



# A Perfect Universe: Ten Stories

*Scott O'Connor*

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From the author of the critically acclaimed novels *Untouchable* and *Half World* comes a new, breathtaking short story collection in the tradition of Annie Proulx's *Close Range* and Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles*.

A young musician trapped beneath a collapsed building. A teenage bicycle thief searching for a kidnapped boy. An aging actor fighting against the erasure of his past.

This science-fiction collection follows a diverse cast of characters struggling to live under the weight of their demons. As their lives intersect, they desperately seek escape and redemption from their own earthbound circumstances. Juxtaposing moments of wrenching tragedy with humanity and grace, *Thalassa* is a stunning and unflinching work that questions our very existence.

## A Perfect Universe: Ten Stories Details

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Author : Scott O'Connor

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## From Reader Review A Perfect Universe: Ten Stories for online ebook

### Jordan Stivers says

I am blown away by this collection of short stories. I requested it on a whim from NetGalley because of my love for short stories and their ability to be as touching and impactful as any novel. O'Connor did not disappoint; in fact, the collection wildly exceeded my expectations.

Each story is a window into a life sequestered in some corner of California, my beloved state, and you get the sense that each of these protagonists are someone walking past you right in that moment. They are as real and ordinary as any I have read. Each is flawed and somehow broken, even the children, but that adds to their mysterious reality. I enjoyed the tidbits about Southern California and one story's deliverance from it.

These stories are tragic and heart-wrenching, even at their brightest moments. The absurdity of life and the strange ways of wrong-place-wrong-time combine to create stories that are surprising without being hokey. Normal people in moments that become somehow extraordinary.

There is a hopefulness to the stories too despite the darkness that surrounds all of them. No matter how close the character comes to being unlikeable, the reader will find themselves rooting for their happiness in the end, which is often left up to the reader's interpretation.

Out of the ten stories, there was only one that I did not enjoy. My favorites were "Golden State", "Interstellar Space", "Colnago Super", and "It Was Over So Quickly, Doug" in that order.

Note: I received a free Kindle edition of this collection via NetGalley in exchange for an honest review. I would like to thank NetGalley, the publisher Gallery Books, and the author Scott O'Connor for the opportunity to do so.

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### Rachel says

A wonderful book, with stories that yearn to be read again and again; these characters and their struggles will stay with you long as finishing the collection. Scott O'Connor is one of our very best.

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### Bonnye Reed says

GNAB These short stories are excellent. The first, a young musician buried in rubble following an earthquake, is everything a short story could be, and each additional story outshines the last. I felt complete sympathy with the barista at the beginning of her tale, and for Liz and Flicker and Frank but in just a few words O'Connor can turn that around and make you question your own naivety. These stories are perfect examples of what short fiction is all about.

I received a free electronic copy of this collection of short stories from Netgalley, Scott O'Connor, and Gallery/Scout Press in exchange for an honest review. Thank you all for sharing your hard work with me.

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### **Amanda (Books, Life and Everything Nice) says**

I received this book for free through Goodreads Giveaways. As always, an honest review.

A Perfect Universe is comprised of ten engaging short stories. The stories follow everyday people in everyday situations which sounds mundane and is anything but. As we get a glimpse into their lives, what will we learn about them and life itself?

I really enjoyed this novel for its well written passages, thought given to ordinary moments of people's lives, and unique perspective on life. A few of the short stories were a bit slow for a few pages, but overall a wonderful book.

There were very few downfalls to this book. Some moments were not as intriguing as the rest. But truthfully that didn't last very long or distract from the storytelling.

I felt the story was especially strong in the area of storytelling. The author takes ordinary people in ordinary situations and transforms them into a wonderful, beautiful exploration of life. The writing is wonderful, giving us a unique perspective than most would take. The characters' inner monologue and perspective about their lives was so well created. I absolutely devoured this book in only 3 days.

I was a bit unsure about this book when I first picked it up, as I don't read a lot of short stories. I was so pleasantly surprised with the wonderful storytelling in A Perfect Universe by Scott O'Connor.

