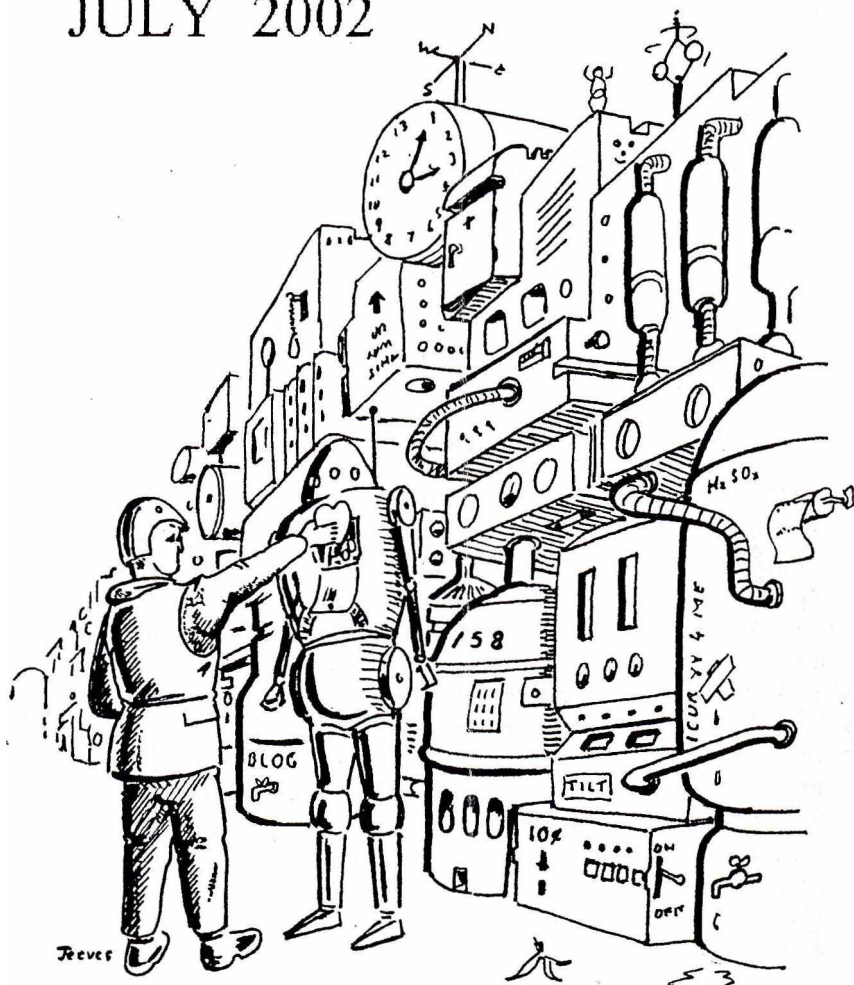


ERG 158

QUARTERLY

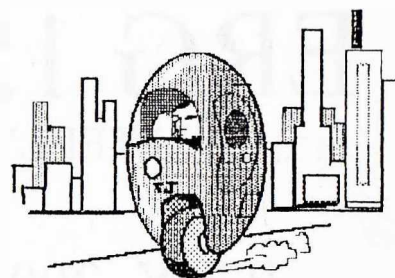
JULY 2002



ERG 158

QUARTERLY
JULY 2002

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



Greetings ERGbods,

My series, 'DOWN MEMORY BANK LANE', finished in the last issue so for the newer readers I'm starting to run my autobiographical series, 'CARRY ON JEEVES' in revised and expanded form. I have already prepared the first 10 instalments, that should take me up to ERG.168 and I'm hoping I'll still be around. Next issue marks my 80th birthday. I have no plans for making notous living, just getting out of bed is quite enough.

I'm still wanting to flog off my collection, so if you're interested I have lists of magazines, hardcovers, paperbacks, non-fiction, and aerospace. Drop me a line and say which you would like.

Repeated thanks to all those who have sent me their American stamps both new and used. I have just about filled my fourth album, so keep 'em coming. Duplicates go to a local charity collection so all are welcome.

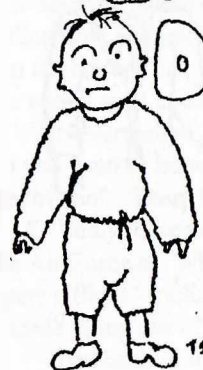
Meanwhile, a few niggles of the kind 'what I would do if I were Prime Minister', starting with a ban on all pop screech and thump music being played in shops, cafes and supermarkets, plus stopping Radio 1 being inflicted on me in dentist or doctor waiting rooms. I'd follow this up by halting the incessant drum beats used by TV channels as background to news programs or punctuation between items. Thoughtless car parking is another no no, I'm regularly inconvenienced by people parking directly opposite my gateway with no thought as to how I'm to get in or out. Then there's hospital queueing. Why do they book in so many people, all at the same time and then keep 'em waiting for hours? They should, by now, have a good idea of how long the average appointment needs and stagger timings appropriately. Another nigger is the proliferation of 'spurious competitions' of the kind, *"What is the capital of England, Is it Belfast, New York or London? Ring us with your answer, Calls cost £1.00 a minute"*. Admittedly only bird brains fall for this one, but it's still a scam. Worse are the letters from Nigeria or somesuch place, which keep promising me several thousand pounds for letting them use my bank account for a few months in order to clear money transactions. On the other hand, just who is daft enough to fall for that one? Surely this is a blatant fraud and should be jumped on with as many feet as can be mustered?

