



## The Apocalypse Reader

*Justin Taylor (Editor), Grace Aguilar, Steve Aylett, Robert Bradley, Dennis Cooper, Lucy Corin, Matthew Derby, Carol Emshwiller, more... Brian Evenson, Neil Gaiman, Jeff Goldberg, Theodora Goss, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Shelley Jackson, Ursula K. Le Guin, Stacey Levine, Kelly Link, Gary Lutz, H.P. Lovecraft, Rick Moody, Michael Moorcock, Josip Novakovich, Joyce Carol Oates, Edgar Allan Poe, Colette Phair, Terese Svoboda, Lynne Tillman, Deb Olin Unferth, H.G. Wells, Allison Whittenberg, Diane Williams, Adam Nemett, David Elliott, Jared Hohl ...less*

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These are the ways the world ends. Thirty-four new and selected Doomsday scenarios: an enthralling collection of work by canonical literary figures, contemporary masters, and a few rising stars, all of whom have looked into the future and found it missing. Across boundaries of place and time, these writers celebrate the variety and vitality of the short story as a form by writing their own conclusions to the story of the world. Obliteration has never hurt so good. Contributors include Grace Aguilar, Steve Aylett, Robert Bradley, Dennis Cooper, Lucy Corin, Elliott David, Matthew Derby, Carol Emshwiller, Brian Evenson, Neil Gaiman, Jeff Goldberg, Theodora Goss, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Jared Hohl, Shelley Jackson, Ursula K. Le Guin, Stacey Levine, Tao Lin, Kelly Link, H.P. Lovecraft, Gary Lutz, Rick Moody, Michael Moorcock, Adam Nemett, Josip Novakovich, Joyce Carol Oates, Colette Phair, Edgar Allan Poe, Terese Svoboda, Justin Taylor, Lynne Tillman, Deb Olin, Unferth, H.G. Wells, Allison Whittenberg, and Diane Williams.

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## From Reader Review The Apocalypse Reader for online ebook

### Andy Phillips says

This book was a huge disappointment. It contains 34 short stories supposedly on the theme of the end of the world. I have read a few collections like this and knew that it's unreasonable to expect to like every story, but I can honestly say that I found at least 30 of them confusing and/or a chore to finish. Almost none of them have any understandable link to an apocalypse of any sort, and some of them made no sense at all to me. I literally couldn't understand what the story was about. I kept thinking that the next story would be better and that it didn't matter if one story was bad because most of them are so short, but I was wrong - the next one was rarely any more enjoyable. Some of the stories aren't terrible as stories in their own right, but they simply aren't apocalyptic fiction in the sense that most people would expect.

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### Chelsea says

I started reading this after listening to Kai Ryssdal introduce a miniseries about the American consumer, and finished reading it in some turbulence landing in Austin and both times it made these situations seem foreboding in a way that made me feel so so gullible!

I'm not a big fan of ghost stories, scary stories, gory stories in general, but this book is a good mixture of versions of the apocalypse from the mundane, cerebral and personal, to the regular old retribution, starvation, looting, etc. There are a lot of times when it seems to be the sun's fault that the earth is ending? Which seems to be a very old-fashioned Twilight Zone era sort of reason.

But I actually like the Twilight Zone a lot so I can't fault Rebecca for giving this to me. I enjoy how the Twilight Zone uses parallel universes not just to screw around like other shows seem to, but to try to put people on unlevel ground so they can get the fear of God put back into them. Let's have some serious moralizing whenever we talk about the End Times, is what I think.

There's one story about how the world will end by falling dead bodies of the past onto those responsible for the deaths (crushing them, in turn) that especially fits the mold. (It would be awesome if they could make this happen during one of the upcoming presidential candidate debates because I'm pretty sure Giuliani has been responsible for a hell of a lot of people dying, and it really makes me ill to see him a serious contender. I guess only 1% of voters watch the actual debate but I think the image could translate well to a Youtube video.)

