



The Rediscovery of Man

Cordwainer Smith

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This is the 1999 British edition from Gollancz that includes 12 of the most famous short stories from Cordwainer Smith's "Instrumentality of Mankind" universe. His complete stories are collected in the 1993 NESFA edition called "The Rediscovery of Man: The Complete Short Science Fiction of Cordwainer Smith". The stories feature governing 'Lords of the Instrumentality' that are immortal with drug 'stroon' from planet Norstrilia. Underpeople are humanoid slaves genetically modified from animals. Starships are replaced by instantaneous planofforming. A unique and strange future history unlike any other.

Scanners Live in Vain (1950)

The Lady Who Sailed the Soul (1960)

The Game of Rat and Dragon (1955)

The Burning of the Brain (1958)

Golden the Ship Was---Oh! Oh! Oh! (1959)

The Crime and the Glory of Commander Suzdal (1964)

The Dead Lady of Clown Town (1964)

Under Old Earth (1966)

Mother Hitton's Littul Kittons (1961)

Alpha Ralpha Boulevard (1961)

The Ballad of Lost C'mell (1962)

A Planet Named Shayol (1961)

The Rediscovery of Man Details

Date : Published May 13th 1999 by Gollancz (first published July 1975)

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From Reader Review The Rediscovery of Man for online ebook

Bokeshi says

Cordwainer Smith is one of the most distinctive and idiosyncratic SF writers, along with Jack Vance, whose writing is totally unlike any other author. His far-future tales of *The Instrumentality of Mankind* are completely original, uniquely strange, richly imaginative, full of wonder, mythic in scope, layered with humor and emotion, and simply unforgettable. Do yourself a favor and read this underrated and overlooked masterwork.

Simon Mcleish says

Originally published on my blog here in August 2001.

In the fifties and sixties, Cordwainer Smith was one of the most original writers in the science fiction genre. His stories include many undisputed classics - *Scanners Live in Vain*, *The Game of Rat and Dragon*, *The Lady Who Sailed the Soul*, *The Dead Lady of Clown Town*, for example - and introduced a level of psychological interest which was much greater than usual in a field generally considered fit only for the cheap pulp magazines. (Under his real name, Paul Linebarger was responsible for the US Army's textbook on psychological warfare.)

The original title of this collection reveals its purpose; it was presumably changed for this reprint because it would affect re-publication of the rest of Smith's output - a novel, another volume of independent short stories, and a collection of related ones. As the best of his work, it provides an excellent introduction to every aspect of his writing.

What is it that was - and in many cases still remains - distinctive about Smith's writing? He has a unique ability to express the alien in a single phrase; examples include referring to space travel as "going into the up-and-out" and the first lines of his earliest published story, *Scanners Live in Vain*: "Martel was angry. He did not even adjust his blood away from anger".

There is a breadth of vision about Smith's writing which marks him apart from his contemporaries. Like two of the most successful science fiction authors of the period, Robert A. Heinlein and (to a lesser extent) Isaac Asimov, Smith's stories can be fitted into a consistent conception of a future history spanning hundreds or thousands of years. (Smith's, reconstructed from the stories as his notes don't survive, covers about twelve thousand years.) Comparing Smith with these other authors, a clear difference is immediately obvious. Most science fiction of the time is concerned with technological change; there is a tendency to assume that American capitalism will always be the mainstream of human culture. Smith, on the other hand, is interested far more in social and psychological change, with technology being used only to illuminate his ideas.

Jaime says

THE DEAD LADY OF CLOWN TOWN, SCANNERS LIVE IN VAIN!, THE LADY WHO SAILED THE SOUL, THE CRIME AND GLORY OF COMMANDER SUZDAL, GOLDEN THE SHIP WAS OH! OH! OH!, THE GAME OF RAT & DRAGON, QUEEN OF THE AFTERNOON These are the hallucinatory and strange titles to some of the strange and hallucinatory tales penned by Cordwainer Smith. Stylistically weird

(he apparently based much of his writing style on classical Chinese fiction like THE ROMANCE OF THE 3 KINGDOMS) and full of unique word coinages and ideas. Planofarming. Cranching. Klopts. Underpeople. Girly-girls (A kind of gene-engineered geisha, frequently feline-based). Stroon, the immortality-conferring wonder drug derived from mutant sheep the size of houses. Chronopathic idiots. Pussycat space pilots doing battle with void-dwelling monsters. Aryan teenagers shot into cold-sleep orbit by their Nazi rocket scientist papa. It's ten kinds of weird all right, which is one of the primary reasons I read SF. Isn't it one of yours?