Enough of this wingeing, maybe it's my old age showing - or do you have similar pet moans?

All the best, Terry

CARRY ON JEEVES. I

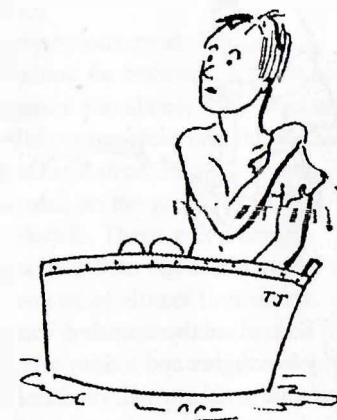
THE EARLY DAYS



Like all my contemporaries I was born at a very early age, a drawback which time soon rectified. Memories of that era remain rather dim, but I do recall being thrust into hand-knitted woollen trousers which had the nasty habit of sagging or stretching in embarrassing places. We lived with grandfather (a Chief Inspector of Police) and grandmother in a large terraced house. It had a kitchen, a parlour and a lounge on the ground floor, beneath them lurked a coal cellar. Three bedrooms and a clothes closet on the first floor and an attic above them. This was my bedroom for many years. It boasted a heavy flap window which when hoisted open gave an

unequalled view over the steel works of the Don Valley.

The toilet was outside across the back yard, Unlit and hell in Winter. Indoors, all our water came from a single cold tap in the kitchen. Hot water had to be heated in kettles or saucepans over the coal-fired Yorkshire range. Central heating was unheard of in those days, the only regular fire being that in the living room. On rare festive occasions one might be lit in the lounge but heat never reached the bedrooms, much less the attic where a bedside glass of water could develop a thin film of ice in Winter months. Lighting was by gas and remained so right up until 1938 when electricity finally fought its way inside. Here again, neither gas nor electricity made their way into the attic so bedtime meant torches, candles or a paraffin lamp.



In those early days, one was awakened at 7am by the howling of loud hooters from the steelworks. These were thoughtfully provided to make sure no worker overslept - hard lines for those NOT employed there. Those who had to start work earlier employed the services of a 'knocker up'. This title has a different meaning in this modern age, but in those days, it was the 'knocker up' who carried a long pole with a chunk of insulating tape on the end. He came around at 5am or some other unearthly hour and rattled on the bedroom window of whoever needed an early call. The clatter of his hob-nailed boots and enthusiastic window-tapping usually woke everyone else as well. I often wondered who woke up the knocker up. Sandy Powell, a comedian of the day even had a routine involving a late arrival for work saying, "Well our knocker-up's knocker up didn't knock our knocker-up, up, so our knocker up didn't knock us up."



One of my very earliest memories from around the age of four, concerns a trip on my little 'fairy cycle'. No, it didn't have wings or queer habits. It was a tiny tricycle with two rear wheels of about three inches diameter and an eight inch front wheel to which the pedals were attached. On this particular day I embarked on an adventurous journey to call for my friend who lived next door. I had got at least fifteen feet from our back door when disaster struck! One pedal broke off. I was panic-stricken, how was I to get home? I wasn't in the AA, hadn't even heard of 'em. It was a real problem for a four year old, but I solved it by sheer brain power - I walked home.

To replace the tricycle I was given a pedal car. Quite a flashy affair with dummy headlights and a door which actually opened. Moreover instead of those abominable cranks which required the leg co-ordinating powers of a genius, my vehicle had pedals which operated a chain drive to the rear wheel. That car was my pride and joy, despite its unusual property of gradually getting smaller and smaller as the weeks went by. That wasn't just my impression, all my friends agreed with me, although none could explain why.

A pity really because it wasn't until it had shrunk so much that I could barely squeeze into the seat that we discovered the best way to get real fun out of driving. We took it in turns to sit inside while the others pushed the car along as fast as humanly possible. The speed so acquired was far higher than that attainable by mere pedal power - but it was a trifle hazardous for common pedestrians.

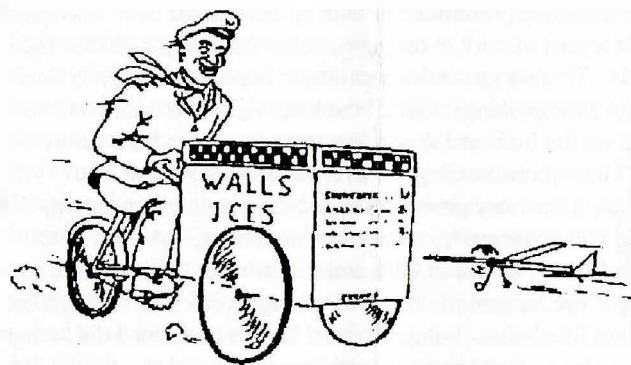
Time passed and someone presented me with an 'Electrical Set'. It consisted of a battery, a bulb, half a yard of wire, a compass, some thin copper sheets and a few other odds and ends. There was also an instruction book, seemingly in Swahili, telling how one could do strange things with all the bits. All I ever achieved was to run the battery flat, step on the bulb and drop the porous pots on a hard floor. As for the compass, it couldn't have been much good as I was always getting lost.

