

# science fiction news

No. 82

February 1964

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

---

## NEXT MONTH'S CHOICE

### The Darkest of Nights

*by Charles Eric Maine*

WHAT would happen if . . . ? This question is the starting point for Charles Eric Maine's sombre and startling novel. What happens when a strange virus, possibly the result of a nuclear explosion, attacks the human race? Half the world's population may die. The governments of the major countries make preparation, each in their own way: the British Government chooses to save itself and the 'Establishment' at the cost of crippling casualties among the less privileged people. Under the pretence of general preparation, underground, virus-proof shelters are built for the survivors, while elaborate crematoria dispose of the millions of bodies of those who have been attacked by the virus.

But what would happen if there were *two* kinds of virus, only one of which is lethal? Once immunity is guaranteed, the survivors would become all powerful, and the first thing they would do is to wipe out the underground shelters and their inhabitants, including the officials of the international medical organization whose researches have become an arm of the political power. After that the insurgents would set up their own government—an efficient and ruthless one, holding all life cheap.

Revolution is succeeded by counter-revolution, and the prisoners of one day become the captors of the next; death levels all sections of society, and new despots, thrown up by the unheeding natural process, quickly seize their opportunity. In this setting of chaos and destruction the author has achieved an exciting and beautifully plotted climax.

The story is told most skilfully in terms of people—Clive Brant, an able, scheming journalist, believing in his own luck and lacking any standard of values by which to judge his actions; Pauline, Brant's estranged wife who, in her private life and in her career as a doctor, possesses all the qualities Brant himself lacks; Vincent, another doctor, who becomes the foil for both Brant and his wife in their private struggle. The whole novel is in fact a study of human character in an inhuman situation—one which could occur in our own lifetime.

'Charles Eric Maine's initial ideas are always good, a doubly enviable asset in one who writes so much. . . . *The Darkest of Nights* runs true to pattern.' KINGLSEY AMIS in the *Observer*.

*Hodder & Stoughton 15s; SFBC 6s*

## The House of Bondage

*A Note about the CF Choice for March*

### THE BIRTHDAY KING

*by Gabriel Fielding*

THIS strange and splendid novel was awarded the 1963 W. H. Smith Prize of £1,000 as the book 'which made the most outstanding contribution to literature' in the past two years. It is