



VIBRATOR 43

AUGUST 2017

JIM MOWATT DOES HELSINKI IN 2017

Hello, I'm the 43rd issue of the current incarnation of Vibrator the Dog-friendly fanzine from Harringey. Woof woof. I like to think we helped Steve Stiles to win his Hugo, but then we obviously didn't help enough to let him reclaim it the next year. Mea Culpa, but whatever the plural of that is. In case you didn't know Steve is our favourite fan artist here in Vibratorville and is currently recovering from having a large portion of one lung removed. We wish you well, Steve, and love you. This issue we are bringing you two pieces of reportage. Curt Phillips, a Virginian, reports his personal views on what happened in Charlottesville. This was published in an edited form in the Washington Post (or as Donald Trump calls it, fake news). I've included a letter from Jim Linwood as an enlightening follow up to racism and its effects in the UK.

Of course there is no denying Jim Mowatt's article on Helsinki constitutes the major elephant in the room here. Jim has a running blog and has matured a lot as a fanwriter since the days I studiously ignored an article he sent me on a minor London fringe Convention.

Quite separately I have made a promise to myself to stop rolling over on my views and sort of hum, haw, equivocating about potential arguments with people I might offend. From now on the gloves are off. I'm going to annoy the hell out of all of you. No, climate change is not totally an anthropomorphic phenomenon. And don't even get me started on Transgender issues.



John Purcell and Nina Horvath at Helsinki— photo by Jim Mowatt

CURT PHILLIPS ON CHARLOTTESVILLE

I used to be a defender of the Confederate flag. That's over now. It ended yesterday with the insanity that happened in Charlottesville, Virginia, my home state.

I cared about that flag because it represented a different time in America when Virginia chose to side with other southern states and go to war. Never mind the reasons for that decision now; the decision was made and Virginia called on its sons to defend her. And some of my ancestors answered that call, and fought for Virginia in the American Civil War. Some of them died in that war, and they died following that flag. We grow up honoring our ancestors here in the south, and so for that reason a lot of later day southerners have honored that flag - myself included.

But after what I saw yesterday in Charlottesville, I have to change my way of thinking about the Confederate flag. I have to accept now it has been stolen from our collective southern heritage by the worst elements of American society. The racists, the haters, the ignorant, and the fools. The KKK, those so-called "white supremacists", those modern day Nazis, and other fascists. They have taken the flag that my ancestors followed and perverted it for their own evil and immoral purposes. I saw a photo taken in Charlottesville yesterday of a man parading with a Confederate flag alongside another man holding a WWII era Nazi party flag. Damn them for that. If the Confederate flag *wasn't* a symbol of hatred before, it has become one now, because those low people have made it one. They have stained that flag beyond redemption in my lifetime, and have quite probably stained it forever. As long as I live, I will never forgive them for that.

Robert Edward Lee is a personal hero of mine. I admire and respect the man for many reasons, but none more important than for the way he conducted himself after the Civil War. He could very easily have taken to the mountains, gathered others around him, and waged a bloody and destructive guerilla war that would have fractured America even further than the Civil War itself had done. Instead he signed an honorable surrender at Appomattox, went home, and began doing all that he could to start rebuilding the country. He accepted a job at a small struggling Virginia school and spent the rest of his days working to educate young leaders who would themselves work to rebuild the state and the nation into a more just society. Robert E. Lee died doing that work, and I respect and honor him for it. The many statues and memorials honoring him in America are well deserved and serve to remind Americans that honor, duty, and working for justice as Lee did are worthy standards to live our own lives by.

But after the events of yesterday, if I could do so I would go to Charlottesville, knock that statue of my hero down with a sledge hammer, and throw the fragments into the sea. And

do you know who would stand right beside me and help me do it if he were alive today? Robert E. Lee himself, that's who. The same people who have stolen and disgraced the Confederate flag now shame and disgrace other memorials to our past, such as that statue of Lee in Charlottesville, and they do so apparently with a complete lack of understanding that their words and actions dishonor the man whose statue they rally around, and they disgrace everything that Lee stood for in his life.

Robert E. Lee himself would weep if he could see what those people have done in his name. As a Virginian I am weeping now at the shame of it.

Tear down those statues, take down and hide away those flags. We Americans have obviously failed to learn the lessons of our great and terrible Civil War. And as long as something like the events that happened yesterday in Charlottesville can still happen, we don't deserve to raise our eyes and see the image of a man like Robert E. Lee. He would be ashamed of what we have become.

JIM LINWOOD RESPONDED TO MY PIECE ABOUT 1967 BY POSTING THIS LETTER ABOUT ENGLISH RACE RIOTS

Your piece on the 1967 Newark Riots in America reminded me that the first race riots in the UK took place in my home town of Nottingham in 1958.

Many West Indians came to the city in the 50's to mostly work in the coal mines and on public transport. They were a friendly, likable group of people – to this jazz fan anyway. Until the riots the only two incidents of racism I knew about was when coloured guys were banned from Goodchilds' Jazz Record Shop on Arkwright Street in the Meadows area of the city (the owner was annoyed that they just wanted to listen and sing along to calypso records and not buy any) and when Big Bill Broonzy played in the city a hotel refused to accommodate him.

The riots took place on Saturday the 23rd of August in the St Ann's district and I was told by my workmates who lived in the area that it had started in a pub with a fight between teddy boys and a West Indian because he had a white girl friend. This escalated into several hours of violence between whites and blacks and several participants were taken to hospital. The local newspaper, the *Nottingham Evening Post*, reported that "the whole place was like a slaughterhouse."

The more well-known Notting Hill riots started in the following weekend.

The fascist leader, Oswald Mosley, was quick to capitalise on the riots and even came to Nottingham to rant in the Market Square. I was told by some Young Communists that they chased him up an alley and pulled his trousers off. London fan, Peter West, who was a refugee from Nazi Germany and married to Mike Moorcock's ex-girl friend, Sandra Hall, made a one-man stand against fascism in 1962. He disrupted a rally held by the Neo-Nazi

Colin Jordan in Trafalgar Square by leaping onto the plinth and grabbing Jordan's microphone. Peter was arrested by the police but found not guilty when appearing in court.

Following on from the recent events in Charlottesville and Trump's response, Bertolt Brecht might have said that although Hitler is dead "For though the world has stood up and stopped the bastard, *the bitch* that bore him is in *heat again*".

JIM MOWATT DOES HELSINKI 2017

Worldcon 75



The first day of the convention seemed characterised by the sight of lots of fans laying around looking exhausted. "How are you?" says Alison Scott. "Exhausted", I reply. She asks why and I tell her that I've been doing heavy duty touristing and now feel that I must retire to a dark room for several days to recover. There are vigorous nods of agreement around the Plokta Cabal occupied sofas that have been drawn up into a circle. We are in the fan

lounge which consists of quite a large number of chairs scattered about in random fashion. A large group of people are clustered in one corner where some kind of program event is taking place. Program seems to be the thing to do at this convention and lots of people seem to have the urge to attend this program thing. I'm told that attending program items is quite a challenge at this convention and only for the determined few. I'm not really feeling the urge to do so myself but have had some vague thoughts about possibly giving it a try at some point.

John Purcell joins us on the sofas and I introduce him around. John has been to a program item and I'm about to congratulate him on his achievement when I realise that this item being the opening ceremony then he was probably part of it and therefore had special privileges.

Touristing wasn't the only thing we had been throwing ourselves into. We had also been doing lots of lifting and shifting on the day before the convention. It was quite an experience rattling around in the large empty halls of the convention centre and gradually filling it up with Worldcon paraphernalia. We spent a lot of time putting chalk on floors and then trying to stop a convention centre employee from helpfully sweeping the chalk away. He seemed terrified by the idea of not sweeping and suggested that if we wanted something so outrageous as for him not to sweep then we would have to speak to his supervisor. I almost jumped for joy. Here was the opportunity to use a phrase that I'd wanted to use forever in a real live situation. OK, says I, "take me to your leader". My joy at being able to say that was slightly overshadowed by the fact that he didn't seem to understand what on earth I was talking about but thankfully he did stop rubbing out our chalk marks.

