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

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In Brief -- Still more 1970 (and a 1971 or two) reviews (almost used them all up!).
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THE WSFA JOURNAL (Supplement)

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TO:

FIRST CLASS MAIL

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S. F. PARADE: Book Reviews

The Cube Root of Uncertainty: Ten science fiction stories by Robert Silverberg
(The Macmillan Co.; 239 pages; \$5.95).

The title is catchy, but there's absolutely no uncertainty that this aseptic collection contains some of the most superb examples of the art of science fiction short story writing to be found anywhere. Silverberg penned these between 1954 and 1968.

"The universe is full of pitfalls and trapdoors" he proclaims in a beautifully simple introduction. He then proceeds to drop a variety of characters through a series of trapdoors not yet invented. The imaginative results he evaluates as ranging from "cheery" to "bleak and thorny".

But the reader who immerses himself in the "wonder, chaos, and diabolical humor" in these creative tales can't help but experience the scintillating clarity and inescapable sharpness of diamond against glass.

Silverberg's characters are real people playing out real roles against real odds. The unreality of his settings merely garnishes uncomfortably logical humaneness as frail sentiences are pitted against such believable chimeras as fabulous treasure, judicial processes, bureaucracy, revolution, love, hate, and more.

The Cube Root of Uncertainty is certain to enthrall serious lovers of science fiction.

-- James R. Newton

Mutiny in Space, by Avram Davidson (Pyramid X-2079; 60¢; cover by Jack Gaughan).

This story disturbs me a little.

The crew of a spaceship mutinies and the officers end up marooned on a primitive world. For some reason, the captain is almost too well-prepared for the situation. He has all the historical precedents of space mutiny on the tip of his tongue, and just happens to be an adept at the art of Maahmohsses, a strange psychological discipline that permits him to calm an alien prisoner.

The planet is portrayed as having a matriarchal society which developed because the women were larger than the men. The implication is made that the Earthmen and the natives are sexually and physically compatible, a fact which seems inadequately explained. The pattern of the society is a bit too familiar, reminiscent of Rogue Queen, and West of the Sun. In spite of the consistency with which the idea is used, I have never been convinced that all matriarchal societies are necessarily both warlike and static.

The book is fairly entertaining; Avram can make anything sound good. But this book impresses me as being a little too unoriginal and much too poorly developed, in terms of its secondary universe. Too many things are left unsaid.

A minor comment. Pyramid deserves praise for their practice of giving the artist credit for the cover, which is pretty good. They deserve laurels for giving the prior printing history of the story. (A shorter version of this, "Valentine's World", was printed in WORLDS OF TOMORROW in August of 1964.) But I would like to shoot the crumb who writes their blurbs.

Book rated C. Publisher B/.

-- David A. Halterman

Maracot Deep, by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (Belmont).

Whoever accepted this novel for Belmont should trot over to the White Hart and donate the manuscript to STAGGERING STORIES OF PSEUDO-SCIENCE. Or anything else to return it to the obscurity it well deserved.

This book, by the creator of Sherlock Holmes, tells a confused story about three men who descend into the "Maracot Deep" (named after one of the characters, as clichéd a scientist as ever appeared in sf), get trapped there because the hoisting cable was too weak, and are rescued by the descendants of people who rode Atlantis down into the deeps and survived by some means Conan Doyle does not really bother to explain. Sundry adventures follow, varied by meaningless pieces of deep thinking. Some biographer of Doyle may wish to wade through the text to document some of his ideas of spiritualism.

The book has numerous faults. The prose is long-winded and overflows with Latin names of fish species. Sherlock Holmes was long-winded, but he had an attentive audience. The narrative is poorly-stitched together. The author was careless of details. How in the name of Mordor did the Atlanteans burn coal at the bottom of the ocean? Professor Maracot is a stereotype; the narrator has less character than this reviewer's borrowed typewriter; the third explorer is supposed to be a Yankee and uses what Conan Doyle thinks is American slang (it is not). There is an utter lack of plausibility. Why, for example, did the Atlanteans go down with their sinking island instead of emigrating somewhere else? That would have been much simpler. For another example, there is a description of CO₂ asphyxiation that would arouse the skepticism of anyone who has ever read a book on submarines.

Not only is the book a miserable imitation of Jules Verne, but it also might almost have been written by an unimaginative plagiarizer the same year Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea was published.

There is one redeeming feature of this Belmont edition. It is the cover painting, an undersea picture of what are presumably two of the protagonists, in the nude.

