

100les it out——wild.

It would be unfair and misleading if I were to tell you the plot. The story is less the point of the book than how Smith tells the story. Unfortunately, I cannot quote enough of it to do it justice. I will settle for this: it is hilariously funny, yet escapes being farce; it is edge-of-the-seat exciting, yet so beautifully drawn and dramatic that it escapes the usual shoot-em-up nonsense; and it is crammed with delicious details and twists, none of which are irrelevant, yet it has none of the pretentiousness of the artsy-craftsy set. In short, it is a fine novel.

I must add that Smith's ability with dialogue may be unsurpassed in the field. And, also, that John Schoenherr's cover does one level of the novel complete justice.

E.C. Tubb's fifth Dumerest novel is a lesser delight—put a delight, anyway. Dumerest left Earth as a boy on a starship that traded with the now-legendary planet. He decided to return, but now no one believes there ever was an Earth nor can anyone tell him how to find it. So he wanders. His universe is a quaint mixture of far future and Medieval ways, filled with intriguing robber barons and Machiavellian princesses; with adventure-laden worlds of natural dangers and barbarian menace. But Dumerest is the equal of it all. A hard-boiled pragmatist, straight out of the wild west, only lacking the oppressive righteousness, and with empathy for others.

There is vastness to Tubb's universe. There is the gut-knowledge that it is there and even Dumerest could be swallowed up in it. His worlds are tangible to the mind's eye. His pain hurts. His loneliness moves. There is a complexity to hero and villain lacking in most space opera. Tubb likes his villains. Their villainy has a reason for being. There is a subtlety, an unpredictability underlying The Jester at Scar.

Dumerest is prospecting for gold spores on a fungi-dominated world. He becomes a pawn in a regal game of marital blitz between the Lord of the planet Jest and the barbarian princess who plots his assassination. The plot is a bit attenuated by sub-plotting, but the whole is worth sinking your teeth into.

An interesting side dish is John Rackham, an Englishman who works in a boiler factory where he cooks up plots about alien worlds. His last, The Treasure of Tau Ceti was a considerable improvement over his early books and The Anything Tree (with a superb cover by John Schoenherr) is an improvement over that. The plot is so-so. It is Rackham's ecology that is fascinating. He has an oddly cold style, but his characters are warm-blooded and real. He also has a tin-ear for dialogue, but his overall competence is so impressive that his faults do not matter.

(I might add that Rackham, whether he knows it or not, is a feminist. No, I do not mean "effeminate". Read him and see what I mean.

A lesser—far, far lesser—morsel is Walt and Leigh Richmond's Ace Double Gallagher's Glacier and Positive Charge. Strictly for ANALOG—at-its-very-worst fans.

The same may also be said for David Grinnell's To Venus! To Venus! with a slight apology. This is the story of a handful of Astronauts who try to beat the Russians to Venus and find themselves stranded. Its use of new Venusian data mitigates its faults. Grinnell impresses me as competently awful-rotten.

Under no circumstances could I recommend Lin Carter's Tower of Medusa. It is a book not even a mother could love. The blurb itself is unreadable.

And, finally, we reach the depths of Marion Zimmer Bradley's The Winds of Darkover, for which I have no words, so I will let the wench speak for herself:

The stars were mirrored on the shore,
Dark was the dark enchanted moor,
Silent as cloud or wave or stone,
Robardin's daughter walked alone.
A web of gold between her hands.
On shining spindle burning bright,
Deserted lay the mortal lands
When Hastur left the realms of light.
Then, singing like a hidden bird...



POSTMARKED THE STARS by Andre Norton—Harcourt, Brace & World
1969, \$4.50 Reviewed by Fred Patten

If the "Solar Queen" is one of the Galaxy's more fortunate Free Traders, I pity the crews of the others. Dane Thorson's life seems to be a study in apc wrecks and/or forced landings, long marches over miserable terrain, and battles with hideous unknown monsters or drug-crazed criminals. After four books this is beginning to run a bit too much towards formula even for me, and I don't care if the miserable terrain is snowbound tundra this time instead of tropical jungle or radiation-mutated venomous forests or arid badlands.

Postmarked the Stars takes up the story of the "Queen"'s exile to an outworld mail run, where they'd ended up in Plague Ship. (Voodoo Planet was an interlude on their way to the mail run.) No sooner do they set up for their first run than Dane is waylaid and drugged, his place is taken by a double who's found dead in his bunk, the animals in the agricultural shipment begin mutating strangely (and their mail contract demands delivery in perfect unchanged condition, of course), and our friends discover that they are unsuspecting pawns of a powerful criminal organization trying to gain control of a frontier planet.

From here on it's the usual struggle to stay out of jail and clear the "Queen"'s name despite everything that the law, the criminals, nature, and monsters can throw at them. It's a good book if you haven't read all the others in the series, or if you're an Andre Norton fan, or if you just want some light, fast action reading... though in the latter case you're not going to want to pay \$4.50 for a hardcover for your permanent library. Ace will get around to a paperback edition in a year or so.

