

The Underwater Ballroom Society

Stephanie Burgis (Editor) , Tiffany Trent (Editor) , Laura Anne Gilman , Cassandra Khaw , Y.S. Lee , Jenny Moss , Patrick Samphire , Iona Datt Sharma , more... Shveta Thakrar , Ysabeau S. Wilce ...less

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Would you rather dance beneath the waves or hide your smuggled magic there? Welcome to a world of sparkling adult fantasy and science fiction stories edited by Stephanie Burgis and Tiffany Trent and featuring underwater ballrooms of one sort or another, from a 1920s ballroom to a Martian hotel to a grand rock 'n roll ball held in the heart of Faery itself.

Stories in this anthology:

Ysabeau S. Wilce, "The Queen of Life"
Y.S. Lee, "Twelve Sisters"
Iona Datt Sharma, "Penhallow Amid Passing Things"
Tiffany Trent, "Mermaids, Singing"
Jenny Moss, "A Brand New Thing"
Cassandra Khaw, "Four Revelations from the Rusalka Ball"
Stephanie Burgis, "Spellswept"
Laura Anne Gilman, "The River Always Wins"
Shveta Thakrar, "The Amethyst Deceiver"
Patrick Samphire, "A Spy in the Deep"

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
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Download and Read Free Online The Underwater Ballroom Society Stephanie Burgis (Editor) , Tiffany Trent (Editor) , Laura Anne Gilman , Cassandra Khaw , Y.S. Lee , Jenny Moss , Patrick Samphire , Iona Datt Sharma , more... Shveta Thakrar , Ysabeau S. Wilce ...less

From Reader Review *The Underwater Ballroom Society* for online ebook

A. says

I received a copy of the book for an honest review. My review (albeit late) is below. You can also read it on my blog [Once Upon A Book Blog\(ger\)](#).

A collection of stories by many fabulous and talented authors, *The Underwater Ballroom Society* focuses on one unifying theme: an underwater ballroom. From the dancing princesses, a martian female detective/spy, the fairy realm (in combination with some rock and roll, of course), to a creepy circus, you will find many fun and satisfying short reads. They will make you laugh, they will make you contemplative, and they will make you want to visit an underwater ballroom of your own.

What sparked my interest in the book was a few things. First, I loved reading the series of books by two of the authors listed, namely Stephanie Burgis (*Kat Incorrigible*, *The Dragon With a Chocolate Heart*, *Snowspelled*) and Y.S. Lee (*The Agency Series*). Second, how romantic and mysterious would plots be if they were to each feature an underwater ballroom? The stories are a must for those who love fantasy, mystery, romance, and adventure. I highly enjoyed reading *The Underwater Ballroom Society* and have now found new authors to enjoy!

The Underwater Ballroom Society takes its name from the real life story of the Witley Park "underwater ballroom" (you can read more on this via [Atlas Obscura](#) here). Through a conversation between authors Tiffany Trent and Stephanie Burgis, they sparked an idea to create a collection of stories featuring an underwater ballroom. More authors joined in the conversation, each wanting to take part in such an endeavor, thus creating the masterpiece that is now available for your reading pleasure.

In all, it was a great read that I could break into pieces due to the short story format, and now I have new authors and books to look into!

Le separatist says

I received the ARC of this collection from one of the editors, Stephanie Burgis, for review purposes. My opinion is entirely my own.

TL;DR version: I loved two of these stories, enjoyed most; the collection was centred around an idea that resulted in varied interpretations that were a pleasure to read. Some stories were less successful, but didn't ruin the overall positive impression. Recommended (with slight reservations).

When reading any collection of short stories, and particularly an edited anthology of stories from different authors, I expect to find some of the stories more to my liking than others. This was also the case with *The Underwater Ballroom Society*, and while some stories didn't particularly grip me, the strength of the ones that did was enough to make this a collection I truly enjoyed. I think any reader who enjoys variety and new voices will enjoy it as well.

The idea behind the collection is imaginative and it was a pleasure seeing all the underwater ballrooms in all their different iterations. My fandom history makes me enjoy prompt-based writing all the more, and I firmly believe a good prompt leads to interesting creative places: this collection confirms my opinion. From fairy tales to urban fantasy, to alternative magical histories to science-fictional versions of history, this collection showcases variety and imagination.

