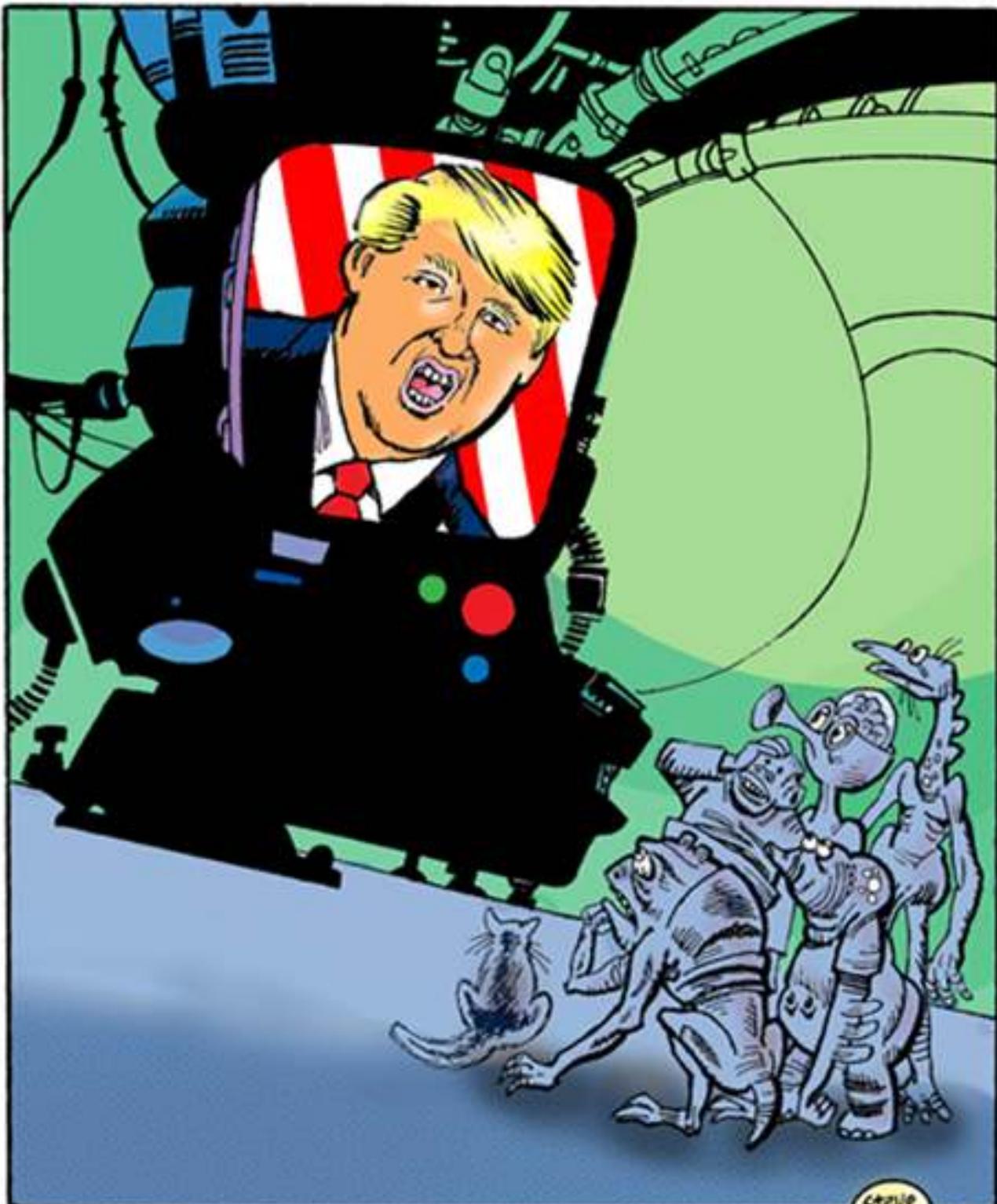


VIBRATOR 45

September 2017



Steve
Snyders

"Oh no! It's issue 45!"

THE VIBRATORIAL

Hark, what's that noise outside? Ghosts and ghoulies, Demons and hobgoblins, the manifestation of the Devil himself perhaps, or at the very least someone resembling Him who would squeeze the very life out of you and leave your soul on the side of the highway like a piece of squashed roadkill. Yes, it's Mark Zuckerberg, the Supreme Lord Pumpkin of Facebook, where everybody is a travesty of himself with flaming and yet strangely empty eyes and vicious jagged teeth.

Halloween has never been a religion I subscribe to, yet every year I am somehow left inconsolable that no little kiddiewinks have bothered to knock on our door and demand pure sugar several flavours of E additives which will drive them crazier than they already are. Perhaps they have read those stories about me that the Daily Mail continues to print, despite several High Court injunctions.

Well, every day these days I wake up in the morning continually amazed I am still alive. Maybe the residual alcohol coursing through my veins gives me some sort of irrational belief in my continuing existence. It's mostly, of course, a sense of gratitude that the scorching white light of a nuclear explosion has not blasted its way through my curtains and left my body a charred imprint on my bedsheets. Yes, there is some optimism left in life if you can dig deep enough to find it. But do not look for any in this issue of *Vibrator*, which I believe, spookily and somewhat disturbingly, is the 45th.

Everything started looking shaky when I took down my Penguin edition of A.L.Alvarez's study of suicide: "A Savage God" and started re-reading it. Looking on my bookshelves I soon found editions of the renowned suicide Cesare Pavese's 'This Business of Living' and Lael Wertenbaker's 'Life of a Man', an early pleading for assisted death, and predictably a dusty well-thumbed copy of Emile Durkheim's seminal 'Suicide'.

As a lonely withdrawn teenager I had what can probably be called a 'dalliance' with the idea of killing myself. I was lonely, unsocialized and felt suffocated by my middle-class upbringing. My parents, God bless them, could never give me the intellectual stimulus I so obviously required, but I was not developed enough not to blame them so I lived a pretty miserable existence. If Goths and Emos had been around at the time I'm sure I would have been one, but these were the immediate post-war austerity years and we couldn't afford Goths and Emos in those days. We still kept rabbits for food, for God's sake, and my father drowned unwanted kittens in a bucket. I was taught not to become attached to anything living.

There is a theory that people subjected to experiences of death in their early years develop what is called a 'death instinct' which makes them more vulnerable to

suicide. Despite my experience with rabbits and kittens, I never saw a dead person until my father died, and that when I was in my mid-twenties. So, really, despite my adolescent posturing, I guess I was never really cut out for suicide.

I don't want to preempt any of the stuff I have written in this issue by continuing in this vein, so I will stop and uncharacteristically hold my counsel, but if you want any more details you can find me via The Samaritans.

I have never ever known anyone very closely who committed suicide. Historically at one time the idea of suicide was considered an act of betrayal against whatever Gods you worshipped, since you were pretty much considered their chattel. Thus it became socially excoriated and even criminalized. I have personally always considered it an act of courage, except when driven by despair and depression, when obviously it is an act of necessity.

It was also interesting (to me) to consider Donald Trump in the light of my re-reading of Alvarez' book, and I couldn't help but wonder how Trump would fit into his various scenarios. I don't know what Trump's early experience with death were, but he certainly seems to have what Alvarez characterizes as 'the death instinct'; every move he makes seems to pre-shadow his own eventual death, even to the solipsistic extent of threatening nuclear war which he knows neither he nor anyone else will survive. The death of the self is also the ultimate outcome of any Narcissistic fantasy, where the preoccupation with Self becomes too unbearable to live with. Trump is also fundamentally insecure and seems always dangerously on edge, as witnessed by his constant self-endorsements in a language he seems to have acquired through some childish reversion to the playground: "I know more words than you. My words are better than yours". I suspect Trump will one day kill himself but will mask it as fake news; he will write a suicide note but follow it up with a tweet from the grave that suggests it is 'lies, all lies, Sad.'

