

# ERGONIC

#140

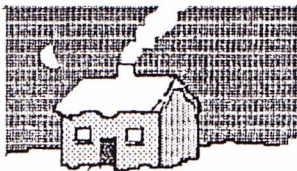
January  
1998

STORIES OF STUPID SCIENCE

QUARTERLY



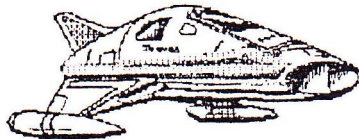
*Season's  
Greetings*



Happy Christmas one and all;  
Let us hope the snow won't fall  
If it does, please not on us  
Or we will start to swear  
and cuss

**ERG 140**  
Quarterly

**JANUARY**  
**1998**



Terry Jeeves  
56 Red Scar Drive  
Scarborough YO12 8RO  
Ph. (01723) 576817

#### MINI-ERGITORIAL

Greetings ERGbuds, first the glad news that on October 3rd.1997, ably assisted by John Hastie, our daughter Sandra (an ERG reader), gave birth to a 7lb.4oz baby girl, Karina Suzanne. All are doing very well though a little sleepless. This is our fifth grandchild and if one in Australia gets cracking we could be great-grandparents any day.

Cover this time is a re-draw of the first issue of Astounding, Jan.1930. I used it before on ERG 83 In July 1983, but I'm running it again to fit in with this issue's DMBL, 'The Pulp'. I'll be re-running similar covers for future instalments. Hope you like 'em.

Now a few pleas for assistance. Does anyone have for sale a copy of a slim poetry book titled STORIES IN VERSE, or who can send me a photocopy of the poem, 'THE FAKENHAM GHOST'? Now specifically to Stateside readers. Are the aircraft mags WINGS and AIRPOWER still in publication? If so, what are the sub rates for overseas and is there anyone out there to whom I could send dollars to have a sub entered? Second, I always welcome your old Stateside Commemorative stamps for my collection. I'm no avid (or expert) collector, but do have sundy albums - 2 of the UK, 2 of Aerospace, and 1 each of the World, the USA and Russia.

Speaking of stamps, the GPO are beating the drum for their marvellous 'new' self-adhesive stamps. Didn't they try this a while back and then withdraw because cancellations could be wiped off ... and Ken Lake please confirm, the idea isn't new, somewhere in one of my albums I have a set of self-adhesives issued around 15 or more years ago by some African state - Sierra Leonmaybe? Mini-Con news. Friday, October 10th., Ron Bennett and I met up at the Forest & Vale hostelry in Pickering for a nosh and natter. We hadn't met for around ten years, so much catching up was in order. Topics ranged acrod old friends, older Cons, magazines, comics and general dollops of "Do you remember ..?" A thoroughly enjoyable outing which we hope to repeat in the future. One spin-off was trading a copy of UNKNOWN to Ron in exchange for EXPLORERES OF THE INFINITE, the saga of SF by Sam Moskowitz. It has given me many happy moments in the reading.

Another excellent read has been, EINSTEIN'S MIRROR by Tony Hey and Patrick Walters. Close on 300, illustration-packed pages telling how Einstein developed his theories as well as the development of modern physical theories, light, time, fields of force, quantum physics, quasars and more. All at a non-mathematical level (though there is an appendix at the rear. Highly recommended to all interested in the subjects.

Still selling off my collection. Send SAE for lists, (say which). 1, pbs at £1.00, 2, pbs at £1.20 3, pbs at £1.50 upwards. 4, Hardcover. 5, Magazines Postage at cost.

In case you hadn't noticed, the next issue of ERG (April 1998) will be its 39th. Anniversary. The big question is, will ERG (will I) be with you for its 40th. The only way to find out is to keep on LOCCing.

Niggie department. Isn't it a shame that in the process of evolving into a rich linguistic tapestry, our language has ditched or defaced many good old words and meanings? One can no longer refer to 'a queer chap' or a 'gay fellow' without raising the 'nudge/wink' response. People get 'indecently assaulted', but can one be decently assaulted? We get 'live' TV broadcasts, but have you ever seen a dead one? Announcers 'take you over' without moving you an inch. A pet hate is someone who hears a doorbell or phoning and says, 'I'll get it'. I have yet to see someone return carrying door or telephone. Even worse is the character answering a 'phone with the query, "Who is this?" If they don't know who they are, how do they expect the caller to know? Particularly irritating are the non-religious types who frequently appeal to "My God", not to mention those overworked cliches, "I don't believe what I'm hearing" and "I can hannel it". How's your geography? Do you know where to find that place Random where all the bombs were dropped - then again, I gather that many people are at Loggerheads, but where is it - and is Coventry packed with all those who get sent there? No doubt about it, we have a rapidly evolving language, the catch is will it evolve into incomprehensibility?

The great Millennium Computat crash due when the chip tries to shift the date to 2000. It seems to me that I can avoid that problem by simply back-dating my PC to, say 1990 or suchlike. Yes, I know that means misdating items, but since I never use the dating facility anyway, that's no great loss. Do any of you expert computer buffs out there foresee any technical error in my plan?

METAPHYSICAL MUBINGS.1 We tend to disbelieve in the possibility of a 'sixth sense' and deny the existence of ESL, telepathy, dowsing and the like. After all, what hard evidence is there for anything beyond, hearing, touching, tasting, seeing and smelling? But what about the homing senses shown by birds, dogs and fish for examples? All make fantastic return trips for hundreds of miles. A small example, when my son moved and took his dog, in a car, five miles across the city to a new home, it quickly returned to its former home over a through city route it had never walked. I wonder what sense guided that.

