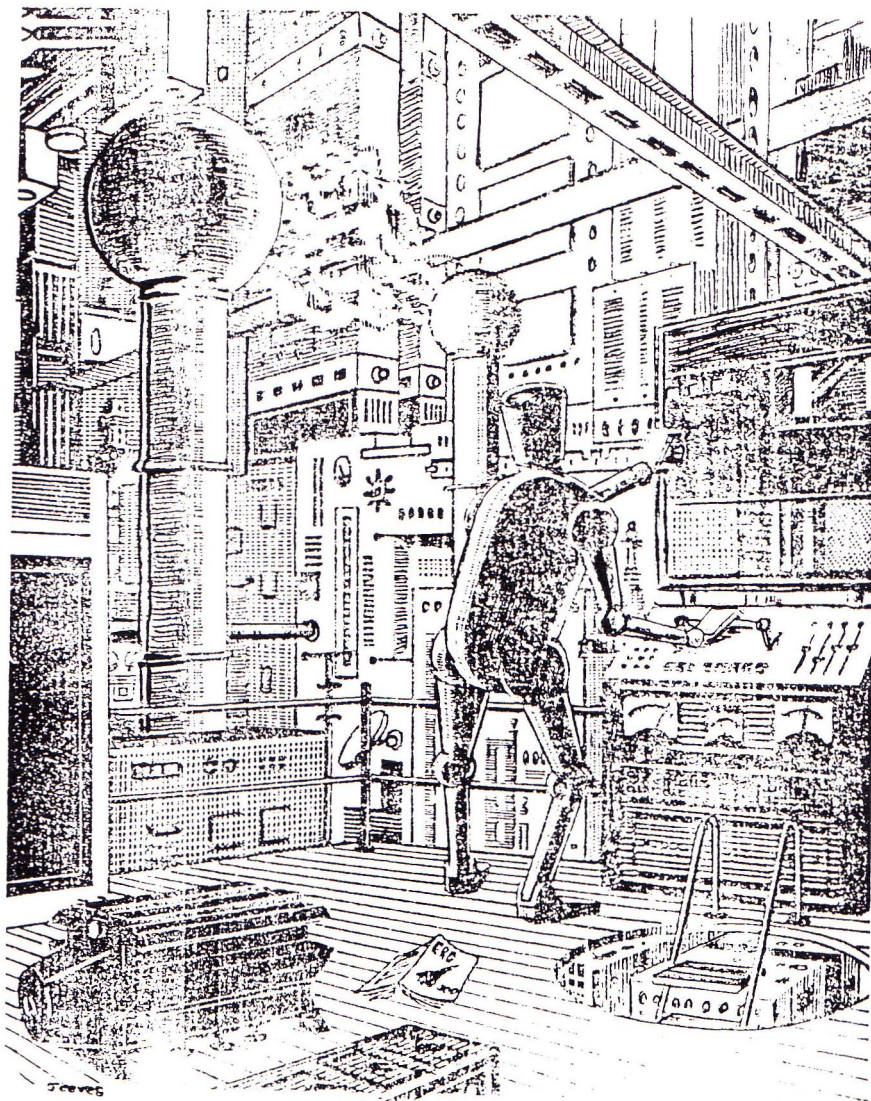


ERG 147

OCTOBER 1999

QUARTERLY



Now in its 41st. Year

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If you enjoyed this issue
and would like to get the
next send a LOC to:
Terry Leves
56 Red Scar Drive
Scarborough YO12 5RQ

QUARTERLY No. 147

OCTOBER 1999

If you notice anything different about this LOGO, blame it on the PC going catatonic just before this issue was finished. This page is being done on the trusty old Beeb. Luckily almost everything else was printed out apart from the Logo, the Fanzine Notes and a page of LOCs. My apologies to those LOCers, you got replaced by an item I had in the files, 'THE OLD, OLD STORY'. Hopefully, by the time ERG 148 is due, that good man John Rupik will have ridden to the rescue and sorted things out.

The cover this issue is another scraper board illo from ERG.45, Jan.1974. Jim Diviney originally printed it for me in blue, so I had to photocopy it and do some re-touching to get a fair black and white copy. The archive reprint is 'DEATH IN THE OPHAND MANOR', which first saw publication in the late Ethel Lindsay's 'SCOTTISHE'. I hope you like 'em both.

A LOCer recently took me to task for saying SF books were scarce before the war. May I quote from no lesser an authority than Arthur C. Clarke, Page 201 in his 'ASTOUNDING DAYS', "A Science Fiction book was once a rare phenomenon indeed" .. So there!

SHELF CLEARANCE. Most back issues of ERG from 98 to 147 available at 40p each, send no cash, just send a list of the numbers you want and I'll send what I still have. I'll enclose an invoice, pay then, Offers are invited for a nearly full run from 98 to 147 with only 101 and 103 missing. SALE TIME, 20% discount on orders for the following:- oodles of paperbacks, hardcovers, and magazines, send SAE for whichever lists you'd like

STAMPS. My hearty thanks to all those kind people who have sent me mint and used US stamps. I have now opened album No.3, so please keep 'em coming. Query, I have two stamps which don't appear in my 1997 BLACKBOOK OF U.S. STAMPS. They are 29c stamps, one for 'Rebecca Of Sunnybrook Farm', the other for 'Little House On The Prairie'. Can anyone supply date and Scott Cat. No.?

