

ERG

QUARTERLY

No. 136 JANUARY 1997



Here's Wishing You
A Merry Christmas

ERG 136
January 1997



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You are receiving this issue because I sent it to you (what a kind man).
If you would like the next issue, a LOC would be lovely.

Greetings Ergbods,

Sadly a few old friends had to be dropped this time, but enduring silences breed no parsnips to coin a phrase. I didn't get where I am today by not breeding parsnips in mid-stream. The next (April) issue mark's ERG's 38th. Annish. Will I last out to the magic 40 years? Keep reading (and LOCing) to find out.

I regret to say that my long time friend and fan, Lynn Hickman passed away in the early hours of October 31st. Lynn and I had corresponded since the fifties, he met me off the plane in Detroit, hosted me and ferried me to Dayton. Last year he visited us in Scarborough and thought of coming again. Sadly, that won't happen. Prolific editor, collector, fan publisher and Con-goer, he will be sorely missed.

Happier news, on the morning of October 22nd, a bulky package arrived from the USA. It contained several Complimentary Copies of the September issue of TOMORROW with my EINSTEIN INSTANT as the first yarn therein. Also enclosed were five crisp \$20.00 bills. \$30.00 more than expected. My thanks to Algis Budrys for the kind increase. Also enclosed was an invitation to join the prestigious SCIENCE FICTION WRITERS OF AMERICA. A great honour, but sadly, one which I had to decline - I can't afford \$45.00 a year dues (\$80.00 with bank rip-offs) and I don't write and sell that many stories to warrant joining. Still it gave me a great ego-boost.

Two excellent catalogues just in. One from Mike Don, 233 Maine Rd., Manchester M14 7WG. Very reasonably priced Hardcover, softbacks and magazines. The second from Simon Gosden, 35 The Ramparts, Rayleigh, Essex SS6 8PY. offers a fantastic range of paperbacks etc. I can recommend both of 'em.

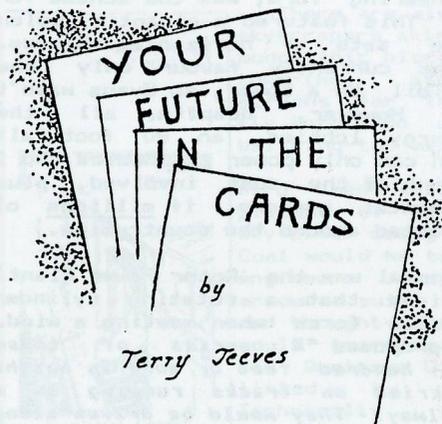
While on books, herewith my want list. Can anyone help?
I'll buy or trade.

STEPHEN LEACOCK TITLES

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| LAST LEAVES | THE DRY PICKWICK |
| MODEL MEMOIRS | TOO MUCH COLLEGE |
| MY REMARKABLE UNCLE | THE IRON MAN AND THE TIN WOMAN |
| THE UNSOLVED RIDDLE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE | |

Also wanted,

- THE WORLD OF TOMORROW by I.O.Evans Dennis Archer, c1937
- THE PULP JUNGLE Frank Gruber, Sherbourne Press. USA 1972
- CHEAP THRILLS Frank Gruber Sherbourne Press. USA 1967
- THE PULPS Tony Goodstone New York Chelsea House
- EXPLORERS OF THE INFINITE, S.Moskowitz, World Publishing USA 1963

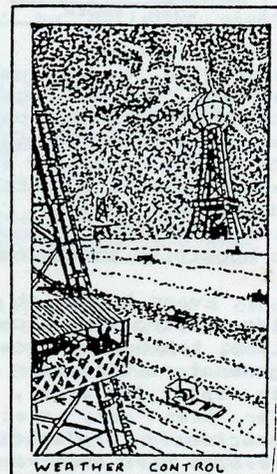


Among the many items of nostalgic junk cluttering my den is a set of 50 'Mitchell's Cigarette' cards titled THE WORLD OF TOMORROW. Issued around 1936 and based on his earlier book, they give an interesting glimpse of what I.O.Evans, the compiler, thought the future might hold in store for us. Many of the cards feature 'stills' credited to SF films such as 'Things To Come' or 'Just Imagine'. Other uncredited scenes are clearly 'borrowed' from old SF magazines.

'Weather Control' came I suspect, from a Paul illustration for Otfrid von Hanstein's 'Electropolis' in an early Wonder or Amazing.

The card depicts huge ball-surmounted towers shooting off lightning flashes into the air above a mechanically tilted terrain. The blurb on the back says, "...streams of water would be evaporated on electrically heated plates to form water vapour. Discharges of powerful electric sparks would cool the air, condense the clouds and bring the contents to earth as rain." Just why lightning would cool the clouds is rather mystifying, but for that matter, why not just spray the water directly on the ground instead of going to all that trouble?

There's a fog-dispersing ray and also an anti-gas ray (Leo Morey??) which would convert poison gas into a harmless liquid by means of that mysterious alchemical power known only to writers of science fiction. I'm not sure where 'The Cathode Ray' spaceship originated, but the drawing has hints of Paul.

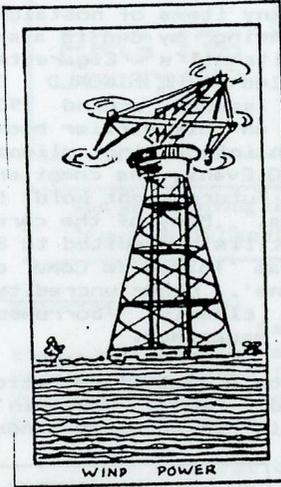


The text explains that a spaceship would be acted on 'by rays of a tremendous intensity', so naturally, one only had to 'receive these rays on a series of great metal vanes for collecting their energy and transforming it into a means of propulsion. So equipped, the space-ship need only carry enough fuel to raise it a few hundred miles; thereafter it would be driven by the sun's rays.' Dead easy when you know how.

