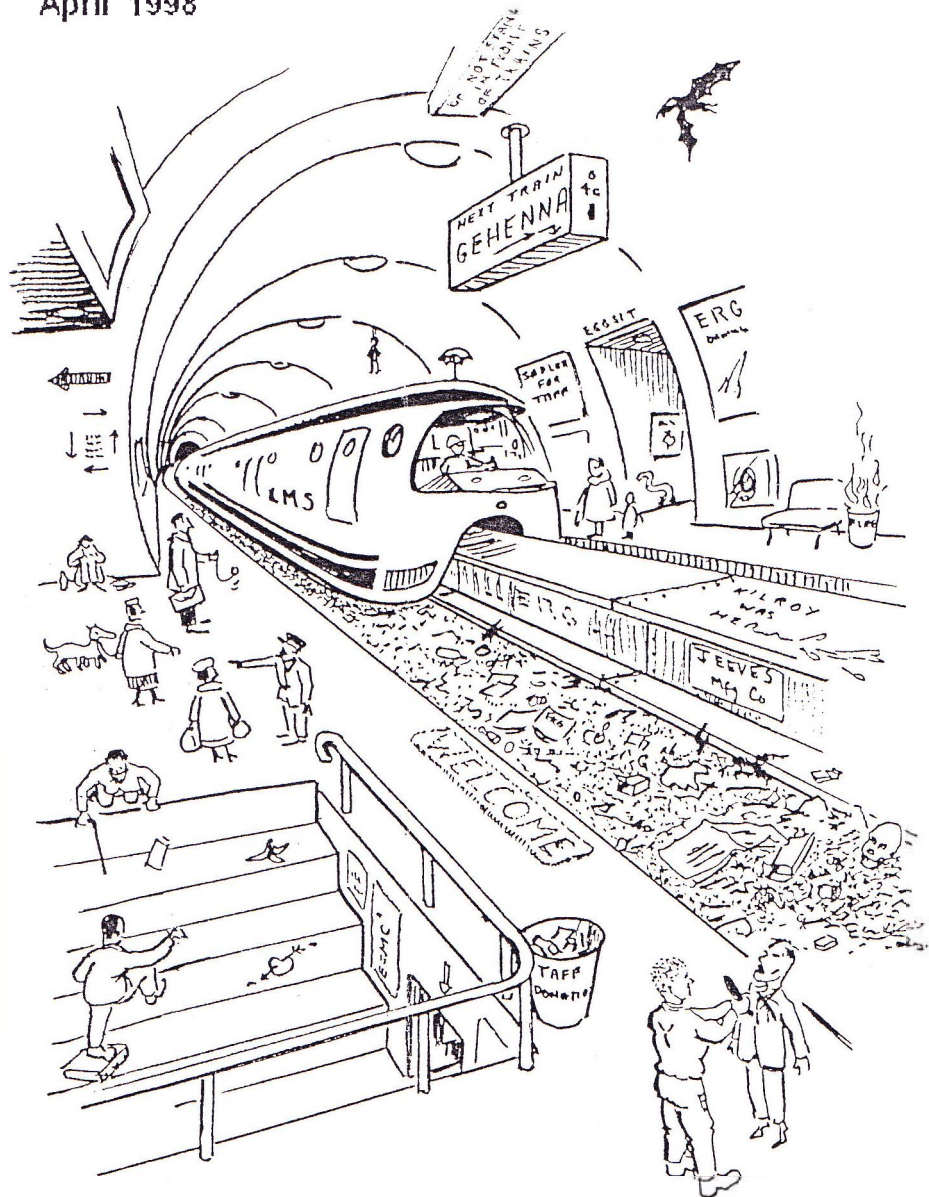


ERG 141
QUARTERLY

39th. Anniversary
Issue

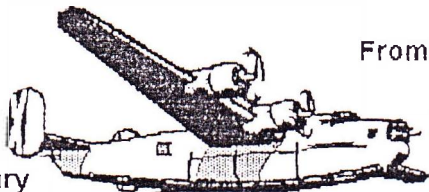
April 1998



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From:- Terry Jeeves
56 Red Scar Drive
Scarborough YO12 5RQ
Ph. (01723) 376817

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ERGITORIAL

COPIES

As a model-maker of over sixty years standing, I have had a great deal of pleasure, both from scratch building and kit construction. If a model looks good on completion, then I'm highly satisfied. Who cares if my Spitfire bears the incorrect registration letters B-TJ or if my racing Bentley is painted blue instead of green? I make models to please me. Because of this, I tend to utter a not very silent snigger when some reviewer in a model magazine says of a kit, "The nose profile is a good 1/10 of an inch oversize and the brown on the transfers is a shade too dark." Who cares? More to the point, how many people are expert enough to spot such minutiae? Letter columns have many such niggles as, "The mizzen cluppers are the wrong way round on the sproozling irons", or "No German Panzerkreutz ever had two spades on its mid-upper turret." In the case of TV, the nit-pickers come out in full force. "Mr. Darcy would never have had metal-tipped shoelaces on his boots", or "The Austin Mudsplasher as seen in 'Upstairs-Sideways' never had self-emptying ashtrays."

To give pleasure, a copy does not have to resemble its subject in every way. The replica of Cook's Endeavour has modern navigation gear, galley equipment and sanitary facilities. Nor do any model Hurricanes have fully functioning Rolls Royce Merlins to power them.