Carrie then returned from the Escape Artists meetup where she had gone to squee over Mur Lafferty and Alasdair Stuart. She wants to wander around and so I go a-wandering with her. We see tables and tables and tables. Some are surrounded by gamers and others have been bagged by dealers who are attempting to seduce you with their strange delights and embroidered dragons. Carrie is currently searching for a copy of Asimov's magazine as she's left her copy at home. The dealer room doesn't have anything as mundane as a science fiction short story magazine.

Carrie and I visit the food court which is manifestly devoid of anything approaching delights. I buy 40 centilitres of beer for 7 euros and try to convince myself that I am delighted with this. I also buy a sandwich that has something green in it. I asked what was contained in the sandwich. The person behind the counter looked confused for a while and eventually said chicken. So why was it green? Maybe it's best that I don't explore that thought any further.

Later we decide that dinner would be an awfully good idea but reckon that attempting to eat at the convention centre would be a thoroughly dismal experience. We nip back into Helsinki and eat at somewhere called Vapianos. You get a card when you enter and take it to one of the queues. Most are labelled pasta and risotto but there's one at the end that is

marked up as pizza. This is the one with no queue and the one that we desire. I have an urge for calzone and Carrie has a pizza in mind. We order and are given an electronic device. Sitting out in the main square we wait for our devices to buzz and flash at us and then collect the food. It is absolutely delicious and here in the heart of Helsinki with the weather being so obliging it is a most excellent dining experience. Upon leaving the restaurant we clock in our cards at the till and are mildly surprised that the bill is only mildly crippling. We have become accustomed to Helsinki emptying our wallets in a most rigorous fashion.

Back at the hotel we regroup ready to launch ourselves back at the convention centre. I decide that I shall push the boat out for fancy night attire and change my socks to a slightly cleaner version of the black socks that I've been wearing during the day. Moments (about a half hour) later we're back at the convention centre and tracking down the parties. The Finnish party is at one end of the hall and the New Zealand party at the other. It's all a bit hot and crowded and I'm not having a good time. We decide to try the Croatian party which is at some random place a couple of blocks away. I see John Purcell and try to explain where I think that this party will be. He reckons he will be along a little later. We begin our journey but are waylaid by a dodgy looking crew outside the front door of the Holiday Inn. It's Jim De Liscard, Meike, James Bacon, Emma King and Tobes. The subject of Eastercon naming has come up and Meike reminds folk that Jim came up with the perfect name for an Eastercon some years ago. It seems that he wanted to call it 'Cormorant'. Why you may ask? Because it's better than a Shag. Apparently the rest of the committee weren't as keen because they felt that it should have the word 'con' in the name somewhere. The conversation moved on to comparing Tobes' moustache to a trained slug balancing upon his upper lip and then James shouted the word whisky (or it might have been whiskey) and began ushering us toward his room. We escaped his clutches and continued toward the Croatian party.

It was all a bit strange wandering the streets trying to find this venue. The information on the newsletter gave the name of the place but no instructions on where it was or how to get there. I put it into Google and it changed the word to something else entirely but did point to a building only about a block away. It turned out to be a large wooden hut full of fans. We were just about to enter when Christina Lake, Doug Bell, Clarrie, Tim and Roman Orszanski all came out with the intent of going off to Helsinki to do some more drinking. This seemed an excellent idea so we joined the expedition. It led us to a bar which had a huge array of beers plus a couple of Fishlifters. I started working my way along the taps testing each beer in turn but then found myself a little too woozy to remember which ones I had already had. Roman ordered a sandwich that looked as big as a car wheel. Claire started to get very technical about how smoky or resonant her beers were. Doug reminisced with me about the time that he, I and Mike Meara were all sat in a corner at Novacon chatting about fanzines when we came up with the answer to everything. We knew how we could revitalise fanzines. We knew everything that was needed to once more make them the most exciting, vibrant and amazing thing in all of fandomania. Unfortunately we carried on

drinking and by the morning we couldn't remember anything of what we'd discussed. "Have you managed to remember any of that discussion yet?" says Doug. "Sorry" I reply "I've been drinking steadily for the past umpty years and I still can't recall what was said." Claire yawned and said it was time for bed and as if it was an episode of Bagpuss we all began yawning and muttering about shuffling off bedwards also.

The convention has begun...

Thursday



I think it's always useful to have an aim, a goal or even a mission. Carrie and I have two so far today. The first is to eat breakfast. We accomplish this, tucking away the salmon, herring, eggs, bacon and blueberry juice with practised ease.

Our next mission is to try to get to the convention for 1300 hrs so that we could see superfan fund delegate, John Purcell, do his thing at the fan funds panel. We cut it pretty fine and just for a moment wonder if we will experience the ongoing full program room problem. Then we remember that this is a fannish program item so therefore only we few, we happy few, will give a flying herring for it. Sure enough when we arrived there were just some Fishlifters, Harveys and Lennart Uhlin in the room. Later the panellists arrived, Ben Roimola (moderator), John Coxon (Taff 2011), John Purcell (Taff 2017), Nina Horvath (Taff 2015), Paul Weimer DUFF (2017) and Donna Maree Hanson (GUFF 2017). The panel was named GUFF, TAFF, NOFF - WTF? I would love to say that it was a lively, exciting panel full of vigorous cut and thrust and glorious insights into the world of fan funds. I reckon that because the participants were being so careful to include everyone else and talk about the

differences between the fan funds, we got rather a bland overview. All that I can hope is that if there was anyone whose interest was piqued by this panel then they will have sought out one of the panellists to find out more.

There are mighty queues outside the door when we leave. This puny fannish stuff is gone. Let the serious programming recommence.

Carrie is away to sort out her volunteering things. She is intending to spend some time helping out at the art show. I, meanwhile am drawn inexorably to the fan lounge. However, on my way there I am discovered by Mihaela Marja Perkovic. Mihaela was the 2013 GUFF delegate and is usually to be seen rounding up Croatians and making them do stuff. At this convention she and the rest of the Croatians are looking after the volunteer lounge keeping the volunteers fed and cared for. She spots me and Roman Orszanski and scoops us up on her way back to the volunteer corner. There is a fanzine and we have been marked down as people who might appreciate that sort of thing. Upon our journey she slips in a most casual (honest guv) mention of a fan that she is grooming to be a forthcoming Taff delegate. With this and someone from Poland that Nina is grooming then we have quite a bit of potential mainland Europe input to come along in future Taff races. We reach the volunteer lounge and the zine is thrust into our hands. The zine is called Parsek and is produced by SFera Science Fiction Society. They do a special English language version for every Worldcon. It looks a very high quality publication indeed. The front cover shows a heavily armoured hairy man astride a horse attempting to hit a green thing with a stick. I thank Marija and Mirko (Editor in absence) for the zine and continue my journey to the fan lounge. There is a gathering in the centre of the room consisting of Christina Lake, Doug Bell and Lennart Uhlin. These are mighty fans indeed as they can converse and remain standing at the same time. In awe of their talents I mimic them almost perfectly remaining completely erect. Many sensitive fannish faces come and go as we occupy the centre ground. Murray Moore and Mary Ellen join in and cause something of a disturbance when Murray discovers that his pen has no ink. He scribbles furiously on his piece of paper and manages to produce some vicious looking slash marks but not a hint of inky goodness.