-- Jim Landau

Genesis Two, by L. P. Davies (Doubleday; 191 pages; \$4.95).

Genesis Two starts like a whodunit, which isn't surprising in light of the fact that Davies has twice as many mysteries to his literary credit as his four science fiction novels. True, there is a murder toward the end of this entertaining novel; but it's incidental to the plot.

For the most part Davies develops plot slowly within a framework of reactions displayed by seven diverse personalities who find themselves involuntarily participating in a catastrophic situation resulting from being thrust, along with their whole village, 10,000 years ahead in time. Imaginative details about what the Earth--more precisely, the Cumberland mountain area of Great Britain--might be like a thousand decades hence build a mystery-like suspense that keeps this otherwise simple storyline alive and moving at a satisfying pace from start to finish.

The chief weakness--which really doesn't detract from reading enjoyment--is the author's failure to adequately explain the plot's basic premise. This seems to be some advanced Earthly culture that unleashed in its own time--unspecified--a force which will destroy the world if it isn't drained off. Hurling an English village into a far future apparently is the answer and the slender thread Genesis Two is hung by.

-- James R. Newton

G-8 and His Battle Aces #1: The Bat Staffel, by Robert J. Hogan (Berkley 425-01734-060; 60¢).

I'll read anything. I grew up on Dave Dawson and the like, and have an inveterate fondness for flying stories, so I almost pounced on this book.

I'm glad I didn't strain myself.

It seems that this WWI German scientist, who looks like a WWII Jap soldier, has, he says, dug a tunnel under Switzerland and has discovered a mysterious cave full of giant bats with poison breath. Shades of super-rabies! He's lying, 'tho.

G-8 and his new-found allies, otherwise known as short-and-smart and big-and-dumb, eventually save the day, with surprisingly little work. It seems that G-8 is a disguise expert, with the help of his man-servant (Government issue during The Great War?). So he disguises himself as a couple of Germans (I told you he was good) and pulls a real gasser on the enemies. He then loads down his trusty Spad with six bombs and he and his friends, fully loaded, proceed to get into a dog-fight with the whole German air force. (Fokkers to the left of them; Fokkers to the right of them; the whole bit.) I'm still trying to figure out how a Spad could carry that load at all, let alone maneuver.

As far as that goes, I'm still trying to figure out the first sentence. How in the hell can a dungeon wear a wrist watch?

This must be high camp. It's so bad it's positively weird.

-- David A. Halterman

The Glass Harmonica, by Barbara Ninde Byfield (Macmillan, NY, 1967).

This is subtitled "A Lexicon of the Fantastical", and is a large red-bound book with good illustrations by the author. The whole point of it seems to be to define the various classes and devices and institutions that one encounters only in Georgette Heyer books and old de Camp-type fantasy. Under "B" in the table of contents we find, for example: "Bannocks, Baron of Beef; Barons, Basilisks, Bats, Bauble, Bagatelle and Trinket, Beaux, Bedbugs, Bells, Below Stairs, Berserkers, Birds, Bleeding, Bodyservants, Bodysnatchers, Bullion, Boudoirs, Burial Alive, Buried Treasure". And so on.... I suppose one might actually use the book as a dictionary--it explains the difference between an Oaf, a Churl, a Lout, and a Knave--but I read it straight through and enjoyed it. There is no explanation as to why the book is entitled The Glass Harmonica, the term is not defined. The only reference to it is under the entry for Bodyservants: "Bodyservants may, surprisingly, be fond of the music of the Glass Harmonica". I had never heard of a Glass Harmonica, but a few days after reading the book I heard a selection on the radio (FM) announced as somebody's something-or-other for "cello and glass harmonica", so I guess there is such a thing. A useful appendix gives the "Legal Holidays", such as Lammas, Roodmas, and Beltane; also the new names of the months established after the French Revolution; and some weights and measures--an ell is four feet, and a firkin is 56 pounds, etc. I had to learn the names of the "Republican" months when I was in a French school in Concepcion, Chile, but I never realized before that they moved the beginning of the year too. The first Republican month, Vendemiaire, starts on September 22.

-- Ned Brooks

A Gift From Earth, by Larry Niven (Walker & Co.; 254 pages; \$4.95).

Totalitarianism plus strict class demarcation plus outrageous favoritism for the ruling class equals rebellion.

This classical formula for societal strife forms the framework from which Larry Niven has hung a very readable action tale. Actually, it's a plausible treatment of subject matter the world of here-and-now organ transplants should be thinking seriously about.