Nevertheless, when some nosy grown-up asked the inevitable question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?", I remember answering, "A pilot or an electrician". Years later I nearly achieved both ambitions when I volunteered for the RAF. Sadly, a weak right eye banned me from becoming a pilot, but I *did* get into the Air Force as Wireless Mechanic. I may not have been a flier, but I did wangle many a flight - including two or three anti-submarine patrols in an antiquated D.H. Rapide flying out of Juhu aerodrome in India.

But back to those early years. I still remember with nostalgic affection, my first flying model aeroplane as a present on my ninth birthday. It consisted of a thin wooden stick bearing a propeller at one end and a wobbly tail assembly at the other. Between them stretched a length of quarter-inch rubber as the power-plant. Perched precariously on top of the stick was a rectangular, fabric-covered wing and slung underneath, a cunningly bit of bent wire held two small wheels. To me it was simply beautiful.

Time came for the maiden flight. Before the envious eyes of my pals, I strutted into the middle of the road. Cars were few and far between in those peaceful days whilst the odd horse-drawn cart plodded along far too slowly to present any danger other than to a sleepy tortoise. Honour and prestige were at stake. I cast all caution to the winds. Offering up a silent prayer to the Patron Saint of Elastic, I wound a full ten turns on the motor, placed the model, on the ground and let go. The propeller flicked over a couple of times and all was still. There was a pregnant silence. I hastily prepared a second attempt with no less than eighteen twists on the rubber. Big deal! My pride and joy managed a taxi run of almost four inches. Murmurs of disquiet arose from the motley bunch of urchins, together with a few placement suggestions of a highly disturbing nature to one of my tender upbringing. Honour and prestige were at stake. I offered up another silent prayer and wound the elastic until a full row of knots ran all the way along the motor. All eyes were on me, I mustn't fail again. Risking everything on a hand launch, I thrust the model blindly into the air. Astonished gasps made me open my tightly shut eyes. MY aeroipolane was actually FLYING !!

The model swooped in a gentle, gracious curve across the middle of the road - straight into the front of one of those menaces, well-known on the pre-war roads of Britain, a Walls' ice-cream, 'Stop-me-and-buy-one' tricycle!



This advanced machine, right at the cutting edge of current technology, consisted of a huge icebox full of lollies, chock-ices and the like, suspended between two large wheels. Behind them came the rest of the contraption which had started life as a bicycle before some mad genius took over in the design office

and added a third wheel, handlebars, bell, and a saddle on which sat a very red-faced and perspiring ice-cream vendor. Model and machine met with a nasty crunching noise

If you are ever invited to place a small wager on the outcome of a dogfight between an unarmed model aeroplane and half a hundredweight of tricycle-borne ice-cream, I advise you to put your money on cold storage, it wins every time.

The now even redder-faced ice-cream man dismounted ponderously from his perch. Amid much creaking and crunching he slowly removed the remains of my pride and joy from the hidden depths of his infernal machine. He handed the pathetic pieces to me then breathed beerily in my face before adding a few words of friendly advice, "Don't fly that bloody thing on the street again, or next time I'll break your bloody neck." We pioneers didn't have an easy time in our younger days.

For a while after that debacle, I consoled myself by collecting metal, 'Dinky Toy' aircraft and very quickly each of them acquired a broken undercarriage through hand-flying them to hard landings. A favourite game with these models was to stretch a thread from a bedroom window, down to the ground at a steep angle. Hooked onto this, my Dinky bombers could 'fly' smoothly down to ground level. However, after several high speed bombing runs had been terminated by loud 'thunks' accompanied by cries of agony from unwary pedestrians intercepting low-flying Whitleys, my squadron was permanently grounded

THE OLD MILL STREAM -- A Country Column of City Life

-- Penelope Fandergaste

I rejected *The Women's Institute Gazette* and picked up the copy of *Golf Monthly*. Oh, for the old days when the magazines piled up in dentists' waiting rooms were all copies of *Punch*. One could go into the inquisition and face the drill rolling with laughter, thus saving the cost of nitrous oxide.

"Take a break in North Wales," screamed the heading. "A country house hotel on the outskirts of Rhyl, close to wonderful golf courses, wonderful lakes, rivers, waterfalls all with wonderful unpronounceable names. Seventeen nights for the cost of two. Don't bother to read the small print."

It sounded perfect. Just what I needed to help my deimpacted wisdom recover. Once home, I extracted the copy of *Golf Monthly* from where I'd stuck it down the front of my trousers... you didn't expect me to be a Philistine and tear out the advert, did you? ... poured out a generous ration of tooth numbing Glenfiddich and set to work on my forthcoming break in North Wales.

I obviously wasn't up to driving so rang British Rail. After three quarters of an hour pressing different keys on my star telephone, I gave up.

Why, what was I thinking of! All this antediluvian telephoning. It's all high-tech and the Internet these days. My search engine found me several sites for British Rail... British Rail by Euro Railways... Europe on Rail... Ah, British Rail... That's more like it.

