



After the Saucers Landed

Douglas Lain

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“When the alien gets around to unzipping her jumpsuit it’ll be impossible to see what’s underneath.”

UFOlogist Harold Flint is heartbroken and depressed that the aliens that have landed on the White House lawn appear to be straight out of an old B movie. They wave to the television cameras in their sequined jumpsuits, form a nonprofit organization offering new age enlightenment, and hover their saucers over the streets of New York looking for converts.

Harold wants no part of this kitschy invasion until one of the aliens, a beautiful blonde named Asket, begs him to investigate the saucers again and write another UFO book. The aliens and their mission are not as they seem.

Asket isn’t who she seems either. Tracking down her true personality leads Harold and his cowriter through a maze of identity and body-swapping madness, descending into paranoia as Harold realizes that reality, or at least humanity’s perception of it, may be more flexible than anyone will admit.

After the Saucers Landed is a deeply unsettling experimental satire, placing author Douglas Lain alongside contemporaries like Jeff VanderMeer and Charles Yu as one of his generation’s most exciting and challenging speculative fiction voices.

After the Saucers Landed Details

Date : Published August 4th 2015 by Night Shade


ISBN : 9781597808231

Author : Douglas Lain

Format : Paperback 248 pages

Genre : Science Fiction, Fiction, Science Fiction Fantasy

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Curtis says

Okay, I'm officially abandoning this one (though still marking it as "read" since I had to put up with it for so long).

I had high hopes for the story, but it just didn't grab me. The idea of being invaded by underwhelming aliens with 70s style is possibly a good one, and it might have been presented in an interesting way. It just didn't happen in this book. It's too slow to get to the point, and it's deliberately confusing in a way that doesn't really add to the story at all. Also, I have simply no motivation to care about the whiney, self-absorbed protagonist. In short, there's not much I can say about this book that I liked.

I wish I could've liked it. I wanted to like it. But I didn't.

Tate says

"This sentence is in French."

I've been struggling with ways to describe this book to my friends. When I do, I say things like, "Okay, so you know how in the 1970s there was this whole groovy concept of aliens as Space Brothers? Yeah, so what if those were the aliens we made first contact with? Or...um, maybe they thought that was what we wanted so appeared like that... maybe? Unless, it's not real at all, but something we created.... okay, I don't really know, but it's a good book?"

Because I do think this is a good book, I'm just not sure I understood it.

Ian Mond says

Douglas Lain's *After the Saucers Landed* is definitely a book that sits firmly in my wheelhouse. Not because it's deliberately self-aware or because it's a "post modern" and "post capitalist" take on the UFO phenomena or because it wears its academic and literary influences on its sleeves. It tickles my fancy because it's like nothing I've read before. And given the amount of cookie cutter fiction that's published on a regular basis, reading a novel that doesn't give a shit if the reader "gets it" is genuinely exciting and, yes, enjoyable.

The novel's title is a neat summary of the central conceit. In 1991 UFOs land on the front lawn of the White House. The aliens that emerge are straight out of an old B-Movie, humanoid and dressed in sequined jumpsuits. Even the saucer's internals look like something that's been cobbled together on a shoestring budget. The ordinariness of the aliens shatters the beliefs of Ufologist Harold Flint who expected something so much more profound. Flint, who'd written a number of novels about the UFO phenomena (prior to their arrival) and who is dealing with the death of his wife, decides to walk away from his life's work. But then one day his co-writer, Brian Johnson, brings home a female alien named Asket who asks Harold to return to his investigation into UFO phenomena. While Flint says no he's steadily drawn into an increasingly paranoid world of missing time, identity swaps and the most banal of invasions.

While the UFO craze hit its straps in the 1950s, it's never really left us as exhibited by Mulder's lengthy conspiracy rant during the opening episode of the newly resurrected X-Files. But Lain pokes fun and wonderfully deconstructs the mythology, all those poorly lit rooms hiding coffee stained files of alien infiltration, by having the Pleidiens (the aliens) reflect a nostalgic expectation of the flying saucer phenomena. The cherry on top is that rather than rely on alien probes and men dressed in black, the Pleidiens invade by converting people to their version of New Age enlightenment.

Identity sits front and centre throughout the novel, specifically the fragile nature of human consciousness. Lain cuts the topic in a number of ways, both through the philosophy of Rene Descartes and via hypnosis as Asket details her identity swapping adventures. Lain's overall thesis might be that we're losing (or have already lost) our identities to a capitalist / consumerist culture that prides the Real Housewives and the Kardashians over genuine philosophical interrogation. At least that's the message I took away from the novel.

