

The R3F
Review of Books
Incorporating Prose Bono
Professor George Phillips, D.Sc., Editor
February 2024

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FREE BOOKS

Promise to write a review of a book for Amazon, GoodReads, or wherever, hopefully with a copy coming here, and these authors will send you the ebook that you request for your reviewing efforts. List of authors and books — request one book at a time, please — is continued on the next page.

Cedar Sanderson <cedarlila@gmail.com>

The East Witch

The Case of the Perambulating Hatrack

Bill McCormick <billmescifi@gmail.com>

Far Future

The Brittle Riders

Splice: Hit Bit Technology

Jefferson Swycaffer <abontides@gmail.com>

The Concordat of Archive Books: "Starships and Empires."

Become the Hunted

Not In Our Stars

The Captive's Rank

The Universal Prey

The Praesidium of Archive

The Empire's Legacy

Voyage of the Planetslayer

Revolt and Rebirth

The Demon Constellation Books: Urban Fantasy with Demons

Warsprite

Web of Futures

The Iron Gates of Life

Deserts of Vast Eternity

The Last Age

The Shadowy Road

When Angels Fall

The Computer Ferrets

The Sea Dragon

The Thug Acrostic

What You See

Painterror

Adrift on a Foreign Sea

The Silver Crusade

Each Shining Hour

Gravelight

The Valley Left Behind

Mainstream: not sf or fantasy

The Chain Forge

Independent: SF and Fantasy not in any series

Eye of the Staricane

Capitulation of the Carnivores

George Phillies <phillies@4liberty.net>

Minutegirls

The One World

Mistress of the Waves

Eclipse – The Girl Who Saved the World

Airy Castles All Ablaze

Stand Against the Light

Practical Exercise

Of Breaking Waves

Simultaneous Times

<https://spacecowboybooks.com/free-content/>

Free ebook – featuring stories by: Cora Buhlert, Kim

Martin, Brent A. Harris, Renan Bernardo, RedBlue-

BlackSilver, Robin Rose Graves, Douglas A. Blanc,
Michael Butterworth & J. Jeff Jones – with illustrations by: Austin Hart, Dante Luiz, Chynna DeSimone, Douglas A. Blanc, & Zara Kand

Editorial

We congratulate contributor A.C. Cargill on turning her essays on writing, including many not seen here, into a book. Alas, that change means that her essays will no longer be seen here.

We have a service for Neffers who are authors. Trade free copies of your books for reviews. See previous page.

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Fiction

A Canticle for Leibowitz by Walter M. Miller Jr.

Review by J.-P. Garnier

<https://spacecowboybooks.com>

I had intended to read this book for a long time, and I wish that had not put it off for so long. Strikingly beautiful writing and a profound story about the cycle of human folly. I often gravitate to science fiction that deals with spiritual issues (there is not enough of it) and this book delivers in that regard. The book is written in three sections, each centuries apart. This structure has the interesting effect of not really having a main character, not a human one at least. The story focuses around an abbey and the building is essentially the main character. This device becomes even more interesting when you read Miller's bio. During the war he was involved in the destruction of one of the oldest western monasteries. In a chilling way one cannot help but think that this beautiful book was written as an atonement for the crimes of war. Some of the passages I had to read and reread because of the density and depth of the ideas being expressed. This is one of those stories that will have me contemplating its meaning for a long time. Do yourself a favor and read this one.

After Moses by Michael F. Kane

Review by Trevor Denning

<https://upstreamreviews.substack.com>

A Loner Spaceship Captain Adopts a Small Crew, and Together They Just Might Save Humanity

Who doesn't love a good space western? That's basically what Star Trek was (before NBC canceled it in its third season). And of course Firefly has a cult following of its own (despite getting axed by Fox almost as soon as it started). Despite those setbacks we're still revisiting those stories today, which proves there's a market. Maybe you're in the market.

After Moses is set in a future where a benevolent AI called Moses equipped humanity to colonize the solar system. For reasons explained in the book, many of the colonies adopted the style of the American west. One day Moses disappeared. Civilization nearly came apart and scientific advancement ground to a halt. Now people are just trying to survive. Matthew Cole's means of survival is freelancing, traveling between the planets and moons in his ship, the Sparrow, taking whatever odd job comes his way.

The Story

Like the aforementioned TV shows, After Moses is episodic. The stories start small, gradually building out the cast of characters and the world. Switching genres for a bit, After Moses is to Star Trek what Burn Notice is to The A-Team. You can start in the middle, but you shouldn't. Ever so slowly (and this isn't a criticism), a plot takes shape which builds to a major climax.

Thanks to the nature of Cole's work, there's no lack of variety in the predicaments in which he finds himself. One week he might be tracking down a family heirloom, the next he could be lassoing a mete-

or, catching fuel thieves, or transporting contraband cheese. Or maybe trouble finds him, and he has to deal with it pro bono.

As his crew grows, new point of view characters are introduced. This means that there's always something happening and makes for a narrative that's engaging and ever expanding.

The Characters

Though absent, the memory of Moses looms large over the story. "Moses represented something unique in the history of mankind. For the first time, a force outside of man's own acted upon the species as a whole. There was a guiding impetus, a mind that was other, directing the course of history. The question was whether or not it was infallible."

Matthew Cole is a freelancer who dresses like the Man with No Name and has a taste for cherry soda. There's something in his past that gave him his moral code and made him a loner, but we don't need to know why right away.

When Cole meets Abigail Sharon (aka: The Shield Maiden) she's the competition. In her mechanized suit she's an almost unstoppable giantess. She has wounds of her own but prefers losing herself in classic literature to opening up. When things get too hot for her on Mars, she reluctantly becomes the first member of the Sparrow's crew.

To say more would give too many spoilers. Suffice it to say, the focus remains on those who come aboard the Sparrow and eventually a shadowy villain from Cole's past.

The World

Moses opened up the entire solar system to humanity. Cities adorn all the planets and some of their moons, but without the aid of an all-knowing AI life is becoming a little more primitive. There's even a fanatical movement which believes everyone off-Earth should die and is eager to help the process. The various world powers no longer exist, nor does contact with Earth, though the Catholic Church remains a significant presence. Unfortunately, without an interplanetary government, various cartels use slave labor to fund their organizations.

What technology there is tends to be fairly grounded, though some items, called miracles, are practically magic. Vat grown meat is the norm. There are no non-humanoid species or other AI since the departure of Moses.

The Politics

There may be subtle, right-leaning metaphors, but nothing overt and they may simply be organic to building a rational world.

Content Warning

The only expletive is in Spanish and translates to, "My milk has gone sour!" Violence is frequent, just not graphic. There's some talk of human trafficking, but the reader is left to summarize what that may entail. Overall, this is about as PG as you can get.

Who is it for?

I'm probably going to take some heat for this, but I'll say it anyway: After Moses is better than Firefly, better than Star Trek, and if you question if that's even possible, this is for you.

Why read it?