As usual I have to send grateful acknowledgements to Steve Stiles for his excellent cover. How he manages to produce such work under the dread scourge of chemotherapy I don't know, but I know I couldn't.

A LITTLE LIGHT LIT CRIT

There is an insightful article on Donald Trump in Martin Amis' new collection 'The Rub of Time'. First published in Esquire magazine (a journal with a history of publishing fairly left-wing authors and so perhaps establishing a platform for Amis to preach to the converted) he latches on to one of Trump's pledges in his book 'Crippled America' (a sort of thinly disguised campaign manifesto presented to the GOP before the selections) "On governmental style: he would 'restore a sense of

dignity to the White House', bringing back 'all the pomp and circumstance'. Later, adopting the style of Trump's knack of referring to himself in the third person, Amis knowingly predicts: "Martin Amis concludes that after a couple of days of pomp and circumstance in the White House, Trump's brain would be nothing more than a bog of testosterone." Of course this article was written before the Presidential Election and Amis' concluding hope that America would somehow come to its senses and reject Trump, proved a sad failure of his predictive abilities.

And Trump's idea of restoring dignity to the White House and restoring all pomp and circumstance? Well we all know what happened to that.

*

In contrast Amis's snipe at Jeremy Corbyn produced for the Sunday Times, reflects all the arrogance of Amis' privileged upbringing, and betrays the aspirations of this middle class boy who would secretly love to have been a member of the Bullingdon club. He immediately rails against Corbyn for being 'uneducated' presumably because unlike Amis he does not care to drop the odd quote from Milton or Donne into his everyday conversation. He calls Corbyn a 'yob' little realizing that this is what true yobs like Amis immediately adopt as their opening proposition in any formal match. He recounts how Corbyn was unwilling to join him and his friends in their drunken journalist Fleet Street binges. He claims Corbyn is humourless, making the familiar mistake of equating a desire to be serious and considered with a lack of humour. Amis in this context is certainly humorous. In fact he is a laugh a minute. In his comments about Corbyn's support of Hamas and Hezbollah (which has never been support as such of course, but a mere willingness to enter dialogue, you know like England did in Northern Ireland) he betrays an almost embedded racism as well as evidence that someone is talking out of his arse.

He concludes in 2015, that Corbyn is unelectable, a common war-cry for those of his ilk. He must have been very annoyed when his predictive powers failed him again and Corbyn almost managed to almost overturn a Tory majority, and in fact did reduce the Tories to a minority government. But I guess you won't see an article about that in the Sunday Times.

LAUGHING, CRYING AND OTHER DISPLAYS OF EMOTION

The company I worked for had just gone bust. I was out of a job, in my fifties and in a country plagued by endless recession ruled by a government that denied opportunities except to the already privileged. I felt abandoned. My marriage was almost on the rocks and I was drinking far too much in an attempt to blot out reality. I went to see my doctor and she asked me one significant question. "Do you find

yourself crying a lot?" I hadn't thought about it before, but now I addressed it I had to confess, yes I was. I would often experience what I can only call existential crises where I broke down and sat sobbing wrapped up in my own misery. No other human interaction or external stimulus needed to be involved. My own mind simply hated itself.

My wife and children were as surprised by this as anyone else, but I literally could not stop it. I was sick. Acknowledging this aspect of my breakdown (for such it was) was an important part of working towards treating it. Reluctantly I accepted being put on a course of anti-depressants, in this case the more-or-less infamous Seroxat which had received bad press in conjunction with a number of suicides, mostly following on from a rapid withdrawal. This seems to be a not uncommon problem with anti-depressants. They may hold despair at bay temporarily but step aside from them and their scorpion tails will whip round and sting you.

Seroxat stopped the crying, but the downside was that I felt bleached, washed out and emotionless, a bit like a walking Zombie. From feeling too much I seemed to have gone to not feeling at all, and all creative endeavours seemed closed off to me. Writing had always been an important part of my life, and I stopped writing. So I stopped taking it. The transition in my case was fortunately fairly easy. Suicidal thoughts did not come rushing in, well no more than they normally did anyway. I was soon made aware however that I could never get back what I had had. My wife and children continued to mistrust me many years after, and still do to this day. I'm not happy with that but I have accepted it, and now do my best to avoid them

I wonder how many of us cry on a day-to-day basis, from causes not necessarily triggered by clinical depression. Of course we all cry when specific triggering stimuli are presented to us: the death of Bambi's mother, for instance. The latest speech by Theresa May. These days I cry most often listening to music when a lyric presents itself to me as particularly meaningful, perhaps for the part it has played in my historical emotional development. What I now find it hard to cry about is the death of friends. I accept we are all part of a similarly doomed timeline. I mourn their passing, but I cannot cry for them. The older you get the more death becomes an everyday aspect of life.

Well, I seem to have dealt with crying fairly comprehensively. What about laughing? I am pretty convinced by arguments that the act of laughing floods the system with endorphins, almost as much as a good sexual workout. Of course if you laugh hysterically during sex you are on a double bonus, unless you are a psychopath on anti-depressant drugs.

We can all juggle our emotional systems to try and achieve equilibrium with drugs, and many seek to do so on a full-time basis, but we really do the same every

day in our normal lives by juggling our specific chemical reactions by physical means. If we feel dull we either consume a couple of jugs of java or go for a two-mile run or a swim. We work out at the gym and feel better for it. If we achieve anything difficult or noteworthy we reward ourselves with a drink. Well do we? I'll take your word on that.



CHUCK CONNOR

As mentioned in a previous email, the envelope with V43 in it should've come with some kind of warning. Pulling it out, turning it over, and then being confronted with a semi-fisheye'd Mowatt? That's one hell of a fugly mofo – and it certainly knocked 12 volts off the pacemaker, I can tell you.

Be that as it Teresa May, we've now hopefully moved for the last time – to a bungalow just outside Peterborough. Place called Crowland – in Lincolnshire, despite the PE6 postcode. Apparently this place was so named because there were so many crows around and about that people thought it was the land of the crows. There's even a new-built housing estate called *The Roostings* – which has nothing to do with the half dozen bats we've been seeing around our back garden. I suspect we're encouraging the things with all the garden lights my sainted other half insists we need. Makes Diwali look like a tu'penny squib, and would, no doubt, induce seizures due to all the erratic flashings. But they do attract the bugs and moths, which the bats dive for.

Mind you, Crowland isn't so bad. Just up the road from here is Cowbit – apparently where someone was actually bitten by a cow. Sadly, unlike Patagonia, I haven't been able to find any lost Welsh colony. At least I've not found any towns,

villages or locations with ‘dafad’ in the name. If you ask any Welshman (or woman come to that) they’ll probably tell you it’s Welsh for ‘Fuck off, that’s not funny.’

Still, according to Google, it’s Welsh for ‘sheep’.

There again, somewhere in Crowland is the curiously named Whipchicken Road. I’m all for upholding old and native traditions, no matter how politically incorrect they may be, but.... Unless it’s an old medieval expression for the abode of a dominatrix? Mistress Whipchicken?

Of course, one of the reasons why I find Whipchicken Road a little unsettling is that according to the Chinese, I’m a 6ft 1” cock. As in ***The Year of the***.... Whatever, moving on....

To your anti-Farcebook editorial. In regard to that, and encompassing the likes of Twitter, Instagram, etc (hash-slag-anything-to-incite- a-shit-storm), it seems that any/all on-line (anti-)social media appears to be more than a little prone to the dreaded FOMO, and the ever popular mass hysteria. The rabid re-transmitting of mis-information – aka the twitter shit storms – has also helped to give rise to the glorious Internet Troll. For some reason there seems to be a belief in Internet pseudo anonymity (unrelated user names, switching gender, etc) supposedly giving people an implied shield of protection.

