

LETTERS

Strange Critic

It is obvious that Michael Collings (Autumn 1984) has not read Robert Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*, and has relied entirely on his misunderstanding of a second-hand source (Scholes and Rabkin). Otherwise he would not say such an absurd thing as his claim that Heinlein sees polygamy as Joseph Smith's "damning sin" and akin to rape.

Quite the contrary, Heinlein does not condemn Joseph Smith or the Mormons for polygamy or for anything else in *Stranger* or in any other book. To be sure, he draws a parallel between Joseph's institution of plural marriage and the even more unorthodox sexual arrangements made by Michael Valentine Smith, but Heinlein's sympathy is in both cases with the Smiths, not with the bigoted mobs that lynch them.

Those who have read Heinlein widely know well that his numerous works are generously sprinkled with references to Mormons and the LDS faith, many of them very positive. In *Double Star*, the narrator explains that he cannot describe the Martian initiation ceremony for the same reason a Latter-day Saint cannot describe what goes on inside the Salt Lake Temple: in both cases, it is a sacred and intimate experience, not to be shared with just anyone. Other instances, if not so positive, are at least neutral. In *Glory Road*, something is described as being "as difficult as converting the Pope to Mormonism."

LDSF Two will soon be out, with an introduction by Dr. Hugh Nibley and a brand-new story by Jack Weyland, as well as stories by prominent SF writers Avram Davidson and Philip José Farmer, to prove once again that science fiction and the gospel are far from incompatible.

Benjamin Urrutia
Provo, Utah

Historical SF/LDS Estrangement?

Towards the end of his article on Mormonism and science fiction (Autumn 1984) Michael Collings says, "Given these assumptions, science fiction and religion — and Mormonism in particular — seem essentially incompatible. One asks the questions . . . while the other answers them." This describes the historical estrangement of the genre and our religion — the views of agnostics dominating the current literary scene as against the absolutist assumptions of many members — but not the real possibilities.

The notion that in this life truth is known and static is obviously false. Early Church leaders in particular repeatedly stated how little of the truth we actually possess and urged members to study other philosophies and cultures for the good they might impart, recognizing the dangers and opportunities this can provide. That a new truth might become a stumbling block or

stepping-stone certainly is no argument against the need for eternal progression continuing here. If truth were so clear and simple we would merely need an extended list of commandments: instead, we have been given scriptures so complex that they require a lifelong search accompanied by personal revelation.

In any event, Mormons certainly disagree on the details of what is "known." Indeed, in compiling *LDSF: Science Fiction by and for Mormons* and the forthcoming *LDSF II* (edited by Ben Urrutia), both of which contain contributions by Michael Collings, we found almost no assumption of conventional Mormonism could not be challenged. The marvelous thing about science fiction/fantasy (I prefer the term speculative fiction) is that it is able to stretch us spiritually and intellectually in ways mundane fiction fails at. It takes questions seriously which religion regards as essential, and it can push religion beyond its complacent assumptions, certainly helping us to gain fresh perspectives on the application of our philosophies. That every philosophy provides limits to what one can credibly write is only one side of the coin, the other being that each view provides special possibilities for enriching us.

Scott S. Smith
Thousand Oaks, California

LDS NOVEL WRITING CONTEST

The LDS Novel Writing Contest, sponsored by Randall Book, will accept manuscripts of any length on any subject for its 1985 contest, but shorter manuscripts dealing with LDS subjects are more likely to be awarded prizes. Manuscripts submitted last year to this contest are not eligible. Manuscripts must be clean, double-spaced, typed, accompanied by a self-addressed envelope, and postmarked no later than 1 July 1985.

First prize is \$1,500 plus a \$1,000 advance on royalties; second prize is \$1,000 advance of royalties; third prize is \$500 advance on royalties; honorable mentions are \$100. Awarding the prize is contingent upon the author's acceptance of a publication contract with Randall.

Winners will be announced after 1 September. Randall Book reserves the rights of first refusal on all manuscripts submitted to the contest and also the right not to award prizes if that is the judges' decision. Send manuscripts to Randall Book, 9500 South 500 West, Sandy, UT 84070.