



Watermind

M.M. Buckner

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From storm drains, illegal dumps, and flooded landfills, all of North America's most advanced technology flows down the Mississippi River—microchips, nano-devices, pharmaceuticals, genetically modified seed—and lodges in the Louisiana delta. Out of this mire emerges a self-organized neural net, drifting in the water: the Watermind. It can freeze, boil, condense, and move—seemingly at will.

Both infuriating and sympathetic, CJ Reilly is a brilliant, sexy, self-destructive MIT dropout running away from Cambridge and the suicide of her ironic, emotionally-distant father. She is working as a laborer in Devil's Swamp near Baton Rouge, cleaning up a small pollution spill, when she and her new lover, Max, discover the mysterious Watermind. Reilly's more interested in investigating it than containing it, but when it kills someone and escapes into the Mississippi, corporations, governments, protesters, the Coast Guard, and a really wacky underground journalist get involved. And there's no longer any question that it must be destroyed before it reaches the ocean. *Watermind* is Philip K. Dick meets *The Blob*, a postmodern combination of camp SF motifs and writerly ambition attacking serious subjects.

Watermind Details

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Author : M.M. Buckner

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From Reader Review Watermind for online ebook

Sally says

I tried, but I just couldn't get into this book and never finished.

Maureen says

I was hoping the book would be similar to M.Crichton stuff but as i got 1/4 way thru i struggled. Was a little disappointed, just not technical enough for me, if guess. Mushy Mushy and techno stuff just dont mix well for me.

Cliff Jr. says

Such mixed feelings on this one. I love the premise, and the technical stuff seems to be described pretty well, but oh the YA floweriness and superficiality! Everybody's so pervy, and nobody's eye color gets overlooked. Not my cup of tea.

Alan says

Though this book came highly recommended (in a review from The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction by author Chris Moriarty, whose own work I've enjoyed), in the end I did not think Watermind measured up to Moriarty's praise. The characters seemed thin, overly-complicated collections of unrelated traits, and obscurely motivated - CJ Reilly, spoiled rich trust fund baby from the North (or, rather, "up North"); Ramon Sacony from Buenos Aires, a caricature of an industrial mogul with stereotypically perverse sexual appetites; and Max, CJ's love interest, noble blue-collar artist and trusty native guide to the Louisiana bayous... none of them was engaging or especially convincing.

And the plot was... well, it hearkened back to a time before there were graphic novels, when a comic book was just a comic book. In particular, I vividly remember poring over the tragic tale of "The Heap" (*a very short-lived comic - one issue - published by Skywald in September 1971; sadly, I no longer own a copy*). The Heap was a man transformed by goo, born of industrial waste and risen from the swamps, a misunderstood hero, impervious to bullets, who was often not allowed to save lives even when motivated to do so.

The Watermind did not start out as a human being, though, and indeed we never really find out what the Watermind thinks, or even if it *has* thoughts, about its emergence from the toxic lower reaches of the Mississippi River. That lack of insight substantially weakens the novel's impact. We are never given a chance to see the mind of the Watermind, to sympathize with it as we are apparently intended to do at least for awhile.

For that reason, and despite a smattering of science-fictional elements, Watermind is primarily a horror story. The Watermind is a new menace-of-the-week, not a character in its own right. It's misunderstood, and has

some potential for profitable exploitation, but even the heroine comes around to the idea that it must be stopped, in the end.

J says

Within the first 25 pages, we are treated to the n and v words for female private parts, casual drug use and a bi-racial couple who become lovers after 2 weeks of knowing each other. And, of course, a young, pretty, intelligent, rich & sexually promiscuous girl struggling with the after-effects of a repressive, controlling father and absent mother. I couldn't care less for the characters or subject matter.

The book has this anti-authority anti-establishment feel which I really appreciate (sarcasm). Drugs and free love are fine. Weird nature and technology themes. Conventional / normal people are seen as stupid and repressive.

Book club pick - otherwise I wouldn't have read more than the first 5 pages. I'm not a science fiction fan in general. This story was incredibly unpleasant and just plain stupid. I'd rather get a root canal than read this book.

