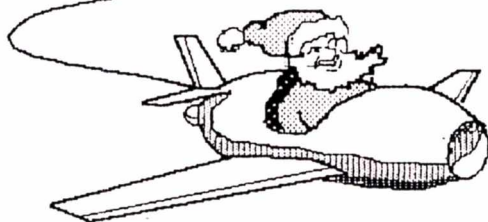


ERG 128

QUARTERLY
JANUARY 1995

A Merry Christmas

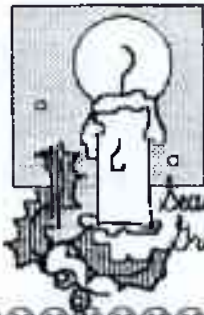
and A Happy New Year



Season's Greetings -

ERG 128 QUARTERLY

JANUARY 1995



ERG Comes to you from:
TERRY JEEVES
55 RED SCAR DRIVE
SCARBOROUGH
N.YORKS YO12 6RQ



GREETINGS ERGBODS,

A hearty Season's Greetings to all of you. Once again, the reminder that if you would have liked to get the next issue of ERG which would have been the 36th. Annish, then you're too late. After the abysmal response to the last issue I've decided to close ERG down. It may revert to an apazine, see the Letters column for more details.

Once again, the cover was drawn using 'Paintbrush' on the PC, as were many of the interior illos. In future, I'll probably revert to hand drawing the covers as this allows more flexibility in the line work.

Now on to a couple of opinion spots. I've recently been re-reading some of the old Analogs from the fifties. I was struck by the better quality of the stories and the far better artwork which related to them. Nowadays, Analog seems to favour certain themes - save the ecology, rescue various species, and central characters tend to be females, preferably black and if possible, lesbian; all of which is OK if it makes for a good story. With Analog, it frequently doesn't, the 'story' being merely a peg on which to hang a platform. Take the November issue. I gave up on the serial, STARMIND after a dozen pages. One story tells how colonists reject those using machines (big deal), Two yarns wouldn't even get into fanzines; one sees Britain turning France's cheese into slime and equally idiotic is the one where advertising chicken soup is illegal. Only one tale clicks - a woman using Virtual Reality witness a murder and must find who did it. Two articles and an editorial round out a typically dull issue.

It's nice to know that in this brave new world, we have no blind, no crippled, no deaf and no dumb. No, advancing medical science hasn't eradicated such troubles; all these and many other afflictions have been swept out of sight by the mighty flow of PC jargon. To replace them, we have the visually challenged, the physically or aurally disadvantaged and those with malfunctioning speech facility. People are no longer fat, but have a weight problem, short ones are vertically diminished, whilst stutterers have a recurring speech attitude. Note, none of these is 'handicapped' in any way.

The term 'negro' was replaced by 'black' which in turn gave way to 'Afro-Caribbean'. This, despite the fact that many, so labelled, had never been near either area. Nowadays, 'pigmentally

shaded' is the buzzword. All this to avoid saying 'coloured' - when we are all coloured in some way, be it black, brown, yellow, a pallid off-white, or even sky blue pink.

Do all these politically correct terms make the individuals concerned suffer less or feel better? I think not. I am stone deaf in one ear, saying that I'm aurally disadvantaged doesn't improve the trouble. Whether you call a spade a shovel or an earth-moving implement doesn't change things one iota. I suspect that the only people who benefit from PC jargon are those who use it. Perhaps they think it shows what thoughtful, considerate and fine-thinking individuals they are. It's a strange, Orwellian, 94-ish sort of double-think society which strives to eliminate such words as blind, lame, crippled or deaf, yet which spatters the foulest gutter-language through films, plays, TV programs and 'literature'.

Racial jokes and stereotypes are also verboten. No more of that 'Englishman, Irishman and a Scotsman' stuff, no penny-pinching Jews or sausage-stuffing Germans. Golliwogs have gone from the nursery and from the marmalade jar label. Black and white minstrels are suspect and although you may refer to someone as a 'Wily Oriental Gentleman', you are in peril if you abbreviate that to 'wog'. Strangely, Limey', 'Yank' or 'Canuck' are permissible, but beware of using 'Hun', 'Dago', or 'Frog' - although 'gringo' seems legitimate. Even villains in our books, films and plays should not belong to an 'ethnic minority'.

Such pussyfooting may irritate at times, but at least it is harmless and basically well meant. However, it tends to obscure a much greater menace in our society - the 'do-gooder'. The put it right at all costs attitude seems to be that criminals are only so because 'society' made them so. Those who batter old ladies to death for a few paltry coins, do so because we forced them to do it. We are told that prison sentences do not 'cure' criminals. Maybe not, but until something better comes along, they deter many potential ones and keep the real ones out of action for a while.

The kid glove treatment of sending youthful offenders on expensive holiday junkets proved an abysmal failure. One teenage robber seeing it as a marvellous chance to pillage the chalets of legitimate guests. Another crackpot idea was to send murder-driving young car thieves on Go-Karting courses. A clear signal to the law-abiding that if they want to go kart-racing they must first steal somebody's car and wreck it.

I'm all in favour of banning fox and deer hunting, but seeing the antics of the hunt saboteurs on TV recently made have more sympathy for the hunters than the daft brigade. I'm also against the idea of mistreating animals in order to create cosmetics, but I feel that another brainless do-gooder idea is the placing of fire-bombs in shops suspected of using 'animal-related' products. Seemingly, it's totally wrong to harm animals but it's OK to kill or maim humans. Even worse, how can any sane individual countenance the blowing up of abortion centres and killing the doctors - in the name of 'saving sacred life'?

Society has made some great strides since the days of the 'dark Satanic mills', but not all of them have been forward.

4.

I wrote this many years ago when a writing course tutor asked each member of the class to produce a short play. This one brought tears to her eyes. Now read on.

TROJAN HEARSE

A GREEK TRAGEDY

by Terry Jeeves

This is a breakfast cereal in one part, very sad and is certain to make the audience cry. To ensure that they do, it is a good idea to rub onion over the programmes before selling them.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE (i.e. Them in it)

EURIPEMOV An olive polisher
ISOSCELES An angular fellow
BLOTTO A wine tester
ARTEHIS NOOVO An artist
CLOTTO 1Three
EROTICA 1 Husing
NUTTIA 1 Fates

There is also a cast of seven hundred helots, zealots and other Grecians. However, as these are off fighting the Punic Wars and never appear on stage they may be safely ignored.

The play is set entirely on a bare stage, representing a Greek Attic. This preserves the traditions of ancient Greece whilst at the same time fooling the critics into thinking it is very arty. NB It also saves money.

SCENE 1: A Greek Attic

((Enter 3 Husing Fates clad in very short and flimsy white robes (Old bed sheets will serve). These costumes will ensure that at least half the theatre will be packed with nasty old men.))

FATES "Woe, woe and Woe"

((They prance around waving bits of cheesecloth, scattering flowers and leaflets on dieting. This will pack the other half of the theatre with intellectual young ladies.))

"More Woe and Woe again"

((Exeunt)) (i.e. they buzz off)

((Enter Euripemov ..stage left))

EURIPEMOV "Ah, flower petals. Methinks the fates have graced this spot. Verily, no trees, no leaves, yet leaflets on the floor. 'Tis passing strange. Egad and forsooth."

((He gestures in astonished surmise))

"But soft, what blighter through yonder wainscote steps?"



5.



((Enter BLOTTO stage right, carrying large vase. He staggers beneath its weight - and that of the liquor he has tested))

BLOTTO "Hail Euripemov, polished off any good olives lately?"

EURIPEMOV "Ah, 'tis the good Blotto, no doubt thou hast tasted much wine this day and will taste more ere it be morrow. But stay, what is that pot which thou bearest?"

BLOTTO "I carryeth it for a joke. This will slayeth thee. Imagine you are from far Afrique and know not what this vase may be when I tell thee that 'tis but a Grecian Urn. Now good Euripemov, ask thou of me, "What's a Grecian Urn" My answer will slay thee."

EURIPEMOV "Nay good Blotto, I know a Grecian earns but three drachmas an hour, whyfor should this be funny?"

