

Release Date: April 15, 2021

Recommended for ages 15+

Content Warning: This audio play contains brief depictions of gun violence.

AUDIENCE PLAY GUIDE

Thank you to both Sage Foundation and ArtsFund for their generous support of the 2020-2021 Audio Book-It Season.

SYNOPSIS

At a time in history very like our own, dirigibles crowd the skies and steam engine whistles sound, a background music accompanying life.

In this world, too, the Haitian revolution marks a time of Black liberation in the West, but white supremacy still rears its ugly head here in the United States.

Jessalyn Dumonde has been on assignment for three months. Three long, unpleasant months in New Orleans. She is at her wits end; the city is getting to her. This must be why she was too distracted to avoid bumping into the gentleman on the street. Or avoid him bumping into her. “Gentleman” is a stretch as he openly remarks on her skin color and hair. This white man, Reginald Forstall from New York, may be out of his depth.

But Jessalyn has more important things on her mind. Her mission. Jessalyn is a spy from the great and free nation of Haiti, and she’s come to meet Monsieur Norbert Rillieux about a machine. She must tread carefully, for as we know “not all parties can be trusted when matters scientific turn to matters commercial.” Though Jessalyn explains to Rillieux that her government wishes him to create a process to transform the effluent from rum production into fuel, he remains skeptical. And hostile! In fact, he becomes rather loud and aggressive, until they are interrupted by the serene energy of his sister, Eugenie, joining them. Eugenie quickly proves to be far more than a pair of fine eyes; her understanding of the chemistry Jessalyn is interested in is astounding. An interesting turn of events, to be sure.

As Jess enters her rooms later that evening, she catches a man rifling through her things! She manages to stab him during their fight, but he still gets away through the window. It’s then she notices what he took, or rather what he didn’t. He left her money and jewelry but found the formula for the extraction process. Not such a simple theft, after all. Moving to a new inn, Jess manages to set a clandestine meeting with Eugenie. The young woman easily sees through Jessalyn’s falsehoods, so the spy grants her an honest accounting of why she’s there and who she works for. As she recounts the history of her country’s revolution, Jessalyn is intoxicated by the very nearness of Eugenie. When she speaks of the accepted ways in which women can work and live and love in Haiti—even openly have families with other women—Eugenie seems intrigued. An agreement to meet again in one week’s time, after Eugenie tries to solve the extraction process, is set. As she’s leaving, Jessalyn is approached by a nun, telling her to beware of The Order of the White Camelia, a white supremacist secret society. Perhaps this explains the break-in at her hotel?

After a week of lying low and changing her appearance to avoid detection, Jessalyn makes her way to the Rillieux home to see how Eugenie has progressed in her task. Such progress it is! There, in the garden shed, sits the almost-finished prototype. As they discuss Jessalyn’s departure from the States, they’re interrupted by the thief from the hotel. And he has a gun. A fight breaks out, Eugenie runs for the house, and Jessalyn manages to shoot the thug. When she makes it to the main house, Jessalyn finds Reginald Forstall holding a gun on Eugenie, with Norbert cowering nearby. She should have known her meeting with Forstall was no accident! Somehow Eugenie manages to knock Forstall on the head, killing him. When they return to the shed for the prototype, the henchman is gone, along with the plans for the machine. There’s nothing for it, Eugenie and Norbert will just have to go to Haiti with Jessalyn to make a new machine. And maybe the two women will even live happily ever after.

THE CAST

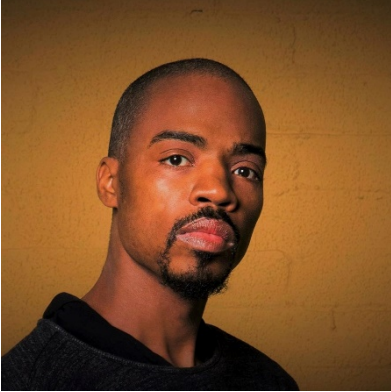


Naa Akua (*Jessaline Cleré Dumonde*) is a Ghanaian and Bajan queer poet, emcee, actor, and educator. Naa was a 2019 Citizen University Poet-in-Residence, they are a WITS writer-in-residence at Franklin High School, a co-facilitator and teaching artist for Young Women Empowered, and a teaching artist at Hugo House. Intentionality, love, and encouragement are the focus of Akua's work that can be found in tracks like "The Elements" or "Till It All Goes Away" from their mixtape *Odd(s) Balance* (on [SoundCloud](#)). Naa Akua was a cast member of Book-it Repertory Theatre's adaptation of T. Geronimo Johnson's *Welcome to Braggsville*, a cast member for Theater Schmeater's production of *Welcome to Arroyo's*, and a participant of an original boilesque ballet