FotisK says

Παρωχημ?νο, θα ?λεγα, με κ?ποιες ενδιαφ?ρουσες ιδ?ες. Ο χρ?νος δεν του φ?ρθηκε πολ? καλ?. Συμβα?νει κι αυτ?, συχν?τερα απ? ?σο θ?λουμε να παραδεχτο?με.

Craig says

Cordwainer Smith, pen name of Dr. Paul Linebarger, was at least fifty years ahead of his time. He was writing great, lyrical, thoughtful, modern stories before it was the cool thing to do. He isn't too well known currently because he was never successful at novel-length, but I guarantee that this book contains some of the best novelettes the field ever produced.

Caro the L. of the H. says

My acquaintance with Cordwainer Smith happened ages ago on the pages of a certain SF magazine. I was reading "A Planet Named Shayol" and I was completely awed and even shocked. The crazy imagination, the context and a bit of a hangman's humor – everything was there. Considering the whole thing was written in 1961 made it even more impressive. And Cordwainer – what kind of weird name was that? I was hooked.

Then I forgot about the whole thing for about ten years.

So now, when I got the whole *The Rediscovery of Man* collection, I was reading it slowly and with great pleasure, which always accompanies me while going through good old classic science fiction stuff. By "old" here I mean written in years 1950-60. But no worries, it feels surprisingly fresh.

I must warn the potential readers that it's not much like Sheckley or Bradbury. Be ready for a total craziness of Carnival de Futuristique - for something that looks like legends or fairy tales retelling future history through colourful and weird, sometimes deformed and crippled characters, with impossible technologies that look like magic, on exotic worlds and about humankind that is not even human any more. Also, get ready for some utopia and some mind control, and some drugs of happiness (yeah, hello there, Huxley, Orwell and friends!) and drugs of eternal living, get ready for overlords, making decisions and plans for humans and under humans and everything else in universe. And the language, oh my god, that was a crazy ride as well - names, terminologies and such. You need to get used to it.

I am sure this is not for everyone, but also sure that fans of Ph.K.Dick will appreciate it, as well as readers who care more about WHAT than HOW in stories. The What is quite impressive here. As for How, Smith on purpose doesn't give us too many answers, which isn't really that bad – it allows us to use our own imagination. Get ready to think a lot.

I also suggest potential readers to learn about the author. C. Smith (aka Paul Myron Anthony Linebarger) was a pretty colorful character himself – only to mention his work for CIA, the fact that he was an expert in psychological warfare and professor of East Asia studies, and that he was writing under three other pseudonyms things very different from SF, and more. I would love reading something about Smith, suggestions are welcome here.

My personal favs in this collection are:

Scanners Live in Vain

The Lady Who Sailed the Soul

The Game of Rat and Dragon

Golden the Ship Was---Oh! Oh! Oh! (not everybody seems to like it)

The Dead Lady of Clown Town

Mother Hitton's Littol Kittons (this was batshit crazy!!)

and of course *A Planet Named Shayol*

Jay says

NO ONE ELSE writes like this dude. His titles are great: "Mother Hitton's Littol Kittuns," "Alpha Ralpa Boulevard," "The Burning of the Brain," "Under Old Earth," "Golden the Ship Was- Oh! Oh! Oh!," "The Game of Rat and Dragon." Science fiction that draws on Chinese myth and a sense of immense, immovable age. Stories that make me feel whirling and small.

Rhys says

Usually after reading a book I give it away. A small number I keep for myself because I know I'll want to re-read them in the future. This volume belongs to the second category. I only discovered Cordwainer Smith last year. One of the stories in this book, 'The Dead Lady of Clown Town', is my favourite SF story ever; 'Under Old Earth' and 'Alpha Ralpa Boulevard' aren't far behind.

Smith started writing in the 1920s but he remained extremely obscure until publishing 'Scanners Live in Vain' in 1950. Before discovering Smith's oeuvre I assumed that all pre-1960s SF authors always followed orthodox narrative structure and employed conventional 'straight' prose techniques. Cordwainer Smith is different. All literature of the imagination is 'strange' and most of it is created by men and women who are not particularly strange. Most tales of the far future maintain the impression that they are imagined by writers who are living in the present: this is normal.

