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

WSFA JOURNAL Supplement: Book Review Issue #3 - - - 2nd May, 1971 Issue (#21)

In This Issue --

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In Brief --

Still more reviews left over from 1970, continuing series started w/SOTWJ #17.

The reviews listed above which are marked with asterisks originally appeared in THE SUNDAY STAR, resp. issues 21 Jun '70, 14 Jun '70, 3 May '70, 6 Dec '70, 10 May '70, 4 Oct '70; they are reprinted here with permission, and are copyrighted (c) by The Evening Star Newspaper Company, in the year 1970. The review marked with an "©" in RABANOS RADIACTIVOS! (an Apa L 'zine), in Oct '70.

Those of you receiving the TWJ/SOTWJ Back-issue flyer with this issue should note that sale prices are extended thru 31 May '71. Also, SOTWJ is a general Supplement (with reviews, etc. as well as news), eff. with issue #17.

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SOTWJ is ap prox. bi-weekly. Subs (via 1st-class mail): 20¢ ea., 6/$1, 12/$1.75. Free to contributors, traders, & to WSFA members if picked up at WSFA meetings. Also avail. as part of pkg. incl. THE WSFA JOURNAL, in bi-monthly Mailings at 75¢/Mailing, 4/$2.50, 8/$4.50 (UK: 30p ea., 4/112½p, 8/200p). TWJ also avail. w/o SOTWJ at 50¢ ea., 4/$1.75, 8/$3.25 (UK: 20p ea., 6/100p, 9/150p). Lone TWJ's & Mailings sent 3rd-class. For names & addresses of Overseas Agents, & Air-Mail rates, write the Ed., or see TWJ DATA SHEET. No room for full Address Code key this time (see #20), but note that K, Something of yours is reviewed/mentioned herein; N, You are mentioned herein. Receipt d-line for #22: 14 May.

— DLM

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TO:

FIRST CLASS MAIL

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S. F. PARADE: Book Reviews

The Waters of Centaurus, by Rosel George Brown (Doubleday & Co.; 181 pp; $4.95).

Science fiction fanciers who have been looking forward to another rollicking adventure of that tough, beautiful, gin-drinking, cigar-smoking Police Sergeant Sybil Sue Blue will be delighted with this tale. It has all the ingredients of sf's farthest-out but lovable heroine, green face cosmetics, rouged knees, purple petal-textured Botticelli and all.

Unfortunately, this probably will be Sybil Sue Blue's final appearance. Mrs. Brown's death in 1967 cut off a promising series.

Sybil's job this time is to uncover unknown elements threatening diplomatic relations between Terra and Centaurus. She discovers the immensely attractive Sea King is using his Terran education to assemble fusion bombs with which to melt the planet's glaciers. All the land area will be drowned, leaving his underwater sea people in control of the world. How Sybil foils this plot is pure thundering space-opera.

Beneath surface improbabilities Mrs. Brown actually draws sharply-consistent characterizations whose seemingly radical departures from literary norms add a taste of the vernacular that makes her imaginative alien locales and societies stand out believably.

I, for one, will miss Sybil Sue Blue.

-- James R. Newton

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Rockets in Ursa Major, by Fred & Geoffrey Hoyle (Harper & Row, Book Club Ed.).

There has been for some time a division in our genre between proponents of "hard sf" and those who exhalt "people stories". This dispute is considerably older than the bitter New Thing vs. Old Wave controversy which is in some senses its offshoot. The present reviewer admits to generally favoring "people stories", i.e., stories that probe beyond a basic sf concept or gimmick into the human factors that make literature a living and creatively-involving thing, but at the same time concedes that authors like Clarke and Anderson (to name just two) create extremely worthwhile hard science fiction and, indeed, at times combine both forms. The definition of valid speculative fiction ought to be broad enough to include both schools, while excluding their more extreme applications. Extreme applications of the "people story" idea produce stories which may qualify as literature, but aren't sf; and extreme applications of the opposite school of thought produce something that is admirable science but hardly fiction.