Ben Babcock says

Nanotechnology is to contemporary society what space flight was to the society of the '50s and '60s-- achievable not but not quite viable yet. And just as space flight inspired some of the '50s and '60s most chilling sci-fi horror stories, nanotechnology serves the same role in the 2000s. Alas, while M.M. Buckner's *Watermind* has an intriguing concept, it fails to deliver anything resembling a good story.

The eponymous *Watermind* is a semi-sentient, self-emergent neural net that evolved from discarded electronic components washing down the Mississippi River. It's a cool concept; Buckner gets definite points for it. This is the ultimate in "environmental" artificial intelligence--although as the main character points out, it's not very artificial, since it evolved naturally. The *Watermind*, unlike the disembodied and abstract villain Skynet, exists as a physical slyph-like being, the Mississippi monster who's actually misunderstood.

That's where *Watermind* drags, unfortunately. Buckner can't sustain a Hollywood-monster-movie-style narrative, nor does she manage to create solid characters. None of her characters are three-dimensional. Some are two-dimensional, but most are one-dimensional caricatures introduced in an offhand way designed to let us know they're *supposed* to be caricatures. There's religious nuts, evil businessmen, and of course, *all* white people are out to get the Hispanic people and vice versa. Can't be having any morally ambiguous characters here!

The protagonist, CJ Reilly, isn't particularly likable. And Buckner seems to be obsessed with hormones. Reilly, supposedly an MIT-dropout genius with a trust fund, spends most of the book acting like a spoiled brat, and the rest of it acting like an idiot. She flouts scientific procedure and then cries foul when things don't go her way. She has a lover devoted to her--for reasons I never quite understood, except the sex must have been awesome--yet she *uses* him when she needs his help and then disregards him otherwise.

Granted, Reilly owns up to this last fact, and Buckner seems to be striving for a flawed heroine here. Toward the end of the book, Reilly thinks Max is dead and attempts to avenge his death--and redeem herself--but it just falls flat because I have absolutely no sympathy for her. Throughout the book, she addresses her dead father and we're given to understand that her relationship with her parents had been strained. I didn't quite follow what happened to her mother, who seems to have shared her name.

Flat characters aside, the other downfall is Buckner's writing. She attempts to convey the scope and majesty of the technological wonders inherent in the independent evolution of nanotechnological life. Unfortunately, it misses the mark and instead feels stilted. Awkward phrases like "her body exuded sexual chemistry" and "his mind went flaccid" made me feel like I was reading *Twilight* all over again. Buckner tends to go on at length about the intricate process by which the Watermind develops, but these scientific asides don't ameliorate the actual story.

Thus, while *Watermind* originates from a very nice idea, its execution fails to live up to the idea's merits. And even if your opinion of it isn't quite as severe as mine, I fail to see how it could ever live up to the hype printed on its dustjacket, with blurbs from the likes of Ben Bova, C.J. Cherryh, and Robert J. Sawyer. In fact, why read *blurbs* by those people? Go read one of their *books* instead of *Watermind*.

Marsha says

Story evolves around the premise that computer chips plus other flotsam and jetsam including lab created bacteria, genetically modified waste products and typical American garbage combine to create an Artificial Intelligence. Interesting and fun.

Kathryn says

This is the book that I read for my Sci-Fi Fantasy Book Club meeting tomorrow night (June 12, 2012). I believe it was selected because it is based mostly near Baton Rouge, Louisiana. This would have been a great pure science fiction book, but, alas, the author chose to throw native color and sex and such into the book, which does not make it a simply bad book, but bad in wondrous new and terrifying ways.

First, as to the science fiction: all of the garbage of early 21st century America east of the Rocky Mountains and west of the Appalachians eventually gets washed down the Mississippi River – all of the pieces from electronic doodads, all the flushed-away prescriptions, all the toxic chemicals from landfills and industry – everything. The book's core is that some of this stuff, eddied and cooking in the Louisiana sunshine, brewed up a sentient colloid that eats metal and emits pure water as a byproduct.

