

**MARUNE: ALASTOR 933** by Jack Vance  
New York: Ballantine, 1975, \$1.50, 169 pp.  
SBN: 345-24518-0

Jack Vance is an author who writes both science fiction and mysteries, and this novel is a good blend of both genres. A young man is found in a dazed condition at the spaceport of Bruse-Tansel, a world of the 3,000-planet Alastor Cluster. He has total amnesia, his mind has been wiped clean. Under medical care he is rehabilitated and sets out to discover who he is and why his memory was destroyed.

Social statisticians identify his physical type as that of the Rhunish inhabitants of Marune, a dour, aloof, clannish race of Alastor's 933rd world. He travels to Marune and learns he is indeed a Rhune, specifically the Kang Efram, heir to the minor but ancient realm of Scharrode, whose father has just died under suspicious circumstances. Efram's return is obviously disconcerting to several different factions within his family, not to mention the other nobility of Scharrode or to neighboring rulers who are about to take advantage of its problems. Who is responsible for the attack upon him? Which of the fawning courtiers, the hearty friends, or the ambitious cousins can he trust? Efram spends the rest of the novel reestablishing Scharrode to a position of strength, dismantling petty and not-so-petty intrigues against himself, and pensively staring out windows as he considers clues to eliminate the various suspects.

The real attraction of **Marune: Alastor 933**, as Vance's many fans will have guessed, is less in the story than in its setting. Vance's specialty is unusual and colorful cultures, and that of the Rhune of Marune is a fine example. Their clothing, their familial relationships, their government, their pastimes, their sexual mores, their diurnal habits (with four suns, Marune has a much more complicated schedule than simple day and night)—all are woven into the story to enchant the reader with a fairyland of exotic yet convincing originality. This cultural uniqueness also has a definite bearing upon the crime puzzler which is the plot. Vance plays fair with the reader up to the denouement, when Efram unexpectedly has his memory restored and all the remaining questions are answered at once. This is rather disappointing, since he seemed on the verge of solving the mystery by pure ratiocination, which is more fun for the reader.

**Marune: Alastor 933** also exhibits Vance's chief fault, lack of characterization. All are cerebral, cold, emotionless, consciously dignified, striking poses and attitudes, more like puppets than real people. The fact that Efram recognizes this and muses upon the artificiality of Rhunish etiquette does not make him or them any more human. The novel is thereby enjoyable on an intellectual basis only—it is difficult to *care* for any of the characters. In this respect Jack Vance shares some of the attributes of Philo Vance, and the novel could be termed simply a drawing-room murder mystery in a Graustarkian setting.

Still, a well-handled mystery is a treat and the construction of a convincingly "alien" human culture is no mean trick. If Vance offers little here that is original, he has at least produced an enjoyable example of the kind of sf that his fans expect from him.

—Frederick Patten

**THE BOOK OF ANDRE NORTON** by Andre Norton  
New York: DAW, 1975, \$1.25, 220 pp.  
SBN: 451-UY1198

No library is complete without at least a sampling of Andre Norton's sf juveniles. Indeed, not even Robert A. Heinlein has been as prolific in this specialized literary form. It was not surprising, therefore, to see an anthology of Norton's work published, especially since anthologies of the works of individual writers seem fashionable (and profitable) these days.

"The Toads of Grimmerdale" is somewhat more adult than most of her stories, dealing with an unmarried heroine who is pregnant as the result of rape. Cast out of the family castle by her brother for bringing disgrace upon the family name, she goes to the "toads" of Grimmerdale, asking for vengeance. The wrap-up is a love story appropriate for *Seventeen* magazine. A curious moment is provided when Hertha, the heroine, refuses to have an abortion but visits the shrine of the goddess Gunnora, to assure that the child will be hers alone, receiving nothing by way of physical heritage from the rapist-father. Overlooking the obvious fallacy—it's a little late to change genes at this stage—it seems an odd and rather pointless aspect.

"London Bridge" is a post-disaster story of young people living underground. Children are vanishing and it's up to one of the boys to find them and solve the riddle of the vanishing Pied Piper who teleported them away.

"On Writing Fantasy" is a special treat for Norton fans, an essay that appeared originally in a fanzine. "Mousetrap" and "All Cats are Gray" are both science fiction rather than fantasy, presenting puzzles to be solved within the context of the science fiction setting. "The Long Night of Waiting" is a story of disappearances, a la Charles Fort.

"The Gifts of Asti" uses its fantasy elements as an excuse for a silly romance, while "Long Live Lord Kor!" is a standard sort of Norton offering, with a 'time agent' who slips his consciousness into the body of another man to change the history of that man's world. Perhaps the most boggling (and exasperating) paradox is why, with literally all of time at his fingertips, a time agent would ever have to be called back from a leave for a mission—"Just set the bloody machine back another ten minutes and let me get dressed."

A critical piece, "Andre Norton: Loss of Faith," by Rick Brooks, is exceptionally fine. Unlike many Norton fans, uncritical in their acceptance of this

writer's work, Brooks takes an unbiased view, neither raving nor carping. By taking Norton's work at its word, he manages to give insight into the author.

