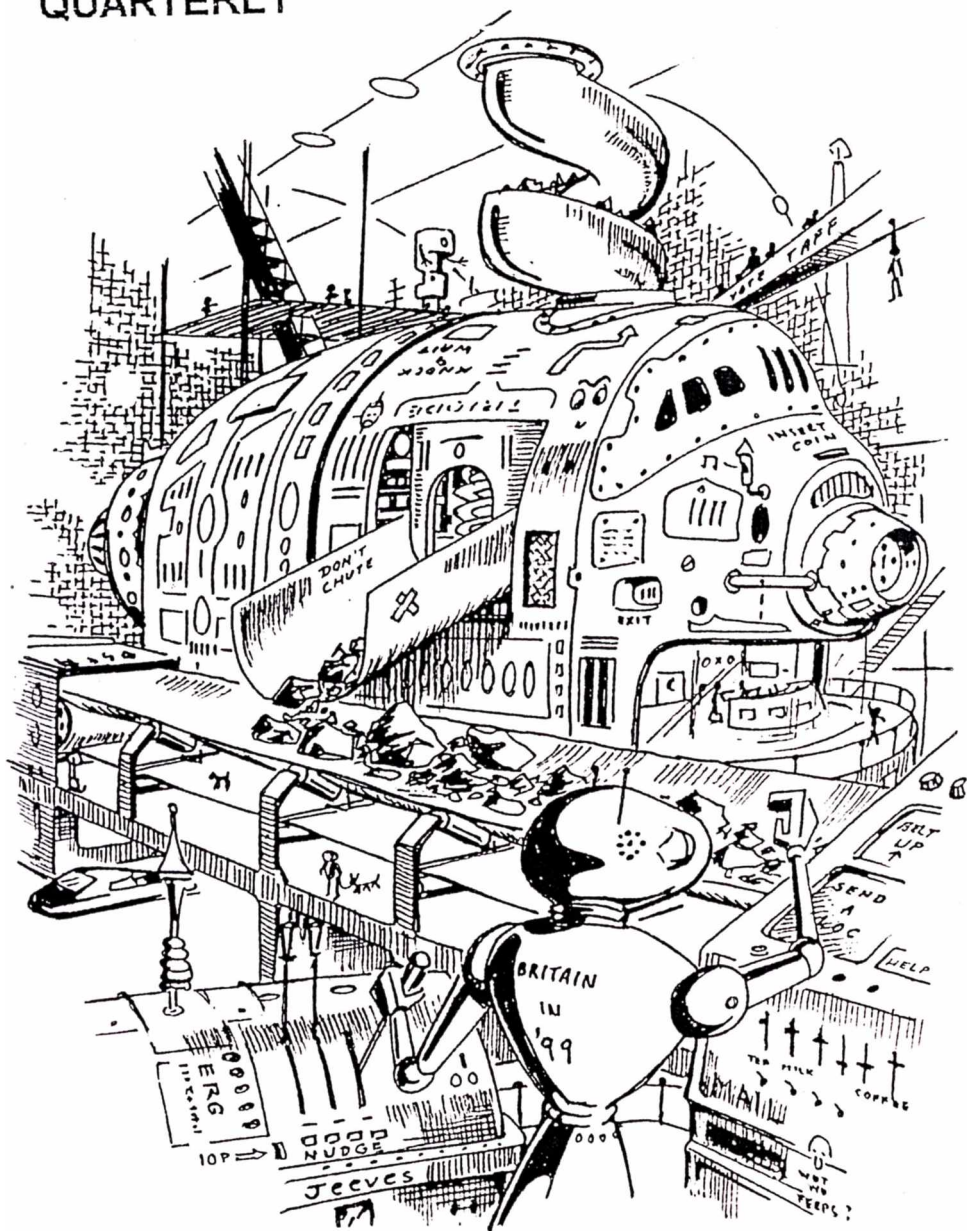


ERG QUARTERLY

137
APRIL 1997

38th. ANNIVERSARY ISSUE



ERG 137

QUARTERLY
APRIL 1997

From
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38th. Anniversary ISSUE

IF you enjoyed this issue a LOC will get you the next

It is now fourteen years since I ran DOWN MEMORY BANK LANE recalling my SF reminiscences, so I'm starting a re-write, re-run with this issue. Even those who have read the articles before will probably have forgotten them by now, so I hope everybody enjoys my rummaging through the dim and distant past.

In those happy times, Fandom used to be politics-free, but nowadays certain fanzine writers feel they have to slag the Tories at every chance. A faned's politics are his own business, but why ruin a good zine by biased insults? Fair comment to complain about any political nitwittery, but snide comments such as, "As stupid as xxxx" or "As totally insincere and brainless as yyyy", have no place in fanzines. I stopped taking New Scientist because of this attitude in what should supposedly be unbiased science reporting. I hate to see such narrow mindedness in fandom.

I was musing about the Turing Test for AI, when it occurred to me that you don't need anything so tedious and complicated as a three-way communication between a human, a computer and a tester. Simply give the computer a cryptic crossword to solve. This requires far more than delving into a huge data bank but sets posers in anagrams, hidden words, word-play, allusions, homonyms and many other traps. If a computer can sort out such a puzzle, I reckon it deserves to be classified as intelligent.

I just came across the news in 'Flight', that the Clipper DC-XA crashed in New Mexico last July because of a disconnected pneumatic line to the landing gear .. and I gather that Ariane blew up through a programming fault. It seems that the human factor isn't all that intelligent anyway.