BLOTTO "Bah! You kneweth it." ((He draws a fully loaded dagger and stabs Euripemov fatally to death, killing him instantly)) "That will teacheth you to ruin not my jokes"

((Enter the Fates. Blotto does not seem to see them as they circle round him and the dead Euripemov))

FATES "Woe, woe and more woe, and so on." ((exeunt))
((Enter Isosceles.))

ISOSCELES "Ho there good Blotto, hast heard the one about the Grecian Urn?"

BLOTTO "Indeed yes. A Grecian earns but three drachmas an hour."

ISOSCELES "I knoweth that one, no this was an empty urn such as thou carryest. Wouldst hear more?"

BLOTTO "Egad and yes forsooth, the tale of an empty urn would muchly interest me. Pray tell me more."

ISOSCELES "Sadly there is naught to tell, as being an empty urn, there is nothing in it." ((He laughs loudly "Did that not slay thee?"

BLOTTO "Indeed sir, the slayfulness is terrific" ((Draws loaded dagger and stabs Isosceles.)) "Try that on your Aeolian harp."

((Enter Fates, Blotto again fails to see them)

FATES "Woe, woe, woe etcetera" ((Exeunt))

((Enter Noovo bearing paints and canvas))

NOOVO "Ho there good Blotto, whatteth is new with thee?"

BLOTTO "A wonderful new joke. Perchance it will slay thee. Have you heard the one about the empty Greek urn that makes 3 drachmas an hour?"

NOOVO "No, pray tell it to me good Blotto"

BLOTTO "Ah, A Grecian earns nothing because being empty he has nothing in him."

NOOVO "I getteth it not as sure as my first name is Artemis"

BLOTTO "Oh well good Artemis, where go you with paints and that canvas covered with little numbered boxes?"

NOOVO "I go to set up my exhibition in the Fornicatorium. My paintings will bring fresh life to the jaded populace."

BLOTTO "What do you call this fresh style, oh Artemis?"

NOOVO "What else but Art Noovo?"

((Blotto gives a strangled scream, whips out his dagger and slays Noovo. The Fates stagger tiredly in))

FATES "Woe, three or four times and we're out of flower petals" ((Exeunt))

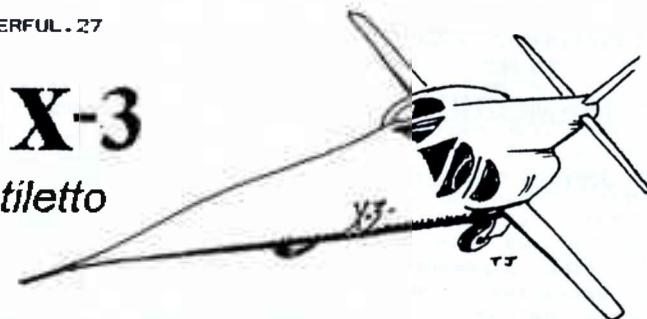
BLOTTO "Ah me, Life palls, farewell cruel world" ((Stabs himself and collapses. Enter the weary Fates))

FATES "Woe, that's enough. ((They dance off))



WEIRD & WONDERFUL.27

The X-3 Stiletto

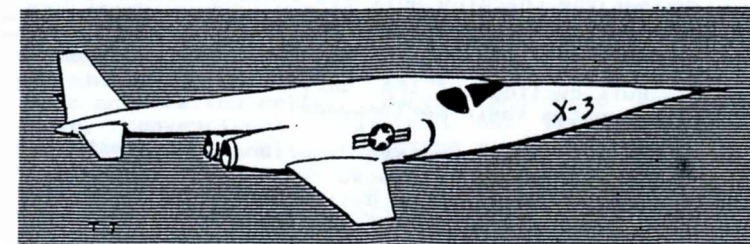


The X-1 and X-2 were both air-launched and of limited flight duration. The X-3 was not only designed to take off and land under its own power without being airlifted by a 'mother ship'; but it was also to remain airborne for periods of up to half an hour at a time to investigate the aerodynamics of flight at speeds up to Mach 2.

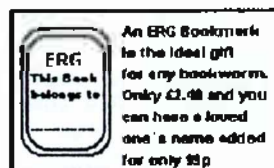
Various power systems were considered:- turbojet, rocket, pulse jet, or ramjet. Flight duration and fuel considerations led the designers to opt for an afterburning turbojet plus a rocket boost-unit. However, when Westinghouse promised a new, 4,400lb thrust turbojet, the rocket idea was scrapped and the project went ahead for an aircraft powered by two of these jet engines. Sadly, as has happened to so many other promising designs, the promised engines failed to materialise, so engines of only 3,300 lb thrust were fitted. So underpowered, the X-3's performance failed to get anywhere near its design brief. Only once did it reach Mach 1.21 in a shallow dive. Two aircraft had been planned but only one was completed, the second being 'cannibalised' for spares.

The X-3 made considerable use of titanium to withstand heating effects. It was a beautiful aircraft with a wing-span only a third of its fuselage length and a take-off speed of 260mph! Much of the wing design data went to help Lockheed design their F-104 Starfighter. An unusual feature of the X-3 was the way the pilot's seat lowered beneath the aircraft for him to enter, then was hoisted up into the fuselage. The first flight was in October 1952. Later flights nearly proved fatal due to instability. This was cured, but the X-3 only made twenty flights before being retired to the Dayton Air Force Museum in Ohio where I had the pleasure of walking around the formidable looking machine.

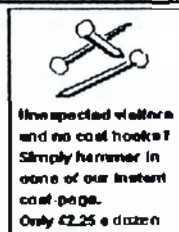
Statistics:- Length 66ft. Span 23ft Speed Mach 0.95
Altitude 35,000ft.



CURTAIN

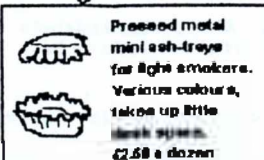


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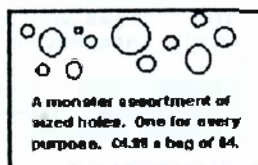
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THANKS FOR THE MEMORIES

James Verran



The paperwork, if any, that comes with Nickel Cadmium (NiCad) batteries is about as useful as that which accompanies most electronic hardware: it is not what it tells you, but what it assumes you already, or do not need to know, that causes the problem. For instance, the nifty little bubble pack usually advises the user to fully charge the NiCads before use, and if you are really lucky, also discloses that they should be fully discharged before recharging. Occasionally, there may be a vague reference to the 'memory effect' and how it reduced the battery's potential to deliver their optimum output.

I have used NiCads for more than eight years. My first encounter resulted from my buying a cute little 'go anywhere' radio, which indeed went anywhere, providing I took along a spare set of batteries. The darned thing sucked the juice out of regular carbon-zinc cells within a few hours. Even the more expensive alkaline cells struggled valiantly, but ultimately ended up costing me heaps for a marginally longer playing time. So I bought two sets of NiCads and a charger, and although they gave a slightly shorter playing time, the radio retained its clarity and volume until the batteries were almost totally exhausted.

Considering that my first two sets (four cells) gave me over 60 charge cycles each during a five-year period, they have proved extremely cost-effective. In the interim I have worn out four sets, and despite the fact that none of them lived up to the manufacturer's claim to be: "Re-chargeable hundreds of times", they have saved me squillions.

In general use, NiCads will give reliable service, providing attention is paid to their peculiar habit of 'remembering' their most frequent pattern of usage. For example: if they are only discharged partially, then 'topped up' repeatedly, they will adopt that pattern and only accept and deliver that amount of energy. Fortunately, if the period of partial cycling has not been unduly prolonged, such a limitation may be corrected.

Unless the charging unit has a built-in discharging circuit, it is a good idea to buy an inexpensive battery holder and wire it in parallel to a pair of flashlight bulbs of the desired voltage. This simple device may be used to completely discharge each cell before recharging. Full cycling is the only way to avoid the 'memory effect' which reduces their performance.

