



Irregularity

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Irregularity is a collaboration between the National Maritime Museum and award-winning publisher Jurassic London: a collection of original stories from some of the most exciting voices in contemporary fiction.

Irregularity is inspired by the great thinkers of the Age of Reason - those courageous men and women who set out to map, chart, name and classify the world around them. The great minds who brought order and discipline to the universe.

Except where they didn't.

The anthology contains new stories from Nick Harkaway, Claire North, Adam Roberts, E. J. Swift, Tiffani Angus, Rose Biggin, Kim Curran, Richard de Nooy, Archie Black, Simon Guerrier, Roger Luckhurst, Henrietta Rose-Innes, James Smythe, M. Suddain and Adam Roberts. It also includes an afterword from Sophie Waring and Richard Dunn, Head of Science and Technology and Royal Museums Greenwich.

The stories are illustrated by Gary Northfield, based on imagery from the archives of the National Maritime Museum. The cover is by Howard Hardiman, showing "Resolution".

Irregularity Details

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From Reader Review Irregularity for online ebook

Alex says

The Last Escapement by James Smythe was a delightful bit of antiquarian body horror with a brutal ending. This one's worth the visit.

That said, I struggled with this collection and ultimately had to give myself permission to put it down as a failure to complete. This anthology's aimed more towards those who deeply appreciate magical realism. This is for fans of florid Victorian or literary prose plus speculative elements. I found the introductory prologue frame story tedious and the firm second person of the first story "A Game Proposition" impossible to connect with. "The Spiders of Stockholm" was definitely wandering in an interesting direction, but it just ended leaving me generally unsatisfied. What was the point? Why did knowledge destroy things? Was this some bizarre metaphor for learning as the death of wonder and innocence?

Amanda Milburn says

My enjoyment was marred by a lack of knowledge of many of the historical figures who featured in these short stories. I shall do some research and then try again - I think background is required to really 'get' most of these.

David McMahon says

Very rewarding. An excellent series of short stories with imagination and interesting ideas. First class anthology.

Justin says

<http://www.staffersbookreview.com/201...>

Elizabeth says

A really excellent collection of short pieces. Science, engineering, exploration, and historical events are all played with and subtly re-imagined for some truly weird and wonderful experiences. It's rare that I can move from one short story to another without a break between but somehow the pieces in this book just flowed perfectly.

Adrienne says

I only finished two of the stories, so in some ways I suppose this review is not as fair as it could be, but after 50 pages I felt I was wasting my time. The first story just kind of ended, the second seemed a little irrelevant, and the third made no sense at all. I need more from a short story collection, is all. I will say this, though: the writing was great. Each had its own clear voice, but each was very well-written.

Richard says

A Time Machine Disguised as an Anthology

“The history of science clearly offers rich territory for the imagination. In *Irregularity* it has inspired stories about people’s efforts, successful and unsuccessful, to know the world better and make it comprehensible, for tales about the things that prove unknowable, and the tension between order and chaos. The result is a wonderfully eclectic mix that asks questions about the boundaries of science and what we can know. But it is more than just entertainment; writing and reading fiction can help us interpret the past and come closer to it. Like all writers, historians need imagination to draw together the papers in archives and objects in museums to tell their stories. Without it, history would be little more than lists of dates and facts,” write Richard Dunn and Sophie Waring in their afterword to this fascinating anthology, published by Jurassic London in collaboration with the Royal Museums Greenwich to coincide with their exhibition *Ships, Clocks & Stars: The Quest for Longitude*.

As a contributor this anthology, I must suppress the urge to wax lyrical about the stories it contains, but I will say that I am still glowing with pride to stand among such outstanding authors, all of whom have the capacity to usher us gently into their own little time machine, before whisking us away and immersing us in the world’s and lives and histories they have chosen to reimagine. Their stories have not only enthralled me, but have also instilled an urge to delve into biographies and other works of non-fiction to learn more about the learned minds so artfully brought to life on the pages of *Irregularity*. To celebrate the efforts of my co-contributors, I will skip joyfully back through the pages of the anthology and pick a flower from each of their stories, in the hope that this colourful bouquet will tempt you to wander out into their world and make your own discoveries.

