

THE SURROGATES: SCIENCE-FICTION AS MACGUFFIN

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In Robert Venditti and Brett Weldele's graphic novel *The Surrogates* (2006), a science-fictional future has been developed in which a technological invention has come to change and dominate all aspects of human life. Due to its intelligent story, its interest in social implications rather than straightforward action, and the artistically sober graphic lay-out, this graphic novel has been received as one of the few comic books that can be truly called science-fiction, in line with the genre's literary legacy. On the one hand, the description of "graphic novel" already implies a certain degree of high-cultural distinction from the usual comics. On the other hand, its reported aspirations to "science-fiction" imply that it moves away from the usual mix of "sci-fi"¹, fantasy, and adventure in comics and closer to the specificity of science-fiction in its critical tradition. Although it may have a central constituent that is science-fiction, namely the concept of the surrogate human, *The Surrogates* draws at the same time heavily on cinematic imagery, cop and noir genres, and the basic structure of linear narrative. In this article, we will investigate to what extent the science-fictional "novum" distinguishes this science-fiction story from other stories with ordinary characters and an ordinary universe. Such a question is less obvious or neutral than it might seem. As a paraliterary, popular or even formulaic cultural practice, science-fiction depends dramatically on the reading habits and expectations managed and controlled by genre labels. Therefore it is quite significant to examine exactly how *The Surrogates* plays with the science-fiction framework that is announced on the very cover of the book.

Specifically, two different threads will be running through this paper at the same time and will be played off against each other. Firstly, one may argue

¹ In science-fiction studies, the term "sci-fi" often stands for and/or refers to the mass-media version of science-fiction, i.e. the popular misconception of what science-fiction is, which is usually derived from the blockbuster spectacles of science-fiction cinema. The abbreviation "sf" is commonly more accepted as a "serious" reference to science-fiction.

that the science-fictional elements are essential to the story and the narrative, which contributes to the idea that this is “real” science-fiction, and not just a “literary” graphic novel in science-fiction disguise. Secondly, one may argue that the narrative structure of *The Surrogates* functions as a prototypical linear narrative, upon which the effects of the sf elements are negligible, as the reader’s interpretive response is comparable to other traditional stories, like the intertextual predecessor of this graphic novel, Edgar P. Jacobs’s *La Marque jaune* (1956), not only on a cognitive level but also on an affective level, which contributes this time to the idea that this is “just” a graphic novel and that its science-fiction aspects only superficially affect its structure. These two arguments will be approached and developed from two perspectives, namely from the angle of science-fiction and from the angle of narrative.

1. IS IT SCIENCE-FICTION?

The Surrogates is a comic book series that ran in five issues from 2005 to 2006, written by Robert Venditti and illustrated by Brett Weldele, and was published as a graphic novel in 2006. Set fifty years into the future, it is basically a police story about the hunt for a techno-terrorist, yet at its centre lies the concept of the “surrogates”, commercial android substitutes linked with the humans operating them. By means of these stand-ins, most people orchestrate their outside life and work from their homes, except for the “Dreads”, who either cannot afford a surrogate, or oppose a surrogate life for religious reasons, and who have consequently been assigned to a colony of their own as a safety measure. Independently, the terrorist, who takes the form of a super-surrogate, tries to disrupt this kind of society by targeting the surrogates themselves. In the end, the police are only just too late to prevent him from disabling all the surrogates, which the Dreads take as an opportunity to destroy the buildings and mainframes of the surrogate corporation (which affects the whole nation) in an effort to reinstate society into its pre-surrogate form.

Considering the reception of *The Surrogates* as a literary science-fiction graphic novel – as one reviewer puts it, “[i]t’s an intricate, exhilarating concept and a triumph of both science-fiction literature and comic book storytelling.” (Bravo, 2006) – we need to contextualise this literariness in two respects.