I lend him my pen and he begins to copy down my words onto a piece of paper. He wrote, “a rhino has a large surface area,” and we all agree that this is true. It’s always nice when fans can come together on these difficult issues.

I’ve been standing and chatting for some time when Nina Horvath rocks up to say hello. She has a problem and lays it at my feet. “I’m hungry” she says. This seems a perfectly reasonable thing to be but I am at a loss as to my role in this scenario. It seems that she has been tasked with watching over the fan funds donations table in the fan lounge but now wishes to be elsewhere for a while. I agree to be eagle eyed fan while she is away.

Some time later I see a young woman bending over the donation table. I wonder across to check that she’s not doing anything nefarious with the donations and find that this is actually Nina who has returned and brought more donations. I call off the killer wallabies and attack slugs and let her continue with her mission.

The Jim Mowatt legs have now grown weary and so I seek out a sofa in the corner of the fan lounge. Within moments I am fortunate enough to have attracted the convivial company of Jim de Liscard and Meike. They bring frivolity, joy and tales of the splendid virtual reality device in the trader area. It sounds enticing so I pop along to give it a try.

I find a chap already plugged into the VR device. His eyes are covered by an HTC Vive headset and Bose earphones are providing the audio. He is sat absolutely still, his body rigid as he stares forward. He is tapped on the shoulder and urged to look around so that he can see more of the simulation. He does so and suddenly his head is jerking in every direction. Quite alarming to watch and I start to feel a little nervous about how I will react to the stimuli. I chat to the author of the books that the simulation is based upon (*The Clock World* - Billy O'Shea). He doesn't seem to be selling many of his books but he is very proud of his son for creating this remarkable thing. I have the headset strapped to my head and the earphones clamped to my ears. A voice gets all atmospheric at me telling me about the clockmakers world. A light appears and then a scene unfolds in every direction. I see that I am sat in a wooden throne-like chair. A window of light opens before me and I am propelled toward it. There are words in my ears but the visual stimuli make it difficult to focus upon what is being said. I am now on rails and plunging down toward the wooden deck of the ship. I clutch for the side of the chair but it doesn't exist and for a moment I think of what I look like out there in the real world of which I was once a part and to which I shall need to return with none of my dignity intact. My chair on wheels rises again amid airships, blazing lights and so many things. It's terrifying and exhilarating and I am most despondent when it ends. I feel like a small child wanting desperately to go around and do it again but sensible head prevails and after congratulating the creator I step back to let others have their turn. I rush back to our sofa gang to squee delightedly about the experience. Those who have already been through the VR experience welcome me as one of the converted. Those who have not peer at me as if looking through a monocle at some tiny Tasmanian Devil. Eventually we persuade Claire Brialey to try out the headset and despite her expectation of it bringing on a projectile vomiting episode she boldly goes and manages to keep most of her fluids inside of her body.

It's evening now and time to do the Helsinki shuffle. We go back downtown for dinner and some beers at an outdoor jazz club called Storyville. This sounds like quite a hassle but it's really not too difficult. There are many trains and they take only 4 minutes to get to Helsinki. Once you get there then you're within 5 minutes walk of so many really nice places to eat. Carrie and I were a little apprehensive of this arrangement of conference centre in one place and hotels a train ride away. We had been mentally scarred by the experience of the Bradford Eastercon in 2009 where it had been such a hassle to get from our hotel to the convention centre and so had decided that such an arrangement was just a ridiculous thing. This Worldcon has now changed that opinion.

We eat, enjoy the jazz and then return to the convention to find ourselves in a truly appalling party space. It is lots of people in a hot room with just one barman. This does not

a party make. We stay and chat for a while, meeting Yvette Keller who is helping out with the San Jose Worldcon, Kylie Ding, party organiser and Sarah Haddock. Carrie leaves me to fill her water bottle. Lilian Edwards pops out of the crowd to tell us that she's arrived but is tired and now and so going again. Sarah Haddock tells me the entire plot of "How To Train A Dragon". She tells me the plot in some considerable detail but, at the end of this Carrie still hasn't returned. This seems most peculiar. Sarah then goes to fill her water bottle but there is no Carrie in evidence. Eventually she does return to tell us that she was cornered by a Malcolm Hutchison who has much to tell about his exciting new move to Aberystwyth (is that the first time in the history of written language that anyone has used that phrase - mebbe so).

David Haddock has attempted to go to a late program item and didn't manage to get into the room. Determined to attempt something, he goes to the Speculative Poetry item instead. We've signed him up to a recovery programme and I expect he will have stopped quivering sometime around November.

We leave the convention to go to a bar called Helsinki Steam. It is absolutely gorgeous although they did charge us 3 Euros each to enter. A bit cheeky I thought but handed over the cash anyway. The music was a strange mixture of Goth and 70's 80's disco mixed with jazz versions of modern rock songs. All very bizarre. We drank cocktails, admired the decor and left. Across the precinct are Christina, Doug, Tim, Clarrie and several others all waving at us from what seems to have become the downtown con bar. They beckon us inside but we're exhausted and must away to bed.



Friday

Friday dawned bright and fair but I was not in sympatico with the day. I felt like a veil had been thrown over me. Neurons were firing but then they trudged along as if they were horses pulling wagons through deep snow. Halfway to a fully formed thought they would collapse in a drift snorting heavily. We made our way to the con and the cool air woke me up a little but once inside the convention centre the veil descended yet again.

Carrie, as usual, had a mission so I followed on in her wake. We bustled off to the volunteer lounge so that she could stash her posh frock for the evening. She had booked herself in for a night of ushering at the Hugo awards. I suppose it's one way of ensuring that you have a seat.

As Carrie was doing the stashing of the frock I spotted Kylie Ding sat on a sofa in the volunteer lounge sticking hundreds of pins into a hat. She has a lacy thing which she has attached all the way around with pins. There will then be ironing and then stitching. It seems a baffling thing to me but then the world is made of many parts and each must strut and something something on the stage (Shakespeare mangling a speciality). Kylie points to the headline on the newsletter: Finnish Trains To Strike Monday And Tuesday. "When do you think I'm travelling home?" I hazard a wild guess, "would it be Monday?" Surprisingly enough my guess is correct. It seems that the Finnish government have learned nothing from the disastrous rail privatisations elsewhere in Europe and have decided to plunge off this particular cliff themselves. The train drivers are attempting to point out that the government are a bunch of bloody idiots who should be first against the wall when the revolution comes.

Carrie completes her mission and so escorts me along to my next husbandly duty. I am to go to the dealer area so that I can express my opinion on earrings. I am taken there and do some pointing. "The blue ones," I say (although I have to admit that I actually called them emerald which may have confused things a little), "they're the ones." Carrie buys the blue ones and then gets so excited about them that she gets the green ones too.

I take Carrie along to the VR headset chap. She's done VR stuff before, occasionally getting the opportunity to demonstrate it to other folks at her place of work but I figure it's useful to get her programming checked. She emerges with shining eyes and excited expression. She is definitely one of the converted (the inexorable earth invasion continues).

Carrie then has to leave again as she is volunteering for art show. I wander over to the fan lounge and spot Flick, Mike Scott, Alison Scott and Jan Van t'Ent huddled around a computer. Hmm, says I. "This looks like a newsletter team to me." "Sssshhhh" they all reply in unison. It seems that I have inadvertently outed a guerilla publication. Sure enough only an hour or so later a scurrilous paper entity called 'Offpiste' is thrust into my hot sweaty little palm by Jan. "Tell no one where you got this" (oops).

