

[Intro music]

Koen: Hey everybody welcome to "Quote Me." I'm Koen.

John: I'm John.

Anna: I'm Anna.

Ian: and I'm Ian.

K. And today we are talking about Octavia Butler. So Octavia Estelle Butler was born in Pasadena California on June 22nd, 1947. Her father, who was a shoe-shiner died when she was 7 years old, so she was raised by her mother and her grandmother. Her mom often had to take her to work with her because, you know, she didn't have the funds for a caretaker, and so Octavia got to see a lot of the racism in the workplace because of segregation-era laws. So that along with many other aspects of her life greatly shaped her writing. She was first inspired to write when she watched what she called 'a horrible movie' "Devil Girl from Mars." She said it was so bad that literally anyone could write it, especially her, and someone got paid to write it, so why shouldn't she. [time 1:19].

J. Makes sense to me...

I. Yeah...

K. An incredible life motto [laughter]

A. A really good point. She has a lot of good points like that.

K. She really does [laughter]. So a lot of her stories center Black women and discuss important topics such as: interracial relationships, racism, misogyny, and consent. She graduated from Pasadena City College and shortly after joined the Screen Writers' Guild Open Door Program and the Clarion Science Fiction and Fantasy Workshop. At that workshop is where she met fellow writer Harlan Ellison who became her mentor, and she was inspired by a lot of science fiction and fantasy authors like Ursula K. LeGuin, Isaac Asimov, Marion Zimmer Bradley, and Robert Heinlein. Her first book was "Patternmaster," published in 1976, the 1st of a 5 book series. "Kindred," her most famous novel was published in 1979. It was originally meant to be part of the Patternmaster series, but she decided it was too realistic. From 1987 to 1989 she published 3 books in the Xenogenesis series, later renamed "Lila's Brood." In 1993 and 1999 she published The Earthseed Series, and finally in 2005 she published her final novel "Fledgling." In 2006 she died from an accidental fall at the age of 58. However, she was posthumously inducted into the Science Fiction and Fantasy Hall of Fame, and some of her short fiction was later discovered and published in 2014. So in no way has she been forgotten. She is now

considered the mother of Afro-Futurism, she was the 1st science fiction author to win the MacArthur Genius Fellowship, and she has influenced other artists such as Jaenelle Monae [Time 2:42], Junot Diaz, and Hilton Ells. So, let's get started with Patternmaster.

J. All right guys, so, Patternmaster is a very ambitious series, and that's in terms of scale and scope, but before we dig into Patternmaster itself which, again, was the 1st published novel that Octavia did, I want to give you guys some background information on what was happening in the world when Octavia was first born, when she was growing up, and when she first started her career as a writer. So, Octavia, as we said before, was born in 1947. When Octavia was 9 to 10 years old the Soviet Union launched Sputnik, the world's 1st artificial satellite. This event began the period known as the "Space Age", the specific date for that is October 4th, 1957 and it's continued on into today. The era was made possible by the advent of nuclear power, advances in rocketry, and the desire to put the 1st humans in space and on the Moon. So, for example 12 years after the Soviet Union launched Sputnik, that was when the US 1st put humans on the moon [time: 4:02]. That was on July 21st, 1969. At that point, Octavia would have been just 22 years old, so this is all happening very early on in her life, you're seeing like all these huge leaps in technology and things that would have been impossible 50 years before that. Humanity is now able to reach beyond the Earth's confines into the stars, these things that have just been theoretical, high, high concept pie in the sky things are suddenly a lot more realistic, and this young woman is seeing these things, internalizing these things, and, since the imagination of the country itself and the world at large is being captured by these advances in technology, you have to think that the same kind of impact was made on Octavia.

K. I just want to interject really quick: she was very similar to Dwayne McDuffie in a lot of ways, and one of those being she loved space, she was incredibly intelligent, and she internalized a lot of the scientific world and put it into her writing.

J. So, July 21st 1969, that was when the 1st people walked on the moon. Just a year later, after receiving encouragement by Harlan Ellison in 1970 is when she began seriously writing and working on her stories. Six years after that is when "Patternmaster" was 1st published. Also, just to kind of give you a little bit more of an idea of what she was reading, you mentioned how "The Devil Girl from Mars" inspired her...

K. Mmm-hmm...

J. She's reading a lot of science fiction authors—another connection point to Dwayne McDuffie, Octavia was actually a Fantastic Four reader she...

K. Yeah she was...

J. She mentioned that she had a copy of Fantastic Four number 1...

K. I think she kept all of books from childhood.

J. She did. She said she just couldn't let anything go...

K. She was a hoarder [laughter]...

J. And [laughter], for those of you that don't know, Fantastic Four number 1 is actually the beginning of the Marvel Universe, and the Fantastic Four, the whole central premise of that is that these four astronauts are launched into space and are exposed to cosmic radiation [Time 6:05] and this kind of changes the way their body is structured and mutates them and gives them these fantastic powers, and in Ben Grimm's case mutates him into a more monstrous form. We'll see this come into play later on when we start digging into "Patternmaster".

K. Before we begin, I think I saw somewhere that she had written all of "Patternmaster" while being in the library, like she just wrote it all at the library [laughter]...

A. Yes, at the L.A. Public Library...

K. Yeah...

A. And there is, like our Spark Space, they have a makerspace also that's named after her. It's called the Octavia Lab, and they have a lot of her, like early writing, her notes and things like that in their archives, which I think is really cool...

K. That's so cool [laughter]...

J. That is really cool, to have like a whole room in a library named after you...

K. Someday...

A. Yeah [laughter]...

K. All right, tell us about Patternmaster.

J. Okay, so Patternmaster [Time 7:07], as I said previously, its a superexpansive series. It actually starts off in the early 17th Century and extends into the far future. So there are technically 5 novels published in the series—one of them Octavia sort of disavowed, she came to regard it as her worst book, her worst writing and we'll kind of dig into that once we get to it. Something that people may not realize is that the order that the Patternist series were published in is not reflective of the books' internal chronology: so "Patternmaster" was the 1st book published by Octavia, period. It's actually the last book in the whole "Patternmaster" series, it's the one that's set in the far-future...

K. Ooh, interesting...

J. Yes. After that “Mind of my Mind” was the follow-up. It’s a prequel set in 1977. “Wildseed” was published in 1980 and “Clay’s Ark” was published in 1985. That was the publishing order. The order that it’s actually set in is “Wildseed,” “Mind of my Mind,” “Clay’s Ark,” and then “The Patternmaster”. “Survivor” is the book that was abandoned and it is set between “Clay’s Ark” and “The Patternmaster.” So, just to kind of dig in and start, I want to give you guys some background on each of the books so you can kind of see the way the story evolved and expanded, just in terms of like the internal chronology. So, we start in “Wildseed.” “Wildseed” is set in 17th Century Africa where it starts and it centers on two immortals that meet each other. One of these characters is named Doro, and Doro is kind of a spirit who transfers his essence into different bodies, and that’s how he achieves his immortality, he’s just body-hopping. The other immortal character is Anyanwu who is a shapeshifting healer. Anyanwu can transform into any animal that she’s tasted to flesh of, and because she can shapeshift, she can rejuvenate [Time 9:30] her cells, so she is positioned as a foil for Doro—much more peaceable, harmonious, her immortality is the total opposite of his. His is about controlling and taking possession of others, hers is about rejuvenating herself. Doro wants to control her. He has these colonies set up in the new world where he’s trying to use Eugenics to create a whole race of superhumans with psionic powers, and he wants her genetics in the mix. He makes a deal with her, you know, “I can help you have kids you won’t have to watch die,” so she gets onboard with it, and Doro, Doro is a Black character but he actually utilizes a lot of the practices a lot of white supremacists utilizing at this time—participating in slavery to further his own agenda and goals. This leads to a 150 year journey over the course of the book where these two characters are in conflict, and Doro’s mission to create his superhumans is put into effect in these new world colonies, and its Anyanwu kind of trying to find her own autonomy and a way that she can co-exist and work with this person who is her only real peer since the 2 of them are immortals, so, pretty compelling stuff. It digs in heavy to African folklore [Time 11:00], the two main characters are rooted in folklore mythology stories from Africa, and then it kind of creates this cool alternate history of the world, this secret history that was going on behind the scenes that we didn’t, we just didn’t know about it. Moving on, that brings us to “Mind of my Mind”. We pick up with Doro in 1977. He’s still trying to create his superhumans—he wants to create this perfect group of telepathic people so that he won’t be truly alone, and one of his daughters, a biracial girl named Mary, is the girl he thinks could link all of them in this super-powerful telepathic network. And she does. It creates the first Pattern, which is where the name of the series comes from and its when all of these telepathic people link with each other. Mary is the dominant person in charge of this link, so she’s exerting influence and control over the other characters. Doro doesn’t like it because he feels threatened. The other characters don’t really like it either, but they don’t really have a say-so in it. This leads to a big conflict where Doro is killed. Mary continues to add people to the psychic collective, and all of this is happening in secret. This brings us to the next book in the series, “Clay’s Ark.” So “Clay’s Ark” is

