



## When Worlds Collide

*Philip Wylie, Edwin Balmer, John Varley (Introduction)*

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A runaway planet hurtles toward the earth. As it draws near, massive tidal waves, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions wrack our planet, devastating continents, drowning cities, and wiping out millions. In central North America, a team of scientists race to build a spacecraft powerful enough to escape the doomed earth. Their greatest threat, they soon discover, comes not from the skies but from other humans. A crackling plot and sizzling, cataclysmic vision have made *When Worlds Collide* one of the most popular and influential end-of-the-world novels of all time. This Bison Frontiers of Imagination edition features the original story and its sequel, *After Worlds Collide*.

## When Worlds Collide Details

Date : Published October 1st 1999 by Bison Books (first published January 1st 1932)

ISBN : 9780803298149

Author : Philip Wylie , Edwin Balmer , John Varley (Introduction)

Format : Paperback 382 pages

Genre : Science Fiction, Fiction, Apocalyptic, Post Apocalyptic

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## From Reader Review When Worlds Collide for online ebook

### **Erik Graff says**

Dated, but I liked it so much that I went out immediately to purchase and read its sequel, After World Collide. Both were read at grandmother's cottage in Lake Charter Township, Michigan.

A movie version of this volume was made in the fifties in color. It also holds up rather well. The most recent remake appears to be 2012--one of the worst disaster movies ever made.

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### **David says**

This is dated but fun. By "dated" I don't mean the science, which veers between inaccurate and glossed over, but is convincingly told: suspension of disbelief holds up. Rather, I mean that the book reflects commonplace social attitudes of the early 1930s about the relative abilities and characteristics of men and women, with an uncomfortable characterization of an Asian valet.

So a few interesting tidbits: in summarizing world reaction to the news, Mussolini gets name checked, but Germany has no named leader. Why? It's written in 1932. The US president (and the rest of government) are portrayed as heroic and courageous, but ultimately ineffective compared to the efforts of the self-selected meritocracy. The amount of discussion of the necessary realities of repopulating a world is also surprising. Finally, there are very few wasted words here- it's 192 pages, and zips along.

Recommended.

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### **A.J. Newman says**

I read this, the first time when I was a youngster. I read it again in 2016 and found it to be just as great 50 years later.

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### **Bill says**

The wonderful movie of the same name is based on this novel which caused me to seek out the book. I read the duology published in the 30's. It is the story of building an arc to save a few humans and animals after the collision with Earth by a rogue planet on collision course. I was surprised by the accuracy of the science, even compared to today's standards. Of course they had to get to the new planet without computers or other modern technological advances. An space travel is told from a 30's point of view. Still it has good, hard science for the 30's. It is an engaging story, even better than the movies.

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## **Thom says**

This short novel is full of win!

First off, it is a grand adventure story, with all the elements you would expect - travel, landscapes, interactions with people. Next, it's a disaster story like no other - real end-of-the-world stuff. Lastly, it's science fiction - describing manned flight off-planet, weightlessness, and the rigors of take-off and landing. All of this written before 1932!

Yes, some of the science we know today is missing. Miniaturization, computers, radio communication through space. A modern version would have had several probes landing on the new planet, and the composition of the atmosphere (via spectral analysis) determined well in advance.

The main characters are fully fleshed out, and the "love triangle" between Eve, Tony and David is a good side story to the direct plot. Yes, some sexism is present. Also, the novel is "color blind" - very few racial descriptions are given.

These are but minor quibbles in a very readable story, most of the time hard to put down. First read this (and the sequel) as a young teen, and my imagination is just as fired by the re-reading. Found myself thinking of this as a movie (not the 1951 film). The plot would work today, with just a few minor tweaks to update the science. Highly recommended!