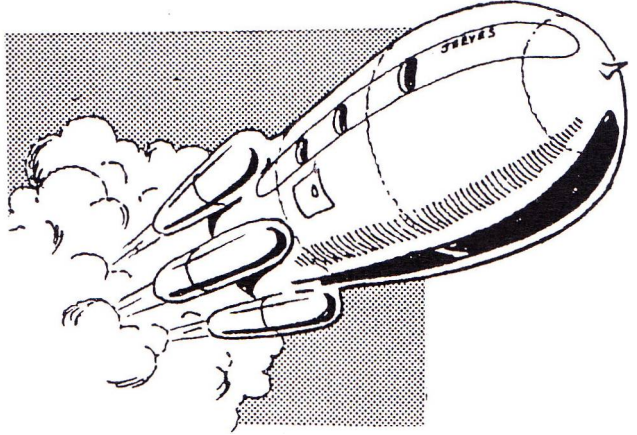
Another plea for help. I recall that many years ago (pre war?) Willy Ley wrote an article in ASF about an overseer who sent a slave down under water by making him breathe through a tube - at about a depth of six feet, his ribs collapsed. My LOC reply to Ken Lake in the last issue reminded me of this, but I can't trace it. Can any reader supply details?

Another birthday issue brought to a close, I start my 77th. year, and ERG is its 41st. How mich longer I'll keep it going is anyone's quess, but as long as it remains fun - and the cash lasts out, the old mag will soldier on.

Happy reading,

Terry

*Assorted
SF
In The UK*

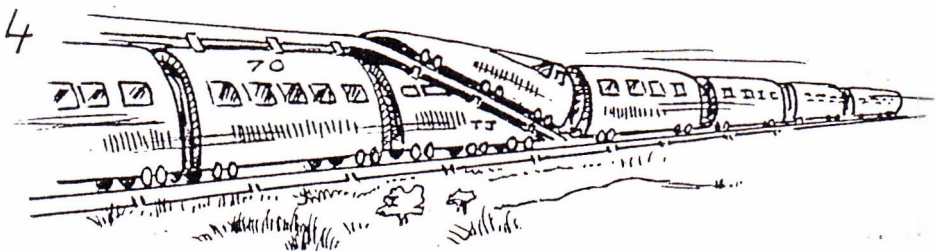


MODERN WONDER, a juvenile weekly was aimed at the technology-loving youngster, but regularly baited its literary hook to catch the SF-minded type. The first issue saw the commencement of John Beynon's serial, THE SPACE MACHINE, a story which along with its sequel, SLEEPERS OF MARS, must have appeared more often than any other yarn.

Readers were urged to join the MODERN WONDER LEAGUE OF SCIENCE. I did so, and got my Membership Card although I can't recall getting any of the 'benefits of membership'. Naturally we got that old standby, the Solar System, thinly disguised as a Grand Tour by some youngsters in an experimental rocket ship. Part.1 had an eye-catching heading depicting a rocket-ship boldly going where no fan had gone before. After a few brief sentences setting up the trip, the rocket and its passengers were relegated to the (very distant) background with sentences such as, "We left Mars and landed on Jupiter". Then came a listing of the currently available facts on that giant planet, probably culled from a handy encyclopedia. The travellers never got to Pluto, probably because it hadn't yet made it into the out-dated reference books used by the writer, 'Ralph Stranger' - which I suspected to be a pseudonym of Eric Frank Russell.

MODERN WONDER featured many multi-coloured illustrations of modern engineering achievements. Keyed, sectional diagrams showed us the inner secrets of science such as, 'EYE INTO SPACE - The 200" Telescope', 'FIGHTING MARVELS OF THE RAF', and 'BLUEBIRD - 300mph on wheels!'

THE MICKEY MOUSE WEEKLY appeared around this time, I'd have given this the cold shoulder but the first issue included an illustrated strip with what (in the Stone Age) must have once been a highly original plot. A Professor (where do all these Professors come from?) sets off in his rocket, accompanied by two children. They land on a strange planet (Mars, where else?) where they meet the fully humanoid inhabitants. Taken on a sight-seeing tour in a high speed train, they are horrified to see another express hurtling towards them on the same line.



A second of panic, then the other train shoots up a set of rails mounted on the roof of their vehicle, passes overhead and descends safely behind them. I remember wondering who decided which train would go over the top.

The rest of the thing was devoted to the antics of Mickey, Goofy and other Disney characters, I dropped the comic when the space strip finished, to be replaced by the standard public school adventure story of tuck shops, a school bully and nasty criminals seeking to swipe the headmaster's rare Egyptian whacking stick.

PASSING SHOW was an adult weekly of almost total lack of interest to me. PS had stories about *girls*, articles about *people*, boring pieces on current affairs, travel and suchlike rot. The magazine had one memory-grabbing facet, its SMELL! A sort of olive-green, chlorophyllish PONG is the nearest I can get to describing it. PS was best read at arm's length whilst wearing a gas-mask. Whatever its drawbacks, PASSING SHOW had one great asset; it ran Beynon's PLANET PLANE as a serial. Yes, it was that good old SPACE MACHINE, back in one of its many disguises.

In 1938 the Jeeves family took its annual holiday at some fashionable watering place. Nearing sixteen, I was too young for official girl-friends but too old for sand castle building. I indulged in my usual practice of bookstall haunting. I was adept at passing over such temptations as, "A woman of twilight, she never paid her gas-bill", "The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monkeynuts" and "Riders of the Purple Prose". My eye roved across HAPPY MAG, HOLIDAY PIE and HOLIDAY FUN crammed with jolly seaside romances in which young girls in print dresses fell for handsome young pipe-smoking men in flannel trousers. Numbled by all this literary merit, I must have passed over a drab-covered magazine several times before its title penetrated my rejection barrier. When it did, I eagerly plonked down my shilling and marched away with the first issue of TALES OF WONDER.

The lead story, 'Superhuman' (obviously a rip-off of Wells' 'Tono Bungay') was all about a couple grown to colossal size because of calcium injections. The cover showed two giant, armour-clad figures striding through London kicking over buildings and burning them with their ray guns. Antique RAF biplanes buzzed ineffectually around their heads but eventually, the calcium solidified and turned the giants into huge statues. John Beynon had 'The Perfect Creature', a synthetic pyramidal being created in a laboratory. It was able to look, hear, eat and run in any direction. It could do everything - except swim. Whilst pursuing its creator, it fell in a river and drowned.