The afterimage of thousands of books hung imprinted on my eyes. It did not matter to me if each and every one was full of provable falsehoods and stupidities: any text is an image of a mind, and any mind is worthy of attention. (Nick Harkaway in the framing story of *Irregularity*)

The next thing he said gave his wherabouts away even if he hadn’t just told us: he was truly an Englishman no matter how far flung he would ever travel, for as a conversational gambit he disparaged his home weather. “Plenty worse than these climes, the weather in England. Damn rain and the drizzle.”
(from Rose Biggin’s *A Game Proposition*)

At night she brought her candle down to the floor and lay on her stomach, marvelling at the work of the spinning spiders, the flame of the candle illuminating the intricate patterns of their mysterious creations. How did they do it? How did they know the exact length of the thread required, where to send it, how to

attach it so that they might cling to any surface, however impossible?

“What will you tell me tonight, spiders?”

If she closed her eyes, she thought she heard their voices.

(from E.J. Swift's *The Spiders of Stockholm*)

I buy a medical journal, because my hand can only take so much, and I need to know where the blood in the body comes at its thickest. The concept of this seems so logical to me, now, that I can scarcely believe that I didn't see it before. To take the body – such a perfect device of itself, and practically a clock, so permanent and constant is the rhythmic beating of the heart – and to somehow infuse my escapement with it!

(from James Smythe's *The Last Escapement*)

“No man knows the precise value of such celerity!” Newton exclaimed, crossly. He had managed, without being observed by Boyle, to use his thumbnail to gouge a crescent-moon sliver from the nail of his forefinger. He was attempting, again without being observed, to manipulate this into the keyhole of the lock of his handcuff.

(from Adam Roberts's *The Assassination of Isaac Newton by the Coward Robert Boyle*)

The quiet authority in his voice, and the gravity of all the men, made me think that perhaps there was truth in Venter's story. This was, after all, a new world. Things were different here. Animals may yet exist of which Linnaeus had no knowledge, I mused. Look at the wonders they have found in New Holland: beasts with both fur and eggs.

(from Henrietta Rose-Innes's *Animalia Paradoxa*)

The cathedral will not sustain a cat. I brought one two nights ago during another of my perambulations – a great tom with a white streak down its nose. I set it beside the north-eastern wall in the crypt and it bristled and hissed, backing away from the stones, staring wild-eyed in every direction before streaking off. Today a wall beneath the south transept crumbled and the labourers shouted out, for they had discovered a cat's carcass therein, much aged and dried out.

(from Archie Black's *Footprint*)

I looked, and beheld a small island of basalt rock, barely a comma upon the unending page of the ocean, a little protrusion that reminded me of those desolate lands where nought but fungus and tawny shrub grew in the side of the cliff, and where yet on these meagre pickings survived many birds adapted to nest in crevices, and insects to feed off of the birds, and more fungus which fed off the rotting bodies of the insects, life thus finding its way in even these most desolate of places.

(from Claire North's *The Voyage of The Basset*)

And so I thundered down the tower's staircase to the Guild's quarters, where I wandered along the murky passage, rapping on several doors before I heard the fall of footsteps approaching. You can well imagine my surprise when the preparator himself opened the door, releasing a pungent draft of camphor and spirits from the room beyond and affording me a glimpse of the macabre specimens that lined the shelves like the pale and misshapen demons of some awful nightmare trapped in glass.

(from Richard de Nooy's *The Heart of Aris Kindt*)

At dinner, over which Mr. Canevin exerted himself greatly, ordering his cooks to deliver a feast far beyond our capacities to imbibe even a quarter of, I revealed that the main purpose of this lengthy journey was less concerned with matters of Jamaica and more to travel on to Port-au-Prince in order to discover the problem at the Cranache Plantation.

