Introduction
In my introduction to Soviet Science Fiction, the first book in this series, I divided the development of American science fiction into three stages. I won't repeat the line of argument here, but I will list the three stages once more.

Stage One: Adventure dominant
Stage Two: Technology dominant
Stage Three: Sociology dominant

I pointed out that the best of contemporary American science fiction was in Stage Three, dealing with the possible societies of the future that might or might not develop in response to new gadgets, rather than with the gadgets themselves. Soviet science fiction, as represented by the six stories in the earlier book, was in Stage Two, dealing with the gadgets themselves.

I even hazarded the guess that Soviet Science fiction might have difficulty reaching Stage Three since social criticism is less acceptable in the Soviet Union than it is here. In making this guess, however, I (of all people!) did not take into account the infinite flexibility of the science fiction form. For here in this book are examples of Stage Three tales—though of a particular specialized form of Stage Three.

To explain what I mean, let me go into the possibilities of Stage Three science fiction in some detail.

Suppose it were your intention to construct (fictionally) a new type of society and to investigate the behavior of
human beings living within that society. How would you go about it?

To my way of thinking, you can begin by making one of three possible gambits:

a) What if—
b) If only—
c) If this goes on—

The first gambit, call it Stage Three-A, produces the problem story with no necessary application to the modern day. Thus, you might begin by saying:

“What if a human colony on Mars lacks water and canno tget it from Earth?”

You would then find yourself describing a society in which water conservation is all-important; in which visitors bring their own filled water flasks; in which people out of water stop at a water-filling station and have their flasks filled out of a meter-equipped water pump. Standards of personal hygiene might change.

The actual plot of the story, the suspense, the conflict, ought to arise—if this were a first-class story—out of the particular needs and frustrations of people in such a society. The author, while attending to the plot, may well find his chief amusement, however, in designing the little details (the filigree-work, if you like) of the society, even where they do not have any direct connection with the plot.

As you see, though, such a story has no lesson to teach with respect to the advanced societies of the here and now. Oh, we are approaching a fresh-water shortage, but it seems quite likely we will learn how to make do by de-salting sea water. And, in any case, we have other shortages that will intervene to make life miserable long before we run out of water.

Stage Three-A is strictly contemporary. I don’t know of any science fiction story possessing this detached “What if—” gambit, written prior to the 1920’s.

The other two gambits, “Stage Three-B” and “Stage
Three-C," are quite old, however, and in fact antedate modern science fiction.

Stage Three-B with its "If only—" gambit would involve stories based upon thoughts such as these: "If only advancement were dictated by ability rather than birth" or "If only men were truly religious" or "If only philosophers were kings" or even "If only I could fly."

The result of such thoughts is likely to be a description of what the author would consider an ideal society. Isaiah depicted one when he said, "... and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."

That was in answer to the thought, "If only the last days were here and all men turned their hearts to God."

Plato depicted an ideal society in *The Republic* in answer to the thought: "If only a society built on justice could be designed."

Sir Thomas More, in 1516, wrote of an ideal society on an island he called Utopia. (He wrote it in Latin and it was not translated into English until 1551.) The word "Utopia" comes from a Greek root meaning "nowhere" so it is a bitter enough name.

The book proved so popular that "Utopia" has come to mean any ideal society. In fact, the Stage Three-B story has come to be known as a "Utopia story" and the Germans frequently use this expression to signify science fiction in general.

A Stage Three-B "Utopia story" requires two things: a feeling of bitterness against society as it exists, and a feeling of hope that there is some definite scheme or device which could bring about an ideal society, if only applied.

Samuel Butler, for instance, in his book *Erewhon* (which is "nowhere" spelled backward if you count "wh" as a single letter, and is thus the literal English equivalent of Utopia) found this idealizing scheme in socialism and atheism.
Modern American science fiction makes virtually no use of the Stage Three-B story, however. Part of the reason is that the bitterness against society is lacking. The American social and economic system may not be flawless, but there is serious doubt among our science fiction writers that any of the alternatives will represent an improvement. In fact, there is a prevalent doubt that any conceivable scheme will automatically lead to a Utopia.

Rather there is the fear of the reverse. Even to remain as well off as we are now, let alone make progress in the direction of the ideal (whatever that may be), means a constant battle against certain deteriorations that will inevitably take place if we don’t watch out.

Therefore, the third gambit, “If this goes on—” has taken the place of the Utopia.

It is not, heaven knows, the invention of the American science fiction writer. One of the best-known examples of Stage Three-C is to be found in Jonathan Swift’s Gulliver’s Travels, published in 1726. This book is divided into four parts, of which the fourth is a Stage Three-B Utopia based on the gambit, “If only horses were as smart as human beings.” The first and best known portion, however, is Gulliver’s involvement with the Lilliputians and that is a Stage Three-C, “If this goes on—” story.

