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The invasion of the future has begun.

Literary legends including Steven Millhauser, Junot Díaz, Amiri Baraka, and Katharine Dunn have attacked the borders of the every day. Like time traveling mad-scientists, they have concocted outrageous creations from the future. They have seized upon tales of technology gone wrong and mandated that pulp fiction must finally grow up.

In these wildly-speculative stories you will discover the company that controls the world from an alley in Greenwich Village. You'll find nanotechnology that returns memories to the residents of a nursing home. You'll rally an avian-like alien to become a mascot for a Major League Baseball team.

The Invaders are here. But did science fiction colonize them first?

Invaders: 22 Tales from the Outer Limits of Literature Details

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From Reader Review Invaders: 22 Tales from the Outer Limits of Literature for online ebook

Joe Karpierz says

Science fiction and fantasy have long been considered the ghetto of literature - if they were considered literature at all. SF&F have long been shut out of major non-genre awards, and indeed have not often been considered for such awards. Literary writers and magazines have long looked down their noses at genre fiction. That attitude slowly appears to be changing. To be sure, the attitude is still prevalent, but the dividing line between genre and literature is showing some cracks. Authors like Michael Chabon and Doris Lessing have long professed their love for the genre, while writers such as Samuel R. Delany, Ursula K. LeGuin, and Harlan Ellison are considered to be among America's finest writers, not just America's finest science fiction writers.

It's also very clear that genre stories have taken over entertainment. In addition, we really do live in a science fictional world, a fact that no one denies. So it comes as no surprise that there are many literary writers that dabble in genre, either jumping in with both feet or use science fictional tropes in their stories without making it the centerpiece of the tale. Jacob Weisman of Tachyon Publications has gathered twenty two stories by writers who are not known to work in the genre in this anthology. And while it's not a book a fan of core science fiction is likely to casually pick up and read, it contains some highly entertaining and definitely well written genre tales that science fiction fans looking to broaden their reading experience are well advised to pick up.

I will admit to have heard of only four of the authors in this book, those being Jonathan Lethem, W.P. Kinsella, George Saunders and Junot Diaz. Kinsella is known for baseball stories, and here he combines science fiction and baseball in a first contact story called "Reports Concerning the Death of the Seattle Albatross are Somewhat Exaggerated", about a baseball mascot who is an alien. Junot Diaz gives us the frightening "Monstro", set in a world that is falling apart at the seams. The story tells of two friends and a mysterious, glamorous woman who all together are trying to figure out what is going on with the weird virus/disease that has broken out. Lethem's "Five Fucks" is a tale which involves many familiar science fiction tropes which makes us think a little bit about one night stands and evolution. Saunders give us "Escape from Spiderhead", a story of scientific advancement in the area of pharmaceuticals and the moral dilemma that can arise from those advancements. It's quite a frightening tale, but I suppose that with the advancements in genetics and medicine it may not be all that far-fetched.

While those are good stories, they aren't my favorites in the book. Steven Millhauser's "A Precursor to the Cinema" is a tale of an otherwise unexceptional artist who for a short period of his career has exhibits of his work that are indeed exceptional and particularly haunting. "Portal", by J. Robert Lennon, shows us a family who has bought a house and property that has a portal at the back of the property that can transport people to other places. The problem is the affect this transportation has on the people who use the portal. Brian Evenson's "Fugue State" is a very scary tale of a man who apparently has a malady that is not only contagious but looks like it could bring about the end of mankind (taken to its logical conclusion). "Lambing Season" by Molly Gloss is another first contact story which takes place in a remote location and relates the story of a human woman who meets an alien and the respect they have for each other. "Help Me Find My Spaceman Lover" by Robert Olen Butler is a story straight out of the National Enquirer, about a women in a small country town in Alabama who meets an alien and falls in love with it.

Other terrific stories include Deji Bryce Olukotun's "We are the Olfanauts", which gives us the tale of advancements in internet technologies. In this case, as you can probably tell by the title, the story deals with

aromas that can be transmitted over the internet, and the consequences for the people that work in the field involved with that technology. "Topics in Advanced Rocketry", by Chris Tarry, takes place in a future when space travel is made available to the common family and the effect it has on the first family it is made available to. Max Apple's "The Yogurt of Vasirin Kefirovsky" shows us a scientist who is obsessed with the idea that the biblical manna was a form of yogurt. "The Inner City", by Karen Heuler, is a story straight out of *The Twilight Zone*, about a woman who is out of a job and looking for work, and who finds a lead for a job on a very strange street in a very strange part of town.

There are no bad stories in the book, and while I haven't summarized all of them, the stories by Eric Puchner, Ben Loory, Julia Elliot, Rivka Galchen, Jami Attenberg, Amiri Baraka, Kelly Luce and Katherine Dunn are just as engaging as the others I've mentioned above. This collection is, in my opinion, well worth picking up and shows that you don't need to be a genre writer to write good genre fiction. If only the rest of the literary world would understand that "good genre fiction" is not any oxymoronic term and recognize there is some really good stuff to be discovered in genre literature.

Tadiana ☆Night Owl? says

\$1.99 Kindle sale, Jan. 24, 2019, for this more-literary-than-usual SF short story collection. 3.5 stars. Final review, first posted on Fantasy Literature:

Here there be, if not dragons, a rousing assemblage of apocalyptic plagues, some time travel, a couple of mad scientists, and several aliens from other planets. But this isn't your normal set of science fiction stories. The real invaders, I suspect, are the actual writers of these stories, descending upon the fantasy and science fiction field with fresh ideas and less adherence to the traditions and tropes of the genre than one would usually expect. The result, from a reader's perspective, can be both positive and frustrating ... sometimes at the same time.

This collection of 22 speculative fiction stories, previously published in various magazines and collections, is by a group of respected authors known primarily for their non-SF genre writings. It may be the most unusual and stylistically diverse science fiction story collection I've ever read. I'll discuss the stories that particularly impressed me, as well as a few that were notably weaker.

In "Beautiful Monsters," by Eric Puchner, the aging process for most humans has been arrested at about age nine by scientific methods. A few adults, called Senescents, still exist as fugitives on the outskirts of society, hiding in the mountains and woods, on the edge of starvation. When an injured Senescent is found by two Perennial children, who take him in, they are as alarmed at his ugliness and feral behavior as he is at what they've lost. It's a haunting and disturbing story.

"LIMBs" by Julia Elliott takes the opposite approach, sympathetically exploring the world of aging people, and the changes wrought by exoskeletal LIMBs that give them new mobility, as well as new treatments that can, at least in part, reverse dementia for some seniors. It's a gentle and poignant tale, insightfully exploring the concerns and frustrations of the elderly.

"A Precursor of the Cinema" by Steven Millhauser, beautifully describes the life and art of Harlan Crane, a nineteenth century artist who invented "animate paint," a type of art that somehow combines painting and motion pictures. Crane's paintings contain details that inexplicably move: flies dart from place to place in the painting, a prisoner appears and disappears, dancers waltz and even emerge from the painting. The combination of the quasi-documentary, matter-of-fact narrative and the mystical, incredible details was absolutely magical, even though the plot itself is understated.

