

ANDREW DARLINGTON SCOOP: "MY LIFE WITH TRANSEXUAL ALLIGATORS!"

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**I WAS TRAPPED IN A
BEATNIK BROTHEL!**

**BIZZARE FLIGHT OF
DAVID REDD AND HIS
48 VESTAL VIRGINS**

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**THE SHOCKING TRUTH ABOUT
DEATH IN THE ELECTRIC CHAIR**

THE VIBRATORIAL (With Christmas Flashbacks)

This is the 47th monthly issue of Vibrator, dated December 2017, and comes from Graham Charnock, at 45 Kimberley Gardens, London, N4 1LD. I never derive much fun from Christmas. I usually tend surprisingly (due to family constraints) to drink less rather than more, which makes me depressed even more than drinking too much. Shopping for gifts has been something which has historically always put me off about Christmas. For most of my working life I was in jobs in which there were so many demands on my time during December that there really weren't that many opportunities for shopping. Hence it was always last minute, and pretty much the equivalent of finding gifts in Gas Stations at 11pm on Christmas Eve. Since retirement it has all become much easier of course, and especially with the advent of Amazon where you are saved the agony of travelling to and through real-time shopping malls heaving with sweating human zombie carcasses all in pursuit of the same tacky prey.

This year however Pat did drag me out on a quintessential Christmas shopping trek when we went to Cattlegate Lane, Enfield. As the name suggests it is a semi-rural area wedged between the A10 Cambridge Road and the M25. Pat was looking for a warm winter jacket, and who can blame her with temperatures hovering around zero degrees. Her online searches had located Cattlegate Lane as the unlikely location for a branch of Cotton Traders who, I understand, do that sort of thing. Considering we were heading into uncharted territory I was not encouraged by the fact that whenever I tried to enter the postcode into my satnav it wanted me to go somewhere in Portugal. Eventually I learnt that case is important when entering info into my Satnav. Eventually the Satnav took us to a warehouse in an area that seemed surrounded by garden centres and little else. The car park was full but we found a space in the car park of a pub across the road. There was still some snow and ice on the ground, so we trod gingerly as we made our way to The Phoenix Centre. It was a peculiar mix of factory outlets, retail tat, and garden centre with a restaurant thrown in. Judging by the car park, it was obviously very popular. They must be very short of entertainment in Enfield. After buying some cat toys in the attached pet store (yes it was that kind of place), we went in search of warm clothing. Pat found a nice coat but in the wrong size, but in another franchise she found something which suited, and I encouraged her to buy it, feeling that coming away from our expedition empty-handed apart from cat-toys, would be something of an anti-climax to our adventure. It wasn't exactly Christmas shopping, but it came near it and I'm not sure I want to repeat the experience in a hurry.

Christmas morning listening to Grieg's Piano Concerto. Waterfalls of music building and cascading. Then deep pools of dark swirling water. Then soaring like an eagle into craggy rock-strewn eyries. The second movement descends into placid but rippling lakes with dark and doom-laden trees around the shore, and rivulets running and cascading over rocks. Better than any movie because there are no humans in the scenario, only brilliantly realized nature. In the third movement a sense of jollity returns, tumbling fish in surging waters, and perhaps a hint of a flash storm and flood. Final resolution as the storm clears, birds sing, and everything

flows calmly. If only Motorhead could have achieved this sort of narrative sensibility. But he's back with a fourth movement. This time it's clowns and jesters tumbling in a town square, but somehow echoing water movements. Building towers of acrobats, all reaching for the sky, then pulling them down in typical watery cascades. Finally the piano itself descends into chaos but emerges with a jaunty dance. Grieg is happy, for once, and bids us a triumphal goodbye worthy of any Star Trek movie.

We only really had half a Christmas this year due to son Dan's chronic illness having a tendency to flare up on such occasions. The rest of us made our way to my other son James' house to enjoy a veggie lunch with my daughter-in-law Shell and their two crazy children, Eloise and Violet, and Shell's mum, Penny. I love my grandchildren but increasingly am starting to prefer to love them from a distance. Eloise, at six, is growing into a fine intelligent socialized girl, while Violet remains a typical three-year-old riddled with angst and schadenfreud, oscillating madly between shyness and manic screaming self-obsession. They are becoming a bit tiring for a 71-year-old man to endure at any length.

Shell prepared a fine veggie meal with literally more vegetables than I could count on the fingers of the hands that weren't holding knives and forks, with stuffed squash and roast quorn and lentil stuffing as a main. I was assured the quorn would taste of chicken, but it didn't really taste of anything except the veggie gravy that it was served with. I'll accept it had a certain chicken-like texture though. I will consider tomorrow's slow-roast leg of lamb to be our main Christmas meal, however. This is basically lamb doused overnight in a red wine/garlic/rosemary/onion marinade and cooked on a bed of root vegetables slowly until it falls apart. Like Skel there was no alcohol to be consumed at James' place, and I was driving anyway, so it was no hardship to stay sober. Except that I can usually endure social situations easier if I have a glass in my hand. I am beginning to realize that, like a true alcoholic the calorific value I obtain from alcohol is useful in sustaining my energy levels and, in a strange contradictory way, essential to keep me awake. Or at least breathing meaningfully.

IN THE MIDST OF LIFE, ETC.