The Lilliputians are a savage caricature of the British court and government. British society is reduced to the six-inch level and its faults and flaws and foibles are carried to the extreme, made more petty, more ridiculous, more mean and foolish. “If this goes on,” in other words, “it is to this you will descend.”

Modern examples of the Stage Three-C story in the “mainstream” are George Orwell’s 1984 in which the gambit is: “If the tendency toward statism goes on—” and Aldous Huxley’s Brave New World in which the gambit is: “If the advance of a soul-less technology goes on—”

American science fiction writers have taken to Stage Three-C with avidity. An excellent example, for instance, is “Gravy Planet” by Frederik Pohl and Cyril Kornbluth
(which appeared, in book form, under the title of *Space Merchants.*) It deals with a dreadfully over-populated world in which advertising techniques have been made the only acceptable guide to human behavior. Its gambits are: "If the population explosion goes on—" and "If the theory that anything that is good for business is morally correct goes on—"

Stage Three-C stories have, with excellent logic, been termed "Anti-Utopia stories."

Now where, according to this analysis, can Soviet science fiction find a haven in Stage Three?

The Stage Three-A "What if—" story might prove embarrassing if it were considered a sign of dissatisfaction with existing institutions. The Stage Three-B "If only—" would be even worse, and the warning anti-Utopianism of "If this goes on—" is worst of all.

It was by this reasoning that I eliminated the possibility of Stage Three science fiction within the Soviet Union.

However, I overlooked a possible hybrid form, which I might call "Stage Three C/B." It is the "If this goes on—" beginning with the "If only—" ending.

The Soviet science fiction writer need only say: "If this goes on, we will achieve the ideal society" and he can proceed to write socially approved Utopia stories. It is exactly this that you will find in the present volume.

The clearest example is the lead story, "The Heart of the Serpent," by Ivan Yefremov. Here the gambit is: "If this (the Communist society) goes on, man's goodness and nobility will be free to develop and people will live under the reign of love."

On the other hand, Yefremov points out that this happy eventuality is impossible under capitalism.

In fact, the story is set in deliberate opposition to a well-known American science fiction story called "First Contact." This was written by Murray Leinster, and appeared in the May 1945 issue of *Astounding Science Fiction.*
Yefremov gives the plot of the American story in some
detail; in essentials, it deals with the first meeting of
human beings (in a spaceship) with alien intelligences
(in another spaceship). A stalemate arises out of mutual
distrust and a solution is found in the psychology of shrewd
business practice.

The people in Yefremov's story denounce an attitude
that seems to find a relationship between different intelli-
gences based only on either trade or war, and deplore
the traces of American nationalism. The story goes on to
deal with Yefremov's own version of a "First Contact"
based on friendship and love.

The other stories, to a greater or lesser extent, simi-
larly deal with the universal reign of love, a reign confined
not only to the human species.

"Siema" is a robot story, one in which the old Franken-
stein-motif is to be found—the creature that turns upon
its creator. This has been done and done and done in
American science fiction, and always with the same
moral: There are some things it is not fit for man to med-
dle with, and the creation of life, or pseudo-life, is one
of them.

This Frankenstein-motif is terribly old-hat among us
now, but here it is among the Soviets—yet without the
moral! The designer must simply improve the design.
And the narrator ends the story by saying, "So we would
soon be hearing about a new Siema. Splendid!"

One does not fear the products of science. One loves
them!

The Strugatsky brothers, in "Six Matches," deal with a
society in which scientists are so lovingly eager to advance
science that they perform dangerous experiments upon
themselves against the loving orders of the government, as
represented by the "Labor Protection Inspector," who
pleads with them to use animals instead. The final kicker
to that story, by the way, strikes me as the most nearly
American touch in the whole book.

In "The Trial of Tantalus" by Victor Saparin, the doc-
trine of love is carried to its extreme. In an article I my-
self wrote in 1958, I pointed out that it was too much to expect man to protect inimical forms of life. I said, "I don't suppose anyone would raise a finger to prevent the extinction of the tubercle bacillus."

Well, here is a story in which even pathogenic microorganisms are defended and cared for and kept from extinction.

How can we interpret this "reign of love" in view of what we are told about Soviet behavior and motives? Is it all a fake?

I suppose, if one were sufficiently skeptical, one might suppose these stories were written strictly for American consumption and are published only in order to confuse us and weaken our will; that the Soviet citizen is not allowed to see them, but is fed on pure hate.

I do not believe this, however.

A more reasonable supposition is that the stories are indeed among those written for Soviet consumption but are carefully selected and are, therefore, not representative. To check on that, one would have to obtain Soviet science fiction magazines or the equivalent and see what the general run of unselected material is like.

On the whole, though, what I would like to believe is that the Soviet citizen would really like to see the coming of a reign of love when "nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."

Why, after all, should he not?

If only we could believe it is what they really want, and if only they could believe it is what we really want, then perhaps things would yet end well.

ISAAC ASIMOV