set much much further down the timeline. It's in a dystopian future where society has crumbled; everybody lives in these gated communities or these roving caravans [Time 12:32] and this kind of actually digs into interstellar travel that we see her fascination with that come in here. This person comes back to earth after being part of an interstellar voyage to another planet, and he brings an alien disease back with him and it begins to infect the human race and the novel just kind of shows how it spreads and causes humans to mutate into these creatures that will be called 'clayarks'...

K. Hmm...

J. After the ship, Clay's Ark. This is where "Survivor" would fall into the canon, and you can still read it that way, but Octavia has like disavowed it, so I don't know that she would count it as her personal canon...

K. Then I guess we'll skip it.

J. Okay, we can do that [laughter]. She, she, just in short, referred to it as her "Star Trek" novel...

K. Star Trek...[Laughter].

J. It was just, umm, the Clayark virus was spreading and setting up these events in "Patternmaster". Again, keep in mind that "Patternmaster" happened 1st and all these books are retroactively explaining these elements that would pop up in that 1st book. The clayarks for example: They're not super-defined, they're mutated...

K. Mmm...

J. They're bestial, and Octavia said that she always kind of felt sorry for them and wanted to expand on it, so "Clay's Ark" kind of like gives that backstory and shows the tragedy of how they mutated into these bestial creatures. And "Survivor" shows that happening and spreading [Time: 14:01], and it shows a group of people going to space, they go to this other planet, they're trying to co-exist with the people who already live on that planet, and she kind of felt like it skewed too close to a bad taste colonizers cliché in science fiction and she wanted to avoid that. So that closes out "Survivor" and brings us to the last book of the series, "Patternmaster." Patternmaster, again, is set in the far-future. At this point, society is ruled by the Patternists, the leader of which is referred to as the "Patternmaster," the person who kind of controls and directs everybody through the telepathic link. And this novel, there's this caste system that's introduced, so the Patternmasters are at the top of this society. They are served by non-powered humans, non-superpowered humans, called Mutes, who are kind of like the slaves the workers who can be transferred from house to house. And then you have the

clayarks, who are the bestial, savage creatures that have their own culture, but are kind of removed from humanity at the point, due to the effects of the virus. They're kind of at the bottom of society, on the outlying part of it. And this novel focuses on the struggle between a Patternist named Teray and his brother to succeed his father as Patternmaster. It kind of like has these Biblical overtones, and Octavia described herself as being raised in a very religious household, so you kind of see that kind of upbringing bleed into this first example of her work with, kind of a take on the Cain and Abel story, and its kind of all about Teray managing to overcome his brother and succeed his father to become the Patternmaster. So that's the whole thing from start to finish. I know I just threw a whole lot at you guys [laughter]. Again, this 4-5 book action series, super-dense, lot of ideas, a lot of worldbuilding elements, but the main key themes [Time 16:13] that Octavia really played with here were: epidemiology, eugenics, and space exploration. You see eugenics kind of pop up and work as a prevalent theme in all of the books, this idea of people selectively breeding, controlling how people breed to achieve certain outcomes, and it often wrestles with the ethics and morality of that. Oftentimes, eugenics is touched on in science fiction, but its not really analyzed with the scrutiny that you would expect it to be in actual real life. Typically it's to achieve some kind of fantastic result like superhuman concept character, and that creates your characters, your plot, and its exciting, and people go wild with it. Here, Octavia kind of explores how that can be a bad thing, and how it can be used to subjugate and control people. I don't think that it can be understated how important her POV is as a Black female author, the only one in the science fiction genre at this point, I don't think you can understate how important it is for her perspective that she's bringing her because the other writers who are white male writers aren't tackling it with this kind of scrutiny and analysis, and I thought that was a supercool thing.

A. One of the things I love about Octavia Butler's writing is that she brings a very realistic perspective to science fiction, so the things that she talks about, like, you talked about her difference in approach when it comes to eugenics as a topic...

J. Yes...

A. Where white male authors are approaching it as like a means to get to your characterization, your plot, your whatever, that, for her, she's unpacking it as like the negative impacts that it has on society. It may not be something that, like a white male author would be able to see...

J. Yes...

A. Because they're not, maybe not looking into how things impact people in a larger scale.

J. That's true. You can definitely see the concept of privilege coming into play there.

K. It's interesting because I didn't know anything about "Patternmaster" coming into this, I've only read "Kindred" and "Fledgling" and I was excited to hear some of the ideas here to kind of see how it affects her later writing [Time 18:39], and something that she does talk about again in "Fledgling" is DNA, how we can use DNA for benefit, so it's not exactly eugenics. In this scenario she's talking about vampires, a lot of vampires in our, like, Western lore, are like beautiful white men, and how in her story it's a Black woman, and her black skin is what allows her to walk in the daylight, and I'll talk a lot more about that when we get to "Fledgling", but it's interesting seeing how those concepts have been there since she started writing and she keeps talking about it and like keeps evolving and, also, I think it was "Patternmaster" was set in the future...

J. Yes, far future.

K. Yes, so, that we can connect back to Afrofuturism, because the idea of Afrofuturism is that there is, in the future there's a culture and a society where Black people are not just like a part of that society, but there like centered and important in that society.

J. Right, and that's sort of like, the overarching premise of this, starting all the way back chronologically with "Wild Seed" all the way to "Patternmaster." It's about setting up a society that is, powered by "Superblackness" is the term I saw used...

K. and A. "Superblackness"...

J. Where white supremacy has been countered in this way, by this character, Doro, who's trying to create this utopian super-society. The means that he does it by, though, emulate the white supremacy...

K. mmm-hmm...

J. And the slave practices of the slave trade, stuff that happened in the 17th 18th Century...

K. Yeah...

J. And, because he kind of uses this same methods, and it's all about him controlling and people not having a say-so, it sort of like builds all of that on like this poisoned concept...

K. Mmm...

J. It was built unethically, and that seems to be, you know, why it ultimately fails, why you have these problems. There's the social stratification where you've got these people on top who are exploiting other people, and I think part of the argument might be that you're like making the case about why that's a bad thing, and how it can ultimately lead to this super-stratified, terrible future you wouldn't want to be a part of. Does that make sense?

K. Yeah...

I. Yeah...

J. Yeah...

K. [Time 21:12] I mean, essentially it's a warning for if we were to like continue down the path we were on, which, she was born during segregation and she saw all the civil rights and like all of the violence between people and like she's like "if this continues like this we're gonna destroy ourselves."

J. That's right, and that is what is so cool about this, because it starts all the way back in 1640 I think is the specific year. You've got the slave trade and you have this "original sin" that the world was participating in, but she subverts it by having this African character Doro participating in it and using it to try and further "blackness," and you kind of see these little steps all along the way—how it progressed and how it changed, you have that scope you don't always have in real life or in fiction to kind of observe how it expands and how it takes root.

K. Yeah, I like how she's like "there is a history [Time 22:16] and it goes very far back, and it's a lot, but it's there and we can't forget about it..."

