

THE KRAKEN WAKES is a suitable book to throw at their so intelligent heads. Just as neither bishop nor bank clerk is ashamed to devour with relish Miss Christie's stories of shocking murders in vicarages or on golf courses, so real and "respectable" is the background, so John Wyndham's picture of London and this England, drawn with affection and irony, can be offered as a bait for those to whom the words science and fantasy are anathema. He has used an idea which on the surface is utterly preposterous, yet like Wells he succeeds in giving the reader the uncanny feeling "It could happen here—and now."

The theme is the emergence of mighty monsters from the depths of the ocean, who invade the land, can suck up human beings into their tentacles and devour them, and who eventually change the geography of the entire world. John Wyndham makes this, the very stuff of fantasy-space-opera, convincing by setting his scene firmly in the present. Here are no future world dictatorships or mechanocracies or interplanetary governments—we are in the Europe of today, a time of suspicious co-existence between East and West, and the two people who tell the story are very much this generation's idea of itself, without being women's magazine prototypes. They are a sophisticated couple who make their living churning out radio scripts for the entertainment of the masses, not taking the work too seriously, intelligent and with wit enough to convince us

that the monsters they think they have seen are a terrifying reality.

There is, refreshingly, no self-conscious attempt as in so much science fiction to moralise about the state of the human race or point Retribution—the description of Authority's immediate reaction to this dreadful menace with no apparent human agency is simply amusing, and highly probable. The idea that the enemy might be visitants from Outer Space is pooh-poohed as a crack-brained theory of eccentric scientists and the gutter press. The English and Americans are convinced that it is the Russians who are carrying out tests for a new kind of weapon, and the Russians of course openly denounce the Imperialist powers as hatching diabolical schemes for the destruction of world peace!

AS IN THE DAY OF THE TRIFFIDS, the time comes when we see London in strange circumstances—a London where Whitehall is a river and Trafalgar Square a huge lake, where motorboats flash up Oxford Street to land at a department store's upper floors, the headquarters of a lone broadcasting station . . . but the gradual build-up of tension in this book is so excellently contrived that it would be a pity to anticipate the reader's enjoyment of the plot. The ending, unfortunately, is an old cliché of science fiction, but since the alternative to this one is usually a completely nihilistic outlook on life, perhaps it is churlish to complain. At all events, THE KRAKEN WAKES does not pretend to be anything more than a tale well told, and it is one, as Joseph Taggart has said, that H. G. Wells would have read with delight.—J.C.

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## About John Wyndham :

In his own words he was "born 1903 at Knowle, Warwickshire, lived Birmingham 1904-11; prep. schools various, Bedales School 1918-21. Farming—this was the fashion of the day, but found that if you really work on a farm you sleep over a book; Law—for a very short time, because this was parentally considered a steady and respectable profession, which it undoubtedly is for those with the bent. Came to London: tried advertising and commercial art, discovered (a) poor standard of self-deception; (b) little talent; wrote some short stories—very bad stories—no takers, 1933-39; short stories under various names, published mostly in U.S.A. 1940: Civil Service, 1943-46: Army (Royal Signals), 1944-45: interesting free Continental tour ending in Germany, 1946: started again. Tried topical thriller. Mistimed. Wrote *The Day of the Triffids*."

## The Book is not for Burning

(The Club Choice for May/June, 1955, is *Fahrenheit 451*, by Ray Bradbury: Rupert Hart-Davies, 9s. 6d.; S.F.B.C., 4s. 6d.)

One of the many delights for the reader of science fiction lies in the variety of ways in which authors approach the requirement of a "logical extension of known facts" or, as our jargon has it, just plain "extrapolation." (Not that I think there is any formula to which sf writing must conform; on the contrary I believe it exists almost solely because it can overstep not only the barriers of time and place but of structure also.)