



## **Foreword to the Special Issue on Afrofuturism**

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The *Journal of Science Fiction's* growing interest in and commitment to representing diversity in SF literature has afforded us an opportunity, through this special issue, to foreground a set of beliefs and practices crucial not only to the future, but to the present as well. Continuing the ongoing discourses initiated at last year's Escape Velocity Conference, this special issue aims to recognize the invaluable contributions that black authors and black cultures have made to science and speculative fictions.

Since its inception in Mark Dery's landmark 1994 essay "Black to the Future," the term Afrofuturism has come to mean a variety of different things. To some, it represents a genre of literature and film. For others, it encompasses dance, fashion, and music as well. Many have argued that Afrofuturism reflects only the lives and circumstances of African-Americans, while more recent scholarship has fully integrated African, Afro-Caribbean, and other Afro-Diaspora projects into the larger narrative of Afrofuturism. For the purposes of our journal, we have characterized Afrofuturism as a set of aims that foregrounds images of futurity involving any and all ethnicities within the larger black community. Coined to address the startling lack of racial diversity in mainstream science and speculative fiction, the Afrofuturist movement seeks to provide alternate visions of the future that include and integrate black life and its various cultural specificities alongside advancements in fields such as medicine, technology, interstellar travel, artificial intelligence, and prospective utopias and dystopias. To challenge the notion that the solution to racial strife is to eliminate racial difference, or to otherwise flatten the rich cultures and histories which differentiate racial and ethnic identities, Afrofuturism enlists our help in imagining both solutions to current racial tensions and positive, productive images of blackness which reimagine or otherwise diverge from the legacy of slavery.

This issue of the MOSF's *Journal of Science Fiction* requested submissions reflecting Afrofuturistic modes of thought, analyses of Afrofuturist texts, and unconventional readings of the cultural present projected into the incumbent future. Fortunately, the scholarly SF community heard our call and arrived in full force, offering us a wealth of critical perspectives, theories, and reflections to choose from. Despite their varying focal points and differing rhetorical strategies, the pieces selected for this special issue share a common thread. They explore what it means and will mean to live in a world dominated by racial consciousness and the historical memory of slavery. Further, they look at the genres of science and speculative fiction as sites for the artistic expression of such concerns, and more positively, hopes, about what our future will look like. Addressing the works of authors such as Octavia Butler and Nalo Hopkinson, the musical contributions of Shabazz Palaces,



and the projects of historical reconstruction, #BlackGirlMagic, and Afrocentric technological development, this collection of critical essays and reflection pieces offers commentary on the contemplation of embodiment, racism, self-image, and most germane to our mission, their implications for science and speculative fictions.