

PROBE

188

Official Fanzine of SFFSA

PROBE 188

June 2021

Published by: Science Fiction and Fantasy South Africa (SFFSA)
P.O. Box 10166 Vorna Valley 1686 South Africa
www.sffsa.org.za

Twitter address: - <http://twitter.com/SciFiZa>

Facebook address: - search under groups as Science Fiction & Fantasy South Africa (www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=7967222257)

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Email: gailjamieson@gmail.com

Probe is typed by Gail Jamieson and other contributors.

Cover. Thanks to Michael Haitel for providing the artwork and Gary Kuyper for creating the cover

Cover artist: Steve Mayer

Drawing on page 46 Ian Gunn




Layout is by Gail Jamieson and Ian Jamieson

Created in MS Word

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- The logo of the South African Fantasy and Science Fiction Association (S.F.F.S.A.) is located at the bottom of the dotted box. It features a stylized rocket ship or space lander within an oval frame, with the acronym 'S.F.F.S.A.' written across the middle.

Editorial

Gail

So we are back into winter again and it's cold in the mornings and evenings but lovely in the sun in the day. I think Highveld winters must be among the best in the world. Anyway, what made me think of that is that it is almost June again and we are still in the throes of the Covid-19 pandemic. We're beginning to see the beginnings of a third wave of new strains; but the good news is that vaccination is under way. Most of the Healthcare workers have received their doses and the over 60's are beginning to get their call-up's. I will be very glad to receive mine.



This issue of PROBE is again a different one. As I have no stories from last year's Nova I've been looking through old issues and choosing stories that I have enjoyed and which I think that a lot of people will not have seen as some of them come from as far back as 1991.

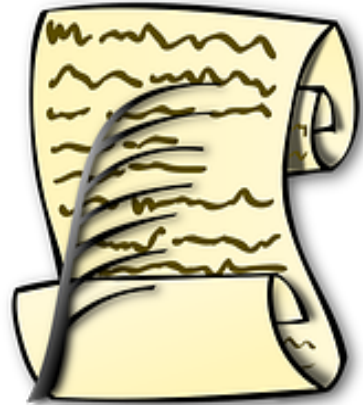
And as around 10 members of SFFSA went to Toronto to attend the Torcon 3 WorldCon, I've reprinted a Worldcon report back from Tony Davis. We had an amazing time and the most fun at a South African WorldCon party and it was really great to see people that we hadn't seen for years, as well as all the other good things that happen when you get around 3000 Science Fiction fans gather together.

Our May Zoom meeting was given by long standing member AL Du Pisani. He has long been interested in space flight and his topic was "Texas Tank Watchers" He told us about some of the groups of people who are watching what SPACEX are up to on the Texas/ Mexican border. There are groups who log everything that is happening related to building and launching ships. There are graphs and pictures and videos and I was not aware of how advanced the space race is. It was a most informative and interesting talk. AL suggests that you go to the [NASASpaceflight.com](https://www.nasa.gov) website for further information

Chairman's Note

Ok, so in a previous monthly meeting we had the scheduled talk, and then we had a bit of a social discussion afterwards, and the topic of the TV series "The Watch (2020)" came up, and no real surprise there, but the opinions about the new TV series were quite opposed.

For those who do not know, The Watch is a new TV series "inspired by the Ankh-Morpork City Watch from the Discworld series of fantasy novels by Terry



Pratchett". Please note the most important word there: "inspired". So of course you can just image the changes that the writers and director made to oh so many readers' beloved characters! Oh the horror, oh how terrible... oh what pish tosh and utter rubbish.

So you can also just imagine all the comments from the Discworld lovers (and that includes our own members) and how badly berated this series has been since it was first released. It only has a very average score or review everywhere, and so many comments lamenting how they did this, and how they changed that, etc. etc. I have never read a Terry Pratchett novel in my life, for me, my comedic writer of choice was Tom Holt. As such I have no preconceptions about what the TV series "should" have been like. I could just watch the show, and I must admit, I thoroughly enjoyed the TV series. It has great production values, it has fun and interesting characters and a cool (however clichéd, but what aren't nowadays) plot. Of course it is not perfect, but like most things we watch nowadays, it is not meant to be cerebral and perfect, it has flaws, but so long it is fun and passes the time nicely, who cares? Well, apparently most everyone who has ever read a Discworld novel! Every single negative review I read mentioned how it was not like Terry Pratchett's novels, even though the creators have already stated that the work is inspired by the novel, and not a direct adaptation. More's the pity because I found it great to watch. but I think after all this negativity (which. I suppose to be honest

they should have expected, Pratchett's work is very, very well known) they are unlikely to make more.

Which brings me to something I have said since I watched Dune (1984), and then years later I finally read Frank Herbert's book: Either read the book, or watch the movie, never do both. Once you have done the one or the other, it is unavoidable that you will make references comparing the two sets of works, and invariably they will not match up. But then again, they never would. A novel has loads of time to build up a world, give the inner thoughts of the characters and have the reader use their imagination for everything the writer is trying to describe. A movie on the other hand, is mostly a visual medium where you are getting one person's viewpoint on how they imagined the novel's world looked, and they only have an hour or two to bring usually hundreds of pages of novel to the viewer. The two mediums can never match up, and they shouldn't anyway, they are meant for different things and should not be compared, they should be taken for their own merit for their own medium. So when I see how badly The Watch has done according to the average viewer, and how much I have actually enjoyed it without the preconceptions that so many other people are bringing to it, I feel a bit sad. The series for me is pretty great, but it will not likely continue because of all the negativity, but then again, TV show producers often cancel good shows before they have time to develop over many seasons anyway. So I guess this will likely not be renewed (I can but hope) but only time will tell.

And speaking of remakes, did you know there is a Dune (2021) coming out, apparently on 01 October? Again, I really loved Dune (1984), so I'm not sure how I feel about this one, but I have watched old and new versions of movies and sometimes (though not often, I don't really believe in remakes, they rarely, if ever, match the originals) I do like the remake. I still love Fright Night (1985) but the 2011 version was actually pretty good as well, so you never know, let us see how the new version goes.

I know you should not to go into a movie or TV series based on a novel or novels with preconceptions, but we are human after all with all the usual human failings. Yes we shouldn't do both, but if we do that, we should at least try not to compare it, however difficult that may be, and base the show on its own merits. So my suggestion, from what I have gathered so far, is that if you are Discworld fan, don't

bother trying the new series, but if you have no experience with Pratchett's world, then go ahead, you may enjoy it.

Magazines Received

Stapledon Sphere (formerly the newsletter of the Middle Tennessee Science Fiction Society [aka the Nashville SF club])

Reece Moorhead reecejb@gmail.com

Issue #46 March 2021

Issue #47 April 2021

Issue #48 May 2021

Ansible David Langford

March 2021 402 <http://news.ansible.uk/a402.html>

April 2021 403 <http://news.ansible.uk/a403.html>

May 2021 404 <http://news.ansible.uk/a404.html>

WARP 110, edited and published by Danny Sichel and Val Royall, is now available for download from our website!

http://www.monsffa.ca/?page_id=6915

Cathy Palmer-Lister

Ste. Julie, Quebec, Canada

cathypl@sympatico.ca

<http://www.monsffa.ca>

L.O.C Lloyd Penney

March 8, 2021

Dear SFFSAns:

Probe 185 is here! (More about that later.) It is getting late enough in this year that is will soon be the one-year anniversary of the pandemic and its lockdowns. We date it

to March 16, the last time we were in our favourite pub. They needed the financial boost from St. Patrick's Day, but they didn't get it, and probably won't get it this year.

Yes, Probe 185 is here, but my goodness, it took a long time to get here! The cancellation on the envelope is 2020-11-10...I will assume November 10 of last year. I received it on March 4. That's close to four months. I see three B5 stamps on it, so this cost you close to R30. I do appreciate the fact you send this zine to me, but you spend so much money on getting that zine to me. I wish it wasn't so expensive for you, and I wish the international mails were more efficient at getting your zine to me.

Smartphones...they can be very expensive here, and Canada pays among the highest rates for web service anywhere in the world. I do have a cellphone, but not a smartphone. It's a flipphone, a small thing that fits in my pocket. A smartphone is a combination of a flipphone and a tablet, so we also have a tablet. The tablet I have, it was supposed to die some years ago, but it just won't do it. The combination of tablet and flipphone is very convenient for us, and in many cases, easier to use.

I very much enjoyed Causation by Odelle Coetzee. Interesting and very topical premise of kids hating their parents and most adults, but this young lady has reasons. She is the smartest of us all. Good courtroom drama and the superior anti-hero having controlling parents' rings so true for so many readers. More adventures with Jenique might be a good idea.

Gary Kuyper's Latent Images is quite the near-future predictive story. I would rather have better stories than better or more visible 3D. The last line proves that all these fancy IT guys really want to do is remake a Biblical movie? Really? In my opinion, what a waste of the tech.

Tipping Point proves that the thin veneer of our civilization gets thinner and thinner all the time, to the point of being translucent. Add in the near-certainty of climate change, and that veneer will shatter, leaving violence and bodies everywhere, as many of us expect.

I think at this point I have done whatever I can. If the international posts keep taking this long to get Probe to me, I will respond as soon as I get it in an attempt to keep up, and make up for the PO's slowness. Take care, everyone, and see you soon.

April 26th 2021

Many thanks for Probe 186, and I hope you are all well and safe in this terrible pandemic. We are in the sixth month of a lockdown in the Toronto area, so besides job hunting, we are keeping busy with various projects. For me, it's letters like this one, among other things.

I can't really tell from the envelope, as the postmarks are incomplete, but I think this issue was mailed in early January, and I received it about a week ago. Four months is still not the best, so I try to respond as soon as the new issue arrives. As above, the pandemic here continues. We are marking close to 4,000 C-19 cases every day. We have each had our first Astra Zeneca shot, and we eagerly look forward to the second shot.

I very much enjoyed Relife by Philip Machanick. A good story to start, well told. The first hint we have that this might be an SF story is the old SF books mentioned. A good trope, and a sign of things to come. There are many themes in SF I have always liked, and one of them is the idea of a human life/soul? recorded or wholly transferred to a real or artificial body. The touch of telepathy is a nice touch.

Letter of comment from Cathy Palmer-Lister...I know in a future letter, you might already have it, she will mention the passing of Sylvain St-Pierre. Sylvain was a friend of ours, one of the busiest fans in eastern Canada, and a pillar of the SF club in Montréal. He died of COVID-19 as he and his bother Marc tried to care for their mother. Their mother Eva died a few days after Sylvain did. Never think that this pandemic is coming to a close; there is still too much happening with it.