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## **Amy Sturgis says**

This is justifiably known as a classic of apocalyptic science fiction. It's an absorbing read. Two planets, pulled from their orbits, are hurtling toward Earth. One will make a disastrously close pass, and the second will impact our planet directly. With almost journalistic objectivity, the novel relates the global efforts by humanity to cheat certain death, and in particular the quest in the United States (with both American and international personnel) to shift a small number of people to one of the planets before Earth is destroyed. This has it all - personal drama, the best and worst of human nature, philosophical and religious musings - and it excels with the science. Given that *When Worlds Collide* was published in 1933, it's remarkable how modern the sensibility seems, including vivid descriptions of manned space flight, weightlessness, and astronomical observation. Some of the social aspects are dated, but not distractingly so. (In fact, the main female character is a scientist in her own right.) It's well worth reading for anyone interested in the history of science fiction, apocalyptic visions, and stirring adventure.

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## **R. says**

Written in the years immediately preceding World War II, this book and its sequel "After Worlds Collide" tell a gripping tale about the end of our planet and mankind's survival (by creating "arks" capable of jumping to another planet).

These books reminded me of Jules Verne's work in a way, probably because of the fantastic detail of the preparations, the events themselves, and the way the politics of the day affected the story line.

Remember, mankind had no rockets in 1933, certainly none capable of carrying humans (and everything needed for their survival) into space. In addition, war was looming and nations such as Japan, Germany, France, Britain, and the U. S. were very much aware of the cataclysm to come.

While actual events have dated the story for both of these books, the books remain viable not only as great adventure stories, but as a glimpse into the fears of that time.

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### **Kay says**

3 1/2 stars rounded up. This is a classic - perhaps the first apocalyptic comet-asteroid-planet hits the earth saga. Not much is written about this example of the genre: It is omitted from many "best of" lists. I suspect this is largely due to several factors like the antiquated views of its authors.

Where do I begin? Endemic racism, sexism, classism, and disdain for anyone who is not wealthy or successful, informs the writing.

Also, the science in the science fiction is at times laughable. The authors, however, deserve applause for this early effort to describe such an event.

The writing is dated, archaic and stilted but the plot and over all vision is mostly well thought out. (The beginning and end are exceptions - totally unbelievable.) Despite plenty of cringeworthy elements this classic is worth a read.

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### **Robin says**

This book was so much better than I expected. It wasn't overly deep, but it was exceedingly well paced. It opens with energy and manages to carry it without. There were a few scientific discrepancies, but that's just because it was written in 1933, and they were very easily overlooked.

The story was engaging without being overly heavy. It was a relaxing yet quality read. I very much so look forward to reading After Worlds Collide.

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### **Laura Leilani says**

Really wanted to love this book. It surely must have been the greatest sci fi book ever written in its time. Unfortunately it is rather dated; people's attitudes toward marriage and sex and people's respect of each other and duty to the greater good. These days no one would care about having to breed with random people to make the best children. They would not work 12 hour days on a ship they may not be able to escape on. Modern people's lack of morals, lack of a sense of duty, and utter selfishness make this story seem very unrealistic.

It's a good story idea, the world about to be smashed by a rogue asteroid, but the writing didn't do much for me. Three fourths of the way through the book, it inexplicably changed to a diary format. Then back again for no reason. Also I found the ending to be a bit empty. That's probably because I was never fully engaged

with the characters.

I would recommend this book just because for its time period it must have been great, and also because it gives a unique view into how people used to think.

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### **Mark says**

I can see why this book is so popular. The ideas presented are astounding and for its time and they're pretty interesting too, even now-a-days. I can imagine what people must of wondered about after reading this book back in the 30's. Very well written and I'm recommending it to every sci-fi fan I know. True classic!

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### **Brendan says**

The first time I remember hearing the name Philip Wylie was when the University of Nebraska put out this wonderful edition of *When Worlds Collide* (which also contains its sequel, *After Worlds Collide*). The plot of the book is no doubt well-known by now. Earth finds itself in the path of two rogue planets, one of them on a collision course with Earth. Some scientists believe the other planet might just be hospitable enough to allow human habitation, the problem being how to get from here to there. Though both the language and the science in the book is dated, there's a lot about it that still rings true.

However, the reason I most appreciate this book and this edition is it introduced me to Philip Wylie, and after reading it, I hunted down most everything by him I could find. Seemingly almost forgotten today, Wylie was a working writer for more than half a century, who distinguished himself in a number of genres, including science fiction, crime, and social criticism.

