

From C. R., Plymouth, Devon:

Science fiction used to be a very interesting and entertaining subject when I first started to take an interest in it way back in 1926.

For example, we used to read of television, atomic power and bombs, aircraft without propellers, and many other things which are commonplace now, but then were laughed at as fairy tales or nightmares. Being of a mechanical mind I could see there were possibilities of these being made as they have been.

Space travel and heat rays, etc., have also become an accepted fact, by rocket and the laser rays, and it is only a matter of time before an atomic or electron power is developed suitable for space travel. But the stuff that is written nowadays and called science fiction usually has no connection whatever with science.

In fact most of the stories appear to have been written by the frustrated patients of a psychoanalyst.

For instance, take teleportation and being able to take a week-end in June 19000 B.C. or June A.D. 4900 by means of a bus converted to a time machine. These sort of things are not possible and should not be classed as science fiction. In fact I think they should be classified as 'Impossible Tales'. Of course I'm in my fifties and may be not quite 'with it'.

Don't take this letter too literally as I have enjoyed most of the books, and the authors have to eat (that statement is debatable). If you decide to publish some impossible tales send me particulars.

From A. J. N., of Crawley, Sussex:

I must congratulate the selection committee on the books chosen for publication as they are of an excellent standard, especially considering the price; when a paperback now costs 3s 6d to 5s, the value we get for our money is exceptional.

From C. J. B., of Lapworth, near Solihull:

Sorry, but James Gunn's *The Joy Makers* is simply not good enough as a club Choice. I have been reading sf over thirty years, and perhaps have acquired some ability to comment. I succeeded in finishing the book recently on the second attempt and certainly do not intend giving it shelf room.

I have been disturbed in my twelve months' membership of the SFBC at what appears to me to be the uneven quality of the selections, and *The Joy Makers* caused me to decide to cancel my membership on the expiry of my subscription—only to find that both the following choices were very good. Walter Miller's *Conditionally Human* was excellent, and I am delighted to have this fine author's story *The Darfsteller*, which I first read years ago in the old 'Astounding S.F.', in permanent form.

It is to be hoped that these higher standards of selection will remain, and I am now happy to continue membership for a further period.

From A. B. A., of Transvaal, South Africa:

I would like to add my mite to what has already been said about Ballard's work. I think he is undoubtedly one of the better writers in this field today, but some of his stories are, symbolically, above my ken!

What C. F. P. of Essex said about publishing sf 'classics' such as the Foundation Stories or the Van Vogt Series has my whole-hearted approval. I am particularly keen on seeing more of A. C. Clarke's work; I regard his *City and the Stars* as perhaps the best sf story yet.

The present dust-covers certainly suit the *genre*, but I would prefer a dark colour in place of the white as they soil so quickly.

From H. F., of London, E.14:

I am seldom moved to comment on the books I read, and having been reading sf now for over thirty years consider myself something of an authority on the subject, but I feel I really must record my dismay at our choice No. 95, *Doppelgänger*. I have seldom read a book so dull, and trust that our selectors will not inflict anything like this upon us again.

From Michael Gray, 624 Langdale House, Oldfield Road, Salford 5, Lancs.:

Further to your members' letters on the subject of J. G. Ballard in the March *SF News*, I could not resist the impulse to answer some of the points made. Although in part agreeing with M. G. T. of Sussex in that I do enjoy Russell, Asimov, Heinlein, etc., more than I do Mr Ballard, I think it is unfair to try and compare his work with the Old Masters. Mr Ballard has plenty of time to develop yet and his work is full of interesting and thought-provoking ideas, together with great originality—surely the most important ingredients of sf?

I cannot agree with C. F. P. (Essex) that Mr Ballard's stories fall into the category of bad stories badly written. The author's unique stories are bristling with new and colourful ideas in a field in which I had almost despaired of reading about any theme which I had not read about a dozen times before!

There may be some slight grounds for saying the stories are badly written, but not literally or grammatically—perhaps from the point of view that in his enthusiasm to express his ideas he is a little over-technical and tends to lose contact with the reader. However, I am sure that Mr Ballard's stories will improve with experience, and they do show a great creativeness of thought that is surely worth a little more patience from the 'fans'. In any case it is certainly grossly unfair to dismiss J. G. Ballard's stories as 'trash', as does C. F. P. I do not pretend to understand all Mr Ballard's stories or ideas, but I do think he deserves a chance to prove his merit and improve his contact with the reader. Let us wait a while yet before passing final judgment on an author of such obvious promise.