I also enjoyed The Poacher by Andre Ian Clarke. Both stories in this issue were great. Another SF trope I have always liked is time travel. This trope, like that of the first tale, is popped into the plot late in the story. We really don't realize that the story is SF until the triceratops shows up, as did the explanation of the true nature of time travel. Both these stories would look great in a magazine or anthology.

My letter... I am now up to seven issues of Amazing Stories, and about a dozen books. At this time, the magazine is on hiatus because of a creditor not paying royalties, but I believe another book may be on the way. I have worked on a Wiccan book, and a screenplay and I am all set to start editing work on a novel by Ira Nayman, the now-departed editor-in-chief of Amazing. I am grateful for the work, for I feel useful in this time of little or no work.

Another reason we're staying inside so much is that it still a little cold. Spring will continue, and the warmth will arrive soon, but never soon enough. Thanks for this issue, and I am sure 187 is slowly making its way around the planet. Take care, and see you then.

Yours, Lloyd Penney.

SFFSA'S SHORT STORY COMPETITION

NOVA 2021

ARE YOU A READER OR A WRITER? ARE YOU AWARE THAT COVID-19 HAD A DISASTROUS EFFECT ON NOVA 2020 AND THAT FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THE HISTORY (ALMOST 50 YEARS) WE DID NOT RECEIVE ENOUGH STORIES TO RUN THE COMPETITION? SO IT'S TIME FOR YOU TO CORRECT THAT ERROR AND GET DOWN TO WRITING. YOU'VE GOT UNTIL THE 30TH OF SEPTEMBER TO GET YOUR ENTRIES TO US. WITH THE PRIZE MONEY IN THE HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF CENTS, IT MAKE SENSE FOR YOU TO FIRE UP YOUR IMAGINATION AND SEND US AN AMAZING ENTRY WHICH MAY BE PUBLISHED IN PROBE AND GO OUT ALL AROUND THE WORLD.

[HTTP://WWW.SFFSA.ORG.ZA](http://www.sffsa.org.za) WILL SUPPLY ALL THE RULES AND AN ENTRY FORM.

Small print: Nova is an unregistered fun services provider and is a wholly owned subsidiary of SFFSA in the short story sector of the science fiction and fantasy genre

Blast from the past – from PROBE 114

Third quarter 2001

Homonyms, Spelling Checkers and the Tower of Babel.

Neveille Cutler.

Don't bother looking up the word "Homonym" in Microsoft's Thesaurus; in the unlikely event you chance to be unfamiliar with it .It isn't to be found there, though the smallest and cheapest paper dictionaries have it. It means words having the same sound but different sense, as in (Inn) "All will be revealed in the fullness of Thyme(Time)".

I recently acquired a pre-publication copy of Peter F. Hamilton's new Book called "The Naked God". It is published by (bye) McMillan; is extremely long; inordinately rambling and tedious to boot. (Sorry SFSA!)I began to read it, and was immediately almost Homonym'd to death. Repeatedly my eye juddered to a halt up against this kind of thing. "The pier sat on the end of the peer." It must have been very uncomfortable for it.

My conclusions were:- Either Peter F. Hamilton uses a spelling checker, and relies on it to such an extent that he never re-reads anything he has written; or there is another alternative. He doesn't see anything wrong because, like my own descendants, he plain (plane) can't spell.

Your average spelling checker sits there in the presence of such abominations, fat and happy, detecting no anomalies. It sees the quoted sentence as wholly (Holy) correct because both "Pier" and "Peer" are words in equally good standing in the English Language, and it does not seem to check for contextual clues to appropriateness. So the program blithely ignores two (too) (to) errors out of two (too) (to).

Had the sentence been..."The pier piered at the horizon." Our spelling checker immediately picks up one of the miss-spellings because it can recognise a word that has no right (Rite) to existence. i.e. "Piered".

The trouble is that any word that has not been included in the Checker's database is treated as non-existent, until the programme is otherwise instructed.

Unfortunately, with well over a million words to deal with, the checker would become impossibly unwieldy if they were all included, especially such infrequently used words as "Flaucinaucinihilipilification", a joke word made up

of the word "Nothing" in several languages. Unfortunately there is no algorithm that can shrink such a database to a halfway-reasonable size. The big problem that Spellcheckers face is the lack of logic in the construction and spelling of English words, for which, in the main, we have Dr Johnson of dictionary fame to thank. Dr. Johnson; plus the incredibly sticky-fingeredness of the English traveller; and the various invasions to which the British Isles have been subjected.

Prior to Johnson, everyman had his own system of spelling, which was as inconsistent as can be imagined. Even Shakespeare went on record as spelling his own name in 23 different ways. So at least, if Johnson avoided logic, he at least embraced his own kind of consistency.

George Bernard Shaw despaired of the spelling of the English Language, though he wrote so well in it. He started a campaign, forgotten these many years, for a revision of the Alphabet, introducing more letters to cover sounds that are at present indicated by letter combinations. He lampooned English, stating that the word "Fish" to be consistent, should be spelled "Ghoti". (GH as in Enough. O as in Women. TI as in Station.) The campaign fizzled, so he wrote "Pygmalion" (My Fair Lady), and at least got something back for his efforts....

The invasions meant that words with ancient Danish roots entered the language; such words being still in use today in Newcastle (UK), if nowhere else. It also meant that every word ending in "-tion" has been stolen from the French; that words of Hindi origin have been pressed into service. (Try "Bungalow" for a single-storey house). Then add invented words like the acronym, "Laser". You end up with an incredibly complex (but useful) mish-mash.

It's bad enough for the native-born English speaker, he doesn't know any better...but how much worse is it for the foreigner who did not learn it at his mother's knee? The commonest question asked by these sorely-puzzled innocents when they encounter such words as "Bough" and "Tough", which are spelled similarly but sound totally different is, "Yes, but why?" The correct response is.. "Buggered if I know!"

During my early years at school, we had spelling tests, "Spelling Bees", at least once a week. There was strong competition, and bees became a popular form of entertainment on the radio. If there was one thing we kids could do, it was SPELL, so it came as a distinct shock in 1941 when I heard (herd) American and British teams compete in one (won) of these half-hour programs. I realised for the first time (thyme) that there was another version of English called "American", and the rules of the game permitted alternative spellings to those we knew (new).

The reason American spelling is different from that of "English English is that early in the previous century (The 20th), some American Congressmen were looking for a.

way to justify their existence, (a difficult task in all conscience), and decided to set the English Language straight. They really should not have claimed that it was a relic of the Apartheid Regime... Oops sorry. Cancel that. A relic of their Colonial ex-masters.

When they achieved independence from Britain, they held a plebiscite to decide whether or not they should switch to one of the Native Indian languages; abandoning the language of the hated English. Laziness won the day, which is why the landing instructions on World's Airways today are not delivered in Cherokee.

Parts of the English Modernisation Project were easy. Everyone can see that "Plow" is more logical than "Plough". Some words simply cannot have their spelling signified without causing or compounding confusion.

As you have surely gathered in the course of your work, there are literally hundreds of words that sound the same in English but are spelled differently and convey totally different meanings. In conversation the shades of meaning are picked up from the context, and hearing the following creates no problems other than an apparent lack of meaning.

Horses do not naye; In Parliament, the neighs do not have it. Coffins are not carried on a beer. Nor do the mourners drink a bier at the Wake.

Is Microsoft trying to develop an AI system that can analyse the appropriate Homonym for the desired meaning? Just bear (bare) in mind that if they succeeded with this enterprise, it carries a new (knew) danger with it. Stultification.

One of the reasons that the French Language is no longer *La Langue Diplomatique* (the Language of Diplomacy) is because of an organisation called the *Academie Francaise*. This body was founded to maintain the "Purity" of the French Language. It did so effectively a job that no new (knew) word can be officially incorporated into the language without the approval of the *Academie*, and spontaneity is frowned upon.

As an instance, Frenchmen and women returning to France after WWII, having spent up to 5 years speaking English, had acquired many new words for new things or new concepts. The Jet had been invented; they had gone on long weekend holidays; they had worn woollen articles called a "pullover", named for the way in which you put it on.

They went home full of “Le Pullover”, “Le Jet”, “Le Weekend”, only to be put down furiously by the Academie. They must not use this “Franglais”, they must wait for the Academie to devise French words with proper French roots in place of these English abominations.

Consequently, the official French word for "Jet is "Machine a. Reaction", Reaction Machine; a sentence; not a word. I shudder to think what a "MASER" or a "LASER" has been Academie'd into

You take my point. Anything that restricts the entry of stolen, miss-heard, borrowed or dreamed up words into a language is in the end going to limit that language's utility: but if the language develops in several isolated centers, then, eventually, the Tower of Babel situation arises. One former Language becomes many: all different.

So here is an opportunity for a new type of program that accepts constant downloads from a central source. I call it a Disseminator. Any new word developed in any English-speaking centre that appears to have some utility, is instantly available to all centers, and is fed into thesauri and spellcheckers, complete with its full meaning. It must then stand on its own; the sole criterion of whether it lives or dies is usefulness.

This means the language can continue to grow freely, but there will be only one version of it, with uniform spelling...then perhaps, Microsoft will be able to develop the needed algorithm and English spelling (God Forbid!) will become logical

And just to add a little something I (Gail)saw.....

10 Reasons why English is Weird

1. The bandage was wound around the wound
2. The farm was used to produce produce
3. The dump was so full it had to refuse more refuse
4. We must polish the Polish furniture
5. He could lead if he could get the lead out
6. The soldier decided to desert his dessert in the desert.
7. Since there is no time like the present he thought it was time to present the present.
8. A bass was painted on the head of the bass drum.
9. When shot at, the dove, dove into the bushes.
10. I did not object to the object.

Editor's Choice Nova Finalist 2001

SPOTTY MUSHROOMS

Gary Kuyper

The beast smiled wryly as it exited the cave. It was one of those smiles that scrunch up only one side of the face. The smile was accompanied by a frown.

"Who the hell are you?" asked the beast looking down at the puny little man.

"Oh, you can talk?" asked the man frowning back.

"I'll have you know that I am fluent in almost forty different languages; including Mandarin and Funigalor. May I be of assistance?"

"I am Charles and I have come for the damsel in distress."

"I'm afraid you're too late, Charlie."

"Someone has already rescued her?" He sounded greatly disappointed.

"On the contrary. Had the wench for breakfast."

"You *ate* her?" Charles looked shocked and angry.

"Hey, I was famished. It has been awhile since any succulent knights have come a visiting."

