

GALACTIC CLUSTER

by James Blish

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

JAMES BLISH is one of the few sf writers today who continue to make an impact on readers who are not addicts. Now he follows up his earlier successes, which include the 1959 Hugo award winner, *A Case for Conscience*, with a collection of short stories vying with one another for originality and deep thinking; and all of them illustrating the questing, questioning aspect of man.

The first, 'A Work of Art', deals with the reincarnation of the composer, Richard Strauss, 212 years after his death. In these advanced times contemporary musicians are seeking to efface their individuality in the creation of a musical expression of the Laws of Chance, which they call Science Music, and are no longer using, or able to read, the old written music. Richard Strauss decided to defy the mind sculptor who has recreated him for this purpose, and compose an opera based on Christopher Fry's *Venus Observed* instead. . . .

Mr Bliss is one of the brightest sf authors of the past decade. Most of the stories . . . depend for their effect on unfamiliar concepts. "Nor Iron Bars" has a new slant on the faster-than-light drive. . . . "Beep" is as pretty a twist on the time-travel paradox as there has been in years, and would alone make this collection worth getting. *The Times Literary Supplement*.

'Bligh is one of the all too few science fiction writers who continually inflict an immeasurable impact on his readers. This collection of yarns is a fine example, all of them illustrate man's desire to solve the inexplicable, as in "Common Time", a unique and indescrutable tale . . . a sparkling cluster that cannot fail to please.' *Asiomatic*.

★ ★ ★

SIX MONTHS AHEAD

NEW MAPS OF HELL by Kingsley Amis

(*Gollancz* 16s.; SFBC 5s 6d)

From a critical and voluble addict comes this famed and best much-needed survey of science fiction to date, and concluding with some hopes and guesses about the future of the *genre*. Amis has hoped to kill for ever the feeling that sf is beneath people of intelligence, being solely concerned with spaceships and monsters from other planets, on the lines of Dan Dare. Instead, he points

out, sf has a lot to say about modern society; to show us the logical outcome amongst other things of over-production, advertising, H bombs and brainwashing.

This is an important book because, one hopes, it will encourage those who have never touched sf with a barge pole to start reading and enjoying, while at the same time interesting and informing the addicts.

'It is an extremely entertaining book, full of witty perceptions about science and literature.' *Saturday Review*.

'A must to buy, read and keep as it is by far the best thing done for us yet.' *New Worlds*.

WHAT IS THE APPEAL OF SF?

I think personally that science fiction has taken over the rationalism of the puzzle story, where crime fiction has abandoned it. Science fiction is strongly rational, radical in temper politically, on the whole; I've taken to science fiction in recent life in preference to crime fiction and I think it is because it's taken over this rational ideal the puzzle story used to have. And a great many science fiction stories *are* puzzle stories initially. They start with a perplexing situation: Why are conditions on this planet as they are?—you know, Alpha Centauri IV, or wherever they may have got to—and eventually provide an answer. . . . The puzzle story will live on in science fiction. And there are already a considerable number of science fiction detective stories, notably Isaac Asimov's Robot series, in which the puzzle is: Why are these robots, given certain basic laws of behaviour to which they must conform, behaving in this peculiar and apparently eccentric way? He has a whole book of stories on that theme, in which he enunciates what he calls the three laws of robotics, which he's made up but which are the "fair-play-to-the-reader" part of the thing. Why does a certain group of robots suddenly get religious mania? Why does another group solemnly go to its human mentors saying, "I think, therefore I am"? What has been going on in their minds and why; who had been getting at them? There are a great many things of that sort in science fiction. And I think it may take over the puzzle aspect of crime fiction. . . .

EDMUND CRISPIN discussing 'The Detective Story' in *The Times Literary Supplement*.

SFBC welcomes letters of comment or criticism on every aspect of the club and science fiction generally. Let's hear from you.