



## Best of Apex Magazine: Volume 1

*Jason Sizemore (Editor), Lesley Conner (Editor), Alethea Kontis, Amal El-Mohtar, Brian Trent, Chikodili Emelumadu, Genevieve Valentine, Ian Tregillis, more... Katharine Duckett, Keffy R.M. Kehrli, Ken Liu, Lettie Prell, Liz Argall, Marie Vibbert, Peter M. Ball, Rachel Swirsky, Russell Nichols, Sam Fleming, Samuel Marzoli, Sarah Pinsker, Ursula Vernon, Rich Larson (Contributor) ...less*

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) ➔

# Best of Apex Magazine: Volume 1

*Jason Sizemore (Editor) , Lesley Conner (Editor) , Alethea Kontis , Amal El-Mohtar , Brian Trent , Chikodili Emelumadu , Genevieve Valentine , Ian Tregillis , more... Katharine Duckett , Keffy R.M. Kehrli , Ken Liu , Lettie Prell , Liz Argall , Marie Vibbert , Peter M. Ball , Rachel Swirsky , Russell Nichols , Sam Fleming , Samuel Marzoli , Sarah Pinsker , Ursula Vernon , Rich Larson (Contributor) ...less*

**Best of Apex Magazine: Volume 1** Jason Sizemore (Editor) , Lesley Conner (Editor) , Alethea Kontis , Amal El-Mohtar , Brian Trent , Chikodili Emelumadu , Genevieve Valentine , Ian Tregillis , more... Katharine Duckett , Keffy R.M. Kehrli , Ken Liu , Lettie Prell , Liz Argall , Marie Vibbert , Peter M. Ball , Rachel Swirsky , Russell Nichols , Sam Fleming , Samuel Marzoli , Sarah Pinsker , Ursula Vernon , Rich Larson (Contributor) ...less

Whether wandering down endless stairwells, searching for answers in the desert, or reaching out to the stars, for more than six years Apex Magazine has entertained readers with stories that are strange, beautiful, shocking, and surreal. Now, for the first time, editors Jason Sizemore and Lesley Conner are collecting the award winning and nominated stories, those chosen by readers as Story of the Year, and their own personal favorites into one anthology.

A Veil that wipes the experiences of war from soldiers' memories. A witch who faces down both God and the devil to save a soul. A swaying dance that crosses the galaxy to transmit a message. A vampire caught in a web of politics and law by his responsibility to his family. Within this collection, you will find 21 stories that explore what it means to love, to regret, to be human.

With stories by Ursula Vernon, Ken Liu, Rachel Swirsky, Sarah Pinsker, Rich Larson, and more, Best of Apex Magazine: Volume 1 brings readers some of the best stories Apex Magazine has published so far.

Cover art by Adrian Borda.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Jackalope Wives by Ursula Vernon  
Going Endo by Rich Larson  
Candy Girl by Chikodili Emelumadu  
If You Were a Dinosaur, My Love by Rachel Swirsky  
Advertising at the End of the World Keffy R.M. Kehrli  
The Performance Artist by Lettie Prell  
A Matter of Shapespace by Brian Trent  
Falling Leaves by Liz Argall  
Blood from Stone by Alethea Kontis  
Sexagesimal by Katharine E.K. Duckett  
Keep Talking by Marie Vibbert  
Rememberry Day by Sarah Pinsker  
Blood on Beacon Hill by Russell Nichols  
The Green Book by Amal El-Mohtar  
L'esprit de L'escalier by Peter M. Ball  
Still Life (A Sexagesimal Fairy Tale) by Ian Tregillis  
Build a Dolly by Ken Liu  
Multo by Samuel Marzoli

Armless Maidens of the American West by Genevieve Valentine

Pocosin by Ursula Vernon

She Gave Her Heart, He Took Her Marrow by Sam Fleming

## **Best of Apex Magazine: Volume 1 Details**

Date : Published January 12th 2016 by Apex Book Company

ISBN : 9781937009373

Author : Jason Sizemore (Editor) , Lesley Conner (Editor) , Alethea Kontis , Amal El-Mohtar , Brian Trent , Chikodili Emelumadu , Genevieve Valentine , Ian Tregillis , more... Katharine Duckett , Keffy

Author : R.M. Kehrli , Ken Liu , Lettie Prell , Liz Argall , Marie Vibbert , Peter M. Ball , Rachel Swirsky , Russell Nichols , Sam Fleming , Samuel Marzoli , Sarah Pinsker , Ursula Vernon , Rich Larson (Contributor) ...less