As to the people involved, we have one C. J. Reilly, a gorgeous erratic woman who is one dissertation short of her MIT doctorate and her current boyfriend, creole zyedeco musician Max Pottetvents. They are working as scutworkers for Quimicron, a chemical plant located north of the Huey P. Long Bridge, cleaning up a toulene spill in Devil's Swamp. The pair discover this colloid in a pond (it's early March, and the pond is a sheet of ice), and Reilly quickly uses her chemist smarts to determine that this is something new to science that is way cool. However, the smoldering Brazilian CEO of Quimicron, one Roman Sacony, only wants this colloid destroyed, especially after it eats a few barges once it gets into the canal that connects Devil's Swamp to the Mississippi River. Apparently everyone who works at Quimicron is Creole, and speak in a weird

patois; and once word of this colloid leaks out, all of the workers begin whispering about Djab Dile and speculating on links with Baron Samedi. If the idea that everyone in and around Baton Rouge is apparently just-off-the-boat-from-Haiti Creole isn't bad enough, the author has a way with words that would grant her a failing grade in any English composition class. She uses the word "drool" at least three times, and never as one would expect ("a stack of old batteries drooled ashy globs of corrosion") and my favorite bad line is "Then she opened three sticks of cherry-flavored gum, stuffed them in her mouth, and masticated." (And I haven't even mentioned the sex scenes yet, and I don't plan to.)

This was a bad book (which will probably eventually end up as a hit movie), but at least I will have great fun ripping the book apart at the book club meeting tomorrow night.

Roger Bailey says

There seems to be a small subgenre of science fiction in which pollution, garbage, sewage or some other disgusting substance forms itself into some kind of malevolent being. The one that comes most quickly to mind is the movie "Godzilla versus the Smog Monster." I think that many years ago I also read a comic book in which a garbage dump coalesced part of itself into a being called Garbage Man. These stories generally are severely lacking in verisimilitude. The premise is pretty absurd anyway. But then, a lot of premises in science fiction are pretty absurd. For that matter, all fiction is false. Otherwise, it wouldn't be fiction. The trick in giving it verisimilitude is in the author and the reader collaborating in allowing the reader to suspend his or her disbelief. The authors of this subgenre usually do not hold up their end of the collaboration. In other words, these stories are usually very poorly written. The best one that comes to my mind is "It" by Theodore Sturgeon. In that one the monster coalesces from the detritus of the forest floor. It is only a short story, though, and so it does not develop the character of the monster very fully nor the character of the others in the cast. "Watermind" is an exception to the usual in this subgenre. It is a story about the pollution that has been dumped into a Louisiana swamp forming an intelligence that, when attacked, defends itself by killing people. The human characters are well developed. There is a romantic subplot. The human protagonist is a young woman who knows her chemistry and who proceeds to analyse the monster in the water and to recognize it as a cognizant being. She actually develops an affection for it too. I liked the story. Nevertheless, throughout the novel I could not completely shake the feeling that I was watching a low budget science fiction movie from the 1950s.

Stephanie from Books Paradise says

„Carolyn (CJ) nahm die Probe mit beiden Händen entgegen wie ein wertvolles Juwel – oder wie eine tickende Bombe.“ Seit Jahrzehnten wird das verlassene Sumpfgebiet Devil's Swamp als Mülldeponie benutzt. Doch nun gelangen dort hochkomplexe Mikrochips in einen Tümpel voller Chemikalien und Biomasse. Sie setzen eine Kettenreaktion in Gang – und eine neue Lebensform entsteht, anders als alles, was es bisher auf unserem Planeten gegeben hat. Aber ist sie friedlich ... oder eine tödliche Gefahr?

Der Thriller beginnt mit der Entstehung dieser neuen Lebensform, dem Watermind und ehe man es sich versieht liegt man zusammen mit der jungen CJ auf dem mysteriösen eisartigen "Ding". Die Idee, dass sich ein hochkomplexer Microchip in einem Tümpel voller Chemikalien und Biomasse zu einer neuen, eigenständigen Lebensform entwickelt hat, scheint erst ziemlich fremd und fast schon fantastisch. Eine Laboranalyse liefert dem Leser jedoch eine glaubwürdige und recht realistische wissenschaftliche Erklärung.

Und eben mit dieser Erklärung sollte man die heutige Forschung, die raschen Fortschritte in der Gentechnik und die großen Sprünge bei der Erschaffung der künstlichen Intelligenz betrachten. Der Mensch entwickelt Computer die "eigenständig" arbeiten, die sogar lernen und dadurch Probleme bewältigen können ohne einen vorherigen Befehl (Lösung) zu bekommen. Ich will damit sagen, dass es wirklich jederzeit passieren kann.

