

Rise of African Speculative Fiction (& South African too!)

Nick Wood

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31 Essays on South African SF (2006-2020)

The beginnings...

- Jan 1924 – >2 years before ‘scienti-fiction’ –
- ‘Pulp’ Genre story by S. African writer
- ‘The man who banished himself’ (Weird Tales, v 3, 1) Ferdinand Berthoud; issue included a Lovecraft tale.
- Webbed Hands (Strange Tales cover story; December 1931)

Webbed Hands: Murder in CT, South Africa

– Ferdinand Berthoud (ST - Dec 1931)



Apartheid years (1960s and 1970s)

- (Politically engaged fiction – e.g. Drum, Staffrider magazines)
- Richard Rive, Alex La Guma, Can Themba etc...
- COSAW directive...
- Versus ‘Science fiction’, e.g. Claude Nunes: (in Probe too?)
- Inherit the Earth (1966); Recoil (with wife Rhoda) (1971);
- The Sky Trapeze (1980)
- (local) Afrikaans – Jan Rabie:
 - ‘Die groen planeet’ - <The green planet> (1961)
 - ‘Die hemel blom’ - <The heavenly flower> (1971)
 - SFSA -> SFFSA (1968 – to date)

Science Fiction South Africa & Probe



Into State of Emergency (>1980s)

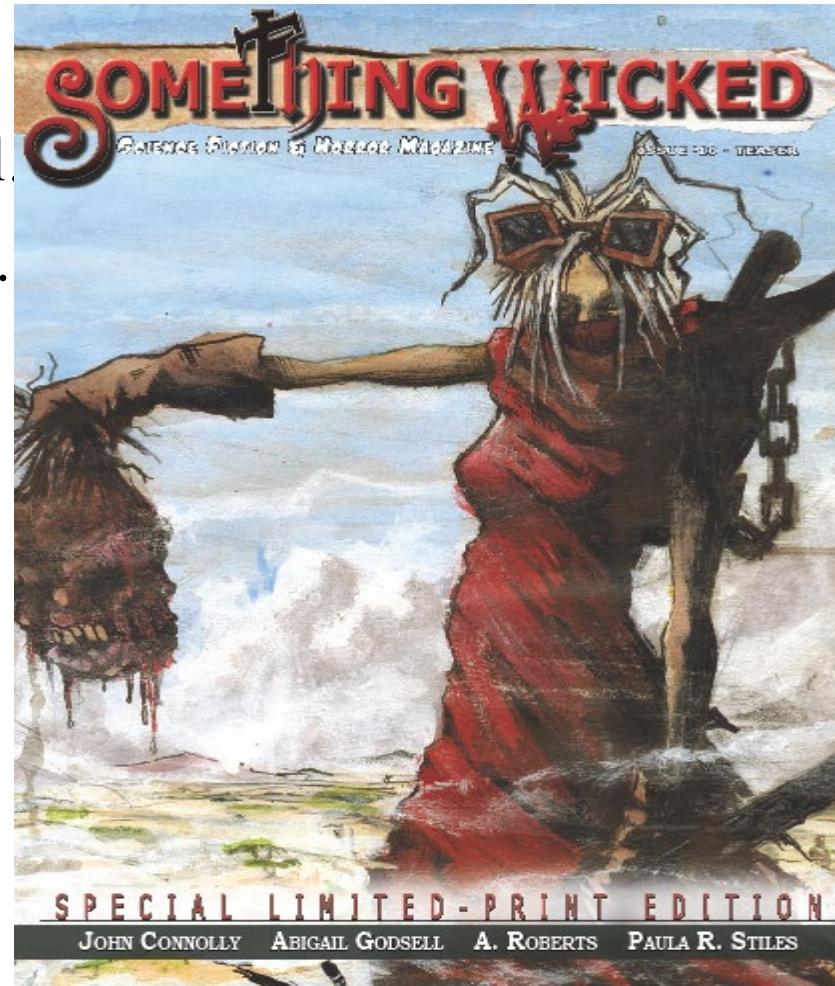
- Fantastical/Futuristic & Implicitly critical - J.M. Coetzee:
- ‘Waiting for the Barbarians’ (1980)
- ‘The Life and Times of Michael K’ (1983)
- Meta-fictional SF: Michael Cope
- ‘Spiral of Fire’ (1987)
- Beyond into the relative freedom of the 1990’s...

