



The Book of Ptath

A.E. van Vogt

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The god Ptath is flung into the far future by a deadly rival and given the mind of a 20th century man. Stranded in this alien world, he must fight to regain his powers before the rival goddess sends the world spinning into chaos and darkness. "Van Vogt's work has a raw power that has never been equalled in science fiction".--Damon Knight.

The Book of Ptath Details

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From Reader Review *The Book of Ptath* for online ebook

blake says

A.E. van Vogt is one of my favorite SF authors, and I'm sure I've read stories that were based around the same technological concept—that of "god power", a way of channeling the emotions of large numbers of people into a force captured by a few "gods"—though I'm pretty sure I haven't read this actual book.

The premise is that an ancient god Ptath has "returned to the people" while a conniving goddess struggles to undo the traps he set protecting his "throne of power". The first step in this plan involves pulling one of his incarnations through time (a 1944 tank driver, conveniently enough) to use his limited understanding of the situation with his inherent Ptath-ness to get *him* to undo the traps. On Ptath's side is a greatly de-powered goddess trapped in a dungeon with limited projection/possession powers.

There are two things about van Vogt, generally: The first is that he wastes no time or words in telling his story. Everything moves along at a hellacious clip. This is one book that could benefit from being twice as long or more.

With relates to the second thing about van Vogt: He always seems like he's writing from some long remembered history (kind of like Robert E Howard and his Conan stories), and there always seems to be history, technology and backstories to every element, if only there were time to write it down.

I guess that's why he's one of my favorites. That said, four stars instead of five *because* I felt the story needed a little more room to breathe.

Johnny says

Ptath just sounds like an ancient god with a name transliterated from Egyptian hieroglyphics or Akkadian cuneiform. Instead, A. E. Van Vogt conjured this image of an immortal god who had "merged with the race" of humans who worshipped him. By merging, he had lost control of his kingdom and allowed an evil goddess to not only take control, but to threaten his very existence. *The Book of Ptath* is the type of fantasy one would expect from Van Vogt. It doesn't measure up to what I consider his masterpiece *Slan* or what the majority seems to consider so, *The Weapon Shops of Isher*.

It is, however, a perfect example of pulp adventure serialized in magazine form in 1943 by Street & Smith's John W. Campbell publication, *Unknown Worlds* and then published in book form in 1947. My local library has a copy of the first edition of the Fantasy Press book from 1947. It contains line drawings which perfectly fit the style I've seen in my meager stash of pulp magazines collected over the years. And, even though Van Vogt may have expanded the story slightly for the book edition, the short chapters and the significant temporal gaps between them make this a relatively choppy reading experience.

Of course, the novel has many of the ideas (one critic labeled them "gnostic" with rather uncanny accuracy) one associates with Van Vogt—transmigration of the soul (with or without death), teleportation of a sort, attractive females associated with religion, a military veteran protagonist finding himself in improbable surroundings, and a protagonist engaged in moving against the establishment. In *The Book of Ptath*, a WWII veteran (an Allied "tanker") cohabits the body chosen by the god Ptath while in *The Universe Maker*

(originally, *The Shadow Men* as presented in the pulp magazine *Startling Stories*), the protagonist is a Korean War vet. Indeed, both stories even use hypnotism embedded in one's brain as the key to success.

The Universe Maker epitomizes the Van Vogt "Ur-plot" in that all religious figures are corrupt and self-serving (much like the goddess in *The Book of Ptath*). The self-aggrandizing minister seeks a bribe and tries to enforce his authority with fear during a key point in *The Universe Maker*. In *The Book of Ptath*, Van Vogt finds closure in having Ptath mock the goddess by saying: "Religion, you see, is not in its roots adoration of a god or a goddess. Religion is fear. Religion is the spark that issues forth when the thought of death or danger strikes the individual. It's personal. It grows out of darkness and uncertainty." (p. 227) Such Freudian sentiment on the origin of religious impulses would still be common in the mid-20th century and, even today, would find some resonance in modern society. Personally, I don't buy such a simplistic idea, but at least Van Vogt turned it into a fast-moving, albeit choppy story.

