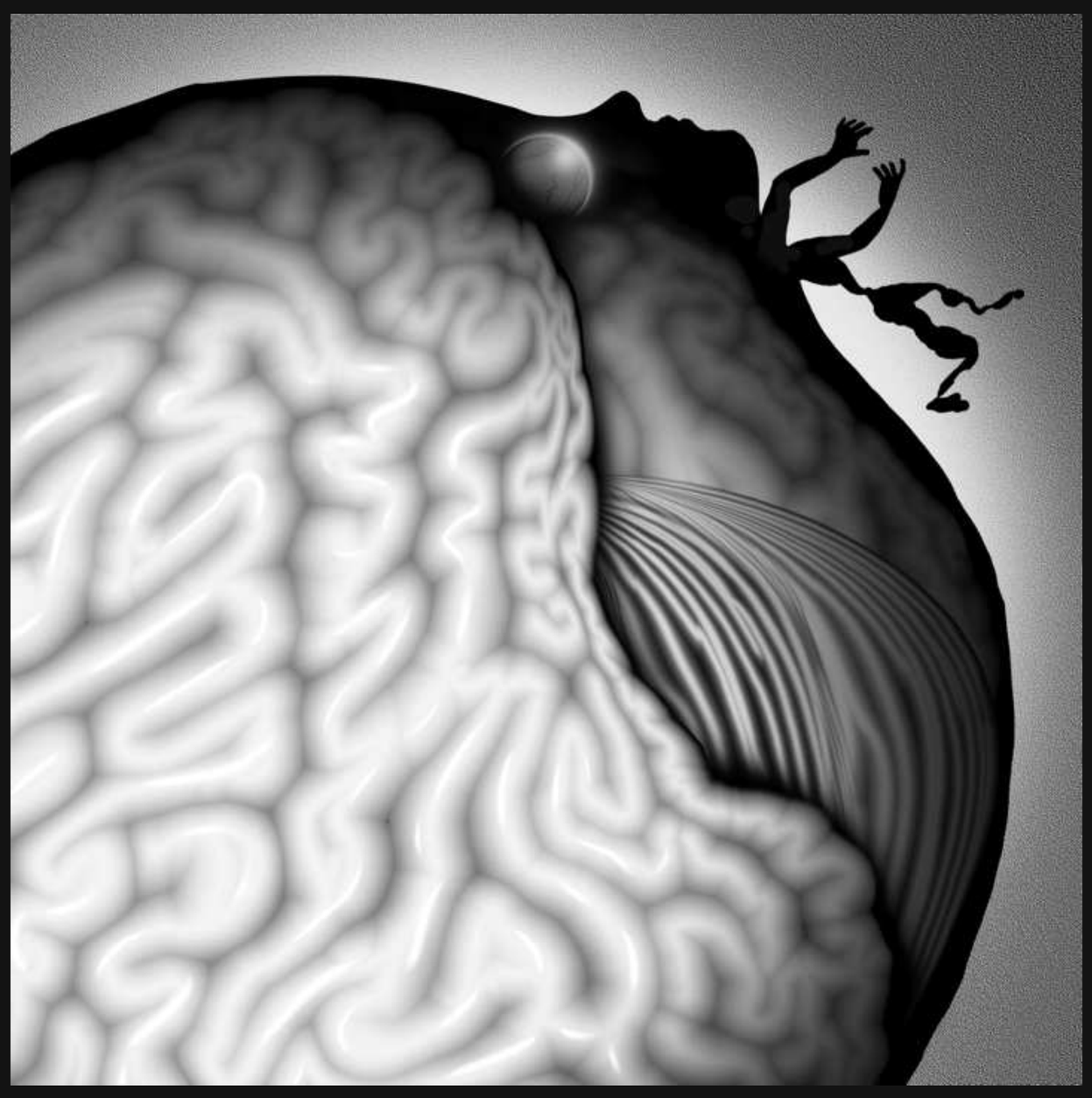
Tomb Series KAIROS (Recovery)

0x6e31 April 15th, 2023
5 Collected

Olaf Stapledon’s novel Last and First Men, published in 1930, presently achieves a credible Van Eyck Index of 1.3, and its continued longevity seems assured. A new paperback edition is expected in the Penguin Science Fiction series in 2023, following an unbroken line of mass market and collector’s editions. In terms of *bibliographically* original hardware, first editions remain in circulation, and well preserved copies are highly valued on the secondary market. A handwritten manuscript is held in the Olaf Stapledon Collection at the University of Liverpool, alongside a fully catalogued repository of the author’s notes, correspondence, and various examples of the graphic time charts that depict the novel’s chronology. Almost a century after its publication, Last and First Men has achieved considerable bibliographic redundancy.



