

August

## ALL THE COLOURS OF DARKNESS

by Lloyd Biggle, Jr

In the summer of 1986, the Universal Transmitting Company, after a long series of failures and difficulties, finally perfects a matter transmitter capable of transporting anyone instantaneously from terminals throughout the United States to all major foreign cities: an achievement which represents man's ultimate conquest of time. The first day of operations is a huge success; on the second day two women fail to arrive at their destinations and cannot be traced. UTC calls in a private detective, Jan Darzek, and Darzek discovers that the disappearances were engineered by two women in various disguises, that their identification papers were false and that no one reported them missing. Behind all the clues lies a mystery on which the fate of the whole of mankind hinges.

'Fast-moving adventure . . . brilliant characterization of the Aliens.' *Books and Bookmen*.

210 pages.

Dobson 16s; SFBC 6s

## And an August Optional Title too . . .

### THE UNPLEASANT PROFESSION OF JONATHAN HOAG

A collection of five stories by Robert Heinlein: 'The Man Who Travelled in Elephants', 'All You Zombies', 'They', 'Our Fair City', 'And He Built a Crooked House', and the longest of the group, the title story, 'The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag'. The mild, rather timid Jonathan Hoag did something during the day, but something so unpleasant that his memory blotted it out entirely every evening: the only clue he had was the sticky red-brown substance under his finger-nails. He thought at first that it was blood, but it wasn't: it was something much worse—something so terrible that the doctor whose advice he asked would not even tell him what it was. He turns then to other help, to Randall and Craig, confidential investigators, and they stumble into the world of the Sons of the Bird. . . .

Readers will know well enough what qualities to expect from one of the masters of sf, but 'The Unpleasant Profession of Jonathan Hoag' is surprising in its approach: it is almost a horror story, but much of the fear and the excitement comes from the calmness with which Robert Heinlein has built up his detail, to create a world so much like the ordinary one, so recognizable and yet so full of terrors.

256 pages.

Dobson 18s; SFBC 11s 6d, post free

(N.B. We know from past experience that stock of SFBC Optional titles goes very quickly, so it really is necessary for orders to reach Letchworth as quickly as possible. Please don't delay.)

September

## TIME AND STARS

by Poul Anderson

'A new collection of stories by Poul Anderson will disappoint no one. This writer's ideas are always fresh and original, and he is a master of the craft of narrative. Read this book especially for the last item, "Epilogue", one of the greatest robot stories in all sf.' *Tribune*.

'Poul Anderson is a consistently interesting writer and this collection is his best for some time.' *Books and Bookmen*.

'To the sf veteran Poul Anderson needs no recommendation. . . . [His] stories move as they inform, whether he is describing the military manoeuvres of a post-nuclear, feudalistic America or the frantic solution-seeking of the star-ship party who find that a planet's "primitives" are in fact geniuses able to think rings round humans. Ideas spill across the pages like mercury across a laboratory bench.' *Evening News*.

249 pages.

Gollancz 15s; SFBC 6s

October

## GUNNER CADE

by Cyril Judd

The setting for the story is Earth and Mars, several thousand years in the future, when war, as it is known now, no longer occurs. Each country has its own regiment of highly trained, dedicated soldiers, obedient at all times to a rigid set of military rules, even when disobedience might win a combat.

During one struggle Gunner Cade is captured, only to escape fairly easily. However, he then discovers that he was reported killed in action, and in his efforts to re-establish his identity Cade finds himself in greater danger than he has ever been. He finds that his fellow gunners have been ordered to kill him, that the Gunner Supreme is not the devout, half-mystical being he had imagined and that the whole government is corrupt. He is drawn into a plot to gain the help of the Marsmen to overthrow those in power, and his flight to Mars ends in a great battle against the pursuing forces of Earth.

218 pages.

Gollancz 15s; SFBC 6s

THIS MONTH'S CHOICE IS  
**IN DEEP**  
by Damon Knight  
(Gollancz 15s; SFBC 6s)

NEXT MONTH'S CHOICE IS  
**WAY STATION**  
by Clifford Simak  
(Gollancz 15s; SFBC 6s)

## Things to Come

WE HAVE already printed in *SF News* two of the papers which were delivered to the British Association's autumn meeting, dealing with science and fiction. The remaining two we shall try to publish as soon as possible—as soon, in fact, as there is *News* space to spare.

## OPTIONAL BOOKS

HERE are details of the Readers Union Optional titles for June, and of the Contemporary Fiction book for May—Kurt Vonnegut's famous *Cat's Cradle*, a selection of very special interest to all members of SFBC.