Der zweite Teil, die Evolution, vermag ein wenig an Spannung verlieren bevor man im dritten und letzten Teil, Epiphanie actionreich dem Ende entgegen "rast". Langeweile entstand hier definitiv nicht. Dazu muss ich aber sagen, dass ich mich für diese Thematik [KI (künstliche Intelligenz), für die Entstehung der Arten und für die Evolution] sehr interessiere. Wer für solche Themen nichts oder nicht viel übrig hat, für den könnte das Buch vielleicht sogar sehr langweilig werden.

Die Kapitel sind recht kurz gehalten, was das Lesen und verarbeiten wesentlich einfacher gestalten lässt. Wissenschaftliche Abkürzungen, Begriffe und Vorgänge werden umgehend und für jeden verständlich erklärt. Der Schreibstil ist toll und flüssig. Besonders finde ich, dass man einige Personen und ihre Charakterzüge erst oder auch nur durch ihre Handlungen und Verhaltensweisen kennen lernt und nicht durch eine "langweilige" Erklärung der Person. Das macht das Ganze noch realistischer.

Fazit: Abschließend möchte ich Euch erklären, wie ich mich bei diesem Buch gefühlt habe: Als ich das Buch las, kam ich mir nicht vor, als würde ich einfach nur ein Buch lesen, sondern es war als säße ich im Kino und sähe einen "Kassenschlager".

Echo says

This really wasn't that good. It had potential & I kept hoping it would realize it, but it never did. Don't waste your time.

Maik says

Tief in den durch die moderne Industrie verpesteten Wassern der Sümpfe des Mississippi entwickelt sich eine neue Lebensform - teils aus biologischen, teils aus winzigen elektronischen Komponenten. Sie wächst und hinterlässt auf ihrem Weg flussabwärts Richtung Meer eine Schneise der Verwüstung - und weil sie zunehmend intelligenter und auch größer wird, macht sie den für den Sumpf verantwortlichen Großindustriellen Roman, der angesichts der immer größer werdenden Schadenssumme alles daran setzt, das "Ding" zu stoppen, auch zunehmend Kopfzerbrechen.

Das ist erstmals ein kreativer Ansatz, den muss man dem Autoren lassen: Eine nicht wirklich böse, aber gefährliche wässrige W-Lan-Kreatur. Und sie kommt nicht aus dem All, sondern ist das Ergebnis des bedenkenlosen Umgangs des Menschen mit seiner Umwelt.

Das reicht dem Autoren jedoch noch nicht: Als Beinahe-Gegenspielerin Romans entwirft er die mit genialen Zügen und einem nicht ganz so hellen Liebhaber ausgestattete junge Wissenschaftlerin CG, die von wissenschaftlicher Neugier und Mutterinstinkten getrieben das Wasser-Wesen retten will. Am Ende erkennt allerdings auch sie, dass das Wesen (wenn auch nicht en gros) sterben muss.

Aber das reicht immer noch nicht: CG ist sich über ihre Empfindungen gegenüber Roman und ihrem Liebhaber Max nicht ganz sicher. Und natürlich schlafst sie erst mit dem einen und dann mit dem anderen (und überraschenderweise auch mit dem Wasser-Blob).

Aber am Ende wird alles gut: CG erkennt ihren Fehler in Bezug auf die Kreatur, entscheidet sich irgendwie

doch für ihren zwischendurch totgeglaubten, nun aber wiederkehrenden Liebhaber, Roman entpuppt sich letztendlich doch als durchaus mitfühlendes und liebenswertes Wesen und das "Ding" wird durch EMPs in einem letzten großen Showdown geröstet.

Der Grundgedanke des Aufbaus, die Spannung über eine immer weiter wachsende und immer bedrohlicher werdende Kreatur und die von der Hauptfigur CG zu treffenden Entscheidungen sowie ihren sich zusätzlichen Konflikt mit Roman zu steigern, scheint durchaus sinnvoll. Der Autor ist zudem sichtlich bemüht, den Figuren Tiefe zu geben - sie wirken nicht wie Stereotypen. Aber trotzdem misslingt der Versuch: Die etappenreiche Verfolgungsjagd mit sich wiederholenden Mustern auf dem Old Men River ist ermüdend. Die psychologische Motivation Romans und CGs in Bezug zu ihren Handlungen wirkt konstruiert. Der lange Showdown - der nichts wirklich Neues mehr bringt - rettet das Buch nicht. Er verstärkt vielmehr die Langeweile, die irgendwo in der Mitte des 463-Seiten-Romans aufkommt.