"Then I shall avenge her horrible death."

"Actually, it was rather quick and painless. Say, where's your shining armor, your noble steed and not to mention...your trusty vorpal sword?"

"I require no more than *this* to destroy the likes of you!" Charles held an object between thumb and finger. He waved it in the air.

"A feather? You been eating some of them spotty mushrooms down by Black Creek?"

"This, my ignorant foe, is a quill!"

"Ignorant? *Ignorant!* I'll have you know that my brain contains the knowledge of over fifty thousand years and is incapable of one iota of memory loss. I have had the honor of being taught by nine of the ten Shin-yu, the wisest Orientals that have ever lived. I have spent countless hours arguing philosophy with the great astronomer, Thoth Ammon. I..."

"And you...your miserable existence," interrupted Charles, "is about to end right here and now!"

"And you plan to do it with that? Does it possess some sort of magical power?"

"A learned creature such as yourself must have heard that *the pen is mightier than the sword?*"

"And you call *me* ignorant. That is a metaphoric expression. You're not meant to take it literally. You can't use a pen as a physical weapon. At least, not on this hide." The beast slapped its rear end. "Tough as nails. Allow me to enlighten you as to how the pen is mightier than the sword. Let's see now." The beast scratched its chin with a

long sharp talon. "Ah, take this for example. A pen writes the words of a speech that will inspire a nation to rally against its foes. Or, a pen can sign the peace treaty that brings a long and terrible war to its conclusion. Also, a pen..."

"*This* pen can write you into oblivion!"

"Oh, it *is* magical then?"

"In a way...yes."

"In a way?"

"Yes! In a way all pens are magical. Like a magic wand, they possess the power of creation. Think about it. Like potential energy, the viscous liquid within lies dormant and waiting. All it needs is the right person to grip it in the proper way; caressing and stroking it across the virgin surface so that it may release the life-giving fluid and thereby give birth to wondrous creations."

"Whoa, Charlie! I didn't realize until now what a passionate experience writing can be. Just a pity that pen of yours is so small."

"What are you insinuating?"

"Phallic symbolism. The only thing missing from your pen is *is*."

"Ah, you mock me?"

"What do you expect? One minute you're raving on about destroying me, the next you're spouting birth and creation."

"I'm serious! This pen *has* the power to vanquish you!"

"Prove it."

"*Prove* it?"

"Prove it! Do your worst!"

"Very Well," said Charles reaching into the leather satchel that rested on his hip. He removed a scroll which he partly unfurled."

"Your virgin scroll, I presume?" The words dripped with sarcasm.

"Correct!" exclaimed Charles as he began to caress and stroke the quill across the coarse parchment.

The beast tilted its head to the side in a forced gesture of curiosity. "I hope this is as good for you as it is for me, Charlie?"

"There!" declared Charles holding out the scroll towards the beast. "Read it and weep!"

The beast bent down, lowering its long scaly neck. It squinted as it read the fresh scribbles aloud. "*Just as the dragon was about to devour the hero, a great pain caused it to clutch at its breast. It released one last terrible roar before crashing to the cold earth, dead.*" The beast raised its neck. "The prose are a little dramatic for my liking, but with a little practice and polish you may just have the potential to be a pretty good writer."

"Prepare yourself for oblivion, monstrosity," said Charles calmly rolling up the scroll.

"Oh, now I get it! You believe that whatever you write will actually come to pass. An interesting concept for a children's fairy tale, but just a load of codswal..." The beast hesitated. "Wait! What's this? Oh, my! I'm afraid I can't help myself. I suddenly have this irresistible urge to *eat* you."

"And so it begins," smiled Charles. "Farewell!"

With uncanny speed the beast moved forward. Its huge jaws dripped with saliva as they opened menacingly above Charles. The maw was large enough to swallow him whole. The next instant the beast recoiled. It clutched at its upper chest, an expression of agony on its face. It released a deafening roar just before collapsing to the ground.

It lay on its back, all four claws in the air, tongue hanging out of the side of the mouth, motionless."

"Ha!" exclaimed Charles beaming. He replaced the scroll in the satchel as he walked over to the fallen beast. "I warned you, monstrosity!" He kicked the motionless form.

"You have suffered the consequences of your cynicism."

As Charles began to walk away he heard the laughter. It started as a soft chuckle, became a giggle and finally erupted into unbridled hysterical howls.

Charles watched despondently as the beast rolled about kicking its legs in the air.

"I've always considered myself quite the thespian," said the beast wiping away the wet streaks beneath its fiery reptilian eyes. "Did you find the roar convincing? Pretty

good, hey? The tongue hanging out may have been a trifle too much though."

"I don't understand it," said Charles reaching for the satchel again.

"Look," said the beast starting to chuckle again. "It is not in my nature to separate a fool and his life. Especially an unarmed fool. Pendragon Grove is just a few miles south of here. In the clearing you'll find a large pitch-black stone that is almost totally covered in moss. Embedded in the stone is a magnificent blade. The sword has magical powers. *Real* magical powers. Powers that will make it possible for you to defeat me. Bring it back here and then I shall be prepared to do glorious battle with you."

"No! You look, monster! I have neither desire to be king, nor do I need any other means but this pen to crush your pompous monstrous hide."

"Jeremiah!"

"What?"

"My name is Jeremiah, not monster. Well, actually I have three first names...Jeremiah David Benjamin, but my friends call me Jerry."

"You actually have some?"

"Names?"

"Friends!"

"Sir, you cut me to the quick. Your tongue is far more competent than that silly pen of yours."

"Oh, now you have feelings too? Some dragon you are!"

"*Dragon?* Dragon! I ain't no dragon."

"No?"

"No!"

"What's that?" asked Charles pointing at the beast's green belly."

"Scales!"

“And those?”
 “Claws that catch!”
 “And those?”
 “Jaws that bite!”
 “And especially those?”
 “My eyes of flame!” exclaimed the beast and then sighed a long plume of smoke from its nostrils.
 “I rest my case,” said Charles folding his arms contemptuously.
 “I’m a jabberwock!”
 “A jabberwhat?”
 “Jabberwock!”
 “Never heard of one of those before.”
 “That’s because you’ve never imagined me before.”
 “Never...?”
 “Look, I’m just a simple figment of your imagination!” blurted the jabberwock. “You can’t honestly believe that all of this is *real*?”

 “I’m dreaming?”
 “Well, it’s more like hallucinating, actually.”
 “This doesn’t make sense?”
 “What?”
 “Your names are Benjamin David Jeremiah.”
 “So?”
 “You’re a figment of my imagination.”
 “Right.”
 “Well, I’m an atheist. Why would a figment of my imagination have names of such a biblical nature?”
 “The mind is a strange and marvelous thing.”
 “Hmm, mind over matter,” mumbled Charles to himself. “But there is no matter, no substance to any of this. So then why didn’t the pen work?”
 “I’m sorry, did you say something?”
 “Of course!” exclaimed Charles once more removing the scroll.
 “Oh, dear! Here we go again,” sighed the jabberwock.
 “I’ve figured it out!” Charles scribbled viciously onto the scroll. “There!” he said gleefully staring at the parchment. “Would you like me to read it to you?”
 “Humour me.”
 “*The jabberwock vanished, never to be seen again!*”
 “And you expect it to work this time?”
 “Yes! Don’t you see? Last Time I wrote *dragon*, but you’re a *jabberwock*!”
 “That is absurd!”
 “Is it? Look!” shouted Charles pointing at the beast’s tail.
 “Whoops!” exclaimed the jabberwock as the sharp barbed end of its tail shimmered and vanished.

Piece by scaly green piece the jabberwock started to disappear. The process continued from the tail all the way up to the head until all that remained was the beast's sarcastic grin. "My mistake, Charlie," said the smiling teeth. "Seems that pen of yours is quite potent after all."

Not long after that, the smile vanished as well.

"Now," said Charles looking around, "How does one get out of one's own imagination?"

This time he wasn't the least bit surprised when the creature spoke.

"May I be of assistance?" asked the flamingo that was wading closest to Charles.

"That you may," answered Charles staring across the vast Crystal Lake. "I'm looking for the way out."

"To get out you first have to get in."

"But I already am *in*."

"Introspection is a long and painful process. You have to go deeper still."

"How much deeper?"

"Until you reach the Chinaman."

"Where do I find *this* Chinaman?"

At the end of the rabbit hole, of course."

"And where do I find *this* rabbit hole?"

Before the flamingo could answer, the lake's surface began to bubble. Calmly at first, but increasing to a vicious boil.

"Bad Omen!" squawked the flamingo. Tally ho, chaps! Time to be wenting!"

As one fowl the flamingoes sprinted for the cover of the nearby forest.

Charles stared at the water's surface.

From amongst the bubbles rose an enormous shiny-black undulating egg-shaped mass. In its centre sat a single monstrous eye. Below the giant orb snapped a large beak. From below the dark slimy oval mass rose even slimier tentacles.

"A giant squid!" exclaimed Charles moving slightly back. "Who are you? Are you also able to speak?"

"I am, as the flamingo said, the infamous *Omen*. Dark in appearance! Darker by nature!"

The ominous words exited deep and hollow from the flapping beak.

"Infamous? I have never heard of you."

"That's because you've never imagined me before. Do you like what you see?"

"I...wait! There does seem to be something strangely familiar about you."

"May I be of assistance," asked the giant squid hastily. It was as though it was trying to change the subject.

"I'm looking for the rabbit hole."

"Ah, you wish to return to your boring reality. Don't you like it here?"

"I am a mathematician. I seek logical answers to logical questions. This place is totally irrational. It is beyond sensible analytical reasoning."

"Well then, let me tell you a little secret."

"Oh, which is?"

"The flamingo lied. You don't need the rabbit hole. There is a simpler way out."

"There is? How?"

"All you have to do is say my name backwards."

"Say your name backwards."

Just say my name backwards."

"Really?"

"Really. Why not give it a try?"

"Very well. Here goes then." Charles took a deep breath. "Ne...wait! You attempt to deceive me. You are no figment of *my* imagination. You are already spoken for."

"Just say my name and you will be free!"

"No! Never! You are a liar and a fraud!"

"I am your friend in arms; all eight of them. Say my name!"

"No! You are my nemesis."

"Nemesis? Have I never inspired you?"

"No!"

"Not even in the slightest? Go on, say my name!"

Charles turned and ran into the forest screaming, "No! No! No! This is no good at all! It's unoriginal! It's all been done before! I've never plagiarized before, and I don't intend starting now! I need something new! Something fresh! Something absolutely fantastic." He fell to his knees and murmured, "Something fantastically absurd."