“Lambing Season” by Molly Gloss, is a first-contact story in which a somewhat doglike alien happens to meet up with Delia, a down-to-earth sheepherder who lives in the mountains with her two dogs and Churro sheep from May to September. Delia’s practical, caring attitude, unspoiled by society, carries over from the way she cares for her animals to her interactions with the alien. This quiet but moving 2002 story was deservedly nominated for the Hugo and Nebula awards.

In “The Inner City” by Karen Heuler, Lena is looking for a job, and stumbles onto a secretive company hidden behind a newsstand, or a café (the façade changes). Lena thinks she’s found a great job opportunity and decides to sneak her way into this place of business, but gradually her experience becomes more and more ominous. This may not be one of the more profound stories in this collection, but it’s a compelling tale with a memorable ending.

Some of the less successful stories for me:

“Portal” by J. Robert Lennon, where the disintegration of a backyard space portal pointedly echoes the breakdown of the narrator’s family.

“The Squid Who Fell Into the Sun” by Ben Loory, a whimsically humorous fable of a genius squid that ended up being a little too quirky, moralistic and thin.

“The Region of Unlikeness” by Rivka Galchen, in which a young woman meets and befriends Ilan and Jacob, two eccentric and rather arrogant men who may be experimenting with time travel. Or maybe they’re just delusional? It’s an odd and elusive story, intriguing at first, but it lost me as it worked its way toward an indeterminate ending.

“In the Bushes” by Jami Attenberg, a too-brief account of a day in the life of a young man, in a near-future world in which America’s love affair with the automobile has ended.

“Topics in Advanced Rocketry” by Chris Tarry, a humorous story in which an average family, with typical problems is chosen to be sent off on a trip in a space capsule.

“Minotaur” by Jim Shepard. The narrator and his friend Kenny chat about their work on classified government projects, exacerbating the frustration of the narrator’s wife with her husband. The story makes a worthwhile point about the impact of this type of secrecy on relationships, but otherwise doesn’t seem to have any particular point to it and is told in a rambling way that didn’t engage me.

“The Yogurt of Vasirin Kefirovsky” by Max Apple is a parody of the mad scientist trope. Professor Kefirovsky is being interviewed by a Time magazine reporter, but by the end of the story I found the odd professor, who has an intense interest in homemade, all-natural yogurt, as tiresome and irritating as the reporter apparently did.

Even these less appealing stories, however, are still worth reading. One of the beauties of short fiction is that it allows you to explore new authors or types of fiction without the major time commitment that an entire novel takes.

With their roots more firmly in literary than speculative fiction, these are all imaginative stories that, for the most part, have some extra heft to them, more attention to style, theme and symbolism, a greater commitment to subtlety. They gave me more food for thought than the typical science fiction short story. At the same time, their more literary nature sometimes gave me a mental run for my money. Some of these stories are opaque and difficult to parse, and they tend to end on an ambiguous note that can frustrate a reader who is looking for a more easily understood story with a clear resolution.

I'd recommend this collection to readers who are willing to stretch their brains and are open to more literary types of stories, with their frustrations as well as their rewards.

Content advisory: several stories contain violent and disturbing content, explicit sexual content, and/or R-rated language.

Chris says

The difference between "literary" and "genre" is something that comes up somewhat often on book blogs; the gap is both hard to quantify, yet also simple enough that it can be explained using pies. Long-time readers might already know that I have a habit of getting up on my soapbox about "what makes good genre" or defending genre works as "literary" fictions, as the (admittedly arbitrary) divide is something I'm both fascinated and frustrated by. So, needless to say I was very intrigued by the new collection coming out from Tachyon Publications, *Invaders: 22 Tales from the Outer Limits of Literature*. The setup is pretty simple---it collects 22 SFF stories by authors who are known primarily for their literary/mainstream writing and less so for "genre" writing. How do genre outsiders---the titular invaders---use science fiction and fantasy tropes to blend genre and literary fiction? The results are pretty impressive.

The thing that stood out to me almost immediately was the heavier focus here on the human side---relationships, sex, etc.---than in the typical "genre" works, with the near-future techno-wizardry and fantastic elements used to emphasize that human element. Take Julia Elliott's "LIMBs," for example, about a woman in a futuristic medical facility who we eventually realize is reacting positively to her memory treatments (possibly Alzheimer's); the name comes from the bionic legs which enable her to move around. She happens to be in the same facility as her crippled husband, as well as the man she cheated with for several summers many years ago when her husband's injury left him distant and depressed. Her past blossoms into the present as she begins to make connections between these two men and her past.

"LIMBs" is just one of many stories dealing with near-future technology, though it offers less to fear than others. Deji Bryce Olukotun's "We Are The Olfanauts" introduces the latest internet trend: whyffing, or scented social media. Narrator Renton works for the company that makes these scented memes and viral videos possible, and as a content curator, he's smelled it all---dismemberment, rape, murder---in order to find and ban videos that take the rush just a bit too far. But as his relationship---with his supervisor, no less---begins to fray, we start to see darker sides of our relationship to this addictive technology. "Escape from Spiderhead" by George Saunders looks at another frightening possibility: boutique pharmaceuticals, drugs that can make you fall in and out of love or expand your vocabulary. The protagonist is a criminal being used as a test subject, forced to test and rate different drugs that control his inhibitions and force his emotions into the dark places his handlers take him. While it ends on a transcendent note, it calls to mind both our current pharmaceutical testing done on animals, as well as our current (and future) addiction to technology.

While most of the stories fit the SF/F mold, there's also a couple of brilliant horror pieces. Brian Evenson's "Fugue State" is one of the longer tales in the volume, and it's one of my favorites. It's a masterful tale of psychological, postmodern horror about a "virus" which puts its victims into a fugue state, losing track of themselves and their goals like sleepwalkers forced to endlessly repeat their actions. Characters slip in and out of the role of protagonist, losing their memories---and minds---and picking up the previous person's voicemail or notes, continues the other's quest as their own. Meanwhile, Junot Díaz's "Monstros" starts off contrasting a trio of party animals in the Dominican Republic as a horrific new plague sweeps across neighboring Haiti. The narrator is enthralled by a girl he has a crush on---"With one fucking glance she upended my everything"---and he follows her and a mutual friend, oblivious to current events; their final mistake leads to a bone-crunching ending.

The thing I love about reading short-story collections is seeing a variety of new and innovative visions, and this collection is quite varied indeed. There's a lot of postmodern fear of our posthuman future, with stories toying with our love affair with technology and how that tech impacts our human relationships. There's a few darkly comedic stories, like J. Robert Lennon's "Portal" (where a family nonchalantly finds a magic portal in their backyard), or Robert Olen Butler's "Help Me Find My Spaceman Lover" (a funny but sadly-sweet tale of spaceman love and self discovery). There's even a few horror gems, like the aforementioned "Fugue State." And really, there's not a bad story among them---the best are impressive and have stuck with me for a while, and the rest are all very good and well worth reading. That about sums up *Invaders*, one of the best SFF collections I've read in years. It's a smorgasbord of visionary and thought-provoking stories, each different from the one that came before but no less interesting. Highly recommended, especially to fans of short fiction. And pick up a copy for your friend who doesn't "get" SFF because they think it's all spaceships and dragons.