Among other things, he wrote the screenplay to the Claude Rains classic, "The Invisible Man." His 1930 novel *Gladiator* is often credited with inspiring the character of "Superman." His 1934 novel *Finnley Wren* is a tour de force and an English language masterpiece. Later, during the Cold War, Wylie wrote a number of books featuring a post-nuclear war America, most notably in *Tomorrow!* Wylie himself became personally involved in Civil Defense initiatives.

But what I find to be the most delightful Wylie are the "Crunch and Des" stories he wrote, mostly for the Saturday Evening Post, that you can now find in a number of modern editions. Telling the tales of a pair of commercial fishermen in Florida, they are guaranteed to bring a smile.

So, in a nutshell, you're ever at a yard sale and see a dog-eared and yellowing book by Philip Wylie, pick it up. You'll be glad you did.

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### **Sharon Powers says**

Well, you can see I gave this book 5 stars. I know, I know. It's an old book, not a "hot off the presses" book. Not a New York Times best seller. But I really loved it. I've also recently learned that Hollywood is about to turn this book into a major motion picture. And...I can hardly wait.

Now, to the book: First, it is 642 pages, so not a small book. It was written by Philip Wylie and Edwin Balmer. It is the second of three books I have read by the writing team.

**SHORT SYNOPSIS:** It is discovered that a huge planet is racing towards the earth. As the planet hurtles towards destroying earth, a team of scientists work furiously to build a special space ship in which to escape earth and fly to a second planet (not far from the one which will crash into earth), that will only pass by the earth and not hit it. They hope to bring along enough seeds, plants, animals and humans to be able to survive on this new alien planet.

As they prepare to leave earth and race in their construction of their space ship, tidal waves occur, earth quakes and hurricanes. But they face an even greater threat that the forces of nature. Groups of terrified people begin swarming their compound. The scientists fight for their lives and have to fire back on the attacking crowd of ravaging people.

#### **WHAT I THOUGHT ABOUT THE BOOK:**

I could not imagine a more terrifying end of the world scenario than the one conceived by Balmer and Wylie. The destruction of New York was especially riveting, and how one pastor could go with the scientists, but opts to stay to give comfort to the terrified for as long as he can. I love how Balmer and Wylie portray the uncertainty of the scientists and how they wonder about such simple, taken-for-granted things as marriage and children--will love have to be set aside for the sake of procreating children for this new world?

I will definitely REREAD this book again. And, I can't wait for the movie to come to the big screen! I give this wonderful sci-fi classic two thumbs up!

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#### **Lilyn G. | Sci-Fi & Scary says**

When Worlds Collide is a book that delighted me on basically every level. It completely caught me up and swept me away. Once I was immersed within it, the world that has developed since the 30s ceased to exist. A delightful surprise. I wasn't expecting much going into this. I've just come off reading an H.G. Wells novel that was a mire to wade through at times (In the Days of the Comet). I was kind of expecting antiquated language and ridiculous execution. Wylie and Balmer defied my expectations in the best of ways.

The drama — Oh, the drama! When Worlds Collide is obviously going to be full of dramatic happenings, but it is written in a way that drips with it. Each word seems carefully chosen to wrest every bit of emotion from the situation. If it was something written today, I'd probably roll my eyes at it. (Actually, I might have rolled my eyes once or twice while reading it.) Mostly, though, I just grinned and gave into the cheese. It flipped my 'bad SyFy movie lover' switch early on, and I had no problem basking in the gloriousness of it for the rest of the book.

Now, obviously given the time this was written in, there are going to be some things that offend modern sensibilities. The fact that the main female character is lauded for how unusual she is in the fact that she 'thinks like a man'. The eager-to-please "Jap servant". I'm not going to talk about them too much because this book was written 85 years ago. It was very much a different time then, and to fuss about the content in a pulp book written that long ago seems silly. We'll just say that yes, there are issues that definitely exist, and leave it at that.

