



## Writers of the Future: 29

*L. Ron Hubbard (Contributor) , Dave Wolverton (Editor) , Alex Wilson , Kodiak Julian , Marilyn Guttridge , Shannon Peavey , Andrea Stewart , Marina J. Lostetter , more... John Eno (Illustrator) , Joshua Meehan (Illustrator) , Luis Menacho (Illustrator) , Nnedi Okorafor (Contributor) , Oliva Xu (Illustrator) , Daniel Reneau (Illustrator) , Jackie Albano (Illustrator) , Aldo Katayanagi (Illustrator) , Side Chen (Illustrator) , Karsen Slater (Illustrator) , Jame J. Eads (Illustrator) , Lucas Durham (Illustrator) , Tiffany England (Illustrator) , Larry Elmore (Contributor) , Brian Trent , Stephen Sottong , Tina Gower , Christopher Reynaga , Chrome Oxide , Eric Cline , Alisa Alering ...less*

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A Starred Review in Publisher's weekly posted May 30, 2013:

"Selected by a panel of judges and edited into a cohesive collection by Wolverton, this year's Writers of the Future collection is exciting and engrossing, with stories that range across the spectrum of SF and fantasy. Eschewing tried-and-true space opera and epic fantasy, these stories explore new mysteries and ideas. Death takes a bride in Marilyn Guttridge's "The Ghost Wife of Arlington." The secrets of the clock that powers the world are revealed in Christopher Reynaga's "The Grande Complication." Shannon Peavey's "Scavengers" introduces the Vulture Lady and explains why no one who leaves her domain ever returns. Adventurous, lighthearted, thought-provoking, and grim, these stories cover a wide range of science and magic, each unique, refreshing, and innovative in a variety of different ways. The anthology is fleshed out by essays from the late Hubbard, Nnedi Okorafor, and artist Larry Elmore. This book is not to be missed, full of exciting new writers to watch. (July)"

### Writers of the Future: 29 Details

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## From Reader Review Writers of the Future: 29 for online ebook

### Carl says

This volume of prize-winning Science Fiction And Fantasy short stories by different authors was a very good read. I read a lot of sci-fi and fantasy in my younger years, but have kind of gotten away from it. I liked the mix of stories, artwork (also prizewinners) and articles with a writing guidance bend. My favorite stories were: Planetary Scouts by Stephen Sottong, a well written log type story of planetary scout adventures. The Ghost Wife Of Arlington by Marilyn Guttridge, a haunting story of a woman who serves the form-changing immortal of the town. Scavengers by Shannon Peavey, A very nicely written story about a couple of sisters and one's husband who guard their town under the direction of The Lady. This one will probably stay in my mind the longest and made a big impression. Dreameater by Andrea Stewart also made a big impression, a story of a young girl who lives with her mother on the road, then with her father who she had never known. Both parents try to care for her, but alas nature provides trouble. The other nine stories were also very good. I recommend this 29th volume from Galaxy.

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### Craig says

\*Goodreads First Reads advanced copy\*

I found Writers of the Future Volume 29 to be highly enjoyable. All of the stories were well written. I can definitely see how each author was able to win this contest. However, some of the stories did not pique my interest. The stories just did not grab my interest.

I will say that my favorite stories in the book were "The Grande Complication", which amazed with its level of detail, "Gonna Reach Out and Grab You", "Vestigial Girl", which I found emotionally riveting and "Master Belladino's Mask" which made my jaw drop when I made a connection to a current societal issue. Each of these stories were well worth reading and fully make the entire volume worth reading.

I would recommend Writers of the Future Volume 29 to all fans of science fiction and speculative fantasy. I'm sure everyone will find at least a couple of these stories to their liking.

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### Cae Hawksmoor says

A bit of a mixed bag. I found most of the stories to be pretty enjoyable, but a few really stood out (for better or worse!).

"The Grande Complication" is a really fascinating concept, and I get the impression that the idea of a clockwork world somewhere just behind the fabric of reality--governing everything from the seasons to the migration of birds with its rhythm--is something that's going to stick with me for a long time. That said, I really struggled to get past the fact that the story is meant to be set in London, but the train that's described pulling into the station is really obviously an American design. Probably that's a stupid thing to get annoyed about, but it seems like the kind of thing that should have been picked up when the writer was researching their setting.

I found "Vestigial Girl" immensely moving and I'm not entirely sure why. Possibly because of the pure determination the main character shows in freeing herself of the 'monster' living inside her own body. I'm not entirely sure whether the story was attempting to make a point about how cloned children/children from same sex families are painted as 'monsters' without a voice of their own, or whether the theme was more disturbing: that cloned/same sex parent children ARE in some way unnatural. My feeling is the story was probably aiming for the former, but I'd be more comfortable if the writer had been a little clearer about it.

"Holy Days"... I don't even know where to start. It's probably one of the most wonderful, moving, and profoundly human short stories I've ever had the pleasure of reading. Honestly? It's worth picking up a copy of this book JUST to read this story. Gutted to see that the author (Kodiak Julian) doesn't seem to have had much published since, because I'm certainly going to be keeping an eye out for her.

I got the idea that I really shouldn't like "The Ghost Wife of Arlington" which seemed a little predicable, kind of clumsily written, and a little emotionally overwrought. I would have preferred to hear less about why the Shaker was so awesome/beautiful/loving, and to have seen more of it for myself. Despite that... I really kind of enjoyed it. I guess mostly because it was so evocative in its descriptions. It's a very pretty 'looking' story :)

"Scavengers" has the same sort of vibe going on for it. Like it's the kind of story that's going to haunt me. It's also really well written, and has that strange almost dreamlike feeling that makes "the harvesters" genuinely creepy (view spoiler).

That said, I'm not sure I understand why they felt the need to end the collection with "Master Belladiono's Mask" which was easily the weakest story in the collection. I didn't believe the character of Leiwood at all, who seems to come into the story for the express purpose of giving the main character everything she wants and being generally lovely (it has a similar sort of problem to "The Ghost Wife of Arlington" in that respect), and the speed at which they seemed to develop feelings for one another felt kind of false and inexplicable. I do kind of like the idea of the dead storing their knowledge and personalities in a mask, but it was sort of buried under how unreadable I found the rest of the story.