How many gallons of digital ink have been spent mourning the premature death of Firefly, writing fanfic, and opining on its significance? After a certain point you've just got to get over it. Firefly is deader than a leaf on the wind. Fortunately, in the world of indie there's always something new to fill the void. Michael F. Kane tapped into what we loved about that IP and used his understanding to craft something imaginative, inspired, and impossible to cancel.

Class A Threat by Dan Sugralinov
Review by Jim McCoy
<http://JimboSFFreviews.blogspot.com>

Sometimes, a book just pushes all the right buttons in just the right order. If you're me then that book is Dan Sugralinov's Class A Threat. Seriously, this book was a real treat. I'll get to the whys and wherefores in a bit, but I don't go through books this quickly very often. I started reading Class A Threat right after finishing another book and I was "taking a quick break" before I started writing my review. I'm still going to review that book, it'll be up tomorrow, but WOW! Sugralinov rocked the dance floor with this one.

And nope, that's totally not a reference to any songs named Rock the Casbah and any mistaken lyrics on my part. Nope. Uh-uh!

DUDE!

You really should make at least an ATTEMPT at looking convinced. It's not good for my ego to get doubted and we all know my ego is, like, fragile and junk. So be nice and stop trying to harsh my mellow.

Or sumfin'

In a lot of ways, Class A Threat is very similar to another book I've read, only they turned that one into a movie. There's no Eighties nostalgia here, nor is there a group of Gunters out to solve the mystery, but the universe reminds me a lot of Ready Player One. There is a game where you can make real world money, pretty much everyone of at least fourteen years of age plays it or used to, and you can put real world money into it. Seriously, Disgardium is more popular than Candy Crush was in its heyday. This game is everywhere, and it's required for kids from the age of fourteen to sixteen. Players that age are confined to areas called "sandboxes" and that's where main character Alex Sheppard starts.

There is also a dystopian society. The government runs everything. People are divided by class according to their ability to do good things for society. Alex lives on the good side of town as both of his parents are computer programmers who contribute to the game that he plays, but that may not last. See, they're going to get divorced and when they do, their social status will drop. Of course, they may be able to gain it back, but they used to work so well together...

Yeah, that and a lot of other teenage problems appear on the pages of *Class A Threat*. There's school, dating, etc. The thing I like though, is that this isn't *Twilight*. Alex isn't some whiny little punk starving for attention. He's the kind of kid who gets through what he has to get through in his own way (read: he's a geek) but he doesn't whine much. He does freak out a bit about things that will have an obvious effect on his future, but it's for logical reasons and he's not a mope. I like this kid. He reminds me of me in some ways.

Well, except for the part where he doesn't end up with the geeky chick. I can't fathom that. Apparently, the other girl is better looking and Alex doesn't understand the concept of a plus five to hotness if she's a geek. Seriously, brain power rocks, and this kid is thinking with his, uhh..

Well, you get the idea. Oh, and he drinks a bit which was something I didn't really do in high school, and I'm actually serious there. Ask anyone who knew me. The one time I did take a sip of beer my buddy Robbie passed out. It was scary, but I also laughed at him. Also, Bud Dry sucks. But I digress.

Something else I was very heavily reminded of while reading *Class A Threat* was my time spent playing *World of Warcraft*, except for the part where Alex doesn't like it at first. He has to play, so it sucks. But once he gets into it, I'm reminded of my early days. He has no clue about the game, or the world it's played in but he's having a good time and finding a way to make his way in the game, and if he has a little adv...

Never mind, spoilers.

If you've played *WoW* though, or really any *Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game*, then you'll see a lot that you'll recognize here. "Gankers", rated Player Versus Player combat, dungeons/instances, raids, Non-Player Characters, different grades of loot drops denoted by colored text, I could go on for hours. Trust me when I tell you that it felt like old home week for a reformed *WoW*head. That even goes down to the mounts, although Alex can't afford one at first. Although I am one hundred percent certain, on every level except reality, that the name of the company that makes *Disgardium*, *SnowStorm*, was in no way inspired by *Blizzard*, the company that makes *WoW*. Yup. Totes coincidental. Totes.

Also like me, Alex manages to find himself a group of friends who actually know what they're doing and can help him in game. Out there somewhere is a woman named Edie, although she was known in game as *Persifinee*, who taught me how to gear up and how to raid. There's a guy named Dustin, aka *Myronath*, who taught me how to rep grind, level quickly and earn cool stuff in game. Later, he taught me a lot about how to run a guild. I mean, no one ever really taught me how to play a hunter with *Growl* turned off, but no system is perfect. So yeah, that part reads true to me, except that I've never gotten to meet Myro or Persi in person and Alex is in the same sandbox his schoolmates are in and they all know each other in real life and actually get to hang out together.

Something that *LitRPG* writers have to do well is create two worlds that work well together. *Sugralinov* has done a damn fine job of doing just that. It's very easy to track when Alex is in the real world and when he's in the game, but there's no discontinuity as he switches back and forth. As a matter of fact, *Sugralinov* does a better job of tracking the real-world effects of too much gaming than pretty much any other *LitRPG* author I've read. This makes *Class A Threat* believable on a level that a lot of other *LitRPG* books just aren't. I've already started *Book Two*, but I'm not going to give the title because it's kind of spoliery for *Book One*. I'm enjoying it though.

It also kinds of bums me out that Class A Threat is too old to nominate for a Dragon Award, because I think it deserves one. Then again, since it's that old there's a ton of sequels to read so I guess I'll get over myself.

Bottom Line: 5.0 out of 5 Boxes of Donuts

The Evolution Man by Roy Lewis Review by J.-P. Garnier <https://spacecowboybooks.com>

A silly little fun read. Anyone who has taken anthropology class will enjoy the satirical humor of this story. The book is about the evolution of thought in early humans but takes a sardonic approach where the characters are aware of their evolution and trying to force it to progress. The tale is written in modern language with the characters aware of what period of history they are part of, what countries they inhabit, and what creatures have gone extinct or will do so soon. This approach makes the book somewhat odd because it straddles prehistory and modernity. While I blew through this book and had fun reading it, I cannot say that it was by any means spectacular. If you feel like reading something light and humorous this one will be a good one for you. Not my favorite book but I do always appreciate science fiction that has a sense of humor.

Honor At Stake by Declan Finn Review by Caroline Furlong <https://upstreamreviews.substack.com>

Lily Sparks has her man, Marco Catalano. Sure, she is small enough he could squash her and hardly notice as they walk down the street, but he is a hunk. And all the world knows that he is hers.

But now it is time to pull over in the nearest alley and have a discreet taste of her boyfriend. After all, what is the point of an evening walk if you cannot have a bite or two before he takes you home?

However, the two are interrupted by a druggie high and looking to kill. Marco disengages to handle him – easily and rather brutally. Lily loses it when she sees him bite their attacker, running screaming into the night after Marco turns to her with blood all over his mouth and chin.

Not hard to guess who the vampire is, right? Hold your horses, we haven't even introduced Amanda Colt yet!

The Story

Amanda Colt slips into the college classroom and Murphy's Law flips a coin to put her next to Marco Catalano. Amanda noticed him the minute she entered the doorway. There was a sense of danger in the air, and, after a few moments of searching, she realized that impression came directly from Marco.

