

# science fiction news

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

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## NEXT MONTH'S CHOICE

# Last Men in London

by Olaf Stapledon

It is always our intention that SFBC should issue books representing the best work in this field. This means keeping constantly abreast of outstanding new writing, but that is only one half of the plan. If the SFBC list is to be really wide and comprehensive, it must contain classic works of sf. We are very glad indeed that *Last Men in London* will be the next SFBC Choice. Olaf Stapledon ranks with Wells for the influence he has had on this whole field of writing. He was a powerful and original thinker, with an amazingly clear vision of the future; many sf writers have taken the end of this planet as their subject, but none has spoken of it more compellingly than Stapledon. One of the most usual criticisms brought against sf is that it is merely escapist—that it has done nothing more than to take Horror from the Haunted Grange and resettle it, with a new set of bogus trimmings, in Space. It is only necessary to read this novel by Stapledon to see what an empty charge this is. A time will come when it will no longer be physically possible for man to go on living on this planet; the end of our existence on Earth is an event which will one day take place—we can treat it as a fiction now because it is at a safe distance in time, but one day it will be the one essential factor in the lives of everyone. The subject which most concerns Stapledon is not the progress of science—the paraphernalia of space travel, extra-sensory perception, communication with alien life—but the ways in which man will adapt himself to changes in the universe that no amount of knowledge will ever enable him to control.

The emphasis in *Last Men in London* is on man himself, on his character as a human being, on his relationship with the natural world, on the changes which he must accept simply as a living organism. This is probably the most important and exciting theme in the entire field of sf: a great many books have been written about new societies on other planets, new forms of communication and awareness; it is, after all, comparatively easy for a writer to create a world or a future when he can lay down his own terms—make up the rules as he goes along; but it needs a tremendous power of insight and imagination to foresee man as he will become, changed both mentally and physically and yet still recognizably man. One of Stapledon's outstanding qualities is his ability to write of life as a continuous process, to think of man in the present as an undeveloped ancestor of man in the future.

We are often asked by members to include classics of sf in the book club list, and so we feel that *Last Men in London* will be very welcome. We have already issued Stapledon's *Last and First Men*; that is possibly his greatest book, but any work by him is indispensable to a really representative collection of sf. He was a profound and original thinker and a writer who did a great deal to widen the boundaries of literature. Although he is one of the most famous and valued figures in the world of sf, *Last Men in London* has been unobtainable for a very long time; we had difficulty in finding one copy to reproduce for this special edition, but we persisted because this is an essential book: it should be read by anyone who feels that sf is not worth a critical attention, but members of SFBC will not need to be convinced that it is a novel which will bear comparison with the finest work.

'Today we should welcome, and even study, every serious attempt to envisage the future of our race; not merely in order to grasp the very diverse and often tragic possibilities that confront us, but also that we may familiarize ourselves with the certainty that many of our most cherished ideals would seem puerile to more developed minds.' OLAF STAPLEDON.

Methuen, o.p.; SFBC 5s 9d

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## WANTED

MR A. BUCK of 50 Penn Road, London, N.7, would like to obtain the following past SFBC titles: Nos. 1-12 inclusive, Nos. 17-20 inclusive and Nos. 24, 33 and 34.

Miss A. Bacchiani, Villa Ulivella, Anticoli Corrado, Prov. di Roma, Italy, wants to obtain a copy of *I Looked for Adam*.

Mr Roger Peyton, of 77 Grayswood Park Road, Quinton, Birmingham 32, would like to get hold of a copy of *Earth Abides* and of *Moment Without Time*.

Will anyone who can help please get into touch with the above members direct.