

Pacific University

CommonKnowledge

Volume 10 (2010)

Interface: The Journal of Education, Community
and Values

8-1-2010

Feed

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Recommended Citation

Barlow, J. (2010). Feed [Review]. *Interface: The Journal of Education, Community and Values* 10(6). Available <http://bcis.pacificu.edu/journal/article.php?id=707>

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Feed

Description

Review of *Feed*

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Feed

Posted on **August 1, 2010** by **Editor**



Review by **Jeffrey Barlow**

Anyone who has browsed the shelves of recent fiction at any of the big box bookstores surely has been struck by the increasingly high percentage of the titles devoted to the monstrously supernatural. Such works continue to appear, although the long-dominant vampires are giving way to zombies, and werewolves remain slaving in third place.

Such titles are, clearly, more than just a passing fad. Horror and the supernatural have always been with us in fiction, with a dependably large niche audience. Now, however, the creatures of the night have crossed over into the mass market, both in fiction and in film.

One of the more persuasive explanations for the enduring appeal of horror and the supernatural is, that like several other genres, they give us a place to fix our own inchoate fears. Mary Shelley's seminal *Frankenstein*, for example, has long been held to have been a Romantic response to the oncoming scientific and industrial revolutions [1].

However, the scientific revolution, as much as fans of *Frankenstein* may have feared it, had changed everything. *Frankenstein* itself depended on a willingness to believe that several new scientific advances might indeed permit the reanimation of dead parts, if properly harnessed.

Horror can, of course, be plotted with a minimum of plausibility, witness the long series of Friday the Thirteenth-style films. But to cross-over and be successful as more than a quick read or a date-film, however, horror works best when supported, even if vaguely, by science. *The Andromeda Strain*, Harvard Medical School graduate Dr. Michael Crichton's bestseller and subsequent film, depended for its plausibility on epidemiology—even if the pathogen was of extra-terrestrial origin. Many of his subsequent techno-thrillers depended in part on some other scientific element [2]. Computers and the likelihood of unforeseen catastrophic events—often supported by vague references to Chaos Theory— were often at the center of such plots.

Mira Grant, the author of *Feed*, the subject of this review, is in some senses closer to the roots of horror fiction in its usual insistence upon copious gore and stomach-churning visuals than is

Crichton, who wanted a mass audience and a PG rating. Grant has created her own persona, which revels in an avid appreciation for blood and horror [3].

Grant's most recent work, *Feed*, cleverly brings together such themes as zombie wars [4], epidemiology (which she has studied at the collegiate level), the War on Terror, hacking, and world-class blogging. The work, despite its helter-skelter pacing, is very tightly plotted and well written. It is set in a dystopian future, the second quarter of the 21st century, which is little evolved beyond the present.

The Zombie Wars, which began in medical experimentations in 2014, are an omnipresent fact. Mankind, at least in its American So-Cal variant, has managed to cope. The really in-crowd restaurants have electronic fences and armed waiters, but crowds rarely gather; the onset of the zombie virus is so rapid that there will be few uninfected survivors of an attack. To be infected is to be immediately killed and entrance to protected facilities—and there are no other kind—gained only through constant blood testing. (Apple makes one of the best testing kits, we are glad to learn.)

The mass media, already in decline, has given way to niche-based blogging. Bloggers have become media stars and compete for increasingly dangerous content. The protagonists, a brother and sister team of video bloggers, is noted for their ability to stream content from areas well beyond human control. Known for their unflinching realism and truth-telling, their team is invited to follow a presidential candidate in the run up to the election.

At bottom the novel is a sort of social satire. The reader will recognize many of the outrageous elements of the plot and the material setting as only mild extrapolations from present equivalents. The Internet, for example, has become not only the dominant mode of communication, but almost the only one.

Reporters have become divided into blogging “Newsies” who “report facts as untainted by opinion as we can manage...” the “Stewarts, who report opinion informed by fact”...The Irwins who seek danger, and “the Aunties, who share stories of their lives, recipes, and other snippets to keep people happy and relaxed. And, of course, the Fictionals, who fill the online world with poetry, stories and fantasies. They have a thousand branches, all with their own names and customs... [5]”

Underlying the entire work is a trope which equates the Zombie Wars to the War on Terror. The government, such as it is, as well as the military, flourishes on mass fear and does not want to see any solution to the zombie problem. There is also a continual trope dealing with fundamentalist religious beliefs, held by those who think that more than a little terror would bring the country, if not the world, closer to their own particular view of god.

The audience for this book is, I believe, a sort of crossover young adult-to-adult reader similar to the more mature end of the Harry Potter and Twilight series. Although there are occasional

references to sexuality, the entire culture seems to have largely lost all erotic urges and beyond the frequent gore fests, the work is “G” rated.

This target audience may initially be entertained but, if even marginally thoughtful, will quickly grow uneasy. The constant references to pop culture and to the increasing irrelevance of news and entertainment, shows us a populace which is so fearful that it seeks relief not in concerted or even individual action, but in increasingly isolated escapism which ultimately dooms it, if not to outright extinction, to irrelevance.

The zombie plague is often referred to as “The Rising,” but when the author asks the audience, as she does in both the work and in her web site, “When Will You Rise,” she has, I think, a double meaning in her question.

This work is bound to find a mass audience, an inevitable film, and as it relies in large part on speculation about the future of the Internet as a critical element in mass communication, it is well worth reading for those interested in the impact of the Internet.

The prose style—a sort of combination of early Tom Wolfe (*Electric Kool-Aid* Tom—not *Looking Homeward* Thomas) and a hard-driving techno-pop narrative will be off-putting to many, as will the youthful voices of the protagonists. However, the book has a great deal to say about the post-Internet world. It is to be the first of a trilogy in which the key characters continue to fight zombies and blog the truth.

Endnotes

[1] For one such argument, see Blake Taylor, “[Frankenstein and Revolution](#).” See also: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frankenstein>. This article is an authoritative one because it is well written and organized and has an extensive vocabulary including scholarly sources.

[2] See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michael_Crichton for an excellent summary of Crichton’s life and work which demonstrates this point. The site is a credible one, well researched and thoroughly researched. As its focus is upon Crichton’s public career, it tends to neglect his painstaking research.

[3] Ms. Grant’s personal WWW page is found at: <http://www.miragrants.com/>. Ms. Grant has also written as Seanan McGuire.

[4] In the zombie wars sub-genre developed by film director George Romero—amusingly presented in a brief cameo in this book as a zombie being protected for research purposes—zombies and mankind are at war and the world has become a series of shifting battlefronts. Mankind fights for survival and zombies, in addition to an irresistible urge to dine out and often, are engaged in some terrible quest for self-actualization.

[5] P. 50, *Feed*.

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2 THOUGHTS ON “FEED”

dating

on **February 4, 2014 at 10:16 AM** said:

I am a student and i observed your info on a internet site incredibly exciting for my study,
Please keep it up.

nigeria entertainment news

on **February 4, 2014 at 10:36 AM** said:

These days the internet technologies offer us with a very particular possibility to choose
what exactly 1 requires