



Up the Line

Robert Silverberg

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Being a Time Courier was one of the best jobs Judson Daniel Elliott III ever had. It was tricky, though, taking group after group of tourists back to the same historic event without meeting yorself coming or going. Trickier still was avoiding the temptation to become intimately involved with the past and interfere with events to come. The deterrents for any such actions were frighteningly effective. So Judson Daniel Elliott played by the book. Then he met a lusty Greek in Byzantium who showed him how rules were made to be broken... and set him on a family-history-go-round that would change his past and his future forever!

Up the Line Details

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From Reader Review Up the Line for online ebook

Erika says

If anyone would have told me some weirdo from GR was going to get me to start reading more Sci-fi and actually really *liking* it I would have laughed in their face. But here I am, so, thank you, Hugh.

I loved this. Loved. I thought it was brilliant. I've read a lot of snarky reviews for this one and I'm not really sure why. Nobody has a sense of humor anymore? Maybe. Maybe it just takes a lot to offend me, because not one thing in this book bothered me a bit. There are also a lot of people saying this is very dated. Well. Can you imagine writing a time travel book in 1969 and coming up with half the shit in here? Genius. The paradoxes all the way through were such fun they took me by surprise. It wasn't predictable, and it was exceedingly witty. All in all an immensely readable book that I LOVED.

John says

This book was selected as our monthly pick for our Time Travel Book Club on Goodreads. The book gets a little bogged down in the middle with pages and pages of Byzantine history that at times is about as exciting as reading an encyclopedia. However, the final twelve chapters make up for it. The excessive sexual content throughout the book might also turn off some readers. This book would have been just as enjoyable with a "PG-13" rating instead of "R." I'm giving this book four stars primarily based on its time travel content and its imaginative ending (which some might argue is a little unorthodox).

Bryan says

Let's keep this simple....

- 1) This book has not aged well. It's almost laughable today, but maybe it seemed trendy back in the 60's.
 - 2) The amount of sex in this book is really very unfortunate.
 - 3) The historical descriptions make the book of interest, but are also a bit dry.
 - 4) The plot doesn't really make an appearance until the last 20% of the book or so. Things pick up quite a bit. It tempted me to rate this book one star higher, but I have resisted.
 - 5) The time travel gimmickry may have been cutting-edge back in the day, but today's audience is a bit more savvy. We've seen this on tv so often... but done better.
 - 6) Oh, and the amount of sex is really a shame.
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Amy says

I like the Time Patrol element of this novel, making sure time tourists don't cause paradoxes and historical

changes. I've not seen time travel approached from a tourist aspect before. I also liked the creative ending. I can't say I've seen such an ending before, so nicely done. However, I think Silverberg forgot he was writing one of his sci-fi novels rather than one of his sex novels, and made this a bit rated X in parts. The ideas behind the story get at least 4 stars, but the creepy incestuous parts take it down several notches. Ew.

Charles Dee Mitchell says

I like time travel books, and so I was actually looking forward to this piece of boring, dated, sexist drivel. Oh, and I left out racist. The main character refers to his always "magnificently oiled" black friend as Sambo.

Silverberg wrote it when he was in his early thirties and it was published in 1969. Maybe he was pissed that he was just a little too old for the summer of love and all the drug-inhanced screwing he imagined went on then. In any case with *Up the Line* he took his always libido-heavy prose in absurd new directions. The mid 21st century is not so much sexually liberated as it is in constant rut. This is a time when pedophiles can casually admit their preferences, and a father can watch a grossly fat molester grope his thirteen year old daughter and think the experience might do her some good. His fourteen year old son, meanwhile, is frequently screwing a woman ten years his senior during the morning orientation sessions this small band of time-traveling tourists gets from their increasingly irritated guide. He's grumpy because he would rather be sneaking back another century in time to screw a distant relative named Pulcheria. (Did Silverberg get these names from *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*?)

The book is untroubled by plot until the last fifty pages or so. Tour groups are given two week visits to the history of Byzantium, catching all the high points of plunder, high court ceremony, and of course public rape. As a history lesson, John Julius Norwich's three volume history of Byzantium could not possibly be as tedious as the first 200 pages of *Up the Line*.