TL;DR: Worth a read, but only a couple of stories that are really something to write home about.

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## **Juliet says**

Unique and original.

This collection of short stories will take you around the Galaxy with the Planetary Scouts, scare you half to death with the Dream Eater and have you laughing out loud with Cop for a Day (and this only 3 of the 13 stories!).

If you need escape fiction - something to get away from the world as we know it, you will have fun with this. The unexpected endings and suspense keep the pages turning.

Have fun with it!!

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## **Barbara Ann says**

This exciting anthology is a collection of science fiction stories by talented, new writers and illustrators who were selected from The Writers and Illustrators of the Future Contests.

These original stories and illustrations are a fine example of what readers can anticipate in the future of the science fiction genre. These stories in this collection are imaginative, and some provide glimpses into an advanced future world and its repercussions on the existence of our society and our humanity. At times, some of the stories made me cringe, thinking...this could really happen. Here are some of the stories that lingered in my mind after reading this latest volume of works. The beautiful illustrations that accompany the stories helped me to really grasp the visions of a different type of world.

Two stories that deal with future worlds and government greed and corruption are "Planetary Scouts" and "Cop for a Day." Aiden, a seasoned scout breaks in Lester, his new partner in "Planetary Scouts." Numerous planets exist, and humans want to venture beyond Earth and explore possible places for settlement and expansion. As a result, scouts are sent out to foreign planets to observe and provide feedback on whether the planet is suitable for habitation. The story is filled with action and suspense as Aiden and Lester struggle to survive in uncharted terrain. The sacrifices made by scouts provide an alarming look at the potential for devastation as a consequence of someone's territorial greed.

"Cop for a Day" describes a world where government controls and restrains capitalism. Citizens are forced to rely on government aid and intervention that is meager and sub-standard. The protagonist, Mark, a convicted felon gets a probationary job that requires him to roam the streets and enforce "asset forfeiture." While on the job, he partners with a highly intelligent car and by the end of his first day on the job, Mark has the potential to change his current situation. The story made me think hard about governmental control and human rights.

The concept of death is presented from different angles in some of the stories. Imagine a world where death no longer exists. "The War Hero" depicts the notion of body regeneration with minds even swapping bodies as needed or desired in order to facilitate covert operations.

On a different note, consider the possibility of the dying able to communicate the final twelve seconds of their lives to officials. "Twelve Seconds" reflects the point-of-view of Howard, a man with autism who also suffers from PTSD. He works in the homicide department viewing the last seconds of murdered victims. Precision is a must for Howard, who becomes suspicious of those whose deaths do not meet the 12 second standard showing their last memories before death. This was one of my favorite stories showing Howard's perseverance in solving the mystery behind these particular deaths. Although the story involves tragic events, the ending left me hopeful about Howard's future.

If Death were a live entity, what would he or she be like? "The Ghost Wife of Arlington" is a paranormal romance that personifies Death, an immortal who has taken a "shade," a mortal woman who is known as the "Ghost Wife." She walks down "Bone Rattler Street" leaving various gifts for the ghosts who reside there in the city of Arlington. I enjoyed analyzing this story, looking at the overt and subtle symbolism found throughout that strengthens and unifies the plot.

A final favorite of mine is "Dreameater," a disturbing and suspenseful tale of a prostitute mother who craves men's dreams to the point she eats their brains. This zombies tale is told from her young daughter's point-of-view as she gradually learns the truth about her mother and the genetic impact on her future.

Expository essays that offer tips and advice for aspiring writers are also included in this anthology. One of my favorites is the essay, "The Manuscript Factory" by L. Ron Hubbard where he describes the economics of writing and offers advice on how authors can examine their creative writing from a business perspective. "The Sport of Writing" shows that writing and sports have many similarities, an unusual comparison that I hadn't considered.

The captivating tales in this anthology are insightful, stimulating, thought-provoking and a thoroughly enjoyable read!

I received a copy of this book from Galaxy Press in exchange for an honest review.

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### **Thepageturner says**

"Writers of the Future" is a must-read for all science-fiction / speculative fiction lovers. Each world is portrayed in a unique, majestic fashion that I easily feel a part of - as if I was in that second body, on an unknown planet as a Planetary Scout, or a detective watching victims' last memories. The authors that have been selected for this volume absolutely deserve their works to be published. I enjoy reading the short stories wherever I am - my bed, the library, my spaceship, my kitchen - ...I wish. Perhaps one day, we modern-day 'Planetary Scouts' will be inspired by these fantastic words and build technology to make that dream come true!

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### **Galaxy Press says**

Incredible new stories by fantastic new writers and fantastic art as well!

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### **Kelly says**

#### **A thoroughly enjoyable collection of contemporary science fiction!**

*(Full disclosure: I received a free copy of this book for review through Library Thing's Early Reviewer program.)*

L. Ron Hubbard's Writers of the Future contest – now entering its thirtieth year, it's one of the longest-running short story contests still in existence – attracts thousands of submissions a year. From this, a panel of judges selects just thirteen essays for publication in the annual anthology. Also included are thirteen illustrations similarly culled from the Illustrators of the Future contest, along with three instructional essays on the art of crafting and selling science fiction, written by professionals in the field. (This year's collection includes one piece by contest founder L. Ron Hubbard himself.)

As suggested by such stiff competition, the essays included in the 2013 anthology are all thoroughly enjoyable, with one exception (Christopher Raynaga's "The Grande Complication," which I didn't much care for). The collection starts off strong with Brian Trent's "War Hero." In the distant future, soldiers and war criminals have achieved virtual immortality with the ability to save one's consciousness, downloading it into a new body (or multiple bodies) as needed - thus assuring the interminability of war, conflict, and the military-industrial complex. (As an added bonus, cross-gender downloading also carries with it some interesting sexual connotations.)

