PAPERBACK INFERNO

ISSN 0260-0595 Price 15p

Volume 5 Number 4 -- a BSFA publication edited by Joseph Nicholas (at the usual address: Room 9, 94 St George's Square, Pimlico, London SW1Y 3QY, United Kingdom) and featuring in this issue reviews by Mary Gentle, Chris Morgan, Brendon Gore, Jim England, Andy Sawyer, Ray Owen, Ian Williams, John Duffty, Ann Collier, Chris Bailey, Martyn Taylor, Judith Hanna and (as usual) me. There might also be a "Blood On The Racks" column by Roy Macinski, if it turns up in time (and if it doesn't, this will at least make him feel guilty about missing the deadline)....and speaking of magazines reminds me to tell you all to rush out and buy a copy of the January 1982 issue of F & SF, on pages 156-157 of which you'll find a really trif-fic letter by someone whose name just happens to be the same as mine (modest coff). Otherwise, the entire contents are copyright 1982 by the BSFA Ltd on behalf of the individual contributors, to whom all rights are hereby returned. Belated New Year greetings to you all, too....

Terry Carr (ed.) -- FANTASY ANNUAL IV (Timescape, 341pp, $3.50)
Reviewed by Mary Gentle

"Fantasy, Whimsy, and Terror!" announces the backcover blurb, getting it right for once. Hard on the heels of Fantasy Annual III comes Fantasy Annual IV, very similar in format to its predecessor.

Stephen King again has first billing (as befits a publishing phenomenon) with "The Monkey", a tale of a demon-haunted child's toy in keeping with the current predilection for finding terror, of the Grand Guignol variety, in the relentlessly ordinary. By way of whimsy, there is Stephen Tall's "The Hot And Cold Running Waterfall", so inconsequentially awful as to be indescribable, and Pat Murphy's "Don't Look Back", probably very good advice for the story itself, which is statement rather than narrative and doesn't hold up if you're inclined to re-read and try to make sense of it. On the other hand, I'd recommend Bob Leman's "Feesters In The Lake", a cheerful and irreverent homage to an author whose names will be found scattered through the text. Mary Pangborn gives us some historical hokum in "The Confession Of Hamo"; and there is a slow, somewhat unserious fantasisation of adolescence in Robert Aickman's "Letters To The Postman".

So much for the lightweight stuff, unmemorable as it mostly is.

There are better stories here. Edward Bryant's "Strata", for one, which like all of his stories is complex, well-characterised, and requires some thought. There appear to be two main themes in this volume, and "Strata" is a good (and therefore untypical) example of one: that the past haunts the present. It also has the advantage of including female and non-Caucasian characters. The overwhelming preponderance of white middle-class male protagonists in this volume I take to be less deliberate sexism and racism as the author taking the easy way out -- it's good to come across one who doesn't.

The other prevalent theme here would seem to be the psychological, as in "Letters To The Postman" and "Don't Look Back", which is taken to a logical conclusion in Suzy McKee Charnas's "Unicorn Tapestry", where the protagonist is herself a therapist. Though it stands on its own, the story follows on from "The Ancient Mind At Work" is Fantasy Annual III, and is part of the novel Vampire Tapestry. The relationship between Floria Landauer and Weyland the vampire-predator is balanced by speculation about art and sex and the non-human; and it's one of the few horror-fantasies that actually feels as though it belonged in 1980, as opposed to the eternal 1890 of most vampire tales.

The remaining two stories in the book are true originals, in that they can be done once and once only. One is Richard Cowper's "The Attleborough Poltergeist": unmistakably English, deceptively quiet, and in its implications the most terrifying story here. To describe it would be to give away its marvellous ending; enough to say that there is a poltergeist, if not quite the usual one, and there is horror -- but not, as with the vampire in the moonlight, the ghost in the haunted tower, safely distanced. If you've any imagination at all, this one will make you sweat.

The other original is Thomas Disch's "The Brave Little Toaster", and anyone who missed its appearance in F & SF should catch up with it here. "A Bedtime Story For Small Appliances" is the subtitle, and so it is; and a lot else besides. Disch has a deceptively light satiric touch, that on occasion, as with the toaster and the squirrels, goes straight for the jugular. If the consumer society isn't Fantasy, one could wish that it was. In the best possible way, this story defies description. Don't miss it.

Harry Harrison -- STARWORLD (Granada, 208pp, £1.25; Bantam, 198pp, $2.25)
Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas

This is the third volume in the "To The Stars" trilogy, and it's really no more nor less than you'd expect, with the Earth forces falling back in the face of a dogged rebel advance and eventually losing the day in a space battle that could have come straight out of a Poul Anderson space opera of the fifties (the rebel commander is a Dane, and his ships use mass-drivers to fire cannonballs at the opposing fleet). The predictability of all this is somewhat mitigated by a series of subplots involving Jan Kulozik, some ghetto blacks, the Israelis and a possible traitor in Earth's security administration chasing hither and yon across the world in much wheels-within-wheels double-bluff thriller-like activity which, while enjoyable enough, seems to have confused the author as much as it did me; about two-thirds of the way through, I lost the thread of what was going on, and might have given up altogether had it not all been ceremoniously junked a few pages later. But then what can one usefully say about a book like this anyway? It may pass the time, but Harrison has done so much better.

