

SPECULATIVE FICTION REVIEW by Stephanie Young

TITLE *The Other Side of the Sky*
AUTHOR Arthur C. Clarke
PUBLISHER Signet
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PRINTING 1959

Précis This is a collection of 24 short stories by Clarke that have a space exploration theme. Some are very short - 3-4 pages, others are more typical and the final one is 38 pages. 12 of the stories are grouped into two very specific themes of six each. For all intents they are chapters in a longer story.

My favorites:

The Nine Billion Names of God - A computer maker is asked to supply their latest machine to a Tibetan monastery in order to compute all the names of God. When asked why the monks tell them that once they have determined all the possible names of God something amazing will happen (I don't want to spoil it). The computer reps don't believe it but the great end line is a classic.

Feathered Friend - This is the second story in *The Other Side of the Sky* section. A crewmember on the first space station smuggles a canary on board. When the bird is discovered there is much concern but in the end the bird proves its worth. A predictable but fun ending.

The Call of the Stars - The last story in the title collection is a story of reconciliation between a father and a son who takes the undesired path. Touching, with a warmth that Clarke has a unique way of capturing.

The Wall of Darkness - This is a chilling tales that kept me guessing until very near the end. It is a story of a planet where a wall represents the edge of the known world. NO one has ever returned from going beyond the wall. After expensive preparations Shervane, with the help of a friend, is going over the wall. His wondrous journey has a very unexpected result.

Security Check - A craftsman is hired by a television show to produce realistic props for their space program. The props are so good he is visited by two men in black suits who want him to come along. The twist is pure Clarke.

All that Glitters - A tale of what happens when something rare becomes as common as water.

Green Fingers - A little mystery about a botanist on the moon base who is seen sneaking off on his own, only to be found and the sad result of his secret work.

All the Time in the World - A terrific story about a criminal given a golden opportunity to score big but in the end finding out his gain is fruitless. This story is a great twist on the concept of time control.

The Star - Another Clarke classic that suggests a relationship between a supernova and a historical event on Earth. This story is a great example of the range of Clarke storytelling talent.

What I liked The concise storytelling that is a Clarke hallmark, the great twist endings on many of the stories that you don't see coming, and the emotion that he brings to the simple stories helps me understand why he is so popular.

What I didn't like The only thing I didn't like was the last story - *The Songs of Distant Earth*. Maybe didn't like is too strong, actually I just found it too long for what the story conveyed. Otherwise this a great collection.

Final Comments This is the second collection of shorts I have read by Clarke and I am impressed by his writing style and power. Some of the best stories are only a thousand words or so but he manages to convey so much in that length. I am glad that so much of his work is still available and I can see that I will have to read more of Mr. Clarke in the future.

Rating 