Yet there seems to be no reason for this. Marco's not bad looking, he doesn't leer, and he seems interesting. If it were not for the extreme control that he demonstrates she might have no reason other than a hunch to consider him a threat. But when she looks him up online later that night, she cannot find Marco Catalano anywhere.

The next day the two have an intense fencing match that puts the other students to shame. Nearly being beheaded or skewered by Marco a couple of times during the match does nothing to satiate Amanda's curiosity. Marco eventually asks her if she would like to go to the Museum of Natural History with him, before taking her to visit some of his friends, men who turn out to be gangleaders who fear Marco and consider him their "Medieval lord." And every time the two talks, their conversations return to vampires. What are their actual powers? Where does free will factor in? Are crosses a blanket defense? Are all vampires automatically evil? Or are they capable of being good as well as bad?

It all seems to be going well until, on a walk around Greenpoint, the two are attacked by four muggers. Amanda takes a knife early in the confrontation, prompting Marco to beat two of the men into mush. He turns to face the other two in time to see one on the ground and the other with Amanda clinging to his throat, blood trickling down his neck.

Who is the vampire and who is the predator?

The Characters

Marco Catalano has a wry wit that cuts quicker and deeper than his rapier. It would also act as an as-tringent in the proper circumstances. Although he describes himself as the equivalent of a Medieval lord and is downright vicious in a fight, his predatory nature is always turned outward, to those who would do him and the ones he cares for harm. Thus, his protective nature softens his brutal fighting tendencies and makes him more likeable than he might be otherwise.

Amanda Colt is equally protective of those she cares for, and her aversion to putting innocents at risk at the same time she is determined to protect them make her enjoyable company as she helps Marco when the flak inevitably starts flying. Add to that her practical nature and dry wit, and this is a vampire heroine who is not only fun to follow, she is creative in the application of her powers and skills as well.

The rest of the cast is as much fun as the two leads. From the Vatican ninjas to their priestly boss, from the gang leaders who are actually a neighborhood watch, to the vampires who try to make the lives of Brooklyn's residents hell, each and every character has their moment to shine. Not one of them is forgettable or out of place, which enables them all to stand out in a reader's memory.

The World

The worldbuilding for this novel is excellent. Not only are the traditional vampire banes and benefits well-considered, their application and creative use is wonderfully refreshing. Decapitate a vampire with a rosary? Sure, just know how to make a garrote and be ready to use it. Holy water in squirt guns – burns just as well as when splashed, if not better. Electricity can be useful, too, since in the right circumstances it can set someone on fire.

Rare is a novel that applies faith, folklore, and creativity to the question of dealing with the supernatural. Faith is pretty much thrown out with the bathwater, which is a crime considering how many folklore remedies rely on some kind of faith to help hold off vampires. Free will also usually takes a back seat – just ask the fated mates.

Honor at Stake looks at the tropes, looks at reality, and gets creative with its "What ifs" while still being respectful of the tropes. It's a perfect blend of "Hmm. Bet I could take out a vamp like that" while treating vampires and the Urban Fantasy milieu with consideration.

That's not even mentioning the biological factor. When was the last time an Urban Fantasy universe countenanced the idea that vampirism is transmitted via an actual virus that can be studied?

Politics

The politics are relatively subtle, with most of them revolving around the modern perception of the Enlightenment and especially the French Revolution. Beyond that, there is little in the way of politics to speak of in this novel.

Content Warning

There are lots of beheadings, burnings, and beatings. Marco's wrathful beatdowns might bother some readers even though they are not graphic. Amanda and Marco also have a fake make-out session for the sake of the mission, which might be too steamy for some, but that part is easily skimmed.

Other than that, there is nothing at all objectionable in Honor at Stake. It is probably one of the most PG-13 friendly Urban Fantasies on the market.

Who is it for?

Urban Fantasy lovers who want some meat on the bone. Finn brings his trademark worldbuilding skill to this novel, making it a dense, action-packed read. Those who like a bit of steam with their romances will find plenty to satisfy, while those who would prefer the steam not be dialed up too high will be happy to know it leaves plenty to the imagination. Anyone looking for non-stop action that still lets the characters breathe will enjoy this.

As for angst – what angst? Everyone is too practical to go around moping and crying into their beer. When the forces of the night are on one's trail, the number of opportunities for pity parties are Slim, Son of None.

Honor at Stake will appeal to those who want drama with a side of practicality rather than soap opera for this reason.

Why buy it?

It's a fun book – a REALLY fun book. Perhaps one of the most fun Urban Fantasies in existence.

If that is not enough reason to buy it, what is?

The Lost Heir by E. G. Foley

Review by Jim McCoy

<http://JimbosSFReviews.blogspot.com>

Okay, so I don't usually mention stuff like this because it's really irrelevant to my (and presumably your) enjoyment of the story, but E.G Foley is actually two people, Eric and Gael Foley. They're a married couple. That's kinda cool. But, with your kind permission, I will now proceed to regale you with my usual nonsense. It makes for fine rea...

Listen. I tried. That makes some kind of difference, right?

So anyway...

E.G. Foley's *The Lost Heir* has a title that is a spoiler in and of itself, so I guess it's okay if I mention that our hero, one Jake (don't call him Jacob) Reed is more than just your average orphan. I mean, there may be someone searching for him or something, possibly related to his heritage. Or sumfin'. Listen, Jake is honestly a scamp. He's got some magical power (and his first scene in the book was epic) and he is making his way in the world any way that he can. It's not quite the way the local magistrate would prefer, and that's unfortunate, but Jake is not the type of person to overly concern himself with the opinion of an authority figure. I mean that lovingly. This kid is a little rough around the edges the way I kinda like to read a bit, but that's part of his charm.

Jake also attracts trouble like sugar attracts ants. This kid cannot - under any circumstances - avoid doing the wrong thing at precisely the wrong time. His sense of timing is eerily terrible. That's a trait that keeps things interesting though, and I don't seem to remember being bored at any point during the story, and that's a really rare thing for the first book in a series. The Foleys have a gift for being able to build their world simultaneously with moving the story along. I was expecting some boring exposition, and I didn't get any, so kudos to them.

What I did get was a feeling of time and place that really worked. Being the guy with the history degree, I'm pretty sure that my college professors would have contracted the vapors immediately upon hearing about a story involving magic and water nymphs in Victorian England. That type of thing is just not historically accurate, no matter how much fun it was. I mean, it seriously was. I guess you wouldn't get this if you've never read a thirty plus page paper about the historical inaccuracies contained in the movie *The Last Samurai*, but trust me, it's a thing.