Harry Harrison -- THE BEST OF HARRY HARRISON (Timescape, 302pp, $2.95)
Reviewed by Jim England

The title invariably prompts and begs two questions -- "best" in what way, and by whose standards? Harry Harrison has written over a hundred short stories; here are twenty of them, with copyrights ranging from 1958 to 1974. Interestingly, whoever composed the blurb for the back cover does not seem familiar with all of them: the summary of "Rescue Operation" should really be applied to "The Streets Of Ashkelon" ('A space age missionary's dream becomes a global nightmare', etc.).

The collection opens with a frivolous introduction by Barry Malzberg in the Asimovian manner -- full of chest-beating, heavy-handed humour, the sort of fake bonhomie we associate with TV commercials. The style of Harrison's own introductions to the individual stories is not very different, and the style of the stories themselves is almost indistinguishable from that of any other writer of (to use Malzberg's own term) "craftsmanlike" stories for the pulps, in that it lacks any kind of sparkle and dialogue (no matter how turgid, lifeless and unrealistic) seems preferred to straight exposition. One of the worst examples of this is "Brave Never World", the longest story, which is at least as inferior to Huxley's Brave New World as Anthony Burgess's 1985 is to Orwell's 1984 (yet, according to Harrison, "Burgess is a writer's writer if there ever was one").

Harrison's two main themes are humour and violence, sometimes combined with sickening results; despite which, he expresses distaste for the "excessive, vicarious violence of screen and TV". I must confess a distaste for almost all the so-called "humour" in SF. As for the remaining stories, however, Harrison is at his best when he is not being consciously "craftsmanlike" but is carried away by some emotion, as in "A Criminal Act", which he wrote when possessed by "rage at the stupidity and selfishness of mankind", and which points out the immorality of having large numbers of children in an already overpopulated world.

In summary, I found this collection no better and no worse than others of its type.

Anne McCaffrey -- DRAGONDRUMS (Corgi, 223pp, £1.25)
Reviewed by Brendon Gore

Like most sequels, Dragondrums is not as good as the original. The world of Pern described in Dragonflight, the first of the "Dragon" series, has become all too familiar. The dragons and their riders, the fire lizards and the Oldtimers, numbweed and Threadfall, even the bubbly pies fail to capture the imagination as once they did.

Take away this background and you are left with a story which is only likely to appeal to younger readers. Piemur, a boy singer at the Harper Craft Hall, is enlisted as junior secret agent after his voice breaks. He soon proves his worth, hiding a nag of sapphires from T'ron, the Oldtime dragonrider. His adventures continue as Lord Holder Meron of Nabol is suspected of trading with the Oldtimers exiled to the Southern Continent. Jus Just to complicate matters, Lord Meron is dying and refuses to name a suc cessor. Piemur, disguised as a herder's apprentice, slips into Nabol Hold and steals a fire lizard egg; unable to escape, he hides in a sack of cloth bales and is carried to the Southern Continent by an Oldtimer dragon.

Unwilling to confront the Oldtimers, Piemur strikes out on his own, determined to hatch the egg and "impress" a fire lizard. Needless to say, he succeeds, enduring Threadfall and fighting off wild wherries in the process. At this point, he meets Sharra, a girl from the Southern Hold. She introduces him to life in the Southern Continent and he decides to stay and make his future there. No longer a boy, he has grown up.

Dragondrums is at heart another rite-of-passage story. Anne McCaffrey may have considerable talents as a writer, but on the evidence of this book the "Dragon" series is played out.

Lee Killough -- DEADLY SILENTS (Del Rey, 245pp, $2.25)
Reviewed by Ian Williams

Checking out the blurb, this looked like nothing more than the usual hard-boiled sci-fi cop mystery routine -- "A murderer stalked an alien world, and the native telepaths needed Terran cops to end the crime wave...." It sounded like a pleasant, fast-paced hour-and-a-half's read, but in fact it's a thoughtful, carefully paced, well-characterised novel. If it has one major flaw it's that the basic premise is artificial and contrived.

The pastoral planet of Egar is inhabited by a high-tech race of hominid telepaths. The group that initiates violence, previously unknown, are the Silents, non-telepaths, a large group of emissaries from Egar to Earth

whose minds were burnt out by the lagre concentrations of minds in Terran cities and who pass their deficiency on to their children. Thus the contrivance, because it seems highly unlikely that the aliens wouldn't have considered the possibility of this occurring before they went to Earth.

However, because the Silents find it difficult to communicate with the normal telepaths, frustration and violemce set in and, for the first time, murders take place. Three hundred Earth police are drafted in to find the murderer. The main focus of the novel is the Earth police: how they adapt to the Egarans and the problems of communication with the telepaths, whose spoken language consists of one-word sentences. The alien society is well thought-out and convincing; the police are presented as vulnerable, frustrated human beings who gradually find themselves becoming a bridge between the Silents and the telepaths.