"Mister Dodgson! Mister Dodgson!"

The voice came from above.

Charles looked up.

There was a long wide tunnel leading to a bright light.

"The way out!" he exclaimed delighted.

"Your assumption would be correct!" The sentence had been spoken in perfect unison by two voices. Charles hastily stood up and turned around. He stared in amazement. It was a human body, but with two heads – male and female.

"And you would be?" asked Charles raising an eyebrow.

"We are the famous Tweedle Twins."

"Never heard of you."

"Of course not. You haven't..."

"Imagined you yet," said Charles completing the sentence.

Two heads nodded in unison. "Correct! I am Tweedle Dumb and this is Tweedle Dumber." The twins pointed at each other.

"Who's Tweedle Dumb?"

"I am," said the twins pointing at themselves.

"Hmm," muttered Charles. "I can see where this is going. Being figments of my imagination, I have no desire to be drawn into this silliness."

"Oh, but we are more than just mere figments of your imagination!"

"Oh, really?"

"Oh, yes! We are a representation of your mind. I am the right hand side of your brain and I am the left."

Charles frowned. Which one of you represents the right side?"

"I do," they both said.

"Look, just go away. You're bothering me and I need to get out of here."

"But we can't go away until *you* first leave."

"That...somehow makes sense. Well, I can't leave until I find a way up that tunnel. I have reason to believe that that is where I'll find reality."

"May we be of assistance?"

"You? How?"

"We weren't always like this you know. Once we were separate and unique; just like other normal twins. If you help us to become singular entities again, we shall in turn be able to aid *you*."

"What happened? What caused you to...merge?"

The twins looked at each other and then with sulky protruding bottom lips they turned back to Charles. "Spotty mushrooms," they mumbled.

"Spotty mu...!" Charles waved his hands in front of his face. "Never mind. Just tell me how I can help you?"

"I'll hold onto that Tumtum tree with one arm and you pull on the other."

"Is that all?"

"Yes, quite simple really."

"Then let's try it!"

The twins grabbed hold of the Tumtum tree's trunk with their left arm whilst Charles gripped their right one firmly. He pulled with all his might.

There was a sound of cloth being torn as the twins were split down the middle. Next came a scrunching and crackling noise as new appendages sprouted from the ripped sides. An instant later, two whole beings stood side by side.

"O frabjovous day! Callooh! Callay!" they exclaimed. "This is so much better!"

"I was hoping that, after the separation, you would no longer be able to expel your dialogue in unison? Frankly, I find it quite disturbing and irritating."

"We can never truly separate, our psyche will always be *one*."

"Psyche?"

"That part which is truly you. That which can never be destroyed. Your soul, if you will."

"I don't, thank you very much! I'm an atheist. I don't believe in an immortal soul. I am not so inclined as to waste either precious time or energies upon such ridiculous concepts."

"Really? Don't be too certain about that," said the female twin. "The mind is a strange and marvellous thing."

“Listen to her,” said the male. “She is the voice of both doubt and reason.”

“My subconscious?” queried Charles frowning.

“Exactly!” they both exclaimed. “Now, let’s see if we can get you out of here.”

“What’s your plan? This tunnel is much too high, and far too wide to climb.”

“I will stand on Tweedle Dumb’s shoulders,” said the twins. You can then climb onto Tweedle Dumber’s shoulders.”

“That’s no good. It’s far too high. I still won’t be able to reach the top.”

“Yes, you will!”

“How?”

Tweedle Dumb can then simply climb onto *your* shoulders, I climb onto Tweedle Dumb again and you climb onto my shoulders again. We just keep going until you reach the top.”

“Ingenious!” shouted Charles flinging his arms into the air. “What a brilliant idea! Why didn’t I think of it?”

“You did!” exclaimed the twins as the one climbed on top of the other. “Come on! Your turn!”

“Mister Dodgson! Mister Dodgson!”

It was that same voice again, coming from the light at the top of the tunnel. Charles gazed up into the convoluted tube. Was the circular light at the top increasing in size or was it coming closer as the tunnel compressed like some enormous concertina?

The light faded and was replaced by the very round face of a very concerned Oriental gentleman.

“Chin!” exclaimed Charles blinking. He tried to focus through the gloom and haze of the smoke. “Something wrong?”

“Humblest apologies, Charles, but you disturbing other customers with your deliriums.”

Charles Dodgson sat up slowly and, with some difficulty, swung his legs over the edge of the small upper wooden bunk. He looked around the small dimly lit room. There were five other men, mostly Chinese, that had also come to utilize Chin’s services. They lay on similar bunks and were all looking at Charles through bleary eyes. He raised his hands, fingers spread, as an expression of apology. The men looked away.

“Chin, did I ever tell you that I once even tried inhaling glue vapors? You know, the really noxious sort that is used for binding large volume books or hats?”

“Oh, you be careful, sir. I understand too much of those substances bad. Lead to irreparable insanity.”

“Don’t worry, Chin. Only tried it once. Besides making me feel light-headed, the only other sensation it evoked was one of extreme nausea.”

“Drink this,” said Chin handing over a small bowl. Charles scrunched his eyes. “Only tea. Very sweet. Make you feel better.”

“I already feel great, Chin! That was the best yet!”

"No, you not use again! Disturb other customers. It extract from very rare caterpillar. Caterpillar feed only on special spotty mushroom."

"Hmm," mumbled Charles taking a sip of the hot urine-coloured liquid. "There is just one thing troubling me, Chin."

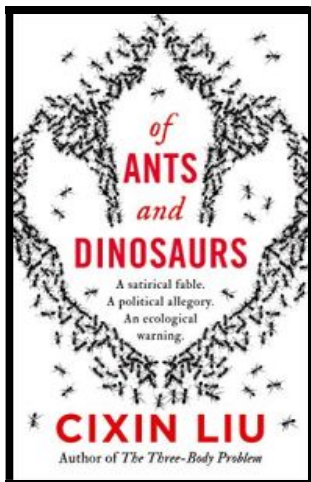
"What that?"

"Did you know that the subconscious is *female*?"

"Of course, mind is strange and marvellous thing."

Book Reviews Gail Jamieson

Cixin Liu of Ants and Dinosaurs



I have to start off by saying that this, at first glance seems to be a very silly premise. The novel takes place in the Cretaceous era and the protagonists are indeed ants, yes those little annoying things that try to walk off with your picnic and the very large and scary Tyrannosaurus Rex. Once upon a time a bunch of telepathic ants help out a T-Rex, by removing a very irritating remnant of its lunch from one of its teeth and so begin a symbiotic relationship

that slowly develops via dentistry and internal medicine to an entire communications network. T Rex's hands cannot do fine work and the ants do not have individual intelligence to know what fine work to do. Working together the two parts create a social, architectural, medical and modern civilization. Each complements the other and the ants grow more imaginative and the dinosaurs more systematic.

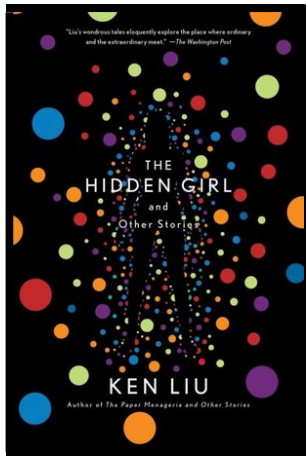
But eventually their differences become exposed and flare over religion – basically: Does God look like an ant or a dinosaur?

This leads to conflict, with each trying to destroy the others' cities. One has to assume that the T-Rexes escalating consumption of resources refer to an environmental warning and that the individualistic dinosaurs represent America, with the communally supportive ants representing China. Liu being a Chinese author nods towards "nod nod wink wink" comments about colonies and the need for expanding living space.

But the outlook is bleak and eventually the conflict heads towards mutual defeat with little concern for our planet.

For if humans really are so evolved, why are we so hell-bent on destroying a planet that has provided us with everything from sunsets to food, oxygen to shelter, trees to, well, Cixin Liu? Will anyone be sorry to see us go? Certainly not the ants, who may well survive to have the last laugh,
Suspend disbelief and give this a go.

Ken Liu The Hidden Girl and Other Stories



There are nineteen very well crafted stories in the collection. There are only a few stories that show Liu's Chinese heritage. Interesting in particular is "Ghost Days" which shows clearly how a person of a Chinese background does not fit into modern American society. But throughout most of the other stories, Cixin Liu uses either a real "mother" issue or the use of mother issues as a plot device.

There are many stories about young girls who are reunited with their fathers after the death of their mothers. And the stories relate how their relationships are affected by this tragedy.

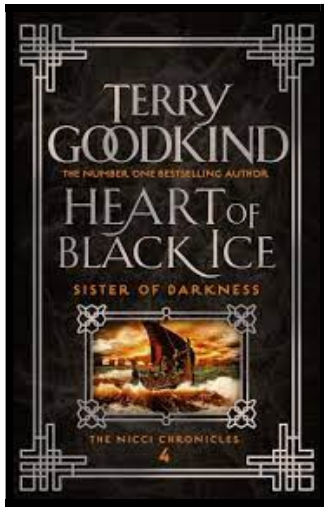
He also brings in the "singularity" – the digital upload of humanity – which produces an AI which begins to show many human traits.

Interesting preface in which Liu tries to explain that he feels that any story does not become complete until it is read by a reader and so each story may have many different interpretations depending on what the author has created. He describes it as a house in which he would be comfortable but that the reader needs to add his interpretation to make it a home.

I enjoy this author.

I will look out for more of his work

Terry Goodkind Heart of Black Ice The Nicci Chronicles 4



This is the final book of the Nicci chronicles which follows Nicci (and her companions) on their ambassadorial missions through the Old World. As is often the case in epic fantasy, shenanigans—many of the magical variety—ensue, involving everything from selkies and silphs to stone soldiers and legendary spells. Goodkind is known for his thrilling fight sequences and battle scenes, as well as his expansive world building and there is plenty of that here

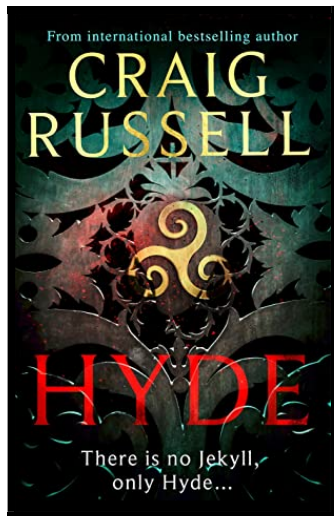
Heart of Black Ice picks up following the battle at Ildakar, which ended with the city disappearing behind a shroud of eternity, leaving a ragtag group of wizards, scholars, soldiers, and Sisters of Light led by reluctant commander Nathan, to attempt to stop the more than 100,000 reawakened soldiers ready to lay waste to the Old World after 15 centuries of stone sleep

It doesn't help that General Utros, the leader of the reawakened soldiers, is teaming up with King Grieve, the leader of the barbaric Norukai slavers. While Utros is continuing the mission of conquest Emperor Kurgan set him on 15 centuries ago, uncaring that the emperor and his empire have long since died. Grieve just wants to watch the world burn, and get plenty of pillaging in along the way. Separately, they are massive threats to the people of the Old World. Together, they may be unstoppable...