Mount Lookitthat, a series of plateaus atop a 40-mile-high mountain on an otherwise hostile and uninhabitable world of a Tau Ceti star system, will support only so many people. For the 300 years since planetfall, the Crew, who manned

the one-way interstellar colonization ship, retained population control by the organ banks which permitted them--the chosen few--to live exceedingly long lives on parts supplied by Colonists. The penalty for the simplest of infractions is dismemberment for the organ banks. And the most heinous crime is to cheat the Hospital by dying in a way that makes one's organs unsalvageable. There are few other Colonist "rights", and the Implementation Police make sure the organ banks are always full.

For those 300 years the spirit of rebellion has existed, in the organization called Sons of Earth. But they've never achieved the objective of breaking Crew stranglehold on life on Mount Lookitthat. Not until the contents of ramrobot 143 (latest in a series of cargo-mail drone ships from home) and Matt Keller (a Colonist with a peculiar psi ability to remain unnoticed) get together as catalyst and reagent, respectively. Then the tension that's been building for so long boils into open conflict.

The "gift" from Earth is a new method of biogenetic regeneration that makes the organ banks nearly obsolete. Matt Keller is the first Colonist who can penetrate Crew strongholds and wrest the secret and control away from the few. The resultant explosion of rebellion is traumatic, to say the least.

This book is fine reading despite the outlandish name of the world and the total unreality of Matt Keller's psi power. Everything hangs together, nevertheless, with such a logical precision that those anomalous--by our experience--factors are really an attractive icing on an already palatable piece of cake.

-- James R. Newton

 Richard Blade: The Jade Warrior, by "Jeffrey Lord" (MacFadden Bartell 75-246; 75¢).

Marginally stinal is this story, which sends Richard Blade, an English secret agent, into the parallel world of Alb--where he becomes involved in a war between the "Mongs" and the "Caths". The story can best be described as Formula Superspy in costume--James Bond sans gadgetry in a disenchanting sword-and-sorcery world. While it is interesting, the story does not realize its full potential, and is just a little too stereotyped in nature. I suspect that its appeal to fans in general will be somewhat limited.

Incidentally, Jeffrey Lord is not, apparently, a single author, but is, instead, a form of writing "syndicate"--something like the Stratemeyer group that turned out most of the boy's adventure books in the early part of the century. The creator of the series, Lyle Kenyon Engel, farms out plot, character, and situation outlines to other authors, who then sell him the finished product. He then submits it under the proper "house" name. (He is also planning some sf series. See THE WRITER, October, 1969.) This is not so bad, really. While the method is not noted for its production of masterpieces, it nonetheless manages to maintain an above-average level of quality. The reader loses those flashes of insight that come from an author's belief in his own creation; but he is not exposed to the tripe that an author can manage to get published during a slump. Like nonvintage wine, it is rarely great; but it is at least consistent. Rating: C.

-- David A. Halterman

 Dark Ways to Death, by Peter Saxon (Berkley Medallion Books; 143 pp.; 60¢).

This is the second of the Guardian books, a long-overdue series about a team of supernatural troubleshooters. Dark Ways, however--the first book I've read in the series, left me dissatisfied.

First of all, the action takes place in London and concerns the attempted resurrection of a voodoo sect. From the start, this seems too campy (there is

nothing camp about the book), and the story is handled in a way that continues this suspicion. The climax, moreover, takes place in an abandoned subway tunnel, the meeting place of the sect. Saxon does little to dispel the feeling of, "Are you kidding?", and the book could well mark the beginning of another Kenneth Robeson tragedy if it weren't for one thing--the author is a good writer.

Saxon handles the mediocre plot well, and in spite of it, puts the book across. The characters come alive under his skillful pen, and the description lends an air of mystery and hidden power to the work. Sex and sadism are injected in sparing amounts, just enough to make the writing effective and realistic.

At any rate, buy it if you need something to read, but don't expect to go wild over it.

-- Richard Rieve

Futures to Infinity, ed. by Sam Moskowitz (Pyramid T2312; Sept. '70; 222 pp.; 75¢).