Rockets in Ursa Major is an excellent example of the latter extreme. Indeed, it is almost a pastiche of a hard science sf novel, and had it been written by someone prominent in the field I would have been willing to believe that it was intended as such. But the authors are a duo almost perfectly suited to provide a horrible example of a certain kind of sf. Fred Hoyle is an astrophysicist of massive intellect and reputation, who occasionally employs sf to outline clever scientific concepts. His son, Geoffrey, is an economist who dabbles in writing. They collaborate superbly to make this novel what it is: Fred provides the science, unimpeachably accurate, of course, and Geoffrey provides the ignorance of sf that has led other mainstream authors like Martin Caidin, Michael Crichton and Richard Cowper to disaster.

An honest description of what Rockets in Ursa Major is about would have to read approximately as follows: This novel is about a method of turning the sun into a gigantic radiation bomb to destroy an alien space fleet, a means of preventing the lithium employed for that purpose from igniting prematurely, the deceleration required for a rocketship entering our solar system from beyond, and an electronic feedback system for space torpedoes. Those are the elements important to this book; those are the only elements important to this book. All

else is hurriedly added on to make a "story". The result is an incredibly shallow novel, peopled (to flatter them a great deal) by cliches--and Veddy British army officer/defense ministry/House of Lords cliches at that, which are the worst kind. Background is laughable: The story takes place around the year 2010, but aside from the existence of spaceships and a World Space Control military establishment, and a couple of things like automated restaurants and door locks responsive to fingerprint patterns, there's nothing the least bit non-1970 about it. Dialogue is sophomoric, and technically inadequate (Geoffrey has worked as a TV story consultant and writer, but he apparently still hasn't learned to write dialogue that sounds like real conversation between real people). Human relationships are non-existent.

In short, if all that is worthwhile in this novel had been presented, as it might well have been, in a single page of mathematical equations, the sf field would be no poorer.

-- Ted Pauls

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Six-Gun Planet, by John Jakes (Paperback Library #63-313; 60¢).

Blurb: "...guaranteed to provoke every SF reader--one way or another." For me, it was another.

With such a title you should get a little farce. Something like the Hokan hokus "The Sheriff of Canyon Gulch". A farce it isn't.

It starts like one, with drunken doctors, strong silent sheriffs, and loving B-girls. It seems that the planet got tired of technology and decided to go back to the good old days. With street-duels, horses (mechanical, 'tis true), and a few incidental savages. The author even manages a few subliminal plugs, what with Brakish fountains, and the like.

Of course, there's a mysterious gunfighter that the hero, who hates killing, must face sooner or later.

Mind you, I'm not complaining. The story is well thought-out, well-written adventure, with a real twist at the end. It just ought to have been a funny.

It's like biting into boeuf a la mode jardiniere and finding out it's Yankee pot roast. It may be good, but it's too damn normal.

-- David A. Halterman

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Orbit 7: An anthology of new stories ed. by Damon Knight (G.P. Putnam's Sons; 217 pages; $4.95).

This seventh in the "Orbit" series is a strangely unsatisfying melange of bittersweet and acid pottage. Touted as new stories--no reprints--the twelve offerings paint consistently dismal pessimistic pictures. Neuroses and psychoses abound.

Characterizations are almost too sharply drawn to be accepted by readers expecting the kind of relaxed pleasure one ought to find in this literary genre. Perhaps the authors' paradigmatic worlds hue a bit too closely to increasingly obvious trends we all can see around us today to engender anything but unease in readers' minds.

Whatever the reason, Orbit 7 is not a happy book. For example, in "April Fool's Day Forever", Kate Wilhelm (who can do much better) paints a frightening picture of the attainment of immortality--for the very few.

Even staid archaeology becomes an undignified charade in "Continued On Next Rock" under R.A. Lafferty's twisted treatment of a disappearing future whose amorphistic reality makes shadows of human souls.

The turned-on generation gets its licks in with Richard Hill's "To Sport With Amaryllis", a numbing glimpse of physical and mental nakedness among the

cycle crowd. It's a sick picture of an unlovely life--or an unlovely picture of sick life. Take your pick.

