



Moderan

David R. Bunch

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Come to Moderan...

Moderan is one of the most startlingly original, provocative & fascinating future worlds in all of science fiction.

In Moderan, men are made mostly of metal. They retain strips of flesh to contain their humanity. They live in Strongholds. They prowl the war rooms of their Strongholds and plan wars.

Quite a world, Moderan. Come visit. The war is about to begin...

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Moderan Details

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From Reader Review **Moderan** for online ebook

Erik Graff says

This is a gem of a work by a little known, underappreciated science fiction writer and poet who wrote with an attention to language rare in the genre. I read the thing on the recommendation of my roommate decades ago, but the mere thought of it brings the cadences back to mind with clarity and force. This might be a book, one of the only books, to bring pimply-geek sf fans to poetry.

Ostensibly, there's nothing lyrical about the interlocked cyborg stories constituting this collection. The themes are overwhelmingly masculine: superheroics, pride, war and clever deception. Yet, painfully obvious just under the surface, the real character of these singing man-machines is that of fear, anxiety and self-delusion. It is as if the classic heros of 1950s science fiction had their garages and workshops transformed into command centers, their homes into walled compounds in a Hobbesian orgy of paranoia and aggression.

Maybe this book affected me so much because my family lived in lily-white suburbia, just one step from a gated community, when I was in high school. We were demographically out of place in Park Ridge, Socialists masked as Democrats among Republicans; atheists among fundamentalists. The *Moderans* reminded me of our neighbors, the male householders, their Ids writ large, armed and armored.

Maybe this book affected me so much because I myself was infected by the surrounding inimical environment and its values.

Rob Friedman says

excellent... wish it was available in digital format. I first read the 2 stories in *Dangerous Visions*... then found the paperback. It was disjointed, uniquely different, and written like someone was talking to you. And somewhere I still have it. I consider it one of the best collections I ever read.

Harry Lang says

Possibly the most imaginative fiction I've ever read. Humanity survives ecological disaster by covering the world in plastic and converting themselves to cyborgs, maintaining the tiniest possible scraps of flesh in order to remain "human." Bunch firmly establishes his own insane world of cybernetic stronghold masters and fills it with astute observations on human nature. The flowing poetic prose is a challenge at first; it's a code that you have to crack but the effort pays off. Should be regarded as a classic.

Stephen Douglas Rowland says

AN ENTIRELY STRANGE, OFTEN ANNOYING READ, WITH INTERESTING IDEAS BUT LITTLE PLOT. LACK OF THIS COMPELLING DRIVE MADE IT A CHORE, BUT THERE IS STILL SOMETHING I LIKE ABOUT THIS BOOK, SEEMINGLY WRITTEN BY SOMEONE MENTALLY ILL

ON AMPHETAMINES. THE STYLE AND VOICE ARE COMPLETELY ORIGINAL. BUT IT'S ALSO IRRITATING.

Noah Wareness says

David R. Bunch was behind the densest, most poetic science fiction that's ever been written, and probably the darkest and bitterest too. If you're interested in fringe writers who demonstrate paths that the mainstream never encountered, Bunch is yours to lose. There's nothing like his work in literature anywhere.

Moderan is a loosely braided novel-in-stories about people who have cut off their flesh to add electronics, paved the entire earth in gray plastic and reduced their culture to a drive for endless war. Obsessively concerned with the cultural fallout of human-machine interfaces, it's plausibly the first work of cyberpunk: some of the included stories predate Neuromancer by more than twenty years. In hindsight, the work here is stranger and more startling than anything that the cyberpunk subgenre created as a coherent movement.

Bunch's greatest stylistic innovation came from integrating formal poetic techniques into straight-up prose. His mad sentences hinge on daring internal rhymes and clauses that repeat like fractals. At their best, these stories don't feel at all like stories. They feel like an evil child genius is shrieking at the inside of your head.

In a broad sense, Moderan comes from a place of devoted lyricism, but we expect poetic lyricism to exalt and cherish the world. Bunch hated the modern world too completely to even suggest alternatives. Instead, the book deploys its lyrical techniques to dramatize human arrogance, materialism and the uncritical worship of progress. It stands in mocking opposition to the Golden Age of Science fiction, the visions of rocketships and endless growth. Bunch rips mercilessly into his own literary tradition like Flann O'Brian, denounces his culture like Thomas Bernhard and challenges the universe's structural unfairness like Thomas Ligotti. Whether or not it'll ever come up in university coursepacks, Moderan is a crucial work of nihilist literature.

Today these stories still feel vibrant and avant-garde. They're unanimously dense and tricky reads, and Bunch's single-minded disgust for technological culture is enough to raise blisters on anyone still capable of guilt. But he didn't write this book for people to enjoy. He had this very un-American, very un-science fiction idea that stories could fix things.