And sadly it’s not just Generation Z (you’d’ve thought the ‘kids’ would be more original – Church of the SubGeni, Slackers – praise be to Reverend Bob!). Witness Brenda Leyland, the 63-year-old who posted particularly vile tweets to Kate and Gerry McCann using the Twitter handle @sweeypyface. Everyone who knew her socially said she was a sweet little old lady, and found it almost impossible to believe she was a poisonous and malicious bitch. Her response to being doorstepped by Martin Brunt over her 400 tweets to the McCann account was “I’m entitled to.”

Brunt was apparently “devastated” when she committed suicide – by helium, of all things. After reading that, all I could think of was ***The Hamsterdam Song***, or the Crazy Frog, closely followed by Karen out of the US TV comedy ***Will & Grace***.

So now we have MPs demanding laws against Trolling (seriously, does no one remember Polari?) – even though they haven’t even thought out the No Mobile Phones While Driving properly yet. It’s one of the reasons I don’t want to drive during the school run times – too many slummy mummies in Chelsea tractors, and desperate dads in BMWs. And if it’s enforceable on the Interweb, then does that also include flame wars in fanzines?

Usually I rarely go near Farcebook, and certainly have no intention of going anywhere near Twitter unless I really have to. I don’t even have any interest regarding In The Bar, mostly because like newsgroups, compuserve, livejournal, and

even the earlier dial-up-direct Bulletin Boards, it's usually the same old thing. Not only that but, for someone who works in IT at various levels, when I come home at night, or log out from a VPN session at home, the last thing I want to do is spend X-many hours gawping at yet another set of screens.

However, in response to various comments while sorting out our Crowland Hub membership (local community volunteer support group) I ended up joining several closed groups on Farcebook. Imagine my joy after logging into one, to find that they were calling for what amounted to vigilante activity. While not quite in the burning torches and pitchforks league, the instigators seemed perfectly happy to organise late evening/beyond midnight 'patrols' with the aim of holding (and I quote) "miscreants" until the police arrived. Thankfully that has stopped being a point of comment.

As for dodgy data gathering/storage? If you're a pissed up 18-something who hasn't realised by now that putting up a string of cock shots, or a video of you jiggling your breasts, is something you're going to seriously regret in later life, then you deserve all that happens in later life when someone does a search.

Cue readership saying you can get that all taken down by complaining to Google, etc. Alas, no, you cannot. Because with your mates and friends (and their mates and friends) all retweeting, sharing, etc, I'll guarantee that there are multiple copies – and probably 2nd gen pictures cropped from the originals – out there, usually without the originator's knowledge.

That's how I can chase down email addresses for CEOs and directors of companies I'm looking to lodge a complaint against. No point in going through their advertised customer services link, mainly because said customer services have been subcontracted out to some firm who can run 10 or 20 such 'companies' via their dedicated call centre.

Quick non sequitur – A while back (around about a quarter past who gives a fuck) you mentioned there didn't seem to be a song you couldn't find on youtube. Or something like that. I'm still looking for Trimmer & Jenkins *I Love Parties* (1979 Charisma 7") You can find the B-side, but not the A. Another is *Now Dance* by The Three Courgettes. I had a now-lost copy of the cassette coupon freebie from NME – Mighty Reel – which has the only version I know of to this day. Oh, and not forgetting the 8.43 minute version of *Yon Yonson* by The Dave Howard Singers. There is a shorter version, but not the 'Full Story' one. And now, of course, that's an earworm I'm going to be humming along to all day.

Your *Fish Tales* actually brought back memories of my own childhood – roach and carp fishing in the local ponds when my family were living in Suffolk. Mid to late 1960s, a 12ft black laminate split cane bottom two sections with the final third

section being nylon/poly with a twitch tip. I used to ground bait using bread cubes. And despite my penchant for outré experiences, I never once put maggots in my mouth in order to warm them up and get them wriggling (something some did due to having kept their maggots in the fridge to prevent them pupating and turning into flies.)

Mind you, having been born in London (23 Brampton Road, N23 – look it up on Google and you'll see we were the end house in the middle of the terrace due to judicious German bombing. In the gap used to be a couple of pre-fabs but it now looks like someone has pulled them down and built a whole mass of non-social housing) then moved near to Lowestoft, fresh fish was something we ate on a regular basis. Even more so once we discovered we could cook them.

Add to that the time spent in the West Indies and such (11 years off and on) and I can say my taste for fish hasn't diminished. Sadly, the downside is that I cannot watch any episode of a sea-based wildlife programme without saying "Eaten it. Eaten it. Not eaten it, but would if I could...."

I have been told that if I start doing that during the up-coming *Blue Planet II* season, then my testicles will be removed without the aid of anaesthetic – local or otherwise.

Doing a Tom Daley and swan diving off the high board, into the Letter Column. Dave Cockfield is correct when he brings up the origins of the swastika, and states that a tiny fraction of history has created a self-reinforcing hysteria of ignorance. It's a changing world, and very selective in how it wants its history presented. Classic would be the BBC over the last couple of decades – binning factual reportage for the 'thankfully photogenic' children in distress, or the zoom in for the cry shot – along with journalists who seem to pause more than a Harold Pinter play, and who use more sensationalist/purple prose than a Victorian melodrama.

To add to David Redd (and by association, Jim Linwood) you can also mark down the 1964 election as being one of the most ugliest and racist so far – including taking into account the *Rivers of Blood*/1968 rubbish (Powell being Shadow Defence Sec 1965 – 68.)

And then David talks about digital connectivity, reminding me of the comparatively recent Internet of Things (IoT) mass attacks. While I would be immensely proud to say "My toaster brought down the CIA" sadly it's all handraulic (and slow, and burns the toast on the second load of slices if you put them in almost immediately after the first load have dutifully popped their golden brown heads above the chrome. Such is Life, I suppose.)

Skipping through until I get to Leigh Edmunds – not that Gary was boring, he was enjoyable but in this case RAEBNC – I was a little bemused by comments following an old episode of *Dalziel & Pascoe*. I've been a Reginald Hill fan since the mid-1980s, and in one interview (in an early *Crime Time* magazine) he stated he had become so tired of the way his characters were being portrayed that he'd gone out of his way to make the latter novels as unadaptable as possible. Shame in some respects that he didn't pull out of the deal – especially when they dropped DS Wield but there you go. Hill eventually went off to write the Joe Sixsmith series of crime novels.

As for all the talk of fan funds? I remember Greg Pickersgill back in the 1990s, actively campaigning against TAFF – then actively campaigning for it when he was put forward as a TAFF candidate. However, his original arguments still stand, to some degree – cheaper than ever travel costs these days (as opposed to the original Willis version) and a decline in interest in the mechanism (falling voter numbers, etc).

Of course, it could be that it gets like the FAAn awards I suppose....

Chuck Connor can be found at: chuck.Connor@gmx.co.uk

BILL WRIGHT

This is a LoC on Vibrator 44, which is notable for the quality of its letter column AND for your editorial that contains something I really must respond to.

Conversation is an effort for me, having spent the early decades of my long life in secret boxes while I tried out a series of identities with which I thought I could survive. Some in my orbit (no, many, I realise now) fell to suicide. Others were subjected to leaching of the vitality I needed to survive. To those who were affected by that and are still alive, I offer my profound apologies. None of the counselling services available today were in evidence then, but that's no excuse.

Moving from that morbid note to another in your editorial, viz. the soliloquy on death of the famous Beegee Maurice Gibb who, when undergoing surgery for congenital volvulus (twisted bowel), suffered a massive bacterial infection into his system, from which he died.

You do well to praise Great Britain's National Health System (NHS) and its universal health care that seeks to prevent such outcomes ... or used to before Prime Minister Theresa May's austerity measures starved the NHS of crucial funds.