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### **Lori L (She Treads Softly) says**

A Perfect Universe: Ten Stories by Scott O'Connor is a highly recommended collection of short stories set in California. This sublimely written collection features stories that are observant of human nature and reactions, while capturing some of the heart break and absurdities that life can bring. Most of these people in these stories are ordinary souls caught in a moment of their lives as they reflect on or have an inner dialogue about their circumstances. Some of the people are at the mercy of events beyond the power of their control and must deal with the aftermath.

**Hold On:** A man trapped in the rubble of a collapsed building clings to the memory of the voice of the woman who read the names of the 146 people believed to be in the building and told them, "Hold On. We're coming for you"

**It Was Over So Quickly, Doug:** An incident is told through the dialogue of a self-important business woman on her phone, bud in her ear, a man waiting for coffee in line behind her and a barista with an attitude.

**Jane's Wife:** Liz worries about the weight she has gained since Jane left.

**Golden State:** Claire and his mom move to California where she tries to get on The Price is Right.

**Interstellar Space:** "Meg started hearing things when she was ten."

**In the Red:** A man attends a required anger management class where attendees "learn to deal with our hostile emotions in a safe and responsible manner."

**Flicker:** An aging actor, who is occasionally recognized, must now deal with his one hit being excised.

**Soldiers:** A young boy meets some other children and joins their game while trying to avoid his drunken,

irritable father and friends.

**The Plagiarist:** A young scholar points out that a novelist's career was based on copying material from other sources.

**Colnago Super:** A teenage bicycle thief searches for the child she babysits after he disappears.

Disclosure: My review copy was courtesy of Gallery/Scout Press.

<http://www.shetreadssoftly.com/2018/0...>

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## Amalia Gavea says

One of the strongest traits of Contemporary American Literature is the Short Story. A genre that can be more touching and powerful than the Novel when done right, serving a long tradition of exceptional short - story writers. I've always been an avid reader of short stories. The open ending, the ambiguity, the uncertain resolution or complete lack of it, appeal to me and this collection by Scott O'Connor is among the finest I've read so far. Complex themes, antiheroes, stories that are bound to take you on an intense emotional journey. Beware, though. It is probable that the course will be uncomfortable...

**"Hold On":** An immensely moving story about a survivor who is trying to cope with the aftermath, the severe alterations in his life, and to discover the identity of the woman whose voice helped him to hold on to life.

**"It Was Over So Quickly, Doug":** A gang shoot-out in a coffeeshop told from the perspectives of three people who couldn't be more different.

**"Jane's Wife":** Two women go through the implications of their troubled marriage within the context of the 2016 Presidential elections in the USA. I wasn't satisfied with this story, to be honest. I found it unnecessarily melodramatic and a bit of a gimmick with two very unsympathetic, selfish and absurd protagonists.

**"Golden State":** A young mother and her teenage son move to California from New York, chasing an irrational dream. The story touches upon the frenzy over TV shows, the hypocrisy of the suburbs, the feeling of being the "new face" in the neighbourhood. Still, the tone of it is light, bittersweet and hopeful.

**"Interstellar Space":** A moving, eerie story taking place in the late 70s. Two sisters are fighting with the imposing enemy of mental illness.

**"In the Red":** A bunch of despicable men take part in an anger management class. Jonas, possibly the least despicable of them but not less of a criminal, tries to find some escape through a TV sales programme.

**"Flicker":** A story that starts with the echoes of frustration from an unsuccessful actor becomes a tragic research on love, death and remembrance.

**"Soldiers":** A bully from a broken family, a boy with a drunkard father and an exhausted, indifferent mother, learns a good lesson from three siblings. An ugly story with an ending that offers plenty to think of.

**"The Plagiarist":** A well-known writer of short stories is exposed as an utter fraud.

**"Colnago Super":** A young bicycle - thief is determined to find a missing boy. This was one of the most touching stories of the collection.