So what about 'old masters'? Make a perfect copy of a Rembrandt which can fool nine experts out of ten. The last one's verdict brands it a worthless fake. So why do the original paintings or ancient chunks of furniture command such high values and the copies bring in peanuts or a jail sentence? It can't be appearance if it takes a top level expert to spot the difference. Can it be their age? Doubtful, I can go out in the garden and dig up a stone several thousand years old, but it wouldn't be worth a penny. Maybe the value comes from it having been touched by some great name. Well scientists tell us that thanks to random movements, our bodies contain some of the same atoms which made up William The Conqueror and Albert Einstein. Seemingly the very air we breathe was previously breathed by some famous person. Great stuff, but it's no use bottling cans of air and labelling them, "as breathed by Boadicea", because they'll not sell.

Just what is the difference (if any) between excellent copy and rather time-worn original? For that matter, why do some individuals love to cart their junk around in a bag labelled 'Adidas'. Why must they pay several times the price of a similar but cheaper article in order to flash the magic symbols of Amani, Levi, Dior, or other fashion ikons from their chests, backs, brows, faces or footwear.

Can anybody tell me why twits will spend umpteen quid to buy replicas of the football strips worn by their favourite teams? Does it make them play better football? Do they expect to get the same adulation awarded to the actual players? This activity seems to rate the replica as being of higher value than the original.

So just why do people spend vast sums on 'the real thing'. What makes somebody spend thousands on a diamond necklace, then bung it in a security vault and have a paste replica made for actual wearing? If truth be told, we all know the answer. That paste replica and its backup in the vault is the filthy rich person's polite equivalent of wearing a placard around the neck, tastefully lettered with the words, "I've got pots of money."



I can think of a few other peculiar things about copies. If you beaver away to make copies of sterling notes and coins, you don't get praised for your skill and industry, but you can be arrested for forgery and awarded the First Prize of a free holiday at Her Majesty's pleasure. If you copy the plot of a story, that rates as plagiarism which can get you a hefty legal bill. Copy someone's signature and your artistic activity becomes forgery which can get you both a jail term and hefty charges. All of which is rather strange in view of the fact that we are often told that "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery".

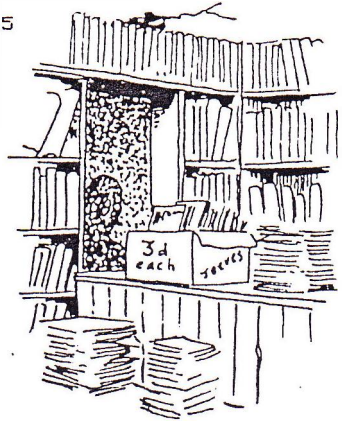
A final word about copies. I was told the following anecdote many years ago, by a bloke who swears it was true. Believe it or not, but I for one would love it to be true.

Many moons ago, representatives of a certain country which shall be nameless and simply referred to as Bolonia, approached a British shipbuilding firm with a request for the design of a small steamship they were thinking of ordering. Plans were duly submitted, but after several months, instead of an order, they were returned as being, "... not quite what we wanted." Tough luck on the British firm, even tougher when a year or so later, the Bolonians launched a ship identical in every way to the rejected plans.

A few years went by and another request was received by the British shipyard, this time for a light cruiser. Once again, plans were submitted and soon rejected. A year went by and Bolonia launched a new light cruiser akin to the one rejected. Time passed by and once again Bolonia approached the shipyard for a small passenger liner. The British designers were about to reject this until their head babu had an idea. Plans were duly submitted to Bolonia and just as duly rejected. A while later, the Bolonians had a ritual launching of their latest liner. It slid majestically down the slipway, out into the bay, then slowly turned turtle and sank beneath the water.

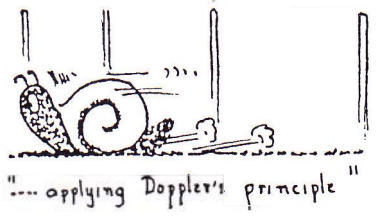
Now that was a slightly different copy. I like that.

More Pulp



In the pre-war years, the way to get hold of Science Fiction was to haunt local newsagents, market stalls and Messrs. Woollies. Here, one could pick up a variety of American 'pulp' magazines, so called because of the quality of the paper. Legend has it that ships sailing from America with light loads, needed ballast. They found it by bulk buying remaindered magazines, carting them to England and flogging 'em cheap. The price of these goodies was 3d an issue, whereas subscription copies cost about 5 times as much. My favourite shop was stacked floor to ceiling with pulps and the owner lurked in a gloomy cavern hollowed out of his stock. It was here that I acquired umpteen issues of Astounding, Amazing and Wonder as well as Everyday Science and Mechanics, Flying Aces, Model Airplane News, Doc Savage and good old G-8 and His Battle Aces.

If there had ever been a Golden Turkey Award for the most boring editor, T. O'Connor Sloane of AMAZING, would have won it hands down. Not a believer in spaceflight, his editorials stuck rigidly to what he knew (once upon a time and long ago). His science was firmly rooted in the past, he loved to parade both his scientific and classical knowledge - paraphrased I suspect, from a pile of slowly mouldering textbooks. He had the great gift for turning an interesting theme into a totally boring diatribe by interlarding such inspiring topics as 'The' Story of Astrology' or 'The Fallacy of Dowsing' with ponderous asides, "Applying Doppler's Principle.." - "In the words of Herodotus..." - "A swart, sour-visaged maid' if Coleridge might lend us his words". I don't know if Coleridge ever got them back again, but I didn't want to borrow 'em in the first place.



