



The Stonehenge Gate

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In a basement in New Mexico, four poker buddies and amateur adventurers who have discovered a dark mystery buried beneath the sands of the Sahara desert decide to do something about it.

In the deep Sahara, they find an ancient artifact that will change their lives and the world, forever... a gateway between planets that links Earth to distant worlds where they discover wonders and terrors beyond their wildest imagination.

Jack Williamson, the dean of science fiction writers, masterfully weaves an exciting tale that takes the friends to the far corners of the universe. While one leads an oppressed people towards freedom, another uncovers clues that could identify a long-dormant super-advanced civilization of immortal beings, and the key to the origin of life on Earth.

The Stonehenge Gate Details

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Author : Jack Williamson

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From Reader Review The Stonehenge Gate for online ebook

James says

A Bit of Familiar Plot:

They call themselves The Four Horsemen! Four academics hang out at a poker game in Portales, New Mexico after some teaching/researching at the local university. Checking out some satellite images, they find a gate of sorts in the middle of the Sahara Desert and buried under a lot of sand. [Nope, we never go to England and see Stonehenge! Oh well!]

They decide to pool their resources and get there!

Comments:

Similar in some ways to Stargate in plot, except these four people are getting the ride of their lives without help from the military or anything like that. Its very unbelievability is its best protection.

Now, the first half of the book moves a bit slowly as the author develops the characters, mostly narrated from the view of Will Stone, teacher and researcher, who is not exactly prepared for a large adventure.

Yes, I'm getting to it: The gate they find is a teleportation device to other planets. It seems these builders built a great civilization and somehow died out in some forgotten war a few millennia ago.

The whole story feels quite familiar with the weak character, the reluctant hero, some light romance and a heavy aspect of racial tension and war between the Whites and the Blacks, who seem to reliving their gods' myth: A black god and a white woman married and then warred.

Writing Style: The story does not really get to a final conclusion. We learn more about the builders but not much else. The racial storyline is not bad, but does not really get to a conclusion for me that resolves the war. I am happy to report that the slavery issue in that other world does eventually get resolved.

Also, the expression "he grabbed my arm" is used over and over again – kinda annoying!

Ram is the reluctant hero which Williamson builds up nicely. Really, he's the only character you can really relate to!

Bottom Line: Jack Williamson is part of the Golden Age pulp fiction writers. He wrote The Stonehenge Gate at the tender age of 97. He passed away in 2006, so this was his last novel! A pulpy adventure with aliens, robots and heroes who don't realize they actually are. Recommended for pulp readers!

Sandy says

What do you plan to do when you're 97 years old? Me? If I'm fortunate enough to attain to that ripe old age, I suppose I will be eating pureed Gerber peaches and watching Emma Peel reruns on my TV set in the nursing home...IF I'm lucky. For sci-fi Grand Master Jack Williamson, the age of 97 meant another novel, his 50th or so, in a writing career that stretched back 77 years (!), to his first published story, "The Metal Man," in 1928. Sadly, the novel in question, 2005's "The Stonehenge Gate," would be the author's last, before his passing in November 2006. Impressively, the novel is as exciting, lucid, readable and awe inspiring as anything in Williamson's tremendous oeuvre. Few authors had as long and productive a career as Jack Williamson, and I suppose it really is true what they say regarding practice, practice, practice....