I've started a new job recently here in the real world, and I was looking for a light read, something I could read straight through without putting too much thought into it and just freaking enjoy. I like my new job, but it's been a bit stressful trying to learn all the stuff about the things so that I can get the people to buy them. (Yes, Virginia, there is a Telemarketer Claus, and he reviews books) *The Lost Heir* was the perfect fit. This is not a heavy, plodding Robert Jordan novel (and for the record, that's a good thing. Jordan never used a word when a chapter would do, and I couldn't even get through the first *Wheel of Time* novel.) nor is it something with the dark, twisted sense of foreboding I got while reading *Dragonlance Legends*. *The Last Heir* is entertaining, and the stakes are high, but it's kind of like the literary equivalent of a good popcorn flick. Speaking of which, I'd pay to see this, and Jake isn't much older than that Potter kid at the start of his story, And Jake's an orphan, too. Hmmmm...

The rest of the cast of characters is also a lot of fun. Jake's best friend is a girl named Dani, and oh wow, do I feel sorry for her. She tries to help Jake out and keep him out of trouble, but I already covered how well that goes. She is loyal to the bone though, and she could hang out with me anytime. She's always there, but she's not afraid to call a bonehead a bonehead. And, while I'm not sure she ever actually uses the word, she lets Jake know what he needs to know.

Uncle Waldrick, on the other hand, is the piece's antagonist and he desperately deserves a thumb to the eye. I don't like this guy at all. He has no magic of his own, but he has friends and they're just as bad as he is. He has kind of a bit of Cobra Commander to him though. He has grandiose plans, but they never seem to work out. His reach exceeds his grasp, but he never gives up. Jake is the one person in the world who can screw everything up for him. It gets ugly. I hate this guy, but I love to hate him. He's the hero in his own mind though and has only managed to come into something his brother didn't deserve.

My one complaint about *The Lost Heir*, and I'd never have noticed this if I hadn't just re-read the Amazon page for the book, is that it claims to be steampunk and I don't really get that feeling from it. There

is some mention of trains, and a quick reference to attempts at flying, but it just doesn't have that weird, old time steam tech thing, at least from my point of view. Now, that may change in later books, and *The Lost Heir* is the first in a series, but for me it's not Steampunk enough to be Steampunk. I guess it's the right time period. Maybe I'm just being that guy. Other than that though, this is a first class story and I'm kind of ticked off at myself for reading that Amazon page of a book I had already loved. But whatever. I'm giving this story a perfect score anyway, because it deserves one.

Bottom Line: 5.0 out of 5 Talking Spiders

My Brother's Keeper by Tim Powers

Review by Trevor Denning

<https://upstreamreviews.substack.com>

Historically Accurate (If Mostly Unverified) Horror

“I shot a werewolf’s skull.”

“That’s always a good thing to do, I imagine.”

Spanning 1845 to 1848, *My Brother’s Keeper* is the historically accurate (if mostly unverified) story of the Brontë family and their battle with a werewolf god and his acolytes. If you’re not an English major and never finished *Wuthering Heights*, fear not. Tim Powers has a gift for telling readers everything they need to know about historical figures, while filling in the gaps of their biographies with the supernatural.

What we know: Patrick Brontë was born in Ireland and changed the family name when he arrived in England. It’s a curious historical fact that he fired a pistol over the church cemetery every morning. Stranger still, two of his children, Emily and Branwell, were bitten at different times by rabid dogs, though seemingly coming to no lasting harm. Sadly, Patrick survived his wife and all of their children, living another six years after his last daughter passed away. But what if those rabid dogs were one and the same, and a mythical monster? And what if Patrick’s family paid the cost for the sins of their father?

Well, if you’re Tim Powers, you have fertile ground for a novel.

The Story

The novel opens with a short prolog in 1830 with four of the Brontë children, Branwell, Charlotte, Emily, and Anne, performing a blood ritual in a local “fairy cave.” While they can’t fully grasp the enormity of their action, or dream of the consequences, something most certainly happens. Just not what Branwell promised. Flashforward 15 years and Branwell is a drunkard, squandering his life in the care of his sisters.

One morning, while out for a walk on the windy moors with her faithful bullmastiff, Keeper, Emily finds an injured man. Though he seemed near death and refused assistance, when she returns with help the man has mysteriously disappeared. This is just the first in a series of increasingly bizarre events as she learns of her family’s history with a malevolent spirit named Welsh, her Anglican minister father’s youthful pact with the goddess Minerva, and of a secret order of Catholic werewolf hunters.

There's plot aplenty and worldbuilding to spare, what with a werewolf god and its cult, trips through the Otherworld, and ghosts. Yet Powers skillfully balances the fantastic elements with the human story at its heart. Every family suffers, and the Brontë family perhaps more than most. Ultimately, *My Brother's Keeper* is about loss and salvation, redemption and healing.

The Characters

The sisters Brontë, obviously, though the primary focus is on Emily. We also spend a fair amount of time with the ne'er-do-well, eponymous brother, Branwell, and their father, Patrick, an Anglican minister wracked with guilt and shame. Also of note is Emily's dog Keeper, named after the heroic dog of her ancestors.

Alcuin Curzon "the one-eyed Catholic" is a Byronic hero: dark, brooding, distant, dangerous, and secretive. He and Emily are both attracted and repulsed by one another, and, while we know from history romance isn't in the cards for her, we can't help but wish they'd lower their guards long enough to have a moment.

A mysterious order with an evil agenda is represented by Mrs. Flensing, who first meets Branwell in a London pub and "baptizes" him with a double-bladed knife. She works in the service of Welsh, an ancient evil spirit whose presence is intertwined with the Brontës.

The World

Set on the moors surrounding the Yorkshire village of Howarth, the world is familiar to any reader of 19th century literature. Emily and her family live in a house walking distance from town, adjacent to the church and cemetery, and rarely leave except to walk the countryside, though Branwell frequents the local pub.

However, in Powers' imagination, there are uncanny things out on the moors that require unorthodox attention.

"You... a curate's daughter, will solicit help from a pagan goddess, through the offices of a werewolf."

The Politics

Only the interdenominational church politics of the day.

Content Warning

If severed fingers and rotting heads make you squirm, you might have a rough time. Obviously, there are elements of horror, but it's far enough removed from today's reality that it would only keep the most sensitive up at night.

Who is it for?

Let me make this explicitly clear: this is neither *Wuthering Heights* and *Werewolves* nor for that crowd. It's not a parody or pastiche, but historical fiction with paranormal elements that keep it firmly entrenched in the murky ground of horror. So if you've ever found yourself up late reading Algernon Blackwood or M.R. James, this is for you.

Why read it?

“You’re still God’s possession... even if He’s left you out in the weather a bit.”

It’s got ghosts, werewolves, and ghosts of werewolves! But it’s all handled thoughtfully with elegance. In a weird way, Hemingway’s iceberg theory applies, in that Powers’ meticulous (one might say slavish) attention to detail and historicity adds weight to what initially sounds like a light and silly premise.

Oni the Lonely by C. Chancy
Review by Caroline Furlong
<https://upstreamreviews.substack.com>

East meets west as the crow flies....

Kyosai Momiji came to Rivertown, USA, to get away from a break-up that wasn’t and to avoid his overbearing parents. The life of an oni is hard enough when you need to dodge court intrigue; add in family drama, and he just wants to get away. Preferably to a place where he can paint what he wants, not what his parents would prefer he painted.

