

ERG 152

QUARTERLY
JANUARY 2001

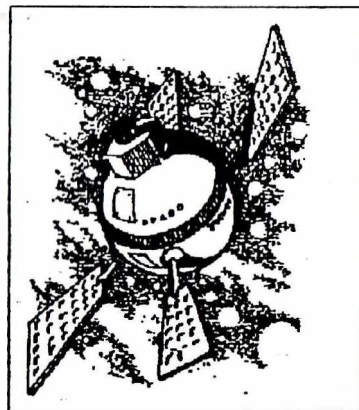


ERG 152

QUARTERLY
January 2001

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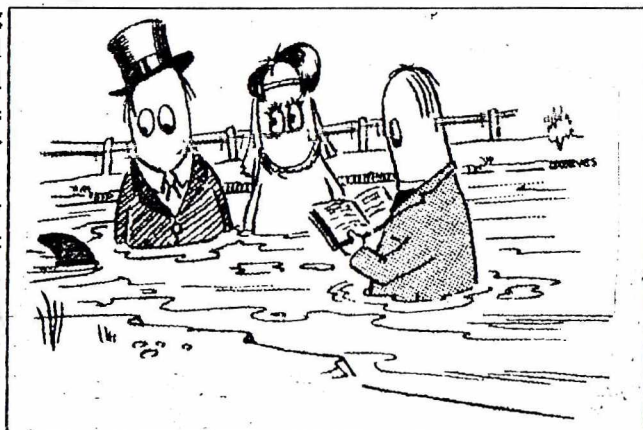


Greetings ERG beds, Humble pie first. I'm afraid half a dozen copies of 151 got mailed out without stamps, some got through for free, but my apologies to those unlucky readers who had to pay

Disaster department. A while back we found a flood of water under the washing machine. We cleaned it all up and tried the washer again - result, more flood water. Deciding it wasn't worth repairing our 17 year old machine, we went out and bought a new one and on its first try - more water underneath it. Investigation revealed both old and new washers were OK, but the drain pipe was gunged up. It reminds me of the railway wheel tapper whose job was to take a hammer and go round tapping train wheels. If they went 'Ping', they were OK, but if they went 'Clunk' they were cracked. One morning he checked a long train and marked every wheel as being clunkworthy and needing repair - before he found out that his hammer was cracked!

I'm still selling off my collection, so if you want hardcovers, paperbacks, old sf magazines or aeronautical mags, send me an SAE and say which lists you would like

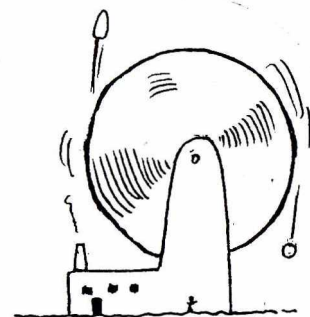
All the best, Terry



**This isn't what I had in mind when I said
I wanted to get married in the spring.**



One cannot travel far down SF's Memory Bank Lane before tripping over a motley heap of weird ideas and strange inventions. Some are impossible, most are improbable but some actually made it from the fictional page to the world of reality. Frank Herbert's 'Dracones', Heinlein's 'Waldos', atomic bombs and space travel to name but a few.



High on the list of impossibles must rank some of the methods dreamed up for propelling spacecraft. Neil R. Jones used a beauty in one of his Professor Jameson, 'Zoroom' yarns. In their travels, the machine seen came to 'The Twin Worlds', the inhabitants of which had achieved a crude form of interplanetary travel by means of a giant Ferris Wheel. A space car was attached to its rim, presumably with a balancing counterweight on the opposite edge. The wheel was spun up until its rim speed exceeded the planet's escape velocity and then the space car was released. Presumably a counterweight would be released to plough into the ground to prevent the unbalanced wheel flying into bits. The car flew off to the sister world where it landed by parachute. Before release the car's

inhabitants would probably have been squashed under the centrifugal force or created by the air friction of zooming round and round in the atmosphere.

Less detailed and much vaguer in operation was James Blish's 'spindizzy'. Peter Nicholls eulogises over this system in his 'Encyclopedia', but never mentions Smith's much more inventive Bergenholm, the operation of which was skilfully woven into the fabric of his yarns. The Spindizzy on the other hand, lifted whole cities into space and propelled them at light speeds. Apart from an occasional breakdown it never had any other function or credibility in the stories. For that matter, I don't recall if it supplied artificial gravity for the spacegoing cities.



Merchant Seaman, A.B. Chandler came up with a similar rotating device, 'The Mannschen Drive'. This seems to have stemmed from the desire of a gyroscope to move off at right angles to an applied force. By that mysterious alchemy known only to

science fiction writers. Chandler parlayed this into a time and dimension-warping device which always seemed to go wrong in unusual ways - thus supplying the basis for the story.

The most beautiful and fully worked out space drive was thought up by the late E.E. Doc Smith. In his Lensman series, he postulated the 'Bergenholm', a device which nullified inertia and thus meant that even a small applied force could accelerate a ship to and past the velocity of light. With no inertia, the mass increase effect couldn't get in the way, so the Galaxy was Doc's oyster. In addition, Doc 'invented' the idea of 'intrinsic velocity' whereby if a spacecraft switched off its Bergenholm, it would immediately revert to the velocity (and direction) it had before the Bergenholm had first been switched on. The idea was used in a variety of incidents and must rank as one of the most carefully developed and logically worked out concepts in SF.

