

World Science Fiction Spring 2019

Islamicates Volume 1: Anthology of Science Fiction short stories inspired from Muslim Cultures

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Preface

The academic Sherman Jackson observed that culture is frequency through which religion travels. While some people either in their naiveté or rigidity would think that culture and religion are separate and at loggerheads, it is true that one cannot have religion with a culture. All religions require a culture for their manifestation. The Islam and Science Fiction project was started in 2005. The main impetus behind the project was to fill a gap in the literature about Muslims and Islamic cultures in Science Fiction. Thus the focus is on the cultures with Muslim majorities and not necessarily the religion itself, although there is overlap between the two. It would have been more appropriate to describe the project as Islamicate Science Fiction but given that the term Islamicate, even 70 years after its coinage by Marshall Hodgson, is still largely confined to academia I decided not to use it at the time as it may cause confusion. The project has greatly evolved beyond the initial scope and has expanded to include spreading awareness, fostering and promoting Islamicate Science Fiction. The current volume, which consists of stories selected from a short story competition with Islamicate Science Fiction themes, is part of the same endeavor.

The area of Islamicate Science Fiction has not reached maturity even after more than 150 years of Science Fiction coming out of the Muslim world and after just over a decade since the inception of the Islam and Science Fiction project. In the early years of this project I co-edited an anthology of Science Fiction stories, *A Mosque Among the Stars*, with the Canadian Science Fiction author Ahmed Khan in 2008. In the span of the last eight years not enough material has come out in this sub-genre, as one would have expected. With the goal of fostering new contributions in this domain and rallying our fan base the Islamicate Science Fiction Short Story writing competition was inaugurated. Given that this is the first time that this competition was held the response to the competition was quite overwhelming, we received a total of 78 submissions. The stories presented in this volume represent the collection of best stories that were submitted to the competition and come from a diverse set of authors and story setting. It is my hope that the current volume is the inaugural issue of Islamicates Short Story Anthology and there are many more that will come in the future.

The role of speculative fiction is to imagine alternate worlds in the minds of people, to make them question the way things are and how

they could be. It is my hope that people will continue to write in the space that exists at the intersection of Islamic cultures and speculative fiction. The Islamic civilization has more than 1,400 years of history but it builds upon the experiences of civilizations that come before it. Thus there is a lot of great material that can be mined from its cultural corpus, which can be used for great storytelling. The current time period in Islamic history may seem like the dark ages but it may be something as benign as storytelling that can help us navigate the current waters and envision something different not just for Muslims but for all humankind.

The current volume is also the first one being released under the banner of Mirza Book Agency publisher, which will specialize in this genre of book. It is homage to my father from whom I have inherited a life long love of books. I wish he was here to see this volume. There are a number of people that I would like to thank for making the current volume a reality: Special thanks to the other judges of the competition, Handara Hankins, Rebecca Hankins, Ahmed Naumann and Noura Al-Nouman; all the people who generously donated to the fund raising campaign. Last but certainly not the least thanks to the community of the fans of the Islam and Science Fiction project for their loyal following. It is your kind words and support that makes this project worthwhile.

- Editor
Muhammad Aurangzeb Ahmad
Seattle, Washington, USA
Earth Prime

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