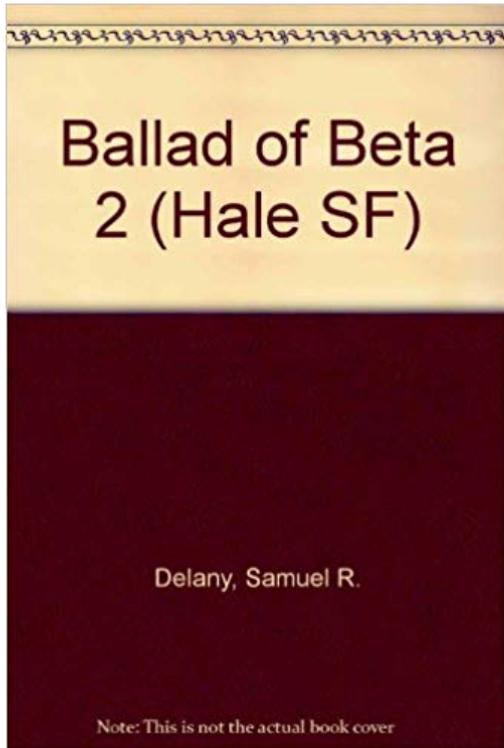


Ballad of Beta 2 by Samuel R. Delany



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Reviews of the *Ballad of Beta 2* by Samuel R. Delany

Humin

I read Delany's books when they first came out in the late 60's, and have always remembered "The Ballad of Beta 2" as one of my favorites. It must have really resonated with me, as even today I can hear the song that's central to the plot in my head. I reread this just a few months ago and I recaptured that sense of wonder I had as a teenager. That's the sign of a keeper as far as books go. Humin

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Invisibile

Here is the story of mankind's first, and unsuccessful, attempt to colonize another planet.

A dozen slow, multi-generation ships were sent to a distant star system called the Leffer System. Soon afterwards, mankind developed a star drive, so that by the time the ships reached their destination, mankind had been traveling around the galaxy for a hundred years. Of the dozen ships, two arrived empty, and two others never arrived at all. The ships were simply parked in orbit, and abandoned. Beta-2, one of the ships, even has its own ballad. Years later, as a college assignment, Joneny, a young researcher, is sent to find out just what happened.

Several of the supposedly indestructible ships show evidence of huge internal explosions. Some old audio recordings talk of being attacked by some sort of green humanoid that communicates by telepathy. Joneny meets the humanoid's half-human son, who is able to exist slightly outside of time, and live in hard vacuum with no problem at all. He watches video from the other ships where the inhabitants have physically, and mentally, de-evolved to the level of an early human. "The Norm" is taken very seriously on the ships. If a person was found to be outside physical norms in any way, whether it's being too tall, or left-handed, or having the "wrong" eye color, they were immediately executed. By the end, Joneny understands just what The Ballad of Beta-2 is all about.

This is a short novel, but a very good one. It's an interesting story about how things on a multi-generation ship can go very wrong, and it's worth reading.

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CONVERSE

Emil Petaja is a Finnish-American writer and photographer. He was a friend of Hannes Bok and an

active promoter of his artwork and fiction (for which, more power to him). *Alpha Yes, Terra No!* (1965) was his first published novel, though he had been publishing short stories for quite a few years before this time. Most science fiction encyclopedias dismiss the novel as "routine". And so it is. But it is not altogether a bad little novel, either. It's passable fun, in fact.

Emil Petaja's *Alpha Yes, Terra No!* and Samuel R. Delany's *The Ballad of Beta-2* (both 1965) are a pair of Ace Double novels. The Delany is his fifth novel, and I'm sure that you can guess without too much of a strain that it is the better of the two. But both of them are worth your attention.

Alpha Yes, Terra, No! takes that old chestnut of a plot-- the Earth on Trial by alien powers. Everyone has had a go at this at one time or another, from Robert Moore Williams to Robert A. Heinlein. But Petaja does a pretty acceptable job of it. An alien demagogue has gained power and is whipping up a campaign of fear, convincing aliens that Terrans are spawns of evil-- a plague that must be exterminated before they can spread into space. So far, he has met little resistance.

But one alien goes undercover into San Francisco to start a counter movement that he hopes will-- against all odds-- turn the tide in favor of Terra. Passable fun, with some likeable characters, and even some songs that aren't too bad.

The Ballad of Beta-2 opens with an all-too-familiar university scene: The bright young anthropology student who believes that he should be excused from studying a civilization that he deems of only minor importance. His professor disagrees. Joneny plans at first to do only a token research project-- just enough to get by.

But bit by bit, he becomes more caught up in the puzzle of his project. First, there is the old ballad itself:

*Then came one to the City,
Over sand with her bright hair wild,
With her eyes coal black and her feet sole sore,
And under her arm a green-eyed child.*

What does it mean? And what is the meaning of the ancient starships-- with one shredded in a strange explosion, and one missing altogether? What is the significance of the flicker in the time-stasis bubble, when time was supposed to be frozen? Who is the boy who suddenly appears in young Joneny's ship? Gradually, Joneny unravels the chilling secret of a strange society of a starship culture that lived by norms run amok, and by a subtle revolt against them, and by the final meaning of "the one who came back like she said she would" (96).

I give *The Ballad of Beta-2* a four star rating and *Alpha Yes, Terra No!* a three star rating for a global score score of four stars. The cover for the Petaja was by Jack Gaughan, and the cover for the Delany was by Ed Valigursky. Both covers were passable.

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The Balad of Beta 2 is beautifully and fully explained another reviewer but I would like to add this thought... the collage student learned a valuable lesson in the fact that bypassing sound research can never replace going to the location and finding the facts the hard way... the "Cliff Notes" of inept researchers never or rarely contain enough facts to determine the truth.

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Hunaya

I found "The ballad of beta 2" lying on a used books shelf, on sale, and brought it just for the sake of it. What a surprise! A catching yet dark plot, excelent writing and a GREAT ending which fits all the missing pieces that the book builds up. I found this book so interesting that i brought other novels by Delany, and i still beleive he is an very underrated writer. 4 stars because it gets a bit too long (for my taste that is), otherwise a GREAT read!

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I was looking for The Ballad of Beta-2 and Empire Star, a two-in-one Delany title that does not seem to be on amazon. I agree with the other reviewer: Ballad of Beta-2 is a quick and interesting mystery, highly recommended. The other tale that it is bound with, in my copy, Empire Star, is more complex (and not as haunting), but still a rewarding bit of short Delany SF. Delany can be very bizarre (as in Dhalgren) but he can also write good old-fashioned SF. !

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