Antibiotics that, in the past, could be relied upon to treat hospital acquired infections are on the way to losing their effectiveness as some the nastiest bugs in Creation develop immunity to them.

In 2015, after yo-yoing between hospitals and respite care, I acquired Golden Staph when a hospital administrator decided to empty out my ward to accommodate a weekend's intake of sports injuries. A trainee nurse had decided to try out her newly acquired catheter management skills on me under non-sterile conditions in a corridor littered with medical waste. Four courses of the strongest antibiotic my physician was allowed to prescribe were administered, to no effect. Then, in desperation, he petitioned the hospital's ethics committee for permission to administer one of the world's Last Resort antibiotics which, fortunately, worked.

Since then I have had a horror of hospital acquired infections (HAI). Surgical instruments can be sterilised in an autoclave, but plastic materials such as inter-cavity and surface transducers have to be disinfected. Until 2010 only partial disinfection using chemical wipes was possible. Then, in 2010, Australian medical device company Nanosonics Limited launched its trophon device that completely disinfects transducers between patient use.

Australia, New Zealand, North America, France, Germany, and (soon) Japan have regulations in place mandating disinfection standards that only Nanosonics can meet. But in Great Britain, only some NHS boards in Scotland and Wales have been able to afford trophon installations. The situation is even worse in England, where regulation has been deferred, creating an environment where unsafe HAI conditions have been allowed to persist to this day.

Opposition leader Jeremy Corbin nearly won the recent British General Election on a platform of re-funding NHS. I had hoped that, by this time, he would have achieved enough leverage on government policy to at least optimise hospital disinfection processes.

It is why I applaud your exhortation, "Praise the Lord and pass the anti-bacterial ammunition. And God Bless the NHS."

Bill Wright can be found at bilw@iprimus.com.au

DAVID REDD

Your editorial: Sorry to learn of downturn in Randy's health, and do wish him all the best for a hoped-for upturn.

Re Facebook Zuckerberg and your comment "He has empowered millions who really don't deserve to hold any sort of power..." this is the key. The Nazis and ISIS (for example) grew by empowering the wrong sort of people (see Guns, ownership, and Absolute Power, Orwell). Also see a totally unsuitable person somehow at the top, empowered to gratify all macho impulses, while concerned advisors huddle for

damage limitation (see Paul Tabori's 1961 "The Art of Folly"; couldn't happen today could it?)

Never mind, once the Russians finally perfect their hacking techniques (see Latvia, outage) or the Chinese elites get really busy it'll be goodbye digital freedom, and goodbye to selling personal data; the new masters will have a more interesting use for such data than merely making money. As for all the other things you mention about Zuckerberg's enterprise, I wish I didn't have to agree with you.

Not much appetite for television here either, due both to a need to conserve eyesight and a disinclination for modern pleasures. One tv effort I do like is the unusually sensible series *Her y Hinsawdd* (Climate Challenge) on S4C which seeks out people at the sharp end of climate change. Islanders frantically seeding coral reefs to protect against increasing floods, farmers unable to rely on the seasons any more, Californians facing a 5-year drought and escalating forest fires with crossed fingers and sewage-into-water tech. One episode dismally showed the "Doomsday Vault" holding the world's emergency seed bank, built into remote Svalbard permafrost as supposedly the safest place on earth but already needing repairs after icemelt damage.

Besides the Vib 44 good stuff from the expected (Farey, Lichtman, everybody) some coincidences between your lifestyle and mine. My father would drown surplus kittens too. That way, no risk of felines proliferating to seven billion and trashing the planet, eh? I too succumb to adrenalin boosts from those ebay postcards, almost the way Imelda Marcos succumbed to shoes, but perhaps talking about it will help.

Also I did develop a fleeting interest in Chinese Brush Painting, in fact had my choice of copies of the same book on it from various people downsizing, and congratulate myself for *not* keeping the colour sticks, brushes, ceramic brush stands and other gubbins that passed through my quarters. People downsizing? Now that's another story, my near-year of distributing other people's possessions among scattered charity shops whose staff eye yet more approaching donations with "Oh God," etc. One day, my luckless family will have to do this with my own relics. A sobering thought. Am already having conversations with people about what'll happen to our respective stuff afterwards. Those who come after may not recognise what they see. I remember the fate of many John Russell Fearn typescripts or carbons, still of considerable commercial value, piled into binbags and dumped in error by executors as mere paper before Phil Harbottle rescued the rest. I'd better start sorting things Real Soon Now.

The Harbottle memoirs remind me of something else. Your description of Pat the profreader, imprisoned underground and fed occasional gruel, is eerily like a

Fifties author seen by Gordon Lansborough in very similar conditions. (Not N. Wesley Firth as sometimes stated: must check exactly who.) Obviously such times are returning. "Today proofreaders, tomorrow the world!"

David Redd can be found at dave_redd@hotmail.com

(Editor:Dian Crayne died last month. I make no excuses for including this last letter from Dian here. She was always sympathetic to me on whatever forum I came across her on and I was proud to have known her.)

DIAN CRAYNE

Ah yes, fanzines. There was a time when I was a multi-apan and churned out zines for FAPA, SAPS, SFPA, and the Cult on a regular basis. Their content was as varied as yours here in Vibrator, probably because I was often at a loss for something to say and scraped madly at the bottom of the barrel.

One of the things that strikes me about the give and take of modern social media is that we have lost the seemingly endless discussions that went on back in the days of paper fanzines. People advanced their opinions, others agreed or disagreed, and there was enough speculation to fill months of publishing. Now either trolls take over, or someone posts an address to an article in Wikipedia. It sort of takes the fun out of it

Fish. The only time I ever went fishing was when I was about six years old. My father got a bee in his bonnet (he was prone to those) about going out for ocean fish. He bought tickets for a barge anchored out past San Pedro Harbor (which hosts the mammoth shipping industry of Los Angeles) and a motor boat took us out to the barge, where we were provided with poles and lines. There was hardly a foot of space between the optimistic anglers lined up at the railing. My father caught nothing. My mother caught nothing. I don't think anyone else caught anything -- except me. I caught a mackerel. It was tossed onto the deck and abandoned as inedible. We never went back.

Skip ahead about five years. We had a tank of tropical fish at home. For some holiday -- Christmas or her birthday -- I bought my mother a copy of "Exotic Aquarium Fishes" by William T. Innes. My father, who was a glazier and had a small shop east of Los Angeles, found this book very inspirational and came up with the idea of transforming the front of the shop into a tropical fish store. It lasted about two years and went bust. I do not have particularly kind thoughts about fishes. Except as a component of sushi, of course.

Dian Crayne can no longer be found. RIP.

FRED SMITH

Sorry I didn't reply (and comment on) V43 the Jim Mowatt issue. I thought I had plenty of time till I got your e-mail with number 44 attached, followed a couple of days later by a nice paper copy. Thanks!

Jim's Helsinki report is very fine although I note a distinct lack of information on the program items. Understandable because of the distance between the venues (which was noted elsewhere) which would have apparently required a sprint to get to a desired item in time. Photos are good if restricted to the same few (very few) people. Sort of emphasizes the trouble with Worldcons - so many people that you have difficulty finding the fans you know. Kind of a wood and trees situation if you don't mind fans being called wooden.

In the lettercol of that J M special David Redd complains about his trouble with his Canon printer which, when he has finally mastered the booklet option, presents him with the "inevitable misfeed and jam". So far I haven't had his problems with my Canon Pixma printer but it's better on the whole to get your nice paper copies.

Especially when your proofreader is on the ball, as here in V44, and the pages are in the right order and no duplication of text or whatever. Give Pat a chocolate or two as reward. It is a rather thin issue this time, however (as you say) and it seems to me that there are less letterhacks this time around. Those usual suspects who do appear of course contribute reams of – er- stuff as usual but could it be that this issue appeared so quickly that (like me) the grizzled (grisly?) gang were caught unprepared?