First, the traditional definitions of literary science-fiction within science-fiction studies have always emphasised the factor of “cognitive estrangement” (which goes back to the Russian Formalists’ concept of “ostranenie”), accompanied by a “novum”² that is responsible for that estrangement. The

² Darko Suvin borrowed this term from Ernst Bloch.

interaction between cognition and defamiliarisation means that the reader is presented with an alternative world that he or she nevertheless needs to relate to our known world, or in other words, to humanity and society. Science-fiction is then “distinguished by the narrative dominance of a fictional novelty (*novum*, *innovation*) validated both by being continuous with a body of already existing cognitions and by being a ‘mental experiment’ based on cognitive logic” (Suvin, 1978: 45, his emphasis). This view on sf, established by Darko Suvin (see Suvin, 1979) in early science-fiction studies, as well as its strong influence, has often been criticised. Indeed, Suvin himself has advocated a biased ideological (Marxist) interpretation of this definition, and used it in a prescriptive way (see Luckhurst, 2005: 7-8) in order to push through his own idea of what good and bad science-fiction is, and exclude certain works from the genre (e.g. Suvin, 1978). However, this definition remains very useful within a descriptive and inclusive approach, even though Simon Spiegel recently argued that the primary *formal* operation of sf is not defamiliarisation, but rather the symmetrically opposite process of “naturalisation”, which means making the alien look familiar, while estrangement occurs mainly on the *diegetic* level, when the *novum* is introduced into the realistically elaborated world (see Spiegel, 2008). Spiegel’s idea is relevant to our double view of *The Surrogates*, too. On the one hand, the graphic novel first establishes a fictional world visually akin to the typical grey environment of an urban thriller, and gradually estranges the reader from his or her first perception through the *novum* of the surrogate. When a man tries to seduce the woman he is going out with in a dark alley, he utters: “Be adventurous. It’s not like you’re going to catch a cold or anything.” (8), which does not rhyme with the reader’s conceptions, given that it is pouring with rain at that moment. The reader further begins to doubt the ontological nature of the characters when the man reasons that they “work hard for these bodies” (8). As the setting is soon identified as science-fictional, the reader comes to realize that the people are not always “who they say they are” (17), for both turn out to be androids linked up to humans in a different location, and the woman even turns out to be a man. On the other hand, *The Surrogates* sticks to familiar structures and conventions on the formal narrative level, as we shall discuss. Moreover, as a graphic novel, it is also in line with both the grim outlook and visual framing of contemporary graphic novels such as Frank Miller’s *Sin City* comic book series, which is a style that is channelled as well as nourished through contemporary popular cinema (which is, of course, the medium that is at the centre of the cultural system today).

Second, we need to look at how *The Surrogates* functions as a graphic novel. For one thing, there seems to be a certain degree of literary quality inherent in the actual term “graphic novel”, which at least suggests an upgrade

from the connotations of a “comic”. The prototypical features that highlight it as a graphic novel rather than a comic book are its authorship (i. e. graphic novelists are “auteurs”, with a vision and worldview of their own), its material aspects (i. e. a graphic novel does not obey the usual publication formats), and its subject matter (i. e. graphic novels are “serious”) (see Baetens, forthcoming). What certainly contributes to the idea of a more literary version of the sf graphic novel, is that it has not been put out by a mainstream publisher; instead, Top Shelf Productions was most known for its (critically respected) original graphic novels, with *The Surrogates* as its most mainstream publication. Taking into account the status of the publisher, there has of course been a reasonable emphasis on the authors in both the book and in the press, Venditti being introduced as a newcomer to the comic book industry or even as the American self-made comic book writer who worked his way up from the mailroom. Weldele is equally in the spotlight, though, for the very specific style of his illustrations. As D. Harlan Wilson remarks, whereas Cyberpunk is traditionally “hyperdescriptive”, be it in William Gibson’s writings or in Cyberpunk cinema like *Blade Runner* or the *Matrix* films, *The Surrogates* is practically the reverse, with illustrations in an abstract and minimalist style resulting in “panels that look like sketches more than finished products.” (Wilson, 2006) This roughness is even more accentuated through the contrast with the slick futuristic outlook of the fictional “paratexts” added after each chapter (or issue), which include an academic article, an archival transcription of a TV broadcast, an archival issue of a news site (including a classified ads page), and a brochure advertising surrogates. In fact, comics magazines have often included advertisements, editorial comments, “infotainment” pages on science or history, and so on, and this mix of fictional and non-fictional sections is a technique that has been popularized by the “first” science-fiction graphic novel, *Watchmen*. To come back to Wilson, he further investigates how the “destylized” aesthetic representation in *The Surrogates* indicates a dystopian “exhaustion of the real and dissolution of the self brought on by media technologies”. More significantly, in this way, the graphic novel departs from its predecessors, suggesting a “new neocyberpunk” that makes us “rethink” the previous method of representation (Wilson, 2006). From the viewpoint of the history of science-fiction, Weldele thus introduces a new material form and format to reflect on a highly technological, urban, and hypercapitalist near-future as Cyberpunk (or the “noir” branch of sf) has always tried to do. Finally, when we link the subject matter with the genre, the reputation of *The Surrogates* as “serious” science-fiction implies that in previous comic books the treatment of the genre was “impure”. Donald Palumbo has argued that, although science-fiction has thoroughly colonised the comic book medium,

