

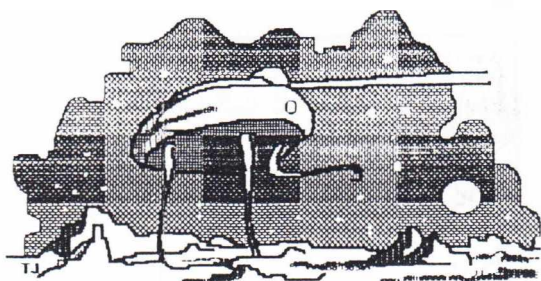
# ERG 155

QUARTERLY  
OCTOBER 2001



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Terry Jeeves  
56 Red Scar Drive  
Scarborough  
N.Yorks  
YO12 5RQ

Ph.(01723 376817 e-mail [erg40@madasafish.com](mailto:erg40@madasafish.com)

Greetings ERGbods, Once again the mighty presses have thundered, trees mangled into paper and much midnight oil consumed, all simply to bring you this latest edition of ERG. Culling time again, sorry chums but if you are a non-responder, this must be your last issue unless you DO SOMETHING! Regulars need have no worry

My thanks to all those good people who continue to send me used (and mint) US postage stamps. I still have gaps in my collection, so more are always welcome

I'm still wanting to dispose of my SF collection and have lists of paperbacks, hardcovers, magazines, aircraft and non-fiction all going cheap. Send SAE for whichever list interests you. A great chance to increase your collection.

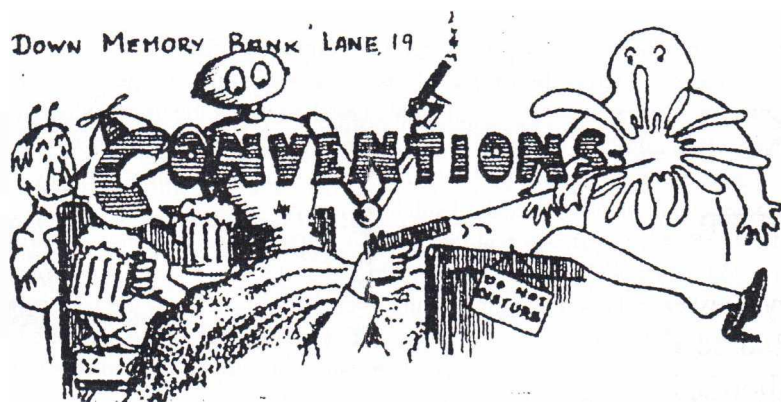
**HELP WANTED** One of my hobbies is book-binding for which I need a special Linson (Linsen?) paper for the covers. Can anyone point me to a supplier?

There is currently great panic about the increase of carbon dioxide in the air. Much of this comes from people breathing out. Now if we all agreed to stop breathing for one hour a day, the problem would be solved.

Then there is all this panic about creating clones of human beings. Where's the problem? Start a clone off and it will still need 9 months for gestation in a host mother, followed by as many years as the rest of us to grow and be educated. The idea of rich men cloning themselves would after many years, only give them an identical looking human with different ideas. As for a dictator raising an army in this manner, he would need another army of host mothers and a twenty year wait to grow and train his warriors. Far more practical and much more dangerous is the ability to select the sex of an unborn child. This could lead to a serious imbalance in the population, or our warlike dictator upping his potential soldier count by issuing an edict setting the birth rate balance. Why go to all the trouble of clones when he only needs to enforce a law that suits his plans?

Oh well, see you next issue, and do remember those LOCs

Bess Twitches, Terry



Fandom and Conventions are so inextricably linked that they resemble the chicken and egg situation. I'd been a fan and collector since around 1932 when at the tender age of ten, I had been exposed to 'Amazing, assorted isotopes of Wonder and d'blops of Astounding. Wally Gillings Scientificion showed me I wasn't the only SF reader and collector in the UK but it wasn't until after the war that I got the chance to meet other fans - a Convention was to be held in London!!! Being a penurious teacher, fresh out of post-war training college, my finances were knee-high to a rather soggy pancake, staying overnight in a hotel wasn't on. That meant a day trip to London and back to Sheffield, the same-day Timetable, 7-30am train getting in St.Pancras about 11-30am, spending some time at the Con and then leaving in time to catch a 9 a clock train which would get me back to civilisation (Sheffield) around 1-30am Sunday morning. Finally a two mile walk through a tough area of the city. Happily, in those days muggers were virtually unknown.

Things worked more or less to plan. Arriving at St. Pancras, I descended into the Tube 'Rotunda'...and duly began to wander slowly around the central bookstall gently waving the identification symbol of the day - a copy of ASTOUNDING. I wonder how often fans have used that particular "I'm a FAN" signal. It worked; before I could be arrested for pushing subversive literature, I was absorbed into a group of real, honest-to-gosh SF fans. Over 50 years separate me from that weekend, and the only names I can recall from that meeting are Ron Buckmaster and that of a slim young girl called Daphne who later became his wife.

