

ilarious, despairing, more than three-quarters crazy, brilliant, fascinating, adorable. What a blessing it is to have him!

EXPLORING CORDWAINER SMITH
Edited by Andrew Porter. 36pp. \$2.50.
1975. ALGOL Press (P.O. Box 4175,
New York NY 10017)

Still more small press publishing, this time issued by the present magazine. The typography and general production quality of this little book are most attractive, making up (at least in part) for the relatively high price associated with short-run publications.

Cordwainer Smith—Paul Linebarger—was one of science fiction's mystery men for some time; his real identity was, I believe, revealed a good while before his death, and with the appearance of definitive editions of his works, interest in this unusual man is on the wax.

This is the man whose book *The Political Doctrines of Sun Yat Sen* was published in 1937—having been based not on dusty academic researches but upon Linebarger's long and close association with Sun. He is also the man whose one major science fiction novel was chopped and battered, appeared in

two fragmentary versions in the 1960s, and has been issued in its full and definitive form only this year as *Norstrilia* (Ballantine Books).

Although *Exploring Cordwainer Smith* is a slim volume it contains an amazingly rich lode of vital material—a graceful reminiscence by Linebarger's old friend Arthur Burns (not the economist), a literary appreciation by John Foyster, a very different one by Sandra Miesel, a concordance-chronology of Smith's works by Alice K. Turner and a good bibliography by J.J. Pierce.

Cordwainer Smith's production of science fiction was too limited and his appeal too special for him to be regarded as an author of first-line importance or influence. (This is not to say that he was not one of first-line quality.) I think that he was good enough, however, and quirkily distinctive enough to gain a place as a "major minor author."

Exploring Cordwainer Smith is a good introduction to him, and will be a valuable adjunct to his own works. ●

FORERUNNER FORAY by Andre Norton. 286pp. \$1.50. SBN 441-24620-150. 1975. Ace Books. (Original edition: Viking, 1973)

Andre Norton is of course one of our most prolific and most popular authors. She's been writing for decades, has over forty books to her credit with (according to Ace's blurb) millions of copies in print. And her popularity is not just that of the trashmonger among the trash-lovers. She is well reviewed in the right journals, accepted by librarians, regarded as a "good author" as well as a popular one. No Perry Rhodan stuff.

Folks, I just don't understand this. I read several of her books some years ago, and failed to detect the charm, and friends told me that I had read the wrong Nortons—I ought to try this or that other title, then I would understand the wonder and the fascination of Norton.

Folks, have I picked the wrong book again?

Forerunner Foray has a fascinating idea to it, and is a very interesting book structurally. It is set—initially—in a typically space-operatic future universe where some sort of large-scale interstellar spying, commercial rivalry, and at least cold warring are going on. There's a good deal of psi-ing going on as well, and our heroine, Ziantha, is an esper. Among her varied wild talents is



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psychometry—the ability to read the past surroundings of an object from the object itself.

Ziantha is sent to steal some sensitive items, stumbles upon an ancient gem and falls into a sort of super-psycho-metric trance in which she lives the life of an ancient owner of the gem. It takes Norton about 100 pages to get through this framing sequence, following which a sort of sword-and-sorcery adventure occupies the rest of the book (or nearly so).

I might quarrel with the excessive length of the framing device or lead-in to the main adventure, but that isn't my major concern. My major concern is that the book is so badly written. I don't mean that it is florid or overwritten or excessively "lit'ry" as some such books, particularly the works of Edgar Rice Burroughs, are accused of being.

It's badly written in that it's *flat*. The writing is plain dull and uninteresting. It early becomes an effort to keep reading. And the writing is murky—it's hard to figure out what the

hell is going on most of the time, and I don't think that this is artifice on Norton's part (although it might be, I will concede). I think it is simply an inability to visualize a scene, develop a concept of a situation, and express this clearly to the reader.

Further, the characters suffer from a classic pulp weakness that has been pointed out by James Blish (not necessarily in regard to this author). They appear onstage and speak their lines and perform the actions that they are assigned by the script, but I have no sense of their living at all. If not two-dimensional they are at least hollow.

I don't know anything about Ziantha's girlhood, what her parents and home were like, whether she had brothers and sisters, what kind of person she is, what her interests and desires are, what are her favorite flavor of ice cream, position for fucking, color dress, spectator or participant sport, etc., etc., etc. . . all of the things that make up a complete personality.

She's a cipher—and she's the

best-developed character in the book.

I think this is a weak book, not badly conceived but feebly executed, utterly lacking in vivid character or setting or action. And with the exception of one or two scenes in the first of the Witch World books, this reaction is typical of my response to Andre Norton's books.

But I will certainly concede the possibility that I am missing something here; therefore I am being neither sarcastic nor rhetorical, but sincerely ask, Will somebody out there who understands that great charm and popularity of Andre Norton's books please explain this to me? ●■

EN HOMMAGE AUX ARAIGNEES by Esther Rochon. 127pp. \$2.50. ISBN 0-7752-0052-2. 1974. Les Editions De L'Actuelle, 955 Amherst Street, Montreal, PQ, Canada H2L 3K4. In French.

This first novel by Montreal resident Esther Rochon is set in the fantasy world of the Vrenalik Archipelago, in the crumbling, once

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