METAPHYSICAL MUSINGS.2 Schrodinger's cat in a box with a lethal device, may or may not be dead. Seemingly it exists in a limbo until the box is opened and the 'probabilty wave' collapses. Suppose we put an observer in the box, does he exist in limbo until its opening?

How about people in the research complex, are they in Schrodinger's never-never limbo to those outside until the news of the box's opening leaks out? It makes yer fink.

And as our ship sinks slowly beneath the Corful, it only remains to say 'Farewell' and have a Merry Christmas followed by an equally happy New Year.



Season's Greetings

# The Pulp



My introduction to American SF came very early indeed. I was ten or eleven when I was given a copy of Hugo Gernsback's WONDER STORIES from around 1931 or 1932. The cover still sticks in my mind even though it was probably the only pulp cover of that era which your maiden aunt Emmelina could have carried in public without blushing. The cover featured hordes of small red, blue and yellow dots romping all over the front like a king-size dose of measles. Inside, a Gernsback editorial, 'The Wonders Of Colour', explained how crafty printers would use thousand of much smaller dots to produce Frank R. Paul's colour paintings. Hugo told us that from a distance, all the different coloured dots combined to create the impression of far more hues than the original three. I remember taking a magnifying glass to those big dots to see if they were composed of even tinier ones - you can never be sure with printers.

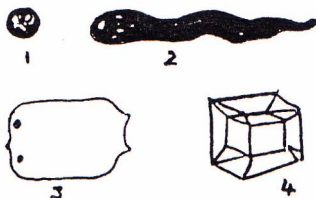
Of the stories inside, unlike pickled onions, only one comes back. 'The Pool Of Life' by Arthur G. Stangland told of explorers trapped by aliens in an underground cavern. It may have been on another world, or merely somewhere in the Amazon basin - in those days, that was another world. The captives were plonked on plinths and a quick-setting, transparent plastic was poured over them. Ghu knows why the explorers stood still for this treatment. Probably they were under the baleful influence of one of those sinister Oriental (or South American) poisons known only to thousands of natives, Fu Manchu and all master criminals. Somehow, by exerting their manly American muscles all the explorers escaped - save for their trusty Negro servant who remained as an overgrown paperweight.

By this time, I was a voracious reader, and I was reading every book and magazine I could acquire. I was also a devotee of the weird tales of Edgar Allen Poe and H.G. Wells. WONDER STORIES was soon followed by various other titles. Then came the day when Woollies yielded up a couple of copies of the 1932 pulp magazine, ASTOUNDING STORIES. (In those days, they cost 3d each, now they change hands at £20 or more a copy - if you can find them). Here was Wells-type fiction by the yard. Adventures in strange places, on other planets, in other dimensions, back and forth in time, as well as terrific illustrations depicting fantastic machines, battles, in space, and strange creatures, robots and mutated humans.

From that time on, I became hooked on SF, and on American magazines in general. My collection of ASTOUNDING, WONDER, AND AMAZING began to grow - as did my files of G-8 AND HIS BATTLE ACES, DOC SAVAGE, DAREDEVIL ACES, and FLYING ACES (which boasted to be 'three magazines in one - fact, fiction and modelling'. Now and then I acquired odd copies of Gernsback's 'SCIENCE AND MECHANICS', COLLÈGE HUMOR and MODEL AIRPLANE NEWS, as well as stacks of POPULAR MECHANICS, and MODERN MECHANIX. Sadly. Later, in a fit of economy, I sold the lot for a pittance, save for the ASTOUNDING, I kept those. Put on the market today, that collection would bring in a small fortune.

The American pulp magazines deserve a book to themselves, and indeed, quite a few such volumes have been written. The story goes that ships returning from the U.S.A. with light cargoes needed ballast to keep them from bobbing around like corks. Rather than load up with sand, rubble or non-paying loads, they used huge bales of pulp magazines. On arrival in the U.K., the magazines were sold to news chains and distributed haphazardly around the country. This meant you couldn't place an order for any particular title, but had to wander around all available newsagents to see what they had on offer.

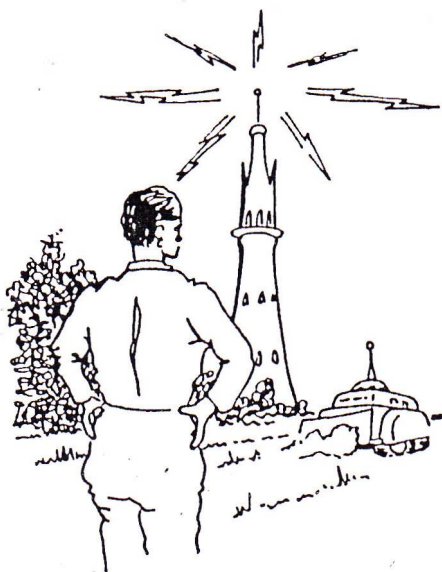
Elsewhere in that first WONDER STORIES was a Science Discussion column wherein some twit asked, "What is the fourth dimension?" Apparently it kept cropping up in stories, but couldn't be found on his tape measure. Such a question might have caused lesser mortals to quail, or even chicken out, but not Uncle Hugo. With a crude diagram, he set out to unscrew the inscrutable in such a manner as to thoroughly bamboozle his readers. Since Hugo used a rather chubby worm to illustrate a 'one dimensional line', it didn't help a great deal.