After a round of introductions we out-of-towners were ferried round London on a brief sight-seeing to before joining a fannish mass in the White Horse tavern. As we approached, our eyes were assailed by the clamour of a burglar alarm in a nearby shop. No one was taking a blind bit of notice, so it went on like the clappers for the whole of the Convention. It gave most of the speakers the screaming habdabs, Ted Carnell and Wally Gillings among them. The latter showed us a cover painting for an issue of TALES OF WONDER. It depicted a skin-clad Burl, dweller on an Earth which had gone badly to seed and about to tangle with

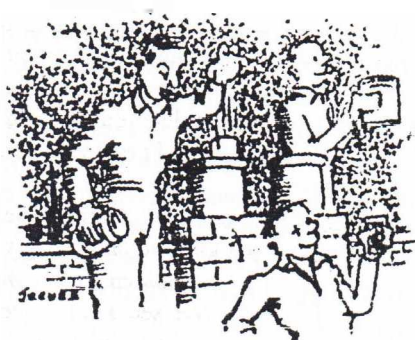




a king-sized wasp. Sitting beside me was a fan busily scribbling away in a grubby notebook. Seeing my interest, he explained his name was Tony Thorne and that he was "Covering this for 'Operation Fantast'". Double Dutch to me at the time but one lives and learns. It was Ken Slater's fanzine in which my first fannish writings and drawings appeared. About the only other thing I remember was everyone using a scratchy stylus to add their names to a duplicator stencil. I still have a copy.

That was 1948, exposure to real fans was addictive, I was back again the following years until 1968 when ill health caused me to nuss a few. I have memories of the Bonnington (?) where a large cat kept walking over the glass roof of the Con hall, much to the distraction of the speakers. Oh yes, and Charlie Duncombe appeared out of hibernation each year to become treasurer, then vanished into some fannish Limbo until the next one. Rather like some TAFF candidates.

Somewhere around this era I attended a Bradford Con where I not only met Captain Ken Slater for the first time, but also met and teamed up with Eric Bentcliffe to form a



friendship which lasted some forty years until his death. Along the way we produced Space Times, Con Science, Triode, and Vector, a UFO summary and Songs From Space as well as playing umpteen games of Scrabble. 1953 saw the Bonnington and the inauguration of that August ceremony, The Roofcon. A peripatetic band of fen, found their way onto the hotel roof. Empty bottles began to pile up and were disposed of in the most logical way by dropping them down the handiest chimney pots.

I missed this affair as Ken Slater and I were waylaid by a porter who insisted that as a visitor from the overspill hotel, I had no right to be wandering around the Con Hotel at two in the morning. Despite Ken's impassioned pleading I was finally ushered out the front door and left to find my way back to my own hotel where I was sharing a room with Eric Jones. I put out the light, nipped into bed and had a full fifteen seconds of kip before there came a tapping on the door, followed by a slithery, scratchy sound terminating in a soggy thump. Brave as ever, I leaped from my bed and opened the door - to find the 5'4" Eric Bentcliffe standing over a heap of old clothes. On closer inspection, they turned out to be the paralytic, 6'0" body of Eric Jones. How Eric had supported him back from the Bonnington was one of those mysteries into which man should never probe. The scratchy, slithery, soggy thump had been Jonesy sliding down the door. I signed for the recumbent body, lugged it into bed and settled down for what was left of the night. At this point a blurred voice announced, "I wanna be sick" so the rest of the night was spent propping him up over the wash basin.

Then there was the Northwest SF Convention in Manchester. One highlight was an amateur SF film made by John Russell Fearn. It annoyed JRF intensely when every one laughed loudly at the sight of a model rocket with a firework stuck up its rear end being hauled skyward on a length of black thread. The Sense of Wonder was fading even then.

Although only a small affair it showed that a proper Con could be held outside London despite the fact that Londoners had claimed it was too far North to travel to Manchester for a Con. This despite the astounding fact that a check with a map revealed the distance was exactly the same in both directions. So we got the Supermancon of 1954. Dubious of the mileage theorem, only a few London fan ventured to make the journey and those who did had concocted a plan to sabotage the Convention. Happily they never put it into practice. Bery Campbell, editor of *Authentic* failed to make the trip which was a pity as I had written a playlet putting him on trial for referring to Northerners as 'blondy provincials'. The play went on despite his absence with me playing the Prosecuting Attorney and Ted Tubb the Defence. Ten seconds into the play, Ted threw his script away and we ad-libbed the rest of the prosecution.