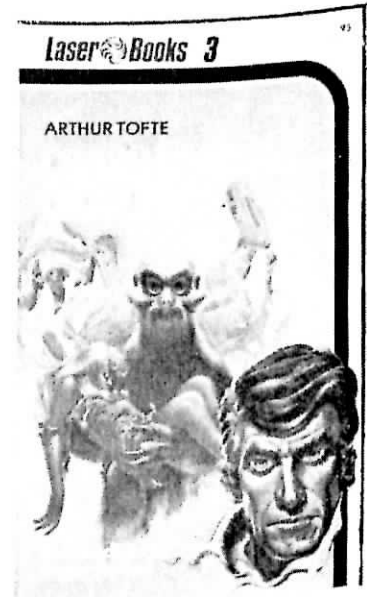
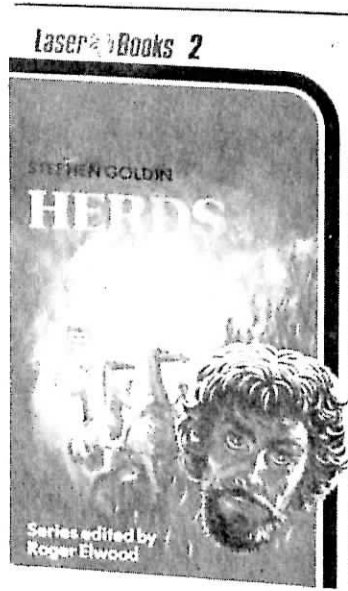
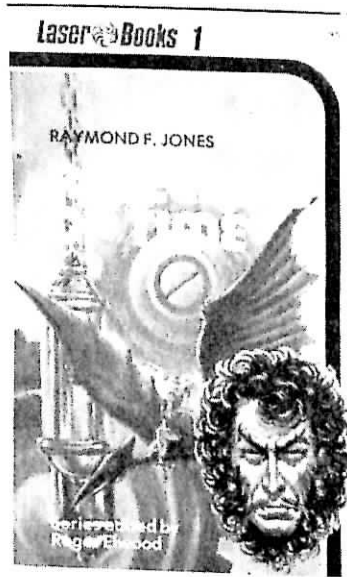
Finally there is a detailed bibliography which may be almost invaluable to readers wanting a comprehensive listing of Norton's books and stories. The bibliography also tells in what genre the story is written.

This book was published last year in hardcover by Chilton, and was then titled *The Many Worlds of Andre Norton*. Although Roger Elwood edited the book and was given credit on the Chilton edition, his name

is absent from the paperback for reasons apparently known only to the publisher.

Any complaints or plaudits for this book can be neatly covered with the comment that the collection is typically Norton. Libraries will likely have already purchased the hardcover edition for their many Norton readers; the paperback can be recommended to Norton's fans who prefer to invest in less expensive editions.

—James K. Burk



**RENEGADES OF TIME** by Raymond F. Jones  
Don Mills, Ontario\*: Laser. 1975, 95c, 190 pp.  
ISBN: 0-373-72001-7

**HERDS** by Stephen Goldin  
Don Mills, Ontario: Laser. 1975, 95c, 190 pp.  
ISBN: 0-373-72002-5

**CRASH LANDING ON IDUNA** by Arthur Toftte  
Don Mills, Ontario: Laser. 1975, 95c, 190 pp.  
ISBN: 0-373-72003-3

[The following is a "sequel" to the review of *Seeds of Change* by Thomas F. Monteleone (DF&SF, August 1975). That review stated that since the novel was advertised as a typical sample of the new publisher's quality, all forthcoming Laser Books could be dismissed for bad writing. But it is hardly fair to judge a publisher's entire output on the basis of one title. This review examines Laser Books 1, 2, and 3 as a more representative sampling of what to expect from this new company.]

In *Renegades of Time*, Joe Simmons of Midland, U.S.A. (i.e., Mr. Average American Male) becomes accidentally caught up in a space-time war between the Algorans and Bakori. The Algorans are decadent scientific geniuses, letting their culture crumble while they travel about the universe for casual amusement. The Bakori are a sadistic spacegoing Mongol Horde

who fly pterodactyl-back and destroy whole worlds with mind-rays so they may loot the ruins. Joe and his buddy, Bill Bradley, go to the rescue of a beautiful Algoran girl, Tamarina, who has been captured by the Bakori. They realize too late that the Bakori have set up the situation so they will leave a trail back to Earth and the Algoran worlds. Joe, Bill, and Tamarina shame the Algorans out of their lethargy into fighting back against the Bakori. The vandals are destroyed just in time to save Earth from annihilation by the mind-rays, Bill dies nobly in battle, and Joe and Tamarina presumably live happily ever after.

This is pure pre-teen comicbook level sf. It might be worth five minutes' reading for a youngster in a ten-page comicbook format, but it certainly isn't worth the time it takes to read as a 190-page novel.

In *Herds*, a ruthless, rising young California politician murders his wife (who is about to divorce him, threatening his career) and frames a nearby hippie community, hoping to ride a wave of public sympathy into office. He is super-normally observed by an alien, Garnna, who is secretly studying Earth. Garnna is shocked, and after his return to the planet Zartic he continues to brood about the event. The novel cuts

\*published by Harlequin Enterprises Limited, 240 Duncan Mill Road, Don Mills, Ontario M3B 1Z4, Canada.