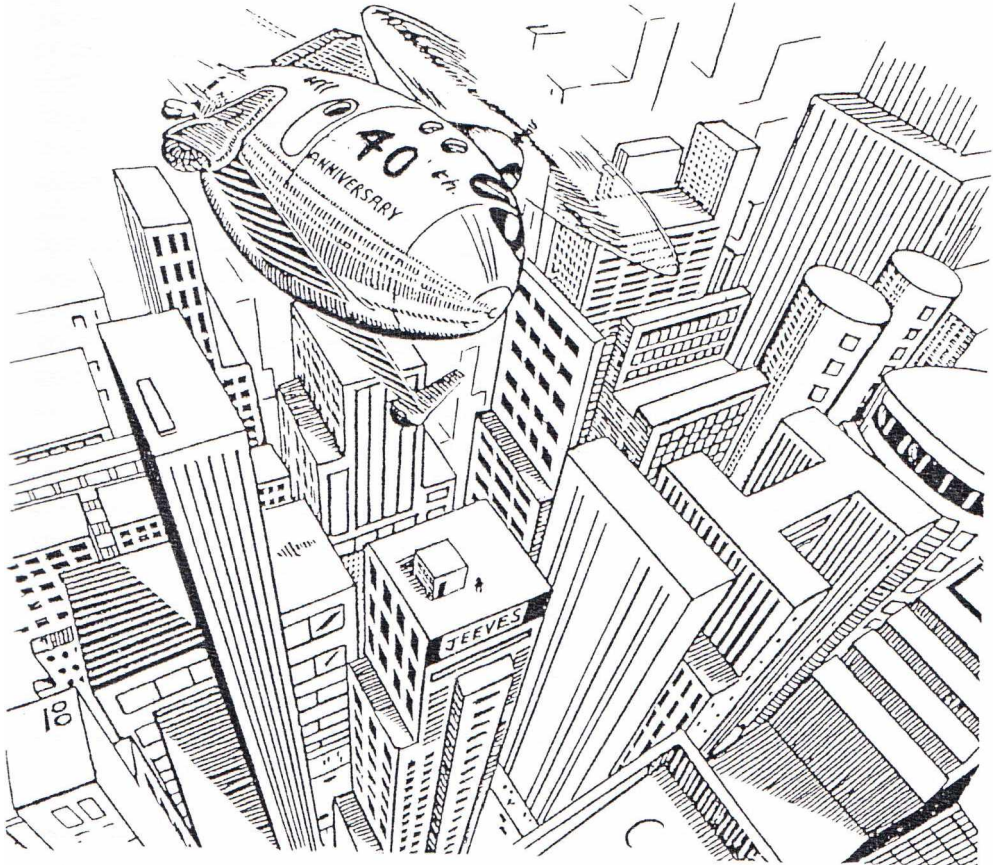


ERG Quarterly

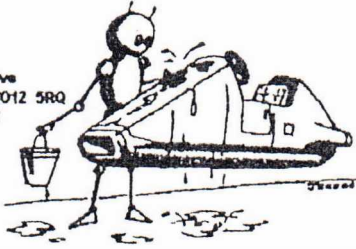
No. **145**

April 1999



40th. Anniversary Issue
1959 - 1999

Terry Jeeves
 56 Red Scar Drive
 Scarborough YO12 5RQ
 Tel. (01723) 370017



Well, I finally made it to that 40 year mark despite a computer snafu just after mailing out #144. Happily a quick repair and I was back in operation.

ERG 145 April 1999

FORTY YEARS of ERG!

What does one say at times like this? It has been a long and very rewarding period and I hope to keep going a while yet. How

about a 50 year target? But that would take me into my late eighties, so who knows? Meanwhile, still mining that seam I found in the garage, the cover for this issue is another scraperboard illo, from around 1984, slightly re-worked to make it suitable for a 40th Annish. I had thought of increasing the page count for this issue, but the added cost for printing and postage rather put me off. Nevertheless, I hope you'll all write in with your LOCs and maybe you'd like to indicate what items you have enjoyed (or disliked) the most in past issues. That will give me an idea of what to include in future issues. Remember, ERG's long-lasting policy to print whatever takes my fancy. That leaves bags of leeway. Still waiting in the 'to be used' pile are further instalments of DMBL., First Issues, W&W as well as a few short story reprints such as 'In Touch With Spirits' and 'Tales From the Wye Tart.

I'd like to offer many thanks to all those kind readers who sent me American stamp, both used and mint, especially two or three kind people who even sent whole sheets and First Day Covers. Greatly appreciated and I'm busy redoing my albums to take in the additions. If you have any you don't want, remember me.

I'm still wanting to sell off sundry back issues of paperbacks, hardcovers and magazines, so if you're interested, send an SAE for lists and say which you'd like.

The run of disasters continues at this end. The bath split so we had a new suite, £924.00. Then the microwave had to be replaced. The car sun-blind jammed and the outside porch light went kaput somewhere in its in-wall wiring. A quick tally listed 18 items which have needed repair or replacing in the last six months. Is this a record?

