

ARTIS



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Reeves-Stevens figures out the trick

by Salman A. Nensi

The latest novel from Garfield Reeves-Stevens, *Dark Matter*, is a chilling tale of quantum physics, mad scientists, murder and intrigue, with just the right touch of Garfield magic.

Many writers base books on their own personal knowledge. Policemen write police novels; journalists write about journalism. More and more, this seems to be the trend followed by new writers.

Not Garfield. He writes with his mind's eye, using his imagination. The effect is startling. Garfield's stories have an air of confident omniscience, so much so that readers will wonder if he is privy to some secret information.

Dark Matter is Garfield's fifth horror/thriller. His first three — *Bloodshift*, *Dreamland* and *Children of the Shroud* — have only been published in Canada (by Bantam). *Nighteyes*, Garfield's fourth novel, was originally published in hardcover, simultaneously in the United States and Canada.

Born in Oakville, Reeves-Stevens grew up in the Toronto suburb of Don Mills. His fondness for horror/thrillers was fostered by regular trips to the local cinema, which reran old 50s horror movies on Saturday afternoons.

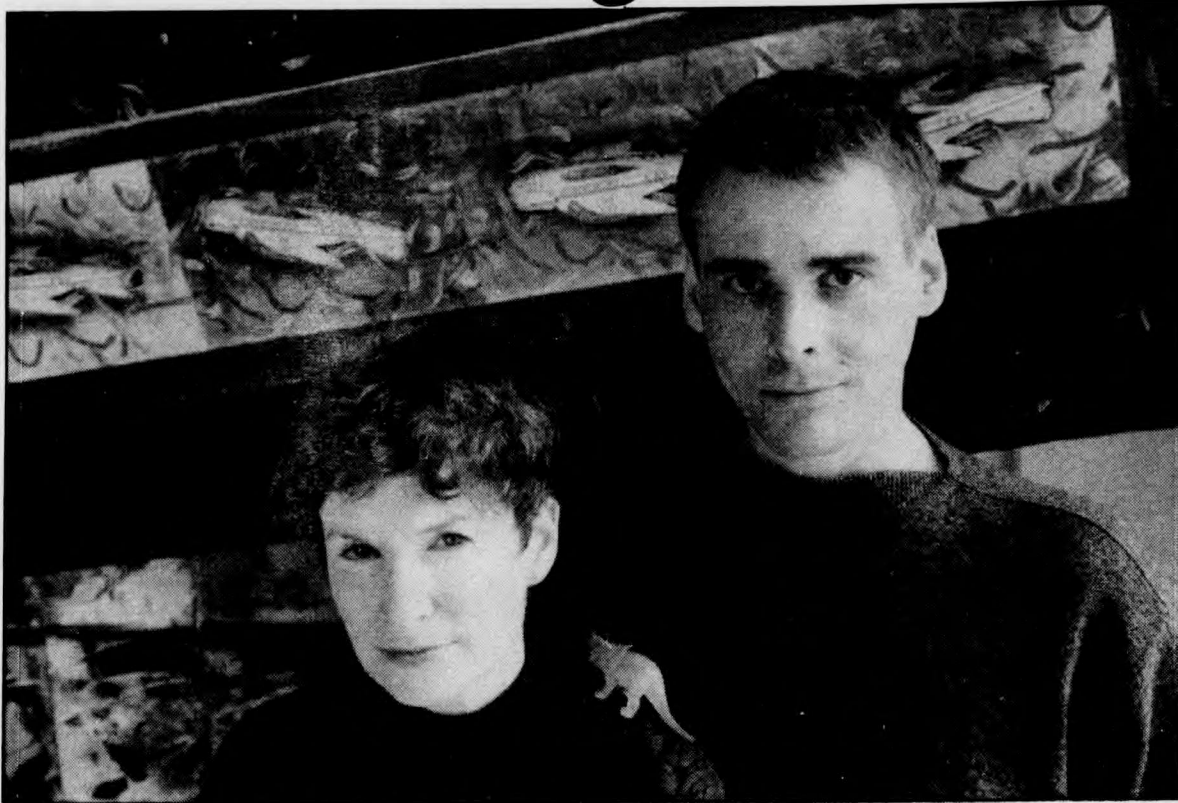
His passion for writing began when he was only eight. Unlike other youngsters who sat glued to their television set, Reeves-Stevens spent his spare time creating fantasy stories for his own amusement.