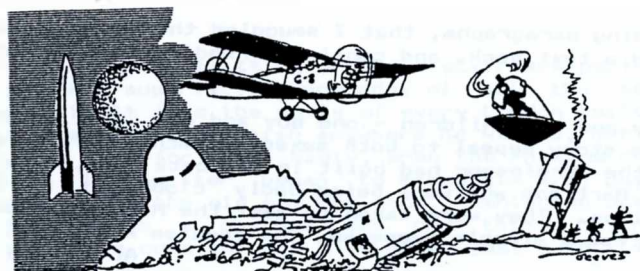
Paradox puzzle. How can anti-abortion 'pro-lifers' justify bombing clinics and doctors' cars? It's a similar mentality to those who fancy to gain peace in Ireland by indiscriminate bombing. Solution, there's nowt so daft as idiots.

I'm delighted to say that following my story sale to TOMORROW, Algis Budrys, the editor has now purchased some of my cartoons for use in the electronic edition. Look for 'em on www.tomorrow.com

It was with great regret that I heard of the death of Brian Robinson at the beginning of January. A long-time fan and ERG reader from way back, after a period of gaffiation, Brian was just returning to fandom. He recently had a leg amputated below the knee and was given six months to live by the medics. Sadly he didn't even get that long. Yet another trufan gone to that great Convention in the sky.

Terry

DOWN MEMORY-BANK LANE.I



BLOODS & COMICS

As far as a rather dodderly memory can recall, my lifelong love affair with SF began in a very humble manner with the comic papers and 'twopenny bloods' of the early thirties. Even now, years later, some of those stories still circulate around my memory cells in fragmentary and chronologically distorted forms. The earliest of these memories comes from around 1930 and concerns a comic called, 'THE JESTER'. This was a kid's comic which was printed on a bilious green paper, guaranteed to give eyestrain if you read it for too long..

The JESTER featured such time-worn characters as 'Weary Willy and Tired Tim', a couple of tramps strongly resembling Laurel and Hardy.

Their main aim in life seemed to be the pursuit of huge plates of sausages and mashed potato. These comic strips were set out in the standard form of that era. Each panel carrying beneath it, about four lines of miniscule, eye-straining script describing the action above.

I fancy these footnotes were offered more as a sop to 'educationalists' than as an aid to the reader, since the pictures themselves and the speech 'balloons' floating above each character adequately conveyed the story line. I can't recall any of us ever reading these subscripts, but such redundant information was a feature of British comics for many a year before, like printed stories, vanishing into Limbo.



In addition to the comic strips, THE JESTER usually carried a couple of stories. One of these invariably concerned a dashing Arab Sheikh. He was usually illustrated riding the mandatory white stallion. In his right hand, he brandished a long, curved sword. Draped tastefully across his left arm and fully clothed in an assortment of bedsheets, he wore a white woman busily engaged in fainting.

Since I hadn't heard of the white slave trade or the unspeakable subject of s-x, I never really worked out the reason for this particular encumbrance. I decided it was just another peculiarity of desert dwellers. Not that it really mattered, as I never read that sort of story anyway.

The second tale in this weekly feast of elevating literature alternated between that old stand-by, the 'wandering-lost-unwanted-sheepdog' roaming around Scotland in search of its lost master, and a Sax Rohmer-ish mystery full of Chinese characters and their sinister Tongs. However, just ONCE, JESTER ran a story set on the planet Mars! No doubt the idea was pinched from Edgar Rice Burroughs, but I thought it was simply terrific. I was so

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enthralled by the opening paragraphs, that I smuggled the comic into school, hid it behind a text book, and continued reading to find out what happened.

Professor Thingy and two children - one boy and one girl, (an idea meant to make the story appeal to both sexes), reached Mars in a rocket ship which the Professor had built in his back yard. They landed among the good Martians who were being badly clobbered in a war with the bad Martians. They were taken to meet the Martian ruler who explained that unless a miracle happened, the baddies would win.



At this point, the Ruler discovered that the Earthpeople had a material called 'glass'. Probably the Professor happened to be carrying a spare sheet of the stuff in a back pocket. The Ruler saw this as a possible answer to a Martian's prayer. He had the pane of glass set up on a table, then ordered one of his soldiers

to put his hand behind it. Reluctantly, the chap obeyed; the ruler whipped out his trusty ray-gun and let fly. Much to the relief of the target, the glass stopped the ray completely and the soldier was unhurt. Orders were given; with all that Martian sand around, large-scale production of glass armour began immediately. Wearing their new ray-proof glass outfits, the good goodies sallied gleefully forth to duff the baddies. The glee was short-lived. One warrior fell and shattered his glass armour. The baddies, seeing that the ray-proof gear would shatter at a thump, began thumping with all their might.

Once again, the goodies were in dire peril. What could the Professor do to save them? It was at this exciting moment the teacher's large hand appeared over my shoulder, snatched the JESTER, screwed it into a ball, then consigned it to the waste paper basket. I never did find out how things turned out on Mars.

Printed on an even more eye-straining dark blue paper than the JESTER, was The BULLSEYE. Possibly both periodicals were secretly financed by the Society of Opticians. The BULLSEYE had pages of closely printed fiction aimed squarely at the sensation-seeking devotees of higher thought. No comics or cartoons sullied its pages, with only the occasional story-heading illustration to break the solid pages of print. It featured various short yarns, most of them in series form to ensure you bought the thing every week.

