



Gypsy

Carter Scholz

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The intriguing story of how a bold but tiny group of beleaguered humanity—financed by a rogue billionaire—undertake the top-secret colonization of a nearby star system

In this collection of sci-fi stories, heralded writer Carter Scholz explores a variety of sociopolitical themes. In the novella *Gypsy*, a few visionary scientists, chosen and nurtured by an eccentric billionaire undertake humankind's most expansive adventure—a generations-long voyage to a distant planet. The story "The Nine Billion Names of God" uses a classic sci-fi text to deconstruct literary deconstruction itself, with hilarious results. "Imprecations" is an unforgiving examination of the primary lies in popular culture. An interview with the author, in which Scholz reveals his sources, frustrations, forbidden delights, and demonic designs, is also included.

Gypsy Details

Date : Published December 1st 2015 by PM Press (first published October 1st 2015)

ISBN : 9781629631189

Author : Carter Scholz

Format : Paperback 160 pages

Genre : Science Fiction, Short Stories, Fiction, Speculative Fiction

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From Reader Review Gypsy for online ebook

Bart says

(...)

In the end, it doesn't matter much, as Gypsy is singular enough. Its dystopic premise isn't new, but as far as possible projections for the near future goes, it's definitely convincing. The middle class is dying and climate is changing. That's not rocket science. Gypsy is a lot less optimistic than KSR's latest book, and Scholz is outright grim. Those looking for just a fun science driven story: this is not The Martian.

To say much more would spoil the experience, but structurally Gypsy is a very interesting novella. There's not a lot of characters, and not a lot of pages, but the way Scholz handles both character and story development is masterly. One would not expect its narrative choices to deliver the emotions it does. At times, Gypsy's atmosphere reminded me of Duncan Jones' 2009 movie Moon.

(...)

Full review on Weighing A Pig

Michael says

I'm going to spend most of this review on the main story here, Gypsy. As soon as I read the jacket of this one I knew I wasn't going to like it. To quote:

...Gypsy goes far beyond the heliosphere of conventional science fiction. Jettisoning the easy warp-drives of fantasy and space opera, Scholz chronicles with chilling realism the epic voyage...

Let me tell you what's wrong with that bit. First of all, I defy you to go find a book of classic science fiction works that take place entirely within the heliosphere. Hint: None. Star Trek. Star Wars. Dune. The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy. Ringworld. Old Man's War. All of them take place in interplanetary space. Next, the "easy warp-drives" and other such SF mumbo jumbo constitute what is known in writing circles as a "plot device," which is something used to move the characters and plot into a situation where something interesting can happen. It's not cheating unless you're writing a technical manual.

A little more on the second one. Mr. Scholz seems to proceed from the mistaken notion that detailed physics make for a good story. No. Well-developed characters and interesting plots make for a good story. The physics provide some details that help flesh the world out and provide the occasional interesting tidbit, but make no mistake - if the whole of Star Trek was Mr. Scott telling us about how the ship works in detail it wouldn't have been a very good show. And that's what we have here. A series of incomplete character sketches. For characters we meet only once and whom we never see interact with each other. It's a repetitious story. Character wakes up. Something is wrong. Checks logs. Gives background of how they got on the ship. Fixes the thing as best they can. Laments their situation. Goes back into hibernation. Rinse and repeat.

Perhaps having recently come off of reading *Aurora* by Kim Stanley Robinson made this book seem repetitive, but again I've read this story before and I've read it better. Like *Aurora* by Kim Stanley Robinson. The story and characters evolve in that book. They do not here. We simply get a picture in time and nothing of much consequence happens. I'm very glad the physics were there and all the maths were done, but it doesn't add up to a story.

Now, with respect to the "plus" sections of the book: These just convince me that Scholz is a self-absorbed prick, and maybe even a little stuck in the past. I don't buy this whole resubmitting an Arthur C. Clarke story and the ensuing exchange as "art", or if it's intended as a joke, particularly funny. As for the interview, it's always difficult to believe someone who bemoans the way things are and talks about how they used to be better. No, they aren't the way you remember them. They've changed. You haven't. Allow for that in the world.