"I still write for myself," Reeves-Stevens says. "The stories I write are the ones I'd like to hear. Writing instructors say you're not supposed to do that, but it seems to work for me."

Reeves-Stevens became serious about his writing at the age of 15, when he submitted a short story about vampires set in the future to a few science fiction magazines. They all rejected his work. Rejection is hard enough on adults, but the 15 year-old Reeves-Stevens refused to listen to what others told him.

"I knew I could do it," he says. "It was just a question of figuring out the trick. At least, that's what I thought at the time. It turns out the trick is to have written thousands upon thousands of words, and then you get better. Because of those early rejection letters, I spent a lot of time writing and re-writing. That helped me to develop my writing skills."

Reeves-Stevens "big break" came in true Hollywood style — while he was having lunch! After studying book publishing in col-



lege, he began to work as a freelance graphic artist, designing book covers.

One day, he was introduced to a book publisher who wanted to start a new line of horror/thriller paperbacks. Reeves-Stevens told the publisher about an idea he had been toying with, a tale of intrigue, suspense and vampires. A year later (1981), his first novel, *Bloodshift*, was a reality.

Being so closely connected to the thriller genre might dampen the ability of some writers to enjoy the works of others, but not Reeves-Stevens. "I'm more aware now of how other writers present scary things, but, because I really want to experience the horror, I can. I think I have become a better reader. I'm probably more thoroughly affected these days than I was before I began writing professionally." Both Stephen King's *Misery* and *Tommyknockers* have scared Canada's Horror Master.

Reeves-Stevens first collaboration is *Memory Prime*, the 42nd *Star Trek* novel. The book was written with his wife of 13 years, Judith.

Although it is the first novel they have written together, *Memory Prime* is not their first project; together, they have created interactive computer games for children, as well as *Science Around Me*, a 45 title science textbook series for grades one, two and three.

Even though Reeves-Stevens is an established author, he is very positive about writing with a partner. "The story plotting goes a lot faster. Instead of me sitting at a pad of paper struggling to work out the story, Judy and I work it

out in brainstorming fashion. We go through this stage about twice as fast as I do when writing solo. Oddly enough, it takes the same length of time to actually write the novel, but the editing and refining stages do go a lot quicker."

Reeves-Stevens also likes the feeling that if either he or his wife get stuck, they have each other to turn to and can work out the problem together. To the couple, "getting stuck" simply refers to having difficulty with story points, which is quite different from the dreaded "writer's block," something they have yet to experience.

Surprisingly, the two creative egos have no difficulty writing together. "We honestly don't fight," said Reeves-Stevens as his stern expression softened into a smile. "Most of the time, our ideas flow together very well."

Steven H. Stern, who directed several Disney movies, recently expressed interest in directing *Children of the Shroud*. This is a great thrill for Reeves-Stevens.

"Mister Stern is a wonderful director," he said, "and he has a real talent for putting stories on the screen. His movies go like clockwork. They are really good to see. He has liked my other work, but *Children of the Shroud* caught his interest, and he thought there was potential for a good movie."

Reeves-Stevens wrote both the treatments and final script for the movie version of *Bloodshift*. He was forced to make major concessions, including changing the ending. How does an artist deal with such radical changing of his work?

"I am much harder to deal with in that sense when it comes to a book, because a book is my arena. I know what works there. While going through the final editing process on *Nighteyes*, there were some things the editor wanted to change, and there were some things I didn't want to change. So, we discussed them back and forth, but the interesting thing is that with a book, the author is the final authority.

