



The plot is simple enough. A flying saucer crashes near the North Pole. Men from a small military installation nearby accidentally destroy the saucer but bring back its pilot frozen alive in a block of ice. A second accident allows the alien to thaw and come to life. The creature proceeds to lay siege to the base looking for blood, a new taste for him.

It also is very subtle in its handling of the alien. The viewer spends the whole film without ever getting a really clear view of the alien visitor. There is an old maxim of filmmaking, "Show them, don't tell them." This film is an exception to that rule. We hear gaudy descriptions of the creature and then are left to picture what the alien looks like. This makes the alien considerably more frightening. In fact, the stills of James Arness, released well after the film had run its course in theaters, are almost silly-looking. So the film has very little in the way of special effects and not much monster makeup, just intelligent characters in an unusual situation. And the film still stands up more than three quarters of a century after it was made. There is a lesson there that modern filmmakers would do well to heed, if they still can.

This was also the first science fiction film of the Fifties to carry an anti-science theme. It was scientists who wanted to push things too far without thinking of the consequences to humanity. In this case Prof. Carrington wants to breed cuttings from the alien, a thinly disguised statement that it was the fault of scientists rather than the military that nuclear weapons were used. These days the military and not the scientist would be more likely to be accused, as it was in *ANDROMEDA STRAIN*, but this film was made less than six years after the end of World War II and much of the public still identified itself with the military.

The dialogue is done in a realistic style that was uncommon to films. Dialogue overlaps so that more than one actor may be talking at once. It probably makes this a difficult film to dub into other languages. Of course, the score is by Dmitri Tiomkin and is a classic. Tiomkin's tones musically evoke images of an Arctic blizzard with a pounding wind. It is definitely a chilling score.

We are left with memories of finding the shape of the craft to be circular. That could have been silly, but instead is genuinely thrilling. The film's worst touch is the silly "melting-man" climax reminiscent of the dissolving witch in *THE WIZARD OF OZ*. This is certainly one of the top handful of science fiction films of the Fifties. [-mrl]

#### **Nine Movies Everyone Should See** (comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

Friends of ours are moving out of state and threw a "farewell" barbecue. At one point, they were saying that we should drink the wine because there was more in the cellar, and they were not going to take it with them. We made some comment about drinking the wine so the Germans would not get it, and got blank stares. Apparently most of the people had not seen the film *CASABLANCA*. (Rick in a cafe in Paris as the Germans are approaching: "Henri wants us to finish this and then three more. He says he'll water his garden with champagne before he'll let the Germans drink any of it.")

Just as there are books that people should be familiar with just so they do not get lost in conversations (for example, yesterday I heard someone refer to a "road-to-Damascus" moment"), there are films (including one television series) one must see at least once just for cultural literacy. The list I would come up with is:

- DRACULA (the Lugosi version)
- FRANKENSTEIN (the Karloff version)
- KING KONG (the original version)
- CITIZEN KANE
- GONE WITH THE WIND
- CASABLANCA
- "Star Trek" (at least some of the original series)
- STAR WARS
- THE MATRIX

Not all of these are necessarily everyone's cup of tea. (My mother could not understand what people saw in *STAR WARS*.) There are many other truly great films you should watch because they are great. But these have become part of our culture. (Although oddly, the "Frankenstein monster" walk comes from *FRANKENSTEIN MEETS THE WOLF MAN* rather than the original Karloff film.) [-ecl]

Mark comments:

I am not sure I would claim that 2/3 of the cultural literacy canon comes from the fantasy genres. I wonder what my high school English teachers would say. [-mrl]

Evelyn responds:

In film media, I think these days it does. [-ecl]

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**REALIVE** (film review by Mark R. Leeper):

**CAPSULE:** For once we have a serious adult science fiction story, part of a new face for SyFy Channel. A contemporary man dying of cancer is carefully terminated, cryogenically frozen, and revived in 2084 to discover a very new world. A new device will allow him to take photographs of the mental images of his memories. The film looks at his relationship to the girl he left behind and a woman who is his new caretaker. Mateo Gil directs his own screenplay. It is all done humorlessly, though the viewer may be reminded of the premise of Woody Allen's *SLEEPER*. The film is in English, but is a Belgian, French, Spanish co-production. Rating: high +1 (-4 to +4) or 6/10

I was under the impression that when the SyFy channel released a film it was usually on the level of *SHARKNADO*. This film has higher aspirations. Here SyFy is releasing an adult piece of science fiction with characters at its center. The plot of having a contemporary person waking up in the future goes at least back to the book *LOOKING BACKWARD* and would have to include Woody Allen's *SLEEPER*. So the plot is familiar but now it has more of a feel of technical realism.

