



BOB KANE DEFOREST KELLEY H. P. LOVECRAFT

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THE GOTHIC IMAGINATION

CHRISTOPHER REEVE RAY HARRYHAUSEN

GAHAN WILSON GREG BEAR T.E.D. KLEIN

CONVERSATIONS ON FANTASY, HORROR,
AND SCIENCE FICTION IN THE MEDIA

ROBERT BLOCH STEPHEN KING

JOHN C. TIBBETTS

GEORGE TAKEI

PREFACE BY RICHARD HOLMES

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The Gothic Imagination

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John C. Tibbetts

Preface by
Richard Holmes

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THE GOTHIC IMAGINATION

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*To my father, James C. Tibbetts (1917–1998),
member of First Fandom, who first showed me the way
to the worlds of wonder.*

Witness this new-made world, another heaven. . .
Of amplitude almost immense, with stars
Numerous, and every star perhaps a world
Of destined habitation. . .

Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book VII, 1667 (lines 617–623)

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P R E F A C E

BY RICHARD HOLMES



Richard Holmes. Image copyright, Stuart Clarke.

It's always a great idea to get a bunch of enthusiasts sounding off about a subject they really know, love, and deeply care for. In the case of the Gothic and science fiction practitioners here, it's genuinely weird and thought-provoking, too. John Tibbetts's wild and exuberant anthology of interviews will certainly test your synapses as well as your literary prejudices. It reminds me that I belong to an old-fashioned generation whose idea of science fiction was defined by two heroic events of the late 1960s: the Apollo 11 Moon landing and Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. More than 40 years later, I am amazed by the Gothic richness, the anarchic wit, and technical resilience of the form as it has obviously continued to develop, especially in America. Just what is it in the Gothic genome that allows it to go on flourishing?

Well, let me give you the reflections of a traditionalist, a British biographer of both writers and scientists, who recently published a mainstream study of Romantic Science entitled *The Age of Wonder*. Not long ago I paid a visit to the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D. C. There I found a dazzling new exhibition installed, entitled simply “Beyond.” It is a display of 148 photographs of all the planets in our solar system (except Pluto). None of the photos was taken from standard, earth-based telescopes. Most were taken by the NASA space probes of the Voyager and Mariner programs over the past 30 years or so.

These “fly-by” pictures (as they are so nonchalantly called) are in fact miracles of technical achievement. Some space probes took many years to reach their target planets, the most ambitious using “slingshot” techniques to swing past the giant gravity field of Jupiter and so sweep on to Saturn and even Neptune. Using multilensed viewing devices, drawing on several different bands of the electromagnetic spectrum, including, of course, infrared, their data has been transmitted back to Earth and gradually built up by computers into these brilliant, colored composite visual images. These are truly astonishing. They give an actual, immediate physical impression of “other worlds”—both beautiful and terrifying—that would be hard to match by anything in my particular favorite science fiction and fantasy authors: Verne, Wells, Arthur C. Clarke, Asimov, Ray Bradbury, or J. G. Ballard. (I said I was a traditionalist.)

So one might think that the inventions of science fiction are always doomed to be overtaken by the fantastic achievements of science itself. (Even *Star Trek* now feels like *The Antiques Roadshow*.) Yet it seems to me that science fiction is now being asked to undertake a rather different task from pure invention. It is to *reimagine what’s already been discovered*. Its watchword is quite simply: ok, what then? All its traditional forms—predictions, Cassandra-like warnings, dystopias, satires, technological fantasies, Gothic epics in hyperdrive—are constantly renewed by such a demand.

Central to this idea seems to me a quite old-fashioned notion: the inexhaustible wonder of the universe. As I began working on my *Age of Wonder*, I set out with a very simple definition of this strange stuff called “wonder,” based on Plato. Plato says that Wonder is one of the fundamental and defining human impulses not shared by animals. “In Wonder all Philosophy began; in Wonder it ends...But the first Wonder is the Offspring of Ignorance; the last is the Parent of Adoration.” (That’s how Coleridge, the old science fiction master of the poem “Kubla Khan,” translated him anyway.)

As my book expanded from the late eighteenth century into the first third of the nineteenth century, the notion of Wonder became more complicated and ambiguous. It necessarily evolves and expands with knowledge; and it takes you into more and more difficult areas. My book’s subtitle, “How the Romantic Generation Discovered the Beauty and Terror of Science,” emphasizes that Wonder leads you into both places: into the beautiful and beneficial, but also into the terrifying and menacing.