The book is thus not really a murder mystery but about the problems and importance of communication, and one whose richness and sensitivity is impossible to adequately describe in a short review. It's not a perfect book by any means, but it has enough virtues for me to recommend it as a diamond in the rough.

Brian Aldiss -- NEW ARRIVALS, OLD ENCOUNTERS (Avon, 206pp, $2.25)
Reviewed by Chris Morgan

If Brian Aldiss's latest collection has a theme at all, it is that the future is going to be a very nasty place. While it must be admitted that this is not, in itself, a wholly original idea, the stories display a great range of unpleasantness, some it quite new. In "Three Ways", for example, a starship returns to Earth after 120 years away (but only 10 years of subjective time) to find many changes. A large group of crewmembers is assembled and given the good news -- "the Great Ice Age is abating....ships can again sail round the tip of South America, or through the English Channel" -- and the bad news, about the two large-scale nuclear wars. Of the three crewmen focussed on as they try to adjust to the degree of change, one is lucky that his Indian village has remained almost untouched, and another manages, against all odds, to beat the system. In other stories, we see humanity not only making Earth a worse place but ruining other planets too. The title story shows man's first landing on a peaceful alien world characterised as the coming of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse!

Another nasty future provides the backcloth for "A Spot Of Konfrontation", but here Aldiss repeats his trick from Barefoot In The Head of allowing style to mask content to a ridiculous degree. Most dialogue is in an unhappy blend of European languages known as spEEC, which must have been great fun to write but is, I'm afraid, a considerable nuisance to read. No longer does Aldiss consider it adequate to tell a complete story clearly. More often than not in this collection, he seeks to score points, to examine particular aspects of situations, to use SF as a metaphor, or just to write wittily. To be honest, he does all of these things very well, but a surfeit of them (however well done) can kill a story. The obvious auctorial response to this would be that he tries to progress, to achieve something new with each new story. While I can understand and applaud such a desire, a line must be drawn somewhere along the spectrum between pure entertainment and total incomprehensibility. Aldiss's closest approach to the latter here is the final piece, a series of supposedly humourous playlets entitled "The Impossible Puppet Show". While containing some witty lines, most of it is just too zany, even if one is into anteaters.

A surprise in the collection is "Amen And Out", which reads like a Philip K. Dick story. I don't believe that the similarity could have been unconscious, and as Aldiss's only other pastiche that I can recall is of H. G. Wells the compliment paid to Dick is considerable. In fact, "Amen And Out" is the best of three stories here which have strong religious elements. It works because of its humour: everybody has a prayer shrine and prays regularly to the Gods; the Gods are computers and they answer individually although cryptically.

While I can't recommand the book wholeheartedly, it certainly has en-

ough in it to make it worth trying. And, for the bibliographically-minded amongst you, only two of its twelve stories have appeared in previous Aldiss collections, both in Comic Inferno (aka The Book Of Brian Aldiss). The rest, as far as I can ascertain from the incomplete copyright data, first appeared during the 1970s.

JACKIE! ALL THE FAMOUS BRAODSHEETS (D. Langford Publishing Empire, £0.50)
Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas

What did Jacqueline Lichtenberg do to deserve all this? Well, she demanded of the Seacon 79 committee that she be given a room in which to meet her fans (I'm not making this up, honest), and in protest at this example of arrogance and contempt for fandom, a certain well-known British SF writer with fannish roots whose books are really triffic formed the JLAS (Jacqueline Lichtenberg Appreciation Society) to properly "welcome" her to Britain. Great was the fuss caused by humourless SFWA members (in particular one who writes long boring books about telepathic homosexuals and whom we shall call Marion Dimmer Bradley for the sake of argument) at the sight of bright yellow badges reading "I'm Backing Jackie"; many were the badly-typed and hastily-duplicated one-shots purporting to come from the JLAS's organisers both then and in the months afterwards (and later; at Yorcon 2, a recent batch were read out to the assembled multitudes by the aforementioned certain British SF writer who's bigger than me and I won't mention him again, honest); and now almost famous TAFF administrator D. Drofgnal has published a collection of them all in aid of the said fund. Hours of fun for all the family; you'll never know how you managed without them; this is not really an advert; buy two, or the JLAS Comite will TAKE MaeSURES.

Gregory Benford -- TIMESCAPE (Pocket, 366pp, $2.95; Sphere, 412pp, £1.75)
Reviewed by Judith Hanna

By now, who hasn't heard that this is a good book, and one that they should read. It's not an entirely enjoyable book, perhaps, unless you're heavily into pessimism, but then the tumble over the edge into ecological disaster is not really the stuff of which escapist entertainment is made.

