

Winner in the mystery sphere

SPHERE. By Michael Crichton.
Macmillan. 385pp. \$24.95.

Reviewer:
COLIN STEELE.

MICHAEL Crichton's *Sphere* begins when a ship laying a fibre-optics cable between Sydney and Honolulu snags what is believed to be an unidentified flying object on the ocean bed.

When the UFO, in turn, is revealed as an American spaceship from the year 2043 which has been lying there for 300 years, then the plot potential is awesome. It would be unfair to provide more of the plot outline except to say that no conclusion could possibly explain satisfactorily some of the mysteries implied.

The investigation of the discovery is entrusted to an unlikely and emotional group of American civilian scientists, but then Crichton could not have produced such a dramatic interplay of personalities if the main characters had shown a

...dramatic interplay of personalities if the main characters had shown a lack of emotion similar to that of NASA astronauts. In this context it is also clear, given the narrative pace and structure, that *Sphere* has been written with one eye on film production.

The dangers ultimately come just as much from inner space as outer space, with a psychologist, Dr Norman Johnson from the University of California, providing elements of rationality amongst threats from giant squids, possible aliens and unstable colleagues.

Crichton provides enough basic scientific jargon, from black holes to computer software, to keep everyone from pondering the time paradoxes and plot implausibilities. It's quite clear, however, that he has judged superbly the commercial sphere of his readership.



Michael Crichton: mysteries

**Michael Crichton: mysteries
and dramas.**