WONDER also featured the tales of whacky inventor, van Manderpootz. He usually tried his ideas out on a Bertie-Wooster-like nephew. 'Pygmalion's Spectacles' had him fall hopelessly in love. In 'The Ideal', Manderpootz anticipated the anti-car lobby with a machine which, if offered the photo of a car, would chew the picture to bits. On the cover it was a giant machine roaming New York's streets and eating every car in sight. Ralph Nader would have loved it. Another cover illustrating 'Dream's End' showed a battleship hanging upside down over New York (everything happened either there or else along the Amazon). Our Universe was merely a dream in a superbeing's mind, when he awoke, things fell apart.

Around this time, I acquired a stack of coverless issues of AMAZING STORIES and SCIENCE WONDER STORIES. I got these literary gems by unloading a pile of old 2d 'bloods' on an unwary friend. I carried my booty home to a spell of blissful reading. He walked home to a thick ear when his elder brother discovered that his cherished SF collection had been traded away in exchange for a bundle of ADVENTURE, WIZARD, HOTSPUR and the like. It served the blighter right for having torn off all those covers so he could carry the magazine in public.

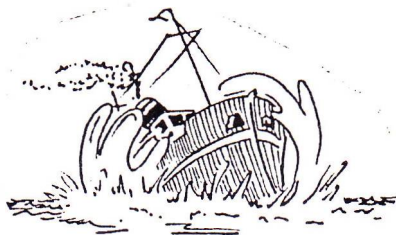
However, the stories were intact. Through them I met many strange people and places. Such as a man born on Jupiter, so strong he could throw a screwdriver with the speed of a rifle bullet. When his spaceship was boarded by pirates, he had the thing in his hand, so he immediately shot them with it. In another yarn, strangely prophetic, an 'air detective' investigated the mysterious crashes involving high speed aeroplanes. He traced the trouble to their reaching the speed of sound and hitting some sort of barrier! (Not bad for 1930). I often wondered if that was what caused my model aeroplanes to come apart in the air.



'Electropolis' by Gotfried Von Hanstein, was about an all-electric Utopia hidden in a remote jungle. Since everybody knew electricity was the in-thing, this story had oodles of it. Multi-gearred machines, radio-controlled ploughs and harvesters romped merrily beneath towers busily radiating electricity. The inevitable jodhpur-clad hero stood in the foreground, whilst just out of sight, lurked the nubile heroine clad only in a flimsy Grecian robe. She was waiting for nastiness to develop so that the hero could rescue her from a horrible death beneath a pile of newly harvested cornflakes.

Another favourite yarn from this era dealt with an inept scientist who created protoplasmic life in a test-tube. It started off by scoffing unwary flies, then when he happened to lean on the stuff it had a go at his hand. He decided to kill it off, but the gunge shocks and even being fried by

thrived on sundry acids, high voltage a blowlamp. However, the scientist discovered that tiny bits could be eaten by his pet goldfish, so he dumped the mass down the drain so that it would end up being eaten by the fish in the sea. Months later, ships began to vanish - his creation had eaten all the fish and was moving on to ships! It was finally destroyed when the scientist injected himself with cancer cells and jumped into it.



'Bridge Of Light' by A. Hyatt Verrill was probably inspired by the argument that if light can have pressure, then it must have mass and substance. Get enough of the stuff and it would be solid enough to walk on. In the story, on every full moon, a bridge of light formed across a bottomless cavern deep in the Amazon jungle.

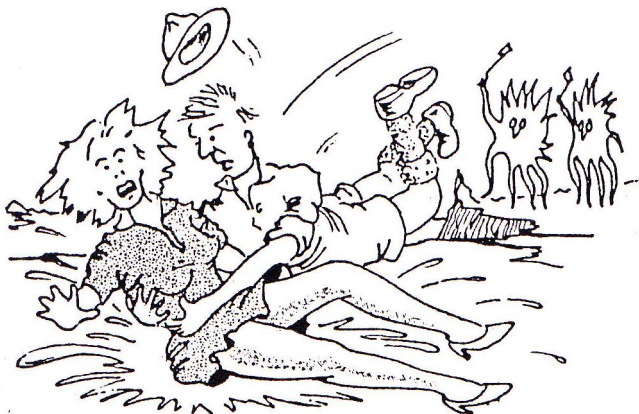
Our hero happened along at the right time, nipped over and found a lost city, crammed with jewels and English speaking Incas ruled by (you'd never guess) a beautiful white girl. Naturally, he shot the Indians, grabbed girl and jewels, then escaped over the bridge before it went out again. Verrill used this setting (and similar plots) in all his yarns, maybe he had been raised by an anaconda or else artist Frank R Paul could only



illustrate people in jodhpurs. All this convinced me that South America teemed with giant snakes, poisonous spiders, blowpipe toting Indians, lost cities and plenty of beautiful white beauties waiting to be rescued. Many an SF story featured an ex-college boy, down on his luck, and desperate enough to undertake any risk for money. Such men were the inevitable prey of the numerous mad scientists who prowled the city streets seeking human guinea pigs. All such scientists came fully equipped with mighty laboratories and beautiful daughters. These women provided a mild, watery and totally sexless love interest and secondly, they were obliged to wander off and get themselves caught by Fu Manchu, alien monsters or some other form of nastiness. This in turn allowed the hero to come along and rescue them from pursuing aliens, or whatever. What really irritated me was the sort of thing that went...

