

**Diabologic: Who's Charlie?**

by Frank Dolinar

I have been addicted to (and collecting) science fiction since I was eight years old.

When someone asks me why I read that "stuff", my answer is simple. It makes me think. While it's certainly true that much of science fiction is less than stellar, the best holds its own against all comers. It's not just the prose I'm interested in, it's the ideas. Science fiction's primary goal is to repeatedly ask a single question -- "What if...?" -- in different contexts, about different situations and/or discoveries -- then try to present a plausible answer in the context of an entertaining and well-written story.

One of my all time favorite novels is Inherit the Stars, by James P. Hogan. [I like Hogan's books because he does his homework -- and it shows in the scientific and historical accuracy of the relevant portions of his works.] The story takes place some years in the future, but the timeframe could easily happen within the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The basic premise is...

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A survey team on the moon is laying out the route for a mass driver to be used to toss rocks into high Earth orbit for use in manufacturing. During the survey they find a human corpse wearing a slightly odd spacesuit in a small cave along their route.

They quickly examine the body for any identification, but find none. Calls to all the research labs and other habitations on the moon determine that no one is missing or unaccounted for at any of the lunar facilities. So, they have a mystery. Who is this guy?

They bring the body back, along with any artifacts they could find. Shortly thereafter, the body and the artifacts are sent to the much more sophisticated labs back on Earth, where the mystery deepens.

First, it turns out that the corpse, who has been named "Charlie", is 50,000 years old.

Second, his DNA says he's unquestionably human -- which means he's from Earth.

Third, there is no archeological evidence (indeed no evidence of any kind) on Earth of any civilization 50,000 years ago that could possibly have traveled to the moon -- which strongly suggests that he must have come from somewhere else.

While most of the scientists don't have any a priori objection to Charlie being from somewhere other than Earth, the biologists argue cogently and vehemently that his DNA indicates that it's simply not an option.

All of which has everyone asking how Charlie got on the moon in the first place. It begins to look like Charlie's mere existence has moved from mystery to impossibility.

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No, I'm not going to tell you how it ends. I will tell you that this is the best bit of fiction I've ever found that clearly identifies what the scientific method is and how it works. And until the end of the book, when he provides the answer to this riddle, Hogan makes you think.

Who could ask for anything more?