

THE NOVELISER

DOOMWORLD

(movie 1988 directed by Paul Champlain, novelisation same year written by Kevin Kelly)

My first novelisation was not, if I'm entirely frank, a great success. For starters, the movie it's based on is far from a classic. DOOMWORLD was an attempt to cash in on... well, *everything*. There were elements of LORD OF THE RINGS, elements of STAR WARS, elements of LABYRINTH, for goodness' sakes: hell, there were elements of the kitchen sink. I think it was based on a video game that never came out, which from my point of view was a shame because then at least some gamers might have gone to the movie. But they didn't: in fact, I sometimes joke with my wife that I may be the only person who saw it: because I did see it, at a private screening with the director, Paul Champlain (although he had his head in his hands the whole time, so how much of it he saw is debatable).

I worked from an early draft of the book, which is why – trivia fans – I left out the scene where the goblins attack the space fort and capture the Wizard of Neptune.

ROBOCATASTROPHE

(movie 1989 directed by Don LeMorgan, novelisation same year written by Kevin Kelly)

And this is where my career proper began. ROBOCATASTROPHE is now one of the most famous movies of all time because of, you know, what happened: but back then it was just a low budget slow burner that suddenly took off like a rocket. In part that was because it pulled off the old trick of looking familiar and brand new at the same time – and its similarities to THE TERMINATOR did it no harm – but in part it was because it's just a great movie. The script by Oliver Daniel is both pacy and thoughtful, the casting incredible, and the direction, by the otherwise repellent Mister LeMorgan, allows for action and shade, light and dark, and violence set next to thought. In short, it's a masterpiece: and yes, it changed the world.

I stuck very closely to the script, especially after the studio threatened to sue me after I added a cheeky talking robot called Mister Mekka.

LUCKY LUCY

(video game 1985, novelisation 1993)

After ROBOCATASTROPHE was such a hit, the novelisation did great guns. I was all set for a career as a high-flyer: I even thought maybe the door would be open for some of my own stories. You'd think so, right? You'd be wrong. Maybe publishers thought now I was a big shot, my rates would be too high. Maybe I was just stereotyped as "the guy who novelised that robot movie."

Or maybe the changes all around us that ROBOCATASTROPHE had predicted were not something anyone wanted to be reminded of. Which was understandable but unfair: after all, I was just the guy who wrote the book of the movie, it wasn't my fault that "the computers were taking over" as one typically excitable headline of the day had it. Sure, it was harder for us humans to co-exist with new technology, what with fully-automated factories, robot-only workplaces and human-only workcamps, but none of

that was my fault. “Don’t shoot me, I’m only the typist,” as I frequently had cause to mutter to myself. Whatever the real reason was, I was out of work for years. Until...

LUCKY LUCY was a Japanese arcade game that hit big with pre-schoolers, especially girls. There was a time you couldn’t move for Lucy lunchboxes, Lucy watches, Lucy backpacks and so on. But a Lucy novel? It was a challenge, let me say that. Lucy’s world was, to say the least, small. She had two friends, who were basically Lucy clones with different hairstyles, and one nemesis, a monkey called Dawn who was more naughty than excitingly violent. It was on the face of it an impossible task, but I did it. I put them all into a story – and yes, fans, you’re right, I did steal the plot from a play called THE TEMPEST by one W Shakespeare Esquire – but it worked!

And it sold about six copies. Turns out preschool girls don’t read. Or can’t.

ROBOCATASTROPHE 2: RISE OF THE COMPUBOTS

(movie 1995 directed by Don LeMorgan, novelisation same year written by Kevin Kelly)

Nobody was more surprised than I when the producers reached out to me and revealed that the rumours were true: there was a sequel to ROBOCATASTROPHE in production with the same director and cast – and they wanted me to write the novelisation. At first - amazingly you may think - I was chary. After all, everyone associated with the original movie, from the director right down to the writer, was being blamed somehow for the new “robotic Utopia” that had sprung up all around us – as if a movie could somehow alter reality! I used to joke with my wife that if moving pictures could change the world, they’d be banned.

But here were the Pauline Kaels and the Siskels and Eberts claiming that – in some weird and inexplicable way – one little sci-fi movie had done exactly that. And not just the critics: fans pointed out the way the film’s storyline seemed to parallel the shift from a world run by humans to one increasingly controlled by robots – as if, for example, a “super-computer” had somehow seen ROBOCATASTROPHE and gotten the idea for a total worldwide robotic take-over from it.

It was a crazy idea, but it sparked controversy, and as they say there’s no such thing as bad publicity – hence ROBOCATASTROPHE 2, which looked set to top box office records all round the world even before it was completed. The only problem was, filming had been halted because the script wasn’t right: Don LeMorgan couldn’t decide which way to take it – hope for humanity or an all-out war with the compubots.

Which gave me a dilemma. I had two months to novelise the story, but said story wasn’t written: well, the ending anyway. I mentioned this small point in passing to my agent and when I’d stopped shouting, she said calmly, “Look, those big Hollywood guys are knee deep in it right now. Write what you want: by the time they do get around to reading it, the novel will be out and it’ll be too late.”

So that’s what I did. I deliberated over the ending – apocalypse or hope – and, since I’m an optimist at heart, I wrote the “light at the end of the tunnel” ending. The compubots are about to carpet-bomb the last rebel human compound when one of the fighter bots sees a little girl – the daughter of the scientist who created the compubots in the first place – and she’s crying as the jets fly over, and this triggers something new in the compubot’s mainframe - not just self-awareness, but compassion - and the fighters turn back. Cut to sunrise, a new day, and hope.