Zantaeus Glom says

'The Book of Ptath' proved to be an enervating affair from an author that I usually find most entertaining. Frankly, the absurdly contrived battle of body-swapping wills between the recently reincarnated god Ptath and his terribly arch, arch nemesis princess Ineznia amounted to very little in the way of a fun read. As an aside, my brain actively disliked having to read the idiotic word 'Ptath' so frequently. Not a good book. much like rabidly consuming sodium-rich Ramen noodles; very soon afterwards one craves some more robust fare. 'The Book of Ptath' is much ado about nothing. But to end on a more positive note I quite enjoyed this effervescing nugget from P. 157: 'Religion, you see, is not in its roots adoration of a god or a goddess. Religion is fear. Religion is the spark that issues forth when the thought of death or danger strikes the individual. It's personal. it grows out of darkness and uncertainty' (this is probably why I still dig on van Vogt, as even within his lesser works, one can always discover something worthwhile)

Paul says

I thought this was an enjoyable book (though not as good as the only other A. E. van Vogt novel I've read, *The World of Null-A*. To be honest, I thought that its really fast pace made it a bit hard to keep track of the characters' motivations (there's a plot twist every five pages, so before you're done processing one development you have to deal with another) and I did want to know more about the setting but I'd much rather read a book with a complicated plot that moves a bit too quickly than one with a simple plot that moves really slowly with a ton of detail about the world. I think it could have been better if the three main characters were more developed. And if the events of 200 million A.D. were connected more strongly with the events of World War II, from which the main character comes. And if the ending were not so abrupt.

Diletta says

Poteri antichi, cerimonie nascoste, viaggi nel tempo e trasmigrazioni. Tutto bene insomma.

Raj says

I enjoyed this pulp story of a god brought into human form in the far future, who has to fight to regain his power from the evil goddess who seeks to overthrow him.

Van Vogt can tell a story well and this is an excellent example of it. From the early frustration of the protagonist being manipulated, while seeing why it seems to be the logical thing for him at the time to his gaining knowledge and then the final battle. Rip-roaring stuff.

Ganesh says

This was a re-read for me. *The Book of Ptath* was one of the first fantasy books I ever read and no wonder I fell in love with the genre. The beauty of the book is not in the story, which is bare to the bones at best, but in the way the author sets a scene by building an exotic world around you all within a few masterful strokes of sentences. Suffice to say that the far-future land of Gonwolane has always been alive in a corner of my mind after more than 15 years.

Scapa Sylvain says

Difficile et passionnant..

James says

"Van Vogt's work has a raw power that has never been equalled in science fiction." - Damon Knight
Like many of Van Vogt's novels this first appeared in shorter form in the early forties. Set some two hundred million years in the future, it is a variation on the superhuman hero theme that Van Vogt employed in many of his novels (see Gilbert Gosseyn in *The World of Null-A* for one of the best examples). Here we have man reincarnated by a god and sent to the future. With multiple personalities, super-human strength and a faulty memory. This is a sort of truly fantastic science fiction that Van Vogt exemplified and I enjoyed during my college reading escapes in my Van Vogt period.

Devero says

Una lettura solo parzialmente interessante, a tratti rovinata da alcuni nonsense e iperboli numeriche. Nel complesso si lascia leggere, ma non avvince per nulla.

Bogdan says

Prima impresie asupra cartii, dupa ce am primit-o prin posta, a fost ca e cam subtire. Ma asteptam la ceva

mai voluminos, dupa exemplul seriei lui Gene Wolfe, la care de altfel Gheara Conciliatorului are cam aceeasi dimensiune ca si Umbra Tortionarului. Tinand-o in mina, nu te poti abtine sa nu admiri coperta si in plus sa realizezi cu adevarat potentialul si farmecul pastrarii copertii originale.

Cartea lui Ptath este impecabila atat ca prezentare, cat si in ceea ce priveste continutul. Iata ca se poate si o traducere fara litere mincate si bine realizata, efort aproape imposibil pentru cealalta editura impricinata, situatie vizibila mai ales in cazul colaborarii cu traducatori neexperimentati.

Intriga este una destul de simpla, insa implicatiile si personajele folosite au dimensiuni, daca le-as putea numi asa, grandioase.

