

REVIEWS

LUD-IN-THE-MIST by HOPE MIRLEES

Ever since reading Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings", it has been disappointing for me to read Fantasy, because in doing so I inadvertently compare the book read to Tolkien's, with the outcome usually in favour of Tolkien. But every once in a while I have found a book which is up to par with LotR in most respects. Such a book is "Lud-in-the-Mist" by Hope Mirlees. The background is not so tediously worked out in detail, but the charm and atmosphere of this book more than readily makes up for it.

Lud-in-the-Mist is the capital of the free state of Dorimare, a small country akin to the Shire in many ways. The people are very much like Hobbits in that they have deep misgivings about anything adventurous or poetic. The reason for these misgivings was an unfortunate incident which had separated the burghers from any relationship with Fairyland years before. Fairyland lay to the west of Lud-in-the-Mist, causing uneasiness in the townspeople, who were against the "mad" inhabitants of Fairyland. Resentment was so deep that the worst thing that you could call a person was "son of a fairy". (note : even today the word "fairy" has taken on a contemptuous meaning, which could give Fantasy a bad name. Alas!) The people totally deny the existence of Fairyland and everything connected with it, but this condition could not last long because they are constantly being exposed to Fairyland through the medium of "Fairyfruit", which floats down the river Dapple from its source in Fairyland. Anyone partaking of this fruit displays a form of "madness" in which he dances around singing poetry, and makes a quick dash to Fairyland, never to be seen again.

The plot of the story centres on the town's Mayor, Master Nathaniel Chanticleer (who reminds me for all the world of Bilbo Baggins) and his attempts to stop the increasing plague of fairyfruit. But when his own son eats of the fruit, he (Chanticleer) is forced to re-examine the customs of his day, and their validity. This eventually leads him to follow his exiled son to Fairyland itself in search of the answers to his questions.

It is impossible to describe in a few words the freshness and charm of this novel, along with its humour and moral point, so I advise every Tolkien and Fantasy fan to run out and get this book, and by all means read it.

Hal (Mithrandir) Broome, of the Istari.

DERYNI RISING by KATHERINE KURTZ

This is the first book in a trilogy published by Ballantine in their Adult Fantasy Series, under the editorial aegis of Lin Carter. It is Katherine Kurtz's first published novel and judged by it she is a talent emerged full blown upon the scene.

The story is set in an alternate world to Wales and Britain at the time of the ninth or eleventh century. St. Camber is an invisible mover behind the scenes, and far from being a long dead heretic saint opposed to the Bishops of the organised Church he seems very much alive-oh. His fine hand intervenes on the side

of the hero, Kelson, young son of the assassinated King Brion, as he seeks to retain power in the central country of Gwynedd against the machinations of his sadly confused mother, Charissa the Shadowed One, double-crossing nobles at court, and the hell-fire and damnation breathing Bishops. Also on Kelson's side are the faithful half-Deryni, Alaric and Duncan, quasi-mortals given only grudging recognition by prejudiced humanity who, not many hundreds of years before, had conducted a Deryni pogrom - born of fear of their superhuman talents and sorceries - which almost wiped the race from off the face of the Earth. Under King Brion the Deryni had regained some of mankind's trust, but with him dead the fears of the ignorant threaten once more to fan the flames of violence.

How Kelson and his friends defeat their friends with the aid of some supernatural fireworks from St. Camber and assorted Deryni talents forms the story in this first book. The framework of this alternate world offers much scope for the remaining two volumes. The action as described here is a little enclosed, being mostly court intrigue with an added dash of magic bitters, a little like the Zimiamvian works of E.R. Eddison, and one hopes that the scope of Miss Kurtz's tales will widen later. The characters of Lord Alaric, Duncan, Kelson, the Queen, and others are clearly delineated and rise off the page almost three-dimensionally, engaging ones sympathies at once.

For the aficionados of Sword and Sorcery there may not be enough Sword, but this lack is more than made up for by the sheer brilliance of the tale-telling. Some of the set-pieces, the scene in the Vault of the Dead King, the final clash between Kelson in possession of full regal powers and Charissa at the Coronation, are enthralling, described in vivid colours. Highly recommended.

A.R. Fallone.

MOORCOCK AND THE 'ELRIC' NOVELS.

If J.D. Collins is looking for "books of equal standing" with LotR, I would whole-heartedly recommend the books of Michael Moorcock.

Undoubtedly the best of Moorcock's works are the 'Elric Sagas', of which the first is 'The Stealer of Souls' (Mayflower Paperbacks, 25p.) In this we are introduced to Elric, "Proud prince of ruins, last Lord of a dying race. Elric of the black sword, sorcerer and slayer of kin, despoiler of his homeland, crimson-eyed albino, who had within him a greater destiny than he knew."

Elric, the rightful king of the sorcerous isle of Melnibone, was usurped by his cousin Yyrkoon, the mad brother of Elric's betrothed, Cymoril. Being an albino, Elric would normally be weak and helpless, but his broadsword Stormbringer, a Hell-forged weapon, took the souls of those it killed to Hell, and in return fed the victim's vitality to its wielder. So therefore the sword was dependant on Elric, and he was dependant on Stormbringer. (A curious love-hate relationship, although neither Elric nor Stormbringer have control over each other.

So Elric, armed with Stormbringer, leads an army against his own realm of Melnibone, so that Elric can free Cymoril from the enchanted sleep that Yyrkoon has imposed on her. Elric battles with Yyrkoon, and finally, by killing him, awakens Cymoril; but Stormbringer is not yet satisfied, and shrieking it swoops on Cymoril and kills her. So Stormbringer, Elric's lifeforce, is the cause of the death of his beloved, and also the destruction of his realm. He earns the hatred of all Melniboneans, and is named Elric Kin-slayer. From the moment of Cymoril's death, Elric becomes a bitter, twisted, haunted man, always seeking peace from his nightmares of Cymoril's death at his own hand.