

Epic by Conor Kostick: A Tale of Power Friction

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Abstract—The coining of "virtual reality", *Epic* by Conor Kostick follows the life of a boy Erik Haraldson in a game called Epic affecting income, social standing, and the careers of the people. Erik defeats red dragon, making him one of the wealthiest players in the game; even though they do not fully understand. As the game becomes self-aware, there are whispers of a revolution among those who would use the game's technology for conversations and elections rather than endless fighting. The present paper "‘Epic’ by Conor Kostick: A Tale of Power Friction" has made the literature review over the novel ‘Epic’ and other similar novels in genre as the primary resource. It has attempted to highlight the silent features of virtual reality fiction. An attempt to analyze ‘Epic’ on the touchstone of the virtual reality fiction has been made. MLA 9 style has been used for in text citation and referencing.

I. INTRODUCTION

Of all the science fictional tropes this may be the one we are slamming into headlong at the most blistering pace. The effect on societies, and the all-important individuals within them, is far less clear www.dailysciencefiction.com (2021). Many science fiction books and films have imagined characters being "trapped in virtual reality" or entering into virtual reality. Laurence Manning's 1933 series of short stories, ‘The Man Who Awoke’—later a novel—describes a time when people ask to be connected to a machine that replaces all their senses with electrical impulses and, thus, live a virtual life chosen by them (*à la* *The Matrix*, but voluntary, not imposed). A comprehensive and specific fictional model for virtual reality was published in 1935 in the short story "Pygmalion's Spectacles" by Stanley G. Weinbaum. Other science fiction books have promoted the idea of virtual reality as a partial, but not total, substitution for the misery of reality, or have touted it as a method for creating virtual worlds in which one may escape from Earth. Stanislaw Lem's 1961 story "I (Profesor Corcoran)", translated

in English as "Further Reminiscences of Ijon Tichy I", dealt with a scientist who created a number of computer-simulated people living in a virtual world. Lem further explored the implications of what he termed "phantomatics" in his nonfictional 1964 treatise ‘Summa Technologiae’.

A number of other popular fictional works use the concept of virtual reality. These include William Gibson's 1984 ‘Neuromancer’, which defined the concept of cyberspace, and his 1994 ‘Virtual Light’, where a presentation was viewable in VR-like goggles. Other examples are Neal Stephenson's ‘Snow Crash’, in which he made extensive reference to the term avatar to describe one's representation in a virtual world, and Rudy Rucker's ‘The Hacker and the Ants’, in which a programmer uses VR for robot design and testing. The ‘*Otherland*’ series of 4 novels by Tad Williams, published from 1996 to 2001 and set in the 2070s, shows a world where the Internet has become accessible via virtual reality. More recently, the 2011 novel ‘*Ready Player One*’ by Ernest Cline is about a virtual reality system called the OASIS that people use to escape from the grim reality of a dying Earth in 2045. Another novel would be Bluescreen (Mirador) by Dan Wells www.wikipedia.org (2020).

A good popular guide to the meaning of the term in its more limited, scientific application is *Virtual Reality* (1991) by Howard Rheingold. The term may have grown from the term "virtuality", used by Theodor Nelson in "Interactive Systems and the Design of Virtuality" (November/December 1980 *Creative Computing*). The coining of "virtual reality", probably around 1981, is usually attributed to computer guru Jaron Lanier, founder of VPL Research Inc, the company that markets DataGloves. The first usage we can trace is in *The Judas Mandala* (1982; rev 1990) by Damien Broderick, a book with many and confusing virtual realities.