"In the end, if my editor and I come to a real impasse, providing it is not something that is going to totally destroy the market for the book, I get my way. If I want to keep in a minor character who she [the editor] wants to take out, in

the end, unless she can convince me, we're going to keep the minor character in."

Movies are completely different; the producer is boss, and what he says, goes. Reeves-Stevens has learned to accept the writer's place in the creative process of film. The writer is involved in the beginning, until the script has evolved, at which point it becomes the director's story.

Reeves-Stevens will be doing treatments and a first draft script for *Children of the Shroud*. That is as far as his creative control goes; but, as he says, "The control quite rightly belongs in the hands of the director and the producer."

Fame and fortune change the lives of many people, but Reeves-Stevens does not envision his life changing much when fame comes knocking at his door. Most writers are not as readily recognizable as movie stars.

As for fortune, he says, "... even when they say you get a mil-

Dark Matter displays a professional quantum leap

by Dileep S. Rangan

Dark Matter
written by Garfield Reeves-Stevens
published by Doubleday

In his new and exciting science fiction/horror novel, Garfield Reeves-Stevens' writing skill has shown an increased maturity. With *Dark Matter*, Reeves-Stevens makes that quantum jump that distinguishes the rookie from the established writer.

The story finds its foundations in the early days of mad scientists cloistered away in eerie super-laboratories where the impossible is created through unspeakable means. Fortunately, the characters in *Dark Matter* are more than the two-dimensional cutouts typical of that era; they are complex and filled with enough life to allow the reader to relate and believe in them. Underlying virtually every aspect of the story is a vast amount of extrapolated science — quantum physics, to be precise. Not only does this make *Dark Matter* an intriguing read, but also lends it a somewhat mystical quality. In our empirical world it becomes harder and harder to suspend our disbelief when magic and the like are involved, but Reeves-Stevens' magic is created by a technological spiritualism which permeates the novel.

Anybody who would be interested enough to read something in this genre has likely heard or read something about the overall concepts of quantum physics, and is, therefore, able to comprehend the basis of the tale. All this science does not allow the reader to simply float along through the plot without thinking about what is going on. If one merely glosses over the concepts brought up in the story, one is bound to miss the experience and energy of *Dark Matter*.

Dark Matter is an exploration of genius and the line which separates it from insanity. The story brings into question accepted social hypocrisies, and compares them to those actions and ideas which are considered, by society at large, to be deranged. The true horrors of this tale are not the brutal slayings, these are merely a back-drop for greater evil.

lion dollars per book, it's not really a million... I think it will just be that my working conditions will change."

The stereotypical writer creates with a typewriter and a garbage can, which is always overflowing with crumpled paper. Reeves-Stevens has avoided the "crumpled paper syndrome" by using a word processor.

While he writes, though, his oversized desk and the floors and shelves are, "covered with half-open reference books and outlines and notes and all sorts of things. My work area is always covered with lots of visual things to look at."

And, while most people have "his and her" towels, the Reeves-Stevens have "his and her" computers. The fact that the computers are both Macintoshes reduces the technical difficulties of two people working on the same project.

Reeves-Stevens draws his inspiration from his childhood memories of watching *The Twilight Zone*, *Thriller* and scary movies. "I loved those stories as a kid, and I think that I am recreating a more sophisticated version for people who, like me, grew up on them."

Reeves-Stevens is currently working on his next novel. In addition, the writing duo has signed with Penguin Books' new science fiction line, Roc, for a series of science fiction adventure novels collectively titled *The Chronicles of Galen Sword*. The first *Galen Sword* is due in September. Also in the works are *Galen Sword Book Two* and *Slyde*, a novel of environmental disaster set against the Olympic Games of the year 2000.

As for his publishing plans beyond 1990, Reeves-Stevens says he has lots of ideas ready to develop. "I'm just as eager to find out what happens next as my readers are. I guess that's what speculative fiction is all about."

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Festival of Festivals:
it's a wrap!