Peter Hamilton gave us a natter about *Nebula* and Alistair Paterson, editor of the *Vargo Statten Magazine* gave us a talk on cover art. I was manhandled up on the stage to illustrate his talk. Alistair had planned to show how impossible it was to get everything fan wanted into one issue and called for audience suggestions. "A spaceship, an observatory, two spacemen, a futuristic aircraft, a beam". By some finagling I managed to get 'em all in, much to Paterson's annoyance. Before he could ask for more, I pointed out, "There's still something missing". Hoping to win the game, Paterson bit. "What's missing?" he asked. "A title for the mag" I explained and quickly lettered in the title *TRIODE*, thus getting in a good plug for the fanzine Eric Benteliff's and I produced. I still have a photo of the incident.

I think it was the Supermancon where Brian Burgess brought a load of offal to serve as the nasty bits due to be removed from a sheeted figure in a spoof operation. He stowed them under his bed, the operation was cancelled and the offal stayed hidden - for a week or so before it made its presence known to the staff. So if you ever see a reference to 'Burgess' Lights', you'll know what they were. This was also the Con where the 'zap gun' made its first appearance as battles raged up and down the corridors of the Deansgate Hotel. The water pistols were so popular they appeared at several other Cons, including the first Kettering shindig where one fan squirted the cinema screen during a film show and a collection was raised to cover the cost and appease the irate projectionist. Kettering was nearer London so many fans came along. The sleepy market town was never the same again. The George Hotel wasn't big enough to hold us all, so the Royal was also taken over. The George was ideal, multi-corridorred, two bars, large Con hall and close to several excellent eateries. The only snag was the church clock across the road which struck hours, halves and quarters throughout the night. It was at Kettering that we revelled in the tape recorded plays, *THE MARCH OF SLIME* and other epics from the Liverpool SF Group. They included that magic ingredient, *BLOG*, which soon began to find its way onto cafe menus around the town, *Blog and Chips*, *Blog on Toast*, *Crottled Greeps in Blog* and so on.. Other delights were the fan huckster tables, prize competitions and assorted fannish items plugging the gaps between sercon items, plus of course, speeches and panels. In those days you didn't want to miss the program items, socialising took place at mealtimes and through the night. Ah, innocent days.

Food supplies at Kettering were not limited to hotel and cafes. For the impecunious and the gourmands, there was a 'Chippy' just across the side road by the hotel. The snag was how to smuggle redolent fish and chips past the eagle eyes and highly capable nose, of the hotel receptionist. Fannish ingenuity solved that problem. When a fan had acquired a bundle of victuals, a high pitched whistle would alert an accomplice in a first floor bedroom. A length of string was lowered, the fish and chips tied on the end and up went supper. It was a grand idea and worked well until a hungry and hasty fan failed to tie the parcel securely. Half way up it came undone, and showered an innocent passer by with its contents. Sadly the recipient didn't appreciate the free meal.



Another Kettering legend was Ken McIntyre after whom the Award was named. He never took part in any fannish activities, but spent the weekend in a gentle, Guinness induced benevolence. His first act every time he booked in at the George, was to seek out the hotel porter and bribe him to stock Ken's room with a crate of Guinness - and see it kept filled. That porter also earned fannish delight. Tall and sadly hunch-backed, he acquired the nickname of 'Boris', and rather than being annoyed, he enjoyed it. Then there was the Bentcliffe Relief Fund. This was simply a welcoming party of fen who carried a pint of beer down to the local railways station to meet Eric off the train from Manchester after a day's work.

It was at Kettering that we formed the British Science Fiction Association thanks to Ted Tubb who rammed the idea through. It's avowed intention was to bring new blood into fandom before it came apart at the seams. Eric Bentcliffe and I were roped in as joint Secretaries, Archie Mercer was Treasurer and Ted was to edit Vector, a name which I proposed and got accepted. Ted's editorialising lasted long enough to send me half the material for the first issue - along with his resignation. So I ended up editing, stencilling and duplicating the first four issues.

In 1957, a Worldcon came to Britain and made a hectic fannish week for Bentcliffe and I. The previous weekend we flew to Antwerp and were ferried around by Jan Jansen. This included a run to Amsterdam to meet Dave Kyle, his new wife and a band of Americans. We were to meet them at Schipol airport, but plane after plane arrived without the group. Jan finally discovered they had come in early and had boarded the KLM coach into Amsterdam. They were waiting for us there. Once united, Jan's little Citroen 2CV led a convoy of taxis through the streets of Amsterdam to the fannish hotel. We finally got back to Antwerp at 4am. A brief nap and we flew back to London and one of the longest and narrowest Con Halls ever. From the back you needed a telescope to see the front. It was reached via the breakfast room, so we were asked not to use it at night as it "put dust on the cornflakes". It was at this Con I met J.W. Campbell. He was so disgusted with hotel coffee that he locasyed a chemical supply house and bought beakers, filter papers and funnels to brew his own.

