S O N O F T H E W S F A J O U R N A L

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Editor & Publisher: Don Miller - 20¢ per copy

In This Issue --

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In Brief --

Still more 1970 (and a few 1971) reviews (only one more 1970 review left!).

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For those who like to keep track of such things, Newton's reviews have recently been appearing in THE EVENING STAR rather than THE SUNDAY STAR. A couple of his reviews which earlier appeared in TWJ or SOTWJ and later appeared in the STAR were: The Shattered Ring, by Lois & Stephen Rose (T.E.S. 1 Sep 71) and Broke Down Engine and Other Troubles with Machines, by Ron Goulart (T.E.S. 17 Aug 71).

Also for bibliographers/review indexers, a non-Newton review which appeared in THE SUNDAY STAR during 1970 was The Green Man, by Kingsley Amis (reviewer, "D.T."), in the issue of 23 August 1970.

Note that, although it lists "Don Miller" above as publisher of this issue, it is possible that it may instead be published by Gary Labowitz.

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-- DLM

S. F. PARADE: Book Reviews

The Ultimate Threshold: A Collection of Soviet Science Fiction Translated and Edited by Mirra Ginsburg (Holt, Rinehart & Winston; 244 pp.; $5.95).

The freest and liveliest published writing in Soviet Russia today, according to translator-editor Ginsburg, is in the field of science fiction. Good! No comrade (even a Red one) who likes science fiction can be all bad. It's nice to have a confirmation that some socialistic vices have a small degree of commonality with capitalistic vices. Now, in what is supposedly an age of more reason following the "gray, grim Stalin years", a resurgence of science fiction has aroused a tremendous response among Russian readers.

Nevertheless, we must not infer "that Soviet science fiction has entirely escaped the vigilant eyes of those who hold that art and literature must serve". Miss Ginsburg admits that the themes of Communist man, Communist achievement and the Communist future permeate a good deal of Soviet sf, although, on the other hand, she chose stories "free, above all, of the political dogma and lessons which most Soviet literature is still compelled to promulgate".

So she says. But the taint lingers subtly, although somewhat blandly in this prominently-labeled "Made in the USSR" anthology. Lingers even though the zing of native flavor has a way of dissipating under the recherche medium of translation. What's left is an almost antebellum aftertaste that pales besides the fresh, zesty melange of science fiction to be found on any American buff's bookshelf.

Still, I enjoyed most of the 13 stories included. I think you may, too.

-- JAMES R. NEWTON

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Man From U.N.C.L.E. #17: The Hollow Crown Affair, by David McDaniel (Ace 51700; 50¢).

If you have to read MFU books, it would appear that the ones put out under the David McDaniel by-line are preferable, over all. In most, he has what amounts to various sorts of fannish in-jokes, such as the Forrie Ackerman appearance in #6, the guest list of famous characters in #13, and so forth. If whoever he is is not a fan, he is familiar enough with the field to kid it at times. In this book, for instance, there is a minor character named "Lin Potter", who sounds awful familiar. But that's besides the point.

In this episode, we have 2½ villainous groups against 1½ nice guys. What it is is that one of the THRUSH big wheels, from the West Coast, makes a visit to Waverly, complaining about a certain Joseph King, a former UNCLE scientist, who, though thought dead, isn't; and that King is making things hot for Baldwin by bidding for THRUSH supremacy. The consensus seems to be that Baldwin is preferred to King on the enemy side. So Solo and Illya take King on, with the help of Baldwin and his wife, who are experts in the Victorian era and electronics, in that order. The plot is pretty conventional, thereafter, except for the Scrooch gun, invented by King, which is described as a Particle accelerator rifle based loosely on synchrotron technology.

The interesting items in the story are the methods Mr. Baldwin uses to leave messages. Having a preference for older ways, he uses, during the course of the story, such methods as the fan flirtation code, heraldic symbols, flower arrangement, and so forth. There are also a few side shots about the THRUSH version of FORTRAN, "THROTL", described as a very advanced computer language--in other words, a good way to axolotl questions. There is also a sly dig about an organization called the Irish Rifleman's Association.