The sf community is a community of communicators. It is also incredibly widespread geographically, at least among the English speaking countries. It had social networks even before the days of computer communication, and people knew and cared about what was happening to its various members and kept in touch, passing on news and gossip. I do not feel it is remarkable for a disease such as glioblastoma to affect our community, as it must surely affect others with a less well-knit and interconnected structure. In what seems like implausibly high numbers. I believe the idea that there is some co-relation between the disease and sf fandom is false and an illusion particular to the very specific nature of sf fandom itself as a community. The notable deaths we are all so sadly aware of have been spread over a number of years and I believe the apparently prolific nature of the illness is simply an indication of that aspect of fandom which means we possibly remember and record and discuss our dead for

longer than other communities. The random nature of incidences of the disease, unmitigated by regionality or relative income, further suggests there is no single factor tying incidents together or at the very least that finding and proving some hypothetical link would be very difficult. I suggest we simply honour and respect our dead and their achievements and feel grateful for them, rather than wringing own hands in fear of some mythical plague specific to our own little sector of society. Which leads us to:

PAT CHARNOCK ON RANDY BYERS

He had charisma, did Randy. I met him for the first time when we went to Seattle and San Francisco in 2006. Graham met him in Hinckley and had been in contact with him, but I'd never met him before. I was jet-lagged, tired, stressed, and really not in the mood for a party, but the plan was that Randy and Carl would pick us up, take us for dinner (us being me, Grah, James, Dan and Shell), and then on to the Vanguard party at Andy and Carrie's.

I can't remember a single thing about Carl. I think he was dark-haired, but that's all. But Randy just erupted into the hotel lobby and charmed me. And every contact since has been positive.

And his writing. Something about the way he wrote just speaks to me. I always eagerly anticipated reading anything he wrote, and I was never disappointed. I thought Chunga (yes, I know the editorship is shared) was a great fanzine, one I aspired to equal. So for me, winning a FAAn award was great, but sharing it with Chunga was amazing!

I remember after he'd been diagnosed, we had some email exchanges about books by Atul Gawande. I'd read one of Gawande's, and found it really interesting, and Randy recommended "Being Mortal: Illness, Medicine, and What Matters in the End". I couldn't get to the end of it, I couldn't get past the chapter about ageing, and what it does to your body. Randy could, and came to terms with what was happening to him.

He was a lovely man.

AMERICA THE DAMNED

An occasional series by Graham Charnock

THE ZODIAC MURDERS

Serial murderers are ten a penny in the US, so much so they have become a ubiquitous feature of the entertainment history, embodied not only in biographical films such as The Boston Strangler, and pure fiction movies such as Psycho, but in TV shows such as Bones, Criminal Minds, and the various iterations of CIS and NCIS. Spree killers such as Paddock who shot lots of Country & Western fans in Las Vegas are equally celebrated and documented.

The Zodiac Killer who operated around San Francisco in the sixties and seventies is an entirely different matter, most significantly because unlike many celebrated serial killers he, or she, has never been caught.

Although the Zodiac claimed 37 murders in letters to the newspapers, investigators agree on only seven confirmed victims, two of whom survived. His suspected attacks began in 1963 with the murders of Robert Domingos, 18, and Linda Edwards, 17: shot and killed on June 4, on a beach near Gaviota. Edwards and Domingos were identified as possible Zodiac victims because of specific similarities between their attack and a later attack, but the first confirmed victim was not until 1968, when David Arthur Faraday, 17, and Betty Lou Jensen, 16, were shot and killed on December 20th, on Lake Herman Road, within the city limits of [Benicia](#).

The couple were on their first date and planned to attend a Christmas concert at Hogan High School about three blocks from Jensen's home. The couple instead visited a friend before stopping at a local restaurant and then driving out on Lake Herman Road. At about 10:15 p.m., Faraday parked his mother's Rambler in a gravel turnout, which was a well-known lovers' lane. Shortly after 11:00 p.m., their bodies were found by Stella Borges, who lived nearby. The Solano County Sheriff's Department investigated the crime but no leads developed.

Utilizing available forensic data, Robert Graysmith postulated that another car pulled into the turnout, just prior to 11:00 pm, and parked beside the couple. The killer apparently exited the second car and walked toward the Rambler, possibly ordering the couple out of the Rambler. Jensen appeared to have exited the car first, yet when Faraday was halfway out, the killer apparently shot Faraday in the head. Fleeing from the killer, Jensen was gunned down twenty-eight feet from the car with five shots through her back. The killer then drove off.

This murder established a significant MO for the killer. He targeted young unsuspecting couples. He was armed and skilled at despatching his victims. He didn't have to entrap them or lure them into a situation where he could deal with them. He simply found them and despatched them. He was an efficient hunter.

The Vietnam war, of course, was significant during this period of history. Kennedy had escalated the war in 1963 before being assassinated in December 1963. His successor Lyndon Baines Johnson continued his escalation. One American President had died violently by the gun and now thousand of conscripts were being expected to turn their guns on a people they hardly recognized; they were sufficiently desensitized to recognize them only as 'gooks'. San Francisco, being a community of mainly liberal people, was in the forefront of peaceful objection to the war. They didn't generally like guns, but it was obvious some members of their community were not afraid to use them. Perhaps they had been hunting all their lives.

San Francisco was then, and still is largely a city composed of separate and distinct villages, each with its own character, from North Beach, to the Presidio to the Castro and others. It is eminently walkable, but it seems the Zodiac killer preferred to drive to find his victims (except in the case of his fourth, which again may or may not be significant in establish his 'home' territory) often following victims who had likewise driven.

The second attributable attack took place just before midnight on July 4, 1969. Darlene Ferrin and Michael Mageau drove into the Blue Rock Springs Park in Vallejo, four miles from the Lake Herman Road murder site, and parked. While the couple sat in Ferrin's car, a second car drove into the lot and parked alongside them but almost immediately drove away. Returning about 10 minutes later, this second car parked behind them. The driver of the second car then exited the vehicle, approaching the passenger side door of Ferrin's car, carrying a flashlight and a 9 mm Luger. The killer directed the flashlight into Mageau's and Ferrin's eyes before shooting at them, firing five times. Both victims were hit, and several bullets had passed through Mageau and into Ferrin. The killer walked away from the car but upon hearing Mageau's moaning, returned and shot each victim twice more before driving off.