However, many cordless appliances come with a recharging unit into which the device is placed when not in use. Very few manufacturers stipulate that the device should be run until the NiCads are exhausted, then recharged fully. One can only assume that their failure to pass on this critical information has something to do with their desire to sell replacement battery packs. The common

misconception that cordless devices may be 'topped up' between uses, is the cause of much anguish when the batteries fail to deliver for the period suggested in the owner's manual. Hand-held vacuum cleaners, cordless drills and telephones, all benefit from being allowed to run right down, if not every time, certainly after no more than half a dozen partial recharges. A major inconvenience with these appliances is that they need to be discharged well beyond the point where they perform a useful function. It is not always practicable to use them until the batteries die. Cordless phones may be left on until the light goes out, before overnight recharging; their auto re-dial and number memory is usually stored in the mains-powered base unit. Drills and the like may be run down by fixing the trigger button in the ON position with a couple of turns of adhesive tape.

The best cordless appliances are those that offer quick battery replacement. This allows the unit to remain in service while the spare battery is being recharged. A little ingenuity may be needed to fit a pair of leads to the battery to enable it to be discharged out of the unit.

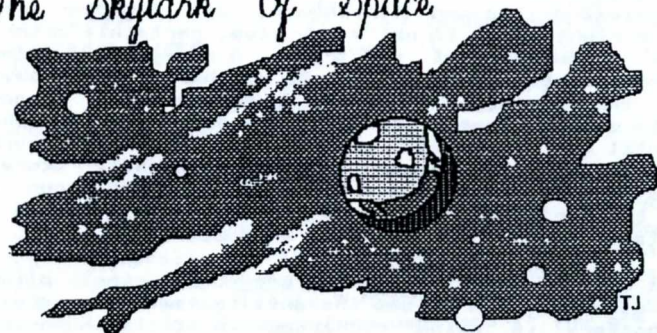
I have a notebook computer which goes into suspended mode when the 7.2 volt battery output drops below 7.0 volts. The manual (written in Koreanenglish) makes no mention of the need to remove the battery pack to fully discharge it. This results in the battery indicator showing a flat condition after only 70% use. It became obvious after a few such cycles (all according to the instruction manual) that the battery was not delivering its full potential. Due to the memory effect, the computer detected a low battery condition after only 70% of the charge had been used. Considering that the previous recharge had only 'topped up' the 70% used from the preceding charge, a pattern of exponentially decreasing charges had occurred. Within a few cycles there was a marked decrease in battery output, and the computer began to shut down after a few minutes of running. Although the bells and whistles went off in time to save the files and connect the AC adaptor, the battery never fully discharged.

When the penny dropped, it was a simple matter to rig up a Bakelite plate with two brass studs attached to leads. This contraption was held onto the battery terminals by an elastic band and surprisingly, when the 'flat' battery was connected to a small electric motor, it ran the motor for 72 minutes before the output dropped below 1 volt. The discharging apparatus has subsequently been improved by substituting a pair of 18 watt auto lamp bulbs in parallel. After the battery pack had been fully cycled (charged, then discharged) several times, it again delivered an output near to that suggested by the manufacturer. The manual could have prevented a lot of frustration if it had mentioned that the battery could not be totally discharged by the computer under normal operation.

Despite the memory effect, carefully maintained NiCads will provide a steady discharge level for longer than comparable Carbon-Zinc or alkaline cells. During prolonged periods of high energy use, conventional cells can not accommodate more than an occasional heavy load, while, excepting a dead 'short' NiCads will deliver a full voltage under very high drain. So, if your budget permits, NiCads are well worth the initial high price. Given the worst possible scenario (unrealistic retail prices included), it is possible to break even after as few as ten charge cycles — then you are home free!

J.Verran

The Skylark Of Space



I'm rather tired of those fans who (a) know it all, and (b) are sure that their opinion is the only correct one. I'm thinking of those who denigrate the old pulps because they don't follow current styles and tastes. Of course they don't! Nor do the works of Chaucer, Shakespeare, Dickens, Verne, Wells or any other long-gone author. That doesn't make 'em bad, just dated. In recent years, the late Doc Smith has come in for much flak for such alleged shortcomings, usually by those who never read him in his era. Doc wrote for the twenties and thirties before tub-thumping ecologists, whale-saving, ethnic minorities, lesbians, gays and PC jargon replaced plots and characterisation in SF.

I decided to go back to see how well some of the older yarns stood up. I dug out and read a stack of Astoundings from the late forties and early fifties. To my surprise, I found every issue highly readable - which is more than I can say for current issues of Analog. Those oldies had fresh ideas, plot twists and interesting characters. Nowadays, if I manage to finish a yarn, I usually find I have forgotten what it was about by the time I come to enter it in my files. So emboldened, I dug out Doc Smith's 'THE SKYLARK OF SPACE', originally published in 1928, and began reading:-

CHARACTERS Physicist Richard Seaton, his fiancée Dorothy Vaneman, friend and millionaire Martin Crane, villains 'Blackie' Duquesne and 'Perkins' and their captive, Margaret Spencer.

PLOT A lab accident puts Seaton on the trail of atomic power, so financed by Seaton they built the 'Skylark'. Duquesne steals the secret, builds a spacecraft and kidnaps Dorothy. Also in his craft are Perkins and kidnap victim Margaret. Uncontrolled, their ship hurtles out of orbit to another galaxy and is trapped in orbit around a dark star. Seaton and Crane follow to effect a rescue, but use all their power source and must find more. They visit several planets before meeting two races of green humanoids, one good, the other bad. After a false start, they join the goodies, wipe out the nasties, and head off home.

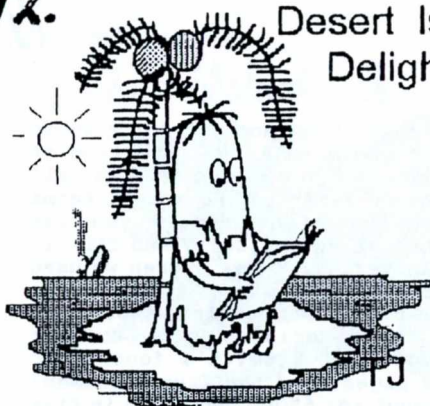
VERDICT Characters are pure gold, villains rotten to the core. The dialog is dated, the 'love' interest (by Mrs. Lee Hawkins Garby) is totally USH. The action is often naive and Smith has no qualms about killing off whole races of people. On the plus side, there are enough incidents, scenes and plot angles to furnish a dozen modern yarns. There's always something happening and 'Blackie Duquesne' is one of the best villains ever to appear in pulp SF. Not a great book, but if judged by 1928 standards, it would have been head and shoulders above its contemporaries and a certain Hugo Winner.

Now dare I try Skylark Three, Skylark of Valeron and Skylark Duquesne?

GENERAL CHUNTERING

Ken F Slater

Time Was... when a query in *farimag* about some "them and us" point would bring a large response. "Them" being the mundane, larger, portion of mankind, "us" being that small but significant portion we used to call "fankind". As there was zilch response to my question about wind-farms and your reaction to them, I must conclude that either none of you live near one, or if you do you stand beside the silent majority and CCL. In some small way I guess that gives me an answer. *Time Was...* when we used to feel that a 3- or 4-part serial in the magazines was a "long" story. Probably the length was more in time taken to get the complete story than the real wordage of the tale. Most of those serials appear to have finished up as books of 200 to 300 pages. E.E. Smith's four basic "Skylark" novels totalled some 1000 plus pages, and the five "Lensman" novels almost 1,500pp. JWC's two series count for 650pp and 570pp in five books; not (so far as I know) serialised but spread over twenty years. E.R. Eddison's *Zimiamvia* trilogy comes to some 1050 pages. J.R.R. Tolkien upped the ante with *TLOR* which can come out at nearly 1200 pp (editions vary). But even this is small compared with some of today's output. I'm part way thru Book Six of an epic novel. Book One had 670 pp; Bk 2 - 598pp; Bk 3 - 595pp; Bk 4 - 1030pp; Bk 5 - 786pp; Bk 6 - 901pp. And I am not certain that this is the last book in this novel. I say "novel" as the plot and the main characters continue throughout. Possibly the total wordage of ERB's "Tarzan" stories would exceed this, but in most cases each "Tarzan" novel is a separate story. I imagine that there are other competitors for the "longest" continuing tale; Raymond Feist and David Eddings are two authors who have made pretty lengthy contributions to the field. Terry Brooks, perhaps, but I'm not sure whether the gaps which occur in between the various Shannara series would put them into a different class. Can you think of any other "long" novels? We need something over 4,000 pages to get on the "short list". Oh yes, this novel I'm following is *THE WHEEL OF TIME* by Robert Jordan. I must admit that I start to overlook "series" novels after the first two or three books; a quick scan - grasp enough to make a reasonable comment in the catalogue - and on to the new material. But this one I'm actually reading - and even enjoying. I wonder whether Mr. Jordan or I will give up first? *Time Was...* when a publisher would ask a bookseller if he'd take along copies of a book or books written by an author who would be attending (not necessarily as GoH). Sometimes this could be at the instigation of the author, sometimes thru odd bits of information floating around in that "aether" that surrounded editors/publishers/dealers/authors & fandom-in-general. On occasion at the bookseller's request. It was all pretty simple; sometimes the books would be supplied on a "pro-forma" invoice, and the payable invoice was raised after the unsold books had been returned. I recall I've been supplied on a handwritten list on a letterhead. All very gentlemanly and not restrictive. The "aether" has evaporated. For a convention this year I rang a sales office asking for titles by two writers. I was told to put in an order in the normal way, it would be expedited, and "on sale". Most items arrive, but one title is "to follow" - which it does, ten days after the Con. When I ring and ask for returns authority. I am told to apply in writing. Six weeks later I get the authority, and I send in the books. Another four weeks and I get the credit note, with some books disallowed as they are over 12 months after publication. They are not returned to me, and when I telephone for an explanation I get told this is the new policy. Exasperation reigns. It has all been sorted now, but! *Time Was...* when I enjoyed bookselling!



