

CHAPTER : ON SCIENCE FICTION

Questions

Understanding the text

1. What makes for the distinction between the various genres of fiction—‘a sports story’, ‘a Western story’, ‘a jungle story’ and science fiction?
2. How does Asimov establish that John Campbell was wrong in his opinion that it is not possible for a science fiction mystery to be fair to a reader in the same way as a classical mystery is?
3. What are the pitfalls that the writer of science fiction mystery must guard against?

Talking about the text

1. Imagination and fantasy help human beings to speculate upon the possible explanations for the complexity and unpredictability of the phenomena in the universe.
2. The difference that science and technology have made to everyday life today was visualised in science fiction fifty years ago.

Appreciation

1. Discuss the author's attitude towards the pre-scientific imagination and the tone he adopts while talking about it.
2. Observe how the paragraph, as a form, has been used in the essay. Some paragraphs consist of just one sentence. What purpose do you think the author had in putting them in this manner?
3. Mark the linkers used by the author to connect the point he makes in one paragraph with that in the next. For example, let me explain the difference that makes in the last line of Para 1 of Section II. These are called discourse markers or discourse signallers.

Answers

Understanding the text

1. The author made a distinction between various genres of fiction by mentioning that Science fiction refers to a literary universe that has no mean size because science fiction is what it is through its background. A 'sports story' consists of some competitive activity as a part of its contents, generally of an athletic nature. A Western story refers to the nomadic life of the cowboy of the American West in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The 'jungle story' consists of the dangers implicit in a forested tropical wilderness.
2. According to Asimov, John's belief about science fiction was incorrect. John believed that it is not possible for a mystery in science fiction to be fair to a reader in the same way as a classical mystery is. But Asimov didn't think that way. He believed that it is fair for science fiction as well to be fair to a reader. He also believed that the opportunities in science fiction are very broad. He said that he imagined that what he expected was the sudden change of rules of the story but was confused in his own thoughts.
3. There are some pitfalls that the writer of science fiction mystery must guard against. According to the author, along with science, one should also know how to make changes to that science. This implies that it is possible to write a science fiction mystery by clinging to the rules of the game in science fiction mysteries as ordinary ones.

Talking about the text

1. In science, it can't be promised that everything is controllable in this Universe. It does not even promise absolute truth, nor does it consider that such a thing essentially exists. Imagination and fantasy bring out possible outcomes that can explain the complexity and unpredictability of the phenomena in the universe. Things related to science are based on imagination as science is born with imagination only.
2. A bridge between science that was fifty years ago and science today was built by science fiction. Fifty years ago science was visualized as something difficult to imagine and extraordinary. Sometimes people even relate it to superstitious energy. But now science and technology had taken a new shape in front of every human being. Everyone today is aware of science and also make critical studies on it. This brings out the difference in science and technology that has made to everyday life today that was visualized in science fiction fifty years ago.

Appreciation

1. The author mentioned the following things:
 - a) Science fiction is the creation of the last two centuries. It cannot be seen as future unless, and until, people get the idea that it is science and technology itself that produces the future.

- b) No one could get that idea until the rate of scientific change became great enough to be noticed by people in the course of their lifetime.
- c) A notion prevailed that the universe is full of superstitious things and some sort of energy or superhuman was the leader of this universe.

The author's attitude and tone is absurd towards the pre-scientific imagination are

- 2. There are many instances where the author has put the paragraphs in a single sentence. He has done so to put a strong plot in explaining what science fiction actually was in different forms. For example, in the first paragraph, the author is talking about ancient and modern science fiction, and in the second paragraph, the author is putting a light on science fiction background and its genres.
- 3. The linkers used by the author to connect the point he makes in one paragraph with that in the next are given below:
 - a) The goals of these ancient stories are the same as those of modern science fiction—the depiction of life as we don't know it: The emotional needs that are fulfilled are the same, the satisfaction of the longing for wonder.
 - b) Science fiction is a literary universe of no mean size because science fiction is what it is, not through its content but through its background: Let me explain the difference that makes.