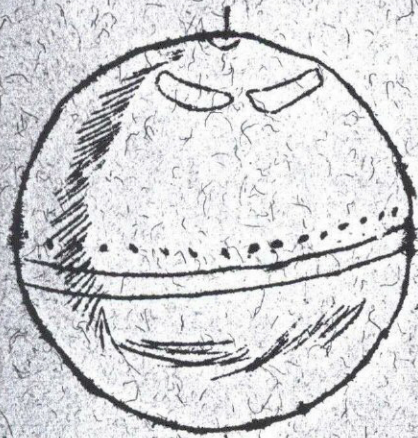


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THISTLE and THORN



Duncan McFarland / This story, set on Mars in the future, but just as plausibly set on our earth, is mainly a character analysis. Kick introduces his own brand of nuts here, but unfortunately they are not as interesting as those in, say, ROGUE MOON. The author also manages to stick in an interesting theory concerning the phenomena of schizophrenia.

In DOUBLE-BILL-8, no. DOUBLE-BILL-8, Philip K. Dick says in the pro-symposium that sf's greatest weakness is "Its inability to explore the subtle, intricate relationships which exist between the sexes!" Perhaps he has attempted to do so in this book by inserting a measure of sex—an ingredient that I hadn't noticed in Dick's earlier works. However, I do not think he has succeeded here. The characters in this novel simply do not come to life. The reader assumes kind of a position as an indifferent observer to the action; he does not follow the story solely from one point of view; does not identify with any one character especially. This type of characterization is harder to pull off, but more effective, as the characters assume more vivid personalities, if it is pulled off. Mr. Dick doesn't. Perhaps he fails to do so because the narration is so disjointed. No smooth flow of words is established, and occasionally I became confused as to just what was going on. Also, this disjointment—and an excess of dialogue—tends to make it hard for the reader to visualize the actual physical setting.

To me this novel represented a new Philip K. Dick, perhaps a more mature one. Maybe someday he will reach new heights with this approach to sf. Personally, though, I prefer the old Dick, at least as of now. After reading this novel, I could hardly imagine it was by the same author of those wonderfully horrible short stories—THE FATHER THING, EXPENDABLE, EXPLORERS WE, and others. Perhaps the author is in transition from one approach to literature to another. I look forward to Mr. Dick's next major sf novel. I think he has vast potential, shown often enough in the past, but perhaps not in its fullest bloom.

KEY OUT OF TIME by Andre Norton

Seth Johnson / This is a sequel to three other books by Andre Norton concerning time travel. In this one a ideal tropical paradise planet has lost all its inhabitants and the time travelers then go back into time to learn what happened to them. The adventures are then in uniting the warring nations to fight off the evil blue villainous galactic overlords of that past time. Like all Andre Norton's books it is worth reading.

Duncan McFarland / I don't really have too much to say about this book other than it is typical Norton, except perhaps not as colorful and vivid as some of her past works. Basically this is a planetary adventure/mystery.

Andre Norton's future societies are often based upon annoying foundations, and this is no exception. Included in this one is the rather juvenile outlook on the conflict between two societies; the "American good guy!—Russkie bad guy!" type of thing. No shades of grey are ever hinted at. And the U.S./Russian struggle for power itself is included here—heaven knows how many centuries in the future. Which is quite all right if the author would include some sort of postulate or condition from which this sort of situation could logically exist. But she doesn't, so one must conclude that Miss Norton is carrying a present day concept even now thoroughly outdated into the reaches of interstellar space. Why the U.S./Russian conflict then? Doesn't the author believe in social progress—or at least change?

The author includes some intelligent aliens in this book. Many people laud Miss Norton's ability to give warm tolerant personalities to aliens. This is the trouble generally with her alien characterization; the extraterrestrials act like warm tolerant human beings. I like my aliens to be alien. The et's in this novel don't act like human beings; they don't act like anything. They are poorly characterized.

Oh, well, I just can't seem to appreciate Andre Norton. If one liked the other the Time Trader stories, he'll like this one.

Steve Barr / This is, I believe, the best book of the series and maybe one of the best she has ever written. The book is written in a magical mood and style that gives the reader the feeling of being there right on the spot. The plot was very strong and I couldn't pick any holes in it. We just must accept the fact that Miss Norton has handed us another great story. Maybe if she doesn't get the Hugo she deserves this year, she will next year for this truly great book.

CAT'S CRADLE by Kurt Vonnegut

Duncan McFarland / The first unusual thing that one immediately notices about this book is the large number of chapters--127 in all. I suppose one could attach some deep significance to this, but I think Vonnegut was mainly having fun. Instead of a general line of dialogue though, this does add to the direct communication between the hero/narrator and the reader. The title of chapter 76 is especially fun, "Julia Castle agrees with Newt that Everthing is Meaningless." This could have come straight from Winnie the Pooh; substitute Piglet for Julian and Eor for Newt and the resemblance in style is striking. And one of the many jingles in this book is a typical hum of Pooh, "We do, doodely do" etc. One gets the feeling that the author read "House at Pooh Corner" or something just before writing this novel.

Good grief—I haven't told you what this novel is about, have I? It is simply the memoirs of a man and his pursuit and and conversion to the religion "Bokononism". Bokononism stresses that everything is a pack of lies, including itself. Which is a theme throughout this book, the apparent meaninglessness of the universe. However, there is a significant quote at the beginning of the book, "Live by the foma (harmless untruths) that make you brave and kind and healthy and happy". Bokonon established a rather humanistic religion though, as this bit of dialogue goes:

"What is sacred to Bokononists?" I asked after a while.

"Not even God, as near as I can tell."

"Nothing?"

"Just one thing."

I made some guesses. "The ocean? The sun?"

"Man," said Frank. "That's all. Just man."

Vonnegut is sheer joy to read. He creates characters and discards them at a frantic pace. Which is unfortunate, for they are very interesting characters. A far cry from the books where the people are darn near interchangeable—undistinguishable! There are times when one just wants to stop reading and clap his hands after finding a select bit of Vonnegut prose. As literature, CAT'S CRADLE far outstrips all the other Hugo nominees this year. It will be interesting to see if it does get the Hugo.

Creath Thorne / The first thing one notices when reading the book is, of course, the literary style of having a large number of chapters. One wonders if there was some basic significance for this. I think so. One notices throughout the book the continual discussion of truth. By having a large number of short chapters the chapter headings are more able to exactly describe what is in the chapter. Yet Vonnegut seems to say in the book that there is no such thing as absolute truth. There seems to be a paradox here. and it seems that this is what Vonnegut is saying: there is a basic paradox when one tries to find absolute truth. I may be reading too much into the literary device that is used here — perhaps Vonnegut did not have this in mind at all. But I do think that the above conclusions do hold true as they are expressed in other ways throughout the book.