Tom Hughes plays Marc Jarvis, who died about 2015 but had his body cryonically frozen in liquid nitrogen to be revived when the science of medicine was up to the technical challenge of curing and reviving him. That day comes in 2084 and a high-bio-tech company is ready to regenerate and bring back the dead. In a high-tech medical facility, Marc recovers after many years of being effectively dead, now alive but being nursed by Elizabeth (played by Charlotte le Bon). His future life is one with a lot of familiar touches predicted also by *The Twilight Zone*, *JUST IMAGINE*, and other science fiction sources. People choose their bodies; lifespan is much longer; sex is no longer stigmatized.

Marc's mind goes over his restored memories that were surprisingly not destroyed by the freezing process. He remembers his first life as being very organic. His best memories involve nature. The film shows his first life as a bond with nature, starting with the first scenes of his being born into a world of flesh and blood. He says his second life started in much the same way, but as we later see the two worlds diverge. The year 2084 is cold to the touch. While his first life was painted in earth tones, his new life is mostly in cold colors of whites, blue, and gray. Even the people have faces flushed with white. Marc can hold onto a visual record of his mental images with a new (future) invention called a Mind Writer that allows him to show his memories to his doctors. But Marc's situation deeply depresses him and he finds himself identifying with the Frankenstein monster.

Much of the film, narrated by Marc, are his philosophical reflections on life gathered from the rebirth experience. *REALIVE* is finally a cold, bloodless, look into a possible future and at human relationships in the present. Still, this look at the future is hard to become engaged with because the world is so cold and lifeless. As Marc says, "before I died I thought there was nothing after death; now I'm sure." I rate *REALIVE* a high +1 on the -4 to +4 scale or 6/10. I am not sure if the title means "Real Alive," "Re-alive," or perhaps "Real Live."

Film Credits: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt4074928/combined>

What others are saying: <https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/realive>

[-mrl]

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**THE MEDUSA CHRONICLES** by **Stephen Baxter and Alastair Reynolds** (copyright 2016 Saga Press, audiobook copyright 2016 Simon & Schuster Audio, 416pp, 12 hours 5 minutes, Kindle edition ASIN: B019DKO3Z0, Audiobook ASIN: B01FKLCV7S, narrated by Peter Kenny) (an audiobook review by Joe Karpierz):

There's something about classic short science fiction stories that makes writers want to either expand or write follow-ups to them. It's happened to stories by both Isaac Asimov and Arthur C. Clarke, for example. Clarke's stories are especially popular for this treatment. The latest is a sequel to the 1971 novella "A Meeting With Medusa", which won the Nebula Award for Best Novella in 1972. This time, a couple of writers joined forces to put together a terrific follow-up, *THE MEDUSA CHRONICLES*: Stephen Baxter who, in my mind writes in the tradition of Clarke, and Alastair Reynolds, one of my personal favorites who writes wonderfully complex space operas, among other things.

I probably have read the original novella back in the depths of time--or at least sometime in the 1970s--but I do not remember doing so. Luckily, *THE MEDUSA CHRONICLES* does not require the original to have been read to enjoy, appreciate, and understand its story. The novel contains a brief but complete summary of its predecessor, which really is sufficient to allow the reader to move on with the larger work. As a brief synopsis here, Howard Falcon is critically injured when an experimental helium airship crashes. He survives due to surgical techniques that leave him part man, but mostly machine. He later goes on an exploratory mission to Jupiter during which he meets the titular Medusae, among other creatures, that live in the upper layers of the Jovian atmosphere.

THE MEDUSA CHRONICLES starts out as a straight sequel to "A Meeting With Medusa" (with a short side stop to Falcon's childhood, some of the details of which play a part in the later parts of CHRONICLES), but evolves into a terrific story of the conflict between man and machine that is, in effect, kick-started by Falcon who also finds himself in between the two factions trying to broker a peace between the two sides. Falcon watches and participates in events that take place starting at Jupiter, where the machines have their base, to the inner solar system as the machines take over each planet in turn, dismantling Earth in the process. Time and again Falcon is called upon to intervene in the situation that he himself started to try to get the machines to end their inevitable march through the Solar System. The last section of the book is devoted to what ends up being a joint mission to the furthest depths of Jupiter with Adam, the machine that was at the start of it all, to find out what really is way down there in the depths of the great planet and in the process maybe find a solution to the conflict.

