



Galactic Empires

Neil Clarke (Editor) , Paul McAuley (Contributor) , Ann Leckie (Contributor) , Gwendolyn Clare (Contributor) , Brandon Sanderson (Contributor) , Greg Egan (Contributor) , John Barnes (Contributor) , Aliette de Bodard (Contributor) , more... Neal Asher (Contributor) , Paul Berger (Contributor) , Yoon Ha Lee (Contributor) , Tobias S. Buckell (Contributor) , Robert Silverberg (Contributor) , Kristine Kathryn Rusch (Contributor) , Robert Charles Wilson (Contributor) , John G. Hemry (Contributor) , Ken Scholes (Contributor) , Robert Reed (Contributor) , Ruth Nestvold (Contributor) , Steve Rasnic Tem (Contributor) , Melinda Snodgrass (Contributor) , Naomi Novik (Contributor) , Ian McDonald (Contributor) ...less

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“Over all this anthology is mostly hits, remarkably few misses. Highly recommended.”—N.K. Jemisin, *New York Times Book Review*

Neil Clarke, publisher of the award-winning *Clarkesworld* magazine, presents a collection of thought-provoking and galaxy-spanning array of galactic short science fiction.

From E. E. "Doc" Smith's *Lensman*, to George Lucas' *Star Wars*, the politics and process of Empire have been a major subject of science fiction's galaxy-spanning fictions. The idiom of the Galactic Empire allows science fiction writers to ask (and answer) questions that are shorn of contemporary political ideologies and allegiances. This simple narrative slight of hand allows readers and writers to see questions and answers from new and different perspectives.

The stories in this book do just that. What social, political, and economic issues do the organizing structure of "empire" address? Often the size, shape, and fates of empires are determined not only by individuals, but by geography, natural forces, and technology. As the speed of travel and rates of effective communication increase, so too does the size and reach of an Imperial bureaucracy. *Sic itur ad astra*—"Thus one journeys to the stars."

At the beginning of the twentieth century, writers such as Kipling and Twain were at the forefront of these kinds of narrative observations, but as the century drew to a close, it was writers like Iain M. Banks who helped make science fiction relevant. That tradition continues today, with award-winning writers like Ann Leckie, whose 2013 debut novel *Ancillary Justice* hinges upon questions of imperialism and empire.

Here then is a diverse collection of stories that asks the questions that science fiction asks best. Empire: How? Why? And to what effect?

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Galactic Empires Details

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From Reader Review Galactic Empires for online ebook

Glen says

I won this book in a goodreads drawing.

This is a pretty good anthology featuring tales about galactic empires. Most of them are pretty good.

Stephen says

Years ago I read a two volume anthology with the same title edited by Brian Aldiss (which Clarke references in his introduction) that still remains on my bookshelf along with a multitude of other books garnered from a 30 year membership in SFBC. Memories of the collection made grabbing the Kindle edition of Neil Clarke's anthology of the same name and theme a no brainer and the quality of the stories made me glad I did.

Certainly there is some variability but there really isn't a story without merit in the bunch. Standouts include "A Cold Heart" by Tobias Bucknell, "Seven Years from Home" by Naomi Novak, "Slow Night's Poison" by Ann Leckie, "Riding the Crocodile" by Greg Egan and "The Lost Princess Man" by John Barnes. I generally keep a couple of short story anthologies on my night stand or in the Kindle for those days or nights when I just need a quick shot of science fiction and I don't have the stamina to dive into a novel.....this is one the best single themed anthologies I've kept around for that purpose.

Lindsay says

An amazing anthology of space opera SF with an amazing scope.

I've included my thoughts on each of the short stories in my updates while reading this over the last few months, but I should call out some favorites.

"All the Painted Stars" by Gwendolyn Clare is a strong story of a really alien creature falling in with a Star Trek-like human crew and engaging with them. A very cool perspective on a story that's been done before, but made quite fresh by the conceit.

