

ME. Oh, it was no power of any value to me. Only when I was thirty years old or so did I realize other people did not have this power and they were skeptical (to say the least) that I really did. But the power was there all right.

So what was this all about? Well, about 1980 our kitchen had some sort of electrical problem. The refrigerator was not running. The electrician said the circuit breaker must have popped. I told him, no, the refrigerator was getting power. It was just not turning on. How did I know that, he asked. Well, I could feel it. There was power running through the front of the refrigerator.

I could see by the look on his face that he thought I was some sort of idiot. At least I had Evelyn there to vouch for me. Except that she came in to the controversy on the electrician's side. She thought it was a put-on. Even Evelyn thought I was only pretending. I told her to gently rub her hand over the front of the refrigerator. She did and felt nothing. Now she was sure that I was trying to pull a stunt.

Mr. Electrician finished the task without my help, but he verified that I was correct about the circuit breaker. He still thought what I claimed to be doing was a hoax. This really piqued my curiosity. Were they really not feeling the sensation I was feeling? If I ran my fingertips lightly over the front of the fridge I would feel a vibration. It was almost an electrical buzzing with the vibration.

I suggested we try it with the fan in the den, which I had noted had the same property. I would leave the room and Evelyn would plug in the fan or unplug it or would do nothing. Then I would gently stroke the fan and see if I felt anything. The fan would be turned off but on each of ten trials it would be plugged in or not. It would be ten trials. Except it wasn't ten. Evelyn gave up after the sixth trial and declared she believed me. I had been given six trials and got it right every time. That was enough to convince her. I have never gotten a good enough explanation as to why my fingertips detect a funny, buzzy sensation when I run my fingertips over a surface that is slightly electrified. It has been suggested that there is a short circuit in a mechanism that has that problem. But Mark Leeper is the man with the power to feel electricity in a piece of metal.

Is that good enough to get me into the X-MEN? I know Stan Lee had a syndicated TV series called SUPERHUMANS. They showed what they claimed were genuine superhumans from around the world. On it guests would do superhuman stunts. If you looked you could see how the tricks were done. Most were poorly concealed carnival tricks, and you could figure out how they were done. My feat of feeling electricity was one step up. It was real. Honest. [-mrl]

SALVATION by **Peter F. Hamilton** (copyright 2018, Del Rey, 564 pp, ASIN B07837SGSY, Tantor Audio, 19 hours and 2 minutes, ASIN B07DVNWH9R, narrated by John Lee) (audio book review by Joe Karpierz):

Peter F. Hamilton is one of those British authors who writes space opera/hard science fiction, along with folks like Alastair Reynolds, who seem to be wildly popular but don't get a lot of recognition--although Reynolds does get more recognition than Hamilton does, and has recently had Hugo nominated novellas (*SLOW BULLETS* in 2016 and *TROIKA* in 2011). Most notably absent from awards rolls is Iain M. Banks, whose "Culture" novels are widely loved but oddly lack recognition. Banks' *THE ALGEBRAIST* was a finalist for the Best Novel Hugo in 2005, but it wasn't a Culture book.

Hamilton writes space operas that are grand in scope, with multitudes of characters and complex plots. His stories are more idea than character driven, which is probably why these days his books do not make the short lists for awards. What his stories are is traditional old school science fiction, providing a grand sense of wonder with modern sensibilities--except for that whole character thing. I've heard many a reader say "I stopped reading that book (which ever "that" book is) because none of the characters grabbed me and I didn't care for any of them." That's fair, of course. My love of science fiction as a youth was driven by these idea driven, sense of wonder stories. Many people must still feel that way, as writers like Hamilton still sell but don't win awards.

SALVATION is the first novel in the "Salvation Sequence", to be followed by *SALVATION LOST* and *SAINTS OF SALVATION*. It is not set in the Commonwealth universe, but in a brand new universe. Like the books of the Commonwealth Universe, the story advances in multiple settings, with seemingly unrelated characters and events, which eventually join up at the end to knock the reader for a loop. *SALVATION* has an additional twist; the story also follows two different timelines. The first is set in 2204, and the other is in the far future 51st century. The linking technology is quite literally linking; quantum entangled trans-dimensional gates that are placed throughout the galaxy. This has the effect of making traditional modes of transportation outdated and useless. Still, there are places that spaceships can't yet go.