Way back in ERG 78, (April 1982), I listed my favourite SF books. They still make excellent Desert Island reading, so I'll list them again here so you can see if you agree, disagree, or can do better.

Frank Herbert's UNDER PRESSURE (aka Dragon In The Sea and 21st Century Sub.) is the tale of sabotage aboard a nuclear submarine

stealing oil from an underwater Russian well. The LENSMAN series of six books by Doc Smith is still a great achievement and a 'gosh wow' read. SINISTER BARRIER, Eric Frank Russell's tale of the invisible energy beings preying on human emotions, always gives me a kick. D.F.Jones' COLOSSUS trilogy of the computer taking over the world is another regular 're-read'. John W.Campbell appears twice on my desert island, first with THE MOON IS HELL, relating the plight of astronauts marooned on the Moon's far side. Then WHO GOES THERE? must be the definitive, shape-changing alien menace yarn. It never fails to thrill.

THE PUPPET MASTERS was foreshadowed by an early yarn in Astounding, but Heinlein's treatment is far better than the old pot-boiler. His UNIVERSE yarn of mutation on a lost generation starship is another excellent variation on an old theme.

James H.Schmitz never fails to hold me when I return to his AGENT OF VEGA collection about the problems of Galactic super-agents; far better than the clownish Relief. A.E.VanVogt's VOYAGE OF THE SPACE BEAGLE, successfully blends his exploration vessel stories from Astounding into a highly enjoyable novel. Two of the yarns (Black Destroyer and Discord in Scarlet) were the sparks for the film, Alien).

Remember the Jack Williamson yarns of the over cautious and helpful robots? WITH FOLDED HANDS... and WITH SEARCHING MIND, they also are worthy of repeated reading. Thirty years later, Williamson gave us another in the series, 'The Humanoid Universe', (Analog, June 1980) but it lacked the life of the old yarns.

Next item on my bamboo bookshelves is Fredric Brown's 'The Mind Thing' in which an alien creature able to take over mental control of any living creature, makes a bid for world domination. All the above are books or book length novels. There are many shorter items which still tickle my Sense Of Wonder when I re-read them. To be honest, many of them make their impact only on a first reading when the barb in the tail is able to make itself felt. After that, one notices weaknesses in dialogue, development and characters. Even so, they are still worth being given a second chance, so here goes.

Hobbyist by E.F.Russell tells of a space scout landing on a world which has just one huge museum created by the superbeing who 'plants' various species, including humanity as a hobby. Another excellent EFR yarn concerns the 'mind-your-own-business' 'myob' society which gradually whittles away the crew members of an all-conquering battleship. Arthur C.Clark is another long time favourite. To be honest, I much prefer his older stuff to more recent yarns, especially in collaboration with Lee Gentry. One of Clarke's earliest, 'Rescue Party' concerning humanity's fleeing Earth as the Sun goes nova always gives me a buzz. 'The Nine Billion Names Of God' is another winner as a computer churns out all possible letter combinations which Tibetan monks believe will end the world - and it does.

I love the twist in the tail of Damon Knight's tale of alien visitors whose only aim whilst helping humans is 'To Serve Man' - boiled, fried or roasted. Knight also wrote the serious/comic, 'Cabin Boy' in which the general dogsbody on a starship earns his captain's wrath by allowing trapped humans to escape. Then there are three winners from Theodore Sturgeon, firstly, 'MICROCOSMIC GOD' where an 'inventor' really gets his inventions from the captive, tiny, 'Neoterics' who can create things overnight thanks to their accelerated time-scale. 'Rule Of Three' sees three mutually antagonistic humans accidentally trapped inside one amorphous creature, and finally, his superb 'Killdozer' which also made an excellent film. That has construction workers on an island site, battle against an alien which takes over their machines. Kat Wilhelm's 'The Killing Thing' is similar in theme, but this time a man is hunted by a deranged fighting machine.

'Child's Play' by William Tenn concerns the misdelivered, from the future, of a 'Bild-A-Man' kit. Its recipient experiments with first amusing, then fatal results. Also misdirected from the future was Kornbluth's 'Little Black Bag' which contained miraculous surgical instruments. These are misapplied by a bogus cosmetician who does well - until the bag is recalled at an inconvenient moment.

Heinlein also appears in the list of shorter yarns, this time with 'Waldo', ('Genius In Orbit') about the genius doomed by a debilitating disease to live in a weightless satellite - until magic effects a cure. The title gave its name to remote handling devices used in atomic plants. Algis Budrys, 'Rogue Moon' about a man surviving on a monstrously intricate killer maze is another goody.

Going back in time for a few real oldies, I must take Doc. Keller's 'The Doorbell' with me. A rather gruesome yarn in which a rich magnate gets revenge on an enemy by feeding him capsules holding metal fish-hooks, then puts him in a room beneath a giant electro-magnet which is connected to the doorbell. I shudder every time I read that one. Then I mustn't omit a clutch of H.G.Wells yarns, starting with 'The Stolen Body' where an out of body experience has disastrous results. 'The Inexperienced Ghost' has a newly created spirit trying to find the right magic passes to escape, his earthly ties. Then of course, 'The Valley Of Spiders' sees explorers running foul of giant, wind-borne arachnids.

All great yarns, mainly from Astounding and all guaranteed to while away many a happy hour on my desert island.

FANTASTIC STORIES OF THE FUTURE



Tom and Dik are trained as spacemen and set on a one-way journey to Mars. Dik suspects the council, finds they are supermen planning to eliminate humans, so he drops a bomb on their HQ as his spaceship passed over.

THE CONQUEROR'S VOICE, Robert Castle (Edmond Hamilton) told of an attempt by Eurasia to take over America by radio hypnosis. The villain is foiled by Agent Martin.

VALLEY OF PRETENDERS by Dennis Clive (John Russell Fearn) has a passenger craft land on Rhea, passengers stroll, are cut off by a fire, find English-speaking dwarves who are killed off by a volcano, but who save the humans first.

THE MACHINE THAT THOUGHT, William Callahan (Raymond Z. Ballun) has High Class humans about to kill off the Lows. Ned Grayden warns the Lows who revolt. Then his robot machine rescues the surviving 'Highs' and dumps them on a Jovian moon to fend for themselves.

HAZARDS OF SPACE FLIGHT by Derwin Lesser (Charles D. Hornig) A pot boiler listing Verne's gun, fuel, asteroids etc.

THE SEA THINGS by Guy Arnold proposed a new form of life rising from the sea to vandalise food gardens, but Clay Adamsen finds a way to kill them off.

