



# THE MIDWICH CUCKOOS

JOHN WYNDHAM

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*The Midwich Cuckoos*



PENGUIN BOOKS  
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PENGUIN BOOKS  
THE MIDWICH CUCKOOS

John Wyndham was born in 1903. Until 1911 he lived in Edgbaston, Birmingham, and then in many parts of England. After a wide experience of the English preparatory school he was at Bedales from 1918 till 1921. Careers which he had tried include farming, law, commercial art, and advertising; he first started writing short stories, intended for sale, in 1925. From 1930 till 1939 he wrote stories of various kinds under different names, almost exclusively for American publications. He also wrote detective novels. During the war he was in the Civil Service and afterwards in the Army. In 1946 he went back to writing stories for publication in the U.S.A. and decided to try a modified form of what is unhappily known as 'science fiction'. He wrote *The Day of the Triffids* and *The Kraken Wakes* (both of which have been translated into several languages), *The Chrysalids*, *The Midwich Cuckoos* (filmed in *The Village of the Damned*), *The Seeds of Time*, *The Outward Urge* (with Lucas Parkes), *Trouble with Lichen*, *Consider Her Ways and Others* and *Chocky* (1968), all of which have been published as Penguins. John Wyndham died in March 1969.

*By the same author*

THE DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS\*  
THE KRAKEN WAKES\*  
THE CHRYSALIDS\*  
THE SEEDS OF TIME\*  
TROUBLE WITH LICHEN\*  
CONSIDER HER WAYS AND OTHERS\*  
THE OUTWARD URGE (with Lucas Parkes)\*  
CHOCKY

*\*Also published as Penguins*

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# *Part One*



## CHAPTER I

### *No Entry to Midwich*

ONE of the luckiest accidents in my wife's life is that she happened to marry a man who was born on the 26th of September. But for that, we should both of us undoubtedly have been at home in Midwich on the night of the 26th-27th, with consequences which, I have never ceased to be thankful, she was spared.

Because it was my birthday, however, and also to some extent because I had the day before received and signed a contract with an American publisher, we set off on the morning of the 26th for London, and a mild celebration. Very pleasant, too. A few satisfactory calls, lobster and Chablis at Wheeler's, Ustinov's latest extravaganza, a little supper, and so back to the hotel where Janet enjoyed the bathroom with that fascination which other people's plumbing always arouses in her.

Next morning, a leisurely departure on the way back to Midwich. A pause in Trayne, which is our nearest shopping town, for a few groceries; then on along the main road, through the village of Stouch, then the right-hand turn on to the secondary road for – But, no. Half the road is blocked by a pole from which dangles a notice 'ROAD CLOSED', and in the gap beside it stands a policeman who holds up his hand. . . .

So I stop. The policeman advances to the offside of the car, I recognize him as a man from Trayne.

'Sorry, sir, but the road is closed.'

'You mean I'll have to go round by the Oppley Road?'

'Fraid that's closed, too, sir.'

'But –'

There is the sound of a horn behind.

'F you wouldn't mind backing off a bit to the left, sir.'

Rather bewildered, I do as he asks, and past us and past

him goes an army three-ton lorry with khaki-clad youths leaning over the sides.

'Revolution in Midwich?' I inquire.

'Manoeuvres,' he tells me. 'The road's impassable.'

'Not *both* roads surely? We live in Midwich, you know, Constable.'

'I know, sir. But there's no way there just now. 'F I was you, sir, I'd go back to Trayne till we get it clear. Can't have parking here, 'cause of getting things through.'

Janet opens the door on her side and picks up her shopping-bag.

'I'll walk on, and you come along when the road's clear,' she tells me.

The constable hesitates. Then he lowers his voice.

'Seein' as you live there, ma'am, I'll tell you – but it's confidential like. 'T isn't no use tryin', ma'am. Nobody can't get into Midwich, an' that's a fact.'

We stare at him.

'But why on earth not?' says Janet.

'That's just what they're tryin' to find out, ma'am. Now, 'f you was to go to the Eagle in Trayne, I'll see you're informed as soon as the road's clear.'

Janet and I looked at one another.

'Well,' she said to the constable, 'it seems very queer, but if you're quite *sure* we can't get through. . . .'