Peter Landau says

Someone championed the New York Book Review's reissue of MODERAN by David R. Bunch. They said it was the best thing since sliced bread or some such mysterious comparison to a just so-so invention. But it's science-fiction, so I was curious, and weird science-fiction at that, where a post-apocalyptic world (are there any others nowadays?) is ruled by men who have given up most of their flesh for new-metal machinery and engage in constant warfare over a world covered in plastic. These short stories, thankfully most very short, are narrated by one such monster, Stronghold 10, who babbles in a new speak almost as impenetrable as his body armor. In a series of encounters that are bonkers the madness of this new life is riddled with fissures where the old and even something like humanity seep through. It's crazy. I can't say it was fun to read but I kind of miss Stronghold 10 shouting in my face about his superiority and love of conflict. An introduction calls the work prescient, only today our apocalypse is global warming not nuclear winter. We do live in a world of Stronghold 10s, screaming insanely to our indifferent, dull or frustrated ears all the time. Their

language, too, is strange and alien. But it's harder to see the humanity. If only Bunch was still alive, he could be their speechwriter.

Glenn Russell says

Moderan is back!

Moderan, the SF world of the future populated by men that are a combination flesh and futuristic metal forever seeking war, conquest and total domination. And the great war of Moderan is now underway. This *New York Review Books* edition of David R. Bunch's classic is made available to readers starting today, the first time since its original publication back in 1971.

Moderan men live in Strongholds. Moderan men live and breathe war - if they are not at war, Moderan men are forever setting plans for war.

Moderan men flowed from the pen of Missouri born and bred New Wave SF author David R. Bunch (1925-2000), the oddest duck in the fringe literary pond of odd ducks. Bunch found American culture with its obsession with progress via technology a repugnant nightmare. The smiling, smooth-talking, upbeat, success driven prototypical American male of the 1950s was for him the scum of the scum, a threat to nature and a violation of human decency.

As far as Bunch was concerned, the Golden Age of Science Fiction with its rocket ships and up, up and away philosophy producing such works as Robert A. Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* was, to put it bluntly, shit on a stick.

To provide a taste of the author's vision, I'll focus on three chapters from the collection:

INCIDENT IN MODERAN

The tale is told in the first-person from the perspective of one of the Moderan men who is sitting on a chair outside his Stronghold, bored stiff since his side voted for a temporary ceasefire to let the damaged enemy rebuild so they can get back to blasting. He's quick to tell us their brief letup has nothing to do with fair play or love thy neighbor, no, no, no – it's about having a bigger and better war and thus greater quantities of hate and better chances to win honors. After all, he goes on, his own fort, Stronghold 10, is FIRST IN WAR, FIRST IN HATE, AND FIRST IN THE FEARS OF THE ENEMY (author's capitals).

What strikes me with these Moderan men is that they might be part human, part metal (making them nearly indestructible) but it is the weakest human parts: a capacity for boredom combined with an unrelenting desire to hate and destroy while instilling fear in others. And to have these human traits made next to invincible through technological innovation in metal parts. Now that's dangerous!

At that moment, Moderan man catches sight of a "piece of movement," a mutant form roaming around on the homeless plastic (in Moderan man's world, the ground is covered in plastic). The thing approaches Moderan man. We read: "When he stood before me, I felt disturbed. Strangely I felt somehow guilty, and

ashamed, that he was so bent and twisted and mushy-looking with flesh. Oh, why can't they all be hard and shining with metal, and clean, like we Stronghold masters are, with a very minimum of flesh-strip holding them in shape? It makes for such a well-ordered and hate-happy life, the way we masters are in Moderan, so shiny and steellike in our glory, with our flesh-strips few and played down and new-metal alloy the bulk of our bodily splendor. But I suppose there must always be lower forms, insects for us to stride on."

I'm quite confident readers will clearly detect the condescension of Moderan man. More metal = greatness and superiority; more flesh = weakness and inferiority. Likewise, I'm sure an observant reader will pick up the odd cadence and meshing of words. This is uniquely David R. Bunch – he wanted his future world Moderan men to have their own vocabulary and way of speaking – not as developed or nearly as sophisticated as Anthony Burgess' *Clockwork Orange*, but the language in *Moderan* is distinctly his own creation.

It had been nearly fifty years since the publication of *Moderan*. Has our culture and society moved in the direction of Moderan man? Are you familiar with the latest developments within the world of Artificial Intelligence (AI)? How much is your life currently intertwined with technology? Is your computer an extension of you or are you an extension of your computer?

And how free are we from our own versions of condescension? Case in point: I recall reading how one world leader said immigrants from lands south of his border were not humans but animals. Sounds like Moderan might be judged by some as an ideal to be pursued.

THINKING BACK ((OUR GOD IS A HELPING GOD!)

Moderan man recounts the creation of his race. Back when the air and water turned poison, people looked to their God on high. Their God was silent. The air and land and water became more poisoned, poisoned to the point where the life of those flesh men and flesh women were on the brink of extinction. But then came the solution! Replacing flesh with steel; replacing weak hearts with strong artificial hearts. A new, improved race was born - steely Moderan man, a man no longer the plaything of time - Moderan man's artificial heart would beat forever; Moderan man's steel body would never grow old. A giant steel man stood in the middle of Moderan man's world to serve as his ideal and God. The air, earth and water could continue to grow poisonous -- no problem for Moderan man since Moderan man transcended such lowly organic considerations.

