

"I'd advise you to avoid hill-climbing, only drink whisky  
and vote Tom Sadler for TAFF."

From  
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MINI-ERGITORIAL

In those dim and distant days when Hugo Gernsback launched AMAZING, stories about men on the moon, supersonic flight or atomic bombs were regarded as sheer fantasy. Fun to read about, but only taken seriously by crackpots. In the late forties, the arrival of jet engines and solid state electronics radically altered the face of society. The change didn't stop there. Fifty years along, 'test-tube' babies, micro-computers as well as genetically altered plants and animals, not to mention clones had all appeared on the scene.

Science fiction has been undermined at its grass roots. Stories involving these wonders have become merely a branch of mainstream fiction. Authors seem to have run out of new yet-to-come gimmicks and instead are spending their time serving up bland, plotless bits of waffle.

So what's left to speculate about? Lurking just off-stage are trips to Mars, a permanent space station, a cure for cancer, extended life spans, artificial intelligence and sundry other concepts which were once just crazy science fiction. It would be a bold (or stupid) person who said that these too, were 'sheer fantasy'.

At this stage, one might be tempted to ask, "Are there any SF basics left undiscovered - and likely to remain so?" Ever prone to sticketh out my neck, I'd suggest that there are a few. FTL is almost sure to remain a pipe-dream although the Aspect experiment in Paris indicates that FTL communication might be a possibility. Invisibility other than top level camouflage is never likely to make the grade and open the doors for unseen bank robber to toddle off under a ton or so of loot. Then there's the fully humanoid robot as envisaged by the late Isaac Asimov. Modern technology can emulate or exceed, most of human senses, abilities and strength, but to miniaturise all these into one human shaped package with full mobility, balance, not to mention a power pack and an Artificial Intelligence unit ... Methinks it unlikely.

Then of course there's hoary old time-travel. Tachyons travelling at FL velocities are often said to be electrons travelling bakwards in time and one might speculate that the well-known Time-v-velocity equation indicates reversed time may follow if you exceed c, but square roots of minus quantities are tricky blighters to build into a working time machine.

I doubt that Martians will ever invade us. Little green men in UFOs or alien monsters from the stars are equally unlikely. Communication with aliens stands a slightly better chance: about on a par with winning the National Lottery every week for a year. The snag here is even if some Government would stump up the cash for a powerful enough transmitter, the little matter of over eight years waiting for a reply from even the nearest star puts a damper on the scheme.

Nevertheless, these 'impossibles' still leave plenty of room for authors to dream up fantasies as wild as the old days. The big snag is that nobody wants to read 'em. TJ



For me, British comics were as dull as ditch water, even when they strove for stronger reader involvement by featuring 'real' people. Thus FILM FUN and KINEMA KOMIC gave us the fictional adventures of Laurel & Hardy, Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd and so on. Strangely, even these American 'stars' were keen on bangers and mash.

Even as a child, something told me there must be more to life than merry japes, wheezes, cream buns and a nosh-up in the final frame. Then I came across American comics. Bostock's zoo regularly visited Sheffield, and I often got taken to see the animals. All I remember of the poor things was the horrible pong from depressed creatures penned in scruffy cages. On one occasion, as we walked away from the hall, a stubbly-chinned old codger standing beside the hot chestnut stall, was selling gaudily coloured sheets of comic papers for a halfpenny a go. I got one and gained my introduction to the whole new world of the 'Funnies'. Quite a bit later I discovered they were sheets culled from American newspapers.

Supplies of these were very hit or miss until Messrs Woolworth, began stapling half a dozen such sheets into a flimsy paper jacket and selling the resultant 'comic' for 6d a throw. With a regular supply of such high quality entertainment now assured, I was able to begin a collection of the serial-story strips. Not as easy as it sounds, since if Woolies had a surplus of one issue, they would unblushingly staple two sets of the same cartoons into one comic.

Not only were the American comics more colourful than the homegrown mush, but they were lively, brash and crammed with interesting characters. There was the wide-ranging humour of Popeye, along with his girl Olive Oyl, and the never ageing baby, Sweetpea. I never did know his parentage. Occasionally there was a nasty old Hag, and of course that fat moocher of hamburgers, J. Wellington Wimpey who not only had an aircraft named after him, but also a chain of fast food stores. The latter from his propensity for scoffing hamburgers. Then there was the trio of Buck Rogers (in the 25th. Century) complete with his flying belt, girl friend Wilma Deering and a whacky professor - close parallels to Flash Gordon, Dale Arden and Professor Zarkov - who also started life as comic strip characters.



