

ERG 162

QUARTERLY

JULY 2003



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Greetings Ergbods,

This has been a session of problems. Two bedroom lights broke down and before I could work on them we had to empty and move two wardrobes to get at the power points. Then two outside lights went kaput, one was a failed bulb, the other a broken wire. Then the shower packed up. New one £134 and £104 for fitting. Next my Samsung, dot matrix printer collapsed, so off to Currys and a new Lexmark ink jet for £70. The driver wouldn't install so I made a frantic call to John Rupik who spent forty minutes on the phone telling me what to try before a final idea worked and so did the printer. Oh yes, my two cassette recorders are being awkward. Outside light burnt out and one of the cover screws stripped so I had to drill it out and hunt up a replacement. Snag when the drill wouldn't work as both spare garage sockets jammed so I had to run a line from the house and now I have to fit new sockets. Then the security light time switch packed up. What next?

My story, 'Mightier Than The Sword' in this issue is another from the files. It dates from the fifties and was based on an idea I got from a story by Chester S.Geir. I used the idea, but the story is my own. Comments?

I hinted last time that I may be closing ERG due to response or lack thereof. All my good and true regulars come through almost every issue with excellent LOCs, but some bods just hang on with two or three sentences every four or five issues. Sorry, but it's pruning time again. The old regulars are as safe as houses. So ERG goes on for a while yet. My health may be the deciding factor as the bad back persists so that Val has to put my socks on for me. I also have a couple of hospital appointments lined up together with most unpleasant tests. Old age isn't fun.

And of course, I'm still selling off stuff, I have lists of paperbacks, hardcovers non-fiction magazines and aerospace, all going cheap. Say which list you would like

I'm plagued by junk mail, twenty or thirty a day. Does anyone know of a way to stop the darned things and still admit genuine messages?

Best, Terry

HOW I WON THE WAR

INTRODUCTION

by

The Right Horrible, Rear Air Vice Admiral of the Royal Air Farce

Norman Baddely-Grunge DSO, DDT & DUFF

In those dark, distant days of 1940, Hitler little knew that when his bombers dropped their evil cargoes on the City of Sheffield, they would set in motion a chain of events which would lead eventually to his downfall.

Those bombs closed down the laboratory in which the young Jeeves was slaving over a hot test-tube and caused him to volunteer for the RAF. The rest is history. The brave lad's wartime exploits are legendary. I am sure that only his innate modesty prevents him relating how single handed and armed only with a toothbrush, he wiped out three German battalions. He would be the last to describe how he converted an old bath-tub into a one-man submarine and sailed up the Rhine to torpedo three bridges and a strongly-defended riverside cafe. Jeeves has never described these events to a soul, but one can see by the steely glint in his eye, that these and other equally incredible feats must forever remain locked behind his lips.

I am proud to have been a member of the same Service as this honest, unassuming lad. Even now, he tells me that his only reason for releasing his memoirs is to make a lot of money. A simple wish from a simple fellow. Truly, they don't come any simpler. Read these pages in the knowledge that every copy sold will help to gladden the heart of a brave comrade and help to swell his bank account.

What more could a man ask?

From one proud to be his friend
NBG

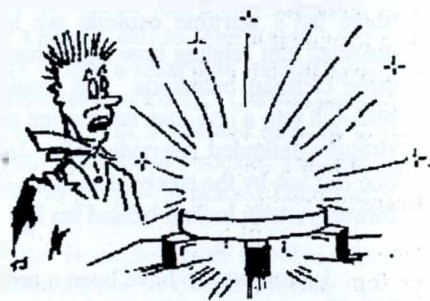
WARTIME DAZE

OR HOW I WON THE WAR

When war started in September, 1939, I was in my final year at De La Salle College; still happily making model aircraft and reading all the air magazines I could find. I was too young for the RAF, so I enrolled as an ARP messenger. Apart from rushing around with sundry bundles of paper, messengers also had to attend sundry lectures and training. The latter included going through the 'gas van', a large vehicle into which a pair of masochists had squirted samples of assorted wartime gases - phosgene, mustard, tear gas or whatever was handy. Having built up a nice concentration of gunge, they would then inject further material in the shape of we poor trainees - after we had donned our respirators. The idea was to get us accustomed to wearing the cumbersome things as well as gaining confidence on finding they actually worked. To prove this point the drill concluded by having us remove the masks! This was followed by the hasty evacuation of a band of coughing, spluttering and eye-streaming students.

On another joyous occasion, the instructor had prepared a lecture on the dangers of incendiary bombs, how to deal with them and how dangerous they were if not handled with skill. To prove his points he placed a metal sheet on his nicely polished desk, then put three house bricks on the sheet. On these he placed an inverted metal dustbin lid which he then filled with sand. Safety precaution complete he then sprinkled a tiny amount of thermite in a small dent in the sand. With considerable difficulty and half a box of matches, he succeeded in igniting the thermite. Just as he had warned us, the stuff promptly proved its menace by burning through the sand, through the dustbin lid and was halfway through the metal plate before it finally sputtered out. It didn't do the polished desk a lot of good either.