# Modern Mysteries

By James Verran

Have you ever wondered about apparently inanimate devices that demonstrate an uncanny imitation of artificial intelligence, malice, even? One might be excused for attributing anthropomorphic qualities to seemingly petulant machines. Among the most frustrating must be motor vehicles under warranty. They present with intermittent problems, patently obvious to the frustrated owner, which fail to manifest as soon as a mechanic is within a spanner's length. However, the day after the free service period expires the niggling faults miraculously reveal themselves to all and sundry, especially the service personnel, who eventually track them down after exhaustive testing and expensive diagnostic procedures.

Computers often make their owners look like complete idiots. I have had many encounters with deceitful digital devices, in particular, system crashes and the like, slyly initiated to make me appear to be at fault. On one occasion I was unable to gain access to my Internet service. After having my password rejected several times, I was forced to phone my service provider to enquire why I could not get on-line. The problem was caused by the Caps Lock key being mysteriously activated without any effort on my part. Due to the prevailing high frustration quotient I had not noticed the small, glowing LED telltale.

When I was a lad, broken biscuits or cookies used to be sold cheaply to regular customers which was a boon to parents of large families. In those days they were packaged in large tin boxes, colloquially known as biscuit tins. Sadly, bulk packaging is a thing of the past, but broken biscuits are still available. These days every individual, hermetically sealed packet sheds crumbling fragments as soon as it is opened. Unfortunately, we now pay full price for the damaged merchandise.

Strange how the recently, "new improved" toilet paper seems to become thinner or weaker in no time at all. Coincidentally, an even newer and -- you guessed it -- stronger, softer product shortly appears in the market place. As an informed consumer I have taken note over several years, and if the manufacturers' claims are to be believed, standard toilet paper should now be about as thick as corrugated cardboard, strong as Kevlar, yet as soft as an angel's kiss. Cannot say that I am too charmed by the prospect of recycled toilet paper, though.

Was a time when: "always read the fine print" was graven in stone. Then some intellectual giant decided that printing critical information on a coloured background, the darker the better, was the way to go. This trend, coupled with alteration (usually a reduction) to the net contents of a given package, must be a blessing to inflation-aware manufacturers. Not so flash when older citizens with failing eyesight are straining to identify the contents or decipher the use-by date.

Someone out there delights in placing pale, very small pictographs onto the dark plastic of remote controls and other devices. Mostly, written labels are non-existent. Such devices are more than likely to have miniscule icons which are not only illegible, but often so abstract as to be useless to mere mortals. I wonder why I went to all the trouble to learn to read: even the ancients eventually progressed beyond pictographs and hieroglyphs, so why revert to an archaic system of dubious value?

What about the disappearing traffic lanes? Three-lane highways mysteriously change to two lanes, which frequently merge to become a single lane. Commonsense, and the road code advises against unnecessarily switching lanes. However, try driving in the same lane, on the same road for your entire journey. Within a few blocks you will likely find yourself in a mandatory turn lane. What can you do, except follow the turn arrows, or diverge into another lane, technically breaking the law? Apart from risking a rear-end collision, you will certainly earn abuse from drivers smugly cruising in the through lane.

How often do we see references to performers appearing, or filmed, "live" at a concert? Logically, dead being the opposite to live, seeing a dead performer in action would be quite a drawcard. Mind you, it is not uncommon for comedians to "die" on stage.

In the world of commercial enterprise one is inundated with "special" offers, most of which have expired just prior to acquiring the product in question. Such offers frequently originate from enterprises about to go out of business; hence, the eternal closing down, or liquidation sale. These are closely related to the old catch where an apologetic shop keeper sincerely regrets that he/she has just sold the last advertised whatever. This devastating revelation is commonly softened by an offer to let you have a later, improved, and consequentially more expensive model of the desired product. Incidentally, whose lifetime is used as the criterion for those lifetime warrantees?

Any photographer will be familiar with the FREE exchange film offered when leaving an exposed film at certain establishments for processing. Invariably, the FREE film is rapidly approaching its use-by date, thus assuring that you will rush back to have it processed, no doubt to be presented with yet another soon-to-expire roll.

Surely the old odd amount protocol, to allegedly make it necessary for shop staff to ring up the sale to make change, is redundant. A few years ago the Australian treasury decided to withdraw one and two cent coins, leaving the five cent coin as the smallest denomination in circulation. To work around this limitation, prices continued to be expressed in one cent increments, to be rounded down, or up to the nearest five at the cash register. Shopkeepers, being only human, continue to express their prices as before, but strangely, the majority of prices end in 3 and 4, or 8 and 9 cents now. The only apparent advantage to having odd amounts is to retail traders who proclaim that they have the lowest prices on certain lines of merchandise. While shop staff are no less honest than before, one must wonder at the motives of the traders.

We truly live in a mysterious age.