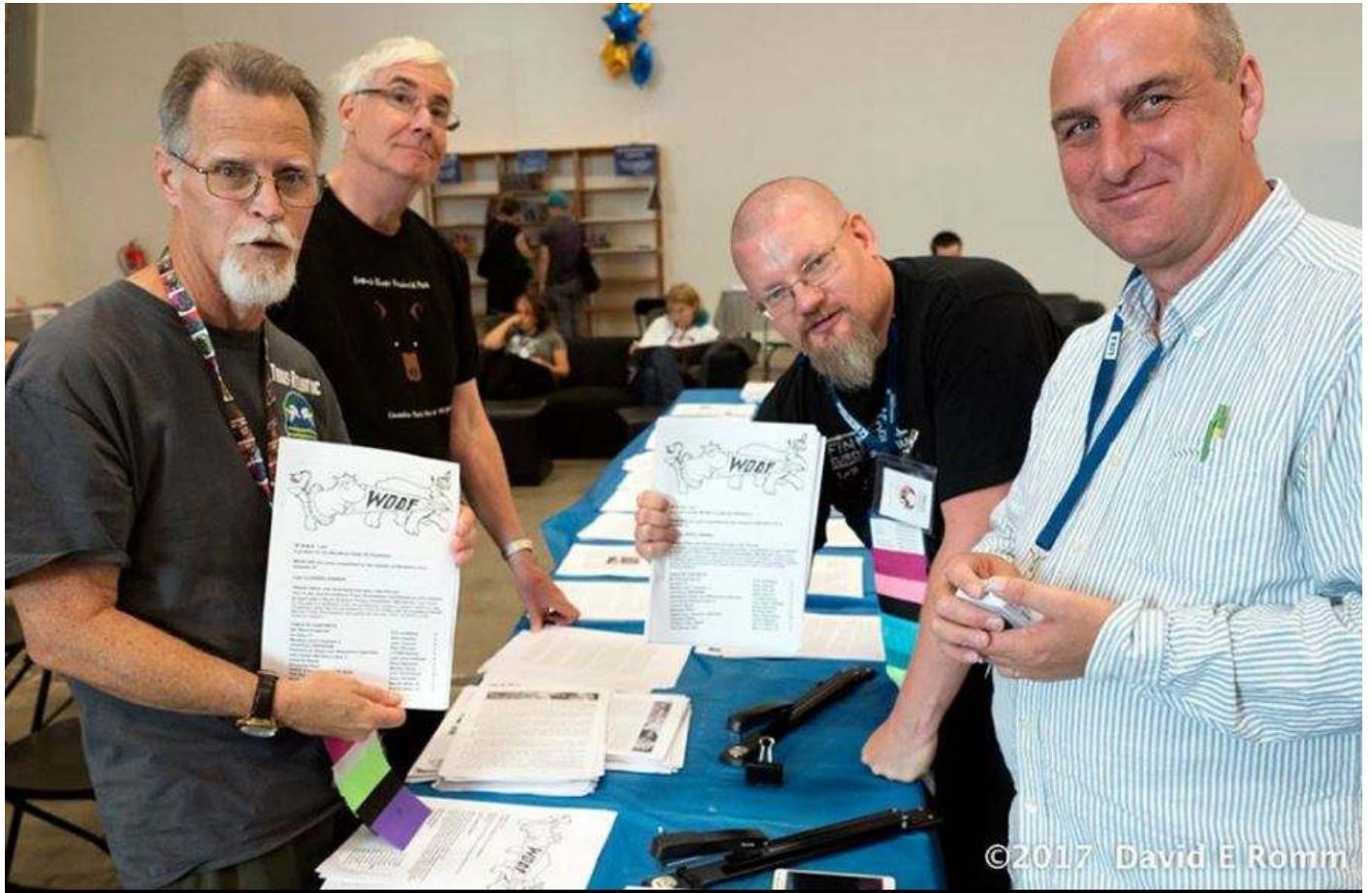
The public health warning on the footer reads:

This newsletter is not an official publication of Worldcon 75. It was put together in the fan lounge by a team of reprehensibly monolingual British newsletter geeks and printed by a Dutchman suffering from acute toner withdrawal. The only Finnish words that we know are 'kitos' and 'lonkerö' and 'sushiburrito'. We apologise for our sense of humour but we can't afford to get piste.

I get beer and hang around for a while doing a little chatting but mostly nursing my poor addled brain. I am finding it difficult to engage and so not particularly enjoying myself. Even attempting to return a friendly wave feels like I am burning through reserves that I don't have. Eventually I decide I must do something so that I don't sink into some kind of self imposed decline. I decide to go to A PROGRAM ITEM. There is a live radio show in room 203 and it sounds like it might be something that I would enjoy and so it is. There are jolly japes, Martians and it all ends with a Steinway pun. Just my sort of thing. Unfortunately I fall asleep several times. That gives me a useful clue that possibly what I require is to catch up on some sleep. Stopping only to buy sandwiches and beer at the 24 hour supermarket in Helsinki I return to my hotel room.

Once tucked up in bed I find it difficult to sleep. I drink my beer and browse around on the web to eventually find myself looking in on what's happening with the Hugos. The live streaming yet again isn't working. This has become a regular theme with Worldcons. Chris Garcia who is bouncing up and down with excitement in the chat stream is more than a little frustrated. There are plenty of people live tweeting the proceedings and I content myself with that and the various people on Facebook posting pictures. I am thrilled that John Purcell (Taff) and Donna Maree Hanson (GUFF) get to present the fanzine Hugo. I asked to present this at Lonestarcon and was told that I couldn't as Paul Cornell was presenting everything. Since then I've tried to do my part to ensure that current Taff delegates get to present this as it feels right that the fan fund winners should be included in the fan awards. I am a little conflicted tho' after seeing the people that are now winning the fan Hugos. They seem entirely disconnected from any fandom that I know and politicised in a way that seems unimportant to me. However this seems to be the way things are going. I suspect the fan funds will also end up going to those same groups of people so it will all synchronise yet again. This will be a shame for me and some of the people I associate with in fandom but I'm sure the various groups will all find their place and there will always be desperate fun to be had.

Saturday



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The WOOF gang: John Purcell, Murray Moore, Simo Suntila, Jim Mowatt
Photo courtesy of Baron Dave Romm

Thank goodness

I feel awake, alive and ready to go. Once more unto the con Jim or close the walls up with our fannish dead (what?). Yet again we are primed and focussed. Our aim this morning is to find the finest ice cream in all of Finland. Apparently this is also the oldest ice cream maker in Finland which is known as the Ice Cream Factory or if the translation on the web page is to be believed, Helsinki Cleaning Test. There are only 4 kiosks in Helsinki and they are all a bit off the beaten track. However we did beat a track and were rewarded with most excellent ice cream. Devouring said ice cream we boarded a bus for the convention and were told by the driver that ice creams weren't allowed but it was fine because he was a blind driver. So that's all right then.

We arrive at the con knowing there is fannish work to be done. The World Order Of Faneds apa is being collated so it's all hands in attendance until the work is done. Around

and around the desk we go, myself, Murray Moore and Simo Suntila, collecting pieces of paper and assembling them into a work of Woofy wonder. We hand over these piles to John Purcell and he positions them under a stapler and hits them with gusto (and the palm of his hand). Unfortunately his mighty strength does not prevail in this instance as there is a technical hitch. They are deep staplers but they have been filled with shallow staples. This doesn't cut the mustard but it probably does take the biscuit. It will not do. Carrie manages to wrangle a hole punch from the press desk and some cable ties (zip ties) from the art show. She punches the holes and fastens the paper together with the cable ties. Not exactly elegant but it worked.

I nip off to check that I can find the room for the fan fund auction and then stop for a beer. While quaffing a fine Czech lager I browse the forthcoming program items and notice that there is an update to the auction. The location has moved to the dance hall which is at the opposite end of the conference centre to where it was before. I am trapped in my current location as Finland has all manner of bizarre rules about where you can roam with your beer. I'm certainly not abandoning my beer (it cost 9 euros you know) so I call Carrie and ask her to pass on the message to folks that there has been a location change but the old location is still advertising the auction as being there. I've passed on the info. I shall enjoy the rest of my beer.