Earth Pearl Production called *Tailfeathers*. Naa Akua's one-person show, *Akwaaba: Healing of A Queer Black Soul* ran as part of Gay City's Mosaic program, and recently in Earth Pearl Collectives Sovereign Queer Black Womyn Festival. Naa Akua has also been a cast member of the groundbreaking play *Queer, Mama. Crossroads*, written by Anastacia-Reneé and directed by Anastacia-Reneé and Aviona-Rodriguez Brown. Akua has also been a part of Sound Theater's Gregory Award-winning production of *Citizen, An American Lyric*, written by Claudia Rankine and produced by Jay 'O Leary. When Akua is not writing and performing they are facilitating Sound Healing sessions, which focus on breathing, being in the body, and meditation.



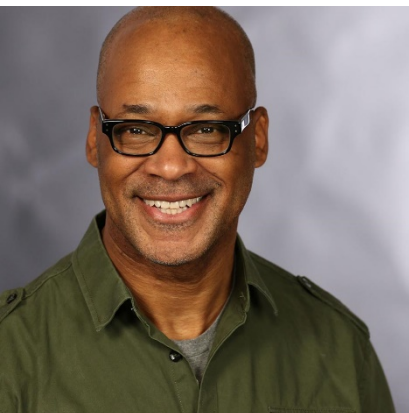
Taece Defillo (*Eugenie Rillieux*) a New Orleans native, is an emerging theatre artist/writer in the Seattle area. Notable collaborations and training include Freehold Theatre (David Hsieh); co-directors Kathy Randels of ArtSpot Productions and Ausetua AmorAmenkum of Kumbuka African Drum & Dance Collective; and author/playwright, Kathya Alexander. She has played gender-reversed roles, as well. She is also a member of The Graduates Rising, a performance-ensemble group that uses stories to ignite systematic change and to ultimately end mass-incarceration in Louisiana. She hopes that her artistry can bring hope to African-American females and encourage them to break ALL barriers. When not performing she enjoys eating bacon, playing her flute, and watching musicals.



Arlando Smith (*Norbert Rillieux/Ensemble*) Book-it audiences may remember Arlando from playing Sam Spade in *The Maltese Falcon*, directed by Jane Jones. Elsewhere locally, he has appeared in productions at ACT, Seattle Opera, Seattle Public Theater, and Seattle Shakespeare Company. He was raised where *The Effluent Engine* is set and is so happy to bring a bit of South Louisiana to Seattle.



Nik Doner (*Raymond Forstall/Bootblack Man*) a Seattle-native voiceover artist, actor, and producer with a B.A. from Loyola Marymount University, is happy to be back at Book-It after his premiere in 2018's production of *My Ántonia*. In addition to providing voiceover for video games, commercials, and training videos, he is the senior video producer of a local online education company. Other theatrical appearances include *Dance Nation* and *Dirty* (Washington Ensemble Theatre), *Saint Joan* and *Office Hour* (ArtsWest), *Romeo and Juliet* (Seattle Shakespeare Company), *Hostages* (Radial Theatre), *Greensward* (MAP Theatre), *In Arabia We'd All Be Kings* (Theater Schmeater), and *We Are Proud to Present...* (Pony World Theatre). His production house (White Rabbits Inc) premiered his autobiographical solo show, *Cuddling with Strippers*, in 2017 and the Seattle premiere of David Harrower's *Blackbird* in 2019, directed by Paul Budraitis.



