

SPECULATIVE FICTION REVIEW by Stephanie Young

TITLE *Phoenix Without Ashes*
AUTHOR Edward Bryant & Harlan Ellison
PUBLISHER Fawcett Gold Medal
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PRINTING 1975

Précis Devon is a loner in the town of Cypress Corners, an agrarian community with Amish values and beliefs. Instead of God, it is the Creator they follow and their world is 100 kilometers wide. Devon has dreams of things he cannot explain and questions the elders and even the Creator, especially over the issue of the girl he loves being already committed to his one friend Garth. His chastisement by the elders led by Micah ends up with his banishment to the hill country.

While there, he discovers a portal to a strange place, and discovers that Cypress Corners is only one of many such worlds. All part of a giant spacecraft built hundreds of years to escape a dying Earth. However, there is a problem with the ship and Devon has to warn the People of Cypress Corners so they can try to stop the impending disaster. Of course, to the simple people of Cypress Corners this is demon talk and he is not believed.

In the end, he realizes he will have to try on his own with only Rachel by his side.

Protagonist Devon
Antagonist Elder Micah

What I liked The smooth pace of the story and the excellent development of Devon as he realizes the truth of his world. The science is well done and the enclosed worlds theme is well portrayed.

What I didn't like The dream sequences to me seemed contrived. I know it helps Devon question his world and makes his discovery less traumatic but I would rather have had him discover some lost manual or such as a way to explain this.

Final Comment This is an adaptation of the pilot script Harlan Ellison wrote for the failed television series *The Starlost*. Having seen the show recently at Worldcon, I can say that while the sets were inaccurate and the story changed somewhat, it did capture the feel of the story as it appears in the book. Unfortunately, the series took a turn away from the arc that Ellison proposed, probably one of the many reasons it failed.

For those of you who are interested in the way series are put together and how a writer often struggles to realize his vision, the introduction by Ellison is worth the price of the book. My main regret is that as far as I know, this is the only novelization of the series and that the story Harlan wanted to tell is not completed.

Rating 