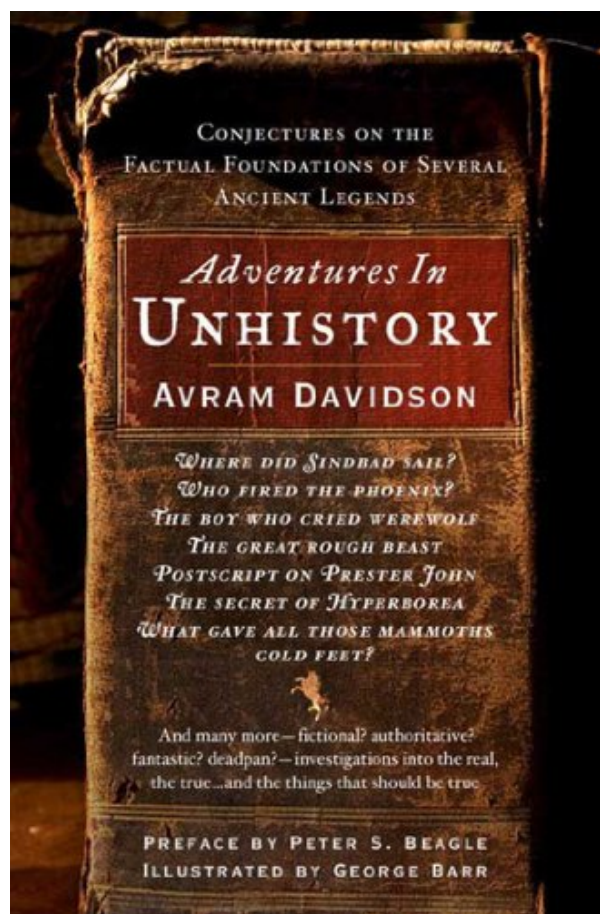
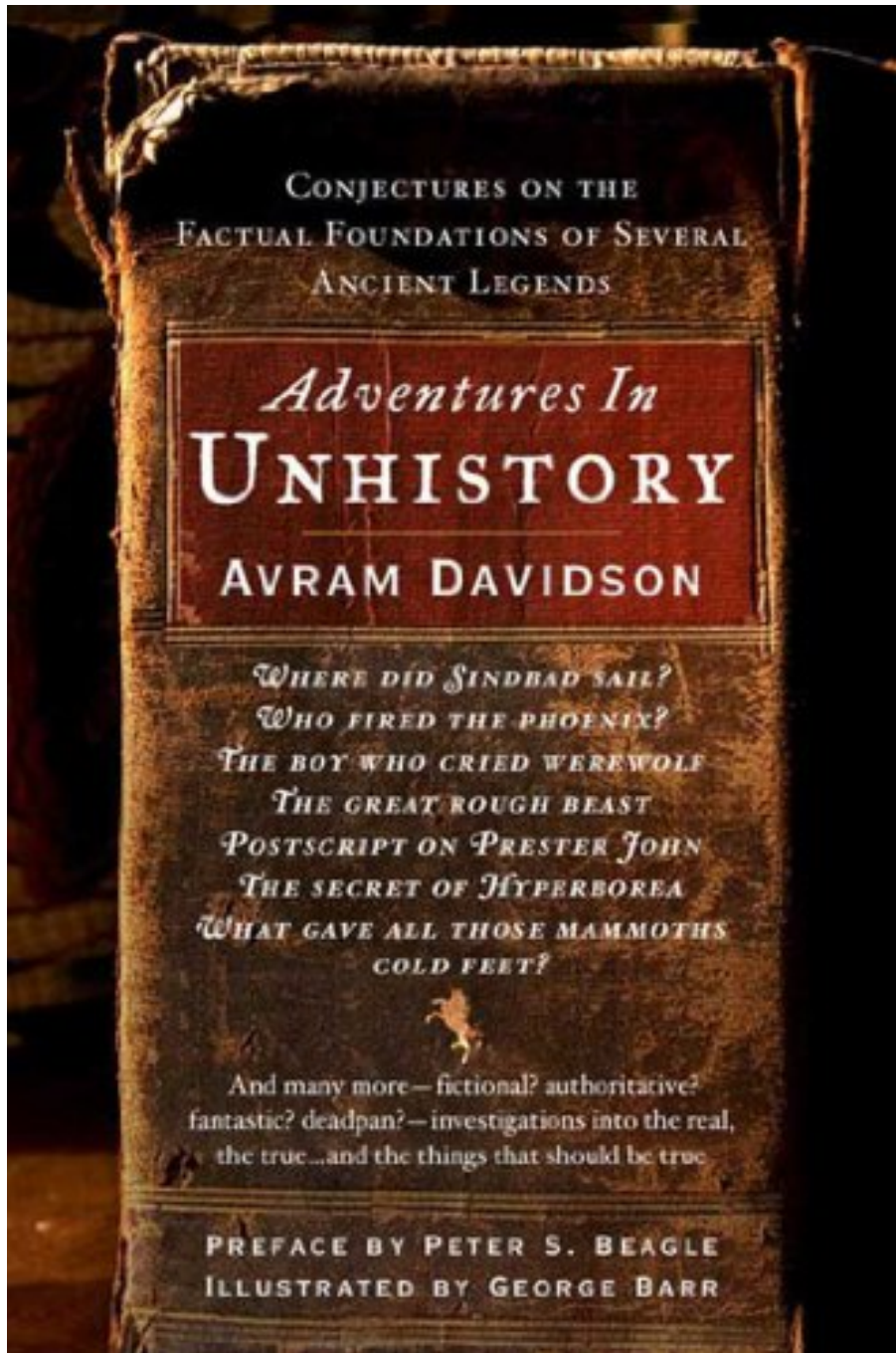