In J.R.Fearn's 'Seeds From Space', Earth was menaced by Martian Weed spreading its loathsome grip across the world..



THE PERFECT CREATURE



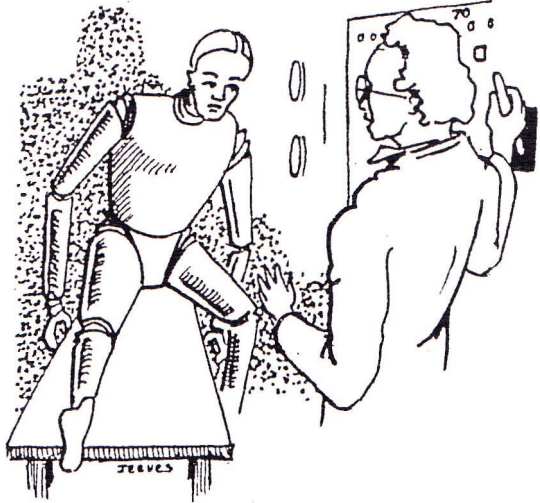
Eric Frank Russell's, 'The Prr-r -eet' described a creature which hopped like a kangaroo and whistled like a bird. I'm not sure why.

Cockroft of the B.I.S had 'Revolt On Venus' and there were other yarns by Maurice G.Hugi, Festus Pragnell and Francis Parnell.

Whereas the American magazines regularly saw invaders destroying the Empire State building or the menacing machinations of mad scientists, their British counterparts invariably flattened the Tower of London or featured dotty old college professors. Much as I loved the American pulps, it was nice to have a home-grown variety around as well.

Just before the war, Newnes started the pulp-size FANTASY. The lead story was a robot saga translated from the Italian. The accompanying illo showed an evil looking android

rising from an operating table to confront its creator. Another showed a horde of robots wading lemming-like into a river, maybe it was their bath-night. 'Valley Of Doom' by Halliday Sutherland told of a police state malcontent due for elimination. A 'friend' took him on a scenic ride through a valley of poison gas after giving him a duff gas-mask which he assured the hero was better than his own. The altruistic hero innocently switched the masks with unpleasant results for the baddie.



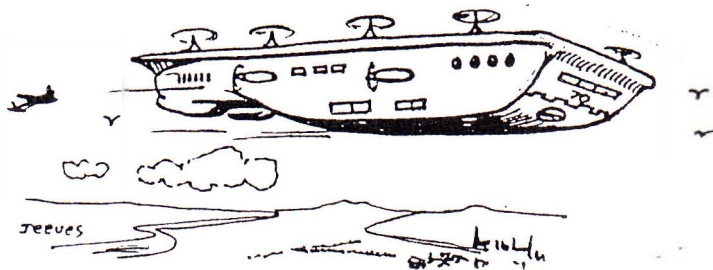
Most of FANTASY's artwork was by Drigin, his spaceships resembled submarines, possibly on the theory that as subs should be tough to keep water out, spacecraft needed strength to keep the air in. Sadly, FANTASY lasted a mere three issues, the UK market just couldn't support both FANTASY and TALES OF WONDER.

But you can't keep a good title down. An A-5 sized FANTASY, appeared after the war. This too, survived a mere three issues. The only yarns I remember were 'Basic Fundamental' which had something to do with sound harmonics and another in which a man got his body reversed from left to right in a power station accident and so was unable to digest ordinary right-handed foods. A repeat accident had to be engineered to turn him right way round again. I have a suspicion that Arthur C. Clarke made his writing debut in FANTASY, but I could be wrong.

After the War, Ted Carnell launched NEW WORLDS, Walter Gillings produced SCIENCE FANTASY and up in Scotland, Peter Hamilton published NEBULA, a magazine which saw my first professional illustration. Sadly, the UK market couldn't support such magazines and one by one they vanished from the scene.

Nova Publications twice began to issue paperback SF novels. Inevitably, their first 1953 title was Beynon's STOWAWAY TO MARS. As far as I know, there wasn't a second one in this series, but in 1954 Nova began a new series. No.1 was van Vogt's WEAPON SHOPS OF ISHER, No.2 CITY IN THE SEA (Tucker), No.3 DREAMING JEWELS (Sturgeon) and No.4 JACK OF EAGLES (Blish). They had striking covers by Gerard Quinn (not 'Gerald' as some sources have it). An early reference work made this error, and others have slavishly copied it.

Kemsley newspapers latched onto the SF boom with Cherry Tree Books. Their first SF title (No.406) was that abysmal old Gernsback potboiler, 'RALPH 124C41+' along with a reproduction of the Paul illo from the 1911 magazine in which the tale first appeared. No.407 was SINISTER BARRIER by E.F.Russell, complete with the Cartier artwork which graced the Fantasy Press Hardcover edition. No.408 had John W.Campbell's excellent WHO GOES THERE? under its film title of THE THING.

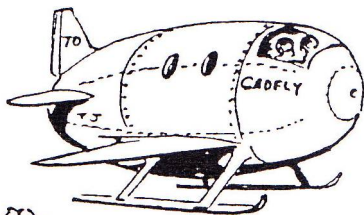


Occasionally I also came across the odd bit of hardcover SF. such as SKYRAFT by Clarke. No, NOT Arthur C. This was a giant flying platform rather like a flying aircraft carrier. Supported by airscrews along the upper side, it flew around in the stratosphere at several hundred miles an hour. The machine was operated by pirates who descended in sleek black aircraft to carry out their foul plans. Now and then the whole platform would settle near some secluded oil-refinery; the staff would be clobbered and Skyraft tanked up on several thousand gallons of high-octane. Eventually our hero flew up in his secret, high-flying (white) monoplane and landed on the platform. Being way up on the fringe of space, he had to hold his breath for the scant ten minutes it took him to get inside. Naturally, he was taken prisoner - this was of course to allow him to be led before the mad scientist so that the idiot could explain just how his machine worked. Whereupon the hero escapes, bungs half a ton of sugar in the petrol tanks and parachutes to Earth leaving Skyraft to crash into the sea.

