

ERG 149

QUARTERLY

APRIL 2000

41st. Anniversary Issue



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from

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My apologies for varying typefaces and styles in this issue. This page is a collage using Beeb, as well as the old and ailing PC. This section is being typed on the Beeb until I get familiar with a new PC. The venerable 381 being hors de combat .. BUT! A while back, I got a letter from Dave Langford saying that a number of fans had donated a new PC to Vince Clarke. Sadly, he is no longer with us, so would I like it? YES PLEASE!

The wheels began to turn, that good man Bernie Peek put the bits together and assembled a lovely machine with a 6.7GB hard disc, 128MB of RAM, CD ROM drive and an in-built modem - but how to get the finished PC, from London to me in Scarborough? Here stepped in two other good fens, Alison Scott and Stephen Cain were coming up to Lincoln for Christmas, so they extended their trip by umpteen miles to bring me the PC and get it working - which would have been beyond my skills as my monitor was acting awkward. Alison did much wonderful keyboard and screwdriver magic to tame the brute and I now have a fully functioning, net-worthy PC.

Finally, John Rupik came over from Doncaster to instal other goodies and get me on the Net. The only thing I don't have is a list of the good people who donated the pieces and the assorted help. Whoever you are, my most heartfelt thanks to all of you.

I am now on the net, but being a total computer nerd, I'm still not clued up enough to cope with loads of incoming or outgoing e-mail. Bear with me, I'll get there eventually and will then list my e-mail address. Oh yes, and if all that isn't enough, this issue mark's ERGs 41st Anniversary. Stay tuned.

This issue's cover was created on the 381 before it acted up and the heading at the top of this page was printed using the new machine. As mentioned earlier, this resulting page is a collage, so to those who object to mixed typefaces, apart from 'hard luck chums', I'd point out that no less an august magazine than Analog does just that in its 70th Annish, so why should I worry?

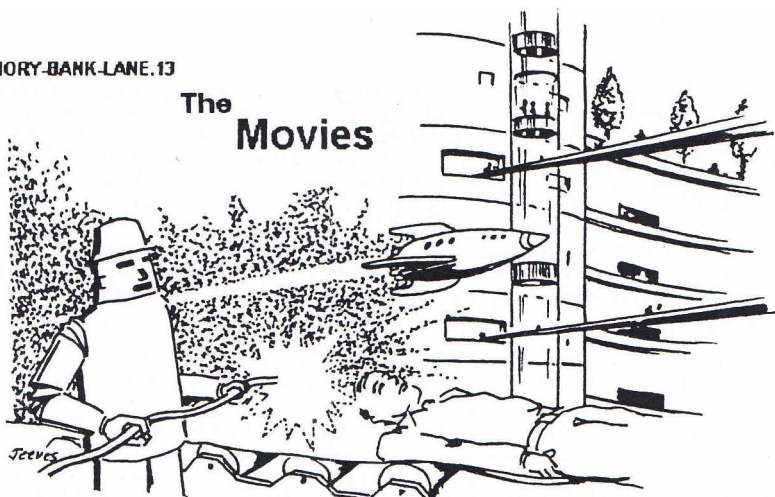
A while back, a reader wrote and asked for back issues of TRIODE. I duly raided my collection for my last copies, sent a bundle off and asked for £3.00 post and packing. The money hasn't yet come and I've lost track of who it was, so if he reads this, I'd appreciate the courtesy of payment.

Meanwhile, happy reading. All the best,

Terry

DOWN-MEMORY-BANK-LANE.13

The Movies



The cinema was a happy youthful pastime. Twice a week, long before I understood what was taking place on the screen, I would be trundled along to the first house at the Coliseum. It didn't matter what the film, or what the weather, there we were in the same balcony seats.

I have vague memories of seeing the black and white versions of 'Ben Hur', Rider Haggard's 'She' or Frank Buck's 'Bring 'em Back Alive' films showing how he trapped animals for the world's zoos. Jimmy Cagney and Edward G Robinson regularly shot each other to pieces, Greta Garbo gave us long, lingering glances and Harold Lloyd defied death on some skyscraper. As for the Tarzan films, I lapped them up, even though emulating Johnny Weismuller's cry gave me a sore throat for weeks.

Such films were incidentals, the real highlight of my film diet was the children's matinee. Every Saturday afternoon, a howling mass of young monsters would converge on the Coliseum. I was always given 3d to go in the balcony with the upper class hooligans, but occasionally, would blow a penny of this on sweets, and have to get a 2d seat downstairs. I never sank so low as to sit in the neck-and-eye-straining front rows which cost only a penny.

The great advantage of sitting up in the balcony was not because the kids were more refined, but simply it was an excellent vantage point from which one could hurl apple cores, toffee papers, orange peel and other missiles down on the lesser fry below. Throwing them back up again was much harder. One summer, saw oranges selling for four a penny! That was a really cheap source of ammunition.

