

THE MAN WHOSE PET HATES HAVE BEEN WORKED AWAY

An interview with Edmund Cooper by Tony Tubb

His book took 10 months to write on and off but he finished the last three chapters on New Year's Eve. Determined to finish the book before the start of 1970 he locked himself away in his study and, with the help of some lager, completed a chapter. A friendly bottle of whisky helped to put away the second in the afternoon. He finished with a flourish and another bottle just before midnight and staggered downstairs triumphant. His wife suggested celebrating with champagne. Mr. Cooper was not awake to greet the New Year.

For a small sum God will drop in for a chat. He comes in any religion or language you choose.

Just step into the auto-confession booth, watch the screen and he zooms up in glowing colour on a cloud.

For God is a computer and religion has been taken over by big business at a nice fat profit. This is Sussex author Edmund Cooper's own private version of the future from his new book, "Son of Kronk", out today.

It is a bitter and highly funny satire on modern life and trends, set in a future Britain. Mr. Cooper also intends it as a warning.

A new strain of VD sweeps the world, making people gentle as kittens. But the disease has a kick-back; after a while people and animals become more violent than ever and even the hunted rabbit tears the pursuing hounds to shreds.

Mr. Cooper takes a mighty swipe at the Church, the mass media, organ transplants and the other doubtful, half-digested accomplishments of Western society.

He lives with his wife and children in a picturesque house at Madehurst, near Arundel, wrapped snugly in a fold of the Downs.

"For me the book was a serious exercise in pointing out the absurdity of life. I was realising pet hates. It was a form of therapy -- working them out of my system," he says.

Mr. Cooper, aged 44, relaxes with a glass of lager in his tastefully-

furnished lounge. He talks intensely, the quotable quotes spinning off like sparks from a flint.

"The human race is galloping into greater and greater absurdity. More people are killed on the roads in a year than in a major war a hundred years ago, yet we tolerate it.

"We are deluged with news. It has to be a "first," like landing on the moon, or something unique for people to take it in. We have so many bloody things to worry about we are dazed to know what to worry about next," he says.

His book satirises the Church. "Anything I can do to kick it up the backside, to hasten its retreat, then so much the better."

He says it is not geared up to modern life yet dislikes its flirtation with electronic gimmickry and the mass media, which, in his book, take it over.

"I can just see the Church having commercials made," he says seriously.

The novel, his ninth, is a deliberately exaggerated prophecy. Yet everything he writes about is a reasonable projection of modern technology and trends.

He is a self-confessed "frustrated Messiah" conducting his own private Doomwatch. Yet with "optimism tempered with terror" he sees the world surviving by the skin of its teeth.

The new novel is the first he has read after publication. Otherwise he would want to go on re-writing indefinitely.

Mr. Cooper has an admirable way of writing. He writes each chapter in longhand on an exercise pad then, apart from checking the grammar, forgets about it. His wife does the typing.

Why the title? The book was originally called "Kronk". The publishers suggested a change. They got it.

Mr. Cooper, a former seaman, journalist, labourer, teacher and civil servant, escaped from the world of public relations three years ago to take up full-time writing in Sussex.

First published in the Evening Argus (East Sussex) October 19th 1970, and reproduced here with their kind permission.