Pretty good story, if you like that sort of thing. UNCLE is just not my bag, samwise or another.

-- DAVID A. HALTERMAN

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The Science Fiction Hall of Fame, Vol. One, edited by Robert Silverberg (Doubleday & Co.; 558 pp.; $7.95).

"The Greatest Science Fiction Stories of All Time", the dust jacket proclaims, adding, like an old-fashioned subtitle, "Chosen by the Members of the Science Fiction Writers of America (SFWA)".

I was suspicious before I even opened the book. I have a thing about someone else deciding for me what the "greatest" of anything is. I prefer to make up my own mind.

My suspicions are hardly allayed by the editor's introduction, in which he admits quite candidly that "some selectivity had to be imposed to keep the book from growing to infinite length". This sounds logical, but Silverberg's rather lengthy rationalization of the final layout of 26 stories leaves no doubt in my mind that he exercised a heavy editorial hand, indeed.

This is a mighty tome (two-plus pounds avoirdupois). The first one (of several volumes span, we're told) covers pre-Nebula-Award stories circa 1930's through 1950's (with one 1963 thrown in for who knows what good measure). Much of the contents will be reruns for the serious sf buff, particularly those of us old enough to remember ASTOUNDING STORIES, THRILLING WONDER STORIES, AMAZING STORIES, et al.

But don't take my suspicions for denigration of the quality of writing of the 26 authors represented here. I don't necessarily agree with the SFWA choices unless you qualify that by saying "at the time written". Heinlein, Brown, Bradbury, Campbell--all have written better stories at later, after-maturation periods.

Packaging, no matter how attractive, doesn't make the archives of a "Science Fiction Hall of Fame" any less dusty and musty. It's another anthology, one timed, I suspect, as a candidate to fill the off-seasonish summer doldrums. If you like antiquarian fare, this is a good one to sample.

-- JAMES R. NEWTON

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Phoenix, by Richard Cowper (Ballantine; 75¢).

In a sense, every novel--sf or not--is a "rehash" of all the other books previously written, combining old elements into something new. Whether a novel is good or bad depends on how well these elements are shuffled around, and the fresh insights or viewpoints that the author reveals. Evidently, however, Richard Cowper did not shuffle the deck too well before he dealt out this novel. Phoenix (from the title on down) is quite an obvious "rehash", and contains enough stock situations to practically turn it into an sf cliché.

Not that Phoenix is without any spark of originality--even I, cold-hearted as I am, would hesitate to say that. Cowper has taken a stock "pulp" plot and attempted to dress it up in (stylistically) contemporary clothes, in the manner of Zelazny and Delany. But instead of trying to dazzle you with mind-bending imagery like those two, Cowper relies upon a cleverly-turned phrase, a subtle hint of humor.... Unfortunately, however, he just doesn't have the talent to quite bring it off--the bare bones of the pulp framework beneath stick through the novel's stylistic clothing just once too often. But before I digress any further, a little background and plot synopsis seem appropriate.

Bard Cecil (pronounced "our hero") has fallen for a girl in a society which regards "love" as a social evil, and has been neglecting his studies and skipping classes to be with her. But now the time of reckoning (final exams!) is fast-aproaching, and Bard must find some way out or face a term at the local "Adjustment Center". And he does find an escape--through the "Caves of Sleep" (suspended animation). Bard plans to lay there sleeping for three years, until he turns legally twenty-one and falls heir to a sizeable fortune. Then he will possess

the freedom to do whatever he likes, without the threat of the "Adjustment Center" hanging over him.

Part II of our story rolls around, and Bard awakes--1,500 years later. A plague has swept Earth, wiping out the ultra-modern, 24th-century civilization that he had known, and replacing it with a decadent, barbarian society that lives off the wreckage of the past. (What Cowper has done is to merely exchange one stock background for another.) A repressive religious group--the "Brotherhood"--has evolved, and it jealously guards against any intruders that might undermine its power, or endanger the status quo. Ah, yes...and guess who's going to challenge the status quo??