Apart from being a general dogbody, a messenger's duties consisted in turning up at the air raid post on an evening shift rota as well as during any 'alert' or actual air raid. If telephone communications were disrupted it was the messenger's job get on his bike and zoom to and fro around the city, carrying dispatches. Another tedious chore came when an alert ended and sirens signalled 'Raiders Past'. A report had to be taken to the other side of Sheffield, a trip of about five miles, but since there was virtually no traffic, I got the journey down to twenty minutes. The snag was on nights when we got three or four visits, we had to turn out and do the trip several times.



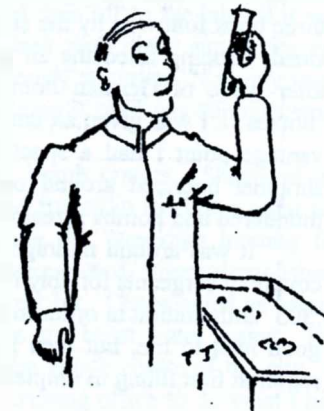
As the 'phoney' war merged into the real one, sirens began wailing away every more often, sometimes as many as four times a night. I evolved a system of having an old pair of flannels inside my ARP battle dress overalls. This saved valuable minutes in leaping out of bed, yanking on my gear, grabbing respirator and steel helmet, then rushing out with my bike and belting off to the ARP Post. To keep track of the number of times I had turned out for air raids, I started cutting a notch in my pocket comb each time. I stopped counting when my comb fell into bits.

This was a period memorable for various unforeseen events such as the time I was turning out during an air raid and scooting full tilt and lightless through the blackout. All was going well until I hit a half-housebrick left thoughtfully in the middle of the road, by some kind person obviously hoping a German parachutist would land on it and break his ankle. Whatever the reason, it was the cause of my first wartime flight. On another occasion I came tearing down a hill, shot round a sharp corner and caused the Chief Warden to jump for his life. Probably his first wartime flight.

My school years ended and on leaving, I didn't have a clue as to what I might do for a living. I'm still not quite sure how I wound up as an embryo steel-analyst in a small private laboratory attached to a larger steel works. My main duties were to wash glassware, mix up stock solutions for analysis and prepare steel samples for examination. This latter task involved first grinding and polishing a smooth surface on each sample, then treating it with acid to bring out the structure. That was routine, but very early on the owner of the lab assigned me the task of sorting the samples into 'good' and 'doubtful' before passing the dubious ones along to him for checking. This was a crafty move on his part as from 120 samples (for which he got paid 9d each), he only had to actually check around half a dozen before typing on his report form, "Samples 23 to 29 show marked traces of Pearlite" and thus notching up a nifty four or five quid.

Another of my little jobs was the daily checking of the electroplating vats. To start with, I was taken on two or three trips to show me how to perform this highly technical operation. After that I was on my own. Each morning, looking very scientific in my lab coat and armed with a test-tube, I would wander into the plating shop, scoop up a sample of liquid from the tanks, hold it up to the light, nod knowingly, decide it didn't have measles and then sign that all was well. I hadn't the foggiest idea what I was looking for other than excess sediment, but here again, the boss took home the lolly.

I also attended night school classes three times a week with the vague hope of eventually attaining a degree in Associated Metallurgy. This involved sessions in Technical Drawing, Theory of Metallurgy and Practical Analysis.



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The Tech Drawing consisted in laying out three view plans of nuts, bolts, ladles and steel furnaces; a sort of student's cure for insomnia. Theory of Analysis was even worse as we had to sit and copy down acres of incomprehensible information mumbled by a refugee from a geriatric ward. As for Practical Analysis, that was utterly boring after doing it all day. At this point Fate stepped in, shuffled my cards and re-dealt them in a manner which was to prove eventful.

It began when I was given my weekly steel sample to analyse for Silicon, Manganese and Phosphorous. I began with Silicon, the first step was to weigh out 4.7gms of steel. Since umpteen of us were doing this it was quicker to use the last bloke's weights while they were still on the balance. This I did, but it wasn't until I had finished the Silicon analysis and worked out the results that I found the wrong weights had been put on the pan. Solution, work out a correction factor and apply it to my results. On with Phosphorous which I checked in the time honoured way of holding it up to the light and guessing the proportions. Then I started work on the Manganese which after sundry manipulations with acids and filters, concluded by burning off excess filter material in a muffle furnace. All went well until then, but as I removed the crucible from the furnace, I sneezed and blew half the sample in all directions. Oh well, nothing for it but to scrape up the residue along with bench dust and debris and press on. Came the following week and I handed in my results. In the past I had usually got the Silicon right, the Phosphorous reasonably close, but always a wide miss with the Manganese. This time I got all three dead right. I began to realise that Steel Analysis wasn't for me, I couldn't base a career on serendipity, guesstimation and fudge factors - but what to do? Here Fate played his second card.