BRACE EVANS (*Nun/Servant/Ensemble*) is a local to Seattle, born and raised. He has performed with several of the local theatres: Washington Ensemble Theatre, Seattle Children's Theatre, Sound Theatre, Seattle Shakespeare Company, Seattle Repertory Theatre, and Book-It. After a year off, as with most everyone in this business, BRACE is excited to exercise his acting skills again. As challenging as the last year has been, it also provided time to work on personal projects that expand his ability in other aspects of theatre aside from performing. Keep an eye out, or follow @brace.evans.



Dedra D. Woods (*Grape Kid/Bellhop/Porter/Ensemble*) is an actor/storyteller/creator/change agent. She has been working in the Seattle arts scene since 2012. She has had the privilege to perform with several companies around Seattle including Seattle Children's Theatre (*Corduroy, The Little Prince*), The Williams Project (*A Bright Room Called Day, Small Craft Warnings, The Time of Your Life*), Seattle Public Theater (*Fire Season*), Intiman (*Wild Horses, Wedding Band*), Seattle Shakespeare Company (*Medea*), Upstart Crow (*Bring Down the House, Richard III*), Book-It Repertory Theatre (*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*), and ArtsWest (*An Octoroon, The Revolutionists*). Dedra has also worked in television, film, and as a voice-over artist. She is the creator and curator of Artists of Color in

Seattle, AOC(S), a social media platform that celebrates Black, Indigenous, and POC artists in Seattle and their work, while inviting everyone to bear witness to their humanity and artistry. AOC(S) strives to lift the voices of people from the global majority and support local artists in the Seattle area, as well as engaging with artists on the national scene.

The Artistic Team

N. K. Jemisin (*Author*) Nora K. Jemisin is the first author in the genre's history to win three consecutive Best Novel Hugo Awards, for her Broken Earth trilogy. Her work has won the Nebula and Locus Awards, and she is a 2020 MacArthur Fellow. The first book in her current Great Cities trilogy, *The City We Became*, is a *New York Times* bestseller. Her speculative works range from fantasy to science fiction to the undefinable; her themes include resistance to oppression, the inseparability of the liminal, and the coolness of Stuff Blowing Up. She's been an instructor for Clarion and Clarion West writing workshops. Among other critical work, she was formerly the science fiction and fantasy book reviewer at the *New York Times*. In her spare time, she's a gamer and gardener, responsible for saving the world from KING OZZYMANDIAS, her dangerously intelligent ginger cat, and his destructive sidekick, the Marvelous Master Magpie.

Jéhan Òsanyìn (*Director/Adaptor*) is a multilingual and biliterate somatic abolitionist and futurist facilitator who is also an AEA actor and Gregory Award-nominated playwright living in Seattle, WA. They hold a B.A. in Theatre Arts from Point Park University's Conservatory of Performing Arts. Many years ago, they had the pleasure of studying theatre in twelve countries with Semester at Sea. In 2017, Jéhan founded Earthseed, an experimental experiential art studio where studio research and performance explore the stories our bodies tell with and without our consent. Earthseed offers individual coaching, workshops, and lots of opportunities to investigate your racialized identity development through experiential education. For three months at the end of 2019, Jéhan was an artist-in-residence at Aktuelle Architektur der Kultur | Centro Negra, Spain. They deepened their research on using theatre and cultural somatics to disrupt intergenerational trauma. Some of their performing credits include Siobhan in Village Theatre's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, Dido in ArtsWest's *An Octoroon*, Clarice in Seattle Public Theater's *The Liar*, and Jenny in Seattle Repertory Theatre's staged reading of *Dry Powder*. Visit *Mann und Maus* by Katharina Fritsch at the Seattle Art Museum online to hear Jéhan perform a poem response to the exhibit. Their playscripts include *MISS*, *Yankee Pickney*, and *A Prisoner*. Their directing work includes *h*llo k*tty syndrome*, *Yankee Pickney*, Seattle Repertory Theatre's Public Works production of *The Odyssey* (Associate Director), One Act at a Time's production of Keiko Green's *Those Left Behind*, and the

postponed world premiere of *Alex and Alix*. In 2017, Jéhan was awarded GAP funding from the Artist Trust in order to prepare *Yankee Pickney* for its 2020 tour (which didn't happen due to Covid-19). Jéhan was awarded the 2018 National Endowment for the Arts Creativity Connects Artist Fellowship for Seattle. www.jehanosanyin.com www.EarthseedSeattle.org