I think I'll stop here, since that should give you a decent--although admittedly vague--outline of Phoenix. The stock situations and ideas are obvious: a society that forbids the expression of "love", the "Adjustment Centers", the "Brotherhood", et al. Why do these same, familiar ideas keep popping up in story after story? Don't writers have any original ideas of their own? Or is it just that these old ideas are the ones easiest to write about? Well, in any event, the result is the same--another leftover, lukewarm novel.

Cowper displays some other hackish traits toward the end of Phoenix. For instance, in this passage one of the characters is explaining time-travel to our hero:

> "The stream of Time cannot be broken, but where the conditions operating are exceptional, a particular current can sometimes be diverted--perhaps 'bent' would be a more suitable term--and that may prove sufficient. For if it can be bent, it can be bent full circle back upon itself. At any given moment of time there exist a number of parallel futures..."

Pure gibberish! Pseudo-explanations like this are the mark of a true hack. Thankfully, however, Cowper manages to resist the temptation to throw Bard off into a time-track maze, as a number of other crudzine writers would have done. Instead, he delivers a fairly decent, coherent, and believable ending--something many better writers have a hard time doing.

To sum up, Phoenix is a good example of "pedestrian sf"--a mediocre novel, not good, but not horribly bad, either. Mildly entertaining. And what more can I say?

-- CY CHAUVIN

The Troika Incident: A Science Fiction Tetralogue, by James Cooke Brown (Doubleday; 399 pp.; $7.95).

Science fiction authors are prognosticators, some serious, some not. James Cooke Brown has come up with a very naively-altruistic treatment of the future. He pictures a world "free from hatred, fear and strife, wherein all basic needs are easily provided and man is freed to fulfill his highest potentials". Although Brown covers just about every aspect of life, his world of 2070 is just too good to be true.

The book's rococo construction does little to develop a futuristic frame of mind in the reader, being a four-way dialogue among three crew members of a tri-national spaceship, Troika-7; and a journalist selected to write their incredible story. This first manned ship powered by the revolutionary pi-meson engine plummets our American-Russian-French crew ahead in time. The rest of the plot is a rather stochastic exposition of what the inexplicably-returned crew has learned about the world a century hence--and what they haven't learned isn't worth knowing. Not really very exciting fare, action-wise.

What saves Troika from tedium is a smoothly-flowing, albeit verbose, style, and an occasional brilliant sally into detailed conjectures about pivotal points in the future as Brown sees them. Consider, for example, the effect on civiliza-

tion of a storage battery weighing only five pounds but capable of delivering two million kilowatt-hours of electricity. That's a capacity seven orders of magnitude--about 10 million times--greater than the best 1970 battery! Think what that kind of cheap energy would do for transportation, ecological balance, housing, home appliances, or a hundred other aspects of everyday living.

The Troika Incident is slow-moving, but for readers preferring a future of rosy hues, the price may not be excessive.

-- JAMES R. NEWTON

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The Null-Frequency Impulser, by James Nelson Coleman (Berkley #X1660; 60¢).

STF-type: Formula sf; Plot-type: Earth invaded.

This story started off fairly well; almost good, in fact. The author, unfortunately, blew the story for me by violating one of the few cardinal rules of science fiction.

Most of the story concerns two disembodied aliens, with strong psionic powers. The good ~~[illegible]~~ gentlebeing is Tisza, the queen-mother-to-be of her race, the Triskellions. The villain is Trabzon, a "drone" who is hot for Tisza's bod(?).

The human protagonist, Catherine Rogers, is a space scientist in the Rogers Group, which is trying to overthrow the monopoly on space flight held by the underhanded "Five Companies". Trabzon makes his appearance in the brain of the head of a company secret police patrol which has come for the body of a certain dead sciontist with a big secret--knowledge of the lair of the Inventors, who are doing secret space research, they think.

Actually, Tisza has been working on a yell for help.

