



Sinister Barrier

Eric Frank Russell

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SIN EATERS

Investigating an epidemic of deaths among the world's leading scientists. Bill Graham learned their terrible discovery: Earth was—and had been for centuries—controlled by aliens!

The alien energy beings fed on human emotions. To cultivate their "food:" they manipulated Earth affairs to create war and strife, the sources of the human fears and passions which the aliens craved.

Now their machinations were leading up to a devastating world war: They would feast finally on the self-destruction of the human race. Somehow. Graham and a hand-picked team of scientists had to stop the aliens before it was too late. But even thinking about the enemy could bring death...

Sinister Barrier Details

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From Reader Review Sinister Barrier for online ebook

Rod Pyle says

50 years old and still creepy as hell!

Williwaw says

I'm hovering between 2 and 3 stars on this. It would make a great (and doubtless "bad") disaster movie. The premise is that beings called Vitons are living off our negative emotions, and controlling our history to get the best possible harvest. But we are unaware of them until a scientist (in a technologically advanced future) invents a way for humans to "see" wavelengths that are ordinarily invisible. The scientist shares his knowledge with others before the Vitons destroy him. The Vitons can read minds, so they pursue anyone else (at first, only some fellow-scientists) who has obtained the forbidden knowledge that will make humanity aware of them.

Anyway, the book was fun at the beginning, because it's unknown why prominent scientists are dying suddenly and violently. There are great descriptions of these guys going up in balls of flame or plummeting from high-rise windows. Cities blow up, and World War III begins. That's why this book is the perfect model for a mega-disaster movie.

A bit more than half way through, the plot starts to drag. Clearly, it's just a matter of time before humans figure out how to outwit the Vitons and then live happily ever after.

I should mention that the Vitons are floating blue spheres that can anchor themselves into our nervous systems and take nourishment. Russell is constantly comparing this process to the milking of a cow.

I was inspired to read this after learning that the book was originally presented as a serial in the legendary pulp magazine, "Unknown," edited by John W. Campbell. The magazine only lasted about 4 years (1939 to 1943, I think), but it is credited with beginning a whole new tradition in modern fantasy writing. Other works which appeared in "Unknown" include: Jack Williamson's novel, "Darker Than You Think," a book that brilliantly combines lycanthropy, anthropology and pseudo-science for a surprisingly good story; Leiber's first Grey Mouser story; and several excellent but lesser-known Heinlein stories. I'd love to lay my hands on a copy of "Unknown," but the prices are beyond what I'm willing to pay.

"Sinister Barrier" disappointed me. It is, more than anything, a disaster/action novel. In a way, it's in the tradition of H.G. Wells's "War of the Worlds," but the premise is that we have been unwittingly been dominated by an invisible species for the duration of our history. All hell breaks loose when we discover our dominators. I'll give Russell credit for the originality of his premise, and his decent prose.

The title of this book, however, suggests something more creepy and insidious than what we get. Instead, we get gratuitous violence like this: "He saw Sheehan, an operative, shove the muzzle of his gun straight into a slobbering mouth and let her blow. Gobs of noggin, slop and goo flew in all directions as the headless victim toppled under his stamping feet."

If you're in the mood for a potboiler, this is the book for you.

Bruce says

Okay sf pulp adventure, tedious in places, quite readable in others. In some ways, it foreshadows Colin Wilson's *The Mind Parasites*.

Colin Sinclair says

Enormous fun. Great concept, well executed and rattles along at a brisk pace.

Scientists are dying - suicide, sudden heart attacks, horrible accidents - and a government investigator looks into the deaths and discovers an awful truth that threatens the world. Written in the late 1930s, so some of the phrasing is kind of weird and things can get a bit clunky and overblown at times. And then there's the appalling attitude to women on display :-/

Despite the faults, I enjoyed it a lot.

Oscar says

En un futuro cercano (desde el punto de vista en que fue escrita la obra, que data de 1939), se están produciendo una serie de misteriosas muertes de científicos, aparentemente accidentales o naturales. Bill Graham, un agente estadounidense, es testigo involuntario de una de estas muertes. Sin embargo, cuando investiga un poco más en el asunto, empieza a sospechar que dichas muertes son más bien asesinatos. Pero, ¿quiénes son los artífices?

‘Barrera siniestra’ (Sinister Barrier, 1939), del escritor Eric Frank Russell, es una novela de ciencia ficción encuadrada en ese curioso subgénero que es el de las invasiones silenciosas, donde destacan ‘¿Quién anda ahí?’, de John W. Campbell, Jr., ‘Amos de títeres’, de Robert A. Heinlein, y ‘La invasión de los ladrones de cuerpos’, de Jack Finney. La novela empieza como una historia policial, pero según se suceden los acontecimientos, se va adentrando más en el género fantástico. En resumen, un libro entretenido e interesante.

Vladimir Ivanov says

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Joshua Buhs says

Sinister Barrier was Russell's breakthrough, and probably the story for which he is still best known. It takes as its starting point Charles Fort's musing that humans are property. The owners end up being some blue orbs that feed on our various energies and read our minds--killing those who it thinks are too close to understanding their status as sheep. The sinister barrier of the title is the edge of the human visual spectrum: as it turns out, the Vitons--as they come to be called--can only be seen by using techniques that allow the expansion of the visual spectrum.

The book is fine, the idea better than the actual execution. There's an introduction in my edition, by Jack L. Chalker, which excuses the dated science--but that's not really the problem. Indeed, the science is so dated it seems like science fiction. More problematic is the breezy dialogue, steeped in 1940s-era tough guy slang, and the ease with which everyone accepts the discovery and moves on from there. The love story feels tacked on--and not very motivated by love--and especially trivial compared to the stakes: so the main character wants to save humanity, and also get a date.

