

deal-with-the-Devil yarn, "Gonna Roll the Bones." (As this is written, I'm waiting to hear what the 1971 winners were. There'll be a note about them soon.)

I have not mentioned the reason why you want to read these stories in this book, rather than in the other anthologies where you may already have seen most of them. Isaac Asimov has written a highly personalized introduction for each story—about the author, not the story. He gets across a lot of the friendly calumny that makes the Good Doctor a toastmaster par excellence for any SF gathering. There are others who shake his monopoly a bit, but Tony Boucher is gone, Robert Bloch stays on the west coast, and I've only just heard about E.C. Tubb on the international scene.

Be a public-spirited citizen. Blackmail your local public library into getting the book instead of replacing two worn-out copies of "The Love Machine." Then borrow it.

ABYSS

By Kate Wilhelm • Doubleday & Co., Garden City, N.Y. • 1971 • 158 pp. • \$4.95

This title incorporates two curiously unsatisfying novellas or short novels, "The Plastic Abyss" and "Stranger in the House," of which the second is the more conventional, but somehow more believable.

"The Plastic Abyss" explores a hypothesis of the structure of time,

in which past, present and future are all coexistent and an individual psyche can be in two places at once. This is, in fact, precisely what begins to happen to the story's heroine, Dorothy Hazlett. My complaint may be the conservative one that Miss Wilhelm doesn't explore the mechanism of what is happening deeply enough, but I suppose her point is that the mechanism is of no concern at all to the people to whom this is happening—and what she does explore is what happens to them in human terms.

The "Stranger in the House" is an alien which has long ago built himself a haven deep under an old house in the country. He is telepathic, but not in the neat and orderly way of conventional human/alien communication stories. The effect of his attempts to mesh minds is invariably traumatic . . . but at last he is sent a mind strong enough to make contact. It's far more conventional than "The Plastic Abyss," and I suppose the characters are less well developed, but somehow it's more believable. I'm just an old reactionary, I guess.

ANDROID AT ARMS

By Andre Norton • Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, New York • 1971 • 253 pp. • \$5.75

In this latest of Andre Norton's juvenile science-fiction books she is launching a new series which promises to be a good one. As usual, the time is the far future, when mankind has scattered among the stars and

evolved many inbred and exotic societies in the isolation of a shattered galactic empire. There, too, men come across the relics of the powerful, unknown races that evolved and disappeared long before humanity's turn came.

As this story begins, Prince Andas Kastor, heir to the throne of Inyanga, comes to himself in a cell on a distant planet, with a lapse of years, or decades, in his memory. He finds that his prison contains others like himself—key figures in galactic politics, who seem to have been spirited away at critical moments and put in cold storage by persons or beings unknown, for motives equally mysterious.

Andas and the feline alien, Yol-yos, do find a way back to Inyanga, only to land up to their necks in even deeper and more disturbing mysteries involving parallel universes and beings who may be able to implant human psyches in synthetic bodies. Is "our" Andas—the Andas we are following—the original, or an android?

Intricate . . . colorful . . . full of deliberately unanswered riddles to tease and entrance the reader . . . this is Andre Norton better than she has been for some time.

GRAY MATTERS

By William Hjortsberg • Simon and Schuster, New York • 1971 • 160 pp. • \$4.95

I may be misjudging the author of this little book, but I have the im-

pression that he thinks he has discovered a highly original idea: that human brains can live, and be preserved, and go on living a kind of mental life apart from their bodies. Shades of "Donovan's Brain" and how many more?

With that complaint out of the way, I can say that he uses his idea well, but within the framework of mainstream—modern mainstream—fiction rather than science fiction. The rationale is sketched in rather than built up: a solution to the population explosion, in which humanity's brains are put into live storage, connected up to a computer, and educated along lines which have their inspiration in oriental mysticism rather than western science. There is an interesting concomitant, in that the seeming savages outside the brainbins are actually final-stage brains, restored to bodies.

Interwoven with this are the threads of two stories: a suitably sex-oriented affair between the fifteen-year-old boy who was the project's first successful experiment and a superannuated central European actress—carried out, of course, in their mutual electronically induced fantasy worlds—and the attempt of a maverick (originally black, of course) to "escape" and embody himself.

I said it was well done, and it is. I just wish that the author had had a little more experience with the "stereotypes" of science fiction. I think he'd have written a better book.