The Coming Race

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Edward George Bulwer-Lytton

The Coming Race
By Edward George Bulwer-Lytton (1803-1873)

Edward George Earle Lytton Bulwer-Lytton, 1st Baron Lytton (1803-1873) was an English novelist, poet, playwright, and politician. Lord Lytton was a florid, popular writer of his day, who coined such phrases as "the great unwashed," "pursuit of the almighty dollar," "the pen is mightier than the sword," and the infamous incipit "It was a dark and stormy night." Despite his popularity in his heyday, today his name is known as a byword for bad writing. San Jose State University holds an annual Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest for bad writing in which contestants have to supply terrible openings of imaginary novels, inspired by his novel Paul Clifford, which opens with the famous words: "It was a dark and stormy night."

The Coming Race drew heavily on his interest in the occult and contributed to the birth of the science fiction genre. Unquestionably, its story of a subterranean race of men waiting to reclaim the surface is one of the first science fiction novels. The novel centers on a young, independently wealthy traveler (the narrator), who accidentally finds his way into a subterranean world occupied by beings who seem to resemble angels, who call themselves Vril-ya. The hero soon discovers that they are descendants of an antediluvian civilization who live in networks of subterranean caverns linked by tunnels. The narrator suggests that in time, the Vril-ya will run out of habitable spaces underground and will start claiming the surface of the earth, destroying mankind in the process, if necessary. (Summary compiled from Wikipedia)

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