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The Apocalypse occurs nine days prior to America's Tri-Centennial celebration - when relativistic bombs launched by an unknown alien civilization finally reach their destinations. One man sees them approaching - but by then, it is already too late. And in a brief, incomprehensible instant, every inhabited planetary surface in the solar system is wiped clean. Life has ceased to exist. Now all that is left of humanity is a handful of survivors hiding between the planets in mobile space research facilities and experimental habitats - a small, terrified remnant of civilization struggling to make some sense of the catastrophe that has obliterated their past and future...while searching desperately for a means of escape before the Intruders' doomsday technology can detect and destroy them. Astonishingly, on a dead and sterile Earth, two people remain alive - a Jesuit and a pilot aboard the deep-diving submersible, Alvin, protected from the devastation by the cold, enveloping waters. An historian and a scientist, it is they whom destiny has chosen to wander the surreal, empty wastes of a terrifying ghost planet - to battle fear, loneliness and encroaching madness...and to await the inevitable arrival of the annihilators from the stars.

The Killing Star Details

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From Reader Review *The Killing Star* for online ebook

Maxwell Edison says

Going to repost my review from printsf:

This is a book I read about on atomic rockets with quite a frightening premise regarding aliens:

1. THEIR SURVIVAL WILL BE MORE IMPORTANT THAN OUR SURVIVAL.

If an alien species has to choose between them and us, they won't choose us. It is difficult to imagine a contrary case; species don't survive by being self-sacrificing.

2. WIMPS DON'T BECOME TOP DOGS.

No species makes it to the top by being passive. The species in charge of any given planet will be highly intelligent, alert, aggressive, and ruthless when necessary.

3. THEY WILL ASSUME THAT THE FIRST TWO LAWS APPLY TO US.

It's a simple premise that may revolt most of us once the consequences are thought through, but the more time I spent thinking about it the more likely it seems, as the rules seem to transcend species. And it's hard to imagine species evolving without self-preserving traits which entail violence. *Atomic Rockets* discusses this premise much more in-depth here (note that the killing star is mentioned a few times before the section that actually discusses it, it's 4th result with CTRL-F): http://www.projectrho.com/public_html...

Fortunately the book has a lot more going for it than that. I was really pleasantly surprised with the amount of diverse topics. It's a real idea book, with everything presented worked out in an interesting and clever manner. This may bother some people as it does seem like the authors love certain ideas so much they crammed several books in to one. I'm personally not bothered as they do seem to fit. Certain ones provide the characters a place to be, others explain human society up to the point of its demise, and others explain why some really unexpected characters end up in the book and why they end up there and survive the initial onslaught.

Cloning is a big thing in the book, and ties in cleverly with the story. An unexpectedly pleasant part deals with an earlier catastrophe humans had to deal with before their demise. I don't want to spoil the nature but reading it was like watching a science documentary where some very unanticipated yet logical in hindsight things happen. The route certain things take are rarely direct and straightforward in this book yet they seem all the more real for that.

Obviously the book deals with the nature of our antagonist and their once again the authors present an interesting hypothesis about alien life. The book is mostly concerned with survivors of the initial apocalypse, survivors in very diverse situations that really makes each story a treat to read. Each one is also used to present clever weapons, clever tactics, and to show off our solar systems.

The only negative I have is the fact that some survivors do not face much of a challenge, it's clear who the authors intended to survive. I would put this book next to *Dragon's Egg* in terms of who it would appeal to, maybe also *Blindsight* as well. If learning stuff gives you pleasure, and the science in sci-fi attracts you give this book a try.

Jonathan says

Rule 1. Aliens will believe their survival is more important than our survival.

Rule 2. Wimps don't become top dogs.

Rule 3. Aliens will assume the the first two rules apply to us as well.

Pat Buchanan says

The biggest surprise book of my life. Not sure if I was just in the right mood or what, but this book caught me off guard with it's incredible writing, the deep characters and the rather unique story. This is the kind of sci-fi book you search and search for, and rarely find. I would put this book in the top 10 sci-fi books I've ever read - shoulder to shoulder with the likes of Old Man's War and Enders Game. Great, and different thinking about how man could use the natural aspects of space in order to hide from their enemy.

The problem is trying to find a copy of this book - I searched and searched, and finally found one that was a "normal" price. I'm not sure why people would think that someone would spend \$200+ a copy, but that is what they were selling for at t he time on eBay. Luckily, I found mine for cover price.

Years later, and this book is still on my mind. I really wish they would have written a sequel, as I would have like to have known how they handled "it".