SA SF: Nineties to Noughties

- ... & an (initially grudging) rise of local spec-fic
- Mpe, Phaswane (1970 – 2004) – ‘Welcome to Our Hillbrow’ (2001)
- Rosenthal, Jane – ‘Souvenir’ (2004)
- Venter, Eben – ‘Horrelpoot/Trencherman’ (2006)
- Henrietta Rose-Innes – ‘Poison’ 2008 Caine Prize
- Moele, Kgebetli (2009) The Book of the Dead
- A new magazine...

Something Wicked <http://www.somethingwicked.co.za/>

- No 10
- Joe Vaz, Ed.
- On hiatus..
- Best Of's
- (2 Vols)



Younger generations – YA SF/F

- Wilhelm, Peter (1984) Summer's End.
- Begin, Elana (1995) The Slayer of Shadows.
- Slingsby, Peter (1996) The Joining.
- Saunders, Robin (1998) Sons of Anubis.
- Robson, Jenny (2004) Savannah 2216AD.
- Wood, Nick (2004) The Stone Chameleon.
- Beake, Lesley (2009) Remembering Green.
- Radloff, Adeline (2010) Sidekick.
- Sarah Partridge (2013) – Sharp Edges <http://www.sapartridg.com/>
- Lily Herne (Sarah & Savannah Lotz) (2010+) – Deadlands Trilogy
- Cat Hellisen (2015) – BeastKeeper - <http://www.cathellisen.com/>
- Helen Brain (2016) Elevation: The Thousand Steps

8/21/2021

... Early 21st Century International SA 'SFF' authors

- **Zakes Mda** (?) – Whale Caller; Heart of Redness etc... 2011 UCR-> SASF
- **Dave Freer**: Slow Train to Arcturus etc... Baen Books (& with Eric Flint)
- **Lauren Beukes**: Moxyland & More
- **Sarah Lotz/SL Grey** (with Greenberg)

Lauren Beukes (Probe interview)

- Great Books and COMICS!
- MOXYLAND (Locus, 2009 – ‘One to Watch’)
- ZOO CITY
- BROKEN MONSTERS
- THE SHINING GIRLS...> AFTERLAND (2020)
- Comics – Vertigo (DC) Survivor’s Club, Strange Adventures,,, (Wonder Woman in Soweto)
- URBO – The Adventures of Pax Afrika

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1299519/>

Rise of African *Science Fiction*

- Nnedi Okorafor (2005: **Zahrah the Windseeker**)
- Lauren Beukes (2008: **Moxyland**)
- ‘First’ (pan)- African SF anthologies:
- **AfroSf** Ed Ivor Hartman (3 volumes now); December 2012
- **Lagos 2060**: Ed Ayodele Arigbabu: October 2013 (Nigerian)
- Ivor contacted me-> London for Africa Writes Festival (2014): <https://africawrites.org/uncategorized/future-africa/> FUTURE AFRICA panel (with Geoff Ryman & Tade Thompson)
- Invited to meet afterwards -> proposing an **ASFS**



2016 Launch

- Proposed to launch an **Annual Prize for Best African SF** in:
- Novel (preceding year)
- Novella:
- Comic/Graphic Novel:
- Short Story
- Prizes called the **Nommos** (after Dogon twin ancestral spirits)
- Sponsored by **Tom Ilube** who was at Africa Writes (2014)
- First Awards **2017: Tade Thompson (Novel); Nnedi Okorafor (Novella); Lesley Nneka Arimah & Tendai Huchu (tie; Short Story) & Chimurenga's CHRONIC (GN)**

First (to Next) Nommo Ceremony

- **Ake Festival, Nigeria**, November 2017:
- <https://www.facebook.com/africansfs/videos/nommo-awards-2017-live-stream-at-ak%C3%A9-festival/1901896973171100/?extid=SEO--->
- Tom Ilube; Geoff Ryman; Nnedi Okorafor; (hosts)
- 2017 – 2020 all held at Ake Festival in Nigeria
- 2021 Nommo Awards? May be at DISCON 3 online-
- 79th (Virtual) Worldcon; Washington DC:
<https://discon3.org/>