The science of When Worlds Collide is... interesting? Interesting is a good word for it. Much more apt than "accurate". Most of it is good, but there were a few things that even had me giving it the stink-eye. However, this is one of those cases where two things step in and save the day. Firstly, it was such a good read that I just didn't care. Secondly, it was written 85 bloody years ago. I'm gonna cut them some slack.

This is the one of the earliest written 'end of the world' novels that I have read. (The other two were both by H.G. Wells: War of the Worlds, The Time Machine). It is also the only one I've ever read that dealt with the passage of another planet bringing an end to life as we know it. Asteroids, zombies, nuclear war, etc, have all had their day in the sun, but stray planets get little love.

Overall, I expect that When Worlds Collide will end up being one of the best novels I've read this year. It's a wonderful book that bulls-eyed me right into my happy zone. I highly recommend it!!

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### **Mike (the Paladin) says**

Dated but wonderful book. I have the book with When Worlds Collide and After Worlds Collide both in it though it's simply called When Worlds Collide. As noted this book is very dated, was written long ago and has some pretty un-PC parts, but it's a good story and shouldn't be missed.

You will definitely spot the time lag here when you start to deal with science in the book but it doesn't take away from the experience. As a matter of fact you might find it interesting. The world of science fiction before miniaturization, portable computers, lasers, etc. Magnetic tape is in its heyday here and we predate videotape. The book gives great portrayals of humans and human nature which hasn't changed all that much over the years...or decades...or centuries...or millennia...

They even have to use actual paper books, wow. I always wonder what happens to the first interplanetary voyage if when they/we get there we can't access the electronic library. For that matter what happens HERE if there's an EMP and all the books preserving human knowledge are saved digitally.

Oh well, off topic.

This is a well plotted, well written book. One of my favorites from way, way back. Enjoy.

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### **Mscout says**

Written in the early 1930s, *When Worlds Collide* tells the story of what happens when two planets that have been set free from their own star "some millions of years ago" make their way into our solar system with first a close pass, then a direct collision course with Earth. Seems as if it's intended as a religious parable (even down to the female lead being named Eve), or at the very least, yet another indictment of man's inhumanity to man and his planet.

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## Scott Rhee says

So, rogue planets are a real thing. I just thought it was a cool---albeit ridiculous---idea conjured up by clever science fiction writers, but, apparently, our solar system is full of orbital planetary bodies that have never latched on to a star like the nine planets in our system (well, okay, eight, depending on whom you ask, although I'm still holding out hope that Pluto will put on some more weight and be re-classified as a planet) and are simply floating around out there in a galactic orbit, waiting to find some brown dwarf with which to shack up. Rogue planets lead a pretty lonely life.

Of course, if rogue planets are real, then it's just one more crazy astronomical phenomenon that we have to worry about destroying us in the future. If it's not sun spots, supernovae, giant asteroids, comets, or alien invasions, now we have to worry about some rogue planet entering our solar system and trying to nudge Earth out of our prime spot.

In 1932, authors Edwin Balmer and Philip Wylie extrapolated such a scenario in their somewhat cheesy and dated but still immensely entertaining novel "When Worlds Collide", made into a popular Hollywood film in 1951. The book and, perhaps moreso, the movie were influential in cementing a trend within the science fiction genre of scientist-heroes faced with either saving the world or saving as many people from an extinction-level disaster. Virtually every science fiction disaster film ("Deep Impact", "Armageddon", "The Core", "Independence Day", "2012", just to name some contemporary examples) has followed the same exact formula.

Considering Balmer/Wylie's novel was written long before the atomic bomb, space flight, and mankind stepping on the moon, the novel is pretty impressive with its attempt at scientific accuracy. It's not hard sci-fi, but it's not flaccid either. I'd say it's semi-hard.

There are several heroes in the novel, although the main focus is on Tony Drake, who is the basic Everyman to which the average reader is meant to relate. Handsome, not that intelligent, decent job, Tony is also dating Eve Hendron, daughter of the brilliant scientist Cole Hendron.

