



Something Coming Through

Paul McAuley

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One of our finest SF writers moves closer to home. London is devastated. New worlds are being explored. And the aliens have arrived...

The aliens are here. And they want to help. The extraordinary new project from one of the country's most acclaimed and consistently brilliantly SF novelists of the last 30 years.

The Jackaroo have given humanity 15 worlds and the means to reach them. They're a chance to start over, but they're also littered with ruins and artifacts left by the Jackaroo's previous clients.

Miracles that could reverse the damage caused by war, climate change, and rising sea levels. Nightmares that could for ever alter humanity - or even destroy it.

Chloe Millar works in London, mapping changes caused by imported scraps of alien technology. When she stumbles across a pair of orphaned kids possessed by an ancient ghost, she must decide whether to help them or to hand them over to the authorities. Authorities who believe that their visions point towards a new kind of danger.

And on one of the Jackaroo's gift-worlds, the murder of a man who has just arrived from Earth leads policeman Vic Gayle to a war between rival gangs over possession of a remote excavation site.

Something is coming through. Something linked to the visions of Chloe's orphans, and Vic Gayle's murder investigation. Something that will challenge the limits of the Jackaroo's benevolence...

Something Coming Through Details

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Author : Paul McAuley

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From Reader Review Something Coming Through for online ebook

Yzabel Ginsberg says

(I got a copy through NetGalley, in exchange for an honest review.)

3.5 to 4 stars.

This novel, while predictable in parts (in a more traditional, "cop-oriented" way), raised some interesting points in terms of what to expect in a near-future, or a parallel present, shaped by the presence of aliens. Namely the mysterious Jackaroo, who showed up some thirteen years prior to the beginning of the story with shuttles and fifteen wormholes leading to just as many new worlds for humans to colonise. Worlds ertswile inhabited by creatures long gone and forgotten, leaving only behind strange, "Elder Culture" artefacts. Meanwhile, Earth is falling prey to memes, ideas birthed into the mind of people who have been touched by the Vorlons some of those artefacts. And who knows how exactly the Jackaroo were responsible for this? Or their unscrutable associates, the !Cha, story-lovers who use plots to gather information used in turn to woo their mates?

Intersting, because the Jackaroo never revealed their true purpose, and because their gift was definitely a double-edged sword. Sure, it allowed humanity to recover from ongoing problems (crime, pollution), but others developed in turn, and the fifteen worlds turned into mirrors of Earth, with McDonald's and Starbuck joints popping up on Mangala and, no doubt, other places. Crime developed there just as it did on Earth, and a lot of things and events made it clear that humans basically did to these colonies what they had done to their motherworld—perhaps worse, even, due to the fact they hadn't had to "work hard" to get to these new places, served on a silver platter. The "benevolent" Jackaroo, in other words, might just be trying to repeat an experiment they did with other planets and will do again, some kind of sick experiment to see what the "lesser" races would do when gifted with space travel they didn't have to develop themselves.

The name itself is also reminiscent of the Australian word "jackaroo" and its potential etymology: wandering people, watching over cattle. At least, this is how it felt to me, and what I believe the author wanted to achieve: making readers question the purpose behind the Jackaroo's actions, all the while swathing them under layers of a thriller-and-chase plot mixed with a more typical seasoned-cop-and-rookie-partner murder investigation.

The more typical parts, as I wrote above, were a little predictable, especially Vic's, whose background is fairly unoriginal in that kind of story. However, I liked how they entwined after a while, and how you have to pay attention to the dates at the beginning of each chapter. This type of narrative can be frustrating, as you keep jumping from Chloe to Vic to Chloe to Vic again, and are left on semi-cliffhangers most of the time... but it's a style I love, and so I wasn't disappointed.