J. That right. Nothing happens in a vacuum...

K. Yes...

I. Yep...

A. Well, you said that "Patternmaster" was her first book, correct?

J. Yes.

A. So, I remember seeing, I think it was in one of the New York Times articles I read about her. She was talking to one of her mentors, and they were saying like: "if you want to talk about race then you should do it with aliens, which, obviously, if you want to talk about race in your writing, you just do it..."

J. Yes [laughter]

A. But that wasn't something that was done in science fiction at the time, so to me this kind of seems like a "screw you, I'm going to talk about aliens AND race and, like, here's a bunch of issues I see in this society, and here's the warning." But I do bring that up, like the alien aspect of it because I feel like she probably felt a lot of pressure in the beginning to bring the...

I. It's kind of like she used that as a way to deliver the race issue, like she did using the time travel. Like the time travel is just a device to try to get to the issues at hand, and it seems like using the sci-fi of the aliens is the same thing. They're very different books, but I'm seeing a lot of the same themes...

A. Yeah...

J. Mmm...

I. That I have encountered in "Kindred" that are in this "Patternmaster"...

J. I think we've talked about it before, but Stephen Graham-Jones says that, you know a person really has only one story that they tell...

K. Yeah...

J. Over and over again [laughter]. I mean you dress it up differently but the beats are the same. You're kind of hitting on the same territory, and it does feel like Octavia does have like the issues and the themes and the things that she's definitely most concerned with grappling with and exploring and I think we'll really see that as we work through all of these different areas how, even though "Patternmaster" is wildly different than "Kindred" or "Fledgling..."

K. Yeah...

J. Or the "Earthsea" books...

A. Yeah...

J. Umm, there's going to be a lot of shared commonality between them.

I. Definitely.

K. Agreed.

I. So next we're going to talk about "Kindred" which is probably her most famous novel. She wrote it in 1979. One thing that Octavia Butler liked to do was, she liked to go to the places that she was going to write about if possible and research, so in 1979, with a 1700 dollar advance that "Survivor" earned her, she took a trip east to Maryland, which was where "Kindred" takes place. Having lived her entire life on the west coast, she travelled by cross-country bus, and it was during the 3-hour wait at the bus station that she wrote the first and last chapters of what would become "Kindred." So the story takes place [time 25:08] in 1976 with the main character Dana. She's a 26-year-old Black woman, and through migraine-type headaches she time travels back to 1815 in the antebellum South, specifically Maryland, to a plantation. So she has a

husband, Kevin, who happens to be white. Him and Dana are moving into their new apartment in Southern California before her 1st time-travelling episode. She starts getting dizzy while they're unpacking, and she wakes up and notices that there's a young boy, Rufus, who is drowning. Rufus is another central character. She jumps in to save him. He is recovering on the bank. His father shows up, points a gun at her, and Dana, terrified, starts getting a dizzy spell again and wakes up back in her apartment in 1976...

A. Yeah...

I. Moments later she has another dizzy spell. She finds herself back in 1815. This time Rufus is a little older, and she witnesses a free Black family being beaten by a white man. One of the white men tried to attack her and she has another time travelling episode and returns back home to her apartment. One thing that I did learn was that although there was a lot of brutality in this book it was meant to show what the slaves had to go through during the 1800s in the south.

J. One of the things I saw when I was doing research on this was that Octavia said that one of the reasons she was inspired to write this is because she heard that young Black people minimized the severity of slavery. She said that they would strongly assert that they would or would not have tolerated if they were enslaved and she wanted them to not only know the facts of slavery but how slavery felt—that it wasn't somehow this fantastical scenario that you could bust out and be free—society was geared to return you to that. There was pressure on all sides, and mainly it was more about just surviving the experience, and there was no shame in just having to endure it, just to make it through and see another day; you're in this impossible situation, and the entire machinery of society is arrayed against you...

I. Exactly...

J. And just really like bringing that home...

I. That is a theme in the book. There is no escaping. In fact at one point she tries to run away and gets whipped severely. So, the next time she does go back in time, she travels with her husband Kevin. He's holding on to her so his is taken back then, too. They end up back at the Weylin's plantation, Rufus has an injury. Dana and Kevin show up. They're not allowed to leave. They are staying at the plantation for several weeks before Dana gets caught teaching a slave how to read and she's whipped for it. Soon after they return to the present day, but Kevin cannot get back to her in time and he's stuck in 1815 Maryland. Yes.

A. [Time 28:17] Yeah, so like one of the things I saw in reading the book is that Dana is telling Kevin "It's terrible, I can't go back there, it's horrible" and then he gets back in modern times and he's like "this time is just too easy. I don't feel like I'm having to work as hard for things

anymore. And so his perspective on the time-travelling events he's like "oh wow what a fun experiment..."

I. Exactly, yep...

A. While his wife is being beaten and abused...

I. And it's not because he's a bad guy, it's just because he happens to be white and he got privileges and so he didn't get that same brutality she faced when she went back in time...

J. You have the two POVs in stark contrast against each other to really...

I. Yes, exactly...

J. Show that to the reader...

I. Because I think that towards the end of the book she kind of is weighing Kevin vs. Rufus, and here Rufus is is a slaveowner, mean, brutal guy, and then even though it's her ancestor and her family and Kevin, and she's kind of realizing that, Kevin, Kevin's just kind of there. He's nothing special...

K. There are some similarities that she has to, like, reconcile...

I. Yeah...

A. Yeah. And it also, kind of like a subplot of the book is her dealing with Kevin's family and her family as they are an interracial couple in the 70s. There's not very much acceptance in modern times of them, and so she's trying to reconcile that already, so there's already like...

I. Yeah...

A. Conflict there, and I think that's also where it gets back to [Time 30:12] what John was saying like she wrote it to show the feeling of it, of racism...

J. Mmm-hmm...

A. In the 70s vs. the 17...

I. 1815...

A. 18...right, where it's like bringing those two levels of conflict to light...

I. Definitely. Okay, so we pick back up when she has another episode. This one is pretty bad. When she comes back events are escalating. She finds out that Kevin has left Maryland. Rufus is getting beaten up by a slave named Isaac because he assaulted Alice. Dana convinces Isaac to

let Rufus live because that is her ancestor, and although he's this evil person, she is torn between having to keep him alive and having to keep the slaves alive as well, so she has this internal conflict of both sides of her ancestry family tree: she has the slaves and the white plantation owner...

J. Yes...

K. Well, she was also fighting for Rufus's life because without him she would not have been born.

I. Yes...

K. So that's where that conflict, if it wasn't for that there would be no conflict [Laughter]...

I. No, definitely, definitely. The slave that Rufus takes and gets pregnant, they have not had the child yet which would become her direct descendant. So, Alice and Isaac run off after that tussle, and a couple of months later Alice and Isaac are caught. Alice is beaten. She's made to become a slave, but, which is kind of weird because Rufus supposedly like loves her, and wants her...

A. That plot point where it's like Rufus loves her...Rufus feels very possessive over her, so it's not so much a...

I. That's a good point...

A. An adoring love, like she had with Isaac, it's who Isaac I believe is sold...

I. Yes...

A. To another...

K. Yeah. I think. I think Alice was free...

A. She was free...

I. She was free at the beginning...

K. Yes...

I. But because she helped Isaac escape afterwards and then she

K. Then she became...

I. Became a slave yeah...

A. Umm, and that's where, that's why Rufus is happy because he's then free to abuse Alice as much as he wants to...

K. Yeah...

I. That's a good point [Time 32:07]...

A. And Alice can't do anything about it, because she's now, even though she was born free, she's a slave now...

I. Mmm-hmm...

J. So we are seeing again the ethics of power and control...

I. Yes...

K. Yes...

I. The corruption of power for sure because that is one thing: Rufus starts out when we 1st get introduced to him when he was a young boy, he seems kind of genuine and he hasn't had the structure of slavery embedded into him yet...