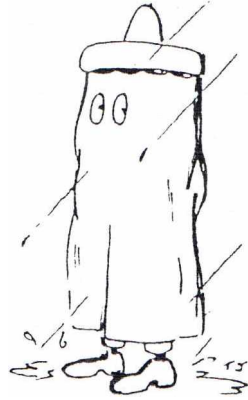
One or two people commented on my 'FREEDOM' piece in the last issue thinking that I was anti-union. I'm not, but if you have a closed-shop, that's anti-freedom. If the union negotiates a wage rise, then the non-union man can't argue if he doesn't get it - that's the result of his freedom. My point was that every worker should have the right to be in or out of a union, but must accept penalties incurred in either decision. Of course one could always cite the labourers in the vineyard.

And so as our issue sinks slowly beneath the waves (of LOCs), it only remains to say, all the best and here's to the next ten years.

Terry

More Mechanics Magazines

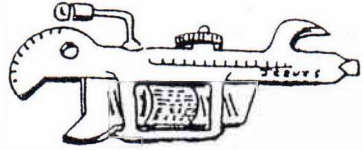
Whacky inventions abounded in the Mechanics magazines. One inventor proposed a hat resembling an overgrown Mexican sombrero. If rain started, the pulling of a rip-cord would release a rain-proof shroud from inside its brim. Under development was a fireproof version to protect anyone caught in an inferno. Those who intended to fall off ships, or into rivers, could buy a handy inflatable rubber undervest. Another character had designed a personal air-conditioning system for people walking around on very hot days. Small bellows were built into the soles of his shoes. From these, rubber pipes led up inside trouser legs and shirt to finish in his hat. The simple act of walking squeezed the bellows and circulated cool air inside clothes and hat. There was a gadget which clipped shut a sleeper's mouth and thus prevented him from snoring. There was a mains-operated mousetrap which electrocuted its victim and a hand-operated vacuum pump for sucking eraser dust out of your typewriter. A length of string tied round a radiator valve allowed you to turn up the heat whilst still snug in your bed.



One aid to graceful dining featured a gadget resembling an overwide and elastic-less catapult. This held your corn-on-the-cob for easy eating. Another chap offered an asparagus boiler, whilst a third offered a mould into which you stacked sausages before pouring molten cheese around them to make fancy frankfurters.

Alongside the impossible, I read such tasty news items as, 'British Police Try Out Speed King's Invention'. This explained Sir Malcolm Campbell's cunning plan to catch escaping bandits. This was to be achieved by means of a long steel pole with a grapnel on its end. This was fitted to the front of the police car. The driver had to catch up to the bandit's vehicle, his partner would manoeuvre the grapnel on to the back bumper. Having achieved this while travelling at 70mph, gentle braking would bring both vehicles to a halt. I don't know where the pole was stored when not in use, or what happened if the pursued vehicle braked suddenly. I fancy a lariat or king-size butterfly net might have done better.

'Lathe Hints and Tips' illustrated weird implements designed to help readers wreak mayhem on innocent chunks of metal. I had never seen a lathe, router, drill-press, or suchlike devices, but according to the magazines, 'my shop' was not complete without them. In my innocence I wondered what they were talking about, as I didn't work in a shop. The only shops I knew were the local ones which sold beer by the jugful as well as cheese, food, paraffin and firewood. It was years later before I discovered that 'shop' meant 'workshop'. One lives and learns.

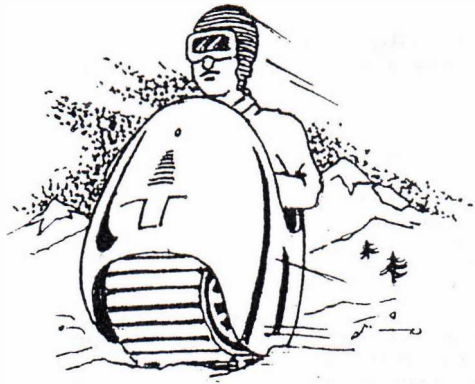


Despite such cultural barriers, I drooled over the magazines. Taking my inspiration from their projects, I carved up old tin cans to make weirdly shaped 'ashtrays' with lethally sharp edges. I also made a crossbow, lovingly scaled down in size (and considerably down in power) from the magazine's plans for a full-size deer-hunting version. I gather that in the USA, citizens are allowed to hunt, shoot, fish or poop off lethal weaponry in all directions. My crossbow could shoot a six-inch balsa quarrel no less than three feet. Not exactly suited to hunting wild caribou or even the cat next door, but I had made it myself.

The magazines taught all sorts of strange things, how to re-wire your auto, re-time its ignition or re-line its brakes. Not much use on my push-bike, I'm afraid. There were plans for converting our basement into a heated swimming pool, but they didn't say what to do with the coal and firewood stored there. I might have made a canoe out of birchbark, but I couldn't identify a birch even if I was whacked by one. Moreover, the local River Don slowly oozing its turgid way between pollution-emitting breweries and smoke-belching steelworks wasn't an ideal location for boating trips.

Another project which caught my interest was bookbinding. I duly pulled apart four of my treasured pulp magazines to try my hand at this, only to find that the pulp paper disintegrated when I tried to separate the 'signatures' for sewing. I compromised by using glue. This produced something vaguely resembling a book - if you observed it from sixty paces on a foggy night. 'Mount Your Own Trophies' had promise, but I decided that our next-door neighbour would have been less than delighted to see her little 'Tiddles' staring out from atop the sideboard.