"Hank scooped the girl's recumbent body into his arms. Lungs bursting, he raced across the scant five miles of desert, hotly pursued by the enraged Wotnots."

Along the way the hero would have enough head of steam to knock out half a dozen of the pursuers before swinging one-handed (the



other hand was busy holding the girl) across a crocodile-infested river. If any of you have ever tried a spot of lady-lifting, you will know it is a back-breaking chore just to get her off the deck. To do this and RUN! No way, unless your middle name is Superman. The best you can manage is a wobbly legged stagger before your legs fold three ways from Sunday and you go splat on the ground - usually in the only puddle within ten miles. Nevertheless, any pulp hero worth his salt could not only perform this minor miracle but also pick off half a dozen of the opposition with his trusty raygun while doing so.

Ken F Slater

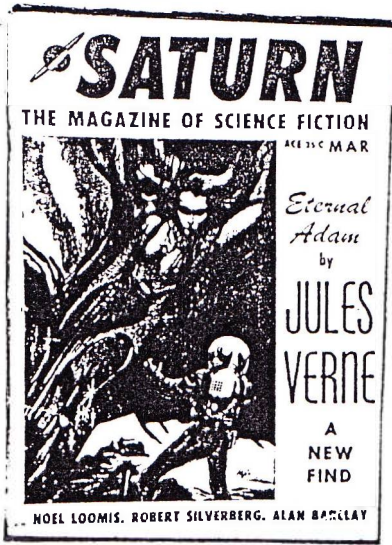
When I went out some time ago I was intending my next discourse should include a few comments on what happened in May, and things of a like nature. But we have moved on, the bloom has faded, and so far as I can see there is not much difference in the overall management (except debate and disagreement are - er - disallowed. The last shower overindulged in those activities, I believe). Still, I try to avoid "party" politics; anyone wants to know my reasons for this can take a look at my page in *FRONTIER CROSSINGS*. But I digress (can one digress before one starts?), I told Terry I was intending to say a few things about days and events long gone\*. But first a more recent item - Vinc's comment about Calgary, bookshops, etc. Slight mismatch here; there was an American to whom I was talking and who was suprised by small towns in Britain supporting bookshops; I didn't know where he came from (hence the deserts/swamps); Calgary enters the confusion from Dale R.Speirs' letter in the same ish of ERG, #137; the American and I were talking about "small" towns; population 10-20 thousand. Dale was refering to the remarks in ERG #136, and Terry sent me an extract before I wrote in #137. I still don't know where the American came from (he wasn't a fan) but I am reasonably confident it wouldn't have been Calgary...at least, not in this time-line, Vinc. I thought I'd explained about the ellipsis; I do not use it conventionally, to indicate an omission, but to indicate a change of direction or alternate. I'm no stickler for convention...just Cons.

Recently I read or heard something about a new, highly expensive road system which will enable buses, delivery vehicles, and such to be programmed to stop and drop (or pick up) at preselected points. Seems a bit late to replace the milkman's horse. But we are very good at replacing cheap and workable systems with expensive ones that don't prove quite as efficient, and cost more, than the labour they save. Street cleaning is, I think, an example I've mentioned in this or a similiar column, and this year I've had occasion to look closely at "hedging and ditching". If you live in an area with grass verges you'll probably have noted that the grass is trimmed by a large mobile set of adjustable hair clippers, mounted on wheels. The unavoidable snag is that this leaves a batch of nettles and other assorted growth at the foot of the telephone pole, or whatever else is erected at the roadside. So either the really tidy-minded council has still to employ people with hand-held power strimmers, or let that small section grow wild and suffer complaints from the public. Around here we have a new gadget - in the fenland a lot of grass verges have ditch-drains that run straight into dykes or streams. An annual occupation for autumn is the clearing of the ditch-drains so that the rain can run straight off the road. Used to offer temporary employment. Now the work is done by a tractor with a drill scoop; takes a hunk of turf and soil about two foot wide and foot deep out of the verge and tips it out alongside the trough it cuts. Neat. But a good rain will wash the spoil back in, and sometimes the cut isn't quite long enough to reach the dyke. Saves labour, which then has to get support from another job, or out of the public funds. Usually out of the public funds, I guess, as 'hedging and ditching' of that standard is pretty low casual work, and if it was all you could get, there can't be much else for you. On the other hand you can get a course in 'hedging and ditching' - the real quality stuff, that will show you how to cut and bend, strengthen, bind... This is, natch, costly and for land management. Sometimes, I think we got our wiring crossed somewhere, and there should be a complaints procedure. But not, it seems, in this universe. I don't know what anything in this column has to do with science-fantasy. Not much; I'll try and do better next time. I think I had a point, but it got blunted.

On background noise, what happened to "ribbet, ribbet" - the frogspeak - that also served as a "vocal white noise"? Actually, I think there are several of these, different people, different favourites. \*Great digression. K.F.S.



# SATURN



The first issue of SATURN was dated March 1957. The magazine held six stories, had 130 digest pages, cost 35c and was edited by Robert C. Sproul. Cover and interior illustrations were by Giunta, the cover depicting a spaceman admiring an overlarge but seductively clad female.

THE CHAOS SALIENT Noel Loomis, Captain Rockman must find the key to navigating the Maelstrom, but who is the mysterious, shape-changing stranger and who is a spy for the alien Snakes? A rather hack-written, pot-boiling space opera.