Format : Paperback 237 pages

Genre : Short Stories, Fantasy, Fiction, Audiobook, Anthologies, Science Fiction

 [Download Best of Apex Magazine: Volume 1 ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Best of Apex Magazine: Volume 1 ...pdf](#)

**Download and Read Free Online Best of Apex Magazine: Volume 1 Jason Sizemore (Editor) , Lesley Conner (Editor) , Alethea Kontis , Amal El-Mohtar , Brian Trent , Chikodili Emelumadu , Genevieve Valentine , Ian Tregillis , more... Katharine Duckett , Keffy R.M. Kehrli , Ken Liu , Lettie Prell , Liz Argall , Marie Vibbert , Peter M. Ball , Rachel Swirsky , Russell Nichols , Sam Fleming , Samuel Marzoli , Sarah Pinsker , Ursula Vernon , Rich Larson (Contributor) ...less**

---

## **From Reader Review Best of Apex Magazine: Volume 1 for online ebook**

### **The Grim Reader says**

Apex magazine has brought together the best stories from the magazine in a collection that features a wide variety of styles. The cover art is fantastic and really sets the tone for what lies within. Stories about legends, love and the future are just some of the topics covered within this excellent volume of speculative fiction. As with most collections/anthologies there are always some stories that resonate more than others, but overall this is a very good example of the quality of fiction that Apex Magazine publish. Particular highlights for me were *Advertising at the End of the World*, *Fallen Leaves* and *Keep Talking*. If you would like to know more about Apex Magazine then this is a great place to start. 4.5 stars.

---

### **Darren says**

I won this as a e-book from a site called library thing. It is a book of short stories from various authors. I enjoyed reading it. I find these authors have a good talent for writing fiction stories.

---

### **Joy says**

This is a solid collection of award-worthy (and award-winning) stories. In the interests of disclosure, I am gratified to find I know several of the contributors. In addition, I won my copy of the eBook edition from the Early Reviewers group at LibraryThing. For many of the stories this was my second reading, as I enjoyed a subscription to Apex last year, which was why I requested the review copy: I knew the material would be stellar.

I was not disappointed. Every story here touched me and took me new places. I felt that amazing sense of not-knowing and wonder I remember from my first forays into SF back when I was chasing down rocket-in-atom labeled anthologies from the public library. The effortlessly different *Going Endo*, the folk-tale certainty of *Pocosin*, the eerily charming *Advertising at the End of the World*; each story is its own nuanced world. The binding thread of the collection is the brilliance of editors Lesley Conner and Jason Sizemore and their ability to find and publish cutting-edge fiction. Both the anthology and Apex Magazine itself are fantastic examples of speculative fiction at its best.

---

### **J.D. says**

This is a feast for the imagination, and also good aerobic exercise for the mind. You will probably read some of these stories more than once, or loop back to the beginning to restart the fun; but, if you try to separate specifically the genre or sub-genre of some, it's going to take you the whole year to finish the book. I stopped doing that half way.

I was provided with an electronic ARC of this collection, in exchange for an honest review, and can say that,

if you like SF, Fantasy, the ‘weird’ (that new genre), or anything out of the ordinary for your readings, this set will have a place in your shelf, whether is made of electrons or wood.

Some of these stories play with multiple levels of emotion [“If you were a dinosaur, my love”] or experiment with alien sex [“Going Endo”]. Others are a delicate meshwork of time and love [“Still Life”], or gather together memory and war [“Remembery Day”], but perhaps, if you reread these last two, it might seem that it was the other way around.

The end of the world gets a playful treatment [“Advertisement at the end of the world”] and, sideways, another tale builds for us an awful future that we haven’t yet imagined—so bend as we are on worlds of virtual reality—and leads to a territory even more nightmarish than nuclear blasts or zombies [“A matter of shapeshape”].

There are also all kinds of (hopefully fictional) legends [“Jackalope Wifes” or “Armless maidens of the American West”, as examples] and witchcraft that’s presented in a shockingly sweet, unexpected way [“Candy Girl”]. And yes, there are vampires [“Blood on Beacon Hill”], but these would make you wonder if there aren’t some loose in our current electoral system.

