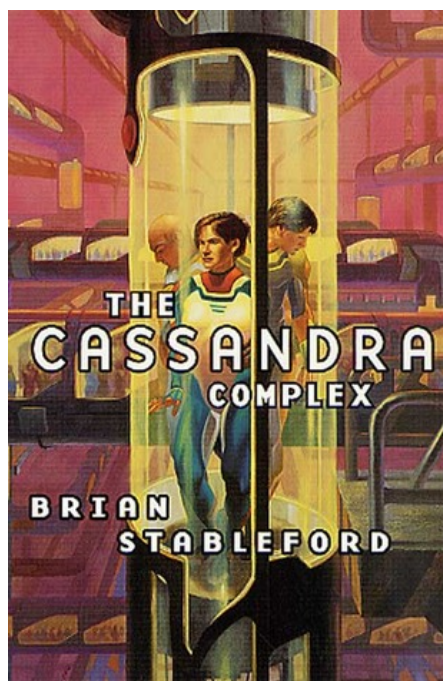




The Cassandra Complex

Brian Stableford

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This is a science fiction novel of enormous scope, filled with wonders. Set earlier in the same "future history" as *Inherit the Earth*, *Architects of Emortality*, and *The Fountains of Youth*, *The Cassandra Complex* is the independent story of events crucial to the creation of the universe in which the others take place. It is the twenty-first century, a world of rapid change and biotech threats and promises. World War Three, the biotech war, is on the horizon and the world as we know it is going to end. The fateful question is, who is going to choose the kind of future that will follow, and who gets to live in this new world to come?

Lisa Frieman, a forensic researcher working for the police, is attacked in her apartment. Jordan Miller, a distinguished scientist with whom Lisa once worked, has disappeared with a secret discovery. But what has he discovered that everyone wants? And why do the thieves, and their remote masters, think that Lisa has any knowledge of the secret Miller guards?

Profound scientific extrapolation combined with riveting suspense make this at once a futuristic thriller and a cutting-edge SF novel. *The Cassandra Complex* expands the scope of Brian Stableford's growing future history and adds another major accomplishment to his long list of triumphant creations.

The Cassandra Complex Details

Date : Published March 15th 2002 by Tor Science Fiction (first published 2001)

ISBN : 9780765342898

Author : Brian Stableford

Format : Paperback 320 pages

Genre : Science Fiction, Fiction

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From Reader Review The Cassandra Complex for online ebook

Jackie (Farm Lane Books) says

This Cassandra Complex is set in 2035 and provides some interesting ideas about what might change in the near future.

I loved the fact that main character was a woman born in the late 70s (like me) as I found it easy to relate to her old-fashioned ways! It was also nice to see an older woman in this lead role.

The science was all accurately researched and there were times it reminded me of books by Michael Crichton. Unfortunately the plot faltered after a few chapters and I found the ideas (mainly about smart fabric, connectivity, and cell biology) repeating themselves again and again.

I was mildly entertained throughout this fast-paced book, but I don't think I'll bother reading the sequel.

David says

Although overall a good read, it was not one of Brian Stableford's better outings. The interludes were too long and perhaps unnecessary and parts read more like a bio-/genetic-engineering textbook. There also wasn't a whole lot of tension built up in the narrative.

Chas says

A good concept but rubbish execution.

David Vanness says

Enjoyable SF

Simon Mcleish says

Originally published on my blog here in July 2002.

Following his well received trilogy about the search for a way to bring immortality to the human race, Stableford has now written a prequel. The early advances in this endeavour in his future history came from research to counter the bio-engineered diseases released in the Plague Wars which end some decades before Inherit the Earth, the first of the trilogy. The Cassandra Complex is set at around the beginning of these wars, as the nations of the West watch the progress of "hyperflu" across the world towards them.