One of these, which I still recall, was 'The Phantom Of Blackfriars'; a ghostly figure who haunted the streets of London. During the day, he led an everyday existence, but after dark in his secret life, he would don a black cape, daub his face with luminous

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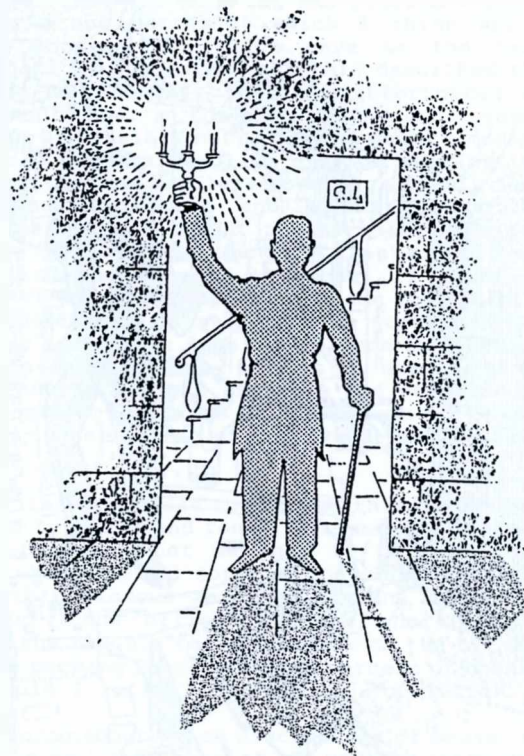
paint, then go flitting around Blackfriars performing his nefarious deeds. His superlative knowledge of all the secret passages and tunnels built into the walls of every London building enabled him not only to appear and vanish anywhere he wished, but also to escape from any trap laid for him. Sadly, when the Phantom returned for a second series, the writer began to endow him with psychical powers which soured me off the old boy for good. Vanishing down a secret passage hidden inside a postbox was one thing, having him dissolve into ectoplasm to ooze through a keyhole, just wasn't fair.

Another 'BULLSEYE' favourite was John Gaunt, a crippled, former explorer who lived alone in the 'House Of Secrets'. No longer able to experience his thrills at first hand, he compensated for this and now gained a vicarious excitement by giving a crisp £100 note to anyone who could relate a true story of some strange adventure.

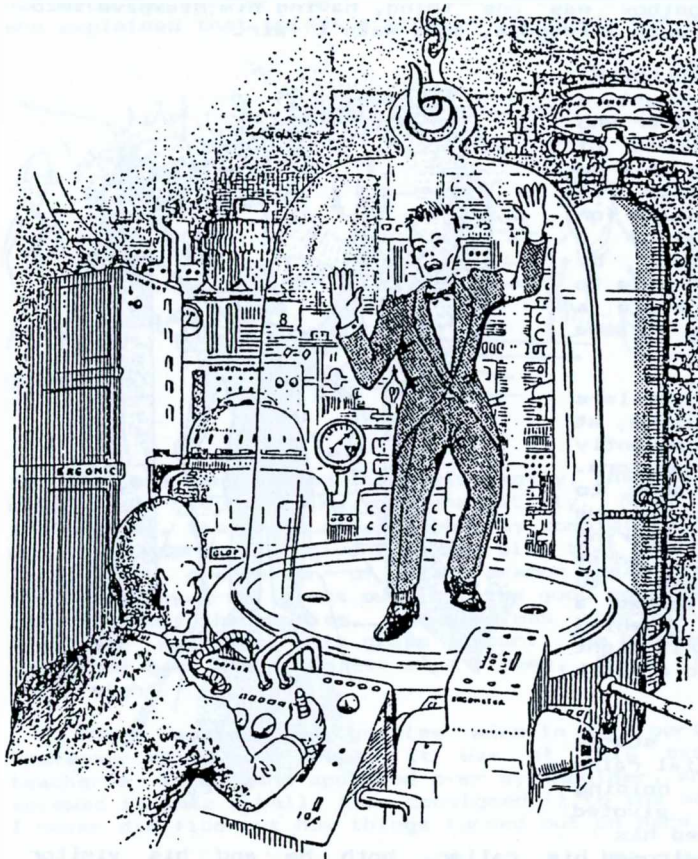
These storytellers invariably arrived, alone, at dead of night, and frequently during a heavy thunderstorm. Gaunt would open the door to them, holding high an antique candelabra holding flickering candles which the worst storms never seemed to extinguish. They seemed a bit superfluous as behind him, a glaring electric light threw his body into a black silhouette.

On one such stormy night, the torrential rains had operated a catch holding shut a secret, pivoted flagstone which formed his doorstep. As John welcomed his caller, both he and his visitor dropped through into a hidden vault beneath. Whilst down there, another story was related and the £100 was paid over. I don't remember how they managed to escape, or if he had the trapdoor repaired, but Gaunt was back in time for the next issue.

One scruffy-looking caller told of being strapped to a giant pointer which rotated on a pivot above a huge 'board of chance'. He had been spun above divisions labelled with such titles as MONEY, POWER, DEATH, etc. Whichever he and the pointer stopped against, so was he to be treated. It was a game entered into by tramps, bankrupts, derelicts or anyone else desperate enough to risk his life for the chance of a fortune. A similar roulette game was operated by a Secret Society whose victims were held in a giant claw and spun above a compartmented 'board'. When the claw stopped the captive was dropped into the segment beneath. Some of these



compartments held large sums of money, others sharp, upward-facing knives and some were deep pits from which the victim was taken to forcible enlistment in the Foreign Legion or another equally unpleasant fate. If a victim landed on a pile of money, he was allowed to take it and go - provided he swore a mighty oath never to reveal his experiences.



On another occasion, a visitor told how he had been drugged by a Mad Scientist. He awoke, to find himself imprisoned inside a huge glass bell-jar from which the air was slowly being pumped out and replaced by some strange gas. Mad Scientists were always doing that sort of thing.

After seeing such exciting scenes illustrated on the cover, who could resist hazarding a measly 2d, to find out what ghastly fate awaited the beautiful woman lashed to the spinning pointer or what foul things were happening to the man imprisoned in the huge bell-jar?

