

# The aliens are coming!

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FOOTFALL. By Larry Niven and  
Jerry Pournelle. Gollancz  
495pp. \$24.95.

Reviewer:  
COLIN STEELE.

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**U**S AUTHOR Jerry Pournelle has written, "my work is intended to entertain. I may well have a serious message, but in my judgment fiction is best served if the characters in a story do not know they have a message to deliver".

Unkind critics of Niven and Pournelle's previous bestselling collaborations, 'The Mote in God's Eye' and 'Lucifer's Hammer', might well claim that their characters have very little to deliver at all! Characterisation in the novels was largely

isation in the novels was largely subservient to a fast-moving plot and "hard" science fiction. 'Footfall' constitutes a much more successful mix of elements as has been shown by the US-rights sale for \$650,000. 'Footfall', like 'The Mote in God's Eye', deals with contact between humanity and an alien race and, as in 'Lucifer's Hammer', there are numerous plots and sub-plots as well as a seeming cast of thousands.

'Footfall' begins with the detection by an observatory in Hawaii of a UFO heading towards Earth, but its inhabitants, unlike the sympathetic aliens in vogue since the trend was set by the films of Spielberg and Carpenter, are far from friendly. Earth's defences are quickly neutralised and global telecommunications are disrupted. The mysterious aliens are clearly not too interested in intergalactic co-operation, as the myriad characters, particularly the Russians and Americans, slowly discern. Niven and Pournelle are also a little self-indulgent with the Americans as the US President turns to thinly-disguised major SF writers to help him tackle the aliens.

Despite this fact and the eventual depiction of the aliens

eventual depiction of the aliens as bumbling, elephant-like creatures. 'Footfall' is an unabashed enjoyable SF romp which rises to the traditional climax of an epic battle to decide the fate of humanity. It is far from "the ultimate novel of alien invasion", as its blurb proclaims, but viewed in the pulp context of the old Saturday-afternoon space operas it is bound to be a resounding success.