THE FALLACY OF DOWSING'

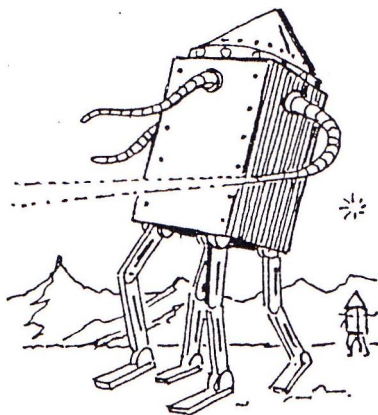
Sloane served up tales such as W.K.Sonneman's anthropomorphic yarns about bees; Rule Of The Bee', 'Greta, Queen of Queens' and so on. From these I learned how to introduce a new queen into a hive by drilling a hole in a block of wood, covering one end with wire mesh, inserting the queen and then plugging the other end with sugar. By the time the other bees had eaten away the sugar, the new queen had acquired the hive smell and was accepted. I learned that over sixty years ago, any time now it may come in useful.

A favourite theme of the SF pulps was the Cosmic Disaster, regularly served up by Clifford ('Hellhounds Of The Cosmos') Simak and that cover-copper, John Russell Fearn who destroyed Earth almost monthly in ASTOUNDING. Giant brains, monstrous machines, dissolving realities and other strange fates flowed from his pen. He also gave us such yarns as 'Mathematica' and its sequel 'Mathematica Plus', wherein the hero found a strange 'mental metal', dreamed up a bulging-brained being called Pelathon and headed off to find the source of mathematics. Bags of adventure, but despite the titles, Fearn never got past the four rules of number. It was over in Amazing that John Russell Fearn gave us his two tedious epics, 'Liners Of Time' and its sequel, 'Zagribud'; but what I really remember Amazing for was a cover depicting an evil space pirate whose victim was strapped to a chair and was slowly being dissolved by a strange ray. That one gave me nightmares for a week.

The 1936 metamorphosis of WONDER into THRILLING WONDER, caught me by surprise. Every Saturday morning I would stroll round the city market and bookstalls. This had to be done every week to avoid missing any of the goodies on offer. On this particular Saturday, I browsed through the 'rag and tag' and noticed a magazine cover depicting a scaly, bug-eyed monster aiding a stalwart American to beat off an attacking caveman and Roman soldiers. I hazarded my 3d and acquired the first issue of THRILLING WONDER STORIES. Once again, science was minimal, the accent on gosh wow adventure. The cover story was one of those time-travel yarns with people drawn from all ages. 'Robot's Revenge' was illustrated by a robot ripping open its chest to reveal the clockwork. There was also a ghastly cartoon strip story, ZARNAK which was so abysmal, reader outrage soon got it dropped.

A few years back, an America Company offered the ultimate in burials - on death, for a hefty fee, your body could be fired into orbit where it would remain preserved forever. Imagine the hazards to spacecraft of having a few thousand caskets zooming around. The daft idea wasn't new by any means. Way back in the thirties, Neil R Jones wrote a series describing the adventures of Professor Jameson who, in his will had ordered that on death, his body be fired into space. Millennia later it was found by a race of machine-men called the Zoromes. They popped the Professor's brain, into one of their four-legged, four-armed and multi-eyed bodies, revived it, and off the mechanical Professor went to

accompany them on their travels. Being a clever blighter, Jameson (now number 2MM...etc) had a ray gun built into one of his tentacles. This got the Zoromes out of so many scrapes I could never understand why they all didn't have 'em fitted at their next servicing.



The best SF magazine of that era, was ASTOUNDING. Even now, more than fifty years later, I still recall cover paintings and favourite stories. Of the covers, the most striking was the one for 'Pacifica' depicting gleaming spaceships racing to reclaim a new land

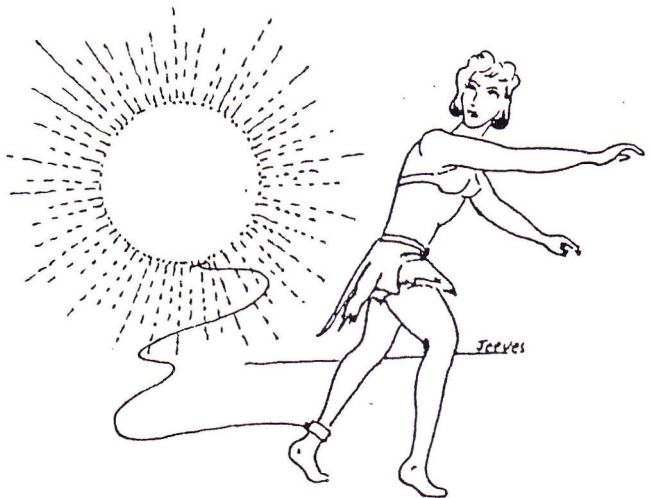
raised from the ocean. Memorable stories included Smith's Skylark and Lensman series, Schachner's 'Eternal Wanderer', Fearn's 'Mathematica' and Campbell's 'Who Goes There?'. The hero of the 'Eternal Wanderer' was shoved in a device which shredded him into a million intelligent bits. He was rescued by reversing the gadget, but an error had turned him into a four-dimensional being. This allowed him to overthrow the baddies before being properly re-assembled. The composite author, Eando Binder (Earl & Otto) gave us 'Spawn of Eternal Thought' in which the hero hooked himself to ten brains and became a genius. To thwart the villain, he ended up using a 100 brain unit before all was saved. Ah happy days.

In more recent years, authors just threatened Earth. 'Death Of Grass' saw food grains vanishing. Eric Frank Russell's novel, 'Sinister Barrier'. in the first UNKNOWN, had 'Vitons' milking our emotions. Strangely, alien invaders seemed to want women. I often wondered what a ten tentacled, chlorine breathing arthropod from Sirius wanted to do with a beautiful blonde, although it might have been more interesting than the average hero who never even got to kiss her - no sex please, we're SF readers.