Also in the eye-strain league approved by nine out of ten

opticians, was BOY'S MAGAZINE. Half foolscap in size and coloured a virulent shade of pink, it usually ran one long yarn and a shorter one. The only concession to cartoon lovers was the single panel, 'Useless Eustace' drawn by Jack Greenall. The long novel would often have a science fiction theme involving ugly creatures descending from outer space, or horrible monsters emerging from the bowels of the Earth. These invaders usually chose the centre of Wembley football pitch, or Trafalgar Square at rush hour for their appearances. Both places were as accident prone as the Empire State Building which was fictionally destroyed on average, half a dozen times a year. As befitted the era, the monsters were often led by renegade Germans, Italians or Chinese intent on taking over the world, i.e. Britain. These tales were highly forgettable, as a result, I've highly forgotten most of 'em.

Ken F Slater

The word "chuntering" came my way back in 1947, when I was looking for something to call a column in which I wished to string a whole series of disjointed comments, oddments of information, and snippets of data from varied sources. The idea was not new; *PUNCH* had such a column for aeons; several of the late thirties magazines such as *LILLIPUT* also used similar "departments". In the sf field Walt Gillings had a column called "Fantasia" in the magazine *FANTASY REVIEW* which he edited and published from 1947 to 1950. So the idea was wide open for use; the name was the problem. I had a dictionary (actually, several, old and battered) which I think was a Blackie's Etymological, vintage about 1928, which gave me the term "chuntering"; so far as I can recall it suggested that this described the sotto-voce muttering of a stream of thought, possibly interrupted or irregular. The sort of thing you would hear in the pub from the local yokel well advanced in his cups and years. Or possibly not, today; I doubt a modern landlord is inclined to welcome old codgers dawdling over an everlasting half-pint. I note that today's dictionaries are less specific; mostly they just give "mutter" or "grumble" as an alternative, and leave it at that. My long-gone elderly dictionary at least tried to put the term into its proper place. Anyway, I used ellipses to indicate a change of track and did not paragraph. The official "ellipsis" was three full stops, if I recall correctly (I don't know if Vallins or some other authority made this rule; I have offloaded to the needy word-poor most of my reference works of that nature, and so cannot check. If you could care, you are welcome to research it. I don't need to know). My ellipses had as many dots as it needed for me to justify a righthand column on an old Olympia portable and very manual tripewriter. Once I start to paragraph the title of the column no longer applies. So this vessel is sailing under a flag of inconvenience, totally false to its nature.

Unfortunately for everyone the machine that I use to produce this column has a very limited facility for varying typesize and font. This may be better, but is not sans serif, which I prefer. Let me know if this is more acceptable, uh? The other machine which has all sorts of fonts and sizes is one in which I get lost. I fall thru windows and find someone moved the ladder. Apart from which it is set up in the "official" office, where I can't keep one eye on the dog, one ear on the radio, a third receptor on the tv, and where (unless I'm standing up at the packing bench wrapping parcels of books) I don't feel comfortable. Why should I suffer? I produce, you suffer...

Sorry if folk thought I was complaining about price discounting of books in the U.K. No complaint, just the facts as I see them; it has made no difference to me, as I "specialise". This, of course, is the answer; but it takes time to build a specialist purchasing clientele, and the margins and leeway and borderlands and so on for many small town bookshops do not exist. Oh, new people will come in, and different methods will be applied, and we shall get something similar back, only less of them... Or so I learned from a conversation with an American fan some time ago. He was suprised at the number of small towns in Britain which, with populations of a few thousand, could support bookshops which were local and not part of a chain. He, apparently, had to travel to a town over fifty miles away to find a good book store (shop). I suppose I should have enquired where he lived - I mean, if he was located in the middle of a desert or a mangrove swamp... But I believe Calgary is a place of some consequence; fifty years ago it had a population of some 90,000 and I assume it has grown since. Here in Britain I mean towns considerably smaller which nevertheless supported one or two "local" bookshops in addition to a chain shop. As an aside I've just discovered that the AA handbook no longer lists population figures for towns. How many years ago did that stop? I was trying to discover a few population figures for

local towns; I don't appear to have a source for that information - the "shorter" edition of Whitaker's omits such essential data. So much for economy. I guess I'll have to get connected up to the modern electronic information service. Trouble is, whilst I can dig my way thru heaps of paper, I was never was a good swimmer. What happen when I fall off my electronic surf board? Do I drown in virtual reality? If so, I want cloning NOW!

Talking of clones (we were?) did you see those reports in the papers written by people who appeared to believe that clones came with all the life experience of the donor built in? They've been reading too much s-f...and not understanding what it said... (New paragraph coming up)

Roger Waddington questions the use of books as loss leaders; I'm not sure whether he queries the concept, or whether it will work. The concept is with us, and it works. Take a look round next time you visit a supermarket. You'll find paperbacks on sale there, and a fair percentage of them will be heavily discounted. They will probably not be the type that you or I would buy, Roger, but then you and I don't represent the majority of supermarket shoppers. Supermarkets often used to carry pbs; often remainders, else normal price. Now they have selected titles from this month's new books as "loss leaders". They are part of the people I referred to collectively as "Big Joe" last column, and the target is the romance reader, with the odd offshoot in the detective & horror genres. Incidentally, have you noticed that science fiction and fantasy are getting an increased amount of "romance" based novels? Anne McCaffrey started it, of course. *SHIP WHO SANG* and *WEYR SEARCH* are unashamedly romantic-based stories. Thin end of the wedge? Could be - Anne progressed onwards to tales like *MORETA*, and the current "Freedom" series which has a strong romantic (i.e. "love") interest. Among others, Lizanne Norman's "Sholan" novels get good reviews in an American magazine devoted to romantic writing; try Rosemary Edghill's fantasy series about "The Twelve Treasures" - I enjoyed them, and some of the repartee 'twixt the characters (especially the librarians) delighted me. But extract the "romantic" elements and you have very little story. I suppose I aquired a taste for "light romance" in my schooldays, when the *HAPPY* and *SUNNY* magazines were two of Britain's popular publications (believe it, I read Richmal Crompton's *Just William* stories on their original appearance - and found them just as boring then as I do today!) My addiction may in part have been due to economics; remainder AS and the like cost at least 3d in Woolworth's but used *HAPPY* mags could be had for 1d - new copies were 7d; whilst new (not remaindered) sf mags cost 1s 6d or 2s. And a weekly 6d pocketmoney could obtain two sf mags; or one sf mag, two "light" mags, and 1d left over for indulgence in a sherbet dab! When I got past 10 years of age my "personal" fund was increased to 1/-, sometimes stretched by the odd grocery delivery or helping load a cart with fodder. And if I got really stuck for reading matter, there was always the housemaid's *Christian Novels*. Stick around and pass the bottle, I'll tell you my life story.