The Cassandra Complex has a similar form to the first two novels, also concerning the investigation into a crime among those involved with longevity technology. Lisa Freeman is both a police officer (in forensics) and a biological researcher with connections to the distinguished Morgan Miller (bizarrely misnamed on the jacket synopsis as Jordan Miller). The story starts when she is woken by the sound of intruders in her home, part of a concerted set of attacks which include the kidnapping of Miller and the destruction of a huge experiment. Mouseworld consists of hundreds of thousands of mice in a maze of connected cages intended to see if their strategies for survival might suggest ways for human beings to cope with the overpopulation crisis (which makes their destruction seem a strangely motiveless crime as the approaching war seems certain to solve this problem in a much more drastic way).

Lisa Freeman is intensely involved in the investigation, due to her combined roles of policewoman, biology expert and Miller's closest friend (and former lover) as well as being a peripheral victim. She is not entirely believable, but it is nice to see a central character who is rather more elderly than usual in science fiction. Nanotechnology and biological engineering are hot topics in science fiction at the moment, and most of the stories they have inspired are set far enough in the future that current controversies about genetic manipulation can be ignored. (The trilogy itself is one example of this.) It allows a writer to explore ideas about what might be done with this sort of technology in a way that the moral issues make impossible in a more contemporary setting. Here, though, Stableford is writing about the near future, the main part of The Cassandra Complex being set in around 2040 with flashbacks to as early as 1999. Thus, Stableford has different concerns here; The Cassandra Complex is not about what could be done with the genetic techniques of the future but rather the dramatic potential of today's concerns about overpopulation, animal experimentation, cloning, biological warfare and the potential for accidental or deliberate release of harmful material. Except on the most obvious of these issues, Stableford seems to want to sit on the fence, not offending anyone (there are, of course, few who would argue that the development of biological weapons is a good thing; the most positive reasons anyone can come up with is to claim it is necessary in the world in which we live). The controversies do give the story a currency which is lacking from the more abstract speculations, though I would expect characters actually involved in biological research to have stronger opinions about the issues than Stableford actually gives them. To make them discuss the issues would, however, add more explanation and argument to a novel already rather overburdened with them.

Before the industrial revolution, most of the potential disasters faced by human societies were biological and ecological (plagues and famines). Then technological disasters seemed uppermost in the mind of the public (nuclear war); but now we have a combination of the two. The constant prediction of disaster is what gives the novel its title, the Cassandra complex being what is suffered by those who predict disaster but are ignored, a prime example being those concerned with the problems of overpopulation.

It is the characterisation which means that The Cassandra Complex doesn't quite live up to the standards set by the other three novels; it contains interesting ideas, and a good (and quite difficult) puzzle. It is certainly enough to make me keen to read Stableford's next novel.

Strix says

Easily the least exciting mystery/thriller I've ever read, redeemed only because Brian Stableford stuffed this book full of interesting ideas about overpopulation, how populations react until crisis, biowarfare, and - surprisingly enough - an interesting take on how radical feminists will react until these circumstances.

The Cassandra Complex is a strange book, both a prequel and a beginning to the Emorality series, which is a sequence of novels that explore the future of humanity, when we've invented a concept known as emorality and spread it to every living human. Emortality is essentially immortality - people can live forever and stay

young! - except that it's not true immortality - you can get hurt, you can die. Just not from aging. In *Inherit the Earth*, the central question was: now that everyone can live forever, who gets to, ahem, inherit the Earth? Who has to leave it? What happens as the population continues to grow and no one's getting older?

But that book has the same problem this one does: it's a collection of incredible ideas and questions and setting development bound by a not-very-good thriller plot.

In the *Cassandra Complex*, a forensic scientist is woken up in the middle of the night to find masked intruders stealing everything they can from her desk and computer. They almost shoot her, and threaten her. They also reveal that her ex-boyfriend, a prominent scientist, has been kidnapped because he's kept a secret from her.

The plot of the book follows the next few days in the whirlwind investigation/rescue - the British secret service get involved because they think Miller's been working on biowarfare stuff, and that's important because in the background, the world is also undergoing biowarfare. There are hyperflus, and in less developed countries people are dying by the droves. (This is cool! This is awful! Except that it's never more than mentioned and we don't get to spend time exploring these hyperflus. Stableford....)