'Terry and The Pirates' was superbly drawn by Milton Caniff. Whilst the start-line of the Terry serial didn't appeal, I really enjoyed perusing the Dragon Lady's cleavage and well-slit skirt. On a much more humdrum level and comparable with our little lost ballerinas or wandering sheepdogs was 'Little Orphan Annie', a shock-haired, big-circled-eyes moppet with a guardian called 'Daddy Warbucks'. Surrounded by kidnappings, shootings, gangster attacks and other forms of nastiness, Annie could always be relied upon to emerge unscathed and wind things up with a few yards of homespun platitudes.

One of my particular favourites was 'The Captain and The Kids' which following a lawsuit in 1912 resurfaced as 'The Katzenjammer Kids' when Dirks, their creator switched newspapers. No sausage and mash here, Hans and Fritz were two rotund German immigrant children whose terrible pranks plagued the life out of



their guardian, the walrus-moustached Captain and his stovepipe-hatted friend.

Much crazier than the Kids was 'Smoky Stover', a fireman who got into scrapes in a surrealist world where wall pictures joined in the action by making comments. Stover's hat would emit blasts of steam, or a character's teeth would leap out to hop around the floor hollering in surprise. Crazier even than Stover,

the most surrealistically imaginative strip was indubitably 'Krazy Kat', a rather non-descript feline who dwelt in an ever changing landscape the outlines of which were dictated solely by the needs of the action. He doted lovingly on Ignatz the Mouse. The latter did not return the emotion, but spent all his time throwing housebricks at Kat - unless foiled by Offissa Pup, the local copper whose neck frequently intercepted the missile. Kat's fractured English was a sheer delight, "You never candle where it'll lead" being a sample.



'Toonerville Trolley' was a whacky form of public transport which wandered hither and yon in the blissful premise that it is better to travel than to arrive - with the passengers having all sorts of outrageous adventures. The conductor was so short sighted, he had replaced the narrow, current-collecting wheel above the trolley, with a yard-wide roller to facilitate fitting it back on the wire whenever it came off.

'Gasoline Alley' involved a variety of characters including the young boy Skee-zix who grew up with the strip. I never did find where the strip's name originated although I gather it stemmed from an earlier one called 'Main Street'. Other strips featured the tomboy 'Winnie Winkle', and her male counterpart 'Skippy', a ringer for William Brown. Aircraft buffs were catered for by the daring pilot, 'Smilin' Jack'. Tough guys could empathise over the slow witted but good-hearted boxer, 'Joe Palooka' and for the really macho-minded there was the Neanderthal character, 'Alley Dop', a caveman whose hairy face and side whiskers reminded me of Abraham Lincoln.

'Mandrake the Magician' who, immaculately garbed in evening dress, top hat and cape; 'possessed the strange power to cloud men's minds'. (Or was that The Shadow?) Naturally, he only used this power for good as he drifted around crime-busting, saving maidens in distress or any of the other problems likely to come along for a wandering magician. He was aided by the giant Nubian, Lothar, who always appeared in a leopard skin and turban, whether attending a brawl or a bar mitzvah.

Head and shoulders above these strips came Al Capp's 'Li'l Abner'. A slow-witted, backwoods hayseed. Amiable, helpful and considered highly eligible by the maidens in the backwoods community of Dogpatch. His huge build and small brain saw that he was always the target of designing females or scheming city slickers, yet remained ever innocent. His girl Daisy Mae had a bosom which would have made Jane Russell green with envy, but Li'l Abner never seemed to notice. Along with Abner came a host of delightful characters such as Mama Yokum who could lick anyone in town, Marryin' Sam, and of course, the hen-pecked Papa Yokum. One of the Li'l Abner strips



invented 'Sadie Hawkins' Day' when all unattached females could chase and catch unmarried males. It was so popular, American readers decided to stage a real-life version. When Li'l Abner made the mistake of starting in a UK newspaper with the story of the edible Smoo creatures who were so keen to please, they would collapse on your plate, ready to be eaten. British readers

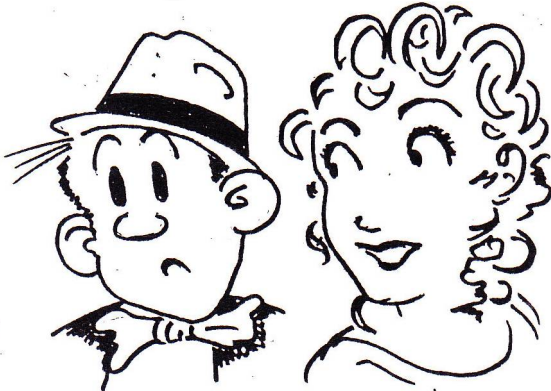
objected and the strip vanished.