Or so I thought until I tried it. Keying "Trip Planner" told me about using my rail pass. Keying "Schedules" brought me back to Trip Planner. *Everything* brought me back to Trip Planner.

Well, there was always coach travel.

Logging on to gobycoach.com is like playing one of those Playstation adventure games. Type in your starting point, type in your destination, you are now on page two, type in your starting point, type in your destination, you are now on page three, type in your starting point, type... Eventually, though, I was told that there is a coach from Victoria Coach Station to Rhyl. A mere 7 hours and 10 for the journey. The return trip, however, runs via Manchester Airport and takes 9 hours 35 minutes. You'd need another break after that.

Then there was the hotel. I phoned the country house hotel mentioned in the advert. The receptionist was very kind. Almost indulgent. The offer had been really well supported. They must try it again sometime.

Once I'd rung off, I hastily took another look at that issue of *Golf Monthly*. Yes, it was two years old.

Back to the Internet. Hotels in Rhyl listed the Hilton, the Marriott and the Sheraton. I hadn't realised that Rhyl boasted such a grand international array. Wait, no... those were in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Let me try again... "Search hotels in Rhyl" ... what's this, the Robin Hood Inn in Hebden Bridge? Wherever Hebden Bridge might be.

I gave up. Not only was it my tooth that was aching.

Where did I put that Glenfiddich?

The gentle art of

FAILEYING

Memory is a funny thing, I find it difficult to recall what I did only a few days ago and if ever grilled as a murder suspect I could never answer the question, "Where were you at 6.59pm on January the 13th?" Despite this, I have some enduring memories from pre-war days, even as far back as the thirties. In those days carol singing at Christmas time was easier than it seems to be today. With modern, semi-detached housing, singers have to take one house at a time and first ring the doorbell to alert their would-be audience to switch off the telly, come to the front door and stand in an embarrassed pose whilst some urchin reels off broken fragments of a half remembered carol. I grew up in an area of terraced houses where you often got as many as four residences to a back yard. When on a carolling round we would file down the passageway to the centre of the yard and, accompanied on a mouth organ, sing several verses of 'Good King Wenceslas' before knocking on each back door in turn to receive our hand out. In those TV-less days we had no TV to contend with and even radio sets were fairly rare, so picking were not too bad.

Which brings me to the memory problem. Not content to go carol singing in the week before Christmas, we had a further offering to present on New Year morning. A group of us would go round 'Faileying', if that is the correct way to spell it - and here I welcome anyone remembering this practice who can not only correct the spelling, but who can supply any and all of the missing verses to this epic.

Faileying involved us lining up in a back yard on New Year morning and performing a short verse play. I can only recall a few fragments of this, but here goes ...

LEADER "Here comes me and my old lass, short of money and short of brass. ... here's Little Devil Doubt"

DEVIL DOUBT. "I am Little Devil Doubt with my pockets turned inside out. Money I want and money I pray and if you don't believe me I'll sweep you all away"

... .. missing lines

CHORUS "The butcher killed the topsy we were up to our knees in blood, we had to fetch a hosepipe to wash away the flood,"

BUTCHER and others have lines which I can't recall... ..

CHORUS "And now the song is ended we have no more to say, so please will you give us a New Year's gift and then we'll go away"

Can anyone supply the missing bits? I realise this requires memories from the late twenties, and even trickier, I suspect our Faileying was a very localised performance limited to South Yorkshire, or even to our part of Sheffield. But one never knows. As I said, memories are tricky things.

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VARIETY OR THE LACK THEREOF

Every so often we get a programme on the box entitled, 'Royal Variety Performance' or some such title. Such programmes usually consist of a string of men or women holding large furry lollipops to their noses whilst yelling, or in some cases, screaming various cacophonous offences to one's ears. Also thrown in is an excerpt from some London show which has large clumps of people running around waving their arms and dishing out further dollops of pure noise. This is called 'variety'? Funny, my dictionary has variety as being, 'diversity, difference, many sidedness'. I recall the happy days of my youth when variety was just that, many sided. For the hell of it, I jotted down a list of the items which I remember watching. I make no claim as to their artistic quality, educational value or PC correctness, but by golly, they were VARIETY.

At the Sheffield 'Empire' Theatre, I watched Knife throwers, crack marksmen, boomerang throwers, rope spinners, whip handlers, and tight-rope walkers all demonstrating incredible skills. We had conjurors, magicians, mind readers, hypnotists baffling us with their doings. Jugglers followed performing birds or animals and trapeze artists, acrobats and contortionists astounded us with their doings. We were amazed by ventriloquists, impersonators or musical whistlers, weight-lifters did their grunting best and trick cyclists or roller skaters whizzed around the small stage. Performers played on xylophones, brought tunes from wine glasses of water, or rang musical handbells. Escapologists defeated ropes, chains, manacles and locked trunks. Paper tearers and balloon manipulators did clever things with their chosen materials and I still recall the great Joe Davis who had as full size billiard table erected on stage and with laarge mirros to show the playing surface, performed fantastic tricks for our entertainment. Most amazing was the one where he lined up eight balls on the baulk line while an assistant held a narrow necked wicker 'bottle' at the far end of the table. Joe went down the line of balls as if using a machine gun and fired them, one after another, off the table and through the narrow neck of the basket.