It's a textbook exemplar of the hard-science, near-future extrapolation SF novel, packed solid with ideas and supplying convincing evidence for the hypotheses it explores. The future it depicts is a frighteningly plausible projection of present social, political and environmental trends: the England of 1998 is permeated with as much of the perverse joy in contemplating inevitable ruin as one might hope to find in anything written by such whinging Poms of note as Ballard, Priest and Nicholas. (Is it the English weather that nurtures such gloom?) Benford's speculations on time and tachyons I accept unquestioningly -- if I knew anything of physics, I might be impressed, but for most of the time I find that the scientific content of an SF novel gets in the way of the characters. I even accept that in some alternate timestream chlorinated hydrocarbons (residual insecticides of the DDT family) washed into the sea, killing off zooplankton and fish, may be mixed with the fertilisers suspected of causing the poisonous "red tides" of the dino-flagellate gymnodium breve. (A re-reading of Rachel Carson's now somewhat dated Silent Spring makes the notion of a chemical able to render such a "bloom" contagious seems likely enough; and, compared to the metabolic breakdowns she describes, it seems a mild enough fate -- Benford could have drawn far more horrifying possibilities from her pages.)

It's well-constructed, structured as tightly as a TV documentary, flashing backwards and forwards between 1962 and 1998, building scene by scene to the inevitable catastrophe, each scene reported in meticulously-drawn detail, as clear and as concrete as a Breughel townscape -- however crowded the scene, nothing is left nebulous in the background. There's no trace of vague and impressionist suggestion in Benford's style: it's photo-realism all the way, the author functioning with the efficient invisibility of a telepathic camera to relay with mechanical exactitude and unremitting close focus all the minutiae of his story. Unobtrusive and

seemingly objective, he's as coldly analytical as if the object under study were not his own creation. As scientific journalism, SF as "the literature of ideas", it's very good indeed.

But it's his characters that let Benford down. No mere cardboard stereotypes, they're drawn with the same meticulous, emotionless care as all the other strands the narrative incorporates, and it's this very detail of description that is the failure -- with their every thought, desire, doubt and motive so clearly labelled and set forth, they come over not as living people but as specimens dissected in action. Such clarity is artificial: real life is a nebulous chaos of uncertainty and ambiguity, and real people are its most indefinable, unanalysable and inconsistent elements. Benford's characters, however, are so over-scripted that they retain only enough vitality to chafe against the constraints of the plot they're caught in. Yet, at the same time, this entrapment of the characters, their subordination to the avalanching events, contributes strongly to the sense of inescapability of the ultimate catastrophe which climaxes the novel.

Did it deserve all its awards (the Nebula, the BSFA, the Ditmar and the John W. Campbell Memorial)? Well, yes it did, actually -- it is, overall, one of the best novels of 1980.

Poul Anderson -- THE HORN OF TIME (Corgi, 173pp, £1.25)
Reviewed by Chris Bailey

Six stories here from Poul Anderson, written between 1956 and 1963. Not, of course, that one could ever tell this from the outside of the book; thank heavens for the obligatory printing history on the inside. One comes to expect that the publisher will not openly confess that such compilations as this are of old material, but the practice of revealing the outline of only one story (in however mutilated a form) on the back cover, thereby leading the unwary to believe that they are purchasing a novel, ought to be outlawed. Likewise, the time-honoured habit of informing the reader that the author is a "Winner of the Hugo and Nebula Awards" -- and whatever one's opinion of the value of those baubles may be, then rest assured that Poul Anderson did not win them for this lot.

Anyway, on to the actual contents. The title piece isn't strictly so, as it's really called "The Horn Of Time The Hunter", but presumably the shortened version was considered snappier, besides being meaningless and missing the point of the story completely. An expedition to the galactic core returns twenty thousand years in the future owing to Einsteinian time-dilation, and discovers that mankind has mutated beyond recognition. Not wildly original, even for 1963, but Anderson comes up with a nice elegaic touch, that "in the beat of his own blood" man can sense his genetic doom hard on his heels, "the horn of time the hunter pursuing a quarry that wept as it ran". Unfortunately, this tragic note does not harmonise with the hero's insistence that such mutations are a good thing, and the story is a dramatic failure anyway, the denouement being delivered in the form of an indigestible chunk of lecturing from the Anderson mouth-piece. "A Man To My Wounding" postulates a future in which war has been replaced by the assassination of your opponent's political leaders, which is fine by me, but the story turns out to be a turgid little sub-Chandlerian narrative about a security man pursuing and nailing an assassin, and eventually fizzles out in some uninspired speculation about the possible outcome of such a war. "Marius" is a weak little fable about military men who gain power during times of unrest but who cannot cope with it in a civilian context. "The High Ones" is quite the nastiest piece in the book, possibly betraying its antiquity in its rabid anti-Communism, which is demonstrated in two ways: firstly, the inability of the routinely stolid Russian woman to withstand the charms of the all-American hero; and, secondly, the way in which the two of them are subsequently able to overthrow an entire alien totalitarian civilisation with their bare hands and a blaster.

The remaining two pieces are a little better. "The Man Who Came Early" is Anderson with his horned helmet on inviting us to quaff a cup of mead while he tells his tale, but the narrative of a twentieth-century

policeman projected into tenth-century Iceland, however nauseating the prospect may seem, is told with sufficient sympathy to gain the reader's attention, the eventual moral being autres temps, autres moeurs. "Progress" has the attractive setting of the Pacific islands several hundred years after the holocaust and Anderson tackles the same theme as he did in "Marius", the rebuilding of civilisation in such a situation. Perhaps surprisingly, he comes down on the side of the Maoris with their domestic technology rather than on the side of the Bengalis and their American helpers with their fusion plants.

