



Footfall

Larry Niven , Jerry Pournelle

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They first appear as a series of dots on astronomical plates, heading from Saturn directly toward Earth. Since the ringed planet carries no life, scientists deduce the mysterious ship to be a visitor from another star.

The world's frantic efforts to signal the aliens go unanswered. The first contact is hostile: the invaders blast a Soviet space station, seize the survivors, and then destroy every dam and installation on Earth with a hail of asteroids.

Now the conquerors are descending on the American heartland, demanding servile surrender--or death for all humans.

Footfall Details

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Author : Larry Niven , Jerry Pournelle

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From Reader Review Footfall for online ebook

Peter Tillman says

I still think this is the best alien-invasion story I've ever read. Granted, it's hard to write a sensible invasion story, given that

- a) it's hard to think of a reason for rational aliens to invade, and
- b) if they did, they should win overwhelmingly. See rifles vs. spears.

But it makes a great *story*, and N&P have given probably as reasonable a backstory as anyone could. As an example of high-level page-turner storytelling, Footfall still rings my chimes. I've read it three times, plus the last time I picked it up some years back, to jog my memory about something, I got sucked in again and spent the afternoon rereading the good parts. "Orion will Rise" -- all right!

Footfall is dragged down a bit by dated political background: the USSR is alive and well here, and is portrayed as considerably stronger and healthier than it actually was in 1985. I'd skim over the Russian scenes; in fact the book is pretty slow-moving until the aliens arrive, so a quick skim of most of this early scene-setting material is all you need.

And make no mistake, once the action starts, you'll have no further complaints. Good stuff, folks. 4.5 stars. Maybe I should round it up?

Mark says

More catastrophe survivalist misogyny from Niven and Pournelle. Maybe it's because I just recently read Lucifer's Hammer, or maybe I'm getting older, but I'm finding my earlier affection for Niven's work fading. I'm sure there's a literary term for what the author's have done in Footfall and L.H., but I'm going to have to describe it- All of the characters we meet (and there are a lot) make the right decisions and are clearly superior to the common people who we don't ever really get to know. Put another way- the people we meet are great, and everyone else is either an idiot or a monster. It's like a superiority complex with an exception clause written in for your friends and family.

Henry Avila says

In the vast reaches of the immeasurable cosmos, a tiny dot is traveling at immense speed, in the background of the flickering lights, seen from the oblivious, distant Earth, the unimaginable is arriving, a small, unimportant looking object, first not recognized by the people of the third planet, (the preoccupied astronomers, for what it is) orbiting an average star, called Sol... Aliens, at last, are coming, we are not, is it good or bad, who knows? Alone...the destination, is our world, unprepared, divided, full of great hate, towards one another, almost helpless, nevertheless an enormous struggle for survival ensues, millions will perish , the blue planet will never be the same...They call themselves these strangers, from a nearby, dying, star system, a few light-years away, The FITHP, led by wily Herdmaster, Pastempeh-keph, resembling...fantastic baby elephants, with two snouts, henceforth, the Earthlings speak of them disparagingly, as "Snouts", their spaceship is not small, either, but huge , a mile long, carrying many thousands of aliens, and tons of equipment , in their long, endless journey, with generations living , and

dying, in this gigantic, almighty craft... the callous aliens, have come to conqueror..Destroying a Soviet space station, (written in 1985) welcoming them... they are not amused. President David Coffey of the United States, flees Washington, goes deep underground, to Cheyenne Mountain, Colorado Springs, Colorado. Maybe he'll be safe there, as the aliens, hurl down a big asteroid, others will fellow, hitting the Indian Ocean , a tremendous splash, occurs, a colossal tidal wave, forms, crushing the people living, near the coast, now dying there, by the sea, India disappears, other nations go dark, no lights, no humans left, the invaders land in Kansas, the local National Guard fights bravely, soon, the U.S.Army , intervenes but to no avail, these creatures from another world, have too much... unknown arms, with superior technology , that devastates the land, structures, roads, homes, dams, that give us electricity, refineries, that make precious gasoline, especially now, and the all important crops, that feed the country, the famous wheat fields, gone, the slaughter, smell, destruction, cannot be visualized, or comprehended...Still the Earth will not give up, no matter how feeble their efforts seem, to save civilization, that long, upwards climb from the mud, to hopefully, in the future, the stars, will not be denied, without an enormous resistance, the history of humanity shows this... A splendid story, exciting, with enough plot for a score of novels, one of the best alien invader books, ever written, for readers that enjoy this type of entertainment, they will not be disappointed...I wasn't.