Some time later Carrie calls back and tells me that upon hearing the news much tearing out of hair had ensued (and many of the fans didn't have much to spare) and intense discussions over whether to ignore the change of venue on the app or go with the new location. New location is decided upon and someone is dispatched to alter the note on the door. The donations are shifted toward dance floor area and we begin to set up ready for the auction. Many people arrive and we realise that we will soon run out of chairs. Extra ones are sought from around the dance floor but we find that they have been thoughtfully cable-tied together so that people can't move them. We overcome this problem by recruiting a long line of people and lifting the entire row of chairs at once and carrying them over. Fannish ingenuity.

The auction is going well. A Doctor Who coat has sold for 200 Euro. John Purcell gets 30 Euros for one of his specially designed Taff t shirts. As time moves on and Jukka Halme slows things up somewhat telling his jokes (he's quite funny but it can be a bit frustrating when you have limited time for an auction and one of the auctioneers is grandstanding) I start to worry about Warhoon 28. It has been brought along by Ron Gemmell and was apparently Bob Shaw's copy. I worry whether the auctioneers will realise how valuable this item is or how likely it is that there are a room full of people out there staring at it urging them to pick it up.. I shuffle in my seat but eventually can't hold back any longer and leap forward to offer to auction it off. I am handed the microphone and immediately there was a 30 Euro bid from the front followed closely by 40. Bidding continued briskly up to 70 when it seemed to slow down with just a 5 dollar rise. Our man at the front obviously sensed that he was close and so hit with what he felt would be a closer at 100 Euros. The crowd gasped

and I looked over to Malcolm Hutchison at the back of the room. Would he answer? Did he have any more? "One" said Malcolm, "one, one". Our man at the front slumped back quite defeated. Malcolm was elated but then realised he would have to pay and so began a frantic scrabbling through his pockets while Janice Gelb waited on hand keeping a hold of the book until Malcolm had come up with the cash. I went to congratulate Malcolm and he told me that he was buying it for Tommy Ferguson. Apparently Tommy had authorised him to go up to 50 Euro. Ooops.

We had to dash away from the auction before the end as we were meeting Yvette, Mark, Dave and Sarah Haddock at a Lapland restaurant in Helsinki. There were reindeers waiting to be eaten and we didn't want to disappoint. We devoured mightily and by the end of the meal were pretty sure that Santa would have to find alternative methods of sleigh propulsion next Christmas. I think he may have some kind of deal going with Google and their self driving santa mobile so I'm sure all will be well as long as the GPS is working.

Outside the restaurant huge torrents of water poured from the sky. This didn't look like the sort of weather in which to take a pleasant stroll back to the station to return to the con so we retired to the Haddocks' hotel for drinks in the bar. Unfortunately the bar had decided it was the hottest nightspot in town. despite there not actually being any people in there. The music was cranked up to arms treaty levels and so we sat in the lobby of the hotel, still being assaulted by a particularly vicious sonic attack.

The hotel lobby provided a considerable amount of amusement being the playground of a couple of gentlemen who had been in the sauna but felt the need to pop outside for a smoke every 5 minutes. They were dressed only in dressing gowns and far too much flesh was being flashed at the hotel lobby crowd. They were continually grabbing at each other underneath their towelling robes as they roamed around, riding the lifts up and down and giggling like demented teenagers. Some women joined them a little later and the lift shenanigans were elevated to a whole new level, when they tried to impress the women by falling over, giggling inanely and dancing around the pot plants. The women looked very impressed or bored. It was difficult to tell which. Not even the towelling men were enough to keep us awake though and we had to retire to our room and recuperate for Sunday which was the last day of the con.

Sunday - Last Day

We always try to have some sort of aim to ensure that we do get up and out to the convention centre. Today we are aiming for a spot of cannibalism with Douglas Spencer; *Recycling The Redshirts* a talk about cooking, cannibalism, and Star Trek. We arrived shortly after the start of the talk but the room was completely full and we were turned away. Doug posted the powerpoint slides and doc in the web version of the con event app so we read it later and thoroughly enjoyed it. The talk involved going through the Star Trek episodes,

seeing how the redshirts died and figuring out whether they could still be safely recycled (eaten). Good family fun.

We stash our luggage in the volunteers lounge and Carrie goes to sign up for another shift helping out with art show. I go off to the fan lounge to do some fan lounging. I'm looking around when I get there to see if I can see other past Taff winners. I'd been trying to collect them together so we could get a photo. Unfortunately they're slippery buggers these Taff types and they kept moving about. You could often see their direction of travel but not so easily their exact position for long enough to get them to stay in one place. As a result I spectacularly failed to get a Taff photo. Maybe next opportunity will be in Dublin for the 2019 Worldcon. Perhaps I could try to organise it far enough in advance that we could pin them down to some sort of commitment. Maybe a fan fund party might be the thing.

While I was lounging Anna Raftery (current Taff administrator) accosted me requesting that I send her the card and book. I look confused for a while and so she repeated the request. Eventually it dawned upon me that she was talking about the Taff cheque book and with all this talk of cards was perhaps a little over optimistic about how advanced was our simple little Taff bank account. I promised to send the cheque book.

I spotted Claire Brialey and Mark Plummer heading off to a program item and so thumbed through the descriptions on the convention app, Grenadine. The program item seemed to be asking the question, who are we. As I have no idea who I am I thought this might be just the program item for me. Here's the description from the program:

Starting at Worldcon 71 and continuing through Worldcon 73, we have collected data on the demographic variables represented by those attending our conventions. As popular culture conventions continue to grow in popularity and as we strive to be a diverse and inclusive community of fans, it is important to rely on objective and empirically-based information to both understand who we are and what purposes Worldcon fulfills for its attendees.

I sit down in the very large room and Doug Bell comes to join me. He has recently done a Masters on this data gathering stuff so I find myself fortunate enough to have my very own marketing and data collecting expert on hand. This comes in very handy when terms such as 'standard deviation' (not as interesting as it sounds) come up. Our speaker had been trying to find something that would interest her students. Every year she had to spend far too much time trying to cajole them into actually collecting some data for their end of year reports. This time she tried to find out what her students were interested in. It seems that all of them were interested in the San Diego Comic-Con. Knowing she didn't stand a chance of getting funding for them to go to Comic Con she looked around for something smaller and found the SF Worldcon which that year was in Chicago. It had many of the elements that the students found exciting about ComicCon and was coming to their home town, San Antonio the following year. Win all around. She got tickets for many of them to attend Lonestarcon and they set to work to collect data. The students designed cards to give out with QR codes leading to websites where people could fill out survey forms. There were lots

of fun prizes to encourage people to take part and there were high hopes that they would get a large number of responses. The students worked hard throughout the con handing out cards to 2500 SF fans. They felt that the people were engaged and reckoned they would get a response rate of about 70 per cent. The final number of people who filled out the surveys was 74. This was disappointing but they did manage to extract some conclusions from it. Worldcon attendees apparently quite enjoy reading books.

The students decided to try again the following year at Sasquan but this time they were going for the low tech option and would use paper and pencils. This boosted the response rate considerably and they came home with 273 completed surveys. They were still pretty sure that Worldcon attendees were book reading types. There was one question though that caused an audience member to effervesce ferociously. The survey asked for the principal reason that people attended the con and a list was shown on the slide which included things like meeting authors, getting autographs, meeting friends, costuming etc. Our mightily miffed audience member got up and demanded to know whether the people being surveyed were led by being given preprepared answers to choose from. Our speaker said that was correct and that they'd been trying to fine tune what possibilities they offered over the two they had done so far and also offered a blank space in which to put your own answer. Mrs I'm so bloody appalled that I could explode then told us all that she was personally responsible for making an undergraduate student cry over faulty data sets (why would you ever want to tell anyone that?). She then started off on a rant about introducing bias etc etc etc. Doug leaned over to me and said that although she had a point of sorts this little survey wasn't really anything to get so worked up about. It was really in a pre survey state where you investigate and find out how best to get the data that you need. Our speaker told Mrs incandescent with rage that she would be delighted to continue that discussion with her after the presentation. I'm not sure that I believed her.