"The Waiting Stars" by Aliette de Boddard. Amazing story and I can see why it did well at the awards. To describe it is to spoil it, but I strongly recommend it.

"The Impossibles" by Kristine Kathryn Rusch. A much smaller scope than most of the stories of this volume, this one deals with a lawyer in the toughest court in the galaxy as part of this author's Retrieval Artist universe. I need to read more of these.

"Seven Years From Home" by Naomi Novak. One of the stronger critiques of the machineries of empire in this book. The biotech is stunning.

Anna Tan says

I haven't had the greatest track record of picking good anthologies to read. Most of them garner something like a 3-star rating; a mixed up kind of meh. I'm also rather picky about my science fiction. Too hard and I get bored, too soft and it often gets too romantic for me.

What Neil Clarke has done here is create a collection that hits just the right spot with the right balance. Obviously, everything is galactic - whether it's a human-settled planet, or humans somewhere in space, or even no humans at all, just aliens - and based around empires - some benign, some conquering, others falling apart. Multispecies, multiracial, multigendered; nothing ever exactly fitting in our earthly constraints, every story mindblowing in its own way.

The only drawback of this anthology is that it takes an extremely long time to get through. This is mainly because each story is a novella in its own right but also because you can't just sit down and power through the whole thing. You need time and space in between each achingly beautiful story to just rest and let your emotions finish unfurling (and your brain to stop internally squealing) before you launch yourself headlong into the next adventure.

*Note: I received a digital ARC of this book in exchange for an honest review via Edelweiss.

Mayank Agarwal says

I have just read two of the stories on offer and both had a very different feel to it, one was boring the other amazing.

“Night’s Slow Poison” by Ann Leckie (1/5)

While it’s set in the same universe as that of Ancillary Justice series of Ann Leckie, there is really no connection with the series. This short story was clumsy, felt deliberately made difficult to read. The world making had potential but being a short story it was not explored, instead, we get a very run down human drama.

“Seven Years from Home” by Naomi Novik (5/5)

Wow, loved it, even for a short story, it’s got amazing world building, lots of social-political questions and rights and wrongs of Imperialism and what really is enlightenment. It’s not a dull story, full of fast-paced events and ingenious military actions, an industrially advance urban civilization vs a biotech rural civilization.

Margaret says

Themed anthologies offer a special opportunity. Get one on a subject you really like. Read the stories by the authors you already know & love.

THEN read the rest of the stories. You won't necessarily care for all of them. But the chance of discovering a new or even multiple new authors is high and definitely worth taking!

I've always dearly loved space opera and I especially like stories set in imperial worlds. So Galactic Empires

was indeed a prime opportunity for me!

Ann Leckie, Tobias S. Buckell, Robert Silverberg, Kristine Kathryn Rusch, Melinda Snodgrass, and Naomi Novik were authors I had already been reading and enjoying.

Gwendolyn Clare, Aliette de Bodard, and Ruth Nestvold were brand new to me and terrific discoveries!

I also enjoyed Paul J. McAuley, Brandon Sanderson, Neil Asher, Yoon Ha Lee, John G. Hemry for the first time.

Overall, I strongly recommend Galactic Empires, edited by Neil Clarke to any space opera sf readers who also enjoy stories about empires!

Joy says

7.5

Eduardo says

I liked the following stories (about 45 % of the total; there are 22 stories in the anthology):

Winning Peace = 4

Night's Slow Poison = 3

All the Painted Stars = 5

Firstborn = 3

Riding the Crocodile = 3

The Colonel Returns to the Stars = 4

The Impossibles = 4

Section Seven = 4

Looking Through Lace = 3

A Letter from the Emperor = 5

Seregil of Rhiminee says

Originally published at Risingshadow.

Do you enjoy reading science fiction stories about galactic empires? Are you fascinated by visits to distant planets? Or are you perhaps interested in imaginative space opera stories? If you answered "yes" to all of these questions, Galactic Empires will be of interest to you, because it will entertain and thrill you in various ways.