OUTLAW OF SAJURN by John Cotton (John Russell Fearn) is set on a swampy Venus where Bruce Lanning grows drugs and oppresses the natives. gent Lena Tavistock arrests him, has a perilous trip getting him to justice and they fall in love on the way.

DEATH BY FIRE from Amelia Reynolds Long has Professor Kendall killed by a scientific murder which is solved by the hero.

LEECHES FROM SPACE, Ephraim Winkler (J.R. Fearn) Earth movies into a space cloud - of leeches. Scientists kill them off by creating artificial thunderstorms.

Hack stuff, but it had plot (sort of), action by the cartload, and no message is the story' rubbish.

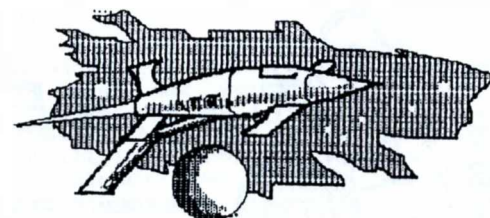
SCIENCE FICTION

SCIENCE FICTION No.1 March 1939 was edited by Charles D. Hornig, had a Paul cover and contained nine stories, one article and one or two fillers. Of the ten main items, no less than seven were written under pseudonyms. I've included the real names in brackets. Artwork was by Paul and Jack Binder, plus one other unidentified illo.

The lead yarn, UNDER THE WHITE SUN by Edmond Hamilton had humanity living in domes on a future, frozen Earth. Earl Ailing (and his girl) are thrown out for opposing the dictator Gora Oga. They face sundry monsters and perils before reaching another dome and getting help.

MARTIAN MARTYRS was by John Coleridge (Earl and Otto Binder). Earth is ruled by the king-sized, enigmatic, Science Council.

Fanzines



THE FROZEN FROG. 10 28pp, folded f'scap from Girard Benoit, 1016 Guillaume-Boisset, Cap Rouge, Quebec, CANADA G1Y 1Y9. Comment on Confrancisco, Fanebs explain 'how they manage their fanzine collection', discussion of a 'world wide party', a long article on American Comic Books, an even longer lettercol and crammed with excellent illos. Friendly and highly readable. For the 'usual'.

MORIARTY'S REVENGE. 3 18, A4, pp from Dave Hicks, 8 Dyfrig St., Pontcanna, Cardiff, CF1 9LR, Wales. Queries fanzine aims and standards, natter on football, WinCon comment, an article on fan art, a lotta letters and some nice artwork. Nice, chatty and entertaining. it covers interesting topics without being highbrow. Again, get it for the 'usual'

ETHEL THE AARDVARK. 56 Melbourne SFC, P.O. Box 212, World Trade Centre, Melbourne 3005, Victoria, Australia. 18, A4pp devoted to club news and books, comment on files and Pt. 1 of producing fanzines on a computer. Also has pages of Langford's 'Ansible'. \$20 for 6 issues overseas, \$10 in Australia.

THE RELUCTANT FAMULUS 34&35 Around 30, A4pp ea. from Tom D. Sadler, 422 W. Maple Ave, Adrian, Michigan, 49221-1627, USA. Well produced, excellent art and crammed with a nicely varied mix of articles, fiction, humour, readers' letters, as well as book and fanzine reviews. Tom also reprint a couple of my old fannish pieces, so I trust you'll rally round with either \$1.50 or 'the usual' - you won't regret it.

RASTUS JOHNSON'S CAKEWALK 4 & 7 approx 28, beautifully laser-printed pages each, from Greg Pickersgill, 3 Bethany Row, Narberth Rd., Haverfordwest, Pembro SA61 2SG. No interior art or fiction, but intelligent comment and argument on a variety of topics - including network discussion, fandom's aims, FIJAGH V PIAWOL as well as future conventions, their costs and aims. All these are covered mainly in letters and Greg's responses in which he pulls no punches. Not really s&c, but highly readable.

ARROWS OF DESIRE. 6 56, 54pp from Michael Abbott, Flat 4, 27 Terront Rd., LONDON N15 3AA. This issue is devoted to religion and has pieces by Ken Lake, Dave Langford, Michael Abbott, Steve Jefferay, and others. There are three stories, but only one appealed to me. In between the main items were capsule details of the world's major religions. You also get lists of SF with a religious slant and another of films with religious links - although Wells' Man Who Could Work Miracles, and Niven's 'Matter Of Life and Death' are omitted. Only three pedestrian illos, I'm afraid but there are plenty of interesting LOCs. A nice friendly and argument sparking zine. Next issue will be on 'Bloody Foreigners'



LETTERS

ETHEL LINDSAY, 69 BARRIE RD., CARNOUSITE ABERG, SCOTLAND DD7 7QD

Your story of Paul Duncan's request and your admirable help to him made me think of the stories I could tell as an agent for SF Chronicle. There are the folks who say 'cheque enclosed' and forget

to enclose it. There are those who forget the fact that I am only the agent and the copies come direct from New York. So they ring up demanding to know why the hold up. Then there are those that send £3 for a sample copy and expect it within a week - to say nothing of the simple soul who forgets to enclose an address or writes a fantastic scribble. Complaining about Con prices, let me add my bit. I always have to pay a single room supplement - usually £10. I know all hotels do it, but it is unfair to say the least. ☞ Agreed, a single room should get single rate - without a surcharge. ☞

ALAN BURNS, 19 THE CRESCENT, KINGS RD. 9TH., WALLSEND, N.TYNESIDE, NE28 7RE

I cheerfully admit to having as many prejudices as the next man, but what gets right up my left nostril ☞ Better than being left up your right one ☞ is this doctrine of Political Correctness. Having ignored my share of digs at not seeing so well and being somewhat deaf, I resent being patronised by those people who should occupy themselves by jumping off the tops of tower blocks and finding how much damage is done when they hit the ground. Since I don't attend Cons, my interest is only academic, but as far as I can see, the only cost is hiring a big hall and maybe hiring a room or two, plus a man with a projector to show a film. All other expenses to be borne out of the attendees pockets except for an important speaker's expenses. ☞ True - up to a point, but robes, file hire, insurance, printing costs etc, all cost a bomb - BUT, why upsteeen parallel programs? You can only attend one film, panel, speech or gab-fest at a time, so why waste money on such extras. For that matter, why a 'fan room'? Fans can seat in lobbies, lounges, their rooms or in cafes, so why special, expensive rooms? ☞

ANDREW DARLINGTON, 14 SPA CROFT RD., TEALL ST., OSSETT, W. YORKS WF3 5WE

It's your 'First Issues' feature I turn to first. As you say, "older readers may get a buzz of nostalgia and newer ones an idea of what has gone before". I guess I must fall into the second category as I was just five years old when SPACE STORIES emerged - the same month Britain tested its first atom bomb and MAD MAGAZINE and NEBULA SF were launched. Oddly enough, I also get a nostalgic buzz for what I never experienced plus a sense of continuity and of belonging to a process of evolution that began before I was born and which will continue for some time to come. I can relate directly to the feel, smell and visual excitement the old time fans felt as those magazines first appeared. I get something of a high digging them out at bookfairs or through Mail Order listings, so it's an ongoing process and not just an indulgence in things of the past.

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

Re cigarette advertizing, you have a very good point - I can't imagine anyone changing brands because of it. I'd guess most smokers try out various brands as one tries out various detergents, and settle on one that suits them in some way. I think that ads give smoking a veneer of social acceptability. Like cars, cigarettes give people a lot of pleasure - and kill lots too. I watched a close friend, fan-artist Atom, die slowly over several years, of a smoking-related disease. Re: letter on Kersh from Paul Duncan, he wrote to me (in July) saying you'd suggested it. I found and photocopied a review for which he was looking, also sent a copy of an entry in the SF Encyclopedia, and haven't heard another word. ☞ Readers, you have been warned. ☞

ALAN SULLIVAN, 30 ASH RD., STRATFORD, LONDON E15 1HL

GENERAL CHUNTERING, I think you would be very hard put indeed to find a story that did not involve a 'quest' of some sort, in the broadest possible sense of the word. Nor is this just a Fantasy/SF thing (I'm one of those people who looks on all fiction as being 'fantasy' - the broadest possible sense I'm afraid). It's just the meaning that's put to the words used. For some people they are just perfectly innocent words used to describe what they're doing. For other, they can be a way of life. (eg: "Trek is a way of life") or a killing insult (eg: "Die Trekkie Scum"). Isn't semantics wonderful? ☞

☞ Yes, Val tells me that 'comedy' just means 'not tragic', whereas to me a 'comedy' should be funny. ☞ Books. I find myself in agreement over "Powers That Be". Anne McCaffrey books, (especially the collaborations) defiantly seem to be getting more and more "romanticistic". It's all so Mills & Boone with 'tateful' changes of scene. ☞ Dead right Alan. OK if you like that sort of stuff, otherwise, yecch.

