



A LITERARY PROPOSAL FOR
MIT PRESS
BY PLYMPTON

AFRO SCI-FI

BY
NISI SHAWL
AND
LATOYA PETERSON

Dreams of Afrofuturism began long before our current moment of dazzling, audience-pleasing science fiction tales like *Binti* and *Black Panther*. The success of these stories proves time and time again that a polychromatic lens of the future is both necessary and relevant: if sci-fi serves as society's canary in the coalmine, often predicting future threats and new possibilities years before they become reality, then black speculative fiction likewise holds a mirror to the ways in which bigotry, racism, and colonialism threaten our future.



As evidenced by the prophetic nature of Octavia E. Butler’s Hugo, Nebula, and MacArthur Award-winning work, we are collectively in need of—and would be foolish to ignore—writing that represents the fullness of the black diaspora and illuminates the many challenges facing a global, networked society on the cusp of social and technological revolution. The successes of more recent works, like *Octavia’s Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements*, reveal a continued appetite for these insights.

As headlines about future technologies become more outlandish each day, science fiction becomes the perfect venue in which to examine their potential consequences. In an era when the racial implications of algorithms determine court sentencing, when self-driving cars run the risk of hitting pedestrians based on the color of their skin, and chatbots can be easily programmed to spout racist hatred, the time has never been more ripe for contemporary takes on the landscape of our shared tomorrow.

With curation and development by noted author and editor Nisi Shawl, we aim to engage a variety of writers to produce works based on the predominant issues of our time. Once the anthology’s writers are selected, we plan to provide them with a set of prompts not only grounded in reality but taken straight from the headlines. A few recent examples: “using DNA as storage,” “curing major diseases through bone marrow transplants,” and “involuntarily added to a facial recognition system.” We will encourage our authors to be broad in their interpretations of these prompts in hopes of encouraging stories that are both personal and universal in scope.

Authors we plan to approach include N.K. Jemisin, Tobias Buckell, Nalo Hopkinson, Nnedi Okorafor, Samuel R. Delany, Kai Ashante Wilson, and Steven Barnes. To allow for maximum flexibility, we will schedule at least six months for the creation of new work and the collection of manuscripts, and four months for the editorial process. This puts us on track to deliver final manuscripts 10 months from the date of commissioning, in February 2020.

SCIENCE FICTION OF THE BLACK DIASPORA

NISI SHAWL, EDITOR

Short fiction, published in periodicals and anthologies, has long been an established and fertile area for science fiction and speculative fiction. Anthologies of sci-fi short stories tend to be annual 'best of' compilations of previously published stories, or themed volumes that gather work with similar content, authorship, or genre. Themed volumes tend also to lean toward previously published material, but occasionally will also include original material. The proposed book, like the *Twelve Tomorrows* volumes, differs from most of the works listed below in that it consist almost entirely of original, commissioned work.

Listed here are recent critical works on Afrofuturism and black science fiction.

COMPARABLE TITLES – ANTHOLOGIES

New Suns: Original Speculative Fiction by People of Color

Nisi Shawl, Editor

Solaris, 2019, pb, \$15.99, 9781781085783

This collection, just released, has a broader remit than the proposal volume in both style—sci-fi, fantasy, horror—and authorship.

Dark Matter: A Century of Speculative Fiction from the African Diaspora

Sheree Renée Thomas, Editor

Warner (Aspect), 2000/2001, hc/pb, \$33.00/\$19.99, 9780446525831/9780446677240

Dark Matter: Reading the Bones

Sheree Renée Thomas, Editor

Aspect, 2004/2005, hc/pb, \$25.95/\$21.99, 9780446528603/9780446693776

These two anthologies include science fiction, fantasy, and speculative fiction by an array of African-American authors, many of whom are not known primarily for their speculative work. The list includes W. E. B. Du Bois, Walter Mosley, Tananarive Due, Samuel R. Delaney, Nalo Hopkinson, and Wanda Coleman.

Mothership: Tales from Afrofuturism and Beyond

Bill Campbell and Edward Austin Hall, Editors

Rosarium Publishing, 2013, pb, \$19.95, 9780989141147

Mothership draws from a broader geography than the *Dark Matter* volumes, and from a mostly contemporary authorship: Junot Díaz, Victor LaValle, Lauren Beukes, N. K. Jemisin, Rabih Alameddine, S. P. Somtow, and more.