The Nicci Chronicles is no different from many other fantasy series, bringing together storylines and important characters from the previous three books in the series, while also alluding to thematic and character elements from Goodkind's beloved *Sword of Truth* series, in which the character of Nicci was first introduced. But you don't have to have read that to be able to follow these chronicles

Really worth reading for Fantasy fans

Craig Russell Hyde



Edward Hyde loses time and has a deep seated feeling of horror that he might be a beast, a murderer when he is in the other world.

He tells his story to the frail Robert Louis Stevenson, who is a friend of his.

This novel is not really Science fiction or horror but more like a psychological thriller that takes place in an Edinburgh that is in the process of replacing the gas lighting by electricity.

Murders take place, a woman goes missing and there are a couple of subplots to complicate the issue.

Hyde's doctor believes in multiple personalities and thinks that Hyde may have different characters in his mind. Hyde gradually comes to believe that he may be the Beast of Celtic lore – with the aid of the minds of the “Dark Guild” that plot to implicate him in the multiple murders that take place, to cover up who is the actual demon of the Dark Guild .

All is finally revealed and Hyde also discovers a secret that his lost time had hidden from him.

And Robert Louis Stevenson then uses the idea to create the novel – “Dr *Jeckel* and Mr Hyde”

As I said not really SF at all but closer to a murder mystery with horror overtones, but an exceptionally well written novel that I would suggest you look out for.

Please note that SFFSA has changed its postal address to:

P.O. Box 10166

Vorna Valley

1686

Books Received

JonathanBall *Publishers*

Avi Loeb **Extraterrestrial** John Murray R355

Ken Liu **The Hidden Girl and Other Stories** Head of Zeus R255

Sarah J. Maas **A Court of Silver Flames** Bloomsbury R280

Craig Russell **Hyde** Little Brown R355

Cixin Liu **of Ants and Dinosaurs** Head of Zeus R225

Terry Goodkind **The Children of Dhara** Head of Zeus R370

Editor's Choice

Liz Simmonds **Even the Weariest River**

It is mid-afternoon when I make my way to the house. Mrs Hudson lets me in and shows me upstairs to wait for the Master, her master

The hall is dark. Its age-old wallpaper, once so precise in its geometry, is now an indeterminate red, scruffy and a little torn in places. Mrs H shows me up the stairs. The carpet, once so fine, is threadbare, coloured dark by the dust that holds it together. The dust rises as we walk, then drifts softly back to the floor.

The panelling is old and dark, and needs polishing. The portraits of ancestors are even more vague than they were originally, misted as they are by a patina of dust. The landing is deeply layered in dust.

Mrs H seems oblivious of this. She hesitates at the door to his room then opens it. "I'm sure he'd like you to wait. I'll away and do you some nice tea." presumed dark and dingy downstairs kitchen.

The famous room is - of course - exactly as it has been depicted in word and on screen. The famous clutter is everywhere. Memorabilia crowd every surface. Genuine and valuable Victoriana push manfully for space with strange tokens of a thousand cases. Even a giant dog-collar finds space next to a jar of resin and a

discarded and empty speckled snakeskin. The violin has pride of place next to a chemical bottle that contains just a small quantity of white powder.

I settle down to wait. I find a small place on an ottoman, squeezed into a corner, Every available space is taken up by some fiddly piece of furniture, and every piece of furniture is crowded to the point of satiation with bric-a-brac. All of it is undusted and faded from its former glory to the point of annihilation. Not an inappropriate backdrop for one of my calling

weather, over the pipe, over the pipe, over the slippers. He does not look old, he is ageless, but he is frail, almost transparent. Does he tremble as he looks around the room? A change in the winds of fashion would blow him away. Then he sees me, reflected in the glass of a convex mirror. I look less scrawny in the distortion, but must still seem very thin. He turns further, seeking me out where I

Now stand beside the ottoman. He sees me, at last, and smiles_ As he takes a step towards me, we are interrupted by a familiar sound. It is the scrape of carriage wheels on the cobbles outside. In a flash, I am gone.

project. Write a story in the style of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle And the Maestro must leap once more into a metaphorical saddle and solve another Case. I had often been there before, unseen, but not, I fancied, unsensed. How often had Sherlock not seemed to catch a glimpse of me as I watched him through the curve of a tankard or the swell of the embossed mirror? Even now he seems aware that I have disappeared uncannily, yet am still present.

"Later, later," he mumbles to himself. His head is tilted to one side and the gleam in his eye is a natural one. Even now his pulse beats just a trifle faster. Perhaps this one will be a Case worthy of his skills

"Lady to see you, Sir," she puffs. The young woman moves delicately past Mrs Hudson and extends an elegantly gloved hand. Mrs Hudson goes away to busy herself with the perennial tea. The young lady looks for a place to sit. She chooses a chair less dusty than most, delicately dusts it with a lace handkerchief, and seats herself gracefully. The dust resettles elsewhere. She explains her predicament. Sherlock appears interested, but is in fact profoundly bored. There are great affairs of state. There are stolen papers. A young man,

not too wise, is suspected of the theft. He is her fiancé

Once more, the Empire must be saved. Promising to do his best, the Maestro calls for Mrs Hudson. This time the tea does appear. There is idle chatter over the inane and complex rituals of the Victorian English afternoon tea, and then the refreshed and relieved guest is ushered out. Sherlock looks around abstractedly, but I am not visible.

With a sigh, he settles down to contemplate the puzzle. He shakes his head, muttering "Always the same plot. Find the diplomat's nephew who has gone to the bad, find the evidence, solve the case. Have they quite run out of ideas?

Even another snake around the forehead or a dog who doesn't bark

would be better than these eternally confoundedly careless young people."

He summons Mrs Hudson. As she clears away, he tells her he will be away for a while.

"Well, pack warm then, no more tramping on those nasty moors then. And no bringing home any more trinkets."

Her eyes gloss over the myriad of treasures and trifles that have never felt the passage of air from her duster. But her air of martyrdom is well practised, and suits her.

With an indignant sniff she removes the tray to the kitchen. She will not wash it.

The next time someone writes a Sherlock Holmes story her tray will be miraculously recreated, sparkling clean and laden with tasty cakes. I wonder what she eats in-between times. Perhaps, as Bishop Berkeley would expect, she ceases to exist.

Perhaps a cosmic Pause Button is pressed. This idle speculation is nugatory and it bores me. I will return in a few weeks.

It is dusk when I make my way to the house. The winter approaches in the world outside of 221b Baker Street. Inside, it is always autumn. Mrs Hudson lets me in and shows me upstairs to wait for the Master, her master.

The hall is still dark, dingy, dusty, decayed, dreadful. The stairs are indistinguishable from each other in the gloom. Mrs Hudson lights the gas (who supplies it?) and I walk up to the study. She returns to her off-stage life in the dark downstairs of her house.

There is not even the usual clatter of teacups with their promise of refreshment. I am concealed in my corner when Sherlock arrives. He has let himself in and does not know that I am here. He looks even wearier; his skin is stretched taut over the noble cheekbones. In places one could fancy it is almost transparent. He holds his hand up to a lamp. The light shines through it, undimmed by its passage through the faded flesh

He paces up and down for a while. Addressing the absent, long-departed, Watson.

"It was a quick case. Just a trip to the midland moorlands. (They seem a little fuzzy at the edges, somehow. Odd thing that.) A week to observe the villagers.

"Anyhow," he continues, got an introduction to the lord of the manor. I inspected the hiding place. It was the latest safe. And only the secretary knew the combination_ It was a clear-cut case. No one but the fiancé could have taken the papers from the safe. Ergo he must have. But he

swore he did not. So how ... Well, staying in the village was a mesmerist. He was grumbling that the constabulary would not allow anyone to leave the village. I

"I needed to look no further than the sly-visaged nephew, who wanted the lands that would go as dowry with that dear girl.

He had crossed the room to light the fire as he spoke. Now he sat by it warming his hands, but his soul was cold. "They may well invite me to the wedding. And I may well go. But I hope they will let me rest. Dear lord, I am weary. When will it end?"

He leans forward, his head in his hands. He heaves a deep breath, almost a sigh. It turns into a cough, and he looks around for something. A drink? A pipe? The solace, so temporary, of that fine white powder? Then he senses me. I have, naturally, made no noise. He looks up at the embossed mirror to confirm my presence. He spins round, joy in his eyes. He greets me like a long-lost brother

"At last, you are here at last. My very dear fellow."

And he is by my side, and I open my arms and he comes into them gladly, oh so gladly. And I take him, and it is all over.

In the morning, when they found him, cold and still by the ashes of that last fire,

sitting in his favourite chair, they remarked upon
the peace in his face. All Mrs Hudson could remember of me was that I had nice
shiny boots.
"Pitch black, and you could see your face in them. I like that in a man."
It was all over. The man created by a culture was at last released to the peace of
the obscurity he had sought for so long.
Even the weariest river winds somewhere safe to sea.

Editor's Choice

INFORMATION CLASSIFIED

Wessel Ebersohn

14th January 1991

During his second term of office President Dwight Eisenhower, in order to satisfy
public opinion, ordered the forming of a commission to investigate the
phenomenon of unidentified flying objects. The public lost interest eventually and
the commission's report was never published, but the commission remained in
existence and, in time, became part of the establishment of the Pentagon. fts
reports were delivered .to all
the Presidents that followed Eisenhower and it was as a result of these reports
that a giant steerable radio telescope was installed on a high hill overlooking the
Indian ocean.....

The hill was on the island of Madagascar . ..

Robert Frayne, the President of the United States, closed the door of the suite and leaned against it, sharply diminishing the level of noise within the room and cutting out the glare from the light the CBS camera team were using.

Beyond the door, in the lounge, now temporarily converted into a campaign centre, the inner circle of the President's staff with their husbands, wives and other family members were celebrating the latest election returns, a number of persistent newsmen were recording or making notes on almost everything, while near the lift a wild-looking ginger-haired woman, who had somehow slipped through the ground floor security cordon, was trying to get past a guard and finding herself firmly held.