I'm not going to talk about the political stories. I don't particularly enjoy politics and I don't read to be angered - I read for entertainment. I'm also not qualified to give an informed opinion.

So... can I go back to my "fantasy and space-opera" with their "easy warp-drives" now? You know, that genre of "speculative fiction literature (vulgarly called SF)"? (All quotes from the jacket) Apparently, I like vulgarity.

Keizen Li Qian says

I found *Gypsy* in a collection of short stories and picked this up for more. Unfortunately, there aren't any more scifi stories in here. There's an avant garde correspondence with a fictional editor arguing over a submission of a previously published work by a different author and essays about US politics. All good and fine, but not what I was expecting...

Sean Ragan says

A grim vision of a bleak future framed by a heartbreaking "space ark" story. One really wants to give Mr. Scholz a hug and tell him it's all going to be OK. Though today's papers are, as ever, full of depressing news, I think Scholz's extreme dystopianism is unfounded, and I think this line from "*Gypsy*" encapsulates his error:

"Those who had the power to change things had no reason to; things had worked out pretty well for them so far."

Certainly there have always been haves and have-nots, and today the gap seems wider than ever. But to paint all the fortune-born as selfish and wantonly unconcerned by the fate of society, to a person, is simply wrong. Selfishness is a flaw more common in those born without abundance. This is the same error Steinbeck made in "*Grapes of Wrath*"—painting the wealthy and powerful as cartoonish moustache-twirling villains and thinking his job was done.

"*Gypsy*" is extremely hard sci-fi, like Hal Clement's "*Mission of Gravity*," that revels in scientific detail and technological speculation, defying us to find chinks in its armor. Once you allow for the "gimme" premise—practical antimatter-induced fusion reactions in lithium deuteride—Scholz's command of this grammar is impressive. There is no magic-wand technology here. There is only science, or what even a very

well-schooled scientific mind could allow as plausible science.

As often happens in the genre, the characters can seem a bit robotic and cold, though as the story advances Scholz does an admirable job of tempering the technobabble with emotion. He also executes a bit of dramaturgical Judo by describing his astronauts as "Aspergerish," and indeed going so far as to suggest that they were selected for flat affect.

I really loved the structural device of rousing the various crewmembers one-by-one from hibernation over the decades to troubleshoot the ship, with flashbacks from each unwinding the events leading up to their departure. It's a very elegant architecture for this story and probably my single favorite aspect.

Jani says

I was drawn to this book by the title story. It is still great, but the other writings on this collection were insignificant.

Gypsy is a story of a dream in a world where the chances for dreaming are decreasing. A dream of a billionaire is to send a vessel with a spark of humanity to another star. However, mere sending a rocket is not enough, the journey is long and full of possibilities for failure.

Gypsy might be classified as 'hard SF' as it feels meticulously researched. Nevertheless, it does not shirk from the human aspect of such stories and the brief scenes with various group members bring life to the journey.

It is a powerful story, perhaps worth five stars in itself, but with the lack-luster other additions not worth reviewing and not very diplomatic back-cover text, the overall rating will be 3.

Althea Ann says

Review of the title story only.

Earth has passed the tipping point. The environment is in ruins, states are collapsing, greedy oligarchs and businessmen are grabbing what resources they can for themselves and letting the planet's billions go to hell. One brilliant scientist forms a desperate, long-shot plan - to secretly divert resources into sending a ship to Alpha Centauri, in the hopes that there will be a planet there where humanity can start again. That ship is the 'Gypsy' and this is its story.

The opening of the piece is too "tell-y not show-y" as the author bluntly lays out this near-future scenario, but as it went on, it wholly won me over. It intercuts between letting the reader know how this plan slowly came to fruition, and 'current events' aboard the ship.

The story includes a plethora of scientific details and problem-solving which I believe would appeal to fans of Andy Weir's 'The Martian' - but this story is ever so much better, on so many different levels. It has real dramatic tension (and excellent writing.)