Rain McKee, Rivertown’s resident cove doctor, is grieving her deceased grandparents while fending off greedy relatives. Far too many people want her to get up and move on in one way or another, and this social pressure is stressing her out further. She needs a break but with her uncle breathing down her neck, that’s not going to happen.

Meanwhile, above Rivertown, the crows settle in to watch and lick their beaks. Oh, such tasty anguish – if only they didn’t have to wait for the promised feast....

The Story

Rivertown is near enough to the city of Irongate that Kyosai can get to and from the Makai (the Japanese equivalent of Faerie) rather easily. It also means that acquaintances and family can get to him without trouble, so it is unsurprising when his younger sister arrives. Miya Momiji, a dramatic young oni who is more capable in the theater than her older brother, has dropped in for a visit. A visit she hopes will get her brother on her side against their parents, since Miya has met a boy whom she likes.

Cue Kyosai’s horrified reaction to finding out his sister is trying to involve him in a love drama, as she wishes to marry this prospective beau. But to have the younger sister married before her older brother? Impossible! Their parents would never stand for that! Furthermore, Kyosai is not going back to the Makai and Japan to “reason” them into letting his sister marry ahead of him, particularly since he hasn’t met the boy in question either.

That still leaves them with the problem of Miya not wanting to go back home if she can’t have her way. So the two siblings settle on a compromise: Miya will move in with Kyosai, and she will get a job in Rivertown to help support herself. Luckily the bakery is open, so if they hurry, they can find a job for her there before a college student is given the only remaining position.

Enter Rain McKee, who has come to the bakery to grab some cherry turnovers and a cup of coffee. Rain is her town’s “cove doctor”: It is a position that makes her like an Estcarpian Witch out of Andre Norton’s universe. One who knows enough conventional wisdom and magic to keep Nasty People Eat-

ers away from local residents but who lacks the training to go up against big bad guys regularly. Right now, she is supporting herself by making soap with just enough magic in it to help those who purchase it.

Rain says hello to the two Japanese standing at the counter while she gets her food and coffee, then off-handedly tells the bakery owner to give them all the good spooky stories on the “cursed McKees.” Yes, her family has a reputation – they all die horrible deaths. It is why Rain was raised by her grandparents and not her mother and father: They died, leaving her grandfather and grandmother to bring her up. And now that her grandparents are dead, Rain is the next cove doctor for Rivertown, despite her uncle’s desire to take her place.

Outside, the crows caw. The time draws nigh when the curse will finally end. And oh, what a succulent meal that will be –

Provided those interloping, lightning-wielding foreigners stay out of what isn’t their business.

The Characters

Kyosai Momiji is a perfectly “adorkable” male lead. Competent and sure, he nevertheless has zero experience with women. Despite this lack of understanding Kyosai is never anything other than a genuine Nice Guy who knows what he is doing even as he tears old monsters apart. Painting, managing a business, and fighting he can do, but send a woman – especially a pretty one – to hold a normal conversation with him, and he is at a loss in seconds because what is the female sex’s idea of “normal”?

Rain McKee’s snark is a good defense mechanism against a town that expects her to do this, that, and the other thing when all she really wants is to curl up and cry over the fact that the only family members who really loved her are dead. Like Kyosai, she really is a Nice Girl who just so happens to have the power to tell old, old Fae to go to hell. All she needs is some training and the impetus to use it, preferably without getting herself killed in the process.

Miya Momiji is fun without wearing out her welcome. Far from the annoying little sister model, while she can and does annoy her brother or Rain, for the most part she’s an honestly sweet girl who wants to help where and how she can. She just needs to learn when no help is better, and when a prank ought to be left to the imagination, not actually put into motion!

The World

The world is the Appalachia of the southeastern United States, specifically a college town. Familiar for its modern conveniences, such as malls and cars, it is nonetheless still alien for how very old the hills themselves are. More things between heaven and earth appear here for that reason, necessitating a cove doctor’s presence to help keep them back, else the locals will find themselves on the menu. In this milieu folklore and fairytales, ancient rituals and old stories all come into play in the day-to-day lives of residents. And when that old – so old – setting has some new players from the Orient thrown into the mix, then the ripples travel further afield yet again.

Politics

None. Take a microscope to this story, and it will show that there is nothing even vaguely political in it.

Content Warning

While there is mention of one Fae becoming lunch, the death is not graphically described or dwelt on. The most language one gets is a “go to hell” from the heroine and one or two innuendos which innocent readers will miss. Overall, this is a nice, clean book any mature teen would devour in an instant.

Who is it for?

Anime fans will love Oni the Lonely, as one of the two POV characters is an oni, a Japanese demon. The cross-cultural pollination, culture clash, and cultural tidbits will taste sweet as candy and be far more filling. Fans of Andre Norton’s Witch World series will love the references to not only Appalachia folklore but to Old World folk wisdom as well. The Grande Dame of Science Fiction has reason to smile and nod in approval of this book; it feels like one of her stories but set in the modern world and given Japanese flair. Romance readers who prefer “sweet romances” and “slow burn” romances will find this book appealing, too, as will artists. Both the protagonists’ mindsets swing toward their specific arts when they are trying to calm down, so this book will be markedly enjoyable for that reason.

Why buy it?

Oni the Lonely is a GOOD BOOK. It is fun, lighthearted, and has enough action that the breathing space in between feels earned. So why wait? Go pick up the book and start enjoying it today!

Shorty by Scott Moon
Review by JR Handley
<https://upstreamreviews.substack.com>

A Mech Warrior's Tale

Hey Space Cadets, it’s time for another fun book review! This time we’re diving into the well-trod ground known as mechanized adventure fiction! I think you’ll appreciate what the author did here, so let’s dive into this review. After you read the story, feel free to discuss what you thought of it in the comments below!

Summary:

First, let me say that none of what I’ll say in this section couldn’t be found on the back copy of the novel. Heck, I cribbed this summary from the back, and then I added my own twist! And not even much of one, since most of the books I read have kick butt descriptions (aka blurbs). If the blurb doesn’t catch my eye, then I tend to skip the book unless a friend recommends it. Generally speaking, my goal is to provide a spoiler-free review, so here goes nothing!

This story was an iconic tale of the underdog warrior fighting the world, on his terms. We see Shorty as the embodiment of the old maxim that bravery isn’t built, it’s forged. The mech jockey fights on a planet plagued by perpetual war, where a mech is a prerequisite for survival. On that planet there is one simple rule: be bigger than the other guy or get your ass kicked.

But at just seventeen measly tons, Shorty doesn’t measure up. His enemies can level cities and punch holes through mountains. They can reshape the world on a whim. They wouldn’t be caught dead in an overgrown trashcan like Shorty. But Shorty isn’t interested in the rule of size. He knows heart isn’t

measured in pounds of steel. Bravery isn't found in the finest machined parts. Glory isn't just for giants. In this expansive story, we learn Shorty's new rule, one he's about to teach it to everyone... ass-kicking doesn't have a size requirement.

I know this seems like a short summary, but hey... it's a short story!

