

Hub Magazine

SCIENCE FICTION HORROR FANTASY

PUBLISHER
LEE HARRIS

MANAGING EDITOR
ALASDAIR STUART

COMMISSIONING EDITOR
ELLEN J ALLEN

DESIGN/LAYOUT
PHIL LUNT

ISSUE 84 · 26TH APR 2009

CONTENTS:

FICTION: *My Dad's Idea* by Llinos Cathryn Thomas

REVIEW: *Godspeaker: The Riven Kingdom*
Primeval Season 3 Episode 4

FEATURE: *Big Screen Future #1* by Alasdair Stuart



Hub Magazine is Sponsored by Harper Collins

EDITORIAL:

by alasdair stuart

The Future is Now, isn't it?

There's a phrase, and I don't think it's mine, that's been sticking in my head for weeks now; 'Unexploded future.' The idea that the future is sitting right next to us, right now, waiting to detonate and change the world forever. It's something that happens two or three times in a normal person's life and I'm all too aware that I've already experienced two of these events (Or mini-Singularities if you're a Vernor Vinge fan); mobile phones and the internet.

Whether or not we are on the verge of the Intelligence Singularity, foodpills, silver togas and flying cars or not is a topic open to debate for far better writers than me but the fact does remain that the singularity and the fear of it is sneaking more and more into popular fiction. The concept haunted *The Sarah Connor Chronicles* like Banquo's ghost, *Eleventh Hour* is a series entirely focussed on one man trying to put down outbreaks of unexpected future and *Primeval*, on this side of the pond, is on one level a series about a group of people desperately trying to protect us from a total scientific change they barely understand. The fact that scientific change has recently involved hitting a very large dinosaur with a helicopter only makes it more fun. Even the *Stargate* franchise dealt with it as more and more alien technology was absorbed by the SGC over the fifteen seasons produced to date.

I have to admit, I love it. I'm as much of a Star Trek fan as the next man but the idea of being here, of seeing the world change around you is incredibly compelling. We, as a species, live moment to moment and the attraction of being able to look back at the world that was and then see the world as it is is incredible.

So, I have a question. What authors deal with this sort of thing? Who would you recommend? Because if the future is now, I really need to be better read.

And speaking of better read, if you want to find out more about the Intelligence Singularity, the wikipedia page is excellent and can be found at: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Technological_singularity

FICTION

My Dad's Idea

by Ilinos cathryn thomas

I'm not allowed to go to school with the other kids. Mum says it's for the best. She says that the big kids could hurt me. They might not mean to, but they would. And anyway they would definitely make fun of me whatever.

I know she's right, but still it isn't fair. I have to get taught in Auntie Valerie's front room, with a handful of other Lesser kids. Auntie Valerie is nice and she gives us cake, but her lessons are boring. I miss my old school.

Lessers – That's not what we call ourselves – that's what they call us. We don't call them anything, not in our house anyway. Dad says there's no need for labels because we're all just people. We're all the same in every way except the most obvious.

I know that's true, and I know that what we're doing is right and good, and some day everyone will see that. But sometimes I still can't help wishing that we were like everybody else. I wish that Dad hadn't had his idea. Before Dad had his idea, we were just a normal family.

Well, not normal exactly. I had to walk to school even when it was raining really hard, because of my carbon footprint. At first I didn't understand what one of those was, and I got really confused, because surely walking to school instead of being driven makes more footprints, not fewer? I asked Dad and he explained it all to me, about how we're using up the resources of the Earth too fast, and we're putting too much carbon in the air and it isn't good for the planet. We have to look after the planet because it's the only one we've got. Even now that we're reaching out into space – the shuttles are going further and faster all the time – we still haven't found a planet that we could move to once we use up everything here. That's why we didn't have a car, and why I couldn't have a bath as often as the other kids and why I had to wear clothes that were home-made out of plants and things instead of synthesised fabrics like everybody else.

I was upset about that because it made some of the other kids tease me, but Dad explained that looking after the planet was more important than being popular, so it was all right. I'm so lucky that Dad always explains everything to me.

Like, when all of this started, Dad explained about how there was a new piece of technology that people were worried about. It had already been used to do bad things. But Dad explained that technology can't be bad or good – it's what people do with it that counts. This new thing was being used as a weapon and people wanted to make it illegal, but Dad wanted everyone to see how it could be used to make all of our lives better.

He went on the telly to talk about it. A lot of people thought he was crazy, and they were angry with him. We used to get lots of letters, and sometimes people would come to the house and shout at Dad and he would shout back at them and Mum would make me turn my cartoons up loud because I wasn't supposed to worry about it.