Through the closed door Frayne heard her voice and winced.

"I want to hear what he has to say about the Poles in our district. What's he got to say about all those Poles?"

'What about the Poles?' He wondered momentarily. At least it was not about the Russians? Or, what about the blacks? At least it was a change.

In the inner office two telephones were ringing simultaneously and simultaneously being answered by two attractive young secretaries. Two more secretaries were already busy on two other telephones, their voices crisp and businesslike while trying to sound polite. Frayne heard the voice of the one nearest him. "Hold on a minute, officer. I'll ask Mr. Stewart.

Mr. Stewart, The officer downstairs wants to know if he can remove the protestors blocking the entrance to the lobby."

"Hold him a moment, Janet" Max Stewart said, coming across the room towards him, his tie and collar button loosened and his shirt sleeves rolled up above the elbows. Stewart had to make his way through an inner office that was almost as crowded as the other had been. The well-wishers, the placed highly- party members and their wives, journalism's favoured elite, the few inevitable security officers, seeming unnecessary in this closed circle - all stepped aside to let Stewart pass. He was the President's right-hand, his advance man in the rough house of political campaigning a man accustomed to people stepping aside to make way for him. Campaign headquarters was Max Stewart's territory. He stopped before Frayne, thick-set, in his early forties, possessing a broad

forehead and a receding hairline that made it seem still broader. He looked like the hybrid, resulting from cross-breeding university professors with professional boxers. "Did you hear the question, Mr. President? Wilson wants to know if he must clean out the protestors." He spoke softly so that only Frayne would hear him.

The President was leaner, narrower in face and body, the forehead higher, far nearer the professor than the boxer. He moved towards the window with Stewart following. "What are they protesting about?"

"Freedom from capitalist exploitation, I think. That or some damn thing like it."

As they worked their way towards the window Frayne was continually being patted on the shoulders by smiling middle-aged men, all tired after the day's excitement. 'Well done, Bobby.'

"Congratulations, Mr. President." A newsman, tape recorder purring softly, tried to get close enough for yet another meaningless off-the-cuff comment, but was intercepted by an aide.

The President a tired man," Robert Frayne heard the aide saying.

Leaning against the window twenty floors above the moving jostling crowd around the hotel entrance, Frayne said, "There seem to be only a few of them. Have him leave them alone.

The bad publicity caused by removing protestors of that sort is never worth it. Send a message down to them that sometimes I feel exploited by the capitalists myself. No don't. It'll sound frivolous. "

"Wilson feels that they might cause damage to hotel property down there, Stewart said.

"Tell him that if anything is damaged we'll pay for it.'

Stewart turned to go. "Max, wait a moment."

"Yes "

"What are people saying about Madagascar?

"Nothing much. There's curiosity of course, but Madagascar's a long way away and the public doesn't yet know the extent of the disaster. The big news is still your re-election.,'

"Have you got a room cleared with a direct phone line?'

"Over there," Stewart pointed. "I'll get the calls set up."

"I want you to do it yourself. Get the message to Wilson and then meet me in the room."

Stewart jostled his way back towards the girl at the telephone while Frayne made his way to the door Stewart had indicated, smiling at everyone he passed, repeating, "Thank you. I couldn't have done it without you," over and over again. He stopped once to put an arm around his wife's shoulders. "Hold things for me, Honey. I'll be in there."

"Is it about ..."

He nodded shortly and left her. The door of the room was being guarded by a security man who opened it for him and closed it again after he had entered. As it closed he saw his wife, smiling broadly, vivaciously holding the centre of the stage, despite her weariness. His had not been an ideal marriage, but his wife was the ideal wife for a president. Leaving her in charge and

returning later to the scene of the action, whether it was dinner for a visiting diplomat at the White House or a fund-raising banquet for business leaders, everything was always still running as smoothly as if he had never been away. She was a real campaigner and still looked relaxed and attractive after thirty years in politics with him.

'God knows,' he thought, 'she was still relaxed and attractive after sixteen hard hours awake on this day of all days.'

The room was normally a bedroom, but had been converted into a private lounge. There were three telephones on a desk near the window, but he sat down on a couch on the opposite side of the room to wait for Stewart. From an inside pocket of his jacket he took out the envelope containing Charles White's letter. He had read it once on the previous afternoon, but he wanted to read it again to make sure that he understood it.

He knew that of all the decisions he had made in his career, those that he would have to make now would be far the most important. They were

decisions that could not be taken in public with all the attendant fanfare from the faithful and scorn from the other side. Much in Charles White's letter needed understanding and Frayne knew that he would have to understand all of it.

Before he could start reading Max Stewart came in. He went straight to the desk. "It's been cleared with the British government. They've no objection to your speaking direct to Jodrell Bank. The head astronomer is there now, waiting for your call."

"Get him on the line - Palomar as well. I'm going to read this again."

"What about Green Bank?"

"I spoke to them this afternoon. They picked up nothing in the closing stages. It seems their angle was wrong."

Max Stewart hesitated with the telephone in his hand. "Bobby, I've been thinking about this. What about a secret session of Congress to decide what to do?"

"There's no such thing as a secret session of Congress," the President said. "If Congress knew tonight the country would know tomorrow. We'd have a panic on our hands that we'd never be able to contain. The Pentagon knows, NASA knows, and apart from us they're the only people that need to know."

"Jesus, I still can't believe it. And for it to happen right on election day ..."

The President leaned forward as if to examine Stewart more closely. The brash self-assertive politician had disappeared as soon as they were alone together. Max Stewart was no longer on familiar territory. The knowledge and the problem that confronted them were a long way from party politics and everything he understood. "Hell, Max, the election makes no difference at all," Frayne said.

"No, but ..."

"Old pal, you get those scientists on the line."

"There's always a chance that they were wrong. It could have been some

kind of natural disaster."

It was a last grasping at a straw that Frayne knew did not even exist. He shook his head impatiently. "There's this." He waved the letter at Stewart. "He wrote it a week ago and yesterday he was at the centre of the explosion. We cannot afford to hope that he may have been wrong."

"I'll get the egg-heads on the line."

While Stewart started putting through the calls Robert Frayne read the letter for the second time. He read slowly, not wanting to miss any detail or even any emphasis. As far as he could he wanted to understand it as White had understood. The address on the letter was :

UNO Radio Astronomical Observatory Tananarive MALAGASY.

It was dated 11th November 1990. The letter read:

"Dear Bobby,

You have probably been inundated with scientific facts about the projectile since we first became aware of it, but although you are an intelligent man you are not an astronomer and I owe it to you and the country, perhaps to the planet, to set it all down in plain language before next Thursday. This is especially so as we know that it is going to strike the East coast of Africa somewhere in the region of Madagascar. I realise that what I have to say may sound foolish and melodramatic and that, in all probability, I shall witness the projectile, whatever it is, burn itself out harmlessly in our atmosphere, but I have always been afraid of it, even if I have never before admitted it. And now, with it so close at hand ...

But I should begin where our knowledge of the projectile started.

It was 1980, the year that I went to work at the Arecibo telescope in Puerto Rico. Until that time we had been pretty sure that all the radio signals, picked up by the big dish and recorded had had natural origins in stars, planets, comets and the like, much in the same way as lightning causes radio interference. The very erratic nature of all the signals had made that obvious.

It was in June, from the direction of the constellation Orion that we picked up a signal that was so intricate and at the same time so persistently repetitive that

at first we did not believe that it was coming from space at all. We thought we had picked up a satellite. But as time passed and we picked it up day after day in the same place, it became obvious that what we were hearing was not close to the earth. It sounded like a chain of Morse figures : dot - dot - dot - dot - dash - dot - dot - dash - then a two second pause and the chain was repeated, the whole taking about five seconds and being repeated again and again, day in, day out, year after year, permanently, it seemed.

It took us at Arecibo some time to get used to the idea, but eventually we had to admit to ourselves that the signal was being emitted neither by a natural heavenly body, nor by something that had its origins on Earth. Stars and planets do not send messages in Morse code and nothing coming from the Earth would be as far away as we were beginning to suspect the signal source was.

As you know the Arecibo dish is staked out on the ground in a natural hollow between three low hills, nineteen acres of steel mesh that cannot be moved at all. In those days an adjustable dish of something like that size had never entered our minds. Now, when your antenna is in a fixed position it is automatically pointed towards the position in space at which the Earth is aiming it. Its focal direction is sweeping across the sky continually, only exploring a small angle of space at any one moment. The result of this was that for months at a time we lost the projectile entirely, but always picked it up again, always on the same frequency, with the same signal power and the same tell-tale series of dots and dashes.

This situation lasted for five years until eventually we grew accustomed to it. We did not know what it was, but it's very consistency was reassuring. We all felt that anything that stayed in the same place, as the projectile seemed to be doing, would hardly be likely to cause us any problems. Then, on the 17th of January, 1985, while we were monitoring it, it disappeared as neatly and completely as if someone had switched off the transmitter - and that was the last we heard of it for another year. Of course, all of this was relayed to the White House at the time, but as you were not yet in the seat of power you heard nothing of it.

During the five years that we monitored it we had had plenty of time to get directional fixes on the source of the signal from almost every point on our orbit and from this we calculated that it was somewhere in the vicinity of four and a half light years away from us - just about the distance of the nearest star outside of our own sun, but in a spot in space that, so far as we know, so far as we have always thought, is completely empty. As you know, radio signals travel at the same speed as light waves, 186 000 miles per second, so whatever it was that was emitting the signals was a long, long way away and the signals we-were picking up had been transmitted more than four years previously.

It was at this stage in my private life that I made what turned out to be a dreadful mistake. You knew about Jane's illness and death, of course. What I did was unforgiveable both as a scientist and as a man. I told her about the projectile. She had always been a pessimistic woman, sometimes having fits of despondency that lasted for months, but on hearing about the projectile she was reduced to a state of despair from which she never truly recovered. No matter how often I assured her that the source of the signals, whatever it was, was completely stationary and therefore no danger to us, her condition declined gradually during those first five years. When the signals disappeared, as a scientist I was disappointed, hit as a human being I was delighted.

As soon as I was sure that the signal's disappearance had not been caused by a fault in our equipment I hurried home to tell Jane, expecting that the news would improve her state of mind. I remember that when I arrived home that day she was sitting on a little shaded stone seat in the garden to escape the heat. I told her my news and she listened to it without any noticeable reaction. By the evening she was curled up under our bed in a catatonic state that lasted until her death four years ago.