terpkristin says

I thought long and hard about giving this one 4 stars. It was really a toss-up...I think on a different day, I might have done so. I really enjoyed this book, but sometimes it felt like there was a lot of "fluff" in it. I listened to the audio of the book, hoping to finish in time to discuss it with the SFF Audio crew. Unfortunately, I didn't quite finish in time. Their podcast episode was pretty good, it summed up a lot of my feelings.

One thing mentioned on the podcast was that this book wasn't particularly deep. There isn't any real allegory and aren't many "big ideas." I think that's part of why the book worked for me. When I read fiction books, I want to be entertained. Sure, it's a bonus if it makes me think with deeper meaning, but it's not my motivation. Sometimes, I find that "thinking" novels get too wrapped up in being thinking novels and forget about being entertaining. This one was mostly fun (though I admit, I did start thinking about the physics of a space war).

Footfall is a book about an alien invasion and earth's fight (mostly the fight of the US) against it. It was written in the mid-80's, when the Cold War was still in full swing, so for part of the book, it isn't so much the US vs. the aliens as much as it is the US with the possible help of the Soviets vs. the aliens...that is, if the Soviets don't double-cross the US. That's one reason that I ended up only giving the book 3 stars instead of 4: the plotline related to the international cooperation with the Soviets more or less abruptly ended about halfway through. I got to the end and wondered what had happened to that thread.

The first part of the book introduced a lot of characters...a **LOT** of characters, many that didn't matter by the end of the story. That's another part of the reason got 3 stars instead of 4. The characters seemed to be some of the fluff. Funnily, Tamahome's review, mentioning The Stand, made me also think of that book as I listened to this one. For some reason, I kept thinking of the Harry Red character in this book as very similar to Tom Cullen in The Stand. His role ended up somewhat similar, and while Harry wasn't mentally challenged, he did seem to be a character that many people underestimated.

After the characters (124, according to Tam?!?!) were introduced, the second part of the book dealt with the response on earth, a "joint response" of sorts requiring the US and the USSR to trust each other and work

together. Given the time period when the book was written, this was a relatively unheard of idea. The third (and final) part of the book was about the response in space, culminating with a battle in the waning chapters. It's odd, I usually knock a book if the ending feels rushed; so many books have a final "battle" or other climax point and then do a very quick wrap-up of "everybody lived happily ever after" (or something). Though the most intense parts of the book were at the end, it *didn't* feel rushed. Heck, the book didn't exactly have a true ending or resolution. But it worked.

I haven't read any other books jointly written by Niven and Pournelle. The only other Niven book I've read is Ringworld (a book I didn't enjoy). When I used to listen to TWiT, I didn't enjoy Pournelle as a guest, he seemed out of touch. Needless to say, I was skeptical about reading this...but I found it surprisingly enjoyable, and I'm glad I read it.

Other things I jotted down while reading:

-As with most books, the president seemed "too perfect" (at least, for most of the book). The part at the beginning where he said something to the effect of, "I won't be a great president, but I'll be a very good president," was especially wishful thinking.

-Why did they call the time "H minus"? Most US launches use "T minus" (for time minus). French launches use H- for "heure" or "time."

-The comment about the "soaring structure" of the IAD terminal building was funny. You don't see that building as you leave the airport, once you're on the road to Washington, DC. As much as I fly into and out of that airport, I can't say I've ever paid much attention to the shape of the building.