Chapter art for Man Remakes Himself by Marijpol

The book’s narrative is the chronicle of an inhabitant of the ultimate human civilisation, some two billion years in the future and on the cusp of annihilation, told through an unwitting narrator in Stapledon’s own time. Storytelling extreme duration was the conceit of much of Stapledon’s fiction. He described his work as “controlled imagination”, quite distinct from the fanciful tropes of mainstream science fiction:

> The merely fantastic has only minor power. Not that we should seek actually to prophesy what will as a matter of fact occur; for in our present state such prophesy is certainly futile, save in the simplest matters. We are not set up as historians attempting to look ahead instead of backwards. We can only select a certain thread out of the tangle of many equally valid possibilities.

In Last and First Men, Stapledon's chosen thread leads initially in prescient directions. He foresaw the fascist significance of the Swastika, he foresaw that the planet's resources would dwindle, he foresaw that communism would be unable to suppress the insidious mechanisms of capital, and that mass migration would refigure the global political map. But, as its chronology accelerates, Stapledon's narrative drifts and diverges radically, sent off course by his inescapable anthropocentrism. In chapter XI, Man Remakes Himself, hundreds of thousands of years hence, our descendants practice a crude form of genetic engineering, producing a "great brain": an architectural installation with an oversized, laboratory grown, human brain at its core, supported by an infrastructure of ordinary mortals who sustain it and execute its commands. Stapledon foresaw that intelligence might be disembodied, but he apparently never suspected that it could be entirely separated from its DNA substrate. The true significance of the *computational* was quite beyond his purview.



Tomb CXLIX – KAIROS

folia

The ancient Greeks had at least two words for time. We understand their *chronos* to have meant the measure of time and its passing, while *kairos* signified a singular, opportune moment in time. Looking backwards on Stapledon looking forwards, he appears agonisingly close to a kairos moment. Three decades — the blink of an eye — after Last and First Men was published, Irving John Good's 1962 essay Speculations Concerning the First Ultraintelligent Machine introduced a key idea that might have alerted Stapledon to the potential for intelligence to jump from wetware to hardware. Good wrote:

> An ultraintelligent machine could design even better machines; there would then unquestionably be an *intelligence explosion*, and the intelligence of man would be left far behind.

The intelligence explosion meme would take some time to propagate. If Marshall McLuhan's celebrated 1964 book, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man, is indicative of a prevailing technological outlook from that decade, the notion of artificial intelligence apparently made little initial impact. McLuhan's book figures technologies as metaphorical extensions of human faculties: the wheel extends the feet, the telephone extends the voice, *the computer extends the brain*, and so on. By the 1990s, McLuhan's anthropomorphism was out of favour in media theory. In Deep Time of the Media, Siegfried Zielinski wrote:

> Technology is not human; in a specific sense, it is deeply inhuman. The best, fully functioning technology can be created only in opposition to the traditional image of what is human and living, seldom as its extension or expansion.

Last and First Men is an exemplary tomb for Stapledon's anthropocentric world-view. A bibliographical survivor and a monumental narrative folly, its world-building ambition illuminates not the future it gropes for, but the culture that produced it. It

stands as a tragic marker for obsolescence.

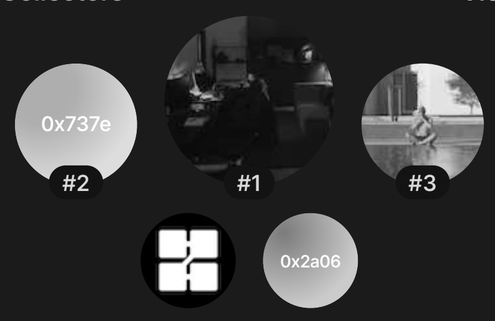
This text is part of a Tomb Series Recovery proposal, an effort to publish extracts from an audio recording of Last and First Men by Olaf Stapledon in the pointed context of Tomb KAIROS (SHADOW). Two extracts are proposed, both from chapter XI: Man Remakes Himself. The recording was made in 1969 by the science fiction writer, editor, and broadcaster Baird Searles, and has been digitally restored from reel tapes by Pacifica Radio Archives at my expense. The formal Recovery proposal and the audio files are presented at the Tomb Series Recovery website.

The great brain image, above, has been commissioned from artist Marijpol for this proposal and, if validated, will become her first work on chain. It is chapter art for Man Remakes Himself, toward a speculative publication of the complete audio recording of Last and First Men. It will be offered for sale from the gilbertagain.eth wallet with a 50/50 split on proceeds between the artist and writer.

This proposal contravenes the digital rights management policies of Pacifica Radio Archives. No permission has been sought, and no licensing agreement entered into, for the publication of these extracts. The audio material proposed for Recovery amounts to less than 45 minutes of the 10 hour duration of the complete recording, but I do not claim this as *fair use* in conventional copyright parlance. In the context of this proposal, these extracts are treated explicitly as non-commercial objects. Should the proposal be validated, the digital audio files will be minted on the KAIROS Recovery contract and the resulting NFTs immediately burned. If I am requested to, by Pacifica Radio Archives, I will edit this post, and any other public presentations of this proposal, and endeavour to replace all related media stored at IPFS with a statement to that effect. In all eventualities, however, some record of this media will forever remain in the Recovery contract of Tomb KAIROS.

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5 Collectors View



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