The opening story, **Ysabeau S Wilce's "The Queen of Life"**, takes on subjects that don't particularly interest me - bohemian musicians and faery abduction. However, what bought me was the perspective: one of an older woman re-evaluating her life and wanting more ("The Queen of Life" is the guitar, but it's also the protagonist who becomes one). The writing was powerful and confident, making the story and the characters convincing. I enjoyed it far more than I'd expected.

Y.S. Lee's "Twelve Sisters" comes with a content warning for "implied domestic violence". In fact, domestic violence takes center stage in this retelling of the famous fairy tale from Brothers Grimm, in which, in the aftermath of the tale's ending, the sisters need to protect their eldest from her abusive soldier husband. The outright violence is arguably not even its most disturbing element; there is some biological horror to go with it. But over all, the story had charm and the sisterly relations were a pleasure to read about.

The third story, **Iona Datt Sharma's "Penhallow Amid Passing Things"** (how beautiful is this title, by the way?) was one of my favourites in the collection, and a story that has stayed with me. This queer tale of smuggler ring with a woman leader and the dashing (woman) officer chasing them had an amazing voice and mood, and some of my (everyone's) favourite tropes ((view spoiler)). The ballroom here was not terribly ballroom-like or that significant to the story, but the worldbuilding of a disappearing magic was fascinating and full of potential for further stories which I hope Sharma will write.

Unfortunately, I didn't find **Tiffany Trent's "Mermaids, Singing"** particularly memorable. The inspiration found in history of Asian migrants to London was interesting, but the story felt squeezed in: there was far too much of it to fit into the wordcount, which resulted in fragments that felt more like summaries than part of a story (particularly the backstories, recited breathlessly). Part of it may be my dislike for carnivalesque, but I've read a few circus stories in my day, and this wasn't even one of the better ones. In addition, I found the attraction between the protagonists to be fairly bland and there were a few turns of phrase (particularly related to the young woman's Chinese heritage) that turned me off in particular.

The next story, **Jenny Moss's "A Brand New Thing"** made a mixed impression on me. The story of a young woman who is transported to an underwater ballroom where she can be more freely herself among shadows of important intellectual figures of the era felt original and interesting on a certain level: the location in time and place, in particular, but also the characterisation of bookworm, neuroatypical protagonist Eve, who was rendered very sympathetically and convincingly. At the same time, however, the same humanity wasn't afforded to other characters in the story, particularly the other female characters - her sister is the villain, understandably, but overall it feels like understanding for Eve comes only from men (view spoiler)).

The very short poetic text of **"Four Revelations from the Rusalka Ball" by Cassandra Khaw** grew on me after reading, but for a story so concerned with beauty of language and metaphor (and so proficient at making use of it), I must say this: seeing English pluralisations of Slavic nouns bothers me. "Rusalkas" takes me out of a story (and as far as I know, translations of Propp and wikipedia both recognise "rusalki").

The next text in the collection was a novella or a novелlette by **Stephanie Burgis, "Spellswept"** and another favourite. Set in the world of Burgis's *Snowspelled*, this prequel focuses on the romantic connection

between aspiring politician Amy Standish and her mentor's black sheep of a son, historian Jonathan Harwood. This story combined some gender role reversal in a familiar historical romance setting with interesting character work. And it was simply charming and pleasant to read, funny and peopled with likeable and complex characters: predictable, but enjoyable all the same. It definitely convinced me to check out *Snowspelled* soon.

I'm not sure I quite got **Laura Anne Gilman's "The River Always Wins"**, a story ostensibly about the last party organised in a club and really about the friendship between the characters and how it helps them deal with difficult issues. All the same, to me it felt squeezed, lacking the space to develop fully. I found the plot twist unsatisfying and the characters never grew on me; there was too much darkness in it and not enough space for that darkness to be explored. But I think other readers might enjoy it far more.

Shveta Thakrar's "The Amethyst Deceiver" was a fun short story about a family conflict, mushroom-y superheroes and the fight for the environment. The plot wasn't terribly complex (and the underwater ballroom felt incidental to it) but the story was fun and full of energy, just as the title suggested.

