



## Bats of the Republic: An Illuminated Novel

*Zachary Thomas Dodson*

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## **Bats of the Republic: An Illuminated Novel** Zachary Thomas Dodson

*Bats of the Republic* features original artwork and an immaculate design to create a unique novel of adventure and science fiction, of political intrigue and future dystopian struggles, and, at its riveting core, of love.

In 1843 Chicago, fragile naturalist Zadock Thomas falls in love with the high society daughter of Joseph Gray, a prominent ornithologist. Mr. Gray sets an impossible condition for their marriage—Zadock must deliver a sealed and highly secretive letter to General Irion, fighting one thousand miles southwest, deep within the embattled and newly independent Republic of Texas. The fate of the Union lies within the mysterious contents of that sealed letter, but that is only the beginning . . .

Three hundred years later, in the dystopian city-state of the Texas Republic, Zeke Thomas has just received news of the death of his grandfather, an esteemed Chicago senator. The world has crumbled. Paper documents are banned, citizens are watched, and dissenters are thrown over the walls into "the rot." When Zeke inherits—and then loses—a very old, sealed letter from his grandfather, Zeke finds himself and the women he loves at the heart of a conspiracy whose secrets he must unravel, if it doesn't destroy his relationship, his family legacy, and the entire republic first.

The two propulsive narratives converge through a wildly creative assortment of documents, books within books, maps, notes, illustrations, and more. Zach Dodson has created a gorgeous work of art and an eye-popping commercial adventure for the 21st century.

*From the Hardcover edition.*

## **Bats of the Republic: An Illuminated Novel Details**

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Author : Zachary Thomas Dodson

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# From Reader Review *Bats of the Republic: An Illuminated Novel* for online ebook

## David Yoon says

It's almost impossible to review this without spoiling the sense of discovery that is so important for this story to succeed. The book itself is a beautiful artifact that adds to the enjoyment of the reading experience but you need to pay attention. The narrative switches from a 19th century novel and a steampunk future dystopia with asides and tangents aplenty. Finishing the book I was left wrestling with an abundance of "plot holes" for lack of a better word that may have simply been a result of inattention on my part. Or maybe I'm just missing the point entirely.

Despite finishing the book frustrated, I nonetheless find myself thinking about it incessantly and wanting to talk about it which is perhaps greater proof of it's value. And while I'd say that the conceit and subsequent payoff don't work for me, it was an entirely compelling journey to get there.

Sorry for the oblique and somewhat contradictory review but I think there's value in discovering this one for yourself ...then hit me up and tell me what's real.

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## Elizabeth A says

This book is a physically beautiful object, and the author makes creative use of an assortment of documents, books within books, maps, notes, illustrations, and more to tell two stories set about 300 years apart. The only problem is that all the beautiful packaging is only skin deep. The writing is not compelling, the characters are uninteresting, and while I enjoyed the setting of stories within stories, and how it is tough to tell which is the present time, and how time folds back on itself, I did not care one whit about the characters and their issues, and found this one a bit of a slog to get through. Too bad really, because this is a physically lovely object, and for that fact alone it gets an additional star.

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## Drew says

2.5 out of 5.

I almost feel like the object is too beautiful - or that it is beautiful to a fault. It's so painstakingly crafted that it feels, at times, like a grad school presentation, one of those innovative book-redesigns you see on Tumblr sometimes that make for an instant reblog but aren't real; they just serve as a calling card for aspiring young designers. The novel itself is tremendously uneven, to the point of sometimes being cringe-inducing... and yet, also, to the occasional point of being not just a great pastiche but a great entity in and of itself. I'm not one to knock someone for ambition, but I can't help thinking that this book was always going to promise more than its innards could actually live up to. It became a slog very early on and even when it picks up, towards the end of the middle third, it isn't enough to redeem - because, ultimately, the beauty of the physical storytelling is trying too hard to distract from the flaws of the literal storytelling. And I'll always want it to be the other way around.

## **Wart Hill says**

holy shit that was cool

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## **Carey Gibbons says**

This was quite the experience. Two eras of a troubled Texas, 300 years apart, one in the past and one in the future. Both of them may be fictional. There might be time travel? Definitely time cycles. And bats. Bats are awesome.