At first glance, it seems an impossibility. Is there such a thing as a "brilliant" but forgotten, never-before-reprinted story by Heinlein, Asimov, Bradbury, de Camp, Van Vogt, Simak, or any of the other most-reprinted and most popular authors in the field? The answer is both yes and no, but mostly no. Moskowitz, like the indefatigable historian that he is, explains in detail where each of these ten stories came from. A number have been "especially revised" by their authors for this anthology, and therefore are not the magazine versions that anthologists have been ignoring for decades. Only Van Vogt's dates any later than the late '30's or early '40's; in fact, the book opens with a dated but very enjoyable anti-Nazi war thriller by Alfred Bester. The Heinlein is revised from a literary doodle he did for Bradbury when Bradbury was a fan barely out of his teens and publishing a fanzine. (As I recall the original version, it was the exact same plot that Van Vogt later sold professionally as "The Judge", and was better than this new version.) Asimov goes on record in the introduction to his story as thinking that it's lousy. (Moskowitz calls it a minor masterpiece and says that, "It will be reprinted frequently." I find it difficult to believe that a story ignored for 30 years by every anthologist in the field, not to mention the author himself [an author well-known for assembling collections of his own works], is suddenly going to become a hotly-sought-after item.) There's L. Ron Hubbard's first sf story, a bit creaky now but good enough that it would probably have been reprinted before this if Hubbard had stayed in the field to push his fiction. De Camp's "Johnny Black" stories were always minor good fun. And that's a pretty good description of the rest of the stories in the book. Futures to Infinity reads like a middling good issue of one of the prozines in the early '40's: all forgettable stuff, but pleasant enough to be worth reading at least once. If you're at all interested in the literary history of science fiction, you'll want this as a sampler of some of the earliest writings of some top names in the field, as well as for SAM's historical notes on the authors and some of the editorial practices of the minor pulps of the period. For 75¢, it's a good buy.

-- Fred Patten

Whipping Star, by Frank Herbert (G.P. Putnam's Sons; 186 pages; \$4.95).

This book falls well short both in quality and quantity of Herbert's monumental Dune novels, but manages to sustain high reader interest despite its weakness. An expanded version of the four-part serial appearing in WORLDS OF IF SCIENCE FICTION for December 1969-March 1970, the stretch-out shows in several sections that teeter on a tautological brink to achieve the still-short 186-page length.

Nevertheless, the Herbert magic shines through. His penchant for the well-constructed, though almost tortuously-intricate, plot adds a hint of alien flavor that turns his basically simple situation-theme from exotically weird to deftly-evoked wonder--making the true sf flavor come through.

Mysterious entities known only as the Calebans gave mankind instantaneous interstellar travel via "jumpdoors". But now the Calebans are dying out, and when the last one dies, everyone who has used a jumpdoor--and nobody of any race, human and non-human, is known not to have jumped at least once--will die as well.

How Jorj X. McKie, agent of the Bureau of Sabotage (and a whole novel could be made of this logically fanciful concept) resolves the deadliest dilemma ever to challenge intelligent life makes Whipping Star exciting sf reading even if it isn't quite award-winning quality.

-- James R. Newton

The Cleft, by Paul Tabori (Pyramid X-1940; 60¢).

Blurb. "A wide-open city--two turned-on players in a strange sex game--a bawdy, blistering game of tomorrow."

Gosh. Gee Whiz. Wowwie.

Well, Pyramid calls it science fiction; Paul Tabori writes well, usually; it even has a genuine Jeff Jones cover. What more can you expect?

Blurb.

A novel of tomorrow? Yes, maybe next week at the latest. The New York of the story is now, and remains so throughout the story.

Blistering? The sex we'll come to in a moment. The political "satire" might be blistering if it suggested a crashingly-corrupt city council; but inept, disinterested politicians are a dime a dozen. That concept is not even luke warm.

Bawdy? The term suggests sex as an item of humorous pleasure, a la Thorne Smith, or, with reservations, Ted Mark. It isn't funny, here. The sex is supplied primarily by the nymphomaniac wife of the slightly-subpotent Commissioner of Miscellaneous Complaints, and a well-known geologist who likes trysts as well as schist. He spends more time walking back, though, than in bed. Two male homosexuals give an entirely unbelievable walk-on appearance, and a little lesbian activity is hinted about toward the end; but it doesn't get too far. The book is so aseptic, by comparison to what has been coming out recently, that it could almost be read by anyone over twelve. If they really want to.

A strange sex game? Since when is sticking pins in a telephone book strange? Everyone knows that's how people get "specially selected for a once in a lifetime opportunity bargain".

Turned on? Hell, nobody in the book is even tuned in.

A wide open city? Well, they can't be all wrong. It is wide open. Right down the middle. New York City is cracked. (So what else is new?) If I'm reading it right, the split goes straight down 23rd Street. (If you think I'm going to reread the damn thing to find out, you're crazy.) And people shudder at my puns.

