



Starburst

Alfred Bester

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Time, Space and the Future. Here is your passport into the fascinating world of science fiction...eleven dazzling, jet-propelled, rocket-paced tales of tomorrow by one of today's leading writers.

Contents:

Disappearing Act
Adam and No Eve
Star Light, Star Bright
The Roller Coaster
Oddy and Id
The Starcomber
Travel Diary
Fondly Fahrenheit
Hobson's Choice
The Die-Hard
Of Time and Third Avenue

Starburst Details

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Author : Alfred Bester

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From Reader Review Starburst for online ebook

Tom Loock says

I read this one a long time ago (pre-1980)

Chuck says

Alfred Bester is a new author for me; he was a "big gun" writer in the fifties, having won several "SF Novel of the Year" awards. Such is the fleetingness of fame; I had never heard of him. I am the poorer for not having read him before, and the richer for having found him.

Starburst is an anthology of his short fiction, so it's a great way to get started. His fiction is the kind of SF that doesn't get written anymore--smart, idea driven, witty. Some things grate; by contemporary standards, many stories are over-narrated, a la Isaac Asimov. Even with the presence of many characters, the main voice in the story is still the narrator's. Like the best of Asimov, though, the reader doesn't mind, because the voice is one that's worth hearing.

Many of the stories are old-style fifties "punch line" stories, in which the story sets up a mystery or raises questions, and everything waits for and is resolved in the last line of the story. These are fun but don't "stick" the way some of the other stories do.

Bester's characters often desire escape, often wishing they could live in another time and place. In many of the stories, the characters get what they wish for, and live to regret it. Bester's heroes are often chronologically grown men who need to grow up, and who have illusion painfully stripped away; sometimes they are better off for confronting reality, and at other times, not.

Like many other mid-century authors, Bester is concerned with the arms race, with the possibility of nuclear war, and with the fear that the world won't survive humankind's stupidity.

Really good fiction; if you grew up reading SF and liked the short stories of authors like Isaac Asimov or Robert Heinlein, you will really enjoy Starburst and the opportunity of getting to know Alfred Bester.

Matthew says

As imaginative I'd expect from Bester, though the prose is not up to par with my more favorite things from him. I give him extra points for this tendency he has to pepper his stories with verbal motifs that repeat with slight variations, which reminds me of old Irish fairy tales.

Mel says

A collection of each have a science fiction twist and range from quaint to very odd. The book was written in

the 50's and much like other Sci-Fi books written in the area, it is very dated although it is still an enjoyable read. Many have reminiscent themes one may remember from more recent works including twilight zone episodes and back to the future. All in all, it's worth it to find a copy.

John says

Grade D+

Joe Santoro says

This is a pretty good collection, but kinda badly mislabelled.. only the 1 of the 11 stories take place in space.. most are post-atomic war, or a present setting. I guess someone must have just really liked the art.

I think a couple of the stories were a bit too similar to be in the same collection... I suspect they would have read better alone, but otherwise it's well worth reading if you haven't read them.

Dissapearing Act(1953): In the War for the American Dream, General Carpenter has molded America into a nation of experts..every knows some specific job. Can the secret of Ward T at St. Albans be the key to victory?

AWESOME anti-war message that walks the line between telling a good story and delivering its moral. I liked this one even over the more famous one later.

Adam and no Eve (1941): The sole survivor of a space travel accident struggles to survive and re-poulate Earth... a little too similar to the one before it in setting, but not bad.

I like the concept of a 'last man on Earth' doing all he can to try to re-ignite the species.

Star Light, Star Bright (1952): A principal and a mobster team up to find a ten year old who seems ahead of his time...is a genius, a mutant or something else? Good story, would make a great episode of Twilight Zone.

The Roller Coaster (1953): A bit of a new twist on Time Travel... Decent for a 7 page story.

Oddy and Id (1950): Alot like Star Light, Star Bright, but with a more sinister twist, and set in the future a bit. Meh.

Probably the only one in the collection I felt wasn't worth it.

5,271,009 (or, The Starcomber) (1954): Yet another one about a guy that can do anything he wants, only this one has a Latin name and talks with weird idioms, so he made me think of the MOST INTERESTING MAN

IN THE WORLD. He wants a painting, but his favorite artist has lost his muse... he kidnaps him and uses his wizard powers to put the guy through a bunch of different scenarios that are very much stories within the story. Those are good (especially one where he puts the guy's 33 year old brain in his 10 year old self), but the main story doesn't end... just implies that it's keep happening 5,271,009 times. No idea if that number has significance or not... is that a word maybe if you put it on a calculator upside down... Boobies? I got nothing. I hate stories that don't end, but the stories-within-the-story were good enough to be worth the read

Travel Diary (no date): cute fill in of a rich socialite on a galactic vacation... made me smile a couple times.

Fondly Fahrenheit (1954): This one is in the Sci-Fi Hall of Fame book... a Asimov-ian Android goes bad, and his drifter owner has to deal with the consequences... excellent, fun story I've read before.