The card for 'Space Suits' came I fancy, from a Wesso drawing in Astounding. Despite the boiler-metal outfits looking more like deep sea diving gear, the description is pretty accurate .. apart from a certain quaintness in the words .. "...they would probably be provided with wireless telephones."

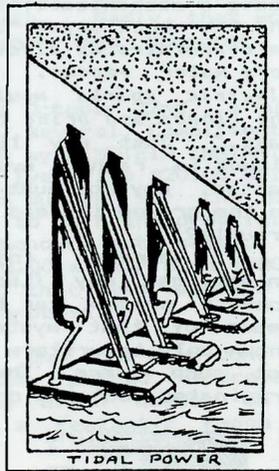


Very accurate in idea, if not so practical in its engineering form, was the scheme for 'Wind Power'. This featured a gigantic pylon bearing five sets of horizontal blades. Modern designs currently favour only one vertical airfoil to a tower, so Evans wasn't so far out. However, despite all the alternate energy lobbies, an 80 foot tall current design can only power six houses, so I shudder to think of the cost involved, plus the environmental eyesore, if millions of these were erected around the countryside.



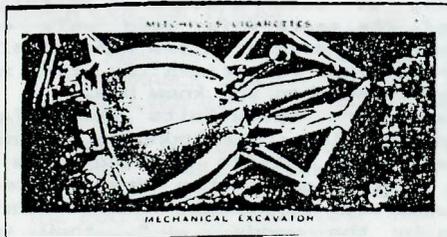
Another proposal was the 'Rotor Power Plant' based on the idea that a rotating cylinder produces a side force when meeting a wind. The writer proposed "A series of these cylinders, a hundred feet or more in height might be carried on tracks running on a circular railway. They would be driven along the line and dynamos geared to their axles would generate electricity". Presumably by generating their own driving power.

There was also a 'Tidal Power Generator' involving a huge wall supporting an array of bobbing floats. Again, the concept and technical description is pretty accurate. All we need to make this forecast come true seems to be the necessary funding. Just how much power could be obtained this way seems a bit doubtful, but on the surface (no pun intended), it looks a far more viable proposition than wind power.

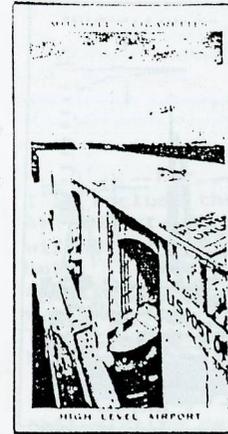


Evans looked at other energy forms, one idea being the 'Atomic Disintegrator', in this case, taking the form of a giant Van der Graaf generator. "Attempts have recently been made to 'split the atom'. Though these have not so far been very spectacular, nor have had any practical application, their theoretical results have been very important."

Underground mining (depicted by the 'Things To Come' disintegrator) is to be carried out by machines squirting chemical into the rocks .. which would then obligingly

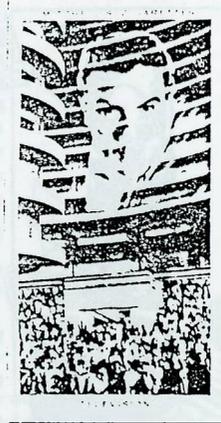


crumble away. Shovel up the debris and you have a nice tunnel .. even maybe even from Britain to America (this has a 'still' from 'The Tunnel'). Cities would also benefit from building machines (another 'still' from 'Things To Come') and would include churches shaped like giant pipe organs. The card shows one such edifice built in Copenhagen.

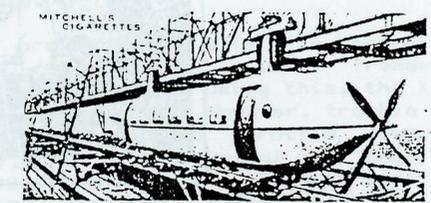
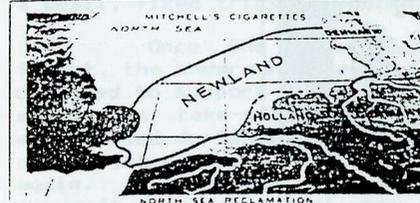


There are also cross-shaped skyscrapers akin to our ghastly monolithic blocks of flats, and towering, storey-high TV screens for the aircraft to fly into when using the new, building-top aerodromes.

Bird men (illustrated by a picture of Clem Sohn) would sky-dive using fabric wings. Coal would be turned into oil, engineers would work in armoured suits (Things To Come) and thought-detecting machines would guard against dishonesty and Business Offices would be linked by pneumatic-tubes. Technically feasible, but horrendous in its political, economical and ecological

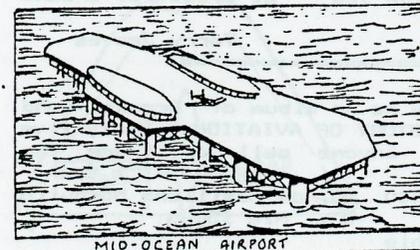


implications, Evans proposed creating 'Newland' by building giant dams to drain and reclaim the North sea.



In the case of transport, the overhead 'Railplane' merits a card depicting the one then operating at Wuppertal in Germany (Is it still running?) You may recall seeing it in Truffaut's, 'Fahrenheit 451'. By being overhead, Evans postulates using the ground space so acquired to make high speed motorways.

