

Patterns of Orbit: Stories

Chloe N. Clark

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Patterns of Orbit is Chloe N. Clark's inimitable collection of short stories and flash fiction, in which mysterious events abound.

Herein, lakeside waves churn and tear up docks; a food scientist creates fruit that tastes of another planet; a witch sucks darkness out of bodies; and an epidemic in a space station disintegrates dead bodies to dust. In an exquisite story about Trauma Redemption Therapy, one's traumatic memory can be removed by implanting it in someone else.

Several stories take place in space or are about astronauts. In the opening story, an AI absorbs the dreams of 2,000 humans sent into space. Elsewhere, a Mars colony leaves no trace of their intrusion, not even burying their dead. And in one tale, an alien presence, *Shadows*, abducts an astrophysicist; his twin sister uses a blood-tracer to locate him in the forest.

Faint, dreamlike, pleasurable connections exist between the tales, some of which mention characters from others. A man and a woman meet at an art exhibit talking about shadows captured in astronauts' photographs—perhaps the same shadows from earlier stories. And despite the to-ing and fro-ing from space, there is a sense of psyches in stasis, lives lived in orbits. A paranoid man thinks that someone is shadowing him, but perhaps it's only his father's ghost or his own traumatic childhood. An astronaut wonders about the point of circumnavigation as she rotates through the stars. Space, indefinable and yet ubiquitous, feels distant when it is "a collection of darkness and shadows." And the poetry of the lines will steal up on audiences with its beauty.

Patterns of Orbit gathers well-crafted stories that move through the darkness of space, delivering interstellar insights about searching for lost loved ones. They are about what's uncanny in the universe and about humanity's unknowability, isolation, and existence.

ELAINE CHIEW (March / April 2023)

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