

science fiction news

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EDITORIAL

SCIENCE—

FACT OR FICTION?

TO PUT the guesses of most sf writers about life on other planets to the test it has always been thought we must wait till man reached the moon—and farther. But recent disclosures from the two American scientists, Dr George Claus and Professor Bartholomew Nagy, suggest that we may not have to wait that long.

Their discovery that minute and primitive organisms are to be found in the dust of carbonaceous meteorites—organisms which cannot have accrued to the meteorites after they landed on earth—has struck a new and urgent note and perhaps a new blow for sf.

The air, as one newspaper put it, is 'thick with suspended judgment' at the moment, and many more meteorites will have to be studied before anything definite can emerge. Unfortunately only nineteen out of the 900 yet known meteorites are carbonaceous; nevertheless scientists all over the world are hot on the trail. Professor Bernard Lovell, in an article in the *Observer*, told us that there are probably some trillion stars possessing planets in a suitable condition for the support of organic evolution; not only that, but that experiments are in progress in an attempt to communicate directly by radio with communities on other stars (always presuming there are such communities).

For those of us who prefer to continue regarding the heavens as so many cold and silent spinning worlds, the news is a little sinister. Do we really want to find out the key to life in the universe? There is surely, we consider, enough to contend with on our own earth without the possibility of future invasions from, maybe even wars with, other planets.

And this raises an even larger question: can the addict, who likes nothing better than to read about invasions from outer space, or about his own world in its last throes, really face in cold blood the likelihood of several of these stories coming true in his or her own lifetime, any more than can the next man or woman? Certainly the child who enjoys the fairy stories of Beauty and the Beast and the Sleeping Beauty has no desire either to meet a real Beast or to live every day under the threat of a 100-year sleep! People enjoy Whodunits mainly for the very reason that murder is unlikely to come any nearer them than the printed page or the newspaper headlines. In the same way the sf addict probably enjoys sf only while it cannot affect him actually—just so long as he can put down his book when he is tired of it and go out for a normal walk in a normal world.

It is difficult to guess whether sf will die out as fiction turns to fact, or whether on the contrary it will feed on all the new discoveries and grow as fast as will our knowledge of space. Perhaps the reading of sf will soon cease altogether, simply because there will be nobody left on earth to read.

Meanwhile, while we are still all here and all human, see what a Programme we have for you in the next six months! A. M.

THE PROGRAMME

May—October 1962: saving you over 63s

May

NEW MAPS OF HELL by Kingsley Amis

With *New Maps of Hell* Amis has performed a badly needed service for sf. In writing this serious commentary on the *genre* he will no doubt raise the status of sf in many people's minds from the level of the sleazy bookstalls to that of the legitimate book trade, and ensure that sf gets into the bedside tables of many who have so far avoided becoming addicts.

The trend is fortunately already in his favour, and part of his book is devoted to giving reasons why this rise in popularity should have happened. But in addition he deals in detail with sf's history to date and its probable future. He also poses the problems of the *genre*, discusses its meaning and considers the place in sf of art, science, religion, sex . . .

This book will not only appeal to you addicts, who are sure to enjoy Amis's criticisms, albeit provocative, of individual novels (many of which have already appeared in the club), but also to the 'laymen' amongst your friends who have so far steered clear of sf, believing it to be so much rubbish. It should certainly help to convert them to the cause!

'Above all, Mr Amis's book is valuable because here unusually is an important writer and critic who has not come slumming among robots, *psi*, spaceships and utopias, who has in fact for many years thoroughly enjoyed reading science fiction and who still does so.' ANGUS WILSON.

Gollancz 16s; SFBC 5s 6d

June

THE STARS ARE TOO HIGH by Agnew H. Bahnson

As Mr Amis was so definite to point out in *New Maps of Hell* sf is not mere fantasy; more often than not indeed speculation about the future is satire on the present in disguise. In *The Stars are Too High* three men invent a spaceship, which, in the right hands, could end the cold war; but if handed over to either Russian or American statesmen would probably cause man's total destruction. Quite apart from its political aspects the book is of technological interest too—for this same spaceship, instead of defying gravity, puts gravity to work for it.

Henry Alvin, who is in the secret, but is also one of the Top Brass in the Pentagon, finds it increasingly hard to keep quiet—especially after his colleagues track the ship's path on their radar screens.

Tension mounts as the idealists strive to keep their secret and the strategists try to unearth it. Finally Bahnson proposes a