



James Mehling/DN

## 'Big Empty' is full story

**"The Big Empty"**  
James Luceno  
Del Rey Books

A secret mission during a war goes awry, and the ship carrying its elite crew is destroyed. Years later, one of the few who managed to escape, living on a low-tech world, is summoned to appear before a veterans' disability board for evaluation.

Thus begins a chase and a race against assassination and interstellar war in "The Big Empty," James Luceno's third novel from Del Rey Books.

Aksum Muse is a cybernetically-enhanced soldier, whose implants allow him to listen in on the electronic signals of artificial intelligences. To escape the constant, maddening clatter, he moves to a low-tech planet without computers. All is fine until he begins to have recurrent nightmares, driving him to deface a local burial mound. This, in turn, draws the attention of the veterans' affairs committee, which calls him in for an evaluation.

Muse sets out for the planet where the

board is located, but along the way strange things happen — someone wants him dead.

Muse was a survivor of a failed mission at the height of an interstellar war between humans and the Xell'em. A war is again looming between the two empires. Muse holds the real key to the coming war. A defense contractor put out of business by the peace is seeking to re-ignite the war by producing a holo film about the late war to inflame passions against the enemy.

The plot is a bit stretched, but Luceno carries it off in grand style with a fast-flowing style. Luceno also throws in a few barbs at the conduct of modern warfare and statecraft. A component of the book is the apparent abandonment of religion by humans and its adoption by artificial intelligences. The parallels drawn between sacraments and interfaces is cleverly done, and is one reason that SF exists in the first place — giving one a new view (not always orthodox) on the familiar. "The Big Empty" is highly recommended.

— Sam Kepfield

## French movie explores collision of two cultures

Many films are easily classified in a specific genre: comedies, romance or action films.

Director Regis Wargnier's Oscar-winning film "Indochine" defies such simple classification.

"Indochine" is the story of what happens when two cultures collide. The story takes place in 1930 in what is now Vietnam. Most of the action revolves around a rubber tree plantation where members of the working class are rebelling against French rule in their country.

Catherine Deneuve gives a spectacular performance as Eliane, the French owner of the plantation. Eliane's personality is a complex one, which sways from the cold businesswoman to the passionate lover.

Camille, Eliane's adopted Vietnamese daughter, struggles with the two cultures, which are both very much a part of her life. She loves her country but has problems accepting its custom of arranged marriages and preference to male children.

She also loves her French mother and Jean-Baptiste, a French naval officer, but she sympathizes with her country's struggle for independence from France.

The other characters are equally complex. Jean-Baptiste and Eliane are extremely important influences for Camille, and yet they are also often unsympathetic to those who fall under them professionally.

Tahn is a Vietnamese student who was kicked out of Paris for protesting French colonialism. Originally intended to wed Camille, he leaves to help lead the communist rebellion. Tahn never forgets, however, that it was not his own culture but the French culture that taught him the concepts of individual freedom and choice.

The complexity of this film goes deeper than the individual characters. The plot takes more

turns than a downhill skier at Lillehammer, Norway.

Eliane and Jean-Baptiste have a love affair before Camille meets him. Her naive, love-at-first-sight relationship is considered dangerous by Eliane.

Eliane uses her power to have Jean-Baptiste transferred to a remote station, where he looks over what is, in essence, a slave trade.

Camille and Jean-Baptiste are reunited when Camille arrives at this hideous market as a "volunteer." After an action-packed escape, the two are hidden by a sympathetic communist.

They travel to China with Etienne, their newborn son, hoping to avoid being captured.

As this unusual chase scene unfolds, the viewer finds that Eliane is retelling the story to an adult Etienne.

The setting is now France in 1954. Camille is involved in the negotiations at the Geneva talks, which have acknowledged her country's independence. Neither Eliane or Etienne have seen Camille since Etienne was a baby.

The film's mysterious beauty comes from an epic storytelling style. The numerous complex characters weave a plot that touches on all basic human emotions. The mythic proportions of the characters and their stories are made real by the historical base.

"Indochine" is a moving portrayal of how individuals were affected by French colonialism. It is a French film which strives to see things from a Vietnamese point of view. In doing this "Indochine" captures some of the positive and negative aspects of both cultures. More than that, it shows that it is possible, at times, to transcend cultural barriers to find love, hope and knowledge.

"Indochine" will show on Sunday at the Mary Riepma Ross Film Theater. Screenings are at 3, 6 and 9 p.m.

— Malcom Miles



Courtesy of Columbia Artists Management Inc.

The Orchestre National De France performed at the Lied Center for Performing Arts Wednesday night.

## French orchestra comes to Lied, gives 'fantastique' performance

By Paula Lavigne  
Senior Reporter

From the opening blasts of the timpani to the ending chords of the full orchestra, the Orchestre National De France played a sea-faring voyage through emotional hallucinations at the Lied Center Wednesday night.

The orchestra's overture, "The Corsaire, Op. 21" by Berlioz, started off with a forceful triumph and swayed from soft subtle melodies to powerful roaring musical attacks.

"La Mer, Three Symphonic Sketches" by Debussy was a voyage through rolling waves and calm waters. From an ocean to a mountain stream, this musical tidal wave threw a trance over the audience, bringing them from peaceful bliss to shocking alert.

The orchestra remained stationary for the entire performance but was visually pleasing. Charles Dutoit,

musical director, threw himself about like a surly penguin on thin ice.

Like a flock of wild geese, the strings section flipped pages as their strings flew up and down like beaks on a whooping crane. The intensity of the entire orchestra was clearly visible.

Their ending piece was Berlioz's musical interpretation of, literally, an opium trip combined with his obsession for an Irish actress.

"Symphonie Fantastique, Op. 14" started with "Dreams; Passions; Largo; Allegro agitato e appassionato assai" and ended with "Dream of the Witches Sabbath: Larghetto; Allegro" From drowsy wooziness to a heavy musical tirade, this piece was simply "fantastique."

Even though a large section of the orchestra doesn't even speak English, the Orchestre National De France spoke the international language of music to everyone.

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