Alongside all this innocent childish revelry, one could watch the cinematic entertainment which usually consisted of an assortment of 'shorts'. Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, Charlie Chase, maybe a Laurel and Hardy, and a cartoon or two. Some of these films were produced by a company titled, 'Educational Films'. I never did work out where the education crept in, unless it taught how to lose one's trousers in some perfectly innocent manner, or the best way to escape a mob of pursuers.

Virtually all cinemas had a kid's matinee, cinema brand loyalty was ensured by concluding the afternoon's performance with an episode of a serial. Each episode would finish with the hero or heroine trapped in some perilous position. Perhaps lashed to a railway line as the express thundered nearer and nearer, maybe in a plane as it crashed into a hillside, or trapped inside a building as it was blown sky-high. Naturally we always came back the following week to find out what happened. This, despite the regular cheating which showed the train had been diverted to a neighbouring line, the hero parachuting out just before the crash, or leaving the building by the back door prior to the explosion.

My favourite serials were those with a science fictional element. The earliest I ever saw was the 'The Master Mystery' which featured that great escapologist, Harry Houdini. I watched enthralled as week after week, Houdini was trapped by the villains, then tied, chained, buried or imprisoned in some way designed to render him slightly dead by the following week. Sometimes he would be tied to a large black bomb with a slowly burning fuse, on other occasions, he was often nailed inside a packing case before being dumped in the river. A procedure which at least made for cleaner films.

Like all such heroes, he must have been a bit weak in the head, to have been trapped so regularly. The baddies were equally stupid for not shooting him there and then when they had the chance. During these activities, we would all shout ourselves hoarse, "Look out behind!", in a vain attempt to warn Harry of the danger creeping up on him. He never took a bit of notice - maybe he was a bit deaf. Although we didn't realise it at the time, Houdini's escapes were done live before the camera, without resort to trickery or any of the standard, "After Harry had escaped from the pit of man-eating snails..." Just imagine, one week he might NOT have escaped the mechanical man.

The serial's SF content came in the form of a robot called 'Q'. This was operated by a bunch of evil gangsters. Time after time, Houdini evaded its claws or managed to free himself from the imprisoning ropes, chains, or locked safes. Each week, as the robot closed in on Harry, the dreaded words rolled up on the screen. "Will our hero be killed? Come back next week for a further gripping instalment." Up came the lights and we would fight our way out to stalk home, stiff-legged and robotic as we emulated the REAL star of the film.

If one robot was good, imagine the effect on my tender young mind of seeing scads of the things wandering jerkily around the place. That was in 'The Phantom Empire'. Throw in an underground city, futuristic buildings and strange machinery and you might think it the cat's whiskers for any SF minded youngster. It was, apart from one very big fly in the ointment. The serial featured baby-faced Gene Autry, a singing cowboy who never got near a cow or into nasty fist fights. At the drop of a stetson, he would grab his guitar and hold up the action for five minutes. Mascot Films had the crafty idea of attracting addicts of Westerns and musicals. Then, by throwing in the robots and masked riders, they could also hook the mystery and SF buffs.

The plot was (fairly) simple. Gene Autry ran the 'dude' Radio Ranch which happened to have been built on the land above a secret underground city. His contract called for him to put out a regular radio program which involved singing to his guests (poor blighters). The inhabitants of the city spent all their time trying to stop Autry getting to the microphone to sing, (an aim I fully supported), so that he would lose the radio contract, go bankrupt and move elsewhere.

Each episode followed the formula...

1. Autry would escape from last week's peril.
2. The Masked Riders would emerge from their secret trap door, wreak some naughtiness and charge back again.
3. Several quick shots of the futuristic city with robots creaking arthritically about.
4. Autry would sing, get trapped, and about to be mishandled by a robot.

Each week's ending had some such sequence as seeing Autry knocked unconscious, then dumped on a conveyor belt taking him under a robot's welding torch. As it descended to give him a warm welcome up would come 'The End' titles followed by, "Will our hero escape? Don't miss next week's thrilling episode!" Naturally, we came - only to see that Autry had awakened during the week and had jumped off the moving belt before he got spot welded.. Just once, why couldn't they have let the robot succeed?