(EDITOR: Strange you should say that Fred. There seems to be no accounting for response in the world of fanac. So far I have had more responses for my 'thin' issue than I have had for many others. Next issue will probably be only 2 pages long at this rate).

Actually, what's been keeping me from fanac is falling in love with around twenty Japanese teenage girls!. They are the members of a high school big band called the BFJO, which stands for Big Friendly Jazz Orchestra! There are loads of videos of them on You Tube but two in particular are quite wonderful, shot and recorded professionally at a concert played in a proper concert hall (I know it's a proper concert hall because there is a grand piano on stage!) they play three numbers on each video. Nineteen in the band, six (or five) trumpets, four (or five) trombones, five saxes, piano, bass, guitar and drums, two or three boys but the rest are all girls. There are a few changes in personnel between the two videos so that there are more than nineteen musicians. And I love 'em all. The playing is just incredible and,

my God, they swing like mad. It's simply the best music I've heard in a long, long time

Sorry to read about your health problems and that's a rather gloomy back page this time. The front cover of course is another brilliant Steve Stiles. Mars, I take it and the cartoon figure on the plinth is familiar but I can't place it.

Hope your feeling much better real soon and that we'll see another *Vibrator* before long.

Fred Smith can be found at f.smith50@ntlworld.com

JOHN SHIRLEY

This is a LoC (letter of comment) I sent to a zine called *Vibrator*, published by Graham Charnock, mostly as an email attachment, so far as I can see. The zine is essentially a science fiction fandom offshoot, rather traditional. He didn't reprint my LoC so I'm putting it up here for those who may have those old fan connections and who might appreciate my references. I mention our friends Steve Stiles and Bill Rotsler...And Robert Silverberg...

LOC: Is this how I send a loc to *Vibrator*? It's what I'm trying to do. I am very much enjoying *Vibrator* 41. The prose is good, the subject matter resonant. Well, I do think the publication needs one of those whispered strangely reassuring voices one hears almost sub-vocalizing under television pharmaceutical ads, as in "Vibrator may cause a strange detachment of the sensorium" -- the sort of hallucinatory detachment attributed to Ketamine (one of the few drugs I never tried)...Possibly the side effect was the result of the piece on fandom which made me remember, just before my freshman year of high school, sending away to an...was it an "APA"?...for a pile of assorted fanzines. When the stack arrived, a score or so zines in one package, I was bemused by the variety of printing methods, mimeo and some form of blurry offset, and the Rotsler cartoons making cryptic references in fannish acronyms (nothing has changed!) I picked a zine out that had some familiar writerly names and wrote a somewhat bizarre letter to it which was reprinted with an editorial air of puzzlement. In the subsequent issue someone wrote, "Is John Shirley a hoax?" But that was just me. It's how I was. Someone clueless who only seems like they should be a hoax...I eventually learned to interpret and enjoy Rotsler and Canfield and the others but didn't get really involved until "semi-pro" zines like *Science Fiction Review* and Steve "where is he now?" Brown's SF Eye...

A few years ago Robert Silverberg said to me, "John as you get older you'll be far more interested in the past than the future." I told him I'm already there; I was 59 at the time. I read mostly biographies, and historical fiction. (Sometimes I re-read Jack

Vance and, lately, Clifford Simak. What a geezer I am indeed.) So I very much enjoyed Andy Hooper on the Sultana tragedy. I was sketchy on the whole event. Now I get it. Greed! It continues to gleefully debase us, does greed, in our own time. . . And now I have to listen to Rubber Soul once again. . . I think Lennon's misogyny was the uncontrolled hostility of the "animal with its leg caught in a trap" variety, and he was gradually growing out of it when The Asshole, as Ringo called the fellow, shot him.

I loved Steve Stiles's cover art for 41. That's the way I think of things too. I'm glad to hear that Steve's tumor will be neatly removable (I'm having some not particularly alarming cancerous lesions sliced off my epidermis shortly, and it seems fairly minor--Steve's operation will be a deep, intrusive thing, but he will do well). (What a parenthetical letter this has been..and ellipses-prone.)

To my own astonishment I have just completed the seventh redraft of a new science fiction novel--I'm astonished I wrote one, at this time in my life, and astonished it got so many drafts--and my agent has submitted it to Tor so I'm fidgeting in the endless-waiting room of book submission.. For a year now, I live in Vancouver WA, just over the river from Portland Oregon. I hope any of you in the area will be in touch. And come to see my loud but professional-quality band The Screaming Geezers, playing around town--at Dante's next month [now at The Twilight in Portland, TONIGHT], and elsewhere. Please pretend to like the band.

John Shirley can be found at screaminggeezer@gmail.com

ROBERT LICHTMAN

I've always enjoyed Steve Stiles's "Marvin" series, and this one is no exception. And yes, it certainly is a wonderful thing that even during his convalescence from his surgery he's come to the fore when an idea for a fresh piece of artwork has popped irresistibly into his fertile imagination.

I can easily understand Andy Hooper suggesting that the next issue of *Chunga* might be the last. From the beginning it's been a well-wrought collaborative effort of him, Carl Juarez and Randy Byers – and in Randy's absence it would probably be too painful to carry on, for the remaining editors as well as for the readers, who would be all too aware of his being gone. I first met Randy at the 1984 worldcon in Southern California and felt an immediate bond – that although I'd never heard of him before then he was definitely One Of Us. I put him on my mailing list once I got home, and over the years I've enjoyed his writing in *Apparatchik*, other fanzines, and the various and varied one-shots he's published and sent my way: *Alternative*

Pants, Conversations, Travels with the Wild Child, Wassamatta U and Way. I think I'm pre-missing him.

(*EDITOR: That idea of feeling an immediate bond with Randy certainly resonates with me, Robert. I first met him at the Leicester Worldcon in 2003, along with Victor Gonzales. They had just returned from visiting D. West and one night drunkenly in the bar they persuaded me to ring D. To corroborate their story, which frankly I didn't believe. I think D. appreciated the bizarreness of the situation as much as I did.*)

I enjoyed your "Fish Tales" and have a few of my own. My brother and I shared a bedroom for our entire childhood, so when I expressed some interest in having a goldfish on a trip to the local dime store that had a corner devoted to them and their accessories the resulting bowl with its sandy bottom and colorful pebbles became "our" pet fish, not "mine." Perhaps because of that, neither of us were very interested in the daily sprinkling of dry fish food they required and the deed devolved to our mother. Eventually they died, and were not replaced.

Somewhat later, my father hit upon the idea that it would be a great father/son activity if he took me fishing (just me, not also my brother, something I've never figured out). I don't recall him having any prior interest in this sport, so perhaps it was something he or my mother read about in *Parents' Magazine*. A pair of rods and reels and some fishing line and hooks materialized, and we were off one weekend morning to a local pier. As we ventured out onto it, I saw lots of what looked to be mostly older men sitting by themselves, silently, holding their gear (and in some cases, watching it being held in place on the railing of the pier by a device built for that purpose that attached to the railing). My father bought a small take-out container of "bait" from a small store at the beginning of the pier, which turned out to be bits of cut-up fish. We attached some of that to our hooks and lowered our lines over the edge. Time passed. Fishing is even more boring than watching baseball. Around us, some of the veteran fishermen caught a fish. Eventually there was a tug on my line. My father and I got very excited and he told me to reel it in. I did so, but before long there was great resistance and I wasn't able to go further. My father took it over and reeled a little more before he, too, could go no further. Looking over the edge of the pier, we found that the hook had attached itself to barnacles at the bottom of one of the pier posts. There was nothing to do about it except cut the line. He stayed a little longer hopeful that he would actually catch a fish and have some bragging rights (and perhaps dinner). He didn't, we went home, and that was the end of father/son fishing.