J. Mmm...

I. And Dana notices that, too, as a boy. As he grows up and she keeps having going back in time he gets worse and worse every single time. So, Rufus tries to get Dana to help convince Alice to be with him, Dana finds out that Rufus had not been sending her letters to Kevin, so she tries to run away. This is a turning point because she receives a vicious whipping, and at that point she decides that it scared her enough so she doesn't try escaping again which goes back to the point that you were saying, John, about people, you know: "I would've just run away I would have done this..." she kind of brings it more to a more historical approach—you get whipped, you get beaten, you get so scared for your life you just stay on the plantation for the rest of your life, there is no, there's not a happy ending for a lot of people.

J. I think all people probably would like to believe if confronted with an adverse situation we'd all rise to the occasion and do the heroic thing. "I'd do this, I wouldn't take it," but in reality it's not really like that. I think it's much more likely that all of us would just do our best to fly under the radar, go along to get along...

I. Mmm-hmm...

J. Umm, yes Anna.

A. In one of the important parts of “Kindred” too is that for her to escape the 1800s and go back to 1970s California, she has to genuinely think she’s about to die. And I think that, too, is important in highlighting the severity, like the lack of escape...

I. Mmm-hmm, and it doesn’t, I think Octavia said with some of those questions about “why does it only happen with this, with the time travel, she wanted to keep it very vague because she didn’t want to take away from the morals of the story that she was saying. Umm, we’re getting towards the end of the book, but she returns back to her apartment in 1976. A week or two later she finds herself back in Maryland once again taking care of Rufus. He’s in a weakened state. He blames Dana for some troubles that happened, though he forces her to work in the fields. Soon after, Alice does give birth to Dana’s direct ancestor Hagar, and Alice tells Dana that soon she will run away, she’s getting too comfortable with Rufus, almost like a Stockholm Syndrome where she’s starting to have feelings for him. She knows what a bad person he is so, it’s just that conflict...

J. Right...

I. And then some time passes. Dana tries to stop Rufus from doing some other terrible things. He strikes Dana, so she cuts her wrists in an attempt to go back to present day and succeeds. At this point there’s just one more time where she goes back to Maryland after talking to Kevin, and there’s some conversations going on and I think Anna like you said earlier them talking, then she goes back. Some stuff happens. I don’t want to give away the ending so I will stop there. John like you were saying there are a lot of themes in “Kindred” like family, home, interracial relationships. Then you have the trauma from slavery, freedom, privileges. Butler also, I think, really makes the reader think about the word ‘home’ and what it means, because there are sometimes where [Time 36:07] Dana, for example, started to feel like the plantation was just as much home as her apartment was back in 1976. She explores the differences between the “Chosen Family” which is Kevin and the problems that arise with the internal conflict he has to get some closure on and the “Ancestral Family.” Dana chooses Kevin to be her family throughout the novel, but doesn’t feel right when he is not with her, but when she’s back on the plantation since she is around her Ancestral Family, it starts to feel more like home even though all these bad things are happening.

K. One thing that we didn’t mention is the use of time. Well, okay we did but we didn’t so [Laughter]. What happens is when she time-travels it’s like a different amount of time for Kevin back in California than it is for her, so there like...she’s there for like years at one point...

I. Yeah...

K. And for Kevin it’s like a couple of weeks that she’s missing. There’s also this conflict of, when she appears again, and she’s obviously harmed, she’s been hurt and she has to go to the

hospital, she's getting interrogated because everyone thinks that Kevin hurt her, and how do you explain that's not what happened [Laughter]...

J. Right...

K. So there's also like this reconciliation of like reality, the reality that we all have vs. her personal reality.

I. Yeah.

A. Yeah, and I think that too is part of, like, where that conflict between what is home and what isn't starts to come in, because she has spent years somewhere else, whereas in, it's in California?

K. Yeah...

I. Yeah, Southern California...

A. In California, she just moved in with her relatively new husband. She's a newlywed. She just trying to settle down this life, so she has two areas of her life that are settling kind of at the same rate...

I. But she's really probably been on a plantation more than she has the apartment...

A. Yeah...

I. Since she could be on the plantation for three years but to Kevin it's only two weeks.

K. She was 26 the whole time, but is actually like thirty...

I. Yeah.

A. Yeah.

J. It's huge so you've got like this four-year period and this super-informative and traumatic event vs. your regular normal life at home and then trying to like kind of reconcile the two things, "am I the same person that I was when I was here, even?"

I. Yeah.

K. Yeah.

J. I don't think you are...

K. Yeah, no, I mean to get that traumatized, you're a vastly different person...

I. For sure...

J. And that also speaks to Octavia's strength because this is a very humanized thing, like I mean it would be very easy to get lost in the, the sci-fi, the time-travel, the high concept...

K. Right...

J. But she keeps it grounded in these real, human experiences and the links between characters. It just, it just shows her burgeoning strength as a writer I think.

K. She has a very direct writing style, so like it's not very flowery language, it's just like "this is what happened" and so I think that works very well for her because she has such gnarly and gruesome ideas and things she has to describe.

I. Her research into the topics fully helped with that, too.

K. Yeah.

A. And one of the things I read in an interview with her is that, she also, in addition to that highlighting the severity of slavery when it was kind of being disregarded like John said in that "Oh well I do it" kind of attitude [Time 40:01], she also said that she wanted to emphasize that all of the people who lived in or survived slavery are heroes because she mentioned that, like Dana is a hero at this point in the story because she gets out of it, but then it's not really addressed until the very end that every single person who is there everytime Dana escalated things, they were there to bring it back down, so they're the real heroes of the story, the people who couldn't get out.

K. Yeah, all the people who are on the plantation definitely protected Dana in a way that she could not have done for herself; she was not aware of the specifics...

A. Right...

K. The little things that she couldn't get away with...

I. It goes back to that Familial Love that like, a lot of times in the 1800s, slaves, all they had was family, and that was a tool used to keep them there on the plantation if you don't sell the family, and that's why Rufus never really, you know he sold Isaac, but for the most part he kept Carrie and Sara around because he used that bond of family...

J. It's a form of control...

K. Uhh-huh...

I. Exactly, a means of control. Yup.

J. But they turned it around and used it as a strength...

I. Exactly...

J. To endure...

K. And this was one of Octavia Butler's most difficult novels to write because of the research she did. She was very meticulous in her research. She would, I mean she would, like you said, she travelled to the place, she looked into the history, she looked into like the specifics and this, writing this novel for her was very very difficult and she addresses that and talks about how, like, writing "Fledgling" was like her taking a break.

J. So projecting forward, this sort of reminds me of Jordan Peele's films which he's described as "social thrillers." This kind of feels like Octavia Butler was doing Jordan Peele before there was a Jordan Peele...

K. Ooh...

J. You've got this "sci-fi concept" or some type of narrative device, but you're using it to talk about a very real social issue [laughter]

K. Social Issue...

J. Social issue, to talk about very serious, gritty things [Time 42:24], and you can definitely see the DNA of this carried forward into the stuff we see today, and that audience's are responding so positively to. Jordan Peele, his movies are events now, he's a brand unto himself...

K. Yeah...

J. And I think you can definitely trace some of that back to Octavia and some of the work she did here with "Kindred."

I. Yes.

A. Another thing that was inspired by "Kindred"— Koen's going to hate me for bringing it up again [Laughter], but the Lemonade visual album [Laughter]...

K. Yes, yes yes yes [Laughter].

A. So "Lemonade", if you just listen to the album is about a woman being cheated, in this case Beyonce by her husband...

J. Yes...

A. Umm, but then once you watch the visual album the elements that were inspired from “Kindred” take it from a woman being cheated by her husband to a woman being cheated by society, and its that context that elevates it.

K. I was just going to say like, Afrofuturism had a big impact in music, especially in the music industry, especially in jazz. We see that a lot in “Lemonade” and also in Janelle Monae’s “Archandroid” album which I did not get a chance to listen to, but she did say that she was inspired by Octavia Butler, so...

J. That’s really cool...

I. Yeah...

J. You can definitely tell something is a classic and has staying power when you can kind of trace lines from it to all of these other projects so many years later, and you can definitely do that with this...

