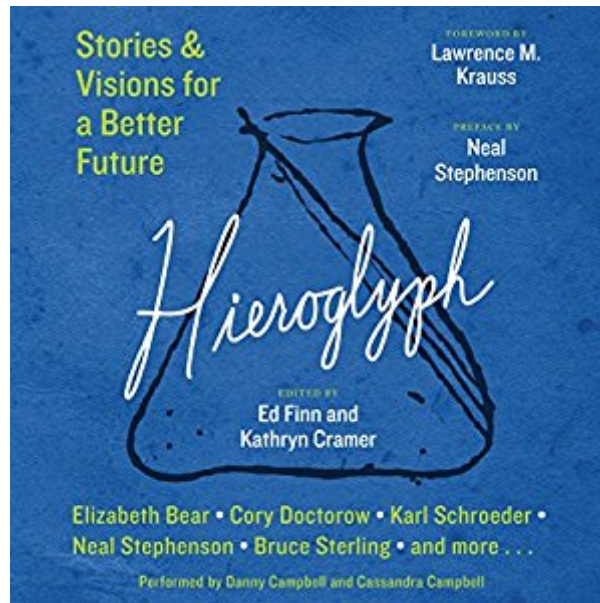


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Hieroglyph: Stories And Visions For A Better Future



Synopsis

Inspired by New York Times best-selling author Neal Stephenson, an anthology of stories, set in the near future, from some of today's leading writers, thinkers, and visionaries that reignites the iconic and optimistic visions of the golden age of science fiction. In his 2011 article "Innovation Starvation", Neal Stephenson argued that we - the society whose earlier scientists and engineers witnessed the airplane, the automobile, nuclear energy, the computer, and space exploration - must reignite our ambitions to think boldly and do Big Stuff. He also advanced the Hieroglyph Theory which illuminates the power of science fiction to inspire the inventive imagination: "Good SF supplies a plausible, fully thought-out picture of an alternate reality in which some sort of compelling innovation has taken place." In 2012, Arizona State University established the Center for Science and the Imagination to bring together writers, artists, and creative thinkers with scientists, engineers, and technologists to cultivate and expand on "moon shot ideas" that inspire the imagination and catalyze real-world innovations. Now comes this remarkable anthology uniting 20 of today's leading thinkers, writers, and visionaries - among them Cory Doctorow, Gregory Benford, Elizabeth Bear, Bruce Sterling, and Neal Stephenson - to contribute works of "techno-optimism" that challenge us to dream and do Big Stuff. Engaging, mind-bending, provocative, and imaginative, Hieroglyph offers a forward-thinking approach to the intersection of art and technology that has the power to change our world.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Back in 2011, a chance encounter between Michael Crow and Neal Stephenson lead to a

discussion about who was to blame for the sorry state of our collective imaginations: the best minds of our generation who spend their time design spam filters and social media apps, or science fiction writers who churn out endless dystopias and apocalypses. From this chance encounter was born the Center for Science and Imagination and Project Hieroglyph, with the goal of bringing scientist fiction writers in contact with actual scientists with a mandate to imagine a world where problems could be solved, as an inspiration to solving them. Now, three years later this is the book, and trust a guy who has read 117 science fiction books since 2010, it is GOOD. The stories in this collection cover topics including space exploration, entrepreneurship, drones, civil liberties, education, climate change, and more, book-ended by Stephenson's Tall Tower, a 20 km steel structure that could cut space launch costs in half-for starters. Stephenson opens with a classically Heinleinian engineering epic of how the Tower is built--think "The Roads Must Roll" or "Blowups Happen". Bruce Sterling closes with the same tower 200 years in the future, inhabited by the decadent and wicked religious dreamers of an Earth that is being abandoned by the Ascended Masters, and the quixotic quest of a cowboy to ride his old horse to the very top. My two very favorite stories were "By the time we get to Arizona" by Madeline Ashby, who provides a The Prisoner inspired take on reforming American's Kafkaesque immigration system with a six week panopticon trial period in a model border town, and "Degrees of Freedom" Karl Schroeder, who uses augmented reality to provide a fascinating and inspiration lens on democracy, legitimacy, and collective decision making. Not everyone manages to hit as solidly, but there's no filler here, and very few reused ideas. I've rarely seen such a creative, energetic, and yet solidly themed collection. The tent-poles are pieces from masters of the genre, names that you should recognize like Neal Stephenson, Bruce Sterling, Elizabeth Bear, Gregory Benford, David Brin and Cory Doctorow. All these major talents bring their A game, and fans of any of them should check out the collection. This might just be some of the best science fiction you'll read in a long time: Retro without being old-fashioned, optimistic without being panglossian. Disclosure notice: While I am a grad student at ASU and have been following Hieroglyph's progress eagerly since it's inception, I have no financial or institutional connection to it. I just think it's super cool. ((Addendum: And Lawrence Krauss is a blowhard. Skip the introduction))

I was really looking forward to this book - I'd read Neal Stephenson's call for more inspirational science fiction and it sounded like something I would really appreciate. But I am afraid the contributions here from those authors I was most familiar with are the most disappointing. The tall tower and moon/stars stories (two that each seem to be deliberate pairs?) seem to meander through decades without much to show for it beyond the one or two gimmicks in play. I can't say

that sort of prospect inspires me. And what's with the dominance of first-person narrative here? Global warming and decline of the natural world are also pretty constant themes throughout the stories - though with some refreshing variations. General disappointment aside, some of the stories are real gems. Vandana Singh's "Entanglement" has to be my favorite - the prospect of deep intertwining of lives around the world is fascinating, but more than that, Singh presents each perspective in a delightful manner, deeply envisioned in their place, yet also deeply entangled (in ways that aren't clear until the end). Second favorite is probably "Degrees of freedom" by Karl Schroeder, a hopeful look at how similar technology could make governments irrelevant and allow real collective decision-making, in a tale focused on a father and son learning to understand one another. James Cambias' "Periapsis" was also nicely done - much more far-fetched technology-wise, but a sweet tale with a fun romantic and surprising ending. My impression is the "big name" writers didn't really put their best efforts into this volume, but there are a few pieces of great writing and inspirational story-telling here, so I'm not unhappy I purchased it. Maybe there will be a follow-on volume with a bit more even quality.

I heard about the Hieroglyph idea and book from an interview with Neal Stephenson where he was talking about how science fiction doesn't seem to embrace optimism anymore. I'm a long time Stephenson fan, and the concept of trying to encourage science fiction that revolves around a hopeful outlook was interesting to me, so I picked up this book. I agree with some other reviewers that not all of these stories could be classified as hopeful, although that did not ruin them for me. While not all of the stories were on the same level as far as quality, I thought that overall it was a good mixture of some wild ideas. The standouts for me were "Atmosphere Incognita", "Girl in Wave: Wave in Girl" and "A Hotel In Antarctica". Those three really felt the most like they were embracing the concept. I don't think there were any stories I would say were bad, but others felt more like standard science fiction ideas that didn't necessarily belong in this anthology. Even so, a very entertaining collection with some neat ideas in the mix.

I bought this because I want more books like this - anthologies of excellent writers who can craft a vision of the near-future. There are plenty of Dystopic Books of Doom out there - I wanted stories with more possibilities. The stories were mixed. Some I liked pretty well, and some I didn't care anything about. That's about normal for me - I rarely read fiction, because I can't bring myself to

care about the characters or the writer. These stories almost always made sense. Competent writing... it's sometimes enough. Good job. More books like this, please. Keep publishing these more interesting authors.

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