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**VISIONS OF PARADISE** and **HALCYON DAYS** Robert Sabella, 24 Cedar Manor Ct., Budd Lake, NJ 07828, USA VOP holds an interesting personal diary, first SF contacts, in depth reviews, a fanzine review and two pages of jokes. HD is the letter fanzine with plenty of stimulating responses. A nice and friendly pair, good reading.

**THROUGH FRACTURED EYES** 12pages K&R Walker, 6 Vine St., Greaves, Lancaster LA1 4UE Con report and costs, acting and audience response or lack of it, pop music, 'escort' agencies, a cartoon and a recipe. I enjoyed it.

**VANAMONDE** 403 TO 407. each a two sided sheet of mainly Apa-natter and comments on a variety of topics from John Hertz, 236 S. Coronado St., No.409, Los Angeles, CA 90057

**FOSFAX.203** OO of the Society of Falls & Idaho, C/o FOSFA. PO Box 37281, Louisville, Kentucky 40233-7281, USA 74 pages of comment, Con Reports, book & fmz reviews, lots of LOCs and plenty of art. Get it for \$4.00 a copy or \$12.00 for four issues

**LIGHT'S LIST.2001** This 16th edition has 62 pages of names, addresses and other details of poems, fiction, interests etc. of over 1450 worldwide small press magazines.

£2.00 (£6.00 USA, \$7.00 air) Cheques, stamps, British POs or IRC to John Light, Photon Press, 37 The Meadows, Berwick on Tweed, Northumberland TD15 1NY, UK

Also from John, **NEOLITHON**. a book of poems and drawings by John and Steve Sneyd. 60 pages, price £5.50, £8.00 overseas

**THE KNARLEY KNEWS.88** H & L Welch, 1526 16th Ave., Grafton, WI 53024-2017, USA 26ppp of personal comment, Graduation, trip to Israel, film review, oodles of LOCs and a page of fmz reviews. Nice and friendly, get it for the usual.

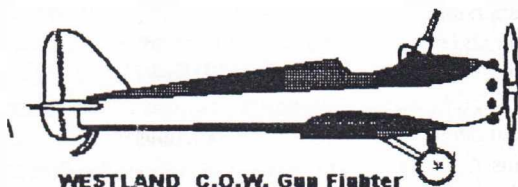
**NIEKAS.46** Ed Meskys, RR.2, Box.63, 322 Whittier Hwy., Center Harbor, NH 032226-9708, USA. 66ppp beautifully laid out with eight articles (M.Z. Bradley, C.A. Smith, Dragon myths and so on). A further eight in the 'Sports section', poetry, LOCs and assorted ultra short stories, excellent art and as near a prozine as you'll get. It justifies its price of \$4.95, a real work of art.

## MEATING OUT JUSTICE

The usually peaceful Transylvanian hamlet of Grunge was in turmoil Each night, some strange being was invading the homes and sucking the blood from sleeping citizens. Traps had been set and eluded, but one aged crone swore she had the answer. By the bedside of each regular victim she sprinkled chalk powder. They checked just after midnight. Clear footprints of the invading vampire led through the town to the home of the local butcher. The howling mob pounded on his door, but the vampire escaped from the back to hide in his cold store among all the stiffly frozen meat. It was to no avail, the mob sought him out and as they had no silver bullets, he was killed in the traditional manner. They drove a steak through his heart

## MORE FAILED FIGHTERS

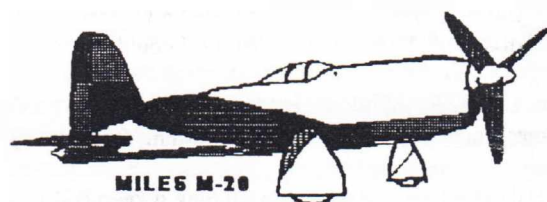
In W&W.13 I mentioned several fighters such as the Martin Baker.5 and Vickers Venom, which although very good, didn't make the grade. One or two other prospective fighters could have challenged the roles of the Spitfire and Hurricane, but for various reasons, never made the grade. An early idea in the thirties may not have been in the running, but at least it was original. The Westland C.O.W. Gun fighter had nothing to do with cattle, the initials stood for Coventry Ordnance Works whose 37mm gun was installed to fire upwards on the theory that it was easier to attack a bomber from underneath where it was less well protected. Built to a 1927 specification, the aircraft was surprisingly enough, a monoplane. It had a 40ft span, fixed undercarriage and a maximum speed of only 184mph. The idea was not followed up as the heavy weight of the 37mm shells meant only a few could be carried -



**WESTLAND C.O.W. Gun Fighter**

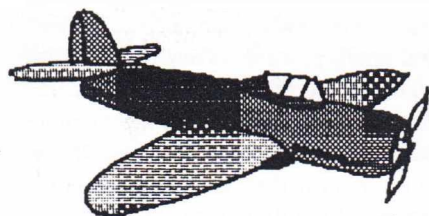
Then there was the Miles M-20 undercarriage aircraft of wooden construction.