Slidges, skis, hunting rifles and caterpillar tracked 'Sno-cats' allowing you to cavort in a blizzard, all got considerable coverage. - especially if the latter could be streamlined and made to hurtle towards the reader in some eye-catching illustration.



Such artistic licence was usually pushed to the limit when dealing with Uncle Sam's latest aircraft. These were never actually credited with speeds of 600mph or more, but reading between the lines this was the impression you were meant to get. This was in an era when the ultimate air speed record stood at 440mph, set by the Italian racing monoplane the Macchi-Castoldi 72.

Another perennial favourite in these magazines was 'Shall We Reach The Moon?' This gave the editor the chance to unearth all the old stock shots of Fritz Van Opel's rocket car, the model from the German film, 'Frau In Monde' and a few cuts from Verne's tale of a trip to the Moon. We also got the usual re-hash of other such fictional journeys - powered by flocks of swans, flasks of dew, cannon balls and so on. Such potboilers continued to appear right up to the epic achievement of Apollo XI. That didn't stop them, the target shifted from the Moon and became Mars, or even the stars.

The Karloff films, 'Frankenstein' and 'Walking Dead and others, spurred many a speculative article on the possibilities of the creation and extension of life. Photographs showed what purported to be the decapitated head of a still living dog, its body replaced by a collection of tubes, bottles, pumps and other 'scientific' apparatus. The text told us that such experiments were being performed somewhere else, usually way off in Russia. If they proved successful they might next be performed on people. Such theorising invariably included shots of Frankenstein's monster strapped to its harness and about to be hoisted up for a dollop of the life-giving lightning which always rages around old castles.

Alongside the fantasy and obviously included in order to prove that all this science stuff was founded in fact, would be a photograph of the newly-invented 'artificial heart', a half-ton monstrosity designed to circulate one's blood whilst the normal ticker got a 600 mile service. It resembled an office drinking-water bottle mated to a moonshiner's whisky still.

Home-made diving helmets appeared fairly often. Some backyard genius would take an old oil-drum, add a faceplate and a length of garden hose fastened to a float resting on top of the water. So equipped, he planned to wander around beneath the waves. Such schemes ignored the fact that whilst his lungs would be (trying) to breath air at atmospheric pressure at 14.7lbs per sq.in., his chest would have several hundred pounds pressure on it once the diver was only a few feet beneath the surface. Not conducive to gracious living.

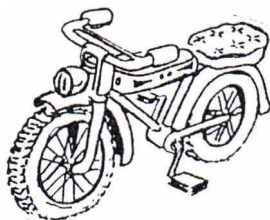
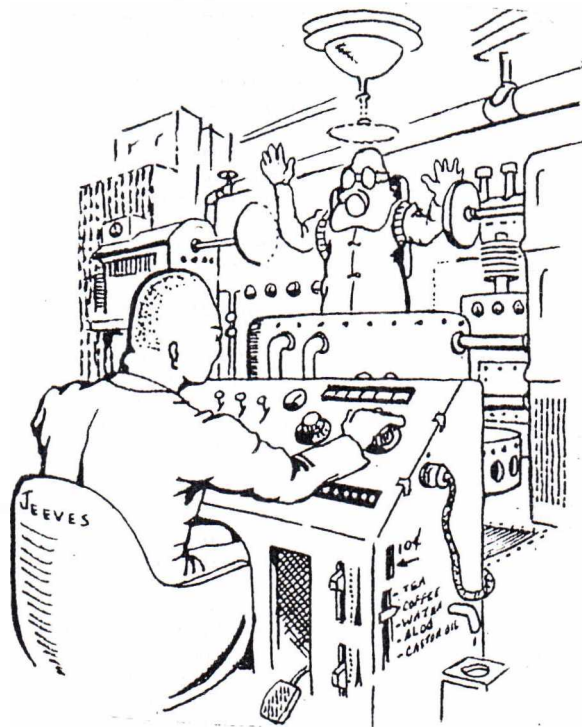
Inevitably, we got giant 'robots' usually created for some exhibition. Most had rectangular, vaguely humanoid bodies, light bulbs for eyes, one movable arm and a built-in loudspeaker to play pre-recorded messages. Some of these creations could stand up and sit down again, or move their arm when the inventor worked a control panel. They were as far from modern industrial robots as a pen-knife is from a cavalry sabre.

Articles offered advice on patenting (or junking) your brainchild invention. You could discover how to put ships and other models into bottles, learn about house pests, read how land irrigation works, make a folding boat, a remote control for radio, an Alaskan chest (wooden variety) or build photo-enlargers, metal light-fittings or a hearing aid. Magicians tricks were explained,

oddities of physics posed and explained, as were tricks of candid photography. One article in a 1937 issue of *Mechanics & Handicraft* detailed experiments for measuring luck .. and followed it by an account of a man fighting sharks hand to hand. I reckon he had plenty of good fortune.