On the downside, the characters weren't that much developed. Vic is moulded on a fairly standard TV-show cop-type (divorced guy, been working for the force for years, somewhat jaded but still trying to make a difference...), Nevers and Harris are also somewhat predictable, and I would have liked to know more about Fahad and his family. Chloe's background was definitely interesting, yet it also made her somewhat aloof and distanced—something that stood to logics, considering what happened to her mother, only it made it harder to feel involved in her quest, as she was more carried by the plot than truly active at times. (In her defence, she wasn't a dumb heroine, and was definitely aware of who was trying to manipulate her, and who intended to off her anyway once she wouldn't be useful anymore.)

Nevertheless, barring the somewhat weak characterisation, I found the world described here—drop here by

drop there, with some info-dumping, but never too much to my liking—intriguing, and I wouldn't mind knowing more about it in a sequel (or in a prequel).

Tudor Ciocarlie says

Interesting and very enjoyable alien contact story. I really liked how the two strands of mystery, one on of Earth and the other on an alien planet, entwined in the last third of the novel.

Michael says

Aliens exist, and now they need our help. After Earth is ruined by nuclear and environmental disasters, it is puzzling that humanity has been given fifteen habitable planets to start a fresh. The Jackaroo assist with the move to the new planets, infrastructure is built and humanity is saved. Chloe Millar is mapping out the changes caused by importing alien technology when she stumbles upon a pair of orphaned children that appear to be possessed by an ancient ghost. On one of the new planets, Vic Gayle is investigating a murder in a remote excavation site that could lead to a war between rival gangs. *Something is Coming Through* is a new novel by prolific science fiction novelist Paul McAuley.

Something is Coming Through interlinks the story of Chloe Millar and Vic Gayle, all the while trying to understand why the Jackaroo are helping humanity. The premise of this book sounded too intriguing to pass up; think a science fiction crime novel that explores the concept of first contact. Unfortunately, nothing seemed to work within the book; it tries to do so much but everything moves too slowly to make it enjoyable. Even the Jackaroo sound like they are an interesting race but there is no real exploration into their motivations which really hurt the novel.

I am not sure if I am no longer into reading science fiction; it has been a while since I enjoyed this genre (with the exception of Russian sci-fi). Or maybe I just need to stick to the classics, those novels from the 60s and 70s that explore sociology and philosophy. I just found *Something is Coming Through* to be a very bland novel that relied too heavily on dialogue. I have to accept the fact that I enjoy novels with substance that explore themes or ideas over plot; this is why Russian sci-fi is still great.

I struggle to find anything positive to say about *Something is Coming Through*; it is one of those occasions where I should have abandoned the book. I honestly cannot even remember why I decided to pick this book up but I was intrigued by the premise. Sadly I found nothing enjoyable about this novel and I do not know if I will try Paul McAuley again. I would like to think I was willing to try authors again but at the moment, there is no way.

This book review originally appeared on my blog; <http://literary-exploration.com/2015/...>

Keith Stevenson says

This review originally appeared in the Newtown Review of Books www.newtownreviewofbooks.com.au

Paul McAuley is a multi-award-winning speculative fiction author whose *Quiet War* series, which spawned four novels and a collection of short stories, is one of the most enjoyable space-based speculative fiction

cycles to come along in the last few years. His latest venture, *Something Coming Through*, revolves around a fascinating premise. Starting just a few years in our future, Earth is going from bad to worse. You name it, we're copping it: revolutions, counter-revolutions, civil wars, terrorism, water wars, netwars all mixed up with the growing effects of climate change and financial collapse. But everything changes when we are visited by extraterrestrial intelligence ...

No one had ever seen one of the Jackaroo in the flesh. They could be devils with bright red skin and horns and hooves and barbed tails, or angels, or anything in between. Gas bags evolved to ride the frigid winds of an exoJupiter. Machine intelligences. Self-organising magnetic fields. No one knew. And no one knew whether or not the Jackaroo actually inhabited their floppy spaceships – the tangles of restless vanes that had somehow towed the mouths of fifteen wormholes, each mounted on the polished face of an asteroid fragment, into L5 orbit between the Earth and Moon. Soon after the Jackaroo revealed themselves, one of their ships had been vaporised by a thirty-kiloton nuclear bomb delivered by a Chinese Long March rocket.