Incidentally since the March *SF News* also went on to say that readers' letters would be welcomed 'on points that interest, puzzle or anger them', I would like to take the opportunity to pursue a pet hate of mine. It does anger me to see letters signed with initials instead of names. Since I am sure all the members who write to you do give their names I wonder why they are never published in the *SF News*. Surely it cannot be because of lack of space, considering the relatively little that would be needed? I am sure my fellow members would prefer with me to see the names of people who write instead of their initials. Why, for all I know the fellow next door may be writing to express his opinion of a letter I have written, and we don't even know that we are both sf fans, let alone members of the same book club.

Since the days when sf fans were ashamed to admit their secret passion are long gone I cannot see any conceivable, logical reason for this irritating practice, so please let us see the names of the members who take the trouble to write in in the future.

[This is a moot point: we feel that it is wiser *not* to print a correspondent's full name and address unless he (or she) has first given us leave to do so.—EDITOR.]

## INFORMATION

### THE BRITISH SCIENCE FICTION ASSOCIATION

NOT all SFBC members may be aware of the existence and the work of the B.S.F.A. One of its principal aims is to encourage the reading and writing of good sf. It supports a library—the largest collection of its kind in the world—and supplies books to B.S.F.A. members in the United Kingdom; it also sponsors two magazines: *Vector*, distributed free to members of the B.S.F.A., contains general articles, reviews of sf novels and magazines, information about new books and addresses of new members of the association; the second magazine, *Tangent*, is available to members of the general public and costs 2s; the next issue will appear in September. *Tangent* is devoted to fiction, and anyone who would like to know more about it should write first to the British Science Fiction Association (Dept. TSF), 71 George Road, Erdington, Birmingham 23.

For fuller information about the association as a whole, please write to the Hon. Secretary, 38 Millfield Road, Deeping St James, Peterborough.

THE AUGUST ADDITIONAL (OPTIONAL) IS  
**THE GREAT PIANISTS** by Harold Schonberg  
(Gollancz 45s; SFBC 32s, post free)

THE AUGUST SUPPLEMENTARY (OPTIONALS) ARE  
**A Visual History of Modern Britain: THE TOWN** by Geoffrey Martin and **TRANSPORT** by Jack Simmons  
(Studio Vista Books 35s each; SFBC 25s each, post free)

## OPTIONAL BOOKS

Here are details of Readers Union Optional books available in October.

### ETERNAL EGYPT

by Pierre Montet

*The October RU Additional*

FROM the book:

'We have arrived at a point at which it is possible to pass judgment on the Ancient Egyptians. Their defects do not outweigh their virtues, although both are equally undeniable. Their vanity was prodigious. The slightest favour filled them with delight and their naïvety in this respect made them a comparatively easy people to govern. They were hospitable, fond of good living and much given to banquets at which jokes, even crude jokes, were the order of the day. On the other hand, they were never guilty of the cruelties perpetrated by the Chaldeans and the Assyrians. They were very much attached to their towns and their villages, their professions, their local gods and their feast days; they were afraid of the Pharaoh, the priests and the scribes, and, from time to time, rose against their masters, but their revolt was always short lived. . . .

'No nation ever invented a more perfectly proportioned or more decorative form of writing than the Egyptian hieroglyphics.

'In the field of art the Egyptians rival the Greeks and outshine the other peoples of antiquity. They excelled in extremes—pyramids and colossi or pectorals and pendants. Their unequalled stylistic originality is shown in their plant-columns, obelisks, pylons and avenues of sphinxes. Certain of their chapels and colonnades are reminiscent, in their perfection, of Greek temples. Some of their statues have a place among the masterpieces of all time. The pictures that they have left us of their daily round suggest that life must have been very enjoyable during the reigns of Cheops and Sesostris.

'Such was Ancient Egypt. An Egyptologist, writing on his favourite subject, must be suspected of partiality. The present author hopes that in describing the days of Egypt's greatness and her unforgettable achievements, he has never allowed his sympathies to distort the truth.'