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CONJECTURES ON THE FACTUAL
FOUNDATIONS OF SEVERAL ANCIENT
LEGENDS BY AVRAM DAVIDSON**



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- * What Gave All Those Mammoths Cold Feet?

And many more--fictional? authoritative? fantastic? deadpan?--investigations into the real, the true...and the things that should be true

PREFACE BY PETER S. BEAGLE
ILLUSTRATED BY GEORGE BARR

"Although the wombat is real and the dragon is not, nobody knows what a wombat looks like and everyone knows what a dragon looks like."

Not a novel, not a book of short stories, *Adventures in Unhistory* is a book of the fantastic--a compendium of magisterial examinations of Mermaids, Mandrakes, and Mammoths; Dragons, Werewolves, and Unicorns; the Phoenix and the Roc; about places such as Sicily, Siberia, and the Moon; about heroic, sinister, and legendary persons such as Sindbad, and Aleister Crowley, and Prester John; and--revealed at last--the Secret of Hyperborea.

The facts are here, the foundations behind rumors, legends, and the imaginations of generations of tale-spinners. But far from being dry recitals, these meditations, or lectures, or deadpan prose performances are as lively, as crazily inventive, as witty as the best fiction of the author, a writer praised by Gardner Dozois as "one of the great short story writers of our times."

Who, on the subject of Dragons, could write coldly, dispassionately, guided only by logic? Certainly not Avram Davidson. Certain facts, these facts, deserve more than recitation; they deserve flourish, verve, gusto, style--the late, great Avram Davidson's unique voice. That prose which, in the words of Peter S. Beagle's Preface to this volume, "cries out to be read aloud."

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- Sales Rank: #868366 in eBooks
- Published on: 2006-11-28
- Released on: 2006-11-28
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Most helpful customer reviews

2 of 3 people found the following review helpful.

Outstanding Author; Great Book

By Amazon Customer

Avram Davidson is one of the greatest authors of 20th century American literature. Unfortunately, he chose eccentric and esoteric subject matter, and is largely unrecognized. This is another of his quirky, fascinating books. Davidson is very learned, and in this book pulls together a fascinating range of facts. His prose is delightful. It's a highly enjoyable voyage through some of the stranger backwaters of legend and mythology.

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful.

An Inquiry into the Roots of Avram Davidson's Work.

By Jim Palmer

It's a pity that Avram Davidson early on got pigeonholed as a writer of science fiction and fantasy, because this designation consigned his work to pulp magazines--thus ensuring that one of the most brilliant stylists of the 20th century (I'll put The Redward Edward Papers up against a legion of James Joyce knockoffs any day) would never, ever get either the attention or the respect he deserved. In this, his last book--and only book of nonfiction, so far as I know--Davidson sits back, lights his pipe, and starts wondering. He brings a lifetime of voracious and eclectic reading, his encyclopedic knowledge of the esoteric, to bear on the roots of old stories and the creatures that populate them. Whence the dragon, whence the mermaid, where did Sindbad actually go?