No, Orbit 7 isn't really science fiction. It's fantasied despair and hopelessness and muddy psyches mired in existences where beauty is largely weird or at best superficial. The words seem to march quite convincingly from page to page, but when you look for some lasting meaning, the holistic aftertaste they leave is sour and unpleasant.

-- James R. Newton

Behind the Walls of Terra, by Philip José Farmer (Ace 71135; 1970; 188 pp; 75¢).

Farmer's "World of Tiers" series is beginning to take on the aspect of an endless serial. The first two books, though closely connected, were independent novels. The third ended with the hero and heroine about to step through a dimensional gateway to our Earth in pursuit of a last villain and in search of the hero and heroine of the earlier volumes, and with the revelation that Earth itself was under the secret domination of a Lord. This fourth book begins exactly where the previous one left off, involves a lot of hugger-mugger around Los Angeles (mostly around the neighborhood in which Farmer is currently living, to be specific; handy for authentic local color), and ends just as inconclusively and with an even bigger cliffhanger.

Behind the Walls of Terra is good reading, but it is just not a novel. It's a fragment of one; an installment of a serial. It's incomprehensible without a knowledge of what occurred in the previous book, and while Farmer supplies this adequately through resumés worked reasonably smoothly into the story, the effect is still that of having read only the synopsis of the Story So Far and a middle segment of a far-from-complete novel. Those who've read and enjoyed the first three books in this series will certainly enjoy this. Those who haven't may want to--they're all good action sf with interdimensional and superscientific skullduggery--and should definitely read A Private Cosmos first as the first part of this book. Those who start out with this volume will be a bit confused by being plunged into an adventure already well under way, and frustrated by the abrupt and inconclusive ending. This is not a book for someone looking for light and fast-paced action with a well-resolved conclusion. On the whole, I'd rather read a story of this quality in parts like this than have it squeezed unmercifully to fit into one standard-format 200-page paperback adventure novel; it's just unfortunate--and unfair to the unwary reader--that the parts aren't clearly marked as what they actually are, and that the intervals between their appearances are so long.

A minor quibble: considering that Red Orc could've been anyone and anywhere on Earth, Kickaha and Anana locate him far too easily in virtually the first place they look. Admittedly he's looking for them, too, but for someone who's supposed to be a maniac about remaining incognito, he steps out of the shadows all too readily. If this book had been an independent novel, it would've seemed much too brief and hastily wrapped up, with a tremendous plot potential just wasted. Read as just a segment of a much longer story, it's more acceptable; the whole work shouldn't run on too interminably.

-- Fred Patten

The Alien Ones, by Leo Brett (Tower T-060-1; 60¢).

Somewhere in the TOWER is a time machine, digging up manuscripts from the forties and fifties....

This couple, the Wildes, tired of the stagnant day-to-day existence of Earth, buy a used spaceship and fly off to the planet Orkol. There they are told by a robot (there are a lot of robots in this story, most of whom are more

human than the people) that the machinery grant they were supposed to get is non-existent and that their land is eighteen-hundred miles away. Of course, the subway isn't running.

So they buy guns, naturally, and stroll off into the sunset. They are of course assaulted, by one Pargoni, but do sufficient damage to escape reasonably intact, and are given a lift by another robot.

Eventually, they are given jobs by one Haldane, in a mining plant analyzing radioactives and such. Especially Orkolite, a strange new element which gives superhuman powers and rejuvenation--sometimes. Hawkins, Haldane's assistant, is getting ambitious, and has plans to become ruler of the planet and, eventually, of the whole galaxy. He has such things as a mind ray and a chemical that will vibrate the world to pieces. Of course, he tries to recruit the Wildes.

Then comes the fun. Mr. Safron Wilde, exposed to the Orkolite, is suddenly changed into Gorgo!

What follows is, of course, inevitable.

This book is for people who love nostalgia and are tired of thinking. Very tired.

-- David A. Halterman

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Mutants: Eleven sf stories by Gordon R. Dickson (The Macmillan Co.; 250 pp; $4.95).

