



Speculative Fiction Book Review

Book Title	Through Shadows
Author	Numerous, edited by PS Livingstone
Date	September 2021
Stars	★★★★★

The short story is a bastard of a thing to write. The reason lies in its title, that word 'short'.

Short stories have different rules to novels. It's not about stopping the story earlier. Stephen King (inevitably!) sums it up best, in my opinion. *'A short story is a different thing all together – a short story is like a kiss in the dark from a stranger.'* (Keep that in mind if you ever meet him.)

But Edgar Allen Poe defines it. *'A short story must have a single mood and every sentence must build towards it.'*

The winning entries in the **QuaranCon short story competitions for 2020 and 2021** succeed in capturing a mood and building towards it. They succeed brilliantly. Each one explores an apocalyptic scenario, fitting for an event initiated by a pandemic lockdown. I'm not going to sum up each story, it defeats the point of a short story's impact. Instead I want to highlight a couple of examples where that outcome was captured, hopefully without giving much away.

I'm going to begin with **Liam Hogan's 'Re-Boot'**. It's the final story in the collection and it deserves this location. It is a clever piece of writing in its use of history to prove a point. That impact I keep talking about is captured in its opening sentence, *'The end of the world began on Thursday the 8th of October 2026.'* The story examines us as a race and, well, we don't come out of that examination very well at all. There's a time machine involved and it reminded me of a similar observation made by HG Wells, we didn't fare very well in his story either. In 'Re-Boot' it's the wit and the wisdom of the chosen events I liked so much. It left me thinking how likely that event in 2026 could be. A chilling thought. I'm not surprised it won in 2021.

When you read **'Job Security in an Apocalypse'** by **Anela Deen**, you get a touch of déjà vu in its opening line. *'The end of the world came on a Monday afternoon.'* I loved this story for its subtlety. You don't immediately identify the narrator but that perspective offers the reader a different take on the end of the world. It proves the importance of how short stories offer a brief insight into a world we thought we knew.

In summary, stories by AM Justice, Alex McGilvery, JE Hannaford, Laura Shank and the two mentioned above, make for a wonderfully diverse collection of short stories. Each one with an impact which makes you think, that stir your soul. A collection superbly edited by PS Livingstone. I recommend this collection because it's insightful and beautifully written.