## The War of the Classifiers

### CAT'S CRADLE

by Kurt Vonnegut

(*The May CF Choice*)

KURT VONNEGUT has won a reputation as a 'science fiction writer'. All literary labels are misleading to the point of uselessness, but this particular one has a special danger in it. It is meant to refer to a definite, circumscribed category of work, to stand as a kind of shorthand for all the subjects which it is proper to include within that category, and it is at once too vague and too arbitrary to have much real meaning at all. Its only obvious function is to act as an obstruction—a shield for enthusiasts and a barrier for doubters.

Here is a whole body of writing saddled with the part of literature's poor relation, largely because words are imprecise and unwieldy things. Part of the fault lies, too, with the campaigners, the writers and critics who often seem to see themselves as members of a persecuted elect; it is bad tactics to make anything in literature—or any other art—appear to be a cult, for the suggestion that something requires defence can so easily arouse a kind of mental bloodthirstiness.

This is what has happened, to some extent, in the case of 'science fiction'. On the one side is the vanguard, pioneering, opening up Outer Space, and on the other the forces of reaction with their backs to the earth! The whole situation is in fact a rather silly tussle about the use of a word—the word 'science'; given its extreme vagueness one could construct a sound and quite pointless argument for an opposing view that *all* fiction is 'science fiction': Dickens wrote about men and women in relation to one another and was consequently 'scientific' in the psychological and sociological sense; the creators of the *nouvel roman* in the present day devote a great deal of attention to the arrangement of physical objects in space, and this, of course, involves them in matters of geometry, geography, physics, statistics, and other subjects, too, which come into the category of science and which have also been quite at home in the world of fiction for a long, long time.

The real point scarcely needs making: it is entirely stupid to create subdivisions within literature—stupid and harmful; no useful classification of any kind could ever be made on the basis of subject. Writers write about what interests and affects them consciously and unconsciously and all of them can be fitted into just two categories: there are those who write well and those who do not, and for the genuinely critical reader this is the only consideration that really matters.

All this is by way of introduction to one of the most remarkable novels in the Contemporary Fiction list. It is also an attempt to free a very gifted novelist from a misleading label. If the words 'science fiction' conjure up a picture of 'Things' which look as if they had been made out of empty biscuit tins, shambling about in the drearier parts of the universe, letting out electronic warbles, then the work of Kurt Vonnegut will be a great surprise and a great pleasure. He belongs very definitely in the category of those who write well and in the main stream of literature: he is, in short, a novelist—probably one of the best at work in America today. He is also an excellent example of a writer whose work could be put into at least half a dozen classifications, all of them equally arbitrary and irrelevant. In this one novel he concerns himself with matters of religion, politics, morality, altruism, psychology and science—among other subjects—just as writers have been doing for centuries. The distinctive thing about *Cat's Cradle* is not its subject-matter but the skill with which it is written, its acuteness and humour, its possession of a personal 'voice' speaking about a very definite view of the world.

'He writes like a poet, with a Salinger's stylish sense of the ridiculous and a pained Thurberian logic. . . . *Cat's Cradle* sounds a sad, discordant music. It is also bitingly funny.'

*Daily Telegraph*.

'*Cat's Cradle* does for adults what fairy-tales do for children—it creates a metaphor of the threatened and threatening world we inhabit. . . . It is full of subtle harmonics that make us aware of the complex and melancholy music of our time.'

MAURICE EDELMAN in the *Saturday Review*.

'One of the best novels by one of the best living American writers.' GRAHAM GREENE.

231 pages.

Gollancz 18s; SFBC 7s, post free

## The Story of Archaeology in Britain

by Ronald Jessup

(*The June Extra*)

A great many books are being published on all the aspects of archaeology and we do try to select the best of them for RU, knowing that this subject has a lively interest for members. We are very glad indeed to be able to include *The Story of Archaeology in Britain* in the list, for it is an outstanding book in a field where the standards of scholarship and skill are high: it is most interestingly planned and written, and it is a broad and careful survey of the whole of archaeology in this country; on its background and the personalities involved in it, as well as on the actual processes of discovery.

The list of contents will give you a good idea of the scope of the book: Discovery by Chance; Discovery by Purpose; Discovery from the Air; Discovery and Science; Discovery and Dating; Fossil Man; Publication and Communication; False Antiquities; Discovery: Four Pioneers; Some Recent Discoveries; Seeing for Yourself; this last section is a sound list of ancient monuments in England and Wales, county by county, for the guidance of readers who want to see for themselves, and the chapter ends with a list of books for general reading.

One of the very best things about Mr Jessup is that he can see all round and beyond his central subject, and this is a specially valuable gift for someone (like the writer of this article) who does not know a barrow from a cross-shaft. It would be stupid to say that *The Story of Archaeology* makes one reach for the nearest spade, but what it *does* do is to make it plain to see why so many people have been—and still are—fascinated by the subject. It has something of the excitement of a great hunt, of a struggle with Time to make it give up its secrets; it needs skill, patience and endurance, even on a small scale; and, above all, it has the