Everything changes. The human race, perhaps more than any other part of the observable universe, shows the results of changes. Consider the evolutionary path homo sapiens has traveled since his Neanderthal ancestry. Now project ahead another 10,000 years or so: what manner of changes will mankind have evolved through?

Gordon Dickson speculates about 11 variations out of an infinite number possible. Each story is a tale of human survival in totally unfamiliar--to us, today--worlds, from an Earth that has become the museum of a star-flung human species to an unguessable interstellar war that's lasted 200 years.

Dickson fans will recognize and welcome the book's lead story, "Warrior", another segment in the tremendous saga of the bred-for-war Dorsai, the telling of which began with the full-length "The Genetic General" in 1960 and continued in the Hugo award-winning "Soldier, Ask Not", in 1964.

To be topnotch, science fiction must have life and plausibility. Mutants has these characteristics. It's good reading.

-- James R. Newton

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The Blue Star, by Fletcher Pratt (Ballantine Books 01602; 240 pp; 95¢).

The only virtues of the cover are the flamboyant use of colors, which attracts the eye, and perhaps the lack of dimension, which portrays the unreality of this fantasy narrative.

This fantasy is unlike most, such as the "Conan" or "Fafhrd and the Gray Mouser" stories. First of all, it is self-admittedly a dream. It is as Lin Carter says in the introduction: "No barbaric, gorgeous worldscape with walled stone cities, improbably luscious princesses (too bad), incredibly stalwart sword-swinging heroes and amazingly villainous villains..." It is a world similar to our own in the Middle Ages--a world in which a few families have the hereditary power of witchcraft--a power inherited and practiced only by the women (reminiscent of Conjure Wife?). The Church rules and in its rule it suppresses witchcraft. The main character, Rodvard Bergelin, is part of a revolutionary organization trying to overthrow the government. He is ordered to seduce Lalette, daughter of a witch--for with the Great Marriage (i.e., first intercourse), the daughter of a witch inherits her mother's powers, and the Blue Star.

The Blue Star is a five-pointed amulet which goes to the husband after a Great Marriage. This is what Rodvard is after, for it gives the husband the power to read the minds of others as long as he is faithful to his wife. The jealousy of a Church official creates havoc and forces Rodvard and Lalette to flee in a series of journeys all over their world.

At first the story is confusing, due primarilly to the too-frequent use of parenthetical asides. There is also as total a lack of descriptions as there was dialog in Lovecraft stories. However the parenthetical asides become gracefully used and the descriptions artistically presented later in the story.

The Blue Star is excellent fare for hard-core fantasy fans, but I'll take Burroughs, Howard, and Leiber instead.

-- Michael T. Shoemaker

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worlds best science fiction 1969
edited by donald a wollheim
and terry carr
ace books book club edition

nineteen stories
some good
some very good
some excellent
the stories are sort of
new wave
literary sounding
with pretty titles
and fancy words
and things like that
but short stories
in science fiction
are best that way
a high adventure
short story
is usually tripe
there just isnt
enough room
to build a world
and expand the mind
i commend delany
time considered
as a helix
of semi precious stones
or vonnegut
welcome to the monkey house
and most of the rest
when you get down to it
the stories have merit
whatever that is

theres something for everyone
theres even
terry carrs
dance of the changer
and the three
which the editor liked
naturally
and i liked
even though i find
narcissism
by an editor
or editors
a little strange
i dont deny
the quality
i like it enough
to give it a hugo
but i have always felt
that an editor
should exhibit
his taste
not his skill
in anthologies
and
in magazines
but that is the purely
personal opinion
of yngvi the cockroach
who is not a louse

-- yngvi

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Inter Ice Age 4: A novel of the future, by Kobo Abe (Alfred A. Knopf; 228 pp.; $5.95).

If you don't read the dust jacket precis, you'll have to wait about 190 pages to find the storyline's raison d'etre. The moral and psychosocial issues which should have been the unifying threads in the book's motif stagger through

more than four-fifths of the pages before being clarified. Saving enucleation is fine for a whodunit, but not in a work where the author tries to project profound moral concerns.