One mustn't forget the 'Cavorite' used by H.G. Wells to get his travellers to the Moon. This mysterious substance had the effect of screening off gravity when it was uncovered. This allowed the space globe to float away from the Earth. (It should have whizzed off at rotational velocity) Once in space, the Cavorite itself was screened off so that the Moon's gravity pulled the globe towards it. Skillful operations of the screens allowed a landing on Earth's satellite. What puzzles me is, if Cavorite screened off gravity - what was used to screen off the Cavorite? Incidentally, if Cavorite ever came along, it would also bring with it, Perpetual Motion (and unlimited power). Simply screen off half of a hefty flywheel. The unscreened half would continually fall, thus driving a generator. Scientists have proved Perpetual Motion mathematically impossible - it violates the Law Of Conservation Of Energy; but since they also proved a bumble bee can't fly -- who knows...?

Speaking of boundless energy, way back in the era of everything bigger and better space opera, John W. Campbell had a 2-part serial in Amazing. Titled 'Uncertainty', it had its hero faced with aliens attacking from another star system. He hastily poured energy into a handy bucket of mercury and by shifting all its electrons into higher orbit, produced a Perfect Power Accumulator with which to power all sort of weapons. By dint of much crafty doubletalk, he brought in Heisenberg's Principle of Uncertainty and so developed a space drive, can-opener and a few other goodies. So armed, our hero soon clobbered the invading aliens.



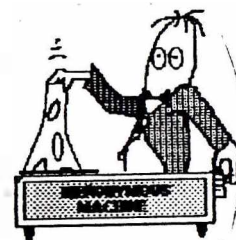
Another rotating device intended to give us the stars was 'The Dean Drive', first announced in Astounding, but also taken up by the prestigious trade journal, 'Missiles & Rockets'. This gadget took some Meccano parts, bathroom scales, an electric drill, electromagnets, some off-centre weights and whopped 'em all together. When switched on, the gadget racketed like blazes as the unbalanced weights were yanked around. In theory, the scales then showed a reduction in weight as the rotary motion of the parts was converted into a linear lifting force. The scales were only added to show that the thing worked - but scales don't give very accurate reading when being smashed up and down umpteen times a second. Of course, once suitably refined, the device would be able to lift a spaceship into orbit (You would need a very long bit of flex to supply power to the drill). The idea keeps re-appearing, it was recently re-invented by a Scottish engineer. Sadly, it never gets past the bathroom scale thumping model.

Earlier ideas for space travel were even crazier. One of the ancient Greeks told of a ship and its crew caught in a great storm and blown to the Moon.

The same writer also told of a man who made a pair of wings and flew there. Then there was the chap who tied flasks of dew to his ankles. As everyone knows, every morning, dew evaporates and rises. Thus the dew in the bottles evaporated, rose upwards and took the fellow to the Moon. Munchausen did it by jumping aboard a cannon-ball, another adventurer flew in an aerial chariot drawn by wild swans, and another designed an aerial gondola lifted by spheres filled with vacuum.

Jules Verne ignored the effects of acceleration and fired his astronauts to the moon inside a cannon shell. Edgar Rice Burroughs simplified the whole process by cutting out the tricky bits. He got John Carter to Mars simply by having him stand and look up at it.

Turning to other whacky inventions, one can't ignore the Hieronymous machine as extolled in Astounding's, pages, again by John Campbell. The thing was patented (as was the Dean Drive), but full details for electronic and symbolic versions were supplied. Basically, the device consisted of a sample-holding coil coupled via an amplifier to a flat plate sensor. In operation, you twiddled a dial with one hand and rubbed the plate with the fingers of the other hand - rather like patting your tummy and rubbing your head. The plate was supposed to feel 'Tacky' at a certain point determined by the 'eloptic radiation' of the sample. According to Campbell, he even claimed a symbolic version (drawn on paper) would work equally well. Eric Jones made one and although I wore out my fingers, I never got a smidgin of a response. Nevertheless, commercial models were actually sold - you can fool some of the people all of the time - simply sell 'em Hieronymous machines, horoscopes, razor-blade sharpening Pyramids or 'magnetic' bracelets. Who said, "There's a mug born every minute"?



Another great invention was Asimov's 'Thiotimoline', which would go into solution before water was added. This allowed it to be the basis of many even more improbable 'science articles', but I don't recall it getting used in story. On the other hand, Bob Shaw gave us many yarns based on his concept of 'slow glass'. Light could only pass through it in days, weeks, or even years. Scenic windows could store up beautiful views, memories of loved ones or other incidents from the past. The substance must have had the density of neutronium and a refractive index approaching infinity instead of the normal 1.3 or so. Light entering would have just about been bent back along its axis of entry - but this didn't make the yarns less enjoyable.

Bending light brings us to that hoary old SF staple, invisibility. Its origin seems lost in the mists of time, but writers have used numerous ways to achieve it in their stories. Some had their hero (or villain) wear a cloak which bent light around him. Others used drugs to render their characters invisible, but only Wells seemed to realise if light passed through his hero, the poor blighter would be unable to see, so he allowed the retinas of his eyes to remain visible. In 'The New Accelerator', Wells postulated a pill which speeded up metabolism and allowed his hero to move so fast he became invisible - a gimmick also used in another writer's 'The Shadow and The Flash'. Two rivals worked on invisibility, one achieved it by transparency (but left a shadow), the other moved too fast to be seen. The snag with the speeding up system was the rapid ageing of the subject and the heat of air friction.