comics have usually employed “the trappings and concepts associated with science-fiction to develop narratives and narrative worlds that are essentially fantastic.” (Palumbo, 1999: 161) Since the science-fictional elements basically take on magical properties, he continues, “the defining presence” in comic books “is the stuff of fantasy” (Palumbo, 1999: 180). Although he certainly has a point that comics have often been closer to fantasy than to science-fiction, it becomes hard to justify, in Palumbo’s (quite narrow) line of thinking, that the stuff of *The Surrogates* is really more essentially science-fiction. Although this graphic novel occasionally hints at science, there is no real scientific basis upon which the concept of the surrogate android can be rested. For instance, the surrogates are being controlled not through an elaborate virtual reality kit (hence not through physical motions the body makes), but merely through a headset, as the fictional brochure explains:

Virtual Self is committed to providing you with a seamless living experience, and our VR LINK is what makes it all possible. This comfortable, lightweight headset turns your thoughts into real-time action, allowing your unit to perform as you would. Better, in fact, because with a surrogate you never have to worry about injury or fatigue. All you receive is sensory data so vivid, you’ll know that you were there. (122)

When the main character unhooks (after he has “parked” his surrogate in his wardrobe in the same room), the moment, which symbolises a shift to a superordinate reality, is represented visually as a pitch-black panel sprinkled with some artistically accidental white specks of paint (see p. 21), as if there is a fundamental change of perspective or rather perception of the character. This emphasises that the characters see their alternate surrogate lives displayed in their mind, which, besides the already capitalist edges of the novum, makes *The Surrogates* even more reminiscent of Philip K. Dick’s stories. Therefore, perhaps, this also gives precedence to the dream-like ontological state of the people’s subordinate lives, rather than the scientific foundation of the novum. But Palumbo’s argument, of course, is rooted in the much larger question of the importance of science in science-fiction.

Roughly, science-fiction literature has induced two strands of criticism, based on the authors’ and critics’ different ideas of what science-fiction is. One line defends that the science in science-fiction needs to be correct and accurate. Simplistically speaking, the ideal science-fiction for those critics will be fiction that thinks realistically about what the future will bring, and tries to sketch that future based on scientific extrapolations. Palumbo clearly belongs to this group, as he “condemns” comic books as fantasy because their “narratives generally

exhibit no interest in extrapolating from – or basing their worlds’ divergences from reality upon – any sound, organized body of scientific knowledge or principles; rather, they use ‘science,’ not to explain, but to explain away.” (161)³ The other line, which has certainly been more prominent in British circles, prefers a more “social” form of science-fiction. According to Christopher Priest, for instance, writers and critics should embrace the idea that sf is metaphorical from the outset, and that, consequently, a science-fiction novel is always about the present⁴. Clearly departing here from the “fiction” aspect of science-fiction, Priest ascribes the strength of the genre to its potential to raise questions rather than provide answers. From this point of view, he suggests that the difference between sf and fantasy is that while fantasy is about the response to magic and science, science-fiction is about the moral responsibility that comes with science and explores the consequences of that responsibility and the decisions it entails. Of course, *The Surrogates* fits perfectly within the latter framework, which may also account for the differences between this graphic novel and the Marvel comic books Palumbo is talking about. As that same reviewer of *The Surrogates* already mentions, “[i]t’s a powerful commentary on the world we live in today.” (Bravo, 2006) Through the nuances in the story as well as through the carefully elaborated and detailed fictional “paratexts”, *The Surrogates* strongly reflects on the social implications of the technological change of basic human life as we know it, while it is at the same time a critique of our present condition as well, emphasising that the distinction between body and technology (cf Haraway, 1991), or between self and body (cf Vint, 2007) is already long blurred. Interestingly, the graphic novel leaves in the middle whether this blurring is positive or negative, deliberately not associating this scientific and social evolution with the notions of “good” and “bad”.