In this case it's bad because Abe treats a problem that may be nearer than we think: deliberate mutation of human beings--coming to be euphemistically labeled "genetic engineering". There are a few other minor irritations: a computer information system so advanced it can foretell human behavior, but which is never adequately explained; and a glibly glossed-over methodology by which fetuses are mutated. Still, the storyline retains its intrigue.

Increased vulcanism is raising the world's water level, so that in 40 years only the tops of the world's highest mountains will remain above the surface. Survival of mammalian life is thus the impetus for action in Abe's story. But the ruthless and manipulative means taken by a secret group of scientists to attain this altruistic end puts the whole of human society's ethics seriously in question.

Abe draws characterizations with a typically fine Japanese brush. Most of this shows through the interstices of E. Dale Saunders' translation. A few shaky linguistic bridges between thought groupings are hazards to be expected in any transliteration.

Inter Ice Age 4, Abe's fourth book to be published in English, rates as a serious effort that suffers from moderate stylistic weaknesses.

-- James R. Newton

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Planets in Peril, Calling Captain Future, etc., by Edmund Hamilton (Popular Library).

This is a review of all the Captain Future books reprinted to date. Following is a list of all the qualities we find them to uniformly hold:

(1) The action is fast-paced and absorbing;
(2) The villains are uniformly villainous, truly despicable people;
(3) As light reading, they are excellent; they relax the mind as one reads every third word;
(4) The quality of the writing is constant, and the writer never raises it.

Side-issues include the books being reprinted in such an order as to introduce us to characters who have already been killed off, and mentions of adventures that will be printed later--all of which helps us place the books properly in our collection without looking at the copyright dates.

All in all, we do not recommend these books, except as gifts to someone you dislike, and we classify them as unworthy of even mediocre consideration.

-- Robert Weston

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Man From U.N.C.L.E. #'s 13, 14, and 15, from Ace Books.
The Rainbow Affair, by David McDaniel (G670; 50¢).
The Cross of Gold Affair, by Fredric Davies (G689; 50¢).
The Utopia Affair, by David McDaniel (G729; 50¢).

Being a reasonable fan, and being temporarily out of reading material and green stuff, I asked Uncle Alexis if he had any books lying around that he didn't feel he had time to review. Being an even more reasonable fan....

So here I sit with three--things. I shudder at the very thought. But I have a cross to bear. I said I'd review them, and review them I will, even if I do have to read them.

So I start with The Cross of Gold. Gee whiz.

Hmmm. It says here that a THRUSH agent (strictly for the birds), a very fat man who floats a lot, named Porpoise, is trying to get all the stock in a very

productive gold mine, by manipulating the stock market. He sends secret messages from his fun house hideaway by disguising them as crossword puzzles. Gee whiz.

He has a maze full of poison gas, and knives, and hot plates, and Napoleon Solo. But Napoleon escapes. Gee whiz.

With the help of a bunch of juvenile delinquents who act like love children, except with their fists, and a bunch of seals, law, order, and the United Network Command emerge triumphant; and the Porpoise is hoist by his own petard, and on his own bed of knives, too. Gee whiz.

That was strictly nowhere, so I tried The Utopia Affair.

Cosmo Topper--pardon me, Mr. Waverly--goes on vacation, leaving Solo in charge. Solo sends Illya to keep an eye on Mr. Waverly. THRUSH sends two assassins to kill Mr. Waverly, one of whom is a very capable Japanese ninja. THRUSH also decides to mess up UNCLE by giving Solo cat fits. Knowing his methods, they try to attack his weaknesses.

Knowing that Solo likes to act personally, they send a squad into UNCLE HQ to draw out Solo, hoping thereby to get a good potshot. Solo finds an invisibility suit lying around and uses it.

Meanwhile Illya bugs the boss, and the THRUSH agent he's unknowingly playing war games with, and the two assassins.

