



## young adult

**NO NIGHT WITHOUT STARS** by Andre Norton  
 New York: Atheneum/A Margaret K. McElderry  
 Book, 1975, \$6.95, 246 pp.  
 ISBN: 0-689-50033-5 LC: 75-6948

Norton provides a highly readable variant on one of her most popular themes in *No Night without Stars*. In a devastated, primitive world of the future, two teen-aged wanderers come together. Sander was an apprentice smith in a nomadic plains tribe until his father's death, whereupon his uncle was named to the post of Master Metalsmith Sander had expected to inherit. Too proud to accept this, Sander leaves on a quest to seek the lost knowledge of the Before People in working metals. Along the coast he meets Fanyi, a young Shaman of a fishing village which has just been destroyed by slavers. The two band together for mutual support as they search for a ruined city of the ancients, where Sander hopes to find the secret of the lost metals and Fanyi seeks a means for vengeance against those who killed her people.

The two journey from one menace to another. Towering ruins threaten to engulf them in crumbling masonry. Giant mutated monsters hunt them. Monkeylike creatures seek to sacrifice them to a hideous being. Suspicious tribes attempt to bar their way. Norton unifies these mini-adventures, showing how each event modifies the youths' aloof attitudes and brings them closer to a real partnership. This tempering proves its value when they finally reach their goal

and find it under the psionic control of an artificial (cyborg?) brain determined to enslave or kill them. The talents of both are needed to defeat it.

Sander and Fanyi are both believable characters, as are their likeable animal companions: Sander's Rhin, a giant "koyot" that serves as both a mount and guard dog, and Fanyi's two large otter-like fishers, Kai and Kayi, the group's scouts. The setting (presumably North America, though it could as easily be Europe) is colorful and intriguing. The situations are exciting, leading to a suspenseful climax. *No Night without Stars* is more tightly written than many of Norton's recent novels, and it is a pleasure to see her return to the quality that won her her early reputation as the most popular author (except possibly Robert Heinlein) of young adult sf.

This novel is in many respects an updating of Norton's first-published sf, *Star Man's Son* (1952). That also featured a teen-aged outcast with a giant pet-companion, making their way through a ruined future world filled with monsters. There the animal was a puma-sized Siamese cat, and the boy had no human partner. The briskly efficient Fanyi adds a modern touch of feminine equality to the plot for 1975. In the earlier novel the disaster that had annihilated civilization was specified as an atomic war—a reasonable prediction for the Cold War-crazed early '50s—with radioactive mutations responsible for the monstrous changes. In *No Night without Stars* the disaster is not attributed to any known source, though there are hints at a natural catastrophe triggered by man's foolish upsetting of the Earth's ecological balance—a more trendy rationale for the ecology-conscious mid-'70s.

Any library that has *Star Man's Son* (still in print from Harcourt Brace) may not really need *No Night without Stars*, but both versions of the story are good reading and there are enough differences between them that Norton's many fans will probably demand both. Certainly no library should be without one or the other.

Frederick Patten

## children

**THE HEAVENLY HOST** by Isaac Asimov. Illustrated by Bernard Colonna  
New York: Walker, 1975, \$5.95, 80 pp. Ages: 7-10  
ISBN: 0-8027-6226-3 LC: 75-16515

Traveling with his mother, a "planetary inspector," young Jonathan Derodin passes up a chance to go to Earth for the Christmas season to be with her as she lands on Anderson Two, a planet with a small but growing human settlement. Inspector Derodin has come to sign the papers which will certify the planet as a Human World. As she is tied up in conferences and meetings with the planet's officials, Jonathan wanders away from Base and into the barren, rocky perimeter.

When Jonathan meets one of the native creatures (known to humans as the "Wheels"), a youngster named Yelger, they discover that they can communicate telepathically. The settlers on Anderson Two are not aware that the Wheels are intelligent creatures,

and there is an active campaign to destroy them - spearheaded by Councilman Caradoc, as one-dimensional a villain as you could ever hope to meet. It seems that only children can communicate with the Wheels, but since they are not allowed to wander away from Base, there is no way for the settlers to have learned about the Wheels' intelligence.

The rest of the story is concerned with Jonathan's efforts to prove that the Wheels are intelligent, before his mother mistakenly signs the papers giving humans claim to the planet on Christmas Day.

A shorter version of this story was published in *Boy's Life* (December, 1974), but it's much too slender an effort for preservation in hardcovers. While the aliens are interesting and appealing, the plot is such a shallow and contrived thing that I doubt any but the very youngest of readers will find it at all convincing.

There are several nice ideas embodied in the plot - the importance of communication, respect for living creatures (intelligent or not), the search for truth and justice - but all are recognized without much struggle, so do not really spur the young reader to think deeply about their worth. The plot is flabby, lacking tension and discipline, and the sentimental conclusion has all the sweet and sticky properties of a piece of Christmas candy.

Because of the Asimov name, this book will probably rack up a good number of library sales. But there are better science fiction and Christmas stories around, and this weak combination of the two is not satisfactory enough to make it a useful addition to either genre.

Richard Delap

## NON-FICTION

**PHILIP K. DICK: ELECTRIC SHEPHERD** edited by Bruce Gillespie  
Melbourne, Australia: Norstrilia Press, \* 1975, \$6.00, 106 pp. ISBN: 0-909106-00-2

Subtitled "The Best of SF Commentary, Number 1," this paperbound collection of articles from Australia's leading sf fanzine is a labor of much love and care, a tribute to one of science fiction's most unique writers. It is beautifully printed, admirably objective, and hideously overpriced. And there is about it the same self-contradictory ambience of many of Dick's own novels.

Much of the book is taken up with essays by SFC editor Bruce Gillespie, who gnaws determinedly at the thematic bones of Dick's novels. Gillespie is a competent enough critic, but a terribly wordy one at times, waffling endlessly, spouting qualifying phrases like a

Presidential press secretary. In the end it all seems to come down to one basic dichotomy: How can an author capable of such classics as *The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch* also be responsible for such turkeys as *The Ganymede Takeover*? (Gillespie's opinion, not mine; I've read neither book.)

Gillespie never quite comes convincingly to terms with this. He trucks in another critic, George Turner, who is considerably more lucid and readable, but whose contributions are limited mostly to letters of comment on Gillespie's essays - lending to the entire discussion a fannish, in-group tone that detracts from the image of Serious Criticism they are trying to project.

Nor does Dick himself resolve very much, for his contributions herein - a long, personal, moving letter, and a reprinted speech titled "The Android and the Human" - merely support this image of brilliance existing side-by-side with vacuity.

On the one hand, here is a man who, in a few keen, effortless strokes, can offer telling insights into the mind of a drug addict. And, on the other, here is a

\*Norstrilia Press: c/o Delap's F & SF Review [U.S. agent], 11863 West Jefferson Blvd., Culver City, Ca. 90230