Breaking the news to Gary Labowitz that I'm not as old as him – just turned 75 a few months ago – you write, "Robert Lichtman is old (aren't we all) but not that old."

He used to be a Hippy, you know, and worked for The Farm. I've visited him and have seen his well organized filing cabinets full of fanzines. I think the only reason he reads old fanzines is simply because he can." Yes, that's one reason. It's so easy to decide "time to take in a little Tucker" and pull out an issue of *Le Zombie* from the month I was born, or read some Carl Brandon in *Innuendo* or maybe *À Bas* – he being a hoax black fan invented by a couple of white guys (and because of that I've always found it bizarre that twenty years ago a Society was formed "to foster dialogue about issues of race, ethnicity and culture, raise awareness both inside and outside the fantastical fiction communities, promote inclusivity in publication/production, and celebrate the accomplishments of people of color in science fiction, fantasy and horror," sez Wikipedia). But an equally strong reason for reading old fanzines is that you can do so without feeling guilty about not writing a letter of comment.

Philip Turner writes that he was "distracted...by getting 3 novel-length works ready for printing," which made me wonder what those works might be. I hope that all be revealed in the next *Vibrator* once he reads of my curiosity.

I was amused by John Purcell's description of the Half-Assed Fan Fund (HAFF), to bring a fan from either of the coasts to a convention in the middle of the country. He writes, "There are many good-sized, fun conventions ranging from north to south in the Midwest, so in alternating years a race would be held to bring a fan from either coast to a con in the American heartland." Additionally, I think, perhaps the destination convention site could move on a rotation plan: from upper Midwest to the central Midwest to the southern Midwest. Perhaps this would lead to competition in each region for the honor of hosting that year's winner.

I hereby retract my comment about #43 being on the thin side to which you took righteous objection. In fact, in the past year four of the issues have had the same page count. You write, "do I have to produce a sixty-page Trap Door type fanzine every month to keep you satisfied?" That would be some accomplishment, beyond even me ever, so...no. And I would never refer to any of the 20-page issues (including this one) as "a pile of crap as Robert Lichtman would probably put it," since in fact *Vibrator* is one of my favorite fanzines going. If it wasn't, I wouldn't make the effort I do to appear in every issue with feedback and comments.

Nic's paragraph about his being in the "artificially-tooth club" raised the question of why he "only ever wears the top set." I would think the absence of the bottom set would explain why he's "unable to eat with the fuckin things in." Perhaps there is no nexus, but I have zero knowledge of such things, having a full set of original equipment (even one of my wisdom teeth is still hanging on).

Robert Lichtman can be found at robertlichtman@yahoo.com

SIMON OUNSLEY

Hi Graham – I've been meaning to send you another loc each time a new Vibrator arrives but it's taken your threat of ceasing publication to finally shock me into it. I was sorry to hear that you may be drawing things to an end, not least because of the link you mention with family illness. I sincerely hope that things improve for you all health-wise and that Vibrator continues to tweak my buttons of inspiration and subsequent guilt on a monthly basis at least for a little while longer. But in case it doesn't – or in case subsequent issues do not provide adequate levels of fish empathy – here is a letter anyway.

Many thanks for your fish-related recollections. I also have childhood memories of fish, though in my case there were only two of them: two goldfish called Arthur and Chloe, the first of whom (Arthur) I won at the autumn fair on Harrogate Stray in (I think) 1961. It was at one of those stalls where you have to throw a ball onto a carpet of round fish bowls and try to get it to go into one of the bowls instead of bouncing off. This is pretty much impossible as the diameter of the holes in the bowls is approximately equal to the diameter of the ball plus e (where e is a very small number, quite probably less than or equal to the diameter of an electron) so it isn't going to happen any time soon, kid, and if you have any sense you'll go and get an ice cream instead.

On this occasion, however, all I can say is that I remember being overcome by an overwhelming determination to be successful. I hurled the ball in the throes of this extraordinary urge, and subsequently (to the consternation of both my parents and – especially – the stallholder) found that against all odds the ball had gone into one of the bowls and I had won a fish. I can still remember the incredulous joy with which I received the prize into my trembling hands, small child and timorous fish sizing each other up through the plastic bag and puddle of water in which it had been supplied. The experience taught me that sheer determination can bring you just about anything you want in life, anything at all – though this won't necessarily apply if it isn't a goldfish.

Though the fish looked perfectly happy to me in its plastic bag, my father (who read *The Guardian*) pronounced that this was cruel and we would have to buy a goldfish bowl for it instead. Fortunately the stallholder (who was suddenly no longer quite so inconsolable in his grief at losing the fish) had a bowl or two to sell. You may not be surprised to learn that the cost of buying one of the bowls turned out to be substantially greater than the cost of winning the fish.

But that was only the start of the vast expense of this great sporting accomplishment of mine. Subsequent reference to *The Guardian* revealed that

circular fish bowls were bad for the cognitive health of fish due to the disorientating effects of their shortage of corners. This problem could, however, be overcome by the purchase of a) a rectangular tank instead of a bowl, b) a veritable forest of edible underwater plants, c) a sunken plastic castle and d) a fish buddy. We duly went into town the following day with the shopping list and bought it all at the pet shop, including fish buddy Chloe and a recommended jar of high quality fish food.

Yes, I was in many ways a spoilt little kid, though not as spoilt as my childhood pets, who all received similar levels of mollycoddling from our loving family – for which concern they paid us back by dying sad and untimely deaths to the last budgie. This included Arthur and Chloe, sadly, but I'm getting ahead of myself.

So we got back from the pet shop laden down with all possible fish accessories short of a TV and a train set. Everything seemed to be going swimmingly (no pun intended) but I had a secret fear concerning the relative sizes of the two fish. New buddy Chloe was about twice the size of Arthur. This had not seemed to matter in the pet shop. Pet shops, after all, peddle a never-never land in which pets live for ever and all they need to be blissfully happy is a plastic squeaky bone (or fish equivalent). But now we were back in the grim reality of Home, this harsh environment in which pets rarely survived more than a few weeks under the onslaught of our care and attention, and the possibility that the big one would eat the little one within moments of their introduction seemed distinctly likely. When the crucial time arrived and the fish merely swam around each other a few times before heading off to browse amongst the foliage at opposite ends of the tank, it came as an enormous relief. I wasn't entirely convinced it would last, however, and I took to peeping at the tank on a regular basis to check they were both still there.

Life is tough, is it not? You go to the fair with coins in your pocket and a song on your lips, and come back with obsessive-compulsive disorder.

However, as the weeks rolled on, it became obvious that my concern for the fish was not entirely without foundation, as the larger Chloe took to making frequent lunges at Arthur, so requiring the smaller fish to make sprightly evasive manoeuvres to prevent a painful collision. Arthur seemed fairly relaxed about this and I suppose the process of lunge-and-subsequent-swerve served as a kind of a hobby, a bit like going jogging, but it worried me that there was no way for the fish to avoid this 'entertainment' if it didn't like it. I therefore decided that Chloe was being a bit mean. On the other hand, I suppose that I too was being a bit mean in keeping the fish in a tank in the first place. That was something else they couldn't avoid, however many evasive manoeuvres they managed to make, though in all honesty I can't pretend I gave this complicit guilt of mine an awful lot of thought. I was more

concerned about the process of lunge and swerve, the act of violence itself, than with the sociopolitical framework that allowed it to happen.

It is also true that however much I worried about the well-being of my fish, I didn't actually do very much about it. It was my mother who fed them and my father who changed the water in the tank every few weeks so that they didn't die. This was, I expect, something else he had read about in the Guardian. As far as I could tell, the fish seemed to quite enjoy this occasional move into temporary accommodation while the tank was being cleaned. It must have been an interesting change of scenery and perhaps the tank even seemed nicer in some vague, inexplicable way, that the fish found hard to describe, when they returned to it. Either way, I'm not convinced that it did them a lot of good. I'm reminded of recent findings which suggest that kids do better in dirty households because they need exposure to all the germs. I suspect it might have been the same with my fish. Either way, clean tank or no clean tank, they didn't last very much longer.

