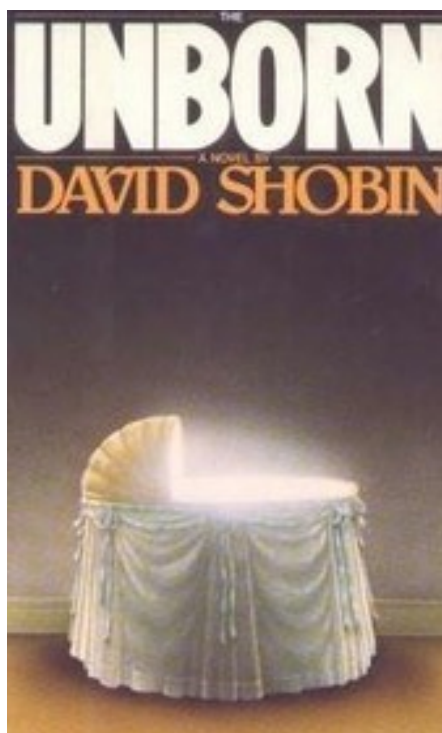




The Unborn

David Shobin

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The Unborn

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A beautiful, pregnant woman...

A handsome sleep research scientist... who falls in love with her.

An incredibly sophisticated computer... who talks with...

THE UNBORN

"If there's going to be an occult bestseller this year, this is surely it! For 10 years I've been waiting for someone who really knows medicine to write an all-out, go-for-broke horror story and the waiting is finally over... I didn't put it down until I had turned the last page... literally wrung out and trembling." — Stephen King

"THE UNBORN is marvelous... The best of its kind since ROSEMARY'S BABY." — Mary Higgins Clark

The Unborn Details

Date : Published January 1st 1982 by Bantam Books (first published 1980)

ISBN : 9780553204766

Author : David Shobin

Format : Paperback 301 pages

Genre : Horror, Fiction

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From Reader Review The Unborn for online ebook

Frank says

Read in the 80s

Paulina Pizarro says

I read this book when I was 10 years old, for me was the coolest experience, I got mad, terrified, probably not the best age to read it but I loved it then

CasualDebris says

Review originally posted at Casual Debris.

The Unborn is a standard suspense/horror novel, lacking in suspense and devoid of horror. At times it reads like a trite medical romance, though I mostly enjoyed its elements of technological parody. Unintentional, of course.

The plot deals with a pregnant woman taking part in a medical sleep study, during which the foetus begins to communicate with the medical centre's super computer. An interesting, far-fetched idea.

Author David Shobin is himself an obstetrician and gynaecologist still practicing in New York (as of the writing this articles publication, June 2010). The Unborn, his first novel, utilizes a fair amount of medical knowledge to narrate its story. While Shobin's knowledge certainly adds to the somewhat thin plot and does help to ground the far-fetched premise, I kept wondering how a sleep-study researcher knew so much about obstetrics, including obscure bits of information related to pregnancy and gynaecology. Is the smart, dashing and sensitive hero of the novel the author in disguise? Or perhaps, while the foetus was communicating with the super-computer, the doctor was in tune with the narrator; a more frightening prospect and a neat idea for a future Shobin novel.

The unusual premise and medical slant help to save an otherwise bland novel. The writing, characters and plot are weak, and though it is a fast read, a third of the 301 pages could easily have been shaved off. Shobin spends far too much time in the first eighty pages delineating these all-too-familiar characters. Samantha ("Sam"), the pregnant woman and Jon, her sleep-study doctor, are both highly intelligent, exceptionally good-looking and hyper understanding of each other. If not convinced of these qualities, rest assured that the author will not hesitate in reminding his readers just how intelligent and good looking these two are. The two fall in love, which is evidently what good-looking people do, and unfortunately they must prove their love again and again at the expense of the reader.

The good doctor has an older, maternal assistant who helps him professionally and socially, and cares about Sam as much as he does. The minor characters, and there are very few, are stock and impossible to tell apart. The computer, sadly, does not act as a character, but as a machine. Shobin had the opportunity to create a creepy menace but avoids it altogether, though at times Sam's foetus does come across in a nice, eerie light.