All this changed with the arrival of MARVEL SCIENCE STORIES and DYNAMIC SCIENCE STORIES. The science was neither marvellous nor dynamic, it was virtually non-existent. MARVEL brought s-x to SF.

Most of the first issue was written by Henry Kuttner under a raft of pseudonyms. Each story featured a winsome heroine who invariably lost her clothes within the first few pages. On a tour of the Solar System she suffered this fate on each planet in turn. I still recall the cover illo of the scantily-clad heroine chained to a glowing, red-hot ball as it chased her around an arena.

DYNAMIC was more conservative, but did feature a yarn in which the survivors of a treacherous Oriental onslaught, took refuge in underground caverns. Being short of men, they instituted polygamy to swell their numbers, a task at which they did very well, so that umpteen generations later, they emerged to clobber the Yellow Peril. By this time, the latter were peaceful and gentle, so another war was averted.



Other outstanding items from the past were the 'inventions'. Wells gave us the gravity-defying 'Cavorite', Karel Capek introduced 'robots' in R.U.R., Clarke postulated Comsats in a 1948 article in Wireless World. 'Doc' Smith came up with the wonderful inertia nullifying 'Bergenholtm', Frank Herbert's 'Under Pressure' supplied 'dracones' and Buck Rogers showed us the flying belt which was later developed by the US Army. The ray gun has arrived as the laser, whilst the communication jewels of vanVogt's 'Book Of Ptath' are not far from modern solid-state communicators and of cours, good old Hugo predicted radar.

Reader's letters were always a feature of the pulp magazines. One had its letter column 'Conducted by Sergeant Saturn' who as a gnarled old space veteran armed with a bottle of Zeno Juice would use pseudo space jargon to answer letters from dim-witted readers. I always envisaged Saturn in 'Boyhood of Raleigh' posture,



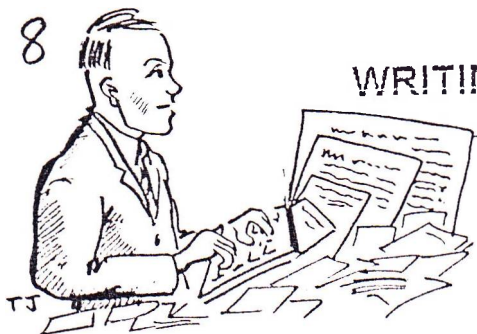
perched on a discarded rocket booster as he held forth to a juvenile audience. I secretly hoped that one day that booster would blow up.

To digress slightly, before the war, GALAXY was a British, (non-sf) digest-sized magazine of articles, fiction, cartoons etc. It folded with the war, but the name was too good to leave doggo, so in 1950 we got an American magazine of that title. Other names have done likewise. In the UK, we has a pre-war pulp-sized FANTASY and a post-war digest-sized ditto. Another similarity was that both saw only three issues. Campbell nearly joined the club when he began to metamorphose ASTOUNDING STORIES into ASTOUNDING SCIENCE FICTION with the ultimate aim of dropping the infra-dig 'Astounding' and simply calling his magazine SCIENCE FICTION. However he had been gazumped by the 1937 pulp of that title edited by Charles D. Hornig. This featured a story by 'Ephraim Winiki' (Good old John Russell Fearn), titled 'Leeches of Space. A piece on 'Hazards Of Spaceflight' included madness brought on by monotony and endless reaches of stars!

But the pulps had another side to them as will be revealed in the next instalment.

WRITING: A TRIAL BY ORDEAL

By James Verran



Along the way to becoming a published writer you will encounter a few surprises, one of which will be discovering how expensive it is to maintain a steady flow of submissions. Apart from the high cost of mailing, you

must cope with the other inescapable expenses: paper, ink and ribbon cartridges, and toner if you have a laser printer. Even a humble typewriter will have its running costs. The cost-cutting trick of mailing disposable manuscripts entails providing postage stamps or coupons to ensure delivery of the inevitable rejections, at the very least. Do not frown at the thought of discarding your meticulously prepared hard-copy, albeit a photocopy. After a few submissions you will discover that manuscripts seldom return in a fit condition to send off to the next publisher on your list; editors naturally suspect that your story has been bounced before, so why give them proof?

If you think electronic submissions are about to alleviate the horrendous expense of putting your work around, be prepared for a further disappointment. While many publishers willing e-mail their guidelines, only a few are equipped, or of a mind, to accept electronic submissions, for the present. At best, you may receive an e-mailed acknowledgement. Facsimile transmission, especially overseas, is relatively expensive owing to the time required, per page, at long-distance rates. Apart from last minute corrections and edits, or to send replacements for lost or damaged pages, faxes are best used for urgent communications.

Membership of a writing group, often lauded by well-meaning acquaintances, also has hidden costs, not the least being those infernal "homework" assignments about "My Most Embarrassing Moment", or "What I Hope To Achieve From A Writing Career". Such trivial party games are of dubious value, and usually send a writer's thought processes off on a tangent from any current project. Writing groups are seldom conducive to the creation of profitable prose, and should be regarded as a wearisome, social intercourse, only to be indulged in when you have nothing better to do.

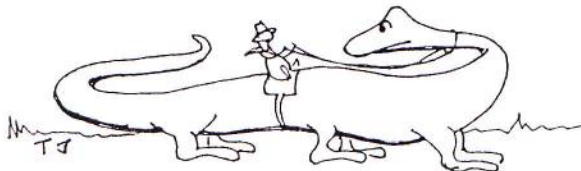
Your frustration will be compounded to the point of exasperation when yet another editor attacks the very shortcomings you had painstakingly worked out of the submission, or so you thought. These things must be accepted graciously; many editors, and their minions, use speed-reading techniques to cope. Imagine trying to find a gem among dozens of indifferently prepared manuscripts, every day of your life. Despite the common belief, editors are only human, so they often miss the subtleties in your careful exposition. On the other hand, when you fo labour a particular point, you will be admonished for insulting the reader's intelligence. I beg to differ: no one ever went broke underestimating the intelligence of the average reader, to paraphrase H.L. Mencken. Of course, ERG readers are invariably in a class well above the average.