The last text in the collection, **Patrick Samphire's "A Spy in the Deep"** (set in the world of his *The Dinosaur Hunters* was also the longest, taking over approximately 1/4 of the available pagecount. I had my reservations going in: I felt like there were some warning signs in the opening pages, but the book largely avoided the pitfalls. The protagonist, Harriet George, is a young woman training to be a spy for the "British-Martian Intelligence Service". I enjoyed the Napoleon-era Martian politics and the ideas behind them, and found both Harriet and her brother-in-law to be enjoyable characters, but felt like the female protagonist was surrounded with just a few too many men and relatively few women with any characterisation (I wish her sister could actually have made an on-page appearance). The plot was actually quite well constructed, and the climactic scene made good use of the locale, but I would have liked slightly fewer moments where Harriet learns men can be useful and clever. Still, the mystery was better than I'd expected, and I think the whole series would make a very enjoyable cozy sf/mystery read for a fan with more interest in that genre.

Overall, I was very happy to spend a few hours exploring different underwater ballrooms, in many different places and times. And I look forward to reading more fiction from Burgis and Sharma.

Meenoo says

I was delighted to receive an ARC of *The Underwater Ballroom Society*. I enjoyed this unique collection of short stories around the underwater theme very much. The stories are fun and imaginative and I enjoyed reading each one, which is rare for a collection of short stories. If I absolutely had to choose favorites, I would choose:

Y.S. Lee's "Twelve Sisters"--what happens after the end of *The Twelve Dancing Princesses* fairy tale
Shveta Thakrar's "The Amethyst Deceiver"--a delightful heist story involving a ring of spies who possess magical mushroom powers!

Patrick Samphire's "A Spy in the Deep"--a young spy in Regency Mars!

However, each story has its own magic, and you will not be disappointed in this book!

K.J. Charles says

A varied anthology brought together by the underwater ballroom setting. I mostly bought this because Cassandra Khaw is in it (her story is short, strange and lyrically nasty, as one might imagine). I very much liked the savage feminist Twelve Sisters by YS Lee, doing a what-happened-next on the ever-creepy Twelve Dancing Princesses fairytale; the Stephanie Burgis story Spellswept is a niftily done short romance in a satisfyingly gender-role-reversed world. And an author to watch: Iona Datt Sharma's Penhallow Amid Passing Things skilfully builds a strange magical Cornwall with a lovely understated f/f Revenue/smuggler romance that I wanted a lot more of. I hope this is a precursor to a book.

Sherwood Smith says

Last summer I was taking a sanity break from the unrelentingly horrible news, and in doing some research, came across a mention of an anthology published around WW II, called Famous Balls. (Copies are rare and go for zillions, so I haven't read it.)

I thought, what a great idea for sheer wish-fulfillment and escapism! And I put the word out for a potential anthology.

At pretty much the same time, the editors here got a similar idea while chatting on Twitter, and as often happens with writers, the idea—balls underwater—caught fire. So while I'm still collecting stories for my own anthology, this one has come out, and of course I wanted to read it. When an idea hits in the Zeitgeist at the same time, it usually means its time has come. More about the Zeitgeist thing later.

There are ten stories here, and I enjoyed them all, some more than others as is inevitable. But I didn't skip any, which to me makes a successful anthology well worth the price.

I had three favorites.

First, and first up, was Ysabeau S Wilce's "The Queen of Life," all the more remarkable because I'm not particularly interested in the fae, or at least the 'beautiful heartless people' version of the fae, with or without rock bands. And here were both fae and musicians.

But Wilce's prose pyrotechnics immediately entranced me, just as it did in her YA novels. And when I saw that the main character was an older woman, I was hooked all the way to the terrific ending.

My second favorite was Iona Datt Sharma's "Penhallow Amid Passing Things," a glorious title, told in such graceful prose that I didn't mind some somewhat jerky transitions that (to me) read as if this might have been a longer work cut down. More on that thought anon.

First of all, this tale is queer friendly. A dashing female smuggler up against an equally dashing revenue officer raised a halleluia. There are a bazillion m/m adventures and romances out there, but so few f/f, especially as well-told and atmospheric as this one, set in an alternate world in which magic is slowly vanishing. I finished it wishing quite strongly for more set in this world.