These magazines usually opened with a dozen pages of advertisements followed by fifty pages of text and concluded with some twenty or more pages of 'small ads'. This led to their most annoying feature. After reading two pages of an article, you came to, "Continued on page x". Turning to page x, hidden away in the depths of the advertising pages, you found one, or at the most two brief paragraphs concluding the article. A scheme obviously designed to make the reader ferret through the 'ads' and hopefully decide to

buy a Kalamazoo stove, give up smoking or sell some unloved product and thus win sundry gifts such as a 'super



bicycle'. The latter usually came with broad, heavy tyres, massive padded seat, hefty handlebars and sundry other weight-adding features so that only a young Hercules could ever ride the thing. This was one area where my lightweight racing bicycle put me ahead of the competition.

Nevertheless, I loved those magazines.

They gave me a lifelong

love of gadgetry, gimmicks, D.I.Y. and the desire to find out what makes things work. I still read the occasional issues of their descendants, *POPULAR MECHANICS* and *POPULAR SCIENCE*, but nowadays the moon rockets and weird scientific experiments have all gone. In their place are reams of paper extolling Detroit's latest gas-guzzlers, hunting rifles, sea-going boats, trailer caravans and other equally boring topics. Our old friend the flying car still appears and a quick look at one such magazine reveals a design for a 'shooting' gallery for kids which enable them to shoot at pictures of squirrels and other animals. Nice one that. Now if it gave 'em an electric shock each time they shot one ...

A pity, but nostalgia isn't what it used to be.

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GENERAL CHUNTERING

7

Sorry about the hiatus; just walk round it until the cleaners take it away. As some of you will have heard (read) I had some health and computer problems; getting over-tired, throwing away what I should have eaten and vicky verky was one of the main health problems; it seemed to take an incredible length of time to get back to my normal working day. The computer took sick after an accident and has been replaced. I still can't make it do what I want. I would have been a lot better off if we'd stuck with Charles Babbage's mechanicoccle computer; things I can attack with a spanner and a screwdriver (and, as a last resort, a large hammer) I can understand. Electronics belong in the world of magic, and I have to call in a witchdoctor. I must not put myself down too much; around 15 years of age I spent a week building a radio from a kit (Cossor, I think) demonstrating for the firm then employing me in their shop window. I would spend the morning carefully building the radio and demonstrating that it would actually work, take my lunch break and whilst I was lurching one of the real radio mechs would dismantle the kit, stick it back in the box, and in the afternoon I'd be back in the window rebuilding it. This lasted a week, and by the Saturday I think I could have stuck it together in about half-an-hour. I did learn a little about elementary electronics and what valves and resistors and things did (all forgotten now) but about three months later I was in London working for the Challen Piano manufacturers, putting lead weights in piano keys to balance them in the keyboard. But everyone in the darn place was able to rough tune the strings, and I could not tell an e-sharp from a blunt pencil. So a few months later I was at the Austin Motors North Row repair depot, working with spanners and getting covered in oil. Then when the army absorbed me, it naturally ignored what I knew and made me a company clerk. Now even the cars that I understood and could if necessary repair at the roadside - put a new diaphragm on the pump, replace a broken half-shaft, and various simple things like that - have electronic bits stuck all over them, and to me it is magic. TDC on the flywheel still mean the same, but instead of being used to locate engagement points on gear trains (or chains or drive belts) it is a reference point to the place where something electronic picks up a signal which is conveyed to something else which delivers the impulse to whatever ignites the compressed gas in the cylinder. I don't know if a camshaft lifts the valves still - I got lost some place along there whilst this was being explained. So, anyway, being thick about computers and electronics I called in a witchdoctor (hi, Bridget!) who picked out a new computer for me; came up when it had been delivered, and made all the arcane arrangements with mysterious servers (not sure, but there is a demon in there somewhere, so I guess I've screwed my chances of finishing up in heaven!), made the magic passes and there I was back in business and able to produce catalogues and send e-mail. So having played about with it for awhile, and re-acting to pressure from people who kept saying "send me your catalogue by e-mail", I decided to try, and asked the w-d to show me how, and supply a magic charm. This done, for a trial I used the first part of a list I was compiling, working with my notes and the "macro" that the w-d has made - and sent what must have been a deeply encoded piece of gobbledy-gook to my unfortunate victim. So I've suspended that until I have time to refigure the whole thing. Oh, yes, I appear to have lost the trial "copy" as well; when I try to call it up there is nothing there. Ah, well, back to the cauldron; pass me some newt's eyes, and I think I'll have the bat's wing hanging on that hook over there. Actually, I had intended to write about my friend/customer Žiga's report on credit card skullduggery in Slovenia, but I got lost. The problem they have is one that we've been through, and most of us have learned a few simple rules. 1) do not let your card out of your sight. 2) Do not entrust your card number to any form of electronic transmission, if you can avoid it. In fact, the telephone is fairly safe, but despite the "encryption" that most big mail order business use (and claim as safe) people seem to overlook that it is not encrypted at the despatch end. 3) Use a sealed envelope. Best KFS

EKRANOPLAN

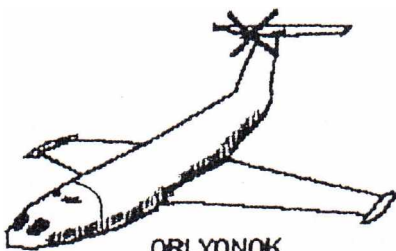


Is it a bird? Is it a plane? Is it Superman? No, it's EKRANOPLAN! Way back in 1960, Russian designer Alekseev began his designs for a giant, ground-effect vehicle, but the first didn't fly until almost six years later. Unlike a 'hovercraft' which uses the engines to provide an air cushion directly, the ekranoplan utilises the ground effect encountered by aircraft when taking off or landing. When close to the ground, air is compressed strongly between wings and ground and gives a floating effect to the aeroplane. At this stage, it takes less power to continue flying than it does at a higher altitude.