"The Stonehenge Gate" is narrated by Will Stone, an English professor at Eastern New Mexico University, in Portales (not coincidentally, the school and town where the author taught and lived for many years). Stone and three fellow teachers--Derek Ironcraft, a physicist and astronomer; Lupe Vargas, an archaeologist; and Ram Chenji, a linguistics and African history instructor, from Kenya--discover a mysterious, Stonehenge-like trilithon buried under the sands of the Sahara, and, after walking through the ancient archway, are transported to a series of planets many light-years distant. The four become separated, but ultimately explore a planet devastated by war, an empty world populated only by morphing robots, a frozen planet that was the home of the trilithon builders, and a world comprised of two continents: one inhabited by whites, the other an equatorial jungle land peopled by blacks. It is on this last planet that the bulk of Williamson's novel transpires, as Ram's arrival begins a series of race riots and the onset of a civil rights movement. That all-important "sense of wonder," which was of paramount importance when the author began his writing career before sci-fi's Golden Age, is evident to a great degree here, and the fact that many marvels go unexplained only adds to that sense of cosmic awe. Those readers who have followed Williamson's career over the decades may be a bit taken aback by the author's use of such words as "Internet" and "e-book" in this, his last work; as great an indicator as any of the longevity of the writer's career. Readers who have likewise absorbed other of the author's works may be pleasantly reminded of them as "The Stonehenge Gate" proceeds. The use of native drugs to elicit visions is highly reminiscent of scenes in 1980's "The Humanoid Touch," while the entire notion of excavating in the Sahara to find the remains of alien artifacts will remind many of similar sequences in 1962's "The Trial of Terra." Even Derek Ironcraft's name is reminiscent of a main character (Frank Ironsmith) in the author's most famous novel, 1949's "The Humanoids." But despite this, Williamson's final book is wholly original, and his four main characters are an extremely appealing bunch. Our narrator is especially convincing. Far from an action hero, this 57-year-old keeps telling us how much he wishes that he were back in his quiet library at home in Portales, and the trials that he is forced to undergo have a very credible impact on him.

Anyway, perhaps I am making too big a deal of the author's advanced age here, but honestly, how many people nudging toward the century mark could be expected to create a 316-page novel that is as fresh and fascinating as any sci-fi in the stores today? The novel in question here could most surely have served as Book #1 in a new blockbuster sci-fi series, but sadly, that was not to be. The world surely lost a man of limitless imagination with Jack Williamson's passing. Though his great body of works remains, the man will certainly be missed....

Carolyn says

Felt like something written in 1970s (without the misogyny) not partially my cup of tea, YMMV.

Wendy says

This book was just okay. I loved the idea behind the book, but unfortunately the author seemed to get distracted and did not follow through with the plot.

The characters are poorly developed so you never make any real connection with them. The beginning of the story is interesting, but instead of taking us on the wonderful journey that could have been the author comes up short. Instead of our explorers traveling through to the many possible worlds that should be accessible through the 'gate' system they get bogged down on one and get involved in the politics of the world. That is where the story moves from a good science fiction tale to politics that have been done before and are not too terribly interesting.

The ending was a huge let down and the book all around wasn't really worth the effort for me. Maybe because I am such a huge Stargate fan and I know what could have potentially been done with this plot, I was left feeling cheated.

Denis says

Jack Williamson's final novel, written while well into his nineties. I found to be it a fine and solid, fast paced, sense of wonder adventure story, written in the style of the classic pioneer SF writer that Jack Williamson was. The audiobook version was competently read by Harlen Ellison.

Alvaro Zinos-Amaro says

In a video interview with Jack Williamson I found on YouTube he talks about how the inspiration for this novel came to him in a dream, and there are certainly dream-like passages, inventive and full of cosmic wonder. There are also some nice riffs on classic sf elements, some of which Williamson's earlier work helped to establish in the first place. So much for the positive.

I found the writing uneven; some passages were sparse, economical, even borderline poetic, but others were choppy and repetitive. I don't blame Williamson for that--he was 97 when this, his last novel, was published--but the editor should have been more thorough. This unevenness made it hard for me to engage with the story. The lack of any serious character development made it even harder. I understand that sf-in-a-travelogue-mode can get by with thin characters indeed, but I found the protagonist uninteresting, bland, reactive in a bad way. The first person narration made things worse, trapping me in this point of view. I didn't particularly care how things turned out for him.