I. For sure.

K. Well I think that brings us to “Earthseed. Earthseed? Earthseed?”

A. Yeah, I think “Earthseed” because I think we are going to end with “Fledgling” right?

K. Yes, I just couldn’t remember if it was called “Earthseed”...

A. So it’s...

J. Me too [Laughter]

A. It’s a little complicated. I’ll explain it. So we’re going to talk about the “Earthseed” duology. So the first one is “The Parable of the Sower”, and it follows the story of the teenager Loren Olamina. She lives in an enclosed, this is kind of like during the fall of society, and the duology follows the story of the United States falling into fascism. So it starts in—Loran Olamina is born in 2009, and I believe it [the book] starts in 2024 so, coming up on modern day [Laughter]...

K. It’s getting there...

A. At the time a near-future sci-fi because it was written in the 90s. Loren Olamina is 15 when it starts. She’s the daughter of the local teacher and the local minister, so her father is a Baptist minister she really looks up to and admires him [Time 45:16]. Her stepmother is the schoolteacher. She helps her stepmother a lot and her stepmother has taken on a really maternal role in her life but she, her biological mother was on a drug they gave her a condition they referred to as “hyperempathy” which means she feels the pain and pleasure of the people

she can see, so, like, Koen you're sitting across the table from me, if you stubbed your toe and I had hyperempathy I would feel your stubbed toe, but if you didn't react to it, like if it was, I don't know, if there was something else that was uncomfortable that I couldn't tell, I wouldn't be able to react to it...

K. Okay so it's like something she would actually have to know happened...

A. Right...

K. Right...

A. Like if somebody was walking past and they were in pain but she couldn't see it, she wouldn't intuitively know that they were in pain [laughter]...

K. Like reverberate to her, like it's parapsychological or something?

A. Yes, and so her brothers used to pretend to be in pain to mess with her...

A. That's not nice...

J. Not it is not...

A. It's not nice. We see later on her brothers, she has 4 brothers, and one of them is really not a great character. One of those "really not a great character," so that's kind of like where we start. There's inside Robledo which is the neighborhood is "safe" quote unquote. Outside of the neighborhood there are what are called the "painted people". They are on a drug called Pyro which makes them pyromaniacs like they love fire, and so what they tend to do, they also have a hate for rich people, which they see as anyone who lives in a house. So it's following the story. Her brother Marcus runs away from the neighborhood because he doesn't like living with rules. He is killed and in a very violent way. Shortly after that Lauren's sense of safety is really rocked by that but instead of reacting how a lot of other people do, there like "Oh at least we have our walls and neighborhood. We're safe here as long as we don't leave [Time 48:03] she sees that as 'Its time to prepare and to start acting, and the ways she's doing that are through education and just kind of like critical thinking. So, she's reading everything that she can, she's looking into indigenous plants and seeing what she can do with those plants, and just really trying to build herself up as much as possible. She tells her best friend about this and her friend freaks out because nobody else was willing to acknowledge that bad things could happen in their walled neighborhood. So her dad talks to her and is like: "Hey maybe you shouldn't talk about it, but if we framed this as earthquake kits(because they're in southern California) if we frame it as earthquake kits then people will be more willing to participate and more willing to prepare because they can acknowledge that an earthquake could affect them. So her dad kind of shows her how to relate to people that's comfortable for them. Her father works for a university

outside of the neighborhood, and he leaves one day to go to work and doesn't come back, and it's assumed that he's killed, which we're fairly certain that he is, it's never confirmed, but he never comes back. Shortly after that their neighborhood wall is run down by a group of "painted people." Loren was already prepared, she grabs her backpack, takes a gun off of a man who was killed, and escapes the neighborhood. She tries to come back to look for her step-mother and her three brothers, but can't find them. It's assumed that they're also dead [Time 49:47], and then after that she ends up meeting up with a couple of people. At this point she has been developing what will turn into the "Earthseed" religion, which is based on the principle that God is change. So she acknowledges that God can be shaped, can be adapted to and directed, but change is inevitable, so that's what the founding principle of "Earthseed" is; it's kind of the same thing she started when she was fifteen where she was trying to prepare, and that's something we see kind of resonate with a bunch of people who have been, who had a sense of stability—and then it was taken away from them. So she's on the road, they're trying to make it to the north because a lot of people are moving toward Alaska—it's more difficult to live up there, there are fewer people because of that, so it tends to be a little bit more peaceful. [Time 50:42], so that's the goal, there going to try to find as many family members as possible on the way but they're really not hopeful to find anybody; its her, Zahra and (??) [Laughter]

K. Another guy...[laughter]

A. Hold on...

K. Did you find the name Anna?

A. Yeah, it's Henry, it's Harry [Laughter]

K. There was something interesting that happened in Octavia Butler's life that influenced this book and its that her mom had four miscarriages, and those four brothers that she imagines in this story are sort of bringing those boys to life. She was a single child. Actually that's what I wanted to say. Well, that's it, that's all you get...

J. Well that's really interesting because you talk about the big societal moving part things...

K. Oh...

J. Influence, but then you have a very personal thing like that...

K. Sorry, just remembered. There was another thing that connected her with Dwayne McDuffie. I kept making a joke while we were doing research that her and Dwayne McDuffie are the same person, in that, in McDuffie's life, his brothers, I think he had one or two, died before him because of like a genetic heart condition, and I was like, wow, they have so much like in common. This is really bizarre, so I just thought that was cool...

J. For sure [Time 52:07], the fascination with sci-fi and science...

K. If you want to get more information about Dwayne McDuffie you should check out our last episode.

A. So, okay Lauren Olamina, Harry Balter and Zahra Moss that are travelling together now. They were all from the same neighborhood and they all managed to escape. They 're trying to make their way to Alaska because it is safer there...

K. Yup...

A. Along the way they keep running into people and Lauren will share her ideology that she's keeping in her book "The 1st book of the living" what she titled her journal because she was like: "Oh, there's so many books for the dead, we need a book for the living. And so she's sharing her ideas and they're really catching on. Some people are like "Yeah, these things are just true" and she's like "Yeah, it's true, I'm just the 1st person to put it together, this has always been what it is. So they continue, they run into several different people. There've been, there was one time where their camp was, like a couple of people came in and tried to steal their stuff, their backpacks, and instead of killing them like they normally would, they realized it was two younger girls, so instead they were like "Hey you can come with us, just don't steal from us again. Stop that." [Laughter] So the girls start traveling with them and end up adopting the Earthseed ideology. It gets to the point where they meet Bankole who's a doctor, and Bankole was saying "I'll never believe in Earthseed, but I'll travel with you, I think your group has good things to offer. While they're with Bankole they run into cannibals [Time 54:06], more Painted People...it's really emphasized that this is a really rough time, it's "every man for himself" situations, so that part isn't very different from other post-apocalyptic...

J. it's something you could find in like "The Walking Dead," or "The Road," or like these other...

K. I was going to say it sounds very McCarthy's "The Road"...

J. It does...

A. Yeah, it's very similar to that where you're, you have a goal, you're trying to get there. It's more about the development of this religion, and so through the different attacks and developments they have, she starts uncovering more and more of these truths as she sees it.

J. Well, that's something I wanted to ask you about Anna. It really seems like this book, more than the other ones that we've talked about, is Butler trying to grapple with her religious upbringing, because like she did grow up in this strict religious household and it seems like maybe her response to it, like an interrogation of ideas. Would you agree with that?

A. I would say probably yes. It does seem to be very deeply rooted in, I wouldn't say Christianity...

K. She was a Baptist...

A. Yes...

K. To clarify...

A. And Loren Olamina's father was written as a Baptist minister, so there is that element of, I guess Christianity, but its more of like the holistic, like most religions end up saying "Be Good to One Another", and that's what "Earthseed" ends up doing...

J. Right...

A. Its "Be Good, Be Prepared," or vice versa, "Be Prepared, Be Good," so it's kind of that thing where she's, she doesn't really feel like Christianity suits her anymore...