I got an ARC of this book due to librarian superpowers. I can't wait to buy a copy in October - I bet it will be beautiful. I can't recommend this book enough. Buy it for yourself. Buy it for your library (librarians). I think this will be the sort of book that will show you something new every time you read it. I look forward to reading it again.

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## **Melissa Crytzer Fry says**

For starters, I should make it known that I don't read sci-fi (ever), steampunk (ever), and rarely read dystopian. And some have called this story metafiction – something I also don't dabble in.

My draw to the novel was multi-faceted though: 1) in addition to the above genres, this book includes a parallel historical story – my thing! 2) It includes bats – also my thing! (I have participated as a 'citizen-scientist' in a nectar-eating bat study over the past 5 years... So I was happy to see the Mexican Long-Tongued bat show up in this book) 3) It was sold as "an illuminated novel" – which meant I just needed to know what that was all about.

Illuminated meant the story was told in an untraditional format: with lovely sketches (drawn by the author; letters, telegrams, users' manuals, fold-out maps, photographs, a novel-within-a-novel (all designed by the author, who has a graphic design background); an honest-to-goodness silky bookmark sewn into the spine; and an actual envelope inserted into the book and marked "DO NOT OPEN," with a letter inside. I mean ... what? ... you tell someone 'do not' and what do they want to do? Open it! (I waited – to open the envelope – though).

All of these elements resulted in a truly unique reading/story experience for me – all of which kept me flipping pages, despite my lack of familiarity with two of the genres represented here. It was easy to pick up where you left off (interestingly, the story felt very much like the 'sound byte' experience we have these days ... where we receive small bits of info on our cells phones, bits of info on the internet, bits of info on the news. Info, info, everywhere. The format felt, perhaps, well suited to millennials and younger who might be more open to experimental fiction and that sound byte kind of pacing).

I have to admit that I was dazzled that the author could piece together all of these different elements into a cohesive dual story told not only with words, but with complementary visuals. That takes talent and was

enough to keep me reading and thinking things like, “Wow – I’m amazed at how different it feels to read a handwritten letter vs. the same content typed out (This was the case with many of the written historical letters. The opposite page would feature the same handwritten letter, only typed).” And, as a fellow southwestern desert dweller, I was tickled by the drawings of the very critters in my own back yard: bats (of course), roadrunners, Gila monsters, jack rabbits, etc.

And yet ... while the writing was often melodic, or simple (depending on the character ... another great testament to the author’s abilities), and while I related to Zadock’s empathy for animals/the natural world, the dual story—in the end – I’m afraid, was lost on me. I’ve come to realize that I tend to be more of a “literal” reader. And while I appreciate picking out metaphors and thematic elements in books (and think I do a pretty good job of identifying them), mind-bending fiction ... well... it bends my mind too much... Or maybe I just wasn’t smart enough to ‘get’ this book. I’m convinced I participated in a literary experience that was great and created by a truly creative mind.

So while I’m still not sure I understand the end of the book, and the circularity of the two stories, I am still happy to have read it. (I found the letter-in-the-envelope and the way you were instructed to twist it – and the parallels to the mathematician’s Möbius strip – interesting).

With all that said – and as many others have echoed – the story is worth reading for all of the above reasons. I was engaged, entertained, and needed something ‘different’ in my reading line-up. This nontraditional form of storytelling was truly something to behold – from the incredible jacket cover (printed front and back) to the sheer HEFT of this book. The stock of the book’s front and back flap feels like dense wood; the paper is thick; the book is printed in three different colors. It’s just a truly unique specimen in its own right (perhaps the ‘meta’ part of metafiction)? I’m not sure how someone reading this on an e-reader could possibly have the same tactile experience?

The recommendation? I say give it a go if you are interested in sci-fi/steampunk/historical fiction; if you want to try something experimental; if you appreciate true artistry; if you like nature; if you enjoy dual stories; if you like to stretch your brain. I will continue to ponder this book’s ending. Will report back if I have any epiphanies!