Catherine goes to the secret cavern, to be confronted and then entered by Tisza. The two of them, with help, manage to confine Trabzon in the body he's using, with the help of the null-frequency impulser designed by Tisza. But he escapes. Pretty soon, he comes looking for Tisza, finds her, and rapes her--in Catherine's mind--then runs off with the kids, bent on bringing them up in his own image as a "soul-eating" pervert. (No, not soul, exactly, but you get the idea.)

There's a lot of action, some parts similar to Needle, others to Sinister Barrier, before the final confrontation--in which there is a psionic battle between the two aliens. Tisza wins, finally, because of the unexpected help from Catherine's hitherto unmentioned mental abilities. Which fact is why I say the author violated a rule of science fiction: namely, NEVER CHANGE SECONDARY UNIVERSES IN MIDSTREAM. It does a story no good to build tension and conflict when the writer decides to save the day by throwing in a factor the reader hasn't been prepared for. It's a bad scene.

The book has some merits, certainly, but I cannot recommend it.

-- DAVID A. HALTERMAN

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Sea Horse in the Sky, by Edmund Cooper (G.P. Putnam's Sons; 190 pp.; $4.95).

Four-fifths of this novel is perhaps the best writing Edmund Cooper has done. The storyline is charted with precision, characterizations are tight, action is tautly drawn, and suspense is progressively edge-of-the-chair. Then--a metamorphic fizzling from the sublime to the ridiculous in the final one-fifth. Judge for yourselves:

Eight men and eight women, unknowingly abducted from a Sweden-to-Britain jet, wake up in plastic coffin-like boxes. Subsequently they determine that they're no longer on Earth; that they're imprisoned by a "wall of mist" within a nine-hundred-square-mile zoo-like area; and that two other groups of diverse humans

have been similarly kidnapped: a medieval lord and his keep, and a band of Stone Age savages. Cooper beautifully depicts the prisoners' efforts to cope with their inner fears and the strange external environment. It's a logical narrative up to the point where they finally break through the barrier.

Which makes the miserable climax an even greater disappointment.

Ghosts (projections? recordings?--Cooper never does make this clear) of the dead Vruvyir, a super-plus race, confront our humans. The Vruvyir weren't born as we poor mortals. They're super, remember. "They were born of a dying star, they coalesced from fire, they took form in vortices of pure energy. They were sentient firebirds, the product of direct stellar procreation." (But they look like sea horses--get the title now?)

Really! And adding insult to injury, Cooper closes with a real Hollywood-style epilogue in which the descendents of our original humans staunchly and smugly face the future imbued with the absolute nobility of their destiny: "To find a planet called Earth. The abode of the gods."

-- JAMES R. NEWTON

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2001
arthur c clarke
new american library

hi
this is yngvi again
and sam
sam mouser
sam says that only a
cockroach
would be crazy enough
to review
2001
he says that
people
and cats
dont have enough
feet
to put in their mouths
actually
i liked the movie
even
the popcorn
i like to see people
make apes
out of themselves
and ive always thought
computers
had eversomuch more
soul
than people
i even chewed my way
through the book
and i read the sentinal
too
after i saw the movie
then
having digested
all three
i realized
that clarke
had done it again
yes
childhoods end
against the fall of night
the city and the stars
he had done it all again
i think
its prejudice
to think man
has any chance
to be a god
or even like a god
i like baalzebub better
what
sam says bast
is best
i doubt it
SAMWATCHYOURFEET!NOSAMNONON

((yngvi -- requiescat in pace. --ed))

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Twenty Years of the Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, edited by Edward L. Ferman & Robert P. Mills (G.P. Putnam's Sons; 264 pp.; $5.95).

Although most science fiction buffs recognize there are differences between fantasy, science fantasy and science fiction, few will agree on precise parameters or definitions. Yet divisions do exist. Without further justification, I see the three styles as:

(1) Fantasy -- stories of supernatural forces and their influence on hominoids (including homo sapiens), usually with elements of magical powers displayed by some or all characters.