FATHER MAGE Robert Silverberg, The Resident Governor on Malok III sets out to oppress the natives in order to make them reject him. The theory being that that will be good for 'em in the long run. Rather lightweight waffle.

A JACKO FOR MCCOY Alan Barclay. An ace space pilot has such a long and hectic tussle with an alien fighter that when he finally wins the battle he unexpectedly holds back from administering the coup de grace.

THE BRIDEY MURPHY WAY Paul Brandts, an old man visits the House of the Second Life on Venus and encounters strange visions. I'm not sure why, or what happens in this one.

ETERNAL ADAM Jules Verne, In a far future, humans can find no link with their past - until they discover history is cyclic and civilisations have risen and fallen many times before.

VISITOR'S BOOK John Brunner, when hostile aliens arrive to conquer a defenceless Earth they are frightened off by a giant mock-up space battleship full of false gimmicks which they can't understand. I seem to remember wartime IFF devices had similar dummy wiring to fool the Germans if they captured one.

SATURN managed to survive for five issues, but judging by the pot-boiling yarns in this first issue, it's rather surprising that it lasted that long. Without reading through the other four, I can't say if it improved. Even with names like Verne, Brunner and Silverberg, I'm afraid the plot ideas and developments didn't match up to the writing skills.

# LUCK



Superstitions are peculiar things; mainly totally irrational beliefs, but a few have some sort of logic behind them. Walking under a ladder supporting a painter happily sloshing away isn't sensible,

it could see you collect a paint-covered noggin and even an unoccupied one could possibly slip and fall on you. The belief that it was unlucky to be the third to light a cigarette from the same match is reputed to stem from WWI. A sniper would be alerted by the first flame, prepare to fire as the second man lit up and fire as the third was inhaling. Definitely unlucky for him.

Expecting bad luck from spilling the salt might seem sheer nuttiness, but may have originated in the Middle Ages when salt was precious and limited to nobles at high table (hence 'Not worth his salt' if you sat lower down). If you spilled the stuff, a miserly Lord of The Manor might well suggest a head amputation.

People who strenuously try to avoid stepping on cracks in the pavement may seem bonkers, but on the other hand, they also avoid being tripped up by a raised paving stone. Likewise refusing to pass anyone on a staircase helps to avoid being precipitated down the steps. There's an old superstition that it is unlucky to open an umbrella indoors. Daft? It was probably quite sensible if you lived in those bygone days when every room was cluttered with hazards in the form of pottery, flower vases and stuffed animal lurking in glass cases; all waiting patiently for some brainless broily-swinger to send 'em flying. Some people leaving a house and suddenly returning for something forgotten, believe tht to avoid nastiness, they must sit down for a moment before leaving again. Well that way there's less chance of knocking something over in the rush.

All those superstitions may be said to have some shred of sense behind them, but most lack even a trace of justification. What good luck can you get from finding a four-leaf clover, crossing your fingers in tense moments, saying 'rabbits' on the first day of a month, or touching a chunk of timber at an awkward time? Conversely, where is the bad luck in breaking a mirror, shooting an albatross or having a black cat meander across your path? OK, careless clots could cut themselves on the mirror, blow holes in their ship's sails or trip over the maggy.

Some of these dozy ideas can have unexpected side effects. I well remember attending a New Year party held by my friend Sid. He had just moved into a newly-built house and was of the old school whereby the 'front' door was only used on very special occasions such as to admit visiting Royalty or to escape an avalanche. All normal, day to day entry was via the back door. Sid was a rather superstitious cove who believed strongly in improving his luck for the coming year by that gormless ritual of 'first footing'. To the uninitiated, This meant that as soon as Jan.1st arrived, one had to admit a dark-haired person from the front door and allow him to poke the fire. (Nowadays, I suppose he'd turn up the Central Heating). This done, the household could expect dollops of good luck for the

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rest of the year. Sid also believed in the idea that you didn't count as a visitor unless you went out by one door and returned via another. Thus was the stage set for ordering a year's good luck. At one minute to midnight, Sid (who had jet-black hair) left by the back door and in a mini-blizzard, toddled round to the front. Ten seconds after the midnight stroke, he tried to enter via the front door. Panic! being new timber, it had swelled with the damp and was stuck. By dint of banging and shoving we got the door open and left it that way whilst Sid duly went and poked the fire. By the time that had been done, the front door had swollen even more and absolutely refused to shut. In the early hours of January 1st., Sid had to dig out his tool-box, take the door off its hinges and plane away large chunks of wood before he could get the thing to close. Not my idea of good luck for a New Year.

How I avoided being saddled by superstitions, I shall never know. I was brought up in a household where a broken mirror indicated seven years bad luck, spilling salt meant you risked some horrible doom - such as an eyeful of the stuff as a pinch was thrown over a shoulder. Mother was a firm believer in the theory that crossed knives brought bad luck, that cutlery must be covered in a thunderstorm, seeing the new moon through glass was bad, but turning one's money over at such a time was lucky. Maybe it was just sheer cussedness which made sure I never believed a word of it.

The number 7 is supposed to be lucky, but 13 is to be avoided. Possibly because of table arrangements at 'The Last Supper'. Solution, never play Russian Roulette on Friday 13th. and remember to take down your Christmas decorations by 'Twelfth Night'.