Galactic Empires (edited by Neil Clarke) is an ambitious and impressive anthology of science fiction stories about galactic empires. It offers readers magnificent glimpses into different kinds of empires and allows readers to immerse themselves in fascinating stories. It's a gorgeous display of good storytelling and fantastic imagination, and it serves as a guide to what kind of galactic empires can be found in modern science fiction stories.

Neil Clarke has done an excellent job with this anthology, because he has gathered entertaining, intelligent and well written stories that showcase the versatility of galactic empire stories. Each of the stories emphasises different aspects of the genre in a compelling way, because readers will have an opportunity to read about humans in space, humans on distant planets, great empires, aliens and many other fascinating things.

As the editor mentions in his introduction, Star Wars is probably the first thing that comes to mind when people think about empires. However, there's much more to galactic empires than Star Wars, because they have existed for a long time in science fiction and the earliest stories were written decades ago. There are many kinds of empires that greatly differ from each other - for example, they can be small or great, benevolent or hostile - but there's one thing that unites them: they're all fictional empires that have their own laws and customs.

What makes Galactic Empires excellent and worth reading is that it has something for everybody. Whether you're an experienced science fiction reader or a newcomer to science fiction, you'll find something to love in this anthology. It doesn't disappoint readers, but holds them captivated by exciting happenings, fantastic sights and vistas, hard-boiled realism and good characterisation.

This anthology contains the following stories:

- Winning Piece - Paul J. McAuley
- Night's Slow Poison - Ann Leckie
- All the Painted Stars - Gwendolyn Clare
- Firstborn - Brandon Sanderson
- Riding the Crocodile - Greg Egan
- The Lost Princess Man - John Barnes
- The Waiting Stars - Aliette de Bodard
- Alien Archeology - Neal Asher
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All of these stories contain different themes and issues that are explored in a nuanced and engaging way. I found it intriguing how widely the themes ranged all the way from alien encounters and travelogues to space battles and family issues. These themes are explored entertainingly, because the authors have managed to write stories that easily capture the reader's interest in them (some of the stories are thought-provoking in the best possible way).

It's great that the authors emphasise different things in their stories, because there are many kinds of galactic empires and each of them is unique and original. Each of the galactic empires reflects the author's personal interests in science fiction. Although certain galactic empires may seem to appear similar in many ways, there are several details and nuances that separate them from each other.

Here are a few words about the stories (without spoilers) and my thoughts about them:

Winning Piece - Paul J. McAuley:

- A story about Carver White, a post-interstellar war prisoner escape and a kind of a treasure hunt.
- The author writes well about Carver, his brother Jarred and what has happened to them.
- I liked this story a lot and found it interesting.

Night's Slow Poison - Ann Leckie:

- This story is set in the same setting as the author's Ancillary Justice and tells of a galactic voyage, a spaceship and its passengers.
- An interesting and well written story that adds a bit of additional flavour to the author's science fiction series. I think that readers who have read the author's Imperial Radch novels will find this story especially interesting.

All the Painted Stars - Gwendolyn Clare:

- This is an excellent first contact story that has been written through the eyes of an alien being who encounters humans.
- I consider Gwendolyn Clare to be an author to watch, because she writes good fiction.
- I enjoyed this story, because it's an entertaining and a bit different kind of a science fiction story.

Firstborn - Brandon Sanderson:

- A story about Dennison Crestmar who is the son of High Duke Sennion Crestmar and the younger brother of Varion Crestmar. A lot is expected from Dennison, but he has no talents for war, because he is not a good leader (people think that he's an idiot).
- This was my first foray into the author's science fiction stories, because I had only read his epic fantasy stories.
- I found the characterisation to be satisfyingly complex in this story.
- An excellent and entertaining story that reminded me a bit of L.E. Modesitt Jr.'s stories.

Riding the Crocodile - Greg Egan:

- In this story, Leila and Jasmin, who have been married for a long time, begin to contemplate death and want to attempt to do something grand and audacious. They decide to observe the Aloof who have maintained their isolation and silence for many years.
- An interesting and well written story.