Fantasy Literature says

4.5 stars from Bill, read the full review at [FANTASY LITERATURE](#)

As with most collections, whether they be of stories, poems, or essays, I found *Invaders: 22 Tales from the Outer Limits of Literature*, edited by Jacob Wesiman, to be a mixed bag overall, with some weak stories, some solidly good ones, some very good ones, and several absolutely great ones, more in fact than I typically find in an anthology, making this an easy collection to recommend.

The authors collected here are non-genre writers known mostly for "literary fiction," such as George Saunders, Max Apple, Molly Gloss, Jim Shepard, Katherine Dunn, and Junot Diaz. In his introduction, Wesiman says the idea for this anthology came out of the responses he saw to an earlier one (from 2009) entitled *The Secret History of Science Fiction*, which was "intended to be a serious investigation of the intersection between literary writers who occasionally dabbled in science fiction and science fiction writers who occasionally dabbled in something resembling literary fiction." The reactions, he states, were mostly positive, save for some that were angry and defensive, accusing the editors (James Patrick Kelly and John Kessel) of telling science fiction writers how they "should write." The most prevalent critical response, though, he says, was that the genre authors' stories were superior to their non-genre counterparts, who were "somehow off the mark or ignorantly reinventing old tropes." ...read the full review at [FANTASY LITERATURE](#)

Althea Ann says

An anthology of 'speculative' fiction by authors who are known for writing mainstream fiction. I'm not familiar with the majority of the authors, but hey, figured I'd give it a try.

*** "Portal" by J. Robert Lennon

The discovery of a magic portal in the backyard is given an amusing dissonance by the fact that the family who owns it treats it like any other property amenity, such as perhaps, an inground pool. And, the narrator tells us, they've allowed it to fall into disuse, in fact, almost forgotten about it, although it was quite the novelty at first, and was used as the starting point of any number of family excursions.

The setup is great, the alternate worlds imaginative and disturbing, especially in their reflections on family members' obsessions and failings. But then, the author doesn't really do much with the idea, and simply ends the piece abruptly on a note of indefinite ennui.

**** “Beautiful Monsters” by Eric Puchner

If I'd read this in an anthology of sci-fi shorts from the 50s or 60s, I never would've guessed that it didn't belong. The themes and setting are both very much in line with the concerns of SF of that era - but hey, that's also probably the era of SF that I discovered first, and that I came to love - so I can't say it's a minus in my book.

In this future, the 'problem' of aging has been solved. The vast majority of citizens are physically children, although they can live indefinitely in their prepubescent bodies. People who age and die are now a persecuted minority, on the brink of extinction. When an injured adult man turns up on the doorstep of one boy and girl's home, it's the first time they've ever seen one...

**** “The Squid Who Fell in Love with the Sun” by Ben Loory.

Awww. It's a sappy parable. But its message about curiosity and ambition; the driving force toward knowledge and exploration - even in the face of ridicule, hopelessness and despair... and its dream of a better, even if unseeable future... brought a tear to my eye.

*** “Five Fucks” by Jonathan Lethem

I'm not generally a big fan of Lethem, but this one had a strong start. After a one-night (or so she thought) stand with a strange (both strange to her, and rather odd) man, a woman discovers that she's somehow lost time, and has been reported as a missing person. Compelled to find her lover again and investigate what actually happened, the situation only gets worse, and odder...

Up till there, I loved it - but I don't think that the author succeeds in wrapping it up well at all.

*** “LIMBs” by Julia Elliott

In a near-future nursing home, an elderly Alzheimer's patient is using new prosthetics to help her to walk unassisted, and is also undergoing a new treatment designed to recover lost memories. Those retrieved flashes of memory allow her to realize that not one, but two of her fellow residents are men who were important to her in the past.

Very well written, but a bit sentimental for me. Recommended for fans of 'Like Water for Elephants.'

**** “We Are The Olfanauts” by Deji Bryce Olukotun

Really good - the introduction made much of this author, but I'm going to have to say I agree with the accolades. Giving us the point of view of a man who works as a content reviewer at a new media company, the story is full of interesting speculative details about new technology, but also subtly and effectively delivers a host of observations and indictments on our present world and where it's heading.

Like any social media content, the new tech, which involves being able to share scents as well as sound and visuals, is able to be abused by trolls and others. The protagonist here spends his work days reviewing 'questionable' content, and his leisure hours pursuing company-approved activities. There's a lot packed into the short pages here - commentary on corporate culture, the inequity of hierarchies, the emotional toll of this sort of work, the ramifications of censorship, the consequences of adhering to rules, guidelines, and schedules, &c. Nicely done.

**** “The Region of Unlikeness” by Rivka Galchen

An interesting investigation of the 'time travel paradox.'

A young woman meets a couple of older men in a coffeeshop, and finds their philosophical conversation more fascinating than that of her college peers. She falls into a slightly odd and unequal friendship with both men... although finding one of them attractive might have something to do with her starry-eyed attitude. But then, they seem to fall off the face of the earth. Did they just get bored with her company and ditch her? Or is something stranger behind this? An odd note piques her curiosity and makes it difficult to move on...

Interesting ideas, a very believable ambiguity, and truly insightful capturing of psychology...

***** “A Precursor of the Cinema” by Steven Millhauser

A wholly and utterly convincing art history essay - the catch, of course, is that the artist in question, and

indeed, the 19th-century art movements he was allegedly involved with, such as the "Verisimilists," are all fictional. The artist that the writer focuses on has, we are told, faded into obscurity as he, and all of his remarkable paintings, disappeared. Researchers have been left with only contemporary accounts of his exhibits and shows, which reportedly featured never-before-or-since-seen effects enabled by what the artist described as 'animate paint.'

Fascinating, eerie, and wonderfully written. I'm not at all surprised to hear that the author won a Pulitzer.

** "In the Bushes" by Jami Attenberg

In a near-future rural America, bankrupted by foreign wars, the poignant tragedy is that young people have to go back to making out in the bushes, rather than in the backseats of cars. Straddling the line between apocalyptic doomsaying and absurdity, this one didn't work for me.

*** "Fugue State" by Brian Evenson

Creepy pandemic tale, featuring a plague which brings confusion, dissociation, amnesia... and, of course, death.

** "Reports Concerning the Death of the Seattle Albatross Are Somewhat Exaggerated" by W. P. Kinsella

If you are the target audience for a baseball/sci-fi tragicomedy, this may appeal to you. I, however, am not that reader, and did not particularly enjoy this story of an alien, alone on earth, masquerading as a baseball team's mascot, abandoned by his countrymen. Cue the sad clowns...

*****"Lambing Season" by Molly Gloss

It's a bit difficult to make the case that Gloss really belongs in an anthology of science fiction by non-SF authors. Yes, she also writes 'mainstream' fiction, but she's a winner of the prestigious James Tiptree Jr. award, the Theodore Sturgeon Memorial Award, and this story in particular was nominated for both the Nebula and Hugo awards. If all those don't add up to Sci-Fi creds, I don't know what does!