If you want to arrange your own luck, you can't beat the routine practised by my long-gone friend Ted. Once a week, Ted would toddle down to his local club, change a fiver into a load of tanners. (6d in old money and 2.5p to you decimalised youngsters). He would then proceed to feed 'em into the voracious one-armed bandit. Naturally, the thing was rigged to pay out fairly often in order to lure the punters. So Ted's fiver usually brought back around three quid. This duly went back into the machine and perhaps produced another pound. When this too had vanished down the slot, all Ted's gambling money had gone. Bad luck? Maybe, but when Ted got home he would quite truthfully say to his wife, "I won four quid on the fruit machine tonight". Perfectly true, but spurious statistics when his real tally was a £5 loss. That's what I call making one's own luck.

Speaking of luck, once and only once did I have a bet on the Derby. That was the only time I have ever put money on a horse. Naturally, being me, the event wasn't all that straightforward. I was ambling idly to school and dutifully kicking hell out of every grass sod by the pavement edge as I did so. One kick dislodged a rather battered penny. I pocketed the coin and carried on to school where I was accosted by two sixth formers. "Buy a ticket for a draw on the Grand National, it's only a penny". Greatly daring, I hazarded my new-found coin, drew a slip of paper and to the annoyance of the two entrepreneurs unfolded the name of the favourite, 'April 5th'. A few hours later, the sixth-formers sought me out and handed me a whole shilling. Good luck? Maybe, but I reckon I was even luckier that they actually paid me my winnings.

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## HAWES

Hawes is a pleasant little grey\_stoned market town situated in north\_west Yorkshire, some seventy miles north of the belt of multi\_racial cities which owe their growth to the "dark satanic" woollen and cotton mills which grew out of the industrial revolution and the availability of the coal and water for power, the correct climate and cheap labour. The belt stretches from Bradford in the east through Leeds and over the Pennine range to the cluster of Lancashire towns like Bolton, Blackburn and Burnley.

The industrial grime which might once have been... and in some cases still is... found has passed by North Yorkshire, correctly written with capitals for the region is now a county in its own right. This is a farming area. Here there be not tygers, but cattle, sheep, wheat, barley and... back to Hawes...excellent Wensleydale cheese.

Hawes itself, being on high ground in the Pennines, is a centre for walkers and boasts a cafe which was once a temperance hotel (Just the place for a convention). There is a nearby waterfall which is a tourist attraction and life seems to mov ealong at a pleasant, reasonable and unhurried pace.

I first heard of the Hawes secondhand bookshop from a radio programme which I happened upon by accident. The narrator had been on a walking tour of the region and was recounting his experiences. He'd visited the castles at Richmond, Middleham and Castle Bolton near Leyburn and had moved west to Hawes. He went into raptures about the secondhand bookshop there.

There was, he said, no assistants either to help one choose a book or to move on anyone who had been browsing overlong. There was no staff there at all. Only books.

And they were not priced. The customer simply paid what he thought the book he wished to purchase was worth. There was a box on the table in which one placed one's money,

The narrator pre\_empted the thought which came to mind about the dealers' rooms at various conventions operating on the same lines by extolling the honesty of the shop's customers and advocating that the bookshops in the Charing Cross area of London might consider working on the same principle. The owner of the shop in Hawes had been interviewed by the programme's narrator. He could see nothing unusual about this method of business.

I beat my way north to Hawes the first opportunity I had, a sixty mile drive which took me through Masham, the home of Theakston's ales, Middleham, Wensley itself (the pub there is Jack Charlton's local) and past the lovely Aysgarth Falls, more than worth a visit in their own right.

It didn't take me long to find the bookshop. After all, how large is Hawes? It's on street level, under the offices of Scott's, the local solicitors.

The window was grimy and the shop interior dark and dingy. There was no interior light and the one room smelled of damp. There were books on dirty, undusted shelving, on the floor and on the table where stood the honesty box,

It didn't take me long, either, to examine the books. They were all damp, with warped bindings and curling, yellowing pages. A small spider crawled across a damp\_buckled paperback copy of Ian Fleming's Dr.No( "with slight foxing, otherwise a very desirable item"..?), I idly leafed through a Hutchinson Cheap Edition of Cold Comfort Farm which fell apart in my hands.

I examined the honesty box. There was a money slot in the lid. The hasp was padlocked. I shook the box. No rattle, no sound at all. The box was empty...

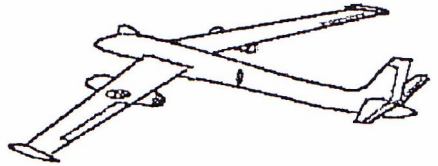
Or could it be that someone had visited the shop shortly before me and had emptied the shop of all that was good, clean and of some value, jamming the little box full of folding papermoney?

Perhaps, just perhaps, the owners have restocked the place with another glittering array of goodies. I just can't wait to get up there to find out.

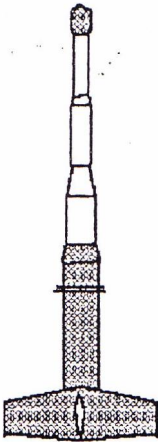
— Ron Bennett

# The X-16 and X-17

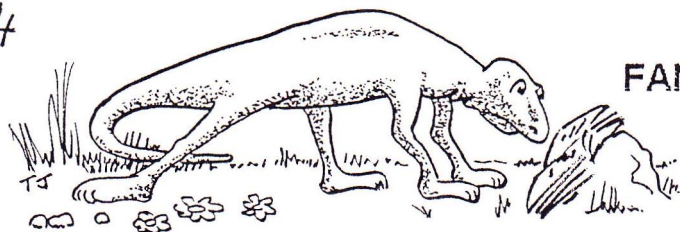
The Bell X-16 was designed for high altitude reconnaissance. Twin jet engines and a slightly swept wing of very high aspect ratio span of 114 feet gave it a predicted operational radius of 1600 miles at an altitude of 70,000ft and a speed of 550mph.. In 1954/55,



this performance was considered to make it immune from interception by current defence systems. Carrying four wide angle cameras and electronic surveillance gear, it was to photograph a strip 50 miles wide. The design called for an in-line bicycle undercarriage with a single nose wheel and retractable outriggers on the wings. 28 aircraft were ordered but in 1955 with the first machine nearing completion, it was gazumped by Lockheed flying their U-2 and the contract was cancelled. without a single X-16 being completed.