Having reached the lofty age of 18 I had transferred from the ARP to the Home Guard, or 'Dad's Army' as it is more generally known. I had begun my training in how to cope with an armed invader by learning all the intricacies and lethal details of foot drill, rifle drill and saluting to the front. All good fun - until one night in December when the Air Raid sirens began their banshee howling around 7pm, I duly reported in to my Home Guard Post at the Burngreave Vestry Hall where we all waited for the customary two or three bobs followed by the sirens signalling, "Raiders passed". It didn't come. Instead a steady droning filled the air accompanied by the crump crump of ack ack fire as wave after wave of German bombers began lambasting the city in the first of Sheffield's 'blitzes'. I was given an empty rifle and put on guard outside the main door. From this vantage point I had a spectacular view of everything - including the sparks flying as shrapnel bounced around on the road. Searchlights crossed the sky, ack ack guns thundered and bombs screamed down to terminate in deafening explosions.

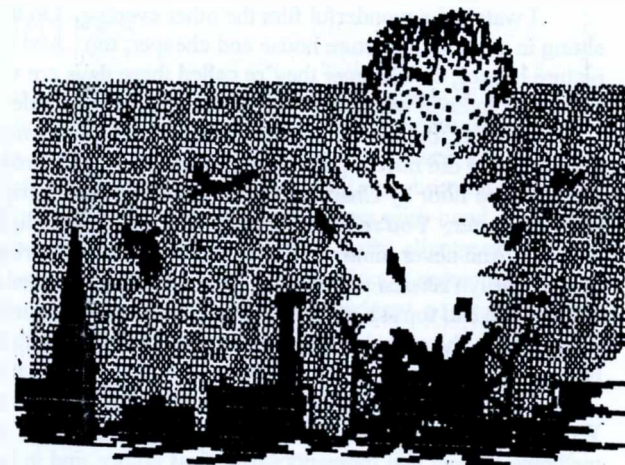
It was around midnight when a scuffle broke out behind me. It turned out to be a couple of sergeants forcibly restraining one of the men as he tried to break open a crate of .303 ammunition in order to take a few pot shots at the German bombers. This seemed a good idea to me, but then I never did understand higher strategy. No doubt the rules required first filling in umpteen forms in triplicate before one could shoot an enemy.

At one point, the Neepsend gas holder received a direct hit. It went up in a mounting mushroom of flame and smoke. Another bomb brought down the overhead power cables for the tramlines, these leaped and thrashed in all directions before finally subsiding. I assumed the circuit breakers had tripped. It seemed correct as a lorry came belting along, ran slap into the cables, backed out and went its way, all without anything happening. Then another bomb landed nearby, jarred the wires and they leaped and sparkled all over again. That lorry driver never knew how close he came to electrocution.

My spell of guard duty finished and I walked back inside the darkened hall when suddenly the whole place lit up. The blackout curtains flew high in the air and glass shattered in all directions. A bomb had landed just behind the hall. Fifty feet to one side and it would have taken out our HQ and us with it. Despite all the damage, my only injury was a cut finger caused when I dropped my rifle on it as I dived flat.

When daylight came I picked my way home over heaps of rubble and bomb holes. The big question was would I have a home waiting for me? It turned out that I did. So it was quick breakfast, a wash and brush up and then off to the lab - if it was still there. It was, but when the gasworks went up it took with it the supply for our laboratory, thus putting us out of action. This was obviously an omen. Not only was I fed up with steel analysis but I was now barred from doing it until gas supplies were restored. Having nothing else to do, I set off down town.

The walk was blocked with fallen buildings and bomb craters. Sheets of ice covered the roads where water from firemen's hoses had frozen in the bitter night air. Gaunt-faced and weary ARP workers clambered among the wreckage hunting for survivors. The city was unrecognisable, familiar stores were gutted, streets demolished, one pub with a shelter full of people had received a direct hit. Chaos ruled as rescue workers struggled with sheet ice, frozen from hosepipes and burst water mains. The bombers had missed the steelworks but had destroyed the whole centre of the city. It helped me make up my mind. I strolled round to the recruiting office to do what I had always wanted. I volunteered for the RAF.



I watched a wonderful film the other evening. On the box of course. Warmer than sitting in a draughty picture house and cheaper, too. And don't write in to tell me that those picture houses, or whatever they're called these days are warm. I'm not talking about just before the interval when they want to boost ice cream sales.

Anyway, the film I kept waking up to was *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*. I won't go into the plot, but I did have a good laugh when Marilyn Monroe is escorted from her dinner table on the dance floor by Charles Coburn wearing a light brown dress. Yes, yes, that could have been put better. You're right, Marilyn was wearing the light brown dress, not Charles Coburn. And never mind what colour dress he was wearing; that doesn't come into it. When Marilyn returns to her table, she is wearing a *mauve* dress. What, one wonders, befell her that she had to rush off and change her dress all in a matter of minutes? Don't let it worry you... the error is compounded later in the film when the following evening, Marilyn is wearing a red dress which moments later has changed to green.

This sort of continuity error I can put up with. Filmdom is littered with examples, like Woody Allen fighting a rogue hair dryer in *Play it Again, Sam* and knocking bottles from a medicine cabinet that moments earlier was empty, and in how many films have stars extracted a cigarette from a case and repeated the process in the next shot of the same scene?

