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Walter Jon Williams

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Facets Details

Date : Published March 1st 1991 by Tor Books (first published 1990)

ISBN : 9780812501810

Author : Walter Jon Williams

Format : Paperback 370 pages

Genre : Science Fiction, Anthologies, Fiction, Speculative Fiction, Short Stories, Short Story Collection

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Jerico says

Like a lot of science fiction writers, Williams does his best work at shorter lengths.

Part of this is a consequence of the genre: SF works best at short to medium lengths, despite the marketing constraints for multivolume series, because the essentially SF qualities of a narrative (worldbuilding, inventive premise, etc) tend to hold together better over shorter lengths. Part of this is because of the filtering process that old-school SF exerted on its writers: the route to publishing tended to be through small volume digests like *Analog*, *Amazing*, etc. This route was the defining feature of Golden Age SF, in a lot of ways.

And part of it is because Walter Jon Williams is really good at writing at short length. There are two great stories in this collection: *Dinosaurs and the Wild Cards* bit (the only shared worlds story to win a major SF award, if I'm not mistaken). Most of the rest of it is good too, showing a range in style and content that's impressive.

Stephen says

"Surfacing" ★★★½ | A reclusive alcoholic scientist with violent tendencies investigates mysterious deep-sea creatures on a distant planet. Maybe a few too many plot hooks for a story this size, but the core ideas were quite good and the setting (with the glaring exception of the "Kyklopes" aliens) seemed well-realized.

"Video Star" ★★★½ | A competently written, but not particularly surprising, cyberpunk heist story.

"No Spot of Ground" ★★★ | Alternate history where Edgar Allan Poe doesn't die in Baltimore, but instead survives and joins the Confederate Army during the Civil War. The inescapable conclusion is that if this is what would have happened, we might all be better off for Poe's dying. (Poe included!)

Flatline ★★★ | Post-singularity cyberpunk goodness, with a slight ding for second person narration and a threadbare plot. Cool scenes and characters though, and a style that really reminded me of *Shadowrun* specifically. (I don't think Williams had any connection to that game outside of both being influenced by William Gibson.)

Side Effects ★½ | Relentlessly cynical and barely sfnal crossed-lives story about pharmaceuticals and slightly bent doctors. Whoop de do.

Witness ★★★★★ | Set in the *Wild Cards* shared universe, an alternate history of superpowers and mutants starting after WW2. This is the story of one of the first "aces," or non-mutated superpowered people, and how he ended up betraying everyone he loved because of the Red Scare. Fun!

Wolf Time ★★★ | Possibly set in the same universe/timeline as "Video Star" (or just using some similar setting concepts), about an ex-corporate-soldier who gets hired for One Last Job?so, very similar to "Video Star." This one was shorter and had some good action, so it gets the edge.

The Bob Dylan Solution ★★½ | Reminiscent of some of the satires of Madison Avenue marketing firms from the Fifties (see, e.g., Pohl's "Tunnel Under the World"), except this is drenched in Eighties colors and it's about L.A. record companies shaping public opinion through their artists. Nothing too surprising, but pretty well crafted.

Dinosaurs ★★★★★ | A weird, weird, existentially-horrifying story about a "human" "diplomat" trying to negotiate peace with a civilization of what I imagined as three-legged kangaroo-shrew-people. "Human" is in air-quotes because this is set eight million years in the future and humanity has evolved in monstrous ways. "Diplomat" is in air-quotes because, well, you'll have to read it.

OVERALL RATING ★★★ | "Surfacing" and "Dinosaurs" are the standout stories of this collection for me, although there are several other solid offerings.

Vahid says

Good sci-fi. The alternate history story with Edgar Allen Poe as a Confederate general dragged a a little, but everything was imaginative and engaging.

Macha says

3 and a half stars