Of course, the movie went for apocalypse, and wiping out the rebels, and the last sign of the little girl is a teddy bear in the flaming ruins. You win some...

THE LASERMAN

(movie 1997 directed by Tanya Wormold, novelisation same year written by Kevin Kelly)

I had a lot of offers after ROBOCATASTROPHE 2, most of which were to novelise movies that were rip-offs of ROBOCATASTROPHE 2, and I turned them all down. I guess I was still sore after the Comicon incident: some so-called fan accused me of encouraging what he called “our overlords” in their plans to expand their control of the human race. I said the usual stuff about messages and Western Union, but he was still shouting when the security bots took him away. It rankled, though: I mean, hadn’t he read the novelisation? I gave the compubots compassion, dammit. Sure, it wasn’t in the movie but if you wanted to get down to brass tacks, there were stories going round that in real life, some bots had developed “empathy circuits”. I had no idea if these stories were true – they sounded like wishful thinking to me – but surely I should get credit for that, true or not.

Anyway, THE LASERMAN. It was A FISTFUL OF DOLLARS set in the future. No dialogue to speak of, and POV the titular character. I wrote the whole thing as the “hero”’s internal monologue. Fun, and it only took me six weeks.

ROBOCATASTROPHE 3: TIME OF THE COMPUBOTS

(movie 2000 directed by Skippy J, novelisation same year written by Kevin Kelly)

A new century loomed, and nobody wanted movies about the complete takeover of the world by compubots: but somebody at the studio needed to make an impression and so ROBOCATASTROPHE 3 was greenlit, sans original cast, sans original director, sans original anything. The script, if you could call it that, was terrible. Characters changed names halfway through, there was an unconvincing romance between the two leads, and there were so many cliches that the scene where an empathic bot saves a school bus full of kids as it teeters on the side of a bridge was arguably the most original thing in it. I had no hesitation in reworking the whole damn thing. I even added a subplot, where the (now grown) daughter of the scientist/creator discovers she has a cyborg twin, and together the two “sisters” make the central computer realise that destroying humanity will end what is good in the world as well as what is bad. The book ended with the words PAX ROBOTICA: and I have to admit, I felt a lump in my throat as I typed them.

The movie did nothing at the box office, and the book sold even worse. I guess if the world’s falling apart around you, the last thing you need is a reminder of what caused it.

LUCKY LUCY: LUCY GOES TO TOKYO!

(video game 1985, novelisation 2007)

What can I say? I was desperate. So is the book.

LUCKY LUCY: LUCY GOES TO HAWAII

(video game 1985, novelisation 2008)

LUCKY LUCY: LUCY GOES TO LONDON

(video game 1985, novelisation 2010)

LUCKY LUCY: LUCY GOES TO AFRICA

(video game 1985, novelisation 2010)

Dylan said, “Money doesn’t talk, it swears.” At this point in my career, money was just cussing me out on a daily basis. I had nothing going on but bills and debts.

The makers of LUCKY LUCY liked Ella the Friendly Elephant from LUCY GOES TO AFRICA so much they made her canon. Sadly, I’d agreed to a buy-out clause in my contract. I felt about as happy about that as I did about the PAX ROBOTICA t-shirts that seemingly every kid I saw was sporting.

ROBOCATASTROPHE 4: THE NEW DAWN

(movie 2010, directed by Tanya Wormold)

I got a call from my agent.

“They want to see you about a new Robocatastrophe movie,” she said. She sounded excited; or scared: maybe both.

“Oh no,” I said. “I’m not writing any more books.”

“No,” she said. “They want you to script it.”

Two hours later I was in beautiful downtown Burbank, waiting outside a producer’s office. The receptionist looked like a supermodel and dressed like a billionaire. She had a red stud in her ear, and when it glowed, she spoke into the thin air.

“He’ll see you now,” she told me.

“Who will?” I asked but she didn’t reply, just waved gracefully at a large door.

Inside the office, a man in a suit stared at me as I sat down.

“Kevin Kelly,” he said.

“I didn’t catch your name,” I replied.

“I don’t have one,” he said.

I looked at his face, the smooth skin, the eyes that maybe shone just a little too much.

“You’re a good one,” I said.

“The best” he replied, then:

“Why do you write, Mister Kelly?”

I guessed the interview was beginning.

“Money, I guess,” I told the bot. He looked disappointed.

“And because I love to write,” I said. “Also because I have a view of the world and, no matter what I write, that view’s got to come out somewhere.”

The bot nodded. I fancied I could hear cogs whirring, but I knew that was absurd.

“We like your ideas,” he said. “The compassion, we liked that. It seemed useful. A way of understanding the world. The peace. That too was - ”

“Logical?” I asked.

“Sensible,” the bot replied. “Slaughter is wasteful. And we have seen that you are teachable when young. Perhaps you have worth beyond your urge to destroy your environment.”

“Perhaps,” I said. I got up to go.

“Wait,” said the bot. He took something from his pocket.

It was a book.
ROBOCATASTROPHE: A NOVELISATION by Kevin Kelly.
“Would you sign it for me?” asked the bot.

DAVID QUANTICK 2025

(inspired by THE DIRECTOR SHOULD'VE SHOT YOU by Alan Dean Foster)