-I cracked up when they mentioned that there was a sign for the "Bureau of Public Roads Research" marking the entrance to the CIA. It *is* true that the Federal Highway Administration is accessed via the same road as the one for the CIA.

-I thought it was funny (and wish it had been explored more) to see how the aliens interpreted human things, such as clothes (why do humans need clothes? To protect their fragile skin? For humidity control?). That said, for a race/entity that has received radio and TV transmissions from earth, it's surprising that they didn't have a better understanding of humans...

-The description of the traffic getting out of LA reminded me of The Stand.

-I think that Niven and Pournelle made a small nod to Douglas Adams and The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy when Harry was doing his back stretches using a towel on the side of the road. He was approached by another person who asked why he had a towel, and Harry said that a towel was a necessity for travel. I smiled at that.

-Why did the Soviet Union involvement in the story drop off so suddenly?

Bruce says

Compulsively readable page turner. Perhaps the most "realistic" aliens invasion of earth novel I have ever read. My second time around reading this, 15 years later, left me with nearly the same high level of delight as last time.

And the importance of science fiction writers to the war effort? Maybe less realistic, but still a lot of fun.

Of course, aliens invading earth is really the perfect setup for what is a pro-military somewhat "conservative" world view. Endless accumulation of nuclear weapons? Wish we had more. Military capable space technology? More. High environmental impact of human activity? When the aliens come, they will be much harder on our biosphere.

So while I reread this us vs. them classic with great pleasure, there was also a bit of a bad taste in my mouth from the political slant of the writing. Still worth 5 stars of fun, though, and hardly dated at all despite being written before the breakup of the Soviet Union and the Challenger disaster.

Manny says

Elephant-like aliens attack Earth. Plucky Earthlings fight back. It's actually not at all bad if you like that kind of thing.

This book was described somewhere as "a rich tapestry". I recently read *99 Ways To Tell A Story*, which has a witty page telling the story using the conventions of the Bayeux Tapestry, and I suddenly saw *Footfall* retold in the same way.

I think it would work quite well. To start off with, in a tapestry you *expect* all the characters to be two-dimensional. What else would they be? And I would so like to see some of the episodes rerendered *à la Bayeux* with Latin subtitles. For example, "Aliens Dump Meteorite Into Indian Ocean", "Humans Build Atom-Bomb Powered Spacecraft And Attack Alien Mother-Ship" and, the one which I for some reason thought of first, "Heroic Ecologist Kills Scummy Journalist And Buries Him In His Compost Heap". Come on... there must be a suitably crazy graphic artist out there who wants to do it?

Mike says

Just good, old fashioned alien invasion, action, science. What else would you want for a good summer read!

fromcouchtomoon says

"...and blood, amazingly red, hemoglobin for sure, like some madman had bombed a Red Cross blood bank."

The metaphors, amazingly compared, similes for sure, like some hackmen had written a crappy genre book without really giving a shit.

Charles says

A good alien invasion story with some fresh aspects to it. The enemy resemble small elephants and have a herd culture to match. This leads to many misunderstandings but also to some opportunities. I thought the opening was really good, with the introduction of some interesting characters. It was fun to learn about the enemy, called "snouts" by humans. The late middle sagged a bit for me but it picked up again at the end. SF writers become some heroes in this one. That was cool.

The book is long and I felt a bit longer than it needed to be. We are introduced to a whole lot of characters, but quite a few of these really have little to do with the story as it goes along. They might have been removed

without harm to the book. There were a couple of places where the politics, which seemed to me to be worn on the sleeves of the writers, seemed out of place in a story about "humanity" facing an invasion. Probably many of the feelings expressed were accurate to the way humans would really be, but they certainly didn't show some of the characters in a good light. All in all, though, I enjoyed and it kept me reading.