Alekseev designed his machine like a huge flying boat, but with short, broad wings to create a large air cushion and powerful engines to bring it up to ground effect speed, some ten feet above the water. The craft couldn't actually fly to altitude, but once free of water drag, could accelerate to very high speeds..

His largest design, the KM, more affectionately known as 'The Caspian Sea Monster', could lift some 540 tons. Its eight jet engines, front-mounted on a stub wing, could move it along at over 300mph. One possible use for such a craft was for the fast delivery of troops to trouble spots near coastal areas. Another suggestion was to employ it as an inter-island, high-speed ferry craft.

An earlier design, the SM-8 featured a V-tailplane mounted high on the fin. This too, had no less than eight jet engines to propel it. Then there was the Orlyonok or 'Little Eagle'. This had an engine mounted high on the tail fin and driving contra-rotating airscrews. This model was reputed to be amphibious and capable to "flying" right up onto a beach. This sounds a bit 'pie in the sky' to me unless the model featured retractable wheels and could always be sure of finding very long beaches.

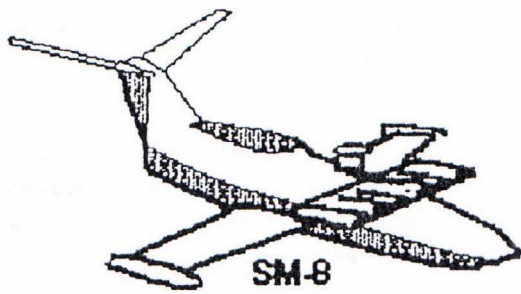


ORLYONOK

The 'Lun' or 'Ring-Tailed Dove', started out as a missile launch platform carrying no less than three missiles, but along the way it became converted into a rescue vessel and re-named 'Spasatel'. The 'Volga' was a much smaller, passenger carrying design using a pair of front-mounted engine driven propellers.



The two great advantages of these craft were the very high pay load and the high speed with which it could be delivered. A disadvantage was their being limited to coastal operations over sufficient distances to justify the benefit of the speed and pay-load..



However, as high-speed, troop landing vehicles, they might have served well in the Soviet Navy

Sadly, Russia's economic state seems to have put paid to further developments, but schemes are afoot in the USA to produce smaller models involving partially vectored-thrust to augment

lift and make it easier to reach ground effect speed.

Whether these craft will ever get beyond the experimental stage is anybody's guess. Offhand, it would seem that any follow-up ekranoplans would face stiff competition from hovercraft and hydro-ski vessels, both of which can shift good loads at high speeds.

THE OLD MILL STREAM A Country Column of City Life

by Penelope Fandergaste

There was only gloom and doom in the newspaper. And I'd read my daily diet of Black Lace novels. What to do. What to do? And yes, I know that I could have cleaned the gas cooker. But I'd already done that. On ERG's twentieth birthday

I turned on the TV. Yes, perhaps it was in desperation. Half an hour later...well, it takes that long, doesn't it, to flick through all those digital channels? ... half an hour later I'd settled down to watch a fascinating programme all about the search for happiness. The people interviewed seemed to think that such a nirvanistic (come on now, why shouldn't I invent a word?) state is actually attainable. There was a group of loonies who coughed up several hundred sheets of folding money to attend a session by a 'happiness guru' who told them all about positive thinking. The guru himself seemed happy enough anyway, probably thinking of the money he'd made that evening. Someone should tell him how a certain SF writer made real money by inventing his own religion. That would wipe the smile off his face.

Then there was another snake oil salesman explaining how happiness is achieved by changing one's name. All that was required to become a completely different, happy personality, was to add an initial between one's names. Like Penelope G.Fandergaste or, I suppose, Harry S.Truman.

There was a common-or-garden working man from Bolton, the old industrial mill-town in Lancashire. He and his wife had, understandably relished their frequent visits to Cumbria's highly attractive Lake District and had enjoyed walking the hillsides there. They'd decided to move home to a Lakeland village but after a few weeks they'd found themselves completely bored. There was nothing to do except sit in the pub night after night. No, no smart comments, please, about this seeming to be bliss or asking what had happened to the beautiful hillsides or had they moved to Bolton? I'm only reporting what the couple said.

They's then decided to move again, this time to Australia. An obvious choice, I suppose. But they had soon tired of the pubs there... Again there was nothing to do... and they'd moved again. Yes, back to Bolton. Ah, isn't television inspirational?

Lastly, the interviewer spoke to a husband and wife who had decided to improve their lives by trepanning their heads, that is, drilling a hole into their skulls. They's each done it, which speaks volumes for the powers of persuasion of one of the pair. They described in details the difficulties of attempting the exercise or operation or what you will, with a hand drill which kept slipping about all over the place and how they'd decided to use an electric drill. Can't understand why they didn't go the whole hog and borrow a road workman's pneumatic apparatus. Perhaps that's in the next programme.

pf

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Serendipity Uber Alles

When comparing man's achievements with those of animals, insects or some future artificial intelligence, it is often maintained that some unique 'spark' sets us apart and on a higher plane than either, thus avoiding any 'take over' by any of 'em. To determine just what that spark may be I have indulged in some research and discovered that the society of our modern world might have evolved in a totally different way and could now be teeming with a totally different collection of inventions. No 'spark' of genius involved, just sheer serendipity.