Herbert Strang's A THOUSAND MILES AN HOUR, followed the standard format of that era by having two public school boys dumped on an uncle with a ranch on a remote hacienda in the uncharted depths of South America, whilst their parents were off climbing the Pyramids, re-pointing the Great Wall of China or shooting kippers.

Out for a jolly stroll, they enter a cave holding a pool of water with the strange power to nullify gravity. They discover this when one falls in and immediately rises up to the cave's roof. Crafty that, had it been outside, he'd have vanished into space.

When the water dries off, the levitating lad drops back with loud cries of "Yaroo", "Ouch" etc.

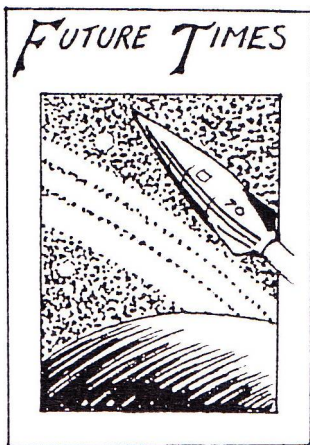


Being inventive types, our heroes build a flying machine out of handy steel plates. The 'Gadfly' is a bulbous glider lifted by compartments filled with wooden balls sprayed with the water. Once at high altitude, they are dried by air jets, the 'Gadfly' drops in a high speed glide and reaches 'a thousand miles an hour'. Calculation tells me that even neglecting air friction, they'd need a seven mile fall to reach that velocity and they had no oxygen supply. Who cares, never let facts get in the way of a good story.

'THE ECHO-MAID'. Circa 1914, told of a shipwrecked mariner landing in the underwater kingdom of 'The Wee 'uns'. These little people never die, but when they grow old, simply eat an apple from a certain tree, then shrivel up and vanish with a 'pop'. Their problem is a giant Phoenix on a rotating platform. Each time it faces the cavern's wall, it pecks it. One day it will break through and water will flood the cave. Our hero feeds it some of the apples so it pops off.

There was a story about a boy born on February the 29th. Finding a small key, he enters a garden of bushes bearing cakes, buns, jam tarts, tea, milk and coffee. There is also a queer character with a mouth all round his head, he eats circular cakes with central holes by lowering them over his head and eating outwards. The boy leaves but promises to return next Feb.29th, but on that day, he trips, falls and loses the key.

In the fifties, Eric Bentcliffe and I published the fanzine, TRIDDE. A local printer approached us with a view to putting it on the newstands - with one proviso, each issue had to contain one of his stories. We wanted to keep TRIDDE, but proposed a new title 'FUTURE TIMES'. The printer agreed, but then his wife stepped in. She disapproved of hubby's new hobby - a fur coat made better sense. The project died, but I still have a mockup of the first issue with my cover and inside are several copies of the four pages of NEVER TRUST A MACHINE by Alfred James - the printer.



Could Eric and I have edited the British SF magazine? I still have the dummy. Will it ever be worth as much as the first issue of ASTOUNDING? There must have been thousands of copies of that, whereas FUTURE TIMES only saw one copy of a non-existent first issue - you can't get any rarer than that.

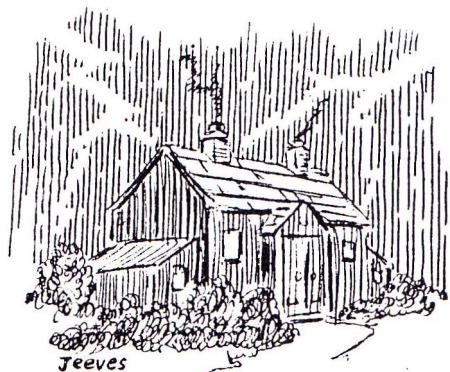
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GENERAL CHUNTERINGKen F. Slater

During a large part of July and August I was entertaining a young Polish lady. Well, to be more accurate she was my guest and was entertaining me with her exploration of some parts of Britain. Oh, she had been to London before, and has friends, and has stayed, in Ireland, but not seen rural and suburban Britain. I will probably have a lot more to say on our joint adventures in some other place and time. For the moment enough to mention that we went to Shrewsbury to visit Doreen Rogers, one-time secretary of the B.S.F.A.; one of the people who turned it into a legal entity rather than a constantly collapsing phantasm. From Doreen's place we went back to Wisbech by way of Hay-on-Wye. Not what you could call a direct route, but at least it served the purpose of letting Magda claim to have visited England and Wales. Now Magda was astonished to find that there were some forty bookshops in what is a tiny town (back in Poland she says "Forty bookshops in four streets" - there really are more than four streets - but not many!) I was astonished to discover how the place had downgraded itself since I was last there, some four or five years back. And overpriced a lot of its offerings. We finished up purchasing very little - even the very few non-sf items which Magda did find - she was seeking Gaelic myth and language material - were way over a reasonable figure or in such terrible condition to be (in my opinion) pretty near worthless. To make the point, I saw a copy of 1950 BRE Astounding, over half the front cover missing, and in poor shape otherwise. The price on its label was "£7"... Magda did find a few StarTrek novels at not unreasonable prices, and a set of "First Series" collector cards we happened upon brought joy to her heart, I think. (Although we did a far better deal on StarTrek paperbacks in a charity shop in Banbury when we stopped a couple of nights in Oxford). But Magda is writing a report on her trip, and I hope to get a translation in due time, and circulate it. Advise me if you'd like a copy.

