

**THE YEAR'S BEST SCIENCE FICTION:
THIRTY-THIRD ANNUAL COLLECTION**

(GARDNER DOZOIS ED.)

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I have read all of the Dozois annual collections. And this one, the thirty-third, is the best. I applaud Dozois's bold ability to collect stories that, whatever their merits as literature or entertainment, truly show a path forward. A path forward from historical oppression of womyn; of those of color; of gender non-binaries; and of the sexually fluid and/or non-conforming; and towards the world of LGBTQQIP2SAA unshackling, with total autonomic self-actualization free of bigotry and hatred. So rather than boring the reader of this review with plot summaries, since plot after all doesn't matter when pursuing social justice, I'll instead note the individual areas where Dozois's story choices succeed so well.

It does surprise me Dozois took this path. In today's world, to challenge the dominant structures of patriarchy and heteronormativity, especially in the corporate publishing world, is to court not just rejection, but utter ruin. What a risk Dozois took with zirs career and zirs social acceptance by taking the bold stances ze did! I'm not sure why ze took this chance (perhaps ze has recognized the inevitable Sokolian dialectic of hetero-, homo-, and resultant metonymy), but we're all the richer for it.

Anyway, on to a few of the individual areas of this collection's stunning success:

Deconstructing Gender Conformity. Dozois shows us that in the future, everyone will be anything but cisgender. We all know that so-called human biology is just a stupid construct. These stories make sure the reader knows that the authors know that we know how important it is to know that.

Fighting Heteronormativity. While this is the area in which perhaps the most progress has been made in today's world, Dozois hammers the point home by making sure that we can all envision a future where nearly everybody is non-heteronormative. Yes, there are a few stories where offensive heteronormative activities appear, where individuals actually marry and have children, and no LGBTQQIP2SAA characters appear *at all!* But mostly, total individualism is shown by total conformity

to an ethic of non-heteronormativity. And, the authors aren't narrowly constrained by their own universes. While some people might say that the spacefaring-yet-ultra-traditional Chinese society depicted in "The Citadel of Weeping Pearls" wouldn't allow the daughter of the Empress to marry a woman, we know better. Or rather, we know that to depict heteronormativity is the essence of hate, so we see that, viewed through the lens of social awareness, there can be no actual contradiction between such a story's structure and the elements contained in it.

Power to Womyn. The selections in this book show us why we should ignore the haters and cis-gender bigots who distract us with their irrelevant arguments, such as that no society in human history has ever been a matriarchy. In the fight against the patriarchy, we know reality is merely a projection of false consciousness. Recognizing this, many of these stories show a world where all leaders are womyn, and most societies depicted are matriarchal, formally or informally. For example, in one story, all men of course take the name of the woman who is dominant over them. Given the total lack of power womyn hold in today's society, choosing stories with this stance is particularly far-seeing.

Calling Out Bigots and Haters. The authors represented here, with heroic insight and originality, directly point out that the future is certain to be dreadful for anyone who retains so-called traditional values. For example, more than one story specifically calls out the redneck bigots who universally populate Texas, casting them as refugees in a future dystopia, thus showing how their current false veneer of hard work and authenticity is merely a sham.

Not Flinching From Atheism. We all know that in the future the chains of religion will have fallen from humankind. Sure, bigots tell us that the religious impulse is part of (a fictional) human nature. Fortunately, though, the visionary authors in this collection never fall for that trap, and show us what the future will really look like—total freedom from religion.

Saving The Earth. The stories here focus not on silly, original futures, but rather, with laser-like intensity, on the future we all know is inevitable given Republican, conservative, fascist, corporate greed. There is no doubt that a combination of pollution and global warming will result in disaster, and every story in this collection that imagines a dystopia rightly only considers those as the causes. Yes, the narrow-minded

might criticize this as a conformist, herd-like view totally lacking in creativity. But those bigoted haters will get theirs in the future—we know that because of the stories in this book!

I will admit, the stories do vary in their degree of commitment to social justice. Some place it at the forefront; others less so. But rare is the story that does not show that it, and its author, is committed, and for that, we should all be grateful.