Intensifying their campaign against UNCLE and Solo, THRUSH gets trouble going in Canada, the Far East, and South America. Riots, mostly, but the Canadian bit is a black ghost as tall as a mountain.

Eventually, Solo figures out the Flin Flon Monster in Canada is a put on, matches it and sends copies to the Far East and Central America, frightening the rioters into quitting.

Meanwhile, Illya takes on the assassins. He finishes one, but the ninja darn near finishes him--only to be interrupted at the last second by the master ninja, his teacher, who commences to knock him about the head until it quits working, permanently. The day is saved. 'Ray!

Not bad; not good, but not bad. Certainly pleasant reading for free.

They seem to be getting better and better. Let's see if there is a pot of gold at the end of The Rainbow Affair.

England.

Robberies executed with a skill beyond even THRUSH's power, and with a careful regard for human life not at all typical of UNCLE's enemy.

Rumors.

A master criminal, Johnny Rainbow, with a band of international thieves, commanding fantastic loyalty. Illya and Napoleon are off to London, and Scotland Yard.

Then it starts.

Inspector West, of Scotland Yard, tells them Rainbow is imaginary.

West?

A stop at a Chinese eatery, and an attack by Lascars.

Lascars?

THRUSH is trying to recruit an old Mandarin, an expert in biochemistry, and hypnotism, among other things. Hints are made by the Chinese that if THRUSH can't garner Rainbow, they can't have him, either. THRUSH makes threats. Meanwhile, the intrepid heroes have been imprisoned by the Lascars, servants of the Chinaman; but they are freed by a tall gaunt man in a trenchcoat.

I'm getting a feeling I know the Mandarin--and the man in the trenchcoat.

A call on MI-5. References to Double-Ought-What'shisname.

A beautiful redhead, and a man in a bowler. No help.

Another brawl, and Illya is rescued by a dapper gentleman who looks like a modern-day Robin Hood, and who prefers knives to guns.

Solo is kidnaped, but escapes with the help of a small girl with a large motorcycle--and proceeds to visit Aunt Jane.

Father John drops in, for a spot of tea and amateur detection.

Meanwhile, Illya meets the elusive Johnny Rainbow, and has a pleasant chat.

Solo is told by the priest and Aunt Jane to contact their mentor in deductive reasoning, a retired beekeeper in Sussex.

With his help, the UNCLE men find, and invade the headquarters of, Johnny Rainbow. They find him at loggerheads with THRUSH, objecting to killing. An ultimatum is uttered.

The heroes leave, in time to see Johnny Rainbow get bombed, thoroughly.

The Mandarin tells THRUSH to shove it up a turkey, and our heroes are off to the wars, with a still small voice, saying: "The Rainbow comes and goes...."

The plot is fast-moving, but standard, more or less. In fact, it would be a perfectly run-of-the-mill story, except for those walk-ons.

Inspector West.

Father Brown.

Raffles, or possibly the Saint.

John Steed and Emma Peel, the Avengers.

Aunt Jane I'm not sure about, but the name is familiar.

The man in Sussex--quite elementary.

But the Mandarin, with his fantastic knowledge, his Lascars--hell, I thought Fu Manchu was the boss of THRUSH.

-- David A. Halterman

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7 Conquests: A Collection of SF Stories, by Poul Anderson (Collier Books; 224 pages; 95¢).

A person reads science fiction because he (a) has an overactive imagination, (b) is a visionary, (c) merely wants to be entertained or is a mixture of all three. Why then do so many sf authors, once they reach the recognized status, acquire a penchant to pontificate? So many do, that it might lead one to believe there's another category of sf reader--the message-seeker.

Anderson, I'm sorry to see, succumbed to someone's blandishment to dress up this volume a little by an introduction that's really superfluous, I think, for two reasons: (1) A reader ought to be able to make up his own mind about what message each story may carry, and (2) to me, while Anderson is an undisputably good sf author, credentials as an expert essayist on war he hasn't.

I don't normally turn to an sf novel, no matter how well-written or how entertaining it may be, as the best authority on any subject except illustrations of speculative fiction. I wish Anderson had left well enough alone.