On July 5, 1969, at 12:40 a.m., a man phoned the Vallejo Police Department to report and claim responsibility for the attack. The caller also took credit for the murders of Jensen and Faraday six-and-a-half months earlier. The police traced the call to a phone booth at a gas station at Springs Road and Tuolumne, about three-tenths of a mile from Ferrin's home and only a few blocks from the Vallejo Police Department.

Ferrin was pronounced dead at the hospital. Mageau survived the attack despite being shot in the face, neck and chest. Mageau described his attacker as a 26–30 years old, 195–200 lbs or possibly even more, 5'8" white male with short light brown curly hair.

Significantly this is the first description we have of the Zodiac killer. Unfortunately the description was not distinctive enough to differentiate the killer from maybe thousands of similar people.

While America remained in political turmoil the killer decided to strike again.

On September 27, 1969, Pacific Union College students Bryan Hartnell and Cecelia Shepard were picnicking at Lake Berryessa on a small island connected by a sand spit to Twin Oak Ridge. A white man, about 5'11" weighing more than 170 lbs with combed greasy brown hair, approached them wearing a black executioner's-type hood with clip-on sunglasses over the eye-holes and a bib-like device on his chest that had a white 3"x3" cross-circle symbol on it. He approached them with a gun, which Hartnell believed to be a .45. The hooded man claimed to be an escaped convict from a 2 words jail of either Colorado or Montana (police officer estimated he meant Deer Lodge, Montana), where he had killed a guard and stolen a car, explaining that he needed their car and money to go to Mexico. He had brought precut lengths of plastic clothesline and told Shepard to tie up Hartnell, before he tied her up. The killer checked, and tightened Hartnell's bonds after discovering Shepard had bound Hartnell's hands loosely. Hartnell initially believed it to be a weird robbery, but the man drew a knife and stabbed them both repeatedly. The killer then hiked 500 yards back up to Knoxville Road, drew the cross-circle symbol on Hartnell's car door with a black felt-tip pen, and wrote beneath it: "Vallejo/12-20-68/7-4-69/Sept 27–69–6:30/by knife."

At 7:40 p.m., the killer called the Napa County Sheriff's office from a pay telephone to report this latest crime. The phone was found, still off the hook, minutes later at the Napa Car

Wash on Main Street in Napa by KVN radio reporter Pat Stanley, only a few blocks from the sheriff's office, yet 27 miles from the crime scene. Detectives were able to lift a still-wet palm print from the telephone but were never able to match it to any suspect.

After hearing their screams for help, a man and his son who were fishing in a nearby cove discovered the victims and summoned help by contacting park rangers. Napa County Sheriff's deputies Dave Collins and Ray Land were the first law enforcement officers to arrive at the crime scene. Cecelia Shepard was conscious when Collins arrived, providing him with a detailed description of the attacker. Hartnell and Shepard were taken to Queen of the Valley Hospital in Napa by ambulance. Shepard lapsed into a coma during transport to the hospital and never regained consciousness. She died two days later, but Hartnell survived to recount his tale to the press.

Here the killer decides to move on from shooting at a distance to an intimate knife attack. If it is indeed the same killer, it is explicable through the usual psychological contortions. Perhaps he had moved on and felt the need to involve himself in more visceral methods. Perhaps he had simply run out of bullets. You will note I have dropped the pretence that this killer could ever have been a woman.

The killer's last confirmed crime took place in the Presidio Heights. This is a location on the south coast of the bay, where US military compounds were once built.

Two weeks later on October 11, 1969, a passenger entered the cab driven by Paul Stine at the intersection of Mason and Geary Streets (one block west from Union Square) in San Francisco requesting to be taken to Washington and Maple Streets in Presidio Heights. For reasons unknown, Stine drove one block past Maple to Cherry Street; the passenger then shot Stine once in the head with a 9mm, took Stine's wallet and car keys, and tore away a section of Stine's bloodstained shirt tail. This passenger was observed by three teenagers across the street at 9:55 p.m., who called the police while the crime was in progress. They observed a man wiping the cab down before walking away towards the Presidio, one block to the north. Two blocks from the crime scene, Officer Don Fouke, responding to the call, observed a white man, walking along the sidewalk and stepping onto a stairway leading up to the front yard of one of the homes on the north side of the street; the encounter lasted only five to ten seconds.

Fouke estimated the man to be 35–45 years old, while the kids who observed the killer in Stine's cab mentioned he was 25–30 year old white male adult at about 5'8"-5'9". The radio dispatcher had alerted the patrol to be on the lookout for a black suspect, so they drove past him without stopping; the mix-up in descriptions remains unexplained to this day. A search ensued, but no possible suspects were found. The three teen witnesses worked with a police artist to prepare a composite sketch of Stine's killer; then, a few days later, this police artist returned, working with the witnesses to prepare a second composite sketch of the killer.

Despite intense police investigation, the murder remained unsolved or even explained.

The Zodiac Killings are distinctive because of the way the killer attempted to communicate with the press. The SF Chronicle started to receive letters in 1969, many filled with grandiose claims and fantasies which never materialized, except later in the plots of Dirty Harry films. Some of them contained puzzles and cryptograms, many of which many never even have been solvable in the first place. By this time the killer's MO had been so well-known that it was not unlikely for it to generate sporadic copy-cat claims by attention-seekers, to the extent that people suffering from fatal illnesses have also claimed to have been the killer, without any proof or justification. It seems everybody in the US wants to be a Serial Killer in their innermost secret dreams. It gives them some idea of connection.