Alastair Mayer says

Not exactly a sequel to Pellegrino's "Flying to Valhalla", but it could be on a very close timeline - there are many common elements, although the story is quite different. For having been written 24 years ago, it still holds up remarkably well, and the inexorable logic is just as chilling. There are a couple of weak spots, but overall enough action, good science, and intriguing concepts to earn its stars.

Ken Richards says

3.5 stars. Perhaps one of the most depressing books I have ever read! Begins with the destruction of Earth, and gets worse from there on.

Checkman says

A bleak and thought provoking novel. Basically it challenges all those who believe that being advanced instantly translates to being gentle, kind and civilized. The book takes aim at several well known advocates

of this philosophy. Carl Sagan singled out for the bulk of the criticism. There is also a rather amusing twist when the reason for the aliens exterminating Humanity is finally explained. You'll never look at *Star Trek* and the song "We Are The World" the same way after you read this book. One man's hero is another man's mortal threat and we shouldn't be so arrogant as to believe that we are the only species in the entire galaxy that is belligerent and destructive.

Intelligent, good hard science, dystopian, and a well written political/social commentary all rolled into one. Long out of print, but worth the search.

Jd says

Very, very interesting, but...

If 3.5 stars was an option that's what I would give it. The reason for the downgrade isn't the story, or even the prose, but the author himself. Occasionally he is wildly obnoxious and the presumptions are sometime insufferable. Between those moments remains 3.5 stars of interesting story laced with technological mind candy. The concept of "absorbic bombs" alone ignited in me hours of thought exercise.

Jay says

This book was absolutely terrifying when I first read it, not in the way a horror story is terrifying, but because of the *reason* the Earth is attacked. Are you an avid science fiction reader, secure in your conception of mankind's strengths and how mature intelligent races behave? This book will rip those notions to shreds.

Evan says

I finally finished this book, and it left me with a difficult task in appointing a star rating. It probably intrigued me on levels and will definitely be a book I bring up in many a science fiction discussion but I also found myself breezing through parts of it, and shaking my head at a few others. But the fundamental premise is one that I'll definitely bring up in any discussion of looking for life on other planets, or reading any story of first contact with an alien species.

Short summary: Turns out being able to travel at speeds fast enough for interstellar travel also means you have the ability to destroy a planet with a bombardment, and what's more, so could any other species to you. And there would be little to you could do to stop it, so it's basically like the Cold War if a nuclear first strike almost guaranteed total victory. It's enough to make you question whether we should be announcing our presence out into space at all. Those hoping for salvation from friendly green men may be making a leap of faith indeed.

The story itself deals with the few survivors of earth after such an attack. Quite bleak as you could imagine. The book employs a back and forth narrative, switching to different perspectives where we get a bunch of other speculative science fiction discussions, cloned dinosaurs as pets, an accidental genetically engineered bird flu that leaves crops at the mercy of unchecked insects, people addicted to virtual reality, etc. A large section deals with survivors led by a clone of Jesus and clone of Buddha trying to survive, and honestly

while I'm up for a science fiction book that respectfully and intelligently approaches religion, there's a lot of stumbles there and it treats generic liberal religious pluralism as a little too much of a shocking revelation (it also brings up some theories about Jesus' life that I think are not credible but I won't bog down the review here). The character study of a person told his is the 2nd coming of Jesus is interesting, it where I feel the book is in turn preaching to me that it fails a bit.

Still, definitely worth checking out for all fans of serious science fiction. Just uh...don't look for a happy story. This a tale of a bleak, cold, world where humanity is all but stamped out just because somebody else thought it might be a threat down the road.

Maciej says

While perhaps not the worst wanna-be-science fiction I've ever read (this distinction is held by WWW trilogy), it is definitely in top 10.

Perhaps I started with wrong expectations - my friend tried to sell this to me as hard SF, which this book is most definitely not. But I am not a person to hold onto my expectations for long, so was this book good, I'd just change my perspective.

The problem is, this book WANTS to be hard SF and fails miserably. The authors put a lot of effort into describing and calculating many mechanism which appear throughout the story, only to pop up magically "anti bombs" which convert all energy in the blast radius into matter. Like... what? Seriously? That's HARD SCIENCE exactly HOW? $E=mc^2$, which has been done to death and over again, is really not enough to satisfy this. Funny enough, the authors never care to tell WHERE is that mass going to, in what form, they just focus on visions of energy sucked out of everything in the vicinity. And let's not start on the entropy considerations...

That's the most glaring example, but there are others. Don't get me started on biology...

