

science fiction news

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Selectors: Kingsley Amis, John Carnell, Dr J. G. Porter

NEXT MONTH'S CHOICE

DRUNKARD'S WALK

Frederik Pohl

AT a time two centuries in the future, when science has proved telepathy to be impossible, why should Cornut, a teacher of mathematics at an American university, be beset by an urge to kill himself, apparently implanted in his mind by telepathic means?

Whatever the cause, it is a terrifying thing to keep trying to take one's life when one wants very much to live. Nine times in fifty days Cornut's students succeed in saving him from suicide; then, at last, Cornut accepts the advice of his friend, Carl—to take a wife, even for a short time, so that there is someone who can watch over him more closely than anyone else. He is lucky in his choice, for the girl, Locille, has worshipped him from a distance for a long time, and she brings him not only a degree of safety but a new lease of life.

Cornut's new happiness is short-lived. He goes to visit Locille's parents on a 'texas', a grim, congested town, built on undersea pylons, where millions of workers are housed and the dirtier industries are powered by wave-force; while he is there, Carl is shot by the bodyguard protecting the president of the university: it is alleged that he was trying to murder the president. Cornut sets out to discover the truth behind the allegations, and in doing this he comes upon the cause of his own danger. It is a horrifying discovery.

Even now, he is still in great peril. The whole world is threatened by an outbreak of smallpox which new drugs cannot control, and Cornut has two battles to fight: he sets himself to destroy the forces which are urging him to die and to obtain for mankind the serum which will bring the epidemic to an end.

It is a terrifying moment when, secured against the power in his mind by alcohol, Cornut realizes that it has begun to attack him through Locille; suddenly, after caring for him for months, she tries to kill him. He faces even more danger when the alien force manages to persuade the smallpox victims that he is a disease 'carrier': he is almost lynched as he boards the 'heli-popper' on his way to find his enemy.

The ending is entirely unexpected; it does not provide a neat, comfortable finish, a feeling of 'all's well now'; it leaves the reader waiting and wondering. . . .

The background to the story and its characters are drawn with all Pohl's customary skill and wit; Cornut's university and the civilization to which it belongs have a disturbing and convincing reality.

' . . . a fine, understandable, futuristic setting, good dialogue and characterization and an intense plot . . . '

New Worlds Science Fiction.

' . . . exciting reading with a real twist at the end. *Drunkard's Walk* is easily Pohl's most satisfactory solo effort.'

New York Herald Tribune.

DON'T FORGET THE FEBRUARY EXTRA

EIGHT KEYS TO EDEN

by Mark Clifton

(Gollancz 16s; SFBC 8s 6d)

In a future world the master-brains are the Extrapolators, men whose thinking is not bound by any accepted laws. One of them, Gray, is sent to discover why Planet Eden is failing to answer Earth's signals. He sees that every sign of habitation has vanished; a few colonists lurking in the trees are naked; there is no other evidence of life. As soon as Gray lands on Eden, his ship disappears and he and his crew are naked too. Whatever force is at work seems to have trapped them. . . . Gray sets himself to find a way out of this mysterious danger; his search involves him in events both frightening and bizarre, but at last he succeeds. A fascinating book, tense, satirical and convincing.

FRENCH SCIENCE FICTION

by J. Piette

ONE tends to think of sf as an Anglo-Saxon speciality, and more American than British at that. But a good deal of it is also written in French, German and Russian, to consider only the