ANDREW DARLINGTON

Hello Graham, the world turns. I am here. You are there. We live in Science Fiction times, we used to speculate about 2017, and now there's a generation of kids who never once set foot in the twentieth-century, the future is here but unevenly distributed, all the best Pop Stars are dead, the only thing worth watching on TV are reruns of 'The Avengers', all the movies at the multiplex are remakes or sequels, and I don't recognize this old guy looking out of the mirror at me, although he looks oddly familiar. Fats Domino is dead. Brian Aldiss is gone, but every city precinct increasingly resembles his 'Greybeard' vision of a world of shuffling oldsters.

I went swimming today at the Wakefield 'Sun Lane' pool. Calling it 'Sun' was maybe a little over-optimistic.

The Xmas decorations are brightening the Ridings Shopping Mall, tinsel and glow-bulbs creating the correct festive purchasing-spirit, seasonal music flowing through the levels in tides of nostalgic goodwill. And as much as you try to resist by fine-tuning your cynic-settings, it still gets through and suckers you every time. 80% of UK consumer spending occurs between now and 25th December, and Leeds is gridlocked solid with endless slow-flows of traffic.

Our trip to see Elvis & The Royal Philharmonic at the First Direct Arena coincides with Black Friday, and the roads around the White Rose Shopping Centre are virtually at a standstill. It's

agonisingly frustrating to sit drumming fingers in impatience watching the minutes tick by, unable to move. Then there's a final furious dash to the arena itself where we pass through security barriers, where they check bags and run sensors up and down your body... even as we can hear the show starting up beyond. But – I guess, following the Manchester stadium attack last year, it's only to be expected. And, once inside, Elvis is still a weirdly affecting spectacle. As – far out across the solar system, Saturn's icy moon Enceladus spews geyser-like fountains of water-vapor into space, with no-one there to watch. I Tweet David Crosby about Joni Mitchell, and he 'Likes' it.

So where do we go from here? More new poems in more online magazines? New stories in new anthologies from Indie publishers? Worlds turn. I am here. You are there. Into 2018, I guess... Hope you have a rudolph red-nose glowing, twelve days of sleighride-jingling, stocking-bulging, star of Bethlehem twinkling, Noddy-Wizard-Pogues Rocking, carol-singing, deck the halls with holly-ing, robin tweeting, pagan no-sanity clausening, winterval equinox celebrating, TV Dr Who box-set bingeing, Bing-crooning, veggie-dinner Feastmas, post-eating burping, inappropriate mistletoe-snogging and rosé-wining paracetamol booze-snoozing, mince pie exceeding Xmas... Merry Meet, Merry Part, & Merry Meet Again -Andy-

Andrew Darlington can be found on Facebook

JOSEPH NICHOLAS

I have been very remiss in responding to the most recent three or four issues of your fanzine.

But before I go on, let me thank you again for the bottle of wine you handed over in exchange for the last half of my remaining 45rpm singles just before Christmas -- quite unexpected, and very welcome. Having said which, I haven't actually opened it yet -- I have been having a fairly abstemious holiday period, the better to double down on the Heavy Reading Programme I outlined to you (one large tome down -- three to go) and dispose of one or two other matters -- including letters in response to fanzines, but also including the scanning-in to laptop hard drive of some photographs of Berlin that Judith took on a solo visit to the recently reunited city in August 1991, with the outfit (Transport 2000) for which she was then working. Recently rediscovered in the drawer under the spare bed in my office (there's a number of unexpected treasures to be rediscovered there, I'm sure), it's fascinating to compare the Central Berlin of today (we spent a week there in June) with the wide empty spaces of a quarter of a century ago, where the Ossies had cleared away the WW2-era rubble but erected nothing in its place, partly to provide the border guards with a clear view of (and field of fire at) anyone trying to escape over the Wall from the east but also partly because they didn't have the money (the Altes Museum on Museum Insel, bombed out in 1944 -- like all the other museums there -- remained a roofless shell until 1986, when it was given a temporary roof to protect what was left of the structure...while the collections themselves remained in store, and have only recently been returned now that the whole building has

been renovated. At least some of the collections have been returned -- the Russians stole most of them at the end of the War, and although some were returned in the 1950s all the material excavated by Schliemann at Troy, and all the German archaeological material remains in Russia. In the case of the German archaeological material, it isn't even on display: it's squirrelled away in basement packing crates, where no one can study it. Bloody Russians -- it isn't part of their culture, holding onto it is a breach of international law, 3 vols surplus rant omitted at this point).

But speaking of clearing away the rubble to give a clear field of fire: John Purcell remarks in *Vibrator* 46 that "throughout Paris the architecture of all the buildings is remarkably coherent and unified" and that "most of the city centre buildings date from the 1870s to the 1920s". As he may be aware, this uniformity is a consequence of the bloodily suppressed Paris Commune of 1871, following which Paris's medieval and post-medieval buildings and street patterns were cleared away and a new layout imposed, with -- in particular -- widened main thoroughfares (the boulevards) to provide the army's cavalry and artillery with the manoeuvrability they had lacked in suppressing the Commune. It's a beautiful result -- one of the most beautiful cities in the world, despite the traffic which chokes so much of it -- but one should nevertheless remember that it was designed specifically to allow a large number of people to be killed very quickly in the event of another uprising.

Whenever we've stayed in Paris, we've always stayed in the tiny, poky hotels of which John complains, albeit (more by luck than design) we haven't been plagued by bad smells from the streets outside or raucous noises from next door. We rationalise away the crowbarred-in bathrooms, the lack of seating and the separate prices for morsels of breakfast by saying that we're not in Paris to spend time in the hotel but to pound that pavement, take that photograph, visit that museum and gallery...we haven't (yet) Done It All (just as we haven't Done all of Berlin), but we hope that we have many more years of active life ahead of us. (We have a cruise on the Danube in May. Cruising! Very much the sort of thing that older persons do, but there you go.)

