



GALAXY'S

5 Star Shelf

THE SIRENS OF TITAN by Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. Houghton Mifflin Co.

VONNEGUT'S BITTER satire is reminiscent in many respects of Bernard Wolfe's *Limbo*. Both are crammed full of new ideas yet weary with old. Both have sparks of humor that turn to ash.

A weird triangle is the hub of the story. The husband, a brave, wise, charming aristocrat, was dematerialized on an exploration into a space hazard between planets. He becomes a sort of ghost who materializes for an

hour once every fifty-five days. A side result of his tragedy is an ability to see both past and future. As a most peculiar step toward establishing peace and brotherhood, he engineers the impregnation of his wife, an immaculate patrician, by a piggish wastrel.

The plot is tangled, intricate and tortuous and the author manufactures mystery and suspense by the deliberate use of time jump and flashback.

Yet the book, though exasperating, is a joy of inventiveness.

Rating: ****½

WALL OF SERPENTS by L. Sprague de Camp and Fletcher Pratt. Thomas Bouregy & Co.

DECAMP AND PRATT were far and away the finest team of fantasy collaborators. In their present misadventure, Shea and his Faerie wife, Belphebe, become involved in the land of the Finnish Kalevala and the Ireland of the hero, Cuchulainn.

If de Camp's and Pratt's heroes and villains alike are usually ineffectual and usually likeable, their stories are always chuckle-filled delights.

Rating: **** 1/2

THE INTELLIGENT MAN'S GUIDE TO SCIENCE by Isaac Asimov. Two volumes. Basic Books, Inc.

SCIENCE FICTION'S loss has been science popularization's gain. Dr. Asimov's style is eminently readable. His knack makes even difficult concepts easily digestible.

By far his most ambitious project to date, the set is divided into two halves, Physical Sciences and Biological Sciences. The section titles convey some idea of the scope of his work: The Universe; The Earth; The Atmosphere; The Elements; The Particles; The Waves; The Machine; The Reactor. The Biological Sci-

ences contains: The Molecule; The Proteins; The Cell; The Microorganism; The Body; The Species; The Mind.

A DECADE OF FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION edited by Robert P. Mills. Doubleday & Co., Inc.

Editor Mills has selected nothing but full-cut gems from the McComas-Boucher diamond mine.

The novelettes: Poul Anderson's "The Sky People," a well-executed, profound yet action-crammed study of civilization's slow resurgence from Atomic aftermath; "Jordan," also in Zenna Henderson's *Pilgrimage*; J. Francis McComas's "Shock Treatment," the acid test of an enlightened penal code in the first murder case on a raw planetary frontier; "To Fell a Tree," by Robert F. Young, an alien planet's last 1,000 foot tree and its felling.

Better by far than any of its annual predecessors, (not even one Ferdinand Feghoot!) this is a top collection by any standard.

Rating: *****

THE RIM OF SPACE by A. Bertram Chandler. Thomas Bouregy & Co.

CHANDLER HAS taken the desire of the Rim Worlds on the periphery of the Galactic Lens for

self-determination as moving force of his book.

Their commerce is coverup for a buildup of strength. Their merchant fleet consists of obsolete tubs manned by a lost legion of human retreads, themselves rejects from the plush liners of Inner World commerce.

All the elements of the salty sea are in Chandler's deep space thriller: the grand-daddy of hurricanes, drunken brawling in a port-side joint, burial at space, shipwreck and salvage.

Art it may not be, but likeable it certainly is.

Rating: *** 1/2

REACHING FOR THE STARS
by Erik Bergaust. Doubleday & Co.

WERNHER VON Braun is an extremely controversial figure. Despite his stature in our space program, many Americans have never become reconciled to the presence of a former enemy and self-admitted Nazi in a most sensitive field. Be that as it may, he has obviously been forgiven by the top brass and today his enormous energy, knowledge and resourcefulness are being put to use.

Because of von Braun's single-purposefulness, the book is more than just his biography. It is also the history of modern rocketry.

PILGRIMAGE: THE BOOK OF THE PEOPLE by Zenna Henderson. Doubleday & Co., Inc.

DESCRIBED AS Zenna Henderson's first novel, *Pilgrimage* is actually a compilation of stories from *F&SF* tied loosely together. "The People" are hunted and haunted possessors of superhuman powers.

Each novelette expands on the theme, "Different is dead." The protagonists involved eventually find emancipation with The Group, hidden in desert country where wild talents can remain unobserved.

Rating: ****

THE RUNAWAY WORLD by Stanton A. Coblentz. Avalon Books.

AVALON APPEARS determined to exhume the remains of all of Coblentz's ponderous satires. Number four thus disturbed from well-earned oblivion, *Runaway World* plotwise is also stamped from the same heavy-duty die.

Rating: *

THE SCIENCE-FICTIONAL SHERLOCK Holmes. The Council of Four.

THE INCOMPARABLE Sherlock's claim to fame has never

been in doubt. Avid groups of fans and writers have given him a degree of contemporaneity never achieved by any other fictional character.

In the above volume, Conan Doyle's oversight in never penning a science-fictional adventure for his human deduction machine has been righted by August Derleth, Anthony Boucher, Mack Reynolds, Gordon R. Dickson, Poul Anderson, H. Beam Piper and John J. McGuire.

The book's appeal is limited, but its special audience will derive intense satisfaction.

Rating: ****

THINKING MACHINES by Irving Adler. The John Day Co.

TO THE man in the street, the word "Computer" conjures up a vision of a vast electronic monster busily tended by a horde of human ministrators. This was largely true until the recent past but miniaturization and simplification have reaped such rewards that room-sized and even desk-sized computers are now extant. The layman, however, still would like two questions answered: What does it do and How does it do it?

Adler's book answers these questions in comparatively simple form—for someone with a good high school math background.

THE PROJECT by Andrew Sinclair. Simon & Schuster.

THE "PROJECT" is the program to develop an undescribed weapon sufficiently powerful to act as an utter deterrent to would-be aggressor nations. The book delves into the character of the weapon's prime architects and their movements and actions on the night preceding the final test. It is a bitter indictment of the idiocy that places the means for utter destruction in the hands of a few and makes it possible for a highly placed psychotic to become mankind's executioner.

Rating: ***½

THE OUTLAWS OF MARS by Otis Adelbert Kline. Avalon Books.

A GENERATION ago, back in *Argosy's* heyday, Kline's serials were usually divided into six parts. There could easily have been twice as many divisions because Kline's heroes fluctuated between soup and frying pan.

A *non sequitur* sequel to *The Swordsman of Mars*, the new hero travels back through space and time to Mars of some million years ago and finds a culturally paradoxical mighty civilization.

Rating (for an old-fashioned fairy tale): ***

—FLOYD C. GALE