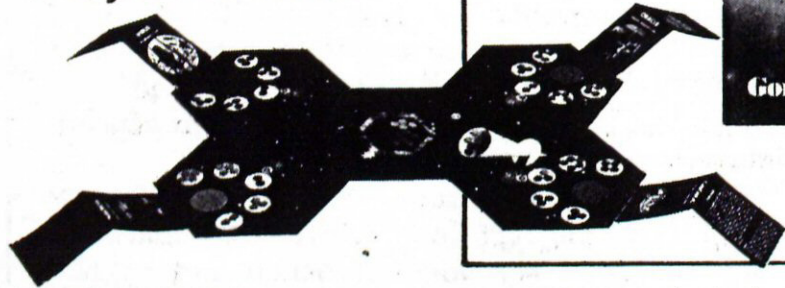


Reviews

Floyd Kemske



COSMIC ENCOUNTER
created by Future Pastimes
Eon Products, \$10.00

Reviewed by Floyd Kemske

I SUSPECT there is a community college in the midwest which offers a ten-week course on how to play *Cosmic Encounter*. If not, then somebody is missing a good bet. This game is not easy to learn and many of us could probably use professional help with it. I myself have played the game both drunk (at our office Christmas party) and sober (first thing in the morning with my teenaged nephews). I found it easier to play it sober, but more fun to play it drunk. If my review seems prejudiced, it might be because I never won and am still smarting over the shellacking I took from a sixteen-year-old.

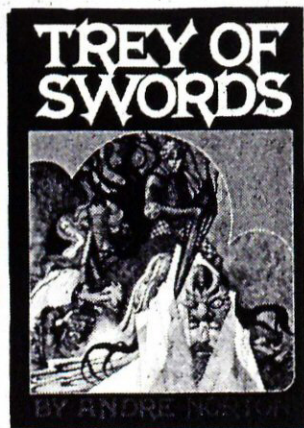
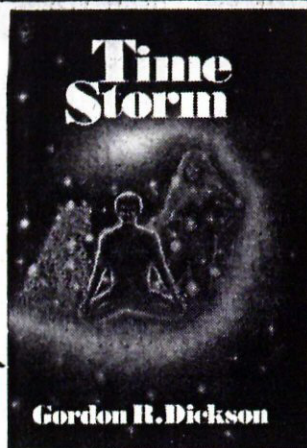
Some might believe that the best games are easy to learn but hard to play. Certainly this is true of classics such as chess, poker, Chinese checkers, and even—to a certain extent—bridge. It is not true of *Cosmic Encounter*, which has so many rules that it requires playing several times for the players to understand them. Then, when everybody has learned the rules, you discover that these same rules must be periodically changed or broken for proper playing of the game. Does it sound complicated? It is.

The groups with which I have played have found it best to learn playing in a few discrete stages. First, take a turn or two around the board in which

everybody engages in simple attack and response operations. Then go around a few times allowing players to make alliances (a crucial feature for the game's effectiveness). Once everybody feels comfortable with attacks, compromises, alliances, and consignments to The Warp, then begin using your unique alien powers (which override the game rules). When things are proceeding smoothly again, start using edicts (which obviate alien powers or otherwise wreak havoc with well-planned strategy). You will probably find you must play the game through this way before you can play seriously, so don't offer any prizes to the winner on the first time around.

Once the game is underway in earnest, it gets interesting. It needs more luck than chess and more strategy than poker. And you might be surprised at how much you can know about what is going on—if you possess a superlative memory, an outstanding sense of strategy, and a liberal allowance of motivation. After all, there are only four colors involved and care in observation can help you calculate the odds on who will be attacked next. Of course, it usually happens that just when you think you know what will happen, some turkey stops the action with one of the half dozen edicts (you can invoke an edict—if you have the card—whether or not it is your turn). The result is an engrossing way of whiling away a rainy afternoon, or a whole semester if you're a sophomore and you're not careful.

The game's big problems are the complexity of the rules and the tediousness of getting the board set up.



Both call for a great deal of motivation. I am not sure what the manufacturers can do to overcome these things. A lot of people, however, will give up before learning how to play. And if you are the game instigator in your crowd, it is difficult to keep the other players in the room while you spread out the eighty tokens, shuffle the cards, and mix up the Destiny Chips. If you can get through these steps, however, you will find *Cosmic Encounter* well worth the effort.

—G—

TREY OF SWORDS

by Andre Norton
Grosset and Dunlap, \$10.00

Reviewed by Barry R. Bernard

THIS BOOK, the latest in the Witch World series of Andre Norton, captures, but never releases, the reader. The answers that are begged never come—so I suppose that we have to hope the next volume will provide. Of course, the publishers will be pleased to have a waiting public, but they deserve little after exorbitantly overcharging for a 180-page, large typeface edition. (If you want to avoid the cost, read the dust jacket, just about the whole story is there.) But if you don't mind being left hanging, and if you enjoy better-than-average fantasy, then by all means... borrow it.

Trey of Swords is, basically, three related short stories. The plots are ordinary, and the wording is sometimes general, but the quality of it comes from

a number of mysteries that keep the reader reading. The two central characters, Yonan, and Crytha, possess flirting spirits from another time. A young ineffective warrior, Yonan is haunted by the memories of Tolar, a past great warrior; Crytha, on the other hand, is a mildly talented healer, who is frustrated by the vague presence of one of the Old Race's Great Ones. It is in these possessions I find the imagination that I like. The people of the past, it is suggested, if failing a mission can return in another person's body and take up the quest once again.

