

Sextopia: Stories of Sex and Society

Cecilia Tan, Editor

Circlet Press (July 2000)

\$14.95 (188pp)

978-1-885865-31-1

Following on the heels of its predecessors, Circlet Press

inaugurates a fresh collection of the erotic and the fantastic, which incarnates the uncertain unions of sexuality and society. As with previous collections, the editor fashions a brilliant mosaic of vignettes that project prismatic glimpses of worlds both futuristic and familiar—worlds that reflect the transient roles that desire and sexuality play in their utopian societies.

“Sex is one of the necessities of life, but erotic desire is a necessity of being human,” Tan offers, “and tremendous energy goes into codifying, controlling and channeling that desire in each and every culture and society in the world.” In Eric Del Carlo’s “To Love and Riot,” readers take flight with a futuristic squadron of riot police, en route to quell a violent and animalistic civilian upheaval. Ranks of soldiers, intoxicated with hypodermic stimulants beneath rigid panels of body armor, angle in the sky above the melee and prepare to restore order to a structured civilization where eroticism has been rendered artificially extinct via genetic engineering. Periodic revolts rage, however, as “somewhere, deeply, on the molecular level, the fundamental instincts abide and evade the scalpels of the geneticists’ micromillimeter knives.”

Alternately, Renee M. Charles’s “The Delectation Debates” tunes in an interactive sexual/political face-off between candidates in a society that equally weighs the erotic and ideological motivations of its potential leaders, as viewers sit with remotes in hand, to cast their votes. Voters of age are allotted one choice, while “there are no restrictions for those viewers registered under more than one sexual category” in a progressive society where candidates range from a registered Lesbian to a work-in-progress transsexual, as well as a member of the “heterosexual minority.”

Rounding out the collection, A. R. Morlan’s “Stone Still,” (perhaps Sextopia’s strongest selection) introduces readers to a society that implements federally regulated matchmaking, after studies had revealed that “being in a nurturing, sexual relationship is of benefit to all people.” Such an impersonal bureaucratic intrusion is met with skepticism and hostility by the heroine, stricken with a progressive disease which ossifies her flesh and limbs, once supple and limber—until a knock at her door yields an unexpected analogue.

Anchored only by a few selections that feel moderately uninspired, Sextopia joins the host of Circlet Press shelf-mates that uphold a standard of accessible multi-genre erotica. Readers are submerged in an undulant realm of imagery that entices with shifting styles and ideological thrusts.

KAREN WYCKOFF (January / February 2002)

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