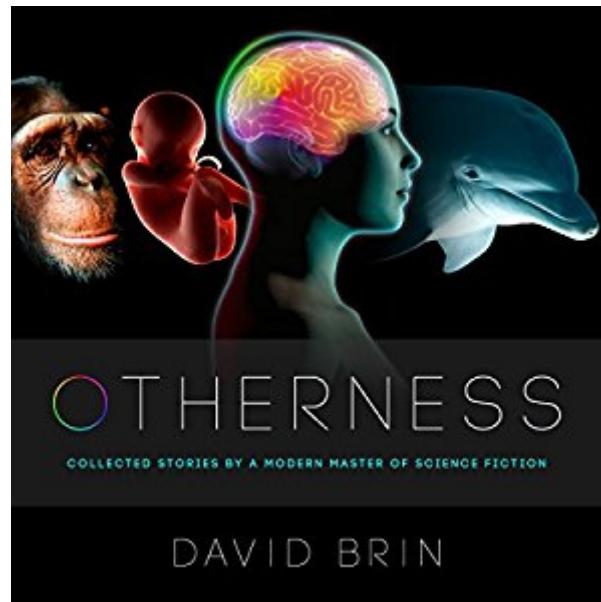


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# Otherness



## Synopsis

From Hugo- and Nebula-winning author David Brin comes this extraordinary collection of tales and essays about the near and distant future, as humans and other intelligences encounter the secrets of the cosmos - and of their own existence. In "The Giving Plague", a virus transmitted by blood donation begins to change humanity. In "Dr. Pak's Preschool", a woman discovers that her baby has been called to work while still in the womb. In "Natulife" a married couple finds their relationship threatened by the wonders of virtual reality. In "Sshhh..." the arrival of benevolent aliens on Earth leads to frenzied madness as humans rush to conceal their secret 'talent'. In "Bubbles" a sentient starcraft reaches the limits of the universe - and dares to go beyond. What happens when an urban archaeologist discovers a terrible secret under the landfills of Los Angeles? Will there still be a purpose for "biologicals" when cybernetic humans become mighty and smart? Come explore these and another dozen startling and provocative tomorrows with a modern master of science fiction.

## Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 11 hours and 13 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Audible Studios

Audible.com Release Date: August 31, 2016

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B01L9QDNPW

Best Sellers Rank: #77 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Science Fiction > Anthologies & Short Stories #824 in Books > Science Fiction & Fantasy > Science Fiction > Anthologies #25692 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Fiction & Literature

## Customer Reviews

Overall, I give the book four stars. Here's a brief summary of its contents, with each story/essay independently rated. From \* "I did not like it at all" to \*\*\*\*\* "I loved it". I was expecting something like Kiln People. The Giving Plague: A scientist tries to avoid catching a plague in which discovery he took part. \*\*\*Myth Number 21: A super short story. To say more would spoil it. \*Dr. Pak's Preschool: Early stimulation on babies is taken to the extreme. \*\*\*\*Detritus Affected: Some archaeologists in the near future make grim discoveries at a site. \*\*\*The Dogma of Otherness: An essay about the

newness of caring for other. \*\*Sshhh...: Humanity looks for its secret unique talent in the Universe. \*\*\*\*\*Those Eyes: A radio talk show profoundly affect a UFO crew. \*\*\*\*What to Say to a UFO: An essay about how the story came to be. \*\*\*Bonding to Genji: Introduction to the world of Genji. \*\*\*\*\*The Warm Space: In the future, natural humans will be left out of the space race from robo humans, so a man makes a choice to be remembered. \*\*\*\*\* The best of the book.Whose Millennium? An essay on Y2K and its relative irrelevance from a millennial standpoint. It was a good one before y2k. \*\*NatuLife: A city dweller and his ancient virtual world. \*\*\*Piecework: Using natural resources for production. \*\*\*\*\*Science versus Magic: An essay comparing Science and Magic. \*\*Bubbles: One stranded spaceship makes an astounding discovery. \*\*\*\*Ambiguity: An scholar discovers he's done more than he thought he would. \*\*What Continues... and What Fails... Evolution on a universal scale. \*\*\*\*\*The Commonwealth of Wonder: An essay talking about ideas that spread and other topics. \*\*

David Brin is certainly a talented author, but there are far too many preachy spots in this book for my taste. That he is a disciple of Richard Dawkins was evident from a line in "The Giving Plague" taken directly from the title of Dawkins' book, "The Selfish Gene". He makes it obvious by the final essay.He also appears to like the surprise twist at the end of the story as several of these short stories have them. The end of "Dr. Pak's Preschool" seemed to me to be a bit contrived, as did the end of the (much better) "The Warm Space", but "Piecework" was such a fabulous, delightful story that I read it several times over even before I went on to finish the book. "NatuLife" was also a fabulous story with many layers of meaning and significance. A fascinating premise that first appears in "Ambiguity" takes a decidedly preachy turn in "What Continues...and What Fails...", a story that crystalizes the author's (and Dawkins') views on evolution.When it comes to the essays, "The Dogma of Otherness" is both clever and interesting. Brin's sense of humor comes through quite well. Starting with "Whose Millenium" the essays get preachy though, and the mask came off in the final one which was both predictable and boring for anyone who has taken part in internet debates on evolution or religion.I own this book, having picked it up when the local library discarded it to make room for others. Most of the stories are definitely worth reading, but it isn't likely to find a permanent spot on my shelves either.

I've tried to read David Brin books before and found them either too subtle for me, or just plain boring. Though, I have read the blurbs on many of his books, and always thought he had some surprising ideas -- as if he'd been practicing those lateral-thinking puzzles for years. I was quite

surprised to find a great collection of very provocative ideas that kept me interested all the way through. From a Japanese culture where the ultimate work-ethic means babies are tutored within the womb and are hooked up to computers at their birth, to "organic humans" discovering themselves useful again after years of uselessness in a culture and society of ultimate "cryo-mechanical humans": I was impressed. He even touches on theories of the existence of the entire universe(s) in a highly entertaining way. My recommendation is forget his longer (and long-winded) novels and devour his short-fiction. The ideas/stories in this collection are crystallised and involving. This one may actually cause me to look more closely at his other novels...

Some of the best, most interesting sci-fi short stories I've read (reread) in a long while. As this was a reread, I'd forgotten they were written by David Brin, but some of these stories have stuck with me as my all-time personal favourites for years. And just to show there's something for everyone, my favourite 5 star stories were the ones only rated \*\*\* by another reviewer - Natulife, Detritus Affected, and we agree on Piecework, and then I'd give at least a 4 for The Giving Plague - nice use of the rationalising mechanism of consistency, and good insight/character progression for such a short story! I hope I don't spoil anyone here - I'm trying to be ambiguous, but skip this if you're really worried... It wasn't until a re-read or two that I realised one of the stories could be a conceptual sequel/spin-off of the original 'Invasion of the Body Snatchers' movie. Duh! Took me awhile to catch on, but worth it. ;) Was less interested in his essays, but still, they're not un-intelligent, but the ideas are less revolutionary or interesting than his stories. His otherness meme suffers from a major flaw - as a culture, we \*don't\* like 'otherness', we like nice, safe, \*exotic\* otherness that we can pat ourselves on the back for our acceptance of. Eg Dolphin intelligence over Pig intelligence, even if they were both to be uplifted. Acceptance of different cultures is better for immigrant populations, especially the new and different, than for already existing 'different' cultures, ie historical immigrant communities or (especially) black communities in America (referring to a study done recently, sorry for not referencing).

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