High speed coaches would have beds, kitchens, lounges and cinemas. Solar motors would produce heat and power — no mention being made of where we would get enough sunshine from in this mist shrouded isle. However, in California, they would be happily smelting metals using the sun's heat. Ocean greyhounds would still

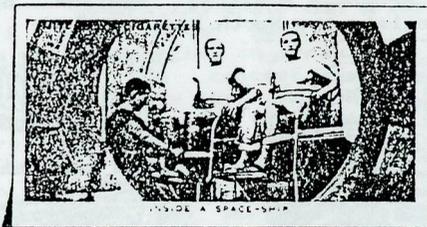
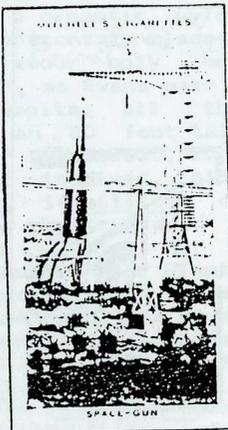


ply their luxury passenger trade, but would be super streamlined, as would Giant aircraft three hundred feet long, weighing as much as a thousand tons and having 'several tractor screws, each fitted with a reserve engine'. Despite such wonderful machines, Evans still subscribed to the idea that they would not be able to fly the Atlantic in one economical trip. This gave rise to the 'mid ocean airport' which involved an artificial island tethered halfway

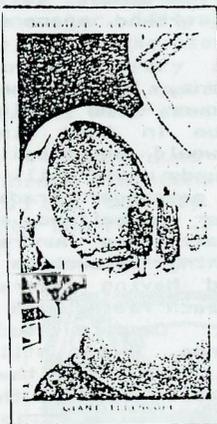
across to enable aircraft to land and refuel on the way. An idea which formed the subject of the film 'FPI Does Not Answer'.



'Anti-gas armour' is illustrated by a view of Raymond Massey emerging from his futuristic aircraft and Evans did not overlook space travel. One card shows a rocket blasting off, "such a vessel would need a great sloping way from which to start" - and prophetically, "Returning ships would drop into unfrequented parts of the ocean". By contrast, card from 'Things To Come' depicted the giant space gun being loaded, another showed its two passengers inside the cabin and there's that final scene of Cabal and Passworthy gazing at the huge telescope screen.



Other cards in the set included a 'sea power generator utilising the temperature difference between surface and depths. A plant to distill oil from coal, streamlined trains (spot on), one-man submarines (another bullseye), a glass house, another that revolves, paratroops, robots and letter-delivery by rocket. The pictures may not depict our future, but they certainly present an entertaining one.



If you have a burning desire to acquire a set of these cards, the London Cigarette Card Company may be able to oblige you -- at a cost of around £7.00 a set.

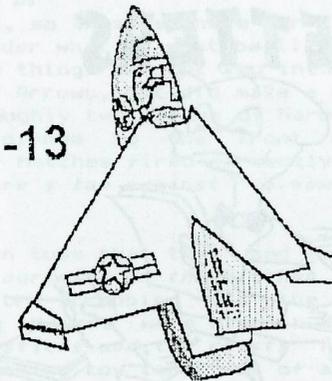
Terry Jeeves

WANTED

A kind friend gave me an album of Brooke Bond tea cards titled HISTORY OF AVIATION. Sadly five are missing. Can anyone sell or trade the following?

- 11. Handley Page O-400
- 12. Junkers F.13
- 13. Mig 15
- 25. de Havilland Mosquito
- 33. Mig 15
- 20 Hindenberg Airship

X-13



For completeness, I'll include the X-11 (ATLAS A) AND X-12 (ATLAS B) here with brief notes. They were both single-stage test missiles to test various systems for the ATLAS ICBM. The X-11 was 96ft. tall, the X-12 103 ft.

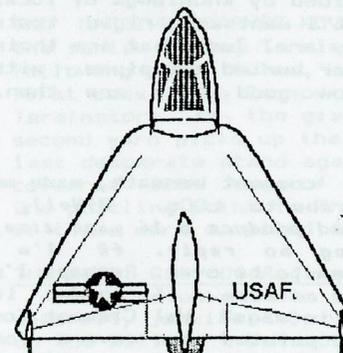
The X-13, Ryan 'Vertijet' (also covered in ERG 106) was a tail-sitting delta-winged jet plane designed for vertical take-off and landing operations. It was 23' long, had a 21' span and a speed of 483mph and was launched and recovered from a tiltable rig. The X-13 was first tested for airworthiness in normal flight by the addition of a small, fixed tricycle undercarriage.

Once the aircraft was proved to fly safely in horizontal flight, the undercarriage was then replaced by a metal framework designed to support it vertically on the ground. Using this, the X-13 managed a take-off and hover up to 50ft. However, trouble was experienced during landings because of the delayed throttle response of the jet engine. This caused the pilot to overcontrol and 'pogo' up again. This snag was overcome by servocontrols.. To help keep the aircraft on an even keel when landing, Wing tip, 'puffer jets' helped it maintain stability.

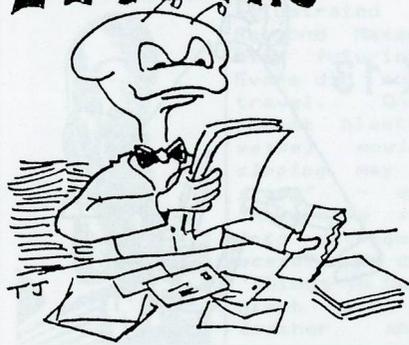
April 1957 saw the first free flight from take-off. The X-13 unhooked from its ground rig, ascended, nosed over to horizontal flight, went through the full operational envelope and then tilted to the vertical and descended back to a landing on the ground rig.

Following this, the X-13s made numerous successful flights, but although the system had proved fully successful, no further action was taken. Possibly because of the difficulties of pilot training to handle such an unorthodox system together with its dependence on a mobile ground platform. Then again, the British Hawker P1127, forerunner of the Harrier might have caused a re-think.