Ne aflam la peste 200 de milioane de ani in viitorul omenirii, viitor in care Zeita Ineznia, avida de putere, il readuce la viata in urma unei reincarnari pe zeul suprem al Gonwonlane-ului, Ptath. Gonwonlane-ul este de fapt numele statului ce "ocupa jumatate din emisfera sudica, continuandu-se cu un promontoriu imens in directia nordului si terminandu-se intr-un indepartat punct estic, unde cu peste o suta de milioane de ani in urma fusese stravechea Australie". Stat este populat acum, printre altele, si de o specie de pasari zburatoare, asemanatoare cu pteranodonul preistoric (sau cel putin asa mi le-am imaginat eu din descrierile autorului si din ce apare pe coperta), screerii, cu un rol foarte important in actiunea viitoare a romanului.

Ptath si-a consolidat puterea zeiasca printr-o serie de vraji speciale, despre care la momentul de fata nu prea are habar, constiinta sa fiind amnezica si personajul in care se reincarneaza neputand sa descifreze mai nimic din misterele lumii in care a ajuns. Cel putin la inceput, pentru ca pe parcurs acest fost soldat, participant la cel de-al Doilea Razboi Mondial, se va dovedi o nuca destul de tare pentru o zeita Ineznia mult prea increzatoare in fortele si farmecele proprii.

Intriga se concentreaza in special pe rivalitatea izbucnita intre locuitorii Gonwonlane-ului si asa-zisii proscrisii din Nushirvan, rasculati impotriva guvernului zeitei Ineznia (5 miliarde), implicat in acest conflict fiind si vecinul Gonwonlane-ului (54 de milioane de locuitori), nemultumit si invidios pe statutul si bogatia statului precedent, Accadistran (19 miliarde de locuitori). Am subliniat si numarul de locuitori pentru a va face o idee despre cum ar arata un posibil conflict deschis intre cele trei state, lucru de altfel aproape neexploatat de autor in afara de o secventa din final, cand unul dintre ele se confrunta cu o invazie militara surpriza.

Ca tot veni vorba de lucruri neexploatate de autor la maxim, mi-ar fi placut sa aflu mai mult despre fauna si flora acesti lumi, despre obiceiurile oamenilor si modul de desfasurare a vietii zilnice. Din pacate autorul se opreste foarte fugar asupra acestor detalii, preferand sa se concentreze pe dilemele de moment si evolutia interioara, dar si spiritala a personajului Ptath, pe incercarile sale de a se adapta noii lumi si de a evita intrigile Inezniei.

O alta scapare pe care am observat-o pe parcurs ar fi cind se spune ca Ptah in forma sa actuala aduce foarte bine cu printul Ineznio, fratele zeitei, substituindu-i-se fizic de altfel la un moment dat, cu precizarea ca scriitorul nu spune nimic despre destinul celui de-al doilea, trecut total cu vederea. Intr-adevar, zeii mai aveau capacitatea de a poseda oamenii, trecand dintr-un trup in altul, insa scriitorul subliniaza clar ca Ptah era identic ca infatisare si, in plus, eu nu am intalnit in text sa se precizeze explicit aceasta posedere; din contra, se subliniaza substituirea fizica. (Daca ma insel si mi-a scapat vederii, atunci imi fac mea culpa, insa eu zic ca nu ma mai prinde nimeni de data asta).

Din punct de vedere al constructiei, personajele mi s-au parut convingatoare, desi ar mai fi fost loc si de mai bine pentru reincarnarea lui Ptath, mai ales pe directia dezvoltarii intamplarilor din trecutul fostului tanchist.

Iar Ineznia nu pare prea malefica daca privim comportamentul si felul sau de a fi, insa rezultatele finale ale actiunilor sale sunt in mod cert oripilante.

Un alt aspect – despre care abia in final ne dam seama ca a fost abordat in dese momente (insa fara a sacai cititorul) – este si inclinatia finteii umane spre o religie, spre dorinta de a crede in existenta unei fiinte divine. In fond, fiind o carte cu si despre zei, nu se putea trece cu vederea nici acest lucru. Insa, dupa cum se intampla si in realitate si nu ar trebui sa ne ascundem nici noi dupa deget, pina chiar si cei prea evlaviosi pot cadea victime ale indoiei, iar in urma unor incercari grele si cei necredinciosi isi pot intoarce prin rugaciuni fata la Divinitate. True facts, isn't it?