Oh yes and we also had real singers and even full dance bands with famous (in those days) names such as Henry Hall, Jack Hylton and Joe Loss.

I submit that in those days, it WAS Variety and after digging into the archives, I came up with the following item written by the late Eric Bentcliffe for Triode No. 1

VAUDEVILLE A LA SPACE

14/8/54.

Some few days ago, Terry received a letter from Messrs Murrays Sales and service Co., of London, informing him that "Video Shows Ltd.," were to present Pete Collins' Space Ship", and "A trip to the Moon without leaving your seats", at the Empire Theatre, Sheffield, for the week commencing August 9th. Aries being in the ascendancy and the time for producing TRIODE propitious, Terry invited myself and Eric Jones over for the weekend. Earlier this evening we 'took in' the show • Reaction— THIS SHOW COULD HAVE BEEN VERY GOOD, In fact I believe that the show, originally, WAS very good

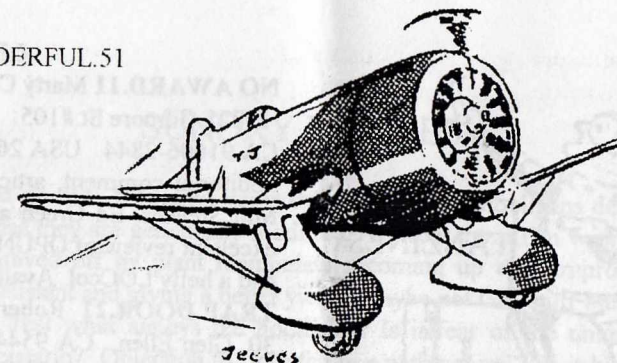
It became obvious after the first few acts that the show we were seeing was not the "Show as advertised", reference to the programme revealed that the rather comy trio now on stage should have been the "Classical Conception of Space Flight." I might conjecture that previous to the show's appearance at the Empire, or early in its run here, the producer of the show had decided that 'Vaudeville a la Space' was not what the masses wanted, and had hurriedly engaged artistes extraneous to the theme of the show in order to give it more popular appeal. What was left of the original show was quite good - it should have been for amongst the credits we find that the sequence of the show was devised by Arthur C. Clarke in discussion with Pete Collins • Technical supervision and dialogue was by Patrick Moore, F.R.A.S. (B.I.S.), and the scenery was based on designs by R.A.SMITH (B.I.S.) who did several of the illustrations for "EXPLORATION OF SPACE

Highspots of the show were - A trip to the Moon in the year 2000 A.D. from Woomera Spaceport, and the introduction of a BEM onto the stage. The former 'act' commenced with a showing of a backdrop painting illustrating Woomera Spaceport in the Year 2000 A.D. After commenting on this scene (in a serious vein) by the compere, the backdrop was raised to reveal a mock-up of the control cabin of a moon rocket. The crew of two garbed in pressure suits strapped down at the controls. In the centre of the control cabin (facing the audience) the Video Screen, enlarged ten times so that the events would be easily visible, lit up. Theatre lights were dimmed and upon this screen we saw the scene around the rocket: this was obscured by the exhaust gases and the roar of the jets drummed in our ears, Terra fell away slowly below us, Australia gradually fading into the blueness of the Earth (it was all in Technicolour). After achieving escape velocity we are treated to shots of (apparently a model) a Space-station and a Dumbell type space-ship. The journey through space was uneventful and our landing on the Moon a good one. The Lunar colony lived in transparent domes, and had a hydroponics farm quite near by. This film was very well done and quite realistic, and so was our B.E.M. later to appear from the audience whilst 'Col. Linfield and his Space Cadets' were going through a comedy routine. The B.E.M. had a marked similarity to our friend the Martian in War of the Worlds, it had a scaly skin with turtle bone, and a Triodical optic.

Kais, 'the electro miracle Martian', who played with nearly a million volts of electricity, and produced sparks a yard long from all parts of his body, called for three volunteers.....The TRIODE responded, and up on the stage we sallied, Terry was given a yard long neon tube, which lit in his hand, Eric Jones held a rod, the end of which held a petrol-soaked rag. This was ignited twice by an electrical spark. Eric Bentcliffe, stepped forward, and was offered a Triode sub. for ten years, in the form of a pile of silver on a metal plate. Eric B. tried manfully, but frustrated by a six inch electric spark. Terry tried, but all he got was a burnt thumb. E.J. tried, but even he failed to collect this voluntary offering. We were forced to retreat, cashless, to our seats.

See this show if it comes to a theatre in your town - in spite of the esoterica you will have to suffer, it is well worth a visit. E.B.

Well there you have it, variety as it was in 1954, and not a lollipop lick anywhere in sight. They don't make 'em like that anymore. T.J.



THE GEE BEE SUPER SPORTSTER

One of the joys of my boyhood was reading American aircraft magazines and the accounts of the various home-built machines entered in the National Air Races. The races still continue but the participants are mainly souped up ex-military hot rods. In the old days almost anyone could design, build and fly an aeroplane in the races. Famous among such entrepreneurs were the five Granville brothers. Working in their spare time and at weekends, they set to and built their own biplane. The eldest brother took it up for its maiden flight - at night and in a thunderstorm! Eight more were built before the Wall Street crash halted their sales, but not their building the low-wing Gee Bee 'Sportster' which they entered in a five thousand mile race and took second place.

