

the other hand, is equally clumsy but less convincing in its passion. A plea for the preservation of mystery and myth, it lacks subtlety and depth, and although I can respect Martin's aims, I can't admire his presentation.

Nevertheless these are three impressive stories. And it's such a bloody shame that the rest of the book is so determinedly mediocre.

The remaining stories are slick and forgettable, emotionally and philosophically vacuous. "Slide Show," for instance, is little more than a treatise on the wonders of space and the thorny question of which deserves the greater expenditure, hungry children or distant stars. Martin walks a tightrope and never falls off—that is, he never takes a stand one way or the other, and the reader feels cheated.

"Override" is a pulp adventure with a fascinating gimmick, "corpse handling," the mechanical use of revived corpses as cheap labor. But Martin seems to hate subtlety with a passion; he destroys the eerie, compelling concept he has created with technical mumbo-jumbo like this: "It was Kabaraijian, his commands picked up by the controller and magnified by synthabrain, who put life into the bodies of the dead men..." We couldn't have guessed?

In "Dark, Dark Were the Tunnels" two explorers from Luna probe the remains of war-ravaged Earth and spend most of their time giving each other socio-historical lectures. "Run for Starlight" features football-playing aliens who resemble discarded ammo shells from a .45 Magnum. (Yes, one of *those* stories.) And "The Exit to San Breta" is a facile fantasy that might have made a good *Night Gallery* episode. More damning than that I cannot get.

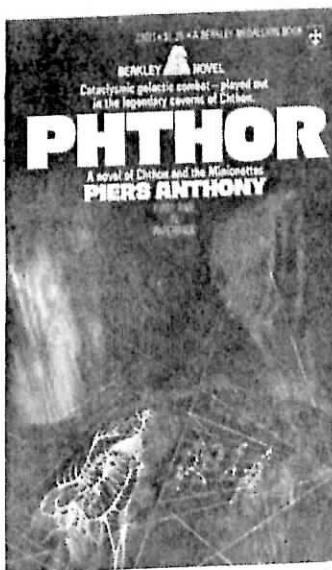
"The Hero" is a predictable anti-war piece of the sort best left to Joe Haldeman, full of lines like "Kagan scowled at the dented plastoid helmet at his feet and cursed his luck." (Why is it always *plastoid*, for God's sake? Do they unfasten their beltoids and go to the toilet?) And "fta" is a short frippery about a faster-than-light drive, first published in *Analog*—but what on *earth* is it doing enshrined here?

All told, then, George R. R. Martin is a talented writer who more often than not chooses to squander that talent in favor of shrewdly-slanted pap. But in stories like "A Song for Lya" and "The Second Kind of Loneliness," his passion and his potential *do* rise to the surface—and if you, like I, respond to sad, lonely songs of love and loss and troubled dreams, you might find this book a worthwhile buy. All others, take your chances. . .

—Alan Brennert

**PHTHOR** by Piers Anthony  
New York: Berkley Medallion. 1975,  
\$1.25, 198 pp. SBN: 425-03011-3

The name of Piers Anthony became



Cover by Richard Powers

widely known in the sf world on the strength of an unusually powerful first novel, *Chthon* (Ballantine, 1967). It was extraordinarily popular at the time, even though it left more loose ends than most readers will accept submissively. So finally Anthony has taken the time to write a sequel, which ties up all the loose ends and determines the fates of the various surviving characters from the first novel. Anthony has grown as a writer during the intervening years, and *Phthor* should have been a blend of his early vigor and imagination with his more recent improvements in characterization and control. It should have been but it isn't.

In order to pinpoint what makes *Phthor* essentially a failure as a novel, it is necessary to first provide some idea of the complex scope of *Chthon*.

Aton Five, son of a prominent farmer on a socially conservative colonial planet, falls in love with a minionette. Minionettes are genetically altered human inhabitants of the planet Minion, a world proscribed for them because of the difficulty of intermixing the normal and altered human strains. Minion females have had their emotional structure reversed—to love them is to cause pain, to mistreat them physically and mentally is to bring them happiness—and Minion males are therefore compelled to ceaseless acts of sadism in order to prove their affection.