Then there was the underground boring machine, usually employed by villains to bore their way into bank vaults, or gold storage depots. Probably one of the first yarns of this type was 'The Mole Pirate' by Murray Leinster in a 1934 ASTOUNDING. Not the first, but the best adventurer in this field was 'The Black Sapper', so called because of his skintight black outfit. His underground boring machine, Earthworm, was mentioned earlier in the chapter on 'Bloods'. It had huge drilling blades at each end so that it could go forward or backward. Later in the series he had an improved and larger version called Earthworm.2, and was hotly pursued by Commander Brent (or some such name) who had somehow acquired Earthworm.1.

The Sapper and his assistant Marot bored to and fro beneath London in their 'Earthworm'. I often wondered why they never seemed to drown themselves by drilling through water mains, sewers and rivers, or blow themselves up whilst traversing a gas main: or why London never collapsed into all their tunnels.



The Black Sapper's contemporary was 'Captain Zero', another member of the black tight brigade. Lacking a boring machine, he tumbled around in the sky on his flying platform. It's tiny airscrew was powered by an even tinier black box which must have held a superb battery of the sort modern car makers would kill to get hold of.

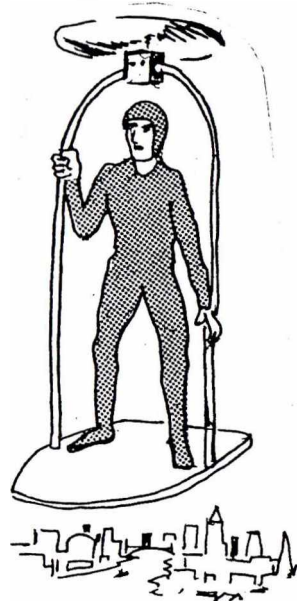
Another favourite gimmick of the early inventors was travel into the fourth dimension. Anyone could do this, you got there simply by putting a dot on a piece of paper. Moving the dot sideways produced a line. Moving this line sideways gave you a plane, a third move at right angles produced a solid, then all you had to do was move this in a fourth direction to enter the fourth dimension. That was the tricky bit which I never managed.

Nevertheless, by popping in and out of this wondrous zone, people could rob banks, commit 'locked-room' murders, or even perform bloodless operations - I think it was David H. Keller who had a surgeon do this, but mucked things up by absent-mindedly leaving his spectacles inside the patient. Early yarns in this field had such brilliant titles as 'The Four-Dimensional Catapult' and 'The Four-Dimensional Accelerator' to tip the reader off to their intellectual plot lines.

Some writers argued that time was the 4th. Dimension. By hopping into a time machine, winding up the clockwork and putting the thing in gear you could visit a variety of eras. Going backwards in time allowed the writer to menace the hero and his heroine - a character only there to be wandered off, get menaced by dinosaurs and be rescued.

Going futurewise you could expect to face weird weapons, or bulging-brained overlords. 'Coils Of Time' by P. Schuyler Miller, saw time wound up like a spring. Travellers could hop across adjacent turns in thousand year jumps. Others used machines, drugs, mental powers or wandering time warps to get around. My favourite was Stephen Leacock's hero who ate pork pies, read all the funny papers and fell into a trance which moved him into a future where everyone wore asbestos suits. All these time or dimension travellings were plot devices to replace the spaceship for getting characters to strange places where anything could happen. This beat adventuring in the South American jungles as a writer's lack of geographical knowledge didn't get in the way of describing monsters far nastier than mere armour-plated dinosaurs.

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WHAT'S IN A NAME ?

We all know who Doubting Thomas was and 'Charley's Aunt'. needs no explanation. Captain Boycott is pretty well-known and no doubt most (all?) Americans will know from whence comes the saying, "Put your John Hancock on that".

Our policemen became 'peelers' after Robert Peel who thought 'em up. However, there are numerous names in everyday use, the origins of which seem shrouded in mystery. Who was Pete that we should ask for his sake? For that matter, why does he 'peter out'? Then we ask "What the Dickens?" when puzzled, swear by the 'Lord Harry' when confounded or "play old Harry" when annoyed, then call "Heavens to Betsy" when surprised. Where, when and why did Tom Dick and Harry appear? For that matter, who was 'Clever Dick' and why was he so smart or why was Simon simple? Other puzzles are the origins of Dolly who gets applied to Dolly-handed people, or dolly-posh for something going awry or why is a low rolling ball a 'daisy-cutter'? Why does that German who always gets blamed for malfunctioning equipment going "On the Fritz" and of course Aunt Sally, that target of slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, and why did 'Sally Lunn' get a cake named after her.

The list goes on., 'Bob's your Uncle' and 'Charlie's your aunt' imply much shared relatives, although Americans also have an 'Uncle Sam', and pawnbrokers are everybody's uncle. Who was Oliver who took a bath and got a biscuit after him and why did Graham become crackers? Who gave his name to the Oscar Awards? Who was the cruel instigator of those 'Dear John' letters giving servicemen the brush-off and what has a certain mouse got to do with pulling someone's leg by "Taking the Mickey"? Why is a silly person 'a right Charlie'? and who was Ken that he should baffle us when something is beyond him? Who was Willy that something unsteady should be 'Tilly Willy'?