We haven't been to a Novacon for many years. Memory suggests that it was sometime in the late 1990s, but a check of the date of the one-shot we published for a Novacon indicates that it was in fact Novacon 33, in 2003. The venue for that -- as a check shows it had been for previous years, and for some years thereafter -- was a rather run-down establishment in Walsall, the chief attraction of which (as far as the organising committee was concerned) was that it had real ale on tap. But one demands rather more of a convention hotel than real ale, and the fact that it was so run-down was undoubtedly the chief reason why we never went to another Novacon. I see from the convention's website that for the past ten years they've been held in Nottingham, which rather obscures the supposedly Birmingham-centric nature of the event. I also see that the committee is still focused on supplying real ale to attendees -- a terrible set of priorities. I can't really see us ever going to another Novacon.

"Halloween," you say in *Vibrator* 45, "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." We've never had kiddies knock on our door and demand sweets that we don't have and never buy, either, but I object to Halloween -- as it is presently understood and presented -- as a ghastly American import that has corrupted and displaced our indigenous British traditions (another 3 vols surplus rant omitted at this point). Certainly, there seems now to be more effort put into Halloween than into 5 November Bonfire Night, although I'll bet that hardly anyone today can explain the original reasons for that, or even identify Guy Fawkes as a historical personality. (I said on Facebook that if anyone did knock on our door on 31 October 2017, I would refuse to give them anything at all unless they could tell me what happened in Wittenberg five hundred years ago that very night. Clue: Europe was consumed by religious wars for the next two centuries. But I'll bet that even if I gave the buggers that clue, they still wouldn't know. Another 3 vols etc. etc..)

I should write more, but I have a strong suspicion that it would be fairly contentless burble - and I've probably burbled on enough. Happy New Year to you and yours!

(EDITOR: It was nice to see you in the pre-Christmas, Joseph. With Judith away I was somewhat worried you might have been unable to enjoy a convivial Christmas, but since you assured me a convivial Christmas in your terms consisted of settling down and reading several quite heavy traction books, (and I don't mean books about traction engines) my sympathy soon bled away. Thanks for the parsnips by the way, although I found they didn't really conform to EU standards with regard to this vegetable, I suppose after Brexit they will be perfectly acceptable. They went well with the leg of lamb we had on Boxing Day.)

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LEIGH EDMONDS

I've now had the chance to read and inwardly digest this issue of Vibrator. For some reason best known to themselves, the presenters on the Australian Broadcasting Commission's Classic FM network have discovered a new word, 'cracking', as in, 'Here's a piece of cracking music I know you'll enjoy ...' Well, to borrow their word, this is a cracking issue of Vibrator. Lots to like in it.

John Purcell's piece is a very nice piece of fan writing. I imagine that some of it would have been lost on those who have not been subjected to the challenges of the Paris Metro, but even so this conveys something of its wonder. If the rest of his TAFF report is like this, I'm looking forward to it.

The last time we were in Paris there was no chunnel so we had to catch the ferry. We'd just done two weeks solid conferencing in Uppsala and Luzern and were on our way, in a round about way, to go to the Deutches Museum where we had an invitation from the Director. I think we were passing through Paris on our way there because we wanted to visit the Musee d'Orsay again (but after two weeks of conferencing our grasp on geography must have left us). So we arrived at the Gare du Nord, found our way with all our luggage around to the Musee

(you've read John's piece, you don't need me to repeat it), spent a lot of time there and during that time looked at each other and decided we were too exhausted to go to Munich and the other places we planned, so we rang Dave and Hazel Langford and asked if they didn't mind if we arrived a few days earlier. 'No problems', said Dave, or whatever Dave would say in those circumstances. So then we had to get ourselves from where we were to the station from which the train to the channel ferry left. We pulled out our map of the Paris Metro and saw that, to get from where we were we'd have to catch a succession of lines through a series of stations to get to the station for the ferry. So we did that, it took a couple of hours and it is engraved on my memory, but again John describes the experience very nicely. Some time later I was looking at a map of Paris, rather than the Metro map, and found that it would have been no more than a five minute taxi ride from where we were to the station we wanted, or we could have walked the distance in less than an hour. Quelle dommage!

In contrast to John, we found the Paris Metro much more agreeable than the London Underground. Even with my schoolboy French I could get directions from the staff there whereas in London I was stumped more than once by all the accents in which English is spoken, in particular the West Indian version. (At a conference in Hungary a few years later, during the question session an American asked a question, a Brit asked a question and then I asked one, and a German woman got up and asked why we couldn't all speak the same English.)

I'm also with you on going to conventions. Either I don't have the energy or I don't have the enthusiasm. Robin Johnson, a habitual convention attendee, can't understand this but I often find myself wandering about wondering why I'm doing this rather than something useful like plucking out weeds in the garden. Of course, there are times when I wouldn't be anywhere else, but they don't seem to be as often as they used to be. This is probably me. At the national convention I went to earlier this year there were a lot of people talking frantically with each other and it was the same thing at an academic conference on fantastic literature that I sampled a couple of days back. But these people were all in their early 20s and I'm now in my late 60s, so that may be the difference. I felt a little envious of their enjoyment and enthusiasm, but then I'm sure that the 1960s was a much better period to grow up in than the 2010s, so I'm also a little sad for them to have missed such exciting times. Like you, I'm not planning on standing for TAFF either, so we have that in common.