My home life was not easy during the period after I sent Jane back to the States for hospitalization. It is not easy explaining to a twelve-year-old girl that her mother is incurably mad and that she will never see her again. The effect on Michelle was to make her prematurely adult in some respects, but seemingly unable to mature at all in others. All things considered, the child has done well though. She has had only one parent these last few years and a

troubled one at that.. "

"Bobby ... Bobby ..." It took a little while for Max Stewart's voice to penetrate the world his imagination had constructed around Charles White's letter. Stewart was holding the handset of one of the telephones for him to take.

"Who is it? Jodrell Bank?"

"No, the Pentagon - Hudson."

Frayne left the letter on the couch and sat down at the desk opposite Stewart. As he took the telephone he saw that the other man was watching his face as if for a signal - a sign of reassurance. The expression reminded Frayne of a dog watching its master. "Robert Frayne," he said into the mouthpiece.

"Good evening, Mr President."

"Good evening, General."

"The central portion of the island where the observatory was situated has disappeared completely. Photographs our aircraft have taken show that Madagascar is now two islands, the Northern one about five hundred miles long and the Southern one only about one hundred miles in length. They are separated by some four hundred miles of sea."

"Good Christ:"

"That's the way we feel about it. You'll have the photographs by special courier within the hour."

"Tell me, General - Michelle White, Charles White's daughter, was down near the southern tip on an expedition to study the lemurs - is there any chance at all ..."

"I'm sorry, Mr President. There's no chance at all of survivors on Madagascar. It seems that something like half the populations of both Beira and Maputo, more than four hundred miles away on the African coast, are dead and the cities almost totally destroyed. We have reports of extensive damage to property, loss of life and total flooding of harbours from Durban, Zanzibar and Mombasa. The reports are only starting to come in, but we already have craft in the air above most of the stricken areas to photograph and assess the damage ..."

"Very good, General. Tell me, our aircraft that were trying to intercept it ... "

"They were at the epicentre of the explosion."

"I see. What about the radar station in Mozambique that was trying to track it?"

"I spoke to Moscow half an hour ago. It seems that the radar station was also too close. It was only three hundred miles from the epicentre."

"But did Moscow not have communication with them during the closing stages?"

"They did. But the speed of the projectile - you must bear that in mind. Conventional aircraft and radar ... "

"Yes, yes, of course. One last thing for the moment, General Hudson - how many people in the Pentagon know the cause of the explosion?"

"Twenty - not more than thirty at the outside ... "

He was reading the letter again. He had been vaguely aware that Max Stewart had twice gone to the door to help the security man keep party leaders from coming in to offer their congratulations and was now standing at the window, probably looking down at the protestors, perhaps wondering how long they would still be concerned with capitalism. Capitalism? Communism? Both concepts and so many others had shrunk away to nothing during the last twenty-four hours. So much had become meaningless.

Finding his place in the letter, he read: "It was March, '86, a little more than a year later that we picked it up again. We had regularly examined the sky in the direction of Orion during that year for a reappearance of the projectile and, naturally, we had always searched at the same frequency. The optical boys had looked as well, but they had seen nothing that had not always been there. On this occasion a student, working on a thesis, was tuning the receiver manually and had the level turned up high, but he was mistakenly on a frequency twice that of the original signal.

Our little stream of dots and dashes came blasting through onto the chart

recorder at a higher power than they ever had before and the dots and dashes were now all just about half their original length.

To say that we were astounded is to do our emotions an injustice. What did it mean? The increased power of the signal? The higher frequency? The shortened dots and dashes. Even the two second pause was now condensed to just one second. We kept the receiver tuned to it for as long as we could that day and then all went home confused.

Sleep was an impossibility that night. No matter what we had assured each other during the years of our observations there was not a man at the observatory that had not been deeply troubled by the projectile and not one that had not been secretly relieved when the signals had disappeared. Now the game was on again and only one feature of the new signal had been obvious to all of us immediately. A more powerful signal meant either a more powerful transmitter or that the projectile was nearer to us than before. But the other changes to the signal? What of them? The reason for them should have been obvious to us. That it was not, only demonstrates how far it was beyond the normal range of our thinking.

I stood outside that evening, looking in the direction of Orion, and at once I knew. What I guessed then has since been proven true. For you to understand it I must explain a phenomenon known as the Doppler effect. This effect is particularly noticeable if an object that is transmitting some sort of waves - sound waves, radio waves, light waves - is either coming straight at you or moving directly away from you. Its motion bunches up the waves before it, shortening the wavelength, making the engine of a car coming straight at you seem higher in pitch than it really is or making one, leaving you, sound lower than it is. If you are standing still and a car drives past you at high speed the pitch of the exhaust note changes noticeably. This is the Doppler effect. In this case, it was making the radio frequencies appear higher than they really were. It also accounted for the shortening of the time periods in the signal. The movement of the projectile had caused its apparent frequency to double. It had to be moving straight at us and a calculation on the edge of a newspaper on my kitchen table showed me that that meant the projectile was travelling at

something like half the speed of light, 93 000 miles per second. I could hardly believe my own mathematics, but every day thereafter - and we watched it now as never before - proved my rough calculations to be near enough to exact.

Our calculations in '86 showed the projectile to be four light years away and travelling straight at us at half the speed of light, but these calculations were based on radio signals that travelled at the same speed as light. While it took the radio signals four years to cross that great empty hollow that separates us from our nearest neighbours the projectile itself would have crossed half that distance, making it only two light years away. We calculated its arrival in our solar system as being late in 1990.

By early '87 the then President had granted permission for the construction of a five hundred foot moveable dish antenna on Madagascar. The new dish would give us our best observation post yet and it would be in the southern and eastern hemispheres with Puerto Rico in the western and Jodrell Bank in the northern hemispheres. Nothing like this had ever been built before (the dish at Jodrell Bank is only two hundred and fifty feet across and that is pretty colossal) but all the money we wanted was granted immediately and quietly siphoned out of defence and NASA funds so that the public would not be aware of just how much we were spending. We could not afford to have people asking what the urgency was. Being in a Communist country, the observatory belonged to the U.N. officially. By this time Russia was involved as well and you will remember all the ballyhoo at the time about joint scientific efforts, detente, new avenues of peace and so forth. The real reason for their co-operation was that they were just as scared as we were.

In October '88 I picked up the projectile from Madagascar for the first time. It was where we expected to find it. Its signal strength was greater than ever and its velocity had remained constant. We now had to back off the amplifiers almost every week as the signal from the projectile came in stronger and stronger. Our observations and calculations on Madagascar confirmed everything we already knew and it brought to light something new and as unexpected as the projectile itself. Examining the sky at the original frequency, I picked up a new signal, this time a different code - dot-dash-dot-dash-dash-

dash-dash-dot-dot. It was four and a half light years away. I immediately tuned to the frequency of the original projectile and it was still there, still coming straight at us, its signal growing stronger by the hour. This time it did not take me an evening to sort it out. We had a second projectile. Well, Bobby, by the middle of '89 we could see that the second projectile was moving and following in the path of the first one. In our receiving equipment it was a faint echo of the original. It should be here by '92. By next week we'll know if there is any reason to fear it.

Forgive me for this, but as you laymen never seem quite able to grasp the nature of the distances in space, I must explain how suddenly the closing stages will be upon us. It has been travelling across the great empty vacuum of space without planets, without asteroids, without even dust for nearly ten years now. Its actual movement started in '80. It will enter our solar system, crossing Pluto's orbit at three a.m. - your time - on Thursday. And at that moment it will only be twelve hours away. At two minutes past three in the afternoon it will flash past the moon. Two point three eight seconds later it will make contact with the surface of the Earth.

Our solar system is a very small archipelago in a very large
a of space. The waiting has been long, but the ending will be sudden.

One last thought I must pass on to you, Bobby. I know I have been laughed at for these fears, but should the projectile destroy Madagascar - and it is going to strike the east coast of Africa somewhere - if, in fact, it destroys the radio telescope, remember that the telescope did not exist before it started moving. It must then, of necessity, have been directed since starting to move. "

"Palomar."

"Good evening."

"Good evening, Mr. President."

"What did you see?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all."

"How were conditions?"

"Conditions were perfect."

"And you saw nothing?"

"Nothing. If anything had passed through our field of vision that could have been picked up by a telescope, we would have seen it.

"What do you mean?"

"Mr. President, we don't even know that it consisted of matter as we understand the matter ..."

"Michelle is seventeen now. Yesterday she left for the southern tip of the island with a French expedition, studying lemurs. There are only a few remaining colonies of this particular species and the child has always been interested in animals, so it was altogether natural that she should want to go. I had never spoken to her about the projectile, the effect of my talking to her mother still being too strong in my memory, but I could not bear to see her go under those conditions. Well, I told her. It took me a long time to explain it all to her and she listened very carefully to everything I said. Then she kissed me and it seemed to me that she was the adult and I the child. She was trying to comfort me.

"You know, Papa, there's no need to worry," she said. "It's bound to burn itself out in the atmosphere, whatever it is. And, anyway, I'll be as safe where I'm going as with you here. Please don't be afraid for me." She went on to tell me that what she was going to study was relevant to the origins of human life itself and that she felt so good at being able to go that she did not believe that anything bad could possibly happen. By Thursday she will be four hundred miles away. At least she will not be too close to the telescope. I may be a worrying old fool, but the projectile's likely point of contact and the existence of this observatory are too coincidental for my peace of mind. Perhaps it is just the effect it all had on Jane, her illness and death. But I am not the only one here who is afraid. We do not talk much anymore.

All of us watch the instruments, plot the projectiles probable position and wait ..."

Max Stewart was beckoning to him again. It was Jodrell Bank at last.

"Good evening. Robert Frayne here."

"Good morning, sir. William Crichton-Smith here."

"Hello, Professor."

"I have really nothing new to tell you." The British astronomer's voice was neat and precise, as unruffled as if they were involved in a friendly cricket match, rather than this deadly unequal struggle. Crichton-Smith had always impressed Frayne as being the astronomer who would be of most value when they reached crisis point. Now they were there, although you would never have believed it, listening to the astronomer's cool thoughtful voice. "It came as expected, struck where expected and at the time we expected. The extent of the damage was not expected."

"Mount Palomar saw nothing."

"I believe I told you that we could expect nothing of them, sir. The projectile, as you Americans call it, was too small and travelling too fast."

The connection between them fell silent except for the mush of the telephone channel. What else could be said? "Then

That's it?" Frayne said at length.

"So far as it goes that is, indeed, it. We still have the second one ..."

"Yes."

"It's a little early to say, but at this stage my calculations show that it could make contact with the Earth in the region of the West Indies."