J. Right...

A. So she's coming to terms with that. It's kind of a 'coming of age' story [Time 56:00] also.

J. It does sort of sound like Octavia's riff on the Bible because you've got like this character who's starting this religion, and she's travelling around talking to people about it and refining and fine-tuning the idea, she's pulling people in and then kind of like evangelizing about the truths of the things she's finding out. It does feel like her spin on this sort of idea, if not directly paralleling the Bible, using it like the starting point and then moving off to the side.

A. Yes. And into the title, too, because the Parable of the Sower, I don't remember where it is in the Bible, I looked it up, but I...

K. It's in there [Laughter]

A. It's, the story goes like, if there's a man who is sowing seeds. If you scatter them some will land on stone and be eaten by birds, some will land in the thorns and grow, but be strangled out by the thorns, some will land in good soil and grow into a rich harvest, and that's kind of the way she's spreading "Earthseed" in this first book, as she, she's not really being discerning about who she tells about it, she's telling everyone she comes across...

J. She's just evangelizing, she's getting the word out...

A. Yes, and its successful to a point. She and Bankole fall in love. Bankole is significantly older than her, but they end up coming to the agreement they've been through so much that their years on earth aren't equivalent to how old they feel...

J. You go through certain experiences with people, these really hard, growing periods, and it's a unique bond that you can't have with anyone else, no one else can understand it, it's going through a crucible...

A. Yeah, and they do establish she is of age before they actually, they start off like travelling companions where he's just a part of their...

K. Mmm...

A. Group and then they come together, and then toward the end of the book they end up being a couple, but that doesn't happen until later on. [Time 58:10], but by the end of the book Bankole suggests that they come to the property that he had with his first wife, but they end up going to Bankole's property, seeing that his house has been burned down, his family has been killed, which they knew his family was killed before, but he's seeing it now. They plant acorns to honor the dead

and they decide to rebuild this property into a community for Earthseed called “Acorn”. That’s where we’re left with “Parable of the Sower.” In “Parable of the Talents” it picks up from Olamina’s daughter’s perspective. And they stop calling her Loren, they start calling her Olamina instead as kind of like a respectful title. Their community has grown to 70-75 people, so it’s a lot larger. We see the rise of, and this is just as Octavia Butler wrote it in the 90s—this is not a direct reflection of modern political standing--they see a far-right presidential candidate coming up really harping on Christian theologies. He’s calling out a bunch of these fringe groups as cults and not advocating for them to be slaughtered, but that’s what’s happening, kind of like saying everything but “go out and kill these cults.” His name is Jarret, so [Laughter]

K. Oh Jarret...

A. Oh Jarret, stop it...

J. So he’s taking all of these fringe groups and kind of turning them into targets to rally people and draw support for himself, turn that vitriol on them, riding that wave so to speak...

A. And taking that as a “this is why the country is falling apart,” not anything else, not people are looking for something that makes sense to them because the country’s falling apart but these fringe groups...

J. He’s made them a scapegoat...

A. Yes. And so they’re kind of dealing with that. Its, like I said it’s from the daughter’s perspective in a lot of it, but it’s through [Time 1:00:41] Olamina’s journals...

J. Mmm-hmm...

A. And the daughter is very critical of her mother, and we don’t really know why until the end of the book. You get to see the workings of their community and how successful it is. They’re doing a really great job, like they’re able to provide for themselves, they have their cabins, they have a school and a church, they have, its like a very strong sense of community there. Their community is attacked by definitely not Jarret’s people, but there...

J. Wise...

A. It specifies they wear a black tunic with a white cross embroidered on the front, which is similar to what Jarret’s people would wear. He is elected, and that’s when everything really goes haywire. After their community is attacked they are given what are called “slave collars.” Ooh, I need to back up. Before that happens, Olamina is reunited with one of her brothers that she previously thought was dead—not the one that tried to escape the community, he really is dead—but Mark who, he escaped similarly to Lauren. He didn’t have a backpack or anything like that; nothing was prepared, but he was able to meet up with friendly people and stay with them for a long time, but was sold into slavery. Its really emphasized that he’s really handsome, like everybody who sees him is like “Oh my God, he’s the most handsome man I’ve ever seen [laughter]” every time, and that really did not suit him well when he was sold into slavery. They had slave collars that they were forced to wear, so if you tried to get away, or not follow instructions or anything like that you would be, it says like you would be hurt but not, it wouldn’t kill you, but then it did kill people, so that’s what the marketing was, you can hurt these people without doing any damage...

J. Its, a control tool...

A. Right...

J. And also the people don't know "Am I going to die? Will I get one of the ones that malfunction or whatever"...

A. And it was more of a severity thing, so...

J. Mmm...

A. After everybody is, so Mark has left and its implied that Mark sells out Acorn and tells Jarret's people where they are. Mark wanted to start a church, like a Christian church, on Acorn. Olamina was not down with that, so he left. So Mark leaves, we don't see him for a long time. The community is attacked [time 1:03:43] and people are separated and forced to wear collars; their children are missing. There's a landslide after 18 weeks of them being enslaved on their own land. A landslide takes out the control center for the collars so they're able to break out. They end up separating. They decide to each go different directions and spread Earthseed as much as they can, but this time they're more discerning with it which brings us to the title of the 2nd book which is "The Parable of the Talents." So in the Parable of the Talents, I also don't know where that is in the Bible, but [inaudible] umm [laughter], there's a rich man who gives talents, which are like coins, he gives five to one, three to another, and one to another person. The person who was given 5 turns it into 10, it's implied that it's through investment, so he ends up with 10 talents. The person who had 3 ends up with 6, and the person who had one was scared and buried it so that it would be safe. So when the person comes back the person who turned the 5 into 10 is rewarded, the person who turned 3 into 6 is rewarded, and the person who had the one is told that they are no good for not having improved upon what they were given, and they get their one coin taken away...

K. Aww...

A. So, yeah, big bummer [laughter] but...[laughter]

K. Big bummer...

A. The way this is relevant to "The Parable of the Talents" by Octavia Butler [Time 1:05:04] is that Olamina sees that just spreading Earthseed as far and wide as possible didn't really work too well, so instead this time she's decided to cultivate, so she goes out and starts Jehovah's Witness style, knocking on doors and getting a read on a person before talking about Earthseed, and through that she's able to build the religion up to a point where her end goal was to quote "scatter Earthseed among the stars", so to start extraterrestrial colonies on other planets to ensure the survival of the human race. That's the goal because the epidemic took out more population than we still have...

J. Yes you're...

A. Your Martian Earthseed people...

K. Your Martians [Laughter]...

J. Your odds of survival go up...

A. Right. She's successful, she ends up doing that. This whole time while she's trying to do that there's this battle between Earthseed and her daughter who she calls Larkin but her daughter goes by the name Aster because when she was adopted by a different family she chooses a different name because she didn't know Larkin as a name, so she has to choose constantly between is she really going to focus in on Earthseed, or is she still going to try to find her daughter even though she doesn't know if she's alive or dead. She does end up after 34 years of her daughter being missing, her daughter finds her after Earthseed has grown to the point where it's in the news and people are really upset about it, but it is funding all of their schools and their space exploration, and all of these things so they can't really be that mad about it...

J. No...

A. Larkin finds her mother. They don't get along very well, but they stay kind of in touch. Earthseed is successful in getting to extraterrestrial colonies, and that's where it ends [Time 1:07:07] with her success. So, the main themes of the Earthseed duology are obviously religion and preparedness, because that's the core value of Earthseed as a religion. There's also a lot on race because this is really the only group where they don't discriminate. It's led by Loren Olamina who is a Black woman, but they accept everyone who's willing to, everyone who's willing to accept Earthseed they accept into their community, whereas with Jarret's church there's a very defined hierarchy which is more based on financial status than with race, but they also go hand-in-hand...

J. Right...

A. So it really focuses in on that. And then another strong element to it is slavery. Whether it's official or unofficial. It starts in the 1st book where Zahra's husband has several wives who are, for all intents and purposes, enslaved to him. There's a lot of indentured servitude in the 1st book and then it devolves from there into the slave collars you see in "Parable of the Talents".