With NASA still in mind, a pertinent example would be Sir William Herschel's wonderful discoveries as an astronomer. He found the seventh planet Uranus in 1781: the first new planet since Ptolemy, which instantly doubled the size of the known solar system, and, of course, suggested that there might be others out there. But later he hugely increased the size of the universe itself. For the first time he actually observed and drew the shape of our Milky Way, defined it as a separate galaxy in space, and suggested that there were other observable "island universes" out there, like Andromeda. This totally confounded all previous notions of cosmic size and scale. Here were distances that no one could remotely conceive, except mathematically. It was a change as radical as the original loss of the innocent, friendly geocentered universe destroyed by Copernicus.

Herschel was effectively the first person who said that as we look into "deep space," we're actually looking into the past, "deep time." The light of the stars takes "many millions" of years (as he mildly conceived it) to reach us. The stars are unbelievably ancient by the time we greet them. His contemporaries found that idea wonderful, as well as frightening, because they found themselves existing in a universe that was more and more alien, decentered and inconceivable. And probably, as the French astronomer Laplace brazenly remarked, no longer requiring "the hypothesis" of God.

Moreover, there were worlds out there both visible and invisible. It was Herschel who also discovered infrared rays: the invisible but powerful edge of a hitherto unknown spectrum emitted by the sun. Gradually, through the cumulative work of Faraday, Maxwell, and Huggins (among others), the whole world of electromagnetic spectrum was revealed, including, of course, ultraviolet, radio waves, X-rays, and gamma rays. It was an invisible world that no one could have believed in before, and science fiction had not remotely begun to exploit. (Incidentally, the new infrared satellite telescope, just launched in 2009, is christened "Herschel.")

Just four years before Sir William Herschel died, Mary Shelley published her book, *Frankenstein, or A Modern Prometheus* (1818), arguably the first true science fiction novel. It contains absolutely nothing about the solar system or outer space or infrared. But it does open up what my late-lamented friend Jim Ballard famously called "inner space"; and it is driven by the same key SF question: *ok, what then?* Mary had read of attempts to create artificial life, or revive dead bodies with voltaic batteries. What if a scientist actually succeeded in creating the first artificial man? *Ok, what then?*

Mary Shelley pursues the question with brilliant and astonishing originality. She was still only 18 years old when she began the novel. She isn't much interested in the technology, or what happens to the Creature's body. Contrary to the popular idea (largely shaped by the 1890 films and stage adaptations that have since been made) she writes almost nothing about the surgical and electrical techniques used to construct and animate the Creature. What Mary Shelley is really interested in is the Creature's inner

world, its mind and spirit. One can say that the novel *Frankenstein* asks two questions: what happens to the Creature's *soul*? And possibly even more hauntingly: what happens to the soul of the man, the scientist Victor Frankenstein, who dared to create it? I might also add—though no one will believe me—that the actual word “scientist” did not exist until 1834, and Mary Shelley's science fiction novel crucially helped to invent it.

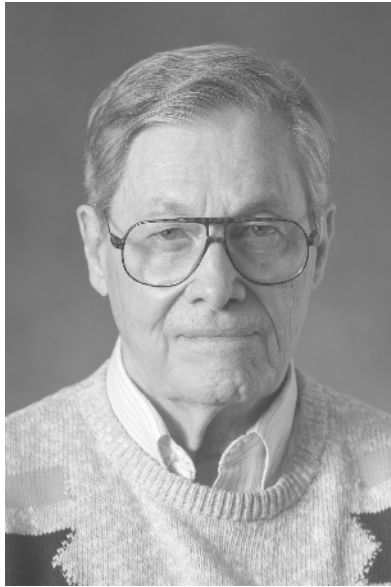
So I conclude, in my stolid way, that the fields of Gothic, fantasy, and science fiction writing are always changing and adapting, simply because their materials are inexhaustible. The demand for human *reimagining* is endless. To rest from the imaginative warp-speed of John Tibbetts's multiversed anthology (I chose my adjective *s* carefully), I have just begun Stephen Hawking's new book of astrophysics: *The Grand Design: New Answers to the Ultimate Questions of Life*. Here are pages and pages discussing 11 dimensional structures. We can assume that mathematically this makes sense: but how do we *humanly imagine* them? Or, indeed, how do we imagine the mind of the scientist who can understand them? Or (since you mention it) what might it be like to make love in 11 dimensions? Over to you.