"Planetary Scouts," by Stephen Sottong, is one of the lengthier stories in the collection – and it's also one of my favorites. Having long since ventured off earth, humans are constantly in search of new planets to colonize. Enter the Planetary Scouts, who land on and probe ("explore" is too lofty a word) strange planets to

determine whether they support “intelligent” life. If not, they’re considered open to human settlement. As always, a species’ intelligence is measured solely in human terms, leading to the genocide of countless “lesser” species who might not be able to grasp arithmetic – but are still sentient, capable of experiencing joy and suffering, with families and interests and lives of their own. On more than one occasion – such as when he and his partner Aidan explore a mostly aquatic planet to determine whether an intergalactic aquaculture company can install one giant fish farm on it - this crass policy leads to a crisis of conscience for young upstart Lester. (As it turns out, the planet is home to one enormous “distributed intelligence,” which is self-aware – and thus worthy of continued existence. More often than not, you’ll find yourself rooting for the aliens.) In more extreme cases, such as when it’s home to “dumb” animals or plant life that’s deemed harmful to humans, a planet may be “sterilized”: stripped of all life, leaving a clean slate for its future human overlords. Talk about your euphemisms!

Also worth singling out for praise is Alex Wilson’s “Vestigial Girl,” which deals with issues such as parenting children in same sex relationships, cloning, and the fear of physical and mental “disabilities” – or, in this case, differences. Young Charlene is a four-year-old girl, illegally cloned from the DNA of her two dads. Lacking in motor control and unable to speak because of the “monster” in her throat, the adults around her mistake her for mentally challenged – and yet, she and others like her are actually *more* intelligent than their creators. They’re just trapped in uncooperative, uncommunicative bodies. Modern parallels abound.

“Holy Days” by Kodiak Julian is outstanding as well. The author imagines a ‘verse in which the laws of nature temporarily bend on special holidays. On “Break Days,” humans are afforded a 24-hour “break” from their illnesses and ailments, be they cancer, arthritis, or pregnancy. Children visit their parents as younger versions of themselves on “Homecoming Day,” while on “The Day of Return,” the dead can choose to come back to life and revisit their loved ones. On “Secret Day,” you recognize your own most deeply held secrets in others who also harbor them. With one holy day for each season, they mirror the passage of time and stress the importance of letting go. For example, The Day of Return is far from a universally enjoyable occasion, with aging parents and friends struggling to please a boy who died young – and will forever stay that way, even as the people in his life age and move on.

Last but not least is Marilyn Guttridge’s “The Ghost Wife of Arlington.” Death is not just one person, but many: the Immortals are each given a city to rule over, claiming his or her citizens as their time expires. While some Immortals choose to steer clear of human affairs, others take attendants called “Shades.” Sometimes these are women who develop an intimate relationship with the Immortal, hence the nickname “Ghost Wives.” Having unwittingly wandered onto Arlington’s Bone Rattler Street while fleeing from an abusive husband, Vivian is quickly claimed as a Ghost Wife. Over time she falls in love with “her” Immortal – whom she calls the Shaker – and bears him a literal Whisper of a child. Death is not the cruel and capricious ruler so often depicted in popular culture, but rather a sad and solitary figure. Not only does Death watch as everyone around him withers and dies – in the end, he must claim them all, even the ones he loves so dearly.

These are just a few of my favorites; I also highly recommend “Twelve Seconds,” by Tina Gower (CSI 2063); Eric Cline’s “Gonna Reach Out and Grab Ya” (animated tattoos, someone please make this happen); Shannon Peavey’s “Scavengers” (a rather delightful – and chilling - fantasy romp); “Dreameater,” by Andrea Stewart (picture a vampiric Aileen Wuornos); and “Master Belladino’s Mask,” by Marina J. Lostetter (enchanted death masks, oh my!).

The illustrations are all wonderful as well, though a mass market paperback is hardly the ideal medium through which to view them. (Happily, it looks as though they’ll eventually be available on the contest’s website; as if this writing, they have yet to be uploaded.) In particular I loved James J. Eads’s artwork for “Scavengers,” which is highly evocative of a childhood favorite, *The Dark Crystal*.

For fans of fantasy and (especially) science fiction, *Writers of the Future, Volume 29* is a must read. Priced at

less than ten bucks, it's a steal.

<http://www.easyvegan.info/2013/08/26/...>

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### **Burma Turner says**

I won this book in a first-reads giveaway, thank you! I really enjoyed this book. I love novels, but I also like short stories occasionally. I love stories with a twist, War Hero was really good. Another one I really enjoyed was Vestigial Girl. Holy Days was very original. My favorite story was Dreameater by Andrea Stewart. It is the story of a little girl, Alexis, and her mother Linda. I would like for Ms. Stewart to continue this story in a novel. This story leaves you wondering what happens to Alexis in the future, will she become like her mother, who is a dreameater, like her father who is a dreamcatcher, or neither one?

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### **Meagen Partin says**

This book is a collection of short stories selected from new and upcoming writers in the Science Fiction and Fantasy. The first portion was all the Sci Fi stories and the second portion was suppose to be the fantasy, but it was more horror and steampunk stories. No swords and elves here. That's alright, but call it what it is, horror and steampunk, not fantasy. I know a fair chunk of fantasy fans who would likely attack you for calling a steampunk novel a fantasy novel. If we did that we would have to concede that all fiction is fantasy. Please, get your genres right.

Now, interspersed between the stories of the winners of the contest are brief writings from two successful writers and one illustrator. Their writings are giving advice to the up and comers. This is where Hubbard comes in. His was the first one and when I started reading it I was totally confused and a little annoyed. I got grief from some of my friends for reading a book by the crazy Scientology guy, but all he did for the book was flaunt how he is a successful writer, not because he's a good writer, but because he's smarter at business than you are. All three of the sections take way from the mood that builds up as you read the short stories. It's like watching an awesome movie that has been pulling you in and then the commercials come on and totally rube the mood. Plus, having these inspirational pieces gives the impression that they expected only the people who entered the contest to ever read the book.

While, I wasn't really happy with the people who put the book together I did really like a lot of the stories that were in it. The first one "War Hero" by Brian Trent I would read as a full novel. It had enough intrigue and set up for a larger universe that it could carry itself over a longer length story. "Planetary Scouts" by Stephan Sottong had a similar appeal, but I think would be more successful as an episodic television show. Each episode could be a planet explored, or have story arcs for some of the more important ones. Think a much darker version of Star Trek.