Beware modern technology. Or at least the people who control it. I have a friend (believe that too!) who switched from BT to one of the newer, cheaper, communication suppliers. I don't know if I misheard or she misquoted the new number, but anyway I got a digit wrong; and the chap I rang said he was getting a lot of wrong calls, and gave me the number of the customer service unit for this network. But the CS said "we do not release the numbers of our subscribers; ask Directory Enquiry". "You means BT Directory Enquiries?" "Yes"; Guess what BT told me? "That number has been disconnected. Sorry, No Information". I guess it will be no good walking your fingers thru the *Yellow Pages* looking for a bookshop that has gone over to Ionica. K F S

How Distressing

Val loves TV programmes on cooking, gardening and home decorating. One result of this is that I get to 'enjoy' such items. A recent one involved two groups of brain-damaged people solving their 'How can we get our faces on telly?' by giving each family (aided by 'experts') a free hand to redecorate the home of the other. The results were often informative, but even more often, catastrophic - which I suggest was the aim of the programmers. Would you be tickled pink to come home and find your once cosy bedroom had become the second-cousin to a ship's cabin, complete with portholes, rivetted bulkheads and bunk-beds?

That sort of thing is bad enough, but one particular gimmick favoured by the professionals was the technique of 'distressing', as if what was being done to the house wasn't bad enough. This queer idea involves mucking up your newly pristine paintwork, wallpapering your wall and generally wreaking mayhem on your newly decorated surfaces, furniture and woodwork in order to make it look tastefully aged. Naturally, they don't call it aged. The expert's word for it is 'distressing' - well it certainly distressed me.



Crazy as it seems, this has given me ideas or a whole new growth industry. Just send me your old clothes for distressing to match your newly-distressed home. For a nominal fee I'll wear your suits and return them suitably worn. I'll even put holes in the pockets for free. If your home has been newly decorated, I'll pop round with hammer and sandpaper and age everything in sight.

Nor will I stop there, how about distressing your car? A few scratches, bodywork dents, torn seat covers and cracked headlamps will take but a few minutes. Your new tyres can be swapped for my time-expired ones, as well as perished wiper blades and worn carpeting. Overnight, you can be the first in your street with matchingly distressed home, clothing and vehicle.

Who knows where this trend may lead. Will tradesmen start selling pre-distressed goods. Will car-dealers charge YOU great trade-in discounts when taking your new car in exchange for a clapped out banger? Maybe they'll make a small charge for the service. There's no doubt about it, the future looks very distressing.



FANZINES

PLOTKA: Journal of Superfluous Technology 14pp A4, from Alison Scott, 42 Tower Hamlets Rd., Walthamstow, London E17 4RH. Old Plokta's Almanac for 1997. Considerable natter on Alison's baby (due Jan.13) and how to dispose of the placenta. A 'Justice League of Fannish Superheroes', plenty of LOCs, excellent illos and a nice send up on Euro-Regulations for fanzines. A nice light-hearted issue.

MIMOSA.19 \$4.00/48PP Refill your superlative bank for this one, a lovely wrap-round card cover, a plentiful supply of excellent interior art and a plethora of articles - Berry on Shaw, Warner on Noreaston plus pieces by Ackerman, Willis Farber, Kyle and others. Medical adventures, fan slang, Conventions, nostalgia and more. Something for everyone and not a clunker in the lot. A sure-fire Hugo winner and highly recommended.

STEFANTASY DEC.96 12 impeccablytypeset pages from Bill Danner, R.D.1, Kennerdell, PA 16374 USA. A second-colour cover of Atomillos, reminisces of the thirties, oodles of LOCs and a lovely 'English As She Is Spoke', back page. Try faunching a copy.

BANANA WINGS from Claire Briarley, 26 Northampton Rd., Croydon, Surrey, CR0 7HA has a massive 56 pages of editorial natter on fanzines, tradition etc. A piece on the Glasgow Con, conflict with asbestosis, fanzine reviews, encounter with a duplicator, a trip report, lotsa LOCs and a Turner bacover. Nice issh, but sadly virtually no illos to break up the solid, two-column print.

OPUNTIA 29.2 & 29.5 from Dale R. Speirs, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, CANADA T2P 2E7. An unusual side-print double spread format which always baffles me. This time Dale lists contents of previous issues and adds some LOCs. \$3.00 or the usual.

KNARLEY KNEWS.61 20pp from Henry & Letha Welch, 1525 16th. Ave., Grafton, WI 53024-2017, USA. Personal natter, News of forthcoming girl-child (in May), Author quotes on technology, a round-Australia cycle ride! and oodles of LOCs. A really pleasant read.