However, once past the minor irritations, it's like greeting old friends. There's nothing new in this paperback reissue of the Collier-Macmillan Limited hardcover edition put out by the Doubleday Science Fiction Book Club last year. Still, the writing magic of Poul Anderson is enough to satisfy most sf buffs. Hugo-winning Anderson is one of the genre's better yarn-spinners and doesn't disappoint anyone here, even though none of the seven stories included originally appeared in print more recently than 1964.

7 Conquests concerns war, a purely human devil's brew that we can expect, unfortunately, to accompany our society into the future. Anderson has conjured up seven imaginative speculations as to the forms war might evolve into and with which the man of the future might have to contend. Even such distractions as a superfluous introduction don't detract too much from the well-plotted construction, believably human characterizations and thought-provoking messages that the author has built into these unusual war stories.

-- James R. Newton

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Tales of the Cthulhu Mythos, ed. August Derleth (Arkham House, 1969; $7.50, 407 pages).

We have here what Derleth apparently considered the best of the Mythos stories not generally available, including six new ones. A word of warning: it would likely not be a good idea to read this book straight through.

"Notebook Found in a Deserted House" will surprise quite a lot of people who think of Bloch's Lovecraftian stories by those rather overwrought things from the '30's. Neither viewpoint nor handling is at all ordinary here.

"Cold Print" has J. Ramsey Campbell making rather acidic comments on the interests, if not the person, of Colin Wilson.

"The Deep Ones" has James Wade insinuating nasty things about dolphins, and "The Return of the Lloigor" has Colin Wilson slurring the Welsh. Soon we won't know who to trust.

If you like this sort of thing at all, buy it.

-- Mark Owings

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Starman, by Stuart J. Byrne (Powell Sci-Fi #PP-165; 95¢).

If you buy this, you'll need a magnifying glass. The book is printed in what can best be described as micro-micro-elite. The type is about 30% smaller than Ed Mesky's. And it is a very long book.

A modern-day spaceman is frozen when the bulkhead of his ship is ruptured, and wakes up 500 years later. (I thought that, by now, everyone had gotten tired of Isaac Asimov and others screaming that space is a vacuum and has no temperature, but no matter.) He is immediately drafted into a revolution on Teran, an Earth colony in the Centauri system that wants its freedom.

There are Teranian aliens, Venusian aliens, and all sorts of problems. Larry Buchanan, the spaceman, manages to lose almost every battle, in spite of himself, except the last one.

The style reads like something out of the thirties, but isn't too bad. There's nothing too wrong with the story. But there is nothing outstandingly right, either. RATING: C-.

-- David A. Halterman

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Nightwings, by Robert Silverberg (Walker & Co.; 190 pages; $4.95).

The scene for this fairylike tale is an Earth that could quite possibly--and chillingly--come to pass in the distant future. It deals with the third cycle of mankind, in which guilds give structure and meaning to a society that has suffered defeat and destruction.

The story unfolds around the Watcher, whose job is to scan space for alien invaders; Gorman, who masquerades as one of the guildless outcasts but who is an alien invader; and Avluela of the Fliers, a product of genetic engineering whose gossamer wings presage the coming of the Redeemers, and who is the key to Earth's freedom.

Though Silverberg molds with bizarre clays, the struggles of his players form a frieze of allegorical sharpness. Class conflicts, jealousies, and violence lace the fast action. Yet personal fulfillment, redemption, and salvation are brought within the grasp of humanity.

I have never doubted Silverberg's quality as an sf author. But for some time the volume of his writing activities--reflected in frequent contributions to the sf magazines, several anthologies, and a number of longer works--seems to have forced him to pay attention to qualification at the expense of consistent quality. Happily, however, Nightwings is short only in length and long in the qualities that mark an eminently enjoyable science fiction novel.

This Walker edition (June 1970) follows the Avon paperback version (V2303) by nine months, and is an entrancing follow-on to the novelette "To Jorslem" that appeared in the February 1969 issue of GALAXY SCIENCE FICTION MAGAZINE.

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-- James R. Newton