



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

Adrienne Maree Brown (Editor/Contributor) , Walidah Imarisha (Editor/Contributor) , Sheree Renée Thomas (Foreword) , Bao Phi (Contributor) , David F. Walker (Contributor) , Alexis Pauline Gumbs (Contributor) , Morrigan Phillips (Contributor) , Gabriel Teodros (Contributor) , more... Tunde Olaniran (Contributor) , Dawolu Jabari Anderson (Contributor) , Tara Betts (Contributor) , Vagabond (Contributor) , Jelani Wilson (Contributor) , Kalamu ya Salaam (Contributor) , LeVar Burton (Contributor) , Terry Bisson (Contributor) , Dani McClain (Contributor) , Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (Contributor) , Mumia Abu-Jamal (Contributor) , Tananarive Due (Contributor) , Autumn Brown (Contributor) , Alixa Garcia (Contributor) , Mia Mingus (Contributor) ...less

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Whenever we envision a world without war, without prisons, without capitalism, we are producing visionary fiction. Organizers and activists envision, and try to create, such worlds all the time. This book brings twenty of them together in the first anthology of short stories to explore the connections between radical speculative fiction and movements for social change. The visionary tales of *Octavia's Brood* span genres—sci-fi, fantasy, horror, magical realism—but all are united by an attempt to experiment with new ways of understanding ourselves, the world around us, and all the selves and worlds that could be. The collection is rounded off with essays by Tananarive Due and Mumia Abu-Jamal, and a foreword by Sheree Renée Thomas.

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From Reader Review Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements for online ebook

Micah says

+2 stars because I respect Walidah.

I feel so many feelings about this book. You know when you want to like something SO MUCH, because it's something your friend made, or something on your team did, but no matter how hard you try, you can only see the things to work on? That was this book. The folks who wrote these stories are all strong bad-asses in their activism, but write spec-fic like they need to clobber the reader with their politics. I'm already on board with the politics, that's why I'm here! And if I wasn't I'd be pissed that someone was trying to metaphorically clobber me!

I feel like a harsh butthole for not being nice to the team, but Oh My God, please, just have less stories so they can go on longer and not continuously have these messy and dissatisfying endings. Put it into two books. Be willing to say 'no' and put some of the stories online as bonuses for folks who are really into it.

A couple of stand-out stories that have been mentioned in other reviews, I regret to say I only made it halfway before it had to be returned to the library, so I wasn't able to get to the final essays. If you think it's gonna be your thing, go for it. If not, give your time to Octavia herself. <3

Brian says

Add a new category to your bookshelves (and your life): "visionary fiction." This impressive collection, a publication collaboration by AK Press and the Institute for Anarchist Studies, defines the genre as connecting science fiction with social justice. There are 22 authors contributing the stories that comprise this volume, and their bios, printed at the end, provide an additional dimension of enjoyment and interpretation for the book. They all are community activists of various sorts (an amazing range, from the well-known--actor/educator LeVar Burton, political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal--to others perhaps less familiar, but soon to become your new best friend icons), and the stories they write entertain us with visions of other, mostly future, worlds while challenging us to imagine, to "vision" how we got there, how we can get there, how we can change the injustice that we see around us in this world (the afterward outlines a set of three "tools" for supporting communities to take up this work, part of a "road show" the Octavia's Brood crew has been taking around America). They all, in a variety of styles and voices, honor the great Octavia Butler.

Terence says

Reading this I'm reminded of a collection of Voltairine de Cleyre's work I have that includes her forays into fiction. There is a certain earnest conviction and honesty about the work but it just isn't good and often borders on unreadable.*

I found the same to be true about too many of the stories in this collection to be able to recommend it (regardless of how much I may sympathize with the authors' points of view).

I'm also reminded of *When the Music's Over* (subtitled: "An Anthology of Tales Against War and Violence," ed. Lewis Shiner), a collection with a similar goal to *Octavia's Brood*. There, too, most of the stories sacrifice readability to the theme. Except for Walter Jon Williams' "Prayers on the Wind," which turned out to be one of my favorite short stories. If you ever have a chance to read this anthology or come across the story in some other medium, read that one if nothing else.