"Arecibo!"

"I must stress that I am not yet certain ..."

"Professor, what are we going to do?"

"I'm not sure what you should do, but as for myself, if the second projectile does strike Arecibo, I think I shall look for alternative employment."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"If Arecibo is second, Jodrell Bank may well be third, sir."

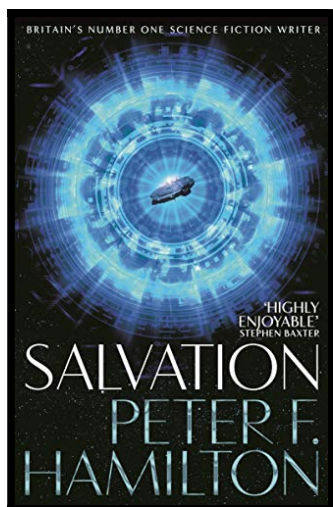
After he had hung up, the President and Max Stewart sat looking at each other. Frayne was again conscious of the other man's expression, as if he was

searching his face for some sign that eventually everything would be all right. He was again reminded of an intelligent dog, studying the face of its master, or a child, the face of his parent.

The President turned away from his friend and went over the window, conscious all the time of the other man watching him and conscious that while Max had him to turn to, he had no one. He opened the window wide, letting in the cold night air. Above him a heavy cloud sweeping slowly over the city, driven by a gusty wind, hid the constellation Orion from his view. Faintly, from far below, the rowdy insistence of the protestors was just audible.

Book Review Philip Machanick

Peter F Hamilton Salvation



Salvation is the first novel in a trilogy; the others are *Salvation Lost* and *The Saints of Salvation*. I review only the first here but give an overall judgement on the trilogy.

The *Salvation* story proceeds along multiple timelines, with clarity about the later ones gradually emerging as the earlier ones unfold. Some authors struggle to pull this off without the flipping between timelines being confusing; Hamilton gets away with this.

The book combines classic space opera with a whodunit in a modern style with issues like altered gender identities.

Who or what exactly are the mysterious aliens, the Olyix, who arrive at humanity home planet Earth a while after humans discover portal technology and the capacity to expand to the stars, offering apparently life-saving biotech in exchange for energy? What does their journey to the end of the universe really entail?

Why have humans, in an apparently distant future from this, developed new

physiologies and advanced martial skills and technologies?

What is the purpose of the expedition to a crashed alien spacecraft? What are the mysterious Neána up to?

Much of this is finally revealed with unexpected plot twists towards the end.

What's not to like? Hamilton's concept of portals is too simplistic to work. If you did have some magic physics that allows you to step through a portal and be somewhere else, what about pressure differentials? As soon as you opened one, you'd get massive airflow from the high to low pressure side. This feature is completely ignored ... until it's needed as a plot device.

Otherwise, the cast of characters is well developed as is the story line. If you like Isaac Asimov and Agatha Christie, you will be blown away by the opening salvo of the trilogy.

I forgive the relatively minor flaws as this is the first trilogy where I have really looked forward to reading all volumes, in a long time.

The other two volumes build up from where the first left off but cannot match it for structure and suspense. Even so, interest created through the first volume is easily sustained through nearly 1000 pages of the second and third volumes.

Only one spoiler. I strongly suspect that this is mislabelled as a trilogy as the last volume leaves a massive loose end – even though the second volume announces that the third will conclude it.

–

Philip Machanick <https://www.facebook.com/GrahamstownResidentsAssociation/>

Department of Computer Science, Rhodes University



Con Review

Torcon 3

Tony Davis

Living just outside Toronto, I figured that Torcon3 was the show for me. It ran for five days, from August 28 to September 1, 2003. Its main attraction from this scribe's point of view was linking up with those stalwart members of SFSA who had made the long trek to the Worldcon.

I think that it was back in 1899 when thousands of Canadians landed in Cape Town to join other British Empire forces in battling the Boer republics. And now, in 2003, SFSA had invaded Toronto. They travelled a long way, including Grant Kruger and Fiona Le Croix from Mississippi.

The notables were: Gail and Ian Jamieson (aka Ian and Gail Jamieson), Cedric Abrahams, Al Du Pisani, Franz Tomasek, Antonio Ruffini, Grant and Fiona, Janis Benvie, Cecilia Lombard and Barrett Brick. Truly a representative gang of SFSAers.

While this noteworthy group did not raze any farmsteads or engage in any pitched battles, they did leave an impression upon Toronto. T-O, as it is known, is home to a good number of ex-South Africans and many SA products are readily available in stores. Ian, with his mild Scottish accent, kept trying to convince Canadians that he was a South African, 35 years in the making. And, to his credit, Ian did his level best (with the willing assistance of Franz) to repatriate (orally) all the long tom Castle lagers he could find in Toronto bottle stores - a bold task - but he was up for the challenge!

Grant - that's Grant as in actor Hugh Grant, he'd tell Canadians - dashed madly about as a Worldcon volunteer, undertaking innumerable duties. He also ventured onto a panel, together with Antonio, to discuss the prospects of a united Africa in the future. Also on the panel were authors Bill Dietz, Steve Sterling and Mike Resnick. Alas, the consensus of opinion was a "thumbs down

" to the concept for a number of factors.

It is worth noting that this panel was held on the Sunday morning of Torcon3, at 10 am, the first scheduled hour. The night before was party night and many functions, with and without alcohol, were held in the huge, Victorian-style Fairmount Royal York Hotel (a good 5 minute walk from the Metro Toronto Convention Centre where most of the panels were held).

Unfortunately there were only about two dozen people in attendance at the 10 am talk - and that included the SFSA gang - prompting Bill Dietz to comment "uh, oh" at all the SA experts. Yet it was not an unruly group - one tends to be sedate after only a few hours sleep. SFSA members were highly visible with their black SFSA T-shirts with the colourful SA flag on the back.

SFSA held a party on the Saturday night, which ran from 9:00 pm to circa 3:30 am. Fiona was taking new memberships (some 20 newbies!) Assorted eats were made available to visitors to the party - koeksusters, nuts, cookies and jelly tots. Many such parties were sponsored by SF clubs, book publishers and sponsors for future WorldCons.

SFSA's party was advertised with a poster with an elephant-rampant (though it looked to me to be a Cthulhu-type being). Some Castles helped to liven up the atmosphere and Janis offered new members to the club a taste of SA booze and copies of Probe. Ian, Gail and I reminisced about SFSA club days in the late 1970s, the Total House meetings, the committee meetings at Felicity's (nice cake!), and social events at members' houses and the first few club cons at Wits. We also talked about the great writers from the early days of the short story competitions, and more notable authors such as Peter Wilhelm and Claude Nunes. I left the festivities after midnight - I did have a 40-minute drive north to travel.

As noted earlier, the Convention Centre held the panels, the hall for the Hugo presentations, an SF fan area, art show and dealers' area. The adjoining Crowne Plaza. Hotel was home to attendees, as was the Royal York. There was a bulky, pocket-sized guidebook to Torcon3 and daily releases with changes to the schedule. Never a boring moment!

I personally had the good fortune to renew acquaintances with SF fans I hadn't seen in some time, though in the vastness of the complexes there were some people I knew to be there but never caught sight of. Some attendees said that Torcon3 wasn't that large a Worldcon in terms of numbers (some 4,000 paid-up attendees, I believe), but I enjoyed it nevertheless. Lloyd Penney, of Probe letters fame, was there with his pleasant-as-ever wife Yvonne. It was very much a fan event with many people in the 30+age category, but not a Klingon in uniform in sight. There were certainly varied interests represented, from SF, fantasy and filking filkers (if that is the way it is phrased). Professional writers and artists mingled freely among the masses. I spotted Hal Clement, Fred Pohl and Robert Silverberg, among others. (There, I'm showing my age!)

A lot of work goes into organizing an event of this size, and the Canadian crew benefited from volunteers from the US of A. In any given daytime hour there were eight to twelve panel discussions being held, films being screened, author signings, book readings, etc. Lots to do. Grant K was steadily gaining expertise on the art of running a Worldcon. I advised that he should win a US lottery to assist in his dream of having a South African Worldcon - lots of \$\$\$\$ are required.

The Hugo awards ceremony, on the Saturday night, was quite a ceremony with more than a thousand in attendance and TV crews recording and displaying the stage events on large screens to the audience. Spider Robinson, as MC, opened the proceedings with his guitar and a witty song. The awards ceremony was interesting (for this first-timer anyway). Local Talent Rob Sawyer won the Hugo for best novel - home favourite?

I'm sure there will be write-ups about Torcon3 in sf magazine "Locus", as magazine editor Charles Brown was present. It will be interesting to see how the experts' view Worldcon 2003.

I am pleased that SFFSA left its mark on Torcon3 - a great time had by all.

Totsiens!

Helicopter Ingenuity flies on Mars



Ingenuity is a small robotic helicopter operating on Mars as part of NASA's Mars 2020 mission. On April 19, 2021, it successfully completed the first powered controlled flight by an aircraft on a planet besides Earth, taking off vertically, hovering and landing. With five successful flights as of May 7, 2021, the solar-charged battery-powered coaxial drone rotorcraft is serving as a technology demonstrator for the potential use of flying probes on future missions to Mars and other worlds, and will have the potential to scout locations of interest and support the future planning. *Ingenuity* travelled to Mars attached to the underside of the *Perseverance* rover, arriving at the Octavia E. Butler Landing site in Jezero crater on February 18, 2021. With a mass of only 1.8 kg, *Ingenuity* is the lightest artificial object on Mars. *Ingenuity* carries a piece of fabric from the wing of the 1903 *Wright Flyer*, the Wright Brothers' airplane, which was humanity's first controlled powered heavier-than-air flight on Earth.

The initial take-off and landing area for *Ingenuity* is named Wright Brothers Field as a tribute. Before *Ingenuity* achieved the first heavier-than-air powered flight on another planet, the first flight on a planet beyond Earth was an unpowered balloon flight on Venus, by the Soviet Vega 1 spacecraft in 1985.

With the success of its fourth flight on April 30, 2021, *Ingenuity* achieved its original objectives. NASA then planned future flights not as pure technical demonstrations but as operations demonstrations. With these new objectives, the *Ingenuity* team hopes to demonstrate how future missions can work together in further collaboration.

During its April 30, 2021 flight, *Ingenuity* also became the first interplanetary spacecraft whose sound was recorded by another interplanetary spacecraft, the *Perseverance* rover. On its May 7, 2021 flight, *Ingenuity* became the first interplanetary spacecraft which landed at a different place than the launch site.