But Smith's stories give the impression that they are realistic or historical fictions written from the future. I believe Robert Silverberg made the witty suggestion that Smith was a real time traveller from the future who offered the mainstream, non-fantastical works of his own age to the science-fiction magazines of ours. This is a pleasing conceit. I have heard it said elsewhere that the strangeness of Smith's style derives from Chinese methods of story-telling (Smith spent his formative years in China) but that doesn't account for the strangeness of his visions. They are authentically strange, not forced or contrived, and I am enthralled by them.

Algernon says

Legends and myths of a past that lays far into the future of humanity. The first things that struck me as I picked up this collection is the particular style of Corwainer Smith of telling most of his science-fiction stories as events shrouded in the mist of history, with all the epic scale and slight alterations of fact to suit the public image of a heroic figure. I understand that the author was inspired in this by Chinese classical tales, like *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, borrowing the past remembrance structure and the elegiac prose. The second thing I believe is remarkable about the collection is how these stories than span 15000 years of our future and several decades of the author's career are in fact episodes of a unitary and coherent vision – *The Instrumentality of Man*, a society defined and structured according to the different stages of scientific discovery.

The mythical scope of the stories and of the prose led me to expect something closer to fantasy than to science-fiction, but I soon realized that each story is firmly anchored in a revolutionary technology that either directly influences the fate of the main characters or the direction of evolution for the whole human race. By looking at these turning points in history, Smith is also examining, as the introduction clearly points out, the relationship between science and religion, the definition of the nature of Man both in biological and spiritual terms.

The human body, which had taken four million years on Earth to grow, has immense resources within it, resources greater than the brain, or the personality, or the hopes of the individual.

The future history included in this collection is not complete (it looks like I need to read also the *Nostrilia* books), but it is arranged chronologically, allowing the reader to follow the expansion of our race to the stars and the changes incurred by the new possibilities offered by science.

Scanners Live In Vain is one of the first stories published in the *Instrumentality* universe. The first steps outside the Solar System are made in ships manned by 'habermans' – criminals and outcasts whose nerve systems are disconnected from their brains in order to survive the terrible pain of interstellar radiation. To control the ships there is a different type of haberman: scanners who go through the operation voluntarily and use monitors to control and regulate their metabolism.

How, O Scanners, are habermans made?

They are made with cuts. The brain is cut from the ears, the nose. The brain is cut from the mouth, the belly. The brain is cut from desire, and pain. The brain is cut from the world. Save for the eyes. Save for the control of the living flesh.

Scanners are basically humans turned into robots, their minds altered by the physical changes and by the strict rules of their guild. The only way they can experience normal human emotions is when they are 'crunched' – a dangerous electric shock that restores them to their family and feeling for a short period. A new technology threatens to make their privileged guild obsolete.

Without going into plot details, the main theme is to answer the question of what separate us from machines, how can ethics be reconciled with a pragmatic technocracy.

Martel knew this because he was crunched. Had he been haberman, he would have thought only with his mind, not with his heart and guts and blood. How could the others know?

The Lady Who Sailed the Soul is a space romance, a love story that spans the light years, with a touch of the supernatural thrown in. I believe it is one of the attempts of Smith to reconcile religion with science.

The Game of Rat and Dragon still shows ships guided by human pilots, with the colonists in cryo-sleep. The space out there is still dangerous, with interstellar monsters ready to attack the ships through psychic waves. To overcome the dangers, human partner with animals in a telepathic link that allows them to achieve nanosecond reflexes. As we will notice later in the future history, this link between human and animal will be further developed, thanks in part to the love of the author for his house pets.

For a moment, they stared at each other, man squatting, cat standing erect on her hind legs, front claws digging into his knee. Human eyes and cat eyes looked across an immensity which no words could meet, but which affection spanned in a single glance.

The Burning of the Brain in a continuation of the theme of the untapped reserves of our brains, capable of reaching much farther out in space than our physical senses, Smith continues to explore the psychological dangers of space travel.

For a second or a year (he could never tell how long it really was, subjectively), the funny little flash went through him and then he was loose in the up-and-out, the terrible open spaces between the stars, where the stars themselves felt like pimples on his telepathic mind and the planets were too far away to be sensed or read.