For connoisseurs of the curvaceous there was the googoo-eyed 'Betty Boop', as dizzy a brunette who ever showed a garter. She had an hour glass figure akin to Mae West and was really a grown up doll. An animated Betty eventually made it to the big screen, a triumph which wasn't achieved by her contemporary, 'Tillie The Toiler', a pert young miss with a more realistic figure - which was exhibited to a larger degree in cut-out and dress up figures at the foot of the page where Tillie posed in her undies, along with various hats and dresses ready to adorn her.



BETTY BOOP

Cut-out items graced many strips. Some were dress-up figures, others play money for use in games. Square-jawed crime-buster 'Dick Tracy', had crime-busting tips to cut out and collect. In those days, his wrist radio was marvellous. 'Midget radios' of that era occupied a cubic foot of space and became almost red-hot in operation thanks to their voltage-dropping barreters.



DAGWOOD 7 BLONDIE

Other strip characters included, 'Blondie' and her husband 'Dagwood' who was always late for work, would dash out eating breakfast, and inevitably knock down the unwary mailman. There was the young, bald-headed 'Henry', one of the few characters to make it to England. Another was 'Jiggs' of 'Bringing up Father' fame.

Erudite tomes have analysed the motives or morals of the comics with a clinical detail, totally destructive to their subject - in the same way that 'doing Shakespeare' has ruined him for many. In the Depression years, the comics were islands of colour, humour and entertainment. Pure escapism maybe, but moral standards, values and ethics were upheld. Crime did not pay, and the baddy always came out worst.

## GREAT BOOKSHOPS OF THE WORLD 2

## Harrogate

It was Ron Ellik who first drew fandom's attention to a bookshop where it was impossible to buy books. His 1962 TAFF report described the odd shop sited behind the theatre in the North Yorkshire town of Harrogate. Here, the books had overflowed into passageways and across all available floor space so that eventually the higgledy-piggledy piles of unsorted volumes completely blocked the entrance to the shop. The aged, skeletal proprietor used to sit in the doorway on an old stool for which there was barely sufficient room for it to be stored away at the end of a day's trading.

Trading! I never saw him sell a book. It was impossible for him to get to any I remember faunched-for titles easily discernible even through the grime-encrusted windows but which were totally inaccessible.

Another dealer in the town told me that every book seller in the area dreaded the day the old man would pass on. "The widow", he confided, "is going to come along and expect one of us to buy his entire stock."

"Well", I said encouragingly, "there's certain to be something tucked away in there which must be worth..."

"It's the time-factor," he said. "Just sorting them out. It's not only the stock in the shop..."

Apparently our eccentric book seller also owned a warehouse and a couple of old garages which were equally crammed full of piles of unshelved and unsorted books.

"And it gets worse," he went on. "The old blighter's not only lost the keys to the garages, but he's even forgotten where they are."

Eventually the old man died. Vandals broke in and threw some of the books around in the street. The door wasn't repaired. There was an amount of rain damage. After some little time the local council moved in and cleared the shop.

I never did discover what happened to the warehouse and the two garages. Perhaps they're still sitting there, full of goodies, just waiting to be unearthed. Rather like the Romanov treasures or the W.C.Fields bank accounts.

Ron Bennett

## SCHOOL FOR SURVIVAL

As a parent and former teacher I have often heard the plaintive cry, "What on Earth are they teaching children in the schools these days?" Perhaps the moan came from a worried mother bemoaning the fact that her daughter had announced that teacher had shown her how to make a Mobius Strip - thus causing panic in the breast of a mum afraid her offspring was likely to end up as a Go-Go dancer in a burlesque show.

Sometimes the cri-du-coeur is sparked when a school leaver is rejected by a prospective employer who demands three A levels in advanced thaumaturgy before hiring someone to push a formidable array of buttons on a computer-controlled cash register. Sooner or later comes the mournful wail, "Where will it all end?" or "Why don't they teach 'em something useful?" Just what IS 'useful' is open to argument, but I'd suggest a first step would be to teach kids how to survive in this modern age. As for "Where will it end?", if my own recent experiences are any guide, it will end with a gunge-covered mass of citizenry, broken-nailed, sans teeth and slowly starving to death amidst plenty. Why? you may well ask. Well it will end in starvation because of the ever increasing demands which modern technology is making on the gentle art of survival.

