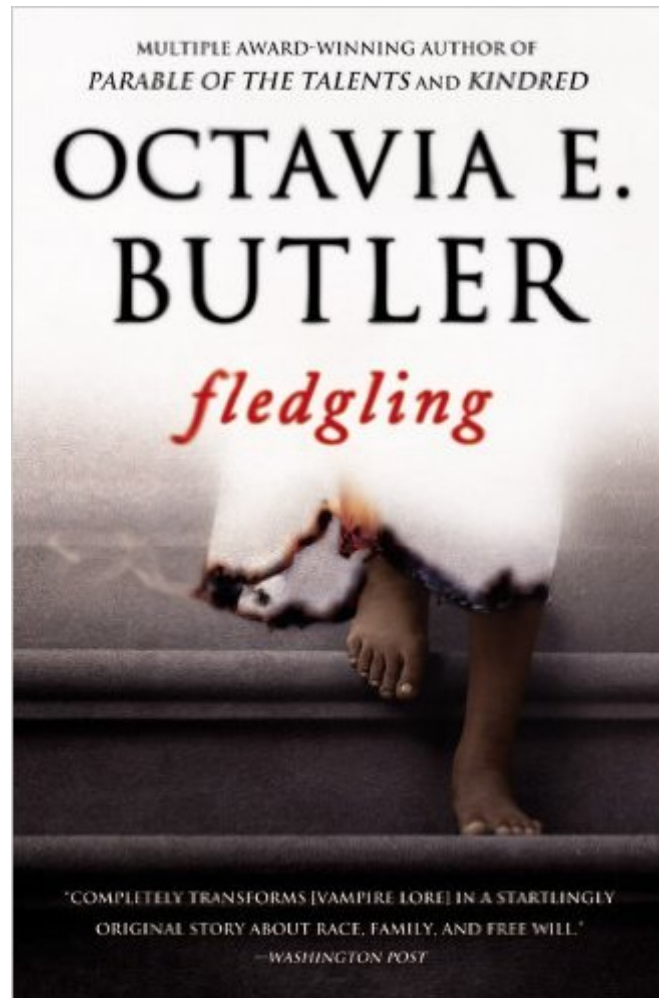


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Fledgling



Synopsis

Octavia E. Butler is one of the finest voices in fiction--period. . . . A master storyteller, Butler casts an unflinching eye on racism, sexism, poverty, and ignorance and lets the reader see the terror and beauty of human nature."-The Washington Post Book World "Readers familiar with . . . "Parable of the Sower and "Bloodchild will recall that [Butler] never asks easy questions or settles for easy answers."-Gerald Jonas in "The New York Times "Fledgling, Octavia Butler's first new novel in seven years, is the story of an apparently young, amnesiac girl whose alarmingly unhuman needs and abilities lead her to a startling conclusion: She is in fact a genetically modified, 53-year-old vampire. Forced to discover what she can about her stolen former life, she must at the same time learn who wanted-and still wants-to destroy her and those she cares for and how she can save herself. "Fledgling is a captivating novel that tests the limits of "otherness" and questions what it means to be truly human. Octavia E. Butler is the author of 11 novels, including "Kindred, "Dawn, and "Parable of the Sower. Recipient of a MacArthur Foundation "genius" grant, the Nebula Award, the Hugo Award, and numerous other literary awards, she has been acclaimed for her lean prose, strong protagonists, and social observations that range from the distant past to the far future.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I am a fan of both vampire fiction and Octavia Butler, so learning last spring that her new novel would be about vampires was truly exciting. I have waited with great anticipation. I will say up front that the novel does not disappoint on either front. Indeed, while the novel is self-contained and reaches satisfying closure, the world she creates is interesting enough to warrant sequels and

prequels. And I, for one, would welcome them. In Butler's other fiction, she has often concerned herself with themes of prejudice and power and, just as often, transformation. In taking on the vampire theme, she certainly allows these interests full development. Obviously, she also takes some unexpected twists in her vampires, drawing on familiar images of the (sub) genre, but taking them in fresh and interesting directions. Take, for example, themes of transformation. Typically, the vampire narrative concerns a protagonist going through "the change," embracing a new (un)life and letting go of his or her former humanity/mortality. Butler has certainly explored the theme of bodily transformation in other novels (e.g. Clay's Ark or the Xenogenesis series, to name a few). The vampires in Butler's novel, however, are a separate species on earth, co-evolved with humanity and full of their own laws and culture. Collectively, they call themselves "Ina." While they live in a mutually symbiotic relationship with (some) humans, they cannot transform humans into Ina. The Ina have their own careful and intricate systems of reproduction, which shape and guide their culture. Transformation in this novel has more to do with the Ina's interest in genetics, a study some of them have been pursuing long before it interested humans.

The sad thing about reading this book was knowing that there will never be another one written by Ms. Butler, who died tragically earlier this year. Since the plot is well covered in the description and by other reviewers, I will simply give my own brief impressions of the book. Ms. Butler has always excelled at telling great stories while making significant social commentaries about our world, and "Fledgling" is no exception. Issues of race and genetic engineering are at the forefront of this tale, and the unique way Butler deals with these issues here is handled skillfully, albeit not so subtly, as some readers might prefer. But then Octavia Butler was always an author who tackled such social commentaries within her writings head on, while still creating a compelling read. For me, the story is at its best the first half to two-thirds of the book, when Shori and her symbiots are on the run from the mysterious assailants who are on her trail. But the story seems to flatten out once she finds a safe haven and begins to learn who may be responsible for the murder of her families. The story becomes more about revealing the ins and outs of the Ina culture, the vampire like race to which Shori belongs. Even the death of someone close to Shori, and the eventual "showdown" between Shori and the guilty party, lack (for want of a less punny word) bite. I just felt more like an observer to the events and not emotionally involved in them. I believe this is due to the lead character's memory loss, which has left her far less emotionally affected by the tragic events around her. And what strain she does feel are more told than shown in any empathetic fashion.

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