Here's the spooky bit. I distinctly remember a visit from a strange kid (I can't remember his name, I'm not sure I ever invited him back, and I can't be entirely sure he even existed) who listened to the history of my fish and gave the entirely unsolicited advice that the fish which came from the fair would die before the other one did. He didn't offer any explanation for this and when pressed he softened his stance somewhat, assuring me that the fish might live for many years, but however many it was, the fish from the fair would go first.

I'm not sure what was going on there. Had the kid undertaken a statistical survey of fish deaths? Was he an expert on fish welfare in fairgrounds? Or was he just taking a wild guess? Whatever the truth, he was right in the case of Arthur and Chloe. They were with us for several months, but Arthur died a day before Chloe. It seemed very spooky to me at the time but I guess it shows there's a price to pay if you spend too much of your time in a plastic bag.

When I recounted the story of winning the fish some years later to D West, a man with considerable experience of never giving a sucker an even break, he responded in disbelief, swearing that such stalls were carefully planned to make it impossible to win a fish. Nevertheless, my parents took careful precautions against any recurrence of such an unfortunate miracle. When the following autumn came, I was offered a Huckleberry Hound Annual instead of a trip to the fair. My parents didn't dare to risk the financial and emotional cost of yet another pet catastrophe.

Anyway, that is all over fifty years ago now. The tears – and the tank – are long dried, and in the normal way of things these two small fish would have vanished entirely from human memory. Yet these analogue creatures still have their place in this digital age. In common with, I'm sure, a great many other deceased pets all over

the world, at least one of them still survives today, not in gill and flipper but in binary code, as an Internet password. I can tell you that it is either Arthur or Chloe, but for security reasons, I cannot disclose which one.

That is the end of the loc. Or maybe it wasn't a loc after all but an overlong article about fish. Either way, you are very welcome to do what you will with it.

Simon Ounsley can be found at ounsley@yahoo.co.uk

JOHN PURCELL

I see you have managed to get another one of these fanzine thingies posted on efanzines. Oh, wait. You sent this one to my email address, so it was waiting in my inbox. Either way, I got it, read it, enjoyed it, and now to loc it.

First off, I love that cover. Steve Stiles wrote about creating this particular piece on Facebook, and quite frankly it is yet another addition to his fantastic collection of wonderful fanzine covers. Now, finding a statue of anything like this on Mars is highly unlikely, so I say when humankind finally does get there - in about twenty years, appears to be the timetable according to NASA and other space flight prognosticators - we really should erect a huge statue of Marvin the Martian in a nice, prominent location. It just seems right to me. This Must Be Done. In the meantime, I am very, very glad to hear that Steve is doing well recovering from his surgery. Now he has to deal with that nasty chemotherapy crap. Ugh! I wish him all the best and hope that he doesn't have to deal with this much longer.

Even with satellite television and its attendant few hundred channels, we do not get that British Bake Off programme you mention. However, we do have at least a dozen channels that deal with food in some form or other, including cooking competitions. At this time of the year the Halloween bake offs and pumpkin carving competitions really are a lot of fun to watch. Some of the things they concoct are insanely cool. So we enjoy watching these shows from time to time. In many ways these cooks, bakers, and pumpkin carvers are artists. And their creations are not only awesome but they can taste good, too.

John Purcell can be found at askance73@gmail.com

ROMAN ORZANSKI

Thoroughly enjoyed the issue, particularly the thoughtful comments on Charlottesville by Curt Phillips, and Jim Mowatt's report on the Worldcon in Helsinki.

My memory of the food court was that the best bargain was the Bratwurst with potato salad: relatively tasty and comparatively cheap. Best food at the con seemed to be from the café on the ground floor, adjacent to reception. Probably why it was relatively crowded most times.

My report on the trip to London & Helsinki weighs in over 38MB as a PDF, mainly due to all the photos.

Since that's a little steep for email, I provide instead a link to the issue in my dropbox: https://www.dropbox.com/s/kzshqi00pt5657z/FAIR_51.pdf?dl=0

Roman Orzanski can be found at websmith@internode.on.net

PAUL SKELTON

I was puzzled as to why Robert Lichtman would say that he was only ‘more inclined’ to drop some money in a tip jar in thanks in circumstances where he actually receives some service. The word ‘more’ is surely superfluous. In the alternative he describes, where you simply order your food, then go and fetch it yourself (and presumably pay) when it is ready, you have received no service at all. He has simply gone into a place that sells a product (cooked food), and bought that product. Cooking the food is not part of the service; it is part of the product. Surely simply buying a product, even in the tip-mad US, does not require a tip. I think it would show outrageous presumption for such an establishment to display a ‘tip jar’.

I would also query his comment (apropos the Fan Hugos now having virtually no relevance to the fanzine fandom that created them, as that same fanzine fandom itself becomes irrelevant to the current Sci-Fi circus), that the fan funds will “end up going to those same groups of people”. On the surface that seems inevitable but, unlike the Hugos, where all that vast amount of administrative work is done by the Worldcon committee, the fan funds require all that work to be done by past winners and interested parties. It seems to me that, even today, the vast majority of the effort put into organising, running, and perpetuating the fan funds has been put in by what I would class as fans of the ‘old school’. I have also picked up an impression, which I will readily admit could be way off base, that some of the winners in more recent times have not exactly ‘played their trips out’ when it comes to the expected post-trip involvement.

So this raises the question as to whether, if the fans who have historically supported the fan funds suddenly wake up and say “This isn’t what I signed up for. Bugger this for a game of soldiers!”, and walk away; would there be the will among the new groups now dominating fandom, who are not steeped in the history and

ethos of the funds, to keep these organisations alive? Personally I think they won't so much go the same way as the Fan Hugos, but rather simply just go.

Ah, fishing...been there, done that...precisely twice. However, as the only thing more boring than fishing is reminiscing about it, I shall leave it at that.

Paul Skelton can be found at paul_skelton_yngvi@hotmail.com

PHILIP TURNER

I emailed off a LoC to Vibratorland and on the next day (or so it seemed), I got an emailed edition of *Vibrator!* Had I dropped down a time warp and was this the issue I'd just LoCed? Not, it was the next one in the line. He's a bluddy fast worker, that Charnock bloke!

Gary Labowitz shouldn't take global warming so personally. The fraudsters are out to steal from everyone and he isn't being singled out for special treatment. I suppose his sense of grievance/persecution is multiplied by being able to see exactly what the fraudsters are doing. He's quite right to point out that the fraudsters' act is the equivalent of a quack doctor doing a diagnosis of an entire human body by taking a quick squint at a lone zit on its chin. Something our politicians and the minions who do their thinking for them are totally unable to spot.

Don't worry about not being able to get up in the morning, Graham. On the rare occasions when I manage it, there's never anything worth writing home about going on. And I have found, through long service for the cause (no OBE yet, though), that hospitals would much rather welcome visitors during the afternoon.

Can you still get gruel (for Pat)? I'm surprised it hasn't been designed out of existence -- or affordability, at the very least.

Don't you just hate machines which are too smart for their own good? I have had my old TV box replaced by a TiVo, which lets me record Canadian football matches when BT Sport schedules the edited version at 3:30 a.m. for the benefit of masochists and those on a night shift. My problem is that I have a box which insists on recording all sorts of stuff, which it thinks I might be interested in. As a result, when I go for a fix of CFL, I have to hunt out my recording (the one I told the box to make) among a shower of other stuff, which the box chose to record. Grrrr!

