

science fiction news

No. 84

April 1964

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

THE PROGRAMME

May – October

May

ORPHANS OF THE SKY by Robert Heinlein

THIS book is regarded as one of the landmarks in sf. It is the first, and best, of all the stories about a civilization evolving in a huge space-ship lost between the stars, whose inhabitants have long since forgotten, except as a myth, the existence of the rest of the universe. A giant cylinder, five miles long, two thousand feet thick, is spinning slowly on its axis and drifting timelessly through the interstellar deep. Inside it are miles of passage-way, acres of living-room, workshops, hydroponic farms, assembly halls, storerooms, offices. The air is warm, moist and fresh, the corridors are lighted, the farms are green. People live there: Earth humans, for whom Earth is a forgotten place, no more than a superstition or a tenet of religious faith. The unseen, outer world has no meaning for them. Generations ago mutiny and assassination destroyed the men who knew how to maintain and navigate the engines. The Ship is the whole world, a universe complete in itself. And then one man learns the truth. . . .

Orphans of the Sky is a splendid piece of story-telling, and much more than mere entertainment. Heinlein makes us wonder whether we may not trust in explanations that have no other basis than our human need for security and order, whether our view of the universe is the final truth.

'Enough freshness and potency to guarantee the classic status of the story.' *Sunday Times*.

'Deserves its place in sf history.' *New Worlds Science Fiction*.

Gollancz 13s 6d; SFBC 6s

June

TALES OF TEN WORLDS by Arthur C. Clarke

A wonderfully varied collection of stories. There are tales set in the world of today, like 'I Remember Babylon', suggesting satirically and all too credibly how, at this moment, our enemies may be scheming to destroy our morale with the help of communication satellites like Telstar; and there is 'Hate', a powerfully dramatic account of what might happen the next time a Russian is sent into orbit. Then there are stories which concern the world of the near future—the terrifying 'Summertime on Icarus', the touching 'Out of the Cradle, Endlessly Orbiting . . .', the amusing 'An Ape About the House', the ironic 'Death and the Senator'. But perhaps Arthur Clarke is at his impressive best when he imagines a future almost inconceivably remote. 'The Road to the Sea' is a poetic, haunting and visionary *novella* about mankind six thousand years hence, one of the most original and prophetic pieces of writing to appear in this field. Altogether *Tales from Ten Worlds* includes some of the finest work from this 'colossus of science fiction'.

'All the old freshness and vitality is here, ironical, touching, alarming by turns.' *Observer*.

Gollancz 16s; SFBC 6s

July

THE FOUR-DIMENSIONAL NIGHTMARE

by J. G. Ballard

J. G. Ballard's first novel, *The Drowned World*, was remarkable for its powerful expression of emotional states through concrete details of landscape and behaviour. . . . His collection of stories, *The Four-Dimensional Nightmare*, conducts a further exploration of "inner space" along similar lines, generating sudden twinges of horror or panic as his obsessed solitaires wander in and out of derelict skyscrapers and ruined luxury hotels, perform meaningless private rituals in some corner of a vacated metropolis and pursue their arbitrary liaisons in a half-hearted struggle against final withdrawal. Not all the stories conform to this pattern. One of them deals with the merchandising of singing plants, including a temperamental, argon-breathing, twenty-four octave orchid. . . . In another, the writing of verse becomes literally mechanical, the unaided human brain hopelessly superseded. . . . But the most successful and characteristic piece takes us to the inner reaches of Ballard-land, to a vast isolated clinic between a dried-up lake and a disused weapons range. Here are accommodated the growing numbers of human beings who have fallen into unbreakable terminal sleep, the first casualties in a devolutionary process that spells *finis* for all life. . . . Mr Ballard is the prophet of biochemical doom, the poet of psychic entropy. This volume confirms his standing as an imaginative talent of great depth and originality.'

KINGSLEY AMIS in the *Observer*.

Gollancz 16s; SFBC 6s

August

THE EXPERT DREAMERS

edited by Frederik Pohl

This collection of stories is probably unique in that every one of the fifteen contributors is a scientist—and some of them are world famous: O. R. Frisch, the first to identify the uranium-fission effect; Leo Szilard, another outstanding figure in nuclear research; Norbert Wiener, the creator of cybernetics as a new and distinct field of scientific advance; R. S. Richardson and Fred Hoyle, the astronomers. The editor, Frederik Pohl, has written an excellent introduction, explaining one of the most interesting points about the collection as a whole: 'Twenty years ago, a good many present-day scientists were young sf fans, showing no other visible trace of the technical skills they were yet to develop. . . . So it is not strange, after all, that scientists should write sf stories. Here is the evidence to prove it. The stories in this volume are by men who work with science, in one discipline or another, in their daily lives . . . men, some of them, who have themselves advanced to occupy some of the farthest outposts of our present scientific knowledge.'

Gollancz 18s; SFBC 6s