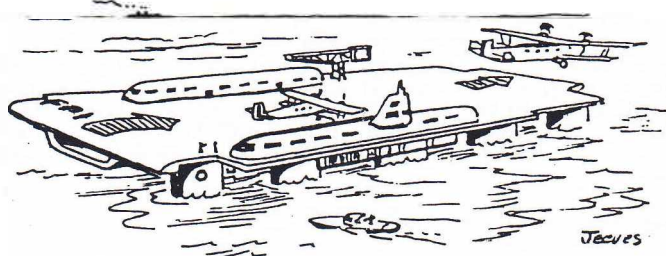
Then there was Flash Gordon, the college boy hero who zoomed off to the planet Mongo along with Professor Zarkov and the nubile Dale Arden whose acting ability was even worse than Buster Crabbe who played Flash - but at least she had much nicer legs. Their aim was to foil the nasty plans of the evil Emperor Ming, who lorded over everything from his Flying City. We got to see the wing-men, the clay-men, some very strange robots and Ming's daughter Azura who had the hots for Flash. Eventually, all Ming's schemes were foiled, but I must admit he had one or two good ideas - such as disintegrating Flash, or administering a fate worse than death to Dale. At least Ming had the right idea, Flash never even gave her a kiss, no mushy s-x was ever allowed to corrupt the young audience.



Every so often a model rocket plane spluttered slowly along. It was always over the same bit of terrain as it did its unbanked turns. Sparks from the tail dropped straight down, whilst the smoke went straight up. It didn't even convince us kids.

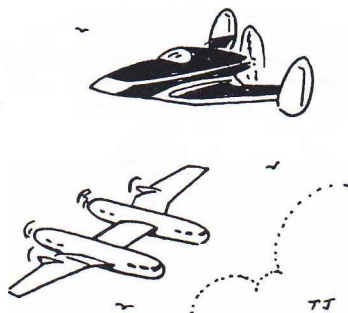
Not at the matinee, but at the main show, I recall seeing 'Der Tunnel' which Gaumont British re-filmed as 'The Tunnel', Richard Dix was an engineer charged with burrowing his way to America beneath the Atlantic Ocean. (A Transatlantic Tunnel, Hurrah!) He also had problems, such as leaks, underwater volcanoes and the usual crop of baddies trying to sabotage the project.

The crafty Germans hadn't put all their eggs in one basket though. Conrad Veidt starred in 'FP.1' a title mercifully abbreviated from its full German version of 'FP.1 Antwortet Nicht' which I gather means 'FP.1 Doesn't Answer'. FP.1 was a floating platform tethered



in Mid-Atlantic so that aircraft could land and refuel on their way across. Shipping magnates wanted the scheme to fail, so they hired a load of baddies to scuttle the platform by opening the sea-cocks thus letting in the sea and allowing it to sink. I never did work out why the builders were so daft as to put sea-cocks on the thing in the first place.

In 'Death Takes A Holiday' the man with the scythe sneaked off for a day, leaving the world to get along without his activities. Jockeys escaped unharmed from beneath falling horses, horrendous accidents failed to kill anyone and a man who fell off the Eiffel Tower didn't even need an aspirin



The greatest SF film of that era was undoubtedly Korda's 'Things To Come'. Though reputedly based on the H.G.Wells book, it had no discernible connection. After a devastating war, 'The Boss' is trying to rebuild a barbaric dictatorship to continue fighting further battles. John Cabal (Raymond Massey) arrives in a futuristic aircraft and wearing a weird space helmet which at first makes you think an alien has arrived. He is followed by the giant bombers of a peace organisation called 'Wings Over The World'. They drop anaesthetic gas

bombs, free the Boss's subjects and off everyone goes to rebuild a brave new hi-tech world. There is dysentery in the ranks when a bloke called Theotocopopolus stirs up contention over the 'Space Gun', a colossal cannon designed to fire a capsule around the Moon. The story culminates with an uplifting speech by Massey as the two young space travellers head outwards. A stirring answer to the ever-present malcontents - who are always ready to accept improvements in social life, housing, food, medicare, entertainment, travel and so on - but who oppose anything they don't understand. Cabal points out that mankind can either stagnate and decay or go forward to new discoveries. As he and his old friend observe the vast expanse of stars, his gesture includes them as he concludes, "Which shall it be, Passworthy? Which shall it be?"

Great stuff, even for a teenager.

by Penelope Fandergaste

Thank goodness that's over. The Millennium. All those fancy hats and the drunken yelling and shouting. I should learn that they give me a headache. I should learn to quieten down.

Yes, it's over. All that hype about computers not being able to cope and the end of the world being even more than its usual nigh.

And those polls! Those endless mindless polls. Who has had the greatest effect on mankind during the past millennium? Which footballer has earned the most money in the past millennium? Which has been the most effective submarine? Which herd of cows has ben most responsible for the most BSE? The polls have gone on and on.

One poll even named Harrison Ford as the best film actor of all time. Not only during the past millennium, by of *all time*. Though, to come to think of it, it's the same thing, really.

I ask you! Harrison Ford. I always thought that film actors were manoeuvred around the set by directors. Wasn't it James Cagney who advised, Hit your marks, say your lines, and go home? A *great* film actor adds something intangible over and above those director's... er... directions. Harrison Ford! As bland and as one dimensional, one expressed as they come. Heavens! How can they have overlooked Charles Laughton who was born, incidentally, just down the road from the ERG editorial offices? What about John Barrymore, Fredric March, Paul Muni, Fatty Arbuckle...?