This was a low wing, fixed undercarriage aircraft. It was designed to be quickly built, easily serviced and a backup should we run short of Hurricanes or Spitfires. In the event, we didn't, so it never went into production. It had eight machine guns, but had room for 12 and the prototype was designed and built in an incredible 65 days. With a speed



**MILES M-20**

of 333mph it was faster than the Hurricane and equal to the early Spitfires. The first flight was in September 1940, but only two were built before the project was cancelled.



**RYAN FIREBALL and DARKSHARK**

In the USA, 1944, Ryan designed the Fireball and its follow up, Dark Shark with both jet and prop propulsion hoping to gain high jet speed with quick take off or 'go round' power for carrier operation. Sadly, the speed was under 300mph

So, there you are... the General Election is over. And the main opposition party has finally got around to electing a new leader, and in its usual gentlemanly fashion, too. And, so, we can all settle back to our usual, normal, *boring*, everyday life.

Just like yesterday. An absolutely typical, ordinary day in the Housegaste Fanderhold. Which should give you a pretty good idea of the general State of Affairs. Yes, yes, with capitals.

We start with the different phials, cartons, packets and containers. All those tablets! Gloclifold, Frusilicide, Fratricide and Pesticide, all prescribed by the local quack. Then to the dispersible... dispersible! Wasn't soluble good enough for us? ...aspirins. The way they change everything, phone book for telephone directory, train station for railway station... They'll be thinking up a new word for wireless next.

Then I get down to the supplements and additives that the nice young assistant in the local health food store tends to recommend every time I go in the place. Ginseng, vitamins A to Z, toasted wheatgerm, cod liver oil, calcium, cadmium, barium, phosphorous, coal tar, arsenic, Icelandic rhubarb and organic beetroot. And of course the extracts of pineapple, guava, cuttlefish and haggis. There's something there I think I've forgotten. Did I mention the smoked Parmesan?

After that a large cup of coffee. Irish, of course. I'd have something to eat for breakfast but after opening all those containers I'm too exhausted. I rest for a couple of hours and then get down to the business of living. Living, man. Like Living.

From the washing machine I take the socks (How is it there is always one odd sock?) and the cat. Wondered why I hadn't seen him for three days. Funny, always though he was *black* and white. I dive for the nearest can opener while he battles desperately with the tin of cat food using only tooth and claw. Good attempt, Puss. 'Hope I won't hurt your feelings by pointing out that that was my hand. And what a wonderful feast for the little mog. Cranberry and cockroach. Why, it smells so good, I could almost...

Then it's on to answering the mail. Let's see what there is this bright summer's morning (Dream on, Pen, dream on). A note from Terry about the next column. But I'll send him one just the same.

Ah, a gas bill. Whom am I supposed to pay this time? I do wish they'd keep still. As soon I write out a cheque there's some bloke at the door showing me the advantages of switching to Rail Track or Conde Naste or some such. I think this gas bill has to be paid to the water company. And there's the electricity bill to pay to the butcher. And the last but one instalment on the squaerial I bought when they were on special offer last year.

And in this super-large envelope is a questionnaire! And my completing it will be valued. Appreciation at last! How is it you can never find a pen that works when you need one.

There! At last it's completed. And before the six o'clock news, too. Fold the sheet carefully and slip it back into the envelope. Say, what's this nestling at the bottom?

That's right, a free pen.

## MORE IDLE THOUGHTS

There are many things not dreamed of in my philosophy, some of them puzzle me greatly, so if any reader can shed further light on them, here goes. Let's start with a beam of light. If it enters a denser medium such as a glass block, it gets refracted towards the normal. On exit, the beam resumes its original direction albeit moved slightly to one side. The move obviously happens at the interface, but just what causes it? Why doesn't the bending continue so that the beam assumes a curved path? The text books never seem to say. One can assume the thicker medium diverts the beam, but why does the thinner one on exit, divert it back?

Another light beam problem which I've mentioned in ERG before, so I'll state it briefly this time. A light beam slows down and presumably loses energy on entering a glass block (Cerenkov radiation?), on exit it speeds up again. Where does it get the energy required for the acceleration?

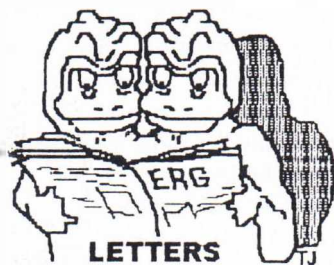
Then there are those FTL equations which say that as speed increases, time slows, mass increases and length shortens. To exceed  $c$  would involve the square root of  $-1$ , but why is that a problem? Electrical engineers handle that routinely. Could time reverse, length become negative and mass become infinity plus? Totally daft speculations but they have made for some good stories.