This comparatively restricted use of the term rapidly became a Cliché of the Cyberpunk movement, but it is only a special case of the larger theme of virtual reality. One reason why virtual realities have been popular so long is the somewhat recursive fact that stories themselves are virtual realities (though we interact with them only in a metaphoric sense); so the notion holds an intrinsic fascination for writers of stories, each of whom is, to a degree, a god creating an imaginary world which is real to the characters within it and partly real to the reader who shares their experience, a notion central to L Ron Hubbard's story "Typewriter in the Sky" (November-December 1940 Unknown). This is not only the sort of question that troubles the protagonists of many novels by Philip K Dick, including *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* (1965). It has troubled writers since the dawn of Western civilization, including Plato, who wondered if what we perceive as reality is only the flickering shadows on a cave wall, reflections of a higher, more solid (or Platonic) reality that we cannot perceive with the senses. The idea that our world may, in fact, be only a virtual reality remains intensely popular in fiction and is central, for example, to the situation in which most of Jack Chalker's characters find themselves. Any virtual-reality world might be assumed to have a creator or programmer, a kind of god, so virtual-reality stories are often stories of god-like or demonic creators. One good example is Daniel F Galouye's '*Counterfeit World*' (1964; vt *Simulacron-3* 1964), filmed as '*Welt Am Draht*' (1973; vt *World on a Wire*), which contains a receding and potentially endless series of virtual realities. Other examples are listed under Pocket Universes www.encyclopedia.com (2018).

II. OBJECTIVES

1. To discuss the genre of the virtual reality fiction.
2. To understand the characteristics of the virtual reality fiction.
3. To analyze the noel 'Epic' by Conor Kostick.
4. To analyze the noel 'Epic' by Conor Kostick on the touchstone of virtual reality fiction.

III. HYPOTHESIS

The present paper 'Epic' by Conor Kostick: A Tale of Power Friction attempts to discuss the genre of the

virtual reality fiction along with its silent features. The novel is a specimen of the virtual reality fiction. The paper attempts to propose the features of the novel over the touchstone of virtual reality fiction.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The paper 'Epic' by Conor Kostick: A Tale of Power Friction attempts to discuss the genre of the virtual reality fiction. The paper has made the literature review over the the novel 'Epic' and other similar novels in genre as the primary resource. It has attempted to highlight the silent features of virtual reality fiction. A attempt to analyze 'Epic' on the touchstone of the virtual reality fiction has been made. MLA 9 style has been used for intext citation and referencing.

V. EPIC BY CONOR KOSTICK

Epic by Conor Kostick takes place on a world named New Earth and follows the life of a boy named Erik Haraldson and his involvement in a game called Epic. Epic is a virtual game which echoes '*World of Warcraft*' and '*EverQuest*', although interaction with this game directly affects income, social standing, and the careers of the people who play. Because of this relationship a growing separation of power occurs that mimics the real world, where those with money and power tend to keep it, and those without tend to stay impoverished (both in-game and in real life). In order to build up acclaim in the game, and thus in real life, poor players must work in-game for their entire lives in hopes of becoming powerful enough to take part in challenges set forth by the elite for prizes. With these prizes the citizens may live more comfortably in real life.

If a community wishes to redress a perceived injustice, they may challenge *Central Allocations* or C. A., which is a powerful, select group of nine individuals that controls all of the world's resources and funds the most powerful characters in the game world. All of the members of C. A. are wealthy and possess nearly unbeatable characters in the game. These are the individuals who set challenges which are held in special arenas where various players may attack each other - the last player alive is proclaimed the winner. If you win against the Central Allocations team, then you get what you want, be it a new law, a

medical procedure, or a material object. However, if you lose then everything your character owns (including items and money) is forfeited and that person must create a new in-game character. Since death in the game results in death of the character, challenges are a risky method of gaining prosperity, as the characters involved are usually trained for months to years of real life time www.wikipedia.org (2020).

