

Opening Paragraphs: Short stories:

I was living with a woman who suddenly began to stink. —T.C. Boyle, “Descent of Man”

There once were two little girls who saw, or believed they saw, a thing in a forest.

—A.S. Byatt, from “The Thing in the Forest”

The day that Donna and Piggy and Russ went to see the Edge of the World was a hot one. They were sitting on the curb by the gas station that noontime, sharing a Coke and watching the big Starlifters lumber up into the air, one by one, out of Toldenarba AFB. The sky rumbled with their passing.

—Michael Swanwick: “The Edge of the World”

Daniel was older than Miranda had expected. In 1970, when they had said good-bye, he had been twenty-two. Two years later he was dead, but now, approaching her with the bouncing walk which had always suited his personality so well, he appeared as a middle-aged man and quite gray, though solid and muscular.

—Karen Joy Fowler: “The Lake Was Full of Artificial Things”

Everybody else got off the train at Hell, but I figured, it’s a free country. So I commenced to make myself a mite more comfortable. I put my feet up and leaned back against the window, laid my guitar across my chest and settled in with my hat tipped down over my eyes, almost. I didn’t know what the next stop was but I knew I’d like it better than Hell.

—Andy Duncan, “Beluthahatchie”

Many years ago a little girl was given, for her fourth birthday, an antique doll’s house of unusual beauty and complexity, and size: for it seemed large enough, almost, for a child to crawl into.

—Joyce Carol Oates, “The Doll”

I had been kept alone for the better part of a week. I was fuzzy on the time because they kept a light burning in my cell and pushed my meals in through a slot in the door. The toilet hole—actually an oubliette in the floor—stank, and I was almost out of the rough paper towels that I’d been using there. The bed was hard and infested with creatures that wandered about but, mercifully, did not bite. My clothes were foul. I was at the end of my wits. Luckily I was being held captive by my own countrymen. It would have been worse if the Iraqis or al-Qaeda had gotten to me first.

—Richard Mueller: “I Am the City”

But the best evidence we have that time travel is not possible, and never will be, is that we have not been invaded by hordes of tourists from the future. --Stephen Hawking, “The Future of the Universe”

I remember now how lonely I was when I met Cross. I never let anyone know about it, because being alone back then didn’t make me quite so unhappy. Besides, I was just a kid. I thought it was my own fault.

—James

Patrick Kelly: “10¹⁶ to 1”

All Meyers wanted to know was how Kid Willette, that he'd personally educated in the ring his last two years as a trainer, had ended up dead—and not just dead, but beaten, mangled, and dismembered dead. It didn't make sense. It shouldn't have been. Nobody could put a glove on Willette unless he wanted them to. Unless he'd been bought. That was the only time he'd ever gone down. Meyers knew that better than anybody. —
Gregory Frost, "The Dingus"

Openings-Novels:

First, the Opening as Establishing Shot/Anchor

Opening ¶: “The years after the American Civil War were characterized by excess, ornamented by cults and corruptions. Calamity Jane rode her horse through Indian country, standing on her head, her tangled hair loose along the horse’s sides. Chang and Eng, P.T. Barnum’s Siamese twins, hunted boar, fathered children, and drank like the gentlemen they were. The Fox sisters held seances and secretly cracked their toe knuckles to dissemble communication from the beyond. T.P. James, a psychic/mechanic in Vermont, channeled Charles Dickens, allowing him to complete his final book, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, posthumously. Big Jim Kinelly plotted the kidnap of Abraham Lincoln’s body. Brigham Young married and Victoria Woodhull told everyone who was sleeping with whom. Football and lawn tennis had their first incarnations.”

Closing ¶: “In 1873, in the fir forests below Tacoma, Washington, a white woman with short black hair and a torn black dress stumbled into a Chinese railway workers’ camp.”