These stories don't need many words. O'Connor doesn't shy away from issues that are universal, relevant to our troubled modern times, and chooses characters that come from all walks of life, different backgrounds, teenagers and adults. They are shady -even the children and morally ambiguous, troubled, confused, tortured and haunted by the past and by their own guilt. Some of them are immoral, verging on the territory of "despicable", but the power of O'Connor's writing is such that draws you in and make you care for them. You want them either to be punished or to find some kind of absolution, a new will to change their way.

The overall tone isn't happy. None of them is a "feel-good" story and I wouldn't like them if they were. Life

isn't made of unicorns and rainbows and fantasy creatures. These stories are real. They are grey and sad, full of desperation, exhaustion and pain, difficult, toiling and demanding, like most things in life. But a glimpse of hope is always present, kind of escape, even momentarily. The state of California, its areas, its people, the particular way of life, becomes a character in its own and Thalassa (the Greek word for "sea") is always present along with the hills and the nightly sky. But the Golden State of O'Connor hides a multitude of coals, in a universe that is far from perfect. A universe that is real and absolute.

Many thanks to Scout Press and NetGalley for the ARC in exchange of an honest review.

My reviews can also be found on <https://theopinionatedreaderblog.wordpress.com>.

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### **Colleen says**

Wow. I tore through this, forcing myself to slow down to enjoy the writing, the honesty, and the spot-on LA-area settings (I'm a native, and he nails it), but the stories are so compelling that I couldn't stop reading. Each one has a full story arc and characters that you get completely vested in within a few hundred words, and many of them break your heart. How does he do this? I hope awards are headed his way.

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### **Bandit says**

Never heard of the author, selected this one randomly on Netgalley, took the title to be ironic and the irony appealed. Lo and behold, while the universe's perfection might be questionable, these ten stories are dangerously close to perfection. Stunningly so. When it comes to short fiction, I expect the same thing as of a novel...tell me a story. I don't want a character sketch or an episodic glimpse or an experimental one off, I want an actual story, with a plot, a character development and an arc, a proper beginning and a proper end. And that's just what this collection offers, ten complete narratives, exceptionally well written and emotionally intelligent, the stories that will leave you with a more profound understanding of the world through a variety of variously traumatized characters usually on some sort of a precipice or at some sort of crossroads in their lives. I can lavish praise on this book with a gamut of completely sincere superlatives, but that wouldn't be quite right for such an understated collection. Suffice it to say this book connected with me on that precise level a reader always hopes for a book to connect with, I loved every single story. What a great discovery. Passionately recommended. Thanks Netgalley.

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### **Lissa says**

While I don't read many short story collections, when I do, I like for them to be realistic, grim, yet hope-filled. This collection more than meets those requirements. These stories are mostly set in California with a science fiction movie serving as a running thread throughout most of them. They include imperfect people who are trying to do better or redeem themselves and they are all characters with small hopes and dreams. I always looked forward to dipping back in and reading another of these stories. I received a digital ARC of this book through NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

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## **Keren Krinick says**

A Perfect Universe, by Scott O'Connor is a masterfully crafted collection of short stories. Ten different circumstances, brilliantly tied together in an ironically not-so-perfect universe. Thank you NetGalley, Scott O'Connor and Books Gallery/Scout Press for the early reading edition of this wonderful book.

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## **Sandie says**

As the stories spin out from the opening sentence, vignettes overlap, lives are united in unusual ways and mysteries come together. All the characters are plagued by subjective emotional confusion and unrest and bound by a desire to reinvent themselves in one way or another. Most of the tales are disquieting to say the least and their individual conclusions leave a lot of room for the reader's personal interpretation.

In general, I do not consider myself a science fiction connoisseur nor is this genre among my favorites. That being said let me add that this "sci-fi light" narrative is drenched with enough California sunlight to illuminate the harshest of truths and to demonstrate once and for all that, no matter how much we may seek to rid ourselves of the anxiety and apprehension involved in everyday living, that a PERFECT UNIVERSE exists only in our daydreams.

Thanks to Net Galley for the opportunity to read and review this collection.

