

THE SF CRITIC

Published by Andrew Porter, 24E82 St., NY 10028 in conjunction with Degler! #177. Hardcover and paperback books for review may be sent to the above address. 7 Apr 67

The Einstein Intersection, by Samuel R. Delany. Ace Books, 1967; 40¢

The Einstein Intersection is a curious book. It is a mixture of strong action-adventure and at the same time an immortal legend framed against the earth of the far future. It is a future in which humanity is gone, leaving mastery of the planet to a combination of mutants, evolutionary deadends, and highly evolved humanoids. It is a world in which dragons are herded across-country. It is a world existing over the Source-cave, a network of tunnels and caves, built by humanity some 30,000 years ago, which encircles the world of The Einstein Intersection.

This book is by a writer who has come to be characterized as a strong and powerful new writer. Having read all the past novels and stories by Delany, I think it safe to say that there is a pattern emerging.

Each novel that Samuel R. Delany writes begins a little further from the center, the total norm that man might be said to exist as now. Each novel, each story, takes us further into the essence of humanity that is transposed into more and more alien surroundings, more and more alien bodies. With each book we move deeper into the variants that, intellectually, can be said to be the descendants of humanity, and yet, physically, would be classed as hideous monsters today.

Another persistent theme is Delany's interest in music. The theme weaves through Empire Star, around Babel-17, into The Star Pit, and is very strong in Delany's The Fall Of The Towers trilogy. Small wonder that Lobey, hero of The Einstein Intersection, plays music through the hollow handle of his machete.

The book is powerful, and yet it is not well-written. I have read no other book in which the loose ends are neatly tied up by page 114, only to be unraveled again by the end of the book. And yet this seems to be the author's intention, for on page 125 he notes "endings to be useful must be inconclusive." Without the notes at the beginnings of each chapter, the book would lose much of its unity, much of its power. Yet with the notes, which seem to suggest and describe and, too, to crystalize each chapter, the book becomes much more than the sum of its parts.

It is very hard to state whether or not The Einstein Intersection is a good book or a bad one. Judged by plot and motivation, it is Delany's poorest to date. From the degree in which it illuminates the soul, the intellect of the reader, it seems to be one of the best books of this or any other year.

But from any viewpoint, The Einstein Intersection ranks as one of the more important science fiction books published this year. Buy it.

-- Andrew Porter

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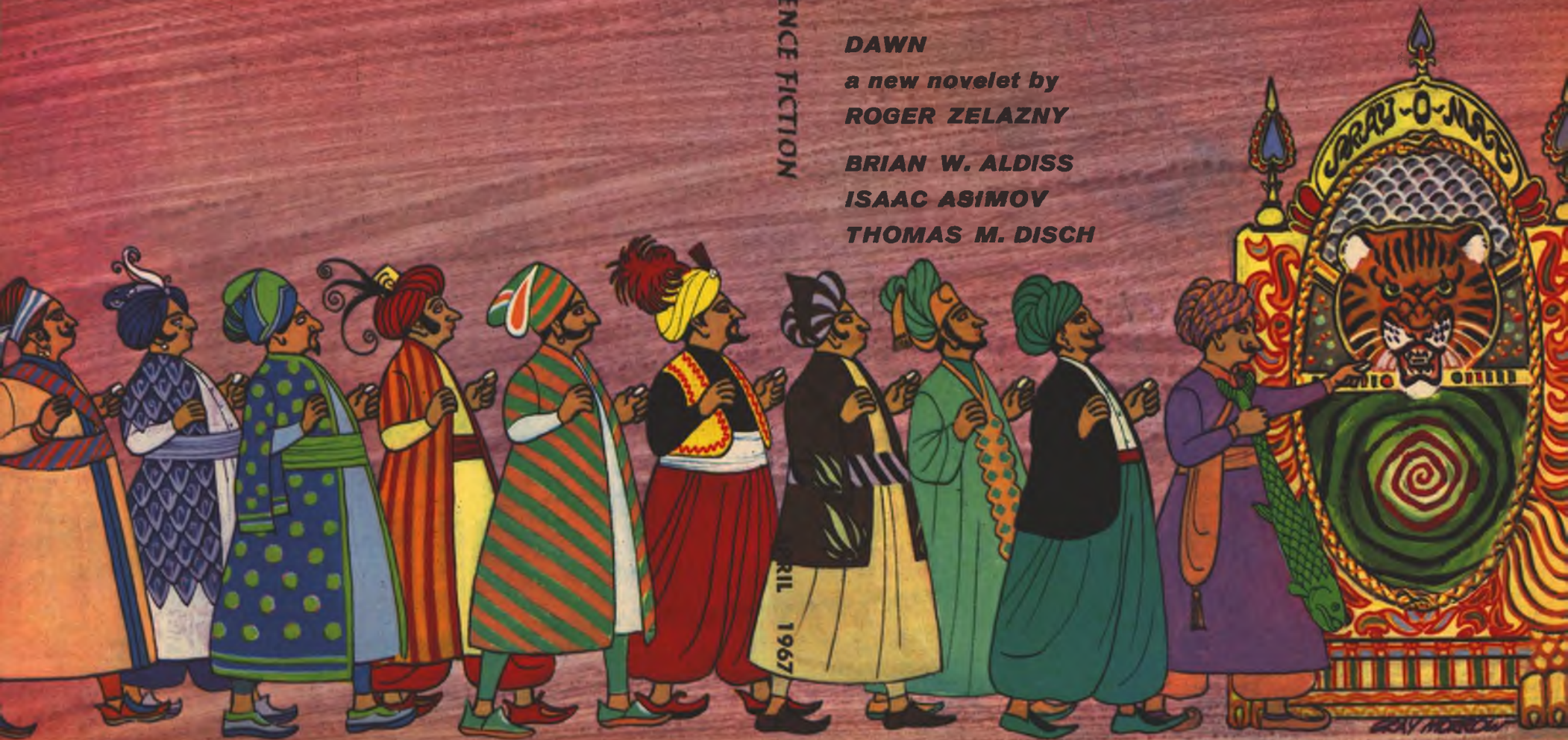
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