Not all of the people shouted, though. Some of them wanted to talk about Dad's idea. Dad made lots of new friends that came round to our house a lot and they always stayed until very late, talking about Dad's idea. It all sounded very serious. They used to come after I had gone to bed, but if I lay on the landing with my head right by the banisters sometimes I could hear what they were saying. They all seemed to like Dad's idea a lot. They wanted it to be more than an idea, they wanted to really do it. But the government had said they couldn't. They said it wasn't safe. They'd managed to get hold of all of the new weapons and they didn't want to give them out to anybody, even though Dad's idea would help people, not hurt them.

So one Saturday in the summer we got to go on a trip to London – me and Dad and Mum and Auntie Valerie and Uncle Jim and all the other new aunts and uncles who liked Dad's idea. Lots of other people met us there too – Mum said later that it was thousands. And we got to go and stand outside Parliament and shout things and wave flags and banners. It was like a party – people gave me sweets and Mum said it was all right, and we sang songs and people walking past stopped to look at us, and people from the telly came and talked to us and asked about Dad's idea.

Later on Dad got onto a big podium so that everyone could see him, and made a speech. All of our new friends shouted and cheered and Mum smiled and looked proud.

'We must not demonise this new technology!' Dad said. 'True, we should be wary of the people who would use it for evil! But that doesn't mean that we should blind ourselves to the opportunities it brings

us! Imagine the possibilities! Imagine the difference this could make to our lives! An end to so many of the terrible problems in the world today! And the long-term environmental benefits are uncountable! We just need to overcome our fear of the unknown! Yes, my ideas are strange! Yes, we would have to make sacrifices! Yes, we would have to change the way we live! But isn't it worth it? Isn't it worth it to save our planet? Isn't it worth it to end poverty and hunger throughout the world?' Dad stopped for a few seconds and looked out at the crowd. 'With all that we stand to gain... isn't it worth at least giving it a try?'

And there was a really, really big cheer and we all waved our flags like mad and Dad just stood there looking pleased.

Three weeks later some of the Shrink Rays the government had confiscated were released to laboratories and environmental groups. The first one went straight to Dad.

So that's how I ended up like this. Before, I was one-hundred-and-twenty-eight centimetres tall. Now, I'm fifteen centimetres tall. Dad is nearly twenty centimetres tall; he says I've still got lots of growing to do.

Now it only takes a few cupfuls of water for me to have a bath. A loaf of bread lasts our whole commune nearly a week, and there's plenty for everybody. There are hundreds of us, and all of our land takes up less space than our old house did. We're saving the Earth. Our carbon footprint is tiny now, just like us.

Dad says it will take time for things to be right. He says we need infrastructure. More plumbers and builders and things need to shrink themselves to that we can have proper houses like we had when we were big. Dad says that we need engineers to work out an efficient way to get from place to place, now that everywhere is so much further apart. But more and more people are shrinking every day, and all of them have lots of ideas, so soon we'll have a way.

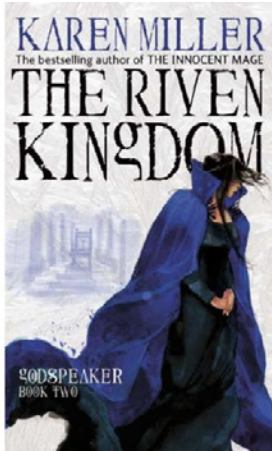
Dad says one day – maybe not in his lifetime but perhaps in mine – everyone will understand, and they'll all shrink themselves. And the world will be like it was thousands and thousands of years ago – wild and big and empty, with little pockets of people just here and there. And then the Earth will get a chance to recover from all the things we did to it when we were big.

Dad always explains everything so well. It sounds like it's going to be great.



Godspeaker: The Riven Kingdom

reviewed by cathy hill



By Karen Miller
Orbit
rrp £7.99

The island kingdom of Ethrea is in trouble; the beloved King Eberg has died and his only remaining heir is female. Princess Rhian seems reluctant to choose a suitable husband to become the next king, despite strong urging from the Dukes and the Church. Rhian, still grieving the loss of her father, wants to escape the wardship of the sinister and overbearing Church leader, Prolate Marlan. She aims to claim her birthright by ruling as Queen in her own right, something unprecedented in Ethrean history. Rhian is helped by humble toymaker Dexterity Jones and sharp-tongued healer Ursa. But what of

Zanadakar, the mysterious black man Dexterity rescued? Does his hidden and distressing past have any significance for Rhian and Ethrea? Accompanied by Rhian's dour chaplain Helfred, the group flee north to the one place where they might find help and support for the challenges ahead.

