

# All Organizing is Science Fiction

An interview with adrienne maree brown

D. Sands

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adrienne maree brown speaks with the *Fifth Estate* about *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements*, Co-edited with Walidah Imarisha, AK Press, 2015, \$18.00, [akpress.org](http://akpress.org).

How do we strategize to create a world without war, without violence, without prisons, without capitalism? For author and activist, adrienne maree brown, the answer is science fiction. She's a strong believer that sci-fi and other literature can be a force for transformative social change.

To that end, with organizer and performance poet, Walidah Imarisha, she's assembled an anthology of radical science fiction, fantasy, horror, and magical realism penned by activist-writers.

The title is a nod to the late sci-fi author, Octavia Butler, whose luminary works offer radical explorations into the nature of power and oppression and open up imaginative space for social metamorphosis.

*Fifth Estate* spoke with brown to find out more about the anthology, Butler's influence, and the revolutionary potential of visionary fiction.

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**Fifth Estate:** What is the connection between activism and science fiction?

**adrienne maree brown:** I believe all organizing is science fiction. Trying to create a world that we've never experienced and never seen is a science-fictional activity. And, to get to a world where there is no rape, no homelessness, no inequality, is going to require a good amount of future casting and future thinking, aligning ourselves into the future, exploring and playing with how we're going to get there.

**FE:** What can readers expect from your book?

**amb:** There's a lot of variety. We have zombies. We have time travel. We have gentrification. We have folks talking about disability justice. [Political prisoner] Mumia Abu Jamal has an essay on *Star Wars* and American imperialism. (*FE note:* Visit [freemumia.com](http://freemumia.com) to find out how you can assist Mumia during his current health crisis.) We have Tananarive Due, the horror writer, talking about her relationship with Octavia. Most of it is original stories, original fiction. [There's] a great deal about climate and violence and things that are very prevalent in our society right now.

We just got news that the book is selling out of its first printing, and AK Press is going to do a second printing, after just one month of it being out.

**FE:** Tell us how the book came about and its connection to Octavia Butler.

**amb:** I was reading Octavia Butler on one side of my life, and on the other side being an organizer and activist and feeling like I couldn't really talk openly about how much I loved Octavia or turned to her for strategy. A few years ago, I decided to try that.

I hosted what I call the Octavia Butler symposium in Detroit at the Allied Media Conference, and it went really well. It turns out many people are reading Octavia's work. She has basically case study after case study of protagonists who are young, black, female and who are changing the world by adapting to changing conditions. She was one of the first people to write that way, and it's very inspiring.

My co-editor, Walidah Imarisha and I became aware of each other's work. She was doing visionary fiction while I was writing out of Octavia. We started picking out the issues we wanted to hear from people around, identifying the organizers we wanted to invite to write for us, facing their resistance, helping them overcome that resistance. Many of them had never read or seen science fiction, but they were able to go ahead, and wrote amazing stories.

**FE:** Is it all people of color writing in the book?

**amb:** No. Majority people of color, majority women, but it's not all people of color. We definitely have a few writers that are white folks. One of the things we talked about was that we needed people to envision a future that all of us can be in.

**FE:** Sci-fi and fantasy are often dismissed as escapist literature. Some authors characterize the audience for it as reactionary. With that in mind, who did you write the book for?

**amb:** What we're finding for the audience is they're a lot of people who do social justice organizing and have been looking for new language and new ways to be creative about the future and about visioning.

There are also people in the science fiction world who are also like: "We're really hungry for this. We're tired of seeing the same old tropes and storylines over and over again with the same people saving everyone in the end and the same dystopias."

We've been excited about talk of the Hugo Awards [for best sci-fi writing], and folks talking about diversity in sci-fi. We're here for all of that, but our first goal is to reach people in the trenches doing the work.

**FE:** What do you think of the revolutionary potential of visionary/speculative fiction?

**amb:** We do a series of workshops that line up with the book. We have people collaborating on building a world in which to explore some issue that needs what we think of as visionary fiction slapped onto it.

We find it really helps people to step outside of their norms, envision a new world together, envision solutions and think about how they could apply those solutions they came up with for outer space or whatever back to the lives that we're living.

**FE:** Were you surprised by anything that happened in the process of putting this book together with Walidah?

**amb:** I was surprised to find that a number of the folks, when we first approached them and asked them to write for us, were like: "No, I can't do this! I don't do this!" But, when the deadline hit, people came back with three, four, five times the number of pages we had asked for. Everyone has these universes inside of them, but they need permission to let that out.

**FE:** In addition to the book, you also have a website and workshops oriented around this work. Do you see *Octavia's Brood* as a literary movement?

**amb:** I think so. I hope so. We've often had people asking that. Is this the beginning of a series of anthologies? Or, what's next? There's a big part of me that's like, "No calm down. Let's just be happy about this right now. This took five years." But, I also feel the sense that there's more out there to explore, and I'm hoping people want to take that on and start to classify their work in this way or long to be involved in this kind of work.

D. Sands lives and writes in Detroit.

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