Erin Bednarz (*Sound Designer*) is a storyteller, connector, and sound fanatic who has lived in Seattle, WA for over a decade. Her career has taken her to regional theatres, Off-Broadway productions, award ceremonies, news publications, institutions, and classrooms around the country. Erin is the producing director at Washington Ensemble Theatre and will be teaching a Master Class with Intiman and Seattle Central College's Technical Theatre for Social Justice Degree. She holds a Gregory Award for Outstanding Sound Design. www.erinbednarz.com

Arlando Smith (*Dialect Coach*) see Cast Bios

Michelle Chesley (*Rehearsal Stage Manager*) is thrilled to be working with Book-It again. She has stage managed Book-It's previous audio dramas, *Childfinder* and *The Canterville Ghost*, and assistant stage managed *Howl's Moving Castle* in 2019. Other recent work includes *Hansel & Gretl & Heidi & Günter* (Village Theatre), *Out of Bounds* (Village KIDSTAGE), *Roan @ the Gates* (Central Works), *Jack and the Beanstalk* (Orlando Shakes), *Hamlet* (Orlando Shakes), *The Mystery of Irma Vep* (Orlando Shakes), and *In the Heights* (Orlando Shakes).

Benjamin Radin (*Technical Director/Recording Engineer*) has worked as an audio engineer, doing both live and recorded work for theatre, music, and short films. He especially enjoys mixing live music. Most recently, Ben worked as the primary audio engineer for Book-It's 2019 production of *Howl's Moving Castle*. Previous work includes mixing live performances at venues such as ACT and MoPop. He is excited to be a part of the first ever Audio Book-It season and is looking forward to a new way of bringing stories to life for our audience.

Zenaida Smith (*Assistant Production Manager/Casting Associate*) strives to build community and advocate for underrepresented voices in all her work, and she is proud to help give life to this vital season. In addition to her work for Book-It, Zenaida is a producing director for MAP Theatre, a freelance actor, and an occasional director. She moved from her native Nebraska in 2013, and since, has worked with notable Seattle companies: Seattle Public Theater, Pork Filled Productions, The 14/48 Projects, Annex Theatre, Theater Schmeater, Washington Ensemble Theatre, and others.

Leanna Keith (*Theme Composer and Performer*) is a freelance flutist, artist, improviser, and composer in the Seattle area. Leanna delights in creating sound experiences that make audiences laugh, cry, and say, "I didn't know the flute could do that!" Her performance artworks have focused on cultural connection and the breaking of audience/performer boundaries. Leanna is the professor of flute at Cornish College of the Arts. www.leannakeithflute.com

ACTIVITY:

Write your own bio, in only 125 words or fewer. In such a short allotment, what will you include? What will you have to leave out? Does this change the way you think about events that happened in your life?

Audience Play Guide produced by:
Torrie McDonald
Gillian Jorgensen
Gus Menary
Jose "Jojo" Abaoag

The Haitian Revolution: 1791-1804

The island of Hispaniola has long played a vital role in the Caribbean. With Haiti occupying two-thirds of its landmass, the nation is pivotal in the region. First violently colonized by Christopher Columbus in 1492, the country's history has been fraught with bloodshed. Centuries of European oppression led Haiti, or Saint-Domingue as the colonizer named it, into a more than decade-long revolution.

After the Ogé rebellion (an uprising led by Jacques Vincent Ogé as a “common front of gens de couleur against the forces of white supremacy”) was squelched in October of 1790, the embers of dissent were stoked. Then, on August 14, 1791, the revolution began with the Bois Caïman ceremony. When many of the French enslavers were to be sailing to France, the enslaved in Haiti would rise up and, as one, literally burn the system down. With the guidance of hundreds of slave leaders, a vast network of enslaved peoples are activated to fight for freedom. A week later, the revolution makes it to the northern territories of Haiti. Burning of plantations and killing of white enslavers takes hold, with 1,000-2,000 slaves joining the revolt. In a highly organized effort, the revolt sweeps the country.