It would seem to me that the dirtiest, bawdiest, most blistering, most turned-on bit in the whole thing is the schistous foliation on page 76.

Recommendation? Send it to Viet Nam, to the enemy.

-- David A. Halterman

The October Country: A collection of short stories by Ray Bradbury (Alfred A. Knopf; 272 pages; \$6.95).

I recognize Ray Bradbury's name with mixed emotions, remembering The Martian Chronicles, The Illustrated Man, and Fahrenheit 451 as excellent science fiction tales. But October Country isn't science fiction. In fact, it's not a

nice book at all. A hardback reissue (Ballantine issued it in paperback earlier this year), it contains somber, bleak, foreboding, dismal stories. It's a distillation of hopelessness and ugliness that exerts the kind of sick fascination one experiences in the presence of a dead body.

I can't fault Bradbury's style. He writes with the swift, precise strokes of a master penman. But his characters have a paucity of dignity that is almost obscene. They wallow in anomic lifelines whose darkness is unrelieved by a single redeeming glimmer of hope, optimism, or social virtue.

After wading about halfway through this aperient volume, I couldn't take more of the vile aftertaste each story was leaving. I doubt I'll ever find the inclination to finish it. I don't recommend you start it.

-- James R. Newton

Operation Malacca, by Joe Poyer (Curtis Books 123-07032-075; 75¢).

At least part of this story appeared in ANALOG in 1966, which might explain why the chief character, Dr. Kielty, seems so familiar. He is a typical Campbellian character, totally independent, thoroughly capable, and dedicated to the proposition that the government is created with inalienable idiocy. Lt. Cdr. Michael Redgrave is also typical, being a little too self-important, but basically decent enough to be used as a foil for Kielty's commentary without blowing up. Then there's the dolphin....

Allies of the Chicoms have placed an A-bomb in the Malacca Straights to destroy Western military effectiveness in SEA. The porpoise is sent to find it. He does. Then the Chicoms send a "Polaris"-type sub for the same reason, and the Porpoise, Redgrave, and Kielty go down to destroy it. It is, of course, too deep to reach by normal means, but Kielty providentially has a means of fixing up everyone with artificial gills, which are attached to the superior vena cava by means of a simple bayonet valve. This is described as a minor type of operation, but I have my doubts.

Things go almost as expected, but not perfectly. There are a few casualties. The porpoise survives, though, so it's not a total loss.

I have always had a certain liking for dolphins. Which is good, considering how many stories have used them recently. Penelope, however, remains the best of the crop. **RATING: C.**

-- David A. Halterman

the jagged orbit
john brunner
ace books
book club edition

when john wrote
stand on zanzibar
he had to edit it
the manuscript
wouldnt fit
in the mailbox
so he took out
a hundred chapters
and made another book
this is the book
krupp
under an alias

is selling weapons
and armor
to all the minorities
and majorities
they sell to the blacks
at a discount
and the whites
at a premium
and everybody picks on
everybody
if americas future
is this bad

i only wonder one thing
what is to befall
england
so horrendous
that even brunner
cant bring himself
to write about it
i await the answer
with baited breath
the breath of yngvi
yngvi the cockroach
who is not a louse

-- yngvi

Rockets in Ursa Major, by Fred Hoyle & Geoffrey Hoyle (Harper & Row; 169 pages; \$4.95).

The Hoyles' knack of combining logical actions with hard scientific principles has produced another (this is their second) excitingly believable glimpse into a possible future. Consider these elements this father-son team concocted:

-- Seeking other life in the universe, none of Earth's exploratory ships returned until the DSP came back after 30 years--empty.

-- Not one, but two alien races shortly show up. The Yela are inimical, bent on conquest with no quarter. The Essan, fighting the Yela with guerilla space tactics, become our allies.

-- Dr. Richard Warboys, Earthman, and Betelguese, Essan, bomb the sun with 400 tons of lithium to produce a gigantic solar flare.

-- Unsuspecting, the invading Yela are literally cooked with hard radiation, thereby saving Earth.

These bare bones can't begin to do justice to Rockets. It's an unabashed adventure tale that has plenty to please both serious science fiction buffs and lovers of resounding space-opera, with only a few minor faults.

Like "Boffins!" Even in context this ejaculation conveys absolutely nothing to me, save to identify (if one doesn't already know) the authors as vedy, vedy British. Luckily, this sort of stereotypical dialogue irritates my colonial ears only infrequently, and not enough to seriously dilute the cover-to-cover suspense.