When the book opens, scientists in a South Africa observatory have discovered the existence of two celestial bodies moving in the direction of Earth. The larger one is named Bronson Alpha, and it appears to be a gas-giant planet similar to Jupiter. The smaller one, which revolves around Alpha, is named Bronson Beta, and it is the same size as Earth. Both planets are named after the scientist, Sven Bronson, who made the discovery.

News of the existence of the rogue planets is kept a secret from the general public because of something else that was discovered: Bronson Alpha is on a direct collision course with Earth. In two years, Earth will be destroyed. Prior to that, due to gravitational effects, Earth will succumb to major tidal and climatic changes, causing hurricanes, tidal waves, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions.

Dr. Hendron, of course, has a plan. He envisions a large space ship, big enough to carry several hundred people, leaving Earth just before the impact with Alpha and landing on Beta. The hope is that once Earth and Alpha are destroyed, Beta will latch on to an orbit around our sun and take the place of Earth's orbit. The hope is that Beta's Earth-like conditions have been in a kind of cryogenic freeze in its million-year stroll through the galaxy and that, once thawed, humans can live there. The hope is that the space ship can land safely on Beta.

There's a lot of hope in this novel.

As expected, news leaks out. Panic ensues. Masses of looters and pissed-off people on a global scale are fighting to survive.

As cheesy as this book is, by today's standards of science fiction, I have to say that I enjoyed the fact that it is still a suspenseful, edge-of-the-seat action thriller. Once you can get past all the disturbing socio-political implications (all the survivors are supposedly white and Caucasian, with one notable exception), it's actually a fun read.

Two years after this novel was published, Balmer/Wylie published a sequel, "After Worlds Collide".

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### **Suzanne says**

What an amazing amount of prediction for a book written in the 1930s!

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### **Brian says**

All those other apocalyptic books with their puny viruses and piddling nuclear wars have nothing on When Worlds Collide, which is about the smashing of Earth itself into jagged little pieces.

Or it would be -- if physics respected the three-act structure.

The book begins with the man who is carrying the fate of Mankind in his briefcase: photographic plates of two large planetary objects -- one about the size of Neptune, one Earth-sized -- that are on a collision course with the third planet in our little solar system. Yeah, that's us. And ain't nothin in the world can stop them. So what is going to happen to our planet is, to coin a phrase, written in the stars from page one. Well, at least there'll be no more ads for Viagra.

The story -- the one with some reasonable margin for error -- is about the men and women who refuse to accept this fate. It turns out, you see, that the smaller body is not only about the same size as Earth, but also very Earth-like. If their calculations are correct, it will survive the collision of the other two planets and take up an orbit of its own about the Sun. So it's just a matter of building a ship that can make the crossing. There's just one catch: the ship envisioned can only house about a hundred people.

According to the blurb on the back of my mid-seventies paperback, this caveat "touch[s] off a savage struggle among the world's most powerful men for the million-to-one chance of survival." You'd think that it would, wouldn't you? But, if you were anything other than a blurb writer, you'd probably want to read the book first before announcing it to the world. The fact is, no such thing ever happens.

In fact, this is one of the curious things about this novel. I could also have said "quaint." "Charming" is another matter. It has that old-timey faith in science and scientists as the saviors of our world. It comes by this honestly -- it was published in 1933 -- but it makes, at times, for some...interesting...developments. For instance, government plays no role in the building of the spaceship. It is conceived by Dr. Cole Hendron (whose honorific is of the Ph, not the M, variety), and he alone gathers about him the people he believes he needs to succeed. He alone will decide who goes and who stays. Meanwhile, the President of the United States rallies the populace to die another day.

That most of "us" have several opportunities to die is determined by the fact that the invading planets make two passes of the Earth, not just one. The first is a near miss. But even a near miss, with the combined mass of Neptune and Earth, is catastrophic. Tidal waves, earthquakes, floods, volcanic activity -- the world is torn apart. Well, all but torn apart; the actual rending comes later. In between, reduced in large part to barbarism, the remaining population finds more traditional ways to kill each other.

This is great stuff.

