

**FANZINE ARTICLE from ECHOES #50 (August 1990):**

# THE YOUTH MAKERS

*by Howard Hopkins*

Eternal youth: though many have dreamed of catching this elusive butterfly, their dream, in every case, has been fruitless, evasive. Ponce De Leon scoured Florida in quest of this dream, but went to his grave with empty hands. He had grasped at a legend and like a sea mist it had slipped through his fingers, dissolving into nothingness in the morning sunlight.

But such is the stuff of dreams.

Many of the great pulp heroes had adventures involving this intangible dream. The Phantom Detective met up with it in *THE SINISTER HAND OF SATAN*, in which glands brought back lost youth.

In *FEAR CAY*, Doc Savage fought the "Fountain of Youth Gang," a band of criminals seeking to snatch a mysterious package that contained a strange weed thought to prolong life. The chase led Doc to a terror-ridden island off the Florida coast where the weed, *Slyphium*, grew. Perhaps this was the answer De Leon sought, but never found. But just as well he never did find it, for he had wasted his lifetime searching for something that was merely a strong medicinal herb.

Even when holding it, youth can sometimes be unclutchable.

Another of Doc's adventures worked this premise: This time the Fountain lay deep in the Arkansas bayou, its secret protected by the ghastly Crimson Serpent. If you reached for this one, it bit off your hand.

Doc penetrates the swamp only to find the Fountain of Youth is a hoax, a front for a band of counterfeiters. The Serpent? Why, nothing more than clever, if old fashioned, iron-maiden device.

In all his amazing exploits, Doc Savage may never have found the Fountain of Youth; but his space-sailing clone did.

All through antiquity, men have searched the world over for this fountain of eternal youth; but therein lay their mistake. For they never searched other worlds for the secret (space travel being rather limited in those days) – at least until the time of Captain Future, defender of the Solar System and its peoples and all that good stuff.

*THE TRIUMPH OF CAPTAIN FUTURE* begins as Curt Newton and his fellow space pals, the amazing Futuremen, attempt to explore a comet. While doing so, minding their own beeswax for a change, they spot a

flare blazing from the North Pole on Earth. Immediately, they abandon their scientific exploration and jaunt back to Earth. Their sleek teardrop-shaped spaceship, *The Comet*, slices through the skyways and we're off on another rip-roaring adventure.

The President tells the Futuremen of the evil personage known as the Lifelord, who has apparently gotten hold of a milky-looking elixir dubbed "Lifewater." Lifewater can reverse the aging process and give its ingestor eternal life. Sort of. This Lifelord, being the evil kind of guy that he is, has been selling this liquid throughout the Solar System for extravagant sums. Lifewater, as you may have guessed, has one teensy-weensy drawback: once deprived of the liquid, the unfortunate person ages rapidly and croaks. The police warn the people, but the Lifelord tells them it's only a ploy to stop the population from exploding. It isn't.

Captain Future seems thwarted at every turn, sitting on his blasters until he finds a clue in the mysterious *Machine City* on Mars, which, of course, leads him to the glorious ringed planet, Saturn. Saturn looms like a milky topaz against the star-studded void of space as the *Comet* makes its approach. Captain Future must venture where no man has gone before – and lived, that is – the Saturnian Mistlands. Pretty suspenseful stuff, all right. Shortly into the Mistlands, however, he discovers the reason no one (well, almost no one) ever comes out.

A race of bald, white-winged people grab him, as they have a goodly number of other people who've braved the Mistland. Still more captives live in the center city where the Fountain is located. They can never leave. Well, technically they can, but they'd age rapidly and die, so that's a fairly strong deterrent. The winged race can't get into the damn place either; if they enter the "sinful" city, they are blasted to smithereens by the eternally young people who live there. The Lifelord, upon discovering the Fountain there, has been exchanging weapons with them for Lifewater.

Good old Cap Future in the meantime has formed an allegiance with the winged people. The Lifewater, Captain Future discovers, is nothing more than a radioactive compound and he soon devises a way to destroy it. In the explosive ending, the Lifelord is killed and the Fountain forever quelled. Simon Wright, the living

brain, analyzes the elixir and finds a cure, but the people will return to their normal ages (which, by the way, doesn't do a whole lot for the people who've been living there for centuries).

Phew!

But, at last, the ever mysterious Fountain of Youth, the gilded elixir of antiquity, has been found – and just as quickly lost. Captain Future has saved the Solar System again, but he has thrown water on a fiery dream. He's always spoiling things, but such is the life of a

space adventurer.

Perhaps, however, he has raised again the question Ponce De Leon never bothered to ask: What if humans are not supposed to live eternally young?

Makes you think, doesn't it?

(In writing this article, I'd like to wish Tom and Echoes a very happy 50th issue and a toast for many, many more. Cheers! Tom. And keep up the good work. Howard Hopkins)