Take Archimedes, you can take him, I don't want him, but he makes a good starting point. He is supposed to have discovered his famous 'Principle' about 'upthrust', 'buoyancy' and the like whilst playing with a toy duck in his bathtub. Leaping from the water, he is said to have run naked through the streets yelling, "You recker", obviously smelling something fishy about his new theory. Nevertheless, the fact remains that if Greece had been suffering from a drought at the time, old Archimedes wouldn't have been bathing, but instead might have been playing golf or perhaps marbles (Elgin type) with the result that his great hypothesis might have been about how a golf ball always lands in the rough - thus leading to pondering why dropped toast always lands jammy side down, and on to an early discovery of telekinesis.

Then again, the discovery of glass is usually attributed to some nomadic Phoenicians breaking their journey to have a barbecue on the beach. When they came to put the fire out and do the washing up, one bright lad noticed GLASS! Had they camped in a farmer's field, we might now be looking through windows framed with panes of fried cow dung. A dim prospect indeed.

Then there's Isaac Newton who, as every schoolboy will tell you, got his famous theory when napping under an apple tree and getting conked by a falling pippin. History does not recall which variety, but I fancy they would all have given much the same result. The sobering fact is that had he chosen to kip under a coconut palm, we'd never have got the theory of gravitation or that business about action and reaction.

Many years ago, an infant record industry was struggling to invent a material on which to emboss the grooves to bring us that cacophonous stuff mistakenly called 'pop' music (a real contradiction in terms). Their experiments were making nice floppy pancakes until a workman on lunch break carelessly dropped a chunk of cheese into the latest bucket of mixture. Bingo! the stuff set into that lovely brittle

plastic from which all those fragile 78s used to be made. Now consider what the result would have been had he been noshing away on a tin of baked beans. Our first 78s might have been self-repeating, wind-borne platters, revolving at 57 rpm of course and just as frequencies became known as 'Hertz', rpm would have become 'Heinz'

Rumour has it that Watt's steam engine stemmed from his idle dreaming over the rattling lid of a boiling kettle whilst brewing up the morning cuppa. Again the element of chance steps in to aid humanity. Had he been idly contemplating a window-catch rattling about in the breeze the Industrial Revolution might well have been powered by reciprocating windmill-sail engines busily grinding flour at the same time as they powered the cotton looms.

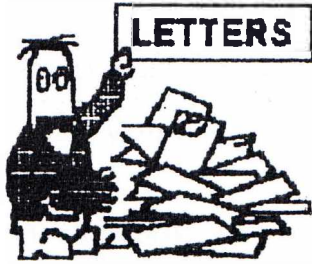
Many similar incidents come to mind. Only a chance breeze depositing a stray bacterium on his Petri dishes ensured that Fleming discovered Penicillin instead of some virulent, world decimating, plague germ. Then there was Baird's perforated, colander like scanning disk, spinning madly to produce a blurry black and white TV image. Had a wind blown across it, that could easily have wound up as an electric tone-organ in some hideously named pop group. Even Dunlop's wonderful garden hose from which he drained the water and filled with air thus producing what became the modern car tyre, might have skipped a stage. Why bother with the air? We could now be riding on water-filled radials. They would also be extremely useful for putting out fires when cars crashed I would imagine, or perhaps as emergency supplies for explorers driving in deserts.

Obviously the great factor in all the above is Chance. Each event proving a pivotal point where mankind could have taken a totally different direction. Only that hitherto undefined 'spark' helped us pick the right path. The solution is obvious - if animals, insects or computers are to rival humanity, they must first learn to play with toys in their baths, eat cheese, save stale bread, sleep under (small) fruit trees and generally make as many careless slips as possible. Until they do things like that, we have nothing to fear from any of them.

Meanwhile, I wonder what might be the effect of dropping scrambled egg and cheese onto a water-soaked chunk of stale bread whilst sitting under a gooseberry bush?

Serendipity might give me a winner!





LLOYD PENNEY, 1706-24 EVA RD., ETOBICOKE,
ON, CANADA M9C 3B2

I can't support hunting for sport, but do for sustenance. Whale and seal hunts should be banned, but when the politically correct try to enforce this they extend that ban to native groups. Aboriginals and Inuit can take every part of a seal or whale and make those parts into useful and necessary commodities for

everyday life... meat, oil, tools, clothing. This teaches their children the old ways, but also to take only what you need and use everything of what you take. Natives are now paying for the white man's sins, and are being included in these bans, which is ridiculous. This is how they live, but this fact isn't considered when they are prohibited from hunting. *[Very sensible comment, I agree]*

