

The Dosadi Experiment

Secret experiments yield thick mysteries

"We have already seen simulator programs of markets," said science fiction writer Frank Herbert in his talk in the EMU Ballroom last December, "Did you know you were a market? Well, you are . . . you are, for the most part, a young American higher

on you to find out how to control you . . . Right now there is a hell of a lot of experimenting being done on people without their informed consent."

In Herbert's latest novel, *The Dosadi Experiment*, he deals with the situation of experimentation

future with the same various intelligent species, the same political set-up and the same main character, Saboteur Extraordinaire Jorj X. McKie.

In this future, all of the many intelligent species (and there are several very different types) had gradually, over the centuries, become part of the ConSentiency, a vast central government. Once, centuries before, a tyrannical majority captured the government. They said they would make all individuals equal. By removing red tape and delays wherever they were found, these tyrants made the government act with great speed, "in the name of the people."

"Thus," Herbert writes, "the powerful governmental machine blundered along at increasingly reckless speed. It took commerce and all the important elements of society with it. Laws were thought of and passed within hours. Every society came to be twisted into a suicidal pattern. People became unprepared for those changes which the universe demands. They were unable to change."

"In those desperate times, a handful of people . . . their makeup and species never revealed) created the Sabotage Corps to slow that runaway wheel of government. The original corps was bloody, violent, and cruel. Gradually, the original efforts were replaced by more subtle methods. The governmental wheel slowed, became more manageable. Deliberation returned."

"Over the generations, that original Corps became a Bureau, the Bureau of Sabotage (BuSab), with its present Ministerial powers, preferring diversion to violence, but ready for violence when the need arises."

McKie is BuSab's top field agent and second only to the Chief of BuSab. McKie is called in by the Gowachin, an intelligent, frog-like race, to look into the Dosadi situation.

Dosadi is a backwater planet whose existence is almost unknown to the members of the ConSentiency. It was originally a poisonous planet unfit for any sentient survival, but it has been altered. It seems the Gowachin have set up an experiment on Dosadi. Many generations earlier, they had selected an equal number of Humans and Gowachin, erased their memories and placed them in a domed city on that planet. Inside the dome they would be safe. Outside the ecology was altered enough that people could breathe, but no food would grow.

Through a contract made with a Caleban (one of a group of mysterious creatures who feed off the energies of stars and who provide "jumpdoors" to the ConSentiency, enabling one to travel to almost any part of the universe almost instantaneously; these creatures were examined in depth in *Whipping Star*) the Gowachin have surrounded the planet with a "God Wall," a gauzy sphere which does not allow the Dosadi any knowledge of anything off their world.

Generations have passed and now the population of the city has grown to 90 million people, who must live under only 800 square kilometers of protection. Matters are getting out of hand on Dosadi and the Gowachin fear that this might have serious repercussions for their own race in the ConSentiency. Why? Ah, that would be telling.

Essentially, Herbert has written a Machiavellian mystery story full of political machinations, power plays and subterfuges. All sorts of loose ends are dangling around. Everyone has some secret or other and they all try to use their private knowledge to manipulate others. Herbert pulls the same trick on us, his readers. He withholds information from us until, in order to make a certain point or a plot device work, it is absolutely necessary for us to know it. This

book is not so much a mystery to be solved as it is one to be revealed, layer by layer, as Herbert desires.

At first I objected to Herbert's manipulation. It almost seemed as though he was making up the rules as he played the game with us. However, an argument can certainly be made that Herbert was only driving home his point on the evils of manipulation by bringing us into direct contact with it not only in the action of the plot, but in his entire approach to the writing.

One of the things I particularly enjoy about Herbert's writing is his attention to selected detail. Take nuance for instance. Nuance seems particularly interesting to Herbert and he fascinates us with his infatuation. Indeed, he is often at his best when describing a particular physical attitude or a minute movement or a certain subtle tone or color in the voice which may add or detract from the truth of a particular statement being made by a character. This is especially true and interesting when the discussion is of a diplomatic, political or cultural nature.

Another matter which has always fascinated me about Herbert's work is his ability to make the whole universe his novels are set in come alive, not just the particular stage his characters are moving on. He puts a great deal of thought and care into his creations, therefore we can readily believe them. He's also good at creating past histories of his people, including all the attendant customs, traditions and philosophies. His books are often thoughtfully entertaining.

The Dosadi Experiment is no exception. The conflicts between worlds and species, ultimately, change all involved and result in some new ideas and perspectives for both Herbert's characters and his readers. As science fiction is indeed the literature of ideas and different perspectives, *The Dosadi Experiment* is a welcome addition to the field.



By BOB WEBB

education market. You can be simulated in a computer and, on paper, test marketing can be conducted to determine what you will buy.

"Have any of you thought, how it is just a matter of degree from that which we do right now, with a high degree of accuracy, just a matter of degree from that and a program of you . . . a simulation of you, of your personality? One could then play off certain stimuli

sans informed consent but on a much grander scale. The Dosadi experiment involves testing not only on individuals or even on groups of individuals, but on an entire planet of individuals. The testing yields some rather dangerous results, even for the experimenters.

The book is, in a sense, a sequel to Herbert's 1969 novel *Whipping Star*. A sequel in that it takes place in the same far-flung

Museum's photo gallery features Owens' books

As a medium of graphic expression the Photography at Oregon Gallery plays a vital role in the Museum of Art. Sponsored by grants from the City of Eugene Room Tax Committee, the Oregon Arts Commission and private donations, the Gallery brings to view the works of both local and national photographers of merit, as well as public lectures by famous artists in the field.

Through Feb. 19 the Gallery is exhibiting works from the three books of nationally-known documentary photographer Bill Owens. A self-taught photographer who worked from 1968-77 as a news photographer in California, Owens' books have been referred to by Newsweek as "a visual anthropology of mainstream American life."

His first book, *Suburbia*, appeared in 1972 and celebrated the mundanity of Middle American life. Filled with shots of women in electric hair rollers, campers, gun collections and vegetable gardens, the book captures the polyester double knit air of kitsch that pervades the routine of many Americans.

Published in 1975, *Our Kind of People* is a study of American organizations and rituals. From photos of John Birch Society meetings to the Military Order of the Louse, Owens' work zeros in on common folk as curiosities.

His latest work, *Working, I Do It For the Money*, was published last May by Simon and Schuster. In *Working* his subjects reveal themselves through their jobs: the baker, the hooker, the sandblaster, the worm farmer. Not necessarily the freak outsiders shown in Daine Arbus' photos, nor the down-and-out workers caught by Stud Terkel, the subjects in *Working* typify the center of American society with its rich variety of occupational choice.

A recipient of grants from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Foundation for the Arts, Owens will direct a day-long workshop on Feb. 17 as well as a free public lecture at 7:30 p.m. Feb. 16 in 177 Lawrence, sponsored by the Gallery through a grant funded by the Cultural Forum. The workshop is limited to 15 participants. Those interested may contact Jim Featherstone at 343-2387. The workshop will cost \$20 for students and \$30 for non-students.

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