Regardless, 5 stars from me for this story. Quiet but intensely vivid, the piece brings us into the life of a solitary shepherd who, on one of her long lonely watches, sees something strange fall from the sky. Her reactions and decisions are not at all what most first-contact stories presume, but they make utter sense in the context of the character and her life.

The almost-hyperrealism of the setting and scenario also drew me to contemplate how very different - even 'alien' - to many of us, the actual lives and situations of many people right here on this planet might seem.

*** "Conrad Loomis & The Clothes Ray" by Amiri Baraka.

Well, this is an excellent introduction to a potential story about an eccentric African-American inventor and his more-conventional buddy. Excellent writing, and pointedly sardonic commentary on the obstacles - and dangers - faced by a brilliant black man with a potentially world-changing - and valuable - invention on his hands. However, then it just abruptly ends. Really too bad this idea wasn't developed further. However, I think I'll definitely have to put the book of short stories this originally appeared in on my list ("Tales of the Out and the Gone.")

Available for free, here: <https://pen.org/fiction-novel/conrad-...>

** "Topics in Advanced Rocketry" by Chris Tarry

For a publicity stunt intended to revive interest in space exploration, a company has decided to shoot an "average American family" up in a rocket. The venture is none-too-safe, and public opinion/interest isn't quite where it was hoped. And even on the launch pad, the family can't stop their mundane bickering. Yeah, the piece has depressingly true things to say about our society, but I didn't particularly care for it.

*****"The Inner City" by Karen Heuler

Creeeepy! A mildly eccentric but utterly believable West Village resident is looking for a job. When she comes across some discarded paperwork that indicates that someone might've been fired from a nearby office, she takes the initiative to seek it out - after all, they must have a vacancy they're looking to fill! But

the secret office she finds is absolutely not what she was looking for.
This one will be coming back to haunt me...

**** "Escape from Spiderhead" by George Saunders

I've previously read and enjoyed Saunders' "Civilwarland in Bad Decline" but I think this story is even stronger. It shows us another aspect of a dystopian near-future, one where convicts might pull strings for the "opportunity" to enter experimental drug testing programs rather than a 'traditional' prison. The disturbing revelations pile up as our protagonist is led toward having to make a terrible moral choice - but the by-the-by implications of what these experiments might indicate about the outside world are equally bad - and completely believable.

** "Amorometer" by Kelly Luce

Felt a bit like an intended homage to Haruki Murakami, but it didn't really do it for me.

A bored housewife receives a letter which was intended for another woman of the same name. A lonely, retired professor is seeking a former student, whom, he claims, decades before tested unusually high on an experimental device designed to measure a person's capacity to love. The housewife is intrigued. What if she was this extraordinary woman?

** "The Yogurt of Vasirin Kefirovsky" by Max Apple

On assignment to interview an elderly scientist of some renown, a journalist discovers that the man has left his past work behind him, and is now wholly obsessed with the alleged benefits of a fad diet. I didn't particularly care for the story, and moreover, I didn't feel it belonged in this anthology, as there's no indication that the yogurt diet's 'benefits' are anything more than a sad delusion.

**** "Monstros" by Junot Díaz

Four stars instead of 5 only because this is very clearly the first chapter of a novel, not a stand-alone story. The introduction to the story here implies that the novel is to-come, but Wikipedia disagrees: "Since 2007, Díaz was reported to be working on another novel, entitled *Monstro*; however, in June 2015 Díaz stated that he had effectively abandoned that novel."

That's a shame, because I would read the hell out of it.

Two Dominican Brown University students, one a nerdy writer, one a wealthy playboy, and the beautiful but troubled girl that our narrator (the nerd) is obsessed with, all happen to be at home in the DR when a new plague breaks out. The plague's effects are a new and extremely creepy twist on the zombie trope... but I guess we don't get to find out what happens.

** "Minotaur" by Jim Shepard

Two couples meet for drinks. Their conversation reveals their fraught relationships and the disconnection caused by the fact that the guys are government agents working on super-top-secret projects that they can't talk about to anyone. The piece feels a bit unfocused and all-over-the-place. I wouldn't have chosen it for this collection, as calling this speculative fic is too much of a stretch for me.

** "Help Me Find My Spaceman Lover" by Robert Olen Butler

In this alternate world, Weekly-World-News-style space aliens are a fact of life. A spinster-ish, small-town homebody is unexpectedly sought out by one of these aliens, and swept off for a whirlwind romance in his UFO.

This tragicomedy is too silly and stereotypical to achieve real pathos, but doesn't go over-the-top enough for satire, either.

* "Near-Flesh" by Katherine Dunn

Previously read; did not re-read: "tells of a nasty, unattractive woman who uses male sex robots to gratify herself... and gets what's coming to her. I didn't like it."

Many thanks to Tachyon and NetGalley for the opportunity to read this interesting mix of stories. As always, my opinions are solely my own.

Alan says

With a title like *Invaders*, this theme anthology could easily have gone very wrong. Xenophobia may be trendier than it once was (and definitely more popular than it *should* ever be), but as it turns out that's not at all what this book is about. The invaders in editor Jacob Weisman's book aren't thinly-disguised Mexicans or Muslims, or any other exemplars of our national paranoia about The Other. No, the *Invaders* in *Invaders* are the *authors*—and what they're invading is SF itself.

You see, SF (science fiction and fantasy, considered together as speculative fiction) has traditionally been considered by arbiters of cultural literacy to be nothing but a genre, a ghetto best kept walled off from the supposedly wider world of mimetic fiction (that is, from fiction that is constrained to the here-and-now, forbidden to include any taint of the fantastic). But there have always been authors (and readers!) impatient with such categorizations, writers both gifted and otherwise who have been willing to cross (in both directions) the boundaries (whatever boundaries might actually exist) between genres.

Again, this could have gone very wrong. All too often, literary authors dabbling in SF fail to consider any of the genre's history, and in so doing make ludicrous mistakes, when they're not simply trudging over already well-covered ground. Imagine a writer who, all unknowing, decides to write a Western where the cowboys all carry Glockes and ride Amtrak... if that were intentional and transgressive, sure, it might make a pretty good story, but otherwise it's just *wrong*. What distinguishes *Invaders* from other experiments in genre-bending is that, most likely due to editor Jacob Weisman's astute curation, while not one of the authors in this book is known for writing simple genre SF, all of them *respect* the territory they're invading—they're at least somewhat familiar with its tropes, and are willing to work with them. Authors like Jonathan Lethem, W.P. Kinsella, Molly Gloss, George Saunders, Junot Díaz and Katherine Dunn, to name a few that rang a bell with me.

Consider this a more modern companion piece (very few of the stories in *Invaders* are from prior to 2000 A.D.) to *The Science Fiction Hall of Fame*, the first landmark anthology of largely literary SF chosen by other authors as a precursor to the Science Fiction Writers of America's Nebula Awards.

Which isn't to say that *Invaders* is a typical genre anthology. These invaders still have an outsider's eye, a perspective from which even the familiar seems fantastic. It doesn't always work, but when it does, the stories in *Invaders* can stand with the best in-genre work.

