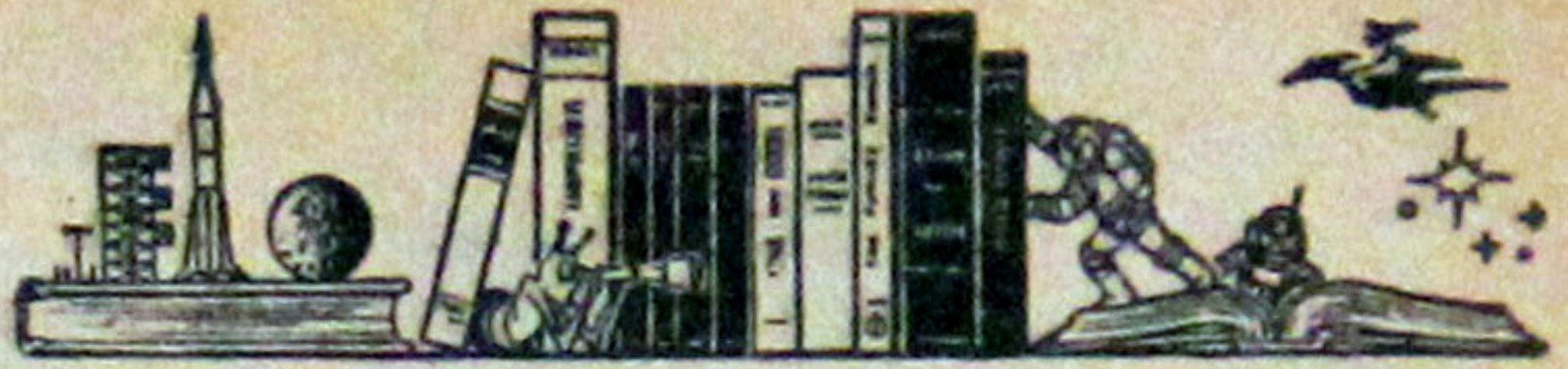


BOOKS



STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND,
Robert A. Heinlein, G. P. Put-
nam Sons, \$4.50

MUSIC OF THE SPHERES, Guy
Murchie, Houghton Mifflin
Company, \$6.95

WHAT THE DEVIL HAS HAP-
pened to Robert Heinlein? He has
succeeded in writing the first half
of his novel like a master, and the
second half like a tyro. This de-
partment, usually quick to aban-
don a faltering book without fin-
ishing it, hung on for the last 200
pages of STRANGER IN A STRANGE
LAND out of faith in the Grand-
master, and out of disbelief. "This
can't be happening," we told our-
self. The story must pick up
again sooner or later. The Old Pro
won't let himself maunder on to
the end." We were wrong.

STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND
starts off with the characteristic
Heinlein bodyblow that hangs you
gasping on the ropes. The first
spaceship has been sent to Mars,
manned by four married couples.
Communications are abruptly and
inexplicably cut off the day before
the ship lands; World War III in-
tervenes; a second expedition

doesn't get to Mars until twenty-
five years later.

There the crew finds a remarka-
ble alien Martian culture, and
there they locate the sole survivor
of the original expedition. He is
Valentine Michael Smith, born on
Mars of human parents he never
knew, raised and educated by Mar-
tians, a Terrestrial being who
thinks, feels, and behaves as a
Martian. This is a superb con-
cept.

Smith is persuaded to return to
earth. There are magnificent pas-
sages in which Mr. Heinlein de-
picts the reactions and confusion
of this young alien in what should
have been his familiar homeland.
There are economic complications
and political machinations result-
ing from Smith's return; he is kept
under lock and key in a hospital;
a brash young reporter, Ben Cax-
ton, and a bright young nurse,
Gillian (Jill) Boardman, maneu-
ver to free him; plot and counter-
plot, punch and counterpunch, in
the familiar Heinlein style.

Smith finally escapes and takes
refuge in the home of "Jubal E.
Harshaw, LL.B., M.D., Sc.D.,
bon vivant, gourmet, sybarite,

popular author extraordinary, and neo-pessimist philosopher . . ." Harshaw is also Mr. Heinlein's mouthpiece, and one of his favorite creations. We've met this salty old character, full of philosophy and worldly wisdom, in many other Heinlein stories.

Meretricious government officials search desperately and unscrupulously for the Man From Mars, finally locate him in Harshaw's bohemian retreat, and launch a frontal attack. Harshaw outmaneuvers and outwits them all, and wins recognition and safety for Valentine Michael Smith by Page 216.

Up to this point it has been a typical Heinlein story, and we expect it to continue its development. Alas, it's at this point that the story ends. In the last 200 pages the novel degenerates into a mishmash of erotic incidents which merely provides Mr. Heinlein with the opportunity to deliver himself of some rather sophomoric opinions expressed in freshman English.