Each of these worlds is quite experiential, and we get to move through events that seem real, even when they are clearly out there and beyond the ‘outer limits’. I can’t possibly comment on all the short stories of this collection, or do it more extensively for some, without spoiling the fun. I’d just say that, from all the collections I’ve read over the years, this one has distinguished itself with an incredible breath. What I can truly promise any interested reader is that one (but surely many more) of these stories will stun you, shock you, or excite your mind into reading other collections. And this will be true no matter how jaded you have become, or how many times—my sorry experience—you’ve fallen asleep going through a supposedly-amazing ‘Annual Best’ or ‘Selected such-and-such Genre’ collection.

A surefire Goodread, and a spirited effort—hopefully to be continued—to put together a broad set of fantastic tales from many award-winning authors.

---

### **Beth Cato says**

I received a gratis copy of this book through LibraryThing Early Reviewers.

Apex Magazine publishes incredibly strong and profound work, and this anthology highlights the best of the best, from award finalists and winners to readers’ choice stories. Not all of them were to my taste, and that’s fine; I’d rather read an anthology with several stand-out WOW pieces than one that is consistently okay. One of my all-time favorite stories in recent years, “Jackalope Wives” by Ursula Vernon, is first in the anthology. It makes for a strong start with its fresh, emotional turn on the traditional shapeshifter animal myth, and I was delighted to read it again. Some of my new favorites include “Remembery Day” by Sarah Pinsker, with a heartbreak tale of the emotional aftermath of war; “Build a Dolly” by Ken Liu, which is short and intensely creepy; and “Multo” by Samuel Marzoli, where a Filipino ghost story creates a deep psychological horror story. That’s not one to read during a power outage late at night, I’ll say that much.

---

## **Maria Haskins says**

This is a diverse and multi-faceted collection of short stories from Apex Magazine: scifi, fantasy, horror, and all the shades in between are represented here. There are some exceptionally strong stories in this collection, including two fantasy/mythology-tales by the fantastic Ursula Vernon: *Jackalope Wives* and *Pocosin*. Vernon's beautifully crafted prose is a thing of wonder, and she paints a world that shifts between the fantastic and the familiar. For me, those two short stories in themselves are worth the price of admission, but this collection has a lot more going for it.

Samuel Marzoli's 'Multo' is another standout. It is an evocative and goosebump-inducing ghost story, anchored in folklore and childhood memories that gave me bonafide chills.

Other highlights include the terse and deeply moving 'Falling Leaves' by Liz Argoll, a tale of adolescent love, friendship and loss; the strange and original 'L'Esprit de L'escalier' by Peter M. Ball; and Sarah Pinsker's wonderful, but sorrowful, 'Rememory Day'.

A great short story collection for any fan of speculative fiction.

---

## **Marcheto says**

3.5 stars

My main problem with this anthology is that I don't think the title does justice to the magazine. I can see that including award winning and nominated stories and reader's favorites seems logical criteria, but unfortunately they have left out most of my favorite Apex's stories ("During the Pause", by Adam-Troy Castro or "Paperclips and Memories and Things That Won't Be Missed", by Caroline M. Yoachim, to mention just a couple of examples).

In any case, this collection is a great way to introduce readers to the kind of fiction they can find in this magazine devoted to science fiction, fantasy and horror. And in my case, being already familiar with Apex, it has been the perfect opportunity to reread some of my favorite stories from Apex, like "If You Were a Dinosaur, My Love", by Rachel Swirsky, and to discover some new favorites, like "Still Life (A Sexagesimal Fairy Tale)", by Ian Tregillis, a really pleasant surprise.

---

## **Eric Edstrom says**

This collection of the best of Apex magazine was quite good. The stories are dark, emotional, and always weird.

---

## **imyril says**

Whether you know and love Apex Magazine already or pick this up as a taster, you'll find it's a little bundle of joy - assuming that nuanced, sometimes edgy speculative fiction that frequently left me in tears is your cup of tea. It's certainly mine. There are several award-winning shorts collected here along with a selection

of the best of the first six years.

That said, I found the second half much more to my taste than the first, with the exception of collection opener Jackalope Wives, which introduced me to one of my new favourite fictional characters, Grandma Harken (there's a follow-up tale in one of this year's issues, and I hope to see other adventures in due course).

Full review.

I received a free copy from the publisher in exchange for an honest review.

---

## **Althea Ann says**

\*\*\*\*\* Jackalope Wives by Ursula Vernon

A 'selkie story' set in the southwest. This story manages to do something rare: it takes a familiar folktale/myth, gives us a truly authentic-feeling rendition, and adds something truly new (and significant), and something unexpected. Beautiful, and sad.

\*\*\*\* Going Endo by Rich Larson

Challenging, but ultimately heartwarming story. Future space battles are being fought by humans who interface with aliens in an extremely intimate way. Many see the alien beings simply as interchangeable tools, but one tech has been developing special feelings for one unique individual.