There's really a lot going on here. Each section of the novel is a story itself, each one being an instance where Falcon is called upon to deal with the machines. It's not until the final story, where he is called to unknowingly be the delivery system for a virus that will destroy the machines, that the ultimate solution-- the unification of machine and man--is the way to get the long elusive peace to occur. It's something of a lesson to the current world that the best way to peace is to work together to make it happen; a bit heavy handed perhaps, and maybe a bit too symbolic, but it is done in an effective way so that the reader may not feel hit too hard over the head with it.

While the book is wonderful on its own, it certainly pays homage to Clarke all along the way, sprinkling references to various Clarke stories, most notably 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY. The journey of Adam and Falcon to the depths of the Jovian atmosphere, if it were to be filmed today, would rival the psychedelic trip of Bowman through the monolith on the way to becoming the Star Child. It's clear that both Baxter and Reynolds know and love the work of Clarke, and at several points in the story I was thrown back to the days of my youth when I devoured all things Clarke. This is truly a terrific novel that fans of Baxter, Reynolds, and Clarke will love. It's a throwback to a different time, when the sense of wonder that was present in the science fiction that we read--maybe it was just because we read those books as young people with eyes wide open to the future--was what brought us into the field to begin with.

I was not fond of Peter Kenny as the narrator. He seemed somewhat monotone and unable to either substantially change his voice to represent different characters or sometimes keep me interested in the narration itself. Often times we are attracted to an audiobook because of the narrator; Kenny is not one of those narrators. Luckily, the story itself overshadowed Kenny's performance such that I was deeply enough interested in what was going on more than I was being disappointed in the narration. I may have been distracted by the narration in spots, but the story itself pulled me through it.

Other than Reynolds' SLOW BULLETS, I haven't read anything by either one of these authors in quite a long period of time. It seems that I must dig in to my to read list and move a few books to the head of that list. I think it's time I explore these authors again. That's what a book like THE MEDUSA CHRONICLES will do for you. [-jak]

**Alternate Worlds** (letter of comment by Charles S. Harris):

In response to [Mark's comments on alternate worlds](#) in the 09/29/17 issue of the MT VOID, Charles Harris writes:

<http://preview.tinyurl.com/void-dt-alt-worlds>

CNN.com  
09/29/17

From Puerto Rico to Russia, Donald Trump is living in an alternate universe  
By Chris Cillizza, CNN Editor-at-large

[-csh]

Mark responds:

I am sure out there there are universes in which they do "borrow" ideas from the MT VOID and some where they don't. [-mrl]

**This Week's Reading** (book comments by Evelyn C. Leeper):

GREEK FIRE, POISON ARROWS & SCORPION BOMBS: BIOLOGICAL AND CHEMICAL WARFARE IN THE ANCIENT WORLD by Adrienne Mayor (ISBN 978-1-585-67608-8) documents the common usage over the centuries of what we think of as modern "weapons of mass destruction." While its enumeration of the numerous ancient accounts of such warfare (and the citation of modern instances that have particular parallels to them) shows how common they were, Mayor seems to think that her readers will be surprised by these ancient instances. Yet once she mentions poisoned arrows, or catapulting dead animals into besieged cities, the reader will immediately realize that, yes, there has been such warfare

through the centuries. So unless you are interested in the specific recipes for arrow poison various people used, or what disease a particular general tried to spread, this book will have little new to offer besides a long list of examples.

And speaking of subtitles, PARTNERS IN COMMAND by Joseph T. Glatthaar (which I reviewed in the 09/22/17 issue of the MT VOID) also has one; its full title is PARTNERS IN COMMAND: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEADERS IN THE CIVIL WAR. I am not sure when the practice of having a catchy but non-explanatory title, and a subtitle that then tells you what the book is about, became common, but it has been picked up by far too many conventions. The result is that the Pocket program, which has only the title, but not the description, is often useless for telling you what you might want to see. [-ec]

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Quote of the Week:

California is a fine place to live--if you happen to be  
an orange.

--Fred Allen

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