Van Vogt a construit un roman care se citeste cu placere si in care esti transportat intr-o lume presarata de piramide si razboinici fanatici, cu o influenta egipteana vizibil mai redusa decat m-am asteptat, dar cu un subiect si o tema centrala suficient de intrigante cat sa-ti pastreze viu interesul pina la final – si asta chiar daca se poate observa o incheiere a socotelilor mult prea brusca si grabita, tiparul fiind spart de lovitura finala de teatru.

Nu as cataloga Cartea lui Ptath in categoria romanelor fantasy de neratat, insa multa lume s-ar putea sa fie atrasa tocmai de exotismul lumii, dar si al subiectului exploatat, si este foarte posibil sa aiba parte de o surpriza placuta.

<http://www.cititorsf.ro/2009/10/07/te...>

Richard Wood says

I read short stories by A. E. Van Vogt when I was in my teens and, remembering how entertaining and clever they were, sought and purchased a novel by him (The Book of Ptath). I enjoyed it, certainly - but it didn't quite grab me the way that his short stories did. (This might have more to do with my advancing age rather than the skills of the author!)

David Roma Palou says

Seguint una recomanació d'un de molts reculls o llistes definitives sobre els 100 millors llibres de fantasia. Vaig intentar localitzar el llibre i vaig descobrir que estava descatalogat d'una editorial de llibres Pulp. Genial vaig pensar ... pot ser divertit investigar i trobar-lo on sigui .. el vaig trobar a una llibreria de compra i venda de llibres: www.mitiendadelibros.com a Ponferrada ... va ser molt divertit descobrir-lo i ficar-m'hi en contacte qual buscador de tresors.

Sorpresa total quan el rebo emocionat i obro el paquet. Estava impecable i molt nou segurament producte d'una liquidació d'una editorial de l'excedent d'estoc. Genial penso.

En si l'obra té la qualitat de les produccions en sèrie de les novel·les Pulp nordamericanes dels cinquanta però és divertit llegir-la i pensar els teus ídols (Stephen King, Dan Simmons, George RR Martin i altres) llegint de nens aquests llibres i entenent que ja els plantava la llavor de la fantasia.

Destacable la línia argumental grandilocuent de grans escenaris i xifres temporals estratosfèriques ... i el concepte de la migració astral de l'esperit o l'essència de l'ésser ... un concepte que sorprèn en novel·les d'aquest tipus.

Llàstima que el format per revista i els temps d'entrega no permetessin a l'autor (un obrer de l'escriptura per

masses àvides de fantasia i ciència ficció) fer el que George RR Martin fa avui en dia ... crec que per imaginació i conceptes no té res a envejar.

Spyros says

Princess on Mars styled novel. Had its interesting parts but overall I did not feel any connection whatsoever.

Old noble god gets ressurected only to be attemped-murdered by evil blond goddess and is saved by good brunette goddess.

The setting is the earth 200 million years in the future where everything has changed but nothing is described in detail. There is just the plot. No character development, no world-building... Nothing... I get it, it was written in a pre-Tolkien era but still...

Also, although written by an author of the sci-fi golden age, the book is barely sci-fi. It's low fantasy.

It did make me want to finish the "Dying Earth" series though. Since it greatly reminds me of Jack Vance. But the latter writes so much better and immersive stories.

Still not giving up on Van Vogt. I will deifinetly read the pure old school sci-fi stories of his. Small books they are anyway.

Jokoloyo says

This is a short novel, even for A.E. van Vogt works.

The description on the book is pulp-fiction standard, and the story is relatively simple with a few characters. It is a good quick read.

The rating might be not so good(3.41 when I write this review), but it is not overrated by zealous fans. When you read this short novel you can expect a light story for killing time.

I didn't commit to praise this is the best book of my life, but when we were together, I had a good time.

Jim says

An American soldier fighting in Germany in 1944 finds himself thrust into the world of the future, 200,000,000 years in the future, to be exact. He also finds he is sharing his mind with the great god Ptath as well as getting caught up in a great global war against a goddess who seeks total control of humanity in that future. Another imaginative work by one of SF's greats, AE Van Vogt (written in 1943, which means that Van Vogt predicted that US troops would reach Germany in 1944).