Keeping the home fires burning are Tony Drake and the chief's daughter, Eve. But theirs is a romance with serious complications. If only a hundred people can survive, how can they justify monogamy? Tony, a simpler soul than Eve, thinks he can justify it just fine; Eve is more realistic. Enter David Ransdell, a real man's man, whose appreciation of Eve's charms is not altogether unrequited.

Flipping my paperback over, we find on the front cover the bold statement: "America's most famous science fiction classic that ranks with 1984 and Brave New World." Except that this book is largely forgotten and the other two are still considered classics. This, I'm here to tell you, isn't quite fair. Literarily, no, When Worlds Collide isn't in the same league. In terms of its vision, though, and its remarkable evocation of utter disaster, it actually is. This is a book in which shit not only happens, it obliterates practically everything.

I'm going to see the 1951 movie later today, but I can already tell you, if ever there was a story ripe for a remake, this is it. And it could be glorious.

When Worlds Collide (1951), directed by Rudolph Maté

<http://brianmartin.booklikes.com/post...>

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### Sandy says

To look at the astronomical statistics, you would think that planet Earth is a sitting duck. In our teensy immediate neighborhood of the galaxy alone, there are over 14,000 asteroids zipping about, not to mention over 100 near-Earth comets. Asteroids of over one kilometer in diameter have hit the Earth, it is approximated, twice every million years during the planet's history; those of five kilometers, every 20 million years. Every 2,000 years, it has been said, a chunk of space matter collides with or explodes over the Earth causing a 10-megaton blast, such as the one (size unknown) that fell over Siberia on June 30, 1908--the so-called Tunguska event--which flattened almost 800 square miles of forest. And these are all relatively small pieces of whizzing space rock, mind you; comparative pebbles. What if another PLANET were to bring good ol' Earth into its crosshairs? Worse still, what if a DOUBLE planetary system were to come swinging into our immediate vicinity? Well, that is precisely the setup of Philip Wylie & Edwin Balmer's now-classic sci-fi novel of 1933, "When Worlds Collide." The novel originally appeared as a six-part serial in the hugely popular "Blue Book Magazine," starting in the September '32 issue (when Balmer was 49 and Wylie was 30) and concluding in the February '33. For such a seminal story, it now seems surprising that "When Worlds Collide" was never given the cover illustration on any of those six issues; Edgar Rice Burroughs' "Tarzan and the Leopard Men" copped the cover spots on the first two, while various stories of Arabia, Western action, Yukon (?) fur traders and the Far East accounted for the other four. I had never read the novel until just recently but had seen the 1951 filmization; a slow-moving affair, as I recall, with only so-so special FX. Fortunately, the novel is anything but dull, and offers up a spectacular story with telling details that dazzle the mind's eye.

In the book, a South African astronomer named Sven Bronson makes a startling discovery: Two rogue planets, that had been ripped from their own sun untold millions of years earlier, are now hurtling toward the neighborhood of our solar system. Even worse, while the smaller of the two, the Earth-sized world dubbed Bronson B, is projected to bypass our world by a safe margin, the larger, Bronson A (a gas giant that is actually 12 times the size of Earth), would seem to be on a direct collision course! As the novel progresses, we observe the approaching disaster and ultimate cataclysm through the eyes of several central characters: Cole Hendron, America's greatest astrophysicist and engineer, who works with Bronson on a means of evacuating some 100 of Earth's best and brightest specimens, via rocket ship, to the promising haven of Bronson B; Eve, his daughter, and a brilliant scientist in her own right; Tony Drake, a stockbroker, all-American man of action, and Eve's hopeful fiancé; and Dave Ransdell, a South African pilot and adventurer, who flies Bronson's discoveries to Hendron in the States and stays on at the scientist's rocket base in Michigan, only to become Tony's rival for Eve's affections. Eventually, Bronson A & B do make their initial pass of Earth, resulting in worldwide earthquakes, volcanoes, massive flooding, the release of poisonous gases from the Earth's core, a general reconfiguration of the land masses, and universal panic and breakdown of society. But can Hendron and his 1,000 followers prepare their 100-person-capacity rocket ship before the so-called "Bronson bodies" return, and wipe out planet Earth in toto?