Your experience with noise coming from the room next door reminds me of a time I was at a conference and a large number of young women in the room next door spent a good part of the night singing ABBA songs as loudly as they could. They ran out of energy around 1am, so that experience was not up to your standard.

I'm in agreement with Dave Cockfield over London (and perhaps the whole of Britain when you come down to it). We were living in Perth (Western Australia) at the time which is a fairly clean city so when we got to Paris we didn't think it was anything special - though I was bemused to see a street cleaner brushing down traffic lights when I emerged from the Metro for the first time - he was more interesting to me than Notre Dame which was just there

behind me. After a week in Paris (this can get a bit confusing - we went first to Paris, then to London, then to our conferences and then back to Paris to visit the Orsay again) we went to London and, getting out at Victoria Station, the place looked as though it was encrusted in a century of grime. The air felt like it too. I didn't know how people could bear to live there but I guess that you don't notice it after a while. We didn't either after a week. I was educated and appalled by the financial calculations that Nic offered us this time. The woman who comes to clean our house for a couple of hours once a fortnight makes, by my calculation, about \$30 an hour. She probably doesn't work a full eight hour day, but even so... Sure, it is what one of our Treasurers called the 'Pacific Peso', but it's not bad money by the standards of what I hear about in the United States. I gave serious thought to migrating there in the 1990s. I'm glad I didn't.

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PHILIP TURNER

Another colourfully illustrated issue. No surprise that John Purcell didn't get on with Paris, the inhabitants of which have an international reputation for obnoxiousness. A pyromaniac nutter attempts suicide using . . . hydrochloric acid? Only in America the Damned Weird!

The recycled Chicken Littles (or Chickens Little?) in the LoC column made me glad to know that I won't be around in 2050, when the sea level has risen by 50 miles due to polar melting and most of the world is underwater and bits of plastic are everywhere. But should we be bothered about that? Not if the doom-mongers are right when they claim that plastic is virtually indestructible and will linger for zillions of years. If this is so, then plastic is a stable material which just shreds into smaller and smaller pieces. It just occupies some space everywhere and it doesn't react chemically with its environment, as a toxic substance would.

By 2050, my physical being will have been recycled to the Universe and it won't be bothered about getting a bit damp. And who knows, some of the atoms may end up being incorporated into the fabric of the Last of the Babylon Stations in 2258, the chronicle of which is on the Pick TV channel on weekday evenings. If there is ever a Nobel Prize for TV SF, Joe Straczynski is a shoo-in!

As it happens, I've just started re-reading Sidney's Comet by Brian Herbert (son of Frank) and that's very doomy initially. But the doomsters are not taken too seriously. Looks like the good people of 2605 might have developed a sense of proportion. But what use is that against a Galactic Garbage Comet? Oh, no! We're all doomed!! You know what, this SF stuff can be really quite fun.

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ROBERT LICHTMAN

I enjoyed Taral's sexy cat-witch cover. The expression on her lap-cat's face is priceless,

perhaps wondering if there was an end certain for her travels. I see from the date she's been adrift on her nicely carved broomstick for two years waiting for a friendly landing, which you gave her.

John's Paris chapter of his TAFF report was an enjoyable read despite – or perhaps because of – the only fans present were him and Valerie. If we visited Paris, a great unlikelyhood given my age and disinclination to fly, there would be one person we could visit: *Trap Door* contributor, book collector and fan about town John Baxter. In anticipation of such a visit, we would perhaps reread some of his many books on the neighborhoods, restaurants, sights, sounds and smells of his adopted town. (He started out life as an Australian fan more decades ago than either of us would probably care to remember.) There were some nice photos accompanying his words, my favorite of which is definitely the one of him and Valerie at the foot of the looming Eiffel Tower.

In your Novacon report you wrote about guessing Ellie Winpenny's age at 18, "reminding her that men invariably knock off at least five years when asked to do this sort of thing," and that she turned out to be 48. Blowing up the page with her photo to get a better look than the printed copy, I can see how you might guess she was somewhere in her twenties – she has a youthful look – but in search of more photographic evidence (scientific interest only, of course), I found this via Google Images – <https://tinyurl.com/ybly3x4v> – with the caption "Loncon visitor Ellie Winpenny as Lara Croft." She doesn't look very 48 there, but it was three years ago. Searching a little further, I found her again in close-up here – <https://tinyurl.com/yicsja5ja> – and using my sterling forensic skills I concluded that her eyebrows in your photo and this one match.

(EDITOR: You know perfectly well, Robert I don't like including links in Vibrator, but I have kept these in on this occasion in case anybody else has to waste their time in a sad pursuit of picturee of Ellie Winpenny. But don't do it again.)

I've never experienced such a noisy horror show as you did at the Not-Best Western, even at a convention. The closest I can remember was back in 2007 when we visited Dan and Lynn Steffan in Portland, and ended up with a room on the side of the Red Lion Inn that was directly across from the huge garbage bins and next to an elevator. People were coming and going noisily in the early part of late night, followed at some ungodly hour by the bins being noisily emptied by an equally loud truck. Between them we had a bad night, and with some hassling we got a decent discount on the room price – but that never really makes up for loss of sleep.

Your account of Frank Lloyd Wright's personal life was informative. I've only known of him though his architecture, especially his residential work, about which I've heard over the years from various sources that, while interesting and attractive, suffered from problems related to the emphasis on form over function, needing frequent repair. I don't understand the relevance of your penultimate paragraph about the July 8, 1959 deaths of two U.S. Army personnel being the first American casualties of the Vietnam War.