The 'Gypsy' was designed for a crew of twenty, who are all in drug-induced hibernation. Only in emergency situations is an expert specializing in the system that the emergency is in, awakened. So the story features a string of emergencies, each dealt with by a different character, whose personality and motivations we learn in their section.

As readers, even as we see the remarkable extremes of human ingenuity and hope, from the beginning, we have to say, "This is more than just a long shot. This might be truly impossible." I wondered how the author was going to deal with that. And at the end, I thought he pulled it off wonderfully.

G33z3r says

A group of dissidents flee a dying Earth for Alpha Centauri just ahead of the final collapse, using cryogenic suspension. A long, Chaucerian journey follows as one by one different passengers are awakened to deal with problems or milestones with the ship or journey, complete with each backstory on how they came to be part of the "Gypsy" group, and how the clandestine escape to the stars was accomplished. Really affecting story, nicely written, full of fascinating characters and some geeky technology.

(I read this novella when it appeared in The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction, November/December 2015,)

Peter Tillman says

Review of the title novella only:

SPOILER WARNING

Gypsy by Carter Scholz: a long novella about an earth in ruins from greedy plutocrats (etc), and the brave rebels who built the first starship, to escape the mess. Except the starship barely works. [SPOILER WARNING!] The crew mostly die off en route. The ship suffers multiple failures, and fails to land at the New Promised Land. BUT... The surviving crewmember gets a radio message from Earth that they got through the crisis OK. Too bad about your wasted trip! Unless it's a head-fake...

OK, this is a snarky (but accurate) summary-- it's a gripping but bleak story, with a sort-of happy ending stuck on.

After thinking about the story premises for a bit, they're implausible, I think. The Earth's environment is holding up OK (so far), although rapidly-industrializing nations (China, Indonesia) definitely have growing pains. But Scholz's premises works just fine for fiction, although it's a tired dystopian one, imo. YMMV.

The starship project's genesis is implausible, too: basically, all of the components are stolen from greedy plutocrats and grasping militaries.... Again, this is fine for fiction, but fails the "giggle test" after you read it.

So this tale will appeal more to environmental & techno-pessimists, rather than optimists who think we can work through the growing pains. Caveat lector.

Lanko says

Space travel through entire galaxies, let alone systems, is something really easy and accessible in popular Sci-Fi. That's not the case with Gypsy.

It shows how hard (near impossible), unpredictable, cold, solitary and dangerous it is.

The premise is that Earth around 2040 is on a catastrophic situation, elevated by the author to the maximum possible (it does look extremely exaggerated to make the plot go, but whatever).

Enter Roger Fry, genius scientist. He assembles a team, builds a ship and plans to launch it to Alpha Centauri to start again. It's not even certain there's an inhabitable planet there, but they don't have a choice.

Roger isn't on the ship (Gypsy, the name is explained later), but he is everywhere on it at the same time. How and why something or someone was there, on surprising levels, some bordering on sheer creepiness.

Now here comes the fascinate aspect of the story: Estimated time travel to reach the destination is around 80 years. The crew will hibernate until it reaches Alpha Centauri, but of course, space travel isn't like Star Wars or Star Trek and things continuously go wrong and have to be fixed or adapted.

When this happens, one member of the crew of sixteen is wakened and has to fix/adapt whatever needs to be done. Sometimes it's not even their main specialization, but they have to do the best they can for the sake of everyone else.

Then they write a log of what they did (by hand, in case computers fail) and if something happens again, someone else has to take the reins.

That's because they don't have food/water to stay awake for longer periods and can only be put to hibernation one more time, if someone has to wake up for the second time, it's only when they are about to reach their final destination.

The great thing is not only the challenges, but how new ones keep appearing. Contrary to what most commonly happens, human error is the main cause of them, not technology failing.

Sometimes someone fix one thing but causes something to blow up later. Then someone else has to fix it. Or sometimes they don't really are on their right state of mind.