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### **Tandava Brahmachari says**

Having an actual sealed envelope marked "Do Not Open" at the back of the book was hugely intriguing, and I always love the idea of creatively constructed/illustrated books. But unfortunately the story itself just wasn't all that great. I could never work out how the life stages system between the city states could be a reasonable idea, and that was distracting a lot of the time. And there seemed to be an awful lot of writing and paper going around in a society that had supposedly banned all that. I couldn't get very attached to Zeke, who mostly just seemed to be a guy who takes laudanum and doesn't want to be a senator. The folks in the 1843 portion of the story were a bit better. (view spoiler)

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### **Zachary says**

The author of this book has a great moustache. Five stars.

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## AmberBug \*shelfnotes.com\* says

www.shelfnotes.com review

Dear Reader,

The fun I had with this book! It reminded me of my time as a kid reading a 'choose your own adventure' book. It was borderline mixed media - not many loose leaf breadcrumbs or anything out on the www to connect to the pages. The art, though! Brilliant. I loved the feel, look and touch of this book. The spine was velvet lined (which ended up filled with cat/dog fur by the time I was finished). Have you seen this Author by the way? Check him out (pic to the right). He's as wacky as his book, and that moustache is FANCY! Speaking of mustaches, there are a few moustached characters - very distinguished gentlemen.

Let me get to the book... what an adventure. I haven't had this much fun reading in a long time. "Bats" is chock full of MAPS (Love maps), letters (LOVE letters, history (yeah, history is cool), and the future (oOoo so very sci-fi, love that too). It is unlike anything I've ever read but at the same time reminded me of quite a few books I've read... if that makes sense. I was reminded of George Orwell's "1984", the future is controlled very similarly. I also got hints of Mark Z. Danielewski and the multi-colored text. Although, I couldn't find a strong distinction as to why the text was colored differently (where as Danielewski has purpose for everything he does funky in his books). If anyone found a connection, please share it with me! Anyways, this book goes back and forth in time (no middle here) between 1843 & 2143, both centering around Texas and Chicago. To try and explain the states in the future would ruin the surprise but let's just say Texas isn't just Texas and Chicago isn't just Chicago. The future is very sterile, a little bleak but with control and order. The past is just that... the past (but chock full of rich and exciting history). The surprising thing is that I didn't connect well with the main characters from the future, or even the main character from the past. My favorite storyline/character was within the sisters and the book within a book. Something about it reminded me a little of "Pride and Prejudice" with courtships and strong-willed females. I told you this book has many reminiscent moments towards some great classics. I wonder if the Author did this on purpose?

So, we are left with the one burning question... should you read this book? Well, do what I did... crack the spine and feel the eyes of the bat staring into your soul... telling you to read this book. Yep, THAT'S what hooked me from the start... the bats!

If the bats don't get you... the snakes will.

I promise you that you'll embark upon an adventure like no other, filled with beautiful drawings and imaginative storylines. You will want to find out how it ends.

Happy Reading,  
AmberBug

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## **karen says**

i read about 150 pages of this, but with all the ephemera and inserts and doo-dads, i think i'm going to pause it for now and wait for the real deal to come out in october. i feel like it will be better experience to enjoy it as a finished product than as an ARC.

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## **Dan says**

I finished this book nearly two hours ago, and yet there's no way I can stop reading *about* it. As I scoured the internet looking for clues and analyses, I skimmed through it again, searching for relevant pieces I'd forgotten. I re-examined the dust jacket (including with a mirror); I checked all the front-papers, and studied the map and character tree. Why haven't more people read this yet? My theories and I, we're waiting.

This kind of single-mindedness after finishing a novel is a delightfully rare occurrence for me -- which is fitting, since this is a delightfully rare book. The primary thread is a dystopian story, paired with a "novel of manners" and a collection of related epistolary artifacts. The artifacts, from maps and telegrams to family trees and drawings, are great fun, and Dodson ensured that they were critical, intriguing, and not disruptive -- just right.