Elizabeth says

Watermind

By M. M. Buckner

Conceptually, Watermind is an interesting idea. A mixture of sophisticated computers, electronic garbage, and toxic sludge accidentally evolving into an alien artificial being. As a story the novel doesn't really go anywhere. We don't get much insight into the creature. The writing is focused on a cast of characters that we never really connect with – mostly CJ Reilly. The style reminds me of a Hollywood horror movie at times – so much so that at one point I expected CJ to get pregnant with some sort of hybrid spawn. No, the story didn't go there but my mind did perhaps because of the omnipresent foreboding tone of the story. By the end, despite the length of the book, I felt like I had read a short story rather than a novel. Still, I would say it is a worth the read if you pick it up at a bargain price.

Spoiler Alert

This review does contain major plot points.

The prologue tells us that 144 micro-computers accidentally get washed into the a river, 119 of them end up in a mix of toxic waste and electronic garbage called Devil's Swamp. Somehow they form some kind of neural net.

The story is mostly told from the POV of CJ Reilly- a woman who is working on the clean up in the swamp. After the swamp ices over in the middle of the hot summer, she makes a miraculous discovery when she analysis a sample from the toxic sludge that turns out to be pure water. Water pure enough to drink.

We then meet Roman Sacony, CEO of Quimicron. A friend of CJ's late father, he becomes involved with containing the newly found entity after the death of one of the workers.

CJ is given the job of identifying the pond fluid which she quickly identifies as an emulsified colloid but further explanation of its strange properties elude her. They catalog a cornucopia of electronic bits and pieces and verify that the colloid produces pure water but don't get much farther than that in their study of it.

Eventually they dub it "watermind" of the book's title. CJ is determined to use it to revolutionize the world as method for generating clean water. The corporate interests are only interesting in keeping it from spreading.

The story gets bogged down at times in the strange language choices and the fact that nothing much actually happens. At one point the author writes "Her womb suffused with crampy heat." I have no idea what that was supposed mean.

CJ pushes to communicate with the watermind using music. We never see things from the creatures POV but it seems to respond. Meanwhile competing interests proceed with research on how to destroy the creature instead. Despite their best efforts to keep it contained the watermind escapes into the Mississippi.

As the story goes public, everyone starts to panic. Meanwhile the watermind starts growing and evolving as it travels down stream.

The panicky battle against this unknown 'menace' reads almost like a Hollywood movie script, right down to the ending which is reminiscent of classic monster and alien science fiction movies.

(view spoiler)

Peg Schoenfelder says

Unlikely premise and slow development. I quit early on.

Lauralee says

I hated the characters. All of them. I hated them so much that I've had to abandon the book.

The Good:

Fairly good dialogue.

Assumes the reader is intelligent, and when introducing new terms or ideas, explains them.

Interesting premise

The Bad:

The characters aren't likeable, except one because we're supposed to be rooting for him but it's so over the top that I couldn't like him either.

Poor physical descriptions of characters.

The main character is emotionally stunted and hard to relate to. Author describes her as "impulsive", but since she's supposed to have got most of the way through MIT, shouldn't she have been broken of the impulsive habits (/sarcasm) with regards to scientific method, specifically data and sample collection as well as SAFETY???? I just couldn't believe there could be anyone this well versed in the chemical concepts explored and be so stupid.

Story moves extremely slowly.

I got this out of the library and found a note tucked inside blasting the book for the misogyny rampant in the book. I can see where the previous reader would come to this conclusion. The women are described mainly for their physical characteristics that relate to fuckability. However, I found that this was equally applied to male characters. Hooray for equal opportunity?

Where I found the misogyny I raged at was that every single female character that had the opportunity to speak from their point of view was primarily focused on gaining the sexual attraction of the bad guy. Seriously?
