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THE REFERENCE LIBRARY

by Sean CW Korsgaard

Happy New Year, *Analog* readers!

Though I'm penning this latest column in July, by the time we've all completed another lap around the sun, I suspect this will hold just as true as it does now:
we live in era that is strange, terrifying, and miraculous all at once.

We have members of Congress having extended debates about possible encounters with unidentified flying objects and alien life. *Strange*.

We see record high temperatures around the globe, and the dogs of war on the prowl from Ukraine to the Taiwan Strait. *Terrifying*.

Remaining cautiously optimistic that nothing changes, it appears scientists from South Korea may have cracked the code on room temperature superconductors, one of the long sought holy grails of modern science. *Miraculous*.

And of course, it should be no surprise you can find science fiction that reflects that as well, often in abundance, these six titles being no exception. An anthology that honors and continues a half-century-old legacy and tradition. One of the modern masters of science fiction has given us an alien abduction comedy. A military SF novel where much of the action hinges on medical drama and theoretical physics as it does gunplay. A cancer victim saved by cryogenic freezing only to be thrust into a terrible future. And a pair of aliens living on the moon offering visitors guidance and homemade pie.

Whatever these days may be in the year ahead, we won't lack for great books to read in 2024.

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Futures: Science Fiction from the World's Oldest Diaspora

Edited by Michael A. Burstein

Fantastic Books, 256 pages, \$24.99 (hardcover)

iBooks, Kindle, Nook: \$7.99

ISBN: 978-1515458050

Genre: Theme Anthologies, World SF, Jewish Science Fiction



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Nearly half a century later after they were first published, the two *Wandering Stars* collections edited by Jack Dann enjoy a special place in the long history of theme anthologies. They were landmarks in a number of ways, from the deeply personal introductory essay from Isaac Asimov reflecting on Jewish identity, to some of the most memorable short stories of the past few decades, perhaps most notably “On Venus, Have We Got a Rabbi” by William Tenn.

Jewish Futures wears that inspiration on its sleeve, with the introduction not only paying a touching homage to the now landmark *Wandering Stars* anthologies, but including a letter from editor Jack Dann, reflecting on how dramatically different the landscape of Jewish science fiction is today.

Yet while the landscape of the genre may change, great fiction is forever, and it’s here that *Jewish Futures* more than delivers.

In “One Must Imagine,” Harry Turtledove has Jews, alongside Christians, Muslims, Wiccans, and Mormons, settling Mars, even as they all settle into old missionary habits. Susan Schwartz’s “Into Thin Heirs” focuses on a joint Israeli and Palestinian attempt to summit Everest, while “Mission Divergence” by E.M. Ben Shaul has Iron Dome replaced by defense satellites. “The Kuiper Gemara” by Shane Tourtellotte has an artificial intelligence who asks a rabbi to aid its conversion to Judaism, while “The Aliens of Chelm” by Valerie Estelle Frankel is a charming retelling of the Chelm stories featuring alien converts to their own form of Judaism.

As for some particular highlights? Steven H. Silver, true to form as a frequent writer of alternate history, has “Initial Engagement,” a story where the Russian Jewish Autonomous Republic has broken away as Russia balkanized to form Yehudah, competing against Israel in an international fencing event, and facing tensions over the match falling on shabbat. Esther Friesner’s wicked sense of humor has made her a favorite among readers for decades, and her tale of the family brisket keeping the zombie apocalypse at bay in “Rachel Nussbaum Saves the World” should be a fast favorite. Randee Dawn’s “Matzah Ball Soup for the Vershluggin” sees Jewish colonists on an alien world sharing a Passover seder with one of the native aliens, and using the ceremony to explore the nuances of culture and colonization. It’s immediately clear why “The Last Chosen” by Jordan King-Lacroix was chosen as the anthology closer though, as it hits like a right hook, following a man who may well be the last Jew, awaiting the end of himself and his people. I say without shame it moved me to tears.

Jewish Futures is edited by Michael A. Burstein, Hugo and Nebula finalist and winner of the Campbell Award, and the author of Jewish-themed science-fiction stories “Kaddish for the Last Survivor” and “The Great Miracle,” both of which were first published in *Analog*. Here, Burstein is to be commended for assembling a fine anthology that manages the no small feat of balancing old authors and new, and multiple genres and styles of while firmly sticking to the theme.

Whether those of you reading this are ringing in 2024, or happen to be a few months into 5784, *Jewish Futures* is an early contender for one of the best anthologies of the year, and a worthy successor to the classic *Wandering Stars* anthologies it was inspired by. Be an *edel mensch* and make sure to grab a copy for you