A new development allows the go-captains to guide their ships mainly by telepathic waves

What does happen to us when we planiform? Do you think it's sort of like dying? Did you ever see anybody who had his soul pulled out?

Pulling souls is just a way of talking about it. After all these years, nobody knows if we have souls or not.

Golden the Ship Was – Oh! Oh! Oh! looks more closely at the Lords of Instrumentality and at the political evolutions in a space-faring civilization. This Instrumentality is not clearly explained here, leaving the reader to come to his own conclusions (or maybe it is chronicled in one of the episodes not included here). I see this Old Earth government as a sort of bureaucracy, theocracy, technocracy, autocracy – all rolled into one and not exempt from corruption, mismanagement and discrimination. There are also signs of decadence, as the pursue of happiness alone can take us down a dead-end alley:

He was lying on the air-draft with his brain pleasure centers plugged into the triggering current. So deeply lost in pleasure was he that the food, the women, the clothing, the books of his apartments were completely forgotten and neglected. All pleasure save the pleasure of electricity acting on the brain was forgotten.

Another subject worth pondering here is the government monopoly on the capital punishment, and on where we draw the line between war crimes and rules of engagement.

The Lords of Instrumentality played at being chivalrous and did loved money, but when life and death were at stake, they no longer cared much about money, or credit, or even about honor. They fought like the animals of Earth's ancient past – they fought to kill.

The Crime and the Glory of Commander Suzdal is one of the weirdest novellas included here, mixing long-term space travel with genetic manipulation and gender politics. This genetic manipulation is one of the first instances of the rise of the underpeople – hybrids with genetic code both from humans and from animals.

I tell you, it is sad, it is more than sad, it is fearful – for it is a dreadful thing to go into the up-and-out, to fly without flying, to move between the stars as a moth may drift among the leaves on a summer night.

The Dead Lady of Clown Town is both revolutionary and biblical in content. The Lords of Instrumentality

have finally achieved happiness for all their subjects. Underpeople do all the hard work, police is made up of robots and telepathic mind control checks that everybody is thinking happy thoughts, or they are sent for re-education.

The people were beautiful, but they felt themselves useless, and they were quietly desperate without knowing it themselves.

A person's career is pre-established before birth by scanning his or her genetic code. One of the rarest talents is that of 'witches', persons who can use a kind of empathy to reach inside the body and heal illnesses. The Lords are even capable of transferring their personality into an electronic memory. The problem with happiness appears to be that it turns people into morons who lack the motivation to try anything in their lives.

People shuffled between worlds – when they had the money to pay their passage back and forth – like leaves falling in soft, playful winds.

The catalyst for change is the meeting between a witch and a group of underpeople, or non-persons. For me, the plot is obviously a variation of the Messianic myth, (view spoiler), with all the accompanying blurring of the border between fact and fiction.

the story of D'joan was already being carried between the stars and developing with all the new twists of folklore and legend.

Under Old Earth is a sequel to the Clown Town episode, both in the future timeline and in the Messianic message.

A god? What do you call a god?

A person or an idea capable of starting wholly new cultural patterns in motion.

Such a person has taken residence into the deep caverns of the Old Earth, where he dances a mesmerizing, hallucinatory dance with a piece of world shattering 'anti-matter' in his hands, mentally linked to a distant multiple star system. An elderly Lord of Instrumentality descends to investigate, accompanied by two android bodyguards with human personalities downloaded into their chipsets. The Lord realizes that the direction the humanity is following is wrong, and sets in motion a return to the old values.

Mother Hitton's Littul Kittons is another weird offering, a spy thriller in space that mixes longevity offered by the drug 'stroom' with the use of telepathy as a weapon. Greed is also a powerful motivator, as the riches of the planet Norstrilia, sole source of stroom in the galaxy, are what sets events in motion.

Alpha Ralpha Boulevard begins a new era in the future history of mankind : The Rediscovery of Man, as humans abandon their perfect but boring utopia in favor of a return to diversity, danger and dissimulation.

The nightmare of perfection had taken our forefathers to the edge of suicide.

Under the leadership of progressive Lords of Instrumentality, Paul and Virginia go through a mental alteration that resurrects in their brains a dead language and a dead cultural identity (French).