J. So definitely playing on the themes we've seen in a lot of things: the control, how to do that, freedom—just grappling with all those things...

A. Yes...

J. You can see the evolution of that here, albeit in a much different setting.

A. Yes, definitely.

K. There's also an interesting connection I'm seeing with "Fledgling" where there's like that idea of a family you create, a family unit. I mean, it's a community but at the same time it is a family. I'll get more into that when I get to "Fledgling" but again that's like another ideology that she has that goes throughout her books.

A. Well, and they do mention Zhara and Harry have children...

K. Mmm...

A. And when they do they accept Olamina as their children's aunt, and then when she has children, they're family, so they're unofficially, but that's their chosen family.

J. So talking about [Time 1:09:42] that and then going back to what Ian was saying for “Kindred” about the importance of family connections, it seems like that sort of connectivity is important in both stories here. Octavia, she had four brothers who were passed away before she was born. I wonder, she was an isolated child—I wonder if this was her trying to sort of create that family unit and structure that maybe she felt like she was lacking in her life, that lack of connectivity to others.

A. I can definitely see that. All of her brothers were either miscarried or stillborn, so she never really knew them. Her father died young, so she was really just raised by her...

K. Mother...

A. Mother and Grandmother, and she’s also said that she was kind of a weird kid [Laughter]...

K. She does say that, yeah, where she [Laughter]...

A. Where she was reading, and she was really tall and even though, Pasadena right?

K. Pasadena...

J. Pasadena...

I. Yeah...

A. Pasadena was technically integrated, like politically socially it still was not...

J. Right...

A. So she was isolated in that regard also. So, I could definitely see that being, I mean she said over and over again that she writes herself into her work all the time...

K. Mmm-hmm...

A. So that makes sense to me...

J. Yeah, some of...

I. Yeah...

J. The things we’ve talked about in this you can really see that coming through. It’s not so much the grander interests, like the science and rocketry and that stuff, but the more nitty-gritty personal things like we were talking about before.

K. Well, one of her main themes that was pointed out in one of the articles I was reading was a question: “What is it like to be human” and I think she tackles that in everything she wrote, though, yeah...

A. I would agree with that [Time 1:11:32] ...

I. For sure...

O. All right. Do you want to move on to “Fledgling?”

A. Yeah, I think that's a good idea. Koen would you like to tell us about vampires as a literary movement?

K. Yes, I would love to thank you Anna [Laughter]. So Octavia Butler's final book was published in 2005, called "Fledgling." And before I get into the book itself I do want to talk about vampires in our literary history because its actually [Laughter]...

A. I'm shocked [Laughter]...

K. It's actually a very incredible history, like, a lot of people think it started with Dracula, but before Dracula we had Carmilla in 1872, and she was actually a lesbian vampire who preyed on women. Her name was an anagram for Mircalla, and her real name was Countess Karnstein, and that is where we kind of begin with women vampires in literature. And then it goes on from there, we get Vampirella comics in 1969, we have "Buffy the Vampire Slayer," and we also have "The Gilda Stories" in 1991 which, a lot of people compare "The Gilda Stories" with "Fledgling." So "The Gilda Stories" is about a girl who escapes from slavery and is rescued by a vampire named Gilda. Gilda is in charge of a brothel, and obviously this young girl is not going to be a part of her brothel, so she's just like "I'll take you in and I'll protect you and when you come of age, we'll see what you want to do." And so, Gilda decides when the young girl comes of age that she doesn't want to live anymore, she's like "do you want to be me, be Gilda?" [Laughter] So the girl becomes Gilda, is transformed into a vampire, takes over this brothel, and then the rest of the story is in 8 chapters. Each chapter is in a different place in a different time, and it goes all the way to 2050 which is again where we get that Afro-Futurism, like the world collapses and everything is bad, but it's still like a really fun lesbian vampire story [Laughter]. So, that's some of the female vampire characters we get in literature and in folklore we kind of see the female vampire as a character that will kidnap and kill kids or seduce men. That's what we're working with here [Time 1:13:41] So "Fledgling" we start out with this character in a cave. We know nothing, we just know that this character is hurting, blind, they have no idea what is going on. They kind of are going in and out of consciousness, and when they wake up they learn a little bit more, they're like "Oh my head is caved in, oh my eyes are opening up, oh this is really bizarre I'm like healing," and then they hear what they think is a deer and they hunt it down, kill it and eat it. Later on they find out actually that it was a human, and that's an important plot twist that happens, but, her name is Shorri and as she's waking up and healing she's realizing like "Oh I need raw meat and blood to heal and survive, and she has no context to say that that's weird, she doesn't have an idea of what 'human' and 'vampire' is, she's just like "I have no idea what's happening." And so, she leaves the cave and she goes exploring and finds these ruins. It used to be a town, but it looks like it's been burned and destroyed, and she has this weird feeling of nostalgia, she can't place it. She's like, she almost has her memory of it but can't quite grab on to it, so she decides to just go start walking and try to find anything. So, she's walking down the road and a car pulls up beside her and there's this older man, or assumably an older man, and he's like "Yo, are you all right? Do you need me to take you to the hospital or to the police and she has this internal horror at the idea of going to the hospital, she's like: "No, I can't go to the hospital." He's like "You are like a 12-year-old girl and you're covered in blood; I have to take you somewhere [Laughter].

A. Fair point...

J. Pretty tough to argue with that...

K. His name is Wright and eventually she gets into the car, she sort of feels comfortable with him, but can't place why. And they get into this altercation, he's like "I have to take you somewhere I have to do something for you," and eventually she like bites him, and he's like "what?" And they both realize in that moment that it was good and that it starts to get a little weird, but like that's the thing, that's like Octavia Butler's trying to make you uncomfortable in this moment because we later find out that the toxins in the vampire saliva are like a drug and it does feel good, it causes pleasure for the other person, and so we have this really weird moment where you're like "is this okay?" because it gets kind of intimate, and you know it's seemingly a 12-year-old girl and like a 40-year-old man. We later find out that Shorri is 53 and she's just trapped in the body of a young girl because she's a vampire. [Time 1:16:32] So that's one of her main conflicts that Octavia Butler sets up, this moral dilemma of age and wisdom and bodies and consent and that's a topic that she'll continue to get through through the novel. So, moving on. Wright is living in his uncle's cabin, and he's not really supposed to have anyone there with him, and he would definitely get in trouble if he found out that a young girl was with him, so he has to hide Shorri from the world. Shorri starts to do some research, he gives her a laptop, he goes to the library, teaching her all about vampires, and they're like "this doesn't seem quite right." So Shorri starts to realize that if she keeps feeding on Wright she could eventually hurt him or kill him, so she's like "I've got to go drink blood from some other people," and she goes and explores and she meets some other people and realizes more things about her powers and that she kind of like control, she kind of has mind control over these people, and she's realizing that she has to be really careful with that, be responsible with that. So eventually they decide to go back to the ruins, and there's a guy there that tries to shoot them, and she's like: "That's weird, why is someone trying to kill me, and so she follows that guy, tracks him down and bites him and tries to use her mind control powers on him and realizes that someone else has already done that, and that whatever she's doing is now hurting him because there's two controlling forces at work in this guy's brain. So, she's like: "so someone else that's like me is using this guy to get to me, so I've got to figure out who that is. Eventually she finds out and she learns who that is, its Losif who is one of her fathers. And now we get into this really complicated world of the Ina, which is a name for vampire, that Octavia Butler came up with. The Ina have this really rich culture: their family units being several fathers, several mothers, the men and women live separately because of this really intense hormonal thing [Time 1:18:36] that's hard to explain, it's sort of like if I smell you, I will not be able to get over it because you are a woman [Laughter] which, I, which is so ridiculous and I love it. Losif if teaching her as much as he can about their culture and about their world, and how these are her brothers, and they have these things called "symbionts". Losif teaches her that she has to have these symbionts, her human counterparts. They have to have five or six at a time so they can stay alive and not hurt any of them individually, but of course this relationship that they have with their symbionts is very intimate, and Wright has to figure this out with her, and there is this uncomfortable moment like "I have to share you with other people?" like a very modern relationship thing...

