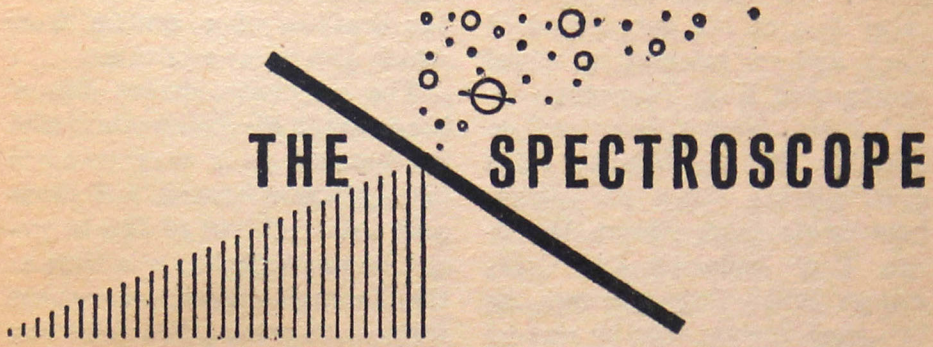

The Sixth Galaxy Reader. *Edited by H. L. Gold. 240 pp. Doubleday & Co.,*
The Best From Fantasy and Science fiction. *Edited by Robert P. Mills. 258 pp. Doubleday & Co., Inc. $3.95.*

The yearly anthologies are out from GALAXY and FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION and, as they say in the wine business, it doesn't seem to have been a vintage year. It's hard to pick and choose, but I'd say that FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION comes somewhat closer to the mark in over-all quality, though the GALAXY collection has a few individual stories that are enjoyable. But even though I'm disappointed in not really enjoying two books that I usually look forward to, I cannot condemn them completely for two reasons. First of all, I remember with pleasure many entertaining hours spent with these two collections in other years. Secondly, I can understand and sympathize with the dilemma that must face an editor who has established a tradition of yearly readers. Should he break his chain because he doesn't have enough first-class material or should he maintain the tradition even at the expense of its quality?

In the GALAXY collection (the sixth of its kind) it is the ladies who save the day. Margaret St. Clair furnishes a highly original tale, "The Nuse Man." And in "True Self," Elizabeth Mann Borgese gives us another of her chillers, seemingly normal and natural in content, but weird in effect. Outside of these, the most interesting thing in the book is Editor Gold's brief but nicely thought out Introduction.

The pick of FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION's crop are the contributions by Jay Williams, a story of children on the moon; Isaac Asimov, a new wrinkle in the battle of man versus com-

puter; Clifford Simak with another tale of his own brand of alien and an interesting moral choice; and Kurt Vonnegut's satiric little "fable of our time" on equality. But to balance these contributions there are disappointments from Avram Davidson, Poul Anderson and Cordwainer Smith. Rosser Reeves has two good poems, and the rest of the selections fall in between. Among these are two interesting but somewhat clumsily written fantasies, a real sick story which could have made its comment on our age in half the time and with half the morbidity, and an offbeat bit of psychology by Jody Scott. All in all, a score of 50% maybe, a respectable number of hits, but this same volume has been known to hit near 100% in the past.

The Seed of Earth. *By Robert Silverberg. 139 pp. Ace Books. Paper: 40¢.*

If you're looking for straight entertainment and don't care if anything else sticks with you or not, this latest from the prolific (too prolific?) pen of Robert Silverberg ought to be the thing.

Earth is in the process of colonizing planets far out beyond the limits of our solar system. The computer picks the fifty men and fifty women who are to carry human civilization to the stars. Every day ships leave with their cargo of unwilling conscripts, the draftees of a system from which there is no escape.

The narrative device Silverberg uses in his rudimentary plot development is a very common one—jumping around and dropping into the lives of this cross-section of people one at a time as they learn the news and prepare for departure, and then following them as they meet and their paths converge in their common fate. Yet old as the device may be, it almost always proves interesting, given an author of the slightest competence.

Why is this so? Probably because each of us has at one time or another traced in his own mind and memory the way he came to meet certain friends, or the seeming chance with which he has been pulled into certain events, or the seeming coincidental occurrences that turn out to be so strongly linked at a later date. So, as cliche-ridden as Silverberg's device is, it almost never fails to attract because it has universal appeal as part of the universal experience.

Worlds of When. *Edited by Groff Conklin. 159 pp. Pyramid Books. 40¢.*

Mr. Conklin has always been one of the busiest anthologizers in the field. Last month he showed some enterprising imagination with a collection of sci-

ence fiction by scientists. This month, I can report he has shown the most discriminating selectiveness in this grouping of five short novels—brain children of Chad Oliver, Fritz Leiber, Arthur C. Clarke, Mack Reynolds and Margaret St. Clair. The book is billed as "novels of improbable todays and possible tomorrows," and this is as good a description as any of these stories, for it is their unifying thread. None of them is wildly impossible, but the ones set close to the present are neither more or less plausible than the ones set in the future.

The first story, Chad Oliver's *Transfusion*, concerns some anthropological investigations with a time machine. All is going well with these scientists until at one point in time, they discover that all the skeletons, skulls, artifacts and cave paintings on which we base our theories of evolution have simply disappeared. The story follows the frantic search to get to the root of the mystery and what is found when they get there. Fritz Leiber's *Bullet With His Name* is the saga of Ernie Meeker, a normal American bachelor, who is saddled with a fearsome responsibility. Two powerful Beings from Galaxy Center are testing him, as a representative of all Earth people, to see if Earth shall be admitted to Galactic citizenship. Needless to say, neither Ernie nor anyone else on Earth is aware of these other Galactic inhabitants nor is he aware that the tests are more than freak occurrences.

In *Death and the Senator*, Arthur Clarke pursues the thoughts and feelings of a prominent Senator who has just learned that he has not much longer to live. In the course of his career he has made many enemies and now he is trying to make peace with himself and others. Just when he has succeeded, this peace is shattered by an unexpected discovery from the least anticipated quarter.

In *Farmer*, Mack Reynolds transports us to the Sahara, where modern American technology has started to turn the area into a green and comfortable land again. But the U.S.'s motives are suspect and, adding to the difficulties inherent in such a project, sabotage suddenly rears its head.

In the last novella, *The Rations of Tantalus* by Margaret St. Clair, we are carried to a safe, sterile and dull future where anything resembling a normal psychological or physiological process is taboo, and where Euph pills assure that no one will ever be anything but pleasant, shallow and bland. But the fly is always in the ointment if one digs deeply enough. Euph

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pills are distributed a month's supply at a time. For those who run out, there is the black market. And then there are a few brave souls (as in *Brave New World,* natch!) who scorn this artificial well-being and who choose to suffer depression, rage, perspiration and all those other "nasty" human failings in order to feel and remain true to themselves.

All the entries are not equal, but the range starts with good and runs up through excellent. The stories seem to fall very neatly, and without forcing, into categories. In Oliver's *Transfusion* and St. Clair's *The Rations of Tantalus,* the ideas are not particularly original, but the writing is smooth and completely convincing. In *Farmer* by Mack Reynolds and *Death and the Senator* by Arthur Clarke, the ideas are fresh, but the writing is somewhat clumsy. In the case of Reynolds, the denouement is as sudden and as inadequately prepared as in a third-rate dectective magazine, while the Clarke story suffers from some embarrassing cliches where there should have been some of the really moving prose of which I know he's capable. Only in Leiber's *Bullet With His Name* is there the perfect meshing of plot, character and high order writing.