In the 2200s, an unknown space ship is found on a planet that has been recently explored, and a team of experts and specialists are sent to the planet to investigate the ship and its contents. In the 51st century, the story follows the development of specially genetically engineered troops whose purpose is to fight and destroy an ancient alien enemy.

You wouldn't think these two things are related, would you? Yes, yes, you would.

I found the portion of the novel that deals with 2204 much more readable, accessible, and interesting. I would think that's

because the soldiers of the 51st century are foreign, almost alien to me. We see how the genetically engineered military units are built, trained, and come together. But that part of the story line doesn't really hold any interest for me. Well, except until the very end.

SALVATION is typical Hamilton, starting out with a sprawling story, the parts of which don't seem to fit together. And yet, as with any other Hamilton story, the parts DO fit together, and a narrative that doesn't seem to be making any sense comes together just when it needs to. I wouldn't call it the best of his novels, but since it's the beginning of something new I think it needs to be given a chance. I look forward to SALVATION LOST.

John Lee once again proves to be an outstanding narrator for a Hamilton novel. His tone and inflection reflect the majesty of a star spanning story as well as the complexity of the plot that Hamilton has written. He seems to be well suited for space opera; he was also great as the narrator of Reynolds' THE PREFECT. I look forward to his narration of the next book in the series. [-jak]

ASTOUNDING (letter of comment by Jim Susky):

In response to [Joe Karpierz's review of ASTOUNDING: JOHN W. CAMPBELL, ISAAC ASIMOV, ROBERT A. HEINLEIN, L. RON HUBBARD, AND THE GOLDEN AGE OF SCIENCE FICTION](#) in the 11/23/18 issue of the MT VOID, Jim Susky writes:

Please extend my thanks to Joe Karpierz for reviewing ASTOUNDING: JOHN W. CAMPBELL, ISAAC ASIMOV, ROBERT A. HEINLEIN, L. RON HUBBARD, AND THE GOLDEN AGE OF SCIENCE FICTION and especially for a taste of the gossip and rumors in that book.

(I have always regarded "gossip" and "rumor" to mean second- (or more distant) hand yak yak without regard to its falsity--or its lack) I especially like how the figures in the book figured into Joe's early fandom. Like him, I read BALL FOUR at a formative age, but do not recall any particular disappointment about ballplayers when I first read it at age 13 (that came much later, when certain Pirates players were implicated in a "cocaine scandal"). Like Asimov's non-fiction/fiction writing ratio, my reading goes 9-to-1 these days and I shall regard ASTOUNDING to have a similar truth/fiction quotient.

My own fandom includes Asimov's sketches of JW Campbell and the redoubtable Heinlein--and recall nothing about Hubbard--who, I understand is "rumored" to have never written non-fiction (not that I read a single word of Hubbard). (Said another way, I will get the book only because of Campbell, Heinlein, and the Good Doctor.) Asimov, in his autobiography, noted that Heinlein's politics had shifted right since he first knew him and speculated that this was to please the new wife after remarrying. I will be interested to see if ASTOUNDING addresses this.

Finally, I will indulge in a publishing gripe.

In 1989 I first used MS Word (2.0) on a Mac SE (running System 6.x). The version of Word offered a very-easy-to-use footnote feature - which I gladly used for 30 issues of a three-column monthly newsletter. Thirty years later, the vast majority of publishers persist in putting "notes" at the back--thus assuring most of them will not be read. [-js]

Evelyn adds:

Jim reports that he is safe and well after the 7.0 earthquake that struck Anchorage last week. [-ecl]

Penguin Quote and Quotes in General (letter of comment by Paul Dormer):

In response to [Denise Moy's comments on the source of the quote](#) in the 11/30/18 issue of the MT VOID, Paul Dormer writes:

[Denise Moy writes.] "When I checked the quote on Google, I found this tidbit which offers no verifiable information about the girl or the book club: <https://www.futilitycloset.com/2011/12/31/cold-shoulder/>." [-dm]

That's the problem with quotes found on the internet.