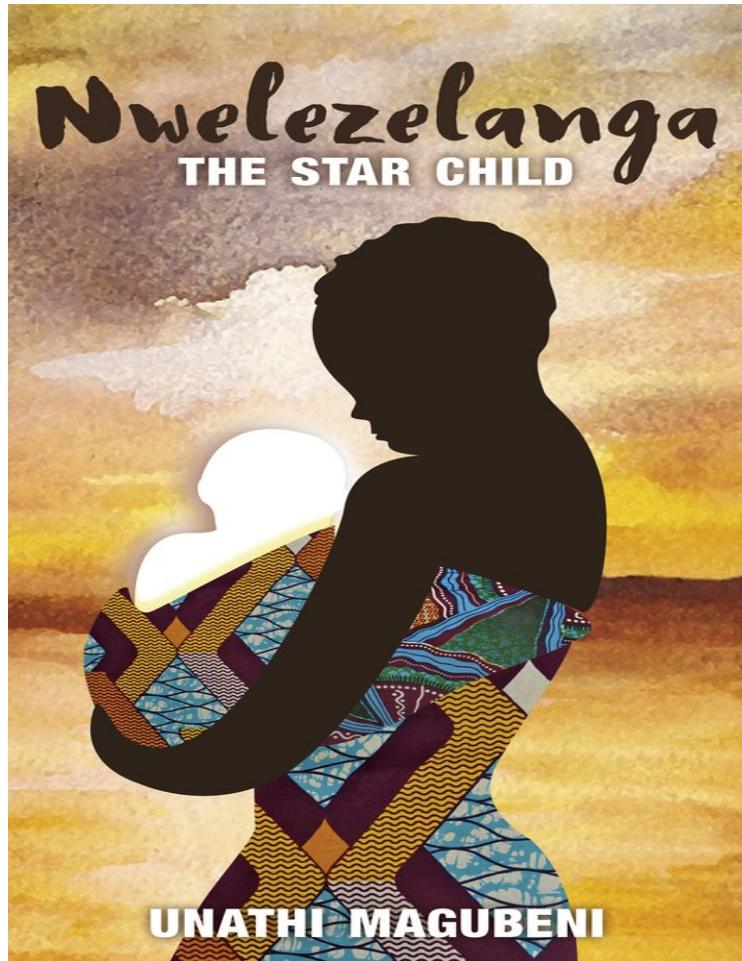
Recent Burgeoning African SF

- **Deji Olukotun**: *Nigerians in Space & After the Flare*
- **Tade Thompson**: *Wormwood Trilogy*
- **Tendai Huchu**: (Zimbabwean) *Edinburgh Nights* (2 vols)
- **Akwaeye Emezi** – *Freshwater & The Death of Vivek Oji*
- **Dilman Dila** – *The Future God of Love*
- **Sofia Samatar** (US/Somali) *A Stranger in Olondria & The Winged History*
- **Chikodili Emulumadu** – *Dazzling* (TBP still)
- **Nnedi Okorafor** - <https://nnedi.com/>

Burgeoning SF from SA TOO!

- Rachel Zadok – *Gem Squash Tokoloshe & Sister, Sister*
- Henrietta Rose-Innes – *Nineveh, Green Lion*
- Charlie Human – *Apocalypse Now Now** &
- Fred Seymour (2014) – *The Raft*
- Andrew Miller (2015) – *Dub Steps*
- Cat Hellisen (2015) - *Beastkeeper*
- Sam Wilson (2016) – *Zodiac*
- Masha du Toit (2016/17) – *The Babylon Eye, The Real.*
- ‘Frank Owen’ (2016) - *South*
- Nikhil Singh (2016) – *Taty Went West & Club Ded*
- **Unathi Magubeni (2016):** *Nwelezelanga: The Star Child*

