

AN EVENING OUT

FETTER LANE, LONDON, E.C.4, is just an ordinary city thoroughfare. At one end you get a glimpse of Fleet Street and the Law Courts; at the other you see Gamages and the Prudential. In the middle you see a bombed site, the front of the *Daily Mirror* offices and the backside of the Records Office. And a public house called the *White Horse Tavern*. Thereby hangs a collection of tales.

Every Thursday evening a number of science fiction enthusiasts meet at this "pub of the Universe" to say hallo, have a drink (if they feel like it), talk to each other in general or get talked to by someone in particular, say good night, and that's that. But this was a special evening—and it wasn't Thursday but Tuesday, September 1st.

It was the occasion of the presentation by Leslie Flood of the International Fantasy Awards for 1953.

The Fiction award went to Clifford D. Simak for his book *City*, and his trophy was accepted on his behalf by Gerald Pollinger, the well-known literary agent. SF fans will know Simak who is an old hand with more than seventy short stories to his credit.

The Non-fiction award was won by L. Sprague de Camp and Willy Ley for their book *Lands Beyond*. Again it was unfortunate that the winners were unable to accept their trophy personally, and this was accepted by Arthur C. Clarke on their behalf.

Short speeches were made by John Carnell, Leslie Flood, Frank Cooper and others, and we were more than somewhat amused by comedian Bob Monkhouse, rapidly making a name for himself on TV. Our evening was nicely rounded off by a short coloured film taken by Arthur Clarke on a recent American tour. We saw America on the ground, underwater (in Florida and California) and from the air, all informatively commented by A.C.C. himself. Arthur Clarke was in good form, and we caught sight of some of the glowing reviews of his latest novel *Childhood's End*, just published in America.

An evening to be remembered.

mas. The average reviewer prays for the average novel. In 1951, when *Tomorrow Sometimes Comes* was first published, a score of fingers must have flipped over its leaves in Grub Street. "Let's see, who sleeps with whom and when and why and how: particularly how. What, no illicit beddings! Ah joy, here's a murder. A whodunnit, perhaps? Blast it, no. There's a hero, anyway. But dammit, he's hundreds of years old! And hell, the villain seems to be a machine. Oh no, that's too much. Why the devil don't they send these things to the *Times Engineering Journal* for review?" A dead loss, in fact. Well not quite. It's still worth 3/6 in the shop round the corner which so obligingly keeps the wife in pin money by buying up unreviewed review copies.

Well, what is *Tomorrow Sometimes Comes* to us, who are not average reviewers but average readers? It's an odd, pungent, heart-shaking book compounded out of Rip Van Winkle, the Time Machine, fission physics, Mendel and the God of the Old Testament, not set in any particular place or any particular time, and told in the obsessive Kafka manner, heavy with Doom and weighted with Guilt. The core of the book is a nightmare Mechanical Brain, created by men like Frankenstein, and like Frankenstein, out of control, torturing poor humans by its absolute fidelity to truth and logic, a logic and truth which leads it to a single irrefutable conclusion: that Man Must Go. Some of its interviews with men have that horrid, verge-of-sanity tension which literature has not known since Raskolnikoff faced the Chief of Police in Crime and Punishment. What if the Machine had not turned sentimental towards the end . . . ? And provided the neatest climax I've read for a long time.