Only two Vertijets were built, both survived the test program and are now in Air Museums.



LETTERS



VINCE CLARKE, 16 WENDOVER WAY, WELLING, KENT DA16 2BN
 I would have thought the majority of your books on offer were received free for review. If so, very easy to clear selves by taking them to the nearest charity shop. \Rightarrow True, but book sales help fund ERG which costs around £300 a year. \Leftarrow Ken's reviews of Writer's books interesting, and as far as I know, not done anywhere before. On similar lines possibly a review of 'How To Write SF Books' by various people is in order? \Rightarrow See Jim Verran's

article in Clarke's Mentor? in 'Fanzines' \Leftarrow Re your reply to Ken Lake's letter, there is no Earthly reason why Pyramid blade-sharpening should work, but dowsing can be explained as an unexplained mental spasm interacting with running water. \Rightarrow How can you explain something by an unexplained effect? I've heard many accounts, but still await strict controlled test results to prove dowsing isn't the result of knowledgeable guesswork \Leftarrow

KEN LAKE, 1A STEPHEN COURT, ECCLESBOURNE RD., THORNTON HEATH, CR7 4BP
 When you read such matter-of-fact reports as that about the Major-General and a TV programme which showed a professional dowser in action, how can you STILL demand 'rigid scientific tests'. I too would find Scott-Elliott's pendulum dowsing quite unbelievable were it not that IT WORKED; if I still denied it, I'd have to admit that what was at fault was my capacity to accept facts. Derek Pickles tells you of a regular everyday experience of dowsing, and you still ask for tests! \Rightarrow Remember Rhine's 'conclusive experiments and results'? Proof of ESP, until sundry fiddlings were disclosed. Remember educationalist Fred Schonell whose 'test result norms' were also proved incorrect, to use a gentle term? Remember all those cases of people kidnapped by UFOs? I suspect some dowsing results are by chance, some by inspired guesswork aided by knowledge of local geology, and some are outright hoaxes. What I want are rigid tests to see just how accurate dowsers actually are. Just what are their percentages of hits and misses Walk 'em over buried hosepipes - with and without flowing water through and see how good they are then. \Leftarrow

TED HUGHES, 10 KENMORE RD., WHITEFIELD, MANCHESTER M45 6ER
 I loved the cover of ERG 135. The comment beneath, made me chuckle. I can't ascribe the value you ascribe to LOCs. \Rightarrow Well, after working for three months to write and produce a 16 page zine, there's no fun in mailing it off and getting no reply. \Leftarrow I'm afraid my story selling days in the US seem to be over. Perhaps I'm getting past it., the enthusiasm ain't there no more. I wonder if this is why so many authors stop appearing in mags? Hal Clement for instance. I know he's still writing, I even painted some covers for him - and when did you last see a story by van Vogt or Vernor Vinge? \Rightarrow Partly old-age I suppose, and partly because modern mags seem to prefer soft fantasy to hardcore SF. \Leftarrow

PETE PRESFORD, 3 TRAM LANE, BUCKLEY, CLWYD, N. WALES CH7 3JB
 'Things That Didn't Come' ... Ah, so this is where our C-5 friend Sinclair got his ideas. I often wonder what it must be like working at the Patent Office. Those boyhood things can get you into trouble. I never really went in for Bows and Arrows, but did make a good line in Gat-guns. Remember those? Roughly two pieces of harboard held together by elastic bands. Another pinned to the front could be stretched back to hold the ammo. Matches fired correctly could be ignited against a wall. \Rightarrow I bet there's law against 'em now. \Leftarrow

PHIL WILTSHIRE, 2 CHILTERN VIEW RD., UXTBRIDGE, MIDDX UB8 2PA
 Do you remember the galvanised iron tubs that they used to have for baths before the fire? \Rightarrow Yes, but ours was in the kitchen without a fire. \Leftarrow I remember we used them for scrubbing out the flower pots in Autumn. Those scrubbing boards were also in demand for skiffle groups. \Rightarrow Along with broomsticks and tea chests for the bass section. \Leftarrow I also remember making toy tanks out of a cotton reel, matchstick, piece of candle and a rubber band. We used to race them against each other. \Rightarrow Ah memories. Do you recall the 'bombs' which took percussion caps, the peg-tops and the 'lucky bags' full of oddments and costing two for a half-penny? \Leftarrow

BOOKS

'48 James Herbert Harper Collins £16.99
 A post-holocaust-disaster tale, with Hitler's last-ditch disease weapon as its trigger. Opening with a hectic chase sequence in which American pilot Hoke flees a ragged mob of Blackshirts led by the half-mad Hubble who believes that he can survive by taking Hoke's rare blood of an immune group. Out of the blue, Hoke is rescued by two girls and German spy, Willy. He soon faces further hunts until he sets out to reverse the action. Highly improbable escapes with umpteen rounds of ammunition narrowly missing Hoke and his band, but the action is so fast and hectic you don't quibble about those, but just go with the fast-paced yarn. A welcome change from current sadistic horror yarns.

BOXTREE announce THE A-Z OF X-FILES, by Jane Collick. 'The ultimate all-in-one guide to the TV phenomenon of the decade' Due December 18th and priced at £7.00 in paperback.

TWO MASSIVE GRAPHIC NOVELS from Boxtree priced at £8.99 each. Under the series title, Terminator.2: Judgement Day and Based on and following the films, are CYBERNETIC DAWN and NUCLEAR TWILIGHT. The first sees Sarah Connor and her young son, John pursued by three Terminators as the giant AI, 'Skynet' seeks to eliminate them. The second yarn picks up the story with John, now adult, leads humanity's last desperate stand against Skynet. Both are superbly drawn and coloured with bags of 'Aaargh', blasting guns and exploding humans. One puzzling point is the occasional page or two of recap, almost as if these were compiled from smaller issues. Anyone know why?