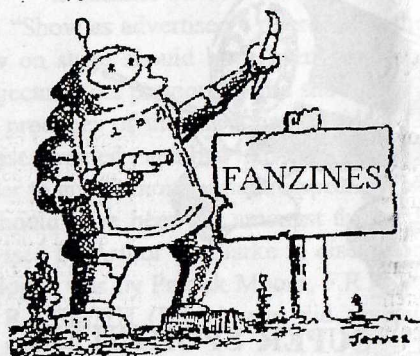
X and Y models followed, then the Z machine which won the Thompson Race at 236mph. followed by the Shell Speed Dash at 267mph. Not satisfied with that, they fitted a larger engine and tried for the world air speed record, an attempt which ended in a fatal crash. Undaunted, the brothers kept on with creating high speed machines. One of these piloted by Jimmy Doolittle set a record of 296mph. Various designs followed, as did many crashes until the brothers called it a day.

The ultimate 'Gee Bee Super Sportster' had a short, stubby 'pickle barrel' fuselage, a heavily spatted undercarriage and a very small tail fin. By all accounts it was a devilish machine to fly but the air race crowds loved it. I seem to recall reading somewhere that a replica was being built. Can anyone confirm this?

A plastic model kit is (or was) available and it graced my walls for a long while until a supporting thread broke and like its larger brethren, my Gee Bee crashed to its doom.

They don't make 'em like that these days.

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NO AWARD.11 Marty Cantor, 11825 Gilmore St.#105. N.Hollywood, CA 91606-2844 USA 26 pages, card covers, Editorial comment, articles by Len Moffatt, Milt Stevens, Ed Green and Greg Chalfin, an excellent review of OPUNTIA, and a hefty LOCcol. Available for the usual.

TRAP DOOR.21 Robert Lichtman, PO Box 30, Glen Ellen, CA 95442, USA A massive issue, nice cover, excellent interior art and crammed with interesting items - Personal incidents, Ted White on art, Chris Priest on

writing, a piece on starting smoking, Nydahlon fanzines, Eklund on fandom, lots of other goodies and a hefty LOCcol. A delightful read throughout with something for everyone.

WEST OF THE MOON John Hertz, 236 S.Coronado St., #409, Los Angeles, CA 90057 A step up from John's excellent apazine, Vanamonde, this has pieces on sundry Conventions, poetry, Japanese cakes, books, a Willis epitaph, Regency musings, great art and a nice LOCcol. 30 pages, beautifully produced and nicely lighthearted.

MIMOSA.27. Nikki and Rich Lynch 22pp Box 3120, Gaithersburg, MD 20885, USA

A massive 60 pages, wrap round card covers and simply crammed with goodies. Ron Bennett describes the Con of 2050, Bob Madle describes early fandom. Fred Smith looks at Mars stories. Other goodies include 4SJ on Boris Karloff, Resnick on dying fandom, Kyle on Arthur C. Clarke and pieces on Cons, Star Trek, handling tigers and much more. One of the best fanzines around. Get a hard copy for \$4.00 or on the net at <http://www.jophan.org/mimosa/> Highly recommended

THE RELUCTANT FAMULUS.58 Tom Sadler, 422 W.Maple Ave, Adrian, MI 49221-1627, USA A superb full-colour cover leads into 32 pages on topics as varied as the twin towers disaster, book reviews, Gene Stewart on perception and belief, a fascinating Maxfield Parrish portfolio, a Con report crammed with colour pics and a good LOCcol. The colour bacover is also good. The whole zine is a real treat to read.

OPUNTIA 51, Dale Speirs, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta CANADA T29 2E7 This comes in two parts - one text, one LOCs and has a long, excellent piece on postmarks, including one on which a murder case pivoted. Then there are fmz and mail art zine reviews. Book reviews on alternate A-bombs (one in Victorian times) and a host of LOCs. Nice variety, once you get used to the strange format.

SFFF.3 Mike McInerney, 83 Shakespeare St., Daly City, CA 94014-1053 A nice blend of old and new. It has a LOC from Walt Willis and a pic of Ron Ellik. There's also a Chicon report, a long article on 'Dancing With Wolves', LOCs and a photopage

THE KNARLEY KNEWS.93 Henry and Letha Welch 1525 16th Ave., Grafton, WI 53024-2017, USA Chat on airport security, a long book review, Gene Stewart on escapism and news trash, a piece on Credit Card abuse, a hefty LOCcol and a page of fmz reviews

IDLE THOUGHTS.5

SUNDRY NIGGLES

I get a bit fed up with TV news items showing assorted hooligans destroying good crops simply because they are genetically modified. Correct me if I'm wrong, but wasn't famine in Africa staved off by plant manipulators coming up with improved forms of grain - more pest resistant and giving a better yield. Maybe not GM stuff but still a change on 'natural food'. Just what annoys the hooligans? Is it fear of the unknown? Some 'Death of Grass' scenario? Objection to 'interference with nature'? Is it blind ignorance, or most likely a desire to follow the mob for some establishment bashing?