This collection is by no means completely worthless, but none of the stories ever quite succeed. Some show evidence of a good deal of thought having gone into them, but lack any sort of dramatic impetus; others get a rattling narrative going, and turn out to be little more. Not a book to abhorred or recommended, then, but rather one to be quietly ignored.

James Blish -- TITANS' DAUGHTER (Avon, 143pp, $1.95)
Reviewed by Joseph Nicholas

It would appear that Avon are about to reprint a number of neglected Blish titles; good for them, but Titans' Daughter is not a particularly auspicious start to the venture, and should have been left neglected. Expanded from a novella entitled "Beanstalk" and first published in 1952, it purports to tell the story of the Tetras, genetically engineered supermen produced by a doctor at an American university, and the resentment for them felt by ordinary humans which leads to the framing of one of them on a charge of murder. Potentially interesting material, all right, but even in 1961 Blish seemed unable to free himself from the tyranny of the pulp ethos -- instead of philosophy, we get ream upon ream of knock-em-down, drag-em-out action featuring more one-dimensional cardboard characters than I care to count and a plot stolen from various fifth-rate detective and sports magazines, tiredly trying to spice itself up with some unimaginative scientific gimmickry. To be fair, it's not wholly tedious, but then neither is it very interesting.

Brian Aldiss -- EARTHWORKS (Granada, 126pp, £1.25)
Reviewed by Ray Owen

Earthworks is one of Aldiss's less well-known novels; this new Granada printing gives us another chance to find out why.

According to the cover blurb, this would seem to be a standard overpopulation novel with "one solution -- a solution so frightening that no one is willing to adopt it". This is totally inaccurate. We never actually witness the overpopulation; much of the story's strength lies in the eerie contrast between the overcrowded cities and the deserted and polluted countryside. Also of note is the first location, a giant, empty cargo ship pursued by a floating corpse. It is the vision of this figure and the letters stolen from its pocket that lead our hero, Knowle Noland, into trouble in the second part of the novel.

Which is unfortunately where the story degenerates into a tired tale of spies, assassination plots and interminable hunts through a half-finished holiday resort. Even more serious than this is the complete lack of balance; half of the book is taken up with background information given out in flashbacks.

There are other flaws, mainly in the writing style. Use of first person narrative is more difficult than third person, but gives the talented author an opportunity for subtle character depiction. In my opinion, Aldiss fails to give Noland any major characteristics other than extreme luck; he survives a nuclear explosion a few hundred yards away by hiding under a jeep. The ending, which I presume is meant to be excitingly uncertain, seems merely to have been rushed to the extent of finishing in mid-chapter; most disappointing.

Despite some well-written sections and a certain amount of "fundamental brainwork", Earthworks is a poorly constructed novel that would seem to have been written without much care. It's certainly not the sort of book on which Aldiss's reputation was built.

And, having been Ever So Slightly Rude about him back on the first page, what should now turn up (moved by the power of telepathic guilt, no doubt) but....

BLOOD ON THE RACKS -- magazine reviews by Roy Macinski

Depressing, truly depressing. Despite what those around me have always said about Analog and Isaac Asimov's, until I'd experienced it at first hand I would never have believed that they could publish so much crap. I'm perhaps being a little harsh, but I feel really angry that I've wasted my time and money on these purveyors of the mediocre when I could have been reading any one of the many good novels published over the past few months. What's even worse is the number of stories by good writers they've published which were either just average or downright bad.

The worst of these was without doubt Kate Wilhelm's "With Thimbles, With Forks And Hope" (IASFM, November 1981). It tells of the battle between a retired police detective and his wife and a mysterious and enigmatic young woman who seems to live off those about to die; interesting enough, but ruined by the dull and uninteresting manner in which it was written. Indeed, it's the kind of thing that I would have expected from a fifth-rate Stephen King and not from someone of Wilhelm's undoubted ability.

Hard on her heels, however, was George R. R. Martin's "Guardians" (Analog, October 1981). This story centres on a planet where the human colony is under threat from a vast array of strange and deadly new creatures. On to the scene comes Haviland Tuf, guardian of a huge spaceship aboard which he offers (for a small fee) to genetically engineer new lifeforms which, on their introduction into the planet's ecosystem, will eradicate the dangerous new beasts. It had some good things going for it, such as the quietly amusing central character, Tuf, the sure manner in which it was written and the inventive solution to the main dilemma. And yet, despite all this, I found myself completely uninvolved in the story and its events; and if it wasn't for writing this column, I'm sure I would have completely forgotten it by now.

The same is true of Ian Watson's "The Artistic Touch" (IASFM, October 1981), which concerned the relationship between chaos and order within the universe. Watson was obviously trying to communicate something important, but it simply washed over me, and on finishing it I couldn't help but say to myself "Oh, was that it?" I was not so much vouchsafed a revelation of The Truth but left wondering whether I might have missed something.

