

# science fiction news

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

## NEXT MONTH'S CHOICE

### The Four-Dimensional Nightmare

by J. G. Ballard

As you know, we have already issued J. G. Ballard's first novel, *The Drowned World*, in SFBC, and we are very glad indeed to be able to follow it with his first volume of short stories, *The Four-Dimensional Nightmare*. Here, in full, is a review of the book by Kingsley Amis:

'J. G. Ballard's *The Drowned World* was remarkable for its powerful expression of emotional states through concrete details of landscape and behaviour: that super-tropical jungle of his was the inevitable setting for the despair and destructiveness of its explorers.

'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, provoked into a fit of rage and a fatal onset of giantism by a bitchy girl singer. In another, the writing of verse becomes literally mechanical, the unaided human brain hopelessly superseded—"how can you compete with an I.B.M. heavy-duty logomatic analogue?" This provokes the arrival of a Muse-figure (in a cerise Cadillac with a Pan-figure as chauffeur) who brings about the symbolic death of the Corydon-figure and the restitution of hand-done poetry.

'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. The biological laboratory holds plant and animal specimens that are building their own shielding against radioactivity in a futile bid to stave off extinction. 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.' *Observer*.

Gollancz 16s; SFBC 6s

## WANTED AND FOR SALE

MR R. H. STARLING, of 120 Hayes Lane, Bromley, Kent, would like to obtain copies (in good condition) of SFBC Choices Nos. 1, 3, 9, 30, 32 and 50 and of *A Canticle for Leibowitz*.

Mr C. Stanley, of 11 Stanhope Avenue, Hayes, Bromley, Kent, wants a copy of *Science Fiction Handbook* by L. Sprague de Camp.

Mr P. Goodrich, of 28 Millfields, Nantwich, Cheshire, wants two copies of the paperback edition of Van Vogt's *The Pawns of Null-A*.

Mr G. R. Ellens, of 53 Stainton Street, South Shields, County Durham, would like to get hold of a copy of *The Second Foundation* by Isaac Asimov.

Mr J. Head, of 18 Gloucester Road, Bournemouth, Hants, would like to hear from anyone who has for sale British reprints of *Astounding SF*, dated before November 1953.

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

## THE ANSWER

by Charles Platt

'So it's finished at last, is it?' grunted McPherson, President of McPherson Electronics, and a man much feared by the lesser members of the company. He strode up and down, peering suspiciously at the smooth metal and the rows of indicator bulbs, covering one wall of the main laboratory. 'Well, let's see it in action then; this is supposed to be the most complex computer ever built—right? It's taken four years of research and construction and Heaven knows how many millions, so it had better do what you say it will. We'll test it on a really tough problem. Tell it to analyse a game of chess . . . find a winning strategy.'

The chief technician remained standing in front of him, speechless with shock.

'Well?' McPherson growled.

'That will take some time to set up on the boards, sir.'

McPherson glared into his face. 'Time? Who said anything about time? I said I wanted something done and I expect to see it done. Call me when you're finished.'

He strode out and slammed the door violently. A piece of elaborate and expensive glass equipment toppled to the floor. The technician winced, and wearily began programming the machine.

Two days later McPherson returned, puffing the usual large cigar and looking more aggressive than ever. He surveyed the laboratory arrogantly, legs wide apart, and then barked: 'Well, have you done it yet?'