André M. Carrington, *Speculative Blackness: The Future of Race in Science Fiction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 282 pp.

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André M. Carrington's recent monograph on the significance of science fiction to black Americans adds to the growing scholarship on race in studies of speculative fiction. Like Dewitt Douglas Kilgore's *Astrofuturism: Science, Race, and Visions of Utopia in Space* and Isiah Lavender's *Race in American Science Fiction* and *Black and Brown Planets,* Carrington argues that "race and racism should be paramount concerns in any inquiry into the relationship between popular culture [i.e., science fiction] and its social context" (1). Picking up on an ongoing critical thread at the intersection of science fiction studies and black studies—that is, the genre's overwhelming whiteness in terms of authorship, presumed audience, and narratological strategies—Carrington's intervention lies in cultivating speculative fiction as an archive for criticism about "race thinking" and the significant role of fandom as a signal feature of the mutually constitutive process of meaning-making identified in a critical dialectic he terms "the whiteness of science fiction and the speculative fiction of blackness" (16).

While the notion of the "whiteness of science fiction"—that is, the preponderance of the notion of science fiction as a primarily white (and male) cultural tradition—is hardly a new observation, the "speculative fiction of blackness" is posited as a fresh way of understanding the embeddedness of race thinking about blackness within the genre. Carrington's argument focuses on the ways in which blackness in science fiction must be situated in a constructive and constitutive relationship with speculative fiction formations in the vein of Toni Morrison's seminal analysis of the haunting presence of blackness in white American fiction, *Playing in the Dark*. This critical formulation extends treatments of race beyond works produced by blacks or those engaging race either explicitly or allegorically. Thus, depictions of blackness within science fiction across media reveal insights about both blackness and speculative genres not otherwise possible. In very close readings of a range of texts representative of a broad swath of media throughout the book, Carrington demonstrates how such nuanced understandings of blackness in science fiction enable readers to apprehend the internal logic of otherness in cultural production.

Perhaps Carrington's singular contribution, however, is the in-depth treatment of fandom in the cultural production of race thinking via science fiction reading, reception, and creative production that is oftentimes parlayed into professional careerism. Centering his critical approach on the analysis of interpretive communities, Carrington delves into archives that mine the rich history of amateur participation in the critical

and creative apparatus of science fiction since the very coinage of the term. Acknowledging the importance of visual cultural aspects of science fiction genres, he reprints several of the referenced texts, further inviting critical interest in primary source material that is not easily accessed for various reasons.

The structure of the text reflects a historical periodization of the age of science fiction, using the late 1920s as its starting point. Bracketing the substantive chapters of the book with analyses of fandom and allied creative productions via amateur publishing, Carrington begins with a chapter on the earliest documented "black" fans of the genre, James Fitzgerald and the fictive Carl Brandon, and he concludes by analyzing contemporary online fan fiction that imagines and fleshes out minor black characters in two popular contemporary white-authored fantasy series, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and Harry Potter. This framing generates a historical arc of fan culture as a foundational space for interpretive communities and their role in the construction of race within the genre and in relation to ongoing cultural and political issues.

The remaining chapters progress along a historical trajectory with focalized thematic concerns. Chapters two and three treat early depictions of black women in science fiction via the iconic figures of Lieutenant Uhura in *Star Trek* (1960s) and Storm of Marvel Comics' *X-Men* (1970s), exploring how the construction of these characters recapitulates myths about blackness, gender, nationalism, and internationalism during the Cold War era. Chapter four continues its treatment of race and gender in comics with an analysis of Milestone Media's *Icon,* a relatively short-lived comic serial published in the '90s as a DC Comics imprint. Chapter five returns to a later iteration of the Star Trek franchise *Deep Space Nine,* also produced in the '90s, and the novelization of a particularly racialized episode by African American horror writer Steven Barnes. In these later chapters, Carrington considers the ways that black authorship of speculative modes calls attention to problematic patterns in some speculative fiction subgenres. The resulting structure results in a quality of depth in the treatment of the book's central themes and concerns not only with the limitations of meanings of blackness in the genre, but also the productive possibilities of how blackness, via speculative fiction, can transform cultural politics.

Simultaneously a study of racial productions and imaginings and a study of genre, *Speculative Blackness* appropriately explores multiple forms of media in the genre, including fiction, television, comic books, and films. Carrington offers a useful recasting of considerations of "genre" specifically as it relates to speculative fiction, an umbrella term for a range of related nonmimetic genres such as fantasy, horror, utopian fiction, and so on. Strikingly, Carrington focuses on the means, methods, and processes of meaning-making within these forms across media rather than on defining properties

within a specific medium. This is a particularly important strategy for engaging the interpretive concerns central to his theorizing of how these cultural products, structured by genre, reproduce race thinking and mediate racial politics.

The text is not, nor does it claim to be, an exhaustive treatment of race thinking in speculative fiction. Instead, it poses a theoretical framework for studying the implications of how racial thinking and the kind of thinking routinely evoked in speculative genres are mutually constitutive and codependent variables that mediate the culture in which they are produced. To that end, while it is perhaps logical that Carrington periodizes his study in a manner that seemingly elides the origins of speculation fiction with the invention of the term in the 1920s, a sufficient number of studies have been written to indicate that such speculative fiction was already being produced by both black and white authors. Indeed, future studies may reach back to explore African American readership and interpretive practices and their contribution to the transformation of cultural politics concerning such early speculative texts as Martin Delany's *Blake, or the Huts of Africa*, or Pauline Hopkins's *Of One Blood*. Finally, while the specificity of blackness in Carrington's project brings to bear particular intellectual and cultural traditions that help to foment his theoretical approach, his framework could very likely be applied to the portrayal of other ethnic groups in the US as well as to other popular culture discourses. Such extensions of this important approach to genre and ethnic studies will go a long way toward helping to achieve Carrington's commendable effort to redefine the relationship between speculative fiction and common knowledge.