Now that *The Surrogates* is established as a specific science-fiction graphic novel, we need to refine this line of argument somewhat, and argue that both its story and structure perhaps owe most not to sf literature, but to “sci-fi” cinema. The fact that Venditti has admitted that even though “he’s a pretty avid reader, [...] he’s not read much science-fiction literature” (Weiland, 2005), does not actually matter, but it may be inserted into the traditional

³ Palumbo even discards the “often ingenious” references “to popularizations of contemporary scientific hypotheses in cosmology, particle physics, and astrophysics, such as Stephen Hawking’s writings on time or string theory, to explain away the characters’ abilities to traverse time, space, and higher dimensions” (162), notwithstanding the fact that Hawking’s *A Brief History of Time* (2008), which has indeed become a standard scientific work for many writers or filmmakers of popular science-fiction (like the screenwriters of *Lost*), comes from a renowned scientist and is already very detailed and complex for laymen not schooled in science.

⁴ Referenced here is a lecture by Christopher Priest at “The Future Is Now” conference in Leuven, November 23-25, 2007.

(outdated) logic which critics have often looked at sf cinema with. Typically, in this argumentation, sf literature is marked by its “ideas”, while sf cinema is dominated by its “events”: “in science-fiction literature (also referred to as ‘speculative fiction’), the reward is often the thrill of intellectual stimulation. In ‘sci-fi’ cinema, the thrill is a visceral one, delivered via ‘special effects.’” (Anders, 2004: 11) As a result, the difference *par excellence* between sf novels and sf films is again the accuracy of the science in sf literature as opposed to the accumulation of scientific impossibilities in cinema. According to Robert Silverberg, the true strength of sf cinema is its vision, while the stark contrast with the mediocrity of its ideas can be attributed to a vicious circle: “science-fiction films require special effects, special effects are costly, costly films need to pull in big audiences in order to break even, and big audiences are snared only by reliance on familiar plot mechanisms.” (Silverberg, 2004: 175) To a certain extent, this holds for *The Surrogates* as well. Seeing as how its plot and story are rather conventional⁵, it is its formal characteristics such as the illustrations that prove to be the most interesting, as Wilson has already noted. Significant here, though, is also its formal indebtedness to cinema. On a microscopic level, there are various hybrid visualisations that are reminiscent of, or refer to, filmic specificity. For instance, visual motion can be implied through graphic conventions: filmic movement can be combined and compressed into one panel (e. g. p. 43); or it can be split up over various panels (e. g. p. 47, the bottom five panels). Auditive links are made possible through the transfer of balloons to the next panel; in this way, a character may still be hearing, even though there may be a time gap, the last utterances of what another character was saying in the previous panel, which indicates, of course, that the character is still thinking about it (e. g. 57-58). This is the equivalent of the “voice-over” or rather the auditive link that in narrative cinema would supposedly mask and smooth over the visual cut⁶. On a macroscopic level, then, the episodic structure of *The*

⁵ To give a random example, the story of *The Surrogates* is developed in more or less the same way as Alex Proyas’s film adaptation *I, Robot* (2004). In the graphic novel as well as in this film, the “culprit” of what at first seems to be just another police case, turns out to be the prototype of the novum, an enhanced version that goes back to the origin of the science-fictional technology, which is thoroughly embedded in the future society. Also, in each of the two fictions, this technology has come to be accepted as “normal”, except for the main character, who questions it on grounds of its impact on humanity. Twice the central message appears to be that society must not let itself be dominated by one technological novum.

⁶ After the advent of sound in cinema, there were many “essentialist” theoreticians that defended the idea that sound was a kind of parasite, and that film lost its specificity, as sound allegedly narrowed down the interpretive possibilities of the images. In this outdated interpretation, sound both masks the radical nature of the visual cut and directs the viewer to one emotion and interpretation. There were also differences of opinion between “realists” and “formative” theorists, the latter of which strived for artistic independence from reality.