\*\*\* Candy Girl by Chikodili Emelumadu

Weird piece that rides the line between funny and disturbing. While visiting Nigeria for her traditional wedding ceremony, a young woman is struck by a strange ailment. Can her best friend find her the help she needs? Folk beliefs and modernity are nicely meshed here, and there's a well-done commentary on jealousy and possessiveness - but it wasn't really my 'thing.'

\*\*\* If You Were a Dinosaur, My Love by Rachel Swirsky

Previously read: "A poetic, short piece utilizing a thought-association format to gradually reveal a tragic scenario.

This was a Hugo-nominated piece (we read several short nominees in my book club this month), and it's not the only one that I felt really didn't belong under the speculative fiction umbrella. The only 'speculative' elements here are purely metaphorical.

I have to admit, upon beginning the story, I wasn't really a big fan of the style. As it progressed, my opinion of it as a piece of writing rose, however.

It's about grief, and crime, and the fallout that strikes victims of violence and those around them."

\*\*\*\* Advertising at the End of the World by Keffy R.M. Kehrli

Bit of a Ray Bradbury feel to this one, I thought, in its melancholy oddness. Alone in a cabin after the apocalypse, a woman is plagued by advertising robots that zombie-like, imitate ones' loved ones and insist on playing and replaying their outdated spieles.

\*\*\* The Performance Artist by Lettie Prell

Artist uses a new technology alleged to 'download' consciousness into a machine as part of a MoMA exhibition dealing with the intersection of flesh and technology. Is the performance brilliant and insightful art - or an exhibitionist suicide?

### \*\*\* A Matter of Shapespace by Brian Trent

Anti-corporate-monopoly screed. A bit too heavy-handed with the allegory for me. However, the main idea is interesting: in the future, consciousness is cloud-based, and all physical matter is malleable and programmable. Obvious corollaries to this: who owns the 'rights' to your molecules, and what happens when the system glitches or is hacked? And of course, there're power struggles...

### \*\*\* Falling Leaves by Liz Argall

The post-apocalyptic setting here is almost an afterthought: the focus is on the fraught and complex friendship between two high school girls. One is a recently-arrived refugee, the other from a 'landed' family, but both are outsiders and dealing with their own emotional issues. The dynamics here ring very true.

### \*\*\*\* Blood from Stone by Alethea Kontis

A retelling of (or, more accurately, a prequel to) the dark and bloody fairy tale, "Fitcher's Bird." A young maid-servant is secretly enamored of her master - who spends all his time in sorcerous experiments. She's ready & willing to do anything for him - and how far that 'anything' goes is more than a bit shocking.

### \*\*\* Sexagesimal by Katharine E.K. Duckett

"Time is money" - quite literally, in this peculiar and sad vision of the afterlife. The dead live banal and ordinary lives of increasing solitude, as they trade away their memories for commodities. Two individuals are unusual in their cleaving to one another - but what are the reasons behind their attachment?

### \*\*\* Multo by Samuel Marzoli

Nice horror/ghost story setup - but one of those inconclusive endings that are so popular these days. When a man receives an unexpected message from his childhood neighbor, stories - and events - he'd long forgotten are brought back to mind. He'd dismissed his youthful fears as imaginative fancies - but now the darkness comes rushing back.

Both the Filipino identity of the characters and the psychology of childhood are done very, very well.

### \*\*\* Keep Talking by Marie Vibbert

On the one hand, I liked this piece's message about different types of communication, and how different modes of thought can complement each other. On the other hand, I do think it fell into the trap of romanticizing mental illness.

A professional translator, a dance instructor and a young autistic woman, already in the midst of some family drama, all react differently to Earth's first transmission from intelligent aliens.

### \*\*\* Rememberry Day by Sarah Pinsker

After a massively devastating war, a mechanism has been put in place so that traumatized veterans only remember their terrible experiences once a year, on a day set aside for a grand Memorial Day/Veterans' Day ceremony. The corollaries of such a decision are nicely explored here, from the perspective of one veteran's young daughter.

### \*\*\* Blood on Beacon Hill by Russell Nichols

Weirdly tongue-in-cheek vampire tale. In a True-Blood-esque setting, one vampire, his fangs palatably filed down) is running for public office. However his wife wants to stop suppressing her true (unsavory) vampire nature, and their son, eternally stuck in the body of a 15-year-old, is entrapped, accused of the statutory rape of a human girl. Uses the reader's assumptions about prejudice and racism in an interesting way, but I didn't love it.