In my younger days, it was possible to relax in the one-and-nines, watching Clark Gable strut his stuff on a real (big) screen whilst you munched away at assorted goodies, prudently purchased at the local sweetshop before entry to the dream palace. Fragments of this, chunks of that and goodly dollops of the other had all been weighed and lumped higgledy-piggledy and otherwise unwrapped into a large paper bag. Once in the cinema, only the faintest of rustling and an occasional smacking of lips marked their transfer from bag to mouth.

Nowadays I must have my remaining teeth and my finger nails, specially sharpened or capped with carborundum in order to break through that first line of defence, the ubiquitous plastic bag.

Crackles, creaks, muffled curses and even faint shrieks of agony, not to mention the gentle tinkle of broken teeth falling to the floor, all accompany the storming of that almost impregnable bastion. Moreover, the surrounding hisses of disapproval from the non-noshers tend to give one an inferiority complex.

Once within the outer bailey of the bag, the battle is not yet won. Each individual morsel of high-priced and plastic-tasting mush is separately gift-rapped within a further line of plastic armour. This has to be picked, scraped and chivvied away, or swallowed in resigned misery. A brief moment of glorious respite and then you're faced with tackling the next bit. Numbed by the struggle, I no longer worry about disturbing those in neighbouring seats. By this time, they are all enmeshed in similar skirmishes so that sounds of conflict completely drown out those from the screen (unless it's a film of Screamer Turner). No doubt about it, the next generation won't need mathematics, but will be in urgent need of combat training in school to survive in an environment which hides its comestibles behind a plastic Maginot Line. For younger readers, that was France's 'impregnable' defence line.



Nor is the cinema the only battlefield. Have you battled with a packet of crisps recently? Not only has the packet size gone down and the cost gone up, but these modern, synthetically-flavoured bits of desiccated dust seldom come complete with their own little bag of salt. Everything (bar the taste) has been added in the factory. Everything that is, except for an easy way to get at the contents. Finger nails are not up to the task, nor are teeth. Adults reared on a childhood of tearing telephone directories in half, might summon the mighty forces needed to crack the barrier - at the peril of showering fragmented crisps over everyone in the blast area. Lesser mortals, such as myself, must descend to the ignominy of worrying the bag between one's teeth in terrier-like fashion. It works eventually, but the fall-out area is massive.

Sooner or later, the back room boffins will devise an ultimate plastic. So tough, we frail, unarmed humans can never overcome its resistance. Even now, I see supermarket shelves jammed with items imprisoned behind unbreakable plastic covers or under lids screwed down by a power press. In addition to making an ounce of potted beef resemble a cocooned buffalo, such defences can defeat nails, teeth, stiletto heels and even an atomic bomb. Just how do we expect our children to defeat such bulwarks and avoid starvation?



Modern plastic warfare makes other demands on society - the increase of beards is clearly attributable to the difficulty of unpackaging modern razor blades without having a soon-to-be-banned combat knife in your hand. Popping in a cafe for a noggin of coffee now threatens body, clothing and sanity. As an experienced elevenser, I have long since learned how to master that

plastic-wrapped chocolate biscuit (hammer it flat, chew off the corner and pour the crumbs down your throat). The minute quantity of pseudo-milk or cream comes hidden within a small, highly squashable plastic shell. When its super-glued seal finally gives way to your onslaught, the container squashes and releases a shower of sticky goo over everybody within the target area. Strangely, thanks to the four-dimensional packaging, far more of the stuff emerges than was originally in the carton. If this happens just before a neighbour releases a shower of powdered crisps, the result is a cafe full of pebble-dashed people.

One-piece plastic bottle-cap seals require the grip of a Hercules to free them, but plastic is not the only offender. In my Wallter Mitty dreams I lead a supermarket manager around his store. We pause here and there for him to demonstrate how easy it is to "Press the cap gently to remove", when dealing with jam, pickles and a horde of other inedibles whose lids have been soeared with an epoxy adhesive before being tightened by a maniac with a monkey wrench. In between torturing my captive manager with immovable lids and unscrewable stoppers, I torment him further with those cardboard packs which (according to the legend on the outside) can be opened by a gentle pressure on a perforated panel. No way! Whenever I try it, the container crumples to resemble a bit of modern sculpture but

retains its contents inviolate. Personally, I triumph eventually by giving a maniacal shriek, dashing the thing to the floor, seizing a meat cleaver and wreaking mayhem on the carcass.

Sardine tins have long been regarded by the trade as the ultimate in contents protection against a ravenous public. The tag for the opening key being designed to tear smoothly off the can. The best system is sling away that stupid little key, find a burglar and borrow his jemmy. A black belt in karate and a third Dan in Ooji-wat-not is also a help. Don't get too cocky and reach for a can opener. Modern defence techniques threaten to displace the sardine tin and its ilk. New steels are under development which can defeat any opener, even one which has miraculously survived its three-can obsolescence time.



