

though, for the nicely mounting sense of unease which permeates the book.

Heritage of the Star, by Sylvia Engdahl; 246p., £1.60 ISBN 0 575 01669 8

When this book appeared in America last year the title was This Star Shall Abide and the author was Sylvia Louise Engdahl. Somehow the two combined to give a quite off-putting aura of spinelessness. Now, with a somewhat better title and an abbreviated author's name it's a good deal less unattractive — which is just as well, as this actually isn't bad at all. Noren is a young lad whose world is an odd, mysterious place. Noren's people are a largely agrarian people; the Scholars and Technicians, who live in the City (where no villager may enter), have an advanced technology which they keep to themselves, apart from treating the grain every year, providing fertile eggs to breed fowl, and giving the villagers drinkable water. Why is the untreated soil poisonous? Why will drinking untreated water drive you mad? Why is heresy such a heinous crime (convicted heretics being handed over to the Scholars, never to be seen again)? Noren, as you may have guessed, wants to know all these things, and eventually he finds out. The experienced sf reader will be a couple of steps ahead of him all the way, but the trip is nonetheless entertaining. Miss Engdahl has worked out her situation well, and constructed her plot very ably about it. Reminiscent of some of Heinlein's juveniles, which can't be bad.

The Crystal Gryphon, by Andre Norton; 234p., £1.50 ISBN 0 575 01616 7

I read somewhere that this belongs in the 'Witch World' series, which may explain why I didn't get on with it. (An alternative explanation might involve the fact that I never get on with any of Miss Norton's books, which I find turgid in the extreme.) This seems to be a sword and sorcery story, and as such is written in a sword and sorcery style, a dreadful thing based, like most such efforts, on misguided attempts to be like Tolkien, and a sad belief that this can be accomplished by constructing your sentences backwards. Opened I the book at a random page, and — "Kinsman, you forget yourself. Such speech is unseemly, and I know shame that you could think me so poor a thing as to listen to it". Et cetera, interminably. Still, if you like books where people call one another 'kinsman' and 'know shame', this may be for you. It's quite cheap. (Why, incidentally, are children's books so much cheaper than adult books? They're no more cheaply produced — in fact Gollancz's children's books often look a good bit better than their adult titles. Explanation anyone?)

From Faber & Faber:

Midsummer Century, by James Blish; 106p., £1.60 ISBN 0 571 10330 8.

Even Blish nods. This seems to be an attempt at a 1930's-style sf adventure — an English-language equivalent of Stanton A. Coblenz's, perhaps. It's enjoyable in a trivial sort of way, this story of an English astronomer accidentally catapulted 25,000 years into a future where the remnants of mankind struggle for survival against the regime of the Birds. But this sort of thing isn't really Blish's forte — it's so far beneath his usual aim. The real Blish is glimpsed in an attempt (not really successful) to graft on some philosophical discussion of levels of consciousness and e.s.p. The opening chapter is a strange affair — for all that he now lives over here, James Blish seems to entertain some funny ideas about this country, not least in giving a native of Doncaster a Midlands accent. Another real and valid