—Karen Joy Fowler, Preface *Sarah Canary*

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WE had not made landfall in more than fourteen years. One disastrous choice of a star after another. The captain viewed this string of failures as absurdly bad luck; the bishop, as divine intervention. Either way, I saw it as prelude to the captain’s downfall, which would almost certainly mean my own downfall as well.

When we detected a transmission from the world that would later be called Antioch, I sensed opportunity. But opportunity for whom? The captain, or his enemies? It was impossible to say. The captain’s position was tenuous at best, and everything was uncertain aboard the *Argonos*.

—Richard Paul Russo, *Ship of Fools*

One minute it was Ohio winter, with doors closed, windows locked, the panes blind with frost, icicles fringing every roof, children skiing on slopes, housewives lumbering like great black bears in their furs along the icy streets.

And then a long wave of warmth crossed the small town. A flooding sea of hot air; it seemed as if someone had left a bakery door open. The heat pulsed among the cottages and bushes and children. The icicles dropped, shattering, to melt. The doors flew open. The windows flew up. The children worked off their wool clothes. The housewives shed their bear disguises. The snow dissolved and showed last summer’s ancient green lawns. *Rocket summer*. The words passed among the people in the open, airing houses. *Rocket summer*. The warm desert air changing the frost patterns on the windows, erasing the art work. The skis and sleds suddenly useless. The snow, falling from the cold sky upon the town, turned to a hot rain before it touched the ground.

Rocket summer. People leaned from their dripping porches and watched the reddening sky.

The rocket lay on the launching field, blowing out pink clouds of fire and oven heat. The rocket stood in the cold winter morning, making summer with every breath of its mighty exhausts. The rocket made climates, and summer lay for a brief moment upon the land....

—Ray Bradbury: prologue to *The Martian Chronicles*

In Medias Res (in the midst of things)

At three-thirty A.M. on the night of June 5, 1992, the top telepath in the Sol System fell off the map in the offices of Runciter Associates in New York City. That started vidphones ringing. The Runciter organization had lost track of too many of Hollis' psis during the last two months; this added disappearance wouldn't do.

—Philip K. Dick, *Ubik*

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Isserley always drove straight past a hitch-hiker when he first saw him, to give herself time to size him up. She was looking for big muscles: a hunk on legs. Puny, scrawny specimens were no use to her.

—Michael Faber, *Under the Skin*

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Kaye took another drag on her cigarette and dropped it into her mother's beer bottle. She figured that would be a good test for how drunk Ellen was—see if she would swallow a butt whole.

—Holly Black, *Tithe*

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Nine months Landsman's been flopping at the Hotel Zamenhof without any of his fellow residents managing to get themselves murdered. Now somebody has put a bullet in the brain of the occupant of 208, a yid who was calling himself Emanuel Lasker.

—Michael Chabon, *The Yiddish Policeman's Union*

1st Person In Medias Res

When I wake up, the other side of the bed is cold. My fingers stretch out, seeking Prim's warmth but finding only the rough canvas cover of the mattress. She must have had bad dreams and climbed in with our mother. Of course, she did. This is the day of the reaping.

Suzanne Collins, *The Hunger Games*

I'm lurking in the shrubbery behind an industrial unit, armed with a clipboard, a pager, and a pair of bulbous night-vision goggles that drench the scenery in ghastly emerald tones. The bloody things make me look like a train-spotter with a gas-mask fetish, and wearing them is giving me a headache...

Charles Stross, *The Atrocity Archives*

One Sentence Openers (the art of the short story writer)

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The changeling's decision to steal a dragon and escape was born, though she did not know it then, the night the children met to plot the death of their supervisor.

—Michael Swanwick: *The Iron Dragon's Daughter*

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Afterwards, Thomas Blaine thought about the manner of his dying and wished it had been more interesting.

—Robert Sheckley, *Immortality, Inc.*

The sky above the port was the color of television, tuned to a dead channel.

—William Gibson, *Neuromancer*