My own mild objection to crop fiddling is an aversion to what pre-GGM stuff we already get in supermarkets. Tomatoes now come in a standard size and have case-hardened skins holding tasteless interiors. Supermarket demand for large orders, standard appearance, long shelf-life and low prices is already making for poorer products so what can we expect with GM foods, longer shelf life, standard colour and size but debased flavour as supermarkets use their clout to dictate to growers?

Another area for complaint is the hoorah over cloning of animals (and humans), a field about which I cheerfully admit to knowing buttons. I gather that the process is akin to artificial insemination plus a bit of earlier fiddling in a test-tube. Some people claim it to be 'against nature' to fiddle this way. If so antibiotics, surgical operations and indeed any sort of medical treatment could be classed as 'fiddling'. A more valid objection seems to be the appearance of unwanted side effects. I gather that the animals cloned so far are showing signs of premature ageing. Very sad, but surely this requires further research as a possible lead to *extending* life? As for cloning humans, what is the point of going to all that trouble and effort just to recreate a product regularly achieved by a nine-month process? The test tube version may *look* like its parent but will still take the same gestation period and from birth on, differences in environment, experience and education will ensure a different individual, not a carbon copy of mother or father.

Then there's abortion. What logic allows 'pro-lifers' to kill people, doctors, nurses etc., connected with termination? I suspect it's the old chestnut, 'the end justifies the means'. Hitler used that one as the improving of German bloodlines by killing thousands of Jews. Many objectors postulate the 'sanctity of human life'. Codswallop! This assumes human life has a special place in the Cosmos and deserves prior place over every other creature. Wild animals don't believe this, nor do disease germs. In the larger scheme of things life is just an accident of nature and goes steadily on its merry way. In my book, assuming no mental disorder, only the pending mother should have the right to ask for and get a termination. Anyone else may advise, cajole, plead or beat on a tambourine, but NOT takes direct action against mother or her medical aids.

Or do you disagree?



ALAN BURNS, 19 The Crescent, Kings Rd. Sth., Wallsend, N.Tyneside NE28 7RE

Now to your writing about gadgets imagined. Well it's always the case, those projected seldom happen, those not projected usually do. I am surprised John W. said there was no future in TV though that is possible with the rubbish we get today. The trouble I think is that a lot of prophets don't do their homework. Penelope and all dining at inns, well it just depends on the inn, like the little girl with the curl when they are

good they are very very good, but when they are bad, Yeuck. I was rocked when read that a plate of fish and chips in the Ritz cost £25

DAVE ROWE, 8288 West Shelby State Rd. 44, Franklin, IN46131-9211, USA

The destruction of the Avro Arrows brings to mind other acts of corporate/government vandalism, especially the destruction of ALL of Northrop's Flying Wing Bombers back in 1950. Thirty years later the B-2 stealth bomber designers had to pick Jack Northrop's brains to get every detail they could about those planes that could have revolutionised flying. One thing that did come up was he was told by "a senior U.S. Air Force official" to merge with Convair's Consolidated Vultee or the government would cancel funding Northrop. Of course Northrop was in trouble because one of his YB-49 test flights had crashed (killing the crew) but even that has a rare CREDIBLE conspiracy theory about it. One crew man had not flown on the fatal flight as he reported in sick. When he tried to do this again on another test flight the Captain demanded that the crewman fly with this YB-49 regardless. In flight four engines caught fire but the pilot made a successful emergency landing. A week later the sick crewman was killed in a "single motorcycle accident" in the Mojave Desert. When the investigation of the engine fire was finalized it was found that the engines in question had not been given lubricant oil which was the job of the "sick" and now permanently silenced crewman. *[A fascinating anecdote]*

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

I'm one of those sad souls who screams the answer at the TV when quiz shows are on without having the courage to apply for a place; so Ron Bennett has my admiration. If we'd known beforehand we could have been there in spirit cheering him on. I can remember when Roger Robinson, a member of our community appeared on Fifteen To One, we knew well in advance and had enough time to be prepared. Ah well, maybe there'll be a Best Of... programme and Ron might qualify for that. *[Well he's had two tries and both times he made it to the last three, you can't do much better than that. Many thanks for the clipping on unreadable 'long term recordings'. It bears out what I've been saying for ages.]*

STEVE SNEYD, 4 Nowell Place, Almondbury, Huddersfield HD5 8PB There was a mention recently re the use of quantum particle 'magic' "to slow light down" - so the technique seems confirmed. Another instance of business that while Newtonian Watchmaker Universe an obedient subset of Einsteinian Universe, Diracian Universe seems to have "mind of own". Next step, Bob Shaw's "slow glass"

JOSEPH MAJOR, 1409 Christy Ave., Louisville, KY 40204-2040 USA

Fifteen to One. Ron Bennett shows the superior efficiency (*snort* *snort*) of public transportation. People made fun of Lord Curzon's arch-aristocratic comment about ordering the omnibus to take him to his office and finding he wouldn't. Letters

Thanks to Robert Lichtman for the update on electric cars. I think he has identified the stopping point, which is that those batteries are going to be the unstoppable environmental hazard *[Along with the power stations needed to charge 'em]*

ALAN SULLIVAN, 26 Thornford Rd., Lewisham, LONDON, SE13 6SO

Schrodinger's Cat. Quantum theory is indeed incredible. The trouble is, an author would have to come up with a way of using it in a story, in a manner that hasn't already been done. The number of stories making use of quantum multiverses (or parallel universes as they used to be called) is quite large - although most of them just use it as a convenient plot device. So it goes....