The Lost Princess Man - John Barnes:

- A well written story about a conman called Aurigar who is interested in the lost princess scam and is very good at it (he convinces a woman that she's a lost member of a royal family).

- This is one of my favourite stories in this anthology, because it's very entertaining.
- I haven't read many stories by John Barnes, but if all of them are as good as this one, I definitely have to take a look at them.

The Waiting Stars - Aliette de Bodard:

- A brilliant and beautifully written story about the Viet Dai, the Mind-ships and girls in an orphanage.
- This story takes place in the author's Xuya universe.
- This is one of the best stories in this anthology, because it's something a bit different. I enjoyed the author's way of writing about the characters and cultural issues.
- I highly recommend this story to everyone who loves well written science fiction, because it's an excellent story.

Alien Archeology - Neal Asher:

- A well written and complex story about what happens when a criminal called Jael robs a man called Rho and nearly kills him.
- This story takes place in the author's Polity universe.
- I enjoyed the author's vision of the future, body modifications and cyborgs.
- I think that science fiction readers will find this story very intriguing, because it showcases the author's range of imagination.

The Muse of Empires Lost - Paul Berger:

- In this story, Jemmi has the ability to bend other people's minds to her will. Jemmi meets another person who has the same ability.
- I found the atmosphere interesting and enjoyed how the author told the story.
- An excellent story.

Ghostweight - Yoon Ha Lee:

- A story about a girl called Lisse in a conquered and ruined world called Rhaion. Lisse is accompanied by a ghost.
- I loved the author's way of evoking a sense of a lost and ruined world, because his descriptions highlighted the atmosphere in a perfect way.
- An excellent and wonderfully written story that deserves to be read by science fiction readers.

A Cold Heart - Tobias S. Buckell:

- A story about a mercenary called Pepper whose memories have been stolen by the alien Satrapi.
- I enjoyed reading about the protagonist and what he did.
- An interesting story.

The Colonel Returns to the Stars - Robert Silverberg:

- In this story, a retired colonel is called back to duty for a new mission.
- I haven't read many stories by Robert Silverberg, so I can't compare this story to his other stories, but I found it interesting and enjoyed it. I intend to take a closer look at the author's stories, because this story intrigued me.

The Impossibles - Kristine Kathryn Rusch:

- A story about Kerrie who works in the public defender's office at the Interspecies Court.
- This story is set in the author's Retrieval Artist series.
- The author touches on such themes as victory and loss in an interesting way.
- An intriguing story that made me curious about the author's series (I intend to read the series, because I liked this story).

Utriusque Cosmi - Robert Charles Wilson:

- In this story, Carlotta, who was once a human, revisits her younger self. When she was young, she lived on Earth and had to make a decision of staying and facing a death or leaving her body behind and going to the stars.
- This delicate story is a fascinating exploration of faith and the end of the world.
- I have to mention that I'm a big fan of Robert Charles Wilson's novels, because he has never disappointed me with his fiction. Unfortunately, I'm not very familiar with his short fiction, because I've mostly read his novels. It was great to notice that this story was just as good as his novels.
- I highly recommend this story to those who love beautifully written and thoughtful science fiction.

Section Seven - John G. Hemry:

- In this story, Foster - posed as a sales professional - arrives in Valentia, because he has an assignment there.
- This is a relatively short, but very good story.
- An interesting story that will intrigue fans of the author's fiction.

Invisible Empire of Ascending Light - Ken Scholes:

- This is an especially interesting piece of science fiction, because it's a slightly different kind of a look at what it means to become successor to the throne.
- The author writes well about Tana Berrique and her difficult task.
- This story has a fascinating theological feel to it.

The Man with the Golden Balloon - Robert Reed:

- This well written story about secrets and exploration is set in the same world as the author's Ship novels.
- I haven't read Robert Reed as widely as I would've liked to do, but I'll soon take a look at his novels, because I found this story fascinating.
- I think that many science fiction readers will enjoy this story.