Mike says

The premise of this book is that writers who are primarily known as "literary" write stories which are clearly in the science fiction and fantasy genre.

Now, there are several different meanings of "literary," in my mind, and they're often confused. First of all, there's "literary-the-manner-of-execution". This includes deep, complex, evolving, memorable characters; a conscious or unconscious mastery of the tools and techniques of prose, able to produce subtle and powerful effects on the reader; apt, fresh, and beautiful imagery; and structures of progressive realization, by which I mean that one thing that's happening as the story unfolds is that the character and the reader both change

their perspective. (Occasionally it's just the reader.) You'll find "literary" stories, by this definition, in every genre. These elements are what often make a book or story an enduring classic, whether its outward form is a "realist" depiction of ordinary life in the author's own place and time, a spy thriller, a Western, a romance, or a fantasy quest. The stories in this volume generally meet this definition, as one would hope given the number of awards the authors have won, and the fact that so many of them teach creative writing at universities. The prose is not just competent, but thoughtful, and (unlike many genre authors) when they use a vocabulary word, it not only means what they think it means, it is exactly the right word to choose.

Then there's "literary-the-bag-of-tricks," which inexperienced writers sometimes mistake for the first one. I include here things like writing in present tense; second person; or without quotation marks for dialog. These are all techniques that have a specific effect, when used consciously and skillfully (usually one of distancing, like any technique that draws attention to itself), but some writers just use them because they've seen them in literary stories and think that's part of how you write one. This error puts me in mind of those dreadful 1980s epic fantasies, which had to consist of three thick books in which an assorted group of companions wanders all over the map in order to defeat the Dark Lord - as if those incidentals were the essential elements of Tolkien. The stories in this volume occasionally pull out such tricks, not always, to my mind, with much justification, but usually they are using the prose in a way that clearly serves the story without being obtrusive.

Finally, there's "literary-the-genre". I know that "literary" and "genre" are often opposed, but there are all kinds of reasons that's inaccurate (this book right here sets out to demonstrate as much), and there is a set of what I can only call genre expectations that mark the so-called "literary" story just as clearly as different sets mark the romance or the Western. The element that is most obvious to me - and one of the prime reasons that I don't usually read "literary" - is that just as a classic romance is structured as "meet cute, obstacles to getting together, resolve obstacles, happy ending," a "literary" story of this type is structured by (often alienated) characters experiencing a decline through helplessness into hopelessness. If you're lucky, there's a poignant moment at the end in which it's implied that something might be saved from the wreckage.

One of the characteristics of most so-called "genre" stories is that they retain an earlier structure, the structure you'll find in most pre-20th-century classic literature: Protagonist wants something, faces fit opposition, keeps trying - in the process of which the world, or the protagonist, or both are changed - and finally triumphs through courage, perseverance and hard-won skill (or fails through a tragic flaw, less commonly). That's obviously not the only way to structure a successful story, though it's the most widely used, the easiest, and, I submit, the most satisfying to most readers. Whether this is because we have been trained to feel that stories should work this way, or whether it is meeting some deeper psychological or social need, I'm not about to discuss here; it would take too long, and besides, I don't know. The important thing for me, discussing this collection now, is that it's the story structure that I personally prefer, and that most of the stories here do not follow it. They follow the literary-genre structure of a helpless decline into hopelessness that I mentioned before.

This is different, by the way, from tragedy, where the protagonist struggles and is finally defeated as much by his or her tragic flaw as by the circumstances or antagonists. I suppose you could argue that many literary-genre main characters (they're not protagonists in the literal sense) have the tragic flaw that they're alienated and don't attempt to solve their problems, but that's rather a feeble tragic flaw, in my mind.

That isn't to say that these aren't wonderful, high-impact and masterfully-written stories. They are. I'm talking here about a matter of personal taste, but also, I would suggest, a failure of imagination, and a failure to examine the assumptions of a literary culture.

This pervasive structural pessimism is in contrast to the frequent optimism of genre fiction, and I have a theory as to why. Early science fiction, in particular, was often written by engineers, whose mode of thought is to identify and solve problems through intelligently applied effort. This gave SF a basically optimistic and

progressive character at its heart, which, while often questioned since (particularly by the writers who tend to be thought of as more "literary" - Bradbury, Sheckley, Delaney, Wolfe), has never been completely lost. Even postapocalyptic and dystopian SF literature, which start from a pessimistic premise, often show the protagonists struggling against the situation. The literary versions (Kafka, Orwell, Huxley) end in failure for the protagonist, of course, but the more popular versions frequently show them succeeding to some degree.

Not only SF, but fantasy started out with a basic structural optimism: a belief in nobility of character, the ultimate triumph of good over evil, and the possibility of personal transformation (classically, from farm boy to king). Today, we have a countermovement in the form of grimdark fantasy, in which the protagonists lack nobility of character, make poor and often selfish choices, and usually fail to transform or triumph. The prose it's written in, though, is often beautiful, vivid, and deeply felt.

Are those our choices, then? A beautifully written nihilism, or clunky, maladroit (perhaps naive) optimism about human potential and the possibility of change? I don't think so. I believe that it's possible in the 21st century - as it clearly was in the 19th - to write beautifully and movingly about protagonists who struggle nobly for the right and triumph through adversity - though our understanding of "the right" has hopefully evolved beyond the feudal/colonial status quo - and, in so doing, take the reader to new realizations about themselves, the world, and the human condition. I'd love to see the authors from this collection take on that project. There are authors who are doing it; Max Gladstone (at his best) and Ann Leckie spring immediately to mind, from the "genre" side. Elizabeth Bear, while a more obviously "genre" author than the other two, is writing genre so well that it's hard to argue against its literary status. The late Terry Pratchett was often, in his own words, "accused of literature," and his humane, hopeful satires certainly check all the boxes I've mentioned. There are plenty of others.

Please note, I'm not saying "don't ever write any story that shows the decline of a character through helplessness to hopelessness; that's wrong". It's one mode of writing. It's not one I like, but I acknowledge great work being done in that mode. All I'm saying is that perhaps it (like the protagonist-struggles-to-triumph story, yes) could do with being changed up from time to time, and that leaving it unquestioned and unexamined as if it was the inevitable structure for a literary story leaves literary fiction in a place where it isn't everything it could be (and isn't winning a wide audience, either, which I imagine at least some literary writers care about).

Returning to this specific collection, a couple more things to note. One is that I have a suspicion so strong as to amount to a certainty that the word "Negro" (always capitalised) has been substituted, in two of the stories, for a slightly different word that the author originally wrote, and which would be more authentic to the voice of those stories. The other is that the concern genre people sometimes express about "literary" writers attempting SFF - that they will, out of ignorance of the genre's history, come up with a story that was already a cliché in the 1950s - isn't borne out here. I have, I would say, a better than average knowledge of the SFF field, though obviously I haven't read every classic story, and all of these treatments, even of common and well-worn tropes, seemed fresh and original to me.