Jen says

Although I generally enjoy Niven and Pournelle's work, this one was just too heavy handed. Footfall was everything I dislike about sci-fi condensed into one book: self-gratifying and self-absorbed writers writing themselves as heroes, ridiculous aliens, extreme nationalism, sexism up the whazoo, and a complete disregard for character development. Some of these are explainable (though not justifiable) from a context-sensitive reading. Indeed, maybe I wouldn't have hated this book if I'd read it in 1985. But that does not make it enjoyable now-- nor does it cover the plethora of flaws that can only be explained by shoddy craftsmanship. I read the entire book, yes. But I regretted it. Everything good about this book appears in other sci-fi, where it is done better.

Mike (the Paladin) says

In this day of wonderful, kind, helpful aliens or omnipotent, unstoppable, tree hugging, environmentalist aliens a nice old fashioned "invaders from outer space" story is kind of nice. I like it. I enjoyed it. Not only a good "yarn" (like the word??? okay, "a good story" ...sigh) but also some nice insights into the way people think. While I can't quite give a blanket recommendation to Larry Niven's works, this is one I really like. So, prepare for the worst...and ready yourself for aliens who want to dominate the world.

Although, I find it hard to believe aliens who resemble elephants as bad guys. :)

Tamahome says

Audiobook is 24 hrs. About 4&1/2 hours in. There's a zillion (well 124) characters, lots of women and sexual intrigue, and it's set nearly in the present, with an oncoming alien attack. I guess they were going for a mainstream bestseller like Lucifer's Hammer (8 years earlier), and apparently they succeeded, back in the 80's. It starts slow. I'm listening in the car, and get confused as to who's talking. There's a lot of Russian/Cold War stuff that we don't worry about much these days. At least someone just got into space.

I wonder where that meteor over Russian recently in real life came from...

Ok, the crap really hits the fan in part 2 chapter 11 around 5&1/2 hours...

The audiobook chapters are 1 higher than the paper book because of the prologue.

I don't know if alien baby elephants talking with a lisp are going to be effective in a movie version...

Yes, there's an alien named 'Takpusseh'.

Maybe they're trying to be like Stephen King's *The Stand* (1978) with all these characters?

A problem with the audiobook: all alien names are pronounced with a lisp, making it hard to figure out who's talking.

On the positive side, a lot of cool sf ideas are discussed in chapter 20 (Schemes) ('Project Thor', 'Project Orion'), from 3 sf writers based on ('Tukerized?') Niven, Pournelle, and Heinlein.

Well that spear chapter was unpleasant.

FINISH:

Not bad. Long on characterization. If you want short sf books bursting with ideas, this might not be the book for you. If you like mainstream thrillers this may be more your cup of tea. I'm told this is reminiscent of Tom Clancy, but I haven't read any. The 'device' they build at the end is the highlight. The story certainly continues to the last line. The print may be preferable to the audio, because of the lisping aliens. I'm told *Lucifer's Hammer* has less characters. Maybe I would prefer that.

Our podcast discussion with Paul Weimer (spoilers) <http://www.sffaudio.com/?p=46207>

DRAMATIS PERSONAE (124)

THE DISCOVERERS (5)

Linda Crichton Gillespie, a Washington debutante

Jeanette Crichton, her sister

Dr. Richard Owen, astronomer

Dr. Mary Alie Mouton, astronomer

Major General Edmund Gillespie, USAF astronaut

WASHINGTON (17)

David Coffey, President of the United States

Mrs. Jeanne Coffey, First Lady

The Honorable Wesley T. Dawson, a Congressman from California

Mrs. Carlotta Trujillo Dawson, his wife

Roger Brooks, Special Assignments Reporter, Washington Post

James Frantza, White House Chief of Staff

Henry Morton, Vice President

Dr. Arthur Hart, Secretary of State

Hap Aylesworth, Special Assistant to the President for Political Affairs

Ted Griffin, Secretary of Defense

Admiral Thorwald Carrell, National Security Advisor

Peter McCleve, Attorney General

Tim Rosenthal, Secretary of the Treasury

Connie Fuller, Secretary of Commerce

Arnold Riggs, Secretary of Agriculture

Jack Clybourne, Presidential Protection Unit, Secret Service

THE SOVIETS (13)