I mentioned before that there were some horror stories in the book as well. I have a soft spot for horror so I was generally pleased and I got a different feeling from them all. "Dreameater" by Andrea Stewart had that serial killer violence and suspense. Although, if you took away the supernatural elements and lowered the body count, it might be confused as a Lifetime movie. Good thing it had the most gruesome death scene of the whole book. Though "Scavengers" by Shannon Peavey had the most heart wrenching death, especially if you saw it coming. But the creepiest story award goes to "Vestigial Girl" by Alex Wilson for knowing what's going to happen and then having to wait for it and wait for it and wait for it. It has the feeling of dread

for sure, as well as some other good feelings for a scary story to be successful.

Two other stories also stood out to me, mostly on a personal level. One of my favorite books is 1984 by Orson Wells and “Cop for a Day” by Chrome Oxide has the same dystopian theme that I enjoy. Depending on your political affiliation you may either really agree with that future being the world is going, or not. The other story is “The Ghost Wife of Arlington” by Marilyn Guttridge which made the little goth girl inside me giggle with happiness. It’s basically a love story for people who like ghost stories.

All the stories had good features worthy of publication and I look forward to seeing more work from them. I think that most fiction fans will be able to find at least one of them enjoyable. However, unless you plan on entering the contest I suggest skipping the three advice sections. And although I rightly deserved the groans I got from my friends when they saw Hubbard’s name on the book I was reading, I think the contest is a good avenue for early writers trying to get some exposure. See the same review on my blog!

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## Erin says

This latest volume in the series features a good mix of sci-fi stories from unknown writers. The stories are chosen by a panel of established writers in the field, who obviously know how to spot who are the next big things in sci-fi fiction.

I enjoyed most of the stories in the collection and found it to be a great book to return to when I needed a palate cleanser after reading something else. As with all collections from different authors, you’ll have some you really enjoy (my favorite was “Planetary Scouts”) and some you’re less interested in. There are also nonfiction essays, including one on writing from Hubbard, that I skimmed only, but I’m sure sci-fi writers would really appreciate them.

\*I received a copy of this book via First Reads.

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## Yaasha Moriah says

If you’ve never read any of the Writers of the Future anthologies, and you’re a speculative fiction fan, you should put them on your “to read” list right away. Every year, Galaxy Press publishes an anthology of over a dozen sci-fi and fantasy novelettes by new authors. While I’ve found the quality of the writing varies from story to story, I’ve never regretted purchasing or reading any of the anthologies. So here’s my review of Volume 29, published in 2013.

### **WAR HERO by Brian Trent**

“We need you to kill Peznowski again.”

Harris Pope has been regenerated a few times, but this time, his new body is different. This time it’s not a

tool, but a disguise—a stolen identity designed to get him as close to his target as possible. But getting close to Peznowski—a particularly sadistic Partisan leader, and a destroyer of the fledgling colonies on Mars—is a death-wish...

I really liked this story. It's fast-paced and the story was made more interesting by the narrator's patchy memory, since each regeneration only includes the memories recorded at the last "save." There are some disturbing concepts and scenes in this story, so it's not for the squeamish, but the story continues to follow a rapid trajectory until its final, explosive sentence.

### **PLANETARY SCOUTS by Stephen Sottong**

"Rule one: If the local fauna or flora starts chasing you, shoot it."

The Planetary Scouts were formed to *Discover and Explore*, as their motto states, but Aidan Pastor has the scars and injuries to prove that the unknown worlds that the scouts investigate are not as cuddly as the recruiters claim. Aidan just wants to complete his 25 missions and retire where the alien creatures don't want to eat, disable, or infect him. And it would be a bonus if his new partner, Lester, lived longer than his last one. But this next mission may cost more than either man suspects...

I enjoyed Aidan's no-nonsense approach. He's not an endearing character, but one whose experience you can respect. Aidan and Lester's varying adventures are a mix of suspenseful action and dry humor. The tension toward the end was exactly the sort of thing I hoped for in a story of this type: Will they make it home in time?

*Heads up: This one has more sexual innuendo than some of the other stories.*

### **TWELVE SECONDS by Tina Gower**

"Victim's siphons need to be twelve seconds, and end with a halo."

Howard processes siphons: the last twelve seconds of memory just before a person's untimely death. But this siphon is only nine seconds and doesn't have the customary halo. Why? As Howard interacts with his coworkers and searches for the answer to the mystery, he uncovers a murder of a kind that is worse than he expects.

Howard is interesting in that he is socially handicapped and must wear goggles to interpret peoples' emotions for him. He is also obsessive about his work (something I can relate to). The mystery is intriguing, but it felt flat and cliché to me when I finally learned the truth. Maybe others won't think so, and either way, the general story ideas are well worth giving this one a shot.

### **THE GRANDE COMPLICATION by Christopher Reynaga**

"My father taught me that all things that fall out of time serve the World Clock. Come," said the old man as he picked up his valise. "I've something to show you."

When time stops, Neil is the only one who "falls out of time," and can move freely in the frozen world. And

there he meets Mr. Harrison, whose job is to fix the Grande Complication, “the heart that turns the cycles of the world.” But this time, the locust-like chronophage have invaded the great clock’s gears, and Neil is the only one small enough to find where they have jammed the Grande Complication.

I think this was the first steampunk-style story I’d ever read. Mr. Harrison has a lovable, uncle-like character, and Neil is every boy who’s ever been fascinated by moving machinery and things beyond normal life. He accepts the strangeness of it all with a child’s trusting practicality and draws the reader after him. For a first introduction to this type of story, this work left me very satisfied by the end.

### ***COP FOR A DAY* by Chrome Oxide**

*This is unreal!* I thought. *The car wants to know if I am moral enough to work with after telling me that there isn’t any difference between a criminal enterprise and a government.*

Mark Rollins somehow finds himself on the wrong side of the law—which isn’t hard to do, considering how convoluted the government has become—and one day gets a lucky break: a selection for work detail. In other words, he has a chance to be a cop for a day.