Look at the ruinous fads and foolish fashions which have nuisanced mankind even in the ages of the highest orderliness. We today know that variety, flexibility, danger and the seasoning of a little hate can make love and life bloom as they never bloomed before; we know it is better to live with the complications of thirteen thousand old languages resurrected from the dead ancient past than it is to live with the cold blind-alley perfection of the Old Common Tongue.

Suddenly unsure of who they are and what their love for each other truly means, the two set out on a quest down the dangerous Alpha Ralpa Boulevard to go see the Wizard of Oz (oops! sorry, I mean a computer in a huge space tower that utters prophetic phrases). The theme of separation between human and non-human returns with a question of the social status of the underpeople slaves of the old system.

The Ballad of Lost C'mell gives an answer to this underpeople issue, in one of the most famous and most elegiac of all the Cordwainer Smith stories. C'Mell is a 'girlie-girl', a sort of geisha with cat genes in her DNA. She falls in love with one of the Lords of Instrumentality, but the fate of her people is more important than her personal happiness. Smith returns to the inquiry into the relationship between science and ethics.

*Some of you are bad and kill other kinds of life. Others of you are good and protect life.
Thought I, is that all there is to good or bad?*

A Planet Named Shayol is a nightmare tale worthy of the imagination of Dante. Criminals against the Instrumentality of Mankind are sent to Shayol never to return. What exactly goes on on this isolated and dreaded planet? Is it really so bad that inmates prefer to have their skin desensitized and their brains fried before they go down?

It's much worse than I expected, and it goes ultimately down to the same question of where we draw the line between the good of society and the good of the individual, between the scientific progress and our inner sense of right and wrong. Which brings me to the last bookmark I made in the book, a fitting coda to fifteen millenia of future history:

There's a special sort of majesty to kindness. It's the best part there is to being people.

Simon says

Cordwainer Smith is a most unusual story writer whose execution and creativity in ideas usually outshone the way they were ended. One usually expects a good, decisive ending to a SF short story but such was the sheer strangeness of his ideas, his poetical prose style and varied range of narrative techniques that I didn't mind too much.

This collection contains about half the stories the author published pertaining to his vision of a future history of mankind. They are arranged in chronological order within this story arc with often thousands of years in between stories. In Smith's vision of our future, our civilization eventually collapses but from the ashes a new civilization emerges guided by the benign Instrumentality that strives to protect and nurture mankind towards its ultimate state of being.

There are many thematic threads running through this collection. We see mankind's relationship with animals evolve as we see the "pinlighters" working with cats telepathically to protect interstellar ships from the ravages of all consuming menace that thrives in the darkness between stars. Later animals are moulded into human form and are used as slaves and their striving and gradual struggle for equality and freedom.

We also see perhaps Smith's own evolution of ideas about how you can maximise human happiness. Can it be by protecting people from uncertainty, pain, strife and suffering? Or does mankind only truly thrive in adversity?

This is not for those who want everything explained and rationalised. Much is left to the reader to speculate upon. But I was constantly surprised by the elegance and rhythm of the prose that, again, is not something

one often expects with SF. In a way, this is more a fantastic retelling of myths and legends told in a far distant future.

Rebecca says

Whoa, I file this under giving-sci-fi-a-bad-name. At first I just found it not my cup of tea. I don't go in for short stories or mythical far future stuff to begin with. And Smith is so obsessed with moralizing about traditional gender roles it borders on misogyny. But I tried to persevere and finish this for the SF Masterworks group.

Then. Then I got to the story "The Crime and the Glory of Commander Suzdal" which holds the dubious honor of being the most hateful piece of fiction I have ever read. It's literally about GAY MONSTERS FROM SPACE COMING TO GET US. Not even in a metaphorical way. It's... not subtle. So the premise is on some far away planet "femininity became carcinogenic" (!) and thanks to another sci-fi standby, a cold-hearted woman scientist, all the women transgendered into men. Cue B-movie as produced by the Family Research Council.

"Since they did not have the rewards of family life, they became strutting cockerels, who mixed their love with murder, who blended their songs with duels, who sharpened their weapons and who earned the right to reproduce within a strange family system which no decent Earth-man would find comprehensible... The family, as they recalled it, was filth and abomination which they were resolved to wipe out if they should ever meet it."

"Mankind could not meet the terrible people of Arachosia without the people of Arachosia following them home and bringing to mankind a grief greater than grief, a craziness worse than mere insanity, a plague surpassing all imaginable plagues."