Characters:

The main character, Chandler Michael Dane III, is a warrior who fights in an understrength and under-sized mech. But nobody calls him that, everyone calls Chandler by his nickname and call sign, "Shorty." He's an average guy in a below average mech that he fought like it was bigger than the biggest Goliath. He's the best kind of mech jockey, one who becomes so in tune with his machine that they become indistinguishable from each other. He's obsessed with his eyes in the sky, Sexy Danielle, who he risks everything to rescue. We also meet his sisters, the twins Stacy and Sheila. And despite the length of this story, we really connect to all four of these people in a way that leaves us wanting more.

Plot:

The basic plot is about a mech jockey raiding the Foxtrot Foundry for any parts that he could salvage. He's hoping to make resupply run, stealing the parts he needs to keep him in the merc game. During his time there, he makes some surprising discoveries and changes the course of the battles that rage across the planet Doomsday. The basic plot of this story was fun, it was fast paced, and it kept me engaged. I didn't have any trouble following this epic romp through mech country, so here the author accomplished his goals as a storyteller!

Worldbuilding:

There was a lot of world building in this short story, setting up a universe where humanity is thriving post-Terra. There were a lot of acronyms for the various political polities, but Scott Moon made it so seamless that it blended into the larger backdrop of the world. This short story set the scene for a larger universe that left you wanting more. I could easily buy the premise of an underdog mech jockey bucking the conventional thinking on mechanized warfare. I would say that here the author accomplished his goals.

Description:

The author was lighter on descriptions than I would prefer, but it was never so sparse that I couldn't picture the action. I feel like the amount of description was just about right for a short story. There are currently four short stories in this series, but I'm only reviewing the first one. Further, if (and I hope that he does) Scott Moon makes this into a long form novel, I'll expect more so I can better visualize it all. Where the author truly shines was through his description of Doomsday, the setting of this fun adventure. I was able to form a picture of the setting in my mind and watch the story play out as a movie in my head. This was not the case with the mech warriors, but those battle robots are so iconic everyone can imagine something. For a short story, it was enough, so hat's off to Scott!

Overall:

I absolutely loved this short story! I hadn't previously gone for mech fiction, but this short story showed me the error of my ways! I found Scott's prose to be easy to read, which is a plus for my TBI

riddled brain. It was written in a way that kept the story entertaining and prevented it from lagging. I only found one typo, which I'd probably have missed if I wasn't reading it with the intention of reviewing the story. Even cooler, Scott fixed it after I mentioned it. Keep in mind, I wrote this review when the short story was shiny and new. Either way, it wouldn't be honest not to mention it.

As for the story itself, I found the basic premise to be highly entertaining. Scott Moon used several creative tactics for the main character to accomplish his goals, despite the odds. His experience as a SWAT officer was evident, as he made things happen in creative ways. Scott was imaginative with his battle strategies, and he did it in ways that were entirely believable within the context of the world he created. We see the smaller mech using hit and run tactics that emphasize speed and surprise, perfect for an understrength fighter. Scott used these ingenious measures to build tension and keep the story moving in a way that was highly entertaining.

In conclusion, I would recommend this story to everyone who loves fun science fiction and give it 5 out of 5 grenades. But don't take my word for it... if this book sounds like it's right up your alley, check it out!

Tentacles of the Dominion by D. T. Read Review by Jim McCoy <http://JimbosSFFreviews.blogspot.com>

Seldom can an author change the entire basis for a series and have it work. John Ringo comes to mind as an author who didn't (and if you've read the Legacy of the Aldenata series AKA The Human/Posleen Wars then you're familiar with the Callie Trilogy. I kinda didn't like them because they didn't fit.) quite make it fit. I never liked the Callie trilogy much, not because it was poorly written, but because it didn't fit the series.

Enter D.T. Read and her latest (re)release, Tentacles of the Dominion. I was a bit leery at first because I had advanced warning that this was a book unlike the first two books, and I wasn't sure how things were going to turn out. I was worrying for no reason though, because this is a damn fine book.

I've remarked before how well Read writes family life and Tentacles of the Dominion is actually the best example of that so far. Lujan Sergey has been badly wounded while protecting an important person at a treaty signing. His son Tristan, the main character of the first two books, is literally light years away fighting on another planet. His wife is left alone to be with him while he tries to recover from a nearly body-wide paralysis plus blindness and deafness using methods that would not be available in the real world. Read gets into Lujan's head. Read gets into his wife Darcie's head.

Lujan's recovery is totally believable if you excuse the Science Fictional methods used to make it work. He struggles. He fights. Lujan is an admiral in the Sperzah, which is a spaceborne version of the Navy SEALs, and he refuses to give up like one. He has that ungodly persistence combined with stubborn pigheadedness that gets him through anything he needs to get through. If he pushes himself further than he should at times, then so be it. You don't accomplish great things by refusing to challenge yourself or by thinking small. Basically, when I finally get to sit down and have a drink with all of my fictional friends, Lujan gets a double. He's hard core.

Darcie is the kind of wife that every man wants. She's tough. She's loyal. She sticks by her man no matter what it takes and helps bring him through the fire regardless of the cost to herself. Seriously, I've got a lot of respect for her, and she gets a girly frou-frou drink, too. Make that two. She's earned it.

Oh, and a moment between Lujan and his mother and sisters deserves mention, too. Mom is totally believable to the point where I didn't know whether to laugh along with her or cry for Lujan. Either way, it worked out well and I had a good time with it. And when Tris makes it back, there are times when I almost did well up.

I mean, I didn't, obviously, because I'm Jimbo and Jimbo is a big, strong, proud, smart, brave, rough, tough guy.

Of course, I taught my daughters to be all of that and they still cry, but not me. Nope. Never.

But yeah, speaking as a guy who lost his dad unexpectedly, I felt for Tris when he came back from deployment. He hadn't lost his father but in some ways, it had to have felt like he did. The dude in the hospital bed wasn't the guy he went rappelling with last book even if he was. If you've ever seen a loved one go through something catastrophic, you'll get that.

But I also felt for Luj. I'm watching my oldest grow up. She's a high school senior this year, just drove me out to dinner and is getting invitations from lots of colleges because of her brains. I always raised her to do her best and succeed but it's still hard to believe that she's so old and grown up now. It's the same for Luj, who sees his baby grown and helping Dad when he needs it. It's a weird thing if you haven't experienced it, but any parent who has been through a similar time can read that part of the book and feel it in their soul.

That's not to say that *Tentacles of the Dominion* is all family and medicine. There is a big-time political plot going on complete with spies, duplicity and murder. There are a few action sequences and they work where they're supposed to. We get that whole pulse pounding feeling a couple times and it's fun but that's not what *Tentacle of the Dominion* is really all about.

If you're a fan of my blog then you're familiar with my whole "someone to root for and someone to root against" thing, then you know I love to hate a good villain, and TOTD has one that I just want to reach out and touch, preferably with a bladed weapon in his core region. Seulemont Remarq is sneaky. He's slimy. He's duplicitous. He'll do whatever he needs to do to achieve his ends and he has no sense of remorse. His only loyalty is to himself and on that level he's a fanatic. He seeks power for his government, but not as a loyalist. His goal is to empower the government to empower himself.