CHALLENGER.5 Guy H. Lillian, PO Box 53092, New Orleans, Louisiana 70153-3092 USA. A superlative, massive 104 pages crammed with art, excellent photos and articles on Girl/Boy training, caving, the LA Convention, the SF Genre, interviewing a criminal, magic, fire-eating and a plethora of LOCs. Definitely a future Award winner. Highly recommended. Set it for \$5.00 or maybe the usual.

THE MEMORY HOLE Greg Pickersgill (address in LOCcol) wishes it be known that he still wants your old fanzines for storage as a fannish archive - from which you can borrow any fanzines merely for the cost of the postage. Send him any unwanted fanzines and Greg will reimburse your postage immediately. This is an excellent fannish cause and deserves the support of every trufan.



WORLDS OF FANTASY

The first issue of **WORLDS OF FANTASY** appeared in September 1968, the magazine was edited by Lester del Rey, but in Spring 1971 it folded after only four issues. No.1 priced at 60c, had cover and interior art by Jack Gaughan. It contained 2 novels, 2 novelettes, 5 short stories, an editorial on 'fantasy' and an article eulogising J.R.R. Tolkien.

THE MIRROR OF WIZARDRY, by John Jakes is a rather run of the mill novelette in which Brak The Barbarian flees a warlord, seeks a lost treasure and tangles with a magician before coming out on top.

DEATH IS A LONELY PLACE, by Bill Warren, is a so-so short about an extremely reluctant vampire with a conscience.

AS IS by Robert Silverberg is a nice little whimsy about a used car with a sealed boot which only opens to release whatever you need most urgently, be it skid chains, tyres, petrol or whatever.

WHAT THE VINTNERS BUY, a short by Mack Reynolds. It's one of those yarns about a pact with the devil with a twist ending. It rambles a bit, gets nowhere and as for the punch line twist, it eluded me.

CONAN AND THE CENOTAPH, Lin Carter and L.S. deCamp. Another barbarian potboiler as our mighty-thewed hero is lured on a treasure hunt by the nasty baddie. He gets trapped by a magnetic monolith which is guarded by a jelly-like monster. Escape seems hopeless, but you can guess who wins.

AFTER ARMAGEDDON by Paris Flammonde (that must be a pseudonym) is a rather wandering short in which an immortal man roams the world but fails to find a companion. However, he lives for ever. H'm, so what's new?

THE MAN WHO LIKED, Robert Hoskins is a lovely vignette about a happy, generous man - who, despite all his kindness and gifts isn't quite what he seems.

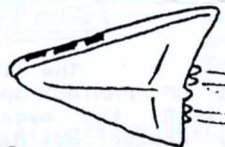
DELENTA EST, A Robert E. Howard short, set in Roman times, the ghost of Hannibal demands the Empire be plundered and kills a traitor to emphasise the idea. A rather pointless yarn I felt was written to put a crust on the table.

HOWEVER, A novelette by Robert Lory. Hamper is the However to the King of Balik. Sent on a long mission to a land of magic, he encounters strange characters and problems along the way. and solves them in amusing ways. A lovely, tongue-in-cheek yarn in the Jack Vance style; the best thing in the issue.

LETTERS

KEN LAKE, 1A STEPHEN COURT, ECCLESBOURNE RD.,
THORNTON HEATH CR7 7BP

Yes, the Wuppertal monorail is still running: Incomprehensible why nobody copied it. Bristol is planning computer-controlled taxis on aerial roads. You bitch about 'teaching school', yet you were a schoolteacher! @> Nobody's perfect. @> How about 'a tap on the door' then? It's a pair of trousers (i.e. legs). @> So do I have a trouser on each leg? @> scissors, two blades. @> H's, does a pair of scissors have four blades? @> Don't look for stupidities



KEN LAKE SAYS IT CAN CARRY
2000 PEOPLE AROUND THE WORLD
IN TWO HOURS USING SOLAR
POWERED BATTERIES

where there's a commonsense reason. Where technology is concerned you're always too keen to rubbish new ideas. @> I'm not too keen to rubbish new ideas, but I am careful in trying to assess incorrect, or over-hyped publicity plugs in 'artist's impression' form. Remember all those mid-ocean platforms, the flying tanks, the personal street hovercraft, the cold fusion, the polywater and umpteen others (and especially electric cars). That 'flying wing' being built in France may exist, but I want more than an artist's newspaper blurb before I take it as fact. @>

ALAN BURNS, 19 THE CRESCENT, KING'S RD STM., WALLSEND ON TYNE NORTH
TYNESIDE NE20 7RE

"Smiles", why can't the English learn to speak? as Professor Higgins said - but there are some odd names for places like our Northumbrian village of Moscow, or Pity Me'. @> There's a Paris near Sheffield and a Land Of Hod near Howden @> Cast about and you will always find some humour in names, like a manager in my dad's firm called Muddiwaters and a Gas Company Manager called I Birchmall. @> Honestly, I once got a redirected letter from the GPD's Mr. Loosemore!! @>

The only English to which I take violent exception is Politically Correct. I don't want to be called 'aurally disadvantaged', I want to be called deaf.