What *doesn't* amuse me is when a so-called classic film treats its audience like idiots. I've recently read a wonderful critique of *Dances With Wolves* in Mike McInerney's excellent fanzine *SFFF*, which immediately got me thinking about a couple of other classics.

In *High Noon*, for example, the sheriff played by Gary Cooper awaits the arrival of a train carrying a gang of outlaws who are intent on killing him. His chances of survival are zilch. Yet when the gangsters arrive in town they immediately split up so that they can be conveniently picked off one by one. Yech! The film should have ended as the train draws into town and Cooper is seen striding forth along a deserted street, obviously going to do what a man has to.... And all that.

Hey, and what about the highly acclaimed *Shawshank Redemption* which depends for its denouement upon a extremely dramatic prison escape. Don't read on if you haven't seen the film; I'd hate to spoil it for you.

This dramatic escape involves the hero's cell being found empty one morning. He seems simply to have disappeared. When the villain of the piece, the nasty warden (wardens in movies are always nasty and villainous. It's a movie cliché, like whenever a character is playing solitaire, there is always another character to walk past and casually say something like "green queen on mauve king." Okay, I must still have my mind on Marilyn Monroe. Let's get back, as they say, to the ranch)... the nasty warden pulls down the large poster our hero has had stuck on his cell wall these past dozen or so years, a large hole is discovered. So *that's* how he got out of his cell!

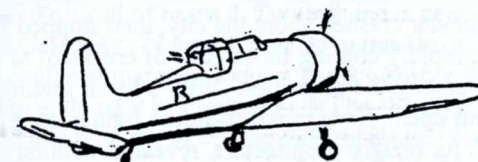
Oh yeh? How on earth did he manage to stick the poster back on to the wall and cover the hole once he'd got through the wall? How was it, if he'd been craping away at that wall night by night over all those years and replacing the poster did its edges never show any digns of ear and tear? Aw, phooey... I'm going to dig out my video tape of *The Music Box* and watch that. No-one minded if L&H made fools of themselves.

— pf

TURRET FIGHTERS

You can't keep a good idea down - nor a bad one as it would seem. If the pilot of a single-seat fighter has to navigate, avoid other fighters, get into a good position and then fire away, hopefully downing an enemy or two, he must have a busy time. Would it not be easier to add another seat and let the chap at the back do all the shooting leaving the pilot free to just fly the aircraft? In the early thirties, two seaters with hand aimed guns were fairly commm, but swinging the guns around against a hefty slipstream was hard work. Solution, fit the guns in a powered turret. This was tried in a Hawker 'Demon' but wasn't a success with the underpowered biplane. With the advent of more powerful engines, three companies jumped on the bang wagon.

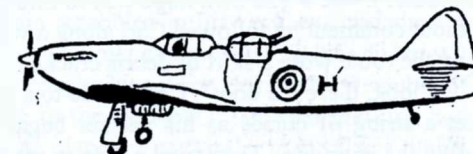
The first was Blackburn who took their 'Skua' dive bomber, added a rear seat, stuck a four gun turret on the back and called it a 'Roc'. Powered by a 905hp Bristol Pegasus engine and a span of 46 feet, it first flew in 1937. Sadly, with a top speed of only 195mph, it was highly vulnerable and was soon relegated to target towing duties.



Also appearing in 1937, the Boulton Paul 'Defiant' of 39 foot span, looked a much better proposition. Its Rolls Royce Merlin gave it a top speed of 305mph. It had a four gun power turret but strangely enough, no forward firing gun. The pilot was merely a taxi driver who had to fly alongside an enemy to give his gunner a chance to 'hosepipe' with a maximum deflection shot at his

adversary. IT saw service, but like the Roc, was vulnerable in daytime sorties but did well as a radar directed night fighter.

In 1938 the Hawker 'Hotspur' appeared on the scene. Also powered by a Merlin, its top speed was 316mph and in addition to a four gun turret, the pilot was given a single forward firing gun to let him have as bit of fun as well. Promising as it may have looked, only one Hotspur was built.



It would seem to be expecting too much for one engine to lug around a beefed up airframe, hefty turret and guns as well as another crewman and still stay highly manoeuvrable against superior enemy fighters.

A yellowish sun beat down from a sky of pure black, it did little to warm the endless expanse of frigid red sands. Only the ancient city, slowly crumbling away, relieved the changeless monotony of the dunes. Weakened by countless cycles of tepid days and bitter nights, a tiny fragment of the outer wall broke from its niche and tinkled briefly down to join a million similar pieces. The sound echoed among the rubble and was gone. Unheeding, the desert dreamed on.

High over head, a speck of light winked into existence along the unwavering points of the stars; it was joined by a whisper of thunder. Together the speck and the whisper until the speck had become a stabbing flame and the whisper was a roaring holocaust of sound ripping large chunks of masonry crashing from the time-weakened towers.