So, were there stories I particularly liked or disliked? There were. There were some that I was beginning to like, until they stopped abruptly; sometimes the stopping points felt like we'd reached the end of Chapter 1 (but there was no Chapter 2) - I'm thinking of "Monstro" by Junot Diaz here - but sometimes they were just sudden stops, as in "Conrad Loomis & the Clothes Ray" by Amiri Baraka. There were some I loved for the perfection of their voice, like "Help Me Find My Spaceman Lover" by Robert Olen Butler. It takes tremendous skill to do the voice of an uneducated, naive person who simultaneously has and lacks insight (that's why Huckleberry Finn is such a classic), and this story pulls it off brilliantly.

I thought the self-involved protagonist of "We Are the Olfanauts" by Deji Bruce Olukotun was excellently done. The slight hopefulness-amid-the-wreckage at the end of "LIMBs" by Julia Elliott was a fitting cap to a story that beautifully explored the regaining of a life's memories from dementia. "Lambing Season," by

Molly Gloss, was a moving and unusual first-contact story. "Reports Concerning the Death of the Seattle Albatross Are Somewhat Exaggerated" by W.P. Kinsella takes first contact from the other side, and does it effectively, though I thought the voice of the narrator was a bit too fluent with what, to him, would have been an alien culture.

I recently watched several short videos on writing by George Saunders, so I was interested to read his story, "Escape from Spiderhead". Although the "hopeful" ending involved a particularly horrible suicide, and the milieu of the story was Kafkaesque, there was a great depth of humanity to the protagonist.

I was disappointed with "A Precursor of the Cinema," by Steven Millhauser, having read his story "The Barnum Museum" in *The Secret History of Fantasy* and been impressed by how he pulled off a pure "milieu" story with only one named character, who doesn't do anything, and no plot - and yet made it interesting. The story in this volume, by contrast, attempts to imitate a somewhat dull academic history, and succeeds all too well. The opening story, "Portal," by J. Robert Lennon, is a textbook example of what I complained about at length above: a story in which an encounter with the wonderful doesn't help, doesn't transform anyone's life, doesn't halt the decline through helplessness to hopelessness as a family falls apart in, frankly, stereotypical ways.

So, do I wish that the Usual Literary Structure wasn't so prevalent in this collection? Absolutely. Did I admire, and occasionally enjoy, the stories in any case? Yes.

I received a copy from NetGalley for review.

Claire says

I enjoyed a lot of these stories a lot. Very glad I bought it!

Seregil of Rhiminee says

Originally published at Risingshadow.

Invaders: 22 Tales from the Outer Limits of Literature features 22 tales written by authors who have mostly written literary fiction, but have also occasionally tried their hands on science fiction. This anthology allows readers an opportunity to explore interesting, inventive and original stories that wonderfully demonstrate what can be achieved when literary authors write science fiction and concentrate on speculating about life, relationships and technology.

As this anthology demonstrates, literary fiction and speculative fiction go perfectly hand in hand. They have a lot to offer to each other, because they balance each other's strengths and weaknesses in a perfect way.

I've noticed that during the recent years certain speculative fiction novels have been classified as literary fiction, although they're at least partially speculative fiction. This is an interesting and welcome trend, because it's possible that many readers may consciously avoid reading speculative fiction, but now they have an opportunity to read it, because it has been classified as literary fiction. I think it's great that many literary authors dare to experiment with different things and have begun to write crossover stories that are in equal parts literary fiction and speculative fiction, because it adds plenty of diversity to genre and brings new readers to the genre.

I've also noticed that authors who are capable of writing good literary fiction often have an ability to produce intriguing speculative fiction stories. All of the stories featured in this anthology are proof of this, because they're well written stories with a strong emphasis on literary values.

The editor, Jacob Weisman, has done his best to gather stories that differ from each other, because he has paid a lot of attention to diversity. His goal has been to discover what kind of science fiction non-genre authors write and how it differs from what actual science fiction authors write. The answer to this question can be found in these stories, because some of them are different and others not so different from actual science fiction.

As many readers may be aware of, speculative fiction has not often been considered to be quality literature and many critics have shunned it. It's a shame that critics feel this way, because the truth is that speculative fiction is often much better literature than actual literary fiction, because allows authors to explore difficult themes and delicate issues on a much broader and more imaginative way. I have a feeling that this anthology will make critics think twice about what they say about speculative fiction, because all of the stories are excellent in their own ways and feature literary prose.

Invaders: 22 Tales from the Outer Limits of Literature contains the following stories:

- "Portal" by J. Robert Lennon
- "Beautiful Monsters" by Eric Puchner
- "The Squid Who Fell in Love with the Sun" by Ben Loory
- "Five Fucks" by Jonathan Lethem
- "LIMBs" by Julia Elliott
- "We Are The Olfanauts" by Deji Bryce Olukotun
- "The Region of Unlikeness" by Rivka Galchen
- "A Precursor of the Cinema" by Steven Millhauser
- "In the Bushes" by Jami Attenberg
- "Fugue State" by Brian Evenson
- "Reports Concerning the Death of the Seattle Albatross Are Somewhat Exaggerated" by W. P. Kinsella
- "Lambing Season" by Molly Gloss
- "Conrad Loomis & The Clothes Ray" by Amiri Baraka
- "Topics in Advanced Rocketry" by Chris Tarry
- "The Inner City" by Karen Heuler
- "Escape from Spiderhead" by George Saunders
- "Amorometer" by Kelly Luce
- "The Yogurt of Vasirin Kefirovsky" by Max Apple
- "Monstros" by Junot Díaz
- "Minotaur" by Jim Shepard
- "Help Me Find My Spaceman Lover" by Robert Olen Butler
- "Near-Flesh" by Katherine Dunn

All of the authors have written unique and fantastically speculative stories that will please and intrigue a wide range of readers. Each of the stories is something special and offers different kinds of visions about strange happenings, near future worlds and technological wonders to readers.

Here's a bit more information about the stories and my thoughts about them:

"Portal" by J. Robert Lennon:

- In this story, the author explores a magic portal in the backyard.
- It was interesting for me to read about what kind of places the family members visited when they went

through the portal.

“Beautiful Monsters” by Eric Puchner:

- This is a fascinating and well written story about what it means to have a parent.
- I liked the author's way of writing about delicate issues, because he depicts an interesting vision of a world without adults.
- I enjoyed this story, because it was something a bit different.

“The Squid Who Fell in Love with the Sun” by Ben Loory:

- In this charming story, a squid is intrigued by the sun and falls in love with it.
- This story reminded me a bit of certain stories written by Rhys Hughes.

“Five Fucks” by Jonathan Lethem:

- An interesting and quite an extraordinary story about a woman who has had sex with a man and suddenly two weeks of her life have passed away.
- This is a delightfully unique and fascinating story.

“LIMBs” by Julia Elliott:

- An intriguing exploration of memories and growing old in the future.
- The author writes well about what is possible in the future world.

“We Are The Olfanauts” by Deji Bryce Olukotun:

- A brilliant story about the change in internet technology and social media, because it introduces a new internet trend called whyffing.
- This is the first time that I've read about scented social media.
- I found this story fascinating.

“The Region of Unlikeness” by Rivka Galchen:

- An excellent account of a relationship between a young woman and two strange men, Ilan and Jacob, who may or may not be academics.
- I liked this story a lot, because it was a captivatingly written story.