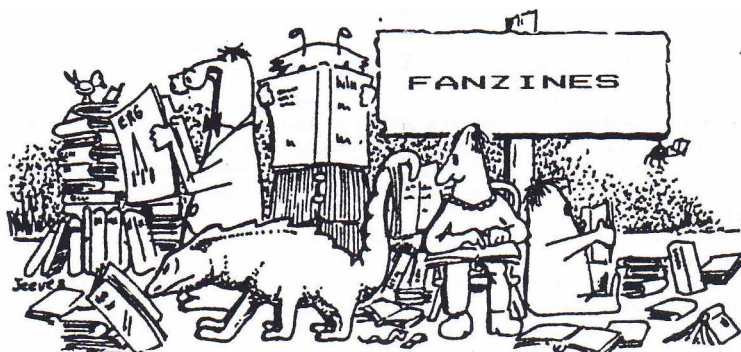
Another film poll threw up... I use the words with malice aforethought... the most memorable lines in films during the past fifty years. Far better than looking back over a millennium. I can handle *small* numbers. Ask my bank manager.

This poll came up with quotes such as "Even a monkey, brought up in the right surroundings, can learn the meaning of decency," and "I want him to know the sneaky, subtle, important reason he was born a human -- and not a chair." I'll give a prize... a whole eightpence... to anyone who can identify from which films those two mega-quotes came before reading the next sentence. Too late... they came from *Bedtime with Bonzo* and *A Thousand Clowns* respectively and spoken, equally respectively, by our old friend, Ronald Reagan, the best film actor turned U.S. President during the past millennium, and Jason Robards. Yes, the same Jason Robards who could knock the acting spots off Harrison Ford any day of the week.

It's a pity that this poll to determine the most memorable lines didn't stretch back a little further into the backlog of films, usually those doled out on Channel Four of an afternoon or thrown at us in waves as special "seasons" which feature one particular actor and are spread out sometimes over an entire five-day period.

Who can forget "Made it, Ma. Top of the world," in *White Heat*, "Nine dollars and forty cents. It's an outrage. If I were you, I wouldn't pay it," in *A Night at the Opera*, "Holy Mother of Mercy, is this the end of Rico?" in *Little Caesar*, "Don't let's ask for the moon, we have the stars," in... handkies out... *Now, Voyager*, or " " in *City Lights*? (Sorry, I couldn't resist that last one).

It's all academic, anyway. Who cares? Who really cares? Not me. Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn.



SHIPYARD BLUES 2000 From John Owen, 4 Highfield Close, Newport Pagnell MK16 9AZ 28 ERG-sized pages, a nicely produced fanzine with a lovely cover by Alan Hunter, comment on Chechyna, Gary Glitter, an article on Stanislaw Lem and a lengthier one on Babylon 5. Rather s&c but good reading. No rates, but I assume 'the usual' applies.

CHALLENGER 10 A massive 102 pages from Guy H.Lillian, PO Box 53092, New Orleans, LA 70153-3092, USA. Striking cover, excellent interior artwork (especially that by Mayhew). A variety of articles, several commenting on High School shootings, Homesickness, Unusual painting, Adolescence, Conphotos, Gorillas, Marital trouble, hefty LOC and Fanzine pages and other items. Good 'un, get it for Contrib, trade, letter or \$6.00

THE KNARLEY KNEWS 22 pages from Henry Welch, 1525 16th Ave., Grafton, WI 53034-2017, USA. Amusing cover, plenty of good art, reports on Ditto Con, a trip to Israel, a jazz concert, death, discussion of Clarke's 'mystic' fiction, fanzine reviews and LOCs (It's a bit hard to sort out LOCer remarks from Ed's comments) Get it for the usual and enjoy.

VISIONS OF PARADISE.83 from Robert M.Sabella, 24 Cedar Manor Ct., Budd Lake, NJ07828, USA. 34 pages of variety behind a striking cover. A personal diary, Letters From Tibet, comment on books, pop music, comment on libraries, more books, humour. LOCs are covered in a separate 12 page fanzine, 'Halcyon Days'. Nice, easy reading, get the lot for 'the usual'.

STET.9, or The Old Fan's 2000 Almanac from Dick & Leah Zeldes Smith. A superb and lovely production, 90 pages, wrap round card covers and a terrific variety of goodies. Assorted calendar days with birthdates, multi colour work, headings and illos etc. Con dates, TAFF AND DUFF names sites and dates was another goodie. Hugo and other awards, a fanspeak glossary, a fannish zodiac and tons more. Heck, it's even perforated so you can hang it on the wall as a calendar. A terrific, issue which will go into fannish archives.