Women don't get overlooked, in this rich tapestry of name calling, how many musicians go to play on the Joanna? and for that matter do doubting opticians exclaim, "All my eye and Betty Martin"? Is 'monicker' the slang for a name, a corruption of Monica? I must admit to bafflement as to why Australian girls are 'Sheilas', and how come a rotating tray on a table is a Lazy Susan?

Happily, a ray of hope shines through all this. I DO know from whence comes the name "Blue John" for the mineral mined in Derbyshire. Apparently the French called the stuff, 'Bleu Jaune' because of its blue-yellow colouring. The corruption soon followed when the locals couldn't get their tongues around the French

No doubt about it, names are funny things.

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FANZINES

THE KNARLEY KNEWS.83 Henry Welch, 1525 16th Ave, Grafton, WI 53024-2017 USA 26pp of articles, books, Con publishing, travel, e-feuds, and plenty of LOCs A Nice friendly read, get it for the usual

FANTASY COMMENTATOR.52 A.L.Searles 48 Highland Circ, Bronxville, NY 10708-5909. Card covers and 76pp, crammed with articles on 'Doc' Lowndes, A.Merritt, an interview with E.F.Bleiler, a memory of Sam Moskowitz plus an excellent posthumous article by him. Book reviews, assorted verse, LOCs and an index to FC make up a top-notch s&c issue. \$5.00 but it's worth it.

BANANA WINGS.16 Claire Brialey, 26 Northampton Rd., Croydon, Surrey CR0 7HA Items on boyhood rocketry, bureaucracy, Unknown, Imaginary fanzines, cost of fanac, Ron Bennett on the military mind, LOCs, fan rooms and much more. Nice and light.

S.F.COMMENTARY Bruce Gillespie, 59 Keele St., Collingwood, Viv. 3066, AUSTRALIA Boasting a full-colour, card cover and running to 120 pages, this is a tour de force dedicated to the memory and works of George Turner. Crammed with writings, interviews and debates this is a superb memorial to the man. Not cheap at \$15.00 overseas airmail, but a real collector's item

HIDALGO 55 Brian Earl Brown, 1675 Beaconsfield, Detroit, MI 48224, USA this is an apazine for PEAPS, has 24 pages and is mainly devoted to the pulps (with many a story precis) plus Brian's personal doings, LOCs and a list of fanzines for sale. You also get some nice full colour prozine cover reproductions. Get it for \$5.00

QUASIQUOTE 3 Sandra Bond, 46 Stirling Rd., London N22 5BP Striking cover(s), 48pp and lots of interesting articles - hut and run, house refurbishing, anti-Earth, fiction, comment, LOCs and a few fanzine reviews. Nice one, get it for the usual.

ACES.15 From Paul McCall 5801 West Henry St., Indianapolis, IN, 46241 has a great full-colour cover and 82 pages crammed with superlative articles and illustrations from the pulps. Three articles on the Westerns. Another on Paul Cartier includes an index to his work, there's an item on the sports covers of Norman Saunders and a number of my own 'Art In SF' articles plus plenty of LOCs. It'll cost you \$10.00 but it's worth it. The bad news is that there won't be another for a year. I'm repeating this one from ERG 151 because I carelessly mis-spelt Paul's surname -- it's still a great mag. Sorry Paul.

FOSFAX C/o FOSFA, PO Box 37281, Louisville, KY 40233-7281, USA 84pp club organ crammed with articles, Con reports, poetry, news, comment, reviews and loads of other stuff. Get it for membership (\$18.00) or sub \$12.00 for 6 issues.

GUFFAW.5 Paul Kincard, 60 Bournemouth Rd., Folkestone, Kent CT19 5AZ 18pp devoted to Guff news including platforms by the four candidates as well as a large sale list of SF titles, (very cheap) with proceeds being split between TAFF and GUFF.

LeZOMBIE After an eons long absence I got three e-mailed issues from Bob Tucker. No.68 remembers the first one in 1938, and details recent visitors. No.69 is on LOCs and books, No.70 deals with fake science and a discussion on bras. All good time-binding stuff, contact bob on btucker@davesworld.net. Welcome back Bob.

PLOKTA.5 Alison Scott (& Co), 24 St. Mary Rd., Walthamstow, LONDON E17 9RG. 14pp crammed with illos and photographs. There's a Plokta Con Rep, an account of the birth of Alison's baby Jonathan, sundry natterings and a nice hefty LOCool. All totally hiohthearted and irreverent, so don't get it if you're a s&c type - otherwise a faunching letter will probably get you a copy.

FANZINE FANATIQUE QUARTERLY. Keith & Rosemary Walker, 6 Vine DSt., Greaves, Lancaster LA1 4UF. Only four pages, but they are crammed with a discussion on fanzines, plus no less than 37 reviews of the same. Get it for the usual if you want to see what fanzines are on the market.

CONNECTION.3 Simon Ounsley, 47 Birkdale Drive, Leeds LS17 7RU 44pp holding a piece on memories (and ashes) of the departed. Then it's on to chat about Bingley and the Cottingley Fairies. (I must admit when I first saw the original photos, I wondered how thick Conan Dole must have been to believe in what were obviously paper cut outs.). You also get a lot of Bronte-slanted material as well as a film scenario vaguely based on the family. Want more? There's a trip report of a visit to Lansarote and a bunch of LOCs and some nice illos.