So. It's the 2040s~ and people wear smart clothes that keep them safe from germs and they can resist stains and so on. Emortality hasn't been invented yet, biowarfare is happening and people in Britain are trying to live like everything's normal, that the end of the world isn't nigh. This is the cool stuff in this book: the glimpses at this society and how it works, whenever the plot isn't occupied with the bland mechanisms of interviewing suspects and inter-police squabbling and the protagonist trying to piece together the clues. I'm sorry, Stableford, but you can't maintain tension. His writing skills just aren't up for it - he's a thousand times better with other plots and other settings, but this was a whiff.

Anyways, for all of my complaining, this book does raise itself from a 1 or 2 star affair to a 3 because of several factors: each (long) chapter has a flashback sequence at the end, where the protagonist spends time talking to her scientist coworkers (and the kidnapped ex) and this is where the book shines: they discuss overpopulation, animal experimentation, etc etc - it's so neat! Because the plot isn't butting in to slow things down, the ideas get to shine and you the reader get to have fun considering them.

Finally, as the plot winds to a climax (and the radical feminists take central stage, which - they're bizarre, but it's an interesting depiction of 'em. I was surprised, because I was nervous with a male writer depicting feminists, but he does well! No sexism that I could see, outside of their obvious radical tendencies.) and all of the mysteries are untangled - this is where the book finally really gets good. The big ideas are big, all of the discussions tie together, the character development clicks, and the last hundred pages of this book really sing.

So. It's a bizarre book that I have a hard time recommending, because it's slow and boring except when it's doing the most "boring" thing of all: having the characters sit and talk about things. You can tell that the author is a trained biologist who has spent a lot of his life thinking about these concepts. You can tell that he's worried about our future, without getting preachy.

Weird book. I'd say read this only if you've read Brian Stableford's other stuff and want more, or if you're profoundly interested in his thoughts on overpopulation and so on. If you're not into that, then pick up his *Werewolves of London* or *Serpent's Blood*, much better books that have more fun concepts.

Jim Carleton says

Spy thrillers; political thrillers; techno-thrillers; "plain old" thrillers... now we have a bio-thriller, a detective novel (in the near future, so it's also sort of SF) that's a race to discover who destroyed an out-dated experiment in sociobiology and kidnapped its main critic. There is, of course, a secret or two to be discovered; what they are and who gets to them first is what moves things along.

I tend to have three, four, six, sometimes more books in various stages of completion at any one time. However, occasionally none of them is what I want at a particular moment, and I'll pick up another from the shelves at home or in my Nook, and wind up not only starting it, but finishing it before picking up any of the others in The Stack. This was one of those books, which is not so much high praise as it is recognition that the story and the characters were engaging. Not quite "can't put it down"; more like "can't wait to be able to pick it back up again".

The basic story is pretty-much what I wrote in this review's opening paragraph. The details tend to be logical enough as the story unfolds, although the premise underlying the whole shebang is the sort of thing that Greg Bear likes to play with. This is not a bad thing, just a bit unexpected, as the few other things of Brian Stableford's which I've read were nothing like this novel. I'm in no way qualified to say whether some of the more bizarre tidbits that are used to underpin this tale are real, or given fair treatment, but the internal logic is more than fair, so I left my "Suspend Disbelief" switch on, and enjoyed the ride, in general. That Mr. Stableford is a biologist and sociologist made it a bit easier to accept some of the more... peculiar things in this tale.

If I have a real criticism, it is that the main secret, for which so many people have jumped to the wrong conclusions, is not really well prepared; it isn't likely to be worked out by the reader before it becomes obvious to the main characters. A good detective novel, of any sort, should allow the astute reader to figure out what all the hubbub is about. It's just sort of dropped onto the floor at some point, which was a bit of a let-down. Perhaps I'm just not astute enough.

This is labeled as the first of a series, one which seems to have a lot of related short stories, as well. I may or may not have time left in my life to add more of these to my Nook, but I certainly will keep the next novel in mind when I am in the mood to spend a few e-bucks.

Bryan says

Fictionwise has this download working once again, so I can now read the book I purchased!

Beverly says

Quite possibly the worst book I ever finished. I thought I never would; I keep asking myself why.