The spacecraft touched down a scant hundred metres from the city wall, rocked a trifle on its landing fins before settling firmly into the sands. For one agonising moment the thunder crashed about the city, then stopped abruptly. Turbopumps whined down the scale, rapidly cooling tubes gave of creaks of tortured metal and the last rumblings died away among the pinnacles. With a harsh grating of space-dried bearing an air-lock door ground open. Two pressure-suited figures appeared in the opening and gazed out at the city. Its bizarre architecture revealed nothing but the slow process of decay. From behind the ship the weak rays of the setting sun cast a long needle of shadow across the rapidly chilling sand. A final fragment rattled down before silence washed back around city and ship, enveloping them against the coming of night.

"Spooky place" grunted Carl Machin. He shivered defiantly and began to descend the metal rungs set into the hull. His partner, Cliff Farrar hesitated before following. "Why not leave exploring until morning?" he asked. Machin gave a grudging reply, "What the hell for? We'll take a quick look around to see what gear to bring down in the morning". Stepping off the last rung he led the way to where a crumbling stretch of wall left a fan of rubble and began to curse his way up the slope. Cliff plodded along behind.

Within the city the ever-present sand deadened the slight sounds of their movements; the two men drew imperceptibly closer. "Whoever built this place must have left it ages ago", whispered Cliff. "I wonder how long ago that was." Machin's response was typical, "Who cares how long ago that was. What counts is what we can find here. With any luck there'll be rich pickings, I can see me living on Easy Street once I find 'em." He unclipped a hand torch and led the way forward.. Cliff smiled ruefully at his partner's 'we'. His own hope was to find sculptures, paintings or other alien artefacts. Without comment he followed Carl along a wide road leading into the city. Each building along the route wore a skirt of debris cracked away by remorseless temperature cycles.

"look, there's a door", Carl strode to a shallow archway. Cliff joined him in time to meet a string of curses as his partner began to batter at a plastic material completely sealing the entrance. They tried a side street only to find that it too was sealed off by the plastic, the surface of which bore strange symbols. Cliff felt they almost made sense, but Carl was pressing on.. Only the way ahead was clear, every side road was blocked off and bore more carvings. Carl's anger grew and was nearing boiling point when they finally

reached the foot of a tall tower reaching into the night sky. Cliff felt it falling on him and fought off a powerful urge to run before it reached panic level. Carl hadn't bothered to look up, he had found a shallow archway, sealed off, but this time by a jet black curtain of pure night. Tiny flecks of light danced beneath the surface. "It's beautiful", breathed Cliff. "It's a bloody nuisance", grunted Carl unsheathing a keen-edged knife. "If we can find out how to make this stuff it will be worth a fortune." He raised his blade and stabbed at the surface. There was a screech as the sharp point skated crazily across the sheet without leaving a mark. Angrily, Machin drew the pistol he always carried on field trips. "To hell with it, this will fix its wagon!", He fired point blank at the barrier. It didn't fix it. There was a high pitched whine as the bullet ricocheted. from the blackness, narrowly missed his ear and vanished into the road behind them.

Cliff broke in before Machin could start cursing again. "Whoever sealed off the side streets meant to lead us here. If they went to all that trouble to lead us here they must have meant us to find the way in. I bet those hieroglyphics have something to do with it." "Space bilge", blustered Carl, "This stuff isn't going to beat me. Just wait until morning and I'll bring some stuff that will open it up like a can of beans." Turning on his heel, he set off back to the ship. Cliff followed more leisurely. Now and then he paused to study the carvings. He became more and more convinced that they and not force were the key to gaining entry to the enigmatic tower. Deep in thought he climbed back into the ship.

Patiently the city and the tower waited and with the dawn, the men returned.. Carl, bad tempered and Christmas-treed with equipment, stamped along in front. Behind him, Cliff was only armed with a stylus and pad; a choice of gear which had led to argument and acrimony from his partner. He paused before the first carvings and tried to make peace with Carl. "Can I help you to cart some of that stuff to the archway?" he offered. Machin gave him a contemptuous sneer, muttered "Blinking ivory-towered professor". and trudged on his way. Cliff shrugged and turned to the carvings.

Reaching the enigmatic wall, Carl dumped his equipment at the foot of the monolith. To the weak rays of the distant sun, its height no longer seemed so formidable. Rummaging through his gear, Carl selected a heavy-duty laser cutter and advanced confidently on the twinkling barrier. Moments later that confidence evaporated rather suddenly as his cutter spluttered furiously but ineffectually against the black surface. He cursed and notched the power to emergency overload. For a brief moment the glare outshone before the power pack smouldered, coughed and whimpered into extinction. A ribbon of dielectric oozed from a split seam and solidified on the ground. The barrier remained unmarked. Carl snatched up a chunk of rubble and smashed it uselessly against the portal. Acid did no better, simply running down the slick surface and bubbling angrily on the stones. Madder than ever Machin scrabbled in his pack and withdrew a small red canister. Placing it against the wall he set a timer and moved to a safe distance.

Cliff had progressed to the third wall of hieroglyphics when he heard the rumble of the explosion. Shaking his head, he bent again to the symbols. The first marking had been easy to understand, a simple diagram of the planetary system, a map of this planet was followed by one of the city. A numerical six-based system was easily understood and gradually the instructions had become a guide to grasping ideas rather than facts. Cliff felt his thinking becoming more incisive as he pressed on., ignoring another crunch of explosives. Sensing Machin's approach, Cliff straightened, "Any luck?" he queried.