I want to add it's not one of his better books, but I like a story where someone is thrown into the future (or past).

Sheppard says

The only reason I read this book was due to the characters introduced in John C. Wright's sequel to Van Vogt's Null-A series. Wright's book the NULL-A Continuum introduces Ptath and Inenzia as two manifestations of key characters in his book. Note that the Book of Ptath was written by Van Vogt before NULL-A. The book of Ptath was disjointed, and left much to be desired. It was a short novel and so deeper backgrounds for the few characters was not emphasized. The realities of the world, Earth in the far future with 50 billion people and an agrarian alomat medieval world culture doesn't make close to sense and this presents problems that are hard to get around especially with armies of 5 billion people for one nation. I would. it recommend this book, but it was nice to see that for a nov written in the 1940's the female characters were strong and determined.

Matteo Pellegrini says

Tra duecento milioni di anni, duecento milioni di anni di guerre e di cataclismi, di prodigiose scoperte scientifiche e di paurosi fenomeni geologici, la Terra assumerà un nuovo volto... il favoloso volto che già possedeva nel remotissimo passato, con la ricomparsa dei mitici continenti di Gondwana, Lemuria e Mu, immense masse continentali popolate da miliardi e miliardi di uomini. Ma non solo il volto della Terra sarà cambiato... anche i suoi costumi e i suoi abitanti verranno modificati da una scienza così evoluta, così suprema, da sconfinare quasi nel regno del soprannaturale. E Peter Holroyd, un uomo del nostro secolo, varcherà l'infinito abisso del tempo, per raggiungere il mondo del futuro... un mondo nel quale, grazie a una geniale applicazione scientifica del più antico e insopprimibile dei bisogni umani, quello della preghiera e della fede, sarà possibile convogliare le energie mentali dei fedeli, attraverso il prodigioso strumento dei bastoni da preghiera, su determinate persone... trasformandole in esseri quasi divini! E il più grande di tutti gli dei di questa nuova religione scientifica è certamente Ptath di Gonwonlane, il Tre Volte Grande Ptath, l'uomo che si fuse con la razza milioni di anni fa, per vivere molte esistenze umane in modo da riacquistare l'umanità perduta. La leggenda dice che un giorno Ptath ritornerà a Gonwonlane, per riacquistare il suo antico ruolo di preminenza nelle cose umane... ma titaniche forze sono in movimento per impedire questo evento. Dal Fiume di Fango Bollente che protegge il Trono di Potenza custodito dal Nushir del Nushirvan alla misteriosa Landa dei Cento Vulcani, dalla rigida civiltà del tempio che soffoca ogni tentativo di ribellione alle immense distese celesti popolate da fantastiche creature volanti, miliardi di esseri umani e giganteschi eserciti stanno per scontrarsi in un pauroso olocausto... e la chiave della vittoria e della sconfitta è nelle mani di un solo uomo!...

(source: Anobii.com)

Joseph says

An awful lot of story crammed into something that only just barely exceeds novella length (if it does even that).

After a rather confusing beginning (the god Ptath finds himself on a road with no idea of who or what he is, or what he's doing other than a generalized urge to get to the city of Ptath for reasons that aren't entirely clear), we discover that a) we're now 200,000,000 years in the future and the continents have again merged into a single supercontinent and b) Ptath is actually driven by the reincarnated spirit of one Holroyd, a 20th century WWII Army veteran who probably died in a tank in Europe in 1944. Opposed to him is an incredibly powerful goddess; aiding him is another mysterious woman with powers beyond mortal ken.

Not altogether plausible, but so breathlessly paced that it's hard to notice how ridiculous it all is.

Jim says

I have been a fan of A.E. van Vogt ever since my teens, when **Empire of the Atom** was one of my favorite books. Although he has been consistently good across his works, *The Book of Ptath* is weak. How can one write a book about a duel between two goddesses without leaving the earthly plain? To complicate matters, Van Vogt's hero is both a human from World War Two, and a god in his own right. Sounds confusing? It is.