And what happened to those flesh men who refused new replacement hearts and steel? We read: "And then the flesh-man - oh, consider. CONSIDER him - the sick few that are left. Please do. Then perhaps you will see why we in our new-shining glory, flesh-strips few and played-down, pay homage to a massive stick of new-metal placed as our guide star when New Processes Land, our great Moderan, was new!"

New world, new land, new Moderan man - steel conquers all!

NO CRACKS OR SAGGING

Our future Moderan man recording these tapes reflects back on the first time he crossed over into the lands of Moderan. He comes across huge, long-legged tamping machines pounding the ground. He's perplexed. Why are these steely monsters pummeling the earth? He's quickly given the answer along with the background of the Moderan world by a lowly old man who has just enough metal parts to oversee these jumbo mechanisms.

Turns out, the machines are doing the flattening, the ultimate goal being to cover the earth with a white-grey sheet of uniform plastic. No trees, no plants, no animals, no oceans even (seen as excess water). The old man

also tells the visitor new to Moderan that he, the newcomer, has all the markings that will schedule him for a procedure turning him into one of the elite-elite steel war-making Stronghold leaders that will secure the future for the new world of Moderan.

Here's a snatch from the chapter that highlights how David R. Bunch developed his own vocabulary and sentence rhythm as part of creating his new Moderan world: "I looked about and far and wide strolled still on that smoothed and rolled-down earth the tall cylinder-carrying monsters, and many was the jammy ram that was hunched into the position and having a go at the jug-jug-jug, phoo-phoo-phoo, bam-bam-bam that was its main mission."

Ah, to cross over into Moderan with its plastic and supercharged war machines. Sounds like 1950s America taken to absurd extremes. But how absurd really? Many Americans love all the war and plastic. Just look at the comic books, TV shows and movies. The more artificial, the less nature and more people, the more killing and destruction, the better. Moderan as the future USA - all life that isn't human and isn't American can go straight to hell.

Olethros says

-Hay cosas que no son nada populares, pero tienen su pequeño grupo de admiradores que las adoran hasta límites insospechados-.

Género. Ciencia-Ficción.

Lo que nos cuenta. Un miembro del pueblo del Sueño de la Tierra de la Esencia encuentra unas grabaciones procedentes del pasado, relatos de cuando el mundo se llamaba Moderan y estaba poblado por seres mecánicos, en parte metal y en parte carne (excepto unos pocos habitantes, de carne y hueso, que vivían en Rumboviejo). Esta es la transcripción de algunos de esos relatos.

¿Quiere saber más del libro, sin spoilers? Visite:

<http://librosdeolethros.blogspot.com/...>

Gabrielle Squailia says

Certain of these stories - strange, lyrical, violent - are among my very favorites. The least of them are hardly there at all.

Jonathan Hawpe says

NYRB has really found a lost gem in this one! Obscure even in their time (1960s/70s) and long out-of-print, David Bunch's interlinked Moderan stories present a startling, grim, bordering on absurdist future world of hyper-gendered society, fields paved in plastic, bodies merged with metal, and endless pointless warfare, all written in a gnarly poetic language that immerses the reader in the mind of a "Moderan man". This is Literary science fiction of the highest order, for readers that appreciate Stanislaw Lem, Jeff Vandermeer,

LeGuin, Sam Delaney, Calvino & Kafka.

Daniel Polansky says

A kaleidoscopic chronicle of a post-human future, in which robot warlords fight endlessly over a plastic landscape. This is more Brave New World than Heinlein, short stories largely free of an overarching narrative, ferocious satire of capitalism, imperialism, etc. It's held together with this really buoyant, peculiar style of prose, with our robot-warlord antihero speaking in this clipped, imbecilic vernacular. It probably would stand stronger at about 200 pages instead of 350, but it's still unique and weird and worth your time.

Kazima says

The influence this book has had on science fiction I feel is rather clear, but unfortunately it didn't have the timelessness I hoped it would have.

Craig says

From the late 1950's through the early 1970's David R. Bunch's Moderan stories appeared sporadically, mostly in AMAZING and FANTASTIC magazines, before being collected in this nice little volume. More stories appeared for years afterwards, but unfortunately an updated or comprehensive edition never was published. Bunch was known as an excellent poet, and his careful choice of words create poignant scenes and situations. It's not a fast or easy read, but is an enriching and satisfying example of the early "new-wave" sf movement.

The Great Dan Marino says

Cons: obscure (the writing, not just the physical book, which is hard to find), static, occasionally too allegorically neat. Pros: prose is its own breed, at first childish and near gibberish and then, you slowly realize, near masterful. No one, NO ONE, writes like this mufucka. Vision = unrelenting and gonzo-awesome and simultaneously hilarious and chilling and moving. Best stories/chapters in here = some of the best fiction I've ever read. Must dig up more from this guy, he's almost disappeared.

Ross Scott-Buckleuch says

Thanks to Justin Isis for the recommendation.