The reply was grudging, "Not yet but I reckon all that stuff needs to open it up is a good helping of duodec. That stuff may be tough but it must have a breaking point. If I can find a way to make it there's a fortune waiting." He stalked angrily back to the ship.

Farrar had progressed more than half way along the road when he estanned his partner's return with more explosives. Mixed waves of resentment and anger washed over him as Carl strode by without a word. Cliff bent to his task and accepted his own enhanced mental state as being quite normal. He was rapidly learning new techniques and concepts from the wall. He became aware that Machin was trying another torch with no greater success and felt the man's sense of frustration at its failure.

Gradually the carved message explained how the city builders had roamed the other planets of their system and gained an almost total mastery of physical forces. Then they had turned to mental powers, telepathy was mastered, psi powers replaced clumsy machines. Finally their cooling sun and thinning atmosphere threatened their existence. Relying on mental powers alone they had set off to find a new home among the stars. They had left one city as a guide to those with the intelligence to read their message. Knowing that any lifeform capable of decyphering it might also be aggressive they had erected the final barrier. The violent would waste their energies on the portal whilst thinkers would seek the key. Understanding the code would awaken the latent powers in any being reaching the city, 'men of action' could never slow down long enough to read the riddle.

Cliff straightened from his cramped position. Now he knew the tower's purpose, to enter he need only estan the final part of the message. He was gripped by a fierce excitement, his heightened senses was placing more explosives against the door. He closed off his hearing against the coming blast and estanned the final text. A brief mental twist and he knew its secret. Farrar made the necessary effort of will and found himself floating through the thin air to where Machin was attaching a length of fuse to a heaped pile of duodec against the enigmatic portal. Hardly noticing the other, Cliff glided up to the entrance. A moment's concentration and the twinkling surface misted and faded away before him. There was an amazed cry of "Cliff" from behind him and he was through. The barrier reformed as he began to ascend a wide ramp bearing more carvings.

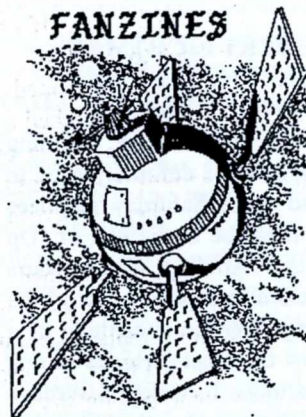
Outside, Carl was in a raging temper, he scooped all the remaining duodec against the door and lit the fuse. In his half-crazed state he failed to withdraw far enough, a flying fragment of stone did the rest.

The weak rays of the setting sun cast a long needle of shadow along the sands, had there been anyone to see, it led to a crumpled figure at the foot of the tower. Looking up the observer might have seen a tiny star detach itself from the peak of a black tower and vanish swiftly into the void. The pupil had gone to join the teachers.

Somewhere within the city a tiny fragment of masonry, loosened by the explosions, tinkled softly down to the sands. The slight noise was soon lost in the thin air. Hand in hand, silence and night returned to the city.

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FANZINES



THE KNARLEY KNEWS.98 Henry Welch, 1525 16th. Ave., Grafton, WI 53024-2017 USA 20pp of personal doings, educational comment, travel on the Nile, fmz reviews and a hefty LOCcol. Regular and good.

VISION OF PARADISE.94, R.M.Sabella, 24 Cedar Manor Ct., Budd Lake, NJ 07828 USA This comes as three separate fan zines, Halcyon Days 14pp of LOCS. Wondrous Stories 15pp of comment, SF memories, fantasy yarns and the magazines plus beautifully laid out fmz reviews. The Passing Scene 18pp lists books read, Bob's personal (and very full) diary and three pages of funnies. A great bundle.

TRIAL AND AIR.13 Michael Waite, 105 W.Ainsworth, Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197-5336 50 pages on heavy stock and absolutely crammed with excellent art including cover repros of books, mags and famz, many in colour. Beautifully set out this is a real visual treat. There is a van Vogt biography reprint, musings on vintage Sf, on joining fandom as well as book, fanzine and film reviews. Being a FAPAzine (No.262), there are also plenty of FAPA comments. This is superbly laid out and is a joy to read. I'd rate it my best incoming fanzine this year No rates given, try faunching.

NO AWARD.13, Marty Cantor, 11825 Gilmore St., #105, N.Hollywood, CA 91606-2844 USA 28 pages, an editorial on writing editorials, e-mail and apas, a fake Con on Trantor, e-mail excerpts, apa memories, great typos, a LASFS report, IDEA a fmz review, plenty of LOCs and a striking cover. How does Marty get it all in?

OPUNTIA 52.1a ERG size, sideways! Mainly fanzine reviews, but also assorted musings on apas and book reviews. Small, but good.