WANTED by the editor...

Stephen Leacock titles

THE DRY PICKWICK
TOO MUCH COLLEGE
AFTERNOONS IN UTOPIA
OUR BRITISH EMPIRE
LAST LEAVES
MODEL MEMOIRS
FUNNY PIECES

I.O.Evans THE WORLD OF
TOMORROW

Anon STORIES IN VERSE



According to a silly old legend Dominic; if you press these studs in the right sequence, the ground will open and swallow you."

The Shape of Things...

..... Which May Never Come

One of my most fascinating 'dip and dip again' books must be FUTURE FACTS by Stephen Rosen. Corgi Paperback edition, 1978 cost £1.95. ISBN 0 552 98073 0. Into its 500+ pages, it crams a similar number of short articles on new ideas, inventions and forecasts. A Foreword details some 21 inventions and the time they took from brainchild to market and then come ten sections devoted to:-

1. Health & Medicine
2. Power and Energy
3. Foods and Crops
4. Transportation
5. Behaviour & Society
6. Construction & Materials
7. Communication & Information
8. Business & Work
9. Play & Pastimes
10. Environment

Finally, there's an Afterword and an excellent Index

This is the sort of book which every aspiring SF writer should own. It's a veritable storehouse of what might be ideas to work into his plots. As pointed out, some inventions took around 50 years to succeed so it's a bit premature to pan some of the forecasts which still seem to be languishing in the wings - but, since conservation is the current buzz word, what has happened to:- ...

GLASS SAND Old bottles, windows and worn-out light bulbs could be ground into artificial sand solving two ecological problems: waste glass disposal and erosion of beaches. Army Engineers estimate that 130 miles of Jersey coastline could be stabilised by an annual addition of one or two million tons"

TYRE/GLASS ROAD "A University of Wisconsin professor says how rubber tyres can be frozen, then broken into a powder to be used as a bonding material in asphalt or plastics." Another item says, "Glasphalt, is a new paving material made of 85% glass and 15% stone aggregate. It retains heat longer than asphalt and so can be laid in winter."

OIL TO FOOD "British Petroleum is constructing a plant in Sardinia to produce 'natural' protein from oil!". And in America, "General Electric are developing a process in which bacteria convert cow manure into protein".

CERAMICS "A UCLA professor has developed a process for turning cow manure and ground glass into 'Ecolite', a lightweight ceramic substitute for brick or shingle"

Dead clever all these scientists, but what has happened to these wonderful ideas in the intervening 20 years since the book came out? Or maybe that's why my breakfast sausage tasted a bit dodgy. If you know of any further developments in this relentless march of progress, do let me know.

Terry Jeeves

KNIGHTHOOD IN FLOUR

A one part cereal

Sir Lancelot de Tyntaq, holder of the NBB and bar, reined his snow-white palfrey to a standstill on top of a ridge, set the handbrake and regarded the ancient edifice before him. It was the legendary Shatto Osef. He could tell from the slowly turning sails that it had been converted from a windmill by its owner, the villainous Borry Skarlof and his heinous henchman Habbab. Now the infamous pair held the fair Custado prisoner in their darkest dungeon whilst submitting her to the foulest indignities such as washing their walls, darning their odious socks and knitting the spaghetti they both loved to eat.

Lancelot, also known as 'The Dark Knight' because of his infrequent washing, paused only long enough to consume a six-course meal taken from his saddlebag, wash the dishes, down a half carafe of fragrant Chemin de Fer, and read the last chapter of his Book Of The Month. After a quick nap he nudged his steed, Bozinante down the winging trail to the Shatto.

The building held no terrors for Lancelot who had fought with King Arthur in the Crusades (he lost on points). A great leader, he had led the retreat from Palestine by a good three weeks and was always the first in the queue at NAAFI tice. Reaching the looming portal. Ignoring the sign, 'NO HAWKERS', he grasped the bail rope and gave it a mighty tug. Somewhere a bell rang, it was the one hanging from Bozinante's neck. The bell rope came away in his hand and a large bag of flour fell from the battlements, landed on the Dark Knight and turned him into a white one. Nevertheless the huge door creaked slowly open to reveal the hunched henchman Habbab. The retainer had 'LOVE' written all over his face. He had asked for 'EVIL', but picked a dyslexic tattooist.

Lancelot brushed the fellow aside and strode into a long hall covered with paintings of Skarlof's ancestors. Hanging over the fireplace was the Archduke Birdinand. He was quite dead but his corpse added a certain je ne sais quoi, as the Germans say, to the scene. Lancelot strode manfully forward to where the evil Skarlof reclined by the fire on a chaise longue skilfully created from several sacks of flour. He was smoking, but the quick-witted Habbab threw a bucket of water over him before he could burst into flame.

Skarlof rose to greet his visitor. An ex-Borstal graduate, he had taken Finance but the police had made him hand it back. He had been to both Oxford and Cambridge on a one-day coach trip. Now he greeted Lancelot in traditional manner. "What the blazes do you want?" he scowled. "I've come to rescue the fair Custado" he gritted from between clenched teeth to prevent them falling out. "And how will you do that?" asked Skarlof. Lancelot made no reply, but strode to a nearby window, swung it open, took a deep breath and threw his chest out. It landed on the unfortunate Habbab who had been planting some new weeds. He apologised for getting in the way, but de Tyntaq brushed it aside and turn to Skarlof. "I you do not free the maiden, I shall write naughty words on your Shatto's walls and get everyone to vote against you in the next TAFF campaign.