Hoooooly crap. I felt dirty just retyping that. This from a man who is widely considered a visionary and master of the genre. I don't want to censor his writing or lessen the inspiration readers have taken from him, but it makes me sad that amidst the rave reviews I couldn't find one single reference or discussion online regarding his gender issues, let alone this virulent homophobia. Scifi community, you're letting me down!

Williwaw says

Smith is a fabulist. His stories have a dream-like, disorienting quality. There's a grand scheme of future history lurking behind all his narratives. Part of the fun and the dreaminess is that he never fully reveals all the details. One of his fairy-tale elements is the "Underpeople," a race of partly human/partly non-human beings. For example, there are races cat-people and dog-people. These races are oppressed and shunned by ordinary humans and a group of god-like rulers known as the "Instrumentality." I think that Smith may have been, on some level, reflecting on the civil rights movements of the 1960s. All the stories in this anthology were published during that decade.

I am downgrading my rating of this book. The first 5 or 6 stories are wonderful, but then everything begins to stiffen up when Smith experiments with longer forms. "Dead Lady of Clown Town" and "Under Old

Earth" are terribly cumbersome and slow-moving. Not much happens, and there are no surprises. Reading these two stories feels like gazing upon a medieval tableau: nice to reflect on, but no dynamism.

I have four stories left to read in this anthology, including "Mother Hittons Littul Kittons" (which I read in another anthology, and enjoyed very much).

If anyone would like an introduction to Smith, I'd say start with the short story, "Scanners Live in Vain" or read "Norstrilia," which is a novel. ("Norstrilia" was my introduction to Smith; it is great fun to read and without a doubt one of the great sf classics). There's nothing quite like Smith in all of science fiction and fantasy literature.

Stuart says

The Rediscovery of Man: The strangest future mythology you'll ever read

(Also posted at Fantasy Literature)

The universe that Cordwainer Smith created has captured the imagination of many SF fans and authors thanks to the short stories that have been collected in *The Instrumentality of Mankind* (1974), *The Best of Cordwainer Smith* (1975), and *The Rediscovery of Man* (1999). It is without doubt one of the strangest and most memorable creations in SF, even if it only affords short, tantalizing glimpses of a much greater tapestry that the author was never able to fully reveal due to his untimely death at age 53.

The most famous of those stories are included in the Gollancz edition:

Scanners Live in Vain (1950)

The Lady Who Sailed the Soul (1960)

The Game of Rat and Dragon (1955)

The Burning of the Brain (1958)

Golden the Ship Was---Oh! Oh! Oh! (1959)

The Crime and the Glory of Commander Suzdal (1964)

The Dead Lady of Clown Town (1964)

Under Old Earth (1966)

Mother Hitton's Littul Kittons (1961)

Alpha Ralpha Boulevard (1961)

The Ballad of Lost C'mell (1962)

A Planet Named Shayol (1961)

Just by the titles you can get a sense of his unique and playful mind, and the stories themselves can be strange, haunting, humorous, and lyrical by turn. It's fair to say that his voice was unique. Every story stands alone but adds a thread to the tapestry of his *Instrumentality of Mankind* universe. The stories are told like far-future fables or legends, and really defy easy description.

"Scanners Live in Vain", which is about a rebellion by a guild of cyborg-like scanners that help pilot ships through "The Great Pain of Space", is probably one of the strangest and most disturbing SF short stories I have ever read. Strange concepts like habermen, cranching, and the fraternity of scanners are thrown at the reader immediately, so you have to be prepared to take it in. It is the best story in the collection, and some consider it the best SF short story ever written.

"The Lady Who Sailed the Soul" is an epic love story of two star-crossed lovers who go to great lengths through time and space to be reunited. The linkage between pilot and sailing ship to navigate the stars is

quite painful and awkward, and perhaps was inspired by the author's continual health troubles in real life.

"The Game of Rat and Dragon", about pin-lighters and their partners who help protect interstellar spaceships that travel via planofforming, is one of the most bizarre, original, amusing, and touching stories I've read. I can't reveal any more details without ruining the surprise, but this is also one of my favorites.

"The Buring of the Brain" features a famous Go-Captain (a pilot who directs his ship to planofform from one part of space to another) and his formerly beautiful wife, who has become mentally disturbed. To save his ship and passengers, he must make a terrible choice. Smith goes back to this theme frequently in his stories.