Another puzzler concerns spiral nebulae, star formation and black holes. The general idea seems to be that mutual attraction draws in debris and dust until a star forms. Fair enough, but why are nebulae, stars and black holes always shown as (and appear to be) composed of a central mass surrounded by a single ecliptic plane of infalling debris? Surely, some stuff should fall from every possible direction and instead of forming a single plane, the central mass should be englobed by a maze of particles orbiting in every conceivable direction?

Then in quantum theory we have all those particles which are interchanged to supply gravity, the strong and weak nuclear forces, etc. In the case of gravity they interact over an infinite distance, so is there a propagation time? Presumably gravitons are being exchanged throughout all particles in the universe, but how do they lose power at greater distances? Then there's magnetism. We know that an electric current can generate a field, but how does a static permanent magnet create one (remember those old school experiments with iron filings)? Once again, the answer isn't in the text books.

One real puzzler concerns birds, animals and fish. How do they find their way back home after immense journeys. Oh yes, I've heard the one about magnets, but how do the voyagers calculate their course unless their 'magnet' has a fix on the starting point? I have often seen clips of fish shoals holding several hundred tropical fish swimming happily along in one huge mass. Suddenly, without warning they all switch direction - simultaneously! Flocking birds sometimes do the same. Now just what signal is passed to tell every single one to make a smart shift of course? Hive mind? Telepathy? 'magnetism'. I don't have a clue. Maybe you can tell me.





**JOE MAJOR**, 1409 Christy Ave, Louisville, KY 40204-2040, USA    **Electric Cars** An additional consideration for the use of such vehicles in California is that most of the state has such an intemperate climate that it is impossible to drive without air conditioning. Which imposes a further power drain. It used to be that steam-driven cars were going to solve the energy crisis. I remember getting Popular Science, Popular Mechanics, Science & Mechanics, etc. and reading the regular as clockwork articles on the coming age of

steam-powered cars. Always coming, too. Another fun replacement fuel was liquid hydrogen. One had to have a solid, albeit porous metal tank for it, and there was always the prospect of it exploding in an accident. *[Or converting all those around into instant popsicles]*

**ALAN BURNS**, 19 The Cresc., Kings Rd.Sth. Wallsend, N.Tyneside NE28 7RE  
**Electric Cars**, as a matter of fact Sinclair CSs were bought in bulk by some American manufacturer who found them just the job for getting about his works. Wish they had them in hospitals, the corridors to get anywhere seem interminable though in the one Joan has to go to occasionally they do have little electric tricycles that will take you about if you act crippled, or are. Cars will come as soon as better batteries are developed, the current petrol electric are not really effective.

**SHERYL BIRKHEAD**, 25509 Jonnie Ct., Gaithersberg, MD 20882, USA    How did you get that effect on the jet stream of the craft? I'm assuming this is a computerised version.. *[No, I drew it in pen and ink, the jet stream was just dotted in]*    **Electric cars**, where is the power coming from? One thought might be to have your own generator .. like the bicycle run idea. Hey, it will have come full circle, bicycle to bicycle. One of the big drawbacks so far is lack of power. Now if **everyone** was in the same boat, then it would not be a concern - but undoubtedly someone is going to have the monster on the block and put everyone else at risk. *[How about twisted elastic as in model planes?]*

**PAMELA BOAL**, 4 Westfield Way, Wantage, Oxon OX12 7EW    I agree that better batteries are a must for more generalised use of electric vehicles. Though I should point out that electric wheel chairs and scooters have improved tremendously over the last 10 years by better motor design making more use of the battery power. Also, electric buggies are widely used in a number of industrial complexes. Over the years we have rescued many boaters, but only once has the boat in question been an electrically driven one that had run out of power. *[Ah, but what is the percentage of such boats as against other types?]* Many of your valid points are less applicable to boats yet efforts to promote electrically powered boats on the Thames do not seem to be meeting with great success. *[How does the availability of re-charging points and time for a re-charge affect that policy?]*

**TED HUGHES**, 10 Kenmore Rd., Whitefield, Manchester M45 8ER I was fascinated by your piece on electric cars. You proved they're impossible - like scientists proved bumble bees can't fly. *[Not impossible. just needing lots of development]* Perhaps someone will invent a new kind of battery. I have a rechargeable spotlight which runs off a totally enclosed lead-acid battery, presumably the same kind as those we used for radio batteries at sea. But those were kept in bullet-proof concrete boxes and topped up regularly with distilled water. The one on my spotlight just needs re-charging. *[And how long does that take?]* So there's still hope for electric cars.

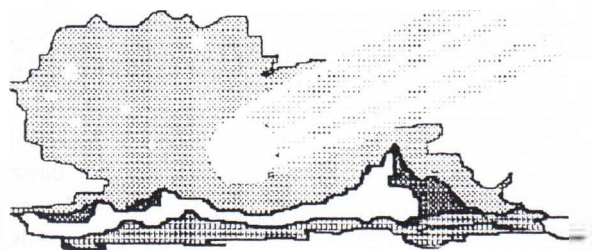
**ROGER WADDINGTON**, 4 Commercial St., Norton, Malton, N.Yorks YO17 9ES.