A clue to Yonan's fate comes as he finds; by chance, the hilt of a sword buried in rock. (Sound like Young Arthur?) Chiseling it free, he later carries it on a rescue mission of Crytha. Now Tolar begins to make his presence known as the secret of the sword, Ice Tongue, is revealed to him by Uruk, another great warrior from the past, whom Yonan also rescues. Uruk tells that Ice Tongue is one of the Four Great Weapons, and, as such, chooses its own master. Uruk himself is the master of another, an ax called Helm-biter. Having been resurrected from a tomb of ice by Yonan, Uruk now has the opportunity to learn that the glory of his world is gone, and that an old enemy, Targi, is responsible. As representatives of the Light, Uruk and Yonan (but now also Tolar) go into the past to defeat Targi of the Dark and thereby change history. In the meantime, Crytha, who was returned home, finds that her skills are summoned by the forces of the Dark. She struggles against Laidan, an ancient lover of Targi, and discovers the spirit of Ninutra, one of the Great Ones.

I'm happy at this point for Crytha, because she understands that it will take some time to learn what has happened to her. As a reader, I wondered if I ever would. Not only that, I really did want to know what happened to Uruk and Yonan after their encounter with Targi. And it did seem strange that Yonan could muster up a little telekinesis when he had to. Was he of some Power as well?

I understand that a series intends to keep our interest, but *Trey of Swords* should, if not climaxing with the defeat of the forces of evil, at least resolve the positions of those characters it introduces. Anyway, I'm caught, I guess. I'll read the next one, too—if I get a free review copy, that is.

TIME STORM

by Gordon R. Dickson
St. Martin's, \$10.00

Reviewed by Floyd Kemske

IF YOU would suppose the boundary of a temporal discontinuity to appear on Earth as a wall of gray mist, then your imagination works a lot like Gordon Dickson's. The "mistwall" is the most visible effect of the time storm which has minced the Earth, leaving each piece of the planet's surface functioning in a time independent of the others, even if the parts are still physically connected. This chaos is the setting for the adventures of a handful of the most memorable characters ever to inhabit a science fiction novel.

The action is conducted and narrated by a former child prodigy of the business world (successful enough to both make a million and suffer a heart attack before the age of thirty), Marc Despard. His closest companions are a shell-shocked and happily imprinted leopard (the most endearing fictional animal I've encountered since Mighty Joe Young) and a teenaged girl (taciturn to the point of aphonia) who loves the leopard. Despard's quest to first understand, then control, the time storm takes him across the virtually depopulated (and certainly fragmented) continent, building a small community of survivors in the process.

Ultimately, he and his band reach the far future in one of the continental segments and he is set on the path of a universe-spanning mission to subdue the forces of chaos. As Despard develops his ability to deal with the time storm (which doesn't seem to require much in the way of tools), he discovers this development is integral to the growth of his powers of self-realization. Ultimately, the reader is bedazzled with the realization that these parallel developments are two aspects of the same progression. And, in fact, the rest of the eight or nine characters have all had indispensable roles in the growth of Marc Despard.

Time Storm is a *tour-de-force* of sf characterization. On the other hand, it has a weakness. Science fiction readers will accept most anything as an explanation, provided it is consistent. But to explain galaxy-spanning temporal dislocations with the phrase "entropic anarchy" is to abandon cause

and effect. This poetic redundancy supposedly signifies the spontaneous and selective reversal of the expansion of the universe, purportedly the result of an overextension of the "space-time fabric." This is not cause and effect. It is wordage, reminiscent of Moliere's ironic explanation that opium puts people to sleep because of its "dormitive powers."

This non-explanation is particularly maddening for its use of entropy, which threatens to become the single most abused idea in science fiction. *Time Storm* is vague enough (the actual cause of the storm is "entropic conflict") to avoid guilt in this connection, but as a public service to the sf community, I want to offer a few words on entropy. For the record, entropy is a concept of thermodynamics and mechanics. It is a measure, not a force. It is a useful way to conceptualize energy waste or to check on whether a system is closed. To use it as a cause of physical phenomena, however, is comparable to explaining the petroleum shortage as being the result of the energy crisis.

—G—

PLANET OF EXILE

by Ursula K. LeGuin
Harper & Row, \$7.95

Reviewed by Geraldine Morse

IN HER new introduction to this re-issue of a 1966 book, Ursula K. LeGuin gives not only her position on feminism in literature (just such a position as a rational, successful woman in her late forties might hold) but also this revealing quote: "Once I was asked what I thought the central, constant theme of my work was, and I said spontaneously, 'Marriage.'"

If it is true that all of Ursula K. LeGuin's work is variation on this theme, then *Planet of Exile* is a veritable fugue. She presents a hero (Agat), a heroine (Rolery), a planet (Gamma Draconis III), and the union of all three.

Rolery is a h.i.l.f. (highly intelligent life form) of a semi-civilized tribe indigenous to Gamma Draconis III. Agat is a farborn, one of the 1,500 descendants of a group of aliens stranded on the planet long ago—so long that the farborns have forgotten much of their heritage, if not their sense of alienation. When Rolery and Agat