

straight theft from H. G. Wells. And even at the time I recall thinking that the creature which lived in a remote cavern on an unvarying diet of people's eyes must have suffered severely from malnutrition and anxiety. But, seen from one angle, none of these absurdities or nastinesses really mattered. Awe, terror, curiosity, incredulity, amazement, fascination—these are the emotions on which science fiction makes its initial impact. (*Thrilling Wonder Stories* is an embarrassingly silly title for any periodical, but it is also an acute and honest one.) I am sure that nobody would bother to become a member of SFBC who had not felt, at some time or other, the force of this impact.

But there is this much more to be said. Just as jazz—which has a lot in common with science fiction: that bookshop I mentioned has a disk section too—appeals in the first place to our instinct to dance, our party spirit, our inclination for light entertainment, but when we know it better can move us in the same way as serious music, so science fiction, having got us hooked by its appeal to our sense of wonder, will soon start working on us as serious writing does. I myself was rather slow in seeing this, and not until I read *Nineteen Eighty-Four* did I fully realize that what I had thought of as a slightly discreditable form of relaxation, about as much to do with literature as stamp-collecting is with geography, was in fact an artistic medium of some achievement and much greater potential. One of the exciting things about modern science fiction is the fact that its writers are asking the same kind of questions and pursuing the same kind of problems in their way as 'serious' writers in theirs. Compare, as studies of the role of women in contemporary society, Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* and John Wyndham's novella *Consider her Ways*: you will not find the comparison going against Wyndham at every point, and you will award him a bonus, I think, for the characteristically science-fictional elements in his treatment of the theme.

This brings me to the sermonizing part of my ruminations, and sermons had better be brief. Right, then: if science fiction is going to do the great things it can do, it must smarten itself up, learn what decent English is, develop a style. Style is not just commas and adjectives, it penetrates into the heart of writing, making the difference between what is crude, dull, vague, tasteless, shallow and what is subtle, alive, precise, vivid, profound. And readers have their job to do here as well as writers: the consumer gets what he asks for: if you go on asking for literate science fiction you will get it in the end. I promise to do what I can from where I sit.

THE WINNER

There was a terrific response to the competition announced in our March issue of *Science Fiction News*, and choosing the winners wasn't easy. Most of the entries contained good ideas, and a great many were well written—we were rather amused to see how prominently sex figures in the minds of SF fans. The hero, Jack Turner, kept being rescued, or at least joined, by outrageously pneumatic females with lustful eyes. Of course, when you think about it, what could be pleasanter—just the two of them/us alone on a depopulated planet. Someone ought to start a campaign for More Sex in Science Fiction. Well, here are the winners. First prize, two guineas, goes to Mrs G. Wicks of Hornchurch, Essex, for an ending which was well written and logical. Second prize, a 30s Conway Stewart fountain-pen, goes to Peter R. Weston of Birmingham, and the third prize, a copy of *The Neon Halo* or a past title, to J. T. Rutter, of Newcastle upon Tyne. The first and second prize endings follow; we hope to print the third later.

IN THE DARK—Conclusion

by Mrs G. Wicks

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No danger? A strange feeling crept over Turner—an awareness. He propped himself up on one elbow, his eyes raking the countryside. Nothing. Yet his scalp crawled and he felt suddenly cold, despite the warmth of the sun. He found himself listening intently, with bated breath. A distant rolling, rising and fading, he took to be the unseen ocean. A rustle and whisper of the grass. No other sound disturbed the silence. Turner stood up and slowly turned around. The valley was empty. Nothing moved on the distant hills. There were no trees, and no birds. Not a single insect. Frowning, annoyed at himself for his silly fears, Jack Turner sat down again. But the peace of the lovely planet had vanished, driven away by something unseen, unheard, but surely there! He hugged his knees, as if to give himself comfort, courage. He felt unseen eyes watching him, and idiotically he turned his head quickly. Nothing. Turner's flesh crawled. His courage ebbing away, he stood up and half walked, half ran to the ship. As he was entering the air-lock he heard it. A laugh! A high, musical, tinkling laugh! Turner threw himself into his seat, shaking. What kind of a place was this? Recovering a little, he

went and stared from the port-hole. He saw his old tartan rug suddenly rise up and dance a mad jig before settling down again on the grass in a tumbled heap. The wind? There was no wind. Turner blinked.

'This,' he muttered, 'is madness. Hallucination, that's what it is, my lad! You must have knocked yourself silly.' Feeling considerably calmer after coming to this conclusion, he went outside again to pick up his rug. As he bent down for it, it moved away. Turner gritted his teeth and made a wild snatch. This time he managed to pick it up—and it wrapped itself lovingly about him. Turner pulled away angrily and draped it over his arm. Immediately the rug flung itself round his neck. 'B—b—bewitched it is!' he gasped. He tore it from him, hurled it away and fled. Again laughter followed him. This time it was husky, provocative, seductive—and the perspiration broke out on the man's forehead. What was it he had said? No fun? No adventure? How wrong can a man be! He mopped his face and helped himself to an extra-strong drink of syntabs. The planet was haunted, he reflected. Any place was better than this. He made a record take-off, heading he knew not where. He leaned back in his seat, striving to overcome his dizziness.

Something, like a soft hand, stroked his face, and caressed him. A sweet perfume, a strand of soft hair. . . . Turner jerked upright. He was alone, yet not alone.

'Please, go away!' he urged, his senses tingling. A soft laugh answered him. He saw no one—but if he shut his eyes—!

THIS MONTH'S CHOICE IS

BEST SF 3

Edited by Edmund Crispin

(Faber & Faber 15s.; SFBC 5s 6d)

THE LORD OF THE RINGS Trilogy by J. R. R. Tolkien
This marvellous and gargantuan Fantasy Award-winning masterpiece is still available to urgent orders. The three volumes, over 1,000 pages, are a joint Readers Union-SFBC Christmas bargain—63s for 36s.

Please note. SFBC orders will be dispatched in December although there will be no SF Choice that month.

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