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Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories From Social Justice Movements



Synopsis

Whenever we envision a world without war, prisons, or capitalism, we are producing speculative fiction. Organizers and activists envision, and try to create, such worlds all the time. Walidah Imarisha and adrienne maree brown have brought 20 of them together in the first anthology of short stories to explore the connections between radical speculative fiction and movements for social change. These visionary tales span genres—sci-fi, fantasy, horror, magical realism—but all are united by an attempt to inject a healthy dose of imagination and innovation into our political practice and to try on new ways of understanding ourselves, the world around us, and all the selves and worlds that could be. Also features essays by Tananarive Due and Mumia Abu-Jamal, and a preface by Sheree Renée Thomas. "Those concerned with justice and liberation must always persuade the mass of people that a better world is possible. Our job begins with speculative fictions that fire society's imagination and its desire for change. In adrienne maree brown and Walidah Imarisha's visionary conception, and by its activist-artists' often stunning acts of creative inception, *Octavia's Brood* makes for great thinking and damn good reading. The rest will be up to us."

—Jeff Chang, *Who We Be: The Colorization of America*; Conventional exclamatory phrases don't come close to capturing the essence of what we have here in *Octavia's Brood*. One part sacred text, one part social movement manual, one part diary of our future selves telling us, "It's going to be okay, keep working, keep loving." Our radical imaginations are under siege and this text is the rescue mission. It is the new cornerstone of every class I teach on inequality, justice, and social change.... This is the text we've been waiting for."

—Ruha Benjamin, professor of African American Studies at Princeton University and author of *People's Science: Bodies and Rights on the Stem Cell Frontier* "Octavia once told me that two things worried her about the future of humanity: The tendency to think hierarchically, and the tendency to place ourselves higher on the hierarchy than others. I think she would be humbled beyond words that the fine, thoughtful writers in this volume have honored her with their hearts and minds. And that in calling for us to consider that hierarchical structure, they are not walking in her shadow, nor standing on her shoulders, but marching at her side."

—Steven Barnes, *Lion's Blood*; Never has one book so thoroughly realized the dream of its namesake. *Octavia's Brood* is the progeny of two lovers of Octavia Butler and their belief in her dream that science fiction is for everybody.... Butler could not wish for better evidence of her touch changing our literary and living landscapes. Play with these children, read these works, and find the children in you waiting to take root under the stars!

—Moya Bailey and Ayana Jamieson, *Octavia E. Butler Legacy*; Like [Octavia] Butler's fiction, this collection is cartography, a map to freedom. —dream hampton,

filmmaker and Visiting Artist at Stanford University's Institute for Diversity in the Arts. Walidah Imarisha is a writer, organizer, educator, and spoken word artist. She is the author of the poetry collection *Scars/Stars* and facilitates writing workshops at schools, community centers, youth detention facilities, and women's prisons. Adrienne Maree Brown is a 2013 Kresge Literary Arts Fellow writing science fiction in Detroit, Michigan. She received a 2013 Detroit Knight Arts Challenge Award to run a series of Octavia Butler-based writing workshops.

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Customer Reviews

As a fan of speculative fiction and an aspiring writer in that domain, Octavia Butler has always been my matriarch. She is the writer that may not have been my first inspiration, but she certainly left a deep, lasting impression on my soul. Her work is so seminal and I want to weep every time I encounter a reader or writer unaware of her contributions. Octavia is as important in my mind to the fabric of Blackness as any Civil Rights activist. Her work empowers and calls us to be great. Octavia's faith in humanity's ability to rise above so tremendous. So imagine my absolute delight when I found out there was going to be a book from social justice movement figures dedicated to Octavia. I was ready to devour the stories and see just what was given birth from the minds of people who were already accustomed to dreaming. Any work where you fight for the marginalized if you're not careful can make you cynical and cause you to lose sight of those dreams that propelled into doing the work in the first place. I wonder how many of these authors walked away from this collection feeling rejuvenated about their work. Because they certainly made

me feel rejuvenated about mines. There were quite a number of works in this collection and admittedly, some were stronger than others. But they all came packed with a message and I think that alone is powerful. In the interest of time and modern day attention spans, I'm going to mention the works that really crawled into my mind and/or heart and lingered there for a while. Like that one friend who you know will tell you what you need to hear even when you're not quite ready to hear it. Some of the ideas took me to sad, contemplative places. But we need to wander through those spaces as much as we need to enjoy our happier moments.

As the subtitle makes clear, this is an anthology with an agenda, and it's an agenda that will inflame certain parties in recent kerfuffles in the science fiction community. That said, this is an enjoyable collection. The stories are varied in setting, viewpoint, and kind. There's an incipient uprising against both a hoard of zombies and the politically repressive response to the zombie hoard. There's a gentle story of a woman attempting to reconnect with both her dead grandfather and her very much alive daughter, in an alternate history where the Civil War started in 1859, and the slaves won. A woman has to decide how she's going to react to a government that's finally responding to global warming, in a way that may be both too much, and not enough. One choice will cut her off from her mother and the place she grew up; another will cut her off from her partner and her life now. Is there a third choice, and can she do it? A young man who is the token black superhero opts out of the nonsense--until he finds out how he matters to young people, and a way to make a contribution that matters to him. The authors include names all sf readers will recognize, like Tananarive Due and Terry Bisson, and people who've never written sf, or even fiction, before. Possibly for that reason, there are a number of stories that I read and thought, that's a set-up for a story I'd like to read the rest of... Having said that, while there are a number of "beginning, middle, no actual end" pieces, there's nothing here I didn't enjoy. There's nothing here that has that special sense you get when mainstream writers go slumming and assume that "science fiction means it doesn't have to make sense." All the writers here respect their readers and their material.

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