Time keeps moving forward and it is soon time to leave. I start to say my farewells in the fan lounge but it takes much time. I give Christina a copy of my book and Spike asks for one too. Unfortunately I don't have another copy with me so can't offer her one. She also wants the Save The Rhino bag that I'm holding but it belongs to Carrie so I don't feel that I can offer it. All the while this conversation has been going on a very striking looking chap is beckoning quite forcefully at me. I ignore him for a while but eventually my curiosity is piqued. I go to see what he wants and he half rises to greet me and then collapses back on to his sofa. He has one good eye and the other looks quite angry as if has been ripped forcefully from its socket. He looks like the sort of chap who might lurch at you out of the shadows telling you that he has seen the end of the world and it is an angry cheese that feels it has been impugned by a TV chef and the whole world will boil in its cheesy blood. What he actually does tell me is almost as strange. He waves his arms about a bit and says that he saw me from over there and I was doing that thing over there and so he waved me over. All this I knew but felt it must go somewhere eventually so I hung on in there.

He then said:

If we shadows have offended,
Think but this, and all is mended,

By this stage I knew what it was and was praying that he didn't know the whole soliloquy.

That you have but slumber'd here
While these visions did appear.
And this weak and idle theme,
No more yielding but a dream,

At this stage I reckoned he probably did know the whole soliloquy so began to settle in for the duration.

Gentles, do not reprehend:
if you pardon, we will mend:
And, as I am an honest Puck,

Here he paused - hurrah thinks I. He's forgotten the rest. I shall congratulate him and run away.

If we have unearned luck
Now to 'scape the serpent's tongue,

Oh well - not too much longer to go now. Reckon I can make it til the end.

We will make amends ere long;
Else the Puck a liar call;
So, good night unto you all.
Give me your hands, if we be friends,
And Robin shall restore amends.

Phew!

I reach forward to shake his hand and so he decides that he can't shake my hand from a reclining position. Poor chap is not too steady on his pins so getting to his feet is a major operation. He eventually completes this just as I'm beginning to wonder how long it's going to take us to get to the airport. However, I think it is the first time that someone has recited that soliloquy just for me so I will feel grateful and move on.

Returning to Spike I find that she's offered a 20 Euro donation to Save The Rhino for our tote bag and Carrie has accepted. It is then that I remember that Spike was one of my sponsors when I ran the London marathon raising money for Save The Rhino. I recall that she donated a jaw dropping amount but I can't remember exactly how much. We talk about her love of rhinos for a while but we must be moving on. Gate 52 at Helsinki airport awaits as do 2 cats in Cambridge that are suffering severe cuddle deficit.

We got home and were molested by one cat who insisted upon non stop cuddles for the next 24 hours and ignored by the other who felt that she had been dreadfully wronged.

We also felt it a fitting epilogue to our Finnish adventures to go see the film 'Tom of Finland' at the Cambridge Picturehouse. I'd never considered before that someone must have created that muscles, leather and chains look in the gay community. There's a great line in the movie when the artist goes to California and someone says to him, "All those lost young men, you helped to give us an identity. You made us want to be beautiful."

■ Jim Mowatt



DAVID REDD

Thanks! You should have had some stamps by now, although not a crisp new £5 note (such objects quite welcome around here too, but they evaporate too quickly). Grateful for

Vib 42. “America the Damned” was excellent again, but did we miss a paragraph between July 12th and 15th? Anyway, your series gets closer to our own time as feared – I write in the aftermath of Charlottesville. Not enough has changed.

Joseph Nicholas’ memory of lost 1960s fields reminds me of H G Wells’ *The New Machiavelli* describing “woods invaded by building” and suchlike (Ch.1 sect.5). We loved Wells’ stories but we never took in his messages, did we?

That *Wild Geese* blooper clip Nic Farey remembers has stuck in my mind too. I saw it so long ago that bleeps made it almost incomprehensible.

Leigh Edmonds’ letter, like many hospital letters/conversations these days, makes my skin crawl at the gruesome details, not least the \$3,000/year health insurance. But I envy his printing arrangements, judging by his description of a simple click and out pops *Vibrator*. Not with *my hardware*, sir:

1. My antique Laserjet 1200 slows unbearably at any pdf longer than 1 page. *Vibrator* has 24 pages.
2. Switching to Canon MX495 I hit the modern Canon curse of printing the last page then the first, ruining my hand feed for double-sided.
3. Finally I master the booklet option, but no; comes modern Canon curse No. 2, the inevitable misfeed and jam. Double-sided wrecked again. [Fortunately, just then your paper *Vibrator* arrives in the post clean and readable and with all pages in the right order. Hallelujah!]

Come the Hugos, I’d vote for anything Paper First.

Thinking back to *The Wild Geese*, its blooper outtake was more fun than the actual film. So should we treasure the clip over *Wild Geese* itself? If we do, what actual films/movies should we nominate as treasures? Usually *Citizen Kane* gets the vote, but I’d rather send the future a more pleasurable choice: *The Producers* (from Holocaust to X-Factor, remember); or *Gregory’s Girl* (penguin in the wrong place); *High Society* (genuinely loving portrait of the highest our society got); or perhaps Chaplin’s *1 A.M.* (man trying to master technology). Hmm, too personal a list maybe? I suppose others would choose *Saving Private Ryan* or anything else with explosions.

However, in the current state of the world, musings about old films (or indeed about old Beatles albums) may be only rearranging the deckchairs on that ship. Especially after BBC4’s *Secrets of Silicon Valley* showed us USA venture capital backing “tech” parasite firms like Airbnb and Uber regardless of the fallout. Apparently we should all be very afraid. So, nothing new over in America the Damned just yet. Perhaps their Sixties garage-band ethos of thumping out “Season of the Witch” and attempting a third chord against all odds ultimately developed into garage-tech startups via hippy idealism? (“If Sgt. Pepper can

conquer the world in 5 minutes, so can we!” Or something.) Robert – is that how the history looks from inside the USA, I wonder?

A pity the UK never got more than crumbs out of the digital feast. Something not quite British about *trade*, you know? Too lower-class.

On that note, I apologise that I can’t enlighten you about Patrick O’Brien. You’d better have the servants read him for you. But I can wax nostalgic about Capt. W.E. Johns instead. His flying hero Biggles used planes not superpowers, so would be too boring for today’s youth, but his “Kings of Space” sf adventurer series declined into flashes of strangely modern we’re-all-doomed pessimism. *The Quest for the Perfect Planet* begins, “There are days when I feel depressed...” and Johns proceeds to spread his depression. The first chapter discusses possible ends of the Earth, mainly mankind wrecking the environment, before his professor called Brane and his heroes called King search space for a possible refuge. (They don’t find one.) In the somewhat misnamed sequel *Worlds of Wonder* the gloom-and-doom continues; its first chapter consists of old men’s talking heads moaning about the future:

“...obliteration... the end of civilisation... a war of races – white, black, brown, yellow. The seeds of hatred have been sown... overwhelming disaster... an infectious disease such as the Black Death... ice ages... earthquakes... man hasn’t hesitated to destroy anything... to all things he is the great enemy... if in the end man is himself destroyed it would be no more than justice... ”

Yet when the book closes and Professor Brane has failed to make an alien planet safe for its inhabitants (in fact probably making it more dangerous), he can say on coming home, “Ah well, life on earth could be worse...” Can’t imagine how, after that first chapter. A book to downsize real soon now.