Surrogates (which is also the first bi-monthly series at Top Shelf Productions) is partially influenced by the serial format of contemporary TV series such as *24* and *Lost*, which, rather than providing independent episodes that have different plot variations on the same concept, have shifted their focus to an overarching story with different episodes building on each other, often culminating in cliff-hanger endings. Finally, the book itself is tailored to the contemporary cinema public by offering additional content in the form of various extras as one would find on a DVD. The graphic novel includes a “Covers Gallery”, a “Behind the Scenes” section (with the subsections “From Concept to Page” and “Script to Page”, just like on DVD documentaries), more information on “The Ad Campaign”, a “Pinup Gallery”, and of course the obligatory “Deleted Scene”. Meanwhile, this package undoubtedly prepares the audience for the film adaptation of *The Surrogates*, coming in 2009, and starring Bruce Willis.

2. OR IS IT SOMETHING ELSE?

Until now, we have argued that *The Surrogates* is a blatant example of a science-fiction graphic novel, although it is not clear whether in its more highbrow form (“science-fiction”) or its lowbrow form (“sci-fi”). Of course, it would be absurd to deny the strong presence of these elements in the graphic novel. Nevertheless, what can be questioned is their specific impact on the reader: do the science-fiction elements really generate a “typical” science-fiction reading, that is to say a reading whose horizon is the rules and the traditions of the genre, or is the reader’s attitude quite different? In the second part of this article, we shall argue that there are indeed good reasons to doubt the sf dimension of *The Surrogates*, not on the level of its content matter, but on the level of its reception. We would like to suggest that readers do not respond to this science-fiction comic book as if it were science-fiction, but they read it in a different way. Yet, in this reading modus, the sf elements are not just a detail or disguise; they play a very specific role which we will describe with the help of a concept that originates with Alfred Hitchcock.

As we have argued above, *The Surrogates* emphasises from the very beginning its affinity with the science-fiction genre. Quite soon, however, the reader realises that its themes cannot be reduced to the typical stock of science-fiction. The notion of the mechanical or mechanised double is undoubtedly as much a global literary theme as a science-fiction theme, for the whole tradition of the literary uncanny abounds with examples of this type of “characters”. Moreover, the dramatically humanist approach of this theme in *The Surrogates*, where technical and hardware issues are quickly replaced by an overtly moralistic reflection on issues of freedom and alienation, involves

a completely different viewpoint, which entails that the typical science-fiction aspects of the surrogate theme are no longer really taken into account. This shift of focus, which blinds the reader to the science-fiction dimension, is reinforced by the utterly “unspecific” treatment of the major story elements, namely characterisation, plot and diegesis, and style. In *The Surrogates*, all those components are exploited in a way that is quite similar to what one can find in non-science-fiction fiction. Once the novum has been introduced and made acceptable to the reader, the science-fiction universe of the book becomes “business as usual”. Firstly, characters are very recognisable with respect to what they are, what they do for a living, what they look like, how they think and behave. In short, the characterisations in *The Surrogates* do not differ from other (non-science-fiction) graphic novels (or books, TV series, or films, for that matter). Secondly, the story world itself and the plot that is shaped within it hardly bear any real surprise even to those readers who are less familiar with the traditions and idiosyncrasies of science-fiction. In order to do a smooth and profitable reading of *The Surrogates*, it is far more important to know the rules of storytelling in general (e. g.: who is the villain; who is the hero; how do they interact; how is tension built up; what can be expected from the denouement? etc.) than to be able to assess the originality of the science-fiction elements in comparison with the rules, models, achievements, and surprises of the genre. In other words, if one does not need to know anything about science-fiction in order to appreciate *The Surrogates*, it is reasonably arguable that too much knowledge of science-fiction may in fact harm the reading, since at this level the merits of the book are less apparent. Venditti and Weldele are good storytellers, but as a work of science-fiction, their product is rather run-of-the-mill. Thirdly, the visual style of the book is not aimed at enhancing the science-fiction qualities of the story. The sketchy way of drawing foregrounds characterisation and downplays the settings as well as the props, which are two elements normally very present in science-fiction comic books and graphic novels. In addition, the page layout avoids the spectacular effects of the “splash pages” and violent colour combinations that tend to be associated with those comics and graphic novels. The utter sobriety of *The Surrogates* underlines that in the first place this graphic novel wants to be read as a novel *tout court*.