I alluded to the spectacular nature of Wylie & Balmer's story just before, and I use that word advisedly; "When Worlds Collide" surely does provide much in the way of spectacle. The authors describe the initial devastation of our planet's surface very well, with copious and convincing detail. After the first approach of the Bronson bodies, Ransdell and two others go on a wide-ranging reconnaissance of the U.S. by airplane, and the reader is thus privy to the great and general destruction. We see the ghost town that was Chicago, completely killed off by toxic gas; the riots that sweep Pittsburgh; and the inundated Eastern seaboard, completely washed over by 750-foot-high waves. During the Bronson bodies' second approach, we watch, from aboard that rocket ship in space, as our fair planet hurtles toward Bronson A, turning plastic and egg-shaped under the gravitational stress, and the authors make us feel what it must be like to have a world drop down on our heads and grind us to atoms. The book contains any number of highly suspenseful set pieces, as well, including Manhattan's initial flooding, which Tony and Eve observe from a downtown rooftop; the attack that a famished and desperate mob of 10,000 makes on Hendron's compound, during which many hundreds are killed; the scientists' desperate attempt to come up with an alloy that might withstand the dreadful heat of their rocket's atomic reaction tubes; and the spaceflight and landing on Bronson B itself.

But the book is not solely concerned with mere spectacle, and its characters take time out to reflect on such matters as the new moral code that might have to be established on Bronson B (can the convention of marriage still be valid when a woman must procreate as often as possible, and with as many men as possible, in the name of humanity's survival?) and whether or not God has deliberately planned to wipe the bulk of humanity away, as He did before the Flood (why send a planet clear across the universe to destroy Earth, while offering the possibility of salvation via Bronson B?). The authors' writing style is often elegant, with references to such varied sources as the Bible, Omar Khayyam and English physicist James Hopwood Jeans. Wylie & Balmer take the time to let us get to know the main players in their story, ensuring that we stay invested in them, and when one of them is injured, or MIA, or endangered, we worry. As I mentioned, the book has more on its mind than just a panoramic catalogue of awesome destruction.

Writing of the book in his "Ultimate Guide to Science Fiction," Scottish critic David Pringle mentions that it is a "now dated story which was popular in its time and has been influential," and to be fair, the novel does indeed strike the modern reader as dated in some instances. For one thing, it is set in the early '30s, and as we now know...well, the Earth was NOT decimated by a giant gas planet back in 1932. The book also makes reference to such "modern-day, in-the-news" items as Stalin and Mussolini, Broadway actors in their "furred collars," the Farm Relief Bill and Prohibition. Drake's valet, Kyto, is repeatedly referred to as a "Jap

servant," and Uranus is mentioned as having a diameter of 40,000 miles (we now know that it is more like 31,000 miles). As a lover of Golden Age sci-fi, I have never been bothered overmuch by these instances of datedness, however; they come with the territory. What concerns me more are some instances of fuzzy writing that crop up occasionally. For example, during the first set of cataclysms, "Gases, steam and ashes welled from ten thousand vents into the Earth's atmosphere. The sun went out, the stars were made visible...." Huh? Shouldn't the stars be made INvisible? Also, when Prof. Bronson is described as having "tactile hands," what does THAT mean? That he has a sense of touch? I believe the authors were going for something like "flexible" or "supple" hands here, but who knows?

Anyway, I'm only carping now. "When Worlds Collide" was a pretty significant achievement for its authors, and again, a highly influential and seminal one. The book is a deserved classic. At its conclusion, Hendron's rocket and crew lie safely on the long-frozen and now sun-awakened world of Bronson B, unaware if any of Earth's other possible ships made it safely away. The 100 survivors have a new world to explore and millennia of humanity to preserve; it is truly a cliff-hanging conclusion, and the reader cannot help but wonder what might happen next. Fortunately, an answer WAS provided in this book's direct follow-up sequel, "After Worlds Collide" (1934), and that is where this reader is surely headed next....

(By the way, this review initially appeared on the FanLit site at <http://www.fantasyliterature.com/> ... a perfect destination for all fans of Golden Age sci-fi....)

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