If you approach a rack where vegetables lurk, seemingly unprotected, you face the reverse problem of getting a few handfuls into one of those transparent plastic bags. In theory, you simply peel off a bag and fill it with spuds, carrots or whatever -- PROVIDED, you can first find where they hid the opening at the end. That little trick usually takes me at least five minutes - unless some kind female takes pity on me and does it in two seconds.

Other problems arise. Only last week during the loafing period euphemistically known as 'staff training', I witnessed assistants being shown how to stick the labels firmly across the container's cooking instructions. Even before such obliteration, the details were invariably printed in Swahili in miniscule type on the most unlikely part of the container's pre-stressed concrete. Nowadays computer-coded labels are replacing price tags. These make it virtually impossible to find the price of something you can't get at anyway.

If tomorrow's children are to break through the massive barriers surrounding their food and drink, we must begin to educate them NOW! It is high time schools stopped plugging such rubbish as maths, English, reading and writing. modern dance should be expunged from the curriculum. As for free movement and expressive word usage, I find enough of both in wrestling a packet of soap powder for the best of three falls. More money needs to be spent in equipping schools with can-openers, thermic lances, knives, hatchets, flame throwers and all the other weapons of survival. On leaving school, our children should be able to fight their way to their food against all opposition.

Remember, our children deserve only the best -- that is of course, if they can get it open.

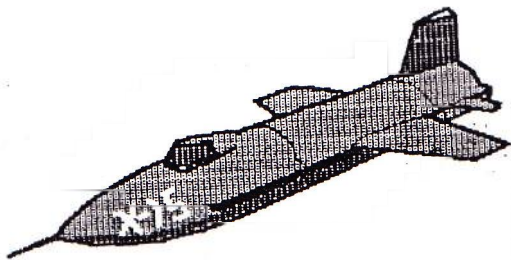
Terry Jeeves

The

# X-15

Probably the most charismatic of the X-planes was the North American X-15. When the contract was first mooted for a hypersonic aircraft capable of exceeding Mach 6.0 and facing skin temperatures approaching 2000 degrees

Centigrade, North American, Bell and Douglas all put in bids. Then North American asked to withdraw, pleading pressure of other work. At this point they found they had won the contract so withdrew their retraction, negotiated a longer time-span and began work.

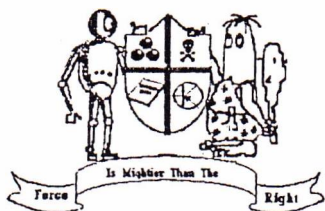


Three X-15s were built, the fuselage was about 50ft long and the trapezoidal wing had a 22ft. span. The tailfin was wedge-shaped and could split open for control. For landing, a double nose wheel and two rear tail skids were lowered. The aircraft were lifted beneath the wing of a B-52 bomber up to launch altitude. After being dropped the rocket motor was ignited for the test run.

Construction began in 1956, the first air-launched unpowered glide took place in June 1959 and the first powered flight came in September 1959. Powered by liquid fuel rocket motors, three machines were built, one of them was later given a more powerful motor and modified into the X-15A-2.

The test programme was not without incident. In 1969 an explosion during ground testing badly damaged an X-15. A mid-air explosion during the fourth test flight led to an emergency landing which damaged the machine and seriously injured the pilot. Then in 1967 the third aircraft went out of control and crashed killing the pilot.

Despite these setbacks the X-15s notched up a magnificent record of 199 flight hours. Bad luck and lack of time prevented them reaching the 200 flight mark. Achievements included a maximum speed of 4534 mph. (over Mach 6.0) and a peak altitude of 354000ft. (67 miles). A delta-winged version, X-15-3 was proposed but never proceeded with.



## Right .. or Wrong ?

Terry Jeeves

Natural laws are unchangeable, you can't repeal the Law Of Gravity Or ignore Newton's Laws of Motion. Human edicts on the other hand, have no such built-in immutability. They change to suit circumstances, public opinion, or different social attitudes. What makes

law-making so difficult is the fact that there are no such Natural Laws as 'Right' and 'Wrong'

Take murder which is generally regarded as a wrong. By that I mean society frowns on the killing of another human being. That's only a human interpretation; the Universe couldn't care less as to whether A kills B or indeed, if A kills oodles of Bs. Come a natural disaster and Mother Nature will wipe out millions without a qualm. There is NO Natural Law against it. Not that all humans always oppose killing. Correct me if I'm wrong here, but was it once possible to kill off Negro slaves without incurring a penalty? Until recently (and still in some countries), the death penalty followed a murder. Correct me if I'm wrong here, but wasn't it once possible to kill off Negro slaves without incurring a penalty? In times of war, the soldier who kills a goodly number of the enemy is awarded with praise and a medal or two. Then again, among some societies, cannibalism was considered the norm. I gather the practice has died (or is dying) out, but nevertheless, I read somewhere that the last recorded act of cannibalism was recorded in the 1980s.

