



Science Fiction

Impossible Futures: Return to the Future That Never Was

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This wholly satisfying collection delivers an entertaining, engrossing, even exhilarating reading experience.

The subtitle emblazoned across Duncan Eagleson's pitch-perfect, retro-kitsch cover of *Impossible Futures* promises its readers a "Return to the Future that Never Was!" It's a promise that this new anthology fulfills several times over, thanks to the efforts of co-editors Judith Dial and Thomas Easton and their contributors.

According to Easton's introduction, this volume serves as an anti-sequel of sorts to *Visions of the Future*, a collection of predictive sci-fi he compiled with Dial several years ago. By way of contrast, this time they asked their contributors to prominently feature various "impossible" technologies and concepts in their submissions. The result is a truly enjoyable collection of carefully crafted stories, every one of them filled with those technological wonders that we had all expected to one day enjoy, but none of which ever seemed to materialize in reality: force fields, artificial intelligence, invisibility cloaks, rocket trains, the Singularity, etc.

As with most anthologies, the various tales included range widely in voice, tone, theme, and content, with adherence to the collection's defining concept, the high quality of execution, and the editors' skillful sequencing of stories serving to bind it all together into a cohesive and coherent whole. So the laconic "I was there" narrative rhythms of Allen M. Steele's ode to mass space transportation, "Locomotive Joe and the Wreck of Space Train No. 4," is followed by the sensual, suffocating intensity of "A Singular Love," from Rev DiCerto, while the sharp-edged emotions associated with a dead love's resurrection in Sarah Smith and Justus Perry's "Private Shrines" scrape up hard against the wide-eyed, child-like enthusiasm engulfing "Searching for Oz" by Jack McDevitt.

And that skillful juxtaposition of the sour with the sweet, the mundane and the marvelous, is further enhanced by their scattering of stories from long-established and award-winning authors like Paul Di Filippo, James Morrow, and Mike Resnick, amongst those penned by some of their less recognized—yet mightily talented—fellow contributors, including Jeff Hecht, Edward M. Lerner, and Fran Wilde.

After all, isn't that variation of voice, tone, and texture a key aspect of any great story or anthology, and one of the reasons we pick them up? Aren't we seeking that satisfying thrill of discovering a new creator even while enjoying the comfort offered by our favorite authors? In this best case scenario, the result is a wholly satisfying collection that delivers an entertaining, engrossing, even exhilarating reading experience.

Bill Baker