Another often-quoted axiom: "Read the publications to which you intend contributing", should also carry a warning against giving up your day job. Who on Earth can afford to subscribe to more than a couple of relevant publications? As a matter of course, many rejections are accompanied by a subscription form; indeed, some rejections tactfully suggest that a subscription will enhance your chances. Vanity publishing aside, some publishers barely stop short of suggesting the writer should pay them to print the thing. A couple of poetry 'anthologies' have been sprung for a similar, particularly underhanded practice. More than a few poets have been sucked in with promises of having their work included in widely-distributed, handsomely bound volumes. Of course, contributors are invited to reserve a personal copy, early, by enclosing an equally handsome amount of cash on, or soon after, receipt of the manuscript. Along with the glowing prospectus comes the revelation that a limited number of extra copies, for friends and relatives, will also be available for successful contributors to buy. Assuming that the book is ever actually produced, the starry-eyed writer will eventually come to the realisation that it is indeed widely distributed, but only among the other gullible contributors.

Fortunately, the majority of editors are only interested in producing publications which sell readily, and continually strive to buy work from competent writers. From a writer's point of view, practising writers make the most considerate editors. They have been there and still understand the sacrifices and privations of the craft. An intelligent writer never expects a detailed critique, but the ubiquitous check-box form, invariably excused by time restraints and/or the large number of submissions, hardly inspires the prompt despatch of another masterpiece. The only thing worse is receiving a form with all the boxes blank -- it does happen. In the foreseeable future, when the stamped, self-addressed rejection slip becomes mandatory, perhaps editors will find time to scribble more than a short sentence after ticking the appropriate boxes.

The ultimate pains-in-the-neck are publishing houses, regularly appearing in the various writers' market lists, who refuse to accept unsolicited and un-agented manuscripts: so why do they bother? Seems there is no way to break into a writing career stone cold. You either have to win an illustrious literary prize, or churn out dozens of moderately successful stories. The odd, prize-winning short helps, but unless you attract the attention of a beneficent agent, it is a long and frustrating road.

Of course, you will never suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune (sorry, Bill) unless you first endure the agony of conceiving, gestating, then submitting your creation -- again and again. How far would Robert the Bruce have gone if he had splattered that spider with his metal-studded gauntlet? So keep faith in yourself, and take note of the endless criticisms, then continue to revise. Despite what you may think, the thing was rejected for a reason, so it is seldom prudent to send it back out unaltered.

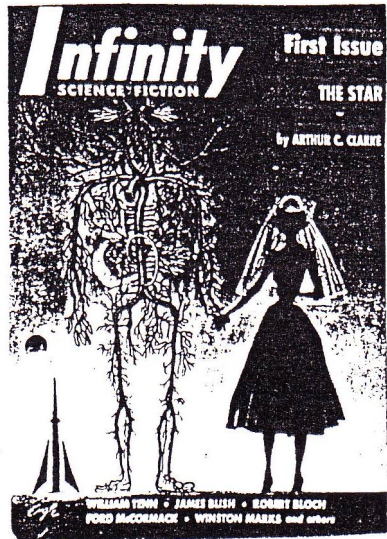


Infinity

SCIENCE FICTION

The first issue of INFINITY SCIENCE FICTION appeared in November 1955, ran to 134 digest pages and cost 35c.

Edited by Larry Shaw, it bore a rather strange cover by Engle, of a young woman wearing a bridal veil, holding hands with a pipework alien as both gaze at a bog standard spaceship. An undistinguished bundle of interior illustrations were done by Messrs. Engle, Giunta, Griffith and Stallman. The magazine held two novelets, six short stories, an ex-fanzine story and a book review.



THE SICKNESS, William Tenn, Nvt. Explorers on Mars discover a dead, abandoned city - and a live virus which takes them one by one, but has an unexpected terminal phase.

KID STUFF, Winston Marks, St. Two dimension-travelling alien children modify a young man, but unfortunately re-assemble him incorrectly. The cover was 'loosely' based on this yarn, but the artist missed reading the end line, "What woman would marry a man with no navel and two heads?"

HAVE TUX - WILL TRAVEL, Robert Bloch, St. This is written in the form of letters from a pompous showman making a mess of a Martian tour.

KING OF THE HILL, James Blish, St. The Bomb Controller in an orbital fort goes crazy and somehow has to be talked out of bombing Washington.

PHANTOM DUEL, Ford MacCormack, Nvt. Spacemen board a derelict, find the dead crew and a virus-like jewel. Greed, aided by the virus take over and we have a SF version of the three-prisoner logic puzzle as they seek a solution.

THE FIRST, Ed Ludwig, St. When he is overlooked during celebrations, the real first man on the moon passes up his chances of kudos.

SIREN OF SPACE, Dave Jenrette, Reprinted from the fanzine, NERLIN. A woman is stealing something, but what? The old wheelbarrow joke reworked.

PLACEBO, David Mason, St. A probability hopper just can't get home until convinced of his ability to do so.

THE STAR, Arthur C. Clarke St. This raises the excellent question, why did God destroy a civilisation by the fires of a nova in order to create the Star of Bethlehem?

An entertaining and easy-reading selection, but nothing really outstanding to stick in the memory cells. Just a good, average pulp read, well suited to its era.