Times and attitudes change, nowadays killing a human is generally considered a very definite wrong -- unless it is done legally, i.e. by means of an abortion. Now this is a real 'can of worms'; people take violently opposed sides. Reasons for abortions vary, an unwanted pregnancy, to prevent giving birth to a deformed child, physical danger to the mother to name a few. Personally, I'm of the opinion that if circumstances warrant it and the mother demands it, then hers should be the last word. This of course is an over simplification and leaves us with the question, "Is an abortion a murder?" I don't pretend to have an answer to that one as it hinges on the tricky point, "When does the foetus become human?" Push that date back too far and you reach the moment of conception. Is this when humanity begins? If it is, then one could argue that contraception preventing the onset of life, is akin to murder. There's no easy, hard and fast Natural Law to solve this one, in the end it comes down to the general opinion of society - and what about the societies which don't want girl children and where the general opinion is to either kill them at birth or leave 'em to perish on a hillside. Different societies, different attitudes, but the one attitude which I just can't understand is that of the pro-lifers who are so anti-abortion that they will blow up abortion clinics or even the doctors who perform the operation. Killing in the name of pro-life? Now there's a twist.

Then there's the problem of euthanasia. Should a person who is painfully and incurably ill be allowed or aided to end their life? This one founders on the rocks of (a) It's murder, and (b) Human life is sacred. Well (b) is a load of bunkum as Natural Disasters show us so often. As for the 'killing' part, isn't it sheer cruelty to condemn someone to a dragged-out existence of pain, immobility and an indefinite period of torture? Personally I'd vote with the euthanasia lobby - provided TWO doctors certified the patient to be in incurable suffering and furthermore that the patient asked for release and was certified mentally competent to realise what was involved. However, I have little doubt another strain of pro-lifers would arise to flex their muscles and demand the suffering patient be left to endure their agonies.

After all, the real Natural Law is the one which says "Might establishes the Right"





# LETTERS

ALAN BURNS, 19 THE CRESCENT, KING'S RD. STH. WALLSEND, N. TYNESIDE NE28 7RE  
 Aircraft, flying bedsteads et al. Where do you dig up all this information? I seldom see anything as detailed. @> I have a VERY large collection of books and magazines about aircraft. <@ I take issue with you on the return of Standard (. Grr. When I compare the troubles I had loading and unloading for never less than five minutes. With my Videocamera I get 45 minutes of pictures. Get it wrong? zip back and do it again. Editing? well you have to use a videocorder and maybe an editing unit

to put words on and a mixer to get sound, but otherwise no trouble.  
 @> Very true, but my interest was in making single-frame animated films. You can't do that with the bog standard videocamera, which is why I'd like my Standard 8 back.

A.V. CLARKE, 16 HENDOVER WAY, HELLING, KENT DA16 2BN

Intrigued by your remark that it was difficult to understand why the boys' papers competed against each other, I did a little research. Yes, D.C. Thomson of Dundee published the Adventure, Wizard, Rover Hotspur and Skipper, so they were competing amongst themselves and I can only suggest that 3 or more papers at twopence a time would have seemed cheaper to kids than one whopper at sixpence. There's also the possibility that free gifts were used to lure non-readers into the fold. Hotspur had school stories, Wizard had more than a few Martian invaders and Skipper was sports stories. I can't remember what distinguished the other two. Personally I was a confirmed Magnet reader though not for the sake of Billy Bunter, who I reckon was, in today's terms, slightly retarded. That's a good semantic query substituting a cryptic crossword for the Turing Test. Does intelligence involve knowledge of all fields of human thought, including superstition (the cat's nine lives)? How far would you take this? A knowledge of Chinese? Who was darts hampion in 1957? You have to first define parameters and that eliminates cryptic crosswords. @> Not so, can YOU define intelligence? See my answer to Ken Lake.. below. <@