Truth be told, though I liked the first 40-50 pages well enough, and enjoyed how they harkened to classic sf in a kind of surreal way, I almost gave up at the part of the novel where it turns into a racial war saga. Fortunately I stuck with it, because around Chapter 32 it starts to get interesting again, addressing the mysteries established early on, and it does end on a somewhat moving, introspective (if slightly unbelievable) note. I think PW got it right when they wrote, "Lush descriptions and a refreshingly brisk pace buoy the novel, but the characters are so uninteresting that disbelief soon becomes as hard to suspend as the space elevator that carries them between worlds." Overall, I'm afraid to say I thought this was a somewhat

disjointed, underwhelming effort, and I would recommend it only to sf completists or historians.

Tim Martin says

The Stonehenge Gate by Jack Williamson reminds me of some of the older, "Golden Age" science fiction stories I read in anthologies growing up, in books I found in my Dad's collection or in used bookstores, where educated, adventurous but otherwise seemingly normal people come across alien artifacts, hints of lost civilizations, technology so advanced it looks like magic, the stories not jaded at all but filled with a sense of wonder, of "gee-wiz," of amazement at the bigger-than-life mysteries of the universe.

The novel's four main protagonists, at least at first, are four poker buddies, college professors at Eastern New Mexico University. Derek Ironcraft is a physicist and astronomer, Lupe Vargas is an archaeologist (the sole woman of the group), Ram Chenji is an African linguist that Vargas met on a dig in Africa and got him to the United States on a scholarship, and Will Stone (the narrator) is a English literature professor specializing in Shakespeare; together they call their little group the Four Horsemen. One night Derek shows the group interesting NASA images of a buried structure deep in the sand seas of the Sahara Desert, images that appear to show a megalithic, Stonehenge-like structure. Though Lupe is tremendously skeptical of the image, or at least of Derek's interpretation of it, saying that the region is not known for such artifacts and is located in an area that the last time it was decently habitable by humans was hundreds of thousands of years ago, well before they were building such structures, she eventually embraces the group's enthusiasm and the four of them manage to make their way to the very remote site, initially hoping during a break between classes to find enough there to justify a grant and a return trip.

Dropped off by chartered helicopter among the remote dunes, many days travel from the nearest thing approaching civilization, they do indeed find that the satellite image was correct, that there are buried megalithic structures. They also find prior to their arrival that Ram had a very unusual background, that he grew up in Kenya, partially raised by his elderly grandmother that he called Little Mama, a woman who spoke a strange language and had taught some to Ram against his father's wishes and given him a strange pendant that had defied the few attempts he had tried to analyze it, covered with enigmatic writings and made of some unfamiliar material. Little Mama before she died had told Ram of having come from some other world, of having to go through Hell before she found the road to Heaven. Perhaps a little convenient, at least in my mind, but it becomes apparent to the group that Little Mama had somehow come through these megalithic structures from some other world.

In very short order they find that they are gates to another world. Indeed, gates to worlds, plural, as the Four Horsemen hop from world to world, for a time separating, seemingly permanently though there are hints that the missing members are alive and well. The first world they encounter was deadly, apparently a trap for unwary gate travelers, but after overcoming those difficulties the remaining team members come to an apparently very Earth-like world, complete with familiar plants and animals. Perfectly maintained (and to my mind a tad too familiar) buildings, roads, parks, and farms are present on the planet, lovingly tended by bizarre robots, but not a sign of people or what had happened to them. Though most things look pristine and untouched, they do come across evidence that what ever had happened to the people had happened a very long time ago.

The tone of the book changed abruptly though when they journeyed to another world, one that is very much inhabited, having a series of adventures on it that encompass a great portion of the book. Though touching on the possible destiny and strange origins of Ram and his people, the interlude on this world, one they later

called Delta, had an entirely different, almost jarring tone from what came before and after in the story. Delta has two continents - Norlan and Hotlan - that are inhabited each by a native race of humans. Norlan is home to a race of mostly blonde imperialist European types, technologically close to that of late 19th century Earth as far as I could tell, while Hotlan was home to black African-like tribes and villages in the dense rain forest of a wilderness continent, largely beyond the reach of most Norlanders. The main characters become embroiled in the lives of individuals from both Hotlan and Norlan and in the growing conflict between the two groups (as the Hotlanders are for the most fantastic racists, not regarding the Hotlanders as human and at least officially condemning all mixed race individuals and their parents to death). Though the story was a decent tale of adventure and fairly atmospheric, it didn't flow well with the odd, otherworldly place they found before Delta and their discoveries about the builders and their origins in the incredibly distant past later on. It was as if I was reading an entirely different novel.