GREAT BOOKSHOPS OF THE WORLD

Woolstraat, Antwerp

In Antwerp there are dozens of bookshops hidden away in the maze of mediaeval streets between the wonderful cathedral and the River Schelde. The shop in question dealt primarily in Flemish books, most, as far as I could tell, of a maritime nature. There were lots of charts in the window. Through the glass door I could make out a waist-high bookcase crammed with paperbacks. One or two looked quite old. I pushed open the door and bent to examine the books. They were all English language publications, mostly crime and with a fair sprinkling of American paperbacks of the early forties, Rex Stout, Sax Rohmer, Dickson Carr and so on.

I pulled out a couple of volumes and realised that there were other books shelved behind them. This second layer was shielded from view by sheets of newspaper draped over it. So, go on, tell me that I should have poked a hole through the newspaper and had a look at what was hidden there. What a terrible suggestion! That would have been sheer, crass vandalism. Besides, the hole wasn't really big enough to see more than a kangaroo logo on a couple of spines before a severe old woman appeared to see what I was doing.

Quite a fair percentage of the inhabitants of northern Belgium don't take kindly to visitors speaking French, but my Flemish was, and is, poor and accordingly we settled for French. The books, she told me, shouldn't be disturbed. But, I tried to explain, I wanted to buy some. She was adamant, the books were bien dormis longtemps. They had been sleeping there for a long time and should be left alone.

Crazy!

I related the story to Jan Jansen, the stalwart Belgian fan who lives near Antwerp. He was under no illusions about what had happened.

"It's your lousy Flemish", he said.

"We were speaking French," I objected.

"Your French! She probably thought you were speaking Flemish." Such faith. Still, Jan promised to come with me to the shop and explain exactly what I wanted.

He explained to the old woman... in Flemish... that I was a collector from England. I would take great care of anything I purchased.

"No," the old woman said. The books were not for sale. I said I'd pay double the going rate for any I purchased.

Jan translated. "Tell her," I said, "that I'll pay a hundred francs just to look at the books and see what's there." It would, I felt, be a start.

"No," the old woman said in Flemish, "not for a thousand francs." Jan read the expression on my face and knew he didn't need to translate.

He kept tabs on the shop and during the next few years would from time to time report that the shop was still there, along with its sleeping books. One day however, he passed by and found the shop empty and deserted.

The story is actually worse than described above. We spent the entire day touring all the bookshops in central Antwerp. I bought a car trunkful of books of all shapes and sizes.

A couple of months later, at an auction in London, an original Mercator atlas was sold for a cool half-million. It had been unearthed some few weeks earlier in a bookshop in central Antwerp. I checked the date. Yes, the atlas had been there, in the Antwerp bookshop, on the date Jan and I had toured the city. We'd missed the chance of a lifetime. I wonder. Do you think the atlas, too, had been sleeping there for a long time in that old woman's shop?

RON BENNET



Can you identify the above aircraft? Nine out of ten if you thought it was a Boeing B-29, but it isn't that superlative aircraft, it's a Russian Tu-4, a perfect copy of the B-29. Herewith a brief history lesson.

The story begins on July 29th. 1943, with a group of B-29 bombers whose home base was Piardoba, only a few miles from Salbani where I was stationed. They often flew up and down the local railway line before eventually moving to an advanced base from which they raided a Japanese steel works at Anshan. One was badly hit, lost its number three engine and number four was failing. The pilot diverted to Russia where, on arrival, he was fired at by ground AA and fighter aircraft. Nevertheless, he managed to land safely on a short airstrip, whereupon, despite America and Russia being Allies against Germany, the B-29 was sequestered and the crew interned in Tashkent, Siberia.

Three weeks later, on August 20th. 1943, another injured B-29 diverted to Russia, but crashed after the crew baled out - they too, ended up in Tashkent.

On November 11th. 1943, a fuel-starved B-29 was fired on, but landed safely in Vladivostok. Once again, the aircraft was kept and the crew sent to Tashkent. On November 21st another B-29 diverted and the scenario was repeated with identical results. The Russians now held three B-29s and four crews. Despite protests from Washington, they refused to release the aircraft, but eventually 'allowed the airmen to escape' over the border into Teheran.

Several years elapsed during which rumors leaked from behind the Iron Curtain. They were strengthened when Russia attempted to buy replacement B-29 parts from America. Then the rumors became fact at the Tushino Airshow in 1947. Three gleaming B-29 look-alike, Tu-4 bombers flew low over the crowd. No, they were not the missing B-29s, those had been stripped down to their last nuts, bolts and components to provide constructional details for the building of Russia's home-grown version - outwardly indistinguishable to the B-29.

For this monumental achievement, the aircraft designer, Andrei Tupolev got Stalin's highest award - and went on to design a series of different and improved versions.

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GENERAL CHUNTERING

Ken F Slater

13

When I got back here a couple of days ago I found a message on my answering machine. I think it was recent, but can't be certain, for I can never remember that this machine has only a visual signal. It blinks a little red eye at you to attract attention. Unfortunately the l'il red eye is frequently covered by one or more sheets of paper. But I had to get rid of the previous machine that had a sound signal; this was okay when you returned from a shopping trip or something, but not clever when someone in Arizona decided to leave you a message in the middle of his working day. That particular model could be switched so it didn't receive messages, but not into a mode where it would receive but not loudly tell you so. Probably there is now one on the market which will do every variation of audible and visual (it may even come up and tap you on the shoulder) but for now I'll stick with what I've got; I usually use it myself every day or so... and so see something waits.