Because of Aton's love for the minionette, he violates many social rules and is ultimately sentenced to life imprisonment in the garnet mines of Chthon, the prison planet. Aton manages to escape, after discovering that there is a mineral intelligence dwelling within the planet. Free, he is caught up in a phantasmagoric web of intrigues and manipulations, resulting in his return to Chthon, a prisoner of his own weaknesses. Anthony constructed the novel as a series of linked flashbacks and flashforwards, with paired incidents combining to illuminate different facets of

Aton's character.

*Phthor* begins several years later and centers on Aton's teenage son Arlo, whose life has been confined since birth to the caverns of Chthon. Arlo is a friend of the mineral intelligence, which protects him from the various menacing beasts of the underworld because it plans to use the boy as its primary weapon at a forthcoming battle between itself and the organic life which it sees as a threat to its own existence.

Arlo, predictably, resents being manipulated by a being he thought to be his friend, and finds as well that he has contradictory feelings about the invading army of minionettes with whom he is thrown into contact. He also finds it difficult to combat the conditioning which Chthon has developed to pattern him into a predetermined role during Ragnarok.

Anthony does tie up the loose ends with *Phthor*, as well as presenting us with a couple of alternate endings, disguised as dreams. But the complexity of the first novel has trapped him. There is too much to be explained about the events that preceded those in *Phthor*, with lengthy explanations of background, either provided by the narrator or in some cases retold by one character to another. The complexity is such that the reader cannot easily assimilate all of this without reading the first novel, and Anthony is reduced to telling rather than showing.

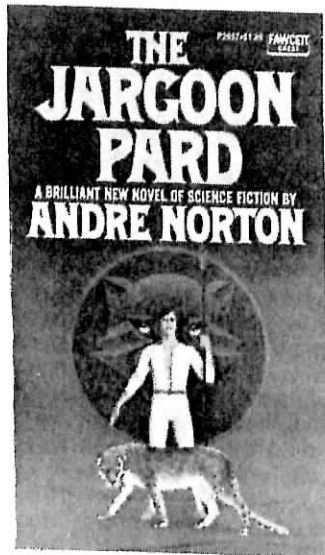
*Phthor* then is not so much a sequel as an afterthought, a clean-up job, and a recapitulation of ideas better expressed before. If *Chthon* and *Phthor* were rewritten into a single novel, the result might be worthwhile. Individually, *Chthon* stands alone as an excellent if somewhat perplexing novel. *Phthor* cannot stand alone.

—Don D'Amassa

**THE JARGOON PARD** by Andre Norton  
Greenwich, Ct: Fawcett Crest. 1975,  
\$1.25, 224 pp.  
SBN: 449-02657

*The Jargoan Pard* is an excellent combination of witchcraft and action-adventure in the finest tradition of "sword and sorcery." Andre Norton, who is no stranger to the fantasy field, has invented several strong characters and placed them in a well-conceived magical world. Against the backdrop of a never-ending battle between white magic ("the voices") and black magic ("the shadows"), she has crafted an effective dramatic saga.

Heroise, ambitious sister of the lord of the city-state of Car Do Prawn, has given birth to a daughter. With the aid of her personal wise woman, Ursilla, she secretly switches her baby for a new-born boy, thereby giving her "son," Kethan, the claim to the throne and herself the power to rule. However, Kethan does not grow up to be a malleable pawn. In fact, he is not quite human, and we discover with



him that he is actually of were blood, although he cannot control his power.

With the aid/curse of a belt of (leo)pard skin with a jargoona (smoky zircon) clasp, the teen-aged Kethan finds himself transformed into a leopard. He is driven from Car Do Prawn as a suspected agent of the shadows. At large in the wilds of the world of Arvon, he must fend for himself while trapped in the form of a hunting cat, with his leopard and human attributes in conflict for domination of his body. His odyssey brings him magic-bearing allies but locks him in a deadly battle with the power-crazed witch, Ursilla, and with his scheming foster-family.

While not a completely-detailed locale, Arvon is used effectively as a setting for this adventure. Kethan and Ursilla are particularly well-drawn and their conflict is strongly developed. Other characters are given sufficient depth to make them interesting and believable.

As in many fantasies involving magic, the spells and powers are used as a crutch to carry the plot over rough spots; thus, Ms. Norton introduces enchantments and witchcrafts as needed. Although this is occasionally disturbing (in the same way I find it disturbing when a mystery writer discloses a new clue just when the detective reaches a dead end), it is a legitimate plot device.