“A Precursor of the Cinema” by Steven Millhauser:

- This is an interesting piece of fiction, because it's a story about the possible missing link - a painter called Harlan Crane - between paintings and motion pictures.
- I enjoyed reading about the almost forgotten painter's works.

“In the Bushes” by Jami Attenberg:

- This is a bit different kind of a story about what has happened to automobiles, because it has become illegal to own them.
- This is one of the most interesting stories I've read this year.

“Fugue State” by Brian Evenson:

- A brilliantly unsettling story about a plague of amnesia.
- This is definitely one of the best and most intriguing stories I've ever read, because it's a fascinatingly surreal story.
- This story will appeal to readers who love the stranger side of speculative fiction and are fascinated by weird fiction.
- I consider 'Fugue State' to be the best story in this anthology, because it's perfect in every possible way.

"Reports Concerning the Death of the Seattle Albatross Are Somewhat Exaggerated" by W. P. Kinsella:

- This story is something unique, because it's a first-contact story about baseball.
- I was totally mesmerised by this story, because I don't remember reading another story quite like this one ever before.

"Lambing Season" by Molly Gloss:

- In this story, a simple shepherd called Delia experiences something strange.
- This story is also a first-contact, but totally different from W. P. Kinsella's story, because it is more literary.
- The author writes excellently about the shepherd and her life.

"Conrad Loomis & The Clothes Ray" by Amiri Baraka:

- An interesting story about a scientist and his amazing invention.
- An amusing and well written story.

"Topics in Advanced Rocketry" by Chris Tarry:

- This is a well written story about space travel and rockets.
- In this story, the author offers his readers an interesting vision of near future.

"The Inner City" by Karen Heuler:

- A story about Lena who is looking for work and discovers a strange part of the city.
- An excellent, wonderfully strange and captivating story.
- I consider this story to be one of the best stories in this anthology, because it has a slightly twisted feel to it.

"Escape from Spiderhead" by George Saunders:

- A story about Jeff who is the target of experimentation administered by Abnesti.
- The author raises interesting questions about human condition by writing about what happens to Jeff.
- An excellent story.

"Amorometer" by Kelly Luce:

- In this story, an invention is used to measure the capacity to love.
- An intriguing and thought-provoking story.

"The Yogurt of Vasirin Kefirovsky" by Max Apple:

- A well written and amusing story about Professor Vasirin Kefirovsky and his yogurt.
- This is one of the best and most memorable stories in this anthology.

"Monstros" by Junot Díaz:

- A fascinating story about a man and a spreading disease that is called La Negruga.
- I enjoyed this story, because it was a good account of what may happen when a plague begins to spread.

“Minotaur” by Jim Shepard:

- A fascinating story about a man and black operations.
- A fluently told story that gives readers something to think about.

“Help Me Find My Spaceman Lover” by Robert Olen Butler:

- An entertaining story about a woman who falls in love with an alien.
- Although the contents of this story could have been taken from cheap and cheesy tabloid magazines, this story is something special.

“Near-Flesh” by Katherine Dunn:

- A story about a woman who uses male robots to gratify her sexual needs.
- This is one of the most memorable stories in this anthology.

I enjoyed reading all of these stories, but my own personal favourites were “Beautiful Monsters” by Eric Puchner, “The Squid Who Fell in Love with the Sun” by Ben Loory, “In the Bushes” by Jami Attenberg, “Fugue State” by Brian Evenson, “Reports Concerning the Death of the Seattle Albatross Are Somewhat Exaggerated” by W. P. Kinsella, “Lambing Season” by Molly Gloss, “The Inner City” by Karen Heuler, “The Yogurt of Vasirin Kefirovsky” by Max Apple, “Monstros” by Junot Díaz and “Near-Flesh” by Katherine Dunn. Each of these stories impressed me in different ways and I found them captivating. I was especially pleased with “Fugue State” by Brian Evenson, because it was an amazing story.

It was fascinating for me to read what kind of science fiction the authors had written, because their approach to science fiction feels similar yet slightly different from those authors who have mostly written science fiction. I found it intriguing how the speculative contents of the stories varied from mild to strong, because each of the authors had their own style of writing and their own way of looking at things (it's great that all of the authors have their own literary voices).

I noticed that some of these stories had a strong focus on relationships, love and sex. This is something that is not often the case with actual science fiction, because several authors tend to emphasise technology over human condition. The authors wrote convincingly and fluently about these issues.

The writing in these stories is excellent and wonderfully nuanced. You won't find bad prose in any of them. Instead, you'll find a well-selected treasure trove of good and exquisite prose.

If you're a fan of hard science fiction, this anthology may feel a bit strange to you, because many of the stories differ quite a lot from what you normally read. However, please persevere with it, because it's worth reading due to its literary values and the fact that it offers something new to readers (I advise you to be open-minded when you read this anthology).

As a reader who loves the literary side of speculative fiction and expects good and well written prose from speculative fiction stories, I was impressed by this anthology. It was enjoyable to read these stories, because they were good. I think that this anthology will be of interest to many readers, because its diverse contents are entertaining and thought-provoking.

I recommend this anthology to everybody who loves literary speculative fiction and wants to read good and imaginative stories. Whether you're an experienced science fiction reader or a newcomer to the genre, you'll

find something to enjoy in this anthology. It offers readers an opportunity to expand their awareness of speculative fiction in a subtly engaging way.

Highly recommended!

Mattia Ravasi says

Video-review: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LHT5m...>

Featured in my Top 20 Books I Read in 2016: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4X6OQ...>

JUNOT DIAZ PLEASE JUST PUBLISH THE FUCKING MONSTRO THING, EVEN IF IT'S THE NEW YORKER STORY FOLLOWED BY THE WORDS **AND THEN WE ALL DIED** IT WOULD STILL BE THE BEST NOVEL OF THE YEAR AND I WOULD BUY TEN COPIES OF IT OH PLEASE GOD.

The rest of the anthology is also fucking astonishing. Seriously, how have I never heard of some of these people? They all write fucking brilliantly. (Except for Jonathan Lethem, who has a habit of being the weak element in anthologies, dunno why).

If you're going to read one short story collection this year, make it this one.

Magdelanye says

A short story collection of such consistently intriguing variety is welcome in any genre. Even more so in the case of science fiction, literatures disreputable cousin, providing as this book does, such indisputable evidence of excellence.

Ellie says

A collection of sci fi stories from a variety of writers, most of whom not known for their work in this genre, *Invaders: 22 Tales from The Outer Limits of Literature* is a delight. Some of my favorite writers are represented: Jonathan Lethem (the name of whose story I unfortunately can't write here) is as hilarious and evocative as always and George Saunders contribution was heartbreaking in an over-the-top kind of way. Jami Attenberg (who wrote *The Middlesteins*, a book I loved) has a touching entry of a time when cars belong only to the government for war purposes and teenagers have to find new places to make out. Stephen Millhauser has a fascinating story of a 19th century artist whose paintings prefigure movies-figures move not only within the canvas but out into the world as well.