Looking Through Lace - Ruth Nesvold:

- A fascinating story about xenolinguist Dr. Toni Donato and her assignment on Christmas. Toni tries to understand the culture and immerses herself in her work.
- The author writes well about Toni and how she tries to figure things out.
- I enjoyed reading this complex and intelligent story, because it had a feel of mystery to it.
- When I read this story, it immediately became one of my favourite stories in this anthology, because it's excellent.

A Letter from the Emperor - Steve Rasnic Tem:

- This story is one of the highlights of this anthology, because the author evokes feelings of loneliness and regret in a touching way. In this story, an old man, who awaits a letter from the emperor, claims to have known the emperor and says that he served with him when he was young.
- I found this story interesting and enjoyed the characterisation.
- An excellent and well written story.

The Wayfarer's Advice - Melinda Snodgrass:

- In this fascinating story, Princess Mercedes is awakened from deep coma.
- I liked this story very much, because the author writes fluently about many things and pays attention to details.
- Unfortunately, I haven't had an opportunity to read many stories by Melinda Snodgrass yet, but after reading this story I can say that her fiction has found a place on my reading list.

Seven Years from Home - Naomi Novik:

- This is an excellent and fascinatingly written story about a woman, Ruth Patrona, who is on an assignment from her government and travels to a warring planet where she ends up getting involved in the local war.
- It was interesting for me to read this science fiction story, because I was only familiar with Naomi Novik's fantasy series (Temeraire). I was positively surprised to find out that the author writes nuanced science fiction.
- One of the best things about this story is that it features sufficiently detailed worldbuilding.
- I believe that this story will be of special interest to those who have read the author's fantasy series, because it's something different.

Verthandi's Ring - Ian McDonald:

- A magnificent story about intergalactic battles and future cultures.
- If you're not familiar with such terms as space opera and galactic empire, this story will give you a taste of them.
- This is an excellent and fitting final story to this anthology, because it's epic and memorable.

I have nothing bad to say about any of these diverse stories, because I found all of them interesting. I enjoyed reading them, because each of the authors had their own vision of galactic empires. The authors explored many themes and issues ranging from loneliness and isolation to war and different cultures in their own way and paid attention to details.

Although I enjoyed all of the stories, I was especially impressed by Brandon Sanderson's "Firstborn", Greg Egan's "Riding the Crocodile", John Barnes' "The Lost Princess Man", Aliette de Bodard's "The Waiting Stars", Neal Asher's "Alien Archeology", Paul Berger's "The Muse of Empires Lost", Ken Scholes' "Invisible Empire of Ascending Light", Ruth Nesvold's "Looking Through Lace", Steve Rasnic Tem's "A Letter from the Emperor", Melinda Snodgrass' "The Wayfarer's Advice", Naomi Novik's "Seven Years from Home" and Ian McDonald's "Verthandi's Ring". In my opinion, these stories stood out among the other stories, because they were fascinating and well written stories.

I want to mention separately that Robert Charles Wilson's "Utriusque Cosmi" and Yoon Ha Lee's "Ghostweight" deserve all the praise they get, because they're beautifully written stories. They're something different and deeply compelling for those who love thoughtfully written stories (there's a literary feel to them that I find mesmerising). In my opinion, these stories alone are reason enough to read this anthology.

I think it's good to mention that some of the stories in this anthology are connected to the authors' novels and their long-running series. If you're familiar with their novels, you may understand certain things better, but knowledge about them is not necessary, because these stories can be read as standalone stories. (I'll also briefly mention that all of the stories have previously appeared elsewhere.)

I can honestly say that it's been a while since I've read a science fiction anthology that is as good and diverse as this one. I was fascinated by the epic scope of some of the stories and was intrigued by how well the authors wrote about what the protagonists experienced in space and on planets and how they handled difficult situations. The complex characterisation in some of the stories appealed strongly to me, because I enjoy good characterisation.