A brief comparison with Edgar P. Jacobs’s *The Yellow “M”*, a classic Franco-Belgian adventure strip with slight science-fiction overtones, will help to make this point more clear. Like in *The Surrogates*, Jacobs’s story is based on one single gimmick, namely the enigma created by the acts of a seemingly invincible villain whose strength and cleverness challenge the limits of his human opponents. The final revelation of the book discloses a truth which is not dissimilar to that of the surrogate’s gimmick: the villain in question is a

kind of sleepwalker, manipulated and used by a crazy scientist eager to take his revenge on the community that had dared to reject his wild and politically dangerous ideas on brainwashing and mind-control. (Incidentally, Jacobs was known for his commitment to the cause of the “free West” in the Cold War years.) Yet, much more than in the case of *The Surrogates*, the science-fiction in *The Yellow “M”* – after all, the practice of mind control and manipulation of human guinea pigs is put in a context of science gone mad, which is of course a staple of science-fiction – is nothing more than a disguise. The science-fictional framing is an easy alibi, or more precisely, an undemanding technique that is used to tell a story about something completely else, about something that does not require any further speculation on the present and future uses of science. In that regard, we must not forget that, for those eager to come up with a story for a large audience, science-fiction is easy, *provided it is not taken seriously*. Problems arise when one “really” wants to write science-fiction, but the superficial use or reuse of some conventional elements from the well-known science-fiction stock has numerous advantages. First of all, it provides at no expense an illusion of profoundness to questions that are overtly banal, whilst offering the readers the reward of finding out those issues for themselves. Instead of a tale about human freedom and independence from alien ideologies, Jacobs as well as Venditti and Weldele tell a story on something else (i.e. a peculiar sleepwalker in the case of Jacobs, and non-human surrogates in the case of Venditti and Weldele), something which the reader is invited to decipher as the superficial layer of a more philosophical question on the meaning of human freedom. Secondly, the science-fictional “translation” of the underlying topic provides the authors as well as the readers with a whole stock of narrative situations and plots that can be easily exploited, and whose reuse is not shameful in the context of popular fiction, where absolute originality is not the prime concern. A good or meaningful thematic question (e.g.: what does it mean to be human; what do we mean by freedom? etc.) is never a guarantee for good storytelling. The detour via science-fiction at least offers the possibility that it will be possible to deploy the non-narrative question in a narrative form.

Nevertheless, the fact that the science-fiction constituent can easily be put aside once the reader understands that the story is less about sleepwalkers and surrogates than about “us”, does not mean at all that its use is gratuitous, opportunistic, or just cynical. After all, all literary fiction has something to do with the tension between truth and disguise, between masking and unmasking, between appearances and essences (Kristeva, 1970). Moreover, no popular fiction can do without the presence of a unifying force, that binds the manifold and often heterogeneous elements together and which helps the reader to get

involved in the story (for a study of narrative “tension”, see Baroni, 2007). In this context, it does not matter what that connecting factor is; in a sense, it is even preferable that it is not too important in itself, so that final twists and surprises always remain open. This is what Hitchcock meant by the “MacGuffin”, which is not just a technique, but a real philosophy of storytelling. In Hitchcock’s films, the MacGuffin is the plot device that sets the plot in motion and is crucial to the characters’ motivations, but which is other than that basically an empty, non-specific gimmick that is of no significance whatsoever (*cf.* Truffaut, 1985: 138-139).

Applying this concept to *The Surrogates* makes clear that the science-fiction component of its plot is more than just a simple trick. On the one hand, on the level of storytelling, it provides the authors with a great MacGuffin, as the concept of the surrogate as developed in the book gives a real unity to the story, without taking up more space than necessary: once the authors reframe the story by focusing on metaphysical questions of freedom and slavery, the surrogate as MacGuffin can be dispensed with without any problem. On the other hand, on the level of graphic storytelling, the sf elements of *The Surrogates* help the book to proclaim its distinction from the science-fiction graphic novel and even from the graphic novel in general. Thanks to the strong presence of a science-fictional, and therefore “popular” MacGuffin, this book avoids any confusion with the more “serious” graphic novels, which are characterised by a strong resistance to fiction. Serious graphic novels have content matter that is either documentary or autobiographical. The emphasis on fiction in a “literary” graphic novel like *The Surrogates* is supplementary proof that the authors play a very clever game with the many genre conventions that occur in the making and reading of literature. Venditti and Weldele manage to keep science-fiction at a distance, as they downgrade their “invention” to a mere MacGuffin; at the same time, they also refuse the easy integration of their work in the now fashionable ghetto of the literary graphic novel, since they so strongly claim their indebtedness to the science-fiction world. It is because of this cleverness that *The Surrogates* makes for great reading.

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