Of the rest....well, the best story was probably John M. Ford's "The Dark Companion" (IASFM, September 1981 -- Ford, by the way, is the natural successor to Barry Longyear, at least in terms of sales to the magazine). Its main character, Gaiser, is an astronomer whose passion for optical astronomy is such that when he realises he is losing his eyesight he undergoes a mental breakdown. Ford makes a brave stab at trying to convey Gaiser's anger and desperation, but simply isn't capable of supplying the emotional force the story requires, and as this is the very core of the tale the rest of it simply falls apart. But it shows promise; it's a good attempt, and perhaps next time.... Marc Shegler's "Petals Of Rose" (Analog, November 1981), on the other hand, is one of the most embarrassingly oversentimental stories I have read in years. It features the Rosan, highly intelligent creatures whose average lifespan is only 36 hours. This causes problems when emotional ties have been built up between a Rosan and a human; again, potentially interesting material, this time ruined by the sort of schmaltz and saccharine that made Love Story so unendurably wet. What on Earth can you say about an ending that has the dying Rosan and the human, almost but not quite hand-in-hand, watching the rising sun together, except that it makes you want to break down and cry for the trees that were sacrificed to print it?

Moving over to the editorial front: I've never like Analog's prevailing right-wing tone, and with the ascent of Ronald Reagan to the American Presidency the libertarians and power-fantasists who run it have been having a field day. The guest editoral in the November 1981 issue, by one John G. Cramer, actually claimed that when Neil Armstrong set foot on the

Moon in 1969 he should have claimed it not for mankind as a whole but for the United States....this sort of thing is positively distasteful, and that's putting it mildly.

By this stage, I was getting desperate; was there something about these two magazines that prevented them from ever publishing anything good? But then along came Avram Davidson with "The Theft Of The Mulberry Tree" and "The Secret Of Hyperborea" (IASFM, October 1981 and December 1981), two more instalments in his "Adventures In Unhistory" series. I enthused over the two earlier pieces in this series in my last column, so will not repeat in detail what I said then; suffice it to say that I found them to be the best written and most enjoyable works published in either of these magazines during the last four months of 1981. I do hope that this series is one day collected and published in book form, so that they may reach the wider audience they richly deserve -- it's almost certain that the typical reader of Isaac Asimov's won't be getting much out of them, and in that regard it seems odd that they should be appearing in IASFM rather than, say, F & SF, where they would be better suited.

But two articles, for God's sake! Are they really all that can be recommended or praised in any way? Yes, they are; and when I think of the time and energy I wasted reading the remaining contents I develop an overpowering urge to pile the magazines up at the bottom of the garden, set light to them and then dance around the pyre like one of Bradbury's firemen, chanting for joy. Certainly, somebody has to protect us from such rubbish.

Shortest damn "Blood On The Racks" column yet, but I can understand why. Okay, Roy, you can have a go at F & SF in the next issue, if you like -- I might be, um, a little busy with, well, er....but here's some more reviews to get me out of that cryptic corner!

Stephen Leigh -- SLOW FALL TO DAWN (Bantam, 165pp, $2.25)
Reviewed by John Duffty

Bantam's gentle afterthought, that this is Stephen Leigh's first novel and that he even now working on a sequel, struck terror into my heart. But it was a terror that soon subsided as I began nosing my way into the story; it's brimming with atmosphere and wrapped around an original idea.

On the planet Neweden, a guild of assassins, known as Hoorka, thrive because they work to a tightly-controlled code. Written by their leader, the Thane, the code consists of a simple get-out for their victims, in that if any should survive until dawn they go free. A sense of moral justice is therefore maintained, for should the Hoorka succeed in eliminating someone it's clearly God's wish -- after all, they gace him a chance. The code is thus the guild's lifeblood, yet the assassins find themselves caught in a political row where the breaking of the code seems the only way to ensure their survival. At the same time, the Thane has ideas to expand outwards to the surrounding planets, and he can only achieve this by proving to the Planetary Alliance that the Hoorka are, by virtue of their code, far above the status of mere hired killers.

It's a Catch-22 situation, and it's built up powerfully as the novel progresses....and, like such situations, when the ending is reached it's an anti-climax. Then, too, the characters never achieve any depth; the majority of them are shallow and unrealistic. The Thane, in particular, is irritating -- he has a tendency to open his heart, to reveal all of his inner thoughts to the reader, which is at first helpful but becomes painfully tedious as he simply repeats himself over and over again. Worse are the minor, marginal characters, who wander into the track of the story, interrupting its smooth progression, then casually wander out again -- or, more often, they die. It feels as though they might be hangers-on from Leigh's shorter stories, where they might have had some role to play; but here, they have none. They do not add to the story's atmosphere or pace, and their only function seems to be to fill some of the gaps in the narrative, unnecessarily marring what could have been a fresh and unusual tale.

But none of the failings are insurmountable; and so I wait, patiently, for the sequel, feeling that Stephen Leigh is someone to remember.