The characters come from various nationalities and have their own backstory, all there on the ship and connected through each other because of the invisible, but omnipresent presence of Roger Fry, someone who could really have a book of his own.

The only downside is when the author decides to tackle some political views. Initially, it was fascinating because it appeared the crew, coming from all the world, would all have its own differences.

But unfortunately, they are all there to reinforce a specific view, and the one they consider the "opposite" is displayed in a totally cartoonish and even untruthful way that it ran the risk of breaking the story, simply because they looked to be simply facets of the author on specific subjects. A shame.

There were arguments I totally agreed with and others I totally disagreed, and even those I agree with left me wondering why it needed to be displayed in such a "in-your-damn-face" manner.

Despite that, and if you don't really mind that part, the story is really, really good. And the ending really packed quite a punch on me.

It's short - a novella of about 160 pages. I heard the book alone comes with two more short stories, an essay and an interview, which I believe could be amusing but also more personal ranting.

I read this through the **The Year's Best Science Fiction & Fantasy Novellas**, by Paula Guran, which I gained as an ARC through NetGalley, so I thankfully only got what it mattered: the story.

And it's a really good one and totally recommended.

Morgan Dhu says

Gypsy is one of the latest additions to PM Press's remarkable Outspoken Authors series. As with previous volumes in the series, Gypsy contains several collected works a single author. This collection features selections from the works of eclectic writer Carter Sholtz, including the novella Gypsy, two bitingly funny satirical short stories, an essay on the ease with which the US and its corporations violate national and international law, and an interview conducted with Sholtz by Terry Bisson.

The novella Gypsy takes place in an unsettlingly familiar dystopic future - climate change, corporate greed, resource depletion, war and the collapse of civil society. It's gotten bad enough that an underground network of dissidents have managed, in secret, to cobble together a space ship that will be able - if everything goes right - to transport a small number of people to the Alpha Centauri system in the hopes of finding a livable planet. It's a desperate shot in the dark.... but letting the situation on earth continue without some attempt to create another place for humans to survive seems unthinkable.

This is not a happy story. It is unrealistic to expect that that everything would go right in such an endeavour, and this is, given the opening situation, a very realistic, hard sf story. But it is also a powerful story, and a thought-provoking one.

In addition to the novella, the other pieces in the collection are well worth reading. I particularly enjoyed "Bad Pennies," a wicked satire on the American penchant for meddling in other countries' business and for doing business at whatever cost.

Ken Richards says

This book contains the novella 'Gypsy' (which I did not read in time to nominate for the Hugo Award, fat lot of good that would have done), plus some short stories, an essays and an interview with the author. The additional works are wry, and only tangentially science fiction. The interview will strike up some chords of resonance with the hobbies of some of the protagonists of the title novella, whilst 'United States of Impunity' sets out some of the reasons for the quiet desperation and despair which are the genesis of the mission of the 'Gypsy'.

The title novella is a perfectly formed jewel. Spare and concise in its prose, it recounts through the real time experiences of 'stewards' of the starship's crew as one by one they are woken from hibernation to attend to setbacks and challenges arising from the journey to the hoped for Ghost Planet at Alpha Centauri. The purloined starship, built and crewed by disillusioned scientists out of the crumbs which fall from the table of the rapacious military-industrial-financial conglomerate which rules and exploits an Earth fast going to hell in a handbasket, is just adequate for the mission. There is a pioneering spirit, and selfless bravery at the fore in this exploit. The backstories of the crew, and their recruitment intercut the episodes from the journey and

reveal the motivations of these pioneers.

Despite some apparent similarities, this is NOT 'Aurora Lite', it is a more hopeful tale, even given the sombre fate of the mission to Alpha Centauri. I'm pleased that I took the time to read this collection.

Jaffa Kintigh says

Humanity reaching out into space remains a recurring fascination. Sometimes this action is one of optimism and scientific expansionism. At other times, it's a defensive tactic of desperation as Earth becomes unbearable and unlivable. This sci-fi novella stands as a blend of the two.