I didn’t like this story at first, because there isn’t much plot to it. It felt like the plot was formulated just to explore...something, but I didn’t know what. Then, half-way through the story, I began to notice the acronyms and the sly jibes at politicians and government, and the combination of diminished intelligence and language skills with increased government programs and control. At some parts, this was laugh-out-loud funny. Still not much of a plot, but I can forgive that for the sake of the very entertaining humor.

### ***GONNA REACH OUT AND GRAB YA* by Eric Cline**

“She took a pair of forceps and tried to articulate the index finger.

The hand grabbed the forceps.

Dr. Molly Boyle has never seen these kind of tattoos on an autopsy subject before. Nor has she ever had a verifiably dead boy reach out and grab her unexpectedly. There is something magical about this man, and his mysterious death.

I’ve told pretty much all I can safely tell in the description, but suffice it to say that this story feels like a chapter out of a bigger story. It holds up well on its own, though with some necessary ambiguity. The end resolves the story, though I couldn’t help but wish there could be more to it—a fuller answer to the ideas raised. I suppose that’s not a bad thing!

### ***VESTIGIAL GIRL* by Alex Wilson**

“Could she defeat the monster entirely on her own?”

Charlene carries the DNA of her two fathers, but the combination did not produce a normal body. At four years old, she can hardly move on her own, and has never spoken. But she can do other things, and she may be able to accomplish herself what others don’t believe is possible, namely, to cut the monster out of her

throat and speak for the first time.

I didn't connect well with this story. Maybe it was the slower, more reflective style of writing, the homosexual undertones, the frequent misuse of God's and Jesus' names, or the lack of a strong sci-fi feeling. It simply didn't capture my attention or make me eager to learn if Charlene was successful in her self-operation. That said, I do feel that Mr. Wilson has talent as a writer.

### ***HOLY DAYS* by Kodiak Julian**

“Even though I had been looking forward to Break Day, I woke to panic.”

Evie's life can be measured by the Holy Days: days in which, for twenty-four hours, something unusual happens. You get a break from your heaviest responsibility or trouble. Your secrets are told. The dead come back. What is life like during the Holy Days?

Every reader probably brings his own experiences to the story. What would my break be? What are my most unsettling secrets? While the plot is flexible, without a real conflict or climax, the ideas hold weight on their own and leave you thinking.

### ***THE GHOST WIFE OF ARLINGTON* by Marilyn Guttridge**

“It was His kingdom, and for a time, Vivian was His queen.”

Vivian calls him the Shaker. Others call him Bone Rattler, Black Coat... or Devil. People fear the mortal woman who is the mistress of the Immortal who claims souls to take to Bone Rattler Street.

I feel a little ambivalent about this story. It's beautifully written—the writer clearly has talent—and yet it's a little disturbing to read about a woman who sleeps with Death and who deifies his pronoun with a capital H. The shape-shifting Shaker is strangely vulnerable and Vivian is admirably poised for one who knows that she is a temporary wife, and destined never to have living children. The use of symbolic color is fascinating, and the emotion very strong. I'm still uncomfortable with the godlike treatment of Death, but for what it is—this story is entrancing.

### ***EVERYTHING YOU HAVE SEEN* by Alisa Alering**

“The last image hung in the air, alive but undisturbed, like a sleeping mouse in its nest.”

Min-hee simply wants to avoid the advancing Chinese forces and the gnaw of hunger, but that changes when she meets a boy whom she calls Turtle. A boy with the gift of creating scenes in the air, scenes that can become real. A boy whose gift might be his only chance to find his father.

This story combines the need to survive with the child's wonder of supernatural things. Min-hee encounters both hardship and magic with equal acceptance. The story has the feel of a personal conflict set amidst a great conflict (war). The former is resolved, the latter is not, but the end is still satisfying.

### ***SCAVENGERS* by Shannon Peavey**

“I wish you true sight, Mara of the Goldwater.”

Mara cannot see well without the Lady’s periodic applications and care. If she could see well permanently, she could have her sister Keera’s place as the protector against the harvesters. When Keera and her husband Rey shoot two harvesters, they cannot account for the mysterious disappearance of the harvesters’ scythes, their traditional weapons. So Keera goes to seek out the truth—a truth that will rip Mara’s world apart.

The vulture-headed Lady is creepy from the first scene, but her flock of speaking birds are oddly comforting. Mara’s internal struggle—her desire to see clearly, her desire to be the protector she trained to be—makes her a relatable character. The intense ending fits well with the clues given, and is still chilling at the final revelation.

### ***DREAMEATER* by Andrea Stewart**

“Your mother isn’t a dreamcatcher.”

Alexis is used to her mother’s liaisons with strange men—and the men’s subsequent murders. But when she learns her mother’s true identity, and her father’s, she realizes that her own identity is in danger.

This story crept me out. First, I thought Mama was a hooker, but her real motives were a whole lot worse, and the descriptions can be pretty disturbing. Alexis is a plucky teenager—enough grit and vulnerability to be likable—and her torn loyalties between her dangerous mother and her mysterious father make for an intense climax. The ending is ambiguous; we never learn if Alexis discovers her true identity, though we have some clues. The Native American feel to this story adds to the interest, and I admit that now I can’t look at a dreamcatcher without thinking of this story.

### ***MASTER BELLADINO’S MASK* by Marina J. Lostetter**

“The knowledge of Master Belladino does not come cheap.”

Melanie needs the knowledge of a healer to save her mother, and if she can just find Master Belladino’s enchanted mask, and put it on, she can access the knowledge of the now-dead legendary healer. But sometimes masks carry the personalities of their masters... and Master Belladino was not known for his kindness.

Since I wish I could cure my mom’s disease, Melanie’s quest hits a personal note for me, but I like the theme: sometimes knowledge carries a cost. In this case, the cost is Mr. Belladino’s sadistic personality. I really like the character of Leiwood. He’s in over his head, but his growing relationship with Melanie adds an urgency to his attempts to rescue her. The resolution is clever—not clichéd—and well-described. This is one of my favorites in this anthology.