The revolutionaries move from district to district, plantation to plantation, burning and killing those who would uphold the old system. On August 25, they march on the city of Le Cap. Knowing that whoever controls the city will control the nation, a victory in this battle is imperative. But, this is the first time they face any real resistance—troops, arms, cannon. They are pushed back. As Brown University's Haiti History tells us, “The slaves' strategy is clear: every time the planters circle or overcome them, the slaves retreat to the mountains to reorganize and prepare a new attack.” At the same time, in remarkable coordination, the enslaved in the Northeast launch their attack, cutting off communication between plantation owners and seizing control of that area.

By the end of August, the ranks of the enslaved number around 15,000 newly hardened and determined fighting forces. The transformation from what they perceived as passive workers to impassioned soldiers catches the slaveholders off guard. As one colonist noted, “...a large attack was afoot, but how could we ever have known that there reigned among these men, so numerous and formerly so passive, such a concerted accord that everything was carried out exactly as was declared . . . The revolt had been too sudden, too vast and too well-planned for it to seem possible to stop it or even to moderate its ravages.” The colonists manage to save the city but within eight days over 184 plantations are destroyed.



Through September, revolts and violence continue to sweep the country. The white population is unprepared for the ravages of war, and the enslaved forces are resolute—burning crops, killing plantation owners, and taking no prisoners. The Colonial Assembly tries to assuage the revolutionaries by finally acknowledging the decree of citizenship for “mulattoes and free blacks” that was made in May. Unfortunately for the whites in the colony, the National Assembly in France rescinds that decree, which leads to renewed violence and even more widespread revolt.



“During those first weeks of revolution, the slaves destroyed the whites and their property with much the same ruthlessness and cruelty that they had suffered for so many years at the hands of their masters....Yet as atrocious as they were, these acts of vengeance were surprisingly moderate, in the opinion of one of the best-known historians of that revolution, compared with the cold-blooded, grotesque savagery and sadistically calculated torture committed by their oppressors throughout the past. These were impassioned acts of revenge, of retribution, and were relatively short-lived.” (Carolyn E. Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, p. 108)

The revolution is marked by its impressive strategic planning, tactical acumen, and general political savvy. The French government tries to take a different tack by granting amnesty to any free person charged with rebellion. This does nothing to dampen the flame, the enslaved are fighting for their freedom and “an end to the whites.”

By November, the enslaved have established an encampment akin to a town or small city. However, one of the first and most powerful leaders of the revolution, Boukman, is killed, decapitated, and his head left on display in Le Cap. This blow gives way to days of mourning and internal strife. The leaders of the rebellion want to negotiate with the colonizers, but most of the rank-and-file slave soldiers want to fight until Haiti is cleansed of the white population. They realize that there can never be good-faith negotiations when the result will still be their enslavement. And the French government proves their point by refusing to engage. They return to war.

In January, the colonial forces overtake the rebel encampment. The leaders and fighters flee to the mountains, leaving noncombatants behind in the belief they’ll be treated leniently. They are mistaken. Those women, children, and elderly are slaughtered. The white establishment celebrates this as a victory, but the leadership and heart of the revolution lives on in the mountains. The fighting continues. And by the Spring, the nations of Europe are at war with each other, allowing uneasy alliances between the slave forces and the British. Le Cap is under siege and the horrors of war are visited on all sides. The French plead with the enslaved to come to their aid against the Spanish, and some agree. For the next year, Europe is embroiled in revolutions on its own shores and battles between its nations. But, though the monarchy falls in France, freedom does not come to Haiti.

In August 1793, the Civil Commission of France gives lip service to freedom for the enslaved. They are now to be called “laborers” and ostensibly have rights. However, their day-to-day lives change very little, and the societal systems of oppression remain intact. At this time, women also begin to raise their voices for equality, as well.



This is the time that Toussaint Louverture makes his famous speech, a rallying cry to continue the revolution. As British control, with an official reinstatement of slavery, is taking hold in parts of the nation, the French Commission begins to grant freedom to their enslaved. And by winter of 1794, slavery is abolished in France and the French colonies. And still daily life is largely unaffected. And still the revolt lives on. The next few years see more conflict between European nations and more jockeying of position by rebellion leaders—Louverture moves from the Spanish to the French and brings his leaders, including Jean-Jacques Dessalines, with him.