Truly, too much weight is put on grammar and not on yobs who can scarcely speak understandably. @> How about the 'ebonic language' now being pushed in some U.S. schools? "Where are you going?" must be allowed in the "Where you goin'?). It's the lunatics taking over the asylum. @>



"WOULD YOU CARE TO GIVE PECUNIARY
ASSISTANCE? I SUFFER FROM AN ENLARGED
FIST AND FINANCIAL DISADVANTAGEMENT"

ROGER MADDINGTON, 4 COMMERCIAL ST., MORTON, MALTON, N. YORKS YO17 9ES

I often hear reports on the news that there are hundreds of people in Jeopardy; but what they never say is where it is, or how you get there, and I've never been able to find it in my atlas. And what about the sign in every High Street, chillingly entitled 'Family Butchers'? (Come to that, why High St. when all the ones I've seen aren't any higher than the others?) And of course you can have a single scissor; though admittedly only with 'scissor movement'. @> Does a 'trouser press' only do one leg? @> Perhaps Santa should have popped a copy of Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable in your stocking and mine; it's the most browse-worthy volume I know. Though speaking as one of the few people who can take pride in being English, @> Better still, we're both Yorkshiremen @> the evolution of the English language is a small price to pay if it's to remain the most-used language in the world. Would you prefer it to be fixed immovably, like Latin. @> No way, but I still deplore the hijacking of words and phrases by the afflicted. As kids we would call for a friend, 'Is Fred coming Out?', and we enjoyed some gay times. Nowadays, both phrases have totally different meanings. I also deplore the PC jargon as mentioned in Alan Burns' letter. I'm stone deaf in one ear, NOT aurally disadvantaged. @>

A.V. CLARKE, 16 WENDOVER WAY, WELLING, KENT DA16 2BN

Ted Hughes querying why authors stop authoring and your reply that it's partly old age is so true. I've felt creative impulses just drain away, even as a fanzine writer. There's also the effect of various drugs used to control bodily functions, high blood pressure and so on. I sometimes think of the late Eric Frank Russell. He died when he was 73, but stopped writing a good 15 years before that, I've often wondered why. Hal Clement was born a month after myself and I can quite understand why he's stopped writing. I suppose one could plug on turning out trash. You mention Coblenz in that Spaceway review with the air of someone finding something nasty on their shoes. He was born 100 years ago, which means he was 57 in 1953: maybe there's a certain age in the late 50s when a decline sets in - for some? @> Well I'm still beavering away at 74. To be honest, I don't do it for money, I'm comfortably off without hunting the extra lolly. It's just a thing I have to keep doing, hence ERG's long life. @>

DAVE ROWE, 8298 WEST SHELBY STATE RD. 44, FRANKLIN, IN 46131-9211, USA



I'VE CUT BACK ON WAITING
SINCE MY BEARD GOT CAUGHT
IN THE DISC DRIVE

I always enjoy ERG especially your humorous pieces, but one word of complaint. It's no good your complaining about when someone (like myself) has LOCed every ish, but doesn't even get a mention in the WAHF column. @> But I don't have a WAHF column. @> Are my locs that bad? @> No, but I only have so much space and late LOCs tend to miss out. @> When Ken questioned if a company's hardback and paperback divisions needed separate entries in Writer's Yearbook, he hadn't heard Ramsey Campbell's tru horror story of when he was setting out on h/b promotion he suggested to his publishers that he also take along his pb which was coming out at the same time. This was vetoed because the hb division wasn't talking to the pb division. He promptly changed his publisher. @> Incredible! @>

LLOYD PENNEY, 1706-24 EVA RD., ETOBICOKE, ON, CANADA M9C 2B2

I can't help but smirk when I see a reference to the Babylon 5 novel by S.M. Stirling. Steve used to live in Toronto and write the goriest war SF you'd (n)ever want to read. Then, after a somewhat successful mini-career at writing that popular drak, he became the beast of burden for many collaborators, like David Drake and Jerry Parnelle. They'd come up with the basic idea, Steve would flesh it out and write the final manuscript, then would get second billing on the cover. Now he is reduced to writing media knock-offs, and it couldn't have happened to a worse writer.

DALE R. SPEIRS, BOX 5830, CALGARY, ALBERTA, CANADA T2P 2E7 I'm a bit baffled by Ken Slater's complaints about price discounting ruining small bookstores, and must assume British booksellers operate differently. This has long been used in Calgary by chain stores such as Coles and W.H. Smith, but smaller bookstores still do well, albeit they specialise more. In recent years the chains have been switching to superstores whose main advertising point is that they have 60,000+ titles in store. Is Fandom doing anything for the Millennium? asks Ken. I work for Calgary Parks and put in my suggestion that celebrations not begin until January 1, 2001, but was shouted down. Calgary will therefore celebrate a year early in 2000. I can't understand why all this money is being spent just because of a date - far better spend it on worthy local causes.

GREG PICKERGILL, 3 BETHANY ROW, HARBERTH RD., HAVERFORD WEST, PENDS SA61 216

I liked the piece on the X-13, one day I must really get a decent book on the X-Planes. THE X-PLANES, Jay Miller, Orion Books £29.95. That was an era of real aeronautical adventurism, fuelled by hi-tech (of the day), but probably the last time pilots really went out into the complete unknown. Nowadays with computer modelling any pilot will have a fair idea of what they will meet as they push the envelope in any direction, but back then, anything could happen - and occasionally did. As usual, I found Ken's column full of useful bits of knowledge, but even harder to read. I don't know if it's me getting older or whether you're using a smaller typesize but I found it very hard to cope with, a pity as it is full of good comment. Ken supplies his column as is using his own choice of typesize. Give us a break TJ, ditch those bookreviews and use the space for Captain Slater instead. Books are at a minimum already, but from time to time I hope to give Ken a longer run.

MED BROOKS, 713 PAUL ST., NEWPORT NEWS, VA 23605, USA

Interesting account of the World Of Tomorrow cigarette cards. You are right about the weather control being silly, lightning does not cool the air or cause rain, but is merely the byproduct of powerful vertical convection currents in thunderheads. But the space suits don't look all that different from NASA models. Very serious studies have been done on tidal power planets in places like the Bay of Fundy, but the cost/benefit analysis seems to have failed to reach the profit level. With regard to dowsing, it would seem easy to set up controlled tests; and I have read that this has been done and dowsing 'proven' to be possible. But who knows how the data were cooked? I wouldn't be sure unless I ran my own tests. Last night the 'phone rang and when I answered it, some woman said "Who is this?" I said, "This is me, who did you want?" "Oh," she said, "I must have the wrong number." "Silly twit", I said - but after I had hung up. Good on you. I hate that "Who is this?" instead of "Who is that?" Likewise the TV cliché, "Oh my God, I can't believe I'm hearing this."