My third fave was the longest work, which I am so glad was permitted its natural length. This is the Zeitgeist

at work again, for I am already familiar with, and very much enjoy, David Levine's Arabella stories, which feature tallships that travel between planets, the eponymous Arabella being a Mars colony native. Levine's series, as is Patrick Samphire's "A Spy in the Deep," is set in an alt-Napoleonic era, with a Mars colony.

I thoroughly enjoyed Samphire's tale, as our heroine, Harriet, is training to become a spy. She travels with her hapless-seeming brother-in-law to Mars on what is supposed to be an easy mission. When her contact turns up dead, Harriet helps her brother-in-law solve the mystery, which she figures out her own mystery. The exhilarating pacing and the vivid visuals kept me glued to the pages until the end, leaving me with a wish to read more in this setting.

Shout-outs to Y.S. Lee's intense take on the Twelve Dancing Princesses, in "Twelve Sisters," with its emphasis on the tight bond of the sisters, and the delightful imagination behind Shveta Thakrar's mushroom magic in "The Amethyst Deceiver."

I enjoyed all the other tales, but several, like Sharma's tale, read to me like longer works stuffed into short form—narrative summary that might better have been scene, characters who needed a bit more fleshing out, abrupt transitions, a few too many dangling threads. In one, a crucial worldbuilding setup felt arbitrarily imposed until close to the end.

Even so, all the stories kept me reading over these mild speed bumps. The price is very modest for this much reading pleasure—I would have paid separately for my three favorites, gladly.

Stephanie says

*ETA: And hooray! There's now a gorgeous paperback edition available as well!

This is the secret project that Tiffany Trent and I have spent the last few months organizing! I loooooove the stories in this anthology, and I am so happy to finally be able to share them all with you.

They're out now! And you can buy your own copy of *The Underwater Ballroom Society* at Amazon US, Amazon UK, Kobo, Barnes & Noble, iBooks, or Smashwords.

**Note: the price for this one has now gone down to \$3.99 US/ £2.99 UK. Enjoy! :) **

I love every story in this anthology, and I can't wait to share them all with you!

(And for any of my readers who loved Jonathan & Amy in *Snowspelled - Spellswapt*, my novella in this anthology, is their story! I am SO IMPATIENT for you to read it. :))

(For anyone who hasn't read *Snowspelled*, though, don't worry - *Spellswapt* is a prequel novella, set years before *Snowspelled* takes place. No prior knowledge is required - just the ability to enjoy forbidden romance, dangerous magic, and political intrigue in an underwater ballroom. What could possibly go wrong? ;))

Hebah says

A short story collection is only as good as its unifying theme and contributor list, and *The Underwater Ballroom Society* was engaging on both counts. I enjoyed seeing how each author interpreted the concept of what an underwater ballroom would be--there are fairytale ballrooms, magical ballrooms, and even a Martian underwater ballroom--and what they chose to focus on within the ballroom, whether that was the musical accompaniment, political intrigue, or darker doings.

Highlights were editor Stephanie Burgis's contribution, "Spellswept," which made me want to further explore the world of the *Harwood Spellbook*; Y.S. Lee's "Twelve Sisters," which re-examines the story of the Twelve Dancing Princesses through the lens of domestic abuse; and Ysabeau S. Wilson's "The Queen of Life," featuring an iconic rocker whisked away to the land of fae.

Jessi says

** I received an ARC of this anthology in exchange for an honest review. All opinions are my own. The main one being: you should definitely buy this anthology.**

I really enjoyed *The Underwater Ballroom Society*. Inspired by the same haunting, beautiful setting of an underwater ballroom, it's an interesting premise for an anthology and makes for a sameness to the stories' aesthetics, despite their being wildly disparate in tone and subject and theme and really, even setting. I especially loved how the authors all used fantasy to illuminate modern-day struggles and concerns, despite their often historical (or ahistoric) time-period. And I was glad to see positive representation of various marginalizations and intersectional characters.