ROGER WADDINGTON, 1 COMMERCIAL ST., MORTON, HALTON W. YORK YO17 9ES


It does give me a quiet chuckle or two as to how the more ecology conscious among us were demanding the withdrawal of nuclear power and replacing it with wind and water power. And now that they've arrived? Apparently, barrages will upset the balance of nature and wind machines disfigure the landscape and create noise pollution: so what do they want? Perhaps they were hoping for the old-style traditional windmills, every one with a rosy-cheeked miller standing at his door. (Come to think of it, that would solve the unemployment problem.) Can't help thinking that they're not really interested in the betterment of mankind; only their own selfish ends.

On bizarre thinking, I can agree on the absolute uselessness of stopping children smoking by banning advertizing cigarette advertizing near schools - of course they don't go anywhere else, don't go into town, don't go out at night. Of course the advertizing companies would like to think that they're so effective, but as you say, it's more due to peer pressure and parents. ☞ Nobody advertises drugs anywhere, let alone near schools, but drug-taking among schoolchildren is rising fast - and that must come from peer pressure or even parents. Why don't the Government whiz kids use advertizing to display the real horrors of addiction instead of just parroting, "Don't do it, it's bad for you." ☞

The run to the top of the rocket on the cover of that Space Stories cover might not be so exhausting if it was on a low-gravity planet. ☞ Good point, but I bet if astronauts, even on the Moon, had to climb 360ft. or so up a Saturn rocket they'd soon demand a lift. ☞

DEREK PICKLES, 44 ROOLEY LANE, BANKFOOT, BRADFORD, W. YORKS. BD5 8LX

We have a few windfarms round here, the nearest being at Howarth. As you drive to Howarth along the Halifax-Keighley road you can see the tops of nine towers and their blades. From this side of the ridge they are not too bad, but when you go over the crest you can see they dominate the hillside and valley. Applications were made to install further windfarms along the ridge and nearer Howarth but there were tremendous protests and inspections by the Planning Committee which turned the applications down. Of course the Bronte Society and Bronte fans were violently opposed to their landscape being sullied. I think it is often forgotten that before the steam engine was introduced into mills - 1780s onwards, water mills were built in the country up the little valley where there were steady streams. Sase in Sheffield where the 'little wasters' built along the (then) beautiful Don Valley and tributaries. Wordsworth praised the fact that, "the mills were tucked away out of sight as they were such eyesores." I have not stopped to listen to the wind turbines but there are probably no more than half a dozen farmhouses and cottages within half a mile or so. Even if every local hated them there can only be twenty or thirty people affected.

Tobacco advertising, do you remember the film NOW VOYAGER when Paul Henreid and Bette Davis were standing in the French window and Paul put two cigarettes in his mouth, lit them and gave one to Bette? After that film (1942?) every lad was imitating Paul as it was thought to be the height of romantic sophistication. True, I remember how much films influenced me as a teenager. After seeing Humphrey Bogart wearing a black tie and a white shirt, I simply had to do likewise - and walk around without an overcoat, even in the depths of winter, just so my shirt and black tie could be seen. On the other hand, I can't recall buying any clothing as a result of seeing advertising anywhere. 

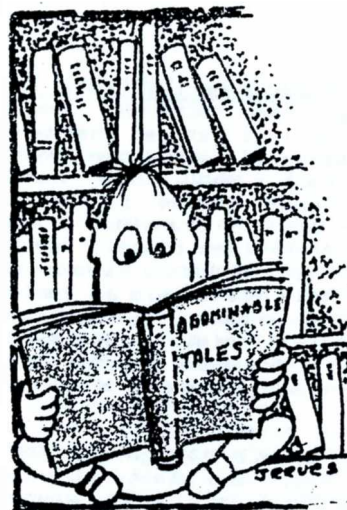
ELECTRONIC STENCILS: I've unearthed a small pile of electrostencilled illos destined for the old duplicated ERG. If you would like 'em, you can have 'em for whatever they cost in postage - not a lot.

ERGITORIAL NOTE: ERG 127 brought in a magnificent total of 7 LOCs, my heartfelt thanks to those 7 stalwarts, but 7 locs per issue just isn't economically viable or worth the effort. Therefore, this is the last issue of ERG. It neatly rounds off 36 years of the old mag as the next issue would have been the annish. However, as I've said before, LOC us or lose us, if you're one of the regular and persistent non-responders, then you have helped bring on the end.

I have enjoyed producing ERG, but mailing it into a response vacuum is costly and pointless. If any fanned out there is interested in carrying on WEIRD AND WONDERFUL, FIRST ISSUES, or indeed, any of my rambling thoughts, articles and suchlike, please drop me a line. I'm NOT GAFIATING, just quitting a losing game.



WHERE TO GET YOUR SF

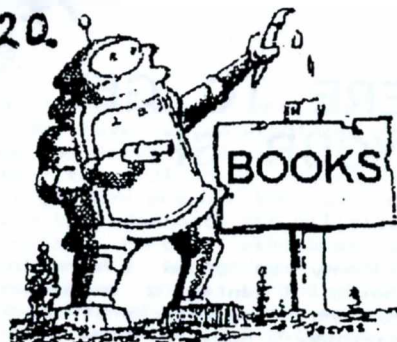


Every so often I have this dream in which I enter a secondhand book shop and find stacks of old SF pulp magazines. Many a time I've entered a shop and hoped it would happen for real, but it never did. Never that is, until last week when I re-visited Franks Booksellers at the Antique Centre in the Royal Exchange, Manchester. Hiding outside was a 1934 Astounding for only £10. Inside was stack of thirty or forty SF pulps, Astoundings from 1934/38, Amazing dated 1928, Wonder and even Tales Of Wonder.

All the mags were in EXCELLENT, near mint condition. A treasure trove going at around £10 to £12 each. Franks is in the basement of the Royal Exchange, (Ph. 061-832-7241) a complex of shops between Cross St and St. Ann's Square at the bottom of Market St. near Deansgate.

This seems as good a time as any to include a list of other dealers who can supply you with SF etc.. If contacting them, don't forget an S.A.E.

- K.F. SLATER, PO BOX 23, UPWELL, WISBECH, CAMBS PE14 9BU. Ken not only has a large stock of SF, but can get you any new item to order.
- MIKE DON, 233 MAINE RD., MANCHESTER M14 7WG
- KEN COWLEY, TRINITY COLLEGE, 153 OLD CHURCH RD., CLEVEDON, AVON BS21 7TU
- SIMON GOSDEN, 25 AVONDALE RD., RAYLEIGH, ESSEX
- ZARDOZ BOOKS. M. FLANAGAN, 20 WHITECROFT, DILTON MARSH, BA13 4DJ
- TERRY JEEVES, 56 RED SCAR DRIVE, SCARBOROUGH YO12 5RQ
- RON HAYESGATE, GLENMORE BOOK CO., 17E PITSFORD ST., HOCKLEY, BIRMINGHAM B16 8LJ PH (021) 554 4002 *'GONE AWAY'*
- ANDY RICHARDS, COLD TONNAGE BOOKS, 136 NEW RD., BEDFORD, FELTHAM, MIDDY TW14 8HY
- KIRK RUEBOTHAM, 16 BEACONSFIELD RD., RUNCORN, CHESHIRE WA7 4BI
- ROBERT A MADLE, 4406 BESTOR DRIVE, ROCKVILLE, MD20853, USA.
- JOHN SCHNEIDER, 1500 MAIN AVENUE, KAUKAUMA, WISCONSIN 54130, USA
- BRIAN AMERINGER, 9 GRAHAM RD., WEALDSTONE, HARBOR, MIDDY HA3 5RP
- MARK NEGUS, SUGEN & Co., HILLINGTON HOUSE, 75 JEFFERSON ST., GOOLE DN14 6SJ Mark deals only in film & TV tie-in paperbacks.
- BRIAN COCKS, 18 WOODGATE, HELPSTON, PETERBOROUGH PE6 7ED - Deals only in aircraft books.
- DAVID S. HEARD, The Heckmondwike Bookshop, 2 Market St., Heckmondwike, W. Yorks (Paperbacks)
- RICHARD WILLIAMS, 15 HIGH ST., DRAGONBY, SCUNTHORPE, DN15 0BE
- CONQUISTADOR, 158 KENT HOUSE RD., BECKENHAM, KENT BR3 1JY For comics and related media items.
- VON L. THIEL, 4074 NE Beaumead St., Hillsboro, OR 97124, USA