Academician Pavel Aleksandrovich Bondarev, Director, Lenin Institute
Lorena Polinova, his secretary and mistress
Marina Nikolayevna Bondarev, his wife
Boris Ogarkov, Party Secretary at the Institute
Andrei Pyatigorskiy, Assistant Director, Lenin Institute
General Nikolai Nikolayevich Narovchatov, Party Third Secretary, later
Party First Secretary
Chairman Anatoliy Vladimirovich Petrovskiy, Chairman of the Supreme
Soviet
Ilya Trusova, Chairman of the KGB
Dmitri Parfenovich Grushin, KGB officer
Marshal Leonid Edmundovich Shavyrin, Marshal of the Long Range Strategic
Rocket Forces

SURVIVORS AND OTHERS (22)

Harry Reddington, unemployed minstrel
Jeri Wilson, Senior Editor, Harris Wickes Press
Melissa Wilson, her daughter
William Adolphos Shakes
Kevin Shakes
Miranda Shakes
Isadore and Clara Leiber
George and Vicki Tate-Evans
Jack and Harriet McCauley
Martin Carnell, Show-dog breeder
Ken Dutton, Bookstore manager
Cora Donaldson
Sarge Harris, friends of Ken Dutton
Patsy Clevenger
Anthony Graves
Maximilian Rohrs, general contractor, Bellingham
Evelyn Rohrs, former Washington socialite
Ben Lafferty, Sheriff Whatcom County, Washington
Leigh Young, Deputy Sheriff
Whitey Lowenthal, welder
Carol North, citizens of Lauren, Kansas
Rosalee Neill

KOSMOGRAD (6)

Colonel Arvid Pavlovich Rogachev, Commander of Kosmograd
Nikolai, onetime Sergeant, Red Air Force
Allana Aleksandrovna Tutsikova, Deputy Commander
Dr. Giselle Beaumont, French scientist
The Honorable George N' Bruhna, Nigerian politician
Captain John Greeley, USAFU astronaut

THE FITHP (22)

Herdmaster Pastempeh-keph
Advisor Fathisteh-tulk

K'turfookeph, the Herdmaster's mate
Chowpeentulk, Advisor's mate
Fookerteh, the Herdmaster's son
Attackmaster Koothfektil-rnsp
Defensemaster Tantarent-fid
Breaker-Two Takpusseh (later Takpusseh-yamp)
Breaker-One Rztupisp-minz
Fistareth-thuktun, priest and historian
Koolpooleh, male assistant to Fistarteh-thuktun
Paykurtank, female assistant to Fistarteh-thuktun
Octuple leader Pretheeteh-damh
Tashayamp, female assistant to Takpusseh (later his mate)
Octuple Leader Chintithpit-mang, sleeper
Shreshleemang, Chintithpit-mang's mate
Eight-cubed Leader Harpanet
Eight-cubed Leader Siplistepth
Rashinggith, warrior (Year Zero Fithp)
Birithart-yamp, warrior in Africa
Pheegorun, warrior in Africa, died by spear
Thiparteth-fuft, guard officer

COLORADO SPRINGS (10)

Sergeant Ben Mailey, U.S. Army
Sherry Atkinson
Robert (Robert Heinlein) and Virginia Anson
the Threat Team
Wade (Jerry Pournelle) and Jane Curtis
Bob Burnham
Lieutenant General Harvey Toland, U.S. Army
The Honorable Joe Dayton, Speaker of the House
Senator Alexander Haswell, President Pro Temps of the Senate
Senator Raymond Carr, Senator from Kansas

WARRIORS AND PRISONERS (29)

Nat Reynolds (Larry Niven)
Joe Ransom
John Woodward
Carrie Woodward, prisoners
Alice MeLennon
Gary Capehart
Ensign Jeff Franklin
Hamilton Gamble
Dr. Arthur Grace
"Tiny" Pelz, crewman
Michael Jason Daniels
Samuel Cohen
Roy Cuber, shuttle pilots
Jay Hadley
Commander Anton Villars, Captain, USNS Ethan Allen