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ROBERT LICHTMAN

What a marvelous cover on *Vibrator* #42! Sending a healthy dose of egoboo in the direction of Bill Burns for its creation – perhaps he’ll get some votes in the fan artist category in the next FAAn awards.

You write that we could “like it or lump it,” and add, “I’m not sure what lumping it entails. It’s an old English colloquial saying, you understand.” Indeed it is, and the UK Phrase Finder is helpful in tracking it down – all the way back to the 16th century, when it meant “to look sulky or disagreeable” which is a perfect counterpoint to liking it.

In your account of the Newark riots of 1967, you make a wonderful comparison of the situation in the US – “riots in major cities practically every week” – to that in the UK: “All we had to worry about was whether we could be seen hanging out in Carnaby Street.” I was living in San Francisco in 1967, basking in the warmth of the Summer of Love, when all

one had to worry about was whether the acid was pure and was free love going to give one a social disease. There were demonstrations against the Vietnam war, but I don't recall any associated riots.

In Joseph Nicholas's letter he reveals that Darroll Pardoe, who I'd previously thought of as a sterling fan, was the likely perpetrator of removing sections of fanzines containing articles he liked and discarding the rest. I'm not sure I agree with Ted White's view that the removed article, losing its immediate context, "lowered its value even to the person who had retained it." In my own collecting of fanzines over the years, multiple copies of many fanzines have come my way. I routinely check for condition to see if the new arrival is better than the one I already have. Perhaps the most memorable instance of this in my experience was the first issue of Al Ashley's (yes, *that* Al Ashley!) *Nova*, published in November 1941. That issue contained a 3-page article, "Constructive Criticism," by Edward E. "Doc" Smith, in which he comments at length on an editorial by Ray Palmer in a recent *Amazing*. Palmer is lamenting that most of the readers' letters he receives are of the "kindergarten school," being only lists of what the writer liked or disliked with no insight as to why. Smith agrees, and says that as a writer he always hopes for more details from the letter writers about their proclamations of "love it" and/or "a real stinker." I hadn't noticed when the first copy came my way that this article had been neatly removed (neatly because at least the remover took out the staples and then restapled). So when a second copy turned up and I performed my inspection I was *very* happy that copy was complete – and passed on the incomplete one with a photocopy of the missing article to another fan.

Nic Farey opens his letter with a reference to the "so far generally ignored *Incompleat Register* FAAn awards voters' guide." I'll confess that I haven't given a second thought – and barely a first one – to that compilation since Nic, in his capacity as the FAAn awards administrator for next year's Corflu, announced its creation early this year. But my attention will certainly turn to it – as I suspect many others' will – next January when it comes time to cast votes for the best fanac of 2017. I'm both pleased and grateful that Nic has taken on the task, which surely must be fairly onerous even in these days of relatively few fanzines.

Gary Hubbard's letter was a delightful mini-"Cracked Eye," including some of the people he writes of in his periodic column currently gracing all too few issues of *Trap Door*. He brought up a bit of my childhood memories in his mention of \$39.95 paint jobs done by Earl Scheib. I never had any of my cars repainted, but the strident television commercials done by Mr. Scheib were a steady feature of my TV viewing in the '50s.

Later in his letter, I adored the typo "Edith Pilaf."

Like Leigh Edmonds, I also noticed that most of your clickbait in "Wither Fandom" (a ice typo on which I failed to comment) were about science fiction rather than fandom. I loved his concluding so tongue and cheekily that "Thus is demonstrated the close link between stf and fandom."

Also like him, my eyes glazed over Rob Jackson's detailed description of "how to turn a pdf of *Vibrator* into a genuine fanzine." Not receiving the A5 version of each issue (and I prefer the A4 version for better readability), there's no challenge to printing it out. The sole hitch is how to turn and reinsert the printed odd-numbered pages back into the printer's paper tray in order to have the even-numbered pages be in the correct order and not upside down. But I mastered that maneuver a dozen years ago when I first got the printer.

But it was shocking to read next about Leigh's breathing difficulties leading to the revelation of a blood clot in his lungs, followed by a long hospital stay, and thankfully the relief of learning that he's basically okay now and gets to take, presumably, blood thinning medications for the rest of his life.

In Nic's column, I was most fantisted by the news that part of his "knowledge" as a cabbie in Vegas now includes the customer service of taking rides to the nearest marijuana store. Are there a lot of them now dotting the desert landscape, Nic? I suppose that this will be a question for California taxi drivers come January 1st, when recreational legalization is set to take effect. I haven't seen any information yet about where stores will be located, but I wondered if the existing "head shops" will be able to be licensed to also sell the product. It would seem a logical fit and, if so, then one is conveniently located not far from here: Annapurna, located on Telegraph Avenue about three blocks from the UC Berkeley campus, and in business since 1969. (There had been head shops in Haight-Ashbury that in 1969 were much closer to where I lived then, in San Francisco, but those are all long gone while Annapurna soldiers on resolutely.) Back in the days when I smoked, my preference was a small hand-held pipe called the Protopipe. Google to have a look. Every now and then I would lose the little poker/cleaner (that also held everything in place) and would go to Annapurna to buy a replacement. Later, when I lived in Sonoma County and worked in Santa Rosa, an alternative source was a head shop called "The Mighty Quinn." Loved the name, but as a source for smoking paraphernalia Annapurna was far superior. It still exists, too, and these days has four locations in three counties – in Santa Rosa, Petaluma, San Rafael and Napa, the most upscale cities in the northern reaches of the Bay Area. They don't seem to carry the Protopipe these days. Their product line appears to run more to a dizzying array of glass bongs. And their website's appearance is much more restrained than Annapurna's, which to me says something about an underlying desire to appear "respectable." Check it out!

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PHILIP TURNER

Great cover picture for Vib 42. The gadget looks like the direct ancestor of the first computer I ever got my hands on, back in 1974.

Everywhere the Damned: Social injustice can be cured only by killing people, burning buildings and looting your local shops (or someone else's) in the correct ratio, which

continues to elude experimenters. But that doesn't stop them from trying to create a perfect world.

I was somewhat surprised [but not in the sense of in flagrante] to see two; count them, 2; contributions from me in the V42 letters section. I went back to my copy of V41 and there was my LoC about issue 40. Then I twigged. I have somehow slipped across to a parallel dimension where the LoC wasn't printed and I got shirty about it.

Here, I see that Mr. Trump is still president across the pond and earning his gold medal for setting off outrage junkies. But who's this weird guy called Corblimey (is it?) who has hijacked the Labour party away from the tainted Blairies?

The other surprise was seeing what I thought would be a suicide LoC in print. I had assumed that accepting the invitation to give my reaction to the Beatles and saying it was total non-appreciation would have evicted me from the mailing list. But the Graham Charnock in this parallel doesn't seem bothered by such crassness on the part of his readership. Stout fellow! (in the 'good egg' sense rather than the 'size of a house' sense)

I read a similar article to Taxi Nic's (although, rather more recently) about the link between doing Xwords and Codewords and retaining marbles. And then I got to thinking. If you're likely to end your days in an old folks' repository, watching your bank balance sinking at the rate of a grand a week, maybe it would be an idea to stop making the effort right now and let the marbles roll away so that the final decline takes place in a state of 'out of it' incomprehension.

"We're spending 5 days a year stuck in traffic jams", read the headline. As a non-motorist, I would like to say a big thank-yous to whoever is serving my 5 days.