BLOODWARS Vampire World.3

Brian Lumley Roc £5.99

In the conflict between the Undead and the Wamphyri, Necroscope Nathan Keogh, Trask and their esper companions must defend Earth and alternate world Starside. When trapped, Nathan saves himself and Zek by teleportation which he learns to control. This puts him in further danger as a Government Agency seeks to co-opt or kill him. The espers

escape to the vampire world of Starside where even greater perils await them. This final epic of the Wamphyri world saga is a massive block-buster of nearly 800 pages.

RED DWARF QUIZ BOOK Nicky Hooks & Sharon Burnett Penguin £4.99

Not just a series of quizzes, although there are plenty of those. You also get crossword puzzles, word-search grids, who-played-who problems, and quotation puzzles. The brain-teasers are interspersed with photos of the characters in the TV series, along with their Questionnaire answers. If you're an RD fan, then this is one with which to relax - or drive yourself crazy over the answers.

SOFTWARE Rudy Rucker ROC £4.99

Hippy Cobb Anderson, was once the top cyberneticist who gave AI's freedom to evolve and control the Moon. Now the robots hope to take over humans to merge them into one complex system. They send robot copies of Cobb and drop-out Sta-Hi, to start the process. Cobb gets integrated into his copy, but Star-Hi doesn't conform to the robots' plans. Much jive language in a fast moving yarn where interest is never allowed to flag.

CONQUEROR'S PRIDE Timothy Zahn Bantam £4.99

Four alien ships fire without warning, wipe out eight Commonwealth battleships and take Commander Phelan Cavanagh captive. His father organises an illegal rescue force to send Phelan's brother Eric on a rescue mission. Meanwhile, the Commonwealth prepares for war but one member race is breeding disunity in its ranks. First in a new series, this is an excellent, multi-layered novel of hard-core SF.

MEN AT ARMS Terry Pratchett Corgi £4.99

In the city of Ankh Morpork, Lord d'Eath is convinced that simple minded Corporal Carrot is the reincarnation of former kings and sets out to enthrone him. He steals a gunne and begins a process of elimination. Carrot develops a crush on policewoman Angua - who happens to be a vampire. He sets out to solve the murders and reaches an unexpected ending. Another hilarious Discworld novel, and to my mind, the best yet.

RAIDERS OF THE LOST CAR PARK Robert Rankin Corgi £4.99

The Hidden King of the World and immense treasure are secreted away in the Forbidden Zones where fairies dwell. Hugo Rune vanished after finding them, now his son Cornelius sets out to recover Rune (or preferably the treasure), aided by the dwarf, Tuppe and the nubile Anna. They rescue Hugo (accidentally), who explains his plan to overthrow the fairies by having Cornelius kidnap the Queen of England. Meanwhile Polly Gotting gets a job with Prince Charles and Inspector Hovis investigates. A rather complicated plot with Rankin in top frenetic form.

THE GREATEST SHOW OFF EARTH

Robert Rankin Doubleday £14.99

Raymond and his friend Simon are idling in the allotment when an alien starfish from Uranus englobes them. Simon escapes, but Raymond is lured to Venus and sold in a food market. Whilst Simon finds a book which lets him win a fortune before being mugged by nasty men in grey suits, he also meets monster chicken Sate-Hen and is arrested for murder. Raymond escapes being eaten, joins Professor Merlin's circus, meets shape-changing Zephyr, and hears how Earth is really two concentric spheres with the outer baddies planning to seal off the inner (our) world. All is eventually resolved in a pun-filled epic with more plot threads than the Bayeux tapestry.



THE ILLUSTRATED FRANKENSTEIN MOVIE GUIDE Stephen Jones Titan £9.99

How many films have used Frankenstein's monster? Five? Seven? More? This collection lists over 400! Including the Munsters, Addams etc. There's an Introduction by Karloff then the films are listed in sections - 'The silents', 'The 30s', 'The 40s' and so on; each with year, director, stars, length, company, a brief precis and a quality rating. Between the sections are essays on Karloff, his make-up man, Colin Clive, Peter Cushing, other monsters and players of the Baron. There's also a complete alphabetical index, a Bibliography and the large (21x27cm) volume is crammed with 'stills', many in colour. An absolute 'must' for any Frankenstein fan.

BEHIND THE MASK M. Salisbury & A. Hedcock Titan £10.99

Subtitled 'The Secrets Of Hollywood's Movie Makers', this large-sized book has twelve chapters devoted to the men and techniques used to bring those incredible monsters to the screen. The text is interspersed (crammed) with black and white and colour photographs showing the experts at work as well as the end result of their magical labours. There's also a 'Filmography' for each FX expert giving his films, year and director. A brief Bibliography also has a few sources for materials to make your own creatures. Film-making and horror buffs, this is for you.

DEVIL WORLD: Star Trek Adventures Gordon Eklund Titan £3.99

The beautiful Gilla Dupree persuades Kirk to seek out her missing father, cast out for treachery. Jacob Kell, is living with the devil-like Danons on Heartland, a world now proscribed because it drove early colonists mad. When they locate Kell, a mysterious mental force prevents their escape, and Kirk falls in love with Gilla with predictable results. A standard pot-boiler.

STAR TREK: TESTS OF COURAGE Howard Weinstein. Titan £9.99

An A4-sized graphic novel with an introduction by George Takei (Mr. Sulu). The story opens as a bunch of distinctly older ST characters welcome Sulu's promotion to Captain in command of U.S.S. Excelsior. After building immense fission bombs, the people of Tabukan 3 and 4 now want peace and seek to dispose of their arsenal. Excelsior and Enterprise are sent to assist, but a Romulan/Maroon alliance decoys Kirk away and sets a trap for Sulu. Both Captains face overwhelming dangers before all is resolved. Great for all graphic fans.

VIRTUAL LIGHT William Gibson Penguin £5.99

Set in the seamy California of 2005, Security man Rydell drives a high tech car, but loses his job after an over-violent response to a hacker's hoax call. He gets a new job driving a skip-chaser. Messenger, Chevettie pinches a pair of special, Virtual-Light, information-packed sun glasses. Mobsters come after her, and so does Rydell's new boss. Crammed with futuristic jargon, slang and references, this is one of those ultra-clever, Cyberpunk yarns which takes a long time to set the background before it gets going.

DRAWING BLOOD Poppy Z. Brite Penguin £5.99

Trevor McGee was only five when his father killed his mother and younger brother. Now, twenty years later he returns to the deserted house where it all happened. Here he meets and nearly kills, Zack Bosch, a hacker on the run. They settle in and the evil of the place starts to operate. Set in the sleazy world of the underprivileged, with plenty of drugs, booze, homosexuality and gutter language. You feel you need a shower by the half way mark. Not my cup of tea, but if you're into that sort of horror novel, you may go for this one.

COLUMBO: The Grassy Knoll William Harrington Titan £4.99

The detective in the crumpled raincoat sets out to find the murderer of chat-show host, Paul Drury who had planned to reveal the truth of the J.F. Kennedy shooting. The files of the last show have vanished, and as Colombo investigates, he finds he is also looking for the killer of JFK. Just as in the TV files, you know who is at the end of his trail, but the fun is seeing how Colombo solves the mystery. Beautifully worked out, and NOT a tedious media spin-off hype. I thoroughly enjoyed the yarn. Recommended.