Like all anthologies, some stories worked better for me than others through no faults of their own (taste and mood often make me a fickle reader, and I'm sure each time I return to this anthology I'll find new favorites, depending on the day). My current favorites included:

Y.S. Lee's "Twelve Sisters" felt like a straightforward, entertaining story of sisterhood and revenge, and an interesting take on the Twelve Dancing Princesses. Very fairytale-like, complete with a wise woman at the side of the road. And like the very best fairytales, I found it a powerful, timely response to the ugly misogyny that keeps taking center stage in the news.

"Mermaids, Singing" felt like a much larger story condensed into a small space with lots of shiny bits (many of my favorites). I enjoyed Tiffany Trent's quick characterizations, complex world-building, and the light romance.

I liked Jenny Moss's romantic "A Brand New Thing" with its non-neurotypical protag, 1920s English country setting and the way her underwater ballroom felt an awful lot like an submerged fairy hill, but populated by beloved book characters.

I enjoyed *Snowspelled* immensely, and so I was very excited to return to England, but also a bit leery about reading about the start of a relationship I already knew the ending of. I should never have doubted, especially knowing what a master Stephanie Burgis is at creating tension. My worry should have instead been for myself. Because, oh, my heart. I loved this story about an ambitious woman repressing what she really wants

to better conform to what she thinks she needs to succeed, and how a teenage girl shows her how to be brave. I also adore that this particular love story centers family/community, which isn't often found in romance, but is perfect for Amy's character and backstory.

Kate says

This anthology is a collection of wonderful stories – all with a nod to an underwater ballroom. I was lucky enough to be given an ARC in exchange for an honest review, and I can truthfully say that I absolutely adore this collection!

The first story, Ysabeau S. Wilce's "The Queen of Life" is great fun; a mix of fairy tales and myths, and rock'n'roll! loved the twists and turns of this, and it's got a really upbeat vibe. Y.S. Lee's "Twelve Sisters" is a wonderful take on what happens next after the soldier solves the mystery of the princess' worn-out shoes and midnight dancing...and also provides a haunting woven-in story that gives more depth to the fairytale, and shows us more of the princesses. Iona Datt Sharma's "Penhallow Amid Passing Things" involves smugglers, Revenue inspectors, magic, illicit goods, adventure...I loved the relationships and characters woven into this, and I'd love to see more of the wider world in a longer story even though this story itself is an excellent read in its own right!

Tiffany Trent's "Mermaids, Singing" puts us into Victorian England, with mudlarks on the banks of the Thames, a freakshow circus with real creatures...and a captured shapeshifter with no memories and a chance to escape. The story's very well-written and the period comes through nicely, but I thought the motivations could have been laid out a bit more clearly; I did struggle to understand why some of the characters were acting as they did, but loved the weaving of Victorian London into the strangeness of another world. Jenny Moss' "A Brand New Thing" is a change of tone again, with a sweet, fairy-tale like quality; a girl who loves to read, who doesn't quite fit in, and who is given a key to a dream world...and Cassandra Khaw's "Four Revelations from the Rusalka Ball" was my favourite; short, sweet, lyrical and evocative, mixing fairytale and darker myths.

"Spellswapt" by Stephanie Burgis is an even better read if you've read her novel "Snowspelled", but it's a great short! It's Regency with magic, and a family who dare to challenge the way things are done – for the best reasons. Laura Anne Gilman's "The River Always Wins" is a mix of grunge, punk, anger, dance, memories, with a nice dash of weird thrown in: I love how she's conjured up the emotions, the mix of anger and no-fucks with the sinking feeling of growing up, becoming boring, until everything's stirred up again...Shveta Thakrar's "The Amethyst Deceiver" was the one sour note for me; the story is excellent and well-written and I loved the setting (1920's vibe with added weird!) but I didn't entirely understand the point of the plot & events; while the story itself makes sense, I felt the character motivations were harder to understand. It certainly doesn't detract from the read though! And the final story, Patrick Samphire's "A Spy in the Deep" is a turn-of-the-century adventuring plus Martian sci-fi mix; a new spy-in-training is given a tough assignment, with a couple of problems thrown into the mix including a fellow-trainee who doesn't like her, a bumbling brother-in-law, and an unfortunately timed murder...

The whole collection is a wonderful, changeable mix of genres, storytelling styles, characters and vibes; I love the central thread of the underwater ballroom – never overtly stressed but always present – and how every author has turned that into something with such a different tone and place. The anthology is wonderful, and well worth a read!