Despite being attacked, the Jackaroo do not take offence. The wormholes are a gift to humanity, offering near instantaneous travel to 15 habitable worlds light years away, and well out of reach of our paltry chemical rocket spaceships. But these worlds had previously been inhabited by other aliens, previous recipients of the Jackaroo's gifts, who have long since gone to dust: the Elder Cultures. Artefacts of these cultures are brought back to Earth as part of the regular Jackaroo shuttle service that supports Earth's colonisation of the worlds, but some of these finds are dangerous, containing memes or eidolons, alien ghosts if you will, that place compelling ideas in the minds of those they infect.

It's a huge starting point and plays immediately into all kinds of fears about the true nature of the Jackaroo gift and the effect on humanity of suddenly being given everything it desired without having to struggle for it: new worlds, untold mineral wealth, vast tracts of arable land, an end to overpopulation, hunger, scarcity as a whole. But what's behind it? Is it meant to divert us or domesticate us? Or do the Jackaroo have some other purpose only they can understand? And did the Elder Cultures die out, were they destroyed by the Jackaroo or are they still out there somewhere?

Given the potential of these gifts for negative cultural impact and the very real danger from Elder Culture infection, it's no surprise that a number of government and non-government enterprises emerge to study the effects of the Jackaroo appearance, while others attempt to monetise or weaponise the finds. It's a potentially explosive situation for Chloe, the protagonist of the story.

Chloe works for a private research agency called Disruption Theory and it's her job to sniff out potential Elder Culture flare-ups and outbreaks in the community so her colleagues can study them. One such event leads her into a dangerous search for a young boy and his younger sister who seem to have been infected by a powerful eidolon and who promptly go missing just as she tracks them down.

Meanwhile on one of the 'gift planets' that now hosts a burgeoning human settlement, 'murder police' detective Vic Gayle and his new rookie partner are investigating a suspicious death that has possible links to organised crime and in particular the illegal exportation of alien artefacts ...

There's quite a William Gibson vibe to *Something Coming Through*, with a thriller template being used to tell a story that goes to some very weird places indeed. In a quote provided for the book, SF author Alistair Reynolds says it's 'as tight and relentlessly paced as an Elmore Leonard thriller'. McAuley is a wonderful speculative fiction writer, but he's no Elmore Leonard, and writing gripping thrillers requires a very different skill set. The Vic Gayle story thread reads like a fairly standard police procedural with a number of

predictable plot beats and this is a distinct weakness in the book.

But McAuley's description of the progress of human settlement on the planet Mangala has a depressing ring of truth to it. As we move out among the stars we bring all the bad along with the good. Crime is high on Mangala and the cities and residential areas are completely 'McDonald-ised' with every ounce of alien beauty seemingly wrung out of them on purpose.

On Earth, Chloe clashes with Chief Inspector Adam Nevers of the London Metropolitan Police's Alien Technology Investigation Squad, who voices a similarly grim view of what 'humanity's greatest adventure' has led to:

'And what does it say about us,' Nevers said, in a level, serious voice, holding Chloe's gaze, 'when just about the first thing we do when we reach other worlds is look for stuff to get us high? That when we find things that are a cross between animals and machines, all we can think to do with them is squirt extracts of their blood into our veins. That's some sorry shit right there.'

'And that's an impressive speech.'

Chloe was wondering if she was supposed to agree with him, to renounce her work right there and then.

'You and I know it isn't all shiny toys, don't we?' Nevers said.

'But the difference is, maybe, you see the worst in people, and I hope for something better.'

Chloe's search brings her into conflict with a wider conspiracy that has some bearing on what Vic's investigating out on Mangala, and as the story progresses, it's the thriller aspect that more and more takes centre stage until the inevitable conflict between those who seek to use the alien artefacts for their own gain and those who just want to protect humanity.

