Fans of science fiction/fantasy can, more often than not, be divided into two subgroups: those who worship Joss Whedon as God and enjoy watching poorly-rendered CG animal hybrids (SHARKTOPUS, PIRANHACONDA, take your pick) attack weakly-penned, one-dimensional television actors; and those who enjoy actual science fiction (in short, sci-fi fans and Syfy fans). So what can fans expect of YEAR'S BEST SF 16? Find out after the jump.

Not to knock Whedon, the man certainly has his fan base—and for good reason—but the guy just doesn't hit you in that Asimov, Orwell, Bradbury sort of way (moreover, if we're on the lookout for best space cowboy, Han Solo > Malcolm Reynolds). If, however, you're a fan looking to hit that delicate balance between highbrow speculative fiction and popular contemporary thrills, look no further.

YEAR'S BEST SF 16 (edited by David G. Hartwell, pictured above, and Kathryn Cramer) is the latest compilation of sci-fi and speculative fiction to come out of Voyager (an imprint of Harper Collins) and separates itself from other yearly sci-fi anthologies with its strong sense of wit and even humor in the volume’s more satirical tales. In the story "Graffiti in the Library of Babel" by David Langford, The Total Library, a computerized compendium of all human knowledge, art and literature, has been vandalized with electronic encryptions from an alien source. As one of the TotLib techs puts it, "Somebody's done something awful all over Jane Austen." Langford's penchant for Douglas Adams-esque lunacy adds a great deal of levity to a story that tackles global warming and the inherent dangers of experimenting with antimatter. In the anecdotal "About It," Terry Bisson spins a colorful yarn about a Hispanic janitor who takes home a Sasquatch from the lab where he works. Alastair Reynolds' "At Budokan" features everything from the genetic engineering of extinct species to giant robots with the facial likeness of James Hetfield.

As with any anthology, not every story is liable to captivate you. Joe Haldeman's opening tale, "Sleeping Dogs," borders on being a little too preachy in its transparent narrative regarding a

soldier who returns to a planet once engaged in war due to its overabundance in natural resources, particularly those necessary for interstellar travel. That said, the good in this book far outweighs the mediocre and even this sci-fi sermon on wartime foreign policy isn't half bad.

Some personal favorites include Benjamin Crowell’s "Petopia," wherein a poor young girl in third-world Africa stumbles upon the junked equivalent of a super-intelligent Furby; Cat Sparks' post-apocalyptic tale of fidelity in "All the Love in the World"; and the story that concludes the collection, "Ghosts Doing the Orange Dance," in which author Paul Park brilliantly utilizes familiar biographic styles in a rather unconventional format to tell an entirely unique and original work of fiction.