

THE YEAR IN NOVELLAS

All fiction lengths have their beauty. The novel allows for extensive world building, subplots, and multiple complex characters. The best novelettes and short stories are like polished jewels. They limn characters, settings, and plots, but perhaps not all at once, and certainly with far fewer tangents and meandering paths. At its interstitial span, the novella is able to borrow from all these art forms. The past year brought us an excellent trove of tales, and I could devote editorials to each category. Alas, I don't have enough space to discuss each of the abundant short stories and novelettes that filled *Asimov's* pages. Due to their longer word count, I can never run as many novellas. Ringing in at nine, however, 2015 has been a banner year for that length. It's well worth reflecting on each of these impressive stories.

January brought us Allen M. Steele's "The Long Wait." This was the last tale in his Arkwright cycle to take place on Earth. The series ended in April/May with "The Children of Gal"—an open-ended story about life on a new planet. Reviewing the author's work in *Locus*, Gardner Dozois said, "Allen M. Steele wraps up his Arkwright sequence . . . in good form . . . well told in a traditionally satisfactory manner." Allen's stories, which are often filled with adventure and always peopled with relatable characters, have been very popular with *Asimov's* readers. Indeed, a previous Arkwright story, "The Legion of Tomorrow" (July 2014) was the winner of last year's Readers' Award.

February brought us something rather different—the nightmarish and almost surreal "On the Night of the Robo-Bulls and Zombie Dancers" by Nick Wolven. In a land of the sleepless, this lawless journey from New York City's Wall Street to somewhere in the Seventies, though a much shorter trip, reminded me of Roger Zelazny's *Damnation Alley*. Reviewing it on his blog, British author Alistair Reynold's said "the story itself is magnificent, one of the best I've read in quite a while. It's a kind of Conradian Heart of Darkness/Apocalypse Now-type quest." He added that the tale was "a tour de force of sustained, high-energy invention, and some quite phenomenal writing." Sam Tomaino of *SFR* *Revu* agreed, saying the story will "be on my Hugo short-list for 2015 Novellas!"

Another of Sam's favorites was "Inhuman Garbage" by Kristine Kathryn Rusch, which appeared in our March issue. In his review, Sam said it would be another novella for his Hugo Short list. He added, "We get some surprising revelations in a story rich with intrigue mixed with science fiction and police procedural. Rusch is so good at this sort of thing." In *Locus*, Gardner said, "Rusch shows the chops she developed wearing her other hat as a mystery writer, and expertly handles the investigation. . . . It would be possible to imagine someone shrugging and saying to the disillusioned detective, 'It's Chinatown—except on the Moon.'"

In addition to Allen's final Arkwright story, April/May also featured a novella by Eugene Fischer. "The New Mother" is about a reporter investigating a disease that renders men sterile and causes infected women to become pregnant through parthenogenesis. Reviewing the tale for *www.Tor.com*, Amal El-Mohtar said, "I'm astounded by this story, by its elegant, thoughtful thoroughness: every character Tess encounters is fully formed, complex, no one of them limited to their narrative function. . . . The story's richness isn't only in its concept: it's in the characters, who, at novella-length, really have room to move and shine, but who are revealed in tight, controlled, beautiful ways. . . . There are sentences so understated in their prose and so resonant in their meaning that I was reminded of Terry Bisson."

July brought us an intriguing story of betrayal, romance, and the effect of time travel on alien reproduction by Derek Künsken. "Pollen from a Future Harvest" is set in the same universe as Derek's earlier, Readers'-Award-winning novelette "The Way of the Needle" (March 2012). Gardner commented that, "the novella also gets high marks from me for featuring another set of really alien aliens."

As I write this, it's a bit too soon for reviews of the novellas from the latter part of 2015. In August, another Readers'-Awards'-winner, Will McIntosh, spun a suspenseful tale of human survival in the wake of a massive asteroid impact as well as a deadly alien invasion. "A Thousand Nights Till Morning" is a nail biter from beginning till end. We ran the longest novella of the year in our October/November issue. Aliette de Bodard's "Citadel of Weeping Pearls" is set in the same far future as earlier tales such as "Memorials" (January 2014) and "Shipbirth" (February 2011). This is another complex story with a large cast of characters whose interweaving tales reveal secrets about a society on the brink of war. As in Derek's novella, the story also examines some unusual consequences of time travel.

Our current issue features the last novella of the year. Greg Egan's submission of "The Four Thousand, the Eight Hundred" arrived just as I was going off to jury duty. Although I spent the entire day awaiting a call to voir dire that never came, the time wasn't wasted. Indeed, as I read this riveting tale about the costs of a civil war on Vesta, I scarcely noticed that time was passing. Once again, an author makes use of the novella form to build multifaceted characters and to layer in hard scientific details. I won't say anymore, because I don't want to include spoilers, but I do envy you this first opportunity to read Greg's compelling story.

I'm quite proud of *Asimov's* rewarding year in novellas. Filling out next month's Readers' Awards ballot will probably be a challenge. Yet, a dilemma caused by hours of excellent reading is a happy one. Thanks are owed to these authors for letting us showcase their tales. We look forward to the stories that 2016 will bring our way.