Nwelezelanga: Unathi Magubeni

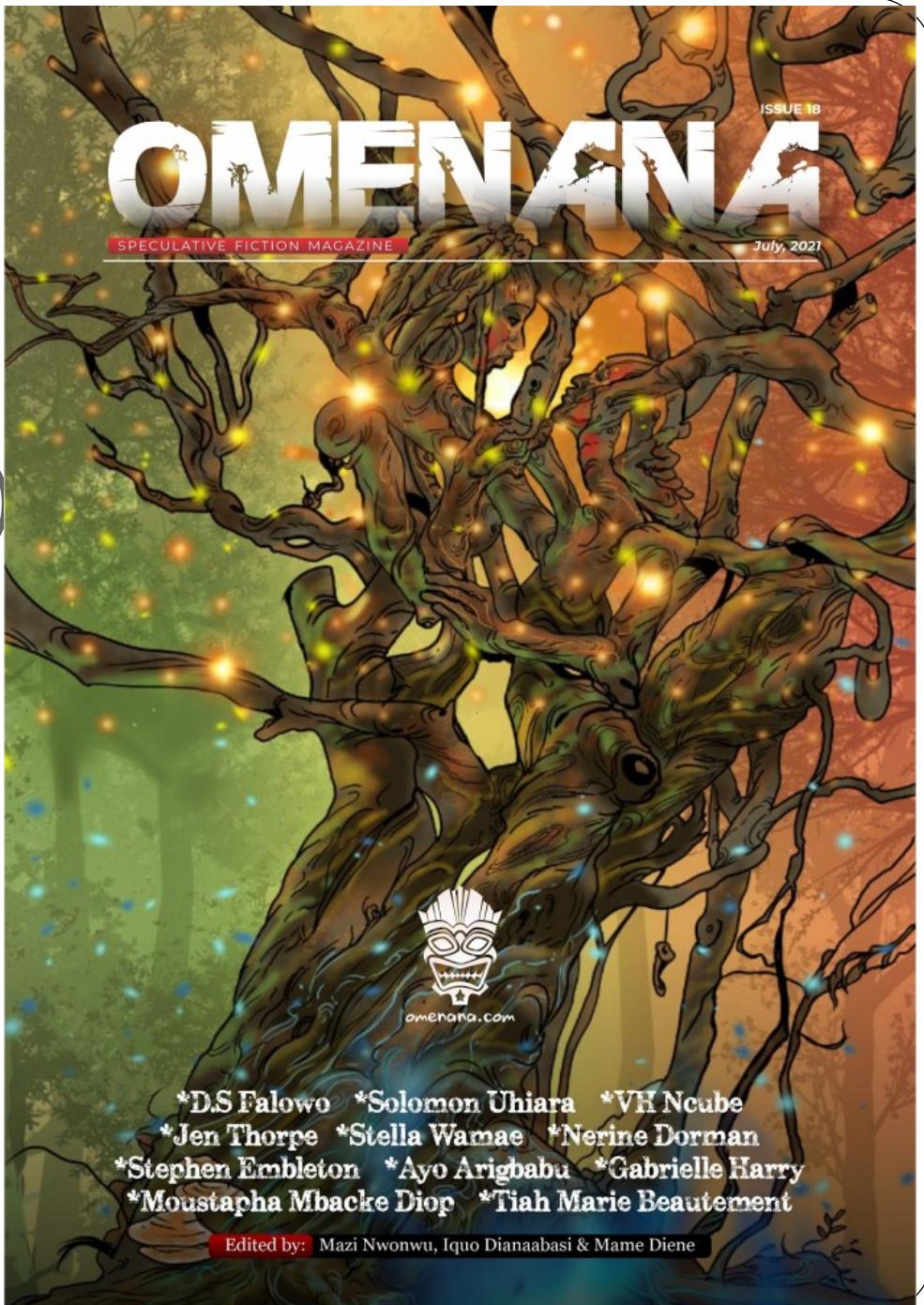


- Lyrical poetic-verse story about a 'star child' (albino) coming down and surviving to perhaps change the world.
- Eastern Cape isangoma & writer
- Interview with Geoff Ryman in Strange Horizons?
- [http://strangehorizons.com/
non-fiction/unathi-
magubeni/](http://strangehorizons.com/non-fiction/unathi-magubeni/)

Nerine Dorman & SA Horror

- Editor, author and promoter of horror fiction in SA
<https://nerinedorman.wordpress.com/>
- Interesting Blogs: This is My World:
<http://nerinedorman.blogspot.com/>
- Annual Horror Competition & Anthology BLOODY PARCHMENT:
<http://bloodyparchment.blogspot.com/>
- SFF Authors Collective SKOLION:
<https://www.facebook.com/skolionwriters>

2015-21 (Issue 18)



Recent SF Books Bursting From SA 1

- Lauren Beukes: *...Afterland*
- Sarah Lotz: *...Missing Person* (last not S.African)
- Charlie Human: *Apocalypse Now Now & Ancestral*
- Frank Owen: *North (& South)*: (Diane Awerbuck & Alex Latimer – *The Space Race*)
- Deon Meyer – *Fever / Koors*
- Imraan Coovadia – *A Spy in Time*
- Nikhil Singh – *Taty Went West & Club Ded*
- Unathi Slasha – *Jah Hills*
- Masande Ntshanga - *Triangulum*

Recent SF Bursting From SA 2

- Gavin Chait – *Our Memory Like Dust*
- Nerine Dorman – *Sing Down the Stars*
- Cat Hellisen – *When the Sea is Rising Red*
- Stephen Embleton – *Soul Searching*
- Jen Thorpe – *The Fall*
- Kerstin Hall – *The Border Keeper*
- Henrietta Rose Innes – *Nineveh & Green Lion*
- Ilze Hugo – *Down Days*
- Abi Godsell – *Idea War* (several years old now) was in PROBE
- Jali Henry – *World Breacher Trilogy*

