

Future History: The Coming Past

David Leavitt

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In *Future History: The Coming Past*, promising science fiction writer David Leavitt takes readers twenty millennia forward in time to an era when humanity is beset by an ancient predator. The last human leader, Lord Peron, sends an agent to find and protect Gary Charlotte, the progenitor of the events which lead to this desperate future. Samantha Raumas time-travels back to the 1950s and eventually locates and eliminates the “false” Gary Charlottes who’d returned to that time as well. When she finally finds the true Gary Charlotte, she’s able to keep him alive. He fathers a son, Kevin, upon whom the world’s future will depend. But Gary Charlotte isn’t of the same mind as Raumas and his son, and sets in motion a chain of events that Kevin and his research colleagues must stop in order to change the future. Other agents are set against Kevin and his friends, and he finds himself on the run from several enemies at the same time.

This novel has some interesting story elements. The mutant whales top the list, and they’re certainly nasty critters. The biology behind the development of the throwback whales appears logical, though it would take a cetacean expert to verify. The squid attacks on the pilot whales in the whale research habitat are realistic and documented in our world, so the appearance of a “colossal squid” (larger than the enormous giant squid) is not a surprise. Kevin Charlotte is a bit of an absent-minded genius, but he has sense enough to know when the situation becomes critical. The good-guy characters are rounded and present enough for readers to be concerned about what happens to them. The bad guys are less rounded, not having much in the way of redeeming qualities to make them seem real. To be effective, villains usually have one positive quality.

Future History: The Coming Past does have a major problem: grammatical errors. The grammar errors are sometimes puzzling (the third paragraph on p.75 contains comma misuse) and other times obvious (missing word on p. 231, the word “at” is missing from the phrase “you would wonder[at] the size of the enormous fish making the movement”). They’re copious enough to persistently throw a reader out of that all-important suspension of disbelief which keeps the world the writer creates intact.

But there’s a story here that’s different and alluring enough for readers to happily push on through the editing mistakes. Leavitt has built a world where something like mutated whales is believable, and his characters come across as real people with hopes and desires. Leavitt has the what-if mojo working well, and science fiction lovers can look forward to his future projects with great anticipation.

J. G. STINSON (November 1, 2010)

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