As Earth succumbs to the apocalypse of 21st Century Western world lifestyles and the emerging dystopian new world order, a billionaire and his hand-picked team of 20 scientists plan an illegal escape into the vastness of space in an attempt to start anew on an unconfirmed planet in the Alpha Centauri system. Only 16 pioneers make it to the starship for the launch, the billionaire not among them.

The 72-year journey requires the travelers to enter hibernation to survive and slow their aging. The ship has the ability to wake individuals to attend to emergencies and system failures. The awakened individual is meant to decide the corrective action, then document their decision and reasoning both on computer and paper as a guide to the next awakened traveler. Each traveler is under a time deadline after which they won't be able to reenter hibernation. And no one person can emerge and reenter hibernation more than a couple times over the course of the entire journey before the action kills them.

This tale alternates between pre-launch scenes on Earth with the benefactor choosing his team and technology and splices of time in the journey when one of the individuals is called into action. The first to awaken is Sophie and only 2 years into the trip as the ship, *Gypsy*, enters the Oort Cloud. The communications to the moon station are offline. There's also signs of an impact a couple months back. The only major effect she can determine is a slightly slowed speed--the journey will now take 84 years. She corrects some time maneuvers and documents it.

38 years later, Fang is the next awakened. After she adjusts to the one-tenth gravity and effects of hibernation, the biologist attends to her sleeping co-travelers. Two are infected with a fungus resembling the bat fungus known as White Nose Disease . . .

The strength of this novella is in following the lives and decisions of the disparate group of scientists each with their own reasons for embarking on such a desperate journey. The decision-making of each is not unlike Andy Weir's *The Martian*. Each decision is life or death when traveling the edge of existence.

This tale appears in *The Year's Best Fantasy & Science Fiction Novellas: 2016* edited by Paula Guran, which I received directly from Prime Books.

Mike says

The supplemental stories are fine, the interview is fun, and the essay would maybe be the second or third best piece in an average issue of *Jacobin*. The title novella is extraordinary, though, a richly unsentimental text that serves as a necessary rebuttal to Kim Stanley Robinson's comparatively Pollyanna-ish *Aurora*.

Ian says

I'd never heard of Scholz, although apparently he is held in high regard. Looking at some of the comments on this book, it's clear he has plenty of genre friends in San Francisco/Oakland, where he lives – including Kim Stanley Robinson – and where PM Press is based. None of which is a reflection on Scholz's ability, more on the requirement of connections and patronage in genre in order for good fiction to get noticed. And 'Gypsy', the title novella of this collection, is very good indeed. It's 2015's third generation starship story, and probably the best of the three as a generation starship story. Tchaikovsky's Children of Time scores well because of its spider civilisation, Kim Stanley Robinson's Aurora has some good bits about narratology... but Scholz's 'Gypsy' goes for real science and engineering and paints a bleak picture – one not helped by the driving force behind the flight being the immanent collapse of Earth's biosphere. Not that the flight itself provides any answers. The remainder of the collection comprises a somewhat tired epistolary short story, an essay about US economic shenanigans, a story presented as house committee testimony, and an interview with Scholz. I have a lot of time for Scholz's approach to genre, as given in his interview, but only the title novella seems a good expression of it.

Gary Milczarek says

In Fantasy & Science Fiction the interviewer asks Scholz, What would you want a reader to take away from "Gypsy?" In his reply:

"Earth is our place, the place we evolved from and for — for better or worse, till death do us part."

This brilliant story touched me because it portrays our destruction of the world that sustains us and a courageous attempt to transcend it. I resonate with the beauty and horror expressed in the characters' memories of the home planet and their heroic efforts to overcome the failures on their journey. I feel the poignancy of all that is lost as we seem to move inexorably to our demise. I see the truth of the impermanence of all things; I just didn't think I would be a witness to this ending. I feel the same sweet nostalgia and heartache listening to Leonard Cohen's song "You got me singing":

You got me singing
Even though the world is gone
You got me thinking
I'd like to carry on