To be fair, the first half of the book works well as a mystery, though there are too many red herrings, and too many leads that suddenly disappear, as though Russell were stretching things. (Needless chase scenes are not a new Hollywood invention!) The second half, in which the vitons are cast off, does not work nearly as well, though Russell does his best to maintain suspense. Supposedly, he originally wrote a different, more downbeat conclusion; the one here is very happy and doesn't really fit the book's tone.

Eugene Zaikonnikov says

On one hand the story is entertaining. On the other, the novel casually is racist in most 1930s way.

V.W. Singer says

[Spoiler Alert - no details, but the general plot features are discussed]

Before there was the "Matrix" or "Aliens" or even "X-Files" and "Fringe", there was **Sinister Barrier** the 1939 debut novel by British SF author Eric Frank Russell, a member of the Science Fiction and Fantasy Hall of Fame.

The author starts with the questions, "If everyone wants peace, then why don't we get it?" and "If there are aliens, why haven't they appeared yet?"

The answer is even more terrifying than Morpheus's answer to Neo in The Matrix. Humans are cattle to an alien race, and have always been. They share the world with us and feed off of our nervous energy, the more intense the better, especially fear and anger.

The enemy is not invisible, but simply exist in a frequency range that unaided human eyes cannot see. And they can read our minds. Anyone who even thinks about the possibility of their existence is doomed as soon as one of the aliens comes close enough to sense his or her thoughts.

But as science progresses, an accidental discovery reveals their secret, even though the discoverers die like flies, one after the other. But the secret spreads, and finally the truth is revealed.

However, truth does not bring freedom. Instead it brings doom. Unable to hide any longer, the aliens, like any rancher faced with rebellious cattle, decides to wipe the human race out in a great feast of terror and agony.

Merely being able to see the aliens is no help, since we, the humans, still cannot touch them. All we can do is run - and die.

The story is told from the viewpoint of a pair of security agents, like Fox and Mulder, who are assigned to investigate the mysterious chain of deaths of prominent scientists.

The book was written in 1939, so the language is reminiscent of a noir detective thriller of the period and may jar some modern readers, but the tone is not heavy or intrusive. Given that it was before World War 2, the writer's future world is incredibly predictive.

Police forensics are emphasised, using such things as 3D cameras and lasers to detect impressions in fibrous surfaces, telephones have video screens and conference speaker capabilities. The most common vehicle is the gyrocycle, a fully covered, two wheel vehicle that can remain upright by itself, something that is actually in development right at this moment and is slowly coming to market. Pistol bullets are "segmentary" similar to experimental frangible bullets of today.

The book is an alien invasion, murder mystery, and horror story all in one and is the grandfather to all the iconic stories mentioned at the beginning.

If you enjoy truly classic science fiction and a rousing thriller, read *Sinister Barrier*.

Michael Adams says

A decent old-school sci-fi adventure, but nothing exceptional. I was interested in reading it since it was inspired by the work of Charles Fort. The first third of the book plays out like a bit of murder mystery, with scientists mysteriously dying around the world, and from there the Fortean phenomena angle is revealed as seemingly unrelated pieces of information culminate in a revelation of planetary significance. From there things escalate into a world war 3 scenario with a race to discovering a sort-of 'silver-bullet' solution to the worlds problem. Main problem with this book is how clunky the writing is, and the 1950's gumshoe aesthetic of the dialogue doesn't help. All-in-all I'd only recommend this book to hardcore classic SF fans. Not many others would enjoy this, despite the clever premise and potential it has.

Riju Ganguly says

This novel, like most works of Russell, is more about humanity than the inhuman or non-human perils that they face. It's a thinly veiled exploration as well as exploitation of paranoia resulting from the cold war situation. Basic question that it seeks to address is: what would you do if you are surrounded, in fact controlled by invisible enemies?

Unfortunately, the protagonist goes for stock response like ray guns and such stuff. But the book was enjoyable. It had also inspired a Bengali work named ??????? ????? by Adrish Bardhan, who had penned a Professor Nut-Boltu-Chakra story around it.

Sbulk says

<http://clarkevivo.blogspot.it/2013/04...>

Ognuno di noi ha fantasticato almeno una volta nella vita sull'eventualità che degli alieni possano girovagare sulla Terra all'insaputa di tutti o di pochi disgraziati. Nell'immaginario collettivo ha preso piede l'ormai secolare concetto di Ufo, o per meglio dire disco volante, di cui nel web sono presenti migliaia di foto (tutte sfocate) che mostrano navicelle aliene a forma di lampioncino, lanterna cinese o cappello a bombetta. Chiunque avrà avuto l'occasione di leggere o ascoltare teorie strampalate sui poteri occulti che governano il mondo. Poche teorie raggiungono però gli spaventosi livelli di orrore e paranoia presenti in "Schiavi degli invisibili" di Eric Frank Russell, scritto nel lontano 1939 ma che nonostante l'età riesce ancora a sorprendere e affascinare.

Luca Frasca says

Lettura non indispensabile.

Un romanzo noioso e scontato, con personaggi bidimensionali e dialoghi al limite del ridicolo.

Il copione ideale per un mediocre b-movie di fantascienza, per altro datata.

Jim Davis says

Didn't finish. Didn't like the writing style.

Michelle says

Another concept that at one time may have been original but since then has been done to death. Star Trek TOS vs Klingons anybody? "...alien energy beings fed on human emotions." Ho-hum. The writing itself didn't draw me in.