This is the very modest conclusion to a splendidly ambitious and successful book. It is pleasing to read and to absorb because of the grace and confidence of its writing and of the great knowledge on which it is based. It has the supreme virtue of a book of this special kind: it concerns itself always with the Ancient Egyptians, not as historical curiosities but as people who had a very real life apart from their marvellously elaborate ceremonial of coronations and funerals, who in fact lived without any reference at all to the future's view of them. It gives one not only knowledge, but warm admiration and affection for the people of one of the world's great civilizations.

338 pages. Plates and maps. Index and notes.

Weidenfeld & Nicolson 50s; SFBC 38s 6d, post free

## WHERE FOUR WORLDS MEET

by Fosco Maraini

*The October RU Extra*

IN 1959 Fosco Maraini, widely travelled in Asia and an experienced mountaineer, was chosen by the Italian Alpine Club to lead an expedition whose object was to scale the 24,000-foot Mount Saraghrar, hitherto unconquered, in the Hindu Kush. This remarkable book is the story of their adventures. It is not only—or even chiefly—concerned with the exhilaration and exhaustion and fear involved in scaling the snows, glaciers and precipices of the great mountains of Central Asia; it deals as much with the whole strange world in which the mountaineers found themselves. In order to reach their objective they had to travel many miles in Pakistan, Swat, Dir and Chitral, over unmade roads and goat paths, across flimsy bridges high above mountain torrents, under overhanging rocks, through bleak semi deserts and blossoming oases.

Over this almost untrodden way the expedition, with the help of more than 170 Chitrali porters, carried the load of equipment and supplies needed for their venture to a point 13,750 feet above sea level, where they set up their base camp. Above this they made seven other camps, the seventh, from which the final assault was made, lying at 23,000 feet. On the morning of 24th August 1959 four members of the expedition left Camp Seven and reached the summit—without the aid of oxygen equipment.

The tense and exciting story of the great climb is enclosed in a vivid account of the age-old history, both secular and religious, which has shaped the peoples of the area, peoples on whom the climbers depended for necessary help. One of the most strange and fascinating sections in the whole book is the account of a visit to a group of Kaffirs, a tribe once powerful in Central Asia and reduced now to a few thousand survivors still practising, in their remote, fruitful valley on the borders of Chitral and Afghanistan, the customs and the pagan religious rites of a frighteningly remote age.

'Signor Maraini is in the top class as a writer and has found the best of translators in Peter Green. The author also took most of the splendid photographs—a story in themselves—with which his book is illustrated.' *Daily Telegraph*.

'Sympathy, profound experience and unaffected learning. . . . [A] rich book.' *New Statesman*.

290 pages. 163 plates, some in full colour. Maps and Index.

Hamish Hamilton 42s; SFBC 35s, post free

## The Reynard Library

(The Special titles for October)

ARNOLD	JOHNSON
BROWNING	MACAULAY
CARLYLE	NEWMAN
DRYDEN	STERNE
FITZGERALD	WORDSWORTH



For the general reader (and the student) these books will represent excellent selections from the work of great English writers. Each volume consists of 800 pages or more and covers every aspect of the particular writer's work: prose and poetry, plays and letters. Some of the series contain everything of the writer's work which a non-specialist reader is ever likely to want; others, like the volume on Dr Johnson, are planned as expansive introductions.

Hart-Davis 30s–35s; SFBC 19s (each) post free

(IN VERY SHORT SUPPLY)

THE SEPTEMBER EXTRA (OPTIONAL) IS  
**THE LIFE OF PLANTS** by E. J. H. Corner  
(Weidenfeld & Nicolson 55s; SFBC 32s, post free)

THE SEPTEMBER SPECIAL (OPTIONALS) ARE  
**Ancient Peoples and Places:**  
**THE MYCENEANS** by Lord William Taylour  
**THE GREEKS IN THE WEST** by A. G. Woodhead  
**THE BYZANTINES** by David Talbot Rice  
**CELTIC BRITAIN** by Nora K. Chadwick  
**EARLY CHRISTIAN IRELAND**  
by Máire and Liam de Paor  
**WRITING** by David Diringer  
(Thames & Hudson 35s each; SFBC 27s each, post free)