KEN LAKE, 46 CHESTNUT AVE, BUCKHURST HILL, ESSEX IG9 6EW

Turing Test. As I am undoubtedly intelligent @> How can one PROVE that? <@ but can't, haven't even the patience to do cryptic clues. they aren't a valid test of human versus computer. I don't believe you can quantify "intelligence": what counts is the ability to extrapolate from INSUFFICIENT data. @> Which is EXACTLY what one does with a cryptic crossword. Point made. It is as impossible to define a catch-all for intelligence as it is for SF, but we have a pretty good idea when we see it. I don't suggest the cryptic is the one and only test, but it is a FAR better way than the Turing Test. Knowing Chinese (if you're NOT Chinese) is one way, knowing AND USING a 'cat's nine lives' could be another. Dog's, cats, dolphins and other creatures all exhibit intelligence, but not one of 'em could pass a Turing or a cryptic. We all KNOW we are intelligent, but how can we PROVE it? <@ ERGitorial made me spit with fury. Thank Heaven you ARE "stuck in a long-gone era" for it was a calm and civilised one compared to today's horrors. I find some type hatd to read and you could do with a spell checker, but the articles are readable - and FUN. @> For which, many thanks. I'll try to limit the typos. <@

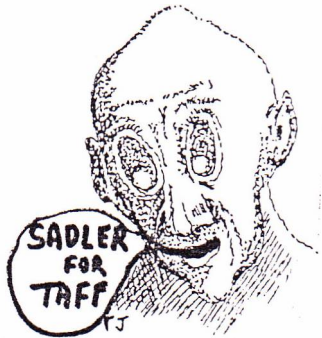
LANGLEY SEARLES, 48 HIGHLAND CIRCLE, BRONXVILLE, NY 10708, USA

'Save The Thingy' contains a couple of inaccurate portrayals. I know it's axiomatic knowledge that wolves are ferocious creatures and harrowing tales of their attacking humans are common. I have also read on good authority, that not a single instance of a wolf attacking a human is on record. In the same vein, bears (whose diet by the way is chiefly vegetarian) by choice), don't bother people who don't bother them. If people insist on putting waste food where it will tempt bears to come, why should it surprise anybody that they do just that? Finally tigers. Contrary to popular belief, man-eating tigers are usually older ones who no longer have the strength to capture their normal prey and are going for the easy kill. As for repopulating India with tigers, there happens to be a large surplus of human beings on the planet; may one be allowed to wonder, even though it is politically incorrect, if a subcontinent of tigers might manage the country better than the present inhabitants?

ROY LAVENDER, 2507 E.17th.St., LONG BEACH, CA 90804-1508, USA

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☞ I want one, NOW ☞  
DALE SPEIRS, BOX 6830, CALGARY, ALBERTA, CANADA T2P 2E7

I fear I would not pass the cryptic crossword AI test, thus proving that I am not an Artificial Intelligence, nor for that matter, an Organic Intelligence. ☞ Not true, I only said my cryptic test needed more intelligence than the Turing, NOT that it was the only way to prove intelligence. ☞ My idea of a Test would be to put the AI on a mowing machine and tell it, "Do a curb swath, make a nice angle past the house then go over to the big patch of yellow mustard and feather in the cut. If it needs a second cut, do so." Any machine that can understand a 'nice angle' or 'feather the cut' will have passed the Turing Test. "if it needs a second cut" is not programmable." ☞ It is, simply specify length, and you can program in cutting instructions for 'angle' and 'feather' ☞

RON BENNETT, 36 HARLOW PARK CRESC., HARROGATE, N.YORKS HG2 0AW

I wouldn't lose sleep over some twit who criticises ERG's reproduction. You're producing an amateur magazine, not a professional one with professional facilities. Foosh on such people. You Save The Thingy, My first thought after reading your opening was .. the pulp magazine .. and there you are at the foot of the page, beating me to it. (And with cigarette cards too. .. and yes, instead of the fags... when did you give up smoking?) @> In 1960 when I got engaged to Val <@ Agree entirely with your premise. I think it's the 'Bell the Cat' situation. Let those who want to save the tiger, do so, at the same time warning its human prey of its approach with a bell round the ruddy thing's neck.

TED HUGHES, 10 KENMORE RD., WHITEFIELD, MANCHESTER M45 8ER

Glad to see DMB1 and another dollop of 'Bloods'. I wish your piece had been longer with Hotspur which was my favourite mag. @> Sorry, but my memory banks ran out on that one. <@ I don't disagree with your A.I. test, I do the Evening News crossword every night. If a machine could do that, it would prove it was really using its loaf. Liked your review of Fantastic, one I somehow missed. Look at that line of writers, Fairman, Neville, Gold, Chandler. They don't print names like that any more @> Or stories. <@ Also liked, 'Save The Thingy', especially the last paragraph. Whoever panned ERG for being old-fashioned should get some time under his belt before criticising elders and betters.