DEREK PICKLES, 44 Rooley Lane, Bankfoot, Bradford, W.Yorks, BD5 8LX I liked the mid-air landing strip with a tennis net at the end. Does the top swivel to face into the wind? *[Yes, and FRED SMITH asked the same question in a grand LOC which I wanted to quote, but have mislaid, sorry Fred.]* I love delving through the old mags with their prophecies of the scientific wonders in store for their readers. Schrodinger's Cat, my mind cannot understand this at all - how did I get a Credit in Maths School Cert? *[Not to worry, I got a Distinction, and later a Higher National Maths certificate and I'm just as baffled.]*

STEVE GREEN, 33 Scott Rd., Olton, Solihull, B92 7LQ I particularly enjoyed your raking over of the ashes of predictive SF. Familiar territory, admittedly, but always good for a kindly chuckle. Size is one aspect futureologists nearly got wrong: our gallant heroes could fly around the universe with tiny jet-packs and laser pistols with no discernible power source, but even the simplest computer had to be the equivalent of a two car garage. Not all 'innovations' are to be welcomed, either: how scenes in otherwise prescient novels have had crucial scenes wrecked by the ludicrous decision to junk Morse code? *[Nowadays, archivists and businesses are finding paper file storage is more reliable and accessible than continual introduction of new systems.]*

RON BENNETT, 36 Harlow Park Cresc, Harrogate, N.Yorks, HG2 0AW Yes I remember those perpetual motion machines. They seemed to be everywhere. Whatever happened to the notion? Never hear a word about it these days. I seem to remember that many of the machines actually worked. Well, they would have done so, had it not been for their overlooking the minor factor of friction. *[I fancy only one ever worked. read "Perpetual Motion" by A.W.G.Ord-Hume for umpteen of 'em. No doubt schoolboys still design them along with trying to trisect angles]*

FRED SMITH, 10 Braidholme Cresc., Giffnock, Glasgow G46 6HQ [I lost Fred's original letter, but he sent me a copy] UN-PROPHETABLE IDEAS, (Lovely title that) proves what I've said all along: SF is not in the prophecy business - it's purely (or impurely) entertainment and if an author occasionally forecasts something correctly, it's accidental. I had a set of those Mitchell cigarette cards. You are right in that they used lots of stills from films like 'Things To Come', 'F.P.1' And if I remember correctly, 'The Tunnel' which was in fact about building a Transatlantic Tunnel. The Channel Tunnel having already been built. They were all thirties movies, however, as were the Wesso and Paul illos you mention. I think you're wrong in dating the set of the cards as late as 1950. I'm certain I had the set at the beginning of the war. [You are dead right, the correct date was 1935, my spell checker missed that typo.]

CHESTER CUTHBERT, 1104 Mulvey Ave., Winnipeg, Man, CANADA R3M 1J5 I see from UN-PROPHETABLE IDEAS that you agree with Don Wollheim about SF lacking accuracy in foretelling the future, but my attention has always been on the big developments like space travel, atomic energy and psychic phenomena - so as these being fulfilled I give credit to the prophets. One of the best-attested phenomena of parapsychology is precognition, failures are more than balanced by true foresight.

C.W.BROOKS, 4817 Dean Lane, Lilburn, GA 30047-4720, USA I have seen nothing like robot uards here, but there are some robots in regular use for deliveries in large hospitals. They have a safe for drugs and other supplies and are smart enough to negotiate the halls and use the elevators, go round an obstacle or ask it to move. The police use robots, not as guards but to investigate and negotiate stand off situations without endangering a human. = When I took a Machine Shop course in the 50s we were allowed to see (but not touch) cubes of metal machined so close to absolute flat that if two were pressed together they could not be pulled apart. [I believe they were called 'Jo blocks' after their inventor, Johanson. I don't know of their practical use]

LLOYD PENNEY, 1706 Eva Rd., Etobicoke, ON M9C 2BZ, CANADA

. Thank you so much for your short article on the Avro Arrow. When the Canadian government funded its creation, it was the best fighter jet in the air, better than anything the Americans could build at the time.. We may never know for sure what happened, but when John Diefenbaker's government ordered the end of production, and destruction of all Arrow parts, rumour had it that the destruct order came from the American government. This showed us that America demanded that it be supreme in the production of all armaments, and that deep down, it never really trusted its allies.

TED HUGHES, 10 Kenmore Rd, Whitefield, Manchester M45 8ER I see from your correspondence columns that no-one has explained why it is still only four and a half years to Alpha Centauri despite the expansion of the universe. Like Schrodinger's Cat, I bet it'll go on being quoted until someone realises it's (a) a daft idea, (b) it contradicts nother daft theory, or (c) needs another dafter theory to rationalise the whole business. I have another for you. Why do planets, the sun, Galaxies -- rotate? What starts them turning. If they are all the results of some primal explosion, why don't they all collapse into one motionless lump under gravitational attraction? [Anyone know?]