Damon Knight, Martin Greenberg & Joseph Olander (eds.) -- FIRST VOYAGES (Avon, 373pp, $2.95)
Reviewed by Andy Sawyer

First Voyages gives us the first published stories of twenty major SF writers. Unfortunately, a writer's first publication is not necessarily likely to be a fully fledged masterpiece. It's possible, and to prove it we have Cordwainer Smith's "Scanners Live In Vain" and J. G. Ballard's "Prima Belladonna", but a more usual standard is that of Avram Davidson's "My Boyfriend's Name Is Jello", a witty fantasy ("harmless trifle" is the author's own expression), and Brian Aldiss's "T", which retells standard SF themes but does so in meticulous prose which is clearly the work of someone with something major to offer. And to counterbalance the major imaginative achievements of Smith and Ballard (rich creations which stay in the mind long after the story is finished), we have some real turkeys as well. The ponderous, pedestrian plot of De Camp's "The Isolinguals" and the lame pathos of Del Rey's "The Faithful" are worth bothering with only by the hardened fan -- and before someone says "Yes, but you have to take into account the fact that they were written in the 1930s", let me point to Van Vogt's powerful "Black Destroyer", equally a pulp product of the late 1930s but deliberately crafted as such, overpowering the reader with its verbal cues. And note, in any case, how much that was revised for the better when it became part of The Voyage Of The Space Beagle.

Far too much of the book is, like Clarke's "Loophole", Sturgeon's "Ether Breather" and Clement's "Proof", essentially minor work, interesting only because the author's in question went on to greater achievements. Hindsight is a wonderful thing.... Heinlein's "Lifeline" is worth a second glance because, although it exposes in embryo his tendency for sometimes long-winded dialogue and anti-intellectualism, it is also far more mature in terms of writing and construction than many of the stories in First Voyages. (Heinlein was 32 at the time of its publication, unlike many SF writers, who began their careers as precocious teenagers.) Unfortunately, it is not that good a story. Edgar Pangborn, who sometimes strikes me as a more acceptable version of Heinlein, surpasses it with his haunting if at times twee "Angel's Egg". But the stories really worth reading tend to be those who I'd put towards the top of my personal list of favourites anyway (I've mentioned a few, but must also note Charles L. Harness, Ursule Le Guin and Philip K. Dick), and I don't think it has much to do with my own prejudices. There's no sense of "Gosh, that was brilliant, pity he never wrote anything which lived up to its promise" here, I'm afraid.

Most of the good stories have proved their value by being available elsewhere. First Voyages is basically a book for the fan, the completist, even the student (I can imagine it finding a place on college reading lists). It's an interesting trip through SF from the point of view of the beginning writer, and you could probably find a basis for some wild generalisations on themes, picking up on the theory that novice writers tend to focus on concerns that are "in the air" rather than on their own obsessions -- note what the stories published herein from the few years after Hiroshima are about, note also (for what it's worth) that three out of the four stories here by women concern children (and note who wrote the fourth!). If you want entertainment, then there's too high a proportion of dross for wholehearted recommendation. Check it carefully.

Richard Cowper -- A DREAM OF KINSHIP (Timescape, 240pp, $2.50)
Reviewed by Ann Collier

For the traveller along The Road To Corlay, A Dream Of Kinship is clearly no more than a stop-over. The leisurely pace of the tale and the inconclusiveness of the ending indicate that this sequel will in due course be followed by another. Not that there is anything necessarily inferior about the middle volume of a trilogy, but this particular one has a pro-

nounced feeling of being after a crescendo and before a finale. As a part of the whole, it may prove to be well-judged, but on its own, despite the quality and variety of its writing, it never rises above the conventional and is, in truth, boring.

The Road To Corlay introduced us to the disastrous effects of the melting of the polar ice-caps at the end of this century. Resulting floods drowned millions of people and covered low-lying areas. Later, England became seven independent kingdoms of higher-lying ground. The Catholic Church has made productive use of the disaster, interpreting it as God's punishment for straying from orthodoxy, and has re-established a repressive hold over a society now reverted to a neo-mediaeval state. But the Church's power is threatened by the rise of a new sect, the Kinsmen, who follow the White Bird of Kinship, and who respond from the depths of their souls (for want of a better word) to the playing of musical pipes. A Dream Of Kinship continues this saga, following the political intrigue of the powerful men who control the Kingdoms and the birth and childhood of Tom, inheritor of his celebrated father's gift for piping.

One of my main dissatisfactions with the book lies in the elusiveness of the nature of Kinship. It is clearly about a sense of brotherhood, about communal inspiration and mystical experiences. There is also a suggestion that belief in Kinship implies breaking down barriers which inhibit freedom and which, through fear, make people resistant to change. But that is just about all we are told of Kinship. One cannot blame Cowper for failing to give us a revolutionary, detailed, all-embracing panacean philosophy-cum-morality-cum-religion; it is not his aim to preach or sell us instant enlightenment. But, unable to get a clear enough picture of what Kinship means to those whose lives revolve around belief in it, I cannot be very interested in them or in the sufferings they endure for its sake. Moreover, I was distracted by the obvious parallels between the lives of the central characters with those in the Bible stories of Christ's birth and early life. We have a parallel flight into Egypt here preceding a birth in a hovel to a single woman in very inhospitable circumstances and, threatened with death, cared for by a devoted older man. There is something very reminiscent of the Holy Family about the future hero, Tom's early life and he all but says "I must be about my father's business". Further associations come to mind between the conventional portrayal of the Paraclete as a dove and the White Bird of Kinship. No immediate explanation of these parallels presents itself, but perhaps all will be revealed later; for the moment, they confuse and distract.

