

disturb complacency was this: suppose that you were the last human being alive, the very last, alone on Earth with all the remnants of the past, all the accumulated wisdom of man, all the monuments and all the things charged with the meaning of what it is to be human . . . and suppose that you had to live your life under these conditions. What would it mean to you to be a human being? And that is the question, with all the influences above, which lies behind the writing of *The Faded Sun*. Hence the title. Hence the hero — who is young and *not* human and faced with the decline of his species. The central question is: what is survival worth? And what is really meaningful, measured against a vast expanse of time?

One of the questions with which I have dealt in my early fiction, and my fiction is still early, because I am a young writer in terms of years published, is that of perspectives. What is all the accumulated experience of man worth when we step off this world? We've set footprints on the moon and scratched the surface of Mars. It was a great psychological wrench when the first photos came back, showing us ourselves,



C J Cherryh

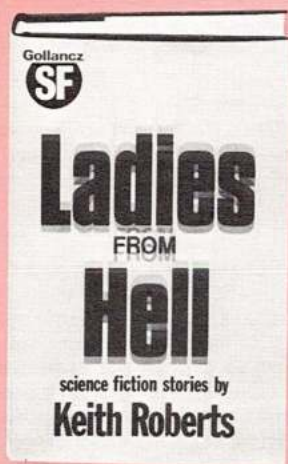
looking back on ourselves, and realizing that all the arena of our past, all the places which loom so large in our history and our self-importance, are, like things remembered from childhood, so *small* when viewed from that perspective. You have to squint to make out the Mediterranean, where empires shook the world . . . to imagine the

Aegean, the ancient past of Mexico, obscured by cloud. And our own homes, our own boundaries, our own little fences and highways are transient and unreal in that context. And while we who *read* have already begun to cope with such perspectives, and we've watched them take subtle effects on generations born in the space age, in daily acquaintance with technology, the man in the street really hasn't met it yet, really hasn't come to grips with the fact that his own little living room isn't ultimate reality. So the perspective of man measured against time, against the totalities of species, has lately fascinated me. Meanwhile, I've been formulating my own estimation of how man might actually make this transition, from the world to the universe, and what it might do to his conceptions of himself and his place within it, and this speculation has occupied most of my recent fiction.

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NOTE: *The Faded Sun: Kesrith* is the first in a trilogy. The second book, *The Faded Sun: Shon'jir* will be available from the SFBC next Spring.



Keith Roberts is not a prolific science fiction writer, which probably explains why his work consistently reflects care and depth of thought, something which is often missing from the work of writers with a greater output and a combination which makes any new story bearing his name something to celebrate. *Ladies From Hell* is particularly worthy of popping a champagne cork because although Roberts' novels have always been very well received (*Pavane*, for example, is one of the major alternative histories of recent years), his forte lies in the short story and the stories in this collection are among his very best.

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