Some African SF Anthologies

- *Hartmann, Ivor (Ed.)* (2012) AfroSF (Vols 1 ->3)
- *Ayodele Arigbabu (Ed)* (2013) Lagos 2060
- *Nnedi Okorafor* (2013) Kabu Kabu
- *Afro SF v 2* (2015) African SF Novellas
- *Dilman Dila* (2015) *A Killing in the Sun & The Future God of Love* (2020)
- *African Monsters* (2015) Fox Spirit Books
- *Billy Kahora (Ed)* (2016) Imagine Africa 500
- *Ezeiyoke Chukwunonso* (2016) Haunted Graves & Other Stories
- *Lauren Beukes* (2016) Slipping

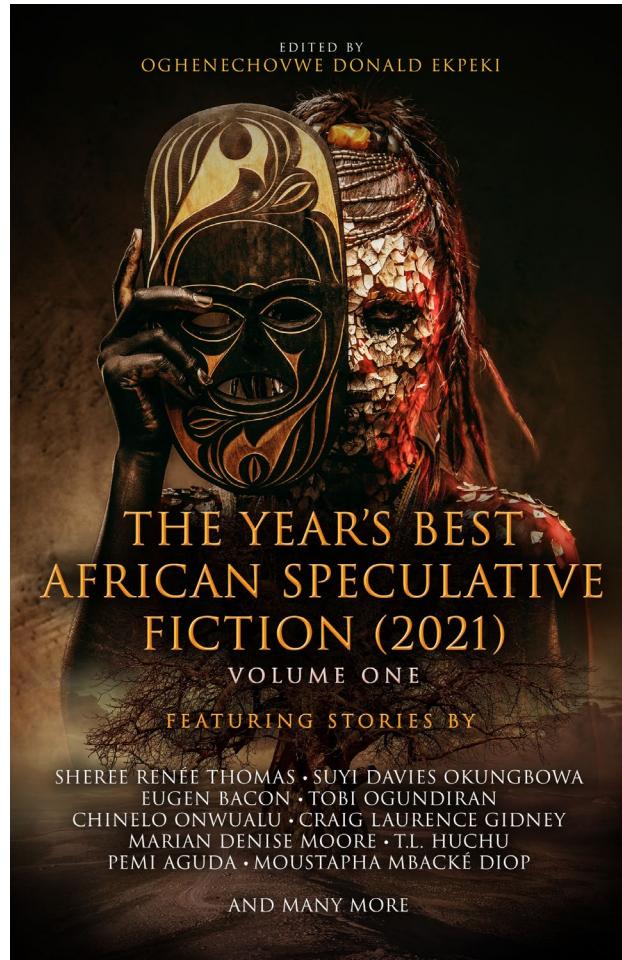
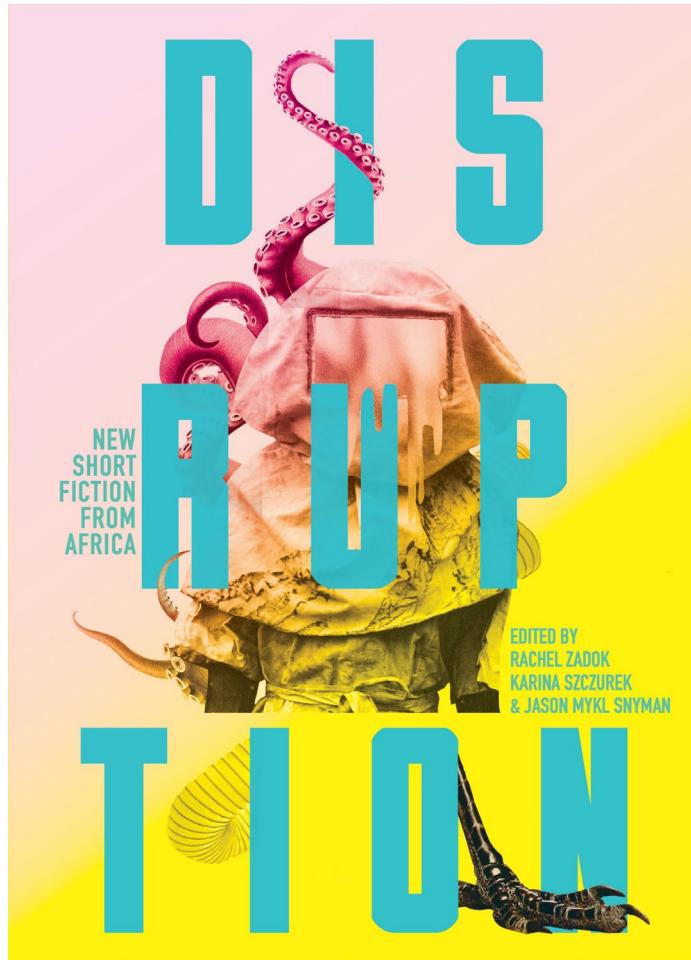
More African SF Anthologies