But not only is this book a glimpse into (maybe) the genuine origins of old myths, it's also a glimpse into Davidson's brain itself. This is what he wondered about, this is what interested him, this is what he was reading about. This is the stuff that inspired his own work--the raw material of his corpus of stories and novels. And this is how his mind worked, and what a mind it was. He was able to sift between the vast amounts of information in his head to marshal his arguments and assemble his theories, and to do so lucidly, cleverly, and chattily.

Some readers will be put off by the style of this last book, which may strike them as overly conversationally erudite bordering on the precious. Others will appreciate it immensely. And others, like myself, will sigh in regret that we never actually got to meet the man and hear him expounding on every topic under the sun in person. Luckily, though, "Adventures in Unhistory" gets us pretty close to that.

22 of 23 people found the following review helpful.

Finally, an affordable edition of this masterpiece!

By Xtopher Xtopher

I am so thrilled to see some of Avram Davidson's work coming back into print! I sincerely hope that this author finds new readers thanks to the work of publishers like this one keeping his work alive. I first stumbled upon a story of his in an anthology (from the '70's), and his story stood out as the most creative and intriguing piece in the book. Since then, I've sought out and found his stories in many anthologies dating from the 60's to his death in the early 90's, as well as several of his novels, and incredible story collections. Although he has written some masterful novels such as 'Phoenix and the Mirror', I prefer his style in the short form. He has a unique imagination and an encyclopedic knowledge of obscure history, world literature, & mythology, all on full display in this wonderful book.

This is a fascinating collection of essays and quasi-historical entries, assembled in a somewhat encyclopedic format, a reference book for bizarre literature. It chronicles the missing parts of history, the strange bits that should have happened. There are entries and essays about mysterious and fantastic creatures, mythical lands, bizarre pseudo-scientific discoveries, and other rather dubious information about a broad variety of obscure

subjects. I think this particular book reads a bit like the labyrinthine works of Borges if he had written while on hallucinogens... This book may have inspired the form of the recent 'Thackerey T. Lamshead pocket guide to ... diseases,' or at least I feel that these two books go together well. Davidson is an absolutely unique talent, but I think this book should appeal to fans of Jeff VanderMeer and the Leviathan anthologies, Kelly Link, Neil Gaiman (who has mentioned his admiration for Davidson), Jeffrey Ford, Gene Wolfe, & R. A. Lafferty (another slightly obscure writer whose oddball work I love).

I have been hoping for years for a publisher to re-print this book so I could round out my Davidson collection. 'Adventures in Unhistory' was originally released in 1993, only in a limited collector's edition, which has gone on to become this author's most sought-after work, selling for many hundreds of dollars when it rarely does exchange hands... It has obtained a some-what legendary status, particularly among other authors of speculative fiction who occasionally cite it as a reference or influence, or just let slip in interviews that they own a coveted copy. An essay from this book inspired the idea behind Vonda MacIntyre's novel 'The Sun and the Moon.' Peter Beagle (who introduces this edition) has listed this as a favorite book, and Neil Gaiman has mentioned it on his blog. The original publisher, Owlswick, published a companion volume, 'The Adventures of Dr. Eszterhazy,' which also first came out in a limited edition, as well as a cheaper HC edition, also illustrated by George Barr. I highly recommend seeking out this companion book as well, if you like this volume.

If this happens to be your first exposure to Davidson's work, and you want more (you will), or you are looking for a more general introduction to his writing, I highly recommend the 'Avram Davidson Treasury', which is a generous collection of stories from every period and genre which he worked in, including work from this volume, with appreciative essays by the greats of speculative (fantasy) fiction. That collection provides a great overview of his short work. I recommend these great story collections to any reader interested in imaginative fiction.

So, in case I wasn't clear: buy this book!

Also mentioned in this review, and worth seeking out:

'The Adventures of Dr. Eszterhazy' Avram Davidson, Owlswick press, HC

'The Avram Davidson Treasury' Grania Davis, Orb, PB

'Pheonix & the Mirror' novel, Avram Davidson

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