

Books Beats & Visions: An Octavia's Brood Reading Group

Revolution Shuffle por Bao Phi

Synopsis: A zombie epidemic spread across the US. 70% of the population, many white, were infected. Without evidence, the government classified the epidemic as a terrorist act, and the US population blamed China, North Korea, and the Middle East.

The military built fortified complexes around giant zombie-attracting machines and then imprisoned Asian- and Arab-Americans (along with anyone else that fit “the profile”) in the labor camps to work as mechanics and operators. Politicians claimed that forced labor was “for their own protection,” since peoples of these groups were frequent targets of hate crimes.

Two Vietnamese-Americans, one male and one female, prepare to liberate a camp, and they debate the possible outcomes of a successful operation.

Selected Passages:

☞ After a moment of silence, she asked him, “What do you miss right now?”

This game again. “A messy plate of nachos,” he said with a sigh. “You?”

“Phở,” she replied, pronouncing it the way only a Vietnamese American whose best language skills revolved around a menu could. He heard it the way a Vietnamese American who understood Vietnamese best when it was coming from his parents would. He smiled. Phở was always her answer.

“How about that lady with the shack out by that camp,” he asked softly, craning his neck, peering up at stars. “You remember, that camp just outside the remains of Kansas City?”

She let out a dismissive puff of air through her lips. “Dingy beef water and spaghetti noodles do not a phở make buddy,” she laughed. “You of all people should feel me on that one.”

“Certainly wasn't as good as my mom's, that's for sure,” he deadpanned.

She laughed out loud and sudden, her smile cornering deep into her cheeks. They were about the same height and roughly the same age, so most assumed that they were brother and sister, though they could not look any more different. While both had black hair, hers cascaded down her back, a river in the dark. His was ragged and short like a burnt field. Her small long eyes slanted, like two dark swans, beaks dipping in to kiss above her nose. His eyes were deep, difficult. She was beautiful, magnetic, even if she did not want to be. His appearance was forgettable at best; for better or worse, he was always the background.

Dancing at Bembe: 81 S 6th St., Brooklyn, NY 11211

Next meeting ☞ October 28 ☞ Black Angel by Walidah Imarisha

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🍃 *Tragic times do not beg for complexity. After the emergency legislation was passed, police and military contractors began rounding up and transporting Asian Americans, Arab Americans, and any person in that particular color spectrum into their new work camps. It didn't matter if a person actually had ancestry from North Korea, China, or the Middle East. It became all too apparent that was not the point. There were Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, Chicanos, and Black people thrown into the camp for protesting, for daring to raise their voices in opposition, for choosing the wrong side. Close enough. And thus people learned not to speak out against the camps. In the wake of disaster, America became even less subtle.*

Discussion:

How does this story...

🍃 relate to the community work that you do?

🍃 resonate in relationship to the communities with which you are connected?

Writing Prompts:

🍃 *"Her hope was that, if she died, her soul would travel to the last beautiful place she imagined."* If you were to die right now, where would your soul travel?

🍃 One of the passages that we read speaks of language and the popular, migrant, and unofficial forms of language. Share an experience that speaks to your relationship to language(s), and how popular or slang forms of language sound and feel different in different places.

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