- **Wole Talabi** – *Incomplete Solutions* (2018). Also see his YB:
- 2020: <https://vector-bsfa.com/2021/02/11/wole-talabi-my-favorite-african-sff-short-fiction-of-2020/>
- **Mohale Mashigo** – *Intruders* (2018)
- **Nick Wood** – *Learning Monkey and Crocodile* (2019)
- *Dominion: SF From Africa and the Diaspora* (2020) (Eds Zelda Knight & Ekpeki Oghenechovwe Donald: EOD)
- **September 2021: The Year's Best African Speculative Fiction** (2021): <https://www.tor.com/2021/08/16/first-collection-of-the-years-best-african-speculative-fiction-is-coming-next-month/>

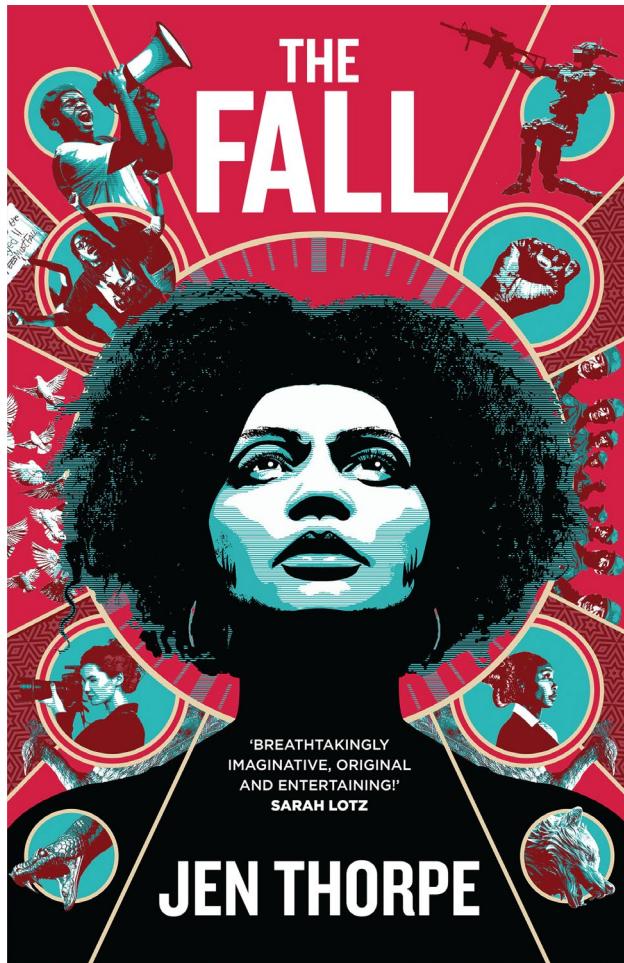
Short Story Day Africa

- Short Story Day Africa <http://shortstorydayafrica.org/>
- Rachel Zadok
- **Terra Incognita** – African SF (Diane Awerbuck)
- <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/if-colonialism-was-the-apocalypse-what-comes-next-dilman-dila/>
- **DISRUPTION: Viral breaks for new African futures (2021: September)**
- **Several Caine Prize winners in anthologies**