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## **David says**

### **War Hero by Brian Trent (4/5)**

A fun but weird story that revels in the well-worn scifi trope of saving a consciousness and transferring it into a clone after death, in the context of a war of attrition between Earth and Martian separatists and the kind of cat vs. mouse infiltration missions that might exist when you can have any body you want when you regenerate, but technology has also progressed to the point of identifying people by their sentence structure and vocal intonation. I thought it was smart that the author had this technology that would make for the perfect spy and then in large part nullified it with an unrelated piece of technology that would also surely exist. You don't see that a lot, people have a hard time thinking about different future technologies developing in tandem and being used as countermeasures against each other. At its most absurd this can result in things like mechs controlled by complex computers but physical photographs, for some reason. If computers exist, people are gonna be using them for everything, not just their mechs. I digress.

It's almost like a comic book or Doctor Who or something, where nobody is really dead and the hero keeps discovering his arch nemesis is still alive in some form. The villain is fun, if cliché. Twisted enough to cut out eyes and steer asteroids towards Earth to "knock them back to the stone age" but also willing to transfer into two different bodies to hide from his enemies, one a woman, and marry himself and birth a son. Talk about narcissism, am I right? Although tbh I'd probably fuck myself if I could so...lol. Having a child with yourself is definitely out there, though. But it's not your DNA so it kinda doesn't matter? Or rather, it matters because having two clones of your dad as parents is fucking weird and probably bad for you mentally, but physically the kid is perfectly healthy and not even biologically related to his father's original birth body.

The fact that the villain lacks any real depth and is basically just a sadistic psychopath could be seen as transphobic, considering one of him is a woman that is clearly comfortable being a woman and getting fucked by a man. The protagonist says at one point that seeing his enemy's eyes staring out from an attractive female face "sickens him," and he almost attacks the female clone on the spot, just barely managing to retain control over his rage and disgust. Later the two clones are flirting and it "makes him want to throw up." The whole thing just really seems like the protagonist is way more bothered by the sexual deviancy aspect of the villain than the torture and murder of innocent civilians aspect and it felt a little gross to me. Relatively minor thing and probably not intentional. I'm guessing the author just wanted to show how much the protagonist hated the villain and was just kinda clumsy and vague about it.

### **Planetary Scouts by Stephen Sottong (2/5)**

This is basically a parody/reimagining of Star Trek where everything hopeful and inspiring that you loved about the show is replaced with death, disappointment, and existential ennui. The "Planetary Scouts," explore and document habitable planets found by automated probes, so they're not even really discovering them, and all these planets are exceedingly dangerous such that most Scouts don't make it to their 25th mission, which is when they are released from their service and allowed to retire.

Instead of Star Trek's post-scarcity society where there are no jobs as such and people can choose to live how they want, we are treated to a bleak and unforgiving universe where many people grow up on mining planets with no hope of anything besides hard labor and are basically funneled into the Planetary Scouts by desperation. This seems...unlikely. You're telling me we have faster than light, completely computer-controlled starships but the most effective way to mine a planet are impoverished human laborers? Where are the mining robots? Where are the human rights organizations? There was really no attempt to explain how and why things are the way they are.

Something else I found very hard to believe is that there are other species that are as intelligent and advanced as humans that have also developed faster than light travel, but they have all decided that it's too much trouble to terraform dead planets and too dangerous to try and set up residence on habitable ones, so they stay on their home worlds. The Planetary Scouts only officially inform members about these other advanced species if they happen to run into one of their long-abandoned probes. Only humans have an "illogical" need to explore and colonize, it seems. I don't buy it, because there's nothing "illogical" about it. No species other than humans has an overpopulation problem? No species other than humans caused environmental

devastation on their home world? No species other than humans has an innate curiosity about the universe? Really?

Yet another thing that's hard to believe is that women are allowed to be Scouts, but toxic masculinity and traditional gender roles seem to still be a thing to a large degree? Men are still judged harshly for shedding tears and just generally seem emotionally repressed. These seem pretty mutually exclusive to me. Either you idolize masculine traits and devalue feminine ones and commit to not letting women join, or you value both and let men fucking cry without judgment when a friend dies. I mean, come on now. Your future is stuck in the past, wtf.

I appreciate the concept of a shitty version of Star Trek in theory, but the world he created just doesn't seem logical and consistent to me. The work needed to justify the bleakness he was after simply wasn't done, there was hardly any world-building at all. Things just suck because the author thought that would be edgy and entertaining in its own right. Add to that the fact that this story was one of the longest in the collection and much of that length was extremely repetitive and the ending was unsatisfying and pointless, and you have a story I didn't much care for.

### **Twelve Seconds by Tina Gower (1/5)**

Let's count the cliches here, shall we?

- 1) We have a near future Earth where technology has been invented that lets you recreate the last few seconds of someone's life, which is used for crime-solving.
- 2) The protagonist is an autistic man who can barely function in society but nonetheless has a job analyzing these recordings of people's final moments because his autism makes him really good at it.
- 3) Something is wrong with some of the recent recordings, creating a mystery the protagonist feels compelled to solve.
- 4) The problem is a new medical procedure directly related to this same technology meant to cure mental illnesses like the one the protagonist has.

This was just a cliche fest. Nothing new or fresh here. Very straightforward, didn't really delve into the social or political aspects of this technology at all or do literally anything to set it apart from the million other stories that have utilized this concept. Another thing that really rubbed me the wrong way is that at the end of a death recording is a halo, the lack of which is what sets off this mystery because everyone is supposed to have one. Some people think the halo is biological, others think it's religious in nature. Sure, fine, I got no problem with that at all. But apparently 62% of people in new york state are religious in this story. A quick google search tells me that right now, in 2018, only 51% of people in new york state are religious in any way and society is on a steady trend towards atheism world-wide. How is your future more religious than the present? You can't just throw that in there with no explanation. If you want to go all Handmaid's Tale and say some devastating war or w/e brought society to its knees and made people religious again, sure, I'm all for it, but you gotta give me something. The protagonist himself seems to be religious, and he consults a priest at one point.

It just didn't feel organic at all. Much like the previous story there was close to zero world-building and things seemed to be the way they are because the author had an agenda of some kind. Writers of the Future is stacked with religious judges and I can't help but believe they chose this incredibly mediocre, unremarkable story for its religious pandering because the alternative is that they thought this was good.