31 January 2011

Note: Acclaimed in the *Wall Street Journal* as “our best living biographer,” Richard Holmes is well known for his many biographies and books on the Romantic Period, including the landmark *Shelley: The Pursuit* (1974, the winner of the Somerset Maugham Award), the two-volume *Coleridge* (1989–1998, winner of the Whitbread Prize), and two companionable collections of essays, *Footsteps* and *Sidetracks*. His latest book is *The Age of Wonder* (Los Angeles Times Book Prize, 2008). He is a Fellow of the British Academy and Professor of Biographical Studies at the University of East Anglia. Among his many enthusiasms is the history (and practice) of ballooning. He currently is working on a study of the “forgotten women” of science.

PREFATORY NOTE

BY JAMES GUNN



James Gunn (KUCSSF)

Full disclosure: I've known John Carter Tibbetts since he was in high school, and that was 48 years ago, when I was surprised and delighted to find that he had been named in honor of the hero of Edgar Rice Burroughs' Mars novels. A couple of years later he was a resident in a University of Kansas scholarship hall for which I was the faculty adviser. Still later he took a fiction-writing class from me (and subsequently sold a few stories). Eventually, he became my colleague at the University of Kansas.

I knew his father, James, whose passion for Burroughs and other things science-fictional, led to John's name and to the dedication of this volume. James may have been the first fan I met, probably in a downtown Kansas

City bookstore, probably in 1953, when I was a struggling freelance writer. James was an avid and knowledgeable collector and an enthusiastic fan. That was something in those days. I was an accumulator.

And my name is mentioned a few times in the pages that follow.

John Tibbetts is a man of many talents—author, editor, artist, musician, scholar, teacher. And his range of interests is as varied: literature, music, art, film, all fields in which he has already published one or more of his 18 books. Now he has turned to his and his father's first love, science fiction and fantasy, with a series of interviews from the classic authors who helped shape those fields (many of whom I have known and worked with), the artists who turned them into paintings and illustrations, the biographers who studied them, the filmmakers who broadened their audiences, and the actors who peopled these visions.

I've done some interviewing myself (and been interviewed even more), and I can assure readers that John asks good questions—the kind of questions readers always wanted to ask for themselves—because he knows the creative people he is talking to and the art that has made them great. And he gets good answers, because he knows the fields, he knows these creative people, and they know he will not be satisfied without candor. A reader can tell when an interviewer knows what he's talking about.

And I can assure readers that they will close the back cover of this book a great deal wiser than they opened it. These are indeed voices of wonder.

JAMES GUNN
University of Kansas
Lawrence, KS

Note: In his long and distinguished career, from the late 1940s to the present, science fiction writer/editor/educator James Gunn has published 100 short stories and 3 dozen books, including the acclaimed *The Immortals* (1962) and *The Listeners* (1972). He served as president of the Science Fiction Writers of America (1971–1972) and president of the Science Fiction Research Association (1982–1982). His numerous honors include the Eaton Award for Lifetime Achievement, the 1983 Hugo Science Fiction Achievement Award, and the Damon Knight Memorial Grand Master by the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America in 2007. His *Alternate Worlds: An Illustrated History of Science Fiction* (1975) stands in the front rank of books of its kind. He is Professor Emeritus of English at the University of Kansas, where he founded the Center for the Study of Science Fiction.

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A note about the images:

The University of Kansas' Center for the Study of Science Fiction has been abbreviated to "KUCSSF" for the images they provided.