Skarlof cringed, reached for a nearby bell and gave it a shake. Immediately, if not sooner, the fair Custado appeared. Fresh (well, not too fresh) from her odious chores of washing the cess pits. She gave a shriek of delight when she saw Lancelot and rushed to his embrace. The Knight swung her up into his arms, dashed from the Shatto, leaped onto Bozinante and rode off into obscurity. They were never heard of again, which is nice to know.

THE END

by Penelope Fandergaste

As soon as I'd poked myself in the eye I knew it was going to be one of *those* days. I'd only the night before returned from a warm... warm? It was blisteringly *hot*, steaming tropical *hot*... holiday on the lovely unspoiled island of Tenerife. At least, I *think* it was Tenerife. All these holiday hotels look exactly alike, just like the concrete monstrosities in the centre of Birmingham. Or Cardiff, for that matter. Besides, the place was probably called Elevenneriffe by the time I'd left. Inflation certainly seemed to be booming. Thank goodness for credit cards, I say.

So, here I was, returning at midnight to a cold, dead house, with a power cut to greet me and my having to scabble about at the back of the garage behind the lawn mower and granny's old zimmer frame in order to dig out a packet of candles from the stockpile I'd built up that time in 1974 when candles looked like being in short supply. If you'd like a couple of hundred, contact me via Terry. I won't ask too much of a mark-up, promise.

I knew I should have installed a gas cooker, but even when I'd neatly set up enough lines of candles to satisfy the director of any Bela Lugosi film, I still had to drag myself to bed without a welcome cup of cha. I tell you, that place in Tenerife might have been okay for paella, but tea, definitely not.

And to make matters worse, I turned round quickly and tripped over one of the suitcases I'd put down and of course had immediately forgotten about. I counted myself lucky. I'd just placed the last candle artistically on the piano and so wasn't carrying it, wasn't dropping it as I tripped and wasn't setting the carpet on fire.

And when I awoke the following morning, awoke to the dark grey of an English noon, I automatically assumed that I was still wearing sunglasses, reached up out of habit to take them off, and, as I said on the first line of this sad treatise, I poked myself in the eye.

And, my chilblains began giving me gyp. That's what comes of being without central heating all night. There is, of course, the old country standby remedy of rubbing into the infected areas a paste composed of cow urine and elderberry jam but I happened not to have either in the place. It's amazing how often one runs out of different commodities when they're sorely needed.

At least, the power was now restored. I made my way, through a mist of tears and pain, to the kitchen and brewed up. One or two of the candles hadn't quite burnt away and I went around the place blowing them out and collecting the dregs of wax to throw into the bin. One saucer, the last remaining example of that horrible tea service Aunt Agatha passed on to me all those years ago... wonder who laid it on *her*... that one saucer containing a little liquid wax which I poured down the kitchen sink.

I did what?

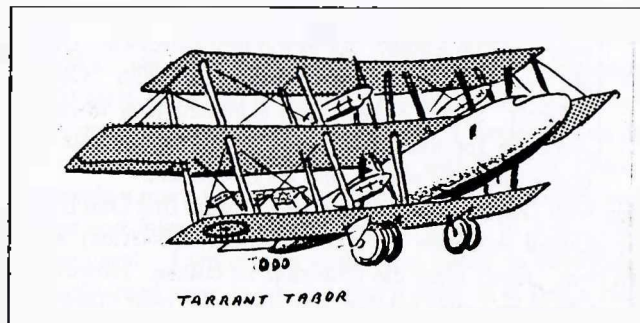
Yes, it was quite a day for doing automatically what one shouldn't do at all. Even as I poured I *tried* to catch the falling molten wax. Another automatic mistake to add to the increasing catalogue. As soon as the liquid wax hit the bottom of the sink it became *solidified* wax, a thin layer across the sink bottom. And, you guessed it, Baby Face, Some... too much... of the wax solidified down the plug hole. Result: one blocked kitchen sink.

Well, it saves on the washing up. But I'll have to have the thing cleared by the end of the week. Aunt Agatha is coming to visit.

--ooOoo--

-pf-

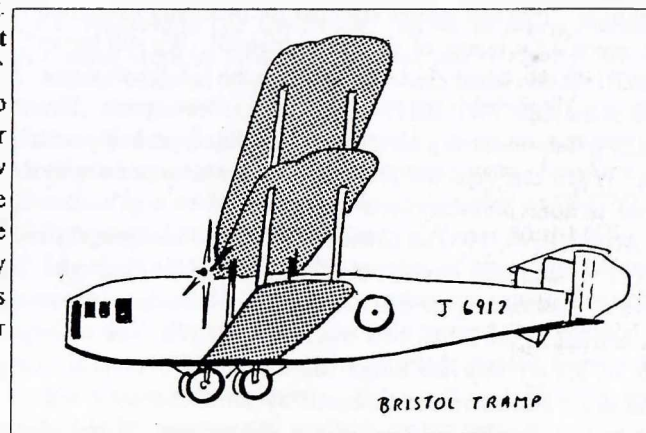
Terrible Triplanes



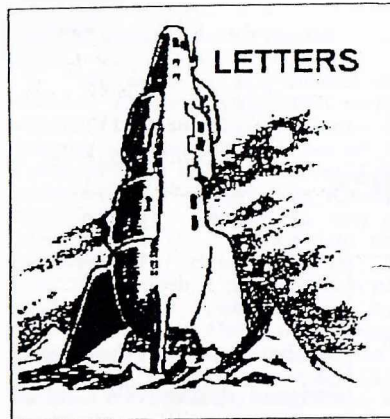
The Tarrant Tabor was designed during WWI as a 'Berkin Bomber' to retaliate against Zeppelin raids on London. Its creator, W.G. Tarrant, was a woodworking building contractor with no previous