In her letter Caroline Mullan makes reference to having "already exceeded the free articles

I'm allowed this month" for one of the periodicals she reads online. Of the ones she lists, I can access with no difficulty (i.e., no ticking bot watching me) the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times* and *The New Yorker*, although in all cases I get pop-ups offering me free or nearly free access to subscriptions. I also read the *New York Times* online, and every now and then I encounter their tollbooth and watch it count down the number of articles (for the month) it will let me see without subscribing. I've long had a way around this, though: I open the *Times* in a Firefox "private window" and when I hit bottom I close and reopen a new "private window" and the tolling starts all over again. (This also works for the others that keep track, though none of them as avidly as the *Times*.) However, since it's the newspaper in which I have the most interest and to which I refer more frequently than the others – yes, even the *San Francisco Chronicle* – I finally took advantage of what I've observed to be their best offer and for a mere \$8 a month I can now read it without all the "private window" hassle, and I feel like I'm a Good Person for actually subscribing (at half-price).

David Redd's bulleted list of End Times is too sad by half. And his punch line goes further: "How can we think about survival when we're too busy juggling luxuries?" Oy, and also vey!

Paul Skelton writes interestingly about the rise and demise of Whipchicken Farm and its accompanying road, concluding with "Whipchicken road is now an abandoned farm track bisected by the new A16 and the farm itself seems to have vanished into the undergrowth apart from a barn." It reminded me of what had been on the land that comprised the Farm commune where I lived in the '70s. Our oldtimer neighbors would take us around informally and tell us about what used to be there in various parts of the two-plus square miles – a water-driven sawmill here, a moonshine-making shack there, and even a small village along one of the creeks at the bottom of a large meadow. Gone, all gone, without a trace. So-called human civilization is at times a thin veneer. I remember a TV show (series?) that posited the end of mankind and what happened next, showing in multi-year increments what happened to our buildings and other infrastructure with the magic of CGI.

I hope Nic's December turned out, financially speaking, better than the dire picture he painted in his column.

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DAVID REDD

Thanks again for V46. Excellent cover featuring Taral's stylish witch – the acceptable face of Hallowe'en? No dip in quality within. John Purcell shows sf and bookshops are not essentials for a TAFF report, provided the writing stays good. His does. Interesting contrast with Dave Cockfield's notes on other countries being "eat your breakfast off the road" clean. I won't mention any French male reluctance to use pissoirs. Instead, regarding noise, smells, three flights of stairs and no lifts, I recall Irish hotels which could match French hotels anyday. I will mention that the southern Irish little rural guest houses we stayed at were unfailingly

wonderful, at least before the Celtic Tiger tried to follow the UK economic model of debt-and-optimism and imploded.

Novacon report vivid but saddening. Following the Helsinki report of an sf worldcon without sf magazines, you picture a forlorn lounge where the bookroom used to be, with Greg Pickersgill staring into emptiness. As affecting as the heartfelt looking back from Steve Stiles at a similar culture-shift closing down his work (before other troubles, I know); all good wishes to Steve on all counts.

You didn't cheer me up with America the Damned either, not that you had any such intention. You gave us polarisation into self-centred super-rich and murderous low-life, with your keywords "resentment" and "exploitation". This was the society the USA went on to make global. Really, you're just rubbing our noses in the warnings we ignored.

Nic Farey's unignorable summary of taxi economics describes with masterly concision a parallel exploitation-to-exhaustion to the process that has been steadily wiping out Britain's farmers for decades. I suspect consumer capitalism, which already thinks it can destroy local suppliers for profit, will soon start destroying local consumers too, because financial AIs will realise they can trade money faster and more profitably just among themselves without any human interference.

Yes, gloomy thoughts in 2017. Because, I diagnose, it really has been a gloomy old year. Lost too many much-missed people from my life January to December. Some I'd met in person only briefly, like Randy Byers; some I'd known for decades, such as family friend Rhianna who first met me before I was born. But in Vib 46 you gave us a great way to remember Randy: his broad grin. So much better than my funeral-pamphlets collection with its photos of old friends looking – well, *old*, sadly different to the friends as my memory wants to keep them.

Strangely, 2017 was a gloomy year for the generation below me too (even leaving aside Trump/Brexit/N. Korea/plastic waste etc.) My son and two married friends all had their partners split from them in '17. Also, revisiting local friends this Christmas, he found that the four of them including him have only two parents out of eight left alive. What's going on here? I hope I'm seeing just random clusters among more sensible averages. But other 2016-17 social trends aren't encouraging: the massive upsurge in "Happy Hallowe'en" bringing a tide of lantern processions; one twist of the dial and they'll become Nazi/Ku Klux Klan rallies. These ideas keep coming back: ISIS gets smacked down in the Middle East, but its ideas bubble up in Malaysia. Unlike the UK which did recover from the murderous fundamentalist barbarism ("Christian" variety) of its civil war, modern globalisation and infomedia make disposing of viral bad ideas almost impossible; destructive comment requires no thought, while constructive comment does. But how can I be constructive about current trends? UK wants post-Brexit trade talks with America the Damned to be totally secret: recipe for getting screwed. Percentage of childline calls worried about suicide up; over-use of wetwipes increasing litter and sewer blockages; Facebook lifting or inventing news while real news-gatherers like The Guardian have to beg on-line for money. And what's this with pipeline

leaks? Following New Zealand's fuel shortages, I find we had a similar problem with North Sea gas requiring top-up supplies from Russia's Yamal gas field – good news for Putin tightening the noose, but not so good for Nenet reindeer herders, or for us. Yes, constructive comment on all this is *difficult*. Where are the Reasons to be Cheerful when we need them? (Oh, junk email is down. That's good.)

Nevertheless I wish you and everyone a Happy New Year, in fact a Peaceful and Prosperous 2018. Including a good Corflu again. And maybe one of my New Year Resolutions should be to keep my LoCs as brief and to-the-point as Syd Bounds' used to be.