INTRODUCTION

Voices Heard 'Round the Cosmic Campfire

JOHN C. TIBBETTS

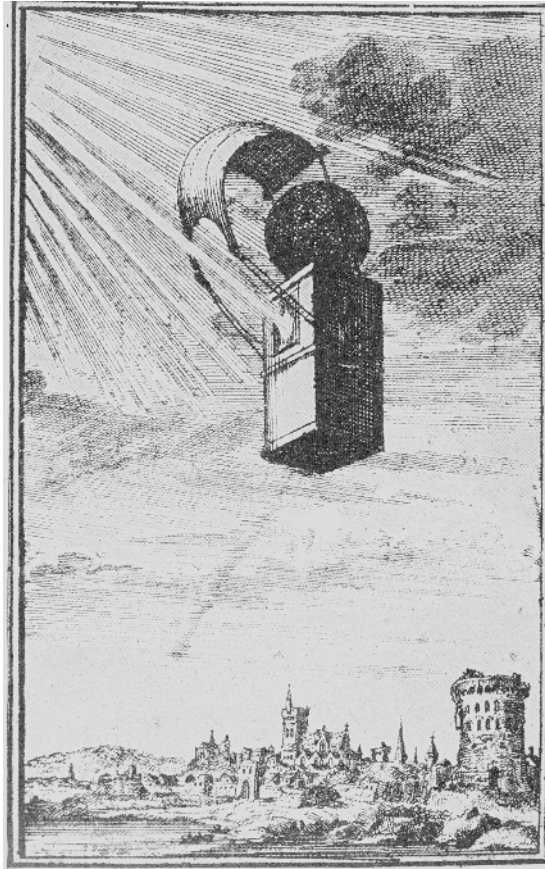
This row of shapeless and ungainly monsters which I now set before the reader does not consist of separate idols cut out capriciously in lonely valleys or various islands. These monsters are meant for the gargoyles of a definite cathedral. I have to carve the gargoyles, because I can carve nothing else; I leave to others the angels and the arches and the spires.

G. K. Chesterton, "On Gargoyles"

In Quest of Wonder . . .

In 1657, Cyrano de Bergerac (Savinien de Cyrano II) took his readers on a *Voyage to the Moon*. Five years later, this "sailor of aerial seas" ventured on to the sun. He spun quite a tale of speculative science and wild fancy—of rocket vehicles, of a centrist sun, of shape-changing aliens, and so on.¹ Unfortunately, the real de Bergerac, the greatest swordsman this side of John Carter of Mars, is currently unavailable for an interview. His precise whereabouts are unknown. However, his literary, painterly, musical, and cinematic brethren are available—and we hear their voices in these pages. Unlike the storytellers of yore, who crouched around the flame of the rude campfire, they speak out here, illumined in the glare of starshine.

And of what do they speak? They chronicle universes real and alternative, microcosmic and macrocosmic, from yesterday's Gothic romances to today's steampunk anachronisms. Just as Edgar Rice Burroughs' John Carter speeds "with the suddenness of thought through the trackless immensity of space" to Mars, later writers—Jack Williamson, Frederik Pohl, Poul Anderson, L. Sprague de Camp, and Kim Stanley Robinson—follow him to the sun and beyond.² Peter Straub, Greg Bear, and Gregory



Cyrano de Bergerac on his way to the moon (KUCSSF)

Benford reverse their rockets and venture into the innermost recesses of the human heart and the human genome, respectively. In worlds between, H. P. Lovecraft unearths cosmic horrors in his native Providence; Ramsey Campbell finds demons under the streets of Liverpool. John Dickson Carr creates miracles in locked rooms. T. E. D. Klein discovers pagan gods in the woods of upstate New York. Ray Bradbury and Ray Harryhausen create dinosaurs in their garage. Suzy McKee Charnas psychoanalyzes a vampire. Wilson Tucker time-travels to an appointment with Abraham Lincoln. Stephen King “walks our dogs at night”. And *Psycho*’s Robert Bloch rips away the shower curtain and leaves us forever afraid.

The painterly, cinematic, and musical visionaries are here: Art historians Albert Boime and Tim Mitchell recall the Gothic “sublime madness”

of the painters Théodore Géricault, Francisco Goya, and Caspar David Friedrich. Latter-day artists Gahan Wilson, Joseph Mugnaini, Chris Van Allsburg, and Bob Kane unleash their enchanted pencils to inscribe modern-day fairy tales. Filmmakers Dan Ireland, Jason V Brock, and Charles Sturridge deploy their moving images to take us, respectively, to meet “Conan” creator Robert E. Howard on the Texas plains; follow Charles Beaumont into *The Twilight Zone*; and disclose fairy-folk in Yorkshire, England. Like futuristic Peter Pans, Christopher Reeve’s “Superman” and the crews of Star Trek’s *Enterprise* and Tom Corbett’s *Polaris* fly the spaceways to their own Never Lands. Professor Jack Sullivan sounds out the Gothic-inspired music of composers Hector Berlioz, Bernard Herrmann, and others.

And, finally, Professor Harold Schechter and artist Rick Geary take seismic readings of today’s subversive cravings for Gothic schlock and true-crime horrors, while Professor Cynthia Miller and T. L. Reid explore that curious Gothic mashup of alternative worlds, punk rebellion, and anachronistic machines known as “steampunk.”

