

*The Time Capsule* by Stephen Bradley

Reviewed by Chris Farrell, May 2013

Try to imagine, if you can, you are reading a novelisation written by James Joyce from a J. J. Abrams movie or television series. Now, we're not talking about the impenetrable prose of *Finnegans Wake*, but the style of *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and, perhaps, *Ulysses*. That is close to the experience one enjoys with Stephen Bradley's *The Time Capsule*.

Basically, the plot centres around a character who has a recurring dream which always continues from a point later than where it was interrupted when last he awoke. This central character is the narrator, Frank (the book is written in a first person stream-of-consciousness narrative style, which Bradley refers to as "streaming"). And events in the dream are paralleled but not duplicated in "real life", rather than the other way around.

Bradley has a readable style which embraces the reader as if he is being brought up to date with events, both in the dream and in "real life", over a drink. I found it difficult to accept that the narrative was entirely fictional, so intimately does Bradley write (though, from what little I know, Bradley's life bears little resemblance to Frank's, beyond being born on the North Island of New Zealand).

The eponymous time capsule is the dream transportation by which the narrator moves from time to time and place to place, much of it in a pre-iron age on a world on which the capsule has landed. In addition to being a mode of transport, the capsule is also a combination womb and incubator, from which everyone on the new planet emerges.

To quote Doctor Who (with whom, I suspect, Bradley would agree), "people assume that time is a strict progression of cause to effect, but actually from a non-linear non-subjective viewpoint – it's more like a big ball of wibbly wobbly, timey wimey stuff". At least, it is in the dream.

The "real" events in the novel take place, for the most part, in New Zealand, from before that country's involvement in the Vietnam conflict to the Afghan war. Frank's brother, Charlie, joins the army and serves in both theatres, while his family and loved ones remain at home, worrying about his welfare. The novel explores personal relationships, responsibilities and aspirations, as well as the alterations in those values brought about by circumstances, and examines the way in which life can be changed by events beyond our control (even if that occurs through the medium of our dreams).

So, to anyone who is able to accept that life can be reflected in a dream (including any Freudians, if such a being still exists) or the fans of any movie or television show which plays havoc with the concept of time and space being linear, I commend this novel with enthusiasm.

**Chris Farrell started his career as a print journalist, then moved into radio as a reporter on AM and PM, and has, since then, spent over 20 years in television as a writer, producer and director.**