Up the Line was nominated by both the Nebula and Hugo. The juries that year must of been composed of adolescent boys look for jack off material,

Jocelyn says

read this 3 times. I generally hate sci fi but was recommended this book by a family member. though it can be offensive, the story is amazing and the mental visuals of the ancient times described are addictive. An excellent though not for everyone book. Very hard to mentally take in a lot of the paradoxes though reading it a couple times seems to make it easier. I had trouble putting this book down.

Stuart says

Up the Line: Fornicating in ancient Byzantium – shameless time travel porn

Originally posted at Fantasy Literature

Robert Silverberg was clearly a big fan of sex back in the late 1960s, and I'm sure he wasn't the only one. But in *Up the Line*, he absolutely revels in it. He doesn't miss a chance for his (all male) characters to fornicate with women at every possible opportunity both in the future and the past, in dozens of exotic time periods in Byzantium, Constantinople, Rome, etc. The act may be as old as time, but that doesn't stop Time

Courier Judd Elliot from trying to bed his great-great-great grandmother Pulcharia with a lusty enthusiasm and complete disregard for all social taboos that have existed for millenia. Sure, it's generally a serious no-no in society to screw your ancestors, but when she is as saucy a sex-kitten as Pulcharia, well who can blame Judd? At least that is the irreverent tone this book tries to achieve, billing its main character as the "Tom Jones of Time Travel".

The plot of the story is quite intricate and promising. Time travel is discovered in the early 21st century, and quickly develops into a thriving tourist industry. Time Couriers take small guided tours to see the most momentous moments in history, including the Crucifixion, Sermon on the Mount, assassinations of JFK, Abraham Lincoln, Julius Cezar, famous ancient wars, etc. There is even an exclusive tour of the Black Death for those perverse types who revel in mass death (don't worry, they're inoculated against the plague).

So our intrepid hero Judd Elliot gets recruited into the business and initially goes along with a senior Time Courier to learn the trade. There are of course many rules that need to be followed. 1) Keep interactions with people of that time period to a minimum, to avoid altering history and thus the future. 2) Avoid the numerous other time travel tourists, since major historical scenes are extremely popular. 3) Do not impregnate any women or kill off anyone, since you might alter the flow of history. That includes committing retroactive suicide by knocking off your direct ancestor. 4) Be ultra careful to avoid creating multiple versions of yourself by carefully timing the shunts up and down the line of history.

Well, as you can imagine, every one of those rules gets violated (no pun intended) over and over, and the time paradoxes start to pile up as the story proceeds, with multiple versions of different characters crowding various time periods, sometimes recognizing each other and sometimes not. And one of the biggest problems the Time Service faces is rogue Couriers who decide to profit by stealing various artifacts and coins from the past and selling it to future collectors. Or trying to set yourself up as a Wall Street tycoon by cheating the markets. Or just making your own kingdom in the jungle like Colonel Kurtz.

So the Time Service has another branch of time travel cops called the Time Patrol. Their job is to hunt down rogue time travellers and retroactively fix all the mayhem caused and restore the "real time line" back to its original state. The key conceit in Silverberg's book is that time lines can be repeatedly edited and "fixed" retroactively, so that you can go back in time and, for instance, kill your great grandfather, but you will not instantly disappear while you are back in the past. You may have erased your future self by altering the time line, but your physical time-traveling self remains. That means that history can be altered, such as going back and killing Hitler in the cradle, but the Time Patrol routinely goes up and down the line to monitor the flow of history, and since they are outside of time they retain memory of the "main time line" and if they find alterations they will relentlessly pursue the offender, go back in time, stop them from their meddling, and punish them in the future (including termination). This keeps the Time Patrol very busy.

I didn't pretend to understand the ever-increasing number of time paradoxes and conundrums that Up the Line presented. My approach to time travel books is that time travel is impossible, so whatever mechanism the author makes up doesn't matter as long as the story is convincing and entertaining. Silverberg carefully explains how it is that the Crucifixion can have literally thousands of time tourists attending, disguised in period attire, including the same Time Couriers bringing group after group, without overwhelming the actual people of the time or blowing their cover. It's pretty implausible, but still a fun idea to imagine. How many of these tourists are in disguise watching the grassy knoll, in the theater with Lincoln, in the Coliseum cheering the gladiators, watching the battle of Gettysburg, etc?