By way of a personal note, this book is dedicated to my father, James C. Tibbetts. Like a modern-day Daedalus, he was the artificer of my wings. When I was just four years old, Dad wrote a letter to Edgar Rice Burroughs stating he had given me the middle name of “Carter” in honor of the immortal John Carter of Barsoom—which elicited a return letter from Burroughs that he was “honored to have originated a name for little John Carter.” As the twig is bent. Not much later, Dad read to me Burroughs’ *A Princess of Mars* (1912). I reveled in the exploits of Captain Carter years before I discovered the chronicles of his brethren, Captain Nemo, Allan Quatermain, and Professor Challenger. Even then I suspected what historian Lin Carter declared, that Burroughs was “the greatest adventure-story writer of all time”;³ and that his stories, as confirmed by Sam Moskowitz, are direct descendents “of the travel tale typified by the *Odyssey*.”⁴ Indeed.

Subsequently, Dad wisely stood aside while, on my own, I reached, read, and savored the treasured volumes from his collections of Arkham House, Gnome Press, Donald Grant, and other publishers. So many of the figures interviewed and discussed in these pages were there, on the bookshelves, just inches away from greedy fingers. (Most of those volumes serve as reference sources for this book.) The words of Percy Shelley come to mind:

While yet a boy I sought for ghosts, and sped
Through many a listening chamber, cave and ruin
And starlight wood, with fearful steps pursuing
Hopes of high talk with the departed dead.⁵

As a member of First Fandom, Dad was welcomed at science fiction and fantasy conventions across America, with me in tow, tape recorder and

notebook in hand. A friend of many, he introduced me to Poul Anderson, Jack Williamson, L. Sprague de Camp, Robert Bloch, Wilson Tucker, Forrest J Ackerman, James Gunn, and many others whom you will find in this book. I like to think that I returned the favor, sharing with him new-found friendships with others in this book, Ray Bradbury, Peter Straub, Chris Van Allsburg, Joseph Mugnaini, Suzy McKee Charnas, and Stephen King, to name just a few. Moreover, as a radio and television reporter, I was subsequently able to contact and interview these and many other filmmakers and actors prominent in science fiction films.

In the end, as Dad lay dying, I once again picked up our volume of *A Princess of Mars*. And, just as he had once read those magical opening pages to me, I now read them back to him. Together, he once again roamed with John Carter across the mossy expanses of the Red Planet. And I know that they both are there, still.

Certain figures and themes haunt these pages. There is scarcely a conversation recorded here that does not cite, directly or indirectly, the presence, example, and influence of the modern American master of Gothic fiction, H. P. Lovecraft (1890–1937). A remark by Stephen King recorded in an interview later in these pages makes the point: “I always say that Lovecraft opened the way for us. He looms over all of us. I can’t think of any important horror fiction that doesn’t owe a lot to him.” In his lifetime frequently regarded—and dismissed—as merely an eccentric scribbler, Lovecraft, as we shall see, is now gaining respect and wider popularity as a significant avatar of the Gothic tradition in all of its thematic variety and cosmic implication.⁶ In his pursuit of the terror sublime and the uncanny, this reclusive citizen of Providence, Rhode Island, drew his vast panoply of forbidden sciences, haunted spaces, eldritch horrors, interstellar invasions, parallel worlds, and Faustian pacts from folkloric traditions—what he termed “old lore,” or “standard stories invented before the dawn of history or later”⁷—and the extrapolations and visions of eighteenth-century writers Edmund Burke and Horace Walpole; nineteenth-century Romantic visionaries Mary Shelley, the Brontë sisters, E. T. A. Hoffmann, Edgar Allan Poe, Jules Verne, H. G. Wells; and early twentieth-century masters of weird science and cosmic imagination, William Hope Hodgson, Arthur Machen, Lord Dunsany, and Olaf Stapledon.

Terror and wonder, not sentimental love and reason, bound them all together.⁸

Admittedly, I apply the term “Gothic” throughout this book in its most loose-limbed sense, that is, as a mode of speculation that *shares* critical themes and questions with fairy tales, Romanticism, and science fiction. “The methods of the Gothic writers,” observes Brian Aldiss, “are those of many science-fiction and horror writers today.”⁹ Later in these pages, art historian Albert Boime asks, “Don’t both [Gothic and Romantic] refer to ways of expanding on a vocabulary? Neither Gothic nor Romantic totally displaces Classicism and the rules; but aren’t they a way of expanding them, to allow for greater effects, for new ideas, for technology, for