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### David Agranoff says

A month or so ago Cari and I went to see local Author Jemiah Jefferson read from her new Cyberpunk web novel First world. She did an excellent reading, from talking to Jemiah at events around town I was already sold on the project but her reading was quite good. You can read the novel for free online, and vote on the direction of the remaining chapters.

There was another author reading that night who has a book out with the same publisher. Brian Evenson, who I had not heard and now I feel bad for having missed him. I saw him before the reading looking at Thomas Ligotti books which is a fanstastic sign.

He read from his book Last Days, and I was sold. A couple days ago I looked him up at the library and I found short story collection which I put on hold and I am waiting for, and an anthology that he has a short story in called The Apocalypse Reader.

I started reading the AR and I have to say this is a must read for fans of dystopias, end of the world fiction or dark fiction in general. It features HP Lovecraft, Ursula K Leguin, Michael Moorcock, HG Wells and many more.

Evenson's story about a post apoc midwestern cannibal man mistaken for Jesus is a stand out but It is a lot of the classics that really make this a must read. HG Wells's story "The star" written in 18th century about stray planet coming the earth way is an amazing read.

Most powerful to me was a story written in 1844 called the Earth Holocaust by Nathaniel Hawthorne. Gotta read it.

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## John says

Taylor has assembled a strong collection of stories by writers from various "genres" and various time periods, all dealing in some way with apocalypse. Apocalypse generally is taken to mean the end of the world, but the word originates from Greek roots meaning uncovering, or revelation. In line with the origins, not all of the stories are doom and gloom, and several are quite funny and intelligent.

Voice matters in this collection, starting with the classic "Nyarlahotep." Taylor includes several authors who make masterful use of language, among them Neil Gaiman (as a girl aged 11 1/4), Michael Moorcock (in a tribute to Isaac Babel), and Terese Svoboda. Svoboda's story is short, barely three pages, but it dances quickly light light in a moving mirror.

Taylor - whose includes his own brief examination of the effects of a shift of the planet's magnetic poles - steadily shifts between humor, irony, and the serious. He includes three historic pieces by Hawthorne, Wells, and Grace Aguilar, showing that views of providence and doom haven't changed much over 200 years. He includes lyric touches, like Kelly Link's "Miss Kansas on Judgment Day," about two honeymooners who are watching a bizarre Miss America pageant - Miss Rhode Island probably is a Deep One - which mournfully repeats the sentiment, "Please don't let me go."

The most challenging story is Dennis Cooper's "The Ash Gray Proclamation." Like the Marquis de Sade, Cooper writes about issues of politics, culture, and intellect beneath a surface of sexual practices that often are hard to read. Cooper uses homosexual pedophilia, cannibalism, heroin, and snuff films to respond to the events of 9/11, and the story resists a casual reading. Most of the story is dialog, and as always, Cooper writes excellent voices for the characters.

Some of the stories are long, owing to the style of the time, while others are long because there is a long story to tell. Dennis Cooper's is one story, while Jared Hohl's "Fraise, Menthe, Et Poivre 1978" takes its time examining the destruction of civilization in Paris, after the sun's spectrum shifts.

The collection is engaging and well-worth reading, even if some of the reading is challenging (Cooper and Moorcock) or slightly archaic (Aguilar and Wells).

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## **Meredith says**

Did not finish. Will not finish. While a couple of these stories read as "edgy" to me if you read long enough you'll get to one that graphically depicts child rape, necrophilia, and child sex work / drug addiction like it's just the right kind of edgy you need. I'm mad I ever cracked this cover.

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## **Brian says**

The same idea that prompted me to pick up Andre Norton's *Darkness and Dawn* lead me to read this book, too. As an anthology, I was thinking that it'd be a great place to find new writers, new ideas, new stories, established greats (Poe! Gaimen! Le Guin! Hawthorne!) and so much more. It didn't exactly live up to this potential. Sure, there were authors I'd never heard of published next to classic authors and a whole book full of apocalyptic tales of all varieties, but it landed off-mark for me. There's a class of fantasy that dives way of the deep end of weird, wandering around in nonsensical realms with all the logic of a Dali painting but none of the artistry; that's how I felt about most of this book.