This book could have been a lot of harmless fun if it weren't for all the incessant sex. I'm not a prude by any means, but there is such a thing as too much! Every couple of pages Judd was getting horny and rarely if ever did he have trouble satisfying himself. The women in this book are eager to rip off their clothes, jump in bed, and pleasure the male characters for hours. Seriously? This goes beyond sexist to just plain ridiculous. I'm sure that Silverberg was having fun trying to push the boundaries of the newly-liberated times, but it

feels very dated and embarrassing to read now.

Up the Line reminded me of the books of Piers Anthony back in junior high school (Xanth, Apprentice Adept, Incarnations of Immortality), and Robert Heinlein's creepy tributes to mother-xxxxxxx, Time Enough for Love and To Sail Beyond the Sunset. I blundered into those books as an innocent teen, and have regretted reading them ever since.

Robert Silverberg is a venerable SF grandmaster and I've been enjoying his best works from that period recently. Who would have thought he could deliver schlock like this? In a world where Kim Kardashian and Nicki Minaj are household names, where sex is just another commodity peddled by popular culture, I still felt disturbed by the shameless raunchiness of Up the Line. There are some passages that have to be exposed to the light of day to be believed, and this book was published in 1969! Here are some dreadful examples (there are worse, actually) which made me cringe:

She didn't seem like my great-great-grandmother. She was lush, fertile, abundant. It was lust at first sight. I felt a familiar tickling in the scrotum. I longed to rip away her clothing and sink myself deep...

To ease my rage and anguish, I dropped down on my bed and rammed myself into her. She was a little startled, but began to cooperate once she realized what was up. I came in half a minute and left her to finished off by...

But there came a point where Silverberg simply crossed the line and decided that pedophilia is a legitimate subject matter for a humorous sci-fi romp, which made me want to throw up. I will quote it here but keep in mind I do NOT condone it in any way:

Just then, a sleepy and completely naked five-year old girl came out of one of the bedrooms. How sweet, I thought, that saucy little rump, how clean little girls always look when then they are naked, before puberty messes them up.

What more can you say? This ruined the whole book completely for me, and I returned it to Audible for a refund (promptly granted). Silverberg is a prolific and accomplished writer, but this may be one of his worst moments. Consider yourselves warned!

Skip says

I enjoyed this book a lot, but it is not for the pious. It is an well written, clever time-travel novel, with humorous passages. Jud Elliott bails on his job as a law clerk, moving to New Orleans in 2059. He blunders into a job as a Time Courier, taking tourists "up the line" (into the past) to Byzantium, one of his few areas of interest and knowledge. His mentor Metaxas helps bring teaches Jud how to bring the past to life for tourists, but also builds himself a comfortable life in the past, risking discovery and sanction by the Time Patrol. He encourages Jud to sleep around with women in the past, leading Jud to fall in love with an ancestor. Then, Jud begins to make mistakes and paradoxes result. 4.5 stars.

Lyn says

Time travel headache feels like ice cream brain freeze.

Paradox, paradox, discontinuity, paradox, transposal displacement, paradox.

Nothing for a reader to do but drink a beer and keep reading.

Robert Silverberg wrote this libidinous, vulgar carnival ride in 1969 and it was nominated for the Hugo Award. This represents my 25th Silverberg work reviewed and I have come to accept that his lasciviousness makes late era Heinlein look like a boy scout. There is just going to be sex in a Silverberg work, lots of it, and this one has all the sensitivity of a bawdy limerick, reminiscent of Heinlein's Time Enough for Love and All You Zombies – readers of those books will instantly know what I'm talking about.

Silverberg's protagonist is a time courier, distinct from a law enforcement time patrol – he's essentially a tour guide. He and his guests go "up the line" meaning back into history. A fascination with and an adept knowledge of Byzantium colors Silverberg's canon and this work characterizes that affinity as much of the novel is of history tours of Constantinople. Silverberg's vivid description of the time is mindful of de Camp's excellent 1941 novel Lest Darkness Fall.

Told with humor and much locker room language, but also with Silverberg's gift for storytelling this sexist and sometimes racist story will unsettle some with its over the top vulgarity but if you're not easily offended and enjoy a good time travel romp, a reader will enjoy.

Space says

It was good. It was real good. Really really good. You know my favorite thing about reading time-travel books is the paradoxes. I like a good yarn with a lot of temporal paradoxes. And this had a lot of those.

