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Binti



Synopsis

Winner of the Hugo Award and the Nebula Award for Best Novella! Her name is Binti, and she is the first of the Himba people ever to be offered a place at Oomza University, the finest institution of higher learning in the galaxy. But to accept the offer will mean giving up her place in her family to travel between the stars among strangers who do not share her ways or respect her customs. Knowledge comes at a cost, one that Binti is willing to pay, but her journey will not be easy. The world she seeks to enter has long warred with the Meduse, an alien race that has become the stuff of nightmares. Oomza University has wronged the Meduse, and Binti's stellar travel will bring her within their deadly reach. If Binti hopes to survive the legacy of a war not of her making, she will need both the gifts of her people and the wisdom enshrined within the University, itself — but first she has to make it there, alive.

PRAISE FOR BINTI "Binti is a supreme read about a sexy, edgy Afropolitan in space! It's a wondrous combination of extra-terrestrial adventure and age-old African diplomacy. Unforgettable!" — Wanuri Kahiu, award-winning Kenyan film director of *Punzi* and *From a Whisper*

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Book Information

File Size: 592 KB

Print Length: 96 pages

Publisher: Tor.com (September 22, 2015)

Publication Date: September 22, 2015

Sold by: Amazon Digital Services LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B00Y7RWXHU

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Not Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #5,862 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #18 in Kindle Store > Kindle Short Reads > Two hours or more (65-100 pages) > Science Fiction & Fantasy #44 in Kindle Store > Kindle Short Reads > Two hours or more (65-100 pages) > Literature & Fiction #54 in Books > Science Fiction & Fantasy > Fantasy > New Adult & College

Customer Reviews

I don't often give a five-star review for fiction. It's so subjective, and even when I really, really like a book I like to reserve 5 stars for something super spectacular. My rule of thumb is this "Do I think everyone on the planet who reads this genre should read this book? Is it that good?" Binti is a phenomenal story, and beautifully written. It is powerful and real and yet not "gritty" the way some authors seem to think they must be gritty to wrestle with real human issues. It is a coming of age story, and there is danger and death and courage and tension... and yet I could give it to my 12 year old son without concern that it might introduce images of sex or violence that would lead him astray or disturb him. There are aliens who are truly, beautifully and intriguingly alien. The colors and language and culture of the aliens is mysterious and fascinating. But one of my favorite parts about this story is that even the main character is so foreign to me. She is so very human, and yet so very different. She lives in a place far from me, both in time and space. A part of Africa, far into our future. She has talents and ways of looking at the world that are unique. Maybe a math person would feel right at home with her special "treeing" skills, but I found it both alien and fascinating. It seemed more like some mutant super power to me, or some mystical religion, because it allowed her to do things normal people couldn't, and it helped her stay calm when her world falls apart. Yet this connects directly to how I feel about my own "special skills" like writing or jazzy/improvisational singing, and I think it will give young people hope in their own special skills.

The best short fiction says much in few words. There is no room for tangents, for building a world with incautious words, for long descriptions of breakfast or the meticulous description of a length of hallway (unless that hallway stands for or means something significant, of course). Dr. Okorafor knows her craft and writes short fiction as short fiction rather than as abbreviated novels. For some people, this novella will act as a window. For others, it is a mirror. Binti depicts the experience of a person who has lived her entire life designated as "other" by most of the people in both her home country and the universe at large. Her people do not even exist in other places; her people are largely invisible. Binti Ekeopara Zuzu Dambu Kaipka of Namibia, the title character, has grown up on our planet. She is the first of her people, the Himba, accepted to Oomza University, though this is not without its challenges. The Himba are an insular people who are obsessed with technology and innovation. They do not leave the tribe: "We prefer to explore the universe by traveling inward, as opposed to outward." Binti herself is a master harmonizer, which is sort of like a magician of mathematics. Most of the humans who space-fare are Khoush, a different people than the Himba. There are some fundamentalist aspects to the Khoush, though I am uncertain from which specific

religion they may have originated. This is certainly far in our future. Bintiâ™s people are dark skinned, black haired, and wear otjize, a sort of orange-red clay with healing properties, over their bodies and through their thick hair. The Himba live in a place with little water, and this clay is used as a cleaner, but it also is a cultural symbol, a signifier, a comfort to those who wear it.

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