Colonel Julius Carter, U.S. Special Forces
Lieutenant Jack Carruthers, U.S. Special Forces
Lieutenant Ivan Semeyusov, Soviet Expeditionary Force
Brant Chisholm, South African farmer
Katje Chisholm, his wife
Mvubi, Zulu warrior
Niklaus Van Der Stel, Afrikaner Commando
Juana Trujillo Morgan, wife of Major Morgan
Lieutenant Colonel Joe Halverson
Major David Morgan, Kansas National Guard
Captain Evan
Corporal Jimmy Lewis
Captain George Mason

Briane Pagel says

I think one of the things I like best about *Footfall* is the sheer scope of the story. It's fitting, I think, for an end-of-the-world story to have a giant cast and a universal reach -- in this case, outside of the galaxy and spanning 15+ years between when the story starts and when the invasion of Earth begins.

I like big sprawling books that you can really sink into. People talk about "world building" and I vaguely understand/care about what they say, but world building like Larry Niven does in *Footfall* is rare. There are characters and interrelationships and sidebars and dead-ends and all of it, somehow, serves the novel.

That's really a testament to the writing. Take two side characters, John Fox and Marty something-or-other. Originally, John is introduced when one of the characters, Roger, a reporter, is looking for someone to interview at the time the spaceship that ultimately invades Earth has been discovered. Fox talks to the reporter about his concerns over a dam or something that threatens the Death Valley area, and the reporter listens more out of politeness than interest; he even says as much, given that the big story is *An Alien Ship Is Headed To Earth*.

That's kind of a throwaway moment, almost, except that later on John Fox shows with Marty. Marty is first introduced as a dog-show breeder who is on the fringes of a survivalist group that ends up making their shelter right outside of the town located [SPOILER ALERT!] in the same place the US decides to pick to build its spaceship to fight back against the invaders. Marty drifts back into the story later on, leaving some friends in Los Angeles to go hide in the desert with John Fox. This all leads to a scene where [SERIOUS SPOILER ALERT] Fox and Marty drive up to a ridge right after the invaders drop a 'dinosaur killer' asteroid that causes a salt water downpour in Death Valley. They watch the rain fill in what used to be a sea bed and Fox makes a brief speech about how he fought nuclear power and was a fool, because had he allowed science to progress then the humans might have been able to fight back against the invaders, and he wouldn't be watching all the fragile, perfectly-adapted creatures of Death Valley drowning.

It's the kind of moment that could be preachy or overdone; it's essentially Larry Niven and his co-author Jerry Pournelle being almost didactic: they're hard-science guys who want people to be pro-scientific advances. But it doesn't come across that way. Instead, the message Fox and Marty convey is buried within a story, because it was chapters and chapters ago that Fox was even introduced, and Marty's just there as a sort of avatar of the reader, watching Fox.

That kind of large-scale writing is tough to do. What Niven and Pournelle do so well here doesn't work as well in other books -- I gave up on Niven's *Building Harlequin's Moon*, as it was more science lecture than story -- but when it does work it's incredible to read. The story keeps threading through these new characters and overlapping subplots and winding back, and even for a guy like me who has a hard time keeping track of characters, it's easy to follow.

Scott says

Moderately entertaining artifact of the 1980s, predictably sociologically dated (and occasionally downright embarrassing in its treatment of sexual issues), but that isn't the biggest problem here. *Footfall* is a shining example of science fiction's general refusal to face up to the challenge of conceiving a plausible invasion by an extraterrestrial power without stacking the deck severely in humanity's favor through biology, psychology, or plain old stupidity. Here our species faces the peril of a world-beatingly superior technology, as commanded by an alien species too psychologically limited and developmentally disabled to actually beat us with it. John W. Campbell, Jr.'s famous exhortation was: "Write me a creature that thinks as well as a man or better than a man, but not like a man." The aliens of *Footfall* meet the third criterion but conveniently fall far short of the first two, stumbling half-assedly through their attempted invasion until we take their high-tech toys out of their hands.