The writing is weak, but I suppose passable for a doctor trying to write his first novel. The sex is laughable

and Shobin seems quite taken by Sam's breasts, though I suppose the attention he lavishes on them might be an attempt at enhancing the focus on maternity. Dialogue is paint-by-numbers and plot is almost non-existent while scenes are quite repetitive. The reader knows well in advance what is happening, so there is no suspense for us (though in abundance for the doctor and his assistant) until about page 200 or so. What kept me reading was wanting to know what will the foetus turn out to be? Freak, innocent child or Damien? I give Shobin credit for not overdoing this in the course of the read, since some authors might find it tempting to fill reams of pages wondering what freakish being resides in the pregnant woman's abdomen to the point that the reader will get fed up and no longer care. I will speculate that Dr. Shobin, during his career, has developed a sensitive view of women in their pregnancy, and I applaud his sensitive approach to what could easily have been a juvenile speculation. Hence little time is spent on such musings, with the occasional mutter from Sam, so that the reader's own imagination can wander at will.

The Unborn was published in 1981, and social and gender roles come across awkward and self-conscious, with the good doctor clearly acknowledging that abortion is the woman's choice. Shobin wanted to make his doctor the well-rounded yet perfect modern male, who is sickened when he feels used by sex and all-understanding of women's lib. Modern at the time perhaps, but a little contrived and comical today.

Moreover, the computers are clunky machines of the past. I mention above that Shobin missed an opportunity in creating a menacing, life-like computer, but in reality this machine may have appeared more frightening in the dark ages of the early '80s. It is indeed 1981, and these massive data banks and "minicomputers" are hilarious. Have a look at Shobin's description of the precursor to the home computer:

Rosa says

Wow

Creepy, Weird, A Great Read ! Read it in a couple of hours, too good to put down. Needs a sequel STAT !

William F. Kammerer says

Book started a little slow and seemed to be the beginning of a love story. However, my mind changed rather quickly and I really became engrossed in the book. There are many turn of events so you don't know what going to happen next.

A really exciting read as all of his books are.

I would recommend this to a friend.

Onemoment says

Best I've read in years

Medical, sci-fi, romance, action...who could ask for more. Believable characters and story progression. Held my attention and denied me sleep. I had to find out!

Carson Moore says

I learned so much about how to hormonally control pregnant women. 6/10 would recommend to all expecting mothers.

Brigitte says

Incredible

This book was so exciting. I love Jon and Samantha. Such lifelike characters. I was rooted for her all the way. Wish there was a sequel.

Grady Hendrix says

A computerized big-headed baby with access to the internet all up inside your wombs.

Mullmuzzler says

Este libro estuvo muy de moda en los 80s cuando yo era niño, recuerdo que siempre me intrigó leerlo, hasta que por fin lo encontré usado en una librería a un precio casi regalado.

Es un thriller sumamente entretenido el cual a pesar de lo inverosímil de la historia, es muy bien llevado y justificado dentro de ese mundo de ficción donde se observa esa paranoia que al parecer era muy común en esa época, en donde se pensaba que las computadoras podrían ser tan inteligentes como el ser humano y que llegaría un momento donde podrían tomar consciencia y tomar decisiones. La base fundamental para sostener este relato ficticio consiste en el amplio conocimiento sobre medicina que tiene el autor ya que es médico de profesión. La trama nunca decae y la parte final se vuelve adictiva manteniendo el suspenso en todo momento. Una buena novela de ciencia ficción.

Ben Mailloux says

The theoretical technology in this story has not aged well.

Patricia Kaniasty says

Kept me interested enough to keep reading. However not that thrilling. Way too technical. Not enough about the baby. Just my opinion.

Kaine Andrews says

It's very difficult to take this book seriously. Perhaps it's just more a product of its time than I can stomach, or perhaps my own familiarity with computers and what they can (and can't) realistically do - let alone what they could do 30+ years ago - renders me unable to stretch my belief far enough to find something of value here. Whatever the reason, I found myself shrieking at this book, throwing my hands in the air and saying "Oh, jeez, that is so *stupid!*" almost constantly.

The premise: Samantha discovers she's pregnant; the father doesn't want anything to do with it. Being a modern (for the early 80s, anyway) empowered woman, Sam vetoes abortion right off (after a bit of politically correct babble about respecting the right to choose) and determines she's still a bit short to meet expenses if she wants to keep the child. Seeking alternate income, she ends up in a sleep study group, purportedly testing a new sleeping pill; upon the doctor discovering her pregnancy, the focus shifts to seeing if fetuses dream (oh, and she starts dating the doctor, too, since he's so young and caring and interesting. Blech.) Of course, the medical complex where the experiments are being conducted has a supercomputer (called MEDIC, tee hee) that starts to "dream" itself, and it's eventually discovered that during the experiments the computer is "talking" to the fetus. Chaos ensues.