With the world of videogames growing ever larger and spreading through so many different cultures and generations, it is no surprise that books written about videogames have begun to pop up in bookstores across the country. These books go beyond the instructional guides for video games or the picture books that show the game being played. These books are novels that center around a fully immersive videogame, its many rules, and the people who create and play them. Novels like this fall into the genre of LitRPG, which stands for Literary Role-Playing Game. For those not “hip” to the world of videogames or role-playing games what makes them unique to the rest of the games out there is the player’s ability to create their own character, called an avatar, and decided how they are going to look, act, and interact with the world around them. What categorizes LitRPG as a genre is the combination of narrative story, game or game-like challenges that form an essential part of that story, and implementation of visible RPG statistics like strength, intelligence, and damage. This genre is nothing new. LitRPG novels have been booming in the e-book world since the genre was given a proper name back in 2013, but Conor Kostick has been writing LitRPG for even longer Emily Mazzara (2021)

“Epic” is a futuristic sci-fi teen novel by Conor Kostick. It has plenty of action and suspense combined with a very original plot, making it guaranteed to stand out. Epic” is set far into the future when humans have colonized empty planets. The main character, Erik, lives in a world where violence is banned. Instead, court rulings and conflicts are decided by combat in the game of Epic, a MMORPG-style computer game www.flipfall.com (2020).

VI. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Erik finds a loophole that allows him to defeat a red dragon, making him one of the wealthiest players in the game; suddenly he is a threat to Central Allocations, a team of powerful players that are the world's de facto rulers, even though they do not fully understand the system they are manipulating. As the game becomes self-aware, there are whispers of a revolution among those who would use the game's technology for conversations and elections rather than endless fighting. Kostick manages to aim his allegory at two separate targets: the pointless wastefulness of a government too big to correct its course or even know its true nature, and, on a slightly more trivial note, the waste of time gamers spend in their online “second lives.” www.publishersweekly.com (2007)

Erik comes to recognise the inherent bias in the game which is skewed in favour of CA. His frustration with his recent crop of deaths in preparation for an exam, not to mention his father’s inexplicable reluctance to play the game and challenge the unfair outcome against his family, spurs him on to create an unconventional Epic character. It’s a minor character type full of swashbuckling style as opposed to the oft chosen major ones, i.e. Warrior, Mage, Hunter et al. And, on a whim, he spends all his initial points on a rather impractical attribute.

Thus starts Erik’s journey of discovery of the true and heretofore unsuspected sophistication of Epic. This places him and his friends on an inexorable path leading to a confrontation with CA that could have vast consequences with regards to their world’s balance of power.

Epic by Conor Kostick is a simple, clean, plot-centric novel that reads easily. It is reminiscent of another MMORPG type novel, Cline’s *Ready Player One*, though published a full seven years earlier. It certainly predates most of the current crop of subpar, dystopian stories and eschews the trivialities they tend to feature. Taking place further in the future and incorporating at times a measured pace Nirvan Jain (2015).

Those who get ahead in the game can gain supplies for their community or get better jobs; on the other hand if a combat is lost then the person has to start from scratch both in and out of the game. When his parents receive an unfair ruling by those in power,

Erik and his friends dare to stand up to the authorities in the game arena. But it soon becomes evident their group is up against a set of power-hungry people with plenty of resources who will stop at nothing to prevent them in their quest www.flipfall.com (2019).

VI. CONCLUSION

Broadly, a virtual reality can be defined as any secondary reality alternate to the character's world of real experience in which the character finds himself or herself, and with which he or she can interact. The purist might insist that such a world be machine-mediated. If it is not (or, less obviously, even if it is) then all sorts of questions of Metaphysics instantly intrude. How sure are we that our own world represents the "real" reality? *Epic* is a delightful adventure where the thoughtful ending even manages a slight level of poignancy. With the real-world stakes so high, the story tells how Erik and his friends get the justice they are seeking, and at what cost? Aimed at a young audience, it features a more traditional fantasy quest juxtaposed with 'real life' politics and offers a greater focus on the antagonists, where we come to appreciate some of their motivations and responses to a society on the cusp of economic disaster. Recommended to all readers, young and old, for a light, fun and adventurous diversion.

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