



Cover by Mo Starkey

THE DRINK TANK

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REVIEWED - SWALLOW THE SKY BY CHRIS MEAD

"Somewhere, EE Smith, Gene Roddenberry, and Iain Banks are sitting around wishing they'd written a Space Opera as entertaining as *Swallow the Sky*. Intelligent world-building, strong characterization, and settings that are just rip-roaring good fun! It tells a tale the old-fashioned way - brilliantly!"

My blurb on the book!

It's the kind of book I don't read much of because so much Space-farin' adventure leaves me cold, but here, in this wonderful book, I was absolutely blown away by the characterization and plot. I'd say it is the first novel I've read since Stephen Goldin's *Scavenger Hunt* that I could accurately describe as "rollicking" without a hint of irony! It's just so much fun.

If there is a character in the history of science fiction that I may, in fact, be related to, it's Carson. He's an intergalactic mailman. There's an occupation that you don't see mentioned in a lot of science fiction (I seem to remember Douglas Adams having one in one of the Hitchhikers books?) and it's certainly a wonderful vocation for a science fiction spacefarer. Carson also happens to be a collector of Antiques. He discovers the location of many of Earth's lost artifacts, and thus, he's off, racing against time and other driven parties. He's gotta get to 'em before anyone else, or else. Much more else!

That premise alone is a wonderful throwback to classic SF stories, and Goldin's novel is an excellent example of the subsubgenre that *Swallow the Sky* belongs to. It's not just about the race to the stuff, it's about Carson's combination of pleasure-driven egomaniacism and cunning. That's a great pairing for a hero, equal parts Han Solo and Indian Jones, but with a hint of Philip Jose Farmer's Greatheart Silver. Our bad guy is pretty much drawn from the classic villains, though I'm not sure why I got the feeling of Professor Moriarty less than Phileas Fogg when I was reading the portions dealing with Juro.

Some of the funnier bits are times like when Carson has to explain how a 'tape recorder' works. I almost didn't recognise the description, though I totally understand how one would wonder how such a thing would exist! The way it rolls along completely had me wishing they still made movie seriels, because this would be an ideal piece of fiction to adapt into that form! The mix of old-fashioned adventure mixed with more contemporary writing along with the somewhat episodic nature of the storytelling would lend itself perfectly to that format.

If I've got a complaint, it's the wrap up. The way it's paced is so solid all the way through, and then we get to an ending that feels as if we hit a wall all of a sudden. Still, it doesn't detract any from the enjoyment of the writing or the plot's fantastic movement. If I were reviewing this in 1989, I'd have pointed to the moments of "As you well know, Susie...", but here that technique gives the impression of Classic SF of the 1950s and 60s, and the entire presentation works to give off

that feeling.

I'd love to see another book focusing on Carson, as it's a character type I'd love to see more of. There's not a lot of loose ends in this one that he could play a direct sequel off of, but there's sure enough good stuff in the characterization to allow for something else bookworthy to happen to our Commonwealth Mailman!

My Favorite Passage - The center of the city was dominated by the latest architectural craze, organic-themed buildings. Towers sprouted branches, leaves, and fronds that interlocked with their neighbors like trees in a densely-packed forest. Four hundred meters above the ground condominiums snaked between cafes, art galleries writhed over gymnasiums while twisting walkways joining one building to another. Carson winced at the complexity, although no matter how clever the construction crafting the leasing agreements between adjoining properties must have been the ultimate challenge.

You should go to swallowthesky.com and buy yourself a copy! It's a purchase you will appreciate!





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THE LEATHERBOUND GEEK, GIVING PEOPLE CREATIVE CONTROL OVER THEIR LEATHER ACCESSORIES.

