

To predict the future is an ancient human desire and still today, astrology has more followers than astronomy. It is however remarkable that in my Editorial for this issue, I was able to quote at least four accurate predictions of nuclear power and one of disastrous atomic bombs. It was published in June 1981.

H.G. Wells in his book *The World Set Free* of 1914 was the first to predict that in 1953, atomic power would produce unlimited energy, leading to a revolution in industry and finally world war. (The first atomic power station to produce electricity was Calder Hall, inaugurated in Britain in 1956). The first atomic bomb (a term invented by H.G. Wells in this book) was dropped on the Imperial Castle in Berlin. More than 200 similar bombs followed, all leading to “continuous explosions, and producing soreness and blistering of skin and lungs, very difficult to heal”.

Apparently the second prophecy in 1923, was by Professor A.W. Stewart in his novel *Nordenholt's Million* written under the pen-name J.J. Connington. The author must have known of Rutherford's paper of 1919 on “Collision of alpha particles” and extrapolating in the novel, the fictitious inventor of atomic power described correctly a chain-reaction how “one set of disintegrating atoms must trigger a second and a third and so forth”. The inventor is killed, others continue, and again produce unlimited energy, a Million survivors are saved to reconstruct a land devastated by the destruction of all green plants and hence condemned to starvation.

Olaf Stapledon was the third who in his classic *Last and First Man* of 1930 described how in the year 2000 a young Chinese scientist demonstrated an atomic rifle with which he destroyed the Island of Lundy in the Bristol Channel and produced a perfect mushroom cloud. Stapledon's description of events was an accurate prediction of the phenomena which took place during the first atomic explosion at Alamogordon, New Mexico, on 16 July 1945.

Hans Dominik, a German engineer and science writer, wrote two books in which atomic power was predicted. In *Der Brand der Cheopspyramide* of 1927, he invented a tactical atomic weapon, a *Kugelblitz* which produced an atomic explosion when in contact with iron. During a war between Arabs and Europeans another version of his atomic weapon is used to set the Pyramid on fire. In Dominik's second atomic book *Atomgewicht 500*, published in 1935, he chose uranium enclosed in an autoclave and submitted it to extremely high pressures of helium and high temperatures which produced a new ‘sun-element’ of atomic weight 500. A minute quantity of this material was sufficient to keep a 20000 h.p. electric power station running for a month. Before final success could be achieved, explosions and other disasters had to be overcome.