Galactic Empires is an anthology that is worth reading and praising, because it's a fantastic glimpse into what galactic empires are like and what can happen in them. If you're looking for something exciting, intelligent and captivating to read, you should consider reading this anthology, because it's one of the best and most captivating science fiction anthologies of the year.

Highly recommended!

Geoff says

A pretty good anthology. I read 15 of the stories, really liked 5 of them. The stories I didn't read were either novella length (I'd prefer my short fiction to be something I can read in one sitting) or didn't catch my interest quickly enough.

Favourites:

Ann Leckie - Night's Slow Poison
Brandon Sanderson - Firstborn
John G Hemry - Section Seven
Steve Tem - Letter from the Emperor
Melinda Snodgrass - Wayfarer's Advice

Justine says

Overall this is a pretty solid anthology, with a few misses and some really excellent hits. My favourite of the collection was Seven Years from Home by Naomi Novik, but there were several others that really stuck with me. I have listed each story below with my impressions noted down as I read them.

Winning Peace by Paul J. McAuley - Quite a bit of worldbuilding and character packed into a short story. Never underestimate the value of a good story.

Night's Slow Poison by Ann Leckie - A story from a point of view outside the Radchaai giving another piece of the world of Imperial Radch.

All the Painted Stars by Gwendolyn Clare - A lovely story of profound transformation and renewal of purpose.

Firstborn by Brandon Sanderson - Enjoyable if somewhat unbelievable premise, although it felt like epic fantasy pushed into an SF setting.

Riding the Crocodile by Greg Egan - Wonderful creative worldbuilding but a somewhat anti-climatic conclusion to a rather long and detailed story.

The Lost Princess Man by John Barnes - Entertaining characters in this story of a con man who finds out one of his cons was actually the real deal.

The Waiting Stars by Aliette de Bodard - A different take on the idea of sentient ships and the notion of control. An excellent example of short story craft.

Alien Archeology by Neal Asher - Not a bad story, but even with it being very long and detailed there is no sense of completeness to it. This felt more like an excerpt from a novel rather than a piece of self-contained short fiction.

The Muse of Empires Lost by Paul Berger - An ancient being fails to recognise the power of a young girl and her devotion to the sentient orbital she calls home.

Ghostweight by Yoon Ha Lee - Written in an appealing and organic feeling style that made me think I should give Ninefox Gambit a try.

A Cold Heart by Tobias S. Bucknell - An altered human is willing to do whatever it takes to retrieve his memories. Bucknell makes this story feel more personal by writing in the second person.

The Colonel Returns to the Stars by Robert Silverberg - A lot of worldbuilding, backstory, and exposition had me expecting something more than it delivered by the end.

The Impossibles by Kristine Kathryn Rusch - An interesting courtroom drama story set in the Retrieval Artist universe. One of my favourites in this anthology.

Utriusque Cosmi by Robert Charles Wilson - A unique story about the cycle of memory and nature of existence. *"I'm at the end of all things, which is really just another beginning."*

Section Seven by Jack Campbell (John G. Hemry) - A neat little socioeconomic black ops story. *"...there are other ways than brute force to increase the price and trouble of non-conformity..."*

Invisible Empire of Ascending Light by Ken Scholes - This one felt a bit incomplete to me for some reason. The writing was fine, but the story just didn't catch me.

The Man With the Golden Balloon by Robert Reed - Old and powerful aliens work inexplicable schemes across unimaginable lengths of time and space. I appreciated what Reed is trying to do, but thought it needed just a tiny bit more connective resolution at the end.

Looking Through Lace by Ruth Nestvold - Excellent story about how perceptions about gender affect understanding. I loved this story, with a feel that reminded me of Dark Orbit by Caroline Ives Gilman.

A Letter from the Emperor by Steve Rasnic Tem - I can sort of appreciate what the author was trying to do, but I found this one rather disjointed and hard to follow.