Something Coming Through riffs on a lot of interesting concepts about cultural appropriation, the dangerous attraction of ideas – particularly ideas of alien origin – and the tawdriness of reality compared with our dreams. The engine room of the novel is powered by the central question set up at the beginning: what on Earth are the Jackaroo really up to? The ending of the book sidesteps an answer by focusing on the unexpected outcome of Chloe's quest, which – frustratingly – is recounted via a third-person account. So I finished the book feeling somewhat perturbed. It was only while researching the title for this review that I discovered a (perhaps inevitable) sequel is in the works, *Into Everywhere*, which promises an answer to the central question. So, on reflection I'm not so annoyed. I'm hooked.

Frédéric says

A very good mix of crime and sci-fi.

In a very near future, after a micro nuclear war claimed its toll-localized, this not a Post-Ap story, the Jackaroos appeared on Earth to "help" us and gave humans access to 15 habitable worlds where they can start anew. But these worlds were inhabited before and traces of the former local cultures remain and

manifest themselves in different ways.

The story is divided in 2 timelines a few weeks apart, one on Earth and one on another planet (Mangala), before they finally collide.

On Earth young Chloe studies the way alien artefacts and eidolons (I had to check in the dictionary for this one, you do the same) affect people submitted to them. She follows the trace of a young boy who draws weird alien landscapes.

On Mangala Police Officer Vic Gayle investigates a strange murder that quickly points towards a mysterious site bought by the local mob a thousand km away.

McAuley subtly mixes the 2 genres, neither too much sci-fi nor crime, and makes good use of the different time-frames to slowly undercover what happened.

The reader is immediately embarked in the story, not much explanation is provided as to what happened before. We're now, the Jackaroos are here, make do with it. And it works. The plot is gripping enough not to bother with rationalizing the past.

No hard sci-fi either. Humans live on Mangala, that's all you need to know and time is not wasted to try and understand how this came into being.

This fact is somehow translated via the casual way the world-or at least life in its main city is described. Just like on Earth, under a different sun with "years" that last a month. Hey, they even just inaugurated a McDonald there!

To sum it up, a subtle and interesting mix of genres that can appeal to the aficionados of both if they're not too hardcore.

Ken Richards says

The Spasm devastated the Earth. Water wars, net wars, border wars culminating in a limited nuclear exchange, tactical nukes obliterating the heart of capital cities. Chloe Millar's heart was also obliterated. Her mother was vapourised, together with a square kilometre of central London...

Then the aliens came. The Jackaroo. They are here to help....

Fifteen "gift worlds" provide room for humanity to breathe, expand and recover. Under supervision of course...

In post Spasm London, Chloe seeks alien memes and eidolons which trickle in from the gift worlds infecting the minds of peoples who have encountered artefacts brought through the wormholes. These prizes can make you rich...or they can make you insane. She encounters an orphaned brother and sister who seem to be dreaming of the gift world Mangala. And Chloe is not the only one interested in these children....

On Mangala, Vic Gayle's newbie partner Skip Williams has been landed with the kind of murder case destined to keep him awake at night. Competing criminal gangs are on the trail of alien riches. There is a ray gun involved....

When these strands knot, everything changes.

The narrative zips along, the world building is strong from the familiar (grittily urban post-Spasm London, with it leavening of alien weird) , to the elegiac eeriness bestowed upon the desolate wastes of frontier Mangala. The characters, though cast in the beginning as archetypes, grow through the story. Enough that the sequel will be eagerly anticipated. And in the background, are unknown motives of the Jackaroo.

Eligible for the Best Novel in 2016, and at this time, likely to be on my nomination ballot

Gareth Beniston says

Smart, rewarding and very entertaining. All kinds of things in its DNA, from the Strugatsky Brothers and Mike Harrison to political thrillers like State of Play. And it's about all those things that are so integral to the state of the world right now: populism, colonialism, the fight for resources and the nonchalance of the ruling class. Can't wait for the second one.

