KARFN ORD

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A NOVEL

A LETTER FROM THE AUTHOR

Dear Reader,

It's been more than ten years since the first Cygnus Beta book, *The Best of All Possible Worlds*, came out. *The Blue, Beautiful World* is the third book in this universe and I'm sincerely grateful to all who've come along for the ride.

In 2016, when I first sat down to write the meet-cutes and ugly clashes between contemporary Earth and advanced galactic civilization, the real world kept changing faster than I could imagine it. I discarded my first drafts set in a near-future era, dismayed by news that matched or surpassed the drama of my speculations. Finally, I found fresh inspiration by pushing the events of the plot forward another century from the present.

Setting the story in the 22nd century allowed me to show how apocalypses, like futures, are unevenly distributed on planets as well as in galactic civilizations. We face incredible crises, and yet we muddle on somehow. Empires fall, republics rise, and vice versa. Nothing is so earth-shattering that it can erase our responsibility to society and to ourselves: to evolve, to create, to play, and to strive—as individuals as well as communities.

That means we can't sit at the gates of our ruins and wait for the aliens to show up and save us. Nor should we hope for a home-grown hero to return us to that mythical security we thought we had, when all we really had was a vast ignorance of the state of the world around us. The amount of power we can wield may vary, but we must learn to use that power wisely, appropriately even, in both small doings and great matters. And then, at last, we should pass the baton to others, and finish our time in the race.

That's the story behind the creation of *The Blue, Beautiful World*, but what can I tell you about the framing? My work has always been varied. From folktale to horror, and romance to bildungsroman, I've been sending my stories skipping like stones across multiple genres. And now, what is this . . . pop mockumentary, diplomatic thriller, psi-powered First Contact manifesto? You'll have to read it to find out! Regardless, beyond all genres and expectations, I hope that within this book you'll find humor, warmth, food for thought, a satisfying sense of familiarity and recognition—and, above all, an enduring faith in our ability to survive and thrive despite the odds.

Karen Lord

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. What aspect of the book resonated with you the most? What did you struggle with?
- 2. What did you think of the time setting for Earth in the book? Does the 22nd century seem familiar or vastly different from today? Discuss.
- 3. The Global Government Project seems an unlikely brainchild of an inventor-tech mogul, actress, and popstar, but proves to be the driving force in preparing Earth for the existence of alien societies. Have you ever participated in clubs or programs that helped prepare you for leadership roles? What impact do you think bringing together people from different experiences can have on the world today? What three public figures would you bring together for a similar project?
- 4. The book features several types of VR (virtual reality) tech that brings people together but emphasizes the importance of meeting "in the raw"—without masks or VR rooms—for human connection. What parallels do you see between this advanced technological society and our own? Are there any ideas from this society that you'd like to adopt?
- 5. The aliens in this book are described as human or having human-like appearances. Does it surprise you that the author chose beings that seem both familiar and foreign to be the outsiders? Why or why not?
- 6. Similarly, what did you make of the fact that the being most invested in the survival of Earth is a human not of Earth? Do Owen's motives seem genuine to you by the end of the book?
- 7. Although Earth seems to be flooded with technology, Kanoa's people represent the many belief systems and myths that have shaped our history for centuries. Do you think these cultural traditions can be just as powerful for humanity's survival? Why or why not?
- 8. We get a brief glimpse of the rest of the world reacting to alien contact in the middle of the Global Government Project. How do you think you would react?
- 9. Would you want a role in preparing Earth for contact? If so, what would your role be? If not, why not?
- 10. What other themes did you notice in the book?

PLAYLIST

- **Bettye LaVette**
- Do Not Want What I Haven't Got
- **Regina Spektor**
- Leonard Cohen
 - Seelyhoo
- The Carolina Chocolate Drops
 - **Barrington Levy**
 - **Mercedes Sosa**
 - The Four Seasons
 - Harry Belafonte
 - Tarkan
 - Miriam Makeba

- The Call
- Anthem
 - **Bidh Clann Ulaidh**
 - Leaving Eden
 - Vice Versa Love
 - Gracias a la Vida
 - **Storybook Lovers**
 - Turn the World Around
 - Geççek
- Pata Pata

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