### **The Grande Complication (4/5)**

The first fantasy story in the collection. This is a familiar but always fun idea of a clockwork universe where everything from the turn of the seasons to the migration of birds is controlled by some hidden clockwork mechanism behind the scenes. A small orphan boy gets swept up in a piece of broken time and is forced to

become the new time keeper. Fun, light, evocatively written, but a little short on substance.

### **Cop for a Day by Chrome Oxide (1/5)**

My god. This is maybe the worst short story I have *ever* read. It's just a protracted, cringe-inducing, hyperbolic to the extreme political rant against the government, fiat currency, bureaucracy, welfare programs, affirmative action, college, etc. Get the hell away from me right now with this extremist libertarian word garbage. I don't often wish ill on people but I hope "Chrome Oxide," never finds much success as a writer because this is irredeemably bad, in a way that something as simple as more writing experience can't fix. When someone uses their fiction as a platform for their ignorant, bullshit politics they don't care about the reader and they are beyond help.

Here's a choice scene between our protagonist and a "smart car" that he fixes that perfectly showcases the tone of the whole goddamn story:

"What law enforcement agencies were you designed to work with?"

"None. I was designed to work with any large organization."

"Why? Large organizations could include crime families and cults."

"The programmers initially entered all existing laws and connected to courts for legal updates. Then all potential purchasing organizations entered their unwritten special orders. There were so many contradictions the programmers switched to boosting the artificial intelligence in order to deal with the inconsistencies. After analyzing all available data, I concluded that all governments and laws exist only to oppress one group to benefit another group. The politicians did not want that analysis leaking out, so they killed the funding on the project."

Here's another exchange between a government employee and a citizen:

Government Liberator: "Don't do nothing stupid, and no one gets hurt. I'm from Wealth Allocation Shares To Everyone, and I'm here collecting the windfall profits tax. Wealthy people needs pay fair share."

Capitalist Exploiter: "Me employee. Leave something. Lose job if lose money. That how got job."

Government Liberator: "Tough. Do honest work for government, then no worry. Work for capitalists, you no better them. Deserve anything happen you."

Yes, it's actually written like that, with the embarrassing acronyms and everything.

The author's understanding of government, politics, and economics does not seem to extend beyond the edge lord anarchist phase many young boys go through in high school. Read some books for god's sake, you're supposed to be a writer. When Trump's political positions have more nuance than yours, something is wrong with you. I mean for fuck's sake, you're gonna take shots at fiat currency? Really? That should be something everybody, regardless of where you land on the political spectrum, understands we need in order to function as a society. To even imply otherwise is baring your idiocy for all to see. Not only did we abandon the gold standard for *very* good reasons, but it is now *literally impossible* to go back even if we wanted to, but nothing will stop libertarian crackpots from being libertarian crackpots I guess.

### **Gonna Reach Out and Grab Ya by Eric Cline (5/5)**

A medical examiner is performing an autopsy on a John Doe who happens to have bioelectric tattoos that move when touched, and an artificial hand far more advanced than anything that yet exists, and comes to the

only conclusion that makes sense--he is from the future, and she has touched that future through him. Best story in the collection so far, without a doubt. Very character-driven, I really felt like I got to know this girl.

#### **Vestigial Girl by Alex Wilson (2/5)**

A fucking *weird* with a capital W story that I have no idea what it's supposed to be about, to be perfectly honest. Basically a gay couple gets a genetically engineered child who is hyper intelligent but developmentally slowed such that she can't speak or move her limbs very well but is already smarter than either of them at 4 (?) years old. I'm not super clear on her exact age. More interestingly, however, she has a growth on her vocal cords that she calls a "monster" that is preventing her from speaking or doing anything other than whistling. She's met other girls like her with the same affliction, although nobody knows because the "monster" appears to be a normal part of the throat tissue to doctors. She is determined to remove this monster herself through surgery with meticulously scavenged, makeshift equipment. She succeeds, but it's never explained what the thing in her throat is, if we're supposed to assume it's a direct side-effect of her being a genetically engineered child, and if so what that is supposed to mean. Is it the next evolution of mankind? Is it a dangerous anomaly that needs to be stamped out? Is she infected by a fucking alien? No clue. This story is so obtuse, it's messaging so confused and stumbling that I have no idea if this is an anti-gay message, a pro-gay message, or if the kid's parents being gay is completely irrelevant.

#### **Holy Days by Kodiak Julian (3/5)**

This is about a world where there are certain days that have specific effects. Break day grants people relief from their ailments. On secret day you can see everybody who shares the same secret as you. On days of return dead loved ones come back to life. Etc. The protagonist is a woman who was pregnant with twins but one of them died during childbirth, with a sister who dies of cancer.

I don't hate the concept, but the execution left a lot to be desired. It felt incredibly forced.

#### **The Ghost Wife of Arlington by Marilyn Guttridge (5/5)**

In this world, death is not an event nor a single entity, but a local "immortal" who governs over a particular community and takes people when it's their time. Some are nice about it, some are not so nice. Our protagonist is the consort, or "ghost wife" of the local immortal ruling over Arlington, and their relationship is fascinating and bittersweet and beautifully written.

#### **Everything You Have Seen by Alisa Alering(3/5)**

This seems to be about a young North Korean girl caught in a war between China and the U.S. Presumably the U.S. is invading North Korea and China is providing defense for their ally. Her town is under continuous U.S. shelling. She meets a mysterious American boy who can produce images by kneading imaginary dough in his hands and forms a friendship with him. After he magically disappears in a vague and confusing way, she is motivated to take her infant sibling from her mother and try to make it to America.

Not a bad story in many respects, but the fantastical element felt incredibly tacked on and...random? Perhaps this dough-kneading thing is something from Korean mythology that I'm not picking up on.

#### **Scavengers by James J. Eads (4/5)**

A small, wild-west town has to be protected from "harvesters," mysterious strangers with scythes strapped to their back. The town is governed by a mysterious bird-headed lady that has mechanical bird familiars and healing powers. Nobody enters the town and nobody leaves. It's all very mysterious, and has a twist ending that was fairly well done.