(2) Science Fantasy -- stories in which scientific principles are woven into essentially fantasy plots.

(3) Science Fiction -- stories of supranatural forces and their influences on hominoids (usually homo sapiens), with scientific principles phylogenetically emphasized or essential to the plot.

By these arbitrary definitions, Twenty Years of the Magazine of F&SF presents ten fantasy, six science fantasy and four science fiction tales. There also is a flippant foreword by that literary peripatetic, Isaac Asimov, who has been the magazine's science editor for most of its twenty years; and an afterword by Edward L. Ferman, who, together with the book's co-editor, Robert P. Mills, span the magazine's full twenty years as either editor or managing editor.

Many well-known sf authors are represented: Isaac Asimov, Alfred Bester, Robert Bloch, Theodore Sturgeon, Ray Bradbury, Philip K. Dick--to mention only a few. But for me, none of the stories reflect the best efforts of these and the other authors whose stories have been culled from the F&SF archives.

Still, lasting for twenty years in a highly-competitive field where a string of other magazines has briefly bloomed and faded away is no mean feat. No one can gainsay that F&SF has given the faithful something they wanted for these twenty years. And that's really the measure of success, isn't it?

If your reading preference leans toward a preponderance of fantasy, you'll like this book.

-- JAMES R. NEWTON

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Mindblower, by Charles McNaughton, Jr. (Essex House #0120; $1.95; Afterword by Philip José Farmer).

Farmer says, "This is a science-fiction magazine to rot the minds of you dwarfs." Somehow, I feel almost unqualified. On the other hand, the bare fact that I have already reviewed a number of science friction books, from Essex House and others, may suggest to some that ~~the~~ rot has already set in. But, to the emissue at hand....

Would you believe:

Four days before the Hashbury "Dog-Shit Orgy", Jack Flasher is tripping up Haight Street (on 600, count 'em, 600 mcg. of L.S.D.) where he bumps into a chick wearing white levis and a pair of earrings (on her nipples). They say hello for about nine pages.

Enter Linton Jowelslem, disguised as a Pig (he was a rob-a-cop). He had a few other hangups, like Birch's Syndrome (right foot-in-mouth disease). Sothron courtesy ("Hippie peace creeps"), autoeroticism, and the most accurate orgasm since Big Bertha. Right between the earrings.

Eventually he withdraws, and our heroic couple adjourn to Jack's pad, get acquainted for about 25 pages, blow a few smoke rings, and Take A Shower.

Philosophy time. (McNaughton likes to philosophize a lot. Especially when everything is up tight.) Did you know that hippies really wear long hair for reasons other than grossing out the opposition? The real reason (he says) is that textures are the biggest thing on a trip, and long hair feels groovy. (I am disillusioned. I always thought it was for protection against billy clubs. Or else a handy place for a stash.)

The next morning, Jack goes for a walk, meditating on how Hashbury is dead, on account of all the reporters, and photographers, and tourists, and Mafiosi, and rich hippies. He meets four trippies hallucinating madly over a pile of big doodoo. (It seems to be the only natural thing left in the whole district.)

Meanwhile, back at the ~~[illegible]~~ pad, Phaedra, the chick, is reading Jack's great American novelette. (As do we. Twelve pages of sentence. One sentence. Two sets of initials and four ellipses account for all 16 periods. Yes..... .....sixteen periods. It's got to be some kind of record.) When she finishes, she happens to meet Jack's other girl, and they get acquainted for

about thirteen pages, with sound effects. She finally waxes tired and goes looking for Jack. (Whew.)

As we again take up the ***** of Phaedra Farout, she is having a bang-up time with a group of Negro youths, one of whom takes time out (in) to comment on, among other things, the race problem, and the morality of people who read Essex House books.

"'Hold on,' gasped Phaedra. '...Haven't you a shred of reverence of for (sic) the concept of "Willing Suspension of Disbelief"...?'

"'Do you mean to tell me that you actually think that people believe what they read in dirty books any more? Let alone one like this?...Communication of ideas is the thing, anyway...'".

