

STARLING PLAGUE

From Autumn to Spring, millions of starlings blacken the sky each evening at Lanivet, near Bodmin in Cornwall. A great plantation of bamboo-canes provides their resting place for the night in just the same way as the National Gallery does in London. The plantation manager and his foreman examine the result of the starlings' visits - a damaged crop that, in hard cash, means a heavy loss to them. Bird lime, three inches deep, is stunting the bamboo growth and killing freshly-planted roots.

Dead starlings litter the ground between the closely growing bamboos. The Lanivet plantation which was begun shortly before the war, has become a flourishing industry; but now it is threatened by the starlings' invasion. Bamboo, apart from being used by gardeners, and for making almost anything from pea-shooters to fishing rods, can be pulped to make paper. Experts believe it can be big business if the starlings will let it. So far all attempts to drive them away from Lanivet have been unsuccessful - the birds always return.

The Latin name for a starling is *Sturnus Vulgaris* - don't know what it means, but I bet he's got a good idea! In the past century there has been a rapid increase in the number of starlings in Britain. If action is not taken soon, they may become yet another pest to worry the country's farmers.