Jasmine says

The Queen of Life — Ysabeau S. Wilce
Twelve Sisters — Y.S. Lee
Penhallow Amid Passing Things — Iona Datt Sharma
Mermaids, Singing — Tiffany Trent
A Brand New Thing — Jenny Moss
Four Revelations from the Rusalka Ball — Cassandra Khaw
Spellswapt — Stephanie Burgis
The River Always Wins — Laura Anne Gilman
The Amethyst Deceiver — Shveta Thakrar
A Spy in the Deep — Patrick Samphire

Tammy says

I received this book for free from the Author in exchange for an honest review. This does not affect my opinion of the book or the content of my review. **The nitty-gritty:** An unexpectedly delightful and varied collection of stories about a most magical place, the underwater ballroom.

Having enjoyed Stephanie Burgis' adult fantasy novels, I was thrilled to receive a review copy of her new anthology. I had never heard of underwater ballrooms—I mean, really, is that a thing?—but Burgis has based her idea around an actual place, and she's invited other authors to let their imaginations run wild using this fascinating setting. And it worked. I enjoyed this collection so much, and I'm happy to say there isn't a bad story in the bunch, which isn't always the case with anthologies. I've decided to give you a quick blurb on each of the ten stories below, in addition to my thoughts and individual ratings:

The Queen of Life by Ysabeau S. Wilce - 4.5 stars

They said that the Muse of Music taught Robert Mynwar to play, that She made his guitar, the Queen of Life, with her own hands, carved the guitar's body from her own shin bone, strung the neck with strands of her own hair, and that the pearlescent inlay on the fretboard were teeth plucked from her own mouth.

I have never heard of Wilce before, but wow can she write! This wonderfully magical story about a famous guitar player is filled with glorious imagery. It's the story of the infamous Oberon, who decides to steal away rock guitarist Robert Mynwar and take him to Faery. The band's singer, a woman named Sylvanna de Godervya, sets out on a quest to bring him back. I loved the way the author incorporates music into the story, and Sylvanna's journey to rescue her beloved isn't quite the straight path she expected. This was a wonderful

story to open up this collection!

Twelve Sisters by Y.S. Lee - 4 stars

Lee takes the story of The Twelve Dancing Princesses and asks the question, "What happened next?" to great effect. In her version, the youngest sister remains unmarried, and while all her sisters are mostly happy with husbands and children, one sister is not. The younger sister, Ling, tells the story of how she and her sisters ban together to save Anya from her cruel husband. We discover in this story that the underwater ballroom is the enchanted place where the sisters snuck off to dance the night away in the original tale. I loved the way the theme was incorporated into this story, and I also loved the underlying theme of spousal abuse and how the sisters dealt with it.

Penhallow Amid Passing Things by Iona Datt Sharma - 4 stars

Sharma's writing is spectacular! I loved the old-fashioned feel to this story about a kingdom that has lost its magic and is trying to find it again. I was immediately caught up in this tale about a woman who unwittingly helps smuggle a source of magic into the kingdom. I would *love* to read a novel by this author!

Mermaids, Singing by Tiffany Trent - 3.5 stars

I'm a sucker for circus stories, and Trent's tale focuses on the emotional side of magical beings who are enslaved in a circus. A downtrodden group of circus performers, compelled by magic to change forms and perform against their will, plan to escape, aided by a man/hound who has had enough. Like several other stories in this collection, this one deals with a world where true magic has been lost.

A Brand New Thing by Jenny Moss - 4 stars

This was a delightful tale with a *Pride and Prejudice* sensibility about a girl who is given a secret key to a magical ballroom. Eve is the "odd" sister who keeps her nose in a book at all times and just doesn't fit the norm, while her older and more lovely sister Edith is about to get married. I love the romantic aspect of Eve meeting a dashing young man in an underwater ballroom and discovering that she can join in the dance with a special key. But are her nighttime adventures real—or simply a dream?

Four Revelations from the Rusalka Ball by Cassandra Khaw - 4 stars

This was the only flash fiction piece, and although it's barely two pages long, it definitely packed an emotional punch. I have never read anything by Khaw before, but her writing is stunning. I will definitely go back and read her novels after this enticing sample! Had this been longer and more developed, it probably would have received a higher rating.