Andrew Lennon says

45% DNF

I'm sorry, I really tried to like this book, I really really tried!

I like the idea of the book, different worlds, but still basically the same script as being on earth because while you may be able to move people you can't change them!

This was kind of an alien crime thriller, and again, I liked that bit.

The problem I had was that it is so slow moving! It felt like a chore moving from one chapter to the next. By the time it did reach something cool I didn't care anymore because I'd already trawled through too much filler to get there!

I could see this story itself being very good if a lot of the unnecessary filler was removed, but for now. Two stars for me I'm afraid.

I received this book from netgalley in exchange for an honest review.

All reviews can be found at <http://lennonslair.blogspot.co.uk>

William says

More superb McAuley. Two intertwined stories, set in the near future, which become ever closer as the book proceeds.

Great characters, fast pacing, wonderful plot, mysterious aliens, dangerous technologies, and a modern western all rolled into one.

There are a number of perfect twists as the stories proceed, all surprising and quite in-character. The main protagonist, Chloe, is courageous, charming and smart, and just vulnerable enough to multiply the tension surrounding her and the other "good guys". And there are a few characters whose agenda and loyalties appear to be known, but not with certainty. Surprises here are terrific, and advance the plot to a surprise finish.

The "epilogue" is satisfying, and not over-long.

I read the last half of this book almost non-stop, and finished it at 4am last night - WOOT! -

... and then downloaded the "Into Everywhere" sequel and read 10% of that before sleeping.

Paul McAuley is truly at the height of his powers. The Quiet Sun series changed my view of human's possible future forever, and I am truly delighted with this Something Coming Through.

Quotes:

64.0% "... "because the French government had yet to forgive the 'English perfidy' that had almost caused the collapse of the EU, its police were reluctant to cooperate." - McAuley prescience of idiot Brexit stupidity?"

35.0% "... quote: The pub was the kind of place where a cluster of locals clung to the bar like barnacles while tides of visitors washed in and out."

20.0% "... it's so depressing to keep reading about being in the EU in this book, while Brexiteers gloat over how we all look with our throats cut in the mirror"

15.0% "... near future, man has wrecked the planet. No smarter in the future than today. Given 15 new worlds, we proceed to fuck them up too. Man is truly a cancer of the planet."

Jackaroo stories so far -

"Dust" (2006)

"Winning Peace" (2007)

"City Of The Dead" (2008)

"Adventure" (2008)

"Crimes And Glory" (2009)

"The Choice" (2011)

"Bruce Springsteen" (2012)

"The Man" (2012)

"Something Coming Through" (full novel, 2015)

"Into Everywhere" (full novel, 2016)

"Something Happened Here, But We're Not Quite Sure What It Was" (2016)

Mike says

Sve više i više mi se svi?aju romani Paula Mcaulya.Sve od njegovog THE QUIET WAR bilo mi je,ako ne baš odli?no, onda jako dobro.SOMETHING COMING THROUGH je u biti krimi? s hard Sf komponentom,brzog ritma naracije i s odre?enom dozom cinizma.Mcauley je raznovrstan i darovit autor koji se ne ustru?ava od druga?ijih pristupa ve? poznatim Sf temama i to radi jako dobro.Ve? sam nabavio drugu knjigu iz serije,INTO EVERYWHERE i ubrzo po?injem s ?itanjem.

Carlex says

I like the quiet science fiction by Paul McAuley

The author is a veteran in the genre. In this novel he deals with some of his favorite subjects: biological contamination, likely (or “hard”) aliens, and also about the people that ends up f*cking everything... That is not exactly, in other words: we, the humans, “humanize” everything we deal with, for better or worse.

The novel has a very good worldbuilding. Another preferred subject by the author is about the characters trying to achieve their goal, or simply trying to survive in this fantastic universe. A very realistic science fiction that can be included within the hard subgenre, which also does not forget the social aspect of any fantastic phenomenon.