Hobson's Choice (1952): In WWII America, a statistician finds out the population is miraculously growing.. the cause sends him on a trip to Kansas... and to some time travellers. Not a particularly good plot, but some very interesting thoughts about time travel, and a cool formatting trick I didn't really get until the end.

This felt a lot like Time Hoppers by Robert Silverberg, only in a shorter form. Makes me wonder if there's a connection (Time Hoppers was written in 1967).

The Die Hard (no date): A far future version on an old guy telling the kids to get off his lawn, more or less. Just a short fill in.

Of Time and 3rd Avenue (1951): A man buying a 1950 almanac gets a 1990 one instead, and someone from 1990 comes to get it back... this one is HILARIOUS for the extreme language and culture changes it implies just 40 years in the future.. cool twist ending, too... great for such a short (8 pages) story
.. but I suspect it wasn't thought so at the time.

Kurt Reichenbaugh says

Cold War Sci-Fi stories from the 50's firmly grounded in morality. Time travel, nuclear warfare and a touch of whimsy. Favorites are "The Roller Coaster" about a thrill seeking couple from the future playing havoc on lost souls in the 1950's, "Of Time and Third Avenue" about a man who purchases an Almanac from the future, and "Disappearing Act" about the war for the American Dream and the shell-shocked "veterans" who keep vanishing from Ward T. Cool stuff.

Mark says

Excellent, interesting stories.

Bloodhound_omega says

Some of the stories were rather odd and not that capturing for me, others were absolutely marvelous! I think my favourite has to be "Adam and no Eve". The entire situation displayed was so intense that it was giving me goosebumps by reading it. I can't help but admire Bester's visions and see now, where so many others have leaned on the concepts he introduced to Science Fiction.

Bill Kerwin says

Alfred Bester emerged during science fiction's Golden Age and indelibly marked the '50's with two groundbreaking novels (telepath detective story *The Demolished Man*, swashbuckling revenge tale *The Stars my Destination*) and roughly two dozen pieces of short fiction. *Starburst* collects under one cover eleven of the most ambitious and memorable of these short works.

As a reader Bester enjoyed a wide range of stories, from Alexander Dumas to James Joyce, but as a young writer he concentrated on science fiction. In 1942, in his late twenties, he began to write for DC and other comics (*Batman*, *The Green Lantern*, *The Phantom*, *Mandrake the Magician*) and later for radio detective dramas (*Nick Carter*, *The Shadow*, *Charlie Chan*, *Nero Wolfe*). From comics he learned how to prepare a titanic battle and choose the right fantastic detail, and from the mysteries he learned how to write tough dialogue, craft a tight plot, and create a *noir* atmosphere. By the time he returned to short stories in the early '50's, he had also acquired a fondness for outsize personalities, men with extraordinary gifts: the genius, the hero, the psychopath, and—the one who interested him most—the man who was a mixture of all three.

This fondness is demonstrated not only in his two novels but in many of the stories collected here. In "Adam and No Eve," we meet scientific genius Steven Krane who is so reckless he would risk the murder of the Earth just to test his new rocket fuel, in "Fondly Fahrenheit" a psychopathic android with a gift for murder, in "Star Light, Star Bright" a boy with a "genius" for being left alone, and in "Oddy and Id" a genius with a gift for extraordinary luck who is being groomed to be the ruler of the world. And then, perhaps the best of all, is "The Starcomber," in which a Faustian artist of genius who has regressed into madness meets an improbable Mephistopheles and begins his journey to become a decision-making adult.

The other half-dozen stories—many of which are brief with expert plots and laconic dialogue--deal with everything from time-travelers with buyer's remorse, a peculiarly unpleasant form of sex tourism, and the last defiant individualist left on earth.

This is a classic collection. Highly recommended.

Carl says

I found this book, a collection of short stories, as I started decluttering my house. It was only after I began reading the first story that I realized I remembered its every word. Now, over sixty years later, it's obvious why Alfred Bester is my favorite author.

John says

Bester is a hell of a writer, someone who can quickly and thoroughly create a world, paint a character with convincing shadings of moral and emotional ambiguity, and generally hold your attention from beginning to end. And he writes convincingly and engagingly about at least three things: time travel, the perils of wish fulfillment (i.e. be careful what you wish for), and the dangers of too much knowledge or curiosity. I say "at least", because the stories in *Starburst* clung almost single-mindedly to these themes, each story another iteration of one or all of them. Best read as a theme and variations.

David Allen says

A rock-solid collection of Bester's short fiction, including the award-winning "Fondly Fahrenheit," which isn't even the most impressive story here. Not only are Bester's plots interesting, but his prose is confident and propulsive. You can tell you're in good hands from the first paragraph of each story.

Steven says

"Can you spare price of one cup coffee, honorable sir? I am indigent organism which are hungering." The stories in here are deeper and better than the cover blurbs would have you believe. This quote is from "Hobson's Choice" which is about people, feeling out of place and unhappy in their time, but who don't really belong to any other time. Some of my other favorites include "Oddy and Id" and "Disappearing Act."