(from Roger Luckhurst's *Circulation*)

She made her way down the steps to stand with the vast creature, and it backed away to keep a discreet distance, snorting steam. The behaviour seemed completely natural, no different from an elephant who respects his keeper in the hope of earning a bun. The others stared in awe, but my profession demands certain instincts – and besides I was eager to ingratiate myself with the lady now I knew who she was.

“What is the next stage?” I asked.

(from Simon Guerrier's *An Experiment in the Formulae of Thought*)

Up at break of day to get away the remainder of my things; which I did by lighter at the Iron Gate. In the evening, Sir W. Pen and I did dig a pit, and put our wine in it, and I my Parmazan cheese. Pen said that talk has already turned to the French, and that the sensible amongst them have already fled home. Many rumours about the Abyss, and fancy is plentiful: that it reached out to grab a baby from his mother's arms; that it speaks in whispers – but only so you'll lean close enough that it can eat you.

(from M. Suddain's *The Darkness*)

She opens and closes the wooden arms of the device, presses the fleshy pad of her little finger against the pointed end, attempting to divine its true purpose. She runs, giggling, to find a scrap of drawing paper and uses the dividers to scratch a circle into the parchment. Uneven and imperfect. But a circle none the less. She hugs the instrument to her chest, rocking it like a baby.

(from Kim Curran's *A Woman Out of Time*)

Carl kept his disappointment to himself. He had hoped, standing in the man's private shed, for a feeling of connection to Thomas Fairchild, the longing disappeared in a breath. There was no life in the little building: no papers or a forgotten cap, no boots by the door or an old glove, its thumb worn from use. Thomas's business legacy, the nursery, had been left open and his nephew had stepped in seamlessly, as Carl could see by the number of workmen tending to the plants and trees. His other legacy lay in a dark drawer in a stone building in London.

(from Tiffani Angus's *Fairchild's Folly*)

Mieneke says

Reading *Irregularity*, Jurassic London's sixth full-length anthology and the second edited solo by Jared Shurin, was a strange reading experience, as I've read a lot of seventeenth and eighteenth century literature at university. Much of that was in the Penguin Classic editions (the ones with a black spine and a red bar at the top) and while the cover is in no way reminiscent of those, the font used for *Irregularity* really resembles the look of those editions. Add to that the fact that a lot of the stories are written in the same language and with the same sensibility as those classics and for a moment it seemed as if I'd traveled back in time to my student days. Thankfully, reading *Irregularity* in no way felt like an essay assignment, in fact it was fantastic fun.

Irregularity is clever, subversive and just so much fun. Out of fourteen stories there were only two that didn't really work for me: Rose Biggin's *A Game Proposition* and Roger Luckhurst's *Circulation*. Biggin's

story didn't sit well with me, because I had a hard time following the game and the dialogue, which made me have to reread sections several times and caused me to lose the rhythm of the story. Luckhurst's *Circulation* just didn't connect. A story of a clerk sent to San Domingue in the Caribbean to check up on one of the sugar plantations, the story is both a critique of slavery and a horror story about medical research. And I didn't really get it.

The other stories all worked really well for me though. How could I not love the grandfather paradox library in Nick Harkaway's *Irregularity*, or Simon Guerrier's Ada Lovelace creating a Victorian version of Jurassic Park, literally loosing the dinosaurs in the crystal palace? Or James Smythe's exploration of failure and its ability to drive a man insane? There are five stories I wanted to give bit more time too as they really hit it out of the park for me.

E.J. Swift - *The Spiders of Stockholm*

This amazing tale set in eighteenth century Sweden mixes the Enlightenment drive to classify things and order them with magic. In traditional secondary world fantasy magic and (mechanical) science are often exclusionary, either because magic precludes the drive to invent machinery to perform tasks humans can't or won't do, or because understanding how a thing works destroys its magic. Swift takes this latter trope and places it in our own eighteenth century and combines it with the belief that there is power in the knowledge of true names. This combination made for a bittersweet story and Swift managed to write a story about spiders that didn't give me the willies, which is a feat in and of itself.