Something that Magda and I were doing whilst she was here was trying to convince some folk that more British fans should support Eurocon next year. And we are trying to turn it into an adventure - a coach from Victoria to Warsaw, spend the night in Warsaw courtesies of various Polish fans, the train to Gdynia the next day. At present prices if we can get about a dozen folks the return fares would cost under £100 per head. Convention attendance, food, and all the usual living expenses would be additional, of course. But food and drink in Poland is cheap, if you let yourself be guided by the Polish fans. Magda, Bridget and I will work on this, and if you put your name down (no commitment) we'll give you all the information as soon as we have it figured out. But this made me think what a flowing and volatile population we have in the world today. I recall that as a kiddy (maybe seven?) I was taken on a trip from Maidenhead to some coastal resort. In a charabanc, a type long out of use where each row of seats had its own door, and the top was open. You have possibly seen a vehicle of this sort in an old (or period) film, or in a museum. That was an adventure. But today? On my last trip to Warsaw, last month, I met and conversed with fellow travellers; on the coach from Peterboro to Victoria an (other) elderly gentleman who was going to France and Switzerland to look at the railways; on the airbus a young Canadian lady who was returning home after ten months in England, to complete her degree course; returning at Victoria (I went to the "Parrot" to get a meal) I met a despairing chap who had travelled from North Wales and who was going to Diss, and arrived at Victoria to find his coach was overbooked, and he had to wait until 18.00 for his connection (reserved seats? A joke!). Then when I caught my coach for Peterborough I got into conversation with the young lady next to me, who proved to be Hungarian and since February she had been at Fridaybridge Camp - a student/agricultural camp near Wisbech. On the way out of London our coach was attacked by a small car, which delayed us, and at P'boro the Wisbech bus had left; but as Susie was meeting me with her car, we were able to give the lady a lift to Fridaybridge. She is going to Paris for a holiday. Gets to be a small but adventurous world, don't it? Would you like to join us and try it out with a Baltic Eurocon? Fantastically K.F.S.

Death in the Ophand Manor



Lightning flashed across the rain-sheated sky. Thunderous peals of pealing thunder crashed crashingly across the heaving heavens. Deep down in the depths of the darksome village, the sole road bridge crashed into the roaring flood waters beneath, taking with it the only telephone line leading to the bleak mansion on the hill. Torrents of water streamed from the skies on to the ivy-covered walls of the stately, crumbling, Ophand Manor. It was a rather filthy night.

Within the majestic walls of the venerable building, all was warmth, light and festivity. Gathered round the festive board and festering merrily were the guests of old Lord Elpuzz; , scion of the Ophand Clan and a great traveller on his youth. Even now, if seated beside a pretty woman, his hands often went roaming. Food had ebbed and flowed across the great banqueting table. Wine had ebbed and flowed even more freely and as the revelry reached its height, the bleary-eyed patriarch staggered to his feet. The old nobleman polished his spectacles, wiped away some of the food which had ebbed and flowed so freely across his once white shirt front, and surveyed his guests. Raising a thin-veined, aristocratic hand, he waited for silence. Gradually the merry buzz of intellectual conversation slowed, dithered a bit and finally ground to a halt. Every eye was on Lord Elpuzz as the company waited with 'bated breath.

"Hic!" said his Lordship. He paused and ruminated a while, perhaps Latin was not the proper language for this occasion. He began again in the ringing tones which had once rallied the troops in the latrines of Aldershot.

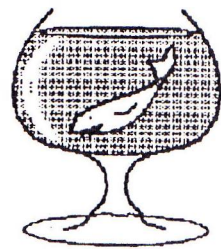
"Friends", he orated. "Look around you at all these riches". He waved his arms wide in a magnificent sweeping gesture which unfortunately caught the soup tureen before him and knocked it neatly into the lap of Lady Lucille Astic. With true aristocratic savoir faire, Lady Lucille took a spoon and disposed of the debris. Ignoring the minor contretemps, Lord Elpuzz continued,

"Someday, all this will go to my heir. That person's name will remain a secret until my death, but this I will tell you. That person is seated at this table tonight. One of you here will inherit all this..." He repeated the magnificent gesture and Lady Lucille resignedly reached for another spoon to remove the contents of the custard bowl. "I give you a toast", cried his Lordship.

Raising his powder-blue balloon glass, he declaimed the Clan Motto,

"Ophand, Ophand, always be Ophand". He drained his glass in one gulp, uttered a terrible scream of agony and crashed to the floor.

Hemlock Shomes, one of the poorer offshoots of the Ophand family was the first to reach him, but by the time he knelt by the body, his late Lorship was merely a haphazard collection of cleanly-picked bones. Something flapped limply among the shards of the shattered



glass. Shomes swept it aside, then laid his palm upon the skeletal rib-cage. A strange, eerie, trilling whistle filled the air - the unconscious sound Shomes made when confronted by an enigma. Swiftly he reached a decision. "His Lordship is dead", announced the master sleuth.

"Poisoned?" queried a quavering questioner.

"Worse", frowned Hemlock, "Some utter cad slipped a rare Piranha-Piranha fish into his drink. The ordinary breed can finish a man off in 29.7 seconds. This one was a steroid-fed competition type bred for the Olympics and it finished him off in less than ten."

"I knew there was something fishy about this set-up", whined the pimply-faced Nick Larss who had recently returned from Paraguay.

"Was it murder, or did it get there by accident?"

"It was murder all right", said Shomes in his deep bronze coloured voice, "And whoever did it left a clue." He stooped and removed a neatly printed card from beneath the skeleton's dentures. Holding it to the light and adjusting his bifocals, the great defective read out,

"Don't put nuts in the armour".

"That must be where the murderer hid the fish", yelled out headstrong old Brummer. Before Shomes could stop him, the old fellow tottered across the room, raised the vizor of the nearest suit of armour (worn by Lord Elpuzz's grandfather at the siege of Coventry) and thrust in his head to look for clues. There was a grinding crash. The vizor, its edge sharpened to the keenness of a razor, slammed down on Brummer's neck. There was a hollow 'Boing' as his severed head fell inside the armour.

