

Third Prize Ending of our SFBC Competition (March) IN THE DARK—Conclusion

by J. T. Rutter, 14 Grove Street, Elswick,
Newcastle upon Tyne 4

... He woke from a vaguely disturbing dream in which he saw the planet inhabited by two-dimensional creatures—a shifting maze of interlacing geometrical patterns over which a series of dark bars moved in a somehow sinister fashion.

'I must have dropped off', he said to himself. Still feeling uneasy, he returned to the ship, to be greeted by a frantic buzzing from the Hyperwave Call System. Being well protected, this had remained intact, although Turner had hardly expected a response to the automatic SOS signal he had started on landing. He knew the odds against success too well.

From the audio came: 'Battleship *Star Rover* cruising in vicinity of Cluster X/1/346 Gal.S. Describe planet to help us trace your position.'

Turner complied, and the voice continued:

'One polar cap... axial tilt probably similar to that of Uranus... Earth-type atmosphere...'

Then, after a long silence, in an urgent tone:

'We know where you are. Danger. Stay by your ship until picked up. Important. Destroy all star maps.' After repeating this several times, the hyperwave went dead.

In a daze, Turner did what was requested. By a billion-to-one chance he was to be rescued. Explanations could come later. He knew now that the surrounding paradise was not all it seemed....

Later, on board the *Star Rover*, he recounted his experience to the commander, a Captain Stoddart, starting with the mysterious explosion far out in space.

'You were right in thinking the planet uninhabited,' said the captain, 'but it has three moons. Familiar with our Earth-Moon relationship we tend to forget that the primary need not necessarily be the centre of activity. The planet on which you had your picnic is a playground—a sort of green belt. But, as we have recently discovered, the alien civilization spread over the satellites is crowded and active—extremely advanced technologically, and bent on enslaving the galaxy. Most of that cluster is under their dominance. Your ship was hit by one of their spy-rays at a distance that will give you some idea of the extent of their probings. If they had reached you first your star maps would have

SFBC's Fantastic Christmas Bargain THE LORD OF THE RINGS

by J. R. R. Tolkien

One of the greatest books of our age

In three volumes: Allen & Unwin 6js the set, SFBC 36s

THE only excuse you can possibly have for not wanting this book is that you have it already. Whether you are a fan or merely an occasional fantasy reader, whether you are racking your brains for a suitable gift for somebody else, or indulging in a treat for yourself—and why not, after all—you couldn't do better than this book. Probably this is preaching to the converted, but for the unconverted here are some details.

The Lord of the Rings is incomparable, unique; it belongs to a *genre* of writing which began with myth and legend, grew up with epic and romance, and received some strange twists with Lewis Carroll and Merwyn Peake. As a work of the creative imagination it can hold its own with almost any other: its three volumes contain a fully visualized world, with a history, mythology, pre-history, geography and diverse cultures; a teeming creation of orcs, ents, elves, wizards, trolls, hobbits and men of varying degrees of culture and savagery. The style of writing is so vivid, the action so real and exciting that it is impossible not to take it completely seriously.

The plot is a cosmic drama which turns on a struggle for a tiny of power. The build-up is gigantic and far-reaching over vast stretches of space and time; the twists and turns are as thrilling as *The Count of Monte Cristo*, and as deeply impressive as ancient symbols.

This book is everything that has been claimed for it. To get your copy by Christmas you must order *immediately*.

THIS MONTH'S CHOICE IS
THE DEEP RANGE
by Arthur C. Clarke
(Muller 13s 6d; SFBC 5s 6d)