The best drawn out characters are Will, who comes across as timid and passive at times, at other times willing to risk everything to save a friend, including friends he makes in Hotlan, and Ram, who is a fairly complex character, constantly at war with himself, struggling with what may be some sort of preordained destiny that was thrust upon him in Hotlan and the life he really wants to lead. Derek and Lupe were a bit less well drawn and not as major characters as either Will or Ram, their time and energy almost single-mindedly spent on trying to solve the riddle of the gates, the builders, and their various worlds and what that means for all of human history.

Certainly not a bad novel, it was a fast read.

Craig says

This is a fine adventure novel, the last that Williamson produced before his death. Several of the reviews I've read seen have suggested it borrows from the Stargate television show, which I think is absolutely wrong. Williamson was one of the top writers in the field from the late 1920's through almost the next eighty years. He wrote the Legion stories, the SeeTee stories, With Folded Hands, Darker Than You Think, excellent collaborations with Frederik Pohl, and on and on and on and on... My point is that he influenced the authors who influenced the authors who wrote the stories that the Stargate people "borrowed"... He was a nonpareil innovator who didn't need to rip-off a concept that's been around for many, many, many years in the field. I enjoyed listening to this one very much, in large part due to the excellent performance of the reader, Harlan Ellison.

Scott says

This is the first book that I've read by Jack Williamson, who is always mentioned as one of the Grand Masters of Science Fiction. He wrote for over seventy years, influenced so many, and The Stonhenge Gate (2005) appears to be his last published work before his passing at the age of 97. I picked this book up because it just seemed wrong to be a fan of Sf and not to have read anything by him, so, I saw it at the library and decided to come home with it. Well, I didn't know what to expect, other than knowing it should be quite entertaining, coming from such an accomplished author. What I found is that this book tries to pack a lot into its short 313 pages. Starting off as a fairly straightforward tale of scientist friends examining a porthole to another dimension in the Sahara Desert, it quickly ventures through the surreal looking glass, and we find our travelers lost amongst various frighteningly "trippy" worlds, both archaic and far future, and trying to

find their way back home, while at the same time trying to find lost members of their own team. Amidst the Sf adventure, Williamson weaves elements of imagined African legend and myth into the plot. About half-way through the narrative the story moves into a mild examination of racial/class rebellion, which while connecting elements of the story perfectly, seemed, in my opinion, to stall out the narrative just a bit. The last quarter of the book comes back around to picking up the excitement of portal traveling, and closes with a very fine ending. Overall, while at times I felt the story dragged, I am glad I picked this book up, and will look forward to his other titles. I get the sense that while reading a story by Williamson, you may never know quite what to expect. That is always a good thing.

Badseedgirl says

I have to admit that I had some real issues with Jack Williamson's novel Stonehenge Gate. For one thing, the medical science in the novel is questionable at best. When the "Four Horsemen" make contact with an alien species of human origin, we should have seen the natives, the explorers or both ravaged by diseases their bodies had no antibodies for. We have several examples of this in our history, most notably small pox and the South American population. That being said, the fact the Mr. Williamson was able to write a decent novel at the age of 97, is in itself a small miracle.

This novel reminds me of one of the throwbacks to the 1950's space adventure. The characters tend to be a little one dimensional. You have ~~Dorothy Gayle~~, Will Stone who spends the entire novel wanting to go home, ~~Pollyanna~~ Derek Ironcraft who unabashedly saw the entire trip as on grand adventure, ~~Gloomy Gus~~ Ram Chenji who is depressed the entire time, and Lupe Vargus, who was not in the novel long enough for me to give her a snarky nickname.

