

# ARABIA FELIX

by Thorkild Hansen

*The RU Additional title for May*

THIS remarkable book is the story of a great journey of exploration, told for the first time nearly two hundred years after the event. In the winter of 1761 six men left Copenhagen: they formed the Danish expedition to Arabia Felix, the first scientific expedition ever mounted, and their venture excited the curiosity of the whole of Europe. In their slow voyage to Turkey and Egypt these ill-assorted companions were preoccupied with plots to kill one another *en route*; then they went into the almost legendary interior of the Yemen, and what was to have been a delightful journey through an exotic, unknown land became a constant struggle with danger, privation, sickness and every kind of disaster.

Nearly seven years later the only survivor returned to Denmark, a forgotten man. Specimens sent home by the travellers had been ruined by neglect; political and private factions suppressed the scientific findings. The diaries, notebooks and sketches from the expedition were put away in Copenhagen Museum, where they have lain ever since, mostly unpublished and unread. Thorkild Hansen, one of Denmark's leading writers, first became interested in the expedition because of his own journeys in Saudi Arabia; he has used the long-neglected original material to tell the story of 'one of the most extraordinary journeys of all time' (*The Times*), and his excellent book is both an account of a real and terrible adventure and a memorial to the courage and the ability of the men who undertook it.

'The endurance and industry of these doomed northerners continually provokes wonder. In particular admiration must be felt for Niebuhr, setting off alone to return from India . . . and for Forsskal, philosopher, theologian, scientist, linguist, born leader and, in the judgment of many, potentially one of the greatest men of the Age of Enlightenment. . . . *Arabia Felix* happily rescues these men from oblivion.' *The Times*.

'The story he has to tell is a gripping one and he tells it simply and well.' *Guardian*.

381 pages. Index and list of sources. Illustrated with original maps and drawings.

*Collins 30s; SFBC 18s 9d, post free*

## MEMORANDUM

FROM time to time it is a good plan, we feel, to remind members of outstanding RU past titles which are still available. One of the most interesting and valuable books published in Readers Union in 1964 was the *Picture History of Photography*, and as it was issued just before members of SFBC were able to buy RU optional titles, you may like to know a little about it.

It discusses and explains every important development in the history of photography. There are more than 600 reproductions of photographs in it, encompassing the most vital work done from the time of the pioneers like Daguerre, Steiglitz and Brassai to the present day. The book gives a short biography of each photographer—famous or little known—whose work is included, and contains, too, an excellent discussion of the possibilities created by the introduction and development of colour film. As the reviewer in the *Sunday Telegraph* said: 'This splendidly produced volume will fascinate amateurs as much as professionals, for, art apart, it is full of scenes of great historical interest.'

682 illustrations, 32 in full colour. Bibliography and Index.

*Thames & Hudson £7 7s; SFBC £5 15s, post free*

Other beautiful and authoritative reference works still available are the world-famous Larousse Encyclopedias of *Mythology*, *Astronomy*, *Prehistoric and Ancient Art*, *Medieval and Byzantine Art* and *The Earth*. In each case these books are invaluable sources of information and a delight to the eye; the text of each of them is a compilation by experts, and the illustrations have set a standard in publishing for their excellence.

*Paul Hamlyn 63s each; SFBC 40s each, post free*

PLEASE ORDER FROM LETCHWORTH—SOON

THE MARCH EXTRA (OPTIONAL) IS

**JOHN F. KENNEDY: Portrait of a President**  
by Hugh Sidey

(*André Deutsch 36s; SFBC 22s 6d, post free*)

THE MARCH SPECIAL (OPTIONAL) IS

**GREAT PRIVATE COLLECTIONS**  
Edited by Douglas Cooper

(*Weidenfeld & Nicolson £6 6s; SFBC 90s, post free*)

THE APRIL SPECIAL (OPTIONAL) IS

**FRINGE MEDICINE** by Brian Inglis

(*Faber 30s; SFBC 19s, post free*)

THE APRIL EXTRA (OPTIONAL) IS

**GAUGUIN** by Henri Perruchot

(*Michael Joseph 42s; SFBC 25s, post free*)

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# science fiction news

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Selectors: John Carnell, Dr J. G. Porter

THE APRIL SFBC CHOICE

## In Deep

by Damon Knight

A COLLECTION of seven short stories by a writer who understands and expresses with great confidence the two most interesting extremes about man: his transitoriness and the inspired vitality that enables him to achieve so much that is permanent.

In 'Ticket to Anywhere' a doorway is found on Mars: it is very old and it apparently leads to doors on other planets, through matter-transmission. A man who prefers the solitude of a distant planet to conditioning on Earth offers to try the door, to see what will happen. . . . 'The Country of the Kind' shows the agony which someone can suffer when he is completely shunned by everyone else on Earth; he is free to go where he likes, to do what he likes, and yet, in fact, he has no more real freedom than a prisoner in solitary confinement. 'An Eye for What' takes a light-heartedly satirical look at the problem of how to punish an alien when you don't know what will punish him! 'Stranger Station', too, is about human-alien relationships: every twenty years a single meeting is arranged between one man and one alien; after each occasion the alien has always died and the man gone insane; will this one end differently? 'Four in One' imagines what it would be like to find yourself without your body, with only your mind still alive and lodged in a large alien protoplasm. Sharing this protoplasm with you are three other human minds and two of them are hostile to the point of murder. How do you retrieve a body? How do you survive? 'Ask Me Anything' is a grim picture of the dangers of knowledge improperly used, and 'The Beachcomber' is about a man who has lost his own planet—in a very strange way!

'The best volume of shorts so far this year. . . . Mr Knight's talent is hard to classify. You think you have him taped as an expert cartographer of nightmare and the next moment he comes up with the first story in this collection, a classic account of what happens when four assorted people become engulfed, but not assimilated, by an outsize jellyfish affair. The tone of this, bizarre and gay by turns, is captivating.

'Nevertheless, it's the darker side of the possible that gets more of an airing here. "The Country of the Kind" is the only interesting and believable guess I've seen at what the artist of tomorrow might become, and being this it inevitably makes the artist of today look a little different. "Stranger Station" begins with some familiar ingredients—a monster, solitude in space, a mechanism with feeling—and ends up as new and old.

'To do something properly is to be original.' *Observer*.

*Gollancz 15s; SFBC 6s*

## WANTED AND FOR SALE

MR M. M. MISTLIN, 122 Headstone Lane, North Harrow, Middlesex, would like to sell the SFBC past titles Nos. 55 to 76 inclusive.

P. F. Littlewood, 2/Lt., 6 O.F.P., B.F.P.O. 17, wants to buy a paperback edition of *Men, Martians and Machines* by Eric Frank Russell.

Mr W. T. Higgins, 51 Forge Lane, Horton Kirby, near Dartford, Kent, wants to obtain a copy of *Castle of Iron*, by Sprague de Camp.

The above members should, of course, be contacted direct.

### A Special Request

MISS L. D. COHEN, 21 Kent Road, Dunbeld, P.O. Box 1147, Johannesburg, South Africa, would very much like to hear from other SFBC members in Johannesburg and South Africa as a whole. Will you please write to her direct, mentioning this note in *SF News*.

Next month's issue of *SF News* will be a programme number