Spellswept by Stephanie Burgis - 4.5 stars

I absolutely *loved* this prequel to Burgis' recent novel *Snowspelled* (which I have not read but you can bet I will now!). *Spellswept* has the feel of a Regency romance, but this society is completely flipped on its head. In Burgis' world, men are the only ones who are allowed to wield magic, but women run the show in the areas of politics and marriage. A girl named Amy is planning to ask for a man's hand in marriage at the upcoming ball, but it's purely for her political advantage. Meanwhile, the man she secretly loves, along with his young sister, becomes swept up in a magical scandal, one that could have serious repercussions. If you've already read *Snowspelled*, this delightful short story will fill in some of the blanks of the characters' early lives.

The River Always Wins by Laura Anne Gilman - 5 stars

It's hard to pick a favorite story in this glowing collection, but if I had to it would be this one. Gilman is the author of the recent *Silver on the Road* (another book I *need* to read, now that I've experienced the author's writing!), and this nostalgic story of a siren and a fury visiting a punk rock club that is about to shut down was surprisingly wistful in tone. It doesn't hurt that said club is located under a river (the underground ballroom aspect), and Gilman's atmospheric writing brings to life a world filled with magical creatures.

The Amethyst Deceiver by Shveta Thakrar - 3 stars

This was my least favorite story, simply because I just didn't get it. A group of creatures with mushroom-like qualities ban together to rescue one of their own. I loved how imaginative this story was, but perhaps it would have worked better in a longer format.

A Spy in the Deep by Patrick Samphire - 4 stars

Samphire continues his Harriet George series with this closing novella about—you guessed it—Harriet the Spy on Mars! This definitely felt like just one story in Harriet's life, and even though I didn't feel as if I were missing anything from not reading *The Dinosaur Hunters* first, I can tell this is going to be an ongoing series, which is a good thing! Harriet is in training to be a spy and has just been given her first real mission: to meet with an informant and collect information that could lead the British-Martian Intelligence Service to apprehend the ringleader of a smuggling operation. Her brother-in-law will accompany her on the mission to the Louros Hotel which lies beneath the waters of the Valles Marineris, where Harriet will meet the informant, collect the information and bring it back home. But things don't go as smoothly as Harriet had hoped, and suddenly she finds herself investigating a murder. This story had the cozy feel of a drawing-room mystery, but add in dinosaurs on Mars, robots, clockwork trains and more and you have one crazy and unique story.

All in all, I had a great time with this collection. It was interesting to see how each author incorporated the "underwater ballroom" theme into their tales, and in most cases, I was fascinated to note, the ballrooms themselves were not the main focus of the stories. I will be looking out for more work from several of these authors, who are now new favorites of mine.

Big thanks to Stephanie Burgis for providing a review copy.

This review originally appeared on Books, Bones & Buffy

Sara Harvey says

DISCLOSURE: I was given a ebook to read in order to review.

This was a REALLY COOL anthology and I highly recommend it.

The writing was engaging and exciting throughout and it was a real delight, even the stories that I didn't love I still read because they were well-written.

THIS IS A GREAT COLLECTION!!

My favorite story of the collection was "The Queen of Life," by Ysabeau S. Wilce, it reminded me of one of my favorite books, ECSTASIA by Francesca Lia Block (so if you loved that story and want a whole novel in that vein, please check out that book!)

I also loved "The River Always Winds" by Laura Anne Gilman. I too mourn the loss of SeaBee's (or CBGB in this world...)

"Four Revelations from the Rusalka Ball" by Cassandra Khaw was a delicious snippet that reminded me of the very best of Cat Valente.

"Penhallow Amid Passing Things" by Iona Datt Sharma was lovely and poignant, if a bit confusing.

"Twelve Sisters" by Y.S. Lee was a great follow-up to the fairy tale we all know.