Terry's *DOWN MEMORY-BANK LANE* caused me to try and recall where I started, and after deep dianotic probing I discovered that my original contact with fantasy (not science fiction) probably stemmed from a publication called "*Christian Novels*" - this was a story-mag which in the mid 20's (at least) was to be found in the hands of many a housemaid, cook, or parlour maid. I imagine that housekeepers would have frowned upon it, but my grandparents' status was not so high that it rated more than a cook and a couple of subsidiaries (and by the time I was around twelve this had decreased to just one all-purpose skivvy; she too vanished to be replaced by a "daily" before I left school at a little under fourteen). Somewhere to the back of the "C.N." used be a) a picture for a child to paint, and b) a fairy tale. My grandmother frowned on this form of literature but I used to beg the chance of reading this bit from the cook/maid/whatever. I was suprised some years ago to learn that the "C.N." was still in production. I discovered what I suppose was "science fiction" two or three years later (I would have been seven or eight) when my grandfather died and in the then current fashion death was a thing that was hidden from children in that "class"; the poor knew all about it, the wealthy, the landed, and the aristocracy thrust it into the faces of their young, but to the so-called middle-classes, like legs, it did not exist if you were under ten or thereabouts. Children were farmed out to friends while all the ceremony of the funeral was conducted. So I was put out to stay with my friend Andrew for a few days and nights. And Andrew had these big bound volumes of a child's magazine (no comic strips that I recall) which were dated for years: 1922, 1923; 1924 and so on. Tales of the Indian Mutiny, the sea, exploration. And in two of them there was a story about a trip to another world. Don't ask me the details; I don't recall but I was hooked. These were of course the amassed issues of a weekly periodical bound into board covers and published as an "Annual"; like copies of "Punch" and other magazines were treated. A couple of years later I was lucky enough to have access to umpteen years of bound PUNCH and this probably conditioned my view of post Great War 1 history. All of this is just explain why although I'm primarily a science fiction addict, I have a soft spot for fantasy.

Within 75 years we have progressed from teaching children to write by scratching on slates with a slate pencil to having schoolrooms (even infants) filled with equipment far more advanced than the Starwriter used here. I recall a magic slate from a fairy tale... As an aside, I had to explain to some younger person that a "slate" was the same material as those used for roofing, but for school use was mounted in a wooden frame and the "pencil" was attached by a string to a corner. Clumsy but adequate for the time. Oh, yes; I have an idea about "comics" I must convey to you: did the people who pushed this pictorial method of communication know something? Did they foresee the need for the understanding of representational pictures we now have? "Icons", "buttons", international road and other signs. KFS



Letters

BRIAN EARL BROOKS, 11675 BEACONSFIELD,
DETROIT, MI 48224, USA

On abortion the position of the Catholic church is that one becomes a person at the moment of conception and thus they oppose any form of birth control. Euthanasia is a more difficult matter because most people subscribe to the idea that Human Life is sacred. It's one thing to let people tired of life shuffle off this mortal coil, but how do we prevent people being PUSHED off? My wife works in a nursing home and occasional patients ask her to help them die, which she cannot do - but only fear of addiction (!!!) keeps them from being given better pain medicine. \Rightarrow I don't believe human life is sacred, that's a myth. On the other hand, it IS a fact that some incurable people are forced to live indefinitely in pain and misery, against their pleas, because of this myth. Now that seems wrong to me. \leftarrow

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

Your piece Right .. or Wrong, seems to have said practically all that can be said about the matter of taking another person's life. The Bible says it is wrong to kill, I still think that a good rule to adhere to. My father ent through WW1 carrying a stretcher instead of a rifle - but he killed many mortally wounded soldiers with overdoses of morphia. A tablet under the tongue and a blue cross on the forehead was the treatment for those past hope. As for abortion, why ask another person to get you out of a self-inflicted punishment? \Rightarrow Why ask for aid if injured in a car or bike scramble, sky-diving, ice skating, ski-ing etc? Pregnancies can occur when people have used every precaution to avoid them. They are not 'self-inflicted' so why deny 'em aid? \leftarrow

ALAN BURNS, 19 THE CRESCENT, KINGS RD. STH., WALLSEND, North

TYNESIDE, NE28 7RE Ah yes, the dead dear days of the pulps where youngsters such as I used to lustfully gaze (with men in grey macs) over popies in various states of undress to see if the stories inside lived up to the cover. The one instance where they did was MARVEL SF issues 1 & 2, but then one would turn to the monastic pages of Astounding where I can only recall one mildly sexy cover of a superhot planet where the only ones who could colonise it were North American Indians. It showed the heroine in bra and briefs. \Rightarrow Both VERY woolly as I recall. ASF had a naked man on the July '31 cover, another on May '37, a girl in a transparent nightie in Oct '31 and bikini wearers on Jly '40 and Feb '41 covers. Want more? \leftarrow But them days is past. Now sex is shown on every page of the ladies mags anyway and the contents, "His bum stole my heart", an honest man would blush at them and the men in grey macs are no more, suffering from pornographic indigestion, and only certain types of 'lady' (?) read them.