He's got friends and followers, or at least accomplices, in high places, too. There is indeed a great deal of corruption in the government, and it seems to be spreading. They even manage to get Lujan retired while he is convalescing, thus removing him from a position where he has a chance to really influence what happens next. It almost has an air of legitimacy but it's fake. And, of course, nothing is worse than fake legitimacy, with the possible exception of my sense of humor. Even that's only possible though.

I do find myself a bit bummed that this is the end of the trilogy because I feel like there is more story to be told here. I won't go into details because it would spoil too much, but I truly do feel like there should be at least one more book to detail the fallout from this one. I think I can get up with saying that there are some loose ends that need to be tied up. Then again, I hear that there are some sequels coming, turning this into an ongoing series once again and that your favorite blogger might have something to say about how they go.

Bottom Line: 5.0 out of 5 Burnt Fuses

The Wind from Nowhere by J. G. Ballard

Review by J.-P. Garnier

<https://spacecowboybooks.com>

This is Ballard's first, and disowned, novel. For Ballard fans it is an interesting read on account of many of his ongoing themes being birthed in this book: urban decay, nature fighting back, megalomania, etc. However, as a novel it feels unfocused and somewhat half-baked. Can't really blame an author for their first novel falling short, but this book makes for a somewhat uninteresting read unless one wants to explore the genesis of Ballard's many novels. The main issue with this book is not the scenarios but rather the underdeveloped characters and motivations. The landscapes he builds in this book are vivid and certainly serve as a precursor to his later, and more interesting, novels. Ballard is certainly one of my favorite novelists, but this book leaves something to be desired and I can see why ultimately distanced himself from this particular work.

Literary Criticism

Jack Bauer, Harry Potter, and the Cassandra Effect
by Declan Finn

So, what do Jack Bauer and Harry Potter have in common?

No, this is not a joke.

Jack Bauer, the hero of 24, is the key agent on the Counter Terrorism Unit. He will torture (mostly just interrogation with yelling and threats), kill, fight his superiors, and lop off heads in order to save the day. He developed a drug addiction to go undercover with a cartel, stopped LA from being nuked about three times, saved the President of the United States at least a dozen times, and will occasionally go on revenge-fueled rampages. He is also the winner of going-the-longest-without-sleep-while-still-kicking-ass award. He's mostly a lone wolf, because everyone who helps him eventually dies.

Harry Potter is essentially experiencing the worst high school experience since Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Instead of being born with martial arts skills and preternatural strength, all he has are the wits of a ten-year-old (to start with) and inborn magical ability that he's still learning to control. His biggest assets are his friends-- one of whom is smarter than he is. And he's got a death sentence on him since he was born, all because of some Saruman wannabe who has his own Manson family.

So, what do the two of them have in common?

The Cassandra effect.

No, really.

Going through both series, you'll notice that no one actually listens to either Jack Bauer or Harry Potter. If people listened to Jack Bauer in several seasons, the show would be called 12, not 24. Every time Harry Potter falls headfirst into a plot, like some sort of magical Jessica Fletcher, no one over the age of 18 listens to him. They are both Cassandra, knowing something will happen for certain, only no one

will listen to them, especially when they're right. Leaving it up to our heroes to act on their own to save the day, despite the stupidity of others.

Now, granted, it's a plot device specifically designed so it can end with the hero standing alone against all odds, with maybe some cavalry coming over the hill at the last minute. One might say it's a very American concept — rugged individualism, cowboy duels in the street, the Lone Ranger, every superhero, every Clint Eastwood western — except that there is still the basic mythology of Odysseus, or Bellerophon, and other folks of yore who have special powers and abilities that make them the only ones to face demons and monsters.

It's the same concept, only we need different reasons for the lone hero to be lone anything.

In the case of comic books, that's easy—most superheroes have superpowers that enable them to go toe-to-toe with the bad guy and walk away. Even Batman and Iron Man have special toys, special training, and a wealth of experience on their side.

But what happens outside of that? When everyone has the same training? The same knowledge base?

Enter the Cassandra effect. In both cases, it stems from Finn's Law of Committees: to get the IQ of a committee, you take the total IQ of the individual committee members, and then divide it by TWICE the number of members on said committee. Why? Because people are dumber in groups.

In either case, this holds. In the Hogwarts School model, the faculty obviously know more than this pissant little child, so how could he possibly have the answer to anything in particular? In the case of Jack Bauer, the CTU bureaucracy looks something like the bureaucracy of the damned, filled with political operatives who know nothing about kicking ass and taking names, and everything about kissing ass and shuffling papers. And, in both cases, our heroes can only appeal to an individual—Harry Potter's Dumbledore, or Bauer's President Palmer — and that person can cut through the red tape that has made everything so very, very screwed up.

If you don't have that, you don't have a plot in either case.

“Oh, Harry? People are going to try and steal this valuable stone we have in the forbidden wing? We'll triple the guard on it. Thank you.”

Or...

“Jack, you've got information that says that there were other people behind the terrorist threat? Sure, we'll have an air strike on them in the next five minutes.”

Sounds boring, doesn't it? And this is before it became commonly known just how incompetent all of those agencies are.

At the end of the day, individuals who will fight the good fight are always more appealing to us than a massive, faceless bureaucracy. We trust individuals to get things done, but not the byzantine structure of bureaucracies, who will seemingly let anyone in. It doesn't matter if it's the IRS, the State Department, the NSA, CTU, or Hogwarts. But good fiction uses this plot device well, exaggerating the natural ineptitude of bureaucracies into a plot point — and sometimes, you don't need that much exaggeration.

Even when you have something like *The Magnificent Seven*, or *The Avengers*, it's very much the same concept. It's the individuals coming together to take on a threat that none of them could deal with alone.

Now, one could counter with military fiction ... except in that case, fiction makes certain to focus on the officers and high-ranking foot soldiers — people who have already been promoted because they have special abilities and knowledge that put them at the head of the pack. Just look at *300* — we focus on, possibly, six of three hundred Spartans. It's hard to make us emotionally invested in 300 individual soldiers in the time and space allotted but making us invested in a select few allows us to be invested in all of them.

If we wanted to look at my books... sure, we can.

Honor at Stake focuses on exactly two people, who have to save a city, then each other, then the world. I've got some military guys in the background, but I avoid military clashes. Because I suck at them. I am not John Ringo or Bernard Cornwell.

Saint Tommy NYPD: again, he's part of a faceless organization, but I largely avoid dealing with most of the rest of the NYPD. Otherwise, he'll end up in a loony bin.

Too Secret Service: I have a collection of spies coming together to defeat terrorists. Again, faceless monolith? Who needs intelligence? Heh.

At the end of the day, we the audience become invested in individuals. The Cassandra effect gives writers the excuse to focus on a select few in a modern age where great big monolithic installations are supposed to take care of everything.

And we know monolithic institutions can't take care of anything.

Book Versus Movie: Jurassic Park!

by Graham Bradley

<https://upstreamreviews.substack.com>

What Spielberg changed in Crichton's most celebrated novel.