The worlds traveled to by these characters were interesting and well described and were the true stars of the novels. The storyline itself was thin, and felt dated. The race relations on planet "Delta" did not really read as relevant and would have been much more poignant in the 60's.

I should probably check out Mr. Williams other works before I pass judgment on him as a writer, but for Stonehenge Gate, I would have to give it 2.5 - 3 stars.

Pat Beard says

Obviously not gripping, a bit tedious at times, but still a worthwhile read.

Jason Cline says

The premise here was really good, just not executed all that well. Four professors discover a Stonehenge-like gate in the Sahara that leads to other worlds. The other worlds were interesting, but Williamson seems to reach too far at times. The planet where a huge chunk of the book takes place is oddly like the 19th century U.S.; colonial rule with slavery and on the brink of civil war. Many questions were left unanswered, and a whole series of books could be written going into more depth about the different worlds discovered here. If that's the case, I'm afraid I won't be reading them.

My biggest gripe would be the lack of depth to the characters. The book is told in first person, and the narrator - an English professor suddenly thrust into the role of inter-stellar explorer - is completely lacking in personality. Through the course of the entire book, all we learn of him is he's 57, single, a university English professor, has never had kids, and feels 'giddy' at heights. That's it. We never learn anything about Derek, a fellow professor, other than his excitement at the adventure he discovers himself on. And the poker analogies - I just wanted them to stop.

Finally, a note about the audio version. Harlan Ellison was not impressive as a reader. His voice for Ram, from Kenya, sounded like an Irishman trying to affect an African accent. Strange and annoying, especially considering how many times he had to use the phrase "little mama" (Ram's great-grandmother, who seems to have imparted some important knowledge to Ram when he was a child.) Voices for the ever-optimistic Derek and the young boy Kensith were equally annoying.

Overall, this was a fine idea nearly ruined by poor execution, both by the writer and the reader.

Jesse Whitehead says

There are a number of reasons why Jack Williamson is awesome. Many of them I've even talked about on this blog. He moved to New Mexico as a young boy with his family in a covered wagon. If that isn't enough he started writing and publishing science fiction when he was 17 and continued to write for the next eighty years. In that time he imagined many of the modern conveniences that we take for granted coined the word terraforming and was also the first to write about a space station that simulated gravity by spinning.

Amongst his surprising resume of literary merits are decades of speculation about the future. Jack Williamson spent his life wondering what the future would be like and he adapted and changed with it so that he could continue to fit into the future that he quickly found himself in.

At the same time his books and stories have never lost a certain sense-of-wonder quality that permeates every word. Jack Williamson always feels like Jack Williamson — that's mostly not a bad thing.

Jack Williamson started out writing for the pulps, because that was what you did. Unless you were Alfred Bester or Robert Heinlein chances are you couldn't get science fiction published in the slicks. The pulps were called that because the paper in the magazine was the rough pulpy paper found in cheap newsprint. They also tended to cater to a different audience — one of mainly teenage boys — the same demographic that comic books would later replace. In fact comic books are a pretty fair comparison. Comic books used to be cheap and full of cheap thrills with over the top villains, idealized heroes and hordes of helpless citizens. Pulp stories like the more famous ones by Robert E. Howard and H. P. Lovecraft tended to be adventure stories, yarns about violence and thunder and muscular heroes. That didn't mean that they weren't well written. In fact many times they needed to be very carefully crafted in order to not reveal the silliness of it all.

Jack Williamson entered directly into that tradition and thrived for many years.

The Stonehenge Gate feels like a hark back to that time of early twentieth century pulp fiction with an adventure that drags the characters into a much larger galaxy.

The characters are an interesting bunch. The narrator hardly speaks — choosing to let other do the talking — and rarely acts in any way other than to follow those around him. Instead of using a main character who is

interesting Williamson chooses to surround him with interesting people.

Imagine my dismay when, in the middle of book he is briefly separated from his friends.