By 1796, when the colonizers try to foment discord between the different factions—mixed race and Black—Louverture rises as the most influential leader in the area, becoming Lieutenant Governor of the colony and Commander-in-Chief of the army. Of course, this increase in power, and Louverture's use of it, threaten the French government. Despite his continued victories against the British, the French Commission attempt to weaken his authority. They fail. While Napoleon Bonaparte overthrows the French Republic and declares a regression to pre-Revolution white rule, Toussaint Louverture makes a secret alliance with the British and the United States.



By 1800, after years of civil war ravaging Haiti, Louverture declares victory, with himself as Supreme Commander-in-Chief and the “absolute master of the island-colony.” After implementing social and economic reforms (though not without some controversy), Louverture is proclaimed Governor General for Life and the new constitution, which abolishes slavery and stratifications based on race and color, is enacted. All is not serene in Haiti, though. With Catholicism being made the official religion, and Voodoo banned, labor requirements that acted in essence as a form of the pre-revolution slavery structures, and the official retention of French colony status, many former enslaved, as well as the French government, were unhappy with the situation. October 1801 sees an outbreak of violence in the North. The next couple of years brings Napoleon's general Leclerc to Haiti with over 400 ships and 80,000 troops. Louverture's forces are divided and many of his leaders defect. Despite some victories, Louverture and his troops are succumbing to the French onslaught. He is offered and accepts a deal, which is a harsh blow to his remaining reputation and influence. Leclerc betrays the agreement, imprisons Louverture, and ships him to prison in France. And still guerrilla fighters maintain a revolt in the hills of Haiti.

As they get word that slavery is returning to the French island colonies around them, the former slaves of Haiti realize they are awaiting the same fate. After a decade of fighting, killing, and dying the Haitians would never allow themselves to live enslaved again. So, again, the bands of rebels grew; however, for the first time in the revolution the factions fight together—mixed race and Black. And for the first time in the revolution, the principles for the island nation were based on popular ideals and common culture. When Leclerc dies in 1802, he recommends Rochambeau for the post, for the man “hates blacks.” Rochambeau quickly becomes known for his merciless violence. “Command of the French forces thus fell to Rochambeau, in whose name and by whose orders so many atrocities and mass-murders, ghastly acts unparalleled since the days of slavery.” Still, the rebel forces continue their attacks, giving no peace to the French oppressors.

When Napoleon pulls out of the West, with the signing of the Louisiana Purchase Treaty in 1803, it is only a matter of time before the French leave the island colonies, as well. Dessalines creates the



Haitian flag “with the red and blue representing the unity of blacks and mulattoes against the whites.” On January 1, 1804, Dessalines publishes the Declaration of Independence for Haiti. Despite this newfound independence, the world does not welcome the island nation. The country is shunned by trading partners, and many Haitians still feel threatened by the French, as they retain some presence on the island. Dessalines orders the slaughter of all whites remaining on the island. Some 4,000 people killed. In October, Dessalines is proclaimed Emperor Jacques I of Haiti.

Spanning from 1791 to 1804, the Haitian Revolution was marked by brutality, courage, and ultimately victory for “the first independent nation in the Caribbean, the second democracy in the western hemisphere, and the first black republic in the world.”

ACTIVITY:

The Effluent Engine is set in a speculative version of antebellum New Orleans. A place where dirigible travel was commonplace, steam-powered machines were the hope for the future, and spies and secret societies battled wits. Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to get a message to Jessalyn letting her know where to find the prototype. But you can't let the information fall into enemy hands. Here's how to create a message in invisible “ink,” from www.popsci.com.