* I wanted to make clear: It's de Cleyre's prose/poetry that I'm referring to here. Her essays, reviews, etc., are far more interesting (and readable).

Bookish says

This has been the year of Octavia Butler and her legacy for me. I have never considered myself much of a science fiction reader because I don't care about the names of gizmos or how space parliaments work. But *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements*, edited by adrienne maree brown and Walidah Imarisha, might just change me. The editors frame this collection of stories as visionary fiction and argue that all science fiction is political: It is about imagining a future beyond what we have today. And if you are sick of dystopias and need a reminder of the human capacity for bravery, care, optimism, and collective action, I couldn't recommend this collection more highly. I especially loved reading Alexis Pauline Gumbs' "Evidence," where a young girl from a future utopia writes a letter to her ancestors (who are our contemporaries), thanking them for keeping faith and being brave even when they had no idea that they would win. Honestly, I'm tearing up again now. —Nina (excerpted from Staff Reads: December 14)

Juushika says

An anthology of 20 stories--many of them quite short--of visionary fiction: speculative narratives that explore marginalization, social justice, and radical social change. Many of these stories come from activists who have never written fiction (others are poets, writing here in prose). The lack of experience shows in clumsy, unconvincing worldbuilding, hamfisted social justice themes, and a general dearth of technical skill. There are a few happy exceptions, like the density of "Evidence" by Gumbs and the fluidity of "Lalibela" by Teodros. Editor adrienne maree brown's "the river" is also strong. But, surprisingly, work from published authors isn't much better; the excerpt from *Fire on the Mountain* by Bisson is the most promising, but it doesn't work as a short story. The intent of this anthology is pointed and brilliant, and there's something refreshing about reading work from activists whom I otherwise might not encounter. But it's simply not very good. The majority of stories share a structure which frontloads worldbuilding and characterization, but cuts off plot while the larger conflict remains unresolved--a logical limitation, given the complexity of the social conflicts at hand and the lengths of these stories, but still repetitive and oddly self-defeating: all these narratives about social change, rarely offering a plan to change society. There are exceptions--there are uplifting stories, cathartic stories, productive stories; but on the whole, this collection feels like an unfulfilled ambition as well as being technically unaccomplished. I admire it, but didn't enjoy it, and don't recommend it.

There are also two nonfiction essays; "The Only Lasting Truth," Tananarive Due writing on Octavia Butler, is a good read and strong finish to the anthology.

Kalin says

I love Octavia Butler, I love her stories and her ideas, love sci-fi, and I am more than happy to try any creative writing that aspires to inspire radical and revolutionary political activism. The thought of Butler's writing giving birth to a generation of speculative fiction activists who use the written word to support the intentional dreaming of radical movements as they/we struggle towards a better, free-er future -- that thought is sends chills. It gives a few extra ticks to the beating of my heart. Octavia's Brood was an exciting prospect from the moment I first heard of the project, and I was extremely happy to get a copy (in detroit no less where a much of this book was born).

The book consists of a few dozen short stories, with a few essays and other types of writing. Within lie stories drawing on a diversity of speculative fiction genres, or as the editors have coined, *visionary fiction*. I will say this: the book was fun to read. I would recommend it to anyone interested in tasting the sweet intersection of sci-fi and social justice. There was a lot of intriguing world-building.

Though, like many other reviewers I've seen on goodreads, I struggled at times with the book. The editors are up-front that many of the stories are published by first-time writers, not professional writers working with the sci-fi genre or even creative writing necessarily. It didn't surface as much in the world-building -- though other reviewers have said that the world-building and conceptual elements of many of the stories were bland, I found them interesting enough -- but in the structure of the stories. One after the other would end on a cliffhanger note just teetering on the edge of the "real" action, having spent most of their 10 or so pages introducing a character or social situation (often a blatantly bleak picture of a dystopian/authoritarian near-future) to which a protagonist is responding with resistance. I'm not incredibly well-read in the medium of short story, but I'm pretty sure they're supposed to have some sort of beginning, middle, and end. Many of the stories I read in Octavia's Brood felt like beginnings with no middle or end, like they were a teaser trailer for the novel-length version of the same story. To their credit, I found myself repeatedly wanting to put down Octavia's Brood and read the next 190 pages of that other novel.