VINCE CLARKE, 16 WENDOVER WAY, WELLING, KENT DA16 2BN

In THE PULPS you mention a guy who used to tear off the covers from his SF, "So he could carry the mag in public". I can't say "Me too", but I certainly used to roll 'em up with the cover inside and stick 'em under my arm. Looking back after more than half a century I've been trying to remember 'why?'. I think it was partly adolescent shame that I should be thought to be reading something like a 'Comic', which in those days was meant for children up to ten years of age. → As distinct from nowadays when they're for children up to 25 .. or older ← Unlike your good self I found the magazines fairly easy to buy. In Woolwich open market there were two stall which sold nothing but pulpazines. As you say, at 3d each altho' the local Woolworth's had a selection at 4d each. → Our markets had three pulp stalls, but you had to check 'em each week as stuff went quickly. ←

KEN LAKE, 46 CHESTNUT AVE., BUCKHURST HILL, ESSEX IG96EW

Sierra Leone had the first self-adhesive stamps, Tonga had many issues; France and USA followed. Our 1st/2nd class rolls of 100 are excellent. e la Rue tell almost all GB stamps will be self-adhesive by 1999. → By gum! that's a sticky situation. → Can you include this request... "I have taken over as Admin of the Organisation apa; it currently has 14 members, more in the pipeline, and is keen to attract more fen who enjoy creating idiosyncratic contributions (minac is 18 pages of A4 a year). It's a general interest apa with lots of chat and controversy - moving slowly towards more factual/fictional 'creative writing'. Anyone interested should contact me at above address, or phone 0181-504-6681, fax 0181-504-6694, e-mail KenLake226@aol.com. "

ALAN SULLIVAN, 30 ASH RD., STRATFORD. LONDON E15 1HL

SF staples and ideas do seem to be finite, but then again, it is meant to be 'the literature' of speculation, so hopefully there will be new approaches to classic ideas. Books seem to be going through a phase where it's the people who have come to the fore, rather putting technology and related issues to one side. Once the majority of SF was about technology, later it became psychological - dare we even say 'spiritual'? True in all these, there have been stories that were 'out of phase' - considering the metaphysical when everyone else was concentrating on the 'hard science' or similar. However, it's the general trend that is the thing. → True, and sadly I can't stand the current trend. It's too bland and boring. ←

ALAN HUNTER, 1186 CHRISTCHURCH RD., BOSCOMBE EAST, BOURNEMOUTH BH7 6DY

Loved the article on 'The Pulpis' with your rather critical, tongue in cheek assessment of their contents. By present standards the stories are mostly pot-boiling adventure yarns, but for the time in which they were written, many had innovative ideas and they are still escapist with strong storylines and generally a satisfactory conclusion. I still prefer them to much of the indefinite, often incomprehensible SF of today. → I agree, and that goes for the artwork as well. ← My experience of WONDER is somewhat the opposite of your coverless copies. I have the issues with 'The Ideal' and 'Dream's End' inside. The striking dramatic covers are in good condition but unfortunately the inside pages are bron, brittle and falling apart. One or two of my mags are going that way I'm afraid. I shall soon be left with covers and no interiors and the same is true of several other issues of similar vintage. → It's just old age - it's getting me too. ←

FRED SMITH, FLAT 13, 15 MANSIONHOUSE GDNS. GLASGOW G41 3DP

I enjoyed 'THE PULPS' very much and it certainly reminded me of my own discoveries in the thirties, and yes, I also read MODEL AIRPLANE NEWS, DAREDEVIL ACES, etc. and built both flying and 'solid' models. You didn't mention THE SHADOW tho'. Neither did you mention all the SF series which were so popular back then. Penton and Blake, Hollywood On The Moon and the Gerry Carlyle big-game-hunting on Venus, all featured in THRILLING WONDER STORIES. \Rightarrow No room. I had to miss out lots of memories in limiting the series to four pages per issue. I hope to mention some of them when I get to 'THE SUPERHEROES'. \Leftarrow We didn't have a local Woollies to buy pulps at 3d, so I had to pay 6d in newsagents. \Rightarrow You were robbed, standard price was 3d right up to 1939. \Leftarrow

FANZINES

ERG 141 April 1998 this issue you're holding marks the 39th. Anniversary of this fanzine. The first issue (April 1959) had 16, mimeo-produced, quarto pages, with handcut illos. Contents included fiction, missile details and a satellite launching list. Only one year to go to reach that magic 40th. annish. Stay with us.

STEFANTASY.121 from Bill Danner, R.D.1, Kennerdell, PA 16374 USA. Despite the lower No., this one is even older than ERG, dating from 1945. Erg-size, 14pp of immaculately hand-set type. Matter on steelworks, railways, memoirs, lotsa LOCs and that lovely page of 'English As She Is Spoke'. A really friendly zine.

THE KNARLEY KNEWS.66 From Henry Welch, 1525 16th. Ave., Grafton, WI 53024-2017, USA Runs to 26 pages holding a brief personal natter, a piece on illness recovery, another instalment of the superb account of Don Pattenden's epic cycle ride around Australia and a hefty LOCCol. Nice one, get it for the usual.

PLOKTA, Nov.1997 from Alison Scott, 42 Tower Hamlets Rd., Walthamstow, LONDON E17 4RH. 14 A4 pages. Personal natter, a table of operating comparison for babies, cats, laptops and books, a Convention item, LOCs and other oddments. All cheerful and lighthearted, no s&c to bore you. Get it for the usual.

VISIONS OF PARADISE.74 Robert Sabella, 24 Cedar Manor Ct., Budd Lake, NJ 07828 USA. 42 pp, well produced and laid out. Personal diary notes, long article on Japanese atrocities, recent reading, mailing comments and LOCs. Nice friendly and easy, s&c issue.

IDEA.11 Geri Sullivan, 3444 Blaisdell Ave., Minneapolis, MN 55408-4315, USA A whacking great 74pp crammed with an excellent cover and great artwork. There are articles on queer cooking, pieces on topics as varied as energy saving, Greece, personal comments and natter, plus a really good and well illustrated LOCCol. Top marks!

THE RELUCTANT FAMULUS.50 76pp from Tom Sadler (FOR TAFF!) 422 W,MAPLE AVE, ADRIAN, MI 49221-1627, USA. Simply crammed with articles, anecdotes, news, humour, books, fanzines, oodles of LOCs and excellent artwork. Something for everyone, get it for the usual or contribs. Well worthy of a TAFF Candidate so don't miss it.