HIDALGO.65, Brian Earl Brown, 11675 Beaconsfield, Detroit, MI 48224 60pp crammed with pulp illos and cover reproductions, many in colour. There are extracts and comments, a text comparison of "Polaris Of The Snows". There's a fascinating, photo illustrated article on making a robot, plus apa comments and a piece on digital cameras and OCR. Brian apologies about printing troubles, but my copy is in great state. If you are a pulp fan, then this is for you

SALES LIST - NON-FICTION Very good at £1.50 ea. unless stated otherwise. If ordering, send no cash, I'll enclose an Invoice, add postage as on parcel and pay then
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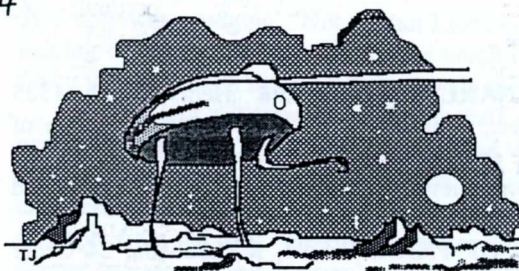
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LETTERS

ROBERT LICHTMAN,
PO BOX 30, Glen Ellen
CA 95442, USA

I was never into building models, but I definitely used to go to those Saturday matinees you describe at the end of "Up in the Air." While yours included "a cartoon or two," the

several neighbourhood theatres in my walking/bicycling range were in something of a cartoon war with one another, vying to see who could show the most cartoons in one matinee. I recall that one theatre showed as many as 25 cartoons for a few Saturdays before backing down to fewer (but still over a dozen). I don't remember the "Phantom Empire" serial you mention, but we got to see lots of Superman and Flash Gordon serials, plus Westerns, adventure films, etc. When I was very young, admission was only ten cents, climbing to as high as 25 cents by my teen years. *[Sadly, those days are gone forever - like pulp magazines]*

DAVE ROWE, 8288 Shelby State Rd.44. Franklin, IN 46131-9211 USA. Twelve Best: Don't go in for "top ten list" but for what it's worth non-fiction would probably include Richard Hilliary's *The Last Enemy* which is an incredibly honest book especially for one written in time of war by a warrior. Have to disagree with you about J.W.Campbell's *Who Goes There?* Yes, it's a great short SF story but his gung-ho attitude muffs the story on the very last line. Don't have it to hand here but going by memory the alien has to connect with bare living flesh to be able to "infect" it and survive. In fact there is a line just before the end that says it was desperately crawling for bare flesh and how do the good guys kill it in the final line? "They tore it apart with their bare hands." Whoops!

[Sorry, not so. McReady uses a high intensity blow torch to burn 'The Thing.'

ALAN BURNS, 19 The Crescent, Kings Rd Sth. Wallsend NE28 7RE Many thanks for ERG.161. The cover reminds me of an incident that actually happened with a very new power station some years since. The automatic lighter for the coal fired boilers failed and so an old stoker proposed a bit of cloth soaked in creosote to start the fuel off. "Anyone got a match?" No, no one had, so a shamefaced stoker went to some nearby houses, "Anyone got a match to start the power station?"

R.M.BENNETT, 36 Harlow Park Cresc., Harrogate HG2 0AW Thanks for ERG.161, I was sorry you hadn't kept, to your promised weekly schedule, but if that's the sort of man you are, Terry, there's not a lot I can do about it. Nice light-hearted cover. It has a different 'ring' to it and I suspect it's an enlarged reprint of a cartoon from earlier years *[Dead right.]* If it's impossible to stop light being reflected, how come people walk into glass doors? I submit that in such cases the doors are *invisible*. QED. *[They miss the very small amount that is reflected]* Time travel already exists. Otherwise we'd be stuck forever in the same moment

PAMELA BOAL, 4 Westfield Way, Wantage, OXON OX12 7EW I particularly enjoyed *School Daze*, a fine example of the fact that it takes the right sort of teacher to bring out the potential of an under achieving rascal. I fear that the present interfering educational authorities of today prevent the development of the gifted teacher. *[True]*

ROGER WADDINGTON, 4 Commercial St., Norton, Malton, YO17 9ES I read SF for all the various possibilities. Sure, SF has predicted all sorts of things that have become reality, but surely that's incidental. For me the whole purpose of SF can be summed up in two words - 'What If?'. If there's anything technology can teach us with those discoveries, it's surely that nothing is impossible. Nothing can be ruled out entirely. I like to hearken back to that vision of London's streets six feet deep in horse manure, that is before the discovery of the internal combustion engine. There's hope for the future yet. *[How about a vision of London's streets jammed with traffic?]*

STEVE GREEN, 33 Scott Rd., Olton, Solihull B92 7LQ Huge congratulations on Erg's 44th birthday, a remarkable achievement. Of your "unattainable physics" list, invisibility might be possible if you could design a suit which could both scan and transmit images from billions of positions all across itself. The question is, why you'd want to bother. It's more likely espionage groups would be more interested in a suit which could slip through radar, thermal sensors, laser beams, etc. *[I agree]*

FRED SMITH, 10 Braidholm Cresc, Giffnock, Glasgow G46 6HQ a few comments on your B24 article. You are doubtless aware that you made a booboo (typo?) when you gave its range as "22000 miles,