VANAMONDE comes from John Hertz, 236 S. Coronado St., # 409, Los Angeles, CA 90057, USA. It's a one sheet apazine (but John sends me several issues at a time) covering all sorts of comment, so if your into apas or just want to talk, give it a try.

I usually avoid religion and politics when chuntering, but I wonder if anyone else out there feels that England (not Britain - I don't think the Britain I knew exists any more) is becoming an oligarchy, rather than a democracy? I think it stems from the Thatcher days, when although there was an opposition it didn't seem to be very effective; now there is no opposition and we seem to work under a "rule by decree and press release" system. With, of course, a lot of external "guidance" from the Bureacracy of Brussels. Why can't avoirdupois and metric be used concurrently? Personally I don't find any real problem in mixing the systems in weights, and will happily switch from one to the other - or use both at the same time. But forcing people who for all or most of their lives have been used to only one system to use another doesn't seem democratic to me. In paper sizes, as I have mentioned elsewhere, I find I can't vizualise the size of some book which is quoted in millimeters. Page sizes in inches, or A4 and B6, or sm8vo and Cr4to mean something to me, but apart from knowing that the height is going to be greater than the width I find figures like 195 x 120mm don't really mean much to me. Until I take hold of a ruler, or do a mental conversion. Oh, all is not lost, I do know that something about 178x110mm is going to be "A" format. But I have to think about it. Whereas if you tell me it is sm8vo or 7" high or "A" format I know it will fit on the shelves along with all the other mass-market paperbacks. But I do rather object to the "metric-correct" attitude of some folk. As I understand it there is an overlap period where the "metric" measure and price must be stressed, but it is permissable (free country!) to display the alternative weight/price also, but in smaller type/chalkmark. A week or so ago I wandered into a local upmarket greengrocer/fruiterer to get some bananas (the ones in the supermarket were a bit yuk) with some other stuff, and when I was being served I said "Oh, and let me have a cupla pounds of spuds, as well". The hoity-toity twit doing the serving says, loudly: "I am sorry, sir, we have to sell metric, now" in that sort of voice the army used to call "insolent". So I just looked even more dim-witted than I assume he thought I was, said "Sorry, I don't want any of those", and walked out. Stopped at the Co-op's Rainbow store on the way out of town and bought my bananas and other stuff (cheaper, too). Childish, perhaps, but occasionally we old fogies have to stamp on toes before we get trampled.

Going back a couple of issues, I imagine that one of the reasons for the widespread American s-f is economic; reprint rights frequently can be obtained cheaply; printruns in the US usually far exceed anything that any single other country can attempt; British print runs are usually less than American by a healthy chunk, and at least British publishers can expect to sell a percentage to other English speaking markets. Most non-English speaking countries can only afford small print runs, smaller sales and markets, hence less to spend. Germany currently supports two sf mags; and a number of original novels; Poland does the same; I don't know the position elsewhere (LOCUS a few issues back had a survey, tho) but my friends tell me that there is a lot of quite good to excellent publishing on the web these days. I pulled down a few pages from *Fantastycznie!* to see if I could figure out any of it (I'm trying to learn a little Polish; I should be able to order a beer or two by about 2011). Look it up on <http://www.magazyn.pl/sf/> - another reason is perhaps that the "fans" feel more at home (in the fannish not the national sense) in the language that brought so many of them into fandom. The language of *Star Trek*. Or perhaps I should say "languages" - any day now I expect to see a desk at an airport that says "Klingon spoken here"! May be other reasons also, Gene, but perhaps it is just inertia?

Britain - to be precise, Scotland - has a new science fiction magazine: SPECTRUM, edited and published in Aberdeen. This is, I think, the second original sf mag to appear in Scotland. And NEBULA was a lifetime ago. KFS

A MOVING MEAL

By January 2nd, 2000, Val and I had fully recovered from the New Year debauchery of nuts, chocolates, sandwiches and copious draughts of lemonade. We felt ready for everything, so at the crack of 10.30 am, we piled into the car, donned sunglasses - it was a brilliantly sunny day - and drove into Scarborough. We parked the car and climbed aboard the waiting luxury coach which was to take us on a scenic outing.

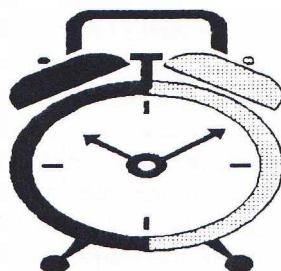
Promptly on the stroke of eleven, the coach pulled away and we began the run to Pickering. We had done this trip scores of times in the car, but now seated high up, at the front of the coach, we were able to see things which we normally missed. Pools and fountains in gardens, pigs rummaging around, ducks floating in flooded fields, ancient church porches and more. We passed through Thornton le Dale (don't ask where the 'le' bit comes from), admired their festive decorations, spotted a new bookshop to be visited and sailed on to Pickering, home base of the North Yorkshire Moors Railway.