The Lockheed X-17 was a missile, not an aircraft, but I mention it here to avoid gaps in the numerical run. The rocket was a 40ft., three-stage, solid fuel design with the aim of investigating missile re-entry and testing designs and materials for this purpose. Stage 1 was spin-stabilised by smaller rockets and boosted the X-17 to a ten mile altitude, whereupon it would tip over, and stages 2 and 3 would accelerate it back into the atmosphere at around Mach 15. Several smaller scale models were also constructed and some 38 test flights made.



## FANZINES

THE RELUCTANT FAMULUS.49, TOM SADLER, 422 W.MAPLE AVE., ADRIAN, MI 48221, USA. A massive 74 pages crammed with discussion sparking items - the problems of cults, SF Superstars, SF and academe, books v CD ROMS, trip report, book & fmz reviews, time travel, an instalment of my own 'Wartime Daze', writing SF, some fiction, coping with ants, good artwork and a whacking great LOCcol as well as other goodies. For 'the usual', artwork or articles. Highly recommended.

CHALLENGER.6 Guy Lillian, Box 53092, New Orleans, LA 70153-3092, USA

A massive 90 pages crammed with goodies, Baen's Convention speech, Warner on his 'Spaceways', Mallardi's scooter adventure, a piece on odd mail items, the Devil, the Lynch trip to Russia, Photopages, Fmz Reviews, LOCs as well as photopages, other pieces and excellent art. Get it for the usual and enjoy a really top-notch fanzine.

OPUNTIA.34 Dale Speirs, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, CANADA T2P 2E7

24 Sheets of side-folded A4 holding a wide range of brief but good, fmz reviews, plenty of LOCs and by far and away the best fanzine item in a coon's age is a series on the origin, history, use and artform of rubber hand-stamps. Made me decide I must get around to having a Soggy stamp made. Very good ish. \$3.00 or 'the usual'.

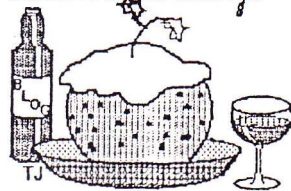
THE GEIS LETTER.40 Richard E.Geis, PO Box 11408, PORTLAND, OR 97211-0408, USA. 16 Pages of comment on Princess Di, education, book & TV reviews, Bosnia, the TWA 800 crash, sundry quotes and a load of LOCs. If you like a good argument, there's plenty of fodder here.

ODDS & SODS Derek Pickled, 44 ROOLEY LANE, BANKFOOR, BRADFORD, W.YORKS BD5 8LX Ten lovely pages of weird, wonderful and amusing clips culled from newspapers and magazines. I don't know if Derek operates 'for the usual', but you can try.

SERCON POPCULT LITCRIT FANMAG and THE ROYAL SWISS NAVY GAZETTE.1 Garth Spencer, Box 15335, VMPO, VANCOUVER, BC V6B 5B1, CANADA. Two ERG-sized, 20pp mags covering fanzine reviews, Cons, Locs, personal notes, fannish nerds, general fannishness and some tongue-in-cheek maths. Nice mags with good covers. For the usual.

OUTWORLDS.68 Bill Bowers, 4651 Glenway Ave., Cincinnati, OHIO 45238-4503. USA. 64 pages crammed with LOCs on earlier issues, good artwork and items by Sam Moskowitz on Fenton Ash, Bill Rotsler on making skin flicks (in detail), also Bill Breiding, Bill Wolfenbarger, Bob Smith, etc. plus loadsa natter on the Internet. Get it for \$5.00 or the usual.

*Season's Greetings*



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VINCE CLARKE, 16 WENDOVER WAY. WELLING, KENT DA16 2BN  
 SF Plots, most of the simple plots have gone. No one now builds a rocket ship in the back garden. Communist plans for a world take-over are a bit passe. Giant insects, hollow Earths, mysterious Shangri La's, invasion from the Moon, the swamps of Venus - it's a long, long list. The passage of time has eliminated much, but if you're willing to construct a proper outline you can set your story in another star system or a galaxy far away. This sometimes involves an elaborate sub-structure, so the author is unwilling to use it for just one story (hence the mammoth series on the bookshelves), but stories are still being written. On the question of abortion (another good article), I've always thought that self-consciousness should be the over-riding factor which determines life. Otherwise Life, as exhibited by ants, worms, fish etc. should be sacred - a logical extension, held I believe by some Buddhist sects. I'd agree with you, let the mother decide. @ Good points, I think you're right. Go a step further - are slime molds, plants etc. sacrosanct as they too exhibit Life and so should not be killed? +@