I understand that Paul McAuley may not appeal to all the science fiction readers, but in my opinion he is still one of the best writers in the genre.

Now I'm starting the second book, Into Everywhere.

Alan says

The alien Jackaroo came to Earth bearing nothing but gifts and goodwill—and then sat back to watch what we did with them. What could go wrong?

Oh, wait. These are *human beings* we're talking about...

Something Coming Through alternates chapters between England and the planet Mangala, one of the fifteen worlds to which the Jackaroo gave humanity access. Mangala is the planet colonized (mostly) by people from the British Isles; the other planets have populations from elsewhere on Earth, but we don't see much of them in this book. The Jackaroo won't say what happened to the previous recipients of their largesse, but there are many, many traces of so-called "Elder Cultures" on all of the worlds involved, and it doesn't take transplanted Earthlings very long to start poking into things they don't—and perhaps can't—understand.

On Earth, Chloe Millar works for her employer, Disruption Theory, investigating a "breakout" of cult activity in London that seems to center around the realistic alien landscapes sketched by the son of a Pakistani immigrant who's never been off the planet. On Mangala, veteran policeman Vic Gayle and his rookie partner Skip investigate a murder that seems to involve at least one alien artifact. We see quite quickly that the two are intimately connected.

"This guy gets a ticket to ride an alien spaceship to another world. He's here two days and gets himself whacked. If I were him, I'd ask for a refund."

—Vic Gayle, p.35

One of the neatest things about Something Coming Through, at least for me, was the sheer *plausibility* of our collective reaction to the Jackaroos' unexplained generosity. It's often difficult for a science fiction writer to

figure out just why people in the future might still have, say, anonymous white vans and drive-through fast food, but Paul McAuley's right—as humanity struggled to assimilate the reality of extraterrestrial intelligences and the science they employed, a lot of our own technological, social and political development would most likely stagnate, and our first exports to a planet like Mangala probably *would* be depressingly common things like McDonald's, Starbucks, and... murder.

I would have liked more assiduous copy-editing. One character named Ellis Sinclair (on p.275) becomes Ellis Peters within ten pages. There may be a reason for that—according to McAuley's Acknowledgements, *Something Coming Through* is based on a number of shorter stories about the Jackaroo—but still I think somebody else should have caught that one before the book went to print.

However, I think *Something Coming Through* is a better book than *Cowboy Angels*, which I read and reviewed in 2011—more complex, more thoughtful, still fast-paced but having less of an obsession with gunplay and fisticuffs. Although there is still plenty of action. Like the Jackaroo, Paul McAuley comes bearing a gift of his own: he comes up reliably with offbeat premises, and then works them out while keeping the story interesting—and, all in all, *Something Coming Through* came through for me, as a productive blend of *First Contact* (or at least its aftermath) and police procedural.

Aaron says

This book is a sci-fi detective novel with an interesting structure. It is told from two different view points, a young woman named Chloe who lives on Earth, and a detective named Vic who lives on an alien planet. The story takes place a several years after an alien race that humans call the Jackaroo have created paths and means for humans to immigrate to several inhabitable alien worlds. Chloe works for a company that investigates old alien technology imported to Earth, and Vic is a detective living on one of the alien worlds. Up until the end of the book, the chapters alternate between Chloe's and Vic's viewpoints, with Vic's story line about 30 days after Chloe's. Eventually, Chloe's narrative timeline catches up with Vic's, but as it does so, we gain insight from Chloe's story about events that take place in Vic's. I liked this unique structure, which for me, turned what would have otherwise been a three-star book into a four-star experience.

Jason says

5 Stars

Something Coming Through is a fabulous read. I was already a fan of McAuley and this one didn't disappoint.

Highly recommended!

Kate says

I really enjoyed this - two strands of mystery, one on a damaged Earth and the other on one of the fifteen planets permitted to humans by the Jackaroo, twist along, combining elements of first contact, alien artefacts

and good old fashioned conspiracy, murder and greed.