I've summarized a few stories here

Too many stories in the collection relied on content rather than writing, and most of the content was unnecessarily sexual. Though if you took out the sex you'd be left without content, so maybe it was necessary? Either way, I didn't enjoy those. In sum, there are a few gems included in this collection, but I imagine that you could find those either on their own or in a better collection than this.

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## **Schnauel says**

I think you either share his taste in stories or you don't, and I don't. Most of the stories were very abstract and I'd say only a quarter dealt with the apocalypse in a traditional sense, the rest seemed to deal more with cataclysmic change in an individual's life. Only a few were character based and two of those were very similar stories about some one either comparing his life to or pretending to be the next Jesus. Both stories were fine but I think they were too similar to include in the same anthology.

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## **Craven says**

The most important thing that those attracted to the title should know is that this book is about the literal Greek meaning of the word apocalypse, which is "a revelation" or "an unveiling," the author also says that it can be "cataclysmic changes of any sort," for instance "the micro-Apocalypses that mark moments in our lives: childhood's end, a relationship's sudden explosion, Death." So instead of this being a book about the Apocalypse that we all know, love, fear and obsess over, he's put together a book where the Apocalypse can be, well...anything. So most of the suspense in the book is when you start another story and are hanging in there hoping that it is indeed about the title's namesake and not some porkknob with a problem. That's not to say that it's a bad collection, just not what I was expecting. This sucks considering he took a specific subject that I was interested in and manipulated it into something as broad as a school textbook.

He picks from a wide range of sources, from classics like Poe and Hawthorne, to sci-fi from Neil Gaiman and Michael Moorcock. Most of it is that kind of stuff that's all non-linear and arty and magically-realismy and full of pretentious language. I don't know what you'd call it. Post-modern? Probably. This is obviously, a

style preference of the editor and while there's lots of other stuff in here, it shows. The problem with that kind of writing is that while I often like it, more often than not it's pretentious, jerk-off session. With this book that still holds true and considering the amount included it really throws off the averages.

When I was a little kid I used to keep score when reading a book of short stories. I marked each one good or bad and made a verdict on whether it was a good book or not based on the higher score. Just for old times sake I'm going to do that with each of these stories.

OK, What I end up with is good stories: 15, bad stories: 19. That's a shitty ratio, folks, so if I were still an obsessive-compulsive kid, I would say this was bad book.. Still I really, liked some what I liked so I can't say I regret reading it. Read at your own discretion.

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### **Jim Elkins says**

This was meant to be airline reading, but it's very poor. It's an uneasy mixture of escapism (more or less what I expected), literary pretensions, and selections from history (Hawthorne, Poe). The writing is full of solecisms, awkward overstuffed tropes, and poorly managed anachronisms meant to sound ancient or portentous (Lovecraft is the model there).

Rick Moody's piece is accomplished and glib. I wonder how quickly the sense of accomplishment fades for a writer like that. Reading it is like watching a sparkler: it's out in seconds.

Dennis Cooper's piece is a meditation on the asshole of a 13-year-old boy: it is harsh and strident, and reminds me of a critique of "The Exorcist": someone said it was like grain alcohol, very strong but probably not good for you. Is a single strong image really an effective strategy for a text of any length?

The rest tends to be weakly imagined fluff, with the usual one-off lines that sprinkle postmodern fiction and make it seem worthwhile: the moment the President comes on TV and shows people it's OK to eat cockroaches; an apocalypse that happens suddenly at the end of a story, when "a torrent of blood comes crashing through the trees." (Robert Bradley) The emotions that are depicted in this book are tiny, sharp things that can only be captured haphazardly, in minute quantities, like pins found in a haystack.