Finished, her friends leave Phaedra to wander off, where she meets Linton, the Krazy Kat Kop. She convinces him that she is Ghod's messenger, and that he, Jowelslom, has been chosen to Make The World Right For God. Like Torquemada, he goes off, a dedicated man.

Then things begin to get hectic. (If they hadn't, the book would have been $2.95).

Phaedra runs across a gaggle of dirty old men--and women--in motorized wheel chairs, mounting pneumatic aluminum extendible "dilliobopples", wearing obscene--but suitable--masks, riding around hell bent for leather, and yelling, "Fuck your mind!" all over the place. (I have the strange feeling that these characters were imported from Search the Sky.) Complicating the situation is a large, hairy, black, sadistic, dyky maid. And every man jack of them was Self Actualized. Phaedra manages to get the oldies mad at the maid, and they are drawing a bead with their dilliobopples, getting ready to really cream her, and Jack Flasher, All Amaryjane Boy, happens along just in time to yell, "Fire!"

During the ensuing mess, Jack and Phaedra manage to escape, and are running like hell, with a herd of mad wheelchairs behind them, when they fall down a tree unto wunderland, where they are captured by a bunch of hairy dwarves. The dwarves are also Self Actualized, and decide that our intrepid duo should be too. So they sock it to 'em, and throw them down a hole.

Sock what? Oh yes. The secret of Self Actualization. The First Cause of the Haight-Ashbury Dog-Shit Orgy. The drug to end all drugs, THE MIGHTY QUINN.

It does everything. Hallucination. Aphrodisia. Self-realization. Telepathy. Total empathy. The communion of every soul on it. And it grows hair. All over, even.

Meanwhile, the drawves, in their zeal for civic improvement, decide to dump the drug into the city water supply. Hoo-hah!

Under the influence of the Mighty Quinn, all the straights realize how rotten they are and kill themselves out of remorse. The minority groups realize just how shitty a deal they've got. They kill themselves. (The Traditional Orientals were the last to go. While they were going through all the rites, their kids used up all the knives.) The Flower People start seeing all the beauty around them, stage the Dog-Shit Orgy, and then they kill themselves. Meanwhile Jack and Phaedra don't like each other so good any more.

Jack turns nark and tries to help the President find the dwarves. (It seems somebody gave him a sandwich during the orgy. Un-huh.) The army moves into the city incognito, disguising themselves as the inhabitants. (Colonels become drunks, and like that.) And as we bid adieu to our hero, a flying saucer comes down out of the sky, and takes our Jack Flasher away.

Yeahhh.

I strongly recommend this book--though I don't quite know what for. I do know where for. It belongs in a true and fitting place in every home.

Down the hall, on the right-hand side.

..... -- DAVID A. HALTERMAN .....

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The House in November, by Keith Laumer (G.P. Putnam's Sons; 192 pp.; $4.95).

Another invasion-by-aliens tale whose plot progression is fairly predictable. The Mono, non-human creatures from another galaxy, have devastated Earth and are about to spawn billions of Mono spores. One human man overcomes, inexplicably, Mono hypnotic control to laboriously and singlehandedly (and at times with unbelievable naivety) defeat the horror about to engulf the planet.

The hardback edition is hardly better than the shorter version serialized under the title "The Seeds of Gonyl" in WORLDS OF IF for October, November, and December 1969.

Not anywhere near Laumer's best. Readable only if you haven't one of the many better science fiction works available at almost any bookstore.

-- JAMES R. NEWTON

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Mind at Bay, edited by Christopher Evans (Panther Books: London, 1969; wpps 186; 5s).

Reviewing a British book in an American fanzine may seem a bit odd, but this thing may--or should--have a U.S. edition soon. (Meanwhile, Dick Witter has it for 60¢.)

Christopher Evans is an experimental psychologist who has assembled an anthology of horror stories, one to each of what he considers basic fears, some of which I'm interested to find don't much affect me.

