

# SF CRITIC

## NUMBER THREE

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World's Best Science Fiction:1967, edited by Donald A. Wollheim & Terry Carr. Ace Books, 1967; 75¢.

At the beginning of the 1950's, several more or less yearly collections of sf were published. All of these have fallen by the wayside, save for F&SF's yearly anthology, Judith Merrill's yearly accumulation, and a few other series. Now, Ace Books is filling the gap with a series collected from the english language sf magazines. This, the third in the World's Best series, is a worthy addition to the collector's library.

This volume features some of the top writers in the field. Bob Shaw, a new writer, Michael Moorcock and Roger Zelazny (in this volume twice) are a few of the writers represented. Philip K. Dick's "I Can Remember It For You Wholesale" is another of Dick's explorations into the nature of reality. As such, it is one of the cleverer stories in the collection, but it points up Dick's major fault: he has gotten stereotyped into this kind of story. What is reality? Are the walls of the real world really made of concrete, or are they merely balsa wood? Read a Philip K. Dick story and find out. Dick writes well--but he writes on one topic only.

"Light Of Other Days" by Bob Shaw is an ingenious and well-written story, using one of the first fresh ideas in sf in many months. Shaw has barely scratched the surface with this one story, and it is refreshing to know that there are others on the way.

"The Keys To December" and "For A Breath I Tarry," both novelettes, are both representative of Roger Zelazny, surely one of the best writers science fiction has ever produced. The two are easily worth the price of the book.

The many other stories in this volume just serve to point out that this is the best collection yet published this year. Wollheim and Carr have both done a great deal of painful reading and selecting, and this volume shows it.

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City Of Illusions, by Ursula K. LeGuin. Ace Books, 1967; 50¢.

This book seems at first to be another of the many cross-country trek books that Ace and other publishers have foisted on the public in the past year. The hero, a victim of induced amnesia, crosses the continent of North America to find himself and, indirectly, to become the hope of mankind. Too many times have I been disappointed by imitators of Jack Vance to look on this plot with anything but loathing. Yet the author, after some 85 pages of cross-country trekking, storms, wounds, thud and blundering, changes the course of the novel and succeeds in making an intriguing ending of it.

The second half of City Of Illusions takes place within the city of The Shing. Falk, the hero, develops from a cardboard figure into a three dimensional figure capable of acting for himself instead of being pushed into situations where he merely reacts like a Pavlovian dog.

From the commonest of beginnings, authoress LeGuin has created a fine, deeply developed book. The major fault lies in its plotting, which leaves much to be desired. The first half of the book has too much action, too little character development. This is over-balanced by the second half, with a paucity of action and too much cerebral development. The author's next book will, perhaps, be plotted more carefully. Positive action and character development are not incompatible.

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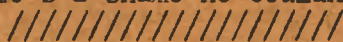
Echo Round His Bones, by Thomas M. Disch. Berkley Medallion Books, 1967; 60¢.

Thomas M. Disch is one of the "enfant terrible" writers of science fiction. He is alternatively despised and held up to be the great White Hope of science fiction.

Disch is neither to be despised nor held up to the light as a Savior. His latest book, originally published in the British magazine New Worlds, is based on the sole idea that, when people are teleported using "manmitters," they leave a living, breathing and thinking echo of themselves at the portal of entry, who is invisible and immaterial to our world. From this idea, Disch has managed to write a long, searching novel which could better have been told in under 5,000 words.

Disch's characters, being echoes of the real thing, have all the depth and motivation of cardboard. This is further complicated by the idea of echoes of echoes, plus an unlimited supply of echoes of originals. By mid-book, I had thoroughly lost contact with the hero who, it seems, is in two places at once, or maybe three. And by the end of the book, I really didn't care if the Earth was in danger of destruction from lethal H-bombs teleported from Mars.

Disch had an interesting idea; it's a shame he couldn't write a story using it.



The Jewels Of Elsewhen, by Ted White. Belmont Books, 1967; 50¢.

This offering is Ted White's best book to date. An alternate world story, it is based on the idea that Leonardo da Vinci, genius of the Renaissance, has discovered Jewels which he has used to create imaginary realities, projections of the ideas of "what if?..." Our hero and heroine find themselves catapulted into a New York of anomalies, of hollow shell-like buildings and no living things. From this world they tumble into a series of distorted realities, each based on a probable series of events. White smoothly develops his characters as real people, and the book climaxes neatly in the final pages, where the purpose and reason for the Jewels of Elsewhen is revealed. Leonardo da Vinci is expertly portrayed in a few well-chosen words, and the book ends with a scene that leaves nothing to be desired. A finely designed, attractive cover which has, unfortunately, little to do with the interior caps this book, one of the best to come from Belmont in many months.



IN BRIEF:

To Outrun Doomsday, by Kenneth Bulmer. Ace Books, 1967; 50¢.

Our hero succeeds in making good despite himself. The Freas cover is the only good thing about the book. Miss this one.



Cities Of Wonder, edited by Damon Knight. MacFadden Books, 1967; 75¢.

A collection of stories of cities of the future, including "Dumb Waiter," "Billenium," and "By The Waters Of Babylon." A fascinating collection of what might have been, what may be, and what must be avoided, collected and introduced by one of science fiction's more astute anthologists.



The Genetic General, by Gordon R. Dickson. Ace Books, 1967; 40¢.

One of sf's better military space operas, hopelessly ruined by dozens of typographical errors.



RECEIVED AND NOTED:

Miners In The Sky, by Murray Leinster. Avon Books, 1967; 50¢.

The Productions Of Time, by John Brunner. Signet Books, 1967; 60¢.

The Ant Men, by Eric North. MacFadden Books, 1967; 60¢.

The Food Of The Gods, by H. G. Wells. Berkley Highland Books, 1967; 60¢.

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