A few of the issues I had:

1. While the cast was wonderfully diverse (huzzah!!) almost all of the stories took place in England or an English proxy. That got a little predictable and tiresome for me.
2. Nearly all the stories feature a literal ballroom under the literal water and they were all almost exactly the same, architecturally. I know this is the "Underwater Ballroom Society" but I was hoping for some more variation on that theme. ("The Queen of Life" and "The River Always Wins" and "Four Revelations from the Rusalka Ball" did not feature this and were my favorite stories)
3. Two of the stories were parts of larger novels/story arcs and I liked these the least. They were the longest in the collection and referred to events and characters outside the scope of the narrative.

4.5/5 Better and more consistent than most anthologies, but you have to really like water and domed ballrooms under it.

katayoun Masoodi says

very enjoyable and fun, liked all the stories, all interesting and fun though maybe had a soft spot for stephanie burgis and patrick samphire's stories, as they were maybe a bit longer and also was looking forward to reading them

Jenni says

I was lucky enough to win an ARC of this anthology and thoroughly enjoyed it. The standout story for me was definitely Iona Datt Sharma's "Penhallow Amid Passing Things", a beautifully atmospheric story with magic, smugglers and an f/f romance that I was approximately 1000% here for, which also managed the feat of feeling like it was just the right length whilst also making me want 900 more stories about the characters and the world. I also enjoyed revisiting the world of Snowspelled in Stephanie Burgis's "Spellswept", while Patrick Samphire's "A Spy in the Deep" made me want to check out his other Regency Mars books.

In fact, there weren't any stories in this anthology that I disliked - some appealed more to me than others, but there were things I liked about all of them, and I enjoyed seeing the different ways the various authors used the underwater ballroom concept. Recommended!

Morgan Al-Moor says

Disclaimer: I'd like to thank Ms. Burgis, one of the editors, for kindly providing this book in exchange for an honest review.

?This was a lovely anthology featuring some of my favorite voices, with all of the stories sharing a common theme--an underwater ballroom! Pretty cool, right??Here are my thoughts on each story:

?The Queen of Life - Ysabeau S. Wilce: A story that mixes fairy tales and rock 'n' roll. Beneath this fresh premise is a deeper story about how one sees their life and its meaning.

?Twelve Sisters - Y. S. Lee's: A retelling of one of the Brothers Grimm's stories, or rather, a "sequel" to it, where after the happy ending we are presented with a failing marriage and an abusive husband. I should mention that the story deals with a pretty sensitive topic, which is domestic violence.

?Penhallow Amid Passing Things - Iona Datt Sharma: Loved the worldbuilding here. A fully fleshed-out land of smugglers, officers, and magic. I actually tried to find out if this is a new story for the anthology or part of a longer form that had slipped my radar, because it read totally fresh to me.

?Mermaids, Singing - Tiffany Trent: Set in Victorian England, featuring a creature ruthlessly forced to work in a circus. It's a little on the darker spectrum of fantasy, and manages to delve deep into some real life topics.

?A Brand New Thing - Jenny Moss: A story of a young bookworm who travels to an underwater ballroom to escape her reality--a very intriguing concept and a lovely protagonist's voice.

?Four Revelations from the Rusalka Ball - Cassandra Khaw: This story (and the next one) are my favorites in the anthology. I'm quite familiar with Ms. Khaw's writing style--sharp, lyrical, and poetic. She "wields" the prose with phenomenal skill, and this story is no different.

?Spellswept - Stephanie Burgis: My other favorite story, which is a prequel to Ms. Burgis' story Snowspelled. It focuses on the relationship between Amy Standish and Jonathan Harwood, and has the same charm and lightheartedness of its sequel.

?The River Always Wins - Laura Anne Gilman: A story that mixes a dance club, memories, and sorrow in a

powerful blend. This one is pretty multilayered, and I read it twice to make sure I didn't miss any of the hidden messages.

?The Amethyst Deceiver - Shveta Thakrar: A very "energetic" and fun short piece about "mushroom-people"! You have to read this one to understand what I'm talking about, one of the coolest concepts I've come across!

?A Spy in the Deep - Patrick Samphire: This story is the longest, but is very tightly woven that I didn't actually feel its length at all. It's more on the sci-fi side, and features a heroine training to be a spy for the "British-Martian Intelligence". I loved the concept a lot, and it compelled me to go look for more of Mr. Samphire's work.

?This book is full of fresh concepts and some of the best writing you can come across. A definite recommendation.