ROGER WADDINGTON, 4 COMMERCIAL ST., NORTON, MALTON, YORKS YO17 9ES

I've never thought much about A.I. or wondered how computers actually work. My attitude being, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" It seems if you have a computer with enough intelligence to solve cryptic crosswords, it'll need an expensive lot of programming. All of Shakespeare. the Bible, the whole of literature from Beowulf to Brian Aldiss; a complete course of religion and atheism and every film made; and that's just for starters. @> Peanuts to modern storage techniques. <@ It's easier and cheaper to rear a human; one reason why I can't see a future where computers are ever our masters. There are plans to introduce wolves back into Scotland; and now that dear little foxes who never do any harm(!) are to be protected, it won't be long before we can walk outside to see the glories of Nature, animals being ripped to pieces, rather than watch it from a distance on wildlife films. Yet we're banned from keeping dangerous dogs such as pit-bull terriers, ourselves; so where's the logic? @> 'fraid you lost me. The proposed hunting ban is to stop foxes being ripped to death. Shoot 'em by all means. But I don't see the connection with pit-bull terriers. <@

DEREK PICKLES, 44 ROOLEY LANE, BANKFOOT, BRADFORD, W.YORKS BD5 8LX

I've seen some beautifully printed fanzines that contained uninteresting material. 'Hello' magazine is well-printed garbage. I like ERG, which compared to my Phantas of the 50s is both legible and interesting. Memory-stirring article on the comics you had to read, not look at pictures or drawings. In the middle of WW2, a pair of brothers who lived just up the road went into the forces. They gave me a big trunk full of mint sets of the 'Big Five' comics. If I'd known what they would be worth today, I'd have kept them. @> The perpetual collector's cry. <@ -- but I didn't, so I sold them all at school. I liked 'Wilson' who lived in a cave on Ilkley Moor, wore the regulation black BVDs and came down, fortified by the herbs he found on the moor and proceeded to win all the flat races at the Olympics. Wilson was 200 years old!

## This and That



### THE ART OF QUEEN: THE EYE

Boxtree announce a new series based on a computer game and the pop group Queen..THE NOVEL OF QUEEN: THE EYE £6.99

In a world devastated by natural and man-made disasters, power is held in the hands of four rulers, the President, The Mother, the Notary and The Leader. When the President dies

Notary and Leader move against the Mother, but here enters the evil Eye from his millennia-long sojourn in an Amazonian glacier. He organises his own power bid and anti-hero Dubroc is the only one to oppose him. Naively written, simplistic and with killings galore, this novel still has a surprising grip on the reader. I enjoyed it.

### THE ART OF QUEEN: THE EYE £15.99

Before wincing at paying £15.99 for a large sized, 160 page softback, let me hasten to inform you that this also includes a CD ROM introductory disc to the game 'The Eye'. The book itself is absolutely crammed with striking full-colour artwork and photos of scenes and characters from the Game. Chapters include photos of the group members, details of the characters, explanations of the backgrounds, domains and enemies the anti-hero Dubroc will encounter and fight his way to defeat the Eye. Other details and photos explain how the Game was animated and finally comes a listing of the Queen's music. If you're a games addict or Queen fan, you'll want this one. SECRETS OF QUEEN: THE EYE £15.99

A gameplayer's companion which tells you how to play and win. I don't have a copy of this, so can't tell you any more.

### BABYLON 5: Security Manual J.Mortimore Boxtree £15.99

A large size, 160pp softback absolutely crammed with line drawing, computer graphics and full colour 'stills' from the TV series. One section details parts of the station, others handle Security, Communications and Defence. There's a chapter on 'Other Agencies' and a set of appendices including a Who's Who with photos of the cast, case sheets and other items. Not cheap, but packed with enough material to appeal to every fan of Babylon 5.

### LATE LOC

TOM PORTER, 25 GREENWAY, CHAPEL PARK, NEWCASTLE ON TYNE NE5 1SU

Wilson was the world's greatest all-round sportsman. He dressed in what appeared to be a Victorian, one-piece swimming costume. I think he had a secluded cave where he bewed his elixir (near Stonehenge?). 'Limp Along Leslie' was the obligatory football character but was unusual in that he had one leg shorter than the other and was not very fast. However his disability gave him the power to impart terrific spin on the ball enabling him to completely bamboozle opponents. Alf Tupper, the 'Tough Of The Track' broke records on a diet of fish and chips, consumed usually just before a race. His opponents looked down on the grease-stained, working-class oik. ☹ I'm afraid these characters came after my time - obviously when anti-heroes arrived. ☹