'I am that, ma'am. It's orders, too. We'll let you know, as soon as maybe.'

If one wanted to make a fuss, it was no good making it with him; the man was only doing his duty, and as amiably as possible.

'Very well,' I agreed. 'Gayford's my name, Richard Gayford. I'll tell the Eagle to take a message for me in case I'm not there when it comes.'

I backed the car further until we were on the main road, and, taking his word for it that the other Midwich road was similarly closed, turned back the way we had come. Once

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we were the other side of Stouch village I pulled off the road into a field gateway.

'This,' I said, 'has a very odd smell about it. Shall we cut across the fields, and see what's going on?'

'That policeman's manner was sort of queer, too. Let's,' Janet agreed, opening her door.

\*

What made it the more odd was that Midwich was, almost notoriously, a place where things did not happen.

Janet and I had lived there just over a year then, and found this to be almost its leading feature. Indeed, had there been posts at the entrances to the village bearing a red triangle and below them a notice:

MIDWICH  
DO NOT  
DISTURB

they would have seemed not inappropriate. And why Midwich should have been singled out in preference to any one of a thousand other villages for the curious event of the 26th of September seems likely to remain a mystery for ever.

For consider the simple ordinariness of the place.

Midwich lies roughly eight miles west-north-west of Trayne. The main road westward out of Trayne runs through the neighbouring villages of Stouch and Oppley, from each of which secondary roads lead to Midwich. The village itself is therefore at the apex of a road triangle which has Oppley and Stouch at its lower corners; its only other highway being a lane which rolls in a Chestertonian fashion some five miles to reach Hickham which is three miles north.

At the heart of Midwich is a triangular Green ornamented by five fine elms and a white-railed pond. The war memorial stands in the churchward corner of the Green, and spaced out round the sides are the church itself, the vicarage, the inn, the smithy, the post office, Mrs Welt's shop, and a number of

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cottages. Altogether, the village comprises some sixty cottages and small houses, a village hall, Kyle Manor, and The Grange.

The church is mostly perp. and dec., but with a Norman west doorway and font. The vicarage is Georgian; The Grange Victorian; Kyle Manor has Tudor roots with numerous later graftings. The cottages show most of the styles which have existed between the two Elizabeths, but even more recent than the two latest County Council cottages are the utilitarian wings that were added to The Grange when the Ministry took it over for Research.

The existence of Midwich has never been convincingly accounted for. It was not in a strategic position to hold a market, not even across a packway of any importance. It appears, at some unknown time, simply to have occurred; the Domesday survey notes it as a hamlet, and it has continued as little more, for the railway age ignored it, as had the coach roads, and even the navigation canals.

So far as is known, it rests upon no desirable minerals: no official eye ever saw it as a likely site for an aerodrome, or a bombing-range, or a battle school; only the Ministry intruded, and the reconditioning of The Grange had little effect upon the village life. Midwich has – or rather, had – lived and drowsed upon its good soil in Arcadian undistinction for a thousand years; and there seemed, until the late evening of the 26th of September, no reason why it should not so to do for the next millennium, too.

This must not be taken, however, to mean that Midwich is altogether without history. It has had its moments. In 1931 it was the centre of an untraced outbreak of foot-and-mouth disease. And in 1916 an off-course Zeppelin unloaded a bomb which fell in a ploughed field and fortunately failed to explode. And before that it hit the headlines – well, anyway, the broadsheets – when Black Ned, a second-class highwayman, was shot on the steps of The Scythe and Stone Inn by Sweet Polly Parker, and although this gesture of reproof appears to have been of a more personal than social nature,

she was, nevertheless, much lauded for it in the ballads of 1768.

Then, too, there was the sensational closure of the nearby St Accius' Abbey, and the redistribution of the brethren for reasons which have been a subject of intermittent local speculation ever since it took place, in 1493.

Other events include the stabling of Cromwell's horses in the church, and a visit by William Wordsworth, who was inspired by the Abbey ruins to the production of one of his more routine commendatory sonnets.

With these exceptions, however, recorded time seems to have flowed over Midwich without a ripple.