New Anthology Covers to Relish



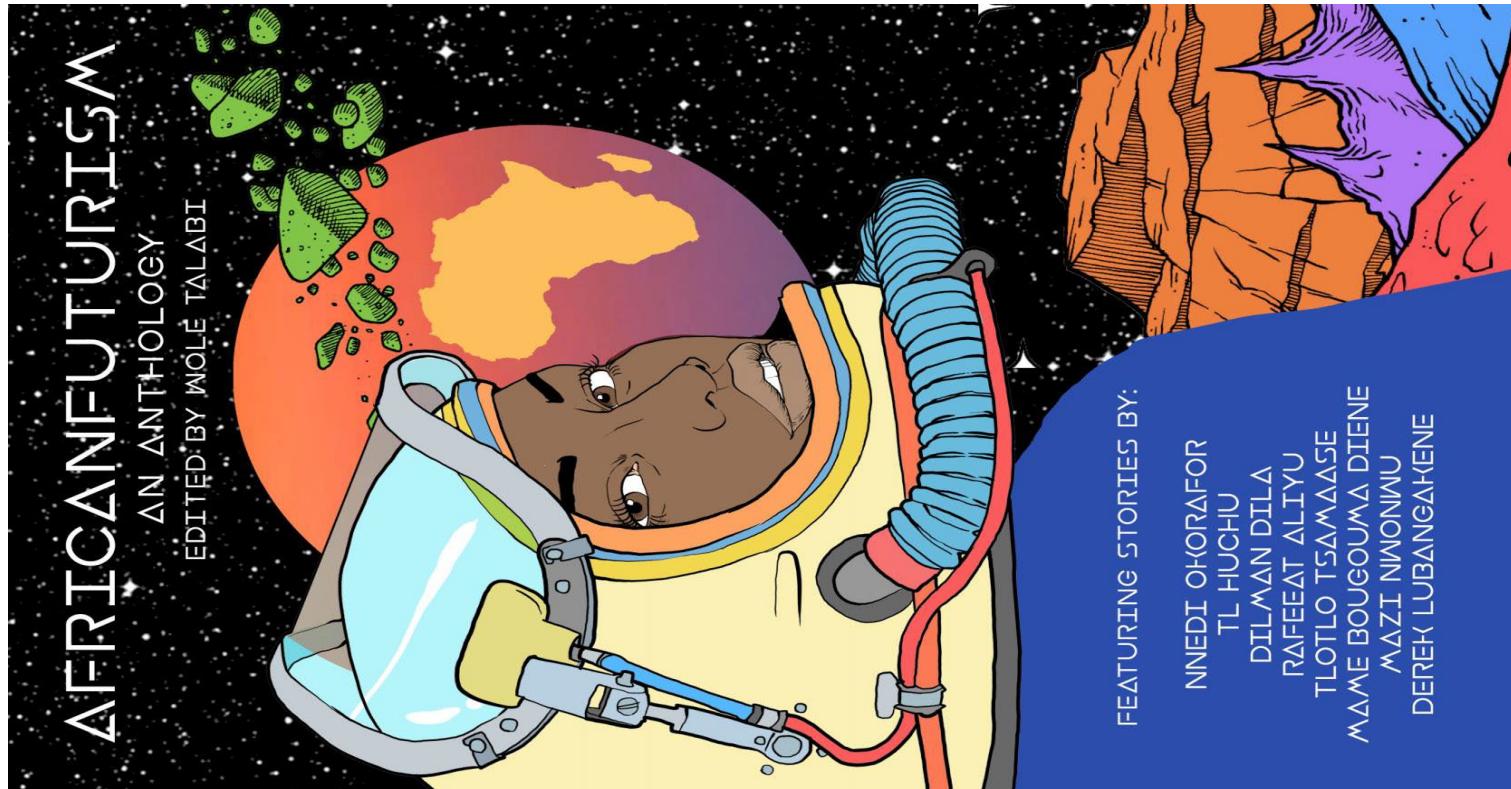
New (2020) SA SFF Book Covers



Vector 289 & GoodReads

- African and Afro diasporic SF (2019)
- https://vectoreditors.files.wordpress.com/2021/03/vector_289_africansf.pdf
- **GoodReads**: 75 New and Upcoming Sci-Fi and Fantasy from African Authors: (July 2021)
<https://www.goodreads.com/blog/show/2130-75-new-and-upcoming-sci-fi-and-fantasy-from-african-authors>
- **Geoff Ryman**: 100 African Writers of SF: *Strange Horizons*.
- <http://strangehorizons.com/100-african-writers-of-sff/>

Afro v African Futurism (Talabi, 2020)



- <https://brittlepaper.com/2020/10/africanfuturism-an-anchor-point-for-science-fiction-that-centers-africa/>

10 African SF Rec's (Focus)

- 1. Point of View: **Kgebetli Moele** – ***The Book of the Dead*** (2010). A human narrator for the first half of Book of the Dead: in the Book of the Living. A personified HIV Virus narrates the middle and end, for the Book of the Dead.
- 2. Idea/Theme: **Tade Thompson** – ***The Wormwood Trilogy*** (2018-19). A vertiginous, yet grittily visceral exploration of alien invasion and survival. ‘*But we’re still here.*’
- 3. Language: **Eugen M. Bacon** - ***Ivory’s Story*** (2020). Language shifts, slides, and swings, in this vivid African- Australian Aboriginal melange of a novella.
- 4. Plot. **Zakes Mda** – ***The Whale Caller*** (2005). This plot does not follow the steep three acts of a Western plot structure. Enjoy, instead, a calm but complex meditation on life and loving (across species too) in the Southernmost parts of Africa. Learn and follow, **My Octopus Teacher** (Netflix).