Adam Roberts - *The Assassination of Isaac Newton by the Coward Robert Boyle*

Robert's story starts with the line: "You will excuse me if I remark," said Boyle, "how strongly I am struck by your resemblance to Brian May." After which I was properly sold on this story, no matter where Roberts was going to take it. I love me some Queen! Roberts litters this tale of a scientist desperate to speed up scientific progress with references to Queen lyrics and other classic pop songs. The most referenced and most iconic of these is *Bohemian Rhapsody* which left me to wonder whether it would age well or if in a decade or so younger readers would even get the references, but given *Bohemian Rhapsody*'s almost permanent top three spot in best of-lists perhaps this isn't that much of a worry as it would have been for say *Single Ladies*.

Richard de Nooy - *The Heart of Aris Kindt*

In the Netherlands the seventeenth century was known as The Golden Age in which our country prospered: we sailed the seven seas, we were a bastion for free expression of thought with many natural philosophers publishing their work out of the Netherlands because they were forbidden in their own country, and some of our greatest painters were active in this period. One of them was Rembrandt and it is he and his work on one of his master pieces *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* that are the focus of Richard de Nooy's story. What happens when the subject of the painting, the titular Aris Kindt starts showing some strange phenomena? And is science always more important to scientist than prestige? I loved De Nooy's smart and atmospheric story and now I want to go visit the original painting when I'm next in The Hague!

Kim Curran - *A Woman Out of Time*

It's no secret I'm a fan of Kim Curran's work, but I'd never read any short fiction by her before or non-YA work for that matter. So I was looking forward to seeing how her style and voice worked in adult short form. The answer is that it worked beautifully. I truly loved this mysterious tale of time-traveling beings – it remains unclear whether they are aliens or god-like entities – who have a decidedly patriarchal outlook on how life on Earth and its scientific development should progress and the trouble they have to go through to keep women from out-thinking and literally out-shining the men around them. It's a tale with a modern sensibility but one that fits in-between the other tales in the anthology quite harmoniously.

Tiffani Angus - *Fairchild's Folly*

One of the received wisdoms about anthologies is that they should close out with a bang and so with one of their strongest stories and Irregularity's editor Jared Shurin certainly kept to that rule with *Fairchild's Folly*. A beautiful meditation on the nature of love and humanity's unrelenting need to categorise things I really loved this last story. The structure of the story told through letters and short sections of straight narrative, flashing between several points in time within a twenty-year span was very well done and lent this relatively short story a far larger feeling and scope than its length would have the reader expect.

As I've come to expect from Jared Shurin and his small press Jurassic London, *Irregularity* is a solid anthology with impressive and fantastic stories. I really like *Irregularity*'s theme and while I wasn't as blown away by this anthology as I was by their last anthology *The Book of the Dead*, it's still a highly recommended collection of short stories. Shurin has once again gathered together a strong slate of authors, some well known, some less so, but just as talented. If you're looking for clever, intelligent and entertaining stories *Irregularity* certainly has that for you in spades.

This book was provided for review by the publisher.

Tiffani Angus says

Stories that explore the battle between order and chaos in science from 1660-1860. My story 'Fairchild's Folly' is included here!

Paul says

It's been a while since I've read an anthology and when Irregularity dropped through my letterbox it appeared that the book gods were indeed smiling on me. Fourteen new works of fiction from a plethora of genre's best and rising stars.

A Game Proposition by Rose Biggin – Four very special women meet regularly in one of Port Royal's seediest taverns. They play an intricate game whose outcome affects the events across the globe. A subtle but evocative fantasy to begin the collection.

The Spiders of Stockholm by E.J. Swift – A young girl called Eva discovers three magical spiders and the strange powers they possess to predict the future. Through her new friends, she learns the power of names and the importance a name can have.

The Last Escapement by James Smythe – An escapement is a device in mechanical watches and clocks that transfers energy to the timekeeping element. A master clockmaker becomes obsessed with the mechanics of his latest time piece. Just how far is he willing to go to perfect his creation? Descending into an almost Clive Barker-esque body horror, this was a real highlight of the collection for me.