I reviewed the first book in this sequence (*Godspeaker: Empress*) in Hub 74. The main problem I identified was that the main character was unpleasant and very unlikeable. Thankfully this is not the case in the sequel; the viewpoint characters in *Riven Kingdom* are much more sympathetic, understandable and likeable. For the most part they work well because they are not perfect people. They all have their own motives, flaws and opinions, which come into conflict throughout the book, even among characters that are on the same side and have the same ultimate goal. Use of internal monologue allows us to see the characters' thoughts and how they are inside, as well as how they appear outwardly and to the other characters. This means the reader cares about them, even when they are at cross purposes. The main exception to the otherwise excellent characterisation is Prolate Marlan, the antagonist. He is the power-hungry, black-hearted and maniacal High Priest stereotype, without faith, compassion or any likeable qualities for the reader to latch onto. While it's a change -and perhaps a relief- from the previous book to know clearly where your sympathies should lie, I think he could have been a little more nuanced to avoid becoming a cliché.

At first this book does not appear to follow *Empress*. It has an entirely different setting and a different set of characters. This means it's easily accessible and understandable for someone who hasn't read the previous book. In doing this Karen Miller has avoided the classic second book syndrome which plagues fantasy writers; where a set of already established characters continue their journey/adventures until they are in the right position for the third book to start. Until Zanadakar turns up as a crossover character you don't even know for sure if the two stories are set in the same world. Ethrea is a much more familiar fantasy setting; it's clearly modelled on Western European climate and attitudes. Mijak, the nation in the first book, appears to be Eastern or maybe African in influence. It's a harsh land, almost a desert, that's home to a ruthless, warrior society. As it turns out Ethrea is so far to the west of Mijak that the two countries have never come into contact. The contrast between the two is highlighted by Zanadakar; despite being one of the more likeable characters in *Empress* he is shown as ruthless and foreign in comparison to the Ethreans. It's only in Ethrea that he is explicitly described as a black man and shown to be exotic and different, skin colour never having been mentioned in Mijak. The global plotline is continued in short segments that return to Mijak and focus on Hekat, the main character in *Empress*. In these sections the distinctive speech patterns of Mijak sound even more unusual in contrast to the familiar phrases and idioms used in Ethrea.

This story has many familiar elements – a defiant princess, an evil high priest, and an alliance against a corrupt regime- however they are approached in a fresh way and don't feel tired or familiar. The fantasy elements are minimal and restricted to the divine, which makes them more exceptional in Ethrea, where godly manifestations are rare enough to be miracles. The pacing is greatly improved in this book, the story takes place over several months and there are no skips in time so the action flows smoothly and there's no need for recaps. The ending concludes the main storyline and sets up what will happen in the next book. The global plotline is treated as a subplot for most of the book; it will clearly be more important later but isn't dominant. The strength of the characters and the writing are excellent and never waver. This is an enjoyable read, and an improvement on the previous book.



Season 3. Episode 4

Starring Jason Flemyng, Andrew Lee-Potts, Lucy Brown, Hannah Spearritt, Ben Miller, Laila Rouass, Ben Mansfield and Ramon Tikaram

The week after the week before. Last week Primeval did something genuinely brave, breaking its format permanently and killing its main character, Nick Cutter, on screen. The glue that held the ARC team together, Cutter's death leaves them rudderless and fragile, all too aware of the incredible dangers of their job. This episode the three primary threats; the anomalies, Mick Harper's investigation and the fact that they are no longer the only government-sponsored Anomaly operation out there, all come together...

Whilst Douglas Henshall leaves an undeniable gap, this is easily the best episode so far this season. The ARC team feel squeezed from all sides as Mick Harper outmanouvers them, the government seem to be working around them and a very, very large Giganotosaurus does its best to eat them. The way they rise to the pressure, most notably Lee-Potts' Connor seems to mark a definite progression in the series, as characters are forced to grow and move far outside their comfort zone. This is largely a Connor episode in fact, as he builds on one of the discoveries in the first episode, is put in mortal danger and has it driven home to him once and for all just how dangerous the job is.

The sheer scale of the episode and the 'G-Rex' helps too and the sheer pulp glee of seeing a dinosaur/helicopter chase sequence really can't be overstated. Jason Flemyng's Danny Quinn is also huge fun, a completely traditional action hero who is all too aware both of that and the lunacy of his new job. He's both a continuation of Cutter and a welcome change and it's going to be fascinating to see where the show goes with him.

The episode isn't perfect, by any means, especially the Mick Harper sub plot. Careening off into stereotype it ends in a muddy fashion that does a disservice to both the actor and the character. But that aside, this is a great episode of a show which is only getting more fun. Give it a try.