There are too many terrific stories to name them all But I strongly recommend this volume to fans of these writers, fans of science fiction, and fans of good literature. The stories are wonderfully satisfying; Although they take place in unreal or highly distorted worlds, they contain the truths that good literature always provides.

Thank you NetGalley and Tachyon Publications for this excellent collection.

Armel Dagorn says

I feel like I'm the exact target audience for this anthology. I don't recall reading a collection gathering that many writers I know and love (I'd already read four or five of the stories selected in individual collections or magazines), or whose names keep coming up.

Some of my favourite stories were:

-Jonathan Lethem's "Five Fucks", a high concept story that contains, yes, five fucks, but that I couldn't really describe further without giving away too much. But I can say that it's just the kind of risk-taking story I love, which can so easily go wrong. Lethem is a prince at them - I believe I might have gasped at the goodness at some stage.

-"Fugue State", by Brian Evenson. A brilliant story, weird and even darkly funny in places. A zombie story by way of Kafka. Quite a long story, but that earns every paragraph. I've been hearing a lot about Evenson recently, and this definitely guarantees that I'll be picking up one or several of his books in the very near future.

-"The Inner City" by Karen Heuler blew my little mind. It's a great weird story in which Lena ends up having a peek behind the curtain, and finds out how the world really works. Again, this is high-wire story-telling territory, where the odds of coming crashing down are very high, but Heuler lands that story perfectly in a beautiful ending that literally makes sense of the senseless.

So all in all *Invaders* is a great anthology, with a few stories that didn't work for me, but less than you would expect in a book that size. Those that I didn't like as much often seemed to not commit enough to their SFF premise, and a couple of them seemed to me to end up abruptly, without having gone anywhere or done anything.

I would seriously recommend it though, as it did what a great anthology should: remind me why I loved those authors I already knew, and, better still, give me a handful of new writers to look out for.

Stephen Case says

What does it mean to write science fiction? On some level, it means writing stories that get published in magazines featuring artistically-depicted spaceships and robots on their covers. It's creating content involving science or at least scientific ideas playing out in new and interesting directions. It remains relevant because of the ways science continues to inform who we are, what we're doing, and where we're going.

Who's writing important science fiction today? Things get a bit fuzzier here, because though there are certainly people (a lot of people) doing wonderful, interesting things inside the genre universe, sometimes it seems very few of them bleed out into more mainstream or "literary" waters—by which I mean publishing works in broader magazines or winning literary prizes not named after celestial objects or science fiction editors.

It's a bit easier to see things going the other direction: important literary or mainstream authors venturing into genre territory. That's what makes a collection like Jacob Weisman's *Invaders* possible. If you think you know science fiction, or you want to get to know science fiction, or you want a new, sophisticated take on some of the angles you've poured over in the pulps, here's an anthology to note.

Invaders encompasses twenty-two short stories, only a few of which are by established genre writers or

originally appeared in genre magazines but all of which explore familiar aspects of science fiction in original ways. The tropes are all here—mad scientists, alien encounters, post-apocalyptic wastelands, sex-bots—borrowed from the pages of the pulps and filtered through the imaginations of some of the top mainstream writers working today. (I started to make a list of all the different awards listed in these author bios—because a guy likes to dream, you know?—and had reached forty before the list was complete.)

These stories are better than good. They're sharp, subtle, and unfailingly well-crafted. Sure, some lack the excitement and straightforward pizzazz you might expect from magazines in which the editors are tasked primarily to entertain. Yet even these, such as J. Robert Lennon's "Portal," Max Apple's "The Yogurt of Vasirin Kefirovsky," and Kelly Luce's "Amorometer" are still lovely and mysterious. There are think pieces in here as well, like Rivka Galchen's "The Region of Unlikeness" or Steven Millhauser's "A Precursor of the Cinema". There are also two stories that take what may be *the* most tired science fiction trope of all, the alien encounter, and make it something new without actually doing anything different but by writing with a style that makes them positively luminous. I'm thinking, of course, of "Lambing Season" by Molly Gloss and "Help Me Find My Spaceman Lover" by Robert Olen Butler.

This stuff is science fiction as literature. These are stories written by artists who have abducted the genre for their own designs. They're haunting, pristine, and sometimes devastating.

And then there are the pieces that are a whole lot better than good. Even if every other story in this collection had been a dud (and none of them are), four stories in here would still make *Invaders* completely worth the read. I'm thinking here specifically of Julia Elliott's "LIMBs," which tells a smart and heart-breaking story of geriatrics and technological advance, as well as love and aging; Deji Bryce Olukotun's "We Are the Olfanauts," a piece about personal sacrifice and the cost of success in a bizarre but strangely believable interpretation of the internet; and "Monstro" by Junot Diaz, which is somehow *Akira* meets *Attack on Titan* set in the Caribbean and told with a linguistic flare I could never hope to emulate or capture.

Finally, there is George Saunter's "Escape from Spiderhead," which wherever it was published (it was the *New Yorker*), genre or not, embodies what makes both great science fiction and great storytelling. It's clean, simple, and as brutally efficient as a razor. I think, from now on, my writing prayer might simply be, "God, help me write a story as good as this one." "Spiderhead" is the story of an idea just over tomorrow's horizon taken to its unexpected and yet in retrospect unavoidable conclusion in language spare and merciless with characters simple and agonizingly real.

If you like science fiction that makes you think, and if you like stories told by writers who are masters of their craft, who use language as both a tool and a palette, this is the anthology you've been looking for.

If you're already familiar with great science fiction authors who fit this description but are looking to expand your horizons further, you're also looking for this book.

Now, my question: would it be possible to do this trick backward? That is, could you create an anthology of "genre" authors, writers who primarily work in science fiction and are not well known beyond it, that contains works of theirs falling outside the traditional boundaries of science fiction? *Invaders* is an anthology of literary authors writing science fiction; could we have a similar anthology of science fiction authors writing literature? (I think we could, and I can name a few writers who would almost certainly be in it, but I'll save that for another post.)

Alisha A says

This arc was provided by Netgalley and Tachyon Publications in exchange for an honest review

If you ever needed a manual on how to write a good short story, this collection would well and truly suffice.

Each story is bursting with imagination; exciting prose; thought-provoking vision. These stories are the cream of the crop, truly fine examples of what make speculative fiction so fascinating. Every piece has a crisp, literary quality to their writing, perfectly melded with the surreal ideas and themes explored within them.

Some favourites were: 'Fugue State' by Brian Evenson, an unnerving glance into a future afflicted by a violent plague of amnesia; 'Escape from Spiderhead' by George Saunders, a brutal look into the ethics of scientific research; the short but incredibly touching 'Help Me Find My Spaceman Lover' by Robert Olen Butler; the amusingly inventive 'Reports Concerning the Death of the Seattle Albatross Are Somewhat Exaggerated' by W.P Kinsella about an alien posing as a baseball mascot; and 'Beautiful Monsters' by Eric Puchner, a fairytale-esque sci-fi which depicts a world where no one is supposed to grow up.

I will certainly be reading more work from the authors showcased in this collection, and also more from Tachyon Publications' backlist: after releasing this and the wonderful 'Central Station', they are swiftly becoming one of my favourite publishers!
