

Clockwork Universe: Steampunk vs. Aliens



Edited by Patricia Bray and Joshua Palmatier

Reviewed by D. Andrew McChesney

What if aliens had arrived on earth during the Victorian Era to find an Earth with a highly developed steam powered and clockwork controlled technology? Several answers are offered in this third anthology edited by Patricia Bray and Joshua Palmatier. In all fourteen stories, the aliens are hostile, intent on conquering Earth, or so advanced that they give little thought to the human inhabitants. In some cases the invaders are distant and remote, a danger and a threat, but never within actual reach.

As with many collections of this type, some of the stories appealed more than others. One or two of the tales were a bit difficult to follow. Perhaps there were too many names to keep track of in a short period of time, or perhaps they used terminology from other professions that didn't quite ring true. Of the rest, most were interesting reads, and a few stood out as being extra-ordinary.

At the top of that list is "Of War and Wings" by Tansy Rayner Roberts. Perhaps it is because this is one of the few stories in which we meet aliens as individuals. In spite of the hostilities that have long existed, we might realize a fleeting bond between a lone invader and a young lady fighting them as a steam powered flyer or angel. "Lady Antheia's Guide to Horticultural Warfare" by Seanan McGuire, also proved interesting and different, perhaps because it is told from the invaders point of view.

"Steamsuit" by David J. Fortier deals first of all with the old idea that women cannot take on roles reserved for men. Secondly it looks at stewardship of

one's planet, as the aliens are here to exchange polluted water for fresh. "Fingers of Steam, Veins of Gold" by Brad Hafford is written in the form of letters to his sister by a young man participating in the Alaskan Gold rush. Accompanied by a steam powered mechanical man, he is determined to strike it rich.

Also worthy of mention is "Heart of the Empire" by Jason Palmatier. This tale takes the idea of steam powered technology to extremes. The central character's heart has been replaced by a steam powered substitute, and his ship not only steams along the Thames, but goes ashore, supported and propelled by paddlewheels.

On the whole, this was an interesting and engrossing read. This reviewer enjoyed the variety of ways in which the different authors approached the basic idea behind the stories.

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