If I have a problem with *After the Saucers Landed* it's that it lacks a human touch. Brian Johnson, our narrator, but not necessarily the protagonist, is a thinly drawn character. There's a plot reason for this, but it does mean that I found it hard to engage with Johnson's plight, in particular the disappearance of his wife who may, or may not, have surrendered herself to the Pleidiens. Asket, who follows Johnson for most of the novel, is a far more interesting and developed character – which is ironic given her personality never stays stable for more than twenty pages.

After the Saucers Landed might be described as pretentious by some. There were certainly easter eggs and references scattered throughout the text that I didn't register until later, such as the antecedent to the name Asket. Other reviewers have noted a level of critical theory embedded in the novel that, if there, went completely over my noggin. But Lain's mix of philosophy, nostalgia and identity is interesting and exciting because it does require some chewing over, because it doesn't speak down and because it takes the risky move of avoiding cliché.

Rob McCleary says

This is not a review

Part *Vertigo*, part *Stanley Parable*, Lain's novel confronts the insatiable American appetite for novelty, spectacle and self-help, the Hungry Ghost of consumer society that must dispel every mystery in favor of a tacky, penny arcade reality full of Aliens in sequined jumpsuits and B-movie UFOs. "*After the Saucers Landed*" is a meditation on the closing of the frontier of the American consciousness by that rarest of beasts: an intellectual with a sense of humor.

Mitchell says

Humor is tricky. Once you don't think a funny book is funny, there isn't necessarily anything else left. It's books like this that make we wonder if I will appreciate *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* and its followups on a re-read. I'd like to believe that *Hitchhiker* is an always-funny. This book was basically an intellectual joke. It made references to times and places that I didn't care about. And joked about philosophical things that I didn't care about. It had no straightforward plot and the characters were literally

interchangeable. The conceit of the book was that flying saucers landed and it was just like it was talked about in the 50's in the ufo community. And it just didn't matter. It kind of reminded me of Steve Martin's joke about going to heaven and finding pearly gates. Which wasn't actually one of his funnier jokes. This though was a bunch of drek. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CZfmo...>

Kazima says

I was really looking forward to reading this, because I thought the premise sounded amazing. And I think it would have been a great story if it stuck to the idea the book's promotion claims it's about, and tried to keep some semblance of a plot, instead of trying to be super literary, experimental and meta. And if it was written by someone with a solid talent for lyrical prose and subtle witticisms, like Douglas Adams. Reading Adams (just using him as an example because he's been on my mind a lot lately having just read Dirk Gently) one can find oneself thinking "what the...? what's going on? this is weird and a bit confusing", but it doesn't really matter because the writing is so fluid and interesting in itself that you can't help but keep reading and eventually things start to come together and fall into place and you can see how this story has been intricately woven. That was not the case with this story (if one can even call it that, or should I say 'piece'?). This felt like someone, as an attempt at an avant-garde project, took my Philosophy 101, Art History and Comparative Litt 101 textbooks, shredded them and then glued the shreds onto blown up stills from Plan 9 From Outer Space. When I think about it, that might be what the author was going for, but I still think it failed...

Marjolein says

Read all my reviews on <http://urlphantomhive.booklikes.com>

To start with the good: It is unlike any other alien invasion books I've ever come across. It provides an answer to the question which bothers us all: what if the discovery of aliens showed that they were nothing but completely underwhelming, with their jumpsuits and new age-y religion.

The bad: I had a constant feeling when I was reading this that it was trying to convey something to me, but I couldn't find out what. It is partly a criticism on society I suppose, but I didn't think it was a particular strong one.

The ugly: I was bored. A lot. Part of the book is really confusing, and while I think that's intentional, it made that I could never get invested in the story. Basically, I was counting the percentages I still had to read on my Kindle.

All in all, an interesting concept, but its execution didn't work for me.

Thanks to the publisher and Edelweiss for providing me with a free copy of this book in exchange for an honest review!

Francisco Florimon says

What happens when the transcendent becomes utterly immanent, and the impossible commonplace? You

might as well ask what life is like within the Q Continuum, or regenerating like the Doctor across all time and space, not that this books has anything to do with those points of reference.

This book is about the fluidity of identity, and I loved reading it because it was interesting and refreshingly weird, and it goes great with coffee. Would I say it's like a Murakami novel, only slightly faster paced? No. I want to make comparisons to his work and to David Lynch's and Gene Wolfe's, but I totally won't. Instead I'll say that such comparison's fail to encapsulate the feeling I'm trying to evoke, but maybe the combined aftertaste of those suggestions will point a potential reader in the right direction.

This is a book about the mysteries hidden in plain sight, and the liminal nexus between the alien and the familiar.

Michelle Morrell says

There are books that are easy to fall into, the story flows and carries a reader away. And then there are those that take a lot of concentration, the story lies as much in the craft of the sentences than the words themselves. "After the Saucers Landed" is one such story.