Okay, so it wants to be hard SF, but fails. It still could be a compelling, interesting story. Unfortunately it's not. The only characters which are remotely interesting either accomplish nothing and die (Cerans) or accomplish nothing and become captured (the Titanic survey duo). Emphasis on remotely, because their stories are stroked in painfully few brushes. Now, being a fan of Japanese culture, I have nothing against minimalism, I do not advocate that Baroque is the definition of perfection. But there is difference between minimalism of form which non the less conveys deep and complex stories by hints, and precise omissions and can be characterised as elegant versus minimalism of a lazy brute who just doesn't care to simulate the minds of his characters very well.

The thing could still be salvageable with the adversary, which in absence of interesting protagonists, could be the center of the story. Soooo the alien race which annihilates humans in one swift strike is a race of octopi. The way the authors tell us that gives me felling that they thought it's an original idea. Well, I am sorry, it is not. It wasn't in the 90' when the book was written and is now even less so.

Plot twist! They are paranoid, short-sighted (in a mental sense), blind, sociopathic octopi from ice world which were enslaved by robots that they built themselves! Woowow, really. Much creativity. Such depth. Very hard SF.

I fail to comprehend how can you build a race which is describable in single sentence, call yourself an SF author, and still be able to look in the mirror in the morning. The "a single person is too complex to be

described in single sentence" is a motif which has been done to death and over again, and then more so in every possible storytelling media. A single person, much less an entire RACE.

The only instance where such oversimplification worked was Star Control I and II, but that was only because those games were intentionally comedic. They were a satire.

And then a clone of Jesus turns into warrior-leader of vengefull remnants of humanity. That really could be funny if it was a comedy. Unfortunately the book tries to be deep and thought-provoking.

I find it ironic that in few places in the book authors put a lot of effort to demean the contemporary culture in general and (for some reason) Star Trek in particular. Well sorry, with all it's numerous flaws Star Trek does a lot, lot better job at everything they tried to do in this book.

Dont read, use Your time in a better way - perhaps with a good math book. Learn math, start experimenting with General Relativity, develop a warp drive or something...

Steven says

Lots of cool ideas but ultimately, it's sort of an amateur venture.

Pearl says

Mi esposo leyó este libro primero que yo y me estuvo presionando durante varias semanas para que yo lo leyera, pero justo en el momento en que me decido a hacerlo me entero que se lo prestó a su hermano, quien lee mas lento que río de caca, así que en total tuve que esperar 3 meses. Lamento mucho no haberle hecho caso a mi esposo desde el principio, porque me lo devoré...y el libro también ;-)

Ahora, fuera de bromas, este en uno de esos libros que no te va a dejar tranquila hasta que lo termines, ¡vas a llegar a soñar con el!

Los "intrusos" han destruido el planeta tierra y la mayor parte del sistema solar, y los pocos humanos que quedan luchan por sobrevivir y encontrarle respuestas al porque del ataque y a quien se esconde detrás de ellos. La razón por la cual los intrusos atacan y la razón que dan es completamente estúpida y te empiezas a preguntar el porqué los 2 autores se han dado por vencidos juntos con los sobrevivientes, pero cuando pasas esa parte y lees la profunda explicación...aún tengo pesadillas con el razonamiento de estos seres.

100% recomendable. 100% aterrador.

Ben says

I read this book a long time ago in high school, and for whatever reason, it's resonated with me more than some 95% of all other novels I've ever read. I find myself referring to it a lot in philosophical discussions (not that anyone else has ever heard of it), and even just thinking about it a lot.

I think it's the cold, brutal, hard logic of the aliens that really draws me in. It's so coldly rational and inescapable, and a welcome counter-point to most of the rest of science fiction. It's also, unfortunately, more likely than I think we give credit to.

Suzy says

[the extinction of much of humanity, not to mention the wiping out of most life on Earth (hide spoiler)]

Chris says

I first read this book probably 20 years ago and it turns out this is one of those books that was much better remembered than it was in actuality.

This book opens with an alien attack on Earth, Mars and all the out-system science stations. In the opening minutes of the attack the human population is reduced to probably a 1,000 people or less. The good part of the book describes the attack, how it works, what happens to who, who happens to survive and what the survivors do in the immediate aftermath to try and continue to survive. The middle of the book gets kind of lost and wanders around a bit, doing flash backs to a bunch of supposedly interesting things that really don't have much to with the story at hand. We see some survivors surviving, some screwing up and not surviving and some deciding on the if we're not going to make it we're going to take everyone else with us course. The book then gets fairly meta-religious and goes kind of downhill from there.

I think if all the irrelevant flashbacks and religious stuff were eliminated and more thought put into logical survival strategies including ways the survivors might have communicated without revealing their locations (given the technology displayed more than half a dozen come mind right off the top of my head) I think the story would have been much better.