"Golden the Ship Was---Oh! Oh! Oh!" is another strange story about how the Lords of the Instrumentality take unusual and underhanded tactics to combat an upstart rival threatening Earth. Besides the strange title, it also features the best character names ever, Prince Lovaduck (there is an explanation of course).

"The Crime and the Glory of Commander Suzdal" tells the tragic tale of a brave and well-meaning space captain who comes to the aid of a rescue call from the planet Arachosia, which turns out to be a trap designed to lure humans into the clutches of a bizarre all-male society. He uses time travel and feline genetic material (what???) to orchestrate his escape, but is still punished by the Instrumentality for his mistake.

"The Dead Lady of Clown Town" is a very powerful tale of martyrdom by a Christ-like dog-girl (one of the underpeople) named D'Joan (the name is not accidental), a human therapist named Elaine, an electronic copy of the long-dead Lady Panc Ashash, and a telepath named The Hunter who start a revolution to uphold the rights of underpeople, genetically-modified animals who are essentially slaves that serve real humans. The religious overtones are quite overt, but the story is very good.

"Under Old Earth" is perhaps the most bizarre story of the bunch, telling the story of Lord Sto Odin, the most venerable Lord of the Instrumentality, who is now dying and ventures to an unregulated region of Old Earth called the Gebeit to see a cure for the "tired, sterile happiness" of humanity. He encounters a wild and suicidal young man below the surface who has stolen some "congohelium" (matter + anti-matter) and is under the thrall of a continuous, loud, pounding music that he must dance to, while all the other young people have collapsed in exhaustion. According to an article on www.everything2.com, this story is Cordwainer Smith's response to the frightening hippie and youth movement of the 1960's.

"Mother Hitton's Littul Kittons" is a story about Norstrilia, the planet that has a monopoly on the immortality drug stroon, which itself can only be harvested from giant sheep infected with a certain virus. Due to the incredible wealth of this planet, every criminal and government covets the stroon and Norstrilia has developed a drastic means of repelling all attempts to take it by force. The title refers cryptically to this, so I wouldn't dare spoil it for you.

"Alpha Ralpa Boulevard" is set later in the history of the Instrumentality, when the tired utopia is starting to crack and the Rediscovery of Man is taking place, where the Instrumentality deliberately allows danger, uncertainty, mortality, and all the illogical and messy old cultural practices of man be reintroduced to reinvigorate humanity. The story is about some of those first people who encounter this new and dangerous world.

"The Ballad of Lost C'mell" is about one of the most famous underpeople, a feline femme fatale named C'mell whose job is a "girly girl", an escort and geisha-type entertainer of humans who visit Old Earth. The plot is fairly convoluted for a short story, and is somewhat hard to follow, but basically involves a plot by Lord Jestocost, a Lord of the Instrumentality, and the E'telekeli, a powerful telepathic underperson that is unknown to the Instrumentality, to use C'mell to steal information from the Instrumentality to further the rights of the underpeople. These characters are also featured in Smith's full-length novel Norstilia.

“A Planet Named Shayol” is another standout story, a very literal descent into Dante’s Inferno, the prison planet of Shayol where the worst criminals in the Instrumentality are sent to be punished eternally. The main character is named Mercer, a name also used in Philip K. Dick’s *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep* to describe the Christian-like martyrdom cult of Mercerism. He is sent to Shayol for an undescribed crime, and learns the true nature of punishment there, which is in turns more cruel and yet more benevolent than anyone would have expected. The imagery here would not be out of place in a Hieronymus Bosch painting.

Bradley says

I'm gonna hit my bongo drum, Sun-man. Anyone up for a laminated mouse brain? I love it. So many great ideas packed into these short stories, I feel as giddy as if I sent my frozen cat people back two million years in the past to fight off the tragic planet of men, men, and nothing but men.

Really, people, this is some classic stuff. :)

Andrew says

When I finished "The Rediscovery of Man," I felt like I had read an entire 20-novel future-history cycle; such is the totality and scope of this collection of interconnected short stories. The closest and most obvious comparison would be Asimov's *Foundation* books, but I honestly believe that *The Rediscovery of Man* does the same thing better in the space of about 300 pages. The first story begins 4000 years in the future, and the stories proceed *in chronological order* from there. Mindblowing.
