

science fiction news

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

NEXT MONTH'S CHOICE

The Best from Fantasy and SF—9th Series

Edited by Robert P. Mills

ALL sf enthusiasts will know that the *Magazine of Fantasy and SF* publishes some of the best and most original writing in this field; it has won many awards as the leading periodical of its kind, and it is unique in that it covers the two categories—'fantasy' and sf—distinct in themselves but often overlapping.

The fact that this collection of stories has been gathered from such a good source is an indication that it is a book to look forward to—and to enjoy. It contains brilliant examples both of fantasy and true sf: in the former group, for example, is 'Pact' by Winston P. Sanders, a hilarious account of a devil in his study in Hell conjuring up a human being to help him in a local political intrigue—a human can perform certain natural acts which are beyond the power of a supernatural being.

The majority of the stories are in the sf category: 'Flowers for Algernon' by Daniel Keyes is the imaginative and very moving diary of a moron given a drug which increases his intelligence to a tremendous degree—but only for a limited time; Robert Heinlein's 'All You Zombies' shows his masterly handling of the paradoxes of time travel: here he unravels the complexities in the life of a man who becomes—literally—his own father and mother! William Tenn's 'Eastward Ho!' is a sharply edged and marvellously inventive picture of America after an atomic war: the remnant of the white population has proved far less able to deal with new circumstances of life than the Red Indians, who now dominate the continent; liberal Indian chiefs try to prevent the younger braves from using derogatory expressions like 'pale-face'; eventually the Indians annex the last white reservation, and the United States Tenth Fleet (three schooners) leaves for the hopeful shores of Europe! Alfred Bester's 'The Pi Man' is a compelling and frightening study of a man driven by inexplicable forces to create 'patterns' in every department of his life—in financial dealings, in politics, in the arrangement of his home, and even in love; his obsession with rhythms leads to very strange results. In 'The Man Who Lost the Sea' Theodore Sturgeon shows his strong and very individual talent, in a sensitive and tragic evocation of the experiences of the first explorer dying on Mars.

We have described only a few of the sixteen stories in this collection: each one of them represents the work of a well-known writer at its best, and each contributes in its own special way to make this a really stimulating and fascinating book, a first-rate anthology.

'The annual treat for good addicts. . . Marvels, terrors, modern fairy-tales and myths-to-come.' *Guardian*.

'A fine mixture . . . an admirable and satisfying collection.'
New Worlds Science Fiction.

URGENT

Welcome to a new Optional Choice

Memoirs of a Spacewoman

by Naomi Mitchison

at 8s 6d (post free)

WE ARE always glad when we can add another Optional title to the SFBC list, but the inclusion of *Memoirs of a Spacewoman* is a double event, since it is Naomi Mitchison's first science fiction novel. She is already well known, of course, in many other branches of writing—as a poet, essayist, playwright, editor, literary critic and especially as a novelist, but this is her first contribution to the field of sf. It is not surprising that the *genre* should interest her: her father was Professor J. S. Haldane, her brother Professor J. B. S. Haldane and her sons are engaged in scientific research; her whole life has been lived in the environment of science. Now she has brought her knowledge and her outstanding gifts as a writer to creative sf, and we feel very glad indeed that her first novel can be made available to SFBC members.

The world of sf has been, until now, very much a male province; it is extremely interesting to see it afresh, from a woman's viewpoint. In these *Memoirs*, Mary, the heroine, looks back on a long and eventful life as a spacewoman exploring distant planets. She is an expert in communications and it is her job to try to make contact with alien 'intelligences'.

The dangers and the excitement of her work are illustrated in a series of wonderfully imaginative fantasias: there is the encounter with the sinister, intellectual super-centipedes, who devour the sympathetic mammalian creatures on their planet; there are the innocent (?) caterpillars subjected to telepathic bullying by butterflies; there are the parasites of alien dinosaurs—parasites which can be grafted on to a human being and form a tragic kind of relationship with their 'host'.

The setting for all these strange adventures in Mary's career are very different from anything known in our own world, and yet the problems involved and the characters are immediately recognizable and gripping in their reality. The people are all drawn with an exceptional subtlety and humour, and so are the alien characters; they live life on their own terms and the worlds they inhabit have been completely imagined.

There is unmistakably a powerful intelligence behind this book: it deals with problems and issues which concern us as much as they do these people of the future, but it is also immensely entertaining; its originality and imaginativeness are a pleasure in themselves. It is a first book that makes one look forward to many more.

'[Wells's] "new worlds" are . . . complete ecologies, sensitive to the intrusion of Man, who himself adapts almost involuntarily to the new environment. This is Mrs Mitchison's tradition too,