'Jurassic Park' 3D re-release slated for July 19, 2013 - The Verge

To describe Michael Crichton as “larger than life” is almost underselling it. He was a novelist, a screenwriter, a doctor, and an adventurer. He measured as tall in real life as Harry Dresden does on the page (six-foot-nine.) He was married five times. At one point in the 1990s, he had the #1 best-selling book, the #1 theatrical film release, and the #1 most-watched primetime TV show (*ER*).

Did I mention that he paid for school by writing throwaway thriller novels in between all of his class-work? We indie writers like to pride ourselves on the number of chainsaws we juggle, but here's a guy who was juggling venomous dinosaurs with machine guns and making it look easy. And he was mainstream.

In 2020, the novel *JURASSIC PARK* turned 30 years old. Last year, so did the movie. 2023 was also the 15th anniversary of Crichton's death. If all of the above wasn't impressive enough, he lived a shockingly full life without even turning 70 years old.

Since most of the world is familiar with this franchise, I figured it was worth putting the incredible novel up against the blockbuster movie and seeing how this story looked different based on the medium.

The Plot

A billionaire wants to resurrect dinosaurs and stick them in a zoo to make money off loaded tourists. It's not all going according to plan and the dinosaurs have attacked a few people. He hires a handful of outside observers to check out the park and endorse it for the general public, yet an act of corporate espionage throws the park into chaos and several people are killed.

While this describes the book and the movie, the execution is a little different for both. In print you're treated to a far more in-depth explanation of how the genetics work, how nature defies man's planning, and how hubris can lead to oversights that result in our downfall.

This is perhaps the most important lesson of JURASSIC PARK, and while the film sets it out there for your own understanding, the book does it with no ambiguity.

The Characters

Alan Grant (Sam Neill) is a paleontologist with a hippie beard and Hawaiian shirts aplenty. Ellie Sattler (Laura Dern) is one of his grad students, rather than being a couple as they were on screen.

Tim (Joseph Mazzello) and Lex (Ariana Richards) Murphy were also in the book, but their ages were flipped and Tim was the older sibling. Spielberg had worked with Mazzello before and really liked him for the role but couldn't have him be older without making Lex five or six years old, adding huge difficulties to shooting. So they cast a teen to play the sister.

There's also a character named Ed Regis who works for Hammond, but he wasn't in the film. He gets eaten by a juvenile T-Rex.

Ian Malcolm (Jeff Goldblum) is still a highly practical mathematician but is a lot more cynical and far less charming than his actor makes him out to be. By the end of the book most of the characters (incorrectly) think he died, but his survival is clarified in the sequel. Speaking of deaths...

The Casualties

As is often the case, not all of the characters from the book were in the movie, and of those who were, the roster of casualties isn't a match.

Robert Muldoon (Bob Peck) was the game warden on the island. He famously got "Clever girl" as his sendoff line, before being ambushed by a raptor. However, he survived in the book and was instrumental in getting the survivors off the island.

On the flipside, John Hammond (Richard Attenborough) was not in the exit party. In the novel, he gets swarmed by a pack of "compies" and meets his demise. He's a very typical Crichton antagonist—rich, sociopathic, and ambitious. The character is much more likeable in the films, just misguided.

Dennis Nedry (Wayne Knight) has largely the same role and is killed in the same way, by a dilophosaurus. John Arnold (Samuel L. Jackson, whose character was named 'Ray' in the movie) was killed by a raptor while trying to restore power, in both versions.

Donald Gennaro (Martin Ferrero) doesn't get eaten by a T-Rex while sitting on a toilet. He survives, but his character dies of dysentery in the epilogue. So the bowel issue persists.

Henry Wu (BD Wong) is killed by raptors in the novel, but he survives in the movie and gets an expanded role for the World trilogy.

The Larger Issue

Any half-decent writer can throw together an action story with humans running away from dangerous monsters; what separates the pulp from the bestsellers is when you convey something larger in your work.

Crichton opens JURASSIC PARK with commentary on Oppenheimer, and how splitting the atom changed everything from science to warfare to geopolitics. Once that knowledge was out there you couldn't put it back in the dark.

He believed humanity was on the cusp of a similar dramatic change when it came to unlocking genetic power: the ability to create, clone, or modify life as we saw fit. The full ramifications couldn't be seen by mankind, and we were once again on the verge of creating something we could easily regret.

But scientists put all of their attribute points into knowledge and research and discovery, often without the context of the humanities, of how the world might apply this thing that they refine. Back in 1993 people showed up to the theaters in droves to watch dinosaurs throw Ford Explorers around, yet we were treated to something just a little bit deeper than that: a cautionary tale.

While it didn't end up in the screenplay in the same fashion, audiences got a taste of it throughout the movie with Ian Malcom's monologues.

The Content

Crichton tended to go harder on the content in his books, so the novel has more profanity and violence than the film. Many of the dinosaur attacks read like scenes in a horror movie.

Recurring Themes in Crichton's Work

Clearly Crichton had an interest in dinosaurs and fossils for a long time; JURASSIC PARK wasn't his first fictional foray into this field. In the 1970s he wrote an historical novel about The Bone Wars, condensing the entire decade-long conflict between two paleontologists into a single summer. Though he completed it, the book wasn't released until 2017, almost ten years after his death.

Likewise he wrote the screenplay for WESTWORLD (1973) starring Yul Brynner. Like the HBO remake, the story centers on a theme park full of robots dressed as cowboys in a western setting, and rich patrons get to act out their immersive fantasies with as much authenticity as they desire.

JURASSIC PARK plays right alongside this idea, swapping out cowboys for dinosaurs. Something goes wrong in the park, and the attractions turn against the guests.

Crichton was prolific enough—and had a long enough career—that few people noticed these things until long after he was gone, especially since the Internet didn't enjoy widespread usage in those days.

The Future of his Legacy

Crichton's widow Sherri has been very active with his archives since his passing. Cynical takes abound—and with good reason, as not all his posthumous works are winners—but the impact of Crichton's work on entertainment is significant enough that he deserves to be remembered for how he changed the game.

According to Crichton's website, the next posthumous book to release is from an unfinished piece about a volcano in Hawaii that destroys a cache of stored chemical weapons—the kind that can end the world. It's a properly high-stakes concept with cinematic potential, just the kind of thing Crichton was known for. While I, a lifelong fanboy, will probably gobble it up, I do have some apprehension.

First, it's a posthumous Crichton book, and he didn't write it all. Other books like this (looking at you, MICRO) didn't land well for me. Second, the finishing author is James Patterson, and I'll be the first to tell you this guy isn't a writer nearly as much as he is a brand. Nobody actually enjoys his work, they just buy it, and I can't figure that out.

Fortunately for those of us who enjoy Crichton's unique blend of hard science and bonkers action, he's got a lengthy bibliography from the time he was alive, and it stands up well to multiple readings. So while Sherri Crichton continues to brush the dust off of Michael's archives, there is still plenty of stuff from this contemporary master to keep us all reading.

~Finis~