The book's merit is as a straightforward story, beginning a sea-faring yarn and being strong on sense of mood, place and time. It is less successful in its characterisation, which is rough and lacking dimension. We have madonnas, faithful serving maids, wicked corrupt lords and scheming clerics. Writing about an intensely felt but ill-defined sense of brotherhood risks inviting a sentimental awkwardness about relationships and here results in characters being over-explicit in declaring their feelings for each other. Cowper seems aware of these dangers and tries to introduce a note of lightening humour which is rarely successful, never less so than in a quite dire, would-be humourous line at the end of a passage describing the internal examination of a woman during labour. More confidently done are those difficult passages evoking mystical experiences. The prose undoubtedly tends to the rococo but it has the courage of its convictions and seems quite appropriate.

The threads which draw the story together are about intuitive communication, precognition and a sense of destiny. It deals with people's reaction to Kinship after initial fervour has died down, and would be hard to follow without having read The Road To Corlay -- which is a better book and promised more than this novel delivers.

Jerry Pournelle -- KING DAVID'S SPACESHIP (Timescape, 260pp, $2.95; Futura, 336pp, £1.95)

Reviewed by Martyn Taylor

In Foundation 23, George Zebrowski bemaoned the fact that so many SF writ-

ers fail to deliver the riches they promise. By and large, this is true, which makes it all the more intriguing to read a book by an author who always delivers exactly what he promises. What takes the gilt off the gingerbread, however, is that the author is Jerry Pournelle and he delivers exactly nothing.

The story is set in a future in which the galaxy has been colonised by Earthmen only for a series of Secession Wars to reduce the Imperial civilisation to its knees. The Imperial Navy has vowed that this will never be allowed ro recur, and to that end all re-emerging planets are placed under the strict hierarchical rule of their bureaucracy, the alternative being bombed back into the Stone Age. Prince Samual's Planet, then, is about to be given a very low status in the Imperial schema when it discovers that the possession of spacegoing technology will guarantee it a much higher place. Fortunately for the planet -- and the plot -- there is an ancient library on a nearby planet, disguised as a temple, so all the locals have to do is dupe the easily dupable Imperial representatives into taking a thinly disguised group of Samualites to it so that they may "acquire" its secrets. After a few statutory trials and tribulations, the expedition is of course a success.

But if the plot has all its loose ends neatly tied up, it does not have any characters apart from a few crudely painted two-dimensional cutouts dancing jigaboo with idiotic tags about their necks. This being the hip, adult eighties, the "hero" is allowed some serious copulation with the equally unlikely "heroine", but their actions have nothing more to do with real human beings than anything else in this farrago of a book. Puppets fucking may be a turn-on for Pournelle, but is no substitute for the description of real human emotion. And if this gratuitous sex play smacks of Heinlein at his worst, Pournelle also genuflects towards the "master" in various other ways. Much of the book's ethos has crawled out from under the same stone as <u>Starship Troopers</u>, and the plot regularly crashes to Heinleinian full stops so that undigested gobbets of "relevant" background and philosophical musings of the most crassly adolescent nature may spew forth from the mouths and minds of Pournelle's protagonists. Realistic dialogue is no more a weapon in his artistic armoury than realistic characters and a realistic society -- he gives not the least indication of any degree of awareness of the forces that mould society at any given moment and in fact, like Heinlein, seems incapable of conceiving that there are areas even on this planet where successful social values are not those of Smalltown USA. For this reason, Prince Samual's Planet is just incredible. His gestures towards verisimilitude -- not only are the menfolk burdened with Scottish names, they also wear kilts -- only add fatuity to an already indigestible sauce.

On the evidence of this and other work, it is plain that Pournelle is incapable of envisaging a functioning society other than the one in which he lives. It also seems clear that he would not want to envisage another society, but this does not preclude him from the obligation to try. SF is supposed to be an imaginative genre, but <u>King David's Spaceship</u> is almost entirely devoid of imagination and what little may be found is second-hand, the work of other men. Ultimately, anger is the only valid response to the book. It is not a typical hack job with a redeeming core of novelty, nor even an exciting, vacuous read; it is just downright awful. That a work of such transcendent worthlessness should be so resurrected implies a contempt on the part of the publishers (and presumably the author, because he has reworked the piece since its previous publication) towards the public. The only way they may be shown the error of their ways is by telling them in terms they are sure to understand -- i.e., money -- by refusing to buy such garbage.

In the inventory for next issue (enough to comprise half of it!) are reviews from Brian Smith, Roy Macinski, Ann Collier, Jim England, John Duffty Ian Williams, Mary Gentle, Chris Bailey and others of books by McKinley, Butler, Aldiss, Sucharitkul, Tucker, Delany, Sheffield, Haldeman and others. Nick Lowe's review, promised you last time, will appear in <u>Vector</u>. Otherwise, I'm left wondering whether I'll ever have room for that index...