What you'll need:

The juice of half a lemon

A small container

½ a teaspoon of water

Cotton swabs

Paper

A heat source

What to do:

- 1. Squeeze the lemon juice into the small container.** You can use either your hands or a juicer (make sure you don't have any unhealed scratches if you use your hands). If you get some seeds, don't worry about them.
- 2. Add the water.** Stir.
- 3. Write your message.** Submerge the tip of a cotton swab in the lemon-water solution and use it to write your secret message on some paper.
- 4. Let the “ink” dry.**
- 5. (Optional) Write a decoy message.** If you want to mislead anybody who might suspect there's a secret message on the paper, write something else on the page with a regular pencil, like a grocery or to-do list.
- 6. Use a heat source to decode the secret message.** To read the message, expose the paper to heat from the back. Move it constantly so it doesn't catch fire. You can use a candle, a lighter, or a lamp with a 100-watt incandescent light bulb. An energy-saving light bulb won't heat up as much as an old, classic bulb will, so you'd be stuck holding the paper over a lamp for hours without anything showing up. If you're using a candle, choose one that comes in a container—that will put some distance between the paper and the flame.

Speculative Fiction: A Story for Everyone

We all know the pleasure of walking the aisles of our favorite bookstore, browsing for something new and unknown. We look to the faded paper tags adhered to the endcaps as maps guiding us on our quest. Nonfiction, mystery, biography, young adult, poetry, fiction, science fiction/fantasy. Hmmmm... That last one feels a bit nebulous, doesn't it? But how do we parse out some of these works?

If we accept the general classifications, as posited by the University of Ohio online, as being "science fiction (as dealing with science, technology, space exploration, and future worlds) from fantasy (as dealing with magic, folklore, and past worlds)," we can see the incomplete and unsatisfactory nature of this divide. Some stuff just blends. They site *Star Wars* as an exemplar of this combination space/magic storytelling. Pierce Brown's "The Red Rising" series and the work of *The Effluent Engine* author N.K. Jemisin are other examples.

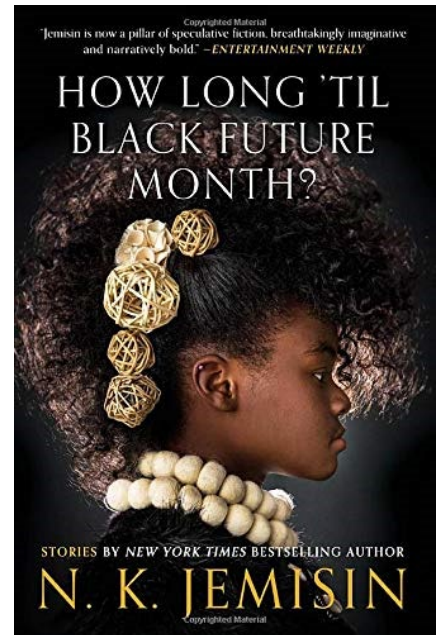
Okay, well, those are all different, so what, then, is Speculative Fiction? Generally, the term is used as a catch-all for a difficult-to-define category of works that deals with changing the known world to accommodate whatever can be conceived. If you dream it, it's speculative fiction. This can encompass, among others—horror, dystopia, science fiction, fantasy, supernatural, superheroes, and urban fantasy. And it is used for more than just works of literature. Graphic novels, video games, visual art, movies, anything that tells a story of a world-that-could-be can be considered speculative fiction.

The term "speculative fiction," first coined by author Robert Heinlein in 1947, is not without controversy, itself. It has often been used by those who are trying to couch their work as being more than "talking squids in outer space," as Margaret Atwood famously commented on the genre. But does this hair-splitting really tell us anything about the off-shoot literary camp? Does it even matter?