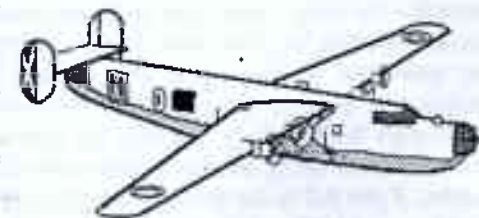
almost double that of the B17" *[Sure did, sorry, should have been 2200]*

I've consulted several sources. One quotes its range as 2850 miles and maximum speed as 303mph as against the B17C range of 2400 miles and max speed

of 291mph. So, not double though the speeds are almost the same. Of course all the figures quoted varied enormously with load, altitude and especially under combat conditions. *[Very true, I came across B24 speeds of 286 and 356 mph in different accounts. Thanks for all the details.]*

TED HUGHES, 10 Kenmore Rd., Whitefield, Manchester M45 8ER MUSIC, Move Rodrigo's *Concerto* to the top of your list. Delete Faure's *Requiem* and Ravel's *Bolero* and substitute Dvorak's *New World Symphony* and the little known Bizet's 'little symphony'. The title as I've learned to call it though it is No.1 on my LP - and apparently he only wrote one, and there you have my choices. I've just made another discovery. 'Tales From The Wye Tart' is really a Jeeves pun on 'Tales From The White Hart', and I thought I was bright.

GEOFF BARKER, 19 Oldfield Rd., Stannington, Sheffield S6 6DR The Old Mill Stream - luck - the column also mentions 'Who Wants To Be A Millionaire' in passing. Of course, the army chap and his coughing friend weren't prepared to trust to luck were they? Idle Thoughts; very clever, I do like maths tricks. Twelve Best - It's years since I read any E.F.Russell but I was very impressed then. Dunno if he would stand the test of time. WASP would be my favourite. *[I go for 'Hobbyist']*



C.W.BROOKS, 4817 Dean Lane, Lilburn, GA 30047-4720 USA I agree that a static unpowered gravity "shield" a la Verne's Cavourite *[It was HG.Wells]* would seem to enable a perpetual motion machine. But all current anti-gravity efforts seem to involve rotating semiconductors. Of course, mere gravity and a vacuum allows 'perpetual motion' in the sense that a rigid body can orbit Earth indefinitely - but any attempt to extract useful energy would cause the orbit to decay.

ALAN SULLIVAN, 26 Thornford Rd., Lewisham, SE13 6SG I like the cover - it reminds me of I once heard about some of the early German rockets. Apparently igniting the engines involved a man in an asbestos suit having to set the things off by manually adding a crystalline reactant to the fuel in the combustion chamber. After which he would take cover and be dug out of the rubble afterwards - assuming the rocket took off rather than exploding. I could be either mis-remembering this, or it might well be an urban myth. *[It sounds like an embellishment on the facts. In his excellent book, V2, Walter Dornberger (in charge of the project) describes how they first tried putting a petrol soaked rag on a long pole, lighting it and then putting it into the rocket's fuel stream. The whole assembly exploded.]*

LLOYD PENNEY, 1706-24 Eva Rd., Etobicoke, ON, Canada M9C 2B2 *[Sorry I lost your last LOC, here's an extract]* Knowing fandom, which is a hobby in itself, we collect. We want all of a particular set, or we gather together as much of one thing as possible. We brag about our multi-thousand-item collections, of books, comics, fanzines, models, etc. I've read recently that the desire or compulsion to collect like this, sometimes to the degree that it takes over your home or your life, can be considered a form of mental illness. Confirms my opinions of some fans I know... Hobbies are fun, certainly, but they are exercise for the mind, which is probably one reason that you, Terry, are still in command of all your faculties in your 80s. Muscles or marbles, if you fail to use them, you will lose them. *[My theory exactly. My thanks also for the second LOC and the copy of the lost one.]*

CHESTER CUTHBERT, 1104 Mulvey Ave., Winnipeg, Man. Canada R3M 2J5 I've read thousands of books and suggest that you might find interesting some on poltergeists which describe phenomena occurring in thousands of cases inspired and accomplished by an intelligent entity which has never been seen and which must be considered invisible. And as far as gravity is concerned, levitation is a fact. *[I enjoy reading such books, but I'm still a sceptic and want to see a demonstration]*

DEREK PICKLES, 44 Rooley Lane, Bankfoot, Bradford BD5 8LX I love the reminiscences - cinema especially, I lived about 75 yards from our local. Benches at the front, seats in the back section and double "courting seats". I never went into the balcony, far too expensive. Did your local book seats? *[Yes]* The picture palace did (1911). Two shows a week. *[We used to go Tuesday and Thursday]*

SHERYL BIRKHEAD, 2005 Jonny Ct, Gaithersburg, MD 20882, USA Very interesting math proof! Statistics on someone's other hand can be used to prove just about anything. My nephew and brother in law fly radio controlled planes, I hadn't thought of the cost in a crash. Those buggers are expensive. If he hasn't, Geoff Barnes might enjoy the tales by Asimov, about Wendell Urth (sp?) Talk about phobias.