THE CROW: City Of Angels Chet Williamson Boxtree £4.99
 Ashe Corven and his son are brutally murdered by a lawless gang of undercity junkies. Corven is reborn as 'The Crow' to wreak vengeance on the killers - but not before they have had more 'fun'. Full of gutter language and sadistic violence, this is the novelisation of a screenplay for a film which in turn stemmed from a 'comic' book. If this is comic, then I pass and I'll certainly avoid the film. What sort of message are we sending to our youngsters these days?

**SPACEWAY**

The first issue of SPACEWAY appeared in December 1953. Edited by W.L.Crawford, it sported a rather inept cover by Mel Hunter, who shared the equally flaccid interior art with Arnold Walter and Morris Scott Dollens. The issue boasted two Novelets, six short stories and part 1 of a 3 part serial. The latter, titled 'THE OSSILANS' was Van Vogtian in its scene and action switches as

it had hobbyist Jay Bard contacting aliens who then emerge from the screen of his oscilloscope and start to manipulate his reality to achieve their evil ends.

SLAVES OF THE SYSTEM, A Short by J.T.Oliver tells of a reminiscing oldster deploring how the arrival of creatures from space has spoilt his planet - the twist ending is that he's a Martian and the 'aliens' are spacemen from Earth.

RE-ENTRANT, Short by Clyde Beck. Stranded spacemen use high-powered double-talk to produce a hyperspatial drive - and end in a time loop.

SPACEWAYS TO VENUS, Novelet by Charles Eric Maine. A rescue mission to Venus falls foul of electric robots but is saved by the actions of the crew's misfit. A real pot-boiler of the kind which gave the pulps a bad name.

FREDERICK, Short by Atlantis Hallam. A footling yarn in which a husband brings back a shy Martian bird as a pet for his wife, whereupon it takes over and becomes a virtual albatross.

DOMINANT SPECIES Short, E.Everett Evans. Two explorers on a new world encounter and defeat a hypnotic plant before it can take over the planet -- but they miss one of its spores.

THE REVOLT OF THE SCARLET LUNES Short, Stanton A Coblentz. A real stinker of a pot-boiler. The Lunas are Metropolis-like slaves and stage a most unbelievable revolt against new marriage laws - which are then repealed and all is back to normal.

NOW YOU SEE THEM, Short by 'Gregory Francis'. A world populated by monkeys and rabbits which can make colony scouts think they (and their world) are invisible.

THE GLAD SEASON, Novelet by Gene Hunter. Somebody is fiddling educational programs to sow racial tensions. An overlong account which peters away with the cop out of one parent starting an opposing campaign.

SPACEWAY ran too many trite or pot-boiling yarns and saw only eight issues between 1953/55, then lapsed for a while. It reappeared with four, saddle-bound issues in 1969/70. Anyone make me an offer for a full set of twelve issues?

Not all humour comes in bite-size wisecracks in the TV sitcoms. In an earlier ERG piece I mentioned the (motionless?) office-equipment supplier who advertised, "WE KEEP STATIONARY" and the greengrocer offering 'VEGATABLES'. Well, keep your eyes open (and camera ready) as you go around and it's surprising how many such little sniggers you'll come across. One shot in my album shows a two-sided sandwich board outside a Whitby chip shop. Beautifully painted, one side advertises the chips as 'Simly The Best' - the reverse correctly has 'Simply The Best'. Only a few hundred yards away over the harbour bridge is 'The Old Smuggler's Cafe' in Loggerheads yard. Entry is through a narrow archway bearing the legend, "Duck Ore Grouse". Yes, it says 'Ore'.

House names can also be rib ticklers. One in Lealholm bears the sign, 'Dunmilkin' and one at Sandside in Scarborough has a nice stained-glass window depicting a fishing trawler and the name 'Skintus'. A few hundred yards away is a very narrow alley about 18" wide. You couldn't even ride a pushbike down it yet the entrance bears on a pole, the official road sign of a red ring with the wording, "No Vehicles Except for Access. Not so funny, but quite near and of interest to Dr. Who fans is an ancient Police Box of the Tardis variety.

Up a country road behind Peyton Bridge is a welcoming sign which may appeal to would-be suicides, 'So-and-so Reservoir. Open To The Public'. Just off the market square in Thirsk is a thought-provoking board which says, "Swimming Pool, Pedestrians only"

Graveyards are not immune to the smile-bringing syndrome. One near Market Weighton is in memory of "DONALD DUCK". My favourite however, is one behind Eyam Church. It recalls the final resting place of a keen cricket enthusiast. The tombstone has a heading of an empire's finger raised in a gesture of dismissal. Then come the details of Harry Bagshaw who died in 1927, and beneath that is carved a cricket bat, and three stumps and the balls being clobbered by a cricket ball.

If you ever get to Pickering and look in the goods yard of the North Yorkshire Moors Railway, look out for the cast-iron signal post with the moulded-in legend, LNER 1942 Other local signs of interest include a signpost directing you to 'THE LAND OF NOD', a local village is called 'Ugglebarnby' and in York there is a street (advice to mother haters?) called, 'WHIP-MA WHOP-MA GATE'.

Such smile-makers may never bring belly-laughs but they do brighten up one's travels. Good luck in spotting them.



Not so visual, but have you considered how in everyday life, we meet many literally incorrect phrases yet we understand perfectly what they mean. This idle thought was sparked off by reading an article by an American woman in which she said she 'taught school for 20 years'. Well I taught in a school, for thirty two years. During that time, I taught children and taught Maths, English, History, Geography etc., but I never taught school. Maybe it's one of those new catch-all subjects such as 'Social Studies' or 'Humanities'.