What I'm saying here isn't new, and could be generalized to a lot of contemporary fiction. Nietzsche's critique of Wagner is a good starting point for understanding work in which a sense of the overall architecture of an artwork has given way to momentary effects, a reliance on local color, what are now called "minor aesthetic qualities," and an artistic sensibility that demands continuous stimulation. Since Nietzsche these issues have been developed by many writers, from Adorno to Karsten Harries, and recently, in a different register, Sianne Ngai. This book is only another example.

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### **Cjlang says**

Discovered this at the library - how could I NOT take a book like this home?? Interesting mix of writers from H.P. Lovecraft to Neil Gaiman.

Have not gotten very far but ran across this in the first story I read: "Once we looked at the pavement and found the blocks loose and displaced by grass, with scarce a line of rusted metal to shew where the tramways had run. And again we saw a tram-car, lone, windowless, dilapidated and almost on its side. When we gazed

around the horizon, we could not find the third tower by the river, and noticed the silhouette of the second tower was ragged at the top." H.P. Lovecraft

I don't really "get" H.P. Lovecraft but this description raised a thrill on my spine and pretty much nails what I love about Apocalyptic stories... Can't wait to see what the rest brings!

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### **Ace says**

Some of these stories are very enjoyable, some feel contrived, several are far more absurdist than apocalyptic, and a few are just poorly written. Overall, I felt like the book was a waste of time, and would not recommend.

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### **David Berberick says**

A crummy read. So-called genre crit-lit at its worst. Go with *The Dog Stars* or *Zone One* or *The Passage*. They're novels but easier reading than what's in this book.

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### **Linda says**

If T.S. Eliot read 'The Apocalypse Reader' he would have said:

*This is the way the world ends*  
*This is the way the world ends*  
*This is the way the world ends*  
*Not with a bang but a YAWN.*

This book was one of the most boring collection of short stories I have ever read. The stores full of heavy handed symbolism and "experimental" writing reminded me of Freshman Creative Writing Class. And the sad thing is that I feel like I am insulting Freshman writers everywhere because at least they have the humility to admit they need to hone their craft. The writers in 'The Apocalypse Reader' seem to revel in their lack of talent.

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### **GUD Magazine says**

"THESE ARE THE WAYS THE WORLD ENDS—THIRTY-FOUR NEW AND SELECTED DOOMSDAY SCENARIOS"

This is a gorgeous book, from presentation to content. The selections are humorous, serious, simple, complex, and much more—thirty-four stories, some short, some long, make for a wide spectrum of apocalypses. Taylor, in the foreword, expounds on his conception of an apocalypse:

"It's worth pointing out that the word Apocalypse comes from the Greek, and literally means "a revelation" or "an unveiling." It can be used to describe cataclysmic changes of any sort. Revolution, for example, or

social upheaval. [...] There are micro-Apocalypses that mark moments in our lives: childhood's end, a relationship's sudden implosion, Death."

The selections do span the gamut—some were written so long ago as to be in the public domain, and some were freshly minted in the late 2000's; some focus on religious upheavals, some macro, some micro; there are personal upheavals, student rantings, surreal recountings of madmen; and of course many take the reader through more conventional "end of the world" scenarios. And even with all that diversity, perhaps guided by the introduction, the theme of the anthology runs strong.

Again, this review is too long for the box. You can read the rest on GUD's site (at <http://www.gudmagazine.com/review/arc...>).

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## **Made DNA says**

I am sadly disappointed by this collection of work. I was (mistakenly) expecting science fiction, which this book is NOT. It's more literary reading, something I do not enjoy. This is my own fault perhaps as I believe now that misunderstood the title.

That however is not the extent of my disappointment with the book. While it did have a couple of excellent stories (perhaps 5% of those included), some work was far to esoteric for my enjoyment. Still others, I didn't understand at all.

This was supposed to be a collection of stories that describe 'apocalyptic situations' but, I felt like I was reading a collection bad poetry disguised as short story work.

I can't recommend it, but there are obviously people out there who enjoy this sort of work.

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