aircraft experience. Nevertheless his workers produced the huge, six-engine triplane, 37 feet tall and a wingspan 30 feet wider than that of the WWI Lancaster. The engines were in two push-pull pairs with two more mounted high above the fuselage. The monster missed WWI and was not completed and ready for testing until 1919. Sadly, after some gentle taxi-ing, all six engines were opened up and the out of balance forces from the upper engines tipped the whole aircraft over on its nose crushing the cockpit and killing the pilots. That was the end of the Tabor.

The Bristol Tramp had four engines buried inside the fuselage and driving two, wing mounted propellers by means of transmission shafts. It was a 96ft. span triplane, 20ft high and 60ft long. With a crew of 3 and meant as a 'spares carrier' whatever that was, only two were built in 1921. Neither of the Tramps ever flew because of insurmountable problems with the transmission system. They ended up at Farnborough as ground test vehicles for engines.



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DAVE ROWE, 8288 West Shelby State Rd., 44, Frankline, IN 46131-9211, USA

On page six you infer that Dickens' books were not message-ridden! Heck, Dickens was one of the most message-ridden authors going. Normally about the plight of the working class. Christmas Carol is one long message, have you ever read the parable just before the spirit of Christmas present disappears? As for Junior Sidekicks: Did your son ever get The Eagle? As in the mid-fifties Dan Dare got saddled with pre-pubescent Junior Cadet "Flamer" Spry. It was such a blatant ploy to have someone for the readers to identify with it was an embarrassment even to the young readers.

(Heck! they were already identifying with Dan Dare!). Oddly enough in the first Dan Dare adventure there was briefly a blue skinned Atlantine boy (later dubbed Urb-Urtos) who could have been taken for Flamer's twin. Apart from the blue-skin, of course. However, for the best words put on paper about the very junior sidekicks of supermen read "Thix" in James Thurber's The Beast In Me And Other Animals. It would take a very brave man to say "Thix" was the most hilarious piece he's ever written but I'll be that man. [I didn't mean to down Dickens, just point out that despite his excellence, moderns don't like him - my own favourite is "The Pickwick Papers"]

GENE STEWART, 1710 Dianne Ave., Bellevue, NE 68005, USA

I tend to agree with you that sf has become less focused, more diverse, even scattered in its overall effect these days. Certainly the media's various takes on sf have never fared all that well, with a handful of exceptions in each crop. However, I've been trying to sell stories for some time now, and if it were merely a matter of including certain politically-correct characters, afflictions, and language idioms, I'd be selling considerably more than I do. I think you've identified tendencies in writers, not buttons on the editors' foreheads. I've had stories rejected for including even mild profanity, and in one case had one rejected for being, of all things, 'risque'. We still haven't figured out how this story fit THAT bill, and I had Harlan Ellison on the job for that one. He wanted this story to place third in the first TWILIGHT ZONE Magazine contest. The Widow did not. We ended up chalking it up to having hit a nerve somehow, probably with the adultery angle that figures in it. [I got one rejected for 'coincidence' in a yarn where the event was a result of the heroine's action. Somedays you can't win.]

ALAN BURNS, 19 The Crescent, Wallsend on Tyne, Tyne & Wear NE28 7RE Now to ERG 151, dramatic cover, but at the head of the Ergitorial the spaceship reminds me of a cover of Astounding of the 30s or 40s where there are two like it, but what with lights, jets and such, look like two monsters. [I checked, it wasn't ASF, it was Dynamic SF Feb. 39, but my ship has wings, there's didn't] The lead story was 'The Lord of Tranerica' - the usual human race dominated by some character with an army of benevolent robots and the hero and his red-headed girl arrive there. They had stories in those days.

RON BENNETT, 36 Harlow Park Cres., Harrogate, N.Yorks HG2 0AW I don't know who James Verran is, but he can't get away with a treatise on correct English usage and then write that "persons leverage themselves", especially coming closely after "outsourced" and "downsizing." I take it that he's an office wallah who's used to this sort of jargon. A pity, really. His article actually seemed to be going somewhere and I was looking forward to his conclusions. "Should of," "could of," and of course "would of," are not now creeping into the written language. Common in America, too. Good points, though, on aitch and contractions. Yes, I remember all the things you mention, plus the cost of fags at something like sixpence a hundred... and a convention bedroom at under £1.00 a night. The Saro SRA 1 is news to me. Intriguing premise. Fascinating piece.