Visionary fiction. It's a wonderful concept, but I found myself wondering (and not convinced either way) if a collection of stories that so repeatedly create totalitarian and seemingly all-powerful state and corporate antagonists have actually managed to use their writing to vision pathways to the future that movements will find relevant, or have simply reflected contemporary frustrations with the powers of oppressive forces that resonate with the radicals of the 2010s. There were only a couple stories in the collection that I would feel comfortable characterizing as *positive* or *hopeful* (and not in the stubborn-hope-in-the-face-of-despair variety); many of the rest featured brutal violence and a focus on the many oppressions that activists struggle against day to day. *Lalibela* broke this pattern inventively and I thank the author for that!

Regardless of what I write here, I think anyone reading should get the book, read it, try writing some visionary fiction of your own, etc! It wasn't perfect, but it was a GOOD effort at something new, and here's to hoping for a GREAT sophomore release.

Hafidha says

For conception, experimentation and and variety I give the book four stars; for well-executed fiction, I give it 2.5 or 3. There were a couple stories I really liked - mostly in the 2nd or 3rd parts of the book. I tried to mark all of those in the updates. The last three or four pieces are essays. Tananarive Due's essay about Octavia

Butler as a speculative storyteller and inspiration is well worth a read for its distillation of Butler's recurring themes, little tidbits about the early AfAm spec fiction community and descriptions of Butler's personality and effect on other Black spec writers. The outro explains the book's intent and how social justice spec fiction (here called "visionary fiction") is being used in community organizing. There were also some useful definitions, such as "the elements of visionary fiction," and so on.

Sunny says

This book calls upon the knowledge, creativity and experiences of folks fighting for social justice. The stories in here use many themes Octavia Butler focused on: community, interdependence, shaping the future, dreaming of the stars and surviving as a human race worth saving. There are stories of resistance and resilience (Hollow by Mia Mingus), characters who choose to fight for humanity despite great personal cost (Black Angel by Walidah Imarisha), and a warning about allowing history to be forgotten or hidden away by the few (The Long Memory by Morrigan Phillips). The editors really put in work to build something with these authors and with all of the communities where they held emergent strategy workshops. Don't miss out on this book. Guaranteed it will spark a lot of hearts and them towards justice.

Heron says

This collection of stories isn't perfect, but how could it be. It is more like a collection of passionate conversations held around a dinner table with brilliant people, terrified and exhilarated for the future. Some are clumsy in their passion, some are coolly pessimistic, some are flighty with imagination, some grounded in present day inequality. I love this book and I will reread it over and over. This is the future, both of writing and of humanity.

Sam Musher says

The premise of this collection is that anytime you're doing social justice work, you're writing speculative fiction -- a premise I adore, as a person who became captivated by, and formed by, both social justice and science fiction at the same very young age. The writers of these stories are mostly not fiction writers but activists, shaping their activist vision into speculative fiction for the first time. I've never read anything like it.

The writers are virtually all of color, as are the editors. The tone of the stories is unlike any sci-fi I've read (though it is clearly informed by Octavia Butler, as the name would imply). All the endings are open-ended, beginnings more than endings and questions more than answers.

It's uneven, even more so than short story collections usually are. It's about ideas more than great writing. But if you are a reader of science fiction and you spend a lot of time thinking about justice, I strongly recommend you pick this up.

Alan says

Make no mistake: Octavia's Brood belongs. It *is* modern sf—an anthology of speculative fiction (including both science fiction and fantasy, wherever you draw that line) from authors both known and unknown, collected here in honor of the late Octavia E. Butler by editors Adrienne Maree Brown and Walidah Imarisha (who is a local, by the way—on the faculty at Portland State University!). This anthology contains dystopias and utopias, angels and aliens, genetic engineering and time travel—even a couple of nonfiction essays—but on the face of it, nothing about it would set Octavia's Brood apart from any other sf anthology published in the last fifty years.

Except... except for those faces.

The difference is difference. These stories were all written by and about people *other than* the white, male, able-bodied and heterosexual engineer who was the writer and default protagonist for so much 20th-Century sf. And good riddance... having that one guy be the hero of so many stories was never more than a failure of imagination, anyway—an ironic failure indeed, since speculative fiction is, precisely, *the* literature of imagination. And as such, sf should *at a minimum* be able to include all of the varieties of human being.