### \*\*\* The Green Book by Amal El-Mohtar

By coincidence, I read this shortly after finishing Trudi Canavan's 'Thief's Magic.' Both stories feature a woman who has been turned into a book by magic, and who can communicate with the 'reader' of the book by forming words on the page. Both feature a 'reader' who "falls in love" with the book/woman and involves the desire to restore her to a human body. This iteration of the theme is much more "literary" in form, but both touch upon many of the same issues.

### \*\*\*\* L'esprit de L'escalier by Peter M. Ball

Grief, on the 'Endless Stairwell.' This story works very well both at face value - and as a metaphor for the 'downward spiral' of depression that the death of an intimate can throw one into.

### \*\*\*\* Still Life (A Sexagesimal Fairy Tale) by Ian Tregillis

Previously read in Strahan's 'Best SF&F of the Year, Vol 5'. Then, I said: ""Still Life (A Sexagesimal Fairy Tale)" by Ian Tregillis. In a land without time, a clockmaker messes with things in order to try to win the man she loves. Some nice ideas and imagery, but I was completely unconvinced that the character, as she was portrayed, would sacrifice herself for this guy." However, I liked it enough that I wanted to re-read it, and this time found myself enjoying the atmosphere and concepts enough to make up for the pointless self-sacrifice.

### \*\*\*\* Build a Dolly by Ken Liu

Oh god, that was horrifying and sad. If you harbor any suspicion that self-aware toys for small children might be a good use of technology, just throw that idea out the window right now.

This one shoots right up to the top of the creepy-doll-story subgenre.

### \*\*\* Armless Maidens of the American West by Genevieve Valentine

Some years back, the wonderful Terri Windling did a themed anthology using the fairytale trope of the 'armless maiden' as a metaphor for child abuse. (<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>). This story seems like it could've been custom-written for that anthology. I liked that anthology very much - but thought, at times, that it was a bit too much, or too obvious with the messages and the metaphors. I felt the same way about this one.

### \*\*\*\* Pocosin by Ursula Vernon

Previously read. " A dying 'possum god asks sanctuary at the cottage of a swamp witch. Reluctantly, the witch must speak to both god and the devil on the ancient deity's behalf.

Vernon wonderfully captures the feeling of an authentic folktale here. it's also a bit reminiscent of 'Anansi Boys' or 'American Gods' Neil Gaiman. "

### \*\*\*\* She Gave Her Heart, He Took Her Marrow by Sam Fleming

After a devastating, zombie-ish plague, a young, mentally ill woman seems to be the sole survivor in an affected zone. Abandoned by her lover, she survives by trading with a walled community. She's alone, except for her dog - and a being who might be an alien... or a fae... or an imaginary companion... or something else altogether. One woman seems to want to rescue her from her solitary fate... but nothing might be exactly as it seems. Really well-done. And creepy.

Many thanks to Apex Books for the opportunity to read this collection. Not a dud in it!

---

## **Frank Errington says**

### Review copy

Before I get to the review of this anthology I have to comment on the exceptional cover art "Life is a Dance in the Rain" by Adrian Borda. This piece really sets the stage for the twenty-one stories that follow in this first collection of the Best of Apex Magazine.

An Apex story can be difficult to describe, but in this collection I enjoyed nearly every one of them. Its the best of speculative fiction, covering multiple genres with an international list of authors, some familiar, many not, but all rich with storytelling skills.

Jackalope Wives by Ursula Vernon the Hugo-award winning author of the comic Digger. Ursula also writes for adults under the name T. Kingfisher. Her work has also won the Nebula, Mythopoeic, Coyote, and WSFA Awards. "Jackalope Wives" gets the anthology started just right. A story that adds to the mythology of the jackalope, a mythical creature from North American folklore.

Going Endo by Rich Larson who was born in West Africa, has studied in Rhode Island, worked in Spain, and at 23 now writes from Edmonton, Alberta.

Candy Girl by Chikodili Emelumadu a Nigerian Writer whose corporeal self resides in London. Her story "Candy Girl" was nominated for the 2014 Shirley Jackson award. A story that would be comedic if it weren't so very tragic.

If You Were a Dinosaur, My Love by Rachel Swirsky, a graduate of Clarion West, her short fiction has been nominated for the Hugo, the Locus, the World Fantasy, and the Sturgeon Awards. She's twice won the Nebula Award, including in 2013 for "If You Were a Dinosaur, My Love." Whenever I see Rachel's name on the cover of a magazine or anthology I know I'm in for a treat. I loved this story when I first read it and enjoyed it again with this rereading.