NED BROOKS, 4817 Dean Lane, Lilburn, GA 30047-4720

I saw a notice in the paper about the "Space Stamps" having hidden images in them that could only be viewed by using a special viewer. When I asked at the Post Office, they looked at me as if I were nuts. I finally got the viewer from the philatelic address. The hidden images are hokey but the technology is interesting, some sort of interferometry. The Post Office sent an enormous promotion about the five-stamp panel, with no mention of the special viewer. *[The old business, 'one hand doesn't know...! I can't see anything on the stamps under normal conditions]* The point of electronic calculators compared to longhand, sliderules or logs, was not only speed but precision. Many procedure involve sequenced calculations and errors can accumulate. *[I agree, but when I did my maths there were no electronic jobs and we used the slipstick as a quick check on our log table work.]*

R.M. Bennett, 36 Harlow Park Crescent, Harrogate, N.Yorks HG2 0AW

Yes, I do like the ERG cover. Excellent use of perspective. Good Grief! You found copies of the Fan Directories in the garage? About a year ago I went up into the loft, dug out my piles of fanzines and put them into alphabetical order... and I came across the Directories. I'd forgotten all about them. Wish I'd not come across them now, then your mention would have made an even greater impact! Good enjoyable article on the Mechanix and Popular Science mags. Your hopes of finding a treasure trove of old pulps. About five years ago a customer of mine told me he'd picked up an old ASTOUNDING for two or three quid at a place in Halifax. He said they had several more and he intended buying them, one at a time whenever he could get there. Poor sucker! Someone went there the very next day and persuaded the owner to let him have the whole pile for thirty quid... tut, tut. A 'posher'? Are you sure it wasn't a 'posser'? - a stick with three prongs. *[Ours was a sort of inverted, perforated metal colander and we definitely called it a posher].*

Alan Burns, 19 The Crescent, Kings Rd. Sth. Wallsend NE28 7RE

To kick off with the cover I ask myself about the legs on the robot. That torso will be full of this, that and the other and you are going to need good supports to carry it, so why spindle shanks? *[Ah, but they are made of neo-tungsten carballoy neutronium]* I recall an article by John W. where the villain had various sorts of robots with human shape, he said they couldn't make them strong enough for the hero to be unable to pull them to pieces. If robot tanks pursued the hero he would just go over soft land and they would bog down. *[H'm. must be a tough hero to demolish a steel casing - also a lucky one to get chased near a handy marsh.]*



NED BROOKS, 4817 Dean Lane, Lilburn, GA 30047-4720, USA

The movie fan magazines were a powerful force at one time - but the power was apparently in the hands of the studios. My guess is that the dialog Penelope heard in the show about silent movie days was, "I'll see the story gets in all the fan 'zines" - or of course, it could have been an anachronism. There are now several web sites for zines. Some are on-line and some are on paper but none of those referenced on these sites seem to be by any fans I ever heard of - mostly music and avant-garde art stuff. On the other hand, there is now a listserv aimed at compiling by electronic committee, a reference to be called *Fancylopedia III*.

DEREK PICKLES, 44 Rooley Lane, Bankfoot, Bradford, BD5 8LX

I too was fascinated by the Popular Mechanics type mags. All those wonderful inventions and me with a bike and feet for transportation. I did help my father assemble a valve-radio, a 'Listener', which came in a large cardboard box containing a self-assembly cabinet, chassis, valves & other mysterious objects. My grandmother had a radio, a large black cube with an on/off switch and a knob which turned a dial viewed through a small window and lined up a number with a mark. It had a loudspeaker like an early gramophone 'L' shaped bell cylinder. This was hot stuff as the first one she had had earphones for one, or if the family wanted to listen they were put into an enamel washing-up bowl. *[Lucky you getting a kit, I made my radios and two oscilloscopes the hard way - drilling and bending sheet aluminium for each chassis and a series of some 80 or so holes round a circle to make a cut-out for the 6" CRT.]*

FRED SMITH, 15 Mansionhouse Gardens, Glasgow G41 3DP, Scotland

I remember Uncle Hugo's 'Everyday Science & Mechanics' well, from a couple of issues I acquired, but it wasn't one of my favourites. Your dream of finding a bookshop stacked with old pulps is not impossible, although highly unlikely. I did recently come across a couple of shops in Glasgow which had old ASFs and AMAZINGS. Only a few though and the AMAZING were Palmer editions at inflated prices. Personally, the only pulps I'm after are a few UNKNOWNs to complete my collection. *[The SF bookshop in Hay on Wye has plenty of pulp mags and caverns if magazines and books - but they are all at SKY-HIGH prices. Be warned unless you're either desperate, or a millionaire.]*

ALAN SULLIVAN, 30 Ash Rd., Stratford, London E15 1HL

Popular Handicrafts. I've encountered one or two magazines like this, although my father had a large collection of 'Practical Householder' type mags which had a lot of interesting projects, like converting a loft into an upstairs room, repairing/motorising various appliances and the like. My father never did any DIY at all. Considering his skills and tools that the magazines assumed their readers possessed, I can't help thinking that they put him off for life. Popular Science-type articles still abound, some of the things which got beyond the "speculative" stage are pretty off-beat. Nuclear hand grenades were presumably ditched when someone worked out how far you'd need to be able to throw one if you wanted to survive.

LLOYD PENNEY, 1706-24 Eva Rd., Etobicoke, CANADA M9C 2B2

I always enjoyed stories about time travel, rocketships and robots. That's the kind of SF I started with, so I don't get upset if my SF has a little fictional science in it.