FEATURES

Big Screen Future

by *alasdair stuart*

1. Akira

Akira opens on a modern Tokyo cityscape. It's day time and the city is busy in that huge, anonymous and oddly comforting way cities can be. You're a cog in the machine but the machine is so big that in the great scheme of things, you don't matter. Safety in anonymity and redundancy.

Then in the distance, something happens. A bubble of force, something between an explosion and a tidal wave builds, and builds, and builds in total silence, tearing the city apart as it expands until it's all you can see.

Akira is the story of what happened next. The explosion is the story of what happened because of *Akira*.

Katashihiro Otomo's seminal anime tale of bike gangs, genetically engineered psychic children and the apocalypse is still, even today, regarded as one of the greatest pieces of anime of all time. Superficially, the reasons why are clear; Otomo's clean, direct line work and love of design gives Neo Tokyo a lived in feel which is both brand new and familiar, alien and common. The advertising blimps of *Blade Runner* could be just off shot for many of the scenes, as Kaneda and his gang discover that their war with the Clowns is a meaningless part of a much larger canvas.

That war itself is a welcome character hook, positioning Kaneda next to James Dean as a rebel without a cause but with a great leather jacket, equal parts glacial cool and raging fury. He's an easy character to watch but far from an easy character to like and the brutality of the first running battle with the clowns drives home exactly how far down the well Neo Tokyo has fallen. Even Deckard's Los Angeles, where the police murder Replicants in the street, never sees biker gangs tearing one another and anyone who gets in the way apart.

Kaneda's journey beyond his war and out into the world is, inevitably, as much a journey into adulthood as anything else. Faced with first the knowledge of Akira and second the transformation of Tetsuo, Kaneda is faced with his own mistakes and also how little they matter. He's a bad man who's done terrible things but he knows that's not all he is, and that knowledge allows him the strength to become something more than the sum of his parts, to become someone who may not be a mature, sane human being but is certainly far less likely to play chicken with a Clown at hundreds of miles an hour.

It's only when you look at Tetsuo though that the core of the film really comes into focus. Tetsuo has the exact same background that Kaneda does, even down to spending time at the same reform school. But, where Kaneda has been in a position of seniority his entire life, Tetsuo has always been Kaneda's sidekick, always been a little too small, a little too young, not quite experienced enough to be trusted with any responsibility. Kaneda has always won, Tetsuo has always watched him win and the difference is what ultimately drives their conflict. Kaneda has got to the top of the food chain in his world and as a result is able to step across into the larger world outside his gang, Tetsuo has never had that opportunity.

Crucially, he's also never had the opportunity to trust himself and when he's revealed to have latent psychic ability, he does the only thing someone who has been bullied and suppressed for so long could do; he lashes out, finally unique, finally different and finally at the top of the heap. Even at the end of the film as he enters an impossible duel with Akira, he does so not because he wants to but because it's his choice, for the first time in his life. Tetsuo doesn't win but doesn't have to. He wants something more, he doesn't care for how long and that's what he gets. Kaneda may have the biker chic but it's Tetsuo who lives fast, dies young and in this case leaves a hideously mutated corpse.

Otomo's adaptation of his own story sensibly focusses on the rivalry between these two over every plot element. The original graphic novel, which is effectively a Charles Dickens novel with added psychic children and governmental conspiracies, is a huge sprawling affair that's incredibly dense, coherent and largely unfilmable storytelling. By stripping everything bar these two away, by rendering characters like the Colonel, the other psychic children and even Akira himself down to supporting roles, Otomo focusses the story on evolution, on the transition from boy to man, past to present and homo sapiens to homo novus. Each change is preceded by destruction just as the film is book ended by destruction and the best anyone can hope for is to still be alive after it's over.

The change wrought by *Akira* the film as opposed to *Akira* the character is less obvious but no less impressive. The film proved, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that anime is a viable medium in the west and paved the way both for the exploitative nonsense of *Urotsukidoji: Legend of the Overfiend* and series like *Ghost in the Shell: Standalone Complex* and *Ah! My Goddess*. More, *Akira* proved that popular culture does not have to be Atlantic culture and without it there would be no manga explosion. Ten years ago, it was difficult to find a bookshop with a graphic novel section, now it's hard to find without dedicated manga and graphic novel sections. *Akira* blazed a trail, proved once and for all that there wasn't just an audience for manga and anime but that audience was starving. Like the titular character, the film changed the environment around it forever and, like the titular character, that hasn't always been a good thing. But genre cinema, like Neo Tokyo, is a mercurial landscape, always shifting, always changing. It's a place where creation and destruction often go hand in hand and it's a credit to Otomo's vision that even today, Kaneda and his bike can be glimpsed on its streets, a neon ghost on streets it helped map and define.



Hub Magazine is Sponsored by Harper Collins