It also had a lot more Greek history than I cared to know. Really, he beat the shit out of me with the tours, going too deeply into what the tour guides were teaching. Okay, Mr. Silverberg, we get it. You know your Byzantium history. Impressive, and I do love history. But not in this context, and not in the middle of a temporal tale.

Written in the late 60s, this was quite well versed. He didn't encounter enough high-tech situations to reveal himself as anachronistic in and of himself. He didn't, in other words, need to know the future tech he wrote about. It therefore stands out as a solid novel, and - seriously, no pun intended - stands the test of time. It really does hold up well. I will enjoy reading this one again in the future. There I go again. Wow. I think I'll just skip the history lessons next time.

Oh, and as a side note - this guy talks about breasts more than I do. Every female character he introduces must go through the same descriptive net. He must describe how beautiful she is, and what her breasts look like. And the protagonist, Jud, sleeps with more women than the hero in a romance novel. "She jumped on the bed and said 'I'm drunk, do me!' so I did her." Yeah. It's ludicrous.

Ferit Feyzula says

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Scott says

A peculiar book, containing some delightful time-travel shenanigans and some of the very best science fictional handwaving and lampshading **ever written** about the paradoxes involved. Truly, that section of the book is a glory and a wonder. *Up the Line* is also very, very much of its time in one unfortunate fashion-- its women are furniture. A scene in which the narrator angrily forces sex with a semi-willing woman is uncomfortable enough, but the way in which an adult male pedophile's constant physical overtures to a 12-year-old girl are painted as a sort of merely comical nuisance to both the narrator and the girl's father (!) is just unsavory as hell.

A.E. Shaw says

Parts of me wanted to give this book five stars, other parts, one star, so to compromise, three seems a good bet.

This is a ludicrous book, truly, it is a bizarre and incredibly dated read which includes the best and worst of timetravel stories, often on each page.

The structure of the story is magnificent - the details, nuances and generally neat workings out of some of the most complex parts of timetravel tales are the highlight of this. Really, it's not easy to construct this kind of thing so well, and to dip through history with such ease. I much prefer Silverberg's timetravel novels that stick with this excellence, rather than painting it with the colours this does.

The main character's desire to bang a distant descendent of his I found completely bizarre and increasingly unpleasant, but it wasn't so much that as the fact that it felt as if even the author wasn't quite sure why he'd decided to put that bit in there, being as he's constantly trying to make it more explicable from the moment the idea crops up.

The sexism and 'casual' racism you can in considerable part put down to the age of the book and, I think, the intended characterisation of a man who's grown up in this very genetically fussy, perfection-seeking, sexually free society. It isn't particularly palatable to read now, but I'd say an author writing such a character now would caveat those aspects every bit as much as Silverberg here does the incest taboo. That said, it gets harder and harder to understand why you're reading the book when everyone you encounter is progressively gross.

Michael says

Dated science fiction is hilarious. I am reminded of the "classic" stuff where a man is flying across the galaxy in an aluminum rocket-ship, chain-smoking cigarettes with a floating anti-gravity ashtray, and wearing a polyester spacesuit. I don't recall how I ended up with this paperback, but it's old. 1969. And the story is from front to back like those Austin Powers movies. This guy thought that a hundred years in the future people would still be using the stupid slang of the day. Calling each other groovy cats, having orgies, and so on. Even better he shamelessly puts himself in the fantasy as the main character- a short of stature, always hip to the scene, sexually adventurous NY Jew who just can't work for the Man. So this guy is a tour guide for time-travelling tourists that go back to watch battles, coronations, and other moments of interest.

He basically bounces around history getting laid by historic babes. At one point he is pursuing his own great-many-times grandmother. A quote from page 172, "When you've jazzed one snatch, you've jazzed them all."

Michael Pryor says

I'm starting to think that, sometimes, 1950s SF holds up better than 1960s SF, especially the 1960s SF that extrapolates the society of the swingin' generation into a future that's full of tie-dye, love-ins and general grooviness, babe.

Sadly, 'Up the Line' suffers from this. I say 'sadly' because when I first read this book (in the mid-1970s ...) I enjoyed it immensely. On this re-reading, I find that the years haven't been kind to this tale. The good stuff is still good - great historical background, nice&knotty time travel paradoxes, Silverberg's usual deft characterisation, but some of the other stuff was wince-worthy, especially the race relations and some of the depictions of women. Sigh.