Of the 11 stories, I think only Jane Rice's "The Idol of the Flies" and Conrad Aiken's "Silent Snow, Secret Snow" are overfamiliar, which is a high average for a horror anthology these days. Stories range from semi-conventional fantasy ("The Frontier Guards", by H. Russell Wakefield; "The Ash Tree", by M.R. James) to grubby modernist fantasy ("Back to the Beginning", by John Connell) to intriguing and/or annoying experiments ("The Master Plan", by John Sladek; "The Watch-Towers", by J.G. Ballard; "Crab Apple Crisis", by George MacBeth).

Evans has given himself more chronological latitude in selections than most anthologists, resulting in a nice anthology.

-- MARK OWINGS

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Gadget Man, by Ron Goulart (Doubleday & Co.; 161 pp.; $4.95).

In this book, riots, general dissatisfaction, guerrilla bands--all threaten the casually repressive order established by the ruling Junta of the (are you ready?) Republic of Southern California.

A most unlikely law enforcer, a member of the Social Wing of the Police Corps, is sent to find the cause. What Sergeant James Xavier Hocker encounters during his odyssey through the rubble of the consumption-oriented, gadget-filled, anything-for-kicks society only illuminates a rather unevenly-constructed but not-entirely-unlikely Kookieland of today projected into some time after the turn of the 21st century.

Too many loose ends and unexploited possibilities make this one not the best Goulart has done.

-- JAMES R. NEWTON

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Danger Planet, by "Brett Sterling" (Popular Library #60-2335; 60¢).
The Solar Invasion, by Manly Wade Wellman (Popular Library #60-2346; 60¢).

There's not much to say, really. If you're too young to remember Captain Future, you should read at least one of these to see how far the field of science

fiction has advanced(?) in the last 20 years or so. If you do remember, there's no sense in my saying anything, because you probably know more about the subject than I do.

Captain Future (Curt Newton to his friends), and his Futuremen, Grag the robot, Otto the android, and Simon Wright the disembodied brain in a box, his best girl, Joan Randall, and all the other members of the planet patrol, ride forth to do good and fight evil, in the best tradition of space opera. Tradition, hell; the Captain Future series didn't follow it; it practically made it.

These stories should be read for the same reasons as Doc Savage. For pure (and I do mean pure) adventure, they are almost beyond compare. For the sake of nostalgia, they are almost mandatory. For entertainment, they still give more value for cost that a lot of other junk that's floating around.

Go ahead and read them. I liked the first one better, but they're both good.

-- DAVID A. HALTERMAN

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The Year of the Cloud, by Ted Thomas & Kate Wilhelm (Doubleday; 216 pp.; $4.95).

Everyone knows what would happen if the world's water dried up: life as we know it would die. But what if, instead of evaporating away, the water merely thickened; how affected would mankind be? The answer to that frightening question is the basis for this superb yarn.

Thomas' broad scientific knowledge and Kate Wilhelm's ability to characterize the most elusive personality combine again, as they did a few years ago in "The Clone", to chronicle a speculative catastrophe nearly fatal to Earth. Their scientific rationale is impeccable. Gradual development of the menace's nature is so logically limned the reader must believe it could happen. More, reactions of the five protagonists through whose eyes we see events are so naturally enucleated the reader cannot help but relate with their motivational fear and despair, their determined courage and hope.

Earth passed through the Yudkin Cloud, a mass of unidentified interstellar dust. Apparently it does no harm, then a frightening change begins--all water gradually thickens to a gel-like substance where the cloud's dust falls. As viscosity increases, every living thing is forced to change or die. Nearly half the population succumbs, from failure to adapt and partly from natural disasters triggered by the change.

Although the book contains a minimum of violent action, tension builds up just as strongly in the sneaky day-to-day way reality has of socking it to us. If the resolution seems a little weak because it includes, but fails to explain, a belated awareness that the Cloud can't have occurred by accident, the story's impact is diminished little. Its strengths far outweigh that triviality.

-- JAMES R. NEWTON

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