The appearance of a cadre of thinly fictionalized science fiction personalities from real life (Robert and Virginia Heinlein, Joe Haldeman, Niven and Pournelle themselves, plus several others whose counterparts aren't so readily apparent) is less embarrassing for its grandiose wish-fulfillment than for the astoundingly unscientific presumption these folks are allowed to get away with. Time and again, they correctly diagnose the intricacies of the alien civilization at a glance. For example, upon noticing that the alien mothership carries sixty-four smaller vessels, one of the writers proclaims that they must use a base-8 (octal) numerical system, which, in a universe where the contrivance of the authors wasn't pressing down firmly on the scales of probability, would be like trying to divine the human numerical system from one picture of assorted aircraft on the deck of the U.S.S. *Nimitz*. The number could mean everything or it could mean nothing... perhaps 64 was all the aliens had room or time to install. Perhaps it was simply the most convenient and symmetrical arrangement for the mass of the smaller craft.

Even more ridiculous is the way the Niven analog correctly deduces the deeply-ingrained herd mentality of the aliens by... well, by watching them move and fight in units for a few minutes. Because human beings certainly never move or fight in groups! Great and incontrovertible weight is given to purely circumstantial evidence, and for all that this sort of book is generally touted as "hard" science fiction, no justice is done here to the most basic aspects of scientific analysis.

There are occasional moments of grace, such as the "Jayhawk War" sequence where a rootin' tootin' band of National Guard go racing off with armor and helicopter support to kick some E.T. butt and are promptly flattened from orbit with no survivors; for a brief instant the vital question of "how does humanity answer the unanswerable?" seems to be in play. But don't worry, folks, the space invaders still turn out to be just conveniently handicapped enough for us to get the best of them in the end. I wonder if the real universe will be so generous to us if we ever spot a large dark mass decelerating toward us from the edges of our solar system...

mark monday says

Footfall is an Independence Day (the movie) type book, about an alien invasion and a wide range of humans across the globe reacting to said invasion. I'm sure you've seen Independence Day and I hope you didn't like it because it sucked. but have you seen Mars Attacks? now that is a great alien invasion film. smart and hilarious. Footfall is much better than Independence Day but it is a far cry from Mars Attacks.

the first thing you should know about Footfall is that the aliens in question who are invading, sometimes slaughtering, and in general causing mass havoc across the earth *look like baby elephants*. that is fucking ingenious!

the second thing you should know about Footfall is that it features a bizarre and hilariously bad and hilariously awesome scene where some rural homespun types, a big city politician, some Soviet astronauts, and the baby elephant alien invaders screen and then discuss that classic film Deep Throat. what Deep Throat means about sex, about relations between the genders, about morality, and of course about whether anyone really gives blow jobs. then the whole thing degenerates into a hysterical argument about 'just us folks' types vs. 'big city feller' types and then the American way vs. the communist way. finally the baby elephants get frustrated and tell the humans that when they are in control, the humans will be able to live by their own rules - but the rules better be consistent and the humans better actually follow them. I literally could not believe what I was reading! that scene is a timeless classic.

I started off the review by comparing the book to a crappy mass-produced Hollywood special effects extravaganza because the issues of those kinds of products certainly plague Footfall. maybe because it was written by two authors, there is a certain blandness and an annoying repetitiousness to its writing. the prose, if you can call it that, is smooth and polished and utterly workmanlike. it indulges in all of the stereotypical character types of your typical lame Hollywood action movie. most of the ladies need to be rescued. most of the guys are strong and upright and dependable. there are annoying jerks who get what they deserve (especially that reporter, ha!) and there are wacky eccentrics who turn out to be heroic, of course. the Russians are often described as having 'crafty peasant' looks, which I did not know was a thing. everyone is white, white, white. after a while, I grew really weary of the humans and if this novel was all about that species, overall this would have been a tedious disappointment.