Advertising at the End of the World by Keffy R.M. Kehrli. Keffy is a science fiction and fantasy writer currently living on Long Island in New York. When not writing, he's busy working on his PhD, doing science, or editing Glittership. A quirky, imaginative story of robotic advertising.

The Performance Artist by Lettie Prell who likes to explore the edge where humans and their technology are increasingly merging. She is an active member of SFWA. A wondrous tale of performance art and technology taken to the extreme.

A Matter of Shapespace by Brian Trent. This story was voted by Apex Magazine readers as their 2013 Story of the Year, and he is a 2013 winner in the Writers of the Future contest. Speculative fiction at its finest. In a future here you can be backed up to the cloud, three megacorps rule the earth. Two have merged and plan a hostile takeover of the third.

Falling Leaves by Liz Argall. An Australian living in Seattle, Liz plays roller derby with the Rat City Rollergirls, writes, and draws comics. A beautiful story of a terribly awkward friendship.

Blood from Stone by Alethea Kontis. New York Times and USA Today bestselling author Alethea Kontis is a princess, a fairy godmother, and a geek. She's known for screwing up the alphabet, scolding vampires, and

ranting about fairy tales on YouTube.

Sexagesimal by Katharine E.K. Duckett a writer living in Brooklyn who collects canes, bookmarks, and unusual earrings.

Multo by Samuel Marzioli who has an incredibly simple bio. He was born and raised and that's all you need to know about that. What would a collection like this be without a ghost story? "Multo" is that story.

Keep Talking by Marie Vibbert an IT professional from Cleveland, Ohio. She has ridden 16% of the roller coasters in the United States and played for the Cleveland Fusion women's tackle football team. This story was the 2014 Apex Magazine Reader's Choice Winner and deservedly so.

Rememory Day by Sarah Pinsker who, in addition to writing science fiction, is a singer/songwriter and has toured nationally behind three albums on various independent labels. She lives with her wife and dog in Baltimore, Maryland. "Rememory Day" tells of a future where one day each year the veil is lifted and people remember the war and those who fought in it.

Blood on Beacon Hill by Russell Nichols a speculative fiction writer and endangered journalist. He writes about race, class, and other human myths. Raised in Richmond, CA, he now lives on the road, out of a backpack with his fairy tale freak of a wife (current location: Mexico). This was my favorite story in the anthology. I do lean more toward horror in my personal taste and this story of the conflicts between mortals and immortals in old Boston hit the spot.

The Green Room by Amal El-Mohtar, an author, editor, and critic: her short fiction has received the Locus Award and been nominated for the Nebula Award, while her poetry has won the Rhysling Award three times. There truly are stories for every taste in this collection. Here is a rather strange story of books.

L'esprit de L'escalier by Peter M. Ball the author of Horn, Bleed, and The Floatsam trilogy from Apocalypse Ink. I couldn't begin to tell you what this story was about, but I did enjoy it immensely.

Still Life (A Sexagesimal Fairy Tale) by Ian Tregillis the son of a bearded mountebank and a discredited tarot card reader. He lives in New Mexico, where he consorts with writers, scientists, and other disreputable types. A charming fantasy of a clock-maker from a very visual writer. He had some great lines, like "Sharp enough to shear the red from a rainbow." and "Its edges were the sharpest things that could ever be, sharp as the now that separates past and future."

Build a Dolly by Ken Liu an author and translator of speculative fiction, as well as a lawyer and programmer. A winner of the Nebula Hugo, and World Fantasy Awards. "Build a Dolly" is a short yet powerful story of a doll with a kind of consciousness.

Armless Maidens of the American West by Genevieve Valentine an author and critic whose first novel, Mechanique: A Tale of the Circus Tresaulti, won the 2012 Crawford Award; her second, The Girls at the Kingfisher Club, was an NPR, Washington Post, and Chicago Tribune best book of the year. Another of my favorites in this collection, the story of a particular armless maiden in the American west and a journalist who comes to attempt an interview,

Pocosin by Ursula Vernon. This is her second work to be included in this anthology. In this story, God, the devil, and death each seek an audience with a dying possum god.

*She Gave Her Heart, He Took Her Marrow* by Sam Fleming who lives in north-east Scotland with an artistic spouse and the correct number of bicycles, that being entirely too many and not quite enough.

