

THE SPACE OPERA RENAISSANCE BY KATHRYN CRAMER, DAVID G. HARTWELL



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From Booklist

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Review

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--John Updike on *The World Treasury of SF*

"An editor extraordinaire."
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About the Author

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"Space opera", once a derisive term for cheap pulp adventure, has come to mean something more in modern SF: compelling adventure stories told against a broad canvas, and written to the highest level of skill. Indeed, it can be argued that the "new space opera" is one of the defining streams of modern SF.

Now, World Fantasy Award-winning anthologists David G. Hartwell and Kathryn Cramer have compiled a definitive overview of this subgenre, both as it was in the days of the pulp magazines, and as it has become in 2005. Included are major works from genre progenitors like Jack Williamson and Leigh Brackett, stylish midcentury voices like Cordwainer Smith and Samuel R. Delany, popular favorites like David Drake, Lois McMaster Bujold, and Ursula K. Le Guin, and modern-day pioneers such as Iain M. Banks, Steven Baxter, Scott Westerfeld, and Charles Stross.

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From Booklist

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Most helpful customer reviews

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Hartwell & Cramer's best BIG review-anthology yet.

By Peter D. Tillman

I'm working my way through the Hartwell & Cramer *SPACE OPERA RENAISSANCE* anthology, and finding it well-done and to my taste -- I think it's Hartwell's best BIG review-anthology yet. Truly a doorstop: 940+ pages!, with a surprisingly large number of new-to-me stories.

Space Opera, as Hartwell points out in his nicely-done introductory essay and story notes, is a flexible concept. And when you get to *New Space Opera*, or *Widescreen Baroque Space Opera* -- well, no one really knows what these are. Really, space opera is what Hartwell (or whoever) points to when he says "space opera"...

Anyway, take a look at this juicy lineup:

(my faves are starred*)

Introduction: *How Shlt became Shinola, Definition & Redefinition of Space Opera, by Hartwell & Cramer

I. Redefined Writers

"The Star Stealers" by Edmond Hamilton

"The Prince of Space" by Jack Williamson

"Enchantress of Venus" by Leigh Brackett

*"The Swordsmen of Varnis" by Clive Jackson

II. Draftees (1960s)

***"The Game of Rat & Dragon" by Cordwainer Smith

"Empire Star" by Samuel R. Delany

"Zirn Left Unguarded, the Jenjik Palace in Flames, Jon Westerly Dead" by Robert Sheckley

III. Transitions/Redefiners (late 1970s to late 1980s)

*"Temptation" by David Brin

"Ranks of Bronze" by David Drake

*"Weatherman" by Lois McMaster Bujold

"A Gift from the Culture" by Iain M. Banks

IV. Volunteers:Revisionaries (early 90s)

*"Orphans of the Helix" by Dan Simmons

"The Well Wishers" by Colin Greenland

*"Escape Route" by Peter Hamilton

"Ms Midshipwoman Harrington" by David Weber

"Aurora in Four Voices" by Catherine Asaro

***"Ring Rats" by R. Garcia y Robertson

*"The Death of Captain Future" by Allen Steele

V. Mixed Signals/ Mixed Categories (to the late 1990s)

*"A Worm in the Well" by Gregory Benford

**"The Survivor" by Donald Kingsbury

"Fools Errand" by Sarah Zettel

"The Shobies Story" by Ursula K. Le Guin

"The Remoras" by Robert Reed

"Recording Angel" by Paul McAuley

"The Great Game" by Steven Baxter

"Lost Sorceress of the Silent Citadel" by Michael Moorcock

"Space Opera" by Michael Kandel

VI. Next Wave (21st Century)

"Grist" by Tony Daniel

"The Movements of her Eyes" by Scott Westerfeld

*"Spirey and the Queen" by Alastair Reynolds

*"Bear Trap" by Charles Stross

"Guest Law" by John C. Wright

Some story comments:

"The Game of Rat & Dragon" (1955) by Cordwainer Smith. My favorite Smith classic, which is to say one of the best SF shorts ever, Hasn't dated one bit in a half-century. Meow!

Dan Simmons' "Orphans of the Helix" (1999, *_Far Horizons_*), is a tasty, atmospheric and thoroughly space-operatic travel-adventure, set in the Hyperian Cantos universe. Pure travelogue and goshwow, mind -- allegedly, this started life as a TV treatment. Would have made a nice show, if the SFX turned out well....

There's a new-to-me David Brin short: "Temptation" (1999), Streaker dolphins in Jijo's ocean. Quite a nice one, and reminds me of the good bits in the Jijo books -- like the sheer audacity of (literally) scraping a technical civilization into the ocean. In theory, anyway . Those tricky Buyurs!

Donald Kingsbury's long novella "The Survivor" (1991) is set in Larry Niven's Known Space universe, during the Man/Kzin wars, and is a proxy for Niven, a Space Opera King who's notably absent. It's the first half of his Lt. Nora Argamentine saga, set just after the Fall of Wunderland. John Clute thought it one of the best stories of 1991, and so do I.

"Ring Rats" (2002) by R. Garcia y Robertson: Space pirates! --pure adrenaline rush, with some nasty bits. Strong stuff, one of his best yet.

"Spirey and the Queen" (1996) by Alastair Reynolds: which has "some of that space-war sizzle and true weirdness that we see as a primary appeal of late-model space opera" -- Hartwell

Anyway, there's a ton of good stories here, most of which you'll be happy to add to your permanent library. Check it out.

Happy reading--

Peter D. Tillman

Review first published at SF Site

8 of 9 people found the following review helpful.

Its okay

By Michael J. Foy

This is a big book and it felt like a big book to read since I could easily put it down. Lots of stories. Some good, some not so good. The surprising thing about this book was that it wasn't more upbeat. When I think of Space Opera I think Star Wars but that kind of fun is a throwback in today's Sci-Fi universe. These stories were very modern and although thought provoking a lot ended with a feeling of 'so what' or 'where's the fun'.

Michael J. Foy

Author of The Kennedy Effect

16 of 22 people found the following review helpful.

superb anthology

By A Customer

In the Introduction to this superb anthology, space opera was coined by Bob Tucker in 1941: "In these hectic days of phrase coning, we offer one. Westerns are called "horse operas," the morning housewife tear-jerkers are called "soap operas." For the hacky, grinding, stinking, outworn space ship yarn, or world saving for that matter, we offer space opera." By 1959 the connotation remained "A hack science fiction story, a dressed up western" as noted by Fancyclopedia II. By the 1960s space opera was considered dead. Yet today it is alive, well, and highly regarded as its reputation changed as "sh*t became Shinola". This terrific compilation pays tribute to space opera tales from various decades starting with a delightful Edmond Hamilton tale from 1929 to a Stephen Baxter contribution from 2003; the entries showcase the evolution and make an analytical argument that even cheap pulp fiction in outer space can be well written. The break out by decades is as follows: 1920s - 1; 1930s - 1; 1940s - 1; 1950s - 2; 1960s - 1; 1970s - 1; 1980s - 3; 1990s - 16; 2000s - 6. Though the spread is heavily the 1990s (half the entries) with some readers fascinated with the sub-genre roots wanting more of the older entries, the contributions are from a who's who, who come through with superb tales. This is must reading for science fiction short story fans.

Harriet Klausner

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