"Well the note told him not to put his nut in the armour" someone quavered.

"Well that eliminates him", said the sleuth. "The only thing we can do now is to re-enact the crime. One of us must take the part of Lord Elpuzz and go through his movements to find who could have slipped him the Piranha-Piranha."

"Suppose they slip in another one", quavered the quaverer.

"Not a chance," scoffed Shomes. "I'll take his Lordship's place and to prevent any Piranha-Piranha getting to me, I'll tie this handy tea-strainer over my mouth. Come, let us re-enact the crime".

Five minutes later, Shomes reached the point of the magnificent gesture. Once again, a re-filled soup tureen made a rendezvous with Lady Lucille's lissom lap. She looked resignedly down at the mess

"To hell with it," she growled. Standing up, she removed the soiled gown and sat down composedly in a silky underslip. Ten seconds later, at the second magnificent gesture, she rose again and discarded a custard-coated underslip. The remaining guests began to see hidden possibilities in this reconstruction and eagerly awaited further gestures .. but Shomes was intent on the matter in hand. Raising a replacement balloon glass to his lips, he took a long swallow before setting down the glass.

"See," he said smugly, "Perfectly safe." Shomes took a slim cigar from his pocket, placed it between his manly lips, struck a match and lit it.

"The murderer's identity is obvious", he paused to smile wickedly.

"It was of course..."

At this point, the cigar between his lips exploded, killing him instantly.

'Jock' Sausage was first to the body. Whipping out a strangely shaped device from a secret pocket in his cummerbund, he

11

operated a switch on the side. In a few seconds, he had collected the mortal remains of the defunct detective. Again, a strange, eerie, trilling sound filled the room. It was 'Jock' Sausage's portable bagpipes which he played in moments of great stress. The man of green, so named for the colour of his teeth, marched up and down, deep in thought. His glance smouldered fiercely, smoke came from beneath his collar. The great man pondered.

"Another murder," he announced. Lady Lucille noticed how his vibrant voice vibrated vibrantly. "And another clue," he added. Picking up a slip of pasteboard and adjusting his high-power contact lenses, Sausage read,

"Smoking can affect your health"

Three guests turned ashen-faced, rummaged within their dinner-jackets and withdrew two Meerschaums and a Churchwarden. Three hands rose and dashed down the smoking equipment. Three explosions marked the removal of three more suspects from the list. Their pipes had been booby-trapped.

Sausage quickly applied his pocket vacuum-cleaner, then faced the surviving guests. The red-faced, doddering old Potsodo, the equally decrepit Schweinfeva, and the tall, slender, Lady Lucille, clad only in the briefest of undies. His gaze lingered thoughtfully on Her Ladyship. His eyes lit up.

"I think we should re-enact the crime once again." He gestured to an old and wrinkled retainer.

"Scrote, refill the soup tureen and the custard bowl."

The job was soon done. Lady Lucille gave a resigned shrug which did nice things for her bare shoulders. Potsodo's face moved a few Angstroms into the purple. Sausage donned the tea-strainer to keep out Piranha-Piranha and laid a fifteen foot long holder handy as a protection against exploding cigars. He began his speech.

In due course, he made the gesture and the soup tureen landed on Lady Lucille's lap. With complete indifference, she wriggled sinuously out of a lacy but soup-spattered garment. Potsodo's faced turned an even deeper purple and his eyes bulged. Clutching vainly at his heart, he slid slowly beneath the dining table. When the custard bowl spread its contents across Her Ladyship's upper storey and she heaved her custard-soaked bra through the air, it was Schweinfeva's turn to follow Potsodo into oblivion. The Ophands never did have strong hearts.

Sausage shot a penetrating glance at Lady Lucille. With only two of them left alive, he was beginning to suspect her. Clad only in stiletto heels, sheer stockings and a wisp of lace, what was she hiding? He took a long swig at the Chemin de Fer '94, lit a stogie at the far end of the fifteen foot long holder, sat back and inhaled deeply.

There was a tiny pop of gas from the stogie. A needle-pointed dart tipped with the venom of a little-known Amazonian fanzine, sped smoothly up the tube. Sausage was dead before his body reached the floor. Silence reigned except for an eerie trilling noise. The body had fallen on the bagpipes.

It was at this point that the old and trusted retainer dashed in, grabbed Lady Lucille under one arm and the boundless Ophand treasures under the other. He had been the murderer all the time. After all, in any decent murder mystery it is always the butler who did it.

THE END

THE OLD MILL STREAM A Column of City Life by Penelope Fandergaste

The other day... That's a good way to begin a column. Nice and vague. Just the job when the column in question is being written some few weeks, or even months, before its eventual appearance in print. I'd begin, "Once upon a time," in the traditional way, but the implication there is that events occurred at some time further back in the past.

So... The other day I went into town to buy a new pair of shoes. Also, I had plans for the shoebox and my neighbour's cat. I've been buying the same model of shoes for years. I don't wait around. As soon as the newspaper I've been using as inner soles can no longer be folded in a different way without coming to pieces in my hands like a 1930 pulp magazine in Andy Darlington's collection. I'm down to the local store on the first free supermarket bus. It wouldn't do to mention the name brand of the shoes in a non-commercial magazine like ERG. Suffice it to say that the shoes are generally accepted as being as safe as houses

The salesman was of little help. "The model has been discontinued," he told me, "But how about this one? It's a pseudo semiGucci type."

"Wasn't the old model selling?" I asked. "I thought it was a popular range."

"It was," he admitted. "I've sold hundreds over the years."

"And this new range?" I enquired.

Another admission, "Hardly a one."