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DAVE COCKFIELD

I tend to get confused these days to how old I am. 65, 66, 67? I retired at 60 and it turns out that last October I turned 66. Whoopee! Drinking over the Xmas holiday period doesn't help. That is meant to explain why the November 2107 Vibrator, number 46, is having a loc constructed in January 2018.

Lots of interesting stuff that deserves commenting on but my brain synapses are barely sputtering into life.

I always thought that Martin Amis was a snobbish twit. I'm not sure why but I did try to read a couple of his books but gave up quite early on. Conversely I loved novels by his father Kingsley.

Lucky Jim, Take A Girl Like You, Girl 20, and The Anti-Death League were favourites.

For a few months in from November 1978 I worked weekends as a barman in the Coach and Horses in Hampstead, London. There was an older couple who regularly turned up on Sunday lunchtimes and drank Pink Gin. They were a pleasure to serve and converse with unlike some of the regulars from such a salubrious area. It was only a couple of years later that a friend and fellow ex-barman told me that it had been Kingsley Amis and his wife. I'm actually grateful for not knowing this at the time as I would probably have fawned over him too much and spoiled the genteel and rather affable atmosphere of that time.

John Purcell highlights well the highs and lows of using Booking.Com. When I go abroad I always try to stay in an IBIS hotel. In the UK I prefer Premier Inn, when Lenny Henry is not hogging the best rooms, or Travelodge. Sometimes though in London I just need a cheap overnight stay. Booking.Com is brilliant for the cheapness but variable for the quality of hotel. Recently I stayed around the corner from the British Museum for £50. The hotel was grimy, the room was on the 2nd floor and there was no lift. It was not en-suite but at least the loo was only a couple of yards down the corridor. The room itself was jaded but clean and the double bed was comfortable. A couple of weeks later I stayed in a single room in Warren Street. It was very clean. Unfortunately it only had a single bed and the room was up 4 flights of stairs. The only loo was on the ground floor. Thankfully the room did have a washbasin. The price

was £45 with breakfast. They both served a purpose so it would be mean to complain too much.

What was amazing is that I kept getting emails from Booking.Com offering cheaper rooms and suggesting I cancel the current bookings at no cost.

I suspect that 2018 will annoy me as much as 2017. They call this news?

Donald Trump has a bigger one than Kim Jung-un.

Jeremy Corbyn, our leader in waiting, is leader of a Labour Party that holds the Centre Ground in Politics. And here I thought they were a Socialist Left Wing Party.

Four people were killed in separate stabbing incidents over the New Year. It appears that all of the murderers were just poor misguided souls who only carry knives because they are afraid and need protection.

CAMRA , the bastion of Real Ale protection, is banning breweries who brew beer with sexist names and have suggestive labels. Okay "Old Slapper" is definitely out of order but are others such as Bountiful and Slap and sickle really that offensive. Is the like of Spitfire and Bombardier racist because of their use of the English flag and other motifs to promote them as "English" beers?

Soon we will be advertising beer like cigarettes. Labels that have statements such as, "Beer will make you fat and obnoxious and prone to Sexual harassment". "Drink Beer and lose your liver and pancreas".

At least there will still be Vibrator. Won't there Graham?

(EDITOR: I wouldn't count on it, Dave.)

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TALES OF A LAS VEGAS TAXI DRIVER`

By Nic Farey

TIDINGS OF COMFORT AND JOY

As Charnock gazed out of his window
Waiting for rain clouds to pass
He said out loud, "Where is Nic's column?"
"He needs a swift kick up the arse"

The columnist sipped at his Newky
To see if the muse might come by
He'd been on the piss for a week now
So desperately gives this a try.

"I'll write the old bastard a poem!"
He dreamed in his head, in the night
Old Charnock could set this to music
If it wasn't such absolute shite.

The dream carried on with some weirdness
Of places he'd not ever seen
And some things, did they really happen?
A strange year, that 2017.

The cabs on the stands sat there idly
Some drivers were fearing the worst
They worried that no-one would come here
Since events of October the first.

Some crowed about Trump in the White House
While others thought "Keep yer 'ead down"
He's not much on helping the workers
Especially if they're shades of brown.

While some have compared him to Hitler,
And others to Jesus, or God
He's neither of those, if you ask me
Just another fuck-spoiled stupid sod.

"If I need some political ranting"
Cries Charnock, in some kind of rage
"I'll ask 'Arry Bell, or Lord Kettle,"
"I don't need that crap on your page!"

"Well ok mate", mumbles the writer
"But you know my last year had some arse"
Yet like a recalcitrant squirrel
Eventually, this too shall pass.

I was laid up a week with infection
And another week home on the couch
It wasn't the nicest of minutes
And the bill was an extra-big "Ouch"

But don't get me wrong, good things happened
I got bonuses for the first time
It just about makes this gig worth it
A grand more a year will do fine.

But be honest, the reader, (J, Uncle)
This ain't the worst column you've read
And I expect there'll be more where this came from
'Cos 'Merica! Work till you're dead.

VIBRATOR BACKSIDE

The end of December is always a fraught time with me. It's bloody cold for one thing. And it presages the car coming up for its annual service and MOT, an event which usually directs me into the wilds of Enfield, not a place anyone in their right mind ever wants to go. The A10 is a bleak place to be in mid-winter.

I'd like to thank anyone who responded to this issue for doing so, and to also encourage you to respond to the next one, providing you are still alive. These days it's becoming hard to rely on that, I know. If you are dead, I will not hold it against you.

As usual thanks to Pat Charnock for proof-reading this, inbetween producing another issue of her remarkable fanzine *Raucous Caucus*, available from usual suppliers.