Most of the second half of the book is dedicated to sex and salvation, with Smith turned into a Messianic figure as written by Frank Yerby out of Sinclair Lewis. It was, we believe, Mr. Heinlein's intent to weave religion and sexual relations into a related design, but he succeeds only in spicing revivalism with voyeurism. And he has managed to make the two most

exciting and potent forces in our culture seem dull and unattractive.

We will not make a detailed criticism of Mr. Heinlein's religious philosophy, which some may find interesting; nor will we attack his views on sex, which others may find adult. However, we must caution him on his dialogue (never a strong point with Mr. Heinlein), which has now become irritatingly mannered.

Aside from the phoney, folksy slang of Jubal Harshaw, which grates on the ears, and the invention of a new verb, *to grok*, with which Mr. Heinlein beats his readers to death, it seems virtually impossible for any of the cast to reply to a question or respond to a statement without first uttering "Huh?" or "Uh . . ."

In past books Mr. Heinlein usually reserved this device for children in an attempt, we presume, to achieve realism in their conversation. Perhaps writing juvenile novels has made him careless. Now all his characters speak this way, but the net result is not realism, it's the impression that they're either hard of hearing or incredibly dense.

And yet, despite these disappointments, there are wonderful touches in the book: fleeting glimpses of the Martians and their alien thinking which become vividly real; Valentine Michael Smith's strange powers and atti-

tudes, and his interesting attempts to understand and adapt to Terran patterns; hilarious yet savage extrapolations of our contemporary American culture.

Mr. Heinlein is still the Grandmaster when he sticks to science fiction; it is only when he attempts to become a thinker that he fills us with sorrow.

MUSIC OF THE SPHERES by Guy Murchie is the finest single-volume popular science book we have ever read, and we urge all readers of this department to buy it for a bedside book. It can be dipped into at any spot and read without the need to know what has gone before; it can be dropped at any page without danger of loss of continuity; it can be picked up again any time later, without any difficulty and with the same interest. In short, MUSIC OF THE SPHERES is rather like a perfect friendship.

Mr. Murchie has a lucid yet colorful style, highlighted with a deft turn of phrase, and charged with his own fascination and delight with science. He writes the way one dreams a brilliant professor might chat about his own work, technically but understandably, significantly yet humorously. We have met only a few men who fulfilled this dream: the great biochemist, Kopac, at New York University, a few of the curators at the American Museum, an aromatic

chemist (who was a dead ringer for Pasteur) in Grasse, perfume center of France. Mr. Murchie is all of them in 600 packed pages.

He discussed, traces the history and development, and sets forth the present problems and enigmas of almost all the physical sciences. Leafing through the pages at random at this very moment, we find: Weizsacker and Bethe on helium synthesis inside the sun, relative magnitudes of the universe, sea wave behavior, the accident that won a Nobel prize for Davisson for confirming de Broglie's theory of the wave nature of electrons, the evolution of the musical scale, Heisenberg on golf balls and atoms, Einstein's Principle of Equivalence. Twenty years ago this book would have been the science fiction author's *vade mecum*, and it may still serve that purpose today.

What Mr. Murchie understands, he makes you understand as you never have before, and what he doesn't understand he has the courage to admit. This warms the heart of this department which was trained in laboratories to realize that negatives are also results. But there is very little that Mr. Murchie doesn't understand, and his grasp is so enormous that he merges the individual departments of science into a vast, flowing whole, exciting and enchanting the reader.

We have only one trivial cavil;

we do wish Mr. Murchie had not illustrated the book himself. His diagrams have a certain quaint charm, but his drawings, especially of human beings (unless copied from professional illustrations), are downright dreadful. But don't let this carping deter you. *MUSIC OF THE SPHERES* is the perfect popular science book; you must buy it; you will never stop enjoying it.

—Alfred Bester



COSMIC GALL

Every second, hundreds of billions of these neutrinos pass through each square inch of our bodies, coming from above during the day and from below at night, when the sun is shining on the other side of the earth!—From "An Explanatory Statement on Elementary Particle Physics," by M. A. Ruderman and A. H. Rosenfeld, in *American Scientist*.

Neutrinos, they are very small.
 They have no charge and have no mass
 And do not interact at all.
 The earth is just a silly ball
 To them, through which they simply pass,
 Like dustmaids down a drafty hall
 Or photons through a sheet of glass.
 They snub the most exquisite gas,
 Ignore the most substantial wall,
 Cold-shoulder steel and sounding brass,
 Insult the stallion in his stall,
 And, scorning barriers of class,
 Infiltrate you and me! Like tall
 And painless guillotines, they fall
 Down through our heads into the grass.
 At night, they enter at Nepal
 And pierce the lover and his lass
 From underneath the bed—you call
 It wonderful; I call it crass.

—JOHN UPDIKE