



Nebula Award Stories Six

Theodore Sturgeon (Editor) , Keith Laumer (Contributor) , Gene Wolfe (Contributor) , Fritz Leiber (Contributor) , R.A. Lafferty (Contributor) , Harry Harrison (Contributor) , Joanna Russ (Contributor) , Clifford D. Simak (Contributor) , more... Thomas D. Clareson (Contributor) ...less

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Author : Theodore Sturgeon (Editor) , Keith Laumer (Contributor) , Gene Wolfe (Contributor) , Fritz Leiber (Contributor) , R.A. Lafferty (Contributor) , Harry Harrison (Contributor) , Joanna Russ (Contributor) , Clifford D. Simak (Contributor) , more... Thomas D. Clareson (Contributor) ...less

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From Reader Review Nebula Award Stories Six for online ebook

Johnny says

Nebula Award Stories Six was the sixth anthology of award-winning and nominated fiction as voted by the Science Fiction Writers of America (SFWA) for works published in 1970. Actually, Theodore Sturgeon was *not* the editor of this anthology. Clifford Simak edited it and Sturgeon had the first story, the award-winning "Slow Sculpture." I had only read one of these stories in the collection prior to finding this volume. Said story was the Best Novella of 1970, Fritz Leiber's "Ill Met in Lankhmar." This appears to be the earliest collaboration of his famous Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser team of thieves. The story had some peripheral inspiration for the "Thief" class (now, "Rogue" class) in *Dungeons & Dragons* and Lankhmer formed a setting for a game in its own right (*Lankhmar*) and, later, supplements to *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* (2nd Edition) which allowed role-players to travel the familiar streets and shops of Leiber's near-Arabian fantasy setting. As for the novella itself? It holds up well on re-reading. The set-up and exploratory sections of the adventure are vivid and mysterious; the conclusion doesn't settle for a happy ending (it is more like Rick's and Louie's "beginnings of a beautiful friendship" at the end of the classic film, *Casablanca*, bittersweet but interesting.

The rest of the anthology doesn't even seem "bittersweet." In one sense, a theme of "bitterness" contributes to the often bleak, dystopian nature of most of the stories. In the introductory essay, Thomas D. Clareson rather celebrates the blending of realism and fantasy in the science-fiction of the turn of that past decade. He lauded the use of the experimental styles and subjects outside the traditional forms of science fiction. My feeling was that most of the stories seemed to fit the theme that I would call, "courageous existentialism." There is a futility in the existence of many of these protagonists, that idea of the "being unto death" from modern Continental Philosophy of the mid-20th century.

For example, when I think of Keith Laumer, I think of the social criticism implied in the "Bolo" stories where the author skewers the military establishment (a popular thing to do in that era which incorporates the Korean and Vietnam Conflicts) and the very clever Retief of the CDT stories where bureaucracy in general is satirized. "In the Queue," as published in this collection, does have a sarcastic slam at bureaucracy, but it is neither as light-hearted nor optimistic as the Retief stories. In a similar vein, Harry Harrison's "By the Falls" has neither the courage of his action-oriented protagonists or the good-natured humor of his "Galaxy Smashers" or "Stainless Steel Rat" stories. Don't get me wrong, I haven't pigeonholed the late writer as a humorist. I know that is only one of his styles, but the journalist protagonist in this episode seems so passive, so lifeless, such a victim that it is difficult for me to reconcile this story with the rest of Harry's work. Indeed, most of the protagonists in this collection seem more acted upon than acting upon.

In R. A. Lafferty's "Continued on Next Rock," archaeologists attempt to ply their profession with accepted techniques, only to have unsettling discovery after discovery to challenge their rationality. There is no satisfying wrap-up, merely a conclusion that is every bit as mysterious as the events which take place in the story. "The Second Inquisition" features a standard trope from science-fiction—time travel. However, the time-travel presented in this story is jarring and, perhaps, unnecessary. The theme of alien invasion interlaced with coming of age would have worked without the wrinkle in time. Theodore Sturgeon's "Slow Sculpture" seems to be a thinly veiled look at genetic engineering. It was filled with new age perspective and Asian philosophy as it moved to its inevitable conclusion. Finally, even Gene Wolfe's brilliant blending of reality, reading, and fantastic imagination depicts a protagonist who is more acted upon than acting upon. To be sure, "The Island of Doctor Death and Other Stories" is incredibly fresh in the perspective and events it portrays, but in an anthology that seems to revel in futility, it ultimately seems unsatisfying.

I realize it will seem irresponsible to downgrade the award-winning and nominated work of undisputed masters of a genre that I love. I just have to believe that Vietnam, inflation, and social protest must have weighed so heavily on SFWA that the voters subconsciously (or consciously) opted for the dark side. The tone of this collection reduced my enjoyment even of authors I generally enjoy.

fromcouchtomoon says

A strong collection of SF stories, all Nebula nom'd in '71. If a theme can tie them together, it might be "... and they were never really there..." or, better yet, "Attenuated Worlds,"-- cliché, but delightful with cancer & bonsais, a waterfall that spews an apocalypse, and characters who don't even exist in our fiction.