*Best of Apex Magazine: Volume 1* is available now in both paperback and e-book formats from Apex Book Company.

While I didn't enjoy every story in this collection. I certainly liked enough of them to recommend it, particularly if you love speculative fiction in all its various forms.

---

### **Julio says**

Apex Magazine es una revista online de ciencia ficción y horror. Los números pasados se pueden acceder sin restricciones para lectura gratuita. Eso permite reconstruir compilaciones como esta. O construir compilaciones propias, cercanas a esta. Y disfrutar de cuentos excelentes, escritos por escritores que poco a poco se convierten en nombres familiares, como Ursula Vernon o la delicadamente poética Catherynne Valente. Realmente vale la pena.

---

### **Andrea says**

The whole thing blew me away, really. A great collection. I was expecting much more strict scifi, but these stories were a fantastic mix of scifi, fantasy, and a little bit of horror (more Gothic than slasher).

What struck me is that these played to the strengths of the SHORT story, tossing the reader into the middle of a world and letting them figure things out as they go. Some stories felt unfinished or not fully realized, which is absolutely not a bad thing.

---

### **Tammy says**

**The nitty-gritty:** A fantastical gathering of Apex's best of the last six years, showing a broad range of styles and talents in speculative fiction, with something for everyone.

Apex Magazine has been going strong for six years, and I'm so happy to have read this group of stories selected from among hundreds published over the course of those years. I recently interviewed editors Jason Sizemore and Lesley Conner about the process of gathering and selecting stories for this book, so if you missed that interview, I highly recommend you check it out here.

It takes a special kind of focus to write a really good short story, and *Best of Apex: Volume 1* brings together a wide variety of stories and authors. If you love speculative fiction at all, I know you've heard of some of these authors, but not all of them are household names, which makes discovering them all the more exciting. While I enjoyed each story in one way or another, I have to admit I have my favorites, and **so in the interest of time, I've decided to share my six favorites with you, and explain why I loved them so much:**

**L'spirit de L'escalier** by Peter M. Ball. By far my favorite story of the bunch! After losing his lover, a grieving man decides to honor her by descending the longest staircase in the world. He takes with him a bag with her ashes, and three sharpies which he'll use to write messages to her on the stairs as he descends. This story was full of aching sadness, as he tells himself he'll keep going down the staircase as long as he has things he wants to say to her, after which he'll stop and climb back up. You could read this story as a metaphor for sinking into grief, but I also loved it for the otherworldly idea of a staircase literally descending into the center of the earth.

*The guidebook says that the lowest step anyone has reached is 120,828 steps down. People have probably gone lower, but they haven't come back. It's assumed that the suicides make it to the bottom.*

*If there is one.*

*If they were lucky.*

**Going Endo** by Rich Larson. This crazy story involves two races of creatures, endos and exos, and delves into their symbiotic relationship, which is so strange and wonderful that I nearly clapped my hands with glee as I was reading! I won't tell you too much, but I will say I loved the narrator, a "tech" who takes care of an exo named Puck and the tender feelings he develops for her. I loved the odd, futuristic language—"Ye, Puck's the slickest, quickest, baddest exo in the squad, I brain."—and the otherworldly quality to the story.

**Candy Girl** by Chikodili Emelumadu. Another strange tale, I loved the African flavor of this story, about a girl whose ex-boyfriend tries to win her back with a love spell, only to discover that his choice of words has turned the spell into a curse. So funny, a little disgusting, and quite a joy to read.

**Jackalope Wives** by Ursula Vernon. You may very well have heard of this story (or even read it yourself) since it's won a whole bushel of awards, including the Nebula. Ursula Vernon has *two* stories in this collection, which doesn't surprise me. **Jackalope Wives** is a folktale-like story of a race of shapeshifting women who can be "caught" if you burn their animal skins when they are in human form. This story affected me strongly (read: made me cry), and after finishing it I wanted to go searching for every Ursula Vernon story I could find!

**Advertising at the End of the World** by Keffy R.M. Kehrli. What an odd and sad story this was! A lonely woman, living alone after her husband has died, manages to survive the end of the world after a superflu has devastated the human population. When a group of robotic advertisements stumble into her garden one day, she is shocked to find that they can change their appearance to look like her husband. This was a poignant look at how loss and loneliness affect us and drive us to do things we wouldn't normally do.

**The Performance Artist** by Lettie Prell. A powerful and terrifying story about a female performance artist

who decides to download her consciousness into a robot—in public, of course. A cautionary tale about merging man and machine, this story shocked me, I suppose much like good performance art might.