THE AVENGERS: Dead Duck Patrick Macnee Titan £3.99

A series of inexplicable deaths by 'heart attacks' turn out to have been caused by one of those little-known South American poisons. Steed and Emma Peel follow a trail leading to a couple of old men in a near-fortress and a maniacal plan to snatch power. A highly camp novel in the old Boy's Own Paper style. Some nice sequences and an over the top denouement. Incidentally, what sort of gold cigarette case holds two salmon sandwiches? (presumably smoked salmon).

STAR WARS: Champions Of The Force Kevin J. Anderson Bantam £3.99

Luke Skywalker lies in a coma as his former pupil Kyp Durron takes the awful Sun Crusher on a voyage of destruction among the Empire's factions. Ambassador Furgan sends a task force to kill Leia's twins and also her baby. Han goes after Kyp whilst Luke operates from his trance and uses his Jedi powers to aid the children. Volume 3 of the Jedi Academy trilogy and the never-ending struggle between the Empire's remnants and the New Republic.

**INTO THE LABYRINTH** Margaret Weis & Tracy Hickman Bantam £4.99

Xar, Lord of the Nexus, seeks to control the powers of the Seventh Gate between the Worlds. To do so, he must first kill then resurrect Haplo. Marit, Haplo's ex-lover is sent to kill him, as is Assassin, Hugh The Hand. Wounded, Haplo enters the deadly Labyrinth to fight for his life. This Sixth volume of the Death Gate Cycle is rather sporadic. Some parts are excellent and really grab you, others seem slow and pedestrian. Could it be where the authors alternate?

VURT Jeff Noon Ringpull Press £4.99

Set in a future, sleazy, Manchester where cyborgs, shadow snakes and telepaths are common. A high-velocity opening sees shadow and real police chase the 'Stash Riders', a small group of dropouts who live for Vurt drug feathers. The band has two women (one a telepath) and two men, one of whom, Scribble seeks his missing sister who vanished into the Vurt world to be replaced by an alien Thing. The trail follows a maze of drugs, trips, violence and four-letter words. If cyberpunk is your bag, here it is in spades.

THE CHRONICLES OF PERN: First Fall Anne McCaffrey Corgi £4.99

In five episodes; the discovery of Pern, a volcano's threat, the creation of Ruatha Hold, a bonding of dragon-to-rider and finally, rescuing Pern's last survivors. There's no mention of the giant AI computer; the tales are virtually plotless with no baddies other than the harsh conditions and the inimical Thread. (Why hadn't it overrun Pern before settlers arrived?). Nevertheless, a good pot is worth boiling well, and McCaffrey does a smooth job of showing the gradual shift from a technology base to an agrarian one.

I SHUDDER AT YOUR TOUCH Ed. Michele Slung Roc £4.99

Subtitled '22 Tales of Sex and Horror', this collection gives you an accidental superwoman's revenge, a mermaid killer, nostalgic fantasy, murder, violence, a ghostly lover, hauntings, vampires, a weird sideshow, a beauty salon, strange lovers, Russian Roulette, metamorphosis, mental power and others. A really mixed bag of terror tales which has something for everyone.

**SHUDDER AGAIN** Ed. Michele Slung Roc £4.99

Another 22 tales of sex and horror. Skeletal love, visit to a weird house, a strong moron, a haunted car, lovers' torture, first love revisited, a haunting wife, an android seductress, Cinderella reworked, vampires, an incredible birth, illegal heterosexuality and many more. As good a collection as the first one so if s&h is your tipple, you can't go wrong with either - or both.

THE ESSENTIAL FRANKENSTEIN Ed. Leonard Wolf Plume £8.99

First setting out Mary Shelley's background and how she came to write Frankenstein. (The reproduction of a page of her handwritten Ms makes me wonder how anyone managed to read it). Then a collection of letters precedes the three parts of the novel in its original (1818) form. The story is followed by a Fantasmagoriana tale, a calendar of events, some reviews, a Filmography and a Bibliography. Many excellent, evocative illustrations, copious footnotes and quotes by sundry writers make this a 'must' for all Frankenstein buffs.

BATTLETECH: CLOSE QUARTERS Victor Milan ROC £3.99

Cassie Suthorn is a warrior with Comacho's Caballeros when they take a 'milk run' job of guarding a V.I.P.'s cousin. But things go terribly wrong when Yakusa and ISF join together. Only Cassie's 'berserker' fighting skill can save the day. Another yarn in the long-running Battletech series for those who like updated sagas of epic sword and sorcery without the magic element saving the day.

HARP OF WINDS Maggie Furey Legend £5.99

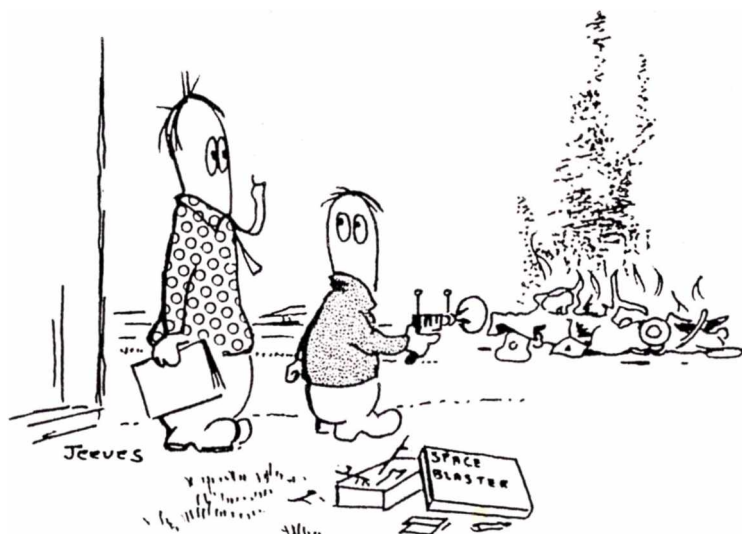
Book 2 of the 'Artefacts of Power', I can do no better than quote the jacket. "Child of wizards, swordmistress, the headstrong Aurian had set her power against that of Miathan, the evil Archmage. Whilst he possessed the Cauldron Of Rebirth, Aurian had recreated the Staff Of Earth, the first of the throw lost weapons, the only defence against Miathan's plans of conquest. Trapped in the Southern Lands, her powers reft by pregnancy, Aurian must rely on the untried powers of the half-blood mage Anvar as their odyssey takes them to the realm of the mysterious Xandim" Does that grab you?

PAPERBACKS, PULPS & COMICS. Vol.2 ZARDOZ BOOKS £3.95

This is a 144-page, digest-sized magazine boasting a full-colour cover (The Shadow) and absolutely crammed with articles, illustrations and cover reproductions (largely of scantily clad females). There are pieces on 'Horror Film Tie-Ins', (films/books). 'Echoes Of Yesterday', (Sexton Blake, Boys Magazine, Greyfriars etc). 'The Ben Sarto Story', 'The Shadow', an article on paperbacks, and a piece on NEBULA accompanied by Hunter illos. Other items include 'The Detective Fiction of Ron Goulart', 'Cartoon Art Production' etc., plus News, Letters, Sales and Wants. A better read than Analog. Write to Zardoz Books, 20 Whitecroft, Ditton Marsh, Westbury, Wilts, BA13 4DJ and remember to mention ERG.

STAR WARS: THE TRUCE AT BAKURA Kathy Tyers Bantam £4.99

An intercepted message drone warns of an attack on far-off Empire-world Bakura, by aliens who make humans into android machines. Luke Skywalker heads a task force to make a truce and aid the Empire. His hope is that Bakura will join the Alliance, but Governor Nereus is tempted to betray him to the aliens. To complicate matters, Luke is contacted by a human slave of the aliens, and finds romance on Bakura. A complicated but well developed plot; nothing to do with the story, but I have a few general Star Wars queries - how did Leia, daughter of Darth Vader become a Princess, and why isn't brother Luke a prince? Moreover, since nobody understands R2-D2, why don't they fit him a voice box?



"Honest Pop, I made it out of a plastic kit!"