
Walking the Clouds:
An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction

edited by Grace L. Dillon. Tucson: University of Arizona Press,
2012. 272 pp. \$24.95 paperback.

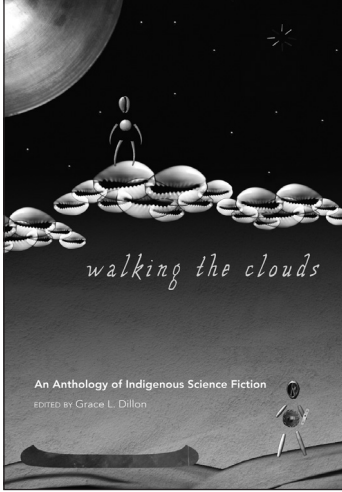
Grace Dillon's recently edited anthology takes a look at the slightly overlooked genre of indigenous science fiction. In *Walking the Clouds*, Dillon brings together some of the best selections by notable authors to create the first-ever anthology of indigenous science fiction. The book is organized by five different sub-genres: The Native Slipstream, Contact, Indigenous Science and Sustainability, Native Apocalypse, and Biskaabiiyang, "Return to Ourselves."

In the first section, Dillon selects stories that involve time travel, alternate realities, multiverses, and even alternative histories. In the well-chosen excerpt from Sherman Alexie's novel *Flight*, the main character known as Zits reminisces about his childhood and the events that have brought him to the present. In security camera footage, Zits is there one second, gone the next, and then suddenly reappears, evidence that he time-travelled briefly. Knowing that the excerpt came from a longer young adult novel, Dillon seems to have carefully and expertly chosen a selection that was not too long and still gets its point across.

In the second section, Contact, Dillon looks at a common trope of science fiction: humans invading aliens or aliens invading humans. In Celu Amberston's excerpt from the short story *Refugees*, the story is told from many first-person viewpoints about an alien lizard race invading and colonizing indigenous people. This is a clear example of contact with other life beings and the struggle to understand whether this lizard race is really there to help them or has been lying to them all along. The excerpt, while occasionally confusing, is an excellent example of a common theme of science fiction with an indigenous twist.

Next, Dillon moves on to Indigenous Science and Sustainability, where western science meets the indigenous side of practicing sustainability. Some of the features presented in this section relate to sustainable forms of medicine, agriculture, and even art. Nalo Hopkinson's excerpt from his novel *Midnight Robber* is an excellent example of sustainability in terms of learning survival skills in a new world. Tan-Tan is a human being who is exiled with her father, Antonio, to a world called New Half-Way Tree. Once there, they must depend on Chichibud, a native of that world, for survival. Being a child, Tan-Tan is more open to the idea of learning and being able to trust Chichibud; however, Antonio sees him as more of an annoyance and someone he must protect his daughter from.

In the selections following Sustainability, Dillon looks at the Native Apocalypse. The works collected in this section take on the idea of Native Americans winning or at least being more central to the narrative rather than traditional western literature. Perhaps one of the best selections of this collection is William Sanders' short story "When This World Is All on



Fire." In it, Sanders looks at a nation in which climate changes have affected the land and the native people have maintained their land while white people become the poor and the powerless with no claim to land, and are only allowed to pass through to their destination. The main character, Sergeant David Blackbear, encounters a young girl on the brink of adulthood. He finds her family, squatters on the Cherokee reservation, and asks them to move on. Blackbear comes across her path once more in town and gives her a ride back to where her family is camping among a larger community of white people making their camp off the reservation. The series of events that

follow are somewhat disastrous but are a clear reminder of how climate shifts and shifts in power can warn of the dangers of an apocalyptic future.

In the concluding section, Biskaabiiyang, "Returning to Ourselves," Dillon presents selections that describe how people are affected by many factors and have to recover certain indigenous traditions in order to adapt to their new post-native apocalyptic world.

Overall, Dillon does an exceptional job gathering excerpts and stories that bring to light a genre that has somehow been overlooked for several years. At times certain sections of the anthology read much like a textbook, but that is to be expected since Dillon is an associate professor at Portland State University in Oregon. The various introductions to each selected work are detailed and at times important because some selections come from longer works and do need the attached explanations. As a first anthology of indigenous science fiction, it reads well, is well organized, and encourages readers to seek other works by the notable writers presented.

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