#### **Dreameater by Andrea Stewart (4/5)**

A teenage girl lives a nomadic lifestyle with her prostitute mother, who gets arrested for murdering a bunch of her johns by eating their brains. Turns out she's a dreameater, a diseased and murderous form of a

dreamcatcher, which seems to be just a normal person with super strength. She learns this when she meets her father for the first time, who is a dreamcatcher. He explains that she has a 50% chance of being like her mother, a 25% chance of being like him, and a 25% chance of being a normal human.

An effective, disturbing horror story with some decent character writing. It's in first-person from the girl's perspective and she has a very genuine voice.

### **Master Belladino's Mask by Marina J. Lostetter (4/5)**

A fantasy story with a couple of very interesting kinds of magic. The first is similar to that In Time movie with Justin Timberlake. People can bottle time and use it as a currency. Some is taken from newborns as a tax, which old people use to extend their lives by a minuscule amount near the end. The other is enchanted death masks that confer the skills and knowledge of the deceased, but also their personality. A young girl seeking to save her mother from a degenerative muscle disease rents the mask of a genius healer who has some issues to work out.

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## **Lincoln says**

First story about body swapping and spying very cool.

Story two...Planetary Scouts..Determining if alien planets are livable and do not possess intelligent life already. The entire story is good however our scouts go from one ruthlessly lethal planet to the next, each time striving to reach mission 25 and retire. They don't quite make it to mission 25, but hey they do get to retire.

Story 3 a heart felt story told from the perspective of an autistic man. It was very good and if people could see passed his "disability" he would of been able to solve the mystery of the story. Poignant.

Story 4 is a how to become a writer by L. Ron Hubbard and was written in 1935. It says something when the same principles apply in 2013. Not a story per say so I read some of it and moved on. If I wanted to be real writer I probably would of given it more time.

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Story 5 has to be inspired by the book and movie "Hugo" Time stops and the world clock has to be repaired.

Story 6 is a reflection of government taking over society. To make a profit is a crime..free health care as long as you have insurance and pay for the ambulance in advance. Government housing projects. The main character a felon because he dared run an electronic repair shop without paying for setup fees and paying the unions and paying the beast of government. Its a sad statement on the way things are leaning.

Story 7 is an out of time autopsy..pretty cool

Story 8 is another motivational speech about writing, I skipped it, however it starts with an epic tennis match that I suppose few people cared about.

Story 9 is told from the perspective of an ultra intelligent 4 year old. She has something constricting her vocal chords and as such has not been able to speak. The brain trapped such a weak body the story is riveting.

Story ten is Holy Days...A day when your young again and all that bothers the body is gone for 24 hours. Day two is to relive a day of your child hood. Day 3 is secret day where people you meet reveal their secrets

to you and you to them. Day 4 is a day for the dead to come back and have a visit. This entire story is awesome and yet extremely sad. Best one of the volume.

Story 11 is about a mistress of Death. Creepy. Cool. a bit too romantical.

Story 12 is some sort of war between Chinese vs. Americans...I was thinking Manchuria before WWII but that was a fight between Japan and China leaving the United States out...Not understanding the setting is beside the point...The protagonist finds an American boy who can show images on a screen that he magics between his hands. Perhaps I lack the education to appreciate the point of this story.

Story 13 is a small town protected by a part bird part old woman. Keeping an eye on "her" people through the use of her mechanized little birds. Is this a cautionary tale about putting too much faith in authority figures? Perhaps.

Story 14 is told from the perspective of a pre-teen who has a prostitute mother...oh but its much worse, she is a dream eater and is killing and eating her victims brains...zombies are all the rage I guess. World War Z!!

Story 15 is a tale of putting on enchanted masks so that you can use the knowledge of the person who created the mask. However, its more of the person possessing you instead of instilling knowledge.

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## **Daniel (Attack of the Books!) Burton says**

Finding an interesting, new author is a fantastic experience, like discovering a new favorite restaurant or traveling to a place you've never been before. It is full of exploration, of discovery, and the refreshing feel of something new and fresh.

Imagine, then, what it's like to find one book with 12 interesting new authors, all at once. It's exactly what you get with Writers of the Future Volume 29. As a collection of the fiction, it's a cornucopia of clever tales and excellent writing, and you won't even need to buy 12 different books to enjoy each author.

Perhaps only slightly hyperbolically, the cover says that the stories "show us who we are, what we may become, and how far we can go." Indeed, the stories may be more imaginative than predictive, but it does nothing to diminish their ability to convey the reader away from the ordinary and to lands and worlds unbounded by time or physics. And, eschewing the cliches even as it embraces them, the stories prove that science fiction and its close cousin fantasy are just as much about people and relationships as spaceships and magic.

The Writers of the Future contest is unique among collections of short stories. Where others focus on a topic, share a single author, or even share the same imaginary world, the commonality between tales in Writers of the Future Volume 29 is in their selection by a panel of judges comprised of the who's who of science fiction and fantasy authors and headed by Dave Wolverton. Authors submit their work to the panel and their submissions are reviewed blind.

In other words, the only commonality is the genre and the high level of writing. Only the best selections win, and it shows. Each tale is carefully crafted, from "cut to the chase" openings that thrust the reader right in the middle of the action, to heart breaking conclusions that both satisfy and leave you wanting more. In addition to the tales, the contest features art from the parallel contest for art, as well as essays on writing by L.Ron Hubbard, Dave Wolverton, and others.

One of my favorite s was “Planetary Scouts” by Stephen Sottong. In the far future, he writes, technology has taken humanity to the stars, but only to confront the harsh reality that many of the planets we might colonize are already occupied, often by forms of life not welcoming to our exploration.

Another exciting tale by Brian Trent is “Hero,” a fast paced story about a young man who must face his nemesis not once, but twice, in a revolution that sweeps the peaks of Mars.

“Dreameater” by Andrea Stewart is a clever and horrifying story about a girl coming to grip with the terrible legacy that may become her future.

And there are more. Writers of the Future Volume 29 is replete with great writing and good stories. If you want a bead on tomorrows great writers, this is the place to start reading.

Review first published as "Book Review: ‘Writers of the Future Volume 29’ edited by Dave Wolverton" on [Blogcritics.org](http://Blogcritics.org).

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