The Wayfarer's Advice by Melinda Snodgrass - The title refers to the chapter, Wayfarer's All, from The Wind in the Willows (one of my favourite parts of that book), where the advice is given: *"Take the Adventure, heed the call, now ere the irrevocable moment passes!"* A predictably wistful story, but no less enjoyable for that. I loved this one.

Seven Years from Home by Naomi Novik - A sad and horrifying story of Imperialism by duplicity and stealth that is reminiscent of the film Avatar. Novik's gift for prose makes this a fantastic read: *"I will not see my sisters again, whom I loved. Here we say that one who takes the long midnight voyage has leaped ahead in time, but to me it seems it is they who have traveled on ahead. I can no longer hear their voices when I am awake. I hope this will silence them in the night."*

Verthandi's Ring by Ian McDonald - Honestly I had to skim through the last part of this one. Too plotless and stream of consciousness-y for my taste.

John says

I'm a tough sell on collections, as the quality or interest of the contents are always variable. This one comes in about average: I'd give an "A" rating to "Winning Peace," "Alien Archeology" (with an extra "Penny Royal and prador, ugh"), "The Impossibles," and "Looking Through Lace." On the other hand, "Verthandi's Ring" and "The Colonel Returns to the Stars" were bores, "Utriusque Cosmi" was a scenario, not a story---and "The Man with the Golden Balloon," "Invisible Empire of Ascending Light," "Ghostweight," "The Waiting Stars," "Riding the Crocodile," and "Night's Slow Poison" were exercises in inscrutability. The rest seemed...competently crafted.

John B. says

3.5 Stars rounded up. This is a collection of science fiction short stories with the common thread being empire. The rating reflects the overall quality of the stories, not any single story. My purpose for reading a short story collection was two-fold. The topic of empires is intriguing. I wanted to sample the contemporary writing of authors who have been recognized for their work in the hopes that I might discover a new author to read.

Far and away my favorite story in the collection is Gwendolyn Clare's All the Painted Stars. Told from the perspective of an alien, the story grabbed my imagination and presented a world from a most intriguing point of view.

Ann Leckie has a short story in this collection. The empire is the Radch familiar to readers of her Ancillary books. If I wasn't familiar with her work I think this story would have not stood out--as it is, it raises some interesting questions about other possibilities within the Ancillary universe.

The short story *Alien Archeology* by Neal Asher has piqued my interest in his writings and in the future I will probably be exploring his Polity universe.

Of all the stories in the collection, Robert Reed's *The Man with the Golden Balloon* had me thinking about what makes an empire powerful and how that power would be manifest. Philosophically he raises some

interesting arguments.

Suicide seemed to be a recurring thread running through many stories across many authors. Empires certainly have power to inflict death on their own citizens as well as the citizens of other empires. Somehow, in the future envisioned by early 21st century authors, the act of taking one's life is one of the few manifestations of free will that hasn't been surrendered to the power of empire. Yet using suicide as a literary device to add 'realism' to an otherwise fantastical story also seems to give the author an excuse to take a defeatist attitude toward empire, where the citizen has no control over their existence, instead of the much harder and more difficult story that would ensue if the protagonist were to make an effort to change the empire. Star Wars is interesting because of the rebels, not because of those who have given up their hopes and dreams to mindlessly serve the needs of the empire. Could it be that the hopes and dreams that survive the day to day monotony are what define the success or failure of the empire?

An examination of empires and their close association with death would be incomplete without finding religion somehow in the mix. Ken Scholes *Invisible Empire of Ascending Light* suggests an empire that is a religion or a religion that has become an empire--it is not clear. His story did bring to mind echoes of the Bene Gesserit from Frank Herbert's Dune.

There were some excellent stories in this collection--too many for me to highlight individually. There are several authors represented in this collection that are now on my reading radar and I hope to sample more of their work in the future.

Eliatan says

Above all, this is a book of hope. Hope that humanity can escape the gravity well of our home planet, hope that there is a place for us in the universe, hope that we will become more than just another sentient species that consumes itself to extinction.