One idle thought I have is, why can't we be more European? We have these grand laws and decree signing ceremonies, then they go away and promptly ignore them, while here in Britain we implement every jot and tittle with Draconian penalties. Indeed, there's now a new term 'goldplating' for our practice of finding interpretations of the law that weren't even intended in the first place and applying them just as heavily. The sooner we accept like other countries that the idea of 'Europe' is a sham, that we don't take it seriously, the better it'll be. *[I fully agree with you. they sign and ignore. we capitulate]*

**RON BENNETT**, 36 Harlow Park Cresc. Harrogate, N Yorks For the first time I was disappointed by DMBL. There was such a wealth of material you left untapped and I felt that the article could have been divided into three different elements and each expanded, these being, for example, fanzines pre and early post war, Fanzines of the mid to late fifties and memories of fans and fan. There were so many excellent fansines around in the early fifties that you overlooked, *Space Times*, *Space Diversions* from L'pool, *Bem*, Paul Enever's *Orion*, *Sidereal*, *Brenschluss*, *Void*, *Femazine*, and *New Futurian*. To say nothing of *Contact*, the forerunner of *Skyrack*, which came later *[I only got two or three of those and didn't have any more space to mention more. so I mentioned those which either had an anecdote attached or of which I had copies for reproduction]*

**LLOYD PENNEY**, 1706-24, Eva Rd., Etobicoke, ON Canada M9C 2B2 Electric cars will come, they just need a better power source. There are several Canadian companies who are still working on that, their names escape me, but I expect relatively small battery packs will be available for electric cars in about five years or so. European cars may all be electric within 20 years, and the last bastion of combustion cars will be in large countries where there are large uninhabited areas, like Canada, Australia and Russia. Will America ever go electric with their cars? I doubt it.

**FRED SMITH**, 10 Braudholm Cres. Giffnock, Glasgow G46 6HQ Re electric cars, you didn't mention the hybrids that several manufacturers have produced. The ones that use electric power in town and switch to petrol for the open road with the petrol engine driving a generator to recharge the batteries. I do agree, though, that much more efficient batteries will be needed before electricity becomes a viable means of automotive propulsion. *[The hybrid car must always lug around one propulsion source that is not being used. They are like those multi purpose knives which hammer, saw, pull Boy Scouts out of horse's hooves, etc. They do all the jobs, but none as good as the dedicated tool.]*



## A LONG SHOT

Are we likely to be hit by a runaway asteroid and if so, what can we do to prevent it? Those two questions keep popping up. Just for

the heck of it, I'm going to throw in my own musings on the matter. I saw somewhere that the chances of such a hit are 1 in 20,000. That may seem a long shot until you think of all the people who regularly plonk their tolly on the 1 in 14,000,000 chances of winning the Lottery.

A recent report warned of a large rock due to hit us in 2030. This was later changed when more accurate calculations were made. However it indicates that such dangers can be detected as far as 30 years in the future, so what can we do in that time? I see only two possibilities, either send a spacecraft to divert the thing into a slightly different orbit, or send a missile to blow up the rock, or. Let's look at those ideas.

1. that incoming menace is probably shifting at around 7 miles per second, so to get there in time to divert it we need a craft with enough fuel to meet it as far out as possible (the further out, the less diversion needed). Then our craft will have to decelerate, reverse thrust and accelerate to match the incoming velocity before it can give the incomer a sideways thrust. Could a Space Shuttle carry all that fuel? Could it have the structural strength to give the rock a sideways push - a task akin to using a pencil point to push a football along. Worse, that rock is probably spinning, so that spin must be killed before any side thrust can be applied. Could spacemen land on it and install giant thrusters? I submit that no craft could be built in fifteen years, able to carry the fuel, spacemen, their life support and the thrusting gear. Scrub the re-direction idea.

2. Send a missile to blow it up. More within the bounds of technical possibility. A thermonuclear warhead might blow up a large rock, but many of the fragments would remain on trajectory for Earth. The choice here is do we allow the menace to blow up one city, or ten smaller towns? Unless of course it is big enough to repeat what happened to the dinosaurs

Supposing a feasible method can be worked out, the biggest problem is who is to fund it? Only two or three nations have the know-how and how do you persuade 'em to do something on such a remote project. Right now, the USA drags its heels over cutting Carbon Dioxide emission and that is a definite problem of today.

How long would such a project take? Well the space program began around 1948 and took about 20 years to put men on the moon. This defensive action would probably take the same, and remember, we only have a fraction of that 30 year warning to organise an international effort, build a spacecraft and set it on its way. Remember, the further out the intercept takes place, the more effective it would be. What do you think?

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