What's really good to have parked next to you for idle moments? (or ads on the TV) A 5" x 8" HB book of 160-190 pages containing a **complete** SF novel rather than the 6th part of the 4th arc of an interminable series. E.g. *The Stainless Steel Rat Saves The World* by H. Harrison, wot I am currently re-reading.

Philip Turner can be found at farrago2@lineone.net

TALES OF A LAS VEGAS TAXI DRIVER

By Nic Farey

I GOT STONED, AND I MISSED IT

Actually (© Holmstrom) the second part is accurate, the first isn't, but you know how I like a good song title, and there's a nod to a Charnock (G) "at which point does this become unbelievable?" essay - third word quick enough for you?

I was asleep. Working the 5-5 day shift does tend to cut down on the supposed decadence, anarchy, drunkenness and tales of Rampant Gay Sex so beloved by the reader (J, (Unc), who I believe may well be up the pub with K, (Lord) as I write this). I'm not Irish (as far as I know), although my eldest son is, so I don't know how much luck can be ascribed to the observation that a lot of the quite *unusually* mad stuff happens on my days off eg deranged sleep-deprived homeless woman driving her car into a crowd outside the Paris, deranged homeless man shooting out a bus window outside the Bellagio, fake palm trees catching on fire at the Cosmopolitan rooftop pool ect *ad nauseam*.

Being old, though possibly not as old as the typical reader of this multiple-award-winning organ, I need my 8 hours of sleep a night (plus naps on days off), so I'll be off to bed about 7pm, getting up at 3. Workaholic Famous Author™ J L Farey hits the hay more like 11pm to midnight.

The news was coming in as she was getting ready for bed, at that time with reports of two dead. When I got up it was 20, and by the time I left for work (typically about 4:15am) it was 50, close to the final count of 58 +1 (the shooter, who was snuffed by his own hand while I was dreaming of cheese and pickle sandwiches).

Street closures were extensive, and we had to work them out on the fly. Second ride, I picked up four from the airport, going to Tropicana. McCarran had been running announcements warning arrivals that there could well be delays in getting to their destinations, so they were somewhat prepared. "I'll get you as close as I can", I said. McCarran to the Trop would usually be about an 8 minute, \$14 ride at that time of day. Turning onto Tropicana Blvd after struggling it out of the port, we come to find the street closed at Paradise, the cops turning a usefully blind eye to all the vehicles making the illegal u-turn, and even those in trucks bumping across the median to get back and out. I got my fare to the Trop in 39 minutes, \$30, up across

Harmon and through the MGM access. They were, thankfully, not suffused with the arse over this, unlike some others who were calling our office to complain about the duration and cost of their rides, office cab manager Steve having to rebut their crap with an increasingly incredulous "You realize what has just happened here?" That didn't improve his typically contentious and combative demeanor.

Streets gradually got reopened during the course of the day, and we were able to access south strip properties the back way in, off Frank Sinatra Boulevard. Luxor North valet (tower side) was the only way out of that hotel all day and part of the next. It's one of my preferred stages, so I know all the security and valet staff there, who were screaming out for cabs, and pleased to see me, or indeed anybody, since it's usually the quieter side of the property, with few if any cabs staging there.

I loaded two ladies who'd been at the concert, still shaken up. "Just get us out of here, *please!*" I don't engage my passengers in conversation unless they initiate it - some people like to talk, some don't. These two needed to talk it out, and one of my more redeeming qualities is that I've always been a good ear when needed. They'd got clear of the concert site and were going along streets they didn't know, just wanting to be on their toes in the general direction of "away", eventually finding themselves at the Bluegreen timeshare on Tropicana, about a mile away in the opposite direction from their hotel. I can only guess at how dazed and frightened they must have been, asking the night clerk where they were. That clerk, an unsung hero (or heroine) of the night, produced a key to one of the rooms. "Here, you need to get some rest, just come out whenever you're ready, no charge." The ladies may or may not have slept, although I'd guess that fatigue may have kicked in, and when getting in that room it would have been the first moments of a feeling of safety for them in hours.

I went back to Luxor, loaded a 20-something guy with luggage. "Airport?" "No, please take me to United Blood Services". That's a fair ride, their facility is out on west Charleston. The traffic jam started over two blocks away from UBS. As we inched in, I first noticed a truck loaded, and I mean *loaded* with crates of water, a full bed stacked 5 or 6 high, then I saw another with a couple of porta-potties. Ten or more minutes later we could see the couple hundred (at least) people in line snaked around the donation facility. A food truck was jockeying for a spot, giving away their wares. Someone else appeared to be dropping a Costco-sized box of energy bars. #VegasStrong, indeed.

There was also, sadly, idiocy. NPR acquired recordings of LVMPD radio traffic, in which the dispatcher was urgently reminding all the officers that they should lock their patrol cars when leaving them, since there were reports of concert-goers attempting to get weapons from them, even long after Paddock had turned a gun on

himself.

Speaking of idiocy, the conspiracy theorists were and are quick to start, and I get to read a lot of this shit off someone who's actually a good friend (and for that reason I won't name him) on the Farkbark. He's actually a sweet bloke with many fine qualities, one of which is not his credulity when it comes to nonsense like the Mandalay Bay security guard who got shot being an illegal. I don't engage with that fuckin nonsense online, though it's a conversation I'd have with him in person, simply urging him or anyone who believes that shit to pretend to be illegal and attempt to get a job on the security staff of any property, or even a low-level janitorial position, come to that.

There's a development in terminology going on. The first week or so, everyone is referring to "the shooting", which is itself insufficiently descriptive of a mass killing. It's almost as though people seek to minimize the egregiousness of such an event by failing to refer to the numbers. Latterly, a question I'll often get asked by people arriving is how things have been affected since "the incident". It's understandable that it's difficult to wrap your head around something of this magnitude, particularly in a case where the shooter's motives may never be known. I've had the conversation several times where I opine that it's going to be nigh impossible to get any real closure. If Paddock had been a Dylan Roof type, or a crazed jihadi, then at least we'd know that there was a thought process behind his actions, however insane.

In a mere few weeks, the reportage has gone from saying "the shooting", to "the incident", and now, apparently, the preferred nomenclature is simply "October 1". A day that will live in infamy, at an increased distance.

VIBRATOR BACKSIDE

I'm sorry, I can't go on, I take it any more. It's all become too much. I must end it all now. Tell my wife and children I love them. And to Robert Lichtman, who said I would never remember him, hi Robert. Now it's time to take the tablets. I don't know what I'd do without the metformin.

Well can you blame me? It's been a long hard graft typing out these locs people keep insisting on sending me, full of their life-affirming messages of confidence and self-assurance.

I know it's only November (nearly) but I've already started my Christmas Shopping. When I was employed I consistently put off weekend shopping as Christmas approached and the high street shops became more and more crowded, so often

found myself in the double-bind of having scarcely bought anything, and also being forced to go out into the maelstrom to battle with the crowds. When I was a child it was much easier. I had a small blue holdall and did all my Christmas shopping at Woolworths in Wembley High Road. Parents were easy to buy presents for, socks and handkerchiefs, bath salts, aftershave for my brothers, and perhaps a small bottle of cheap perfume (for my dad).



Nowadays, just as most experiences of ageing show reverersions to childhood, I'm finding Christmas shopping much easier. Thanks to Amazon. Not only am I offered a vast selection of items and choices but I can get them delivered to my door, without even having to go out. Truly we live in an age of miracles.

WAHF: Taral Wayne, who sent me an article about Canada's reactions to Donald Trump which would have fitted in nicely with my Trump-bashing agenda, but then spoiled his chances of getting it printed by posting it on Facebook. Anybody else considering such shenanigan should please take on board that I Do Not Do Things That Way.

Pat Charnock has been involved in some heavy proof-reading lately (I think Dave Landford will be making an official Ansible announcement about it soon) but still found time to bread this, so once again, as always, I thanks her. And so, farewell.