

Books

Ossian's Ride

by Fred Hoyle

Harper & Brothers \$3.00

As a visiting professor of astronomy at Caltech, Fred Hoyle spends the first term of each academic year at the Institute. As a fellow of St. Johns College at the University of Cambridge (where he is now Plumian Professor of Astronomy and Experimental Philosophy) he spends the remainder of the academic year in England.

Along with this peripatetic academic schedule, Mr. Hoyle has an active career as a popular writer. Starting in 1952, after two lively and controversial books on astronomy (*The Nature of the Universe* and *Frontiers of Astronomy*) he turned to philosophy (*Men and Materialism*), tried his hand at current affairs (*A Decade of Decision*), then plunged boldly — and very successfully — into

science fiction with *The Black Cloud*.

Ossian's Ride represents still another departure for Mr. Hoyle, because this is a chase story, a real spies-and-counterspies thriller, in the Graham Greene and Eric Ambler tradition. Of course, Hoyle doesn't do it anything like as well as the old masters on his first try, but he's in there firing with both barrels all the way.

Ossian's Ride, naturally enough, has plenty of scientific overtones. In 1958, as Hoyle tells it, a small group of scientists established an industry in Western Ireland for extraction of a range of chemicals from the organic material in peat. In a short time, they were producing an amazing range of valuable chemicals. Profits were enormous.

In 1962, when the organization (known as I.C.E. for Industrial Corporation Eire) developed a contraceptive pill, profits were even greater. Soon the capital resources of the

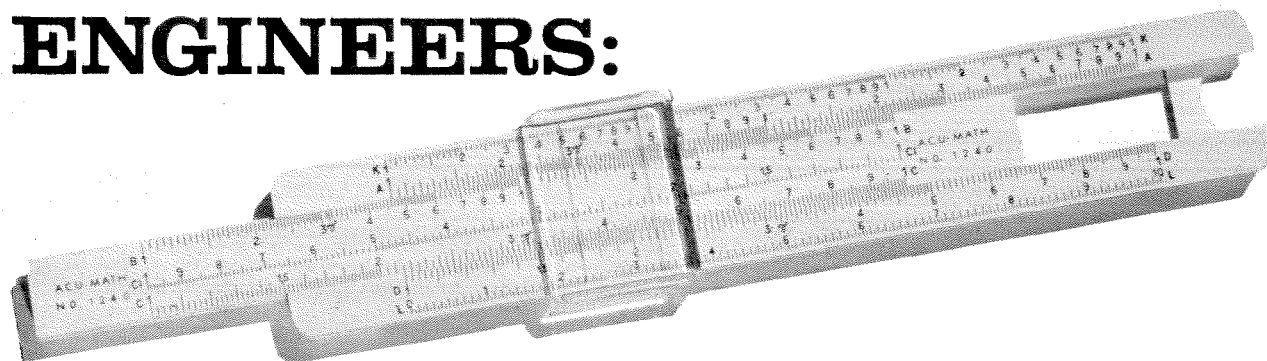
corporation were over a thousand million pounds.

In 1964, I.C.E. began to change its emphasis from chemistry to physics. It began importing metals. It drew a steady volume of outstanding scientists into its employ. By 1969 it had a chain of commercially working thermonuclear reactors.

It is 1970 when *Ossian's Ride* begins, and Western Ireland is sealed off from the rest of the world. No one can break through the iron curtain that protects I.C.E. It is up to Mr. Hoyle's hero, a durable young mathematician, to make his way into the forbidden territory and discover the secret of what I.C.E. is doing, and how it does it.

Hoyle keeps his story going at such a clip that he hasn't much time for characterization, or for tying up a lot of loose ends of plot—which results in a kind of rough and ready performance. It may be confusing, but it's undeniably lively.

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