A few other stories that really stood out for me: *Pocosin* by Ursula Vernon, *Sexagesimal* by Katharine E.K. Duckett, and *Still Life (A Sexagesimal Fairy Tale)* by Ian Tregillis. Please note that the word “sexagesimal” appears in two titles in this collection, a word I literally read for the first time right here! (Weird, right?)

**And here's a shout-out to the rest of the stories in this collection, all worthy of being included:**

*If You Were a Dinosaur, My Love* by Rachel Swirsky

*A Matter of Shapespace* by Brian Trent

*Falling Leaves* by Liz Argall

*Blood From Stone* by Alethea Kontis

*Multo* by Samuel Marzoli

*Keep Talking* by Marie Vibbert

*Rememory Day* by Sarah Pinsker

*Blood on Beacon Hill* by Russell Nichols

*The Green Book* by Amal El-Mohtar

*Build-a-Dolly* by Ken Liu

*Armless Maidens of the American West* by Genevieve Valentine

*She Gave Her Heart, He Took Her Marrow* by Sam Fleming

My only (small) complaint would be that I would have loved to read a short blurb from each author, describing their inspirations for the stories, which could have easily been added to the author bios at the end of the book.

The bottom line, though, is this: *Best of Apex: Volume 1* will blow your mind—in a good way—with some of the most creative, magical, upsetting and thought-provoking stories I've read in quite some time. Check out the state of speculative short fiction. I promise, you'll find something here that will change you in some way, and isn't that what fiction is supposed to do?

**Big thanks to the publisher for supplying a review copy.** This review originally appeared on Books, Bones & Buffy

---

## Chrysten Lofton says

**5.0? “Dakila: So, everything is okay? You’re safe? — Adan: Of course. Why shouldn’t I be?”**  
\*\*spoilers\*\*

If you’re here, and you’re following my reviews, thank you for rolling with me. We’re on episode 29 of Stitcher’s LeVar Burton Reads, and we’re gifted with *Multo* by Samuel Marzoli.

**o\_0**

***AhhHHHHhhHH***

**Heccin Scare ! ! !**

Dang. Samuel and LeVar, you spooky bastards. x-D

I listened to this story at work and at the time, it was empty and dead quiet, except for an ambient fish tank bubbling and a few ticks and clicks of electronic gadgets. As the story began, I was like, “Bfff, this ain’t gonna scare me.”

By the end, I had gone a little cold and had to clear my throat and call up some inner gumption to get my limbs moving. That quiet was too quiet, and the ticks were too animated. The A/C cut on, and I jumped.

There are so many layers to the psychology of fear laid down in this story.

The first, is the uncertainty of childhood. As a kid, you can never quite tell when people, especially older adults and kids, are just *fucking with you*. You search their faces for any sign of betrayal or humor, and when you can’t find it, you have to start questioning everything. Do they mean it? Are they acting? You might’ve been fortunate enough to have the whistle-blower parent “IE, Stop it, you’re scaring your sister! Don’t worry, little one, he’s just trying to frighten you.” On the other hand, You might be like me. I had the parents who *told* the scary stories, so, yeah.

The second layer, is just raw childhood fear. Children are dutifully lavished in security, so when they experience something without a parent, something out of all control or explanation, it’s like having a trap door open beneath their feet. There are few things as pure as childhood terror.

The third layer is the *nostalgia* of childhood fear. There were movies I saw as a kid that seemed so *horrifying* at the time, but when I saw them as an adult, they were tame and sometimes even comical. There were places that seemed foreboding and nightmarish as a kid, that seem ordinary now. But even when all those places are dressed down in my adult logic, I remember how they made me feel when I was small, and it sometimes breathes new life into what made them frightening.

Experiencing remembered fear is losing all the mighty power and security you got to claim by growing up.

Stephen King’s *IT* was frightening for these same reasons. I’d put these stories on par. They really share the commonality of having to face a monster that you thought you’d outrun, and long put out of your mind.

But here's a plot twist. LeVar's personal story about childhood phantoms was as scary as the story?? AhHHh, No LeVar, I'm for sure having nightmares now.

I love horror and suspense. This season is KILLIN IT so far.

EDIT: I had to come back and add that LeVar's reading of Multo might be his best performance yet. Editing and soundbites, also top tier.

Thanks for reading, and If you wanna chat about the latest LBR episodes, hit me up in the comments and come meet up with us at LeVar Burton Reads: The Community on Facebook.

- ??♥

---