Alright, so maybe I made fun of it a little much in the synopsis, but honestly it felt entirely too contrived. The romance angle felt forced - Doctor Bryson goes on at length how sex was just a physical release and his true love is his research, then proceeds to tell us every chance he gets about how it's totally different with Samantha, and the whole "Dating your patient, who also ends up being your employee, who falsified records to participate in your study, who is pregnant with another man's baby that you guys hardly ever talk about" was crossing so many lines and flying counter to every bit of logic one could apply that it became just stupid. The characters were all very basic tropes and felt like cardboard cut outs - pretty, intelligent, strong woman in trouble(TM); motherly, understanding type who's playing matchmaker *and* faithful sidekick, and so on. Three quarters of the characters have apparently never heard of an ethics committee or are capable of thinking past their own cubicles.

And then there's the computer. Keep in mind this is the early 80s. MEDIC is the room-sized, runs off tapes and reel-to-reel recorders for it's data input and storage, prints things out via typewriter (and receives most of it's input the same way). Yet somehow it can store the complete medical knowledge of mankind, cross reference all of it in seconds and perform "free associative thinking" tasks without a hiccup. Uh. No. Mind you, I'm not adverse to science fiction, but this felt like the author was merely pulling things out of his butt and shoving them together, without any logic applied. Oh, did I mention it responds to - and responds with - direct english commands with a minimum of "computer-ese"? Yeah. You can ask it, for example "Describe last analysis of patient Samantha Kirsten and likely results of death." And the computer comes back with "1.5 Hours - Liver failure, renal failure, hypertension, cardiac arrest likely." *facepalm* Oh, and does it in about 5 seconds. Without anyone having to thread a different reel of tape (this is before hard drives and gigabytes of RAM, mind you; we'd just gotten past the punch card stage.) despite it being several days later on a system that is purportedly running 24/7. Not buying it.

This computer also somehow taps into the EEG nodes that our doctor put on Sam's belly to monitor her fetus, and not only records/references this data, but somehow begins beaming everything it knows into the little amphibian's head. Bet you didn't know those little nodules could do that, did ya? Oh, and then the fetus - and mind you, I really hate typing that word over and over again, but it's how the book refers to it, so... - figures out how to excrete hormones and neurotransmitters at will, using its supreme medical knowledge in conjunction with this technique to essentially mind control mommy into doing fun things like forcing Bryson

to ejaculate into her repeatedly (because his semen contains a hormone that promotes fetal growth, makes labor easier, and is a primary component in its mind-control scheme) and eat raw fish eyes (because they're oh so good for baby, apparently). Yeah. There never seems to be much point in this - the computer supposedly can't "think" in terms of this being an ultimate plan, and no motive/reasoning/higher cognitive function is ever ascribed to the fetus - so I guess this all falls under the "just because" header.

The book has the appropriately predictable "dun dun dun!" ending, though it still doesn't make any sense - I'm really wondering how a kid sitting in a cradle is going to access his computer "mentor," or even what the point of it would be - unless it also developed psychic powers or something, and it's left very vague, as though it was tacked on merely because that was the custom of the country, to have that last "scare." Add in that government agents appear, sweep everything under the rug - including the murder, the attempted murder, the break in, and all the data Bryson had collected "proving" something was up - and tell mommy a fairy tale that she believes since she conveniently has amnesia as a residual effect from stress, flatlining during the labor (because the baby tried to kill her during birth) and the fetus mind-control of her, and it leaves you with an entirely too tidy and predictable ending.

So why two stars? Why not the 0 or 1 this would appear to deserve from my tearing apart the entirety of its insipid plot? Mainly the writing itself. When the author isn't discussing the state of Samantha's breasts - which happens way too often - he does a good job of keeping the language flowing, and the imagery he manages to conjure is suitably disturbing when taken out of context. It's just when you try to put it into the whole that it becomes problematic. The scene with the fish eyes is duly repulsive, and when Bryson suffers a bit of... performance anxiety, Samantha's response and the way it's written is suitably disturbing. Moments like that pepper the script, and when the characters aren't making goo-goo eyes at one another or otherwise behaving like bloody idiots, the dialogue is amusing and well-written.

Honestly, though, I'd steer clear. A lot of people can use language well, and several of them can tell an interesting, coherent and intelligent story while they do it. Just not worth the time, in this reader's humble opinion.

Ralph Martins says

Surprisingly terrifying

Linda Smith says

Wonderful medical,mystery.

I love medical mysteries. My favorite author is Robin Cook. This book was almost up to his level. It was a bit far fetched but really kept your interest! I highly recommend it.
