

Author Read Alike *Octavia E. Butler*

Genre: Science Fiction

Have you ever wanted to break into the Science Fiction genre for a change but felt intimidated by words and phrases such as photon torpedoes, event horizons, accretion disks and the like? You may be pleasantly surprised to discover that not all science fiction ("SF" or "sf") necessarily involves complex and/or imaginary descriptions of technology or phenomena.

Octavia E. Butler, a Nebula and Hugo Award-winning author (1947-2006), wrote themes laced abundantly with social, racial, sexual, and class-oriented ideas than those one typically associates with this genre, such as space exploration or galactic warfare.

Many of the characters in her books possess special mental powers such as Lauren Olamina, in Butler's first Parable series title, *Parable of the Sower*. Lauren is an empath and can read other people's pain. As he flees her ravaged California neighborhood to escape desperate savages, she experiences adventures quite unlike other people who don't have her empathic "psi powers". She transforms into a prophet along the way and begins the establishment of a new faith called Earthseed. In *Parable of the Talents*, Lauren's travails continue in 2032 when her daughter, Larkin, is taken from her by religious zealots locked in

completion with her. She is reunited with her brother Marcus, only to discover they are split over the religious issues of the day. Butler's par excellence contributions to SF continue into her *Patternist* series with themes such as eugenics and telepathy, and also the *Xenogenesis* series.



Octavia E. Butler

Read Alike—Doris Lessing

Doris Lessing, the Nobel Prize winner in 2007 for literature, broke another glass ceiling in the SF genre, as did Octavia E. Butler. In her *Canopus in Argos* series, Lessing touches on the decline and fall of worlds, species and civilizations in the space age. Much of

this involves issues of interpersonal relationships, evolution, human behavior, psychology, philosophy, racism, and tolerance. The series begins with *Shikasta*, about an Earth-like planet whose annihilistic traits are monitored by an advanced alien race that

tries to influence these traits to steer the Shikastans away from destruction. This planet is influenced by an ill-intentioned planet, *Shammat*. There are four other titles in the series which examine the same themes throughout.

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Read Alike—Margaret Atwood

Margaret Atwood has thus far written only one novel that could be classed as a SF gem, but be that as it may, it is worthy of mention, as it is one of her best novels.

The Handmaid's Tale fits into the kind on "social" SF already discussed. It

revolves around the experiences of a woman in a futuristic United States, now no longer a genuine democracy, but a theocratic, repressive regime called the Republic of Gilead. It is a dystopic environment in which the author expresses situations touching on caste,

sexism, feminism, women's roles, and infertility.

This novel may hold plenty of appeal for those who read 1984, Animal Farm, or A Brave New World in high school and liked any or all of these titles.

Read Alike—George Orwell

A case could easily be made that George Orwell was among the first authors of the 20th Century to delve into a class of speculative science fiction that today would be called dystopic SF. Many of these tales relate to fallen fictional societies or those speculated from

the real world. Such is the case in 1984, Orwell's perennial classic about a future England which, luckily, did not come to be. It follows the harrowing path of a bureaucrat, Winston Smith, who is tortured by the state for perceived transgressions. Animal Farm is a satire

about totalitarianism which shows how farm animals become just as cruel as their former owner when they take over the farm and attempt to govern themselves. Even when the pigs evolve to the use of the dining room, they are barbaric animals.

Read Alike—S.M. Stirling

S.M. Stirling covers apocalyptic and dystopic ground in his Dies the Fire series. A strange electrical storm over Massachusetts inexplicably causes all electronic devices to cease to operate. This causes worldwide disruptions and from this, problems in com-

munities, among groups, exile, regression, social change and conflict, and survival issues. People who find they like this series will also enjoy Cormac McCarthy's The Road, about a post-apocalyptic Earth upon which nearly all life has vanished.

Stirling's second series is based upon the original premise of the Dies the Fire series. It is called The Sunrise Lands series. In book one, called by the same name as the series, a zealot urges the destruction of all remnants left of technology since the electrical storm occurred.