- 5. Short Stories: A feast of delights from **AfroSF 1** (2012) to **Dominion** (2020) and from **Nnedi Okorafor's Kabu Kabu** (2013) to **Shanice Ndlovu's The Pride of Noonlay** (2020) For smart purist SF, however, my pick is **Wole Talabi's Incomplete Solutions** (2019).
- 6. Queer & Non-Binary: **Innocent Chizaram Ilo** – **various**. Their works interrogate gender, class, politics, and sexuality. They were the regional winner for Africa of the 2020 *Commonwealth Short Story Prize* for their short story “*When a Woman Renounces Motherhood*.” And **Akwaeye Emezi** – see books, stories, and essays here: <https://www.akwaeye.com/>
- 7. Film: **Dilman Dila - Her Broken Shadow**. A smart East African SF tale, beautifully scripted and filmed, despite a low budget. Read **Dilman's** account at the Mithila Review (2017): https://mithilareview.com/dila_04_17/
- 8. Heads Up One: **Tendai Huchu - The Library of the Dead** (February 2021): *Ropa* dropped out of school to become a ghoststalker – but she now speaks to Edinburgh's dead, carrying messages to the living. First in the Edinburgh Nights series.

To ‘Ten’...

- 9. Heads Up Two: **Chikodili Emelumadu** – Dazzling (2021): Treasure, a young girl who has lost her father and is taken in by a spirit, finds her life intertwined with Ozoemena, another girl who becomes part of a Nigerian Leopard Society --- whose members are normally men. For updates, follow @chemelumadu
- 10. Champion: **Geoff Ryman** – various hugely supportive contributions. His 100 African Writers of SFF is an ongoing, BSFA Award winning epic, at Strange Horizons. My pick, however, is Geoff’s curated compilation within The Manchester Review 18 (2017)

Refs: South African SF/F...

- Ansell, Gwen (2019) The Future of Sci-Fi is African. (*Coovadia & Ntshanga*)
<https://www.newframe.com/the-future-of-sci-fi-is-african/>
- Barbini, FT (2018) *The Evolution of African Fantasy and Science Fiction*. Luna Press
- Bould, M. (2015) African SF 101:
<https://markbould.com/2015/02/05/african-science-fiction-101/>
- Byrne, Deirdre (2004) “Science Fiction in South Africa” *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, 119 (3), 522-525. [/](#)
- **Ryman, G. (2017) The Rise of African SF. Manchester Review:**
<http://www.themanchesterreview.co.uk/?p=8001> (FREE)
- African Fantasy Reading Group (Facebook)
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/african.fantasy/>
- Wood, Nick (2009) “SF in South Africa” *Locus*, November.

Appendices: Comics & Graphic Novels

- Best historical site: Interview - George van Der Riet:
<http://www.techsmart.co.za/news/South-African-Comic-Books-A-chat-with-George-van-der-Riet.html>
- George's site:
<http://southafricancomicbooks.blogspot.co.za/>
- Mighty Man: South Africa <1977
http://southafricancomicbooks.blogspot.com/2011/10/so_wetos-super-man-mighty-man-and-mid.html

SA COMICS

- Kay Carmichael – *Sophie, Giant Slayer*:
<http://kaycarmichael.co.za/sophie-giant-slayer>
- Willem Samuel - *MengelMoes*
- Daniel Hugo - *Sector* – SFF Anthologies
<http://sectorcomic.tumblr.com/post/117188446646/heres-a-look-behind-the-scenes-on-a-page>
- Trantraal Brothers – ‘*Coloureds*’ and ‘*Crossroads*’

MORE SA COMICS

- *Bitter Komix 17* (Anton Kannemeyer: ‘Joe Dog’)
<http://www.booklounge.co.za/2016/05/26/launch-of-bitter-komix-17-by-anton-kannemeyer-conrad-botes/>
- Joe Daly – *Scrublands* et al:
<https://www.redbulletin.com/int/en/culture/joe-daly-the-creative-extremist>
- Vincent Sammy – *EchoGear*
- ND Mazin – *The Legend of Blue Mamba*
- Andy Mason (PAX) – *What’s So Funny?* (History SA Comics)
<http://mg.co.za/article/2012-10-19-drawing-inspiration-from-the-comic-underground>

Loyiso Mkize - KWEZI

- KWEZI: Examples here!
- <http://www.okayafrica.com/culture-2/kwezi-south-african-superhero-comic-loyiso-mkize/>
- SIX African Super-Heroes (2016) -
<http://youniekstudios.com/6-african-superhero-comics-to-look-out-for-in-2016/>
- Seven Marvel Characters from SA: (2020):
- <https://www.fortressofsolitude.co.za/marvel-characters-from-south-africa/>
- LOTS Happening – Africa Buzzing with phones and web:

CAPE TOWN CALLING

From Mandela to Thabo on the Mother City

Edited by G. J. Hoffman