Perhaps the worst problem with *The Jargoona Pard*, a paperback reprint of Atheneum's 1974 young adult hardcover, is that it is so obviously set in a world Andre Norton has previously used.\* (I continually wondered if what I had missed in the earlier stories would have tied together the use of magic in this novel with previously-established principles.) However, even without reading the other stories, I found this adventure of young Kethan seeking to escape the power strug-

\*In fact, Kethan is the son of the protagonists of Norton's *Year of the Unicorn* (Ace Books, 1965).—As. Ed.

gles of others and lead his own life to be very entertaining fantasy escapist fare.

—Sandy Coben

**THE DEADLY STREETS** by Harlan Ellison

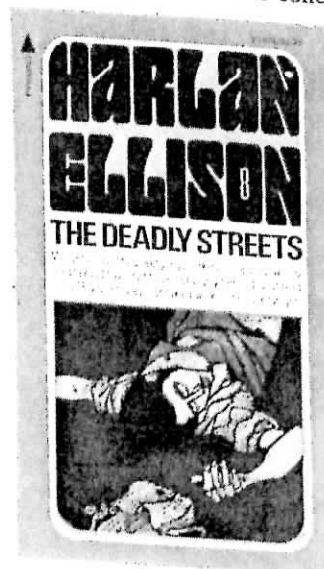
New York: Pyramid. 1975, \$1.25, 207 pp. ISBN: 0-515-03931-4

No. 8 in the Pyramid Harlan Ellison series, *The Deadly Streets* isn't simply filled with violence; the book is about violence, and the author spares no opportunity to describe it in its many incarnations. On the average there is about one gory death on every other page, and the methods range from pushing people out of moving cars to quick knifings.

Because the author does not spare his audience from brutal descriptions and blunt ideology, the book stands out from the usual collections of mystery/horror/suspense stories. Ellison displays the horror of violence, specifically on the streets of urban America, and with such force that the reader responds with revulsion to the situation Ellison is describing.

According to the author these stories are all based on his own experiences with a New York City street gang. *The Deadly Streets* never presents its violence in such a way that the reader becomes accustomed to it; Ellison continually finds new ways to shock. One story in particular "The Dead Shot," is told through the eyes of a psychotic youth who manifests his love of his rifle by using it to kill anybody who rubs him the wrong way. The Dead Shot has a maturity level of perhaps a six year-old, and what Ellison is effectively showing are the capabilities of a deadly weapon in the hands of an immature mind, a mind with no concept of right and wrong.

While the book succeeds in getting its message across, the dynamic style found in most of Ellison's other works is missing in most of the stories in this collection.



Cover by Leo & Diane Dillon

But the book presents several important messages—in addition to the problems of gun control, street gangs, crime in the streets, and just violence in general, Ellison donates some time in his introduction to discuss the inefficiency of police departments.

More importantly, the entire book is concerned with the killer instinct, which Ellison seems to feel is inbred in all of us. Given the right set of circumstances, insists Ellison, anyone would kill. And *The Deadly Streets* states that these circumstances are in frightening abundance in every major city, and that they frequently enmesh the younger generation.

This edition has been expanded (by five stories) from the original 1958 Ace paperback, Ellison's second published book. It certainly isn't a pretty book, and not all the stories still apply in today's society. But *The Deadly Streets* is important, for its repulsive violence accurately mirrors the violence that continues to be a part of the world around us.

—Larry Downes



Cover by Kelly Fraas

**THE STAR WEB** by George Zebrowski  
Don Mills, Ontario: Laser. 1975, 95c, 173 pp. ISBN: 0-373-72015-7

There is nothing really *wrong* with *The Star Web*; however, by the same token there is nothing particularly memorable about it. It's like cotton candy, layers of sweet, insubstantial confection around a nondescript paper cone. You may satisfy your hunger for a brief moment, but it won't last for long.

A U.N. team is sent to explore a buried radio source in the Antarctic, discovering a huge subterranean structure under the ice which proves to be a starship. While four of the party are exploring its interior, they are accidentally carried away by the sentient vehicle to begin an intergalactic hayride through the aliens' sun-centered power system that gives the book its name. Eventually they are returned