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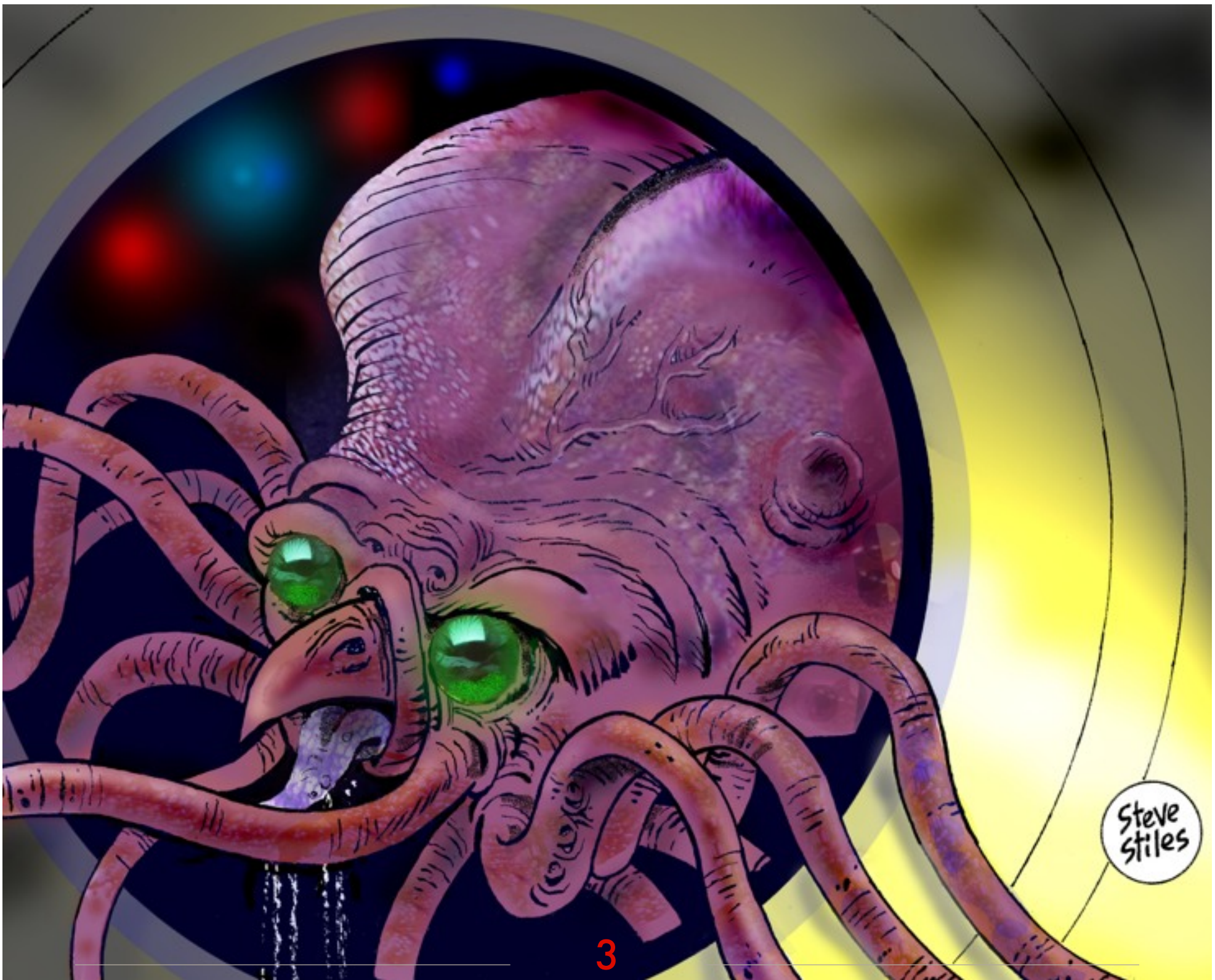
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MY MONSTER

I was asked the other day about Aliens. *Do you think they exist?*

Well, of course they do, and they're weirder than we can imagine. I remember reading *Calculating God*, or maybe it was *Illegal Alien*, and Robert J. Sawyer said that our ideas and images of aliens are too Human to be real. There is no other concept of living condition that would allow for the existence of life, Humans think, and thus all other aliens are human-like, right? We even have an accepted astronomical concept called the Goldilock's zone which states that planets have to be close to a star, but not too close, and not too far. That concept is just flat wrong, as you could easily have different forms of life that exist in greater temperature ranges than we'd possibly understand. We're just too deeply ingrained with our idea of the definition of life to accept that there might be different forms of it.

The idea of the tentacled monster alien is interesting, as tentacles make sense for transit of bodies. They distribute weight more evenly, and with the great surface area, that would allow for easier bodily heat exchange. I Talking space squids are far-fetched, but maybe not as much as you'd think.

Personally, I think aliens that would want to build ships to come to Earth, or any other planet, would be those that can less easily tolerate environmental extremities. Like Humans. Think about it: if you're a species (or maybe they'd be different classes or phylae?) that can adapt to extreme heat, cold, changes in the CO₂ or whatever levels, you don't really need to get off your planet, right? You can just adapt. Tentacled aliens might make sense, so maybe our good friend H.G. Wells was right in *War of the Worlds*.

In my eyes, though, most life on other planets must be colony-based. Not algae-like floating masses, but imagine bodies, perhaps in the shape of a squid, that were composed of millions of individual cells, each making decisions or simply responding to stimulus, but without a single consciousness. Perhaps they're distributed thought forms, that have one central coordinator cel, or series of cells, but the rest of the cell act independently, which would allow them to flee one form and enter another in reaction to some stimulus or another. It's hard to imagine how that would work, but I love the idea. Not like a colony of ants, but more like a body that is aware of itself in levels. It's cartoonish in a way, like when you see cartoons where the various different parts of the body thinking and talking for themselves. That would be cool, though!

Of course, there's the idea that we evolved because this is how creatures living in a habitable zone with consciousness on a round planet must look like. That's a fascinating concept, but if you look at the whole idea of the 'Grey' alien, it ties very closely to the classic image of an alien ambassador from *Star Trek*. The timeframe matches up very closely.

DO I think that there are aliens?

Of course there are. Will they look like us? Well, if they do, then that throws a monkeywrench into a lot of evolutionary theory now, doesn't it?