It's a smashing good yarn!

-- James R. Newton

Seven Conquests, by Poul Anderson (Macmillan, SF Book Club Edition).

This book is a collection of seven stories, with an introduction by the author, largely organized around the common theme of the futility and inhumanity of war. In order:

(1) "Kings Who Die" -- Interplanetary war, and a man who becomes a traitor to himself, his friend, and his own side, so his own side can win. Cyborg versus subconscious, with both dehumanized. Rating: 3.

(2) "Wildcat" -- War, with an oildrilling rig in the age of dinosaurs trying to maintain the supply line. Time travel with odd limitations that seem to me a little inconsistent. This story contains one of the most brutal scenes in science fiction--a perfect example of what Joanna Russ calls pornoviolence. Rating: 3½.

(3) "Cold Victory" -- Another interplanetary war, involving conflict between two brothers, and its dehumanizing aspects. Rating: 2½.

(4) "Inside Straight" -- A story reminiscent of several by Eric Frank Russell, with an interplanetary war in which the odds are not what the seem. Rating: 3.

(5) "Details" -- Aliens trying to manipulate human society, to bring about a mature world government, and ending up blowing the whole deal. Rating: 2.

(6) "License" -- Legal, unionized, gangsterism, as a substitute for violence on a larger scale. Rating: 2½.

(7) "Strange Bedfellows" -- A van Rijn-type of story, with political and corporate shenanigans involving the Terraforming of the moon. I find the story to drag, by comparison to the rest of the collection. Rating: 2-.

Ratings based on a four-point system.

All of the stories herein are passable. In overall style, they are reminiscent of ASTOUNDING of the late fifties, et. seq. In general, they make good entertainment, but there is, with the exception of "Wildcat", nothing really striking about any of them.

I have said before that I prefer novels to short stories, in science fiction; perhaps this preference clouds my feelings on this book. I, personally, however, would not pay the hardcover price for it.

Recommendation: that readers check out a library copy before buying the book. There's nothing special enough about it to justify more.

-- David A. Halterman

Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?, by Philip K. Dick (Signet; 75¢).

This novel has some very interesting ideas behind it; unfortunately, Dick doesn't make use of them. The story centers around Rick, a bounty hunter from San Francisco, who hunts down escaped androids from Mars. The Earth in this story has just been ravaged by an atomic war, and only the healthiest people remain. The radioactive dust is everywhere, and most life on the planet has died. It's a symbol of status to own a live animal. Rick is not that well off, and only owns an electric sheep (thus the title). Because of the radiation danger, Earth officials try to get people to leave the planet to colonize Mars. As an added incentive they offer each colonist the choice of any make android to be his "slave". The only problem is that with new technology and improved models of androids, some androids become smart enough to do away with their owners and escape to Earth. Only skilled people--bounty hunters--can detect an android from a human.

Well, anyway, there is a report that there are eight escaped androids on Earth, and it's up to the department's chief hunter to finish them off--only the androids finish him off first. Then it's Rick's turn. There follow whole batches of chase scenes, and for a time Dick begins to hint that Rick himself may not be human, but nothing comes of this. The Rick gets a fetish for female androids, but nothing much happens here either. In fact, as far as the main story plot goes, the book's a dud. All that there is is new wave symbolism and sex scenes. It's the Earth background behind the story that makes the novel worth reading. With the advent of the penfield apparatus, which can give a person any emotion he wishes with the turn of a dial, Earth almost becomes a paradise.

As I said, the background of this thing is beautiful, but the plot is just average. It had lots of possibilities, but never realized them.

-- Steven L. Goldstein

Orbit 8: An anthology of new science fiction stories, edited by Damon Knight (G.P. Putnam's Sons; 219 pages; \$5.95).

This latest in the semi-annual series presents both established writers and new talent. They write in today's style, which seems to increasingly rely more on the convolutions of the psyche than on futuristic gadgets to make their points. Although these sixteen concoctions are superbly prepared and served, their taste is uniformly bitter.

Actually, they merely mirror what's happening in much of the literary world today, in both mainstream and specified categories. For the role of literature is to reflect the pandemic flux that stirs the whole multi-element pot made out of the world's several social orders. These stories certainly do that--with a vengeance!

The result is far from the restful balm of simple escapism. One is forced to again squarely face and be aware of the decay and sickness around us--and perhaps incurably in us. Unease and tension are left after the reading is done.

In the final analysis, that is perhaps the most worthwhile contribution any book can make to the social order in which it is published.

-- James R. Newton