The story weaves between different narrators of varying reliability, and the puzzles and mysteries transform into the critical pieces of the narrative. The clever construction is a masterful way to redirect and confuse; it was the most appealing part of the story to me, though I can see it not holding the same interest for everyone. While the dystopia seems familiar at first, it quickly becomes something unique, with the conventional plot patterns abandoned. The historical fiction sections are even more fun, an unexpected treat that livens and provides additional depth to the story. And then there's that letter...

While I would have appreciated more dimensions given to a few of the characters (maybe this deficiency is a hard requirement for dystopian stories?), this book got me in its grips so well that I didn't feel it was worth docking a full star. This isn't at the top of my 5-star range, but it will stick with me for a long time to come. Highly recommended, especially to those who enjoyed *Night Film*, epistolary novels, or the experimental side of literary.

p.s. If you don't feel mind-bended enough afterwards, just ask me and I can tell you a few things you may have missed (I originally did, and so did many reviewers) and then you'll be fully crunched.

WARNING – theories ahead, these are spoilers!  
(view spoiler)

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## Holly says

Just a colossal disappointment. This is a beautiful book with beautiful colors, beautiful type, and nice artwork. It was also a dystopia whose sole quality was that it was a dystopia. Nothing was explored in any meaningful way. I never got a firm grasp on the world, the characters, or why things were how they were and how seriously I was supposed to take anything; at the same time, it was utterly humorless. It sort of reminded me of a hipster dressing up in corduroy and standing around at an absinthe bar to be seen. This book contains, near the end, an actual envelope with what is supposed to be the letter that brings the entire story together. It just... doesn't. It's not even a letter. It's just a continuation of the story folded up into a page. It's lazy, it's tedious, and it's boring. But it is pretty.

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## Mike says

I enjoyed this... uniquely written book. I hesitate to say story because it really is a collection of several that mirror, echo, and contain each other. I have a feeling a lot of people would hate this book. It is written in a variety of ways: hand written notes, personal letters, straightforward prose, secret police transcripts, and books within books; very post-modern in structure. There are also some wonderful drawings in this book that add nicely to the setting and the characters.

So there are a few main threads of the story: a dystopian future Texas city state, a book about a mid-19th Century Chicago family, letters between a man and his daughter that he has been separated from for decades, and letters between the possible ancestor of a Texas character and his love (who was a member of that Chicago family). The events of the mid-19th century and the future dystopia show many parallels to the point where I sort of got the impression of an Ouroboros:

Was the Dystopian story actually a book written in the 19th century or was the 19th Century book but a work of fiction that existed in the Dystopian future? Given the vagaries of time and the seemingly supernatural abilities of some characters it could be both or neither. It can get a bit confusing but the story does a good job sweeping you up and moving you forward. The world building was superb, both in the past and future, and the characters felt very vibrant.

Also, I must say, the book is gorgeous. Great pictures, each different story thread was done up in a unique visual style, there were some excellent information supplements that felt very natural in the flow of the story further deepening the world of the story. But the best part was the package. In the story this package was essential to both the future and past timeline. AND IT WAS PHYSICALLY INCLUDED AT THE END OF THE BOOK, SEALED AND ALL!!!!!! So when I got there I got to open it up and read the ever so important contents of it.

This book is by no means for everyone, but I really enjoyed it and appreciated the risks the writer took to tell this unique and imaginative story.

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## **Allison says**

4.5

What a weird and wonderful novel! I requested a review copy based solely on seeing the "An Illuminated Novel" subtitle, and didn't even know what it was about until I received it! "Bats of the Republic" is a back and forth and twisting and turning narrative between an amateur naturalist in the 1843 Republic of Texas and a Senator's heir in a 2143 dystopian steam-powered Republic of Texas.

Throw in a dash of mysticism and oodles of maps, notes, letters, transcripts, naturalist sketches, and even portions of another novel, and this became exactly the book I didn't know I needed right now!

There are a few twists, some that I saw coming (including perhaps the ~big~ one), and plenty of action for a novel of this format.

Should appeal to fans of Danielewski and "S." but is much more lucid than either.

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## **El says**

Some guy on the bus is reading this and he looks like an okay guy, so why not?

Also dystopia. Yes.

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