



The Best of John W. Campbell (US)

John W. Campbell Jr., Lester del Rey (editor)

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THE VISIONS OF JOHN W. CAMPBELL

Here are the finest stories by the man who almost single-handedly created modern science fiction--the writer who taught a generation to dream...and to write of all possible futures.

TWILIGHT

He was a mere hitchhiker now, but he had once seen the far, far future...and had returned to mourn what he had seen!

THE MACHINE

The machine was ultimately benevolent...so benevolent that it gave mankind the ultimate but most unwanted gift!

FORGETFULNESS

They were like children in the museum of Earth's glorious past...children who had forgotten so much, but whose powers were those of gods!

And the classic that was to become the movie THE THING: WHO GOES THERE?

The Thing was the most dreadful threat men had ever faced...a creature that could be any one--or all--of them!

And many more!

Contents:

- Introduction: The Three Careers of John W. Campbell · Lester del Rey · in
- The Last Evolution · ss Amazing Aug '32
- Twilight [as by Don A. Stuart; Dying Earth] · ss Astounding Nov '34
- The Machine [as by Don A. Stuart; Machine, et seq] · ss Astounding Feb '35
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- Rebellion [as by Don A. Stuart; Machine, et seq] · nv Astounding Aug '35
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- Elimination [as by Don A. Stuart] · ss Astounding May '36
- Forgetfulness [as by Don A. Stuart] · nv Astounding Jun '37
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The Best of John W. Campbell (US) Details

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Steve says

Review to come.

Emily says

I enjoyed this book quite a lot. John W. Campbell certainly didn't disappoint with any of these short stories. The only reason this book didn't get five stars from me is because I read late at night and some of these very well crafted stories were a little disturbing as bedtime stories... says the lover of Stephen King books... go figure... right? But honestly, I will be looking for more of his work.

Justin Robinson says

This was one of those cases where something was far more influential than it was good. The ideas were there, but the actual mechanics of the writing were, in some cases, shockingly bad. Even the better stories usually amounted to people standing around and explaining the plot to each other. The best of them was "Who Goes There?" and to say John Carpenter's The Thing (which it was turned into) is better would be like saying getting a piece of cake is better than a punch to the gonads.

Rachel says

I'm down between 3 and 4 stars, because a lot of these stories in this book were not my cup of tea. **HOWEVER**, the reason why I read this collection was all because I wanted to read the short story *Who Goes There?*, which is the basis of one of my favorite horror sci-fi films, *The Thing*.

I would give that story five stars, and I'd give another short story in the collection, *Elimination* five stars as well.

I really appreciated the introduction and the postscript. In the Introduction I learned quite a bit about the development of sci-fi literature. Prior to reading, I was ignorant of the role John. W. Campbell played in the history of the genre. I liked that this collection included his earliest works and moved through his writing career chronologically because you can see the progression in his storytelling skills as you turn the page. The ideas expressed in his early works are fascinating and impressive, and I respect that, even if the characters and plot development were lacking. That was apparently how sci-fi was back then, though, so you can't really blame him for his "crude" writing.

After going through all the stories (and admittedly I skipped/skimmed over some) I can say that *Who Goes There?* is probably his best work. It's a truly frightening story that has both great characters AND great science, and the prose is the best that I've seen from him based on the collection.

Josh Thornton says

Timeless (and scienceless) sci-fi from the dawn of the genre. We remember Campbell mostly for his proteges (Clarke, Asimov, Bradbury...), but he made a heck of a contribution of his own - particularly with the last story of this collection, 'Who Goes There?'

Jon says

4 stars

James says

As with all older golden age science fiction you must read Campbell with a grain of salt. Much has happened that was unimagined when these stories were written in the 1930's. So you often have to place perspective into that alternative universe where much of the twentieth century has not occurred yet.

Some of the short stories are quite brilliant although the crossover of story lines (think crossover from Bradbury's "The Martian Chronicles") can be confusing at times. especially if you put down the book for some time as I did. The included novella "Who Goes There?", the basis for "The Thing from Another World" and John Carpenter's "The Thing" (1982), is a tight and tense psychological sci-fi thriller that is worth reading alone if you choose to read only one thing in the book.

Loren Toddy says

My girlfriend found this book for me and I was thrilled to crack it open and see it was the book with the story I had always wanted to read - Who goes there? I wasn't disappointed at all plus I was in for a great surprise. The other stories in the book were awesome. I love this book and it sits on my main book shelf proudly. I hate to say it but the story is more terrifying than the original film and my favorite version that John Carpenter made so well. I love that film but this story really is more horrifying!