Leaving the coach, we wandered into the railway station, sampled the souvenir shop, then watched as our engine steamed its majestic way up to the platform. The festively decorated coaches were brilliantly lit to display the dining tables laid out with cutlery, glassware, crackers and all the trimmings for a New Year nosh-up. We climbed aboard, located our reserved seats and placed orders for drinks. At 12-20, the guard blew his whistle and we pulled our crackers as the train moved smoothly out of the station. It's been a good few years since I last travelled on a steam train, but never have I known such smooth starting and stopping as we had on that NYM run. Off we steamed through the Levisham Forest and onto the Moors. The scenery was superb, not even the Scottish glens can hold a candle to the Yorkshire moors on a sunny day, and here we were steaming our way through the heart of them. Our meal began with an excellent prawn cocktail, and we were just making our first stop at one of the wayside halts to disembark a bunch of hikers as the minestrone soup was served, piping hot and accompanied by delicious rolls and butter. With this consumed it was time to tuck into roast turkey with all the trimmings. By the time we had put this lot away, the train was pulling into its terminus at Grosmont. Here we had a twenty-minute wait before starting the return journey. Leg-stretching was in order, then it was back aboard for more of the superb dining service for the serving of dessert. Val and I opted for 'Cook's Mountain', Chocolate icecream, topped with real cream and studded with nuts and raisins. To finish off, along came coffee, accompanied by a dish of fruit and chocolates. What more could one want?

Then all we had to do was sit and admire the beautiful scenery as we headed back home after a memorable and highly pleasant outing. Someday, we must do it again.

IT'S 2000: SO WHAT?

By James Verran



What is so special about the year 2000? Apart from marking another circuit of our planet around its star, nothing has changed. Of course there are a few problems, none of which would exist but for the human desire to regulate its short tenure of this small globe. Perhaps it is easier to place everything in perspective if we remember that dates are an invention of our species. Of all Earth's creatures, we alone chronicle the passage of time yet cannot agree on a uniform calendar. The major part of our existence is recorded in reverse chronology. Granted, the continuation of our societies depends upon forward planning, and although the lessons of our histories have made us what we are today, even in these enlightened times we still cling to old beliefs.

Modern calendars owe their very existence to our many religions. In medieval times religious fraternities enjoyed a monopoly in the scholarly pursuits, and as a result governed human societies, often by proxy through puppet monarchs.

Now I do not want to make light of Christian beliefs, but the predominant calendar in use throughout the Western world was drafted in 1582 by Pope Gregory XIII to correct the shortcomings of the earlier Julian calendar. Named for Julius Caesar, the Julian calendar had been in effect since 46BC. However, the Julian year was 11 minutes 14 seconds longer than the solar year and by Pope Gregory's time had an accumulated error of 10 days. The Pope compensated by dropping 10 days from October and devised our present hierarchy of leap years. This hierarchy dictates that years marking the century would only be leap years if divisible by 400; hence 1600 was a leap year, while 1700, 1800 and 1900 were not. However the Gregorian is still 26.3 seconds longer than the solar year, and if allowed to run unchecked until 4316 will have gained a whole day on the calendar as reckoned by the sun. The second was calibrated atomically in 1958, but anomalies in the Earth's rate of rotation made it necessary to occasionally add or subtract a leap second (introduced in 1972) to synchronise our clocks with astronomically regulated time.

The second dominant calendar is the Muslim calendar. Based on the Lunar year, it is 11 days shorter than the solar year. In AD 622 Muhammad fled from Mecca to Medina, his journey is known as the Hegira, and the Islamic calendar originates from that date. The Islamic year of 354 days results in the Islamic New Year moving backward through the seasons completely over a period of 32.5 years. So if you think Pope Gregory's leap years are confusing, contemplate the Islamic calendar which divides time into 30 year cycles. During each 30 year cycle, 19 years have the regular 354 days, while 11 years have an extra day each, with an extra leap day added to the Islamic month of Zulhijjah.

The Hebrew Year, also based on the Moon, normally consists of 12 months alternating between 30 and 29 days. Seven times during every 19 year period, an extra nine-day month (Veadar), is inserted between the months of Adar and Nisan, with Adar extended to 30 instead of 29 days.