I think I mentioned a few weeks back that I have a diary that gives a quote at the bottom of each page. One was "Both my marriages were failures! Number one departed, and number two stayed" which was attributed to the composer Gustav Mahler. And, indeed, I can find that one on the Internet, too:

<https://www.azquotes.com/quote/1046757>

Trouble is, I can find no evidence that Mahler was married more than once. (Alma Schindler, of course, made famous by the Tom Lehrer song.) [-pd]

Evelyn notes:

Alma Maria Mahler Gropius Werfel was born Alma Maria Schindler. [-ecl]

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

THE IDEA OF PROGRESS by J. S. Bury (ISBN 978-0-486-25421-0) was written in 1931 or so. (It was published in 1932.) The world was in the depths of the Great Depression, but Bury could still see that humanity was making progress (or maybe he made himself see it). He could see that we would pass through the economic problems and resume our progress (though I doubt he foresaw that it would take another world war to heal the economy). But he was blind-sided by his faith in something that seemed so obvious then, and so false now:

"As time is the very condition of the possibility of Progress, it is obvious that the idea would be valueless if there were any cogent reason for supposing that the time at the disposal of humanity is likely to reach a limit in the near future. If there were good cause for believing that the earth would be uninhabitable in A.D. 2000 or 2100 the doctrine of Progress would lose its meaning and would automatically disappear. It would be a delicate question to decide what the minimum period of time which must be assured to man for his future development, in order that Progress should possess value and appeal to the emotions. The recorded history of civilization covers 6000 years or so, and the idea of our conceptions of time-distances, we might assume that if we were sure of a period ten times as long ahead of us the idea of Progress would not lose its power of appeal. Sixty thousand years of *historical* time, when we survey the changes which have come to pass in six thousand, opens to the imaginations a range vast enough to seem almost endless.

"This psychological question, however, need not be decided. For science assures us that the stability of the present conditions of the solar system is certified for many myriads of years to come. Whatever gradual modifications of climate there may be, the planet will not cease to support life for a period which transcends and flouts all efforts of imagination. In short, the *possibility* of Progress is guaranteed by the high probability, based on astro-physical science, of an immense time to progress in."

The fact is that in 1931, we had no concept of "nuclear winter" or how the same effect could occur from, say, a meteorite. In retrospect, it seems obvious, especially since the earth had already gone through "the Year Without a Summer" in 1816 after the cataclysmic eruption of Mount Tambora in 1815. At any rate, the threat of a meteor strike was not on people's radar then (not that they had radar). Bury's belief that all climate modifications would be gradual and not so much as to threaten life is touching, if misguided. And while it may be true that *life* will survive, there is no guarantee that *human life* would do so. In this regard, Bury seems to put humans back in that privileged role as having some special protection from a higher power, or at least so it seems now that we have experienced the extinction or near-extinction of so many species.

So what does this do to the idea of progress (or as Bury always writes it, "the idea of Progress")? Do we return to the ancient idea of cycles: humanity rises to a Golden Age, then sinks to the depths, then rises again, and so the cycle repeats? Or do we embrace the medieval Christian idea that we have our "Golden Age" in the Garden of Eden, and have been descending ever since, getting worse and worse until God ends the (earthly) world? Or is it more a progression of waves: the dinosaurs had their rise and fall, then the mammals (including humans), and after us some other form of life will take their place? The last has echoes of LAST AND FIRST MEN by Olaf Stapledon, since the "men" that follow use are truly different species. Or of Russell Hoban's observation in PILGERMANN: "We are, for example, clever enough to know that a year is a measure of passage, not permanence; we call the seasons spring, summer, autumn, and winter, knowing that they are continually passing one into the other. We are not surprised at this but when we give to seasons of another sort the names Rome, Byzantium, Islam, or Mongol Empire we are astonished to see that each one refuses to remain what it is."

Of course, it is not just Bury who makes statements that seem foolish in retrospect. In the late 17th century, Charles Perrault wrote, "Our age has, in some sort, arrived at the summit of perfection. And since for some years the rate of progress is much slower and appears almost insensible.--as the days seem to cease lengthening when the solstice is near--it is pleasant to think that probably there are not many things for which we need envy future generations."