There are a number of extreme coincidences. There are four college professors in New Mexico. One of them discovers a stonehenge-like structure beneath the sand in the Sahara. Another of them just happens to be an archeologist and another has a strange hereditary birthmark on his forehead and a grandmother who told him stories about stealing the key to Hell and 'the road to heaven leads through the gateway to hell.'

Without giving anything else away suffice it to say that they discover a Stargate-like passage to other worlds and a millions-year-old history of other races on other planets scattered across the galaxy. There is a great deal of discussion of slavery and ethics and history and evolution and Williamson does a creditable job of making his altered evolution of man seem possible, if a little bit fifteenth century in it's cradle of life scenario for the earth.

Jack Williamson has always been a good writer, his stories have mystery and depth that feel wonderful. He's matured a great deal as a writer and a storyteller, which is to be expected after eighty years in the business.

The book itself is a mixture of that good old early days wonder, social commentary and slogging, plodding plot development as the main character seems to spend most of his time locked in a cell as the world and events and people around him make things happen.

To be fair he is a literature professor, and he is nearly sixty so leading slave revolts and hopping across the galaxy is probably not in his usual job description. It just seems like maybe somebody else would have made a more interesting character from which to tell the story.

Most of the good feelings I had for this book were nostalgic remembrances of old science fiction I read as a boy. This feels so much like one of those old stories of exploring and seeing things so preposterous that it doesn't matter any more how real it is. The amazing thing is that it has this feeling while keeping most of the future tech and wonder firmly grounded in the possible and maybe even the probable. Perhaps it's the magic of godlike aliens and stonehenge gates leading to other worlds that made it so fantastical.

I would recommend this book to anybody who longs for a trip back to the days the Weird Tales or Amazing Stories. It will make you happy and feel modern at the same time.

Bettie? says

Home audio F:\bookies\not essential\to read\Jack Williamson - The Stonehenge Gate

This is an unabridged version running for 9 hours.

blurb - *This is Jack Williamson's last book, at least it's the last book published in his lifetime. The man has had a long career, a very long career. Jack's first story was published in the fairly new Amazing Stories in 1928. Jack has been able to adapt his fiction to the changing and maturing literature that we call Science*

Fiction, again and again.

One admirable quality of Jack's work that remained consistent over the nine decades in which he wrote, was his ability to tell a good yarn. His stories can always hold your attention, and he never forgot to have a beginning, middle and an end. This may sound like a trait that all writers should have, but it is really not the case. This always kept Jack's works above the average SF writer.

In The Stonehenge Gate, we have four poker buddies that find a gateway into other worlds. The four characters are academics who are excavating a site under the sands of the Sahara. Will is an English Professor who narrates the story. Ram is an African professor who has a strange birthmark that mimics the shape of the Stonehenge Gate that they find. Stranger still is that the birthmark seems to be hereditary.

They soon pass into many new worlds throughout this novel. The majority of the novel takes place in a world inhabited by a preindustrial society with institutionalized black slavery. The characters have to grapple with functioning in this world while supporting abolishinest causes. There's a dark quality to this part of the journey that has more than a passing nod to Joseph Conrad's Heart Of Darkness.

Harlan Ellison's narration is spectacular. This is likely the only audiobook that is written by one SF Grand Master and read by another. Of course, there aren't any SF Grandmaster's that have also won an Audie award like Harlan has. Harlan throws himself into his acting. He's energized and seems to be convincingly living the parts he's portraying to a greater degree than can be said of most voice actors.

How does this book stack up against the rest of the Williamson cannon? I don't believe this is one of Jack's best books nor one of his lesser efforts. Placing it somewhere in the middle. But in the case of Jack, that's a pretty damn good book.

(SFFAudio review)

Too much like Stargate!

George Morrison says

I'm sorry to give this book such a bad rating, but the stereotyped characters, numerous technical errors and erratic plot just ruined it for me. Sadly, there were parts of the book that showed promise, but these were overwhelmed by the implausible action scenes and stilted dialogue. A good developmental edit would have flagged these issues.
