

## Book Review- The Outward Urge by Olivia Bastin

I have always enjoyed science fiction as a genre despite my girly personality and otherwise very artistic and linguistic interests. John Wyndham without a doubt has significantly stood out to be as not only an imaginative and innovative writer but one whose future worlds and people don't seem overly far-fetched. His writing style isn't flowery like H.G Wells nor sometimes dense like Orwell's. Therefore *The Outward Urge* is one of my favourite novels and one I would highly recommend. The novel charts one family's exploration and colonisation of space through several short stories that read in a chronological fashion.

My favourite passage had to be the last one titled *The Emptiness of Space*. This story depicts a family member who wants to follow in his family's footsteps yet learns that his great great uncle lost his soul in space and is still trying to find it again. The rather bleak ending caught me by surprise. So much of space exploration within science fiction movies shows explorers and astronauts discovering new planets and galaxies. For example in *Prometheus*, a group of scientists discover a pyramid in the desert hoping to meet their makers. In *Interstellar* the astronauts locate three separate planets all with different biomes and atmosphere. The cyclical karmatic nature of their voyages is rewarded. They find what they are looking for even if it doesn't present itself in the way they are thinking it is going to. This passage challenges this notion. Another interesting parallel that goes hand in hand with this is H.G Wells *The Country of the Blind* where a mountaineer finds a forgotten utopia made of blind people who disregard his sight. This short story beautifully highlights how easy it is to make assumptions about others. In both *The Emptiness of Space* and *The Country of the Blind* both narrators have very fixed ideologies or concepts of how something will be. Yet their viewpoints ended up being challenged and altered at the end.

What struck me as fascinating was the way Wyndham had flipped this on its head. His uncle was drawn to space exploration due to his pioneering spirit, drive, tenacity and curiosity. And as much as these characteristics still persist, they persist in a very different form.

This theme runs throughout the novel yet what is fascinating about it is that *The Outward Urge* could read as a family biography as opposed to a science fiction novel. The way each stage of space colonisation is set out so factually means as a reader the events depicted in *The Outward Urge* feel concrete and historically based. This contrasts many other dystopian novels I have read such as *The Secret People* (also by John Wyndham), *The Giver* by Lois Lawry and *Floodland* by Marcus Sedgwick and H.G Wells *The Time Machine*.

It is important to consider another one of Wyndham's novels which is *Exiles on Asperus* which acts as foil to *The Outward Urge*. In *Exiles on Asperus*, a group of humans land on a

wild and hostile planet which their forbearers previously colonised. Their ancestors enslaved the indigenous vampiric creatures called the Battracks. Yet when the new human colony arrives the Battracks have won back power and influence by raising human children to be afraid of their own kind. This is surprising because the battracks have used humanity's adaptability and survival instinct against their former oppressors. Exiles on Asperus explores the human condition through its adaptability to new environments whilst the Outward Urge looks at the human condition through its pioneering and ever curious tenacious spirit. And the Country of the Blind also looks at humanity's ability to adapt and endure.

I would of course highly recommend The Outward Urge to any science fiction fans but I also thoroughly enjoyed Exiles on Asperus and H.G Wells short story The Country of the Blind. I just wasn't overly convinced by H.G Wells' The War of The World's and The Invisible Man.