

# SCIENCE



*Jovian, Jove-like Dr. A., who has warned our world (alas, without visible effect) of the dangers of polluting our seas, herein tells us something new about a sea vaster than any of ours, and something which will affect one of the basic questions of our quest for outer space.*

## BY JOVE!

*by Isaac Asimov*

SUPPOSE WE ASK OURSELVES A QUESTION: ON WHAT WORLD OF the Solar system (other than Earth itself, of course) are we most likely to discover life?

I imagine I can plainly hear the unanimous answering shout of: *Mars!*

The argument goes, and I know it by heart, because I have used it myself a number of times, that Mars may be a little small and a little cold and a little short on air, but it isn't too small, too cold, or too airless to support the equivalent of primitive plant life. On the other hand, Venus and Mercury are definitely too hot, the Moon is airless, the remaining satellites of the Solar system, and the planetoids as well, (to say nothing of Pluto) are too cold, too small, or both.

And then we include a phrase which may go like this: "As for Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus and Neptune, we can leave them out of consideration, altogether." I use a phrase like that constantly so that I don't have to think about the monsters, even.

However, Carl Sagan, an astronomer at the University of California,

alchemy, flying saucers, transmigration of souls, hyperintelligent cavemen, hollow-earth theories, and endless other species of nonsense. Plato invoked the Atlantis myth the better to objectify his theories of government, and more than two millenia later that particular science-fiction gambit was still going strong, as when Edgar Rice Burroughs transferred to a Mars already enlivened with the remarkable canal systems of Percival Lowell the Atlantis of the theosophists populated by all Helena Blavatsky's Seven Great Races.

What the purist can legitimately demand is that wherever the author take off from, he be completely honest, remember science, keep his eyes open, and see all he can—not flinch from any dark wall in popular or scientific worldview or in his own mind. The science-fiction writer's noblest task is this: to awaken, in a story, a world on the very edge of impossibility, and then, in the midst of the story, on the verge between the written and the unwritten, to

study and search with all the passion of a scientist scrutinizing his experiment, or an analyst his patient's thought-stream, or a Holmes a Moriarty, or a lover his beloved.

And if, in such a wild pursuit, the science-fiction writer fail to achieve ungrudging recognition, or if the science-fiction reader lack the wholehearted approval of his peers, neither should grieve.

It's clearly a case of the old adage: Prophets are without honor on their own planet.

Perhaps, therefore, the Martians will be the ones duly to honor us science-fiction folk. But I rather imagine the Space Force PR boys will tell their story to the Martians first. Just before he bows out of the communal burrow of the Giant Black Beetles, Ralph-12BB-4U will very casually let slip this afterthought: "Oh by the way, some terrestrials known as science-fictionites will eventually be coming along, claiming it was all their idea that we get in touch with you in the first place. They're quite harmless—but don't believe a word they say."