Musing along this line of thought, I came up with a few other misleading bits of English. Speaking of a wooden hut poses no problems, but have you ever seen a paper shop? Maybe in Japan, but it would still need rain-proofing. Then many of us move houses, but it's a rare and expensive occasion when it actually happens. Does a grass widow need regular mowing? Can you ride sea-horses? For that matter, do broad-minded people need wider doors or narrow-minded individuals manage with leaner ones? Do you repair the local roads if you mend your ways?

People put on hats and coats, but though they also said to put the kettle on I've never seen anybody wearing one. Is it theft if you take a bus or steal a glance? What sort of a trap is used to catch one's breath or a train? What material do you use when making tracks and what nutritional value do you get from eating humble pie?, or is it cannibalism to eat a Chinese?

Then we have male and female toilets, can they have sex? If they are labelled 'Disabled Toilets, does that mean they are out of order? I've been informed of many a 'live broadcast' on TV, but never been told to expect a dead one. What horrible operation is involved in changing one's mind? What does one travel in when being driven to distraction? Where is Random, target of many wartime bombs, Jest where all the true words are spoken, or Fear where many refugees live in?

From time to time, Americanisms invade us. The doorbell or the 'phone rings and somebody says, "I'll get it". I have yet to see them rip the door off its hinges or yank out the telephone cable. Even more irritating is the way some people respond to an unknown caller with "Who is this?" 'This' is surely the speaker -- wanting to know who that is on the other end of the line. Then there's the one liner, "I don't believe what I'm hearing". Bad enough as modern jargon, but I recently heard it used in a film set several hundred years ago. Different than seems to be creeping in instead of different from. I'll pass over 'different to' and that stock phrase used by heroines to express the deep emotion to which their acting ability will not rise, "Oh my God" - often followed by "I don't believe this".

Then there's the puzzle of how we have trousers, but never a trouser - except for a trouser leg. We wear pants, but pant if short of breath, in which case we revert to breath coming in short pants, very confusing. Can you have a scissor? You may use spectacles to watch a spectacle, but you can't have a net full of salmons.

Charles Fort wrote of a rain of frogs, yet strangely, he never recorded cats and dogs falling from the heavens. I've heard of skies as 'black as thunder', but can a sound have a colour? (OK cleverclogs, black isn't a colour.) What do storm clouds gather and what is 'East' that rain can spread it?

Truly, English is a rich, varied and idiomatic language. To a foreigner it can be a baffling one, but it is also a rewarding one with lots of built-in fun. Thank Ghu it doesn't go on for portmanteau words such as Rakenteflugplatz for spaceport.

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HERB GARDEN

Although he'd never heard of the term, six-year-old Timmy was an ardent lover of Science Fiction. His hang-up was the square-eyed monster glowing gently in the corner of the living room as it brought him Star Trek, old and new, live or animated. He gazed in wonder at episodes of Babylon 5, re-runs of episodes of Buck Rogers, Dr. Who, or indeed anything involving robots, space travel, alien monsters, Flying Saucers or anything involving travel into the dim past or a strange future. All this was well-known to Timmy's parents, Beryl and Tom Brewell; what they didn't know was that their box-watching offspring was also a budding genius.

This latter fact hadn't loomed on the horizon when, one sunny morning, Beryl decided to try and widen her son's interests to include horticulture. Taking him by the hand, she led the would-be spaceman around their tiny back garden and began pointing out the various plants.

"This is a potato, I use them to make French Fries, you like those don't you?" Her pride and joy gave the struggling plant a look of total disinterest, "I'd rather have cake". Beryl tried again, "This is a rose, Timmy. Just smell its scent." Timmy duly sniffed, sneezed, then drew an imaginary raygun and dispatched the wilted flower.

"I want some chocolate cake."

Beryl remembered the rule book, 'Never speak angrily to your child, it may give him a complex'. Complexes were the last thing Beryl wanted for her son, so she bit back a hasty response and contented herself with "No chocolate cake until I bake tomorrow." Regaining her patience, Beryl led him hopefully to her pride and joy, her own little herb garden.

"Look Timmy, these are all called herbs. This is sage, this is parsley, this is rosemary, this is ...", she carefully pointed out and gave the names of all the different herbs. For a brief moment, Timmy seemed to show an interest in one of the straggling green things before stating with even greater emphasis,

"I want some chocolate cake, cake now, not tomorrow"

Beryl's patience was at an end. Dropping Timmy's hand, she waved an admonitory finger under his nose.

"No chocolate cake today! I am not going to bake until tomorrow. You will not get any chocolate cake until then, so you'll just have to wait." She turned on her heel and stalked back into the house. Timmy gazed thoughtfully at her retreating back, then turned and gave the herb garden a long, pensive look. His decision made, Timmy set to work.

An hour later, Tom Brewell came home, gave Beryl a husbandly peck on the cheek, looked around and asked, "Where's Timmy?"

"He's out playing in the garden getting over being told he'll not get any chocolate cake until tomorrow. Let's go and get him." Tom followed her out into the garden and down the path. Beryl gave a shriek. There sat Timmy amidst the wreckage which had once been a herb garden, his face smeared with chocolate and a large chunk of cake clutched in his fist. Around him stood a weird construction of plant stems. They twisted around each other and over their creator in an eye-wrenching way which seemed to vanish into nothing. Beryl blinked her eyes and gasped. "What's he done, and where did he get that cake?"

Timmy gave a satisfied grin, swallowed a lump of chocolate cake and mumbled,

"You said no cake until tomorrow, so I went and got some then."

Tom took a painful glance at the eye-straining assembly of plant stems woven around his son. He gave a surprised gasp,

"Good heavens, he's made a thyme machine!"



