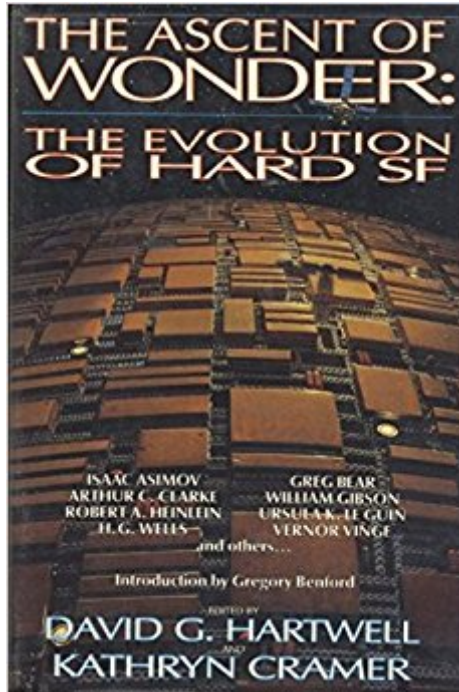


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The Ascent Of Wonder: The Evolution Of Hard SF



Synopsis

Featuring more than sixty groundbreaking short stories by modern science fiction's most important and influential writers, *The Ascent of Wonder* offers a definitive and incisive exploration of the SF genre's visionary core. From Poe to Pohl, Wells to Wolfe, and Verne to Vinge, this hefty anthology fully charts the themes, trends, thoughts, and traditions that comprise the challenging yet rich literary form known as "hard SF."

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

If you're a fan of hard science fiction, you need to own "The Ascent of Wonder: The Evolution of Hard SF." Period. Even if you have, as I do, a large collection of hardcover and paperback science fiction books that collectively contain many of the stories reprinted in this volume, you still need it. As you might expect, many of the stories are from the "Golden Age" of the 1940's and '50's: you'll find classics such as Hal Clement's "Proof" (1942), James Blish's "Surface Tension" (1952) and Tom Godwin's haunting "The Cold Equations" (1954). Representing later years are such riveting tales as Theodore L. Thomas' "The Weather Man" (1962), Bob Shaw's "Light of Other Days" (1966) and Donald Kingsbury's "To Bring In the Steel" (1978). The 67 stories in "The Ascent of Wonder" make up a fantastic smorgasbord of the best hard science fiction of all time. But wait, there's more...there are three essays, totaling about 30 pages, on hard science fiction, written by editors David G. Hartwell and Kathryn Kramer and noted author Gregory Benford. Each story also contains a relatively short (half a page or so) but exceptionally insightful introduction. These alone make "The

Ascent of Wonder" worth having. With 990 pages of small, dense type, this volume is big and heavy. But even if you have to put an extra brace on your bookshelf to hold the weight, you should buy it. Quite simply, there is no better compilation of the imaginative, speculative, science-based stories that form the genre's "visionary core."

This book presents a massive collection of excellent "hard" science fiction stories. (The precise definition of "hard" s-f is left as an exercise to the alert reader.) While the stories are unimpeachable, the introductions and section headings written by the editors range from merely dull to painful. Buy the book, love the book, read the stories, skip the editorial matter.

This weighty tome, is absolutely packed with some of the definitive stories of hard science fiction. The introductions to the stories illustrate the trends from the late 19th century to today. Although there is an annoying misuse of the word 'affect' for 'effect', the story reviews are illuminating as to the great authors and their stories. To have read this book is to have gained an overview of the evolution science fiction, to see where it all came from, to see the stories that started the subgenres, to know what IS the core of SF, hard SF.

David Hartwell and Kathryn Cramer are experienced science fiction anthologists, well-known for their annual "Year's Best SF" collections. In this themed anthology, they trace the development of "hard science fiction" through 1994. In three separate introductions by Gregory Benford, Cramer, and then Hartwell, this subgenre is defined and redefined. Fascinating stuff. Then come the stories, sixty-seven of them. Each is introduced by a tightly-written, part-page description of the author's life, beliefs, and other written works. There are some very good stories here. I'll list five that I liked very much. Your top five may well be different. Tom Godwin's "The Cold Equations" illustrates the danger of taking along just enough of everything--air, fuel, mass--on a space trip. There is always the unexpected. Poul Anderson's "Kyrie" demonstrates how love can last forever--and we find this not the least bit comforting. In James Blish's "Surface Tension" the main characters are marooned in an alien world and must overcome obstacles and opposition to build the ship that can rise above their world into the unknown. Will their ancient metal records help them or hold them back? Arthur C. Clark takes "The Longest Science Fiction Story Ever Told" and strips it down to its essentials. Isaac Asimov serves up perhaps the longest short-short science fiction story ever told as he slowly builds the tension while we wait for a supercomputer's answer to "The Last Question." At nearly a thousand pages, this collection requires some serious reading commitment. If you like good science fiction,

it's worth it. These stories are all worth reading and most bring the sense of wonder characteristic of good, imaginative writing. True to their hard SF tradition, the authors don't "fake" the science one bit more than is necessary.

I found some great stories here that were new to me. It's a good collection of stories but there are a number of well-written stories here that are not Hard Science Fiction. The title is misleading. The editors seem to have no sympathy with the genre. In their introductions to the stories they seem to sneer at the whole genre from their elevated literary viewpoint. They are entitled to their opinions, but then, why did they do this collection? I suppose a collection entitled "A Gentle Introduction to the Better Sort of Science Fiction by Those Who Know Better Than You", or "Science Fiction that You Don't Need to be Embarrassed to Show your English-major Friends", wouldn't have much of a market. The snobbery and put-downs are really annoying. So, as has been suggested, skip the editorial commentary, let the stories speak for themselves.

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