AfroSF: Science Fiction by African Writers

AfroSF2: Five Novellas

AfroSF3

Ivor Hartmann, Editor

StoryTime, 2013, pb, \$13.50, 9780987008961

Anthologies of original science fiction by African writers only, open to submissions from across Africa and abroad.

People of Colo(u)r Destroy Science Fiction!

Nalo Hopkinson and Kristine Ong Muslim, Editors

Lightspeed Magazine, 2016, pb, \$17.99, 9781532943478

Lightspeed Magazine is edited by John Joseph Adams and is published monthly. The special issues gather previously published material in book form, with a view to bringing more attention to voices that have traditionally not been heard in the genre, and include *Queers Destroy Science Fiction!* and *Women Destroy Science Fiction!*

So Long Been Dreaming: Postcolonial Science Fiction & Fantasy

Nalo Hopkinson and Uppinder Mehan, Editors (Introduction by Delany)

Arsenal Pulp Press, 2004, pb, \$24.95, 9781551521589

An anthology of original new stories by leading African, Asian, South Asian and Aboriginal authors, as well as North American and British writers of color. Writer and editor Nalo Hopkinson notes that the science fiction/fantasy genre "speaks so much about the experience of being alienated but contains so little writing by alienated people themselves."

Contributors include: Tobias Buckell, Wayde Compton, Hironi Goto, Andrea Hairston, Tamai Kobayashi, Karin Lowachee, Devorah Major, Nnedi Okorafor-Mbachu, Eden Robinson, Nisi Shawl, and Vandana Singh.

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

Walidah Imarisha and Adrienne Maree Brown, Editors

AK Press, 2015, pb, \$18.00, 9781849352093

Includes stories from an expansive definition of speculative fiction—sci-fi, fantasy, horror, magical realism—to explore the connections between radical speculative fiction and movements for social change. Also features essays by Tananarive Due and Mumia Abu-Jamal, and a preface by Sheree Renée Thomas.

COMPARABLE TITLES – ESSAYS AND SCHOLARLY WORKS

Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture

Ytasha Womack

Chicago Review Press (Lawrence Hill Books), 2013, pb, \$16.95, 9781613747964

Afrofuturism explores criticism and cultural production at the intersection of race and technology, especially in the North American African diaspora. Ytasha Womack introduces readers to Afrofuturist works and the wide range of subjects they explore, from the sci-fi literature of Samuel Delany, Octavia Butler, and N. K. Jemisin to the musical cosmos of Sun Ra, George Clinton, and the Black Eyed Peas' will.i.am, to the visual and multimedia artists inspired by African Dogon myths and Egyptian deities.

Afrofuturism 2.0: The Rise of Astro-Blackness

Reynaldo Anderson and Charles E. Jones, Editors

Lexington Books, 2015/2017, hc/pb, \$100.00/\$44.99, 9781498510509/9781498510523

Investigates and updates the intellectual underpinnings of Afrofuturism particularly around issues of the digital divide, music, and literature. *Afrofuturism 2.0* broadens the discussion to include religion, architecture, communications, visual art, philosophy and reflects its current growth as an emerging global Pan-African creative phenomenon.

Speculative Blackness

André Carrington

University of Minnesota Press, 2016/2016, hc/pb, \$87.50/\$25.00, 9780816678952/9780816678969

In *Speculative Blackness*, André M. Carrington looks at speculative fiction in literature and media, along with their fan cultures, to illustrate "the relationship between genre conventions and the meanings ascribed to blackness in the popular imagination."

The Black Imagination: Science Fiction, Futurism and the Speculative

Sandra Jackson and Julie E. Moody-Freeman, Editors

Peter Lang, 2011/2011, hc/pb, \$135.95/\$35.95, 9781433112423/9781433112416

This critical collection covers a broad spectrum of works, both literary and cinematic, and issues from writers, directors, and artists who claim the science fiction, speculative fiction, and Afrofuturist genres.

Strange Matings: Science Fiction, Feminism, African American Voices, and Octavia E. Butler

Rebecca Holden and Nisi Shawl, Editors

Aqueduct Press, 2013, pb, \$20.00, 9781619760370

Scholar Rebecca J. Holden and author Nisi Shawl have joined forces to bring together a mix of scholars and writers to celebrate the work and explore the influence and legacy of Octavia E. Butler.