JOHN OLLIS, 51 BELMONT RD., LUTON LU1 1LL

What sort of dowsing tests would satisfy you? You're only saying what won't. Something like blindfolded dowers on a field with a buried hosepipe, water on or off over several tries - and a 90% hit rate. When I was about nine I read a novel by Arthur Ransome called 'Pigeon Post' where

one of the characters discovered water by means of flexible hazel branches. With the help of a library book, I too, looked for water with hazel (but it may have been birch, no-one could tell me what hazel looked like). The hazel/birch reacted not, even when water was present. The book did say that it didn't work for everybody.

Earlier dowers used whalebone staves, but where would you get those nowadays? Ken Lake would probably know, he seems to know everything.



KEN BUCHER, 5 HOLLY MANSTONS, 20 FRANT RD., TUNBRIDGE WELLS, KENT TN11 5SH

Ken Slater's column is highly interesting and also depressingly factual. If a bloke like this who knows what he is talking about sees what we'll have to call relative disaster in the book trade, then we're in for dry days ahead. I'm fascinated by my own weird reaction to Cons these days. Haven't been for yonks and when I see adverts for forthcoming Cons I get the urge to slap the old deposit down and trek - and then I don't. There must be umpteen reasons for this GAFIA-like attitude not least because Cons don't grab me as they used to do and I realise that the fault is mine. In addition and the most compelling reason is that these days I hate to travel anywhere. This is a well-known symptom of senility. Welcome to the club.

Now I must seriously try to get on with my next book. I'm currently writing Number 52 of Dray Prescot. Oh and by the way, they've put him, Alan Burt Akers and me on the Internet - epub@savanti.com. He too, www.tomorrownsf.com

ALAN SULLIVAN, 30 ASH RD., SYRATFORD, LONDON E15 1HR

The cigarette cards put me in mind of the Brooke Bond Tea Cards I used to collect when I was a kid - particularly the 'Race Into Space' series. Fifty cards running from Sputnik 1 to a proposed manned flight to Mars, with things like a 'skylab' space station, space shuttles (a winged lifter-orbiter combination taking off like a conventional aircraft in the best SF tradition, space 'tugs' for orbital work and so on. They'll come. More extrapolation than fantasy, but to my generation, space travel was science fact. SF came into my life slightly after. Interesting fantasies and idea, true, but as you comment, politically, economically and ecologically not so sound. Still, those were the days when Technology was the cure-all, and no one paid too much attention to the side effects. Letters. Good to see you're still getting the LOCs coming in. Response is the thing. Dead Right, Alan

SALE of 1934 ASTOUNDING STORIES by Editor:-

Condition, bearing age in mind: P=Poor F=Fair G=Good
 VG=Very Good ST=Spine Sellotaped. Where an issue is not VG, damage
 is usually confined to covers and/or spine. This is indicated, then
 overall condition is given. Thus 'ST, tear on cover, VG' means that
 although the spine is taped and the cover has a tear, the body of the
 magazine is good for its age.

1934 As priced separately, or all nine for £100

JAN	VG	£14	
FEB	P	£6	NBC Index page missing. Spine crumbling, 6 pages of Brass Tack photocopied
APR	G	£13	
MAY	VG	£13	Contents page missing
JUN	G	£12	Piece torn off back cover, tear on front cover. No Contents page
JUL	VG	£13	No Contents page
AUG	G	£13	ST
SEP	G	£13	
NOV	VG	£14	

ALSO available, paperback, hardcover and magazine lists. Send SAE
 for printouts (say which).

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BOOK NEWS

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DISCWORD II:MISSING PRESUMED... The Official Strategy Guide

Paul Kidd Boxtree £14.99 Quarto sized, 144pp, card covers;
 this seems a bit pricey but if you're an addict of Pratchett's world
 and computer games you'll want this narrative-style guide to the
 brain-busting Discworld computer game. Reading this book made me
 want to dash out to buy a copy (anyone know how much and what PC
 requirements?). I loved the Disney-like sepia illustrations which
 grace almost every page. Additional bonuses are the large size,
 fold-out map of Discworld and the comprehensive Index to sort you out
 if you get stuck. Cover art is by Josh Kirby and excellent interiors
 are by Stephen Player. What more do you need to know?

AMALGAM - AGE OF COMICS: The Marvel Collection Boxtree £10.99

160, A4 pages crammed with full-colour artwork using a blend of
 superhero characters (and villains) from a fusion of DC and Marvel
 Comics - why do they call 'em 'comics' when there's never a giggle in
 the violence-packed clashes laced with over-mammalian females?
 Mighty warriors meet in titanic and incomprehensible battles against
 equally powerful baddies. The strips are obviously aimed at the
 teenage market and they'll lap 'em up with gusto.

I only have the press sheet to hand, but it tells me that the pop
 group Queen has linked with computer wizards to produce THE ART OF
 QUEEN: THE EYE £15.99, which is a superbly visual, interactive
 computer game. The handout shows some spectacular scenes. SECRETS
 OF QUEEN: THE EYE £15.99, clues you up on how to get through the
 game. It is either a game, a music CD or a combination of both - the
 handout isn't clear on that. Then for £6.99 you can get THE NOVEL OF
 QUEEN: THE EYE. Judging purely from the press sheet, they make a
 great trio.