ALAN BURNS, 19 THE CRESCENT, KING'S RD. STH., WALLSEND-ON-TYNE NE28 7RE  
 Comics, I am still growling with rage when, on the recommendation of a newspaper critic I bought a copy of the Dandy. A decent comic has been turned into a humourless sunch of political correctness. Desperate Dan and his cowpals have been replaced by a single cowboy mother and her daughter. Lord Snooty is gone, the Bash Street Kids are polite little darlings YEUK! But in general one can still see a bit of realism. Judge Dredd for example and you do find the odd comic worth reading. Comic strips in the newspaper are often worthy though I'm just waiting for Garfield the cat to be Doctoroed. Re your excellent drawings, Daidy Mae always showed much more of her décolletage. @ Hadn't you heard? Under sexual equality one is not allowed to exhibit physical differences. +@

Re a plane to do Mach 6, very nice but what about the little old lady facing her first flight? @ Motion is relative, given gentle acceleration and without seeing things whizzing by, how can she tell between Mach 6 and 30mph? +@

FRED SMITH, FLAT 1/3, 15 MANSION HOUSE GARDENS, GLASGOW G41 3DP, SCOTLAND  
 DMBL on American comics struck a chord. I remember Snokey Stover, The Katzenjammer Kids, Toonerville Trolley etc. Did you see the early Harvey Kurtzman MAD comics which lampooned most of these? @ I had a slew of 'em but lost 'em in a house move. I still have the early pbs which did send-ups, but went off MAD with the later, Don Martin stuff. +@ I have vague recollections of the JESTER, but none of the BULLSEYE. Apart from MODERN BOY I read a few issues of the MAGNET but the adventures of Harry Wharton and chums paled beside Captain Justice, Biggles and Co. They paled even more when I discovered WONDER, ASTOUNDING and the rest of the pulps. Incidentally, I have several BRE UNKNOWNS if anyone wants to make an offer.

MARK COULTER, 41A GLANTON HOUSE, EDENDALE AVENUE, BLYTH, NORTHUMBERLAND NE24 5QF  
 I agree with what you say about plots in SF. Not that I read a lot of SF, mainly Fantasy; all that about science tends to make my eyes glaze over but I do try to understand it all. @ I get that way at times +@ I can get away with Star Trek and most stories hich most dedicated hard SF fan class as soft, for a wide audience, but I enjoy reading them because some have quite good strong plots and characters. Beside which, have we proved that tachyons exist the way they do in the TV and films today, or is it just all theories? Had a good laugh and a wince at the sections on plastics and cartons. The old ring pulls on canned drinks used to be a nightmare before the new ones came out. The foil bags of crisps are just as bad as the old ones.

KEN CHESLIN, 10 CONEY GREEN, STOURBRIDGE, W.MIDLANDS DY8 1LA

I remember FILM FUN -- better than CHIPS etc., in fact I don't think I've heard more than a mention of most of these comics. I must have 'come in' as most of these were 'going out'. Apart from FILM FUN, of which I don't think I was a serious reader, I recall the DANDY and the BEANO. My mainstays were the WIZARD, HOTSPUR, ROVER and ADVENTURE, with SCRAMBLE later on, and a few EAGLES towards the end of my comic reading days. I did see, and I suppose this was around the end of the war via American troops, some American comics, Capt. Marvel etc. At least one must have featured Mandrake the magician & Lothar as I've a fairly clear mind's eye recollection of them. I have never seen more than glimpses of L'il Abner or the Katzenjammers, which is more than I can say about the others you mention. In your diatribe re crisps, milk etc., you forgot to mention Oxo/Bovril cubes. I've never managed to open one without getting crumbs all over the place. Then there are shirts and the very dangerous corned-beef tins as I can testify having had to rush my wife to hospital when she cut her hand on one.

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

Re Right...and Wrong? I'd say we've only had to wrestle with problems of life and death since we became a civilised society. There were never such problems in the past; when old people became a burden to the tribe, they were abandoned to the jungle (or left out on the ice as with the Eskimos). Babies that were surplus to requirements or with defects were left out on hillsides, Spartan style. Now we look after the elderly and the dying; encourage defect-laden babies to fight for life, and it gives me some hope for humanity that we can debate or agonise over such questions instead of simply applying the instant solutions of the past.  $\theta$  I suspect some people would suggest it right now, were it not for the fact that eventually, they too will age.  $\theta$

As for School For Survival, have you never had the benefits of a Swiss Army Knife? We needn't worry about children, it's us adults who can't cope with modern packaging. One piece of evidence must be child-proof caps on pills and medicine bottles. You must have heard how they defeated dotting grandparents, only to have the the grandchild remove them in less than a second.

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

Sunday funnies. I love those old funny sections. today's versions are totally and sadly insipid, whereas around the mid-forties to the late forties there was an exultant and heroic sweep about the different strips, with some good, strong story lines and some excellent artwork. I'm a little surprised you didn't mention either Tarzan or Prince Valiant  $\theta$  Beautifully drawn but I wasn't interested in the story lines.  $\theta$  Both were presented with care and attention, not only to detail, but with an attempt at a balanced and pleasing presentation.

Sardine tins. I avoid the traditional tag type in favour of the round tins which can be opened with an ordinary opener. My own bete-noir is the corned beef tin. Ten times

out of eight (huh?), when I've got it home I find I have a tin without its little opener key - even if I made sure one was attached when I picked up the tin. There is some special device which, between store and home, disintegrates the key. Even when I manage to hang on to the key, it goes off line and I'm left with a tin only one-third open and a long spindle of razor-sharp metal guaranteed to shred thumb and fingers. Great Fun!



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