TED HUGHES, 10 Kenmore Rd., Whitefield, Manchester M45 8ER I was surprised by how many of your LOCers read F&SF. I thought I was one of the few faithful left. I have a soft spot for F&SF. Ed Ferman was the first editor to buy a story from me. It is certainly a more literary mag than the other sf publications, and, apart from a tendency to ghost and fairy stories, I think it's superior to Astounding - not that that is saying much these days! I am edging closer and closer to becoming a non-reader. I have a pile of partially read mags in which I find it difficult to find a readable story [Sad, but true]

PAM BOAL, 9 Westfield Way, Wantage, OXON OX12 7EW Ah yes, the superheroes of yesterday. We poor creatures of the female persuasion had to identify with those of the male persuasion. I ask you, who wanted to be cast in the role of a creature whose participation was limited to screaming, swooning or being unable to get out of peril because of the need to wait around for the hero to come to the rescue at the eleventh hour. As you write in 'I Remember It Well'. Many things have changed, not all for the better, but when I watch the young female gymnasts in the Olympics I remember that I had to join a boys club because girls were not allowed to jump over the vaulting horse [Such ridiculous 'rules' still keep copping up I'm afraid]

FRED SMITH, 15 Mansion House Gardens, Glasgow G41 3DP I'm pretty certain that Gerry Carlyle, big game huntress, was a creation of Arthur J. Burks and featured in the pre-war Thrilling Wonder Stories. There was some cross fertilisation so to speak between the Carlyle stories and Kuttner's "Hollywood On The Moon" series, so this is probably what made you think the Burks' yarns were by Henry K. [I think you're right]. I must have encountered in local government, along with such inventions as 'disbenefit' (as the opposite of 'benefit'). As far as spoken English is concerned the encouragement of "regional" accents on TV tends to produce some very strange pronunciation. [and totally incomprehensible speech as practised by a certain Scotswoman announcer on GMTV]

ROGER WADDINGTON 4 Commercial St., Norton, Malton, N.Yorks YO17 9ES

On English as she is spook. I keep a mental tally of the number of times that the lady called Laura Norder turns up in news bulletins. What really makes me cringe is hearing 'drawing' instead of 'drawing' [I hate 'E-Stanglea'] I now tend to treat the evolution of English with equanimity, what is it anyway but a collection of words pirated from every other language in the world? It's always been evolving. You can't read Chaucer now without the help, of a translation and Shakespeare will probably go the same way.

GEOFF BARKER, 19 Oldfield Grove, Stannington, Sheffield S6 6DR Superheroes - first rate. Of course it's almost difficult to obtain nowadays and horrendously expensive when/if you can find it. 'Where is English Going?' Peculiar Asian auto names. try checking out the names of the guests on an average edition of U.S. talk shows, Rikki Lake or Mantel Williams. [*How about Oprah Winfrey?*]. 'I Remember It Well' - do you think our children/grandchildren will look back on 2000 and say, "Those were the good old days"? [*A lot depends on what their life is like without oil, cars, power etc.*]

ROY LAVENDER, 2507 E.17th St., Long Beach, CA 90804-1508 USA James Verran might enjoy looking in a dictionary of 1800s British criminal slang Aussie, Crissie, chockie sound remarkably similar. I don't have great grandchildren, but my youngest granddaughter explains the latest words from her school vocabulary very well. I once read the Diary of Dr. John Dee, who wrote it in Saxon. Get with it James. I regard Sci-Fi as a bastard form from Hollywood. It is a commercialised product designed to fill the time between commercials. Science fiction requires, first, that you can read and second that the writer can capture your imagination so you can fill in the scene. [*I fully agree, I just can't abide the Star Trek spin-offs and clones.*]

LISA MAJOR 1409 Christy Ave., Louisville, KY 40204-2040. USA More Movie Memories was a great article. Of course, I always like to attend the Ackerman panels because he has some really great stories to tell. You also, I note, manage to give us the plane facts. As a racing fan I enjoyed Penelope Fandergaste's mention of the 1931 Derby being won by a joke entry.(I assume Fandergaste is talking about the English Derby.) Offhand, I can think of two similar stories in the Kentucky Derby, one being the workhorse Exterminator in 1918 and 1964 winner Northern Dancer, who was sort of a Hobson's choice for his breeder. There was also 1977 Triple Crown winner Seattle Slew, who as an unfashionably bred yearling went for \$17,500. And I mustn't forget 1989 winner Sunday Silence, who nobody wanted to buy as a yearling.

BOB LICHTMAN, PO Box 30, Glen Ellen, CA 95442, USA Regarding your "More Movie Memories," I quite agree with you that the 1954 film of THE WAR OF THE WORLDS was one of the best SF films ever made. I've seen it several times on the big screen and a few more on TV. I also have fond memories of that changing store window in the George Pal film of Wells' THE TIME MACHINE, one of the nicest and subtlest special effects touches in an SF film I can think of and really made the movie for me. I think I have a higher opinion of FORBIDDEN PLANET than you do, but then I saw it when I was just twelve and it really revved up my fledgling sense of wonder. I also had a crush on Ann Francis and thought that Robbie the Robot was also pretty hot stuff. My only disappointment with the film of WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE is that they never did the sequel. [*A great film, but marred by that glowing technicloud ending after landing over snow and ice.*] I read the book of AFTER WORLDS COLLIDE quite a few times when I was in my early teens, before I discovered fandom, and liked it even more than WHEN. I didn't get to see THE THING for quite a few years after its 1951 release; my parents had read all sorts of Weird Stuff about it in the newspapers and forbade me to see it. I was young enough then that the movie houses that were playing it were too far away for me to venture to on my own.