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TALES OF A LAS VEGAS TAXI DRIVER by Nic Farey

THE MOMENT OF ECLIPSE

So I sez to the award-winning Aldiss enthusiast Charnock (G), "Look mate, this is the 'weekend' I usually write the column which has been fermenting in those two brain cells for the last several days, but this coming Saturday is the Mayweather v McGregor circus, which we imagine might create a couple of stories given the character of the followings of both men, so will it hurt if you don't get it until next week?"

"Early next week will be fine", he replies, "Not really thinking about it much since the Mrs is a bit Sheridan again."

Well, I don't do "early next week" or any fuckin week, as I've banged on about seemingly

forever; job vagaries and schedules dictates that I work to a principle we might dub "3F": Fanac Fursday and Friday. I consider all this while spending an inordinate amount of time attempting to coax the squirrels from their lair, and manfully ignoring the headache I get every time a storm front comes through and the humidity is up, also the observation that I have less than a full pack of smokes and 3 hours until the shop opens.

We typically expect stranger than usual trending to utterly bonkers behavior when there's a full moon, and possibly even more so at the moment of eclipse, which none of us saw in person since we ended up with cloud cover and a storm, not unexpected this time of year, it being monsoon season in The Meadows. We were compensated to some extent by having a gloriously clear double rainbow, though. The main observable departure from SoP is that Canadians have suddenly started tipping \$10, and, unrelated, a spate of \$40+ runouts is occurring. Even our ensmalled handivan driver Mogese (pronounced "McGeezy") got one, an occurrence about as unusual as the totality over Norf Merka itself.

The money seems to be worse than ever, though, despite Uber drivers shooting themselves in the dick on a regular basis. This last week I had one of the worst days ever, bad luck after bad luck, booking a miserable \$138 on ten rides. That translates to less than minimum wage for that particular 12-hour slog. Admittedly other days of the week played better, and I heard from several other drivers who usually book solid that none of them did much more on that particular day. Uber stories, though, oh how much you love them: a driver who also habituates one of my favored stands (Luxor North) told me he's taken a nice lady to the airport, with her telling him in no uncertain terms that she'd never, *ever* take an Uber again, after she'd got in the car the previous night and the driver started watching porn. I nicked an Uber ride the following day on the basis of the comment "Oh, well, good luck" when this young lady advised me that she was waiting for one of those fuckin pirates. It transpired that she'd taken several Uber rides during her stay, only one of which was satisfactory. The others included one driver who was unduly aggressive with a ton of unnecessary lane changes, and another "pool" ride where two other passengers in the free pickle were complaining that their evening was pretty much fucked up since they'd been in this car for an hour already. Of course, the company response is that these dodgy drivers will get poorly rated and end up getting "fired", which is not a massive consolation given that, as with the porn-watcher, you could get some greasy slob having an actual wank while he's taking you round the houses until he gets rated down to 0. Mind you, some people might like that. I've started being of a mind to ask the cheapskates waiting for Uber rides whether they've checked the sex offender registry.

Anyway, here's an observation I've been saving for filler (ahem). We're a city of many billboards, both static and variable (video screens). The name of the owner-operator company of said displays will be there on the lower edge, and one of them is "Crear". Because what's left of my mind works this way, I noted that, from a series of radio and TV ads for vocational training, that's a Merkan pronunciation of "career", notionally two syllables, but slurred into one. I don't see or hear those ads any more, possibly because I

eschew broadcast TV and radio (except for NPR in the latter category), and I might well observe that, ooh, values approaching fuckin no-one has anything like a "crear", you'll just count yourself lucky to have a job, despite the best efforts of certain previous administrations (which have improved things, though). I'm lucky enough to have a *job*, one which I've now plied for 2 1/2 years of continuous employment, 2 of them with Lucky Cab. Does that count as a "crear"? I dunno, did my years in time & motion, programming, construction amount to that? Obviously not, since I'm not doing any of those things any more, although the carpentry probably came closest. Who here, had a "crear"? (Blatant comment hook.)

But that's not even what engaged the brain cell, albeit it's a typical aside from the one member of the working class allowed access to these hallowed halls as court jester to the idle millionaires. What I laterally thought of was an equivalent slurring of an ostensibly two-syllable word into one, and the "English" English equivalent that immediately came to mind: "police", generally vocalized (in the various of my manors at least) as rhyming with "fleece". Then again, I recall that as being more self-identification ("I'm a pleeceman", 'The Sweeney' (qv)), mostly we called them "cozzers" (also 'The Sweeney' (qv)).

That in itself almost brings us back to "crear", since at one time to identify the blue boys as "cozzers" would identify you as at least a semi-professional (career) criminal, but back in the day when everyone was bent to some degree or another, and we'll await Grah's "Serious Crimes Squad the Damned" series with interest.

"Wot about that Mayweather fiasco, then?", asks the desperate-for-even-more-filler ed a week later. Notwithstanding opinions about what transpired in the ring, not a fiasco for the town or the cabs, only one actual discharge of a firearm on the strip that I know of. A special event crowd always ups the book, and the Saturday, Sunday and Monday were nicely busy days, and if you were lucky enough to get mostly McGregor supporters (generally decent to good tippers) rather than the Mayweather mob (mostly get the round-up to the next dollar, unless they're paying by card in which case you get 0) then you had the chance at a fair take-home. The fact that the arena itself didn't sell out (about 8,000 empty seats out of 22,000 capacity) was seemingly predicted by the apparent reduced presence of higher-end brasses from the coast who would normally mob the town. Instead we got a lot more low-rent options, who were probably trick-rolling the Irish lads if they judged them too langered to remember, thereby exacting a proper price for the option of going home without a painful case of knob-rot to have to explain to the hometown colleens. At least for the day shift, the craic was grand. No doubt I'd have more salacious details to report if I worked nights but Hey: I drink, and I know things...

So, wave goodbye to Vibrator 43 as it heads intrepidly for the horizon, manned by a crew who have not been told that the world is flat and they are about to sail over the edge.

RIP

I should perhaps mention some people who have died since we were all last gathered together. Most eminent was probably Brian W. Aldiss but although going to a lot of the same cons I cannot say we really connected or that he even knew who I was. I rather embarrassingly sat next to him at a London showing of 2001 when it was released and did the should I/shouldn't I thing about whether I should introduce myself to him. I did, but it was a stilted moment and not one I remember with any pleasure. Later we both had stories in one of Rob Holdstock's Other Edens anthology and I was at a launch party at Cafe Munchen with him. I engaged him in conversation but all I could think of saying was that I thought it was a mistake for him to call the lead character in his story Dick. I said Dick was a ridiculous name as far as science fiction was concerned. He looked at me as if he had just stepped in something distasteful and had to hurry off to scrape it off his shoe.

A more important death, in my Universe at least, was when Uncle John Nielsen-Hall's wife Audrey died of a combination of throat and bone cancer after a particularly rapid decline. We had stayed with Johnny and Audrey in their Wiltshire home, and had lunched with them many times both at home and abroad, and she was an absolutely lovely intelligent lady with no front or affectation and always struck me as an excellent companion for Johnny, who has now lost two such wives in tragic circumstances.

So let's move on up away from all this morbid stuff to what will probably be my final words on Climate Change (I knew you were all waiting for that).

Natural disasters have always happened. They still happen and always will. They will occur long after mankind has ceased to walk this planet. Plainly not *every* natural disaster can be man-made or attributed to human intervention in the processes of the climate. That would be an irrational view to hold. Nevertheless propagandists for human generated climate change monomaniacally continue to use *every* natural disaster in just this way as *proof* of their cause, when obviously it cannot *always* be so. If you cry wolf whenever you see both wolves and something that is plainly not a wolf, then you will eventually prove foolish and people won't believe anything you say.

All propagandists eventually lose the ability to distinguish what is true and what is not.

I'm Graham Charnock at graham@cartiledgeworld.co.uk. Call me sometime.