It's just another aspect of 'What If?' Freedom is terribly subjective. Exercising your freedom to do or not to do one thing, usually impinges on another's right to do or not do something else. Total freedom would necessarily include total isolation. Society means the limiting of personal freedom in such a way that all can live together in a constructive manner. *[You neatly put the point of my article into one sentence.]* Over the past few years, death seemed to follow fandom like a shadow. Now Britain had lost Vincent Clarke, I think this now means you may be Britain's oldest active fan.

ROY LAVENDER, 2507 E.17th. St. Long Beach, CA 908084-1508. USA

I visited the Ford Trimotor Assembly line. Deedee and I flew from Sandusky, Ohio to Put-In-Bay on South Bass Island, in Lake Erie. The trimotor was the only passenger plane available at the time capable of using the 400ft. runways. Island Airlines kept buying up old ones from all over the world for spare parts. They even financed a company to make a new one from the original prints. The FAA refused to certify what was at the time probably the most reliable airplane in passenger service.

LAST MINUTE FANZINES

THE RELUCTANT FAMULUS.53 from Tom Sadler, 422 W Maple Ave., Adrian, MI 49221-1627, USA. 72 pages and a lovely colour cover by Sheryl Birkenhead. then a variety of items, personal notes, maturity, tussles over traffic tickets, TV, a great Mayhew art folio, children, book & fanzine reviews, an instalment of my autobiography and a whole raft of LOCs. Terrific variety, highly entertaining and only \$2.00 an issue.

FOSFAX.193 This is the O-O of the Falls of Ohio, SF Association, PO Box 37281, Louisville, KY 40233-7281, USA. It runs to 84 mini-printed pages. Loads of assorted reviews, Heinlein dissected, Lockheed's F-104, Movies, Con Rep, travel, fanzines and loadsa LOCs. Terrific value at \$12.00 for 6 issues

KNARLEY KNEWS.78 from Henry & Letha Welch, 1525 16th. Ave.Grafton, WI 53024-2017, USA. 28 pages covering the joysof an Advent Calendar, marriages, the reasons for writing, more of Pattenden's epic cycle ride, reviews and a dollop of LOCs.



NIEKAS.45 from Ed.Meskys, Nickas Pubs. RR.2, Box 63, 322 Whittier Bay, Center Harbor, NH 03226-9708,USA A superb colour cover and no less than 120 pages produced in a manner that would make a professional jealous. This issue is devoted to 'Dark Fantasy' and offers articles, essays, fiction and verse from a scintillating array of contributors. \$19.00 for 4 issues, but well worth it if you're into horror.

VISIONS OF PARADISE.78, Robert Sabella, 24 Cedar Mount Court, Budd Lake, NJ 07828-1023 USA. 36 pages of Con reporting, a personal doings diary, a comprehensive breakdown of three different lists of '100 Best Literary Books' (I'd only read half a dozen of 'em), a one-fanzine review and a lettercol. Light-heartedly serious. Get it for the usual.

SPACE CADET.13 Graeme Cameron, 1855 West 2nd, Ave., Apt.110, Vancouver BC, CANADA V6J 1J1 38 pages of small print (so you get as much as a 44 pager). Graeme tells how he saved a life, A Con trip report with some heavy black photos, a CUFF diary and Balance Sheet, heart-rending reminiscences of trench warfare in WW.I, a review, award winners, two fun items and a LOCcol

STEFANTASY.123 William M.Danner, RD.1, Kennerdell, PA 16374 USA. ERG-sized,14pp, is type-set by hand and crammed with nostalgia on old machinery, engines, boyhood etc., plus LOCs and a lovely piece on fractured English. Nice one.

BANANA WINGS.12 Claire Brialey, 26 Northampton Rd., Croydon, Surrey CR0 7HA and Mark Plummer, 14 Northway Rd., Croydon, Surrey CR0 6JE pp on hunting smorfs, girls on a shopping spree, Rachmaninoff, visiting Swindon, Con report, weaponry, assorted fanzine articles, ditto for SF books and films. Finally a large LOCcol to wind up a handsomely varied issue.

NO AWARD.4 Marty Cantor, 11825 Gilmore St. #105, N.Hollywood, CA 91606, USA 28pp, of personal comment, websites, travelling, a fanzine review, and oddles of LOCs. Nice print, good art, cheerfully written. Nice one.

BARMAID.4 Yvonne Rowse, Evergreen, Halls Farm Lane, Trimpey, Worcs DY12 1NP Personal news and musings,, a Con report, the layers of fandom, Nattering on SF in a bar, a selection of biased PC situations, pub music. Something for everyone and enough argument hooks to keep you busy. Breezy and friendly.

YNGVI IS A LOUSE.55 T.K.F.Weisskopf, Box 130162, Birmingham, AL 35213, USA 20pp FAPA zine with appeal to all. Comment on books, videos, TV-watching exercises, a section of assorted argumentative opinions, Star wars one-liners and some LOCs

OPUNTIA 40.5 & 41, Dale Speirs, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta CANADA T2p[2E7

Unusual page/print layout. Locs, natter on elections, Indexing, postal costs and all sorts of coverage on whatever takes Dale's fancy.