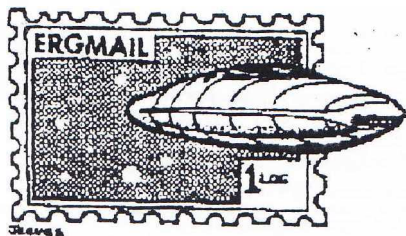
There is more. The Chinese calendar, accredited to the Emperor Huangdi in 2637 BX, designates years in cycles of 60. The year 2000 (year of the dragon) is the 17th. year in the 78th. cycle. Also based on the Moon, the Chinese year generally consists of 12 months of 29 or 30 days duration, with each month beginning at New Moon. Interestingly, the Chinese also add an extra month to a year, seven times during a 19 year period to maintain seasonal conformity. The Chinese year commences at the second New Moon following the start of the Northern Winter.

The Babylonians attempted to keep track of their dates by adding an extra month to their years at irregular intervals. However, their calendar soon crept out of sync, and despite alternating months of 29 and 30 days it was still inaccurate.

The Egyptians adopted a solar-based calendar after observing that the Dog Star, Sirius, reappeared in the pre-dawn Eastern sky after regular periods of absence. The annual flooding of the Nile, which usually followed soon after the reappearance of Sirius, gave them a basis for their 365 day calendar. Their year had 12 months, each of 30 days duration, with an extra five days added at the end of the year. However, they made no allowance for the extra quarter day and this error compounded until their calendar too, became out of sync. The earliest date known in the Egyptian calendar, according to Egyptologist J.H.Breasted, corresponds to our date of 4236 BC.

The Romans appear to have adopted the Greek calendar. Their earliest Roman calendar, circa 730 BC, supposedly introduced by Romulus, Rome's first ruler, had a 304 day year of 10 months. The Romans ignored the remaining 60 days which fell, in the middle of winter, until Numa Pombilius added January and February to make their year 355 days long. Numa also ordered a month of 22 or 23 days (Mercedinus) to be added every other year to make the calendar correspond approximately to the solar year. The last days of February, after the 23rd. or 24th., were moved the the end of Mercedinus.

Three new calendars, each with months and years beginning on the same day of the week, and having almost the same number of days have attracted some support. One, a thirteen-month calendar of four-week months, has an extra month, Sol, coming before July, with a year-day at the end of the year belonging to no week or month, and a leap year added before July 1 every four years. The World, and Perpetual Calendars, however would contain 12 months of 30 or 31 days but with the same year-day and leap-year-day arrangement as the Thirteen-month Year. Now if these new calendars were to begin at the Big Bang the current date would be undeniably astronomical.



LETTERS

Ron Bennett, 36 Harlow Park Cresc.,
Harrogate HG2 0AW

Your account of the little wooden ball with the cash and bill disappearing shooting along a cable brought back a memory of something I'd not thought about for about a

hundred and twenty years. I certainly never knew about this ball and cable arrangement, but I did remember... and wow! There it was, neatly laid out and analysed in the next paragraph, the old cylinder in the tube bit of magic. A couple of stores in Leeds boasted this wonder and I've *never* known how it worked. Your nostalgic note about aircraft model kits evoked the pungent smell of the dope one needed to paint the things. My father was quite a model buff, too. I remember particularly his building a balsa helicopter from, I think, *Modern Wonder*, which actually flew. Sadly its maiden journey was very brief, the excellent construction whizzing across the living room and smashing into the wall.

Alan Burns, 19 The Crescent, Kings Rd Sth., Wallsend, North Tyneside NE28 7RE

1 Kmph, you're dawdling man. I recall a story by Hal Clement where they found this abandoned spaceship with not a joint to be seen. Too late they discovered it was held together by jo-blocks. They applied the loosener and the ship fell to bits. [*That was 'Technical Error', but the ship didn't fall to bits, it went up in flames*] Ah yes, those mags of the thirties with Bill Barnes and his Lancer. In one tale I recall he was getting flogged by the villain and by blinking his eyes in morse he managed to tell his men where he was when the villain sent the tape to demand ransom. Then there was the evil German device of tiny planeds with monkeys in them that shot things that formed a gas cloud in the shape of an ape that when sucked into our engines blew the plane up.

Lloyd Penney, 1706-24 Eva Rd., Etobicoke, ON, CANADA M9C 2B2

Many thanks for issue 148. I think this is the first fanzine I've received dated 2000. Welcome to the future! The media is telling us that 2000 marks the beginning of the Millennium and the scientific and scholarly communities are telling us it's 2001. Myself, I'm going with 2001s so Yvonne and I will be having a Bogus Millennium's Eve Party, and a good chunk of the local fannish community will be there. G-8 and his Bottle Aces... sillier every time, Terry. Well done, and perhaps you should collect them together for a very sill volume. I had heard that a new PC may come your way courtesy of some fans who'd like to see ERG continue. [I gather it was originally intended for Vince Clarke, but on his sad death it was diverted to me. Naturally I'm delighted and hope to be able to thank all the fans concerned. But personally, I'd rather still have Vince with us. He was one of the last of the old guard.]