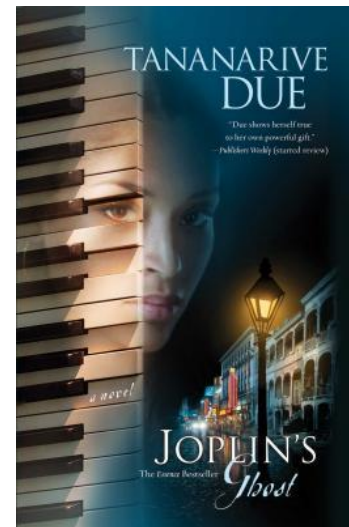
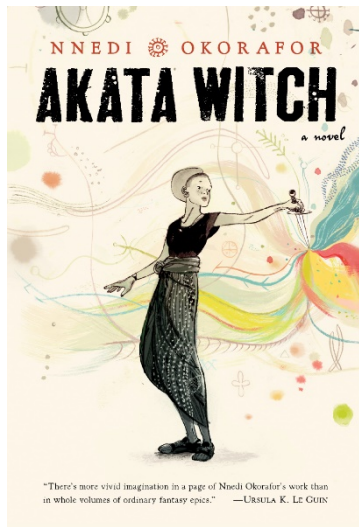
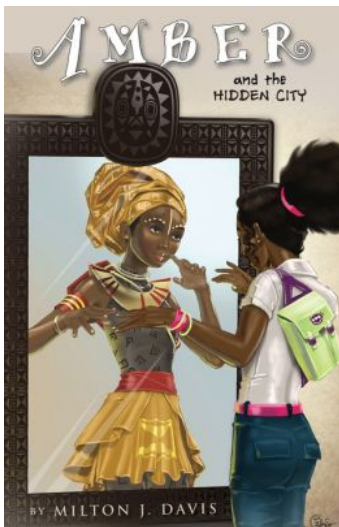
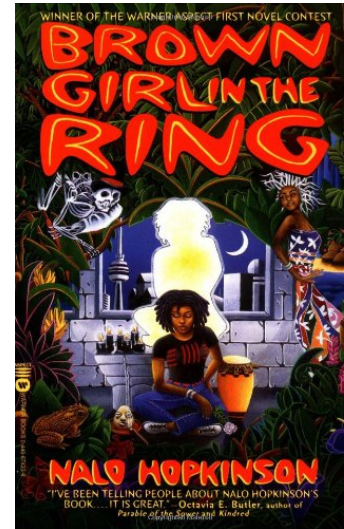
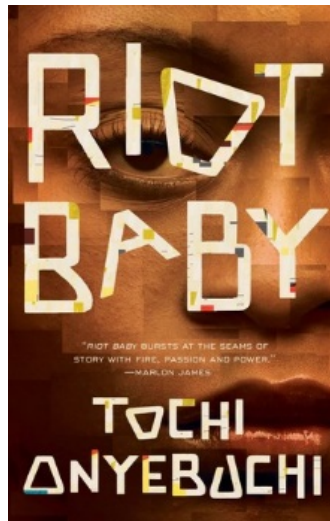
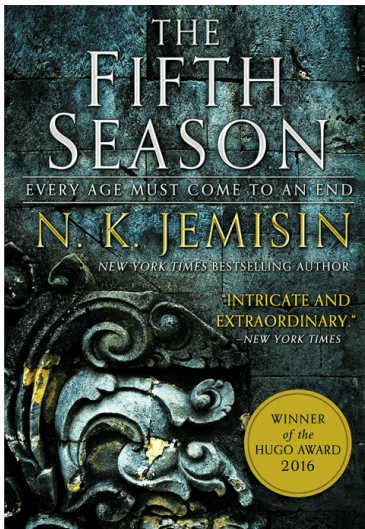
Yes. It matters because there is unnecessary—and unwarranted—prejudice against genre writing in many "literary" circles. When *The New York Times* makes such close-minded sweeping statements as "science fiction will never be Literature with a capital 'L,'" as they remarked in their review of Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*, one can almost forgive the author her reluctance to identify with science fiction. Such capitulation to snobbish ideals leaves science fiction, its authors and readers, relegated to the outskirts of the literary establishment. This outdated and unnecessary elitism only registers because the establishment still holds sway over publishing deals and author fees.

In the larger, and more personal, sense none of this matters. If a work entertains and engages you, if it makes you think and feel, if it leaves you wanting more, then genre is of no import. It does make it easier to stroll those bookstore aisles looking for the next adventure to take, though.

Happy reading and happy listening!



To Read, To Watch, To Check Out



MOVIES:

- *Black Panther*: Disney+
- *Sorry to Bother You*: Hulu
- *Blade*: HBOMax
- *Attack the Block*: Amazon Prime, Hulu
- *Black Death*: Kanopy

WEBSITES:

- <https://nkjemisin.com/>
- <https://blacksciencefictionsociety.com/>
- <https://www.fictionunbound.com/>
- <https://library.brown.edu/haitihistory/11.html>
- <https://www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/haitian-revolution-1791-1804/>