FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Science Fiction

Lumen
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While the very idea may seem alien to science fiction fans, there was a time when most people never even considered the possibility of life on other planets, much less what forms such life might take and how such beings might behave. In an age that has imagined everything from an E.T. who can heal with his glowing fingertip to parasitic aliens that bleed acid when wounded, such naïveté may seem impossible. The theory, too, within quantum physics that the act of performing an experiment can influence the result of that experiment is unfamiliar to many. Yet perhaps the notion is not so new as science readers might think.

Reading this new translation, the first in over a hundred years from the original French text, one would never guess that the author predated current science and science fiction by so many years. His speculations on the forms of life on other planets, the relativity of time, and numerous other subjects are a curious mix of old and new, accurate and inaccurate. His social commentary is, however, in many areas as timely today as it was when originally written.

The editor-translator, a well-known author and science fiction writer as well as a lecturer at the School of Cultural Studies, King Alfred's College, Winchester, has done an admirable job of translation and annotation. The text flows, despite the unfamiliar form of the work ("conversations" between the cosmic spirit Lumen and the mortal man Quaerens on the nature of life). A lengthy and detailed introduction acquaints the reader with Flammarion's standing as a scientist in his own time (1843-1925) and his efforts to popularize science for the masses. It also places the work within the field of speculative fiction and introduces Flammarion's interest in such subjects as reincarnation and spiritualism. Exhaustive footnotes on both translation and context ensure that even readers unfamiliar with early science fiction or the historical references quoted in the text will be able to appreciate the context.

This is a fascinating look at one of the earliest works to consider the matters of relativity,

alien life, and the advancement of mankind. Its views, while often obviously (to the modern eye) erroneous, nevertheless offer fascinating insights into science's early efforts to consider life of other-than-earthly origins. Its efforts to envision a world in which man has evolved morally are particularly telling: "I recently visited a world where the search for the discovery of merit and intelligence is as eager as that for gold and diamonds in yours. All is done there for the benefit of humanity."

Readers of science, science fiction, and moral commentary alike will find much to pique their interest in this artifact of science fiction.

Marlene Satter