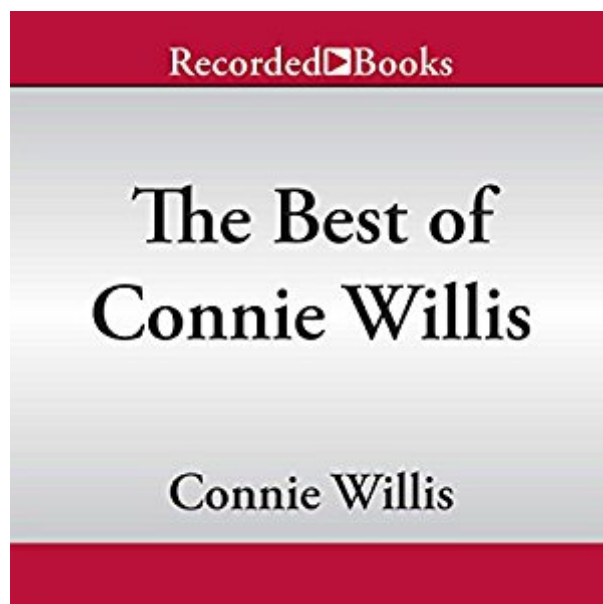


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The Best Of Connie Willis: Award-Winning Stories



Synopsis

Few authors have had careers as successful as that of Connie Willis. Inducted into the Science Fiction Hall of Fame and recently awarded the title of Grand Master by the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America, Willis is still going strong. Her smart, heartfelt fiction runs the gamut from screwball comedy to profound tragedy, combining dazzling plot twists, cutting-edge science, and unforgettable characters. From a near future mourning the extinction of dogs to an alternate history in which invading aliens were defeated by none other than Emily Dickinson; from a madcap convention of bumbling quantum physicists in Hollywood to a London whose Underground has become a storehouse of intangible memories both foul and fair. Here are the greatest stories of one of the greatest writers working in any genre today. All ten of the stories gathered here are Hugo or Nebula award winners - some even have the distinction of winning both. With a new Introduction by the author and personal afterwords to each story, plus a special look at three of Willis' unique public speeches - this is unquestionably the collection of the season, an audiobook that every Connie Willis fan will treasure, and, to those unfamiliar with her work, the perfect introduction to one of the most accomplished and best-loved writers of our time. The full list of narrators includes Graham Winton and Suzy Jackson.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I'm a fan of the "Best of" series, but how does an editor pick the best of a writer who won eleven Hugos and seven Nebulas, among other awards? Some writers are better at drama than comedy, some are better at comedy, but rare is the writer who is equally adept at both. Connie Willis is one

of the rare ones. Her range of talent -- her ability to write hilarious stories alongside stories that are sad and moving -- is on full display in this anthology. Willis excels at time travel stories, making "Fire Watch" a welcome addition to the volume. History student Bartholomew doesn't know why he's been sent to London during World War II, but he suspects he's there to keep St. Paul's Cathedral from burning down. Willis' time travel stories are often quite funny but this one is both an ironic tale of paranoia and a sad reminder that the real lessons to be learned from history are often concealed. "Fire Watch" won both the Hugo and the Nebula in 1983 and it's my favorite serious story in the anthology. A close runner-up, "The Last of the Winnebagos" (1988 Nebula, 1989 Hugo) -- a story about guilt and forgiveness that combines a mystery with a commentary on the loss of privacy -- imagines a sad world in which all the dogs have died. The other serious stories are: "A Letter from the Clearys" (1983 Nebula), in which a letter written before the nuclear war reminds a family of everything they've lost. A visitor to London notices cold winds and smells death and decay at several tube stations in "The Winds of Marble Arch" (2000 Hugo), but when he investigates the phenomenon, he comes to understand some sad truths about life.

My exposure to Connie Willis has been, primarily, through the Blackout/All Clear books which were, in turn, brought to my attention through the Nebula awards. I was fascinated by the time travel aspect, especially when it coincided with another fascination of mine - WWII stories. So, when the opportunity came to me to read some of Willis's short stories, I immediately grabbed the chance and ran with it. What I found was a mind that felt... well, like a kindred spirit to me, to borrow a favorite phrase of Anne Shirley's that Connie Willis also loved. One of the things I love about science fiction, and especially sci-fi short stories, is how everything seems completely normal at the start of the story until it suddenly is not. It could be as simple as a single word being said by the character that sets the hair on the back of my neck on edge, or a completely strange set of surroundings, or even the presence of Martians as factual creatures. All of these concepts were present, among others, in Willis's brilliant set of stories, but I want to talk in particular about one story as well as some other additions in the book that aren't fiction. First, Connie Willis did something that forever endeared her to me when she took on Emily Dickinson and, in essence, created a research paper that centered around the reclusive poet writing from her grave and the connection that it had to H.G. Wells's *War of the Worlds*. Written with humorous footnotes, research that thrilled the academic in me, and a knowledge of literature that branches through the classics (both sci-fi and literary), this story had me giggling uncontrollably and yes... even snorting with laughter a few times. The other thing this story did was make me wish I could sit down with Ms.

Reviewing this collection was a pleasure. I love Connie Willis' writing. All of it. Short stories, novels, novellas, everything. In this volume, I especially enjoyed her introduction because I had already read the stories and loved them all. Getting additional insight into how she came to write them was enormously interesting to me. Equally interesting were her list of the authors who influenced her, especially since they are the same authors who influenced me, notably (but not limited to) Shirley Jackson and Robert Heinlein. My introduction to Connie Willis was *The Doomsday Book*. Not exactly one of her lighthearted humorous books, but it was written entirely for me. I have two huge literary passions: the 14th century and time travel. *The Doomsday Book* is about time travel back to the 14th century, so I was predestined to love it. After that, I worked my way through the rest of the Cambridge Time Travel series and then ...I discovered her shorter works. *All Seated On the Ground* (included in this anthology) had me laughing so hard it woke my husband from a dead sleep to ask me what in the world was going on. This has got to be the funniest alien invasion in all of science fiction. Yet it also has a message. Willis is one of the few authors who can include a message without making you feel like someone's banging you over the head with it. It's there, not hidden, not obscure, but gently put. For your consideration. I love every story in this collection, though *All Seated On the Ground* is my favorite. *The Last of the Winnebagos* is a must-read for every science fiction fan. Honestly, every story in this collection is a must-read. These are fantastic, wonderful, elegantly written stories.

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