This is what comes no doubt from market research. Someone out there has to be responsible for things *changing*. It happens all the time I don't subscribe to the widely held theory that it's a Dastardly Plot perpetrated by the Inner Wheels of the Fourth Dimension or anything like that. but suddenly we notice that some loved artifact isn't there any more.. It's gone. Something else has taken its place. And were we consulted?

Heavens! What happened to Motoring Chocolate? Or for that matter, Five Boys Chocolate with the five pictures of a miserable looking callow youth brightening up visibly as he envisaged getting his grimy paws on a bar? And no, there's no truth in the widely circulated story that I posed for the first picture of the series.

Tootal ties, Panshine, Rinso, Oxydol, Swan Soap, Sylvan Flakes... Where did they all go? It strikes me that in so many instances a change was made simply for the sake of making a change.. If it's new, it has to be better. Yes, like those new designs on the tailplanes of British Airways aircraft. Someone was paid hefty money to come up with that super idea. No doubt someone was paid a large amount, too, to devise this new introductory logo to the BBC TV news. Very necessary. It's a change. It has to be better.

I'm not for the moment suggesting that we stand in the way of progress. Stage coaches, gas lighting, and penny-farthings have all had their day and have all been superseded by something better. But really, those BA tailplane designs! I ask you, are we living in the Real World? Or in Nursery Rhyme Land? Perhaps it's a case for "Once upon a time," after all. Or in Nursery Rhyme Land, the rhyme which was once on everyone's lips... yes, you know the one... Gucci, Gucci Gander.

Tell me THE OLD OLD STORY



In the early days of SF, if an author sat down to write a story he generally needed a hero, a heroine and a villain to keep things moving. It was also almost mandatory to include a mad, or at least eccentric, Professor. We never heard what he professed, but to simplify things it was handy to give him a daughter to double as the heroine. She was 'a true brick' (i.e., a bit of a square) and probably created by parthogenesis, polyandry or even polyfills, as we never heard of Mrs. Professor. We didn't have clones in those days

The hero (usually named 'Chuck'), had to be seven feet tall, have muscles of steel (iron could be accepted), and was always a handsome college boy down on his luck and ready to accept any stupid job if it paid off well. He also possessed 'piercing blue eyes', whereas the villain had 'gimlet eyes' which presumably made different sized holes. The baddy also spoke with a foreign accent, had greasy black hair, a thin moustache and no muscles to speak of, that is if you like speaking of muscles. Here again, to keep things tidy, it was customary to make him the Professor's laboratory assistant. Returning to the Persil-white heroine, she was a tall, slim golden haired brunette with pearly white teeth, mostly her own, no brains and given in moments of high emotion to using words such as "spiffing", "whizzo", "anyone for tennis", "How does it work Professor? or "sod it!"

Having met all the characters, we can now get on with the story. Chuck is sitting on his usual seat in his temporary home - a bench in the park. He is reading an interesting ad in a paper he found in a trash can, Chuck isn't a proud man. The ad says, and I quote, If I don't, you won't know what it's all about... "Half-witted ex-college boy required to undertake a hare-brained experiment which is almost certainly deadly, if not utterly fatal. No insurance supplied, if you fail, you couldn't collect it and if you succeed, you won't need it."

Chuck thumps one fist into an open palm. and winces in pain, he forgot his steel muscles. "By golly, that's for me". he ejaculates or says emphatically. Immediately, if not sooner, and straight away without further delay or dallying, he springs to his feet and sets off to the address given in the newspaper. This proves to be a ramshackle old mansion boasting an East wing and a West wing. Given a good engine and a decent runway it could probably get airborne. Most authors refrain from pointing this out.

Chuck raps firmly on the double doors and is busily sucking the splinters out of his knuckles when they creak slowly open (the doors, not his knuckles). An ancient Professor and his hunchback henchman, Igor, stand revealed. Henchmen are always hunchbacks, it comes with the job. The professor is bent double, something like this, U, but the other way up. He's a little stiff from hiking, whereas Igor is a big stiff from Tooting. He blows a trumpet in the local youth orchestra under the false name of Rogi, he's a very backward chap.

"Come in", says the Professor, "I'm Professor Ben Tova, and this is my assistant Igor Stravinsky Skivar. Come to my laboratory. Please walk this way." He sets off, Always eager to oblige, Chuck bends over and hobbles after him.

They descend to a basement room crammed with huge retorts, flashing sparks, strange machinery and all the paraphernalia of the standard Hollywood horror film. The click click of high-heeled shoes comes from behind a giant transformer (it transforms giants). It is the Professor's daughter, Doolally, practising on her castanets as she waits for a beaker full of a strange brown liquid to come to the boil.

"Anyone for coffee?" she asks giving Chuck a winsome smile - you winsome, you lose some. But the professor is in no mind for dallying, he sets out to explain his invention to Chuck (but really, for the benefit of the reader, so that he'll know what is going on.)

"By means of negatively polarised quanta particles I feed genetically modified sunlight into my multi-dimensional accumulator and give it three seconds at F.8. When all is ready, you stand on that platform, press the button and in a flash you will be transported to another dimension..." He hands Chuck a belt studded with highly technical-looking gadgets, "Wear this and press the red button to return."

At this point, the author can choose from two possibilities.

(a) Doolally, steps up on the platform, says,

"Is this the button Chuck has to press? She puts her finger on it, and naturally, touches it too hard. There is a flash and she vanishes.

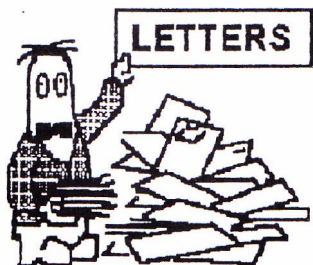
Alternatively,

(b) Igor grabs Doolally round the waist (he has long arms), sweeps her up on the platform, presses the button and they both vanish.