Nor would the inhabitants – save, perhaps, some of the youthful in their brief pre-marital restlessness – have it otherwise. Indeed, but for the Vicar and his wife, the Zellabys at Kyle Manor, the doctor, the district-nurse, ourselves, and, of course, the Researchers, they had most of them lived there for numerous generations in a placid continuity which had become a right.

During the day of the 26th of September there seems to have been no trace of a foreshadow. Possibly Mrs Brant, the blacksmith's wife, did feel a trace of uneasiness at the sight of nine magpies in one field, as she afterwards claimed; and Miss Ogle, the postmistress, may have been perturbed on the previous night by a dream of singularly large vampire bats; but, if so, it is unfortunate that Mrs Brant's omens and Miss Ogle's dreams should have been so frequent as to nullify their alarm value. No other evidence has been produced to suggest that on that Monday, until late in the evening, Midwich was anything but normal. Just, in fact, as it had appeared to be when Janet and I set off for London. And yet, on Tuesday the 27th. . . .

\*

We locked the car, climbed the gate, and started over the field of stubble keeping well in to the hedge. At the end of that we came to another field of stubble and bore leftwards

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across it, slightly uphill. It was a big field with a good hedge on the far side, and we had to go further left to find a gate we could climb. Half-way across the pasture beyond brought us to the top of the rise, and we were able to look out across Midwich – not that much of it was visible for trees, but we could see a couple of wisps of greyish smoke lazily rising, and the church spire sticking up by the elms. Also, in the middle of the next field I could see four or five cows lying down, apparently asleep.

I am not a countryman, I only live there, but I remember thinking rather far back in my mind that there was something not quite right about that. Cows folded up, chewing cud, yes, commonly enough; but cows lying down fast asleep, well, no. But it did not do more at the time than give me a vague feeling of something out of true. We went on.

We climbed the fence of the field where the cows were and started across that, too.

A voice hallooed at us, away on the left. I looked round and made out a khaki-clad figure in the middle of the next field. He was calling something unintelligible, but the way he was waving his stick was without doubt a sign for us to go back. I stopped.

'Oh, come on, Richard. He's miles away,' said Janet impatiently, and began to run on ahead.

I still hesitated, looking at the figure who was now waving his stick more energetically than ever, and shouting more loudly, though no more intelligibly. I decided to follow Janet. She had perhaps twenty yards start of me by now, and then, just as I started off, she staggered, collapsed without a sound, and lay quite still. . . .

I stopped dead. That was involuntary. If she had gone down with a twisted ankle, or had simply tripped I should have run on, to her. But this was so sudden and so complete that for a moment I thought, idiotically, that she had been shot.

The stop was only momentary. Then I went on again.

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Dimly I was aware of the man away on the left still shouting, but I did not bother about him. I hurried towards her. . . .

But I did not reach her.

I went out so completely that I never even saw the ground come up to hit me. . . .

## CHAPTER 2

### *All Quiet in Midwich*

As I said, all was normal in Midwich on the 26th. I have looked into the matter extensively, and can tell you where practically everyone was, and what they were doing that evening.

The Scythe and Stone, for instance, was entertaining its regulars in their usual numbers. Some of the younger villagers had gone to the pictures in Trayne – mostly the same ones who had gone there the previous Monday. In the post office Miss Ogle was knitting beside her switchboard, and finding, as usual, that real life conversation was more interesting than the wireless. Mr Tapper, who used to be a jobbing gardener before he won something fabulous in a football pool, was in a bad temper with his prized colour-television set which had gone on the blink again in its red circuit, and was abusing it in language that had already driven his wife to bed. Lights still burnt in one or two of the new laboratories shouldered on to The Grange, but there was nothing unusual in that; it was common for one or two Researchers to conduct their mysterious pursuits late into the night.

But although all was so normal, even the most ordinary-seeming day is special for someone. For instance, it was, as I have said, my birthday, so it happened that our cottage was closed and dark. And up at Kyle Manor it happened, also, to be the day when Miss Ferrelyn Zellaby put it to Mr Alan (temporarily Second-Lieutenant) Hughes that, in practice, it takes more than two to make an engagement; that it would be a friendly gesture to tell her father about it.

Alan, after some hesitation and demur, allowed himself to be persuaded into Gordon Zellaby's study to make him acquainted with the situation.

He found the master of Kyle Manor spread comfortably