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## **miss.mesmerized mesmerized says**

"A Perfect Universe" is a collection of ten stories all set in California, yet not the Hollywood California of stars and success, but the part where life is a bit sadder and less full of hopes. It's about a young man buried under a building which had crumbled, a business woman hated by the other clients in a coffee shop, a relationship which ended and does not provide solace anymore, a woman's preparation for a big day which ends in a disappointment, a girl hearing voices, a class of men trying to control their emotions and others. Scott O'Connor provides a huge variety of topics, yet all taken right from life. His characters are not the rich and famous, not the especially talented or gifted. It's the average boy and girl or their grown-up version.

As always in collections of stories, you like some more and others less. I cannot really say why this is the case, since it's neither due to the topic nor the protagonist that I prefer some. The first one, "Hold On" got me immediately. The man waiting to be rescued, finding comfort and hope in the woman's voice who is reading out their names, thus signalling them that they are not forgotten but searched for. His anger when the mayor decides to give up and the joy of surviving after all – you could easily feel the emotional rollercoaster Robert went through.

"Interstellar Space" also caught me, but this time there isn't much hope, it's a really melancholy story of schizophrenia. Her slowly deteriorating condition is sad to read. She seemed to be bright, joyful and lively and suddenly her mind decides to play tricks on her and have her finished in a hospital, locked-up in her body and the world outside shut out.

One which made me ruminate a bit was "The Plagiarist". I often wonder if there can be indeed something completely new that can be written or if not rather all has already been said somehow. How can today's works actually be "original"? There are some plot concepts that you can easily recognize, phrases that have

been used again and again – so, what is invented and what is rather copied?

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## Wit & Wonder Books says

\*\*ARC provided by author in exchange for an honest review\*\*

*A Perfect Universe* is a collection of ten short stories based in California in the shadows of Los Angeles. The stories of heartbreak and loss belie the title with richly developed characters that are each fighting or struggling in some way. From the has-been actor trying to erase his past to the young bicycle thief trying to find a kidnapped boy. The stories show the characters each trying to make a connection with someone or something that is unattainable.

My favorite story, *Interstellar Space*, is about a woman trying to re-connect with her sister who has been committed to a psychiatric hospital. Meg is lost in her world and Cate is trying to connect with her where she is now. The story is poignant and shows the depth of love that Cate has for her sister. Several of the stories seem to overlap or weave together with a plot line, a location, or a place in time.

Some of the stories seem to end when it feels there is still more to the story. I found myself wanting to know more or what happens next. I'm not sure if that is a flaw in that the stories feel incomplete or is a testament to the author in how quickly he got me invested. Perhaps a bit of both.

I highly recommend *A Perfect Universe* and will hold out a bit of hope that perhaps Mr. O'Connor will decide to turn some of these stories into full novels.

5 stars

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## RMazin says

All the characters in *A Perfect Universe* fall short of living in that ideal, but they are wistful enough, even in the face of adversity, to hope that somewhere the ideal may exist. While not linked the stories are bound together by the California setting. Subtler, is the author's use of a failed science fiction movie that occasionally plays in the background of several of these tales. Sometimes it is at the forefront, other times it is just a thread that would pass unnoticed in the greater theme of that tale. My favorite story is "Hold On" about a survivor of a building collapse. Obviously suffering from PTSD, he finds it hard to reconnect to his past or even imagine how to proceed into his future. Another favorite is "In the Red," where men are remanded to an anger management class that yields results ranging from the catastrophic to a bare glimmer of hard-earned hope. "Flicker" is about a faded "almost one-hit" movie star whose life is burdened by the professional and personal past he envisioned for himself. All these stories introduce the reader to people leading seemingly ordinary lives under great pressure, sometimes self-inflicted. It is what is happening under the surface that makes these stories so compelling.

Thanks to Netgalley and the publisher to read this outstanding story collection.

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## **Emma Charles says**

A collection of engaging short stories. Some stories I found myself becoming very invested in, but others fell short. Overall, a decent, fun read!

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