Of course, a common feeling, first expressed by Jerome Cardan in the 16th century, and promoted by Francis Bacon in the 17th century was that the three greatest inventions of the Middle Ages were the compass, the printing press, and gunpowder. These were attributed to Europeans, of course, as the "advanced" race, and it was only later (recently?) that all three (and paper, often included in a "Big Four") were invented by the Chinese.

Bury summarizes Rene Descartes' contribution to the idea of Progress as not embodied in his mathematics, but in the two basic principles he espoused: "the supremacy of reason and the invariability of the laws of nature." The former destroyed the appeal to authority that had led "natural philosophers" to rely on Aristotle and Aquinas without question, and the latter meant that there was no room for Providence--the intervention of God--in natural events. This led to a rise in Deism, the belief that God created the Universe and its natural laws, and then stepped back from it and let the Universe run itself.

Bury also says, "At present the [human] race is not more than seven or eight thousand years old..." It may be true that civilization is seven or eight thousand years old, but the human race is closer to 200,000 years old.

In a theme that has been repeated, more recently by Jared Diamond, "[Rousseau] ascribed to metallurgy and agriculture the fatal resolution which brought [the original] Arcadian existence to an end. Agriculture entailed the origin of property in land. Moral and social inequality were introduced by the man who first enclosed a piece of land and said, This is mine, and found people simple enough to believe him. He was the founder of civil society."

L'AN 2440 by Sebastien Mercier was published in 1770; L'AN 2000 by Restif de la Bretonne was published in 1790. Both were forerunners of Edward Bellamy's LOOKING BACKWARD, and if one considers the latter science fiction, then Mercier and Bretonne are earlier science fiction authors than Mary Shelley.

Bury does note, "You may establish social equality by means of laws and institutions, yet the equality actually enjoyed may be very incomplete."

Bury's condensation of Kant's thoughts seem to be quite psychohistorical (in the Asimovian sense). "Individual men do not obey a law. ... The problem for the philosopher is to discover a meaning in this senseless current of human actions, so that the history of creatures who pursue no plan of their may yet admit of a systematic form."

And finally, Bury, weighs in on the Great Man vs. Tide of History theories, with:

"The reader of the PHILOSOPHIE POSITIVE will also observe that Comte has not grappled with a fundamental question which has to be faced in unravelling the woof of history or seeking a law of events. I mean the question of contingency. It must be remembered that contingency does not in the least affect the doctrine of determinism; it is compatible with the strictest interpretation of the principle of causation. A particular example may be taken to show what it implies. ...

"It may plausibly be argued that a military dictatorship was an inevitable sequence of the French Revolution. This may not be true, but let us assume it. Let us further assume that, given Napoleon, it was inevitable that he should be the dictator. But Napoleon's existence was due to an independent causal chain which had nothing whatever to do with the course of political events. He might have died in his boyhood by disease or by an accident, and the fact that he survived was due to causes which were similarly independent of the causal chain which, as we are assuming, led necessarily to an epoch of monarchical government. The existence of a man of his genius and character at the given moment was a contingency which profoundly affected the course of history. If he had not been there another dictator would have grasped the helm, but obviously would not have done what Napoleon did.

"It is clear that the whole history of man has been modified at every stage by such contingencies, which may be defined as the collisions of two independent causal chains. Voltaire was perfectly right when he emphasised the role of chance in history, though he did not realise what it meant. This factor would explain the oscillations and deflections which Comte admits in the movement of historical progression. But the question arises whether it may not also have once and again definitely altered the direction of the movement. Can the factor be regarded as virtually negligible by those who, like Comte, are concerned with the large perspective of human development and not with the details of an episode? Or was Renouvier right in principle when he maintained 'the real possibility that the sequence of events from the Emperor Nerva to the Emperor Charlemagne might have been radically different from what it actually was'?

"[Footnote: He illustrated this proposition by a fanciful reconstruction of European history from 100 to 800 A.D. in his UCHRONIE, 1876. He contended that there is no definite law of progress: 'The true law lies in the equal possibility of progress or regress for societies as for individuals.]" [-ecl]

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Quote of the Week:

All truth is not to be told at all times.
--Samuel Butler

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