The way ahead is now clear, Chuck snatches the return belt, jumps on the platform and heads off to the rescue. This involves fighting off vicious aliens in the other dimension, or knocking the stuffing out of Igor. Either way, he returns with Doolally. At this point the machine explodes, Doolally goes into Chuck's embrace, then makes coffee for everyone - unless they fancy a game of tennis.

They don't write stories like that any more

T.J.



ALAN BURNS, 19 The Crescent, Kings Rd. Sth. Wallsend NE28 7RE Re SCOOPS, I read it of course, but one day my Father, who could never resist a junk shop came home clutching two bound year-issues of a mag called CHUMS. It had ripping yarns of schools and such, but it also had in each set a science fiction serial. In the first ish was one about the usual world

conqueror done down by two schoolboys, the other ish had a story about the usual trip to Mars in a ship called the Marsobus and how the wicked Grappies (boo, hiss) were dealt with and beaten. This leads me to a point that often occurred, how a secret spaceship could be built without anyone knowing. When the last supertanker was being built in one of the shipyards here, you could hear the noise all over Wallsend at knocking off time. Thirty-five special buses were there to take the men away and bring in the nightshift and the glare of lights was enough to light up the streets around. How do they build these spaceships secretly, you tell me. *[They drug the local drinking water so people sleep through the row]*

ROY LAVENDER, 2507 E.17th St., Long Beach, CA90804-1508 My only experience with UAVs was with Curtiss-Wright and the KD-2C target drone. The pulse jet engine is essentially a quarter wave organ pipe. A 400lb organ pipe is a loud organ pipe. They ran it at the far SE corner of Wright and you couldn't carry on a conversation at the NW corner. C-W decided on a neat, streamlined torpedo with an internal Giannini pulse jet. Fed by a duct from an opening in the nose. Wing spar, aluminium electrical tubing supporting Styrofoam with aluminium foil skin. It didn't fly. They tried carrying it under a fighter plane, it ran. They released it, it quit running. After several repeat failures someone mentioned that the front duct made it a half-wave pipe. A telephone pole was cut and turned to form the front half of the torpedo. Side inlets were cut to let it breathe. The first test involved a drone on two wooden saw horses with an air hose in its mouth. It took off and made it most of the way across the Columbus airport before someone punched the stop button. It flew well at Fort Wachucca. 50 calibres through foam wings just made holes. When they ran out of ammunition the operator brought the still flyable drone back at finger tip altitude, right over the gunners. At that altitude, it impressed them.

RON BENNETT, 36 Arthur's Ave., Harrogate, N.Yorks, HG2 0AW Appalling news about John Roles. As I understand it, John disturbed an intruder in his shop and was killed for his pains. *[Ron also sent a clipping revealing that the killer even set fire to the shop to conceal his work. John was an actfan in the 50s and a member of the Liverpool group. He will be missed.]* Down Memory Bank Lane hit the spot] I was never in a position to buy *Scoops* when it appeared but I have a set and have read quite a few of the issues. I've never been able to see much difference between the fiction offered from that which appeared in *The Wizard*. *[I don't think there was any.]*

KEN LAKE, 36 Barrington Rd., Loughton, Essex, IG10 2AY You suggest that when you stop using your brain you become senile: this doesn't explain all the seemingly senile 30 year olds I've known [*They started non-thinking early*] Did they stop using their brains when they left school? [*Probably*] Like the University lecturers I know who never absorbed a new fact since they were students. Me, I'd say senility begins when you stop getting angry about things in the newspaper. [*Like fish and chips?*] I don't have a TV as, from what I read about it, I'd be permanently furious. [*TV gets ever more slanted to the brainwashed brigade, Ghu nows what will eventually emerge from the multi-channel (tripe) society*]. So KFS is finding bookbuying fandom shrinking: I suggest he take a table at UNconvention - I thoroughly enjoyed the last one. [*Ken has a table at almost every Convention going, plus a mail order business, so he knows the market well. He'll get you almost any title published, his address is Ken Slater, PO Box 23, Upwell, Wisbech, Cambs PE14 9BU*]



Joseph T. Major, 1409 Christy Ave, Louisville, KY, 40204-2040 USA *More*

[*Mechanix Magazines*]: I had a theory that there was some sort of secret agreement among the various publishers of these things. The mags would regularly among themselves, publish one article on the forthcoming wonders of steam and one on the forthcoming new lighter-than-air craft. I started reading these at the end of the fifties and I still have not seen any steam cars, while lighter than air craft seem to be divided into small unmanned blimps moored over auto dealerships and larger manned blimps that drift around the country advertising things. All those grand passenger palaces and silent, efficient steam cars are still pending. [*So are feasible household robot maids*]

Ned Brooks, 4817 Dean Lane, Lilburn, GA 30047-4720, USA You are apparently closer to right about gun control than about TV violence - much of the world gets our TV and videos and yet does not have anything like our murder rate. [*We have fewer guns*]. Many of these countries have gun control but there are lots of ways to do away with people - the Swiss are required to have a military weapon in every house. Japanese TV is even more violent than ours. But the USA is the last of the 'civilised' countries to retain the death penalty. Perhaps governmental example has something to do with it.

Dale Speirs, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, Canada T2P 2E7 Your comment on the low rate of British gun deaths versus USA will stir up a few people. Canada's gun death rate is likewise far lower than USA per capita, but you can't convince some people. I am however sympathetic to the viewpoint that it may be too late to put the genie back in the bottle Stateside. But we'll keep gun control for the Canucks. If only criminals have guns, then the murder rate will drop 95% since most murders are the result of domestic disputes or consensual drunken arguments. [*Sounds logical to me*].

Roger Waddington, 4 Commercial St., Norton, Malton, N.Yorks YO17 9ES Raising the question of guns and the USA again, American friends will claim the right to bear arms is written in their Constitution. Of course it is, but what follows usually tends to be ignored, "... as part of a well-ordered militia.", so we can only assume that all those 9360 people killed in the USA last year must have been enemies of the State.