Galactic Empires explores possibilities; futures that contain the best humanity can hope for. I read so much dystopian sci fi that it was an absolute joy to revel in the futures imagined in this collection. Even then bleakest of possibilities shout with the joy of humanities survival.

On a more practical note, the contributors to this anthology are without a doubt some of the best writers and world builders of our time. If I haven't already read their long form works, they're on my list. Short story collections like this are a brilliant way to meet new authors and discover new ideas.

Some particular favorites from the collection were All the Painted Stars by Gwendolyn Clare, Ghostweight by Yoon Ha Lee and Looking Through Lace by Ruth Nestvold. I've been paying particular attention to women writers of this genre and there is something extraordinarily special about the worlds and societies they create that has such a different flavour to the more traditional stories of empire and domination.

Jana says

Galactic Empires is an anthology, published in 2017 and edited by Neil Clarke, presenting twenty-two stories with individual publication dates ranging from 2003 to 2014. Each story features a galactic empire in some fashion, whether as the driving focus for the plot or as the background informing a character's behavior. The anthology itself covers a broad range of styles and themes, ensuring that there are sure to be at least a few stories that will capture the interest and imagination of any science-fiction fan. Due to the sheer number of stories included (and the potentially ridiculous length of the resulting review), I will not cover every single story, but instead will write briefly about a few stories which impressed me.

"Night's Slow Poison," by Ann Leckie: This story is set within Leckie's IMPERIAL RADCH universe, and can be read at seemingly any point; knowledge of the events of any of the novels isn't required. Inarakhat Kels is a watchman aboard a ship, embarking upon what should be a completely ordinary journey through protected space surrounding his homeworld. A chance encounter with one of the passengers brings up memories of his youth, and though he knows he shouldn't, Kels forms a connection with the stranger, with unforeseen results. I've read "Night's Slow Poison" before, and was glad to see it included here, since it's an excellent story about the ways in which old hurts can reach forward and affect one's present life in unexpected ways, no matter how far one tries to escape them.

"All the Painted Stars," by Gwendolyn Clare: Ohree, a Sheekah pilot who can interface with technology, saves some humans aboard an unfamiliar spaceship they are trying (with great difficulty) to return to its home planet and the species who created it, known as the Brights. Ohree's ship is badly damaged in the process of saving the humans, and Ohree must take refuge among them, learning their language and customs. Without a ship, Ohree's life has no purpose, though the humans may be able to provide another. "All the Painted Stars" has a melancholic air, though the ending is hopeful, and Ohree's analysis of the humans is both sympathetic and incisive.

"The Muse of Empires Lost," by Paul Berger: Jemmi, a young girl on her own in a strange town, encounters something truly remarkable: a spaceship carrying an old man lands on her homeworld. The man, Yee, has the power to direct the thoughts and actions of people around him, and has come to Jemmi's world with a singular purpose, one which Jemmi is uniquely suited to assist. Whether she will do so, however, depends on many factors. The major details of this story are revealed slowly, in careful and interesting details, and the resolution is both satisfying and dark.

"Looking Through Lace," by Ruth Nestvold: Dr. Toni Donato is the most recent addition to a first contact team on the planet of Kailazh (Christmas, to the Terrans, due to its unique topography and planetary rings). The Mejan people are reluctant to speak freely with the other members of Toni's team, all of whom are male, and Toni herself has massive difficulties crossing cultural and linguistic barriers in order to communicate meaningfully with the Mejan. As if that weren't enough, the superior member of her team, Dr. Repnik, brought bucketloads of personal prejudice to this assignment, making communication with him nearly impossible. Nestvold masterfully works linguistics and anthropology into this novella, illuminating the very real obstacles and challenges that would face any contact team. I especially appreciated that Nestvold is careful to establish that while the Mejan people are different from Terrans, those differences in society and culture do not make them inferior.

This is, as I said, only a short list of the stories in *Galactic Empires*; I highly recommend reading this anthology to see what pieces grab hold of your own imagination.

I received a free review copy of this book through the Goodreads First Reads program. This did not affect my review in any way.