P.J.Boal, 4 Westfield Way, Wantage, Oxon OX12 7EW

I think we tend to forget that comics and films influenced our generation just as much as TV influences youngsters today. The comment that (according to US comics) there were no British flying aces in WW' reminded me of an American acquaintance who was supposedly intelligent and educated. He honestly believed that America stood alone against Japan and that the need to come and rescue Britain and Europe extended the conflict in the Pacific. He was unaware that the war had also been fought in the Middle East. I wonder sometimes if they have any salt in America that they fail to take a pinch of it with their films. I suspect that Americans would be mortally offended if I expressed a belief that their world was Prohibition Chicago or Beverly Hillbillies. Don't get angry, American readers, I know fans are better informed.

Brian Tawn, 27 Burdett Rd., Wisbech, Cambs PE13 2PR

Love the G-8 piece, Great fun. I used to enjoy scribbling heroic fantasy spoof s in the early 70's before I got entangled with Hawkwind. Great fun to read and great fun to write. "...by cruel chains which scratched their medals and badly creased their uniforms..." Oh magic! I have to agree about books that run to many sequels. I enjoyed Dune, but didn't even bother with sequels. I read all of the Rama books, but only the first one really does the business for me, and to a lesser extent, the second one. *I agree!* After that I didn't really care. So often the case with series. Nowadays, if I see a book is part of a set, I just ignore it.

Geoff Barker, 19 Oldfield Grove, Stannington, Sheffield S6 6DR

'Something In The Air' - goodness knows what a collection of some of those magazines would be worth today. Science and realism may not be their strongpoint, but they knew their market and gave the readers what they wanted. 'G-8 and His Bottle Aces Meet The Cucumber of Doom' - first rate stuff. I really enjoyed it, more please. Fanzines - some lovely zines, I'd better get more IRC's and another handful of US dollars. You always find something to tempt me to write off for a sample copy. Well done!. 'Waste Not, Want Not', very interesting. Perhaps today's children have it too easy.

ROGER WADDINGTON, 4 COMMERCIAL ST., NORTON, MALTON, N.YORKS YO17 9ES

TV holiday programmes, the ones where they claim the public service of showing us where we can go on our holidays; a more blatant example of freeloading on the licence payers' money, I've yet to see. They point out what hard work it is, but they're not filming 24 hours a day, or, at the end of the working day, going home to depressing reality. There seems no shortage of presenters queueing up for this onerous task. The Beeb compound their crime by inviting celebrities to share these jaunts. Perhaps with the intention that we're so starry-eyed, we'll want to do likewise; but the fact remains that these celebrities can surely afford to pay for their holidays themselves, without the excuse of 'inviting' a film crew to accompany them. What the Beeb's really doing is selling holidays; and I don't remember seeing that in their original charter, do you? [I have said much the same thing for many a long moon. It's a racket, especially as they seem to dwell on food, drink, water 'sports' and discos.]

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DALE SPEIRS, Box 6830, Calgary, Alberta, CANADA T2P 2E7 General Chuntering: "... as the sale of magazines is falling ..." I suspect I am not alone in discontinuing prozine purchases because the stories in them, regardless of their literary merits, are not SF. I found that I was only reading one or two stories in an issue; the rest lost me by the second paragraph; [I fully agree, I gave up on Analog in '93]

Waste not, want not: We learned never to throw anything away back on the farm because it would be an hour's drive to town just to get one bolt. Now we are city folk, we can nip out to a nearby store in minutes, so why bother keeping junk around? [How many city stores will sell you ONE bolt? Small 'one little item' traders have been forced out of city stores. Heck, you even buy batteries in packs of four.]

FRED SMITH, 15 Mansion House Gardens, Glasgow, G41 3DP I liked dDML particularly this time round being an old aviation fan myself and yes, I read all the mags you mention, particularly B-B. AIR TRAILS became a large size 'slick' eventually, devoted entirely to factual articles with a model section and featuring good quality photos. In fact it was the first magazine I ever saw to have a colour photo on the cover - pulp origins long forgotten. [Didn't ANAZINS have one or two photo covers in the late thirties?] I built Skybird models too, and then flying models. [Me too. My Hawker Hart biplane flew beautifully - 5 yards into a brick wall!]

C.W. (Ned) Brooks, 4817 Dean Lane, Lilburn GA, 30047-4720, USA

I heard something on the Net about you getting a new PC [Yep. Lovely little widget, upteen bells and whistles and I'm even on the Internet] Wish I could help you with the file conversion, but while I can write Word Perfect format and have 5.25" and 3.5" drives, I never heard of Wordwiset+, if it's compatible with WordStar. I still have that. [Sorry, as far as I know it isn't compatible with anything] Ken Lake might have something there - i everyone were required to have a gun it might do wonders for the overpopulation problem. [So would arsenic in the water supply]

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