnate" and "Large Garbage." I think Dougal was written better, if one can say that, as the main character in Large Garbage was a little flat, but both were great reads. Crush was good, but a little heavy-handed on the message.

The "Waterloo" story was ok - I guess I liked it least because it seemed so far-fetched, so asinine really.

Warriors:

"Twilight of the Gods" was really interesting. I would have loved this one to be a novel or a novella. The

characters were great and the setting was intriguing. Poor turtle.

I also really loved the twist at the end of the "Atheists Were Almost Right" so it's a hard choice between the two.

I didn't really care for "1999", though it wasn't bad.

Overall, I'd say there are some really amazing stories in this collection and only a few that kinda sucked. Definitely worth a read!

Jane says

The title had me so excited that this was going to be a great read! However, the title was more accurate than I wanted: these writer's aren't the "fittest that survived," they're truly Darwin's Bastards. That's unfortunate as I was hoping for engrossing tales of the future, wrapped up with evolutionary themes, the best of science fiction, highly evolved...

Instead, I give this the Darwin Award: not worth reading.

Ryan I says

There's no shortage of wit, Big Ideas and speculative, dystopic landscapes in the 23 stories compiled in Darwin's Bastards.

Each of the is stories a potential future; a road not taken, with each author spinning their own wild vision of the future, spawned from our muddled present.

It's a very hit-then-miss collection, but there's enough in here to make it worth your time.

Top 5:

-This Is Not The End My Friend by Adam Lewis Schroeder. Canada outlaws celebrity and hides our most valuable imports undercover in remote parts of the country, much to the chagrin of the States. A family takes a road-trip - in a flooded North America, where the Lower Mainland starts at Hope -- to find Feist in a trailer in Summerland(!).

-Dougal Discarnate by William Gibson; sort of a psychogeographic ghost story. A disembodied soul is trapped in Kits, unaging, after a bad LSD trip, while his body is an accountant in Burnaby.

-Sunshine City; a detective story that takes place in the protected utopia of a Country Club City where social order revolves around your golf game. An expert in risk-management is brought in from the outside world -- The Rough -- to solve a murder.

-Large Garbage; A suburban neighborhood is invaded by a filthy horde of liberal arts-educated homeless that invade neighborhoods around North America.

-There Is Not Time In Waterloo; where Blackberries have evolved into all-seeing oracles. if yours breaks, you're a social pariah, excommunicated.

Also; Survivor by Douglas Coupland (follows a crew member on the reality game show Survivor amidst global nuclear annihilation), 1999 by Pasha Malla (four women find themselves alone in the world with The Artist Formerly Known As Prince is the last man on Earth), The Dreamlife Of Toasters by Heather O'Neill (a sweet, sad tale of robot love and birth).