but then there are the baby elephants! Niven and Pournelle really outdid themselves on these aliens. fascinating, well-developed, by turns threatening and sympathetic, just beautifully rendered and utterly *alien* creations. a far cry from aliens who are basically humans in alien drag. these baby elephants turned Footfall into an often delightful and fascinating experience. and they are given vaguely Thai or Khmer names, which added a lot of color (cough) to their characterizations and which made it an odd experience to read while traveling around Cambodia. my companion was really disappointed that I was reading an alien invasion novel to fall asleep to after a whole day exploring Angkor ruins, but hey I'm a prosaic kind of guy.

I've had this book since I was a kid and I'm not sure why I took so long to read it. it is an 80s style book, so it has one of those 80s fold-out covers:

that cover mesmerized me. but I think it also disturbed young mark monday because there was something so sympathetic about that alien. and so I avoided the book until now. here's a close-up of that image:

those humans look quite threatening. the alien looks intriguing, like someone I'd like to sit down and have some coffee with. plus check out his little backpack! and that mirror to spy on threatening humans. and that teddy bear! adorable. I hope he didn't take that off of a slaughtered human because that would be rather a bummer. let's just assume he found it somewhere and decided to keep it. aww!

Holly Heisey says

I was hooked on Niven and Pournelle ever since I read *A Mote in God's Eye*, which hit every right button for a space-based alien contact epic. *Footfall* told a story closer to home, asking what if the aliens came to us at Earth, what would we really do, how would different groups of people react, and how would the aliens respond to the alien-ness of us?

Though it's familiar territory, *Footfall* really delves into the human aspect, extrapolating from hard science and politics to paint a very plausible scenario. I loved the characters, I cheered for them and shouted at them, and sat on the edge of my seat through the epic conflict at the end. Though the politics were from the Soviet era, the story itself did not feel that dated, and I moved along at the fast pace the authors set. The alien names were a bit much to pronounce at first, but I got used to them, and came to cheer for some of the aliens as much as the humans.

For any science fiction fan or fan of alien invasion thrillers, I'd highly recommend.

Amanda says

Worst. Aliens. Ever.

But seriously, that's 5 reading days that I'm never going to get back. I'm sure some people loves this book, but it was just not for me.

Craig says

Footfall is a fun alien invasion story, full of up-tempo optimism and enthusiastic good feeling for humanity, science fiction, and *The Right Stuff*. It's a happy, fast-paced beach read in the spirit of Independence Day.

Vfields Don't touch my happy! says

1995 - The first and best Science Fiction I ever read. I loved every second.

2016 - I thought it was time for a revisit to one of the best books I'd ever read and the book that taught me 'big & busy' was nothing to fear when picking a book. The cast of characters were many. Wes Dawson is wonderful, one character makes me mist up near the end, we're offered better female characters from Niven, there are aliens I could hate and even care about a few. *A word of note to readers: When 'Archangel Michael' is launched give yourself a large hunk of time to sit and let the momentum build to the end. It's worth it!* This was originally published in 1985 and I didn't feel like this was a dated story at all because people are just people.

I want to give this three more stars for standing the test of time and making me want to skip work to read.

Mary JL says

This is an excellent "invasion from outer space" book. The kind of good, old fashioned slam-bang adventure that was very prevalent in SF at one time.

One quirk of these elephantine invaders is: they will fight but if they surrender, they belong to the winning side permanently. So they are confused when humans surrender--and then fight back. They consider those humans to be dangerously "rogue", and kill them instead of conquering them.

Also, one of the aliens is captured by our side--and becomes a part of a think-tank against his fellows. And he remains on our side--in thier culture, once you yeild, you yeild totally.

Interesting battles and ideas; lots of fun and excitement. Not incredibly deep or philosophical but well worth reading.

Recommended for any science fiction fan. It will especially appeal to those who like "war of the worlds" type stories.