A. John...

J. The symbionts, to clarify, they're like "the Familiar," like Renfield in Dracula, like a human servant that tends to the vampire's needs?

K. No, actually...

J. Okay...

K. They are a family unit, so in exchange for keeping the vampires alive and feeding on them, the vampires will give them housing and give them money to do whatever they want. They can literally live their life however they want, they can like start their own family, have kids, so it is very much like a symbiotic relationship. They're not servants.

J. So it's her take on the familiar concept?

K. Yes, which is also a great thing that I love, like different vampire stories this is recreating the myth—a popular example of course is “Twilight” and the sparkling skin [Laughter]. It's silly but I love to see it [Time 1:20:26], so they're very much a family unit. I love this because it very casually talks about sexuality without really getting into it. So, she has a very intimate relationship with men and women. It's very casual—that's just a part of her life, and that's just how things are done, that's how they become a family, and Wright has to deal with this because there's at some point, another man and he has to deal with these very human emotions of jealousy, and Shorri has to explain “it's not like that. First of all you'll always be my first which is kind of cute, and also this is what she has to do to survive. So eventually Losif's family gets attacked and a lot of them are killed because most of them have to sleep during the day, like live, like they cannot stay awake, they will fall asleep if it's daytime and Shorri escapes again because Shorri is a Black woman, and we're starting to learn that she was actually an experiment, and one of her mother's was a Black human woman who had donated her genes to help create Shorri so that Shorri could walk during the day which to some extent she can. She still has to wear a hood or a blanket, but she can stay awake. So when she she escapes that attack again, and two symbionts from Losif's family escape with her, and so she has to take them into her family unit and they travel to another family called the Gordons where she learns a little bit more about herself, she learns about how she was originally going to be like partnered with some of the Gordons—they call it mating, because, it's, it's mating, but it's very consensual, it's like yes the parents like talked it out and figured it out and wanted to pair them together, but they still get the consent of the child, like “do you want to do this,” and its also, its not monogamous which is another interesting take, it is very casual polyamory, but it is all consensual and safe and that is the topic she is trying to get out there, it's about consent...

J. This feels very very different than the eugenic coupling we have in “Patternmaster”...

K. Yes, its very important that there is communication, and there's communication [Laughter]

J. One person imposing their will on all these people?

K. No, they all have this culture that they are happy to be a part of and they are welcome to leave.

A. It kind of feels like Butler [Time 1:23:12] took all the things that she hates about vampire lore and was just...

K. Yeah...

A. Like mmm...

K. Why don't I make this good...

A. “This feels icky, I want a good vampire story...”

K. Yeah...

A. "Here we go."

K. And that's where this next important part comes in, is that Shorri tells them, "like hey, we're going to get attacked. It keeps happening; we're not safe. I don't know who is doing it, but they're humans and that seems weird, so Shorri is like "all your symbionts need to stay awake tonight and we're going to fight back. So they do and they're able to kidnap some of the humans and interrogate them, and again we have this moment where they've [the attacking humans] been brainwashed by another vampire, so this is very painful for them. And they realize that another vampire family called the Silks are behind the attacks, and its because they're mad about the experiments—so again we get into the idea behind racism and this conservative traditionalism that this older vampire family wants to keep up. The rest of the novel is about this trial that happens where Shorri has to prove that she can stay calm in this situation, even though she has amnesia she is still a trustworthy resource, knows what's going in, is in her right mind, and she has to prove all of this to vampire court [Laughter]

A. Oh, wow...

K. And it's really interesting. I love the way she took vampire lore and turned it into this really new and progressive idea of family and community and taking responsibility of your power, which is another thing that they tackle in "The Gilda Stories," is like, being this powerful entity where you need humans to live are you either going to be like the Silks and use them like servants like you were saying, because that's what the older Silk family is doing, they don't respect humans, or are you going to bring them into your family and respect them and not be miserable [Laughter], so...

J. I love this concept of putting vampirism on trial, like really using...

K. Yes...

J. That construct to analyze it and dig into it.

K. Yeah, I really liked it because they also talked a lot about how human trials are a mess, and that's so funny [Time 1:25:38], because human trials are very odd they way that we do things. It made sense when we started doing judiciary things; now it doesn't work as well, but I do like that commentary of like "that's so silly, why would we do it like that, we're vampires [Laughter]"

J. But you get this interesting conflict, like between traditionalism vs. progressivism...

K. Mmm-hmm...

J. And using vampires kind of like, to sort of mask that...

K. Yes...

J. through a sci-fi fantasy lens. That's super cool.

K. The last point I really specifically want to make is from this article called: "Any Other Age: Vampires and Oceanic Lifespans," by Habiba Ibrahim, where they talk about how Shorri's age is a reflection of slave times because Black women, Black slave women were often seen as the same age; adults were infantilized, kids were sexualized, there was no consistency, it was just how big you were because like the body count was important when they were putting you on a ship, like for selling you, so they talk a lot about how Black women and age has been an issue since slave times,

and it's especially apparent with PT Barnum when he put Ms. Heth on display at one of his shows. She was claiming, or they were claiming, that she was 160 years old and had nursed George Washington. It was this very absurd story, like age and how like Black women are not human, it was very dehumanizing, it was like "oh, they're ancient" it was very strange, and that's sort of this idea I think Octavia Butler is playing with, with Shorri appearing to be a child but actually being a 53 year old woman, is that she would have been infantilized by the society that was very very old vampires, very old traditionalist white vampires, they were going to infantilize this woman, so I think that was a really interesting way of doing it, by literally showing her as a child since that was the way the world saw her.

J. That is really interesting. And that's why she had a MacArthur Genius grant you know...

K. It's so funny, there's an interview where someone said like: "You're the 1st one to get the MacArthur Genius grant" and she's like "that's a nickname, it's not actually called 'the genius grant', just take, Octavia Butler ma'am [Laughter]..."

A. She seems like she's so particular about things like that like, she was saying that genres are just marketing...

K. She's right...

A. It's true...

J. Yeah...

A. But it's so funny the way she sees through everything...

K. Mmm-hmm...

A. And then the way she talks about it makes me laugh...

K. Yeah...

A. Because it's like, oh, anytime you try to do anything for her, "you're like the 1st Black female writer in science fiction" she's like "oh, that's just marketing..."

K. Yeah, they're just words [Laughter]...

A. We're trying to give you credit.

J. I don't worry about things like that. Let other people figure it out is a version of something...

A. Right...

K. Yeah...

J. She said in response to something like that...

K. Right and she's so humble, again, back to Dwayne MacDuffie [Laughter]...

J. Mmm...

K. Like, incredibly humble, even though she's obviously a genius. I think it was Junot Diaz who said she wrote 9 perfect novels. This was before the other ones came out [Laughter]. Now she has 12 perfect novels [Laughter]...

J. Except "Survivor..." she would...

K. Never mind, yes, "Survivor"...

J. She would dispute that one...

K. She didn't like that one, and if she doesn't like it, we don't like it. Those are all the books that we want to talk about. I want to close this out with a quote that Octavia Butler said. This was her describing herself, and again with her incredible humor, it's just a lovely quote. She described herself as: "Comfortable asocial, a hermit in the middle of Seattle, a pessimist if I'm not careful, a feminist, a Black, a former Baptist, an oil and water combination of ambition, laziness, insecurity, certainty and drive."

A. That comes across in her work...

K. I think so. She's...

J. Mmm...

K. Brilliant and...

J. I don't think you could sum her up...

K. Any better...

J. Any better. Umm, I'm John.

K. I'm Koen.

I. I'm Ian.

A. I'm Anna, signing off from "Quote me" the podcast [Laughter]

[end music plays]

J. We'll catch you on the next one, thanks guys.

K. Bye.

A. Bye

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