The Assassination of Isaac Newton by the Coward Robert Boyle by Adam Roberts – Astronomy, astronomers, the nature of the universe, and a passing resemblance to Brian May. This is exactly the sort of surreal madness I've come to expect from Adam Roberts, and it doesn't disappoint.

Animalia Paradoxa by Henrietta Rose-Innes – A naturalist seeks to capture the most outlandish and obscure animals in the dark heart of Africa. Striving to document nature and all of its myriad wonders he happens upon a creature that defies categorisation.

Footprint by Archie Black – The engineer responsible for assisting Sir Christopher Wren with St Paul's cathedral is consumed by his work. Recreating one of the capital's signature buildings is a mammoth task pushing him to the limits of his own sanity and beyond.

The Voyage of the Basset by Clare North – Charles Darwin is set a very specific task to accomplish before Victoria's impending coronation. Will nature's elements and the enemies of the British Empire allow him to succeed in his endeavour or not? I loved the premise of this particular tale.

The Heart of Aris Kindt by Richard De Nooy – At the dawn of the age of reason, surgeons began to unravel the deepest darkest secrets of human anatomy. Some discoveries however are beyond anything resembling explanation.

An Experiment in the Formulae of Thought by Simon Guerrier – A young reporter is given the opportunity to meet some of the most renowned scientific figures of the age. Ada Lovelace and her fellow scientists have created something wonderful that has the potential to capture the imagination of the entire nation. The Great Exhibition is set to deliver sights never before been seen by man.

Circulation by Roger Luckhurst – Mr Fotheringham, lately of London, has travelled to the Carnache plantation in Haiti to uncover the mysteries of the region. Used to the hustle and bustle of city streets, the Caribbean islands are like a different planet to the young bookkeeper. He is ill-prepared for his meeting with the mysterious Sangatte. Another story that dances deftly round the very cusp of horror. I loved the ending and the ever-darkening tone.

The Darkness by M Suddain – Samuel Pepys and his famous diary recount the events of the Great Fire of London. In this version of events however, the fire has a distinctly darker feel. This story has a wonderfully pulpy period science fiction feel. I could happily read an entire novel based on this idea alone. I loved Theatre of the Gods and I loved this short story as well.

A Woman Out of Time by Kim Curran – Universal forces are compelled to take action when a lowly woman takes it upon herself to question the establishment and rock the intellectual boat. How dare she, a woman, make discoveries and make all her male counterparts work look pointless. In a just a handful of pages, Kim Curran dissects the gross inequalities of eighteenth century gender politics with a dry, satirical wit.

Fairchild's Folly by Tiffani Angus – A botanist's journey to create perfection and understand the nature of love. A tragically bittersweet denouement to a fantastically evocative collection

I've struggled since finishing Irregularity to adequately articulate my feelings regarding the book, there is just so much to appreciate and enjoy. After much pondering, I realised the answer was staring me in the face from the very beginning. There is a comment in the introduction by Nick Harkaway that struck a chord and perfectly sum up the fiction on display here..

"...any text is an image of a mind, and any mind is worthy of attention."

Irregularity is best viewed as exactly that, fourteen individual, impeccably formed, visions of literary minds. I'm pleased to confirm that each and every one them, and the tales they have to tell, are most definitely

worthy of your time.

Blurring the lines between science fiction and science fact, the stories in this collection all feel wonderfully apt and cover the full gamut of experience from the age of reason. Imperialism, scientific endeavour and technical innovation sit hand in hand with obsession, fantasy, philosophy, and in some cases horror. It's wonderful to uncover an anthology that delves into such lofty subject matter with such obvious gusto. To strive for perfection, to succeed or to fail – all this and more is what it is to be human and the authors featured here all know it.

Jason Scott says

I only ended up reading the Nick Harkaway and Claire North stories... well written, but this isn't my cup of tea.