The aliens have arrived, and they are a 1950s stereotype, complete with silver saucers filled with white plastic modular furniture. But along with the missing time and sparkly jumpsuits, hiding behind the happy crappy scientology-esque enlightenment lies some disquieting revelations about personality, identity and the future of the human race.

I must admit I had a hard time getting into this book, I don't like struggling to make sense of the plot, or even a scene. But I'm glad I persevered, there were some interesting nuggets to be found within about identity, memory and humanity.

I read this because it's nominated for the 2015 Philip K Dick awards. It falls well within the parameters and actually felt a lot like the spirit of PKD, not just looking forward, but off to the side and skewed a bit.

Paul says

I liked the book a lot, but I have to admit it was confusing at times. After all, when an author draws one into questions of identity and "What is reality?", it's necessarily going to risk some confusion. If you're not willing to look beneath appearances and chew on stuff a bit, you'd better pick up another science fiction novel.

I enjoyed following the everyman characters trying to sort out their lives. The author was clearly having fun with them, and inviting us to find out how much of ourselves we could see in their attitudes even while we are tempted to feel superior to them.

Lain's kitschy aliens aren't going to save the human race or amaze us. If we don't think too hard, we can become cult followers and fit in to the new reality they impose. If we try to pin them down, we can desperately try to fit them into an ordinary understanding of how things work. If we are willing to set aside assumptions (about them and, more importantly, about ourselves) and accept ambiguity and impermanence,

we might be able to realize or construct a more authentic reality that fits better than the stories we've been telling about ourselves.

"How can I know that I am who I believe myself to be?" Sort of scary and exciting, isn't it? Is it time to change personalities? Don't wait until after the saucers land.

Andy says

I had reasonably high hopes and low expectations, but, still, the experience was consistently "meh."

Andy says

At least it was short.

Jeff says

This one is quite trippy and definitely not a typical alien invasion novel. It is told from the viewpoint of a writer who experiences strange shifts in reality (such as an alien who assumes the identity of his wife, as well as several other identities). It can be confusing at times but is nonetheless interesting. If you like having your mind played with, I recommend it.

Renaë says

The author seems to suffer from what I call Terry Goodkind Syndrome: He's absolutely desperate to prove how smart he is (never quite accomplishing anything of the sort), and is so focused on that that he seems to forget his main job is to write a good story with a plot that makes sense.

The whole lost time concept could have been interesting, had the author not used it in a desperate and thinly-veiled attempt to hide how absolutely terrible he is at writing transitions.

Dan Lett says

Alien invasions in fiction often serve as a means to explore themes of common humanity — characters are forced to overcome differences and band together to respond to some radical, threatening other. Douglas Lain takes a very contrary tack in his intriguing novel, *After the Saucers Landed*, in which the “soft” alien invasion of the benevolent Pleidiens triggers an identity crisis among the main characters, whose travails lead the reader through a series of questions about the nature of reality itself.

As with much of Lain's work, there is a strong philosophical flavour to this novel. Generally, philosophy-oriented fiction is best when it observes Wittgenstein's observation about Tolstoy: “when [he] turns his back

to the reader, then he seems to me most impressive. His philosophy is most true when it's latent in the story". Lain's approach is pretty full-frontal. Although his main characters are academics and artists, who we might expect to wax a little, it seems that every character in the book is a dabbling epistemologist — even the FBI agents quote Descartes. But Lain's book is tackling the relationship between ideas and reality, so his didacticism can be justified as performative. Once I settled into the surreal rhythm of the novel, I enjoyed the over-the-top cerebral jousting between the characters, and the instances of what would otherwise be dismissed as jarring authorial intrusion work pretty well to reinforce Lain's points about narrative and identity.

While the novel is very intellectually satisfying, I took the most pleasure from Lain's characterization of the bewildered Brian Johnson and his fumbling attempts at intimacy and negotiating an era that is gradually passing him by. The attention to detail and cataloguing of 90s tropes and cultural artefacts is entertaining and adroit — the humdrum minutiae strikes a satisfying balance with the lofty themes in a way that is somewhat reminiscent of DeLillo's *White Noise*.

This is a well-written and smart book, but it isn't for everyone. Fans of naturalism or classic SF invasion yarns will be thoroughly alienated. Lain's approach might also annoy a proportion of academically-oriented readers. In order to appreciate all the references and ideas, the book demands a reader who is fairly well-versed in — and sympathetic towards — cultural and critical theory (and, ideally, the history of art movements). While endlessly diverting, the blunderbuss blast of references makes it difficult to trace a central argument, which may or may not have been intentional. Being familiar with Lain's other work (having listened to his philosophy/culture podcast and read his other written work), I can guess what he's driving at, but I'd be interested to know what sorts of impressions the average intelligent reader would take away from this.
