

THE CASE OF CHARLES DEXTER WARD by H. P. Lovecraft (Beagle 95123, 95¢) When Lovecraft wrote at length, as herein or in AT THE MOUNTAINS OF MADNESS, his technique was to increase the density of the work by addition of historical detail. CDW is an historical short story within a short novel, plus more peripheral detail than you could possibly desire. The work is not unified but chapter five, the concluding section, seems to me to be one of the most effective pieces of writing that Lovecraft produced. The whole is worth reading in spite of its obvious failings. I never could get up any interest in poor young doomed Charles, though. It is almost a novel without characterization. (Dave Hartwell)

ANDROID AT ARMS by Andre Norton (Harcourt Brace Jovanovitch, 1971, 253pp., \$5.75) This begins as one of Norton's most imaginative novels. A storm destroys the power source of a lonely tower on a desolate planet, and its inhabitants awake. Each is a person of importance on his or her own planet, and the last each remembers is preparing for an event of crucial political importance. Who kidnapped them? Where are they? How long have they been gone? - for they have been in stasis for decades or longer. What has happened in their absence, and can they return to their rightful positions? The story follows young Andas, crown prince of Inyanga, a planet of African colonization. He discovers himself - or an android double - on his planet's throne. At this point, halfway through the book, Andas and one of his companions stumble through a dimensional gateway into an alternate universe in which Inyanga is being destroyed by civil war. Andas takes command of the good side to lead his people to victory against the scientific devices of the evil Lady Kidaya, and the story closes with the promise of his reigning happily ever after among his new people. The reader is left to wonder what was the purpose of the first 139 pages of the novel, which have virtually no connection with what is actually a new story beginning at that point. It looks unpleasantly as though the author set herself more questions and a more complex plot than she was able to handle and that, finally realising this, she abruptly abandoned the whole story for a much simpler and safer SF variant of Prince Charming vs. the Wicked Witch. The result is an extremely unsatisfying conclusion to what had the potential to be an excellent story. (Fred Patten)

THE ELEVENTH COMMANDMENT by Lester del Rey (Ballantine 02068, 95¢) Lester del Rey argues cogently and at length in favor of the unpopular idea that we ought to overpopulate the earth in order to preserve the vitality of humanity. This book was totally ignored when it came out in 1962 and we should not let that happen this time around. It's a serious extrapolation of a future society, well-written and highly intelligent. The overpopulated earth is contrasted to the Madarin scientism of the human colonies on Mars, become vaguely effete and quite inhumane. del Rey takes the hard way, that of describing earth as massively overcrowded yet still preferable. Don't miss it. (Dave Hartwell)

BEST SF: 1969 edited by Harry Harrison and Brian Aldiss (Berkley N1982, 95¢) This is the finest anthology of the series. It is arguable, as always, whether the stories that Harrison and Aldiss have selected are really the best, or among the best, of 1969, but I think they've come closer this time than ever before. Outstanding stories by J.G. Ballard (a conventionally plotted story, not an exercise in heavy imagery and esoteric symbology), James Tiptree, Jr., Anthony Burgess, P.G. Wodehouse, Jon Hartridge, Bruce McAllister and co-editor Aldiss, plus LeGuin's "Nine Lives" (which I find wanting but nearly everybody else seems to think is great). A few clinkers, notably a piece of hollow piffle from Playboy by Ken Purdy, and a couple of disappointing stories (one by Philip K. Dick which is, astonishingly, predictable, something Dick almost never is). On the whole, though, a fine best-of-the-year anthology, substantially superior to its predecessors. (Ted Pauls)

102 H BOMBS by Thomas M. Disch (Berkley S2044, 160pp., 75¢) The new Tom Disch short story collection is actually a collection of early SF stories first published as a book in England in 1966. Though it is a fine collection, it isn't quite up to the quality of his more recent FUN WITH YOUR NEW HEAD. Nor is it nearly so unconventional as SF, so those of you who are put off by Disch's more advanced stuff might find this a convenient introduction to his work. And you can't afford to ignore a writer of such obvious and immense talent. (Dave Hartwell)