THE MENTOR.90 38 packed pages from Ron Clarke, PO Box K940, Haymarket, NSW 2000, Australia. Lengthy piece on Governments, excellent expose of Odessa Fancon, Strelkov on homesteading in South America, Verran reviews books on writing, Darlington on 'Dan Dare'. Then a couple of travel articles, two book reviews and a page of 'verse', plus a hefty LOCcol. Very good zine, get it for the usual.

ATTITUDE.9 A tri-partite zine edited by Michael Abbott, John Dalman and Pam Wells, from 102 William Smith Close, Cambridge CB1 3Qf. No less than 68 pages with articles (and snippets) on:- Eastercons, Attitudecon, English, Nanomechanisms (more on these please), tattooing, SF, pornography, prostitution, GUFF trip, a sport send-up, Eastercons, Albacon, fanzines, LOCs and a few other items. Bags of variety. Trade by sending 3 copies of your zine.

HIDALGO.39 68 beautifully produced and illustrated pages from Brian Brown, 11675 Beaconsfield, Detroit, MI 48224, USA. This issue celebrates the 100th Anniversary of the pulp magazine and has a long and interesting article on a 1939 Thilling Wonder, another on Operator #5. a review of a Doc Savage fanzine, sundry book reviews, a piece on 'cheesecake cards' and a brief LOCcol. Illos are mainly story-heading reproductions from TWS and round out a great feast of nostalgia. It made me dig out, read, and enjoy! an old G-8 yarn.

SERCON POPCULT LITCRIT FANMAG.7 has 27 ERG-sized pages from Garth Spencer, Box 15335, V.M.P.O. Vancouver BC., CANADA V6B 5B1. Personal natter on Internet usage, a Con report, lots of LOCs, fanzine reviews and a page of newly accepted neologisms. Surely, 'command, corrupted, document, post etc. don't qualify?

STEFANTASY.119 Appx ERG-size, but actually type-set in this modern age, which shows th dedication of Bill Danner, R.D.1, Kannerdell, PA 16374, USA. Fascinating time-binding chat on early Ford cars, steel mills, railroads etc. and lotsa LOCs. Not ambitious, just homely, friendly and clearly a labour of love.

IN TOTAL CONTRAST, Alan White wishes it be known that he has a Sci-Fi website devoted to Forry Ackerman and crammed with articles, con reports, photos, reviews and such. All you wire-up folk will find it on [Http://members.aol.com/forrysite/forfans.html](http://members.aol.com/forrysite/forfans.html) Alan is looking for readers and contributors on this side of the Pond.

THE KNARLEY KNEWS.60 \$1.50 from H.L.Welch, 1525 16th. Ave, Grafton, WI 53024-2017,USA. 26 pages covering reader response, con-going, travel, an excellent symposium on changes in fandom, author comment, an unusual 'planetary' tour and a hefty LOCcol. Altogether a highly readable mix with plenty of comment sparking items

LATE CATALOGUE Hefty, 50+ pages from ZARDOZ BOOKS, 20 Whitecroft, Ditton Marsh, Westbury, Wilts BA13 4DJ

Ken F. Slater

Last time round I asked Terry if I could have an extra page this time, as I had some earth-shattering information to impart. I think... It could have been "awe-inspiring", perhaps. I even made some notes. I am now looking at them, and wondering what the devil I thought was even interesting, let alone worth conveying to others. Trouble is, I didn't make the notes clear enough, and whilst I may have had some thoughts I wished to give to Alan Sullivan, my note "see A.S. letter" doesn't make it clear whether I had more to add to "TANSTAAFL" or the subject of traversing narrow lanes at high speed, or if in fact I may someplace have a letter about *AMAZING STORIES* (TM) and the note has nought to do with Alan Sullivan. Whatever, it just shows my recall ability is poor. Now I can't even leave notes to me that are meaningful. At least, not brief notes. But having taken Alan's name in vain twice, I guess I owe him a bit more wordage. The problem is to keep control; unfortunately book-lovers lost control of the book trade long ago. Note that under the heading "book-lovers" I include the whole range of folk connected with the trade - those who write them, publish them, distribute them, sell and read them, and all minor and major activities. Like reviewing and proof-reading; illustrating, binding, printing.... Most of the people so involved did it for a living, yes, but a living they enjoyed. Not many trades connected with the book-trade were on the top of the wages scale. Probably the highest paid sections were the printing and engraving trades - it was a truism to say the the first book off the press was the one that cost almost all the production money; anything after that had a great reduction in cost. Particularly true in the days of hand-setting type, from which period it comes. Electronics in various ways have vastly cut this cost. A book can go from an author all the way through to the machine that is going to print it with little more attention than a series of readers and editors tapping their fingers on a few keys. But these people still love the books. The ones don't care are the money and marketing people, to whom the book is just one more commodity. Read Kristine Katherine Rusch's last few editorials in F&SF, ending (I think) with the December 1996 issue. I am not overly impressed with the story selections she made, not to my taste, but she did fine work on those last five or six editorials. But the freebies; I am out of touch with the economics of publishing but as a rough guide say that a publisher expects to get 50% of the retail price of the book to cover his costs and his profit. He has to pay the printer, the binder, the artist/designer of the jacket, throw a crust in the direction of the author; and tuck a couple of pennies into his piggybank to prepare for the rainy day when a book doesn't sell and he still has a wages bill to meet. Now he's been reasonably happy offloading a large percentage of the publishing run at 35% direct to some bookshops, 45% to medium big distributors, and 50% to the giants. He has known he has a small margin to play with, to absorb returns, to give an extra 2½% when some special case comes up, and so on. But now there is a new player in the game. He can no longer control the price, he can no longer control the day of sale (he is trying to, but see recent issues of *The Bookseller* on how futile that is) and although he can refuse returns even that is not easy with the new players in the game. Big Joe comes along and tells the publisher he wants 50% of the print run; he wants 60% off, and a guaranteed cover for 25% returns. This can be for all the scheduled titles for X months, or for selected titles. What does the publisher do? It may work out okay the first time, but as soon as Big Joe starts using the books as loss leaders the regular book trade outlets start cutting their orders. I no longer buy as many new hardcover Terry Pratchett and Anne McCaffrey titles as I did, because I don't sell as many - I gather that *HOGFATHER* was being sold at £9 by some store in Birmingham which is a lower figure than either Andromeda or I could normally buy it from the publisher. With a signing session for a new title Andromeda might be able to squeeze a 50% discount for a title. If past performance showed it would benefit the publisher. I don't have signing sessions - no passing trade for publicity, sitting in my l'il ole POBox. But as we specialise this doesn't affect us too much. But with a small bookshop in King's Lynn I note the effect of the two big retailers cutting prices on all the "popular" titles has been to put them out of business. Which means that the couple of lines of-not-very-popular titles he used to stock are no longer carried in the town, and if you want one it has to be a "special order" - and you can't browse to select... You have to *know* that you want it. This is not easy - I advertise that I will supply any British book in print, and I do. But this service is only called upon in special cases. The