Octavia's Brood goes a long way toward that goal. Standouts for me included:

- * Walidah Imarisha's "Black Angel," an urban fantasy about a differently-abled angel;
- * The lively "Sanford and Sun," by Dawolu Jabari Anderson, which puts Sun Ra into Fred Sanford's living room. Sitcom meets sat-comm, or some such;
- * Gabriel Teodros' time-twisted "Lalibela";

but there are many others.

And definitely don't miss the essay "The Only Lasting Truth," by Tananarive Due, a moving personal retrospective about Octavia Butler's life and work that goes a long way toward explaining why an anthology named after her came to exist.

I did have a few issues with the selections that appear in Octavia's Brood. Too many of them are just vignettes—fragments of larger tales, not self-contained stories. The tropes explored are often familiar ones. And—again ironically, perhaps—many of the tales here hark back a little *too* well to the earliest days of sf: like Hugo Gernsback's "scientifiction," they are *didactic*, idea-driven and energetic but often stiff, more focused on the lessons we are to learn than on the characters who convey those lessons. Walidah Imarisha says in her Introduction that many contributors "had never written fiction before, let alone science fiction." (p.4) Sometimes that shows. But... even then, the energy's still there. The ideas are still there.

Octavia's Brood is not perfect, but it's a start—and a damned good homage to its namesake.

Victoria Law says

Amazing collection, but many of these short stories seemed like they wanted to be longer works. Several times, I turned to the last page of a story and thought, "That's it? Where's the ending?" But even though many of the stories seemed to leave me dangling, the authors build worlds or futures that suck you in and create characters that you want to keep following. Here's hoping that they continue writing (and that some of them

pick up full-length book contracts to continue building those worlds and story arcs).

Lis Carey says

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. The editors didn't excuse lesser work because they wanted a particular name or a particular theme included. Despite being an anthology with an agenda, there's no pounding the reader over the head, except to the extent that happens with any themed anthology when you read straight through rather than dipping in.

I'll carry away from it a particular fondness for "The Token Superhero," by David Walker, and "The River," by Andrienne Maree Brown.

I've been saying "read" throughout this review; that's a very loose usage. I listened to the audiobook, and the narrator's voice is excellent, strong, clear, and expressive.

Recommended.

I received a free copy of the audiobook in exchange for an honest review.

Naori says

Octavia Butler united us in a way, as one of her books suggested, as kin. She united all who have needed worlds where we could find inclusion, because for so many of us, painfully, we have met with some form of

exclusion or another. During an interview once someone asked Octavia what made her write the way she did; what drove her. She responded, "You've got to write yourself in." To paraphrase, if you don't already see yourself in a world, then you write yourself into it.

I can't say that I loved every single story in this collection, but I can say that so many of them drew out something in me I have rarely felt, mainly only when reading her work. Something very old that I haven't felt for a very long time.

There are times in literature where there are certain scenes that are so powerful, so vivid, that even if you read them twenty years ago, you could sit down today and sketch out every scene, detail, emotion, character of that moment. I would say there were about ten stories like that in this collection for me - and what a powerful thing that is to have...

We all inherit things in different ways. Some of us tangible, some of us familial, and some of us hopeful. What this collection has made possible is for us all to inherit being a part of Octavia's Brood...and I wish I could see what that kind of group of beautiful diversity would look like...

Edie says

This incredible collection of stories is as important as it is fun and fascinating. Sure, not all the stories are brilliant or perfect, but most of them were compelling and many left me wanting more. I laughed out loud, cried, had my expectations continually exceeded, and was very sad to finish the last story. In fact I put off finishing this book for months because I didn't want it to end.

The themes of change, struggle, spirit, and hope in the face of extreme challenges are reminiscent of Butler's themes (done great justice by Tananarive Due's essay). They are what we all should be thinking and imagining about in these times. The editors' articulation of Visionary Fiction as a genre is absolutely perfect, and just in time.

My favorite stories were the river, Homing Instinct, The Long Memory, Evidence, and Hollow. Lots of other good ones too though, it was definitely a fun read.