Jake says

Pioneer. Good stuff.

Jerry says

I have one quote in my quotefile from John Campbell:

I want the kind of story that could be printed in a magazine of the year two thousand A.D. as a contemporary adventure story. No gee-whiz, just take the technology for granted.

Most of the stories follow that advice; there is very little explanation of how the technology works (though he does break that advice pretty heavily, and I think to its detriment, in *Rebellion*).

He especially likes stories about mankind evolving to a pastoral future, one so idyllic that it can't be understood by various invaders. There are two series here: two stories from his Sarn earth, and four from his Invaders earth: *Twilight*, *The Machine*, *The Invaders*, and *Rebellion*. *Forgetfulness* is possibly from that line, too. It has a very similar feel, but not quite the right history.

These pastoral idylls, of course, involve a vast reduction in the number of humans on the planet. They're beautiful stories, but it's probably best not to think too much about them.

There's also *Who Goes There?*, the short story that *The Thing* was based on. It is pretty much just what the movies were: an Antarctic expedition discovers alien life, and now no one on the expedition can trust anyone else. It's a very thrilling horror tale, and a caution against believing scientists; their curiosity goes against the best interests of humanity.

The lessons may not be great, but the stories are.

Ben says

The man who essentially invented Science Fiction as we know it. Later. As an editor for Astounding and grooming the likes of Asimov and Heinlein. As a pulp writer of the '30s, Campbell writes stories that are chock full of great ideas that are not necessarily served by his writing ability.

David says

Like many of the early sci-fi writers John Campbell's prose is awkward and clunky. In this collection you can see him mature as he ages (the tales span about 6 years of his life). The earlier stories are rougher and the later tales are definitely an easier read and more (relatively) polished. However many of his stories (even his earliest) are entertaining and filled with big (and interesting) ideas. The two best stories are "Forgetfulness" which I thought was very creative (especially the beam and how it turns to the end of time and back) and the justly famous sci-fi horror story "Who Goes There". If HP Lovecraft had been the writer of this last story it would be probably the scariest story ever written. Regardless these two stories are quite good, and clunkiness aside, all these stories move and are entertaining.

Zantaeus Glom says

Rather disappointed in this collection by iconic sf editor John W. Campbell; there's very little to separate each story, and his prose is rather leaden. At best it's workmanlike, at its worst it's deadly dull and repetitive.

(he has a great fondness for the adjective opalescent, and he uses it with inauspicious repetitiveness. That said, I did like the proto-Blog entity (The Sleath) in 'Double Minds' - a nice bit of meltoid madness.

The thing (no pun intended) that really stood out tho', even to the point of it being somewhat incongruous, is how utterly fabulous 'Who Goes There?' is; it's a veritable masterpiece of morbid atmosphere and inexorable doom. An absolute frosty classic of polymorphous, paranoiac body-morphing horror that PKD would've heartily approved of.

I just really couldn't connect with his prose; quite literally galaxies away from the lyrical genius of Sturgeon or Scheckley.

Professor says

Interesting collection of short stories from a man best known today for his story "Who Goes There?" which was the basis of *The Thing*. For that story alone the book is worth a look. Campbell's greatest significance was as an editor, but the book is initially fascinating in that you can watch Campbell's gradual development in style and content. Ultimately I found the content repetitive, however, and Campbell's constant appearance of degenerate societies found by lesser but up and coming societies tiresome and gave up on the book. Worth a look for fans of *The Thing* and old school sci-fi fans.

Lamadia says

This is a really hard one to rate because the quality of the stories are very different. This is on account of them having been written over a long time, and you can see the improvements over time, especially since they are arranged in the order in which they were written. The best one by far is the last one, "Who Goes There?", which is rightfully the most famous of them. I definitely have to see the movie they made after it now. It was such an original idea and really brought suspense into his style, which he doesn't have in the earlier ones. However, I did end up giving the book three stars instead of four, simply because the stories rely on being based on really great ideas without having a good quality of execution. This doesn't take away from the importance of Campbell, since it's his ideas that were so radically different from the science fiction that was being published at the time. Campbell's force as an editor in getting new and different types of science fiction into the mainstream was his lasting legacy that ushered in the science fiction of the sixties and seventies.