customer has to *know* what is wanted; browsing not possible. And with the closure of that shop there won't be any more browsing in those two ranges, in that town.. So I still feel that although the step we've taken may cheapen some books, it will in the long run reduce the range available, and probably increase the price of less-than-popular titles. We shall see..... On the other hand, some things of "limited" appeal have to be pretty pricey. There is to be (mayhap already is) a 50th anniversary issue of NEW WORLDS, No.221, edited Mike Moorcock, magazine format, some 11" high, 64pp, at a price of £10. Contributors include Brian Aldiss, Michael Moorcock, Iain Sinclair. The first issue of NW was in April '46; in the late 1950 and early 1960 years I was selling upwards of 200 copies of NW. Don't somewhat feel I'll be doing that with this Annivish....Spoke to Heather North on the 'phone a few days ago, checking on why I'd not seen her at a convention recently; she's the lady who sculpts dragons and unicorns and other mythical creatures - seems at Glasgow Worldcon time they were elsewhere on holiday; last Easter they decided to give the hotel a miss; for the future she says no way does she want to visit Liverpool again, but although Manchester was her home town and "boring" she'll probably come there....we really should get out the plans of the TuckerHotel and start building....just as soon as someone wins the lottery....they don't build hotels to cover fandom's needs...at Con-fetti I shared a room with another chap (hellishly expensive if you didn't) who was quite pleasant but regrettably snored....real loud...and who if shouted at would stop and turn over....then quiet would last about four breathes, average....the other snag these days is this (so-called) security measure of rooms having only one key...it can work if sharers do drop the key in the desk every time they come out of the room...but it is darn inconvenient and time wasting...FGoH at Con-fetti was Leo Kindt, who I have known for some years..(he said it was 31 years, and all my fault)...I think he meant getting him involved in s-f and fandom.. although my first contact in Dutch fandom was Nic Oosterbahn...I've found recently I get the blame for a lot of things...I became used to my good friends James (Jimmy) White and the late Bob Shaw saying that I (in the guise of Operation Fantast) put them in touch, but I seemed to get the same treatment at Saarcon, and then when Leo came in with another variant on the theme at The Hague I start thinking its a conspiracy....all I used to do when someone I didn't know contacted me was look them up on the map, and tell them of anyone else in that area...where's the harm in that? In fact, I still look up locations in the maps today, although my geographical knowledge is somewhat wider so I refer to the map less frequently. And I do not divulge locations. Science fantasy no longer needs missionary work; except possibly corrective work - some small screen pundit recently gave Star Trek as the source of all sfl I would have hurriedly penned a letter that way years ago, but now...who cares? GoH at Con-Fetti was Bridget Wood, a very pleasant person who gave a short full-coverage speech on how she came to write, how she plots it out, and all aspect of the field. Brief, entertaining, and useful. First time for ages I wished I was still taping speeches. She also agreed that whilst Bob Heinlein may have written for the beer-money, she writes for the gin-money; everything is on a higher plane today... She was engaged in one of those author-tours; 48 cities/bookshops in 28 days (or is it 24 in 48?)...its Tuesday so it must be Madrid...there are times when I am pleased I cannot write...this BeneluxCon had its usual fairly strong British support...and I signed up for CosiCon next year...then when I got home I realised that Novacon and CosiCon occupy the same spot on the calendar...Curses...well, I fear that I'll be going to Great Malvern rather than Den Haag next November...I tried to arouse a little interest in the possible German Worldcon at Con-Fetti, but although a few people said that if it came about they would go, there was little response...particularly Berlin did not seem to be an attraction...of course, I could be wrong...In January (maybe in later December) you will be able to buy the first British edition of a David Weber "Honor Harrington" novel...*Honor Among Enemies*...which must be the sixth in the series, only in hardcover in the US so far...at the same time, I don't quite follow the logic of starting with a back-log of five books all of which guide the path of Honor to where she is when the the sixth opens...and which must be pretty difficult to guess unless there is a lengthy preamble to the book...the ways of publishers are a wonder to behold...and if, as LOCUS was telling us in November, DRAGON'S WORLD have gone into suspension, why do they send me a new list this month...including a new Rodney Matthews limpbacK, COUNTDOWN TO MILLENNIUM...incidentally, is fandom doing anything for the Millenium?...I haven't heard mention...by the by, I favour the alternative spelling with one "n"... I mean, let's economise where we can...think of the number of times that word is going to come up in the next few years, and the amount of paper space, ink, and effort we can save with one "n"... KFS